

SUDAN & NUBIA

The Sudan Archaeological Research Society



Bulletin No. 11

2007





Egypt

RED SEA

Sudan

Eritrea

Ethiopia

- The Sudan Archaeological Research Society Concession
- ▲ Ancient sites
- MODERN TOWNS



0 250 km



ASWAN
1st cataract

Aniba
Qasr Ibrim

WADI HALFA
2nd cataract

3rd cataract
Tombos
Tabo
Kerma/Dokki Gel

Kawa

KARIEMA
Jebel Barkal
4th cataract

ABU HAMED

5th cataract

Dangeil

Akad
ATBARA

6th cataract

OMDURMAN
KHARTOUM
Soba East

Botri

WAD MEDANI

KOSTI

SENNAR

KASSALA

GEDAREF

Wadi el-Allaqi

Wadi Gabgaba

Nije

Wadi Howar

Wadi el-Meilik

Wadi Muqaddam

Atbara

White Nile

Blue Nile

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Contents

Kirwan Memorial Lecture

- Death at Tombos: Pyramids, Iron and the Rise of the Napatan Dynasty 2
Stuart Tyson Smith
-

The Merowe Dam Archaeological Salvage Project

- Survey and excavations in the vicinity of ed-Doma (AKSE) and et-Tereif (AKSCW), 2006-2007 15
Derek A. Welsby
- Preliminary Report on the Second Season of Excavations Conducted on Mis Island (AKSC) 20
Andrew Ginns
- The 4th Season of the SARS Anglo-German Expedition to the Fourth Nile Cataract 26
Pawel Wolf and Ulrike Nowotnick
- Rock art and archaeology: the Hadiab Survey 34
Cornelia Kleimitz
- The Value and Future Potential of Human Skeletal Remains Excavated at the Fourth Cataract 43
Tina Jakob
-

Reports

- A Century of Archaeological Salvage, 1907-2007 48
William Y. Adams
- The Nubian Cemetery at Hierakonpolis, Egypt. Results of the 2007 Season
- The C-Group Cemetery at Locality HK27C 57
Renée Friedman
- Overview of the Hierakonpolis C-Group Palaeopathology 63
Margaret Judd
- Overview of the Hierakonpolis C-Group Dental Remains 66
Joel D. Irish
- The Taharqo wall painting rescue project 72
Eric Miller, Pamela Rose and David Singleton
- Excavations in the Palace of Aspelta at Jebel Barkal, March 2007 82
Timothy Kendall and Pawel Wolf

- Bread Moulds from the Amun Temple at Dangeil, Nile State – an Addendum. 89
Julie R. Anderson, A. Catherine D'Andrea, Amanda Logan and Salah Mohamed Ahmed

- Rescue Excavation of a Late-Meroitic Tomb at Botri, South of Khartoum. Preliminary Report 94
Mahmoud Suliman Bashir

Akad Excavation Project

- Preliminary report on the 2005 and 2006 Seasons 98
Mohamed Faroug, Yassin M. Saeed and Alexandros Tsakos

- Report on the human skeletal material from Akad 107
Husna Taha el-Ata and Hwida Mohamed Adam

- Archaeological Reconnaissance in the Nuba Mountains, Sudan 112
Helen Taylor and Michal Bieniada

- The Sultan Ali Dinar Museum, el-Fasher. A window on Darfur's history 119
Pieter Tesch

- Victorian Gunboats in the 21st Century 122
Henry Keonn-Boyd

- A visit to a traditional leather tannery in Central Sudan 125
Lucy Skinner
-

Miscellaneous

Obituaries -

- Friedrich Wilhelm Hinkel (1925-2007) 127
Janice Yellin and William Y. Adams

- Patrice Lenoble (1942-2007) 128
Jacques Reinold

- Peter Lewis Shinnie (1915-2007) 129
Krzysztof Grzymiski

- Bruce Graham Trigger (1937-2006) 130
Krzysztof Grzymiski

Review -

- Włodzimierz Godlewski 2005. *Pachoras. The Cathedrals of Aetios, Paulos and Petros. The Architecture* 132
Julie R. Anderson
-

Front cover: Village on the Island of Dirbi in the SARS concession above the Fourth Nile Cataract (photo: D. A. Welsby).



The 4th Season of the SARS Anglo-German Expedition to the Fourth Nile Cataract

Pawel Wolf and Ulrike Nowotnick

General results¹

In the last season of our mission to the Fourth Nile Cataract, efforts were directed towards the central part of the SARS concession.² Fieldwork focused on three islands, Umm Mereigit, Umm Balla and Midaimir, as well as on a 3km long stretch of the left bank west of Hadiab village (Plate 1). The three islands are separated from the left bank by seasonal channels which in some places still retain water into November/December. The landscape of the islands does not differ very much from the mainland – gneiss outcrops, *wadis* of varying size and silted alluvial plains near the river bank. These plains and channels make the islands suitable for farming, as soon as the water level drops after the inundation. The local Shaigiya still cultivate some of these locations using seasonal dwellings during sowing and harvesting. Some of these places have been used for several generations and have thus been documented by our team (e.g. sites 3-N-85, 88, 207). However, the picture must have changed considerably since the Medieval period. Medieval and Kerma occupation remains (sites 3-N-120, 121, 124, 126, 140, 147-149, 204), box-grave cemeteries (like sites 3-N-129 and 205) and many crevice graves amongst the rocky outcrops indicate that a chain of small hamlets must have existed along the river banks of the islands during pre-Islamic periods. Notably, most of the few rock-art sites with Medieval period markings and camel representations, as well

as several rock-gongs, were concentrated within the outcrops adjacent to these sites (see Kleinitz, this volume).

We conducted surface clearings at one of the Medieval occupation sites (3-N-140) and two occupation areas with Kerma pottery (sites 3-N-196 and 3-N-217). In addition, we tested several graves at the Kerma cemeteries 3-N-340 and 3-N-271 (see below). We completed the fieldwork with trial excavations of specific occupation features such as stone pavements at sites 3-N-333 and 3-N-351, a detailed rock-art survey (see Kleinitz, this volume), a survey recording the distribution of linear stone structures – dams (see Welsby, this volume), stone lines and dry-stone walls, as well as tethering stones.³ A rather unexpected find during the survey was the discovery of the most complex gravel feature in the concession. It had been made by the children of Gamra village (Plate 16).

A number of Neolithic occupation sites and workplaces were located on the seasonal islands, as well as on the adja-

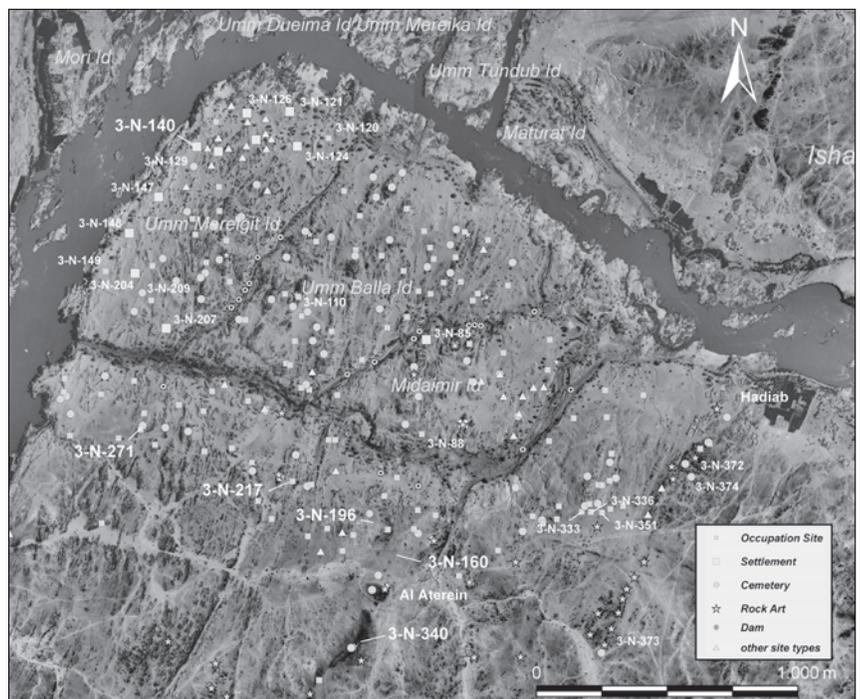


Plate 1. Map of the surveyed area (labelled sites are referred to in the text).

¹ For the preliminary reports on the previous three seasons see Wolf 2004; Wolf and Nowotnick 2005a; 2005b; 2006; Schiestl 2006; as well as the literature cited in Wolf and Nowotnick 2006, 31f.

² The season took place from 1st November 2006 to 15th December 2006. We are grateful to the National Corporation for Antiquities and Museums, Sudan for logistic support. The team consisted of Mohammed el-Toom (NCAM inspector, Sudan), Sara Bock (archaeologist, Germany); Björn Briewig (archaeologist, Germany); Dagmar Fuchs (archaeologist, Austria); Baldur Gabriel (prehistorian and geographer, Germany), Cornelia Kleinitz (rock art specialist, Germany), Ulrike Nowotnick (co-field director, archaeologist, Germany), Michael Schmitz (archaeologist, Germany), Florian Wöss (archaeologist, Austria); Pawel Wolf (field director, Germany). Some of the pottery was recorded after the season by Dobieslawa Baginska (Poland).

cent left bank. These sites are strategically well-placed on higher outcrop plateaus, or gravel terraces overlooking the Nile valley or smaller *wadis*. Their ancient surface was generally heavily eroded. Rarely we found protected locations where stone knapping had taken place. Here were dense concentrations of lithic stone tools, interspersed with quartz-tempered pottery fragments, spread among loose stone settings.

³ Preliminary reports on these surveys are under preparation and will be published by Gabriel and Wolf in the proceedings of the 4th *conference internationale sur l'archéologie de la 4^e cataracte du nil* in Lille 2007.

Cemeteries of the Kerma tradition are fairly abundant in the surveyed area, both on the islands and on the left bank. Frequently we found different types of tomb monuments at the same location, ranging from ring tumuli and tumuli clusters, to dome graves and crevice graves among rock boulders. Their absolute dating often remains uncertain. Almost all of these cemeteries were looted, some evidently very recently; hence, we dated these cemeteries on the basis of scattered potsherds. Most of them may originate from the *Kerma Moyen* period. These cemeteries, with tumuli of type FT04,⁴ were usually located on hilltops and outcrop ridges. Their superstructures, usually not exceeding 15 in number, might also represent the ruins of destroyed dome graves, or vaulted chambers of types FD01-04. The most impressive burial place of this kind was site 3-N-340 at el-Aterein, with more than 90 graves, situated on top and on the slopes of a 20m high basalt plateau (see below).

Most of the rock art in the area, representing mainly cattle, is spatially related to these Kerma tradition cemeteries indicating a possible date for most of those rock engravings within that period – a suggestion which is supported by the cultic significance of cattle within Bronze Age cultures, particularly in the Kerma horizon.

Many more cemeteries in the area consist of New Kingdom period to Napatan scatters of semi-dome and crevice graves atop outcrop ridges and upon their slopes. Using natural rocks to form a part of the grave substructure, they display a variety of forms such as crevices, semi-domes, alcoves, or rock nests.⁵ Occasionally, tumuli of type FT04 were erected on top of the same mound. Local handmade Kerma wares and wheel-made variants of similar types, as well as Napatan amphorae fragments lying among scatters of human bone, suggest continuous use of these burial grounds into the New Kingdom/Napatan periods.⁶ Medieval potsherds indicate a reuse of such localities for pottery deposits (cf. Wolf and Nowotnick 2006, 30f; Nowotnick and Tsakos, forthcoming). Larger Kerma tradition cemeteries with 30-70 graves are rare within the surveyed region. They are situated on and around prominent outcrops as at site 3-N-110, Jebel Umm Balla and sites 3-N-372/373 near Hadiab village. They are often spatially associated with rock-art panels (see Kleinitz, this volume).

Another type of Kerma tradition graves is represented by cluster cemeteries. Between 10 and 20 stone tumuli are densely clustered together, on slightly elevated gravel terraces. All of these tombs had been heavily looted, revealing masses of *Kerma Classique* pottery, imported Egyptian wares,

and fragments of ostrich eggshell and of polished stone bracelets. Our test excavations at cemetery 3-N-271 confirmed that these graves date to the *Kerma Classique*, or later periods (see below).

In close proximity to the Kerma burial grounds we located a relatively large number of occupation sites of that period. Remarkable amounts of worn Kerma potsherds were scattered over large areas on gravel terraces, or on the alluvial plains, sometimes protected by low outcrop ridges - places suitable for hamlets and small settlements. A few irregular stone settings were the only visible structures on the surface. However, the test excavations at two of these places were less satisfactory. At both sites 3-N-196 and 3-N-217 our surface cleaning of up to several hundred square metres did not reveal distinct archaeological features, such as post-holes, stone-settings, or fire places. Most likely, the occupation horizons have been utterly eroded over the past millennia, leaving only numerous finely decorated and coarse potsherds, lithic tools and debitage, grinding stones, burned animal bones and ostrich eggshell fragments.

Unambiguous Meroitic and post-Meroitic remains are fairly scarce in the surveyed region. Despite this infrequency, a large tumuli field of 65 FT05 and FT06 superstructures is situated at el-Aterein (site 3-N-160). This cemetery is typically situated on a wide alluvial plain, probably a former branch of the Nile, showing the preference for softer grounds which facilitated excavation of deeper substructures. Low dry-stone walls extend from some of the tumuli in various directions occasionally linking some of them - a feature also known from other post-Meroitic cemeteries at the Fourth Cataract.⁷

Another major site type in the area is Medieval settlements. Located in flat gravel plains close to the river bank or adjacent to *wadis* and *kebeeran*, these sites display various kinds of stone constructions, low stone walls or circles, semi-circular structures against boulder outcrops, or irregular settings. The surface between these possible hut remains is littered with worn Medieval pottery, including domestic wares and cooking pots, with a few fine-ware fragments, spindle whorls, grinding bases and hammer stones. To gain a better understanding of such settlements, we chose one of them for surface cleaning. It revealed partially preserved Medieval compounds with *jalus*-houses (see site 3-N-140 below). Several box-grave cemeteries are situated on similar spots nearby.

Medieval occupation at site 3-N-140, Umm Mereigit

The Medieval settlement site 3-N-140 is one of several occupation places along the river bank of Umm Mereigit

⁴ The type designations within this report refer to the MDASP type series, which will be published by Borowski and Welsby in the proceedings of the conference *Archaeology of the Fourth Nile Cataract – Merome Dam Archaeological Salvage Project, Cologne, 13–14 July 2006*.

⁵ Types FD03-FD04 and FR01-FR02.

⁶ This is confirmed by C¹⁴-dating undertaken by the Gdańsk mission (H. Paner, pers. comm. 2006).

⁷ Cf. site 3-O-1 (Welsby 2003a, 19f and fig. 2.17; 2003b, 28f) and site 4-M-53 (Welsby 2005, 5).



(Plate 1). We chose the site for test excavations because its surface features seemed better preserved and were less covered by sand and silt than similar occupation areas elsewhere. The central part of the site appeared to contain remains of dwellings in a small rural hamlet (Plate 2). Box-

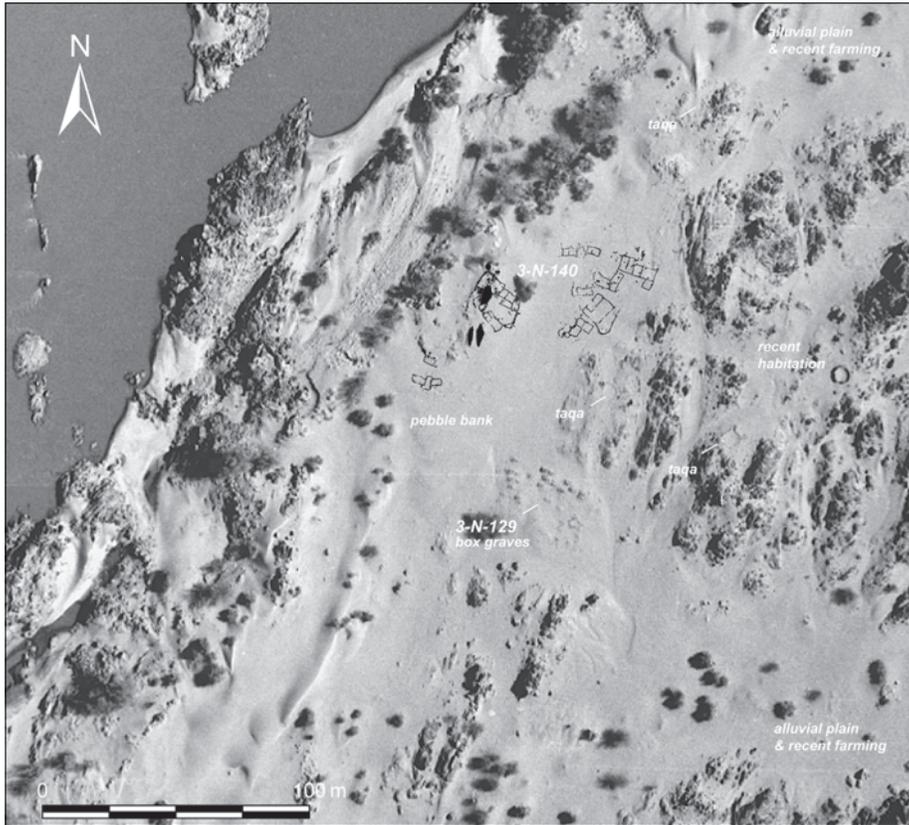


Plate 2. The settlement 3-N-140 and its environs.

grave cemetery 3-N-129, with about 50 graves, might have belonged to this community. The farming areas must have been the alluvial plains to the north and the south of the settlement. They are situated on a lower level and are still used for agriculture by the local Shaigiya. The northern part of the site was unfortunately destroyed by recent farming. Several threshing floors (*taqat*) are situated within the outcrops in the vicinity. They are now used by the locals, but may have been used during the Medieval period. There is hardly any rock art close by, but a couple of rock gongs may be found within the outcrops immediately to the east of the settlement (C. Kleinitz, pers. comm. 2007). Close to the south-westernmost surface features of the hamlet, a wide pebble bank revealed several large pits which seemed to have been dug recently. Our workmen informed us that the locals dig there for gold, which, if true, would certainly have been the case in former periods as well.

We cleared several areas, 750m² in total, focusing on areas with visible surface remains of stone alignments. Remarkably, almost none of these surface structures resembled the archaeological contexts below ground. Instead, our clearings revealed the remains of five house compounds.

The *jalus* walls⁸ were about 300-400mm thick and were reinforced by stone slabs and small boulders in several places, but without foundations (Colour plates XIX and XX). We did not find any substantial post-hole settings.

Preliminary conclusions, based on the surface cleaning, suggest that the settlement grew irregularly. It consisted of houses comparable to those of other rural settlements of the Medieval period at the Fourth Cataract.⁹ Houses and compounds follow a rectangular pattern. The general layout of the living units resembles the traditional bipartite unit of an anteroom and a chamber (Plate 3).¹⁰ The relatively thin walls were obviously not strong enough to hold a second storey.

Unfortunately, only the layout of two compounds was completely preserved. Compound 1600 consisted of two large courtyards accessible from the south west and a rectangular room set into the north-western courtyard (Plate 4, Colour plate XIX). Within compound 1000, smaller compartments are grouped around a central courtyard which was built against a large gneiss outcrop (Plate 5, Colour plate XIX). The entrance was from the south west, leading into a forecourt and



Plate 3. Rooms 1220/1210 of compound 1200 from the north.

⁸ According to Adams, *jalus* was used as building material in the north not before the 17th century AD (Adams 1994, 233 and n. 4, 246; see also Fitzenreiter 1999, 154). However, in the town at Kerma *jalus* was utilized since the Kerma period for fortifications and similar constructions.

⁹ Cf. settlement 3-Q-62 near Turkab (Wolf and Nowotnick 2005a, 192 and fig. 11).

¹⁰ Compounds 610/620; 1210/1220; 1310/1320; 1430/1440. Cf. Fitzenreiter 1999, 116 and n. 182.



Plate 4. Compound 1600 from the north.

then into the large central courtyard. A terrace facing the river was constructed to the west of the outcrop and reinforced by large boulders up to 2m in length (Plate 6). Two semi-circular stone-settings with *jalus*-walls about the south-western face of the outcrop - probably a kind of *seribat* for small livestock, since one of them was filled with dark brown dung. A cooking place consisting of large broken *doka*-sherds set in a circle, 900mm in diameter, was found directly next to the outcrop within the larger compartment to its north west (Plate 7).¹¹



Plate 5. Compound 1000 from the south east.

Some of the rooms contained a brown dung-like material. By comparison with recent habitations, these might have been stables for small livestock, since no separate *seribat* have been found.¹² Fireplaces, consisting of ash and burned clay and sometimes charcoal, were preserved in several rooms.

¹¹ It contained a large amount of ash and sherds of various smaller vessels.

¹² Dung layers in recent *seribat* and habitations are up to hundreds of millimetres in thickness. Thus, it is quite probable that Medieval dung layers are preserved until today. A similar situation was encountered during the 2005/06 season at settlement 3-R-112 and 113.



Plate 6. Reinforcement of the terrace in the west of compound 1000.

Larger pottery fragments were associated with some of these cooking places. In general, we found a small number of jars, bowls, plates and *doka* of mostly common forms, dating the settlement into the early to classic Christian periods (c. AD 600-850) (D. Baginska, pers. comm. 2007). Several complete pots were *in situ*, set into the floor level of the courtyards next to the house walls (Plate 8). Other artefacts were grinders and a notably large number of hammer stones.



Plate 7. Fireplace in the north-eastern part of compound 1000.

Kerma Cemetery 3-N-340

Site 3-N-340, certainly the largest and most impressive Kerma cemetery recorded within the western part of the SARS concession, is situated at el-Aterein, half a kilometre to the south of Umm Midaimir Island. The surrounding territory is characterised by wide *wadis* and alluvial plains, only rarely separated by smaller gneiss outcrops. In the midst of this rather gentle terrain, a high basalt ridge extends for about 400m in a north-easterly direction (Plate 1). Its central plateau of c. 100 x 15m is delimited by small natural outcrops and boulders. Being 20m high, it must have represented an impressive landmark throughout all periods of



Plate 8. Complete vessels from settlement 3-N-140.

human occupation in that region (Colour plate XXI). Even today, our local workmen told bizarre stories about ghosts and strange phenomena occurring in the vicinity of that place. A Neolithic site occupies the southernmost part of the ridge, possibly a hilltop hunting station.

The highest plateau shows almost no traces of building activities and was evidently cleared of larger stones and boulders. However, the adjoining outcrops and gentle slopes are covered by a prominent burial ground of no less than 90 tumuli and some crevice graves. Kerma pottery is scattered among the graves of site 3-N-340, indicating that most of them have been looted. Different areas of the cemetery display different types of tumulus superstructures – probably a matter of preservation and of the available building material, rather than of cultural traits. While the upper tumuli are freestanding stone monuments 1m in height (type FC01), the graves on the gravel slopes are covered by flat gravel tumuli with a stone kerb (FT01a-c).

The main platform - deliberately left free to form an open space which is delimited by stone tumuli - obviously represents an extraordinary layout of yet unknown significance. Its cultic atmosphere is furthermore supported by numerous rock-art depictions. Mainly cattle, but also anthropomorphic representations, dogs, antelopes, and camel motifs are found among other forms. The pictures are engraved into the outcrops and on smaller boulders used for the erection of the tumuli. The basalt ridge, having smooth rock faces, is especially suited for rock art. In addition to the usual pecked engravings, fine-line incisions representing cattle and other motifs were found by C. Kleinitz at several spots – a rock-art style hitherto unknown in the Fourth Cataract region (see Kleinitz, this volume).

We tested three tumuli at site 3-N-340 to establish a more precise date for the rock engravings. Unfortunately, all of these graves were completely destroyed and looted. Thus, the Kerma potsherds scattered within the cemetery remain the only means of dating. One of the tested graves, tumu-

lus 17, had several rock engravings of bovines on the bedrock beneath it. Its superstructure, a tumulus of type FT04 or FD01, was comprehensively destroyed by robbers, who had redeposited most of the stones into the former grave after its looting. The burial chamber, a crevice covered by up to 1.5m long basalt slabs, did not contain any artefacts except for a few bone fragments within wind-blown sand (Plate 9). Most important, however, was that the bovines engraved on the bedrock had most likely been covered by the original tumulus' superstructure, providing a *terminus ante quem* for the rock engravings. The Kerma date of the cemetery, based on the form of the grave structures and the surface pottery, indicates that the rock pictures must be from that period, or earlier (see Kleinitz, this volume).



Plate 9. Burial chamber of grave 17 at site 3-N-340.

Kerma Cemetery 3-N-271

Cemetery 3-N-271 is an example of the so-called 'cluster cemeteries' situated about 250m inland opposite Umm Mereigit Island (Plates 1 and 10), an area densely scattered with occupation places and burial grounds of the Kerma and also of the Medieval period. The remains of about nine heavily-disturbed stone tumuli are clustered together on a gravel slope next to three outcrop ridges full of crevice, semi-dome and tumulus graves. The relation of these two burial grounds remains unknown. Both are heavily looted and have a large number of potsherds on the surface: late Kerma types, local wheel-made specimens and imported Egyptian wares.

To the east of the grave cluster, several robber pits revealed human bones of children and adolescents. In the hope of finding less disturbed burials we concentrated our efforts on this part of the cemetery. We discovered another seven graves without obvious superstructures and a number of empty pits of unknown function (Plate 11).

The substructures of these graves were made of rectangular boxes of upright stone slabs. These cist graves were roughly 600 x 400mm in size and generally oriented north-



Plate 10. Panorama of site 3-N-271 from the south.

south. Most of the graves were heavily looted, yielding some pottery fragments and bones of young individuals. Thus the children of the community were buried slightly apart from the main burial ground. Grave F4 still preserved remains of its superstructure - a small circular stone tumulus *c.* 1m in diameter with the lower stone courses embedded in a mud mortar - covering the burial. The excavation of the small stone cist revealed a small child's skeleton in contracted position, head towards the north, facing west (Plate 12). The child's right hand was positioned underneath its head, whereas its left arm remained by the left side. Six small faience pendants in the shape of *uraei* were aligned around the child's neck, probably belonging to a necklace (Plate 13). Two rather coarse Kerma bowls were placed inside the grave. A bowl with incised cross-like pattern below its rim was placed directly under the body of the child, whereas a small black-topped red-burnished bowl was placed in the lower right corner on the bottom of the pit. The Egyptian jewellery together with local handmade ves-



Plate 11. The eastern part of cemetery 3-N-271 after surface clearing.



Plate 12. Substructure and burial of grave F4 at site 3-N-271.

sels presents an interesting mixture of traditional elements and northern influences from the Egyptian New Kingdom. To the south of the Third Cataract the persistence of ancient indigenous practices is evident throughout the New Kingdom and later times, thus a post-Kerma date for this cemetery cannot be ruled out.¹³

Trial excavations at sites 3-N-333, 3-N-336 and 3-N-351

During the 2005/06 season we had tested circular and oval stone 'pavements' of *c.* 1-1.5m in diameter.¹⁴ This season, we uncovered a number of similar pavements,

¹³ Similar cist burials, in a tightly nucleated cemetery, were excavated by the Peruvians further to the east in the SARS concession at site 4-L-100. The cemetery appears to have been in use during the 18th Dynasty (pers. comm. I. Welsby Sjöström).

¹⁴ See Wolf and Nowotnick 2006: 30; cf. Welsby 2005, fig. 2 type V; Paner and Borcowski 2005: 104 and fig. 26 no. 2.



Plate 13. The uraei from grave F4 at site 3-N-271.

situated on a higher gravel plateau south-west of Hadiab village. No obvious settlement sites have been recorded within this archaeologically rather poor area and the pavements also do not show any association with the few burial places in the vicinity. We excavated three pavements at sites 3-N-351 and 3-N-333, as well as two so-called ‘*Steinplätze*’ at site 3-N-336 (Plate 1).¹⁵

Among the tested platforms, we recorded two types, both representing circular to oval pavements of roughly 2m in diameter. One type, equivalent to type P01, was made of a single layer of slabs about 200mm in size (3-N-333, F1 and 3-N-351, F1, Plate 14). The other type consisted of fist-sized stones and pebbles and, like type P04, it was surrounded by a kerb of larger slabs (3-N-333, F4, Plate 15). Again, we could not find any archaeological features such

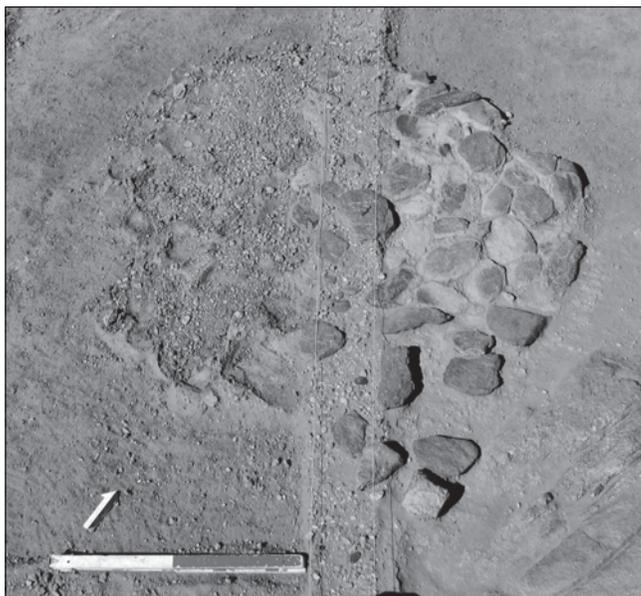


Plate 14. Stone pavement, site 3-N-351, F1, after clearing and removal of stone slabs at its western half.

¹⁵ A number of similar surface features have been tested within our previous seasons. For the ‘*Steinplätze*’ in general see Gabriel 2002.

as post-holes or pits associated with the pavements - neither pottery, charcoal, nor any other artefacts. The platforms were simply paved on top of the gravelly ground, without any additional building activities like *seribat*, *rakubat* etc. The bedrock beneath these pavements did not show any evidence for cooking, or heating (cf. Wolf and Nowotnick 2006, 30). Consequently, their explanation as cooking places is unlikely.

The two ‘*Steinplätze*’ at site 3-N-336 are irregular concentrations of quartz and gneiss stones with a diameter of 600-900mm. In contrast to structures of types P01-P04, their outer

limits are not regular. Instead, the concentration of stones simply decreases. The stones of one of them were embedded within a thin layer of ash, mixed with a little charcoal, indicating a cooking place, or fireplace of unknown date, since we did not find any associated potsherds or other datable artefacts.

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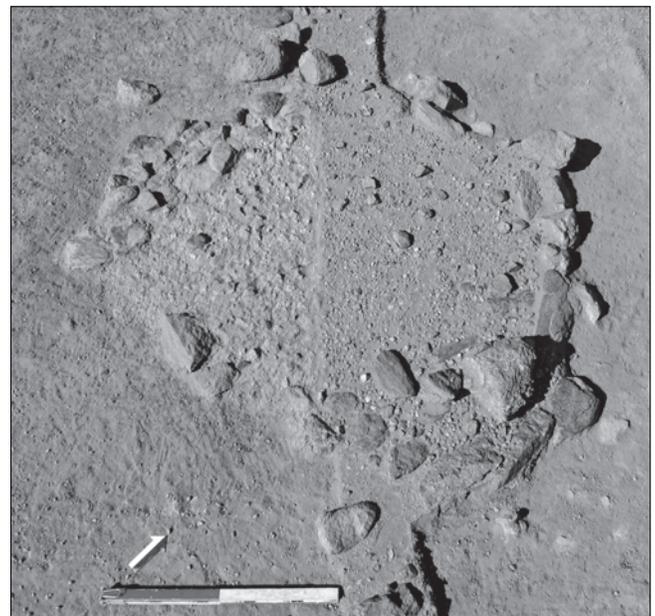


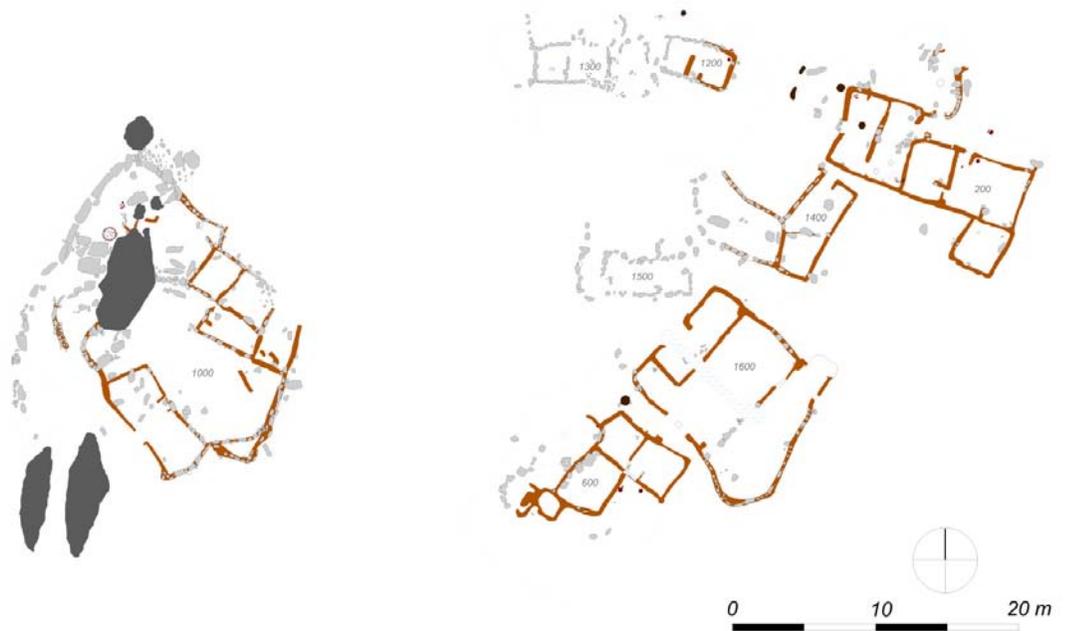
Plate 15. Stone pavement, site 3-N-333, F4, after clearing of its western half.



Plate 16. Gravel feature near the village of Gamra.

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*Colour plate XIX.
AKSW. Plan of the
central part of the
Medieval settlement
3-N-140.*



Colour plate XX. AKSW. Panorama of settlement 3-N-140 after the surface cleanings.



Colour plate XXI. AKSW. Panorama of site 3-N-340 from the north.