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Old Dongola: Monastery 1995

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OLD DONGOLA

MONASTERY 1995

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The 28th field season of Polish excavations at Old Dongola lasted from January 4 to February 22, 1995.¹ The work programme included excavations on the following sites:

Kom H. A monastic compound located on the site of Christian cemeteries (directed by Dr. Stefan Jakobielski). Research on the mortuary complex including cemetery TNWH (where 28 tombs were recorded) was conducted by Dr. Bogdan Żurawski.²

Kom A. Excavations of the fortifications of Old Dongola and two church buildings: Pillared Church (PC) situated outside the city walls, on the slope facing the Nile and the Tower Church (TC) built in the late Period on top of destroyed fortifications (supervised by Prof. Włodzimierz Godlewski).³

Kom E. East of the village of el-Gaddar, on the site of the Mosaic Church (EEC), Dr. Bogdan Żurawski conducted additional work on the uncovering and protecting of the mosaic floor, as well as the examination of the foundations in the western part of the Church.

¹ The Mission comprised: Dr. Stefan Jakobielski (director); Prof. Włodzimierz Godlewski; Dr. Małgorzata Martens-Czarnecka, Dr. Bogdan Żurawski; Mr. Krzysztof Pluskota, Mrs. Ida Ryl-Preibisz, archaeologists; Mr. Wojciech Chmiel, restorer; Eng. Radosław Kostro, architect; Mr. Sławomir Rzepka, documentalist (student of archaeology). The Sudan National Corporation of Antiquities and Museums was represented by Syd. Omran Ali, inspector of antiquities. The excavations were financed by the Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology of Warsaw University with small financial contributions from the Research Center for Mediterranean Archaeology of the Polish Academy of Sciences and the National Museum in Warsaw.

² Cf. *infra*, separate report, pp. 121ff.

³ Cf. *infra*, separate report, pp. 114ff.

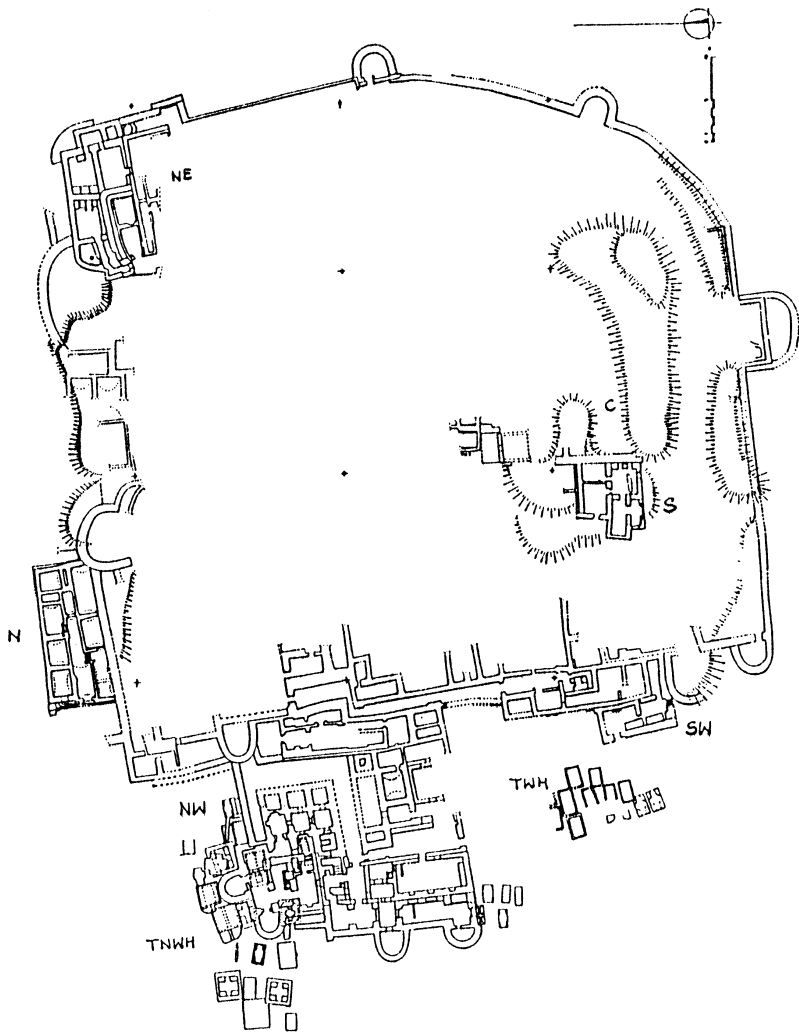


Fig. 1. The Monastic compound on Kom H at Old Dongola NE = Northeastern Service Area, N = North Building (hospice?), NW = Northwestern Section (Commemorative and Residential Complex), SW = Southwestern Building; S = Hermitage of single monk, C = Church, TNWH = Northwestern Cemetery; TWH = Western Cemetery

KOM H, SITE NW

The northwestern section of the monastic complex, excavated since 1991/92,⁴ reveals a complicated plan, which is the result of both consecutive rebuilding and westward expansion of the chief monastery buildings beyond the enclosure wall with semicircular towers (Fig. 1).

The original layout of the buildings is evidently earlier than the 10th century and can partly be reconstructed on the grounds of existing remains of walls in the upper strata of the fill. Gradual expansion of building activity to the west did not take place before the 11th century. In the 12th century, the development of the mortuary and commemorative complex gave the western extension of the Monastery its final shape.

Work in the 1995 season was focused mostly on distinguishing and dating the individual parts of the NW complex in order to prepare the ground for further methodical exploration of the site. Excavations and trial trenches were dug here, and the tops of walls, which protruded on the surface, were cleared on a large area in the highest part of the Kom.

Two individual buildings, code-named NW-N, NW-S, were singled out in the section of the Monastery's NW complex excavated this season (Figs 2,3). Both are earlier than the 12th century, and were erected outside the former western facade of the alleged main monastery building (NW-E) located in this part of the compound.

The Northern Building (NW-N) is of nearly square plan (9 x 0.3 m), most probably storeyed, and comprises nine rooms. A U-shaped corridor enclosed the main block of rooms. The southern section of the corridor, which is connected with the western gate, separated

⁴ Cf. S. Jakobielski, *PAM IV 1992* (1993), 102-106; *PAM V 1993* (1994), 115-126; *PAM VI 1994* (1995), pp. 84-92; id., Monastery of the Holy Trinity at Old Dongola - a short archaeological report [in:] *The Spirituality of Ancient Monasticism. Acts of the International Colloquium*, Kraków-Tyniec 1995, pp. 36-45.

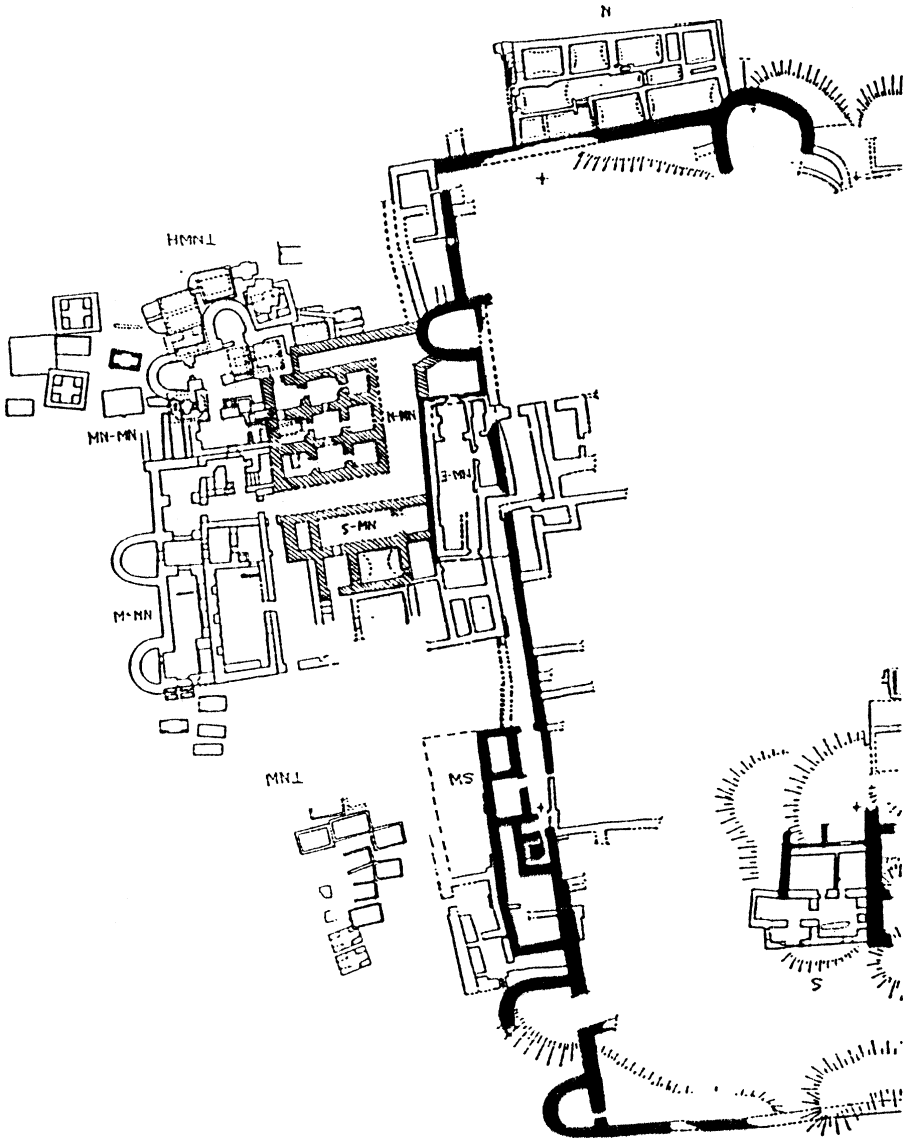


Fig. 2. Western part of Kom H. 10th century structures, or earlier.

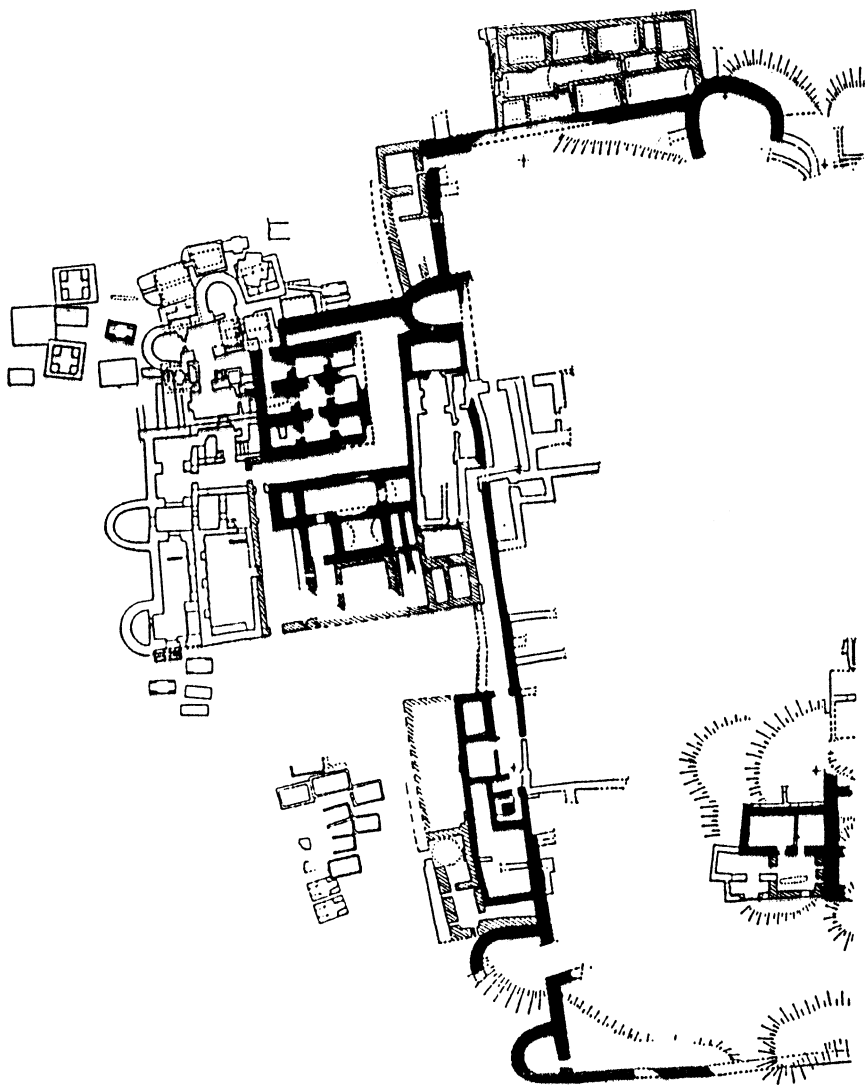


Fig. 3. Western part of Kom H. 11th century structures.

Building NW-N from NW-S. The Northern Building was gradually enlarged and rebuilt, and was later incorporated into the commemorative area with crypts located underneath (NW-NW).

The Southern Building of slightly irregular plan (12 x 7 m) originally contained six rooms, all barrel vaulted. The vaults carried some remains of an upper-storey floor paved with terracotta tiles measuring 0.23 x 0.18, the floor was 4.65 m above the basement floor level. A small staircase of the late Christian period was arranged on the upper storey, in a room in the north-eastern corner of the building.

The Building NW-S gradually expanded to the south (where four rooms were added) and to the west, where a small courtyard was created with an additional gate leading to the south, i.e., to the TWH cemetery.

It is rather difficult at this stage of the investigations to establish the use of the building in question. Judging from its further rebuilding, one may consider, however, residential use (an *episcopoeion* adjoining the Monastery?). To its west, the large room 20 was built (8.5 x 5 m) with numerous niches in the walls and narrow (slot) windows in the western wall; it was perhaps a meeting-hall. On the north it adjoined the rooms by the former gate, whose character now changed (Figs 4, 5). A doorway was cut in the southern wall of room 17, enabling access to it from the hall. This entrance was sheltered by a screen wall, 1.80 m high, and in the southwestern corner of room 17 a small latrine was arranged. It could have been cleaned through a hole in the lower part of the wall, but only from the adjoining room 16, now inaccessible from room 17. Two other latrines, used in the later period, were situated in semicircular towers built together with an elongated entrance corridor in the 12th century (room 21). When the southern entrance to it was closed, several masonry containers for provisions were built in between pilasters alongside its eastern wall, and it evidently

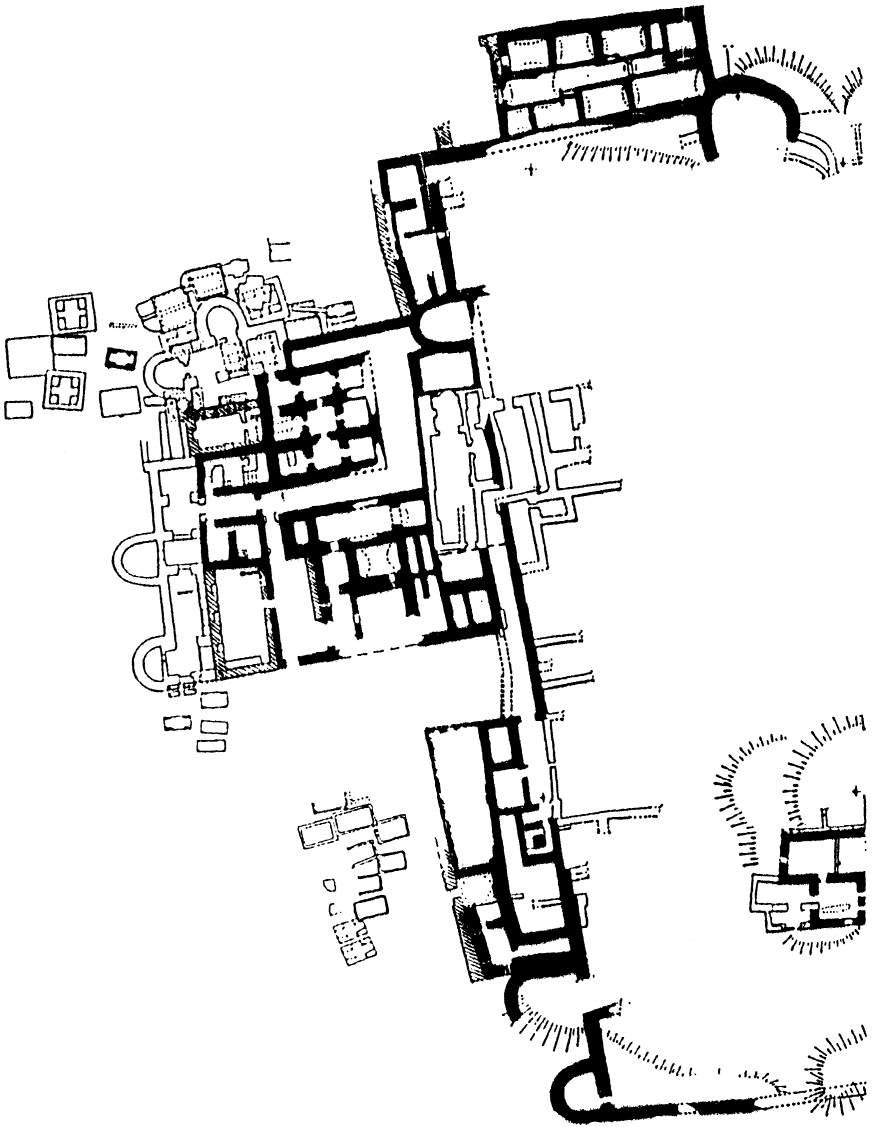


Fig. 4. Western Part of Kom H. Late 11th century structures.



Fig. 5. Western part of Kom H. 12th century structures with later additions.

became a storeroom. In the 14th century, the hall was used as a kind of dump for waste thrown from the upper storey.⁵

The rebuilding and adjustments in the NW complex in the 12th century integrated the two mentioned buildings into one whole and formed (together with the mortuary-commemorative section)⁶ one large nearly rectangular building (27.5 x 22 m) with an upper storey located on top of barrel vaults (Fig. 5).

Several structures mapped on the top of the hill, in the area of Building NW-E, once believed to be the remains of the upper storey of this building, turned out to belong to the latest (14th century) stage of building activity. They were created for the most part after serious damage to the NW complex and its subsequent levelling, when the ground floor rooms were on the whole intentionally filled with rubble. Their foundations correspond roughly with the level of the upper storey of the older buildings, but the position of preserved thresholds clearly indicates that they were constructed after the area was levelled.

In the southwestern section of the monastic compound, another two-storey building (SW) was distinguished, measuring originally 18 m along the N-S axis.⁷ It protrudes from the western facade of the monastery in a similar way as building NW-E, and may possibly date from the same time; successive rebuilding also expanded it to the west and south. An unusual feature is a doorway, lined with ashlar sandstone blocks, leading to it from the west. Part of a wooden beam from the lintel is still preserved. A complete staircase (2 x 2 m) is preserved in the central part of the building. Two rooms adjoining the building on the south (SW.1, SW.2) revealed very interesting murals.

It is somewhat strange that both described complexes received painted decoration as late as the 12th century. The decoration is not

⁵ Cf. S. Jakobielski, *PAM VI 1994* (1995), p. 86.

⁶ For a study of this complex cf. B. Żurawski, *Mortuary Complex on Kom H at Old Dongola*, *Nubica III*, 2 (1996), in print.

⁷ The extent of the building remains to be recorded.



Fig. 6. Nursing Virgin enthroned, 12th century mural painting from the Monastery on Kom H. Drawing W. Chmiel.

uniform in style and time of execution; paintings continued to be added by several other painters, most probably even in the 14th century.

This season, 14 paintings in buildings NW-S and SW were added to the more than 30 murals (including fragments) discovered in previous years. All were documented, treated and protected in situ. A great composition of the Nativity (13th century), which occupies the whole eastern wall in room 23, merits special attention as does also a figure of the Archangel Michael on the opposite wall. In the hall (20), a large representation of an ascending figure shown in the context of a burning bush – Moses perhaps - was found on the northern wall. In Building SW (room 1), a whole series of representations of the Holy Virgin, painted in the 12th century, were discovered: the Nourishing Virgin (Fig. 6); a spinning Nourishing Virgin (an iconographical theme not encountered so far in Nubian art); and the Virgin Enthroned. Among loose fragments found in sand in the same room, there was part of the legend of yet another representation of the Holy Virgin. In the neighbouring room 2, representations of St. Epiphanius, dressed in bishop's garments, and of Jeremy, the Prophet, were discovered.