

Title: **Refuse dump in sector B in Naqlun: excavation report 2008–2009**

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**REFUSE DUMP IN SECTOR B IN NAQLUN:
EXCAVATION REPORT 2008–2009**

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Keywords: Egypt, Naqlun, refuse dump, site B, 6th–7th century, mud-stoppers, lamps, papyri, Cemetery A

REFUSE DUMP IN SECTOR B IN NAQLUN: EXCAVATION REPORT 2008–2009

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LOCATION AND STRATIGRAPHY OF THE TRENCH

In the 2008 season excavation was conducted on a refuse dump located in Sector B in the southwestern part of the kom (for the location of the kom, see Godlewski 2012: Fig. 1, inset, on 195, in this volume). The investigated area was an eastward extension of a north–south oriented trench, 26 m long and 3.50 m wide, that had been excavated to bedrock in seasons 1986, 1988, 1990, and 1992 (Godlewski *et alii* 1987–1988: 171–207, esp. 189; Godlewski *et alii* 1994: 201–263, esp. 209–212; see also Godlewski 1993). The work of past seasons has shown that the dump consisted of accumulated refuse discarded by the residents of the Naqlun monastery in an early phase of its existence (late 5th to mid-9th centuries)

and deposited by the basket load on a gentle, rocky slope. Its layers contained considerable amounts of pottery, remains of food, ropes, basketry, wooden objects, and more than 100 Greek texts on papyrus. At some point the surface of the dump was leveled for construction of later structures designated as Complex B (see Maślak 2012, in this volume), the plaster floors of which sealed the latest deposits. The trench excavated in the 1980s and 1990s lay immediately west of the relics of complex B.

In order to continue exploring the refuse dump in 2008 excavations began in room 26 of complex B (for the location of the trench on the general site plan of Naqlun, see Fig. 1 on 195, in this volume), where the

floor was largely missing and the west wall was no longer extant. The trench measured 3.50 m x 4.80 m at the maximum and the walls of the unit constituted its eastern and southern boundaries. The excavated area was extended somewhat to the north by removing a relic of the north wall of room B.26, to line up with the northern edge of the old trench. The trench reached a depth of 2.30 m and it was excavated to bedrock (in 12 stratigraphic units).

The excavated area of the refuse dump had layers sloping down gently from the northeast to the southwest and consisted of organic remains and sand, as well as lenses of ash and deposits of pebbles and cobbles [*Fig. 1*]. The stratigraphic units contained domestic and construction refuse, such as fragments of bricks, basketry, wood and plentiful amounts of pottery, and were provisionally dated from late 5th or early 6th to the end of the 7th century. A deposit of broken amphoras (LR7) was uncovered in a sand layer, at an elevation of 7.32 m. Over 20 vessels were scattered randomly across the central part of the trench, on its east-west axis (for an analysis of the pottery, see Danys-Lasek 2012, in this volume).

The upper layers were cut by a burial pit, which had been dug into the floor of B.26 to a depth of 1.60 m, disturbing stratigraphic units I–VII.¹ The pit contained two burials, T.500 and T.501, most probably chronologically associated with Cemetery A (11th–14th centuries AD) and some scattered remains of other individuals (for a report on the medieval burials, see Dzierzbicka, Ożarek 2012, in this volume).

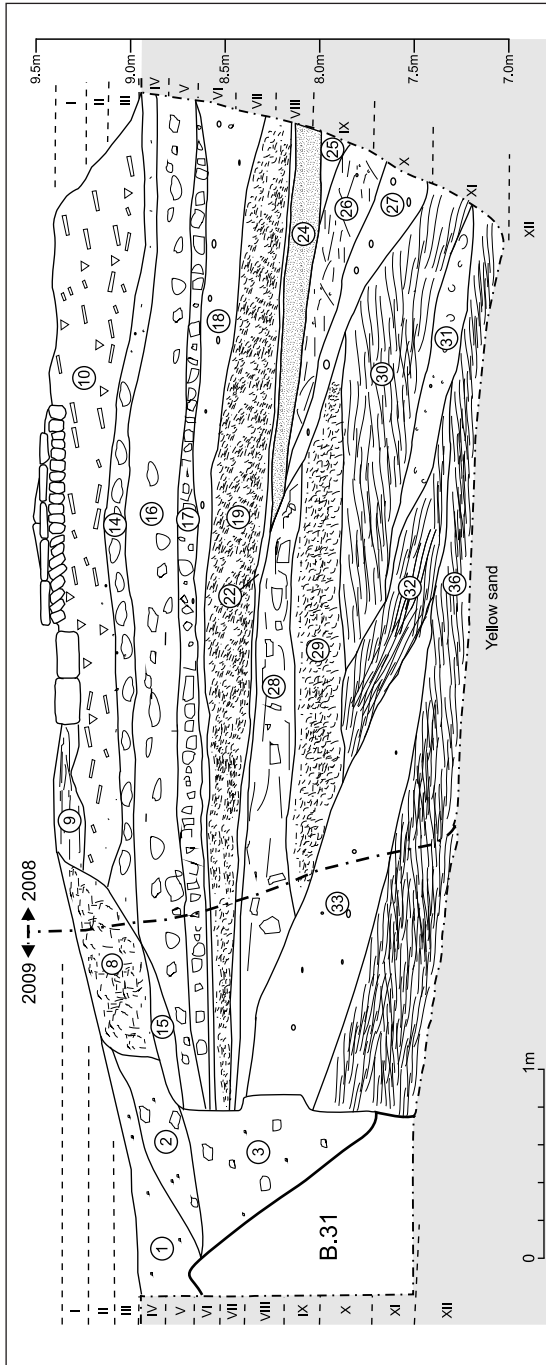
In 2009, the trench from the 2008 season was extended to the north in order to define the northern limit of the refuse dump. However, this area had been cut in order to build vaulted, subterranean mud-brick structures B.31 and B.32 (for the plan and comments, see Godlewski 2012, in this volume, especially *Fig. 18* on page 209; also, Maślak 2012, in this volume), whose purpose and dating await clarification. Therefore, the finds pertinent to the refuse dump were retrieved solely from the undisturbed strata approximately 1 m north of the trench from 2008 and from the mixed context in the foundation trench dug for B.31 and B.32, between its wall and the southern vault of B.31 (see *Fig. 1*, north section).

FINDS FROM THE REFUSE DUMP

The excavation of the refuse dump in B.26 yielded the expected numerous array of finds. The pottery is presented separately (Danys-Lasek 2012, in this volume). The remaining finds included glass, wood, textile fragments, mud stoppers, oil lamps,

and texts on papyrus and paper, all of which will be the object of further study. The layers that were the richest source of finds were stratigraphic units I, III, IV, and V, mainly due to an abundance of glass fragments and potsherds.

¹ The burial pit was visible on J. Dobrowolski's plan of 1992 as an oval area where the floor was missing. However, the floor of B.26 was no longer extant at the moment of re-excavation in 2008 and the pit was not discernible in horizontal section owing to the heterogeneous nature of the dump layers.



1. Surface debris, mostly grey sand with pebbles and mud brick
2. Sand with some organic particles, pebbles and lime
3. Yellow sand mixed with gray dust and some mud brick fragments
4. Relic of the floor of room B.26
5. Packed organic particles with ashes
6. Organic particles with pottery and stones
7. Soft, fine sand, pebbles, bones, fine organic particles
8. Firmly packed large and small organic particles, ropes, textiles, pottery, palm leaves and stones
9. Firmly packed organic particles
10. Burnt layer with ashes, some sand and abundant potsherds
11. Grey sand with ash forming strata sloping from E to W, white plaster
12. White stones, pebbles, grey sand with ash forming strata sloping from E to W, white plaster
13. Firmly packed organic particles, palm leaves and reeds
14. Thin, horizontal layer of very fine grey sand with small pieces of pottery, plaster and pebbles; in N section firmly packed rubble with fragments of mud bricks and baked bricks above a leveled surface; in E section white cobbles in central part
15. Tightly packed organic particles
16. Large pieces of white stone, mud brick rubble, firmly packed organic particles, fragments of baked bricks, ropes, pottery, fruit pits, traces of burning in E section
17. Compacted mud brick rubble
18. Sand with pebbles, cobbles and few small potsherds
19. Heterogeneous layer consisting of fine strata of grey sand and organic particles sloping from W to E, more organic in the E, more sandy in the W
20. White cobbles
21. Large, compacted organic particles, potsherds, ropes
22. A horizontal layer of very fine, grey sand mixed with lime and fine organic particles
23. Thin burnt layer
24. A heterogeneous layer of firmly packed organic particles with ashes, traces of burning, abundant potsherds, animal bones
25. Fine sand with pebbles, hardly any artifacts; lies on a thin layer of white cobbles
26. A thick layer of fine and medium organic particles, firmly packed, mixed with sand, pebbles, seeds, fruit pits, charcoal, ropes, potsherds. Larger organic particles in the upper part and in the east
27. Yellow sand with pebbles and few organic particles, shells
28. Firmly packed large organic particles mixed with sand, pebbles and white stone rubble, threads, ropes
29. Firmly packed fine organic particles, small potsherds, charcoal
30. Large organic particles mixed with sand and ashes. Burnt spot and ashes at the S end
31. Yellowish coarse sand with pebbles, and some organic particles, few potsherds in lower strata
32. Firmly packed large organic particles (palm leaves, reeds), coprolites, ropes
33. Yellowish sand with pebbles, hardly any artifacts
34. Coarse sand with pebbles, scarce potsherds and fine organic particles, papyrus in the lower part
35. Layer identical to no. 34
36. Large organic particles mixed with sand, fruit pits, pottery, pebbles, papyrus fragments; thin lenses of ash
37. Tightly packed chaff, potsherds
38. Grey sand with small pebbles, thin layers of fine organic particles
39. Fine organic particles mixed with sand, mostly chaff, potsherds, ropes, threads

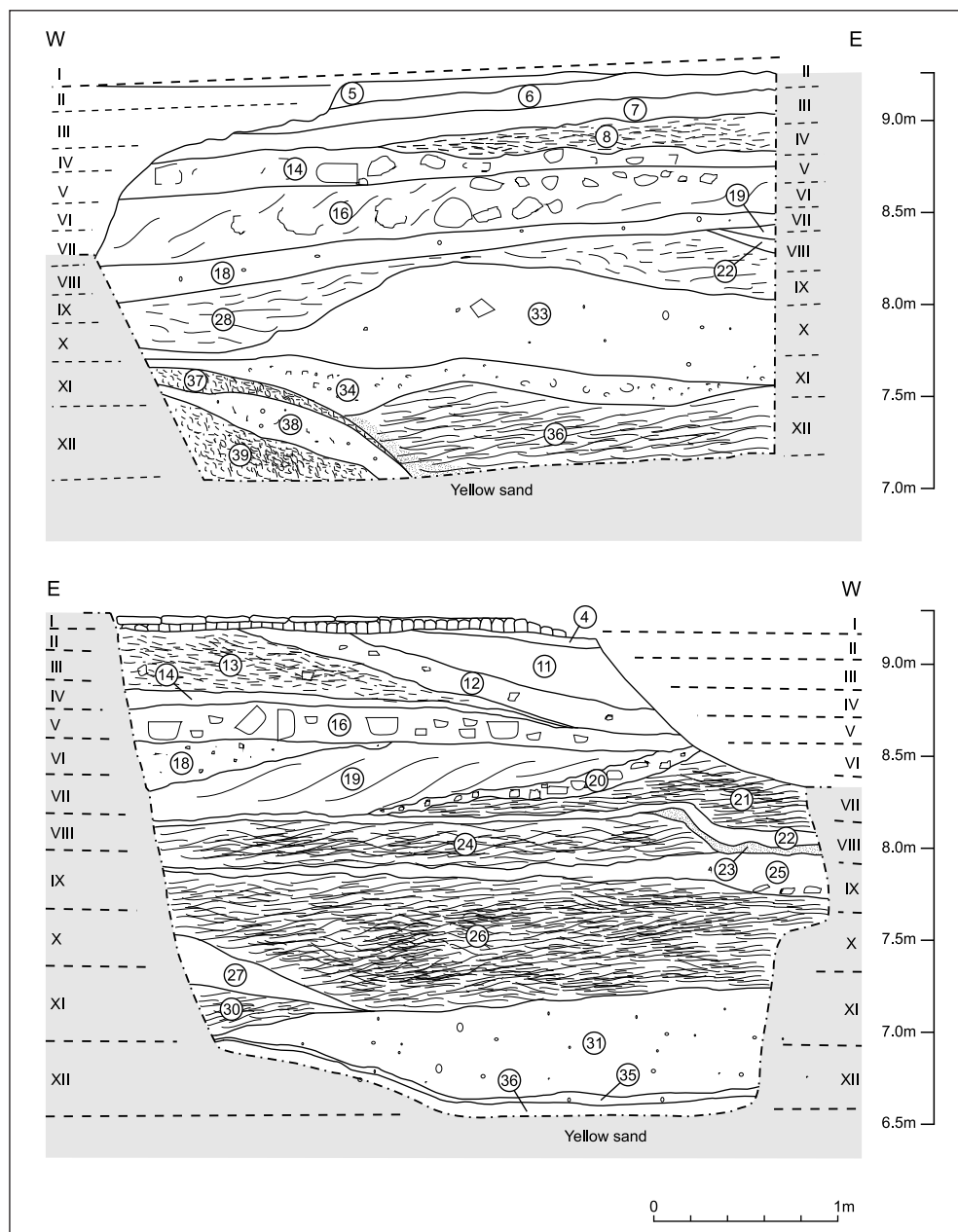


Fig. 1. Cross-sections through the excavated area under unit B.26: this page, north and south trench walls; east wall and description of layers on the opposite page; Roman numerals indicate stratigraphic units (Drawing D. Dzierzbicka, Ł. Krupski, PCMA archives)

TEXTS

In 2008, almost twenty texts were retrieved from the trash deposits. Whereas the documents on paper, in Arabic and Coptic, were found in layers I, III, and IV, Greek papyri were uncovered only in the lower strata provisionally dated to the 6th century: units VII (*sebbakh*, rich in finds), VIII, IX, XI, and XII (*sebbakh* with lenses of sand). A few of the documents merit closer description here.

Nd.08.566 was found crumpled up into a ball [Fig. 2, left], in rather bad condition. The fragments were unfolded and placed between glass panes pending restoration and proper arrangement. The document is an official letter, written *charta transversa* in a very nice, sloping cursive script.

The address is preserved on the back: the sender is a certain Kyriakos, *illustrius*, i.e., an official of high rank; the addressee is a distinguished monk presumably residing in the Nekloni monastery. The original width of the document can be reconstructed as about 33 cm; its length was not less than about 70 cm.

The first part of the letter concerns some financial and fiscal operations in the Fayum, or more precisely in Zinnis, a village known from several documents of Fayumic origin, dated to the 6th–8th centuries. The sender mentions considerable sums of money, as high as 172 *nomismata rhypara*, solidi of full value, i.e., almost two and a half pounds of pure gold. In the second part at the bottom the sender greets

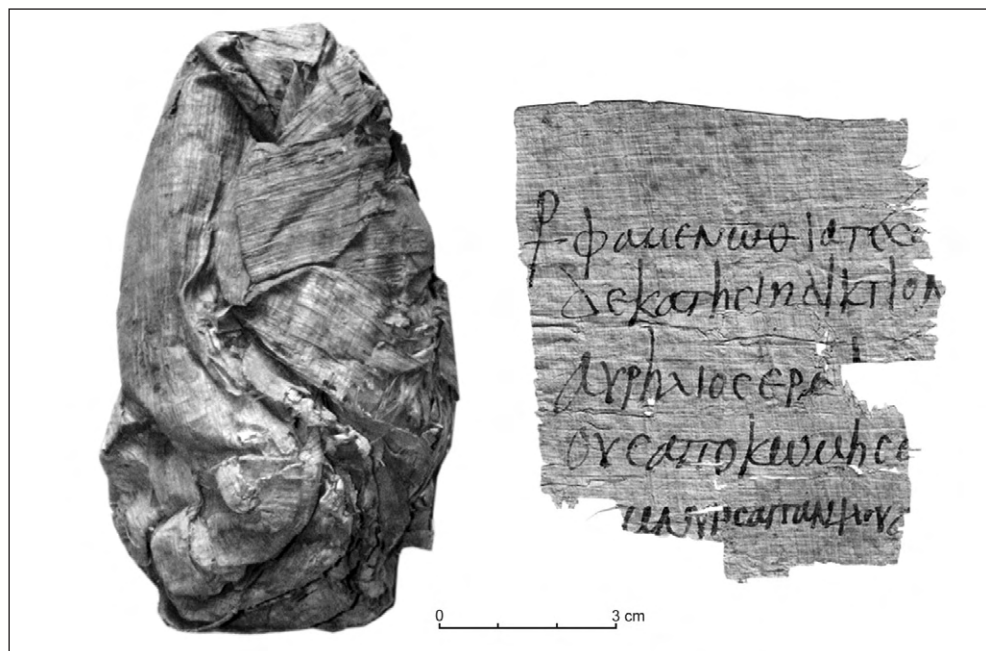


Fig. 2. Greek papyrus documents from the monastic dump: left, document crumpled up into a ball (Nd.08.566) and beginning of a Greek contract (Nd.08.722) (Photos W. Godlewski, PCMA archives)

the recipient(s) in an elaborate manner, mentioning Jesus Christ and *Theotokos* (Mary Mother of God) who are forgiving of sins. Of special interest is a date recorded at the end of the letter, in a rather unusual context: 'I wish you good health for the current 21st year.' Since the document is to be dated palaeographically to the 6th century, the 21st year should be seen as referring to the reign of Justinian, i.e., AD 548 (the next emperor to have more than 21 regnal years is Heraclius, which, however, would produce too late a date, given the document's script).

Another papyrus found in similar circumstances, Nd.08.567, but much fragmented, is a register of income or perhaps tax payments, written in a handsome upright cursive.

Nd.08.741 is a completely preserved letter of the 6th century, sent to 'holy fathers, Agathes *presbyteros*, *apa* Paulos, *apa* Neilammon and *apa* Aanes, all of them deacons, and all monks of holy Neklonion'. This is the first Greek text explicitly mentioning the name of the monastery. The senders are a *presbyteros*, a deacon and the whole community of the village of Tebetny (in the Fayum, some 10 km west of Naqlun). There was a man sent from Naqlun to Tebetny, and then further to Oxyrhynchos, who should stay there until Easter. The details of the letter remain unclear because of Greek so corrupted that it hinders understanding. The handwriting is that of an educated person, which makes the text even more surprising. Perhaps the sender (someone from Tebetny, *presbyteros*? deacon?) was a man who fluently wrote in Coptic, but not in Greek. If so, it would be interesting to know why he decided to write his letter in Greek. Perhaps he thought it would be

better to address the monks of Naqlun in this tongue, which would be an additional argument for assuming that Greek was the language spoken and commonly used at Naqlun in the 6th century.

Nd 08.722 contains the beginning of a contract dated to 11 Phamenoth of the 14th indiction [*Fig. 2*, right]. One of the contracting parties is a certain Aurelios Hermi[], the other one [] on son of *apa* Nilos, presumably connected in some way with the Naqlun monastery. Since the document has none of the religious formulas opening contracts after AD 590, its date can be established as before AD 580 (the last possible indiction 14 before 590).

It is worth noting that all of the texts found in the lower layers were written in Greek, and none in Coptic, which again strongly suggests that the dominant language used in the monastery in the 6th century was Greek.

In 2009, several fragmentary texts on papyrus were unearthed south of vaulted structures B.31 and B.32 [see *Fig. 1*, north section]. One of the fragments, Nd.09.236 (4.4 x 2.6 cm), seems to be a complete label bearing the name of Phoibammom noted in abbreviated form. The remaining fragments are letters written in cursive script, either upright or sloping. Some of them are of a business nature, judging by the sums in *nomismatia* and *keratia* that can be read. Generally speaking, they can be dated to the 6th–7th centuries. All of them were written in Greek and none in Coptic. A fragment of a letter (Nd.09.295), found in a disturbed context in the fill of B.31, is written in sloping cursive of the 6th century and contains elaborate wording, typical of the ecclesiastical milieu.

Sector B also yielded two Greek ostraca, one of them completely preserved

[Fig. 3]. This text says that Menas, son of *apa* Ol was an owner(?) of seven parts(?) of fodder for animals.

LAMPS

Four terracotta lamps, two nearly complete and two fragmentarily preserved, were found in the dump. Lamps Nd.08.223 and Nd.08.342 have an elongated piriform shape and undefined base; they can be dated to the 6th–mid 7th century,² which corresponds to the overall dating of the dump. Both of them are nearly complete, except for broken-off vertical loop handles. Both have a raised edge round the discus-rim, extending to form a channel to the nozzle. The relief decoration that adorns the discuses and shoulders consists of short strokes, straight or wavy lines, and circles. The entire surface of lamp Nd.08.223 (found in layer II, a deposit of ash mixed

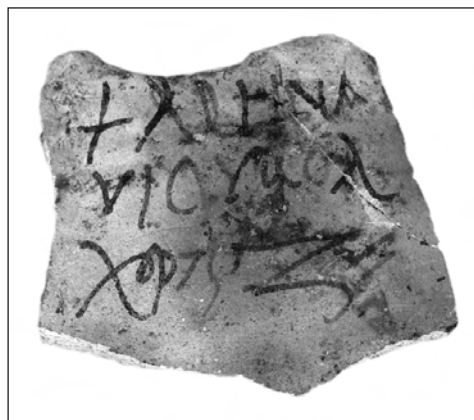


Fig. 3. Greek ostrakon (Nd.09.158)
(Photo T. Derda, PCMA archives)

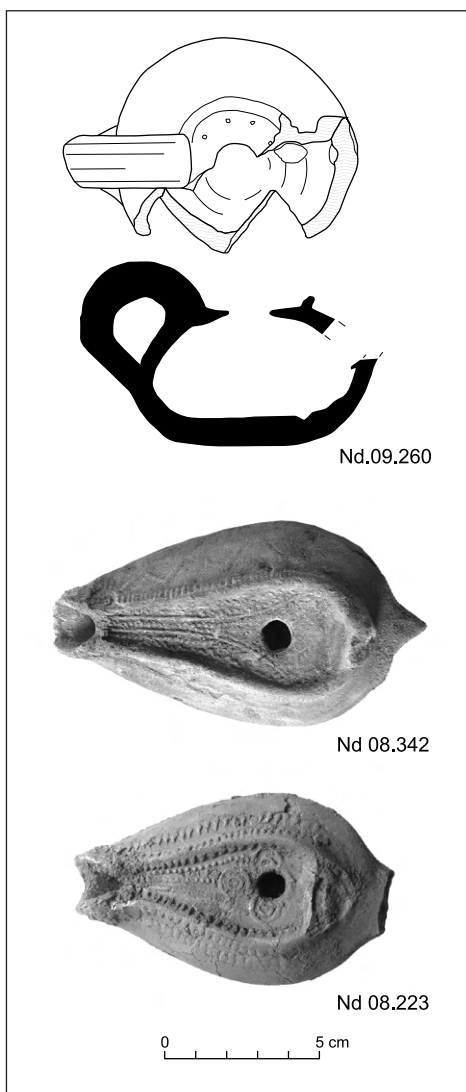


Fig. 4. Strap loop handle lamp and two piriform lamps (Photo W. Godlewski, drawing D. Dzierzbicka, PCMA archives)

² For parallels, see, e.g., Petrie Museum Late Antique specimens UC50829–32 from Ihnasiya el-Medina, UC50833 from Koptos, and two lamps UC54506–7 of unknown provenance. Especially UC54506 bears a resemblance to Nd.08.223. The two lamps have no precise dating; the Naqlun parallels suggest a 6th or 7th century date. There are two similar lamps in the collection of the British Museum: BMC Q 2256 EA (unknown provenance, 6th–7th century) and BMC Q 2258 MLA (Wadi Sarga, 6th–7th century).

with sand containing an abundance of potsherds and glass, above a fragmentary compacted level) was burnt and cracked. Short transverse strokes adorn the shoulder, as well as the external and internal sides of the raised edge round the discus [Fig. 4, bottom left]. There are three sets of small concentric circles in relief adjacent to the filling-hole. The area within the raised edges between the wick-hole and filling-hole is decorated with rows of raised points. The decoration of lamp Nd.08.342 (layer IV) consists of a wavy line on the shoulder and short, transverse strokes on the raised edge round the discus [Fig. 4, bottom right]. Two straight lines in relief lead from the wick-hole to the filling-hole and the space within the raised edge is filled with patterns composed of raised points.

The form of lamp Nd.09.260 [Fig. 4, top] can be reconstructed satisfactorily as a rounded wheel-made body, a circular ring top with a flat discus, a small filling-hole, and a strap loop handle. The wick-hole is broken off. A circle of raised points surrounds the filling hole.³

MUD STOPPERS

The excavated part of the refuse dump yielded an abundance of mud stoppers, both undecorated and stamped. They were mostly encountered in the lower strata, layers VII–XII. About 20 mud stoppers bore seal impressions with diverse inscriptions, geometric patterns and figural representations. The inscriptions, all of them fragmentary and in Greek letters, were stamped sideways on the mud stoppers in the part where they

covered the neck and handle of a jar. Of the figural representations one should note two impressions, one circular with a typical depiction of St Menas flanked



Fig. 5. *Mud stoppers from the refuse dump with impressions of, left, St Menas (Nd.08.337) and an elephant (Nd.08.332) (Photos W. Godlewski, PCMA archives)*

³ A more elaborately decorated parallel is UC65035 at the Petrie Museum (Oxyrhynchos, generally dated to the Byzantine Period). An undecorated specimen generally dated to the 7th–8th century was found in Kellia (Egloff 1977: 163 and Pl. 86.2, Type 316).

by camels [Fig. 5, left],⁴ and the other showing an African elephant standing to left [Fig. 10, right], found in layer III and in *sebbakh* layer VII respectively, both contexts provisionally dated to the 7th century.

OTHER

About 150 diagnostic glass fragments were found during the 2008–2009 seasons, the majority in the upper layers I–II below B.26. Most of them were drinking glasses, but also pieces of *polykandelion* lamps, windowpanes, small cups and plates.

Other small finds were the most abundant in layer IV, which was composed of *sebbakh* with plentiful domestic refuse, including objects made of wood, leather and bronze, as well as fragments of textiles and basketry. More than 70 wooden artifacts included some fragments of keys and bolts, pegs, a pulley, and a small bowt (see Zieliński, Zych 2012, in this volume). There were also a dozen or so fragments of leather objects, mostly of footwear,

including a double sandal sole. Worthy of note was a piece of a belt decorated with patterns of impressed circles and herring-bone motifs [Fig. 6].

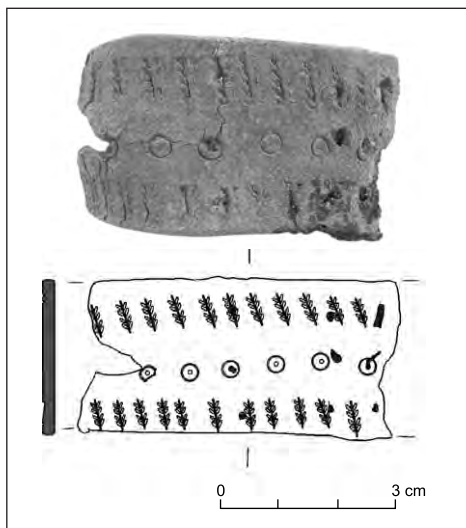


Fig. 6. Decorated leather belt fragment (Nd.08.337) (Photo W. Godlewski, drawing D. Dzierzbicka, PCMA archives)

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⁴ An almost identical mud stopper representing St Menas between two camels was found in the refuse dump in 1988 (see Godlewski *et alii* 1994: 210 with Fig. 7 on 211).

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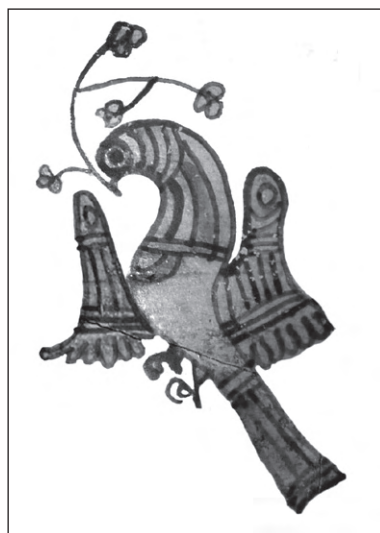
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