

NAQLUN 2003 FROM SCRAPS TO TUNIC

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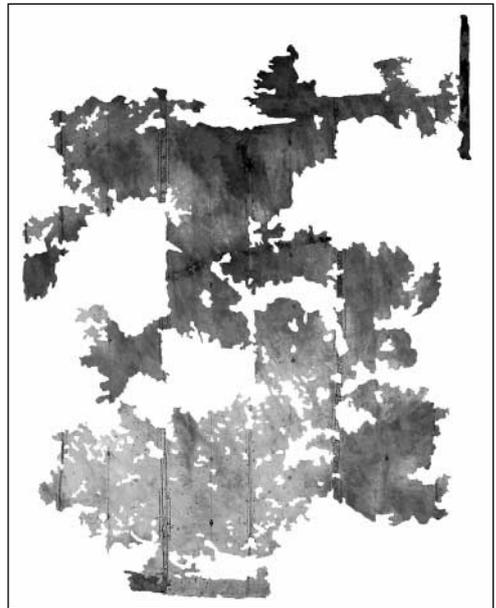
During the exploration of the cemetery on kom A in 2000, several scraps of a decorated woolen textile (Nd.00.083) were uncovered in grave T. 165.¹⁾ The burial was found disturbed, both the skeleton of a man and the furnishings being incomplete. Long exposure had done considerable damage to the textile and the surviving scraps were soiled and deformed. The fibers had been overdried, setting in wrinkled and deformed position.

Immediately after discovery, a mini-vacuum cleaner was used to clean the surface of the fabric mechanically. Some flexibility and resilience was restored to the woolen fibers by soaking the scraps with a lanolin solution. This was followed by a water bath containing washing and softening agent PRETEPON G. The scraps were then tamponed gently to remove the soiling from between the fibers. The last stage consisted of disinfection with PREVENTOL added to the final bath. The scraps were then spread out on glass panes and left to dry.

Upon close examination the fragments revealed many elements useful in identifying the textile and the actual position of particular scraps. Lined edges were found, seams joining the separate

pieces and a part of the “bateau”-shaped neck opening. The ornaments also seemed to follow a certain rhythm, repeating patterns and colors.

On the grounds of this evidence a reconstruction of the shape, dimensions and decoration of the textile was undertaken.



*Fig. 1. Scraps of the tunic (Nd.00.083) after cleaning
(Photo B. Czaja-Szewczak)*

1) W. Godlewski, “Naqlun excavations, 2000”, *PAM XII, Reports 2000* (2001), 160; id., “Les textiles issus des fouilles récentes de Naqlun”, in: *Egypte, la trauma de l’histoire*, ed. M. Durand and F. Saragoza (Paris 2002), 203, fig. 1.

2) Bag-shaped tunics were made of a rectangular piece of cloth folded in half and sown at the long edge, leaving openings for the arms, and with a boat-shaped slit as neck opening. For a discussion of various kinds of tunics, cf. B. Czaja-Szewczak, “Burial tunics from Naqlun”, *PAM XIV, Reports 2002* (2003), 177-184 and esp. Fig. 1.

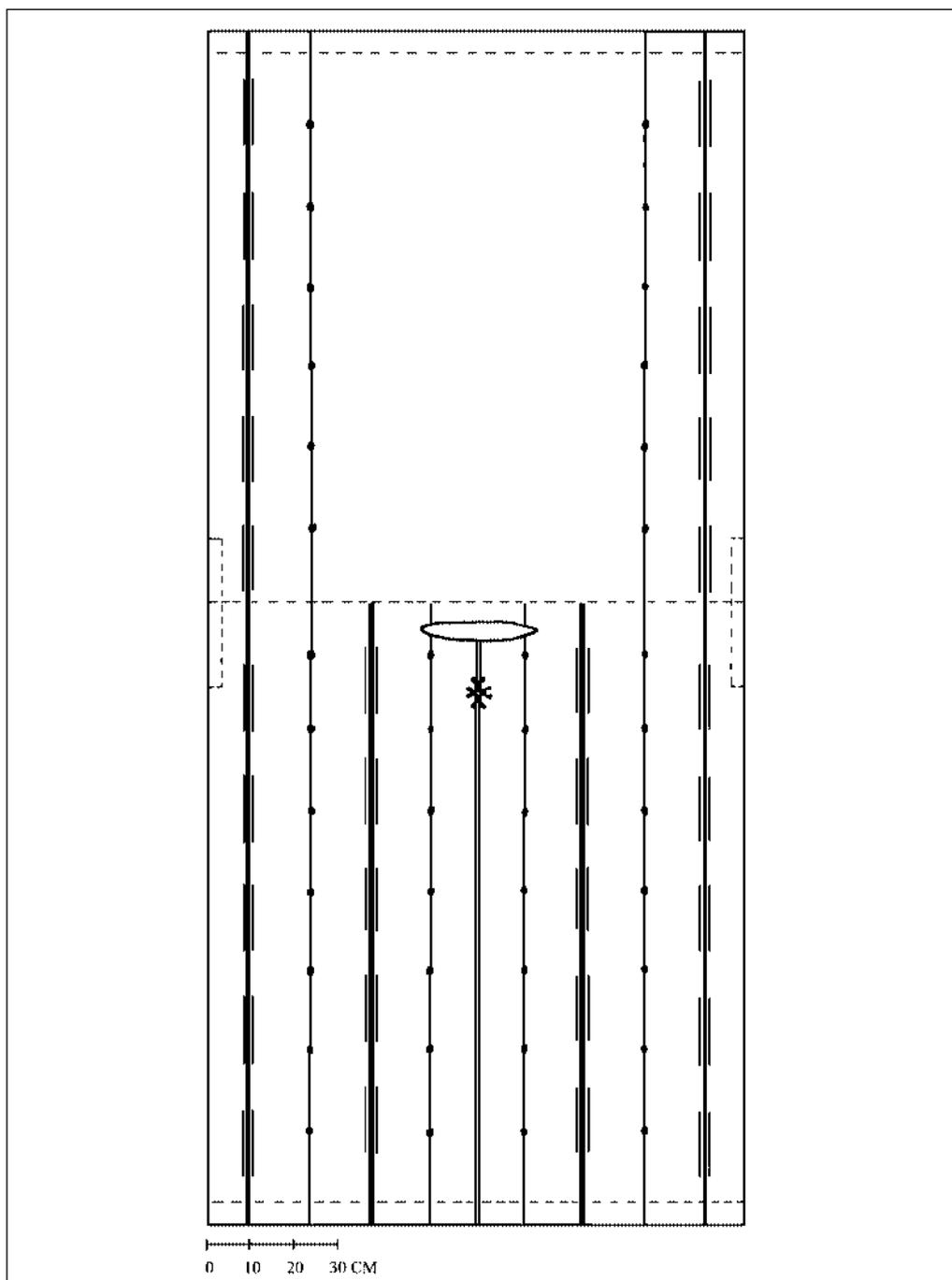


Fig. 2. Reconstructed tunic (Nd.00.083) from T. 165
(Drawing B. Czaja-Szewczak)



*Fig. 3. Tunic Nd.00.083 after reconstruction
(Photo T. Szmagier)*



Fig. 4. Ornamental cross on the front of the tunic
(Photo T. Szmagier)

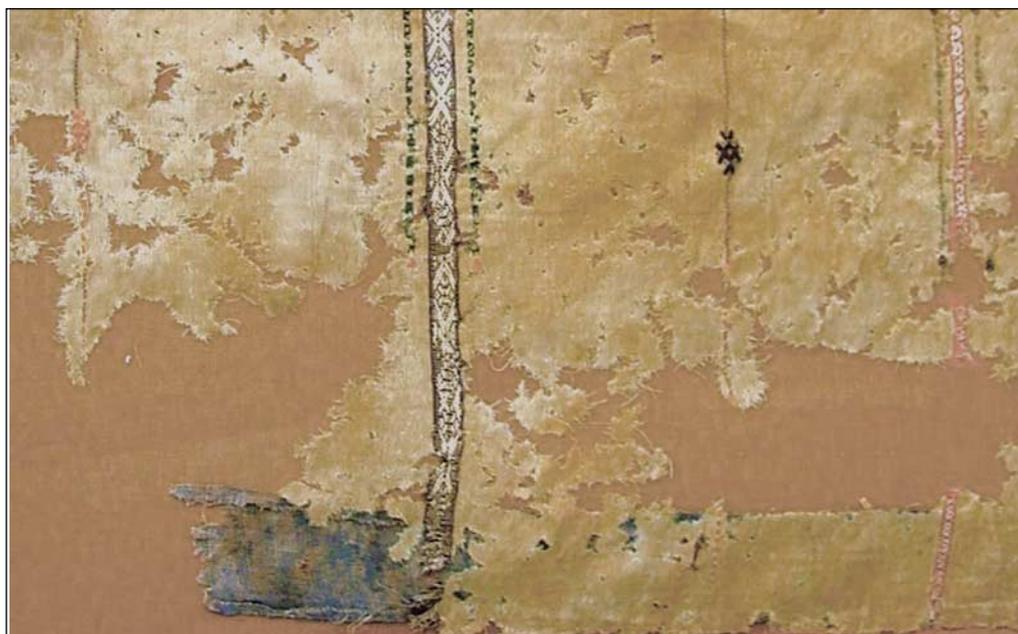


Fig. 5. Lower left front of the tunic with Coptic inscription vertically and blue-dyed band lining the bottom edge (Photo T. Szmagier)

The woolen robe turned out to be a sleeveless tunic of the bag-shaped type (Figs. 1-3).²⁾ It proved possible to establish its shape, full dimensions and the pattern of the decoration. It was 148.0 cm long and 124.0 cm wide. Woven in balanced plain tabby, it had the ornaments embroidered with woolen and linen thread. Decorating the front of the tunic was a big four-branch cross (Fig. 4), and bands of geometric decoration flanked by multi-branched color crosses and inscriptions in Coptic (Figs. 5, 6), identified as an excerpt from Psalm 46, 2-3.³⁾ Spread out, the tunic has a rectangular shape; the neck opening was a crosswise oval-shaped slit, 22.0 cm long, set in the middle. The rectangle had been sown together of two pieces of fabric of different size to achieve the required length. The part constituting the front of the tunic is longer (152 cm) and terminates 4.0 cm above the neck opening. The back part is 144.0 cm long. The resulting piece of cloth was folded in half and sown together at the sides, leaving openings for the hands, each 20.3 cm wide. The edges of these openings, as well as the bottom hem were lined with bands of blue-dyed linen cloth, 3.1 cm wide at the sides, 5.7 cm at the bottom (cf. Fig. 5). This trimming also served to reinforce the edges of the robe.

In the textiles collection of the Louvre there is a tunic with an ornament resembling that on the Naqlun robe.⁴⁾ The Coptic inscription on the sleeves gives the name of the owner, one monk called Apa Kólthi from the Neklóni monastery⁵⁾ (Deir el-Naqlun); he was undoubtedly the person for whom the tunic had been made.

The inscription on our tunic has no such information to give, but its religious nature is unquestionable and the cross motifs on the tunic are also telling. The

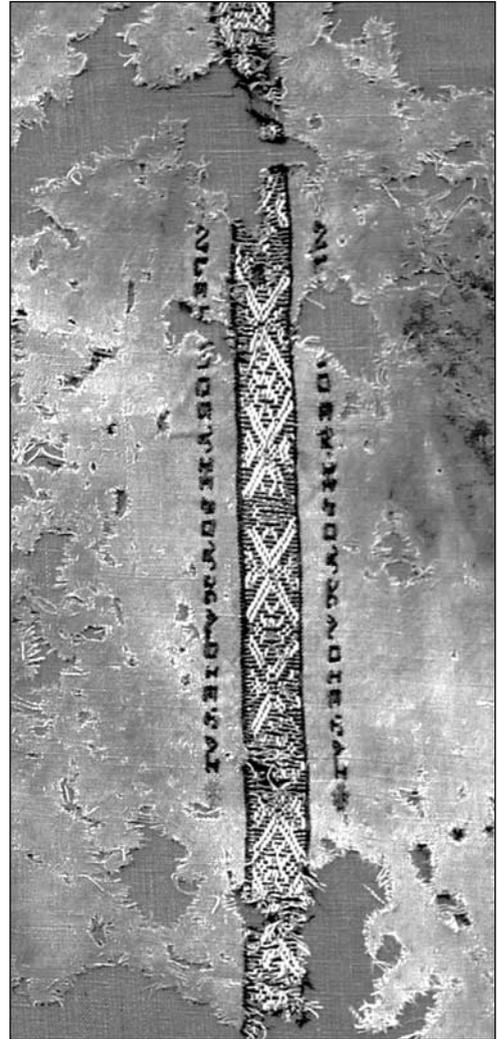


Fig. 6. Coptic inscription on the upper left front of the tunic (Photo T. Szmagier)

3) J. Van der Vliet, 'In a Robe of Gold'. Status, magic and politics on inscribed Christian textiles from Egypt (in press).

4) M. Durand, Tunique liturgique et son capuchon, in: Egypte, la frame de l'Histoire (Paris 2002), 129-130, cat. 95.

5) J. Van der Vliet, "A Naqlun Monk brought Home. On the Provenance of Louvre inv. E 26798-26799", BSAC 39, 239-244.

tunic from the Louvre was dated to the 10th-11th century on the grounds of the overall shape, decoration and the text which is, in the opinion of M. Durand, a typical Coptic inscription formula imitating the decorative bands of *tiraz* textiles, characteristic of products from the 9th-11th century.⁶⁾ The dating of the Naqlun tunic is based on the archaeological context, which points to the Fatimid period.

The large number of fragments belonging to tunic Nd.00.083 caused problems not only with photography, but also with storage. Full conservation during a single season was impossible, so the only solution was to stabilize the tunic on modern linen ground. A plain-weave piece of linen fabric was prepared and all the scraps of the tunic were placed on it taking into consideration the continuity of the decoration, the coloring and the spaces between ornaments. The extent of the damages and the discoloring helped to determine the part of the tunic a given piece had come from. Another element facilitating the reconstruction was the impression of a belt visible on a few fragments. The amplexure of the robe made the bands of ornament, so characteristic of Late Antiquity, equally important in Early Christian and Arab times. A belt to hold the tunic in place at

the waist made it easier to move around in such a robe.⁷⁾

Knowing the dimensions of the tunic permitted the linen ground stabilizing the preserved scraps to be shaped appropriately in resemblance of the original. Thus, the tunic has been restored to its shape and all the surviving fragments are clearly visible (cf. *Fig. 3*). The doubling linen is of a golden-brown color that resembles the modern coloring of this kind of dress. The purpose in this choice of color was to integrate it as fully as possible with the reconstructed robe. A thin polyester thread and a semicircular surgical needle were used to baste the scraps of the tunic to the ground. This is a provisional solution. In the future, the textile will be attached to the ground with laid stitch replacing the polyester thread with silk. The size of the doubling cloth will be strictly adapted to the full dimensions of the tunic in order to restore the textile to its original shape.

Once the work intended for this season was completed, the large number of scraps of tunic Nd.00.083 could be photographed and safely stored without fear of further damage. The linen with the doubled pieces of textile was rolled onto a cylinder measuring 8.0 cm in diameter. Successive layers of the cloth were separated with acid-free Japanese tissue paper and the roll inserted into a tube of acid-free paper for storage.

6) Durand, *op. cit.*, 130.

7) D. Pfister, D. Flamm, s.v. Belts, in: *Coptic Encyclopedia*, vol. 2 (1991), 643.