

SUDAN & NUBIA

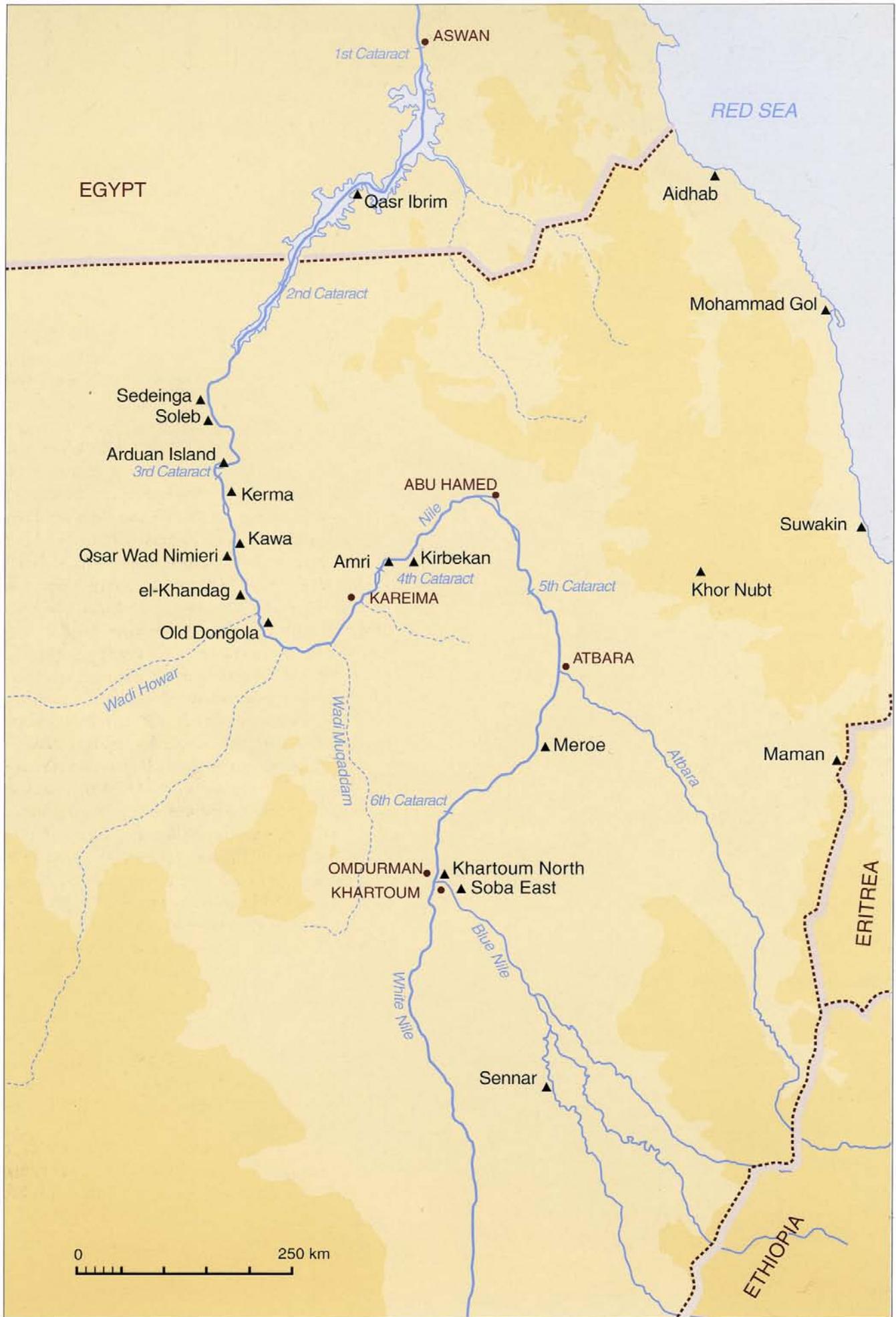
The Sudan Archaeological Research Society



Bulletin No. 4

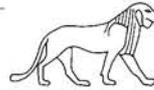
2000





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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).

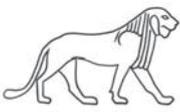
Introduction

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.



Archaeological Survey in the Fifth Cataract Region

Yousif M. El-Amin and David N. Edwards

Introduction

The progress of systematic field survey in Upper Nubia/central Sudan has recently made important advances, with a number of projects currently exploring substantial areas of the Dongola Reach (e.g. Welsby 1996; Zurawski 1998) and the Fourth Cataract-Abu Hamed Reach (e.g. El-Tayeb 1998; Paner 1998). Rescue-oriented work has also recently been completed along the line of the new highway linking Khartoum and Atbara (Mallinson *et al* 1996; Edwards 1998). As was apparent from a review of the published sources a decade ago (Edwards 1989), although a significant list of archaeological sites could be assembled in these areas, the information available was of often very variable quality and many major gaps remain where several areas are still almost entirely unknown archaeologically. Such new work has major potential for enhancing our knowledge of the settlement archaeology of riverine central and northern Sudan. With the accelerating development and expansion of settlements, agriculture and infrastructure and the erosion of archaeological resources which this entails, the need for such work is also becoming increasingly urgent.

One area which archaeologically still remains largely unknown is the region downstream of Atbara, extending north to the river bend at Abu Hamed. Until very recently, the only significant fieldwork carried out in this region was that of O. G. S. Crawford, who made a brief reconnaissance through the region in 1951-2, recording a number of sites and drawing together the records made by several early travellers and others (1953a; 1953b). However, while no major projects have subsequently been carried out in the region, the University of Khartoum was active in the region for several years, in training projects for students. This work produced some published studies (e.g. Sid Ahmed 1971; Kleppe 1982; Eisa 1995) as well as unpublished work, in the form of student dissertations. One of these (El-Amin 1971), by the principal author, forms the basis of this article. In view of the limited published information available relating to this region and the new work currently underway in the Atbara-Abu Hamed Reach, at Kurgus and Dangeil, it seems particularly timely to publish the substantive core of that project with some additional commentary, drawing on the results of research in the intervening years. Acknowledgements are due for the encouragement and advice from the late Bryan Haycock with the original field project, to the staff of the History Department and Abbas Sid Ahmed and Khidir Adam Eisa who were also involved in the fieldwork.

Topography and Place-names

The survey region lies astride the extended Fifth Cataract of the Nile, representing a relatively barren and broken landscape with numerous islands (Fig. 1). Cultivation in the region has been restricted to relatively small areas, with a few localities (e.g. Abidiya, Bauga, Fitwar and Abu Qurun) having greater resources of arable land. The west bank is the most productive as the east bank tends to be rockier and, in many areas, suffers from encroaching sand dunes. While there are many islands, most are very rocky and barren and offer very limited possibilities for agriculture, largely only on their margins following the fall of the Nile flood. Few fertile alluvial islands are found in the region, although Fitwar Island is one, which was largely eroded away during the 1950s-60s, although it was re-emerging some 15 years later. The lower parts of many of the islands have tended to carry a dense cover of bushes and scrub and have a reputation for being insect-ridden.

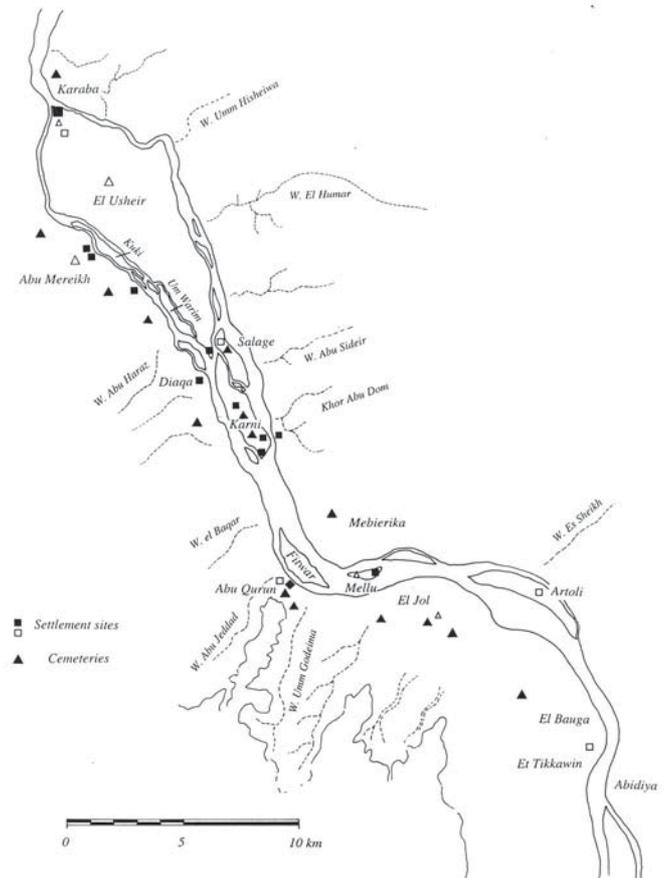


Figure 1. Map of Fifth Cataract area with the main sites.

Date palms are found in some areas, but they are relatively unproductive and, historically, date growing appears to have been less developed than, for example, in the Dongola Reach and northern Nubia. During the early 19th century Burckhardt noted that in Berber dates were scarce and 'a great dainty .. imported by the Dongola merchants from

the Mahass' (1819, 220). The hinterlands to the east and west of the river have traditionally been quite important for both grazing and seasonal cultivation along the wadi systems. The major wadis are the Wadi el Sheikh, Khor Abu Dom, Wadi Abu Sideir, Wadi Umm Hisheiwa on the east bank and the Wadi El Baqar, Wadi Abu Jeddad, Wadi Abu Haraz and Wadi Abu Mereikh on the west.

With its relatively barren and inhospitable landscape, the cataract region has remained thinly inhabited into recent times. Local centres lie at Bauga and Abidiya, with other significant villages at Fitwar and Abu Qurun on the west bank and Karaba on the east bank, the latter rising to prominence only in the 20th century as a railway station. The islands are very thinly populated and even large examples like El Usheir, most of which consisted of barren rock, have supported only small communities in recent centuries. Smaller islands such as Salage, near Karni, supported a population of about 15 during the late 1960s.

The modern population of the region is quite heterogeneous and while dominated by groups of 'Arab' ancestry, these incorporate people of varied origins. The main 'tribal' groups are the Mirafab on the east bank and the Inqerriab on the west bank, while some Rubatab and Manasir also live in the area. Some oral traditions also suggest that Beja groups who settled in the area during the 18th and 19th centuries now call themselves Rubatab or Mirafab. Although we lack detailed research into the social history of this region, complex origins for these modern social groups seem likely with such 'ethnic' identities being essentially social constructs, constantly being reworked and developing through time (Jones 1997). The bases for the extant genealogies (*Nisbas*), with their emphasis on 'Arab' origins, clearly merit further critical analysis. It may be hoped that archaeology can also be brought to bear on issues of ethnic and cultural identities through a careful study of both ancient and modern material culture (El-Amin 1999, 1-3).

The Mirafab, described by Burckhardt as 'partly shepherds and partly cultivators', dominated this region at the beginning of the 19th century, having had their own 'Mek' during the Funj period and a further minor 'chief' at Qoz, in Ras el Wadi to the south of Berber. The 'Meks' owed allegiance to the Sultans of Sennar and it is said that Mek Nur el Din received the regalia: 'the Kaker and Um Gereinat' (Shogier 1967, 426). Relations with the Rubatab to the north were traditionally poor and raiding and warfare are reputed to have been common. The Inqerriab formed the major group on the west bank of the Nile, from Bauga northwards. By the 1960s they were predominantly farmers. Some genealogies link them with the Abdallab of Qerri, and Inqayr was reputedly one of the nine sons of Abdalla Gamaa. The 'tribe' does not appear to have had its own Mek during the Funj period. The Rubatab lie to the north of the region and the traditional boundary was situated at Karaba. A relatively small group of Manasir is centred at Berti.

With regard to the long term settlement history of the

region, it is noteworthy that some place-names in the region appear to be of non-Arabic origin. Some place-names, for example those of islands such as Artoli, Mellu, Karni, Salage and Kuki, appear likely to be 'Nubian'. However, assuming, as is likely, that a form of Nubian was spoken in this region in the medieval period, it is certainly possible that it differed significantly from the medieval Nubian of the north, and indeed the languages still spoken in northern Sudan. In view of this, while it seems likely that 'Nubian' strata of place names survive in this area, much more systematic research such as that carried-out in the Batn el Hajar and Third Cataract region (Bell 1969; Hashim and Bell 2000) is still required to determine the extent and nature of non-Arabic toponyms and develop their potential for elucidating the history of the region.

Archaeological Sites

Fieldwork in 1971 provided an opportunity to carry out a reconnaissance of the cataract region, exploring both banks of the river and most of the islands. The main sites identified are briefly discussed here with measured sketch plans. As was apparent at the time many sites were fast being eroded by expanding settlements, agriculture and quarrying for soil and stone and some may already have been destroyed. It is hoped that exact GPS coordinates for the sites may be obtained by further survey work in this area in the not too distant future.

Et Tikkawin

Situated to the south of El Bauga, this settlement site extends over c. 300m x 150m, marked by broken red bricks and small quantities of sherds. It had been substantially robbed since it was visited by Crawford (1953b, 11-12). No diagnostic pottery was noted, although Crawford suggested there was Meroitic pottery present, and whether it is a Meroitic or medieval site remains uncertain.

Artoli

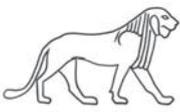
On the seasonal island of Artoli, Crawford reported a large rectangular enclosure which he attributed to the 'Funj' period or more recent times (1953b, 8). This was not located in 1971, although scatters of medieval pottery and red-brick rubble were noted in the area.

El Jol

Located c. 2km west of El Jol village was a large cemetery area with tumuli and rectangular Christian medieval graves, previously seen by Crawford (1953b, 12). The tumuli/cairns lie mainly along a low ridge with medieval graves closer to the river.

Um Buwa

A cemetery with both tumuli and rectangular Christian medieval graves, some 500m downstream of the El Jol cemetery. Some Christian graves cut into earlier tumuli. Some of the superstructures of the Christian graves were well-pre-



served standing c. 1m high.

Gezira Mellu

A rocky granite island marking the upstream end of the Fifth Cataract. Reached by boat from near Mebierika. Near the east end of the island was a large enclosure built of rough stone, measuring c. 170 x 90m, with walls surviving in places to 2m high (Fig. 2). The walls were discontinuous and parts of the east and west sides were defined by natural rock faces. No internal structures were visible and its date remains uncertain. At the highest point of the island (Benchmark 416) traces of a medieval Christian settlement were noted, with remnants of upstanding mud-brick walls and surface sherds recorded.

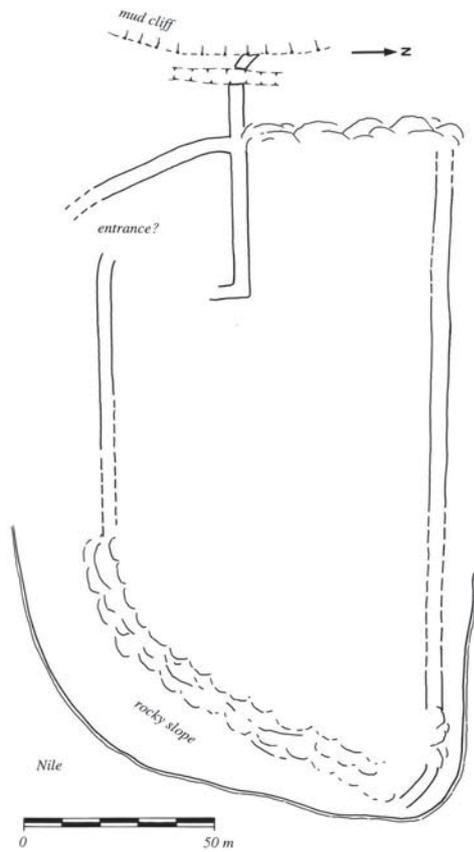


Figure 2. Enclosure at east end of Mellu island.

Near the west end of the island, a Christian medieval cemetery with east-west oriented grave superstructures was identified. A small stone-walled enclosure lay beside the cemetery. The cemetery was much damaged by stone robbing. Similar structures were reputedly demolished around 1960.

Abu Qurun area

There are several tumulus cemeteries in the area. West of Fitwar village and north of the main cemetery are the remains of a stone and red-brick structure, apparently the remains of a church, called *Gunter* locally. The rectangular structure was not surveyed. Some 50m away lies a Christian medieval cemetery with c. 30 graves, with substantial stone

superstructures. Further tumulus graves lies closeby. In Abu Gurun village was another cemetery extending over an area of c. 300m x 200m. Some graves had red-brick superstructures and are probably of medieval Christian date. Some intact bricks measured 33 x 17 x 7cm.

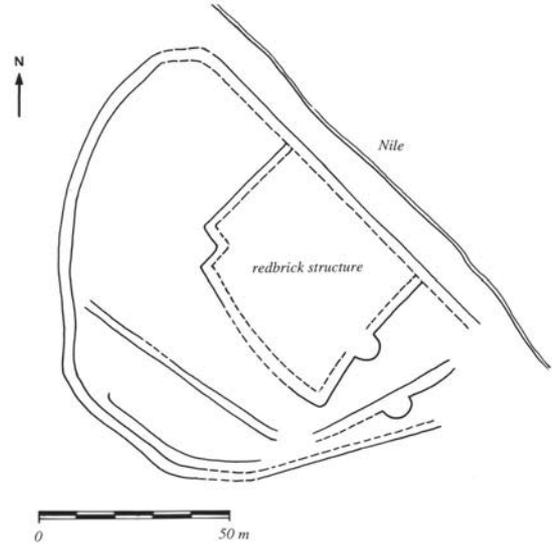


Figure 3. Fortified site at Abu Qurun.

This cemetery lies close to the large 'castle' of Abu Qurun, situated close to the river bank (Fig. 3). This comprises a large enclosure with a number of internal structures. The riverside wall is c. 108m long and up to 3m wide and was quite well preserved. In the highest part of the enclosure were the remains of a large red-brick structure, built against the riverside wall. The site is likely to be a medieval structure. Between the enclosure and the cemetery was situated a substantial settlement area, almost entirely destroyed by agricultural expansion during the 1960s. Only some surface spreads of a few red bricks and sherds survived.

Diaqa

A large fortified site located c. 100m from the river at Diaqa village. The subrectangular enclosure measured a maximum of 80 x 65m, with additional walls probably extending as far

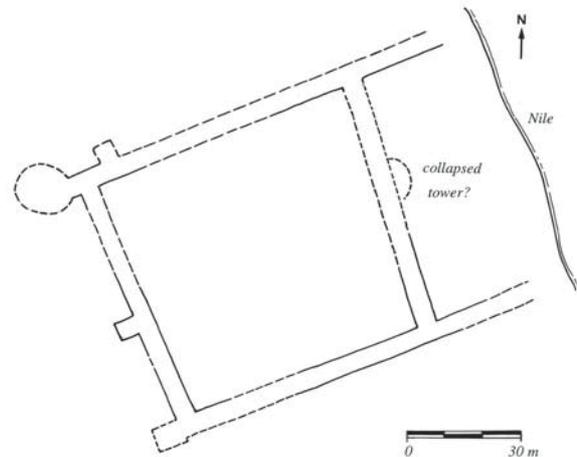


Figure 4. Fortified site at Diaqa.

as the river bank (Fig. 4). The stone walls were up to 5m thick and there were three towers on the west wall. No up-standing internal structures survived but there was abundant surface pottery.

Mebeirika

On the east bank, a tumulus cemetery was noted northwest of Mebeirika village (also known as Gananita).

Gezira Karni

A large island with relatively abundant agricultural land. Near the southeast end of the island are some red-brick structures noted by Linant de Bellefonds in 1822 at the start of the major cataract area, "la cataracte de l'Ane" (1958, 155). The first structure appears to have been a small red-brick tower measuring c. 3 x 3.5m, made of bricks 29 x 14 x 7cm in size. A little to the south of the tower is a further mound of stone and red brick, possibly a large tomb. Below these is a large red-brick and stone structure at the river edge. Partly in the river, the structure appears to represent some form of quay or jetty. The date of the structure remains unclear but predates the 19th century. It may well relate to the large fortified site opposite on the east bank (see below). The construction of such paired sites on both banks of the river is not uncommon in the cataract regions and may be compared to the two fortified sites near the upper end of the Fourth Cataract at Kelidob (Titherington 1939) and at Mugur-Marakol in the middle of the Third Cataract (Edwards and Osman 2000).

Near the south end of the island is a large irregular fortified enclosure bounded by a *chor* on one side and the river on another (Fig. 5). The north wall is c. 63m long with a central tower, and 2m thick, built of mud brick and stone. Most of the internal walls are mud brick with a stone outer facing. The west wall is c. 36m long and c.2m wide with a large circular tower at the southwest corner. In the southeast wall is the remains of a gateway leading towards the river.

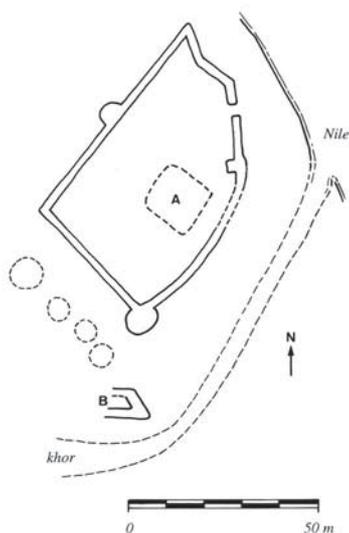


Figure 5. Fortified site at south end of Karni island.

The remains of at least one large structure built of stone and redbrick lie within the enclosure walls (Fig. 5, area A). The ruins of four subcircular buildings lie outside the southwest side of the structure as well as some additional walls (of a tower?) of which no coherent plan could be made (Fig. 5, area B). A large cemetery lies to the northwest of the fortified site, in an area of black rocks, the graves having rectangular stone superstructures. The site had been heavily robbed for stone but some 70 graves survived in the late 1960s.

A church was located c. 2-3km northwest of the fortified site on top of a rocky plateau. Roughly rectangular, measuring c. 12 x 10m with walls c. 1m thick (Fig. 6), the building was constructed from bricks and stone, but little of the internal features were visible on the surface. The walls were heavily eroded and survived no more than 30cm high. A gap in the south wall may be an original door. To the east of the church was a deep cutting into the rock leading down to the river. Its purpose remains uncertain. A further cemetery of tumulus/cairns was situated c. 50m from the church.

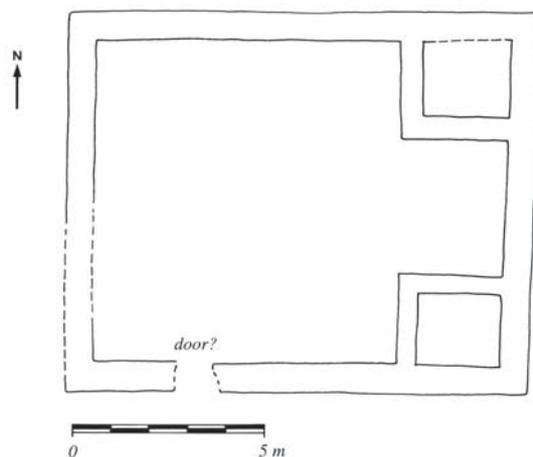
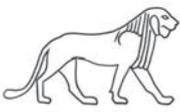


Figure 6. Church on Karni island.

Gezira Salage

This island is accessible at low river from Karni. By the early 1970s its population was very small. On the east side of the island on a rocky hillock is a medieval Christian cemetery of 40-50 graves with superstructures measuring c. 2.5 x 1m. Some medieval Christian pottery was found in the area. A small tower lies close to the cemetery.

Cemeteries are quite numerous on the west bank, continuing the extensive spread found north of Bauga. The first encountered are between Diaqa and Umm Warim island, near El Usheir, and include groups of medieval Christian graves, in clusters of 40-50, some with quite well-preserved superstructures. Near Umm Warim, inland from the cultivated areas, is a cemetery of tumulus graves with associated medieval Christian rectangular tombs. Another cemetery of large tumuli lies north of Wadi Abu Haraz at Fungoka. A cluster of medieval Christian graves lies near the centre of this cemetery.



Abu Mereikh

Three enclosed/fortified sites lie close together at Abu Mereikh, opposite the island of Kuki.

Site A is a small trapezoidal stone enclosure measuring c. 30m x 20m with walls c. 2m thick. Rubble collapse at the southern corner may indicate a small tower but this could not be confirmed. The walls had largely collapsed and no entrance could be located. No traces of internal structures were found and its date remains uncertain.

Site B: located c. 3km north of Site A is a similar enclosure measuring c. 100 x 70m (Fig. 7). The north and west walls only survive as foundations amongst collapsed rubble with indications of an interval tower in the centre of the west wall and a further one the southwest corner. A water channel cut across the northwest part of the site has removed substantial parts of the site. The foundations of a rectangular stone structure measuring c. 30 x 22m were noted in the northwestern part of the enclosure (Fig. 7, area A).

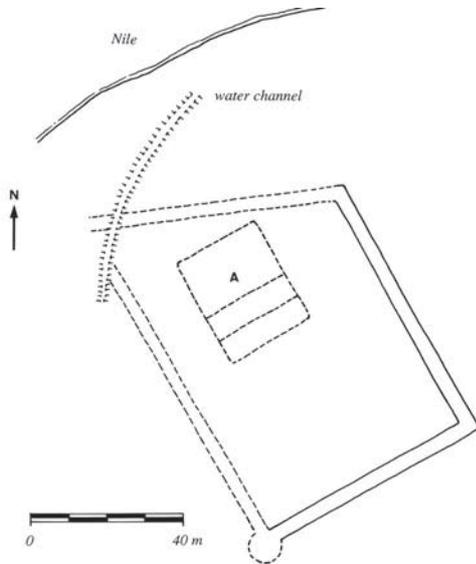


Figure 7. Fortified site at Abu Mereikh (B)

Site C: located c. 150m northwest of Site B, another poorly preserved subrectangular enclosure close to the river bank. It measured c. 48 x 36m with a rectangular tower in the north wall and collapsed towers in three corners (Fig. 8). No traces of brick or stone structures were identified within the enclosure.

Some 3km north of the tumuli at Fungoka, a large medieval Christian cemetery of c. 150 tombs lies close to the Abu Mereikh enclosures. The rectangular graves superstructures, made of black stone rubble, stand up to 0.5m high. An Islamic cemetery lies on lower ground below this site.

El Usheir Island

The island appears in 19th century travellers' accounts, named 'Dregeh' by Cailliaud (1826, vol III, 180) and 'Dricki' by Linant de Bellefonds (1958, 70). The name does not appear to be currently used. This large island is very barren and

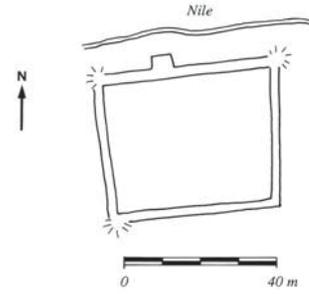


Figure 8. Fortified site at Abu Mereikh (C)

rocky. The presence of ancient sites at the south end of the island was reported to O.G.S. Crawford in 1952 but he was unable to visit them (1953a, 20, n.11). Access to the south end is difficult and is most easily reached via the island of Salage. A large fortified site was found there, located on raised ground overlooking the islands of Salage and Karni (Fig. 9). Constructed mainly of large stone blocks, some mud brick and red brick are also used in its construction, forming an enclosure c. 70 x 60m.

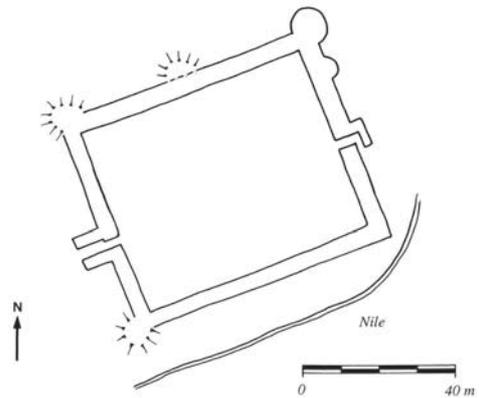


Figure 9. Fortified site at south end of El Usheir island.

The second major fortified site on the island is located on the east side of the north end. This was noted by Linant de Bellefonds (1958, 70) and recorded by Crawford who published a plan (1953a, 20-21). The complex included two large enclosures with a further less well preserved one on the west side. At the north end of the site, a red-brick platform (Fig. 10, area A) with stone walls extends to the river edge, providing access to the water, Crawford's 'brick wharf' (1953a, fig. 4). As noted by Crawford the quantities of red-brick rubble mark the presence of internal structures, especially in the southern enclosure. Surface sherds included much medieval Christian material.

The 'Mosque', a near square red-brick structure c.180m south of the castle, was identified as a Church by Crawford (1953a, 20, pl. XII-XIII). With walls c. 12.6m long and nine cylindrical piers supporting the roof, the structure has an entrance in the south wall. Most of the bricks measure 22 x 11 x 4cm. The identification of this structure as a church remains open to question, and, as Adams noted, if such is the case, it would be unique in Nubia (1965, 88).

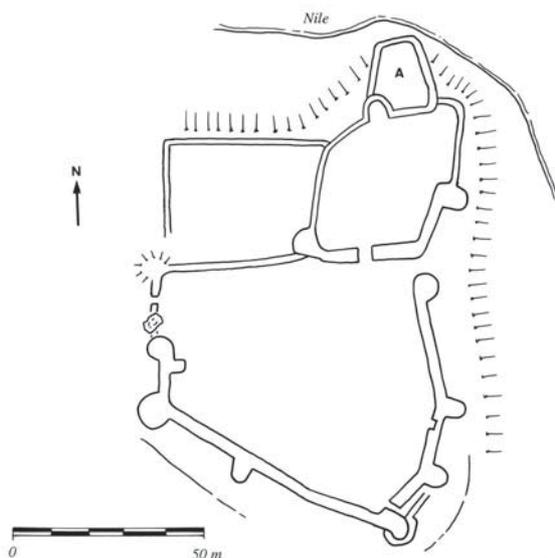


Figure 10. Fortified site at northeast end of El Usheir island.

The presence of numerous Muslim graves in the vicinity and local traditions which record its use as a Mosque and an association with a fekki called 'El Deqair' suggest Crawford's interpretation of the site may be wrong.

On the island a large cemetery was located on the plateau near the centre of the island, north of Hamadab. It includes c. 150 graves of medieval Christian type, with raised rectangular stone superstructures as well as c. 70 Islamic graves, some with similar superstructures. The second cemetery site lies close to the northern castle with c. 50 graves of medieval Christian type as well as many small mound graves, of unknown date. Some graves were marked by red-brick rubble and fragments of white plaster.

Cemetery sites on the east bank appear rare, the main example being a large tumulus cemetery c. 200m north of Karaba station. Here, some of the gravel mounds are edged with stones. The cemetery has c. 100 graves, many of which have been heavily disturbed, in some cases exposing elements of mud-brick substructures.

Rock Drawings

A small number of rock drawing sites have been identified and, as in the other cataract regions of northern Sudan, with their abundant exposed rock faces they are likely to be quite numerous here. Drawings are reported near the church at Abu Qurun which appear to be of relatively recent date and associated with Arabic inscriptions. On El Usheir, a substantial group was found on Jebel Kuluwa near Hamadab. These include drawings of bovines and camels, human figures and crosses. The bovines include examples with both long and short horns and the 'closed-horn' type.

Conclusions

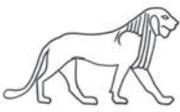
It is hoped that the results of this preliminary survey of the region provide some useful pointers for future work and some

indication of the range of sites encountered in this region. One prominent feature of the area is the numerous tumulus/cairn cemeteries found on the west bank. These are likely to be largely of broadly post-Meroitic date. However, it should be noted that while such burial forms are generally associated with the period of the 4th-6th centuries AD, both earlier and later occurrences of such burial forms are possible. The results of investigations of cairn burials in the Shendi Reach by Lenoble (1987) suggest that cairn burials may be encountered in many periods. While it seems likely that many found in this region are 'post-Meroitic', it may also be premature to assume that these necessarily predate the traditional date of the 'official' conversion of Nubia to Christianity in the mid-late 6th century. We have as yet no direct evidence for when Christianity made a significant impact in this region and, as was recently demonstrated at Gabati, forms of tumulus burial survived until at least the late 7th century. On current evidence, it is certainly possible that pre-Christian burial practices may have survived for a considerable period in many areas of southern Nubia (Edwards 1998).

Despite Crawford's suggestion that some cemeteries might date to the Meroitic period (1953b, 11), this remains to be confirmed and indeed the extent to which this region may have been settled during the Meroitic period remains far from clear. A substantial Meroitic centre existed at Dangeil on the east bank a little to the south of Abidiya. However, north of that point we as yet have no indications of a significant Kushite presence along the river between the Fifth and Fourth Cataracts. In view of the generally inhospitable and marginal character of much of the Abu Hamed-Atbara region, and especially the cataract zone itself, such limited occupation may not be surprising. However, with our very meagre knowledge of the character and density of Meroitic settlement even in the core regions of the kingdom close to Meroe (Edwards 1999) it may be premature to infer too much from the limited evidence at our disposal.

In contrast to the limited evidence for a Meroitic presence, here, as further north, there appears to have been extensive medieval occupation, marked by substantial fortified/enclosed sites, cemeteries, churches and more ephemeral surface remains. Many of the enclosed/fortified sites appear to be of medieval date and have much in common with similar sites identified further downstream towards Abu Hamed and beyond (Crawford 1953a;1953b; Eisa 1995; Welsby-Sjöström 1998). At present, further interpretation of such sites remains difficult in the absence of more detailed information from excavations or systematic surface surveys.

Resolving many key questions concerning the long-term settlement history of the region will require more detailed dating evidence. In particular, it remains to be seen whether such medieval settlements originated in earlier periods or whether they represent new foundations. In relation to broader issues concerning the extent of the Makurian and Alodian (Alwan) political and/or cultural influences on this



region, there is as yet little hard evidence. The historical sources provide us with little information on the extent of these two kingdoms or their internal organisation. However, in view of the common identification by previous researchers of 'Christian' pottery in this area (as well as in the Abu Hamed Reach further north), we may infer that the more readily identifiable types of wheel-made decorated wares typical of the Dongola Reach were being found, rather than the wares of the Alodian (Alwa) heartlands, only well-documented from recent excavations at Soba (Welsby and Daniels 1989; Welsby 1998). The extent to which there may also have developed distinctive regional forms of material culture in this area during the later medieval period is certainly worthy of further study in view of historical references to the 'kingdom' of al-Abwab in this region (discussed by Ahmed al-Mutassim as cited in Eisa 1995, 56).

The late and post-medieval history of the region and its material culture still remains poorly understood and, as elsewhere in the central Sudan, systematic studies of the archaeology of the 'Funj/Islamic' period have yet to begin. While references to 'Funj' pottery are not uncommon in the literature, no significant groups of post-medieval pottery from central Sudan have yet been published and such references must be treated with caution. In this region, the situation may be particularly complex due to the likely coexistence of local riverine cultural traditions, 'Funj' influences from the south and cultural traditions originating to the east of the Nile, among 'Beja' groups moving between the Red Sea Hills and the Nile. A hint of such interactions was recently found at Gabati, south of the Atbara, where a small group of pottery was identified, tentatively dated to the end of the first millennium AD, which has many similarities with material found in the northern Red Sea Hills (Edwards 1998, 208-9). In view of the close links between the Rubatab and Beja in recent centuries, considerable diversity in material culture cannot be discounted. Here, as elsewhere, local histories are likely to have been complex and progress in understanding general processes of, for example, 'Islamicisation' and 'Arabisation' will need to be balanced by a concern for, and understanding of, the local and regional historical context. Future fieldwork, both archaeological and historical, in this region and areas to the north will hopefully begin to provide a basis for such studies.

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