

SUDAN & NUBIA

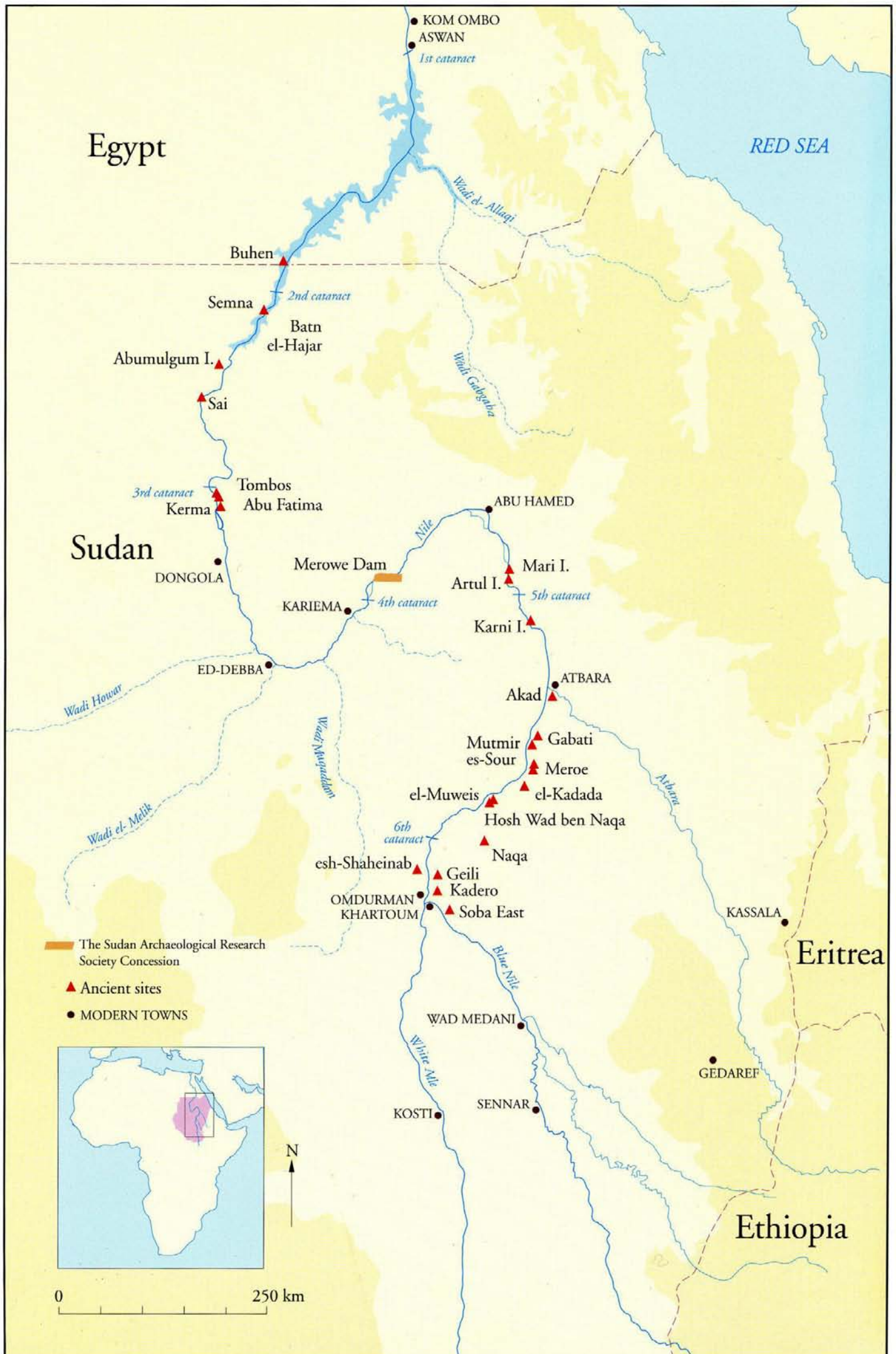
The Sudan Archaeological Research Society



Bulletin No. 9

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Front Cover: Representation of a bound Kushite from the
Mortuary Temple of Amenhotep III at Kom el-Hettân
(photo © Memnon/Amenhotep III Project).



The Merowe Dam Archaeological Salvage Project

Survey in the vicinity of ed-Doma (AKSE), 2004-2005

Derek A. Welsby

The concession of the Sudan Archaeological Research Society within the Merowe Dam Archaeological Salvage Project (MDASP) includes approximately 40km of the left bank of the Nile and the islands between the fortress at Suweigi West (Dar el-Arab) and Jebel Musa at Kirbegan. Detailed survey of the whole area and excavation of the sites located are impossible within the timeframe available. In the light of this, the strategy has been for small areas to be surveyed in detail followed by excavation of a sample of the sites located during those surveys. Survey began in the central part of the concession based at et-Terief in 1999¹ (Welsby 2002) and was followed, from 2002 to the present, by three seasons of excavations² of cemeteries and settlements on the left bank and on the islands of Umm Melyekta, el-Hilla and Umm Muri. In 2003/4 survey and trial excavations were also begun in the region around Dar el-Arab followed by a season of excavation in 2004/5.³

In December 2004 SARS, with support from the British Museum and the Egypt Exploration Society, began work in the upstream part of the concession based in the hamlet of ed-Doma. The team was in the field from 5th December 2004 until 10th February 2005.⁴ Within the area chosen for study this season an attempt was made to investigate a number of different environments (Colour plate I) which include:-

1. The banks of a wadi close to its confluence with a Nile palaeochannel
2. The banks of a palaeochannel (Wadis el-Fersib and Umm Shidr)

¹ Directed by Derek Welsby.

² Directed by Derek Welsby, Dorian Fuller and John Payne.

³ Directed by Pawel Wolf

⁴ The team consisted of Vince Cherubini (archaeologist), Andrew Ginns (archaeologist), Hyder Mohammadein (NCAM inspector), Sylvia Kennedy (archaeologist), Mohammed Ibrahim (cook), Helen Macquarrie (archaeologist), Ilaria Mancosu (prehistorian), Ben Neil (archaeologist, physical anthropologist), Derek Welsby (director, photographer), Rachel Welsby (archaeologist), Isabella Welsby Sjöström (assistant director, pottery specialist).

3. A palaeoisland
4. The 'west' (south east) bank of the Nile
5. The islands of Dirbi and Umm Hajar along with several small seasonal islands between these two

As elsewhere in the concession there is a vast number of sites spanning from the Palaeolithic up until the recent past across the whole area surveyed. Before the work began only one antiquity was known in the area, a scarab of Thutmose III (SNM 2611 from site 4-H-1); we have now recorded in excess of 670. Among the sites are many concentrations of rock art, settings of stones, enclosures, settlements, occupation scatters and cemeteries. Where available, samples of pottery have been collected from those sites where it is considered the ceramic material may be associated with the use of the site and in some cases lithics have also been recovered. Dating of many sites is problematic as the pottery found within them ranges on some occasions widely in date.

Palaeolithic

A small amount of Middle Palaeolithic material (Plate 1) was recovered from an extensive deposit of river cobbles on the left bank a little to the south west of ed-Doma.

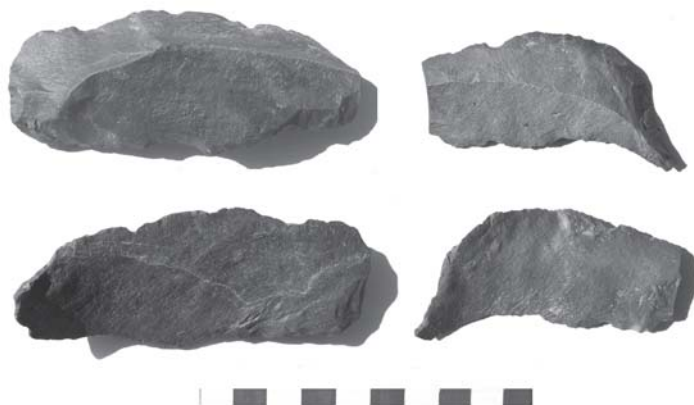


Plate 1. Palaeolithic tools from site 4-M-150.

Neolithic

The whole area of the survey, apart from the beds of the palaeochannels, is littered with lithics, which may be of many different periods. Occasionally concentrations of lithics were found which indicate the presence of more intensive or long lived, although perhaps seasonal, occupation. Some of this material was associated with Neolithic pottery. One site in particular included a vast number of lithics over a large area on the bank of the Wadi Fursib palaeochannel. No cemeteries which could be confidently assigned to this period were found, although many graves had no associated artefacts and their date remains uncertain. Some may be Neolithic (see crevice graves below).

Kerma

Occupation contemporary with the Kerma culture was well represented in the survey area. Very common are the tumuli of types T.V, Va and VIIa (Figure 1) which are found on the left bank and on the palaeoisland crowning the summits and ridges of the rocky hills (Plate 2). Sometimes small



Plate 2. *Kerma Moyen* tumulus (25), site 4-L-291.

groups of tumuli abut each other but form part of cemeteries extending over a wide area, in one case with approximately 80 monuments on one hill. Almost all, if not every one, of these tumuli have been robbed,⁵ this activity providing much pottery useful for dating. The material shows similarities with pottery dating to the *Kerma Moyen* period (2050-1750 BC) and suggests that these dispersed hilltop cemeteries are a little earlier in date than the two nucleated examples found close by. Of these latter type site 4-L-2 had a little over 50 tumuli (Plate 3) and site 4-L-100 approximately 70. They consist of small tumuli which abut their neighbours. Some have well defined single and double kerbs. A robbed example at site 4-L-100 had the small circular grave pit lined with upright slabs. The pottery from these sites dates to the *Kerma Moyen* perhaps extending into the *Kerma Classique* (1750-1450+ BC).

Occasionally sherds of Kerma date were found in a non-funerary context on sites which may be settlements. However, in most cases sherds of other periods were also found in the same area. Two such sherds, with typical *Kerma Ancien* decoration, came from settlements at 4-M-92 and 4-L-163, the latter site strewn with medieval pottery. One small hut circle at site 4-L-232 did contain several sherds of Kerma pottery and may be of that date. It was one of two similar

features set on an area of bedrock high up on a hillside.

Kerma to early Kushite

As noted in the region of et-Tereif in previous seasons the Kerma pottery tradition appears to continue through into the early Kushite period. Sites of this period were not easily defined. A small amount of New Kingdom Pharaonic pottery was noted.

Kushite

Material dating to this period was almost non-existent. A few pieces of early Kushite pottery may have been recovered from a small cemetery of tumuli at site 4-L-259. None of the often very distinctive later Kushite material was noted. A small faience amulet, which is probably of Kushite date, came from an area of stone settings (site 4-M-148) south west of ed-Doma.

Post-Meroitic

One large post-Meroitic cemetery was studied in detail. The tumuli occupy the beds of small *wadis* and the alluvial plain to the south west of ed-Doma. They are typical of tumuli of this period noted at et-Tereif and elsewhere in the region of the Fourth Cataract. Most are either type T.III or T.IV with a few examples of type T.VI. Many have been robbed in the very recent past revealing the sloping or stepped descendary dropping down into the oval side-niche grave

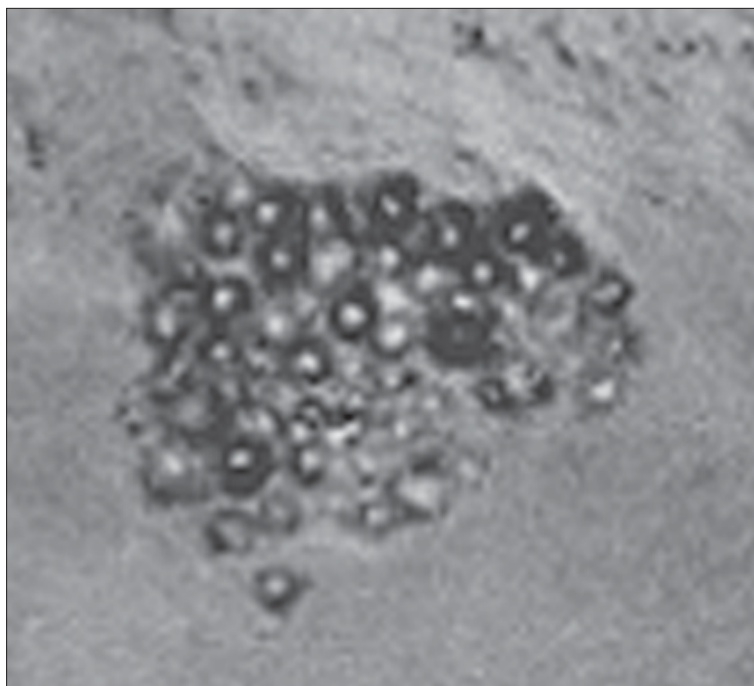


Plate 3. Aerial view of the cemetery at site 4-L-2.

pit. Bones and some pottery were scattered around on the surface and in one case many crudely worked circular disc beads of ostrich egg-shell. In the sides of the robber pits the fill of earlier robber pits are clearly visible, interleaved

⁵ Some of this robbing is very recent: one tumulus, clearly in the process of being robbed, still contained a *guffa* and *toria* when we arrived on the site.

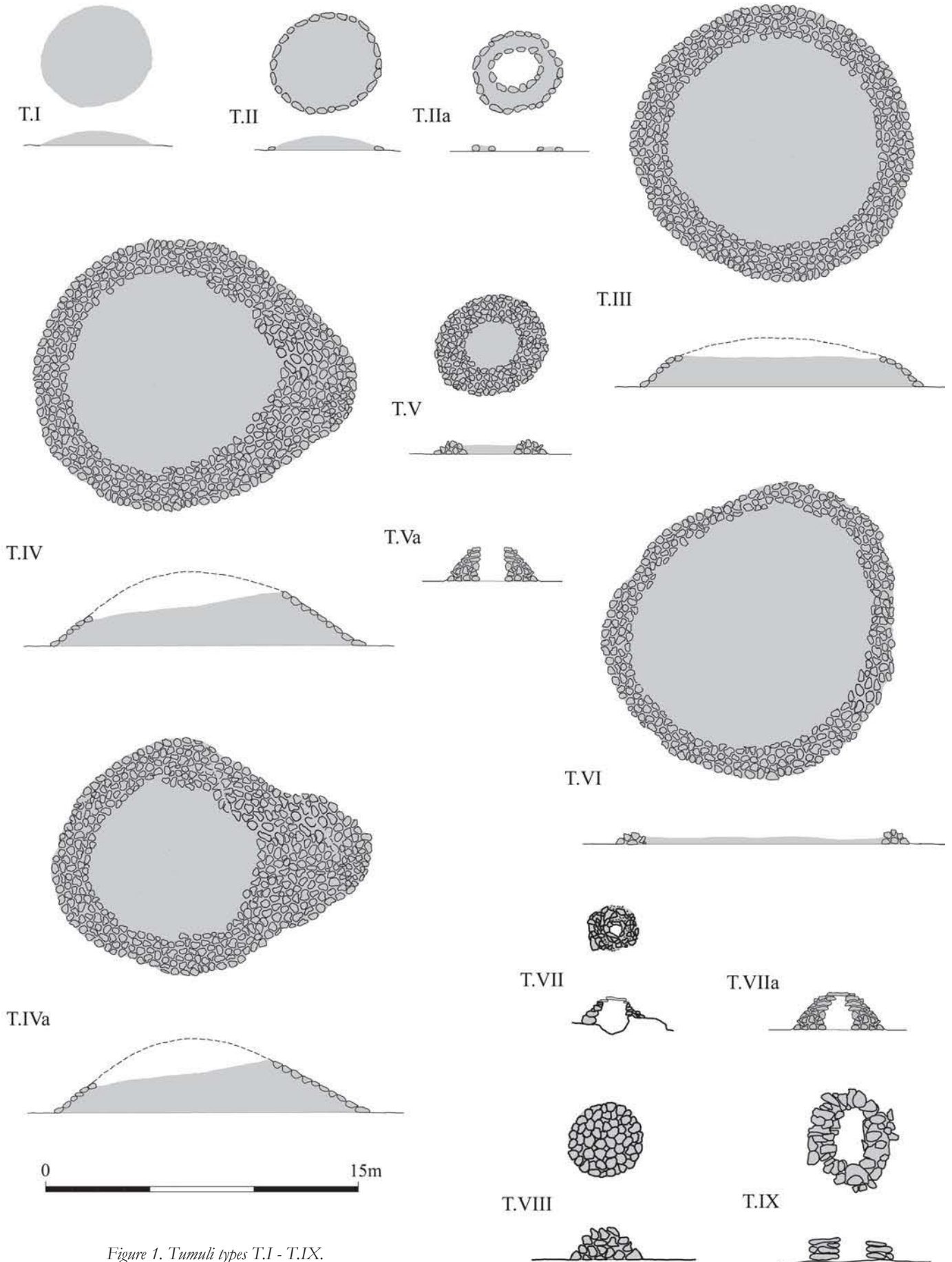


Figure 1. Tumuli types T.I - T.IX.

with layers of wind-blown sand and water-deposited silt. Four tumuli were linked together by walls of a single line of stones while other tumuli had walls of the same type extending out for several metres from them. At least one of the type T.IV tumuli had a 'lamp box' at the apex of the point.

Medieval

Cemeteries of box graves dating to the medieval Christian period were found across the survey area. Some were small groups of a few graves while the largest concentration was of approximately 35 graves. Two cemeteries were immediately adjacent to the post-Meroitic tumuli on sites 4-L-92 and 4-M-53; another (site 4-M-142) was closely associated with Islamic graves. The box graves, up to about 750mm in height, did not have lamp boxes associated with them. Although it can be expected that very few of these graves contain grave goods, a number have been robbed in the recent past.

Post-medieval

The association of one Islamic cemetery, no longer in use, with its medieval predecessor has already been noted. Other Islamic cemeteries, some still in use, were noted but not recorded in detail. The settlements currently occupied are often on the low-lying ground close to the river immediately adjacent to the irrigation, although in some places due to lack of space they extend up the hillsides. Typically the houses are rectilinear and constructed of *jalous* or mud brick, sometimes on a stone socle (see Welsh, this volume). Those villages in the plain are probably of no great age. On the hills behind many of them are villages of sub-rectangular to round stone dwellings associated with curvilinear enclosures (Plate 4). The village of this type by ed-Doma was, according to a local informant, still being occupied into the middle of the 20th century. Occupation was only moved down into the plain when the threat of flooding of those areas ceased (the result of the construction of the dams upstream on the White and Blue Niles and River Atbara?).

On one of the small seasonal islands between Dirbi and Umm Hajar and dominating the perennial river channel on the north side of Dirbi there is a walled enclosure entered through a single narrow gateway (Colour plate II). Its walls with battered outer face, still standing in excess of 3m in height, are on average 700mm thick at the top. They are constructed in stone with some of the mud-bonding material still remaining. The walls are pierced by numerous small drainage channels. Against the inner face of the defensive wall are small rooms. Towards the river the hilltop plunges vertically to the water's edge. Along this side there are traces of a wall of mud brick. Little in the way of dating evidence

was noted: it may date to the Turkiya or Mahdiya periods in the 19th century.

The finds are still being processed and therefore little can be said in detail about the chronology of the sites investigated. Many were not associated with any datable finds (or indeed any material at all in most cases) and their period of construction and use is difficult to ascertain. Among the as-yet undatable structures are the following:-

- Crevice graves
- 'Tunnel' graves
- Boundary walls
- Wadi* and *kbor* walls
- Settings of stone
- Enclosures
- Shelters
- Hut circles



Plate 4. Post-medieval settlement, site 4-L-119.

Crevice and 'tunnel' graves

The nature of the terrain leaves many small crevices either between boulders or as narrow gaps in the bedrock. Some of these have been used for burial. The simplest form has the ends of the crevice blocked by vertical walls of small stones, and slabs are placed over the resulting chamber. Others have a pile of stones covering the crevice forming an elongated tumulus/box grave-like superstructure. 'Tunnel' graves are basically similar (Plate 5) but are largely man-made. They either use a very shallow crevice with slabs set on edge to form a taller burial chamber and then covered in slabs, which are in turn covered by many smaller stones forming a sub-rectangular tumulus, or the grave chamber is entirely man-made. These graves tend to occur in isolation. From the patination on the granite used in their

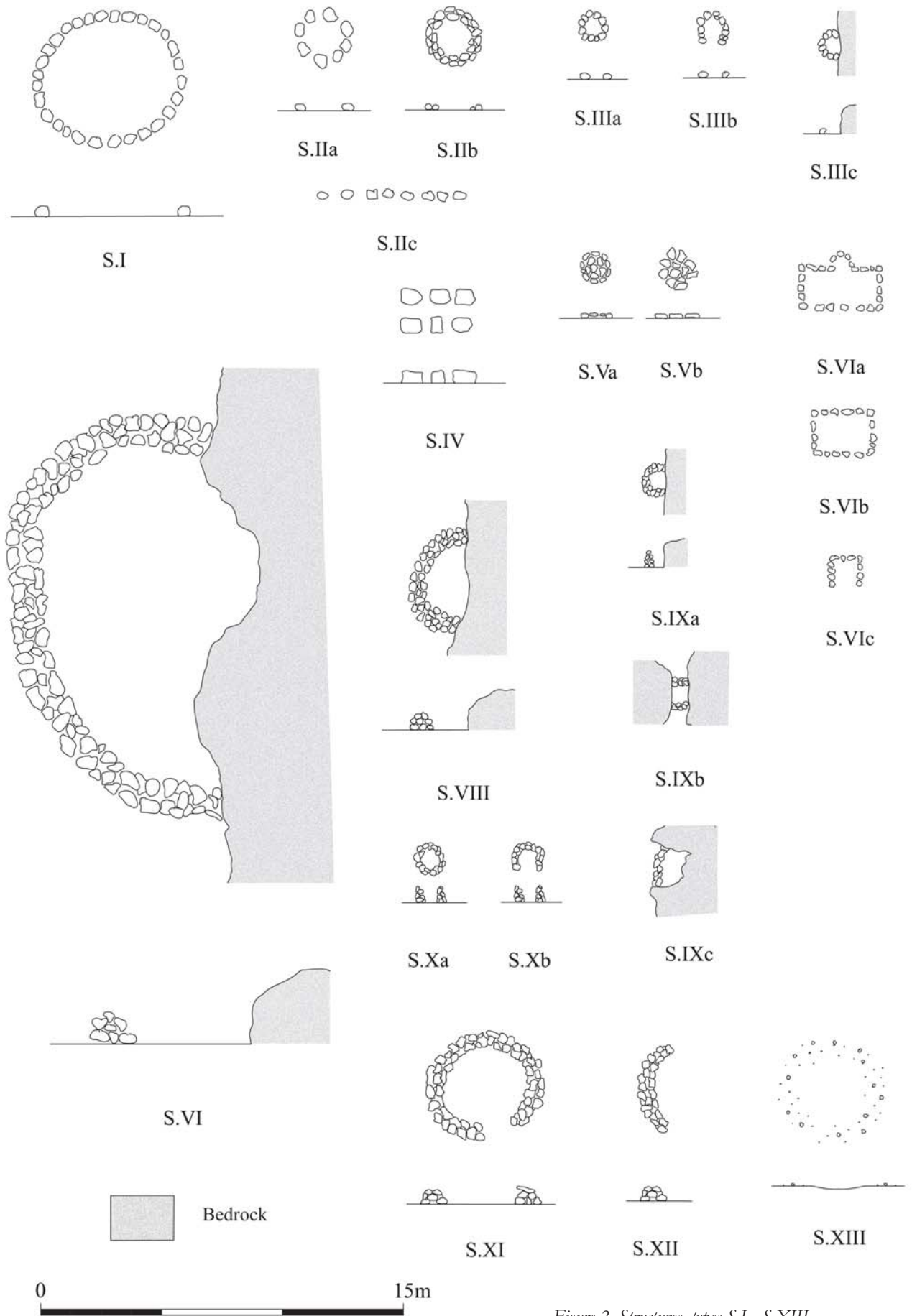


Figure 2. Structures, types S.I - S.XIII.



Plate 5. 'Tunnel' grave at site 4-L-165.

construction they may not be very old, although their function is a complete mystery to the local people today.

'Boundary' walls

Sometimes running for many hundreds of metres these narrow walls, built of rubble, never exceed 500mm in height (Plate 6). They often run along ridges but also frequently down the slopes and across *keberan* and *wadis* before ascending the hill on the other side. After running for long distances they frequently just stop for no obvious reason, perhaps picking up again after several or dozens of metres. The boundary walls along the ridges on occasion run right along the ridge, other times deviating around hilltops. None of them form enclosures nor do they effectively block access from or to particular areas. They are never high enough to form an effective barrier against either men or animals. Apart from being obvious features in the landscape their function is unclear. Dating them is problematic. One example seems to be earlier than a type T.VII tumulus, another has one of its blocks decorated with two representations of cattle, most likely after the block was placed in the wall. However, neither the tumulus type nor the rock art can be closely dated. All that can be said is that the boundary walls do not appear to be modern and are found in areas devoid of modern settlement. Some run along the hills flanking the palaeochannel.

Wadi and khor walls

Running across many *wadis* and *keberaan* are narrow walls, often a single line of stones. Sometimes these are associated with boundary walls but often they are independent structures. Frequently found on relatively wide sloping areas between rocky outcrops they do not look to be ideally placed to have acted as installations associated with water management. As with the boundary walls their function and date are uncertain.

Settings of stones

Very common are arrangements of stones set on their own or abutting rock outcrops or boulders. Some are single lines of stones (like many of the *wadi* and *kebor* walls), others are circles, pennannular rings or occasionally more complex shapes. The only example to which a function and approximate date could be assigned was clearly a mosque with small *mibrab* (type S.VI, see Figure 2). Some of the stone circles are several metres in diameter, well laid out and the area within has been cleared of stones. These are probably threshing floors (type S.I).

Similar in plan to the settings of stone are structures with dry-stone walls several courses high (types S.IX-X). These are often very small, much too small to have been used as a shelters for humans. Local informants told us that some of these may have been used to house small animals such as lambs, kids and chickens.

Enclosures

Frequently built up against rock outcrops and equally frequently having no doorways, these are to be identified as animal pens of a type still used in the area today where they are often given a makeshift roof to provide some shade for the animals. Although the walls are usually not high enough to stop the animals escaping, the adult goats and sheep are frequently tethered within the pens ensuring that they remain there and also that their offspring do not wander too far away.

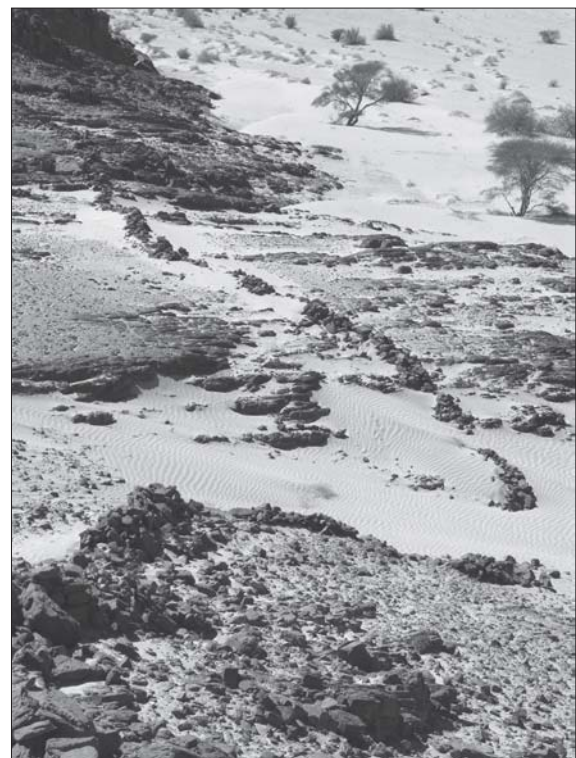


Plate 6. 'Boundary' wall on the southern side of the Wadi Umm Shidr, site 4-L-13.



Plate 6. Cattle, site 4-M-89(3).

Shelters

Some of these are rough walls describing an arc or semi-circle (type S.XII) usually open to the south (away from the prevailing wind). Many are placed up against rock outcrops and boulders forming a more enclosed space (type S.VIII). Some of the latter may have been for human use, others small animal pens.

Hut circles

Circular walls of stone usually with an opening on the south side and several metres in diameter are identified as hut circles. Apart from pre-dating the more substantial early modern sub-rectangular houses, they could be of any date.

Rock art and rock gongs

The areas surveyed abound in rock art. This is concentrated along the major tracks passing through the landscape, although there are some isolated examples of rock art elsewhere. Where suitable rock is available in a prime location there can be large numbers of representations in a small area. The range of subjects is similar to that found elsewhere in the SARS concession:-

- domesticated animals – cattle including zebu, sheep, goats, horses and camels (Plate 6)
- wild animals - giraffe, ostrich, bustard?
- human figures - camel and horse riders, warriors armed with a circular shield and spear (Plate 7)
- symbols
- boats
- inscriptions – Greek and Arabic (Plate 8)

Dating of most of this art is as usual problematic. The representations of camel probably date to the last millennium or a little earlier. The Arabic graffiti may be largely modern and some are certainly very recent. The Greek inscriptions, which include the name Micael and monograms with a and w, are of medieval Christian date. Associated with the rock art are rock gongs sometimes with the stone



Plate 7. Warrior with round shield and massive spear, site 4-G-16.

striker, a quartzite pebble, found close by. The most complex gong was on the north side of Dirbi (Colour plate III) and was one of several on the same outcrop.

Conclusions

This season's work has once again highlighted the richness of the area in archaeological remains. Many of the sites are probably of little significance: the stone settings and small stone structures could have been made in a matter of minutes in some cases and may only have been used once. However, there are also a significant number of larger, more complex sites, be they ritual (rock art sites?), settlements or cemeteries. They indicate the presence of a human population in the area at least from the Neolithic through to the present with perhaps a lull in the Kushite period, the reasons for which are unclear.

Acknowledgements

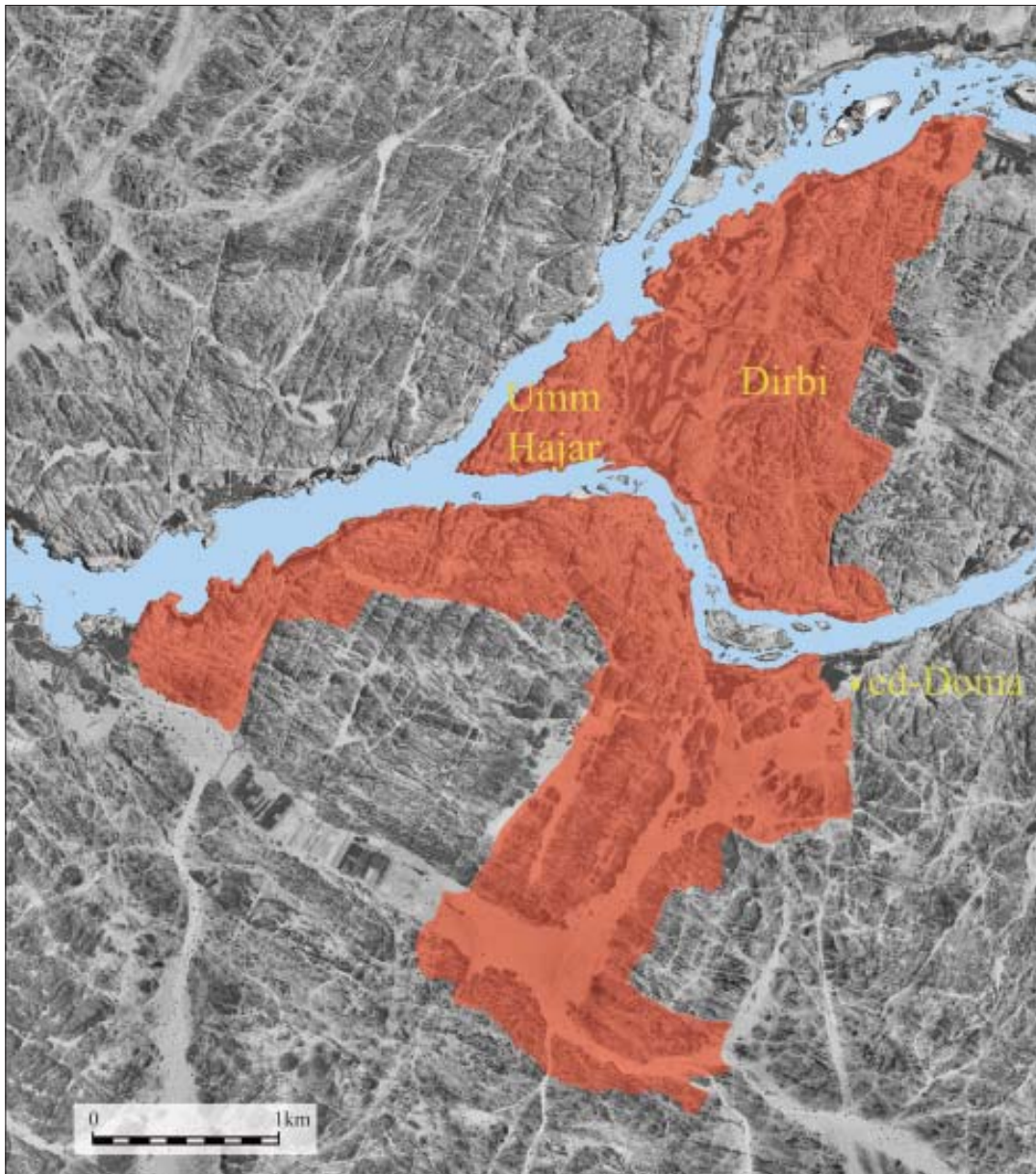
SARS would like to thank the staff of the National Corporation for Antiquities and Museums for their assistance with setting up this project and the British Council for logistic help. The financial and other support given to this contribution to the Merowe Dam Archaeological Salvage Project by the British Museum, the Egypt Exploration Society and patrons of SARS is gratefully acknowledged.

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- Welsby, D. A. 2002. *Survey above the Fourth Nile Cataract*. SARS Publication no. 10. London.



Plate 8. Greek inscriptions, site 4-M-152(4).



Colour plate I. AKSE. The areas surveyed in 2004-5.



Colour plate II. AKSE. Fortified enclosure, site 4-G-1.



Colour plate III. AKSE. Rock gong on Dirbi, site 4-H-41.