



Napatan hieroglyphs discovered in Old Dongola, Sudan

During the current excavation season in Old Dongola (Sudan), an expedition of the Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology, University of Warsaw, headed by Dr. Artur Obluski, came across an unexpected find: architectural elements from a Pharaonic temple.



Dr. Obluski's expedition research focuses on the period when Old Dongola came under the rule of the Muslim Sultanate of Funj in the 15th century (the [UMMA](#) project funded by an ERC Starting Grant and [Baraka](#) funded by the ALIPH Foundation), and the time when it functioned as the capital of the medieval kingdom of Makuria from the 5th to the 14th century (the [Afropolis Tungul](#) project funded by an ERC Consolidator grant).

Yet, during this year's research, stone blocks with pharaonic hieroglyphic inscriptions and figural decoration were found at the site of the medieval citadel in Old Dongola. Egyptologist Dr. Dawid F. Wieczorek, working with the expedition, identified them as elements from a Pharaonic temple. According to his assessment, based on iconographic and paleographic criteria (i.e., an analysis of the script), as well as the sandstone blocks' dressing technology, they came from a structure that dates back to the 1st half of the 1st millennium BCE.

These were the times of the XXVth Egyptian dynasty, which ruled over vast territories in northeastern Africa and the Middle East. This is a unique and unexpected discovery, as until now, despite nearly 60 years of archaeological research in Old Dongola, no traces from such an early period have been encountered. Therefore, confirmation of the existence of a Pharaonic temple on the site of Old Dongola, a thousand years older than the city which is dated to the 5th century CE, could shed new light on the history of the site, indicating a much earlier date for its foundation.

As Dr. Wieczorek points out, at present these are only hypotheses. – Based on the archaeological material collected so far, it is impossible to determine whether the inscribed blocks came from Old Dongola itself, or whether they had been brought here from another site and reused for construction purposes. Either way, this is a surprising find, as the blocks came from a monumental stone building and there are no known sites



with Egyptian architecture within a radius of more than a hundred kilometers from Old Dongola, – explains the Egyptologist.

The closest sites are Gebel Barkal, about 150 kilometers up the Nile, and Kawa, about 120 kilometers down the Nile. These were two leading urban and religious centers founded in the period of the New Kingdom (in the 16th and 14th centuries BCE, respectively) by Egyptian rulers of the 18th Dynasty.

However, it is possible that there were more Egyptian centers in this stretch of the Nile Valley, and the current state of knowledge is simply a reflection of the current state of archaeological research. – I hope that our discovery will help fill this gap, – says Dr. Wieczorek.

- Read more about [Old Dongola](#)

Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology, University of Warsaw (PCMA UW) coordinates Polish archaeological research in the Eastern Mediterranean since 1959 (since 1990 under the present name). In recent years, it broadened its scope of interest into the Arabian Peninsula and the Caucasus. Currently about 20 projects are ongoing in Egypt, Sudan, Tunisia, Cyprus, Lebanon, Kuwait, Oman, Georgia and Armenia. The PCMA UW also runs Research Centres in Egypt, Sudan, Cyprus and Georgia.

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