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Old Dongola: Kom A (Citadel), 2007

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OLD DONGOLA

KOM A (CITADEL), 2007

Włodzimierz Godlewski

The team of the Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology of the University of Warsaw conducted excavations at the site of Kom A (Citadel) in Old Dongola from 20 January to 23 February 2007.¹

The prime objective of the exploration was the palace complex (SWN) in the southwestern part of the citadel, where work continued from the previous season in 2005 (Godlewski 2007b: 287–299; see also 2006a; 2006b: 263–286; 2007a: 131–140). A new site was opened at the western edge of the central part of the Citadel (C.07.1).

Taking advantage of the location, team members fulfilled a part of the program of the Early Makuria (MtoM) project exploring the post-Meroitic cemetery close to Gebel Ghaddar (cf. report by W. Godlewski and J. Kociankowska-Bożek, in this volume).

¹ The Mission was directed by Prof. Dr. Włodzimierz Godlewski and comprised: Joanna Kociankowska-Bożek, Szymon Maślak, Artur Obluski, Dobrochna Zielińska, archaeologists; Wiesław Malkowski, topographer-archaeologist; Paulina Komar, Bartosz Wojciechowski, students of archaeology, University of Warsaw. The NCAM was represented with utmost efficiency by Sali Osman Abu el Halis.

BUILDING B.V ON SITE SWN

In 2005, the northwestern corner of a building which had been raised on a high platform was cleared to the south of

latter, cf. Godlewski 2004: 200–215; 2006a; Zielińska 2004: 216–223). The brick walls of this structure, designated as Building III (Cruciform Building) (for the

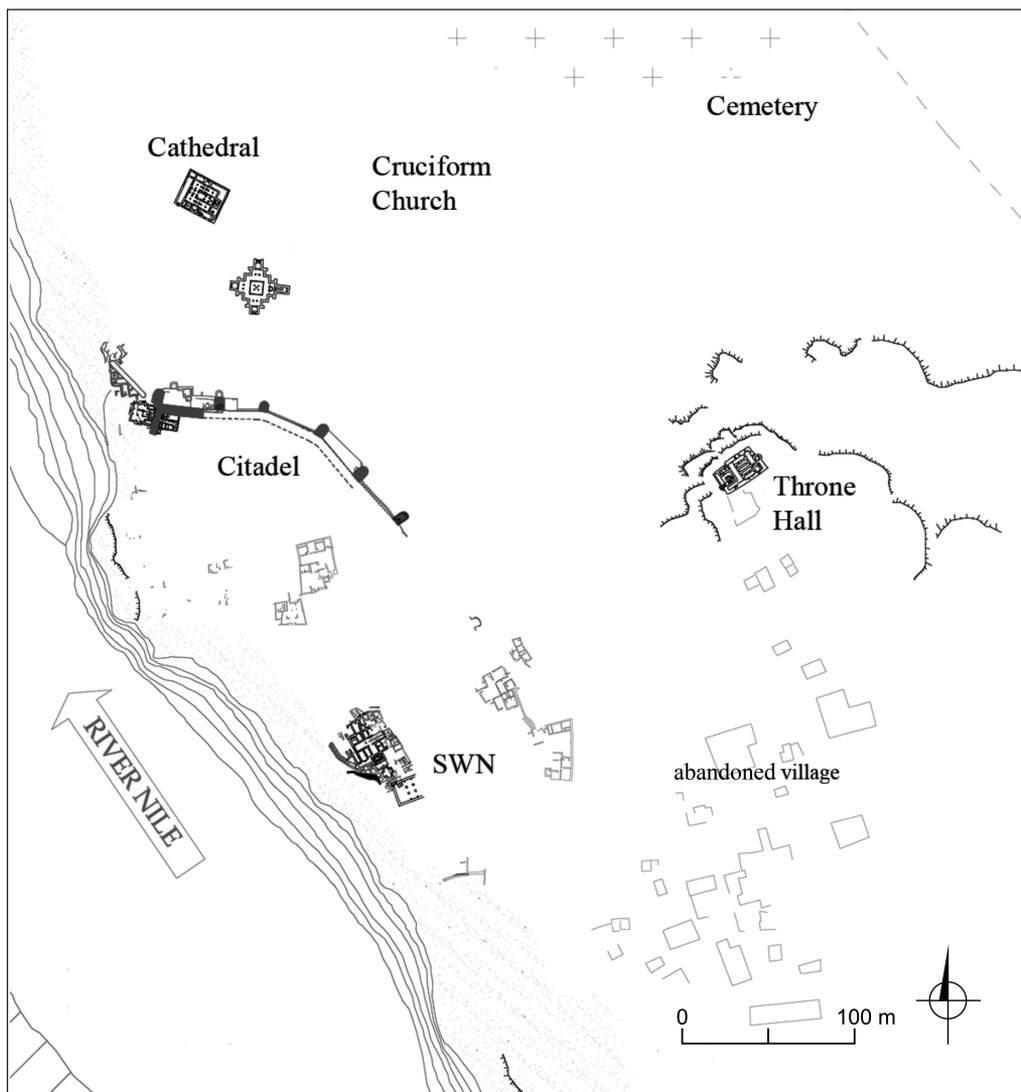


Fig. 1. Survey plan of the citadel in Dongola
(Drawing W. Godlewski, W. Małkowski)

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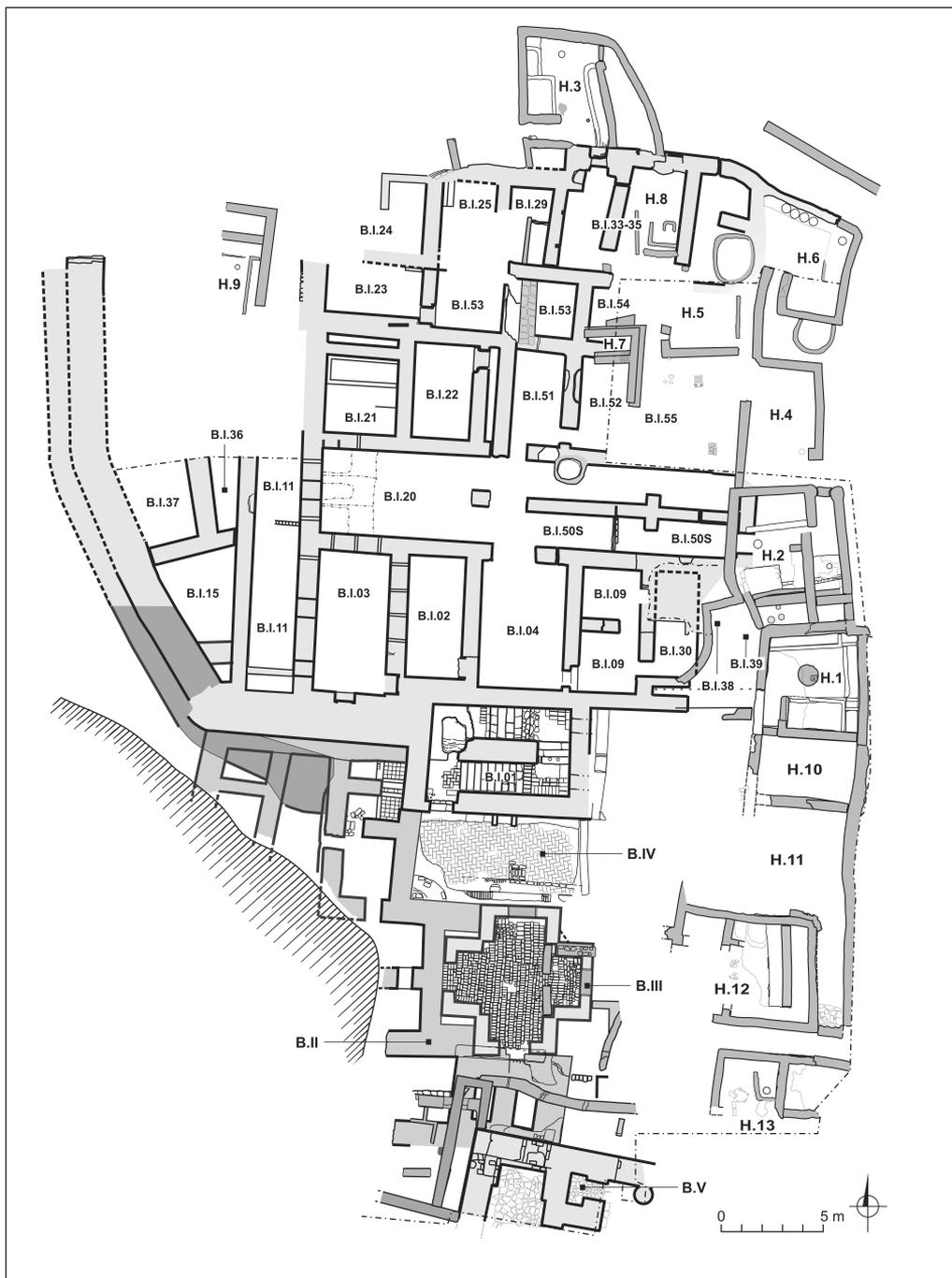


Fig. 2. Plan of site SWN on the citadel in Dongola
(Drawing W. Godlewski, M. Puzkarski, D. Zielińska, S. Maślak)

down to the level of the stone pavement and foundation platform (Godlewski 2007b: 294). The building appeared to have been used for a long time after it stopped serving its original domestic function and the dismantling did not take place until modern times, possibly even the 20th century.

A 10 m long trench dug this season along the north wall of the structure confirmed the earlier observations. A section 16.50 m long of the wall is now cleared and it proves to be in good shape [Fig. 3]. Only the west wall was robbed out, while the east wall appears to be standing at least 2.50 m high. Two round piers were located in the northern part of the building: N.2 preserved to its full height of 3.00 m above the floor and N.1 to a height of 2.15 m. Considering that the ground surface here rises to the south and east, it is extremely likely that the southern and eastern parts of the complex

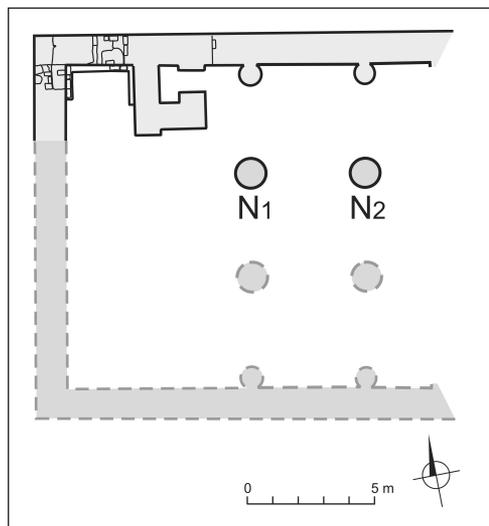


Fig. 3. Plan of Building V, after the 2007 season (dashed lines indicate presumed reconstruction of unexcavated part) (W. Godlewski, D. Zielińska)



Fig. 4. Greek inscriptions on the north wall of Building V (Photo W. Godlewski)



Fig. 5. Top of pier N.2, view from the north side (top) and top (Photo W. Godlewski)

are preserved as well or better. The technical parameters of this structure place it among the most important structures of the royal complex on the summit of the citadel in Dongola. Indeed, it finds no parallels either in Dongola or in all of Makuria. The walls are 1.20 m wide and are built of red bricks (35–37 x 19 x 8 cm) bonded in mud mortar. The round support by the north wall and the round piers in the center are constructed of red bricks suitably shaped as triangular wedges and trapezes with arching sides, set in lime mortar [Fig. 5]. A thick lime rendering with a very smooth surface covered the inside walls and piers. Similar plaster has been recorded to date only in the Cruciform Building (B.III) situated between the royal palace (B.I) and Building V. In other buildings, like the cathedrals in Dongola and Faras, walls were floated with lime-washed mud plaster and the painted decoration executed on thus prepared surfaces. The present work in Building V uncovered on the north wall and on pier N.2 murals and inscriptions painted directly on the lime plaster, similarly as in Building III [Fig. 4]. The painting technique needs to undergo lab analyses, but it is most likely also oil tempera.

The massive walls and piers (the latter of a diameter equal to 1.20 m), topped in the case of pier N.2 with an impost of sandstone blocks and bricks presupposing the existence of arches, vaults and domes. A preliminary reconstruction of the building plan suggests a central hall with piers and a developed western part, only partly recognized, and a completely unknown eastern part [Fig. 3]. Assuming only four piers in the body of the church, the minimal width of the building can be reconstructed at 14.50 m. Its archaeologically confirmed length is 16.20 m, but

it was surely longer. The building had stone floors set in a lime mortar bedding, murals and architectural decoration executed in very light sandstone. Finds from the upper layers of the fill included a fragment of balustrade decorated with a guilloche (Godlewski 2007b: 295, Fig. 9) and a partly preserved keystone from an arch decorated with a palmette (Add.05.238).

The function of this structure remains to be determined. It may have been a civil structure of special importance or a sacral building. It definitely was part of the royal complex which also included the Palace (B.I) and the small Cruciform Building (B.III). It was erected later than the other two, which are dated to the first half of the 7th century (B.I) and the middle of the 7th century (B.III). Acting upon the presumption that the appearance of round piers built of profiled bricks in the church architecture of Dongola is linked to the rebuilding of the Third Cathedral (Church of the Granite Columns), currently dated to the second half of the 9th century (Godlewski 2006b: 281–282; Gartkiewicz 1990), and the founding of the so-called Pillar Church on the northwestern platform next to the fortifications, also dated to the second half of the 9th century (Godlewski 2006b: 279–280), we can suggest a date in the 9th century, and rather the first half of that century, for the construction of this building. The quality of execution and homogeneity of the conception are such that it could have been a model for the Pillar Church and the Fourth Cathedral. It should be noted that pillared interior designs were popular in the architectural milieu of the capital. The building uncovered in the northwestern part of the citadel (07.C.1; cf. Fig. 9) also had a central hall with round piers built of bricks.

PALACE (B.I) ON SITE SWN

The phasing of Building I established in 2005, encompassing the foundation and two successive rebuildings, was instrumental in planning the excavation of this extensive structure, which covers more than 1000 m² (Godlewski 2007b: 289–292). Current work was aimed at investigating as much as possible of the third phase (3B.I) which had changed the original layout by introducing new walls established on the occupational level from the second phase. Rooms 3B.I.30, 38, 39, 50S, 52 [Fig. 7] and 54 were excavated in the central part of the complex, leaving only unit B.I.55 uncleared and the northern units B.I.33–35 incompletely investigated. The entire western part of the royal palace appears to have been abandoned by this time. Silos were operating on the platform

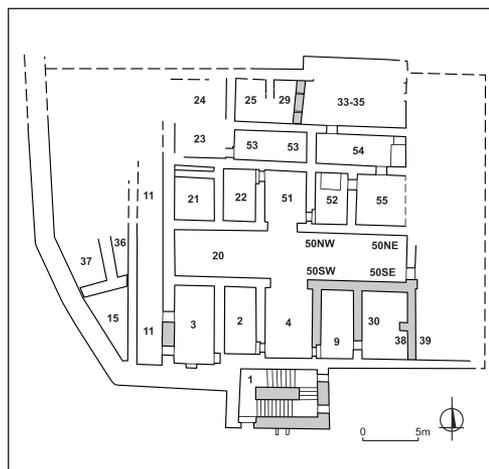


Fig. 6. Plan of the third phase of occupation of the palace building on the citadel (3B.I) (W. Godlewski, D. Zielińska)



Fig. 7. Room 52 from the 3B.I phase of the palace, view from the north (Photo W. Godlewski)

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Fig. 8. Collection of pottery and other objects from room 3B.I.52 (14th–15th century): vases, beaker (center right), oil lamp (bottom right), clay objects identified as plugs (bottom left) (Photo A. Obluski)

(courtyard) with one of them being built into room B.I.21. It is unclear what was happening in the eastern part of the palace where the small houses H.1–2, H.4 and H.6 were later established. It was probably already destroyed as well, as indicated by the findings from a trench in the southeastern corner of the building, in room B.39 where no occupational level was recorded for this phase of Building B.I.

In the third phase, the building seems to have comprised 13 rooms [Fig. 6]. The entrance from the city side led to room B.50.SE and the entrance from the south via the still functional staircase remained in use. Most certainly the original walls of Building B.I were still standing. The only new construction was the west wall in units 51, 53 and most probably 50, in similarity to the west wall of room 33. Partitions were introduced in some of the rooms (9, 30, 50) as well as a number of masonry benches of different dimensions, all approx. 0.20–0.30 m high (in rooms 9, 38, 52 and 54). The interiors were plastered and whitewashed; red pigment was noted on some of the walls, often on the entrance jambs. Some Old

Nubian graffiti were noted scratched in the plaster of the east wall of unit 51.

Dating of the third-phase occupation of Building B.I is grounded on one hand in the architectural sequence of construction changes in the structure, where the second phase is attributed to the period of military conflict with the Mamluks, presumably in the end of the 13th century, and on the other hand on the pottery material from the fill overlying the floors in particular units, that is, presumably the last phase of use of Building 3B.I (Godlewski 2007b: 291, Fig. 4). The pottery from room 52 is of the greatest interest, consisting as it does mostly of Terminal Period wheel-made ceramics from the 14th–15th century [Fig. 8]. The repertoire of forms includes bowls and vases decorated in black and red paint on an orange or yellow slip; cups with massive lower bodies, yellow slip and a red band on the rim, *qullae* (bottles with clay filters in the necks), *qawwadis*, clay objects identified tentatively as plugs approx. 6.50–10.00 cm in diameter, and large stoppers with geometrical stamps on the surface. One wheel-made bowl lamp had a rim moulded by hand.

BUILDING C.1 ON THE CITADEL

The other site, which started to be explored in the northwestern corner of the Citadel, is C.1. A large mud-brick building (B.VI) uncovered here (its full size is not yet known) is situated at the edge of a rocky cliff, rising steeply from the river at this point. So far, a big hall has been explored, its ceiling supported on six round piers constructed of brick, and a number of chambers of different size in the southwestern part [Fig. 9]. While it was certainly in use in the 11th–12th century, there is no doubt that its construction falls at a much earlier date.

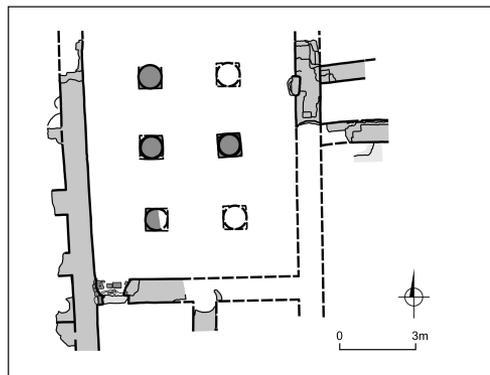


Fig. 9. Preliminary plan of Building C.1 (Drawing S. Maślak, A. Obtuski)

HOUSES ON THE CITADEL

The work in the southeastern part of Building B.I also encompassed a continuation of the exploration of houses H.1 and H.2 uncovered in 2003 (Godlewski 2004: 206–207) and the habitations situated to the east of B.III, between the palace and B.V. Another two houses, H.12 and H.13, were cleared, as well as two courtyards — H.10 connected with H.1 and H.11 connected with H.12 [Fig. 11].

Fragmentarily preserved houses H.12 and H.13, like House H.1, belong to the latest period of habitation in the SWN sector of the citadel. In the face of a lack of more precise dating criteria for this occupation (the documents from the archive in H.1. do not provide any dates unfortunately), we have to resort to the ceramic evidence. A general date in the 16th–17th century is tenable based on glazed pottery in the traditional Egyptian style — fragments of bowls or small plates with ring or flat base, made of marl clay and coated with a green or

bluish glaze, painted underglaze with floral motifs [Fig. 10]. This pottery was not likely to have been made in Dongola, but whether it came from Upper Egyptian workshops (like Qus, for example), remains to be determined. The share of these vessels in the pottery assemblage from SWN and C.07.1, both on the citadel, leaves no doubt that this imported ware must have been in common use in Dongola, most probably as a form of luxury tableware. A typical Mamluk ware made of Nile silt, brown-glazed with engraved underglaze decoration, is represented sporadically in the archaeological record in Dongola.

Of particular interest is the material from house H.12, which comprised two interconnected rooms, one big and the other small. This house type is well known from earlier investigations on the citadel as well as around the Cruciform Church lying on lower ground to the north of the acropolis (Godlewski 2006a). The small unit is usually



Fig. 10. Egyptian-style glazed bowl, 16th–17th century
(Photo A. Obluski)

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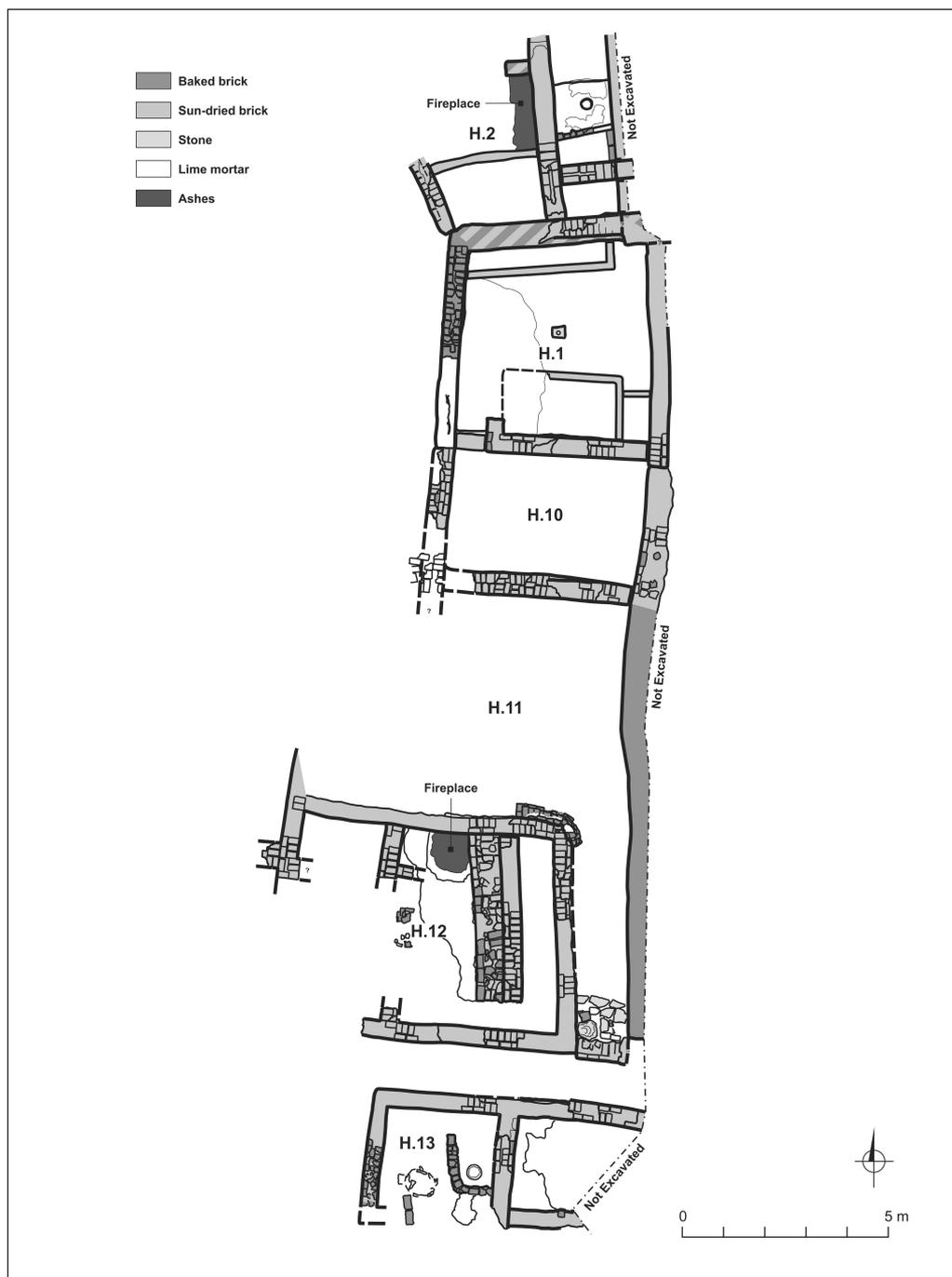


Fig. 11. Plan of 16th–17th century houses on the citadel (site SWN)
(Drawing S. Maślak)

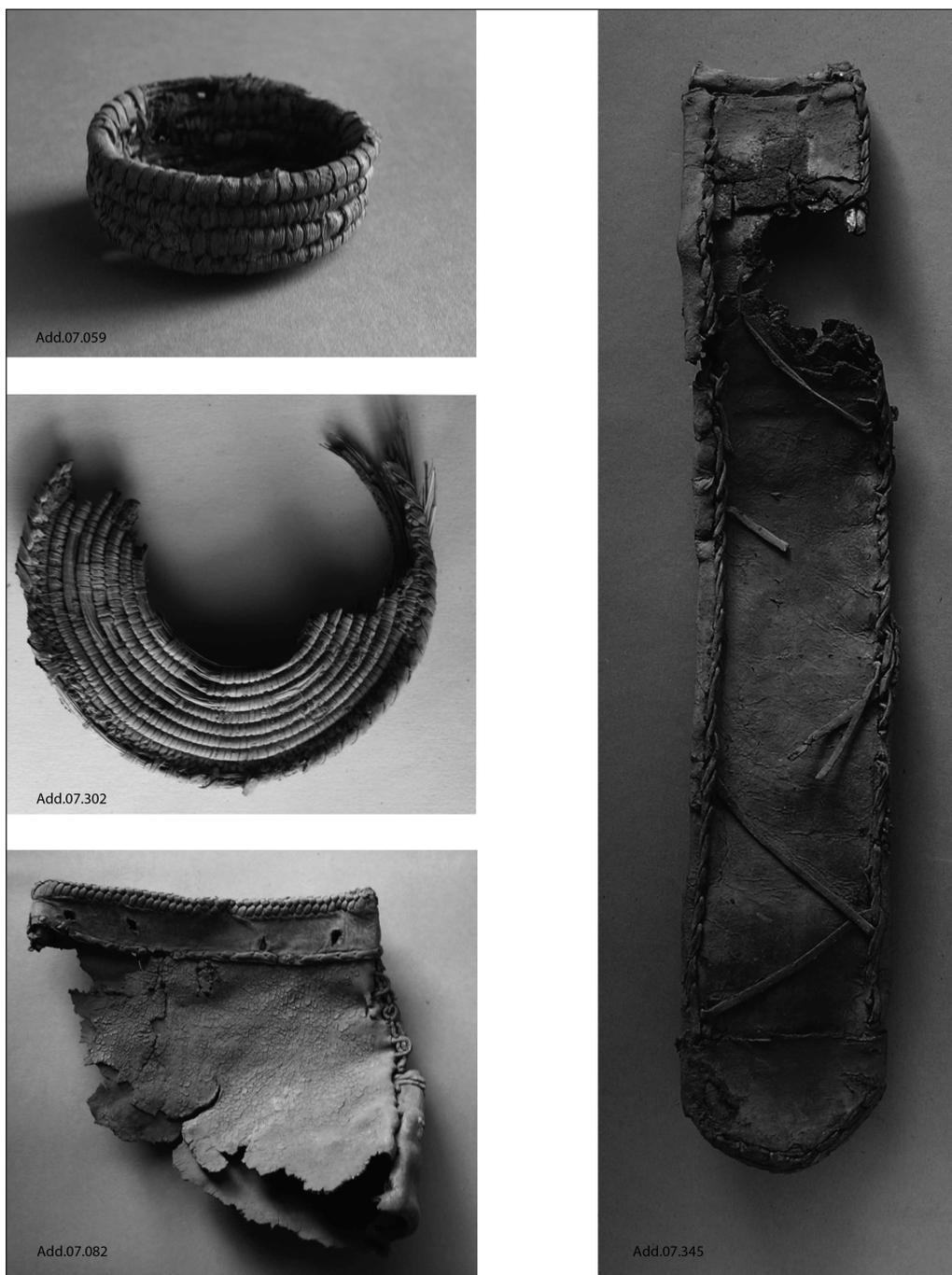


Fig. 12. Collection of 16th–17th century finds, all from house H.12 except for the sword scabbard from H.2: small basket, basket lid, leather pouch, sword scabbard (Photos A. Obluski)

a storeroom for pottery containers. H.12 yielded, beside the pottery, several objects connected with the everyday life of the inhabitants, including basketry (straps, lids, small vessels, bags/baskets made of palm-leaf fiber and grass), sandals (not from the small room), leather items (decorated pouch, sword scabbard, the latter from H.2), tools (spindle whorls made from wheel-turned potsherds, iron knife, wooden plugs), and finally a few beads of glass paste or cowry shell [Fig. 12]. Archeobotanical remains

found in the fill: fowl, bamia, date stones, millet, testify to the agricultural yield of irrigated fields mentioned in the notary acts found in the archive in H.1 as well as to alimentary habits.

Of the houses the one market as H.1 has been excavated and researched most fully. Three successive levels of habitation were documented inside this house in the course of the excavations carried out in this area to trace the southeastern corner of the palace (B.I) beneath it.

FAMILY ARCHIVE FROM HOUSE H.1

The fill of the big mastaba occupying a place by the south wall of the house in the latest phase of use contained a small cooking pot, buried in its center. This handmade pot (Add.07.426; H.17.2 cm, Dia. 12.0 cm, Fig. 13) was found open, but the traces of mud on the rim indicate that it had once been sealed shut. Inside the pot there were five small bundles of rags carefully tied with palm-fiber tape. Four of these packets contained documents written in Arabic on paper, carefully folded over and over before being wrapped in the cloth [Fig. 14]. The fifth packet held small fragments of a gold object — possibly loop earrings with a suspended small piece of plate as the ornament. The deterioration of the earrings must have been post-depositional.

The four Arabic texts were unfolded and protected for transfer to Poland where they were conserved.² Two have proved to be complete, while the other two have suffered some damages. All four are deeds of sale of plots of land with waterwheels (*saqiyah*),

written by a very efficient hand, and hence probably in a notary's office. The two parties to the sale are mentioned by name and the object of the transaction is referred to by a place-name. The witnesses are then written down by name but no date for the contract is



Fig. 13. Cooking pot containing the archive from house H.1 (Photo A. Obluski)

² Artist and painting, sculpture and paper restorer Maria Regina Niewiadomska has kindly conserved the texts from her own resources.

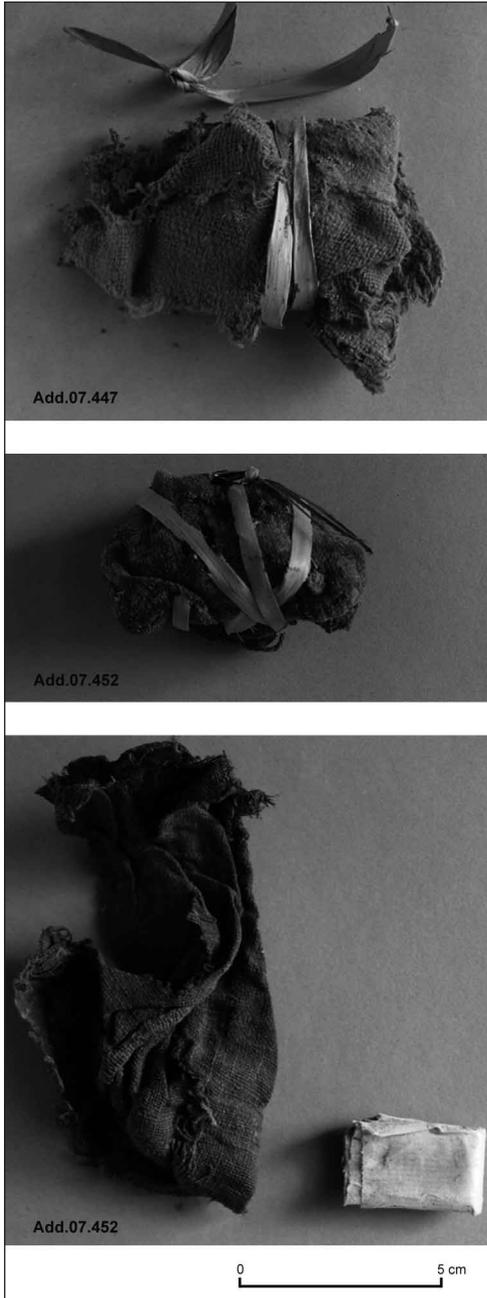


Fig. 14. Examples of packets containing deeds of sale from the archive in H.1; at bottom, one of the packets after unpacking and the folded deed (Photo A. Obluski)

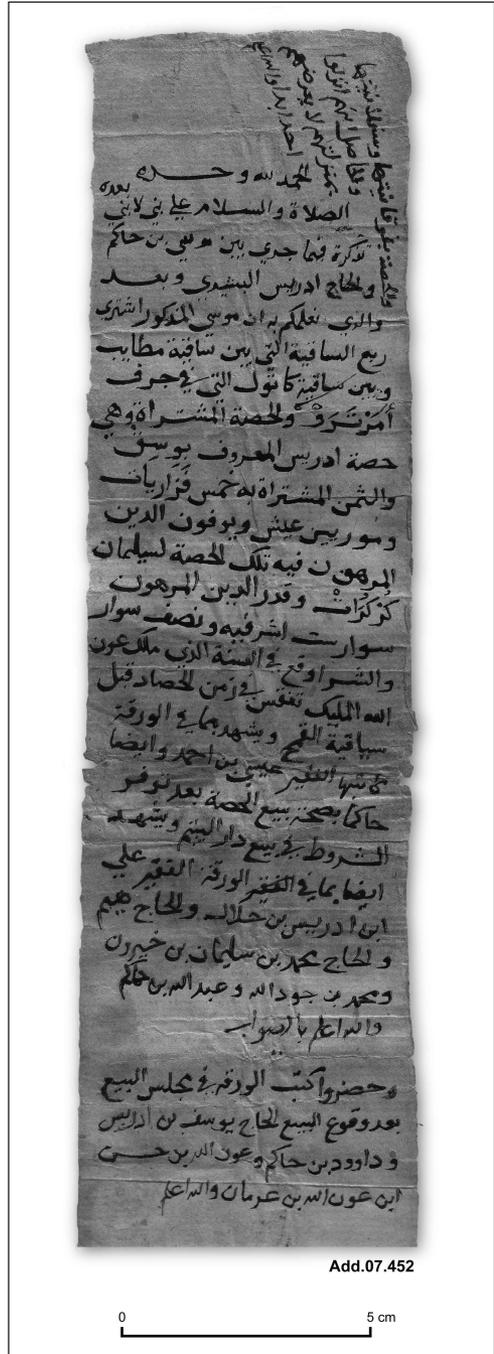


Fig. 15. Real estate deed, after conservation (Photo A. Obluski)

given. The illustrated deed [*Fig. 15*], written in Arabic on a glossy sheet of paper (27.5 by 7.4 cm), documented the sale of land by

one Musa bin Hakim to one al Hajj Idris al-Bashiri and named numerous witnesses to the transaction.³

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3 Gisela Helmeke of the Museum of Islam in Berlin has kindly provided this preliminary appraisal of the contents of the four documents.