

# SUDAN & NUBIA

The Sudan Archaeological Research Society

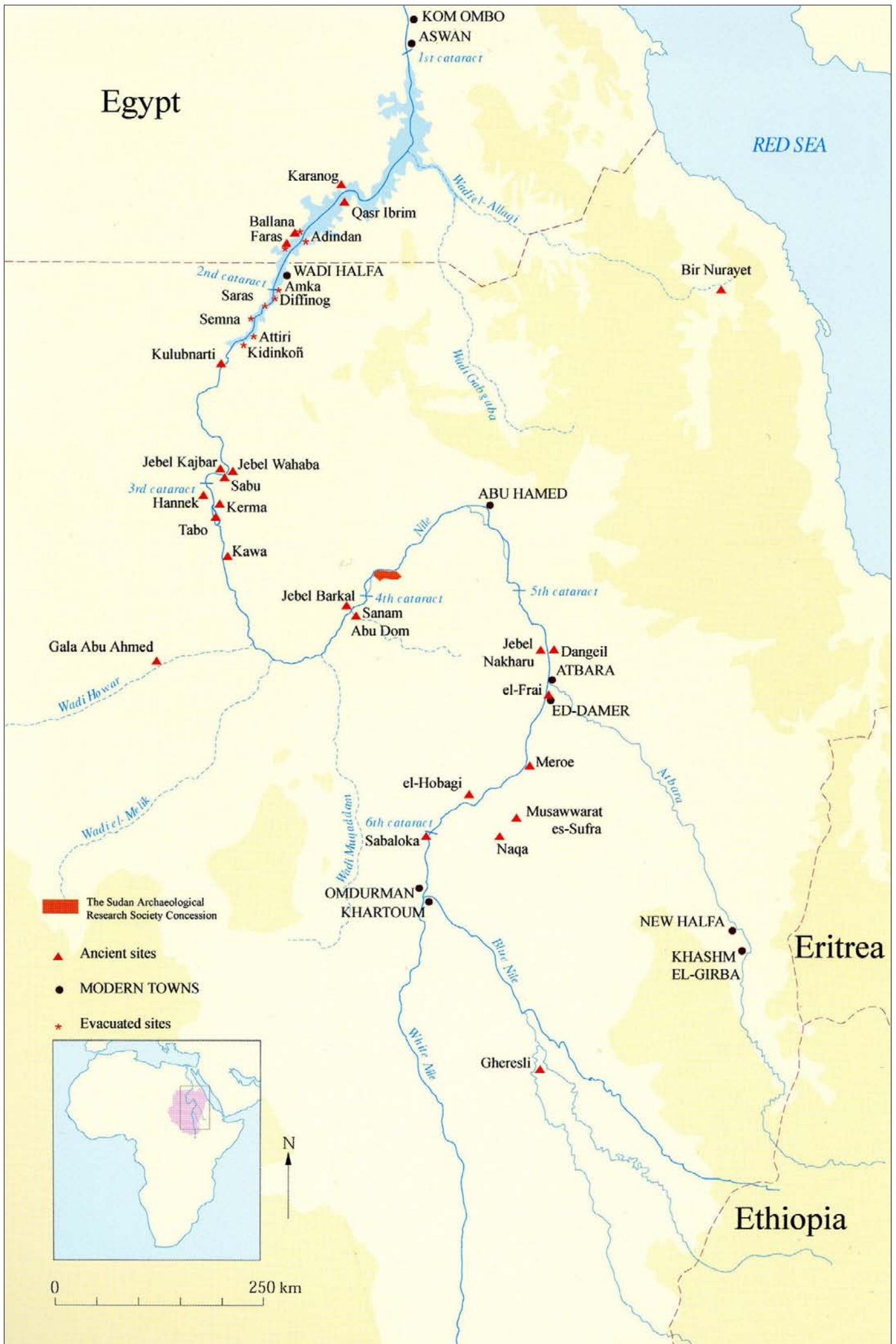


*Bulletin No. 10*

2006



# Egypt



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*Front cover:* Beja man by the well at Bir Vario, Eastern Desert (photo K. Pluskota).



# El-Frai: a new Meroitic habitation site in ed-Damer

Mohamed Faroug A. Elrahman

The area between the Fifth Cataract and ed-Damer has been mostly surveyed by Crowfoot (1911), Jackson (1926) and Crawford (1953a; 1953b) and their work has served to supplement the accounts of the 19<sup>th</sup> century travellers.

Meroitic habitation sites have been located at Fikhikheira (Khider A. Ahmed 1984, 26-31), Jebel Dayiga and Zeidab East, while some others are associated with temples such as at Gadu and Matmir (Hintze 1959, 174-5). Shinnie suggested that these sites represent the distribution of the Meroitic suburban settlements (Shinnie 1979, 124). For further study, these sites have to be investigated to shed more light upon royal and non-royal habitation and administrative sites in the Meroitic period, and to answer the question as to whether these settlements were inhabited by, and the area controlled by, a local chieftain appointed by the king, or a member of the royal family (viceroy?).

During the 5<sup>th</sup> season of the Akad project, a police officer<sup>1</sup> informed us that there was a concentration of pottery sherds near the railway at ed-Damer.

The site is located in el-Frai village south of the junction of the railway and the ed-Damer-Atbara road (Figure 1).<sup>2</sup>

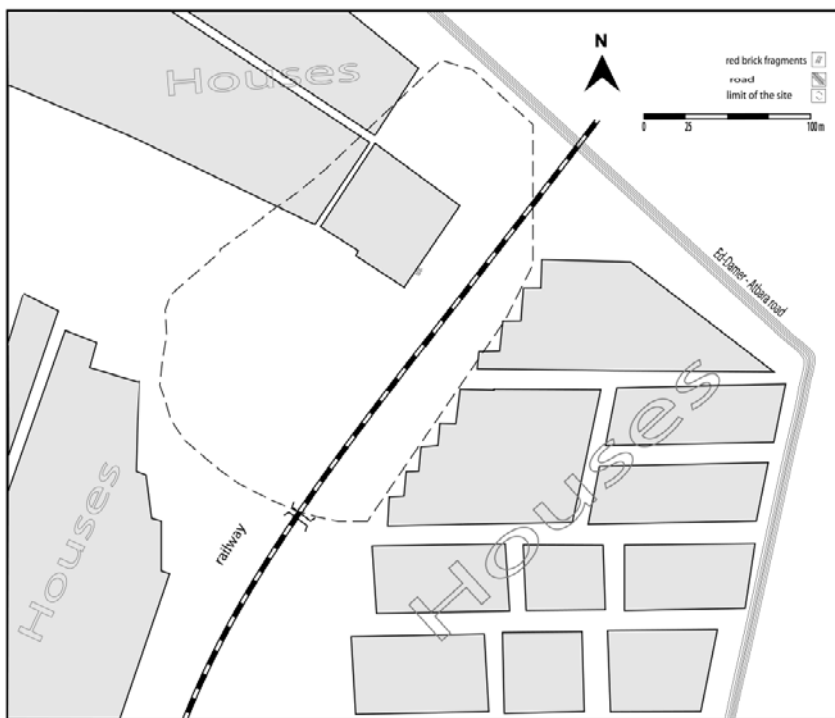


Figure 1. The location of el-Frai.

It is a flat area covered with black soil and measuring about 150 x 260m in size. The site has been heavily disturbed by many factors; the construction of the railway in 1898 damaged the eastern part of the site. Recently, large parts of the southern part of the site have been dug out by the locals, who make their mud bricks out of the site's deposits leaving large pits and swamps. In addition, the buildings of the present village extend towards the northern and southern parts of the site. These buildings are built over an old red-brick construction.

The site was surveyed and this revealed that it is very rich archaeologically. The fragments of red bricks which measured 200+ x 180mm by 80mm thick (Plate 1) are most probably of Meroitic date. However, the structure and its function cannot be determined at the moment.

Two east-west transects were made through the site where the archaeological finds on the surface were concentrated towards the south, and consisted of the remains of wooden posts (Plate 2), fragments of stone grinders, fireplaces and pot-sherds.

The fineware pottery sherds show the importance of the site (Colour plate XLV, Figure 2), these being classified as fine-walled cups: 'egg-shell wares', Adams' Family M (Adams 1986). This type is common at Meroe, and is defined by Shinnie and Bradley as Group Fb; it is an unslipped white ware, externally decorated with a combination of stamps and brown painted bands (Shinnie and Bradley 1980, 154-55).

A fragment of a faience vessel with a large flat base and a thick wall was collected.<sup>3</sup> The nearest site which has provided pottery sherds in the same fabric is the Meroitic cemetery at Gabati (Edwards 1998, 66-67 fig. 33, no. 9402).

## Discussion

For the first time at ed-Damer, according to the preliminary study of the material collected, a



Plate 1. Part of red-brick wall visible on the surface, probably of Meroitic date.

<sup>1</sup> Officer Salah Roduan, Atbara Security Police.

<sup>2</sup> Co-ordinates N 17° 36' 00", E 33° 58' 13"

<sup>3</sup> For comparison, see the few faience objects noted from Meroe city (Bradley 1984, 206).

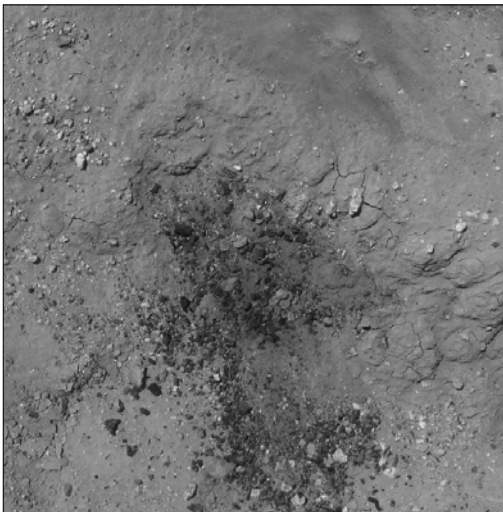


Plate 2.  
Remains of  
wooden  
posts and  
potsherds.

site can be dated to the Meroitic period, and added to the distribution map.

Further investigation here may enrich our knowledge of the administration and of Kushite policy towards other urban centres in the Meroe region away from the capital. It may also facilitate studies of the nature of the non-royal society discussed by Shinnie following his work at Meroe. It is that stratum of society whose presence made possible the existence of palaces and temples and who were crucial to the maintenance of the fabric of the Meroitic state (Shinnie 1999, 13).

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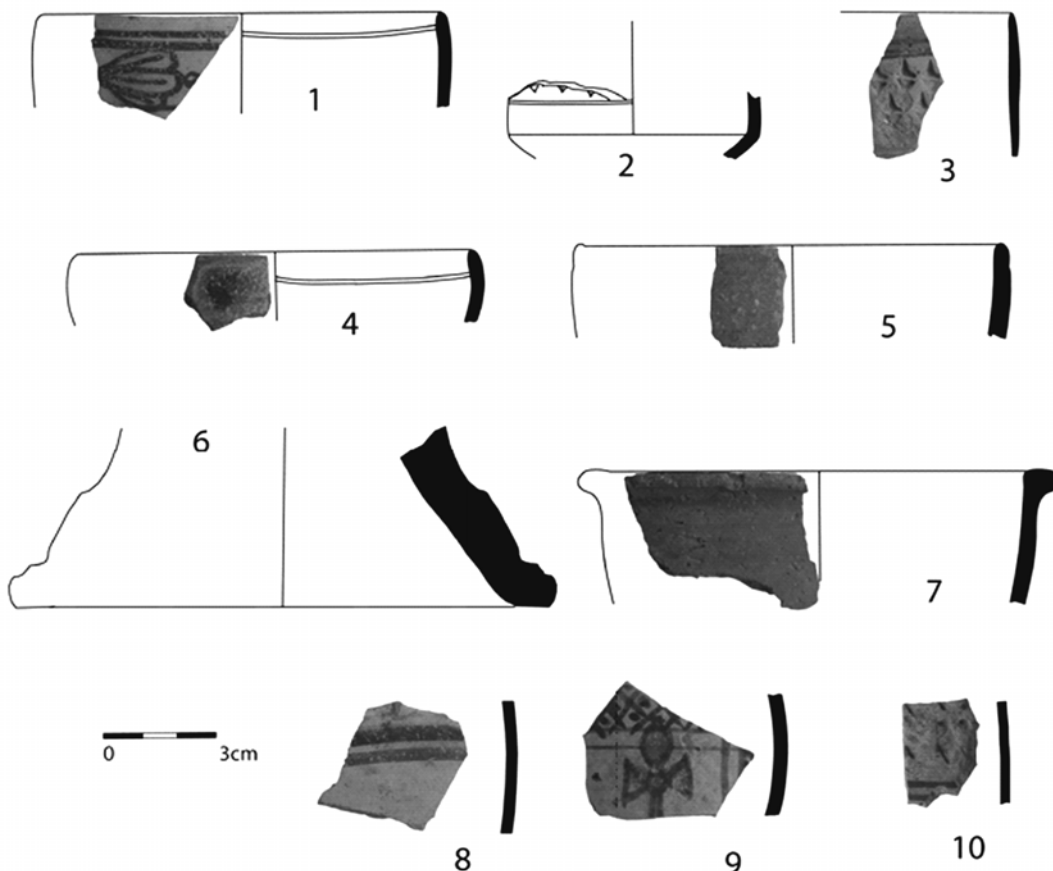


Figure 2. Pot-sherds  
collected from the  
surface (scale 1:2).



*Colour plate XLV. El-Frai. Meroitic stamped and painted fineware.*