

Kedurma: a Meroitic regional administrative town north of the Third Cataract

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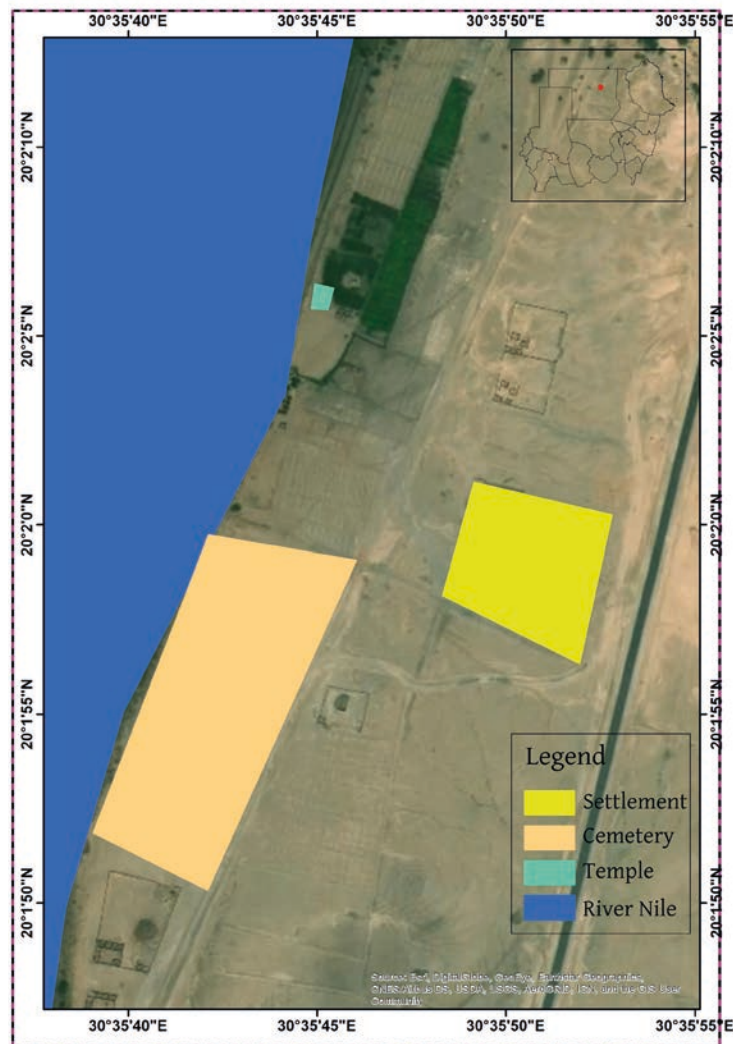


Figure 1. The archaeological site of Kedurma.



Figure 2. Complex B before excavation.

Introduction

The Meroitic townsite of Kedurma is located in an open area on the east bank of the Nile, some 9km north of the Kajbar rapids at the northern end of the Third Cataract region (N 20.01.971/E 030.35.732). There is a small village to the south of the site from which it takes its name. The name is Nubian and is composed of two words; 'Ked' which means stone, and 'Urm' which means black (Bashir 2019, 27). This is derived from a low hill of black granite which occupies the area between the village and the site. The site is on the right bank of the river and extends c. 2km eastwards where the main tarmac road between Dongola and Wadi Halfa is situated. To the north of the site is a deep *khôr* (a waterway) that partially fills in during flood times and then a village with the name of Kada, which also means stone. To the northwest of Kada is a prominent hill named Kada Musa. It has a major Ottoman site on its top and some Islamic qubba-like burials as its southern foot (Figure 1). For further information about the history, discovery, site description and earlier excavations see Bashir 2019.

Fieldwork in the settlement area

It was decided in the 2018-2019 season to start work at the northern part of the site, close to the south-east corner of the main building, designated 'Complex A', where several walls were visible, in order to investigate what could potentially be a complex structure (see further Osman and Edwards 2012, 100). This area was chosen in order to get a better picture of the stratigraphy, and to see if it had a direct connection with Complex A (Figure 2).

Archaeological work on the site was conducted from 5th-17th February 2018. Before excavations commenced, a reconnaissance survey was done, a grid system added, and a sample of pottery was collected from the surface of the site. Subsequently, one area measuring 15m² in front of Complex A, was selected for excavation. It was divided into three squares (each one 5m²) orientated north-south, then each given a letter designation starting with A1 at the datum base through to A3, and finishing with C1

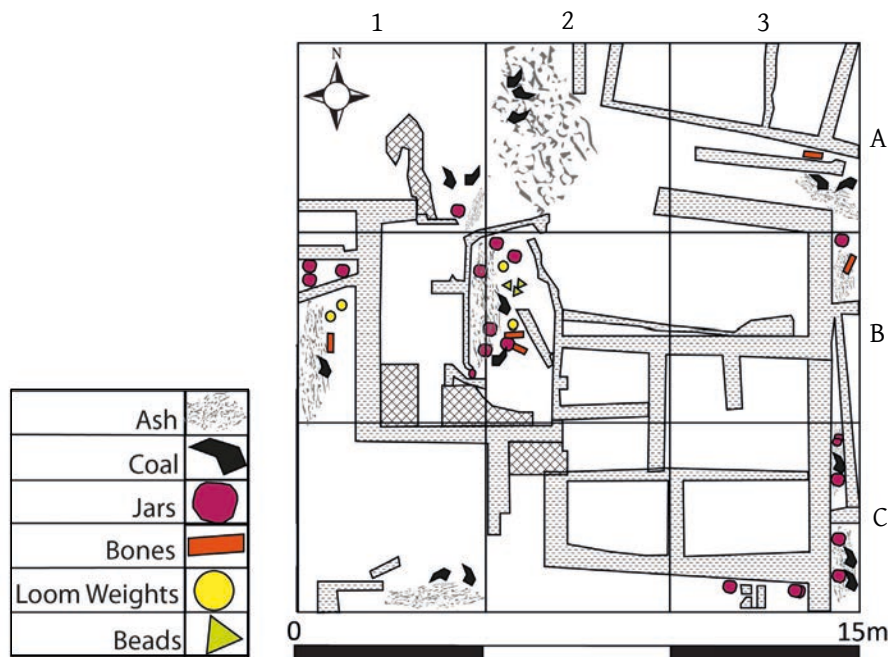


Figure 3. Sketch plan of the excavated building (designed by Mohamed Hayati).

domestic refuse of potsherds, bone, ash, and charcoal (Figures 2 and 4). Many of the small rooms, such as Room 1 in Square A2 and Room 2 in Square B2 (Figures 5 and 6) contained domestic detritus of a white sandy nature, comprising the fill in and around the structures.

A tight cluster of small, irregular, contiguous rooms was found in this small area. Along the north-south wall of the structure in Square A3 in the second strata, five pottery jars arranged in a line were recovered. Two were set one inside the another, and were situated 300mm away from the other vessels. The other jars were found close together with 10-20mm between them with the exception of the last which was 100mm away from its neighbour. The diameters of the jars were 450mm, 280mm, 300mm, 330mm, and 250mm respectively and all were situated close to the east side of the square (Figure 7).

Another three jars were recovered from the southern end of the same square, set one inside another, and another was found hidden behind a small mud installation (Figure 8). Other large jars were found in the western part of Square B2 where a curved mud brick wall 300mm thick was exposed. Four pots were recovered from beside this wall in B2, and a further two in B1. At the south end of the curved wall in B1, part of a large jar full of charcoal and ash with a diameter of 300mm was found under the wall (Figure 9). A small fine black bowl was also found in the western part of Square C2 (Figure 10).



Figure 4. General view of the excavated building (photo by Mohamed Nasreldein).

to C3. The archaeological work started with the collection of objects from the surface area starting with Square A1 (Figure 3).

The surface consisted of white sand mixed with small black granite stones and covered with a lot of Meroitic potsherds, Nile shells, upper grinding stones, ostrich eggshells, small colourful beads, and some bones. Many straight walls were visible on the surface, seemingly dividing the site into different parts. This was designated 'Complex B'. The excavated structure in Complex B shows the greater part of a building, which appeared to be a house. The fill of the rooms was largely comprised of

Pots and bowls in the building, especially those found in Squares A3 and B2, probably had been placed on charcoal for cooking or heating food. The discovery of vessels, set inside one another, in two places in A3 may serve as evidence for the long-term functioning of this structure as a kitchen. Similar installations of tubular vessel-ovens in a repeated position in the same location, often replaced after breaking, are attested in kitchens at the Meroitic townsites of Hamadab and Abu Erteila (Wolf *et al.* 2011, 233-234; Fantusati *et al.* 2012, 172-174). Other cooking installations have been found at various Meroitic sites such as the southern village of Abu Geili, Gaminarti, and Meili Island (Adams 1980, 272).

A considerable number of large plain Meroitic jars, decorated material, and numerous loom weights (part of a weaver's toolkit) were uncovered, suggesting household production within the settlement area, and there are a number of observations that may be made as a result (Figure 3). The most important are as follows: The second layer (beneath the surface) covered the whole area and was very rich in terms of objects (the lowest level to which excavations reached was 350-400mm below surface). Mud brick was the universal building material used in this complex. The standard size of bricks employed was 300x200/350x180mm. Domestic detritus of a white sandy nature comprised the fill in, and around, the structures. It was mixed with building remains, charcoal, and ash in most parts of the area. It included cooking vessels, vast amounts of potsherds, large quantities of bone fragments, and mud loom weights. Charcoal was scattered throughout. The most common objects throughout the excavation area were upper and lower grinding stones and loom weights. The latter were found particularly in Squares B2 and C2 where they numbered c. 150 complete objects, with an additional 15 fragments recovered. Nile shells were found in great numbers, especially in Square C2. A total of 18 jars were recovered. Eight were found in Square A3, while four were found in Square B2. All the jars in A3 and B2, had been placed upside down except for one, which was situated in the centre of the other jars between B2 and C2. Four of these large jars were distinguished by short necks (see Figure 3).

Small Finds and Objects

Object documentation included identifying the artefact and recording its material, measurements, and findspot. They were further documented by photographs taken *in situ*, drawings, and some sketches to provide further details.

Pottery

Initially, pottery was collected during the surface survey of the settlement site in 2014, and then from excavations during the 2018-2019 seasons (Figures 11 and 12). The site was covered by fine quality pottery, including thin-walled stamped eggshell wares, and other fineware sherds, predominantly of small bowls and cups. The stamped and painted decoration is from a Meroitic ceramic workshop of the highest quality. The survey and excavation at the site produced a large number of pot sherds and complete jars, averaging an estimated 500 sherds in the first season, and 390 in the second season. There was a considerable variability in forms and wares exhibited. Many of these wares come from contexts earlier in date than the collections in Lower Nubia upon which the Adams (1964, 68) ceramic classification was based, and do not fall into that system. This also includes some imported pottery.

Loom weights

150 mud objects were identified as loom weights. They were egg-shaped to ovoid in shape, with rounded-flat profiles, and with a hole at one end. Their maximum size ranges from 70x70x70mm-8x120x80mm (see Figures 13 and 15).

Spindle Whorls

Five complete and fragmentary spindle whorls were found (Figure 14). Most were made of pottery. One was of clay which was decorated with ornamental incisions and impressions. Similar objects have been found at Meroe and Hamadab (Näser 2004, 255; Wolf *et al.* 2014, 727).

Beads

Beads were numerous and displayed a variety of shapes, colours, and materials (Figures 16 and 17). Most were isolated finds, so the patterns in which they were originally strung could not be reconstructed as can sometimes be done when found *in situ*, particularly in graves. Cylindrical and disc beads were the most numerous shape. Most comparative collections contain beads of these common shapes.



Figure 5. Rooms in Squares A2 and B2.



Figure 6. Rooms in Squares A2 and B2.



Figure 7. Pottery jars from excavated Square A3.



Figure 8. Jars from the southern part of Square A3.



Figure 9. B2, the curved mud brick wall and associated jars.



Figure 10. The black bowl found in Square C2.



Figure 11. Samples of decorated and painted pottery from the settlement surface.

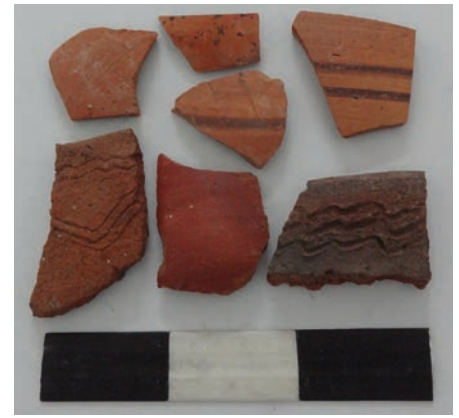


Figure 12. Samples of decorated and painted pottery from the settlement surface.

Bone

Objects made from bone were extremely rare (Figures 18 and 19). One object 200mm in length and decorated with lines was recorded, but its function was not determined. Faunal remains were found but most were fragmentary and only tentatively identified.

Lamps

A complete pottery lamp was discovered in Square B2, on the second level (Figures 20 and 21). This corresponds to the domestic occupation of Complex B. It was decorated with two frogs that surrounded the hole for oil on the top of the lamp. A similar-shaped pottery lamp (5300, c. max. width 147mm; max. height) was found at Meroe along the 50m-line associated with a hearth (Shinnie and Anderson 2004, 231), although did not have the same decoration. Lamps of the same type were recorded from the excavation of the Egyptian Exploration Society at north Saqqara in Egypt during 1964-1976 and dated to the 1st and 2nd centuries AD (Bailey 2001, 119-126).

Stone

Ten complete and fragmentary grindstones made of sandstone and granite were recorded (Figures 22 and 23). Many were found in the second level in B2 and B3. No pattern of the temporal or spatial distribution of grindstones could be determined, and only in some cases was it possible to differentiate between upper and lower grindstones.

Shell

Ostrich eggshell was an important raw material used for the production of beads (Näser 2004, 221) and many objects of



Left: Figure 13. Loom weights from Squares B2 and C2.



Figure 14. Example of the spindle whorls excavated.

Shape	Measurements (mm)	Weight (g)
Semi-cylindrical	70×120×50	638.3
Semi-cylindrical	70×130×80	717.3
Semi-cylindrical	80×120×80	676.9
Semi-cylindrical	60×110×80	651.7
Semi-cylindrical	70×110×80	806.2
Semi-cylindrical	60×110×70	395.1
Semi-cylindrical	70×130×80	601.8
Semi-cylindrical	70×120×70	613.6
Semi-cylindrical	80×120×80	681.2
Semi-cylindrical	70×120×70	664.7
Semi-cylindrical	70×120×70	687.8
Semi-cylindrical	70×110×80	517.2
Semi-cylindrical	60×130×70	836.1
Semi-cylindrical	70×130×80	691.7
Semi-cylindrical	70×120×80	753.9
Semi-cylindrical	60×120×60	504.2
Semi-cylindrical	60×120×70	703.6
Semi-cylindrical	70×120×70	570.2
Semi-cylindrical	60×120×70	706.9
Semi-cylindrical	70×70×70	694.7
Semi-cylindrical	70×120×70	681.7
Semi-cylindrical	80×120×80	630.7
Semi-cylindrical	60×120×80	815.1
Semi-cylindrical	70×110×80	613.6
Semi-cylindrical	70×120×80	598.1

Figure 15. Loom weight shape, measurements and weight.

this material were recorded from the site. Seven complete Nile oyster shells were also found along with several fragments.

Cemetery Excavation

The cemetery was located east of the settlement site, to the east of the local road in an open area, and now is partially covered by a group of unoccupied modern houses. Like other Meroitic cemeteries, the cemeteries of Kedurma were largely unmarked on the surface with few surface indications of graves except for small scatters of sherds or stones, on an otherwise featureless gravel-covered plain. Most parts of the cemetery witnessed heavy destruction caused by tomb robbers and gold miners. In the 1991 season of the Mahas Survey Project, a few Meroitic burials were rescued (a total of four graves), and provided rich cultural material despite the very destructive looting activities (Edwards 1995, 43-45). No work was undertaken on the site again until 2018 (Bashir 2019, 30). Two graves were excavated during this season, and the extent of the main cemetery was approximately determined by surveying the area. Many Meroitic burials east of the settlement site were recorded, covering an area of c. 150m north-south and 100m east-west.

The two graves excavated were of two different types: The first was a mastaba/pyramid superstructure with underlying chamber. The superstructure consisted of a square, mud-brick foundation, measuring 6.3m east-west with a small 'chapel' on the east side. The superstructures were oriented perpendicular to the river rather than according



Figure 16. Examples of beads excavated.



Figure 17. Examples of beads excavated.



Figure 18. Examples of excavated bone.



Figure 19. Examples of excavated bone.



Figure 20. Front of ceramic lamp from B2.



Figure 21. Back of ceramic lamp from B2.



Figure 22. Granite grindstone.



Figure 23. Sandstone grindstones.

to magnetic north. Skeletal remains were found in the chamber (including six skulls). The individuals were dorsally extended, with head to the west. No evidence of coffins or shrouds was found (Figure 24). The second grave was orientated east-west with a sloping shaft c. 2m long, leading to a small chamber at the east end. The chamber entrance had a stone blocking, and the body had been placed within (Figure 25).

Throughout the cemetery, only a few courses of mud bricks have survived from the original tomb monuments, but in many cases there was enough to suggest grave structures. Most tombs had a sloping entrance ramp leading to an axial cavity. Furthermore, grave goods that survived plundering suggest the presence of a rich community and that this was an elite cemetery and an important site in the Meroitic kingdom. Although most were discovered in very disturbed contexts, the finds contain a significant amount of fine Meroitic pottery, including small finely decorated cups. Other types of small objects were recovered by Edwards and Osman from the surface of this area, and from the local inhabitants during 1991 season (Edwards 1995, 45-46). These included:

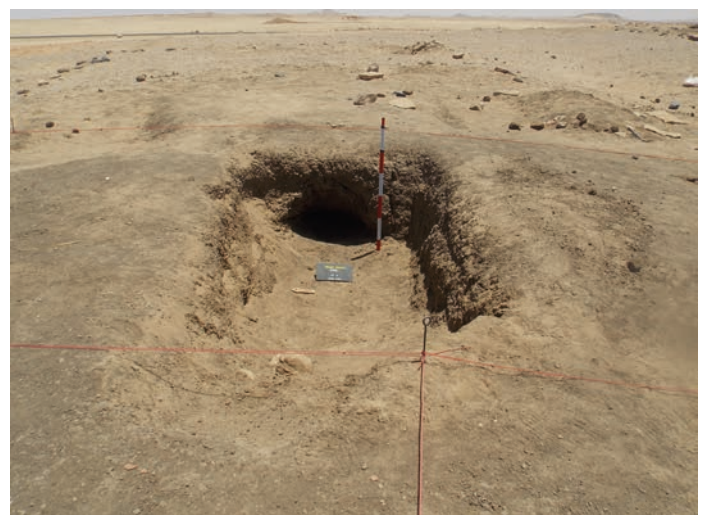
- Ba statue, base with pedestal. Sandstone. The base of the pedestal measured 300x170x70mm.
- Ba statue, body, fragment. Sandstone.
- Carved stone fragment. (Double Ba statue). Coarse yellow-orange sandstone. 14x170mm.
- Stone tool for pottery decoration. Black sandstone, l: 53mm, w: 51mm, max. th: 3mm.
- Glass vessel fragment. Mouth and handles of imported Romano-Egyptian 'path bottle'. Pale green glass. The rim diameter measured 38mm.

Conclusion

The excavated area of Complex B forms the greater part of a building, and it seems that it may have been a house. The fill of its rooms largely was



Figure 24. Grave type one (photo by Abdelrhman Saied).



Figures 25. Grave type two (photo by Abdelrhman Saied).

comprised of domestic refuse of pot sherds, bone, ash, and charcoal. It is probable that this building served multiple functions in addition to being a residence. The presence of large pottery vessel bases found in corners and along the walls, which had served as hearths and were filled with fine ash, may indicate the use of some rooms, for example, as kitchens. A considerable number of large Meroitic jars both plain and decorated, and a considerable number of loom weights (part of weaver's equipment) were also found indicating craft production within the settlement area.

At present, we have little detailed evidence concerning the site's chronology, although it seems likely to span much of the later Meroitic period within the large re-urbanisation process of the Meroitic heartland.¹ It seems clear that Kedurma was a major Meroitic centre in the Third Cataract region and perhaps an administrative centre of the region north of the Third Cataract. The existence of both the settlement and its associated cemetery mark this as a site of importance with great research potential. It is worth stressing that despite intensive survey and excavation programs carried out in more northerly areas of Lower Nubia, no substantial Meroitic settlement and its associated cemetery, have yet been investigated together (Edwards 1995, 46). Future investigations will no doubt shed more light on the nature of the site.

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¹This culminated in the extensive building program of Natakamani and Amanitore throughout the Meroitic kingdom in the 1st century AD, and included, for example, buildings of these rulers much further to the south at Meroe and Napata (Hakem 1988, 88; Barberini 2010, 170) as well as Naga (Wildung and Kroeper 2016), Muweis (Baud 2014, 780), and Wad Ben Naga (Vercoutter 1962, 279-287).