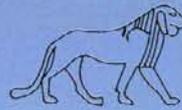


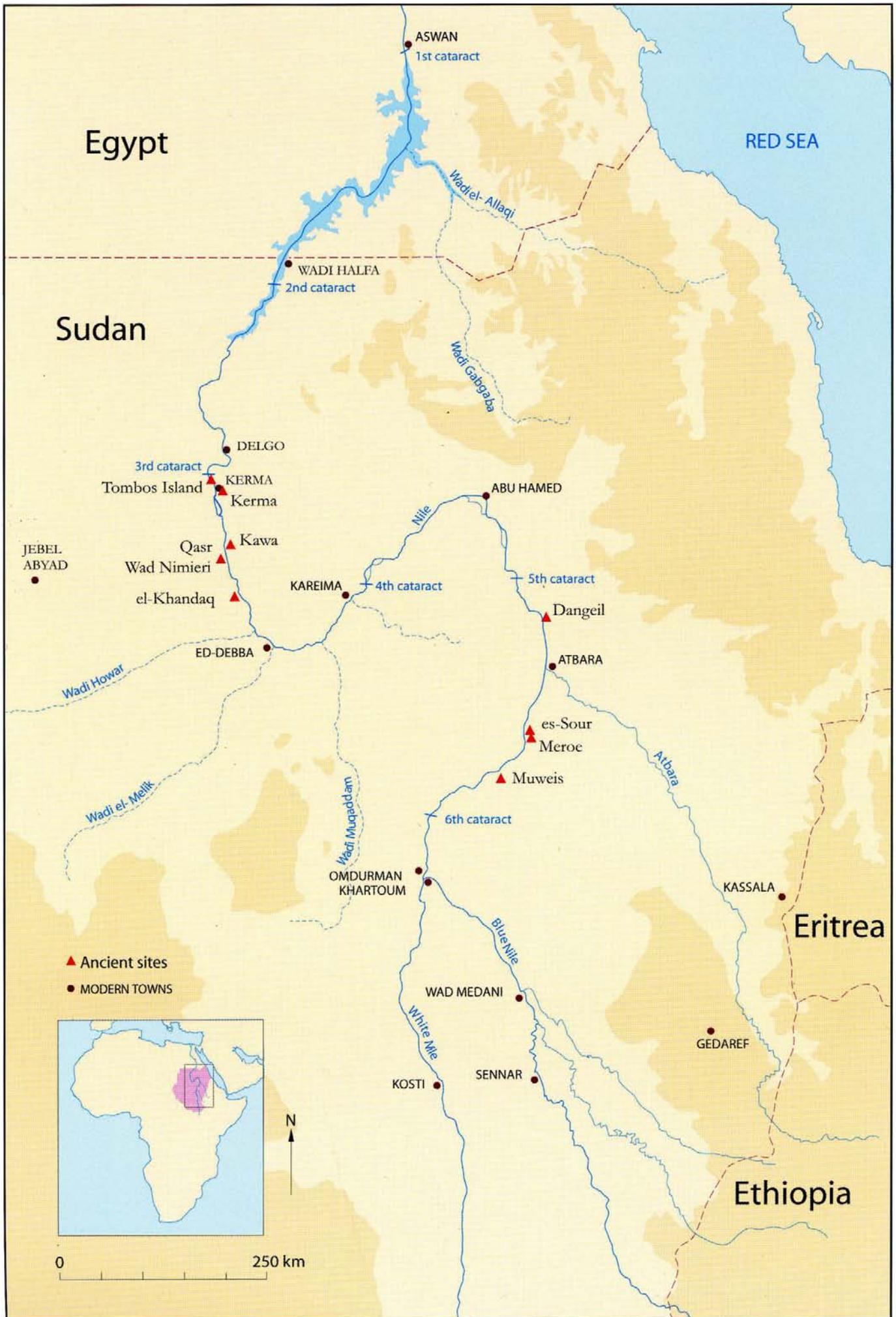
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Front cover: Rescuing rock art from the Sudan Archaeological Research Society's concession at the Fourth Nile Cataract. This collaborative project between the British Museum, Iveco and New Holland was undertaken in November 2007 and resulted in the removal, from the SARS concession, of over 50 boulders bearing rock art or used as rock gongs. The pyramid, offering chapel and enclosure wall from site 4-F-71 were also relocated. Here the work is being filmed by a cameraman from the Italian TV news channel Rei Due (photo D. A. Welsby).

Excavations in Palace M 750S at Meroe

Krzysztof Grzyski and Iwona Grzyska

Introduction

When the joint mission to Meroe of the University of Khartoum and the Royal Ontario Museum set out to the field in November 2007, its main objective was to complete excavation of the south part of building M 750. Our previous investigations of this structure led us to believe that its history and layout had been identified and all that remained to do was to explore individual rooms, in order to record the fill contents, identify earlier remains and collect additional, re-used, decorated blocks. While some new reliefs were indeed found, the most interesting and unexpected discovery was that of walls of an Early Kushite structure. The campaign started on November 2nd, 2007, and ended on December 2nd, 2007. The team comprised Krzysztof Grzyski, Iwona Grzyska, Emily Cole, Pavel Onderka, Sara Abdelfatih (November 2nd - 12th) and Fathrahman Mohammed (November 12th - December 2nd).

Excavations at M 750S

It has been commonly assumed that the preserved remains of M 750 represent merely the foundation of a building, or perhaps of two adjoining buildings, connected by a common wall, but separated by an open courtyard. The northern part of M 750 remains fully exposed since Garstang's days and is variously interpreted as a temple (Hinkel and Sievertsen 2002, 124), or as the official/administrative part of a royal palace (Török 1997, 182), whilst the square-shaped south part is uniformly considered to be a palace, one of many Meroitic palaces built on a similar plan (Grzyski 2008, 234-235). The square and rectangular rooms in the palace were identified as cellars ("Untergeschossräume"; see Hinkel and Sievertsen 2002, 123).

Garstang dated M 750 to the period between AD 1-300, while Török, Hinkel and Sievertsen convincingly argued that the earliest possible construction date was the late 1st/early 2nd century AD. As our excavations progressed, the question of the precise dating of the south part of M 750 became quite important. Charcoal samples collected from various parts of M 750S, associated with many different structures, or finds, produced a whole range of dates, from 840-800 BC in room G to 410-390 BC in room N, 190-60 BC in room Z, AD 60-230 in room BB, and 380-200 BC, outside the south wall of the building. Similarly, the pottery assemblage included both Napatan and Meroitic wares, although, rather surprisingly, very few fine Late Meroitic egg-shell wares. This range of C¹⁴ dates and finds led us to believe that M 750S had a long and complex his-

tory of construction and occupation and that was the conclusion presented in the paper read at the 11th Nubiological Congress in Warsaw, in 2006 (Grzyski 2008, 234). However, when reviewing these data, in preparation for the forthcoming volume of *Meroe Reports II*, it became apparent that the interpretation of "rooms" in M 750S as cellars of the palace was incorrect (Figure 1). While the preserved remains of the building definitely represent the foundations, the supposed cellars ("rooms") were simply spaces filled with debris, accumulated from earlier periods and/or dumped by the builders. In fact, some deposits might even have been dumped by Garstang. However, the discovery of Garstang's photograph of M 750 (Neg. No. M605.8), which showed that he merely cleared walls' outlines, but left the interiors untouched (Grzyski 2008, fig. 5; Plate 1), proved that what we excavated were largely undisturbed ancient fills. It is now clear that most, if not all of the structures and finds discovered within each room, represent pre-construction remains rather than the deposits associated with the period of occupation of the palace. This explains the variety of archaeological material and the range of dates associated with the finds. As for the Late Meroitic palace, apart from the foundation walls, the only other surviving

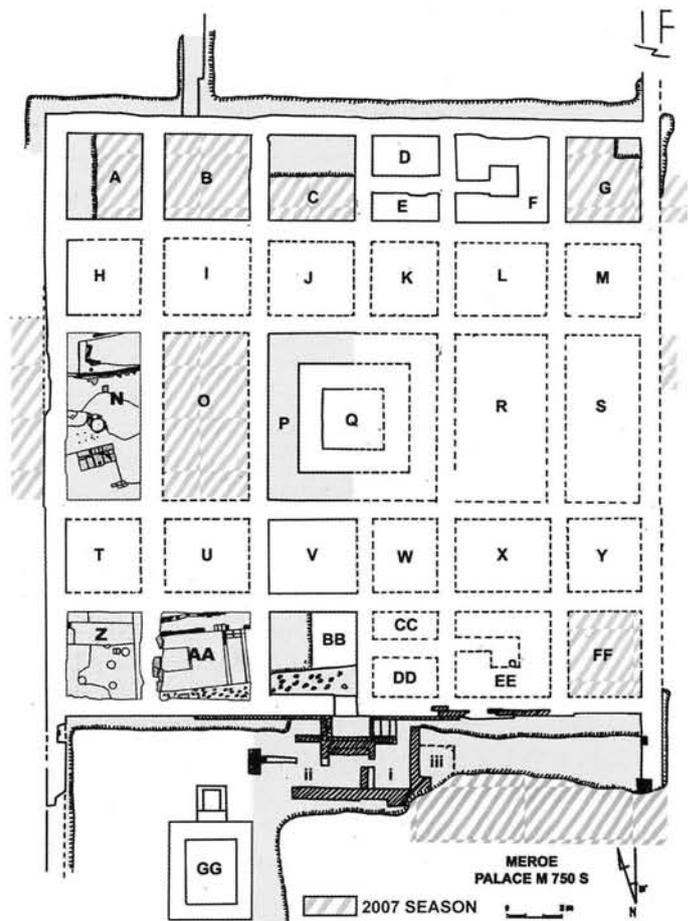


Figure 1. Plan of Palace M 750S with the 2007 excavations marked by light shading.



Plate 1. Garstang's photograph of M 750 (negative no. M 605.8, courtesy of the School of Archaeology, Classics and Egyptology, University of Liverpool).

elements were remains of a floor, or a floor base, made of ferricrete sandstone slabs found in rooms AA and BB and fragments of a red-brick wall preserved in the south wall of M 750S.

In order to complete our research and prepare the final publication on M 750S we needed to answer a number of questions. Was there a side entrance to the building in addition to the main, south entrance? Did the walls discovered within the long room N continue into the neighbouring rooms? What was the nature of the Early Kushite/Napatan deposit discovered in 2004 in a small sondage in room G, and finally what was the layout of the southeast corner of the building? Additionally, we decided to complete excavations of the interiors of rooms A, B, and C, which were only partly explored in past campaigns.

The search for the supposed side entrance to M 750S was first carried out in 2005, when we excavated the interior of room N and cleared the top of its west wall (wall 21). While there was no indication of a side entrance, we found a number of interesting features inside the room: a stone wall running diagonally in the south part, a thick-walled silo in the centre of the room and a small red-brick wall in the northern part. During the last campaign we excavated the neighbouring room O, to the east of room N, but did not find any interesting architectural remains. We also excavated a 2m wide trench along the west side of room N extending down to the natural soil (*rigeita*) at a depth of *c.* 1.5m below the surface. To our surprise, approximately 500mm below the top of wall 21 (i.e. the west wall of the palace), we found a small wall projecting west for a distance of some 2m. (Plate 2). To the south of it there was a stone rubble spread over a distance of 2m. It is difficult to explain the function of this small wall and rubble and, in

fact, it might have been a later addition abutting the west wall of M 750S. It is also possible that it represents the vestiges of a small ramp leading to a side entrance. In such a case, its modest size would suggest the existence of a small side door, rather than a large gate. The symmetrical plan of the building suggested that a similar arrangement could have been made on the east side of M 750S. Therefore, we excavated a small sondage along wall 22, outside room S, but no walls, rubble or other remains were found in this trench.

When a small sondage was excavated in the north-east corner of room G in 2004, a large amount of early Napatan pottery was found. The charcoal sample collected from the fill suggested a date of *c.* 840-800 BC. Similar pottery, although mixed with later material, was also found in the excavated part of room C. The charcoal sample from room C produced a very similar date of 820-790 BC for that assemblage. These were, in fact,



Plate 2. Wall 130 on the west side of room N.

some of the earliest radiocarbon dates from Meroe and, more importantly, they were associated with identifiable cultural material. Nevertheless, it remained uncertain whether this early pottery was either dumped by Garstang when backfilling his trench, or was deposited by the builders of the palace M 750S, or, thirdly, represented remains of an early Kushite/Napatan midden covered by the Late Meroitic building. The excavations undertaken in this corner room produced most interesting results. Below the late deposit of sand and soil we found a layer of broken red bricks mixed with early pottery. Underneath this red-brick rubble there was an enormous quantity of pottery, including some complete vessels. Some pots were found embedded in the base of the stone foundation walls of M 750S, clearly showing that they pre-dated the construction of the latter. In the

south-east corner of room G we found an intact mud-brick wall made of small bricks (230-260 x 130 x 80mm) usually associated with the 25th Dynasty. The wall was running from east to west and then turning south (Plate 3). This suggests that what we found was a corner of a very early building. We expanded the excavation by digging a trench on the east side of wall 22, i.e. outside M 750S, and we found the same wall continuing eastwards. This wall, too, was covered by a ceramic dump. The total number of sherds found in room G and the east trench exceeded 10,000 fragments, all of them clearly of early date. Mixed with the pottery was a large quantity of animal bones, presumably cattle, as well as some charcoal. Two C¹⁴ dates were obtained, 2740±60 BP (Cal 930-820 BC 68% probability) and 2520±40 BP (Cal 790-520 BC 68% probability), confirming that the new-found wall is of the Early Kushite/Napatan period. This is the oldest building found so far at Meroe and its location outside the Royal City throws new light on the early topography of the site. It would be premature to try to identify the function of this early structure, but the east-west direction of the wall and the discovery of four bread moulds suggests a temple. This, however, is only speculation. Further research is planned for the forthcoming field campaign.

The south-east corner of palace M 750S was something of a mystery. The 2002 magnetometric survey showed a pile of red bricks and no clearly recognisable walls or structures. Yet, considering the symmetrical plan of the building, one would expect to find a wall extension here similar to that of wall 21 on the west side of the palace, and a square room similar to room GG, discovered in the south-west corner. The excavations carried out in 2007 covered the area immediately to the south east of the palace, as well as the corner room FF within the palace. Inside room FF we discovered a mud-brick wall (Plate 4), oriented almost



Plate 4. Early mud-brick wall in room FF.

exactly to magnetic North, which contrasted with the other walls of M 750S oriented 18° to the east. We also noticed that the palace walls in the south-east corner had one, or in some places two, layers of bricks still resting on the stone foundation walls. These are the remains of the Late Meroitic

palace whose superstructure was evidently built of red bricks, covered with white plaster. The red-brick scatter in the south-east area, immediately outside the palace wall, was first encountered in 2004. A large amount of burnt palm fronds and/or reeds was found. A sample was collected and dated by means of C¹⁴ to 380-200 BC (Grzymski 2005, 54). This was a surprisingly early date even though it was consistent with the early Meroitic ceramics found therein. During the last campaign, we uncovered the entire area and noticed that, except for the red-brick rubble, the only recognisable structures were a brick pillar and a collapsed roof, made of dom palm beams and reed and palm frond bundles (Plate 5). In some places we found plaster fragments from the roof cover and very small bricks placed on their narrow side on top of the plaster. A similarly plastered roof was recently reported from the palace of Aspetla at Jebel Barkal, although in that case the plaster was placed under the roof, forming a painted ceiling (Kendall and Wolf 207, 86), while in Meroe



Plate 3. West wall of the palace (wall 22) overlying early mud-brick wall in room G (right) and trench 143 (left).



Plate 5. View of the south-east area with a red-brick pillar and burnt roof.

the plaster seemed to be placed on top of the roof. A charcoal sample collected from this roof was dated to 2370 ± 70 BP (Cal 520-390 BC 68% probability), consistent with the date obtained in 2004. Moreover, another sample, collected from a pot found embedded in the wall running through room FF, dated to the same period: 2370 ± 70 BP (Cal 520-390 BC 68% probability). This suggests the wall and the red-brick construction outside the palace belong to the same structure, destroyed prior to the construction of M 750S. There can be little doubt that the Late Meroitic palace lies above many earlier structures of which the most intriguing was an Early Kushite building found in room G.

Decorated sandstone blocks

During our earlier campaigns we have found many decorated blocks lying loose or re-used in the construction of walls of M750S (Grzymski 2005, pl. 4; pls XXV-XXVI; Grzymski 2008, fig. 7). We had hoped we might find blocks, bearing royal names, providing clues to the source, or sources, of material used in building the palace. Since one inscribed block, unfortunately without a royal name, was found in 2004, one could reasonably expect more such finds. In this respect, our hopes have not materialised. Nevertheless, several re-used decorated blocks were discovered during the last campaign and can now be added to the existing corpus of reliefs from M 750 (Grzymski 2008, 234; Hofmann and Tomandl 1986, 36-43; Török 1997, 183-187). The two most interesting examples were blocks representing royalty. In room C we found a reused sandstone block with a relief depicting a Meroitic queen or princess (Colour plate XIX; Figure 2). Stylistically, it is reminiscent of late Meroitic images of Amanirenas, Amanitore and Amanishakhete and further strengthens the possibility for

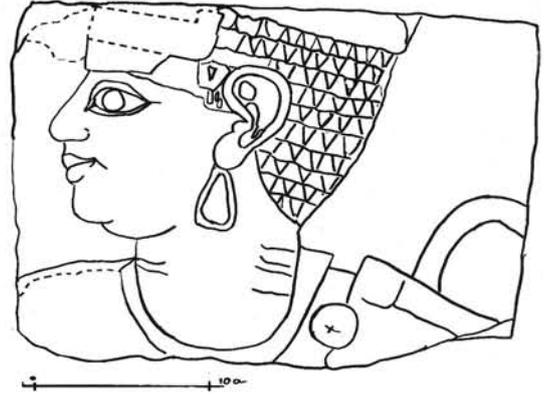


Figure 2. Drawing of the relief of the Meroitic queen or princess.

the 2nd century AD date of the construction of the palace. Another block, found embedded upside-down, in the southern extension of wall 22, was decorated with a relief depicting the head of a king wearing a crown. The yellow and dark red paint was still preserved on the relief (Colour plate XX; Figure 3).

Acknowledgements

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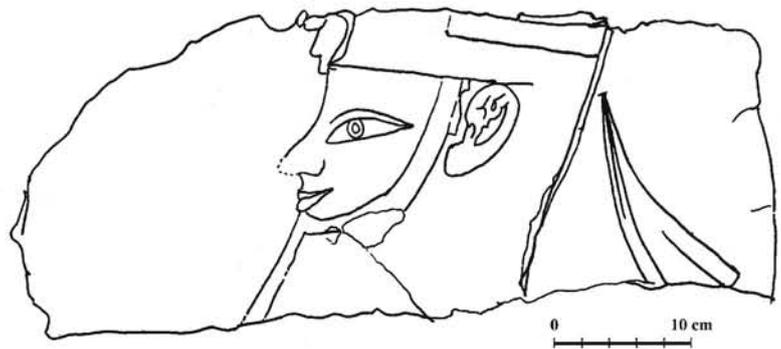
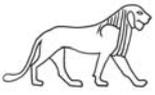


Figure 3. Drawing of the painted relief of a king.

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Colour plate XIX. Meroe, Palace M 750S. Sandstone block with relief depicting a queen or a princess found in room C.



Colour plate XX. Meroe, Palace M 750S. Painted relief of a king wearing a crown decorated with a uraeus and streamers.