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Old Dongola Town Fortifications, 1993

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Investigations of the northwestern part of the town fortifications discovered in the 1990 season were continued in 1993.¹

Work proceeded in a sector of the north wall 110 m long. The top of this part of the wall was cleared on almost the entire length, and the two corner towers, on the northeast and northwest, were explored.

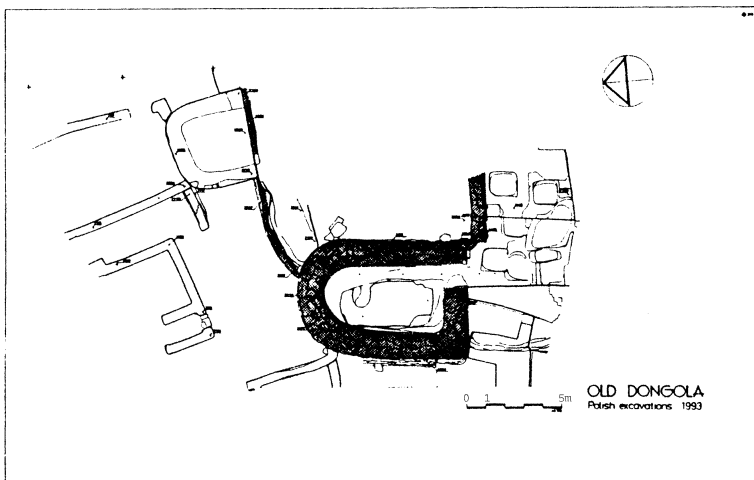
On top of the wall and the towers there were traces of habitations belonging to the last phase of settlement in Dongola, presumably in the 17th-18th century. It was also found that the old fortifications had been reinforced; the character of the reinforcements as well as the construction technique would indicate a date in the Post-Christian period, in the 15th-16th century.

The original fortifications were observed only on the eastern side of the northwestern corner tower. The walls were of mud brick faced on the outside with undressed stone blocks from the local limestone quarries. The width of the wall has been determined as 5.30 m, with the exterior stone facing being 0.80-0.90 m wide at a height of around 6 m. It is not to be excluded that in the lower parts of the walls this outer stone facing was even wider.

Elongated and rounded towers projecting up to 9 m were set at intervals along the northern stretch of the town walls. Beside the

¹ W. Godlewski, The fortifications of Old Dongola. Report on the 1990 season, *Archéologie du Nil Moyen* 5, 1991, 103-128. Excavations were directed in the 1993 season by W. Godlewski. Miss Agnieszka Gryglewska of the Wrocław Technical University was responsible for the architectural documentation.

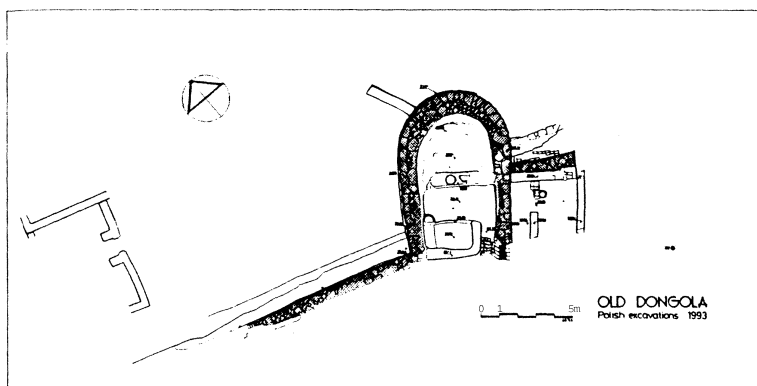
corner towers, a tower designated N.1 was found c. 40 m to the west of the northeastern tower; about 12 m from this tower the so-called "northern gate" was located. Presumably another tower should be hypothetically reconstructed along the stretch of wall between the N.1 tower and the corner, NW tower. The "northern gate", which supplemented the three towers reinforcing the northern part of the walls, was constructed in a different manner than the towers and presumably at a later date; its function remains to be determined.



*Fig. 1. Plan of Tower N.1.
Drawing A. Gryglewska.*

The northwestern tower was also constructed of mud bricks which were larger in the central part, measuring 42-43x18-19x 9-10 cm; they were laid in regular courses bonded in mud mortar. The exterior face was built of courses of broken stone and

measures c. 1.20-1.50 m at a height of about 3.50 m. Built parallel with the mud-brick core, this stone casing was quite probably wider at the bottom, since it generally has a slightly sloping character and narrows toward the top. The tower, which was founded on bedrock, was 8.90 m long and 6.30 m wide where it joined the wall. About 6.50 m of its height has been preserved; originally it must have been much higher.



*Fig. 2. Plan of the northwestern tower.
Drawing A. Gryglewska.*

The northeastern tower was built in similar fashion. It is 8.55 m long and 5.70 m wide. The foundations were not touched, but it is definitely better preserved than the northwestern tower. Considering that a late habitation was found to occupy the top of this tower, it should be assumed that it may have been as much as 9 m high.

The two seasons combined have revealed that the town of Old Dongola had its own massive fortifications, which were subsequently developed to include a large earthen platform, west of the northwestern tower, where some military installations were presumably to be found.² The platform was constructed in the first half of the 6th century judging by the evidence provided by pottery and iron-smelting furnaces.³ The fortifications are probably earlier in date, definitely earlier than the Christianization of Makuria, if the fact that the earliest churches of Dongola (BX and the Old Church) were built outside the fortifications can be taken as relevant for this point.⁴ Therefore, a tentative date in the late 5th century for the construction of the Dongola walls is currently admissible.

² W. Godlewski, *The fortifications*, op.cit., 105-107.

³ *Ib.*, id., 107-108.

⁴ W. Godlewski, *The earliest evidence of the settlement at Old Dongola*, *Proceedings of the 6th Meroitic Symposium*, Berlin 1992, in press.