

MATS FROM THE CEMENTERY AT NAQLUN

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The 33 mats found at Naqlun during the 2002 season all originate from the northern end of the Christian cemetery dated provisionally to the 12th-13th century.¹⁾ They were found mostly covering the burials (and in one case also underlying burials)²⁾ made in wooden coffins and in *jerid* crates used as coffins.³⁾ Matting was used also to wrap up tightly bodies buried on *jerid* biers or simply laid in the ground covered only in a shroud.

These mats (28 in all) were produced in the basketry techniques of weaving with one and with two strands. The remaining five mats were made by twining and these were all without exception found covering the wooden coffins.

Pending specialist examination, it can be said that palm rope was used for the warp (or passive system)⁴⁾ while the weft or active system, whether one or two strands, were of some kind of rushes.

MATTING MADE WITH THE ONE- AND TWO-STRAND WEAVING TECHNIQUES

The active element (weft) in mats manufactured in a technique similar to fabric-weaving, consists of one strand (member)⁵⁾ or two parallel strands (two members), which is/are woven in two different

directions,⁶⁾ up and down, around the passive elements (warps) in one plane. The technique of single-strand weaving was employed when the end result was to be a plain-weave mat,⁷⁾ while two-strand

1) For a discussion of the results of this year's investigations, cf. report by W. Godlewski in this volume.

2) Mat Nd.02.254 under burials T. 323 and T. 324.

3) *Qafas* in Arabic, crates or cages made in the pierced technique using *jerid*, the split mid ribs of the date palm leaves, cf. W. Wendrich, *The World According to Basketry. An Ethno-archaeological Interpretation of Basketry Production in Egypt* (CNWS: Leiden 1999), Appendix D, Glossary, 467.

4) I have followed W. Wendrich in using basketry and weaving terms concurrently: the flexible or active element = weft, the rigid or passive element = warp. Basketry techniques have been discussed exhaustively in two recent studies: W. Wendrich, *Who is Afraid of Basketry. A Guide to Recording Basketry and Cordage for Archeologist and Ethnographers*, (CNWS: Leiden 1991), 30-85; id., *The World According to Basketry*, op. cit., 153-174, 289-330.

5) Strand is a general term for any length of material used to make basketry, meaning a plant member or component making up the active, weaving element.

6) This is the orientation of the weaving system. In the case of the mats from Naqlun described here, it can go up-and-down or be S- and Z-oriented, cf. Wendrich, *The World According to Basketry*, op. cit., Glossary.

7) In plain-weave matting the active element or weft consists of one strand being woven around each passive member (warp). This means that the weft goes alternately up and down: 1(over):1(under):1(over), etc., with a shift of one in the next strand.



*Fig. 1. Example of plain mat woven in one-strand technique (Nd.02.037) from T. 262
(Photo A. Łyżwa-Piber)*



*Fig. 2. Example of plain mat woven in two-strand technique (Nd.02.136) from T. 283
(Photo A. Łyżwa-Piber)*

weaving resulted in a mixed-weave technique: irregular "panama"⁸⁾ next to the long-edge selvage and regular "panama"⁹⁾ for the center (except for the decorated parts).

MATS WOVEN IN ONE-STRAND TECHNIQUE

Eight plain-weave mats manufactured in one-strand technique, all undecorated, were found this year (*Fig. 1*). In length they range from 1.6 to 1.97 m, in width from 1.2 to 1.52 m. The warp/dm² number varies from 5 to 6, the weft/dm² from 12 to 15.

MATS WOVEN IN TWO-STRAND TECHNIQUE

Of the 20 mats woven in the two-strand technique in mixed irregular and regular "panama" weave, five were absolutely plain, ten decorated and another five doubled.

The plain mats were from 1.75 to 2.12 m long and from 0.8 to 1.6 m wide. The warp/dm² number was 6 or 7, the weft/dm² between 20 and 30 (*Fig. 2*).

The decorated mats featured ornamental bands, a checker composition of rectangular fields or a geometric element or composition made with an added different-color plant member woven into the body of the mat.

Ornamental bands were found on three mats, which were from 1.72 m long at the least to 1.9 m at the most, the width running from 0.93 to 1.57 m (but in none of the examples has the entire width survived). The warp/dm² number was constant at 7 in all three examples, while the weft/dm² number ranged from 20 to 27.

The bands ran lengthwise and consisted of a checker pattern of modules (over 3, under 1 with a shift of one). Two bands of such a module composition decorated mat Nd.02.311 (T. 307); each band was 1.20 m long and 18 cm wide. An added orange-colored plant member was woven into the fabric to form ornamental crosswise lines. On the other two mats the checker bands alternated with bands of plain weave, one in each case. Mat Nd.02.287 (T. 330) has three ornamental bands: two of a checker pattern, which are 1.13 m long and 21 and 14 cm wide, framing a center plain-weave band that is 26 cm wide and runs the length of the matting. Finally, there is mat Nd.02.234 (T. 318) with four long bands: three of the checker module pattern (18, 18 and 11 cm wide) and one of plain-weave (12 cm wide), adding to the decor (*Fig. 3*).

Four mats have instead of bands rectangular panels of the same module pattern (over 3, under 1 with a shift of one) appearing in pairs that are a mirror reflection of one another. These four mats are from 1.75 to 1.80 m long, and from 0.85 to 1.10 m wide. The warp/dm² number stands at 6 or 7, the weft/dm² is between 20 and 24. Mat Nd.02.137 is decorated with six rectangular panels, each panel 10 cm long and 16 cm wide, forming three pairs of mirror ornament. Mat Nd.02.154 has 14 rectangular panels, measuring 8.5 by 16 cm, in seven symmetrical pairs. The other two mats are additionally decorated with a geometrical pattern between the panels, made of an extra plant member of brown or perhaps red color woven into the base structure. The module panels in mat Nd.02.136 form

9) Regular "panama" weave consists of two parallel strands actively weaving up and down around two parallel passive elements: 2(over):2(under):2(over), etc. with a shift of two.

8) In irregular "panama" weave the active element or weft consists of two parallel strands weaving around the passive strand in two directions, up and down: 1(over):2(under):1(over), etc., again with a shift of one.

three symmetrical pairs with each rectangle being 16 cm wide and ranging in height from 7.5 to 10 cm (Fig. 4). Between the panels is a brown-colored geometric pattern consisting of one straight line and another criss-crossing one parallel to it, inscribed into a rectangular field 6 cm high and 23 cm wide. The other example, Nd.02.255, has six pairs of rectangular panels that are 16 cm wide and range in height from 1.5 to 6.5 cm; between them are another five panels with geometric ornament in the form of criss-crossing weaving made with an added plant member of brown and red color (Fig. 5).

Apart from the above mats with geometrical patterns, there are three others that feature such an ornament, either singly or in composition, made of added plant members of red and brown color woven into

the fabric. These mats are from 1.45 to 1.90 m long and from 0.58 to 0.90 m wide. The warp/dm² number is 7 for all three, the weft/dm² running from 20 to 24. Mat Nd.02.035 is decorated with a six-arm cross-spider, 6 cm high and 12 cm wide (Fig. 6). The other two mats have rhomboids and triangles in composition and a series of oblique lines above and below the "frame". The ornamental motif on mat Nd.02.133 is inscribed in a rectangle 16 by 30 cm in size; the size of a similar rectangle on mat Nd.02.132 is 18 cm by at least 35 cm.

The double mats are characterized by an ornamental band in plain weave, which is a constant 12 cm in width, based on six passive members, of which the four inside ones have been doubled. This band serves to join two narrow mats into one big

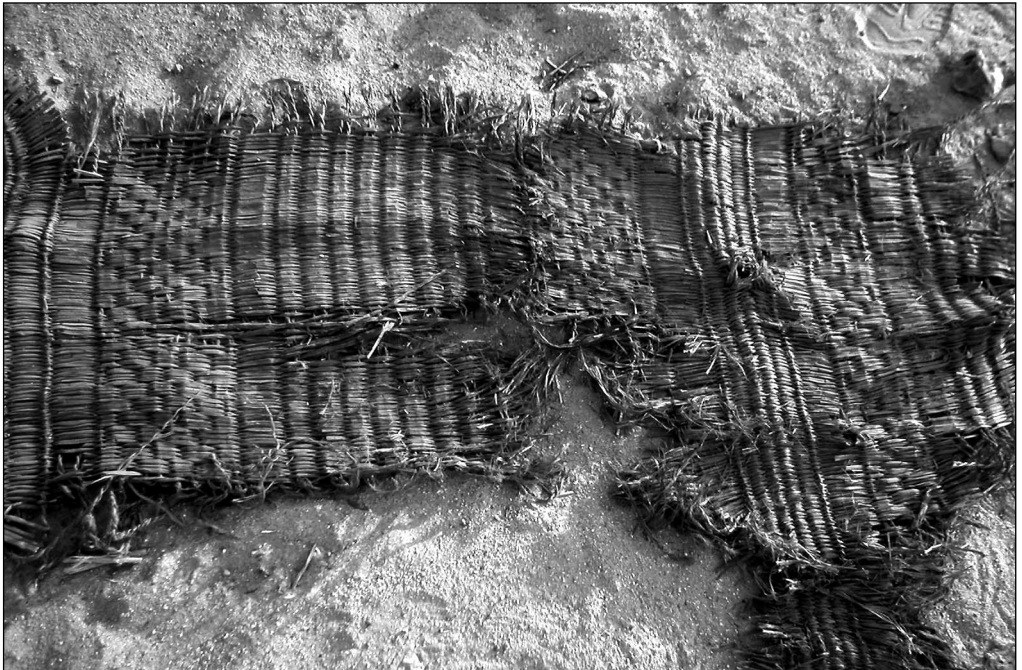


Fig. 3. Decorated mat woven in two-strand technique (Nd.02.234) from T. 318 (Photo A. Łyżwa-Piber)



Fig. 4. Mat woven in two-strand technique with panels of module decoration (Nd.02.136) from T. 283.A (Photo A. Łyżwa-Piber)

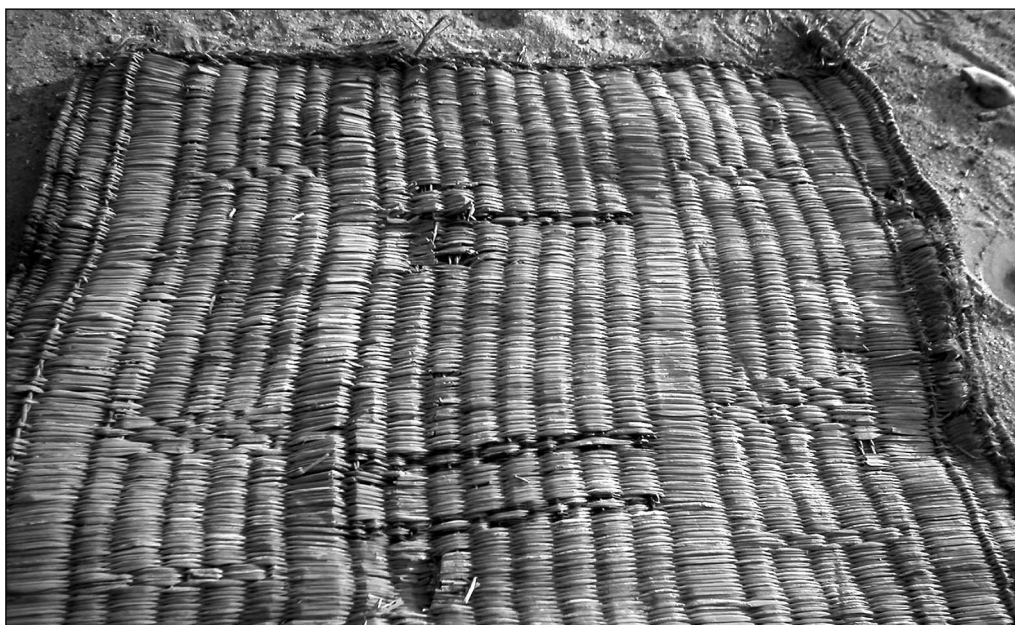


Fig. 5. Mat woven in two-strand technique with pairs of module panels framing a geometrical pattern of different color (Nd.02.255) from T. 319 (Photo A. Łyżwa-Piber)

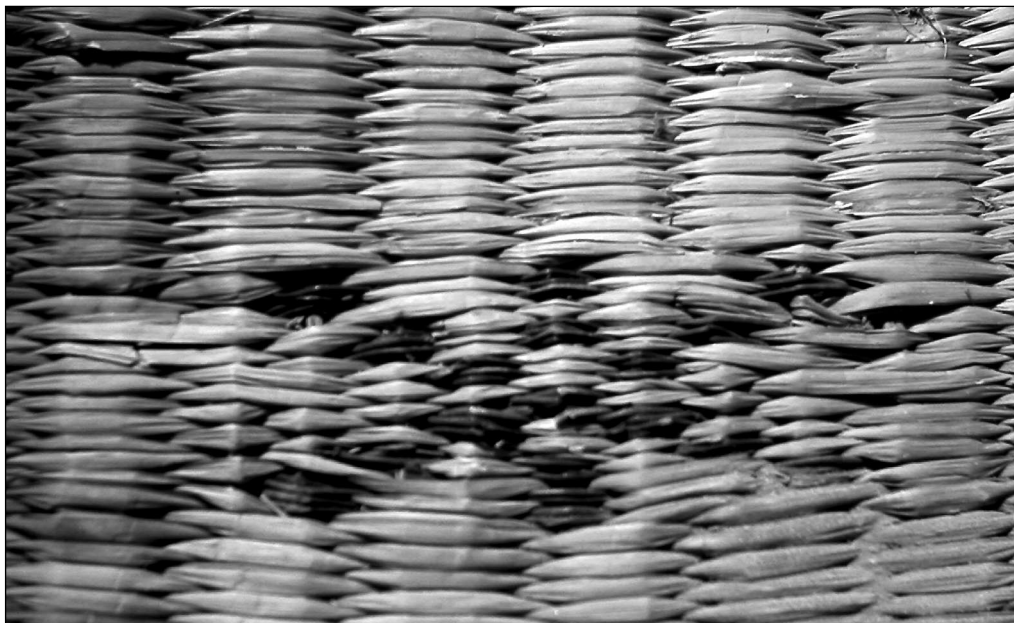


Fig. 6. Mat woven in two-strand technique with a different-color geometric ornament woven into the structure (Nd.02.035) from T. 264 (Photo A. Łyżwa-Piber)

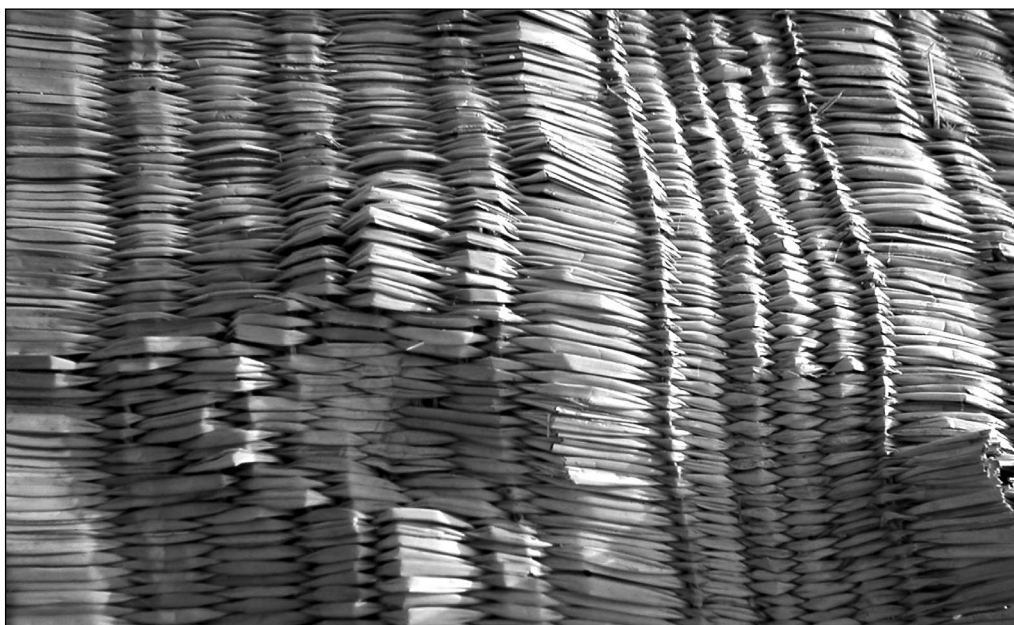


Fig. 7. Double mat with ornamental band (Nd.02.230) from T. 310 (Photo A. Łyżwa-Piber)

whole, at the same time facilitating their folding. The length of these mats is from 1.77 to 2.20 m, the width from 1.6 to 1.66 m. The warp/dm² number is 6-7, the weft/dm² from 14 to 20. Double mats are seldom decorated, the sole exception

in our assemblage being Nd.02.230, which features two pairs of symmetrical rectangular panels of module pattern (over 3, under 1 with a shift of one), each panel being 8 cm high and 19 cm wide (*Fig. 7*).

MATS MADE IN TWINING TECHNIQUE

Five of the mats discovered this year at Naqlun represent a basketry technique called twining. The active element in this technique is moved spirally around the passive warp strands in two planes, oriented in S- and Z-direction; if woven alternately, the resulting pattern is V-shaped. The mats found at Naqlun used a double strand for the weft.

In length these mats reached from 1.45 to 2.12 m, in width from 1.02 to 1.6 m. The warp/dm² number ranged from 7 to 9, the weft/dm² from 12 to 16, and the number of V-shaped rows from 6 to 8. The craftsmanship in the case of these mats is good as a rule, they are often decorated and are occasionally fitted with handles. Three of the mats (Nd.02.228, Nd.02.289,



Fig. 8. Mat woven in twining technique with loop at one edge (Nd.02.232) from T. 317 (Photo A. Łyżwa-Piber)

Nd.02.290) are decorated; they are divided into segments of varying width by crosswise bands consisting of either one or two V-shaped interlaces. In mat Nd.02.289 these bands have been dyed black and in Nd.02.290 the particular segments are ornamented with added geometrical patterns consisting of, successively, a checker

pattern of small rhomboids, big rhomboids and a wavy line. The mat Nd.02.232 is not of a typical shape for it resembles most closely a lid with loops of 1 cm diameter woven at the edge of the long ends. These loops were made of palm rope twined with the same kind of plant member as the mat (*Fig. 8*).

FINAL REMARKS

The burial context of the mats discovered at Naqlun leaves no doubt as to their part in the funerary ritual. The mats were presumably meant to protect the burial at the moment of interment and this they apparently did with considerable effectiveness, especially in the case of the less durable *jerid* crates or biers or when the body was buried simply wrapped in a shroud. The

large number of mats discovered suggests that they were of common use in households. The large number of mats discovered suggests that they were of common use in households. Considering the conditions and circumstances in which these mats were found, it is surprising how many of them are in very good condition, as if they had not been made use of earlier.