

Artur Obłuski

Excavation at Site C.01 on the Citadel of Tungal (Old Dongola), Sudan : Preliminary Report

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EXCAVATION AT SITE C.01 ON THE CITADEL OF TUNGUL (OLD DONGOLA), SUDAN: PRELIMINARY REPORT

Artur Obluski

Oriental Institute, University of Chicago

Abstract: Site C.01 on the citadel of Tungul (Old Dongola), the capital of Makuria was explored in 2007, 2008 and 2010 as part of the PCMA UW Dongola Project. A sequence of buildings was unearthed, dated to the Early Makurian (B.IX), Late Makurian (B.VI) and Funj (houses) periods. The earliest structures represented later abandoned techniques of combining a core of sun-dried brick with fired bricks. In turn, the well preserved complex B.VI could be assigned to the 13th or early 14th century based on building materials, technique and pottery. The building was interpreted as a potential storehouse. A change of function occurred in the Funj period (17th century) with a series of domestic structures being built into the ruins. One of the finds was a 12-nummia coin of the Emperor Maurice, the sole such coin found south of the Third Nile Cataract.

Keywords: Dongola (Tungul?), Building B.VI, site C.01, Funj, domestic/house architecture, coin, Nubia, storeroom

The following report presents preliminary results of excavations carried out in 2007, 2008 and 2010 on site C.01 in Tungul, the capital of Makuria (modern Old Dongola) (for the results of the PCMA UW excavations at Old Dongola in general, see Godlewski 2014, in this volume). The site is located in the northwestern part of the citadel of Tungul (18°13'25.80"N, 30°44'31.47"E), on a rising promontory that juts out toward the river. To the north the terrain slopes down gently, but on the west and south it drops steeply toward the riverbank. The area chosen for exploration did not differ considerably from other parts of the citadel, being characterized by

a scattering of loose fired bricks and walls of buildings from the Funj period coming to the surface, but the ceramic surface finds appeared to be poorer than elsewhere on the citadel. It turned out that the thickness of archaeological strata here was relatively minor (3.50 m compared to the up to 10 m recorded in other locations) and it took a total of 36 days to dig a trench of 500 m². Two large buildings, one from the Early Makurian period (6th century, B.IX) and the other from the Late Makurian period (13th/14th century, B.VI), were uncovered, as well as considerable sections of an urban complex from Funj times (17th century). More than 300 artifacts were recorded.

A sequence of two large buildings was unearthed, the earlier dated to the Early Makurian (B.IX), the later to Late Makurian (B.VI); this was followed by a complex of domestic structures from the Funj Period. Preliminary examination of the earliest structure revealed it to be typical of early Makurian architecture, built in a technique that was later apparently abandoned: sun-dried bricks making up the core of walls, faced with a single row of fired brick. Little more can be said of this early structure. Building B.VI that followed was the most substantial architecture excavated. Materials and technique as well as the pottery evidence suggested a date for it in the 13th or beginning of the 14th century. In the Funj period, animals were evidently kept in the ruins of the large buildings and new houses were either built into the old structures or constructed anew.

Found in the topsoil was the sole monetary find to date south of the Third Nile Cataract, a cast copper 12-nummia coin, identified by the author as struck probably by the Emperor Maurice [Fig. 1].¹



Fig. 1. 12-nummia coin, probably of the Emperor Maurice

BUILDING B.VI

Building B.VI from the Late Makurian phase was the single largest structure identified during excavations. It was superimposed on the remains of an earlier, equally large structure, Building B.IX [Fig. 2]. Three consecutive occupation phases could be discerned: an initial phase with the two-storey building being used as a storeroom, a phase following the destruction of the first floor and a third phase when the northern part of the building vanished and the remaining walls of sun-dried brick were incorporated by several small domestic structures.

The original building is assumed to have been almost square: approximately

19 m (N-S) by 18.50 m (E-W). It consisted of the following: a central part encompassing rooms B.VI.1,2,4,5 and two sets of rooms of similar shape and size, flanking the central part, B.VI.7–14 on the east and B.VI.15–21 on the west. These side rooms were not originally interconnected on the ground floor level, thus suggesting access only from the top. An entrance led into the building on the ground floor, in the southeastern corner of room B.VI.2. The main room on the ground floor, B.VI.1, could be reached from Room B.VI.2 by an entry located in the northwestern corner of the latter.

¹ The publication of the find by Barbara Lichocka (2011) gives the findspot erroneously as Building B.VI.

CENTRAL PART

Room B.VI.1 was the biggest room in the building, approximately 90 m² in size [Fig. 3]. It had the shape of a trapeze tapering toward the south. The sole entrance at the beginning was located probably in the southwestern corner. It led from B.VI.2 and was 1.03 m wide. A pivot stone was added, changing the arrangement of the doorway in the second or third occupational phase. Two rows of columns, three in each row, were placed symmetrically in the middle of the room. They were built of fired bricks, 22 x 10.5 x 5 cm in size and rectangular in shape,

contrary to the trapezoid or triangular bricks used in construction of columns in the earlier period at Tungul. The columns stood on cuboid bases, which were 0.90 m square at the bottom and 0.70 m high, and made of the same kind of bricks. The walls of the room and the columns were smeared with mud plaster and whitewashed; the considerable sand content in the mud resulted in the beige coloring of the plaster. The mud pugging on the floor had no brick or ceramic-tile underlay. Three pots, two of these of unfired clay, were sunk in the floor between the southern pair of columns and the south wall of the room.

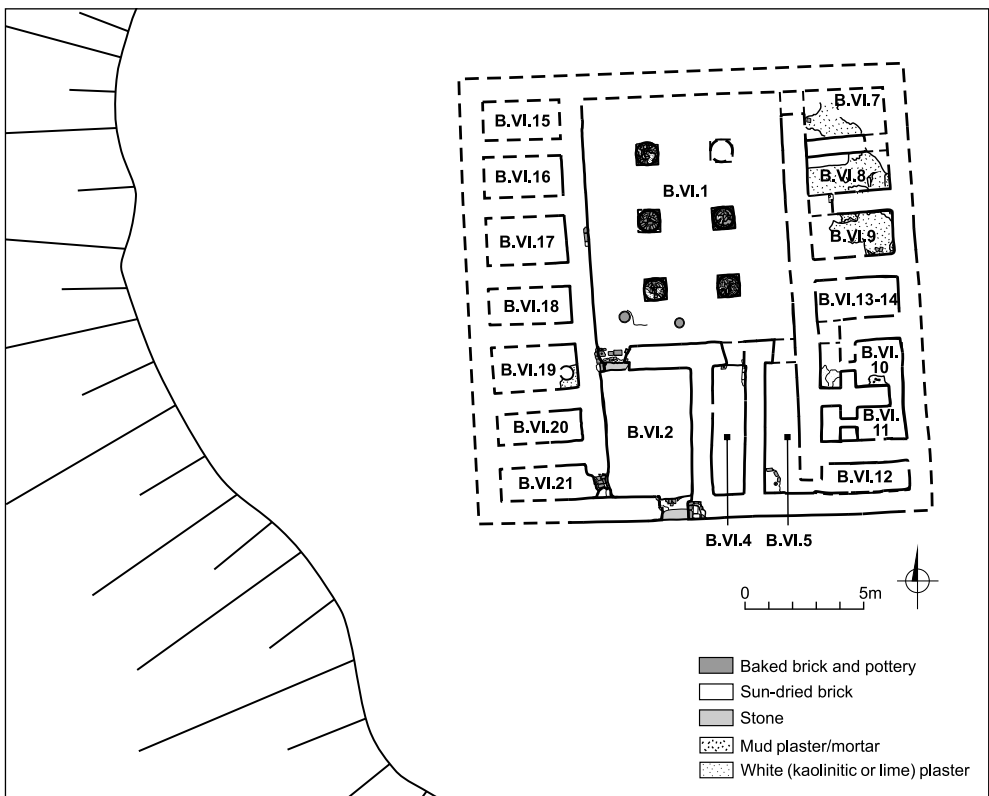


Fig. 2. Site C.01: building B.VI (Late Makurian)
(Plan S. Mašlak, A. Obluski)



Fig. 3. General view of Building B.VI from the west, top, and view of colonnaded hall B.VI.1 in the central part, view from the southeast

All photos in the text A. Obtuski.

B.VI.2 on the south was 5.45 m long and 3.75 m wide [Fig. 5]. It had two doors, one in the northwestern corner leading to B.VI.1 and the other one of similar size on the diagonal, in the southeastern corner of the unit. The flooring had an underlay of reused fired bricks covered with a mud pug. In the centre of the unit stood a base from a small column (0.36 m by 0.32 m), found in secondary context, 2.73 m from the north wall and 1.80 m from the east one. The walls of the unit had been plastered and whitewashed at least six times. A cut in the west wall, 0.68 m wide and subsequently bricked up with fired bricks, was found 0.32 m away from the south wall. Just 0.30 m west of this cut (passage) a pot was found sunk in the floor.

B.VI.4 further to the east was originally 1.20 m wide and 5.45 m long and had no entrances on the ground level. The

passage leading to B.VI.1 was a secondary cut, approximately 0.70 m wide, in the north wall. It had a wooden door with a pivot on the west side [Fig. 4]. Located east of B.VI.4, room B.VI.5 was almost identical in size and also had a secondary entrance, as well as an original passage to



Fig. 4. Secondary passage from room B.VI.4 to B.VI.1, view from the north



Fig. 5. Room B.VI.2, view from the north

B.VI.12 located in the southeastern corner. In the opposite, southwestern corner, a clumsy contraption of bricks with a pot sunk in it bottom up was discovered. The bottom had been hollowed, presumably for use as a pot stand.

EASTERN FLANK

The eastern flank was composed of seven rooms in a row. Originally, only B.VI.10 and B.VI.11 were interconnected [Fig. 6]. B.VI.7, the northernmost preserved room on the eastern flank, was rectangular in plan, 3.50 m long and at least 1.67 m wide; its northern part was demolished when a Funj-period house C01.H02 (see below) was built into it. An entrance to B.VI.8 was located in the southeastern corner. The size and form of this doorway suggests its secondary nature, as in the case of the other secondary passages. B.VI.8, located south of B.VI.7, was 1.65 m wide and 3.46 m long [Fig. 7], could be entered from the north (B.VI.7) and south (B.VI.9), but not directly from the central unit B.VI.1. The southern entrance, 0.70 m wide, was cut in the southwestern corner of an already standing wall. The room was paved with a mud pug that was subsequently whitewashed, similarly as in the neighboring unit B.VI.9, which was 1.83 m wide and 3.53 m long. Due to secondary pits being cut into walls, it is not clear whether there was any communication with unit B.VI.14.

Room B.VI.14 was situated south of B.VI.9. Its walls at the western end were also substantially disturbed by several later pits. At a later stage the eastern part of the room was used as a separate space, 1.70 m wide

(N-S) and 0.92 m long. There was a pit approximately 0.70 m deep hewn already in bedrock, which existed before the wall separating B.VI.13 from B.VI.14 was built. This pit was interpreted as a cesspit as it contained pieces of a toilet seat. Other finds included kitchen ware, storage jars and big Late Makurian mud stoppers. Three letters were found scratched on a sherd from a storage jar: ΙΣΑ[, undoubtedly part of the name Isaac (ADd.10.293, see Danys-Lasek 2014: Fig. 1 on page 312, in this volume). Parallels from other locations on the Tungul citadel indicate that it may have been used as a cesspit, although the location of the toilet on the ground level is different from that of standard toilets recorded so far, which were situated on the first floor with a deposit chamber underneath.²

B.VI.10, situated south of B.VI.13 and B.VI.14, was 1.95 m wide and 3.35 m long. The walls were smeared with mud plaster in a perfunctory way. The western part of the unit was separated from the rest of the room by two pilaster structures attached to the north and south walls. They were 0.57 m wide and 0.72 m long leaving a very narrow passage between them. A passage 0.56 m wide in the southeastern corner led to unit B.VI.11. It was blocked in the latest stage, when B.VI. ceased to be used as one building and started to serve as several small, separate domestic and storage accommodations. At that time, apart from bricking up of the entrance to B.VI.11, a doorway, 0.60 m wide, leading out of B.VI, was cut in its east wall, 0.52 from the northeastern corner. B.VI.11 was rectangular, 1.45 m wide and

² A parallel for a ground-level location of toilets was found recently at the monastery in Ghazali (personal observation by the author).



Fig. 6. Eastern flank of Building B.VI: top, view from the north; bottom, view from the south



Fig. 7. Unit B.VI.10, view from the east



Fig. 8. Unit B.VI.11, view from the east

3.53 m long [Fig. 8]. It was divided with two pilasters, like B.VI.10, leaving a passage 0.39 m wide between them. The lower parts of the pilasters were reinforced with fired bricks, while the rest of the walls was constructed of sun-dried bricks. Its walls were smeared in the same perfunctory way as the walls of B.VI.10 and likewise were not whitewashed.

B.VI.12 was 1.36 m wide and 3.80 m long [Fig. 9]. It was entered from the southwestern corner through a doorway 0.57 m wide. The walls were mud-plastered and whitewashed. Reused later, it had a doorway, 0.40 m wide, cut in the east wall leading outside the building, just as in room B.VI.10. A door placed

inside the room was set on a pivot stone located on the north side of the entrance. At the west end of the room (2.75 m from the east wall), a flimsy wall was built, dividing B.VI.12 from B.VI.5.

WESTERN FLANK

West of the central part of Building B.VI (B.VI.1, 2) was a row of rooms similar to those on the eastern flank. These units were of various width, from 1.80 m (B.VI.20) to 2.50 m (B.VI.17). Unlike the rooms on the eastern side, all of these units were plastered and whitewashed, although in this case it was only one coat, not six as in B.VI.2. Communication between this set of rooms and other parts of the building



Fig. 9. Unit B.VI.12, view from the east

was possible only in a secondary phase when a cut was made in the west wall of B.VI.2. Then the rooms of the western flank were destroyed and the eastern parts of them were filled up with rubble to buttress the western walls of B.VI.1 and B.VI.2.

DISCUSSION

Building B.VI was the largest architectural structure recovered during excavations. Were size a distinctive feature for domestic architecture at Tungul, B.VI with its approximately 360 m² would have been middle-sized, falling somewhere between Houses A.105 and A.106 (Godlewski 1998a) and the so-called Palace B.I (Godlewski 2002; most recently 2013). Wall thickness suggested the presence of an upper floor, and thus storage functions for the ground floor, but the absence of any trace of a staircase made this idea somewhat tentative. Storage function for the ground-floor rooms was further suggested by the absence of any form of communication between the units in the original building, indicating the possibility of access being through openings in the ceilings. This would point indirectly to the presence of an upper floor, although the function of this upper floor otherwise remains unclear. Had a staircase existed, it may have been located in B.VI.15 and lost when this unit was demolished down to bedrock.

It is possible to reconstruct the spatial organization of the ground floor in the original phase of the building (Phase I) as follows: the central part of the building made up of rooms B.VI.1 and B.VI.2, and two more rooms south of B.VI.1 (B.VI.4,5) and two rows of rooms east and west of the central part. The interconnected Rooms B.VI.1 and 2 were

entered from outside by an entrance located in the southeastern corner. The central module was flanked by two rows of storage rooms on the east and west, seven in each row. These rooms were rectangular in plan, the proportions approximately 1:2 with the longer walls running E-W. The slope of the terrain to the north of the building and the lack of preserved structural remains makes an extension of B.VI northward highly improbable.

Still in the 14th century, the upper floor was destroyed; the debris was removed in all likelihood, considering that no substantial mass of building material was found on the site. A cesspit (B.VI.14) accessible on the ground floor level was introduced in this occupation phase, along with several new entries cut in standing walls: from B.VI.1 to B.VI.4 and B.VI.7, and then between the rooms of the eastern flank B.VI.7-8-9 and B.VI.13-10-11. At the same time an entrance was cut in the west wall of B.VI.2, leading to B.VI.21. It was bricked up after the destruction of the western row of rooms.

In the last phase, the building ceased to function as a single structure. New entrances were cut into it and several rooms were adapted for use as separate living units (B.VI.2, 10 and 12).

Clues for the dating of Building B.VI issued also from the building material used in its construction. The size of the sun-dried bricks in the walls (35–36 x 17–19 x 8–9 cm, 35 x 21–22 x 8–9 cm, 31–32 x 28–30 x 8 cm) was much bigger than in the later Funj period (24 x 12 x 6 cm and 25 x 15 x 8 cm; see below). The shape and size of the fired bricks in the columns differed from that of columns used in 9th and 10th century buildings, like the Pillar Church, which were trapezoid in

shape (Godlewski 1998b: 132). These new bricks were cuboid in shape and smaller in size (22 x 10 x 5 cm) than the earlier fired bricks. Based on the building techniques and materials employed in the construction of Building B.VI, the structure should be dated no earlier than the 11th century.

Complementary and coherent dating was given also by the pottery and beads from the excavations. An analysis of the pottery assemblage from Building B.VI and various test pits in the area has suggested a date for the construction of this architecture not earlier than the end of the 13th century and most probably in the early 14th century, as can be assumed from a comparison of amphorae found at Site C.01 with those from the Monastery on Kom H, room 44 in Building B.I on the citadel of Tungul and Banganarti. The pottery can be dated to 12th(?) or 13th century, while finds from the building are later and dated to the late 13th and 14th centuries (Danys-Lasek 2014, in this volume). The first phase, when the building was used as a two-floor facility, was relatively short. As can be assumed on the basis of the deposit from the cesspit in room B.VI.13, the second phase of occupation started in the late 14th century when only the ground floor of the building was in use. The first pots of a clearly different tradition than the Makurian one came from the third occupational phase, when various sections of the building were used separately. The northern part of the building was razed and new houses encroached on the spot. Animal dung accumulated in considerable quantities, especially in B.VI.1, which must have served as a barn for quite a long time.

Building B.VI has no clear parallels in Nubian medieval architecture and the spatial organization and function of the upper floor is obscure. Huge halls with columns had a long tradition in Nubia, dating back at least to the Meroitic period. Preliminary studies of the building architecture delivered three structures similar in terms of spatial organization:

- palace at Meroe (Garstang, Phytian-Adams, Sayce 1914: 2);
- palace in Wad ben-Naga with a column hall at the entrance (Adams 1977: 322, Fig. 54).
- building XLIII, so-called Market Compound at Meinarti, with two rows of parallel rooms built on both sides of an unroofed central corridor; from Level 18 subphase 1a dated by the excavator to about AD 200 (Adams 2000: 41, Fig. 8);
- unit 785 at Qasr Ibrim, a building erected also in the Meroitic period but served the Nubian community as long as the Late Makurian period (Adams 1996: 42); interestingly, all the doorways in rooms were in the corners and not on the main axis, which is also the case of Building B.VI at Tungul.

Apart from the logic of a central communication module and storage rooms surrounding it, none of the presented analogies can be considered as a prototype for Building B.VI. Two tentative functions can be suggested for this structure at this point: a storage building or a domestic facility with household activities located on the upper floor. The presence of Tungul's river port in the neighborhood was suggested by Włodzimierz Godlewski (most recently, 2013: 109).

FUNJ PERIOD REMAINS

In the upper layers, excavations uncovered eight domestic structures dated to a period of over 400 years after the fall of Makuria (from about the mid-15th to the 19th century) [Fig. 10].

The architecture represented several cultural phases that cannot be considered as linear evolution. The earliest houses, built in the second half of the 15th century, were flimsy structures located rather haphazardly. The large Room B.VI.1 served as a barn in this period. The accumulation of dung in the area was rapid and substantial, so that all subsequent houses were founded on a thick deposit of animal turd.

BUILDING MATERIAL

The basic building material in the Funj period was sun-dried brick measuring 24 x 12 x 6 cm and 25 x 15 x 8 cm. Wall thickness seldom surpassed 0.50 m. Very often parts of the walls were constructed

of reused material, mostly fired brick, which ceased to be manufactured in Funj period, and occasionally stone blocks. All the material was bonded by mud mortar, made of the same raw material as sun-dried bricks, but with altered proportions, namely more sand.

EXEMPLARY FUNJ HOUSE (C01.H08)

The house [Fig. 10] consisted of one room, 4.50 m by 3.46 m, where three occupational levels were distinguished. The entrance was located in the northeastern corner of the east wall. A partition wall, 1.66 m long and 0.49 m thick, ran south of the entrance. A bench extended along the east wall up to the southeastern corner. It was 2.53 m long with the southern part set off (approximately 0.65 m from the south wall). Its width was 1.38 m wide at the northern end, narrowing to 1.18 m at the southern end. In the southwestern



Fig. 10. Funj-period house C01.H08, view from the west during excavations, view from the east (Photo A. Obtuski)



corner, against the west wall, 0.50 m from the south wall, there was a cesspit 0.35 m in diameter. There was mud pugging all over the room. A magic text in Arabic was found between two consecutive pug levels in the southeastern corner and another text of the same kind, both on paper, jammed in a small pot made of unfired clay and subsequently stabbed with a pick [Fig. 11].

DISCUSSION

Funj period houses served two basic purposes: sleeping and storage. Other activities like food preparation were performed outside the house. House units consisted of two rooms either

Fig. 11. Arabic magic texts from Funj-period house C01.08, after unfolding

interconnected or with separate entrances. Bedrooms, more or less square in plan, were accessed through a narrow entrance, 0.40–0.50 m wide. Inside the room, the area immediately next to the entrance was screened off by a partition wall (Arab. *tuddiq*), usually about 1.50 m high and 1.60 m long. Its length equaled the width of the main bench (Arab. *mastaba*) which served as a bed. The furnishing of the room was complemented with benches against the walls. Roofing made of palm-leaf stems (Arab. *jarid*) covered with mud was supported on a central pillar (Arab. *amud*). The pillar was made of sun-dried brick as a rule, sometimes replaced by a wooden beam.

The second room of the house adjoined the main one usually had the shape of an elongated rectangle. It was entered directly or through the bedroom by a passage 0.40–0.50 m wide. Big pots standing in these rooms or sunk in the floor testified to their storage character. The walls were plastered with mud and then whitewashed. The issue of windows and lighting inside the houses could not be decided due to the poor preservation of the walls (just 1.20 m high). In some of the entrances hewn stones were used as sockets for the door pivots, but it was not a standard in Funj-period houses.

Dr. Artur Obłuski
Research associate
The Oriental Institute, University of Chicago
1155 East 58th Street, Chicago, Illinois 60637
aobluski@uchicago.edu

Urban planning of sorts was introduced at some time probably in the 17th century at the earliest. At this time, the houses were organized in rows along narrow streets that might have been closed by wooden doors. Buildings of that period uncovered at Site C.01 were identical to those excavated elsewhere on the citadel so far. It is not highly sophisticated domestic architecture and differs considerably from the houses of the Makurian period.

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