

# SUDAN & NUBIA

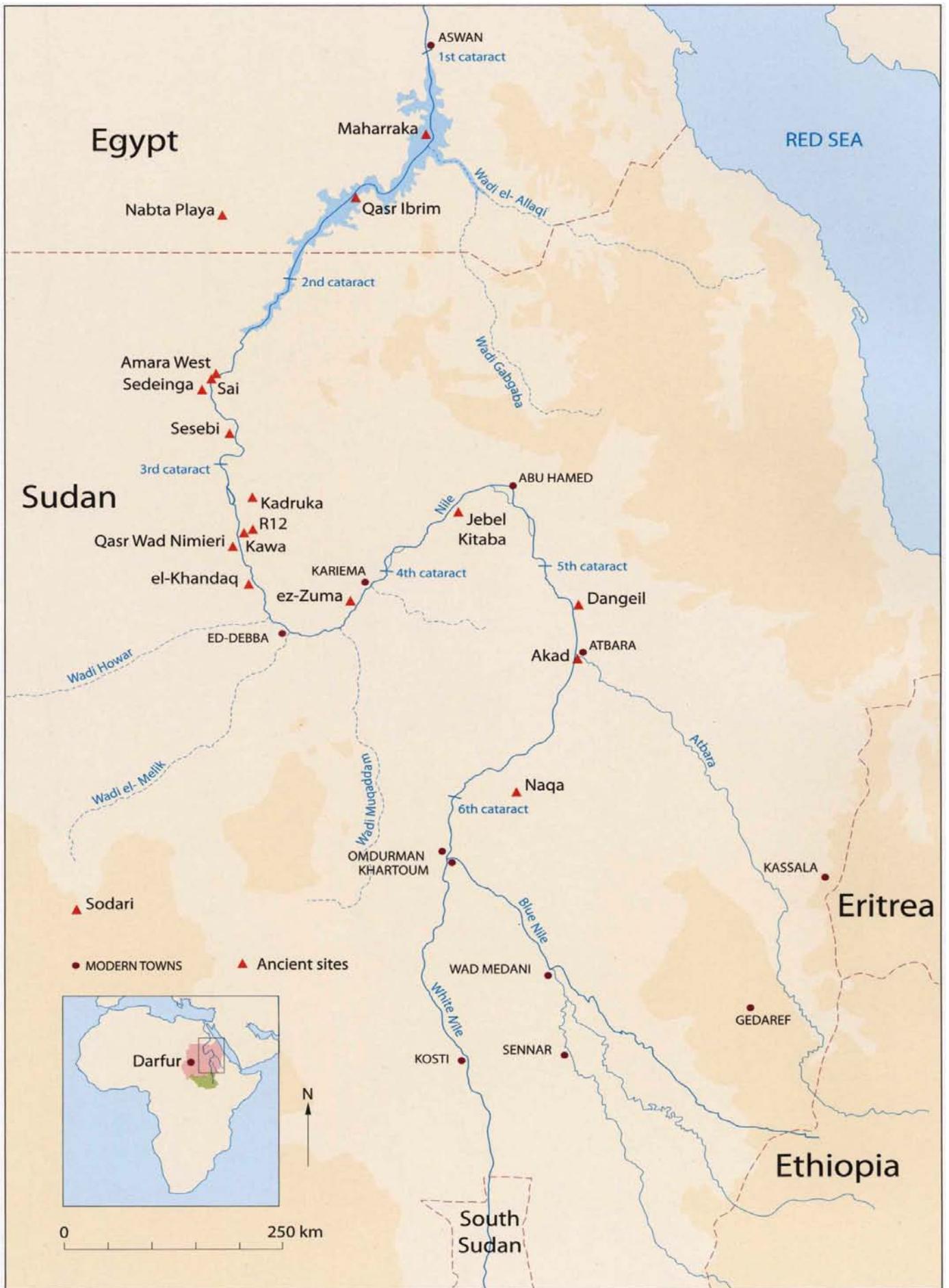
The Sudan Archaeological Research Society



*Bulletin No. 15*

2011

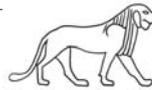




The map reflects the new territorial situation following the independence of South Sudan in July 2011.

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# The Late Meroitic Cemetery at Sedeinga. Campaign 2010

*Claude Rilly and Vincent Francigny*

The Sedeinga Archaeological Unit (SEDAU),<sup>1</sup> a French mission funded by the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the University of Paris-Sorbonne, resumed its archaeological fieldwork on the site from the 19<sup>th</sup> November to the 18<sup>th</sup> December, 2010. This was the second season by the new team.<sup>2</sup>

The huge Napatan and Meroitic necropolis in Sedeinga covers an overall area of roughly 650 x 450m. From west to east, it lies between a long irregular white quartz outcrop and the main track passing alongside the Temple of Queen Tiyi. An upper track, part of the famous Darb al-Arba'in used by camel herds coming from Darfur to Egypt, cuts the site along its length. From north to south, two dry *wadis* divide it into three sectors numbered I, II, III. A small hill situated in the north-western part of the site (Sector West) was the burial place of local princes.

Several surveys conducted on and around the site this year shed a clearer light on the past of Sedeinga. A group of "primitive graves" had been unearthed by the early excavators directly under the base of the largest pyramid of Sector W (WT1) and studied later by Jacques Reinold who described them as "Neolithic" without further dating (Reinold 1994). This year, two more Neolithic sites situated in the western part of Sector III have been found in a survey of Pre- and Proto-historic remains conducted by Helene Delattre. They included a stone axe head and pottery assemblages similar to the sherds discovered under WT1 that can be dated to the 6<sup>th</sup> millennium BC. A second discovery confirmed the presence of a Pre-Kerma settlement. A sherd assemblage found 20 years ago west of the camel track had been erroneously attributed to the A-Group in spite of the location of Sedeinga, lying far too south for this culture. This assemblage, after further examination last year, could be assigned to a Pre-Kerma group. Three new sites with the same kind of material were found this year in the north-western end of the site (Jebel Aswad) and in the western part of Sector III. The finest sherds exhibit

<sup>1</sup> The archaeological mission was co-directed by Claude Rilly, presently director of the French Unit of the NCAM (SFDAS) in Khartoum and by Vincent Francigny (American Museum of Natural History, New York). The scientific team consisted of Agathe Chen (physical anthropologist), Vincent Colard (archaeologist), Hélène Delattre (archaeologist), Romain David (ceramologist), Sandra Porez (archaeologist) and was assisted by Awadallah Ali el-Basha (driver, SFDAS) and Mohamed Bakhit (cook). Our inspector on site, representing NCAM, was M. el-Taieb el-Jak. Our rais Abdelrahmane Fadl was the head of a gang of 25 workmen from the villages of Qubbat Selim and Nilwa. We would like to extend our thanks to the National Corporation of Antiquities and Museums and especially to Mr Hassan Hussein Idriss and Dr Salah eldin Mohamed Ahmed for their kind assistance.

<sup>2</sup> For the results of the previous campaign, see Rilly and Francigny 2010, which includes in addition a full bibliography of the former excavations.

herringbone patterns or zigzag motifs. It must be emphasised that, if the term "Pre-Kerma" was chosen in accordance with the culture known on the eponymous site, the assemblages found in Sedeinga show a slightly different profile closer to the material of the same period found in Sai Island. From the Kerma period, hardly any significant remains have been unearthed on the site. However, in the descendency of II T 186, two *Kerma Classique* sherds were uncovered. They might belong to the same object, a fine funerary beaker, as a sherd found last year on the surface.

A general examination of the pottery spread on the surface and of the architectural remains was also conducted in Sectors I to III. Added to the results of former excavations, this survey gave a more accurate picture of the chronological distribution of burials in the necropolis. In Napatan times, the local rulers of Sedeinga, representing the royal power in the region, were buried under the large pyramids erected in Sector W and in the eastern part of Sector I. The Napatan commoners were interred in pit-graves in the western part of Sector III. In Meroitic times, smaller pyramids were built directly east of each Napatan superstructure in Sector W for the local princes, whereas Sector II harboured the monuments of second-rank officials. The simple tombs without superstructures dug around them might have been the resting place of the humbler and younger members of the clan. No specific place of burial has been found for the lower classes. The assignment to precise periods is still questionable for several areas. The area of Sector II situated west of the camel track might be Meroitic but still awaits excavation. In the eastern part of Sector III, Christian graves have been found and one of them was thoroughly excavated by our predecessors, but the great amount of Meroitic sherds, including fragments of clay offering-tables, indicates that the area was already occupied in Meroitic times. The absence of a Post-Meroitic cemetery, though surprising, seems certain. A sole Post-Meroitic burial in a reused tomb from Sector II (II T 66) was reported by Catherine Berger-El Naggar (Leclant and Clerc 1996, 338). Finally, high concentrations of Egyptian sherds in the schist layers east of Sector II, added to the presence of large schist slabs and parallels with the Pharaonic tombs in Soleb, tend to indicate that the long sought after Egyptian graves contemporary with the Temple of Tiyi might have been in the vicinity. A sondage in this area is required.

Last year, we started our excavations in the necropolis in the place where they had been discontinued in 2002 by the former team directed by Catherine Berger-El Naggar. A large burial cluster with pyramidal superstructures had been unearthed in the central part of Sector II extending eastward from the camel track. In its northernmost part, in the vicinity of the *wadi* separating Sectors I and II, this cluster comprises two perpendicular rows of pyramids, oriented north-south and east-west. Our last campaign was centred on the flat area between the two rows of pyramids. Eighteen tombs without superstructures were discovered, of which eight could be excavated to the natural. Due to their original poverty

and to heavy plundering, only rarely were artifacts discovered. The most significant items (three cap-stones and two Meroitic funerary stelae) were found in surface deposits and originate from the neighbouring superstructures. North of these graves, we found a large empty space deprived of any traces of burial, which has presumably been used as a sand quarry. In the last days, excavations were conducted east of the east-west row of pyramids and a new row of four monuments, oriented north-south, was unearthed. Eventually, the traces of a fifth pyramid with inner cupola were found in the direction of the *wadi*.

This year, thanks to more time available for fieldwork and an increased number of workmen, a much larger area has been explored, covering seven 10 x 10m squares (Figure 1, Plate 1). The excavations have been extended initially north of

Pyramid No. 180, for instance, with its 800mm wide base, is probably the smallest monument of the kind ever found in Nubia. A tiny chapel was nevertheless integrated into its eastern side, making it a complete, though miniature, funerary superstructure. The small associated tomb, II T 180, has been found so heavily plundered that it is difficult to know which of the individuals whose scarce bones were discovered mixed together was the occupant. However, some of the neighbouring graves of similar size can be attributed to immature deceased (II T 183 and 185), so that it cannot be ruled out that this diminutive monument was intended for a child, even if burials of immature individuals usually did not have superstructures.<sup>3</sup>

In addition to the small pyramid No. 188 found in 2009, two larger superstructures with inner cupolas were found

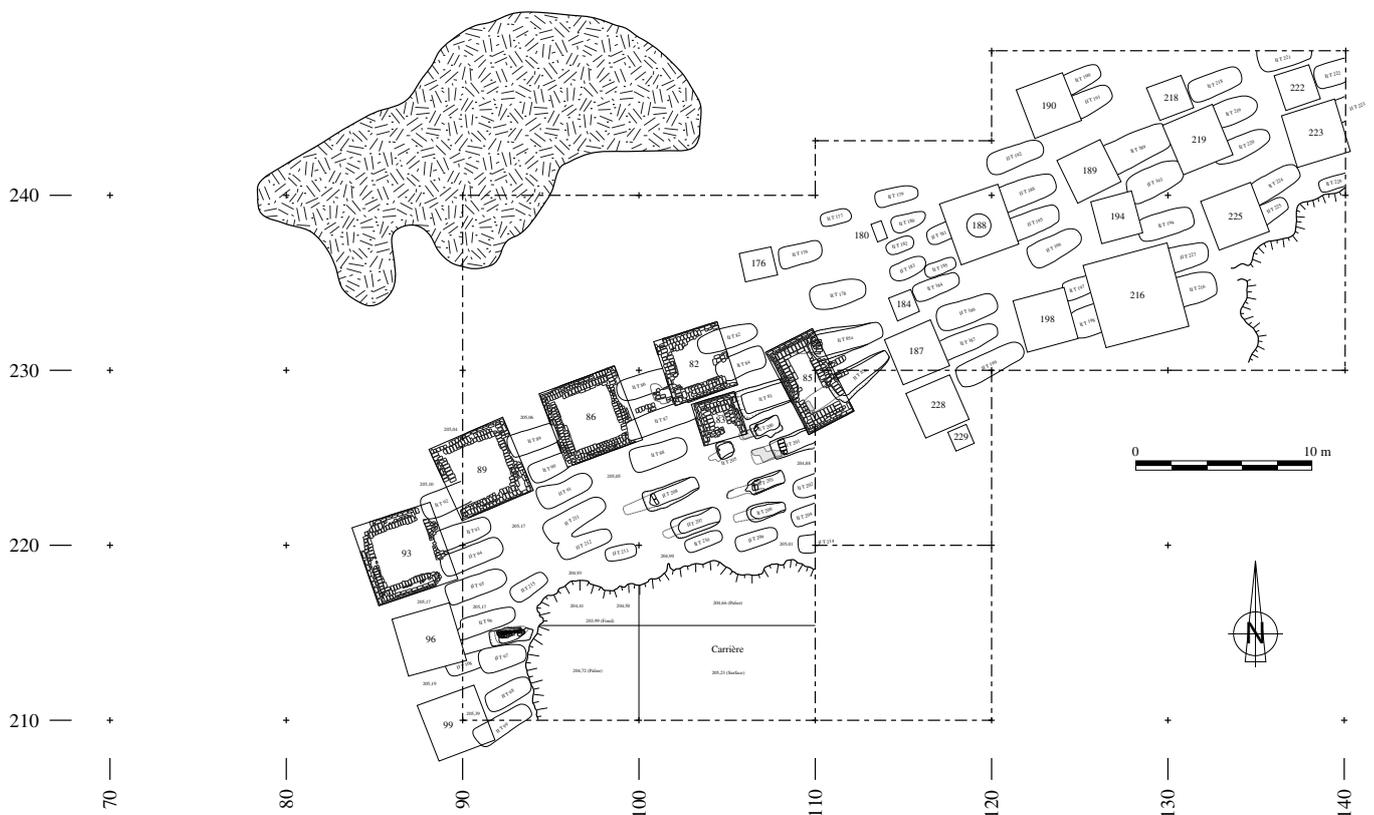


Figure 1. Map of the excavated zone, Sector II, mid-December 2010.

the east-west row of pyramids, later eastward along the *wadi* and finally southwards, in the direction of the neighbouring burial cluster. No superstructure or simple graves were found between the main row of pyramids and the *wadi*. An inscribed funerary stela was unearthed in surface deposits, north of Pyramid No. 86. On the eastern side, however, no fewer than 15 pyramids were discovered, in addition to the five unearthed at the end of the former campaign. These monuments are distributed in five small north-south rows and 33 tombs have been found in connection with them. The largest (No. 231) is approximately 5m square and can be compared with the main monuments of the burial cluster excavated by our predecessors, but many of them were of smaller dimensions.

this season. In the cupola of Pyramid No. 216 (4.5m square), a hard cemented floor was discovered a little above the level of the natural soil, upon which an old-style ba-bird (with full bird body and human head) had been laid. This statue, much eroded, might have been reused from an ancient burial, presumably as a foundation deposit. The second pyramid (No. 231), with an approximately 5m square base, is the largest monument discovered during this campaign. It displays a

<sup>3</sup> For another instance of a late small Meroitic pyramid for a child in Faras, see Griffith 1924, 156 and pl. XXXIX and Francigny 2008, 40. For Karanóg see Woolley and Randall-MacIver 1910, 130 (G 109), 148 (G 201), 164 (G 286); among other examples are those which can be better explained as a reuse of earlier graves.

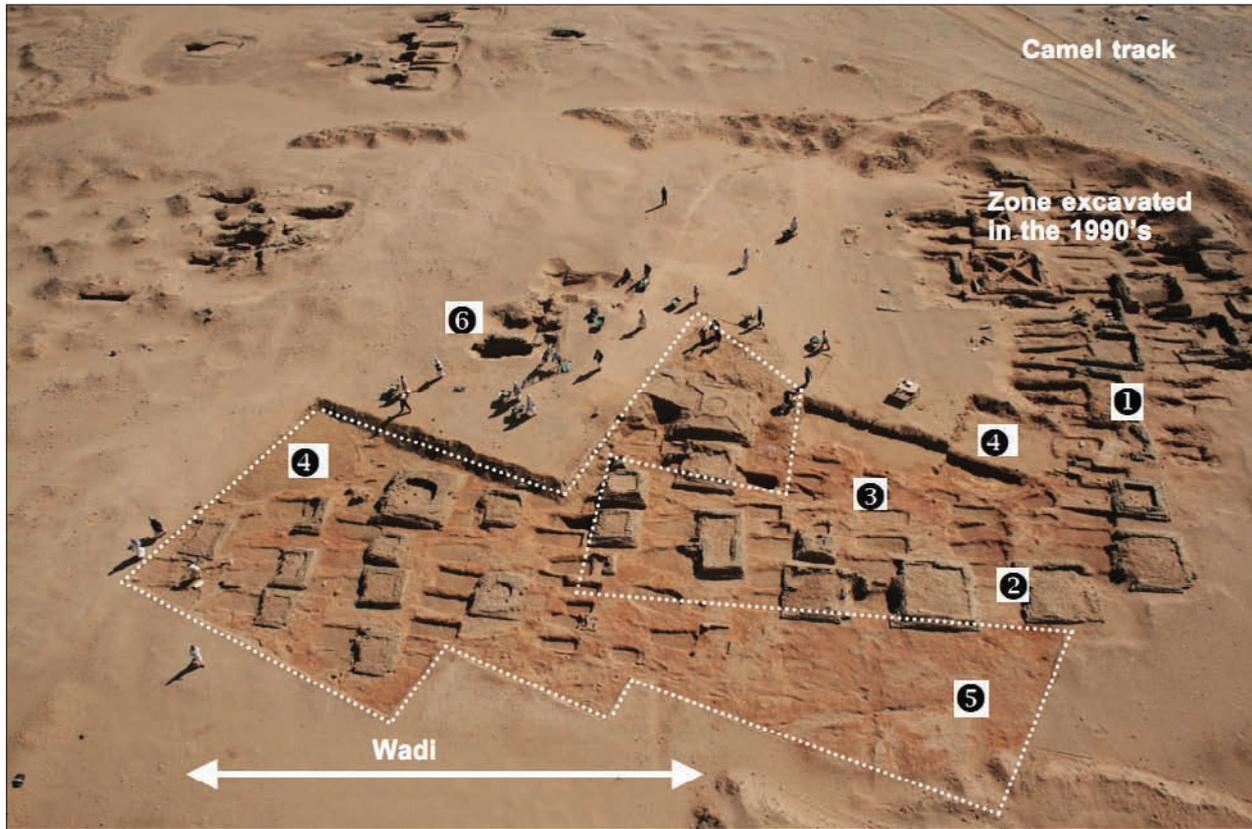


Plate 1. Kite aerial view of the excavated zone at the end of the campaign (© B. N. Chagny / SFDAS).

Dotted lines: excavated zone in 2010, 1. row of pyramids north-south (former campaigns), 2. row of pyramids east-west (former campaigns), 3. tombs excavated in 2009, 4. sand quarries, borders of the funerary cluster, 5. northern edge of the pyramid cluster, close to the wadi, 6. Top of the second cluster with sondage conducted by the former team.

unique architectural feature: the usual inner cross-braces, mid way along, give way to an inner cupola with thick walls forming a small central cavity. Superstructures with inner cupolas are rarely attested. Of the six instances that are known so far, no fewer than five are located in Sedeinga, the exception being in the Begrawwiya West cemetery (Beg.W.2). The two monuments found by our predecessors in the site were located, one in the medium part of Sector II, east of our excavation zone, and the second in the West Sector (W T 9). The chronological span of this type of monument extends from late Napatan (W T 9) to late Meroitic (Pyr. No. 188 and 216). The function of this complex architectural structure is not fully explained. It cannot be interpreted as a chapel (*contra* Leclant 1969, 289 (for W T 9)) since there is no entrance and it does not contain any material. Interior walls in the pyramid were usually intended for reinforcing the superstructure, which was filled with sand and rubble. Various devices were built, all of them consisting of different types of cross-braces. It is difficult to believe that this inner dome had such a function: it was more difficult to build than cross-braces and the result was not better in terms of solidity. In two pyramids (W T 9 and No. 231), the inner dome was of much smaller dimensions than the monument itself and could not have been efficient as a reinforcement. Nor were these cupolas intended for display, since they were invisible

under the pyramid walls. The only hypothesis which is left is a symbolic function, whether connected with a solar cult, or combining in the same monument the pyramid, favoured in the northern part of the kingdom, and the tumulus, which was preferred for private superstructures in central Sudan.

East of the largest “cupola pyramid” (No. 216), the remains of a small chapel, a sandstone threshold (displaced) and an offering-table stand were discovered. Further south, an isolated wall was unearthed. Probably part of a temenos, it joins the monument to a further pyramid, the last we discovered this season. Both the wall and this pyramid are made of pinkish mud bricks that characterise early superstructures in Sector II. No monument was unearthed to the east of the chapel of Pyramid No. 216, where an empty space, possibly used as a second sand quarry, constituted the eastern boundary of the burial cluster.

The excavation of the tombs was frustrating because they had all been looted. This was not a surprise for seven humble graves (II T 202, 209-213, 215) left unexcavated in 2009, in the shallow area south of the main east-west row of pyramids, because all the neighbouring graves had been found pillaged last year. The tombs connected with the new pyramids (II T 176-178, 180, 183-188, 192, 195) had been so severely and repeatedly plundered that almost nothing was left of their original contents. Only decayed fragments of the wooden

coffins were discovered and hardly any significant objects. A small Bes amulet in blue and green glazed faience from the descendary of II T 178 (Plate 2), a pair of rosettes in white stone with black and red inlays (Plate 3), probably part of a



Plate 2. Bes amulet in glazed faience from II T 178.

necklace,<sup>4</sup> found separately in the descendaries of II T 186 and 192, and a series of drop-shaped beads, scattered in the filling of the cavity in II T 192, gives only a pale reflection of the material that may originally have accompanied these burials.



Plate 3. Rosettes. Elements of a necklace found in II T 186 and II T 192.

<sup>4</sup> An identical item was found in Faras at the neck of a deceased, see Griffith 1924, pl. LIX.8; 1925, 114. The same object appears in a frieze where it alternates with *wedjat*-eyes on a painted globular bottle from Meroe M 200-221 (Török 1997, I, 101, 202-2; II, fig. 88, 202-2).

### Architectural interpretation

The chronological data on the burials in this middle part of Sector II was augmented, thanks to the exceptional architectural finds that have marked the season. Last year, we had worked out a general interpretation for the development of the necropolis: it was made of separate clusters comprising one or two “patron pyramids”, around which rows of satellite monuments of lower status (smaller scale) were erected, along with simple graves deprived of superstructures. The discoveries made this year, including those from the clearing of the boundaries of the zone (sand quarries and *wadi*), show that the scenario is more complicated. The idea of funerary clusters with a distribution of the burials strictly following the social hierarchy is valid for the Early and Classic Meroitic periods. This is the case with the large pyramids in pinkish mud bricks Nos 131 and 134 excavated by the former team in the southern part of the burial cluster. Later on, at the beginning of the late period (mid-2<sup>nd</sup> century AD, as shown by the epigraphic material), burials with superstructures, once reserved for a limited aristocracy, underwent a relative “democratization” and became accessible to a greater part of the population. The superstructures increased in number but decreased in size, being in proportion to their owners’ lower income. Consequently, larger parts of Sector II were colonized. From the cluster around prestigious pyramids Nos 131 and 134, superstructures were built first towards the *wadi*, later on along it and finally in the direction of the next funerary cluster, whose large “patron pyramids” made of pinkish mud bricks and equipped with deep descendaries were finally topped by a secondary monument. This pyramid, built without foundations upon the remains of the ancient walls, displays the darker hue of late superstructures. Its owners did not have to dig another burial place. They just used the descendaries and the cavities already existing since the original occupants were long forgotten and their tombs had been plundered.

The reuse of ruined substructures became common across the whole necropolis. New superstructures, mostly of lesser size and quality, were built beside or even upon the ruins of the former pyramids. In Sector West, “princely squatters”, namely the late Meroitic princes of Sedeinga, similarly reused the large burial compounds of their Napatan predecessors by building, east of the ancient monuments, secondary pyramids and chapels where their inscribed offering-tables and funerary stelae were uncovered. Around the same time, the large Napatan elite tombs in Sector I were in turn invaded by modest “squatters”, who could afford neither new superstructures nor inscriptions. The “democratization” of prestige burials had a side-effect on the status of immature deceased. Whereas they were originally buried in small pits dug under the superstructures, in late Meroitic times they had their own tombs beside the adults, and possibly small superstructures of their own in some cases. This scenario offers a new picture of the alleged “wealth” of Sedeinga through the ages. In Napatan times, this wealth was real but concentrated in the hands of



a very small part of the population, who had large pyramids built in Sector West and Sector I, whereas the lower social classes were buried in pits in the western part of Sector III. In the late Meroitic period, the monuments show the wider distribution of a diminishing wealth.

### Anthropological study

The human bones found in the 2010 campaign were studied by Agathe Chen according to usual bioanthropological procedures: MNI, identification of gender, age estimation, morphological measurements, observation of possible pathologies and discrete traits. Of the tombs excavated this year, it has been possible to study 12. The basic physical anthropological observations are encapsulated in Table 1.

Considering the disturbed context (plundering, repeated reuse), the Minimal Number of Individuals is hardly informative. It simply gives an idea of the mixing of archaeological and anthropological material in the tombs from this area. The identification of the occupant is deduced from combined factors: skull and/or long bones in the cavity, presence of skeletal elements both in the descendary and the cavity, association of bone elements with decayed coffin wood, etc. No occupant could be assigned to two of the tombs (II T 192 and II T 212) because of the considerable dispersion of human remains.

At this stage of the new excavations in Sector II, it is too early to draw conclusions about the age and gender distribution, as the studied sample is a small and unrepresentative part of the Meroitic burials in this part of the necropolis. As during the last campaign, all age classes are present, though immature individuals are slightly overrepresented. The five adult individuals so far identified were all female. From the 14 pelvises from which gender identification was possible, ten belonged to female individuals, one to a male and three remain undetermined. This feminine overrepresentation cannot as yet be considered significant until it is confirmed on a larger sample.

The main pathologies include, first, joint disease, particularly vertebrae disc disease, which is of course connected with age. Second, many instances of cribra orbitalia have been observed, principally on the skulls of immature individuals from different age classes. This defect is characterized by an abnormal porosity of the upper part of the eye sockets. It can be the result of different factors such as anemia or dietary deficiencies and bears witness to the sanitary and nutritional state of the population, although genetic factors cannot be excluded.

The anthropological work has also included teeth sampling for DNA analyses from the best preserved skulls found *in situ*. The sampling was undertaken by Agathe Chen under the supervision of Vincent Francigny, who is presently conducting a large DNA sampling of ancient and modern populations of Sudan in collaboration with Dr Alexander de Voogt, curator of the African Department at the American Museum of National History in New York.

Table 1. The basic physical anthropological observations.

Tomb	Total MNI	Identification of individuals	Presumed occupant of the tomb
II T 185	4	- 1 adult - 3 immature [1-4]	Individual 1: [1-4]
II T 187	7	- 4 adults - 2 immature [15-19] - 1 immature [1-4]/[5-9]	Individual 1: F 20-39 Individual 2: F > 60
II T 186	4	- 2 adults - 1 immature [10-14] - 1 immature [1-4]	Individual 1: F > 40
II T 192	9	- 4 adults - 2 immature [5-9] - 1 immature [1-4] - 1 immature [10-14] - 1 immature [15-19]	
II T 183	4	- 1 adult - 1 immature [0] - 2 immature [1-4]	Individual 1: [1-4]
II T 178	7	- 3 adults - 1 immature [1-4] - 1 immature [1-4]/[5-9] - 1 immature [5-9] - 1 immature [10-14]	Individual 1: [10-14] Individual 2: [1-4]/[5-9]
II T 209	5	- 2 adults - 1 immature [0] - 1 immature [1-4] - 1 immature [5-9]	Individual 1: [1-4]
II T 210	6	- 1 adult - 2 immature [0] - 1 immature [0]/[1-4] - 1 immature [1-4] - 1 immature [5-9]/[10-14]	Individual 1: [0]
II T 211	5	- 2 adults - 1 immature [perinatal] - 1 immature [5-9] - 1 immature [15-19]	Individual 1: F [15-19] Individual 2: F > 40
II T 212	6	- 4 adults - 1 immature [0] - 1 immature [1-4]	
II T 213	5	- 2 adults - 1 immature [0] - 1 immature [1-4] - 1 immature [5-9]	Individual 1: [5-9]
II T 215	3	- 2 adults - 1 immature [1-4]	Individual 1: F 20-49

### Ceramic study

Approximately 1,600 potsherds were examined and classified by Romain David. A detailed description was made of 165 items and two dozen objects with complete profiles have been drawn. The material was in a fragmentary condition and scattered both in surface deposits and within most of the tombs, the result of the extensive and repeated looting. One such example is a single decorated bottle whose fragments were found in the rubble from five tombs, and in surface deposits from four grid squares. It was, therefore, difficult

to reassemble the fragments, even those originating from a single grave, and to assign the objects to a particular burial.

Consequently, the excavated zone yielded only a few of the pottery items commonly designated for funerary purposes. Some of the profiles which were drawn during the last season were completed by new elements found this year in neighbouring squares. An unexpected result of the ceramic study this year is the considerable amount of sherds from handmade vessels identified as domestic ware. Most of them were significantly found in surface deposits and in the descendaries and only rarely in the tomb chambers. A large part of this material predates the building of the monuments in which they were found: a fragment of a pot was for instance unearthed last year in II T 217, an undisturbed tomb. A large part of this domestic ware could be intrusive, as were the Napatan sherds recently identified in the same excavated zone. However, the limited range of containers (large bowls and restricted pots) might suggest a type of earthenware designed to be left upon the graves for post-burial offerings. Though this custom still exists in Sudan, there is as yet no archaeological support for its practice in Meroitic times, so this simply remains a hypothesis until further evidence is forthcoming.

Apart from this domestic ware, the usual funerary assemblages were scarce, due to the poverty of the burials in the excavated area and to severe plundering. In addition, many potsherds were heavily weathered by the summer rains and have consequently lost their original slip. Half of the registered sherds are reduced to shapeless fragments. The pottery found this year includes a large proportion of late bowls and beakers, with red slip inside and out or whitish slip on their inner surface. Several fragments of white fineware beakers with stamped or painted motifs were discovered. However, earlier items such as a miniature lekythos or some sherds from handmade black bottles, all of them dated to the period extending from Early to Classical Meroitic, were found mixed in these assemblages. They probably originate from the structures of this area identified as “early” and reused for late burials.

### Epigraphic study

A single written document was found this year on the second day of the excavations as opposed to the three (but one complete) found during the last campaign (Figure 2, Plate 4). Once again, it was a funerary stela. It was discovered in surface deposits, north of the large east-west row of pyramids, in the vicinity of Pyramid No. 86. It most likely originated from the chapel of this pyramid or another in the neighbourhood, from whence it had been displaced by plunderers.

The stela has been carved from a block of soft Nubian sandstone. It was found lying on the obverse side and has been damaged in several places, so that part of the right side of the decoration on the lunette and of the first line of text has disappeared. The last line of signs is almost entirely missing. By contrast, the pigments have been remarkably

preserved, so that, in addition to the red colour of the signs, the yellow paint on the solar disk and its wings, the red hue on the snakes and the lines of the wings are still visible. It was restored on site and brought to Khartoum. The form and dimensions of this stela are very similar to the main piece found last year on the other side of the same pyramid row (II T 212 s1, see Rilly and Francigny 2010). It is ogive shaped and rather narrow in width, with a slightly rounded base. The upper third is filled with the usual figure of a winged disk with uraei. The text is composed of ten lines of Meroitic cursive script. Surprisingly, the engraving of the signs is of poorer workmanship than the lunette, whereas it was just the opposite for the stela found last year. Admittedly, the quality of the stone is here coarser than the white sandstone of the former stela, but it raises the question of how the different tasks for the production of a funerary text were distributed. It seems that, even in a provincial city like Sedeinga, the work of several specialists was required to produce a stela. It is, therefore, not surprising that so many burials lack an element that few people could afford.

The palaeography of the text belongs to the Transitional C period (Rilly 2007, 348, tab. 14), which extends from the beginning of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD to the first decades of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century. Though the lesser quality of the engraving must be taken into account, the script seems later than that of stela II T 212 s1, which could be dated to the second part of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century. One might place this text in the early 3<sup>rd</sup> century, two or three generations after the stela found in 2009. As it is presumably originating from the same area (the large east-west row of pyramids), it might show that activity in this burial zone lasted over several generations. The transliteration of the text is as follows. The passages in square brackets are reconstructed, thanks to numerous parallels in other funerary inscriptions.

<sup>1</sup>[Wos: qe]tneyineqe<sup>2</sup>li Sorī: qetrrī:

<sup>3</sup>Wosptmo,ide qowī

<sup>4</sup>aribet: Totoli: ye<sup>5</sup>rikelowī:

D,eye: tē<sup>6</sup>d,elowī:

semte: md,i<sup>7</sup>te: A[tij]e[te]lowī:

<sup>8</sup>ato: m f e: [psofete]:

at m<sup>9</sup>be: p[si,rke]te:

<sup>10</sup>[mlol: pfolk]ete

“[Oh Isis, qe]tneyineqeli, oh Osiris qetrrī, this is Wosa-patamokhide, begotten by the aribet Totoli, born of Dakheyē. She was a virgin semte-priestess in Sedeinga. Make [her drink] plentiful water! Make [her eat] plentiful bread! Make her [receive a good] meal!”

The initial invocation, frequently occurring at Sedeinga, is “extended”: it comprises two epithets added to the names of Isis and Osiris. No satisfactory meaning has been yet suggested for these elements, which has been left in Meroitic in the translation. The name of the deceased, Wosa-patamokhide (here with vocalization), includes the name of Isis (W<sup>o</sup>s)

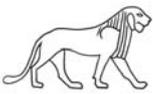


Plate 4. Meroitic funerary stela S 022.



Figure 2. Facsimile drawing of stela S 022.

followed by an element *ptmo*, which is known from another funerary text (REM 1281), engraved on a lintel found in 1997 on the surface of tomb II T 83, north east of pyramid No. 86, near where the present stela was discovered. The owner of this lintel, an important woman, was Patemokha-dakheto (*Ptemofd,eto*), literally “she was born of Patemokha”, with a slightly variant spelling *ptemof*. According to the paleography of the text, she was buried in the middle of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD. No further attestation of this word is known.

The title of the deceased’s father, *aribet*, is frequently mentioned in Sedeinga (REM 1090, 1091, 1116, 1281) but remains obscure. It might be a shorter form of *arebetke*, a function for which the demotic graffito of Tami in Philae (No. 417) gives a description as corn-measurer. The woman quoted above (REM 1281) was the wife of an *aribet*. The name of the mother, Dakheye, is known from another late stela (REM 1346), found in II T 104, a tomb belonging to the southern part of the same burial cluster. It belongs to the mother of a deceased called *Nkeb*[...] (Carrier 2001, 60 and fig. 14). It is however, not certain that it is the same woman although the name does not occur in any other Meroitic inscriptions. Dakheye was probably not a birth name: it means “the one who gives birth” (followed by the common anthroponymic suffix *-ye*) and could be given as a nick-name to any mother.

The deceased of the new stela is a woman who bore the title of “virgin *semte* in Atiye [= Sedeinga]”. This title is attested only in Sedeinga and significantly, only in the area

where excavations are currently being carried out. The woman in REM 1281 was *semte qoretke-se*, presumably “*semte* of King Taka [= Takidemani?]” or “*semte* of Qoretaka [a deity?]” and the deceased from the stela II T 212 s1, Takatelito, was “*semte* of Isis”. It might, therefore, describe a priestly function. No genitive follows the title here, which might suggest that the deity was obvious. Isis, who is present in many titles in Sedeinga and already attested with *semte*, would be a good candidate. Instead of the expected genitive, a locative *Atiye-te* “in Sedeinga” is added at the end of the phrase. In spite of the missing characters, the place-name is certain. Between the title and the locative, the rare word *md,ite* “virgin” is inserted. In the funerary stela of the Viceroy Abratoye (REM 1333), the phrase *kdi-m,d,e* “woman who has not yet borne”, “virgin”,

appears in two lists of captive enemies. The translation, first suggested by Millet (Millet 1996, 612-614; Rilly 2010, 398-399), is secure now that the suffix *m-* has been clearly identified as a negative particle, *d,e-* being the stem for “to bear”. In *md,ite*, the adjective *md,e* is extended by a suffix and could be a noun in apposition to the title *semte*. The mention of the virginity of a priestess is quite rare in the Nile cultures. Even the God’s wives of Amun were not explicitly referred to as “virgins”, although their status as “wives of the god” and their succession by adoption suggest so.

In conclusion, many elements from the stela II S 022 connect it with the two funerary stelae found nearby, the inscription on lintel REM 1281 and the stela found in 2009, II T 212 s1. Two of the deceased, described as wife or virgin, are certainly women. The third (II T 212 s1) might be so if the title of *semte* is actually a feminine function. This can be linked with the over representation of women in this area observed in the anthropological study above, although it was based on the material found mostly in tombs without superstructures and, therefore, without accompanying texts. The three inscriptions are successive and cover approximately three generations, from the middle of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century (REM 1281) to the beginning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century (II S 022). They mention similar titles, chiefly *semte*, present in the three texts, but also *aribet* (REM 1281 and II S 022). Finally, a rare element, *Patamokh(a)*, possibly a personal or divine name, occurs in the names of the deceased both in REM 1281 and in II S 022. All these elements tend to show that this area of Sector

II, namely the large row of east-west pyramids, was the burial place of the same clan or even the same family for several generations. Unfortunately, no common names have been found so far in the different parentages mentioned in the texts but some members of the family are referred to only by their title (the father in II T 212 s1, the husband in REM 1281). Further inscriptions which could shed some light on the genealogy of this clan will possibly be unearthed in the next seasons.

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