

# Włodzimierz Godlewski

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## Naqlun: Excavations, 2001

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# NAQLUN

## EXCAVATIONS, 2001

Włodzimierz Godlewski

*The excavation work at Naqlun this year, carried out between August 28 and October 3,<sup>1)</sup> was focused on the central part of the kom, Site A, which had begun to be explored last year. Concurrently with the main thrust of the explorations, work was continued on the restoration of textiles uncovered in previous seasons (1999-2000), the investigation of the cemetery of the Fatimid period on Site A and the restoration of the wall paintings in the central niche of the apse of the Church of the Archangel Gabriel. Further recording work was carried out inside the church: Dr. J. van der Vliet verified the reading of Coptic inscriptions on the walls (apart from his study of Coptic texts uncovered in previous seasons), and D. Zielińska checked and supplemented the written and drawn documentation of wall paintings. Other team members went on with their studies of particular categories of finds: Dr. M. Żurek of the medieval pottery, A. Łyżwa of the Islamic glazed wares, M. Mossakowska-Gaubert of the glass and I. Zych of the worked wood.*

1) The mission was directed by Prof. Dr. Włodzimierz Godlewski and included: Ms Anetta Łyżwa, Mrs. Maria Mossakowska-Gaubert, Ms Dobrochna Zielińska, Dr. Magdalena Żurek, Mrs. Iwona Zych, archaeologists; Dr. Jacques van der Vliet, coptologist; Mrs. Barbara Czaja-Szewczak, textile restorer; Mr. Cristobal Calaforra-Rzepka, wall painting restorer; Mr. Szymon Maślak and Mr. Grzegorz Ochała, students of archaeology. The Supreme Council of Antiquities was represented by Mr. Issam Adel Abderrahman. With the assistance of the authorities of the Supreme Council of Antiquities in Cairo, as well as in Fayum, the fieldwork progressed smoothly and efficiently.

The Mission is also grateful to the monks from the Monastery of the Archangel Gabriel in Naqlun for their enduring hospitality and generous assistance on many occasions.

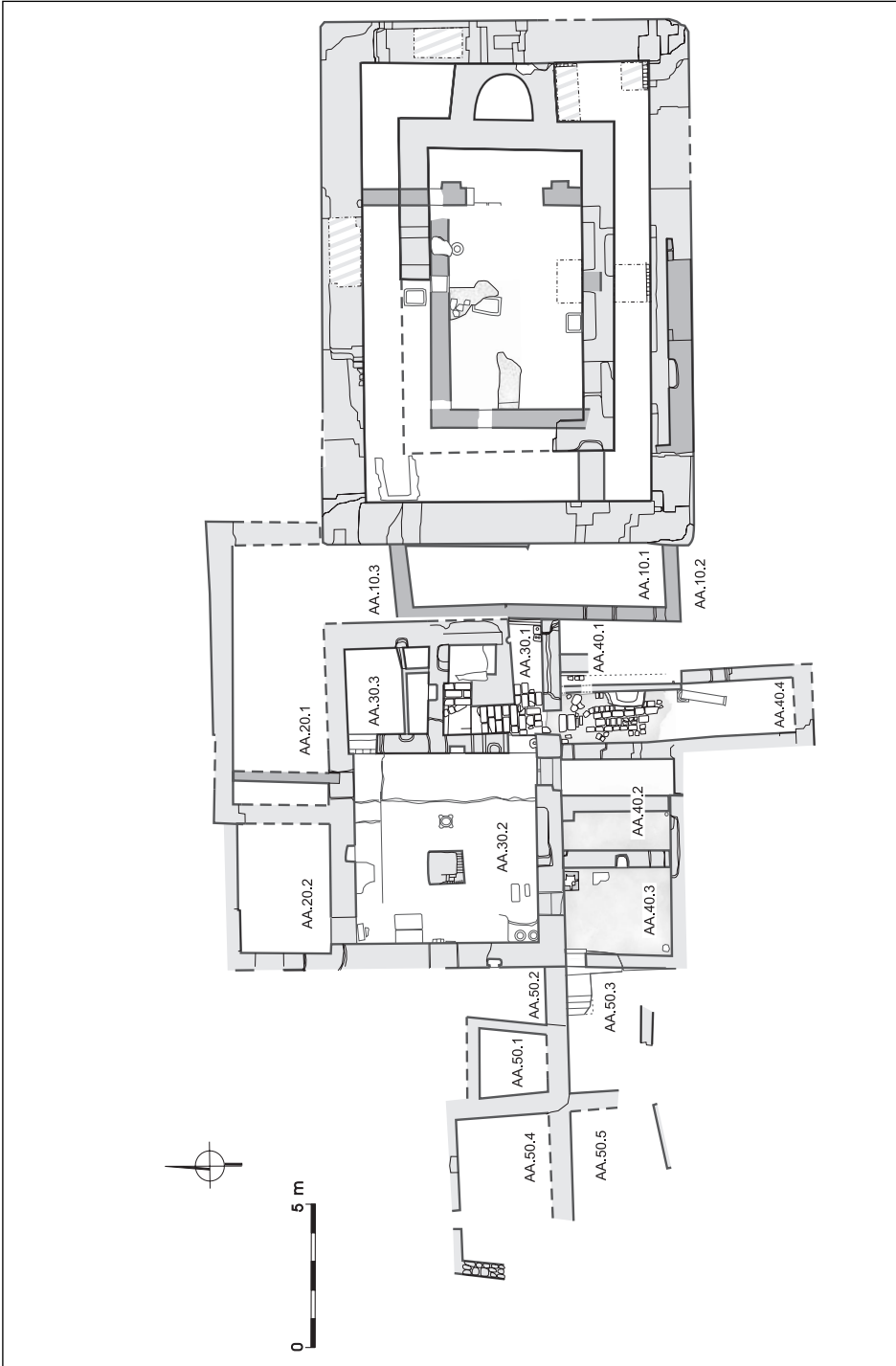


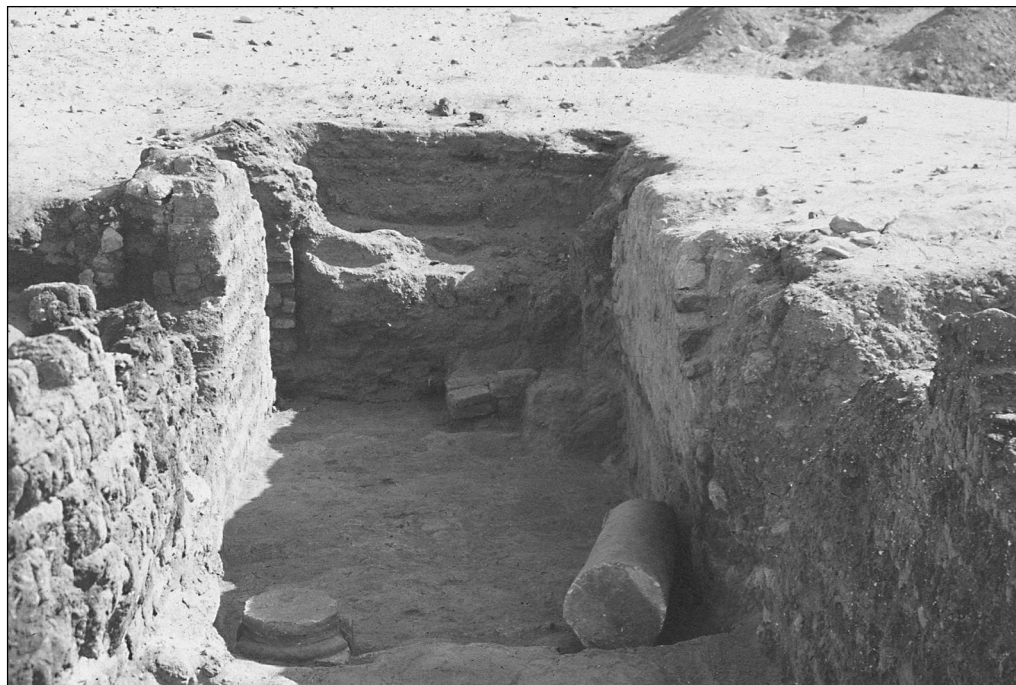
Fig. 1. Site A. Tower A and Building AA.30, plan after the 2001 season  
(Drawing W. Godlewski)

## MONASTIC COMPLEX (AA)

The oldest part of the monastic complex, AA.30.1-3, identified and partly explored in the area west of tower A in the previous season<sup>2)</sup>, continued to be cleared. Included now was the complex of rooms surrounding it, especially on the north (AA.20.1-2) and west (AA.50.1-4) (*Fig. 1*). The rooms on the south had already been identified in part in season 2000. Additional work was carried out also between tower A and complex AA.30.1-3, next to the northern part of the western church facade and at the southern end of the alleged corridor (AA.40.4, *Fig. 2*), which leads to the staircase entrance in the developed monastic compound.

## BUILDING AA.30.1-3

The rectangular structure, measuring 12 by 8 m, was constructed to the west of tower A, some 2.70 m away from its western facade. The northern facades of the two buildings followed the same east-west line. The walls of AA.30 rested directly on bedrock, which had been lowered here substantially (from 60 to 120 cm) with respect to the foundation level of the tower. The material used for the construction was mudbrick of varying size, resulting in varied bond work. The bottom part of the walls depended on fairly thick brick (32 x 16 x 12 cm) laid in regular alternate courses of headers and stretchers. In the upper



*Fig. 2. Site A. "Corridor" AA.40.4, view toward the south (Photo W. Godlewski)*

2) W. Godlewski, *PAM XII, Reports 2000* (2001), 149-154, Figs. 1-2.

parts, the bricks were of smaller size, laid in a cross bond for the first four courses and as stretchers afterwards, alternately horizontal and vertical. Despite the variety, the wall appears to be fully homogeneous. The surviving height is close to 2.20 m, the highest point being in the southwestern corner, while the northeastern one has been razed practically to the ground. The ruins here reveal a different structure that raises doubts as to whether it was part of the original building.

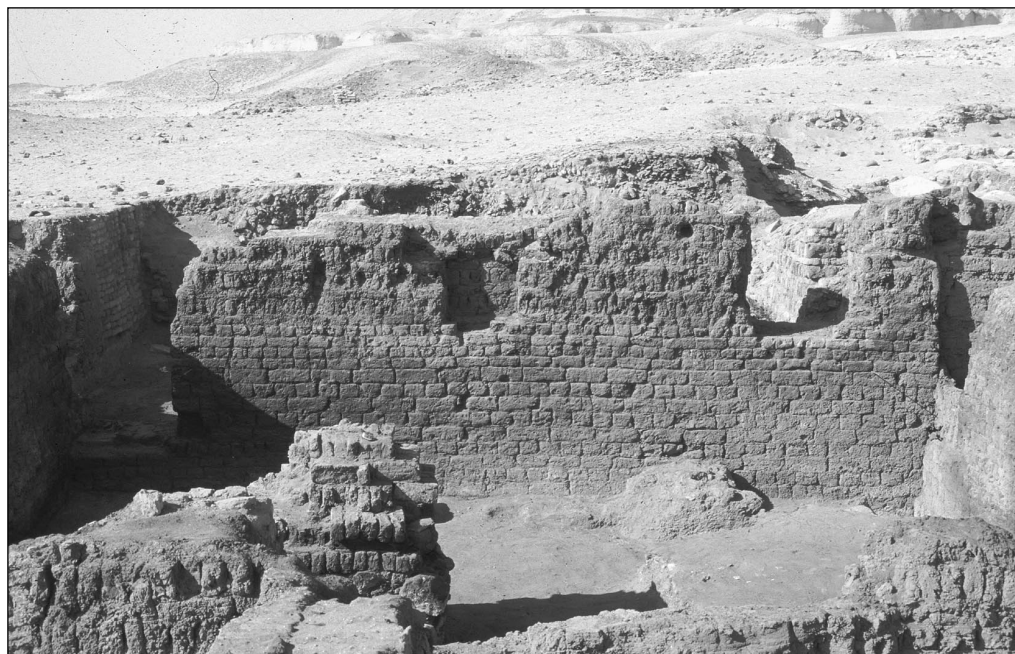
Building AA.30 likely had two entrances, one in the western facade and the other in the southern one. There is no certainty as to whether the entry from the east, near the southeastern corner, had been in use in the first occupational phase of the building.

Building AA.30 was quite definitely a storied structure as indicated by the

massiveness of the walls (80-90 cm), as well as a variety of architectural elements, like column bases and capitals. A basin and water-vessel stand, which were found in the debris filling room AA.30.2, appear to have fallen from an upper storey when it collapsed. The ground floor consisted of three rooms: a big hall (AA.30.2) to the west and two much smaller units (AA.30.1 and 3) to the east.

**Room AA.30.1** is a small space (3.20 by 3.40 m) with a staircase fitted into it; the steps were made of limestone slabs supported on palm-wood beams. It was cleared completely in the previous season.

**Room AA.30.2** is practically square in shape and big (6.70 by 6.30 m) with thick walls that survive to a height of 2.20 m. The entrance from the outside was through a doorway in the middle of the west wall – later blocked carefully – while another



*Fig. 3. Site A. Room AA.30.2, northern wall with niche in the middle (Photo W. Godlewski)*

door opened into the other room (AA.30.3). The entrance to the staircase (AA.30.1) may have been a consequence of a remodeling of the complex; whatever the case may be, its attribution to the original phase is questionable. The wooden ceiling was supported on a massive pillar (120 by 120 cm) of brick and stone blocks, reinforced with small wooden beams. The pillar stands on the same line of symmetry that runs through the entrance and the entire room, but it is much closer to the west wall than to the east one; hence, it is more than probable that it was not part of the original layout, but was introduced at the time of the first remodeling.

Three niches were identified in the walls. A small niche (55 cm wide, 45 cm high and 32 cm deep) was set in the middle of the north wall (*Fig. 3*). Its sill, similarly as that of the niche in the middle of the east wall, was at about the same level. This other niche, considerably damaged, was found to be some 50 cm wide. In the south wall, closer to the west corner, there was a much bigger niche, which was blocked meticulously at a later date, thus hindering its proper identification. It was about 60 cm wide and was set quite high, its sill being some 70 cm above the walking level. No plastering was noted inside it, but then the wall surfaces had suffered considerably in the conflagration that destroyed the building.

There could have been a bench made of bricks standing by the walls of the hall, but only fragments of it have been preserved. A bench of this kind, c. 96 cm wide, appears to have run along the entire length of the north wall. The walking level inside the hall, just above bedrock, was not hardened in any way, but the pieces of limestone flagging found in the lower layers of the debris filling the room would indicate that slabs 3.0-3.5 cm thick could

have once covered the floor here. Some of the slabs found in the fill may have actually come from the furnishing of an upper storey. Not one of the slabs was found in its primary position.

In the second occupational stage, the floor level was raised by a c. 30 cm thick bedding of well tamped silt. The western entrance was blocked at this point and the hall was connected with the staircase and room AA.40.5 that was added to the primary complex on the south. Two big storage jars (Nd.01218 and Nd.01219) had been sunk into the occupational level in the southwestern corner of the room, their rims even with the floor surface. Both vessels were finely painted with a variety of bird, fish and plant representations, as well



*Fig. 4. Site A. Room AA.30.2. Wooden pulley found in the construction of a bench (?) by the north wall (Photo W. Godlewski)*

as geometric patterns on the upper part of the body. On one there was even a relief rendering of a human face (*Fig. 5*). There is hardly any doubt that they were not meant originally to be sunk into a floor and must have been used, at least at first, in their primary function as storage vessels. The massive pillar supporting the ceiling should also be attributed to this stage.

The hall was remodeled another two times to fit the needs of the developing compound. New passages were created leading to the outer rooms on the north and south sides.

At the time of the final conflagration the only doorways opening from the hall were onto the staircase and to an abutting room on the north (AA.20.2). The ceiling was additionally supported on a beam of

palm wood, set up on a damaged, upside-down capital standing to the east of the pillar.

The detritus filling the room consisted of burnt bricks from the upper parts of the walls, mixed with ashes from burnt reeds that had presumably been stored inside the room. The debris included two capitals (*Fig. 6*), a column base and a stone basin (mentioned above) that had fallen from an upper floor. The stone water-vessel stand that was found by the outer face of the western wall must have also been originally part of the upper-storey furnishing. Two fragmentarily preserved funerary steles were also discovered. One of these (Nd.01180), of limestone, is a good-quality depiction of a figure in prayer, set in a niche constructed of stone blocks (*Fig. 7*). The



*Fig. 5. Storage jar with painted decoration and relief rendering of a human face (Nd.01219) (Photo W. Godlewski)*



*Fig. 6. Marble capital from the debris in room AA.30.2 (Nd.01060)  
(Photo W. Godlewski)*



*Fig. 7. Limestone funerary stele with figural representation (Nd.01180)  
(Photo W. Godlewski)*



other stele represents a type that was popular in Naqlun, that is, the facade of an *aedicula* with crosses between the columns.<sup>3)</sup>

**Room AA.30.3** is a small rectangular room (2.85 by 3.12 m), accessible from the hall to the west through an entrance, 101 cm wide, in the north corner. The threshold was reinforced on the inside and outside with small wooden beams, 10 cm thick, inserted into the jambs on either side; its level was raised 77 cm with regard to the foundation level of the wall, indicating that access could have been only by non-existent steps, leading up from room AA.30.2 and down from the upper level. Sometime during the occupation of building AA.30, this entrance was blocked with big bricks. Hence, the fire that consumed the neighboring rooms left no trace on the walls here. The northern wall, the face of which was recessed some 15 cm in comparison to the same wall in room AA.30.2, also has a different bond in the upper parts: alternate courses of stretchers and headers, the stretchers being of thick bricks and the headers of smaller bricks.

The interior had not been plastered. A small niche occupied the middle of the south wall, about 1.5 m above the floor. It was 52 cm wide and 28 cm deep, rising to a surviving height of 45 cm. Planks covered it on top and its interior was smeared with a layer of mud.

Practically the entire length of the southern wall was taken up by a platform 2.10 m long, from 85 to 91 cm wide and 100 cm high. The outer walls were made of mudbrick, the core filled with an earth fill. In time the bench was made longer to fit the entire length of the wall, while a similar, but less well-made structure was

constructed in the southeastern corner (same height, width up to 106 cm) by the east wall. The clay floor in this room was not very well tamped.

At a certain stage much effort was put into blocking the entrance to this room, leaving it to be accessed solely from the east, through a potential new doorway. Unfortunately, the poor condition of the wall in this area precludes sound identification.

#### ARCHITECTURE NORTH OF BUILDING AA.30

To the northeast of building AA.30.1-3 a mausoleum (AA.20.1) was found, encompassing two tombs with superstructures, T. 50 and T. 133. The structure measured 3.20 by 3.50 m and was built after the fire, on top of the northeastern part of the destroyed building AA.30.1-3 and using the red-brick north wall of AA.30.3. The south wall, constructed of mud brick in courses of alternately horizontal and vertical stretchers, was founded on a layer of burning; it is preserved to a height of 90 cm in the southern end.

Room AA.20.2 is situated to the west of locus AA.10.3 and by the northwestern part of Building AA.30.1-3; it measured 4.57 by 3.18 m. Initially, it was not connected in any way with Building AA.30. This status changed at a later stage when an entrance was pierced through the wall in the northwestern corner of room AA.30.3. This space is believed to be a kind of small courtyard.

The walls here are hardly homogeneous. The north wall was founded directly on unlevelled bedrock and most likely was connected with a building standing to the

3) Godlewski, *PAM* XII, op.cit., 152, fig. 3; A. Lajtar, "Two Greek inscriptions from Deir el Naqlun", *Nubica* III.I (1994), 265-274.

north. The original part of the wall has been preserved for a distance of 3.0 m. It reached the northwestern corner of room AA.10.3, which was also a kind of courtyard, but connected directly with tower A and building AA.30. Further to the west, the added part of the wall, which reached the west end of the space, was of much poorer workmanship. In the eastern corner, a stone block or dressed bedrock perhaps served as a foundation. A course of stretchers laid horizontally followed the vertically-standing bricks of the foundation, then another course of vertical bricks that reached the middle of the length of the wall, and above this a regular cross bond. This wall appears to be earlier than the baked-brick wall of AA.10.3 with an underpinning of pottery.

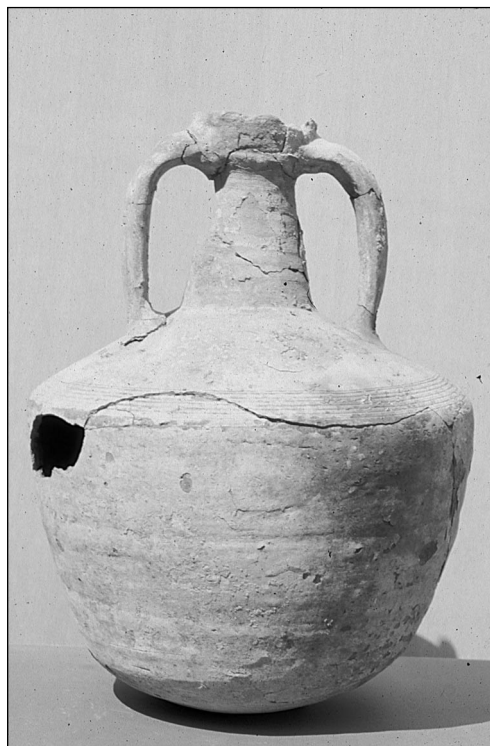
The west wall reached the northwestern corner of Building AA.30, but the actual joining of the walls had been destroyed by an ancient trench that was backfilled with mud brick detritus. This wall extended beyond the room in a northward direction. Some 1.70 m away from AA.30 there was an entrance, 0.90 m wide, pierced through it. At some point this doorway was blocked. In its southern end the wall was plastered.

The east wall of AA.10.3, made of red brick, was dismantled practically in its entirety, only a scrap of it surviving by the northern corner. It was 66-68 cm wide and presently runs for a distance of c. 35 cm. It was founded on bricks standing on end in a loose-sand layer with substantial quantities of early pottery and shards of glass vessels, including lamps from the 6th century AD. Smearred mud plaster is visible on the northern face of the wall (of building AA.30), where a red-brick wall bounding courtyard AA.10.3 on the east, north and west, a wall that was

added to the north walls of both tower A and building AA.30, was clearly later than either one of the latter. It also presumably suffered destruction during the conflagration. No evidence of a big fire was recorded in AA.20.2, suggesting that the southern wall of this locus was dismantled only after the catastrophe that has been dated to the early 10th century, at which time the entire monastic compound on Site A was abandoned and then partly dismantled.

#### ARCHITECTURE WEST OF BUILDING AA.30

A trench 14 by 8 m dug west of building AA.30.1-3, at its southern end, was



*Fig. 8. Amphora from the fill inside room AA.50.4 (Nd.01287)  
(Photo W. Godlewski)*

designed to ascertain the boundaries of the extended monastic compound. It was determined that the architectural remains (AA.50) cover an area up to 11 m away from Building AA.30 and are hardly homogeneous. Two or even three stages of the development are easily recognizable here.

In the central part, the tops of the walls of a small room (AA.50.1), measuring 2.40 x 2.00-2.50 m, were uncovered. To judge by the substantial quantity of disturbed

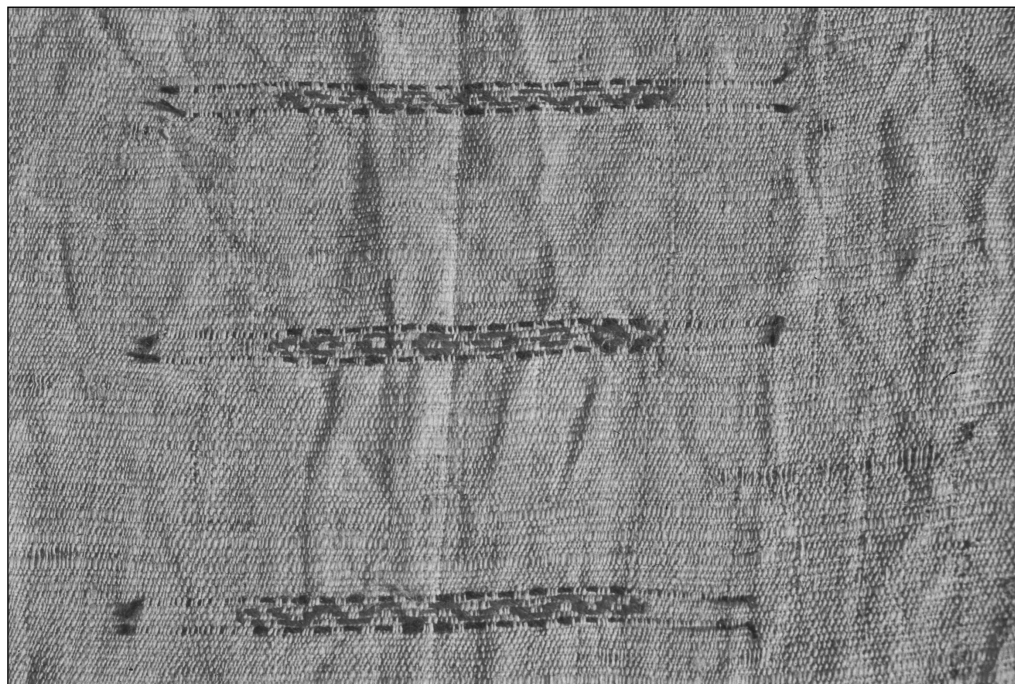
bones found within the confines of this structure, it must have been a kind of mausoleum used in the Fatimid period, built on top of the earlier monastic architecture.

Numerous traces of fire on the walls of these western rooms, as well as the characteristic fill, indicate that this part of the complex was also destroyed in a catastrophic conflagration. Once further tombs were identified, the work had to be interrupted.

## CEMETERY A

Although the chief effort in the past season was concentrated on monastic architecture within the confines of a trench where a cemetery of the Fatimid period had

already been explored and removed in 2000,<sup>4)</sup> another eleven tombs were excavated in the area of room AA.30.3 and the trench between Building AA.30 and



*Fig. 9. Piece of decorated burial shroud from Cemetery C (Nd.01266)  
(Photo W. Godlewski)*

tower A. As these tombs were situated in the lowest layers of the fill, it was possible, based on their stratigraphy, to date them provisionally to the earliest phase of the cemetery. Still another eight tombs were discovered in the southern part of

“corridor” AA.40.4 and in room AA.50.3. Most could be assigned to the 12th-13th century. Grave goods were recorded in a mere few of the graves: a wooden pencil case, small glazed bowls<sup>5)</sup> and two tiny glass vessels.

## CEMETERY C

At the site of cemetery C, which lies in the desert to the southwest of the monastery,<sup>6)</sup> salvage work was carried out in a number of tombs. A few pieces of burial shrouds from destroyed tombs were protected (*Fig. 9*). A provisional dating of the tombs places

them in the turn-of-the-6th-century horizon. Greek steles of the *aedicula* type decorated with a cross, found in the ruins of the monastic architecture on site A in this and the past season, may have been connected with this cemetery.

## CHURCH OF THE ARCHANGEL GABRIEL

The conservation of wall paintings inside the Church of the Archangel Gabriel continued throughout the season.

During work on a poorly preserved representation of Mother of God and Child (MA.4) in the central niche of the church apse, an earlier mural in much better condition was revealed. The top mural, like the remaining decoration in the apse, can be dated to the 1020s.<sup>7)</sup> It was transferred to a new artificial ground and will be displayed inside the church.

The newly uncovered painting inside the niche is a complicated depiction that was apparently created in two stages, corresponding to the process of building

the church and its early functioning. P. Grossmann dates the Church of the Archangel Gabriel to the 8th century,<sup>8)</sup> but it was most probably constructed after a momentous conflagration that destroyed the monastery in the late 9th or very early 10th century. These are undoubtedly the oldest paintings found at Naqlun.

Initially, the composition filling the niche was that of *Gloria Victis*. It was painted just after the church had been built and may be dated provisionally to the turn of the 9th century. This rendering was then partly repainted. Instead of the upper arm of the cross, above the transversal arms, a youthful bust of Christ was introduced

4) Godlewski, *PAM* XII, op. cit., 154-160, fig. 6; K. Piasecki, “The Skulls from Naqlun”, *PAM* XII, op.cit., 173-180; M. Mossakowska-Gaubert, “Réceptifs en verre provenant des tombeaux datés du XIe au XIIIe siècle”, *PAM* XII, op.cit., 168-172; id., “Les objets en verre trouvés dans les tombeaux coptes des époques fatimide et ayyoubide (Deir el Naqlun, Égypte)”, Proceedings of the 15th Symposium AIHV, New York – Corning, 16-20.10.2001 (in press).

5) For a discussion of glazed pottery finds from these graves, cf. contribution by A. Łyzwa in this volume.

6) W. Godlewski, T. Derda, T. Górecki, “Deir el Naqlun (Nekloni), 1988-1989, Second Preliminary Report”, *Nubica* III.1 (1994), 216, 235, 263, fig. 25.1-2.

7) W. Godlewski, “Naqlun. Les peintures de l'église de l'Archangel Gabriel à Naqlun”, *BSAC* 39 (2000), 89-101.

8) P. Grossmann, *Mittelalterliche Langhauskuppelkirchen und verwandte Typen in Oberägypten* (Gluckstadt 1982), 118, 120; J. Dobrowolski, “Naqlun - Deir al-Malak Ghubra'il: The Existing Monastic Complex”, *Nubica* I/II (1990), 161-170.

(*Fig. 10*), creating a highly interesting composition that refers to Byzantine representations known from Palestinian pilgrim's flasks from Monza and Bobbio,<sup>9</sup> and from gems.<sup>10</sup> A similar representation of Christ in the central part of the cross has been preserved in a hermitage on Kom 29 in Kellia, now in the collection of the Coptic Museum in Cairo.<sup>11</sup> The dating of

this extended composition is imprecise – provisionally, it has been set in the second half of the 10th century. The representation of Christ is the work of an excellent craftsman. This composition, restored by C. Calaforra-Rzepka (cf. *Fig. 3* on pp. 176 below,<sup>12</sup>) is now displayed in the church apse, on the original plaster in the central niche.



*Fig. 10. Christ, depicted in the central niche of the apse of the Church of the Archangel Gabriel (Photo W. Godlewski)*

9) A. Grabar, *Ampoules de Terre Sainte (Monza-Bobbio)* (Paris 1958).

10) *Spätantike und frühes Christentum. Ausstellungskatalog Liebighause, Frankfurt am Mainz, 1983-84*, ed. C. Bonner & M. Pieper (Frankfurt am Mainz 1983), no. 174.

11) F. Daumas and A. Guillaumont, *Kellia I, kom 219. Fouilles effectuées en 1964 et 1965 (Le Caire 1969)*, pp. 47-48, pl. XXXIXc, pl. 6 e.

12) For a report on this work, cf. contribution by C. Callaforra-Rzepka in this volume.