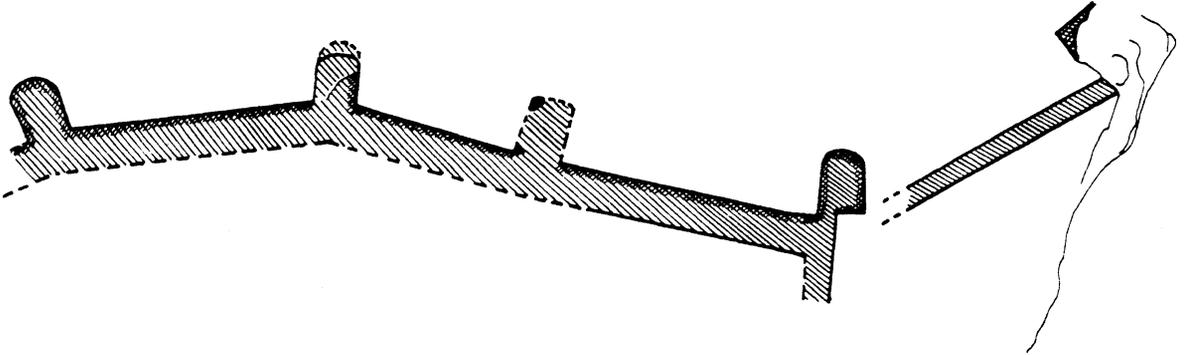


OLD DONGOLA
THE FORTIFICATIONS, 1994
Włodzimierz Godlewski

Investigations conducted in January and February 1994 on Kom A aimed at establishing the course taken by the northern line of the Dongola fortifications.¹ Based on determinations made in the course of the 1993 season, yet another tower was anticipated along the northern stretch of the walls between towers NW and N.1, the distance from one to the other appearing to be too great. Test pits served to determine the position of tower N.2, located 21.5 m away from tower N.1, and clearly much less well preserved than the other towers. The structure was pinpointed in two places: at the junction of the eastern wall with the main line of defenses and in the northeastern corner, indicating its projection to have been 8.10 m from the line. In construction it is identical with other parts of the fortifications. In form it appears to be slightly less semicircular on the outside, possibly because it may have served as the northern entrance gate, a fact still requiring corroboration. A rectangular structure of red brick and broken stone was added to the eastern side of the N.2 tower at a later date; this structure was identified in 1993. On the crown of the tower, which was presumably destroyed to a larger degree than the others, a small church was built on a typical late plan with a rectangular presbytery extending the width of the building. This church, of which only the southeastern corner has been excavated, is undoubtedly the latest known church structure from Dongola and is dated, considering its position, to the 14th-15th centuries; indeed it may have been constructed already after the Nubian-Mameluke

¹ The author was in charge of the work on Kom A. Radosław Kostro was responsible for the architectural measurements. The painting in the Church on the Tower was protected by conservator Wojciech Chmiel.



*Fig. 1. Northern stretch of the Dongola fortifications (1:1000).
Drawing W. Godlewski.*

wars. It is noteworthy that the building partly extended to an earth platform which was built between the towers N.2 and NW, and protected with new fortifications on the north, comprising two small towers of brick. Although there is no evidence to confirm the dating of this development, it could not have taken place before the end of the 13th century. The inside of the "Church on the Tower" was decorated with murals; preserved is the bottom part of a standing figure from the east wall of the southern aisle. Brick constructions at the foot of the representation as well as numerous oil lamps indicate that it was the object of veneration for a long time. The painted pottery found in the fill inside the church is of Post-Christian date.

An attempt was also made to determine the course of the western line of Dongola defenses. The wall was built of mud brick alone, without an outer stone facing, and was narrower – only 3.60 m at the top.

On the outside of this wall, on a platform built on the slope, an extensive structure of red brick was discovered. The western part of the "Pillar Building" was damaged by erosion of the terrain. The eastern end next to the main fortifications is still concealed under later fills and structures of Post-Christian date. The "Pillar Building" was 13 m wide, its length not more than 15 m because of the western fortifications wall. The one determined entrance to the building was through a special portal 4.5 m wide, projecting 1.10 m from the wall face, set in the northern side. The interior was divided by two rows of round pillars made of red brick specially prepared for the purpose in the shape of voussoir and semi-circular bricks. Corresponding to the pillars were round engaged pillars bonded with the exterior wall. The flooring was made of terracotta tiles in a regular arrangement. Interior walls and pillars were finely plastered with a lime-and-sand plaster. It is still not to be excluded that the uncovered part was only an elaborate vestibule of a building which extended further to the south.

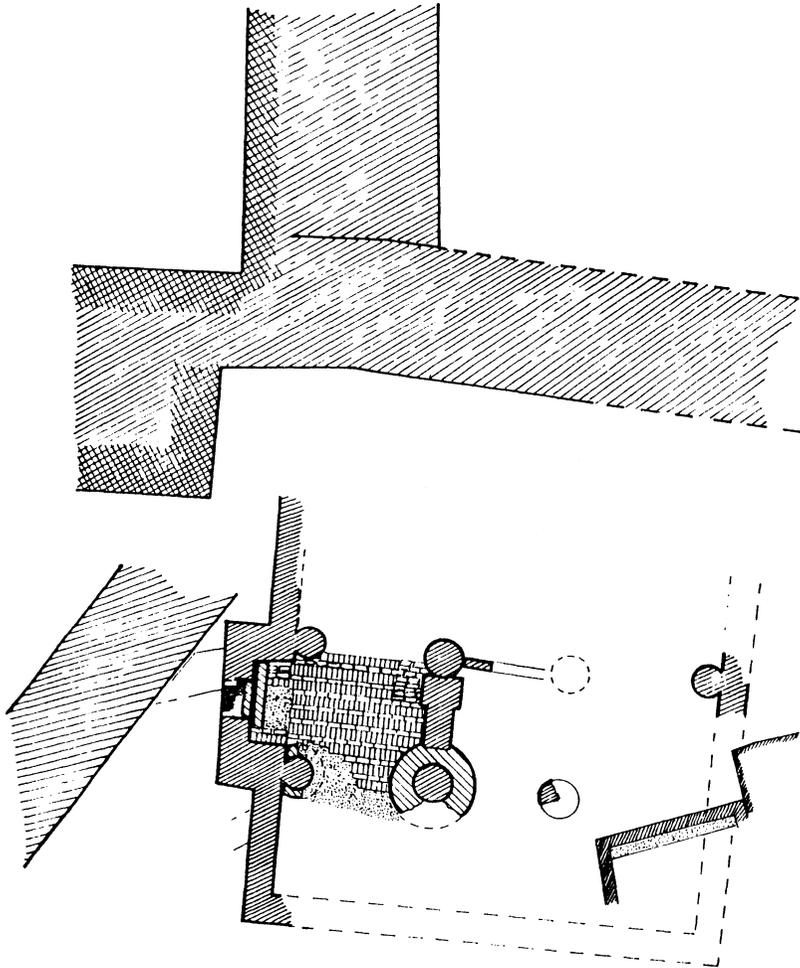


Fig. 2. Pillar Building (1:200).
Drawing W. Godlewski.

Dating the "Pillar Building" proves a difficult matter for the present. It was constructed on the ruins of other structures located on the platform, which was itself built in the 6th century. To judge by building technique and the kind of brick used, the "Pillar Building" was probably constructed around the 9th century.

Two test pits were dug to bedrock at the eastern edge of the earth platform. Early pottery of the 6th century abounded in the fill between the structural walls of the platform construction. It was mostly local Dongolese ware with highly characteristic thin-walled red bowls and an almost completely preserved amphora of undoubtedly local origin. The set serves to broaden our understanding of early pottery from Dongola.