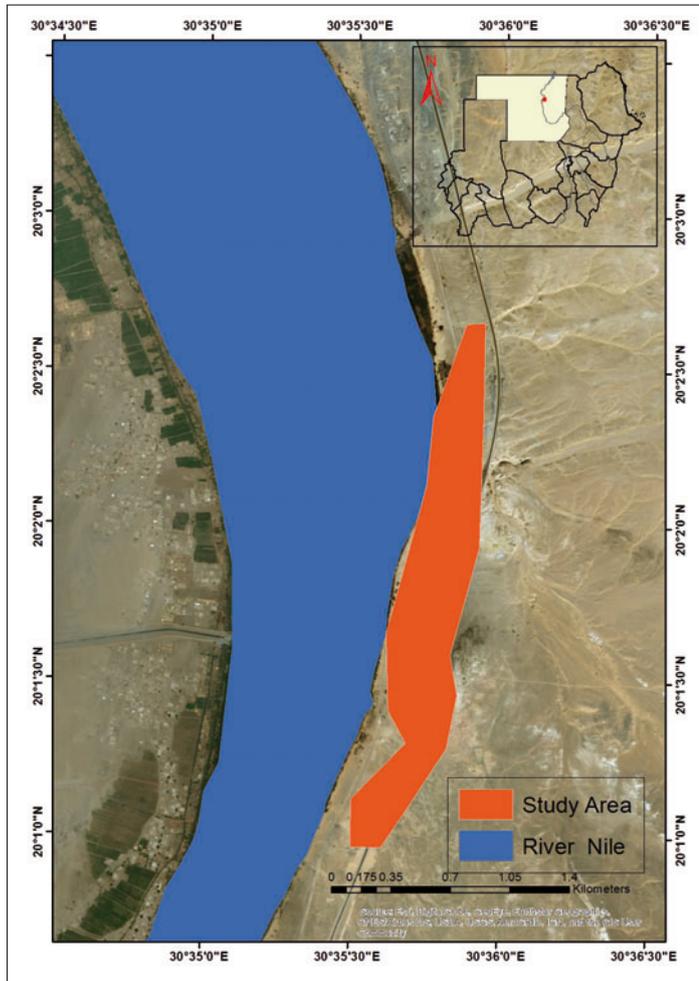


Kedurma: The University of Khartoum Project, 2017-2018

Mohamed Bashir



Map 1. The geographical location of the site.

Introduction

The Late Kushite site of Kedurma lies in the Third Cataract region, c. 9km north of the Kajbar rapids, which form the north end of the Third Cataract (Edwards 1995, 37). The site is close to the river, a maximum of some 400m north-south and 300m east-west, and comprises a settlement, temple, and cemetery (Map 1). It is located in an open area on the east bank, and there is a small village to the south, which is eponymous for the name of the archaeological site. The name itself is Nubian and is composed of two words: 'Ked', which means 'stone', and 'Urm', which means 'black'.

History of archaeological research

The site appears to have been first recorded in 1937 by Blackman while excavating for the Egypt Exploration Society at Sesebi. He reported the existence of a poorly preserved red brick temple with at least one stone-built gateway, and a large mudbrick building in the settlement site (Blackman 1937). The site was also noted in 1989 in the Antiquities Service Archive, but no account was published. It also appeared in the Sudan Survey Department map of the Mahas region as a Meroitic site in the village of Kedurma (Edwards 1995, 37).

In 1989 the Department of Archaeology, University of Khartoum Mahas Survey Project, conducted their first archaeological survey in the area and documented the Kedurma site (Edwards and Osman 1992, 86-88).

During the second field season of the Mahas Survey Project in 1991, the site was found to be considerably damaged due to the construction of an embankment for an irrigation channel. A preliminary ground survey of the surface features of the site was carried out, and part of the disturbed areas of both the settlement and cemetery along the line of the channel was cleared (Edwards and Osman 1992, 86-88). Four cemeteries were excavated in order to expose surviving archaeological material and to assess the nature of the remains (Edwards and Osman 1992, 86-88), but as funds were limited, no works were subsequently conducted after the survey.



Plate 1. The surface of the settlement site.



Plate 2. The surface of the settlement site.

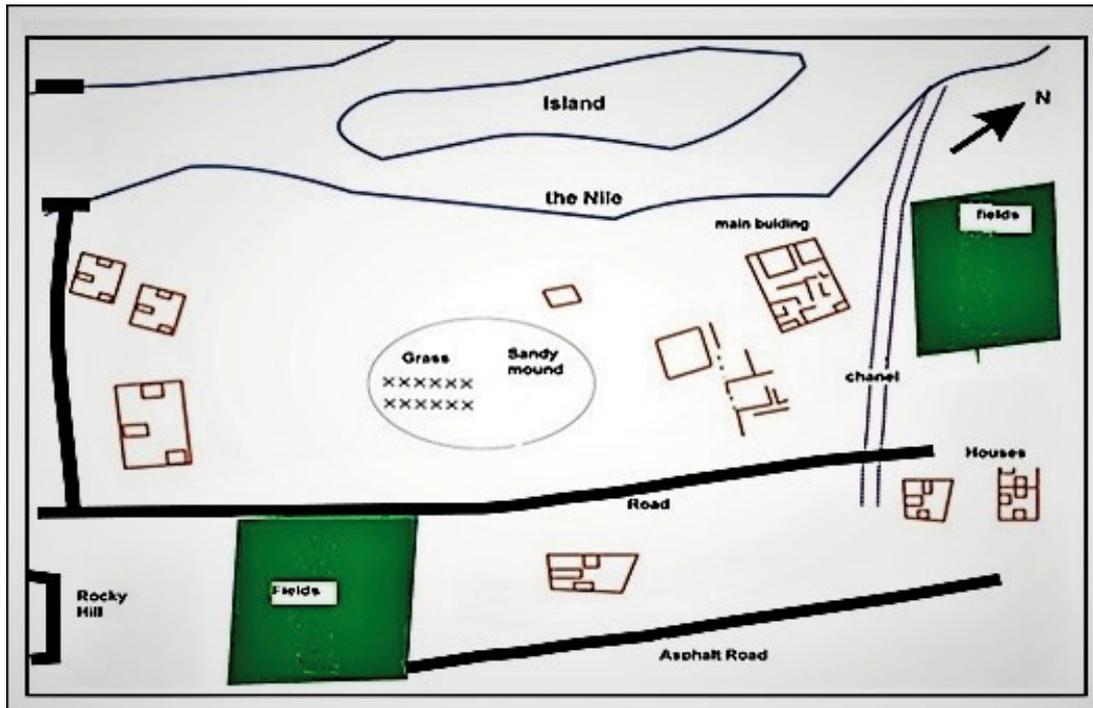


Figure 1. The settlement districts.

The settlement area

Most of the settlement lies close to the riverbank, and covers an area of 300m north-south and 150m east-west. The surface is generally sandy, and covered with considerable quantities of fine Meroitic pottery sherds and materials. Numerous

mudbrick walls are visible on the surface, while many more are obscured by drifting sand (Plates 1 and 2).

A systematic surface survey was carried out in the settlement site by Edwards (1995), and again by the author in 2017-2018, and samples were collected. It appears that the settlement area, as currently visible, consisted of four main districts; administrative, domestic, industrial, and religious (Figure 1).

The first part of the settlement, as recorded by Edwards (1995), consists of Complex A and the surrounding foundations (Figure 2, Plate 3), and represents the administrative sector of the site. This mudbrick building is almost perfectly square, measuring 18m each side. The walls were c. 0.55m wide with alternating courses of headers and

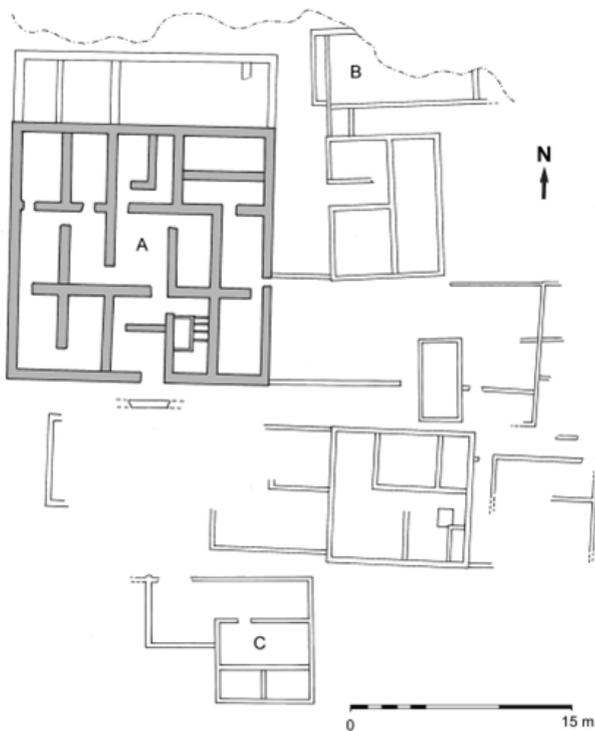


Figure 2. Complex A and the foundations around; after Osman et al. 2012, pl. 3.



Plate 3. Complex A.



Plate 4. The sand mound area.

stretchers. The walls stood *c.* 1m above the present ground levels (Edwards 1995, 38). The building is orientated to the south. The main doorway in the middle of the south wall leads into a vestibule with a stairwell on its east side. The exposed upper part of this doorway was *c.* 1.50m wide and no traces of stone jambs survived, as might be expected in such a substantial building (Edwards 1995, 40). The rest of the structure comprised of a series of quite small, interconnecting chambers. The standing walls were planned in outline, although some details remained unclear (Osman *et al.* 2012, 100).

The foundations appear to be a casemate structure. The square plan, consisting of several stores, and basement rooms, has no access except perhaps from above. This technique is common in monumental architecture of the Meroitic period (Baud 2008, 60) and has been reported at different regional Meroitic centres, such as: Karanog, Napata, Jebel Barkal (B155), Wad Ben Naqa, Muweis, Naqa, Hamadab (Wolf *et al.* 2014, 108), and at the Royal City of Meroe, where all the rooms in the lowest level of building M750 lack communication between them (Maillot 2014, 82; Maillot 2015).

The second district consists of domestic buildings, and is represented by the sand mound and the mud brick foundations in the centre of the settlement area (Plate 4). The mound stands over 3m high, which may suggest that



Plate 5. The industrial sector.

it covers several more buildings, and there are a number of mud brick walls that appear on the eastern side of the hill. The height of the sandy kom suggests that the walls may be preserved to a considerable height (Edwards 1996, 115).

The industrial sector of the site (Plate 5) is represented by the southern part of the settlement, which was covered by deposits of ash and burnt-brick, and where the outline of at least one circular kiln was traced (Plate 6) surrounded by fragments of vitrified brick from the kiln fabric (Edwards 1995, 38). Some more recent activity, apparently related to gold mining on the site, partly exposed this kiln, showing it to have had a circular chamber with six pilasters, *c.* 2m in diameter, constructed of bricks measuring 340mm x 165mm x 85mm. This kind of kiln, as noted by Welsby (1996, 168), is a so-called up draught or double chamber kiln, where the heat rises from the lower furnace chamber to the upper firing chamber. Similar buttresses have been reported from a kiln at the Meroitic site of Hamadab, namely kiln H3201 (Wolf *et al.* 2014, 729).

The religious sector is represented by a small temple at the northern fringe of the settlement site (Plate 7). The temple was first reported by Blackman in 1937, who at the time



Plate 6. The kiln in the industrial sector.



Plate 7. The small temple.



Plate 8. Mastaba/pyramid grave type, facing west (photo: Saaid 2018).



Plate 9. Chamber grave, facing east (photo: Saaid 2018).

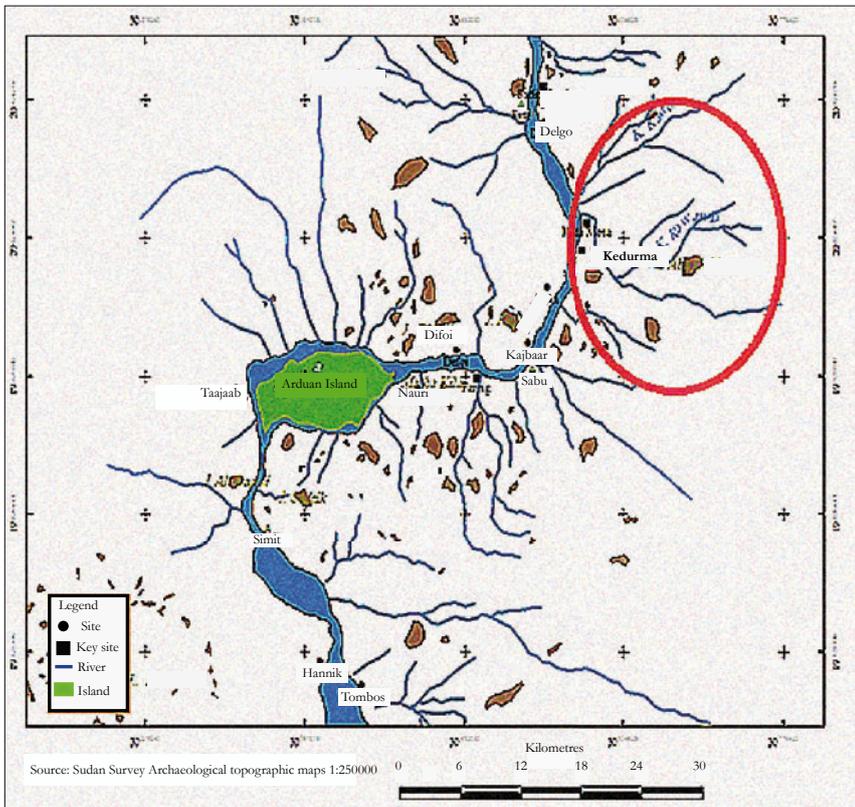
described its situation as a poorly preserved, red brick temple with at least one stone-built gateway. The area of the temple has now seen considerable damage by agricultural activities.

The cemetery is located east of the settlement in an open area partially covered by a group of unoccupied houses. In most areas there were few surface indications of graves with the exception of small scatters of sherds or stones on an otherwise featureless gravel-covered plain (Osman *et al.* 2012, 103). Its full extent could not be determined without extensive surface clearance, but the sherd scatters suggest it may have extended as much as 230m north-south and 100m east-west. Most parts of the cemetery have suffered heavy destruction

by tomb robbers, gold miners and digging of earth to produce bricks for buildings near the site. These activities disturbed many graves. Human bones appear on the surface, as well as pottery sherds from vessels that may have formed part of the funerary equipment, together with mudbrick fragments. A total of six graves were excavated. Four were rescued by the Mahas Archaeological Project team in 1991, and more recently, in 2018, a mission from the University of Khartoum excavated two further graves.

Two types of graves have been reported at the site: mastaba/pyramid superstructures and chamber graves. The superstructure of the mastaba/pyramid type excavated consisted of a rectilinear, mudbrick foundation, that measured 6.3m east-west, with a small 'chapel' at the east side (Plate 8). The superstructure was orientated perpendicular to the river. This grave had a near rectangular chamber, of $\approx 1.65\text{m} \times 0.75\text{m}$, aligned close to magnetic east-west. At the base of the chamber, skeletal remains were found. In the middle of the mudbrick foundation of one tomb (Grave 5), seven poorly preserved skulls were discovered at depths between 100-310mm beneath the surface of the surrounding ground. No evidence for coffins or other funerary materials was found, except for some pottery sherds and an associated small fine cup.

The chamber grave type (Plate 9) had an east-west orientated grave with a sloping shaft measuring at least 2m long leading to a chamber at the east end. The chamber entrance measured 1.60m and had a stone blocking. Due to the activities of robbers, the skeleton's position and finds in the chamber were not identified, but were found disturbed and scattered in and around the grave.



Map 2. The survey area.



Plate 10. Before excavation, facing south.



Plate 11. The test excavation, facing north.



Plate 12. The test excavation, facing north.



Plate 13. The test excavation, facing south.

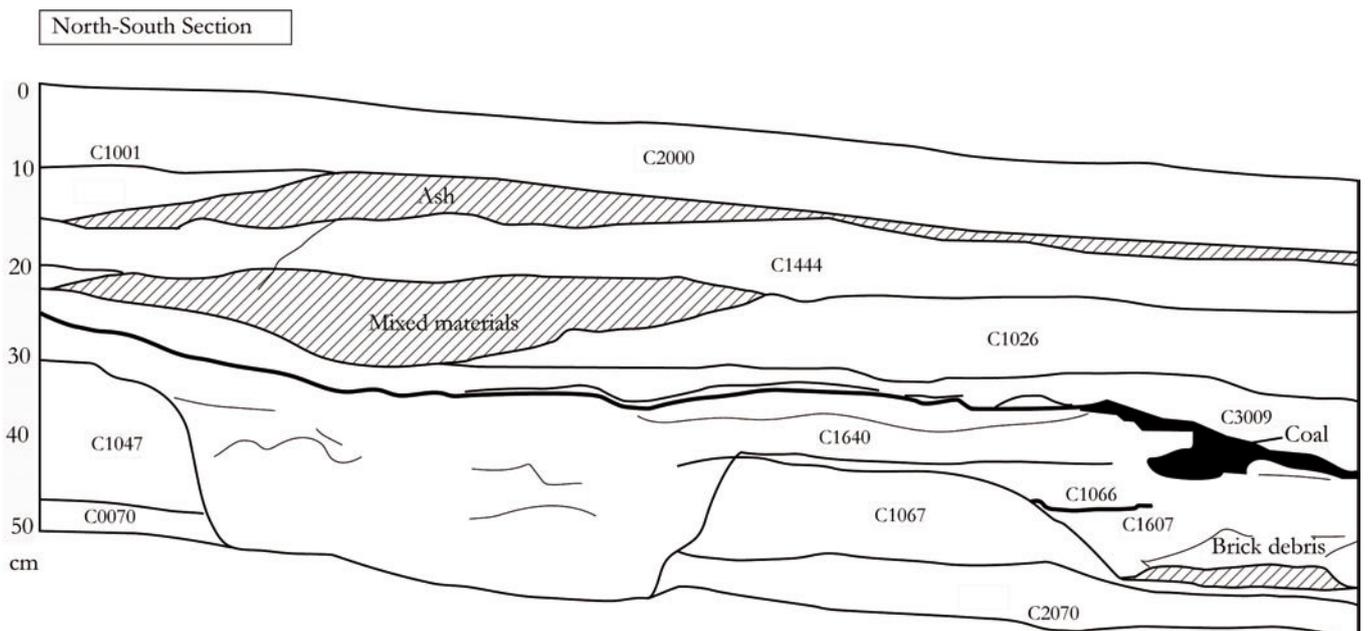


Figure 3. Excavation section.



Plates 14 and 15. Pottery samples from the surface of the site.

A new project at the site

To further study the Kedurma site and its importance in the region, the University of Khartoum initiated an archaeological project involving two seasons of archaeological survey and excavations during 2017-2018, in the settlement and cemetery. The survey covered the area east of the Kedurma site and covered a distance of about 10km (Map 2). The eastern hinterland is an open desert that extends to the east beyond the Halfa-Abu Hamed railway. The survey shows a sporadic distribution of Kerma-type superstructures of cemeteries and medium-sized individual graves.

The first test excavations were conducted in an industrial area at the southern end of the site (Plate 10). This part of the site had previously produced a significant amount of fine Meroitic pottery sherds, so the test excavation aimed to get typical Meroitic samples and to determine the stratigraphy of the site. Excavation of a 2m x 2m square revealed four strata and reached a final depth of 0.4m (Plates 11-13, Figure 3).

This small test excavation produced a significant amount of fine Meroitic pottery (88 sherds). The work revealed deposits of ash and charcoal with more pottery, including both fine and coarse wares, separated across the three stratigraphic levels (0.1m for each level). The soil was white in the first layer, but dark brown in the second and third layers as a result of admixture with a great quantity of ash and coal. The soil was white again in the fourth layer and was mixed with a little coal and burned wood.

Based on a random surface collection made in a north-south transect across the Kedurma site, an assemblage of 400 pottery sherds was collected and studied (Plates 14 and 15). The pottery assemblage was comprised of a range of clays, techniques, and forms. Jars, bowls, beakers, and fineware cups were well attested at the site and often showed high-quality workmanship.

The importance of Kedurma is well attested by archaeological evidence obtained from the early 1990s, as well as by the recent archaeological investigations from the University of Khartoum missions at the site, and its features and archaeological materials are similar to other Late Kushite urban sites excavated in and outside the Island of Meroe.

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