

SUDAN & NUBIA

The Sudan Archaeological Research Society



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

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Archaeological, Ethnographical and Ecological Project of El-Ga'ab Basin in Western Dongola: A Report on the Second Season 2010

Yahia Fadl Tahir

Summary

The current survey registered about 36 sites: one workshop with prehistoric tools and unfinished lithic tools, 18 Neolithic and eight Mesolithic habitation sites. Most of the sites are associated with scatters of Neolithic and Mesolithic pottery sherds, stone tools and grinders. Graves with circular sandstone superstructures and crescent and circular stone structures were also seen. In Mangour area, southwest of Ga'ab Abu Namel, a sandstone of rectangular shape (10.8 x 9m) (Sheikh Wad Fazari *benia*) was reported. One undated sandstone fort and stone enclosure were registered at Ga'ab Um Hilal, the former roughly circular, the latter roughly rectangular in shape. In el-Kewieb south west of Ga'ab Um Hilal, a large undated fort was registered, built of sandstone.

Introduction

The first season of the Archaeological, Ethnographical and Ecological Project of El-Ga'ab Basin west of the Dongola Reach (Northern Sudan) was conducted in 2009 by the Department of Archaeology, University of Khartoum. The first report was published in *Sudan & Nubia* (Tahir 2012).

The project is located in a rectangular area, the coordinates of the four corners being

19° 38' N / 30° 18.25' E

19° 39' N / 30° 7.5' E

18° 33.8' N / 29° 59.8' E

18° 32.25' N / 30° 22.8' E

It was established to carry out archaeological survey, excavation, ethnographic and palaeoenvironmental studies in the area.

The study area is a depression situated south of the Third Cataract of the Nile on the western bank, parallel to the Dongola reach. It extends for 123km north-south (Figures 1 and 2). It diverges from the Nile towards the south; the nearest point to the river is about 6km at its northern end and the most distant point is 60km in the south. Its width varies from 2km to 8km (Tahir 2012, 100).

Fieldwork

The second season was carried out from December 2009-January 2010. The northern parts of el-Ga'ab, Wadi el-Husha (Hashsha) and the western and eastern parts of el-Ga'ab



Figure 1. General location of the survey concession.

village, which were not covered in the previous season, were surveyed. Ga'ab Abu Namel (el-Mongori hamlet), and the fossilised forest at Kogila hamlet were also visited. Ga'ab Um Hilal and Wadi el-Kewieb (near Ga'ab Bauda and Biayuda) were visited. All sites are summarized in Table 1.

The mission team members included Dr Azhari Mostafa Sadig, Dr Ahmed Husein Abd el-Rahman, Dr Abd el-Rahman Ibrahim Saied and Dr Yahia Fadl Tahir (director). The survey so far has recorded over 36 sites ranging in date from the Mesolithic to Islamic periods. In this season archeological sites were recorded of hitherto unrepresented dates and types such as Islamic *benias* and forts.

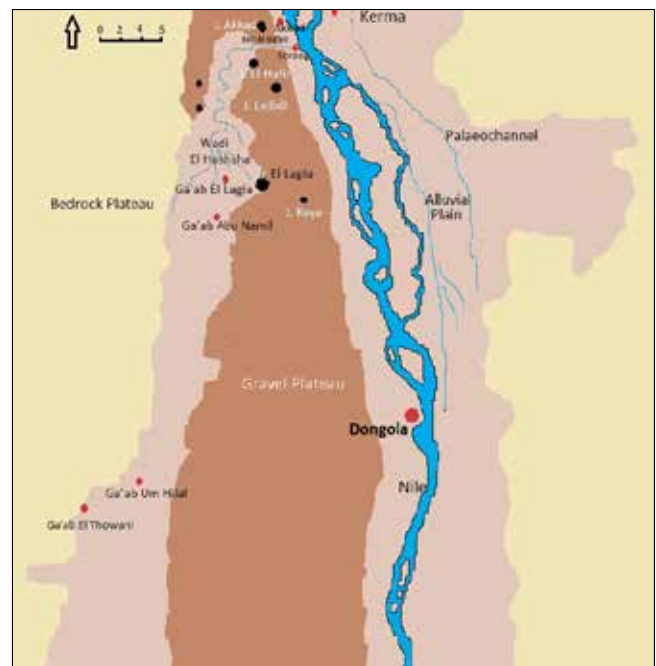


Figure 2. Map of el-Ga'ab Depression.

Table 1. List of Archaeological Sites in el-Ga'ab Depression – Second Season 2010.

Date	Type	Position	Site Number
Wadi el-Husha			
?	Workshop (Lithic tools and grinding stones) + grave	19° 31.040' N / 30°16.947' E- Alt. 228m	HA-1-2
Mesolithic	Habitation	19° 30.763' N / 30° 16.950' E- Alt. 226m	HA-2-2
?	Graves	19° 30.527' N / 30° 16.979' E- Alt. 240m	HA-3-2
?	Graves + stone features	19° 30.417' N / 30° 16.837' E- Alt. 226m	HA-4-2
?	Graves + stone features	19° 30.207' N / 30° 16.889' E- Alt. 360m	HA-5-2
Upper Neolithic	Habitation	19° 3'.190' N / 30° 16.681' E- Alt. 320m	HA-6-2
Neolithic	Habitation	19° 30.275' N / 30° 16.493' E- Alt. 227m	HA-7-2
Early Neolithic	Habitation	19° 32.820' N / 30° 15.368' E- Alt. 230m	HA-16-2
Early Neolithic	Habitation	19° 29.684' N / 30° 15.125' E- Alt. 230m	HA-17-2
Early Neolithic		19° 32.353' N / 30° 14.277' E- Alt. 226m	HA-18-2
Early Neolithic	Habitation	19° 31.856' N / 30° 13.716' E- Alt. 226m	HA-19-2
-	Small fossilised forest	19° 31.515' N / 30° 14.243' E- Alt. 227m	HA-20-2
Gaab el-Lagia			
Christian?	Pottery kiln	19° 28.294' N / 30° 16.428' E- Alt. 227m	GL-8-2
Neolithic	Habitation	19° 28.009' N / 30° 16.438' E- Alt. 227m	GL-9-2
?	Graves	19° 27.813' N / 30° 16.507' E- Alt. 230m	GL-10-2
Neolithic	Habitation	19° 27.742' N / 30° 17.617' E- Alt. 230m	GL-11-2
Neolithic	Habitation + graves?	19° 27.404' N / 30° 17.796' E- Alt. 238m	GL-12-2
?	Graves+ stone structures	19° 27.404' N / 30° 17.796' E- Alt. 238m	GL-13-2
Neolithic, <i>Kerma Ancien</i> or A-Group?	Habitation	19° 28.044' N / 30° 14.259' E- Alt. 232m	GL-21-2
Early Neolithic	Habitation	19° 27.874' N / 30° 14.342' E- Alt. 226m	GL-22-2
Mesolithic + Neolithic	Habitation	19° 28.212' N / 30° 13.764' E- Alt. 227m	GL-27-2
Neolithic	Habitation + small fossilised forest	19° 31'.507' N / 30° 13.634' E- Alt. 228m	GL-28-2
Neolithic	Habitation	19° 28'.425' N / 30° 13.770' E- Alt. 225m	GL-29-2
Mesolithic + Neolithic	Habitation	19° 28'.650' N / 30° 13.626' E- Alt. 228m	GL-30-2
Mesolithic + Neolithic	Habitation	19° 28'.577' N / 30° 13.767' E- Alt. 222m	GL-31-2
Mesolithic + Neolithic	Habitation	19° 28.856' N / 30° 13.579' E- Alt. 222m	GL-32-2
Jebel el-Hattana			
Early Neolithic	Habitation	19° 24.980' N / 30°17.141' E- Alt. 235m	JB-14-2
Kogila			
-	Fossilised forest	19° 27.665' N / 30° 11.554' E- Alt. 230m	KO-15-2
Neolithic and Mesolithic	Habitation	19° 27.905' N / 30° 13.529'E- Alt. 226m	KO-2-23
Mesolithic	Habitation	19° 27.912' N / 30° 13.609'E- Alt. 226m	KO-2-24
-	Biological remains	19° 27.912' N / 30° 13.609'E- Alt. 226m	KO-2-25
Neolithic / Mesolithic	Habitation	19° 28.394' N / 30° 13.643'E- Alt. 238m	KO-2-26
Ga'ab Abu Namel			
Islamic	<i>Benia</i>	19° 22.079' N / 30°12.419' E- Alt. 230m	AN-33-2
Ga'ab Um Hilal			
?	2 enclosures	19° 06.275' N / 30° 8.919' E- Alt. 260m	UH-34-2
Islamic	Stone structure, <i>benia</i> ?	19° 06.357' N / 30° 7.972' E- Alt. 231m	UH-35-2
el-Kewieb			
?	Fort	18° 52.096' N / 29° 57.614' E- Alt. 231m	KE-36-2

Prehistoric sites

In this season, one prehistoric workshop, eight Mesolithic (7000-5000 BC) and 18 Neolithic (5000-3000 BC) habitation sites were discovered. Most of the sites were associated with scattered Mesolithic and Neolithic pottery sherds, lithic tools

and grinders. From the two seasons' work, it can be concluded that extensive Mesolithic and Neolithic settlement occurred on the edge of the narrow palaeochannel. The pottery recovered (Plates 1 and 2) is classified according to its decoration; combed, rocker zigzag curve line, rocker zigzag dotted line



and incised line, which are typical motifs found on pottery from Neolithic sites on the Nile in the Third Cataract region and in the Dongola reach. Many fish remains were collected from most of the sites (Plate 3).

One of the Mesolithic and Neolithic habitations (KO-2-24) is a very long former shore settlement site extending



Plate 1. Mesolithic pottery sherds in situ.



Plate 2. Neolithic pottery sherds.



Plate 3. Skull of *Clarias* sp. (catfish).

more than 1.8km, with the surface very rich in pottery sherds, lithic tools (Plates 4 and 5) and grinding stone artifacts. Fish bone fragments were distributed on the surface. Two very well preserved harpoons were collected (Plate 6).



Plate 4. Mesolithic basalt tools? HA-5-2.



Plate 5. Stone tools (GL-29-2).



Plate 6. Bone harpoons (KO-2-24).

Post-Meroitic Sites and Stone Structures

Twelve sites comprising cemeteries or isolated graves were recorded, the majority belonging to the so-called Post-Meroitic period (Plate 7). Graves with circular stone superstructure (Kerma?) (Plate 8), an undated grave between rock boulders

(Plate 9) and unidentified crescent-shaped stone structures (Plate 10) are common features in the area.



Plate 7. Post-Meroitic grave.



Plate 8. Circular stone grave (Kerma?).



Plate 9. Grave between rock boulders.

Christian sites

In addition to the ruins of three buildings noted in the first season (Tahir 2012, 103-104), a Christian pottery kiln and Christian graves were added to the Christian complex to the east of Ga'ab el-Lagia village.



Plate 10. Crescent-shaped stone structure.

Islamic Sites

In Mangour area, south west of Ga'ab Abu Namel, an Islamic *benia* (A N -33-2I) was discovered; it is an unroofed sandstone building (Plate 11) of rectangular shape, 10.8 x 9m in size and 2.3m high. The wall thickness is about 600mm. The doorway in the south-east wall has a width of 1m. A grave is present inside the building 1m from the north-east corner. Some



Plate 11. Benia of Sheikh Wad Fazari.

unclear writing was noticed on the stone door jambs. The upper part of the eastern wall has collapsed but the base is still standing. Local people attribute the building to Sheikh Wad Fazari who has no descendants in the area. Fazari is not a name known in the area but it is common in Kordofan.

Other Islamic graves (2m in length) are present around the building; some of them containing children. Pottery sherds are distributed on the surface inside the building as well as some pots seen outside it of the type normally placed at the end of graves in the area along the Nile.

North west of Ga'ab Um Hilal, in Abu Kewa hamlet (UH-35-2), two low sandstone buildings (*benia*?) are located on two mounds 145m apart (Plate 12). Other mounds with stone structures were also seen in the vicinity of these buildings.

Forts

El-Kab fort and enclosure

South west of Ga'ab Um Hilal village, (U H -34-2,) two walled



Plate 12. Two low sandstone buildings (benia?).

structures, a fort and enclosure were noted. The fort with an annex is set on the el-Kab Hills at a distance of 34km west of the Nile, the same distance which separates it from el-Kewieb fort (Plate 13). It is built of sandstone and has an irregular shape. There are no clear structures inside the fort. The height of the wall in most places reaches 1m and the thickness is about 1m. The gate (Plate 14) opens towards the south east and is associated with a guard chamber 3 x 3m



Plate 14. The gate of the northern el-Kab fort.



Plate 13. The northern el-Kab fort annex.

in size and surviving 2m high. The fort on the bigger hill is larger than its annex and has the shape of a human ear with a circumference of \approx 230m. The annex is built at the foot of the larger hill and includes the rock outcrop to the north west. It has a circular shape with a circumference of \approx 145m and there are no structures inside. The thickness of the wall is about 2m.

About 200m south of the fort there is a roughly rectangular enclosure (Plate 15) built up against the foot of a small but prominent hill. The enclosure wall, built of sandstone, has collapsed in most parts. It is also formed of two units, both of which are sub-rectangular. The western unit is \approx 25 x 11m with a gate. The eastern unit is \approx 21 x 11m and abuts the foot of the hill. Pottery sherds and grinding stones are distributed on the surface within the enclosure. Some crosses (Plate 16) were noticed on the rock slabs on the top of the hill, indicating at least the presence of Christians.



Plate 15. The southern el-Kab enclosure from the top of the hill.

Two authors have commented on the site: the first was Smith (2003, 160), who mentioned that the desert fortress at el-Kab was perhaps connected to the famous Darb el-Arba'in, a key route for camel caravans transporting valuable trade goods into Egypt. He found Turkish pipe bowls on the site



Plate 16. Crosses on the rock slabs of the southern el-Kab enclosure.

so suggested a date of the 17th century for its use. He added that the enclosures were used as caravanserai, providing a secure temporary halting place. The second author was Kröpelin (2006, 4) who found what he believed to be demotic writing among engravings of a type usually associated with administrative buildings. The demotic script was used during the period 650-30 BC (Kröpelin 2006, 4).

El-Kewieb Fort

In Wadi el-Kewieb west of Ga'ab Bauda and Ga'ab Biayuda, a large fort (KE -36-2A) was registered, 62km west of the Nile and 32km south west of el-Kab fort. It is built of sandstone and a few pieces of granite (Plate 17). It has a square shape, 70 x 70m. The thickness of the walls is about 2m and the height reaches approximately 4m (Plate 18). It has two gates each 6m wide, one on the east and the other on the west side. At each angle were projecting towers. Sand dunes are lying against the walls on all sides within the interior, especially in the northern part. A few pottery sherds, grinding stones and ostrich egg fragments are distributed on the surface inside the fort. The date of the fort, on the evidence currently available, is difficult to ascertain because the pottery sherds

recovered from the surface are undiagnostic. The function on one level is clear; it is a military installation but why it is at this particular place is another matter.

There is another fort 122km to the south of el-Kewieb known as Gala Abu Ahmed which lies 110km to the west of the Nile. Gala Abu Ahmed is a fort (120 x 180m) located in lower Wadi Howar. It was discovered in 1984 by archaeologists from the University of Cologne. Radiocarbon dating suggests that the fortress was already in use around 1100 BC. The function of the building is still unclear (Eigner and Jesse 2009; Jesse, this volume).

The three forts, the enclosures and the Kawa temple on the Nile (Plate 19) may need to be studied together to show if there was any relationships between them and to know if they have had a role in the relationships between the Nile and Kordofan in ancient times. However their widely differing dates and the very diverse forms of the forts makes this unlikely on present evidence.



Plate 17. *El-Kewieb fort.*

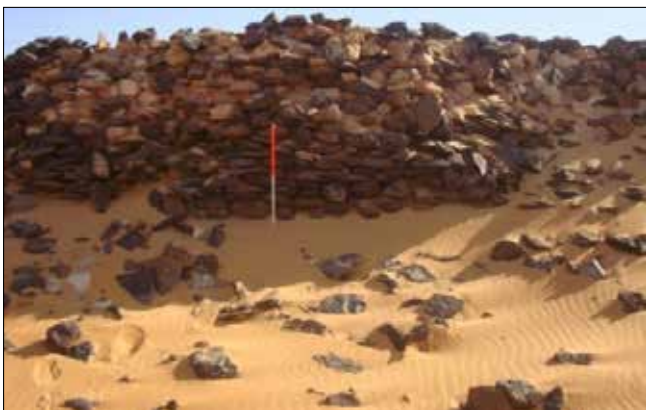


Plate 18. *Detail of the wall construction of el-Kewieb fort.*

Acknowledgement

The project is grateful to NCAM for granting a concession for archaeological work in the el-Gaab area in 2008. Special thanks go to the mission members and Salah Mohamed Osman (driver), also to Mr Mohamed Kheiri Humdo for his hospitality and to the members of the Sudanese Armed Forces who joined the group on its visit to Wadi el-Keweib, especially to Colonel Muzammel Abu Baker El Haj and Mr Salih Aloop (from Teati village). Ustaz Mohamed Kheir Salama, Mojahid Mohamed Kheir and the late Ustaz Mohamed Hamato kindly arranged the visits to Kogila and Ga'ab Um Hilal. I wish to express my sincere thanks to the Dr Abd El Aziz Abd El Rahiem the Directorate of Scientific Research and Cultural Relations, University of Khartoum, for the financial support.

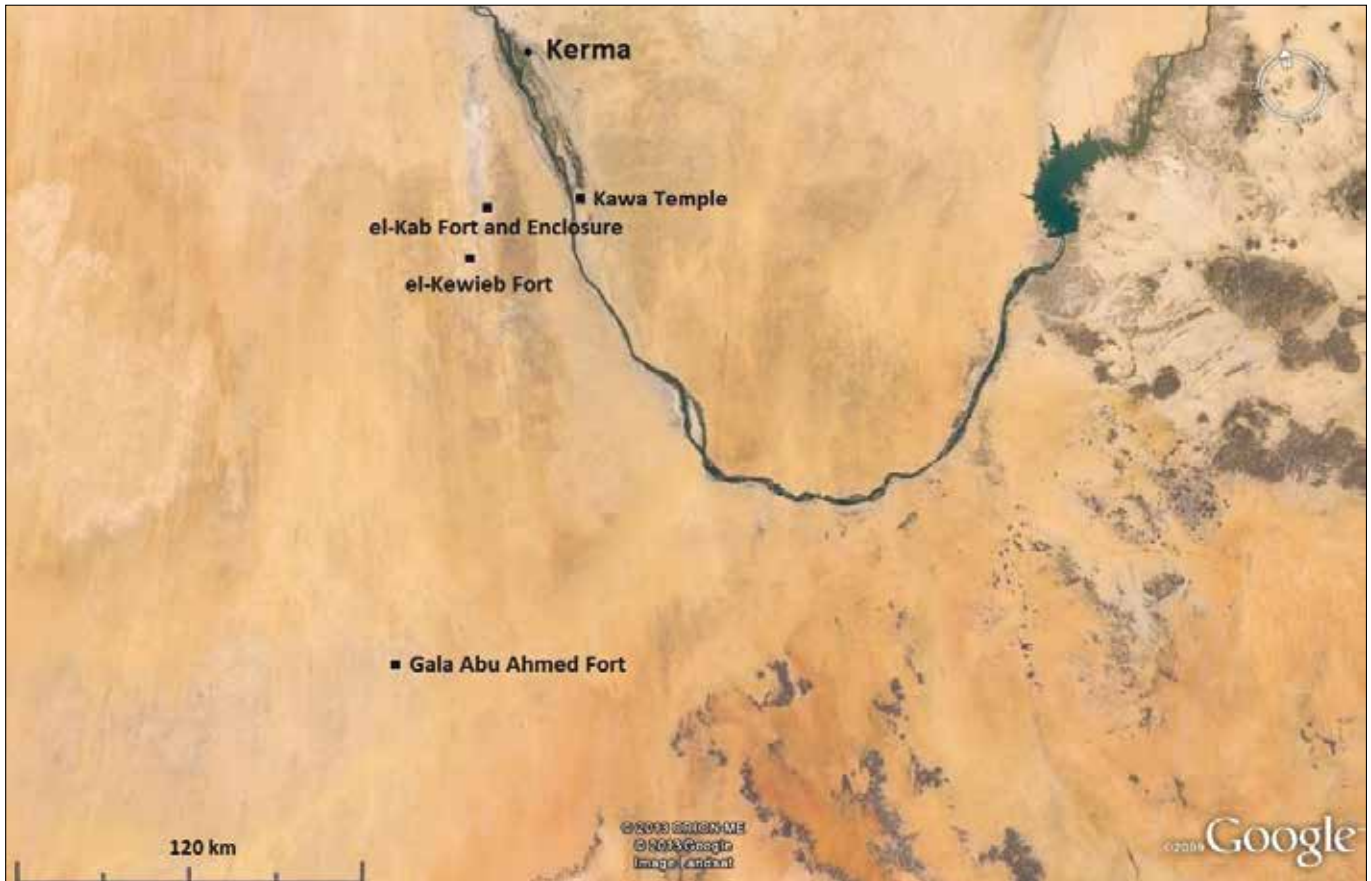


Plate 19. Gala Abu Ahmed, el-Kewieb, el-Kab fort and enclosure and Kawa temple locations on the Google Earth Satellite Image.

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Gabati

A Meroitic, Post-Meroitic and Medieval
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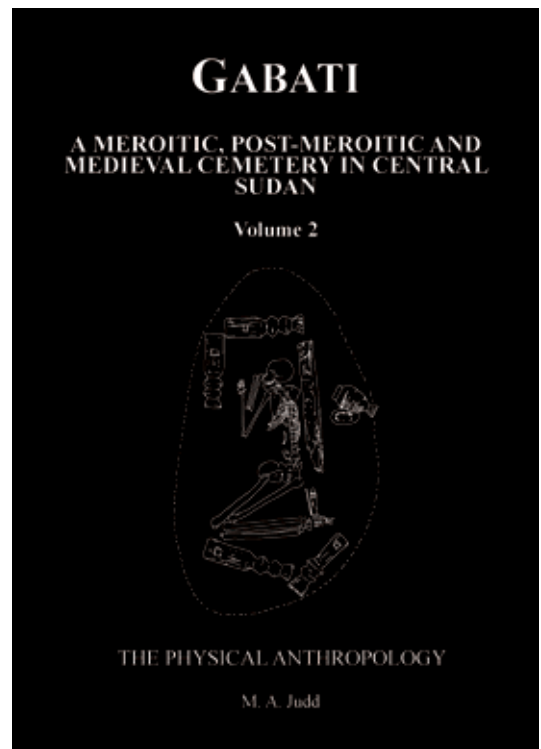
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with a contribution by David N. Edwards
London 2012

xii + 208 pages, 110 tables, 15 figures, 66 maps, 73 colour plates
ISBN 978 1 901169 19 7

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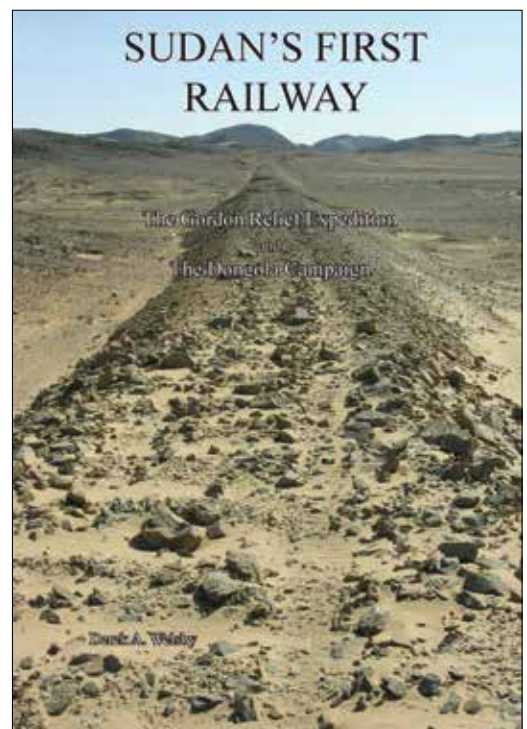
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London 2011

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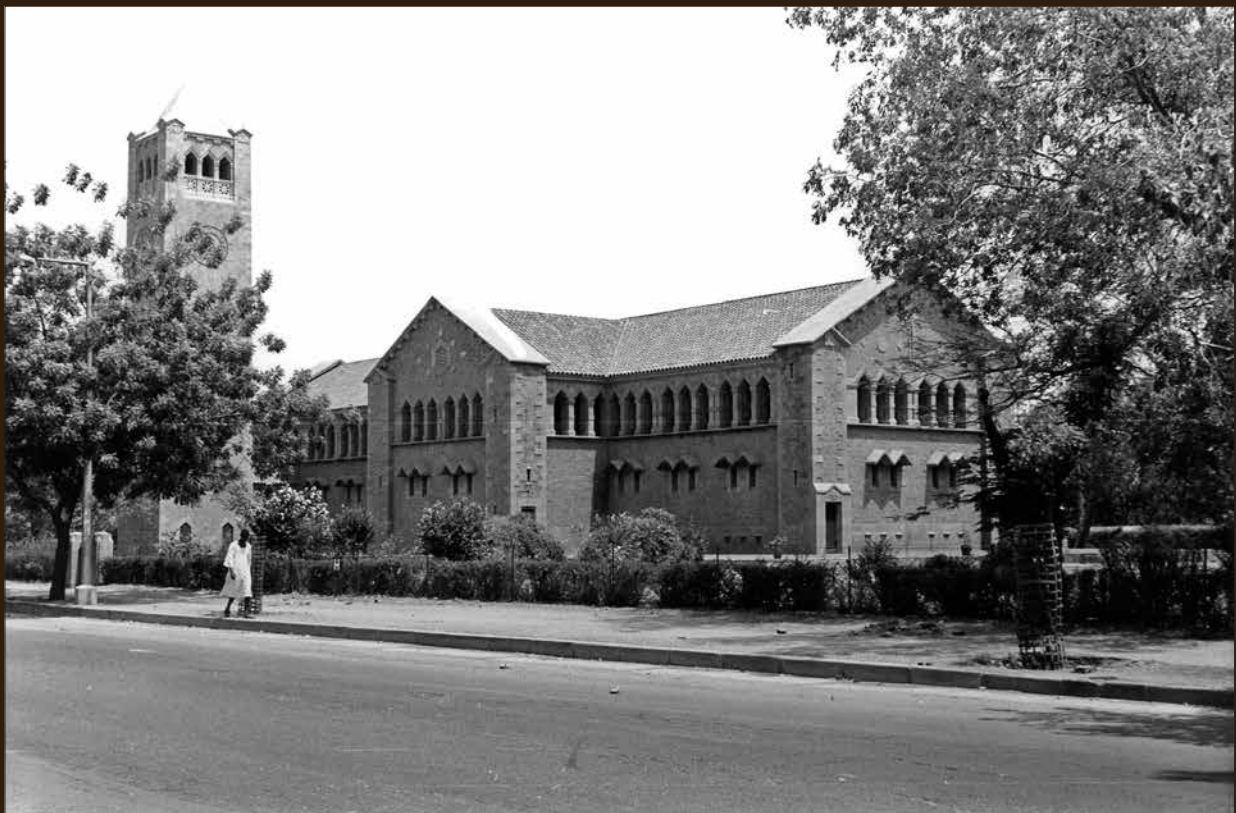
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Khartoum. The Republican Palace, once the Governor General's residence, in 1968 (photo SARS Hawkes Archive HAW P091.01).



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