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Naqlun (Nekluni): Season 2004

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NAQLUN (NEKLONI)

SEASON 2004

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A mission from the Polish Center of Mediterranean Archaeology of Warsaw University, directed by Prof. Dr. Włodzimierz Godlewski,¹ completed another season of excavations (from September 6 until October 18) on the site of the monastery of Nekloni in Fayum.² The work was geared to exploring the medieval burial ground from the Fatimid-Mamluk period (11th-13th century) situated in the central part of the kom and the Late Antique cemetery tentatively dated to the 6th-7th century, situated west of the modern Deir el-Malak monastery. The skeletal material from both cemeteries was examined (K. Piasecki). Further research was conducted on the complex of monastic architecture situated in the central part of the kom, south of Tower A and in Building G. The worked wood from this and previous seasons was studied (I. Zych). Textiles from the cemetery and Building G were conserved and protected (B. Czaja-Szewczak), as were the written Coptic and Arabic documents (W. Godlewski). Finally, with the assistance of the IFAO, for which the Mission is deeply indebted, a full digital documentation of the Coptic and Arabic texts on parchment from the Banu Bifam archive discovered in 1997 (Mohamed Ibrahim, IFAO). The documentation will be used in the publication of the archive now being prepared by Dr. M. Mouton and Dr. Ch. Gaubert.

The work of the Mission proceeded effectively and efficiently thanks to the all-encompassing assistance of the SCA authorities, in Cairo as well as in Fayum. The Mission would like to express its gratitude to Mr. Mohammed Mohammed Hamdy, the inspector attached to the expedition, and to Mr. Ibrahim el Ragab in charge of the Mission Stores at Naqlun. The hospitality of the Fayum Coptic monastic community and the efforts of Abuna Abraam personally to create a proper environment for effective work are duly appreciated.

- 1 The staff included: Mrs. Iwona Zych, Ms Dobrochna Zielińska, Mrs. Maria Mossakowska-Gaubert, Mrs. Anetta Lyszwa-Piber and Mr. Szymon Maślak, archaeologists; Prof. Karol Piasecki and Mr. Michał Jastrzębski, anthropologists; Mrs. Barbara Czaja-Szewczak, textiles restorer; Dr. Christian Gaubert, arabist; Mr. Mohamed Ibrahim, photographer; and students of archaeology from Warsaw University: Mr. Grzegorz Ochała, Ms Dorota Dziedzic, Ms Agata Strzelecka and Mr. Jan Odolczyk.
- 2 The previous season was reported on in *PAM XV, Reports 2003* (2004): W. Godlewski, "Naqlun (Nekloni). Season 2003"; S. Maślak, "Bricks and brick bonding in the monastic architecture on Kom A in Naqlun"; B. Czaja-Szewczak, "Naqlun 2003. From Scraps to Tunic"; M. Żurek, "Two pottery deposits from Building AA in Naqlun". Other contributions: J-M. Mouton, "Un village copte du Fayyoun au XIe siecle, d'apres la découverte d'un lot d'archives", *CRAIB-L* (2002), 447- 458. Papers presenting the scope of Polish activity at Naqlun were read at an international

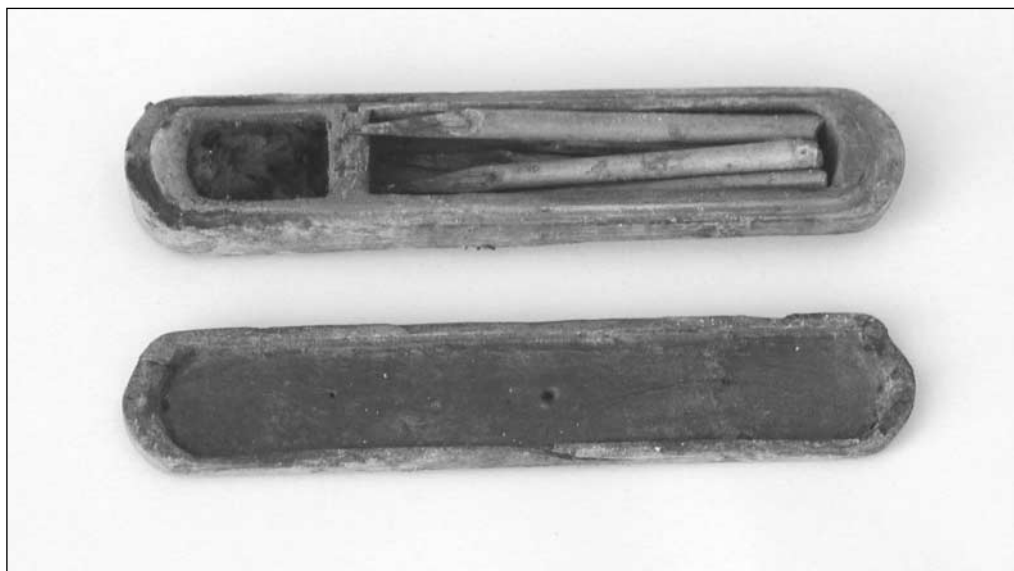


Fig. 1. Pen case and kalamoi from grave T. 358. Nd.04.149-Nd.04.150
(Photo W. Godlewski)



Fig. 2. Small glass bottle from grave T. 352.
Nd.04.071 (Photo W. Godlewski)



Fig. 3. Bronze bowl from grave T. 352.
Nd.04.070 (Photo W. Godlewski)

CEMETERY A

Following an intensive investigation of the eastern and western parts of the cemetery in 2000 and 2002, this season the expedition concentrated on digging the southern part extending between the Church of the Archangel Michael and the so-called South Building of the monastic complex, the northern façade of which was cleared this year. Apart from this, two graves were excavated in room 2 of Building G (T. 342 and T. 343) and one in complex H (T. 341).

The total number of graves discovered and explored this year was 64. They belonged to both adults and children from the Christian community of Fayum. A few of the graves on the south side of the church had brick and earth superstructures. As a rule, the burials were made in coffins, which were wrapped in coffin coverings, and had mats and baskets placed on top of them. The grave goods included in a few cases small glass bottles. One adult male had been buried with a pen case and five *kalamoi*, obviously a mark of his profession [Fig. 1]. Inside a child's coffin (T. 352), there was a small glass bottle [Fig. 2] and bronze bowl with Arabic inscription engraved inside the vessel just below the rim [Fig. 3]. In some of the tombs, the robes, in which the dead were buried – tunics, shawls, trousers, and sporadically shoes – were preserved. Silk-thread embroidery was noted on several of the tunics, shawls, and shrouds. A few textile

fragments from destroyed graves were found in the earth fill. One of the most interesting textiles is a small piece of silk shawl (Nd.04.112) decorated with animal medallions, the colors enhanced with gold-thread embroidery (see the color plate on p. 207). Jewelry was also noted in the women's and children's graves: rings, earrings and bangles made of iron, bronze and bone. Two small bone bangles were placed with a child burial (T. 388) [Fig. 4].

To date, the investigations in cemetery A have recorded a total of 390 graves.³ The sample is sufficient to attempt a characteristic of the burial customs current in the Christian community of Fayum in the Fatimid-Mamluk Period. Anthropological studies on the medieval inhabitants of Fayum and research on the textiles and robes of the period are also underway with a view to publishing the results in the near future.



Fig. 4. Two bone bangles from grave T. 388. Nd.04.373-4 (Photo W. Godlewski)

symposium held in Deir el Azab in Fayum (February 5-10, 2004): W. Godlewski on the history of the Nekloni monastery and the Coptic cemetery of Fatimid and Ayyubid times on Site A; T. Derda on the Greek texts related to Christianity from al-Fayum and J. van der Vliet on the Coptic inscriptions from al-Fayum, M.-J. Mouton & Ch. Gaubert on the unpublished archives of Girga; M. Mossakowska-Gaubert on the glass objects from the excavations, B. Czaja-Szewczak on the textile tunics and A. Lyżwa-Piber on the basketry; E. Parandowska on the preservation of the wall paintings from the Church of the Archangel Gabriel at Naqlun and C. ten Hagen on the legend of St. Aur and the foundation of the Church of the Archangel Gabriel. The symposium proceedings are scheduled to be published by The American University in Cairo Press in 2005.

³ For reports on the exploration of the Coptic cemetery on kom A in Naqlun, cf. *PAM XI, Reports 1999* (2000), 125-148; *PAM XII, Reports 2000* (2001), 149-180; *PAM XIV, Reports 2002* (2003), 163-195.

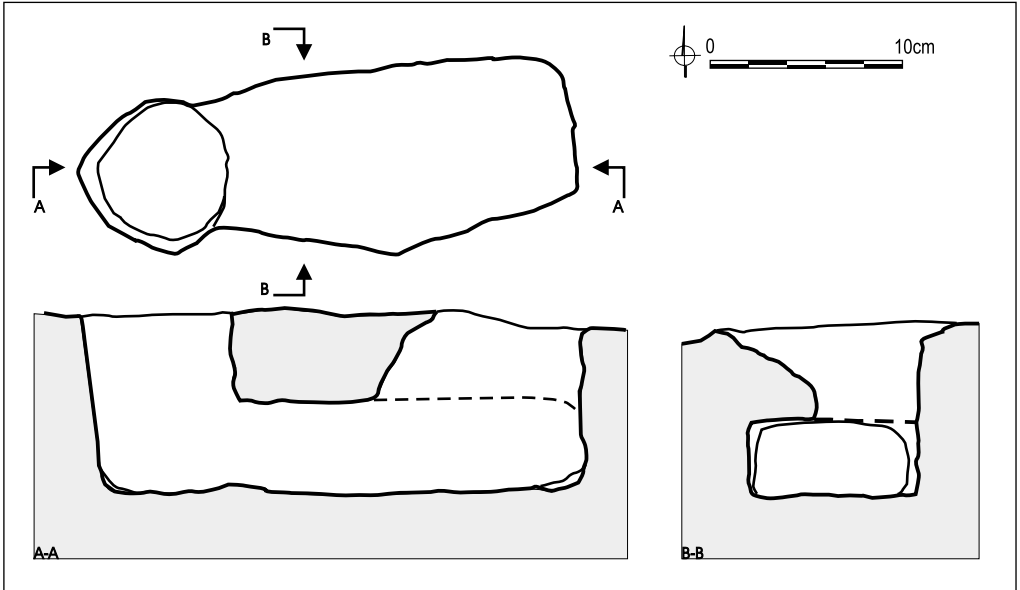


Fig. 5. *Tomb C.T. 003*
(*Plan and sections W. Godlewski & D. Zielińska*)



Fig. 6. *Tomb C.T. 003. Amphorae and cartonnage in situ*
(*Photo W. Godlewski*)

CEMETERY C

The cemetery, situated west of the modern monastery wall surrounding Deir el-Malak, was identified during a topographical survey of the site carried out by the mission in 1987. At the time, one tomb was explored.⁴ Excavations in the Nekloni monastery in past years have uncovered a few fragmentarily preserved funerary stelae with Greek inscriptions originating presumably from this cemetery; two completely preserved Greek stelae, likely connected with this cemetery, have also been identified. The stelae suggest that cemetery C, tentatively dated to the 6th and 7th century, was used also by the local Fayum community.⁵

Current economic and building activities have endangered the area of the cemetery; hence, it was deemed necessary to

undertake explorations. Five tombs were explored in the central part of the site. Each of the tombs consisted of a small subterranean chamber (L. 2.00-2.30 m; W. 1.00-1.30 m) cut in the soft sedimentary rock. The chambers were accessed via vertical shafts, about 1.00 m deep, situated to the west of them. The rock surface around the tombs is heavily eroded and there are no apparent traces of any funerary monuments or superstructures, the existence of which funerary stelae, found separately, would appear to suggest. Three of the tombs had been penetrated already in antiquity and destroyed. Finds from these tombs were limited to burial shrouds and broken LR.7 amphorae.

One of the tombs (C.T. 003) was discovered undisturbed [Fig. 5]. The shaft



Fig. 7. *Cartonnage from C.T. 003*
(Photo W. Godlewski)

4 W. Godlewski, T. Derda, T. Górecki, "Deir el Naqlun (Nekloni). Second Preliminary Report", *Nubica* III.1 (1994), 216 and 235.

5 W. Godlewski & A. Łajtar, "The cemetery and Greek stelae from Naqlun", *JJP* XXV (2006), in press.

contained seven amphorae of the LR.7 type, standing upside down on the rims. Filling the burial chamber almost entirely was a cartonnage with a projecting *jerid* structure rising above the head [Fig. 6]. The cartonnage was made of linen shrouds and bandaged with colorful ornamental tapes criss-crossing on the surface [Fig. 7]. The state of preservation of the cartonnage permitted storage following protective measures, with full conservation scheduled for the future.

In another undisturbed tomb, two burials were recorded. A second burial was made in a chamber already containing a cartonnage (C.T. 005). This second burial was encased in a plain linen shroud. Its position on top of the earlier cartonnage caused the latter's partial destruction. The fill in the shaft and chamber contained sherds of some LR.7 amphorae belonging to the original burial and broken when the secondary burial was made. Inside the disturbed tombs there were many pieces of tapes used in bandaging the cartonnages, indicating what they may have looked like in analogy to the intact example from tomb C.T. 003. Similar cartonnages were discovered in the cemetery at Karara. The best known example is a wooden painted coffin now in the Museum of the Institute of Egyptology of Heidelberg University.⁶ The architecture of the cartonnages from Naqlun approaches the construction of the Heidelberg coffin.

The disturbed tombs also yielded several examples of woolen and silk textiles, some of the most exquisite fragments coming from tomb C.T. 005 [cf. color illustrations on p. 208 below]. A more complete characteristic of the textiles from the graves in

cemetery C will be possible once a full documentation of the season's finds has been completed in 2005.⁷ Sporadically accompanying the textiles and amphorae were other grave goods constituting personal belongings, e.g. a wooden comb [Fig. 8] and footwear.



Fig. 8. Wooden comb from tomb T.C. 002. Nd.04.316 (Photo W. Godlewski)

⁶ C. Nauwerth, "Karara und El-Hibe", *Studien zur Archäologie und Geschichte Altägyptens* 15 (1996), 30-36.

⁷ Cf. contribution by B. Czaja-Szewcak in this volume.

MEDIEVAL MONASTIC ARCHITECTURE

Concurrently with the exploration of cemetery A, work continued on the monastic complex built around the Church of the Archangel Michael in the central part of the kom presumably in the 10th century and successively expanded over the next few centuries. Building G in the northeastern part of the complex was explored this year, and the northern façade of the South Building (J), situated to the south of the church, was cleared. The latter structure lines the southern side of an E-W street running alongside Church A and the adjoining rooms A.S.2-3 [Fig. 10].

BUILDING G

The building, which probably had no more than the ground floor, consisted of a number of rooms and was accessed from a street that ran alongside the northern facade of the church. Four rooms were explored this year (G.2, G.7, G.9 and G.10). In one of these rooms (G.2) there were two burials dating from the 13th century. The walls of Building G have survived to a height of 1.00-1.20 m. The function of particular rooms has not been identified beyond all doubt, but they were surely not residential in character. In one of the rooms (G.2) there was a basin built into the floor, in another (G.10) a staircase doubling back on itself, constructed already when the building was standing. The steps presumably led to the roof or were associated with a gate located in the southeastern corner of Building G. The fill in the room with the staircase (G.10) yielded a small assemblage of documents, 30 in all, written in Arabic and Coptic. The documents can be dated to the 10th-11th century. Beside letters and contracts, they included lists of individuals receiving different, most often small amounts of

goods of some kind (Nd.04.168) [Fig. 9]. Some of the "economic" documents were

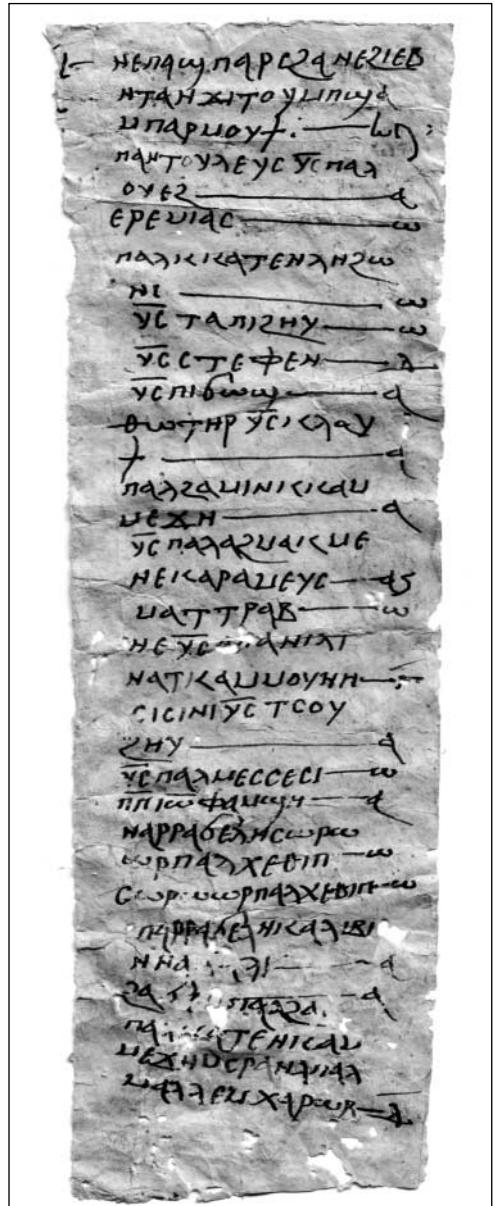


Fig. 9. List of recipients. Coptic text on paper. Nd.04.168 (Photo W. Godlewski)

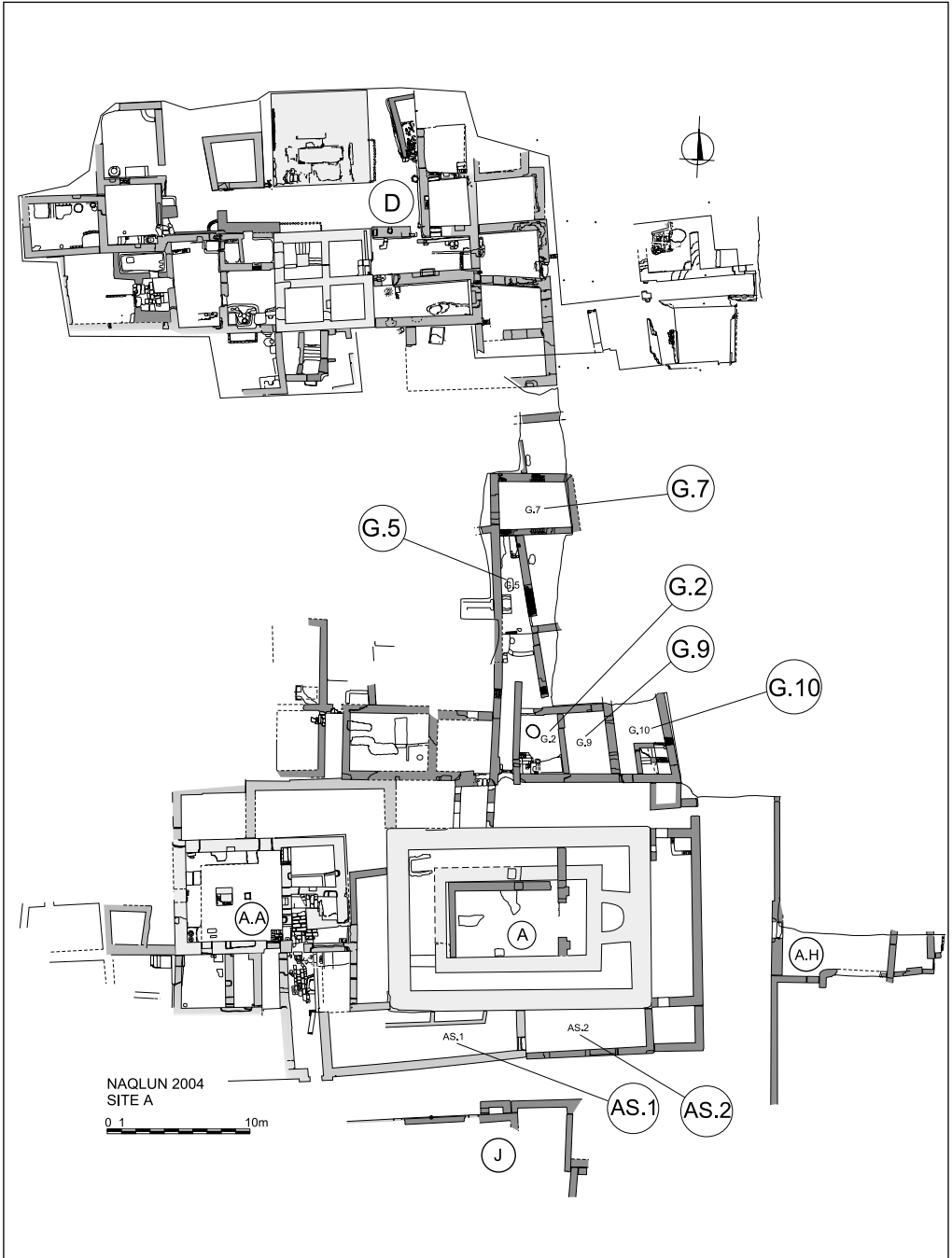


Fig. 10. Plan of the monastic complex on site A. Area explored by 2004
(Plan W. Godlewski & D. Zielińska)

written on parchment codices originating in all likelihood from the 8th-9th century. The documents uncovered this year constitute part of a larger assemblage, a few documents of which had already come to light during the season in 2003.⁸ The texts suggest that Building G could have been used for administrative purposes.

In the floor of the passage from G.5 to G.7, which was repaired at some time during the building's existence, a few fragments of a tunic decorated with vertical stripes containing Coptic inscriptions were found (Nd.04.290).

Rooms A.S.1-2 along the southern church façade were built onto the wall of the church. These are two extended rectangular rooms, the southern one of which (A.S.1) had belonged to the original developed complex AA situated west of the tower. It was discovered already in 1986, when the southwestern corner of the tower and the medieval tombs there were explored, but it was impossible then to interpret its position in the architectural complex. Measuring 13.10 by 2.85-3.50 m on the outside, it was presumably a single-space unit serving some kind of household function. After the conflagration of the monastery, it continued to be used as a courtyard, connected with the newly erected room A.S.2. Later it was transformed into a kind of communal mausoleum. Several tombs were dug in the courtyard and two of these were even furnished with underground chambers built of brick (T. 28 and T. 35). Both tombs were explored in 1986.

Room A.S.2 was added onto the complex already after the catastrophic fire. It was also rectangular in shape, measuring 8.40 by 2.70-3.00 m inside, and of indeterminate function. Pits dug under the graves, which were located here once the south wall had collapsed, went a long way to destroying any evidence of the interior. A few fragments of Coptic texts written on parchment codex cards and an illumination depicting a cross with birds (one of the birds is a cock) in the center of the composition (Nd.04.189) were discovered in the original fill between the grave pits.

SOUTH BUILDING (J)

Excavation of the cemetery in the area south of the E-W street lining the structures adjoining the church on the south (A.S.1-2) revealed the presence of well preserved mud-brick walls (rising to a height of 1.50 m). This building had two entrances on the church side. To judge by the foundation level and the manner of founding, as well as by the sizable traces of conflagration on its walls, the building must have belonged to the original monastic compound of the 6th century and was rebuilt in the 10th century. At this time a new building, more extensive but much less well preserved, was built on top of the earlier structure, which had been destroyed by fire. Further extensive explorations are required in this part of the site, but even now, it seems that the walls of the South Building marked the southern extension of the medieval cemetery.

8 Cf. contribution by J. van der Vliet in this volume.

TEXTILES CONSERVATION AND DOCUMENTATION

Textiles discovered during the exploration of the burials in cemetery A ran in the dozens. Shrouds and robes, preserved in fragmentary state, were cleaned, preserved and documented. These textiles constitute an important part of the large assemblage of 12th and 13th century textiles discovered at Naqlun and they provide a sound basis for studies of textile production in the Fayum, as well as of robes worn in the region in this period. Numerous well preserved tunics (*galabiyah*) and shawls

also support observations regarding fashion styles in the design and manner of decoration. Many pieces also reveal fragments of silk-embroidered Arabic inscriptions and there are also a few pieces from Building G that preserve Coptic texts.

Concurrently, the conservator proceeded with the conservation treatment of a shawl (Nd.00.082) discovered in 2000, ornamented with fragmentary Coptic inscriptions [cf. *Fig. 9* on p. 210 in this volume].⁹

WORKED WOOD

The worked wood from the previous season, as well as the current one, was recorded by I. Zych, whose main task, however, was a study of the wooden coffins from the burials excavated this year (plus coffin documentation from earlier seasons).¹⁰ The

coffin assemblage proved interesting not only in terms of the burial context, but also as an indirect exposition of local wood-working techniques current in the Fayum in the 11th-13th centuries, as well as of the local trade in wood in this period.

9 W. Godlewski, "Les textiles issues des fouilles récentes de Naqlun, Égypte", in: *La trame de l'Histoire. Textiles pharaoniques, coptes et islamiques* (Paris 2002), 100-104.

10 See contribution by I. Zych in this volume.