

# Włodzimierz Godlewski

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## Naqlun Excavations, 2002

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Polish Archaeology in the Mediterranean 14, 163-171

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2003

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# NAQLUN

## EXCAVATIONS, 2002

Włodzimierz Godlewski

*The 2002 field campaign of the Polish Center of Archaeology at the site of Naqlun (Deir el Malak Gubriel) in the Fayum was carried out between September 27 and October 30.<sup>1)</sup> The chief objective of the mission was to clear the eastern part of a Christian cemetery dating from the Fatimid period, situated on site A in the central section of the kom. The western part of this cemetery had been cleared in 2000 and before. The conservation of two wall paintings from the Church of the Archangel Gabriel (C. Calaforra-Rzepka), completed this season,<sup>2)</sup> marks the end of restoration work on the murals discovered a few years ago inside the church. Textiles from burials were protected on a day-to-day basis and a full conservation was carried out of a textile with Arabic inscription, Nd.93.035 (cf. Fig. 8), from earlier excavations (B. Czaja-Szewczak). Study work during the season included a final review prior to publication of the Arabic documents from the archive of Banu Bifam (Ch. Gaubert) and continued documentation and analysis of a deposit of painted pottery from chamber E.9 (T. Górecki). The anthropological material from two seasons – 2001 and the current one – was examined (K. Piasecki assisted by R. Mahler).*

1) The Mission was directed by Prof. Dr. Włodzimierz Godlewski and included: Ms Dobiesława Bagińska, Mr. Tomasz Górecki, Mrs. Anetta Lyżwa-Piber, Mrs. Maria Mossakowska-Gaubert, Ms Dobrochna Zielińska, Dr. Magdalena Żurek, archaeologists; Dr. Christian Gaubert (Arabist, IFAO), Mrs. Barbara Czaja-Szewczak, textile restorer; Mr. Cristobal Calaforra-Rzepka, wall painting restorer; Prof. Dr. Karol Piasecki and Mr. Robert Mahler, anthropologists; Mr. Szymon Maślak and Mr. Grzegorz Ochała, students of archaeology. The Supreme Council of Antiquities was represented by Mr. Ibrahim Ragab.

The work of the Mission proceeded efficiently and according to plan thanks to all-encompassing assistance from the Authorities of the Supreme Council of Antiquities in Cairo and the Department staff in Fayum, especially Mr. Ibrahim Ragab, the Inspector attached to the expedition, to whom we are immensely indebted. The generous hospitality of the monks from the Naqlun monastery is acknowledged with equal gratitude.

2) For a report on the conservation project, see contribution by C. Calaforra-Rzepka in this volume.

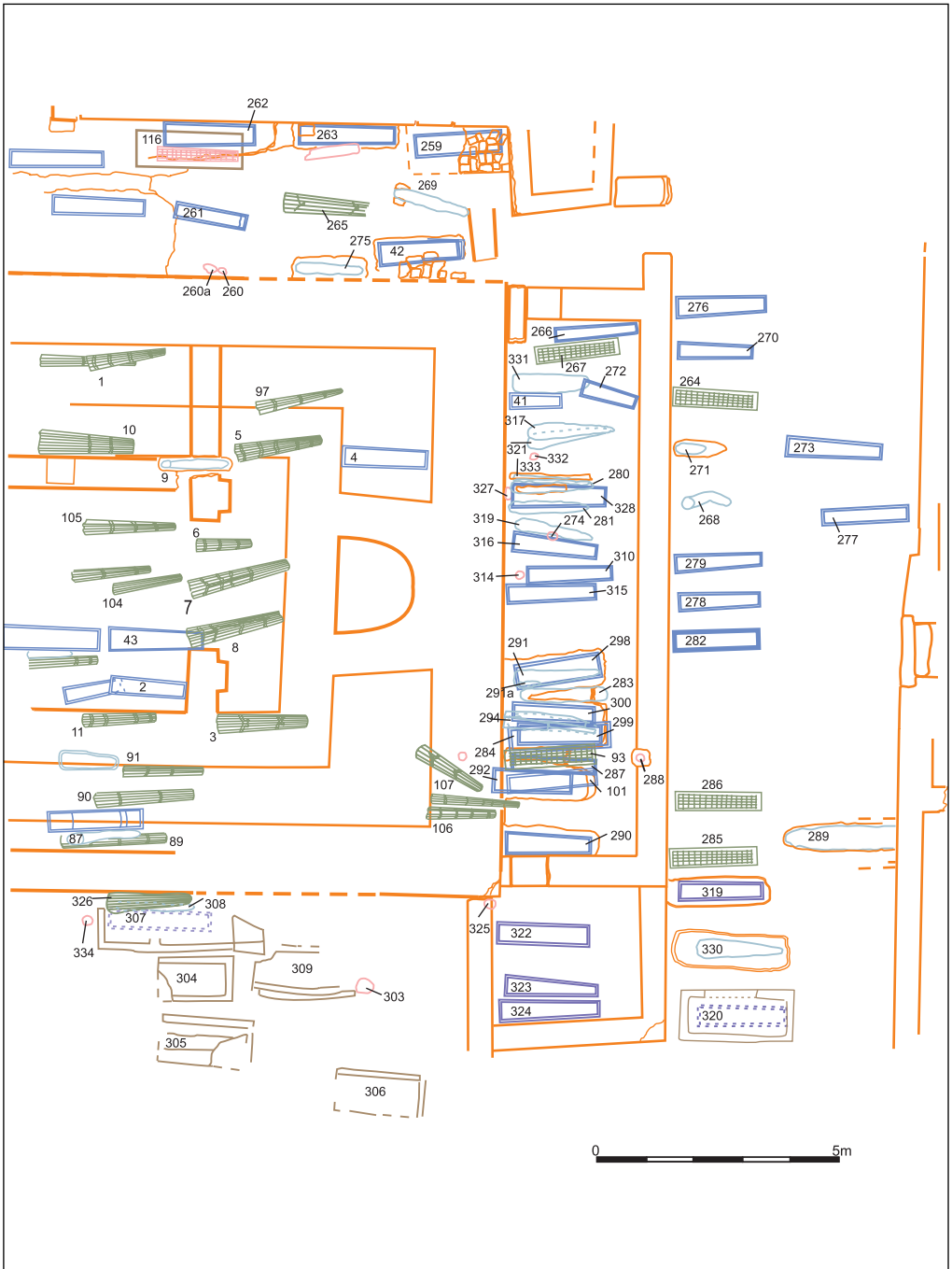


Fig. 1. Site A. Eastern part of the cemetery  
(Drawing W. Godlewski, D. Zielińska)

## MONASTIC COMPLEX

The spreading monastic compound with monumental tower that had burned down in the early years of the 10th century was superseded on site A in the central section of the kom, presumably at the turn of the 10th century, by a new church and several accompanying residential and household buildings located to the north of it (Buildings E and G), east (structure AE.1) and south (structures AS.1-3) (*Fig. 1*). In the area west of the church, among the ruins, a cemetery for the civil population connected with the monastery was established, encompassing over time all of the area around the church and even its interior after the building had been abandoned. At this time the monastic settlement was growing around the church of the Archangel Gabriel, which had been refurbished at the beginning of the 11th century and has continued in existence until the present-day.

The area east and south of the massive Tower A must have initially been uninhabited and started being developed presumably only after the conflagration of the monastic complex and the erection of

Church A. The architecture has been noted summarily, the focus of this year's excavations being on the tombs of the superimposed cemetery. Contrary to the area north of the church, where a kind of alley separated Buildings E and G from the church facade, on the east (AE) and south (AS 1-3) the architecture leaned against the church walls. At a size of 11.10 by 2.80-2.90 m, the eastern room (AE.1) is the biggest; it was accessible from the south and north. The rooms on the south (AS.2 and 3) appear to be smaller, but they have yet to be fully explored. Apparently the latest addition, room S.3 in the southeastern corner of the church (3.07 by 2.75-2.85 m) was turned into a family mausoleum (M.2). A wide street (A.5) ran past AE.1 and AS.3 on their east, giving access to yet another structure, Building H, which extended even further east. This architecture of presumably domestic function may date to the 11th century. To judge by the fill in AE.1, as well as in street A.5, the eastern rooms could have served as animal pens. A full interpretation of this complex is still pending.

## CEMETERY A

During the past season excavation work concentrated around the eastern end of Church A where chiefly burials were explored. Over 80 tombs were identified inside the rooms adjoining the eastern part of the church. Only a few burials, mainly by the southeastern church wall and inside mausoleum no. 1, had rectangular masonry superstructures covered with lime plaster. Nothing but the bottom of the structures has survived in virtually all of the cases. Similar superstructures in much better condition were found in the northwestern

corner of the church. No superstructures were noted inside the eastern chambers. Wooden coffins were located in fairly deep trenches. Sequences of successive burials were observed in a number of places, as for instance in chamber AE.1 which adjoins the eastern façade of the church. This fairly big room with a surface of about 31 sq. m yielded 30 burials from three distinct phases. The oldest graves were destroyed when coffins of the second phase were placed in the burial pits; all that survives of this first stage are broken pieces of wooden

coffins, fragmentarily preserved textiles: shrouds, pillows and robes, and some human skeletal material, including a few skulls. In the second phase, 11 coffins, well-made of palm-wood planks and mostly featuring gabled lids, were introduced here (*Fig. 2*). These coffins were covered with mats, the latter frequently characterized by ornamental weaving,<sup>3)</sup> and linen shrouds decorated with mostly silk bands of ornament and Arabic inscriptions. Simple red crosses were also painted with ocher on the shrouds. The shrouds were tied onto the coffins with ropes, the knotting on top of the lids being quite elaborate. The bodies inside the coffins were stretched out on their back, heads – all oriented to the west – on

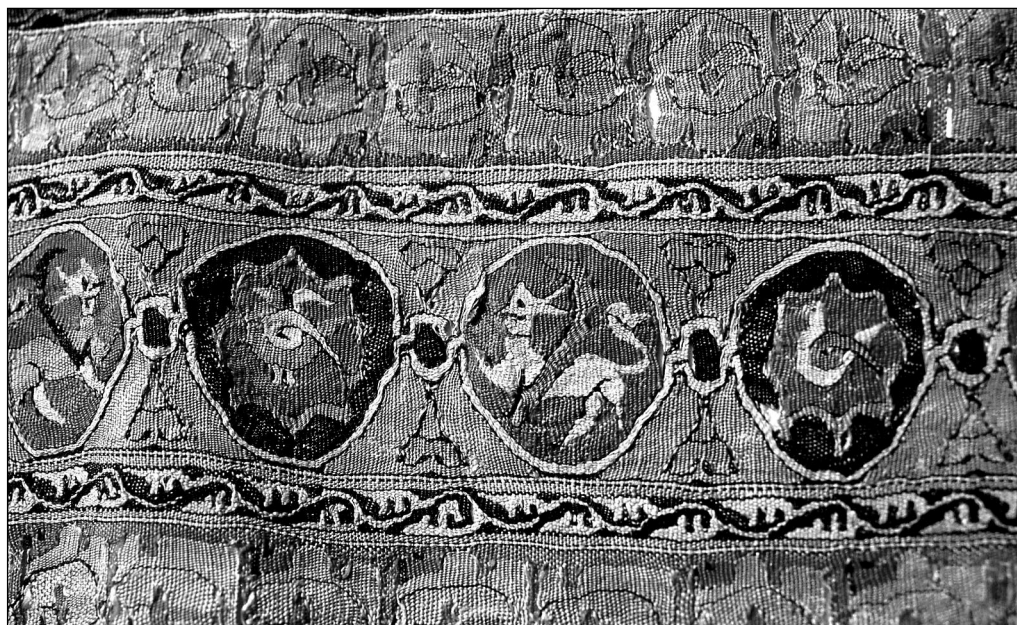
pillows stuffed with the leaves and flowers of aromatic plants. Linen shrouds were used as wrapping for the bodies, the fabric sown together at the side and gathered around the ankles with a band or rope. All the dead – men, women and children – were dressed in tunics, pants, shawls and wraps.<sup>4)</sup> The textiles, which survive in fairly good condition – shrouds, pillows and robes – were richly decorated with bands of Arabic inscription, geometric, floral and figural patterns done in silk (*Fig. 3*). Most of the textiles had been manufactured presumably in local *tiraz*-style weaving workshops. Small glass and glazed earthenware vessels were occasionally placed inside the coffins, by the head or the feet of the deceased.



*Fig. 2. Site A. Room AE.1. Burials T. 298-T. 300 and T. 292, seen from the west (Photo W. Godlewski)*

3) For a preliminary discussion of the assemblage of mats discovered in the Naqlun cemetery, see contribution by A. Łyżwa-Piber in this volume.

4) For a discussion of the burial tunics discovered in the Naqlun cemetery, as well as for details of textile conservation, see contribution by B. Czaja-Szewczak in this volume.



*Fig. 3a. Piece of linen-and-silk shawl (Nd.02.245)  
(Photo W. Godlewski)*



*Fig. 3b. Piece of tunic (Nd.02.168)  
(Photo W. Godlewski)*

Graves from the third phase of the use of the cemetery inside room AE.1 lay in the upper parts of the fill, just below the surface. Thirteen burials from this period represented a variety of coffin types, all the boxes made of palm-wood planks or palm-leaf ribs; in a few cases the bodies had been placed on biers of palm leaves and wrapped in mats. The shrouds continued to be decorated with ornamental bands embroidered in silk on the textiles. Women were more likely to have simple jewelry, such as necklaces, bracelets and rings.

To date, over 340 burials of men, women and children, belonging to a Christian community connected with the monastery, have been uncovered in the cemetery at Naqlun. Not one can be identified as a monk's burial. The majority of the graves are dated to the 12th and 13th centuries, but the oldest could possibly go

back as far as the late 11th. The most recent burials on the site could be of the 14th century, perhaps even later, especially the burials made in the abandoned church interior. Studies of the textiles and the Arabic inscriptions ornamenting many of the pieces should provide a more specific chronology for particular graves. Also the glass and pottery furnishings should be helpful in this respect, as well as objects obviously connected with the deceased's profession, such as weaving implements, pen cases etc.

#### MAUSOLEA

Two sets of graves found inside small chambers may be identified as small family mausolea, although the identification is based on purely archaeological evidence.

In the southeastern corner of the church there was a small chamber measuring 8.5 sq. m in area. It was accessible from AE.1 and contained three burials, T. 322-T. 324, two of which (T. 323-324) consisted of separate coffins with the bodies of a man and a woman placed in the same burial pit. The coffins stood on the same mat and were covered jointly with another mat. Both coffins were wrapped in inscribed shrouds and had leaves and flowers deposited on them. Both the man and the woman were richly robed in textiles of the *tiraz* type with Arabic inscriptions. The woman had an ornamentally plaited palm-leaf wreath around the crown of her head. The man's burial had been richly furnished with two glass bottles still in their protective basketwork (Fig. 4) and a pen case with metal fittings and two sharpened reed pens (*kalamoi*). Inside the coffin there was also a codex in a leather cover with a flap featuring blind tooled decoration consisting chiefly of two big crosses (Figs. 5-6). The codex contained the text of the Gospel of John written down in Coptic on 73 paper

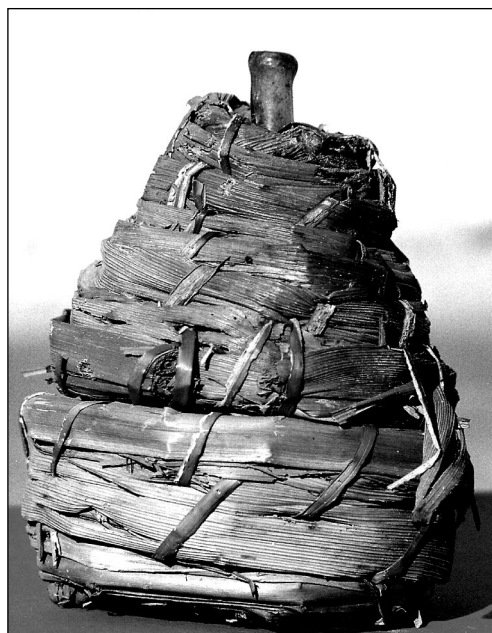


Fig. 4. Glass toilet bottle in protective basketwork from T. 324 (Nd.02.235) (Photo W. Godlewski)



*Fig. 5. Burial T. 324. The codex apparent next to the enshrouded head of the deceased (Photo W. Godlewski)*



*Fig. 6. Coptic codex of AD 1099/1100 (Nd.02.239) from burial T. 324 (Photo W. Godlewski)*



cards, measuring 19.2 by 12.8 cm, in year 493 of the *hijra* (AD 1099/1100).<sup>5)</sup> Preceding the text is a full-page illumination depicting a cross; additional decorative elements are to be found in the text on the title page and on the last page of the codex, which also contains a brief inscription in Arabic giving the name of the owner of the book – one Botros, presumably the same with the man laid to rest in T. 324. The codex is relevant to the dating of the burials inside this mausoleum, as well as to the contemporary second-phase graves in chamber AE.1. All may be placed provisionally in the middle of the 12th century.

The second mausoleum was a specially constructed room just about 10 sq. m in area, situated in the northwestern corner of

the church (*Fig. 7*). The chamber was accessible from the east and contained four plastered superstructures of red brick, erected in four stages over seven burials. Obviously the mausoleum had remained in use over a lengthy period of time. Initially, a narrow marker had been put in place; this survives only fragmentarily by the northern wall of the chamber, indicating the position of a grave containing two coffins deposited simultaneously (T. 50a,d). This marker was made wider when the next coffin (T. 50b) was buried next to the previous two. After a while the most fully preserved marker was erected; this stood by the southern wall of the chamber over two coffins (T. 133a,b), which appear to have been deposited together in their pits. In the last phase of the mausoleum one more person was buried



*Fig. 7. Site A. Mausoleum with tombs T. 50 and T. 133*  
(Photo W. Goldewski)

5) For a preliminary discussion of the contents of this codex, see contribution by J. van der Vliet in this volume.

between the older superstructures and a marker was erected of mud brick; it is now only fragmentarily preserved.

Of the furnishings of the seven coffins, all of which are heavily damaged, only the more durable objects have survived – two glass bottles and two copper pins for fastening a headdress. The shrouds and robes have all but completely disintegrated. The founding of the mausoleum just above the layer of burning of the early 10th century suggests that the northwestern mausoleum could have been among the earliest burials made in the cemetery on site A; its dating, however, can be fixed roughly in the second half of the 11th century

The cemetery in Naqlun with its well preserved graves, the numerous textiles of

documented function in the burial rites (coffin shrouds, body shrouds, pillows, robes), equally numerous well-preserved mats and fair quantities of vessels and personal belongings, including jewelry, contributes to a study of the burial rites current in a Christian community of the 11th through the 13th century, a time when the community was becoming a minority group in the Fayum. The textiles discovered in the graves at Naqlun will go far in explaining the usage of particular kinds of fabrics and will help to date many uninscribed textiles now in museum and private collections. Doubtless the documented archaeological context of the textiles from Naqlun will make them one of the more important sets of comparative material.