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THE ENCLOSURE WALLS OF BANGANARTI AND SELIB AFTER THE 2010 SEASON

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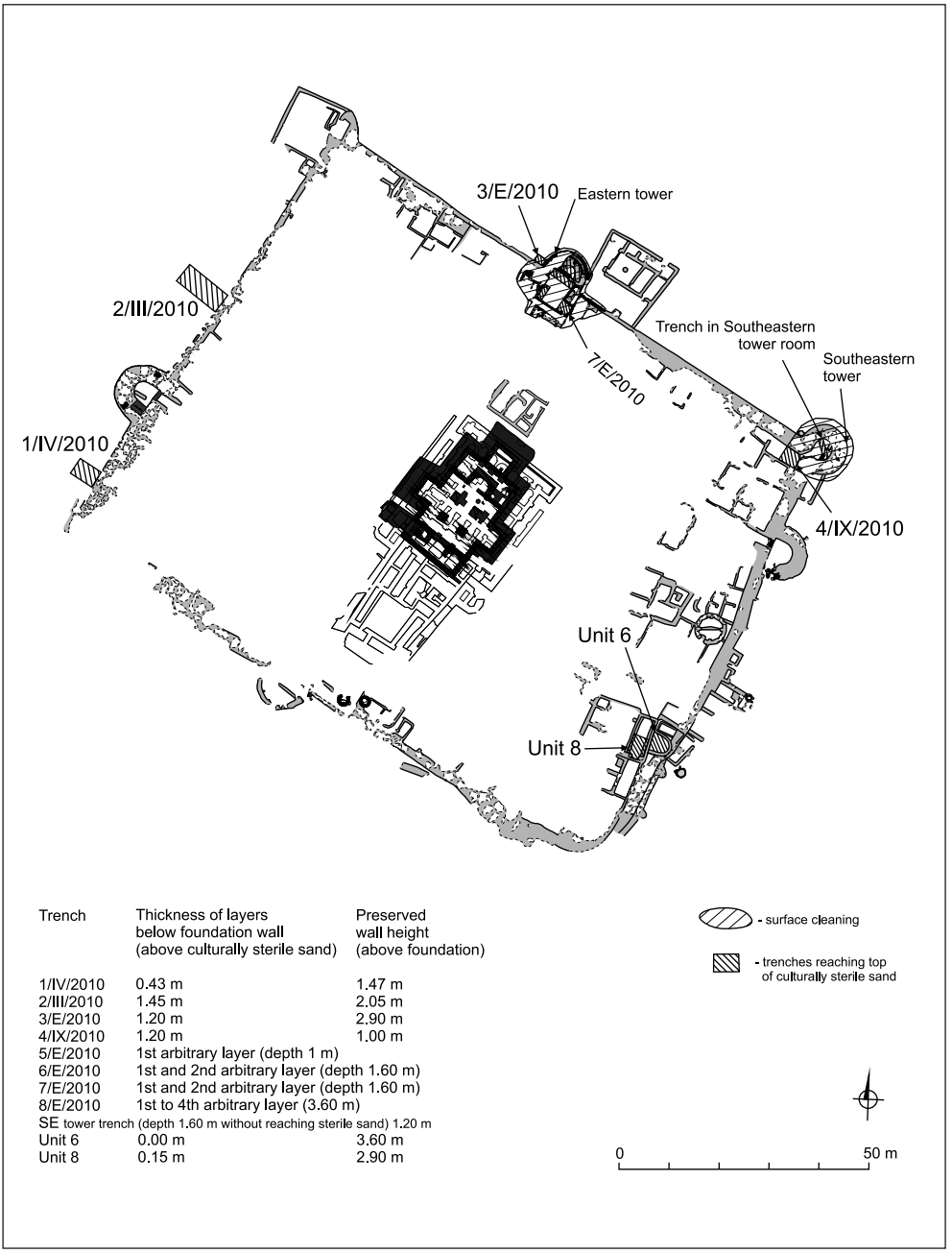
Abstract: Banganarti 1 (ROM 53, BNG 1) and Selib 1 (ROM 100, SLB 11, SLB 1), lying approximately 9 km apart in the southern Dongola Reach, had been perceived as twin sites of analogous nature. In 2010 the enclosure wall in Selib was surveyed and the investigation of the fortifications in Banganarti was continued, in both cases aiming to test the theory about the similarity of the two complexes. A detailed examination of the enclosure walls enabled a comparison of the wall architecture, building materials, state of preservation and settlement intensity in the neighborhood.

Keywords: Banganarti, Sudan, fortifications, Selib, architecture

Banganarti 1 (ROM 53) and Selib 1 (ROM 100; SLB 11) were considered twin sites from the time of the first archaeological survey in those locations (Grzymski 1987: 9–10; Żurawski 2003: 142). Both were described by the Royal Ontario Museum Expedition to Nubia (ROMEN) in 1984 and 1985 as regular complexes with a central kom over the ruins. The mounds were identified as remains of Christian churches. Measurements carried out later revealed that the two sites were of similar size: Banganarti approximately 120 m by 90 m and Selib 130 m by 90 m (Żurawski 2011; Drzewiecki forthcoming). Both localities stand now at a considerable distance from the Nile, but Bogdan Żurawski is of the opinion that Banganarti may have occupied a permanent or seasonal island on the river (Żurawski 2003: 141), whereas Selib stood on the riverbank (Żurawski 2011).

One of the objectives this season was to recognize the key features of the enclosure walls of both complexes. In 2010 fieldwork covered the curtains of Selib (6–16 February) as well as the fortifications in Banganarti (9 February–21 February). In Selib, the layout of the outer face of the wall was traced in surface cleaning and small sections of the inner face and an area suspected to be the site of a gate were uncovered. At Banganarti surface cleaning was followed up with testing, going down to culturally sterile layers of sand. Consequently, specific categories of finds, like building material, architecture, remains of settlement in the immediate vicinity of the walls, and state of preservation, are now open to comparison [***Figs 1, 2***].



Trench	Thickness of layers below foundation wall (above culturally sterile sand)	Preserved wall height (above foundation)
1/IV/2010	0.43 m	1.47 m
2/III/2010	1.45 m	2.05 m
3/E/2010	1.20 m	2.90 m
4/IX/2010	1.20 m	1.00 m
5/E/2010	1st arbitrary layer (depth 1 m)	
6/E/2010	1st and 2nd arbitrary layer (depth 1.60 m)	
7/E/2010	1st and 2nd arbitrary layer (depth 1.60 m)	
8/E/2010	1st to 4th arbitrary layer (3.60 m)	
SE tower trench (depth 1.60 m without reaching sterile sand) 1.20 m		
Unit 6	0.00 m	3.60 m
Unit 8	0.15 m	2.90 m

Fig. 1. Architectural remains in Banganarti after the 2010 season (Drawing R. Łopaciuk, M. Drzewiecki)

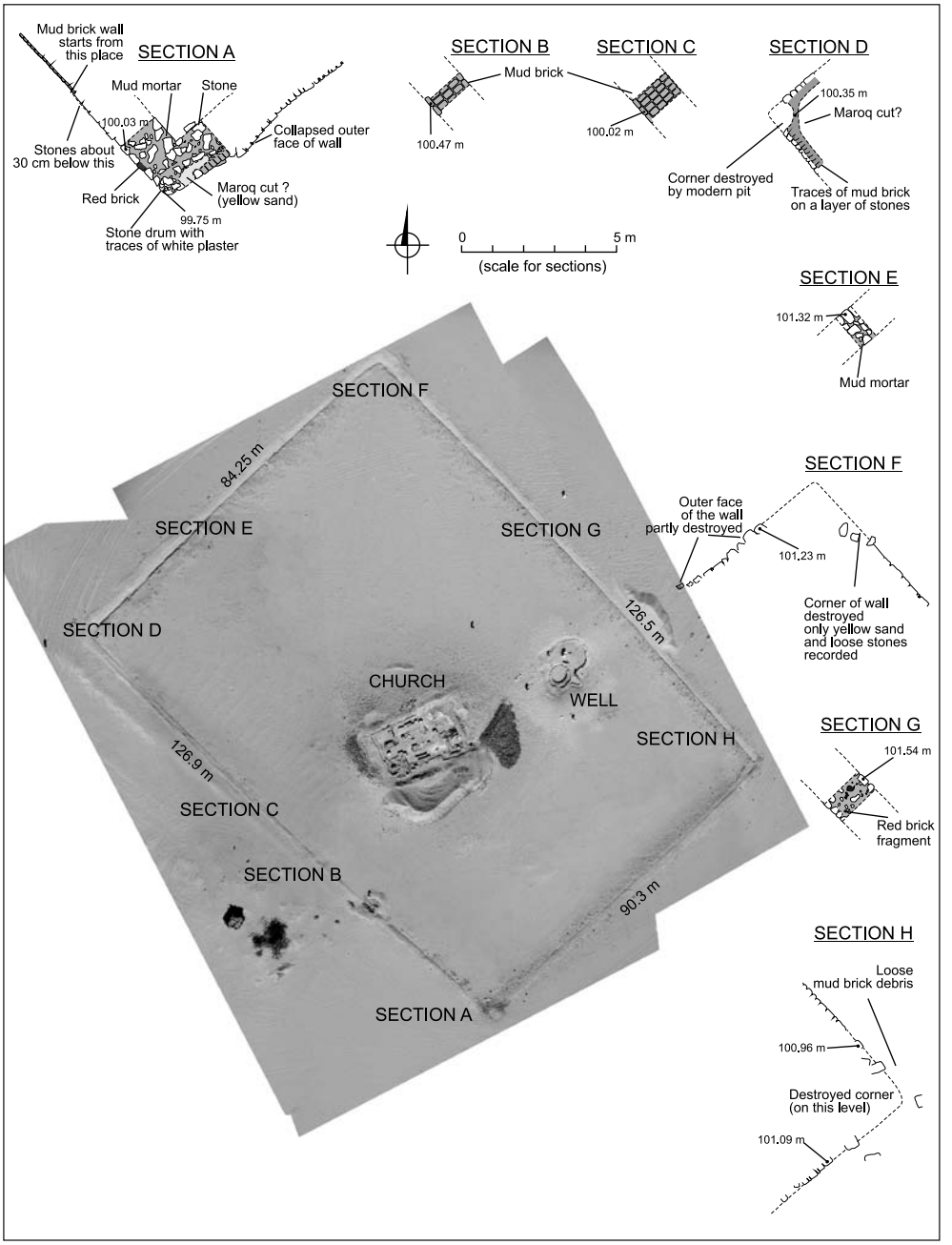


Fig. 2. Selib 1, curtain wall seen in an aerial photograph taken during the 2010; test pits A to H dug around the perimeter of the wall (Drawing M. Drzewiecki; kite photo B. Żurawski)

BUILDING MATERIAL

Banganarti is a rare example of well preserved early medieval mud-brick fortifications [***Fig. 3***]. A different material, either stone or baked brick, was used in places of key structural importance [***Fig. 6***], such as arches above the entrance and the bottom of the foundations, but there does not seem to be any pattern that could speak in favor of there being a building principle. The size of mud bricks was varied, possibly because of the numerous episodes of repair and rebuilding, as well as building techniques.

The enclosure in Selib was built for the most part of irregular stones. The bigger stones (up to about 0.60 m in diameter) were used as facing, while the smaller ones, mixed with sporadic fragments of mud- and baked brick, constituted the core. Mud was used for bonding. A stone column drum about 0.30 m high and 0.57 m in diameter was used in the structure of the southern corner. The surface of the drum bore remains of lime plaster, but no evident traces of painting or inscriptions [***Fig. 4***]. In 2010 a considerable part of the southwestern curtain wall, that is, 90 m out of a total length of 128 m, was observed to be of mud brick [see ***Fig. 2***] interspersed with a few baked bricks. The interface of brick and stone sections of the wall is not straight, the stone course

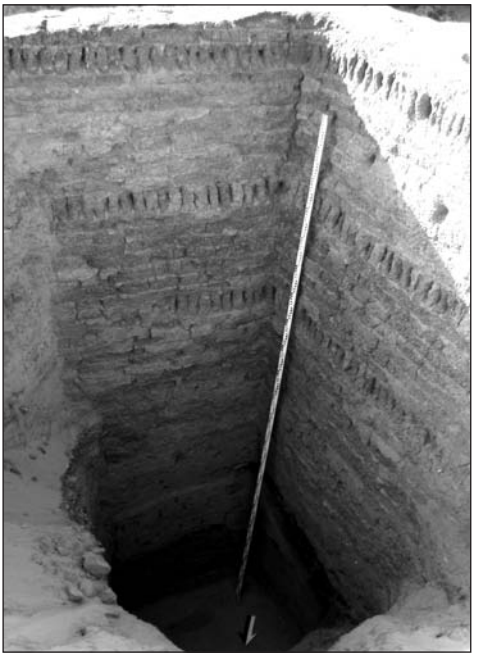


Fig. 3. Banganarti 1, corner of mud-brick walls where the eastern tower joined the main wall (3/E/2010) (Photo M. Drzewiecki)

Fig. 4. Selib 1, southern corner of the curtain wall with reused column drum (Photo M. Drzewiecki)

in the lower parts underlying courses of brick. It cannot be said with any certainty whether this was the original intent of the builders or a rebuilding phase after sections of the wall had collapsed or been destroyed.

Summing up, there are considerable differences in the kind of building material that was used. Availability of material could have been an important factor, but there could also have been other non-utilitarian reasons.

ARCHITECTURE

The biggest differences were observed in the architecture of the two complexes. The enclosure wall at Selib had no elements typical of fortifications [see ***Fig. 2***]. No features of a defensive nature other than the wall itself were recorded, no towers or bastions either at the corners or at regular intervals along the walls. One gate was traced [***Fig. 5***] and two places of potential gates, neither one however with any additional defensive features or hindered access. The thickness of the enclosure wall did not exceed 1.50 m, indicating that it could not have been a parapet wall, especially if it is kept in mind that the facing of the wall was always receded slightly at the top, making the top of the wall less massive than the parts just above the foundations.

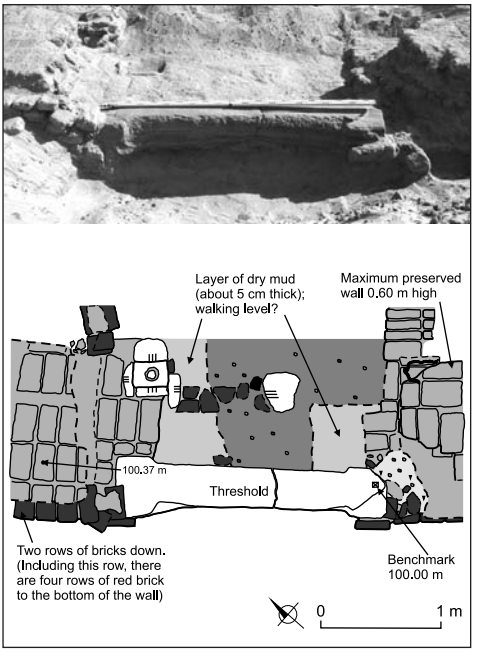


Fig. 5. Selib 1, west gateway with stone threshold, view from the outside and plan (Photo and drawing M. Drzewiecki)

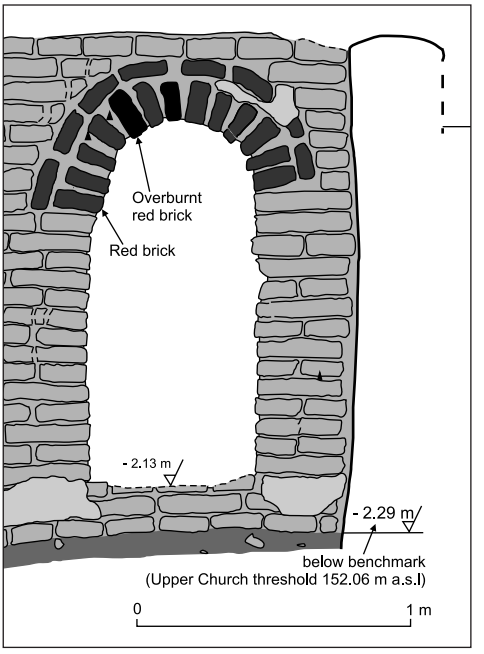


Fig. 6. Banganarti 1, arched entrance in the eastern tower of the fortifications (Drawing M. Drzewiecki)

The fortifications of Banganarti are nothing like the Selib walls in this respect. The southeastern corner tower excavated in 2010 was about 8 m in diameter in the first building phase (wall I) and was enlarged to 10 m [*Fig. 7*]. The room inside the tower was about 3.70 m in diameter and was entered through a corridor that was from 0.67 to 1.00 m wide. A floor of compact mud, 5 cm thick, was found inside the room. The threshold, traces of which were recorded, was made of baked bricks. A wall partitioned the room into two units. A passage led through this wall. It was vaulted, the sole evidence of this being bricks set at an oblique angle at the springing. The passage was about 1.00–1.30 m high and the inner unit could have been a small, storage room, possibly supporting stairs leading to the upper level of the tower. Walls now no more than a meter high failed to give any clues as to the nature of the vault in this unit.

Exploration of the eastern tower, located midway between the corners of the eastern wall of the fortification, revealed the remains of a staircase and vaulted room under the steps [*Fig. 8*, bottom]. The feature has survived in much better condition, allowing the architectural layout and construction to be studied in greater detail.

The original enclosure wall was approximately 2 m thick, but was enlarged to 3 m

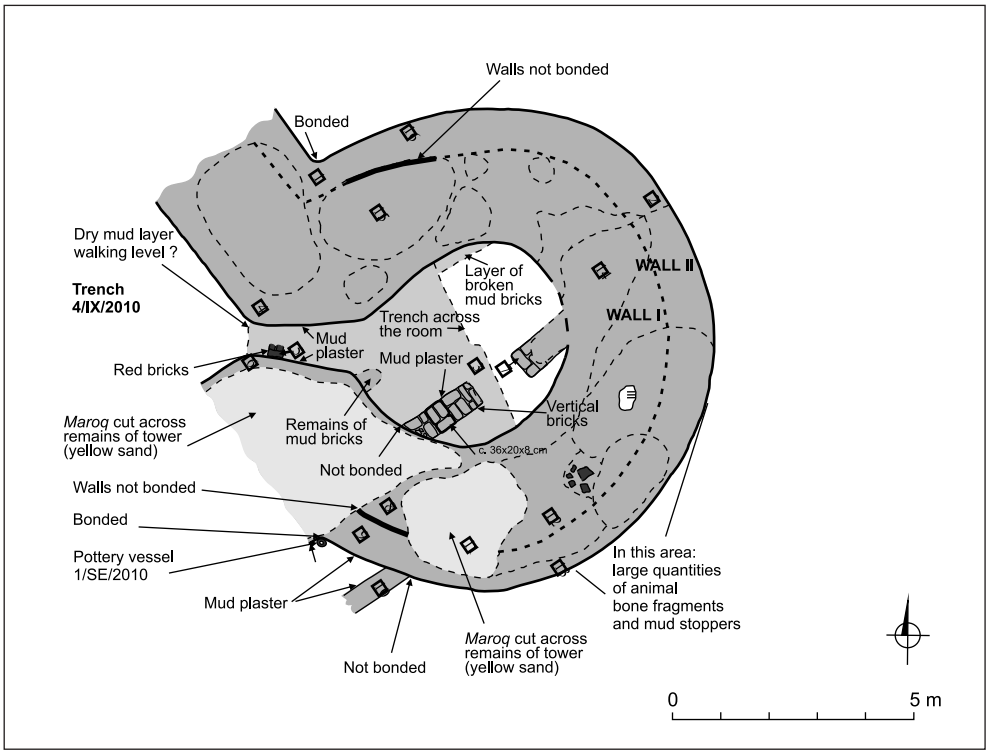


Fig. 7. Banganarti, plan of the southeastern corner tower (Drawing M. Drzewiecki)

or 4 m,[1] which could suggest the existence of a parapet walk (wall II). It is impossible to resolve this question with regard to wall I. To date, three gates have been recorded in the enceinte and another potential gate in the trapezoid building (Wiewióra 2005: 266–268; Drzewiecki 2010: 344–345, 350). All of the gates were defensive in

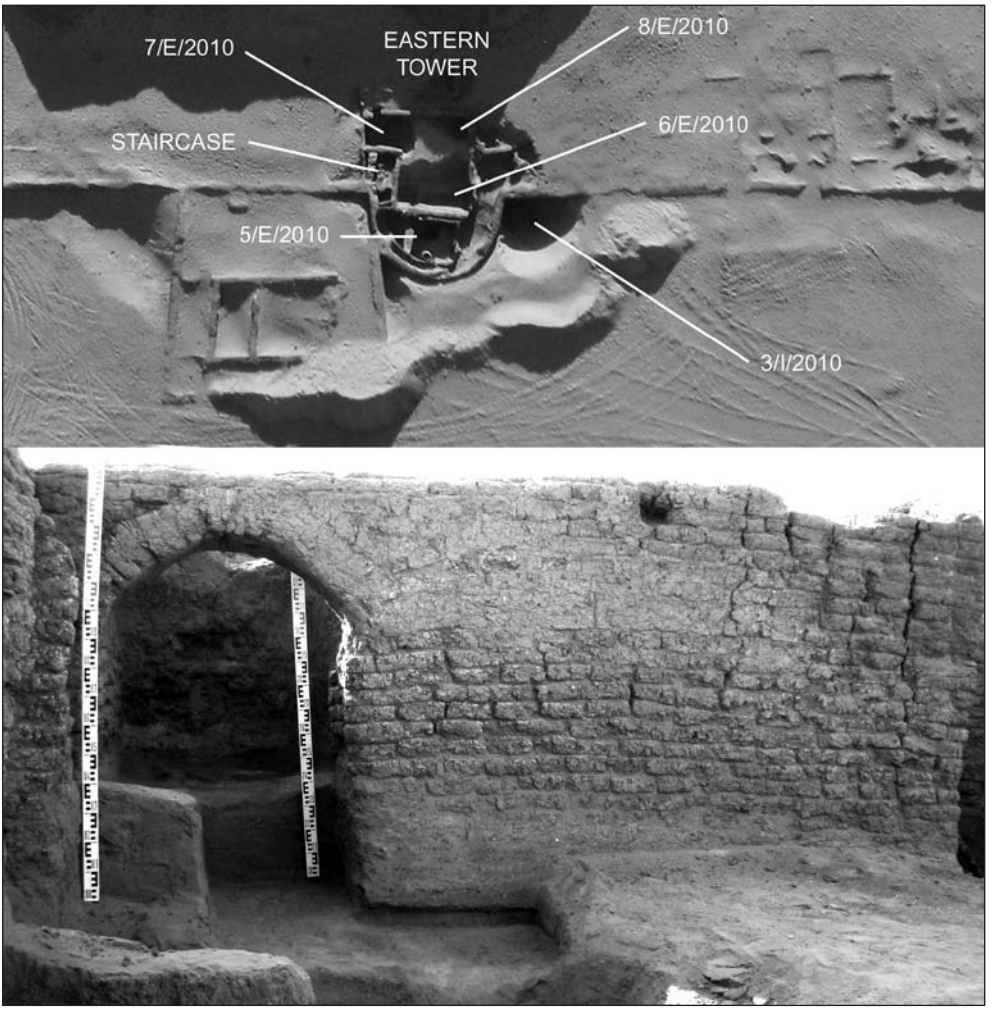


Fig. 8. Banganarti 1, eastern tower: top, aerial photograph taken in the 2010 season; bottom, view of the entrance to the room under the stairs (Photos B. Żurawski, M. Drzewiecki)

[1] The section between the eastern tower and the northeastern corner is an exception, being approximately 0.80 m thick. On the inside, this section of the wall was lined with a series of long rooms (Drzewiecki 2008: 404–405). This particular design may have been due either to savings made on building material or else the desire to enlarge storage space inside the complex.

nature with projecting semicircular plan defending access to a double-bend passage [see ***Fig. 1***]. Assuming Banganarti had indeed been an island, this would have made the complex doubly defensive.

In sum, the enclosure wall at Selib was meant to enclose a certain space, protecting it against the elements and unwelcome animals. It could have been a symbolic barrier, analogous to a temenos wall, for example, between the *sacrum* and *profanum*, but it was evidently not defensive in the military sense. On the other hand, the complex in Banganarti served all the functions listed for Selib, but was also heavily defended.

STATE OF PRESERVATION

Testing carried out in 2010 in different parts of the fortifications at Banganarti demonstrated a differentiated state of preservation of the walls [see ***Fig. 1***]. Standing walls oscillated around 1 m high in the southeastern and southwestern corners,[2] rising to 3.60 m in the southern section. For the most part the fortifications stand on non-architectural layers up to 1.45 m in thickness [***Figs 9, 10***]. Standing architecture and sand accumulated against the walls have protected occupational

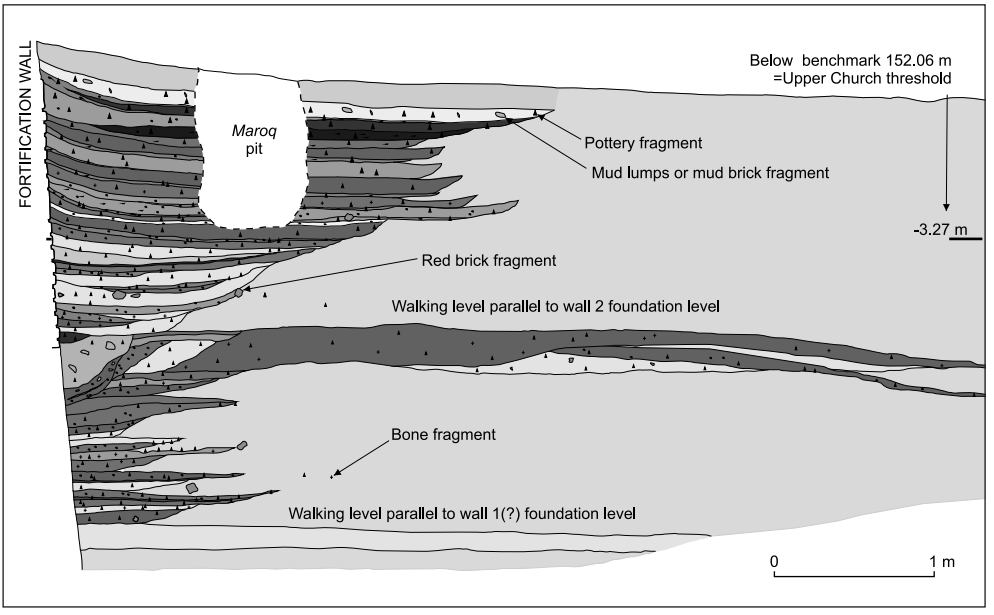


Fig. 9. Banganarti 1, section at right angle to the face of the curtain wall (trench 2/III/2010) (Drawing A. Cedro)

[2] The section of the ruins around the southwestern corner is the most difficult to interpret probably because of the Nile floods, which changed the wall into a solid irregular mass, preserved up to a meter high.

layers from erosion [*Fig. 10*]. Indeed, accumulated sand has almost completely hidden the remains of walls. In some places the remains were covered with 3 m of windblown sand. Wherever the wall could be traced on the surface, there was extensive proof of digging. Part of the site, especially the western curtain, has suffered extensively from date palm cultivation. Pits up to 3 m deep were dug for each tree, pockmarking this part of the complex.

At Selib 1 the remains of the enclosure wall were visible on the ground in many places. It was enough to clear a layer of humus up to 0.30 m deep to uncover the outer face of the wall. This may have been due to intensive preparation of the area under cultivation, which took place a few years back according to local informers. In 2010, the bottom of the foundation of the enclosure wall was reached in the area of the western gate [see *Fig. 5*]. The wall stood 0.60 m high and there were no archaeological layers around it. This may have been the reason for such a small number of *maroq* pits along the length of the wall.

Summing up the state of preservation of the two sites, one has to wonder why it was so different, Banganarti should be in much worse condition being situated closer to cultivated land and modern village settlement.

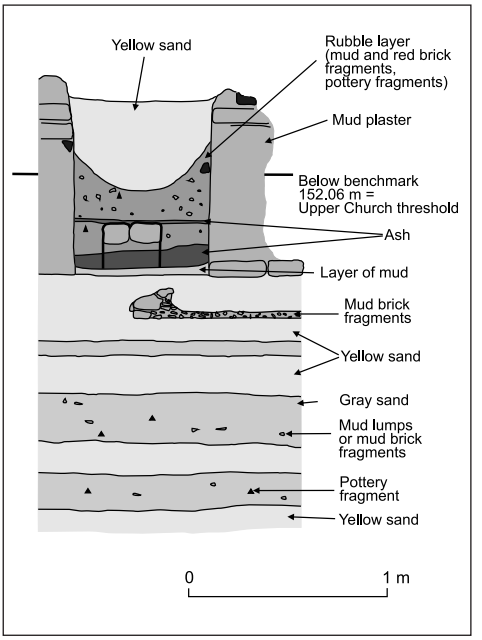


Fig. 10. Banganarti, entrance to the southeastern corner tower on top of non-architectural occupational layers (trench 4/IX/2010) (Drawing A. Cedro)

REMAINS OF OCCUPATION NEXT TO THE ENCLOSURE WALL

Few artifacts were recorded next to the enclosure wall in Selib — mostly well fired storage jars and *qawadis* pots used for drawing water in water installations (*saqiya* wheels). Some red bricks, partly painted white, were also found [*Fig. 11*]. No attached architecture was recorded along the outside of the curtain wall. Only small sections of the wall were cleared on the inside, but work in the neighborhood of the gate revealed a street, set off by the foundations of mud-brick structures [see *Fig. 2*].

The opposite is true of Banganarti where even in the least well preserved parts of the enceinte there were many artifacts, including mainly pottery sherds, fragments of animal bones, burnt organic material

(such as seeds), all of which represented refuse dumped outside the walls. A set of amphora mud stoppers was recorded in the area of the southeastern gate during excavations in 2010 [***Fig. 12,*** left]. Some of these were stamped and bore traces of red pigment on the surface. Two clay seals were also recorded [***Fig. 12,*** right]. Remains of architecture were noted both on the outside and inside of the enclosure wall [see ***Figs 1, 8***], but they were more concentrated on the inside. Artifacts found inside were in much better condition comparatively, whole pots being found much more frequently, for example, and even in some cases undisturbed in remains of hearths or in a room corner, nestled against the walls [***Fig. 13***].

In summary, despite the different degrees of preservation of the remains, the complex in Banganarti appears to have seen much more intensive use than the one at Selib. The number and diversity of artifacts from relevant areas on the two sites is seen as confirmation.

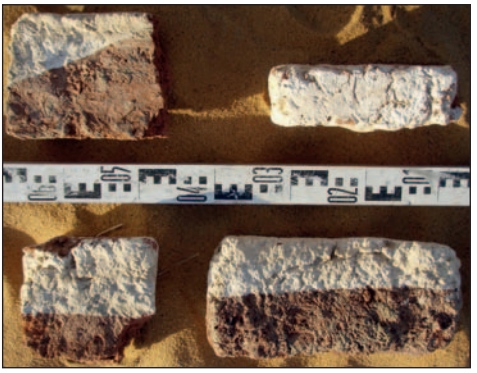


Fig. 11. Selib, partly white-painted red bricks found along the curtain wall (Photo M. Drzewiecki)

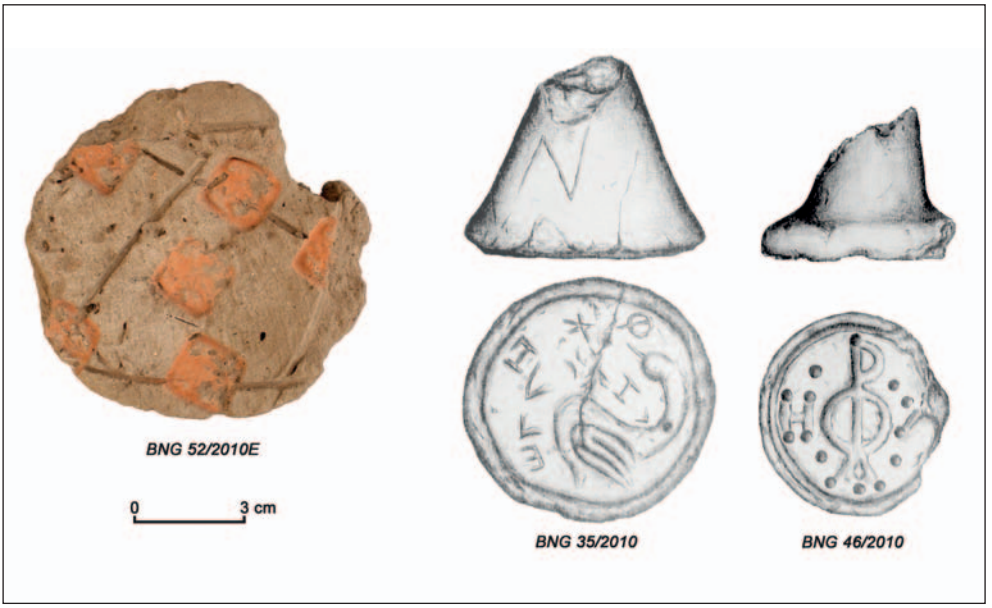


Fig. 12. Mud stopper (left) and clay seals from occupational contexts next to the Banganarti walls (Photo K. Molga; drawing A. Cedro)

CONCLUSIONS

Upon closer examination different building materials and architectural designs were evident. The occupation intensity was not the same.

Why were different building materials used? Assuming Banganarti was indeed an island, then transporting stone material from inland would have greatly exceeded the effort of making mud bricks on the spot. But in the case of Selib the situation is not so evident, because although making mud brick on the riverbank would not have posed any difficulty, there is no data on whether stone was easily available in the area. No traces of stone quarries have been recorded anywhere in the region, but then drifting sand dunes may have obscured features of this kind. The material may have somehow been significant to the builders and was sought out especially. Or it may have simply been quarried nearby, at an outcrop now engulfed by moving sands.

The symbolic meaning of the Selib enclosure wall can be discussed also in the light of the defensiveness of the complex. There is an apparent difference between the non-military function of the wall around the church at Selib and the

Fig. 13. Banganarti 1, Unit 6, storage vessels along the wall (Photo M. Drzewiecki)

fortifications at Banganarti, which have utilitarian qualities and were intended to protect against potential raiders.

Both localities may have partaken of the symbolical protection afforded by the religious nature of the complexes (churches with their symbolism and holy protection), but it was Banganarti with its practical defenses that may have attracted regular settlement more effectively.[3] Buildings here were stronger and sounder and people occupied them for longer stretches of time. It has been suggested (B. Żurawski, personal communication) that the last mentions of Christians in Nubia, in a letter to cardinal Belluga dated to 1742 (Vantini 1970: 141–143), referred to Banganarti. Krzysztof Grzymski from the Royal Ontario Museum survey recorded graves on top of the kom; the burials represented the last occupational phase (Grzymski 1987: 11). Investigation of Selib 1 by the Southern Dongola Reach Survey (SDRS) attributed the ceramic assemblage from the site to the early Dongolan and classical Dongolan phases, that is, 600–850 and approximately 850–1100 respectively (Żurawski 2003: 168), whereas the artifacts from Banganarti indicated a much longer period of occupation from the first Dongolan intermediate period (around AD 550–600) until the times of the Funj sultanate about 1500–1800 (Żurawski 2003: 151).

Prolonged occupation of the site and the more massive defenses could have also been responsible for the better state of preservation and the larger number of artifacts found in context at Banganarti.

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[3] It may have been only one of the factors. A study of the two churches at Banganarti has demonstrated that in its terminal phase the Raphaelion may have been the object of pilgrimages as attested by numerous scratched and written inscriptions on the walls of the church (Żurawski 2004: 223; Łajtar 2008).

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