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## Banganarti: 2004 Season Including Activities at the Fortress of Ed-Deiga

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# BANGANARTI

## 2004 SEASON INCLUDING ACTIVITIES AT THE FORTRESS OF ED-DEIGA

Bogdan Żurawski

*Work on the central kom in Banganarti ran from January 20 to March 27, 2004.<sup>1</sup> The program covered excavations in and around the Church of Archangel Raphael (=Upper Church), as well as preservation and documentation works on the murals and inscriptions in both the Upper and Lower churches (for a report on the conservation of murals, see below, remarks by C. Calaforra-Rzepka in this volume). The main objective was to trace the entire layout of both churches and to shelter the ruins under a corrugated-iron roof, a project begun already in 2003. Minor activities focused on the fortifications where two shallow test pits were dug along the eastern curtain wall in an effort to date the occupation by analyzing the ceramic waste dumped beyond the walls.*

*The present report also includes activities carried out at the fortress of Ed-Deiga. A separate report in this volume concerns the exploration of Saffi Island, a project on the mission's agenda that was accomplished in the course of the season.*

1 The staff comprised: Dr. Bogdan Żurawski, archaeologist, director of the project; Dr. Adam Łajtar, epigraphist; Mr. Piotr Osypiński, archaeologist; Mrs. Marta Osypińska, archaeozoologist; Mrs. Edyta Klimaszewska-Drabot, archaeologist/ceramologist; Mr. Cristobal Calaforra-Rzepka, art restorer; Mrs. Magdalena Łaptaś, iconologist/mural documentalist; Ms Marta Momot, Ms Anna Błaszczuk, draftspersons; Mr. Artur Baran, construction engineer.

## BANGANARTI

Starting work on the northern side of the Upper Church [Figs. 1,2], the team traced the mastaba-like platform in the north-western corner of the church, already fragmentarily explored in 2002,<sup>2</sup> further both eastward and southward. The bench appears to have lined the porticoed walls (i.e., south, north and west walls), terminating near the two eastern corners. It was

well-made of red brick, laid in an exacting pattern, the corner sections additionally reinforced with squared sandstone blocks. Later on, after the Upper Church I was leveled and the Upper Church II raised in its place, the original platform was covered with another one, wider but poorly constructed (of bricks of various size). The northern entrance to the Upper

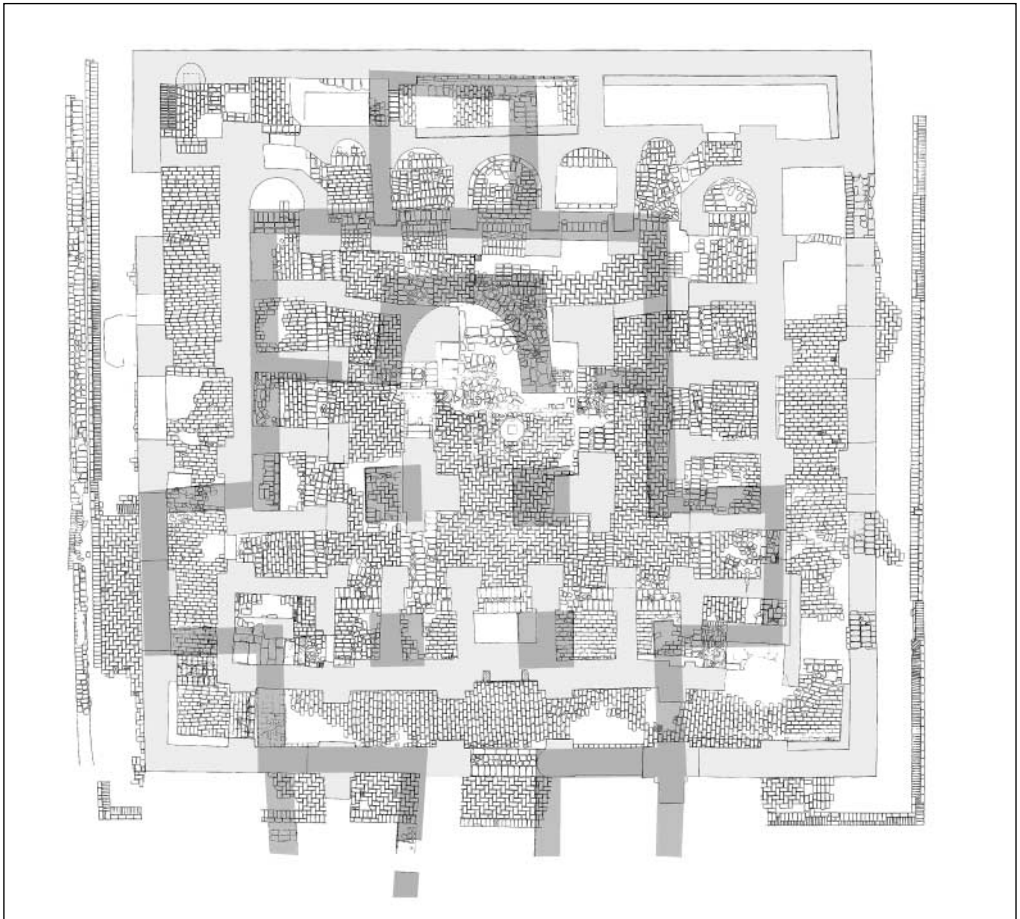


Fig. 1. Upper (lighter walls) and Lower (darker walls) Churches at Banganarti (Drawing B. Żurawski, M. Momot, E. Klimaszevska-Drabot)

2 Cf. report in PAM XIV, Reports 2002 (2003), 241-250.

Church was also cleared of sand and debris [Fig. 3].

Inside the church, the last still unexposed walls and rooms were now cleared. Some of the late niche blockings and wall abutments were pulled down revealing important inscriptions<sup>3</sup> and fragments of murals. Two inscriptions on the walls of Room 11<sup>4</sup> gave the name of a certain Paper designated as "King of Tungul (= Dongola) [cf. Fig. 1 on p. 310 below]. No king of this name has been attested in any of the written sources known so far. He probably reigned in the middle of the 14th century AD. King Paper is to be considered in all likelihood the forerunner of the later Muslim *mukuk* of Dar Dongola.

Apart from a few small trial pits made in order to trace in full the layout of the Lower Church, the excavations concentrated on three huge trial pits, dug in Room 8 (=Sondage I), outside the church, in a space between the two red-brick abutments reinforcing the west façade (=Sondage II)



Fig. 2. Aerial (kite) photograph of Banganarti site in February 2004 (Photo B. Zurawski)

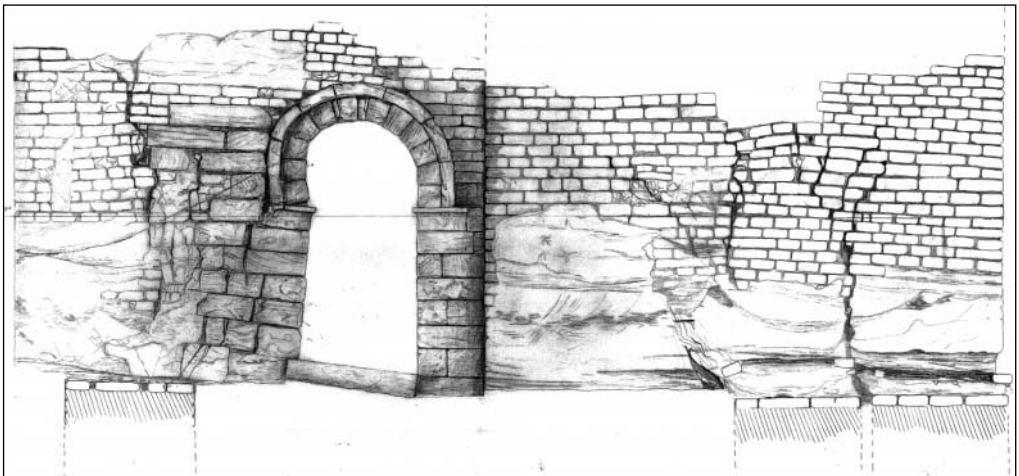


Fig. 3. Northern entrance to the Upper Church (Drawing Anna Błaszczuk)

<sup>3</sup> Cf. contribution by A. Lajtar in this volume.

<sup>4</sup> For a plan with room numbers, cf. PAM XV, Reports 2003 (2004), Fig. 6.

and in the eastern (uppermost) part of the Western Annex (=Sondage III).

#### SONDAGE I/2004

The pit in Room 8 revealed a wall built of well squared sandstone blocks and red brick. In its middle part, a blocked passageway to the northern sacristy of the Lower Church was found [Fig. 4]. Faint traces of murals (black and yellow patches) were registered on the decayed lime plaster.

The eastern face of the northeastern pier of the Lower Church was also exposed. It was raised in mixed stone/red brick technique on a sound stone foundation. Interestingly enough, the foundation was com-

posed of spolia from an earlier building [Fig. 5]. The huge voussoir-shaped, plastered<sup>5</sup> halves or quarters of column drums originated either from a nearby earlier church or from a pagan temple of considerable dimensions.<sup>6</sup> Considering the enormous weight of these blocks, their number and their prolific use in the foundation courses, where boulders and stones abounding in the nearby desert would have easily sufficed, the temple, which was the alleged source of these elements, must have stood quite close.

#### SONDAGE II/2004

The unexpected discovery of a painting on a wall of the Lower Church, found running

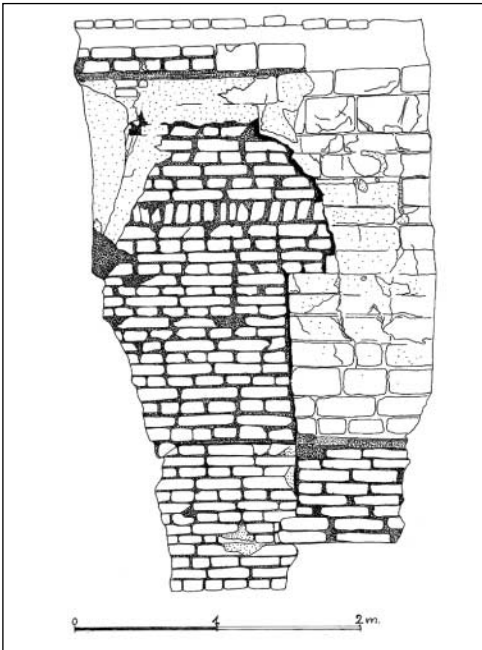


Fig. 4. Lower Church. Blocked entrance to the northern sacristy (Sondage I/2004) (Drawing Anna Błaszczuk)



Fig. 5. Foundation beneath the northeastern pier of the Lower Church (Photo B. Żurawski)

- 5 The plaster still adhering to the columns is extremely hard and smooth. It does not resemble the medieval plaster known from the Dongola region.
- 6 Judging by what can be seen, the diameter could run to 1.5-2 m (!), much more than the columns in the nave of the Mosaic Church and in the Hambukol *katholikon*.

N-S beneath the western section of the *mastaba*-like platform lining the western wall of the Upper Church, necessitated the excavation of this trench. The mural represented a mounted saint transfixing with a lance a figure wearing a crown, trampled under the horse's forelegs [Fig. 6].<sup>7</sup> Below the holy rider a very long inscription in Greek (40 lines of text) was found, while to the right there was a rather unusual "graphic" representation of Mary in prayer, framed like an icon.

The passage between the space in which the mural was found and the central nave

of the Lower Church was later blocked by an unplastered, but solidly built wall. The reason for its building remains obscure.

#### SONDAGE III/2004

Two deep pits (a and b) were dug in the Western Annex, the main objective being to explore the point of contact between the westernmost section of the Lower Church and its western extension. The results convincingly disproved the existence of any walls corresponding to the already known walls of the Lower Church. The Western Annex, which was stratified in passing, ap-



Fig. 6. Warrior saint spearing a royal figure; a Maria Orans icon on the left (Drawing Anna Błaszczuk)

<sup>7</sup> The lance is aimed directly at the *tablion* of the king trampled under the horse's hooves. The figure in question could be either Diocletian or Julian, the equestrian saint being consequently St. George or St. Mercurios.

peared to be older than previously thought, antedating the last rebuilding of the Upper Church (well before AD 1280). Indeed, it was already standing when the red-brick piers were built abutting the two double columns of the west façade. The most plausible time for the raising of the Western Annex was the 11th century, soon after the building of the Upper Church I.

The Western Annex was used long after the church was abandoned. It was enlarged at least three times, the width of its walls

being doubled at the end. One of the last Christian interments in the region was found in the floor of the long, vaulted room running E-W. It was marked with a short inscription in Greek, scratched on the south wall near the burial.

At the close of the 2004 season, it became evident that the eastern extension of the Lower Church (exedra) was not paralleled by a similar feature in the western end. Thus, a regular cruciform plan is not sustainable any longer.

## THE LOWER CHURCH

Excavations conducted so far, including shallow and deep trial pits dug this year, have traced all the key diagnostic features of the Lower Church, namely the four square pillars that supported the dome, the eastern passage behind the apse, the eastern extension (exedra) communicating with the passage through a door, the tripartite layout of its western section with a staircase in the northwestern corner and, more importantly, two "arms" that extended north and south, adding another 7 m to the church width (exactly 20 m in total).

The passage behind the apse, the eastern wall of the southern sacristy, the eastern wall of the nave both right and left of the apse and the tripartite western section were all given a coat of plaster at least twice.<sup>8</sup> Painted decoration was found on both layers, complemented by Greek inscriptions rendered in ink.

Figures of saints were painted on the first layer of plaster; the second bore many more mural representations, including motifs like that of Christ (or an unknown saint) in a tondo executed in red paint

(with three red Maltese crosses outlined in black below the tondo).

The Lower Church was constructed of well-fired, standardized red brick and worked sandstone blocks. The foundation courses were made of red brick on a stone footing, whereas the foundations of the central pillars were of stone spolia. The walls aboveground were of red brick with the corners raised in stone.

In the final years of its use, the Lower Church was apparently entered via a flight of steps descending nearly 3 m below the 10th century ground level around the building.

The fill below the pavement of the Upper Church yielded sherds dated to the 7th-10th century. A layer of broken amphorae of 7th century date [Fig. 7], accumulated in the lowest parts of this fill, could correspond to a level predating the pavement of the Lower Church (it remained virtually undisturbed during the removal of the Lower Church flooring). It suggests a *post quem* dating for the construction of the Lower Church.

8 A third coat was attested on the east wall of the nave. The first layer there consisted of a very thin coat of lime render bearing a painted brickwork design.

The Lower Church at Banganarti finds no exact counterpart in the rich repertory of Nubian churches, but there are structures exhibiting close affinities to it. Taking into consideration the absence of choir seats, as well as altar and *bigab* (probably made of wood<sup>9</sup> in the apse) the Lower Church best fits Adams' Type 3b (Abu Sir Type), which is dated to AD 750-850.<sup>10</sup> If so, then the Type 3b forms known from Nubia are among the earliest known examples of the Byzantine "inscribed cross" church plan that appeared in 10th-century Constantinople as a well-developed and well-matured late variant in a long typological sequence.<sup>11</sup> Similarly to the inscribed cross churches in Byzantium, the Nubian churches of Type 3 constituted a response to the growing need for ecclesiastical buildings of more mundane di-

mensions, made of cheaper materials (mud brick) instead of stone and red brick.

The early church at Banganarti was vaulted already in the first phase (offsprings of vaults are still visible in the southern aisle on both sides of the entrance to the *diakonikon*). This feature definitely moves the possible construction date up to the 8th/9th century.<sup>12</sup> This date is "elevated" in comparison to church DC excavated by J. Dobrowolski in Old Dongola in 1986. In the rich repertory of Type 3b churches, it sits next to the Lower Church. However, its dating is embarrassing, since it looks definitely earlier (timber roofing !) but is dated to the 10th century instead, "in any event not later than the beginning of the 11th century".<sup>13</sup> The church in the ruins of a monastic complex at Hambukol,<sup>14</sup> *ante quem* dated by the famous Marian Kudda

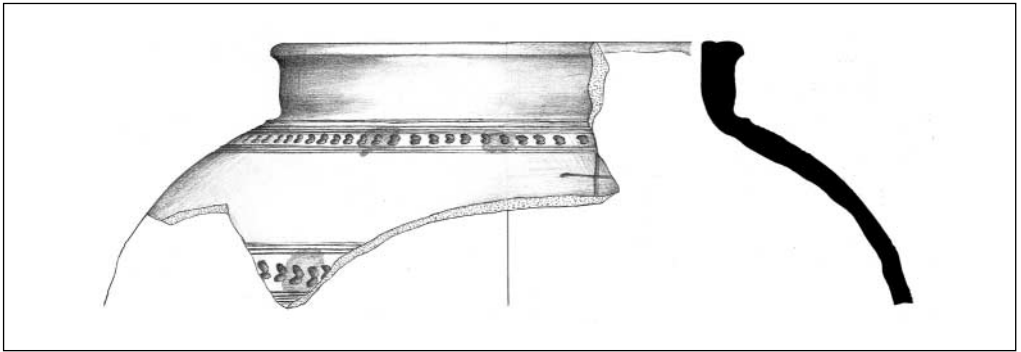


Fig. 7. Seventh century open jar of a type found in abundance below the pavement of the Upper Church (rim dia. 19 cm) (Drawing M. Momot)

- 9 Cf. W.Y. Adams, "The Architectural evolution of the Nubian church, 500-1400 AD", *JARCE* 4 (1965), 113.  
 10 Ibid., 112-114; cf. also P.M. Gartkiewicz, "An introduction to the history of Nubian church architecture", *Nubia Christiana* 1 (Warsaw 1982), Fig. 16.  
 11 L. Rodley, *Byzantine Art and Architecture* (Cambridge 1994), 137. Inscribed-cross churches developed during the so called 'dark age' (late 6th to mid 9th century) and the surviving 9th and early 10th century examples are well-matured forms.  
 12 P. Grossmann, *Kirche und spatantike Hausanlagen im Chnumtempelhof, Elephantine II* (Mainz am Rhein 1980), 91; a 9th century date is quite plausible since it fits the general style of the earliest mural decoration of the Lower Church.  
 13 J. Dobrowolski, "On a recently discovered church in Old Dongola", *Nubian Letters* 9 (1987), 4, Fig. on p. 2.  
 14 J. Anderson, "Monastic lifestyles of the Nubian desert: Seeking the mysterious monks of Makuria", *Sudan and Nubia* 3 (1999) 73-75, Fig. 5.



stela of AD 887,<sup>15</sup> seems also to be a good analogy to the Banganarti Lower Church, the points of similarity being the northern and southern lateral extensions (exedrae), the antithetic arrangement of the northern and southern entrances and the tripartite western section.<sup>16</sup>

The Type 3b churches, analogous to the Lower Church at Banganarti as far as the main diagnostic features are concerned, lack the lateral northern and southern extensions and the eastern exedra, all key features of the North-Western Church at Old Dongola,<sup>17</sup> dated by Jakobielski and Medeksza to the 12th century;<sup>18</sup> the Octagon Church at Kulb,<sup>19</sup> dated by Adams to the 12th-13th century;<sup>20</sup> the church in the Ramses II temple in Aksha<sup>21</sup> and to some extent the *extra muros* Church of Angels at Tamit dated by Bresciani to the 14th century<sup>22</sup> (Grossmann's date is

mid-9th century<sup>23</sup> and, *toutes proportions gardées*, the Cruciform Church at Old Dongola.<sup>24</sup> The lateral extensions of the walls were also found in the so-called Pillar Church on the western slope of Kom A in Old Dongola<sup>25</sup> (although their function as 'vestibules' was totally different from the purely structural purpose of the Banganarti exedrae). Although not manifested outside the building, the 'extension' of the nave to the north and south (forming a kind of transept) was observed in the Church of Granite Columns in Old Dongola.<sup>26</sup> It is worth emphasizing that the projections in the north and south walls in the 'inscribed cross' churches appeared in local Byzantine churches of the 9th century.<sup>27</sup>

An eastern annex was found, for example, in the Northern Church on Kom B at Soba East.<sup>28</sup> It was also recorded in a number of other Nubian churches, but its func-

- 15 A. Lajtar, *Catalogue of the Greek Inscriptions in the Sudan National Museum at Khartoum* (Leuven-Paris-Dudley 2003), 81-93, Pl. XVII.
- 16 Anderson, *op. cit.*, Fig. 5; the church was too devastated for the layout of the eastern part to be traced in any detail.
- 17 S. Jakobielski, S. Medeksza, *The North-West Church at Old Dongola*, in: *Coptic Studies*, ed. W. Godlewski (Warsaw 1990), 165-174.
- 18 Jakobielski, Medeksza, *op. cit.*, 174.
- 19 U. Monneret de Villard, *La Nubia Medioevale I* (Cairo 1935), 234, Fig. 224.
- 20 W.Y. Adams, *op. cit.* (1965), 114-116; P. Grossmann, *Mittelalterliche Langhauskuppelkirchen und verwandte Typen in Oberägypten. Eine Studie zum mittelalterlichen Kirchenbau in Ägypten* (Glückstadt 1982), 60-63, Fig. 20; cf. Gartkiewicz, *op. cit.*, 97, Fig. 23(b.3).
- 21 H. De Contenson, Aksha I. La basilique chrétienne (Paris 1966), 17ff., dating of the Phase I church to the beginning of the 8th century, 36ff.; J. Vercoutter, "Les Trouvailles Chrétiennes Françaises à Aksha, Mirgissa et Sai", in: *Kunst und Geschichte Nubiens in christlicher Zeit*, ed. E. Dinkler (Recklinghausen 1970), 155-156; Grossmann, *op. cit.*, 92-94, Figs. 17, 18.
- 22 E. Bresciani, "Le chiese", in: *Tamit* (1964). *Missione Archeologica in Egitto dell'Università di Roma* (Roma 1967), 27-39, esp. 35, Fig. 20.2.
- 23 Grossmann, *op. cit.*, 81, Fig. 36.
- 24 W. Godlewski, "The Cruciform Church at Old Dongola (Sudan). Some comments", in: *Coptic Studies*, ed. W. Godlewski (Warsaw 1990), Fig. 1, 127; *id.*, "The Cruciform Church site in Old Dongola. Sequence of buildings from the sixth to eighteenth century", *Nubica III* (1990), 527-529, 528-532; Figs. 9,10.
- 25 *Id.*, "Old Dongola. Kom A, 1995", in: *PAM VII, Reports 1995* (1996), 117-120, Fig. 2.
- 26 On the possible sources of such an arrangement in the Church of Granite Columns in Old Dongola, cf. P.M. Gartkiewicz, *The Cathedral in Old Dongola and its Antecedents, Dongola 2* (Warsaw 1990), esp. 249-257.
- 27 Rodley, *op. cit.*, 138, Fig. 104 (Church of the Dormition at Skripou in Boeotia), 873-4.
- 28 D.A. Welsby, *The Medieval Kingdoms of Nubia. Pagans, Christians and Muslims along the Middle Nile* (London 2002), Fig. 35A.

tion as a memorial space, grave etc. classifies this feature more as a side chapel than an organic element of the church layout.

Typological considerations and the early introduction of vaults firmly place the Lower Church in the 8th/9th century horizon. By analogy with the model buildings known from Old Dongola and elsewhere, it stands at a typological crossroad of two trends represented by the "tetrapylon" churches and the cruciform variant (=inscribed cross churches). Being a hybrid of Adams' Type 3b "Classic Church", the Banganarti edifice was conceived as the best solution to the challenge posed by local geomorphological conditions, once the instability of the subsoil was observed (the hypothetical church of stone columns that was the predecessor of the Lower Church probably fell

victim to the unstable ground of Banganarti Island). The long barrel vaulting over the axial naves (extended by the exedra) sloped towards the center of the building, taking upon itself the outward (lateral) thrust of the central (groin ?) vault. Significantly enough the western wall is not abutted in this way because the two dividers served as repelling spurs, giving the wall the same extra strength that the side walls of the three exedrae gave to the south and north walls.

There is a substantial difference in how the churches were founded; the foundations of the Lower Church were made of red brick (even the stone sections of the walls were thus substructured), whereas the Upper Church stood on a stone footing on which the brickwork was raised.

## DESTRUCTION OF THE LOWER CHURCH

The reasons for the destruction of the Lower Church are unknown. The high Nile floods in the mid-10th century could have raised the water level in the foundations and caused the walls to subside. The church probably did not collapse but was abandoned after cracks became apparent in the vaults and dome. The second half of the 10th century is a most plausible ceramic *ante quem* date for the deliberate dismantling of the walls of the Lower Church. Before this happened, a huge *mastaba*-like structure was built abutting the eastern wall of the church, concealing in the process the eastern graves that were set against the east side of the church.

The church walls were purposely leveled to c. 2.80 m above the original pavement, and the interior was filled with debris. Another church (=Upper Church) was then built on top of it. The pavement

of the new building was laid directly on the leveled walls of the predecessor. However, before the Upper Church walls were raised, the ruin beneath was stabilized (one of the precautions called for blocking with masonry all passageways that could collapse under the load of the Upper Church and for cutting off the western arm from the central sections by means of a thick wall made of huge bricks). Safety seems the only plausible explanation for these strange activities which required considerable effort. It must be remembered, however, that in its last days the Lower Church was entered from above, the entrances being useless in the face of the sand engulfing it on all sides. To my mind, it seems likely that by the mid-10th century only the nave of the Lower Church remained in use, whereas the remaining spaces were cut off.

## PREDECESSOR OF THE LOWER CHURCH

The three deep trenches reaching below the floor level of the Lower Church did not hit on any trace of pavement. Neither was a layer of tamped earth found, meaning that the huge slabs of well-polished bluish-veined granite of the pavement in the central part of the church must have been patiently dismantled along with the huge terracotta tiles that formed the pavement in

other parts. It must have been accomplished before the passageways were blocked (!). It could hardly have been done after the dome had collapsed. Before the end of the season the whole interior of the Upper Church at Banganarti was roofed with corrugated iron mounted on a welded steel construction set in the heightened outer walls and the central piers.

## EXPLORING ED-DEIGA FORTRESS

In January 2004, while working at Banganarti, the mission was informed of illicit excavations at the ed-Deiga fortress exposing some sandstone column drums, which the SDRS team, exploring the site extensively in the past, had not recorded.

The mighty fortress of ed-Deiga [Fig. 9] situated on the southwest outskirts of el-Arak village, was originally constructed on the riverbank, even though today the river flows a kilometer or so away. It once guarded the strategic checkpoint between Dar

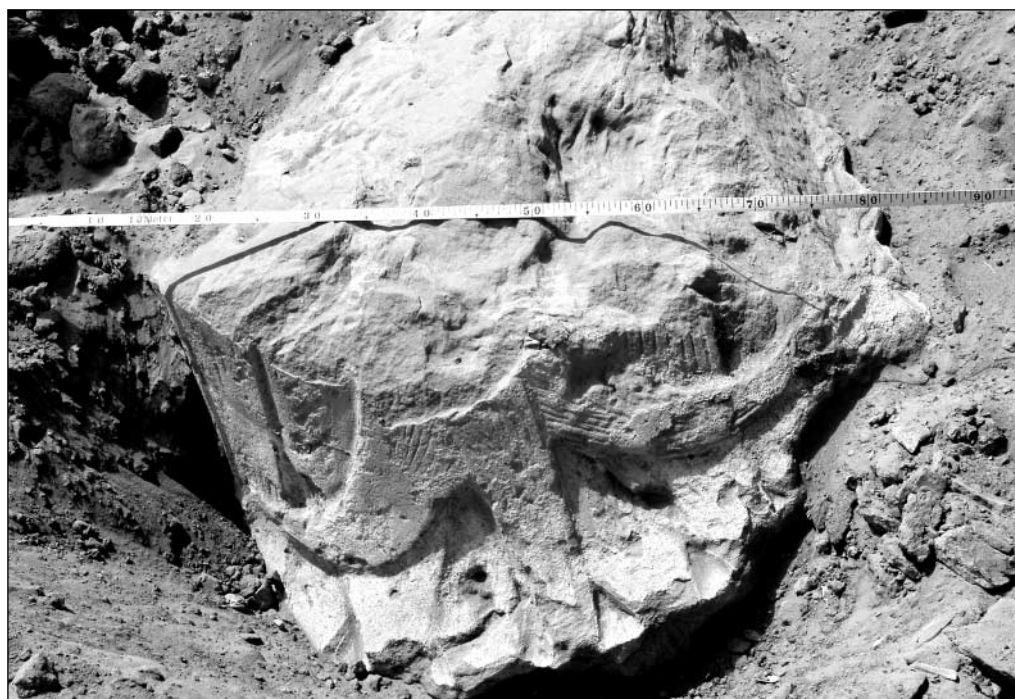


Fig. 8. Meroitic sandstone capital (plastered with lime mortar) from ed-Deiga fortress (Photo B. Żurawski)



Fig. 9. Aerial photograph of the ed-Deiga fortress taken in February 2003 (Photo B. Żurawski)

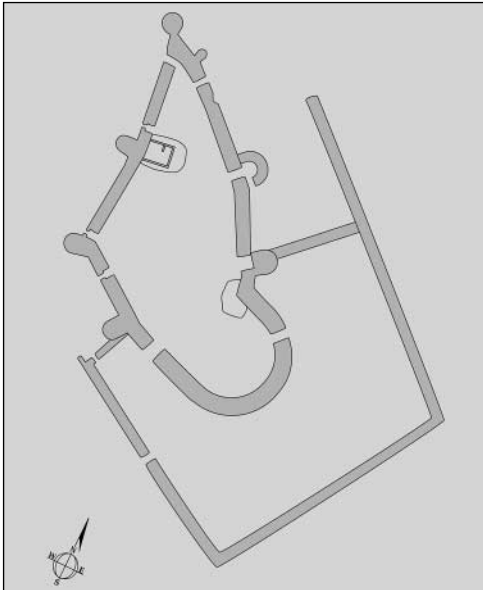


Fig. 10. Sketch plan of the ed-Deiga fortress with the fortress church built against one of the western bastions (Drawing B. Żurawski)

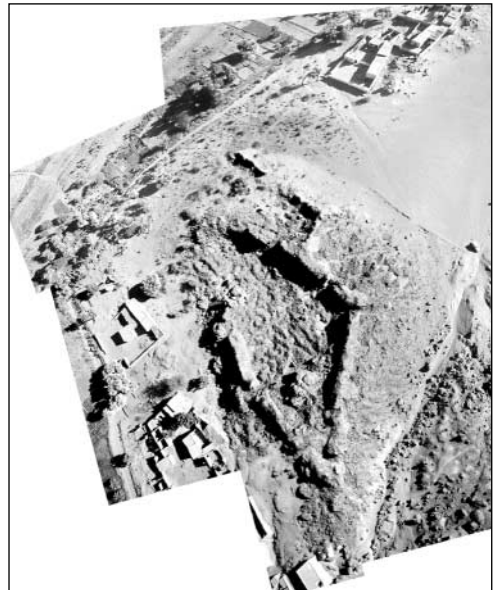


Fig. 11. Computer montage of low-altitude, aerial (kite) photographs of ed-Deiga fortress (Photo B. Żurawski)

Dongola and Dar Shaiqiya. Reconnoiters in 1998 and 2000 *intra* and *extra muros* revealed no trace of occupation prior to the 6th century AD, and the ceramic material collected within the walls dated its construction to the 7th-8th century. Ed-Deiga is markedly different from its sister strongholds at Bakhit and ed-Diffar, probably due to its different role in the Makurian defensive system. Whilst at Bakhit and ed-Diffar there were numerous settlements within the walls, ed-Deiga apparently housed only a church and military quarters, with the stables being probably located in the enclosed (lower) courtyard [Figs. 10, 11].

The curtain walls of ed-Deiga were c. 5 m thick, constructed of ferruginous sandstone bonded in mud mortar. The mud-brick church, seen within the fortress

by Lepsius, Wilkinson, Linant de Bellefonds and even Arkell in 1941, has now all but disappeared, as have the fragments of granite capitals and columns they reported seeing.

The two visits to ed-Deiga fortress, effected by the SDRS team in February 2004, revealed the existence of a Meroitic temple either inside the fortress or in its immediate vicinity. The *spolia* from this temple were used in the construction of the fortress church probably at the very onset of the Dongola Period. The evidence found on site is strongly suggestive of the temple being an integral part of the first defensive complex raised on the site. One capital from this temple was revealed, drawn and photographed [Fig. 8] (as were also some plastered stone drums, unearthed earlier by local inhabitants).