

CATHEDRALS



Capitals of grey granite from the Third Cathedral (RC.I)

None of the buildings discovered in Dongola to date have provided irrefutable evidence of their status as cathedrals, at least no proof as evident as the foundation stela, paintings and inscriptions that identified the Pachoras (Faras) Cathedral. Nonetheless, four structures can actually be interpreted as cathedrals, based on important formal similarities with the cathedrals at Pachoras and Phrim. The Church of the Stone Pavement is one of these: its original form of a columnar basilica (EC.I) and its form as a domed basilica (EC.II) can be interpreted as the first two successive cathedrals of Dongola. The other is the Church of the Granite Columns, which was undoubtedly a model for the Cathedral of Paulos erected in Pachoras in AD 707. Moreover, the two cathedrals, one in Dongola and the other in Pachoras, were rebuilt in the 10th century according to the same plan and in keeping with the same liturgical demands. The four structures, presumed to be the cathedrals of Dongola, were built and rebuilt in a chronological sequence from the first cathedral (EC.I) erected in the second half of the 6th century to the abandonment of the last cathedral (RC.II) in the second half of the 14th century.

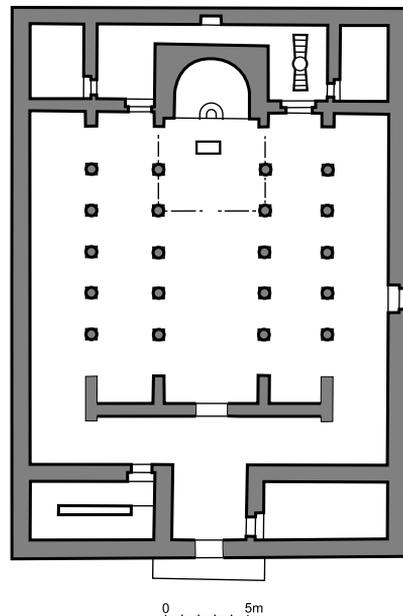
FIRST CATHEDRAL

(EC.I = Church of the Stone Pavement)

The founding of a diocese in Dongola, which occurred likely in the seventh decade of the 6th century (Godlewski 2002b), can be linked with the construction of a new church in Dongola. This building, EC.1, replaced the earlier Building X (BX), apparently damaged by a natural catastrophe. Thick deposits of black Nile silt found inside the remains of BX suggest a high flood that need not have harmed the building itself, but raised the occupational level inside it by a meter at least (see page 63). This opportuned a rebuilding of the naos into a five-aisled basilica that the first bishop of Dongola (and Makuria) presumably decided could function better as a cathedral (Godlewski 2006a).

The hull of the building and the layout of the eastern and western chambers remained unchanged. It was a large rectangular structure, 33.40 m by 23.60 m, built of red brick and entered from the west, on axis, as Building X before it. A new southern entrance was made in the center of the naos, to service the approach from the Citadel. The nave was one-and-a-half times wider than the aisles, which were accessible from the narthex. The aisles were separated by four rows of pink granite columns. Chips of granite from the setting of the columns have survived in the fill resting against the foundations. The column shafts were smoothly polished and the capitals had smooth corner leaves supporting an abacus with slightly concave sides. Between the leaves there were rings with inscribed Greek crosses of the Maltese type or straight-armed. Smaller capitals of pink granite found in the Cruciform Church (CC), as well as the Throne Hall, should be seen as spoils probably from EC.I. This

First Cathedral (EC.I)



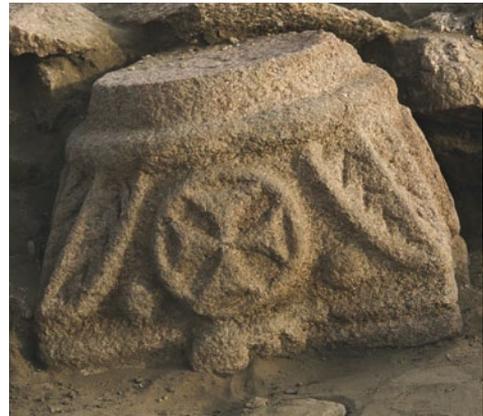
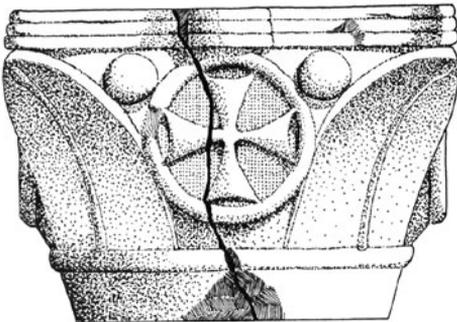
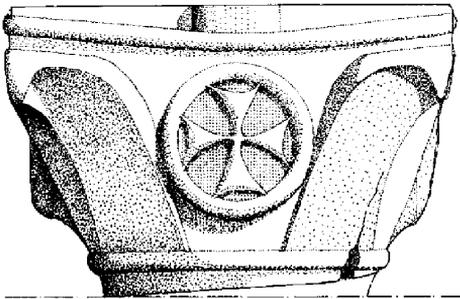
suggests that the first Dongolan cathedral had emporia and upper colonnades at least in the nave. A staircase built into the north-western corner room led up to the emporia.

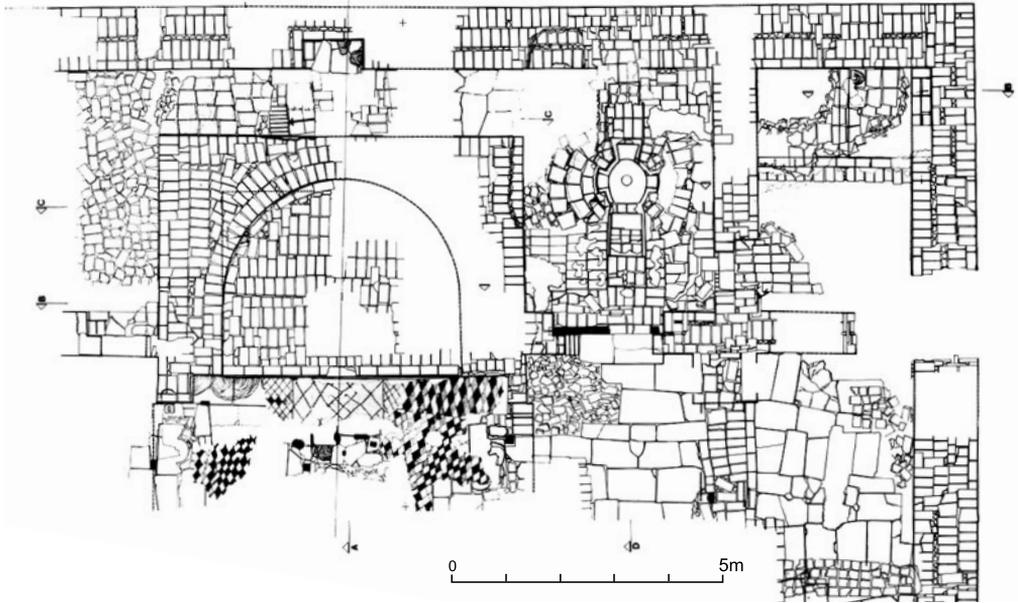
Wall paintings presumably filled the interior. Fragments of painted plaster imitating marble revetment were preserved on the walls of the baptismal pool. A wooden roof covered the basilica. Remains of liturgical furnishings included a *synthronon* in the apse, partly preserved, and a stone altar screen in the eastern part of the nave, enclosing a table altar in front of the apse. The location of the pulpit is uncertain. In the southern sacristy, which adjoined the apse, there was a round and deep baptismal pool, furnished with two sets of steps, one from the east and the other from the west. A passage backing the apse connected the *pastophories*. The entrance to the shaft of the crypts in Building X was adapted to the

new stone floor level. A niche in the wall of the eastern corridor revealed heavy traces of burning oil on the sill.

The large five-aisled basilica that was thus constructed provided a template for other edifices of this kind in Makuria. It may have been the model for the rebuilding of the first cathedral of Bishop Longinus in Qasr Ibrim,

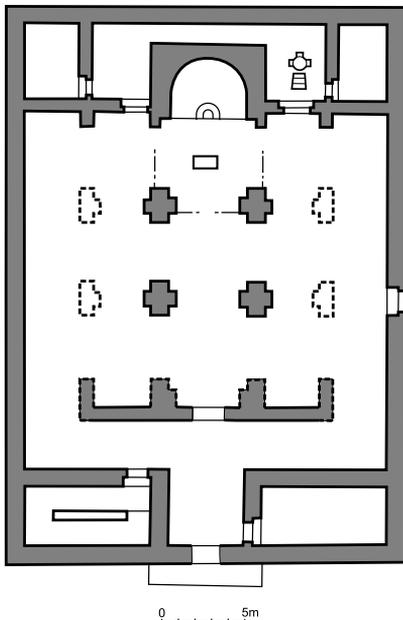
Capitals of red granite from the First Cathedral (EC.I)
(below and lower right)





Baptistry and sanctuary with mosaic floor from the Second Cathedral (EC.II)

Second Cathedral (EC.II)



the Old Church, into a five-aisled basilica (Gartkiewicz 1982a: 87–94; Aldsworth 2010: 126–138), as well as for the construction by Bishop Aetios of a new cathedral at Pachoras (Godlewski 2006b: 33–41). The latter presumably followed the establishment of a diocese, as willed by the king and bishop of Dongola in the 620s.

While there are differences in fairly secondary characteristics, the basilicas from Pachoras and Qasr Ibrim and their potential prototype from Dongola constitute a type that is quite homogenous and which prevailed in Makuria in the first half of the 7th century.

SECOND CATHEDRAL

(EC.II = Church of the Stone Pavement)

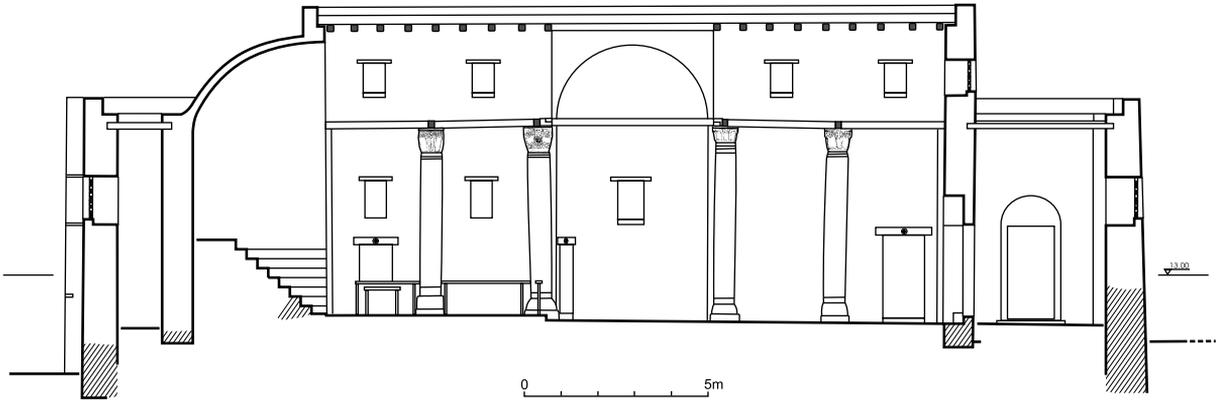
The modified design of Dongola churches from the latter half of the 7th century resulted from, on one hand, wartime destruction caused by the Arab siege of AD 652, and on the other hand, from a creative adaptation of domed basilica plans en vogue throughout the Byzantine Empire at the time (Krautheimer 1981: 252–270).



Bishop, mural from the Chapel of Archangel Michael in the monastery complex on Kom H

The changes in the original cathedral were certainly forced by heavy damages to the naos and Arabic sources indeed speak of the destruction of the main church of Dongola (Vantini 1975: OSN 528–529). The shattered columns and capitals were removed from the interior and were reused in the construction of a new defensive tower (see Citadel and fortifications, pages 20ff.) on the Citadel (Godlewski 1991b: 108–109). The naos was rebuilt (Godlewski 1990: 524–527; 2006a), enlarging the foundations of the central part and erecting four massive pillars probably to support a central dome. The aisles, separated from the nave by the pillars, were re-roofed with vaulting. The western and eastern parts of the basilica remained unchanged. Some modification of the liturgical furnishings was introduced. The baptismal pool was reduced, cutting the western stairs off from the cross-shaped basin (Godlewski 1979: 103–110).

The interior decoration was also, no doubt, refurbished, but the sole surviving remains are in the bema, where a geometric mosaic floor of black and off-white pebbles was laid in a clay-mortar bedding. This local form of mosaic, doubtlessly made by local artisans, is a good example of the aspirations of the founders (bishop? king?) to have Byzantine-inspired decoration in the interior, likely modeled on examples from Syria and Palestine (Godlewski 2011). The technical characteristics of the Dongolan mosaics (other examples of the art have been preserved in the Mosaic Church II) demonstrate that local workshops were cut off from their Mediterranean counterparts, which is understandable in the second half of the 7th century, but were charged with an ambition to imitate examples that they had seen or heard of. These ambitions were also present in the murals decorating the Cathedral and many other churches in Makuria, not to mention the Commemorative Building (B.III.1) on the Citadel in front of the palace facade, where early wall paintings survive.



Reconstructed section through the Third Cathedral (RC.I)

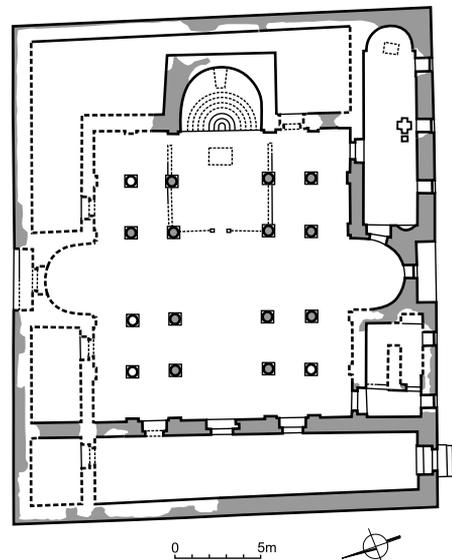
THIRD CATHEDRAL

(RC.I = Church of the Granite Columns)

The peace that followed the political perturbations of the mid 7th century stimulated building development in the capital. Not only was the Cathedral rebuilt (and perhaps other complexes like the Mosaic Church and the Old Church), but new foundations were initiated. One of these was the Church of the Granite Columns (RC.I), perhaps the church of the archbishop of Dongola. Sited on the ruins of the Old Church, it was bigger, measuring 29 m x 24.50 m (Gartkiewicz 1990: 109–304). The new cathedral followed a central plan with a five-aisled, columnar naos and two naves intersecting at right angles in the center of the complex. It was entered most likely through an entrance in the southwestern corner, leading to a narrow narthex. Another entrance from the north, leading to the transept, was reconstructed by P.M. Gartkiewicz on the grounds of parallels with the Cathedral of Paulos in Pachoras, but there is little architectural evidence or functional justification for this idea. From the narthex, three entrances allowed passage into the columnar naos, which was divided by rows of gneiss columns. The intersecting naves terminated each in an apse, the eastern

one being slightly wider than the others. Flanking the eastern apse were *pastophories* connected by a corridor running behind the apse. The northern sacristy, mostly destroyed, appears to have been shaped like a reversed L, filling the space between the northern and eastern apses. It must have been entered from the north side of

Third Cathedral (RC.I)



the naos. It joined the southern sacristy, which shared space inside the church with a long room, the baptistery, entered from the naos. Together these two rooms formed a mirror "L" shape to the northern *pastophory*. A staircase was located by the south wall, between the southern apse and the narthex. Two analogous chambers probably existed on the north side. One would have been by the narthex and the other by the northern apse, the walls of which have been preserved only in part; their function has not been identified.

The staircase is proof of the presence of galleries in the western part of the building, over the narthex and the western ends of the aisles, but there is no architectural evidence in support.

The liturgical furnishings included a *synthronon* in the apse, bema in the eastern end of the nave, surrounded by a stone altar screen, a table altar and a pulpit in the central part of the naos. In the baptistery, beside the sunken, cruciform baptismal pool, there was a small apse with table altar, and a sanctuary screened off by a low altar screen (Godlewski 1979: 110–124).

The date of the church foundation is relatively poorly documented in the archaeological record on site. The granite capitals of the naos, as well as terracotta window grilles from the baptistery(?) suggest the end of the 7th century. The capitals are an intermediate form between the architectural decoration of the cathedral in Qasr Ibrim and that of the Cathedral of Paulos in Pachoras. The latter is also the closest parallel to the Dongolan cathedral. Assuming P.M. Gartkiewicz was right in deducing the pattern of borrowings proceeding from Dongola to Pachoras, the new construction in the capital must have preceded the building in Faras. The most recent reconstruction of the naos of the Cathedral of Paulos as a five-aisled design (Godlewski 2006b: 43–82) further emphasizes the similarities. This reconstruction has been based

on a re-analysis of architectural elements in the Cathedral of Petros, which remained from the earlier church and were not moved during the 10th century rebuilding. Considering that the Pachoras cathedral is dated securely to AD 707, the construction of RC.I cannot be later than the close of the 7th century. Gartkiewicz's dating of the Dongola structure to the second half of the 8th century was grounded in the belief that the Faras cathedral had been built by Bishop Ignatios (766–802), but this is hardly justified. Paulos's building activity is evidenced in a number of inscriptions, while there is nothing at all in the way of evidence for Ignatios's involvement, whether in the architecture or the mural decoration of the church in Pachoras.

What's more, not only were the two complexes erected at the same time, but they were likely the work of the same group of craftsmen, which is evident from the carving of the capitals. The church at Sai, tentatively identified as an episcopal building, may have also been built on the same plan (Gartkiewicz 1990: 255–257), but it has not been excavated yet.

All facts considered, it seems likely that the new cathedral of Dongola (RC.I) exemplified a novel and, specifically Nubian design in the religious architecture of Makuria. Gartkiewicz (1990: 249–255) observed inspirations for the naos design in the Church of the Prophets, Apostles and Martyrs at Gerasa and for the multi-columnar division of the naos in the North African churches at Junca (Basilica B) and Carthage (Damous el Karita). Suggested Armenian influences were rejected by Peter Grossmann (2001). Gartkiewicz had already stressed the input of local traditions in the final shape of the Dongola building and his view has been borne out completely with the unearthing of several other church buildings (e.g., Building X, EC.I and EC.II), where these traditions can be discerned more clearly (Godlewski 1998). The predilection for central plans and five-

aised naos is evident and the creativity of the Dongolan milieu of architects has also become more apparent. Thus, it may be said with conviction that when the emergence of the Umayyad Caliphate greatly reduced Byzantine influence in Makuria and restricted the influx of new patterns, Dongolan craftsmen were sufficiently prepared to fulfill the commissions of the royal court and bishops of Dongola.

The Church of the Granite Columns has no direct parallels in Byzantine church architecture. The architectural principles in general are similar, but on closer inspection the building in Dongola does not really represent the same form. It seems therefore that Dongolan architects and craftsmen independently created a new model of cathedral church, making use of experience gained from earlier building projects in the capital and their knowledge of Byzantine architecture. This creative period was to last throughout the 8th and 9th centuries, coming to fruit in such splendid buildings as the Cruciform Church (CC), the Throne Hall of the Kings of Makuria, and two other important churches, the Pillar Church and Church D.

FOURTH CATHEDRAL

(RC.II = Church of the Granite Columns)

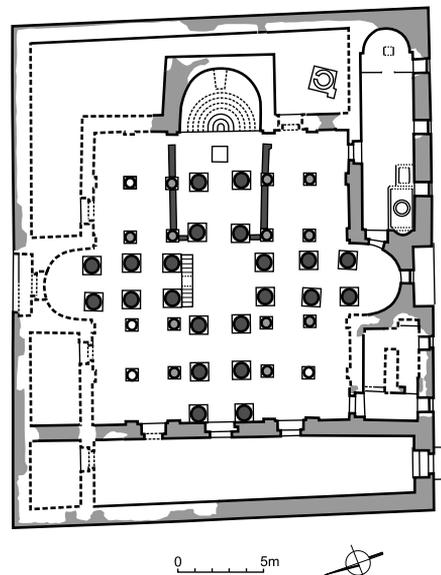
The rebuilding of the Third Cathedral (Gartkiewicz 1990: 264–299) should be viewed in the context of churches from the Dongola area planned as a cross-over-rectangle design. Actually, apart from a new system of vaults resulting from the modified plan, the Fourth Cathedral was not changed much in effect of the rebuilding. A set of round brick pillars was introduced in the nave and transept, while leaving a columnar naos with wooden roof in the corners. Vaults resting on the columns above the corners of the naos were also suggested by P.M. Gartkiewicz, but it is hard to imagine this arrangement as being a stable one. There is no evidence

from Makuria of architectural designs with arcades over the columns.

The rebuilding of the Cathedral at Pachoras (Michałowski 1967; Godlewski 2006b: 93–110) is much clearer in terms of vault design. Pillars were introduced instead of columns to support a central dome, the nave and transept were covered with barrel vaults, and groin vaults appeared in other parts of the naos. The new Cathedral of Petros in Pachoras was a more harmonious building, and with its painted decoration, it must have been counted among the most magnificent edifices of the kingdom.

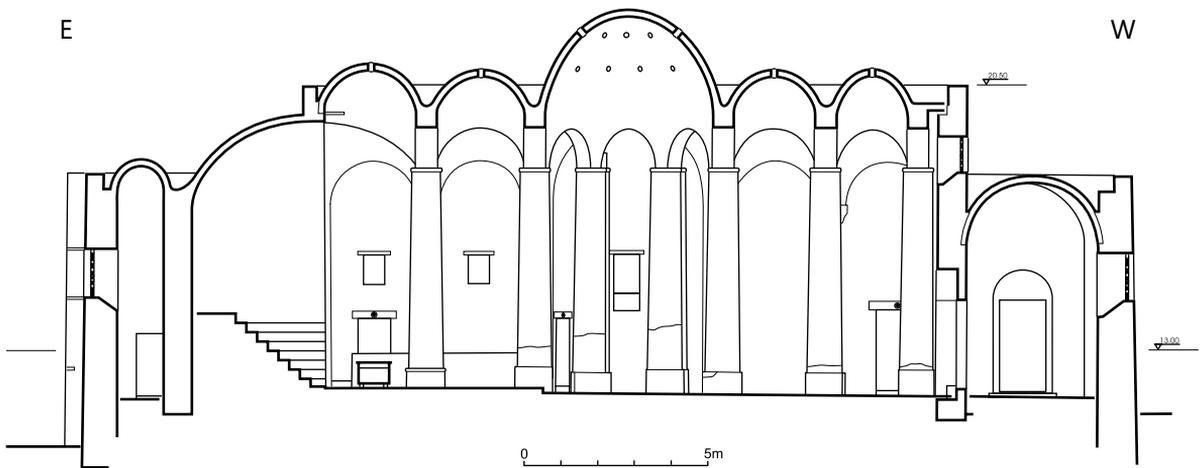
The alterations made in the Fourth Cathedral have not been dated precisely. Gartkiewicz suggested the close of the 10th century, based mainly on Abu Makarim's report concerning the introduction of domes in the palace of King Raphael (Vantini 1975: OSN 326–327). The cathedral at Pachoras was rebuilt during the second half of the 10th century, and it seems to have happened later than the reconstruction of

Fourth Cathedral (RC.II)





General view of the Fourth Cathedral (RC II)



Reconstructed section through the Fourth Cathedral (RC.II)

RC.II in Dongola. In view of the appearance in Dongola of new church buildings on the cruciform and cross-over-rectangle plans, the Pillar Church (PC) and the King's Church (B.V on the citadel) with its round pillars in particular, the alterations introduced in the Fourth Cathedral may be presumed to date from the close of the 9th century or even earlier. A strong argument in favor of an earlier date for RC.II is the tomb and funerary stela placed in the floor, in front of the new monolithic altar standing in a lateral chapel (baptistery) of the Cathedral. The burial is most probably of *Eparchos ton Gaderon*, Ioannes son of *Augustus Zacharias*, who died in AD 883 (Łajtar 2003a: 100–106). If the stela is indeed connected with the tomb, as well as with the new arrangement of the chapel, and if a similar placement of the stela of Mariankudda in the church at Hambukol is compared (Łajtar 2003a: 81–93), then Ioannes may be seen as one of the most important noblemen of the kingdom, the man responsible for the new form of the Cathedral. As the founder and a brother to King Georgios, he had the right to be buried in a chapel inside the Cathedral, but the event remains nonetheless unique in Nubian tradition. In any case, his tomb provides a connection with Zacharias that would suggest a likely date for the refurbishing in the 870s–880s, thus placing the Fourth Cathedral in the mainstream of architectural aesthetic and functional changes occurring in the religious architecture of Dongola at the time.

The last cathedral was open with no further apparent rebuilding until the 14th century when the church complexes north of the Citadel were finally deserted. The Mamluks did it no harm and indeed the columns continued to stand while sand slowly engulfed the ruins and the walls were dismantled in search of building material.



Priest, mural from the Chapel of Archangel Michael in the monastery complex on Kom H