

SUDAN & NUBIA

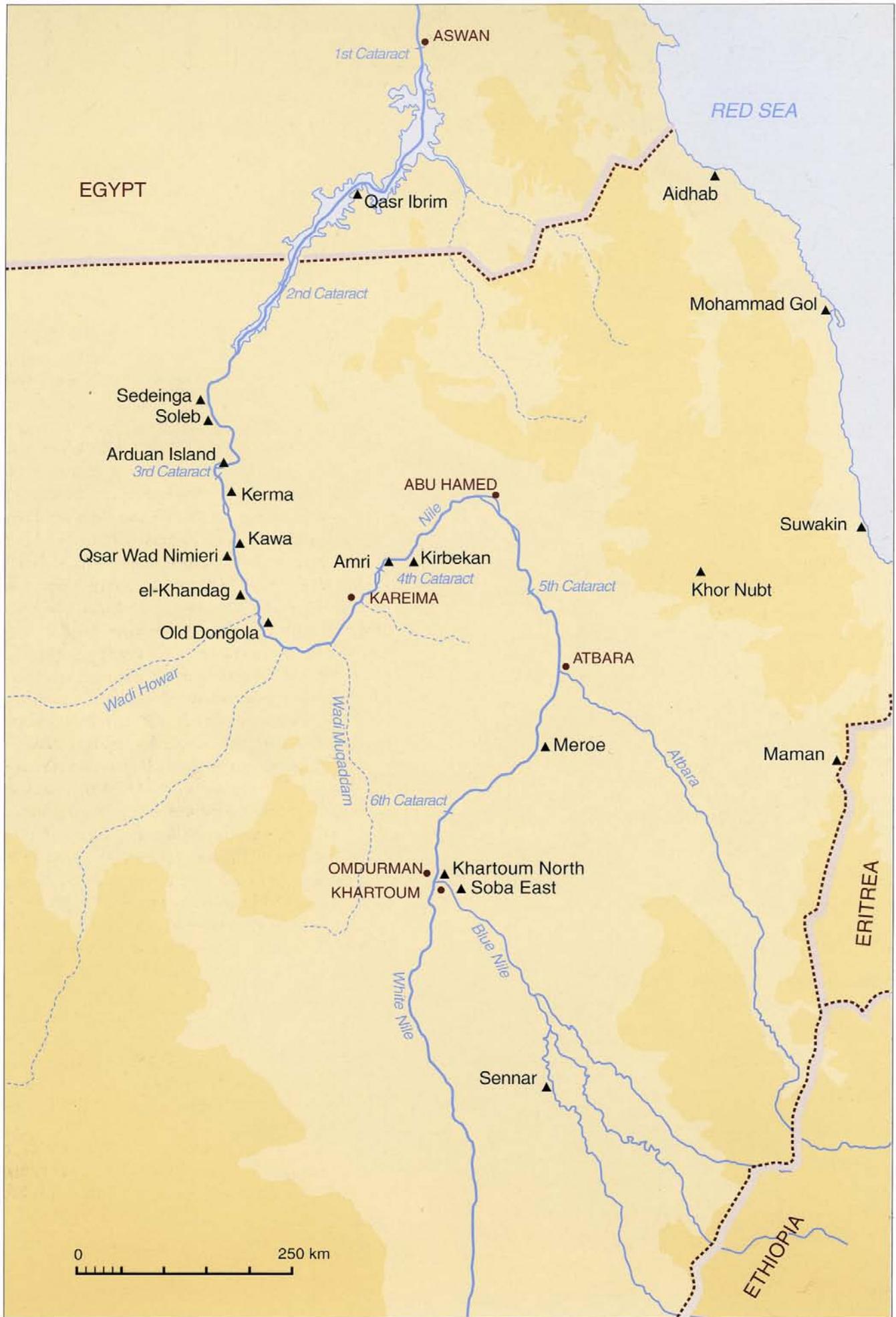
The Sudan Archaeological Research Society



Bulletin No. 4

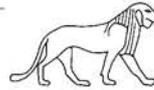
2000





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

Introduction

Vivian Davies

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

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

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

The Kawa Excavation Project

Derek A. Welsby

Kawa, set on the right bank of the Nile in the northern Dongola Reach, was occupied at least from the mid 14th century BC into the 3rd century AD. The earliest structural remains are those of a temple completed if not constructed solely by Tutankhamun, although earlier occupation dating from the Kerma period is quite possible. Excavations by the Oxford Excavation Committee, under the direction of F. Ll. Griffith were undertaken from 1929-31 and by L. P. Kirwan¹ in the winter of 1935-6, and focussed on the temple precinct in the northern part of the town. The Sudan Archaeological Research Society undertook a detailed survey of the environs of the site in 1993 and is now engaged in a five season project to plan and record the upstanding monuments and to excavate within the town and in the associated cemeteries. This report describes the results obtained during the second season of survey and excavations which took place from mid January until the end of March 2000.¹

Topographical survey

The topographical survey of the 36 hectare site, begun in the 1997-98 season, was continued with the surveying of the steep slope along the river bank. The survey of a grid of points at 2m intervals across the whole site will allow a detailed contour plan to be produced using the Digital Terrain Modeller in Minicad7.

Planning of buildings

Many buildings are visible on the surface across wide areas of the site. Over 30 of these were planned in the first season at a scale of 1:50 after the wall tops were cleared of the thin layer of wind-blown sand covering them. No excavation is undertaken as part of this planning work so as not to destroy crucial stratigraphic relationships by inadvertently divorcing the walls from the deposits adjacent to them. During this season buildings planned included a mud-brick temple (Plate 1) measuring 21 x 10m excluding the width of the pylons, and a large courtyard approximately 39 x 36m in the lower town, along with a number of buildings in the upper town including the stone-faced entrance into the *temenos* of Temple T. Substantial buildings have now been observed over large areas of the town suggesting the possibility that the whole of the 36 hectares was densely built over.

¹ The team members were Mohammed Faroug (Antiquities officer), Margaret Judd (Physical anthropologist), Gail Mabbott (Archaeologist), Charles Morse (Archaeologist), Robert Radford (Site planner), Isabella Welsby Sjöström (Pottery specialist), Alexey Vinogradov (Archaeologist, epigrapher) and Derek Welsby (Director). A total of 42 local workmen were employed.

Excavations

Area B

In the first season three domestic buildings were excavated on the southern slope down from the upper to the lower town (Welsby 1998). The excavation of Building B1 was completed while that of Buildings B5 and B12 is being continued along with the excavation of a building further to the west, Building B13.

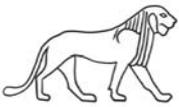


Plate 1. The mud-brick temple, Building G1.

The limits of none of the three buildings investigated this season were discovered within the excavation area. Building B5 and B13 were originally freestanding, although their chronological relationship is unclear. Subsequently the space between them was filled with rooms forming Building B12. So far no direct communication between the three buildings has been found. They were bounded by a street to the north but extend well beyond the excavation area to the south. Only the eastern side of Building B13 was uncovered, the walls extending beneath a thick layer of sand to the west making further excavation difficult. In all the rooms uncovered excavation was continued down to the level of the primary floors, although the many much later pits, which usually were dug to a much greater depth, were also fully excavated.

All the walls, which survived to a maximum height of about 1m, were constructed of mud brick, mainly with courses of one header and one stretcher, although some levelling courses of bricks set on edge at an angle were employed. One section of wall incorporated a horizontal timber and timbers were elsewhere set into the walls at doorways forming thresholds. In the north wall of room I in Building B13 were holes for timber beams running north - south across the room. The level of these is only a little above the primary floor surface in the adjacent room in Building B12. Either these beams were at first floor level in Building B13, which must be on a much lower terrace than B12, or they supported a floor over a cellar. Further excavation within Building B13 should clarify this.

The southern and eastern walls are thicker than the norm and have a battered outer face. It appears that the external



walls of the buildings were founded at a low level and served torevet terraces down the slope towards the south and west. The area within these stout external walls was then infilled with sand and domestic refuse and on this material the internal walls were constructed and the primary floor surfaces, a hard though frequently irregular layer of mud, were laid. In one room the primary floor surface slopes steeply down from the doorway. Later a deposit of domestic refuse was placed on this floor to level it and was sealed by another floor surface. Many of the rubbish deposits, which form thick strata in the rooms, appear to be rich in organic remains.

Among the internal features noted was a rectangular bin delimited by a wall of mud brick, a cylindrical ceramic oven (Plate 2) of a type found the previous season in room II of Building B12 and in rooms VI and XI in Building B5, a large hearth pit in Building B12, room VII, and a number of hearths frequently recognised by the fire-reddening of the mud-brick walls against which they were usually placed. In room XIX of Building B12 were two ovens formed from large pots with ring handles which had been set deeply in the floor and up-ended, their bottoms being removed. The pottery which was recovered in quantity is all of early Kushite date.

At no point was excavation carried below the level of the deeply founded external walls and no structural remains of earlier buildings were revealed. Next season an area in the centre of the large room, Building B12, room VII, will be excavated to a low level in the hope of locating either earlier structures or the natural sand deposits.

There has been extensive destruction of the buildings with



Plate 2. Ceramic oven in room XXI of Building B12.

many pits dug to remove the mud bricks from the walls and there are very large pits dug through the rubbish deposits in many rooms which penetrate into the sand layers on which the primary floors of the buildings are founded. All the pottery from these pits was of the same date as that found elsewhere in these buildings. It may all be residual and hence provide no indication of the date of the extensive robbing activities.

Area A

Excavations were also undertaken at the southern edge of the site. The plan of Building A1 was revealed as well as the street to the north separating it from Building A2, part of Building A3 and an extensive area to the south and south-east.

Building A1 – This was a five-roomed structure (Colour Plate I). Originally it consisted of a range of three rooms, measuring 11 x 4.5m, with each room approximately 3m wide and 2.3m, 3m and 3.5m in length internally. A doorway gave access into the building from the west and there were centrally placed doorways between the rooms. Subsequently the west wall was extensively rebuilt and the doorway narrowed. It was constructed throughout of mud brick with walls *c.* 650mm thick, the south wall having a markedly battered outer face. All the external walls were rendered in a mud plaster and whitewashed. On the north wall in particular the render and the whitewash had been refurbished many times, although no attempt was made to remove the large amounts of wind-blown sand which had built up against the wall, the decorators merely painting the parts of the wall visible above the level of the sand drifts (Colour Plate II).

All the internal faces of the walls were again rendered in mud plaster and painted with polychromatic decoration. Room I at the east end of the building was partly excavated. The painted wall plaster on the south wall in particular was very badly damaged by wind erosion while the north and parts of the east and west walls have suffered from the moisture percolating down through the sand fills from the irrigation channels which cut across the building. Only the upper parts of the surviving paintings were uncovered this season (Colour Plate III). On the east wall is a number of unidentified motifs in yellow, red and blue above what may be a blue and red banded dado. On the north wall at its west end are preserved the ankles and feet of a figure wearing elaborate yellow sandals (Colour Plate V), clearly a royal personage advancing towards two bare-footed gods. Among the rubble towards the centre of the room are three large dressed white sandstone blocks, the largest 595 x 483 x 304mm in size. The two which were largely exposed fit together and bear cartouches of the Kushite king Taharqo² providing a date for the use if not the construction of the building in the earlier part of the 7th century BC. A piece of what may be a cornice block was also noted. All these may be part of an altar which will have stood in the centre of the room.

Within the doorway between rooms I and II lying at an

² Provisional reading by Dr Alexey Vinogradov.

angle among the rubble was a fragment of painted plaster which had presumably adorned the lintel. It bears a representation of a winged sundisk flanked by uraei in red, yellow and blue paint (Colour Plate VI). The extremely fragile nature of this piece, which is over 500mm in length, and the poor condition of the paintings adhering to the walls forced the abandonment of the excavations of the three painted rooms. Excavation will be continued next season when a qualified conservator can be present on site.

At a later period a room was added onto the south side of rooms II and III. This room, room IV was entered by a narrow doorway, with a timber doorjamb, which had been cut through the south wall of room II. Like the external faces of the walls of the original building those of room IV had been plastered and whitewashed. However, internally its walls had not been rendered and plastered allowing its excavation to be undertaken. The walls stood to a height of a little over 1m above the primary floor, which, over the eastern side of the room, was of mud brick. To the west this floor sloped down and was covered by layers of mud with pottery, bone and beads within it; this was not fully excavated this season. The walls of room V were then constructed abutting onto the west wall of room IV. They were founded at a higher level than those of room IV and were built on a layer of rubbish material containing mud bungs, sand and pottery which was observed extending outside the room to the south. A doorway, cut through the west wall of room IV, provided the only means of access into the room. In the doorway a step two courses high marked the transition in level between the primary floors in the two rooms. In the south-west corner of the room was a cylindrical ceramic oven.

As layers of rubbish material built up within these rooms hearths indicate that they were utilised as living surfaces. In room V several pots appear to be set into a floor level (Colour Plate IV) while in room IV four ceramic platters were stacked against one wall. A little above the primary floor in room IV, close to the centre of the east wall, a large piece of white sandstone window grill pierced by a lattice of square holes was found and another lay immediately outside and half way along the north wall of room V.

Contemporary with the use of rooms IV and V is what appears to be the top flight of a mud-brick staircase giving access down into the original building whose floor must by that stage have been well below the level of the exterior ground surface. Immediately to the south of this step was a single roughly hewn column drum and two dressed blocks, one bearing a graffito or mason's mark, were found close by.

Both rooms IV and V were filled with wind-blown sand, some rubble and rubbish deposits which had been tipped into the rooms from outside the building and from room II. From within these rubbish deposits, and also from within the similar deposits immediately outside the building, many mud sealings were found impressed with seals (Plate 3), among them one possibly recording the titles of the Kushite king Aspelta.³ These extensive rubbish deposits also contained a



Plate 3. Mud sealing with seal impression.

mass of pottery including bread cones, very large numbers of mud bungs and several hundred faience, ostrich eggshell and stone beads (Plate 4). A faience plaque, 63 x 53 x 9mm in size, bearing representations of nine *udjat* eyes (Colour Plate IX), was also found here, and ivory plaques with a representation of the god Bes and another with the head of a ram with sundisk came from the vicinity (Plates 5 and 6). Part of a decorated cup of glazed composition (Plate 7) came from within room IV.



Plate 4. Rubbish deposit adjacent to Building A1.

Within the rubbish deposits in room IV was found a large fragment of a ceramic statue of Bes, the companion figure to the Beset statue which was found immediately outside the east wall of the room on the exterior of the building (Colour Plates VII and VIII). The Bes fragment consists of the

³ Provisional reading by Dr Alexey Vinogradov.

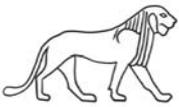


Plate 5. Ivory plaque with a representation of Bes.

whole of the face minus one ear, part of the headdress and the upper torso. Most of the Beset statue was found in the previous season in the upcast from a very recent robber pit (Welsby 1998, 19). This pit was dug into a large rubbish dump against the exterior face of the south wall of the building suggesting that the statue had already been discarded by the inhabitants of the building while the structure was still in use.



Plate 6. Ivory plaque with a ram's head crowned with a sundisk.

Although in plan the building has nothing in common with Kushite temples elsewhere, the fine quality wall paintings and the artefacts recovered from it suggest that it was a religious monument.

An extensive system of irrigation channels cuts through the building and had caused some damage to the wall tops. The date of this system is unclear but may be associated with the post-medieval occupation (site Q4) noted to the south of the Kushite town during the NDRS project, occupation

associated with smoking pipes of mid 19th century and possibly earlier date.

Building A2 – The south wall of this building was utilised to delimit the excavation area to the north. It was constructed throughout of horizontal courses of mud brick and stood in excess of 1m high. It was pierced by a doorway at its west end.



Plate 7. Sherd from a glazed composition cup decorated with figures in relief.

Building A3 – Only a small part of this structure lies within the excavation area. It appears to have predated the construction of Building A1 and may have been partly demolished when the latter structure was built. One wall has collapsed and approximately 15 courses could be recognised among the rubble.

The cemetery

Five graves, all of which have been robbed to a greater or lesser degree, were excavated in the eastern cemetery, site R18.

R18(485) - A tumulus covered by brown quartzite pebbles and ferruginous sandstone fragments. The grave pit proved extremely difficult to locate as it was dug into very fine silver sand. However, the robber pit fill, containing many mud bricks presumably from the blocking wall used to seal the burial chamber, was observed. The grave itself was not located.

R18(533) - The grave is marked by a square mastaba, 2.7m in size, constructed from large irregular pieces of ferruginous sandstone. Access to the tomb was via a long descender with a flight of 14 steps to the east (Plate 8). The robber pit was dug into the fill of the descender with a steep flight of six narrow steps cut to facilitate entry into the tomb. This pit had filled with clean wind-blown sand. The tomb was found to have been totally destroyed by the robbers whose

pit had penetrated right through the floor of the tomb chamber removing virtually all of it. It is most likely that the chamber was rather small and perhaps circular or oval with maximum dimensions only slightly larger than the width of the descandary. Only a small amount of pottery and human skeletal material survived, none *in situ*.

R18(561) – Prior to excavation this tomb appeared to be marked on the surface by a low tumulus covered in brown quartzite pebbles into which a robber pit had clearly been dug. However excavation rapidly demonstrated that the ‘tumulus’ was actually upcast from the robber pit, most of



Plate 8. Tomb R18(533). The descandary and tomb monument looking west.

it deposited on the south side of the pit, while what little remained of the tomb monument lay to the west. The well preserved tomb was originally marked on the surface by a small mud-brick structure, presumably a mastaba or a pyramid, of which only one corner survived. The tomb had been used on three occasions but the robbers had only penetrated as far as the latest burial. The primary burial had been much disturbed by the secondary interment at which time all the bones had been stacked along the south side of the chamber. The chamber had been closed by a mud-brick blocking

wall of which only one course remained. The secondary burial, an extended inhumation laid east-west with the head to the west, was placed on the floor of the original chamber although the blocking wall, again of mud bricks, was set on a thin layer of earth (Plate 9). The tertiary burial was at a much higher level in the chamber and its blocking wall of mud brick sat on a layer of earth approximately 500mm above the remains of that of the preceding period. The latest burial was much disturbed but appears to have been the only one to have been accompanied by a pottery vessel. A small number of sherds were recovered from the fills of the earlier burials but not enough to suggest that complete vessels had been included among the tomb contents.

During the survey of the cemetery in 1993 a large area towards the centre had been noted where grave monuments were very scarce. During this season the reason for this became apparent. Large numbers of graves were noted in this area where extensive deflation had removed whatever tomb monuments there may have been along with much of the original ground surface. Well over 20 graves with descendaries were recorded as well as a few ‘slot’ graves, and one of each type was excavated. All had been robbed.

R18(1052) – A long narrow slot with rounded ends with a



Plate 9. Tomb R18(561). The mud-brick blocking wall.



Plate II. Kawa. The north wall of Building A1 showing the numerous phases of mbitenwasing.

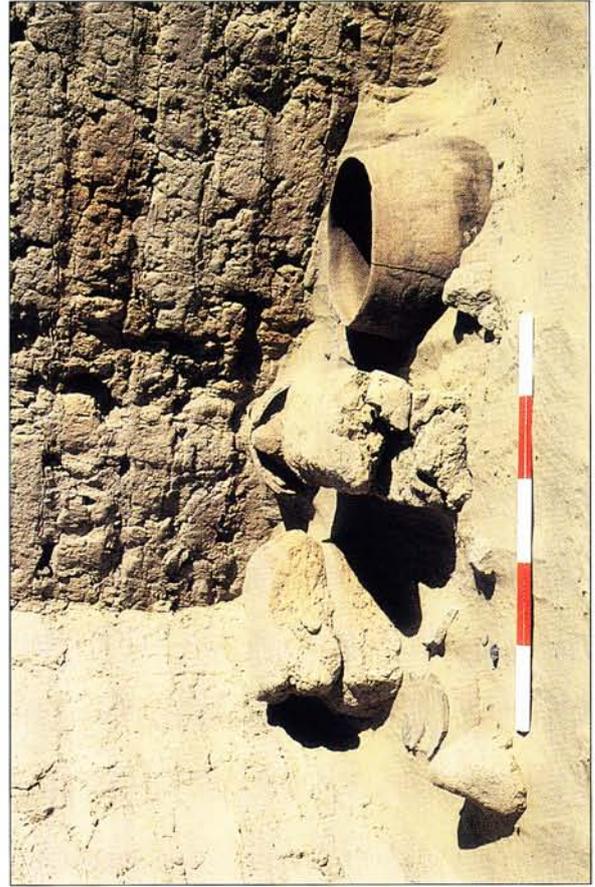


Plate IV. Kawa. A hearth in Room V of Building A1.

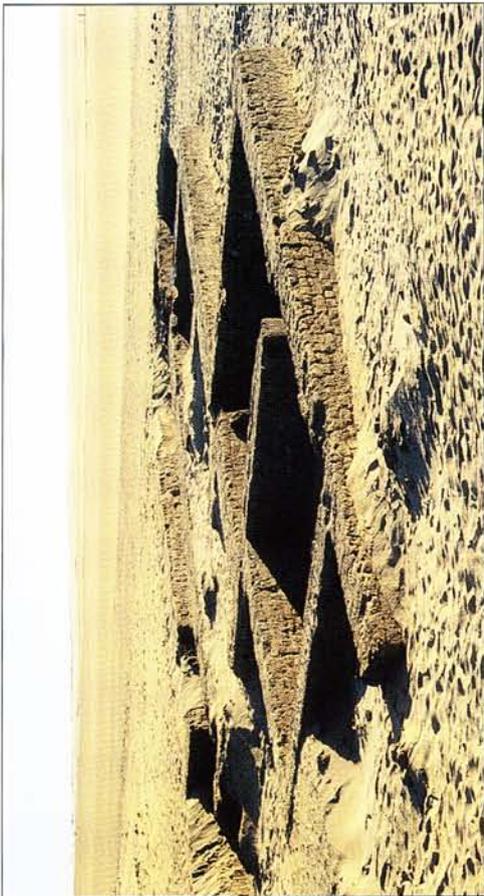


Plate I. Kawa. General view of Building A1 looking north east.

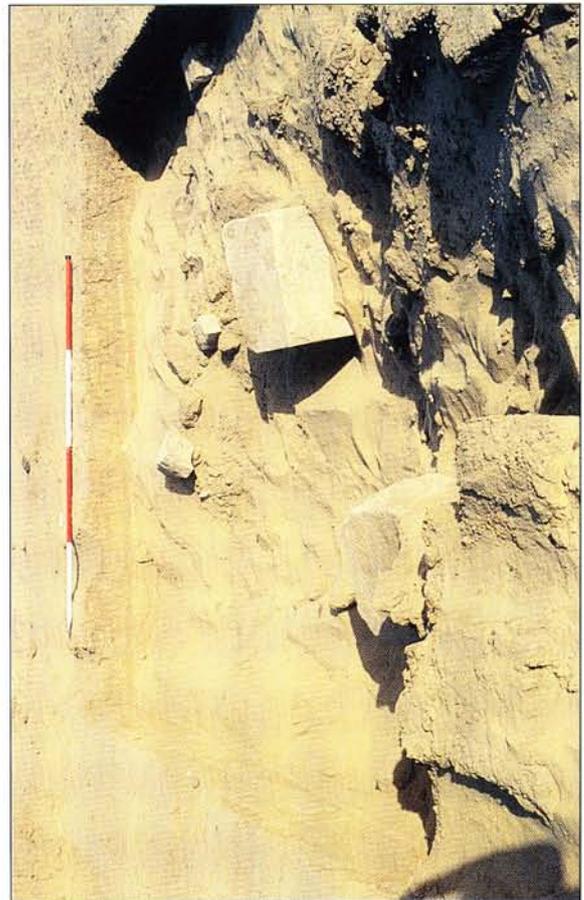


Plate III. Kawa. Room 1 in building A1 looking east.



Plate V. Kawa. Wall painting of the feet and sandals of a king on the north wall of Room 1 in Building A1.

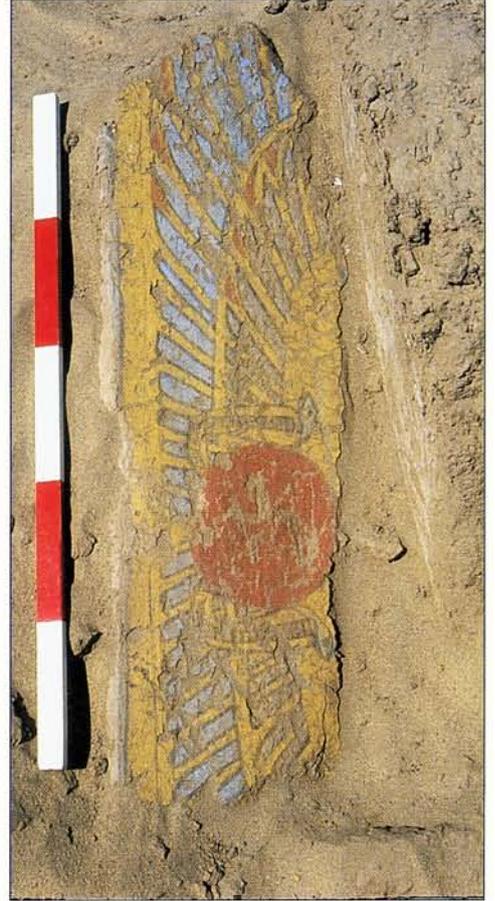


Plate VI. Kawa. Wall painting on a fallen lintel in the doorway between Rooms I and II in Building A1.

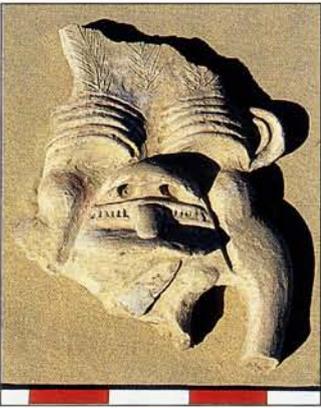


Plate VII. Kawa. Ceramic statue of Bes from Building A1.



Plate VIII. Kawa. Ceramic statue of Beset from Building A1.



Plate IX. Kawa. Glazed composition plaque decorated with udjat eyes from a rubbish deposit immediately adjacent to Building A1.



long narrow side niche on its north side within which the body was laid in an extended position with the head to the west (Plate 10). The head and upper body had been disturbed by robbers. The side niche had been closed by mud bricks. No grave goods were found.

R18(1055) – owing to the amount of deflation only a short descendary was preserved and the *intrados* of the vault of the chamber was very close to the present ground surface. No steps were found in the descendary, it was rather a sloping ramp. The single inhumation was extended east-west with the head to the east. No grave goods were found.



Plate 10. Tomb R18(1052) looking west.

A total of six ‘funerary loci’ have now been investigated within the eastern cemetery at Kawa containing 11 individual burials. Only one grave can at present be closely dated, one of the secondary burials R18(5)7, which contained pottery of late Kushite date (Salih 1994, 29). What is noteworthy is the range of diversity in the graves excavated so far. This together with the difficulty of dating the graves owing to the lack of associated artefacts makes it premature to discuss further Kushite burial practices at Kawa.

Acknowledgements

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