

Włodzimierz Godlewski

Dongola, Sudan : excavations in 2012-2013

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WŁODZIMIERZ GODLEWSKI

DONGOLA, SUDAN. EXCAVATIONS IN 2012–2013

The team of the Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology of the University of Warsaw (PCMA) carried out excavations in Old Dongola from 18 November to 20 December 2012 and from 16 January to 16 February 2013.¹ This season's excavation and conservation work was carried out in the Citadel (the royal building complex SWN, B.I and B.V), including the area of the north-eastern defense tower, and Kom H (the south-western quarter of the monastery enclosure and Southwest Annex)

Citadel fortifications

The Dongolan citadel rises impressively over the ancient capital of the Nubian kingdom of Makuria, having been built in the 5th and 6th c. on a rocky uplift along the Nile bank. The defense walls on the north and east were massively constructed: the curtain was 5.7 m wide, the tower projecting from the curtain – 8.5–8.9 m. Mud brick and broken limestone were used for the outside face (approximately 0.9 m thick). The towers were set at regular intervals of 32–35 m. The north-western tower, which was partly explored in 1993–1995, still stands about 6 m high on a rock foundation. The riverside defenses were constructed of mud brick and measured 3.7 m in the northern part and 2.1 m in the southern part.

The northeastern tower, which was explored during the first campaign of the season, was in a much better state of preservation than the described north-western tower (Fig. 1). It was also founded on bedrock. The width was 6.1 m, length 9 m, and it rose to 8.35 m in height. A house of the 17th c. village located on the citadel occupied the top of the tower, using the stone ruins of the tower as its outer



walls. Taking this into account, the original height of the tower (and the curtain on either side of it) can be estimated at about 10.5–11 m.

The fortifications underwent a programme of development and rebuilding, removing sand dunes accumulated against parts of the curtain and adding a new outer facing of dried bricks, approximately 1 m wide, on a level 4.7 m higher than the stone-wall foundation. This construction

¹ The Mission was directed by Prof. Włodzimierz Godlewski (Institute of Archaeology, University of Warsaw) and composed of: Ms Katarzyna Danys-Lasek, archaeologist/ceramologist (freelance); Ms. Lucia Dominici, volunteer (Italy); Ms Justyna Dziubecka, student of archaeology (IA UW); Mr Łukasz Jarmużek MA, archaeologist (IA UW); Ms Jolanta Kurzyńska, wall painting conservator (Academy of Fine Arts, Kraków); Prof.

Adam Łajtar, epigraphist (IA UW); Marta Osypińska PhD, archaeozoologist (Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology, Polish Academy of Sciences, Poznań); Mr Marek Woźniak MA, archaeologist (IAE PAS, Poznań); Dobrochna Zielińska PhD, archaeologist (IA UW). The National Corporation of Antiquities and Museums, Sudan, was represented by Ajab Said el Ajab, archaeologist, NCAM inspector.

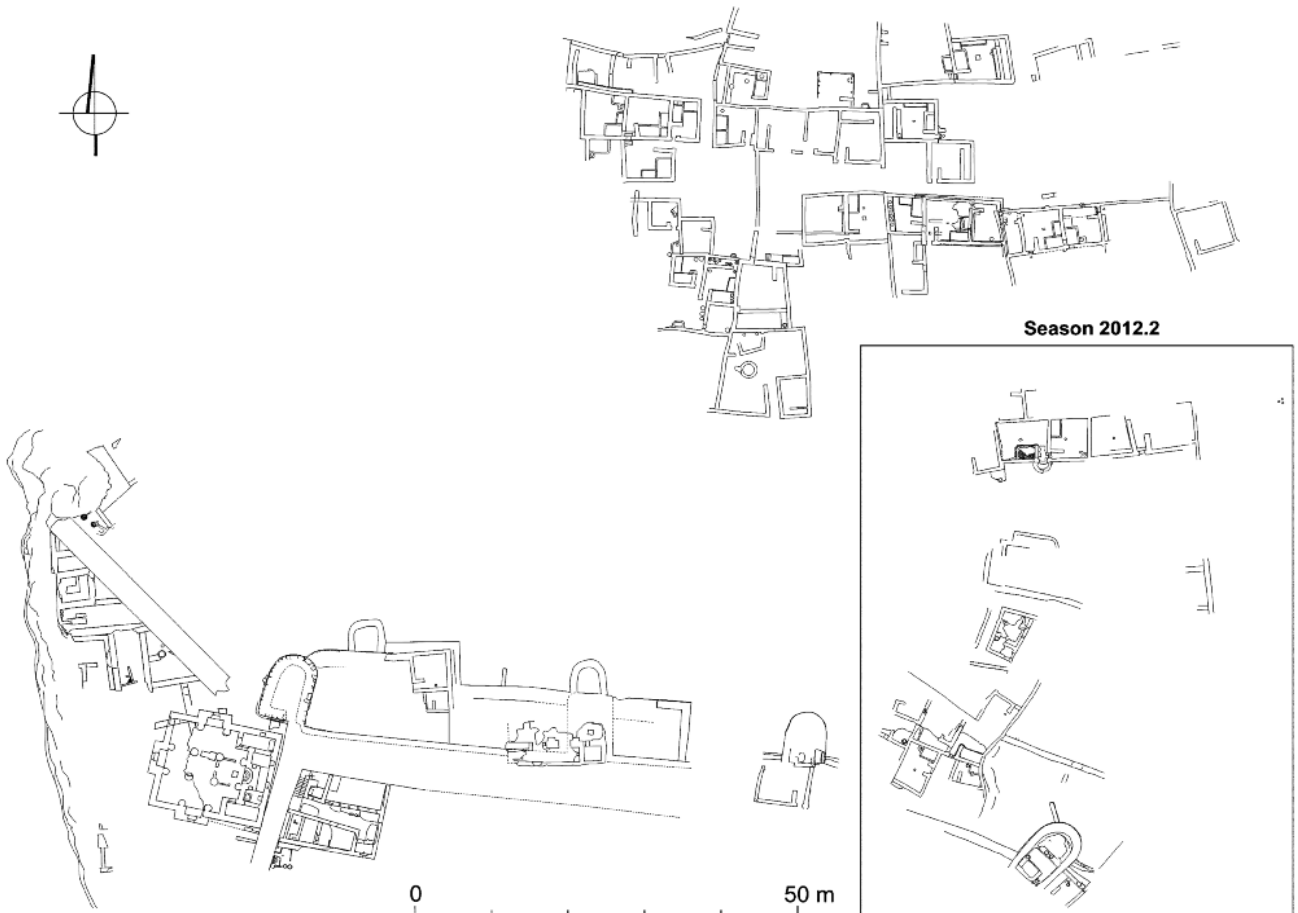


Fig. 1. The northe-astern tower of the fortifications (Photo W. Godlewski; Archive of PCMA).

Ryc. 1. Północno-wschodnia baszta cytadeli.

Fig. 2. Village dwellings by the north-eastern defense tower (Drawing R. Jarmużek; Archive of PCMA).

Ryc. 2. Zabudowa mieszkalna przy północno-wschodniej wieży obronnej.



appears to have taken place sometime in the end of the 16th c., presumably in response to a growing Ottoman threat (the author had previously suggested a date in the end of the 13th c., in defense against raiding Mamelukes). The pottery assemblage recorded from sand corresponding stratigraphically to the dried brick wall facing, handmade in its entirety (not one sherd of wheel-made ceramics was found), was undoubtedly post-Makurite and could be attributed to the 15th–16th c. The dwellings to the north of the fortifications, excavated in the season of fieldwork, can be dated to the 17th c. (Fig. 2). These were small houses with no upper storey, built of dried brick, usually with two or three interiors, founded directly on the sand dune. A rich assemblage of handmade domestic pottery, attributed to the last phase of the functioning of the house and hence dated to the 17th c., was excavated in House DH.116 (Fig. 3). The pots were finely burnished on the outside, decorated with bands of engraved decoration and a neatly impressed mat on the bottom part.

The sand fill by the north-eastern tower already below the foundation level of the dried-brick curtain facade, but also corresponding and above the foundation, yielded an extensive assemblage of faunal remains. The bones were evidently post-consumption refuse dumped from the 17th c. village located on the citadel summit. Archaeozoological research has established that villagers in the 17th c. were eating mainly cattle and camel meat (Table 1).

Table 1. Animal species identified in the osteological material (by M. Osypińska)

Tabela 1. Gatunki zwierząt zidentyfikowane w materiale kostnym

Animal species	N	%
Sheep/Goat <i>Ovis orientalis f. domestica</i> / <i>Capra aegagrus f. domestica</i>	4	7.70
Sheep <i>Ovis orientalis f. domestica</i>	5	
Cattle <i>Bos primigenius f. Domestica</i>	73	62.39
Horse <i>Equus ferus f. domestica</i>	1	0.85
Dog <i>Canis lupus f. domestica</i>	6	5.12
Camel <i>Camelus dromedarius f. domestica</i>	27	23.07
Pearl oyster <i>Pinctada margaritifera</i>	1	0.85
Number of identified bones	117	100/99.15
Unidentified	1	0.84
TOTAL	118	100



Fig. 3. Pottery vessel from Dwelling H.116 (Photo W. Godlewski; Archive of PCMA).

Ryc. 3. Naczynie gliniane odkryte w domu H.116.



Fig. 4. Wall paintings in the north-eastern part of Building B.V (Photo D. Zielińska; Archive of PCMA).

Ryc. 4. Fragment malowidła w północno-wschodniej części budowli B.V.

Royal architecture on the citadel (SWN, B.I and B.V)

Excavations of the palace of King Ioannes (end of 6th c.) and a large church (B.V) to the south of the palace were continued for the past few seasons of fieldwork. The church B.V was a large central basilica (25×15 m). In previous seasons the ruins, which stand to a height of more than 4 m in the eastern and southern parts, were covered with a metal shelter roof and closed off from penetrating tourists by a wire screen. The interior is now being gradually emptied of sand, allowing the conservation of the murals preserved on the lime-plastered walls to proceed at its own pace, determined by conservation needs (Fig. 4). Unfortunately, the plaster and the murals are severely damaged. The church appears to have been connected with the palace of Ioannes, but was a much later foundation than the royal residence, having been constructed most probably in the 9th c. (a more precise dating will be available after the completion of the excavations). Building features suggest that it was one of the best architectural achievements in Dongola and the quality of the murals as well as the lime plaster ground are of the highest mark. The paintings bear legends in Greek, but there are also some inscriptions in Old Nubian, which may have been added presumably at a later date.

Three trenches were explored inside the palace building (B.I), one in the eastern part and two in the western one. Trench 2013.01, traced on the E-W axis of the structure at its eastern end, reached the wall tops of the palace ground floor, about 3.7 m above the walking level in the western part of the structure (the ground floor in this part of the building is known to have measured more than 4 m in height). In the western part of the trench, the walls of the original palace appear to rise beyond the ground floor (Fig. 5). It is too early to ascertain beyond all doubt that this was the eastern facade of the building. The upper layers in the trench revealed ruins of 16th–17th c. village architecture.

In the two western trenches, 2013.2a (B.I.11) and 2013.2b (B.I.36), the destruction layers from the end of the 13th c. were removed, revealing palace wall foundations superimposed on remains of earlier architecture. This building (B.X), preceding the palace of Ioannes, was a dried brick structure lined up with the western defense wall, located at a distance of approximate 1.8 m from it (Fig. 5). It formed part of a complex of architecture already recorded in other trenches: a structure in front of the southern palace facade (Building B.IV), made of red brick and furnished with a red brick floor, and Dwelling H.111, discovered in the north-western corner of the citadel, under the foundations of House H.106 built of dried brick. Pottery found in the

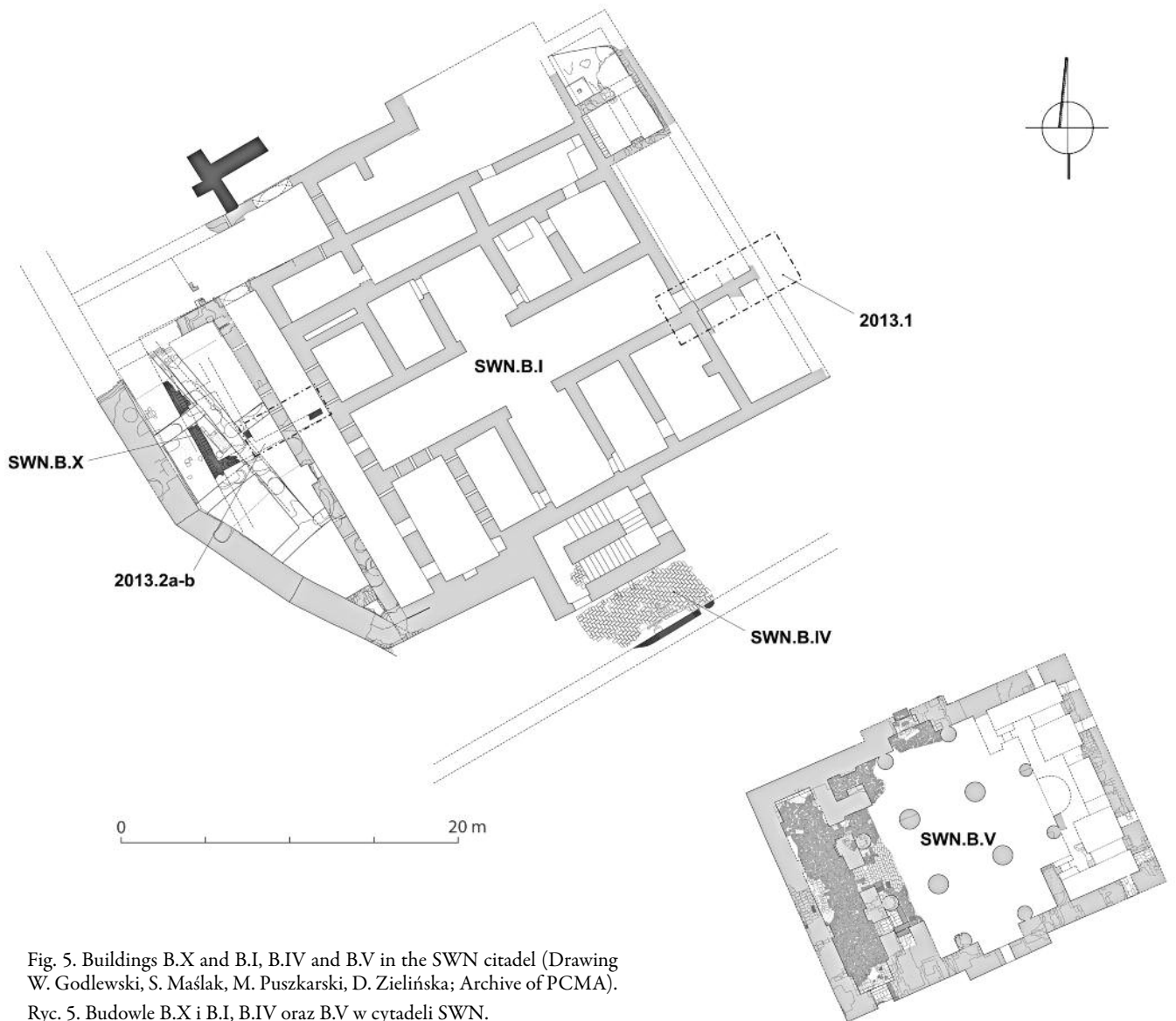


Fig. 5. Buildings B.X and B.I, B.IV and B.V in the SWN citadel (Drawing W. Godlewski, S. Maślak, M. Puzkarski, D. Zielińska; Archive of PCMA).

Ryc. 5. Budowle B.X i B.I, B.IV oraz B.V w cytadeli SWN.

foundations of B.X and H.111 is dated to the mid-6th c. or earlier.

South-western courtyard of the Monastery on Kom H

The south-western quarter of the monastic enclosure on Kom H, including the outer annexes to the north of the western gate, was explored in the course of the season. This part of the compound comprised a courtyard, which opened from the western gate and which extended in front of the west end of the church and the adjacent sanctuary of Anna. An inner enclosure wall partitioned off this open space from the rest of the monastery inhabited by the monks. It was intended presumably for lay visitors to the monastery, presumably coming to the sanctuary of Anna By, who may have entered the complex through the western

gate, which led from the direction of the town. A red brick pavement fronted the entrance to the church and the south side of the sanctuary. The outer enclosure wall of the monastery in this sector was constructed of dried brick and was about 1.3 m wide. The south-western corner was reinforced with a semicircular tower that was accessible through a door in the wall. This tower appears to have served as a place for preparing meals for visitors to the monastery.

Two phases of architectural development were identified in the construction of the western gate to the monastery. In its initial form it was an entry in the wall, approximately 1.75 m wide, with two inner antae walls each a meter wide. The walls next to the entrance on the outside and in the passages were faced with red brick. The jambs in the entrance, by the west face of the wall, were made of sandstone blocks; some fragments of the northern jamb have been preserved, but the southwestern corner was dismantled in its entirety at some point.

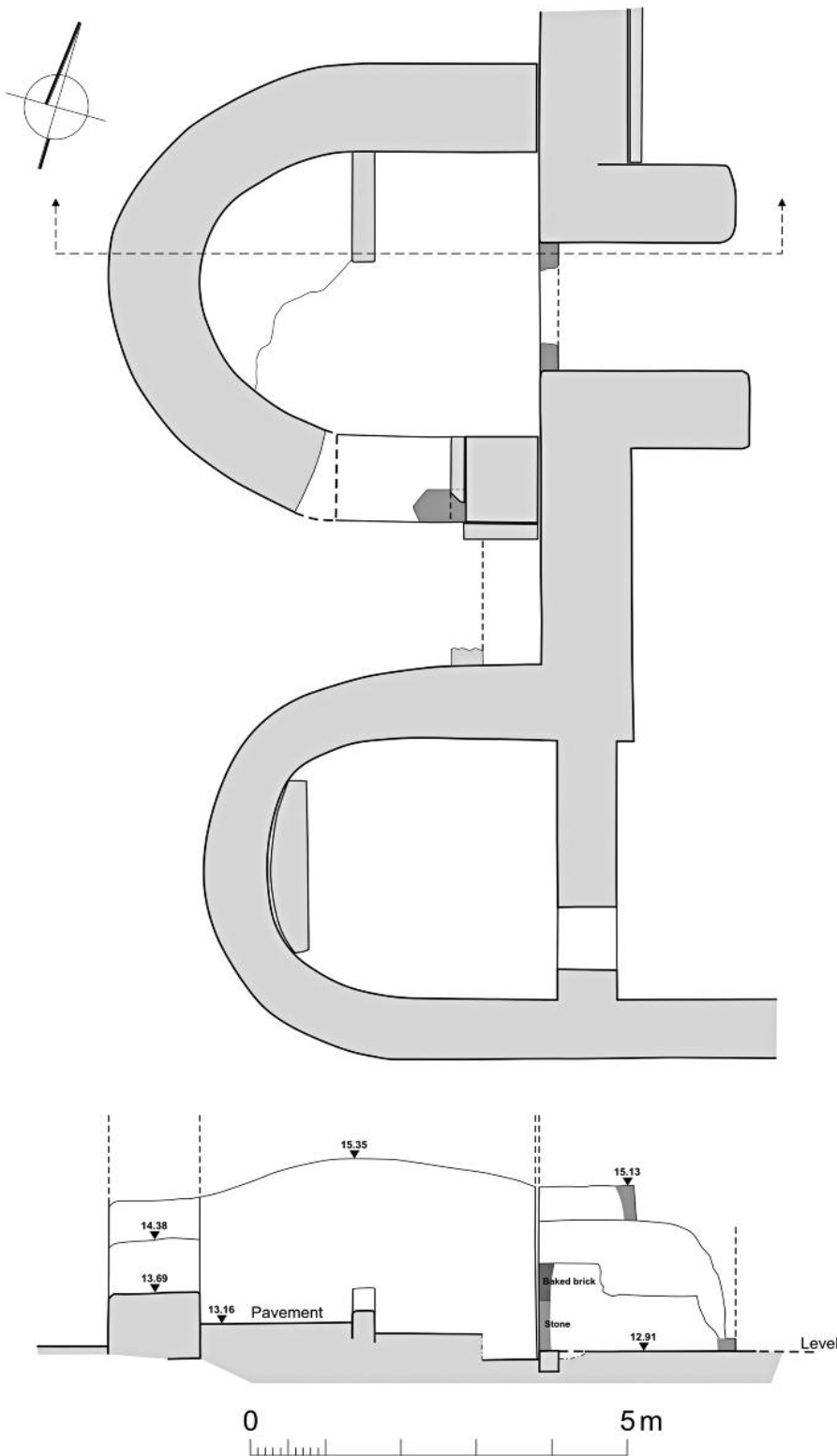


Fig. 6. The south-western gate of the monastery on Kom H (Drawing W. Godlewski, S. Maślak; Archive of PCMA).

Ryc. 6. Południowo-zachodnie wejście do klasztoru na komie H.

The second phase of the gate revolved around a semicircular tower being added in front of the entrance on the outside (Fig. 6). The feature was 6.2 m wide and 5.8 m long, and was entered from the south. The walls, made of dried brick, were 1.1 m thick. A small unit with a floor of ceramic tiles was installed inside the tower, by its west wall. The southern door,

which had a maximal width of 1.6 m, had jambs faced with red brick and a threshold of granite; only the east jamb has been preserved along with one slab from the threshold, but the west jamb can be presumed to have been the same. The entrance passage was just 2 m away from the face of the corner tower of the monastery enclosure.

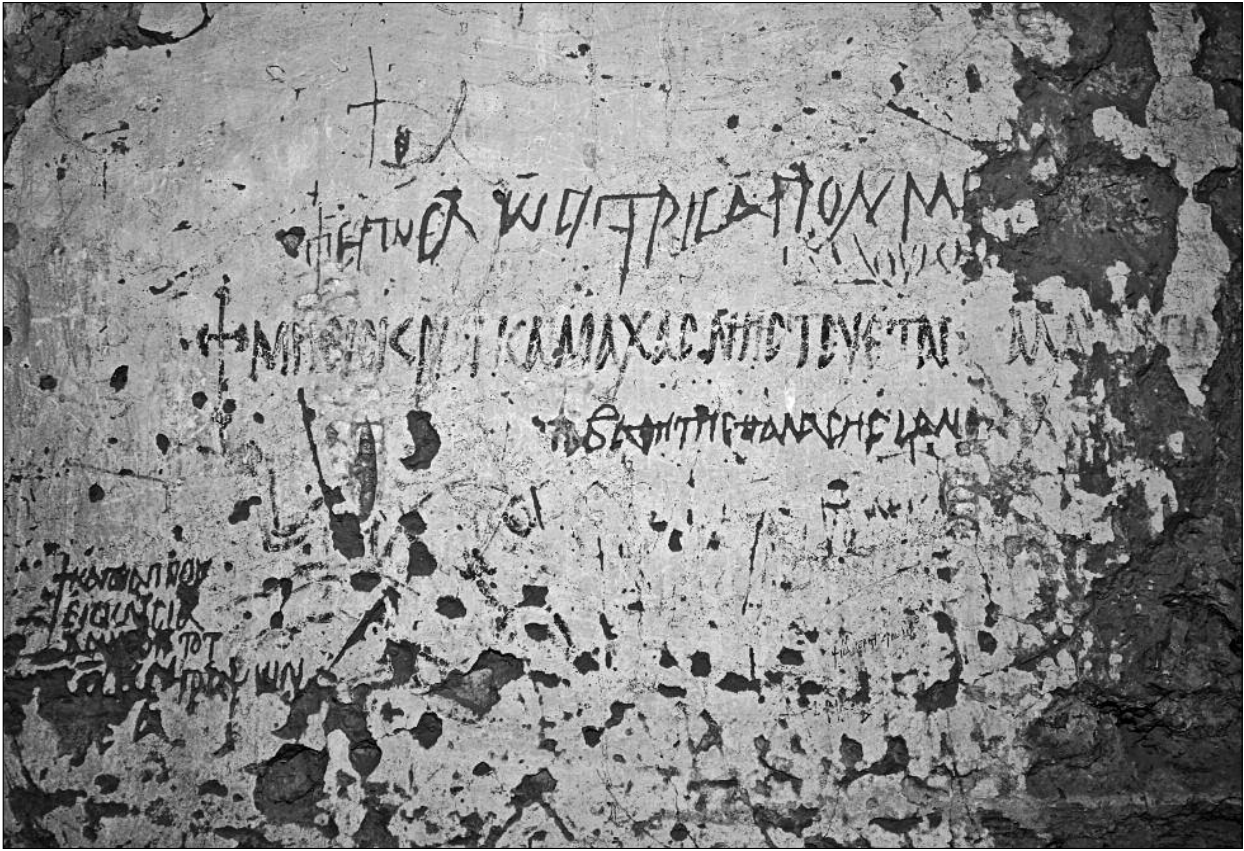


Fig. 7. Inscriptions on the south wall of Building WH.1 (Southwest Annex) on Kom H (Photo D. Zielińska; Archive of PCMA).

Ryc. 7. Inskrypcje na południowej ścianie budowli WH.1 (południowo-zachodni aneks) na komie H.

Building WH.1 (Southwest Annex) of the monastery

Work in the south-western quarter of the monastery also involved a comprehensive review of the excavated sections of outside annexes added to the west wall of the monastic compound, immediately to the north of the west gate. This presumably storied building extended from the west gate to the north, in the direction of another annex built earlier along the outside of the monastery wall (Building WH.2 = Northwest Annex). The structure was excavated successively by Bogdan Żurawski in 1995 and by Stefan Jakobielski in 2005; the wall paintings from the annex have been recently published by Małgorzata Martens-Czarnecka. The poor condition of the shelter roof constructed in 2005 called for immediate action and a new metal roof was installed this season.

The work provided an opportunity to clear the west facade of sand, as well as to carry out additional research and documentation of the architecture, paintings and inscriptions preserved on the walls. Studies undertaken by Adam Łajtar on the inscriptions from Building WH.1 have demonstrated that most of them were written in Greek.

Only a few of the graffiti scratched in the plaster were in Old Nubian (Fig. 7). Most of the Greek texts were legends accompanying murals – prayers and literary texts (psalms). Despite their poor state of preservation, they are of key importance for understanding the repertoire of painted decoration on the ground-floor of the structure. The graffiti were left by visitors. None of the inscriptions included a date.

The building was undoubtedly of a sacral nature, but the exact function has not been determined despite the preserved inscriptions and murals, as well as some inner installations. Neither has the date of the founding of this structure been established, although the building is evidently later than the second architectural phase of the west gate. The annex was open to visitors from outside the monastery, but the staircase installed in one of the southern units of the annex permitted inner communication not only with a presumed upper floor, but also with the monastic buildings beyond the monastery wall.

Prof. dr hab. Włodzimierz Godlewski
Institute of Archaeology
University of Warsaw
w.godlewski@uw.edu.pl

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WŁODZIMIERZ GODLEWSKI

DONGOLA, SUDAN. WYKOPALISKA SEZONU 2012–2013

Misja wykopaliskowa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego (Centrum Archeologii Śródziemnomorskiej) pracowała w stolicy Królestwa Makurii – Dongoli w okresie od 18 listopada do 20 grudnia 2012 roku oraz od 16 stycznia do 16 lutego 2013 roku, kontynuując badania nad budowlami królewskimi, tj. Pałacem Johannesesa (B.I), budowlą B.X, starszą zabudową poniżej pałacu i nad kościołem królewskim (B.V), a także nad fortyfikacjami cytadeli i zabudową mieszkalną przy północno-wschodniej fortyfikacji, na tere-

nie klasztoru na komie H, w jego południowo-wschodniej części. Badania fortyfikacji cytadeli zmieniły wcześniejsze ustalenia. Oryginalne fortyfikacje z przełomu V i VI wieku są zachowane do wysokości powyżej 8 m, a ich rozbudowa, fundowana na wydmie piaskowej pod fortyfikacjami, zapewne powstała znacznie później – w XVI wieku. Szersza informacja o wynikach prac misji w 2013 roku, jak również w latach wcześniejszych, znajduje się na stronie internetowej UW: www.polacynadnilem.uw.edu.pl.