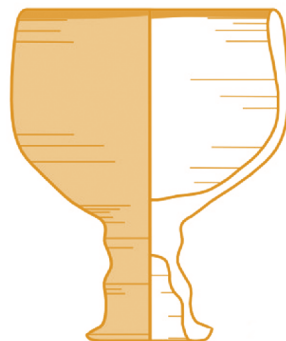


# Ceramics from the North Church in Old Dongola revisited



**Abstract:** The paper seeks to reexamine the ceramics unearthed from the North Church in Old Dongola. These findings are placed within the context of the terminal phase of Christianity in the capital of the Kingdom of Makuria. Examples of liturgical implements found *in situ* inside this Dongolese church provide a rare glimpse into the Nubian Liturgy.

The paper incorporates new assessments of the ceramic chronology drawing on the recent findings of the UMMA project. Many vessels recovered in the 1980s are currently housed in the National Museum in Warsaw, presenting a unique and advantageous opportunity for their in-depth study and analysis. Consequently, they offer a fresh perspective on Old Dongola's Late and Terminal Christian phases.

**Keywords:** ceramics, liturgical vessels, church, Old Dongola, Sudan

## INTRODUCTION

The North Church (NC) [Fig. 1] is situated in the northern part of the site of Old Dongola, west of the monastery on Kom H. It has remarkably well preserved walls, reaching heights of up to 2.5 m, making it a prominent and conspicuous feature of the site (Michałowski 1966: 293, Pl. 40a). The church was documented already prior to the Polish excavations; in 1845, Karl Richard Lep-

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### **Acknowledgments**

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The author would like to thank the anonymous reviewers for their remarks and comments, which significantly improved the paper.

sus drew a plan of the visible structure, published later by Ugo Monneret de Villard (1935: 247), but without any specific commentary or attempt to suggest the building's function. While the Polish team spotted the structure already during the early seasons of work in Old Dongola, the excavations were not conducted until January 1981. Włodzimierz Godlewski, who led the works, published a comprehensive report that included detailed architectural documentation, a preliminary description of finds, and interpretations. This report served as a primary source of data and the present author's starting point for reevaluating the ceramics.

The church's architectural design is defined by its thick and massive mud-brick walls, arranged on a cross-in-square plan, featuring four apses, lateral pastophoria, and a staircase situated in the southwest corner (Godlewski 1990: 38; 2013: 73–74). Notably, it is one of the few churches in Old Dongola constructed during the Late Christian period (AD 1150–1350). Other examples, namely the Northwest Church (NWC) situated west of the North Church (Jakobielski 2001: 21–22) and the Tower Church (TC) constructed on the north wall of the Citadel (Godlewski 2013: 74) [see *Fig. 1*] were poorly preserved and yielded no significant pottery assemblages associated with their occupation. The three churches featured similar traits: they were constructed of mud bricks and paved with red bricks (Jakobielski and Medeksza 1985: 2; Godlewski 1996: 116–117). The interiors of the North Church were finely plastered and adorned with painted images but, unfortunately, only a few fragments have survived. Among the fragments that were

still somewhat legible during the excavations, only depictions of the Enthroned Christ and the Virgin Mary were identified (Godlewski 1990: 42–43, *Fig. 5*).

The ceramics were found beneath melted mud bricks indicating a collapse event. No archaeological evidence suggests that this space was reused after its abandonment (Godlewski 1990: 38). The construction of the church was preliminarily associated with the 13th century AD or possibly earlier, and its use continued into the 14th century AD (Godlewski 1990: 44).

The pottery collected during the excavations in the North Church was not quantified. Instead, it was selected on the basis of its significance within the ecclesiastical context, as in the case of chalices and lamps, or for its aesthetic value, as painted vessels. A preliminary examination of this pottery suggested that it mainly consisted of wares characteristic of the Terminal Christian period (AD 1300–1500) (Godlewski 1990: 50). Some of the vessels and their fragments were generously shared by the Sudan Antiquities Service with the National Museum in Warsaw, Poland.

This pottery collection was reexamined by the author along with the archival documentation stored in the Documentation Archiving Department of the Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology, University of Warsaw. One of the primary objectives in revisiting these vessels was to attempt their contextualization whenever possible and to place them within a diachronic perspective alongside other pottery discovered in churches. Furthermore, the new data on Late Christian to Funj pottery, which emerged within

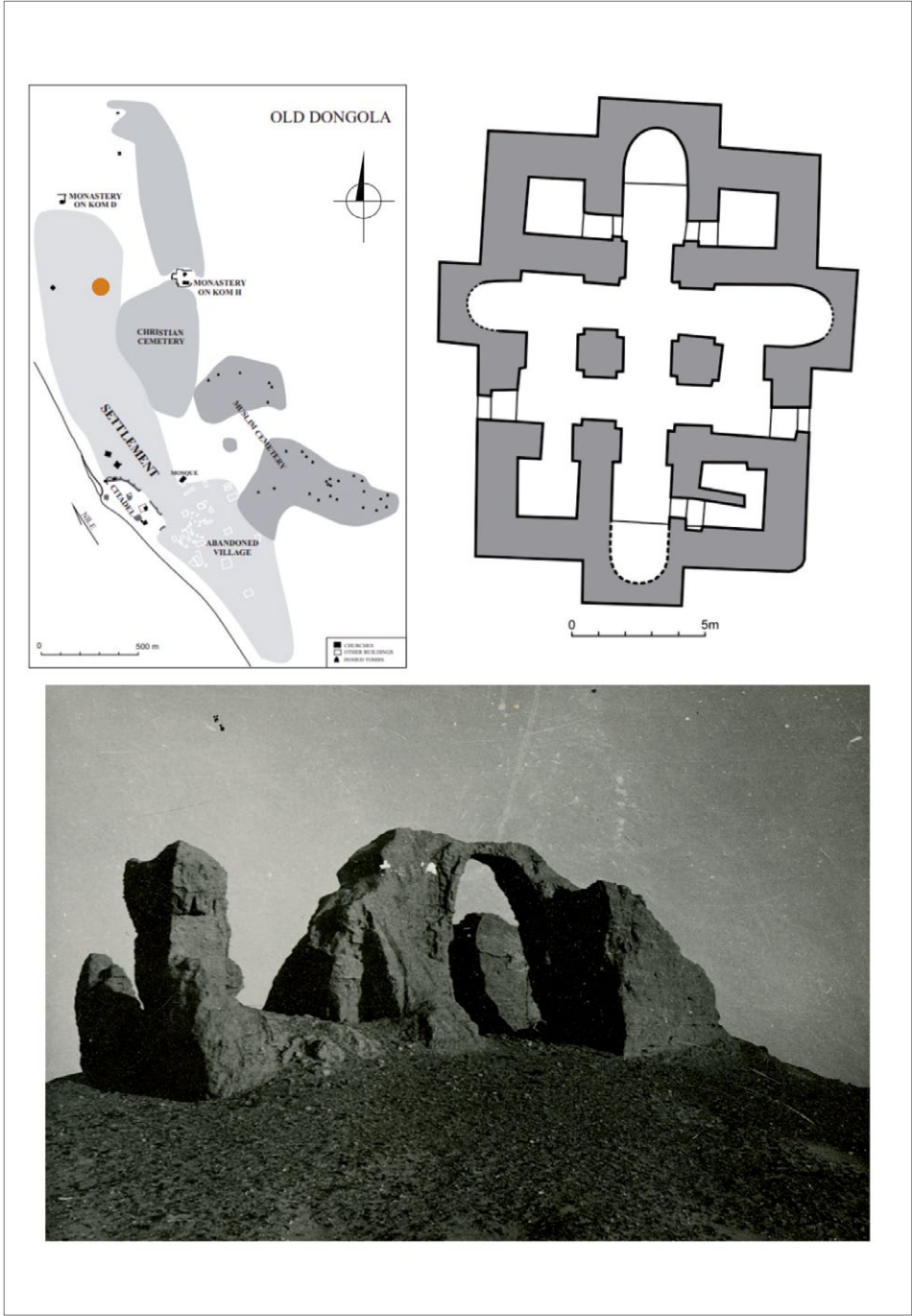


Fig. 1. North Church in Old Dongola, plan and location on the site. Top left: plan of the site (PCMA UW | Obluski 2021: Fig. 2), top right: plan of the church (PCMA UW | Godlewski 2013: 71), and bottom: photo of the North Church taken in 1964 (PCMA UW | photo A. Ostrasz)

the scope of the ERC Starting Grant UMMA and the fieldwork funded by the Qatar-Sudan Archaeological Project allowed the author to establish absolute datings (Dzierzbicka and Danys 2021; de Lellis-Danys in preparation) and apply

them to the archival materials. Additionally, the findings from the North Church provide a unique glimpse into the Nubian Liturgy, as they form part of the small group of liturgical vessels found *in situ* within the Dongolese churches.

## CERAMIC ASSEMBLAGE

The recorded ceramic assemblage encompasses several functional categories: transport containers, utility ware, tableware, and liturgical implements. These items represented various classes, such as amphorae, jars, and bottles, employed for transporting and storing goods including wine, oil, and water, potentially for use in religious ceremonies. Utility ware included fewer examples, which represented jars and *qullae*, though their precise function within the sacred space remains unclear. Large plates and vases represent the tableware group. Ceramics of religious significance, comprising chalices, a paten, and a lid constitute the most noteworthy discoveries. This set is one of the most unique assemblages ever found in Old Dongola. In addition, lamps recovered from the church would have been used to illuminate the space and possibly venerate the holy images depicted in the interior.

The description of classes includes vessel types according to the Dongolese field naming system established by the author and preliminarily published (Danys 2018: 101). An exception is the group of amphorae, as they follow the typology elaborated by Krzysztof Pluskota (2005). The similarity of the described ceramics to Lower Nubian pottery allows the use of the system of groups of

wares and styles established by William Y. Adams (1986).

It is worth noting that although the group of finds from the North Church was not quantified, it nevertheless represents one of the most significant archaeological pieces of evidence related to the practice of the Christian faith in Old Dongola.

### TRANSPORT CONTAINERS

The pottery mentioned by Godlewski included fragments of coarse wares such as amphorae, jars, and *zirs*, which were neither quantified nor fully documented (Godlewski 1990: 51). The National Museum in Warsaw houses a single amphora (235689 MNW) [*Fig. 2:1*] bearing a black-ink inscription on the body (Godlewski 1990: *Fig. 13a*). The vessel belongs to type F of Dongolese amphorae (fabric F2) (for the fabrics' descriptions, see Danys 2022). It displays grayish-black residue covering the interior and partially extending to the rim and shoulders on the exterior. Interestingly, the partly preserved black-ink inscription consisting of two lines of text [*Fig. 2:2*] was initially misidentified by Godlewski (1990: 54) as Coptic. While challenging to read, the inscription on the amphora is likely in the Greek language (Adam Łajtar, personal communication, 2022). The residue was ex-

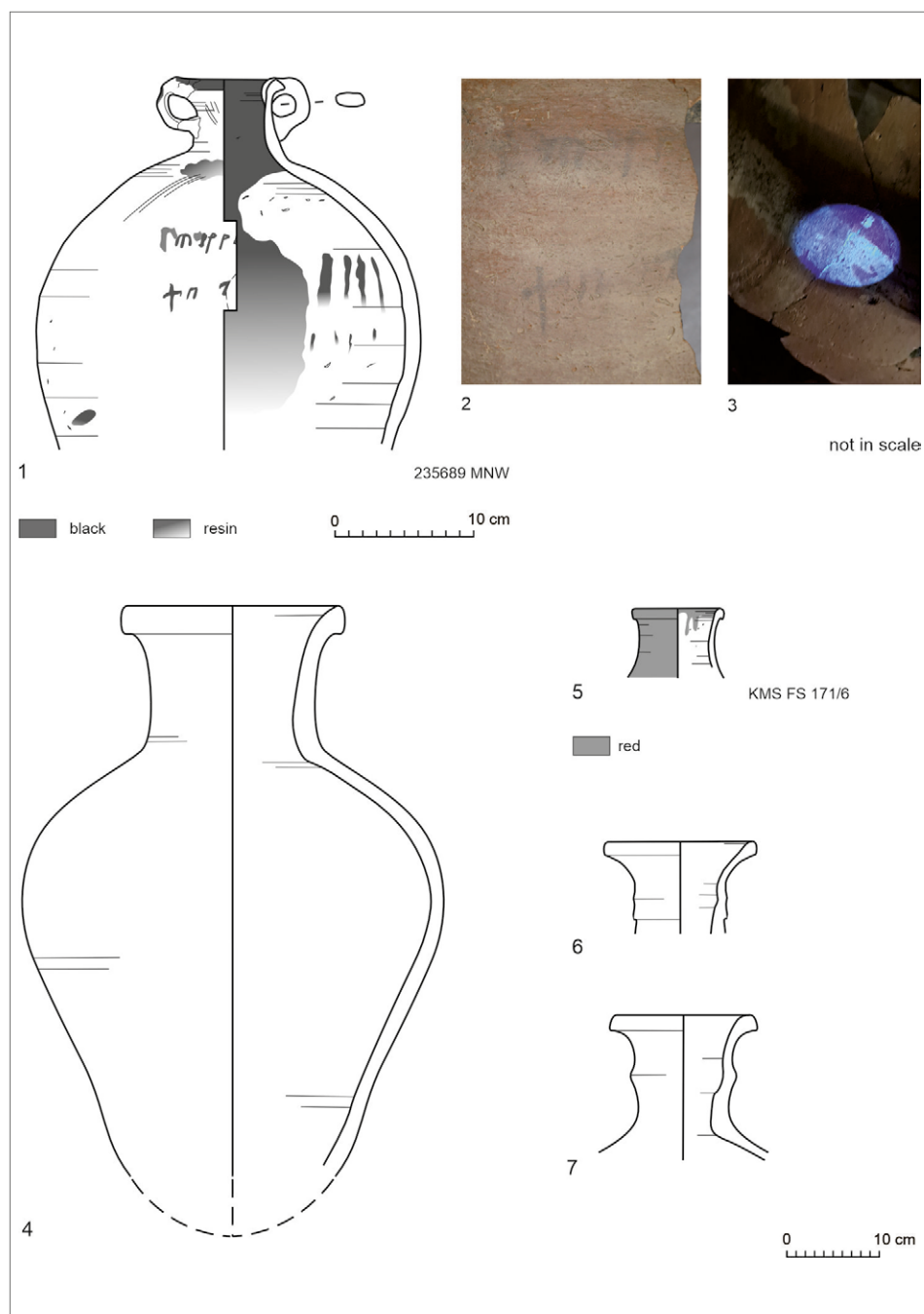


Fig. 2. Selection of transport containers: amphora (1), detail of the inscription (2), drips in the UV light (3), jar (4), and bottles (5-7) (MNW | photos K. de Lellis-Danys (2), A. Sulikowska-Belczowska (3); drawings K. de Lellis-Danys (1, 5), W. Godlewski (4, 6-7); digitizing K. de Lellis-Danys (4, 6-7) after Godlewski 1990: Fig. 13:c, d, e)

amed by Agnieszka Kijowska and the present author at the National Museum in Warsaw using UV light to detect resins (Michel and Rots 2022), with positive results [Fig. 2:3]. However, the contents of the amphora remain uncertain. The potentially destructive nature of organic residue analysis precludes its application to museum objects. Nevertheless, the presence of resin may suggest that the vessel contained wine.

In addition, it is worth noting that some of the other amphorae found within the North Church were reported to bear potmarks and graffiti (Godlewski 1990: 51, 54). They belong to types E–G, which are associated with the second phase of the Dongolese pottery production (AD 950–1400) (Pluskota 2005: 228, Fig. 8). Similar vessels with comparable chronology have also been discovered in other parts of the site, for example in Courtyard A within the monastery on Kom H (Danys 2018: 105, Fig. 8.4) and in the Church of Archangel Raphael, SWN.BV.

In addition to amphorae, jars and bottles were used to transport and potentially deliver commodities to the church.

Transport jars (JT) are wheel-made forms typically sealed with large mud stoppers. They feature distinctive, large, conical necks, globular bodies, and rounded bases [Fig. 2:4]. The JT vessels known from Old Dongola were commonly made of fabric F1, a fine alluvium.

Conversely, narrow necks, often adorned with red or purple-painted bands, are characteristic of bottles (BT). These vessels have bodies similar to JT vessels, but intact examples from Old Dongola suggest that their shoulders were more bulbous than those of JT vessels.

A specimen currently stored in the National Museum in Warsaw, KMS FS 171/6 (*wadi* fabric F28), features a red-painted band [Fig. 2:5]. Other bottles found in the North Church [Fig. 2:6–7] are only known from the preliminary report (Godlewski 1990: Fig. 13:c, d).

Such sets of diverse transport containers as listed above are characteristic of the Post-Classic and Late Christian periods (AD 1000–1350) in Old Dongola, like the findings from Courtyard A in the monastery on Kom H (Danys 2018: 105–106, Fig. 8.4). Radiocarbon dating has confirmed that such assemblages date from the mid-11th to the early 14th century AD (Dzierzbicka and Danys 2021: 453, Fig. 5).

## UTILITY WARE

Storage vessels, referred to as “large containers” (*zirs*) by Godlewski (1990: 51), were among the pottery found in the North Church. However, this class is a challenge to identify, as the term “zir” denotes large, handmade jars analogous to modern ones. Nonetheless, two fragments of daily-use vessels were documented and are now housed in the National Museum in Warsaw.

These vessels are spherical containers (alluvial fabric F2) coated on the outside with red slip. One specimen, 228516 MNW [Fig. 3:1], has smoothed surfaces, and the other, KMS FS177/6 [Fig. 3:2], is polished. Their interiors, which are also smoothed, are gray and brown respectively. They have similar decorations, featuring separated or continuous white or yellow motifs with black framing.

Vessel 228516 MNW is adorned with white-painted motifs of arcades (Adams motif CE.11-1) and vertical elements in-



side the arches (Adams motif L.8-3), all outlined in black and filled with black spots. White spots framed in black, with a central black dot, are painted on the vessel's shoulders. The small body sherd of KMS FS177/6 is decorated with a similar motif: a white blob with black outlines and a black circumferential element in the center.

It is worth noting that the body of jar 228516 MNW has a regularly worn surface in the lower part, which probably resulted from continuous contact with sand (Skibo 2013: 120–121), suggesting placement of the vessel in a sandy deposit. The latter is indicated by examples of a jar and a *qadus* from the Pillar Church in Old Dongola embedded in the church's floor in the south pastophorium (Godlewski 2018b: 165, Fig. 14.22).

The second domestic vessel is KMS FS 152/3 [Fig. 3:3], a neck of a wheel-made *qulla* of the QU1 type (*wadi* F28 fabric). The painted decoration (Adams motif CE.8-3), composed of a continuous white band with black framing and large blobs, is placed on a red and smoothed slip. The vessel's smoothed interior is beige, with red slip drips. The filter inside the neck comprises one sizeable central hole surrounded by seven smaller ones. Analogous specimens came from Courtyard A in the monastery on Kom H in Old Dongola (Danys 2018: 103) and from houses at Banganarti (Cedro 2021: Pl. 6: CB-1763). These vessels belong to Adams R20 "Terminal Christian Heavy Decorated Ware" (Adams 1986: 251). Its chronology was not determined due to scarcity and substantial fragmentation of

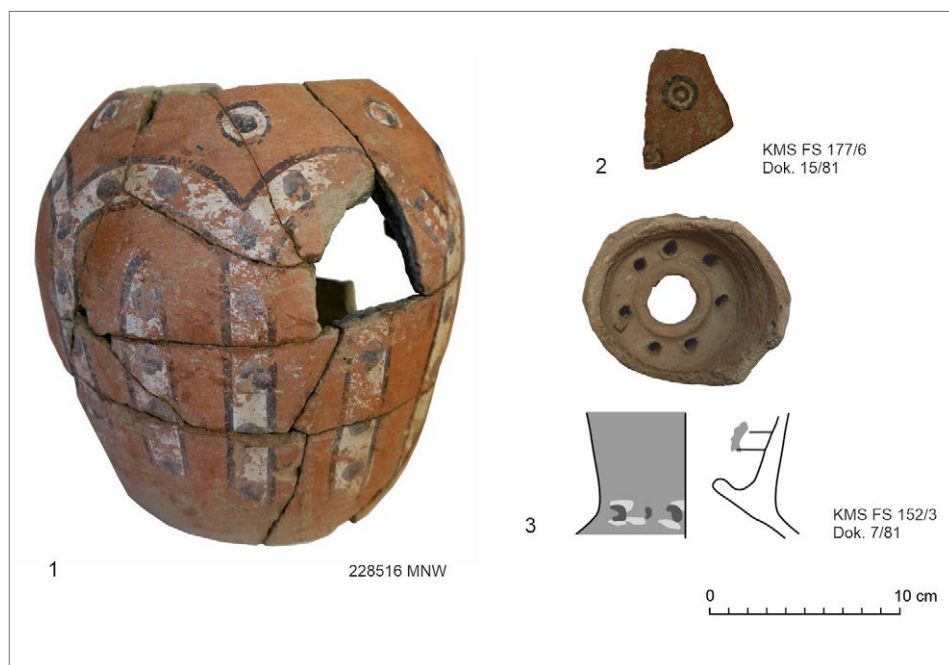


Fig. 3. Selection of utility ware: jars (1–2) and *qulla* (3) (MNW | photos, drawings, digitizing K. de Lellis-Danys)



sherds. However, it falls in the Terminal Christian period (AD 1350–1500) (Adams 1986: 512). This style features motifs documented in Lower Nubia, for instance, CE.8-3, CE.11-1, and L.8-3 (Adams 1986: Figs 205, 353). However, recent investigations in Old Dongola suggest that Ware R20 should be dated to the 13th and, possibly, early 14th century AD (Dzierzbicka and Danys 2021: 451).

Furthermore, it is worth noting that vessels decorated in this style are much more frequent in Old Dongola than in Lower Nubia (Adams 2002: 48), suggesting their local production in Old Dongola, with some distribution further north. Adams was unaware of examples of Ware R20 beyond the area around the 2nd Cataract, where it was “insufficient for satisfactory description or evaluation” (Adams 1986: 512). The evidence from Old Dongola and Banganarti challenges the previous geographical limits of Style R20 and provides valuable insights into the production and distribution of these vessels.<sup>1</sup>

### TABLEWARE

Another functional group of vessels, tableware, comprises mainly thick-walled plates and vases. These specimens correspond to the church's latest phase of use. However, certain specimens may also point to the dating of the building's construction.

The plates encompass thick-walled types such as T8A, T9A, T10A, and T10B. They are made of kaolin-based fabrics, including F27 and F28. Notably, they

predominated in tableware production during the Late and Terminal Christian periods (13th–14th century AD) (Danys-Lasek 2014: Fig. 3).

One particular plate, KMS FS 161/25 [Fig. 4:5], features white-slipped and polished surfaces. It is adorned with a red-painted rim band and black-painted vertical motifs, forming a radial design filled with crosshatchings akin to Adams motif H.6-2 of Style NVII (Adams 1986: Fig. 204). Adams classified such vessels as Ware R28—Terminal Christian Decorated Orange (primarily identified at Qasr Ibrim)—and broadly dated them to AD 1300–1500 (Adams 1986: 512). However, recent revisions of the pottery chronology at Old Dongola have indicated that plates of this kind were in use in the 13th century AD (Dzierzbicka and Danys 2021: 455), and their presence in later deposits resulted from residuality (de Lellis-Danys in preparation). Consequently, it is plausible to associate these plates with the main period of use of the North Church, as discussed further in the description of the vessels below.

Another similar plate of type T10A, KMS FS 159/1 [Fig. 4:6], is unadorned and features surfaces with a polished red slip. Notably, it exhibits traces of wear on the base exterior, indicating regular placement in sand. While this type of plate is not explicitly identifiable in Adams's descriptions of wares, its shape suggests a 13th century AD date, aligning it with the temporal context of other plates discovered in Old Dongola (Dzierzbicka and Danys 2021: 455, Fig. 6).

1 The author would like to express her gratitude to the anonymous reviewer for calling attention to this issue.

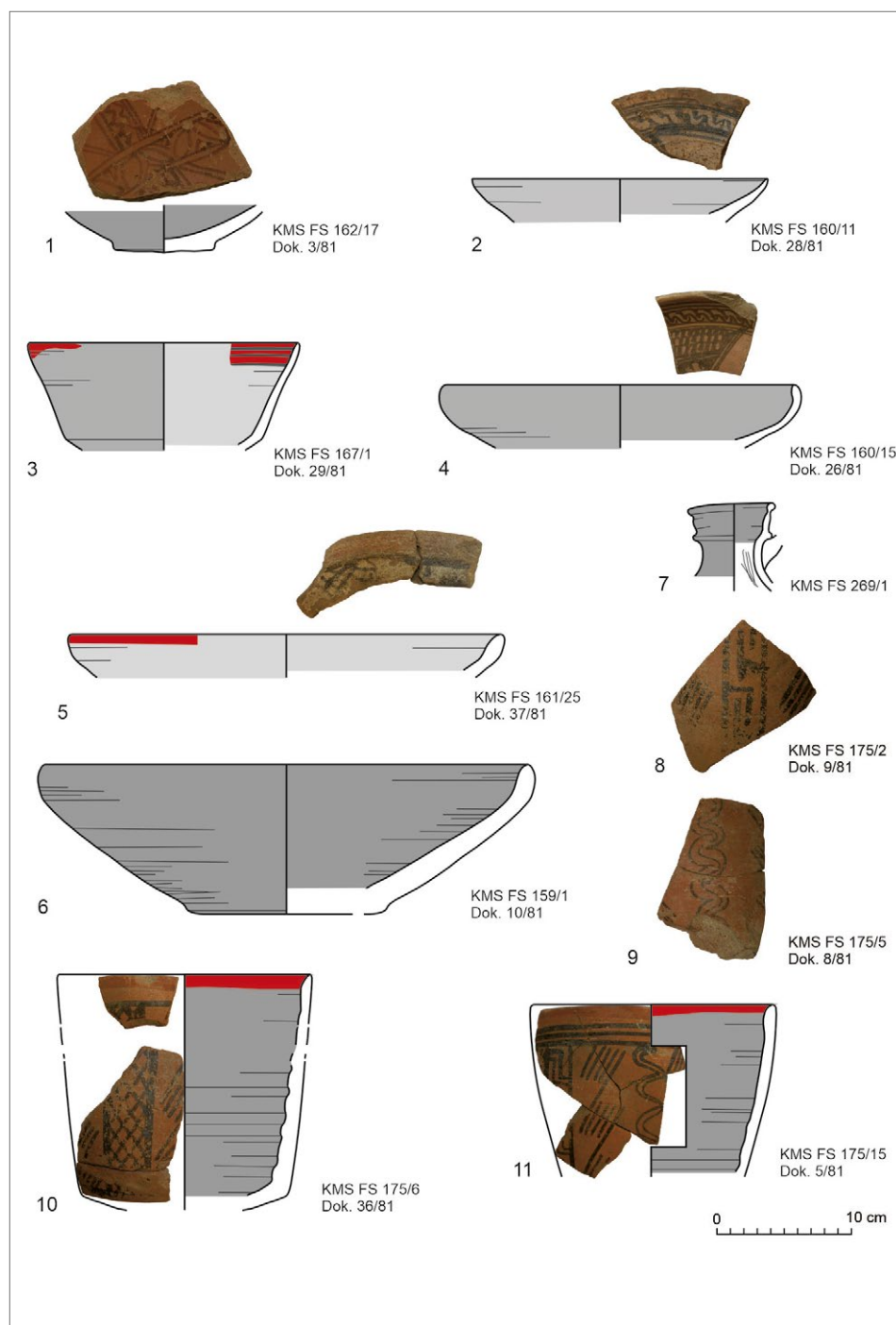


Fig. 4. Selection of tableware: plates (1–2, 4–6), bowls (3), a jug (7), and vases (8–11) (MNW | photos, drawings, and digitizing K. de Lellis-Danys)

Plate KMS FS 160/11 [Fig. 4:2] of type T9A is coated with polished yellow slip. It features a red-painted rim band and a black composition of a continuous guilloche band analogous to the Adams motif E.7-1 (Adams 1986: Fig. 182), along with a fragmentarily preserved radial element on the bottom. This plate is associated with Style NVA (AD 1000–1150) and is identifiable as Ware W20 (Post-Classic Christian Polished Yellow Ware), broadly dated to AD 1000–1200. As the evidence of this ware was insufficient, Adams suggested a continuation of its use up to AD 1300 (Adams 1986: 498–499). A more recent chronological study conducted in Old Dongola has provided a 13th century AD date (Dzierzbicka and Danys 2021: 455). This revised dating again aligns with the broader temporal context of the North Church and its associated artifacts.

Vessel KMS FS 160/15 [Fig. 4:4] belongs to type T8B and is coated with polished orange slip. The brownish-black decoration adorning its interior consists of a continuous guilloche band (Adams motif E.7-1) and a wedged panel below. The latter contains three arcades and floral motifs separated by three parallel lines. Notably, these motifs find no direct analogies within the repertoire of decorative elements published by Adams.

However, its aesthetics suggest an affinity to Adams Style N.VIA, defining the Late Christian Heavy Decorated Ware R19 dated to AD 1150–1500 (Adams 1986: 504). Nonetheless, the diachronic perspective from Old Dongola again indicates that this broad time frame can be narrowed down to the 13th century AD.

The solid and flat base KMS FS 162/17 [Fig. 4:1] features a polished red slip and

purple decoration painted inside. The radial motif comprises elements like a band filled with the guilloche motif (Adams motif K.17-1) and another with two parallel lines and zigzags. This plate is also associated with Group N.VIA and Late Christian Heavy Decorated R19 Ware (AD 1150–1500) (Adams 1986: 504–505). It is worth noting that this type of decoration resembles motifs of Classic Christian Geometric Style N.IVB (AD 850–1100). Adams (1986: 247) suggested that it was possibly characteristic of pottery production centers other than Faras. Nonetheless, the revised chronology of the Dongolese pottery suggests a 12th century AD date for parallel examples (Dzierzbicka and Danys 2021: 455).

The chronological assessment of plates from the North Church shows that vessels representing various Adams styles, like Post-Classic NVA, Late N.VIA, and Terminal Christian N.VII coexisted in its deposits. The chronological frames drawn by Adams were broad due to the scarcity of absolute dates and challenges associated with the residuality of potsherds (Adams 1986: 607, 617–633). The state-of-the-art dating methods used in pottery analysis in Old Dongola allow for the proposed phasing and narrowed-down dating (Dzierzbicka and Danys 2021). The coexistence of plates representing the Adams Styles mentioned above may also result in variabilities in their time of use, and, thus, the residuality of some vessels (Orton and Hughes 2013: 222, 227).

A single example of a bowl (KMS FS 167/2) also represents the tableware group [Fig. 4:3]. It belongs to a trapezoidal type, M3A (fabric F28), coated with an orange slip on the outside and white on the in-

side. The decoration is relatively simple, consisting of a red rim band and three parallel circumferential black stripes painted below the rim on the inside of the bowl. These motifs resemble the Adams Classic Christian Style N.IVA (AD 850–950) and elements A.1-1 and C.1-6 (Adams 1986: Fig. 163). Red and black stripes reoccurred in the decoration of Terminal Christian Ware W18 (Adams 1986: 251, Fig. 207). Parallel forms and decorations came from the 12th century AD deposits in Courtyard A of the monastery on Kom H in Old Dongola (Dzierzbicka and Danys 2021: 455). Therefore, it is challenging to determine whether the described bowl was an integral furnishing of the church associated with its foundation and early phase of use.

The pottery collection from the North Church also includes a set of deep and large vases representing a range of open-mouthed forms, including V2B1 [Fig. 4:10], V3B1 [Fig. 4:11], and V5D1 (not illustrated), made of fabric F27. These vases are polished and coated with orange slip on the outside and cream slip on the inside. One specimen, KMS FS 175/2 [Fig. 4:8], has smoothed surfaces, and two, KMS FS 175/6 and KMS FS 175/15 [see Fig. 4:10–11], have orange slip coating their interiors. These vessels are characterized by geometric decorations, red-painted rim bands, and black elements on the body's exterior.

Vase KMS FS 175/15 [see Fig. 4:11] is adorned with a rim band reminiscent of Adams element A.1-1 and with a composition of vertical elements, such as diagonal strokes, two parallel lines, and meander-like motifs, known as Adams K.4-1, and K.11-1. These motifs resemble

those found in the Terminal Christian Style N.VII in Lower Nubia dated AD 1350–1500 (Adams 1986: Fig. 204) and documented at Tergis in the Dongola Reach (Phillips 2003: Pl. 84:d).

The second specimen, KMS FS 175/6 [see Fig. 4:10], has a composition framed by a single line and filled with alternating elements like diagonal strokes (Adams motif K.4-1) and a band filled with crosshatching (Adams motif H.6-1). This decoration belongs to Terminal Christian Style N.VII (Adams 1986: Fig. 204) and has also been documented in the Dongola Reach, in Old Dongola (Bagińska 2008: Fig. 8) and Banganarti (Phillips 2003: Pl. 94:b). Other vessels like plates and cups with analogous decorations represent the 13th century AD horizon in Old Dongola (Danys 2018: Fig. 8.2; Dzierzbicka and Danys 2021: 455, Fig. 6).

Examples of vase body sherds exhibit the same stylistics of black-painted and alternating vertical elements. For instance, specimen KMS FS 175/5 [Fig. 4:9] features diagonal strokes and three parallel wavy lines, known as Adams motifs K.4-2 and K.9-2 (Adams 1986: Fig. 196). Another example is KMS FS 175/2 [see Fig. 4:8], which displays a composition of diagonal strokes and a meander-like motif, following Adams decorative elements K.4-2 and K.7-1 (Adams 1986: Fig. 196). These sherds can be associated with Late Christian Group N.VI and Polished Orange R11 Ware (Adams 1986: 504), most likely from the 13th century AD (Dzierzbicka and Danys 2021: 451).

An upper part of a spouted jug, KMS FS 269/1 [Fig. 4:7], resembles type JG1A from the 7th century AD (Danys 2016: Fig. 5: ADd.11.100), although the type

of fabric (F28) indicates a later dating, likely of the Late or Terminal Christian periods. It is coated with polished red slip on the outside and smooth pink slip on the inside.

Analogous jugs were documented in the churches of Wadi Halfa (Mileham 1910: 55) and Akasha (de Contenson 1966: 101, No. 212). However, while the North Church jug lacks a precisely indicated findspot, one cannot exclude its potential function in ecclesiastic ceremonies.

### VESSELS FOR RELIGIOUS USE

The excavations conducted in the North Church yielded an exceptional discovery of liturgical vessels. The set includes two chalices, 235714 MNW [Fig. 5:5] and 235867 MNW [Fig. 5:4], and one paten, KMS FS 160/5 [Fig. 5:7]. They were found in the north pastophorium, inside a circular feature built against the northeast corner of the unit; thus, their context was ecclesiastic in character. A lid, 235691 MNW [Fig. 5:6], was found together with these implements.

Additionally, the sacral spaces of the North Church yielded several lamps. One of them, 235680 MNW [Fig. 5:1], is now housed in the National Museum in Warsaw, and the others, D.3/81 [Fig. 5:3] and D.17/81 [Fig. 5:2], are known only from documentation kept at the Documentation Archiving Department of the PCMA UW. These discoveries provide valuable insights into the liturgical practices and material culture of the North Church in Old Dongola.

Both chalices are shaped like cups with high-footed and narrow bases, knobbed at mid-height. Their rounded rims are narrowing [see Fig. 5:4] and

flaring [see Fig. 5:5]. The first specimen is made of fabric F28, and the second has been reconstructed, making its fabric impossible to identify. Both chalices are coated with polished slips, reddish-orange and white, respectively. Their decoration is plain and limited to rim bands: purple in the case of 235867 MNW, and red in 235714 MNW. These chalices represent two wares of the Terminal Christian period, respectively R26 — Polished Orange and W14 — Decorated White, dated by Adams (1986: 510–513) to AD 1300–1500. Vessels assigned to these wares found in Old Dongola are dated to the end of the 13th and early 14th century AD (Dzierzbicka and Danyś 2021: 451).

The scarce finds of liturgical chalices from Nubia will be discussed in the following section devoted to functional assessment. The vessels unearthed in the North Church share traits with the few known examples. The specimen 235867 MNW of R26 Ware finds parallels among the liturgical implements from the churches in Banganarti (Phillips 2003: Pls 80–81), Sonqi Tino (Angelozzi and Iob 2012: Fig. 5), and Wadi Halfa (Mileham 1910: 63). The chalice 235714 MNW of W14 is similar to a vessel found in the South Church in Faras (Mileham 1910: 35, Pl. 19:a).

An incomplete paten, KMS FS 160/5 [see Fig. 5:7], represents a bowl with a rounded rim, reversed trapezoidal body, and flattish base (fabric F28). Its surfaces, covered with smoothed red slip, are decorated with a purple-painted rim band. The base bears brown, burn-like attrition traces both outside and inside. Furthermore, the interior of the base is covered with green residue, suggesting the pres-

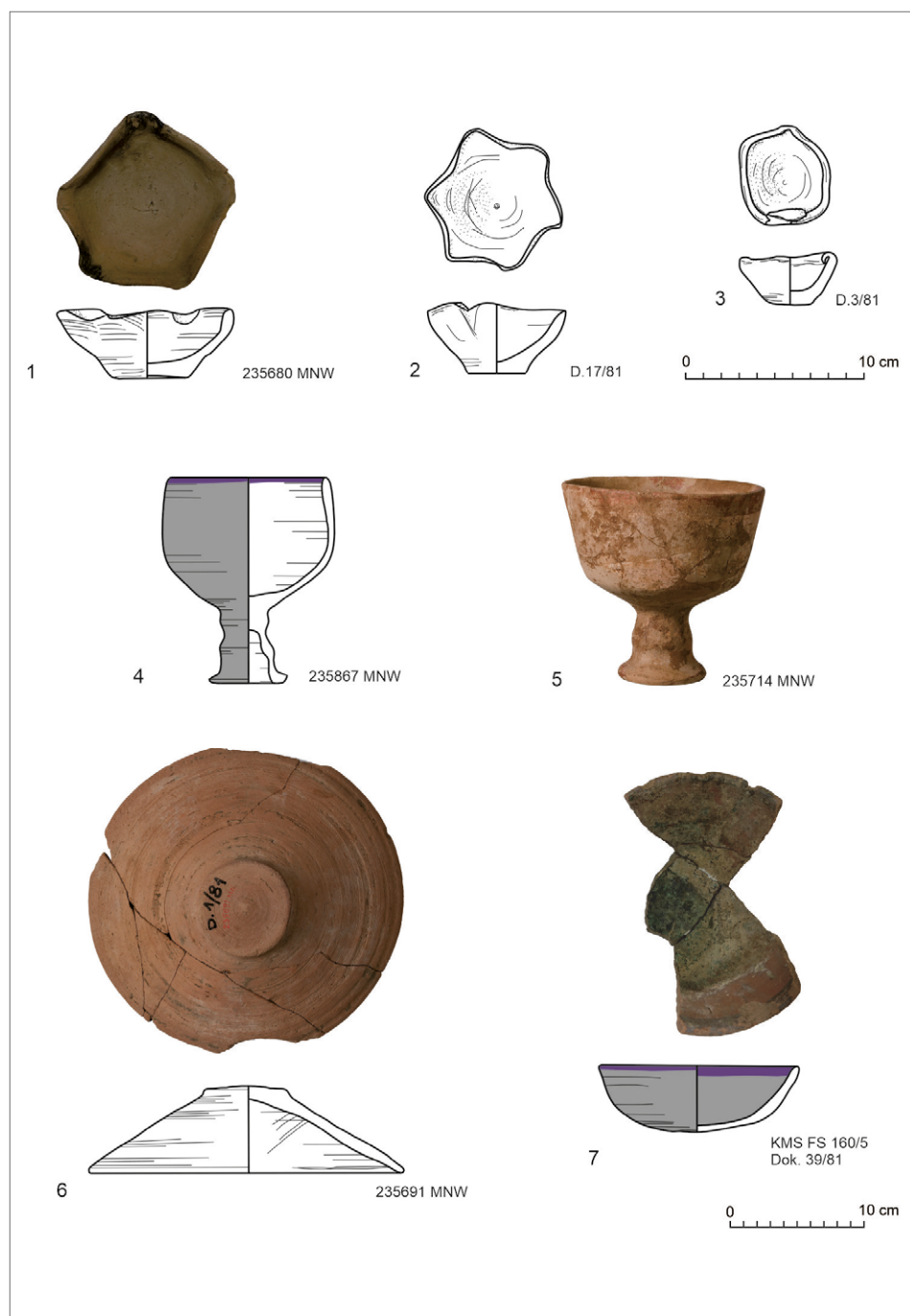


Fig. 5. Lamps and liturgical vessels: lamps (1–3), chalices (4–5), a lid (6), and a paten (7) (PCMA UW (2–3), and MNW (1, 4–7) | drawings K. de Lellis-Danys (1, 4, 6–7) and W. Godlewski (2–3), digitizing and photos K. de Lellis-Danys)



ence of a disintegrated metal object. The paten belongs to Adams Terminal Christian R26 — Polished Orange Ware (Adams 1986: 510). Analogous vessels came from the churches in Banganarti (Phillips 2003: Fig. 83), Faras (Michałowski 1964: 196), and Sonqi Tino (Angelozzi and Iob 2012: Fig. 2).

An almost complete vessel preliminarily described as a plate (Godlewski 1990: 53), 235691 MNW [see Fig. 5:6], has a rounded rim, a plain and conical body, and a solid, buttoned base (fabric F28). Its surfaces are plain and smoothed. The visible technological traces of wheel-turning and the rotation directions suggest that the item should be classified as a lid. Its findspot in the north pastophorium and the co-occurrence with liturgical implements suggests an analogous function.

Three oil lamps from the North Church were documented. However, two more were found in the circular structure in the north pastophorium (Godlewski 1990: 42). These objects belonged to the latest stage of lamp production in Old Dongola, identified as type L4, and were

characterized by distinctive squared or multi-spouted bodies (Pluskota 2010: Fig. 3). They have rounded rims, reversed trapezoidal bodies, and solid and flat bases. The rims are shaped with spouts that vary in number from one (D.3/71) [see Fig. 5:3], to five (235680 MNW) [see Fig. 5:1] and six (D.17/31) [see Fig. 5:2]. These lamps are wheel-made of alluvial fabrics. Technological features on the bases suggest that a string was used to cut them from the potter's wheel. The surfaces are smoothed and brown.

Lamps of this type appear to have been commonly used during the Late and Terminal Christian periods (AD 1150–1350) in Upper Nubia. Analogous oil lamps have been found in all churches excavated in Old Dongola and used in this period, like the Tower Church (Godlewski 1996: 117), the Northwest Church (Jakobielski and Medeksza 1990), and the Church of Archangel Raphael SWN.B.V (de Lellis-Danys forthcoming). Such lamps were also used in the Upper Church in Banganarti (Phillips 2003: Pl. 91:c; Cedro 2014: Pls 1–2, 3:a–j; 5:e–g).

## FUNCTIONAL AND CHRONOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT OF THE CERAMICS

The excavations in the North Church of Old Dongola brought to light several ceramic finds, including those from the ecclesiastic space, the sanctuary, and flanking it, two rooms constituting the pastophoria.

The north room, known as the *prothesis*, served as a storage area for liturgical paraphernalia and vestments, *prosphora* bread, and possibly as a place where the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts was

performed (Adams 2009: 386; Łajtar and Zielińska 2016: 436, 452). The south room, the *diakonikon*, was associated with baptismal rituals, storing vestments and paraphernalia, as such were found in several Nubian churches (Adams 2009: 387; Łajtar and Zielińska 2016: 436). Pastophoria in Nubian churches were also furnished with features like an altar and a niche near the northeast corner, inscrip-



tions related to the Liturgy, i.e. the Liturgy of Wine in the case of the *prothesis* (Łajtar and Zielińska 2016: 436–441), and an iconographic program of wall paintings, like the image of John the Baptist from the *diakonikon* in the Church of Archangel Raphael SWN.B.V in Old Dongola (Godlewski 2018a: 127–128).

The set of vessels was found in Unit 7, identified as the *prothesis*, near an altar. These finds were covered with a layer of melted mud brick from the collapse (Godlewski 1990: 44, 53). Two chalices (235714 MNW and 235867 MNW), a paten (KMS FS 160/5), a lid (235691 MNW), an amphora (235689 MNW), and an oil lamp (235680 MNW) were found inside a semi-circular feature, possibly a storage bin, abutting the altar; thus, these items were functionally associated with the space. In addition, Unit 7 also yielded a piece of brown textile decorated with white and blue stripes. According to Godlewski (1990: 54), it could have been used in the *prothesis* as a veil. In the Coptic Liturgy, different types of textiles are used to cover the empty paten and chalice when they are stored (Archbishop Basilios 1991b).

None of the archaeological deposits documented inside the North Church suggested a post-abandonment occupation.<sup>2</sup> Paved floors were covered with a thin sand layer, implying that the space was abandoned and left to decay before its roofing and walls collapsed (Godlewski 1990: 42). Therefore, the discussed implements are evaluated as an integral part

of the church's furnishing. As such, they offer valuable insights into the material culture and liturgical practice of the North Church. The significance of this discovery extends beyond Old Dongola and has the potential to impact the interpretation of finds from other Nubian churches.

The evidence of liturgical implements from Nubia is scarce and most of the documented objects are made of ceramics. The Dongolese churches yielded several such findings from different periods. Liturgical implements contemporary to the North Church were reported from the Pillar Church in Old Dongola, but with no further details (Godlewski 1996: 119).

The most recognizable liturgical implements are chalices used in the Divine Liturgy and the Liturgy of Wine. The Upper Church in Banganarti yielded a set consisting of numerous chalices and patens located in the north pastophorium. Some of them were stored in the niche in the altar, indicating their functional association with the ecclesiastic space (Żurawski 2003: 97; Phillips 2003: 414, Pls 80–81). Like the discussed examples from the North Church, they represented Terminal Christian Ware R26. A ceramic chalice and a paten of analogous ware came from the space under the main altar in the Faras cathedral (Michałowski 1964: 196), while a chalice made of Ware W14 was found in the south pastophorium in the Faras South Church (Mileham 1910: 35, Pl. 19:a). The cathedral in Faras also

2 The post-abandonment reuse of sacral spaces is well documented in Old Dongola. The Church of Archangel Raphael in the Citadel yielded compacted deposits of organic matter with animal dung (*zibala*), mixed with ash and pottery inside the building. Their stratigraphic sequence spans from the 15th to the 17th centuries AD (Godlewski 2015b: 53–55, Fig. 5-2; de Lellis-Danys forthcoming).

yielded an outstanding find of a marvered glass chalice, possibly of Egyptian or Syrian origin and dated to the 13th century AD (Kucharczyk 2016: 79–80).

A ceramic chalice of an earlier date than the North Church finds was discovered in a pit within the sacristy of the Duweishat East Church. This object, adorned with a continuous guilloché band (Edwards 2016: 371, Fig. 11), belonged to the Post-Classic Christian Polished Orange R21 from AD 1000–1200 (Adams 1986: 498).

Other examples of ceramic chalices and patens came from the northeast corner of the staircase in the Great Church in the monastery of Ghazali (Shinnie and Chittick 1961: Fig. 21:2, 5). Their findspot does not indicate direct association with liturgical ceremonies, but they could have been relocated from the sacral space and stored in the staircase.

The functional assessment of liturgical vessels like chalices and patens is undoubtedly associated with the sacral space, especially the *prothesis*. They were stored with other paraphernalia and used for ceremonies like the Liturgy of Wine. This ritual was probably performed within the *prothesis*, as inscriptions and wall paintings found in other Dongolese churches indicate. The iconographic program in the Nubian *prothesis* includes a representation of Jesus Christ, depicted on a wall above an altar. He holds a chalice in one hand, as shown in the examples from the Faras cathedral dated to the 10th century AD [Fig. 6 top right, left] (Łajtar and Zielińska 2016: 436–439, 441–444). The bust of Jesus Christ holding a chalice is depicted just above the partly preserved altar of the space used as the north

pastophorium of the Northwest Annex to the Monastery on Kom H in Old Dongola [Fig. 6 center right] (Martens-Czarnecka 2011: 166, Fig. 79; Łajtar and Zielińska 2016: 442–444). This image is contemporary to the North Church, while none of the Terminal Christian period churches in Old Dongola provided evidence of well-preserved paintings. Thus, the image from the Northwest Annex may help reconstruct the functional aspects of the *prothesis* in the North Church.

Wine holds special significance in the Christian Liturgy. The functional assessment of the finds from the North Church indicates that besides chalices also other vessels were associated with liturgical activities. An amphora (235689 MNW) was also discovered in Unit 7. As suggested by the UV light analysis, it may have held wine, which was likely stored in the *prothesis*, ready to be used. Amphorae and their mud sealings were found in large numbers in the north pastophorium of the Upper Church in Banganarti (Łajtar and Zielińska 2016: 436). Such containers were also documented in the Pillar Church in Old Dongola, beside the altar (Godlewski 2018b: 163).

The functional association of wine (and amphorae) with liturgical practices performed in the *prothesis* room is proven through dedicated prayers inscribed on the walls (Łajtar and Zielińska 2016: 446–449). The wall paintings also underscore the importance of wine and link it to the material culture, as in the case of the depiction from the north wall of the *prothesis* in the Church of Archangel Raphael SWN.BV in Old Dongola. The image depicts presbyter Theophorou offering and opening two wine amphorae before the Virgin and

Child (Zielińska 2015). Therefore, the amphora from the North Church was most likely functionally associated with the north pastophorium.

Another essential liturgical utensil is the paten (KMS FS 160/5), which holds *prosphora* bread during the Divine Liturgy. The identifications of bowls as patens in Nubia are based on their contextual association with ecclesiastic spaces (Michałowski 1964: 196; Phillips 2003: Pl. 83). The consecrated bread was also essential in other rituals, like the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts,<sup>3</sup> during which wine was blessed by dipping the bread, as suggested by a rite from the Syrian Liturgy (Łajtar and Zielińska 2016: 450). Loaves for such ceremonies were usually kept in a special basket (Archbishop Basilios 1991a). Although there is no evidence of such an object among the finds from the North Church, a wall painting from the Faras cathedral (7th century AD) [Fig. 6 bottom right] depicts a basket filled with *prosphora* placed on a decorative textile (Sulikowska and Mierzejewska 2014: 184–185), suggesting the presence of such items in Nubian churches.

The paten used to offer the liturgical bread is usually covered with a veil during storage. The textile found in the north pastophorium might have served this purpose. On the other hand, the paten also could have been covered with the object identified as a lid (235691 MNW).

As mentioned earlier, the paten also brought to light a piece of indirect evidence on liturgical paraphernalia from

the North Church. The brown, burn-like traces and green residues of a disintegrated metal object may suggest the presence of a censer. It is a liturgical implement of a symbolic significance related to the Virgin Mary (Archbishop Basilios 1991b). The canon of prayers in Eastern Liturgies includes the offering of incense, although it is not explicitly mentioned in the Nubian version (Łajtar and Zielińska 2016: 446).

Metal incense burners are known from the Nubian churches and monasteries. They were discovered, for instance, near the altar of the Fourth Cathedral (RC.II) in Old Dongola (Godlewski 2006: 282; Wyzgoł 2017), in the sanctuary of a church in Abdallah-n Irqi (van Moorsel, Jacquet, and Schneider 1975: 20–22), and in the aisle of the monastery church in Akasha (Edwards 2019: 63, Fig. 8a). Bioarchaeological attestations of the use of incense came from Qasr Ibrim (Evershed et al. 1997), and an “amber” residue was documented in Akasha (Edwards 2019: 63). Therefore, even though Nubian prayers did not explicitly mention frankincense, the presence of incense and objects associated with its use was indeed a part of Nubian liturgical practices, possibly also performed in the North Church.

A jar (235681 MNW) representing vessels of daily use had a particularly intriguing findspot in the rubble deposits beneath the staircase. As a result, Godlewski (1990: 51) suggested its association with the construction phase and the original filling of the space. The abrasion traces documented in its lower part may

3 The Liturgy of Presanctified Gifts in the Nubian Church is attested by a prayer on the east wall of the north pastophorium in the Church of Archangel Raphael SWN.B.V in Old Dongola, and witnesses probably the oldest liturgical celebration of this type in the Kingdom of Makuria (late 9th–10th century AD) (Łajtar 2015: 114–115).

imply, however, that the vessel was initially embedded in a floor. Examples of such furnishings come from other Dongolese churches. For instance, a jar and a *qadus* were sunk into the floor of the south pastophorium in the Pillar Church adjacent to the west wall of the Citadel (Godlewski 2018b: 165, Fig. 14.22). In addition, vessels like the jar from the North Church could be used during consecration of the building. A passage from the Life of Christodoulos, Patriarch of

Alexandria (AD 1046–1077), mentions consecrating a new church founded by a Nubian king, who took an active part in the service by holding a vessel filled with water (Vantini 1975: 104).

The presence of other utility wares in the North Church was primarily interpreted as possible evidence of the church's reuse for economic activities after its abandonment (Godlewski 1990: 44). However, the archaeological documentation contradicts this inter-



Fig. 6. Examples of Nubian wall paintings associated with liturgical implements. Left: Christ holding the Eucharistic chalice from the *prothesis* in the Faras cathedral. Top right: a detail of the chalice (PCMA UW | photo M. Niepokólczycki). Center right: Christ consecrating wine from the monastery on Kom H in Old Dongola (PCMA UW | Martens-Czarnecka 2011: Fig. 79). Bottom right: vessel with *prosphora* from the synthronon in the Faras cathedral (MNW, public domain)

pretation, as the stratigraphic sequence consists of a thin layer of sand covering the floor and rubble above it (Godlewski 1990: 42). A single attestation of post-abandonment occupation was the top-most brownish-red deposit in the central part, covering the rubble from collapsed roofing and walls (Godlewski 1990: 38). The discussed utility wares came from the same deposit as other ceramics and represented a coherent chronological horizon, although their specific functions within the church's space remain uncertain.

Ceramic lamps were employed in Nubian churches for illuminating interiors and for performing religious practices such as the veneration of representations of holy figures. The specimens found in the North Church are no exceptions in this respect. They came from the sacral spaces of the sanctuary (D.17/81) and both pastophoria (235680 MNW, D.3/81), therefore, they could be related to illuminating the space, particularly during the reading of prayers usually written on the church's walls (Łajtar 2015).

In Nubian churches, whose windows were adorned with ceramic grills, lamps of this kind would have been the primary sources of light. The documented examples from the North Church represent portable objects. However, the evidence of holes drilled in the walls of lamps from Banganarti indicates that some could have been used as suspendible light sources (Cedro 2014: 328). Examples from the Byzantine Empire show that illumination methods used in the sacral spaces were diverse and included standing and hanging lamps as well as *polycandela* made of metal and glass (Bénazeth 2008: 216–217). Such items were possibly also used

in the interiors of Nubian churches, as attested by a metal suspended lamp from Nag el-Sheima (Bietak and Schwarz 1987: Fig. 34).

Oil lamps also held symbolic significance in veneration practices related to the representations of holy figures on the walls, as suggested by the finds from the Upper Church in Banganarti (Cedro 2014: 327, 330, Fig. 2). A similar observation was made by Godlewski (1996: 117) while excavating the Tower Church, where he found ceramic lamps “left under a painting on the eastern wall in the southern aisle”. In addition, oil lamps also played an important role in popular practices associated with the veneration of the deceased, as they were placed in niches in grave superstructures, for instance in Faras (Kołodziejczyk 1982: 188–189).

Distribution of the oil lamps in the North Church was limited to the ecclesiastic space. The lack of attestations of such finds from other parts may be due to clearing out the space upon abandonment, but the presence of liturgical implements left behind testifies to the contrary. On the other hand, the large number of oil lamps from the Upper Church in Banganarti resulted from its unique status as a pilgrimage center. Therefore, it is possible that the North Church was not frequently visited, and the lamps were used for illumination of the sacred spaces during celebrations.

The functional association of tableware with the ecclesiastic space is intriguing. Since according to the archaeologist who excavated the church it was probably associated with the church's construction (Godlewski 1990: 42), it will be evaluated as a chronological marker, as no samples



for radiocarbon dating were collected. Reexamining the pottery chronology seems crucial for understanding the terminal phase of one of the latest Dongolese churches.

A comparison with the recent revisions of the pottery from Old Dongola supported by radiocarbon dates and stratigraphic sequences (Dzierzbicka and Danys 2021; de Lellis-Danys in preparation) leads to a reevaluation of the North Church chronology. It aligns with Godlewski's interpretation, yet it relies on data generated using state-of-the-art dating methods.

Most of the plates and vases represent wares typical of 13th-century AD deposits in Old Dongola (Dzierzbicka and Danys 2021: Fig. 6). None of the tableware represents cylindrical cups of Terminal Christian Ware H<sub>14</sub>, a chronological marker for the 1st half of the 14th century AD (Dzierzbicka and Danys 2021: 453–454). Therefore, the North Church seems to

have been founded in the 13th century AD, not later, although Godlewski's suggestion of an earlier date remains an open question. A single indication of the duration of the church's use is a chalice representing the abovementioned Ware H<sub>14</sub>, and it might indicate the end of the 13th / early 14th century AD or the 1st half of the 14th century AD (Dzierzbicka and Danys 2021: 453–454, Fig. 6) as the latest period of its occupation. None of the pottery finds align with wares characteristic of deposits from the mid- or the second half of the 14th century AD in Old Dongola, i.e. wheel- and handmade Terminal Christian Wares H<sub>14</sub> and W<sub>31</sub> (de Lellis-Danys in preparation). It is worth noting that an analogous set of tableware came from the latest phase in the Church of the Granite Columns, where it was associated with structural changes and delimitation of the ecclesiastic space (Jakobielski and Ostrasz 1967–1968: 137–139, Fig. 5; Godlewski 2013: 57).

## DISCUSSION

The liturgical implements found in the North Church in Old Dongola are among few examples preserved from the capital of the kingdom of Makuria. These rare objects provide valuable insights into medieval Nubia's religious practices. Contextualized objects like the liturgical implements from the North Church may significantly contribute to the ongoing research on Nubian Liturgy conducted by scholars like Agata Deptuła and Adam Lajtar.

The study of these findings raises several questions. Firstly, why were the liturgical vessels made of ceramics, and was

there another set of implements made of typical material, i.e. metal? Secondly, why were the ceramic liturgical implements used in the North Church, and why were they left behind upon abandonment?

The liturgical implements found in the North Church are made solely of ceramics, readily available and relatively inexpensive, unlike the traditionally used precious metals. The use of clay for liturgical chalices is attested in the Byzantine Empire. They come from ecclesiastic and funerary contexts dated to the 13th and 14th centuries AD (Iverson 2000). As they bear inscriptions associated with the Di-

vine Liturgy and the Liturgy of Bread, their use as sacral objects is beyond doubt (Iverson 2001: 220).

The ceramic vessels, including the chalices from the North Church, feature a *nodus* placed in the middle of the high-ringed base, mimicking their metal and glazed counterparts. Eric A. Iverson hypothesized that ceramic liturgical chalices reflected “the poverty of provincial churches or the humility of their donors” (Iverson 2000: 164). However, the consistent use of ceramic paraphernalia suggests a common practice in the Byzantine Empire and Nubia. The Byzantine chalices were commissioned and donated by members of society. They did not reflect their low economic status but a conscious choice to present themselves as pious and humble Christians. Possibly the Dongolese society shared the same idea. The second issue associated with the poverty of provincial churches, brought up by Iverson (2000: 164), does not apply to the North Church as it was founded in the capital of the kingdom of Makuria, not a provincial town.

The attestations of church paraphernalia from Byzantine Egypt (6th–7th century AD), representing a period much earlier than the founding of the North Church, indicate that even churches from small urban centers were equipped with gold and silver liturgical implements (Wipszycka 2004: 136–138). Hoards of church inventories discovered in Syria and dated to the same period are composed of objects made of precious metals, bearing inscriptions commemorating their donors, an example being the Attrouthi treasure (Evans, Holcomb, and Hallman 2001: 38).

It is worth noting that metal paraphernalia are attested in Nubia for the earlier period, namely the 7th century AD, and are thus contemporary to the abovementioned findings from the Byzantine Empire. For instance, the bronze censer from Old Dongola, which received the same chronological and iconographic attribution as the Attrouthi treasure (Wyźgoł 2017: 779), proves that the Nubian churches had liturgical implements of the same value as in the Byzantine Empire. Textual sources attest to the existence in Nubia of the office of *kimeliarches*, keeper of church treasures, for instance, in the Great Church of Jesus in Dongola (Łajtar and Ochala 2018). Artur Obluski has recently proposed an identification of this church with a newly discovered church located in the center of the Old Dongola Citadel. Therefore, in Nubia, like in other parts of the Christian world, church paraphernalia included objects of high value.

Using ceramic vessels in the most sacred ecclesiastic ceremonies may raise doubts of a theological nature. However, while materials other than gold and silver are forbidden in Western Christianity, Eastern Christianity has no such regulations. Thus, chalices and patens made of glass, clay and wood are accepted as long as their contents cannot penetrate them (Braun 1932: 17–18). The abovementioned ceramic chalices from the Byzantine Empire conform to this rule.

The use of “less precious” liturgical implements in the North Church might also be associated with the church’s use and location. It was founded on the city’s outskirts within the cemetery of the local population and thus may not have been



visited on a regular basis. An example of the church in Banganarti, a pilgrimage center, attests numerous visitors' graffiti and common use of lamps in the veneration of holy images. Such evidence is missing from the North Church. Furthermore, documents from Byzantine Egypt suggest that churches on pilgrimage routes often housed rich collections of items donated by the visitors and displayed within their interiors (Wipszycka 2004: 132–133).

The North Church was mainly in use in the 13th century AD, and its abandonment occurred in the early 14th century AD, a period marked by significant changes in the Dongolese and Makurian populations, including political, religious, and social transformations. The consecutive raids of the Mamluk army into the heart of Makuria led to the siege of Old Dongola and establishing an Islamic ruler (Welsby 2002: 242–251). The milestone of this historical change was the conversion of the so-called Trone Hall into the first mosque in AD 1317, as witnessed by its foundation stela (Godlewski 2013: 42–47, 137; 2015a: 22–23). Furthermore, the account of el-Nuwayrī concerning the Mamluk military campaign of AD 1276 mentioned an inventory of the church of Sūs (Jesus), which was taken to Cairo and included “crosses, gold and other objects for the value totalling 4640 1/4 dinars, and silver vases to the value of 8660 dinars” (Vantini 1975: 475). The abandonment of the North Church did not leave any traces of intentional damages observable in the archaeological record. It is possible to hypothesize that the building fell out of use in the early 14th century AD, and

the ceramic liturgical implements were left behind.

If indeed the church was functionally associated with the surrounding cemetery, it was not visited often and over time fell into oblivion. Godlewski suggested that the contemporary Tower Church (located in the heart of the city) served for religious practice after abandonment, based on the discovery of ceramic lamps found under a “representation [that] was worshipped even after the church itself had been abandoned” (Godlewski 1996: 117). No evidence from the North Church might sanction a similar hypothesis.

It is also intriguing if any liturgical implements made of metal, except for the residues interpreted as remains of a censer, were used in the North Church. If so, they could have been concealed by the local clergy due to military operations and unstable political situation. Such a hypothesis was drawn for the several hoards of precious liturgical vessels of the first half of the 7th century AD found in Syria. Their discoveries outside churches were interpreted as a consequence of Sasanian or Arab conquests (Furlas 2021: 1133).

The research conducted by the ERC Starting Grant UMMA under the direction of Artur Obłuski from the Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology, University of Warsaw, plays a vital role in shedding light on this historical transformation (Obłuski and Dzierzbicka 2021; 2022). The liturgical paraphernalia from the North Church provide valuable contributions to a better understanding of the history of Old Dongola, the decline of Christianity, and the rise of Islam in the region.

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