

# SUDAN & NUBIA

The Sudan Archaeological Research Society



*Bulletin No. 17*

*2013*





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Front cover: The descendency of Tomb IV T 1 near Sedeinga under excavation (© V. Francigny / SEDAU).

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# The Latest Explorations at Usli, Northern Province

*Miroslav Bárta, Lenka Suková and Vladimír Brůna*

In 2000, Usli, a site situated some 40km from Jebel Barkal, was briefly visited by the Southern Dongola Reach Survey team headed by Bogdan Żurawski (2000, 285-289; 2003, 383-386). They identified remnants of a sandstone temple (together with sherds of New Kingdom and Napatan pottery) in the vicinity of the modern cemetery (Usli 1), a huge Meroitic/Post-Meroitic tumuli field and several koms dating to Christian times in the area of the modern asphalt road connecting Gabolab and Merowe (Usli 2). Three of the tumuli were excavated in a rescue operation. According to Żurawski, this site, situated on the left bank of the Nile just opposite the huge temple at Hugair Gubli, might be tentatively identified with Tare/Tele, a place with the Bastet temple known from the stelae of Kushite kings Harsiyotef and Nastasen of the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC (Żurawski 2003, 26; Wicenciak 2005, 262). A bronze statue resembling in its shape perhaps Bastet or Sekhmet was reportedly found by local inhabitants shortly before the Polish team visited the site (Żurawski 2000, 285). In 2006, another Polish team led this time by Michal Bieniada (2006) found here several loci with pottery from Kerma, Napatan, Post-Meroitic and Christian times (including a Napatan pottery workshop and a kiln with Christian pottery), a tumulus and a fragment of sandstone with remnants of hieroglyphic text (Plate 1).



*Plate 1. General view of Usli with remains of Temple 1 in the foreground prior to the excavation (photo M. Bárta).*

During the first three seasons of the Czech archaeological work, done in close cooperation with the National Corporation for Antiquities and Museums of Sudan<sup>1</sup> in November

<sup>1</sup> We would like to thank the National Corporation for Antiquities and Museums for assistance and support rendered to our team in connection with the exploration at Usli since 2009. This study was written within the Programme for the Development of Fields of Study at Charles University, No. P14 Archaeology of non-European regions,

2009, February 2010 and February 2013, four principal goals were attained:

- 1) preliminary survey in and around the modern village of Usli where several ancient sites were found which comprised important archaeological remains of ancient occupation starting during the *Kerma Ancien* and extending down to the Meroitic period (Bárta *et al.* 2009),
- 2) documentation and small-scale excavation in the sandstone temple and its vicinity (Usli 1) (Bárta *et al.* 2009),
- 3) sampling of the floor deposits of the temple (Suková and Lisá 2010),
- 4) geophysical survey of the site.

In this small contribution, only some preliminary results will be presented.

## Archaeological survey

Within the modern village of Usli, three ancient wells with sides lined with sandstone blocks were located. In the immediate vicinity of the mosque, several reused or loose fragments of sandstone blocks lying on the surface were found; at least one of them had been originally decorated. On the edge of the modern settlement, at least two places were identified with fragments of sandstone blocks and surface scatters of Meroitic and Post-Meroitic pottery. The modern Islamic cemetery was found to have been established on the site of an earlier burial ground with graves provided with superstructures in the form of heaped tumuli capped with sandstone blocks or marked by pieces of sandstone laid out on circular, oval, or irregular ground-plans. South east of the modern cemetery, an ancient sandstone quarry that had been reopened in recent times by the local inhabitants was recorded.

In the flat desert plain between the village and the main asphalt road, a scatter of sandstone blocks and remains of column bases and drums made of sandstone were clearly visible over an area covering about 300m by 200m. The excavation carried out in three 10 x 10m squares (with controlled cross-sections in between) revealed parts of the much destroyed architecture of a temple (Temple 1, see Plate 2) consisting most likely of three divided areas; its main axis was oriented from north west to south east, *i.e.*, perpendicular to the local course of the Nile. Its floors had been paved with rather irregular blocks of relatively soft sandstone. At one place (between Squares 1 and 2), the floor was found to contain a reused column drum 800mm in diameter (Plate 3) which might have derived from a monumental structure predating the construction of Temple 1 (*cf.* Spence *et al.* 2009, 39, pl. 2). Furthermore, the remains of white paint (or white-wash) on the surfaces of numerous of the paving blocks indicate that the floor must have been originally painted (white-washed). The temple had been almost completely

sub-programme Research of ancient Egyptian civilisation. Cultural and political adaptation of the North African civilisations in ancient history (5000 B.C.–1000 A.D.). The geophysical survey costs were kindly sponsored by Pharmedex s.r.o. Company.



Plate 2. View of Temple 1 after first year of excavation in 2009 (photo M. Bárta).



Plate 4. Temple 1, Square 1, statue of a king as found in situ (photo M. Bárta).



Plate 3. Temple 1, Square 2 and cross-section with the reused column (photo M. Bárta).

denuded – its walls were preserved to a height of only about half a metre. Originally, the walls of the temple bore reliefs and hieroglyphic texts; these have been preserved only as small fragments.

In spite of the fact that only a small portion of the temple has been excavated so far, its arrangement seems to correspond to the typical form of a New Kingdom temple, consisting of an entrance pylon, a colonnaded open courtyard, a hypostyle hall, and a sanctuary. Originally, the temple might have been 15–20m wide; its length might be estimated at between 30m to perhaps 50m. In the area excavated so far, no traces of the entrance pylon were found.

Among the most significant individual finds is a fragment of an almost life-size royal statue made of granodiorite.<sup>2</sup> It was found in Square 1, standing on the paved floor and originally facing in a south-easterly direction. Of the statue, only the base (with a rounded front) and the feet of a striding male king remained (Plate 4). The dimensions of the preserved fragment are 600 × 320 × 180mm. On the back pillar, remains of a hieroglyphic inscriptions ...*p mrrj-Ra* '...p,

<sup>2</sup> Another fragment of a granodiorite statue was reportedly found in the area of the temple before 2010 during a cursory visit to the site by an inspection group from NCAM (Mahmoud Suliman, pers. comm. 2010).

beloved of Ra' are cut in incised relief. The statue, although badly damaged, seems to corroborate the dating of the temple to the New Kingdom.

### Geophysical survey

In February 2013, a geophysical survey was carried out aiming to explore the presence and extent of any underlying architecture in the vicinity of Temple 1 partly explored during the 2009 and 2010 field seasons. With respect to the character of the archaeological strata, architecture in sandstone, mud brick and burnt brick<sup>3</sup> covered by c. 400mm deposits of wind-blown sand, occupation layers and rubble,<sup>4</sup> magnetometry was selected as the ideally suited method for the present site. The magnetic survey was carried out in co-operation with the Polish Academy of Sciences in Warsaw, coordinated by T. Herbich and represented by R. S. Ryndziejewicz and D. W. Swiech. The survey covered an area of 6.12ha and was performed with a Geoscan Research FM 256 Fluxgate Gradiometer ideally suited for the local conditions.

The magnetometric survey revealed an extensive and complex agglomeration of structures to the north/north east of Temple 1, the most remarkable amongst which is a large (c. 30 x 40m) building probably of a palatial type oriented north-south, a smaller brick temple (Temple 2) to the west of Temple 1, and various other anomalies which may have archaeological potential (see Plate 5). A more detailed report on the discoveries will be available after evaluation of the data.

### Archaeological potential of, and threats to, the antiquities located in the research area

The geophysical survey and other methods applied in the exploration of the concession area during the three field

<sup>3</sup> The existence of both mud-brick and burnt-brick architecture was indicated by the darker colouring of the desert surface at certain places as well as by occasional finds of bricks in the delimited area.

<sup>4</sup> The depth of the overlying deposits was ascertained during previous fieldwork.



USLI, spring 2013 Magnetic survey taken by Dawid Swiech and Robert Ryndziejewicz

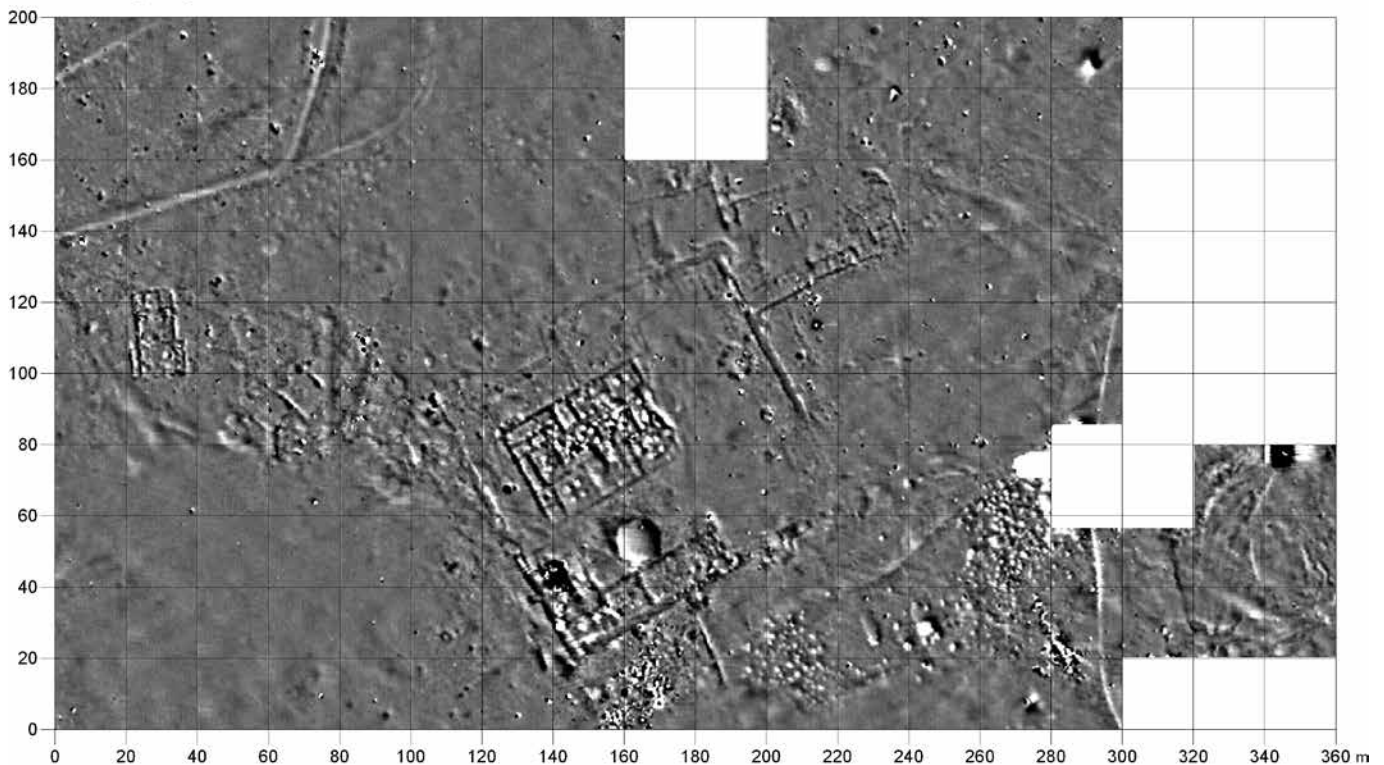


Plate 5. Results of the fluxgate gradiometer survey in the central part of the research area around Temple 1 (R. S. Ryndziejewicz and D. W. Swiech, 2013).

seasons revealed the marked complexity and archaeological potential of the studied site. A careful excavation of the area, which can be planned with great precision on the basis of the varied types of documentation collected up to the present, will certainly bring important data that may extend our knowledge of the social, cultural, and political development during the main periods of Sudan's past. Despite the preliminary nature of our findings, it seems likely that the history of the site can be dated as far back as the New Kingdom with subsequent historical horizons present.

However, as the site is located in an area undergoing a certain degree of development, the exploration of the site has to proceed hand in hand with measures ensuring an effective protection of the cultural heritage localised on this site which is threatened by a number of factors (see Plate 6). These include, *inter alia*:

planned irrigation schemes in the Northern Province  
 establishment of desert tracks across the site, used by 4WD vehicles and trucks

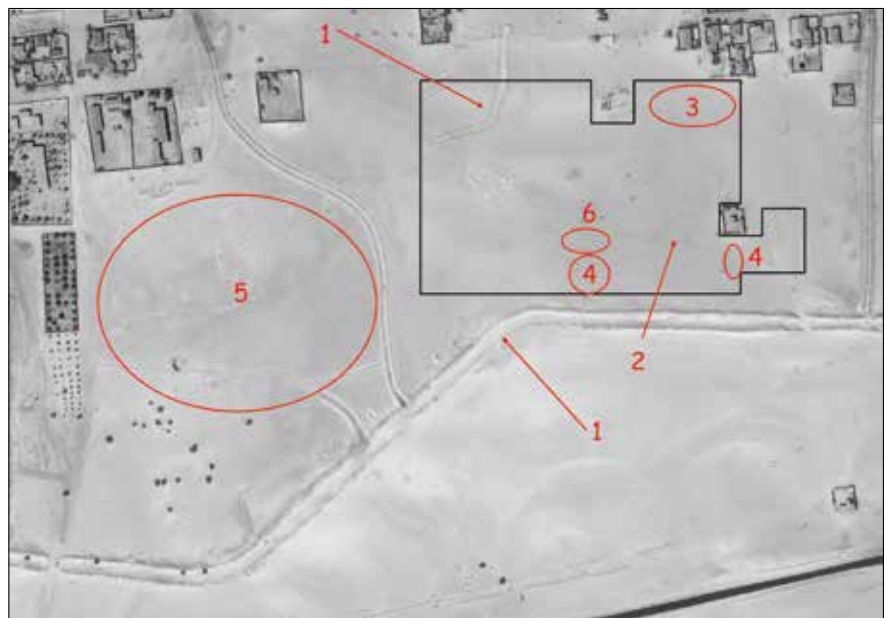


Plate 6. View of the area submitted to archaeological reconnaissance during the 2013 field campaign with marked locations of the varied types of damage and threats to the antiquities of the site: 1 – dug-out water canal that is to convey water from the Merowe Dam; 2 – one of the desert roads cutting across the core of the site (used by 4WD and trucks); 3 – site of planned construction of a residential building (?); 4 – rubbish dumps established on the site between 2009 and 2013; 5 – modern cemetery established and expanding on the site of an earlier burial site with tumuli and graves with low superstructures; 6 – disturbance of the site by illegal diggings for antiquities (V. Brůna and L. Suková, 2013; background QuickBird 2010).

planned construction of residential housing  
 use of some parts of the site as a rubbish dump  
 extension of the modern cemetery established on the site of  
 an earlier burial ground  
 illegal digging for antiquities by local inhabitants

While the last of the threats may be reduced by the return of the antiquities guard to the site, the complexity and interconnection of the former five threats, resulting from the development of the area, may require careful (re-)planning and measures to be taken on the part of the local as well as regional authorities.

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## Gabati

A Meroitic, Post-Meroitic and Medieval  
Cemetery in Central Sudan.

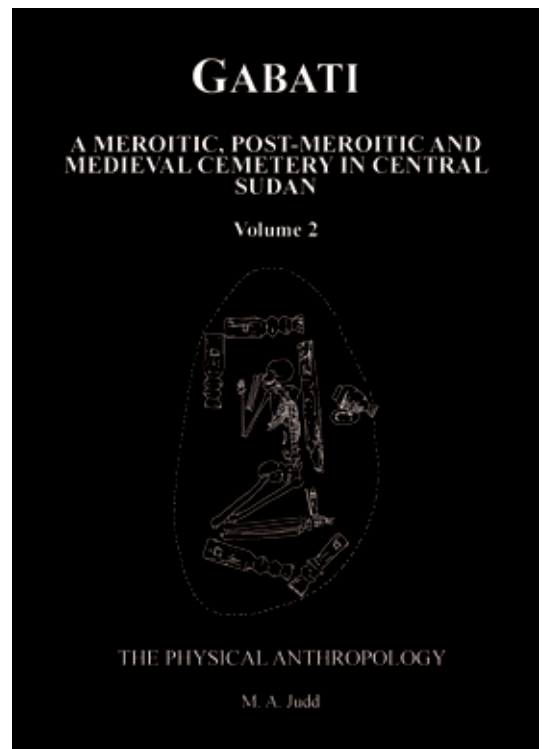
Vol. 2: The Physical Anthropology

by Margaret A. Judd,  
with a contribution by David N. Edwards  
London 2012

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ISBN 978 1 901169 19 7

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## Sudan's First Railway The Gordon Relief Expedition and The Dongola Campaign

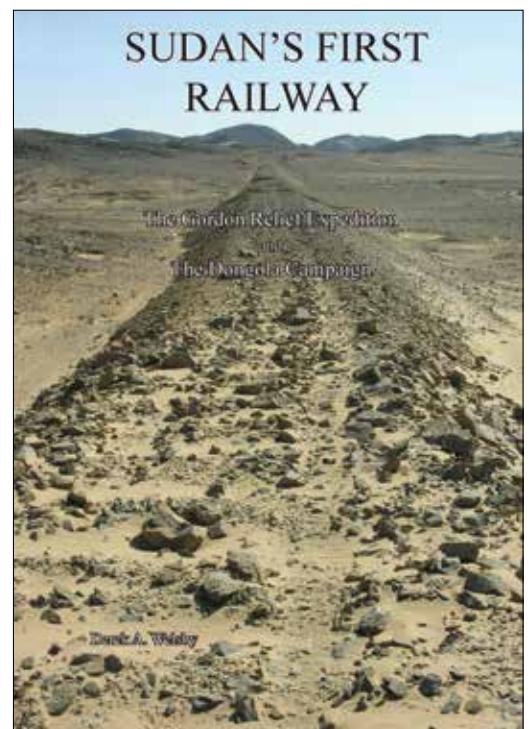
by Derek A. Welsby

London 2011

*149 pages, 6 tables, 47 figures, 173 colour and 19 b&w plates*  
ISBN 978 1 901169 1 89

Begun in 1875 by the Egyptian khedive, Ismail Pasha, the railway played an important role during the Gordon Relief Expedition of 1884-5 and Kitchener's Dongola Campaign in 1896. It was abandoned and cannibalised to build other railways in Sudan during the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. For much of its course it runs through the desert and in those areas the roadbed, the associated military installations and the innumerable construction camps are extremely well preserved. This book is the result of a photographic survey of these installations together with the detailed archaeological surveys undertaken within them. A report on the artefacts, which includes personal equipment, ammunition, fragments of rolling stock, bottles, tins and ceramics, completes the volume.

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*Khartoum. The Republican Palace, once the Governor General's residence, in 1968 (photo SARS Hawkes Archive HAW P091.01).*



*Khartoum. The Anglican cathedral in 1968. Now minus its bell tower it houses the Republican Palace Museum (photo SARS Hawkes Archive HAW P090.01).*