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Old Dongola 1988-1989 : House PCH. 1

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OLD DONGOLA 1988-1989

HOUSE PCH.1

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The excavations in Old Dongola, conducted by a team from the Polish Centre of Archaeology in Cairo, have been concentrated until now mainly upon sacral architecture, a fact which is reflected in the ten churches and commemorative buildings that have been uncovered.

During the last two seasons covered in this report, House PCH.1 with its courtyards was cleared and investigated.¹ The house in question covers an area of 215 m², comprising the dwelling proper (135 m²) and two courtyards adjoining the complex on the north and west. The house was built in an open area, free of structures of any kind, and so constituted presumably a freestanding building on the northern border of the city agglomeration.

House PCH.1 is relatively well preserved with mud-brick walls reaching a height of about 2.5 m. However, numerous alterations and the continued use of the ruined building as a dwelling in the last phases have destroyed much of the ground floor and induced various changes and much dismantling. All this was hardly helpful in establishing the initial plan of the structure. Three phases were distinguished. The first two are periods of habitation, the last one reflected the use of the largely ruined structure by squatters. In the first phase, the house was rectangular, measuring 14.6 by 9.2 m. (Fig. 1) The layout was well designed. The entrance led into a spacious rectangular vestibule which served as a major passageway inside the building composed of five rectangular rooms and a staircase in the northwest corner. The presence of an upper

¹ W. Godlewski, Old Dongola 1988-1989. The House PCH.1, *Archéologie du Nil Moyen* 4, in press.

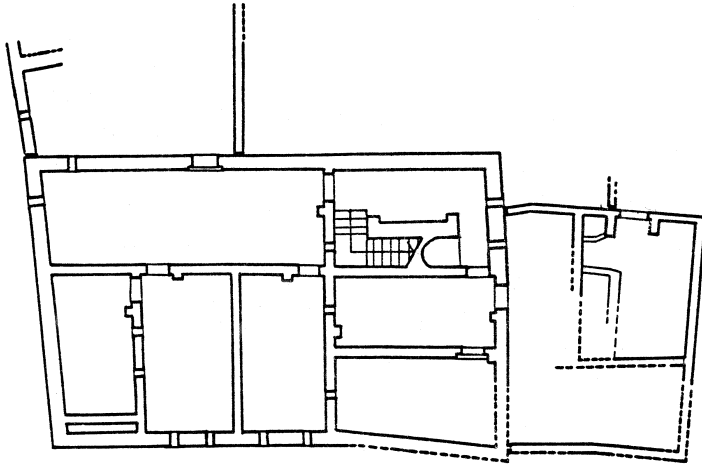


Fig. 1. Plan of House PCH.1.
Drawing J. Dobrowski.

floor appears more than probable, although there is no direct evidence.

Among various finds from House PCH.1 (pottery, lamps, glass) attention is drawn by two stelae inscribed in Greek, found in the Northern courtyard.² The one belonging to Petros, eparch of the land of the Nobadians, is dated to AD 798. The eparch Petros is mentioned here for the first time. According to a Coptic document from lower Nubia³ dated to about AD 750, under king Kyriakos one Paulos-Kolla was eparch of Nobadia and one Petros *domesticos* of Nobadia. We have no means of telling whether he was the same Petros named in the stela from House PCH.1, but it is not impossible for a *domesticos* of Nobadia to have been named eparch

² A. Łajtar, Two Greek funerary stelae from Polish excavations in Old Dongola, *Archéologie du Nil Moyen* 4, in press.

³ F.L. Griffith, Christian documents from Nubia, *Proceedings of the British Academy* XIV, 1928, 1-29.

after the death of Paulos-Kolla. Petros, the future eparch, may have also been the king's emissary to conduct talks with Husa ibn Ka'b, governor of Egypt in AD 758, mentioned in a letter from Qasr Ibrim,⁴ addressed to the king of Nubia. Most probably one Kyriakos mentioned in documents⁵ of 804-813 was the direct successor of Petros as eparch after the latter's death in 798. In this way, the stela from House PCH.1 in Old Dongola contributes to the series of known administrators of Nobadia.

The other funerary stela, belonging probably to Zacharias and dated to 824, does not add any significant historical data in its present, fragmentary state.

The dating of House PCH.1 is not precise, but it came into being most probably at the end of the 8th century.

The duration of phase I is undetermined, but considering the evidence it could not have lasted longer than one generation. In phase II, the house was altered in a significant and interesting fashion. The house was clearly divided into three separate units with autonomous entries from the west, presumably intended for three families, possibly the descendants of the first owner.

The pottery of phase III belongs exclusively to the Postclassical Period, determining the 12th century as the chronological horizon of this phase.

⁴ J.H. Plumley, An eight-century Arabic letter to the king of Nubia, *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 61, 1975, 241-245.

⁵ Griffith, op. cit.