

NAQLUN

EXCAVATIONS, 2000

Włodzimierz Godlewski

The excavation season at Naqlun between September 15 and October 30, 2000,¹⁾ centered on a continued exploration of Site A in the central part of the kom. Paralleling the archaeological work were studies undertaken by specialists: Karol Piasecki, assisted by Elżbieta Dąbrowska, worked on the skeletal material from the current excavations, as well as that stored from the 1997-1998 seasons; Tomasz Górecki recorded the ceramic assemblage, chiefly the red and painted tableware from the leveling layers of the putative 10th-11th century street between buildings A and E; Jean-Michel Mouton and Christian Gaubert continued studies of the Arabic archives of Georgi Bifam and his family pending publication; Maria Mossakowska-Gaubert worked on the glass finds, Magdalena Żurek on the tombs and Barbara Czaja-Szewczak on the textiles.

1) The Mission was directed by Prof. Dr. Włodzimierz Godlewski and included: Dr. Jean-Michel Mouton (Sorbonne, Paris), Mr. Christian Gaubert (IFAO), Dr. Karol Piasecki, Ms Elżbieta Dąbrowska, anthropologists; Mrs. Maria Mossakowska-Gaubert, Mrs. Magdalena Żurek, archaeologists; Mr. Tomasz Górecki, ceramicist; Mrs. Barbara Czaja-Szewczak, textile restorer; Ms Anetta Lyżwa, Mr. Szymon Maślak, students of archaeology. The Supreme Council of Antiquities was represented by Mr. Ibrahim Ragab. 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 continued hospitality and generous assistance on many occasions.

Excavation work was concentrated on the central part of the site, where Building A and Church A, built on the ruins of an earlier tower, as well as Building E to the north of Church A had been discovered in previous seasons.²⁾ This season an area of 300 m² was cleared to the west of Building A, in the immediate vicinity of its western wall, uncovering vestiges of

the two major occupational phases known to have existed in this area: the monastic complex AA.10-40, indubitably connected with Building A and interpreted as a monastic tower, and a vast cemetery situated in the ruins of the monastery and connected with Church A, the functioning of which may be dated tentatively to the 11th-12th century.

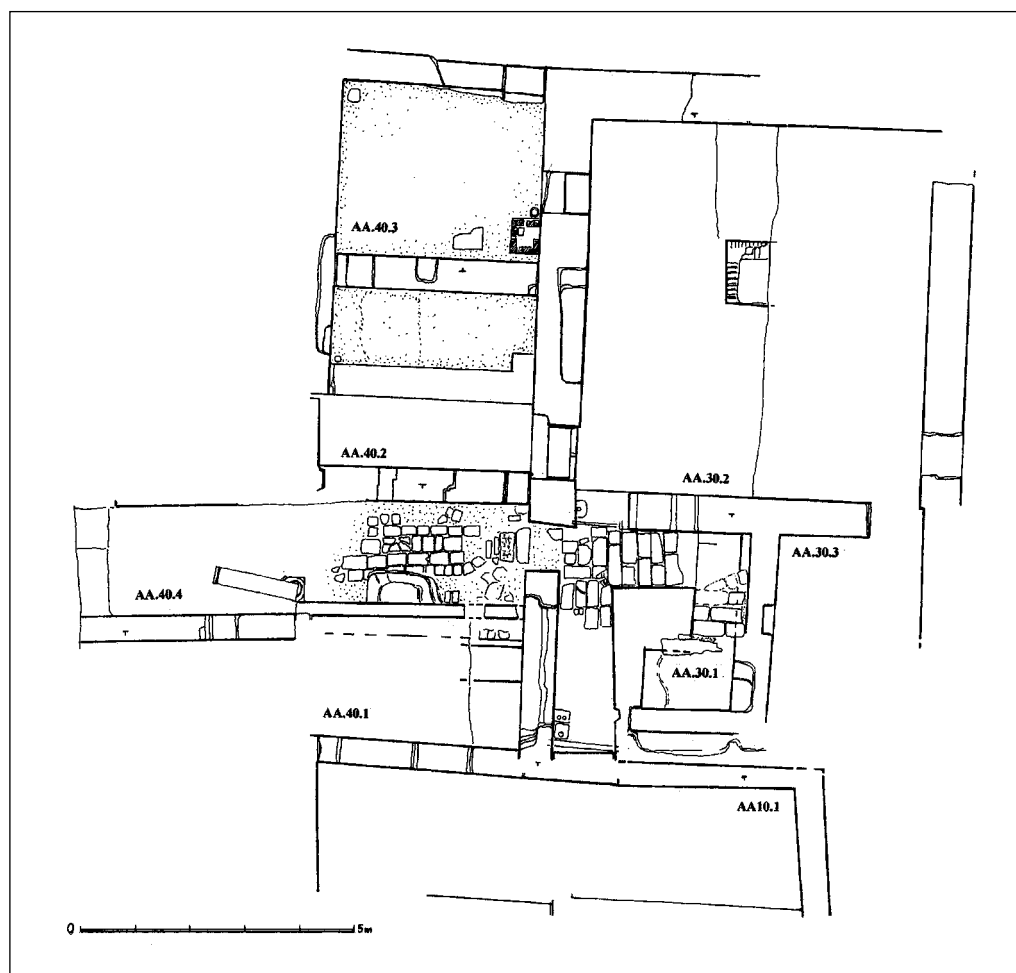


Fig. 1. Naqlun. Site AA. Plan of the Monastery Building after the 2000 season (Drawing W. Godlewski)

MONASTIC COMPLEX AA.10-40

The compact monastic architecture west of Building A is surprisingly well preserved – up to 2.20 m in height for some parts of the walls – presumably due to the sudden drop to the west of the bedrock on which the whole compound had been raised. While the structures found here constituted one compound with Building A and the northern and southern walls, it is still too early to determine the specific plan and function. Little of the actual architecture could be cleared during the current season due to the time-consuming exploration of

numerous medieval graves in the upper layers of the accumulation and the thick rubble deposits below. The heterogeneity of the architecture with apparently extensive changes of wall orientation and door location complicates additionally any attempts at interpretation at this point (*Figs. 1, 2*). However, it seems clear that the original complex had included a staircase (AA.30.1) together with a big square hall to the west of it (AA.30.2) and a room with “mortar” floor (AA.40.5), later divided into two rooms (AA.40.2 and AA.40.3), to the



*Fig. 2. Monastery Building: AA.40.1 and 4. View from the south
(Photo W. Godlewski)*

2) W. Godlewski, *PAM XI, Reports 1999* (2000), 125-132; id., Naqlun. Recent Studies, *BSAC* (2000), in press; M. Żurek, “Naqlun. The Modern Cemetery on Site A/E at Deir an-Naqlun”, *PAM XI, Reports 1999*, op. cit., 135-134; B. Czaja-Szewczak, “Textiles from Naqlun, 1999”, *ibid.*, 135-144; J. Van der Vliet, “Preliminary remarks on the Coptic texts from seasons 1998 and 1999”, *ibid.*, 143-144; I. Zych, “Note on the collection of wooden finds from Naqlun”, *ibid.*, 145-148.

south of the square hall. Room AA.30.3 north of the stairs was apparently part of the same complex, but so far only the tops of its walls have been cleared.

This complex was fitted with separate entrances: one from the south directly onto the staircase through an extensive and later rebuilt vestibule, and two others from the west straight into the square hall and the south room, suggesting that the architecture stretched away to the west. From the east, that is, from the tower, there was an entrance, as yet unexplored, leading to the staircase. The staircase is 100 cm wide and has two flights of steps with a landing in the middle. The steps were of limestone

blocks, mounted on palm-wood beams. Much worn, these steps bear evidence of long use. Between the staircase and Building A there is a narrow space, 2.55 m wide. Unfortunately, since the original walking level was not reached here this year, the relation between the staircase and Building A could not be interpreted conclusively. The southern vestibule, from which the staircase must have been entered, may have been 4.35 m wide; its ceiling could have been of wood supported on columns. A column shaft associated with a base still *in situ* was uncovered on the floor here.

The square hall, which measures 6.30 x 6.70 m, was accessible initially only from the south without any direct connection with the staircase. The partly preserved square pillar (115 cm to the side) was not centrally positioned and there is nothing to indicate that it had been part of the original outfitting of the room. The south room, measuring 3.75 x 5.05 m, featured a mortar floor and walls that had been plastered and painted, perhaps even with representational painting in the upper parts, if the plaster fragments found in the debris are any indication.

In the second phase, the southern part of this complex underwent major reconstruction. Two new rooms, AA.40.2 and AA.40.3, were introduced, access to them being from the square room. The entrance vestibule with stone flagging was made narrower and served more as a corridor. The threshold in the doorway of AA.40.2 turned out to be the funerary stele of one Damianos, a typical example of a Greek stele from Fayum with an *aedicula* and cross inside (Fig. 3). Steles of this kind may be dated to the 7th century, hence the reconstruction of the monastic complex may be put at tentatively not earlier than the 8th century.



Fig. 3. Stele of Damianos (Nd.00296)
(Photo W. Godlewski)

The complex of rooms AA.10-40 was destroyed in a conflagration that resulted in the burning of the walls, the deposition of a layer of ashes in the square hall and the filling of the rooms with a thick deposit of burnt brick from the upper parts of the building. The fire that destroyed the monastic architecture was also evidenced under the foundations of Building E, where a thick layer of ashes was explored inside the earlier rooms, the walls of which were found to be burned. This intensive and spreading conflagration appears to have engulfed Building A as well: The outer wall face is heavily disintegrated and a layer of ashes was also discovered against the south side of the tower. In 1998, a gold denarius (Nd.98091) was excavated from the ash layer under Building E (room E.4); the coin was minted by Hurawayh ibn Ahmed (864-896), the second Tulunid ruler of Egypt, in 278 H (AD 891/2),³⁾ suggesting in consequence a date for the conflagration of the

monastery no earlier than the turn of the 9th century AD. A pottery deposit uncovered in the debris in room AA.40.2, consisting of vases, plates, bowls, amphorae, *qullae*, cups, beakers, pans and lamps, points to the second half of the 10th century as the most likely time for the deposit of rubble inside the structure (Figs. 4, 5). A similar deposit of pottery had been discovered under the north wall of the complex in 1998 and the vessels from the staircase floor – bag-shaped bottles and small bag-shaped amphorae – also may be dated to the 10th century. The fill of room AA.40.3 yielded a bronze coin putatively identified as that of Al-Hakim⁴⁾ and a glazed lamp of type B in W. Kubiak's classification.⁵⁾ The rubble inside the rooms could have accumulated over an extended period of time as indicated by sherds of bag-shaped amphorae of sand-tempered clay found in the square hall (AA.30.2)⁶⁾ and storage containers inside Building A, of which one had been



Fig. 4. Plate (Nd.00244)
(Photo W. Godlewski)

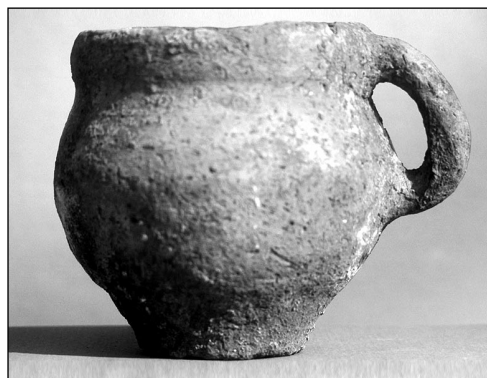


Fig. 5. Beaker (Nd.00240)
(Photo W. Godlewski)]

3) C. Morisot, "Quelques monnaies découvertes à Deir al-Malak", *Ann.Isl.* 34 (2000), 327-333.

4) Personal communication of C. Gaubert and C. Morisot.

5) W. Kubiak, "Medieval ceramic oil lamps from Fustat", *Ars Orientalis* VIII (1970), 6-7.

6) Similar amphorae were found on site D in room D.3, cf. T. Górecki, "The pottery", *Nubica* III.1 (1993), 230-231, fig. 19.17-21.

constructed on top of the dismantled northern inside wall.⁷⁾ On the other hand, however, Church A could have been erected as a basilica with a *hurus* on top of the ruins of Building A not later than in the second half of the 10th century. At the same time presumably some sections of the walls of

room AA.10.1, the northern one and the western one in the northern part, similarly as the blocking of the entrance to the staircase from the east, were introduced using a big brick that must have been salvaged from the ruins of Building A. The church was also built of similar bricks.

CEMETERY

With the 134 graves uncovered during the present season in the area west of Church A, the total number of burials on Site A is now 234 (*Fig. 6*), and was probably much higher when one takes into consideration the area – poorly explored so far – to the east and south of the church.

Few of the tombs had the debris-filled brick superstructures still in place. Three of these (T. 133, T. 143 and T. 150) are situated in the western part of Street A/E, in the immediate vicinity of the burial monuments discovered in 1998, next to the northwestern corner of the church.⁸⁾ None had been excavated yet. One rectangular monument (T. 170) recorded in the southern part of the trench (unit AA.40.1) had three coffins, one of a child and two others belonging to adult males found lower down, under the brick superstructure that measured 110 x 80 cm. It is not clear whether the tomb marker was associated with the child burial alone as its measurements would suggest; from the archaeological point of view all three burials could have been contemporaneous. The child's coffin was made of palm-tree planks joined together with forged iron nails, the lid covered with a linen cloth decorated with painted red crosses in addition to a narrow band of ornament and

an Arabic inscription running alongside it (Nd.00189). The coffin was covered completely with a woven mat. The body of the child, whose head had been placed between two bricks, was clothed in a plain linen tunic. There was a small simple bone cross (Nd.00169) around its neck.

One of the adult males (T. 170.2) was also buried in a coffin of palm planks, reinforced with cross-beams and tied with palm string. Its lid, a mat covering it, was also encased in a linen cloth featuring a narrow band of simple black silk thread embroidery and an inscribed Arabic inscription running down the band (Nd.00193). The body was wrapped in a shroud. Two glass bottles (Nd.00170-00171), with raised globular bodies turning into a narrow neck and featuring a flat bottom with a sharp kick, had been placed in the coffin with the deceased.

The other male had been buried under the same mat, but without a coffin (T. 170.3). His body was wrapped in a shroud and placed on a "mat" of palm-leaf ribs tied with palm string. His head rested on a brick. He was dressed in a woolen tunic with a simple geometric ornament (Nd.00247), a wide belt tied with thongs at the waist. On his neck there was a simple iron cross, while on his chest,

7) W. Godlewski, *PAM XI, Reports 1999*, op. cit., 129, fig. 3.

8) A. Lajtar, "Two Greek inscriptions from Deir el-Naqlun", *Nubica* III.1 (1993), 265-269.

on the tunic, there lay a partly preserved big plaited leather cross on a plaited leather strap (Nd.00166-00167).

The majority of burials discovered this season, as well as previously, had no

preserved superstructure. The horizontal arm of a wooden cross (Nd.00102) was found in association with one of the tombs (T. 165?), but there is no certainty that it had once stood on this grave. Earlier on,

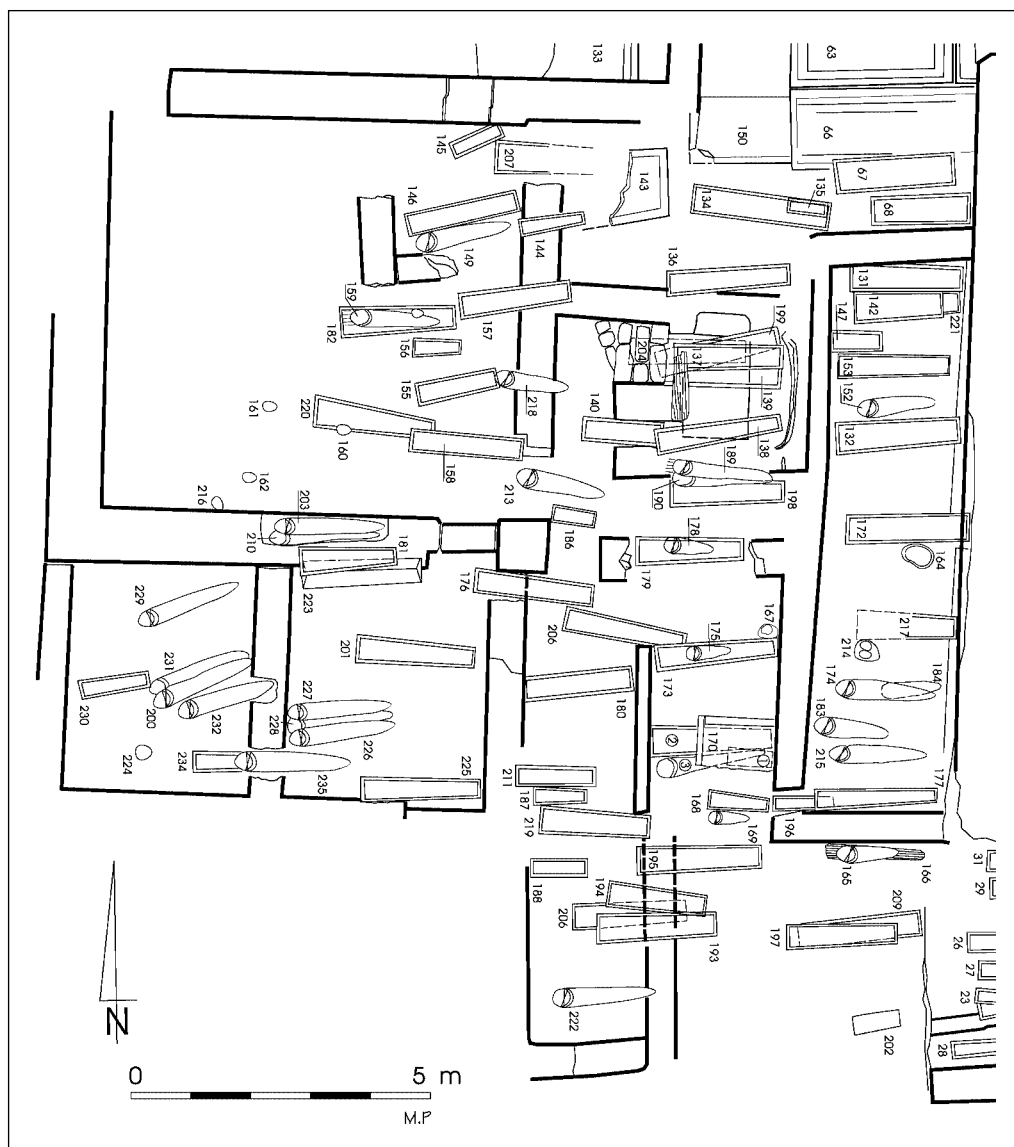


Fig. 6. Site A. Plan of the cemetery following excavation in 2000 (Drawing W. Godlewski, J. and B. Dobrowolski)

part of the horizontal arm of a cross with a Greek inscription had been discovered inside Church A; the inscription evidently referred to the tomb of a priest called Petros,⁹⁾ although again there was no evidence for how the cross had been mounted. It had indubitably served as a funerary stele and is probably earlier than the cemetery by Church A, in similarity of the limestone steles of Damianos (Nd.00296) and Mena (Nd.00201) found this year. All three may have come from another cemetery altogether.

The bodies, usually in a wooden coffin but occasionally only wrapped in a shroud, were placed in pits dug in the rubble filling of the monastic building, often cutting through the ruined walls, which were apparently no longer visible on the surface. Only the space under the staircase was used as a crypt of sorts with four successive burials being made there, the coffins superimposed one on top of the next (T. 04, T. 199, T. 139, T. 137). The chronological importance of this series of burials will be studied in detail. What is noteworthy is the



Fig. 7. Detail of textile (Nd.00098). Linen and silk (Photo W. Godlewski)



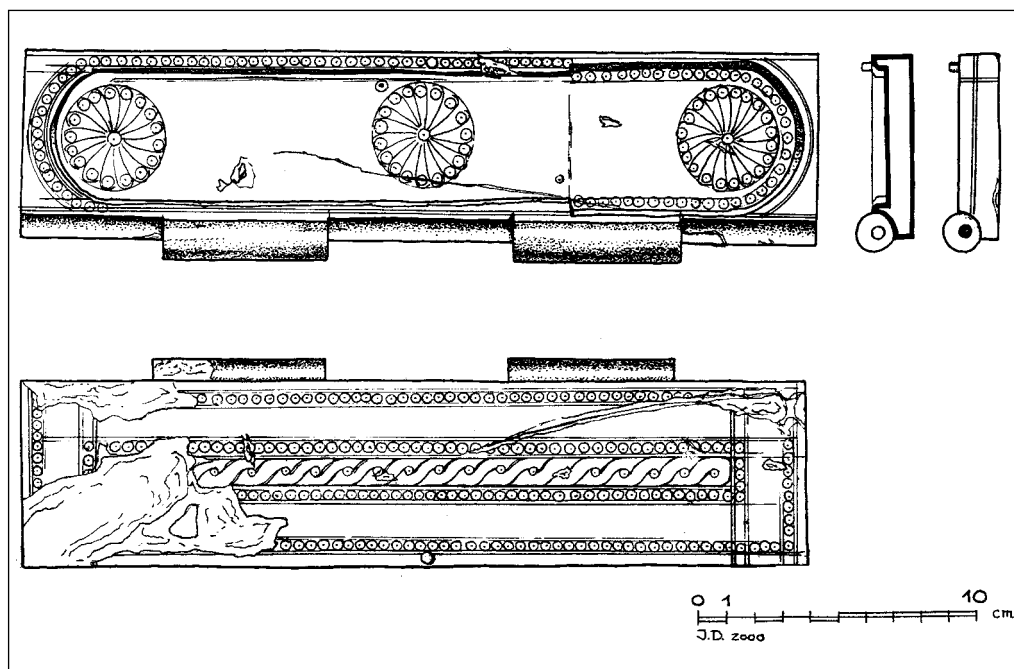
Fig. 8. Ivory cross (Nd.00038) (Photo W. Godlewski)

9) A. Łajtar, "Two Greek inscriptions from Deir el-Naqlun", *Nubica* III.1 (1993), 265-269.

cloth found with the woman buried in the latest of the four coffins (T. 137); it is one of the most decorative textiles discovered so far (Nd.00098), featuring a banded silk ornament alternating with a series of Arabic inscriptions running alongside (*Fig. 7*). Close analogies to this cloth, found in London (O.A.1901.3-14.52),¹⁰ Geneva (JFB 1.28)¹¹ and Brussels (IS.Tx.119),¹² are dated to the second half of the 12th century. Also noteworthy are two ivory crosses (Nd.00038-00039) found with the dead woman: one suspended around her neck (*Fig. 8*), the other forming part of an unpreserved object once held in the hands of the deceased. A small glass bottle

(Nd.00041) had been put into the coffin as well, by the feet of the dead woman, and a bouquet or wreath of the fine leaves of an aromatic plant by her head. A wooden pencil-case, richly carved on the lid (Nd.00120) (*Fig. 9*), was discovered in association with the lowermost, heavily deteriorated state (T. 204). It had assumedly become displaced from the coffin, in which it had been put, in similarity to the pencil-cases unearthed in 1986 in graves T. 32 and T. 27 south of Church A.

Occasionally, an adult and a child were buried in the same pit. The child was wrapped in a shroud and placed on the



*Fig. 9. Wooden pencil-case lid (Nd.00120)
(Drawing J. Dobrowolski)*

10) P.L. Baker, *Islamic Textiles* (London 1995), 58.

11) *Tissus d'Égypte. Témoins du monde arabe. VIIIe-XVe siècles* (Geneva-Paris 1993), 259, cat. 158.

12) M.C. Bruwier (ed.), *Égyptiennes étoffes coptes du Nil* (Mariemont 1997), 103.

coffin of the adult, who could be either a male or a female. In this context it is interesting to note a burial (T. 179), where a woman was buried in a coffin together with an infant that had been put into a small bag-shaped amphora (Nd.00086). On top of the coffin there was the body of a young boy lying on a mat of palm-leaf ribs tied with palm-fiber string. Pieces of a linen shawl (Nd.00075) and two other textiles (Nd.00086-00087) were found next to the woman's head; they were richly decorated with silk bands of ornament – a guilloche with inscribed, alternately bird and hare medallions (Fig. 10), and Arabic inscriptions running alongside the edges of these bands.

Fragmentary linen textiles featuring woolen or silken ornaments that are typical of the Fatimid *tiraz* workshop production were discovered in a few dozen of the

graves.¹³ Frequently associated with the robes were metal (bronze or brass) or bone, or ivory buckles (Fig. 11). Grave furnishings included mainly small toilet bottles of glass (Fig. 12) and glazed vases (Fig. 13), as well as jewelry: rings, metal and glass bangles, necklaces, silver earrings. Bouquets of aromatic plants were also frequently placed inside the coffins. Some of the graves had no grave goods and the shrouds to wrap the bodies were made of plain undecorated linen. The textiles from the deepest-lying graves survive in very poor condition.

Constituting a separate group are graves located especially in the space AA.10.1-2, presumably removed from other spots of the local cemetery or indeed transported to Naqlun from elsewhere. In these cases the bones are displaced, there are no coffins and sometimes not even

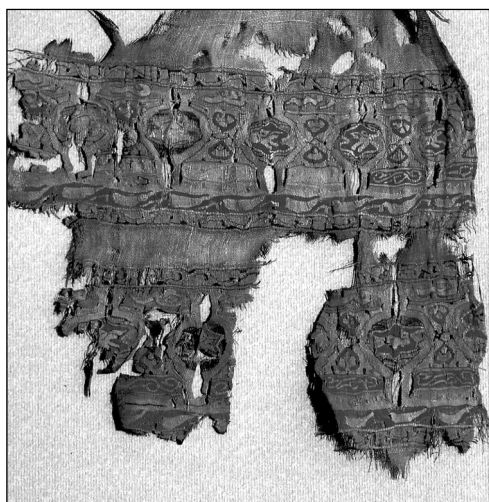


Fig. 10. Piece of linen and silk shawl (Nd.00075) (Photo W. Godlewski)



Fig. 11. Ivory belt buckle (Nd.00098) (Photo W. Godlewski)

13) J.A. Sokoly, "Between life and death: The funerary context of Tiraz textiles", *RB* 5 (1997), 71-78; S.S. Blair, "Inscriptions on Medieval Islamic textiles", *RB* 5 (1997), 95-104.



Fig. 12. Glass toilet bottles from the graves
(Photo W. Godlewski)

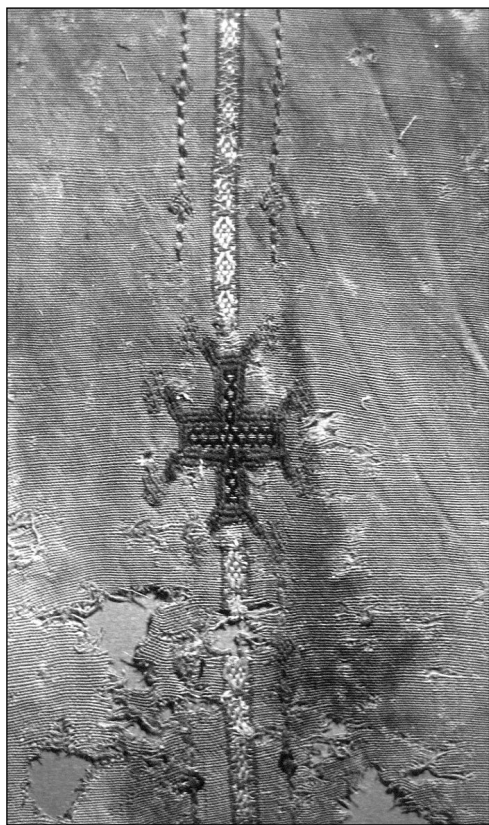


Fig. 13. Small glazed vessels from the graves
(Photo W. Godlewski)

shrouds, a mat being used instead to cover the body. Of this group the most interesting undoubtedly is burial T. 165. The deceased was found to have had a leather-belted woolen tunic (Nd.00083) and shawl; (Nd.00082), both ornamented with vertical bands of geometric decoration, crosses and vertically aligned "Coptic" letters imitating an inscription (Fig. 14).

In the light of excavations in 1986 and 1997-2000, the cemetery on Site A, concentrated around Church A, constitutes a fairly extensive and intensively used burial ground for Christians from the

Fayum area over a number of centuries. The cemetery, which has not been fully explored as yet, appears to have served the common folk; not one of the graves could be associated with the monastic community at Naqlun. Indeed, the monastery in the 12th century must have undergone a considerable reduction as regards size and population. Right from the start, the cemetery was associated with Church A, which presumably served the local Christian community. Members of this group must have been quiet affluent and influential to judge by the archives of Georgi Bifam and his family discovered in 1997 in the ruins of Building E. Evidence is lacking for a precise dating of the beginnings of this cemetery, but it obviously started functioning at the turn of the 10th century. Initially, the tombs were situated in the close vicinity of Church A, to the northwest of it and presumably also to the east, although only three burials have been recorded on this side (T. 041, T. 093, T. 101); while these three graves are evidently medieval, none of the furnishings provide for a better date and they need not have been among the earliest burials in this section of the cemetery. The second group of burials, uncovered on the spot of Building E, dates to a time when the structure was abandoned already, that is, to the 13th-14th century presumably. The latest in the cemetery are graves put inside Church A, obviously only after it had been destroyed. This latest period of use started tentatively in the 14th century and continued for a long time, perhaps even into the 19th century. The modern custom of burying Christians in monastic crypts associated with the still functioning Church of the Archangel Gabriel must be a leftover of the medieval tradition connected with Church A and constitutes a continuation of the investigated cemetery.



*Fig. 14. Woolen tunic. Central part with a cross ornament (Nd. 00083)
(Photo W. Godlewski)*

STREET A/E

In 1999, while exploring street A/E – the area between Church A and Building E and the as yet only fragmentarily recorded Building G lying to the west of the latter – we found small sections of street-leveling layers that had escaped disturbance by the graves of the cemetery. This layer was made up of mostly pottery and was deposited undoubtedly sometime after the

conflagration that had destroyed the monastery at the turn of the 9th century and after the building of Church A. Selected parts of this leveling layer inside space E.9, which is a passage between Building E and Church A,¹⁴⁾ were examined by Mr. T. Górecki, who also recorded the pottery coming from this layer.¹⁵⁾

14) W. Godlewski, *PAM XI, Reports 1999*, op. cit., 127, fig. 2.

15) Cf. contribution by T. Górecki in this volume.