



NAPD excavation, Hosh al-Kafir 2014-2018

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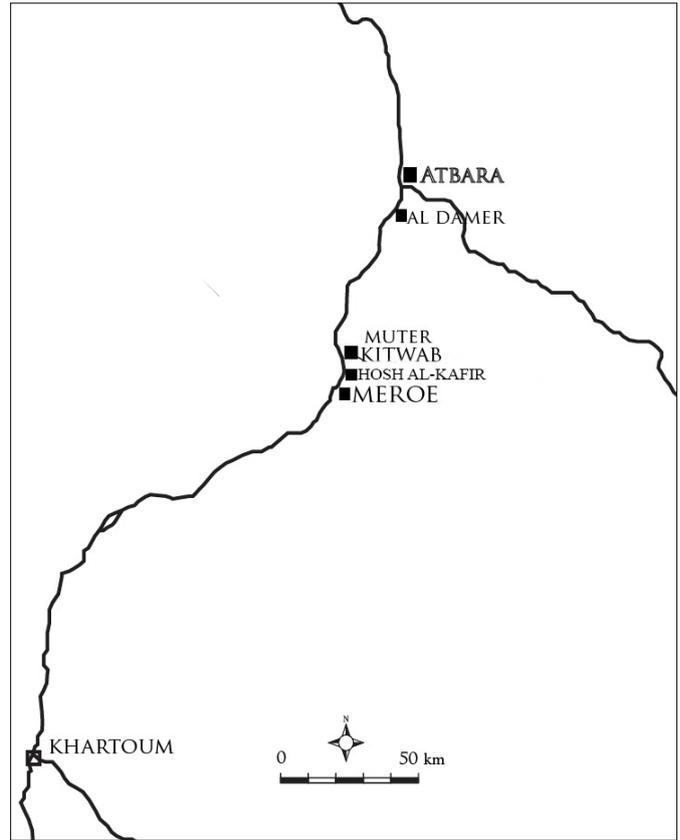
Introduction

Hosh al-Kafir is one of 398 archaeological sites registered within the Nile Valley University Archaeological Project of ad-Damer region (NAPD), a project funded by Qatar Museums through the Qatar-Sudan Archaeological Project (QSAP). The NAPD extends for 82km on the western bank of the Nile from al-Fadlab to the north, to al-Kimair to the south, and for 67km on the eastern bank of the Nile from ad-Damer to the north and Um Ali to the south. It extends for 10km on each bank of the Nile.

The site is located approximately 17.5km north of the Royal City of Meroe, in an area surrounded by a series of rocky highlands on all sides except the western side, which borders the Nile (Map 1). The main buildings on the site are at the foot of an isolated sandstone mountain called Jebel Ambor. The site was described by Hintze (1959) as containing a Meroitic temple (Plate 1). Limited excavations were also conducted here by Lenoble and the enclosure wall discussed by Welsby (Lenoble 1992, 9; Welsby 2005, 48). The magnetometry survey conducted at the site indicated the presence of many more structures under the surface (marked by the T-shape in the topographic map, Map 2).

Enclosure wall

The excavations at Hosh al-Kafir began in 2014 with the enclosure wall. The walls were built of sandstone and red brick, and measured approximately 2.2m thick. The preserved lengths of the walls were as follows: the northern wall: 84.5m; the southern wall: 90m; the eastern wall: 114.53m; and the western wall: 108.1m. The construction method used seems particularly regular and is very fine in some areas, such as the main wall beside the Western Gate. The presence of a



Map 1. Map of the location of Hosh al-Kafir.

temenos wall associated with a Meroitic temple as was found here is not unique in the area north of Meroe, e.g. see Dangeil (Anderson and Ahmed 2006, 95) located further to the north of Hosh al-Kafir.

Gates

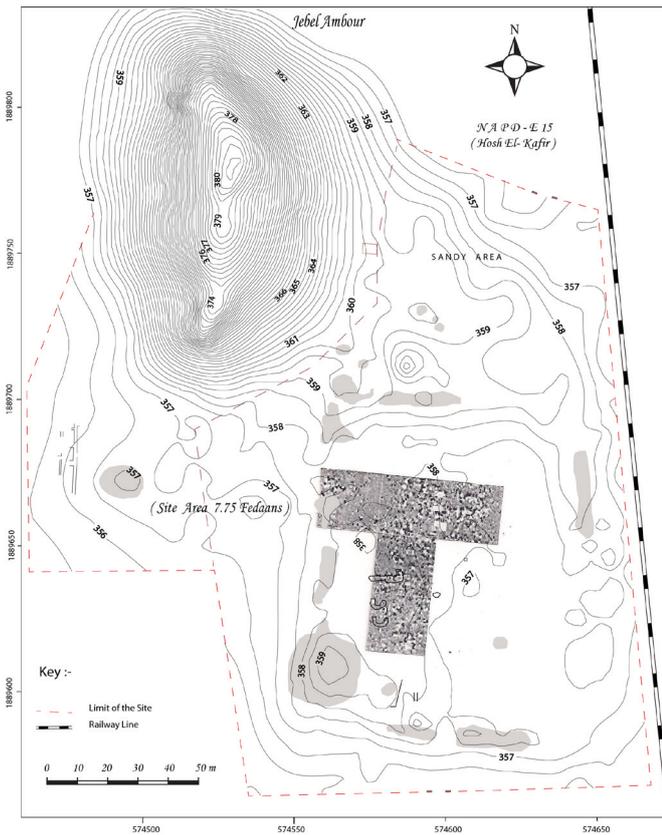
The excavations revealed three monumental gates in the southern, eastern, and western walls (Figure 1). The Southern Gate was located in the middle of the south wall. It is the narrowest gate of the building, measuring no more than 1m wide. Part of a cylindrical sandstone column was placed in this gate, possibly brought from one of the site's temples, in order to later close or block the gate.

The Western Gate was located on the north side of the western wall facing the Nile. This gate was protected by two prominent L-shaped constructions on both sides. Each of these measured 2.45m, and was 1.7m thick.

The Eastern Gate, which was located in the middle of the eastern wall, was completely destroyed. Traces of fire were found deep in the stratified layers of this gate. This may indicate that the building had been attacked through this entrance at an undetermined time, although this remains to be clarified. In any case, a notable event occurred here.



Plate 1. General view of Hosh al-Kafir.



Map 2. Topographic and magnetic survey plan.

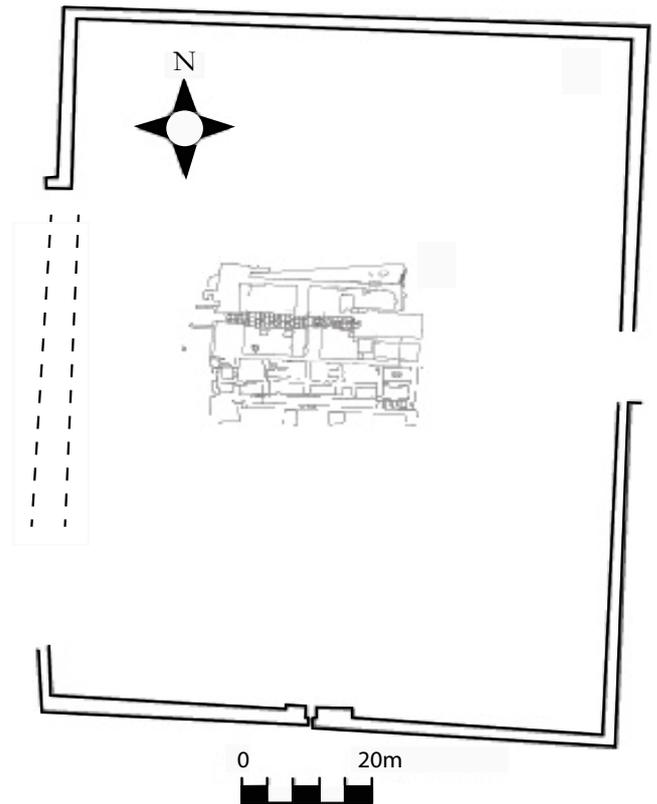


Figure 1. The enclosure wall and the temple location.



Plate 2. Aerial photo of the temple.

The temple

In the middle of the western part of Hosh al-Kafir, excavation revealed a building facing west (the direction of the Nile) built of sandstone and red brick, with red brick

columns, and floors paved with stone flagstones (Plate 2, Figure 2). The dimensions of the building are 24.1 x 13.66m. This building appears to be one of the Meroitic temples at the site, of which there are at least two. The temple mentioned by Hintze (1959) is located to the north of this structure and has not yet been excavated. The structure consists of five main halls and 14 additional rooms adjacent to the south wall of the temple. It is expected that excavation over the next few years will reveal more buildings and rooms.

The temple consists of multiple phases. The adjacent rooms were part of the earliest phase – they were built of sandstone, and seem to belong to the same time period as the construction of the enclosure wall. The temple was probably established in a later phase (Figure 2). It is in the highest stratigraphic level at the site, and was constructed of both red and mud brick as well as mud (جالوس).

Some of the sandstone blocks from the monumental gate appear to have been reused, probably from another earlier building, or possibly a temple, that has not yet been excavated, indicating another phase at the site.

At the time of the construction of this temple, the adjacent rooms already existed and may have been part of another temple or important building located to the south. These are



Figure 2. Coloured top level plan of the temple and adjacent rooms showing building materials used.

finds. Some pottery fragments were found in poor condition beside the inner parts of the enclosure wall foundations. Most of these are small wheel-made sherds of a plain brown colour (Plate 3).

The excavations during the 2018-2019 season revealed a third temple that will be discussed in a future publication.

Conclusion

The discovery of multiple temples at Hosh al-Kafir suggests that it may have played an important religious role during the Meroitic period. These recent results further suggest that Hosh al-Kafir was an important Meroitic site.

Acknowledgements

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currently under archaeological investigation.

There was a layer of sand between the paved floor of the temple and the remains of the collapsed walls, which contained no finds apart from fragments of pottery, suggesting that the temple was abandoned for a period of time before it collapsed. This further indicates two or more temporal phases at the site.

Small finds and pottery

The excavations at Hosh al-Kafir have so far not recovered any important archaeological artefacts. As mentioned above, the temple and its adjacent rooms were free from any small

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Plate 3. Examples of pottery from the enclosure wall foundations.