

SUDAN & NUBIA

The Sudan Archaeological Research Society



Bulletin No. 17

2013





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Front cover: The descendency 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.¹ The Society decided to focus its activities at the Fifth Cataract where a dam is planned immediately upstream of Shereiḳ. 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 team² arrived in Karaba on 31st 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



Plate 1. Location of sites studied at the Fifth Cataract.

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



Plate 2. Tumulus in the cemetery at site RB05.

¹ The meeting on 15th May 2012 was hosted by the Department of Ancient Egypt and Sudan at the British Museum.

² Team membership: Abdelhai Abdelsawi (NCAM inspector; archaeologist), Silvia Gómez-Senovilla (archaeologist), Susanne Hakenbeck (archaeologist), Moises Hernandez-Cordero (archaeologist, GIS), Jon-Paul McCool (archaeologist), Julian Newman (archaeologist), Isabella Welsby Sjöström (assistant director, pottery specialist), Derek Welsby (director, surveyor, photographer), Rebecca Whiting (archaeologist, physical anthropologist).



Plate 3. General view of the cemetery at site RB27.

rings of stones (Plate 4) very similar to the typical *Kerma Moyen* and *Classique* tumuli as found in the Fourth Cataract. Others represent a local variant where the opportunity has been taken to utilise the abundant stone slabs to provide a revetment around the monument (Plate 5). Amongst the small amount of pottery recovered from this cemetery were two

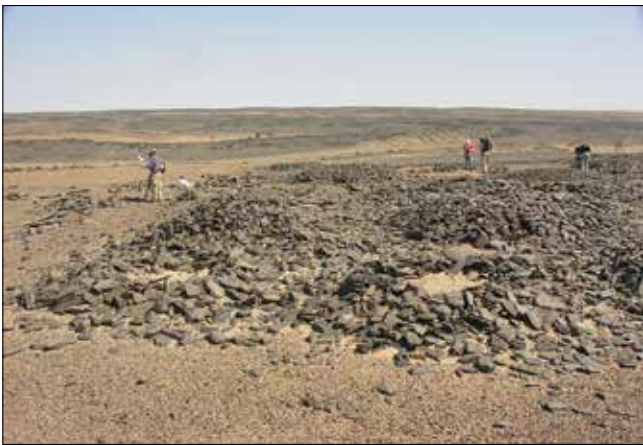


Plate 4. General view of the northern part of the cemetery at site RB27.

sherds which look to be typically Kerma - smooth red on the exterior and smooth black on the interior. One or two other sherds may also be related to well known Kerma ceramics.

The Kingdom of Kush with its metropolis at Kerma near the Third Cataract, which is represented in the archaeologi-



Plate 5. A tumulus with a revetment of stone slabs at site RB27.

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 Mogrart 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 Pudlo 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).



Plate 6. Railway Construction Camp 3, tent base 68 and the path leading up to it.

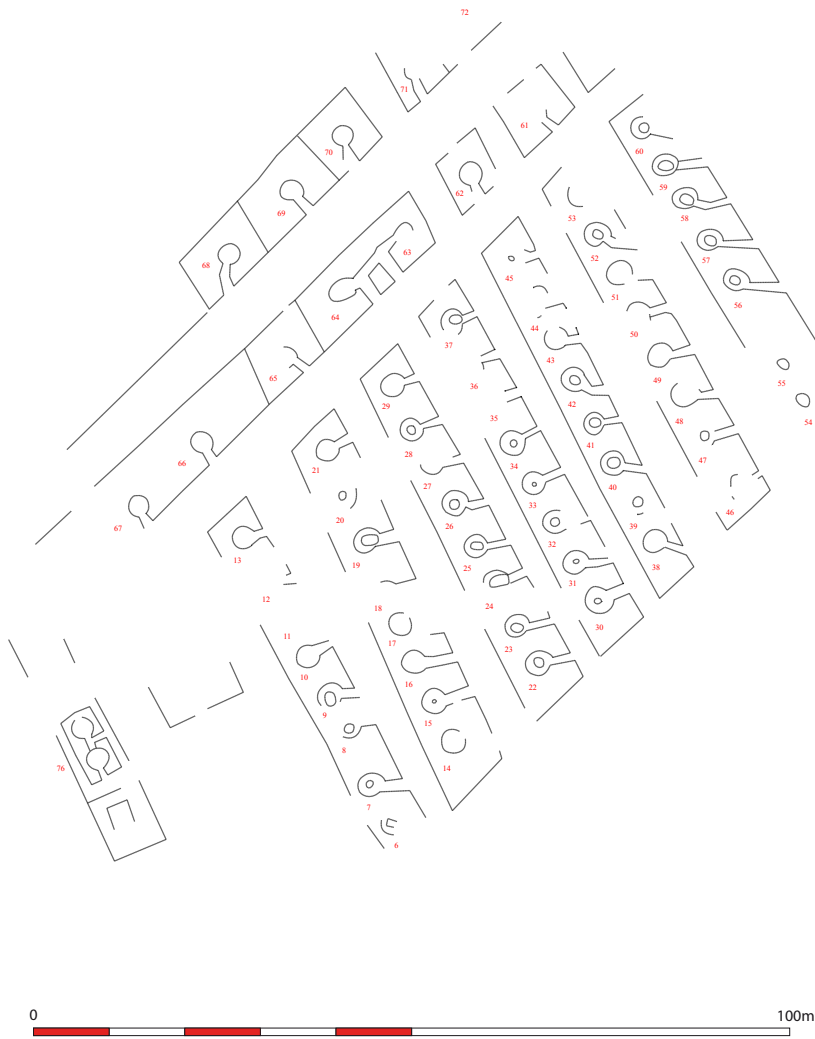


Figure 1. Railway Construction Camp 3, the main tented area, scale 1:1000.

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 descendaries 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 descendary was a copper-alloy bowl upside down in the fill.

Grave (JF2)20. The sand-filled robber pit and the descendary 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*.

(JG1)12. This grave had a very substantial descendary 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 descendary 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 descendary 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 descendary 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



Plate 7. Site R18, grave (JF2)20, stone monument and sand-filled robber pit.



Plate 8. Grave (JG2)150 looking west.



Plate 9. Grave (JG2)150, remains of the barrel-vaulted tomb looking east north east.



Plate 10. Grave (JG2)171, extension of the tomb chamber into the west end of the descandary.

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 descandary 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.

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 descandary and blocking wall were cleared this season. A rectangular mud-brick construction (Plate 10) extended the length of the tomb into the descandary 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 descandary (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 descandary. 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 descandary piercing the



Plate 11. Grave (JG2)175, end wall of the barrel-vaulted chamber with arched doorway and blocking wall looking west.



Plate 12. Grave (JG2)231, remains of the mud-brick tomb monument and the grave pit cut through the thick layer of sandstone chippings.

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 descender 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 descender 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



Plate 13. Grave (JG2)244, the descender dug into the base of pit (JG2)185, the blocking wall and the tumulus on the surface above.

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.



Plate 14. Site H29, 'C-Group' style bowl.



Plate 15. Copper-alloy objects found in the vicinity of the stone monument associated with grave (JF2)20.



Plate 16. Scarab from (JG2) grave 231.

Acknowledgements

The project is grateful to the Committee of SARS, the Research Board of the British Museum, The Institute for Bioarchaeology and the Patrons of SARS, who provided the funding. Particular thanks go to NCAM for its assistance and especially to Abdelhai Abdelsawy, our inspector. The British Council offered logistic support with our vehicles. Dr Claude Rilly kindly provided accommodation for the team during its time in Khartoum. Thanks also to the British Ambassador and his wife for their hospitality.

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Gabati

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

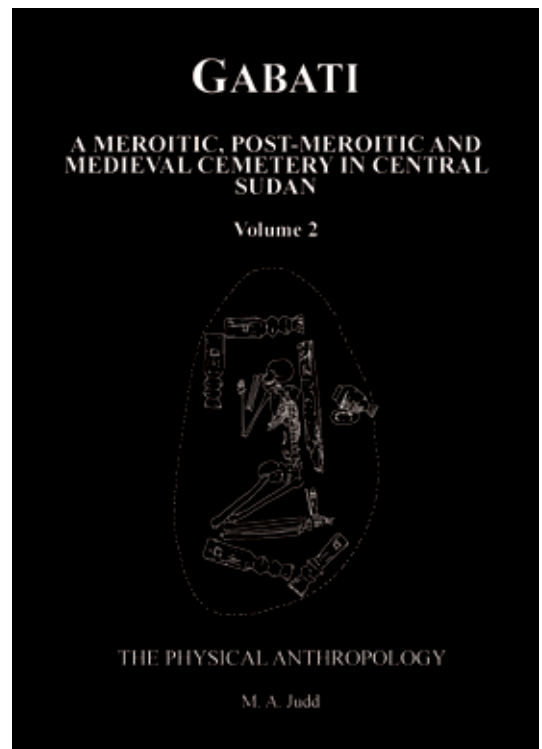
Vol. 2: The Physical Anthropology

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

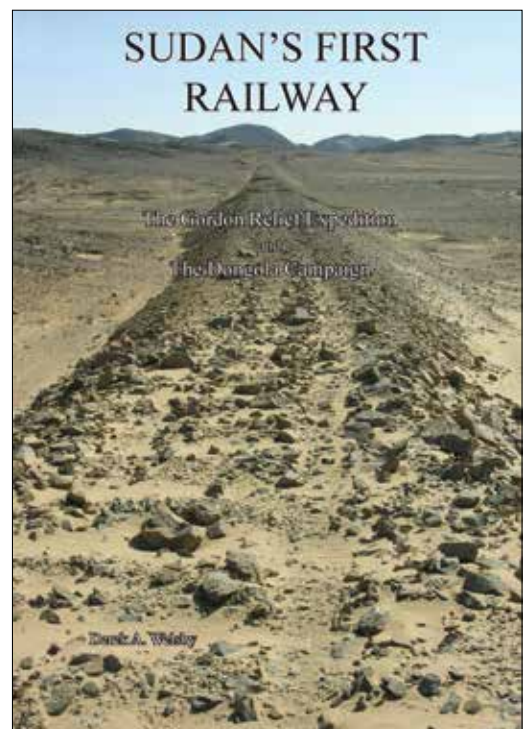
by Derek A. Welsby

London 2011

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

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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).