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# NAQLUN (NEKLONI) EXCAVATIONS IN 2010–2011

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with appendix by Barbara Czaja<sup>2</sup>

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**Abstract:** Continued excavation by a PCMA archaeological mission was concentrated on uncovering monastic architecture on kom A, which is the site of the main medieval monastic compound at Deir el-Naqlun. Work proceeded in three sectors of the site: the southern part (Site B, refuse dump, reported on separately), the center (Buildings J and AA, including more graves of 12th century date from the southwestern part of the medieval cemetery) and the northern end (Site 2011.1 = K.1) of the kom. A linen-wrapped deposit of votive objects from the Northern Building (Site 2011.1) contained four small crosses cast of lead and a round lead plaque with Arabic inscription.

**Keywords:** Fayum, Naqlun/Nekluni, monastery, site B, site 2011.1 [K.1], Cemetery A, votive deposit, cross

Excavations on kom A in Naqlun were continued in 2010 and 2011 in the central part of the site, in the area of Buildings J and AA, and in a new location (2011.1) approximately 50 m to the north of Building D in the northern part of the kom. New graves were revealed in the

southwestern part of Cemetery A, which corresponds to the parts of the monastic buildings J and AA explored this season. Further work was carried out also on the refuse dump in the southern part of the kom (for a report on these excavations, see Dzierzbicka 2014, in this volume).

## CENTRAL COMPLEX ON KOM A

The original early 6th century hermitage on Kom A in the central part of the Naqlun complex comprised a tower (Building A) and two buildings: Building AA.30 and Building J [Fig. 1]. It was enlarged successively, incorporating rooms from structures AA.40 and AA.50, even as Building J was redesigned and shut

off from the complex by the blocking of its northern entrances from street S.1. By the 8th century there were two separate complexes: the old Hermitage A with Buildings AA.30, 40 and 50, and Building J, which was incorporated into the newly built complex on the south, raised on top of a rocky rise. A fire, which took place

not earlier than the middle of the 10th century, destroyed this arrangement and the buildings appear to have been deserted in the beginning of the 11th century. By the end of the 11th century, a burial ground gradually appeared in the ruins (Cemetery A).

### BUILDING J

Building J consisted of at least nine rooms uncovered in 2009. It appears to have had a row of double-room units, entered separately from the street, used as residential quarters at the time of the expansion of the monastery in the 6th century. Modified extensively over the ages, it succumbed to a severe fire that consumed the entire monastery together with Tower A. The *terminus post quem* for this conflagration was set tentatively is AD 937 on the grounds of a hoard of Abbasid coins discovered in the ruins in 2009 and studied

in 2011 by Dr. Gisela Helmecke. The hoard comprised 18 completely preserved dinars and 62 fragments that had been cut specially for commercial purposes.

In 2010, the excavation, which was slowed down by the great number of tombs in the 12th century layers, was limited to a relatively small area in the western part of this building, encompassing rooms BJ.9 and the more extensive BJ.10. Some cleaning was conducted in rooms BJ.2 and BJ.6, where some pots and installations from the 9th–10th century were uncovered.

Room BJ.9, which had a surface of 11.3 m<sup>2</sup> (3.40 m by 3.33 m), was entered originally from street AS.4 and was connected with BJ.8 in a two-chamber unit. The walls were damaged, both by the conflagration and by the grave pits of cemetery A. The walls of the chamber also bore testimony to an earlier rebuilding

### Team

*Dates of work:* 26 September–2 November 2010; 17 September–13 October 2011

*Director:* Prof. Włodzimierz Godlewski, archaeologist (Institute of Archaeology, University of Warsaw)

*SCA representative:* Amal Salah Mahmoud Sayed Ahmed Al Sharif, Mabruk Ahmed Tawfik, Sayed Rahman Abdel Aziz, Ibrahim Ragab Ahmed (Inspectors of SCA in Fayoum)

*Arabists:* Dr. Gisela R. Helmecke (Museum of Arab Art, Berlin), Dr. Christian Gaubert (IFAO, Cairo)

*Papyrologists:* Prof. Dr. Tomasz Derda (Institute of Archaeology, University of Warsaw), Dr. Dorota Dzierzbicka (Institute of Archaeology, University of Warsaw)

*Ceramologist:* Katarzyna Danys-Lasek (independent)

*Worked wood specialist:* Iwona Zych (2010) (PCMA)

*Glass specialist:* Dr. Maria Mossakowska-Gaubert (IFAO, Cairo)

*Anthropologist:* Marzena Ożarek (PhD candidate, Institute of Archaeology, University of Warsaw)

*Archaeologist, documentalist:* Szymon Maslak (PCMA)

*Registrar:* Łukasz Krupski (independent)

*Textile restorer:* Barbara Czaja-Szewczak (Museum of King Jan III's Palace at Wilanów)

*Metal restorer:* Władysław Weker (2011) (State Museum of Archaeology, Warsaw)

*Student trainees:* Joanna Ciesielska (2011), Larysa Gidzińska (2010) (Institute of Archaeology, University of Warsaw)

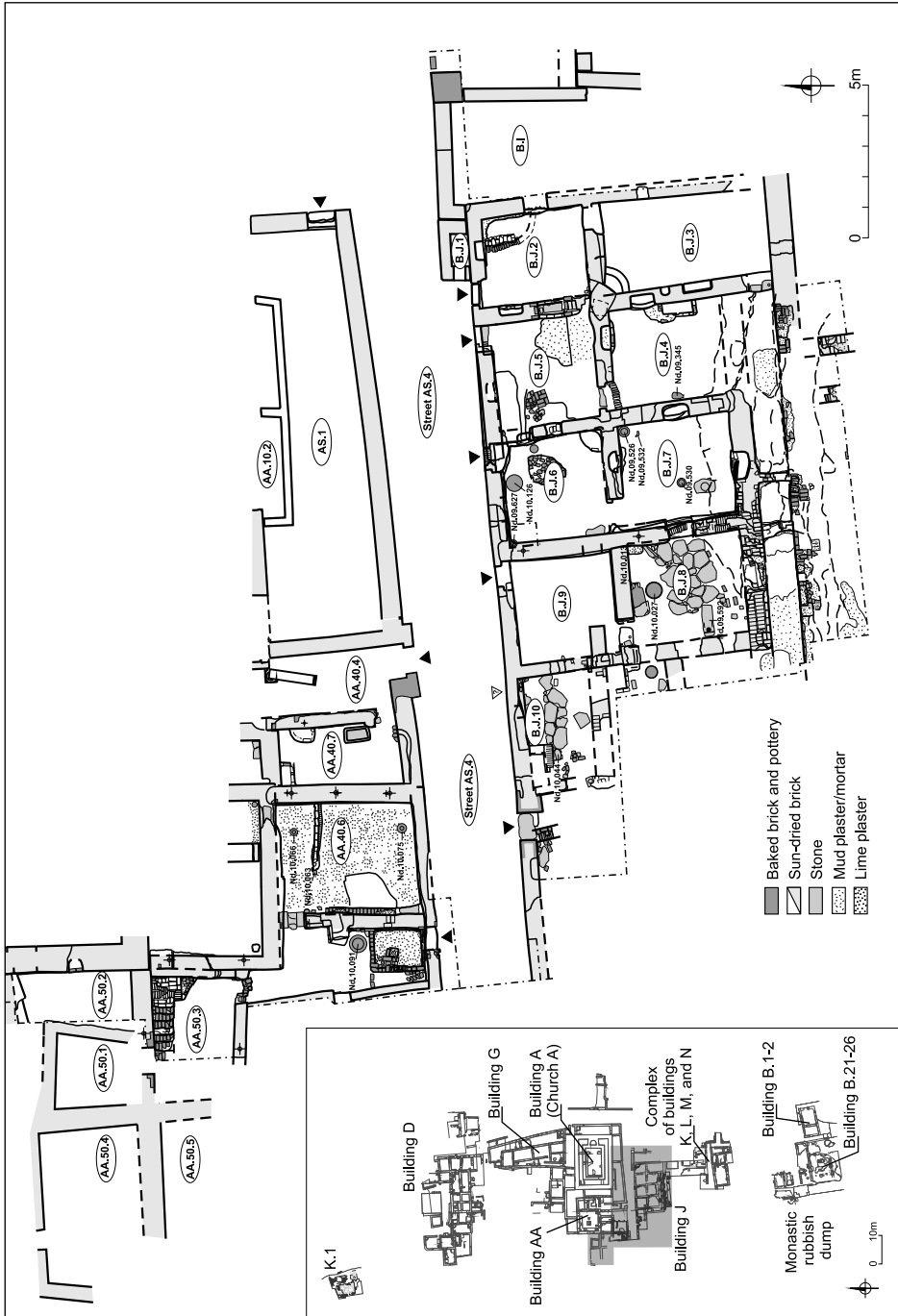


Fig. 1. Central part of kom A: Buildings J and rooms AA.40 and AA.50 (Plan S. Maslak, PCMA Mission Archives)



*Fig. 2. Building J, room 10, view from the east*

*All photos W. Godlewski (PCMA Mission Archives)*

event. The north and east walls in particular had undergone damage and were subsequently rebuilt. This occurred sometime at the turn of the 7th century, although a more precise date cannot be given. It was most probably the same event that caused damages in building AA and resulted in the destruction of tomb superstructures in cemetery C. The funerary stelae from cemetery C were subsequently used as building material in the rebuilt and enlarged buildings J and AA.

Room BJ.10, the full dimensions of which still need to be established, was paved with a floor (partly preserved) of limestone slabs. It was much more extensive than the other units in Building J and may have had a special function [Fig. 2].

A narrow passage running by the southern façade of the structure (BJ.11) gave entry into the building in its last phase of use (8th–10th century). The floor level in the passage was 0.90 m above the walking level inside the rooms. The south wall of BJ.11, preserved residually, was erected on a rocky rise to the south of the complex, occupied by architecture which has been recognized only sketchily so far.

### BUILDING AA

An extensive complex of buildings AA and A, excavated by the Mission in previous seasons, faced Building J on the opposite side of street AS.4. This complex was explored once numerous medieval graves from Cemetery A had been recorded and removed (see below).

Room AA.40.6 was accessible originally from street AS.4 through a door in the south wall. It consisted of a nearly square space that was entered

from a vestibule on the west side through a narrow doorway by the north wall. The inside dimensions of this unit were 5.90 m by 4.55 m (26.80 m<sup>2</sup>). Fragmentarily preserved lime plaster was recorded on the walls of the room and some painted fragments in the debris can be considered as tentative evidence of mural decoration. The floor was made of lime plaster mixed with gravel [Fig. 3]. The western part of the complex, cleared in 2011, turned out to be a narrow vestibule, 5.84 m long and 1.06 m wide, originally accessible from alleys on the south and west. A passage led from it to Building AA.50. After a basin was built in its southern part, the room was accessible only from room AA.50.3. The inside dimensions of the basin were 1.16 m by 1.65 m. A small square depression, 0.28 m to the side and 0.28 cm deep, in the lime-plastered floor of the basin must have served sedimentation purposes [Fig. 4]. An assemblage of plates, vases, bowls and large bowls or basins came from the fill. The room shared the fate of the rest of complexes A and AA, destroyed by fire in the middle of the 10th century.

Room AA.40.7, 4 m long and 2 m wide, was located at the southern entrance to the complex and it may have been the dwelling of a doorman. Found inside it was a small limestone basin, 0.85 m long by 0.47 m wide and 0.24 m high. The fill contained a deposit of tableware and kitchenware datable to the 10th century (for a report on the ceramic assemblage, see Danys-Lasek 2014, in this volume) [Fig. 5].

Rooms AA.50.2 and AA.50.3, the eastern ends of which were excavated this season, were part of the central monastic complex enlarged in the 8th century. The



*Fig. 3. Building AA.40, room 6, the floor in the eastern part, view from the north*



*Fig. 4. Building AA.40, room 6, basin in the floor, view from the north*



*Fig. 5. Building AA.40, room 7, view from the south*



*Fig. 6. Building AA.50, room 3, staircase, view from the south*



staircase in AA.50.3, which was preserved up to the first landing, must have once led to the upper floor of Building AA.40 [Fig. 6].

#### STELAE FROM CEMETERY C

Three fragmentary limestone stelae were found in the debris filling the western part of Building J. The characteristic decoration in the form of a cross inside an aedicule placed these objects in a long series of funerary stelae from Naqlun associated with cemetery C, which burial ground was located to the west of the modern monastery (for excavations in this cemetery, see Godlewski 2004 and 2006) [Fig. 7].

#### CEMETERY A

More graves from the extensive Christian cemetery spreading around the church of Archangel Michael, located in the ruins of the abandoned monastery, were explored on the sites of street S.1 (S.4), the western part of Building J and inside rooms AA.40.6 and AA.40.7, as well as

AA.50.3 of the large complex AA located north of street S.1 [Fig. 8]. Much of this cemetery was explored in 1998–2004 and in 2009 (Godlewski 2000; 2001; 2002; 2003; 2004; 2005; 2012). In 2010 and 2011, 61 graves were explored: 27 male, 20 female and 10 juvenile burials; the sex of four skeletons went unidentified. The wooden coffins, in which most of the burials were made, were severely damaged by damp, leaving also the mats, shrouds and fragmentary garments in lamentable condition. Glass bottles and flasks or small glazed vessels for aromatic oils, all found open, were recorded in fifteen of the burials.

A silk sash decorated with six tassels, found together with scraps of tunics, came from the burial in the partly looted grave T.476 [see Fig. 18 in the appendix]. The sash is unparalleled among the textiles uncovered to date in cemetery A in Naqlun (for this and the other textiles from this burial, see appendix below).

Some of the graves had brick superstructures coated with white plaster.



Fig. 7. Limestone stelae from cemetery C found in the rubble of Building J: left, Nd.10.095; right, Nd.10.103

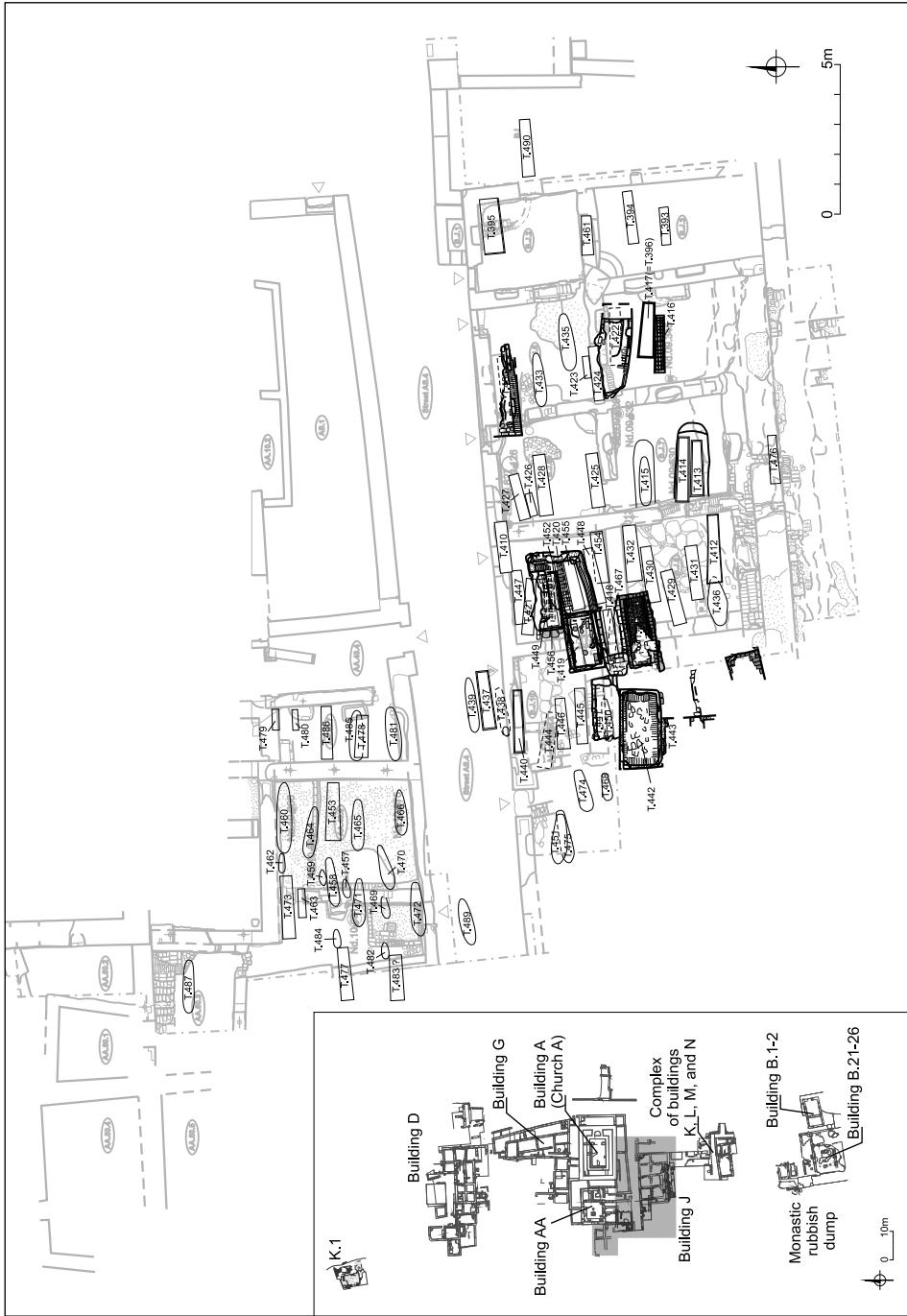


Fig. 8. Cemetery A on kom A: tombs explored in 2010–2012 (Plan S. Maslak, PCMA Mission Archive)



These were barrel-vaulted structures on a rectangular base. One of the largest grave monuments in cemetery A, T.442, measured 2.60 m in length and 1.40 m in width [Fig. 10].

The explored tombs from the past two seasons represent a later phase of cemetery A and could be dated to the end of the 12th and the first half of the 13th century, mainly thanks to a footed bowl with painted radial decoration under brown glaze coming from tomb T.440 (Nd.10.011) [Fig. 9, see also Danys-Lasek 2014: 636–637, in this volume].

*Fig. 9. Glazed bowl, Nd.10.011, top view*

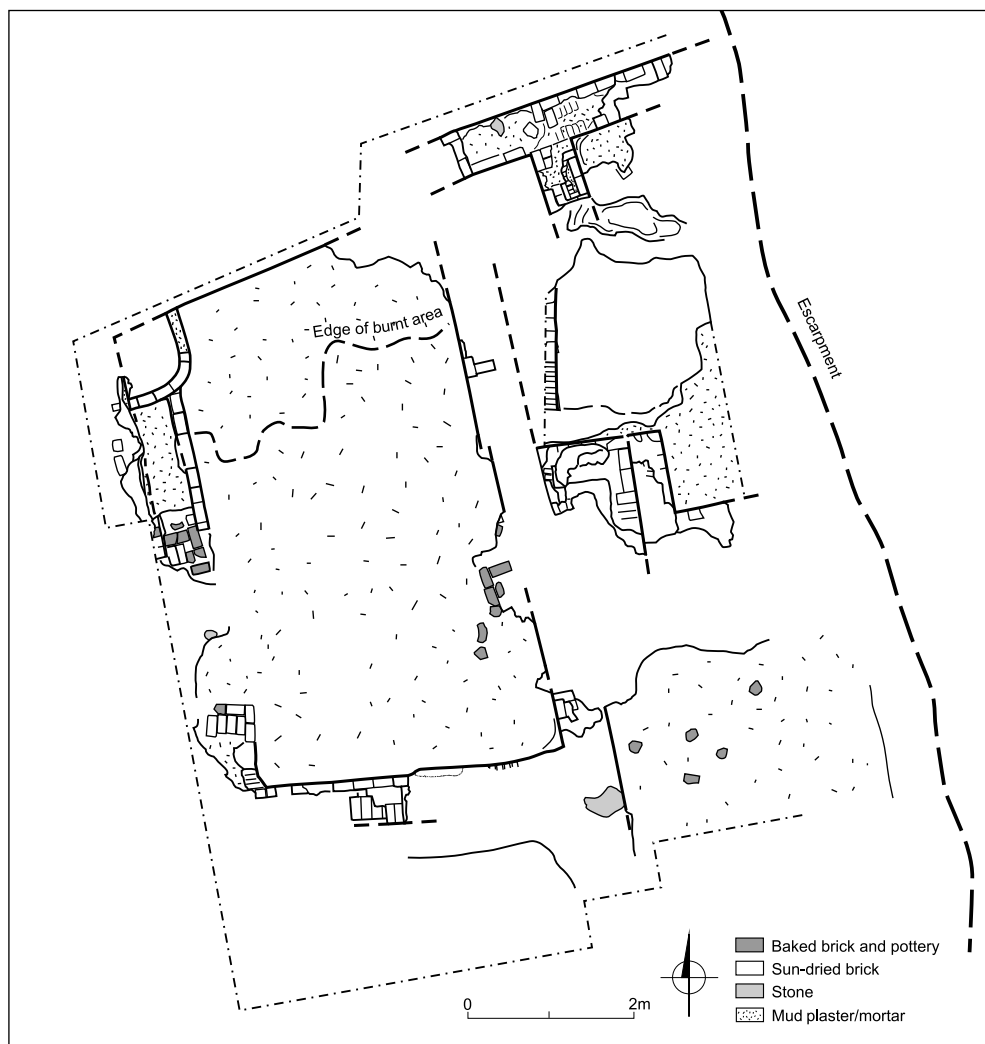


*Fig. 10. Top of the superstructure of tomb T.442 from the medieval cemetery A, view from the west; superstructures of tomb T.419 in the background at far left*

## SITE 2011.1 [K.1] (NORTHERN BUILDING)

The investigation of a new site (2011.1), the northernmost point of the Nekloni monastic complex, located approximately 50 m north of Building D, brought to light part of a severely damaged structure

[*Fig. 11*]. The Northern Building, part of which was investigated in 2011, had burned down and after the conflagration the mud-brick walls were disassembled down to the foundations. Two rooms



*Fig. 11. Northern Building (10th century)*  
(Plan S. Mašlak, PCMA Mission Archives)

and a storage pit uncovered in the northeastern part of the building provided important archaeological evidence for the dating of this structure and its furnishings. The walls of the structure, which was most probably a single-storey building, were carefully covered on the inside with mud plaster on which, to judge by the preserved fragments, there were drawings and inscriptions in Coptic and Arabic. The preserved floors were also coated with a thick layer of mud mortar [Fig. 12]. Well preserved local bag-shaped amphorae were discovered in the fill of the main room [Fig. 13]. They were decorated on the shoulders with combed bands (horizontal and wavy lines) (see Danys-Lasek 2014: Fig. 15 and Table 2-1, in this volume).

Other ceramics from the site included numerous broken tall vessels and storage jars (see Danys-Lasek 2014: 589–601, in this volume). They had been stored inside and were buried when the burning roof and walls collapsed.

The storage pit in the complex contained ten-odd Coptic and Arabic texts on paper, including completely preserved documents. One of them (Nd.11.253) is a letter to the deacon Kouonti, most probably a resident, sent by another monk with barely legible name. Another one (Nd.11.254) is a well preserved magic text [Fig. 14].

The most striking discovery was a bundle of votive objects wrapped in linen cloth, found in the northeastern corner



Fig. 12. Northern Building following excavations, view from the south



Fig. 13. Amphorae under debris inside the Northern Building

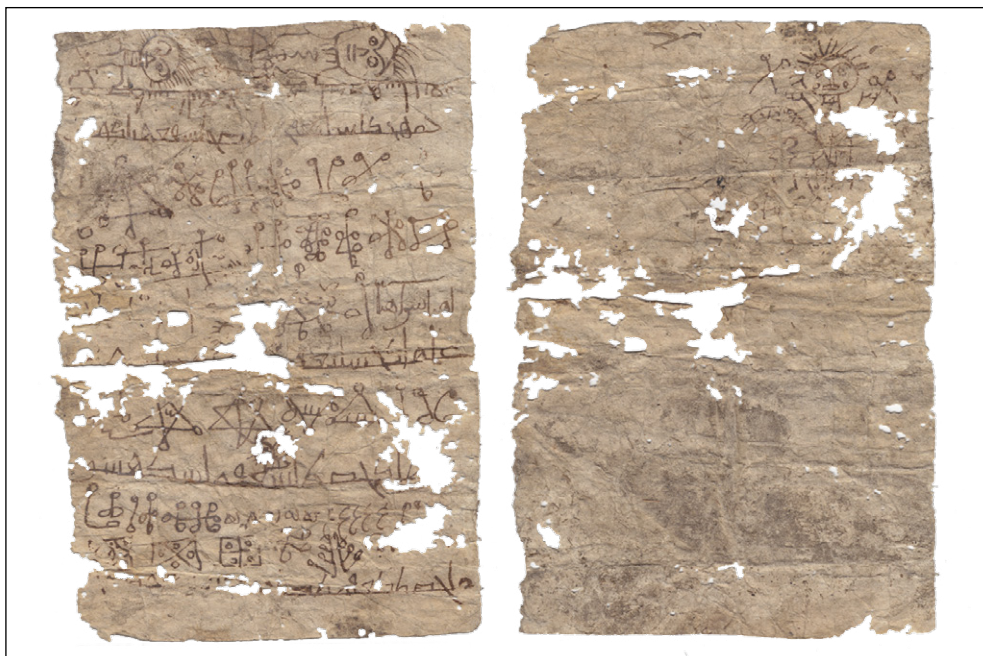


Fig. 14. Magic text on paper, Nd.11.254, front and back



Fig. 15. Deposit of votive objects wrapped in a bundle (center): top, one of the four small crosses of lead with two-sided impressed decoration, crucifixion on one side and a Virgin in prayer on the other, Nd.11.149; bottom left, lead plaque with Arabic text (*Quran*, sura 112), Nd.11.148; bottom right, small brass bell, Nd.11.147

of the main room [Fig. 15]. It comprised four small crosses molded of lead, a round lead plaque with Arabic inscription, and a small brass bell.

The crosses (Nd.11.149abc, H. 4.86 cm, W. 3.16 cm; Nd.11.150, H. 4.73cm, W. 3.05 cm) with loops for suspension at the top were cast in a double mold. They are decorated with figural representations and symbols on both sides. On one side there is Christ wearing a *colobium* (on three of the crosses) or a loincloth (on one of the crosses). The sun and the moon are presented above the cross. On the other side the representation is that of the Virgin clothed in a *maphorion* and on either side, on three of the crosses, likenesses of human heads and on the fourth, crosses [Fig. 15, top]. The image of Christ's victory over death was perhaps the most popular Christian symbol and small cross-shaped encolpia

were worn around the neck as powerful amulets protecting their bearers from evil. Votive objects of this type are very rare in Coptic art. Their dating most probably to the 10th century was based on the archaeological context of the find. The plaque (Nd.11.148, Dia. 2.86 cm) with a double loop for suspension is inscribed on both sides with a text in Arabic reading "God is one, he did not beget, nor was he begotten", which may be a fragment of the Qu'ran (Sura 112, identified by Leonora Soniego) [Fig. 15, bottom left]. It is a manifest of Islamic, but also Coptic monotheism.

The bundle also contained a small bell of brass (Nd.11.147, Dia. 2.8 cm, H. 3.85 cm), attested in medieval iconography as an element of the outer garment of a bishop or priest, but also well known as part of horse trappings [Fig. 15, bottom right].

## APPENDIX

### TEXTILES FROM BURIAL T.476

Barbara Czaja

Museum of King Jan III's Palace at Wilanów

Burial T.476, excavated in the medieval cemetery A on the central kom in Naqlun yielded two tunics:

- 1) linen tunic of the *galabiyah* type in plain weave decorated on the sleeve margins with geometric decoration embroidered with silk thread (*broché* technique) (Nd.11.012) [Fig. 16];
- 2) linen tunic of the *galabiyah* type in plain weave decorated with vertical bands of brown color, executed with silk thread in plain weave (Nd.11.013) [Fig. 17].

The burial textiles included two linen shawls. One of these had striped decoration made with silk thread in tapestry weave (Nd.11.015) [Fig. 18, center]. The other shawl was decorated with two bands along the long edges, made with brown silk in tapestry weave (Nd.11.014) [Fig. 18, top]. There was also a plaited belt (Nd.11.016) decorated with large dark brown tassels with a golden wire wound around silk thread [Fig. 18, bottom and inset].





Fig. 16. *Silk broché decoration on the sleeve edge of a linen tunic of the galabiyah type (Nd.11.012) from burial T.476; inset, remains of the whole tunic (Photo B. Czaja)*



*Fig. 17. Linen tunic of the galabiyah type (Nd.11.013) from burial T.476; inset, hem end of one of the brown vertical bands (Photo B. Czaja)*

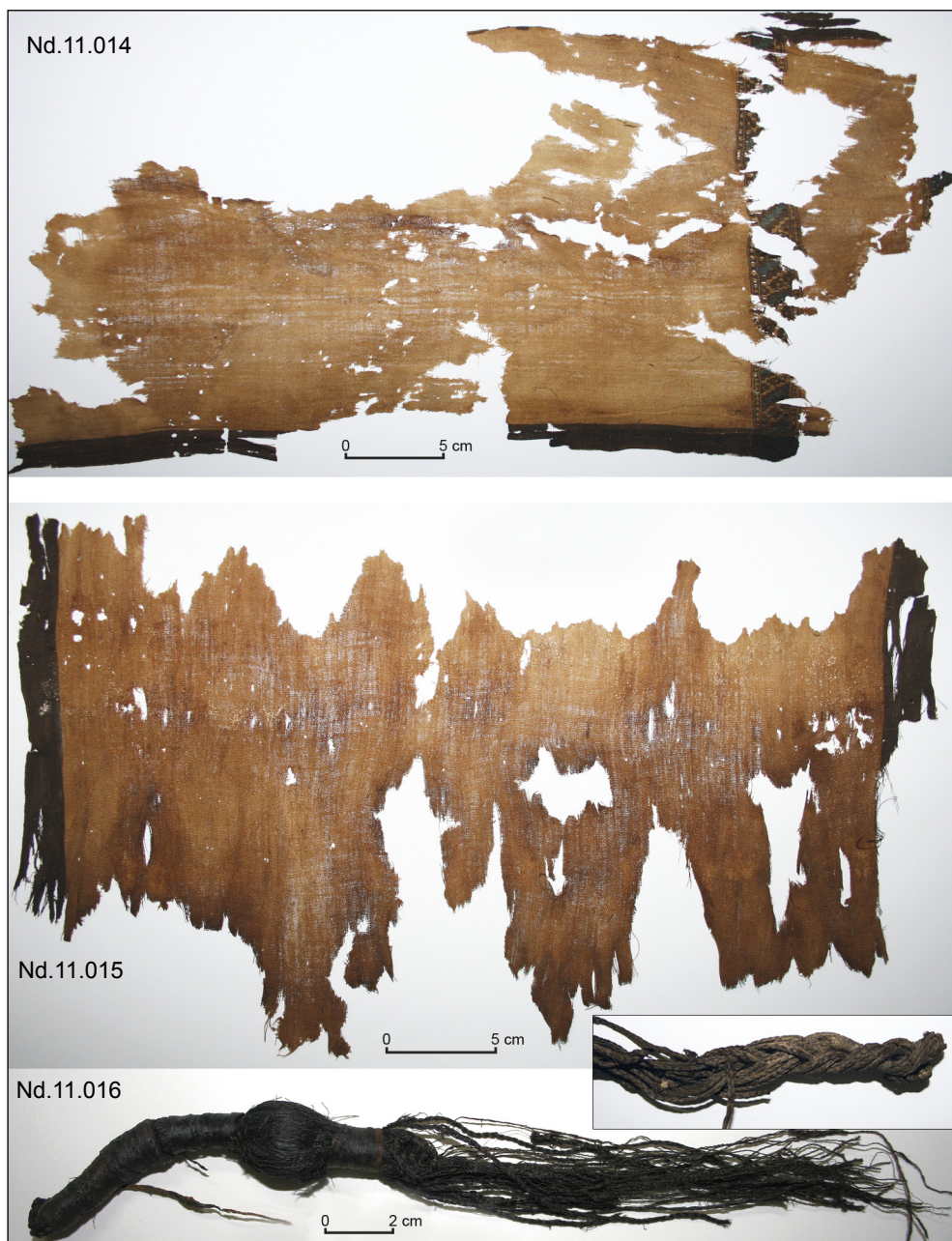


Fig. 18. Linen shawls from Burial T.476: Nd.11.014, top, with close-up of the ornamental band at one end; Nd.11.015, center; plaited belt (Nd.11.016) and tassel with golden interwoven thread (Photo B. Czaja)

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