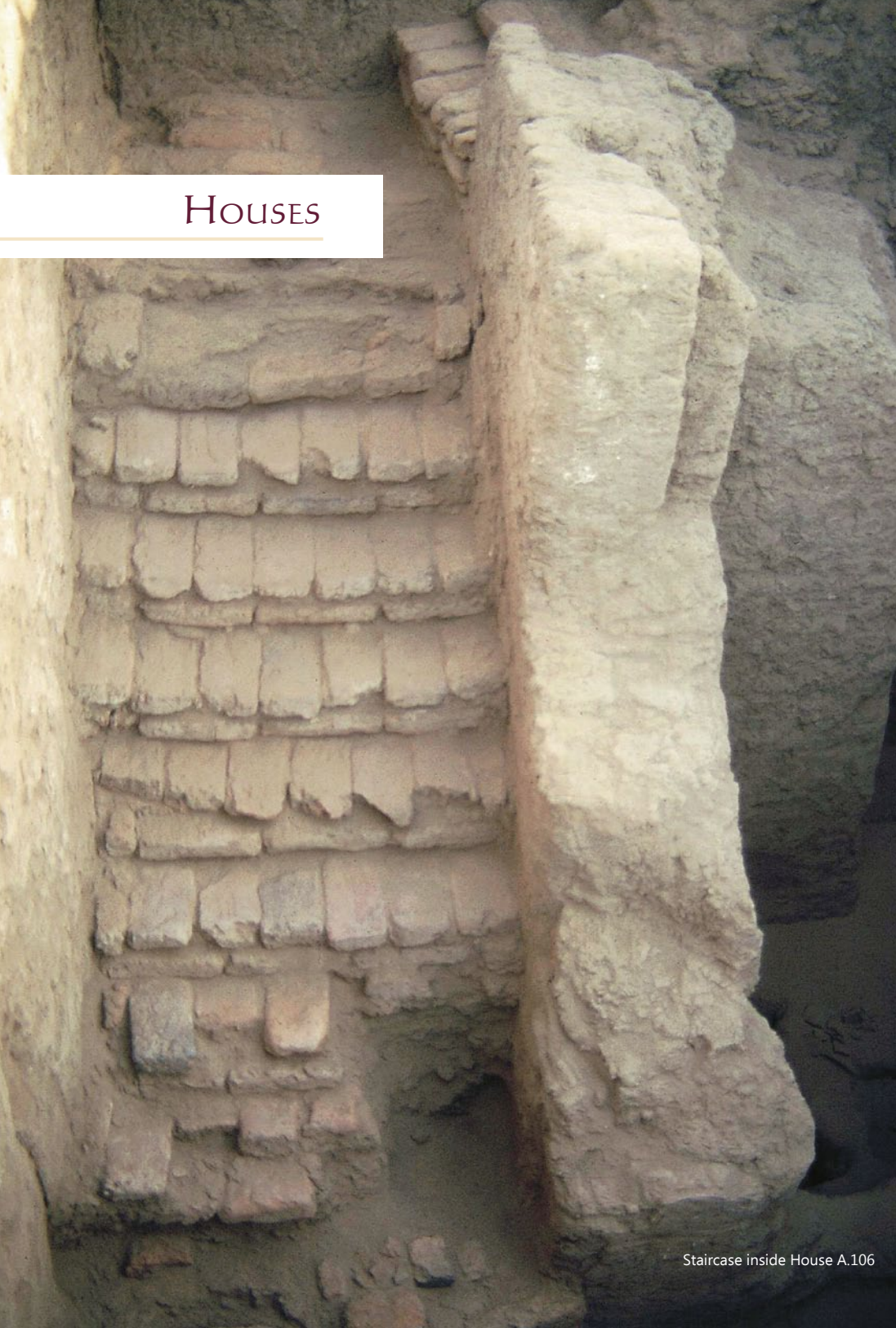


HOUSES

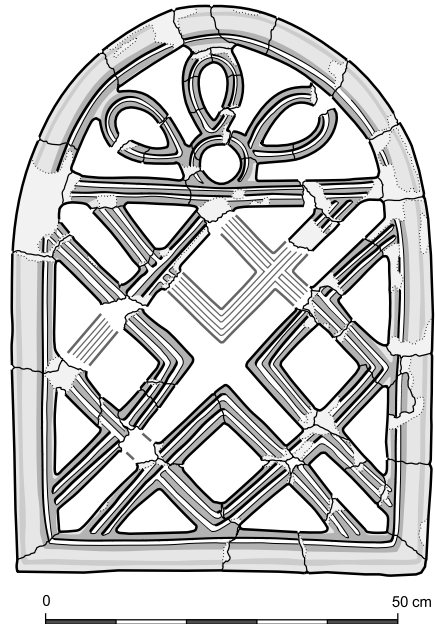


Staircase inside House A.106

Private houses were uncovered inside the fortifications, in the northwestern corner of the citadel (House A.106), as well as on the northern outskirts of the extended town (Houses A, B and PCH.1), where they formed a regular urban network. These were extensive and well-planned complexes, built of mud brick, with a ground-floor area of 100–150 m². The total utilitarian space once the upper floors were added (but without the roof terraces which these houses were furnished with) was about 200–300 m². All the excavated houses proved to have toilets with ceramic lavatory pans. Some of these interiors were decorated with murals and there was even one bathroom with two pools for bathing and a furnace for heating water.

The four houses presented here were built in the times of Early Makuria and are dated to the period of spontaneous architectural development, which occurred in the capital in the 7th and 8th century. Despite having open courtyards, the houses on the northern fringes of the town were of undoubtedly urban character without their own home economic base. Installations in the courtyards, such as furnaces for heating water and bread ovens (see page 105), supported ordinary everyday household functions. No grain silos or pens for domestic animals were recorded. The owners were undoubtedly high-ranking members of local society. The fill of the house on the citadel yielded amphorae tagged with the names of a bishop, archimandrite and archpresbyter; in the houses to the north of the town, a stela of the eparch Petros of Nobadia was discovered, as well as murals depicting figures in a royal crown.

The houses in Dongola were used for long periods of time, until the 13th century. They were refurbished and adapted repeatedly, undergoing alterations of the layout and slow deterioration of standards. In the late period, they were inhabited undoubtedly by poor families.



Terracotta window grille from House 106

A town as developed as Dongola must have also incorporated semi-permanent settlement made of reeds and wood, but so far no such remains have been found in excavation. The location of a few small churches in the northern part of the agglomeration, already outside the district occupied by masonry houses, indicates that they had served a population residing in the outlying suburbs of the town. Masu'd of Alep, envoy to the King Moise in 1175, mentioned seeing architecture of this kind (Vantini 1975: OSN 370).

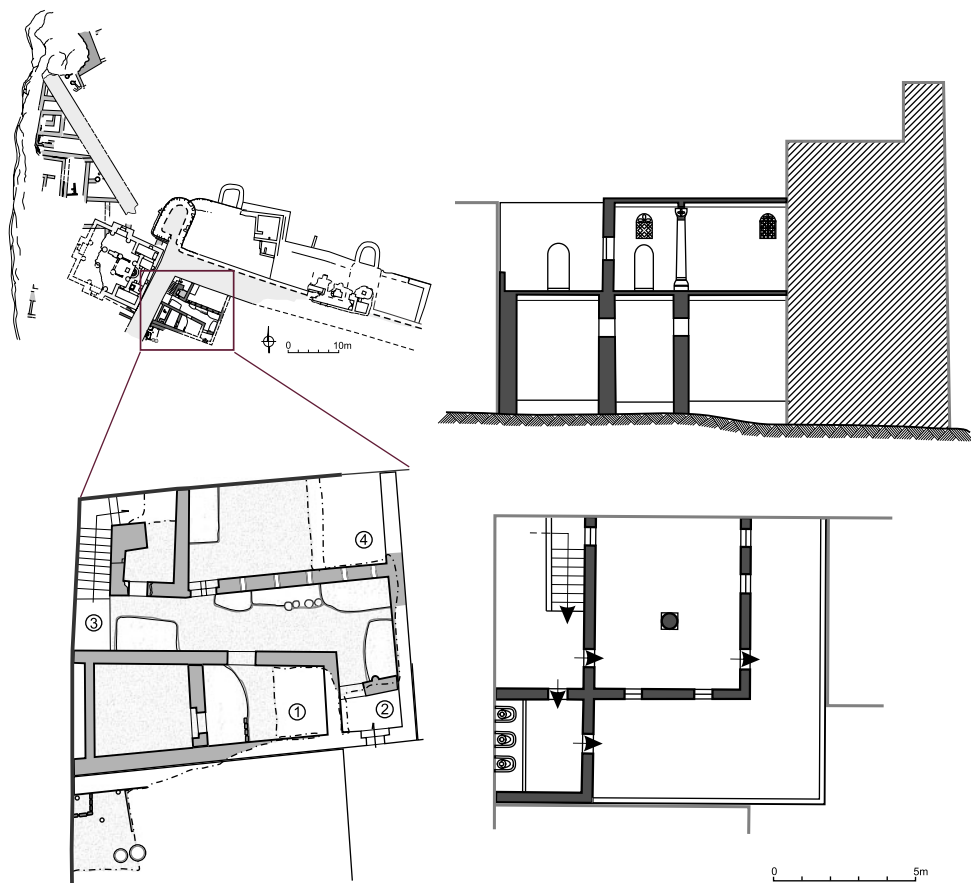
HOUSE A.106

This almost square building (10 m by 11.40 m) was erected against the inside of the rampart wall in the northwestern corner of the citadel, one in a row of buildings standing against the northern and western curtain of the massive defense walls. The house was accessible from a circuit street running inside the citadel (Godlewski 2000: 197–202; 2002b: 214–216).

The ground plan of House A.106 consisted of four interconnected rooms: a long and narrow L-shaped corridor (2) leading from the entrance to a staircase in the northwestern corner (3), but opening also onto two big rooms (1 and 4), one on the north and another on the south, the latter containing a narrow space that was set apart in the western end of the room and which served as the depository of toilet facilities on the upper floor. Evidence of wooden ceilings, in the form of sockets for beams cut into the curtain wall, was observed in room 4. The height of ground-floor rooms could thus be reconstructed at

about 3.60 m. The south wall of this room also preserved the lower sections of six slit windows, each 16 cm wide, about 60 cm high, and located about 2.50 m above walking level. The entrance to the northern room, 0.81 cm wide and 1.90 m high, was crowned with finely worked wooden beams. Similar slit windows must have existed in the south wall of the corridor, which was preserved in much worse condition. The door to room 1 was about one meter wide. A flight of steps, 1.20 m wide and constructed of red brick, led to the upper floor. Walls were finely plastered and whitewashed. A fragmentarily preserved mural could be seen on the wall west of the

House A.106, plans of the ground and first floors, and reconstructed section; location of House A.106 inside the fortifications



door to room 4, but since no broken plaster fragments were found in the fill anywhere in the excavated area, it is highly unlikely that the interior of House A.106 was decorated with paintings.

The only evidence of an upper floor belonging to this structure are big sections of 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 a 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 wooden ceiling supported



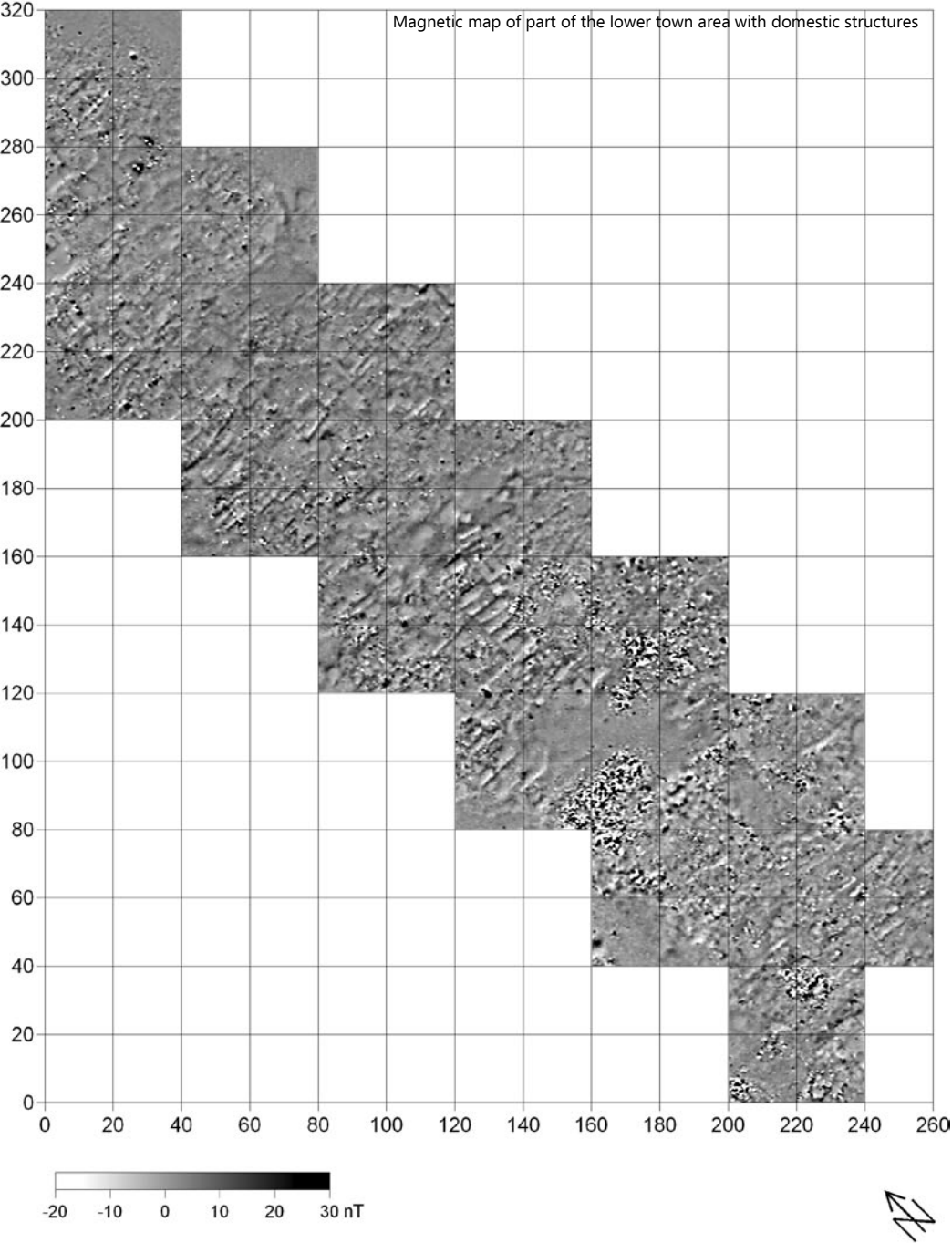
Amphora of local production, bearing an address in Greek: "*archipresbiteros Psate*"



Plate with painted decoration

on a central column may have occupied the northern part of the first floor. It was probably equipped with terraces on the east and south sides, as only then would it have been possible to have big windows with grilles in the walls of this room. At least five such grilles must have existed in the upper floor walls. Their form and decoration is differentiated, but they seem to have met the same technical requirements: height: 85 cm, width: 60 cm, thickness 4–5 cm. Most of the grilles were rectangular in shape, but at least one had a semicircular top. A sandstone balustrade presumably secured the edges of the terrace from the side of the circuit street; two pieces of such a balustrade were recorded during the excavations.

House A.106 was erected on the ruins of earlier architecture from the 6th century. It is dated on the grounds of the tableware fragments discovered in the toilet depository. Red-ware plates and flat bowls, sometimes with simple white painted decoration on the bottom inside, dated the first period of use to the mid 7th century. Window grilles, similar in execution, form and decoration to the grilles from the Church of the Granite Columns (RC.I), also speak in favor of dating the foundation of this house to the first half of the 7th century.



HOUSE PCH.1

The house in question with walls standing 2.50 m high, covered 135 m² of habitable area and some 80 m² of service courtyards adjoining the complex on the north and west. The western courtyard was not cleared completely and may be even larger. The house was built in an open area, free of structures of any kind, and so constituted presumably a freestanding building on the northern outskirts of the urban agglomeration. The houses abutting PCH.1 on the south and east were built at a later date. Houses A and B located to the north on the other side of the street should also be considered as later than this structure.

It underwent numerous alterations during its existence and was used for a long time, inevitably resulting in various modifications being introduced, at least on the ground floor (Godlewski 1991a).

The house's plan was rectangular, measuring 14.60 m by 9.20 m. Its outer walls were thicker (54 cm) than the inner partition walls (34 cm), but both kinds were well constructed of mud brick. The main entrance to the house was at the southern end of the west wall. It led to a spacious rectangular vestibule (2.90 m by 8.60 m), which served as a major passage inside the building. It is from here that the staircase and two rooms adjoining it on the east could be reached by means of two doorways. On the eastern side of the vestibule, there were three small rectangular rooms set at right angles to the vestibule; two of them, 3 and 4, were accessible from the vestibule, while room 2 could be reached from room 3. This latter room measured 2.20 m by 4.30 m; a narrow space at the east end served as the depository of toilet facilities located on the upper floor. The rooms, about 3.00 m high under a flat wooden ceiling, were lighted by slit windows (12–16 cm wide and about 60 cm high) located in the outer and inner walls. All the rooms of the ground floor were carefully plastered and whitewashed.



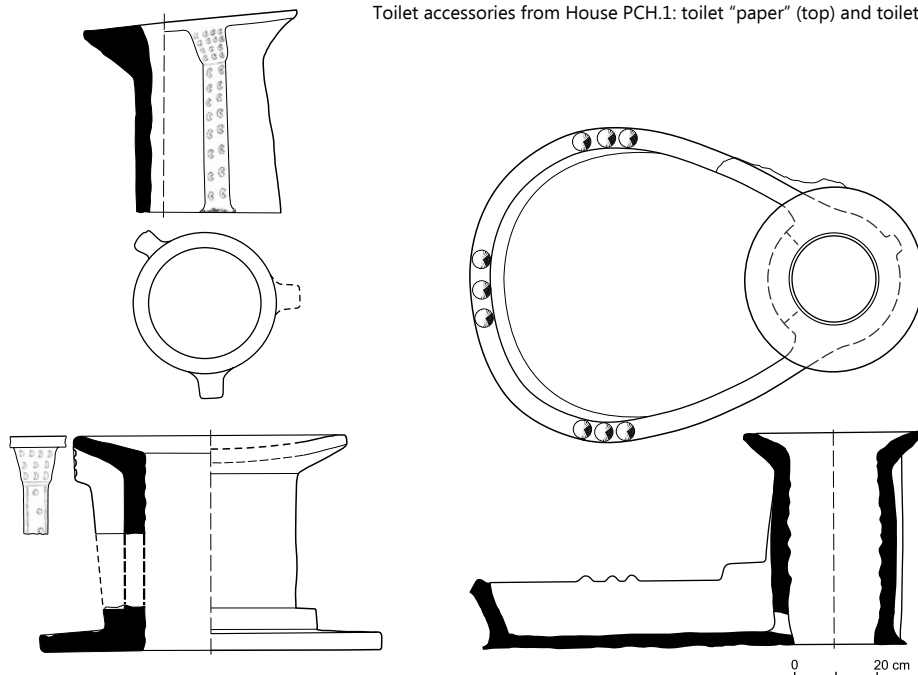
Aerial view of the northern part of the town agglomeration, arrow indicates excavated houses A, B and PCH.1

The entrance to the staircase lay in the north wall of the vestibule. The stairs, supported on vaults, were built of red brick. Two flights of steps and the first landing have survived; of the second landing there is only a part, preserved as a 'ghost' impression above the destroyed vault of the passage beneath the stairs. The corridor led to the northeastern part of the house, which was composed of two inter-connected, rectangular rooms set parallel to the staircase. The western of these two had an additional exit into the northern courtyard.

The staircase constituted indirect evidence of an upper floor, otherwise confirmed by various elements like fragments of terracotta window grilles and pieces of lime plaster of much finer quality than that noted on the walls of the ground floor, retrieved from the debris filling the rooms. The layout



Toilet accessories from House PCH.1: toilet "paper" (top) and toilet seats



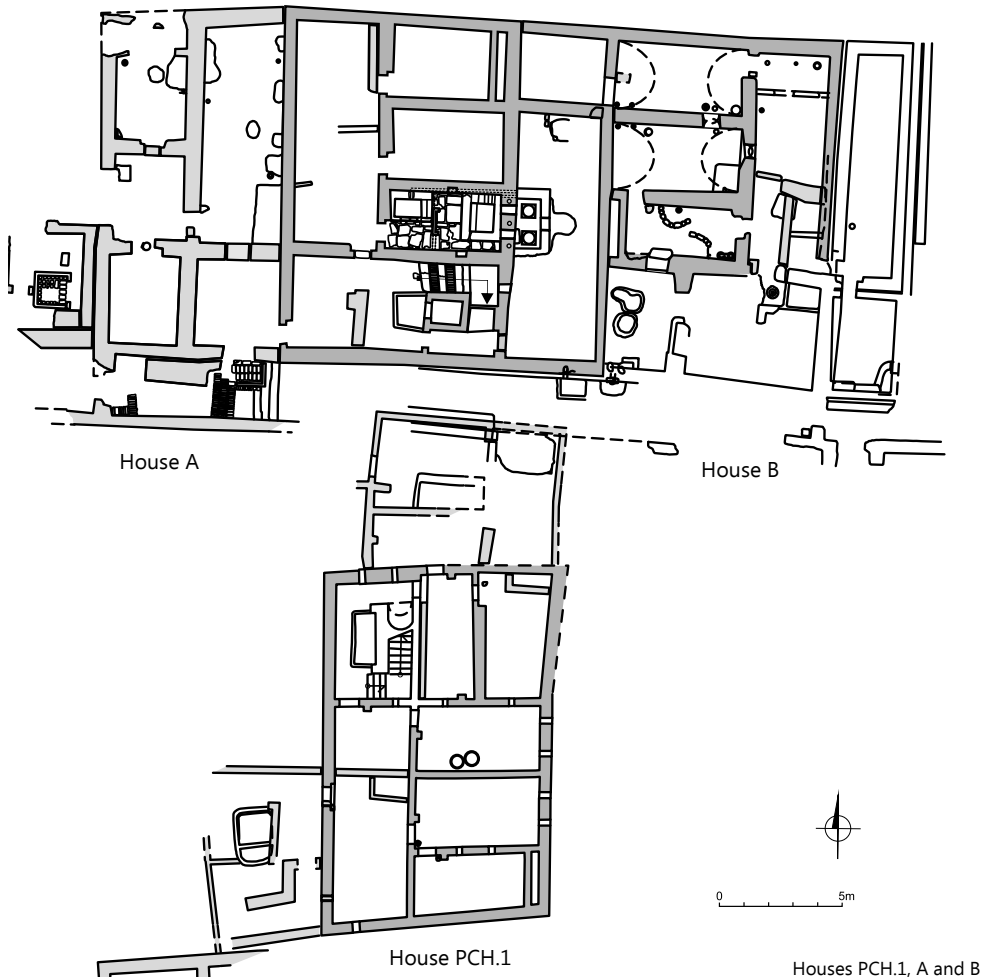
of this upper floor is not known, but logically, it need not have been much different from the ground floor. The rooms of the upper floor featured fine wall plastering and were fitted with much larger windows screened with terracotta grilles.

HOUSE A

A narrow street, 2.30 m in width, separated the enclosure of the northern courtyard of House PCH.1 from two houses A and B located to the northeast of it. The two were built practically at one time, virtually as twin

structures, and shared a courtyard for a long time. House A, to the west, undoubtedly had more luxurious facilities and featured mural decoration (Godlewski 1982; Łaptaś 1999; Martens-Czarnecka 2001: 253–259). Both houses were repeatedly enlarged and modified. A number of rooms were added to House A on its western side, changing the character of the complex and its functionality in the 12th and 13th centuries.

The original mud-brick structure was rectangular, 14.30 m by 9.50 m, its facade turned to the west with an entrance at the



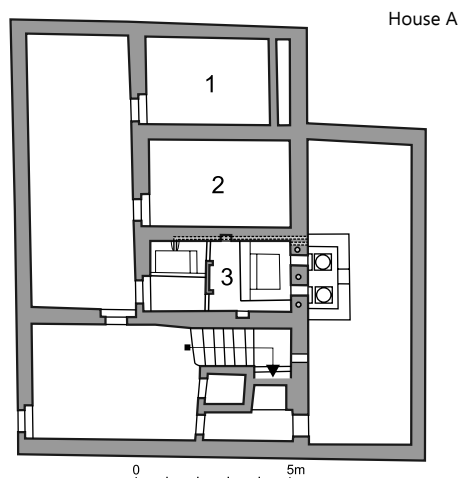
Houses PCH.1, A and B

southwestern corner. On the east side there was a rectangular courtyard. Five rooms on the ground floor included a large vestibule in the southern part of the house, combined at the east end with a staircase leading to the upper floor and a passage under the steps to the eastern corridor.

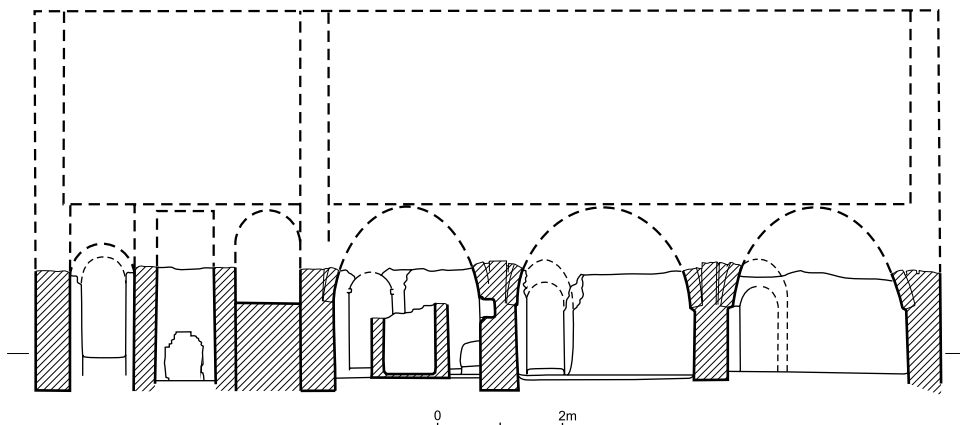
Sandstone jambs of the entrance to the northern part of the house were noted in the north wall of the vestibule. The part thus entered consisted of a long hall and three smaller rectangular rooms set at right angles and reached from it. The northeastern hall was slightly smaller than the rest, because the eastern part was separated with a transversal wall, forming the depository of a toilet on the upper floor. All rooms except for the vestibule had barrel vaults. The staircase, too, rested on vaults. The vestibule was probably two floors high. Some of the rooms were lighted by small external windows. All the inner doorways had stone arches resting on stone jambs.

Room 3 adjacent to the staircase on the north was thoroughly rebuilt soon after the original construction. A narrow wall with a shallow arched niche on the east side divided it into two. Two arched doors by the side walls gave passage from one part to the other. Both of these units were furnished with pools set against the east and north

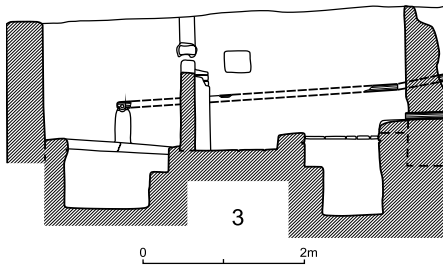
walls. The pools were faced with stone and coated with waterproof plaster. Each had a step facilitating access. The floor of the room was paved with irregularly cut stone slabs. A terracotta pipe ran along the north wall, supplying the pools with water from a tank set up above a furnace built against the outer wall in the eastern courtyard. Three vertical terracotta pipes in the east wall acted as flues bringing warm air to the rooms with pools and the upper-floor hall above it.



Reconstructed section through House A



Bathroom of House A with preserved water installation in the north wall; close-up of the tap in the pipe



The furnace in the eastern courtyard was a rectangular structure with two round pillars inside it, presumably supporting the water tank. The bottom part of the furnace, with an opening that could be opened and closed, presumably served as a hearth. The vertical pipes in the east wall of the room with pools was connected with it. Thus, room 3 may

be said to have been a bathroom with two pools for bathing, filled with hot water from the outside tank set atop the furnace.

An upper floor in House A is confirmed by the staircase and by the positioning of the toilet depository in room 1, as well as ceramic flues supplying warm air to room 3. The layout must have resembled that of the ground floor. A toilet connected with the depository, identified on the ground floor, can be situated in its northeastern part, and a heated room in the middle of the eastern side; the latter could have been a bedroom or official hall, presumably with a wooden ceiling supported on a stone column. Indeed, the entire upper floor had wooden ceilings. A presumed roof terrace would have been accessible from the staircase.

All the ground-floor rooms of House A were given a fine mud-plaster and lime-sand-plaster coating. Murals decorating the walls of the house were preserved most fully in the bathroom, as well as in the vestibule and western chamber. No traces of wall painting were in evidence in rooms 1 and 2.

The surviving murals took on the form of a continuous frieze running at the point of the springing of the vaults. The frieze consisted of a horizontal band of floral decoration (vestibule) or else a geometric guilloche with



Bread oven from House PCH.1

Murals from the bathroom in House A

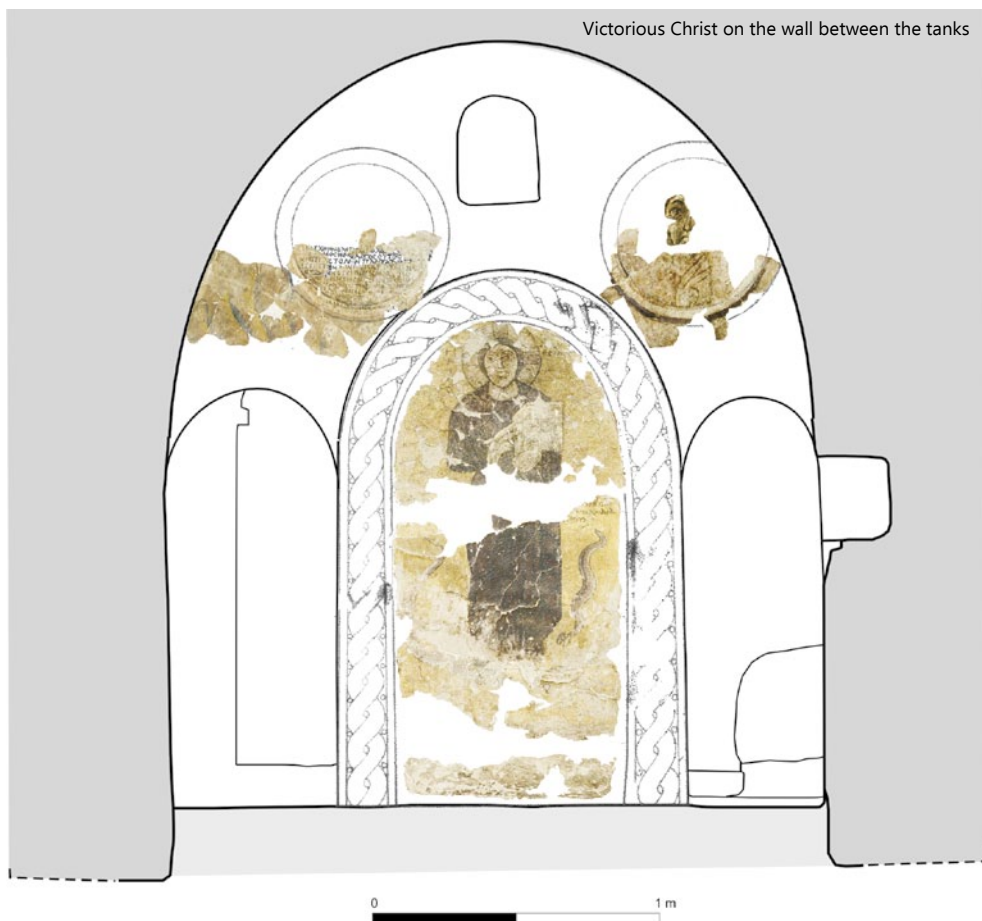


Flowers



Archangel

Victorious Christ on the wall between the tanks



crosses depicted above it (mostly surviving only in the bottom parts). A rich figural decoration was recorded in the eastern end of the bathroom. In the niche of the partition wall, there was a monumental representation of Christ in Triumph, trampling a serpent, lion and basilisk, in illustration of Psalm 90:13. A legend identified the figure as *Sol Victis*. A golden background filled the entire niche, which not only had a masonry frame, but was further accentuated with a painted guilloche on this frame. A floral composition with two tonda appeared above the arcades of the lateral passages. One tondo was filled with a text of St John Gospel, the other held a fragmentarily preserved bust of a man, most likely a saint. On the north wall, a partly presented scene depicted two archangels standing side by side. On the opposite, south wall, the artist had painted two standing figures of holy warriors, presumably Teodore Stratelatos and Merkurios, slaying the apostate emperor. The east wall with two windows bore a floral decoration consisting of large flower buds in the corners of the room and a guilloche under the window sills (Martens-Czarnecka 2001: 253–259).

The repertory of paintings discovered in House A has led most experts to consider a liturgical function for this room, despite the obvious indications provided by the bathing facilities. The niche with the Christ mural was venerated even after the house had been abandoned, as indicated by late oil lamps that were left even on top of the sand dune penetrating into the interior of the room.

All paintings were taken off the walls of the house and were transferred, after conservation, to the collection of the National Museum in Khartoum.

HOUSE B

Rectangular house B in the eastern part of the complex appears as a virtual mirror reflection of House A. The entrance was in the east facade. There were six rooms on the ground floor. A vestibule on the south side

of the structure opened into a very damaged western staircase. In the north end, there was a very big eastern chamber opening into three smaller units set perpendicularly to it. The courtyard between houses A and B was entered from the northern of these rooms. Chamber next to the staircase was smaller, having a toilet depository arranged in the back of it. Vaults, only partly preserved, covered the entire northern end of the house. In the south, there is no evidence of ceilings, perhaps there was a wooden ceiling above this chamber, which could have been higher than the rest, as in the southern end of House A. It is likely that House B was enlarged at some point when additional rooms were added in the eastern part.

Again, there is no evidence of an upper floor, except indirect proof like the toilet depository and the staircase.

The interior was given a plaster coating and it is very likely that it was painted. The evidence is modest to the utmost: a few pieces of plaster with color polychromy found in the fill of the rooms. They could have come from the upper floor. The best preserved piece is a fragment of a small composition depicting a figure dressed in a royal crown with horns.



Fragmentary image of a royal crown, mural from House B