Architectural Studies of the Fortresses
in the Third Cataract
and Southern Dongola Reach Region
Explorations within the area of the Third Cataract were conducted as a part of the rescue surveys preceding the building of a new dam on the Nile. The research concentrated on two fortresses situated on the left bank, in the vicinity of two modern settlements – Shofein and Marakul. Both fortresses were excavated and described during earlier exploration of that region from the 80s.1 Last season was also the time of architectonic research of two fortresses located in the Southern Dongola Reach: Bahit and Deiga.2 This work had a limited character and its main purpose was to make a documentation and describe architectural characteristics of the preserved walls.3

SHOFEIN

Close to a rectangle with proportions of 1:2, stone fortress embankment was built on a steep rocky slope near the narrowed river section, on the North-South axis. It occupies the slope falling about 30 degrees towards the road and the Nile flowing nearby (Fig. 1). The northern curtain with bastions is situated at the upland edge, while the southern one is located a little above the road level (Fig. 2). From the West, the stronghold is additionally defended by natural crack. Within a small distance from the northern curtain, there is an upheaval overlooking the surrounding, in a close vicinity of the northern curtain. The land relief is characteristic for areas nearby cataracts – similar configuration was observed near Fourth and Fifth Cataracts. The ground going down towards the river in terraces is cut in places by steep sections of black basalt rocks (Fig. 3). Some of them are of a big surface, which became good base for building such a defensive construction. This location gave the position overlooking the surrounding, towards up and down the Nile as well as the desert. The builders must have known topography and were able to employ all defensive


3 Survey and research of the Third Cataract fortifications and Dongola basin were held between January 10 – February 3, 2013 within the program of ‘Archaeological rescue operation on 3rd and 5th Nile cataract and the upper Atbara’ directed by Bogdan Żurawski, now head of the Department of African Cultures in the Institute of Mediterranean and Oriental Cultures of the Polish Academy of Sciences and financed by the Center of Mediterranean Archaeology of Warsaw University. The research team consisted of (except its supervisor): a land surveyor Roman Łopaciuk, archaeologists Aneta Cedro, Bogusz Wasik and Marcin Wiewióra from Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń.
values of the area in an efficient way in their purposes (Fig. 4). Shofein fortress is one of the smallest structures of that type along both banks from Third to Fifth Cataract. Its corners are enforced with massive oval bastions, equipped with one main gate protected by fortified front in L letter shape. The other entrance to the stronghold was located in the shorter gable wall from the river. The wall with thickness from 2.4m to 3.3m, and about 7m high, was built of raw and partly processed stones, usually oblong, about 0.70m long, composed in *opus emplectum* – precise, stone facade and rubble filling (Fig. 5). The stones were carefully selected and placed the smooth surface outside. The construction of the wall is irregular, but with clear tendency towards layer composition – in places we can speak about horizontal rows. Bigger stones were put tight, and gaps between them were filled with smaller stones and ceramics fragments. The wall interior was worked out less precisely, placing stones not so carefully and joining them using big quantities of silt mortar. This excess mortar is characteristic and distinctly seen in the wall structure, sticking out sometimes from between the stones.\(^4\) All parts of the fortress were constructed in the same technique, but in many stages. These stages (over 20 wall sections were distinguished) refer to one building process (Fig. 6). The stronghold walls were placed directly on a rock falling with berms towards the South. It can not be excluded that in some places the rock was leveled for the construction, which can be indicated by stair-like structures present at north-eastern side of southern tower. On the other hand, these platforms may have been the relics of stairs made in the rock intentionally.\(^5\) Two interesting elements were identified in the main entrance gate. First is a regular hole for beam fixing, recognized on the right side of the gate. On the other entrance left side, just in front of northern door jamb, there is a huge stone, against which the curtain base is resting. The stone facade reveals engraved, but substantially damaged images of animals and human figures; two birds fly over these animals. The animals look towards the entrance (Fig. 7). Characteristic gate neck in shape of L letter is made of three or four wall sections.\(^6\) Door jambs readable at its entrance are not attached to the wall, but just added on both sides – one to the facade of the eastern curtain, the other to the gate neck’s wall end.

**The constructing technique**

Curtains were built in short sections, what could have been caused by stairs-like shape of a steep slope. Slightly over 20 wall sections could be distinguished (including bastions). Closer joints examination indicated that in some cases the point of the wall delamination


\(^5\) Stone rubble covering nearly all the surface made it impossible to interpret this element univocally.

\(^6\) There is not any certainty, if the small crack seen in outside wall surface is an intentional joint of these two wall sections or lamination trace of disrupted fore-gate construction.
appears at some height above the ground level. South-western bastion is tied into the sections of circumferential walls. North-eastern one is just added, while the other two are tied into lower parts with other wall part and added to the defensive wall in the upper section.

**Wall description**

In the eastern curtain, equipped with the entrance gate, the wall structure reveals evidently mortar material joining stones together. Southern wall section – from the side of the river – was built of two parts. Both corner towers were attached to a section of the eastern curtain and a fragment of the western one. Western section of this wall had a wicket, which left the traces in form of a breach with faced western jamb. On both sides of that passage, rectangular nests have preserved, which could have been the signs of elements of wooden lintel(?). The western curtain is very destroyed (in the middle), the rest of the wall is readable. Its internal facing is substantially disturbed, but from the yard side there are numerous signs of a niche(?) running along all the wall length. The north-eastern tower is bricked up with the curtain.

**Building stages traces**

Apart from the circumference described already, two structures have clearly preserved until today, giving evidence of several construction stages. The corner bastion was equipped with a ‘buttress’ adjoined to the southern tower façade (Fig. 8). Second wall section was added to the first one, however, it is very damaged, without distinct facades and edges. On the right side of the gate, within a distance of about 2.5–3m, the ruins of a small stone construction have preserved, built in the same technique as the walls of all the fortress complex. Its definite form and function is not recognized. Original function of two wall sections directed towards the Nile is not defined, either. Any remains of parallel curtain have not been excavated. But we can assume that this wall could have divided the road, controlled and protected from the fortress. The southern wicket and barely preserved quadrilateral building founded on the rock in front of southern curtain could have also been connected with this function.

**Internal architecture**

Inside the fortress, no traces of any buildings were observed, but the stone rubble contained an element of door framing: a piece of sandstone with a hole inside, where a wooden beam could have been placed. Generally, the fortress interior is unfriendly for any form

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7 It was stated simultaneously in several sections that vertical joints can be rather effects of delamination, being a result of disturbance in the wall structure.

8 From the river side, on south-east corner tower, at the height of about 2.0m from the footings, there are two holes visible, distanced from each other of about 1.2–1.5m – both placed at the same height. Similar holes are seen on internal wall surface from the yard side. It is not defined if they are related to the building process (e.g. holes remained after scaffolding?).
of settlement activity – only the lowest, bottom southern part of the yard – from the river side, would have been suitable for any building activity. The rest of the yard raised sharply, separated with steep, stony slopes.

**Dating**

The fortified structure in Shofein is stylistically homogenous and is built according to one conception. Only the southern wall, running towards the Nile, could have been of a secondary building, but there is no evidence of that fact, therefore it can be supposed that it was contemporary to the rest of the stronghold.

According to the previous surveys the pottery collected from the surface, dated the occupation of the site to the Late Christian period. However recent research brought some new evidence to light. Several dozen pieces of pottery were collected from the surface within the fortress and its vicinity, additional group of sherds was also recovered from the mortar on the top of the wall. Most of the pottery pieces, especially from the later group, were fragmentary and difficult to date, but even so an analysis of the fabric, decoration (black rim stripe) and some reconstructed forms allow us to suggest that the beginning of the Shofein fortress went back to the very Early Christian period (sixth–seventh century AD).

**Marakul**

The fortress in Marakul has analogous location with Shofein stronghold. Both buildings are distanced about 10km from each other, with a trapezoid plan close to rectangular shape, situated with its longer side (southern) along the Nile (Fig. 9). The fortress surrounded with a mass stone wall was built on a rocky slope of an upland, dropping towards the river with about 20–30 degrees (Fig. 10). The circumferential wall is trapezoid with semicircular bastions in the corners and additional square buttress. Three entrances led to the fortress. Originally, one main gate situated in the northern curtain, protected by classic L-shaped foregate was supposedly the only entrance into the structure. ‘Side’ gate was diagnosed in southern curtain – from the river side (at present only one of its edges has preserved). The third gate in western curtain, straight originally, was protected in later period with a ‘gate neck’ added to the bastion. Stone stronghold curtains were founded on a rocky base. The walls made of local sandstone were from 2 to 3m thick and the height reaching 5–8m. They were erected of medium size stones. Oblong pieces of rock were usually placed horizontally, but vertically in places as well. They were selected carefully to keep the façade’s smooth form. The stones (especially of the core) are joined with mud mortar. In places, the walls are preserved up to the pavement level, together with stone parapet. The wall passages and the tower terraces were paved with mud bricks. No clear traces of

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dwelling buildings were reported inside the stronghold, although during the survey relics of some stone foundations could be identified. All preserved walls were composed along East-West axis and consisted of sections few meters long, made in the same technique as the main walls. They were built at the borderlines of flat parts of rocky terraces, where other buildings could have been constructed.

**Technique and Building Stages**

As a result of architectonic studies, several wall construction stages were distinguished, part of which can have a character of chronological phases (Fig. 11). Western, northern and eastern curtains together with semi-cylindrical bastions and northern gate were undoubt-edly made as a result of one building process (phase). Northern gate, north-eastern bastion, western (axis) and south-western ones are tied with circumferential wall. In case of north-western bastion the situation is not clear. Similar problem was stated in the context of a square buttress at eastern curtain. Founded on a rock shelf, the buttress is partly tied with the curtain (southern joining part at the porch level) and partly added (southern joining part in lower section and total of northern part). Stronghold southern wall was added (built up) to the western curtain. The area of south-eastern corner is characterized by untypical form. The curtain walls are completed with facades – eastern wall straight and the southern one turns with a straight angle towards the Nile. The gap between these walls is filled with semi-cylindrical single standing tower, open from the yard side. After the construction of this tower, some other works were also performed, i.e. building up and lengthening the ending of eastern defensive wall. Its unusual form can have resulted from the ground level on which it was constructed – the curtains were built on rocky surface, while the tower was built up on flat surface, partly outside the rocky ground. This situation can also be explained by the change of original building conception: during the final works at eastern and southern curtains it was planned to built in this place a bigger construction (tower), which for unknown reasons was not fulfilled, while the prepared gap was filled with a smaller tower.

Western gate building, added to the tower and the wall can be associated less precisely with subsequent stronghold building phase. It can not be excluded, that blocking up the gate passage in northern entrance building is associated with this gate building. All corner bastions were built using the same techniques as in fortresses of Fourth Cataract. The wall core was constructed of mud brick completed with stones, external facade was made of unprocessed stones.

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11 Both sections of circumferential wall are entangled from the yard side in this corner. The bastion is entangled with northern wall, but is not connected to the western one. This illogical situation can be explained by presumable simultaneous work of facades constructed from various sides by some building teams. This bastion, however, can be regarded as chronologically identical with the other three, what can be confirmed by their homogenous form and technique.

12 Closer wall examination in this stronghold part indicates that the tower could have been built in I stage and both curtains were built up onto the tower in II stage of this construction erecting.
GATES

The main gate building protecting the entrance cut in the northern curtain is a massive structure with stone facade and stone and mud brick interior held together with silt mortar. The wall of the gate neck is tied with circumferential wall creating a kind of ‘tower – barbican’ with shooting post (Figs 12–13). Clearly readable windows have preserved in northern wall and side western wall. Slot windows were secondarily bricked up. From the East, the gate neck was closed by a wall section added to the curtain façade (blocking). The building wall crown must have been roofed, double-storey. Another entrance to the fortress, cut in the western curtain, had been existing since the very beginning. It was situated close at the bastion, which was built more or less in the middle of that wall. In the beginning stage it was not protected additionally and belonged to typical side entrances. In later period to the tower was added a solid, high, L-shaped wall (Fig. 14). Crown of the western curtain wall – the one with stairs and the bastion – close to north-western corner bears traces of rather square empty space sized 0.50 x 0.50m and the depth reaching 1.5m. Identical openings were also reported on the wall crown of Shofein fortress, on both sides of the main gate.13

STAIRS

Communication between the fortress yard and the defensive porches was possible using stairs. Two examples of stairs preserved until today were reported in the stronghold. First ones are located in western curtain, at the height of central tower; the other ones in northern curtain – at the gate height. They were made of stones and set in the wall thickness (Fig. 15). The western ones possess additional way leading from the yard, and the northern stairs could have been two way. The stairs from the yard level led to a specially constructed niche in western curtain thickness. This niche contained another stairs, this time clearly readable in the wall structure leading to the tower crown.14 Another flight of stairs were reported in a similar niche made in the northern wall thickness (the one possessing the main entrance).

DATING

Along with the architectural survey of the Marakul fortress some pottery studies were also conducted. Most of the pottery assemblage (more than hundred pieces) was collected from the surface, but also small group was gathered directly from the mortar inside the wall. Upon preliminary analysis of the forms and clay used in its manufacture, most of

13 Function of these installations is not known. These places could have served as posts for trebuchets(?) (see: Żurawski, Strongholds). However, the holes reported in Marakul stronghold – particularly their sizes – also suggest, that they could have served as soldiers posts(?) for stronghold defensive crew. In such a case they might have been the posts of roofs anchoring(?).

14 This is second case of preserved stairs in fortresses of Makuria. Similar stairs were found during exploration of Kaldob fortress (Dar El Arab) in 2005.
the sherds can be attributed to the Early Christian period and a little less dated to the Late Christian Period. Among the collected material a numerous and homogeneous group composed of high quality, thin-walled wheel-made vessels (mostly goblets and small bowls) which are diagnostic for the Post Meroitic and Transitional/very Early Christian period (sixth–sixth/seventh century) attires particular attention.

A preliminary study of the pottery assemblage from Marakul shows that the fortress went back to the Transitional – Post Meroitic and Early Christian period.

**BAHIT**

The fortress is situated about 10km south from ez-Zuma and 15km from ed-Deiga. With imposing size and building technique it reminds early Christian buildings in Lower Nubia.\(^\text{15}\) The fortress was installed close to fertile grounds located on both river banks, including Masawi Island, situated farther to the North. It is an example of deliberate exploitation of natural relief. The stronghold was built at the edge of the plateau, slightly wavy and cut with ravines, steep near the Nile bank (Fig. 16). Built on a plan of a vast trapezoid, the fortress is equipped with 16 oblong semi-cylindrical towers and bastions. Access to it was additionally defended by defiles (khor) from the North and South and the rock cliff and the Nile from the East. Western curtain was additionally protected by a dry moat with the depth of about 4m.

**BUILDING TECHNIQUE**

The fortress walls were built using dark volcanic stone put in irregular layers and mudbrick with big admixture of cut grass. Brick walls are additionally strengthened by horizontal layers of stone. The fortress walls thick of about 3m at its southern side and about 5m at the western side were put directly on a rock. Lengthened and rounded half-shell bastions and defensive towers are characteristic elements of that construction. The only preserved building inside fortress is a church. Its walls were built of mudbrick, broken stones and red brick. The church plan has been clearly readable till today – all its walls at the ground floor have preserved. On the surface – there have remained the ruins of burnt brick and mudbrick.

Of all four circumferential walls, three have preserved until today – southern, western and northern, the fourth had probably been placed also from the Nile side.\(^\text{16}\) Narrow wickets, similar to side entrance gates are characteristic elements of the fortress. The fortress state of preservation is very poor (Fig. 17). The walls are nearly completely destroyed. It refers especially to their western and northern parts: the stone facing, which had probably been


\(^{16}\) During this year, only a small section of that wall was registerd. The wall presumably had separated originally the cliff from the Nile side at all its length. However, that fortress part must have possessed the worst defensive conditions.
placed in the biggest part of the object had fallen off, or (what is more probable) had been dismantled – leaving only very damaged and washed out by wind and rain walls made of mudbrick. Some other elements useful in the strategy of wall construction interpretation were also observed.

Observing some bastions situated from the North, where original stone facing had disappeared, it was noted that the building process looked as follows: first (probably on deeper foundation) a heap of clay/mud with readable thickness of 0.30–0.40m was made. The platform prepared that way was next filled with a thin layer of stones and finally the wall itself was built up. In case of fourth western tower situated at the southern curtain built directly over the ground crack, to stabilize it – a tall quadrilateral base was constructed, on which semi-cylindrical tower was built. In case of north-eastern and some other bastions deprived of stone facing and situated at southern curtain, scaffolding holes were reported (Fig. 18). The relics of facing stones observed in the ground part negate the supposition that the bastions had been made entirely of mudbrick. Presence of scaffolding holes under the facing coats does not seem convincing, though. It is rather impossible that the mud core had been erected first and later a stone facing was added, although such possibility can not be rejected totally. It can not be excluded, that those bastions had originally their facing made only to a certain height or that the stone coating in this construction part was added later.

THE WALL DESCRIPTION

Southern, western and northern curtains had total of 16 towers/bastions added or tied with the wall core. The southern curtain was equipped with six defensive and half-shell towers or bastions, built in the same technique: with a core made of mudbrick and stone facing. In towers/bastions added to eastern and central curtain part the stone facing has not preserved until now.\[17\] The wall section connecting the bastion I and tower II was made of mudbrick and stone facing on both sides. The wall consisted of small, medium and big stones joined with mud mortar and fine-grained grit. Observations of tower and bastion II and III indicate that the core of that buildings had been built first of mudbrick put tightly to the existing curtain fragment. Later the stone facing was added. The bastion III has preserved regular scaffolding(?) holes.\[18\] In some of them original remains of a wooden beams were reported. Similar holes have been noted also in bastion V. The wall section between bastion III and gate IV had been built much more carefully: it consists of stone base, on which the exact wall of mudbrick was constructed. It was made in a characteristic way: from inside and outside stones are placed vertically. The half-shell tower being simultaneously the gate neck IV distinguishes from other structures of that type present in the fortress. It had been built on the crack coming to the curtain. To stabilize the tower, additional tall quadrangular base was made, on which semi-cylindrical structure was built.

\[17\] At least a part of those bastions could have been originally tied with the circumferential curtain wall at the height of the wall crown (e.g. bastion I which has preserved in the best condition).

\[18\] These holes served for scaffolding fixing.
built up. Both, an entrance cut across the curtain and both wickets in the gate neck are today practically unreadable. Between bastions V and VI a section of external fortress curtain – stone-mud wall with carefully made facing has preserved. Clearly seen narrow passage cut in the curtain between bastions VI and VII has also preserved. Bastion VII, i.e. south-western fortress corner possesses original fragment of stone facing. This building is tied with southern and western curtains. The manufacturing difference between eastern and western parts of southern curtain is clearly visible. All bastions of the western fortress side (VIII, made of mudbrick) and half-shell tower (the gate neck IX) had originally been faced with stones. The circumferential wall between the gate neck (IX) and the bastion (X) was erected on a stone base, on which a wall of mudbrick was placed. A narrow passage cut in the curtain has preserved between the bastions. North-western corner has a shape close to D letter. IX tower added to the western curtain is at the same time entangled with the northern one. The main entrance gate was situated in the northern curtain (XII). Semi-circular gate neck is carefully made, in technique similar to the one described for the sections of western, southern and northern curtains. The wall is full, made of stone with facing. Between the main gate and the corner bastion XI there is another narrow pass cut in the curtain, similarly to the vicinity of north-western corner. The opening width – despite the fact, that the doorposts have not preserved – amounted barely 1–1.20m. The gate neck (XIII), built similarly to the ones described earlier, protected next narrow pass cut in the northern curtain. The wall section between bastion XIV and the next gate neck (XV) is simultaneously the last carefully built fragment of circumferential wall in the northern curtain. The rest section of that wall was made in another technique, of mudbrick. It corresponds with its structure with the eastern section of southern curtain. The last corner bastion (XVI) was made of mudbrick – stone facing had probably never been put on.

**Building Technique**

Analyzing the building methods, implemented techniques and materials we can draw the conclusion, that external curtain walls had been constructed of various material and with different dose of precision. On grounds of the wall sections’ analyses it was stated, that clear differences seen in various parts of these can be associated with precise stages of the fortress extension.

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19 Evident signs of rectangular mastaba made of mudbrick, which had been built up before the building of semi-circular gate neck was started, confirm that it served the leveling purposes due to the ground configuration – significant slope nearby the passage cut in southern curtain.

20 At the height of tower VI, a wall section built much more carefully starts and it runs up to south-western fortress corner. All western part and a fragment of western section of northern curtain was also made in the same way. The wall core and facing are carefully made, the stone wall was built of small, medium and big stones, partially processed.

21 It delivers the evidence, that the western curtain section had already existed when the corner tower with northern curtain part building started.

22 The gate neck XV – similar of the ones described before – made of mudbrick. The lowest brick row placed upright. The wall was added to the curtain. The wall of mudbrick was made carelessly and in another technique than the others. The bricks were placed directly on the rock surface, which had been carefully prepared, though – leveled.
So, separated curtain sections have the following features (Fig. 19):
1. The fortress fragment made the most precisely. The walls posses stone facing and their fillings had been bricked up using stones joined with mud mortar.
2. The wall up to about 3–4m is built in complete stone construction, and higher of mudbrick with strong stone facing.
3. This section has construction close to the one above, but the stone base reaches only up to about 2m height.
4. The section with strong stone facing and mudbrick core.
5. Mudbrick wall. Thin stone facing has preserved up to about 1–2m.
6. The curtain section of mudbrick. Small relics of single stones on the surface level suggest that stone facing, at least to some height had existed there.

The walls from the easiest accessible side are built in the most precise way, while from the directions defended by cracks, cliff and canyons the structure precision declines. From the Nile side where there is steep rock, the wall has not preserved, but the fragmentary relics at north-eastern tower confirm, that it must have existed there in some form.23

**Dating**

The numerous sherds of pottery scattered on the surface within the Bahit fortress and in its vicinity proves intensive occupation of the site all along the Christian period. Noteworthy is especially presence of the imported amphorae pieces, among them the type LRA 1, which appeared in Nubia between fifth and seventh century.24 The pottery sherds were extracted from the mortar between the mud bricks of the fortresses wall. An analysis of this material revealed that the all of the fragments can be dated to Transitional/very Early Christian period.

**DEIGA**

Huge stone construction situated in the south-western part of el-Araak village was originally rising up directly over the river, which today flows about one kilometer from the fortress walls (Fig. 20). Some destruction traces of bottom walls’ parts may have been caused by temporal intense river overflowing.25 The fortress protected the most strategic zone in southern Dar Dongola region part, because it not only marked but also controlled the natural borderline between Dar Dongola and Dar Shaikiyia.

The curtains about 5m thick were built up of broken stones joined with mud mortar (Fig. 21). Similarly to Bahit, eight wickets with the width from 1 to 4m were reported (Fig. 22).

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23 The above situation can be explained by extended chronology of that huge enterprise. It could have also been related to financial problems and deliberate implementation of cheaper techniques in safer places and protected by natural obstacles.


Three of them were located in the western wall, from the desert side. They possessed
doors, what is confirmed by the doorposts preserved, or they were blocked with stones or
wooden logs. Only one door opening connected the upper castle with the lower yard; it was
clearly wider than the others (about 4m). One of the door openings in the western curtain
was situated near the church(?) building marked on the nineteenth-century Wilkinson’s
sketch, opposite the main entrance to the castle. Only this wicket in north-eastern curtain
sector was additionally protected by semi-circular gatehouse of broken stones. Narrow
gate of 1m width was also registered in the lower yard, near western corner. The fortress
was built on a rock terrace composed of dark formations, basalt rock and sandstone. The
stones were joined with the mortar, in which fragments of ceramic vessels are still visible.
The fortress has a form rarely met, which is an effect of adjusting the walls composition
to the area relief. The structure form resembles flattened rhombus – similar to a triangle.
Another characteristic feature of that construction is its double-part form: a stronghold
and a lower castle, added in later period, adjoined to the fortress from the South. Another
characteristic element is already mentioned a big number of narrow gates leading to the
structure interior. The inner courtyard is cut by steep rock elevations. The biggest of them
could have served as a platform for the church(?) building. Although, there are no traces
of any construction buildings preserved till today, in the courtyard surface we can observe
burnt bricks and elements of Meroitic ornamented tholobates and capitals, originating
from an unidentified temple. Despite a big number of passages, bastions are also its
characteristic elements. Total of five such buildings strengthened the walls and one gate
neck protecting the gate, cut in northern curtain. The towers built on the western side are
tied with the curtain walls, similarly to all corner bastions. The walls added to the main
fortress sector from the southern, eastern and western sides determine the other element
of defensive earthwork. This fortress part must have been built in later period. However, it
is difficult to state chronological stages or phases of their construction. The lower castle is
limited from the northern side by two wall sections placed vertically to the eastern curtain
and the western ‘citadel’ (first fortress element). They were added to the bastions. During
this year exploration it was stated that the lower castle wall sections practically have not
preserved until our times. The western wall may have had the only entrance leading inside
the structure.

Stairs
Observations of the massive bastion at eastern curtain, situated South from the gate neck,
brought interesting results. The bastion is built into the circumferential wall. From internal
side, the wall thickness contains an intentional niche, which served similar purposes as
the two niches excavated in Marakul fortress. That was the place where stairs leading to
the wall crown had been built.
DATING

Preliminary analysis of the vessels fragments obtained from the yard surface and wall core gives evidence, that similarly to the fortresses discussed above, all of them originate from the early phases of the Middle Ages (sixth–seventh century) and date to the oldest stages of Christian period in Nubia.

SUMMARY

Determination of settlements function is always an important issue, but an attempt to answer the question about role and importance of the above analyzed structures is particularly important for several reasons. Considering their location, it appears that all of them usually emerged in places of particular strategic importance, especially in places of narrowed stretch of the Nile. It becomes obvious then that these fortifications protected the sites of important crossings, passages between the two banks, both navigable stretches of the river to help local communication and transportation, which in this region of Nubia had a special significance relevant to the economic foundations of the state.

We are not sure what function precisely these strongholds served for. But if we admit that analyses carried out on samples of ceramics recovered from this survey provide a date for rising of these fortifications, it transpires that they were built during the period when the Kingdom of Makuria was in the process of establishing itself. It was a crucial period with changes being introduced in the state administration, social structures and creation of new zones of influence (frontiers).

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5. Shofein fortress – the interior of the curtain wall (Phot. B. Wasik).


- untied walls
- partially tied walls
- tied walls


17. Bahit fortress – part of the southern curtain wall (Phot. B. Wasik).

