



BOGDAN ŻURAWSKI

BETWEEN HEAVEN AND HELL EXCAVATIONS AT BANGANARTI, 2001-2013



Fig. 1: The right bank of the Nile between Old Dongola and Baganarti (aerial photo: Bogdan Żurawski).

The etymology of the name Baganarti seems to be clear (although varied opinions are expressed by the local Nubian speakers); in the Leo Reinisch's vocabulary (1879, 18) and in lexicons by Murray (1923,19) and Armbruster (1965, 29) the toponym is unambiguously etymologized as the *Locust Island*.

Baganarti today is a name of a village, the bigger territorial unit (*mantiqa*) is traditionally called Tanqasi. In all likelihood the stela of *hegemon* Thodorou found, as the SNM file says, in Tanqasi, most probably originated from Baganarti.¹ It is a matter of dispute whether the placename Tanqasi could be associated with name Tungul used in the thirteenth/fourteenth century inscriptions from Baganarti as an equivalent for (Old) Dongola.² The toponym (written *Tongol*) was recored also by Burckhardt (1819, 67). Budge in 1896 knew it as *Tunkul* (1907, I, 104). Reinisch's informant in the 1870s also knew the ruins of Old Dongola under the name *Túngul* (1879, 165).

Baganarti sits in the southernmost part of the 'S-bend' drawn by the Nile into the Saharan sands between the Fifth and Third Cataract, on the right

bank of the Nile, seven and a half km upriver from the fortified Upper City of Tungul/Old Dongola. The *kom* that buries the sequence of five superimposed churches stands among the sandy fringe separating the modern village from the now sanded up northern channel of the Nile that once detached the Tanqasi Island from the right bank of the river (Fig. 1).

Baganarti, as the name suggest, might have been an island in the past although other solid evidence, apart from the name, lacks. The aerial photographs taken in 1954 and later by the Sudan Survey Department show the streak of vegetation that marked the course of the Nile palaeochannel. During the record floods of 1946, 1988 and 1994 the Nile entered this palaeochannel inflicting heavy damages to the houses that were built in its course.

The central *kom* in Baganarti until the year 2001 was known as *kom el-kenissa* (Arab. *mound of the church*), *jebel en-nassara* (Arab. *mountain of the Christians*) or *kom es-Sinada* (Arab. *mound of Sinada*). In the first three designations the memory of a church was fossilized, whereas the last toponym recalls Sayyid Sinada Mohammed Farah, a merchant (?) who came to Baganarti from Dar Funj in the second half of the nineteenth century and settled south of the ruin.

1 Łajtar 2003, no.29, 123-127; 2003b, 164.

2 Łajtar 2008, 325.



Fig. 2: The Banganarti site (in the middle) and its surroundings, with Tangasi Island in the upper part of the photograph taken in 2003 (aerial photo: Bogdan Żurawski).



Fig. 3: Orthographic and digital elevation model of the Banganarti enclosure generated from the aerial photographs taken above the site in 2014 (photos and computer rendering: Bogdan Żurawski).



Fig. 4: The 2014 plan of the fortified enclosure at Banganarti (drawing and measurement Roman Łopaciuk et al).

The aerial kite photograph shown above (Fig. 3) presents the site partly excavated and reburied with sand. All architectural features hitherto unearthed are seen on Fig. 4. The plan shows the Upper Church which is now hidden beneath the corrugated iron protective roof.

The ramparts, investigated from the first season, were being found overgrown with all sorts of dwellings. The posterns which provided an easy access to the interior in many Middle Nile strongholds (e.g. Deiga) were not registered in Banganarti. The girde wall was negotiated in some points by means of overpasses provided with stairs. They are characteristic for the later phases (after the twelfth century).

No trace of a monastic complex was found *intra muros*, nevertheless the so-called smaller *ksenodochion* located outside the eastern curtain wall, could easily serve as residence for a small monastic community who took care of the church and the pilgrims.

Banganarti fortifications lost most of their defensive qualities in the tenth century or slightly earlier when good relations with the Fatimids brought peace and stability to the region. The excavation results of the parts of the girde wall, gate and towers pro-

vided sufficient and reliable evidence suggestive that the original curtain walls were strengthened already in the seventh century (after the Abdallah ibn Abi Sarkh assault on Dongola in 652?). There are also good grounds to believe that the fortified settlement was garrisoned by a military detachment which comprised also the highly specialized unit that serviced the stone throwing devices (trebuchets, Arab. *manganiq*). The discovery of the deposit of the ceramic sling missiles in the area of the northern gate suggests also the presence of the unit of slingers.

Another strengthening the defenses dates from the fourteenth century when the lack of safety returned to the region. After 1365 when the kingdom moved to the north the walls were rebuilt and in some places heightened. Huge mud bricks (52 x 28 x 9 cm) were used for the purpose but the quality of these last repairs is very poor. Nevertheless the perimeter wall was doubled by addition of an outer coating.

The excavations carried out so far in Banganarti produced seven complete or fragmentary preserved stone mortuary slabs (including an inscribed stone cross). It is much more than the number of known graves within the walls, which are two. Therefore the

attempts to find more tombs were taken on several occasions. Most serious one was undertaken after a local resident acknowledged that in 1997 he found the red brick construction at a depth of *circa* three metres near the northwestern corner of the enclosure. However, the archaeological testing carried out in the spot pointed by him proved ineffective.

The excavations in Banganarti which brought to light almost sixty murals and nearly thousand inscriptions, not to mention tons of ceramics, the hundred oil lamps and a plethora of other minor objects, started as a rescue project. The central *kom* was excavated in response to aggressively advancing palm groves and extensive *turab*-digging. In 1998 the mission, directed by the present writer, began its field activity on the site. During two days spent there a surface pottery sampling was carried out and the first session of aerial (kite) photography accomplished (Fig. 5).

The real discovery of the Banganarti potential happened three years later. On the 10th of February 2001 a trial pit was sunk on the eastern slope of the *kom* where the wall made of huge mud brick was found. In the course of excavation the red brick semicircle and a fragment of a small, painted pilaster scratched with Greek graffiti was exposed. Widening the sondage to the south revealed the upper part of a portrait of the anonymous Nubian king (Fig. 6).

In a couple of days the basic characteristics of the structure were recognized and the general layout of the red brick building, later labelled the Upper Church, was sketched.

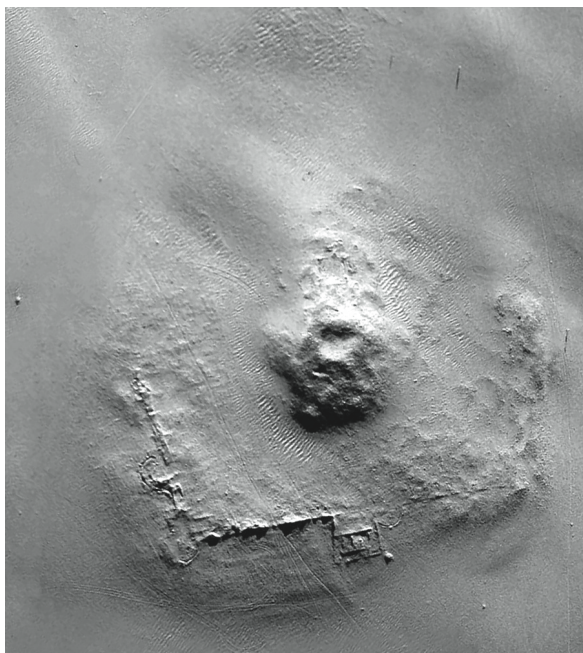


Fig. 5: The aerial (kite) photograph of the Banganarti taken in 1998 (photo: Bogdan Żurawski).



Fig. 6: The very moment of discovering the king's image in Banganarti, in Chapel 3 (photo: Jacek Poremba).

The discovery of the Upper Church in 2001 was promptly followed by the finding beneath its predecessor, the Lower Church. The exploration of both churches proceeded concurrently. For the sake of clarity of the disquisition I would present them in chronological order.

Before the Upper Church was raised *circa* 1070 A.D.,³ the central point of the fortified enclosure at Banganarti was occupied by a sequence of three churches jointly labelled the Lower Church (coded LCH1-3). They were raised one upon another duplicating most of the predecessor's layout. The first of a series (LCH1) was erected soon after the enclosure was fortified, in between the late sixth and the beginning of the seventh century A.D.

The Lower Church chronology, reconstructed on the basis of the 35 sondages excavated inside and outside its walls was cross referenced by the data obtained from the examination of ceramics, murals and inscriptions. The basilical LCH1 (Fig. 7) was raised on a virgin sand. Its chronology is a matter of conjecture because the first firmly dated document found on spot is the stela of *hegemon* Markos who passed away in 786 A.D.⁴ Since the association of Markos' grave with the Lower Church is problematic the date of erection of the LCH1 can be approximated only through the analysis of the stratigraphy and evaluation of the ceramics from the relevant strata (luckily enough there are substantial deposits of potsherds and complete objects from the foundation layers).

3 Żurawski 2012, 121-122.

4 Łajtar 2003b, 163.

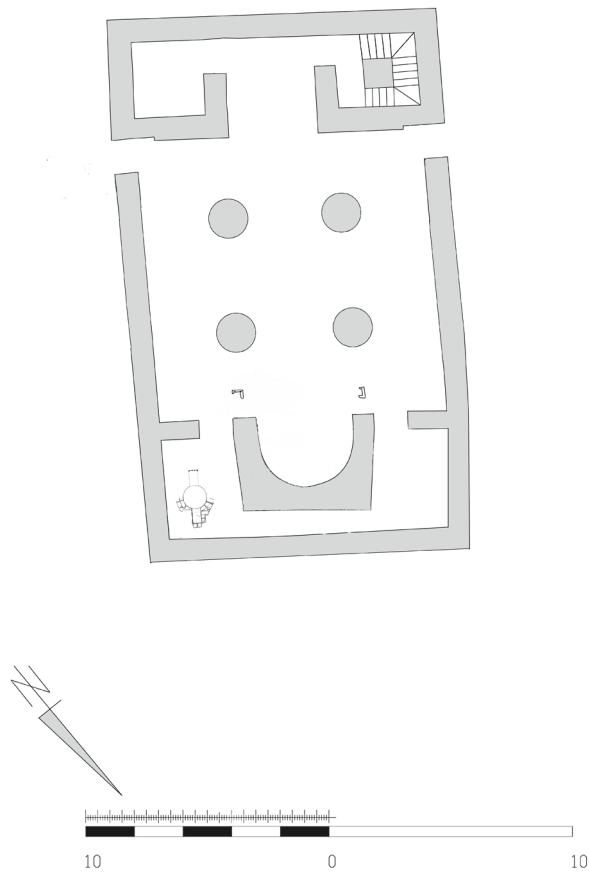


Fig. 7: The Lower Church I at Banganarti (drawing: Bogdan Żurawski, measurements: Roman Łopaciuk).

The LCH1 was raised in mixed red brick/stone construction. Its exterior walls were covered by a thin layer of lime plaster. Inside gypsum was rather used instead. To this layer a painting decoration were applied. Murals covered the walls but also the plastered columns. The recognizable fragments found on the voussoir blocks, that once formed the columns, display a variety of motifs among which the holy riders and archangels seem to prevail (Fig. 8).



Fig. 8: Ink copy of a mounted warrior from the voussoir block reused in the foundation of the LCH2 pier. (drawing: Anna Błaszczuk).

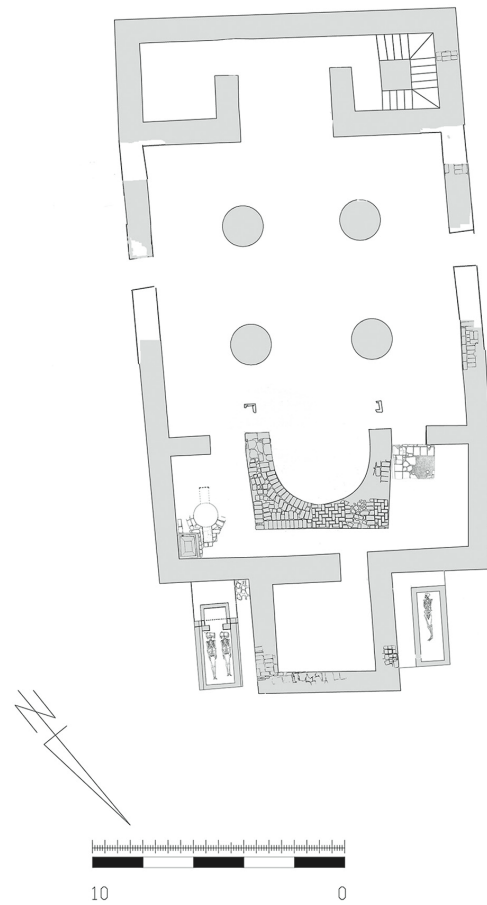


Fig. 9: Plan of the LCH2 (drawing: Bogdan Żurawski; measurements: Roman Łopaciuk).

The interior of the LCH1 was paved with ceramic tiles, bricks and stone blocks.

The polished slabs of granite were laid, on the lime underlay, near the altar only. Brick were applied as a rule to repair the tile floor. The space outside the church was paved with half brick laid directly on the layer of the virgin sand. It was enclosed within a low wall that made a sort of *peribolos* around the church. Later on (in the LCH3 phase) the *mastaba*-abutment was raised on this pavement.

LCH2 was raised mainly on the foundations of its predecessor. The original plan has been altered in the eastern section only where an annexe was added (it was entered from the passage behind the apse). The new church's layout, however, remained mainly the same (Fig. 9).

The transformation of LCH1 into LCH2 took place most probably not later than the turn of the seventh century. The LCH2 was certainly standing when King Abraham ascended the throne in Tungul in the mid-eighth century.

The purpose of raising against the eastern wall of the church a square chapel-like structure measuring 6.5 x 5 m has not been satisfactorily elucidated so

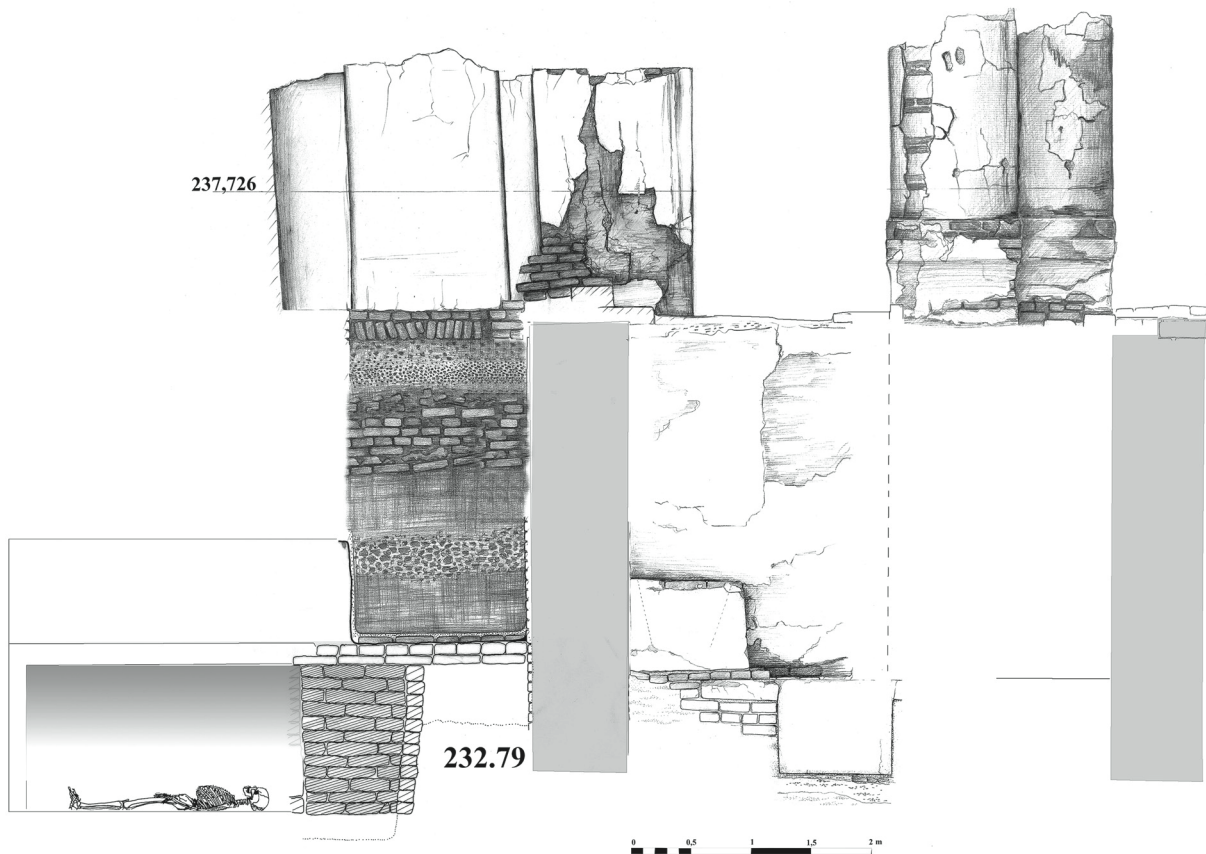


Fig. 10: Section E-W through the baptistery and southern *bisomus* grave (drawing: Marta Momot & Bogdan Żurawski).

far. It plausibly housed the commemorative function associated with the tombs that were built on both its sides (Fig. 10).

The decorative programme of the LCH2, that partly survived until now, was styled in a somewhat iconoclastic manner, at least the eastern wall of the nave (until it became replastered in the mid-ninth century) was covered with layer of plaster decorated by painted geometrical pattern imitating the ashlar bond. Since this decorative scheme was introduced in the first half of the eighth century, a question must be asked whether the iconoclastic ideas that were dominant in the eastern Christianity at that time were not responsible for introduction of religiously neutral, geometric decorations instead of images of the saints etc. that were favoured earlier?

The LCH2 was used for at least hundred years. As said above the main event that shaped its religious characteristic was inhumation of the three individuals in two graves located on both sides of the eastern extension. The southern grave, provided with the solid *mastaba* made of red brick, was first to be built (Fig.10). The northern one, topped by a flat grave monument, was built soon after. The space between the eastern annexe and the grave superstructure was plastered on the northern side and paved with half-

brick on the southern. After the two sepulchres were installed in the most prominent *ad sanctos* place in the middle of the eastern wall of the LCH2, the site apparently started attract a considerable flow of pilgrims.

The visitors to Banganarti scrapped the series of hollowings e.g. in the stone corner section of the eastern wall of the LCH2. They had to be made within a relatively short time between the graves were built and the *mastaba*-abutment was raised.

What really brought the pilgrims in must remain an open question at the moment. They were most plausibly attracted by the sacredness of the southern *bisomus* that was equipped with the huge semi cylindrical monument and an epitaph that was inserted into the eastern wall of the church.

Inside of the southern of *bisomus* grave two males of about 35 and 50 years respectively were buried. At least the individual buried along the northern wall of the burial chamber was originally inhumated in another grave and transferred to the new sepulchre concurrently with the inhumation of another occupant of the tomb. After that happened the burial chamber was sealed, the entrance shaft blocked and the platform above plastered with white, very hard lime plaster.



The direct reasons behind the transformation of LCH2 into the LCH3 are unknown. The human made destruction is highly hypothetical. Apart from the struggles with *al-Omari* there was no danger to the integrity of *al-Muqurra* state and no reliable testimonies testify to the devastations wrought in the region of Tungul in between the eight and tenth century.⁵ The catastrophe (if any) was plausibly caused by natural causes. The unusual Nile flood that made the ground water soak up seems to be the most plausible reason.

The serious counter measures taken to prevent the wall buckling were suggestive that the danger was deemed serious; both northern and southern walls were abutted by two *exedrae* that stabilized the outwardly push of the central dome exerted upon the outer walls. The increased concern for the stability of the new construction was probably also stimulated by the fact that LCH3 was higher than its predecessor.

The LCH3 duplicated the LCH2 layout. The apse and sacristies were virtually untouched. In the baptistery (southern sacristy), however, a new basin was installed above the older font. The substantial modifications affected also the nave; old vousoir columns were replaced with massive redbrick/stone piers set on the square plan.

While the system of covering the LCH1 and LCH2 is conjectural, it is certain that LCH3 was vaulted. The central dome supported by four piers was surrounded by a system of barrel vaults and corner cupolas. The extended transversal nave that bisected the ground floor of the church accommodated the expanding congregation.

Although strained and endangered by the constructional mistakes the LCH3 lived surprisingly long. During the three hundred years of its liturgical use the surroundings of the LCH3 have risen by three metres what makes an increase of one centimetre per year (!). There were three main reasons that jointly contributed to that speed of the accumulations of the cultural layers around the church; first was the vigorous activity in its surroundings caused by the pilgrims and local residents, second the accumulation of ritual debris caused by religious ceremonies, third encroaching of the sands was facilitated because the fortifications were partly levelled and the northern girdle wall (protecting the church against the northern wind) was much reduced in height and width.

The high central dome supported on the four piers was a challenging experiment for the LCH3 builders. Despite the constructional counter measures

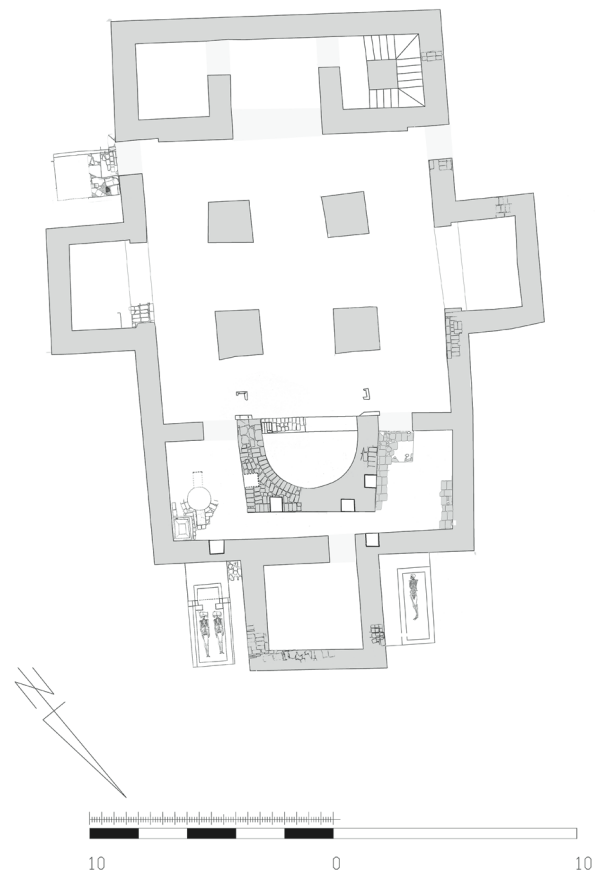


Fig. 11: Plan of the LCH3 (drawing: Bogdan Żurawski; measurements: Roman Łopaciuk).

adapted the church's outer walls, wedged off by the push of the dome, started to deflect and had to be abutted by a huge *mastaba*-like counterfort made of mud brick (with occasional use of red brick). It was started when the outward thrust of the dome (not adequately counterpoised by the *exedrae*) got out of plumb after the mid-ninth century. It was enlarged several times until it reached the average height of three metres. In its first phase the *mastaba*-abutment was raised as a quite narrow structure made of fired and sun-dried brick. Later on, when it proved to be not enough effective, it was widened and heightened in mud brick only. The counterfort was built substantially stronger on the northern side because the church apparently tended to subside northwards following the natural slope of the terrain. Understandably the higher walls were abutted with wider and higher buttress. On the northern side of the staircase the buttress is almost six metres wide (!). It gives a clear suggestion that the western part of the LCH3 had to be considerably higher than the rest of the church.

Most of the interior of LCH3 was replastered. The new coating composed of lime heavily admixed with mud was of inferior quality to the earlier

⁵ Munro-Hay 1982/1983, 105-106; Vantini 1975, 710 ff.

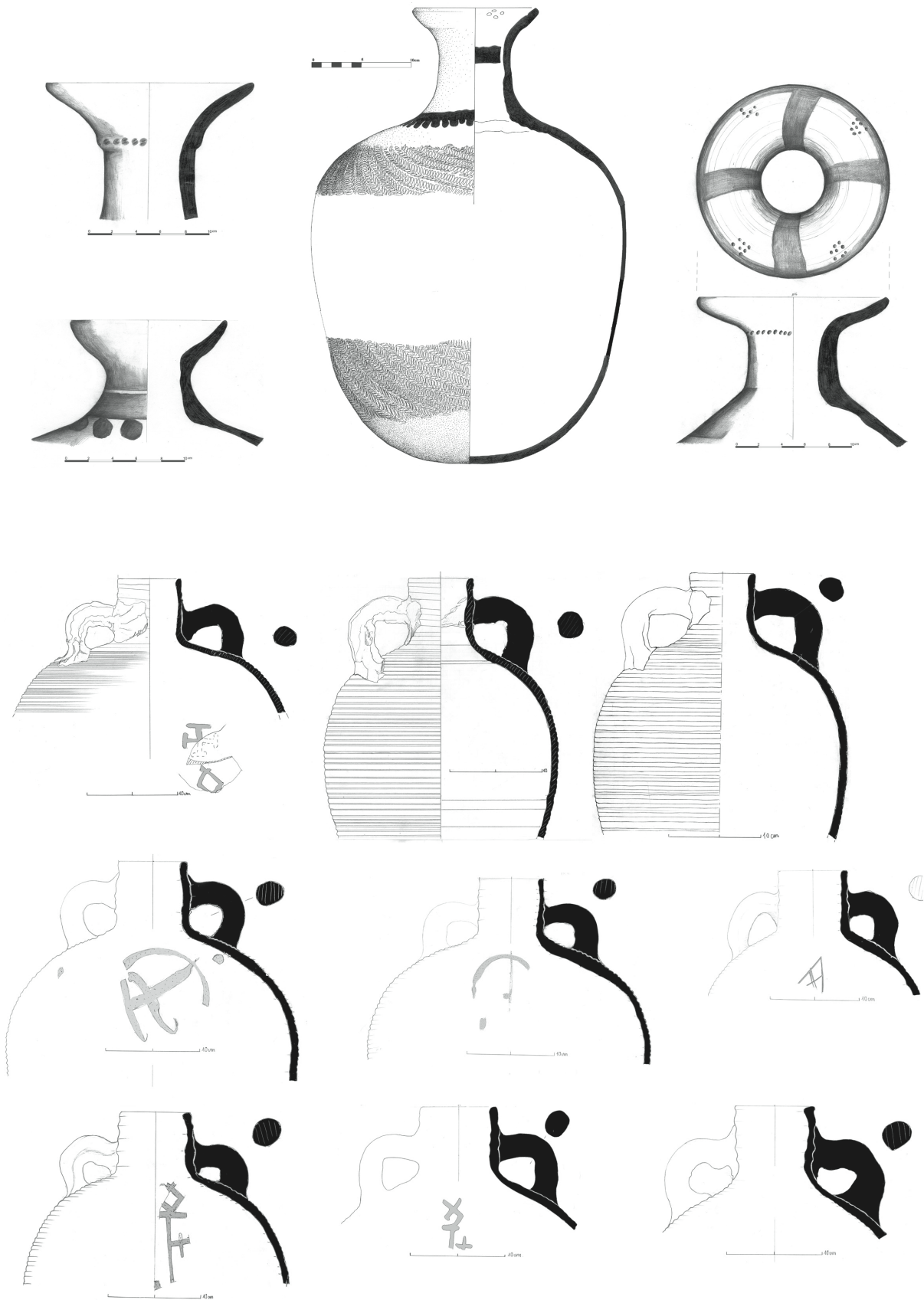


Fig. 12: The amphorae and other vessels found in ceramic layer in the fill of the Lower Church (drawing: Agata Rak, Dobiesława Bagińska & Bogdan Żurawski).



one. On this new layer most of the Lower Church murals were painted.

The ceramic date for the termination of LCH3 liturgical activity is the mid-eleventh century. The timespan between the abandonment of the LCH3 and raising of the Raphaelion (Upper Church) was very short, rather years than decades. Before the upper part of LCH3' walls have been pulled down (to the upper edge of the *mastaba*-abutment) some important modification were carried out.

First the westernmost space that served as a vestibule to the NW corner room and the staircase was fenced off from the nave. Concurrently all arched apertures within the church were sealed. Before they were blocked, however, the arch voussoirs and most of the stone jambs were taken away.

The reason for sealing of all the opening within the church at five to twelve before its abandonment seems bizarre. There is only one logical explanation to it; that the next in turn structure planned to be raised on the walls of the LCH3 was originally conceived as its layout duplicate.

Even the first sondage dug into the Lower Church in 2002 revealed the compact layer of broken liquid containers mostly jars and amphorae. Most of these wares belong to the seventh century horizon. The ceramic stratum was found evenly distributed throughout the whole of the Lower Church interior. Outside, the similar deposits (but less densely saturated with potsherds) were found in two sondages dug immediately outside the LCH walls (along the eastern wall near the northern tomb and along its northern wall). Significantly enough this highly diagnostic composition of seventh century RW amphorae and handmade jars with flaring rims was not encountered, in any of the sondages (despite the intense search) outside or inside the enclosure's girdle wall.

The RW amphorae that made the most numerous group in the collection were almost exclusively fired in the Dongolese kilns. Their most tentative dating based on analogies from Dongola is seventh/eighth century A.D. The handmade, mat impressed jars with flaring rims and textile impressed bottoms form the second ware in the whole assembly (Fig. 12). In the sixth/seventh century these vessels were a living archaism in the Middle Nile. They were plausibly fired in centers which earlier produced the post-Meroitic beer jars. They are handmade, sparsely painted and burnished on shoulders, with coarse body conformable to the better absorption of heat.

The filling up of the LCH3 interior happened in the eleventh century while the pottery used in filling belongs mostly to the seventh/eighth century. The

potsherds (and complete vessels) had to be stored somewhere at least three hundred years before they were thrown into the LCH interior. But where?

The evidence registered validates the hypothesis that this layer was a byproduct of the religious activity performed within the Lower Church during the first part of its 500 years of use.

In 2007 I launched a hypothesis that the layer of broken amphorae and liquid containers was by-product of the use of the baptistery during the LCH1-3 phases (Żurawski 2007, 307). I still cannot find a better solution. The baptismal service could be accounted for such quantity of broken amphorae and liquid containers. The more so that the some of the Coptic rituals performed in the church required bringing water from outside in the water containers that could be broken afterwards.⁶

The water used in huge quantities in the seventh/ninth century baptismal ceremonies (that were performed in the key-hole immersion basin) was plausibly brought in earthenware vessels that were afterwards broken, and thrown outside the church's walls, because the vessel that was in contact with holy water should not be used for a mundane purpose. Such a practice has some justification in the nineteenth century practices in the Coptic church as described by Butler.⁷

One of the best preserved parts of the LCH3 was the north sacristy (*prothesis*). The most unusual features of this space found in the paving. These were the terracotta pipes set vertically, rim level with the floor surface. The sectioning through the deposits beneath one of these pipes prove that the pipes were used to dispose the liquids directly into the absorbent layer of clear sand that is beneath the pavement. They apparently served as the Western Church *sacraria* intended to receive the water used for the ceremonies or left after cleaning the liturgical vessels. The *sacraria* ensured that any consecrated particles or the water sacralized by the ceremony or the contact with the liturgical vessels were returned directly to the Earth.⁸ In the exposed walls of the *prothesis* three niches were found. From the eastern and southern niches some interesting objects were collected that shed more light on the liturgical use of the *prothesis*. Among others a rim and body fragment of a W-W juglet (Inv. No. 11.2008/2009) was found in the eastern niche whereas the other (joining) part of the body and complete handle of the same vessel were recovered from the southern niche.

⁶ Żurawski 2007, 308 n. 7.

⁷ Butler, 1884 II, cf below

⁸ cf. Rohault 1883, III, 140-144.

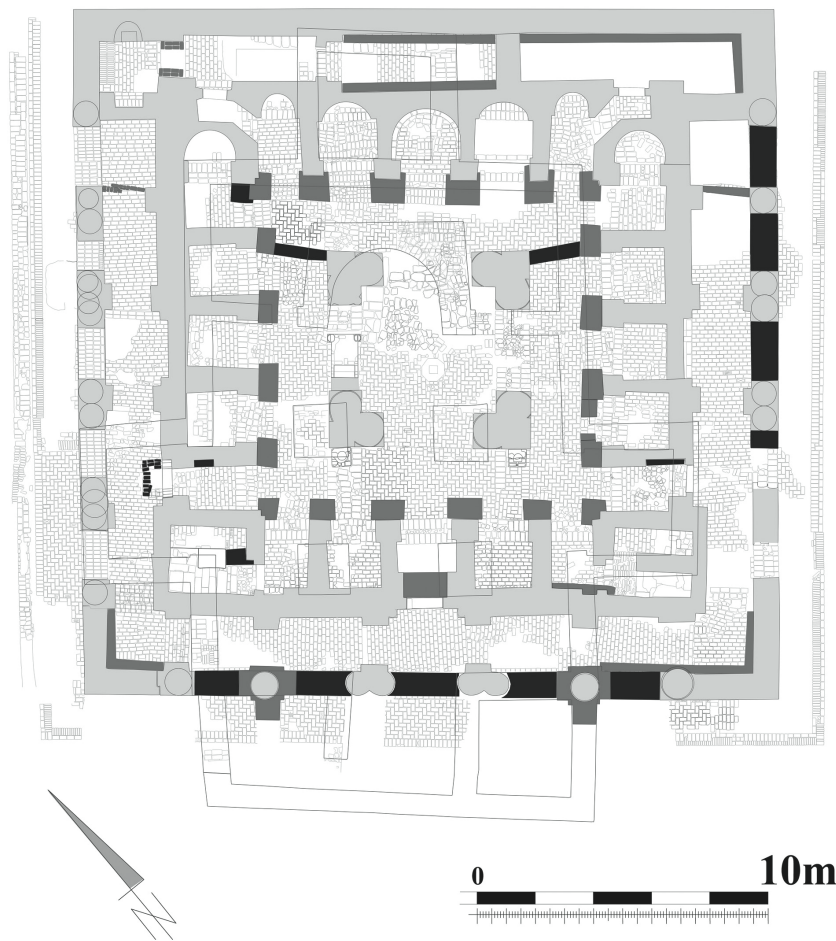


Fig. 13: Plan of the Lower Church (marked with red line) on the layout of the Upper Church (drawing: Roman Łopaciuk).

In the same (eastern) niche an almost complete terracotta paten was found. In the debris that filled the niche two bottom fragments of another paten (inv. no. 12. 2008/2009) were also discovered. When glued together, they appeared to be inscribed on the inside with the Raphael monogram.

The highlight of the mural decoration of the LCh3 is a diptych that occupied the uppermost register of the southern wall of the southern aisle. Its right panel focus at the striding male figure clad in white, flanked by two bushes. The left hand one is filled with the lavish scene of *Christ's Descent into Hell* that in the Eastern Christian art is called *Anastasis* (the scene is known in the insular art under an old English designation of *Harrowing of Hell*). Both are contoured by a rectangular thin frame rendered with red paint, and separated by the same line. The part of the wall between the diptych and the S-E corner of the space is decorated with the representation of a mounted saint spearing a female demon (Fig. 14). Although loosely connected with the diptych it conveyed a complementary message that is relevant

to the baptism ritual. The ideological relation of both scenes to the rite of baptism, that symbolizes the victory over evil and death and usually took place during Easter, was thus visually underlined.

The Lower Church iconographic programme abounds in the Holy Riders trampling the Evil embodied in the human shape of the adversary of Christianity. In the middle one of the three westernmost rooms there is an image representing St Merkurios trampling Julian the Apostate (Fig. 15). Below the horse there is a long inscription containing liturgical hymns. The painter was quite aware of the circumstances of the Emperor's death in the battle near Ctesiphon on the 26th of June 363. Julian felt in the middle of the fierce skirmish with the Persian guerillas harassing his retreat from Ctesiphon.⁹ He was hit by the spear thrown by somebody whose identity was unknown to the witness accounts.¹⁰

A framed icon showing the Theotokos as Orante was added to the space right from the foreleg of the Merkurios' horse. The icon-like representation of Theotokos is shown with hands held against the chest (Fig. 15).

The Mother of God wears a long sleeved mantle and the *maphorion*. Her forearms make a horizontal line, parallel to the lower edge of the icon's frame. The hands, unnaturally bent, almost clenched at wrists are held in front of the chest in the so-called contained orans gesture with open palms, turned outward. Fingers are outwardly opened in a quite classy manner.¹¹ Her neck is slender, its base involuted in the circular folds of the mantle. The nose is long and slim, the eyebrows arched. The widely open eyes give her face a somewhat smiling countenance.

⁹ Cf. DiMaio 1978, 43ff.

¹⁰ Cf. Ammianus Marcellinus. *Res Gestae* XXV,III, 2-8, ed. Rolfe II, 1940, 491-493, cf. also Tougher 2007, 150.

¹¹ Cf. "*Doppelorantentypus*" (Seibt, 1987, 52 n. 58; Cheynet, Morrisson & Seibt, 287; Felicetti-Liebenfels 1956, 50; Kalokyres 1972, 54f).

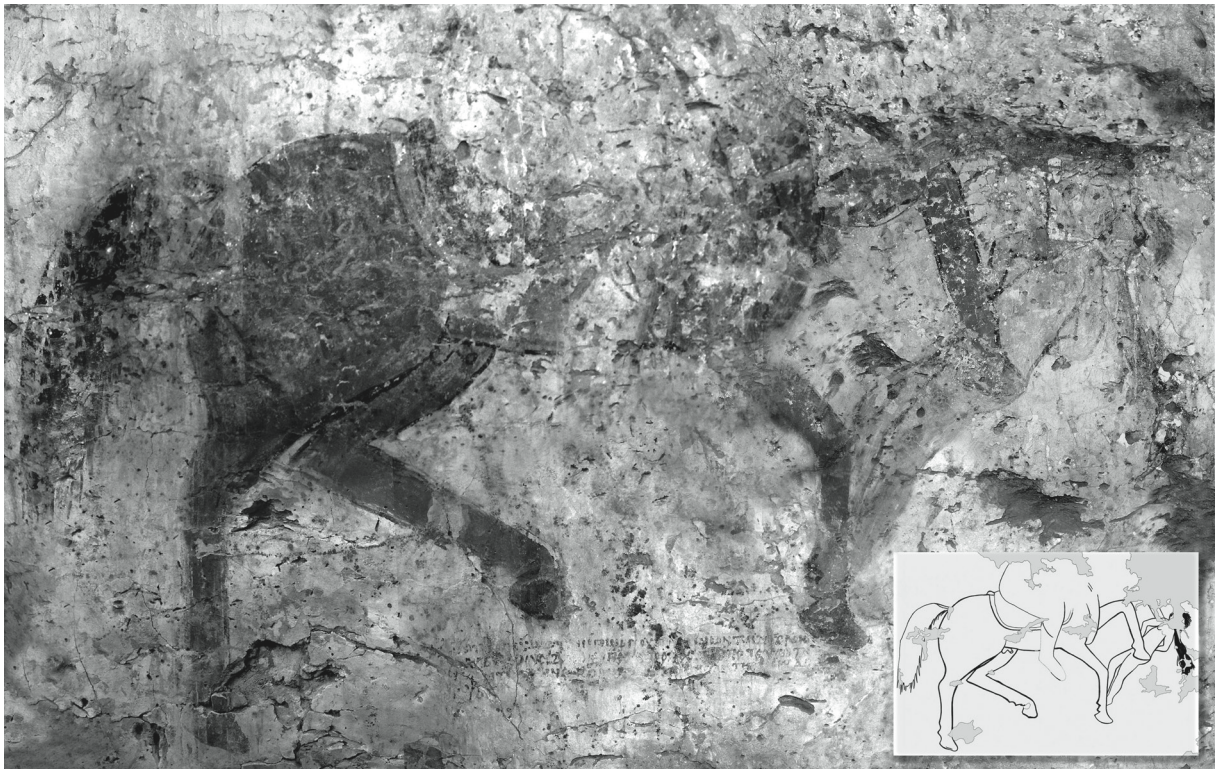


Fig. 14: St. Sisinnios trampling the naked demoness, before conservation (photo and drawing : Wojciech Chmiel).



Fig. 15: Ink drawing of the painted decoration of the southern wall of the Space 18 (drawing: Anna Błaszczyk).

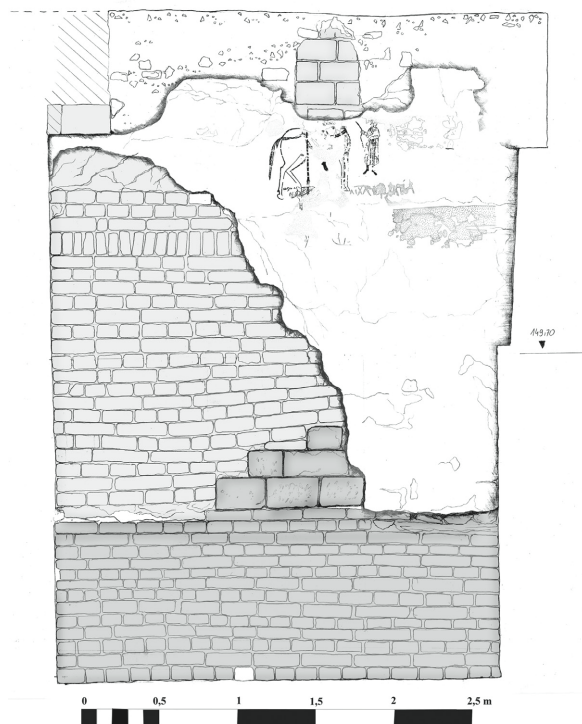


Fig. 16: Central part of northern wall decoration (drawing: Anna Błaszczuk).

The mouth with raised corners are tight-lipped, the chin furrow markedly sketched. Her young and regular face features match the delicate fingers. She emanates with bodily perfection that is totally subordinated to the arduous spirituality of the prayer that through the peculiar gesture of hands make the focus of the composition.

The northern wall of the space copies the iconographic scheme of the southern one. A picture of an equestrian saint spearing a fallen adversary is painted there with a Byzantine canon written right and

beneath (Fig. 16). Both paintings thematically focus on representation of the triumph of the holy rider over the fallen enemy and both are accompanied by lengthy inscriptions in Greek.

As compared to the scene on the opposite wall the north wall motif is smaller. It depicts a mounted warrior transfixing a figure lying disorderly on the back that is partly identifiable by a legend in Greek written close to his head. Only the first seven letters survived forming *Maximia* (...). It certainly stands for one of the Tetrarchs responsible for the Great Persecution. Interestingly enough the horse is bridled up by the groom who stands in a hieratic, frontal pose right to the horse that is represented as white (it is hard to judge, however, whether the colour resulted from the graphic style of the painting, that simply left the outline unpainted) or was deliberately selected. Plausibly the first option is true because the figures of the groom, the rider and the speared figure are also white. The rider and the groom are wearing red riding boots of similar design.

The style of this composition is different to St Mercurios mural on the opposite wall. The scene is much more static. As compared to its southern wall counterpart it lacks dynamism and coloration. The sharp difference is discernible in the manner of drawing the horse. The stallion rode by St Mercurios is compact, stoutly built whereas its north wall counterpart is more slender and higher. Its rendering is graphic, with body uncoloured at all, the black contour.

The activities preparatory to the construction of the Upper Church (cf. Fig. 13, right) are suggestive that originally the new church was planned to be raised partly on the walls of its predecessor (in keeping with the *usus* continued on the spot for the past

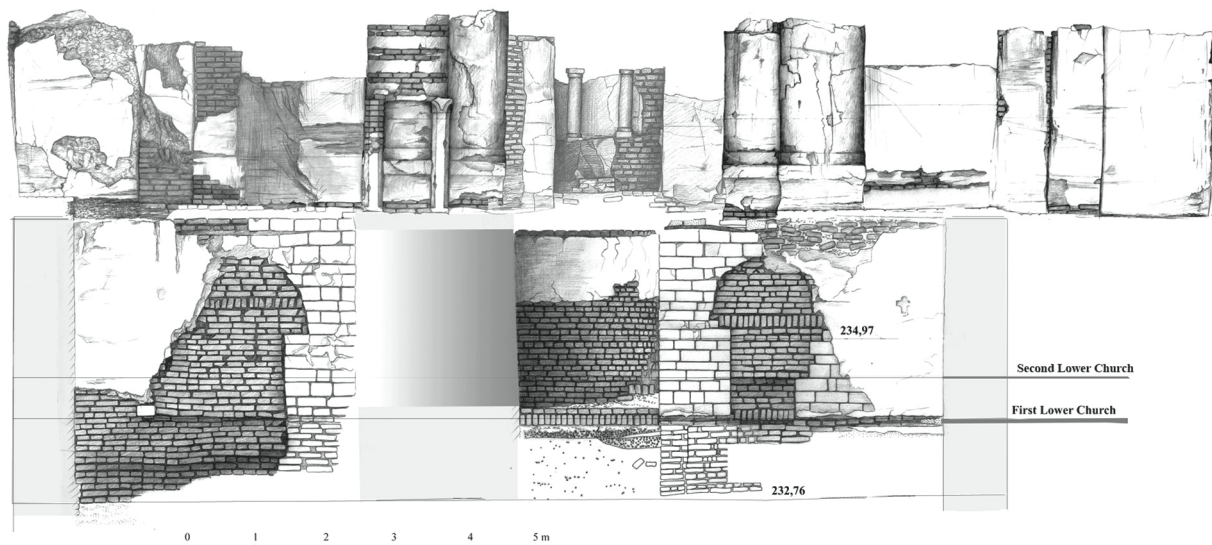


Fig. 17: Section N-S through both Baganarti churches (drawing: Marta Momot & Bogdan Żurawski).

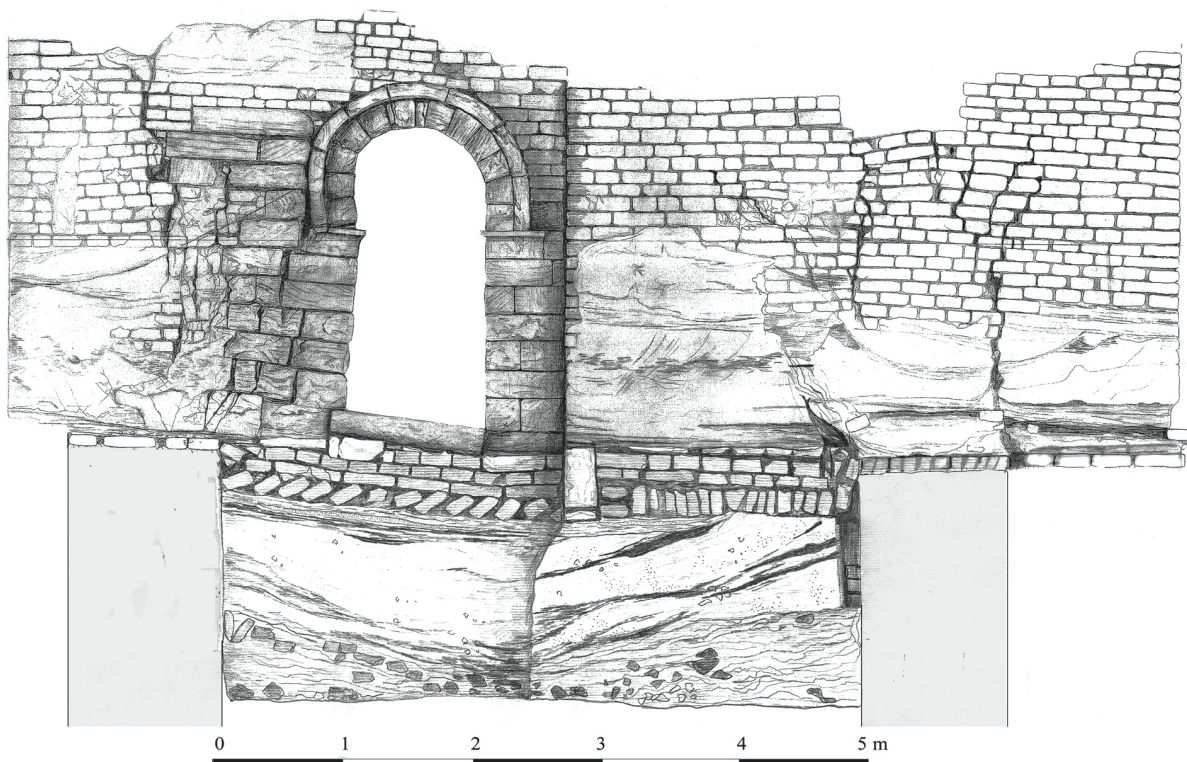


Fig. 18: Vertical crackings cause by uneven subsidence of the section of the northern wall of the Upper Church on both sides of the northern entrance (drawing: Anna Błaszczyk)

500 years). On the reasons not fully comprehensible to me this preparations were cancelled and new, differently planned, structure was built instead.

The research carried out in Banganarti until the year 2013 did not change the main tenets of the chronology of both churches: the Lower Church which was used until the mid-eleventh century in the second half of the eleventh century was pulled down and overbuilt with another religious edifice dedicated to Archangel Raphael.¹²

The new building raised on the levelled ruin of its predecessor was an audacious structure, at least twelve metres high. Its stability was secured by the foundations which were not up to the challenge put out by the weight of the superstructure and the unstable substratum composed of the sturdy walls of its predecessor and the loose filling of the Lower Church's interior space. The discrepancy between the outstanding way of raising the walls and the worst manner of their founding is beyond comprehension.

Needless to say the uneven subsidence that ensued, aggravated by the changing level of ground water was too much the Upper Church could stand. The different density and strength of the foundations tested by the force of gravity inevitably resulted in

cracks, fissures and eventually caused the destruction of the whole structure.

The Raphaelion rebuilt, reconstructed, propped up constantly repaired survived as one of the most important pilgrimage centres in the Middle Nile until the late fifteenth century or later.

There is no doubt that Upper Church from the very beginning was conceived, commissioned and executed as a pilgrimage center. The new building was far better adapted to the new function than his predecessor, the Lower Church. No doubt the Archangel Raphael remained a patron saint of the new church but it remains an open question whether the highly respected burials, which in the late eleventh century were three metres beneath ground, continued to attract the pilgrims. There are evident fingerprints of the attempts to dig through the fill to these graves after eleventh century but the purpose behind this efforts are not particularly clear. Upper Church attracted the pilgrims through the virtue of the relics which were kept there and the esteem of his patron saint and the *anargyroi* who were venerated in the church at least on their holidays. As was already said the best place to make the putative relics accessible by the crowds was the *analogion* standing beneath the central dome in the axial point of the building reachable through the three entrances and visually available by the people in the galleries.

¹² Żurawski 2012, 179-182.



Needless to say it is a unique building both in the Middle Nile and elsewhere. Although some of the pilgrimage churches in the East reveal of similarity features (e.g. porticos) in terms of general layout the closest analogy is drawn between Raphaelion at Banganarti and Philippeion at Pammukale (Hierapolis).¹³

Noteworthy the Philippeion at Pammukale is equipped with portico and the four suits of identical rooms which might be the dormitories where the incubation was performed.¹⁴ There was probably also an ambo, but no altar. The portico along its three walls is another strong point of similitude to the Raphaelion.

The original feature of the Upper Church was its spatial openness which allowed the unhindered influx of the visitors. In the first phase of its use it had three entrances, two on the N-S axis and one in the middle of the western façade which provided easy and direct access to the nave in general and to the masonry *analogion* built on an octagonal base in the focal point of the church beneath the dome, in particular.

The heart-shaped piers, ambo and two massive stands set against both western piers which originated in the phase I all were plastered with a thin layer of top quality, water resistant, lime render.

In terms of architectural evolution of the Nubian church the Upper Church shows a stubborn archaism. Many features that were *en vogue* in the sixth/seventh to ninth century architecture reemerged in this edifice. The late eleventh century church built on central plan entirely of red brick with extensive use of well worked stone should be regarded as an architectural fossil. The reason behind such departure from the current convention was probably the royal patronage and the special place the Raphaelion occupied in the Nubian sacral landscape. Although raised in times when the *floruit* period of the Nubian building technique was over the Raphaelion was planned and executed in an exceptional way (although the marks of decadence and neglect are visible). It defies all logic and trends observable in the development of the Nubian architecture and masonry technique because it was commissioned by somebody belonging to the highest echelons of the Nubian society, perhaps the king himself. The enormous possibilities and resources brought to the scene by the individual who sponsored its construction were entirely responsible for the archaizing

technique and materials. There were, however, some favourable circumstances to build it in that way – these were the *spolia* which were extracted *en masse* from the Raphaelion's predecessor. The ample use of well worked stone was facilitated by the availability of this material on spot because the Lower Church used stone copiously.

The ambulatory around the central *tetrapylon* (which housed the *analogion* and ambo) in the Upper Church was one of the most distinctive features of its layout before the *kburus* was built in late thirteenth century. It facilitated movement within the church the processions included, and provided access to its 22 chapels, rooms and spaces. In the first place it allowed circumambulation of the *analogion*, where important relics were kept and the important icon could be displayed.

The evolution of the Byzantine churches suggests the Raphaelion's typological affiliation with the so-called ambulatory churches¹⁵ of which the best known example is Pammakaristos at Constantinople.¹⁶

In the middle space of the Raphaelion stand four mighty piers (*tetrapylon*) carrying the dome. Although solidly substructured by foundations *circa* two metres deep the piers buckled wherever they were raised above the edge of the Lower Church's wall.

The piers themselves are the only architectural elements of the Upper Church which were plastered three times. It means that they were not affected by the general reconstruction of the church which witnessed the levelling (almost to the pavement) of most of the inside rooms and chapels.

The Upper Church piers are the only known to me examples of the engagement of the Middle Byzantine recessed bricks masonry in Nubia.¹⁷ In building technique characteristic for the Komnenian period the alternating courses of bricks were recessed from the wall plane and covered with mortar, so that the interstices seemed much thicker than the bricks themselves.¹⁸ It was extremely popular in the eleventh century in the countries under the Byzantine cultural and political influence.¹⁹

13 Verzone 1960: 1-20, Pl. 3; 1962: 631-634; 1961-1962: 633-647; 1963- 1964: 371-389; 1965: 613-627; *Reallexikon zur byzantinischen Kunst* 2, (s.v. Hierapolis), 1203-1223 (especially 1207-1211); De Bernardi 2002: 147-179.

14 Verzone, *Reallexikon zur byzantinischen Kunst* 2, 1211.

15 Marinis 2014: 52.

16 It was most probably founded in the twelfth century by certain John Komnenos and Anna Doukaina (Coche de la Ferté 1982: 504 (with plan). The latest dating by Marinis ("late eleventh or early twelfth century", Marinis 2014: 191) makes Pammakaristos a contemporary of the Raphaelion.

17 For the analysis of this technique, examples and bibliography cf. Ousterhout 1999: 174-179; for later publications on the subject cf. Mihaljević 2012: 102 and n.13.

18 Krautheimer and Ćurčić 1986: 520.

19 Ousterhout 2006: 70.

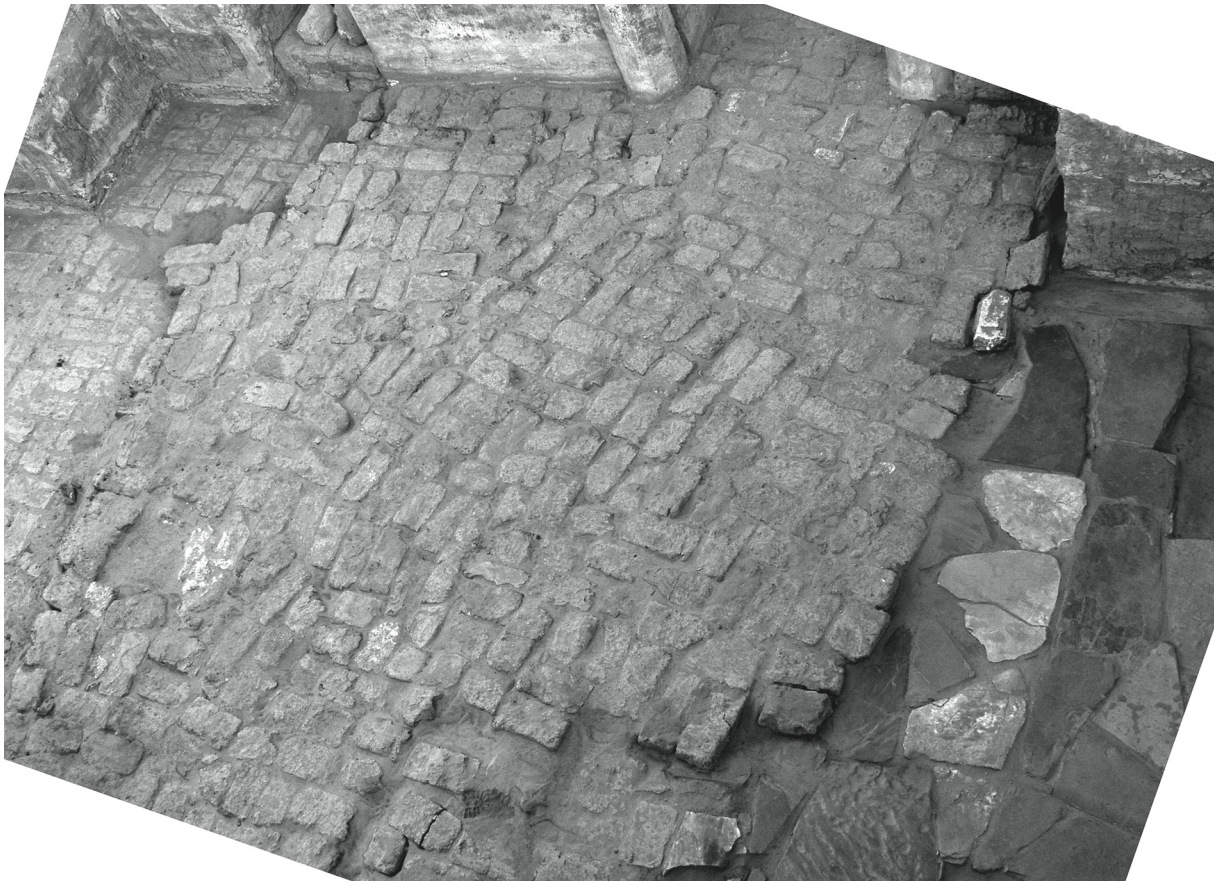


Fig. 19: The central part of the Upper Church (in front of the ambo seen in the upper part) covered with an extra course of red (unbound) brick (photo: Bogdan Żurawski).

The recessed brick technique appeared together with aesthetical improvement of the exterior walls of the churches. It articulated the dimensions of depth as well as width and height in the wall treatment achieved through the medium of pilasters, niches, engaged colonettes, mouldings *etc.*²⁰

The Upper Church was profoundly dismantled and rebuilt with the exception of the central *tertrapylon* and the liturgical furniture it enclosed. Lesser modifications included pulling down the vaults and arches reconstructing them on more solid supports with shorter span.

The space enclosed within the *tertrapylon* (being in fact the real *naos* of the church) was the axial space of the church, easy accessible through three entrances.

As was already said above the focal point of the Raphaelion was a brickwork octagon set in the middle of the nave, beneath the dome. Being installed before the pavement was laid, it belongs to the earliest outfit of the church. In its subterranean, and over ground part as well, it had a square cache plastered inside with lime.

It was found open and empty. Its content, if any, is a guess, however, it features some similarities with the altar caches in which reliquaries were kept.²¹ Its shape and location within the church leaves no doubt that object in question should be labelled an *analogion* i.e. the stand on which the icons or relics are placed for veneration.

The oldest type of *analogion*, as e.g. from the *katholikon* at Athos was “ a high octagonal stool panelled all round to the ground and usually inlaid with tortoise- shell and mother of pearl”.²²

The easy access to the *analogion* was provided by all three entrances, nevertheless the main approach was by means of the western door. We do not know what sort of *sacrum* brought the pilgrims to the Upper Church. Apart of the quality of the patron Saint also the relics and the holy murals acted as magnet for crowds. If so, the holy objects had to be displayed in a place where the pilgrims could come in close contact with them. The *analogion* is the best and the only choice. It is perhaps a sort of too far a

²¹ Godlewski 2006: 40 and fig. 22 on page 40.

²² Riley 1887: 55; on *analogion* in general cf. Parry *et al.* 1999, s.v. 27; Lampe 1961: 111.

²⁰ Ousterhout 1999: 175.

jump into conclusion but suggestion must be made, with hesitation however, that the relics which have attracted pilgrims to the Upper Church could have been kept in reliquaries which are painted in the hands of the kings pictured in Chapel 2 and Chapel 3 (cf. infra). I would not be astonished if it was Bishop Georgios who consecrated the Raphaelion in the 1070, and came to Dongola to ask for gold needed to pay off the Patriarch Christodulos from the slavery, who brought the relics as a gift from the Patriarch to the Nubian king.

Since the pavement in the central part of the church caved in the depression had to be covered with a layer of sand on which a course of red brick was laid (the bricks were left unbonded) Fig. 19. In the eastern part the brick course was replaced with by a layer of polished marble slabs. Before it was done the *analogion* was dismantled and never rebuilt again.

The moulded lime window grilles fragments come mostly from excavations inside the Upper Church. The distribution of find places of the fragments suggests that the main source of light in the nave was a ring of windows beneath the central dome and the apertures in the vaults above the ambulatory around the central *tetrapylon*. Altogether in the 2001-2005 seasons 323 grille fragments were inventorized. Unfortunately all fragments come from the layer of disturbed debris filling of the Upper Church. Not even one sizeable concentration of fragments from one window grille was found. It made the reconstruction process difficult and the results disputable. As a rule the grilles fit the average opening of 50/60 cm x 70/80 cm having the curved upper edge. Being standardized in terms of width and height they differ much in thickness (from 2.8 to 7 cm).

One grille fragment (BNG 2005/45) was glazed. The glazing was done in the following manner: a small piece of glass of irregular shape was pressed into the aperture when the lime paste was soft. Then it was fixed with lime coating applied generously and smoothed. After it was done the grille was left to set. The glazing was applied to the grilles with small apertures because only a very small glass fragments were available (from the broken glass objects?).

The Raphaelion's uniqueness in terms of mural decoration consists in the collection of the images representing Nubian monarchs. The composition painted on the first layer of plaster in Chapel 2 belongs to the best preserved. It represents a Nubian ruler under the patronage of the archangel standing behind him, surrounded by three Apostles.

The middle part of the mural is preserved only (the paint has been washed and has faded out in



Fig. 20: Fragment of the king's representation in Chapel 2; upper part of the columnar scepter topped by Christ figure and the rotunda-shaped object painted against the right shoulder of the king (photo: Bogdan Żurawski).



Fig. 21: Konrad von Soest (1370-1430), Charlemagne receives a reliquary from an angel, Engelzyklus in the Aachen Cathedral, after: Schiffers 1951: fig. on page 17.



some places making the composition unintelligible in details). It comprises the heads and shoulders of the Apostles, king's figure preserved from the waist up and part of the archangel figure standing behind. The outside edges of the archangel's wings seen on the apse's side walls either side of the ruler are contoured with black. The inner edges are jagged with red colour. The nicely decorated yellow shoes seen above a pavement apparently belong to the archangel. He touches the king's left shoulder with the fingertips of his left hand. His right arm, bent at the elbow, is mostly gone.

The Apostles either side of the ruler place their hands on king's upper arms in a gesture of protection. King's left shoulder is also delicately touched by the archangel's left hand. The middle part of the king's face and the face of the Apostle right from him have been chopped out.

The ruler is depicted frontally. His oblong face is trimmed with sparse beard. He is clad in a yellow *kuftan* patterned with a repetitive multicoloured, flower-like design densely covering the entire garment. The *tiraz* bands segment the sleeves above the elbows. Around his neck there is a green torque (*maniakion*).

His hair is cut very short or shaved. He holds in the right hand a sceptre in the shape of a column topped by a capital on which the sitting figure of Christ is painted with red. The Saviour's right hand is raised in a gesture of blessing, his body strongly contorted; the lower part is shown in profile, the chest and the head in frontal view.

A tiny patch of malachite green paint above the right ear is all that remained of the king's crown. Better preserved is the royal wrap of densely patterned cloth bordered with wide band of dark brown streams from his right shoulder across the chest and over the left arm to end in a loop below the left elbow. It looks as if the upper end of the wrap (above the left shoulder) is attached to a chapel-like object (reliquary?) surmounted by a cross.



Fig. 22: General view of the Chapel 3 interior, looking east (photo: Bogdan Żurawski).

The scepter held by the king in his right hand deserves a comment. First of all because of its symbolic meaning, second because of its uniqueness (the only analogy in Nubia and elsewhere is in the neighboring Chapel 3). Rendered in yellow paint (imitating gold) it is shaped as a column topped with a cross. The seated figure of Christ atop adds the sanctity to this symbol of earthly power of the king.

Not less intriguing is the rotunda-like object painted against the king's right shoulder. I argued on several occasions that the chapel-like objects held by the Nubian monarchs depicted in Chapel 2 and Chapel 3 are probably reliquaries not church models.²³ The reasons for such assumption are rife. First of all the church models are presented to the saintly figures by the donors who commissioned the originals. In Raphaelion the action is reversed; it is the archangel who hands the chapel-like object to the king, not *vice versa*. Secondly, the details of the object in question, its rotunda shape (there is no rotunda-shaped churches in Nubia), its yellowish colour (all churches in the Middle Nile are plastered and whitened), jeweled façades *etc.* rather preclude

²³ Żurawski 2008, 316.



Fig. 23: Ink copy of the painted decoration in Chapel 3. Schema (fold out) of the paintings on the eastern, northern and southern walls (drawing: Wojciech Chmiel).

its being the church's model. The scene resembles more the composition known from the Aachen Cathedral depicting an angel handing Charlemagne the reliquary (Fig. 21) rather than the Byzantine representations of donors offering models of churches to the Heavenly Beings.

The king in Chapel 2 is depicted with three crowns: one on the head (only a tiny fragment preserved), the second in his left hand and the third (*maniakion*) around his neck (Fig. 20, colour fig. 5). There seems to be two too many, however, the custom had a good precedence in Byzantine ritual.²⁴ The meaning of the second crown in Byzantine investiture is not clear. Brightman had suggested that it symbolized the authority to crown consort.²⁵

The Chapel 3 in its present shape was probably rebuilt since part of the original wall is seen in the lowest part of the southern wall and the southern pilaster (Figs. 22 & 23, cover picture).

On the curved eastern wall a Nubian king under the holy patronage of an archangel, accompanied by the Apostles was painted. The mural is relatively well preserved up to the line above the heads of the Apostles. The rainwater trapped in the chapel, when it was half filled with sand, washed out a horizontal section at the height of the ruler's loins.

The central place of the composition is taken by a royal figure clad in ceremonial dress. The king "levitates" above the line on which the archangel and the Apostles stand, held up in this position by Apostles standing next to him. He grasps in the left hand a globular, horned helmet topped by a cross with

bulbous endings and base. The helmet, ornamented with a scale-like design is bisected with a straight horizontal band in the middle. Another, much wider, band, decorated with jewels borders the helmet along the lower edge.

The horns, patterned with an arabesque design, are plain at tips. A bird figure is attached to the uppermost part of the left horn; the other tip (plausibly with another bird?) is concealed behind the ruler's right hand.

The ample wrap lavishly patterned with a compartmentalised design and bordered with reticulated band streams down across the chest from his right shoulder, over the left forearm and ends in a sling fold at the left elbow. Each four lobed compartment of the wrap design is filled with a figure of a bird with wings outspread alternating with an antithetic design of two confronted birds either side of a lily-like plant with roots exposed, the birds pecking at its stem. The inside of the compartments is painted blue.

A tiny fragment of a jeweled crown is seen above the right ear. Around king's neck there is a malachite green torque. His hair looks as if cut short or shaved. The oval earrings are clipped to his ears. In his right hand the king holds a gold (painted yellow) sceptre in the shape of a fluted column crowned by a capital, on which a seated figure of Christ.

At the height of the king's knees, on his left side a lower end of an elaborate ribbon covered with hatched design is seen. It ends with three pendants. This iconographic element, alien to the Byzantine royal costume, could have been borrowed from the Meroitic royal imagery which knows the pendants terminating in tripartite decorative elements, e.g. the band with tassels (*Dreiquastenschnur*) being part of

24 Woolley 1915, 16.

25 Brightman 1901, 375.



the royal *Staatsornat* represented in Naga relieves.²⁶ Cords hanging from the shoulders almost to the knees, frequently depicted on Kushite reliefs, are considered the attributes of royal attire.

As was already said, the Chapel 3 ruler holds in his hand a sceptre which finds analogy only among the royal insignia depicted in Chapel 2. It is a fluted column crowned by a capital on which sits a figure of Christ his body in profile whilst his head is in frontal view. Behind him is a cross seemingly attached to the capital.

The archangel's figure, which stands behind the king is almost twice the size of the ruler. Protecting the king he also 'embraces' the Apostles either side of him with the outspread wings. He gently grasps a yellow painted object that resembles a small domed chapel from above and below with the outstretched thumb and fingers of his left hand and hands it to the ruler. A cross atop this object resembles the cross fixed to the horned headgear (however its endings are pointed, not spherical). Its front side ornamented with a band of *quilloche* is painted blue as if the original was glazed. Archangel grasps it with his finger tips. The object definitely bears more similitude to the chapel-like reliquary than to the church model. It finds an analogy in the late tenth century reliquary of Saint Anastasios the Persian, at present in Aachen²⁷ and two eleventh century reliquaries from Venice Saint Marc Treasury²⁸ and Aix-la Chapelle (Treasury of the Cathedral).²⁹

The archangel's cloak is belted. His feet kept wide apart are shod in *markub*-like footgear. His relation to the king is somewhat reserved, as hardly a bodily touch between is indicated. His hands hang above the ruler's shoulders rather than actually touch him. A totally different relationship exists between the ruler and the two Apostles next to him (Peter and Andrew). Both support the ruler's elbows, as if intending to elevate him, with the tips of the thumbs and fingers clasped together. This protective gesture rarely employed in Christian iconography resembles the Kushite protection scenes in which the ruler is protected by accompanying deities through raising by elbows.³⁰



Fig. 24: The St Damianos mural in 2003, soon after discovery, with the entrance to the staircase still blocked by a debris and sand fill (photo: Bogdan Żurawski).

The presence of the king's image among the Apostles stresses the sacrosanct status of the Makurian monarch which associates him with the position of Byzantine emperor. Both sovereigns are said to retain some privileges reserved for the clergy. The Nubian king being to some extent a *ἱερεὺς καὶ βασιλεὺς* was said to have right to enter the *haikal* area of the church. This honour was accredited to him *per analogiam* to the legal rights of the Byzantine emperor who was permitted to enter the bema during the service, to incense the altar and to kiss, like the clergy, the altar cloth.³¹

To the highlights of the Upper Church mural decoration no doubt belong the composition from the northwestern staircase's vestibule depicting Saints Cosmas and Damianos (Fig. 24, colour fig. 6).

The figure of St Damianos is painted in a niche outlined with black line. The image of his twin brother is painted on the plain wall, however, within a frame contoured in black in apparent imitation of the St Damianos' niche.

26 Gamer-Wallert 1983: 100.

27 Evans & Wixom 1997: 461 and no. 300.

28 Bréhier 1936: 88.

29 Vollbach and Lafontaine-Dosogne 1968: 196-197, fig. 76.

30 e.g. granite stela of king Tanyidamani, from the Great Temple of Ammun in Jebel Barkal (dated to the 2nd cent. B.C.) now kept in Boston Museum of Fine Arts (No. 23.736) and coronation scene on the column in the Great Enclosure in Musawwarat (Kormysheva 2006: fig. 7 on page 20 after Hintze *et al.* 1993: 108, fig. 58.

31 Bréhier 1948: 43; *Liber de ceremoniis* I, 10.



Both saints are painted on the red background which, in case of St Cosmas representation, is almost totally washed out.

St Damianos is standing *en face* with the feet kept wide apart. His eyes are partly gouged out with a sharp tool (the middle of his forehead was also cut with the same tool).

He wears a long white belted tunic stripped with vertical folds shaded with ochre. The baggy sleeves are rendered in similar way. The white over-gown, clasped in front with a round, decorative *fibula* is trimmed with a double black line along the lower edge. His right arm, bent at the elbow is raised against the chest. In the right hand he holds a lancet provided with a short, curved blade (the way he holds the lancet is peculiar since it is clasped with bent ring a little finger whereas the index, middle finger and the thumb are extended).

His skin complexion is pale white with a pinkish tint, shaded with light brown and contoured with purple red. He wears a pointed beard and mustaches coloured brown. With the thumb and index of the left hand he holds the bag for surgical tools, painted red violet. The string handle of the bag shows from between the thumb and the forefinger. On the nimbed head he wears a low crown topped with three semicircles. His feet are shod with ornamented slippers painted with black.

The cult of the *anargyroi* Saints Cosmas and Damianos could have been more widespread in Nubia than the iconographical evidence suggests (e.g. Abu'l-Makarem mentions the Nubian Monastery dedicated to Saint Cosmas and Damianos).³²

Given the medical associations of both Saints it is perfectly understandable that the churches dedicated to them were linked with the art and practice of faith-healing.³³ By the sixth century, when the *anargyroi* cult reached its apogee their association with *ksenones* and pilgrimage centers seems to be already well established.³⁴ The Cosmidion in Constantinople had a *ksenon* for the poor and sick next door, probably under the same administration. Bishop Nonnos founded a leprosarium in Edessa and provided it with a chapel for Saints Cosmas and Damianos.³⁵ When Bishop Theophylaktos built an *iatreion* for the sick and lepers in the ninth century Nikomedia, he also added to the complex a chapel dedicated to Saints Cosmas and Damianos.³⁶ The *ksenones* usually included a chapel where the holy healers's

reverence was cultivated (e.g. in the Pantokrator Monastery in Constantinople).³⁷ The relationship between hospitals and *anargyroi* shrines was so close that hagiographers often pictured Cosmas and Damianos as though they were physicians. The popularity of their cult was based on the dogma verbalized by the hagiographer who, while acknowledging many cases of cures on the tomb of St Evaristus, said that "the divine energy and grace is much more powerful than human medical service".³⁸

The Room 21 (middle one in the southern row) is better known for its inscriptions rather than the murals. Nevertheless, in the uppermost register of the eastern wall there is still seen a lower part of the New Testament scene showing Christ and Doubting Thomas (both protagonists are identified by the legends, cf. Fig. 25, colour fig. 7).

Thomas is wearing purple tunic draped into vertical folds modeled with pink-reddish stripes. The colour of his shoes almost totally faded out. Christ is shown barefooted, clad in purple tunic with two white narrow *clavi*. His complexion is pale white. His right foot (the only visible) is outlined with yellow. He steps with his right bare foot over Thomas' left shod foot. Below the mural there is an inscription within the yellow frame containing the scriptural quotation. Interestingly the text is followed by a dedication made by a certain "Papasa who was d (...) of King David". Łajtar thinks that King David from this inscription should be identified with the king of this name who is mentioned in the Royal Proclamation from Qasr Ibrim dated to the year AD 1155, as the uncle (and predecessor) of King Moses George.³⁹

Below the mural illustrating the incredulity of Thomas there is a famous inscription in Catalan/Provençal language scratched with a sharp tool by a visitor from southern France (?). His name was Benesec (that is Benedict in Provençal). He visited the Raphaelion in the fourteenth-century.⁴⁰ The reasons for his coming to Banganarti are so far unknown. The text he left is short and simple, confirming simply that *Benesec came (to pay homage?) to Rafael*.

The Benesec graffito belongs to the latest inscriptions scratched on the Upper Church's walls.

Below there is an Old Nubian prayer addressed to St. Raphael the Archangel (Łajtar *forthcoming* no 670). It is the longest and most moving Nubian inscription ever found in Banganarti. Its historic importance is as great as its dramatic message. It is an ardent prayer for the Nile flood and for peace, the

32 Evetts 1895: fol. 94 b.

33 Miller 1985: 65.

34 Miller 1985: 64

35 Philipsborn 1961: 360.

36 Philipsborn 1961: 350.

37 Gautier 1974: 95 (1097).

38 Kazhdan 1984: 45-46.

39 Łajtar, *forthcoming*, no. 667.

40 Łajtar and Płóciennik 2011: 95-119.



two essentials without which life and work in Nubia was never possible (Browne 2004, 23 - 26).

On the southern wall of Room 21 there is a very rare (in Nubian painting) double protection scene representing a king or an eparch in a horned helmet together with his consort or a co-ruler, both protected by an archangel standing behind them with wings half-outspread.

The mural survived in the worst imaginable state of repair due to the joint action of the elements. Despite its lamentable state of repair a horned helmet covered with a scale pattern surmounted by a cross is clearly seen on the head of the figure on the archangel's right. The *protégé* on his left side is almost totally washed down by rainwater.

*

In the central nave of the Upper Church there is virtually no mural decoration. Only above the northern one of the two putative Communion tables set against both western piers there is a mural representing the Virgin with Child. The painting belonging to the later period of the church decoration is accompanied by lacunous text contains the words the Mother of God said to Archangel Gabriel during Annunciation, according to Luke 1:38.41. Faint traces of the murals have been found also on other piers. There were probably more but since they were applied to the second layer they are mostly covered by the third one.

For the dearth of murals in the central nave we were compensated by the wealth of texts that are on all piers. Among them there is a graffito of an anonymous "deacon and *epirshil* of the King Joel" applied to the southeastern pier.⁴² King Joel of Dotawo, there is no evidence so far of another Nubian king of that name, ruled the northern Nubian buffer state in the second half of the fifteenth century.⁴³ The



Fig. 25: Eastern wall of Room 21. In the upper register lower part of the mural representing Christ and Doubting Thomas. The inscription in Provençal, barely visible, is between the Greek legend to the painting (in the yellow frame) and a long Old Nubian prayer to St Raphael below. Orthophotograph generated from the three-dimensional model made by photogrammetric image processing of the archive photographs and modern tachymetric measurements (photos and rendering: Bogdan Żurawski).

graffito left by his officer in the Upper Church at Baganarti is the latest internal textual confirmation of the liturgical use of this church in the Terminal Christian Period. The textual evidence coming from Egypt confirms the use of the Raphaelion by the Christian squatters in the eighteenth century.⁴⁴ The archaeological research is always aimed at confirming or rejecting the written testimonies. The research done so far in the Upper Church and its neighbourhood fully corroborates the tenor of both documents.

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43 Welsby 2002: 250-251.

44 Żurawski 2012: 20, 128-129.



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ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Banganarti, wo 2001 Ausgrabungen des Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology begannen, liegt am rechten Nilufer, 7,5 km oberhalb von Old Dongola. Der Name des Ortes (Banganarti bedeutet in der Nubischen Sprache „Heuschreckeninsel“) deutet darauf hin, dass die ursprüngliche Position als Insel im Nil war.

Die Ausgrabungen enthüllten Verteidigungsmauern, Wohnquartiere und, besonders wichtig, zwei Kirchen, die übereinander – die spätere auf den Ruinen der älteren – gebaut waren. Beide waren dem Erzengel Raphael geweiht. An den Wänden der oberen Kirche sind ca. 1000 griechische und altnubische Graffiti erhalten. Auch Wandmalereien sind in verschiedenen Erhaltungsgraden entdeckt worden. Diejenigen, die auf die Wände der sieben östlichen Kapellen gemalt sind, zeigen Nubische Könige unter dem heiligen Schutz der Erzengel in Gemeinschaft mit Aposteln. Die untere Kirche überliefert die längste griechische Inschrift, die bisher auf Wänden von nubischen Kirchen gefunden wurde. Unter den Wandmalereien sind einige einzigartige Kompositionen, wie z.B. die Anastase.

Der Ort begann Pilger anzuziehen, nachdem zwei berühmte Persönlichkeiten im *ad sanctos* Grab außerhalb der Ostmauer der unteren Kirche begraben wurden. Banganarti erlebte einen enormen Anstieg der Pilgerbewegung nach dem 11. Jh., als die obere Kirche errichtet wurde.

Über die heilkräftigen Aspekte des Patrons der Kirche hinaus ist die Heilung durch den Glauben in der oberen Kirche auch durch die Darstellung der heiligen Ärzte (*anargyroi*) St. Cosmas und St. Damianos verkörpert, die im Vestibül der Treppe Richtung Galerie als Wandmalerei erhalten sind.