

# SUDAN & NUBIA

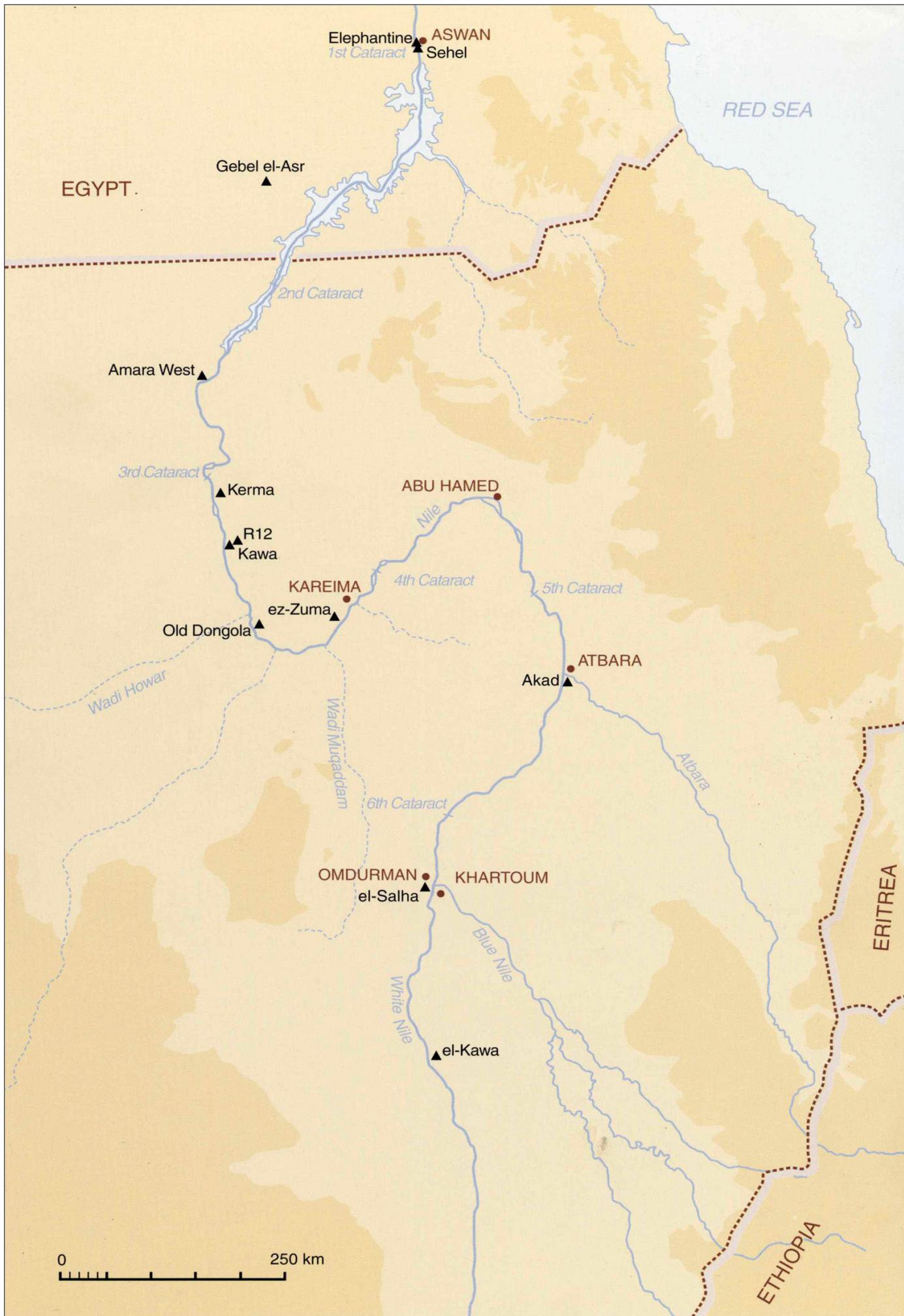
The Sudan Archaeological Research Society



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*Front Cover:* An apostle from the mural in the chapel at Baganarti containing the king's portrait.

## Introduction

*Vivian Davies*

At the time of writing (mid-September 2002), the 10<sup>th</sup> International Conference for Nubian Studies has just finished, generously hosted by colleagues in the Università di Roma "La Sapienza". The large number of papers delivered shows how rapidly the subject of Middle Nile studies is growing, with significant advances in knowledge achieved since the last conference held in Boston four years ago, an encouraging state of affairs, to which the content of this present volume bears further witness. There was, however, one hugely important issue which overshadowed the event: the looming crisis of the new dam at the Fourth Cataract.

As reported by the Sudanese delegation, preparatory work for the dam has now begun and actual building will start in two years. It is expected to take a further seven years to complete. In an unwelcome echo of the Aswan High Dam scheme, the reservoir created will flood over 170km of the Nile Valley between the Fourth Cataract and Abu Hamed, enveloping, as we now know from preliminary surveys, thousands of archaeological sites - artefact scatters, settlements, cemeteries and rock-drawings dating from the Palaeolithic to the Islamic Periods. Very little is known about these sites; for the most part only that they exist. Our Sudanese colleagues are urgently appealing for assistance, so that as much as possible of the record may be investigated and documented before the area is lost to knowledge for ever. In response, SARS is this winter launching a campaign of rescue excavation in a region which we recently surveyed (see *Sudan & Nubia* 4 [2000], 51-7), but an extensive international effort will be required if any serious impact is to be made. Our next international colloquium, to be held at the British Museum on 8 May 2003, will focus on the dam emergency. All colleagues with an interest in helping are invited to attend.



# Archaeological Discoveries along the East Bank of the White Nile, 1997-2000

*Khider Adam Eisa*

Most of the archaeological excavations, surveys and research, as well as historical and ethnoarchaeological studies before the recent past, have been devoted to the regions north of the confluence of the two Niles (the Blue and White Niles) in central Sudan. However, although there has been an awareness of the need for a broad scientific research programme incorporating the approaches noted above in the areas immediately south of Khartoum, to the east and west of the Nile Valley and in the southern states of the present-day Sudan, such activities have rarely taken place for the following reasons.

1. Administratively, the directorate of Sudan Antiquities services in the 1950's and 60's was eager to see foreign expeditions working on the key sites in the north following the tradition of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. This was promoted by the objectives of the missions themselves with the hope (or certainty) of achieving positive results and abundant archaeological finds.

2. A public awareness of the importance of the cultural heritage and its safe-guarding was lacking.

3. Development work was planned and executed without consulting the Sudan National Corporation for Antiquities and Museums. According to the Antiquities Ordinance of 1999 such project should be preceded by general surveys and salvage excavations.

4. The problems of the environment and climate in the early days of archaeological activities hindered such work south of Khartoum. This is different now except in the southern states, where security remains a problem.

The possibility of working south of Khartoum along the eastern bank of the White Nile, supported by the accidental discovery of archaeological finds, increased our interest in surveying that area. Crawford (1953, 2.29) mentioned the existence of a Christian period archaeological site in the El-Getaina area and Arkell (1961, 136-137) referred to sites at El-Kawa and Kosti; others, for example Håland (1986, 48), thought that from Khartoum southwards up to Rabak was a wide region of human settlement. All of these reasons led us to form a national archaeological team, a joint expedition between the University of Khartoum and the National Corporation for Antiquities and Museums, to survey and undertake salvage excavations south of Khartoum. Our objectives are principally to find answers to some of the questions raised, such as the existence and nature of settlements south of

Khartoum, the southern extensions of the Kushite state and the safe-guarding of endangered sites.

Our first season began in May 1997 surveying an area of about 40km south of Khartoum up to the town of Jebel Awlia; a number of sites were discovered (Figure 1), such as El-Kalakla Tiraie, 2km east of the White Nile bank, with its surface covered with potsherds of the Early Khartoum Mesolithic tradition (Eisa 1997). About 400m further south is the prehistoric site of Wad El-Agli, whose exact date is difficult to ascertain before excavation. The third site discovered was El-Shigailab, the surface of its low mounds covered with a large number of potsherds and stone tools dating to the Neolithic period. This is one of the major sites of this period to be discovered, which faces a direct threat of destruction due to a village planning project and, therefore, demands urgent salvage excavation.

The large site of Tiraia El-Beja (site nos 4, 5 and 6) is divided by the natural wadis and village buildings into three parts. On its surface are very rich collections of Neolithic pot-sherds and stone tools.

To the south is the site of El-Masra (site no. 7), which lies about 300m west of the Jebel Awlia-Kosti highway to the

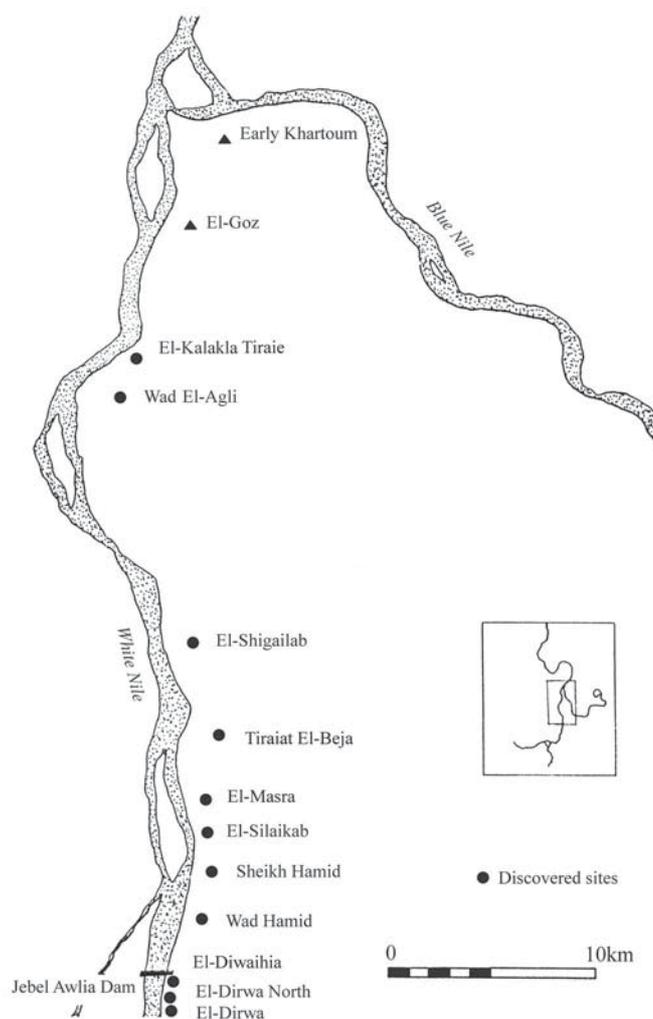


Figure 1. Sites discovered between Khartoum and Jebel Awlia in 1997.

east of El-Masra village. It is a mound elevated 1-2m above the surrounding surface and has been protected because most of it lies inside the courtyard of the village clinic, while a portion of it extends beyond the enclosure wall. The local people think that this mound (*kom*) is inhabited by a devil, which is why they never approach it. Its surface is covered with pot sherds, animal bones and human skeletons, some of which are exposed on the surface. It seems to be the most important settlement and cemetery in this region, but needs future excavation to determine its cultural and historic periods (ranging from Neolithic to Meroitic periods, judging from the surface finds).

The site of El-Silaikab (site no. 8) lies to the south west of the previous site. Its surface is covered with Neolithic potsherds and some stone tools. The ninth site is Sheikh Hamid, which is situated to the north of the town of Jebel Awlia. It consists of a low mound covered in pot-sherds with Early Khartoum types of decoration. Wad Hamid village site, also north of Jebel-Awlia town (site no. 10), is covered with Neolithic type potsherds.

One of the sites located during this first season of the survey was El-Beja El Diwaihia, south west of Jebel Awlia, right on the eastern bank of the White Nile (site no. 11). It is an elevated plateau (3m above reservoir level), which is mostly occupied by a Muslim cemetery. At its western end is a section formed by the activity of the White Nile. The archaeological material recovered from the different levels of the section and from the surface of the plateau consisted of potsherds with various types of decoration, stone tools, mollusk and snail shells. The site might belong to different historical periods, possibly showing a continuous occupation of the site from the prehistoric up to the Meriotic and Post-Meroitic periods. It is very endangered by the waters of the White Nile and the extension of the Muslim cemetery.

One of the last two sites located in this first season is the comparatively small site at EL-Dirwa North (site no. 12), south of EL-Beja El Diwaihia, which is covered with decorated potsherds probably dating to periods later than the Neolithic. The other, EL-Dirwa (site no.13), lies south of the previous site; its potsherds have distinctive decorations, which are very difficult to date before excavating the site.

In the second and third seasons of the project (1998-2000), we concentrated our work on the area of the White Nile Sugar Project in the El-Kawa region, 222km south of Khartoum (Figures 2-3). The survey of the area of the main and subsidiary canals, as well as part of the proposed area for cultivation, led to the discovery of a number of sites ranging from the Neolithic to Islamic periods, judging from the archaeological finds. These are:

Umm Saboru, a number of low mounds covered with fragments of red bricks, potsherds and animal bones, probably dating to the Christian and Funj periods.

Goz Farah West, Middle and East, are three large mounds covered with pot-sherds with various patterns of decora-

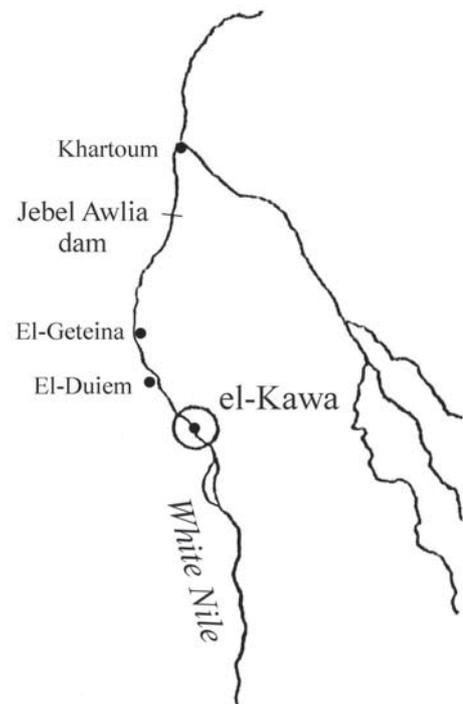


Figure 2. The location of El-Kawa.

tion, stone tools, animal bones, and some exposed human skeletons (Goz Farah Middle). These sites probably date to the Meroitic, Christian and early Islamic periods. Other sites include Goz Abdel-Hadi, south east of EL-Kawa (pot-sherds, numerous stone tools and material of great interest, are covering its surface), Goz Abu Dom, Goz Ashosha, Goz Abu Hijalieja, Goz Wad Eisa, Goz El Goulamab and Goz Umm Foukhar.

The common factor in these sites is that their names begin with Goz, which means an elevated plateau or mound. Their surfaces are covered mostly with potsherds, stone tools, animal bones and river snails. Their dates cannot be determined with certainty before excavation, but it is remarkable that the El-Kawa area is very rich in archaeological sites, dating probably from the prehistoric to the early Islamic period (Eisa 1998; 1999a and b; 2000).

The salvage excavations at the site of El-Kawa-Hillat Saeed continued during two seasons (the second and third 1997-1999). This site is threatened by the digging of the main pump and canals of the White Nile Sugar Project. During the examination of the squares excavated (1-1.3m in depth) between the waters of the White Nile and the planned pump area, no archaeological remains were revealed. The squares excavated along the passage of the main canal in an eastward direction (about 2km in length) were similarly void of any archaeological remains. To the south of the main canal, a number of squares were excavated during both seasons. Many burials were discovered, dating to the Meroitic, late Meroitic and Christian periods.

The survey and excavated sites proved the remarkable archaeological richness not only of the El-Kawa area but

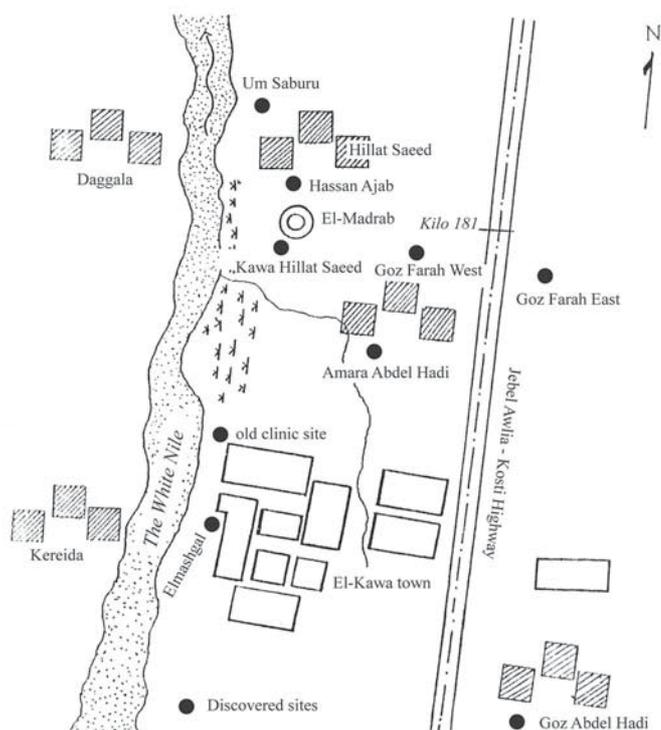


Figure 3. The El-Kawa area.

also of the eastern bank of the White Nile in general. These archaeological sites require special attention to excavate and safeguard their cultural remains.

## Postscript

The fourth season of the White Nile Archaeological Survey was conducted in May-June 2002 (Eisa 2002). We continued surveying the area south of Jebel Awlia towards Geteina and discovered 13 new sites along the eastern bank of the White Nile. Some of these are very sizeable and important settlements, such as el-Dirwa south, Goz Imam I and II and the Goz Nuri I - Goz el-Khazna sites, which can be dated to the Meroitic period. Cemeteries were also discovered at the Sondos Agricultural Scheme Water Pump site, at Goz Wad Jar el-Naby and Goz Nori II. Some exposed burials on these sites, also dateable to the Meroitic period, were excavated. Most of the sites need protection and urgent salvage excavations, particularly those at el-Dirwa South and Sondos.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank The Sudan Archaeological Research Society and the Sondos Agricultural Scheme authorities for their generosity in financing the 2002 season. We hope that their support will continue in the forthcoming season, which will be devoted to salvage excavations at el-Dirwa and Sondos.

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