

# SUDAN & NUBIA

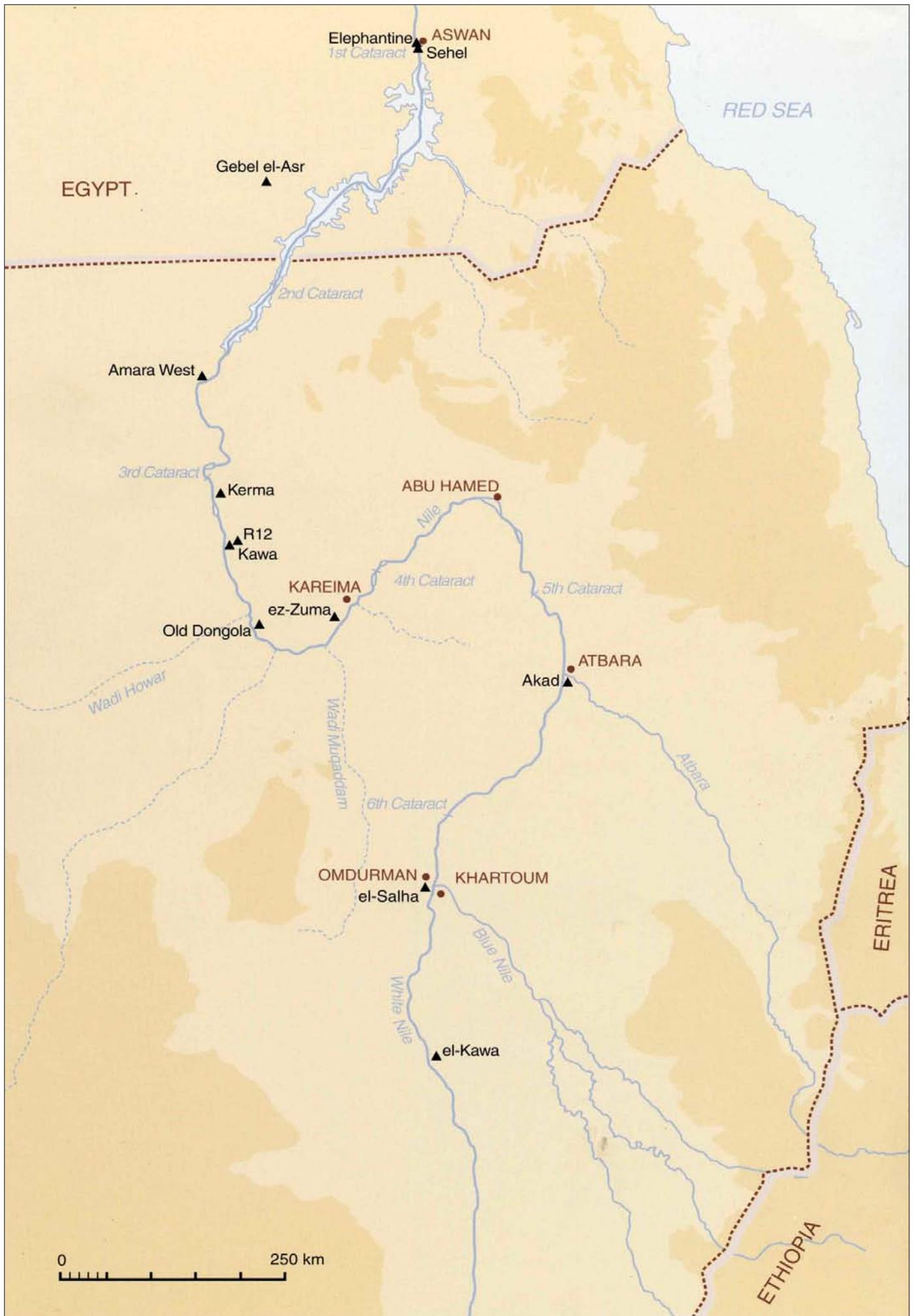
The Sudan Archaeological Research Society



*Bulletin No. 6*

2002





# SUDAN & NUBIA

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*Front Cover:* An apostle from the mural in the chapel at Baganarti containing the king's portrait.

## Introduction

*Vivian Davies*

At the time of writing (mid-September 2002), the 10<sup>th</sup> International Conference for Nubian Studies has just finished, generously hosted by colleagues in the Università di Roma "La Sapienza". The large number of papers delivered shows how rapidly the subject of Middle Nile studies is growing, with significant advances in knowledge achieved since the last conference held in Boston four years ago, an encouraging state of affairs, to which the content of this present volume bears further witness. There was, however, one hugely important issue which overshadowed the event: the looming crisis of the new dam at the Fourth Cataract.

As reported by the Sudanese delegation, preparatory work for the dam has now begun and actual building will start in two years. It is expected to take a further seven years to complete. In an unwelcome echo of the Aswan High Dam scheme, the reservoir created will flood over 170km of the Nile Valley between the Fourth Cataract and Abu Hamed, enveloping, as we now know from preliminary surveys, thousands of archaeological sites - artefact scatters, settlements, cemeteries and rock-drawings dating from the Palaeolithic to the Islamic Periods. Very little is known about these sites; for the most part only that they exist. Our Sudanese colleagues are urgently appealing for assistance, so that as much as possible of the record may be investigated and documented before the area is lost to knowledge for ever. In response, SARS is this winter launching a campaign of rescue excavation in a region which we recently surveyed (see *Sudan & Nubia* 4 [2000], 51-7), but an extensive international effort will be required if any serious impact is to be made. Our next international colloquium, to be held at the British Museum on 8 May 2003, will focus on the dam emergency. All colleagues with an interest in helping are invited to attend.

## Survey and Excavations between Old Dongola and ez-Zuma

*Bogdan Żurawski*

The Polish Joint Archaeological Expedition to the Middle Nile (also known as the Southern Dongola Reach Survey = SDRS) is organised jointly by the Research Centre for Mediterranean Archaeology of the Polish Academy of Sciences and the National Corporation for Antiquities and Museums (NCAM). These two institutions were (and are) being helped in this ambitious task by the Michalowski Centre for Mediterranean Archaeology in Cairo and Poznan Archaeological Museum. Nicolas Copernicus University in Torun and Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw have also contributed to the project. After five field seasons completed so far, more than 900 sites ranging from the Middle Palaeolithic to the present day have been registered, documented, drawn, photographed (aerial photographs included), sampled, GPS-positioned and mapped. Below I would like to present some of the highlights of the SDRS with the stress put on the achievements of the last (2002) season.

The SDRS concession encompasses the right bank of the Nile between Old Dongola and Khor Mahafour upstream from Bakheit fortress. According to the agreement with NCAM the strip extending on average 2km from the river was to be surveyed. In 2000 the right bank from Mahafour to ez-Zuma, including the tumuli field, was added to the survey area (Figure 1). However, our fieldwork there was limited.

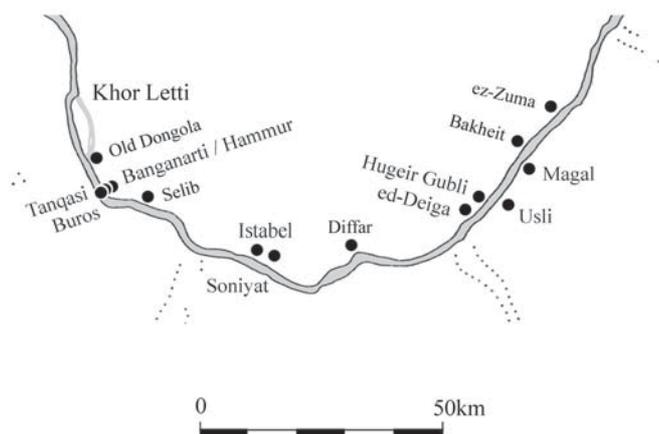


Figure 1. The SDRS concession.

The SDRS team was also active outside the concession area. Our “external” activities were in all cases limited to aerial photography. With permission from NCAM and the missions who hold the relevant concessions, and assisted by the favourable northern wind, we succeeded in taking a series

of low-altitude vertical aerial photographs of Kerma, the el-Ghazali monastery, the Kassinger and Jebel Kulgeil tumuli fields, the *khazna* in Merowe, as well as Old Dongola and its surroundings.

Throughout the historical period, and probably in earlier times, the Southern Dongola Reach served as an important connection linking the caravan routes going to the Red Sea with Wadi Howar, the main thoroughfare to the heartland of Africa. Whereas the role played by the region under consideration in the transmission of culture and trading of goods from north to south (and vice versa) is meagre, its importance in building the east-west trade and culture network is tremendous.

The Southern Dongola Reach is the most productive and well populated region of the Northern Sudan with agri- and horticulture centred on the fertile islands and in the basins formed by the river’s defunct palaeochannels. Farming, pottery production, trade, husbandry and horse breeding were the most important factors stimulating its political importance.

In 1997, when the SDRS began, the Southern Dongola Reach was a high priority region for archaeological research. The lack of interest shown by archaeologists in this region which was the cradle of the Kushite empire and the heartland of the mighty kingdom of Makuria, as well as a nucleus of the Shaykiya Nile dominion, prior to 1997 was surprising.<sup>1</sup> Consequently one of the main questions facing the SDRS, apart from reconstructing a settlement pattern, was to provide a satisfactory answer to the following question: what were the factors that elevated the tribes inhabiting the Southern Dongola Reach to supremacy in the Middle Nile Valley and, as was the case of the Kushites, extending well beyond that region? Was it the early domestication of horses and subsequent mastery in cavalry tactics? Was it the agriculture and economic wealth of the fertile region, or perhaps a cultural stimulus received from the East? Last, but by no means least, migrations from the Arabian Peninsula, the latest of which, a transfer of the Rashayda tribe in 1847, should also be taken into consideration.

Among the many scholarly conclusions of the archaeological surveys and excavations undertaken in the Southern Dongola Reach by the Canadians, Poles and Sudanese, there

<sup>1</sup> The enormous efforts of the Canadian, British and Polish missions have now brought this task almost to completion. However, the left bank of the Nile from ed-Debba to Merowe and beyond still remains uninvestigated. The archaeological reconnaissance of the Southern Dongola Reach was initiated in 1976 when N. B. Millet, A. J. Mills and A. L. Hollett sailed from ed-Debba to el-Khandak (Grzymalski 1987, 5). While no systematic survey of the study area as a whole have been undertaken until 1997, some historical monuments are known from travellers’ reports and several archaeological sites have come to light due to the research conducted in the northern part of the region under consideration by the Canadian Dongola Reach Survey directed by K. Grzymalski. I had the pleasure to participate in that undertaking.



is one that confirms the value and accuracy of written sources as a sound basis for archaeological hermeneutics. The sometimes doubtful reputation of the literary testimonies was repudiated and their historical value corroborated as a result of fieldwork conducted in the region. The Canadian work in Khor Letti corroborated Ibn Selim al-Aswani's report on the hinterland of Old Dongola during the 10<sup>th</sup> century (in Vantini 1975, 606). Some of the villages, churches, monasteries and beautiful buildings seen by al-Aswani in Letti were brought to light (Grzymalski 1987, 3).

The Southern Dongola Reach has also made a modest contribution in proving the exactness of Pliny's report in respect of Tergedus, which was found exactly where it should be according to the measurements taken by Nero's centurions either in AD 63 or 67 or both (Żurawski 1998, 74-81). Even the poor reputation of Evliya Çelebi is considerably enhanced since his descriptions of the fortified settlements of Old Dongola, Abkur, Tankasi and Diffar appear to contain a "grain of truth". The SDRS research in the region has corroborated (to some extent) Evliya's adventurous narrative.

The most important outcome of the three seasons of the SDRS was the archaeological corroboration of the "literary

every god, giving rewards to the prophets and [pri]ests of every temple-compound at which he arrived. Every district was in a state of rejoicing on meeting, shouting, thanking god, and bowing down."

(FHN I, 34, 219-220)

However, until 1997 the "temple-compounds" visited by Anlamani and other Kushite kings on the way from Napata to Kawa were seen as only a literary fiction.

The discovery by the SDRS team of three of "the missing temples of Kush" has corroborated the value of the written sources thus bringing to a close the age-old controversy concerning the settlement pattern in the Southern Dongola Reach in Napatan times.

### *Old Dongola*

However, the first sites of importance upstream from Old Dongola sondaged by the SDRS team were Christian. They are situated within the so-called "outer enclosure of Old Dongola" (= SDRS *Old Dongola 23*, N 18° 13' 04.13" E 30° 44' 51.89")<sup>2</sup>, a fortification encompassing the southern suburbs of the Makurian capital (Colour plates XL-XLI, Plate 1). The sondages that provided a cross-section of the girdle



Plate 1. Oblique aerial photographs showing the Old Dongola 23 site.

attested settlement pattern" to be found in Kushite written sources; Irike-Amannote's inscription from Years 1-2 (FHN II, 71), the Annals of Harsiyotef (FHN II, 78), the Stela of Nastasen (FHN II, 84) and most importantly Anlamani's Enthronement Stela.

The well known passage in the Anlamani Stela contains a description of his journey from Napata to Kawa in c. 623 BC (Welsby 1996, 207):

"He sailed northwards in the second month of Winter (re)founding each district, doing good for

wall and the adjacent strata provided ambiguous results as might be expected from a site that was probably built in the Early Christian period and continued in use until the fall of Christian Dongola and even thereafter.

The sondages excavated during the 2002 season resulted in the discovery and partial exploration of the EC Church

<sup>2</sup> The GPS coordinates (as above) mark exactly the place where the curtain wall joins the river. Originally the wall in question encompassed the whole of the so-called Abandoned Village of el-Ghaddar. It is lost among the cliffs to the east of the Mosque Building.

(= SDRS *Old Dongola 13*, N 18° 13' 08.14" E 30° 44' 56.82"). Simultaneously, some structures within the Outer Enclosure were investigated and duly assigned to the Transitional/ Early Christian Period.

The wall, as seen on the oblique air photographs on Plate 1 and Colour plate XLI, abuts onto the most important cemetery in the Sudan, namely the famous *gubbab* field of Old Dongola (= SDRS *Old Dongola 30*, N 18° 13' 26.01" E 30° 45' 11.83"), where the *shuyukh* who preached Islam in the region of Old Dongola after the fall of the centralised Christian kingdom of Makuria were buried. In 1672/73 Evliya Çelebi (Prokosch 1994, 153-154) prayed at the grave of *Sheykh* Gulammulla, whose *gubba* still stands there.

Thanks to the aerial photographs and the land survey, the latter limited to the extreme edges of the cemetery on account of its sacral character, we successfully registered all the funerary monuments there. It must be said that some of the earliest Christian graves in the region were accidentally found, and some interesting Early Christian ceramics were recovered by the locals while digging the modern graves.

### *Hammur Abbasiya*

The first rescue excavations were conducted in January 1998, on the tumuli field situated within the modern village of Hammur Abbasiya (= SDRS *Hammur 2*, N 18° 10' 50.4" E 30° 46' 57.7"). The four most endangered tumuli have been excavated *in toto*. The most interesting results have been obtained while excavating the tumulus designated no. 4, the largest of the group (19m in diameter)<sup>3</sup> situated in the northern part of the cemetery. Its main burial chamber was closed with huge bricks 50 x 25cm in size, that seem to have been the standard building material in the Transitional and Early Christian period.<sup>4</sup> Near the head of the secondary burial, apparently inhumed during the Transitional Period, an Early Christian metoped bowl, of Dongolese manufacture, was found (Colour plate XLII). The tunnel it was buried in, presumably that made by the tomb robbers, was entered via an elaborate access shaft lined, in the uppermost part, with stones. According to the excavator, Dr Mahmoud el-Tayeb, the Christian burial was ostentatiously placed in the tomb of his/her pagan forefathers. It provides a link between the pagan tumuli field of Hammur and the nearby Christian site of utmost importance to the Makurian kingship and Nubian Christianity, namely that of Banganarti (*vide infra*).

The fieldwork of the next seasons gave some corroboration to this thesis. The excavation of Banganarti supported the earlier hypothesis that in Hammur were buried the local post-Meroitic chieftains in the 5<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> centuries AD. The graveyard was also used in the Transitional period and later. In the Early Christian period the cemetery extended southwards and eventually spilled over onto the island where a Christian royal necropolis was inaugurated in the 6<sup>th</sup> century and con-

tinued in use until the fall of the Kingdom of Makuria in the late 14<sup>th</sup> century.

Excavations in Hammur produced a rich inventory of iron objects such as spear heads c. 60cm long, similar to the examples from el-Hobagi and Ballana. The analogies with Ballana and Qustul material are many. A copper-alloy lion figure that appears to be made of brass, being either a part of horse bit or casket fitting, makes a perfect analogy to the identical objects known from Qustul.<sup>5</sup> A similar clasp was found, possibly imported, in Aksum.<sup>6</sup>

### *Banganarti (Sinada)*

The Hammur tumuli field is separated from Banganarti (= SDRS *Banganarti 1*, N 18° 10' 00.4" E 30° 47' 04.8") by a defunct Nile channel that today is densely planted with date palms. Banganarti means in Nubian "Locust Island" and, as the name suggests, was an island before the northern channel was sanded up during the last 200 years.

The immediate surroundings of the main *kom* are also known as Sinada after the first Shayqiya settler there. The fortified *kom* of Banganarti once sat on the river bank at the mouth of the *wadi* that still becomes partly submerged during a high Nile flood. (The last time the Nile entered Khor Jerf al-Mardi was in 1994, when part of Hammur Abbasiya village that lies on both banks of the *khor* was destroyed).

The site was briefly visited by the SDRS team in 1998, when some aerial photographs were taken and a sample of surface potsherds was collected. Surface clearing and limited scale sondaging in 2001 were followed by full-scale excavations in 2002 (Colour plate XLIII).

The soundings and excavations revealed a sub-rectangle, c. 80 x 100m, enclosure defended by a mud-brick curtain wall provided with circular angle towers and a tower-gate on the south side. The curtain wall, c. 3m thick, was constructed of enormous bricks ranging between 48 and 50cm in length.

The original nucleus (Early Christian cemetery) in the 6<sup>th</sup> - 7<sup>th</sup> century, which was sealed below the later mausoleum-church, was not fortified but was protected only by a Nile channel. Neither was it defended when the first mausoleum-church was erected. Evidence from the foundation courses indicate that this occurred not earlier than the 9<sup>th</sup> century. It was eventually turned into a stronghold probably as late as the 11<sup>th</sup> or even 12<sup>th</sup> century *pari passu* with the construction of the second mausoleum-church above the first one, which was dismantled to ground level. This church, set in the centre of the enclosure, was a perfect square 25m in size (Figure 2). The layout is based on the principle of a cruciform structure arranged around four supports composed of two engaged columns and a pillar. On three sides it is surrounded by a system of chapel-like spaces, the seven chapels built along the eastern wall terminating in apses. There were also a pair of *pastoforia*. On the sides it was surrounded by a

<sup>3</sup> The largest mounds in the cemetery attained a diameter of 30m.

<sup>4</sup> The excavations on the nearby site of Banganarti (*vide infra*) proved that 50 x 25cm sized bricks were used as late as the 11<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>5</sup> Török 1988, 161, Pl. 49. object no. 105 and Pl 55, object No. 48; Emery and Kirwan 1938, II. Pl. 59 (Q. 3-93).

<sup>6</sup> I owe this information to Dr Jacke Phillips.

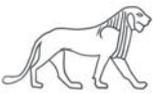


Figure 2. Plan of the mausoleum-church at Banganarti.

portico. In the 12<sup>th</sup> century the phase II mausoleum-church was embellished with its first layer of murals. After the remodelling of the second church's layout in the 13<sup>th</sup> or even 14<sup>th</sup> century another layer of murals was superimposed over parts of the earlier decoration. The diagnostic features of a church are present: a main entrance in the western side, with subsidiary, parallel entrances in the side walls; a central apse at the east end provided with an altar; a passage behind the row of apses; and the high standard of red-brick masonry with abundant use of well-worked stone suggests that it was a church. Nevertheless, it is the most bizarre church in Nubia, unparalleled in the vast repertory of Nubian churches. The quality of the red-brick masonry of the mausoleum-church, and of the murals, places it amongst the masterpieces of Nubian art and architecture.

The church seems to have been the only substantial structure within the fortifications for most of its history.<sup>7</sup> Other

<sup>7</sup> The only other substantial building, apart from the Western Annexe, is an extramural compound resembling a *ksenodocheion*, with latrine, refectory-like space and courtyard situated outside the eastern wall of the enclosure. The communication of the would-be hostel with the space *intra muros* was provided by means of stairs negotiating the wall that was approximately 4-5m high in this point.

structures, the so-called Western Annexe being the most important, were added at a very late period. The *kom* that covers the church is devoid of any substantial quantity of potsherds. However, a very dense ceramic scatter extends between the *kom* itself and the girdle walls.

A sondage dug in the eastern part of the church in February 2001 revealed the upper part of four paintings. The style of the murals and the palaeography of the numerous graffiti and inscriptions (Greek and Old Nubian) place them firmly into the 12<sup>th</sup> century.

To the first decoration of the mausoleum-church belongs the superb portrait of a Nubian king under the holy patronage of the archangel, and surrounded by the apostles (Figures 3 and 4, Colour plates XLIV-XLV). Its upper part was revealed in March 2001 and promptly reburied in sand. The king wears a crown (only a tiny fragment above the right ear survives), while holding a horned headgear in the left hand and a golden sceptre in the right hand.

The archangel (Raphael?),<sup>8</sup> standing behind, hands the king an object that is conventionally called a church-model.

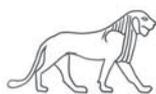
<sup>8</sup> He is frequently referred to in inscriptions. Also the main inscription in the central apse contains an invocation to him.



Figure 3. Ink copy of the mural representing a Nubian king flanked by the apostles.



Figure 4. Ink copy of the mural representing a Nubian king, detail.



However, since it looks more like a chapel-shaped object with the front fitted with glass and a guilloche pattern running along its four sides (a rather unusual feature in church building) it could better be identified as a reliquary. It was a standard convention in the Christian East to give reliquaries the shape of a church or chapel (cf. e.g., Bréhier 1936, Pl. LVIII; I, II, 88).

However, the most interesting regalia is the sceptre which the king holds in his right hand. It is a golden (rendered with yellow paint) column topped with a capital, on which sits a figure of Jesus Christ with a golden cross behind (Colour plate XLV).

This sceptre deserves a brief note since it is important evidence in a long standing debate on the *archistylus* office in the Nubian Church. It seems to end the controversy concerning the curious nomenclature of the 11<sup>th</sup> century archbishop Georgios of Dongola, who is named (among other epithets) *archistyslos*. The discussion began on the discovery of some inscriptions in Old Dongola referring to the unknown office or honorific title of *archistylus*. I have argued on several occasions that the *archistylus* was a name for the bearer of the *stylus*, that is a sceptre in the shape of a column. Accordingly the golden columnar sceptre with a cross and Jesus Christ sitting on the capital should be understood as an attribute of the metropolitan bishop of Makuria. Significantly enough the columnar sceptre is also shown in the hands of other rulers depicted on the walls of the Banganarti chapels.

This priestly attribute in the hand of a Makurian king is the best illustration of the Abu Makarrem statement (after John the Deacon) on Nubian kingship. He wrote before 1200 that:

“The land of Nubia is under the jurisdiction of the see of Saint Mark the Evangelist, which consecrates their bishops for them; and their liturgy and prayers are in Greek. The number of kings in Nubia is thirteen and all these rule the land, under the supremacy of Cyriacus, the Great King; and all of them are priests, and celebrate the liturgy within the sanctuary, as long as they reign without killing a man with their own hands; but if a king kills a man, he may no longer celebrate the liturgy.”

(in Vantini 1975, 333)

In the lowermost section of the king's portrait exposed in 2001 we noticed a most bizarre figure of a bird sitting on an object that was still at that time buried in sand. The problem was finally solved in March 2002. The chapel was excavated to the pavement level and the figure was exposed and restored by a team of three restorers from Poland.

The bird in question appeared to be seated on the right horn of the Nubian horned headgear, elaborately carved and topped with a cross. Whether it was paralleled by a similar emblem on the left is unknown since the left horn is concealed behind a sceptre which the king holds in his right hand.

The ruler, if the identification is correct, is depicted as priest-king, the overlord of the Nubian church and the earthly monarch, according to the Byzantine conception of the monarch who is the providential ruler chosen by God. Such a concept is well attested by written sources. It must be noted that the individuals buried in the tombs below the chapels (*vide infra*) are referred to as *hierei* that is (pagan) priests much in accordance with early Byzantine royal titulary (Treitinger 1938, 124 n. 2).

The mural shown on Colour plate XLVI belongs to the last portraits, dating probably to the 13<sup>th</sup> century or later. Curiously enough he has a sort of badge, sewn on the royal cloak at chest level. It is the latest known Nubian version of a Byzantine *tablion*, which was in Nubia, as well as in Byzantium, a mark of the highest civilian status.

The iconographical scheme of most of the murals so far unearthed appears to be homogenous: the ruler with regalia, clad in elaborate robes of honour, under the holy patronage of archangel Raphael (?), flanked by six apostles on each side.

Banganarti lies only 9km from Old Dongola. However, the contemporary murals from there are significantly different. They seem to represent a different *milieu*, dare I say, royal not monastic. The first and most important difference is the concern for the third dimension. The unknown master, provisionally labeled “the master of Sinada”, was obsessed with the three-dimensional treatment of the human figures. He used abundant shading techniques and applied various methods to render the spherical aspect of the forehead and face. In the apostles' heads he tried to achieve this by circular brush strokes applied to the foreheads and shading along the cheeks (Front Cover, Colour plate XLVII). As compared to the rather flat paintings in Old Dongola and elsewhere in Nubia it marks a significant innovation comparable, however, with the general technique of Byzantine portraiture of the 12<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>9</sup>

The central apse arrangement is also most unique. The representations of the apostles are set in six intercolumnia, two in each (Colour plate XLVIII). The ruler under the protection of archangel Raphael is painted in the central intercolumnium (it was repainted at least twice). His portrait seems to be the latest mural executed at Banganarti, belonging to the late 13<sup>th</sup> century at the earliest (the 14<sup>th</sup> century is more likely). The state of repair of some of the murals is lamentable, due to their exposure to the elements after the collapse of the vaults (rain being the most destructive factor).

The murals, inscriptions and the unique quality of architecture elevate Banganarti to the rank of one of the most important sites in the Middle Nile. However, the tremendous historical import of Banganarti comes from the plethora of inscriptions that are on every patch of plaster not covered by murals (Colour plate XLIX). Banganarti must have

<sup>9</sup> E.g. Evangelist Paulos' portrait on the eastern wall of the southern transept in Capella Palatina in Palermo (Tronzo 1997, Fig. 5).

been one of the most important pilgrimage centres in the Nile valley. The graffiti of the visitors were put on the walls in their hundreds; most were done by local scribes on behalf of illiterate visitors, then covered with a lime wash and scratched again.

The typical formula runs as here in an inscription on the late extension of the central apse's southern pillar (in the lowermost section, on the left) (Colour plate XLIX):

Emou Ampapa,  
Papas Athanasios  
*Thegna Grapson*.<sup>10</sup>

I, Ampapa, thegna of the patriarch (?)  
Athanasios, written.

The inscription is ambiguous since *papas* in Nubian is a bishop and in Greek a patriarch. The inscription in question is Greek but with a considerable admixture of Old Nubian. Whether the *papas* Athanasios is Athanasios III, the Coptic patriarch reigning eleven years from 1250 to 1261 (Maspero 1923, 376) or a local bishop of Makuria remains an open question. He could be also bishop Athanasios, the predecessor of bishop Timotheos on the episcopal throne in Qasr Ibrim and Faras (Plumley 1975, 4, 18, 35). It is worth mentioning here that Timotheos, a Nubian by race, was ordained in AD 1371-2 (Plumley 1975, 23) as a bishop of Nubia as well.<sup>11</sup> The place where the inscription was written is strongly suggestive of a very late date, possibly mid-14<sup>th</sup> century. It also remains a mystery what were the duties of the *thegna* that occurs several times in the Banganarti inscriptions (*vide infra*).

The Banganarti inscriptions are rich in onomastic and prosographic data.<sup>12</sup> The visitors were both ecclesiastics and laity. They were mainly men; however, some women are also on record. The majority of these people bear Nubian names, many of them attested here for the first time (e.g. Dourere, Tounoukout, Eshsham, Tidnoukouta, Lougouarati, Ankaron, Migal and many more). Among the visitors were some prominent people like the Queen Mother (her name was Outage), an archbishop of Dongola named Papi, an archimandrite of a monastery of St. Stephanus, archpriests, archdeacons and *protomeizon*. Several persons bear titles which were unattested hitherto (as mentioned above *thegna* with its derivative *archithegna*, *pared(...)* *dong(...)*, *eipirsil* and many more). The exact meaning of these titles remains unknown, the more so as they are often recorded in an abbreviated version. On the stone arch in the northern part of the building *eipirsil of king*

(*basileus*) *Siti* is mentioned<sup>13</sup> (Siti, king of Dotawo, is known from a Qasr Irim scroll dated to 1334 and from documents found at Edfu dated to 1331 [Munro-Hay 1982-83, 130]). So far it is the latest closely dated inscription from Banganarti and indicates that the site continued as a pilgrimage centre well after the collapse of the central dome, which probably happened during the 13<sup>th</sup> century.

One of the most inspiring inscriptions was painted with black ink on an altar mensa or, more likely, an altar top. It was found reused in the late pavement of the northern *pastoforium* that is the *prothesis*. According to the palaeography it should be dated to the second half of the 11<sup>th</sup> century or later. It begins with two quotations from the Gospel of John (3.3) and of Mathew (18.3) followed by a liturgical prayer that consists of two parts. In the first it reflects biblical antecedents, namely the miracle of Christ who multiplied loaves and fed the 5000. In its second part it invites the Holy Ghost to appear and to transform the milk and (...) (honey?, the text is mutilated in this place) on the altar into the blood and body of Jesus Christ. Milk was used in very early baptismal liturgies in Egypt and in churches dependent on the Alexandrian Patriarchate (Ethiopia). In the 11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> century Nubia was a living archaism.

The altar was found in a context with some broken amphorae with fitting jar sealings as well as liturgical paraphernalia i.e., chalices, patens and oil lamps. In fact the best ceramics were found in *prothesis*. The pottery chalice and bowl-shaped paten shown in Colour plate L were found in the cache beneath the altar niche's. The jar in Colour plate LI comes from the *diakonikon*.

The 2002 season's excavations could not be concluded without answering the fundamental question: are the chapels provided with kings' portraits mortuary chapels; in other words, were they provided with graves beneath?

To answer this question a sondage was dug in front of the threshold to the chapel (Colour plates LII & LIII) with the magnificent royal portrait among apostles immediately to the south of the central one. The answer came in a most unexpected form. We did not find a crypt but another chapel. It appears that the chapel was built above a lower one that was provided with an arched entrance blocked with red bricks and plastered twice before it was buried in sand and red-brick rubble. Significantly murals were painted after the entrance was blocked. The original chapel seems to have been unplastered as long as its inner space was accessible.

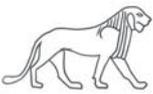
On the first (oldest) layer of plaster covering the western wall of the lower chapel a huge mural representing the saints or apostles in the Faras Style I (White) was painted. The figures were rendered in a less rigid stance than the Faras examples, wearing, however, the same slender black-coloured boots that are a distinctive feature of early Christian painting in Nubia. On the same layer a handful of brief, badly mutilated,

<sup>10</sup> All the inscriptions recored so far have been transcribed and provisionally translated by Dr Adam Łajtar. His publication on the epigraphical material from the first two seasons at Banganarti is forthcoming.

<sup>11</sup> Plumley, 1975, p.18. In the mid-fourteenth century the see of Nubia was limited to the dioceses of Ibrim and Pachoras.

<sup>12</sup> The information on inscriptions has been provided by Dr Adam Łajtar.

<sup>13</sup> King Siti ascended the throne in Dotawo towards the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> century and reigned at least until 1334 (Plumley 1978, 234-235).



Greek inscriptions in black ink were found. Later another layer of plaster was applied and new murals painted. Among them there was a representation perhaps of 'Christ in tondo' with a long inscription in a perfect "Biblical majuscule", which should be dated to the 5<sup>th</sup> - 8<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>14</sup>

It is contemporary with the compact layer of broken ribbed pinkish amphorae (with white painted monograms) that were found at the level of the threshold of the entrance to the lower chapel. Some 600 pieces of *Ware U2, Aswan Byzantine Pink Utility Ware*, were recovered from the almost 4m deep sondage. The main period of their importation to Nubia falls within the period AD 550-850 (Adams 1986, 545).

We have the following sequence of events that took place prior to the close of the 8<sup>th</sup> century, i.e., before the second layer of plaster was applied to the western wall of the lower chapel and the 'Christ in tondo' was painted:

- early 7<sup>th</sup> or even 6<sup>th</sup> century, construction of the lower chapel.
- probably in the 7<sup>th</sup> century, the entrance to the lower chapel was blocked and first layer of murals was executed.

On the basis of the data unearthed so far one should not doubt that the lower chapel was a mortuary chapel which was provided with a shaft (dug into its floor) giving access to the actual burial chamber below. The royal or high-ranking ecclesiastic (?) who was buried here had sat either on a royal or episcopal throne in Old Dongola, probably in the second half of the 6<sup>th</sup> century. He is referred to in a brief invocation in Greek written in black ink on the very first layer of lime plaster covering the lower chapel, as *hiereus*. Two other *hierei* known from Nubia were pagan priests from the period referred to by T. Hägg (1990, 163, 169) as proto-Christian.

Another sondage dug in the eastern passage behind the apses revealed two tomb structures beneath the chapels situated north of the central one. They are of two different types, but both were founded at the level corresponding to that of the lower chapel noted previously. It appears that every upper chapel was constructed above a grave or an earlier mortuary chapel. There were traces of attempts at robbing. All were patiently repaired. The cultural layer at Banganarti is c. 8m thick. It spans from the time when Christianity was introduced into Nubia into the period of the decline and fall of the Christian kingdom of Makuria in the late 14<sup>th</sup> century. It was several times reconstructed and rebuilt after natural disasters caused by the lack of stability of the Nile alluvium subsoil. The first royals, however, were buried in clear sand that must have been brought from elsewhere.

I am confident that Hammur and Banganarti were one traditional burial place since pagan times and that it continued as a royal necropolis after the baptism of the land in the 6<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>14</sup> Dr Adam Izajtar personal communication; on "Biblical majuscule" cf. Cavallo and Maehler 1987, 5. The identification of the figure as Christ is uncertain. It may be a saint (holy bishop) or archbishop.

## Tanqasi Island

According to the letter written in 1742 by the Apostolic Prefect of Upper Egypt addressed to Cardinal Ludovico Belluga there was on Tanqasi island, which lies opposite Banganarti, the remnants of a Christian population as late as 1699 (Giamberardini 1960, 101). The cross on an oven found in one of the modern dwellings on Tanqasi (Plate 2), stone *spolia* from churches scattered among the houses, and a column excavated in the yard of a mosque give some evidence for the long history of Christianity on the island (which nowadays has merged with the east bank of the river).



Plate 2. Modern oven with a decorative cross emblem.

## Buros Island

Between the large Tanqasi Island and the left bank there is the small island of Buros (= *SDRS Buros Gezira 1*, N 18° 07' 92" E 30° 49' 28") Near its southern end two elongated structures known as "the pillars of Buros" protrude from the riverbed (Colour plate LIV). They were first visited and described in 1831 by E. de Cadalvene and J. de Breuvéry (1836, 305). They are constructed of well-fired bricks bonded with lime mortar. Both "pillars" are 8.94m in length and are rounded at upstream ends. That closer to Buros Island is 1m thick, its neighbour is c. 2m thick. They are separated by a 1.6m wide channel. The thicker pillar has a flight of steps cut into the riverward side (60cm wide), near the rounded (i.e., northern) end.

These pillars have no close parallels and their function is unclear. The bridge theory is untenable as no trace of other piers was found. The stairs seen on the face of the higher pillar suggest that it formed a sort of embankment for loading and unloading cargo boats. This theory is plausible, as the Nile here is shallow near the water's edge. That they were part of a *norja* (a water wheel) is precluded since the current

is not swift enough to have turned it. Another possibility is that they were part of a peculiar type of *saqia*. Huge *sagias* in the region of Dongola were drawn by J. G. Wilkinson in 1847. The distance the pillars are separated from the river bank varies each year. In 1998 they were 60m from the shore, in 2000 they almost stood on the riverbank. The pillars cannot be dated as no ceramics used in the mortar were found and the brick sizes are not characteristic of a particular period.

### Selib

Opposite the eastern promontory of Tanqasi Island, on the right bank, is the site of Selib (= SDRS **Selib 11**, N 18° 08' 34.3" E 30° 52' 12.0"). Selib today is a prosperous village with its own *gaffir* of antiquities. The village is proud of its rectangular fortified enclosure, called simply *murabba*. There are many reasons to believe that the structure, sitting centrally within the enclosure walls, but reduced to a line of stones, is a church.<sup>15</sup> The site as seen on kite photograph bears a close analogy to Banganarti and should be identified as a fortified church.

Numerous local oral testimonies circulating among the older generation at Selib concern the graves(?), murals(?) and even sculpture buried within the outer walls of the *murabba*, and the existence of a kind of 'basin' near Selib within living memory. The locals in Selib tell the same story as the inhabitants of Abkur, namely that the Nile passed close by the enclosure and then duly turned south a century or so ago. The Nile now flows c. 1km from the fortified enclosure at Selib.

Upstream from Tanqasi there is the important region of Argi Basin, where huge Neolithic sites were recorded, especially at SDRS **Argi 113**, (N 18° 04' 08.2" E 30° 59' 23.3"). Kerma sites were few, the most important being SDRS **Banganarti 25**, (N 18° 08' 59.0" E 30° 50' 59.5") between Banganarti and Selib.

### Abkur (Istabel)

As the locals say and as Lord Prudhoe wrote in 1837 Abkur (= SDRS **Abkur 83**, N 18° 02' 32.2" E 31° 04' 34.8") was a typical Nubian riverine fortress site. The river channel moved southward, pushed by the dunes some 200 years ago. The last time the river entered the old channel was in 1914.

### Soniyat

Soniyat is situated some 2.25km east (upstream) from Abkur village. This village is of modern date; it is not on the 1954 Sudan Survey Department's air-photographs. The Kushite temple (= SDRS **Tergis 40**, N 18° 01.93' E 31° 05. 98) is

<sup>15</sup> An unpublished ms. kept in the Griffith Institute at Oxford University. Envelope 1 (dated 1910) contains a file, unnumbered and untitled, relating to:

"Christian pottery fragments found on 20/03/1910 in Soleb (Merkaz Debba). The pottery is said to be found at the site of an old church inside a fortress with a stone wall 1 metre thick."

located 600m south of Soniyat village. Originally the river ran closer to the temple than at present. The temple of Soniyat was first mentioned by Prudhoe in 1837 and excavated by the SDRS team between 1997 and 2001. The excavations brought to light a sandstone temple that around the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC was reduced in size and rebuilt in mud brick. The Meroitic sanctuary was constructed with abundant use of mud brick and the old columns were re-erected on the mud-brick pavement.

In 1997 an unexpected discovery was the so-called "Soniyat treasure" found while brushing the wall tops, in a niche in the wall, east of the entrance to the transversal ante-chamber leading to the cella. Curiously enough it was the only place in the unfinished temple where the stones were carefully trimmed and the walls were smoothed with rubbers. Other objects were found near both door-jamb in later seasons. Altogether more than 200 objects were found in this "offering place". The initial deposit found in 1997 consisted of 22 objects including two copper-alloy Osiris figurines, a quartzite celt and a set of bizarre shaped stones. The following year more stones were found, the total being 148. Apart from the natural objects, a range of Kushite amulets, votive figurines and pottery was found in the offering place and elsewhere in the temple. Most important is the bronze *sistrum* (or mirror ?) handle representing a naked female, wearing a broad necklace with a substantial counterweight on the back (Figure 5). On the lintel, which she is supporting with raised arms, sits a figure of a cat.

Another object of highest artistic value is a terracotta portrait head (Colour plate LV), moulded and "sculptured" in wet clay and afterwards fired. There is a hole, made before firing, in the forehead, perhaps to accommodate a metal *uraeus*. Many amulets were found, including a faience pendant decorated with winged serpents, composite creatures and *udjat* eyes (Plate 3). Copper-alloy objects were common. Eight *uraei* (Plates 4 and 5) inlaid with glass paste covered with gesso and gilded were unearthed together with an ample repertory of Osiris figurines (Plate 6). No parallels to the figurine



Plate 3. Faience amulet (SDRS 16/01).

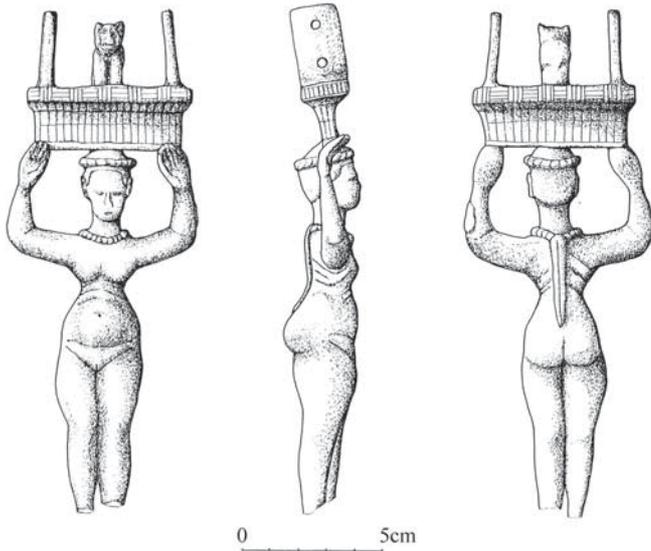
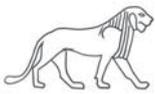


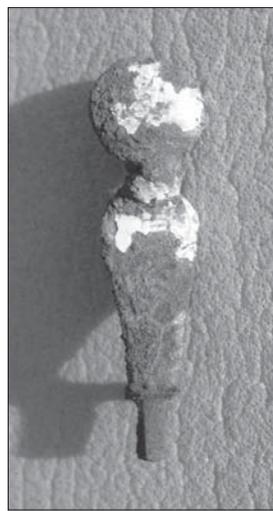
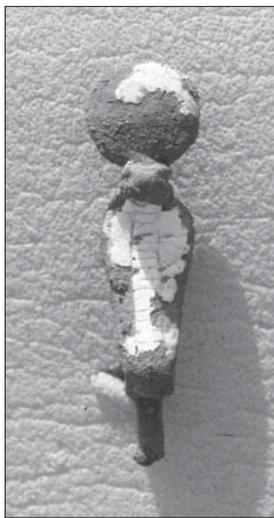
Figure 5. *Sistrum* handle(?) (SDRS 32/98).

representing a sitting male figure are known to the author, although a South Arabian origin is possible. Mixed with the oddly shaped stones, faience amulets and copper-alloy objects were some sherds of Meroitic pottery. The bizarre stone object on Plate 7 may be a gaming-board.

In the southern part of the earlier Kushite temple some huge, reused blocks were found. These *spolia* might originate from a still earlier temple that stood nearby. In 2001 geophysical soundings revealed a rectangular outline resembling a temple around two huge monoliths that we originally had taken for the foundation blocks of a gate. It now looks like an earlier temple stood there, which was totally dismantled except for the largest blocks that were too heavy to move.

### Ed-Diffar

Twenty kilometres up the river from Istabel fortress there is another fortress site at ed-Diffar (= SDRS Ed-Diffar 11, N 18° 02' 12.4" E 31° 17' 39.5"), also known as *Kidjab* or *Kadjub*,



Plates 4 and 5. Copper-alloy uraei (SDRS 23/01 and SDRS 27/01).



Plate 6. Copper-alloy *Oriris* figurines (SDRS 37/98 and SDRS 36/98).

which was photographed from the air and measured in 2000 and sondaged in 2002. It was a fortified city of some importance with a citadel within the girdle walls. The sondage aimed to locate the fortress church, the presence of which was indicated by the ferrocrete capital and a column (Colour plate LVI) visible on the site. However, it brought to light a capital sketched by Wilkinson in 1848 and was thereafter reburied in sand.



Plate 7. Gaming-board (?) from Soniyat temple (SDRS 103/99).

The stretch of the river upstream was particularly heavily fortified due to its exposure to the nomad threat.

### Ed-Deiga

The drystone walled fortress of ed-Deiga (= SDRS Ed-Deiga, N 18° 10' 42.2" E 31° 36' 16.9") once guarded a narrow passage between the *jebel* and the river, hence the name.

It was photographed in 1998 (Colour plate LVII) and drawn in 2000. Fortunately the now destroyed lower section of the girdle wall was well-documented in Wilkinson's drawing of 1848, thus making the reconstruction of its plan possible.

### *Hugeir Gubli*

The distance from ed-Deiga to Hugeir Gubli, the site of the important discovery of a hitherto unknown Kushite temple, is less than 6km. The hamlet of Hugeir, locally called Kerreri, was built partly of *spolia* from a huge sandstone temple (= SDRS **Hugeir 10**, N 18° 14' 40.7" E 31° 38' 31.6") found in the most dilapidated state (the only elements still *in situ* were the blocks that were too heavy to be taken away) concealed within a maze of Hugeir houses, its largest remaining part in the *hosh* (courtyard) of Ali Abd Er Rahim, who seems to be the only private owner of a Kushite temple in the Sudan. Its discovery was a pure accident, since we seldom had a chance to survey inside the private houses. The *hosh* is separated from the river terrace by a dyke constructed during the last record-high Nile flood in 1998. Some blocks bearing traces of polychrome decoration and possibly hieroglyphs were found among the blocks used for constructing the dyke. Column bases were formed of two halves clamped together; one 'half-base' dropped on the embankment approached 2.5m in diameter. The well-worked megalithic foundation blocks of the temple were cut from local sandstone. A 'T'-shaped block forming part of a *naos* measured 2.8 x 2.6m. Its thickness is unknown, as the side wall could not be exposed to a depth greater than 60cm. The blocks were laid directly on bedrock. The unit of measurement employed here seems to be the Egyptian royal cubit. There was no associated ceramic material.

Hugeir Gubli is favourably located at the end of a short-cut across the desert leading to Kawa and Old Dongola. It lies opposite the fertile Nile islands of Masawi and Umm el-Suyuf. This region of great economic importance was guarded at both ends by the two massive fortresses, Bakhit and ed-Deiga, in the Christian period.

### *Usli*

While we were desperately searching for ceramics and stone fragments and other dating elements around the temple we were constantly alarmed with news coming from the other side of the river, where the Gabolab-Merowe road was under construction. The rumours said that stone sculptures were being found by the road builders.

The reconnoitring of the area on the other bank was promptly rewarded with the discovery of another temple of more moderate size but in far better state of preservation. It is situated north of the Muslim cemetery in Usli.

The temple is well-dated by the associated Kushite ceramics with Egyptian Marl Ware imports and huge bread moulds. As at Hugeir Gubli all the sizes of stones, walls and stone drums were multiples of the Egyptian royal cubit.

Column drum diameters and walls widths were 1.05m, blocks were mostly 1.05 x 52.5m. The 'Kushite' statues excavated by the road constructors appear to be of modern date. According to the mixed and contradictory local testimonies they were sculptured 20 or 30 years ago by a villager from Usli. The possible source of the "Master of Usli's" inspiration could be the reliefs and sculptures he had seen in the temple ruins,<sup>16</sup> which is all the more plausible since the temple was quarried for stones into modern times. Some of the column drums reveal traces of reshaping (Plate 8).



Plate 8. Reshaped (?) column drum from Usli temple.

The road construction inflicted serious damage on the tumuli cemetery in Usli (= SDRS **Usli 1**, N 18° 13' 00.1" E 31° 39' 33.5"). The trench dug by Sudantel cut through at least two tumuli chamber graves, totally destroying one and badly damaging the other. We collected cultural material, mostly beads and potsherds, in the debris heap for an entire day. We also drew and photographed the damaged grave. The antiquities (complete jars, Plate 9) were in the possession of a local inhabitant, who willingly handed them to the SDRS team.

Under the circumstances, the NCAM inspector Mahmoud Suleyman decided to conduct a rescue excavation of the endangered tumulus, situated next to a *gahwa* (café), which had already lost its mound. Its subterranean part was invisible. It would probably never have been found except for the excellent memory of the local *gahwa* owner, who remembered the tumulus there. A vast tumuli field in Usli is clearly seen on Sudan Survey Department photographs; all had been erased on the surface by the locals and, more recently, by the road constructors, who used the tumuli as ready-made mounds of gravel and desert clays for levelling-up the road. The rescue operation revealed a *hypogeum* with oval side niche and sub-rectangular entrance shaft. No skeleton was discovered, nor textiles from its shroud or garment. Apparently the corpse had been dragged through an opening in the

<sup>16</sup> A fragment of a leg from a granite statue was found in Usli by the NCAM team in 2000. It is now kept in the Sudan National Museum.

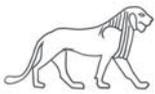


Plate 9. Grave goods (pottery) from a tumulus grave in Usli.



Plate 10. Granite capital from Magal site (Magal10).

chamber blocking made by the robbers. This seems likely considering that the main objective of the robbers was to recover jewellery and the personal adornment that usually decorated the corpse; it was much easier to search the corpse in the open air than in a small, pitch-dark chamber. The grave furnishings were left virtually intact. One pot was found filled with small pebbles; in another, over 500 faience beads were found.

### *Bakhit*

The north-eastern limit of the SDRS concession was guarded by an enormous fortress at Bakhit (Back Cover), locally called Helleila (= SDRS **Bakhit 11**, N 18° 16' 53.6" E 31° 40' 49.9"). Bakhit was fortified from all sides except along the river. The towers had originally been faced with stones. On the western north-western side the curtain wall was protected by a double dry ditch. It was apparently built to withstand attack from desert marauders and bedouin forces rather than from a better organised enemy using siege machines, a navy, etc. The interior of the fortress has been ravaged by the *sebbakhin*. It is covered with stones that originally had been bound with mud mortar and used in wall construction. The only building that escaped their attention was the fortress church. If the *sebbakhin* were digging for horse dung and fertilizers produced by human occupation, the church would have been of little interest to them. The church, preserved up to 4m, is made of mud brick, stones and red brick, and many vaulting bricks are scattered around. Its columns have disappeared but the passage behind the apse is still discernible. Some of the mud bricks bear traces of conflagration.

Bakhit was a refuge site for the local population that inhabited a rich agricultural district on the right bank of the Nile. The opposite side was guarded by the twin fortress of Tanqasi. In times of peace the inhabitants prayed in churches located among the fields like the stone church of Magal (= SDRS **Magal 10**, N 18° 16' 13.7" E 31° 40' 08.2"). It is situated among the irrigation. Sandstone columns shafts and capitals (Plate 10) are scattered around, half buried in the ground. People call the place *Tarabil* ('pyramids' in the

Central Sudanese dialects of the Jaalin nomads). According to our local informant, Osman Ali Ahmed et-Tum, his father had told him of a sort of embankment and stairs going down from the church to the landing place on the riverbank. Osman also said that six columns are known altogether, but two have sunk into the ground.

### *Ez-Zuma*

The SDRS concession terminates at ez-Zuma. Along with the reconnoitring and drawing of the tumuli Dr Adam Łajtar copied inscriptions in the so-called Anchorite Grotto. The sparse ceramic scatter in the tumuli field points to a date for its use in the very late post-Meroitic period, overlapping with the Christian period in Nubia. Of the much eroded sherds, 70 % belong to the Early Christian repertoire. A comparison of modern views of the site with air photographs taken by the RAF in the 1930s reveals the alarming devastation inflicted on the archaeological landscape by human activity.

The fortress in ez-Zuma (Karat Negil = present-day Karadegil (Zuma Gubli)), mentioned by Lepsius (1852, 248), exists nowadays only in oral testimonies. It is totally walled in by modern houses. In 2002 the locals found a complete bronze scimitar and duly passed it to the Sudan National Museum in Khartoum. According to the local *gaffir* it was found buried in sand at the bottom of a *chor* near the place known as Ali Karrar, where the Anchorite Grotto is located. Since the grotto seems to be a Kushite or Pharaonic rock tomb, the scimitar could be associated with a still unknown cemetery there.

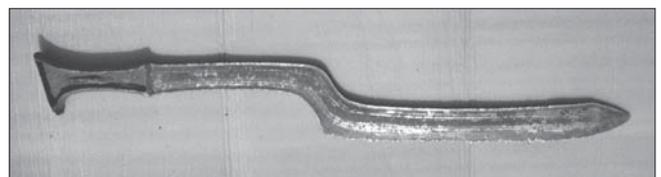


Plate 11. Copper-alloy (gilded) scimitar from Khor Ali Karrar in ez-Zuma.

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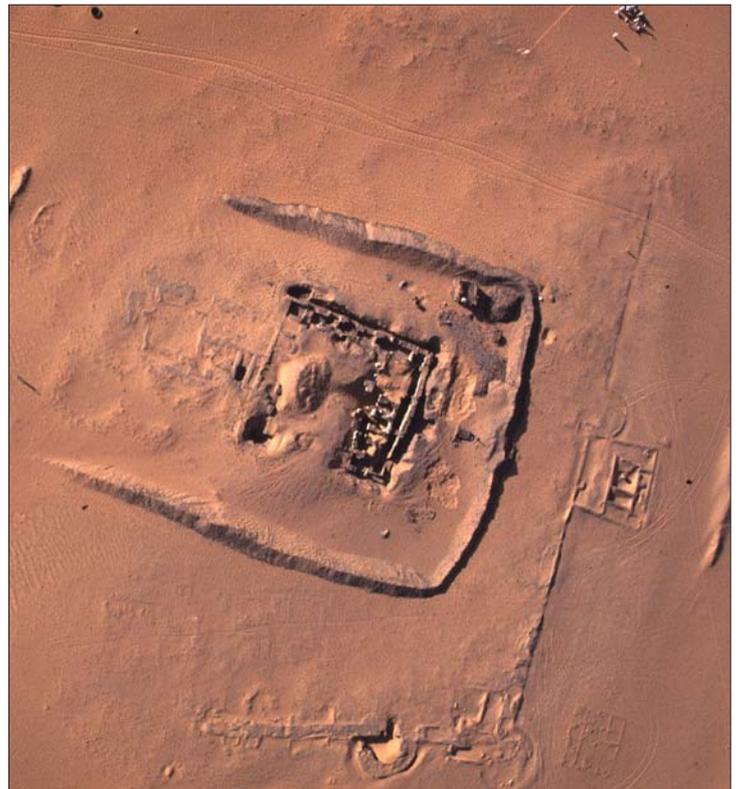
*Plate XL. SDRS Project. Oblique aerial photograph showing the northernmost sites within the concession (Old Dongola 13, Old Dongola 23 and Old Dongola 30).*



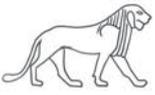
*Plate XLI. SDRS Project. Oblique aerial photographs showing the Old Dongola 23 site.*



*Plate XLII. SDRS Project. Dongolese Early Christian bowl (SDRS 74/98) from Tumulus 4 at Hammur Abbasiya.*



*Plate XLIII. SDRS Project. Vertical kite photograph of Baganarti in 2002.*



*Plate XLIV. SDRS Project. Banganarti: a Makurian king under the protection of archangel Raphael.*



*Plate XLV. SDRS Project. Banganarti: detail of the mural of a Makurian king.*

*Plate XLVI. SDRS Project. Banganarti: late king's portrait.*



*Plate XLVII. SDRS Project. Banganarti: one of the apostles flanking the king's portrait.*



*Plate XLVIII. SDRS Project. Banganarti: fragment of the central apse of the mausoleum-church.*



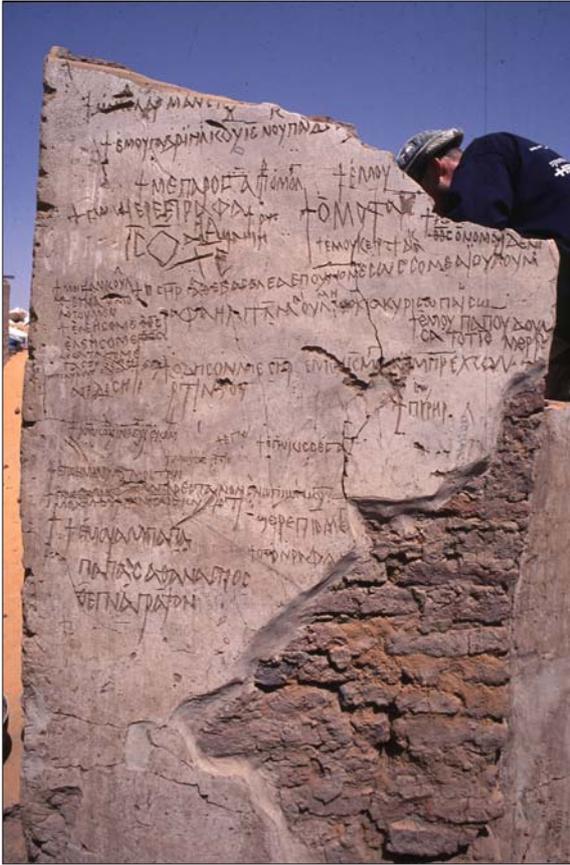


Plate XLIX. SDRS Project. Banganarti: inscriptions on the late extension of the central apse southern pillar.



Plate L. SDRS Project. Banganarti: chalice and paten (SDRS 5/02 and SDRS 4/02) from the prothesis.

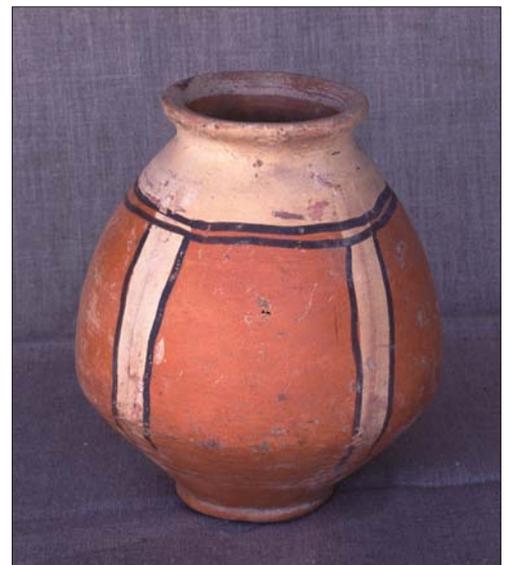


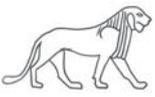
Plate LI. SDRS Project. Banganarti: Orange Ware jar from the diakonicon (SDRS 10/02).



Plate LII. SDRS Project. Banganarti: low altitude kite photograph showing the eastern part of the mausoleum-church.



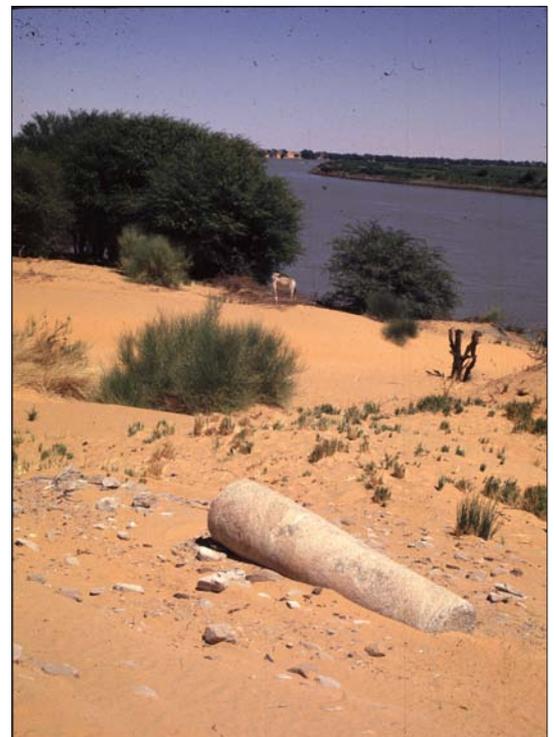
Plate LIII. SDRS Project. Banganarti: sondage below the chapel with the king's portrait.



*Plate LIV. SDRS Project. The Buros Pillars in 1998.*



*Plate LV. SDRS Project. Terracotta portrait head (SDRS 19/98).*



*Plate LVI. SDRS Project. A granite column from the fortress church at ed-Diffar in 2002.*



*Plate LVII. SDRS Project. Computer montage of low altitude aerial photographs showing ed-Deiga fortress.*