

Mosaic floor from the sanctuary of the EC.II cathedral in Dongola

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The beginning of the 7th century was an auspicious time for the kingdom of Makuria. The northern territories of Nubia, that is, the former kingdom of Nobadia, had been incorporated and close political and economic relations with Byzantine Egypt, governed by the influential Niketas, had been established. The reign of Ioannes was a period of intensive civilizational development stimulated by Byzantine influence. The fullest picture of these changes can be observed in Dongola, as much because of the importance of the capital city of Makuria as because of the scope of archaeological research carried out inside the town.

Intensive urban development can be traced in the palace of King Ioannes on the citadel and inside the Dongolan monastery, but most fully this process can be seen in the sacral architecture. The second half of the 6th and the beginning of the 7th century witnessed the founding of a number of different churches. Among these there was a basilica, another basilica with transept, churches on a cruciform plan, which included the Old Church, the commemorative Building X, the early church on Kom D, Church E and the extremely important monastery church which now appears to have been Dongola's first domed basilica. The monastic church and the first five-aisled basilica EC.I, acting as a cathedral [*Fig. 1*], were the most monumental sacral complexes in Dongola next to the Palace of Ioannes on the Dongolan citadel.

The town's rapid development was not interrupted even by the unexpected showing up of Abdullahi abu Sarh at the walls of the citadel in 651. Not only did King Qalidurut defend the citadel, but he also concluded with the new administration of Egypt a treaty, the *baqt*, that prolonged the old political and commercial treaty with Byzantium. But the international situation had changed and direct contacts with Byzantium had been reduced drastically. Even so, the kingdom was already sufficiently developed to take up the Byzantine heritage and to redefine it creatively, best visible again in the sacral architecture and the murals painted on church walls. Dongola has also provided sound evidence of technologies adopted in the Nubian kingdom, in tempera painting on lime and gypsum ground, architectural sculpture, glassmaking, iron-smelting and pottery manufacture, including mass production of amphorae for the purposes of a quickly developing

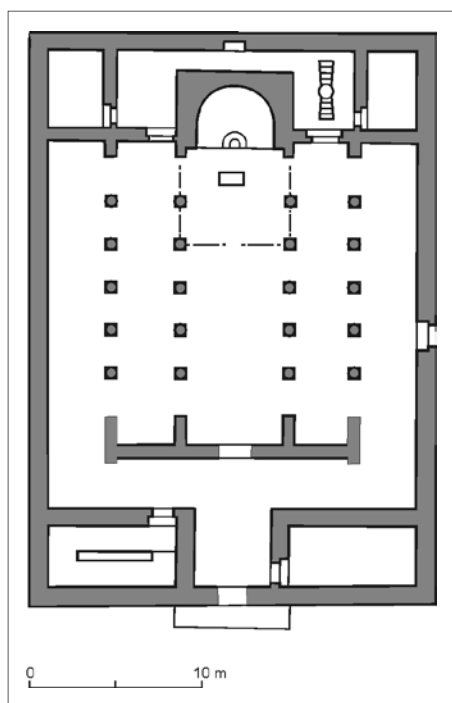


Fig. 1. EC.I cathedral (Plan W. Godlewski, M. Puskarski, PCMA)

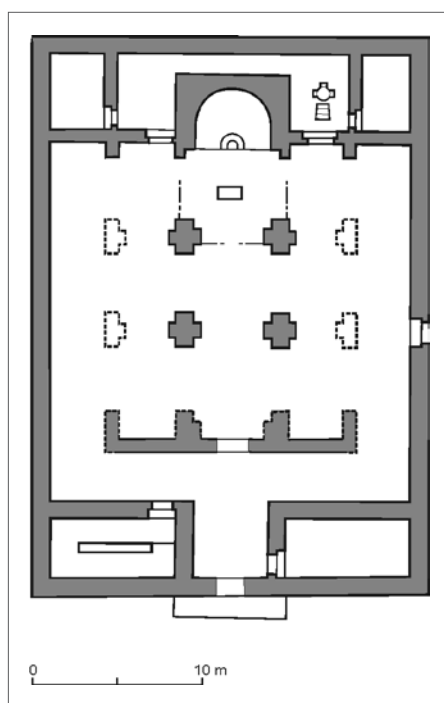


Fig. 2. EC.II cathedral (Plan W. Godlewski, M. Puskarski, PCMA)



Fig. 3. Mosaic in the sanctuary of the EC.II cathedral (Photo W. Jerke, PCMA)

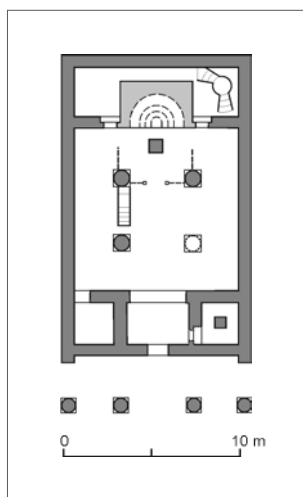


Fig. 4. Church MC.II (Plan W. Godlewski, M. Puzzkarski, PCMA)



Fig. 5. Mosaic in the northern aisle of the naos of the MC.II church (Photo W. Godlewski, PCMA)

viticulture and wine consumption. Traces of this can be recognized in the *baqt*, which guaranteed deliveries of wine from Egypt. The royal court was interested in receiving imported wine, although the evidence from the area of the citadel and the Palace of Ioannes in particular does not suggest mass deliveries on the same levels as at the turn of the 6th century. Local wine production was already well developed.

One of the most surprising elements of the Byzantine tradition in Dongola is the appearance in the second half of the 7th century of mosaic floors undoubtedly produced in local workshops. Mosaics have been preserved in the interiors of two churches: the new cathedral EC.II [*Figs 2–3*] and the rebuilt MC.II, which was a small three-aisled basilica with a portico in the western façade [*Figs 4–5*]. These are the first and only mosaic floors recorded so far in the kingdom of Makuria.

The second cathedral in Dongola, EC.II, was established at the very beginning of the second half of the 7th century. The episcopal church had to be rebuilt from damages incurred during the siege of the citadel by the troops of Abdullahi abu Sarh. The wooden roof of the five-aisled building either went up in flames or was damaged mechanically, resulting in the collapse of the red-granite columns. The shattered shafts and damaged capitals were removed from the interior of the cathedral and used in the construction of a massive tower on the Nile side of the citadel, possibly securing the entrance to the harbor. The new cathedral was built in a hurry, but following new trends in Byzantine sacral architecture already present in Dongola's monastery church. The interior of the new cathedral was rebuilt in brick and the naos took on the form of a domed basilica with the central dome supported on four massive pillars of baked brick. In this it differed from the monastery church where the dome stood on pillars raised of sandstone blocks. The eastern and western ends of the episcopal church remained unchanged. The sanctuary occupied the eastern end of the nave and was fitted with a table altar mounted immediately in front of the synthronon which filled the apse. The pastophoria were connected by a passage between the east wall of the church and the framing of the apse. The southern pastophorium served as a baptistery, its function suggested by a cruciform baptismal font built into the much bigger earlier baptismal basin of the EC.I cathedral.

The sanctuary [*Fig. 6*] was closed off with an altar screen furnished with stone *cancelli*. Their presence is suggested solely by openings in the pavement and the lower parts of posts still mounted in some of these holes. The old stone pavement of the holy-of-holies of the first cathedral was covered with a new floor. It has been preserved mainly in the eastern part of the sanctuary with evidence of repairs. The rebuilding of the church in the 9th century affected the state of this mosaic floor. The domed basilica was replaced with a cruciform commemorative structure with triphoria closing off a central square space on all four sides [*Fig. 7*]. The bases of the eastern triphorium were placed inside the old sanctuary of EC.II.

The new floor in the sanctuary of the EC.II cathedral took on the form of a mosaic featuring geometric motifs, originally alternately black and white rhombuses. This is especially well visible in the southern and northern parts of the floor which had never been disturbed. The ornament in the space between the altar and the synthronon, which saw

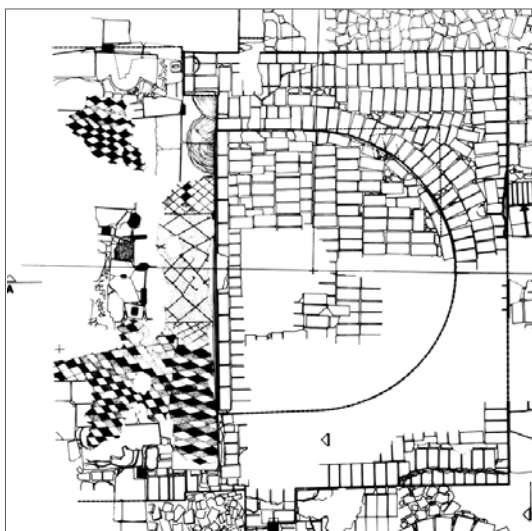


Fig. 6. The sanctuary in the EC.II cathedral (Drawing P.M. Garkiewicz, PCMA)



Fig. 7. Cruciform Building, digital reconstruction of the interior, view from the west (W. Godlewski, D. Zielińska)

the heaviest traffic, is completely altered, the rhombuses barely discernible as not very regular black lines in a white matrix. The state of preservation of this mosaic in the old sanctuary of the cathedral is also dependent on the technique employed in its making. The local craftsmen apparently had no opportunity to learn the craft outside Makuria. Perhaps they had not even seen any real mosaics in churches in Egypt, Palestine and other regions of Byzantium. Instead, they tried the best they could to rise to the expectations of the bishop of Dongola who wanted to have a Byzantine church not only in architectural form, but also in its furnishings and decoration. The beginning of the 7th century was not conducive to contacts with a world at war. Consequently, the craftsmen had only local means and to satisfy the bishop's artistic tastes, they used small rounded pebbles from the nearby desert, approx. 10–15 x 20–30 mm, today often placed on graves. The pebbles come in natural colors: light yellowish or beige and grayish-black. The desert was also the source of natural beds of fossil lime, used as mortar to bond the stone pillars in the monastic church and in preparation of the hard external plasters in sacral and official buildings, as well as the interior plaster inside a small cruciform structure raised in front of the southern facade of the royal palace at the beginning of the second half of the 7th century. A similar mortar was used also in laying the mosaic in the sanctuary of the cathedral. It was not strong mortar, hence the mosaic was easily degraded and had to be repaired continuously.

The floor mosaic in church MC.II, a small basilica situated on the northern fringes of Dongola, has been preserved mainly in the northern aisle. From the cathedral, however, there is no evidence of the mosaic appearing anywhere but in the sanctuary. It seems therefore that it was laid only within the perimeter of the sanctuary.

The mosaic floors from Dongola are quite probably the sole examples of this technique of floor decoration in the sacral architecture of the kingdom of Makuria and were made presumably only in the middle of the 7th century. They should be seen as proof of the aspirations of local church elites. The Byzantine tradition in church architecture, sculpture and wall painting had been shaped in Makuria for more than a hundred years from the time in the first half of the 6th century when the Kingdom converted to Christianity. Dongola was home to well prepared craftsmen and artisans who passed their skills from generation to generation. The process is well visible especially in Nubian art of the 9th–10th century but also later.

The art of laying mosaics was a short-lived need, most probably of the bishop, but since it had not been adopted as a technique at the turn of the 6th century, it had not been learned and was not passed down to the next generations of craftsmen. The effect of the work as seen in the EC.II cathedral and the MC.II church was not satisfying and gave way to another form of paving which was technically easier and functionally more practical. These were ceramic floors, made either of tiles or bricks, prevalent in Dongola's sacral architecture of the period.

ABBREVIATIONS

AA	<i>Archäologischer Anzeiger</i> , Berlin
AAAS	<i>Annales archéologiques arabes de Syrie</i> , Damas
ABSA	<i>Annual of the British School of Athens</i> , London
AJA	<i>American Journal of Archaeology</i> , New York
APF	<i>Archiv für Papyrusforschung und verwandte Gebiete</i> , Leipzig, Stuttgart
ASAE	<i>Annales du Service des Antiquités de l'Égypte</i> , Le Caire
BAAL	<i>Bulletin d'Archéologie et d'Architecture Libanaises</i> , Beirut
BABesch	<i>Bulletin antieke Beschaving</i> , Louvain
BCH	<i>Bulletin de correspondance hellénique</i> , Paris
BdÉ	<i>Bibliothèque d'étude</i> , Le Caire
BEFAR	<i>Bibliothèque des Écoles françaises d'Athènes et de Rome</i> , Rome, Paris
BIFAO	<i>Bulletin de l'Institut français d'archéologie orientale</i> , Le Caire
BSFE	<i>Bulletin de la Société française d'égyptologie</i> , Paris
CCE	<i>Cahiers de la céramique égyptienne</i> , Le Caire
CCEC	<i>Cahiers du Centre d'études chypriotes</i> , Nanterre
CdÉ	<i>Chronique d'Égypte</i> , Bruxelles
CRAI	<i>Comptes rendus de l'Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres</i> , Paris
CSEL	<i>Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum</i> , Vienna
EtTrav	<i>Études et travaux</i> , Varsovie
GM	<i>Göttinger Miscellen</i> , Göttingen
GRBS	<i>Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies</i> , Durham, NC
IEJ	<i>Israel Exploration Journal</i> , Jerusalem
JbAC	<i>Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum</i>
JEA	<i>Journal of Egyptian Archaeology</i> , London
JGS	<i>Journal of Glass Studies</i> , New York
JHS	<i>Journal of Hellenic Studies</i> , London
JJP	<i>Journal of Juristic Papyrology</i> , Warsaw
JRA	<i>Journal of Roman Archaeology</i> , Ann Arbor, MI
JRS	<i>Journal of Roman Studies</i> , London
KHKM	<i>Kwartalnik Historii Kultury Materialnej</i> , Warszawa
LIMC	<i>Lexicon iconographicum mythologiae classicae</i> , Zurich
MDAIA	<i>Mitteilungen des deutschen archäologischen Instituts, Athenische Abteilung</i> , Berlin
MDAIK	<i>Mitteilungen des deutschen archäologischen Instituts, Abteilung Kairo</i> , Wiesbaden
MEFRA	<i>Mélanges d'archéologie et d'histoire de l'École française de Rome. Antiquité</i> , Paris
MIFAO	<i>Mémoires publiés par les membres de l'Institut français d'archéologie orientale</i> , Le Caire
NC	<i>Numismatic Chronicle</i> , London
NumAntCl	<i>Numismatica e antichità classiche</i> , Logano
OLA	<i>Orientalia Lovaniensia analecta</i> , Louvain
PAM	<i>Polish Archaeology in the Mediterranean</i> , Warsaw
RACrist	<i>Rivista di archeologia cristiana</i> , Cité du Vatican
RBK	<i>Reallexikon zur byzantinischen Kunst</i> , Stuttgart

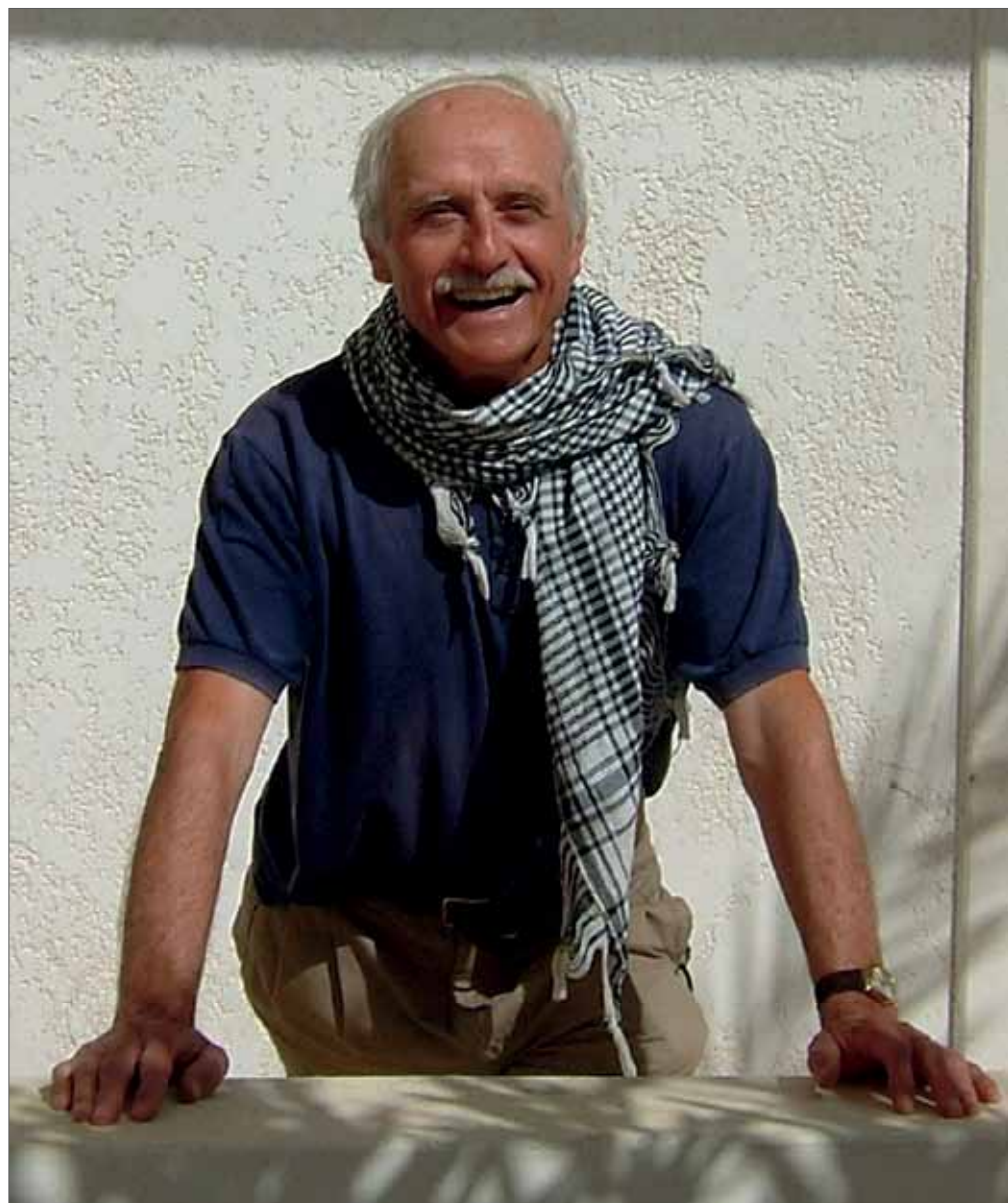
Abbreviations

<i>RDAC</i>	<i>Report of the Department of Antiquities, Cyprus, Nicosia</i>
<i>RdÉ</i>	<i>Revue d'égyptologie, Paris, Louvain</i>
<i>REPPAL</i>	<i>Revue du centre d'études de la civilisation phénicienne-punique et des antiquités libyques</i>
<i>RMNW</i>	<i>Rocznik Muzeum Narodowego w Warszawie, Warszawa</i>
<i>RSO</i>	<i>Rivista degli studi orientali, Roma</i>
<i>RTAM</i>	<i>Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale, Gembloux</i>
<i>RTAM</i>	<i>Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale, Gembloux, Louvain</i>
<i>SAAC</i>	<i>Studies in Ancient Art and Civilization, Kraków</i>
<i>VetChr</i>	<i>Vetera christianorum, Bari</i>
<i>ZPE</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik, Bonn</i>

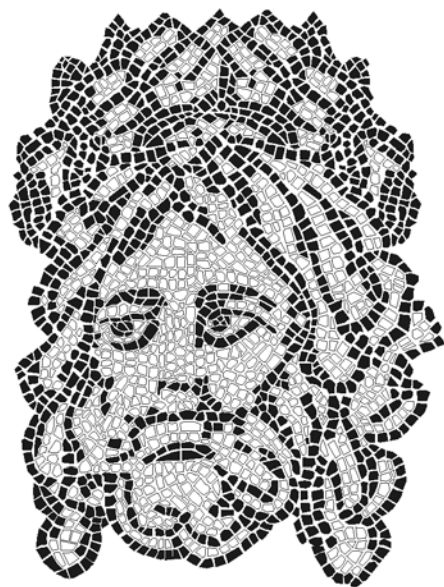
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<i>DACL</i>	F. Cabrol, H. Leclercq, <i>Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie</i> , Paris, 1907–1953
<i>LCI</i>	E. Kirschbaum, W. Braunfels (eds), <i>Lexikon der christlichen Ikonographie</i> , Rom: Herder, 1968–1976
<i>RealEnc</i>	A. Pauly, G. Wissowa, W. Kroll, K. Mittelhaus, <i>Real-Encyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft</i> , Stuttgart–Münich, 1893–1980

CLASSICA ORIENTALIA



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Essays Presented to
Wiktor Andrzej Daszewski
on his 75th Birthday

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