

SUDAN & NUBIA

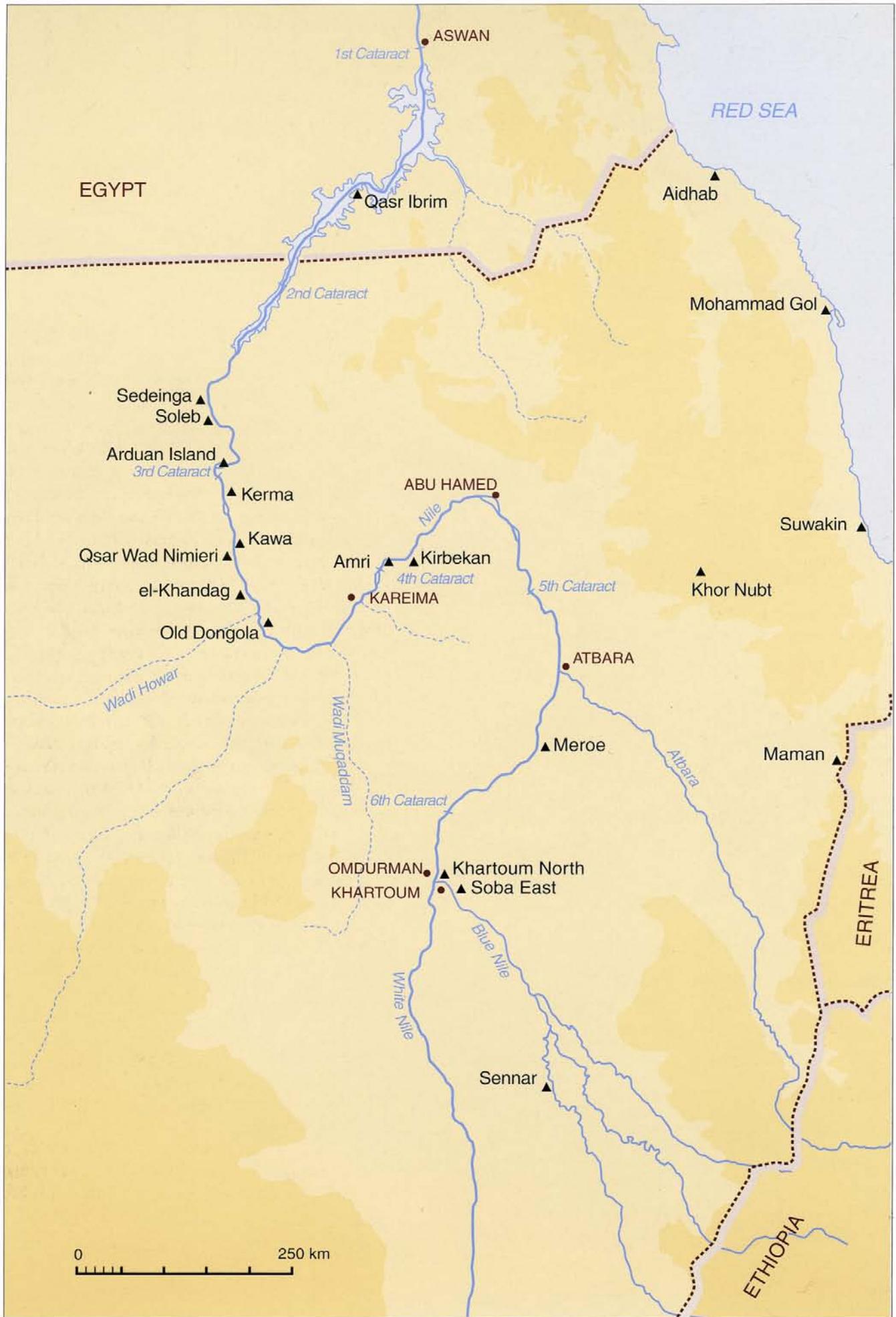
The Sudan Archaeological Research Society



Bulletin No. 4

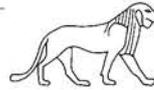
2000





SUDAN & NUBIA

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Front Cover: Meroe. Pyramid BEG N 18 (type XII) before restoration work on the chapel. In the background pyramid BEG N 9 (type VII). Photo taken by F. W. Hinkel in 1980 from the top of BEG N 19 (slide 5467).

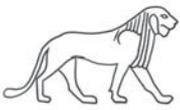
Introduction

Vivian Davies

During the last winter the Society resumed its flagship project at Kawa, among other things uncovering more of the early Kushite town, including an extraordinary mud-brick building once decorated with wall-paintings showing royal and divine figures and containing the remains of large ceramic figures of the gods Bes and Beset (see Welsby below). We also responded to the international appeal for help from the National Corporation for Antiquities and Museums to document sites threatened by the planned Merowe Dam, carrying out a survey on the left bank of the Nile and on the islands between Amri and Kirkeban above the Fourth Cataract which identified well over a hundred sites of different types and periods (Welsby). Qasr Ibrim, for many years under excavation by the Egypt Exploration Society and still yielding information of first-rate importance (Rose), embodies an acute reminder of the destructive consequences of dams and of the loss to knowledge that such schemes entail.

The need for rescue-work in response to various threats (environmental as well as man-made) is a thread running through much of this issue, which also includes reports on the study and conservation of the monuments at Meroe (Hinkel), excavation necessitated by road-building at Soba East (Abdel Rahman Ali Mohamed), archaeological survey in the little-known Fifth Cataract region (Yousef El-Amin and Edwards), and continuing investigation of the Mahas region at the Third Cataract (Edwards and Ali Osman), the latter an interdisciplinary project which now valuably incorporates ecological, ethnographic and linguistic components (Muhammad Jalal Hashim and Bell). We are also very pleased to include two papers on aspects of Islamic archaeology in the Sudan (Intisar Soghayroun el-Zein and Salah Omer Elsadig), hitherto a chronically neglected subject but clearly one with great potential for further research.

It is an enormous pleasure to report that Professor William Y. Adams, one of the great names of modern Sudanese archaeology, has accepted our invitation to become Honorary President of SARS, in succession to the late Sir Laurence Kirwan. Professor Adams takes office in time to preside over our tenth anniversary in 2001, a year in which SARS celebrates a decade of progressive achievement and looks forward to the formidable but exciting challenges that lie ahead.



The Archaeology of Arduan Island - the Mahas Survey 2000

David N. Edwards and Ali Osman

Introduction

Systematic archaeological survey in the Mahas region of north Sudan began in 1989 with a series of field seasons carried out by the University of Khartoum in the Third Cataract zone between Tombos and Kajbar-Sabu (Edwards and Osman 1992; 1994). Following a break of several years, the project was revived during 1999, greatly assisted by a substantial grant from the Haycock Fund of the British Institute in Eastern Africa (BIEA). Building on the foundations of the earlier work, the project is operating as an interdisciplinary programme combining archaeological, historical, linguistic, folkloric and related research within a regional study. A strong emphasis is also being placed on collaborative work with and between Sudanese institutions and expatriate researchers, as well as on the training and development of Sudanese researchers.

The spring 2000 season

The main focus of the fieldwork this year was Arduan, a large island measuring some 12 x 6km, located in the heart of the Third Cataract zone. This is the second largest island on the Nile (if barely an island at low river). It still remains relatively isolated and thinly populated, with a cluster of villages around Arduan itself, a scatter of smaller settlements around its margins and a barren rocky interior (Fig. 1). There are few settlements on its southern side with only a single village, Gumaara, between Barja and Amla, although several

small hamlets may be found on the south side of the river channel. Amla, at its southwest corner, once an important village, now has a very small resident population.

During the season, nearly all the island margins were explored with some transects into the interior, mainly to assess the potential for palaeolithic sites. Some 80 new sites were recorded while further recording was carried out on about 10 sites outside the island. Return visits were also made to most sites on the east bank between Tombos and Kedurma, located in previous seasons, both to assess their current condition as well as to more accurately locate them with a GPS. Working in conjunction with a language/toponymic survey carried out by members of the Institute of African and Asian Studies, University of Khartoum, supervised by Herman Bell, a novel and very useful feature of this season's work was the accumulation of numerous oral histories and traditions concerning the island and many of its archaeological sites.

Late prehistoric sites

Few Neolithic sites were found on the island. However, one unusual 'find' was a group of three polished stone axes, found by a local inhabitant on the edge of the hamlet of Arduan Konj (Plate 1). Such objects are relatively rare in this region and we have previously only found a single fragment of an axe elsewhere in the Mahas region, near Kajbar. These may be compared with examples from the Neolithic cemeteries at Kadruka, south of Kerma (Reinold 1994, 6). Further north in Lower Nubia polished stone axes are by no means common but examples are known from Abkan Neolithic as well as A-Group contexts, although these are generally short and thick, with a broad convex edge and a rather narrow butt (see Nordström 1972, 121 for references). While polished stone axeheads are not uncommon finds in Kerma contexts

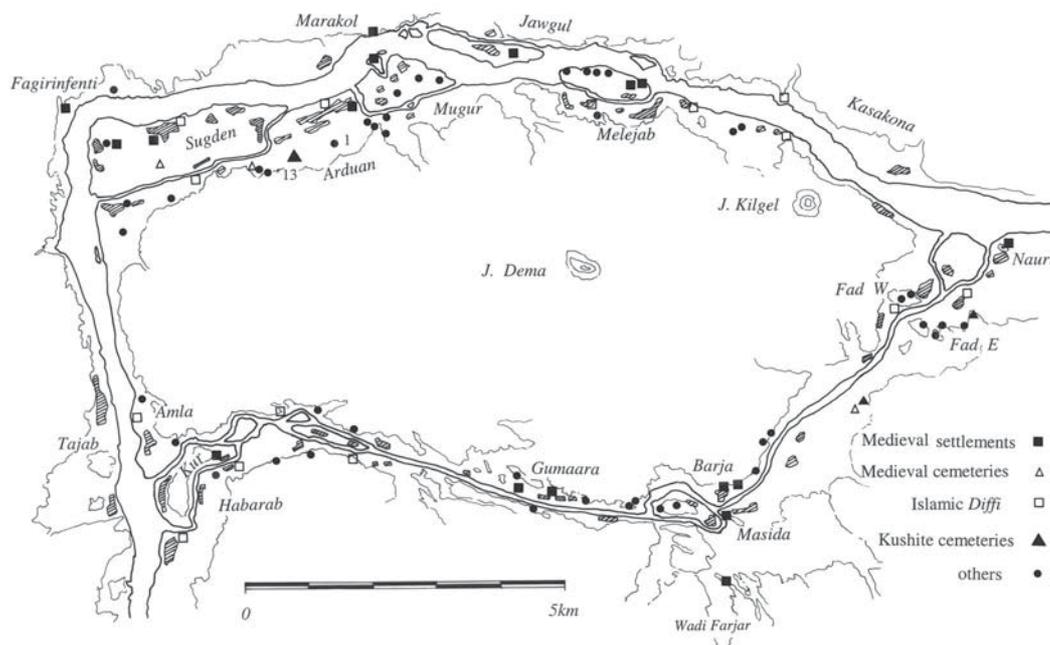


Figure 1. Arduan island and its environs.



Plate 1. Neolithic polished stone axes from Arduan.

(e.g. Bonnet 1990, 153, 164; Sjöström 1994, 7) they also tend to be smaller and proportionally broader than our examples.

One of the most interesting late prehistoric sites found this season was what appears to be an extensive 'pre-Kerma' settlement, located on the desert edge south of Arduan village (ARD001). Covering c. 0.5ha the sand and gravel surface of the site was marked by concentrations of stones and pot sherds and many shallow sand-filled hollows, superficially similar to those left by quarry pits (Plate 2). A narrow



Plate 2. Surface of 'Pre-Kerma' settlement at Arduan (ARD001) with sondage.

rock outcrop with a band of mica-rich quartz ran through the east side of the site and many pieces of worked quartz were noted on the surface. The density of sherd material on the surface was remarkable and the many clusters of large sherds clearly represented parts of single vessels; most appeared to be relatively large bowl forms. A fragment of a copper alloy axe was also found. Surface collections were made from two sample squares (3m x 3m), one of which was then excavated.

Below the stony surface, the excavated area revealed a coarse sandy deposit 10-20cm deep, under which were nine

small cut features (Fig. 2); five of these were completely excavated. Features 1, 3, 4 and 6 proved to be near circular pits c. 70cm in diameter and 30-40cm deep. With steep sides and slightly rounded bases, their sandy fills generally contained a few stones and sherds and occasional fragments of bone, shell, worked quartz and charcoal flecks. Pits 3 and 6 produced sherds that matched or joined sherds collected on the surface. Feature 5 was markedly smaller than the other pits, 50cm in diameter and c. 30cm deep. With more curved edges, it also had a smaller socket c. 10cm across, cut into its base. Its fill contained several large stones but no finds and this feature is probably a post-hole, the socket and stone packing for holding a post. Feature 2 was only part excavated and may have been another post-hole while three other features (7-9) were not excavated. No desiccated material was found in the pit fills.

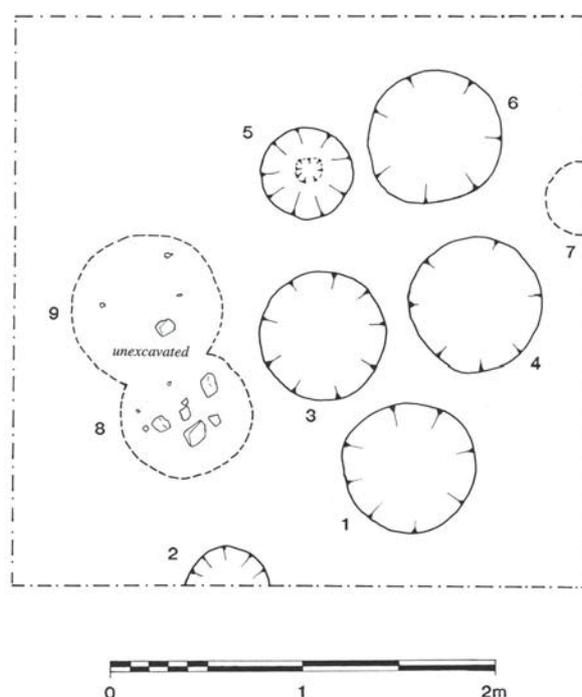
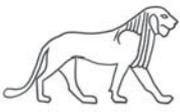


Figure 2. ARD001 – plan of pits and post-holes in 'pre-Kerma' site.

The relationship between the features revealed by the sondage and the condition of the surface still remains unclear. As noted above, when first discovered it was presumed that the surface features were the result of quarrying activities of some kind, possibly relatively recently. However, after excavation, no obvious relationship could be seen between the surface and subsurface features, and no evidence was found for intrusive quarry pits post-dating the prehistoric features which could account for the sand-filled depressions. The abundance of stones within fills of the pits/post-holes and the demonstrable relationship between surface sherds and pottery from the pit fills does suggest that much of the stone and pottery on the surface comes from material eroded out of subsurface features by deflationary processes (for a discussion of such processes, see Sadr 1991,



20-22). This in turn may also have become mixed with other material from deflated occupation levels. It was noted during excavation of the pits that all the sherds came from the upper levels of the pit fills, and much of the surface pottery may represent whole pots, or large fragments, originally placed in the top of pits.

The small sample of decorated pottery from the site (Plate 3) compares well with material published from recent exca-



Plate 3. 'Pre-Kerma sherds' from Arduan (ARD001).

avations of the 'pre-Kerma' settlement at Kerma (Bonnet 1990, fig. 108; Privati 1988; Honegger 1997; 1999), currently dated to around 3000BC. Amongst the finer wares, the most common were burnished black-topped red wares (Fig. 3, 3-4) with a distinctive rippled decoration below the rim, some, as at Kerma, with a narrow band of light brown fabric between the black rim and red slipped surface. Coarser unslipped black wares were also common (Fig. 3, 1-2), many with incised or impressed rim decoration, as also seen at Kerma (Privati 1988, figs 1/2 and 2/8). A small number of

sherds were also found with geometric impressed designs, but no substantial parts of vessels of such types could be reconstructed.

Similar pottery has been noted in surface collections from several other sites in the Mahas region (Edwards and Osman 1992; 1994), but this represents the most substantial site so far recorded. The sondage suggests the presence of both storage pits and structures at the Arduan site, as at Kerma, but no evidence has yet been found for associated burials. Attention may also be drawn to possible comparisons between the Arduan site and a large Neolithic site, with a similarly pitted surface with subcircular features, recently identified on Sai island (Geus 1995, 85-6, pl. III). The results of excavations at Sai have yet to be reported, but it will be interesting to see how the surface remains there may, or may not, relate to underlying features.

Interpretation of the Arduan material and its cultural associations is presently based largely on comparisons with finds from Kerma, where such pottery seems to be part of a developing tradition which continues into the 'Early Kerma' period, as well as being part of a geographically more extensive ceramic tradition of the 'A-Horizon'. What is still far from clear, however, is how such material may relate to pre-existing 'late Neolithic' ceramic traditions in this region, clearly a question of great importance with regard to tracing the origins of Kerma. Our knowledge of late Neolithic pottery in this region is still relatively limited (and derived from burial contexts rather than settlement sites), based on preliminary reports from the Kadruka cemetery south of Kerma. In view of this, more detailed study of material from this and other 'late Neolithic' and/or 'pre-Kerma' sites in the survey area may be able to throw further light on such longer-term cultural developments during the fourth-third millennia BC.

A further unusual find of material probably of broadly similar date was made on the east edge of Arduan village. High amidst one of the granite outcrops, which are such a feature of the cataract region, large parts of two pots were

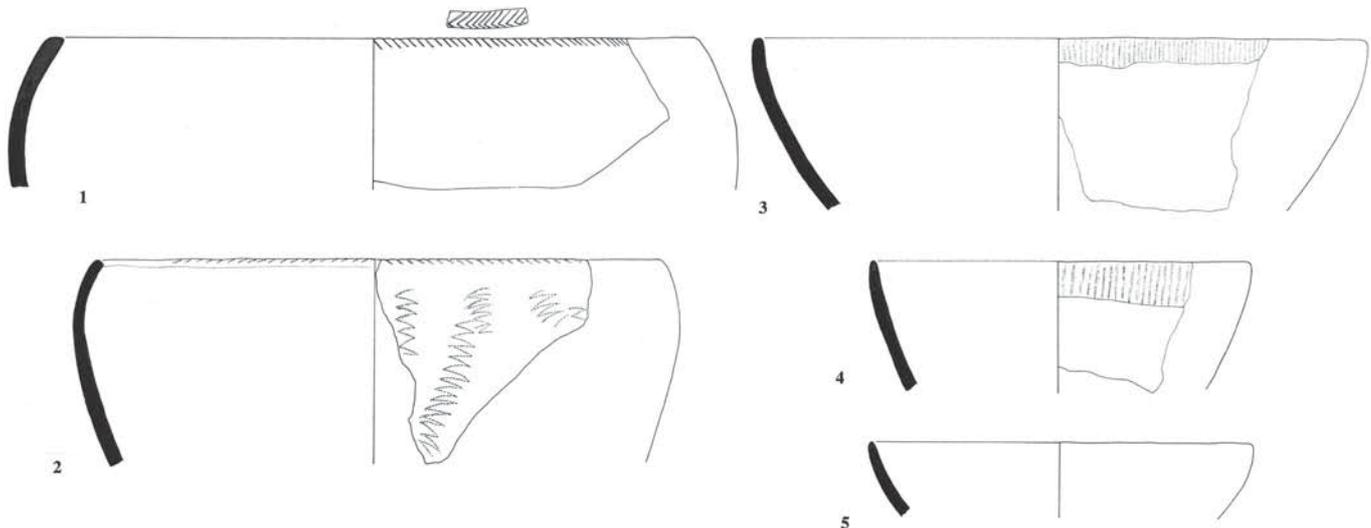


Figure 3. ARD001 – 'pre-Kerma' pottery.

found as a cluster of sherds. Thin scatters of sherds are not unusual amongst these outcrops, although their origin often remains far from clear. These vessels were particularly unusual, however, in being substantially reconstructable and well preserved, and both would seem to date to the pre- or 'Early Kerma' periods. The first vessel was a very fine red burnished bowl (Fig. 4, 1) with bands of fine impressed decoration running down the body from just below the rim. The deep and pointed form suggests a relatively early date ('pre-Kerma' or possibly 'Early Kerma') and parallels 'A-Group' forms. Such decoration is also a feature of 'Early Kerma' finewares (e.g. Gratien 1978, 151-2, fig. 42). Similar decoration also occurs in the early 'C-Group' in Lower Nubia (Bietak 1968, Taf. 2, Ia 12; Williams 1983, pl. 4B), but generally on shallower bowls. The second vessel (Fig. 4, 2) was less complete, but preserved a substantial part of an elaborate incised geometric design, although one which seems difficult to parallel. Such a layout is not common in 'C-Group' material, and perhaps has more in common with some vessel types with varying incised panels found in 'A-Group' contexts in Lower Nubia (e.g. Nordström 1972, pl. 173.3).

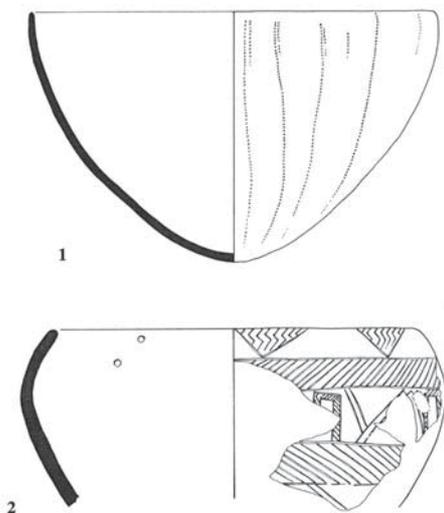


Figure 4. Pottery from rock outcrops near Arduan (ARD002).

The circumstances of the deposition of two such fine vessels in the middle of a rocky outcrop remain obscure. However, their fine quality is such as to suggest they were not just part of the debris of a campsite, and it is tempting to suggest that they may represent a deliberate deposit of some form. A further unusual feature of the red bowl is that one area of the surface below the rim was coated (a handprint?) with what appears to have been red ochre, or a similar substance. The presence of red ochre (a 'powerful' colour and substance) is perhaps another indication of the 'special' nature of these vessels and its tempting to suggest that they represent a ritual deposit(s) of some type.

This possibility is of particular interest as our ongoing ethnographic work is already suggesting that many such rock

outcrops have enjoyed a special significance in the local landscapes in more recent periods. Strong associations of rocks and rock outcrops with elements of the 'spirit world' recall practices encountered in several areas in Sudan (e.g. MacMichael 1967, 73, 100-101, 127), and here we are also getting some indications that the presence of rock drawings in such places may also be explained in such terms. While the projection of such recent associations into prehistory is not without problems, this chance find certainly raises the possibility that such locations may also have enjoyed special significance in the landscape of the third millennium BC.

Kerma sites

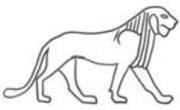
Only two new Kerma sites were found this season on Arduan island, although further reconnaissance along the wadi systems, which run south of Arduan towards Tombos, revealed several more sites. Following the first discovery of several small Kerma-period sites along the Wadi Farjar in 1991 (Edwards and Osman 1992, 54-9), it now seems clear that there was quite extensive occupation in this hinterland as late as the second millennium BC. While it was not possible to carry out a systematic walking survey and mapping of sites along the wadis this season, additional reconnaissance work along several wadi branches indicates that late prehistoric sites are very common on banks of ancient alluvium often encountered along the wadi margins. The enigmatic burnt red features, widely encountered in the Kerma basin and further south (Welsby 1996, 5), are also common in these areas. Further groups of wadi walls (Plate 4), possibly relating to water-harvesting systems, were also located. No unequivocal dating evidence has yet been found, but at least one group of walls had extensive spreads of Kerma period pottery associated with it.



Plate 4. Rubble walls along the edge of the Wadi Farjar.

A new Meroitic cemetery (ARD 013)

Only a single Meroitic site was found on the island, a cemetery (ARD013) on the desert edge on the south side of Arduan village. Previous work has only identified a single early Meroitic cemetery in the cataract region between



Tombos and Kajbar at Fad East, opposite the east end of Arduan island (Edwards and Osman 1992, 63). This new cemetery was located in a bank of ancient alluvium, cut by a series of small gullies. The quarrying of clay for use in the construction of new houses on its north side had damaged the site in recent years and the location of several graves was visible on the surface, together with a thin scatter of sherds. During that quarrying work an almost complete red burnished Meroitic wheel-made jar (Fig. 5, 1) was found by one of the local inhabitants. Surface sherding produced limited material, in which orange-burnished wheel-made wares were most common, including some decorated fragments. The small closed jar (Fig. 5, 3) had a burnished orange surface, decorated with black bands and a red rim. A fragment of a larger jar also had a burnished orange slip with black decoration infilled in red (Fig. 5, 2). No sherds of the distinctive Meroitic black-burnished or brown handmade wares (Rose 1996, 119-21, Wares A1, A2, A4) were noted. In addition to Meroitic material, a few small sherds of what appear to be Napatan or possibly New Kingdom wares were noted, indicating an earlier phase of the site's use.

bodies were recovered from the shaft fill, including well-preserved (naturally mummified) body parts, still articulated. Much soft tissue survived as well as scalp hair on one skull, and finger nails stained with henna. Much of two further bodies, clearly not *in situ*, were found in the north side of the chamber. The original shape of the chamber cannot definitely be determined as most of its south side was quarried away. Articulated body parts (found in the shaft) confirm that some at least of the bodies were buried in an extended position. However, as the grave chamber was no more than 1.5m long, it is possible that others were buried in a contracted position.

Pottery recovered from the fills was very mixed and not all the sherds may relate to the original burials. It included a large fragment of an oil bottle (Fig. 5, 4), several sherds of a hand-made jar (Fig. 5, 6), a coarse wheel-made dish/bowl (Fig. 5, 5) and a large rim sherd of a coarse open dish (not illustrated), whose very worn edges indicate it had been used as a digging sherd. The oil bottle is an imported 'Aswani' vessel type commonly found in Meroitic graves in Middle and Lower Nubia. The hand-made jar is a micaceous brown

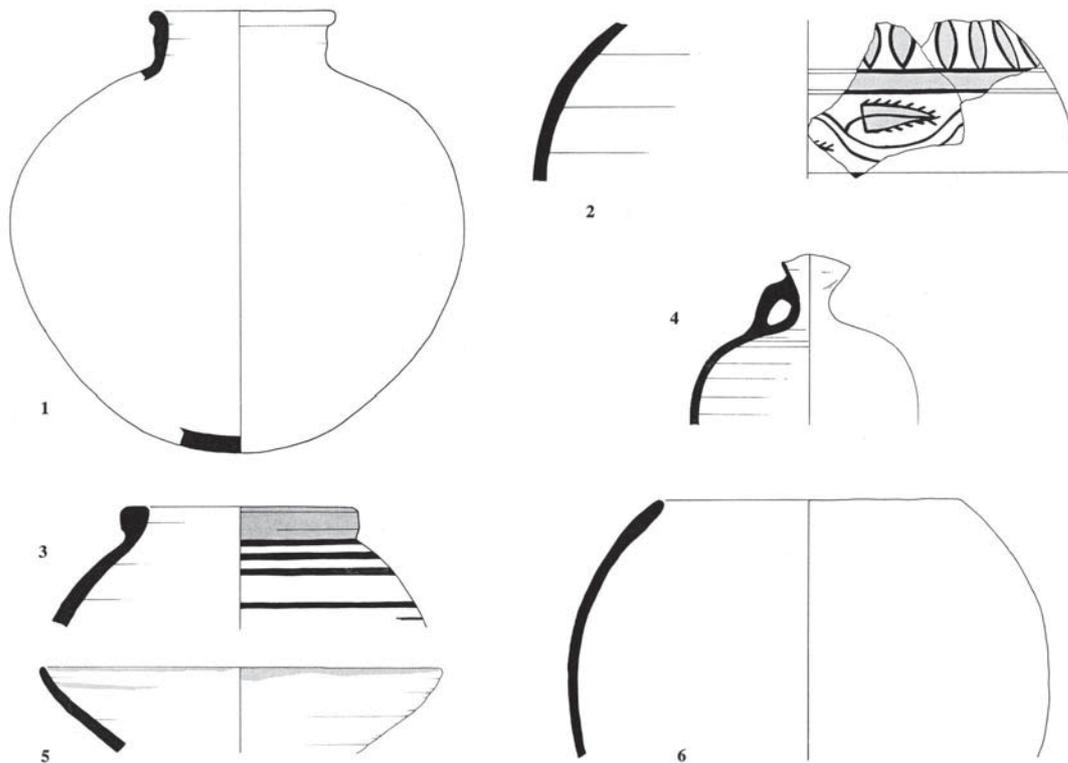


Figure 5. Meroitic pottery from ARD013.

Two heavily damaged graves were selected for a test excavation. Grave 1 had previously been damaged by quarrying on its south side, which had cut into its chamber. This proved to be an east-west oriented grave with a sloping shaft c. 3m long leading to a chamber at the west end (Fig. 6). The chamber entrance had a stone blocking, parts of which remained *in situ*. The grave was much disturbed, both from robbing in antiquity as well as more recently. Large parts of three

siltware. While such coarse hand-made wares are uncommon in Meroitic graves it appears similar to material recorded at Qasr Ibrim (Rose 1996, 120, fig. 4.6; ware A3a) and may be associated with the original burials. By contrast, the wheel-made dish with its red rim-stripe, in a matt brown micaceous silt fabric, is very similar to Napatan material recorded from the Tombos area (Edwards and Osman 1992, 20) and would appear to be intrusive.

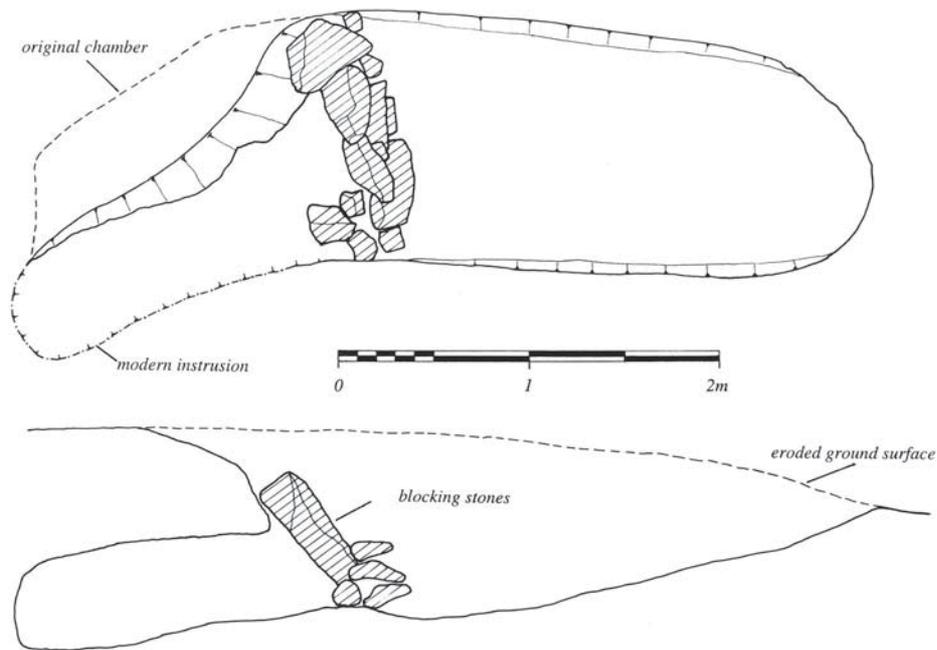


Figure 6. Plan and profile of Meroitic grave ARD013/1.

Grave 2, located a little to the west, was exposed by the effects of erosion and quarrying and it seems likely that at least 0.5m of surface soil has been lost since the grave was originally excavated. On a slightly different orientation from Grave 1, the tomb consisted of sloping shaft at least 2m. long with a tapering axial chamber at the east end (Fig. 7). The lower parts of two bodies, dorsally extended, feet to the east, were preserved at the east end of the chamber area but the upper bodies and skulls were absent. While most of the lower limbs of the bodies were well preserved with some soft tissue preserved, scattered bones near the surface were much more poorly preserved and had clearly been exposed by robbing. At the base of the chamber, a regular area of dark brown staining of the ground surface probably outlines the area of

a wooden coffin although no fragments of this survived. Just to the west of the probable location of the chamber entrance a small pit was found in the floor of the grave shaft. Infilled with silt and a few stones, no evidence was found as to the purpose of this feature. No artefacts were found with the burials.

While the artefactual evidence is limited, it seems likely that both graves were Meroitic, although it may be expected that Napatan or possibly New Kingdom graves are to be found close by. In view of the scarcity of Meroitic sites in this region, and its insecure position on the edge of the village, further investigation of this site is clearly desirable and it is hoped that further excavations may be carried out here in the future.

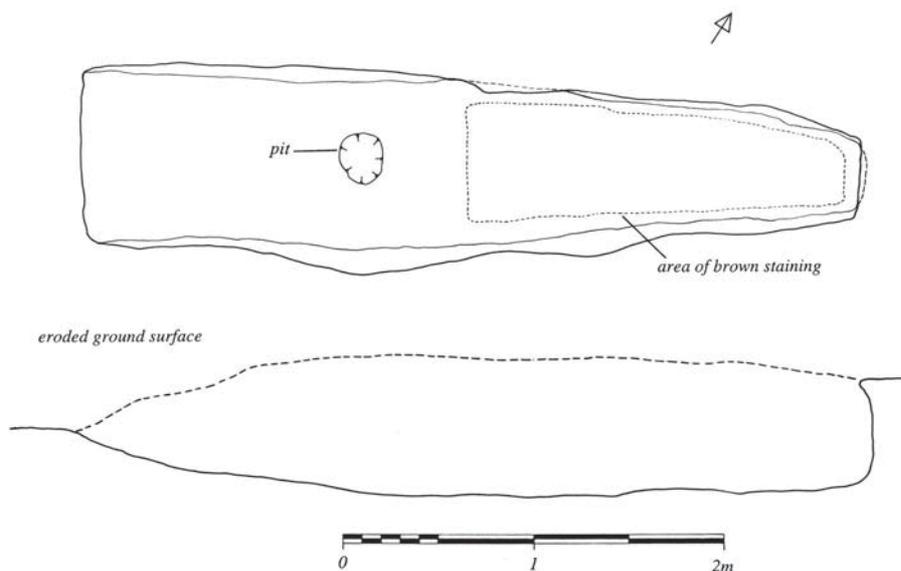
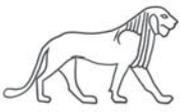


Figure 7. Plan and profile of Meroitic grave ARD013/2.



Medieval settlement

Several substantial medieval sites were identified and all the major modern settlements on the island have evidence for medieval villages or hamlets in their immediate vicinity. The best-preserved sites tended to be found in more isolated areas such as on the seasonal islands of Sugden, Mugur, Kur and Melejab-Shyinirki. It seems likely that other substantial settlements existed, but their remains now lie under the modern villages. In several areas in and around the spread of hamlets which comprise Arduan village, large spreads of medieval 'Christian' pottery were noted, but no settlement foci could be identified. Two church sites were located, one on Melejab island and another at Barja (Fig. 8, left), both only preserved at foundation level. Parts of a rare upstanding mud-

While many will remain difficult to date, and such structures may have served a number of purposes, their abundance suggests that they should be treated as an important component of the medieval (and later) settlement landscape. The very small stone and mud buildings encountered in northern Nubia by Burckhardt in 1813 (Burckhardt 1819, 140-1) may well have been of similar types.

Among the general spread of medieval sites, one interesting group comprised seven 'castle-houses', a type of structure which appears in Lower and Middle Nubia in the later medieval period (Adams 1994). These were found at three locations on Arduan, one at the west end on the seasonal island of Sugden (Sugden Koro SUG003), three in Barja (Mooga BRJ004, Diffinog BRJ005/2-3) and three in a group

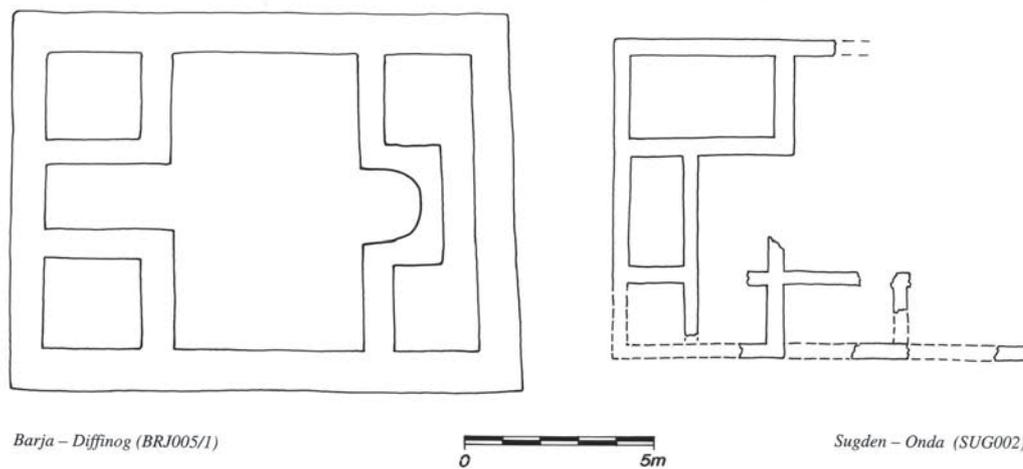


Figure 8. Plan of the church at Barja-Diffinog (left), and a medieval building on Sugden island (right).

brick building were found on the edge of the modern hamlet at Sugden Onda (Fig. 8, right). Two large enclosed sites were found on Mugur island (MUG004) and Melejab island (MLG001), both built on raised rocky areas overlooking the river (Colour Plate XXIII, Fig. 9), the first located almost directly across the river from the great stone enclosure at Marakol (Edwards and Osman 1994, 40-41). Both seem likely to date to the later medieval period and may well have been occupied in later centuries as well.

A further element of medieval settlements were many small rough stone structures, commonly found amongst rocky outcrops. The low stone walls of both rectilinear and subcircular structures may include the remains of small huts, although some may also be animal pounds. While many single examples were encountered, in some areas, notably Melejab Island and Fad East, groups of several were found, hidden among the rocks and low hills. Surface sherds indicate that many of these are of medieval date, and it seems likely that these small sites represent small settlements, some perhaps temporary 'camps', and perhaps more specifically 'refuges'. The existence of such refuges in inaccessible and 'hidden' locations, occupied in periods of insecurity, is a feature of local oral histories relating to more recent periods.

at the east end of Melejab island (Shyinirki MLG001, MLG002, MLG007), one being incorporated into the large enclosure there (Fig. 9). The design of all the structures was very similar, with a lower storey built in stone and a second floor in mud brick (Fig. 10). Like 'castle-houses' further north discussed by Adams, the lower floors of these buildings comprised a series of small vaulted rooms, with no external entrances, but entered from the upper rooms of the second storey (Adams 1994, 18). Surface collections of pottery also place them in the 'Late Christian' period.

These buildings may be added to several other examples found previously in the region. On the west bank, a building of this type was found at Tajab Toona (Edwards and Osman 1994, 33), while a cluster of several are found in the medieval village on Jawgul island (*ibid*, 43). Similar structures but built entirely in mud brick may be found in the medieval village of Tinutti (*op.cit.*,53-4) with a further isolated structure at Haleeba (*op.cit.*,55; site 90/48). As yet no examples have been found in the area further north between the Kajbar cataract and Sesi-Delgo. On the east bank, three more examples form a small settlement at Awai, on the seasonal island of Kur, at the southwest corner of Arduan (Edwards and Osman 1992, 45). Like the Arduan exam-

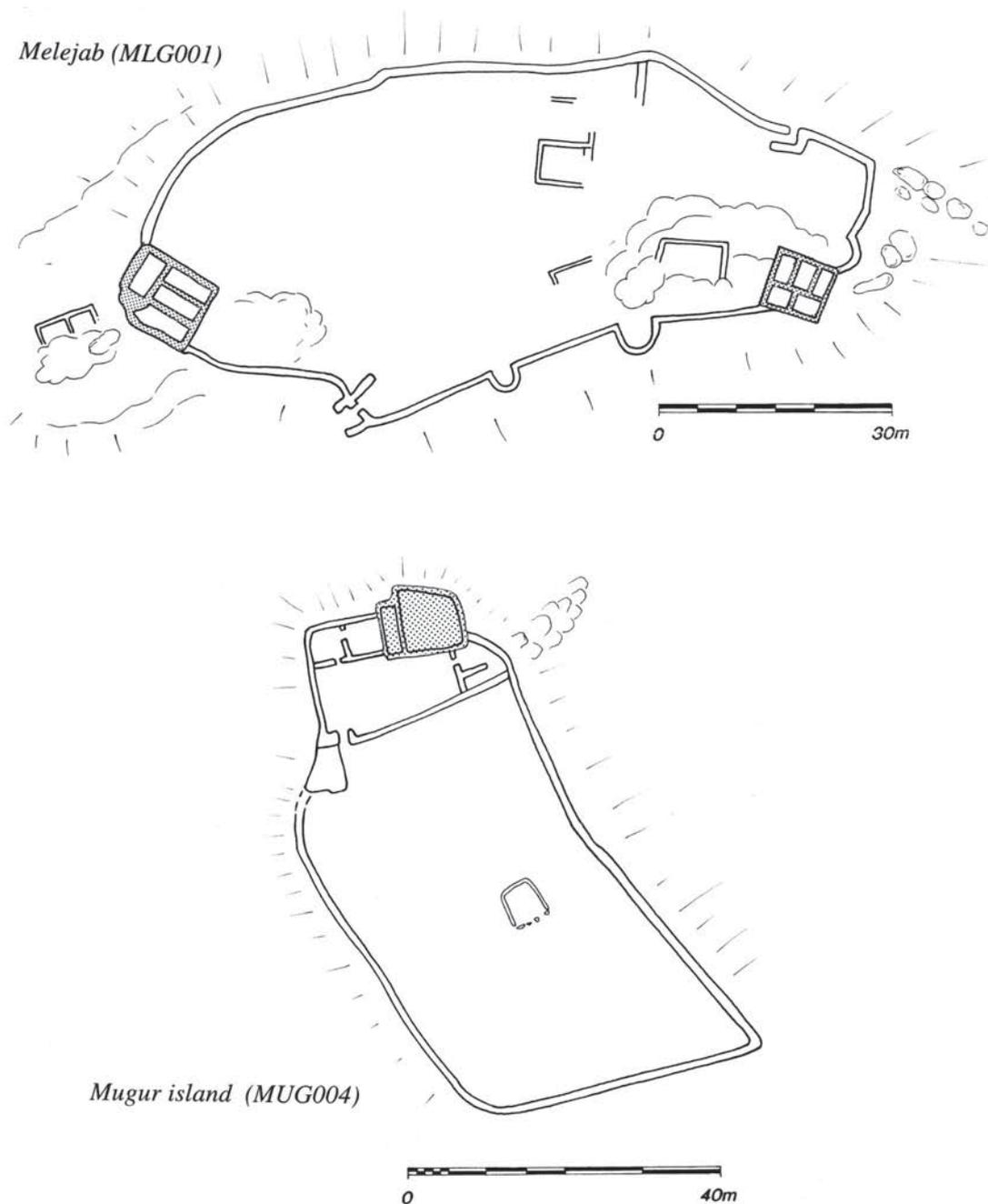


Figure 9. Medieval fortified sites at Melejab (top) and Mugur (bottom).

ples, those at Awai, Tinutti and Haleeba may confidently be dated to the later medieval period, although dating evidence for the buildings at Toona and Jawgul is less certain, dateable sherds from surface collections also including 'Classic Christian' or earlier types.

These buildings add significantly to the number of this class of 'castle-houses' and allow some amplification of the conclusions Adams drew in his recent study. As he suggested, the construction of 'blind cellars' in the lower floors of the buildings is a feature common to all and it seems to be a feature differentiating 'castle-houses' found south of Tanjur (in the southern Batn el-Hajar) from those found further north in Lower Nubia (Adams 1994, 18). Their abundance

in this area would further support the case that buildings of this type represent a distinctive regional architectural form, occurring in the area between the southern Batn el-Hajar and the southern end of the Third Cataract. As found further north, they occur both as isolated units and as parts of larger settlements, and most commonly in defensible locations such as islands (Adams 1994, 16). However, those at Awai, Sugden and Melejab do not appear to have been sited with a concern for maintaining views upstream along the river as was suggested for the northern examples (*loc.cit.*).

Post-medieval and Islamic archaeology

Our project has an explicit concern for investigating the more

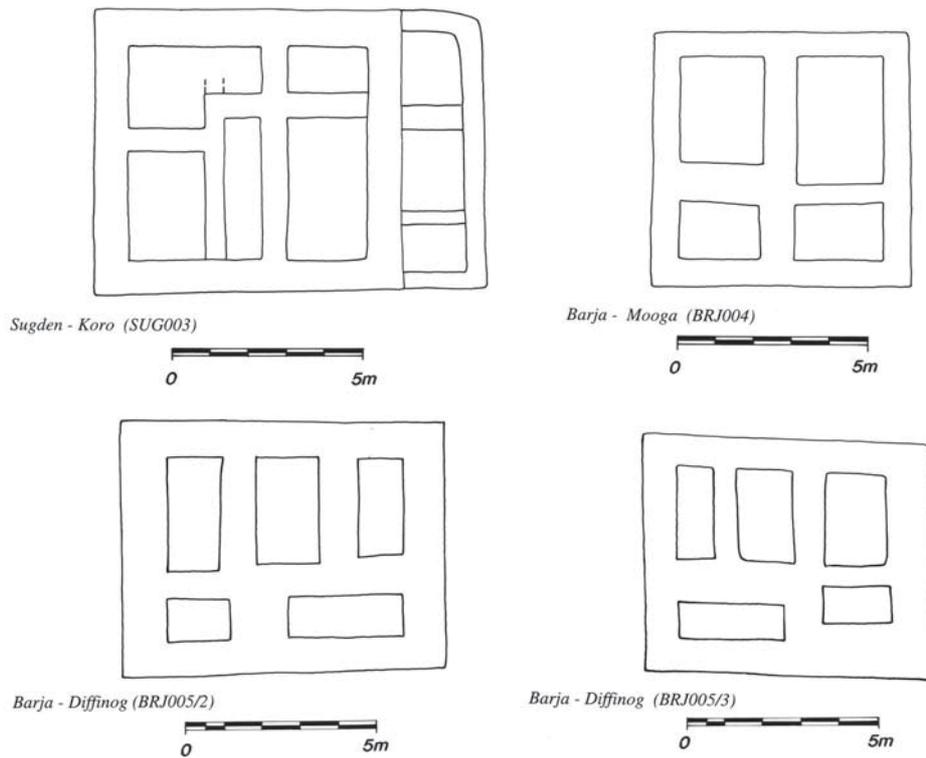
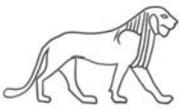


Figure 10. Plans of four late medieval 'castle-houses' from Arduan.

recent post-medieval history of the region, which corresponds with what may broadly be termed the 'Islamic period'. The most prominent features of this period in the region are its *Diffi* (fortified houses/castles) and domed *Qubba* tombs. This year, as part of our collaborative investigations with the Nubian language and toponym survey, special efforts were made to improve our records of such 'Islamic' sites and to begin to collect oral histories and traditions associated with new sites found on Arduan as well as sites previously located, an undertaking which has proved both successful and stimulating. The *Diffi* are an unusual class of site, already recognised as being a distinctive feature of the Middle Nubian landscape occurring only in areas south of the Batn el-Hajar (Adams 1987, 338), with at least 39 examples (locally known as *Kourfa*) recorded in the Sikoot region between Dal and Nilwatti (Vila 1979, 71-120). The many examples in the Mahas region add considerably to this number and this season a further 11 *Diffi* sites were recorded on Arduan island and its immediate environs. Several others elsewhere in the cataract region, registered during previous fieldwork seasons, were revisited and, to date, over 30 have been recorded in the survey area.

While we have begun to accumulate a considerable amount of information about such sites, many questions concerning their purpose and function remain unresolved. While some clearly have the capability of serving defensive purposes, as 'fortified houses', they show considerable variety in form. Some contain complexes of internal rooms and yards while others have very little in the way of internal structures and are little more than enclosed yards with corner tow-

ers (Colour Plate XXIV, Fig. 11). Their distribution is also very variable. The *Diffi* on Arduan are widely dispersed with usually only a single example found within the environs of existing communities. In other parts of the region they are sometimes more abundant, and in some villages such as Mashakeila (Edwards and Osman 1992, 68-73) and the Delgo area, several examples may be found clustered in very close proximity. Similar clusters have also been noted in the Sikoot region (Vila 1979, 73, fig. 22).

Dating the sites still remains problematic. Genealogies of lineages associated with the buildings often span several generations, taking us back into the early 19th century at least. Preliminary work on the *Diffi* in the Sikoot region has also suggested that many date to the early 19th century, and perhaps more particularly to the aftermath of the conquest of the region by Ismail Pasha (1820-21), being associated with local magnates ('gouverneurs locaux') of that period (Vila 1979, 72-3). However, such evidence is by no means conclusive and some may well predate this period, as Adams has suggested (1987, 338).

Whether some may be associated with earlier political units certainly requires investigation. Links with local 'kings' (*meks*) notably those of Sai in the Sikoot and Koka in the Mahas region (Osman 1982) during the 17th-18th centuries are certainly possible and the distribution of such sites may provide useful pointers for future research. It is, for example, noteworthy that one cluster of such sites occurs in the Hamid-Koyekka area south of Sai (Vila 1979, fig. 22) where Burckhardt reported the existence of a 'king, or Melek, of the Arab tribe of Hamyde, who is tributary to the governors

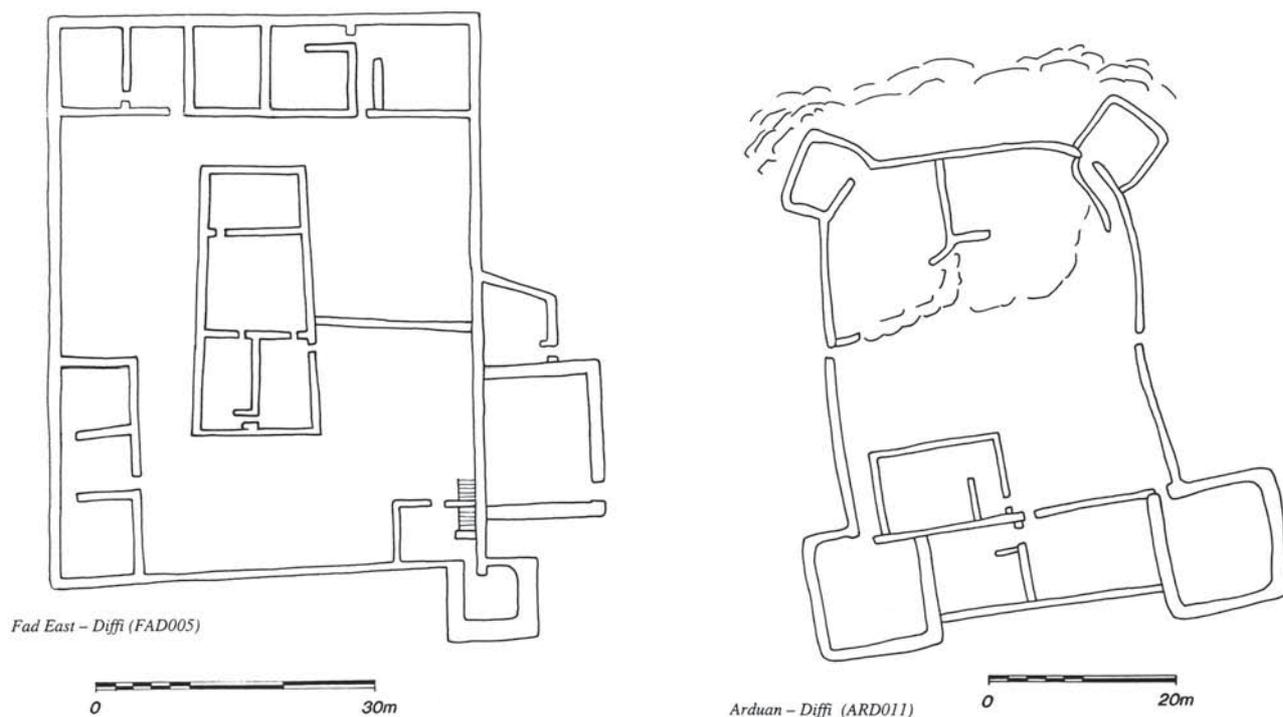


Figure 11. Nubian fortified houses (Diffi) – of late 18th-19th century date?

of Nubia' (1819, 56). The histories of these small-scale polities and their relationship with the late Ottoman *Kashef* rulers of Lower Nubia still remain obscure, but future work in this area is likely to prove very fruitful.

While the *Diffi* represent the most common class of Islamic period sites in the region, some additional work was carried-out this season on a very unusual and anomalous site at Jebel Kadamusa (Edwards and Osman 1992, 85-6), which, while clearly of post-medieval date, still remains difficult to interpret (Plate 5). Located on the east bank of the Nile north of the cataract, opposite Narnarti island, this enclosed settlement occupies a low hill close to the river bank (Fig. 12). The relatively gentle hill-slopes on the east and north sides are protected by a low rubble wall, while the steep southern slope appears to be undefended. A notable feature of the settlement interior is the presence of 15-20 regular mud-brick buildings constructed of highly distinctive large flat green mud bricks, located on a series of rocky terraces running down the west facing slope. Exceptionally, a small enclosure built on a low rock outcrop at the northwest corner of the site was built of smaller mud bricks similar in colour to those normally encountered in this region. Some of the buildings have walls preserved up to 1m high, but most appear to have been deliberately demolished, again a very unusual feature.

On the south side of the hill there is a small cemetery, marked by two upstanding mud-brick tombs and several regular rows of graves marked by low mounds, some surrounded by low rectangular walls. The two upstanding tombs differ from the more common form of *Qubba* tombs, associated with local Islamic teachers or holy men, which are

built to allow access to a grave within, and seem to represent a rather different type of monumental tomb. No similar tombs are known from elsewhere in the Mahas region, although they appear similar to examples in an unusual cemetery at Hamid-Kuchungi, on the west bank near Sai (Vila 1979, 112, fig. 71). Further potentially comparable tombs also occur in Lower Nubia, at for example Jebel Adda and Agargia (Adams 1987, fig. 7) although these are only known from general photographs and none are well-dated.

The date and associations of this unusual settlement and its cemetery still remain uncertain. Linant de Bellefond's report of the site, 'les ruines d'un village et celles d'un petit fort en briques crues', when he passed through this area in 1821 (1958, 17), provides a *terminus ante quem* for the site. However, beyond suggesting a date range between c. 1550 and c. 1800, more precise dating remains difficult. One possibility being considered at the moment is that this may have been an Ottoman military outpost, established sometime after the initial Turkish campaigns which reached the Third Cataract in 1584 (Alexander 2000). The location of the site, the regular plan and construction of the internal buildings and its otherwise unusual features are certainly compatible with such a hypothesis. While we are still far from being able to confirm this suggestion it is clear that the archaeological study of such sites has considerable potential for adding to our still limited knowledge of the post-medieval history of this region.

Conclusions

This season has added considerably to our knowledge of this region and has provided valuable new information on the

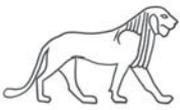


Plate 5. *Jebel Kadamusa, view west across part-demolished building and NW enclosure of site – Narnarti island behind.*

settlement history of Arduan island. The apparent absence of major Kerma or New Kingdom sites is notable and it seems likely that by the second millennium BC, this rocky and barren area was relatively marginal and unattractive for set-

tlement. It certainly seems likely that the main north-south routes along the river will not have followed the main river bank here and will have by-passed the island. The abundant evidence for Kerma period occupation in the wadi systems of the Wadi Farjar may well, at least in part, relate to such a route cutting across the bend in the river south of Arduan, avoiding this difficult area. The extent and nature of the Meroitic presence at Arduan village remains to be determined, but as yet the cemetery found here remains the only site of this period on the island. As is apparent today, this represents the most attractive location for settlement on the island. However, within the context of wider patterns of Meroitic settlement in Middle and Lower Nubia it may be noted that it is one which also marks a convenient outpost for managing river transport in the middle of the cataract zone, and perhaps more specifically for managing traffic around a series of small rapids which are quite prominent here at low river; it is perhaps not coincidental that two substantial medieval sites (at Marakol and Mugur island) face each other across the river here. Such imperatives seem to have been of major importance in determining the location

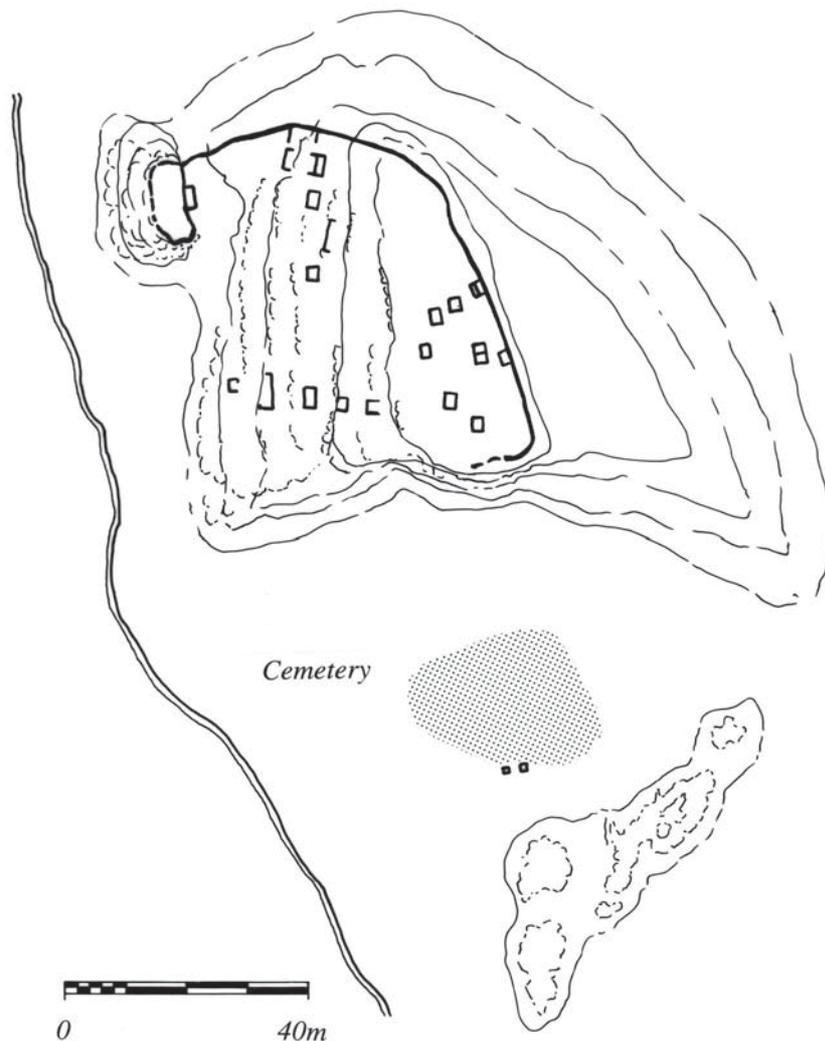


Figure 12. *Jebel Kadamusa, Islamic-period fortified settlement and cemetery.*

of many Meroitic settlements further north, especially in the rocky Batn el-Hajar (Edwards 1996, 86) and may well have been here.

No post-Meroitic sites have been identified, reflecting their almost complete absence in the cataract zone, and on the evidence we have so far, the general pattern of settlement we see today was only beginning to be established in the early medieval period. By the later medieval period, settlements had been established around the island, in or close to the sites of the modern villages. In general terms, this fits well with the evidence we have for the settlement history of the region between the Third Cataract and the Batn el-Hajar as a whole, where extensive and dispersed 'rural' settlement can be identified no earlier than the very late post-Meroitic or early medieval periods.

Evidence for the existence of distinctive regional architectural forms in both the late medieval ('Late Christian') and post-medieval periods, in the form of the 'castle-houses' and 'Diffi/Kourfas', is of considerable interest in relation to the emergence of Mahas and Sikoot regional identities. While we are far from understanding the exact purpose(s) which these two classes of structures served, they represent prominent material manifestations of a particular settlement landscape with its own history which developed in the Middle Nubian region, which in turn may be distinguished from that of both Lower Nubia proper to the north and the Dongola Reach to the south. Further regional distinctions in the post-medieval period may also be identified in the distribution of *Qubba* tombs, which, while common in both the Mahas and Sikoot regions, do not appear to be found further north in the Batn el-Hajar or Lower Nubia proper (Adams 1987, 338).

This project has a number of aims, having specific academic research interests in exploring the long-term settlement history of the region, as well as wishing to contribute to the ongoing exploration and documentation of the archaeology of the Sudan. However, we are also interested in encouraging a wider popular interest and concern for the cultural heritage, both within the project area in local communities and more generally. To this end, we hope to be able to produce more popular reports on our work (in Arabic) and in our first main season hosted lectures, a very successful exhibition and an 'open day' at our field camp in Arduan, all of which were very well attended. The interest and support for our work was very encouraging and we hope that we will be able to build on this goodwill in the future.

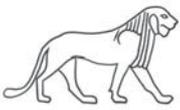
The archaeological field team consisted of Prof. Ali Osman (Dept of Archaeology, University of Khartoum), Dr. David Edwards (School of Archaeological Studies, University of Leicester), Azhari Mustafa Sadig (Dept of Archaeology, University of Khartoum), Faiz Hassan Osman (Archaeological Research Centre, Nile Valley University, Atbara), Abdel Moneim Ahmed Abdalla (Dept. of Archaeology, Shendi University) as well as two staff from the Sudan National Corporation for Antiquities and Museums, Amal Awad

Mokhtar and Amal Hassan Gasmalla. We were also joined from Nairobi by Eva Ormrod (Cardiff University), on a graduate attachment to the BIEA, and were pleased to be able to give her this opportunity to gain experience of working in Sudan. We are grateful to the NCAMS for granting the survey license and the University of Khartoum for supporting the project. Thanks also to Ahmed el Motassim and Daniel, the inhabitants of Arduan, and especially Abdel Nur, Nureddiin and Ustaz Maalik for all their assistance and hospitality to the field team.

The project's web site, which is regularly updated, may be found at <http://www.oldnubia.com>

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Plate XXIII. Late medieval enclosure and tower house, Mugur island (MUG004). The large medieval fortification of Marakol can be seen on the opposite bank of the Nile.



Plate XXIV. Diffi fortified house, Arduan (ARD011) – 19th century?