

SUDAN & NUBIA

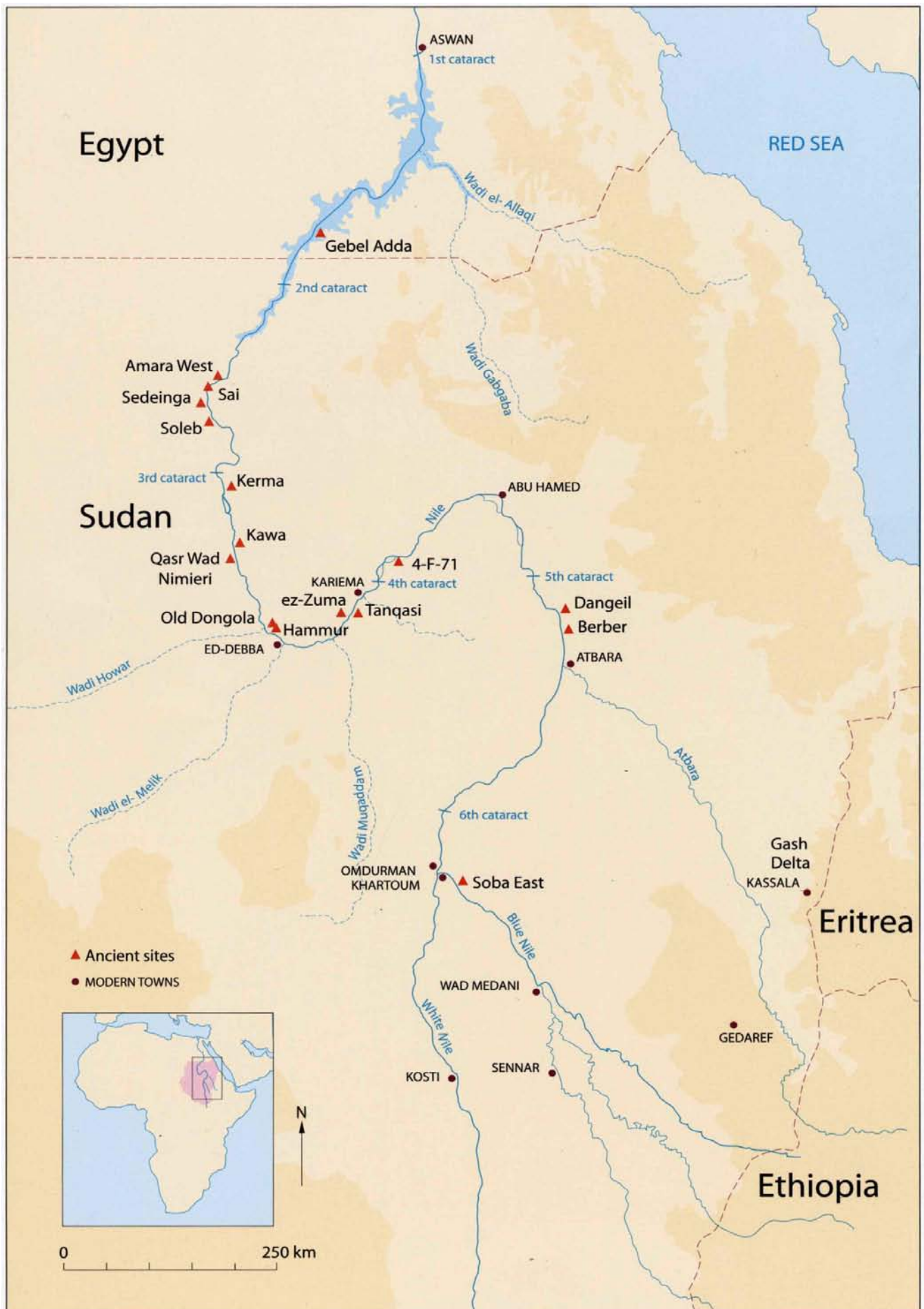
The Sudan Archaeological Research Society



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SUDAN & NUBIA

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Front cover: Berber Meroitic Cemetery. Tomb, BMC 8, showing grave goods, the extended position of the skeleton and the remains of a coffin (photo: Mahmoud Suleiman Bashir).

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Dongola after the 2008-2010 Seasons: Royalty, Saints and Blessed Bishops

Włodzisław Godlewski

The excavations carried out on the Citadel in Dongola and to its north, where the biggest and oldest church foundations of the city have been located, have provided convincing evidence for the suggestion that the Citadel complex was in all likelihood a royal foundation, constructed at the very end of the 5th or at the beginning of the 6th century with the intention of making it the new political centre of the Kingdom of Makuria. The Early Makuria Research Project, which is currently underway, has recorded enough archaeological data to support the hypothesis that the Kingdom of Makuria was politically centred in the region of Napata in the 5th century. The evidence is visible in the cemeteries of Tanqasi (Godlewski 2007, 469-475; Klimaszewska-Drabot 2007) and ez-Zuma (Mahmoud el-Tayeb 2007), and in the fortified settlement of Merawi el-Sheriq (Godlewski 2007, 464-468), which could well have been Makuria's oldest political power centre.

There can be little doubt that it was the Kingdom's territorial expansion which stimulated the undoubtedly huge investment in monumental fortifications upon an elevated rock on the eastern bank of the Nile at Dongola. In the 5th century Makurian kings already seem to have ruled over the river valley from the Third to the Fourth Nile Cataracts. The extent of their power is corroborated by the results of salvage excavations carried out in recent years in the area upstream of the Fourth Cataract. The choice of location for the new fortified centre was governed by the site's central position between the Third and Fourth Cataracts, good economic hinterland, with islands on the Nile and the Letti Basin to the north, as well as Tanqasi to the south. The place was virgin: excavations to date have revealed no traces of earlier settlement.

The churches uncovered to the north of the citadel, comprising an extended series of buildings built one on top of the other (designated BX, EC.I, EC.II and CC), leave no doubt that the official conversion of the Makurian kingdom to Christianity took place in the first half of the 6th century, after the Citadel with its main buildings had already been built.

The strongly fortified and spacious citadel occupying approximately 12,000m² of rock was the seat of kings (Colour plate XXIX). The urban agglomeration expanded in the plain below, spreading mostly to the north. In the 1970s and 1980s, three houses, A, B and PCH.1, were excavated on the northern outskirts of this town. Geomagnetic research of much of the urban agglomeration, carried out in 2009, has revealed the existence of compact masonry architecture covering almost 24,000m². The northern part of the city between the churches, the North Church (NC) and the north-western one (NWC), must have mostly consisted of shelter-like architecture.

SWN The Royal Complex

The SWN complex, where excavation began in 2000, lies in the south-western part of the citadel in close proximity to a river harbour, most likely a private one, connected with palace B.I (Figure 1). The buildings that have been cleared so far are functionally interrelated. The oldest building on the citadel, apart from the defences, is Building IV (Colour plate XXX). The next three structures (B.I, B.III and B.V) are undoubtedly interconnected functionally, even though they were not built simultaneously. The Palace of Ioannes (B.I) was the first to be erected on top of the ruins of B.IV. The small, cruciform, commemorative building (B.III) was founded in the middle of the 7th century and the big sacral

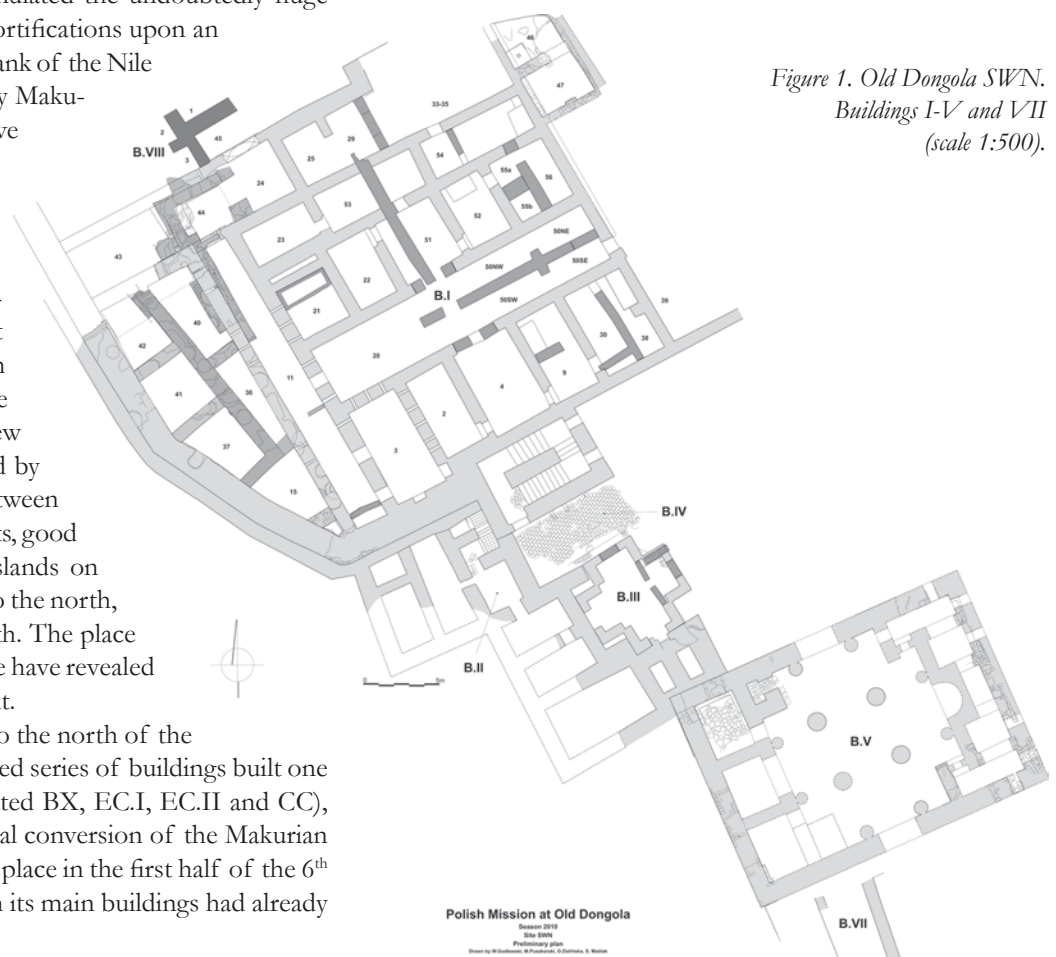


Figure 1. Old Dongola SWN. Buildings I-V and VII (scale 1:500).



complex B.V was constructed later, but the exact time of its foundation remains to be determined.

Building B.II is of military nature and was erected in the 13th century as riverside protection for the royal complex of B.I and B.III during the Mameluke wars.

2.b – Palace of Ioannes

Approximately 80% of the 1200m² of the ground floor of the extensive palace complex (B.I) has been cleared, leaving the eastern part still concealed under a layer of 15th-17th century domestic architecture. The building had an upper floor. Sandstone stone blocks were used for the façade and the corners, red brick for the outer wall faces and to reinforce internal structures, and finally mud brick in all the internal architecture. The building was attached to the inner face of the citadel walls on the river side.

It was erected on top of the ruins of an older structure, the plan and function of which have not yet been determined. Two entrances have been recorded so far: one in the southern and the other in the northern façade. A third entrance from the east has been assumed. The southern entrance, which presumably led from the private harbour, opened onto a staircase that led straight to the upper floor of the building. The doorway from the north gave access to the storerooms on the ground floor through a vestibule (B.I.24 and 44) and southern corridor (B.11). The keystone in the arch crowning the northern entrance was carved with a cruciform monogram containing the name of the founder, Ioannes (Figure 2, Plate 1). The presumption that Ioannes was a king can be drawn from the size of the complex and its position inside the Citadel. The western corridor (B.I.11) separated the living area of the building from the domestic household area that adjoined the fortifications. This part of the complex was definitely added onto the main part of the building. Prior to that, the space between the palace and the riverside walls of the Citadel served as a large courtyard or a building site for the palace. The entrance to the western corridor was a wide portal made of sandstone (the arch itself has not survived). Excavations in the household section (B.I.15 and B.I.37, 40 and 42) have yielded a rich assemblage of finds defining a time-horizon for the erection of the palace, as well as pro-



Plate 1. Old Dongola SWN. B.I. Key stone of the north entrance with monogram of Ioannes (King).

viding a fuller picture of living conditions enjoyed by the earliest owners of the palace on the Dongolan citadel and the extent of their contacts with the Mediterranean-Byzantine world of their day.

2.c – Meat and wine on the royal table

The palace storerooms (B.I.37; 42) and latrine (B.I.15) have been the source of data on the royal menu from the late 6th and early 7th century. First of all, studies of imported and locally produced amphorae pointed to a significant change that occurred in the second half of the 6th century in terms of drinking habits. Beer, which had been so common earlier considering all the jars for beer found among the grave goods in the tombs of Tanqasi and ez-Zuma, was replaced over a very short period with wine which was imported from Egypt and to a lesser extent from Palestine and Syria, as well as Cyprus. Once vine cultivation was introduced into the green area of Dongola, locally produced wine became a staple as is indicated by the abundant evidence for the oldest locally-made Dongolan amphorae.

The Egyptian amphorae, all of which are resinated, originated from the workshops in Aswan, Middle Egypt (I.R.7) and the Mareotis region. Palestinian, Syrian and Cypriot amphorae are found with lesser frequency, but their presence reflects a significant diversification of the wine cellar holdings to include wines from Gaza and the Eastern Mediterranean in general (Plates 2-4). Additional important evidence has been provided by numerous amphorae stoppers found in the depos-

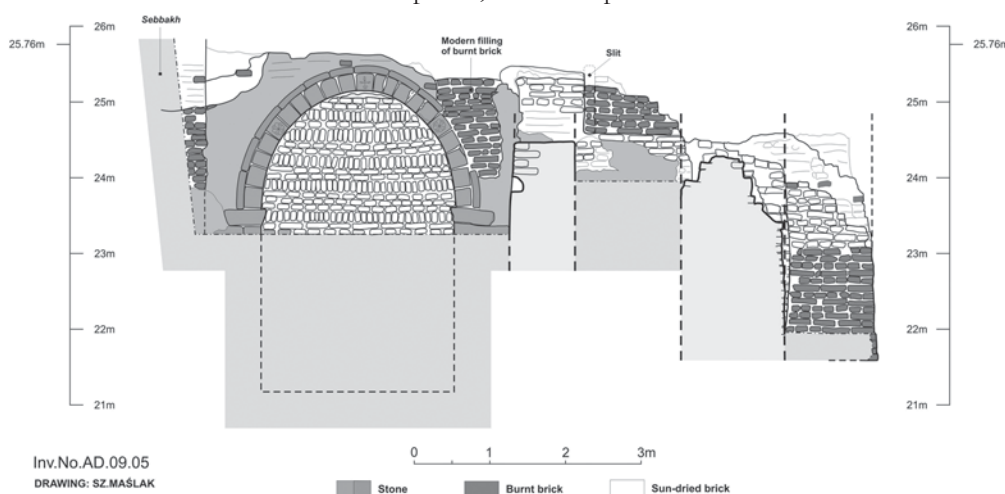


Figure 2. Site SWN. Building I. The north entrance. Room B.I.45, east-west cross section looking south (scale 1:100).



Plate 2.
SWN.B.I.37.
*Amphora from the
Aswan Region.*

Plate 3. SWN.B.I.37.
*Amphora from the
Mareotis Region.*

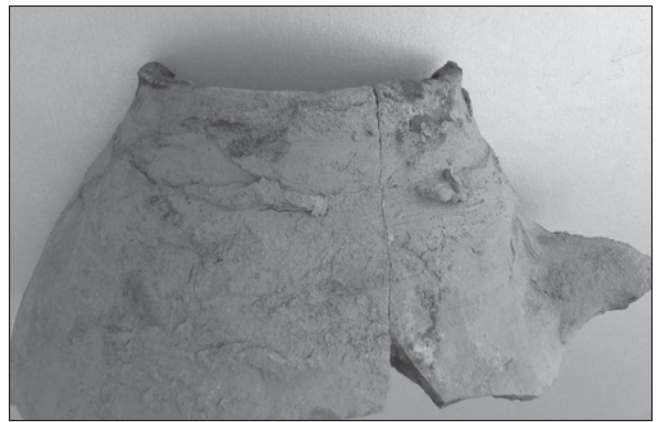


Plate 4.
SWN.B.I.37.
*Amphora from the
Gaza Region.*

its inside the palace stores. The stoppers are made of mud, both marl clay and Nile silt, as well as of lime plaster (Plate 5). Of particular significance are double-stamped examples, that is, the original stopper made of marl clay was covered with a layer of mud and stamped again with a different stamp (Plate 6). This could be connected with trade customs, if the goods crossed more than one customs barrier as in this case. Most of the marl-clay and lime-plaster stoppers can be tied to the Mareotis region, this conclusion being based on their shape and size.

Imported amphorae have not been recorded before in Dongola. Their presence in such numbers in the palace deposits is unquestionable proof of a strong and direct commercial relationship between the Kingdom of Makuria and Byzantine Egypt. On the other hand, the sudden increase in the number of locally produced amphorae, recorded in

the deposits filling rooms B.I.15, B.I.37 and B.I.42, is proof of a permanent change in the consumption patterns of the residents of the Dongolan citadel tied in with the successful introduction of vine cultivation in a region where it was not



Plate 6. SWN.B.I.37. *Stopper of an amphora
with stamps on two layers of clay.*

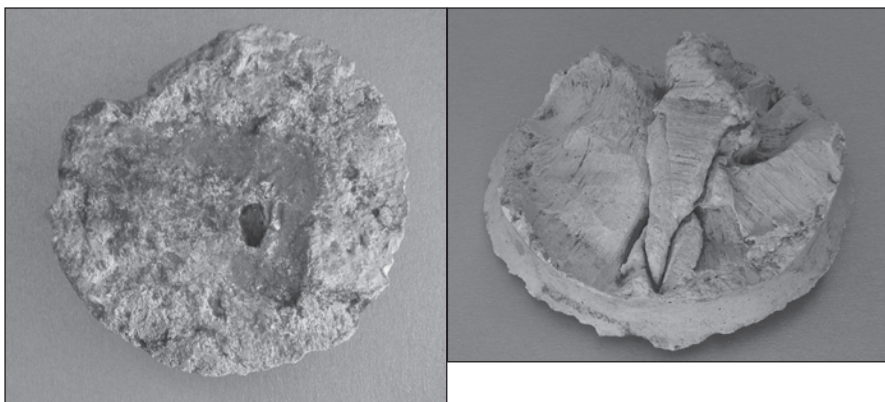


Plate 5.1-2. SWN.B.I.37. *Lime stopper of an amphora from the Mareotis Region.*

previously evidenced.

The wine amphorae of Egyptian and Mediterranean origin are dated to the end of the 6th and beginning of the 7th century. Their presence in the fill of room B.I.37 has provided firm evidence for the building date of the palace at the end of the 6th century, as well as placing the reign of King Ioannes of Makuria, believed to be the founder of the palace, at the turn of the 6th century. In the history of the



Makurian Kingdom, this particular period at the end of the 6th and beginning of the 7th century was of paramount importance politically and economically. It was marked by territorial expansion, including the incorporation of the kingdom of Nobadia, and the signing of an economic treaty with Byzantium.

The fill sealed under the floor (and also under the north wall) of room B.I.37 contributed more important evidence relating to the palace's early function, namely a layer of broken glass vessels, including wasters. Combined with a chunk of raw glass and more quality glass vessels found in 2005 in the adjacent room B.I.15, this suggests the presence of secondary glass workshops making vessels and other glass artifacts in Dongola from raw glass imported from Egypt.

Fragments of an ornamented bronze sheathing were also recovered from B.I.37. They came from a narrow piece of sheet metal, which must have been attached to a wooden back, decorated with medallions executed in *repoussé* technique, depicting male busts wearing hats and flanked by simple, even-armed, crosses. Double stars appeared between the medallions. The object had decorated an item of furniture or other object which cannot be identified. It cannot be said with any certainty whether the piece came from Egypt or whether the decoration was made in Dongola.



Plate 7. SWN.B.I.37. Fragments of sandstone basin.

At the base of the deposit in B.I.37 fragments of a broken stone washbasin were discovered (Plate 7). The walls were decorated on the outside with relief images. On one long side, which can be assumed to have been the front, there were two standing rams in antithetic composition, their heads turned to the front. Between their strongly projecting heads was the protome of a lion, shown frontally (Plate 8). One short side of the basin bore flat relief decoration in a square frame, comprising an oblique cross circumscribed on a square and with a double line wrapped around it. The other parts of the basin which have not survived must also have been decorated. The basin was made of sandstone and stood 580mm tall. It appears to have been 1.1m long and 0.76m at the widest as far as the full shape can be reconstructed. This



Plate 8. Decoration of the front side of the basin.

is the only example of a carved basin known from Dongola. The impression is that it was executed by a local artist.

The finds add to a growing body of evidence for the existence of technologically advanced, professional craft workshops in Dongola in the second half of the 6th and the 7th century. These artisans produced high-quality ceramics, glass, iron of commendable purity and a wide assortment of building products. They were also responsible for wall paintings in the tempera technique on lime plaster and for sculptural relief decoration precisely carved in both sandstone and granite.

Upon archeozoological analysis, the numerous animal bones dumped in the latrine B.I.15 (Osypińska 2003), as well as those found in the fill of room B.I.37, have provided a picture of meat consumption patterns. The menu was varied, with a relatively large percentage of mutton and goat meat being consumed, but the quantity of beef was also considerable. Pork appears to have been less popular, but was present in sizeable proportions. Consumption of birds and fish was very low, as was wild game. The meat consumed at the palace consisted mostly of young animals and the bones reflect the choicest cuts of meat for the royal table.

This species distribution additionally reflects the Dongolan residents breeding preferences at this time. Cattle prove to have been an important component of the animal economy, as well as goat and sheep, while pigs were also bred.

The pottery from yet another latrine and an adjacent complex of rooms B.I.46-47 on the upper floor in the north-eastern corner of the palace was helpful in determining a date for the palace's destruction. The locally-made vessels (Colour plate XXXI) were accompanied by imports from Egypt, dating from the last quarter of the 13th century, contemporary with the Mameluke wars (Plate 9). Proof of heavy damage was found in the north-western corner where the destroyed walls had been replaced by new structures. Finally, all of the ground-floor rooms had been filled in around the turn of the 13th century and early 14th century. Only the upper floor of the palace remained in use after that.

The southernmost part of the SWN complex comprises a building erected on a high base or platform, which was built to level uneven ground. It was 15m long and 20m wide. In the



Plate 9. SWN.B.I.46. Bowl on ring base. Glaze. Mameluke Period.

eastern part, the walls stand to a height of 3.5m. They were made of red brick and coated with lime plaster on the outside, as well as the inside. The plan is a cross circumscribed on a rectangle. A central dome rose on four round pillars. Excavations are still in progress, but the layout of the uncovered eastern end resembles that of a much smaller church, the so-called Pillar Church, excavated on a platform north west of the Citadel walls (Godlewski 2006b, 279-281). The apse is ensconced between two L-shaped *pastophoria* connected by a corridor behind the apse. The western part of the building, having suffered severe damage, survives only at its north-western corner. The interior decoration consisted of murals which have been observed already in a number of places on the walls of the *naos* and on the central pillars.

The building was undoubtedly a sacred establishment, but its proximity to the palace and the commemorative structure next door suggest a special purpose. At this point, one should definitely note the plan, a central cruciform structure circumscribed on a rectangle, which appears to have been an original invention of Dongolan architects from the middle of the 9th century, repeated in the sacred foundations known from Hambukol and from the north-western platform below the citadel in Dongola.

Building B.VI on site C.1

The plan of a mud-brick building, newly discovered in the north-western part of the Citadel overlooking the riverbank, has turned out to be unusual when compared with what is known of Makurian civil architecture (Plate 10). This structure, which measures 19m square on the outside, was raised on top of the ruins of an older complex. It stands much nearer to Meroitic foundations from Napata and Wad Ben Naga, as well as Faras (Grzymiski 2008; Welsby 1996, 124-133).

The building is in fragmentary condition, missing, in all

probability, the northern part and most of the western side. The entrance was from the south and it led into a vestibule from which there was access to a central hall. Here, six round pillars of red brick supported the ceiling. Narrow rooms opening off the sides of this hall were from 1.25 to 2m wide, presumably with a storage function. Considering that the building stands to the south of a sharp bend in the Nile, where a river port was located, it is possible that it was a storehouse connected with this harbour. It was erected sometime in the Late Period, in all likelihood at the close of the 11th and the beginning of the 12th century, as suggested by the limited repertoire of painted tableware found on the floor level.

The Mosque – Throne Hall of the Kings of Makuria

A new Polish-Sudanese conservation project brought this unusual building, so characteristic of the Dongolan landscape, into the mainstream of activities again in 2008. The objective of this project is to preserve and open for visitors the interior of the ground floor and first floor of the practically intact building which was erected in the middle of the 9th century and converted into a mosque in 1317. In the 1970s



Plate 10. Citadel. Site C.1. Building VI.

it was identified as a royal structure that was furnished with a throne hall on the first floor (Godlewski 1982; Godlewski and Medeksza 1987). The building was entered through a central façade and up a monumental staircase leading directly to the first floor and viewing terrace over the western part of the building. The ground floor, which was 6m high, could be entered through two separate entrances, one in the northern and one in the southern part of the building.

The technical design calls for a shelter roof to be constructed above the building, supported on the reinforced



crown of existing walls. The walls and ceilings in the upper floor rooms should also be replaced where necessary. Once bats had been prevented from nesting inside the structure, the conservators were then able to begin the uncovering and preservation of paintings on the walls of the central room on the upper floor. Three layers of painted plaster were recorded, severely damaged by water pouring down the walls, each of unusual historical importance. At first glance, the murals appeared to represent the ruler of Makuria under the protection of the Virgin *Hodegetria*, Christ and the Makurian Holy Trinity represented as a triple bust of Christ (Colour plate XXXII). The kings of Makuria and Dotawo are depicted wearing crowns of Byzantine style and typically Nubian horned crowns (Godlewski 2008, 272-274). The latter are characteristic of representations from the 11th - 14th century. The oldest images can be dated to the 9th - 10th century. These wall paintings strengthen the proposed interpretation of the complex as the Throne Hall of Makurian royalty.

The Monastery of Anthony the Great and the north-western annex

Building S (Jakobielski 1993), which abuts the south-western corner of the monastery church, started out as a small rectangular cell, connected with an even smaller oratory by its southern side. This tiny hermitage was the residence of a man named Anna. Whether he was a monk or a lay person connected with the monastery we shall probably never know, but it is evident that for the church and the local community he was holy. After his death and burial in a grave inside the oratory, his earthly residence was turned into a small church furnished with an altar in the eastern niche, a separate *prothesis* on the northern side and a pulpit in an additional room that was added on the western side (Figure 3). Numerous graffiti and inscriptions on the walls are proof that this was a cult place where Anna was worshipped, making him thus the first Makurian to be known by name who was made a saint. The nature of the architectural complex is substantiated by two of the inscriptions found on the walls. One is the date of the saint's feast, 10 Tybi (6th January), engraved on the west wall of the sanctuary, the other a plea for intercession (Plate 11). The place appears to have been visited frequently by priests, monks and lay people alike, the visitors leaving a mark of their pious activities in the graffiti written on the walls. Saint Anna's time cannot be established precisely, but the incomplete murals of probable saints and tiny icons of Saint Menas, Saint Philoteos, the graffiti of birds and animals, such as a horse and a ram, as well as an image of an unidentified rider saint, which could have been executed by Anna's own hand, indicate that he flourished in the 11th - 12th century.

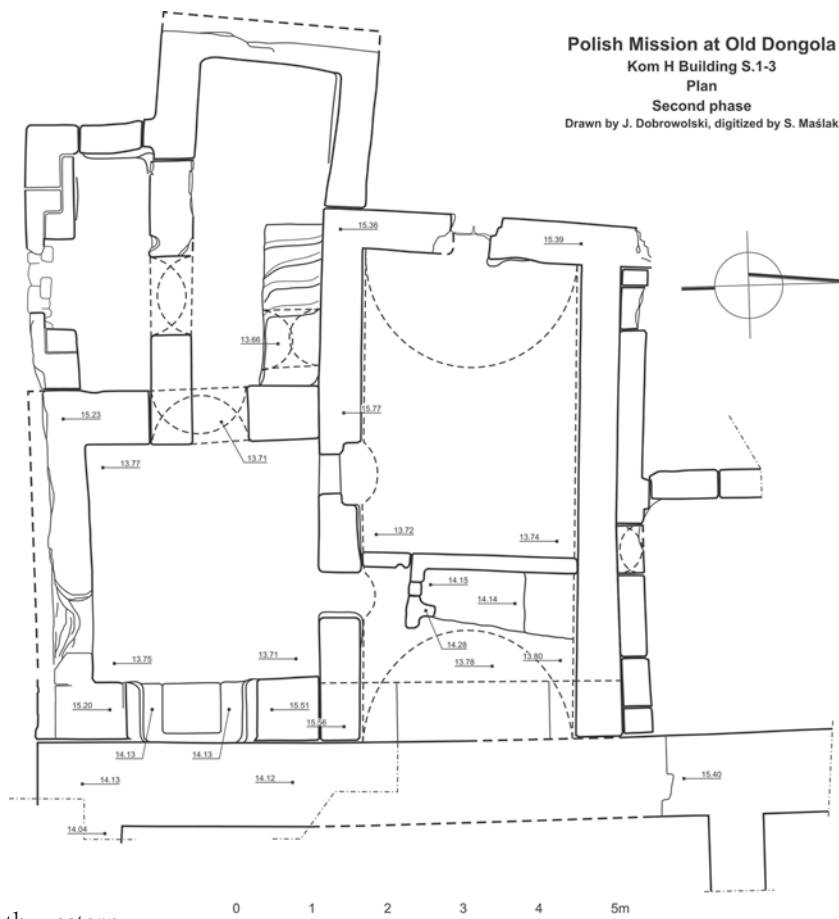


Figure 3. Old Dongola. Kom H. Building S (scale 1:100).

Excavation of the three-aisled monastery church indicates that this elongated basilica with a central dome supported on four pillars and colonnades in the eastern and western parts of the *naos* could be dated to the turn of the 6th and 7th centuries. This simultaneously establishes the foundation date of this huge monastery complex in Dongola

The three crypts discovered more than a decade earlier (Jakobielski 2001; Żurawski 1999; 2006, 182-1857) in the

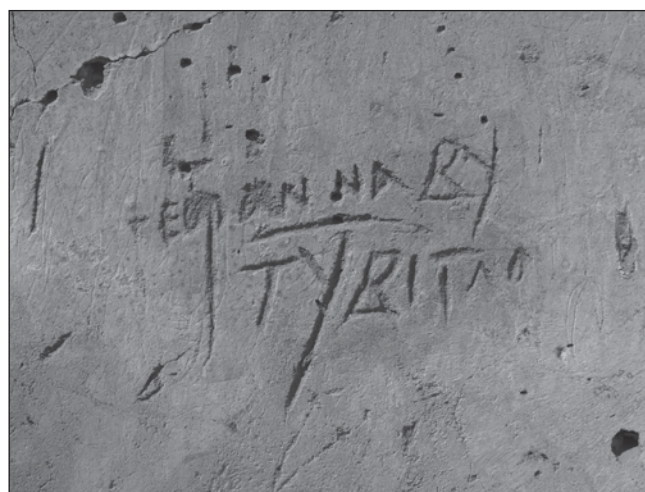


Plate 11. Kom H. Building S.2. Graffiti with the date of the feast of Saint Anna (6th January).

north-eastern part of the monastery annex were reopened and examined comprehensively with the participation of various specialists. The north-western annex is the location of a commemorative chapel with two altars which was installed in the early 12th century. One of the altars stood over the crypt in which archbishop Georgios was buried in 1113; the other over two northern crypts remains un-named for lack of a surviving funerary stela in a niche prepared for it in the wall of the altar screen. The sanctuary had one *prothesis* where an altar was located. The walls were decorated with fragmentarily preserved murals of Christ with a chalice and prayers from the Greek liturgy.

To begin with, the seven male burials were lifted from the southern crypt (no. 1) and examined anthropologically by Robert Mahler, with a simultaneous meticulous examination of preserved remnants of textiles by Barbara Czaja-Szewczak and of the objects found with the bodies. Once the crypt was emptied it was possible to document the Greek and Coptic texts on its walls, said to have been written down by one Ioannes (Plate 12). Adam Łajtar and Jacques van der Vliet, who carried out this documentation, plan to publish these fascinating texts

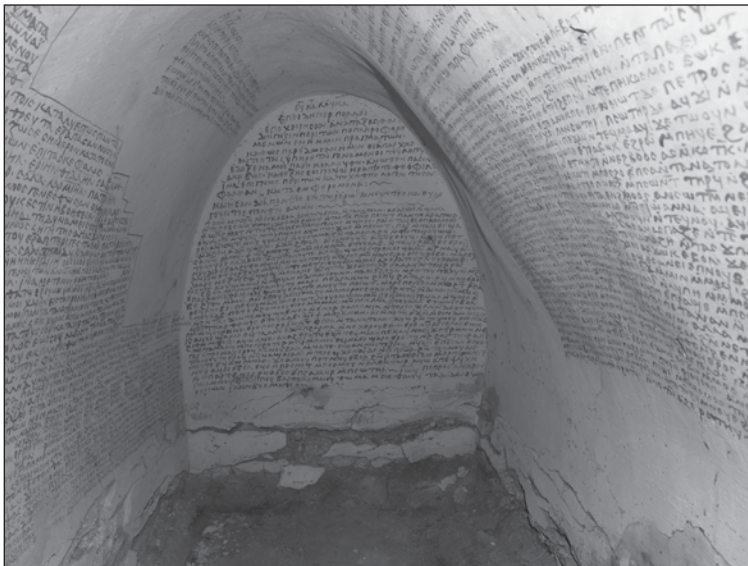


Plate 12. Kom H. The Crypt of the Archbishop Georgios with texts in Coptic and Greek.

in 2011. Pending further laboratory tests it may still prove possible to identify from amongst the seven skeletons in the crypt the skeleton belonging to Georgios, who, if one believes the text of his funerary stela, died at the age of 80. Fragments of linen textiles, both shrouds and robes, are in very poor condition, but enough survives to observe the presence of coloured ornaments of a symbolic nature in the form of crosses and single letters; on one piece there are fragments of a few letters in sequence. On their necks or on belts fastening their robes the deceased wore small crosses made of bone, wood and glass paste.

The second crypt (no. 2), which is the more southerly of



Plate 13. Kom H. The North Crypt.

the two to the north, also contained seven male burials (Plate 13). One body had been dressed in a silk robe, decorated with golden thread and wrapped in a shroud made of silk with different coloured stripes. Cleaned and preserved by a textile conservator, the robe proved to be one of the prized textiles from Fatimid workshops that were most probably run by the caliphs (Colour plate XXXIII). The robes and shrouds of the other deceased are in fragmentary condition, but even so it may be hazarded that they were locally made, both the textile itself and the clothes. The men buried in crypt no. 2 had also been furnished with their individual small crosses of wood, bone or glass paste. The last, northernmost crypt (no. 3) has still to be examined.

The identity of the burials in the two investigated crypts remains uncertain for lack of surviving funerary stela. The one that has been preserved, that of Georgios, archbishop, *archimandrite* and *archistylitos* of the Dongolan monastery (Łajtar 2002), hints that the seven men in crypt no. 1 must have been, like Georgios, bishops in 12th century Dongola. The lamps, *quillae* and amphorae found inside the crypts were put there with each successive burial, as in the case of the crypt of Bishop Ioannes in Faras and the late bishops' crypts in the upper eastern tomb at Faras, situated above the tomb of Ioannes. Grave goods being rare in Makurian burials, this supports the view that those buried in the Dongolan crypts were actually bishops.

The complex that was developed around the crypts in the north-western annex, including a sanctuary with altars and *iconostases*, *prothesis* and two small *naoi* with pulpits, reflects the intent of establishing the worship of, at the very least, the two bishops mentioned in the stelae and commemorative practices for the remaining individuals, most likely also bishops, buried in the crypts. The local community had access to the sanctuary where the liturgy was celebrated. Hence,



there is reason to believe that those buried in the crypts had for Makurian society the status of blessed individuals, who could be entreated regularly for intercession.

The cult of local saints has been evidenced for Makuria. Bishop Kyriakos who stood up against the offences of King Abraham in the first half of the 8th century, resulting in his exile from Dongola and burial after his death in an unknown desert monastery, was believed to be a saint. Pleas were carried to him for help in times when catastrophe struck the land. Pilgrimages were made to the hermitage of Timotheos in Pachoras, where this venerated monk had also been buried. Numerous graffiti testify to visits to the hermitage by the laity as well as monks and priests. Some of the monograms left on the walls of the hermitage have even been thought to belong to bishops of Pachoras.

The Kingdom of the Town of Dongola

The Citadel's buildings suffered at the hands of the Mameluke raiders who repeatedly conquered the town. Every time the damage was contained and considerable effort was put into the rebuilding process, something that is particularly evident in the Palace of Ioannes (B.I). Once the ground floor was filled in, the upper floor remained inhabited until the end of the 14th century. The Cruciform Building (B.III), transformed into a small church, survived even longer.

Once the ruling family evacuated the royal seat in Dongola in the 1360s, a rash of small houses sprang up on the eastern side of the SWN building complex (B.I, B.III and B.V). They were located on the level of the upper floor of the palace and displayed a totally different layout from house plans observed at the north-western corner of the Citadel and northern districts of the town. These houses were made of mud brick and consisted most frequently of one or two rooms. The residents of these houses kept their sheep and goats in the abandoned halls of the palace. A rich assemblage of finds came from the exploration of these houses: mainly ceramic cooking wares and containers, basketry made of grass, or palm fronds, leather products and mostly woollen textiles. Like the houses, the finds are from the 15th-17th century. A ground survey of the citadel area indicates that similar or perhaps somewhat more monumental architecture might be expected everywhere on the Citadel. A small archive of three texts in Arabic on paper was preserved in House H.1. The texts are of a notarial nature and concern plots of cultivated land watered by a *saqia*. A few other Arabic texts written on paper, found in houses both in the SWN sector as well as C.1, are magical, intended as talismans and most probably coming from destroyed talismans. Fragments of leather pouches which could have been used as talismans were also discovered during the excavations. The pottery assemblage included a proliferation of underglaze decorated ceramics – mainly cups, bowls or plates, which have been dated by the archaeological context to the 15th and 16th centuries. The production centre for glazed wares of this kind remains unknown, as such vessels are not encountered in Egypt at the time, but it is

unlikely that they were made in Dongola. They must have been imported as luxury goods from southern Egypt, from unknown workshops which imitated Fayumi wares in the Mameluke period.

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Colour plate XXIX. Old Dongola. Map of the central part of the town. 1. Mosque; 2. Fortifications; 3. Complex of the Royal Buildings; 4. Building VI.



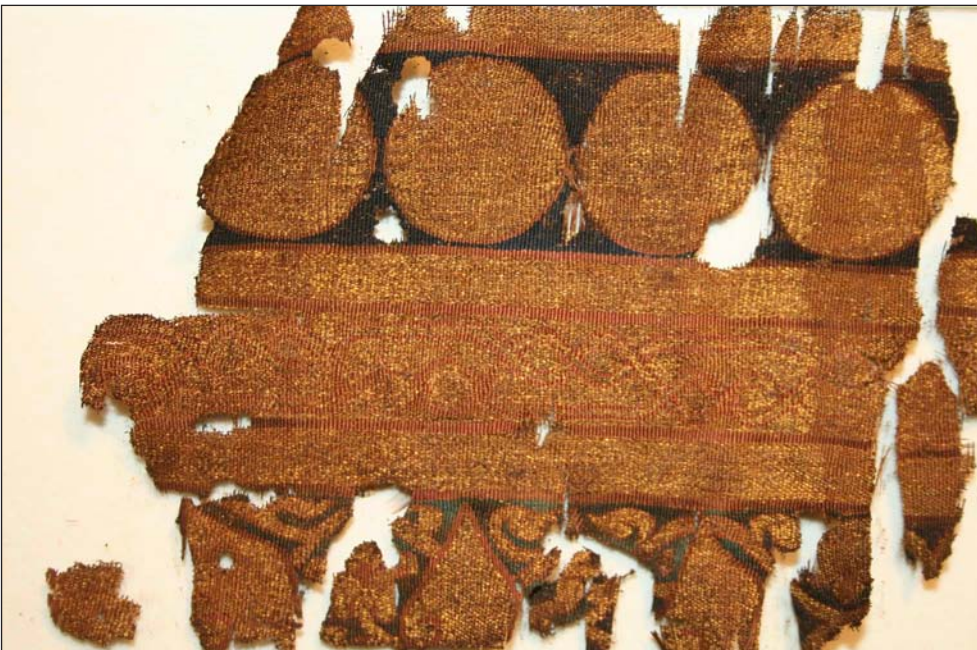
Colour plate XXX. Old Dongola SWN. View from the north.



*Colour plate XXXI. Old Dongola. SWN.B.I.46.
Vase. Late Period.*



*Colour plate XXXII. Old
Dongola. The Mosque. A
fragment of mural depicting
the Byzantine crown of the
Makurian king.*



*Colour plate XXXIII. Old
Dongola. Kom H. A fragment
of a textile from the North
Crypt, silk and golden thread.*