

SUDAN & NUBIA

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Front cover. Stone slab A3 used as a paving slab in Temple 4, Qasr Ibrim, showing Taharqa and Amun (photograph courtesy of F. Aldsworth).

Above. Frontal scan of lion head, Naga (Kroeper and Perzlmeier 2022, fig. 21, © Naga Project, 3-D scans by TrigonArt BauerPraus GbR).

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The archaeological site of Damboya in the Shendi Reach.

Third season

Marc Maillot and Sébastien Poudroux

Introduction

The archaeological site of Damboya, identified by F. Hinkel and investigated in 2002 by Patrice Lenoble and Vincent Rondot (Lenoble and Rondot 2003), is located 270km north of Khartoum, near Shendi, in the concession of El-Hassa (1.7km), of which it is a component. The Louvre Museum asked the National Corporation for Antiquities and Museums, Sudan (NCAM) to integrate this concession into that of the Department of Egyptian Antiquities in 2020. Marc Maillot, current Director of the mission, had expressed the wish to open an archaeological excavation in Damboya, as part of his programme as director of the SFDAS (French Archaeological Unit in Sudan). A scientific cooperation agreement was therefore signed between the Louvre Museum and the SFDAS, so that the Damboya excavation could begin in 2020 under the aegis of the SFDAS.

The results of the first season enabled the SFDAS archaeological team to continue the programme on the most promising sectors for a long-term study on the settlement of Damboya. The third campaign was between February 4th, 2022, and March 5th, 2022. The archaeological team was composed of Marc Maillot, director of the SFDAS, responsible for Sector A and director of the mission; Romain David, SFDAS researcher and ceramologist; Gabrielle Choimet, PhD student at Sorbonne University, responsible for Sector E; Coralie Prenat, international volunteer, SFDAS; Sébastien Poudroux, topographer and responsible for Sector G; and Alexia Desbos, archaeologist. NCAM was represented by Antiquities Inspector Essamani Ezadeen Kara.

Three sectors were opened, two of which (A and E, see Choimet 2021 for Sector E), were chosen for their position framing the main hill of the site (named Sector G), which was the primary focus of the season. Sectors A and G, which will be presented here, confirm the presence of a Meroitic royal city at Damboya.

Sector A

The southern hill of Damboya has a diameter of 40m, and a preserved elevation of 1.10m above the surface level of the site. Covered with red brick fragments, small grindstones, ceramic sherds and some scattered bones, it presents all aspects of a classic *kom* in central Sudan. Successive surveys carried out on the site indicated that the ceramics predominantly dated to the Meroitic period, which results subsequently confirmed (1st-2nd centuries AD). Five construction phases have been identified, mostly Meroitic, and three horizons are attested. These construction phases are described in detail in a previous article (see Maillot 2021). For the 2022 season, the excavation of Sector A was closed, after opening a few sondages to verify some of the hypotheses presented in *Sudan & Nubia* 25 (Maillot 2021).

The Meroitic red brick temple

The best-preserved building in Sector A is a rectangular structure in red brick orientated east-west, measuring 16.30m long x 7.20m wide (Figure 1). Four walls (F003, 6, 7, 46), frame an internal space of 5 x 15.7m, of which nothing remains of the original occupation level. These four walls are 1.10m wide, with masonry in a header/stretcher pattern. It should be noted that many bricks are slightly vitrified, and bricks with the plaster coating facing inwards were incorporated, indicating a fairly significant reuse of a previous structure that already had an official purpose. Wall F006 widens towards the southeast, up to 1.30m, because it cuts through a previous mud brick structure (see below) but partially reuses it

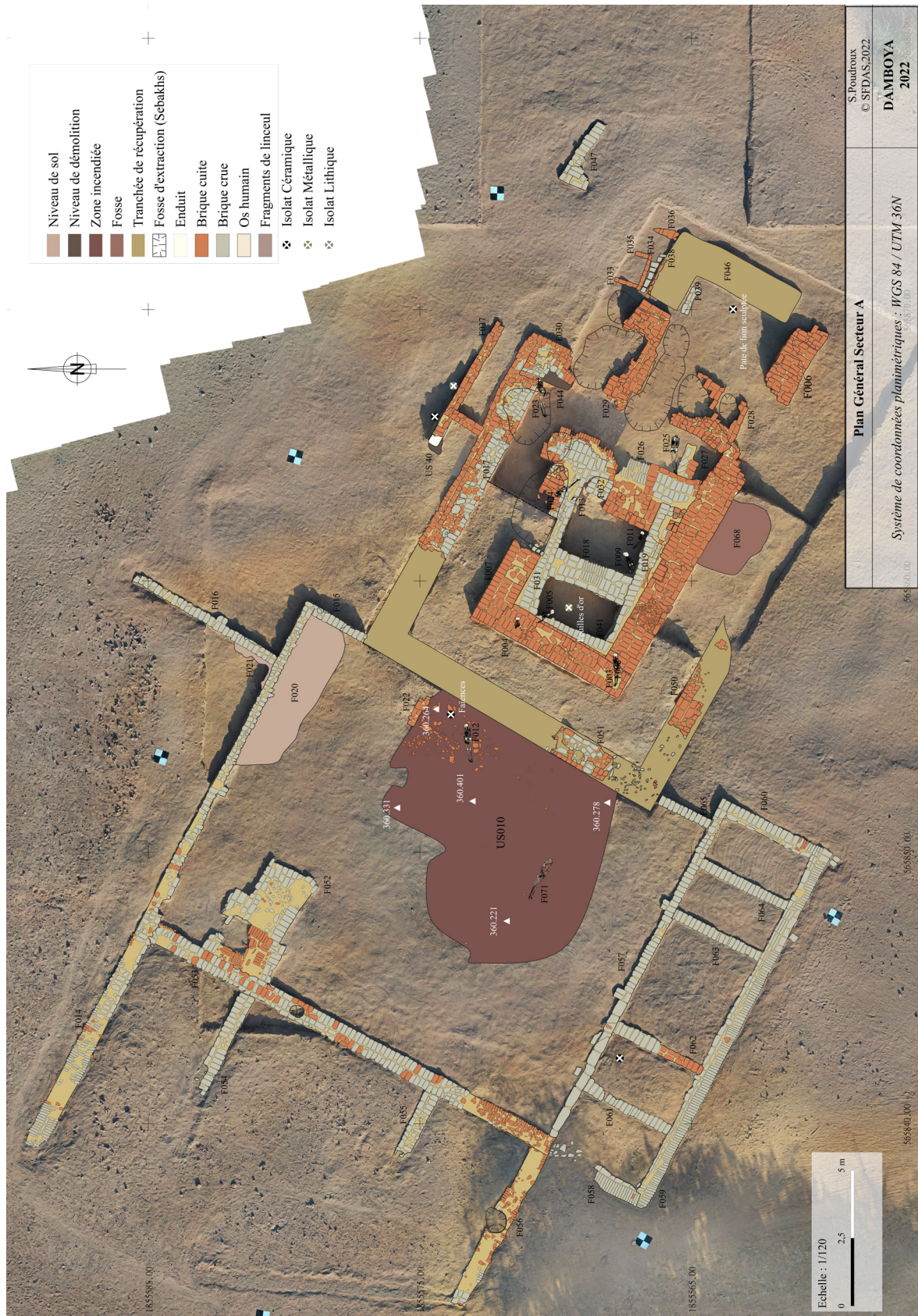


Figure 1. General plan of Sector A (©SFDAS/musée du Louvre).

as a foundation (F026), by means of masonry laid in a herringbone pattern and broken red bricks at the junction between the temple and this former building. It forms an angle with Wall F28, which is wider than the other walls (2m).

Wall F28 is particularly interesting even if poorly preserved (sometimes only a single brick remains of the wall in elevation), because it corresponds to an internal wall of a tripartite temple. Indeed, Wall F029, also badly damaged by *sebakhin* pits, was bonded with F28 to form a single foundation wall, even if the connection is now missing. This F29 wall, 1.20m wide, no longer shows any internal or external facing and is founded in the original matrix of the sector, a yellow hardened sand, devoid of any material. A *sebakhin* pit full of destruction debris (F043) - also cut into the original matrix - is visible and aligned with the south-east extension of Walls F028 and F029, which indicates in negative the location of an angle now missing. A similar pit is not visible in section north of Wall F28, which implies that the corner of F28 was a simple right angle. Finally, this F28 wall is the only one with an offset of 200mm from its wall line, which may suggest an earthquake, as in Sector E (Choimet 2021, 181-182). This is not the case for the other preserved building elements; all were subject to construction defects (vertical joints creating cracks for example).

Wall F029 comprises an extension of an additional metre towards the east. F029 and F006 meet at right angles thanks to Wall F046, which constitutes the eastern facade of the red brick temple. It is more precisely the negative of a wall, because only the bottom of the foundation pit, composed of fragments of broken bricks in a black indurated sandy matrix, could be found (alt. 359.65m a.s.l.). Even though this wall has been looted down to the foundation, the importance of this discovery is paramount, since it allows us to establish the complete plan of the temple to the east and to confirm that the façade of the latter was at right angles, with a wall width identical to the others (1.10m), founded at the same depth and without a pylon. This wall (F046) also confirms the tripartite plan of the temple, with, from east to west, first a narrow room (3.80 x 4.01m), then a second central room (2.76 x 3.97m), and finally a last room, the sanctuary, closed by Wall F003 (4 x 5.02m). The façade of the temple was therefore at a right angle.

The central space of the building was probably coated with white plaster on raw earth decorated with black sickle patterns, unspecified floral motifs with yellow, red and blue pigments and with a total absence of green. We were able to collect in the surface material, unfortunately not *in situ* but inside the central space, a small number of these plaster fragments on raw earth. The internal facing of Wall F003 bore, just above its foundation (alt. 360.45m a.s.l.), the negative of the plaster. However, this was not the case for Walls F006 and F007. This is not unusual given the prominent position of Wall F003 in the main axis of the temple.

On the other side of Wall F003 towards the west and at the limit of Square 260/510, a circumscribed destruction level was present comprising a large number of fragments of lime plaster (179), a concentration of gold leaf, faience and fragments of boxes in glazed ceramic. This context (US 10) is remarkable beyond this particular concentration of material, as it includes a large amount of charcoal sealed by demolition and evenly burnt sand. US 10, which benefited from a special focus this season, is quite extensive, with a semi-circular outline and a maximum radius of 1.40m. The third campaign was an opportunity to excavate this level. The hypothesis presented last year (see Maillot 2021, 157) now has to be excluded, since no further traces of fire were discovered nor a single vitrified brick. US 10 (after a complete cleaning with a section cut along its entire length (Figure 2), is 200mm thick and corresponds to a clay floor that includes fragments of scattered bones, eroded fragments of redbrick and a small amount of pottery. Thickly laid, it is a circulation surface that initially covered the entire enclosure of the western complex (see below).

A second sondage was opened at the junction between Wall F022 and US 10 to verify their relationship to one another (Figure 3). F022 has burnt bricks in its masonry and is connected to US 10 in the western



Figure 2. General view of Sector A, from the northeast. Cut of US 10 in the background (©SFDAS/musée du Louvre).

section of the wall. This area needed detailed clarification as explained previously (see Maillot 2021, 159), because a line of white plaster is contiguous with the foundation trench of Wall F022 and goes up against its exterior facing. The indurated clay floor (US 10) does not extend beyond Wall F022 to the north and is replaced by a standard floor of flattened raw earth, still present along Wall F015 (US 20). We can thus conclude that US 10 was designed to accommodate heavy traffic in an open area (the coating present along F022 towards US 10 confirms this). US 10 also covered a construction level (F70), composed of broken redbrick and fragments of grindstones. This level is the same as the construction floor of the temple (see Maillot 2021, F049, 160), as they share the same altitude and matrix (360.14m a.s.l.). This suggests that US 10 was laid after the construction of the temple corridor, making the whole junction between the temple and the western complex contemporaneous. The perfect alignment between F022, F007 and the entrance staircase F052 of the western complex seems to confirm the hypothesis.

Wall F017 (northwest - southeast; 1.20m wide) follows the same orientation as Wall F007 and is separated from it by a passage 1.90m wide, forming a corridor around the exterior walls of the temple (13.02 x 12.31m maximum). This wall, arranged in fragments of mudbrick and fired brick, is deeply founded (alt. 359.71m a.s.l.) in its western section. Wall F017 extends towards the north-west in a straight line (total length 13.02m), but this is now only observable - despite its partial destruction by a *sebakhin* pit up to the foundation in Square 260/520 - by the negative of the wall that cuts through the neighbouring contexts, and in particular the construction level of the temple. The connection with Walls F014, 15 and 16 is therefore established, the latter being contiguous to Wall F017. F017 then formed a right angle with another wall orientated south-north, F051 (12.30 x 1.10m alt. min. / max. 359.91 / 360.18m a.s.l.), so as to frame the western part of the temple and more particularly Walls F007 and F003.

The corridor surrounding the temple is also symmetrical to the south, as demonstrated by the discovery of Wall F050 (6.74 x 1.10m; alt. min. / max. 359.96 / 360.15m a.s.l.), strictly parallel to Wall F006. Wall F050

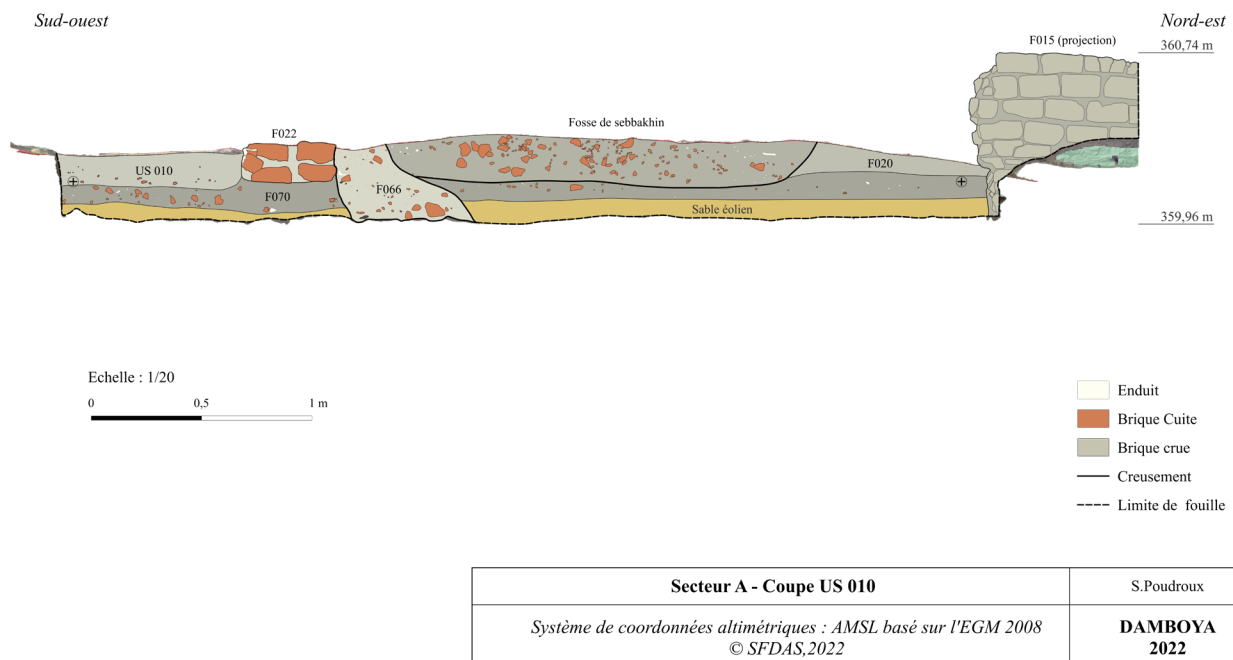


Figure 3. Cross section of US010/Wall F022 (©SFDAS/musée du Louvre).

must therefore have a returning wall that enclosed the corridor to the south at the intersection of the line of Wall F030 and Wall F050. The corridor had to frame the outer walls of the red brick temple for over two-thirds of its perimeter (13m), at the edge of partition Wall F028. Wall F030 and its southern counterpart were then joined respectively with the walls of the temple F007 and F006, unless a passage was created from the east, which we cannot verify due to the state of preservation of the building. Finally, and in the same way as for Wall F030, it is significant that a pit, full of mud brick destruction debris (F068, Figure 4), is visible to the west of this missing wall, which would imply a foundation method similar to F030, i.e. placed on an earlier destruction level (the double chamber 'chapel', see below), like Pit F044 (bottom alt. F030, 359.86m a.s.l.; bottom alt. of F068, 359.68m a.s.l., i.e. 180mm).

A side entrance staircase in the northeast part of the hill was found following the full exposure of the F037 wall (5.15m). The latter, of which only a small section had been discovered in 2020, extends in a northwest – southeast orientation and is bonded with the F017 wall. 350mm wide, it is built in a stretcher / header pattern, and just like F017, is made of reused bricks sometimes broken in half or thirds, with a lot of mortar. It forms, for its south–east section, a narrow passage with the F017 wall, 1.13 m wide (alt. 360.20m a.s.l., equivalent to the construction floor F049), then turns inside the corridor surrounding the temple. It is fully coated with white lime plaster similar to that found at el-Hassa. The top of the northwest section of F037 is also plastered, which indicates that it did not rise higher in elevation and opened onto an exterior, whose circulation level, judging by the curve at the base of the coating, had to correspond to the current natural topography, to which is added about 300mm (alt. 360.29m a.s.l.). This plaster is laid on a dense destruction level (US 40, alt. 360.06m a.s.l.), just like the foundation of the wall, which indicates the area was not leveled before the foundation of the temple.

The western complex

As indicated above, a group of three walls (F014, F015, F016), identified in 2020 and directly below the surface level, were not connected and at that time could not be associated with any phase of Sector A.

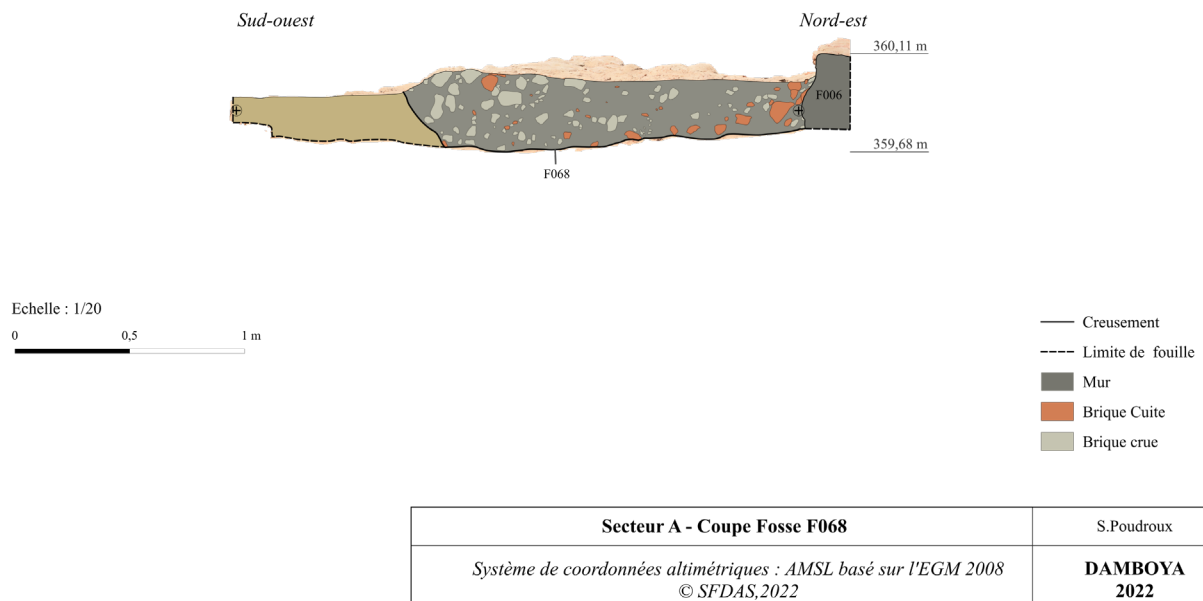


Figure 4. Cross section of F068 (©SFDAS/musée du Louvre).

In mudbrick and one brick wide, i.e. 350mm, they are built in a header/stretcher pattern. Orientated respectively northwest-southeast (F014), with a return splitting northeast-southwest (F015) and a later unbonded addition attached with a mud mortar reinforcement orientated northeast-southwest (F016), they are connected to a floor level in indurated clay (F020) obtained by spreading water forming successive screeds, as is usual in Meroitic settlements. This floor level, equivalent to the occupation level of the temple (alt. 360.30m a.s.l.), is only present in a few spots and disappears under a layer of virgin sand near the red brick temple. The three walls (F014, F015 and F016) continue respectively to the northwest and northeast, which made it possible to verify the chronology of this unit and to link it to a larger complex associated with the red brick temple dated to the middle of the 1st century AD.

This complex (22.78 x 21.05m) is accessible by a ramp (F052, alt. 360.08m a.s.l., 1.82 x 4.09m), of which unfortunately only a brick in the foundation remains, the whole of this structure being heavily damaged. Similar to the ramp in Sector E but smaller, two steps near Wall F053 delimit a ramp landing (2.80m wide, i.e. one metre more than the rest of the ramp) of which the masonry is mud bricks on edge (alt. 359.99). This entrance is extended by the ramp itself, where a mudbrick facing in headers frames a filling of broken red bricks laid in a large amount of mud mortar.

This ramp abuts a long wall (F053) delimiting a building of 16.52 x 6.53m where most preserved, composed of mud and fired bricks. It forms a right angle with the F014 wall, which continues towards the west, but which then disappears at the edge of the *kom*, where the state of preservation of the remains is precarious. Wall F053 is also flanked by three other walls, F054, F055 and F056, which delimit a tripartite plan with three spans of rooms (3.71m, 7.10m and 3.86m from north to south) enclosed to the south by Wall F056, which has red bricks laid on edge at the corner, marking the presence of an external angle. This angle is placed in the immediate vicinity of another set of the complex, orientated east-west, which seems to correspond to a row of store rooms (14.86 x 4.53m).

This row is organised according to a rectangular plan divided into five parts (from west to east, 2.02 x

3.46m; 2.07 x 3.51m; 4.25 x 3.45m; 1.70 x 3.52m; 1.73 x 3.51m) including a larger central room that has only one course preserved in elevation. On the southwest edge of the hill, it is entirely in mud brick. Partition walls are one header brick or two stretcher bricks wide, i.e. 350mm. Finally, there is a resurgence of red bricks on edge at the southwest corner of this row (F058). This row is then attached to the corridor of the red brick temple through the F065 wall, 350mm wide in mud brick, attached to the F050 wall. It is also positioned in the north-south alignment of the F015 wall, to form a sort of rectangular mud brick enclosure (12.77 x 16.25m or 208m²) attached to the corridor of the red brick temple, within which is the US 10 circulation floor.

To conclude, this complex located behind the temple on the west edge of the hill, which, to the best of our knowledge, is unparalleled in the Meroitic period, continues northward, certainly in a desire for symmetry with the span of storerooms located on the south, in an extension of Wall F016. We extended surface clearing to the north, to verify this hypothesis. The very poor state of preservation of the area prevented this, as nothing was preserved (F016 alt. min. / max. 360.41 / 359.90m a.s.l., i.e. 510mm lost in the north section of the *kom*).

The mud brick chapel

An earlier occupation preceding the red brick temple is confirmed by the presence of four mudbrick walls, F041, F018, F019 and F031 (the latter, orientated east-west, was initially faced in mud brick in stretchers and measured 1.10m wide), which form a rectangular space (2.94 x 1.51m) unfortunately cut to the west by Wall F003. A second rectangular space (2.95 x 1.88m) is bounded on the east by the same walls, in addition to Wall F026. The latter, a composite, is the result of destruction and partial reuse during the construction of the red brick temple. It has an exterior of fired brick and an internal masonry of mudbrick, to which is attached at the north a section of wall in mud brick on edge, and founded on sand, much higher than the rest of the wall (alt. 360.30m a.s.l. against 360.05m a.s.l. for the rest of the wall). The red brick fragments, as well as the herringbone pattern and heavy mud mortar joints observable in connection with Wall F006, correspond to the reuse of this wall in the red brick temple, so as to maintain stable foundations.

The angle formed by Walls F026 and F031 is the key to understanding this strange arrangement. Deeply founded (alt. min. 359.19m a.s.l.) with a fired brick on edge foundation course, this angle corresponds to the northern half of a pylon. Its symmetrical southern counterpart is attached to the section of the wall with mudbricks on edge, which was to serve as a support for a rectangular ferruginous sandstone threshold of similar dimensions (800 x 600mm). We are therefore in the presence of a double-chamber mudbrick chapel (3.88 x 7.02m at most, the external space is cut on all sides) with an entrance pylon in mudbrick faced with red bricks and access from east to west, identified thanks to a coated and painted threshold placed in the axis of the chapel. This axis is confirmed by mudbricks on edge appearing within Wall F018, exactly in line with this first threshold, opening onto the second west room of the chapel.

Season 2022 provided an opportunity to confirm the details needed to complete the description of the chapel pylon. The north half of the pylon was completely uncovered, allowing us to confirm that the construction method used was the same as that of the F026 wall of the redbrick temple. The builders reused the deep foundation of the chapel pylon to build the temple on stable ground. At the junction of F026 and F031, another section of Wall F007 was identified abutting the foundation of the chapel pylon by its masonry, which was laid in a herringbone pattern with thick mortar joints. We can also see from the *sebakhin* pit in Wall F007 that it was specifically targeted, probably because of its high concentration of redbrick. This enabled us to notice that the redbrick foundation on the edge of chapel Wall F031 (alt. 359.60m a.s.l.) was installed higher than the foundation of the pylon itself, and that the construction of the redbrick temple cut through half of the chapel wall thickness (Figure 5).

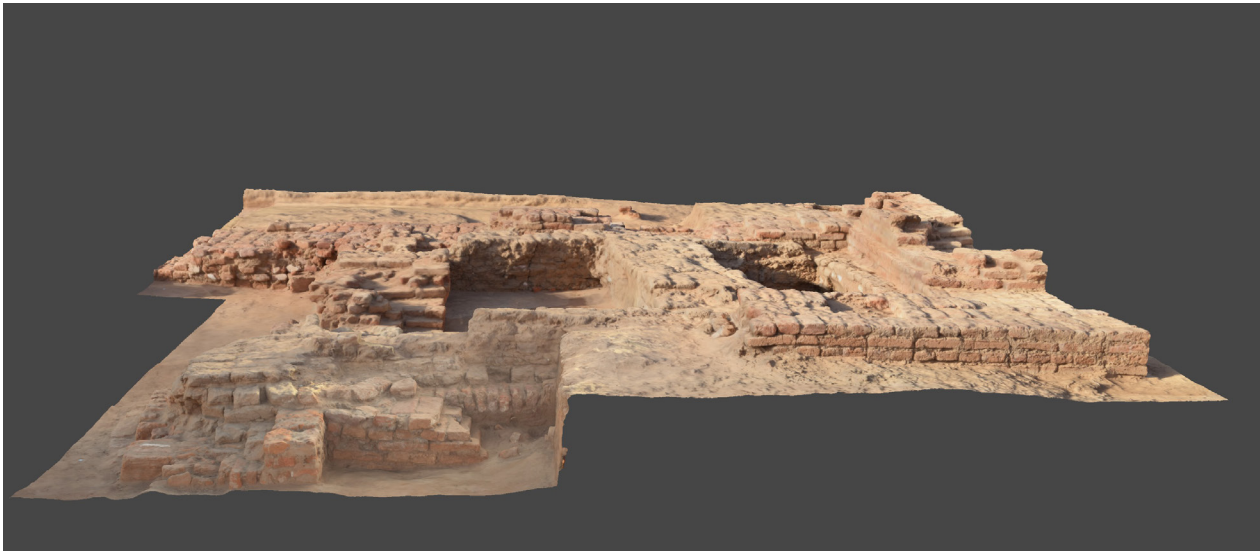


Figure 5. 3D model of the northern half of the chapel pylon and its reuse in the red brick temple (©SFDAS/musée du Louvre).

Sector G

The excavation of the central *kom* (Sector G) began during the first week, after the implementation of a 10x10m grid on the excavation area (two squares). This area was defined according to the east-west orientation of the complexes in Sectors A and E, with the hypothesis that a potential monumental building would follow the same axis. Two squares (330/530 and 330/540) were thus opened, and this hypothesis was confirmed very quickly (Figure 6).



Figure 6. Sector G general view from northeast (©SFDAS/musée du Louvre).

The monumental building

A 12m long access ramp with a landing was uncovered, leading to a front wall (F009), 31m long, varying between 0.80m and 2m wide. Two sondages were dug at the supposed angles of this wall, orientated northeast-southwest, in order to get the exact width of the main structure lying under the *kom*. The building measures at least 31m x 31m (Figure 7).

Similarly, a sondage was opened to the southeast in order to get the complete dimensions of the ramp, the partially preserved entrance of which is still marked by two slabs of ferruginous sandstone, indicating the presence of a threshold (F061, 800 x 400mm for the larger; 400 x 300mm for the other, Figure 8) and a reinforced angle (F065, a pedestal?). A polished fragment of an axe, a fragment of a lithic object and a metal object (iron point) were found at the angle of F065. This is most likely a foundation deposit. The south wall (F026) of the ramp was mostly destroyed by *sebakhin* pits down to its foundation. The whole formed a counterpart to pedestal F065 in the south, framing the access ramp.

The preserved part of the ramp consists of five courses of red bricks (350 x 180 x 80mm) laid in a header/stretcher pattern. According to the elevations, the slope of the ramp rises 860mm, compensating for an important height difference between the landing of the ramp and its eastern threshold (alt. min. 359.787m a.s.l., alt. max. 360.649m a.s.l.). This difference indicates a desire to elevate the building, probably to increase the majesty of its position at the centre of the site, especially when considering the building's decorative features. Wall F26 is made of mudbricks and its external facing is covered with painted plaster (Figure 9). A white sandstone statue of a lion (F011, Figure 10) was found nearby during the surface cleaning (US 30). Although not *in situ*, we can associate it with the ramp, and also with a fragment of a lion's paw in white sandstone, probably coming from another similar statue (destroyed or yet to be discovered), found during surface cleaning (US 30) in Square 330/540, north of Wall F023 of the ramp. The walls (F005 and F023) of the ramp landing are covered with painted plaster on their external facing and about the front Wall F009.

The height difference between the threshold of the ramp (and thus the external circulation level) and the main circulation level of the building is all the more remarkable if we take into account the first level of appearance of the plaster at the foot of the few elevation courses remaining in Wall F001; namely, the only internal space available based upon the current state of the excavation. With an altitude of 361.081m a.s.l. compared to 359.787m a.s.l. of the threshold, there is a 1.30m difference between the circulation level inside and outside the monumental structure. This makes the presence of a platform designed to raise the building and/or at least, a ground-floor with storerooms and blind rooms supporting the weight of a first floor, probable. However, one also has to consider the presence of the ramp landing, delimited by Walls F005, F008, F024 and F023. Even if the plaster on the inside of the walls framing the landing is not preserved, the external coating on Wall F005 is situated at an altitude of 360.05m a.s.l.. This makes a difference of only one metre with the circulation level inside the building. The absence of a first floor is thus also possible, even though the poor state of preservation of the remains in the ramp landing area prevents us from knowing the exact height of its walls.

A 1.5-metre-deep sondage was dug at the intersection of Walls F023 and F009 to establish their foundation level. Wall F09 has a combination of fired and mudbricks laid in a header/stretcher pattern. The utilisation of quarter-column bricks in the masonry indicates the presence of an earlier construction of importance (Figure 11). Its outer facing is also covered with painted plaster. As mentioned earlier, its width varies between 0.80m (south) and 2m (north). This difference may be explained by natural phenomena (more fragile ground to the north at the foundation level) or perhaps to repairs into the masonry (as could be attested by two circular red brick arrangements, appearing on the abandonment level of the wall, positioned at the angle of F020 and F009



Plan Général Secteur G	S.Poudroux © SFDAS, 2022
<i>Système de coordonnées planimétriques : WGS 84 / UTM 36N</i> <i>Système de coordonnées altimétriques : AMSL basé sur l'EGM 2008</i>	DAMBOYA 2022

Figure 7. General plan of Sector G (©SFDAS/musée du Louvre).



Figure 8. Threshold F61 of the monumental ramp (©SFDAS/musée du Louvre).



Figure 9. Ramp landing from south with its coating (©SFDAS/musée du Louvre).

and junction of F09 and F088). Next season, the excavation of this area will be extended to better answer this question.

Two units comprised of several walls were uncovered to the west of Wall F009, attesting to at least two construction phases in the chronology of the building. Indeed, although bonded to the façade Wall F009, Walls F015 and F021 are slightly offset from the latter and the access ramp. Wall F015 (0.95m long, 0.80m wide) was observed on five courses of red bricks alternating with a header/stretcher pattern. A wall (F018) continuing under the western limit of Square 330/540 is aligned with Wall F015. A filling of half broken red bricks laid within a very strong mortar of about 150mm thick links them together. The foundation of Wall F015 (1.10m) is made of a layer of red bricks laid on edge and rests on a sandy level that abuts Wall F015. These two structures were destroyed by *sebakhin* pits (Trenches F006 and F012, visible in the western section of Square 330/540).

A similar phenomenon can be observed in the second set: Wall F021 (1.15m long, 0.80m wide) is bonded to the front Wall F009. It is extended to the west by Wall F0014, with a blocking (F048) between the two composed of two rows of red bricks laid in headers. Another wall (F01), parallel to the front Wall F009, was found in the northwest corner of Square 330/540. Bonded with Wall F014, and most probably with Wall F018, it continues under the western cut of the sondage. Its foundation, which is about 0.90m wide and about 1.30m high, is built on ten courses of red bricks with alternating stretchers and headers. The bricks were laid on edge for the first course. Two courses have been preserved, marked by a 60mm projection covered with painted plaster on the west face of the wall, appearing at the same height as the second floor level (F002) located in the north-west corner of Square 330/540 (alt. 361.312m a.s.l.).



Figure 10. Lion statue F011 (©SFDAS/musée du Louvre).



Figure 11. Quarter column brick reused in Wall F009 (©SFDAS/musée du Louvre).



Figure 12. Water pipe F020 (©SFDAS/musée du Louvre).

Wall F001 was also cut down to its foundation by a *sebakhin* pit (Trench F013, visible in the north section of Square 330/540). An architectural element from a column ('abacus?') was abandoned in the fill of this trench. An enclosed space was delimited by the two sets of Walls F018, F015 and F014, F021, F048, the façade Wall F009 and Wall F001. It may have been a foundation for an entrance colonnade (see Maillot 2016, 80-81). The presence of a ferruginous sandstone column base (F007) to the southwest of Wall F05, unfortunately not *in situ*, and the sandstone column drum ('abacus') tends to confirm the hypothesis.

A circular structure (F025) was partially excavated in the north-west corner of Square 330/540. Preserved on two layers of red bricks, its function remains unclear for the moment. A construction level is associated with it (US 75), unfortunately cut by Trench F013. Associated with floor Level F002, a waterpipe (F020), preserved over a length of 2m and a width of 0.50m, seems to have been embedded in the façade Wall F009 (Figure 12). It probably continues beyond the wall, as shown by the presence of an alignment of bricks (F087) following the same orientation, to the east of façade Wall F009.

In conclusion, the architectural remains and associated artefacts (lion statue, column base and column drum) uncovered suggest the existence of a monumental complex under the central *kom*, comprising at least two construction phases (hence the numerous repairs in the masonry) and contemporary with Sectors A and E according to the ceramic (1st -2nd centuries AD). The angles of the 31m long façade and the returning walls bonded to them suggest a square plan, to be confirmed next season. If it is the case, a royal palace is present in the central part of Damboya, adding another royal site with a palatial complex present in the centre of the town. It would also confirm the hypothesis of palatial residences as relays of the central power (Maillot 2016, 290-291), when considering its close proximity to sites like Muweis, Abu Erteila and Wad ben Naga.

The medieval necropolis

During the 2020 and 2021 campaign, nine burials were excavated in Sector A and seven in Sector E. It was

therefore expected that the 2022 campaign would result in similar findings, but only three graves were discovered: one in Sector A (F071 in Floor Level US 010) and two in Sector E (F092 in Room E07 and F103 along Wall F013). Nevertheless, due to greater erosion at the site's margins, it is likely that graves dug in the surface layers have disappeared. This seems to be confirmed by the recurrent presence of scattered bones on the surface of both sectors collected between 2020 and 2022.

In Sector G, 13 burials were found in the two excavation squares. As in Sectors A and E, they date from the medieval period and confirm that the building was used as a necropolis. Two burials were excavated (F022 and F059) and six others were located and collected for further study (F046, F044, F045, F060, F084). Like most of the burials excavated so far in Sector A and E, those in Sector G contained primary deposits. The deceased were deposited in narrow pits and either orientated along a southeast-northwest axis or an east-west axis; the position of the body is opportunistic, on their back with their lower limbs extended and their hands crossed over the pubic area or on their side, with the legs slightly bent. Unusually the graves did not yield remains of shrouds or mats wrapping the body. The concentration of bodies indicates that the site was used as a necropolis for a relatively long period.

Small finds in Sector G

In Sector G, a sandstone statue of a seated lion was found in the vicinity of the access ramp. This discovery was followed by that of a lion statuette and other fragments of lion's paws, either made of stone or faience.

Apart from these exceptional pieces, Sector G also yielded pieces of a terracotta offering table, glazed tiles and painted plaster fragments, a bronze nail, a few iron pieces, lithic artefacts and an incomplete polished axe. Notwithstanding the architectural evidence, these objects – either associated with the building's construction level, its period of use or its demolition – and the recurrence of the leonine iconography, strongly support the idea of an official building.

Conclusion

In Sector A, the main goal of the excavation was fulfilled and the area is now closed. Several sondages to determine the chronology of the mound were completed and included an important layer of raw earth and destruction debris (US 10), which had functioned as an outdoor occupation space in the western complex enclosure. To better understand the transition between the former mudbrick chapel and the redbrick temple, a detailed excavation of the northern pylon of the chapel was conducted, which confirmed the reuse of the chapel as a foundation for the red brick temple. The ceramic typology and dating of the site places it mostly in the classic Meroitic period, and more precisely to the second half of the 1st century-beginning of the 2nd century AD.

In Sector G, the remains and associated artefacts (lion statue, column base and column drum) suggest the existence of a monumental complex under the central *kom*, comprising at least two construction phases, contemporary with Sectors A and E. The entire area has been the subject of georeferenced aerial and terrestrial photogrammetric coverage. This very promising complex was backfilled with fired bricks and will be the focus of the next season, aimed at confirming the royal status of the city of Damboya.

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