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Front cover: The descendary 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 20º 21.202’ / E 30º 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).

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.

The Nile at this point is actually flowing east to west.

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 storeys 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.

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1 The Nile at this point is actually flowing east to west.
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.

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 be 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).

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.
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.

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-
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 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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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 18 9

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