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Dongola 2010 : Epigraphic Report

Polish Archaeology in the Mediterranean 23/1, 285-295

2014

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.

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DONGOLA 2010: EPIGRAPHIC REPORT

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Abstract: The article offers a general presentation of wall inscriptions in H.B.2 (Building 2 within the monastic complex on Kom H) in Dongola, studied during the 2010 season of work. The inscriptions are characterized as for their date, language, form and function within the cult space. The information provided by the inscriptions is used to draw conclusions about religious and cultural life of the Christian Kingdom of Makuria.

Keywords: Dongola, epigraphy, Anna, Nubian monasticism, visitors to cult places, wall inscriptions, Nubian saints, school exercises

Documenting wall inscriptions in H.B.2 (Building 2 within the monastic complex on Kom H), previously known as the South Building ("S"), was the principal epigraphic activity during the 2010 season of work at Dongola.

H.B.2 is a relatively small and unsophisticated structure adjoining the monastery church on the west (see fig. 9 on page 276). The building was excavated by Stefan Jakobielski in 1990 and 1993 (Jakobielski 1993; 1994), documented by him and Jarosław Dobrowolski, and backfilled with sand for protection. In 2010, Włodzimierz Godlewski cleared the building again and protected it with a roofed red-brick shelter (Godlewski 2014, in this volume). This provided the present author with the opportunity to study the inscriptions found on the walls of this building. A full descriptive documentation of the inscriptions was prepared and most of them were traced on plastic film.

An archaeological analysis of the remains points to a two-phased occupancy of the building, observable in the architecture as well as in its apparent functioning (Godlewski 2014: 275–280, in this volume). Phase I consisted of just two rooms: a smaller, almost square room B.2.2 situated to the south and a larger, rectangular room B.2.1, located to the north. This large northern room was parted at some time with a wall into two smaller rooms (B.2.1 AB) connected by a door. This created an arrangement that was used as a dwelling by a holy man, B.2.2 being his oratory, B.2.1 A his living room and B.2.1 B his dormitory. After death the original occupant was buried in a grave cut under the floor of B.2.2 and the building itself was refurbished to assume the function of a cult place. This cult place, a kind of commemorative church, corresponded to Phase II of the building. The role of a sanctuary was played by room

B.2.2, which was provided with an altar located in a large arcade in the east wall. Room B.2.1 B, separated from room B.2.1 A and connected by a door with B.2.2, was likely a prothesis. Room B.2.1 A, taken together with the newly built Room B.2.3 with a pulpit, corresponded to the naos, whereas room B.2.4, through which the complex was entered, with the narthex. The internal walls of the church were decorated with appropriate painted decoration: figures of Christ, the angels and saints (Martens-Czarnecka 2001: 277–280). The church was frequented by visitors who left traces of their visits in the form of inscriptions on the wall.

The chronology of H.B.2 is known only in general outline. A visitor graffito on the north wall of room B.2.2 gave the year 791 of the Era of the Martyrs; this corresponds to AD 1074/1075 demonstrating that by the second half of the 11th century the building had already started to serve as a cult place (Phase II).¹ Consequently, Phase I should precede this moment, even as it must follow the time of the foundation of the monastery church, which it abutted, in the second half of the 6th century. It is more probable to have occurred in the second half of this period. Phase II of the building lasted apparently through the end of the 13th/first half of the 14th century, assuming that some of those who left their inscriptions in the building had namesakes who left their mark among the visitors'

inscriptions from this period found in the upper church at Banganarti (see below; for preliminary publication of these, see Łajtar 2003; 2008).

The total count of inscriptions identified on the internal walls of H.B.2 is 71.² Most of them are in B.2.2 (21 items) and in B.2.1 A (37 items). Fewer were observed in B.2.1 B (perhaps because visitors did not have easy access to this space) and B.2.3–4 (most probably because of the poor state of preservation of this room).

The inscriptions are either in Greek or Old Nubian or a specific mix of these two languages. The mix occurs mainly in visitors' inscriptions constructed according to the pattern: "I, NN, wrote (this)"; in these cases, the text may start with the personal pronoun in Greek and end with the verb in Old Nubian, or the other way round. The script is mostly majuscules of the Nubian type, characteristic of Nubian literacy of the period from the 11th century onwards.

All inscriptions seem to belong to Phase II of the building, connected with its use as a church. From the point of view of their function, they may be divided into two groups: (1) those belonging to the original decoration of the church, and (2) those constituting a secondary element of the interior, appearing over the course of its use for a number of centuries. The inscriptions of the first group are invariably painted, those belonging to the second

¹ Włodzimierz Godlewski (2013a) is of the opinion that the commemorative church in H.B.2 could have been an initiative of the famous bishop Georgios of Dongola in the second half of the 11th or the first years of the 12th century. For Georgios, see Łajtar 2002.

² This number encompasses inscriptions expressly identified by the author in 2010 and several items that were seen by Stefan Jakobielski and Jarosław Dobrowolski in 1991, but which have been lost with the collapse of plaster from the top of walls. On the other hand, items from Jakobielski's list, consisting of entangled strokes that need not have been letters, were omitted from the present dossier.

group may be both painted (very rarely) or scratched.

The first group included at least eight items. Among these, one can distinguish three categories: (1) legends to paintings, (2) invocations and prayers, and (3) inscriptions of a literary character (perhaps quotations from Biblical and Patristic literature).

The first category is best represented by three inscriptions written on the south wall of Room B.2.1 A, immediately to the right of a door connecting it with B.2.2, over the heads of three small-scale paintings showing saints. All three inscriptions were executed in red paint, in a rather unsophisticated hand (perhaps that of the painter). The one on the left-hand side reads: "Saint Mena, martyr of Christ" and the one on the right-hand side: "Saint Philotheos, martyr of Christ".³ The fragmentariness of the inscription in the middle does not enable a secure reading, but it is near to certain that it also gave the name of a martyr saint. Another inscription of this category is found in the northern part of the east wall of B.2.1 A, near another small-scale painting of a saint. It is done in black ink, with small, regular upright majuscules, and may contain the name of Saint Mena.

A very peculiar legend to a figural representation is found on the vault of a recess under the pulpit abutting the north wall of Room B.2.3 (published in Martens-Czarnecka 2001: 278–279, Fig. 22). The representation, executed in dark purple paint, shows a man clad

in a horizontally striped cloak and tunic under the protection of Jesus Christ, and to the right of him, a figure holding a spear and a shield. Above the head of the armed figure, there is an inscription reading *Geōrgios*. Małgorzata Martens-Czarnecka suggested that the composition shows Georgios, Archbishop of Dongola (the figure on the left) and his patron saint Georgios (the figure on the right). According to her, the representation may have been executed by someone wishing to pay tribute to the bishop.

The second category is illustrated by an inscription situated on the south wall of Room B.2.1 A, immediately to the right of the three legends presented above. The inscription in black ink, with nice and regular sloping majuscules, was left by a certain Marianos, a deacon. It mentions a martyr saint (name not preserved) and seems to contain a request for protection against sorceries (*ta pharmakia*). Also, a very damaged black ink inscription in the northern part of the east wall of B.2.1 A may belong to this category. The text, which is arranged in at least five lines, has in line four the verb *eiselthei*, "when/if he enters", or *eiselthei[s]*, "when/if you enter", perhaps belonging to an expression like "remember me when You enter Your kingdom".

The third category has its representative in an inscription in black ink standing on two pieces of joining plaster, found under the pulpit abutting the north wall of Room B.2.3 (the only new epigraphic find from H.B.2 in the 2010 season). It is evident from the context that the

³ Interestingly, the term "martyr" in these two inscriptions occurs in its by-form *martyros* (against the classical *martyrs*). The same form is found in a legend to the representation of saint Mercurius in the Southwestern Annex to the monastery on Kom H (unpublished, my reading from the original). Obviously, it was this form and not *martyrs* that was used in Nubian Greek. For the use of *martyros* in Greek papyri from Egypt of the Roman and Byzantine periods, see Gignac 1981: 64.

inscription adorned the north wall of B.2.3 prior to the construction of the pulpit. Fragments of five lines of text have been preserved, of which the third has *idou Sar[a*, “and now Sara”, suggesting that it is a composition based on Gen. 17.19 (the textual context shows that it cannot be a direct quotation). A two-line inscription written in black ink on the east wall of B.2.2, between the altar arcade and the northeastern corner, may belong to this category as well. Unfortunately, the text is too damaged to be read, except for the expression *apostolos tēs khoras*, “apostle of the country”. I was unable to find this expression in any known text and cannot even guess whom it may have referred to here.

The second group of inscriptions is larger than the first by far and encompasses all the remaining items. From the point of view of their form and contents, the inscriptions of this group can be divided into the following categories: (1) single letters and fragments impossible to classify because of their poor state of preservation; (2) names of visitors standing alone or with some elements of personal presentation; (3) texts composed according to the pattern: “I, NN” (name of a visitor preceded by the personal pronoun of the first person singular); (4) texts composed according to the pattern: “I, NN, wrote (this)”; (5) names of holy figures standing alone; (6) invocations and prayers; (7) school exercises; (8) miscellanea.

Inscriptions from categories (2), (3) and (4) are typical visitors’ graffiti as we know them from various cult places all over Nubia, including the Northwestern Annex

to the monastery on Kom H in Dongola (unpublished; known to the author from autopsy), Banganarti (Łajtar 2003; 2008), Sonqi Tino (unpublished; for preliminary discussion, see Donadoni 1975), Faras, meaning inscriptions on the walls of the cathedral (not fully published; Jakobielski 1972; Kubińska 1974; see also Jakobielski 1983 with an attempt at classification) and the so-called Anchorite Grotto (Griffith 1927: 90–91), and finally Gebel Maktub near Qasr Ibrim (unpublished; for a preliminary assessment, see Łajtar, van der Vliet 2013). The persons appearing in them bear as a rule Nubian or Nubianized names like: Añonga, Dolli, Gourrōnga, Immeni, Kyri (Nubianized form of the Greek Kyrikos), Ornouta (perhaps a by-form of or a mistake for Orinourta), Oskota, Staurosikuda. Names of other origin are less frequent; let me note: Christodoulos, David, Marianos, Mena, and possibly also Ioannes. All the visitors, who indicated their social status, were ecclesiastics. As many as six of them (Dolli, son of [- - -]ti, Christodoulos, [- - -]ouril, David, Añonga) fulfilled their functions of clergymen in the Great (Church of) Jesus.⁴ This church should perhaps be identified with the so-called Cruciform Church in Dongola, which, according to Włodzimierz Godlewski (1990: 136), served as the Dongolese cathedral in the late Classic and Terminal Christian periods. One visitor indicated that he was priest in the Great (Church of) the Trinity and the author of another may have been a priest of a Church of Raphael. An inscription on the eastern part of the north wall of B.2.2 was left by a certain

⁴ Members of clergy of the Great (Church of) Jesus are represented prominently also in visitors’ graffiti in the upper church at Banganarti; see Łajtar 2003: 144–145; 2008: 325.

abba Kyri, *archistylites* [Fig. 1].⁵ The latter title has been attested so far only in Dongola. There are two other men in addition to Kyri, who bore this title and are known by name, namely Georgios, the famous archbishop of Dongola from the second half of the 11th/first years of the 12th century (Łajtar 2002: 176) and Lazaros, whose table set was found in Room 20 of the Northwestern Annex to the monastery on Kom H (Łajtar, Pluskota 2001: 348–349). The title is also found in an inscription on a window grille that



Fig. 1. Inscription of *abba* Kyri, *archistylites*; north wall of Room B.2.2

came to light in the debris to the west of the Northwestern Annex, unfortunately, the name of the person it referred to has not been preserved (Jakobielski 2003: 213, Fig. 2 on page 214). Publishing the dossiers of Georgios and Lazaros, I have suggested that *archistylites* was a monastic title, perhaps designating a person who took care of the spiritual life of monks in a given monastery (Łajtar, Pluskota 2001: 347–349). Kyri's inscription confirms this hypothesis in that it connects the title of *archistylites* with the undoubtedly monastic title of *abba*. An inscription on the north wall of B.2.1 A mentions Gourrōnga, priest and archimandrite [Fig. 2]. A person with the same name and the same titles is known from a wall inscription in the upper church at Banganarti (unpublished; my reading from autopsy). In view of the rarity of the name Gourrōnga (which is unknown except for these two attestations) and the coincidence of the name with the titles,

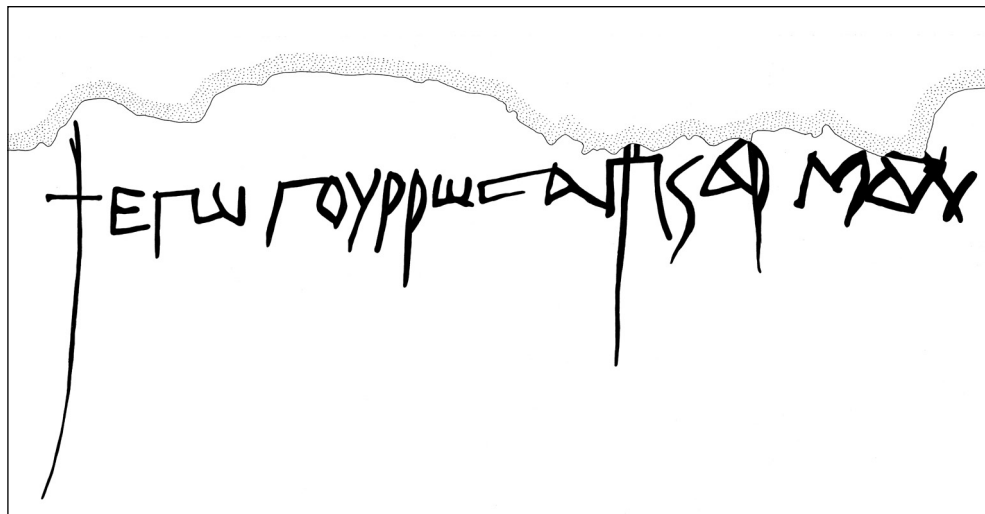


Fig. 2. Inscription of Gourrōnga, priest and archimandrite; north wall of Room B.2.1 A

⁵ The word *archistylites* was recorded in abbreviated form, but the resolution of the abbreviation is beyond doubt.

one can venture to identify the authors of the inscriptions from H.B.2 and the upper church at Banganarti. The above remarks show that the men leaving their inscriptions in the commemorative church in H.B.2 were recruited mainly from among members of the clergy officiating in churches of the Makurian capital and its immediate hinterland.

Among inscriptions from category (5), six and perhaps even eight contain the name of the Archangel Michael (in one case the name is repeated twice). An inscription on the fillet at the top of the altar in the arcade in the east wall of B.2.2 mentions two other archangels: [- - -]iel (Gabriel rather than Zedekiel) and Anael. There is only one mention of Jesus Christ and not entirely certain at that. The above listing is an excellent illustration of Nubian popular piety, which was very much oriented on angelic beings, and held Michael in the greatest esteem. His name, either in *scriptio plena* or in the form of the numerical cryptogram 689, is found in the hundreds, written on a variety of media.

As for inscriptions from category (6), I have already mentioned a prayer for protection addressed to a martyr saint, apparently from the original decoration of

the church. An inscription on the north wall of the altar arcade in the east wall of B.2.2 asks in Greek: *kyrie Iēsou Christe phylaxon*, “Lord Jesus Christ, guard”. A graffito on the north wall of Room B.2.1 A contains the invocation “O, Saint Anna” in Old Nubian and the same invocation is found in an inscription on the south wall of Room B.2.1 B (these two inscriptions have survived only in S. Jakobielski’s original dossier of 1991). An inscription on the east wall of Room B.2.1 A has the invocation “O, Saint Anna” in Old Nubian followed by information about the writer (“I, Staurosikuda, wrote”) in Greek [Fig. 3]. The presence of as many as three invocations to Saint Anna raises the question of the identity of this figure and the reasons behind the popularity of his/her cult among visitors to the church in H.B.2, the more so as he/she is mentioned yet another time in an inscription belonging in the miscellaneous category (see below).

School exercises (7) are represented by three inscriptions. Two of them, one on the northern side of the passage between B.2.2 and B.2.3, the other on the east wall of B.2.1 A, are exercises in composing alphabetic lists of words in *phi*, in which consecutive words contain a consecutive vowel of the Greek alphabet in the first syllable. The first of these two inscriptions reads: *Phares | Phei | Phēs | Ph | Ph | Ph | Ph* [Fig. 4], the second: *Phar | Phe | Ph | Ph | Ph | Ph | Ph*. The two inscriptions from H.B.2 have at least three parallels from Christian Nubia. One is an inscription in the northern aisle of the Faras cathedral, now kept in the National Museum in Warsaw (Jakobielski in Michałowski 1974: 307–308, No. 52; repeated after Jakobielski in Hasitzka [ed] 1990: 158–159, No. 233;

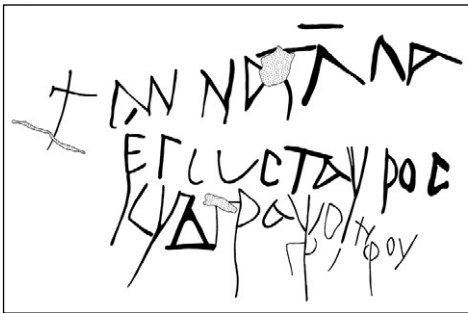


Fig. 3. Invocation of Saint Anna left by Staurosikuda; east wall of Room B.2.1 A

published anew, Kubińska 1990). The text inscribed in black ink by a practiced, but not very nice hand reads: *Phares* | *Pheison* | *Phēstos* | *Phirsoos* | *Phoibēn* | *Phou* | *Phō* . . . n.⁶ The other parallel, not recognized as a school exercise by the editors of the text, comes from the so-called Saint Paul Church in Tamit (S. Donadoni in Baldassare, Bosticco *et alii* 1967: 68–69, No. 19, Pl. 23, note that the photo is

printed upside down). The text inscribed in ink in the apse of the church contained three alphabetic lists of words: in *omicron*, *upsilon*, and *phi*, and some other elements difficult to recognize. The third parallel is yielded by a set of inscriptions in red paint on the east wall of the southern aisle of the monastery church on Kom H at Dongola (unpublished; for a photo showing the inscription with lists of words in all letters of Greek alphabet from *ny* to *psi*, see Jakobielski 2008: 289, Fig. 9, and Gazda 2010: 50, Fig. 21). One of these inscriptions contains alphabetic lists of words in all consecutive letters of the Greek alphabet from *ny* to *psi* (including a list of words in *phi*), and the other lists words in *sigma* and *phi* (note that the list of words in *sigma* is written from right to left). Additionally, there is an inscription which lists only two words in *phi*, namely in *phi* + *alpha* and *phi* + *ēta*. The lists from Tamit and the monastery church at Dongola are essentially the same as the one occurring in the Faras inscription. The inscriptions from the Faras cathedral, Tamit and the monastery church at Dongola, as well as similar finds from the church at Sonqi Tino (alphabetic list of words in *theta*, see Donadoni 1975: 38–39, also mentioning lists of words starting with *zeta* and *gamma*) show that sacral spaces were used as schoolrooms in Christian Nubia.⁷ This must have been the case also with the church arranged in H.B.2. Here, as in the neighboring monastery church, letters were taught by learned persons, most probably monks or ecclesiastics, to all, both monks and people from outside

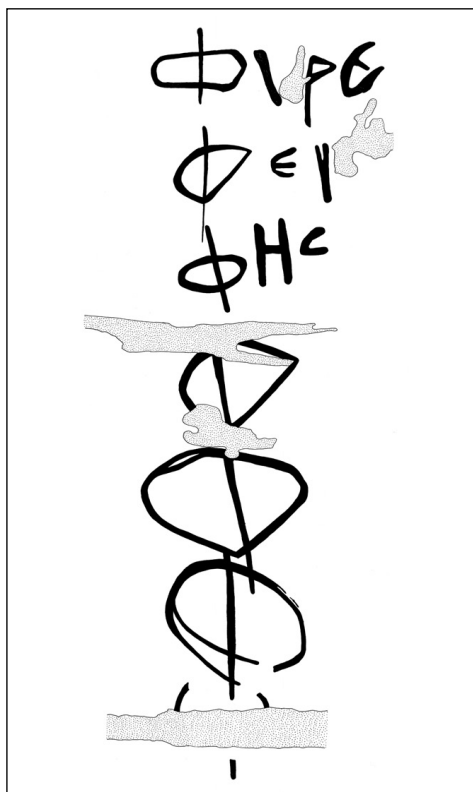


Fig. 4. Exercise in composing an alphabetic list of words in *phi*; north face of the passage between Rooms B.2.2 and B.2.3

⁶ Note that *Phirsoos* is obviously a mistaken form of *Phirmos*, rooted in the visual similarity of “m” and “so” in Nubian-type majuscules. The explanation of *Phirsoos* given by the previous editors is no longer valid.

⁷ This is especially true of the inscriptions in the monastery church at Dongola, which was undoubtedly executed by a student's hand.

the monastery, who wanted to learn how to read and write. The process of teaching called for the teacher to write the initials and some other elements of the list (the first word or the first syllables of several words) and students supplemented this. The teacher's text was carved, the students' supplements could have been painted and whitewashed after being checked by the master. In any case, there are no traces of letters following that which has been transcribed above.

A graffito in the southern part of the eastern wall of B.2.2 brings the expression *an mou grapsei*,⁸ "when/if he writes me", written twice, one under the other, by a practiced hand. *an mou grapsei* is likely an epistolary formula. Ready formulae, like this one, were memorized by students at an advanced stage of their education. Perhaps this particular inscription was left by such an advanced student who had just learned how to compose letters in Greek. It cannot be a teacher's model, as it is clearly too small for the purpose.

The miscellaneous category (8) includes texts that do not fit elsewhere. Three of them are noteworthy. A graffito on the south wall of B.2.1 A reads: *kouph() 29*. The abbreviated word *kouph()* could be expanded to *kouph(a)*, "baskets". However, I have no inkling what the inscription "29 baskets" written on the wall of a church could refer to. Could the reference be to an offering made to the church? A graffito on the north wall of B.2.2 with the date: *apo mar[t](yrōn) 791*, "from the martyrs (year)

791", that is to say, AD 1074/1075, has already been mentioned above.

A Graeco-Nubian graffito on the west wall of Room B.2.2 states that the feast of Anna falls on 10 Tybi (5 January in normal years, 6 January in leap years) [Fig. 5].⁹ This turns our attention again to the person of Saint Anna who, as we already saw, is the addressee of as many as three invocations written on the walls of H.B.2. The saint mentioned in altogether four graffiti could not be Anna, the mother of Mary, even if her cult is attested in Christian Nubia through her painted representations in the Faras cathedral. It is because her feast falls on 26 July in the liturgical calendars of all the Christian churches. Other Annas are hardly to be expected in Christian Nubia. This suggests that the Anna mentioned in inscriptions from building H.B.2 was a local saint. Quite tentatively, one could identify this person with the holy man who had occupied H.B.2 originally and was



Fig. 5. Graffito giving the date of the feast of Anna; west wall of Room B.2.2

⁸ Obviously a mistake for *an moi grapsei*. Note that the inscription is located only 48 cm above the floor, as if the writer was sitting or kneeling on the floor.

⁹ A photo of the inscription is published in Godlewski 2010: 80, Pl. 11, and 2013b: Figure on page 82. In this inscription, the name of Anna is followed by the letters BY. This is most probably an abbreviated word, but the resolution escapes me. The only certain thing is that the word in question was of Greek origin, as Old Nubian did not have the /b/ sound. The function of the word is an attribute to Anna or a predicate.

later buried in the grave that is under the floor of room B.2.2. If so, his name would not have been of Hebrew origin, as the Hebrew (H)anna(h) is a female name, but would have rather been connected with the local Nubian onomastic stock. The name Anna is attested several times in Old Nubian documents from Qasr Ibrim and its bearers apparently were all men (Browne 1991: 38.21; 49.7; 50.4; 53.1). Provided this hypothesis is correct, the holy man Anna, who lived in H.B.2 and who was buried there and subsequently venerated by the local population, would be the first Nubian saint known to us by name.

To round off the report on epigraphic finds from the 2010 season, I should mention some pieces of inscribed pottery discovered in the filling of Building B.I on the citadel of Dongola. The most interesting of these was a *dipinto* in black ink, written in a nice and skillful hand on the neck of an amphora of local Dongolese production, datable to the late Period (Danyś-Lasek, Łajtar 2011). The *dipinto* mentions a potter of the name Oungkouda, son of Ounna. He was either the producer of the amphora or the addressee of a product, most probably wine, that had been sent in it.

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