

# SUDAN & NUBIA

The Sudan Archaeological Research Society



*Bulletin No. 15*    2011

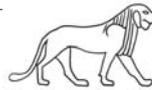




The map reflects the new territorial situation following the independence of South Sudan in July 2011.

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# The 10<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> century BC – New Evidence from Cemetery C of Amara West

Michaela Binder

## Introduction

The site of Amara West is located on the northern bank of the Nile, 720km upstream of Khartoum. Based upon the evidence recovered during the first excavations on the site by the Egyptian Exploration Society (EES) in 1938/39, and 1948-50 (Spencer 1997), it has been recognized as the administrative capital of the province of Upper Nubia during the late New Kingdom occupation of Nubia (1297-1069 BC). On the basis of current knowledge, it was founded in the reign of Seti I as a planned settlement of recognisably Egyptian character, designed to house officials serving in the colonial administration. This is attested through the archaeological record, both in terms of inscribed material and sizeable houses which might reflect the presence of wealthy strata of society at Amara West. The nature of the settlement during the colonial period is becoming increasingly well known

through ongoing British Museum fieldwork, commenced in 2008 (Spencer 2009; 2010). Substantial tombs that can be associated with the colonial administrators serving at Amara West were discovered in Cemetery D, north west of the town in 2010 (Binder *et al.* 2010; 2011). The fate of the settlement after the end of the New Kingdom occupation is still unknown; it was originally assumed that the settlement was abandoned, but recent excavations in the two distinct cemetery areas adjacent to the town, most notably in the north-eastern necropolis (Cemetery C), have started to reveal evidence that the area was inhabited by people during the 10<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries BC. However, the nature of later settlement at the site of Amara West itself remains unclear, as structures post-dating the New Kingdom are yet to be identified, despite considerable amounts of pre-Napatan and Napatan ceramics upon the surface.

## Cemetery C – Topography and history of research

Cemetery C is situated on a low alluvial terrace to the north east of the town (Figure 1). It is limited by a palaeochannel to the south, an escarpment to the east and a *wadi* to the west. On the surface it is marked by a small number of low tumuli made up of alluvial silt debris and loosely arranged local black schist stones (Plate 1). Geomagnetic surveys carried

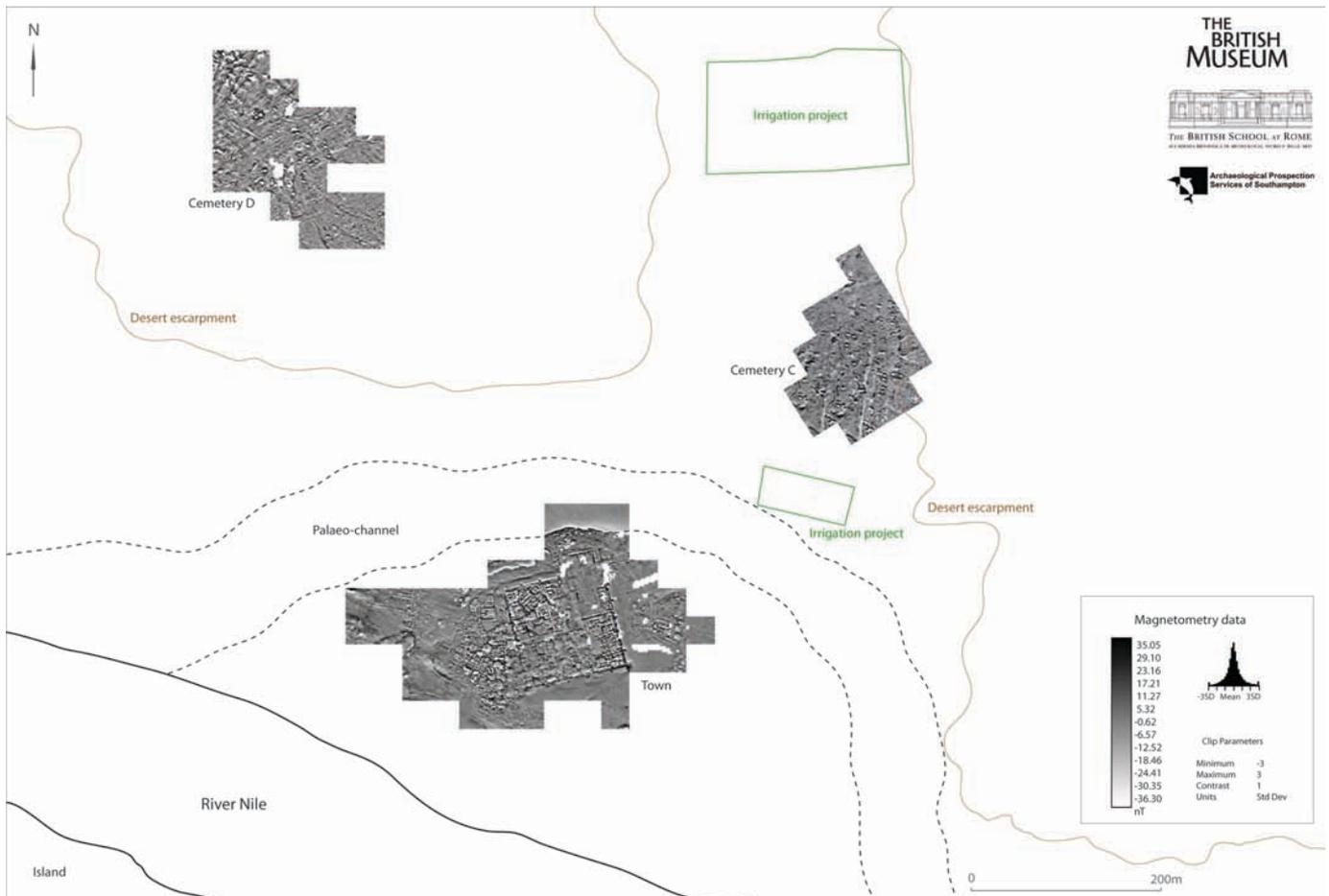


Figure 1. Map of Amara West showing the locations of cemeteries and town site.



Plate 1. View north-west over Cemetery C.

out by researchers from the British School in Rome and the University of Southampton<sup>1</sup> in 2008 and 2010 revealed a dense swathe of 80-100 grave cuts, considerably more than indicated through surface features (Figure 2). The distribution of graves seems to become less dense in the southern part but excavations at the southern end of the cemetery (grave 200, Plate 2) have shown that this area suffered heavily from surface erosion and it seems likely that the more shallow graves have disappeared over the course of time.

Small scale excavations in Cemetery C were first carried out by a survey of the French CNRS (Vila 1977), who recorded three graves in two distinctive locations in this area. While one of them was dated to the New Kingdom (2-R-8, Vila 1977, 28–31), two more were assigned an X-Group date, despite the lack of grave goods in those graves (2-R-9, Vila 1977, 32–3). This dating however seems doubtful in light of the new results presented below. Whether the EES carried out excavations in Cemetery C during 1938/39 when fieldwork was undertaken in Cemetery D, remains unclear due to the fact that they did not record the locations of the graves they investigated (Spencer 2002). In 2009, fieldwork was resumed by the British Museum team with a five week season (Spencer 2009) and continued for a further seven weeks in 2011.<sup>2</sup> Nine graves were investigated in 2009, and 24 in 2011.

<sup>1</sup> The magnetometry survey in the cemeteries was conducted by Sophie Hay with the assistance of Leonie Pett and Rose Ferraby (British School at Rome/Archaeological Prospection Services, University of Southampton).

<sup>2</sup> The British Museum's Amara West research project ([www.british-museum.org/AmaraWest](http://www.british-museum.org/AmaraWest)) is directed by Neal Spencer with work in

Further excavations are planned for this cemetery, which may result in some of this paper's conclusions being modified.

### The chamber tombs

A notable characteristic of this necropolis is the variety of grave types. One type of tomb features two large underground burials chambers used for the interment of multiple individuals, at the base of a rectangular vertical shaft (Figure 3). Three examples of this type have been excavated so far and the magnetometry indicates the presence of at least three more. The graves of this type seem to be loosely distributed all over the cemetery with no clear zoning observed so far. In terms of substructure those graves find close parallels in Cemetery D, but differ from them in their lack of superstructures (Binder *et al.* 2010; 2011; Spencer 2002). However, it is



Figure 2. Magnetometric survey of Cemetery C.

possible that this is in fact a consequence of the severe surface erosion and their one-time presence cannot be excluded. One grave of similar shape was recorded by the CNRS survey in locality 2-R-8 (Vila 1977, 28–31).

the cemeteries supervised by the author with the assistance of Shadia Abdu Rabo (2009, 2011), Carina Summerfield-Hill and Dyan Semple (2011). Analysis of the ceramics was carried out by Marie Millet. Marie Vandenbeusch was responsible for registering finds in 2011. Osteological analysis on the human remains was performed by the author. Further contributors to the project are Michele Buzon (Purdue University, isotope analysis), geomorphologists Mark Macklin (Aberystwyth University) and Jamie Woodward (Manchester University) as well as Caroline Cartwright, Philippa Ryan and Michela Spataro (Department of Conservation and Science Research, The British Museum, archaeobotany, petrographic analysis).

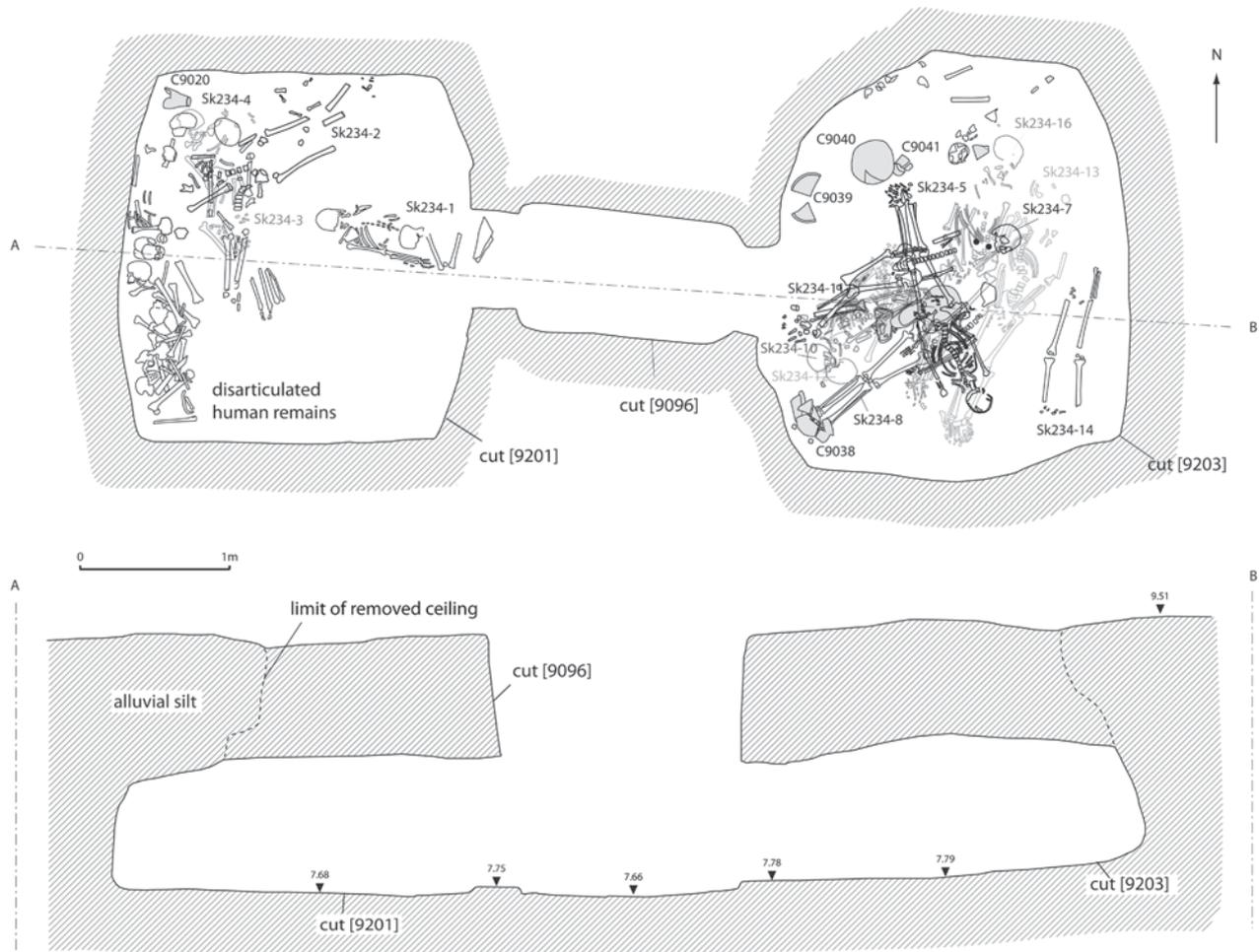


Figure 3. Plan and section of grave 234, scale 1:50.

### Grave 200

Located in the southern part of the cemetery, and only preserved to a depth of 400mm, the general outline of the grave conforms to the double-chamber tomb form. As such, it is likely to have been an underground tomb, with much of its original height lost due to surface erosion (Plate 2). The shaft measures 0.85m north-south x 1.1m east-west, providing access to eastern (2.4 x 2m) and western (2.3 x 2m) burial chambers. The number of interments is difficult to determine: due to looting all of the burials were found disarticulated, commingled and very fragmented. However, based on preliminary observations it can be assumed that at least five adults were buried in this grave, with the majority of skeletal elements being found in the eastern chamber even though this might be related to the looting as well. However, this estimate awaits confirmation through further analysis of the human remains. Even though some skeletal elements remained articulated, it is not possible to infer burial position or orientation as it seems unlikely they were found in their original position.

Grave goods comprised large quantities of wood fragments which were mainly recovered from the western chamber. While most of them were unspecific, one headrest



Plate 2. Heavily eroded substructure of grave 200 (view to the west)

(F9102) as well as a number of incised fragments and at least three bed legs could be identified. The funerary furniture used in the grave was decorated with plaster, often bearing traces of red and black paint of which large amounts were recovered from within the fill of the chamber (Plate 3). In addition, the chambers provided a large number of disarticulated shell and faience disc-beads. The substantial assemblage of ceramics



Plate 3. Fragments of painted plaster, graves 200 and 201, F9093 bottom right.

comprised at least 15 vessels, among them a complete pilgrim flask (C9000, Figure 4), five complete bowls/beakers with thick red-painted rims (C9002-C9006) and a handmade Nubian style pot (C9100) (Plate 4).

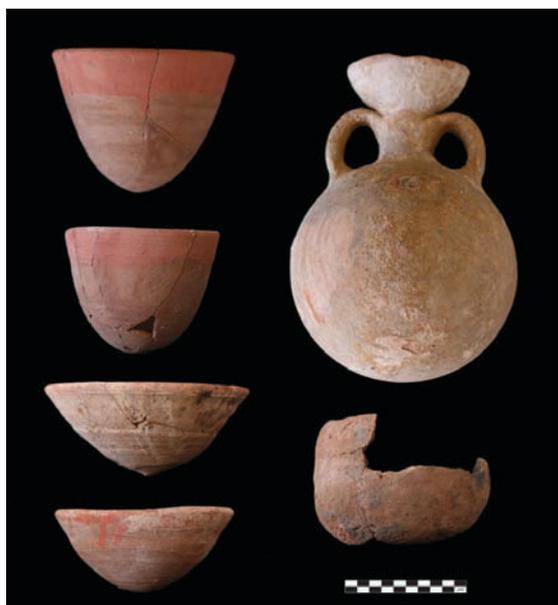


Plate 4. Selection of ceramics from grave 200: C9000, C9100, C9005, C9006, C9002, C9003 (clockwise from top right).

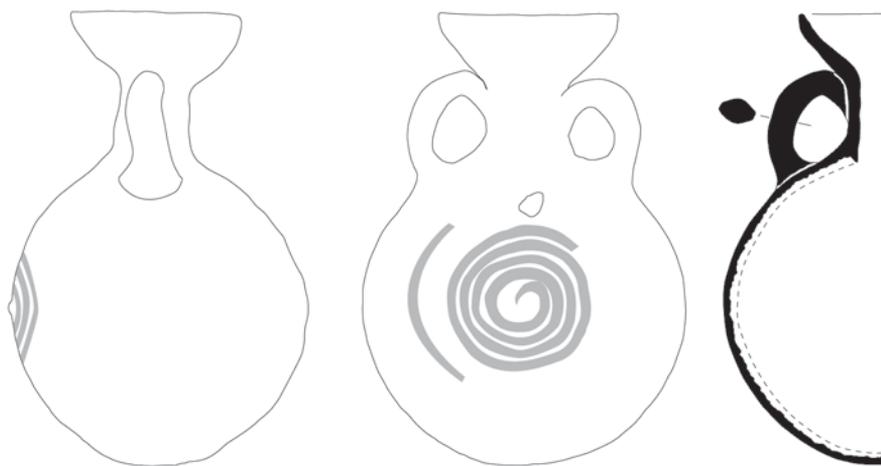


Figure 4. C9000, scale 1:4.

### Grave 201

With a shaft of 1.9m (east-west) x 0.85m (north-south) reaching a depth of 1.8m, leading to two burial chambers of 2.8-3m in diameter, G201 is the largest of the chamber tombs investigated so far. Entrance to the chambers was originally blocked by walls of mud bricks and schist stones sealed with mud plaster (Plate 5), even though these had



Plate 5. Remnants of the mud-brick wall blocking the entrance to the western chamber of grave 201.

been partly destroyed by looters. Excavation of the tomb was started in 2009 in the eastern chamber but due to safety concerns — the chambers are entirely dug into the instable alluvial silt — excavation was not completed. In 2011 the

ceiling was removed to allow the western chamber to be fully excavated. Both burial chambers were used for a large number of consecutive burials. Due to the constant re-use of the chamber and the looting many individuals were heavily disturbed, disarticulated and only partly preserved. Therefore, establishing a minimum number of individuals remains difficult, but it is estimated that at least 27 adults and 11 children were buried in the eastern chamber and at least 14 adults and one child in the western chamber. With regards to the burial position, all individuals recovered intact were placed in an extended position orientated north-south, with heads alternating between north and

south (Figure 5). The position of the skeletal elements indicates that these individuals were tightly wrapped for burial, even though no fragments of wrapping material survived. An interesting observation was the presence of several infant burials, which are thus far absent from the other chamber tombs both in Cemetery C and in Cemetery D.

Despite the looting, the grave yielded a considerable amount of artefacts, among them seven faience and steatite scarabs, toiletry articles such as remnants of wooden pigment containers (F9020, F9022) and a cosmetic applicator (F9023) as well as a large number of jewellery items such as pennisular earrings, beads, pendants and a faience Bes amulet (F9058) (Plate 6). Further notable objects were fragments of a copper-alloy vessel (F9044). Almost all the objects were recovered from disturbed fill layers. The only objects found *in situ* were scarabs associated with three burials in the western chamber where they were found either placed in the hand or underneath the head of the individuals. Similar to G200, G201 held a large number of wooden fragments (Plate 7) of which again some could be identified as remnants of funerary beds but also of coffins as

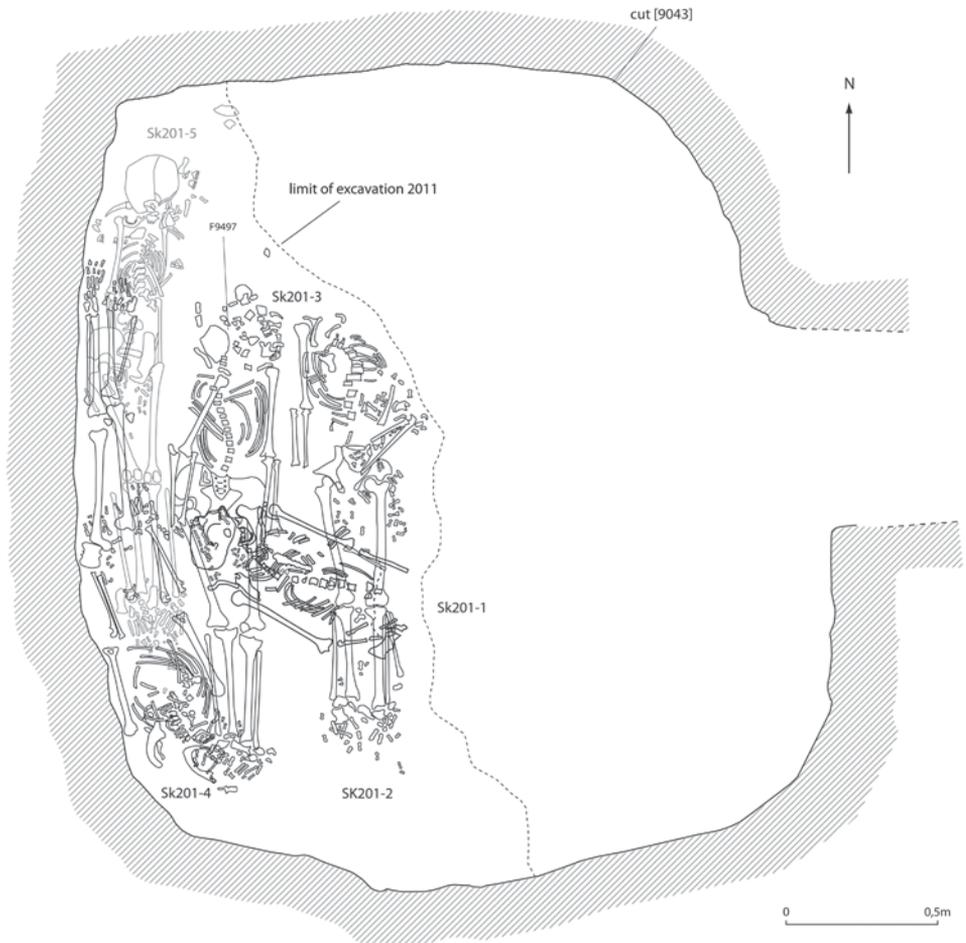


Figure 5. Plan of the western chamber of grave 201, results of resumed excavation in 2011, scale 1:25.



Plate 6. Selection of finds from grave 201: F9490, F9499, F9497, F9016, F9058, F9027, F9041, F9023, F9020, F9024, F9055 (counterclockwise from bottom left).



Plate 7. Fragments of funerary furniture from the eastern chamber of grave 201: F9078, F9075, F9064, F9077 (clockwise from top left).

well as two more headrests (F9064, F9109). The use of coffins for some burials is attested by coffin panels recovered from disturbed deposits, but is also observable from the articulated individuals in the western chambers, where the outlines of the decayed coffins were fully preserved. A large amount of plaster suggests that coffins and/or beds were decorated. In addition, a number of plaster fragments bearing imprints of textiles were recovered suggesting they were applied to the



wrapped bodies directly, a practice also reported elsewhere (Säve-Söderbergh and Troy 1991, 64–65). While decoration consisted mainly of red, black and yellow stripes, one fragment bears a figurative depiction of a bird-headed figure (F9093) (Plate 3). The assemblage of vessels consists of at least 31 (Plate 8) including several complete bowls/beakers

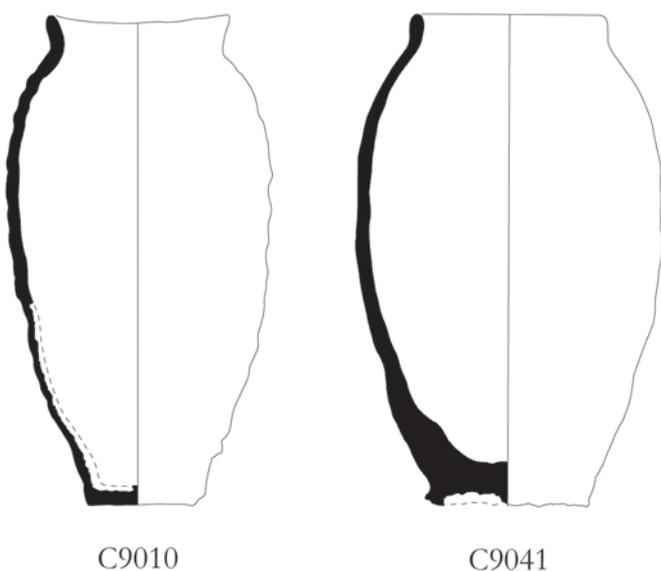


Plate 8. Selection of vessels from grave 201: left side eastern chamber C9014, C9016, C9013, C9112, C9122, right side western chamber C9009, C9128, C9010 (both clockwise from top left).

with thick red-painted rims, two complete large jars (C9128, C9129), a number of beer jars (Figure 6: C9010), a marl clay miniature jar (C9016) and a fragment of pilgrim flask (C9131).

#### Grave 234

The third large double-chambered tomb excavated thus far was located in the centre of the cemetery. The rectangular



C9010

C9041

C9038

Figure 6. Ceramics from graves 201 (C9010) and 234 (C9038, C9041), scale 1:4.

vertical shaft (1.4 x 0.9m) of the tomb reaches a depth of 1.6m, with four foot holes carved into the northern and southern wall on the eastern side of the shaft allowing access to the interior of the grave. Evidence for door blockings, as observed in G201, are confined to the remnants of a schist stone wall in the entrance area of the eastern chamber. The burial chambers span an area of 2.4 x 2.9m (eastern chamber) and 2.5 x 2.4m (western chamber), both reaching heights of 800–900mm. Despite the looting and consecutive use of the chambers, some of the burials remained largely or partly intact, even though their arrangement suggests the individuals were no longer *in situ* (Figure 3). While the minimum number of individuals estimated for the eastern chamber is eight, at least six were buried in the western chamber, though both chambers contained a large amount of disarticulated human remains, thus it is possible that the number of interments is slightly higher. Contrary to G201, only adults were buried in G234. Most burials seem to have been placed in coffins and clear evidence for funerary beds is missing. The amount of painted plaster is considerably less, confined only to the eastern burial chamber; contrary to the other chamber tombs, no significant traces of paint were recovered. With regards to burial position, the individuals were placed in an extended position and the position of the shoulder girdle, legs and pelvises again suggests tight wrapping was employed for these burials. The only exception is individual Sk234-1, the only flexed burial thus far found in Cemetery C. Its position in the entrance area of G234, resting on a thick layer of wind-blown sand, stratigraphically higher than the remainder of burials in the chamber, suggests that it was a later intrusion, made at a time when a lot of wind-blown sand had already entered the chamber. Unfortunately, no datable evidence was recovered associated with this later burial. The amount of grave goods associated with burials in G234 was quite small, comprising three scarabs of steatite and faience (F9164, F9167, F9169, Plate 9), a set of penannular earrings made of carnelian associated with skeleton Sk234-7 (F9161, F9163) as well as remnants of a bracelet of faience disc and tubular beads (F9166). In contrast, a fairly large assemblage of ceramics was recovered, four beer jars and eight plates (Plate 10; Figure 6: C9038, C9041). Vessels were more frequent in the eastern chamber, but due to the looting they were mainly found scattered all over the chambers and none of them could securely be considered *in situ*.

#### Niche burials

By far the most common type of grave found in Cemetery C features a rectangular vertical shaft leading to an oval- or rectangular-shaped lateral niche. They seem to cluster in the northern part of the cemetery, even though this impression might be obscured by the severe surface erosion observed in the southern part of the cemetery which may have removed the more shallow graves. The two graves recorded by the CNRS survey at the site designated 2-R-9 (Vila 1977: 32–3) also conform to this type. The majority of the niche burials



Plate 9. Selected finds from the eastern burial chamber in grave 234: F9161, F9164, F9167, F9169 (clockwise from top left).

graves do not feature any kind of superstructure.

Within this group of tombs, there is considerable variation. In terms of size, the vertical shafts range from 2.3m east-west x 0.6m north-south to 1.4m east-west x 0.6m north-south in plan, and 400-850mm in depth. The niche is usually lower than the bottom of the shaft, creating a stepped profile to the bottom of the shaft (Figure 7). The length of the niche is generally identical to that of the shaft; the width varying from 400-750mm, with a height of between 300mm and 440mm, though in most cases the original height of the niche was not preserved due to the friability of the alluvial silt. The niches were sealed, employing different methods of blocking such as single large schist stone slabs covering the whole length of the niche, rows of schist stones as well as mud-brick walls (Plate 11). Differences are also observed with regard to the orientation of the niches. While the shafts are consistently



Plate 10. Ceramics of grave 234: C9019, C9020, C9038, C9039, C9043 (left to right).



Plate 11. Partly destroyed niche covering in grave 237 consisting of large schist slabs and mud plaster (view to the north).

aligned east-west, 14 of the niches were cut into the north and five into the south face of the shaft. Even though the difference in orientation of the niches is commonly observed at sites such as Missiminia (Vila 1980, 22), Sanam (Griffith 1923) and Qustul (Williams 1992), no explanation has yet been presented to account for these variations. As all niche burials excavated so far had been looted, most of them did not yield grave goods.

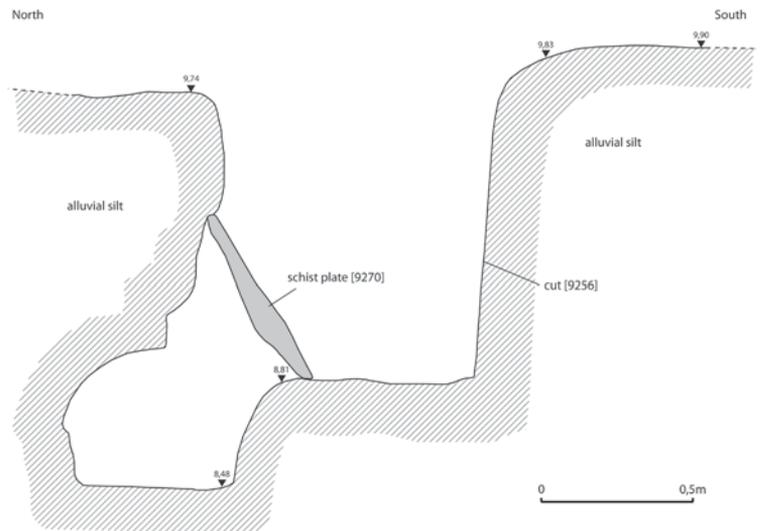


Figure 7. Section through the substructure of grave 240, scale 1:25.

Contrary to the chamber tombs, child burials are fairly common among the niche burials. Ten of the 19 niche burials excavated so far were small single burials of children, while in two of the multiple niche burials children occurred together with adults. In addition, three infants were recovered from very shallow (100-200mm) pits, possibly representing the eroded remnants of niche burials. The children range in age between neonates and infans II (6-12 years). The graves do not differ from the adult burials either in outline of the grave or in orientation and the use of different covering structures. Contrary to the adult burials, the children do not seem to have been equipped with any kind of funerary beds



or coffins. Due to the fact that all infant burials were heavily looted nothing can be inferred about burial position or the presence of wrapping. With regard to the grave goods, only G204, the burial of an infant of 1-2 years of age, contained a small black-burnished slipped vessel of Nubian style (C9012, Plate 14).

### Grave 216

Grave 216 is the largest of the niche burials recovered so far. Its shaft has an area of 2.6 x 1.3m and reaches a depth of 850mm. The northern burial niche is 1.1–1.2m in length. A single large slab remained in place from the original covering of the grave, with further fragments recovered from within the disturbed fill of the shaft. The niche was re-used for at least five consecutive interments, in contrast to the other niche burials in Cemetery C and also to other sites featuring this burial type such as Fadrus (Säve-Söderbergh and Troy 1991), Missiminia (Vila 1980) or Sanam (Griffith 1923) where niches were usually only used for one, or a maximum of two burials. At least three were buried in a decorated wooden coffin (F9457), with only the last burial being partly intact while the disarticulated bones of the previous burials were found scattered on the bottom of the coffin (Figure 8). Disarticulated and commingled remains of additional individuals were recovered from the shaft of the grave, among them remnants of a newborn child. G216 is exceptional in terms of finds; in contrast to the other niche burials it contained a fairly large assemblage of grave goods including jewellery such as two necklaces – one of ostrich eggshell disc-beads and semi-precious stone beads, the other of blue tubular faience beads with a large biconical ivory bead and a nerita in between – a copper-alloy bracelet (F9465) and three amulets (Plate 12). Due to the looting of the tomb it was not possible to associate objects with any particular individuals. Two amulets are made of faience, and depict Isis suckling the Horus-the-Child (F9466) and Pataikos (F9467); the third is a Bes amulet carved in ivory (F9457, Plate 13). While the faience amulets conform to the conventional Egyptian style, the ivory Bes amulet is rather unusual. Though the body displays the usual attributes of Bes, the head represents a significant departure from the traditional Egyptian style and presumably reflects local Nubian stylistic elements. Only one parallel has been found, in a private Swiss collection and supposedly from Helwan, dated to the Predynastic Period (Chappaz 1981, 84, 93/fig. 049); this dating now requires revision. In addition, the grave provided a small assemblage of vessels comprising at least five bowls/beakers with red-painted rims and two red-burnished bowls (Plate 14, Figure 9: C9139, C9141, C9144).

### Niche burials with tumulus superstructures

One of the most prominent features in Cemetery C is a cluster of at least seven, well defined tumuli located on a low rise, slightly elevated above the main ground in the eastern central part of the cemetery. The tumuli are again made of alluvial silt and local black schist stones arranged in a circle up to



Plate 12. Amulets and jewellery items recovered from grave 216: F9466, F9467, F9465, F9470 (clockwise from top left).



Plate 13. Ivory Bes amulet F9453.



Plate 14. Ceramics from the niche burials: C9139/ G233, C9018/ G226, C9012/ G204, C9017/ G226, C9144/ G216 (clockwise from top left).

10m in diameter. Three of those tumuli (G238–240) were investigated during the 2011 field season (Plate 15). While the substructure of these graves is generally similar in outline to

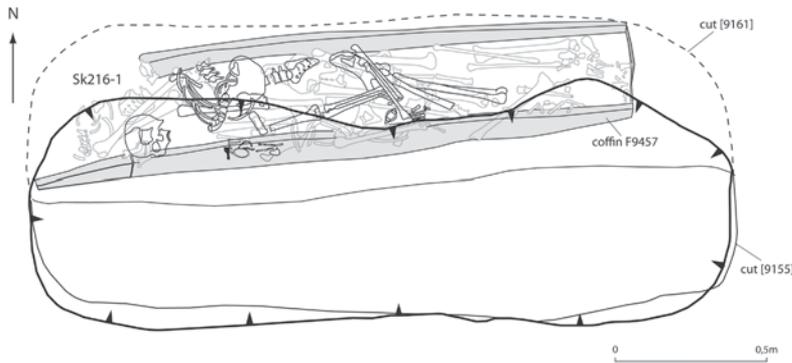


Figure 8. Plan of niche burial grave 216, scale 1:25.

the other niche burials, these graves far exceed the other niche burials in size. G238 and G239 both reach depths of 1.8m. The shafts and niches have lengths of 2-2.6m, with niche heights ranging between 400mm and 500mm. G238 and G239 had covering structures of large schist stone plates of up to 600mm sealed with mud plaster, even though neither blockings were found intact. The niche in G240 was again sealed with a large schist stone slab, spanning the length of the grave. Due to its size, the covering structure remained intact.

Looting of G238 and G239 resulted in the preservation of very few burial goods, but what survived nevertheless provided an indication of the relative wealth of the buried individuals, such as fragments of a large ivory objects (F9503), painted plaster presumably associated with a coffin and large cowrie-shell beads

(F9510, Plate 16). Two copper-alloy needles (F9508, F9509, Plate 16) were recovered from underneath the pelvis of the remaining articulated torso of one of the two burials in G239, suggesting they were used to close the wrapping. In G240, the large schist stone slab (Figure 7) largely prevented looting, preserving a good assemblage of finds including fragments of a finely carved cosmetic container (F9519, Plate 16), two large carved ivory fragments which presumably served as inlays (F9518, Plate 16), a large piece of yellow ochre (F9529), a round clay ball (60mm diameter, F9526) and a round river pebble (F9527).

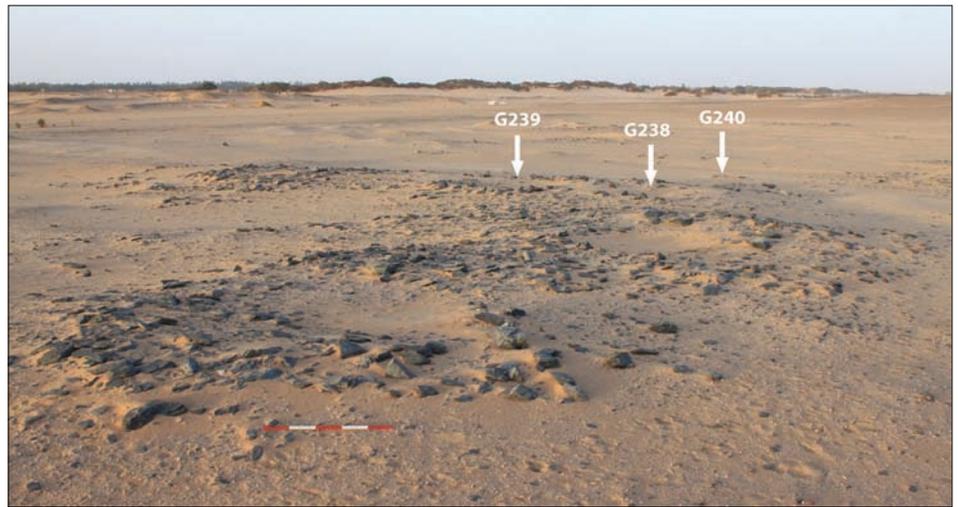


Plate 15. View south-west over a cluster of tumuli showing graves 238, 239 and 240 in the back.

In addition, large amounts of reed matting were preserved. Wooden remains suggest the female individual was placed on a funerary bed. Ceramics were only recovered from G239 and G240, each of them containing a fairly large number of vessels. In G239, the assemblage consisted of at least six vessels among them a jar, three bowls with red-painted rims (Figure 9: C9044) and two bowls/beakers with a red-burnished slip (Figure 9: C9150) as well as a marl clay pilgrim flask (C9153) of which only fragments were preserved. The estimated number of vessels for G240 is eight, including three bread moulds (Figure 10) which were recovered from the shaft. They represent the only examples of bread moulds found in the cemeteries so far and might be related to funerary cult rather than the burial assemblage.

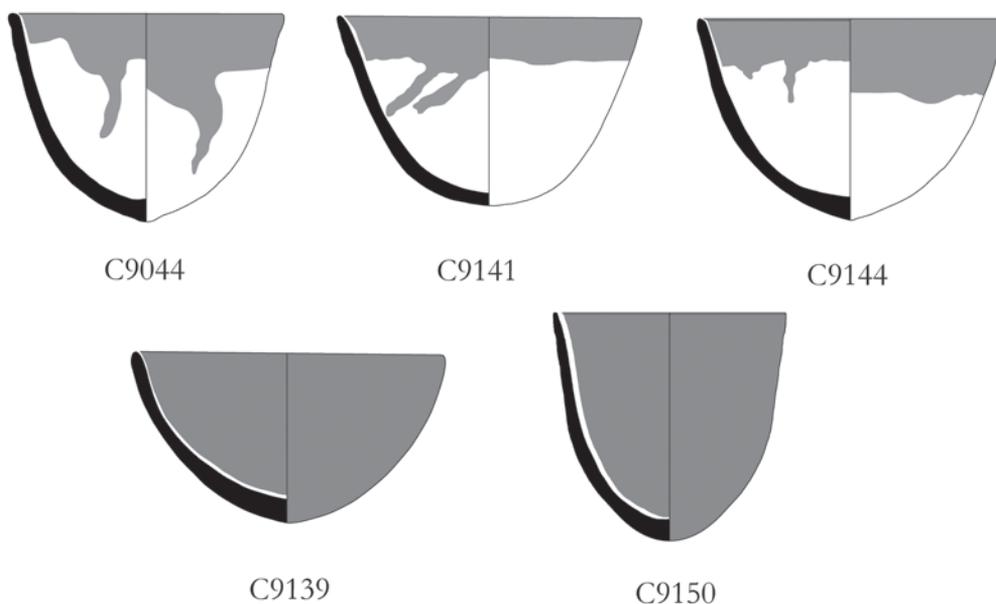


Figure 9. Bowls/beakers from niche burials G239 (C9044, C9150) and G216 (C9139, C9141, C9144), scale 1:4.

Elsewhere in Cemetery C, three more tumuli with niche substructures were investigated



Plate 16. Finds from the tumuli G239 and G240: beads F9510, carved wooden fragment F9519, copper-alloy needle F9509, ivory fragments F9518.

even though these are considerably smaller both in terms of the size of the sub- and the superstructure. G210, located in the northern part of the cemetery, is a tumulus with a southern burial niche used for the interment of two adults and two children. A Ramesside sandstone lintel (F9010), presumably taken from the town and re-used in the cemetery served as a covering structure for the niche (Plate 17). In addition to fragments of a miniature cup in marl clay (C9106) and a bowl with red-burnish slip on both sides, a bracelet of Egyptian blue and a number of bone and faience beads were recovered.

Further to the south, G226 featured a low, less well defined tumulus, consisting of a small circular scatter of schist stones. Its northern burial niche was used for the burial of an adult,

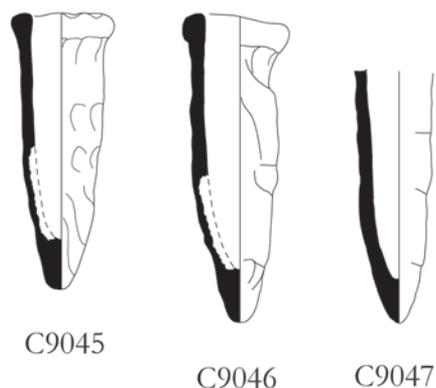


Figure 10. Bread moulds from grave 240, scale 1:4.

in an extended body position on a wooden funerary bed (F9142) of which only remnants were preserved. The burial was accompanied by two wooden baskets (F9143, F9144) of which one contained a faience necklace (F9145) and a miniature jar of marl clay (C9018); an incomplete pilgrim flask (C9017) was recovered from the shaft (Plate 14, Figure 11). G233, also investigated in 2011, featured a small circular scatter of schist stones with a southern burial niche which held the disarticulated remains of a neonate.

The relationship between the simple niche burials and those with tumulus superstructures remains unclear. While it



Plate 17. View east into the shaft of the grave 210 with Ramesside door lintel (F9010) covering the southern burial niche in situ.

is possible that this might have chronological significance, it might be that status differences account for these variations. This might particularly be the case with regards the tumuli G238-G240, located on an elevation and strikingly larger than all other niche burials investigated so far.

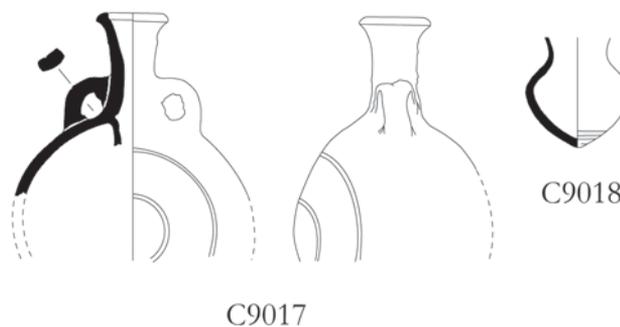


Figure 11. Ceramics of grave 226, scale 1:4.

### Grave 211

G211 represents a combination of the two different burial forms. It features a rectangular burial chamber on the western side of a rectangular shaft used for the burial of four adults, a neonate and a child of 1-2 years of age, a rectangular shaft as well as two lateral burial niches on the northern side of the shaft (Figure 12, Plate 18). One niche is located at the bottom of the shaft, and conforms to the same form as seen in the other niche burial. It was used for the burial of an adult, sealed behind a large schist slab. The second, smaller, niche located at the top of the shaft held the disarticulated remains

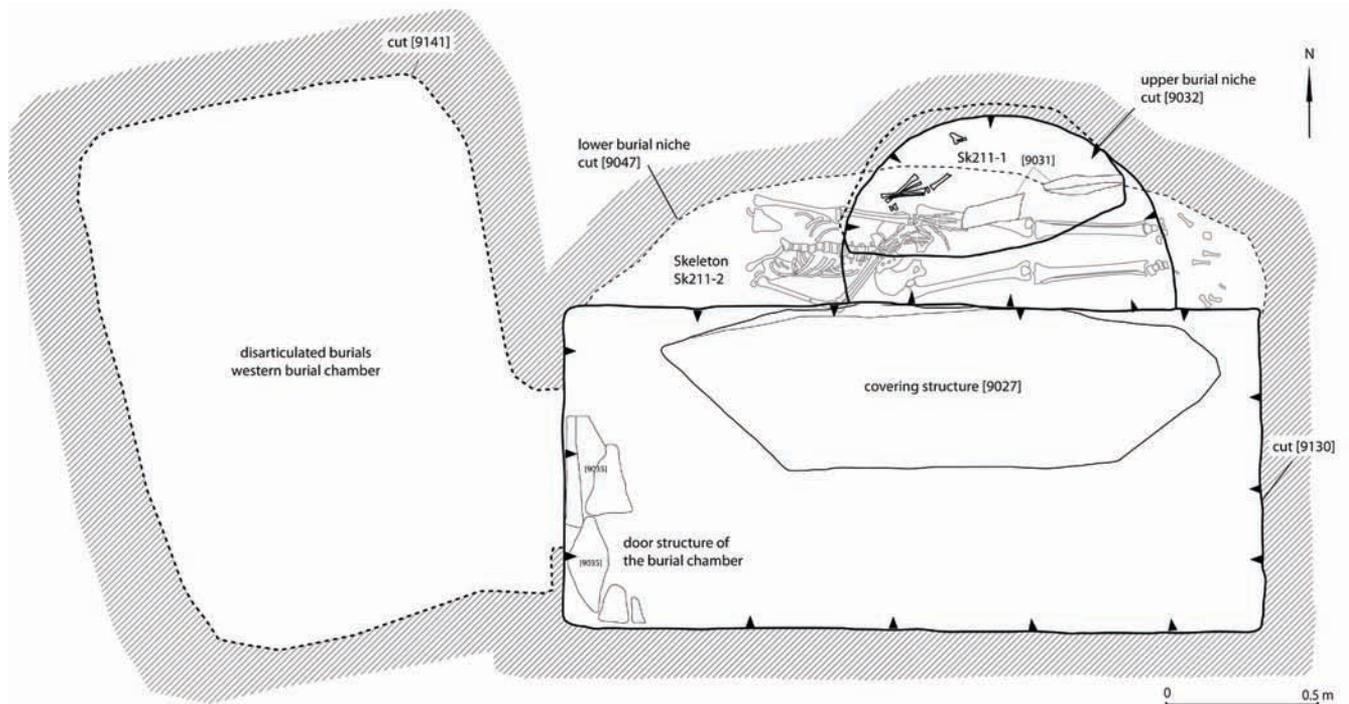


Figure 12. Plan of the substructure of grave 211, scale 1:25.

of a 1-2 year old child. Remnants of mud bricks indicated the presence of a sealing for this niche. So far, this is the only example of this transitional type.

Both, the burials in the chambers as well as the niche burial were placed in an extended position, with the niche burial being orientated west-east and the chamber burials being orientated north-south with heads either in the north or in the south. While any funerary furniture used in the chamber was destroyed due to looting, the heavy schist slab covering the niche largely prevented looting and allowed for the preservation of a funerary bed. In addition, large parts of the textile used to wrap the niche burial survived. While neither of the niche burials was equipped with grave goods, the burial chamber provided a significant amount of artefacts, even though due to looting, the majority again came from disturbed fill layers and could not be associated with any of

the burials. The finds assemblage recovered from the chamber is exceptional in its large amount of preserved woven reed fragments, possibly representing remnants of baskets or matting. In addition, the finds assemblage comprised of copper-alloy tweezers (F9039) and personal adornments such as plaques and beads made of bone, ivory, carnelian, lapis lazuli and ostrich eggshell. Surprisingly, the number of vessels is very small and confined to only a globular pilgrim flask (C9007, Plate 19) and a small faience situla (F9049, Plate 20).



Plate 18. View north into shaft of grave 211 showing both burial niches and entrance to the western burial chamber.

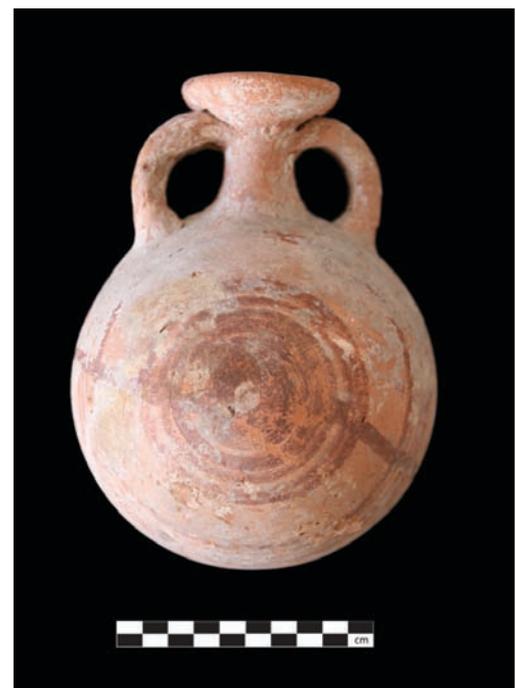


Plate 19. Pilgrim flask C9007 (grave 211).



Plate 20. Finds from graves 211: F9100, F9063, F9060 (Hathor heads), F9053, F9049, F9062, F9061 (clockwise from top left).

### Chronology of Cemetery C

The 2011 season has, for the first time, provided evidence that Cemetery C was already in use during the late New Kingdom. In G234, the large underground chamber tomb, the ceramic assemblage of five plates (Figure 6: C9038) and eight beer jars (Figure 6: C9041) are forms well known from late New Kingdom sites, even though Aston observed that it is difficult to distinguish beer jars between the Late New Kingdom and Libyan layers at Elephantine (Aston 1999, 72). Nevertheless, the vessels present in G234 find very close parallels in the deposits of the townsite, most notable from well dated late Ramesside layers in an extramural villa (Spencer 2009), thus providing sound evidence that Cemetery C was already in use during the New Kingdom. A dating to the New Kingdom was also suggested by Vila for the chamber tomb reported by the CNRS survey, based on the occurrence of beer jars and plates similar to those seen in G234 (Vila 1977, 28–31).

More significantly, however, the remainder of the graves – both chamber and niche burials – excavated in Cemetery C provide ceramic material that post-dates the New Kingdom occupation. The most common forms appearing in Cemetery C are bowls or bowls/beakers with thick red-painted rims which were found in niche graves with (G239, Figure 9: C9044) and without (G210, G216, Figure 9: C9141, C9144) tumuli, as well as in two chamber tombs (G200, G201). Such bowls are similar to examples in Egypt where they are dated to the 11<sup>th</sup>–10<sup>th</sup> centuries BC (Aston and Jeffreys 2007, 42). In Nubia, similar vessels were common in niche graves in the necropolis of Missiminia, near Amara West on the east bank of the Nile. These were dated to the Napatan period (Type I–1, Vila 1980, 55–56, fig. 167) but might in fact be earlier. In addition to the bowls, G201 also held a number of beer jars and plates, somewhat similar to those recovered from G234 (Figure 6). However, even though those forms echo typical late New Kingdom shapes, they already seem

to represent a departure from the Egyptian originals possibly indicating local imitations. This has also been suggested by Vincentelli in her analysis of the ceramics recovered at Hillat el-Arab (2006, 2), which are very similar to the ceramic assemblage recovered from Cemetery C at Amara West. A local origin of Egyptian style vessels found at Amara West was also confirmed by a petrographic analysis carried out on sherds recovered from the town in 2009 (M. Spataro, pers. comm.).

The marl clay pilgrim flasks (C9000, Figure 4; C9007) have a more globular form suggesting a late New Kingdom date (Aston 2008, 189, pl. 61, 1218 and 1224) and also consistent with a dating to the 9<sup>th</sup>/10<sup>th</sup> centuries BC (Vincentelli 2006, 137). The large neck-less jar with red slip outside (G201: C9128, C9129) is similar to those found in a deposit dated at Elephantine to Ramesses IX (Aston 1999, pl. 9, 198) but elsewhere in contexts of the mid-8<sup>th</sup> century BC (Aston 1996, fig. 209). The ovoid jar (C9009) is of a similar date (Aston 1999, pl. 35, 1094). The bowls with red-burnished slip on the interior and exterior (C9115, C9139, C9150, Figure 9) only occur in the niche burials of the Napatan Period at Missiminia (Vila 1980, 64, fig. 54,1). However, comparative examples from Elephantine suggest that they could in fact be earlier, dating between the 10<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> centuries BC (Aston 1999, pl. 47, 1485). The lack of some distinctive Napatan shapes such as marl clay storage jars (Aston 1999, pl. 56, 1698) further supports a dating of Cemetery C to no later than the mid-8<sup>th</sup> century BC.

In conclusion, the ceramics so far recovered from Cemetery C indicate a long period of use ranging from the Late New Kingdom until the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC. With regard to internal chronology, the results of the past three seasons suggest that the chamber tombs were the earliest to be constructed in Cemetery C. This would also be consistent with the known chronological framework for the use of multi-chambered tombs in general. Multiple underground hypogaea are a typical Egyptian tomb form and occur in Nubian sites related to periods of Egyptian colonisation from the Middle Kingdom onwards (Williams 1992, 3). They are particularly common at colonial sites of the New Kingdom and find close parallels in a number of Lower and Upper Nubian sites related to the Egyptian occupation such as at Qustul (Williams 1992), Serra East (Williams 1993), Sai (Minault and Thill 1974), Soleb (Schiff Giorgini 1971) or Tombos (Smith 2003; 2007) but also in Cemetery D of Amara West (Binder *et al.* 2010; 2011). However, a notable difference in Cemetery C is the lack of superstructures in the chamber tombs, a feature usually observed in graves of this type elsewhere and it remains to question whether this was caused by surface erosion or whether other reasons might account for it. In addition, the reason why both cemeteries were in use at the same time remains unclear. A possible explanation might be sought in status differences. While Cemetery D is located in a more

prominent location on top of an escarpment, Cemetery C lies at its base. Similar distributions were observed in the Debeira-Serra region (Säve-Söderbergh and Troy 1991) but also at Sai (Minault and Thill 1974; Thill 2007) and Tombos (Smith 2003; 2007), where burial in prominent locations seems to have been reserved for members of the ruling class.

As for the niche burial type, the evidence from Cemetery C so far suggests that they were introduced at Amara West during the later periods of use. They are lacking the typical late New Kingdom forms such as plates and beer jars, but in contrast provide later forms such as red-burnished slip bowls absent from the chamber tombs (Table 1). Whereas niche

Table 1. Comparison of the occurrence of selected find categories and ceramic types between chamber and niche tombs.

	Chamber tombs	Niche burials
<i>Specialised funerary equipment of Egyptian tradition</i>		
scarabs	x	
amulets	x	x
head rests	x	
coffins	x	x
painted plaster	x	x
wrapping	x	x
<i>Nubian cultural elements</i>		
tumuli		x
flexed burials	x	
burial beds	x	x
<i>Ceramic assemblage</i>		
beer jars	x	
plates	x	
pilgrim flasks	x	x
bowls/ beakers	x	x
red burnished bowls		x
Nubian style pottery	x	x

burials are known from New Kingdom cemeteries of Lower Nubia such as Qustul (Williams 1992), they are so far only known for the later periods in Upper Nubia. They are present at Sai (Geus *et al.* 1995), Tombos (Smith 2007) and Sanam (Griffith 1923; Lohwasser 2010a) but also at el-Kurru three of the early tumuli (Ku. Tum. 1, Ku. Tum. 5 and Ku. Tum. 6) feature niche substructures (Dunham 1950). At Missiminia they are very common and bear striking similarities to the niche burials at Amara West in terms of find assemblages and ceramic repertoire, particularly in the occurrence of bowls or bowls/beakers with red-painted rims (Vila 1980). The significance of the composite grave G211, featuring both a burial chamber and two burial niches is unclear. In the absence of dateable material for the niches it is impossible to say whether this is a reflection of a transition between two distinct burial traditions, or whether other underlying factors account for this hybrid grave type. A comparable example was found at

Qustul (VF 72 A, Williams 1990, 75, 77, fig. 27; VF 72 BA, Williams 1992, 311–317, figs 134–137) which featured an eastern and north-eastern burial chamber dated to the New Kingdom, but also a northern burial niche interpreted as a Napatan re-use of a New Kingdom tomb.

### The evidence for settlement in Nubia during the 10<sup>th</sup>–9<sup>th</sup> centuries BC

The time period between the end of the New Kingdom occupation around 1069 BC and the rise of the Kushite Empire in the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC still remains one of the mysteries of Nubian history, as there seems to be no archaeological evidence for settlement in Lower Nubia and few traces in Upper Nubia (Morkot 2000, 129). For decades, most researchers have accepted the view that the end of New Kingdom occupation led to the abandonment of colonial settlements, with Egyptian settlers and administrators (and implicitly, Egyptianized Nubians as well) returning to Egypt (e.g. Adams 1964; for Amara West see Spencer 1997, 220). The remaining population would have retreated to the Eastern desert or the regions of Upper Nubia and the entire area regressed into a “tribal way of life” (Trigger 1976, 140). Only by the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC, at the beginning of the Napatan era, is there consensus regarding settlement patterns (Edwards 2004).

In recent years, new fieldwork in Upper Nubia alongside re-evaluations of old excavations have started to bring new evidence shedding light on this period of Nubian history. One of the most significant sites in this respect is Hillat el-Arab, 3km downstream of Jebel Barkal, where a joint Sudanese-Italian team excavated a cemetery of large rock-cut *hypogaea* between 1993 and 2000 (Vincentelli 2006). Those graves provided a wealth of material suggesting they were associated with high status individuals, from the 19<sup>th</sup> Dynasty until the Napatan period. More recently, similar evidence for continued use of a New Kingdom necropolis was revealed at Tombos, where tumuli graves similar to those at Amara West, dating to the 10<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries BC are currently being excavated (Smith 2007). Further evidence for settlement of this period has come to light near Jebel Barkal. The cemetery at Sanam was dated to the Napatan era by the excavator (Griffith 1923), but a re-evaluation of the artefact assemblages suggests it was already in use during the New Kingdom (Lohwasser 2010a, 91–92; 2010b), though problems with the ceramic chronology remain. A comparison with Hillat el-Arab would again seem to support continued settlement between the end of the New Kingdom and the early Napatan period (Lohwasser 2010b). At Kawa, recent excavations have revealed evidence for significant settlement activity already during the 9<sup>th</sup> century BC (Welsby 2010; this volume). However, earlier structures, filling the gap between the end of the New Kingdom and the early Kushite period have yet to be found; thus the nature of the transition still remains to be clarified.

As for the region between the Second and Third Cataracts, the evidence for settlement activity during the 10<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup>



centuries BC remains scanty. Cemetery 8B5/SAC5 on Sai island (Thill 2007), Missiminia (Vila 1980) and now Amara West are the only localities where burials are known to have occurred in this era. Yet one of the major difficulties in interpreting occupation during the 10<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries BC is the absence of evidence for occupied settlements: much of our data derives from cemeteries. At Amara West, post-New Kingdom ceramic material has been recovered from the surface of the town, and in disturbed deposits in the southern part of the town, but no architecture of this period has been identified thus far. Thus it remains impossible to reconstruct the nature of settlement after the end of the New Kingdom colonial control. Nevertheless, the knowledge gained through the analysis of the material, especially with regard to ceramics recovered from sites such as Amara West, Tombos and Hillat el-Arab, might in future help to identify further sites or re-evaluate sites excavated during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century dating to the 10<sup>th</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> century. These efforts might in future assist in gradually removing the 'Dark Age' from the history of the region.

Cemetery C also provides important evidence for the cultural processes taking place in Upper Nubia during and after the end of Pharaonic control. The material and ritual evidence recovered from Cemetery C suggests a population strongly adhering to Egyptian cultural elements acquired during times of Pharaonic control over the area, when Amara West was an important centre of the colonial administration. As such it would have housed officials and military personnel largely maintaining Egyptian cultural norms, whether they were native Egyptians or Nubians drawn to the culture of the dominant political power. By the time Egyptian occupation came to an end, Pharaonic culture was sufficiently integrated into local culture to ensure significant aspects were retained, as is also seen at Tombos, Sanam or Missiminia. Evidence for Nubian elements in funerary culture is significantly less common. Elements of indigenous funerary rituals such as tumulus superstructures, bed burials, flexed burials or occasionally Nubian style pottery do occur, but always in association with elements of Egyptian culture attesting to a mixed culture developing in the settlements of occupied Nubia. A unique manifestation of how these two cultures blended is the Bes amulet F9453 (Plate 13). An additional indicator of an influx of more local cultural practices might be seen in the occurrence of child burials in the later chamber tombs and more commonly in the niche burials, while in Egyptian cemeteries child burials are often missing (e.g. Buzon 2006) due to the practice of burying them in towns or separate zones of the cemeteries (e.g. Brunton and Engelbach 1927). So far, they are also absent from the double-chambered tombs in Cemetery D at Amara West. Interpreting the cultural significance of the occurrence of different tomb types at Amara West remains equally difficult. While the tomb form itself does indicate major differences, this is less well reflected in most other aspects of funerary ritual. Up until now, neither the configuration of the finds assemblage nor

the expressions of funerary behaviour differ significantly between the two tomb categories, apart from the absence of head rests and scarabs from the niche burials (Table 1). In general, finds from both chamber and niche tombs continue to be almost entirely of Egyptian character, mainly including objects associated with Egyptian funerary beliefs. Tumuli, one of the hallmark features of Nubian burial customs, have only been found in association with niche burials, although they do occur with chamber tombs in Cemetery D (Grave 305, Binder *et al.* 2010; 2011). Nevertheless, any conclusions in this respect have to be treated with caution in the light of heavy looting of both grave types

However, despite the signs of acculturation, the processes leading towards the Egyptianized culture visible in the archaeological record remain far from understood. One of the most important aspects yet to be established is the fate of the indigenous population during the time of Egyptian occupation, as burials of this time period are as yet not very numerous and mainly confined to elite burials in Cemetery D. Thus it is unclear whether the presence of Nubian elements in the post-New Kingdom graves represents a re-emergence of indigenous customs or whether in fact they had never disappeared as is evidenced through the occurrence of elements of Nubian funerary culture in New Kingdom burials on sites such as Tombos (Smith 2003). However, it is hoped that further fieldwork, particularly in Cemetery D, will provide archaeological evidence which can elucidate these processes of cultural transition.

The persistence of Egyptian cultural elements into the post-New Kingdom also has implications for the question of the still unresolved origins of the strongly Egyptianised culture of the Kushite Empire of the Napatan period. Along with sites such as Hillat et-Arab, Tombos and Missiminia, Amara West bridges the gap between the New Kingdom and the Napatan period, perhaps attesting to the survival of communities at the colonial settlements which strongly continued adhering to Pharaonic traditions. Thus, these sites provide further evidence that the Egyptianization of the Napatan period was not triggered by external influences as has been suggested (Kendall 1999) but may have been born of communities retaining aspects of Egyptian culture acquired during the New Kingdom or possibly even earlier. Along the same lines as the continued presence of settlers in the Middle Kingdom fortresses of Lower Nubia during the Second Intermediate Period, which may have facilitated the Egyptianisation of the Nubian population at the beginning of the New Kingdom period (Smith 2003, 84–5), these processes may have continued and ultimately resulted in the culture of the next Kushite Empire.

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