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Banganarti 2004 : Inscriptions

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BANGANARTI 2004 INSCRIPTIONS

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The excavations of the 2004 season carried out by the Southern Dongola Reach Survey team on the site of Banganarti brought to light a rich epigraphic crop comparable to that of the previous seasons. It consisted

mainly of inscriptions on the walls of the two churches – Upper and Lower – and also included fragments of a sandstone stela with an epitaph (?) in Greek¹ and *dipinti* on pottery.

THE UPPER CHURCH

With the excavations of the 2004 season, the unearthing of the Upper Church was completed.² This means that the corpus of inscriptions, 954 items in all, from the walls of this church has been closed. Further inscriptions may still occur on the first layer of plaster hidden under the second (and last) layer, where this last layer will be removed, but their number cannot be substantial.

Wall inscriptions discovered on the walls of the Upper Church this year have not altered in a significant way the general characteristic of this material obtained after the previous seasons.³ In an overwhelming majority, these were visitors' graffiti scratched in the last layer of plaster in the end of the 13th and the first half of the 14th century. The language is Greek, very corrupt as a rule, or Old Nubian; these languages frequently interfere with one

another in particular inscriptions. The texts ordinarily gave the name of the visitor, sometimes supplemented with other pieces of information concerning his person, like the name of his father, his origin, church and/or state offices held, etc. More elaborate items added a prayer, mostly addressed to the Archangel Raphael who must be considered the true patron of the Upper Church. The majority of the visitors to the Upper Church were clerics attached to various churches in Dongola and its vicinity, mainly to the church of (Great) Jesus which probably should be identified with the Cruciform Church in Old Dongola.

During the 2004 season, "new" wall inscriptions occurred mainly in the northwestern part of the church (Rooms 11 and 14 with the adjacent part of the western corridor),⁴ which was the only unexcavated

1 The fragments were too meager for anything conclusive to be said about the contents.

2 For the results of fieldwork in 2004, cf. B. Zurawski's report in this volume, pp. 297-308.

3 For this, see A. Łajtar, "Wall inscriptions in the Banganarti churches. A general note after three seasons of work", *JJP* 33 (2003), 137-159; id., "Inscriptions from Banganarti, Season 2003", *PAM* 15, *Reports 2003* (2004), 253-260; for an Old Nubian inscription on the eastern wall of Room 21, see G.M. Browne, "An Old Nubian Inscription from Banganarti Church", *JJP* 34 (2004), 23-26.

4 For a plan of the church with the numbering of the rooms, cf. *PAM* XV, *Reports 2003* (2004), Fig. 6.



*Fig. 1. Inscription mentioning King Paper on the western wall of Room 11 in the Upper Church
(Photo W. Cbmieł)*

part of the church thus far. Among the inscription which came to light in this part of the church, two items bear particular interest. They are situated near one another in the southwestern corner of Room 11, one on the southern wall, another one on the western wall [Fig. 1]. Both of them are in Greek and commemorate Paper, King of the Town of Tungul (= Dongola). A king of this name is otherwise unknown. The relative chronology of the Banganarti wall inscriptions indicates that he reigned in the end of the 13th/first half of the 14th century. It should be remarked that the king's title sounds somewhat strange. Instead of being called "King of Makuria" (or similarly) he is designated only as "King of Dongola". Perhaps he sat on the throne of Dongola after the Kingdom of Makuria ceased to exist, having split into a series of chiefdoms (mekkships) of which one was centered at Dongola, in other words he was a Christian *mekk* of Dongola. Provided this is true, Paper's inscriptions should be dated to the middle of the 14th century and perhaps even later.

Another interesting phenomenon of Paper's titlature is that his King's title is followed by the word *brepbos* – "babe". This designation surely is not to be taken literary. Perhaps it should be understood in the sense "The Junior (King of the Town of Tungul)". Another possibility is that it translates a Nubian word, e.g. *tot* = "son, child", which also is attested as the name of an office in the Kingdom of Makuria. Paper's titlature would read "King of the Town of Tungul (and) Tot" in this case.

Among the inscriptions occurring on the walls of the northwestern part of the church one should mention also a graffito in the southern part of the eastern wall of Room 11 which commemorates a King's Mother with the name Andala (?).

Several inscriptions occurred in different parts of the church on the earlier layers of plaster after removing the last layer.⁵ The most interesting among them is situated on the southern part of the eastern wall of Room 20, just behind the door leading from the southern portico to the interior of the church [Fig. 2]. The Nubian text commemorates a certain Teeita who claimed "to have" no less than three churches: the Church of Jesus at Moukdakko, the Church of Michael of the West, and the Church of Gabriel at Edi.⁶ In contrast to other Banganarti inscriptions, which as a rule do not contain dating elements, this one has as many as three chronological indications: Hathyr 22, moon 26, second (day) of the week, a coincidence which probably corresponds to 18 November 1280. This date is of primary importance for the chronological evaluation of the use of the Upper Church at Banganarti. It is the *ante quem* date for laying the last layer of plaster and, consequently, for the entire collection of inscriptions written on this last layer. It should be observed that Hathyr 22, the day of Teeita's visit to the church, is according to the Coptic synaxary the day of the commemoration of the saints Cosmas and Damianos, whose representations stand on the western wall of Room 13, not far from the place where this inscription was writ-

5 The church had three layers of plaster on the central supports and two on the remaining walls, columns and pillars.

6 For "having" churches in Christian Nubia, see A. Lajtar, J. Van der Vliet, "Rich Ladies of Meinarti and their Churches. With an appended list of sources from Christian Nubia containing the expression 'Having the Church of So-And-So'", *JJP* 28 (1998), 35-53. None of the churches mentioned in the inscription can be identified.

ten. Perhaps the visit of Teeita remained in connection with their feast.

Another interesting inscription belonging on an earlier layer of plaster was found on the northern column engaged in the southeastern support. The Old Nubian text reads: "O God of Michael (or: O Saint Michael), cause Arouase to live through the savior of King David". The author of the inscription is otherwise unknown. The King David mentioned in it should probably be identified as one of the two kings of this name, father and son at that, who occupied the throne of Makuria in the

1260s/1270s. This again confirms the date of the laying the last layer of plaster (sometime after November 1280), pinpointed thanks to the previously discussed inscription. It is interesting to observe that the inscription makes reference to some troubles that King David had encountered, but was saved from by God (or by St. Michael). This may be an allusion to conflicts within the reigning dynasty of Makuria, which led to the Egyptian intervention ending with the capture of Dongola, the flight of David the son to the south and his death in Cairo as a prisoner.⁷

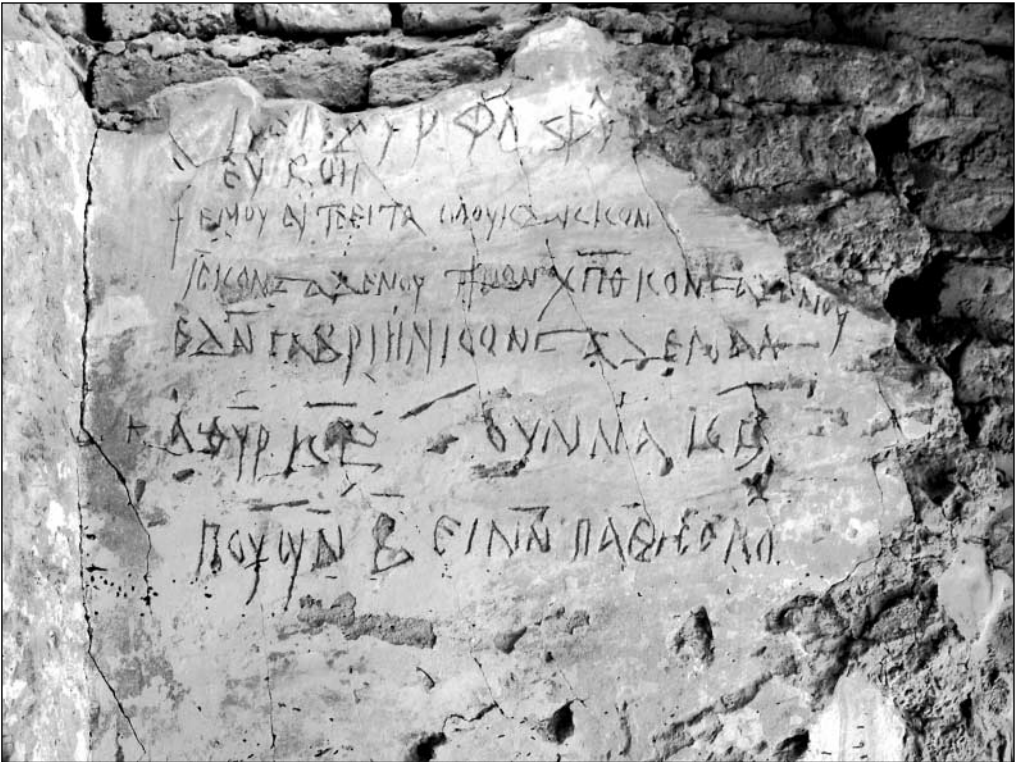


Fig. 2. Inscription of Teeita on the first layer of plaster on the eastern wall of Room 19 in the Upper Church (Photo W. Chmiel)

⁷ For this troublesome period of Nubian history, see most recently D. Welsby, *The Medieval Kingdoms of Nubia* (British Museum: London 2002), 242-245.

THE LOWER CHURCH

The Lower Church proved to have a central cross plan. The inscriptions occurred only on the southern wall of the western part of the cross. Three texts were identified, all in good Greek, done in black ink and nice bookhands writing Biblical majuscules, dated to the 8th-9th century. The first inscription on the left contained 43 lines. It consisted of c. 12 entries marked on the left margin by a *paragraphos* (a short horizontal stroke at the bottom of the text line). Each entry apparently started with

the expression "You who has made this and this". All this suggests that we are dealing with a dogmatic text, perhaps ecclesiastical canons. Another possibility is that it contains a series of invocations to God the Father or Jesus Christ. The inscription neighboring with the first text to the right was too damaged to allow for a certain evaluation of its content. The text on the right-hand side is inscribed within and under a schematic "icon" showing Mary. It was probably of a votive character.