

## CONSERVATION OF A FATIMID SHAWL FROM THE NAQLUN CEMETERY

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A Fatimid shawl was put on display at the Egyptian Museum in Cairo as part of the exhibition *Seventy Years of Polish Archaeology in Egypt*, held from 21 October to 21 November 2007 (subsequently extended through January 2008), celebrating the Polish archaeological and conservation contribution to Ancient Egyptian heritage.

This linen wrap (Nd.02.245; Godlewski 2007) is a plain-weave textile (18 weft/cm, 27 warp/cm) with colorful silk decoration in tapestry weave (56 weft/cm, 25 warp/cm). It is dated to the second half of the 12th century. Ultimately used as a burial wrapping (it was excavated from tomb T.316 on Cemetery A in Naqlun; Godlewski 2003: 167, Fig. 3a), it had suffered damages due to direct contact with products of human body decomposition. The surviving fragment constitutes about half of the original textile. The dimensions after conservation are: length 87 cm, width 112/104 cm.

The cream-colored linen is decorated with two bands of decoration. Bordering the tasseled edge (the fringe is 4.2 cm long) are four black threads of silk woven into the weft, each one millimeter wide, forming a band barely 0.4 cm wide. The main ornament is a band 7.6 cm wide appearing 21.5 cm away from this band. Joining medallions form this band. They are filled alternately with images of birds on an inscribed rosette and a fantastic hoofed

creature on a pink ground. The line of medallions is flanked by Arabic pseudo-inscriptions (*tiraz*) in pink on yellow ground, sandwiched between bands of a cream-colored scrolling-vine motif on black ground.

The conservation program developed for textiles coming from the excavation of cemeteries A and C at the site of Naqlun is carried out continuously from season to season, following a schedule based on regular assessment of the condition of particular finds and their relative importance for research. The wrap in question was in good condition compared to other pieces in the collection. The decision to display it at the Cairo exhibition, however, necessitated immediate full conservation treatment [Fig. 1, top].

The first steps had been taken already in 2002, right after the discovery. Surface dirt was removed with a brush and mini-vacuum cleaner and the textile was subjected to a water bath containing PRETEPON G liquid softener. Biocide PREVENTOL R 80 was added to the last rinsing. After draining off excess water, the textile was laid out on a horizontal surface and delicately pulled into shape without risking any damages. It was fixed to a flat board with entomologic pins and left to dry.

The next stage was carried out in time for the exhibition in the last quarter of 2007. Biocidal treatment was repeated with

a 1% solution of LICHENICIDE 246 in ethanol. The textile was subsequently doubled on cream-colored linen and the task of protecting fabric edges and fringe, as well as external edges of holes, was undertaken. Silk thread was basted in place to hold the doubled textile in place and to preserve the edges of the holes and the textile itself [Fig. 1, bottom].

The last step was to prepare the textile for safe transport to the exhibition in Cairo. For this purpose the textile was placed on

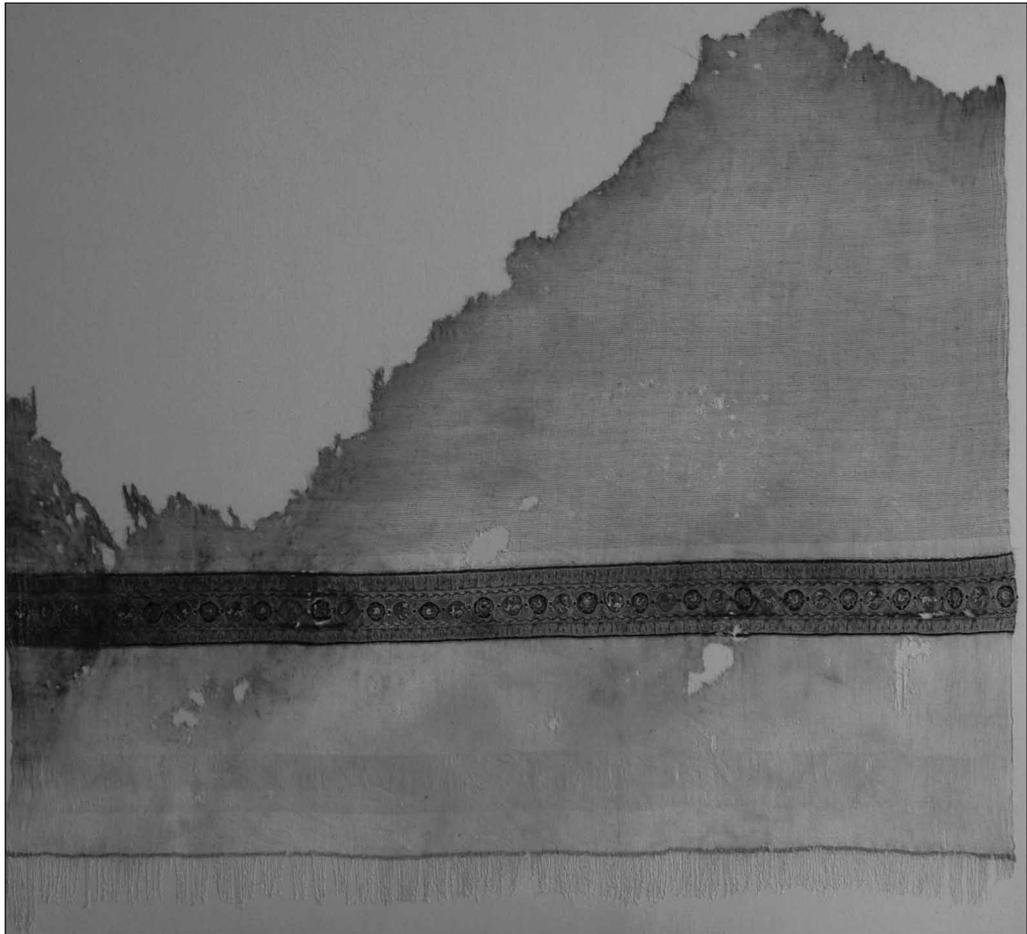
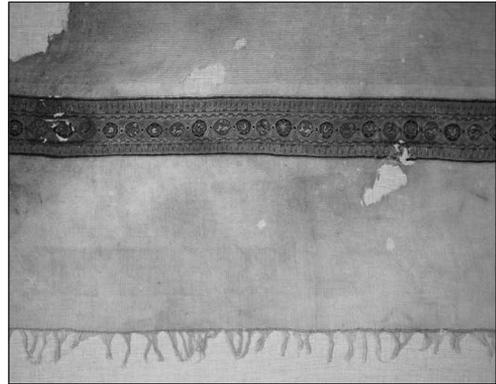


Fig. 1. Fragment of Fatimid wrap Nd.02.245 with fringe before (top) and after conservation (Photo B. Czaja-Szewczak)

a foam board (DEPARFIT) covered with acid-free paper, the edges of which were doubled under and fastened to the back of the board. The textile was fixed in place, protected

with a sheet of acid-free paper, and inserted into a specially-made case designed for moving objects to the Egyptian Museum in Cairo.

## REFERENCES

Godlewski, W.

- 2003 Naqlun. Excavations, 2002, *PAM XIV [=Reports 2002]*, 163–171  
2007 Shawl [in:] *Seventy Years of Polish Archaeology in Egypt. Egyptian Museum in Cairo. Exhibition Catalogue*, Warsaw: PCMA, University of Warsaw, 192–193, Fig. 84