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THE MONASTERY CHURCH

The origins of the monastery on Kom H are associated with the arrival in Dongola of the first missionaries who brought the new religion to the royal court of Makuria and the Dongolese community. The monastery itself was probably one of the first Christian foundations in Dongola, alongside other sacral complexes like the Old Church and Building X located to the north of the Citadel (Godlewski 2013: 59–64, 80–81).

The Monastery Church on Kom H is situated next to the Central Building (C.B). Together with the Northern Building (NW.B.I), it is one of the oldest structures in the monastic complex [*Fig. 1.1*]. The church was uncovered by Daniel Gazda in 2003–2006 (Gazda 2003; 2005; 2008; 2010; Jakobielski 2008: 283–288). Additional excavation, documentation and conservation works were undertaken in 2008–2016 in order to uncover the original layout of the building. This became possible after the transfer of wall paintings belonging to a late development phase of the church to partly reconstructed spaces in the western part of the building. Conservators Dorota Moryto-Naumiuk and Maciej Karpiński dismantled the wall relics from this late phase [see *Chapter 2*]. This opened the way to further in-depth research in the church naos. Remains of the original stone altar screen were uncovered and a more precise chronology of the construction phases and subsequent transformations of the church was established. It was also possible to reconstruct the original interior of the church [*Fig. 1.2*].

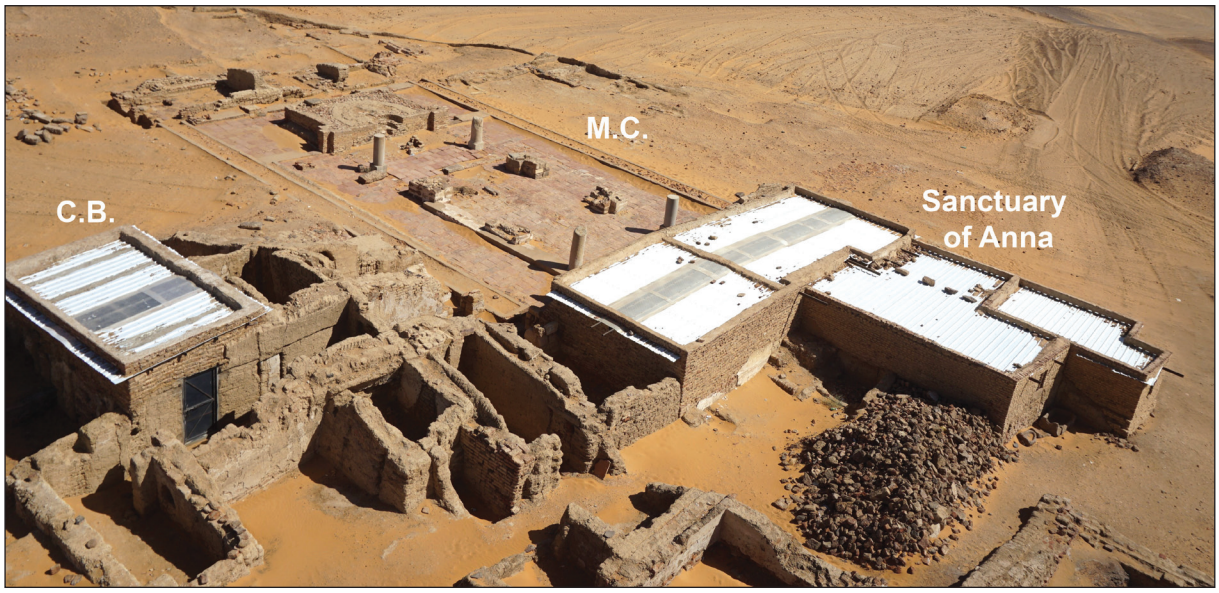

Fig. 1.1. Aerial view of the Monastery Church (center back), Central Building (partly roofed structure on the left), and sanctuary of Anna (roofed complex on the right), state in 2017

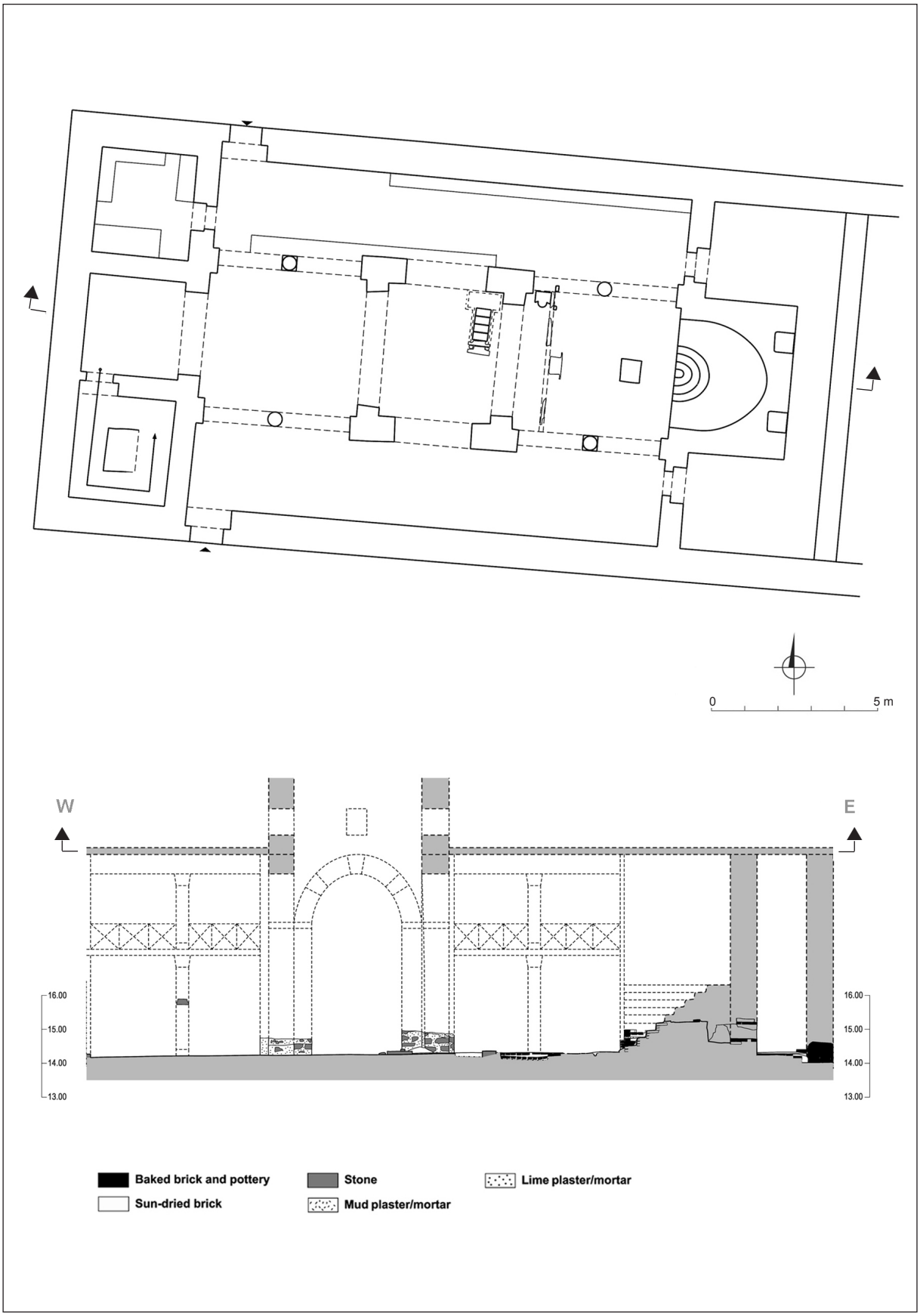

Fig. 1.2. Monastery Church: top, original plan of the church from the mid-6th century AD; bottom, east–west section through the early naos, looking north

EARLY CHURCH (MC.1)

According to its original design, the Monastery Church was intended to have elongated proportions. The planned size of the building is indicated by the foundation layout that survived in the eastern, ultimately undeveloped, part of the church. The planned size of the structure was 31 m by 14 m and the original northeastern corner of the building is preserved at foundation level [*Fig. 1.3*].

For reasons now unclear, the length of the constructed church was ultimately 27 m. It bears stressing, however, that the builders did not plan for the current east wall of the structure to be the external wall of the church; its width, 0.70 m, is typical of the building's internal walls, and the wall is thinner than the other outer church walls, which measure 1.15 m in width. Also the foundation level of this wall is higher than that of the external walls of the church. It also seems that at foundation level the east wall of the church was not structurally bonded with the side walls. However, conclusions based on the preserved evidence are hampered by the fact that the foundation of the structure's outer north wall was completely destroyed at its junction with the east wall, and the eastern part of the outer south wall is obscured. Nonetheless, it was possible to determine the relationship between the south and the east walls of the church in the southeastern corner of the *diakonikon* [*Figs 1.4, 1.5*].

It is uncertain whether the eastern section of the south wall of the building was destroyed or simply never built. At the current stage of research one cannot rule out the possibility that the southeastern part of the building was razed along with some of its foundations. The originally planned eastern part of the church was at a later stage adapted to other functions, including funerary purposes. Nothing suggests, however, that construction of this eastern part of the church was continued above foundation level. It is probable that the original version of the project was abandoned while the building of the church was still in progress, and the logical consequence was the reduction of the building's length to 27 m. The originally planned eastern part was never built. The internal partition wall behind the apse thus became the external wall of the building. This wall is preserved almost exclusively at foundation level, up to the level of internal flooring. It is impossible to establish how its external face was finished, as no plaster has been preserved [*Figs 1.2* top; *1.5*].

The monastery church was built of baked bricks (32–33 cm by 15–16 cm by 6.5–7 cm) and of sandstone blocks used only for the central pillars and the arches that connected them.

Fig. 1.3. Church foundations: northeastern corner, view from the north

Architectural decoration elements were made of granite (columns) and sandstone.

STATE OF PRESERVATION OF THE ORIGINAL BUILDING

In general, most of the church is preserved no higher than the level of its internal flooring. Apart from three stone pillars and two lower parts of columns, the features rising above floor level in the naos date from a later phase, when the interior was remodeled. The internal walls of the church were dismantled along with their foundations, and fragments of the latter survived only in the western and eastern parts of the building [see *Figs 1.2* top; *1.7*].

The walls of the church were founded in deep trenches adjusted to the width of the prospective

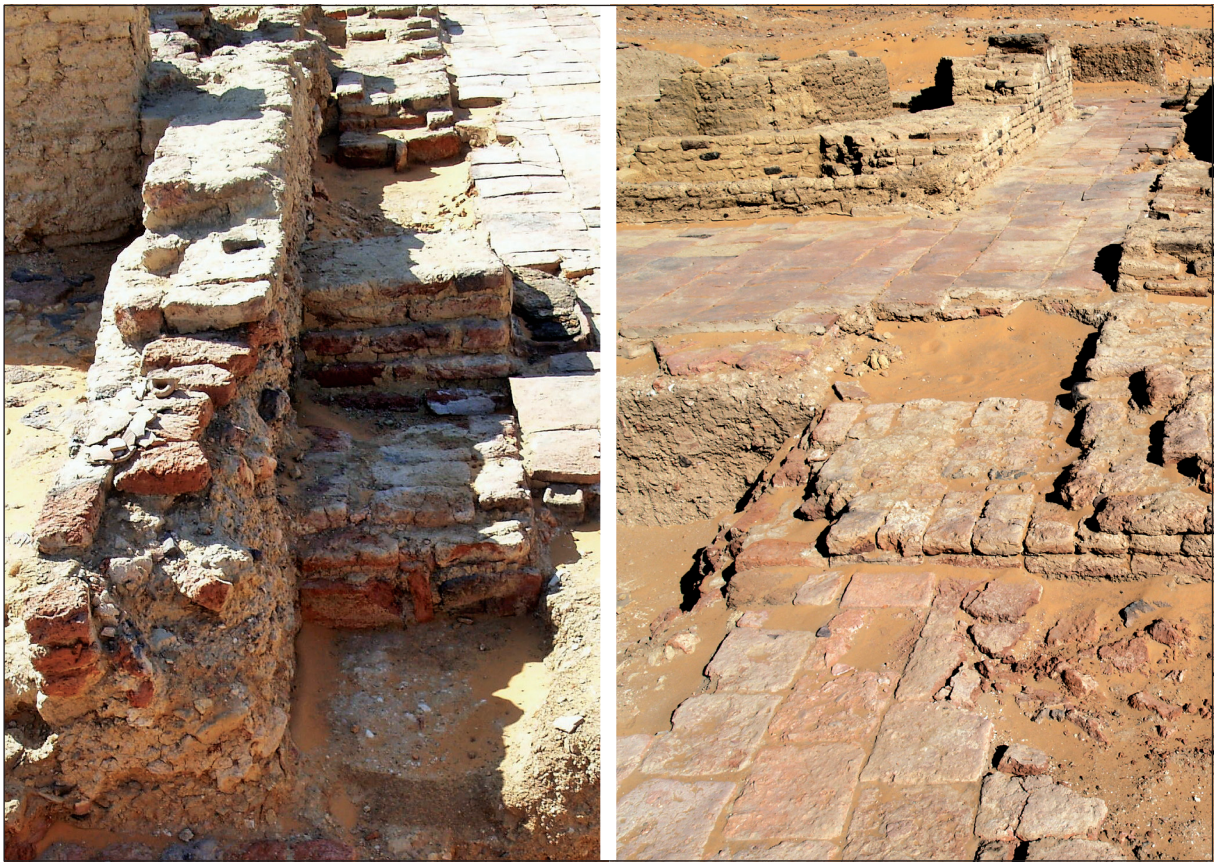

Fig. 1.4. Church foundations: left, state of preservation of the east wall of the church; right, eastern part of the south outer wall of the church

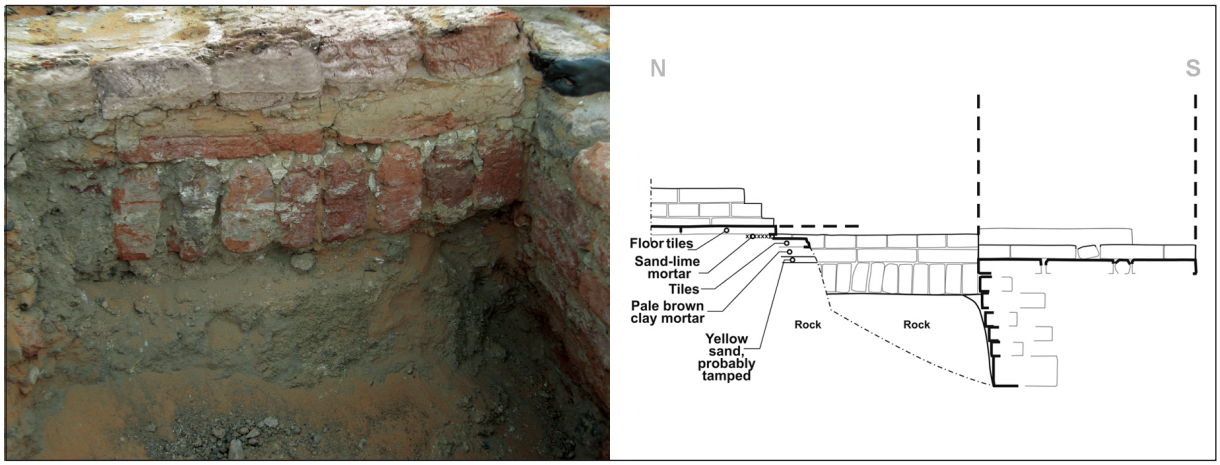

Fig. 1.5. Foundations of the south and east walls in the southeastern corner of the diakonikon

walls. The north wall was founded 1.15 m below the level of the floor in the naos, the south wall 0.90 m, and the thinner east wall behind the apse 0.57 m below this level [see *Fig. 1.5*]. The foundation level of the west wall has not been established.

Original building layout

The church was planned as a basilica with a tower in the central part of the naos [see *Fig. 1.2* top]. The nave was wider than the side aisles (4.70 m versus 3.00 m). The back wall of the apse was separated from the east wall of the building by a corridor that connected the two pastophories. The two corners in the western part of the building were walled off to form rooms; the southern one housed a staircase. Two entrances leading into the church, one from the south and the other from the north, were located near these western corner rooms. The vaulted ceilings of the nave and aisles were supported by four central pillars and four granite columns [*Fig. 1.6*, *1.8*]. The existence of vaults is suggested by the fact that the fill inside the building contained vault bricks, baked with characteristic side

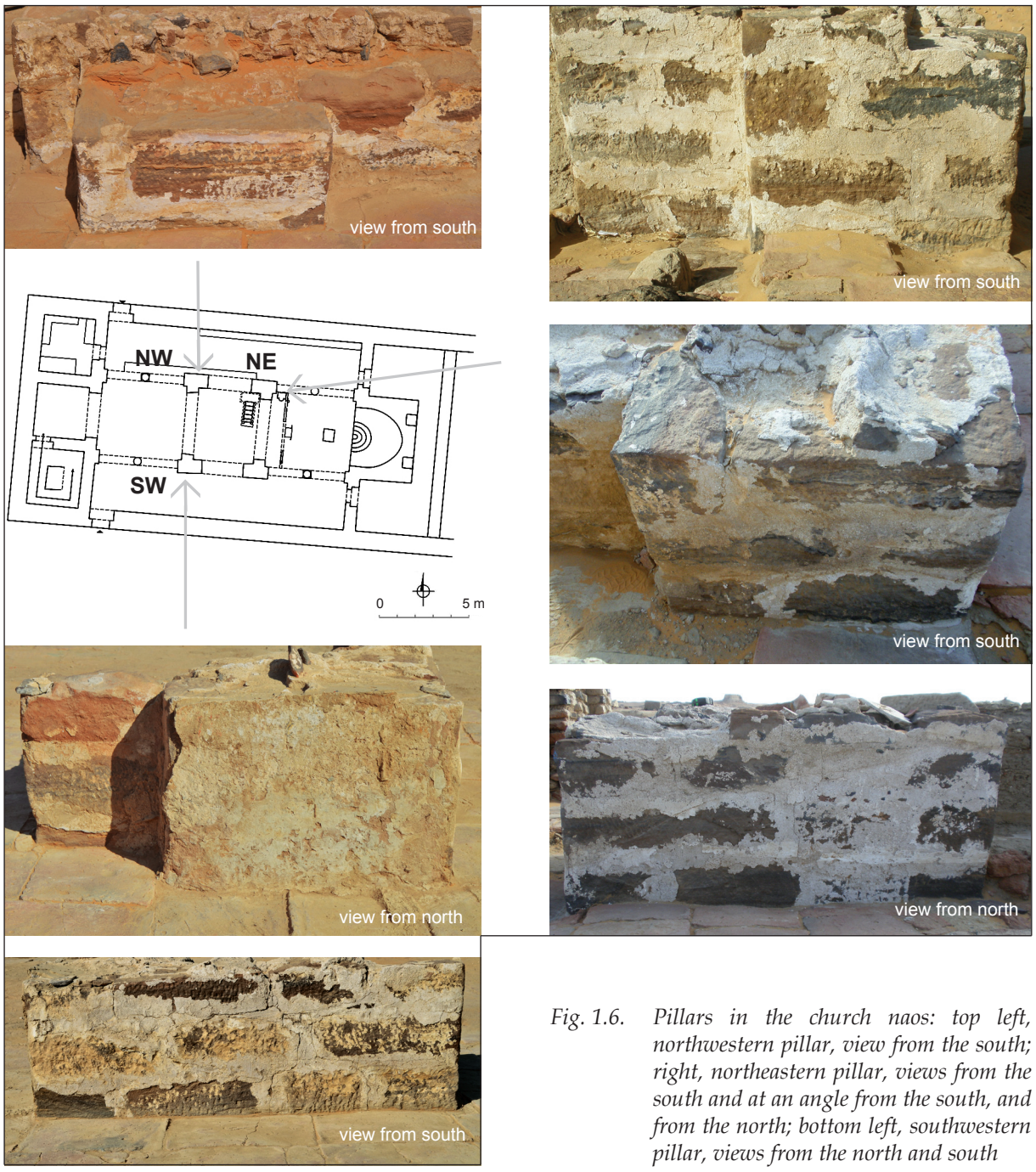

Fig. 1.6. Pillars in the church naos: top left, northwestern pillar, view from the south; right, northeastern pillar, views from the south and at an angle from the south, and from the north; bottom left, southwestern pillar, views from the north and south

Fig. 1.7. Southern side of the southwestern pillar in the church naos: left, earlier pavement seen in test under ceramic tile floor; right, later ceramic tile floor abutting the face of the pillar

Fig. 1.8. Columns in the church naos: top right, outline of lost southwestern column; bottom left, northwestern column; bottom right, southeastern column

depressions that improved the cohesion of the mortar binding them. Vaults were sprung probably over the western and eastern rooms of the building.

Church naos

Pillars

The central part of the naos was occupied by a tower (5.80 m by 6.20 m), of which only three stone pillars survived. The pillars were built of broken ferruginous sandstone blocks worked only on the exposed surfaces and bonded with lime mortar. Three of these supports are preserved up to a height of approximately 0.50 m, while the fourth (southeastern) one was completely dismantled. Its location, however, is discernible from the layout of the floor tiles. The pillars were built on continuous baked-brick footings stretching between the western rooms of the church and the apse of the basilica; the footings also separate the nave from the side aisles.

The northwestern pillar, founded on the northern footing, is uniform in construction and consists of a wall, 1.58 m in length and 0.86 m in width, with a pilaster, 0.40 m long and 0.70 m wide, attached to it from the south. The preserved height of the structure is 0.56 m above the floor level [*Fig. 1.6*]. The northeastern pillar, also founded on the northern footing, has a uniform structure and it, too, consists of a wall, 1.58 m in length and 0.86 m in width, and a pilaster, 0.40 m long and 0.70 m wide, attached to it from the south. The preserved height of the structure is 0.59 m above the floor level [see *Fig. 1.6*]. The southwestern pillar, founded on the southern continuous footing, is uniform in construction and likewise consists of a wall, 1.58 m in length and 0.86 m in width, and a pilaster, 0.40 m in length and 0.70 m in width, attached to it from the north. The preserved height of the structure is 0.41 m above floor level [see *Fig. 1.6*]. The southeastern pillar was completely removed, yet its shape and size are discernible in the outline of the adjoining flooring. This pillar was also founded on the southern continuous footing and consisted of a wall at the southern side and a pilaster on the northern side.

In the 2012 season, trench 10.01 was excavated in order to determine the relationship of the stone pillars to the floor and to the footing. The size of the trench was 1.00 m by 0.30 m [*Fig. 1.7*]. Two floor tiles were removed by the western edge of the southern face of the southwestern pillar. The floor tiles, 0.50 m by 0.30 m each, lay parallel to the pillar's face, on a thin (0.02–0.03 m) layer of fine gray sand (bedding), covering a carefully laid course of baked bricks perpendicular to the continuous footing, on which the pillar was founded. Also noted on the bricks were drips of excess lime mortar used to bind the sandstone blocks of the pillar. The surface of the mortar was slightly smoothed, it is therefore beyond doubt that the pillar was founded on the footing after the adjacent course of bricks had been laid: the plaster and mortar preserved on the southern face of the pillar are the same as those preserved on the bricks below the flooring, so the plaster must have dripped down from the pillar face.

The upper surface of the footing is at a level of 14.13 m and its foundation is on bedrock at an elevation of 13.75 m. Only the southern face of the footing has been uncovered; it was built of baked brick, and its foundation consisted of a course of bricks on edge followed by three courses of bricks on bed. The footing's height is approximately 0.38 m; its width has not been determined but it must have been adjusted to the size of the pillars.

By the northern face of the footing, below the layer of bricks, there was a uniform layer of finely crushed rock and baked brick; this fill was tightly packed and very hard.

Columns

The same continuous footing on which the stone pillars were founded also supported four granite columns standing to the east and west of the central tower. Two columns, the southeastern and the northwestern one, are preserved *in situ*. The other two were dismantled, but it is possible to establish their location by investigating the layout of the floor tiles that abutted their bases [*Fig. 1.8* top right]. Each of the two preserved columns was made of a monolithic block of gray granite carved to form a shaft and a base. The upper parts of shafts of both columns were destroyed. The northwestern column, over 1.82 m in height, had a base measuring 0.50 m by 0.50 m and 0.30 m high [*Fig. 1.8* bottom left]. The southeastern column (over 1.45 m high, with a square base 0.50 m to the side and 0.38 m high) was overturned when the church had already been partly buried and destroyed [*Fig. 1.8* bottom right].

Sanctuary

The space partitioned off as the sanctuary measured 4.30 m by 5.20 m and was located in the

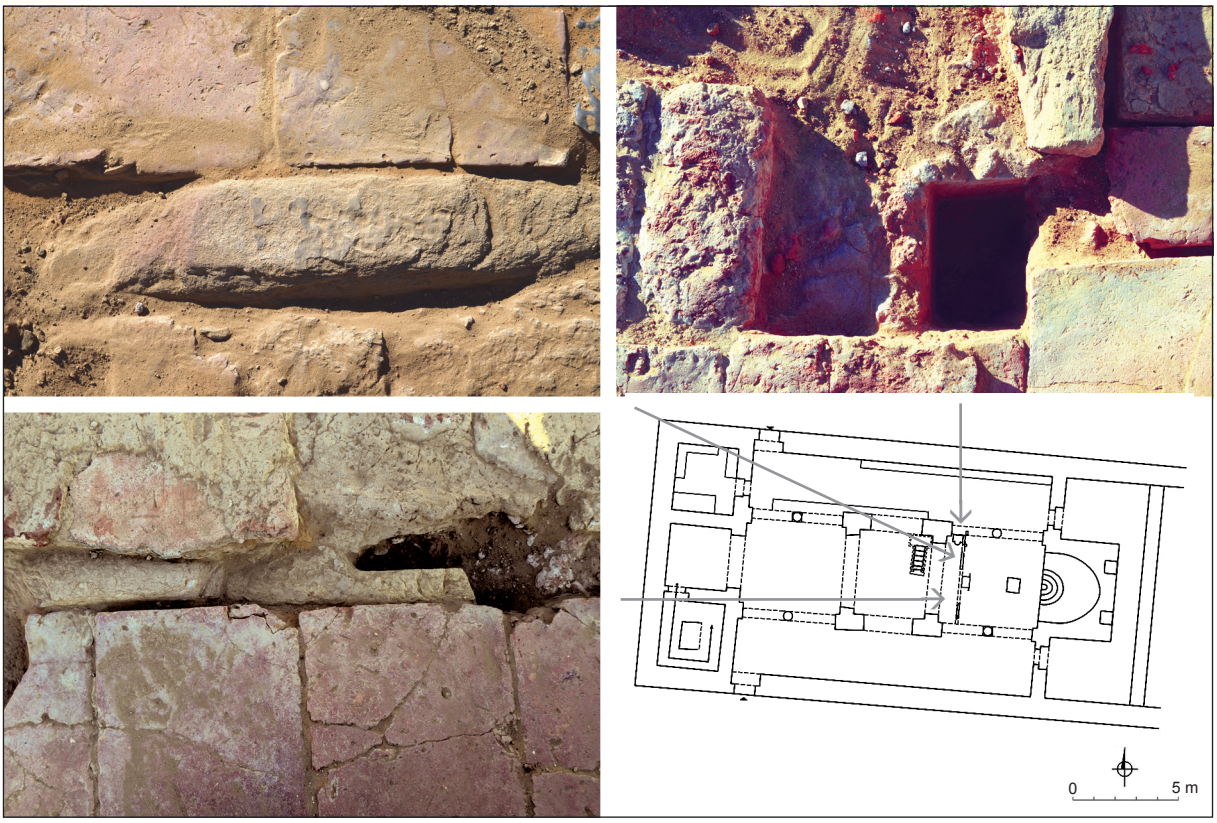

Fig. 1.9. Evidence for the location of the original sanctuary: top and bottom left, broken slabs of the altar screen between the flooring tiles; top right, outline of a removed altar screen post in the pavement

Fig. 1.10. Sandstone slab from the altar screen

eastern part of the nave, in front of the apse filled by the synthronon. At a later stage, this space was remodeled and destroyed by burial pits (Gazda 2005: 290–292). The original location of the sanctuary was established thanks to fragments of broken slabs from the original altar screen preserved below the flooring [*Fig. 1.9* left].

The slabs of the western section of the altar screen were embedded in the fill below the floor and additionally supported by small posts mounted on their inner side [*Fig. 1.9* top right]. Only postholes survive on the northern side of the western screen. The distance between posts was 0.52 m; the holes in which they were mounted varied in size: 19 cm by 12.5 cm and 14 cm by 15 cm.

One of the sandstone altar screen slabs (dimensions: H. 97 cm; L. 110 cm; Th. 12.5 cm) was uncovered lying in front of the west screen wall, in the naos of the church [*Fig. 1.10*]. The surface of the slab is badly damaged, with cracks and chips in the upper and lower parts. Only one side of the slab was studied, since raising it could have led to its complete destruction. Within a border 15 cm wide were two bands, each 10 cm wide, one horizontal and the other vertical, dividing the space on the slab into four fields decorated in shallow relief. The decoration is very eroded and hardly discernible. The motifs in the two lower(?) fields were geometrical, with diagonal lines intersecting in the middle and circular elements inscribed into the resulting triangles. Decoration in the two upper(?) fields was floral with symbolic elements including a small cross.

The entrance to the sanctuary was situated in the central part of the west altar screen wall. The surviving stone threshold of this entrance was 0.88 m wide and 0.39 m long. In the shorter sides, it had notches (14 cm by 17 cm and 15 cm by 16 cm), in which the slabs of the screen had been lodged. The width of the entrance was 0.58 m. No elements survived of the lateral north and south screen walls, which were erected on the continuous footings, on both sides of the eastern columns.

The original altar was situated in front of the synthronon, which filled the apse. One can only hypothesize as to the exact location of the altar based on relics and traces extant in the floor of the sanctuary; although the floor underwent changes during the period when the sanctuary was in use, the stone bases installed in it to hold up the pillars supporting the altar top seem to have retained their original position. Of the four bases, only two are preserved *in situ*. They are located centrally, and the distance between them (0.60 m) allows for the reconstruction of only one of the dimensions of the altar. Hypothetically, the altar mensa could have measured 1.00 m in the length and about 0.80 m in width.

Apse and *synthronon*

The apse, 3.60 m in width and 3.00 m in diameter, was flanked on the front by two pilasters (W. 0.70 m; Th. 0.20 m), which presumably supported the ceiling beams of the side aisles [see *Fig. 1.2* bottom]. The inside of the apse was completely filled by the *synthronon*, only the central part of which survives [*Fig. 1.11*].

The synthronon was a semicircular feature consisting of several concentrically arranged steps, of which only the bottom two are extant. On the top step of the *synthronon* there might have been a platform or throne, the stone backrest of which was found below the floor next to the northeastern pillar in the naos. This sandstone slab (dimensions: H. 0.505 m; W. 0.54 m; Th. 0.08 m) has a rounded upper edge with two finials on the sides.

Pulpit

The pulpit, located in the inner corner of the northeastern pillar, was oriented transversely in relation to the axis of the nave [see *Fig. 1.2* top], which was an unusual solution. It consisted of a flight of steps and a platform, which are no longer preserved *in situ*, but their dimensions can be reconstructed on the basis of the extant relics. The slab measured 0.62 m by 1.15 m, and the steps 1.45 m by 0.75 m. Both the steps and the platform of the pulpit rested on structural supports, four posts in each case.

Of the four posts supporting the platform, the lower parts of three are still lodged below the preserved flooring. The fourth post was removed, but the posthole in which it had been mounted is preserved in the pavement next to the pillar. The posts supporting the pulpit stairs were also lodged in postholes below the flooring. The first step of the stairs is preserved *in situ* [*Fig. 1.12*]. A reconstruction of the pulpit using the preserved architectural elements—slabs and posts—requires further investigation.

The pavement in the naos as well as in the western and eastern rooms of the basilica consists of large ceramic tiles (50 cm by 32 cm) laid in a regular pattern on a thin bedding of sand. Below it was a brick leveling layer, which in all likelihood could not have been an earlier floor, since it did not directly abut the footing of the pillars and columns, while the tile floor situated above the top surfaces of the footings had its