

SUDAN & NUBIA

The Sudan Archaeological Research Society



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- Front cover:* Examining the pharaonic inscriptions at Khashm el-Bab on the Korosko Road, November 2013 (photo: D. A. Welsby).
- Sudan & Nubia* is a peer-reviewed journal



Wad ben Naga: a history of the site

Pavel Onderka

Two thousand years ago, Wad ben Naga (Figure 1) was amongst the most important settlements of the Island of Meroe. The town, situated on the right bank of the Nile, was located 80km upstream from Meroe on the northern bank of the estuary of the Wadi Kirbikan. The Nile in the Wad ben Naga area bends and runs from west to east. The river has – now as well as in the ancient past – slowly but increasingly cut into the right bank while along the left bank former islands have been gradually joined to the mainland. The general area of Wad ben Naga is characterised by a relatively flat surface covered by alluvial deposits. The terrain slowly rises towards the east and north east (cf. Vacek *et al.* 2013). The location of the settlement which rose to the rank of a royal city was highly strategic. It not only controlled the trade routes running east along the Wadi Kirbikan, west through the Bayuda Desert and along the banks of the Nile, but also dominated an extensive plain located to its south. Wad ben Naga in the south and Meroe in the north formed the limits of one of



Figure 1. Plan of the archaeological protected land at Wad ben Naga (drawn by V. Vrtal).

the two core areas of the Meroitic state (cf. Edwards 1996, 20-38). The archaeological site covers some 4km² and may be divided into three main parts – Central Wad ben Naga (with the ruins of ancient settlements), the Northern Cemeteries and the Southern Cemeteries.

History of exploration¹

The site was first described by Frédéric Cailliaud (1787-1869) in 1821. Cailliaud was shortly after followed by Louis Maurice Adolphe Linant de Bellefonds (1799-1893). The site was visited by Lord Prudhoe in 1829 and by George Alexander Hoskins (1802-1863), who made the earliest attempt to interpret the structures located there in 1833. Giuseppe Ferlini (c. 1800-1870) dug for treasure here in 1834, but left the site highly disappointed. The first American to come to Wad ben Naga was John Lowell (1799-1836), who travelled in the company of Swiss artist Charles Gléyre (1806-1874). Other Europeans to come here were Hermann Ludwig Heinrich von Pückler-Muskau (1785–1871) and Arthur Todd Holroyd (1806-1887). The expedition led by Carl Richard Lepsius (1810-1884) made crucial discoveries in what was later named as the Isis Temple (WBN 300) in 1844. ‘Bilingual names’ of King Natakamani and Kandake Amanitore inscribed on the bark stands found by Lepsius helped Francis Llewellyn Griffith (1862-1934) to decipher the Meroitic script. Four years after Lepsius, the French naturalist Pierre Trémaux (1818-1895) came across the ruins of Wad ben Naga. He was followed by Theodor von Heuglin (1824-1876) in 1855 and Johannes Dümichen (1833-1894) in 1863. The scholars and travellers who visited Wad ben Naga before the outbreak of the Mahdist revolution paid most attention to pillars decorated with the depictions of the originally Egyptian god Bes with Hathoric capitals which dominated the western part of the ruins (Figure 2). The pillars were last seen and photographed by Carl Berghoff in 1882. They disappeared either during the Mahdist revolution or as a consequence of the construction of the railway by the British between 1898 and 1899. When James Henry Breasted (1865-1935) visited the site in 1907, he made no allusion to the Bes pillars. Three years later, Wad ben Naga was visited by Francis Llewellyn Griffith.

The site waited for real archaeological exploration until the late 1950s. Between 1958 and 1960, the Sudanese Antiquities Service under the direction of Thabit Hassan Thabit carried out excavations in the eastern part of Central Wad ben Naga. Two years after the excavations, Thabit Hassan’s predecessor in the office of Commissioner for Archaeology, Jean Vercoutter (1911-2000) published a report on the excavations, as Thabit Hassan Thabit was preoccupied with the management of the on-going UNESCO High Dam campaign. In the report Vercoutter gave general descriptions of the work and structures discovered at the site and interpreted finds setting them into the context of the then knowledge of the

¹ For references to these early visits see Onderka 2013b.

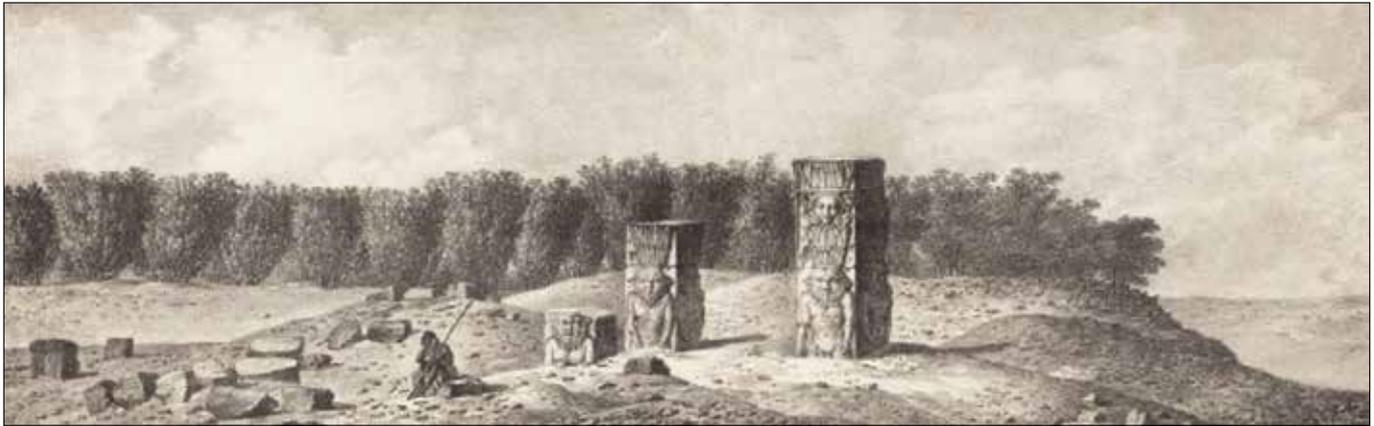


Figure 2. Drawing of the ruins of the Typhonium published by Cailliaud (1826).

history and culture of the Meroitic period (Vercoutter 1962). In 1984, Karl-Heinz Priese published two studies (Priese 1984a; 1984b) based on the unpublished material from the Lepsius expedition. One was dedicated to the excavations themselves, while the other only to the Isis Temple.

Vercoutter's article was complemented by description and interpretation by Ahmed Mohamed Ali Hakem who, in his study on the Meroitic architecture (Ali Hakem 1988, 93-95 and 322-326), added detailed descriptions of some temples excavated at the site. Friedrich Hinkel visited and worked at the site several times providing the first nearly accurate ground plans of the buildings at Wad ben Naga (Hinkel and Sievertsen 2002, 69-71, 75-76; IX.72-75).

In 2009, the National Museum of the Czech Republic launched excavations at the site. So far eight excavation seasons have been carried out. The first two seasons focused on the general survey of the site and its surrounding and re-excavation of the structures unearthed by the Sudanese mission between 1958 and 1960. Since 2011, the mission has been primarily occupied with the exploration of the so-called Typhonium, a temple complex known from accounts and depictions of early Western visitors to the site (cf. Onderka *et al.* 2013).

Written evidence

The origins of the settlement at Wad ben Naga are far from clear. At the turn of the 4th and 3rd century BC, the Greek traveller Bion of Soloi visited the Middle Nile region, including a town called Arabam, traditionally identified with present-day Wad ben Naga (Priese 1984c, 497). Excerpts from Bion's itinerary have been preserved in Pliny the Elder's *Historia Naturalis* (NH 6, 193). Arabam seems to be identical with a cultic centre known from the inscriptions of King Arnekhamani, a contemporary of Ptolemy III Eurgetes I (later reign; c. 246-222 BC) and Ptolemy IV Philopator (early reign; 222-204 BC), from the walls of the Lion Temple at Musawwarat es-Sufra written in Egyptian script and language (Hintze 1962, 20). Two captions to the depictions of the (Crown) Prince Arka (Plate 1), most likely the future king Arkamani II, identify the prince as the 'King's Son, priest of



Plate 1. Depiction of the King's son Arka from the northern wall of the Lion Temple in Musawwarat es-Sufra (photo P. Onderka).

Isis Arka of Apeber(-ankh) and Arabikeleb' (*s3 nswt hm ntr n 3st Jrkj n Jbrp(-5nh) Jrbjklb*), identified with Musawwarat es-Sufra and Wad ben Naga, respectively (Hintze 1962, 25, Abb. 6 = no. 9; Hintze *et al.* 1993, 79, Abb. 28; Hintze 1962, 25, Abb. 7 = no. 10; Hintze *et al.* 1993, 86, Abb. 37). Providing that the identification of the ancient ruins at Wad ben Naga with Bion's Arabam and Arka's Arabikeleb is correct, a town of considerable political importance likely existed at Wad ben Naga at the turn of the Napatan and Meroitic periods.

Epigraphic evidence

The settlement seems to have experienced its heyday around the beginning of the Christian era. Epigraphic evidence from the site attests to building activities of three Meroitic sovereigns – Queen Amanishakheto (attested in WBN 100), King Natakamani (attested in WBN 200, 300) and Queen Amanitore (attested in WBN 300). In 1844, the Royal Prussian Expedition led by Carl Richard Lepsius discovered in the ruins of what was first called the Southern Temple (before and including Arkell 1955), later the Isis Temple (including and after Vercoutter 1962) at Wad ben Naga two barque-stands

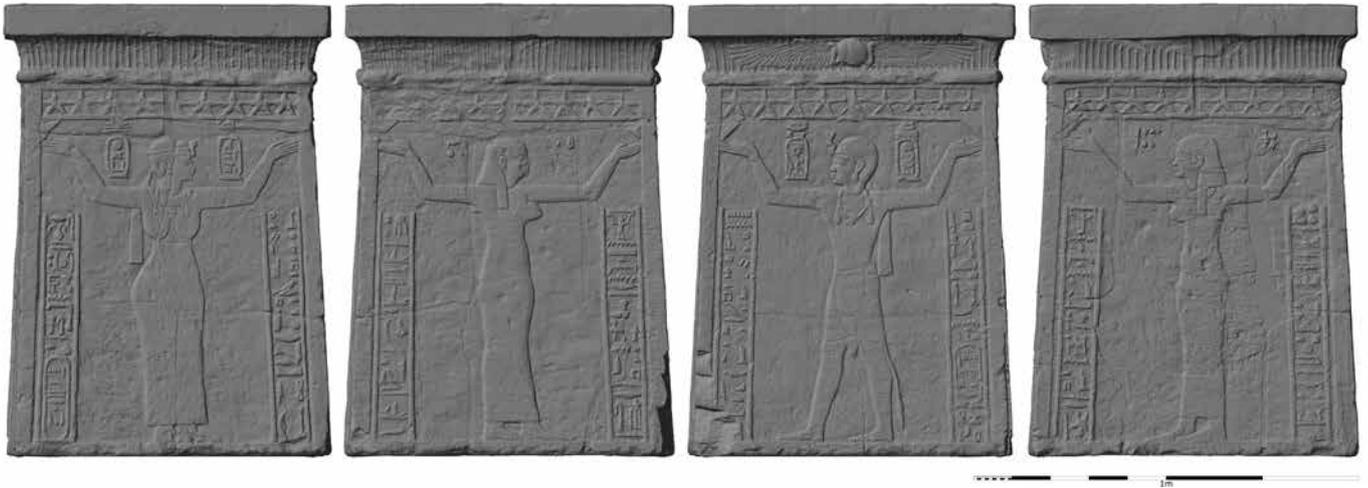


Figure 3. 3D-scan of the Altar A from Wad ben Naga, Egyptian Museum and Papyrus Collection in Berlin, inv. no. 7261 (created by A. Gatzsche).

and an abacus with the names of Natakamani and Amanitore. The larger of the two barque-stands, known as Altar A (Figure 3), was cut into several pieces, transported to and reassembled in Berlin (cf. Priese 1984a; 1984b; Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung in Berlin, inv. no. 7261). The temple has never been properly excavated. The smaller bark stand, labelled as Altar B (Figure 4) was left at the site and its fate

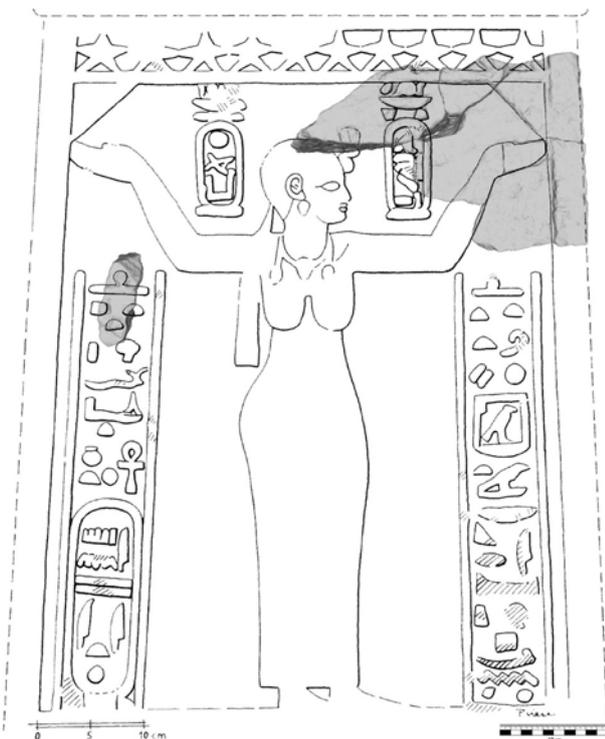


Figure 4. Reconstruction of Altar B from Wad ben Naga, Sudan National Museum, SNM 36350 (drawn by A. Gatzsche).

was unknown until 2012, when its fragments were discovered in the ruins of the so-called Typhonium (cf. Onderka 2013a).

The Sudanese Antiquities Service expedition working at Wad ben Naga between 1958 and 1960 focused mainly on

the eastern part of Central Wad ben Naga which until then had received very little attention from any visitor to the site with scientific interests. The excavations were discontinued due to Thabit Hassan Thabit's engagement in the UNESCO Campaign to Save the Monuments in Nubia. During the two seasons remains of two temples (WBN 400 and 500), a monumental circular building (WBN 50) and the largest and best-preserved royal palace (WBN 100) from the Meroitic period were discovered. Based on the discovery of a faience plaque with a royal name in the cartouche, the construction of the palace was ascribed to Queen Amanishakheto in the late 1st century BC (Vercoutter 1962). Recently the cartouches of Natakamani were discovered on a fragment of a wall-painting from the main sanctuary of the Typhonium (WBN 201; cf. Onderka *et al.* 2013, 117) (Plate 2).



Plate 2. Wall paintings with the cartouches of Natakamani from the main sanctuary of the Typhonium (photo A. Gatzsche).



Urban layout of the site

The urban layout of Central Wad ben Naga as we know it relates to the settlement in the late Meroitic to Post-Meroitic Periods (Figure 5). Only recently structures dating to the early Meroitic period were identified. In terms of urban planning two main axes may be discerned. The western one is identical with the processional road starting from the so-called Isis Temple (WBN 300), which was once the main sanctuary of Amun at the site, leading towards the Nile, possibly to port installations anticipated by authors who considered Wad ben Naga as a mere port of other sites located in the interior of the Island of Meroe, namely Naqa and Musawwarat es-Sufra (e.g. Arkell 1955, 164; Adams 1977, 107; Kendall 1982, 13). On both sides of the processional road several subsidiary temples oriented towards the axis were erected. To the north of it was the Typhonium (WBN 200), recently identified as a temple of Mut (cf. Onderka and Vrtal 2014), and another temple under Cailliaud's *kom H* (which is now buried under the railway embankment). The structures to the south were destroyed by the seasonal waters flowing through the present-day *wadi*.

The eastern axis extended from a ramp leading to the upper floor of the Palace (WBN 100). It must be taken into consideration that this ramp (WBN 161-162) might not have been a

part of the original layout of the palace building. At the sides of the eastern axis two temples were built, namely the Small Temple (WBN 400) and the Eastern Temple (WBN 500), both oriented towards the east (and not towards the axis).

Revising excavations

The first seasons of the Archaeological Expedition to Wad ben Naga were almost exclusively dedicated to the re-excavations of structures unearthed some 50 years ago by the Sudanese team (cf. Onderka and Dufková 2011; Onderka 2011; 2012).

The most remarkable structure at the site is the so-called Circular Building (WBN 50; Vercoutter 1962, 273-277; Onderka *et al.* 2013, 67-74) (Figures 6 and 7). It is a round structure with an external diameter of 18.3m. It was built of mud bricks with burnt brick outer casing. Access into it was via a ramp oriented towards the Isis Temple. This building, which stood in the midst of a complex, has been identified as a sacral shrine having a local architectural form. The structure was most likely up to 20m high and could be seen from a considerable distance when approached from the south. The absolute dating of the Circular Building has not been determined yet; however, several indicators suggest that it dates before the reigns of the above-mentioned sovereigns.

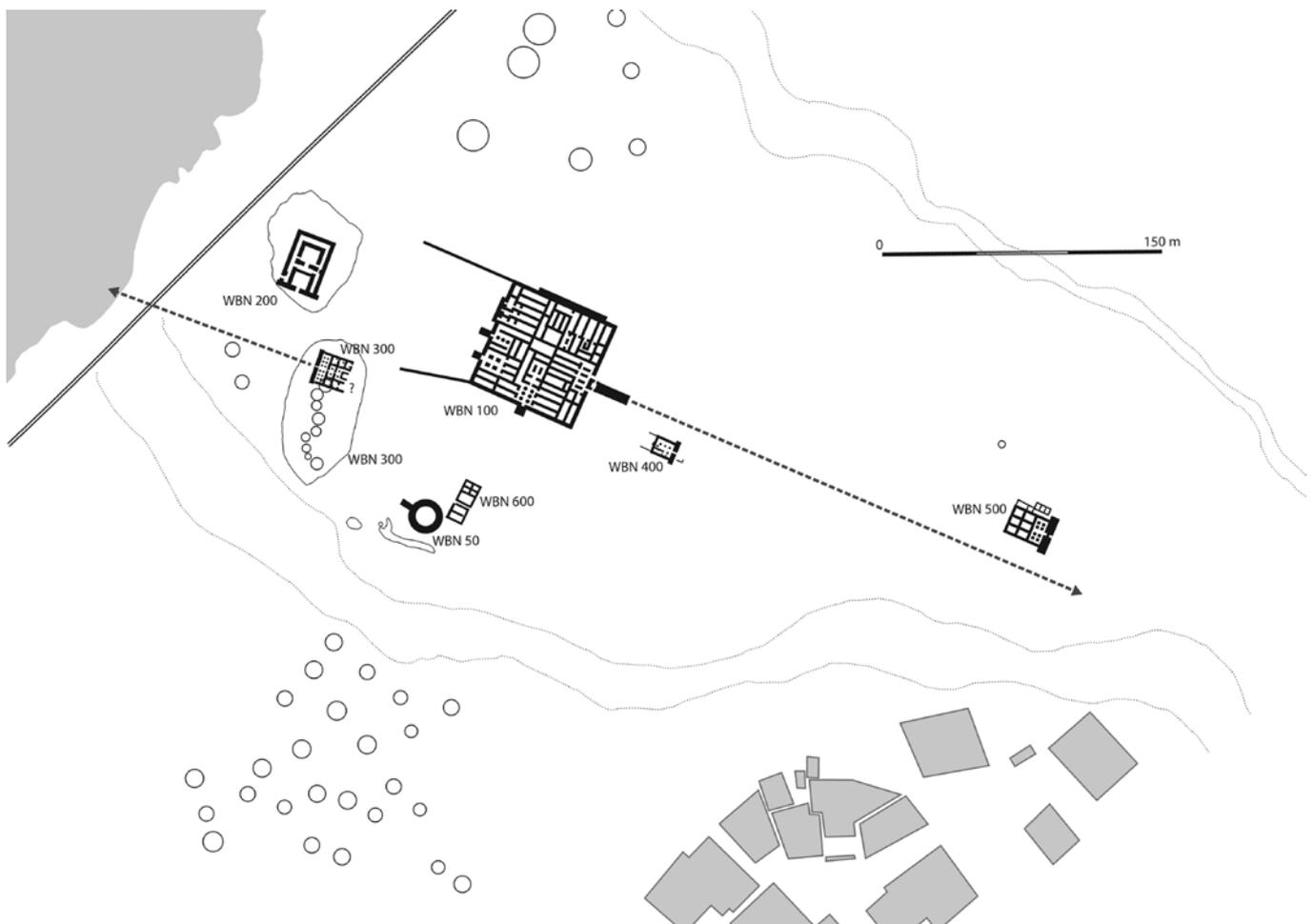


Figure 5. Plan of Wad ben Naga showing the main archaeological structures (drawn by V. Vrtal).



Figure 6. 3D model (Structure from Motion method) of the remains of the Circular Building (created by A. Gatzsche).



Figure 7. 3D reconstruction of the Circular Building complex (created by S. Rihák).



The Small Temple (WBN 400; cf. Vercoutter 1962, 273; Ali Hakem 1988, 323; Onderka *et al.* 2013, 93-96) (Figure 8) is an example of a single-roomed temple with a free-standing kiosk in front of the pylon. Unlike the other temples at the site, it was built entirely of burnt bricks and in several construction aspects resembles the Circular Building. Despite the fact that

the first collapse of the temple was due to stability issues, the reasons behind its final collapse are unknown. Apparently during the Post-Meroitic period, squatters turned the remains of the temple into a habitation.

Further to the east is located the so-called Eastern Temple (WBN 500; cf. Vercoutter 1962, 271-273; Onderka *et al.* 2013,

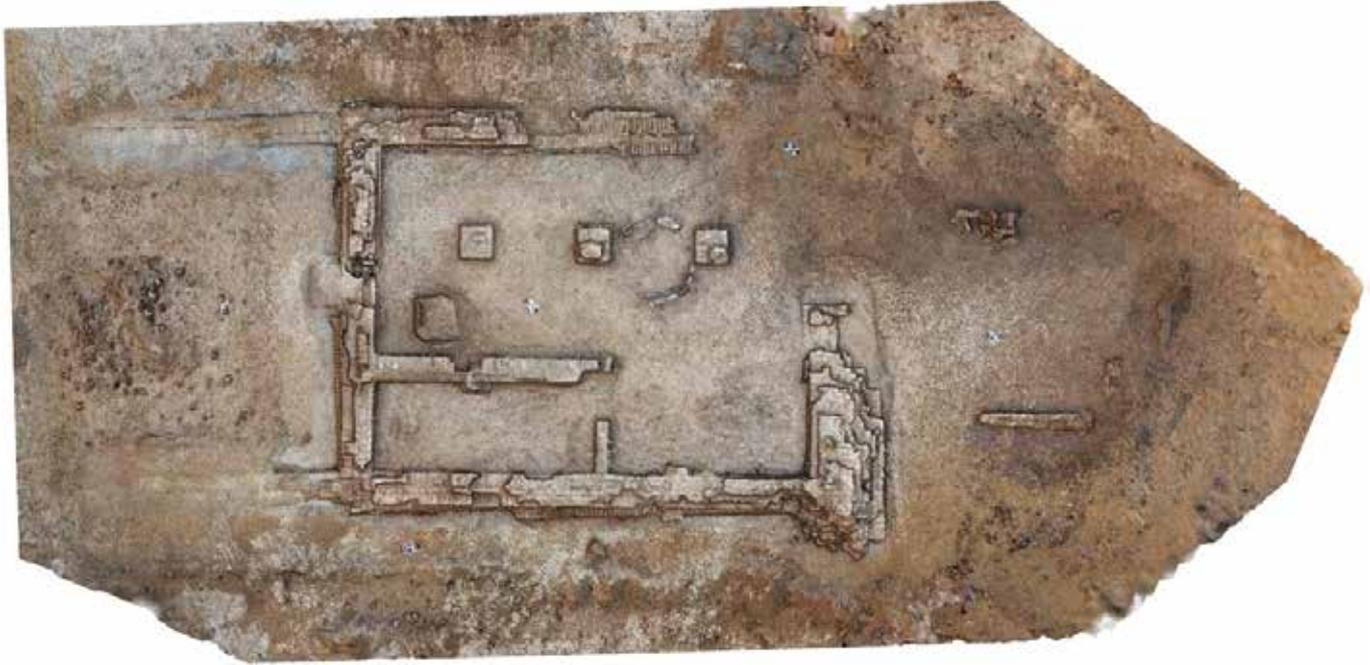


Figure 8. 3D model (Structure from Motion method) of the remains of the Small Temple (created by A. Gatzsche).



Plate 3. Remains of the Eastern Temple (photo P. Onderka).

only foundations and the lowermost courses of brick masonry are preserved, it was possible to identify two main phases in the structure's development. The first phase is attested by the foundations only. It seems that the temple collapsed at some point and was then totally rebuilt, during which two blocks from a statue base were inserted into the foundations. While

75-82) (Plate 3, Figure 9). It is an example of a multi-roomed temple (likely those dedicated to Amun). Its builders largely employed recycled material: burnt bricks for foundations, and the columns used for the temple's hypostyle hall which originated from the Palace of Queen Amanishakheto. The cultic equipment placed into the temple (including a seated statue of a lion and a bark stand) seems to have been collected from other sacral buildings at the site. To the north out-buildings were added in at least three phases. The closest parallel to the Eastern Temple is the Amun temple at el-Hassa built by King Amanikharekerem who is dated to the end of the 1st century AD (Török and Rondot 2010). Based on pottery finds, Vercoutter dated the construction of the Eastern Temple to around AD 200 at which time the Palace of Amanishakheto must have lain in ruins. The

Eastern Temple was reused for an uncertain purpose in the Post-Meroitic period (Vercoutter 1962, 273).

Recent excavations at the Typhonium

The activities of the Archaeological Expedition to Wad ben Naga have in recent years focused mainly on the exploration

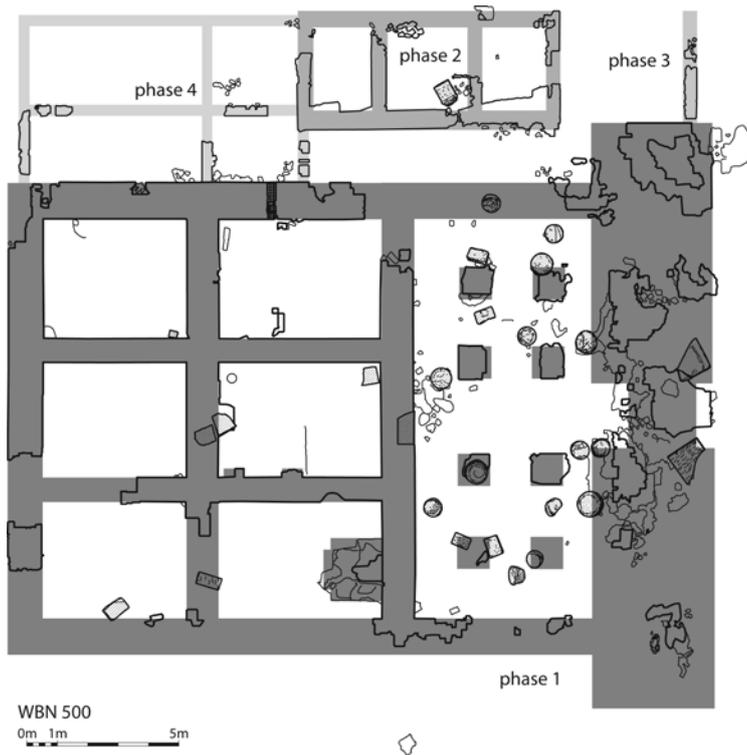


Figure 9. Plan of the Eastern Temple with phases of construction, scale 1:250 (drawn by V. Vrtal).

of the Typhonium (WBN 200; cf. Onderka 2012; 2013a; Onderka *et al.* 2013; Onderka and Vrtal 2014) (Figures 10 and 11). Excavations revealed a multi-roomed temple of unparalleled ground plan. The front part of the temple is not preserved; however, it seems probable that it incorporated the Bes pillars known from the depictions of the early visitors to the Middle Nile region. The first preserved element of the temple is a pylon, followed by an open courtyard (WBN 203) with two trees planted within it. Behind the courtyard was a portico (WBN 202) sheltering the entrance to the main sanctuary (WBN 201). The central rooms were surrounded by a range of side rooms. It was in these rooms that were revealed foundations of an earlier structure (WBN 700), predating the reign of Natakamani. The discovery of this structure supported the hypothesis that the settlement of the early Meroitic period was located in the western part of Central Wad ben Naga and that the settlement moved in an easterly direction as a result of the ecological stress of the river.

The exploration of the Typhonium's portico and main sanctuary provided archaeological evidence for an attack on the temple in particular and/or on the royal city in general. The entrance to the main sanctuary was once flanked by two double statues of Amun and Mut inserted into niches in the portico. In the niche to the right of the entrance was the statue of Mut together with ram-headed Amun of Napata (Figure 12), while on the other side was Mut shown together with, presumably, the human-headed Amun of Karnak (Figure 13 left). The statue on the right was discovered in more than 100

pieces. The figure of Mut was destroyed with an axe, while the rest of the statue was smashed after falling down on the floor. The other statue was only pulled out from the niche and its projecting pieces (crowns, feet, etc.) broke off as a result of the fall. The less destroyed statue was later moved into the main sanctuary, most likely for security reasons. In the north-west corner of the main sanctuary a cache (or possibly an offering place) was discovered (for a possible parallel N 360 at Naqa cf. Kroeper *et al.* 2011, 95-101). The cache seems to have served for a ritual burial of several damaged divine images (including a bust of Apedemak (Figure 14) dated to the reign of Natakamani and Amanitore; an almost complete statue of a seated lion; feet of a bigger lion statue) and other cultic objects (Plate 4). No direct indication regarding the dating of this attack exists; however, the complex archaeological situation suggests that the temple was in use for a shorter period than the collapse of the Meroitic kingdom three centuries later. The Typhonium fell victim to an extensive fire that destroyed the whole temple but which occurred later than the attack itself.

The corners of the Typhonium complex, the Palace of Queen Amanishakheto and the so-called Isis Temple were at some time after their construction linked by walls. The masonry of the walls resemble those of Hosh el-Kafir at el-Hobagi which might place their construction in the Post-Meroitic period; however, one cannot exclude that they were built as a reaction to the attack. A largely damaged wall was also built south of the Circular Building. A human presence is well attested during the Post-Meroitic period. Besides squatter activities attested in the temples in the eastern part of the site, a number of Post-Meroitic tumuli are present not only in the central part of the site.

Conclusion

A settlement of regional importance likely existed at Wad ben Naga already at the turn of the Napatan and Meroitic periods. During the early Meroitic period the settlement developed into an important political centre of the southern part of the state. Wad ben Naga witnessed its climax at the beginning of the Christian era when Amanishakheto, Natakamani and Amanitore built extensively at the site. The urban development followed a west to east direction with later structures built in the eastern part of Central Wad ben Naga. At the moment, the main chronological question at Wad ben Naga is whether the attack on the city (attested by the finds from the Typhonium) or the temple's later destruction may be synchronized with the destruction of the Palace of Queen Amanishakheto (indirectly attested by the reuse of material in the Eastern Temple) or with the general redevelopment in the eastern part of Central Wad ben Naga.

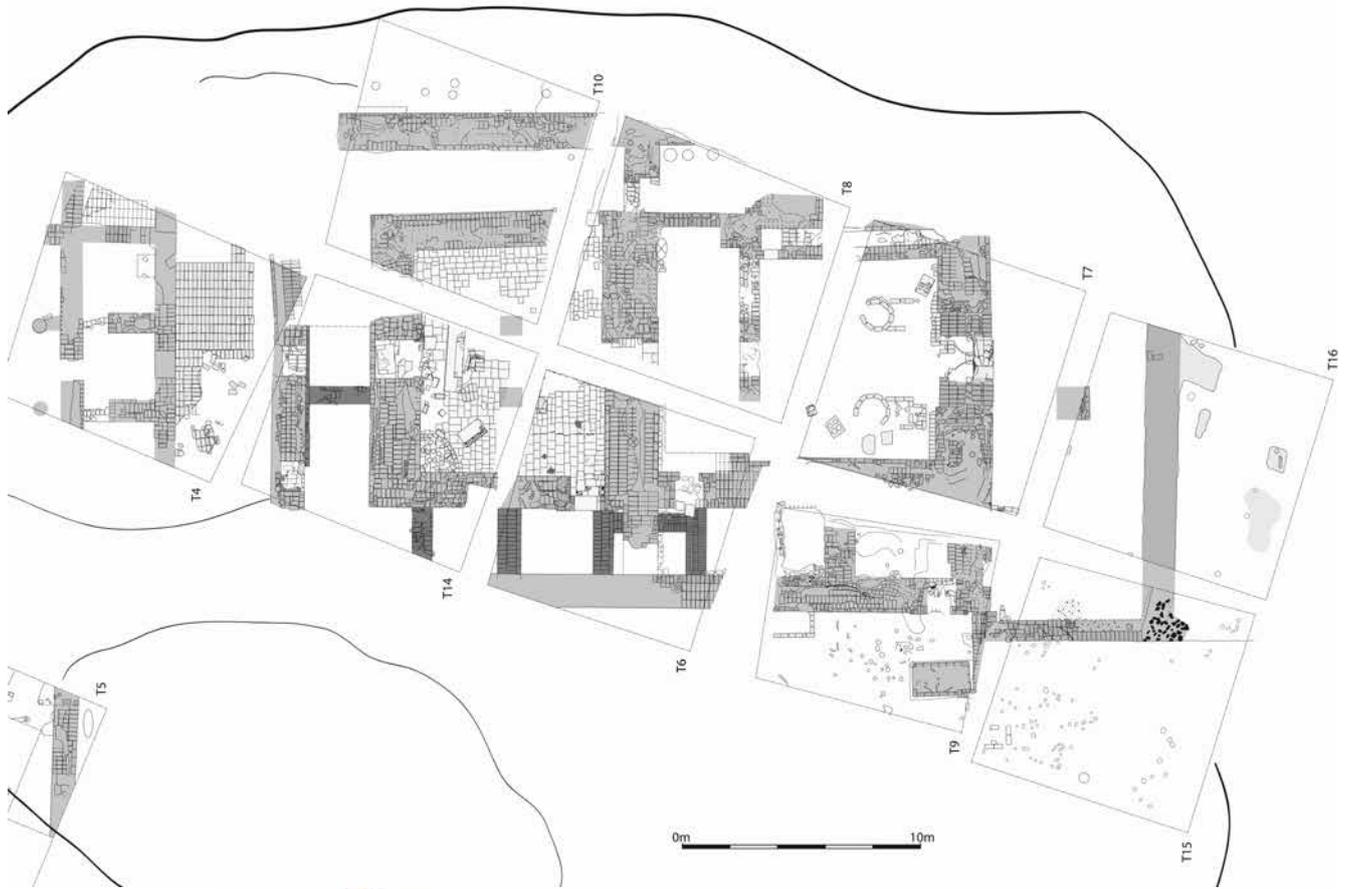


Figure 10. Plan of the Typhonium (drawn by V. Vrtal).



Figure 11. 3D model (Structure from Motion method) of the remains of the Typhonium (created by A. Gatzsche).



Figure 12. Virtual reconstruction of the double statue of ram-headed Amun and Mut (created by A. Gatzsche).



Figure 13. Two double statues of Amun and Mut (created by A. Gatzsche).

Acknowledgements

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Figure 14. The bust of a statue of Apedemak, Sudan National Museum, SNM 36343 (created by A. Gatzsche).



Plate 4. The cachette in the north-west corner of the main sanctuary of the Typhonium (photo V. Vrtal).

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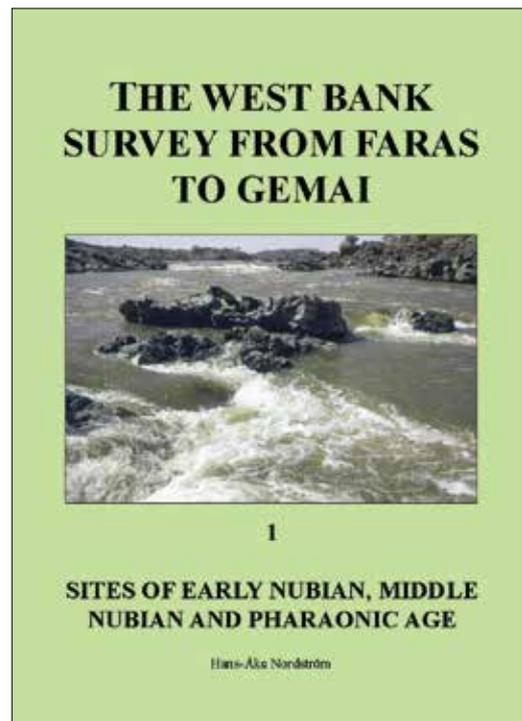
The West Bank Survey from Faras to Gemai 1. Sites of Early Nubian, Middle Nubian and Pharaonic Age

by H.-Å. Nordström
London, 2014

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ISBN 978 1 901169 195

This volume completes the three-volume series devoted to the results of the survey and excavations conducted by the Sudan Antiquities Service between 1960 and 1963 during the UNESCO-sponsored Campaign to Save the Monuments of Nubia. The author reports in detail on the Pharaonic and earlier sites, the excavation of many of which he personally directed. Also heavily involved in the publication of the Scandinavian Joint Expedition's work on the opposite bank, he is ideally placed to provide a synthesis of the evidence for human activity in this part of the Nile Valley, now largely inundated.

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Gabati

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

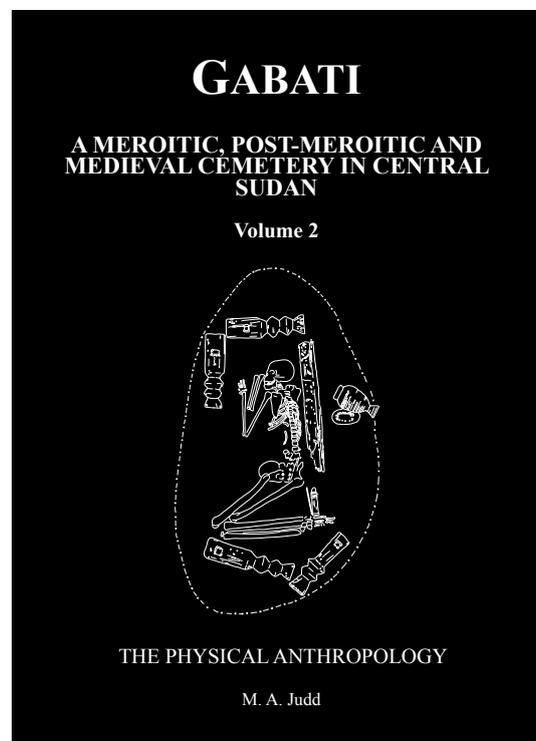
Vol. 2: The Physical Anthropology

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
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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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*View upstream along the Wadi Murrat from the late 19th century Anglo-Egyptian fort.
The pharaonic inscriptions are amongst the trees at the wadi edge in the far centre (photo D. A. Welsby).*



Horus, Lord of the Desert. A natural rock outcrop along the route from Buben towards Wadi Murrat (photo D. A. Welsby).