

# SUDAN & NUBIA

The Sudan Archaeological Research Society



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Front cover: The descendency of Tomb IV T 1 near Sedeinga under excavation (© V. Francigny / SEDAU).

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# The Archaeology of the Medieval and Post-Medieval Fortress at Tinare in the Northern El-Mahas

*Abdelrahaman Ibrahim Saeed Ali*

## The site

Tinare fortress (N 20° 21.202' / E 30° 28.990') lies near the northernmost Mahas village on the west bank of the Nile. It is built on a high rocky promontory about 22m from the river. The village of Tinare lies to the east and Komongana to the west (Figure 1).<sup>1</sup>

The site has two parts; the first includes the fortress and the buildings within it (the main section) (Figure 2), and the second includes an outer fortified enclosure occupied by the soldiers' barracks and stables for horses (Plates 1 and 2).

It is constructed from a variety of building materials, stone, mud brick and *jalous* and is well and strongly built although the walls differ in thickness along their length. The roofs consist of dom and date palm tree trunks and fronds, traditional roofing materials.



Figure 1. The Mahas area with the location of Tinare fortress.

<sup>1</sup> The Nile at this point is actually flowing east to west.

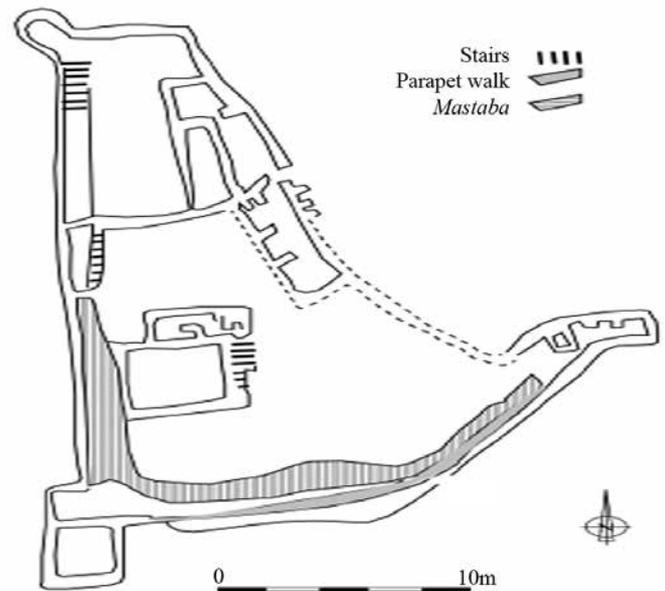


Figure 2. Plan of the Tinare fortress.

## The fortress defences

### The towers

The main section comprises the fortress; a triangular structure, built on a rocky slope running down to the river, with three upstanding towers. The eastern tower, two storey's high, was constructed of mud bricks and *jalous* with a stairway built of stone and mud. The ground floor consists of two rooms with a doorway in the south wall. The tower stands in places 10m high and its walls are pierced by six small windows for firearms (Plate 3).

The north-west tower, the main one, which overlooks the Nile and the enclosure has a solid 'D'-shaped plan and is constructed of stone in the lower part with mud bricks and *jalous* above. It has three loopholes for firearms and stands to a maximum height of 8m (Plate 4).

The third tower is to the south west. It is a substantial tower, but the upper rooms have completely disappeared.



Plate 1. General view of the fortress.

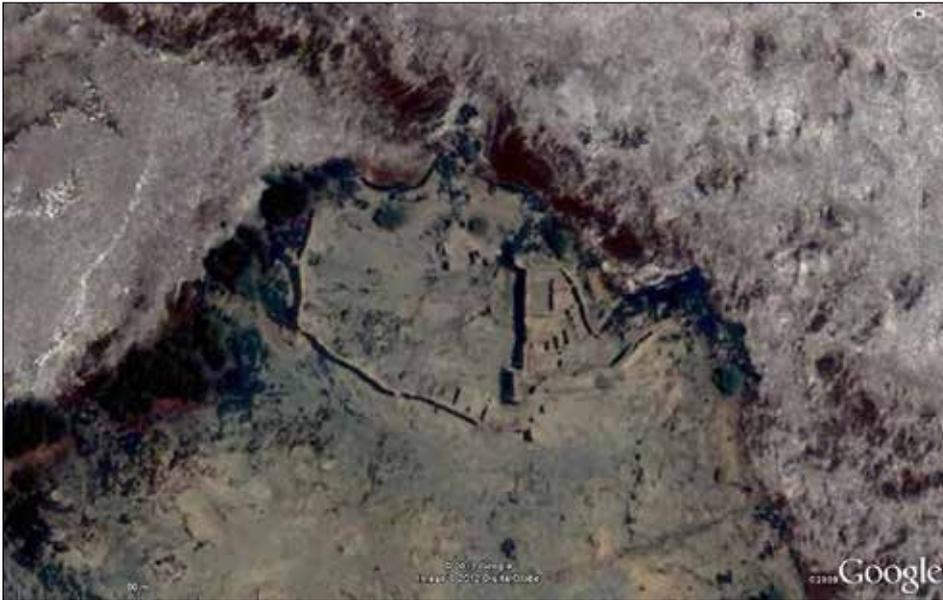


Plate 2. Satellite image of Tinare fortress (Google Earth).

Constructed of stone, mud bricks and *jalous* it is still standing 10m high. The walls are very thick; about 7m. The main entrance to the fortress is located in the central part of the northern wall.



Plate 3. The eastern tower.

#### *The curtain wall*

##### The southern wall

The southern wall is massive, constructed of stone in its lower part and of mud bricks and *jalous* above apart from in the centre where it is built throughout of stone. On the wall top is a parapet walk 1.7m wide. The entrance seems to be located in the centre of this wall, leading to the main room in the fortress. Some cavities are visible in the wall which may have been for the use of firearms (Plate 5).

##### The western wall

The western wall is also substantial, constructed of stone

to a height of 5.6m, then of mud bricks and *jalous*. There is a parapet walk and a stairway built of mud bricks and faced with plaster, leading to two rooms in the centre of the wall (Plate 6).

##### The northern wall

The northern wall which faces the river is built on a rocky slope running down to the water's edge. Like the others it is constructed of stone, mud bricks and *jalous*. There is an opening through this wall, probably a small gateway, used to take the water from the Nile which was later blocked. A stairway links this gateway to the river (as at Qasr Ibrim and Sai) (Alexander 1996; 1997).

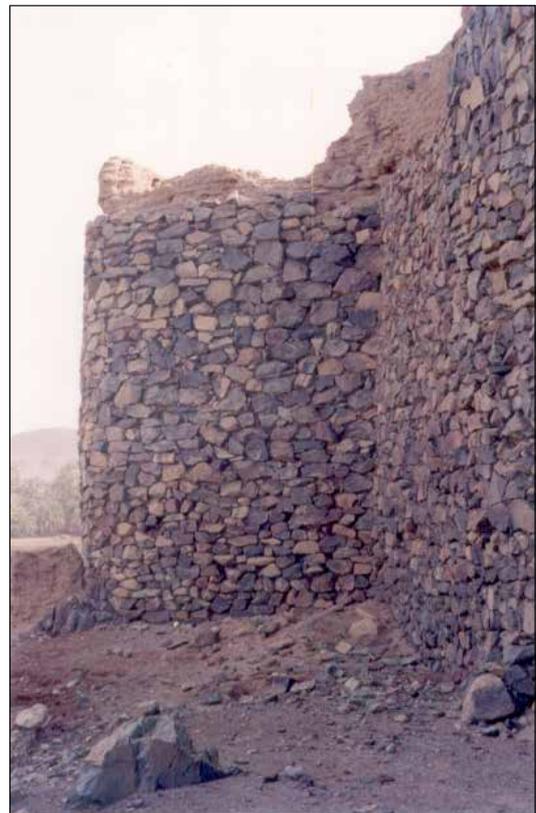


Plate 4. The north-west tower.

#### *Internal building*

Within the fortress are remains of houses, some 10 rooms arranged mainly along the curtain walls (Plate 7). They are constructed of rough stone, mud bricks and *jalous*, but one portion around the windows is of baked bricks laid in regular courses, and some of the wooden lintels over the windows are still intact. The unmortared rubble walls have a battered face, are 600-350mm thick and in places survive to a height of between 2.8m and 4m.



Plate 5. The southern wall.



Plate 6. The western wall.

### The outer enclosure

To the west of the main fortress the rest of the promontory is itself defended by substantial walls which abut those of the fortress. This area contained barracks for the soldiers and horse stables adjacent to the fortress, and located to the west



Plate 7. Remains of houses.

are complexes of buildings and walls.

### *The building complexes*

Near the south-western tower are five rectangular rooms, constructed of stone, arranged mainly north-south, which were the stables for horses (Plate 8). Also there are many rooms for soldiers' accommodation, constructed of stone, mud bricks and *jalous*.



Plate 8. Remains of the stables.

### *The curtain wall*

#### The southern wall

Constructed of stone, mud bricks and *jalous*. There is an opening in this wall near the horse stables, probably the entrance into the western enclosure (Plate 9).

#### The western wall

Also constructed of stone, mud bricks and *jalous*. There is another wall, adjacent to and providing further protection to the western wall; openings used for firearms, and a sub-circular building constructed of *jalous* providing an additional reinforcement for the wall.

#### The northern wall

This wall, facing the river, constructed of mud bricks and *jalous*, has collapsed.

### Archaeological finds

Spread on the surface of the site are Christian and Islamic sherds (Plate 10), grinding stones and fragments of clay pipes.

### Cemetery

No cemetery was found, but south of the fortress a small Islamic grave, aligned north-south, was noted (Plate 11).

### Dating

Evilya Çelebi mentioned Tinare fortress during his visit to the Mahas area in the Ottoman period (1671-1672), and he wrote "Tinare, had a garrison, reportedly, of 800 men, under the command of one Salih whose territory encompassed a popu-



Plate 9. Outer enclosure: the southern wall.



Plate 11. Islamic grave.

were sent by Sultan Selim I to Nubia (Burckhardt 1959, 231).

During the archaeological work, pieces of decorated pottery were found which when compared to the pottery classification of Adams (1986) are attributable to the Christian (Medieval) period.

### Conclusion

The Tinare fortress is the most important site in the region for border control and supervision of trade in Nubia in general and in the Mahas area in particular. Close to the southern border of the Ottoman Empire, at this time it lay within the Islamic Kingdom of Koka. The large site at Tinare is in need of more detailed study, a good survey and excavations. To complete this study it is also important and necessary to investigate the oral traditions in this area.

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lation of 40-50,000 Kerrarish nomads' (Çelebi 1938, 325).

Burckhardt (1959) also mentioned Tinare fortress during his visit in 1812, and mentioned that it was considered a noted place in the Mahas area. He then goes on to mention the war between Hussein and Mohammed (Kashif) – grandsons of Hassan Gusi, commander of the el-Bushnag soldiers who



Plate 10. Sherds and a spindle whorl.

## Gabati

A Meroitic, Post-Meroitic and Medieval  
Cemetery in Central Sudan.

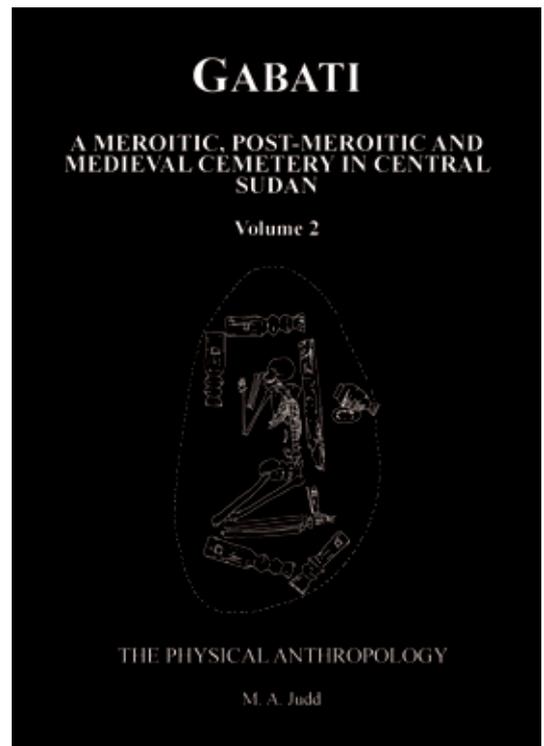
Vol. 2: The Physical Anthropology

by Margaret A. Judd,  
with a contribution by David N. Edwards  
London 2012

*xii + 208 pages, 110 tables, 15 figures, 66 maps, 73 colour plates*  
ISBN 978 1 901169 19 7

The cemetery at Gabati, dating from the Meroitic, post-Meroitic and Christian periods was excavated in advance of road construction in 1994-5, the detailed report being published by SARS in 1998. This complementary volume provides an in-depth analysis of the human remains. A final chapter, a contribution from David Edwards, the field director of the project, in conjunction with Judd, assesses the archaeological results in light of continuing research in the region over the last decade and more.

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## Sudan's First Railway The Gordon Relief Expedition and The Dongola Campaign

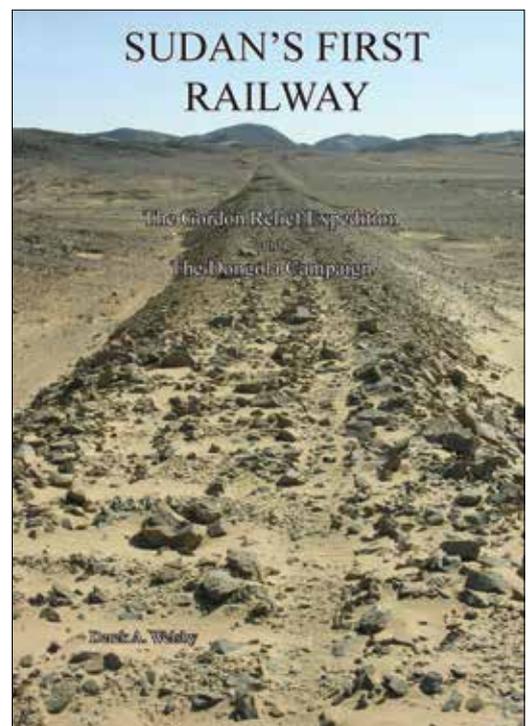
by Derek A. Welsby

London 2011

*149 pages, 6 tables, 47 figures, 173 colour and 19 b&w plates*  
ISBN 978 1 901169 1 89

Begun in 1875 by the Egyptian khedive, Ismail Pasha, the railway played an important role during the Gordon Relief Expedition of 1884-5 and Kitchener's Dongola Campaign in 1896. It was abandoned and cannibalised to build other railways in Sudan during the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. For much of its course it runs through the desert and in those areas the roadbed, the associated military installations and the innumerable construction camps are extremely well preserved. This book is the result of a photographic survey of these installations together with the detailed archaeological surveys undertaken within them. A report on the artefacts, which includes personal equipment, ammunition, fragments of rolling stock, bottles, tins and ceramics, completes the volume.

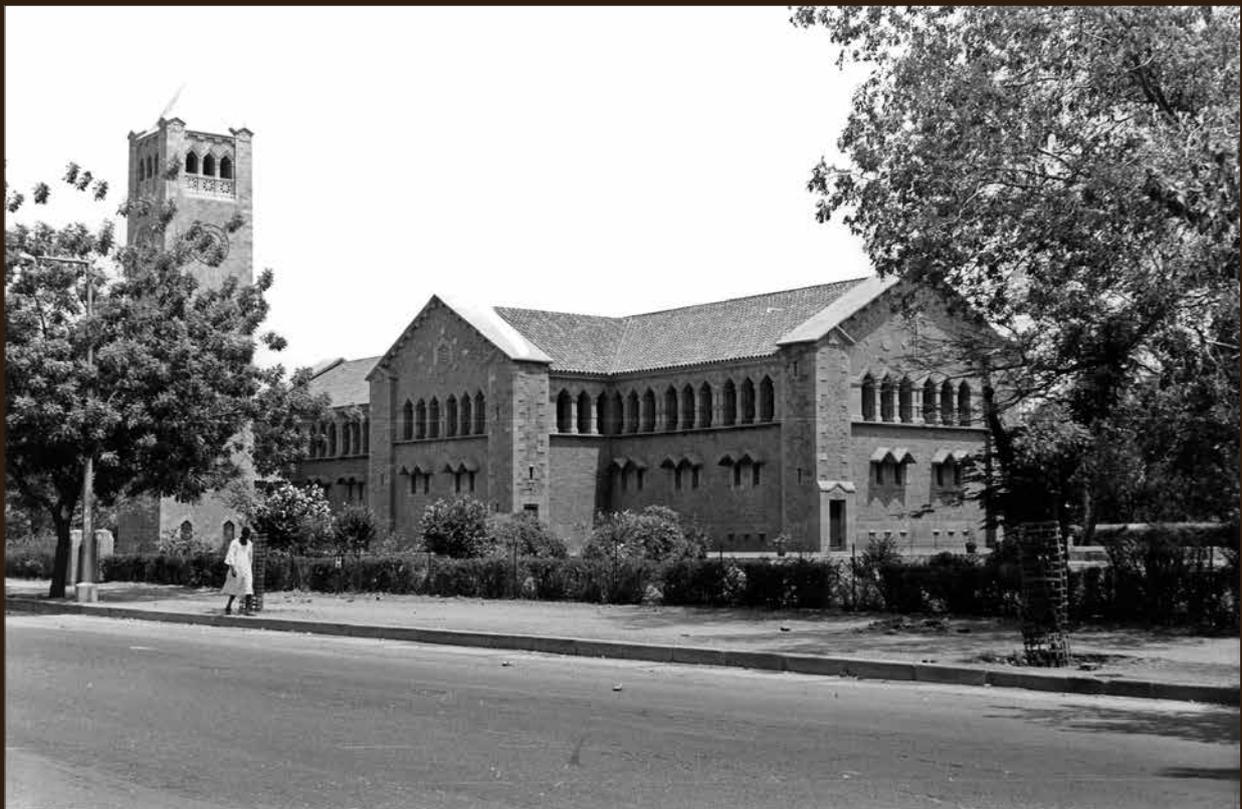
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*Khartoum. The Republican Palace, once the Governor General's residence, in 1968 (photo SARS Hawkes Archive HAW P091.01).*



*Khartoum. The Anglican cathedral in 1968. Now minus its bell tower it houses the Republican Palace Museum (photo SARS Hawkes Archive HAW P090.01).*