

## OLD DONGOLA

### KOM H, SITE NW

Stefan Jakobielski

The northwestern section of the monastic complex (under investigation since 1991/92<sup>1</sup>), forms indeed a separate annex to the monastery, abutting its western enclosure wall on the outside from earlier than in the 10th century. The complicated plan is the result of consecutive rebuilding and perhaps changes of function (Fig. 1). Two units: Building NW-N and NW-S, are of evidently earlier date, erected before the 11th century outside the former western facade of the alleged main monastery building (NW-E), located in the western part of the compound. Their original function is obscure, but a kind of passage left between them, leading to the east, most probably indicates the position of the western compound gate. Later adjustments, including the addition of a commemorative complex (NW-NW) and a residential(?) one (NW-W), resulted in the buildings apparently losing their original function and being integrated with the newly built Western Annex. Further progress in establishing the sequence of rebuildings was reached in the 1996 season and the Annex itself has recently been identified<sup>2</sup> as a Byzantine type *hospicium (xenon)*.

In 1996, excavations covered an area of 10 x 8 m, i.e., the southwestern part of Building NW-S, including a former yard (Room 19) from where an arched doorway led to a kind of vestibule (Room 23) giving access to Rooms 29 and 31, both

---

<sup>1</sup> Cf. S. Jakobielski, *PAM IV* 1992 (1993), pp. 102-106; *PAM V* 1993 (1994), pp. 115-126; *PAM VI* 1994 (1995), pp. 84-92; *PAM VII* 1995 (1996), pp. 105-113; id., *Monastery of the Holy Trinity at Old Dongola - a short archaeological report*, in: *The Spirituality of Ancient Monasticism*, Kraków-Tyniec 1995, pp. 36-45.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. B. Żurawski, *Faith-healing and commemoration in Late Christian Dongola*, *Akten des 6. International Koptologenkongress Münster 20.-26. Juli 1996* (in print).

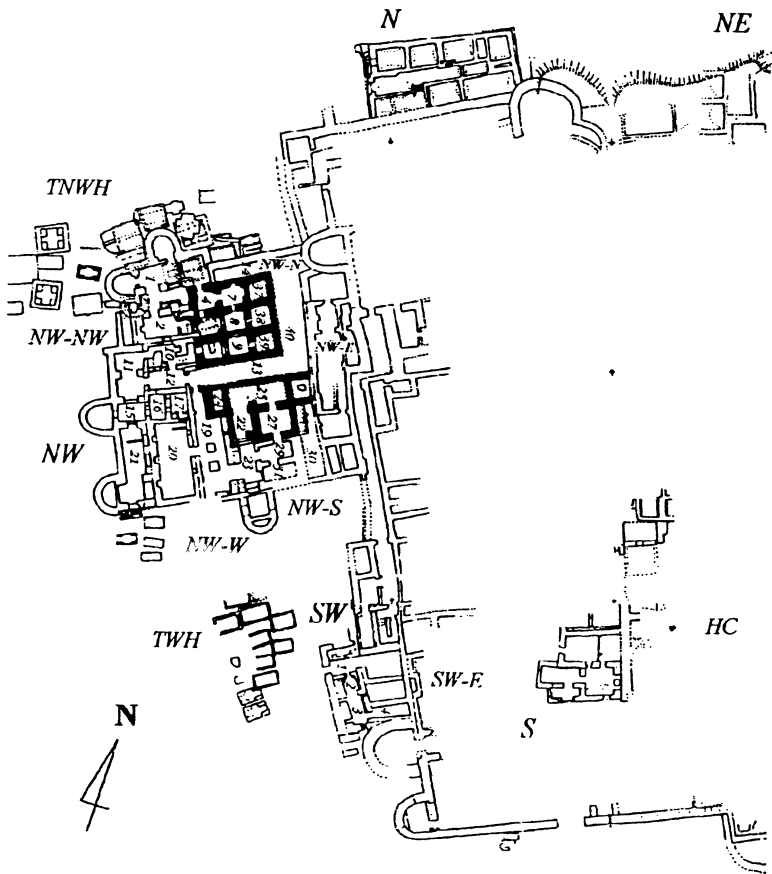


Fig. 1. Western Annex abutting the Monastery (the earliest buildings NW-N and NW-S distinguished by a plain contour).  
Drawing A. Wójcik and K. Pluskota.

situated to the east; Room 22 to the north was approached through the former main door to the oldest part of the Building NW-S. In this way, a long corridor was formed with the main entrance to the building being located at the west end.

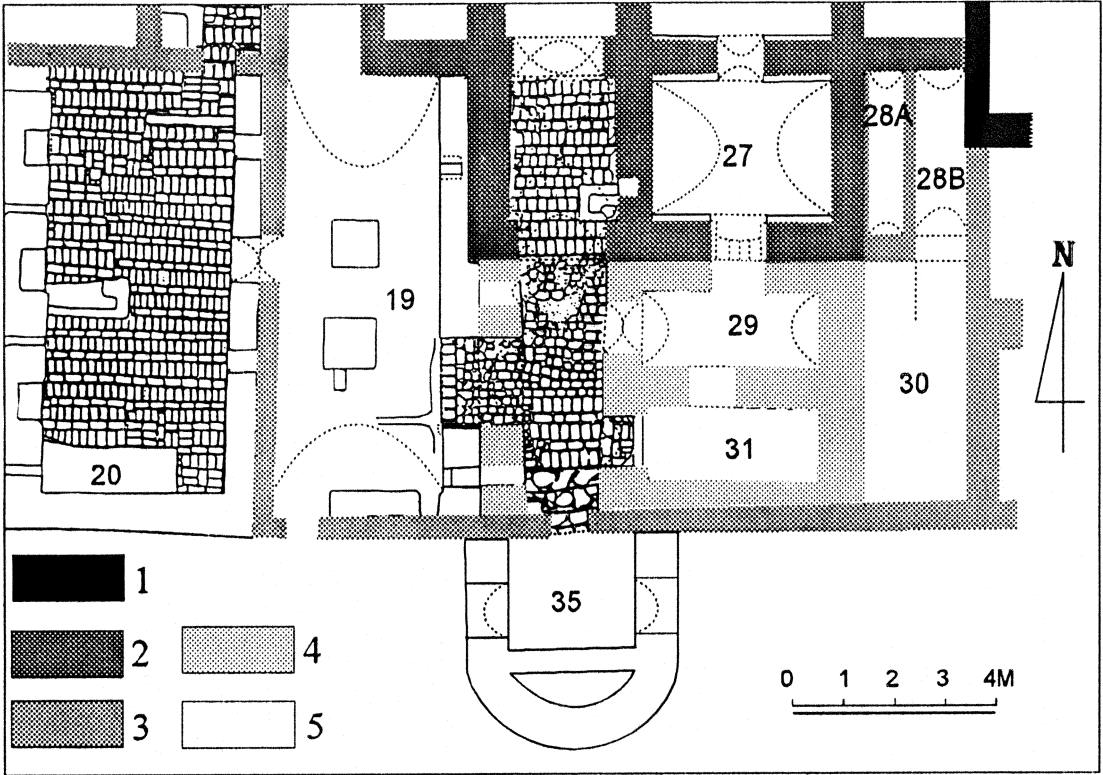
The uncovered rooms are preserved up to some 4 m in height; all were originally barrel-vaulted and paved with brick (Fig. 2). Differences in brick sizes, wall thicknesses and mortar composition clearly indicate that the structure is not uniform and a sequence of consecutive rebuildings is easy to detect. Soon after the original phase of Building NW-S, a yard was added on the south and west, and the building was enlarged to the east. The next phase (3) consisted of the addition of the southern part (Rooms 23, 29 & 31). In phase 4, a large hall (Room 20) was built outside the western wall of the yard. This facilitated the introduction of vaulting over the remaining part of the yard as its western wall could now support its weight, but required that an extra wall be constructed alongside the western facade of Building NW-S, thus bringing Room 19 into existence. The last addition was a semicircular structure (Room 35) built on the axis of the elongated vestibule (22 & 23) and projecting beyond the southern outer wall of the enlarged building. This room was evidently used as a latrine, as structures of the same type along the western outer wall of the Western Annex (Rooms 15A and 21 A).

Not much can be said about the time of this rebuilding, but at least Phase 3 can be dated. On the east wall in Room 29, there is a mural composed of two parts: a half-figure of Christ above and an Archangel below.<sup>3</sup> The two representations are separated by a honorific inscription in Coptic (Fig. 3,A) containing the name and titles of archipresbyter Georgios (no doubt, the founder of the painting, or even of this part of the building), a well known benefactor of the monastery and later Archbishop in Dongola, buried in the famous inscribed crypt in AD 1113.<sup>4</sup> But since the inscription does

---

<sup>3</sup> The mural was only partly visible as Room 29 was not cleared to the floor level; the lower part of the figure of the archangel is still covered by rubble.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. *PAM* V, pp. 118-121; S. Jakobielski, *Monastery of the Holy Trinity* (no. 1), pp. 40-43. The stele of Georgios is published by A. Łajtar, *Greek inscriptions from the Monastery on Kom H in Old Dongola*, *ibidem*, pp. 50-55.



not list his bishop's rank, it is to be believed that the foundation is earlier than AD 1063, that is, before his episcopate, which lasted 50 years. The style of the mural in question suits such a dating well and judging from the style of other paintings in the building it seems that its interior (including the original part of it) was not decorated earlier than in the middle of the 11th century.

Of the 10 murals in Building NW-S (including five found in the last season), some deserve special attention. The earliest group (mid-11th century) most probably comprises, apart from the foundation of Georgios, a huge painting of Archangel Michael with a nicely preserved figure of the donor, archipresbyter Marianos, depicted as a small figure against the Archangel's wing on the west wall in Room 22. The entire eastern wall of this room is occupied by a Nativity scene that follows Nubian tradition in incorporating such elements as the adoration of the Magi and Shepherds, but with important novelties: the running soldiers with drawn swords alluding to the Massacre of Innocents, and a standing figure identified as Isaiah the Prophet,<sup>5</sup> perhaps connected with the composition. A rare motif, not found as yet in Nubian painting, can be observed in the representation of Three Youths in the Fiery Furnace, namely, the figures of stokers feeding the furnace (in

---

<sup>5</sup> Cf. M. Martens-Czarnecka, Wall paintings from the Monastery on Kom H at Old Dongola, *Akten d. 6. Internationalen Koptologenkongress, Münster 20.-26. Juli 1996* (in print).

---

<- Fig. 2. Old Dongola. Part of the Building NW-S, excavated in season 1996. 1) The earliest Monastery building NW-E; 2) Building NW-5, original phase - 10th century or earlier; 3) the first rebuilding including the yard - 10th/11th century; 4) Georgios' rebuilding - mid 11th century; 5) later constructions - 12th century. Drawing A. Wójcik and K. Pluskota.



fact, the only extant part of this scene) painted on the west wall in Room 23.

Two other murals are unparalleled in Nubian painting and were most probably added to the decoration in the 12th century. Both seem to reflect the later function of the Western Annex as a faith-healing complex.<sup>6</sup> One is painted on the east wall of Room 23, opposite the main doorway, and is identified as representing the saints Cosmas and Damianus receiving purses with medicaments from an Angel. The other mural in the archway leading from the vestibule to Room 29 depicts Christ healing a blind man at the Pool of Siloam (John 9:1-12). The blind man is represented with a dark face as if he was a Nubian; the legend inscribed over his head contains only one word: "Siloam".<sup>7</sup>

Among the numerous graffiti scratched or written in ink on the walls of Rooms 19, 23 and 35, one is of outstanding importance. It contains an apparently complete text in Greek (written in black ink in regular "Nubian hand"), of a Creed (Fig. 3,B). The wording of the text does not correspond literally to any of the known versions of the Nicene or any of the other Councils.<sup>8</sup> The location of the text on the north jamb of the archway between the vestibule (Room 23) and Room 31 shows that the inscription cannot be earlier than the end of 11th century.

Very high mud-brick walls of Rooms 22 and 23, exposed down to the floor level, were found to have been seriously damaged immediately above the terracotta paving. Nearly half of the original wall's thickness had been washed away. Conservation used new red-bricks to fill in the missing parts of walls. Other protective measures were taken in the western entrance where a large

---

<sup>6</sup> According to a hypothesis of B. Żurawski, cf. note 2, above.

<sup>7</sup> For other murals found this season in the SW section, cf. B. Żurawski, *infra*, pp. 169ff.

<sup>8</sup> The text is being studied by A. Łajtar and shall be published shortly in the *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum*.

part of the arch was reconstructed. Conservation included the cleaning and treating of all the painted plaster surfaces in order to preserve the murals.

A new roof was introduced over the entire complex of Rooms 22, 23 & 35, new red brick masonry brought the walls to an uniform height of 4 m with a proper gradient to the south. The roof was made in the traditional way of the region: palm branches covered with a layer of mud mixed with dung, but iron pipes were used instead of wooden beams.