An aerial photograph of the Kingdom of Dongola ruins in Sudan. The image shows a vast, sandy landscape with numerous stone structures, including a large rectangular building in the upper center and a cluster of smaller buildings to the right. In the lower left, there is a large, organized cemetery with many small, conical mounds. The background shows a dark, flat expanse, likely a river or a plain. A white banner with a thin gold border is positioned across the middle of the image, containing the text 'KINGDOM OF DONGOLA TOWN'.

KINGDOM OF DONGOLA TOWN

Southern Dongola, town and cemetery

At the close of the 13th century, during yet another war with the Mamluks of Egypt, Dongola suffered heavy damages. Several of the most prestigious buildings — the Cruciform Church, Throne Hall, “Palace of Ioannes” (Building I) and Church B.III — lay in ruins or needed serious rebuilding. The entire northern part of the agglomeration was abandoned and the population number dropped substantially in effect of a series of deportations. Despite the unfavorable situation, an effort was made to pick up the pieces and continue life as usual.

The fallen dome and porticoes of the Cruciform Church (CC.I) were cleared away and a large *ciborium* with altar was built in the central courtyard, restoring worship in the most important religious edifice of the kingdom. The weakened structure of the Throne Hall was thoroughly rebuilt, giving it an outer casing wall, partly filling in the ground floor and renovating the upper floor. Building I also had the ground floor rooms filled in with rubble in order to create a stable platform for an adapted version of the first floor chambers, leaving the staircase still functional. The commemorative monument B.III.1 was changed into a small church.

Despite these efforts, the decline of the town could not be stopped. In 1317, the restored Throne Hall was transformed into a mosque. Dynastic conflicts and threat from raiding Banu Jad tribes forced the royal court to abandon the city in 1364 and move northward to Gebel Adda and Qasr Ibrim in search of a safe haven. This was the end of Dongola as capital of Makuria.

Yet Dongola remained an important center of power. The Kingdom of Dongola Town was created in the 14th century. One of the first to rule this local kingdom was Paper, who left his name in graffiti on the walls of the ruined Upper Church in Banganarti. His inscriptions are the first evidence of a new kingdom upholding the old traditions (Łajtar 2003b). Priests remained in the town, as did most likely also the Bishop of Dongola. One of the last bishops was portrayed in the apse of a small church that was built into the commemorative monument on the Citadel (B.III.2, see page 75). The Fourth Cathedral continued to function, as did a few other churches, including the North Church, the Tower Church and the Pillar Church. There is nothing to disprove the continued existence of the monastery on Kom H. Thus, for the



Qubbas in the Muslim cemetery

first time in Dongola history, a mosque and churches were operational in the city at the same time.

The social make-up of the residents changed substantially. The influx of new inhabitants was considerable and the changes are best exemplified by the new forms of houses appearing in the 15th century in the settlement by the south wall of the Cathedral and inside the destroyed Cruciform Church, on the Citadel and adjoining Building I. These were small structures consisting of two rooms with no upper floors with a flat roof and they became the standard for the next two centuries. The new residence of the king of Dongola Town was raised in the northeastern part of the Citadel, which did not lose its importance as a defensive point, hence the extensive repairs and even enlargement of the walls observed

in the northwestern part of the circuit. In the second half of the 16th century, Dongola ultimately became one of several small kingdoms subordinated to the Funj sultans, who finally settled their border with Osman Egypt on the Third Nile Cataract.

At the close of the 17th century, the Citadel was finally abandoned. On the vast plateau that stretches south of the citadel, a new settlement was built and new mud-brick defenses were raised to the east and south of the new houses. The dating of these extensive fortifications is not clear, perhaps they were built already in the 16th–17th century, to protect the residents as much as their herds of horses and cattle.

The picturesque *qubbas* of the period were gathered in the southernmost part of the town cemeteries, to the east of the long wall.

Frédéric Cailliaud's drawing of the Mosque in Dongola, 1821

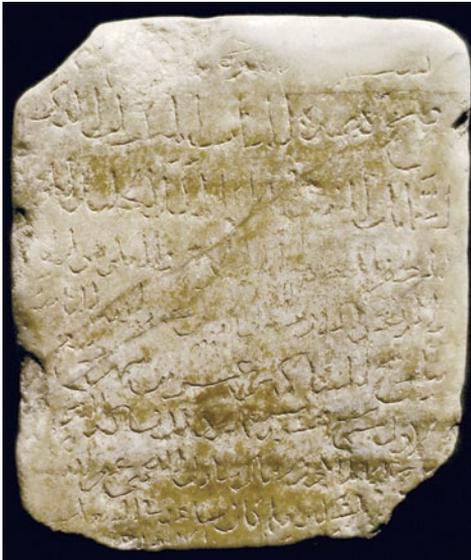


MOSQUE

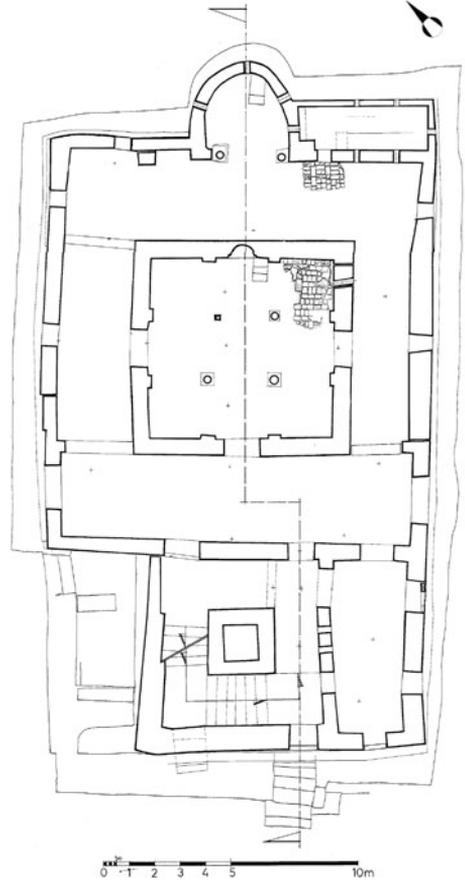
A fortunately preserved foundation stela informs that the Throne Hall of the Kings of Makuria was turned into a mosque in 1317. Abdalla Barshambu, a member of the royal family educated in Cairo, paid with his life for this change, but no one after that dared to revoke the decision and return the building to its former function. The Mamluk Sultan in Cairo stood behind the new foundation.

The building had already been rebuilt at the close of the 13th century. Now, only the central square hall on the first floor was turned into a prayer room, with a *mihrab* being carved in the east wall and a *mimbar* erected next to it. A minaret was constructed in the northwestern corner, next to the exit from the staircase. The surrounding upper-floor corridors were also altered with a coating of plaster being introduced to cover up the old paintings. The porticoes could have been replaced by big windows and the roof modified already during the recent rebuilding. The same staircase led to the prayer room as before to the ceremonial hall.

Foundation stela of the mosque, 1317



First floor of the Mosque Building



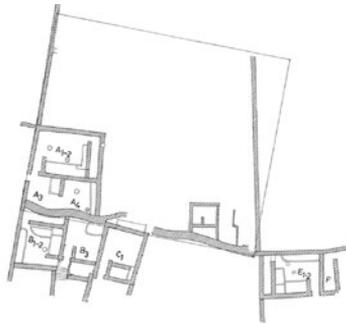
A thorough alteration of the ground floor started with more than 1.50 m of rubble being thrown in as backfill of the chambers. Windows that had lighted particular rooms were now recut as passages between different parts of the building. Entrance was through the southern door, although strict evidence for this is lacking. Arab sources reported that the ground floor was used by pilgrims on their way to Mecca. A *mihrab* was found carved into the east wall of the central hall, exactly 1.50 m above the original walking level, that is, on the level of the rubble fill.

HOUSES IN SITE CC AND NEXT TO THE FOURTH CATHEDRAL

Excavations revealed three successive levels of new housing in the area of the ruined and abandoned Cruciform Church (CC) and between it and the Fourth Cathedral, especially by the southern wall of the latter, which became at the same time part of the rampart protecting this new district from the north. The oldest houses made use of standing walls, their foundations resting on a layer of rubble about 75 cm thick, overlying the original pavements. Later houses were founded already 1.50–2.00 m above the floors of the Cruciform Church. These houses were extensive complexes of small two-room units, grouped around a shared courtyard. This characteristic topography suggests family relations between the residents; particular houses were built successively

around a common courtyard as the needs of a growing family demanded.

The four houses (K, R, M and N), which are the oldest in the northern area of the Cruciform Church, were dated to the 15th century. Even using standing church walls, they managed to present a new type of private building consisting of a courtyard fronting a bicameral unit without an upper floor and with a flat roof. House N was a fully developed example of this type. It was constructed of red brick salvaged from the ruins of the church and it encompassed an area of approximately 36 m². The wood-and-reed roof rested on the walls and on a palm-tree post standing in the center of the bigger room. The entrance was from a courtyard in the south, through a passage (*tuddiq*)



Houses in and over the ruins of the Cruciform Church (CC)





Egyptian-style glazed plate, 16th–17th century

screened off with a perpendicular wall, into a big square room (approx. 26.50 m²) with beaten floor and whitewashed walls. This room was furnished with a number of brick-cased structures filled with sand and with a beaten clay surface, standing by the south and north walls of the room — places for sleeping and sitting. Traces of a hearth and cooking pots were recorded next to the central post. A door by the east wall led to a narrow room in the back of the first one, 1.10 m wide and measuring 5.60 m² in area. In other houses, this second room often contained storage pottery.

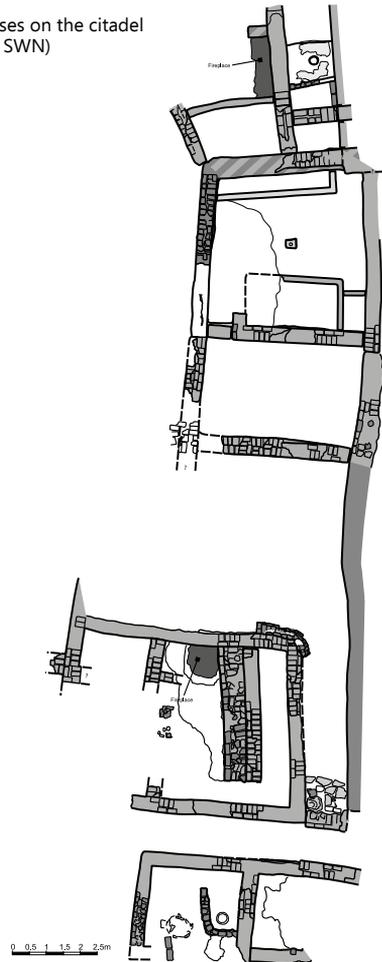
Houses M and K presented a very similar layout and furniture, indicating that they followed a standard adopted for new housing in Dongola. House R was bigger presumably only because it had adapted the west arm of the Cruciform Church and was thus determined by still standing elements of architecture.

HOUSES OF THE 17TH CENTURY

Architecture of the 17th century was recorded over large parts of the ruined and sand-covered ancient Dongola. For the most part, it drew little on the older urban remains. The northern part of the new Dongola has been investigated in the area overlying the

Cruciform Church and by the south wall of the Fourth Cathedral, which, as stated above, became part of the new ramparts in this part of the town. The Citadel, still a fortified stronghold of importance, was built over entirely at this time, as was the district stretching from the Citadel to the Mosque, south of the rocky ridge joining the two. The southern extent of this new town has not been established, but it is not to be excluded that the thick southeastern wall of mud brick, discovered in 1988, actually originated from the 17th century.

Houses on the citadel
(site SWN)



Ruins of a bigger complex traditionally referred to as the “Palace of the Mek of Dongola” can be seen on top of the citadel. Preliminary surveys have shown it to be a complex structure, probably not built according to one design, but nicely reflecting contemporary house building traditions in Dongola. It is as if it was a monumental version of the typical Dongolan house of the period.

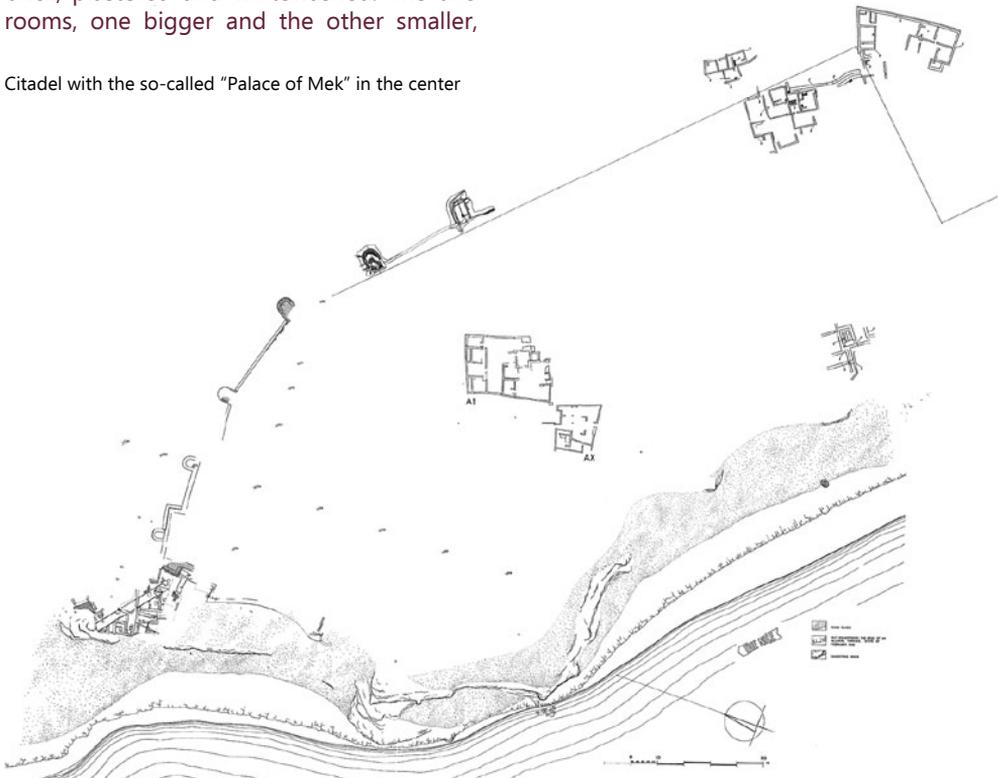
Apart from the Mosque and “Palace of the Mek”, several houses representing completely uniform layouts and architectural form were identified on the SWN site on the citadel (H.1; H.10–13). They have been dated to the latest period of habitation in the 16th–17th century. The type of house is very conservative: a two-room unit with courtyard in front, which first appeared in the 15th century. The houses were built of mud brick, plastered and whitewashed. The two rooms, one bigger and the other smaller,

were interconnected. Standard furniture of the bigger of the rooms consisted of two or three low bench-like structures lining the walls and a developed platform that was located usually just inside the door. Rooms were usually not higher than 2.50 m and had small triangular windows pierced in the walls. The flat roofs were too weak to support activity, hence no steps anywhere. Fronting the entrance was a courtyard, which was usually shared by a few neighboring houses.

THE FAMILY ARCHIVE

In the fill of the mastaba in house H.1 on the citadel, inside a small cooking pot were four packets containing documents written in Arabic on paper. All four were deeds of sale of plots of land with waterwheels (*saqiyah*) (Godlewski 2010: 324–326).

Citadel with the so-called “Palace of Mek” in the center



Family archive from House H.1 on the Citadel center, wrapped and tied bundle and two of the paper documents after unfolding



نص الربع
 الحمد لله وحده لا شريك له
 مباركته امانا بعد
 فان اذ ربيس ابن
 عيسى ارهن ساقية
 عيا ابن مسير بثلاثة
 قروش وازنان
 وثلاثة ارباع فضة
 بشهادة علتود
 وبشهادة عبد الرحمن
 ابن منال وبشهادة
 الحاج عبيد القاسم
 وبشهادة محمد ابن
 عيسى والهل
 ست لثمان ثمان
 وبشهادة العلاء
 وهو الحاج محمد
 ابن سليمان
 وبشهادة داود
 ابن الهادي عنقه

الحمد لله وحده
 الصلوة والسلام على من لا نبي بعده
 ذكره فيما جرى بين ربيس بن حاكم
 والحاج ادريس البشير وبعد
 والربى نغلمك به ان موسى المذكور اشترى
 ربع الساقية التي بين ساقية مطايب
 وبين ساقية كقول التي في جرف
 امرت كرف والحصة المشتراة وهي
 حصة ادريس المعروف يوسف
 والتمن المشتراة به خمس قزاريات
 وموريس عيش ويوفون الدين
 البرهون فيه تلك الحصة لسليمان
 كركرات وقدر الدين المبرهون
 سوارت اشرفيه ونصف سوار
 والشراوق في السنة الذي ملك عون
 الله الملك بنفسه ومن الحصاد قبل
 ساقية القمح وشهد بما في الورقة
 من شها القمير عيسى بن احمد وايضا
 حاكما بجمع سبع الحصة بعد يوسف
 الشر وط بجمع دار اليتيم ويشهد به
 ايضا بما في القمير الورقة القمير علي
 ابن ادريس بن حلاله والحاج عيم
 والحاج محمد بن سليمان بن خيرون
 ومحمد بن جود الله وعبد الله بن حاكم
 والله اعلم بالصواب
 وحضر واكتب الورقة في مجلس البيع
 بعد وقوع البيع للحاج يوسف بن ادريس
 وداود بن حاكم وعون الله بن حسن
 ابن عون الله بن عثمان والله اعلم