Palace

Pavement of Building IV on the citadel, south of the "Palace of Ioannes" (B.I)

The rulers of Makuria envisioned the citadel in Dongola as a place of economic and social security, as well as a mark of prestige and a convenient and comfortable residence. The massive ramparts were designed to stop invaders, but the prime objective of all construction within the walls was to provide the king and his household with a residence, and to establish a center of royal administration, where wealth and economic resources could be collected as well. Knowledge of the architecture on the Dongolan citadel is still poor. Private houses certainly occupied the northwestern part of the Citadel and in the southwestern sector (SWN) three buildings making up the royal palace complex were uncovered: Building I ("Palace of Ioannes"), Cruciform Building (B.III) and Building V, a royal church. The second of these three was a commemorative structure raised in honor of the defenders of Dongola and to commemorate the signing of the *baqt* treaty with the Caliphate. Its presence here emphasizes the prestige of the place, prestige further confirmed not only by the reason for the commemoration, but also by the form of the building and the decoration of the interior.

The extensive structure spreading north of the monument, Building I, appears to have been constructed earlier, in the end of 6th century. It was linked with the river harbor, which thus constituted an integral part of the palace complex. The river entrance to the building led up a staircase directly to the residential upper floor. The ground floor was accessed from a circuit street inside the citadel from the north and most probably also from the east.

On the other side of the commemorative monument stood a very fine building (B.V), undoubtedly of later date, furnished with a central dome on the ground floor. The King's Church is a medium-sized building, 24 m by 15 m, built on exposed ground, on an artificial platform. It was made of red brick, including bricks of special shape for the construction of round pillars and

Relics of earlier architecture under the walls of the "Palace of Ioannes" (B.I.41)

pilasters (see page 119). The plan was of the cross-over-rectangle type with projecting north and south arms.

The oldest building in this part of the town (B.IV) seems to be of 6th century date. Only a fragmentary brick pavement and the south wall were discovered in the area between the Cruciform Building and the "Palace of Ioannes". Indeed, it was mostly taken apart when the palace was being constructed. Further excavations in the area should answer questions concerning the layout of this structure and its function. Relics of architecture dated by pottery finds to the mid 6th century were found also in the western part of the palace, below rooms B.I.41–42.

BUILDING I: "PALACE OF IOANNES"

This extensive building — the available area on the ground floor exceeded 1200 m^2 — was erected against the western curtain wall. The walls were constructed in a mixed technique, using red brick, sandstone blocks and mud brick. The outer face of walls was made of red brick, which was structurally interconnected with mud brick on the inside. Red brick was used in structurally important places inside the building, like staircase vaulting, window arches and nests under wooden ceiling beams on the ground floor. Sandstone can be seen reinforcing wall corners and in entrance facades and arches of the doors. The technique is especially well discernible in the staircase leading to the upper floor from the river entrance. The stairwell projected from the building facade. The bottom parts of the walls were constructed of stone blocks, particular courses rising highest in the entrance with its arch of stone voussoirs. The upper parts were faced with red brick, which was used also for the underlying vaults.

The other, northern entrance to the palace was more monumental. The decorated arch built of sandstone voussoirs had a keystone bearing the monogram of the founder Ioannes. This northern entrance led to a spacious vestibule (B.I.24 and B.I.44). A stone arcade, which has partly been preserved, led from there, down a long corridor (B.I.11), to the western part of the edifice.

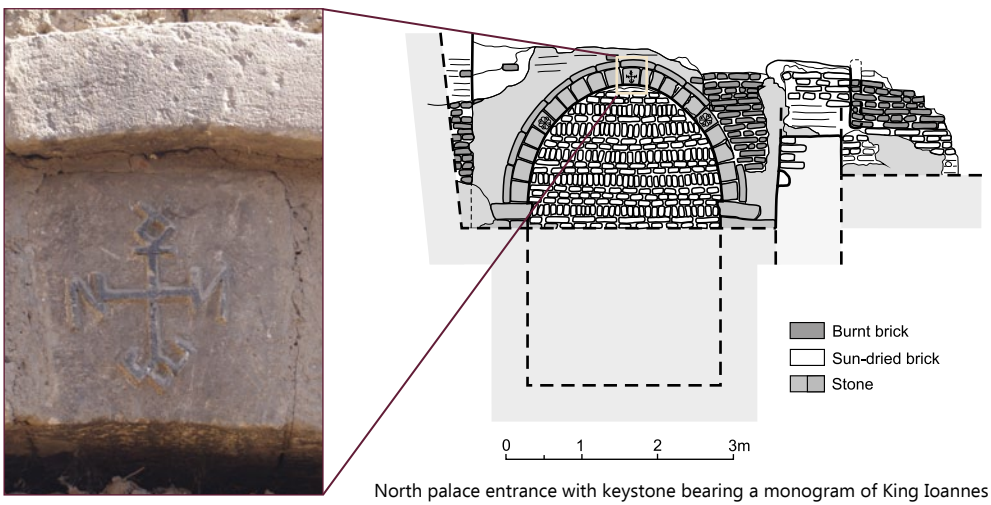
The ground floor was fairly high, walls being preserved to a height of 4.50 m. The ceilings were presumably of wood and there were big arched windows and narrow slots (110 x 13 cm), lighting up and ventilating the structure. The western part of the palace, situated immediately next to the citadel walls, served domestic functions and was lower than the rest of the building. The main part was divided into a few smaller segments separated by corridors running E–W and N–S. The function of particular rooms, not to mention the exact layout, requires further study, identification being made all the more difficult because the structure was rebuilt comprehensively in the 13th century and the ground floor rooms filled in with rubble at this time. The central and eastern part of the building was still operational in changed form in the 14th and 15th century, being inhabited presumably by entirely new residents. The upper floor of the palace has been preserved in places, but the layout is yet to be recognized.

To recapitulate, the ground floor served administrative and economic functions, while the upper floor or floors were residential and official in character.

The king's staircase, entry to the upper palace floor from the river gate

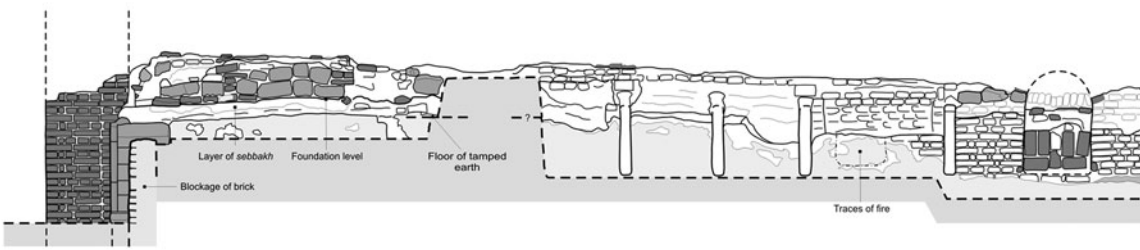
The western, functionally subordinated part of the palace has yielded several deposits of pottery and other refuse, which have proved important for the dating of the original structure to the end of the 6th century. Imported amphorae from Egypt and the Eastern Mediterranean, discovered in some quantity in the fill here, constitute tangible proof of effective regulation of the commerce between Makuria and Dar el-Islam, apparently in continuation of an earlier agreement between Makuria and Byzantine Egypt.

South palace facade — lion-shaped supports of a stone bench next to the entrance



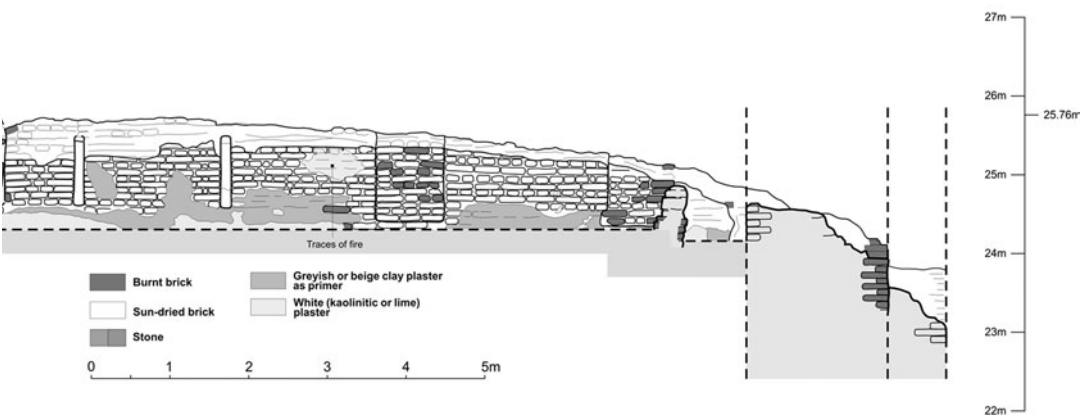
North palace entrance with keystone bearing a monogram of King Ioannes

Plan of site SWN on the citadel



Cross-section looking east through Room 11 of the "Palace of Ioannes" (B.I)

Site SWN on the citadel: eastern part of the "Palace of Ioannes" (B.I) and Commemorative Building (B.III.1) in 2001



Wine

Units B.I.15 and B.I.36 in the "Palace of Ioannes" were most probably depositories of palace latrines located on the upper floor. They yielded a huge amount of amphorae, both imported and locally produced, as well as local tableware. Similar material of even greater interest came from a small trench excavated in the northwestern corner of room B.I.37, below floor level. It consisted of several hundred fragments of amphorae from Egypt and Palestine, among which the best represented were amphorae from the vicinity of Aswan, from Middle Egypt (LR 7) and the Mareotic region (Danys-Lasek 2012: 322–327).

In Dongola it was the first such large ensemble of imported amphorae and mud stoppers with inscribed seal impressions, dated to the second half of the 6th and the 7th centuries. The presence of only pitched amphorae in deposits from units B.I.15 and B.I.36 suggested that the inhabitants of building (B.I) were fond of wine of Palestinian and Egyptian origin. The material has also given a better understanding of the political and economic relations of Makuria with the Byzantine administration in the 6th/7th century and with the Arab administration in the 7th century.

A count of amphora toes indicated that the material from this trench contained at least 17 Aswan jars and 20 Middle Egyptian ones. At least four separate Mareotic amphorae were counted in the set, although the quantity of sherds suggested a greater number. There were also two amphorae from Gaza and the region of Syria and Palestine, but these seem to have been isolated speci-

Amphora from the Mareotis region in Egypt, bearing a Greek inscription

mens. A small number of sherds was identified as local vessels, produced in Dongola.

Accompanying the amphorae were mud stoppers, two still attached to the rims of Aswan amphorae. One was made of lime mortar, three others of marl clay with the stamped surfaces concealed under a layer of mud and stamped again. The lime stopper had a *gamma* written on it in red ink. Several similar lime-mortar stoppers were found in the fill of units B.I.37 and B.I.42. The stoppers made of lime mortar and of marl clay may have been used with Mareotic amphorae. Of utmost interest are the stamped stoppers with mud cap, which appear to be unparalleled in the Nubian material published to date. This may have exemplified double marking of wine amphorae — by the producer and by the warehouse — when wine was transported over long distances and at least two customs checkpoints had to be crossed when entering and exiting a territory.

An initial study of the amphorae and stoppers from the "Palace of Ioannes" has led to the conclusion that the wine imported from the north must have been a luxury beverage for the royal retinue. The habit proved so compelling that vine saplings were adapted to local climatic conditions and wine started to be produced locally.

Deposit inside palace room B.I.15

The sudden rise in the manufacture of local amphorae on the spot in Dongola, dated to the 7th century, may thus be a reflection of this new industry.

This change of tastes certainly had to do with the establishment of close relations with the Byzantine world, especially with Egypt, in the second half of the 6th century. The journey of royal envoys of the king of Makuria bringing a giraffe and a leopard to the court of Justin II in Constantinople in 572, as described by John of Biclar, indicates Makuria's already lively relations with the Byzantine world. These contacts must have been associated with the Christianization of the royal court of Makuria by an imperial

Double-cap mud stopper sealing an amphora

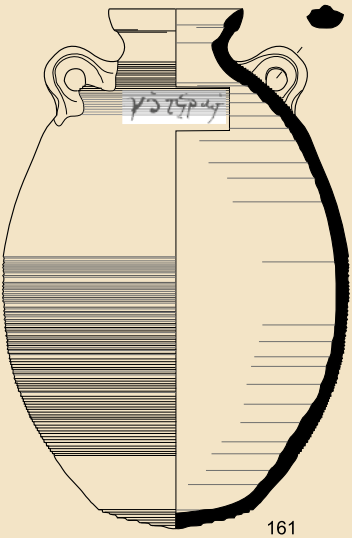
mission in the 540s, indirectly mentioned by John of Ephesus. Egyptian wine, and presumably also Palestinian wine, much less common in the Dongolan palace, certainly came directly from Egypt.

Wine from Egypt and Palestine was transported across the lands of the kingdom of Nobadia, which, until the end of the 570s, in the time of the journey of bishop Longinus of Nobadia to Soba, did not have friendly relations with Makuria, as it is implied by John of Ephesus in his account of Longinus's trip. The bishop had to travel along the Red Sea coast. The Dongolan discovery of stoppers made of lime and of marl clay smeared with a layer of mud with new seal impressions may have to do with the transport of wine from Egypt to Dongola through Nobadian territory. At this point it is worth emphasising that goods known to have come from Nobadia, especially pottery, were not found upriver from the Third Cataract in the 5th and early 6th century, in early Makuria. This is an indication of there being no trade between the emerging kingdoms of Nobadia and Makuria, and most probably also political rivalry between these two states, which had emerged on the ruins of Meroe.

Clearly, trade between Makuria and Egypt was not limited to wine. In the trench below the floor of room B.I.37 there were glass and metal objects, most probably of Egyptian origin as well. Knowledge of Makurian goods exported to Egypt is not sufficient. We can suspect, however, that the political and economic agreement signed in the mid-7th century by ʿAbdallah b. Abī Sarh, the Arab governor of Egypt, and Qalidurut, King of Makuria, was a continuation of Makuria's earlier trade relations with Byzantium and it may have concerned a similar selection of so-called African goods and slaves (Godlewski 2013b).

The import of wine from Egypt (and from the entire territory ruled by the early caliphs) was included in the political and economic treaty signed in the mid-seventh century (*baqt*) and material proof of its implementation is found in Dongola in the form of numerous Egyptian amphorae (Mareotis, Middle Egypt) and a few amphorae from Palestine found in the deposits filling the palace, dated to the second half of the seventh century. However, the plenitude of local amphorae also indicates that wine production was already thriving in the gardens of the Letti Basin, the economic hinterland of Dongola. The wines from Egypt and Palestine must have tasted better and been more appreciated at the royal table and were therefore mentioned in the *baqt*.

Stamped amphora mud stoppers from the palace store rooms



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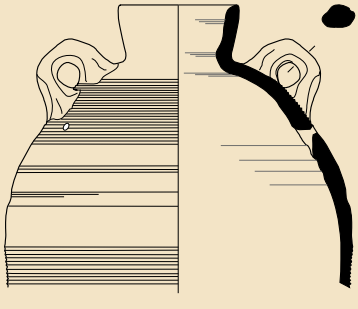

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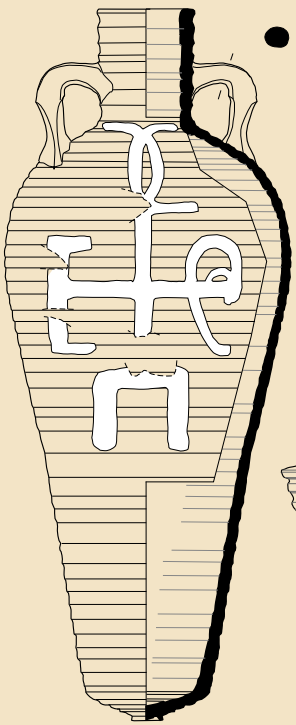
Mareotic LR 5/6

Palestinian

Aswan



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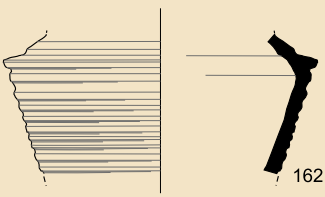

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Middle Egypt LR 7

0 3 cm

Imported amphorae excavated in the rubbish dumps inside the "Palace of Ioannes"