

# INVESTIGATING OLD DONGOLA

The first systematic excavation in Old Dongola was initiated in 1964 by the Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology, University of Warsaw. The project is continued until today. Kazimierz Michałowski was granted permission to excavate at Old Dongola after his team's significant contribution at Faras within the framework of

Najm ed Deen Mohamed Shrif (the then director of the Sudan Antiquities Service) visits the excavation undertaken by the Polish team in 1974 (Photo W. Jerke)





The current project works on the investigation of the Funj period, wall painting conservation, management planning and sustainable development (Photos top and center M. Reklajtis; bottom C. Calaforra-Rzepka)

the UNESCO International Campaign for Save the Monuments of Nubia (so-called “Nubian Campaign”). The Polish team also made a commitment in conservation of wall paintings at Faras.

The investigation of Old Dongola began by an architect, Antoni Ostrasz, by uncovering of the Church of the Granite Columns. The tops of some of the columns could be seen sticking out from the sand. From 1967, Stefan Jakobielski directed the excavations for 40 years. Among his long and significant contributions, the most notable achievement was the discovery and research of the Great Monastery of St Anthony and its annexes. He also negotiated the site boundaries with the local farmers. Włodzimierz Godlewski directed the work from 2007 focusing on the area of the citadel. Bogdan Żurawski (Polish Academy of Sciences) also conducted a survey of the southern Dongola Reach and excavated two sites upstream from Old Dongola, that is, Banganarti and Selib. Artur Obłuski currently leads the project at Old Dongola, investigating the socio-political transitional period in the Funj period.

In addition to the Polish-led excavations, the Sudan Antiquities Service (today’s National Corporation of Antiquities and Museums) undertook some archaeological research; the initial investigation of the rock-cut tombs in the northernmost part of Old Dongola was made in 1971 together with the Polish team, and the tumulus cemetery at Jebel Ghaddar was excavated by Mahmoud el-Tayeb in 1990, during his tenure at NCAM.

From the start, the people from Ghaddar and Bokkibul participated in the excavations, post-excavation work and other household tasks. The excavation workers were supervised by several *Rais*: Jiddalmeiya Abu Ghabi, Osman Amin Hirali, Hassan Mabruk, Mahjoub Iman, and now Najm al-Din Mahjoub. Among the workers, el-Nour Aloub and Abdelwahab Jaden are the long contributors. El-Nour has worked



El-Nour Aloub  
(Photo T. Fushiya)



Abdelwahab Jaden  
(Photo T. Fushiya)



Hassan Mubarak,  
the long-time  
site guard at Old  
Dongola, worked  
with the Polish  
mission  
(Photo G. Ochała)



from the first season of the Polish excavations in 1964. He recounts the days when the project used to hire 150 workers. He also speaks of how he enjoys his job for uncovering the civilization important for the locality (*baladi*) and the country (*watani*). His most memorable discovery in the excavation was an inscribed stone slab for which he was rewarded with a good 'discovery *bakshish*'. He is also a talented singer. Abdelwahab is known to the archaeologists as 'Kalilbo' because of his characteristic moustache and he has worked with the Polish project for 25 years – the job helps him to support his six children. He recalls he found a stone slab with Greek inscriptions, and is proud of it as he thinks the discovery reveals history that is firmly engraved on the stone surface. Archaeological work would not be possible without the contribution of many local workers like el Nour and Abdelwahab.

◀ The current *rais*, Najm el-Deen supervises the excavation workers  
(Photo M. Reklajtis)

## Mysterious tunnels

Stories of mysterious tunnels, often with golden treasure hidden in them, are common at archaeological sites around the world. Dongola has its share of such legends, although without the 'gold' inside the tunnels.

A Dutch antiquities dealer, Jan Herman Insinger, who visited Old Dongola in 1883, recorded a story. Arriving by boat from the north,



A strange hole attracts the attention of the workers  
(Photo M. Reklajtis)

he saw a hole in the rock on which the city stood. The skipper told him that it was the entrance to an underground passage used by Dongola residents to fetch water from the river. Insinger also noted hearing about another tunnel with a blocked doorway that was located below the staircase of the Mosque-Church. A local story tells that one day, a calf entered into the tunnel by accident and came out in Merowe. In recent years, a Sudanese archaeologist, Mahmoud Suleiman, documented similar stories of the two tunnels, heard from local residents around Old Dongola. For example, during the conflicts between the Christians and Muslims, the Christians found refuge inside the Mosque-Church which had two underground tunnels: one led to the Nile to ensure access to water and the other went all the way to Jebel Barkal.