

SUDAN & NUBIA

The Sudan Archaeological Research Society



Bulletin No. 11

2007



Egypt

ASWAN
1st cataract

Aniba
Qasr Ibrim

WADI HALFA
2nd cataract

Wadi el-Allaqi

RED SEA

3rd cataract
Tombos
Tabo
Kerma/Dokki Gel

Sudan

Kawa
JEBEL BARKAL
KARIEMA

ABU HAMED

5th cataract

Dangeil

Wadi Howar

Wadi el-Melik

ED-DEBBA

Wadi Mudaddam

OMDURMAN

KHARTOUM

6th cataract

Soba East

Botri

Blue Nile

WAD MEDANI

White Nile

KOSTI

SENNAR

KASSALA

Eritrea

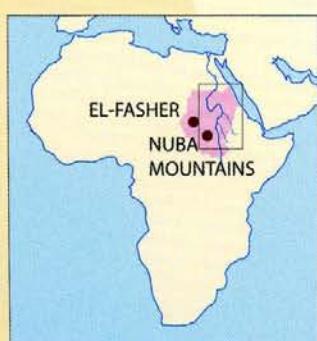
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Ethiopia

The Sudan Archaeological Research Society Concession

▲ Ancient sites

● MODERN TOWNS



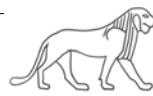
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The Sudan Archaeological Research Society



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Kirwan Memorial

Lecture

Death at Tombos: Pyramids, Iron and the Rise of the Napatan Dynasty

Stuart Tyson Smith

Upon their assumption of the Egyptian throne in 750 BC, the Nubian Pharaohs of Egypt's 25th Dynasty appear to be more Egyptian than the Egyptians they conquered. In his victory stela, Nubian Pharaoh Piye states: "I am a king, divine emanation, living image of Atum, who came forth from the womb, adorned as a ruler, of whom those greater than he were afraid; whose father knew, and whose mother recognized that he would rule in the egg, the Good God, beloved of the gods, achieving with his hands, Meriamon-Piye" (Breasted 1906, IV, 419). Just 300 years before, these same people were the leaders of "Wretched Kush", subjects of Egypt's New Kingdom empire (*c.* 1500-1050 BC). George Reisner (1919, 246-48; 1920, 50) argued that the Nubian Pharaohs actually came from Egypt, so complete was their apparent adherence to Pharaonic ideals of kingship. They were buried under pyramids, the quintessential royal funerary monument. These tombs were decorated with the latest spells to ensure the deceased king's rebirth and survival after death in a classic Osirian afterlife. They were also equipped with the latest Egyptian grave goods, including elaborately inscribed and decorated sarcophagi, amulets, and shabti figurines. In life, they were strong adherents of the cult of Amun-Re, and commissioned, or rebuilt, temples throughout Nubia and Egypt.

Although Reisner's idea was quickly abandoned, Nubia's dramatic emergence into a regional empire based at Napata (850-750 BC) has largely been seen as the result of cultural assimilation driven by a new group of expatriates and/or an Egyptian or Egyptianized remnant of the old New Kingdom colony (Breasted 1909, 561; Arkell 1961, 114-15; Fairservis 1962, 187; Emery 1965, 206-208; David 1988). Other scholars have adopted a mixed view, arguing for Egyptianization and some lasting influence from the colony, while acknowledging the importance of internal dynamics and native agency (Dixon 1964; O'Connor 1993, 58-69; Adams 1977, 246-59; Gardiner 1961, 335). The fact that recent surveys in the Dongola Reach, including my own (Smith 2003a), have failed to uncover evidence for a widespread Egyptianized imperial culture (Grzymski 1987; Welsby 2001, 589-90; Jacques Reinold, pers. comm. 1998), casts doubt on the survival of any significant imperial rem-

nant into Napatan times. On the other hand, our project's excavation at the Egyptian colonial cemetery of Tombos established the existence of a substantial Egyptian community with Nubian connections at the Third Cataract. If this community survived into the Napatan period, it could have influenced the rise of the new native Nubian Kushite Dynasty. Did descendants of Egyptian colonists guide this radical transformation from subordinate to conqueror, or did Nubians seize control over their own destiny? The combination of Egyptian and Nubian cemeteries at Tombos provides a unique opportunity to assess the legacy of Egypt's colonial occupation and its contribution to the emergence of one of Africa's earliest and most expansive states.

The New Kingdom Empire

'Year 2, second month of the first season, fifteenth day, under the majesty of Horus, the King of Upper and Lower Egypt A'kheperka-Re, Son of Re Thutmose, living forever and ever... He has overthrown the Ruler of Kush, the Nubian is defenseless in his grasp, like a young panther among the fleeing cattle; the fame of his majesty blinded them.'

Thutmose I, *c.* 1502 BC (Breasted 1906, II, 30)

Located at the Third Cataract of the Nile, Tombos marks a geographic and political frontier thousands of years old (Figure 1; Colour plate I). The Cataract's rugged terrain and treacherous rapids form a natural northern gateway to the fertile Dongola Reach, and thus an important strategic point of control for both Egyptians and Nubians. It was also the location of a granite quarry, providing the raw material for monumental construction blocks and colossal statues. Here Thutmose I commemorated his conquest of the great Nubian kingdom of Kerma by carving triumphal stelae on the huge granite boulders that make up the Cataract. Eight hundred and fifty years later, Nubian Pharaoh Taharqa commissioned a statue that still lies broken in the quarry. The site is the southernmost Egyptian colonial cemetery located so far. We might expect to find a cemetery associated with the large, apparently Egyptianized settlement and temple precinct at Dokki Gel, the urban successor to Kerma, but so far the only tombs dating to colonial times reflect a hybrid culture blending Egyptian and Nubian elements (Bonnet 1993; 2000, 144; Welsby and Welsby Sjöström 2007). Cemeteries have so far eluded archaeologists working at the only other potential sites for Egyptian tombs, Kawa, with its temple complexes founded in the mid-late 18th Dynasty and Jebel Barkal, where, presumably, an Egyptian garrison was stationed. Although a New Kingdom cemetery is reported at Tabo, its exact nature is unclear (Jacquet-Gordon 1999). This leaves Tombos as the only extant Egyptian cemetery in the Dongola Reach. Regardless, the Third Cataract likely marks an important boundary within the Egypt's southern empire between more direct and indirect control (Morkot

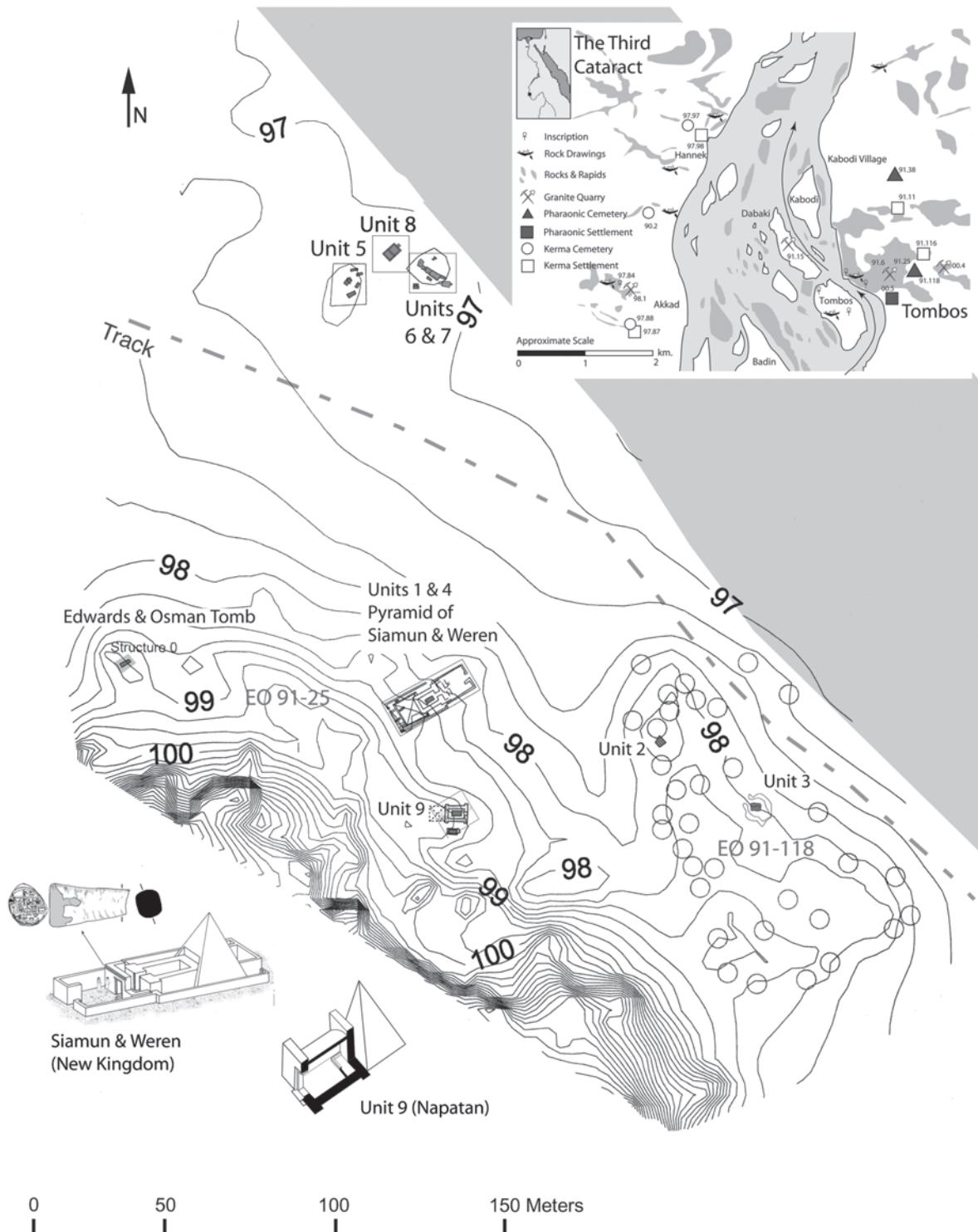


Figure 1. Plan of Tombos (scale 1:200).

2001), since the only Egyptian installations in the densely occupied region upstream from Kerma are Kawa and Jebel Barkal (and perhaps Tabo). This pattern parallels the Egyptian occupation of Syro-Palestine, where Egyptian garrisons, like Beth Shean in Israel, were small in scale and few and far between (Smith 2003b, 94-96).

Early archaeological work at Tombos established the existence of a substantial New Kingdom Egyptian cemetery.

Arkell (1950) briefly visited in 1946, noting some sherds of Mycenaean pottery. Test excavation of one tomb by David Edwards and Ali Osman from the University of Khartoum confirmed the site's identification as a New Kingdom colonial cemetery (Edwards and Ali Osman 2001). Our excavation of a large pyramid tomb of a high ranking ancient Egyptian colonial administrator in the winter of 2000 has helped to establish the importance of Tombos as a colonial



centre, more substantial and vital to the Egyptian administration than previously suspected (Figure 2). The tomb was dedicated to ‘the Scribe of the Treasury and Overseer of Foreign Lands’, Siamun and his wife, ‘the Mistress of the House’, Weren. We have their names, thanks to the extraordinary discovery of inscribed funerary cones, normally found only at the capital at Thebes, a fact that underlines the high rank of this official and implies a Theban origin for him. Funerary cones were set in a frieze across the façade of tombs; their round ends probably symbolizing the rejuvenating power of the sun disk. Their conical shape also mimics the shape of the traditional offering bread loaf (Ryan 1988). The only other tomb in Nubia discovered thus far to employ cones was located at Aniba, the colony’s Lower Nubian administrative capital. As an ‘Overseer of Foreign Lands’, Siamun was perhaps the third most important official in the Nubian colonial administration and was probably in charge of tribute coming from the former kingdom of Kush, still based at Kerma, a mere 10km to the south (Morkot 2001; Smith 2003b, 140-142).

In addition, a previously unsuspected middle class component to the cemetery was unearthed (Figures 1 and 3; Colour plate IV). In the 2000 season, we identified two underground chamber-tombs (Units 6 and 7), but only had the time to partially excavate one of them (Unit 6). We had also identified and excavated a group of pit tombs (Unit 5), and further work in 2002 revealed a completely new and very large underground chamber tomb, Unit 8, which we were able to completely excavate. Funerary architecture, burial placement and grave goods, such as painted and inscribed mummiform coffins and specialized funerary objects including shabti figurines and heart amulets, strongly reflect ancient Egyptian funerary beliefs and practices (Plates 1 and 2). The human remains recovered in just this one season represent a minimum of 121 individuals, pointing to a substantial Egyptian colonial presence in this area. The prosperity of the community was reflected by the presence of scarabs, amulets and earrings of ivory, faience, glass, jasper and carnelian (Colour plate III), ebony tubes and applicators for *kohl* eye-paint, an ebony boomerang for bird hunting, and numerous pots for food offerings. While their extreme rarity could indicate that they were personal possessions brought from Egypt, the extraordinary discovery of two intact Mycenaean

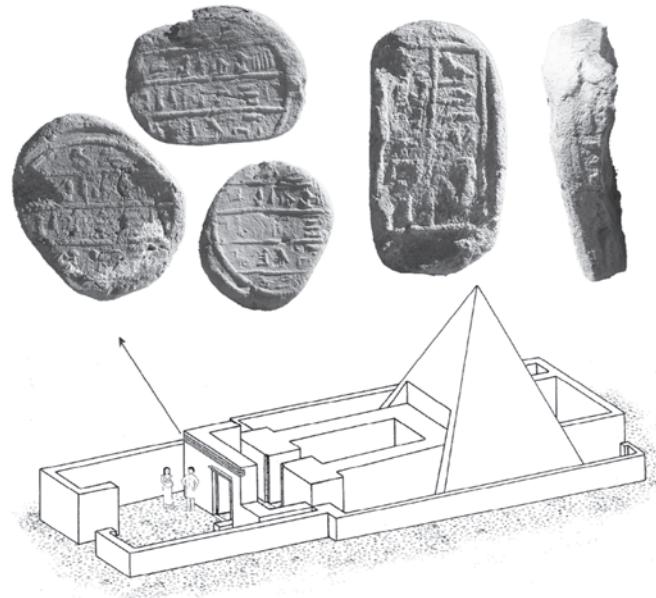


Figure 2. New Kingdom Pyramid of Siamun with funerary cones and brick.

jars imported from mainland Greece in the middle class part of the cemetery and sherds from at least two more in the pyramid of Siamun may point toward the community’s connection into large-scale trade networks stretching from central Africa to the Aegean (Plate 3; Colour plate II). The

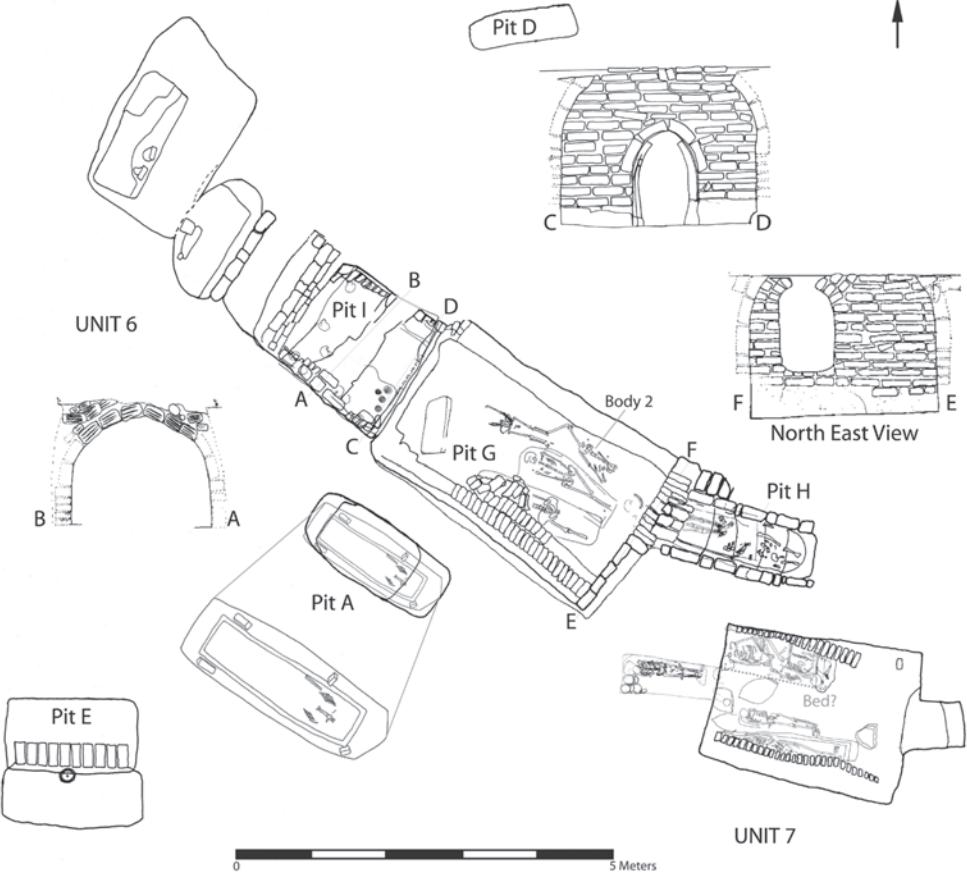


Figure 3. Units 6 and 7, middle class pit and chamber tombs (scale 1:100).



Plate 1. Face from lid of New Kingdom ceramic coffin from Unit 8.

types of pottery found at the site indicate that the community flourished from the Egyptian conquest until at least the end of the New Kingdom empire (c. 1070 BC; Plates 4 and 5).

Our discoveries in 2000 reflected the strong Egyptian identity projected by the colonists, matching the contemporary Pharaonic ideology of separation and ethnic polarization (Smith 2003b, 19-27, 167-87). But in 2002, in the deepest part of the Unit 6 tomb, we made an extraordinary discovery that turned this notion on its head. We had left the last approximately 500mm of the tomb's vaulted main burial chamber unexcavated at the end of the 2000 season. After



Plate 2. Glazed steatite scarab with gazelle from Unit 8 and serpentine scarab with unusual design.

removing the backfill, we continued excavation at the point where we had left off, a layer of wind-blown sand upon which a series of intact burials had lain. As we hoped, a group of intact burials lay underneath. Two were extended Egyptian fashion with head to the west, but we were surprised to find two women buried in Nubian style, flexed with head to the east, facing north (Plate 6). One of these

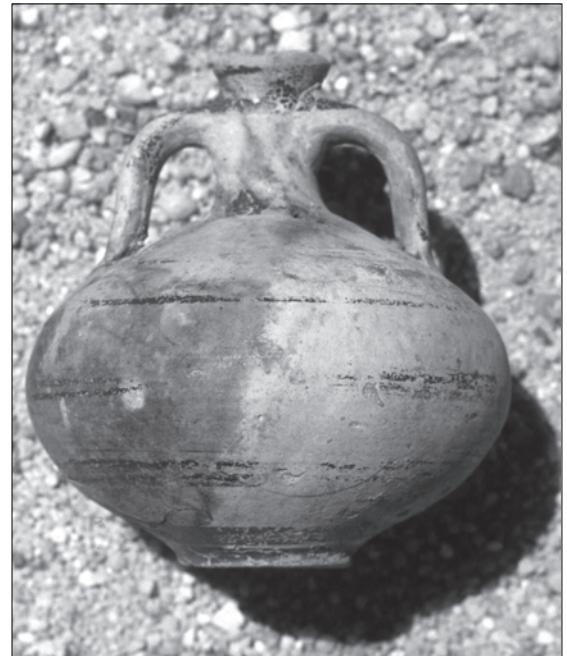


Plate 3. Mycenaean flask from Unit 6.

Kerma-style burials lay in an odd pose, on her back with arms and legs splayed out in what can only be described as a relaxed position, otherwise unattested in either Nubian or Egyptian burial practice (Colour plate V). The discovery of a group of beads behind the skull gave us a clue to the reason behind this unusual burial placement. Looters had clearly shifted her from an originally flexed position, since

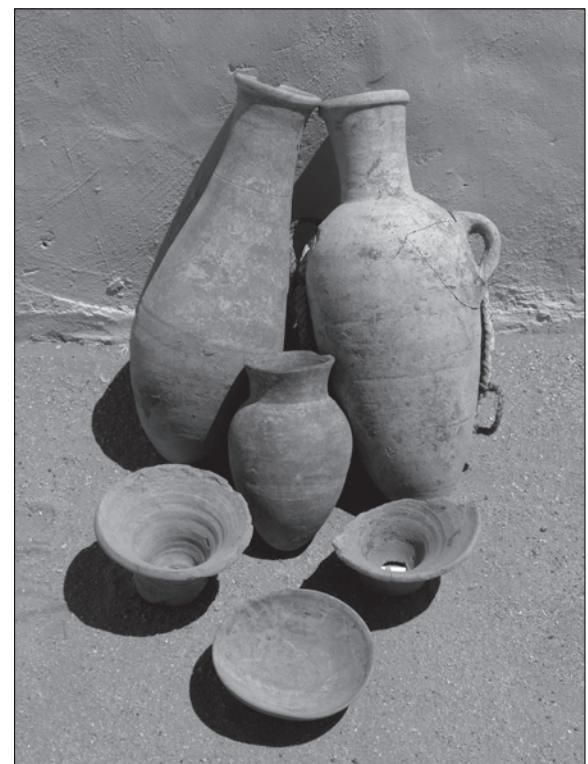


Plate 4. Group of mid 18th Dynasty pots from Unit 8.



anyone pilfering valuable jewellery would have to displace the arms to gain access to a necklace, shifting the entire body as a result.

The fact that her skeleton was still articulated implies that the robbery took place not long after her death, perhaps even by a member of the burial party, a practice attested in Egypt (Winlock 1929, 24). They presumably took any beads and/or amulets made of gold or silver, but left those made of less valuable glass and faience, including three amulets of the dwarf god Bes. Bes was a popular Egyptian household deity whose fierce leonine aspect scared away evil spirits and serpents. Thus, in spite of her insistence (and/or of those who buried her) on a Nubian burial position, the deceased Nubian woman was devoted to an Egyptian household deity, suggesting a process of cultural blending that is not uncommon in colonial communities (Deagan 1998). She was particularly fond of a rare dancing Bes amulet that had been broken in antiquity, yet was saved and included



Plate 5. Late Ramesside amphora from the entrance to the Unit 6 chamber tomb.



Plate 6. Kerma-style burial of a woman from Unit 6.

in her burial. Balancing these Egyptian amulets, the necklace also had a nerita shell bead typically associated with Nubian burials. We also found jewellery near the body of the other Nubian woman, including a faience scarab with the throne name of Amenhotep III (c. 1350 BC) and a faience scaraboid plaque with a scarab beneath a sun disk on one side and a lion on the reverse (Plate 7). The scarab image probably depicts the Egyptian solar god Khepri. Lions were also connected to the solar cult in Egypt. The care taken with her burial suggests that she was not a slave, or even a servant, but rather a Nubian woman who had become a vital member of the colonial community through marriage with one of the colonists.

Like Unit 6, the main chamber of Unit 7 was packed with occupants stacked one on top of another (Figure 3). Much to our surprise and delight the burials were largely untouched by looters, except for some superficial disturbance of the top layer of skeletons. The bodies were tightly packed into this crowded tomb, with individuals stacked directly on top of one another in three groups, in some cases with two, or three, sharing a coffin. Although this practice seems odd to us, it is attested from cemeteries in Egypt (e.g. Carter and Carnarvon 1912). The best preserved coffin contained two women on top of a very robust man named Tahut, a reference to the god Thoth, patron of scribes. He was probably a lower ranking scribe, since in



Plate 7. Jewellery associated with the burial in Plate 6.

addition to the elaborately inscribed coffin with an invocation to Duamutef, one of the four Sons of Horus who protected the body (specifically the stomach), he was provided with two wooden shabtis, which lay next to his calf. Although we think of them today as a standard part of Egyptian funerary equipment, these small mummiform figurines are restricted to burials of the literate elite (Smith 1992). A number of beads from necklaces, some scarabs and a large number of intact pots were found, including a libation vessel painted with a blue polychrome lotus motive and containing an ashy deposit full of organic remains (Colour plate VI). Across from Tahut, we made another extraordinary discovery, two women lying together in semi-flexed position, heads to the west Nubian style, exactly the opposite of the extended Egyptian style burials in the tomb. At their head lay a small Kerma style handmade black-topped cup, either an heirloom or perhaps an indication that the Kerma ceramic industry continued a hundred or more years longer than scholars allow. The persistence of Nubian culture at Tombos supports Welsby and Welsby Sjöström's (2007) argument that Kerma ceramic traditions and other cultural features did not disappear, but continued to evolve during the colonial period in parallel with the more Egyptianized culture seen among the elite at the large colonial centers.

Aftermath of Empire

'As for Pharaoh, how shall he reach this land?
Whose master is Pharaoh now?'

The general of Pharaoh Piankh to the
scribe of the Necropolis Tjaroy,
c. 1070 BC (Wente 1990, 183)

In c. 1086 BC, Panehesy, the last Viceroy of Kush, quelled a rebellion in Thebes with the help of Nubia's colonial army. Around 1079, he rebelled against Ramses XI, marching north towards the capital at Piramesse, but was beaten back into Nubia by general, later high priest of Amun, Herihor. The Egyptian empire in Nubia had ended in the social and political chaos that brought the New Kingdom itself to an end. Ruling in Thebes, Herihor took on all the trappings of a Pharaoh, and his successor Piankh could openly question the authority of the last of the Ramesside rulers. Nubia enters an archaeological and historical dark age that lasts for 300 years, until the emergence of the Nubian dynasty around 750 BC.

Several burials at Tombos seem to date to this period, raising the possibility that a small group of colonists survived the fall of the New Kingdom empire to influence the rise of Napata. A simple pit and side-chamber tomb in Unit 5 contained a partially disturbed skeleton, buried in Egyptian style, extended with its head to the west, to symbolically catch the rejuvenating rays of the morning sun. At his feet was a large bulbous pilgrim flask that immediately raised questions about the tomb's date (Plate 8). Pilgrim flasks became popular in the mid 18th Dynasty, around the reign

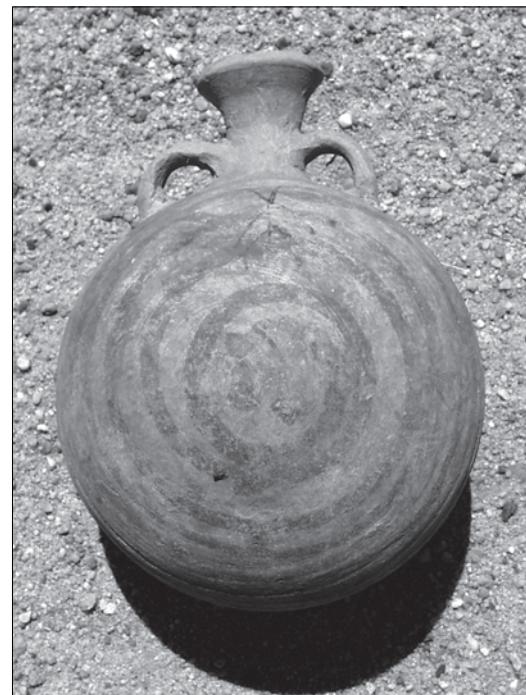


Plate 8. Third Intermediate Period pilgrim flask from Unit 5, pit b.

of Thutmose III (1504-1450 BC), but the New Kingdom types are generally smaller and flatter. This example matches those from later periods, in particular, examples found by Vila (1980, figs 60-70 and 78) in the Napatan cemetery at Missiminia. A radiocarbon date of 1210-890 BC (95.4% probability) is consistent with a post New Kingdom date.

At the same time, a group of three dozen or more tumulus burials adjacent to the eastern end of the Pharaonic cemetery provide evidence for a kind of Nubian revival at Tombos in the aftermath of the Egyptian empire (Figure 1). Initially, we thought that these tombs might date to the post-Meroitic period, since the tumuli consist of rough circles of granite boulders. A radiocarbon date of 1090-820 BC (94.5% probability) from the Unit 3 tumulus excavated in 2000, however, places this cemetery firmly within the post-colonial period. Although no strongly diagnostic pottery was found, the style of the burial reflects the combination of Nubian and Egyptian features that characterizes the Napatan period (Figure 4, Plate 9; cf. Geus 1997). Tumuli are a quintessentially Nubian burial monument. Traces of a bed found beneath the body also provide a Nubian connection, but the extended position of the body, head to the west, shows Egyptian influence. Although no diagnostic pottery was found in this tomb, a second tumulus partially excavated in 2005 contained typically Napatan period potsherds, indicating that this cemetery had a long life.

The Nubian Dynasty

'Amun of Napata has given to me to be ruler of every land. He to whom I say: You are king, he shall be king. He to whom I say: You are not king,

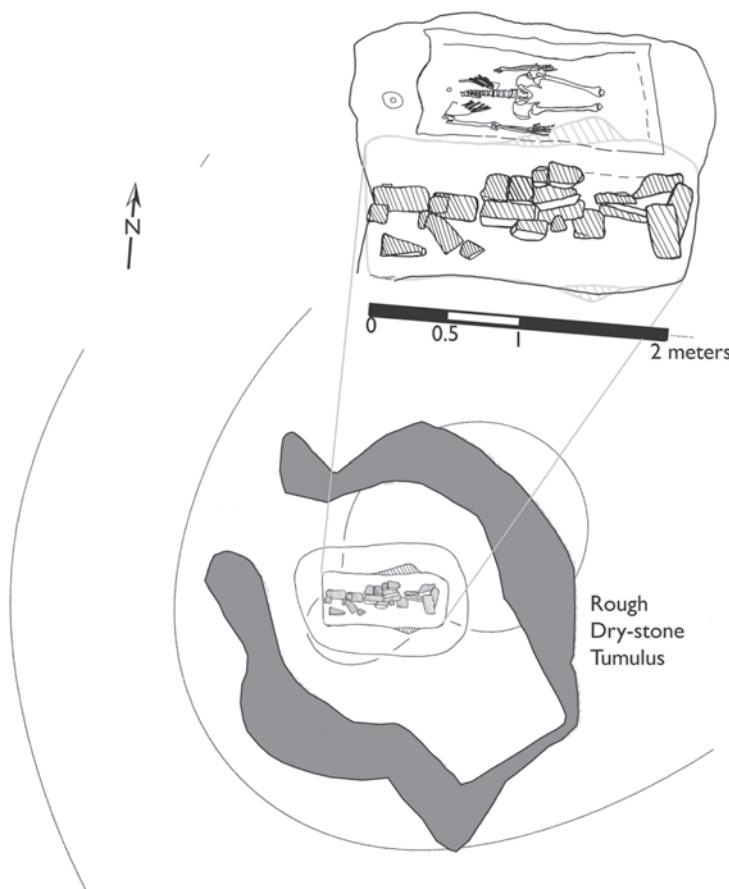


Figure 4. Unit 3 tumulus burial (scale 1:20).

he shall not be king... The gods make a king; the people make a king; but Amun made me.'

Piye, c. 726 BC (Török 1995, 226,
from Reisner 1931)

Our original survey and surface collection at Tombos in 2000 indicated that Napatan period pottery appeared at the site (Figure 5), in particular towards the southern end of



Figure 5. Napatan pottery from the surface of the cemetery (scale 1:4).

the cemetery, a pattern also noted by David Edwards and Ali Osman (2001). This evidence suggested that the community at Tombos survived through the Nubian dark age and on into the golden age when Nubians ruled Egypt and became players on the international stage. In 2005, we decided to investigate the relationship between the New Kingdom empire and the period of the Nubian Dynasty at Tombos. Combining traditional surface survey with an electromagnetic survey conducted by George Herbst, we discovered a new pyramid at Tombos (Figure 1, Unit 9). This time, the pottery clearly indicated that it dated not to the New Kingdom, but instead to the time of the Nubian 25th Dynasty.



Plate 9. Unit 3 tumulus.

The tomb complex is smaller than the pyramid of Siamun, with only a single-chambered chapel (Colour plate VII). This later complex also had unusual extensions at the front and back that would create a pylon-like effect (see reconstruction in Figure 1). Large rectangular pieces of roughly hewn granite served as a covering for the tomb shaft, although only one had been left in place by the looters (Plate 10). Thanks to the efforts of Radwan Daoud, our Rais and host in Tombos, these large stones



Plate 10. Burial shaft in the chapel of the Napatan pyramid with granite blocking stone in situ.

were removed the old fashioned way without damaging the structure (Plate 11). Although we excavated down to the bottom of the tomb shaft, the burial chamber proved too unstable to excavate, and will have to wait until someone with expertise in shoring can be found. Unlike the pyramid of Siamun, where the bottom courses of the mud-brick pyramid had survived, we found only the casemate foundation, characteristic of mud-brick pyramid construction behind the chapel (Plate 12). Vaulting, springing from this



Plate 11. Radwan Daoud supervises the removal of a blocking stone from the pyramid's chapel.

foundation, a technique originating in the New Kingdom, would have supported the pyramid itself. A group of fallen bricks at the back of the complex suggests just such a fallen vault.

We established the date of the pyramid through the large amounts of Napatan period pottery from the fill of the shaft and both from within and adjacent to the chapel (cf. Griffith 1923, pls XVII and XVIII; Vila 1980, figs 167, 169, 184), including sherds from distinctive, red-polished beakers, a kind of handmade buff ware found at Jebel Barkal (Timothy Kendall, pers. comm. 2006), small-handled amphorae showing heavy rilling, presumably from the use of the newly introduced fast kick-wheel, and imported sherds from jars made of very thin Upper Egyptian marl clay also indicating the use of a fast wheel (Colour plate VIII). A small intact 'New Year's' vase also points to a

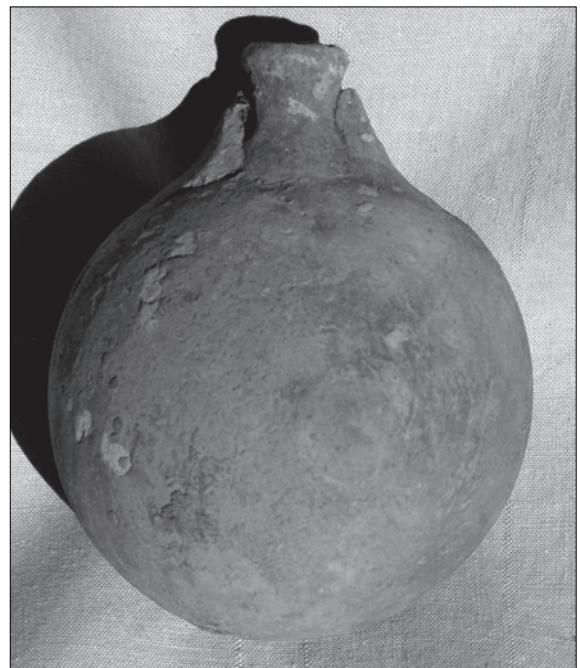


Plate 13. Napatan period New Year's flask from the pyramid chapel.

Napatan date (Plate 13). The only New Kingdom sherds that we found were weathered and incorporated into the leveling and foundations of the complex, suggesting that this tomb was newly constructed and not re-built from an earlier structure, as was the case at Soleb (Schiff-Giorgini *et al.* 1965). Only a handful of jewellery came from the tomb, including assorted beads, fragments from a 'Sons of Horus' amulet set, and a scarab naming Amun-Re, all consistent with a Napatan date (Plate 14). Small flecks of gold leaf and a group of blue faience inlay pieces for a decorated box, or coffin, imply a lavish burial, but the large amounts of disarticulated human bone found in the shaft demonstrate that the tomb was badly looted in antiquity.

In a small chamber tomb to the left of the pyramid complex, however, we had better luck (Plate 15). The collapse of the crypt's vaulting sealed the tomb after an initial bout of looting that removed the torso of the body (Plate 16). A radiocarbon date of 790-480 BC (87.9% probability) establishes the Napatan date of the tomb. Although as usual the termites had done their work, remains of wood (reduced to frass) indicate that the body had been placed in a mummiform coffin, and traces of linen show that the individual was wrapped and therefore probably mummified. These features, along with the burial position – extended, head to the west – reflect Egyptian burial practice, but wood traces beneath the coffin indicate that it may have rested on a bed - a Nubian practice. Excavating the remains of termite-eaten wood is a difficult prospect, but in this case I noticed that the foot end of the coffin was raised above the floor, propped up on a copper-alloy beaker. A careful examination of

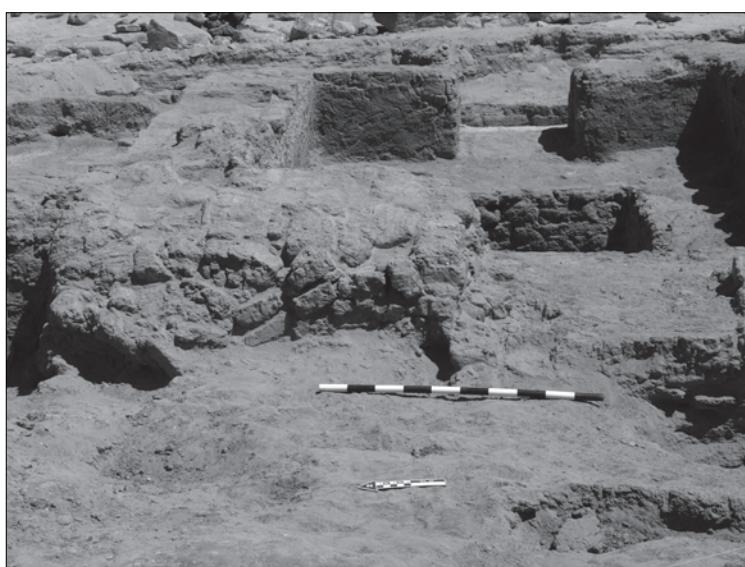


Plate 12. View of the casemate pyramid foundation at the back of the chapel with possible fallen arch.

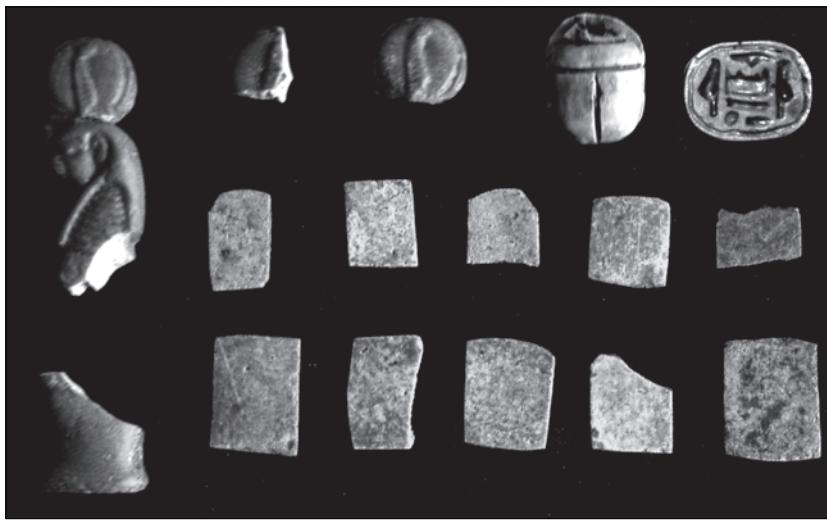


Plate 14. Fragmentary Sons of Horus amulets, a glazed steatite scarab naming Amun-Re, and faience inlays from the pyramid.

the area revealed the remains of the footboard and back legs of a bed. Although the front end of the bed had collapsed down onto the floor, careful excavation showed that a separate layer of termite frass lay under the coffin, consistent with the remains of a bed. This interpretation was supported by the discovery of several finger bones from the body's missing right hand underneath this layer, showing that the body was raised above the ground when the burial was looted.



Plate 15. Composite of two photos of the collapsed vaulting of the small chamber tomb next to the Napatan pyramid.

Apart from the missing torso, the tomb was remarkably intact, and every day of excavation revealed more and more interesting finds. One of the first things we spotted was a pile of jewelry lying on the floor to the left of the bed (Colour plates IX and X), a curious practice also attested at the Napatan cemeteries at Missiminia and Sanam (Vila 1980, fig. 37:1; Griffith 1923, 106). These included several popular amulets appearing in Napatan tombs at Missiminia, Sanam, and Meroe, like the ever-popular faience Eye of Horus, a steatite plaque showing images of Amun-Re and various other deities, a glazed cat (Bastet) with a *nefer* (beautiful) sign on its base,



Plate 16. The warrior's burial, showing the location of the various finds mentioned in the text.

another cat or perhaps a frog, an agate goose (for Amun), and a Janus-like double sided faience amulet of the dwarf god Pataikos, juxtaposed with a grotesque female, or fecundity figure (Plate 17). Pataikos is related to the god Ptah, Bes, and Harpocrates (Wilkinson 2003, 123), but in Nubia is often paired with a leonine goddess, presumably Sakhmet (Dunham 1950, pl. LIV). An extraordinary copper-alloy scarab carries the name of the god Amun as part of a cryptic inscription (Plate 18) and a green faience scarab names Nubian Pharaoh Shabaqo (Plate 17). This nicely crafted piece has a scene showing a griffin (the king?) trampling an Asiatic enemy – apposite given the Nubian Dynasty's struggle against the Assyrians.

It is tempting to simply date the burial to Shabaqo's reign (716–702 BC), but scarabs are often kept as heirlooms. Four wheel-thrown, red-polished Napatan beakers found near the



Plate 17. Faience Pataikos amulet, scarab of Shabaqo, and steatite plaque with Amun-Re on one side and the king with assorted other deities on the other.



Plate 18. Bronze scarab with a cryptic inscription naming Amun.

foot of the bed helped to refine the date, which must have been roughly the time of Shabaqo or his immediate successors Shebitqo or Taharqo (*c.* 716-664 BC). One of these pots was black-topped, showing that Nubian ceramic traditions had not been completely forgotten (Colour plate XI). The presence of several cattle-themed objects in the tomb provides another potentially Nubian feature. Three of the four copper-alloy bowls, placed on either side of the body at the back and front of the tomb, were decorated with images of bulls, incised on the inside (Plate 19). Two had a row of five charging bulls whose iconography is closely matched by faience bowls found in the tombs of Piye's wives, buried during the reign of Shabaqo. The third has a more sedate bull with a lotus blossom around his neck. An elaborately decorated wooden box found next to the (missing) head of the deceased continues the cattle theme, with an openwork design depicting a cow suckling a



Plate 19. One of three bronze bowls with friezes of incised bulls on the inside.

calf in a papyrus swamp (Colour plate XII). This theme refers to the goddess Hathor and was a popular one in the Iron Age international style. For example, the same motif appears on one of the ivories from the Assyrian palace at Nimrud, destroyed in 612 BC (Mallowan 1978, 56-58, Fig. 65), although the piece itself probably dates to the 8th century.

As is so often the case with archaeology, just when we thought that we were finished with the tomb, we came across the most extraordinary discovery yet, a group of iron weapons, including a heavy spearhead and four barbed javelin or harpoon points (Plates 20 and 21). Beneath these iron weapons was a pile (originally a quiver?) of arrows tipped with quartz microliths, perhaps representing another traditionally Nubian element in the tomb (Plate 22). Fine quality



Plate 20. Iron spearhead.

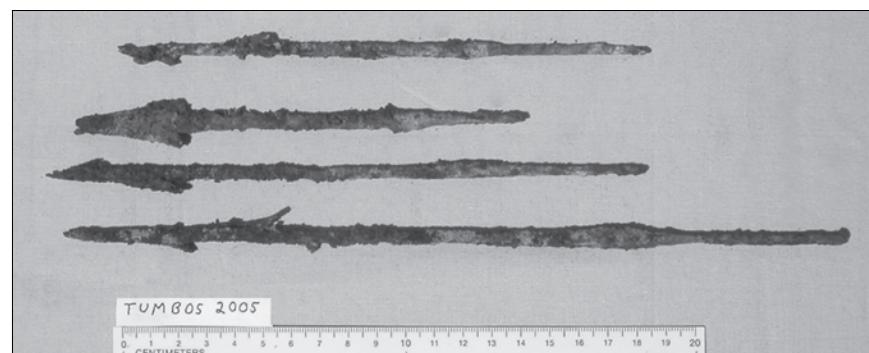


Plate 21. Iron javelin or harpoon points.

lithic arrowheads, including microliths, were found at el-Kurru. Not surprisingly they came from the Nubian style tumuli, but fine quality chipped stone arrowheads also appear in much later pyramids at Meroe (Dunham 1950; 1963). Stone arrowheads are mentioned by Herodotus as part of the equipment of Nubians serving in the Persian army, a passage sometimes used to illustrate how poorly equipped the Nubian army was, a notion contradicted by our soldier. The iron weapons are some of the earliest examples found in Nubia or Egypt. The hollow hafting and leaf-shaped blade of the spear are characteristic of earlier Egyptian bronze examples, but this style also appears in the inventory of contemporary Assyrian weaponry, so it could have been a trophy from military campaigns led into the Levant by Shabaqo, Shebitqo, and/or Taharqo, who while ultimately defeated did have considerable success against the Assyrians.

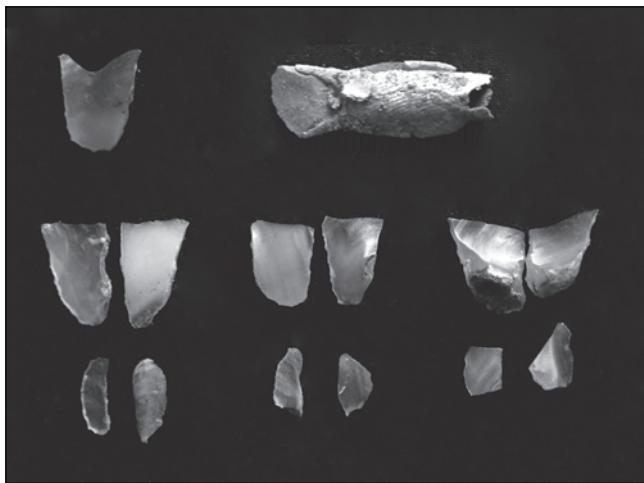


Plate 22. Microlithic arrowheads, including one with preserved hafting. Fine pressure-flaking and backing was employed on the upper left example.

On the other hand, a similar set of spearheads was found by Firth in 1911 at Arabi Hilla in Lower Nubia (Firth 1927, 186–87, pls 28–29). He dates the burial to the Meroitic period – I suspect largely due to the iron weaponry. The associated objects, however, point to an earlier date, and the contents are similar to our burial, including goose (Amun) and Pataikos amulets and four copper-alloy vessels. Since the same style of spearhead was used during the New Kingdom, these weapons could be local products. The absence of Assyrian parallels for the javelin or harpoon also points to a local origin for the weaponry. This new evidence from Tombos may provide support for the idea that at least elite members of the Nubian military were equipped with the latest technology, even though they may have still preferred lithic-tipped arrowheads. These weapons appear some 200 years earlier than the conventional 6th century date for the introduction of iron, in quantity, into north Africa (Shinnie 1985, 161–62; Ehret 2002, 201). A recent metallurgical study of later iron, from Arminna, suggests that the Nubian industry may have developed independently from both the Asiatic and African industries (Abdu and Gordon 2004), perhaps at a much earlier date than previously suspected.

Conclusions

When the land brightened, very early in the morning these two rulers of the South and two rulers of the North, with serpent crests, came to kiss the ground before the fame of his majesty... They entered not into the king's house, because they were unclean and eaters of fish; which is an abomination for the palace. Lo, King Namlot, he entered into the king's house, because he was pure, and he ate not fish. There stood three upon their feet, (but only) one entered the king's house.'

Piye, c. 726 BC (after Breasted 1906: IV, 443)

Evidence from our recent excavations at Tombos points to the cemetery's continued use from the New Kingdom into the Napatan Period, when large pyramid tombs were either revived or continued to be built. Although a full assessment of the pre-25th Dynasty presence at Tombos must await further excavation, the site clearly bridges the gap between the New Kingdom empire and the rise of Kushite Dynasty. This evidence suggests that at least some of the Egyptian and/or Egyptianized colonial communities survived the collapse of the New Kingdom empire. Could they have helped Piye acquire the profound knowledge of Egyptian theology that would allow him to show himself as more Egyptian than his fish-eating Libyan rivals in the Nile Delta?

The presence of a large pyramid tomb dedicated to a high-ranking colonial administrator establishes the importance of Tombos as a key imperial centre during the New Kingdom, but the surprising discovery of women buried in Nubian-style burials reveals a much closer connection between the two societies than was previously suspected. The Nubian-style burials were all of women. The fact that they were mixed in the same communal tombs with Egyptian-style inhumations implies that they married into the Egyptian colonial community, a common pattern in colonial encounters since colonists tend to be mostly men (Deagan 1998; Lightfoot and Martinez 1995). Establishing kinship relationships across ethnic boundaries in this way benefits both sides, personalizing what would otherwise be impersonal bureaucratic relationships. Physical anthropology analysis by Michele Buzon (2006) reflects the population's mixed character, while preliminary results of Strontium Isotope analysis shows that some of the population came from outside Nubia (Buzon *et al.* in press). The presence of similar burials at Soleb (Schiff Giorgini *et al.* 1965, figs 603 and 616) suggests that this practice was not unusual in Upper Nubia.

The evidence for a flourishing multicultural community at Tombos stretching back into the New Kingdom suggests that peaceful interactions between Egyptians and Nubians could have continued during the Third Intermediate Period at least partly through the conduit of surviving colonial communities, who had kinship ties on both sides of the intercultural relationship. At the same time, more traditionally Nubian tumulus burials continued in a separate cemetery that dates back at least to the early Third Intermediate Period. This demonstrates that key elements of Nubian burial practice were revived, like tumuli and bed burials, if indeed they ever truly disappeared (Welsby and Welsby Sjöström 2007). This pattern is consistent with the earliest tombs at el-Kurru, the ancestral burial ground of the Napatan kings (Dunham 1950). At least the one burial we excavated was found in extended position, a practice attested in Napatan cemeteries that presumably reflects Egyptian influence. Evidence for cultural blending also appears at Hillat el-Arab (Vincentelli 2006). In a similar way, Nubian elements appear in our Napatan warrior's burial, in spite of

its overall Egyptianized character. We can reach a greater understanding of the eventual rise of the Napatan 25th Dynasty by placing it in the context of this complex cultural mosaic consisting of different degrees of Nubian-Egyptian blending. We need no longer look directly to Egypt for Egyptian influence, such as the construction of royal pyramids, which are better seen as an innovation modeled on the New Kingdom – or alternatively, a continuing tradition of elite pyramid construction. Török (1997, 118-121) argues persuasively that, since pyramids disappeared as a royal monument at the beginning of the New Kingdom, 700 years before their use at Napata and Meroe, they can be seen more as an innovative adaptation of Egyptian symbolism than a slavish imitation of Egyptian royal ideology. In this view, the royal use of Egyptian iconography legitimized Napatan rule at home through the display of external (Egyptian) cosmological power. At the same time, the Napatan use of Pharaonic ideology transformed them from the barbaric foreign enemy of New Kingdom royal theology to the saviours of Egyptian civilization against the competing Nile Delta Dynasties of Libyan ancestry (Török 1995; Smith 1998). Our work at Tombos is giving us an important piece of this puzzle by documenting how Egyptians and Nubians, living and buried together side by side, forged a new society that transformed Nubian culture and may have contributed to the rise of one of the greatest and longest enduring kingdoms in African history.

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Colour plate I. Tombos.
This stele at Tombos
commemorating Thutmose
I's conquest of Kush is
clearly visible to any river
traffic heading north.



Colour plate II.
Tombos.
Mycenaean
'Amarna' style
flask, probably used
to transport
perfumed oil.



Colour plate III. Tombos. Selection of
jewellery from Unit 6.



Colour plate IV. Tombos.
Excavation of the Unit 6
chamber tomb. The burials
extended right into the
staircase.



Colour plate V.
Tombos. Unusual
Nubian burial in Unit
6 with Bes amulets from
behind her neck.



Colour Plate VII. Tombos. The Unit 9 Napatan pyramid with undecorated libation
tables in situ. The small chamber tomb is in the far left corner of the unit.



Colour Plate VI.
Tombos. Libation vase
with blue polychrome
lotus motif.



Colour plate VIII.
Tombos. Napatan
pottery from the pyramid.



Colour plate IX.
Tombos. Pile of
jewellery in situ
next to the body in
the small chamber
tomb.



Colour plate X. Tombos.
Amulets from the pile of
jewellery shown in Colour
plate IX.



Colour plate XI. Tombos. Napatan
polished beaker employing the traditional
Nubian black-topped style popular with
the earlier Kerma culture.



Colour plate XII. Tombos. Openwork polychrome painted wooden box from the small chamber tomb showing the Egyptian goddess Hathor in a marsh suckling a calf (after consolidation).