Contents

Reports

Lithic Material from the Late Neolithic Site of es-Sour, Central Sudan
Azhari Mustafa Sadig

‘Pharaonic’ Sites in the Batn el-Hajar – the Archaeological Survey of Sudanese Nubia Revisited.
David N. Edwards and A. J. Mills

A Note on the Akasha Rock-Inscriptions [21-S-29]
Vivian Davies

Creating a Virtual Reconstruction of the Seti I Inscription at Jebel Dosha
Susie Green

Archaeobotanical Investigations at the Gala Abu Ahmed Fortress in Lower Wadi Howar, Northern Sudan

The Site and the Findings
Friederike Jesse

Phytoliths on Grinding Stones and Wood Charcoal Analysis
Barbara Eichhorn

The Fruit and Seed Remains
Stefanie Kahlebeber

New Excavations at El-Kurru: Beyond the Napatan Royal Cemetery

Introduction
Geoff Emberling and Rachael J. Dann

Investigating Settlement at El-Kurru
Geoff Emberling

Geophysical Prospection in the Archaeological Settlement of El-Kurru
Mohamed Abdelrahman Mohamed-Ali

Coring and Soundings in the El-Kurru Settlement
Tim Boaz Braun Skuldbøl

Five-sided Corinthian Capitals in the Mortuary Temple at El-Kurru
Jack Cheng

Geophysical Survey at the El-Kurru cemetery
Ed Blinkhorn

Sedeinga 2012: A Season of Unexpected Discoveries
Claude Rilly and Vincent Francigny

The Latest Explorations at Usli, Northern Province
Miroslav Bárta, Lenka Suková and Vladimír Brůna

Dangeil 2012: Sacred Ram – Avatar of the God Amun
Julie Anderson and Salah Mohamed Ahmed

Dangeil, A Preliminary Report on the Petrography
Meredith Brand

A Third Season of Rescue Excavations in the Meroitic Cemetery at Berber, October 2012: Preliminary Report
Mahmoud Suliman Bashir

Jawgul – A Village Between Towers
Mariusz Drzewiecki and Piotr Malinowski

The Archaeology of the Medieval and Post-Medieval Fortress at Tinare in the Northern El-Mahas
Abdelrahman Ibrahim Saeed Ali

Upper Atbara Seti Sett Dam Archaeological Salvage Project (ASDASP), the Rescue Excavation Results on the Western Bank of the Atbara: Preliminary Report
Murtada Bushara Mohamed, Mohammed Saad Abdalah, Sanii Elamien Mohamed and Zakki aldien Mahmoud

Archaeological, Ethnographical and Ecological Project of El-Ga’ab Basin in Western Dongola: A Report on the Second Season 2010
Yahia Fadl Tabir

Surveys at the Fifth Cataract and on the Sudan Military Railway and excavations at Kawa, 2012-13
Derek A. Welsby

Archaeological Survey in El-Metemma area
Nada Baliker Mohammed Ibrahimi

Archaeological Survey of Aba Island:
Preliminary Report
Abded Hussein Abdel Rahman Adam

From Nubia to Arizona – and back; or, Reisner comes Home
William Y. Adams

Miscellaneous

Obituary
Michel Azim

Brigitte Gratian

Review
William Y. Adams

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

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Surveys at the Fifth Cataract and on the Sudan Military Railway and excavations at Kawa 2012-13

Derek A. Welsby

The Fifth Cataract

The season was planned as the first response by SARS and the British Museum to the appeal launched by the National Corporation for Antiquities and Museums in conjunction with the International Society for Nubian Studies to the threat of more dams on the Nile. The Society decided to focus its activities at the Fifth Cataract where a dam is planned immediately upstream of Shereiq. During a preliminary visit the project rented two derelict houses belonging to Sudan Railways at Karaba at the northern end of the concession, as its base for the first half of the season; it also secured the promise of a rented house at the southern end of the concession, on Karni Island for the latter part of the season.

The concession awarded to the Society by NCAM was a 20km stretch along the Nile on both banks and on the adjacent islands, which includes one of the larger islands in the Nile, el-Usheir (Plate 1). Some low level survey had been undertaken in the area by the Wadi el-Nil University a decade ago on the islands and west bank (Ali Osman 2003), and a few of the forts had been studied very recently by a team from the Adam Mickiewicz University of Poznan, Poland. It was the brief of our season to survey in detail a sample of the archaeological sites in the area to gain an overview of the potential for further work. To this end survey began on the east bank of the Nile which we were able to access with our vehicles.

The team arrived in Karaba on 31 December and work firstly took place within the Post-Meroitic cemetery in Karaba itself, site RB12. A total of 18 sites were visited of which two no longer survived, one having been built over, the other destroyed by gravel quarrying presumably associated with the construction of the Berber-Abu Hamed road. Most of the other sites were recorded in detail, planned with the aid of images from Google Earth and artefacts were collected by feature. In the second week activities were moved to the island of el-Usheir. However on the second day whilst recording the third site on the island the work was brought to a halt by circumstances beyond our control.

Within the Fifth Cataract concession the cemeteries at sites RB12 and US28 as perhaps that at site RB25 can be dated to the Post-Meroitic period on consideration of the form of the tumuli which included egg-shaped examples, a type first noted at the Fourth Cataract (see Welsby 2000, pl. 2), and the limited amount of pottery recovered. Of particular interest were the cemeteries at sites RB5 and RB27. The former had stone revetted tumuli with what appeared to be an apron of small stones around them (Plate 2). Site RB27 was a nucleated cemetery occupying a prominent ridge 1.1km to the east of the Nile (Plate 3). Many of the tumuli were circular...
cal record by the Kerma culture, has seen our perception of its power greatly increased over the last decade. The work at the Fourth Cataract has demonstrated that the culture and presumably the writ of the kingdom with which it was associated penetrated well beyond Jebel Barkal certainly as far upstream as Mograt Island near Abu Hamed (Lange 2012, 304ff), offering the real possibility that the southern border of Egypt’s empire in the New Kingdom at Kurgus may actually reflect the southern border of Kush. However the recent find offers the possibility that the kingdom may have extended still further up the valley while Kerma sites are now being discovered out in the Bayuda Desert (Paner and Pudło 2010, 122).

Clearly cemetery RB27 demands a detailed study and other similar sites may await discovery.

The Sudan Military Railway

With the permission of NCAM activities were briefly transferred to the Sudan Military Railway. A little to the south of Shereiq the decision was taken by the railway engineer Girouard in 1897, when informed that there was broken and rocky ground along the Nile for the next 50 miles, to detour the line eastwards out into the desert before rejoining the river near Abidiya (Sandes 1937, 238). A brief photographic survey of this section of the line was made on one day which included the examination of two bridges, a quarry, four construction camps and the railway station at Abu Salam where a 10 girish coin dated 1889 – the 15th year of Sultan Abdul Hamid II – was found. Another day was devoted to recording a construction camp; a detailed plan was made of Construction Camp 3 and all artefacts were collected. The camp (Figure 1, Plate 6) was of the same type as those extensively studied by the British Museum team between Wadi Halfa and Kerma in 2008 and 2010 (Welsby 2011). Among the finds were dog-head spikes bearing the date 1897. This desert section of the line was replaced in 1911 by that in use today along the river bank (Sandes 1937, 238, fn. 3).
Kawa Excavation Project

In mid January the team relocated to Kawa where activities were concentrated in the cemetery. Excavations were continued in the north-eastern part of the Kushite cemetery, site R18, immediately to the north and north west of the stone pyramids. A total of 10 graves were located of which seven descendencies were excavated and three tombs studied in detail. Of these, four had mud-brick tomb monuments, roughly square in plan which may have been pyramids, one had a dressed stone monument (Plate 7) and one a tumulus.

The following graves were worthy of note:

Grave (JF2)2. In the robber pit at the west end of the descendancy was a copper-alloy bowl upside down in the fill.

Grave (JF2)20. The sand-filled robber pit and the descendancy fill are visible in the surface of the alluvium. No further excavation of the grave was undertaken this season but the tomb monument was investigated (Plate 7). It is 3.8 x 3.76m square and is well constructed of dressed stone blocks bonded in a lavender-coloured lime mortar. A maximum of three courses are visible with their front faces vertical. These may represent the foundations of a small pyramid or the base of a mastaba.

Figure 1. Railway Construction Camp 3, the main tented area, scale 1:1000.

Grave (JG1)12. This grave had a very substantial descendancy with a flight of six narrow steps. It is 6.92m in length, at the surface it has a maximum width of 3.75m and attained a maximum depth of c. 3.2m. The arched entrance to the tomb was 1.27m wide and 1.16m high. The blocking wall was in a poor state of preservation having been largely destroyed by the robbers. The tomb was marked on the surface by a substantial mud-brick monument surviving to a height of two courses.

Grave (JG2)150. The substantial mud-brick tomb monument 6.8 x 6.7m in size set in a foundation trench sealed a trapezoidal descendancy 7.1m in length and from 2.37m to 2.66m wide with a flight of irregular steps leading down 2.45m (Plate 8). At the west end of the descendancy a barrel-vaulted mud-brick tomb (Plate 9) with internal dimensions of 2.2 x 0.8m was constructed and a wall built up to ground level at its east end to retain the fill then deposited over the extrados of the vault.

Following the burial another brick wall was built up against the east face of the earlier wall and served to close off the tomb. Presumably associated with the funerary rituals, a shallow, oval pit 811 x 690mm in size had been cut into the tread of the first step. It contained fire-reddened earth and much charcoal. All this had been greatly disturbed by the robbers. Presumably the first robbers entered via the descendancy and punched through the blocking wall allowing easy access into the tomb. In the second robbing phase all the fill above the vault was removed and almost all the vault was destroyed. The end result of these activities was that not a single human bone remained in situ and very little of the grave goods. Some sherds from...
pottery jars were recovered and many pieces of gold leaf but no evidence remained to indicate from what they came.

Grave (JG2)171. Only the descendary and blocking wall were cleared this season. A rectangular mud-brick construction (Plate 10) extended the length of the tomb into the descendary and an in situ foot was hard up against its east end. Presumably the tomb was too short to accommodate the tall individual who was interred within it.

Grave (JG2)175. The descendary (Plate 11) began with a very deep step and a flight of seven others giving access to the chamber hollowed out of the alluvium at a depth of 2.59m below the contemporary ground surface. The chamber extended for a length of 1.97m. Set into this was the mud-brick barrel-vaulted tomb which extended out into the descendary. At that point a wall surviving to a height of 1.02m was constructed. Entry to the tomb was by a well-built arched doorway 770mm wide by 1.06m high. Following the burial the doorway had been blocked with mud bricks and this blocking remained in situ. During the primary robbing phase a pit had been dug at the end of the descendary piercing the east end of the vault. The secondary robbing was via a pit dug vertically a little to the west through the natural, which had destroyed the rest of the vault. Nothing remained in situ in the tomb. A small number of bones were recovered and some small pieces of gold leaf. The grave was marked by a mud-brick monument set in a foundation trench and perhaps originally 5.85 x 4.03m in size.

Grave (JG2)231. This grave was totally excavated. It had a small descendary only 2.98m in length attaining a maximum depth of 1.08m (Plate 12). At the west end a very small chamber had been hollowed out of the alluvium, 450mm wide and 350mm high at the mouth and extending 540mm. It had contained the body of an infant which had subsequently been redeposited as a mass of disarticulated bones immediately outside the tomb. No evidence for a blocking wall was noted.
A scarab was recovered (Plate 16). The grave was marked on the surface by a mud-brick monument probably originally 2.22m square. Only a maximum of two courses survived but as the upper steps in from the lower this may well have been a pyramid.

**Grave (JG2)244.** The descendary of this grave was dug into the base of a very large oval pit 4.75 x 4.56m in size with steeply sloping sides down to a flat bottom (Plate 13). This pit was entirely filled with windblown sand. The small trapezoidal descendary is dug towards the western side of the pit and the tomb chamber is hollowed out of the west side of the pit. A substantial blocking wall was uncovered damaged at the top by the robbers. This grave was marked on the surface by a small tumulus 3.5m in diameter constructed of quartzite pebbles and small ferruginous sandstones.

In the area of the tumulus and extending to the south, west and north is a homogenous layer of white and yellow sandstone fragments up to 370mm thick. Graves (JG1)12, (JG2)171, 175 and 231 cut through this layer and the foundation trenches for the monuments associated with graves (JG2)175 and 231 cut into it. The tumulus rests on a sand deposit overlying it. Amongst the stone layer are a few dressed sandstone blocks. The origin of this layer is at present uncertain. It might represent a foundation raft for a substantial stone building but if so no trace of that now remains. Excavation of this area will be continued next season.

**Finds processing**

All the ceramics from the work at the Fifth Cataract was processed. Whilst at Kawa the detailed study of the pottery from the *Kerma Ancien* cemetery at site H29 excavated last season was undertaken and substantially completed. This included many fine but unfortunately incomplete vessels in the C-Group tradition (Plate 14). The small finds from the railway construction camp were studied and those from the Kawa cemetery inventoried. Amongst these were two identical heart-shaped copper-alloy objects (Plate 15) of uncertain function found close by the stone monument, the scarab already mentioned (Plate 16) and the gold leaf.
Acknowledgements
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Bibliography
Sudan’s First Railway
The Gordon Relief Expedition and The Dongola Campaign

by Derek A. Welsby

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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 20th 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.

Retail price £22. Available to members at the discounted price of £20 (p&p £2.50, overseas £5.50).

Please order these books from the Honorary Secretary at the Society’s address.
Khartoum. The Republican Palace, once the Governor General's residence, in 1968 (photo SARS Hawkes Archive HAW P091.01).