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# DONGOLA: POTTERY FROM BUILDING B.VI (SITE C.01), SEASONS 2010–2011

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**Abstract:** Excavations in Dongola in the 2010 and 2011 seasons encompassed site C.01 with the relics of a late Makurian building (B.VI) and the superimposed remains of domestic occupation from the Funj Kingdom. The pottery from the fill of Building B.VI consisted of both hand- and wheel-made storage containers from the late 13th and 14th centuries. The earlier chronological horizon (B.IX) was represented by some pottery, including tableware from the 9th–11th century and the 12th century, marking the destruction horizon of B.IX and the foundation of B.VI. The Funj layers yielded mostly handmade storage and cooking ware and some glazed ceramics.

**Keywords:** Dongola, pottery, glazed pottery, Funj Kingdom, Building B.IV, Late Makurian

Excavation of building B.VI in ancient Dongola in the 2010 and 2011 seasons (for the archaeological finds, see Obluski 2014, in this volume) recorded pottery assemblages from the fill of rooms 7, 10, 11, 12 and 13, as well as small tests below the floors in rooms 1, 2 and 7, designed to explore an earlier structure on the spot, Building IX, and the mutual relations between the two complexes. The ceramics proved to be mainly from the turn of the 13th and the 14th century, but there were two objects (ADd.10.301, ADd.10.327, see below) from the lowest level of B.VI.12 (floor and under the south wall foundation), which came from the 12th century. Some sherds of the 9th–11th and the 12th century marked the earliest

occupation phase of Building VI, which was at the same time the destruction horizon of B.IX.

Thick-walled storage vessels dominated the pottery assemblage that was recovered from inside building B.VI (ADd.10.293, ADd.10.296, ADd.10.312, ADd.10.314) [*Figs 1–3*]. These containers were made both by hand and on the wheel. Most were red-slipped and burnished on the outside.

Two pots bore post-firing graffiti [see *Fig. 1*]. In the case of ADd.10.293, it was a horizontal line of text in the upper part of the vessel. It started with a cross, the preserved first three letters being ΙΣΑ[. In the second case, ADd.10.314, two letters (the top one fragmentary) were placed in a column on the body: [.]P. The graffiti

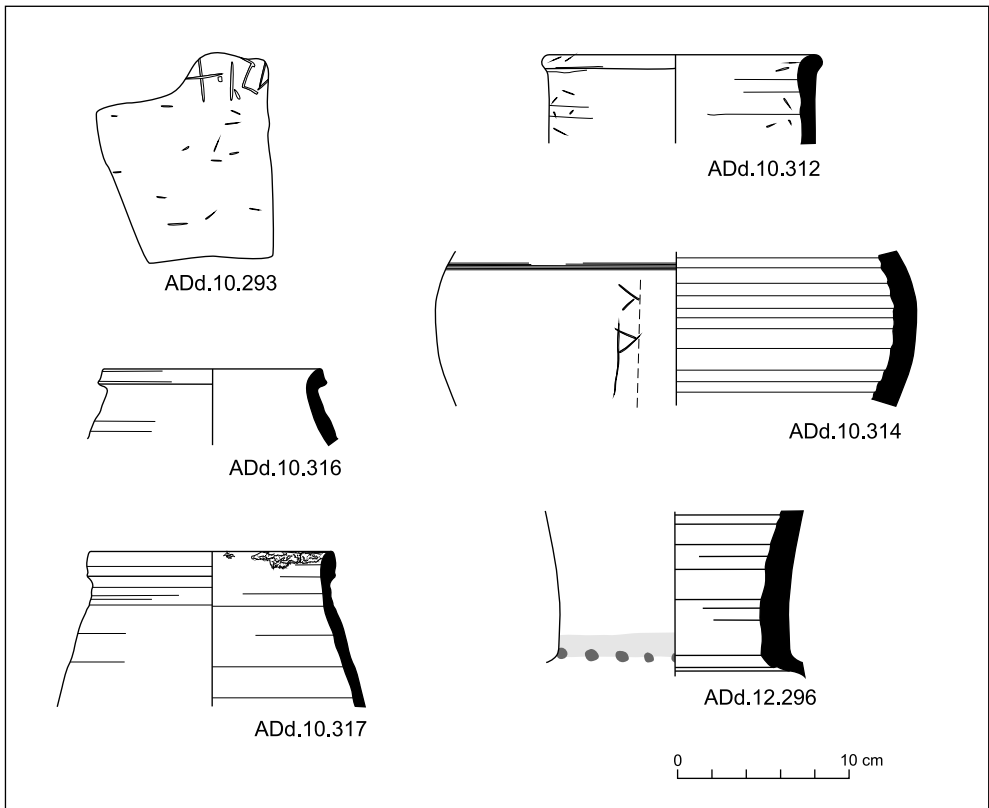
<sup>1</sup> A similar interpretation, that is, an invocation to the archangel, has been proposed for a graffiti reading “MIXAEL” on an amphora of local production ADd.11.099 from the fill of room 41 in Building I in Dongola.

can be interpreted as either an ownership mark or, in the first case, an invocation that was meant to protect the content.<sup>1</sup>

Jars with wide cylindrical necks, e.g., ADd.10.296, and pink slip on the outside formed a separate group among the storage containers [see *Fig. 1*]. A wide cream-colored band ran around the neck at the base, decorated with a row of large dark gray dots. A similar jar from Building I in Dongola had been dated to the Terminal Christian Period (Godlewski

2007: Fig. 4, Add.05.333) and similar ornamental motifs were noted on other types of jars from Dongola, among others, House PCH 1 and the North Church, where they were assigned to the 'Late Christian' and 'Terminal Christian' periods (Godlewski 1991: Pl. II:a,b; Godlewski 1990: Fig. 13:g).

*Qawadis* (*saqqiyah* pots) sherds were also found in abundance inside Building B.VI, e.g., ADd.10.316, ADd.10.317 [see *Fig. 1*].



*Fig. 1. Storage ware from room B.VI.13: top, pots including two with post-firing graffiti; bottom left, qawadis; bottom right, jar with ornamental motif at base of neck*

*All drawings and digitizing by the author.*

Cooking ware was represented mainly by non-diagnostic, heavily sooted sherds of vessels handmade of Nile silt. Two *doka* with round handles (ADd.10.318, ADd.10.319) had rough bottoms and a burnished black surface on the outside [Fig. 2]. ‘Fire-dogs’ made of elements turned on a wheel were also present, exemplified by ADd.10.270. The upper part was formed of applied clay with evident finger impressions, only roughly smoothed [see Fig. 2].

Cooking pot ADd.10.323 was distinguished in this assemblage by its

form and even more so by the fabric and firing technique [see Fig. 2]. Produced of desert clay, it was multi-colored in the break (yellow–red–gray–yellow), containing mineral inclusions of black, brown, white and gray color. The thin walls (0.3–0.7 mm) were yellow-buff inside and dark gray on the outside, the color difference being due presumably to firing conditions (setting upside down in the kiln?). This firing technique, as much as the form of the vessel and the fabric, bring to mind “Late Roman” utilitarian ware produced in Cyprus (Jacobsen 2005: Fig. 6) and the

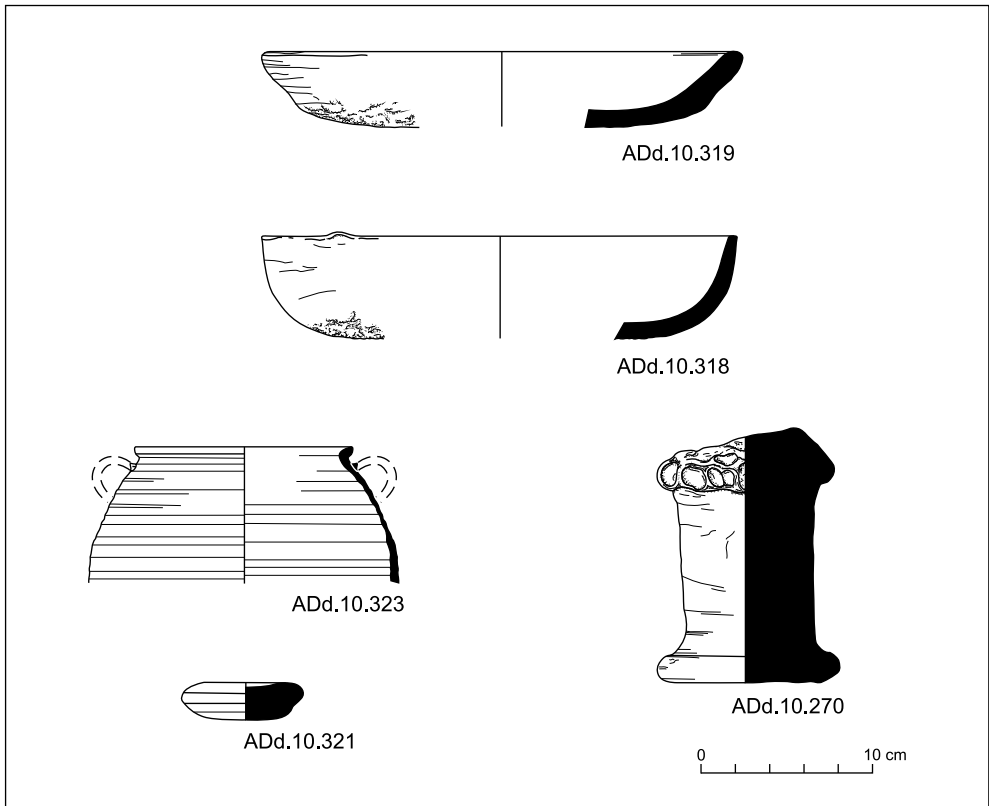


Fig. 2. Cooking ware from room B.VI.13: top, two *doka*; center left, cooking pot, bottom left, stopper lid; bottom right, ‘fire-dog’ from room B.VI.10

Levant (Waksman, Reynolds *et alii* 2005: Fig. 2:7). The dating of this vessel as well as its origins remain a moot point, as vessels of this kind had no place in the Dongolan pot-making tradition.

The amphora assemblage was heavily fragmented. Sherds represented the second phase in local ceramic production, that is, types E–G distinguished by Krzysztof Pluskota (2005: Fig. 8).

Last but not least, the utilitarian wares included a small stopper lid, ADd.10.321, made of the bottom of a vessel of “tableware” type. It had been broken away from the body and the sharp edges were neatly blunted [see Fig. 2].

“Tableware” comprised sherds of vessels featuring an orange slip, occasionally graced with painted decoration. Ornaments included red and orange bands, as in the case of ADd.10.302, and black-painted broad zigzags with the arches filled in and hatched rhombuses as well as a stylized omega, as on ADd.10.299 [Fig. 3]. These particular ornamental motifs represented style N.VII (AD 1300–1500) (Adams 1986: 245–251). A vessel decorated in analogous fashion was uncovered in room 5 of the Southwest Annex of the monastery on Kom H in Dongola, where it was assigned to the Terminal Christian period (Jakobielski 2005: Fig. 14), whereas

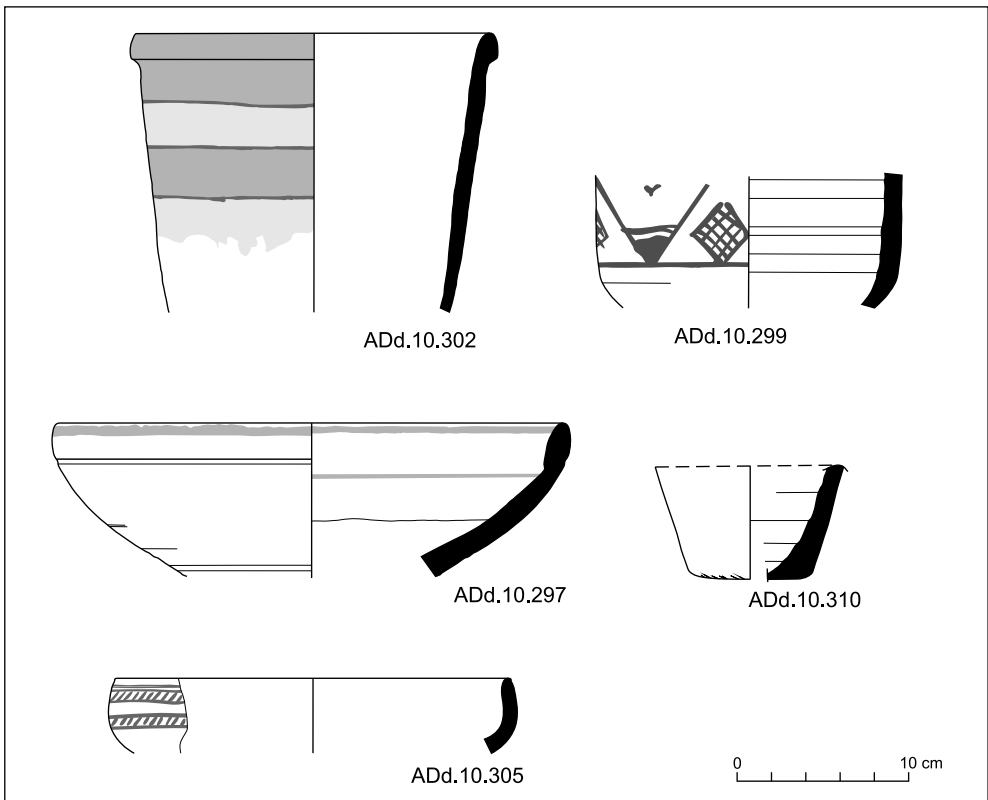


Fig. 3. “Tableware” (dishes, vases, cup used as a funnel) from room B.VI.13

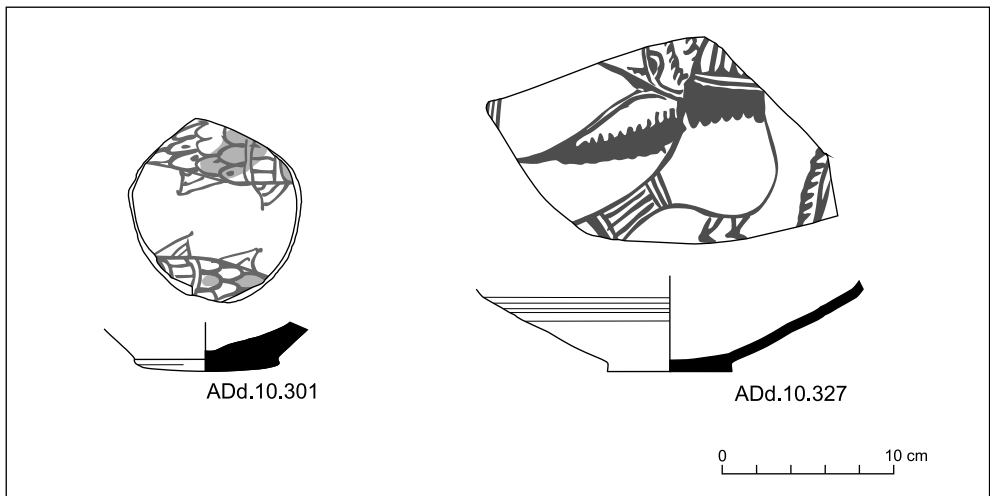
a similar vessel from the environs of Banganarti was dated to the 13th–mid 14th century (Phillips 2003: Pl. 94).

Large thick-walled dishes with orange slip are rare among the finds. Dish ADd.10.297 was decorated with painted red bands, wide at the rim and narrow in the middle of the body inside. Analogous dishes have been found near Banganarti and dated to the 13th–mid 14th century (Phillips 2003: Pl. 85a). Dish ADd.10.305 bore two bands filled with dense oblique hatching on the outside [see *Fig. 3*], a pattern assigned by W.Y. Adams to his style N.VII (AD 1300–1500) (Adams 1986: 245–251). An analogous design was observed on a small jug from the Monastic Church on Kom H in Dongola, dated to the post-Classic Christian period (Gazda 2008: Fig. 5).

Two dishes of obviously earlier date, preserved only as parts of thickened bases, were found in the lower parts of the fill, the first stuck in the floor of room B.VI.12, the second under the foundation of the

south wall. The painted decoration in brown or black was executed on a yellow slip and was figural in nature. The two fishes on ADd.10.301 were rendered with extreme care for detail in the form of scales and fin parts, further enhanced by the use of red spots of paint, presumably to depict a specific species (although the state of preservation of the sherd precludes identification of the species today) [*Fig. 4*, left]. Analogous dishes with painted fish were recorded from the pottery kiln on site R2 in Dongola, dated to the post-Classic Christian period (Pluskota 1994: Cat. 4 and 5). Fish motifs were noted in style N.IV (Classic Christian period), although there they were simplified in form, and in style N.VIA (post-Classic Christian period) where the depictions were more elaborate (Adams 1986: Fig.164:H.34, Fig. 177:M.31, Fig. 197:M:34-2).

Dish ADd.10.327 featured a dove painted in the center, its wings, tail and neck elaborately styled 'three concentric lines encircled the image [*Fig. 4*, right].



*Fig. 4. Tableware dishes with painted decoration, from room B.VI.12*

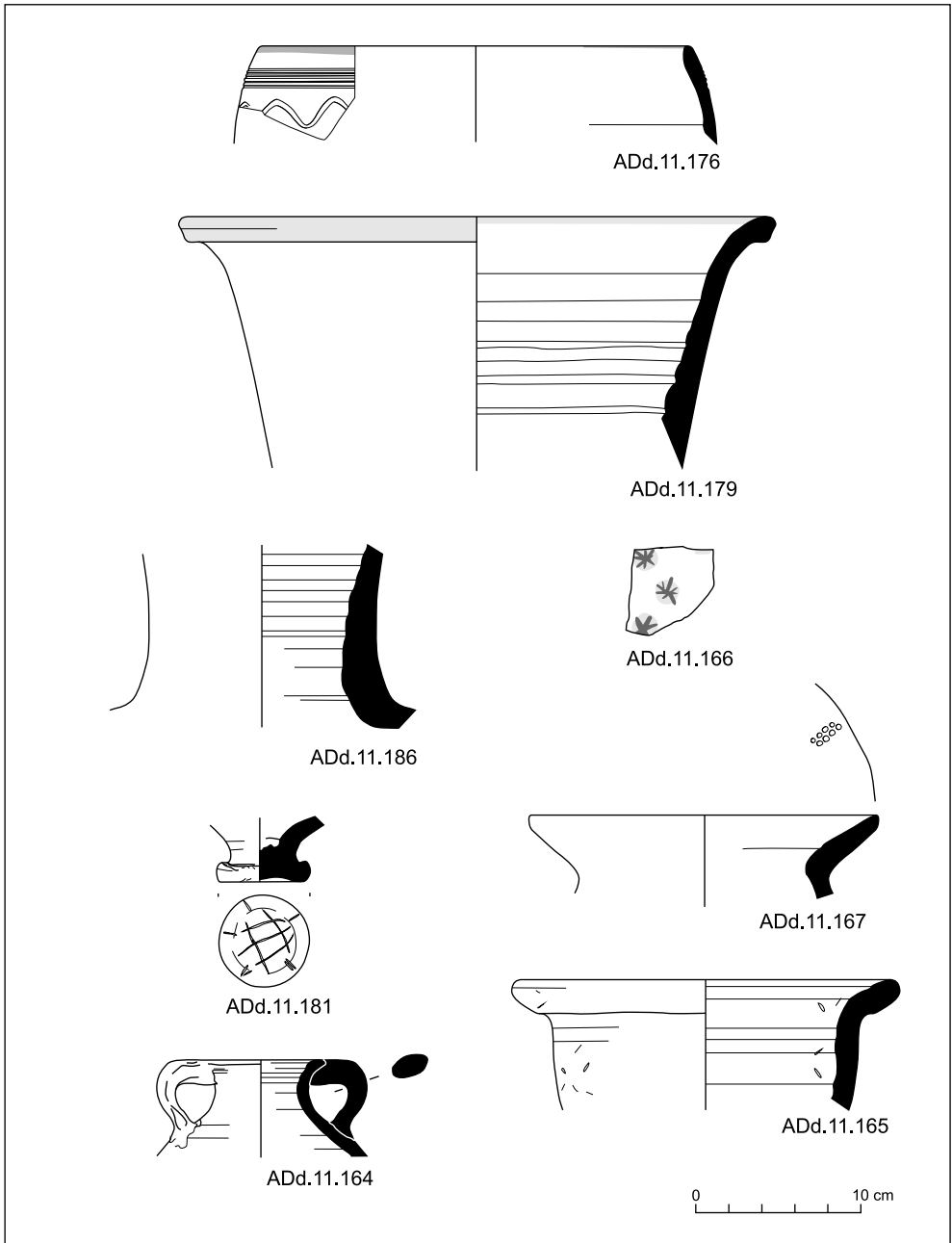


Fig. 5. Storage ware from test pits in Building VI: jars, amphora, qadus, cooking pot, basin

A small sherd with a fragment of a wing suggests originally two doves on the floor of this dish. Rich decoration of this type typifies style N.VIA (post-Classic Christian period) (Adams 1986: 249).

The fill of Building VI also produced tall cylindrical beakers that are a frequent find in late Makurite contexts in Dongola (Godlewski 2007: Fig. 4, Add.05.294; Philips 2003: Pl. 98a). Beaker ADd.10.310 is additionally of interest as it was reused [see Fig. 3]. Once the top had been damaged, the broken edges were blunted and smoothed, making the vessel rather squat in proportions. Then, a hole about 2 cm in diameter was pierced in the bottom and the beaker was subsequently used as a funnel.

The pottery material from the tests dug under the floors of Building VI inside rooms B.VI.1, B.VI.2, B.VI.7, was not very abundant and rather indistinct in terms of diagnostic features. Utilitarian wares made primarily on the wheel predominated in this assemblage. The fabric was mixed desert clay and Nile silt clay. Forms included large storage containers without distinguished neck, a red band on the rim and combed decoration with a wavy engraved in the clay below it in the upper part of the body (ADd.11.176) [Fig. 5]. Parallels are known from the monastery in Ghazali (Shinnie, Chittick 1961: Fig. 15: J, rim 5). The upper part of a large storage jar analogous to ADd.10.296 with a cream-colored band around the rim was also recorded (ADd.11.179), as was a fragmentary neck without decoration (ADd.11.186) [see Fig. 5]. A body sherd (ADd.11.166) was decorated with cream-colored spots dotted with dark gray stars on a background of a pink slip. The colors and design recall decoration on

large storage jars, such as ADd.10.296 [see Fig. 1]. A similar ornament but with reversed colors was featured on a vessel from room 16D of the Southwest Annex of the monastery on Kom H in Dongola (Bagińska 2008: Fig. 8:d DOK.6.06). A roughly made thick-walled vessel (Add.11.165) [see Fig. 5] was analogous to a vessel from Banganarti site 1 (Philips 2003: Pl. 75c), assigned there to the “post-classic Dongola” period. A broad-mouthed cooking pot (ADd.11.167, see Fig. 5), decorated with a motif of two columns of rectangular depressions, resembled a vessel from Banganarti from the “Classic Dongola” period (Philips 2003: Pl. 69d). A small amphora preserved only in the upper part (ADd.11.164, see Fig. 5) represented Pluskota’s type F associated with late stages of ceramic production in Dongola (Pluskota 1994: Fig. 8). A base of a *qadus* (ADd.11.181, see Fig. 5) presented a post-firing mark in the form of five scratched, criss-crossing lines; this could be the owner’s sign.

“Tableware” was represented by non-diagnostic sherds from red-slipped dishes and small bottles, as well as a small beaker (ADd.11.171) [Fig. 6], which was decorated with a dark red band on the rim and a narrow black stripe below it on the outside. Beakers of this type were common from the 9th to the 12th century, with and without decoration, parallels appearing in assemblages from Dongola (including the monastery on Kom H, Żurawski 1994: Fig. 30), Banganarti (Philips 2003: Pl. 56d), and the monastery in Ghazali (Shinnie, Chittick 1961: Fig. 7:B6). Two kinds of vases were also recorded, a broad-mouthed example (ADd.11.179) and a cylindrical vase furnished either with a bulge (ADd.11.174) or without it

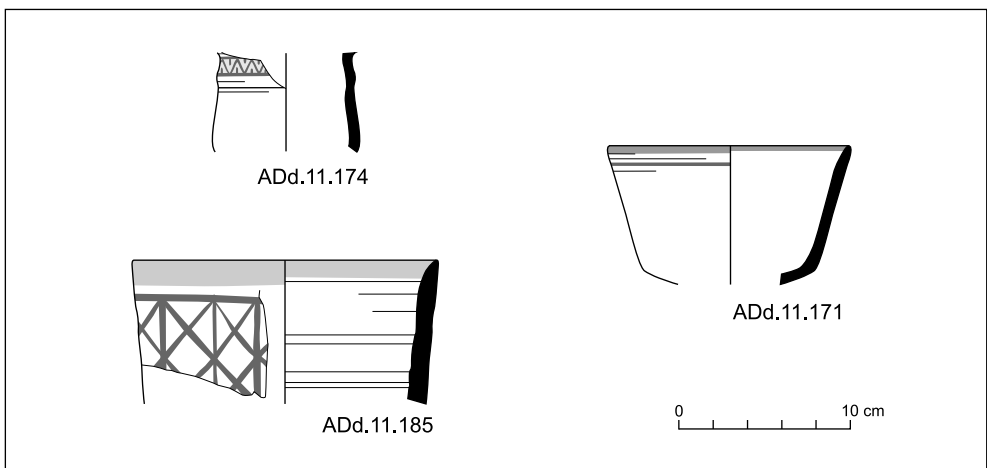


(ADd.11.185) [see *Fig. 6*]. The example with a bulge, covered with a red-orange slip, was decorated in the upper part above the bulge with a frieze composed of a white band between black lines and a black zigzag with a vertical dash in each field. A vessel with analogous decoration was discovered at Abkur and dated to the “Classic Dongola” period (Phillips 2003: Pl. 65a). A second example, with a polished orange-slipped surface, had a red band on the rim and a frieze on the outside, composed of vertical panels with a loose lattice pattern.

The last and youngest chronological horizon was made up of post-Makurian ceramics of the 16th and 17th centuries, from houses (H.06, H.09, H.11, H.12) that had been built into the ruins of building B.VI. The pottery was composed of handmade pots, the *qawadis* being the only wheel-made vessels in this assemblage (ADd.10.268). The repertoire of shapes was much the same in all of the houses. Large storage containers were the rule (ADd.10.259, ADd.10.267,

ADd.10.269) along with cooking pots decorated under the rim with engraved and incised compositions, much like examples found at Banganarti, el-Diffar and Tergis (Phillips 2003: Pl. 107b, 109d, 112), as well as Dongola itself, e.g., House H.6 in building B.I (ADd.09.058, ADd.09.075, ADd.09.076 etc.). These were accompanied by lids made of one lump of clay (e.g., ADd.10.200) and red-slipped bowls (ADd.10.251).

Last but not least were small fragments of glazed vessels found in the post-Makurian houses as well as in the foundation levels, already in the ruins of B.VI. Four principal types were represented: monochromatic (turquoise glaze, ADd.10.247a), imitation “Silhouette” (black floral motifs against a green background) (ADd.10.248), imitation Blue-Black-White (BBW, linear motifs ADd.10.261) applied to porous yellow quartzite clay presumably originating from Egypt, and Chinese celadon (ADd.10.247b) [*Fig. 7*]. Analogous glazed wares came from Sheik Daud (Presedo Velo 1964: 79), where they were dated



*Fig. 6. Tableware sherds from test pits in Building VI: beaker, vases*

to the 14th–15th century, and Meinarti (Adams 2002: Pl. 17), connected there with the Late and Terminal Christian periods. Chinese celadons, as well as their imitations are known from Fustat (Scanlon 1984), whereas imitation

“Silhouette” vessels were excavated in 16th–17th century settlement contexts in Dakhleh Oasis (Gayraud 1984).

The pottery from the fill of post-Makurian (16th–17th century) houses, excavated at Dongola in 2010 was heavily

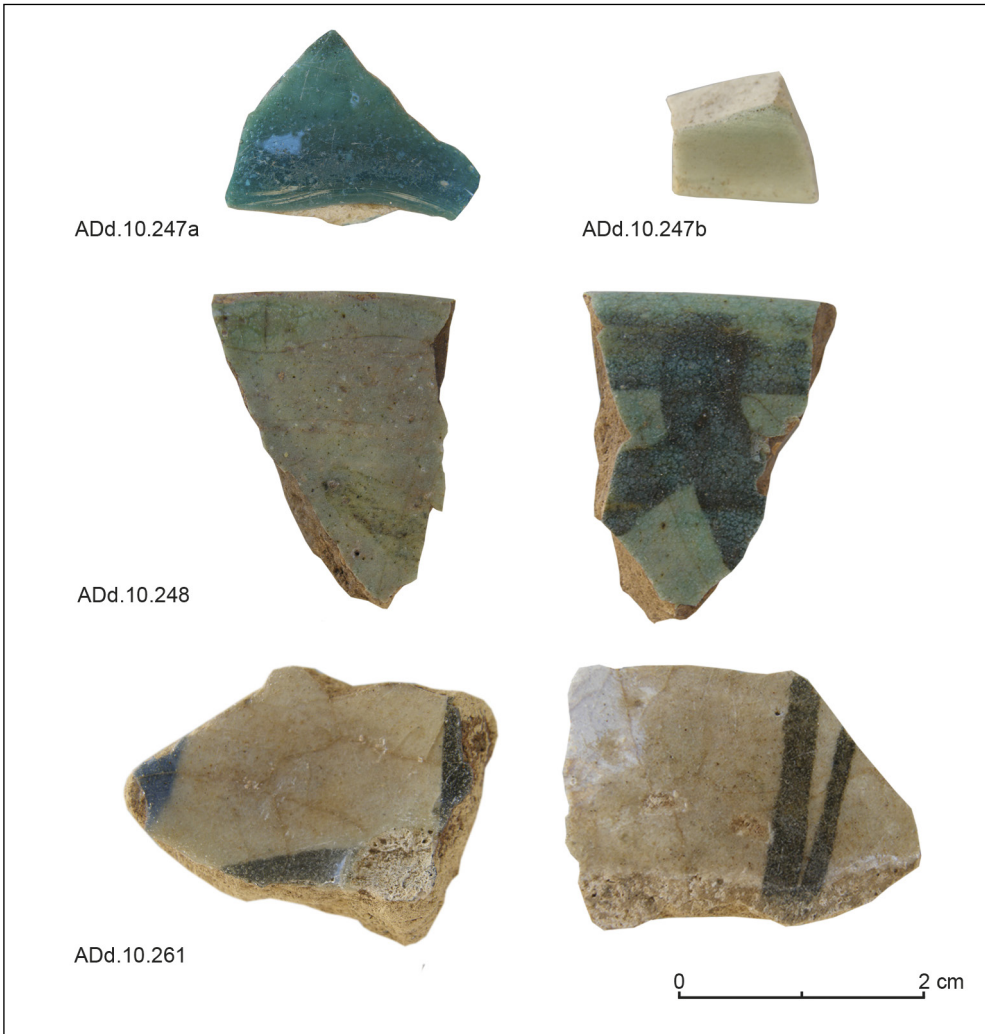


Fig. 7. Glazed vessels from 16th–17th century horizon: monochromatic (ADD.10.247a), imitation “Silhouette” (ADD.10.248), imitation Blue-Black-White (ADD.10.261) and Chinese celadon (ADD.10.247b) (Photo W. Godlewski, PCMA archives)

fragmented making shapes difficult to identify. Nonetheless, a technological analysis as well as study of the decoration revealed on the vessels indicated the presence of two separate pottery traditions. The first represented Dongola's dying out tradition of making pots and the second reached out to southern ceramic traditions associated with the Kingdom of Funj. In the latter case, the only wheel-

made pots are the *saqiyah* pots, the rest being handmade. Smaller tableware forms are also absent and there is a considerable variety of shape.

Thanks to regular excavations on the citadel, material from chronologically defined contexts is now providing data for studies of ceramic production continuity and developments also in modern-age Dongola.

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