Włodzimierz Godlewski

Old Dongola: Kom A (Acropolis), 2005

Polish Archaeology in the Mediterranean 17, 287-299

2007

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MUZEUM HISTORII POLSKI

OLD DONGOLA
KOM A (ACROPOLIS), 2005

Włodzimierz Godlewski

Excavations of site SWN on the citadel of Old Dongola were continued in the winter season of 2005 (January 27-March 3) by a PCMA expedition headed by Prof. Dr. Włodzimierz Godlewski.[1] The main objectives of work in the southwestern part of the citadel {Fig. 1}[2] included establishing the extent of Palace B.I, especially to the northeast, and determining the nature of the occupation of the ground-floor rooms in the southwestern part of the complex. The trench of 2003 was extended to the south and east of Building B.III. In the end effect, three main stages of development were distinguished for palace B.I and the post-Makurian phase of architecture in the eastern part of the palace was examined more thoroughly. Investigations inside B.III were also completed. To the south of the structure, the northwestern corner of yet another monumental building was uncovered (B.V). The southern part of B.II, a fortified enclosure erected to protect B.I and B.III on the river side, was further explored.

The pottery deposit discovered in room B.I.15 in the previous two seasons was documented and a study was completed of the amphorae, both local and imported from Egypt and Palestine, excavated on the citadel.[3]

The conservation effort included repairs on the roof shelter constructed over Building B.III in 2003[4] and damaged during recent high winds {cf. Fig. 7}. Inside Building B.V, the wall tops were protected.

1 The team included: Ms Dobiesława Bagińska, Mr. Artur Obłuski, Ms Dobrochna Zielińska, archaeologists; Mr. Bartosz Wojciechowski, student of archaeology from Warsaw University. The NCAM was represented by Ms Habab Idris and Mr. El Montaser Dafalla. Words of thanks are due Dr. Hasan Hussein Idris, Director General, as well as all the NCAM staff, in Khartum and in the field, for their efficiency and continuous efforts to facilitate the mission's work.

2 For an extended report of the previous season, see *PAM XV, Reports 2003* (2004), 193-230. See also W. Godlewski, Old Dongola, in: Sudan. Ancient Treasures. An Exhibition of Recent Discoveries from the Sudan National Museum, eds D.A. Welsby & J.R. Anderson (The British Museum Press 2004), 209-213.

3 PhD dissertation by D. Bagińska, submitted to Warsaw University in 2006.

4 Cf. *PAM* XV, op. cit., 206, Fig. 12.

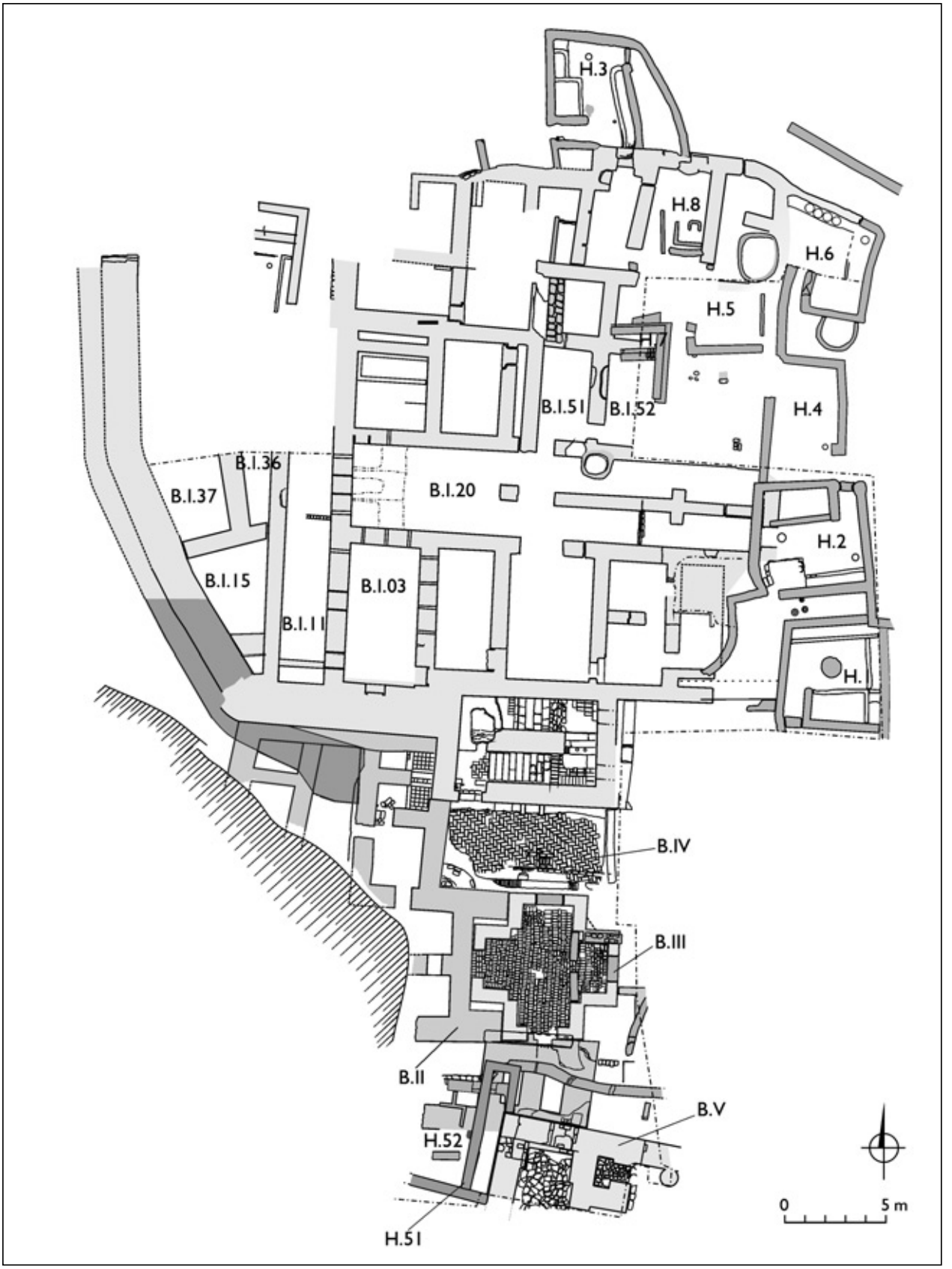


Fig. 1. Plan of buildings uncovered on site SWN on the citadel of Dongola, 2005 (Drawing W. Godlewski, M. Puszkarski, D. Zielińska)

PALACE B.I

Excavations inside the big palatial structure, which covers at least 1000 m^2, were concentrated on the central and eastern parts [cf. *Fig. 1*]. Post-Makurian architecture was uncovered and development in this part of the complex examined, revealing alterations of the palace interiors on the first floor made during the last phase of occupation of the building in the 14th century. In the southwestern part of the complex, ground-floor rooms B.I.20, B.I.03, B.I.11 were investigated, as well as B.I.36 and 37 by the inner wall of the fortification, to the north of B.I.15, which contained the depository of a toilet located on the first floor of the palace.

Excavations in the southwestern part of the palace, especially in room B.I.20, provided evidence for at least three phases. The original, first phase remained in use the longest, from the first half of the 7th until the second half of the 13th century. The second phase can be dated to the turn of the 13th century and the beginning of the 14th when the ground floor of the severely damaged structure was filled in with rubble, forming a layer about 4.50 m thick. Some alterations were introduced inside the palace. Phase III is preserved in the central (B.I.50-54) and southeastern parts (B.I.09 and B.I.30). A series of new walls was introduced in the interior on a level above the floors from the second phase. The earlier spatial arrangement was thus modified. The floor level from this phase is about 100 cm above the second-phase pavements.

ORIGINAL PHASE OF B.I

In the southwestern part of the building, where nothing but phase I is to be distinguished in rooms B.I.01-04, B.I.11, B.I.15, B.I.20 and B.I.36-37, the original floor level was reached in B.I.01 (staircase leading directly to the upper floor) and in the western end of B.I.20, a 22-m long corridor (4.05 m wide) running all through the ground floor of the palace. The level of the threshold in the entrance to the staircase (22.33 m a.s.l.) and inside the room (22.02 m a.s.l.) roughly corresponds to the floor level in corridor B.I.20 (21.65 m a.s.l.). The interior walls of rooms on the ground floor (more than 5 m high) were raised of mud brick. Based on the architectural evidence from B.I.20, it can be said that the ceilings were of wood, although it should be kept in mind that the stone steps of the staircase were laid on vaults of baked brick, and red brick was also found in limited quantities in the rubble fill of room B.I.20. No evidence of a vault was to be observed on the short side walls. The ground-floor rooms B.I.03 and

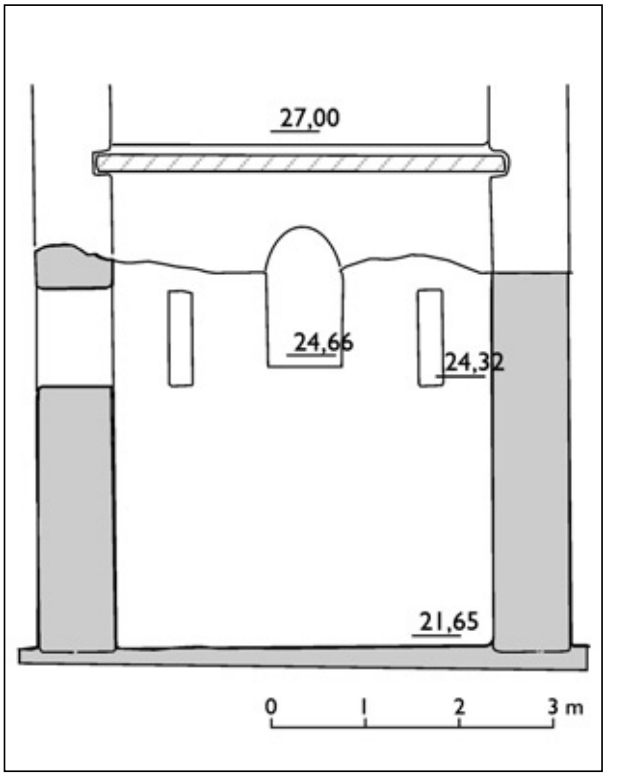


Fig. 2. West wall of room B.I.20 (Drawing W. Godlewski, D. Zielińska)

B.I.20 were furnished with several narrow slit windows (W. 0.11-0.15 m, H. 1.10 m), located high up on the wall (2.60 m above walking level) ensuring air flow between the rooms. Similar slit windows were discovered also in the walls of the corridor on the ground floor of House A.105 in the northwestern part of the citadel.[5] Both rooms also had big arched windows on the western side, 0.90 m wide and about 2 m high, the sills on the same level as the slit windows; these were blocked as a result of the second-phase alterations in this part of the building [*Fig. 2*].

The western part of the palace consisted of rooms: B.I.11, a narrow corridor just 2.26 m wide, running presumably across the entire complex from north to south, and rooms B.I.15 and B.I.36-37, all filled with rubble containing early pottery of the 7th-8th century. This would suggest that this part of the complex was abandoned first. A fragmentary clay figurine found in B.I.37 (Add.05.309), just over 4 cm high, is deceptively like a small-size copy of some ancient nude female statue. It is certainly a rare example of secular art from the Early Makurian period [*Fig. 3*].

The search for the east outer wall of the building on the town side was encumbered by post-Makurian architecture surviving in this area. Some of the new structures (Houses H.1-H.2 and H.4-H.7) were founded on the rubble fill of the original palace interiors [cf. *Fig. 1*]. It seems, however, that the walls of the original phase were even better preserved in this part than in the west, where they had disappeared together with the post-Makurian architecture.



Fig. 3. Fragment of a standing female figurine of clay, Add.05.309. Back and front views (Photo A. Obłuski)

5 W. Godlewski, "Old Dongola. Kom A, 2001", *PAM XIII, Reports 2001* (2002), 215, Fig. 8. See also D.A. Welsby, "Windows in Medieval Nubia: the Evidence from Soba East", *Antiquaries Journal* 72 (1992), 174-178.

PALACE PHASE III (3.B.I)

The third phase of the Palace Building has been preserved in the central and south-eastern part of the old palace; it covers rooms B.I.50-54 and B.I.09 and B.I.30. The building may have imaginably included other rooms in the northeastern part. Floors have been recorded in B.09; B.I.30 and B.I.51-52, rising over 5.50 m above the original walking level of the palace. Thus, the building of the third phase (3.B.I) appears to have taken advantage of the upper-floor walls of the original phase; further architectural studies should be able to confirm this idea. The cups and vases found in the fill on the floor of this phase of the building [*Fig. 4*], as well as mud stoppers from big *zirs*, represent types that W.Y. Adams attributed to the Terminal Christian period.[6] The bones of two small monkeys were discovered in room B.I.50N. They were identified by archeo-zoologist Marta Osypińska as belonging to young green monkeys or grivets (*Chlorocebus aethiops*, considered by some as a single species *Cercopithecus aethiops*), a sub-Saharan species of medium-sized primates with greenish-gray back.



Fig. 4. Pottery from 3.B.I: mugs, Add.05.294, Add.05.324; neck of storage pot, Add.05.333; vase, Add.05.253. Not to scale (Photo A. Obłuski)

6 W.Y. Adams, Ceramic Industries of Medieval Nubia, II (Kentucky 1986), 506-514.



Fig. 5. South entrance to Building B.III. Threshold beam in the entrance (Photo W. Godlewski)



Fig. 6. South entrance to Building B.III. Ceramic deposit found below the threshold (Photo W. Godlewski)

BUILDING B.III

The original floor was excavated in the central part of complex B.III and in the north, south and west arms. In the eastern arm, the late pavement from the church phase (2.B.III) was left in place along with the partly preserved altar screens. The original floor was made of big bricks in a regular and continuous pattern that emphasized the E-W axis of the structure and the perpendicular north and south arms. This floor was later covered with a smoothed hard mortar. Once cleared, the eastern outer façade of B.III proved to incorporate a blocked entrance to the eastern arm of the original cruciform structure. The surviving evidence indicates that even after the entrances from the west and south were blocked off by the fortified building B.II, the edifice in question remained accessible from the east and north even after its partial destruction in the end of the 13th century. The accumulated sand layer on the mortar floor suggests that the building must have stood abandoned for some time at the close of the 13th and in the beginning of the 14th century. During this period the city suffered considerably at the hands of raiding Mamluks.

Removal of the floor in the southern entrance revealed a kind of foundation deposit located carefully under the floor. It consisted of a large storage vessel (Add.05.225) standing upright in a pit that cut through the lower floor of B.III and a small cup used as a lamp (Add.05.224), placed inside the neck of the storage pot [*Figs 5,6*]. The vessel was half-filled with sand, containing also remains of a substance consumed by insects.

Once it was changed into a church, the building remained accessible only from the south, from the level of the partly ruined structure of B.II.16.

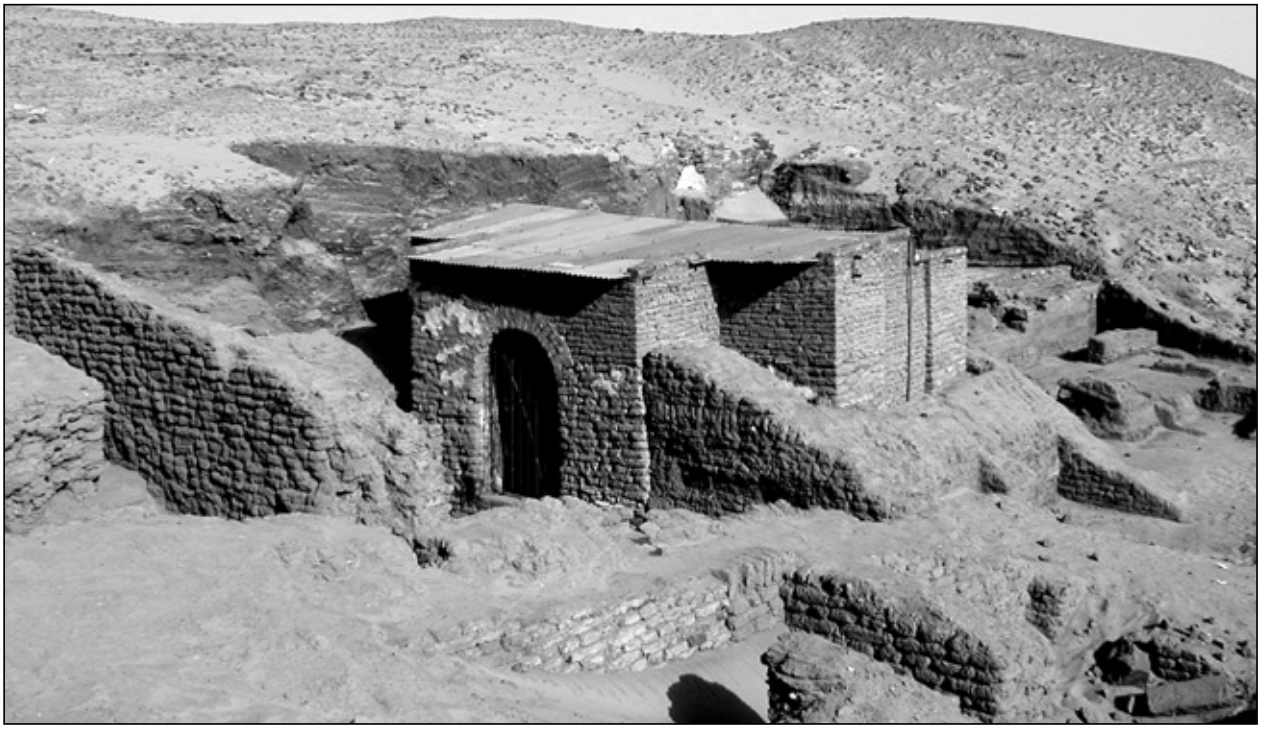


Fig. 7. Building B.III. New shelter roof, view from the northwest (Photo W. Godlewski)

BUILDING B.V

Building B.V was erected just 4.00 m from the southern arm of B.III, on a high platform of undressed blocks of stone from local quarries [*Fig. 8*]. In the northwestern corner, the platform was all of 2.00 m high, the purpose being presumably to level the ground under the new structure. It was constructed of red brick with outer walls 1.20 m wide and vaults supported on pillars and pilasters built of brick, the latter almost fully circular in section. The stone pavement laid of undressed slabs bonded in lime mortar was found on a level 2.50 m above the pavement of the neighboring cruciform structure (B.III).

While only the northwestern corner of this building was cleared – not enough to make the plan completely clear – there can be no doubt that this monumental complex followed a central plan. The inner walls were carefully coated with lime plastering seldom encountered elsewhere in the known architecture of Makuria. No traces of wall paintings have come to light so far. The almost fully round pilasters by the north wall of Building V recall the Pillared Church uncovered in 1995 by the western curtain wall of the fortifications in the north-western corner of the citadel.[7]

The function likewise remains to be determined, but it is fairly clear that it was a monumental public building of special importance. The date of its foundation is equally unclear for the moment, but it can be presumed on technical grounds that it was not built before the buildings B.I and B.III, most likely not earlier than the 9th century. Nonetheless, it is certainly part of a well-planned complex of buildings in this part of the citadel. It is slightly off axis, turned more to the south than B.III and B.I. The accumulation on the floors, characterized by an abundance of ashes, and the very late ruination of the outer walls (which were dismantled practically from the present surface level in the area of the citadel) suggests that the building functioned for a long time in its original role and condition, and even after this function was severed, the halls with standing vaults were used as domestic and storage space. Architectural members like window grille fragments and parts of guilloche-decorated balustrade (Add.05.002) of a light-colored soft sandstone [*Fig. 9*] found at the top of the rubble layers could have originated from inside Building B.V, as could a keystone of similar material (Add.05.238) found in the fill of Post-Makurian structures above B.I.

BUILDING B.II

The southern part of a vast structure B.II was also explored.[8] It was added onto the west wall of the stone platform under Building B.V (B.II.15) and between B.III and B.V (B.II.16). It comprised eight units of military significance, accessed from a staircase reaching the upper floor of B.I (B.II.5). The building constituted a fortified screen protecting the palace interior (B.I), cruciform commemorative structure (B.III) and entrance to the town running between B.III and B.V from the west, the direction of the river harbor. The western parts of this building had been completely de-

7 W. Godlewski, "Old Dongola. Kom A 1995", *PAM VII, Reports 1995* (1996), 116-120.
8 Ibid., "Old Dongola. Kom A, 2001", *PAM XIII, Reports 2001* (2002), 212-214.



Fig. 8. Building B.V, northwestern corner, view from above (Photo W. Godlewski)



Fig. 9. Fragment of a sandstone balustrade, Add.05.002 (Photo W. Godlewski)

stroyed, presumably by floodwaters; this encumbers a fuller understanding of the military character of the annex. It was presumably part of the Dongolan fortifications, corresponding in time to the extension of the defenses in the end of the 12th and early 13th centuries, as well as just before and in the course of the wars with the Mamluks.

Dating B.II to the end of the 12th century is grounded in the pottery evidence originating from above the church pavement in B.III. Fragmentary plates with painted radial decoration and bowls found in the fill under the floor are typical of Post-Classic period ceramics[9] and cannot be dated later than c. AD 1200 [*Fig. 10*]. The fill could not have accumulated inside B.III before the blocking of the northern and western doorways by the fortified annex. Therefore, it is highly probable that B.II was constructed after the conflict with Ayyubid Egypt in AD 1172 and in response to the breaching of

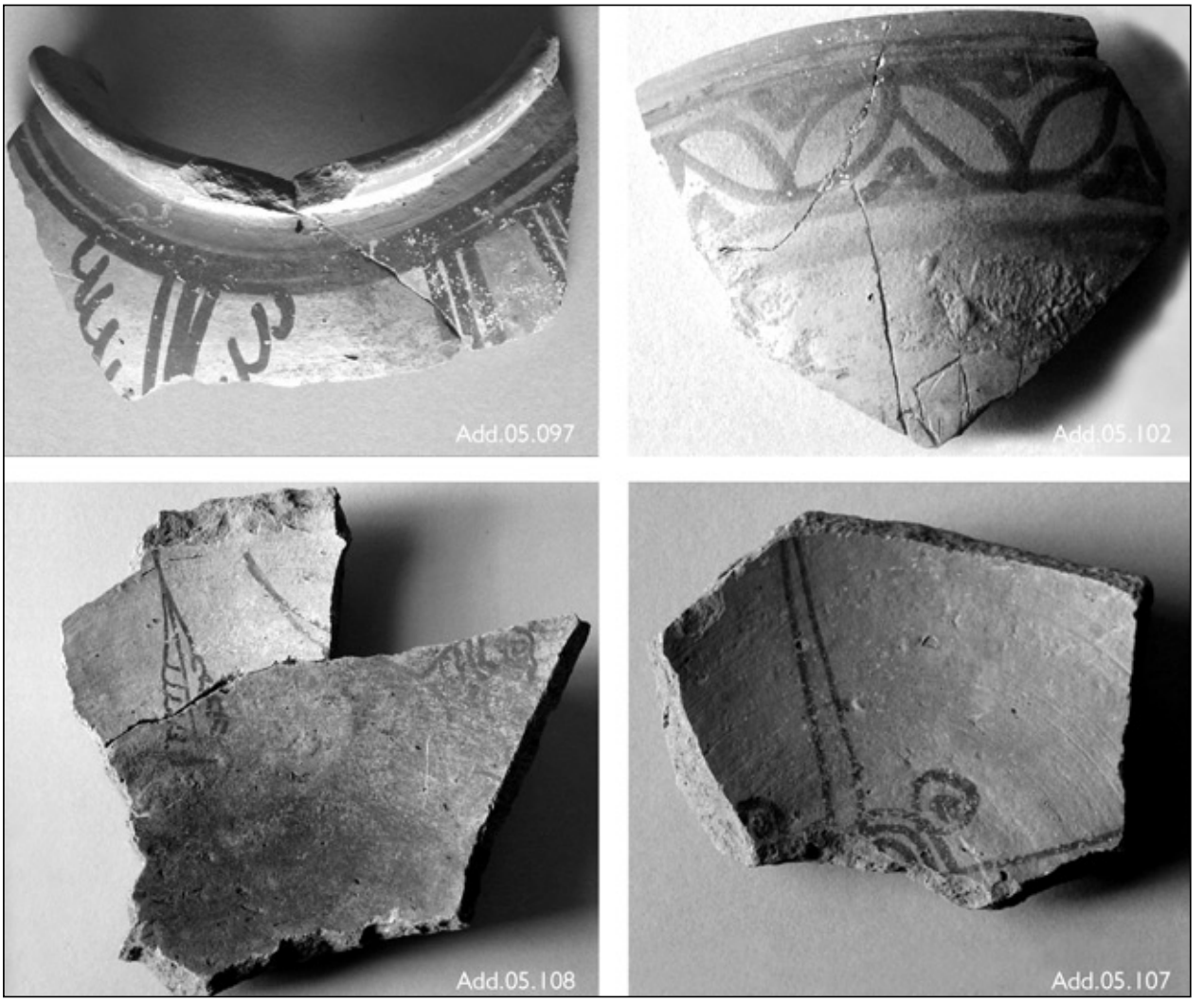


Fig. 10. Pottery from B.III, layer below the church floor: bowls, Add.05.097, Add.05.102; plates, Add.05.108, Add.05.107 (Photo A. Obłuski)

9 Adams, Ceramic Industries, II, op. cit., 495-501.

the *baqt* peace and economic treaty in force since AD 652. In the last years of King Moise Georgios (1155-1190s) the towns and settlements of Makuria started being fortified again and the neglected fortifications were rapidly rebuilt. This process presumably prompted alterations of the fortifications in Dongola, as well as further protection of the palatial complex from the direction of the river harbor.

The siege of Dongola left this fortified annex practically in ruins. This can be concluded especially from the part between B.III and B.V, where the strong construction (B.II.16) was leveled and access was made to the late church in B.III. It now seems that the destruction of the town in the end of the 13th century was extensive, encompassing all of the royal and commemorative structures on the citadel.

KINGDOM OF DONGOLA TOWN

Once the king and court abandoned Dongola in the second half of the 14th century, the architecture in the citadel area was reused in various ways. B.III was transformed into a church and other buildings (B.I, B.II and B.V) were adapted to serve new living and domestic needs. Their monumental character, the scope of damages incurred during the wars of the late 13th century and the very limited means of the new users resulted in a complete change of the spatial organization of the area. This is particularly well observed in the archaeological record on the site of the Palace B.I, the original ground floor of which was filled in with rubble at this point to create a suitable platform for building a series of small houses that made pragmatic use of standing walls of the upper palace floor. At this stage in the explorations, only the last phase of this arrangement is known. The dating of the houses is still not very precise, but it falls within the 17th-18th century. The houses were small, usually with just two rooms and a courtyard. In House H.6, the benches by the walls contained numerous *gessebas* or containers for foodstuffs, made of lime mortar. Big storage pits were constructed in the courtyard of this and other houses; their walls were made of brick fragments and the inside faces were



Fig. 11. Sickle, Add.05.189 (Photo A. Obłuski)

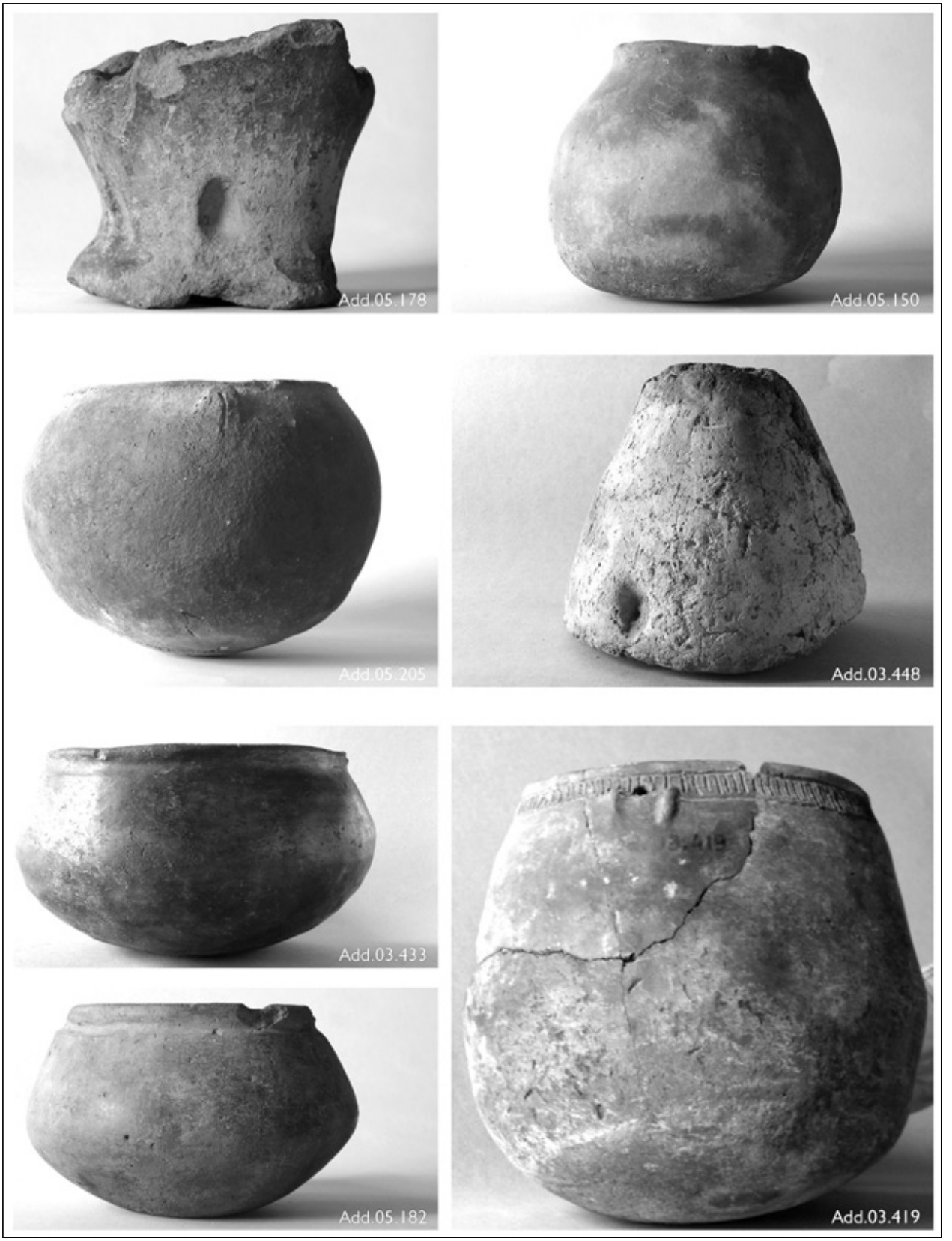


Fig. 12. Finds from House H.03: cooking pots, Add.05.205, Add.05.182, Add.03.433, Add.05.150, Add.03.419; censer, Add.05.178; pot-stand used in a fireplace, Add.03.448. Not to scale (Photo A. Obłuski)

plastered. Domestic animals were also kept in the courtyards. Metal agricultural tools, like sickles [*Fig. 11*] and adzes, were found in the fill along with handmade pottery.[10] The well preserved House H.03, situated by the northern facade of B.I, has been cleared completely. The inventory of finds from its interior is varied and quite abundant: handmade pottery included cooking pots, plain bowls, storage ware, censers, pot-stands for pots in the fireplace [*Fig. 12*].

An earlier house (H.52) was preserved by the western face of the platform under Building B.V. It was erected presumably in the 15th-16th century, above the destroyed walls of Building B.II. The suggested dating is based on the stratigraphy of the architecture established for this spot [*Fig. 13*].



Fig. 13. House H.52, view from above (Photo W. Godlewski)

10 Godlewski, *PAM* XIII, op. cit., 212-213, Fig. 7. Some metal objects have been tentatively identified as halberds, but it is more likely that they were agricultural tools used for loosening the soil. They were found in the northwestern part of Building B.II. Following the 2005 season, it has become clear that the rooms of this structure after its partial destruction were used as dwellings.