

An aerial photograph of a desert landscape. In the upper left, there is a small settlement with several buildings and a green rectangular area, possibly a field or garden. The rest of the landscape is arid and sandy. A prominent feature is a large, dark, rocky mound in the upper right. Scattered across the middle and lower parts of the image are numerous circular mounds, which are the tumuli of the cemetery. Several of these mounds are enclosed by low, light-colored walls. A dirt road or path winds through the landscape, passing between the mounds. The overall scene is a mix of natural desert features and human-made structures.

CEMETERIES

Tumulus cemetery in El Ghaddar

Two rock-cut tombs are to be found on the southeastern fringes of the modern village of El Ghaddar, just 2.5 km away from the Citadel. The rocky rise is not extensive in size and its surface has been heavily eroded. Avast tumulus necropolis of post-Meroitic date extended close-by to the northeast, in the direction of Gebel Ghaddar.

ROCK-CUT TOMBS

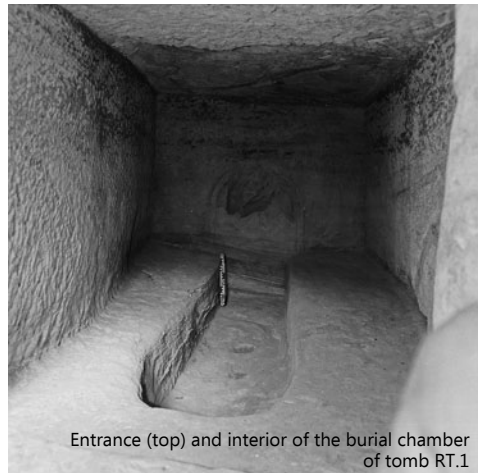
Discovered by local inhabitants, the tombs were first explored in 1948, but no records of these investigations were kept. The tombs were cleared once more in 1971 and again in 1981. Of the burials and potential tomb equipment nothing is known except for a note in the NCAM archives, describing the finding of "fragments of bone and an earthenware lamp of about 13 cm in diameter" inside RT.1 (Jakobielski 1982a).

The two tombs were quite evidently solitary in this location, cut into the soft sandstone and devoid of the accompanying superstructures, which have been eroded completely or, had they been raised of stone blocks, dismantled to salvage the building material. The tombs themselves are just 8 m apart. They are furnished with burial shafts and a wide staircase leading to the burial chamber from the west.

The layout leaves no doubt as to the Christian attribution of the tombs. The two are similar, but not identical, with a carved cross decorating the lintel on the facade of RT.1 and burial niches of anthropomorphic shape cut in the floor, leaving a rounded place for the head oriented to the west. Tomb RT.2 with its two crypts finds a close parallel in a masonry tomb located beneath the apse of the Commemorative Building BX, although there the shaft entrance was placed on the east side for purely practical reasons.

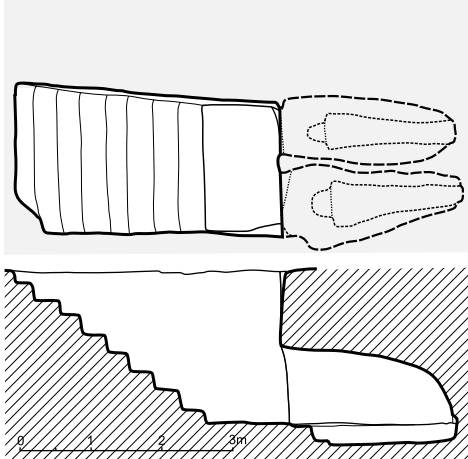
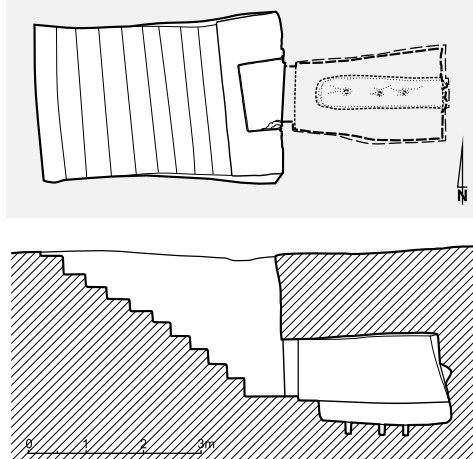
The only clue for dating is based on the lintel decoration from the facade of RT.1. No monumental tombs of a similar kind have ever been found in Dongola and not a single fragment of a funerary stela belonging to

a Makurian king has been found so far. Surely, the royal graves are still to be discovered, perhaps somewhere in the vaults of the church structures on the Citadel. On the other hand, considering the monumental aspect of the rock tombs and their localization near the tumulus cemetery and not far from the Citadel, one could suggest that they had been made for the rulers of Makuria, who had already moved their seat to a freshly constructed fortress on the citadel, but had

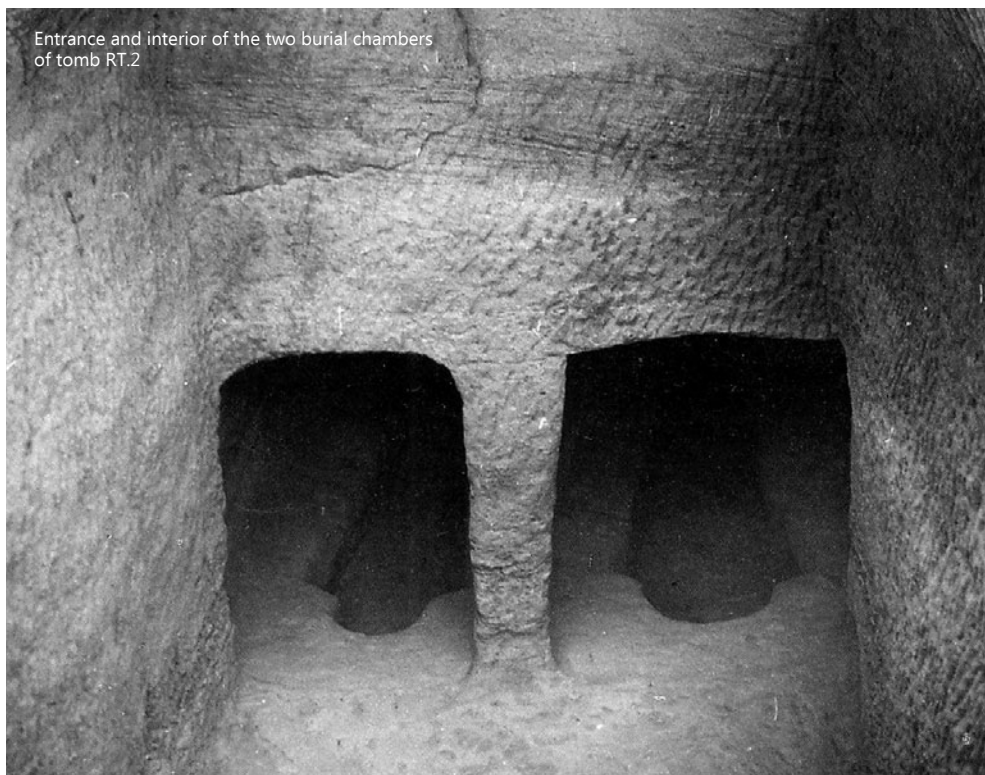


Entrance (top) and interior of the burial chamber of tomb RT.1

Rock-cut tombs RT.1 (left) and RT.2



Entrance and interior of the two burial chambers of tomb RT.2



still retained the age-old Nubian tradition of being buried away from their residence.

The architecture of the tombs is also telling. The stepped shafts descend directly into the burial chambers, as called for in the well-documented Kushite tradition well preserved on the late Southern Cemetery at Gebel Barkal, e.g., tombs Bar.16–17; 19; 21–25 (Dunham 1957: 100–106), not to mention examples of post-Meroitic date from Ballaña, among others. Unlike the tombs from Nuri and Meroe, however, there are no offering chambers in Dongola and this absence could be explained by a change of ritual imposed by the adoption of new religious norms. In the Christian tradition, the dead did not need to be furnished with any tomb equipment or burial offerings.

The heavily eroded rock surface above and around the tombs lends no suggestion as to the appearance of the superstructures. A tumulus form is rather out of the question. It may have been a kind of stone structure within an enclosure wall. The crypts of the BX structure were associated with a large church building, whereas the much later Christian tomb superstructures of the 9th and 10th centuries took the shape of small monolithic buildings with a central dome set up over the grave.

TOMB RT.1

The shaft is rectangular, 4 m long, 2.70 m wide and 2.65 m deep. It contained a rock-cut staircase of 11 steps, which were as wide as the shaft. The entrance to the burial chamber, 0.96 m by 0.94 m, was positioned centrally in the east wall. The facade was decorated with carved reveals and had a smoothed lintel, in the center of which there was a cross inscribed in a circle, measuring 30 cm in diameter. A small niche, presumably for an oil lamp, was cut into the wall face to the right of the entrance.

The rectangular burial chamber (2.60 m long, 1.20–1.50 m wide, 1.05–1.25 m high)

had a cross inscribed in a tondo, set in a niche decorating the east wall. The cross is heavily damaged. A rectangular burial niche with rounded western end was cut into the floor of the chamber. It was 2.22 m long, 0.52 m wide and 0.34 m deep. Three vertical holes 6 cm across and 20 cm deep were cut into the floor of this specific form of coffin.

There is no evidence of how the entrance to the burial chamber was closed; it may have been sealed with a wall of bricks.

TOMB RT.2

A rectangular shaft, measuring 3.75 m in length, 1.75–2.00 m in width and 2.10 m in height, was furnished with a nine-step staircase cut into the rock to the full width of the shaft. Two plain entrances opened in the east wall, giving access to two burial chambers. The northern one was slightly wider — 0.86 m to 0.68 m of the southern one. Both were 1.06 m high.

The northern chamber was 0.96 m wide and 2.40 m long, the height being 1.08 m at the beginning. Towards the back of the chamber it narrowed both in width and in height to form a small niche at the end. The burial niche cut in the floor was of anthropomorphic shape, 1.98 m long and a maximum 0.52 m wide, carved to a depth of 0.34 m. In the rounded western end there appeared to be a 'pillow' under the head.

The southern chamber was very much like the northern one in shape (1.48 m long by 1.10 m wide, 1.05 m high) and it was also furnished with an anthropomorphic niche cut into the floor, 2.10 m long and a maximum 0.58 m wide, the depth being the same 0.34 m.

Both entrances to the burial chambers may have been sealed with fired-brick walls. Some pieces of red brick bearing traces of mud mortar used for bonding, were discovered in the fill. The entrances, however, yielded no evidence of any kind of blocking.

TUMULUS CEMETERY

The cemeteries of the town spread along the desert edge east of the agglomeration for about 4 km. The oldest part was in the north, near Gebel Ghaddar, where the tumulus tombs of the 5th and 6th century were located (El-Tayeb 1994; Godlewski, Kociankowska-Bożek 2010). The center, in the general area of the monastery, was composed of Christian graves dating from

El Ghaddar cemetery, southern part

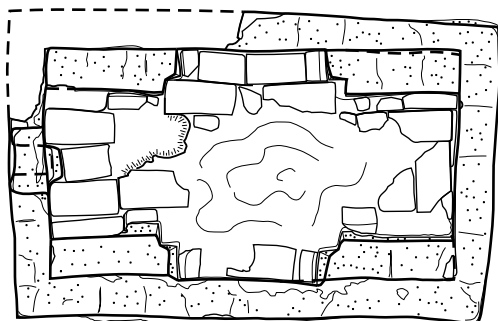


the 6th through the 14th century (Żurawski 1997a; 1999). Unfortunately, these structures are not easily recognizable on the ground surface. The southern end of the cemetery field with the characteristic *qubb*as can be linked with the period from the 15th century through modern times. The oldest Muslim burials from the 14th–15th century must have been near the Mosque, where rock-cut tombs have been revealed in the eroded rock surface. The modern Muslim cemetery partly overlies Christian burials.

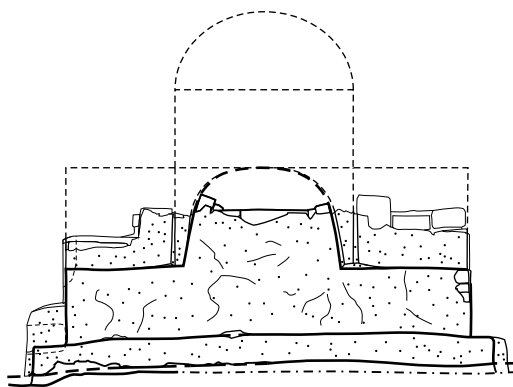
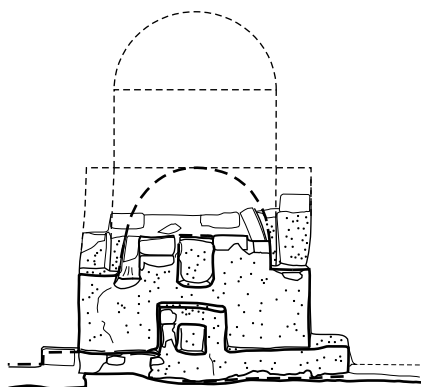
CHRISTIAN BURIALS

Christian graves were positioned also around the churches and cathedrals, as well as in crypts inside church interiors. Most of the burial chambers were square brick-built shafts that gave access to the underground chamber from the west. Burials were usually single, although communal graves are also known, especially in the neighborhood of the monastery, and rather from a late period, that is, from the 11th through 13th centuries. The tombs near the monastery are usually interpreted as monks' graves, although it has proved impossible so far to identify characteristics for distinguishing lay burials from monastic ones.

The surviving funerary monuments present a considerable variety of form, a catalogue of these from the cemetery of Dongola was published by A. Łajtar (2011). The brick tomb superstructures can be rectangular and plastered, or they can be cruciform in shape with barrel-shaped arms, or finally, they can be cruciform in plan with a dome or cylinder in the center. Each of these plastered superstructures had a place in the west front for fixing a funerary stela, below which there was usually a small square niche or box intended for an oil lamp. Ceramic crosses could have topped such tombs, but none have been discovered in place. Extensive excavations of the necropolis surface, covering an area of more than a dozen square meters, have demon-



Reconstruction of the tomb superstructure THNW 7



Tomb superstructure THNW 7, seen from the west



Tombstone of Paulos, eparch of Nobadia

strated care in arranging the tombs in regular rows. Thus, it cannot be excluded that the cemetery of Dongola had a topographical layout of its own with tombs appearing in rows and regular access paths. There is no doubt that visits of relatives to the cemetery were regular.

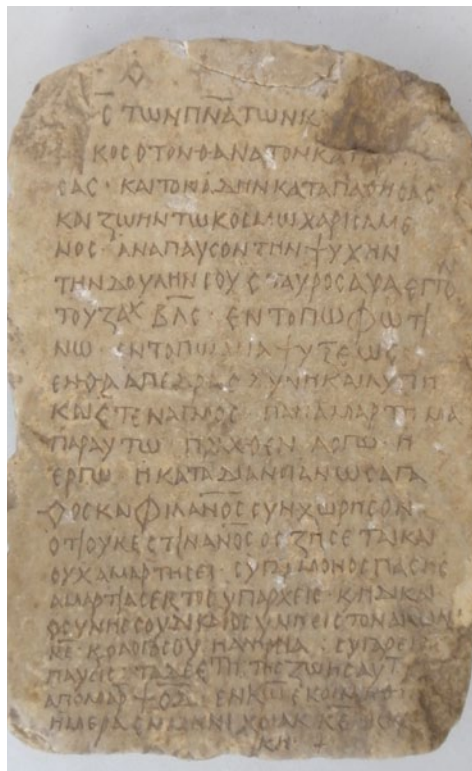
GENERAL REMARKS

A few of the tombs investigated so far appear to have been exceptional. Their underground part is unique and it can only be presumed that the architectural appearance of the now lost superstructure was not typical or mediocre in the least. Suffice it to mention a large tumulus tomb surrounded by numerous rectangular Christian graves raised of brick; the rock tombs with monumental staircase leading to a burial chamber from the west, interpreted as royal burials; the

two crypts under the apse of Building X (BX), interpreted as the tombs of the apostles of Makuria (see pages 7, 40–41, 64); the grand tomb of a woman by the south wall of the east arm of the Cruciform Church and finally, the mausoleum of bishops in the Northwest Annex of the monastery (see pages 87ff). In the last mentioned case, the funerary crypt of Archbishop Georgios, who died in 1113, holds a special position because of the exceptional redaction of texts of “Great Power”, inscribed in ink on the plastered walls and vault (Łajtar, van der Vliet 2012).

An interesting phenomenon is constituted by the appearance in Dongola of commemorative monuments directly connected with the crypts and the individuals buried there. The oldest chapel of this kind was established in the mid 9th century in the

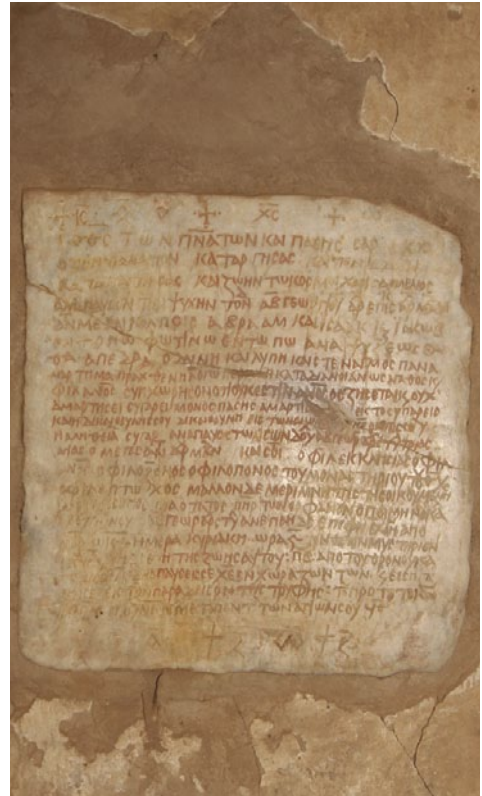
Tombstone of Staurosafa, died 1057



eastern arm of the Cruciform Church (CC). It was separated out as a whole and furnished with a *synthronon*, altar and large funerary monument in the form of a big cross mounted in the chapel floor, above one of the crypts of the mid 6th century, which are to be connected with Building BX. The long veneration of the two men buried in the crypts, lasting uninterrupted from the mid 6th century through the end of the 14th, has given rise to the idea that there were the burials of the “apostles” of Makuria.

In the 11th century or at the beginning of the 12th century at the latest, an elaborate mausoleum with two chapels and a shared prothesis was established for bishops in the Northwest Annex of the Monastery of St Anthony the Great (see Mausoleum of bishops, page 87). The issue awaits a detailed discussion in the light of similar complexes known from the Cathedral of Petros in Pachoras and from the church at Banganarti.

Tombstone of Joseph, bishop of Syene



Tombstone of Archbishop Georgios, died AD 1113, found in the bishop's crypt

FUNERARY STELAE

An overwhelming majority of the funerary stelae from Dongola was written in Greek (Łajtar 1997; 2001). No more than a few have been preserved that are actually in Coptic and they usually belonged to monks. One exceptional tombstone was that of Joseph, bishop of Syene (Jakobielski, van der Vliet 2011).

No early Arab stelae are known, but this is hardly surprising, considering that Muslims did not appear in Dongola in significant numbers before the end of the 13th century. Earlier residents of the Muslim faith would have been reduced to passing merchants and diplomats.