

Stefan Jakobielski

Old Dongola 1989-1990

Polish Archaeology in the Mediterranean 2, 65-73

1991

Artykuł został opracowany do udostępnienia w internecie przez Muzeum Historii Polski w ramach prac podejmowanych na rzecz zapewnienia otwartego, powszechnego i trwałego dostępu do polskiego dorobku naukowego i kulturalnego. Artykuł jest umieszczony w kolekcji cyfrowej bazhum.muzhp.pl, gromadzącej zawartość polskich czasopism humanistycznych i społecznych.

Tekst jest udostępniony do wykorzystania w ramach dozwolonego użytku.

OLD DONGOLA 1989-1990

Stefan Jakobielski

In January and February of two consecutive years, 1989 and 1990, a team from the PCMA conducted respectively the 23rd and 24th campaign of excavations.¹

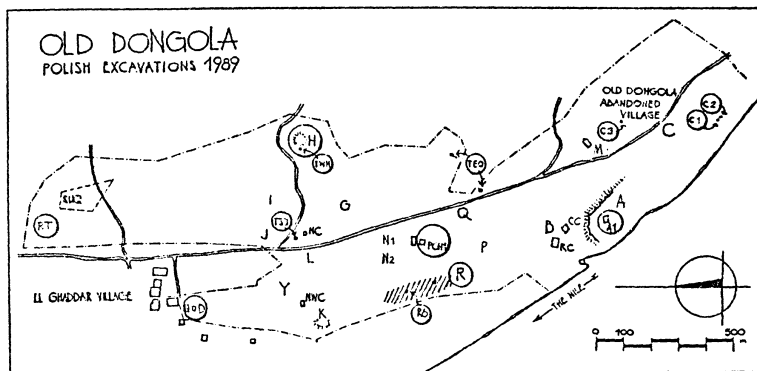


Fig. 1. Plan showing sites investigated in 1989-90.

The work was carried out on chosen sites within the limits of our concession area (Fig. 1) and comprised:

– continuation of excavations in the urban complex on Kom P, i.e., house PCH.1, conducted by Prof. W. Godlewski.²

¹ The two expeditions headed by Dr. Stefan Jakobielski comprised: Prof. Włodzimierz Godlewski 1989, 1990; Dr. Bogdan Żurawski 1989, 1990; architect Mr. Jarosław Dobrowolski 1989, 1990; Dr. Małgorzata Martens-Czarnecka 1990; Dr. Krzysztof Misiewicz 1989; Mrs. Ida Ryl-Preibisz 1990; conservator Mrs. Ewa Parandowska 1990; anthropologist Dr. Maria Kaczmarek 1989.

² See his reports: Old Dongola 1988-1989. House PCH.1, PAMI (1990), pp. 14-16 and Old Dongola, House PCH.1, *Nubian Letters* 13 (Aug. 1989), pp. 1-13.

- excavations of city fortifications in the riverside part of Kom B, commenced in 1990 by W. Godlewski, who described the results in a separate report (below, p. 74);
- continuation of excavations of the churches DC/EDC and the monastic complex DM on Kom D, supervised by the author of this report. The site has been the object of explorations since 1986; the 1990 season was devoted to restoration and preservation activities;
- recording architectural remains on Kom A and C in 1989 was the responsibility of Mr. J. Dobrowolski;
- survey of the cemetery grounds in the eastern part of the concession (1989), combined with excavations of chosen tombs, conducted by Dr. B. Żurawski;
- anthropological material from these graves, as well as those from Kom D was examined on the spot by Dr. M. Kaczmarek;
- archaeological and architectural survey of Kom H, chosen in 1989 as a site for future excavations; Mrs. E. Parandowska was charged with some emergency conservation work there in 1990.
- geophysical survey in the northern part of Kom R, cemeteries TEQ and RT and on Kom H (continuation of work from the 1988 season, carried out by Dr. K. Misiewicz);
- improving the aerial photography method using kites and its practical implementation in recording the sites in Old Dongola effected by Dr. B. Żurawski.

KOM B

Salvage excavations undertaken in 1988 on a low hill to the north of the urban agglomeration of Old Dongola, on the southern outskirts of the present village of el-Ghaddar, revealed the remains of

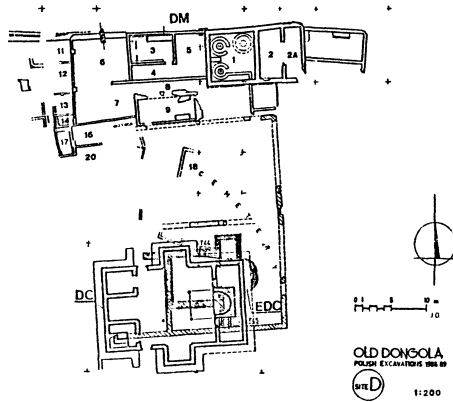


Fig. 2. Churches on Kom D and the remains of monastic complex DM.

two superimposed churches designated as DC and EDC³ and a monastic complex DM (Fig. 2). Archaeological explorations of both sites were terminated in 1989 and the 1990 season was devoted to preservation and restoration activities. The work, supervised by Mr. J. Dobrowolski, included reinforcing sections of preserved paving of bricks, terracotta tiles and stone slabs, marking the position of missing granite column bases and church walls, partial reconstruction of these.

The area of the monastic complex suffered extensive damage, both through rebuilding and intentional levelling as well as through flooding. Ever since the Post-Classical period (12th century) this particular spot served as the source of mud and *sebbakh*. The devastation is so extensive that even deciphering the complete plan of the monastic complex turned out to be impossible. Some chro-

³ The results of these works were published preliminarily by J. Dobrowolski, Church on Kom D in Old Dongola, *Nubian Letters* 9 (1987), pp. 1-5, id., On the first church on Site D in Old Dongola, *Nubian Letters* 11 (1988), pp.1-6, id., Kościół na Komie D w Starej Dongoli, *Kwartalnik Architektury i Urbanistyki* 3/1988, pp. 217-231.

nological observations were made and four habitation phases of the complex distinguished (Fig. 2).

The earliest phase (7th century?) is represented by a massive mud-brick wall, one meter thick and running E-W, which confined the inhabited area of the settlement on the north. This wall was later used as a foundation for the outer northern wall of the Monastery. From the next phase (7th-8th century) only a few structures have remained, including a wall constituting the southern limit of the area of the later rooms 4 and 5, the southwest corner of the room west of locus 11, fragment of walls to the west and south of rooms 13 and 14, as well as traces of Building 18.

Evidence of a monastery having been erected here comes from the third phase, i.e., the beginning of the Classical Christian Period, the 8th-9th centuries. There is the refectory room (1) preserved only on the level of the stone slab paving; it is provided with some typical round benches used during meals. Adjoining the refectory on the east there was an unit composed of a vestibule(?) – 2, 2a, presumably subdivided into two parts by a wide arcade doorway. Preceding the entrance to the refectory building was a kind of small courtyard, possibly of earlier date. West of the refectory building, which was freestanding at the time, there were two cells (rooms 3 and 9) with their own yards (loci 4-5 and 8). The construction technique here is similar to the refectory walls, i.e., mud brick on a rough stone foundation. More to the west there was another yard (loci 6-7), which was presumably domestic in function. Although most of its original surface has disappeared in consequence of later levelling works, part of its equipment has survived in the form of a covered drain built of red brick and stones, which runs across the northern wall. Roughly the same period saw further building activity – the erection of rooms 11, 12 and 13 as well as extensive rebuilding of yard 6-1-7 and rooms 14, 16 and 17, but there is no indication as to the function of this part of the complex.

By the end of the Classical Christian Period the monastery seems to have been destroyed by fire. Its eastern part with the refec-

tory appears to have been used for some time following this disaster, but by the 12th century the area seems definitely abandoned. There can be no doubt that the DC Church, which most probably served previously as a monastic church, continued in use for a time. The grounds north and east of the church were used as a common cemetery. Some trial pits made here in 1989 dated the levelling of the cemetery, as of the entire area of Kom D, to the Late Christian Period, prior to the 14th century. Later still the DC Church was dismantled and building material removed to other sites.

KOMS A AND C

In 1989 some preliminary studies were made on Kom A, the urban centre of Old Dongola encircled by massive city walls. Building A.1, which is the only building on the Kom preserved above present ground level, appears to be a residential structure dating to the Post-Christian Period. Excavations were restricted to surface clearing and some trial pits dug in spots significant for distinguishing subsequent phases in the construction of the edifice, which was apparently erected in place of an earlier Christian structure (Fig. 3).

The building technique of the oldest part of this edifice corresponds to solutions applied in Dongola in the Christian period in such buildings as the Royal Audience Hall converted into a mosque and churches of Classic Christian date. The continuity of build-

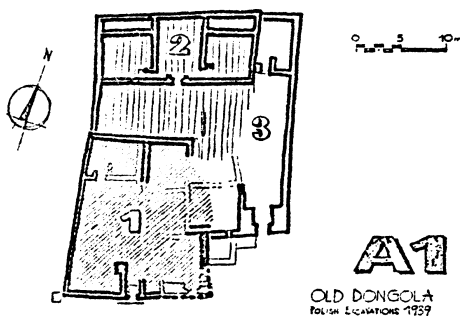


Fig. 3. Sketch plan of House A.1, showing particular phases of construction.

ing traditions would suggest that the structure in question originates from the earliest period of Islamic rule in Dongola.

Dobrowolski, who examined building A.1, concentrated his attention on the characteristic shape of the corner entrance tower-gate. Analogous, although much later, are three gates in houses located in the area of the abandoned village (Kom C) further to the south, also measured in the course of the 1989 season. The gate belonging to House C.3 (18th century?) possessed a kind of machicolation – a round opening in the roof above the wide passage permitting an attack from above on the enemy attempting to force the entrance.

In the western part of the abandoned village a large storied house C.1 (23 x 25m) was examined and measured. It belonged to a known and meritorious Dongolan family, the Suar ad-Dahab. Investigation of the building technique, spatial layout and interior equipment partly preserved in House C.1 brought new and interesting material for the study of the development of Post-Christian residential architecture in Nubia.

SURVEY OF THE CEMETERY AREAS

The survey covered three cemeteries: TEQ east of the northernmost part of Dongola town, TWH west of Kom H and TSJ lying close to the North Church (NC). The main goal was to fill out the chronological sequence of grave types known from Dongola, suggested by the earlier examinations of burial sites TEE, TNH TDC and RT (Fig. 1).

Some of the graves excavated in the 1989 season deserve special attention. TEQ.1.7 is a more than 2 m deep slot-like trench roofed over with mud brick, containing a body shrouded in linen. Remnants of a rectangular mud-brick superstructure (mastaba) were still distinguishable on the surface. The dating of the grave to the Early Christian Period was confirmed by C¹⁴ dating (second half of the 7th century).

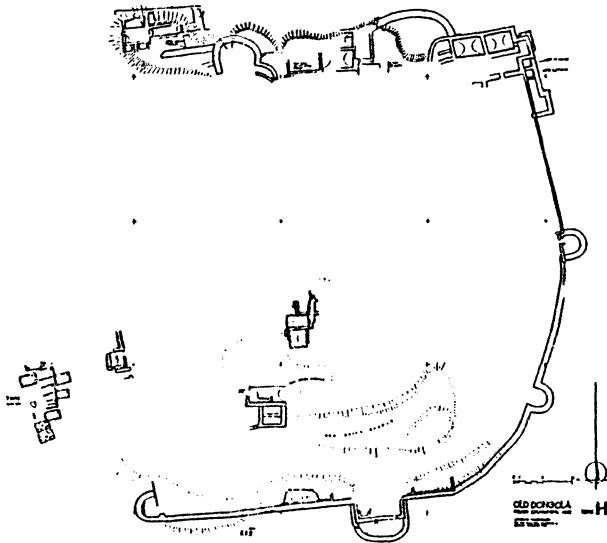


Fig. 4. Kom H and Cemetery TWH. Preliminary inventory of extant structures.

Classic Christian tombs (burial chamber built of mud brick and barrel-vaulted, accessible by a small entrance from the shaft on its western side) are best represented by Tombs TSJ-1, -2⁴ and TEQ.1.3. The latter served as a grave for ten individuals (men, women and children), buried most probably at one time.

A sand dune accumulated on the western slope of Kom H has protected the tomb superstructures belonging to the THW cemetery. Twelve tombs were found here. They were made up of both fired and dried mud brick, coated with hard lime-and-gravel plaster. Originally, all twelve had superstructures in the form of mastabas shaped as crosses. All had lamp-boxes on the western side (Fig. 4). Curiously enough, bodies were buried in simple rectangular

⁴ The C¹⁴ sample gave a date of AD 860±40 years.

trenches covered with sand, not in burial chambers of any kind. The excavated section of this cemetery can be dated to the first half of the 10th century.⁵

KOM H

In order to prepare the site for further methodical excavations, in 1989 we conducted a survey of Kom H located in the eastern part of the concession area. This large kom measuring some 100 m in diameter and encircled by cemeteries appears to form an isolated settlement, presumably a monastic complex fortified with a mud-brick enclosure wall, the whole built not later than the Classical Christian Period (Fig. 4). A detailed inventory of remains visible on the surface suggests that some of the buildings are preserved up to the vaults of the upper storeys, while red brick structures seem to have been dismantled down to the foundations. Murals and numerous graffiti of the Late Christian Period were observed on the walls of Unit S. Mrs. E. Parandowska, chief conservator of the National Museum in Warsaw, carried out emergency conservation work on this material in order to stop further decay of the painted and inscribed plaster.⁶

GEOPHYSICAL SURVEY

Dr. K. Misiewicz from the Institute of History of Material Culture of the Polish Academy of Science continued in 1989 a geophysical survey of the area of our concession commenced in 1988. The main objective was to locate kilns on sites R and S alongside the Nile, presently covered by a sand-dune strip. A total of about 27,000 square meters (that is, about 30,000 measuring points) was survey-

⁵ A C¹⁴ sample from Tomb TWH.4 gave a date of AD 930±40 years.

⁶ The work and the results will be discussed in a separate report following the next campaign, in which we plan to subject Building S to methodical archaeological investigation.

ed using the magnetic method. Magnetic anomalies were measured with two proton magnetometers PMP-5 of high sensitivity with a regular 1 m grid. Extant anomalies of the magnetic field suggest the presence of various objects underground, objects which when made of certain materials would disturb the natural magnetic value of the soil.

It has been observed that the remanent effect resulting from burning (red-brick, slag, ashes) gives a very strong magnetic reading between 40 and 150 gamma. This phenomenon permitted nine clusters of kilns to be located very precisely regardless of their being 0.5 to 1.8 m below the surface. These results were confirmed archaeologically on site R.6. Here a trial pit 2 x 6 m was dug in a dune where no traces of any kind of human activity were to be observed on the surface. Upon removing 1.6 m of overlying dune, the tops of the walls of two kilns of red-brick appeared, their inner surface covered heavily with slag. Since they are of a different construction than the already known Dongolan kilns nearby, they appear to have had a different function. The site can be dated to the later Classic Christian period (10th-11th century).

On the site of cemetery TEQ the magnetic method was instrumental in establishing individual concentrations of tombs and the extent of the burial ground. The results were extremely helpful in this case for the surface here has suffered extensive erosion and no tomb superstructures are to be seen.

Some clearing was done on the site of the Rock Tombs (RT) in the north end of the concession area in order to verify the observations made on the basis of a geophysical survey conducted in 1988. It is certain at present that no other rock tombs existed here beside two imposing monuments RT.1 and 2, excavated in 1971 and 1981 respectively and dated back to the very beginning of the Christian Period in Dongola.⁷

⁷ S. Jakobielski, Polish excavations at Old Dongola 1978/79-1982 [in:] M. Krause (ed.), *Nubische Studien*, Mainz 1986, p. 308ff.