

SELIB 1. PRELIMINARY REPORT FOR THE 2012 AND 2013 SEASONS

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Abstract: Part of a lower building was uncovered during the third and fourth seasons of excavation at the site of a church in Selib 1. Finds from the fill between floors confirmed the early dating of the oldest church (6th/7th century). Two buildings were examined in the vicinity of the inner peribolos: BN.13, which proved to be a domestic dwelling from a later phase (11th–12th century), and BS.13, identified as a structure of religious function built before the 9th–10th century.

Keywords: Selib, church, peribolos, medieval, Nubia, ceramics, oil lamps, domestic and ecclesiastical architecture

Excavation at the site of the church in Selib 1 in the 2012 and 2013 seasons extended the trenches to cover approximately 600 m² of the immediate vicinity of the church, mostly within the small enclosure, the so-called inner peribolos. A better understanding of chronology and functional character was the goal, focusing on the earliest phases of the church and its surroundings and leading to a reconstruction of the plan and its subsequent alterations.

Trial pits inside the church included 2/11–12 in the nave, 4/11–12 in the south aisle, 2/13 in the south-western corner and 3/13 in the north aisle. In the immediate surroundings, excavation proceeded trenches: W.01/11–12, W.5/11–12, W.7/11–12, W.10/11–12 (Western Complex), W.01/13 (Building BN.13), W.07/11–12 (Building BS.13). The *saqiya* within the church enclosure also continued to be investi-gated.

CHURCH

TRIAL PIT 2/11–12 (NAVE)

The main trial pit within the church was set in the nave, expanding on a small test trench 9/11, where the floor of the older building was revealed at 1.20 m below the latest pavement (Żurawski, Cedro et al.

2014: 330–331). The test was aligned with the central building axis [*Fig. 1*]. Part of the west wall of the upper church had to be dismantled and some stone slabs from the upper floor had been taken out as well in order to explore the earlier phases of the

architecture. The southern edge of the pit followed a wall from a rebuilding phase, raised on the row of stretchers set directly on the lower pavement. This structure ran along the main axis of the building, under the line of supports in the upper building, serving as their foundation. The area of the lower church uncovered in this trial pit was 3.00 m wide and 13.00 m long. At the east end, it ended before the altar of the upper church and only a narrow extension was dug on the southern side, reaching the edge of the east wall.

The space between the upper and lower floors was filled with alternate layers of

sand and red-brick debris. A cylindrical clay vessel was set in the pavement in the northern section of the pit, near the eastern edge [see *Fig. 1* bottom]. Similar vessels were found near the inverted capital (SDA.6.11) inside the southeastern pillar and another two during the clearing of the floor between the stone slabs. The vessels were arranged around the altar in a slightly asymmetrical semicircle from 1.30 m to 2.00 m from its center. Traces of organic material, probably wood, were found inside these containers. Similar jars were discovered in the monastery church at Ghazali, where they were inserted into

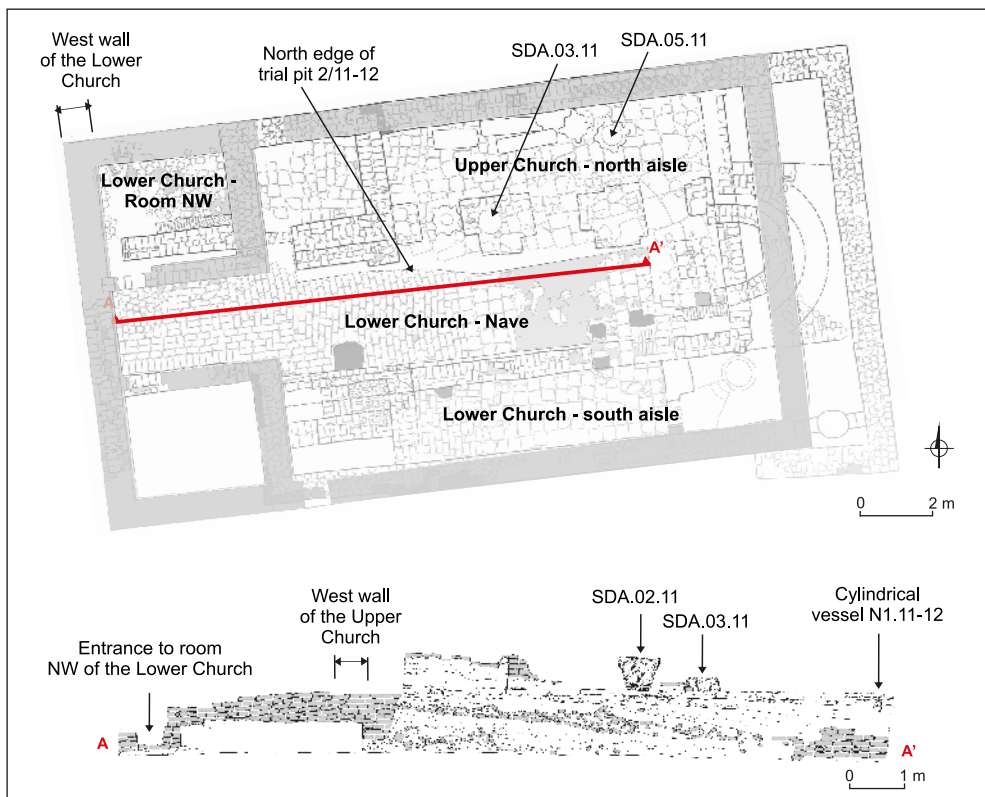


Fig. 1. Plan of the church (top) and cross-section through layers excavated in the nave (bottom) (Drawing A. Cedro)

the floor, in a line between the easternmost piers. There they were interpreted as accommodating four supporting posts of a wooden haikal screen (Shinnie and Chittick 1961: 14). The jars from Selib may have been used for a similar purpose, the divider however having a different shape.

The pavement of the floor of the lower church was uneven. The western part of the nave consisted of red bricks (averaging 34/35 cm by 17 cm) laid in wavy rows, replaced in the middle part by square ceramic tiles (34/35 cm to the side). The part of the floor on the east was coated additionally with a fine hard lime plaster.

The connection between the nave and the south aisle was investigated once a small section of the south wall from the reconstruction phase was dismantled. A fragment of a wooden beam was uncovered along with two other holes, apparently for similar beams. The wooden supports may have been used in the first phase of the upper church or during the rebuilding, before a more solid abutment was installed.

The lower church floor in this section was missing a few ceramic tiles and the voids were filled with stone slabs. Considering their location in the church interior, they may have been used as bases under columns or other supports.

Pottery from the fill between the lower and upper floors included several almost completely preserved vessels. Small hemispherical bowls with a black band around the rim predominated. A fine example of an Aladdin-type oil lamp (WS1.150.11-12) was found in the eastern part of the trench [*Fig. 2* top left]. A few well-preserved mud stoppers with stamped signs filled with red ochre

came from amphorae with rims of an inner diameter averaging 6 cm to judge by the impressions on the underside [*Fig. 2* bottom]. Impressions of rims and handles on the underside indicated that they had sealed amphorae once. The assemblage of pottery and other objects can be attributed to the Transitional/Early Christian period (6th/7th century).

TRIAL PIT 4/11-12 (SOUTH AISLE)
A trial pit in the west part of the south aisle was an eastward extension of test trench W.12/11 from the previous season (Żurawski, Cedro et al. 2014: 330-332). The fill between the upper and lower building was of a similar character as in trial pit 2/11-12. Similarly as in the nave, the lower church pavement in the aisle was composed of red bricks in the western part and ceramic tiles in the east. This indicates a coherent interior with no distinct division between the nave and aisles.

The inside face of the south wall exposed in the test pit was covered with lime render. A very fine coating of such plaster was found on other parts of walls belonging to the oldest phase of the church. Excavation revealed also the southern entrance to the lower building (1.20 m wide). It was located directly under the threshold of the upper doorway and was blocked with halves of red bricks during the rebuilding. Two complete hemispherical bowls were discovered next to the west jamb [*Fig. 2* top right].

**TRIAL PIT 2/13
(SOUTHWESTERN CORNER)**

The trench in the southwestern corner of the building joined trial pit 4/11-12 from the previous season (see above). The lower floor in this section continued



Fig. 2. Finds from the fill above the lower church pavement: top left, Aladdin-type oil lamp (trial pit 2/11-12); top right, hemispherical bowls (trial pit 4/11-12); bottom, stamped mud stoppers (trial pit 2/11-12) (Drawing and photo A. Cedro)

the red-brick floor from other parts. The exposed west wall and parts of the south wall were covered with white lime plaster, indicating that it had belonged to the oldest church. The second doorway of the lower church was revealed at a distance of 1.65 m from the western jamb of the first entrance. Both openings were eventually blocked during the rebuilding of the church.

The pottery from the fill between the upper and lower floors can be attributed to a very early Christian period. An almost complete molded red-slipped oil lamp (WS1.01.13) represents a form imported for the most part from Egypt [see similar lamp *Fig. 3* right]. In Lower Nubia they were popular enough to be taken as diagnostic of the X-Group and very early Christian period (Adams 1986: 104; Edwards 1994: Plate XXX 1). To date, they have not been found south of the Third Cataract.

TRIAL PIT 3/13 (NORTH AISLE)

The location of the trial pit in the north aisle necessitated the removal of columns and capitals lying on the upper pavement; a set of four complete oil lamps of late 12th century was found on the pavement under one of the capitals [*Fig. 3* left]. The inverted capital (SDA.03.11) reused as a base [*Fig. 4*] and the stone slabs from the upper pavement were taken out as well, revealing another of the cylindrical vessels stuck in the floor, similar in shape and size to the ones discovered earlier, and covered with a stone slab.

The floor of the lower church was paved in the same way as the nave and south aisle: red brick in the western part of the aisle and ceramic tiles in the eastern. Traces of repairs were noted between these two sections. The exposed face of the north wall was rendered with lime mortar. The east jamb of the lower door was exposed below the upper entrance to the church.

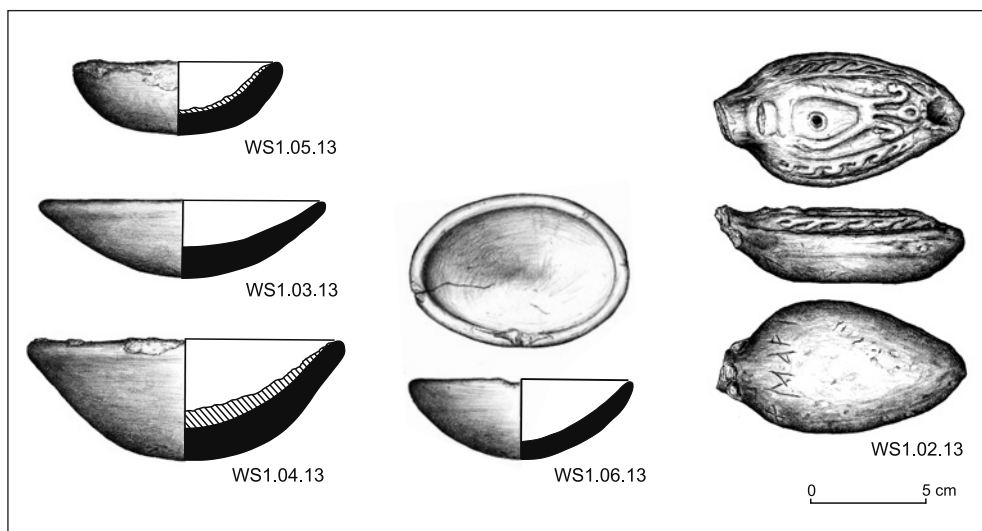


Fig. 3. Oil lamps: left, set found on the upper floor, under one of capitals; right, inscribed molded oil lamp (Drawing A. Cedro)

A wall parallel to the outer wall of the church was found 2.00 m to the south, corresponding to a similar structure in the south aisle. Both of the walls belonged to the rebuilding phase. Holes cut in the bricks and traces of a wooden beam were noted in the top of this wall, too. Exploration south of the wall revealed the same red-brick and terracotta tile pavement that was uncovered in the nave. Next to this was the structure of the pulpit, partly used as a foundation of a wall from the reconstruction phase; it was 1.60 m long and probably 0.90 m wide, preserved to a height of 0.27 m. It was built mostly of mud brick (44 cm by 22 cm by 7 cm), red bricks having been used only

for the first step. The walls and step were rendered with thick (2 cm) mud plaster and whitewashed. Traces of burned oil from lamps were observed on the floor tiles next to the pulpit.

A square room adjoining the north aisle was cleared in the eastern part of the trench. It was originally the northern pastophorium of the lower church. The south wall of this room was destroyed and replaced by the strip foundation wall of the upper building. A perpendicular wall connected with the new apse divided the room into two parts. The room was 2.50 m by 2.50 m at first. The walls were coated with a lime plaster that was inferior to the one used in the aisle. The floor was also of lower quality, paved only with red brick halves arranged in an irregular pattern. The interior of the pastophorium was furnished with masonry mastabas of red brick (0.55 m wide and 0.30 m high), built against the east, south and west walls.

The fill from the room yielded a set of Transitional/Early Christian pottery, especially thin-walled hemispherical bowls (WS1.08–09,11,16.13) and a fragmentary small goblet of greenish-blue glass (WS1.18.13). A molded oil lamp (WS1.02.13) bears the same decoration as the lamp from pit 2/13, combined with an inscription, † MAPI, on the bottom [Fig. 3 right].

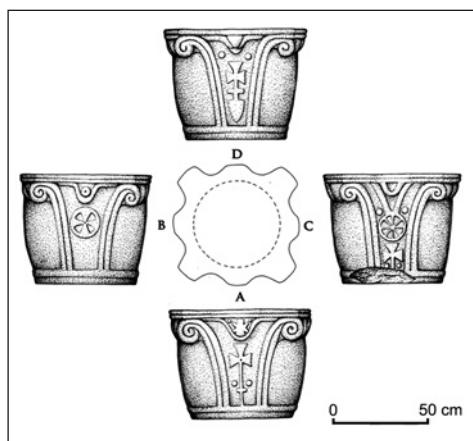


Fig. 4. Capital (SDA.03.11) reused as a base (Drawing A. Cedro)

TRENCHES OUTSIDE THE INNER PERIBOLOS

AREA W.01/11–12

The sector explored on the western side of the church (continuing trial pit W.11/11 from the previous season), 9.00 m wide, ran for about 18.00 m between the walls of the church on the east and the western part of the inner peribolos [see Fig. 9]. The

three perpendicular walls discovered here in 2011 were revealed to be connected with the western part of the lower church. It turned out that the earlier building was shifted more to the west compared to the later structure. Two of the perpendicular walls had originally divided the western

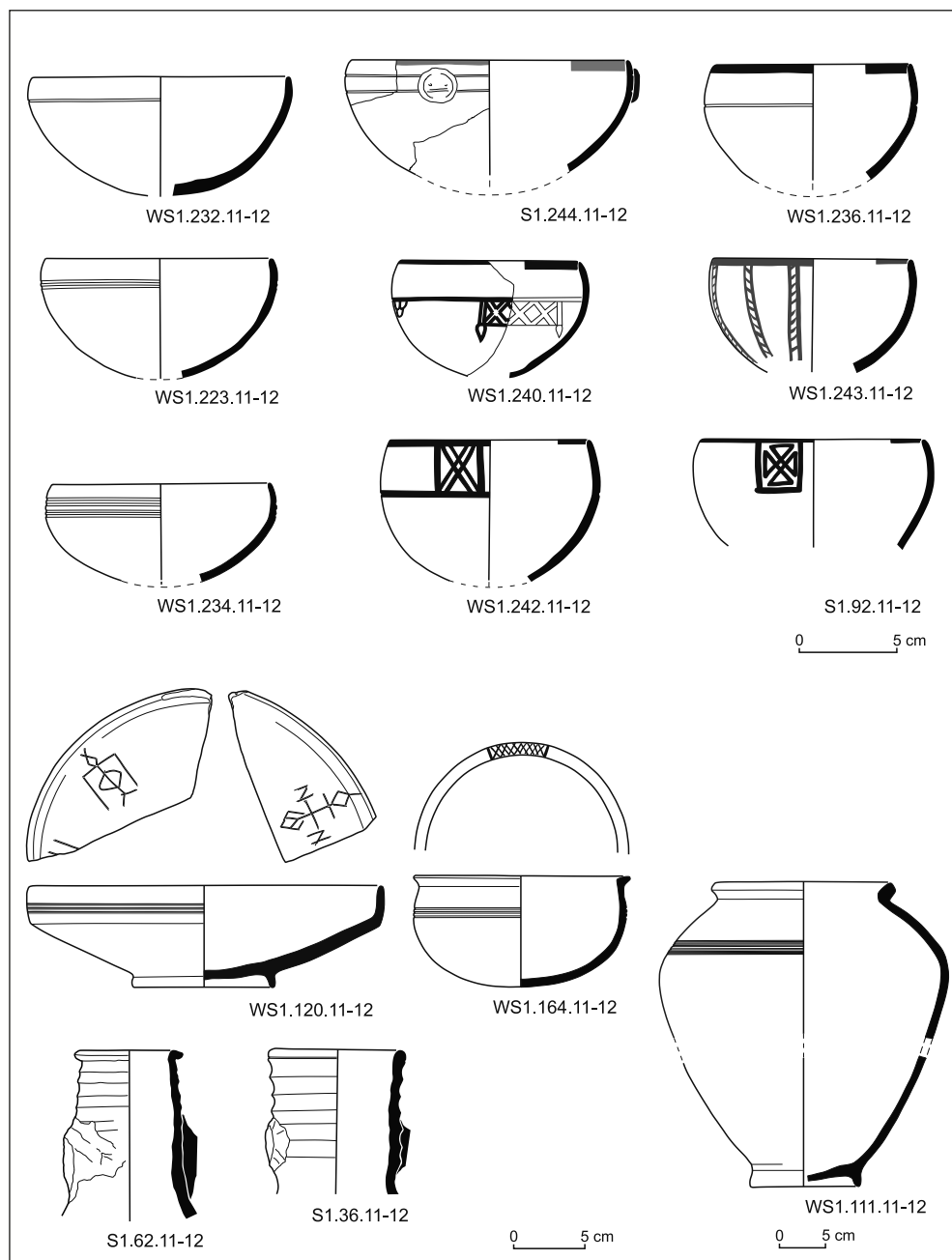


Fig. 5. Selection of pottery attributed to the 6th and 7th century, recovered from a deposit in area W.01/11-12 (Drawing A. Cedro)

part into two rooms in the northern and southern corners and a central space opening into the nave. This kind of internal division is a typical arrangement in Nubian churches. The floor in the middle space was paved with red brick (averaging 35 cm by 17 cm). In the northwestern corner room, 3.00 m by 3.50 m, the pavement was of a much poorer quality, constructed mostly of half-bricks in an irregular arrangement. No evidence of paving was observed in the southwestern room, which could have housed a staircase that was dismantled during the construction of the upper church building. The third perpendicular wall was superimposed on the floor of the southwestern room and belonged to the reconstruction phase.

The outer west wall of the lower church was located 4.50 m to the west of the position of the same wall of the upper building. The foundation trench was clearly outlined despite the poor preservation of the wall itself.

The fill of the southwestern corner room yielded a rich deposit of pottery and other materials, including some broken glass vessels and few stone, bone and metal artifacts, together with sizeable pieces of crystalline gypsum. The room appears to have been used as a convenient refuse dump before the remains were leveled and the upper building was constructed. The pottery constitutes a homogeneous assemblage, containing abundant tableware, mostly hemispherical bowls and forms imitating wares from late Roman Egypt, accompanied by containers, bottles, amphorae (both local production and imported) and oil lamps [Fig. 5]. The repertoire of forms and decoration attributes the assemblage to the 6th and 7th century.

Six graves were discovered in the western part of the area, in the uppermost strata consisting of sand and rubble of dried mud and red bricks [Fig. 6]. These were typical Christian burials, aligned east–west, the body supine and the head to the west. A simple arrangement of red bricks was found around the skull or the whole skeleton. In one of the graves (G.2), a small granite column from the older phase was used as part of the arrangement. The graves were most probably dug during the latest occupation phase of the site.

Exploration of the area between the west wall of the lower church and the inner peribolos revealed remains of superimposed structures. Parts of a parallel, red-brick wall were discovered about 7.00 m from the lower church remains and on the same level of the foundation. A wall of dried mud bricks stood further to the west, also parallel to the red-brick structure, but on a lower level, extending northward, outside the peribolos which was constructed in a later phase. The red-brick structure was connected most probably with the oldest church, perhaps as a kind of western vestibule. The mud-brick walls belonged to some older building and their structure resembled Meroitic building techniques known from the nearby settlement at Selib 2.

The thick accumulation of debris that covered the structures described above yielded numerous sandstone slabs (enough to pave about 100 m²). They are similar to the stone slabs used in the pavement of the upper floor, but must have belonged to an older monument, other than the church.

Eleven Meroitic column drums were found in the southwestern part of the sector, on the same level as the red-brick structure, arranged in a row, perpendicular

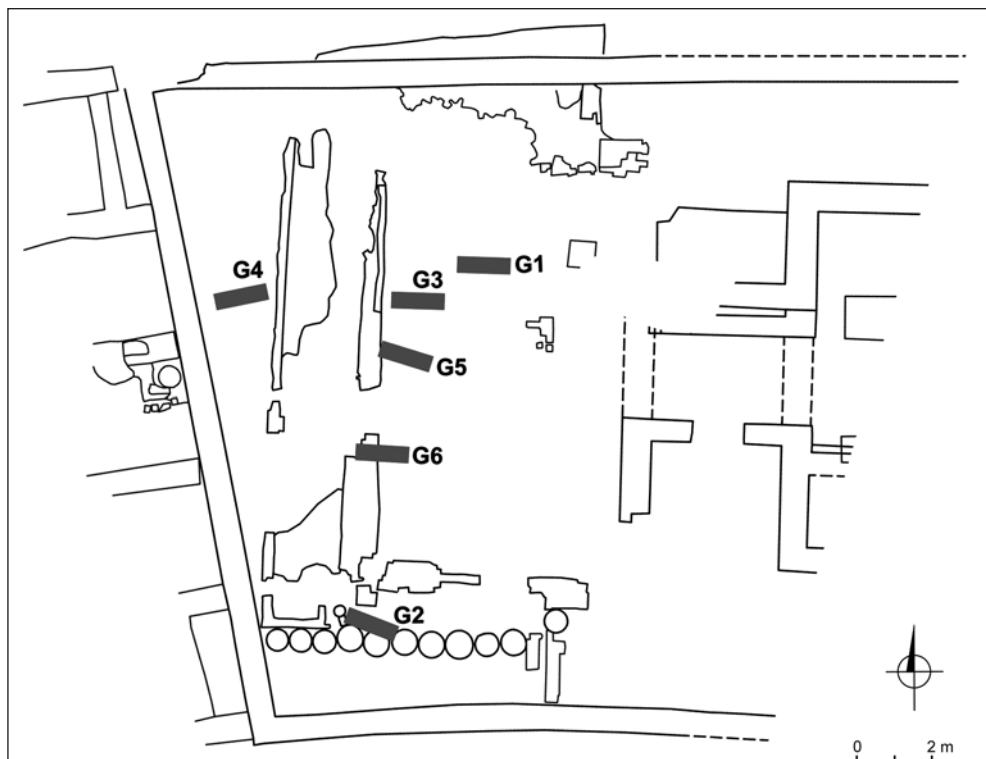


Fig. 6. Western part of area W.01/11–12, plan positioning the six later graves
(Drawing A. Cedro, B. Wójciewowski)



Fig. 7. Row of Meroitic column drums
(Photo A. Cedro)

to the south wall [Fig. 7]. Relief decoration could be seen on some of the drums, arranged in horizontal bands, the main scenes depicting an offering to the gods, bordered by narrow rows of stars. The easily recognizable figures are of Amun as Ra [see above, Fig. 9 on page 380], Bastet and Mut, popular Egyptian deities adopted in Meroe. The column drums must have come from an unknown Meroitic temple; its location could not have been distant considering the weight of these stone elements.

AREA W.5/11-12

The trench, 4.00 m wide, extended 10.00 m eastward into the inner peribolos, running along the south wall of the church, limited by the church and inner enclosure wall [see Fig. 9]. An irregular sequence of red bricks (35 cm by 17 cm by 8 cm) was reached under a stratum of sand and debris, measuring about 2.00 m

at the thickest. They may have been part of a collapsed wall from the lower church. Sherds of Classic Christian wares prevailed in the assemblage from the upper stratum, along with a bulk of terracotta window grille fragments and sandstone slabs, similar to those from Area W.01/11-12 and the upper church floor.

Excavations uncovered the southern face of the upper church wall and the visible foundation of the lower building, revealing the slightly different orientation of the two. The location of the southern entrance to the lower church was indicated by a layer of lime plaster covering the western jamb. The entrance was blocked in a later phase and the whole wall was covered with a second coat of lime plaster.

Relics of an oven were located about 4.00 m east of the southwestern corner of the upper church. They took on the form of a curving wall with charred opening and mud plaster render, standing on a red-brick



Fig. 8. *Top view of an oven on a red-brick platform*
(Photo A. Cedro)

platform attached to the inner peribolos wall [Fig. 8]. Considering the location of this structure in the immediate vicinity of the church, its purpose was very likely to bake Eucharistic bread. Eastward of the furnace a thick compact layer of lime mixed with small red-brick rubble extended about 6.00 m along the peribolos wall. It was connected with a container for slaking lime found directly below the oven platform, on a similar level as the foundation of the lower church. The rectangular, three-compartment structure may have been used by the builders of the lower church to prepare lime render for the inner and outer walls of the building.

AREA W.7/11-12

The trench extended onto the slope outside the small peribolos, south of its western part [Fig. 9]. A red-brick wall stood about 2.50 m away from the peribolos wall; next to it were remains of a mud-brick structure and a thick layer of ashes. The southern curtain of the peribolos was completely cleared of drifted sand with sparse potsherds and red-brick detritus in the upper layer. Walls were mostly of mud bricks lined with red brick halves, as in other parts of the structure, in a manner typical of Meroitic masonry. The exploration in the trench was not finished.

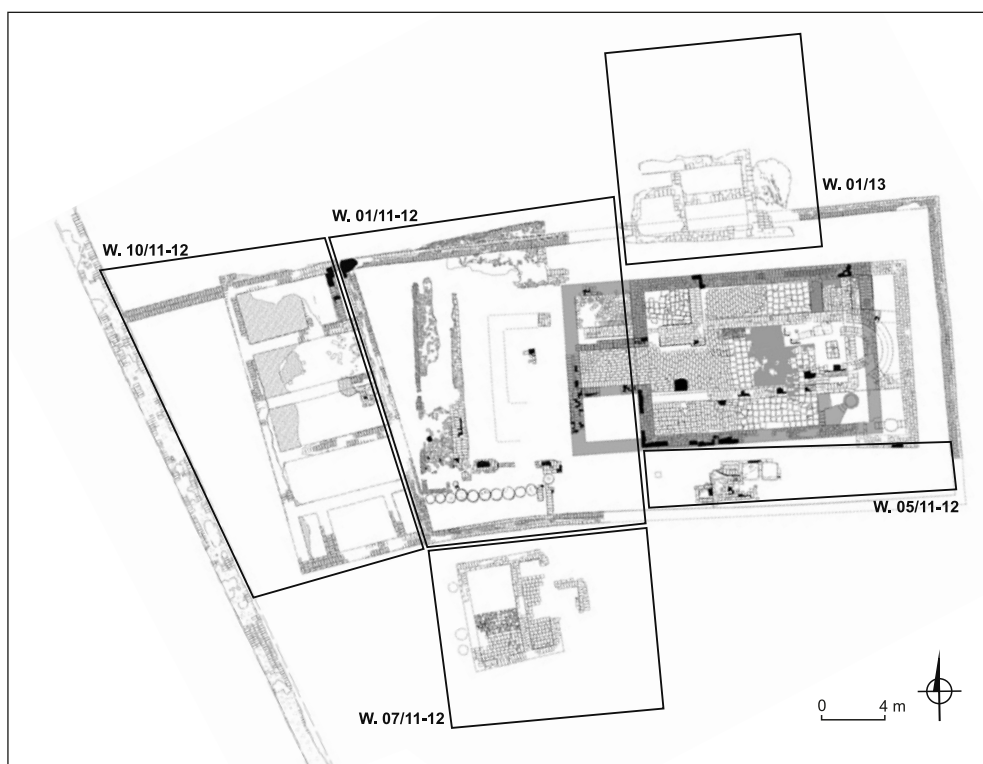


Fig. 9. Plan of the central part of the site with trenches excavated in 2012–2013 (Drawing B. Wojciechowski, A. Cedro)

AREA W.10/11-12
(WESTERN COMPLEX)

A trench 3.00 m wide and 19.00 m long was dug along the west wall of the peribolos on the outside, uncovering a set of six perpendicular, mud-brick walls [see *Fig. 9*], attached to the outer face of the peribolos and raised on a level about 0.30 m above the inner enclosure founding. The five cubicles formed by these walls were 2.80–2.90 m wide. The complex was of the same width as the west wall of the peribolos, whereas the length was ascertained to be about 7.50 m. The mud-brick walls averaged 0.72 m in thickness and were raised in the same kind of bondwork, directly on sand, devoid of a foundation. Middle walls were the best preserved, rising to about 0.60 m at the eastern end and dropping toward the west, where only one course of bricks was preserved. The north wall extended westward to the west curtain of the enclosure wall. Additional walls inside and traces of a mud layer, perhaps remains of the original pugging, were uncovered in the two corner sectors (Nos 1 and 5). No furnishing or additional facilities were noted save for a bread oven (about 0.60 m in diameter) by the northeastern corner in the third section. A thick layer of dung in the adjacent unit (4) is seen as evidence indicating the presence of an animal pen. The oven and pen identify the western complex as set apart for activities connected with domestic economy.

The relevant archaeological assemblage contained mostly potsherds, including numerous fragments of *qawadis*, cooking vessels and several oil lamps attributable to the end of Classical and Late Christian period (11th–12th century). A vessel of note is a bottle with painted decoration

and a flat rim inscribed with the letters MHNA (WS1/12.13).

The top of the western curtain of the enclosure wall was also uncovered and documented.

AREA W.01/13 (BUILDING BN.13)

A mud-brick wall uncovered in trial pit 6/11 outside the peribolos to the north was explored further in 2013. The wall was parallel to the north wall of the church, about 2.80 m away from it, on a foundation level about 0.20 m above the north entrance to the church. Excavation revealed that this structure was originally the south, outer wall of a building (BN.13), probably a house from the latest occupation phase of the site [*Figs 9, 10 left*].

The building was best preserved in its southern part, where the outer wall rising to about 0.50 m was traced for about 10.60 m. The east and west walls do not exist and the only trace of the north closing wall is a thin irregular layer of mud about 1.70 m from the southernmost preserved inner wall. The overall dimensions of the edifice can be estimated at approximately 12.00 m by 10.00 m.

The outlines of three rooms survive, two joining ones (1 and 2) of similar shape and size (3.90 m by 1.90 m). The third room (3) was almost square (2.80 m by 2.60 m). Both the outer and inner walls were 0.60 m wide and were constructed of mud bricks measuring 44 cm by 25 cm by 8 cm. The building was entered from the outside through a doorway, 0.75 m wide, in the south wall which led to room 1. The doorstep of BN.13 was situated 0.40 m higher than the church threshold. The door jamb and part of the south wall in this room were rendered with

mud mortar. Room 3 was entered from room 1 through a doorway 0.60 m wide. No traces of the floor or pugging were preserved save for a thick layer of mud brick in the unit adjoining room 1 on the east, which could be however the remains of a collapsed wall or ceiling. A small platform of red brick, 1.00 m² in size, was traced in the southwestern corner.

The stratigraphy, confirmed by dating of the pottery finds, placed building BN.13 in the Late Christian period and confirmed its function as being rather domestic than ecclesiastical.

AREA W.07/11-12
(BUILDING BS.13)

Exploration south of the small peribolos centered on a structure already identified about 2.30 m south of the inner enclosure and interpreted as a furnace or oven owing to a thick layer of ashes (see above). The plan of the building (BS.13) was now traced to the extent made possible by

its preservation (distinct outline of the western part) and the ashes proved to be connected with later use. The original structure, preserved to a height of about 0.50 m at the most, was made of red bricks (averaging 34 cm by 17 cm by 7 cm) and its interior was coated with pink mud-lime plaster. The complete plan of the building could not be established.

It consisted of two rooms presumably [Fig. 10 right]. The western room 1 was of rectangular shape, measuring 5.80 m by 2.60 m. This space was entered from the outside through a doorway in the south wall. Another doorway in the middle of the east wall led to the second room. It was a narrow space (about 5.80 m by 1.40 m) with an additional square extension to the east (1.40 m by 1.40 m) in the central part. It could have been a separate room, but the floor and walls in this part of the building were quite damaged. The furnace in the northern part of this unit was a later addition.

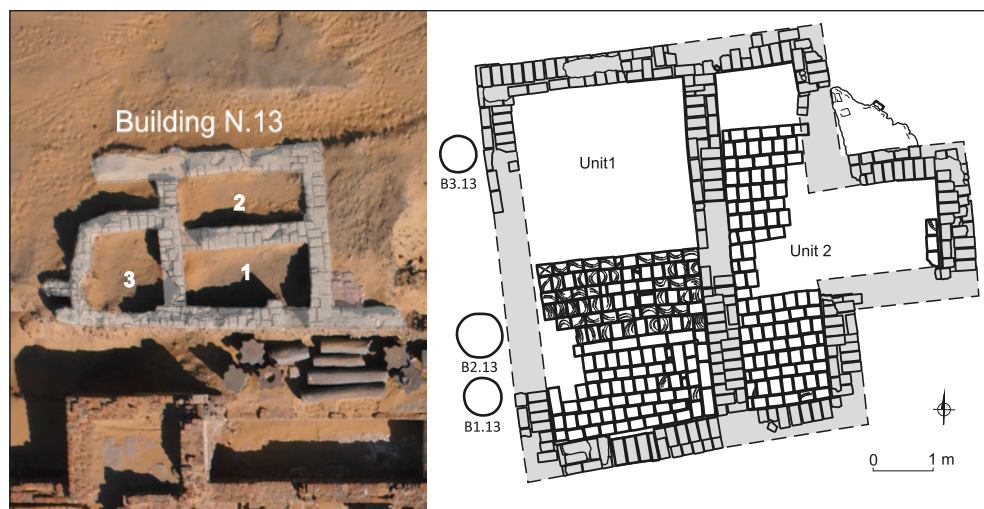


Fig. 10. Late architecture near the church: left, building BN.13; right, building BS.13 (Drawing A. Cedro; photo B. Żurawski,)

The building was reconstructed at least once, being furnished with a new floor. The upper pavement remained almost complete on the floor in room 1 and in the southern part of room 2. It was made mostly of red-brick halves in an irregular arrangement. The older pavement was of much better quality, consisting of well made ceramic tiles (24 by 18 by 4 cm) and long red bricks (44 by 19 by 4 cm). Some of the tiles bore finger-impressed wavy lines made pre-firing. Potsherds found under the structure of the furnace in room 2 dated

the reconstruction of building BS/13 to the 9th–10th century.

Three drums from Meroitic columns were discovered along the west wall of building BS.13. They are of the same kind as described above (including vestiges of offering scenes in relief on two of them) and must have come from the same edifice.

The function of building BS.13 is not evident, but considering the plan and quality of execution, especially the ornamental floor, it may have been of a religious rather than secular purpose.

SAQIYA

Excavation in the well, explored to 8.00 m below the top of the wall (for earlier reports see Żurawski, Stepnik et al. 2013: 284–285; Żurawski, Cedro et al. 2014: 336), now reached ground water level. The fill consisted of yellow sand containing

numerous fragments of *qawadis* pots; the lower stratum was dense and soaked through with salt. Changing water levels inside the well were marked by rims of white salt efflorescence on the inside face of the exposed wall.

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