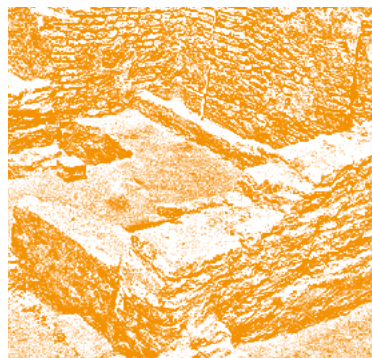


# Archaeological and architectural evidence of social change in 13th–17th century Dongola



**Abstract:** The article reviews the body of archaeological and architectural evidence for social transformation taking place in Dongola during the period from the end of the 13th through the end of the 17th century, the uppermost stratum uncovered by Polish archaeologists excavating the ruins of the medieval seat of Makurian kings. Domestic architecture from the late 14th through 17th centuries and the artifactual finds from these dwellings, which were built on top of the ruins of the Makurian capital, demonstrate the character and extent of changes in the education, culture and religion of the inhabitants of the city from the Funj period.

**Keywords:** Dongola, Nubia, Funj, domestic architecture

Dongola—and, presumably, all the territory of Makuria as well—was set upon a gradual process of transformation from the time the dynastic treaty between the ruling families of Makuria and Alwa was concluded. The system of royal succession changed, shifting the mutual political and economic relations of Makuria and Alwa in favor of the latter. Social and civilizational changes inevitably followed (Godlewski 2008: 270–274; 2018b; Welsby 2014). Archbishop Georgios of Dongola added to the volatility of the situation by introducing changes in the functioning of the Church. Old Nubian took strong root in everyday life (Godlewski 2013a), largely replacing Greek as the official language of the Church and the language of education. A plethora of graffiti on walls and objects highlights this process (Łajtar 2008; Łajtar and Pluskota 2001). The cult of dead rulers changed

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significantly as well (Godlewski 2018b; Żurawski 2014), and so did that of bishops who had passed on (Łajtar and van der Vliet 2017; Godlewski 2018b).

The pace of social change accelerated in the 12th and 13th centuries, additionally fueled by migration, that is, influx into the valley (including Dongola) of people from the sub-Saharan region in the west. The reason for these population movements surely must have been climatic, one being a seven-year drought in the mid-11th century (Lane-Poole 1901: 142–143). Several years of low floods triggered a serious economic crisis that also must be calculated in as a factor in this transformation. Intensive migrations are well attested in Arabic sources of the time (Monneret de Villard 1938: 195–210).

The wars with the Mamluks in the last quarter of the 13th and beginning of the 14th century had a cataclysmic effect on Dongola. The city was destroyed, plundered and depopulated, the people enslaved or fleeing enslavement. There are accounts of how the Mamluks behaved in Syro-Palestine—their actions in Dongola would hardly have been more cultured (Waterson 2007: Chapter 5). The economic situation, already poor due to armed conflicts, must have been further aggravated by cyclic bouts of the plague. In Egypt, at least 55 different episodes were noted in Mamluk times (Northrup 1998: 287–288; Garcin 1998) and it should probably be assumed that the disease also would have been a real enough threat in the southern part of the Nile Valley during the late Kingdom of Makuria and early years of the Funj.

In the face of these events Dongola remained an important political and

religious center. The royal administration operated effectively under successive Makurian kings. Some kings converted to Islam before their coronation, thus gaining favor with Egypt, but their reigns usually were rather short-lived. The Church administration in Dongola continued to be with the bishops of Dongola residing there through the 14th century and presumably also in the early 15th century. A church newly discovered in 2018 in the Monastery on Kom H (NB.2), preserving numerous wall paintings and inscriptions, is dated to the middle of the 14th century. The monumental image of a king under the protection of Christ and two nameless saints attests to the continued rule of kings supporting the Church. The last dated inscription from the Dongola monastery, found on the wall of the Central Building (CB.2 room 2), dates to 1498.

It is easier to understand the economic straits of Dongola as a consequence of wars, plunder and imposed tributes for Egypt, than to describe social transformation without insight into local archives that surely must have existed. There is evidence, even if not entirely satisfactory, for two important aspects of the transformation of social life at Dongola: changes in Christian religion still prevalent in the 13th and 14th centuries and in broadly understood education. These two issues will be discussed below, based on available sources.

In 1317, Dongola received its first mosque, created on the first floor inside the so-called Throne Hall (Godlewski 2013b: 42–47 and 137). This event must have signified a lowering in prestige of the kings of Makuria, but is hardly a reason

to assume a growing popularity of Islam as a religion in the city. In all likelihood, the mosque served the religious needs of the newcomers from the north such as soldiers, merchants and tax collectors. In that sense, it symbolised Makuria's subjugation to the Mamluks. However, the Church retained its efficient organisation and enjoyed popular support, as attested by numerous graffiti engraved on walls of churches and on objects, particularly tableware. The Great Church of Jesus (CC) and the Cathedral of the Holy Trinity (RC.II) were still open in the 14th century, the monastery of Anthony functioned (Godlewski 2013b: 29–41, 55–57, 78–91) and a new church (NB.2) was installed. Another new church, the Tower Church atop the citadel wall, was constructed in this period (Godlewski 2013b: 74–75). The Cruciform Building was converted into a small church, even though the Church of the Archangel Raphael still functioned beside it (Godlewski 2013b: 75–77). New bishops were ordained and those who were deceased were buried in crypts situated in the Northwest Building within the monastery (Godlewski forthcoming). Priests and deacons also are attested, their presence being especially important to the local community they served on a daily basis.

The other domain in which the transformation is evident is education, understood primarily as literacy. The evidence in favor is strong and yet questions must be posed that, if answered, could throw more light on the issue of the transformations taking place in Dongolan society at this time. First of all, Greek continued to be taught in Nubia, best attested on the one hand by the great inscription in the

main monastic church rebuilt in the 12th century and, on the other, the numerous Greek–Nubian graffiti on all kinds of objects. This is a natural reflection of a society's attitude to religion and, while one may note the "fugitive ink" phenomenon in the 14th century, the explosion of scratched and engraved texts, by lay people as well as by the clergy, is a good indication of writing skills in Dongolan society. This, allegedly, went hand in hand with a fairly general ease of reading. Old Nubian was beyond doubt accessible in reading and writing to the people at large and not just the clergy and monks.

One is entitled to wonder why the total absence of graffiti in other languages, whether African or Arabic. The archives in Qasr Ibrim (Adams 1996: 213–255) constitute a special case, presumably due to the specific role of Nobadia in the general structure of the kingdom, admitting migrants from the north only as far as the second Nile cataract where a royal customs authority presumably operated. It is more than obvious that people with oral and written knowledge of Arabic and others speaking various African tongues were present in Dongola, but in a strictly practical sense. They were the necessary agents of a functioning economy and commerce on a local as well as more geographically extended scale. Thus, their languages were not written down and especially not on movable objects. The newcomers evidently adapted to local culture, in terms of both religion and the usage of Old Nubian. After all, the language survived until the mid-20th century, mainly in domestic talk of women and children, which was also of social significance in the broader aspect of human communication.

In the second half of the 14th century, Dongola was still a functioning and important center of the kingdom, despite the transfer of the royal court to Daw (Gebel Adda) described in the Arab sources. A single inscription from the ruins of the church in Banganarti, mentioning a King of Dongola called Paper (Łajtar 2008: 329–330) hardly signifies unequivocally the fall of Makuria as a state polity. It may, at most, indicate division of the state into smaller territorial units. Documents from Qasr Ibrim and Daw, dated to the end of the 15th century and evoking the full organizational structure of the kingdom (without the bishop of Dongola, which is understandable considering that the documents are written in the Phrim bishopric), are an important indication (Łajtar and Ruffini 2011).

Dongola remained a Christian city throughout the 15th century, with functioning churches and a monastery but, to judge by the technical state of the religious and monastic architecture, the economic condition of the Church had weakened severely. Perhaps the processes of assimilation of incoming people, to the Christian religion as well as the Old Nubian cultural identity, had begun to peter out. Texts in Old Nubian disappeared about this time but no new ones in Arabic replaced them, and a long period of illiteracy began at Dongola. This silence has another consequence: we have no way of measuring the extent of the Arabization or Islamization of Dongolan society although, in the author's opinion, one cannot speak of a real Islamization of the city before the beginning of the 16th century.

The makeup of society must have changed radically with Bedouin coming from both the eastern and western deserts, initially in the wake of Mamluk activity in the region and then on a more independent basis. But the vitality of oral Nubian in Dongola demonstrates the existence of a significant population substrate that had largely lost its economic and intellectual position. The few known texts in Arabic from the city, amulets and magical texts on a Koranic base written on potsherds (Vanthieghem 2015), are not necessarily sufficient proof of a population group versant in the language. There are, after all, no funerary stelae written in Arabic. The three fragments of stone stelae found near the Mosque Building in the past 50 years of excavations were out of context and hardly well dated. The recipients of these few texts may have been individuals, solitary men and women and not necessarily permanent residents of Dongola. What is important regarding these texts is the belief in their magical value, and this certainly finds continuity in a Nubian milieu.

While we cannot speak of processes of Islamization or Arabization in the local Dongolan community at the end of the 15th century, one thing is certain: it was not a community living in isolation. To get a better understanding of these issues, one should take a broader look at the relevant archaeological assemblage, including dietary preferences that speak volumes on animal breeding and customs, and the products of local craftsmanship catering for the basic needs of the residents of Dongola in the 16th and 17th centuries. Polish excavations in Dongola over the years have yielded a sizable

assemblage from the extensive ruins of domestic architecture, which in itself is an important witness to the social changes taking place in the city. Dongola was still a regional center of some standing, as described by the Turkish writer and traveler, Evliya Celebi, who penned a multi-volume description of the known world.

The sprawling location of private houses was a vibrant and quite visible part of the urban agglomeration, and Celebi's description (although there is no absolute certainty that he actually visited Dongola) is surprisingly consistent with the discoveries made so far on the citadel and its northern outskirts (Godlewski 2015b: 211–213).

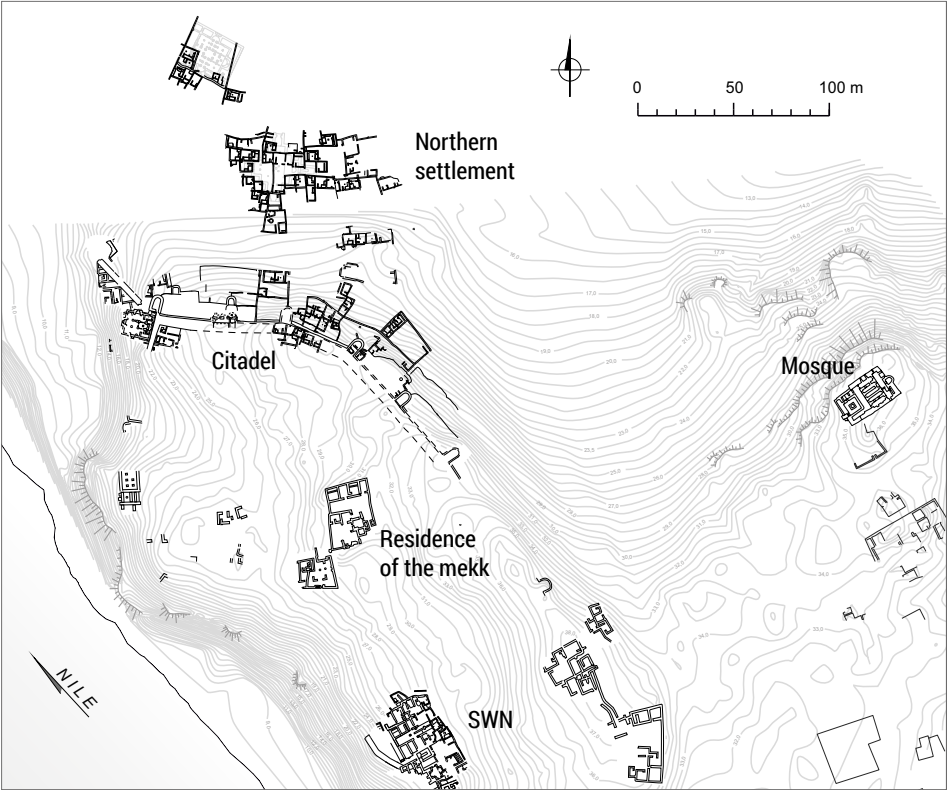
## URBAN TOPOGRAPHY OF 16TH–17TH CENTURY DONGOLA

In the 16th–17th century, the city spread over an area of some 150,000 m<sup>2</sup>. The architecture is easily observed on the ground and, between 1969 and 2017, parts of it were explored by the Polish archaeological project. It covers the entire citadel including the fortifications, the curtain walls and towers, the area to the north and east of the defenses, sitting atop the ruins of the successive Cruciform Church (CC) and cathedral (RC.II), the rocky plateau between the citadel and Mosque on the east and most probably also the area in the immediate neighborhood of the citadel on its southern side [Fig. 1]. Current excavation work has focused on the architecture in the northern and eastern part of the agglomeration and on site SWN on the citadel directly next to the Palace of Ioannes (SWN.B.I) (Godlewski 2015a; 2015b; 2018a; Maślak 2015).

Celebi's description in the second half of the 17th century (Žurawski 2001: 95–97) is generally consistent with the architectural remains observed today on the ground surface. Celebi counted 650 houses on the citadel and another 3000 beyond the fortifications. On this basis, a cautious estimate of the popu-

lation totals about 18,000. Traders also convened on the city in large numbers; Celebi speaks of even a thousand merchants visiting Dongola, an indication of this local market's attraction. This group was mostly itinerant, as Celebi says that they came from both the north and south, evidently considering the city a good meeting point and a place for conducting business.

Celebi also mentioned a palace of the local *mekk* (or ruler), a number of different public buildings (six schools, a khan or hostelry) as well as a mosque and seven other places of prayer (Prokosch in Žurawski 2001: 95–97; Godlewski 2015b: 212–213). To date, the only building of these to be explored, at least in part, is the Mosque. The building, originally the throne hall of the kings of Makuria, was turned into a mosque in 1317 by taking advantage of the upstairs rooms. The foundation stela of the mosque has survived; it is now immured in the east wall of the interior, left of the mihrab. The palace of the *mekk* has been tentatively located on the citadel, the ruins of which can be traced on the ground, but its function has yet to be confirmed by excavation.



## DOMESTIC ARCHITECTURE

The domestic architecture from the period discussed here, excavated to date on the citadel and to its north [see *Fig. 1*], is entirely different from its Makurite counterparts (Godlewski 2013b: 96–107)—in building plan, mutual topographic relations, building technique and interior furnishings. This new type of architecture first appeared at the end of the 14th or

beginning of the 15th century and seems to have been the work of an incoming population.

The oldest of the explored houses presented in this paper is Building R (excavated in 1985), situated within the high-standing walls of the ruined Cruciform Church [*Fig. 2*]. Another house described here is Complex U (excavated



- ◀ Figs 1–2. Architectural remains from the 13th–17th centuries in Dongola: opposite page top, aerial view of the city of Dongola from the north; opposite page bottom, general plan of the excavated remains; above, dwellings from the 16th–17th century on the site of the ruined Cruciform Church (CC) (church walls in outline underlying the architecture) and northwest of it; inset, the earliest dwellings of this phase located within the standing walls of the ruined church (walls in outline) (PCMA UW Dongola Project/plans W. Godlewski, W. Małkowski and S. Maślak, digitizing and correlation S. Maślak and M. Puzkarski, aerial photo S. Lenarczyk)

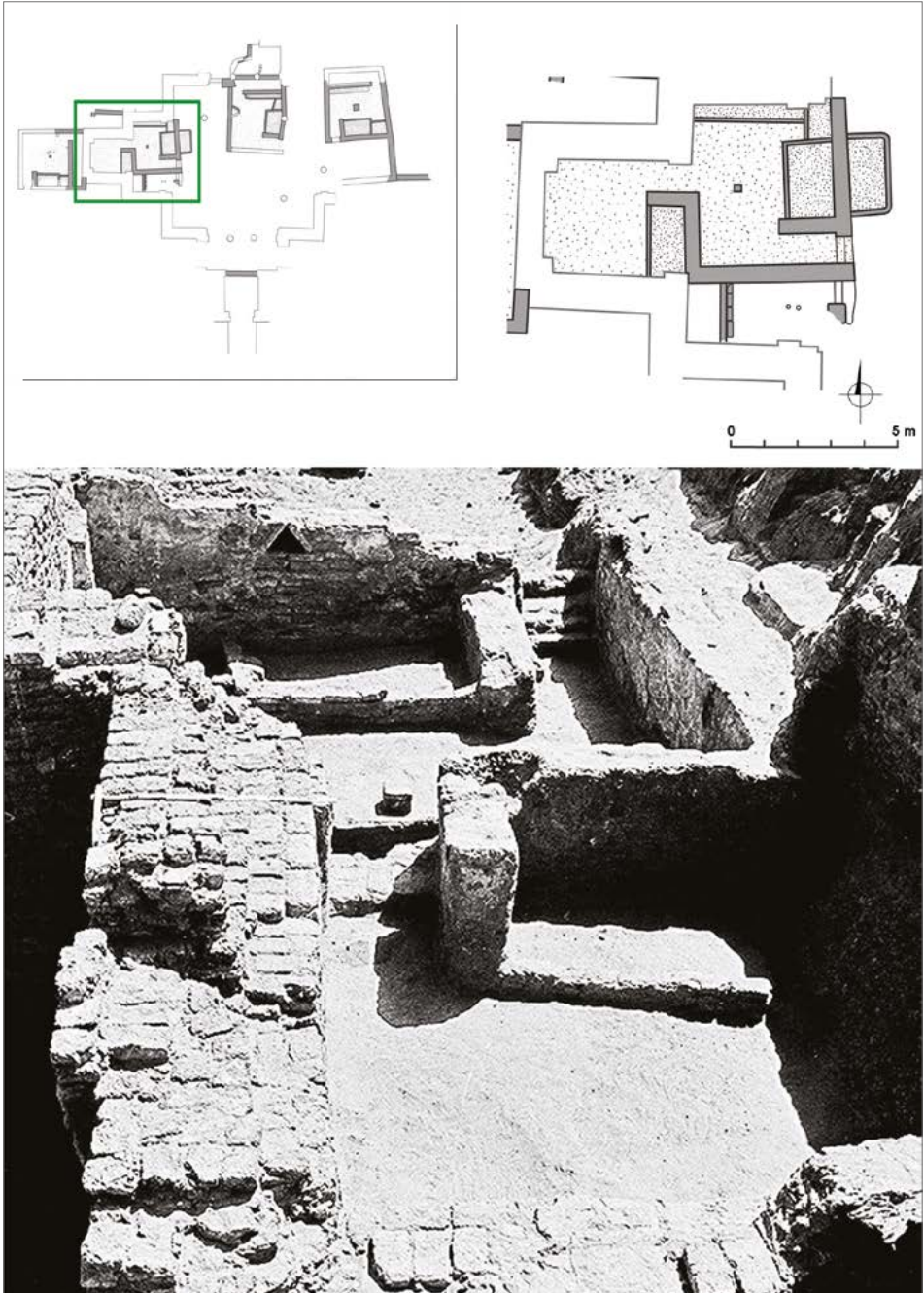


Fig. 3. House R.1–2 (site CC): top, house plan with location shown in the inset; bottom, house interior, view from the west (note thick brick wall of the church at extreme left) (PCMA UW Dongola Project/ plan W. Godlewski; photo W. Jerke)

in 1974), which represents some of the latest buildings of its kind from this area. It is situated directly south of House R, on a level approximately 3.50 m higher than the earlier building. The other three units described here are located on the citadel. The earliest, probably contemporary with House R, is House SWN.H.3, built onto the standing walls of the ruined Palace of Ioannes. SWN.H.1 was a house constructed at a later stage, when the palace was already in ruins, hence the period between them must have lasted some time (probably within the 14th century). Both were excavated in 2003. The last here is House Y (excavated in 1982), next to the ruins of the residence of the *mekk* of Dongola as seen by Celebi. It is probably not as early as Houses R and SWN.H.3, but it preceded the other two complexes described here. They are presented below in more or less chronological order of construction as ascertained in research to date and, taken together, exemplify 200 to 300 years of domestic Funj architecture. They also demonstrate the nature and extent of the changes taking place in this sphere in post-medieval Dongola.

### HOUSE R.1–2

The house occupies the interior of the western portico and the western arm of the Cruciform Church (CC), taking advantage of its north wall that still stood high. The south and east walls of the house were constructed from scratch (Godlewski 1990a: 532–533) [Figs 3, 4]. The layout was determined, to some extent, by the adapted space inside the ruined CC building. Two chambers of similar size are joined by a doorway. The house

is entered through a doorway only 0.80 m wide in the southern corner of the east wall. A low wall, 1.70 m long, borders the entryway on the interior. The roof was supported on a central pillar, which may be reconstructed on the grounds of its preserved stone base. Two mastabas stand on the tamped clay floor by the east wall, the larger measuring 2.35 m by 1.45 m and the smaller 1.15 m by 0.80 m. A narrow bench (0.55 m wide) is by the north wall. All structures are made with low brick walls. The walls were mud-plastered and whitewashed repeatedly.

Room R.2 was smaller (4.30 m by 3.40 m) and it also had a low wall, 1.15 m long, bordering the entryway, and a mastaba by its east wall, measuring 2.15 m by 1.15 m. Yet another mastaba, 2.45 m by 1.40 m, stood in front of the east facade of the house, north of the entry.

A small room was formed between the south wall of the house and the south wall of the portico of CC. It was just 4.30 m by 1.90 m; it could be entered via a separate door from the east. A mastaba formed of a low brick wall filled the western end of this chamber, 1.90 m like the room and 1.40 m deep. This chamber presumably served household purposes.

### HOUSE SWN.H.3

House SWN.H.3 was built onto the north facade of the presumably already deserted Palace of Ioannes (SWN.B.I). It most likely had a courtyard before the two-unit interior, but this remains unexcavated (Godlewski 2007: 289–293) [Fig. 5].

The entry to the large room was 0.65 m wide, bordered by a low wall some 1.70 m long. The walls were mud-plastered

and repeatedly renovated; they stand to 1.30 m. The big room, 4.80 m by 3.70 m, had a tamped floor and was furnished with two mastabas by the west wall:

the larger measuring 1.90 m by 1.50 m, the smaller 1.40 m by 0.70 m. Both were made of low walls around a sand-filled core with a hardened surface. A low bench



Fig. 4. House R.1–2 (site CC): house interior, view from the southwest (top) and southeast (PCMA UW Dongola Project/photos W. Jerke)

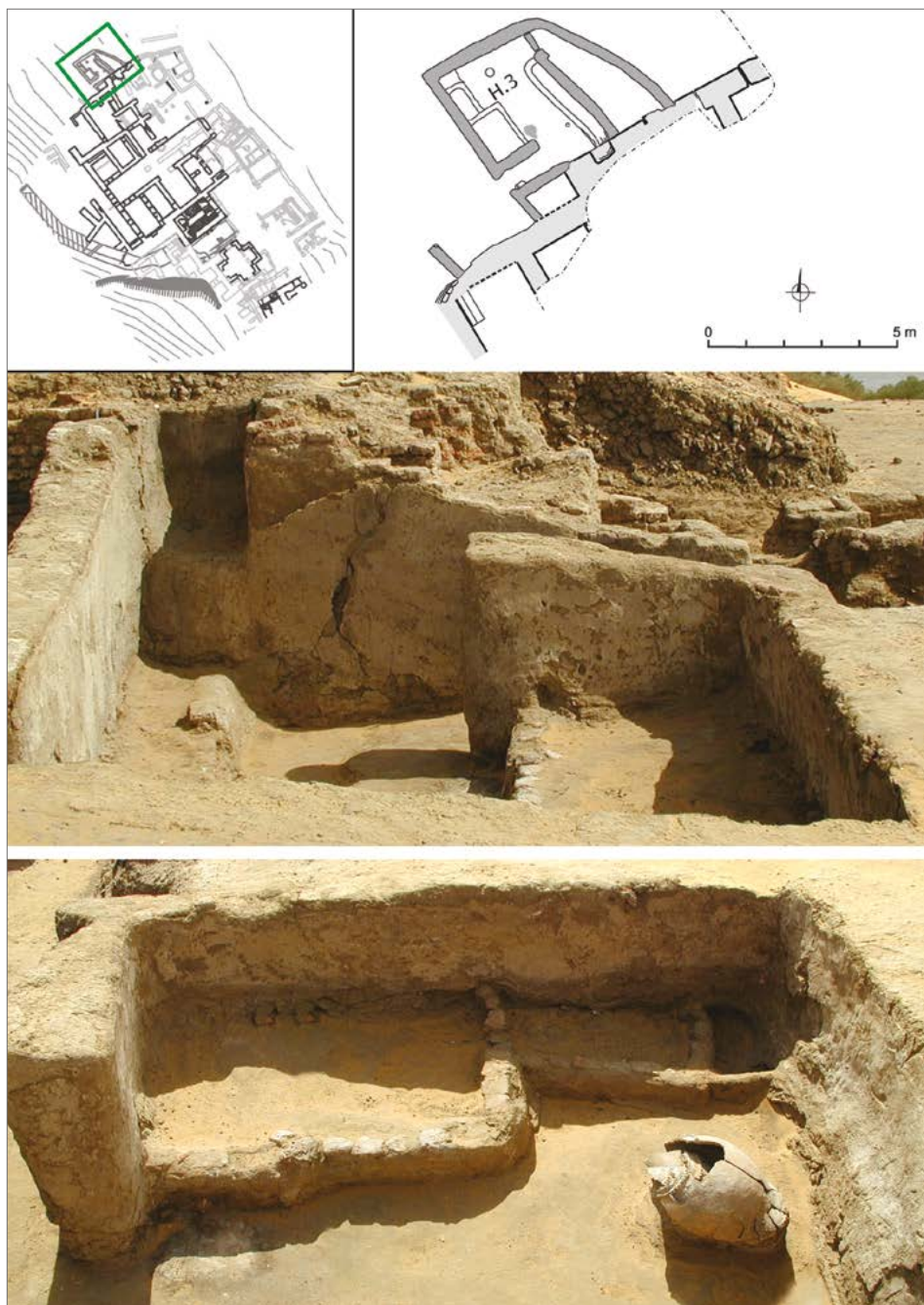


Fig. 5. House SWN.H.3 on the citadel: top, plan with location on the SWN site; center, house interior, view from the northwest; bottom, close-up of the installations and storage container in the northwestern corner of the room inside the entrance, view from the northeast (PCMA UW Dongola Project/plan W. Godlewski and S. Maślak, photos W. Godlewski)

of similar construction, 0.70 m wide and 4 m long, stood by the east wall. A deep niche with missing arch in the southeastern corner of the south wall was 0.80 m wide and 0.50 m deep. Traces of a hearth were observed on the clay floor by the southeastern corner of the large mastaba.

The narrow room, some 5.00 by 1.00–1.90 m, lacks a floor, wall plastering and

interior furnishings. It was entered from the northeastern corner of the big room and had a low wall bordering the entryway. In the last phase, it was blocked off entirely and abandoned.

Finds from the house included a storage container [see Fig. 5 bottom], cooking ware pots and bowls, and some artifacts of everyday life [Figs 6, 7].



Fig. 6. Handmade clay vessels from house SWN.H.3: 1 – bowl (H. 10 cm; D. 22.5 cm; room SWN.H.3.1); 2 – bowl (H. 10 cm; D. 37.5 cm; room SWN.H.3.1); 3 – bowl (H. 13 cm; D. 21 cm; room SWN.H.3.1); 4 – pot (H. 10 cm; D. 14 cm; room SWN.H.3.2); 5 – cooking pot (H. 16 cm; D. 12.5 cm; room SWN.H.3.2); 6 – pot (H. 19.5 cm; D. 17 cm; room SWN.H.3.2)

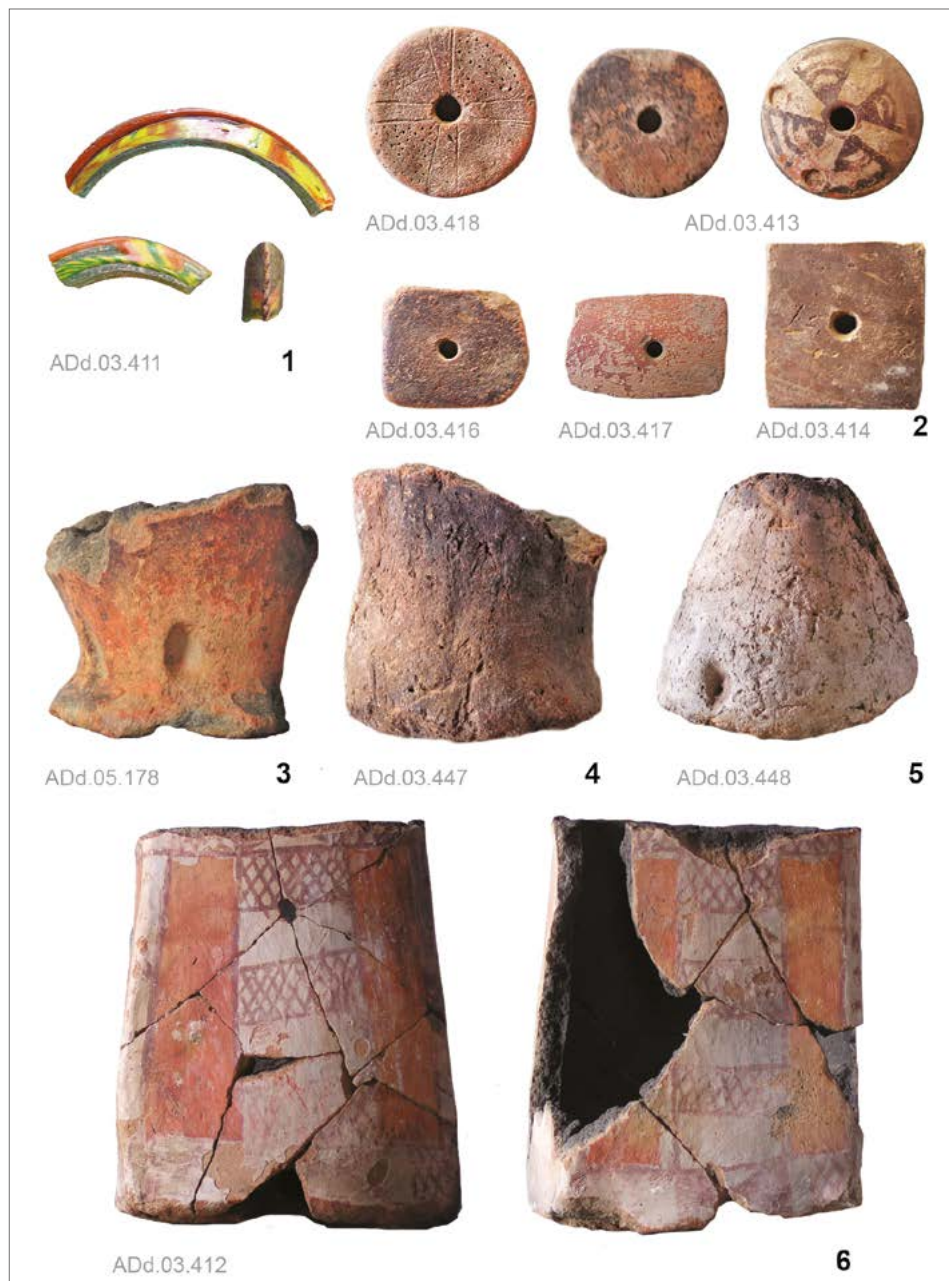


Fig. 7. Clay finds from house SWN.H.3: 1 – glass bracelet fragments; 2 – spindle whorls: ADd.03.413 back and front (Dia. 5.7 cm; Th. 0.9 cm), ADd.03.414 (5.2 x 6.0 cm; Th. 0.8 cm), ADd.03.416 (4.8 x 6.0 cm; Th. 1.0 cm), ADd.03.417 (4.7 x 7.7 cm; Th. 0.8 cm), ADd.03.418 (Dia. 5.9 cm; Th. 0.9 cm); 3 – handmade incense burner (*mubhar*), ADd.05.178 (H. +9 cm; Dia. base 9.4 cm; room SWN.H.3.2); 4, 5 – firedogs of Nile silt, ADd.03.448 (H. 15 cm; Dia. base 18 cm), ADd.03.447 (H. +7.2 cm; Dia. base 6.8 cm); 6 – box with lid, ADd.03.412 (H. approx. 35 cm; base 18.5 cm by 19.5 cm) (PCMA UW Dongola Project/photos W. Godlewski)

### RESIDENCE OF THE *MEKK* ON THE CITADEL

Exploration cleared some 18 m by 28 m of a large structure in the central part of the citadel southwest of the ruins. The size of these remains, much larger than of regular houses known from this period, and their location have led to their purported identification as the residence of the *mekk* that, according to 16th and 17th century travelers, was located on the citadel [see Fig. 1]. The most recent architecture preserved there was traced and the house (House Y) identified is described below. An extensive courtyard (X.1) was entered via a separate entrance and apparently unconnected with the house, although the two are contemporary. A trench was dug by the east wall of the courtyard to establish the stratigraphy of the complex down to the ruins of the citadel building from Makurian times. The uppermost horizon of organic deposits in the yard was

identified as horse manure, indicating that it had served to keep the *mekk*'s horses.

### HOUSE Y

The mud-brick house had a regular layout composed of a big square room (4.80 m by 4.70 m) and a narrow rectangular one (4.35 m by 1.15 m) [Fig. 8]. A small trapezoid courtyard (4.20 m by 2.80–3.75 m) opened south of the house, fenced in by a stone wall. The building was cleared at the most recent occupational level, elevated approximately 0.30 m above the original floor. The interior walls, preserved low, were mud-plastered and repeatedly lime-washed, the last time in conjunction with the most recent occupational level.

The large room (Y.1) was entered from the courtyard in the north (Y.3) through a 0.75-m-wide doorway, with a low 1.60-m-long wall bordering the entryway. A socket for the door pivot was found by the threshold in the doorway. The furnish-

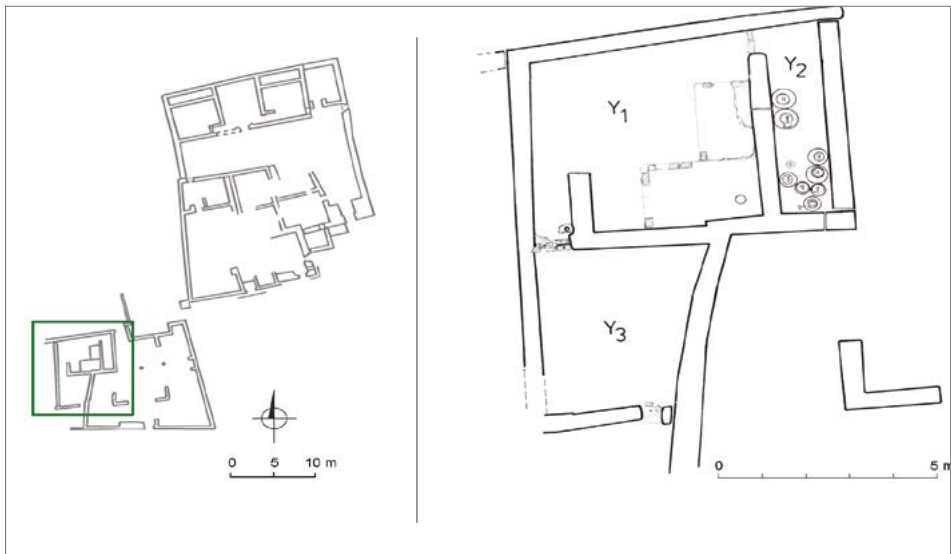


Fig. 8. House Y, plan (right) and its location on the site of the so-called residence of the *mekk* in the northern part of the citadel (PCMA UW Dongola Project/plans S. Medeksza; digitizing S. Maślak)

ings preserved at the tamped floor level (elevation 26.60 m ASL) include two mas- tabas by the northwestern corner walls of the unit. One was 2.55 m long and 1.50 m wide, the other 2.00 m long and 1.23 m wide. Both consisted of a sand-filled core

lined with narrow mud-brick walls and a hardened surface 0.27 m above the floor.

The narrow room (Y.2) opening off the southwestern corner of the big room was a storage space. It yielded a few dozen storage containers and domestic pottery [Fig. 9].

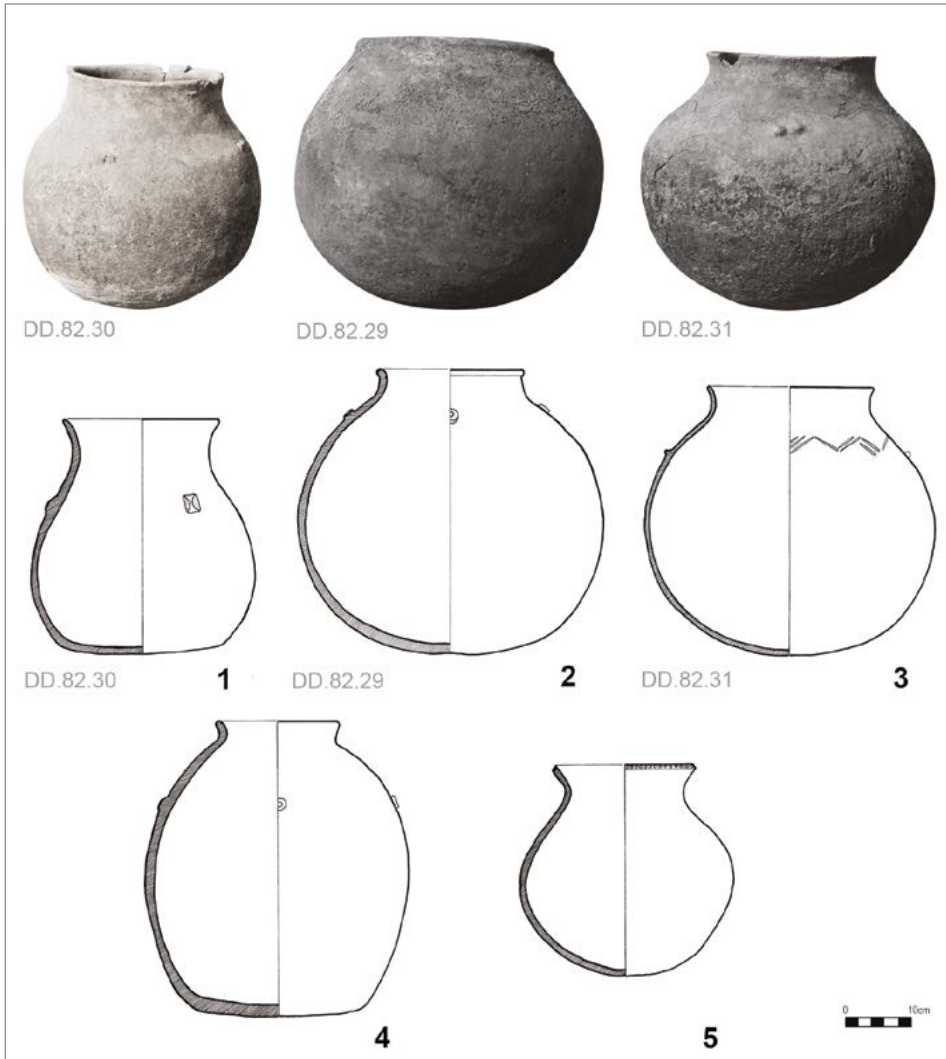


Fig. 9. Clay storage containers from the storeroom of House Y [see Fig. 8]: 1 – pot D (H. 38 cm; Dia. 25.5 cm); 2 – pot E (H. 42 cm; Dia. 22 cm); 3 – pot C (H. 40 cm; Dia. 25 cm); 4 – pot I (H. 46 cm; Dia. 20 cm); 5 – pot F (H. 34 cm; Dia. 23 cm). All except pot C are handmade (PCMA UW Dongola Project/ photos and drawing W. Godlewski)

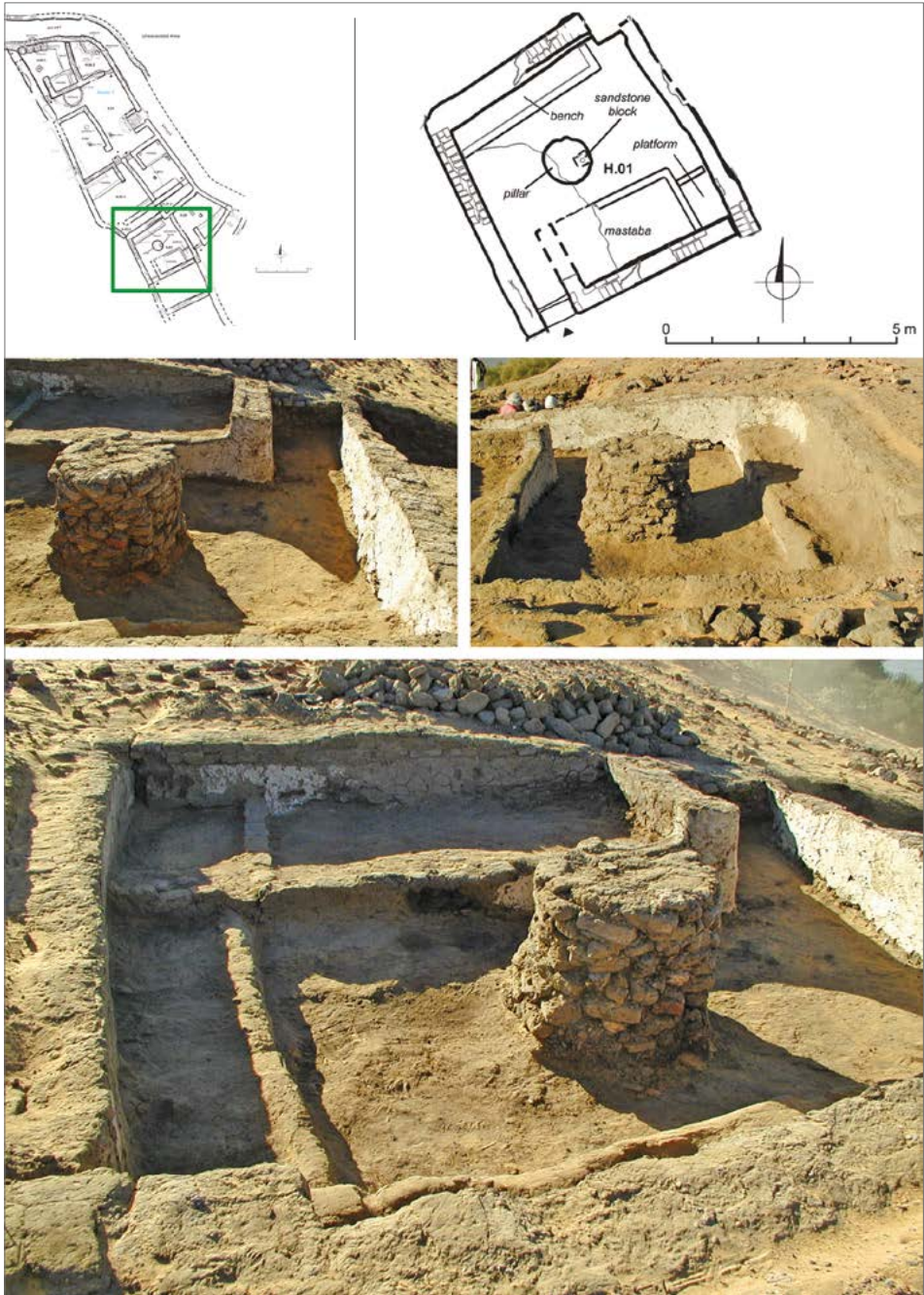


Fig. 10. House SWN.H.1 on the citadel: top, plan and location on the SWN site; center, views of the massive central pillar in the interior, from the north and east; bottom, western part of the house, view from the north (PCMA UW Dongola Project/plan and photos W. Godlewski)

**HOUSE SWN.H.1**

The ruins of a house were cleared atop the remains of the Palace of Ioannes, in the southeastern corner of the building, directly below ground surface. It had only one chamber, 4.50 m by 4.70 m, most likely preceded by a courtyard on its south side [Fig. 10 top]. It seems to have taken advantage of the remains of an earlier house (2H.1), but at a higher occupational level. The entry from the south, in the southwestern corner, was 0.65 m wide, with a long low wall bordering its side. The walls were mud-plastered and lime-washed. The roof was supported by a massive pillar constructed of bricks in the center of the unit [Fig. 10 center and bottom], probably a later addition and not plastered. The floor was weakly tamped.

The furnishings were composed of two mastabas by the south wall, the larger 2.75 m by 1.50 m and the smaller 0.60 m by 1.65 m, and two benches by the east wall, 2.50 m by 0.60 m and 4.20 m by 0.50 m respectively on the north and south. A pot containing notary documents in Arabic written on paper was concealed inside the central section of the large mastaba (Vanthieghem 2015) [Fig. 11]. It is a solitary example from Dongola of how important family deeds were kept. Each document was separately wrapped in a textile, tied, and then packed together in another piece of cloth [Fig. 12]. The double protection proved effective as the documents have survived in good condition.



Fig. 11. House SWN.H.1 on the citadel (site SWN): view of the mastaba concealing the pot (PCMA UW Dongola Project/photo W. Godlewski)

**COMPLEX U**

Architecture occupying the southwestern part of the ruins of the Cruciform Church (CC) consisted of three separate houses and a courtyard giving access to all [Fig. 13]. The complex was built onto the western side of a partition wall in the central space above the older ruins. The six units making up the complex may not all have been contemporary but, as no extensive excavation was carried out here, it was not possible to discern their mutual chronology.

**Unit U.1–2**

This unit incorporated earlier walls of units U.3 and U.4, using them as its side walls. The north and south walls were built of mud brick, the east and west walls of red brick. Five coats of mud plaster were recorded on the walls, standing about 1.00 m. Room U.1 was almost square, 4.00 m by 4.50 m, and its connected rectangular room U.2 was 4.00 m long and 0.90 m wide. The entrance from the courtyard, in the southwestern corner, was 0.70 m wide and was fitted with a red-brick



Fig. 12. Pot ADD.07.426 and parcel ADD.07.447 containing the paper documents, each individually wrapped deed ADD.07.448–452 shown below; bottom left, the pot *in situ* inside the mastaba (PCMA UW Dongola Project/photos W. Godlewski)

threshold and a low wall some 1.60 m long, bordering the entryway on the right side of the doorway. A door socket was noted in the southeastern corner of the entrance and a slot for the bolt was preserved in the west wall. The smaller unit was entered from U.1 via a doorway 0.60 m wide, situated by the east wall. It, too, had a red-brick threshold. The floor in U.1 was a tamped mud and sand layer that appears to have been repeatedly renovated.

Two mastabas stood in the southeastern part of chamber U.1. The larger, at 3.00 m by 1.70 m and 0.27 m high, lay between the low wall bordering the entryway and the east wall. The smaller mastaba, 2.15 m by 1.10 m, joins the first at right angles. Both are formed of a narrow brick wall surrounding a sand core and finished with a tamped surface. Three large storage pots stood on the large mastaba, set off by a partition and sealed with

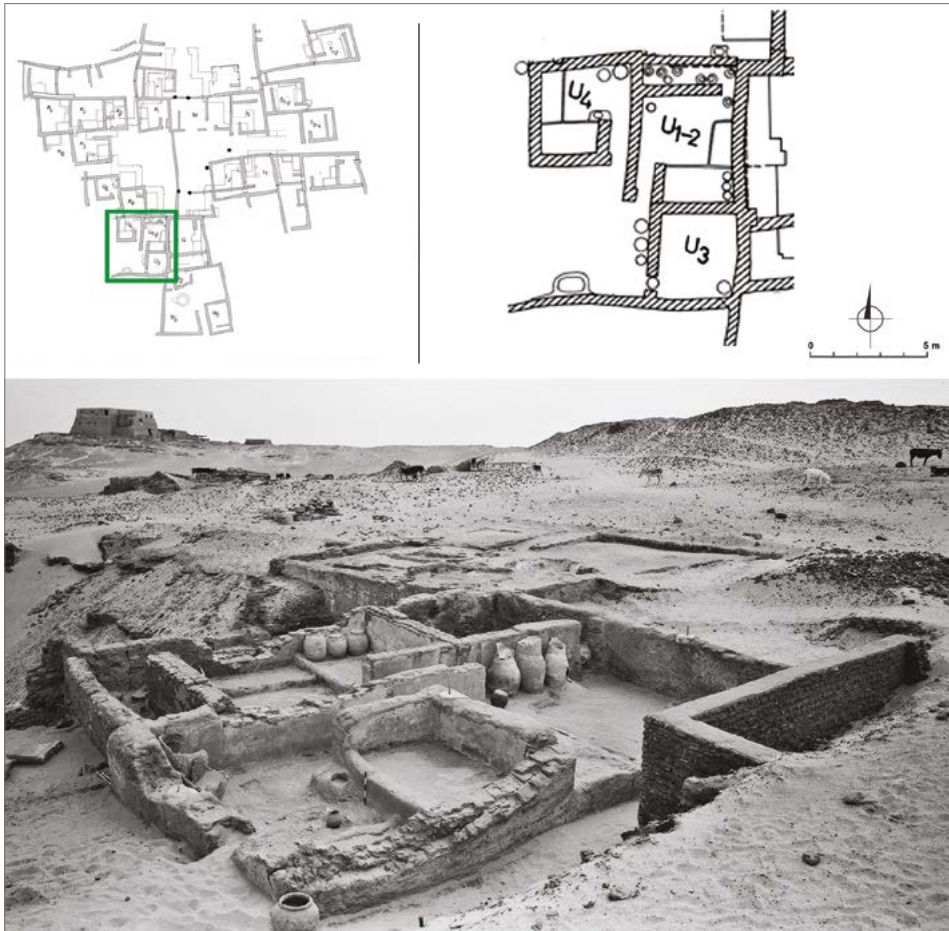


Fig. 13. House complex U on the ruins of church CC: top, plan and location within site CC shown in the inset; bottom, general view of domestic complex U from the west (PCMA Dongola Project/plan R. Sobolewski and S. Medeksza; photo W. Jerke)

clay [Fig. 14 top]. Two *gessebas* (bins of dried clay) stood by the west wall and a fired vessel, a *zir*, was still present in front of the threshold to U.1, by the east wall. Unit U.2 contained seven large storage pots, each different in size and all broken, the sherds also scattered within the 0.60 m wide entry.

### Unit U.3

This unit is south of U.1–2. The walls, standing to a height of 1.30 m, were of dried mud brick; the lower part of the east wall, of red brick, was actually the top of the wall of the southern arm of the Cruciform Church (CC) [see Fig. 2]. The unit was small and



Fig. 14. Storage pots in place inside the rooms of Complex U: top, pots on a mastaba in unit U.1; bottom, pots in unit U.4 (PCMA UW Dongola Project/photos W. Jerke)

squarish at 3.60 m by 3.30 m. The inner walls were given one coat of a yellowish sand–lime plaster, now blackened with soot. A lighter-colored plaster was used for repairs. The entrance from the courtyard was in the southeastern corner, the width of the doorway 0.60 m and, in this case, lacking a low bordering wall. A sand–clay floor was repeatedly relaid, rapidly accumulating a thickness of about 20 cm.

Furnishings included a low clay structure 1.20 m by 1.00 m in the southeastern corner, serving as a stand for storage containers. Two somewhat damaged pots were still in place at the time of discovery. A patch of intensive burning and ashes was noted on the floor by the west wall. A large pot had been left in the entrance. It is handmade, fired, 49 cm high and with a rim 27.5 cm in diameter, decorated with a relief pattern of four “V”s.

#### Unit U.4

The walls of unit U.4, immediately west of U.1–2, appear to have collapsed at some point, leading to abandonment of the structure. Debris from the walls lay on the floor under drifted sand, whereas the west wall had tumbled to the outside, leaving the wall stub also clearly leaning outwards. Mud brick was used to construct these walls, standing about 1.00–1.50 m in height at the time of discovery. The interior had been plastered and whitewashed three times, the second and third coats being refreshed only with whitewash.

The entrance from the courtyard was in the southeastern corner of the south wall. The threshold was of dried mud brick, but with the first ground course of

red brick. A door socket in the threshold by the east wall had been worn into a red brick, while a vertical semicircular niche worn into the east wall is the negative of the door pivot. The slot for the door bolt was 0.98 m above the floor, cut in the low wall bordering the entryway, which was 1.30 m long. The sand–clay floor was tamped heavily.

Furnishings consisted of a mastaba by the south wall between the low wall by the entry and the west wall; it was 2.30 m by 1.40 m, and 0.45 m high. A wall of dried mud brick around a sand core formed the mastaba, finished with a kind of mortared surface. Lying on it was a coffee set: china cup (D.14/73-4), a pot for making *gabana* coffee (D.11/73-4), firedogs (D.12–13/73-4), a bead (D.15/73-4) and a metal ring band (D.16/73-4). The bench by the west wall, between the mastaba and the north wall, was a low wall constructed around a sand core with a tamped surface. A brick-made structure by the high mastaba and low entry wall incorporated within a vessel with broken off bottom; the structure was plastered.

A bench for storage containers stood in the northeastern corner. Two *gesseba* vessels of dried mud, their function being to store dry products, were found in place, broken to pieces [Fig. 14 bottom]. Clay had been used to cement them to the bench. Both had a body diameter of approximately 65 cm, one preserved to a height of 50 cm and the other to 75 cm.

A hearth occupied the center of the room. Mud bricks and vessel sherds were incorporated into the clay floor, which was fired in the immediate vicinity of the bricks. Found next to the hearth was

a handmade pot probably for cooking, with the body daubed with rough clay on the exterior. It was 22 cm high with a rim diameter of 16 cm. The shoulder was decorated with an engraved wavy-line ornament.

A large handmade globular pot was found outside the unit, by the northwestern corner. It was 51 cm high, 35 cm in rim and 50 cm in diameter, and had four small loop handles situated axially at the junction of body and shoulders.



### Courtyard U.5

An open courtyard of irregular shape opened onto all units of House U. Walls delimited it on the north and south, being continuations of the walls of unit U.6 and U.3 respectively (the western boundary wall remains unexcavated). The walls were constructed of dried mud brick, with some red brick thrown in for good measure. The interior walls are mud-plastered, three coats were noted. The floor was tamped only around unit entrances and the various structures found in the courtyard.

These structures consisted of a mastaba by the south wall of U.4, formed by a wall 0.50 m high, some 3.80 m long and 1.40 m wide. The core is of sand with tamped surface. A kind of shallow clay basin of oval shape, roughly 1.75 m by 0.95 m, stood by the south wall of the courtyard. Three large *gesseba* vessels of dried clay were found standing in the sand by the west wall of U.3, and a small globular pot was found by the entrance to U.1–2.



Fig. 15. Unit U.6 in house complex U (Site CC): room with *murhaka* (PCMA UW Dongola Project/photos W. Jerke)

### Unit U.6

The unit was built onto the east and north walls that originally bordered the complex of House U. The added walls were of dried mud brick. The unit was practically square at 3.35 m by 3.45 m, the walls still standing to about 0.58–1.09 m above the clay floor at the time of discovery. They were mud-plastered and whitewashed both inside and outside.

The entrance from the courtyard was from the northeastern corner. It was 0.60 m wide and fitted with a threshold of red brick. The door socket in the form of a worn circular depression in a red brick was found in the southeastern corner by the threshold. A low wall bordered the entryway from its western side and a slot for the door bolt cut into its side. The sand-clay floor was tamped.

Furnishings included a structure by the east wall, probably a *murhaka*, a flour-grinding place with stone querns set into the base (one had been ripped out) and two vessels incorporated into it, for storing the flour once it had been milled [Fig. 15]. The structure was thickly coated with lime plaster. A globular pot was found in the center of the unit. The floor along the west wall was burnt through and covered with ashes. A single firedog came from this context.

A clay structure with a low wall around it was found opposite the door, in the corner between U.4 and the east wall bordering the courtyard (a party wall with unit U.6). It was 1.40 m by 0.80 m and incorporated a pot at its northern end. The inside of this pot was burnt, hence its probable use as a hearth. Another pot stood next to this structure.

## DOMESTIC ARCHITECTURE AND SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION IN 16TH–17TH CENTURY DONGOLA: DISCUSSION

The oldest domestic housing known at Dongola was preserved in the western part of the Cruciform Church (CC), in the western arm of the building and to its west. This location, in an abandoned royal church (Godlewski 2013b: 39–41), suggests the people who occupied it had no ties with Christian religion. The houses had only two chambers with no upper floor; one chamber was small and narrow, the other squarish in plan with much more space. This arrangement at Dongola first appears only at this time. It is best exemplified by House R.1, incorporating the ruined west wall of the church to some extent, House SWN.H.3,

attached to the north facade of the Palace of Ioannes, House Y by the ruins of the so-called residence of the *mekk*, and the complex of House U on site CC north of the citadel. Walls in these buildings are constructed of brick: initially baked red brick from dismantled Makurian structures and later dried mud brick. The houses only have ground floors with walls 0.40–0.50 m thick, built properly and plastered with mud, renovated repeatedly with the same kind of plaster and whitewashed with locally produced lime (*gir*). No windows have been recorded, but we can assume the presence of small openings in the missing upper

parts of the walls. Stone thresholds were found at the doorways and presumably wooden lintels. The doors were of wood turning on a pivot, sockets for which were preserved in the form of use-wear, circular hollows in pieces of stone or baked bricks. Bolts were used to close the doors from within; appropriate slots for sliding the bolts are recorded in door jambs or, more often, low walls bordering the entryways. A flat roof rested on wooden beams supported atop the walls, propped up on a wooden pillar in the middle of the larger room. The stone bases of these beams (pillars) were preserved, raised insignificantly above the level of the tamped earthen floor surface. Much less often floors were composed of bricks laid flat. The narrow rooms have neither plastered wall surfaces nor tamped floors; theirs was a typical household role.

The large chamber was a multi-functional living room during the day, turning into a bedroom at night. Furnishings included benches and rectangular mastabas consisting of thin low walls only one-brick thick, around a sand fill. A coat of mud or (less often) a layer of bricks served to harden the surfaces of these structures. Usually each house had two mastabas, sometimes with a small square structure attached to the large mastaba, built around a usually bottomless cooking pot set into it. Charcoal preserved in these pots indicates their use as hearths with limited intensity. Traces of fires also are usually found on the mud floors of the rooms, in the form of burnt-through circles. Low circular stands for cooking pots also are recorded. The objects left in the deserted houses include mainly handmade cooking and tablewares

(Wodzińska 2015). *Qawadis*, vessels traditionally used in *saqiya* water-wheels, are the only form of ceramic vessel that continues to be wheelmade. They also are found in houses. Still standing on the mastaba in House U.4 is a typical pot for making *gabana* coffee, a china cup, stands for vessels in the hearth, a headrest and some jewelry (Then-Obluska 2013). Nonetheless, the majority of the space within the houses or inner courtyards is taken up by large storage jars, baked or merely of dried clay, set upon the benches. Larger silos sometimes are placed in deep pits in the courtyards, their body walls lined with bricks and plastered on the surface. Frequent are so-called *murhakas* (stones mounted on a masonry podium) with one or two vessels by the side. Equally common are flat stones for grinding grain or other products. Granite capitals sometimes fulfil this role.

There seem to be no outbuildings for cattle or structures for keeping birds in the immediate neighborhood of the houses. However, there are places on the citadel where animals could have been kept for some time, presumably prior to being slaughtered. The courtyard between the ruins of the palace (SWN.B.I) and the Church of Raphael (SWN.B.V), still standing high with preserved vaults, seems to have been an area where animals were kept and food prepared for large numbers of people for a long period of time. This is evidenced by a thick accumulation of hearth deposits, ashes and animal bones in the courtyard, but also inside the church, where a deposit of ashes reaching 2 m in thickness suggests a cooking area. Thick accumulations of horse manure and straw were also noted

in the urban area between the palace of the *mekk* and House Y; the obvious interpretation is that horses were kept here periodically, presumably catering for the needs of the people residing in the palace.

The domestic architecture known from the citadel and the area north of it betrays a planned layout easily interpreted as an urban topography by our modern standards, expressly a form of settlement with no economic base for keeping domestic animals. In African circumstances, however, it is hardly an urban layout, but rather a well organized village with inhabitants undertaking different activities, nearer to a trade-and-crafts economy. The fields they would have cultivated would have been located on the river islands and banks, as well as in the Letti basin lying north of Dongola.

Houses consisting of several units, like Complex U—and they are more numerous in the village on the whole—show a functional differentiation of particular units, as well as an agglutinative form of development with new units being added to the principal ones in rhythm with the growth of the owner's family. Of significance for understanding social aspects of family make-up is the absence of a distinct gender division with no part of the house being separated out for women in opposition to the “male” part open to visitors. This may be interpreted as a still traditional family model in Dongola. Transformation will occur only with the firm arrival of Islam and the norms imposed by religion, shaping also the interior of the family home.

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