

SUDAN & NUBIA

The Sudan Archaeological Research Society



Volume 28

2024

The Kirwan Memorial Lecture

Forts in Upper Nubia and a new perspective on the first centuries of Alwa and Makuria

Mariusz Drzewiecki

1-21

Reports

Sai Island: defensive architecture of a New Kingdom town in Nubia

Franck Monnier and Vincent Francigny

22-38

Sai Island: medieval architectural remains of a flourishing era

Hugo Dussart and Vincent Francigny

39-52

Newly identified macrobotanical remains from Old Dongola (14th-18th centuries AD), Northern Sudan: a breakthrough in archaeobotanical research

Mohammed Nasreldein

53-64

Keepers of tradition: preliminary remarks from the ethnographic investigation of customs associated with clothing and authority among Sudanese women

Joanna A. Ciesielska, Agnes Dudek and Fatima Edres Ali Mahmoud

65-72

Jebel Barkal 2018-2023: new research on the Napatan and Meroitic city

Geoff Emberling, Tim Skuldbøl, El-Hassan Ahmed Mohamed, Sami Elamin, Gregory Tucker, Pawel Wolf, Burkart Ullrich, Suzanne Davis, Saskia Büchner-Matthews, Dobiesława Bagińska, Rebecca Bradshaw, Tohamy Abulgasim, Jan Peeters, Timotheus Winkels, Richard Redding, Anna den Hollander, Dorian Q Fuller, Abigail Breidenstein, Taylor Bryanne Woodcock, and Jochen Hallof

73-98

Rescue excavations at Jebel Barkal by Dongola University's Department of Archeology (Seasons 14 and 15)

Mohamed Fath al-Rahman Ahmed Idris

99-109

Survey of the Meroitic site of el-Hassa. Understanding the links between the Amun temple of Amanakhareqerama and the settlement

Tomasz Herbich and Marie Millet

110-131

Archaeological discoveries in the hills and coastline of the Red Sea State, Eastern Sudan 2016-2021. Preliminary report

Fakhri Hassan Abdallah Hassan

132-151

The Sudan Military Railway between Wadi Halfa and Abidiya

Derek A. Welsby

152-193

Archaeological and paleoenvironmental survey in the White Nile state (first season, 2022)

Hamad Mohamed Hamdeen, Al Bagir Badwi, Siddig Mahadi, Manahil Mohammed Farah, Mukhtar Maaliieldin and Abdelhai Abdelsawi

194-210

Studies

Excavating 'Areika': Cuthbert Balleine and the 1907 Eckley B. Coxe Jr. Expedition to Nubia

T. O. Moller

211-222

Metal anklets at Faras and other Meroitic sites: form, function, chronology and a response to Vila's 'gens à anneaux'

Henry Cosmo Bishop-Wright

223-256

Darfur in the early 1980s: a photographic record of communities, craft, and change Zoe Cormack	257-266
Further insights into a forgotten aspect of Meroitic religion: the amulets of Apedemak Mahmoud A. Emam	267-278
The ancient Nubian skeletal collection at Universidad Complutense de Madrid, Spain Mar Casquero, Víctor M. Fernández, Salomé Zurinaga Fernández-Toribio, Mohamed Saad and Luis Ríos	279-289
Sudan in Swansea Kenneth Griffin	290-302

Obituaries

Professor Dr Ibrahim Musa Mohamed Hamdon – Director General of NCAM An homage to his work Ghalia Gar el-Nabi	303-305
Professor Khider Adam Eisa (1947–2023), Cairo Professor Intisar Soghayroun el-Zein	306-307
Professor Ibrahim Mousa Mohamed Hamdoun (1953-2024), Cairo Professor Intisar Soghayroun el-Zein	307-308
Professor Abdul Rahim Mohamed Khabeer (--2024), State of South Sudan Professor Intisar Soghayroun el-Zein	308-310
Professor Mahmoud El-Tayeb (1957–2024), Poland Professor Intisar Soghayroun el-Zein	310-311
Professor Herman Bell (10th March 1933-7th February 2023) Kirsty Rowan	311-314
Henry (Harry) Sidney Smith (June 14th, 1928–September 8th, 2024) Robert Morkot	314-318

Biographies

Miscellanies

Front cover. General view of Site WNP-J-22\1, Al-Jabalain, White Nile State. Photo by Hamad Mohammed Hamdeen.

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Sai Island: medieval architectural remains of a flourishing era

Hugo Dussart and Vincent Francigny



Figure 1. The church Site 8-B-500 (photograph by T. Nicq).

Although the first photograph taken in the 19th century at Sai depicted the ruins of a medieval church (Frith *et al.* 1862, 231), the development of Nubian archaeology throughout the 20th century never favoured research related to that period on the island. While these columns, three of which still appear standing *in situ* (Figure 1), intrigued many travellers who visited Sai (Cailliaud 1826, 366; Linant de Bellefonds *cf.* Rondot *et al.* 2021, 454) or its surroundings (Waddington and Hanbury 1822, 295) before the first excavation began to further explore its heritage in the mid-1950s, no further investigations took place.

With the exception of George Somers Clarke (1912, 45-46), who, during his study of the Christian monuments in the Nile Valley, published the first description of the column capitals of Sai, and later the synthesis on Christian Nubia written by Ugo Monneret de Villard (1935, 238), where Sai's architectural remains were put in the context of textual records to demonstrate the existence of a bishopric and a cathedral, no study really addressed the subject or advanced its conclusions in the 20th century, despite the emergence of an important research field on medieval Nubia in Sudan, driven by the excavations of major sites such as Soba, Dongola and Banganarti.

Under the direction of Jean Vercoutter, no efforts were made to reveal the structure to which the columns belonged. The minds and efforts of the early archaeologists were almost entirely focused on the remains of a fortified town located further south and dating back to the New Kingdom, whose state of preservation suggested it would be ideal for studying the Egyptian conquest of Nubia.

Even the imposing remains of an Ottoman fortress, founded in the 16th century, were not sufficient to divert the attention of these first missions, which consequently never grasped the significance of the medieval period at Sai and its importance that is now evident. Yet, many discoveries were reported during the excavation of the southern part of the Egyptian town during the 1950s and 1970s, in addition to a considerable amount of medieval pottery that was simply discarded with the rubble in large spoil heaps. Among these were many architectural pieces including sandstone capitals, lintels and decorated blocks that suggest the existence of another church in the area, although many blocks were reused in Ottoman buildings and could have been brought from nearby locations. Whether or not these blocks originated from the settlement area, they exhibit a great diversity of shapes and sizes attesting the importance of Christian religious buildings at Sai, possibly with multiple construction phases.

Although in the 1990s some funerary data was added from the excavations of medieval graves while searching for Meroitic cemeteries (Geus *et al.* 1995), and some important pieces were recovered (Geus 2006), we had to wait until the early 2000s for things to change. A first major contribution, to offset the lack of archaeological investigation, came with the publication of internal and external written sources mentioning Sai during the medieval period (Łajtar 2006). This was followed a few years later by the publication of the medieval inscriptions at Sai (Tsakos 2011) and more importantly by the arrival of a team dedicated to the study of Christian remains.¹ The project, led by Alexandros Tsakos and Henriette Hafsaas-Tsakos, opened the first excavations on the so-called Cathedral (Hafsaas-Tsakos and Tsakos 2012), and conducted the first surface survey around the island focused on the medieval period,² as well as an epigraphic survey along the sandstone cliff near the antique town. A total of 39 sites were recorded, of which 26 were attributed to the medieval period, mostly identified as settlements by the presence of Christian era pottery sherds on the surface (Hafsaas-Tsakos and Tsakos 2010).

In an unpublished report by S. Hassan Thabit Hassan (1954), mentioned by J. Vercoutter (1958, 147) (who established the first French archaeological mission in Sudan at Sai during that year), five churches were identified during a short preliminary survey of the island. Although the survey conducted by the GNM could not confirm without further investigation the presence of these five religious buildings from the Christian era, they recorded a number of sites where churches had potentially been built. Apart from Site 8-B-500 with its monumental columns in granite that left no doubt about the presence of a church, and the site of the antique Egyptian town, upon which the medieval settlement was built and where several architectural blocks could correspond to another church (*supra*), many other sites offer clues for Christian occupation (Figure 2). Among them is 8-G-507, a small construction located to the south of the island at a place called Dibasha, where debris of what appears to be the remains of kilns for medieval ceramics are visible, and 8-G-51 on the west side of the island, where there are a group of large buildings in redbrick and mudbrick associated with blocks of quartz.

Overall, these surveys convey the image of an island with different communities spread over its large territory during the medieval period, which would explain the multiplication of churches, all probably connected to the main cathedral.

The Sai bishopric in textual sources

Site 8-B-500 has thus been included in the larger corpus of Nubian churches and cathedrals. Archaeological investigations are in their early days on Site 8-B-500, and the phases of construction are still uncertain, so the data may seem too thin to include this so-called cathedral in a history of Nubian church architecture.

¹ The Greek-Norwegian Mission (GNM) worked within the French Archaeological mission during 2009, 2010 and 2012. In addition to a series of publications, the mission created a blog expanding the scope of discussions and research around the site (<https://medievalsaiproject.wordpress.com>).

² Greek-Norwegian Mission to Sai, Sudan, List of Surveyed Sites, January-February 2009 (unpublished report).

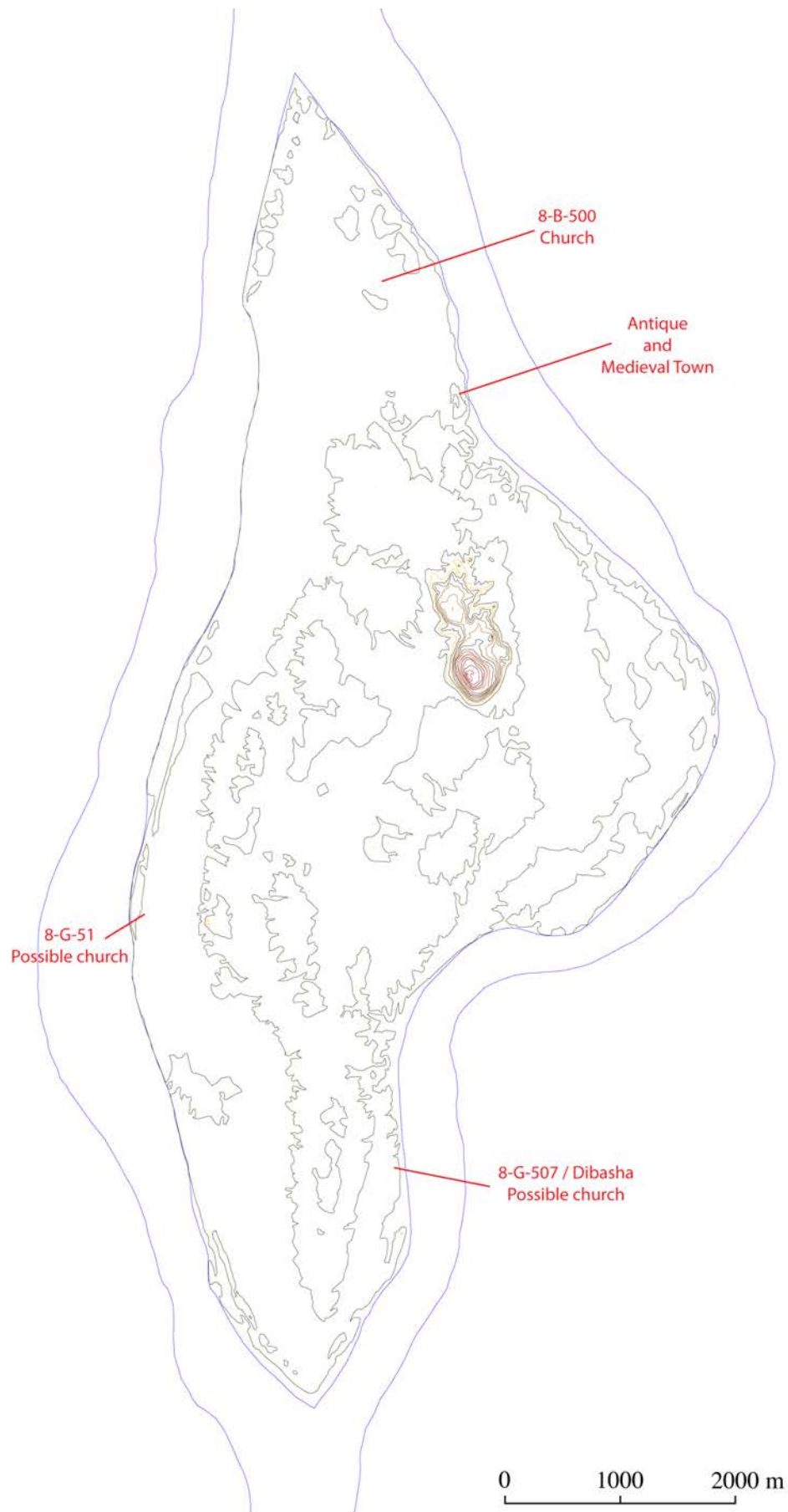


Figure 2. Map of Sai Island with the location of medieval churches (V. Francigny and

Nonetheless, we propose an outline of the chronology and tentative phasing through study of the architectural blocks dated from the medieval period and their comparison to other known sites. Such a study presents the opportunity of bypassing the currently impossible access to the site, and provides a preliminary picture of Christian architecture in Sai, through its history, its features, its originality or the influences it illustrates. It would further strengthen the identification of 8-B-500 as the site of the cathedral, an assumption which still hinges on the textual sources mentioning a bishop and episcopal see on the island.

By the time archaeological investigations eventually began at the site of the cathedral, the history of the bishopric of Sai, though scarcely known, had been improved by several references in written sources that attested to the existence of an episcopal see on the island. The only mention of Sai in external sources contemporary to the bishopric's period of activity appears in Ibn Sulaym al-Uswānī's description of Nubia, compiled by al-Maqrīzī (Troupeau 1954; Vantini 1975, 601-616). Al-Uswānī describes Sai as an episcopal see, wherein resides a bishop. Another source is the *History of the Church of Alexandria* written by Vansleb (1677) who quotes a list of Nubian bishoprics from a Coptic manuscript that mentions the episcopal see of Sai. This is corroborated by five other *scalae* copying the source compiled by Vansleb (Seignobos 2015). These indirect and external sources do not provide much of the history of the bishopric, although al-Uswānī's testimony attests to the activity of the episcopal see in the second half of the 10th century.

An ideal source would be a continuous list of episcopal *fasti*, such as the niche inscription from Faras, listing its bishops from its foundation, c.AD 630 to AD 1069 (Jakobielski 1972, 190-195). Unfortunately, Faras is the only bishopric whose history benefits from such an exceptional find. Nonetheless, a reconstruction of fragmentary *fasti* for Sai is possible, thanks to the discovery of several Nubian texts mentioning the bishops of Sai. To date, 13 sources mention a bishop of Sai (Figure 3), nine being funerary inscriptions in Coptic and Greek (Łajtar 2006; Tsakos 2011), all discovered on the island. It is a valuable source of information as it documents funerary practices linked to religious dignitaries, and attests to the existence of a particular bishop, allowing us to differentiate between homonyms when a name is preserved, and, sometimes, to establish the dates in office. In addition to these nine epitaphs, a bishop of Sai is mentioned

Time in office	Name	Source	Language	Site
Before the 9 th century	Tobias	Funerary inscription	Coptic	Sai
Turn of the 8 th to the 9 th century	Kerikos	Funerary inscription	Coptic, prayer in Greek	Sai
First quarter of the 9 th century ?	Chael	Dipinto	Greek	South pastophorion of Church B.V., Dongola
? - 884/885	Ignotus	Funerary inscription	Coptic	Ottoman fortress, Sai
Turn of the 9 th to the 10 th century ?	Chael	Dipinto	Greek	South pastophorion of Church B.V., Dongola
1021/1022 - 1054	Iesou	Funerary inscription	Coptic	Sai
		Graffito	Greek and Old Nubian	Sai
1075-1080 - 1124	Dioskoros	Funerary inscription	Coptic	Ottoman fortress (first fragment), Adou village (second fragment), Sai
11 th -12 th century	Symeon	Funerary inscription	Coptic	Sai
End of the 12 th century	Symeon	Legal document	Old Nubian	Nauri
11 th -12 th century	Ignotus	Funerary inscription	Coptic	Ottoman fortress, Sai
11 th -12 th century	Ignotus	Funerary inscription	Coptic	Sai
11 th -12 th century	Ignotus	Funerary inscription	Coptic	Sai
Turn of the 12 th to the 13 th century	Isou	Letter	Old Nubian (body of the letter), Greek (address)	Qasr Ibrim

Figure 3. Episcopal *fasti* of the Sai bishopric.

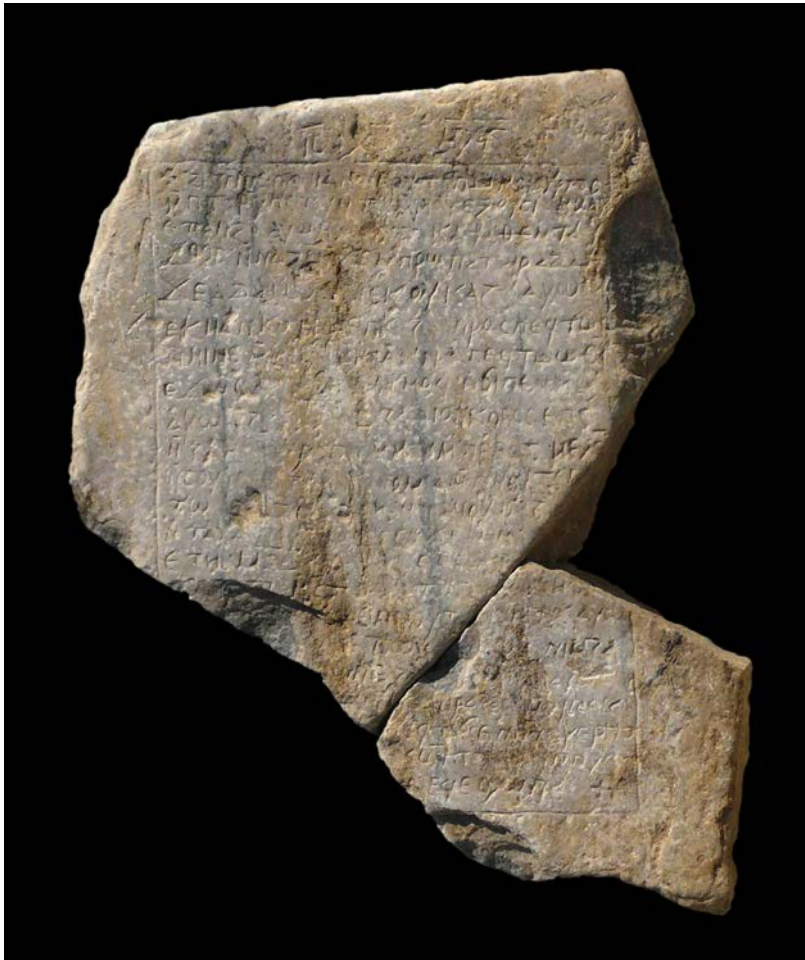


Figure 4. Funerary stela of Bishop Dioskoros (V. Francigny).

by name in four other texts: the commemorative *dipinto* written in Greek discovered on the west wall of the south *pastophorion* of the Church of Raphael in Dongola (Derda and Łajtar 2020); a *graffito* in Greek and Old Nubian discovered at Sai, inscribed on rocks, above the waters of the eastern branch of the Nile (Łajtar 2001); a legal document in Old Nubian, discovered in Nauri (Griffith 1928, 10-18); a letter in Greek and Old Nubian, discovered in Qasr Ibrim (P. QI 3, 57; Browne 1991, 57 and 72).

Between nine and 12 bishops of Sai can be identified from these Nubian sources. Their offices can be tentatively dated from the 8th to the late 12th century. The dates of office are known for two bishops, Iesou and Dioskoros (Figure 4), and incompletely for a third anonymous bishop. The

majority of these stelae are dated from the 11th and 12th century, mostly from epigraphic or formulaic observations by Alexandros Tsakos. This may indicate the reuse of stelae from the same cemetery during the construction of the Ottoman fortress, where most stelae seem to have been discovered.

Funerary stelae are relatively silent about the life of the bishops. Their careers are rarely described, the exception being Iesou, the best-known bishop of Sai. Born in 971/972, he was a monk in the monastery of Eittde (otherwise mentioned in P.QI 3, 30, and whose location is unknown) before becoming bishop in 1021/1022. He held this office until his death, at the age of 82. The three texts discovered away from the island provide more information about the bishops' activity during their office.

The legal document discovered at Nauri mentions in its protocol Abba Symeon, Bishop of Sai. Mentioning bishops in the protocols of legal documents is a common practice in medieval Nubia (Ruffini 2012), though its function is not clear, be it a rough dating of the document or a legal formality. In a similar way, the *graffito* found at Sai mentions Abba Iesou to date an exceptional Nile flood, indicating how the office of the local bishop could serve as a temporal reference for events affecting the local community. The mention of the bishop of Sai alongside 'Kattikouda, *angagett* of Seven Lands', an officer of a local administrative structure (Łajtar 2024) may follow the same structure as Nobadian protocols, which mention, after the officers of the central administration, the eparch of Nobadia and the bishop of Ibrim as local representatives. The reference to the bishop of Sai as the local ecclesiastical authority, probably charged with legal meaning, seem to have prevailed far upstream, if one assumes Nauri is the origin of the document, and may indicate that we need to push the southern border of the Sai bishopric to the 3rd Cataract.

A letter (P. QI 3, 57), found at Qasr Ibrim, sent by Aron, Bishop of Faras, to Isou, Bishop of Sai, documents

the correspondence that Nubian bishops engaged in. The salutations employed by Aron suggest that this letter is an answer to Isou, which was already an answer to another letter. The exceptional nature of this find and its obscure content do not invite firm conclusions, although this hypothetical series of at least three letters seems to indicate a regular correspondence between these neighbouring episcopal sees, indicating that bishops stayed in contact between the synods. The wall inscription discovered in the Church of Raphael in Dongola probably commemorates one of these ecclesiastical meetings, which probably took place in the first quarter of the 9th century, during the seven days preceding the Feast of the Nativity. Most, if not all, Nubian bishops seem to have participated and travelled to Dongola, and among them Abba Chael, Bishop of Sai. The discovery of the letter kept in Ibrim and not Sai – or even Faras – may be indicative of travel, and this inscription attests to another *expressis verbis*.

The liturgical and pastoral roles of the bishops of Sai, which encompassed their most common and daily practices, remain absent from the textual sources. The ordinary nature of these tasks might explain their absence. The texts thus document the mobility of the bishops of Sai, and therefore the functioning of the Nubian Church.

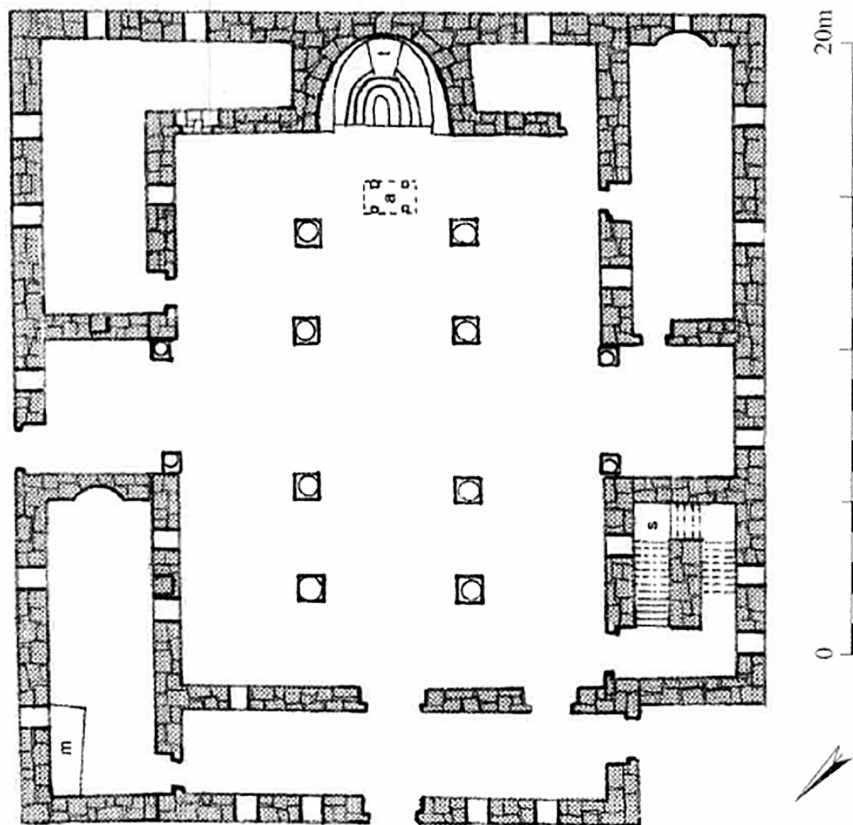
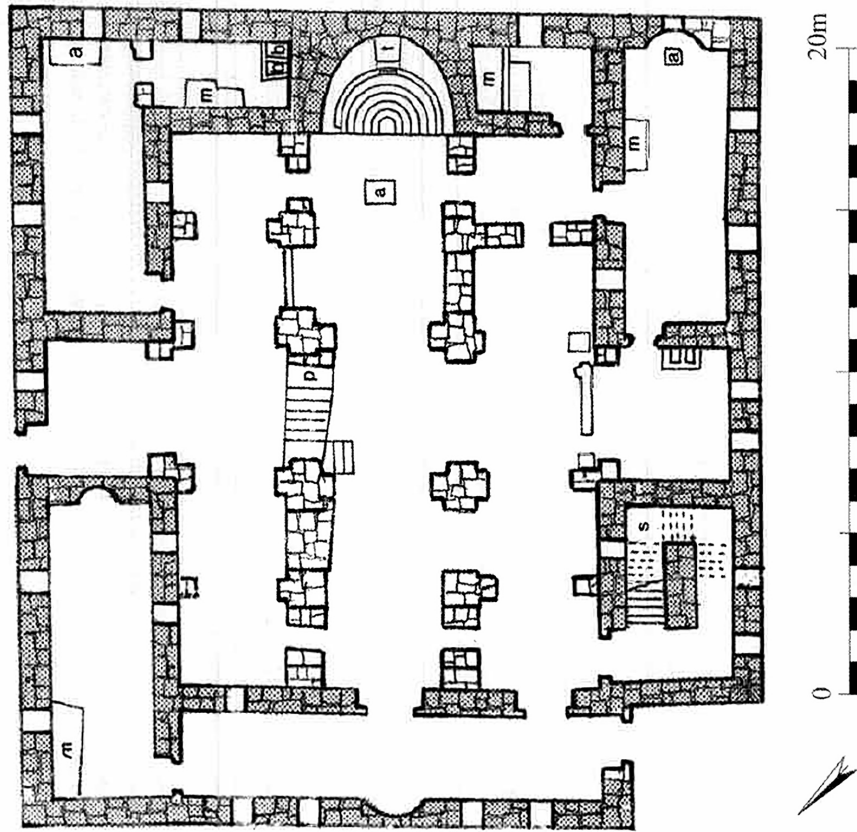
A Nubian ‘cathedral’

The Dongola *dipinto* provides further insights into the organisation of the Church, via a fragmentary list of Nubian bishops (Derda and Łajtar 2020). The number of Makurian bishoprics remains uncertain. Vansleb’s list, and all other descendants of the ‘list B’ (Seignobos 2015) mention seven episcopal sees: Kourte, Ibrim, Pachoras (Faras), Sai, Dongola, Termus and Scienkur. Dongola’s list mentions ten bishops, adding the see of ‘Upper Ounger’. Only Kourte, Ibrim, Faras, Sai and Dongola are attested as episcopal sees in other internal sources, and only in Ibrim, Faras and Dongola have cathedrals been identified and excavated, with Sai’s so-called cathedral often suggested as a very probable candidate.

The identification of a Nubian church as a cathedral raises a number of epistemological questions as this appellation does not appear in Nubian sources. The foundation inscriptions of the cathedral of Faras (I.Khartoum Copt. 1) refer only to a holy place (Jakobielski 1972, 42) and no *cathedra* has been found in Nubia. Yet cathedrals have been categorised as such in the typo-chronology established by W. Y. Adams (1965; 2009). Churches of Type 1, and specifically of the Subtype 1.A, approach a definition of a cathedral in a Nubian context. This category regroups the cathedral of Philae (n°7), the cathedral of Qasr Ibrim (n°39), the first cathedral (n°67-1 and 2) and the great cathedral of Faras (Figure 5), and the columns of Sai (n°125). This list also includes, when considering the Kingdom of Makuria, five different phases of churches on two cathedral sites: the Building X-Church of the Stone Pavement I/II site and the Old Church-Church of the Granite Columns site in Old Dongola (Figure 6).

The general definition of a Nubian cathedral remains a difficult task, given the architectural variety of the churches. Nonetheless, several traits seem to define a cathedral: after the 7th century, two aisles on either side of the nave; a complexification of the ‘basilical’ plan, and the introduction of several axes, whether with a transversal western aisle or a central plan with a cross inscribed in a square; a narthex at the western end, accessible with doors to the west or the south, aligned on the aisles; the use of monolithic columns of granite, at least as early as the beginning of the 8th century, in the nave; the addition or replacement of the columns by brick pillars, probably for structural reasons. While the statutory distinction between churches and cathedrals seems likely, the architectural distinction is particularly clear and relevant.

The attribution of the columns at Sai to a cathedral is based on two factors: the existence of an episcopal see at Sai, and the presence of four monolithic granite columns. The bases, shafts and capitals exhibit a strong resemblance to the columns of the Church of the Granite Columns in Dongola (Gartkiewicz 1990,



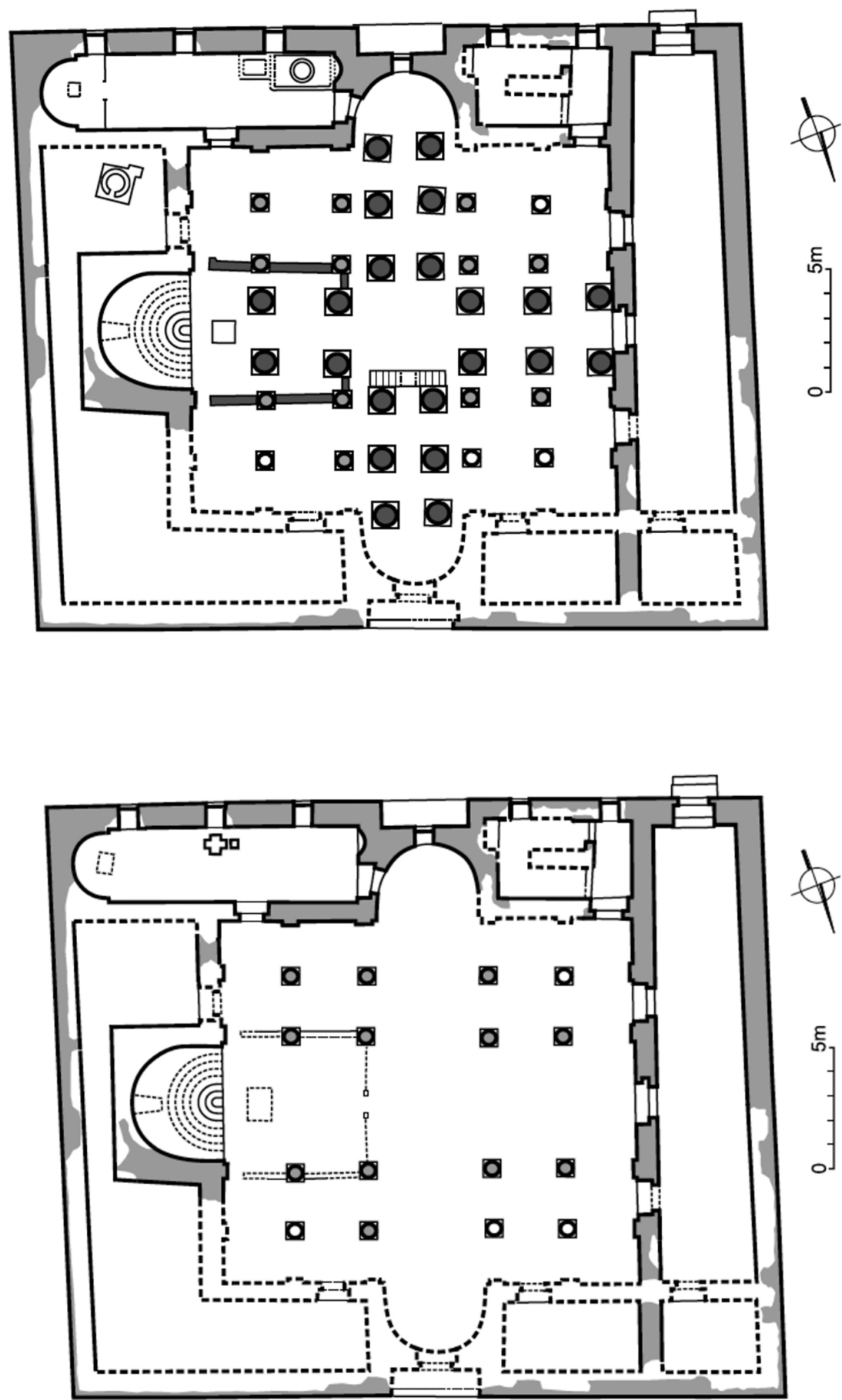


Figure 6. Plans of the Church of the Granite Columns – columns and pillars (Godlewski 2013). Courtesy Godlewski.



Figure 7. Columns *in situ* (O. Cabon).

186-194; Hafsaas-Tsakos and Tsakos 2016). The shafts, in particular, are decorated with a moulding below the top (Figure 7), which may be a style particular to Makuria (Gartkiewicz 1990, 195) as they are only found in Dongola and Ganati (Somers-Clarke 1912, 42; Bakhiet 2015). The capitals both bear the two types of ornamentation found in the Church of the Granite Columns, with an original decoration of cryptograms on them, which may refer to the Archangel Michael (Hafsaas-Tsakos and Tsakos 2021). A ‘Makurian way’ is clearly distinguishable in the features of the granite elements, the columns at Sai probably inspired by those at Dongola rather than the columns of Nobadian cathedrals.

Architectural decorations

The sandstone blocks, reused in the Ottoman fortress, constitute a larger corpus of Christian architectural elements. 70 have been recorded by the GNM, among which are bases of colonnettes, capitals, decorated blocks with friezes or sequential motifs, zoomorphic decorations, inscriptions, crosses or rosettes. These are the obvious remains of religious architecture in sandstone from which a selection of blocks is presented here.

Two sandstone bases have been found intact, although slightly eroded; they correspond to the third type of column bases in Gartkiewicz’s typology (1990, 186). They bring the total of column bases found in Sai to six and must have supported decorative colonnettes, perhaps placed at the entry of the *haikal* or the *pastophoria*.

Four complete sandstone capitals have also been discovered, three during the excavation of the Ottoman fortress (Figure 8). They seem to be independent from the bases and prove the existence of larger sandstone columns. The fourth capital was carved in its centre, forming a basin; a slit on the side appears to be designed for a water inlet. It might have been used as a baptismal font, or more likely a *thalassidion*, traditionally placed in the *diakonikon*, the southern *pastophorion*. The capitals exhibit a great variety of designs and decoration, with floral scrolls and motifs reminiscent of the capitals from Faras and Qasr Ibrim (Ryl-Preibisz 1990; Aldsworth 2010).

A fragment of a sandstone tympanum (Figure 9) offers a striking resemblance to a tympanum found above the lintel of the *diakonikon* in the Faras Cathedral of Paulos and Petros (Ryl-Preibisz 1987, fig. 11; Michałowski 1967, 67; Godlewski 2006, 164-165). It confirms the Nobadian and Lower Nubian influence visible in the sandstone elements, though the Sai tympanum has a half disk, reminiscent of a rising sun, in its centre while the Faras tympanum has a rosette. Its fragmentary nature does not show whether the Sai tympanum had the acroterion-like feature of the Faras one, but the resemblance seems strong enough

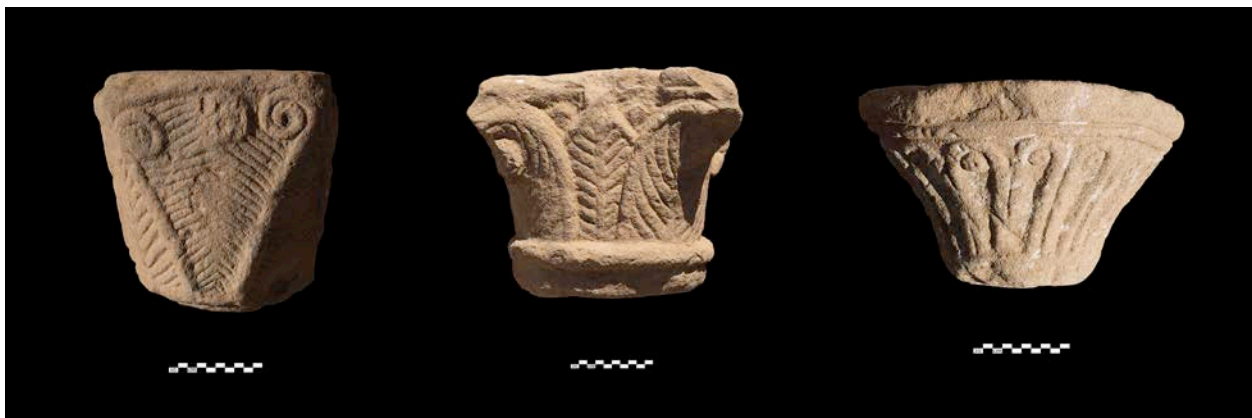


Figure 8. Sandstone capitals (O. Cabon and V. Francigny).

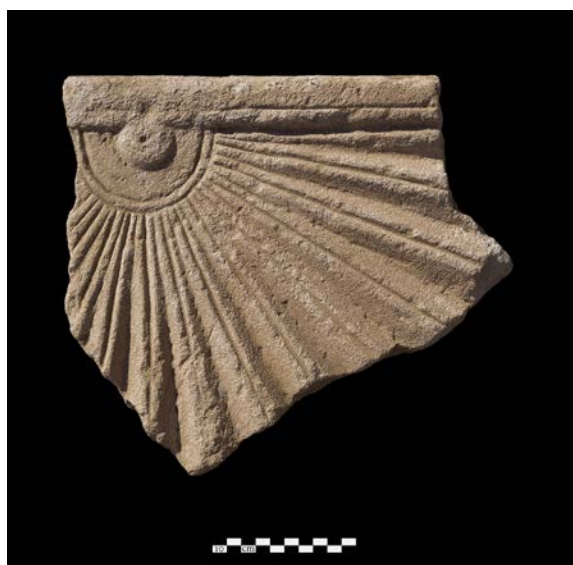


Figure 9. Fragment of a Tympanum (O. Cabon).



Figure 11. Fragment of a terracotta window grille (O. Cabon).



Figure 10. Left part of a lintel depicting a peacock (O. Cabon).

to date it from the early to mid 7th century.

Perhaps the most spectacular sandstone element is the block decorated with a peacock, discovered in the fortress (Figure 10). Identified by Vercoutter as a fragment of a lintel, it depicts a peacock passing to the right. The right-hand edge, where the break is located, shows a Maltese cross inscribed in a circle; the spaces between the branches of the cross appear to be decorated with floral motifs. The whole decoration is delimited by a double line forming a frame. Two rosettes in two squares adorn the top left-hand corner of the frame, while items are depicted at the peacock's feet.

The motif of the peacock has a lengthy symbolic history in India, Persia and the Middle East. Several instances in Christian architecture, in Ravenna, Deir al-Suryan or Bawit illustrate a sacred iconography where the peacock has a prominent role as a symbol of eternity and protection, especially in a funerary or liturgical context. In Nubia, it is not the peacock but its feather motif that is regularly depicted in religious iconography, adorning the wings of angels, in particular those of the Archangel Michael (Martens-Czarnecka 2020). This motif appeared in the 9th century, first in the form of pointed scales and then of whole peacock-like eyes; from the second half of the 10th century, peacock eyes became a distinctive feature of representations of the Archangel Michael.

The peacock on the lintel provides a Nubian representation of the common Christian bird motif, instead of the common Nubian peacock feather motif. This lintel is broken and the probability of symmetric peacocks on a complete lintel is high. Incidentally, this representation fills a void in the genealogy of the symbol and its introduction to Nubia and may act as a link between the early Christian peacock and the archangel's feathers.

The items carved at the peacock's feet are also of interest: on the left, a disk symbolises round bread, while an amphora is represented on the right; the latter reminiscent of imported wine amphorae. The middle item might represent an altar, and we propose that the round loaf of bread (the *prospora*) on one side of the peacock and the amphora of wine on the other represent the two elements involved in the Eucharist, transubstantiated into body and blood. As far as we know, this juxtaposition of the Eucharist and peacock is found nowhere else in the Nile valley. This representation, exceptional though it may be, fits into the wider context of the church's decorative programme, of which this block was a part. This block is a door lintel, examples of which are quite similar in terms of composition at Faras, with a Maltese cross carved in a circle (Griffith 1926, LIII). It is possible that this decorative block was the lintel of the door of the *prothesis* of a church decorated in sandstone at Sai, where the liturgy of the preparation took place.

Between two capital cities

The majority of the blocks discovered at the Ottoman fortress are probably the remains of a mudbrick church using architectural pieces made of sandstone stylistically close to Nobadian churches and cathedrals of the 7th century, that would precede the one with granite columns. This was clearly influenced by the Church of the Granite Columns in Dongola as the lack of sandstone decoration and the absence of sculpted blocks other than capitals are characteristic features of Makurian architecture, which favours mural paintings or mosaics. The stylistic similarities with the cathedral at Faras, the materials used, and the richness of the decoration are, in our opinion, three elements that are sufficiently convincing to propose the existence of a cathedral at Sai, probably built in the 7th century and inspired by the capital of the kingdom of Nobadia.

The island was part of the independent Kingdom of Nobadia before it was integrated as a province into the Kingdom of Makuria. Given the date of construction of the Paulos Cathedral in Faras, around 707, the cathedral with its granite columns at Sai also probably dates from the first half of the 8th century. The

architectural influence originates from the capital at Dongola, possibly the episcopal see of the bishopric bordering to the south with the bishopric at Sai, as is that of Faras to the north. Two very distinct styles, typical of the architecture of a Nubian cathedral, dating from two distinct periods are both represented among the medieval blocks at Sai. This can be explained by its geographical position, midway between both capitals.

The exact location of the Sai cathedral remains unknown: the 2011 excavation around the granite bases has shown that they are not connected to any structures. The discovery of a fourth granite base in the fortress (Hafsaas-Tsakos and Tsakos 2016) and of the reused sandstone blocks suggests that the cathedral might have been located on the site of the New Kingdom town and the Ottoman fortress. The granite columns would have then been relocated to Site 8-B-500 at a later stage. They were most probably part of another church, as the capitals have been replaced atop the shafts, and the columns organised in a regular square. Eight centuries separate the probable construction of a cathedral with granite columns and the Ottoman conquest, a long period that remained obscure until very recently. A cathedral with sandstone columns and decorated blocks is the first phase we can propose, and not necessarily the oldest church or cathedral. In the early 8th century, a second phase would correspond to a probable renovation, with the addition of at least four granite columns. The location of sandstone decoration with granite columns at Faras and Qasr Ibrim indicates that the transition to a Makurian-inspired cathedral can thus lead to the collocation of columns inspired by the Makurian style and sandstone decoration in the Nobadian style. As things stand, we have reason to think that this was also the case at Sai, as the renovation would have led to the installation of granite columns and possibly a modification of the plan. Like the cathedrals of Faras and Dongola, another renovation may have occurred, replacing the columns with pillars, or, more likely, adding pillars to the nave to support a roof of vaults and domes.

Plans for future excavations

The influences of Faras and Dongola on the architecture of the cathedrals of Sai raise the question of regional schools. It would be interesting to compare Sai with other monuments away from the island but still within the bishopric, particularly near the borders. If Sai and its surroundings are seen as an intermediate territory halfway between the two most important cities of Middle and Lower Nubia, our archaeological focus should also expand. There are still medieval monuments, forts and churches in the region that have received little if any attention from archaeologists.

The discovery of numerous Christian archaeological artefacts accumulated over the years around the antique town at Sai have recently taken on new significance with the identification of a possible medieval fortification in the upper levels of the north-western quarters. Besides the stone pieces discussed above and other architectural elements scattered around the site (Figure 11), ceramic sherds are present in quantities that sometimes exceed those of the New Kingdom. Stone tools, difficult to date within the chronological mixture of surface layers, could also partially originate from the medieval period and indicate intense craft activities on a major settlement.

The size of some yet-to-be-excavated mounds, as well as the presence of several metre-high stratigraphic sections left exposed at the edges of the areas excavated in the 1970s, suggest that complete buildings in plan and relatively well-preserved elevations may be discovered in the future.

To the high potential in the town can be added that of smaller sites on the island, some of which have already been identified through the survey conducted by the GNM. The multiplication of settlements and the numerous Christian burial sites scattered behind them inevitably reflect the growth of the population that seems to characterise the advent of the Christian period at Sai. This dynamic, perhaps initiated as early as the 5th century with the expansion of the post-Meroitic necropolises, although confined to the

northern half of Sai at that time, is evident in the immediate area around the island, as attested by the numerous Christian sites, including several churches, identified during the survey conducted by A. Vila (1978a; 1978b).

At Sai, one must therefore think not in terms of an island isolated on a river, but rather on the scale of a larger regional ecosystem corresponding to the borders of the diocese. A site like Dibasha, for example, might have been quite polluting, thus the production centre was moved to the other side of the river to a settlement established on the east bank of the Nile. Otherwise, why would it be so far north from the main town where the economic and religious center of the island was located? In the future, it will be necessary, through archaeology, to follow all these internal dynamics on Sai and its interactions with the rest of the valley to the south of the Dal cataract, if we want to understand how the island prospered and its role within the Christian kingdoms of Nubia.

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