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The Southern Dongola Reach Survey, 2001

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DONGOLA REACH

THE SOUTHERN DONGOLA REACH SURVEY, 2001

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The fourth SDRS season lasted from February 8 to March 24, 2001.¹⁾ The agenda comprised a re-survey of the entire concession area with the objectives of mapping the region under investigation, interpreting some issues that had emerged during post-season work, testing the endangered site of Banganarti, and completing the salvage work at the Soniyat temple.

1) The mission was staffed by the following: Dr. Bogdan Żurawski, archaeologist, director; Dr. Marcin Wiewióra, archaeologist, architect; Dr. Mahmoud El Tayeb, archaeologist (as in the previous two SDRS seasons, he shared his time and energies between the Gdańsk Archaeological Museum's Mission to the Fourth Cataract region and the SDRS); Dr. Krzysztof Misiewicz, archaeologist, geophysicist; Mr. Piotr Osypiński, archaeologist; Mr. Maciej Kurcz, archaeologist, ethnologist; Ms. Magdalena Łaptaś, archaeologist, iconologist; Ms. Paulina Terendy, archaeologist, draftsman; Mr. Jacek Poremba, photographer. As in previous seasons, two students were attached to the Mission: Ms. Olga Dłużniewska and Ms. Anna Jaklewicz, both very busy and effective with ceramic drawing.

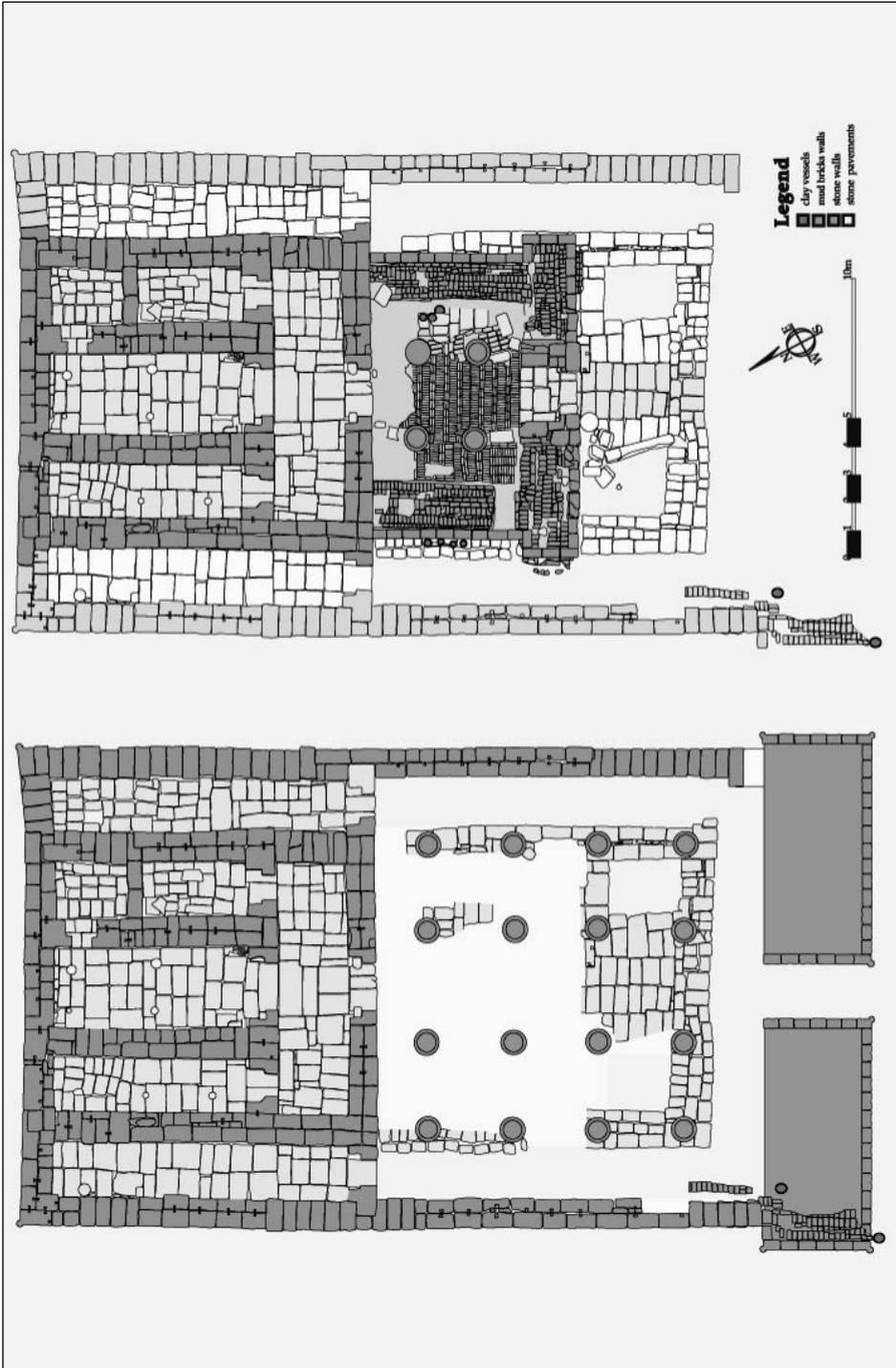


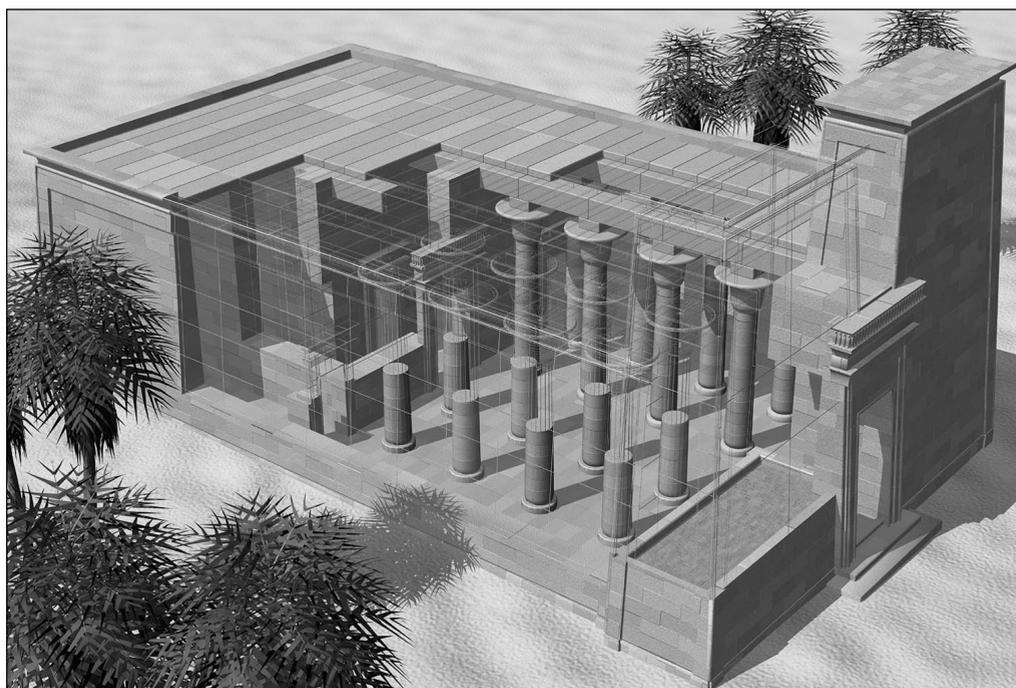
Fig. 1. Plans of the two temples uncovered at Soniyat (Tergis 40)

KUSHITE TEMPLE OF SONIYAT

The work at Soniyat concentrated in the southern part of the Kushite temple investigated during the 1997, 1998 and 1998-1999 seasons.²⁾ Six test pits were dug, to enable the master plan of the religious complex to be completed. During this work, a second-phase temple was found (*Figs. 1, 2*). It had been raised in the Meroitic period, after the Napatan temple had been ruined. With alterations effected in mud, adding to existing stone sections, it was much smaller and of inferior quality than its predecessor. The

pylons and the walls behind them were constructed of sun-dried bricks and faced with stone. The roofing above the cella was supported on wooden beams set in the pavement in its latest phase of use. A kitchen space was arranged in the side rooms, cut off by the new mud brick walls; it was used extensively by later squatters (Late Meroitic/post-Meroitic period), living in the temple after it had been abandoned (*Fig. 3*).

In the southern part of the earlier Kushite temple some reused blocks were



*Fig. 2. Three-dimensional reconstruction of the Kushite temple in Soniyat (Tergis 40)
(Computer rendering P. Malec)*

2) For reports on the previous seasons, cf. B. Żurawski, "Soniyat. Southern Dongola Reach Survey. Archaeological Reconnaissance near Abkor 1997", *PAM IX, Reports 1997* (1998), 180-193; id., "Dongola Reach. The Southern Dongola Reach Survey, 1998", *PAM X, Reports 1998* (1999), 149-160; id., "Dongola Reach. The Southern Dongola Reach Survey, 1998/1999", *PAM XI, Reports 1999* (2000), 209-221.

found that seem to be too heavy to have been transported from the nearest temples at Kawa or Hageir Gubli. These *spolia* might have originated from a still earlier temple that could have stood nearby. A geo-physical survey conducted by Dr. Krzysztof Misiewicz revealed a rectangular outline, resembling a temple, evolving around two huge monoliths originally believed by the mission to be the foundation blocks of a gate to the temple *temenos*. It now looks as if an earlier temple had stood on the spot and had been dismantled completely except for the largest foundation blocks which were too heavy to move.

Another rich deposit of votive objects was discovered in a test pit sunk in front of the western doorjamb of the "stone temple", parallel to the eastern doorjamb where a cache had been found in 1997. Robbers and *sebbakhin* had heavily disturbed the area with the result that some objects were in a lamentable state, especially the ceramics. However, a fine collection of complete objects was also recovered (Figs. 4, 5).

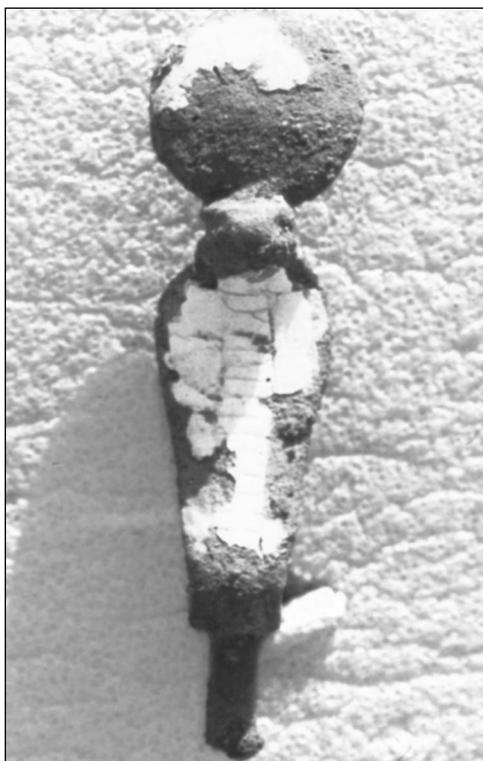


Fig. 4. Copper-alloy uraeus found in the offering space in Soniyat temple (SDRS 01/25) (Photo B. Żurawski)

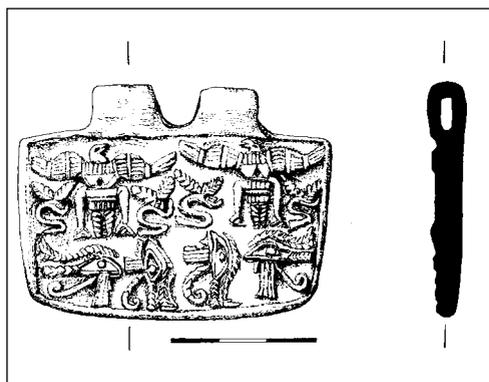


Fig. 3. Amulet pendant (SDRS 01/16) greenish faience. From a pole hole in Soniyat temple, possibly foundation deposit under a wooden structure (?) (Drawing P. Terendy)

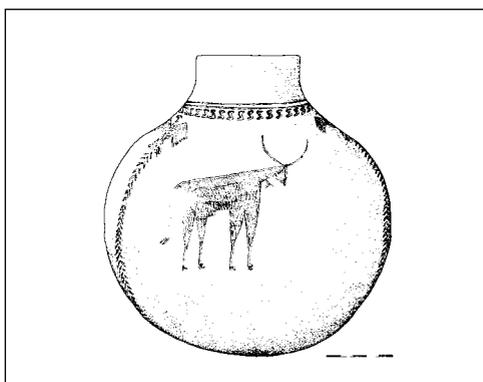


Fig. 5. Handmade Meroitic globular jar (SDRS 01/19), black ware, found in the offering space in Soniyat temple (rim diameter 7.7cm) (Drawing P. Osypiński)

FORTIFIED ENCLOSURE AT BANGANARTI

In February 2001, some trial pits were dug on the central kom of Sinada in the right-bank village of Banganarti ("Locust Island" in Nubian), halfway between the Fourth and Third Cataracts on the Nile.³⁾ The fortified kom of Banganarti had once sat on the river bank, at the mouth of a *wadi* that is still partly submerged during a high Nile flood. (The last time the Nile entered Khor Jerf al-Mardi was in 1994 when part of the Hammur Abbasiya village that lies on both banks of the *chor* was destroyed.)

Test pits revealed a fortified enclosure composed of mud brick curtain walls, c. 3 m thick, provided with circular towers and a tower-gate opening to the south (Fig. 6). The fortress(?) or fortified monastery(?) of Sinada was constructed on the plan of a sub-rectangle 80 by 100 m (Fig. 7). The curtain walls were made of enormous bricks ranging from 48 to 50 cm in length. The complex was eventually turned into a stronghold, probably as late as the 11th or even 12th century, when the first church was dismantled down to ground level. The "second church", set in the center of the enclosure, was raised (like the first one) on the plan of a square measuring 25 m to the side. The layout is based on the principle of a cruciform structure built around four supports composed of two engaged columns and a pillar. On three sides it is surrounded by a system of chapel-like spaces, the seven chapels built along the eastern wall terminating in apses. The *floruit* of the complex came in the 10th through 13th centuries, when the church was embellished with murals. The high standard of

the red-brick masonry of the church and the quality of its murals place the Banganarti church among the masterpieces of Nubian art and architecture. Its layout is unparalleled in the vast repertoire of Nubian ecclesiastical buildings.

A test pit dug in the eastern part of the church revealed the upper portion of four murals (Figs. 8-12). The apostles in the central apse are the latest addition (cf. Fig. 8). Stylistic analysis and palaeography date the numerous graffiti and inscriptions, in Greek and Old Nubian, to the 11th-13th centuries (Fig. 11).

Definitely the finest iconographical find of the season at Banganarti is a superb portrait of a Nubian king depicted under the holy patronage of an archangel and surrounded by the apostles (Fig. 12). The king wears a crown and a coronation garment. He is painted receiving from the archangel an object conventionally named a "church-model", more likely a reliquary. Nonetheless, it was a tradition in the Christian East from the 11th century onwards to represent reliquaries in the form of a church or chapel.

Of greatest interest perhaps is the scepter held by the king in his right hand is the most interesting. It is a golden column topped by a capital, on which sits a figure of Jesus Christ with a golden cross behind him (the gold rendered in yellow paint). The representation seems to shed new light on the issue of the curious nomenclature of the 11th century archbishop Georgios of Dongola, who is identified (among other epithets) as *archistyl(os)*. It seems apparent to me that

3) The kom itself and its immediate surroundings were called "Sinada" after the first settler in the region, according to local oral testimony.



Fig. 6. Vertical low-altitude (kite) aerial photograph taken of the Banganarti Site in February 2001
(Photo B. Zurauski)

this title came from the column (*stylos*) that was an attribute of archepiscopal power in the Nubian church.

The kom that conceals the church yields inconsequential quantities of potsherds. However, a high-density scatter of Early to Late Christian potsherds spreads between the kom itself and the curtain walls.

The evidently Early Christian complex of Banganarti almost touches the Transitional Period tumuli field of Hammur Abbasiya. Was this accidental or were some early monasteries (or fortified settlements) associated with the conversion of "X-Group" nomads to Christianity? It

must be stressed that the mission's excavation in four of the 52 tumuli at Hammur Abbasiya revealed very early Christian burials inside these tumuli, near their pagan forbearers. Last but not least, the same huge mud bricks used in the curtain walls of the alleged monastery were also found in the blocking of the burial chamber in Tumulus 4 there. The settlement pattern of post-Meroitic cemeteries and Early Christian settlements and monasteries recorded in Banganarti and Selib, for example, indicates a peaceful co-habitation between the sedentary population and the nomads or semi-nomads living on the fringes of the desert.

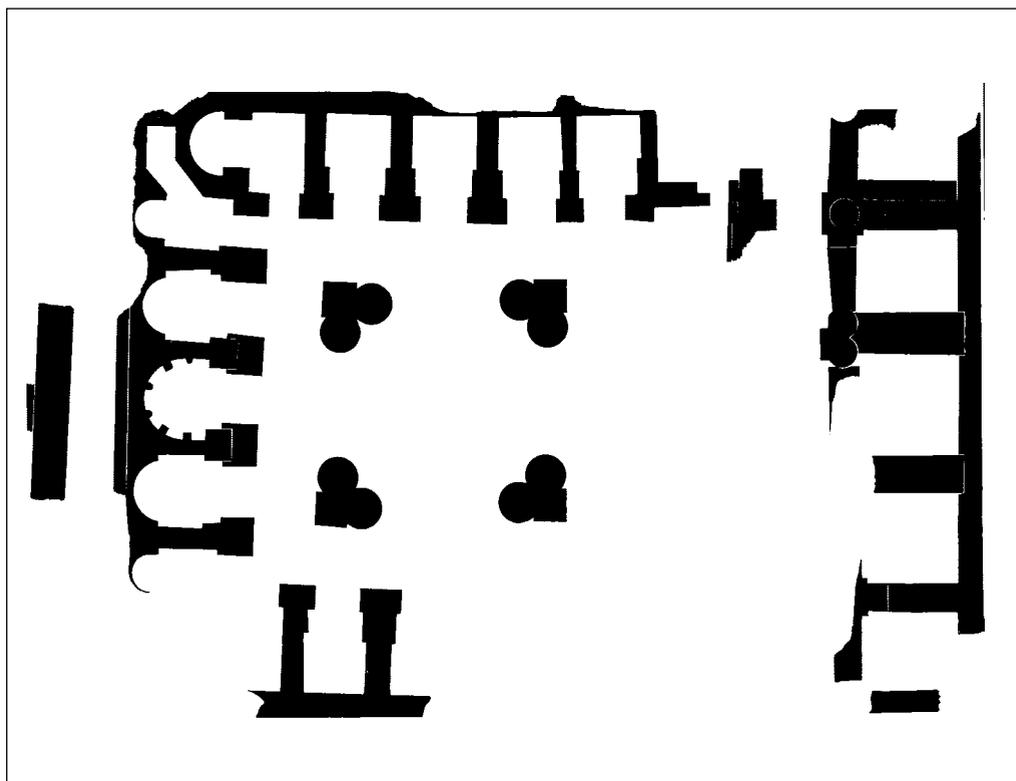


Fig. 7. Interior of the Banganarti church, parts exposed during fieldwork in 2001
(Drawing B. Żurawski)



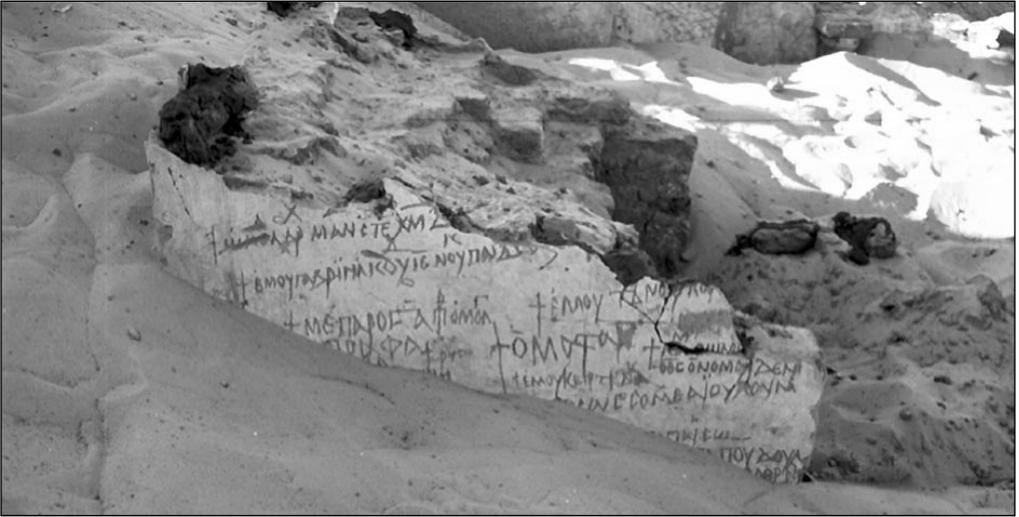
*Fig. 8. Latest mural in the apse, representing two apostles, 12th century
(Photo J. Poremba)*



Fig. 9. The faces of the apostles from the southern apse of the Banganarti church at the moment of discovery (eyes partly reconstructed), 11th century (Photo J. Poremba)



Fig. 10. The apostles from a side apse of the Banganarti church (Photo J. Poremba)



*Fig. 11. Graffiti in the central apse of the church, 12th-13th centuries
(Photo J. Poremba)*



*Fig. 12. The moment of discovery of the portrait of a Nubian king
(Photo J. Poremba)*