OLD DONGOLA

Kom A, 1999

Włodzimierz Godlewski

Excavations were carried out from January 26 until March 5, 1999, and covered the entire site on Kom A identified with the oldest architecture in the Makurian capital.[1] *The work was programmed as a continuation of the 1997 investigations*[2] *and included research on the fortifications of ancient Dongola, as well as excavations in the northwestern corner of the town area, where the House of the Ecclesiastics (A. 106) is being cleared.*

[1] The Mission was headed by Prof. Dr. Włodzimierz Godlewski and included: Dr. Adam Łajtar, archaeologist and epigraphist; Mr. Zbigniew Solarewicz, architect; Ms Joanna Kociankowska, Ms Marzena Romaniuk, Mr. Daniel Gazda, archaeologists; Ms Lidia Badowska and Ms Magdalena Chabowska, students of archaeology from Warsaw University. The NCAM was represented by Mr. Mustafa Ahmed el-Sherif.

[2] W. Godlewski, *PAM IX, Reports 1997* (1998), 170-179. See also id., The Earliest Evidence of the Settlement at Old Dongola, in: Studien zum antiken Sudan, ed. S. Wenig (Wiesbaden 1999), 554-559.

HOUSE OF THE ECCLESIASTICS (A. 106)

The western part of this house located in the northwestern corner of the fortifications had been uncovered in 1997. Excavations this year, while failing to remove the debris of the upper floor walls overlying the southeastern corner of the building, entrance included, succeeded in establishing the essential architectural information.

House A.106 was a fairly extensive structure (c. 10.0 x 11.4 m) with the interior four-room ground plan measuring 91 m^2 and an upper floor habitation area of about the same size. Lighting and communication possibilities presented in the schematic reconstruction below *(Fig. 1)* are a factor of the building's position and location as one of a series of houses built alongside the western and northern curtain wall of the defenses.

The structure was erected on top of earlier mudbrick architecture that has yet to be fully identified (*Fig. 2*). While no explorations of the underlying House A.111 were undertaken this year, its eastern wall was followed in small trial pits dug by the eastern wall of the renovated room A.106.1. This dwelling, most probably of the early 6th century AD, must have dif-

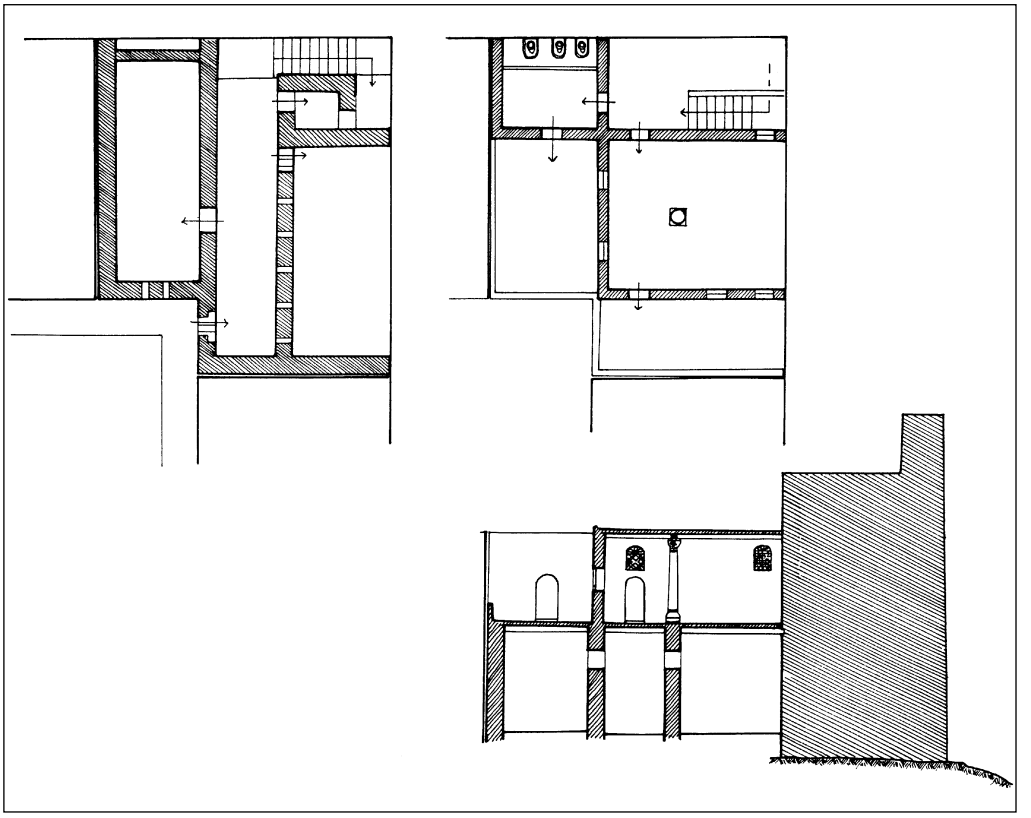

Fig. 1. House of the Ecclesiastics (A. 106). Schematic reconstruction (Drawing W. Godlewski)

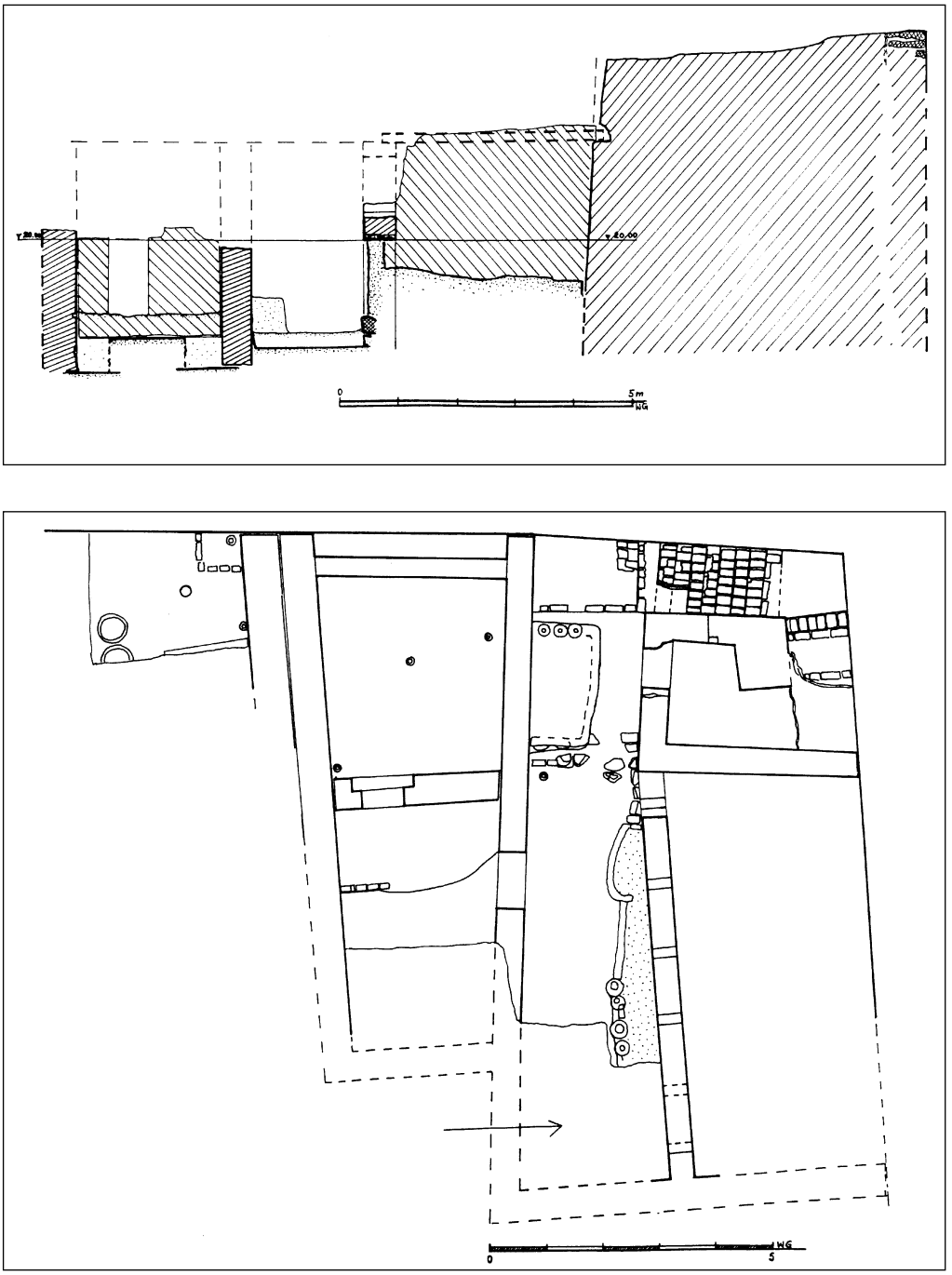

Fig. 2 House of the Ecclesiastics (A.106). Phases I and II. Documentation plan (bottom) and N-S section through rooms 1, 2, 4 (top) (Drawing W. Godlewski)

fered in plan from the later structures, but the current state of research still precludes its full understanding. It was also positioned differently with respect to the fortifications, having a narrow alley running between it and the defense wall.

The ground plan of House A. 106 consisted of four interconnected rooms: a long and narrow corridor (2) leading to a staircase (3) in the northwestern corner, but opening also onto two big rooms (1 and 4). Repeatedly whitewashed mud plastering on all the walls of the ground floor units is proof of frequent interior refurbishing. Traces of a color mural (but not the composition, unfortunately) were identified on the northern wall of the corridor west of the entrance to room 4. No other plastering with traces of polychromy was discovered in the debris filling the interior of the structure.

Evidence of wooden ceilings was observed in room 4; it took on the form of sockets for the ceiling beams, found cut in the curtain wall. It permitted the height of the ground-floor rooms to be reconstructed at c. 3.60 m. The southern wall of this room also preserves the lower sections of six slit windows, each measuring 16 cm in width and c. 60 m in height, located some 2.50 m above the walking level. The entrance to the northern room, 81 cm wide and 190 cm high, was crowned with finely worked wooden beams 5-6 cm thick. The southern room, which was not as well preserved, reveals clear evidence of two structural phases. Initially, it was much bigger with a wider (100 cm) entrance from the corridor; in phase II a transversal wall was introduced to reduce its size to 3.40 x 3.00-3.35 m. The other, eastern part of the south room was joined to the corridor when the eastern section of the northern wall was removed. It may have been used as an open court in the House of the Ecclesiastics of the second stage.

The biggest modifications concerned the corridor (2). In phase II a number of benches was introduced alongside the

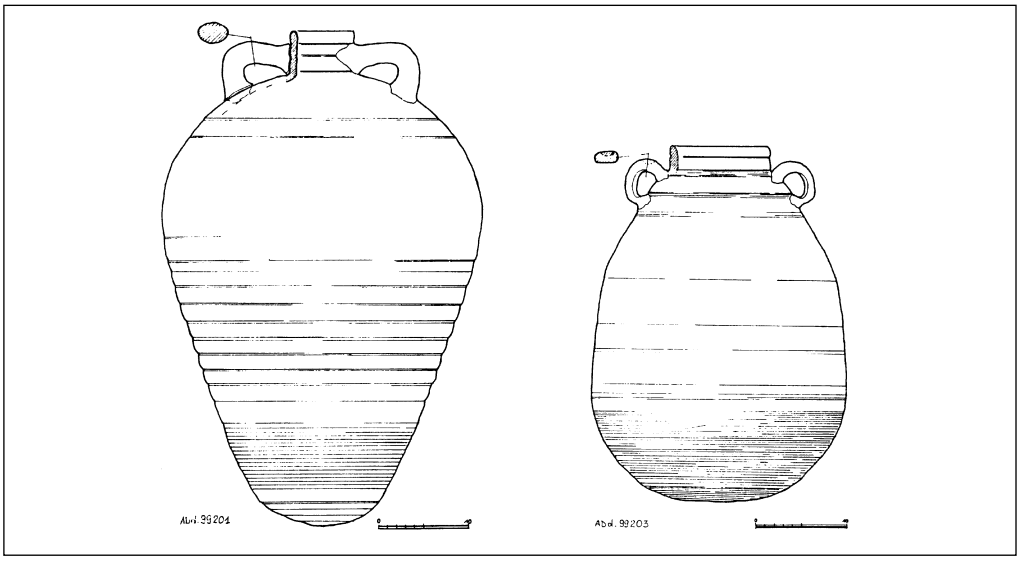

Fig. 3. Amphorae: a) Add. 99201; b) Add. 99203 (Drawing W. Godlewski)

walls, erected not very uniformly of bricks and big storage and water jars. At this point in time a hearth was built against the south mastaba. This southern bench, which measured 2.30 x 2.10 m and was 75 cm high, was constructed incorporating amphorae, three still preserving the "address" written in cream paint on the shoulders. Two of these vessels had been excavated in the previous season. Now we know that the amphorae, which were probably filled with wine, had been sent to the following inhabitants of the house:

ⲙⲁⲣⲓⲁ ⲉⲡⲓⲥ[ⲕⲟⲡⲟⲥ]
ⲙⲓⲭ[ⲁⲉⲗ] ⲡⲥⲁⲧⲉ ⲡⲣ[ⲉⲥⲃⲩⲧⲉⲣⲟⲥ]
[&] ⲁⲣⲭ[ⲓⲙⲁⲛⲇⲣⲓⲧⲏⲥ]
ⲁⲃⲃⲁ ⲥ[ⲓ]ⲗⲃ[ⲁⲛⲟⲥ]
ⲁⲣⲭ[ⲓ]ⲙⲁⲛⲇ[ⲣⲓⲧⲏⲥ]

It was based on these inscriptions that the name "House of the Ecclesiastics" was coined. It was eminently possible that the residents included a bishop, priest and archmandrite. Of course, it is equally possible that the vessels had been brought here from elsewhere as building material.

The northern mastaba was also constructed of bricks and amphorae, the latter both domestic and imported (*Fig. 3*). The locally produced vessels belong to a Dongolan type modeled presumably on Aswan amphorae, although the examples from the mastaba have a much modified body, which bulges more than the regular amphorae of the turn of the 6th century.[3] One of the amphorae incorporated in the bench was most definitely an Egyptian import from the Mareotis region. It is a typical bag-shaped late form (LR 5-6) dated to the turn of the 6th century. In shape, size (H. 39 cm, Dia. 11 cm, max. 28 cm) and pale gray surface, it resembles the products of Kariyet Hamra, a production center 40 km west of Alexandria.[4]

The only evidence of the upper floor belonging to this structure are big sections of the wall lying by the house entrance, a sandstone column base and several dozen fragments of ceramic window grilles found in the fill. Accordingly, it is to be assumed that the upper floor interiors had been finely plastered and repeatedly whitewashed, and lighted through big windows screened with ceramic grilles. The function of the upper floor rooms and indeed their layout are the subject of theoretical reconstruction, but it is certain that a toilet had been located in the southwestern part, complete with depository in the form of a narrow compartment on the ground floor by the curtain wall. A big official hall with ceiling supported on a central column may have occupied the northern end of the first floor. It was probably equipped with terraces, as only then it would have been possible to have big windows with grilles piercing the walls of this room. A staircase, uncovered in 1997 in good condition, assured communication between the floors. Enough has survived of the grilles to permit a reconstruction of their original appearance. At least five such grilles (windows) must have existed in the upper floor walls. Their form and decoration is differentiated, but they seem to have met the same technical requirements: H. 85 cm; W. 60 cm; Th. 4-5 cm. Most of the grilles were rectangular in shape; at least one, however, had had a semicircular top.[5] Two others have now been reconstructed (*Fig. 4*). The quality of these pieces is relatively good. They appear to be earlier compared to the grilles from the cathedral

[3] W. Godlewski, "The fortifications of Old Dongola. Report on the 1990 Season", *ANM* 5 (1991), 118.

[4] G. Majcherek, Roman and Byzantine amphorae from Alexandria (Kom el-Dikka). Typological Study (in Polish), unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Warsaw University (1992).

[5] *PAM IX, Reports 1998* (1999), 175, fig. 5.

complex (Church of the Granite Columns), which are dated to the second half of the 7th century,[6] and thus should presumably be attributed to the original architectural decoration of House A.106.

The dating of the House of the Ecclesiastics is based on pottery found in the depository and on the upper-floor window grilles. The mid-7th century dating that has already been suggested for the origins of the building appears to be highly probable, while the date for its abandonment in the 10th century keeps being corroborated by new evidence. At this time, after the houses had been destroyed and the area covered with sand, the northwestern part of the town became the spot for well-prepared ground storage pits. However, there must have been a period, during which the area lay abandoned and after which it was resettled in the Late Period, that is, in the 12th-13th centuries.

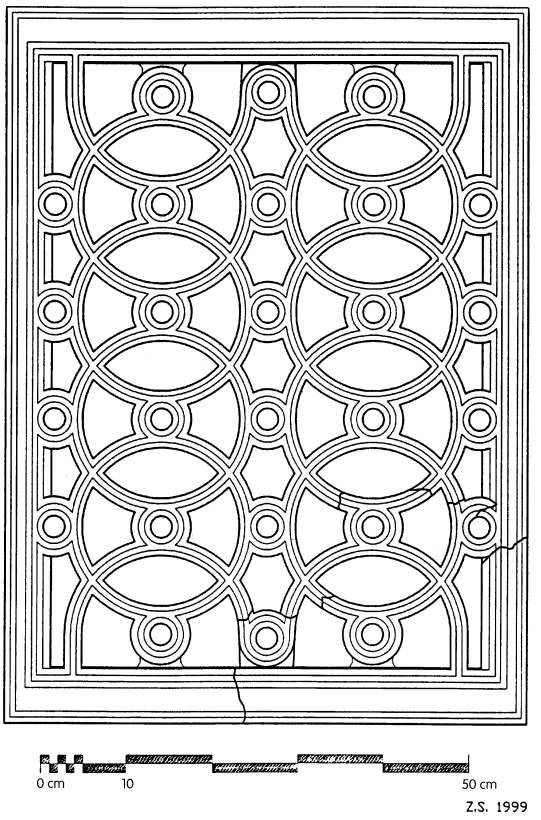

Fig. 4. Grille. Reconstruction (Drawing Z. Solarewicz)

[6] P. Gartkiewicz, Dongola 2. The Cathedral in Old Dongola and its Antecedents (Warsaw 1990), 202-211. The author places the origins of the Cathedral in the late 8th century, but the complex should be considered rather earlier in date, perhaps even from the second half of the 7th century.

FORTIFICATIONS

In an effort to trace the course of the defenses east and south of Kom A, the tops of towers E.1 and E.2 in the northern part of the eastern line of fortifications were cleared. Also, the recording of post-Christian houses lining the inside and outside of the ruined defenses in the southeastern part of the mound was undertaken. A trial pit was dug in the southwestern part of the kom, revealing a section of the southern line of defenses. In another trial pit (SW.N) the tops of walls and an entrance gate to a big palatial complex were uncovered.

Rising some 31 m away from the NE tower, the E.1 tower did not differ substantially from the other known towers. A mudbrick core was lined with rough stone blocks forming a curtain 85 to 120 cm thick (*Fig. 5*). The tower projected 8.50 m from the face of the fortifications; at the base it was 6.25 m wide, while the projecting end was rounded on a semicircular plan. It is relatively well preserved in terms of height and was probably founded on bedrock, like the other parts of the defenses in the northwestern part of the kom, although no investigation of the foundations was undertaken at this date. Instead, a floor of regular ceramic tiles (each 25.2 x 14.5 x 4.0 cm) was cleared on the surviving top of the tower (29.70 m level), leaving no doubt that at some point in the history of the tower there had been a finely finished compartment inside the stone curtains of the defense wall. The condition of the relics precludes any closer characteristic of the room and its furnishing. Neither is there any evidence for the dating of this floor, but it most cer-

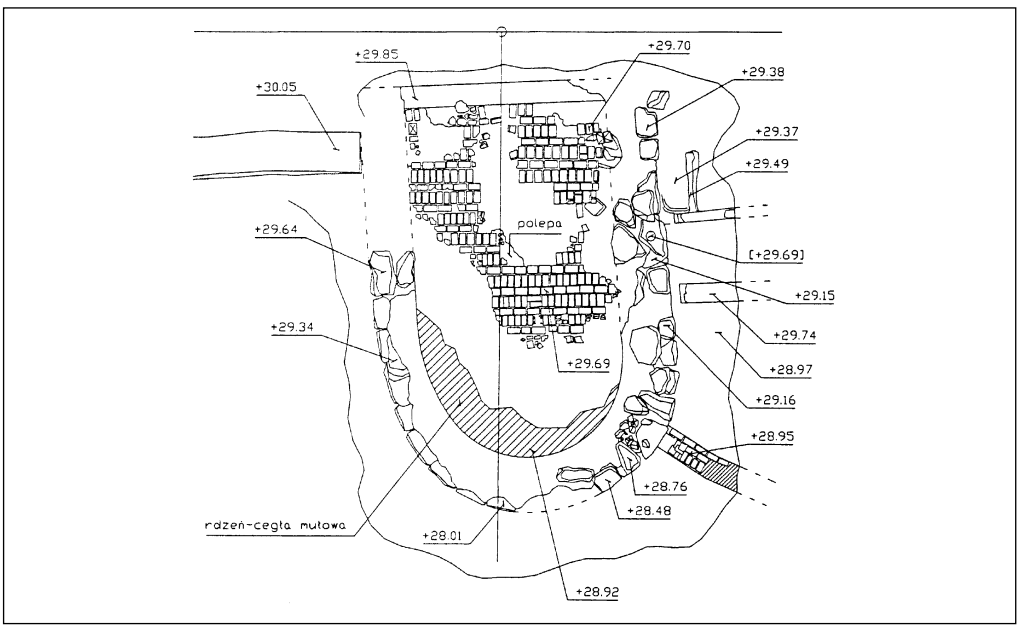

Fig. 5. Tower E.1. Plan (Drawing Z. Solarewicz)

tainly dates to before the fall of Dongola. A provisional dating in the 13th-14th century refers to the church erected over the northern city gate.[7] This room remained in use as a habitation in Post-Christian times. A hearth was observed and with it a number of handmade vessels and sherds most probably from the 15th-16th centuries.

Tower E.2 located another 31.5 m further on is in even worse condition. Its stone-curtain structure was revealed only in a trial pit situated atop the southeastern curve. The tower was of standard proportions with a length of c. 8.40 m and a width at the base of c. 6.0 m. The ruined structure – there is no evidence to date this event – had a superstructure of mudbrick erected on top of it, repeating the tower layout, but serving as a habitation with a window in the northern facade. The rooms, which were probably part of a bigger complex raised on top of the curtain walls, as well as inside the fortifications, were used in post-Makurian times. It is noteworthy that the outer mudbrick coat, which was built to encase the fortifications presumably during the wars of the Makurians with Mamluk Egypt in the late 13th century, also surrounded the northeastern part of the rebuilt tower E.2. It firmly roots the rebuilding of the tower in the period preceding the "renovation" of Dongola's fortifications in the 12th-13th centuries.

The recording work in the northeastern part of the kom concentrated on a number of rooms belonging to houses established inside and outside the fortifications, on leveled ground that sloped slightly toward the northeast. All the structures in this part of the kom recall the latest habitations superimposed on the site of the Cruciform Church north of the defenses and may be dated presumably to the 17th century or shortly thereafter. In the early 19th century, to judge by Fr. Cailliaud's sketches, this part was already destroyed and long abandoned.[8] A rough course of the "renovated" Dongolan fortifications was traced among these late architectural remains, as well as fragments of broken-stone structures resembling the original fortification outer curtain wall. No towers were identified for certain in this part of the site. The trial pits could not be made sufficiently deep because of the sand fill lying against the outer wall face and will need to be extended in order for the explorations to continue.

A trial pit in the southwestern part of the kom (SW.S) revealed a structure that resembled the fortifications from the last period of their existence after the "renova-

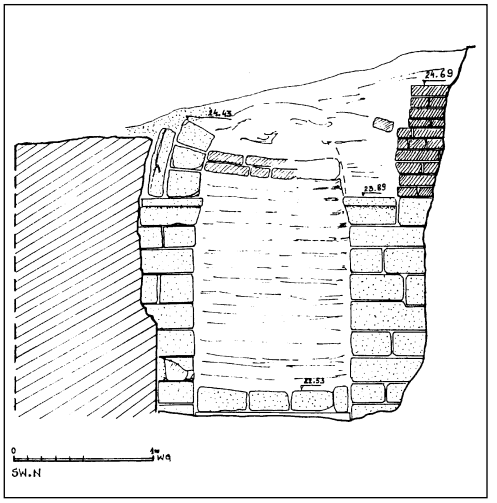

Fig. 6. Entry gate to Building S-W.N Drawing W. Godlewski)

7) W. Godlewski, *PAM VII, Reports 1995* (1996), 114-117.

8) Fr. Cailliaud, Voyage a Meroe... (Paris 1826), II, pl. I.

tions" of the late 13th century. Nonetheless, since the brick and stone structures were repeatedly rebuilt and consist of many occupational stages, it is difficult to propose any binding interpretation of the uncovered remains. What appears obvious is that the structures (fortifications?) mark the southern extent of urban architecture on Kom A.

Some 85 m north of the wall fragment identified in trial pit SW.S, on the sandy river bank, another trial pit was excavated (SW.N) clearing the wall tops of an extensive structure, as well as the southwestern entrance to it that led from the river side. It was an artfully designed building with red brick used for the outer facade walls and vaults, and mudbrick for the interior walls and for the cores of walls. This kind of mixed wall-building technique characterized by a structural use of red bricks had been employed in the erection of the Building with Throne Hall (the so-called Mosque) in Dongola.[9] The riverine gate of the structure was found to be 110 cm wide; it was constructed of sandstone blocks and crowned with an arch of regular voussoir stones (*Fig. 6*) The construction recalls the entrance to Church at Wadi es-Sebua and may be dated to the 7th century. The gate led to a monumental staircase, 1.45 m wide, supported on a red-brick vault, which is hardly common in Nubian architecture. The interior of the building was finely plastered and whitewashed. The evidence suggests that the upper floor of the building has been preserved at least in part. For now only the south end with walls some 5.00 m high has been recorded provisionally. It is too early to discuss possible dating suggestions, but it is most certainly early and may be attributed to sometime in the 7th century. Neither is the function of the building already apparent, but there is little doubt that it is one of the most important residential complexes discovered so far in Dongola. It may be presumed to be an extensive palace erected on a rocky riverbank with a gate leading to the harbor (river port).

Fig. 7. Plate with a nursing gazelle pictured on the floor (Photo W. Godlewski)

In the light of the investigations carried out so far, the fortified settlement at Dongola covered an area of c. 57,000 m^2, extending over a rocky outcrop that fell steeply to the river below.[10] The fortifications were designed to defend the settle-

[9] W. Godlewski, S. Medeksza, "The so-called Mosque building in Old Dongola (Sudan). A Structural Analysis", *ANM* (1987), 185-205.

[10] W. Godlewski, "The City of Dongola before the Arab raid of 651/2", *African Reports*, II (in press).

ment only on the landside – from the north, east and south. The rocky riverbank was defended merely by spot defenses – in 1990 a tower was uncovered in the northern end of the stretch. A look at the riverbank and the architecture identified so far indicates that two small river harbors should be expected on the banks. The northern one, which was presumably the bigger one, was located in a natural bay; from the north it was protected by an artificial platform. The southern bay could have been more of a small private haven and was presumably connected with the building from trial pit SW.N. A survey of the area between the ports indicates that the rocky shore between the ports was the site of some extensive structures that could have constituted a complex of royal palaces. The site was naturally defended and there was no need for fortifications on the riverside to block the view or limit the open space in any way. These buildings were probably separated from the remaining structures inside the fortifications. The post-Makurian architecture developed mostly near the outer fortifications; the buildings of this time in the western part of the town, where we would like to locate the royal palaces, are scarce and on the most part easily traced on the surface today.

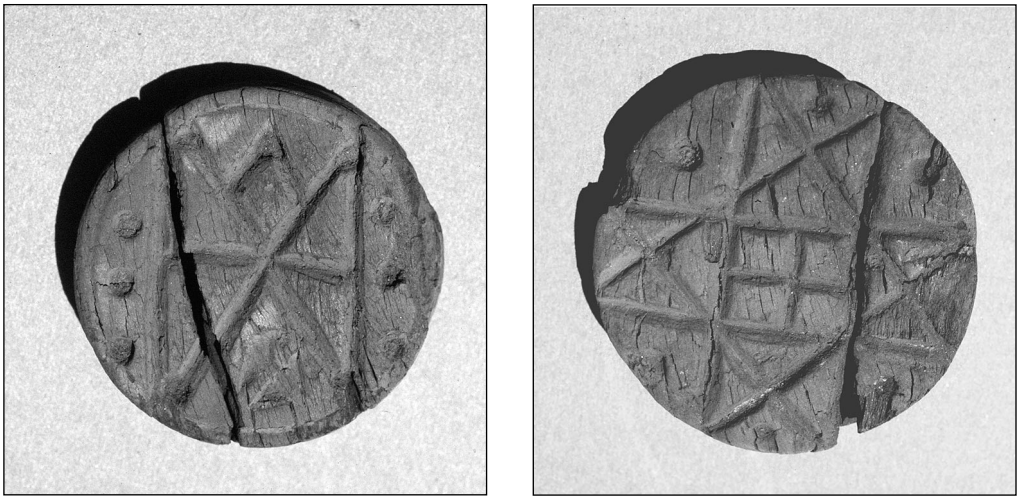

Fig. 8. Two-sided wooden seal (Photo W. Godlewski)