

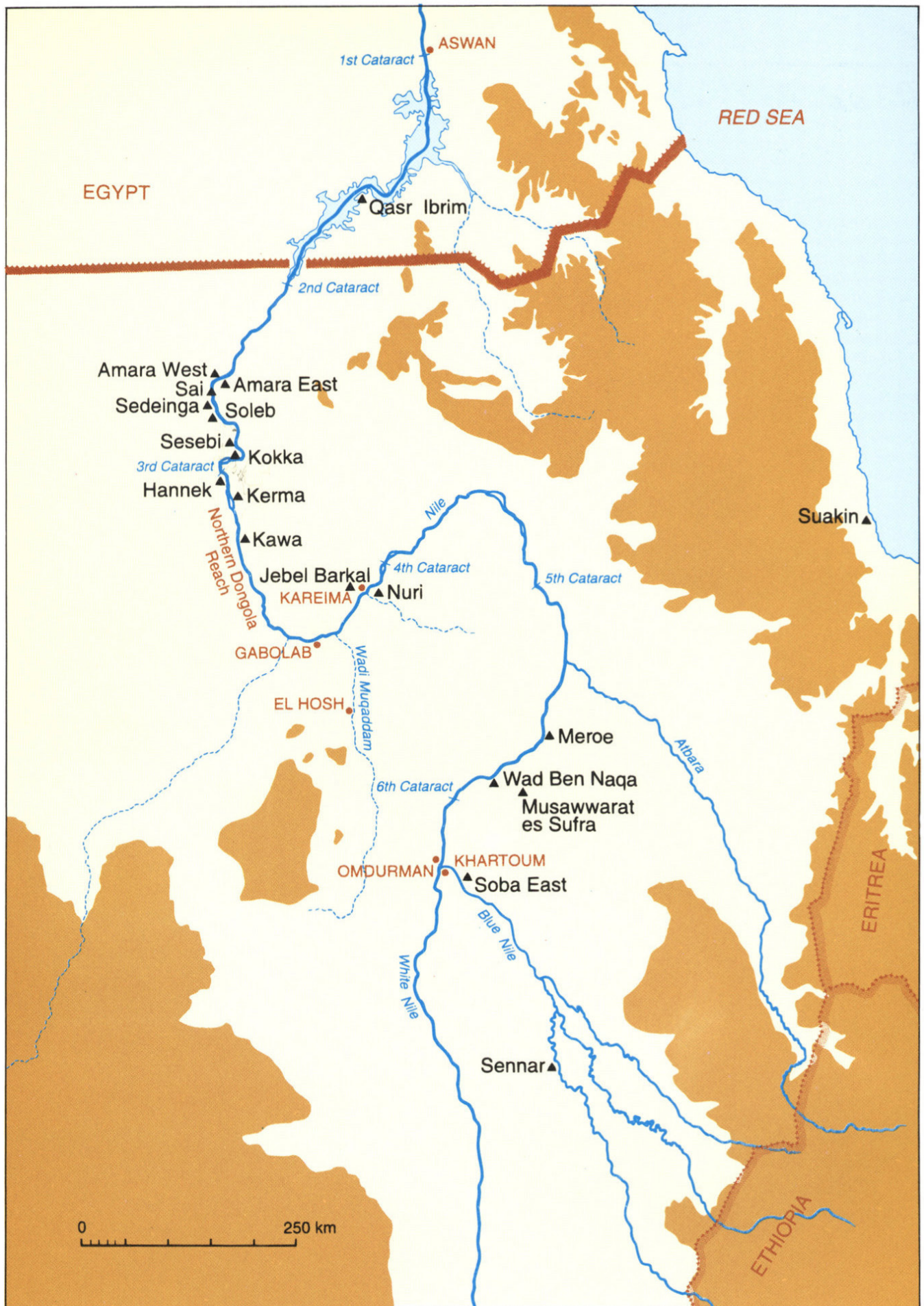
SUDAN & NUBIA

The Sudan Archaeological Research Society



Bulletin No. 1 1997





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Front Cover: Relief of the Kushite King Taharqo (690–664 BC) in the Temple of Amun, Jebel Barkal. (Peter Hayman)

Introduction

Vivian Davies

The appearance of *Sudan & Nubia* represents an exciting new development for our Society. Replacing the old *Newsletter*, and incorporating colour illustrations, it is designed to be a more substantial and attractive periodical, and of more lasting value. It will continue to publish reports of our own excavations and other scholarly activities but will also include papers dealing with relevant topics and material from other sources. *Sudan & Nubia* will serve, we hope, to promote interest both in the Society and in the field of Sudanese and Nubian archaeology in general, including that of Egyptian Nubia. It will appear, at least initially, once a year, in the Autumn.

This first issue contains an impressively wide range of subject-matter, covering a time-span of nearly five millennia. In the fieldwork section it will be seen that the Society's project in the Dongola Reach directed by Derek Welsby, comprising in this last season the rescue excavation of sites of the Kerma Period and related palaeohydrological research, continues to yield important new data, while a brand new project initiated by Michael Mallinson – a survey of multi-period sites in the Bayuda desert threatened by road-building – looks to be very promising. Pawel Wolf gives an account of the Humboldt University's fascinating and quite unexpected new discoveries at the great Meroitic temple-site of Musawwarat es Sufra. John Alexander reports on his investigation of an Islamic fortress on Sai Island, a military outpost (similar to Qasr Ibrim) which represents the southernmost point of penetration of the Ottoman Empire in Africa. There are two papers on recent research. Patricia Spencer has been reconstructing from old records the unpublished excavations at Amara West undertaken many years ago by the Egypt Exploration Society. She very usefully summarises the results of her work (recently published in full in an EES Memoir), which has shed valuable new light on this important pharaonic town-site. Finally, Michael Cowell provides an up-date on his programme of scientific examination of Nubian metalwork, a subject sorely neglected in the past. The project has now been extended to include Napatan foundation-deposits, source-material of special value for this kind of research in that the deposits are both well dated and richly endowed with metal objects.



Qalat Sai, the most southerly Ottoman Fortress in Africa

John Alexander

In 1826, on the western frontier of the United States of America an inspecting general wrote, "I would have the soldier point to his garden in proof of the good provision he has made during the short intervals from military service rather than boastfully talk of his proficiency as a farmer".

Quoted by Ramsay MacMullen (1967)

For some 200 years, from 1585 to 1798, the Ottoman Empire maintained and garrisoned a fortress on Sai Island in the Nile Valley 650 kms south of Aswan (fig. 1).¹ It was at the furthest point of penetration made by the Empire into Africa and its history shows yet another example of what happens when great states leave garrisons on forgotten frontiers whether they be Romans, Turks, Americans or French. At Qalat Sai, as at its companion fortress Qasr Ibrim, the garrison, isolated and neglected, became soldier/ farmers very like the Roman 'limitanei'. As MacMullen (1967) says 'the moral is clear: soldiers cannot be kept from farming, whatever the official pressure . . . they turn to it out of boredom, or out of need to vary their diet or simply because they were born farmers and cannot bear to see good earth go to waste'.

Qalat Sai was built near the 3rd Cataract of the Nile because of the confrontation there between two sultanates, the Ottoman and the Fung. The Fung state had its heartlands in the savannahs south of the Blue and White Nile confluence (c. 15.15°N) and its capital at Sennar (fig. 1). Its influence, by the 1530s, spread from Kordofan to the Red Sea Coast and by the 1560s had become a potential danger to Egypt. The Ottoman Empire, which had attempted for over twenty years to conquer the Christian empire of Abyssinia, extended the war in 1582-5 to an assault on the Fung sultanate. This was carefully planned with a vast new province (the Eyelat of Ibrim) as its support base in the Middle Nile Valley (fig. 2), but a series of contemporary events caused the Imperial Government suddenly to abort the plan. These included a major Ottoman victory over the Persians in the Caucasus, the potential advantages of which concentrated attention on the eastern frontier; a fierce, perhaps drawn battle with a Fung army at Hannek near the Third Cataract, and disturbances in Egypt which weakened the supply base. In place of an advance the army was halted, a defensive policy was decided upon and a formal frontier with the Fung was agreed at Hannek. This frontier was maintained for over two hundred years.

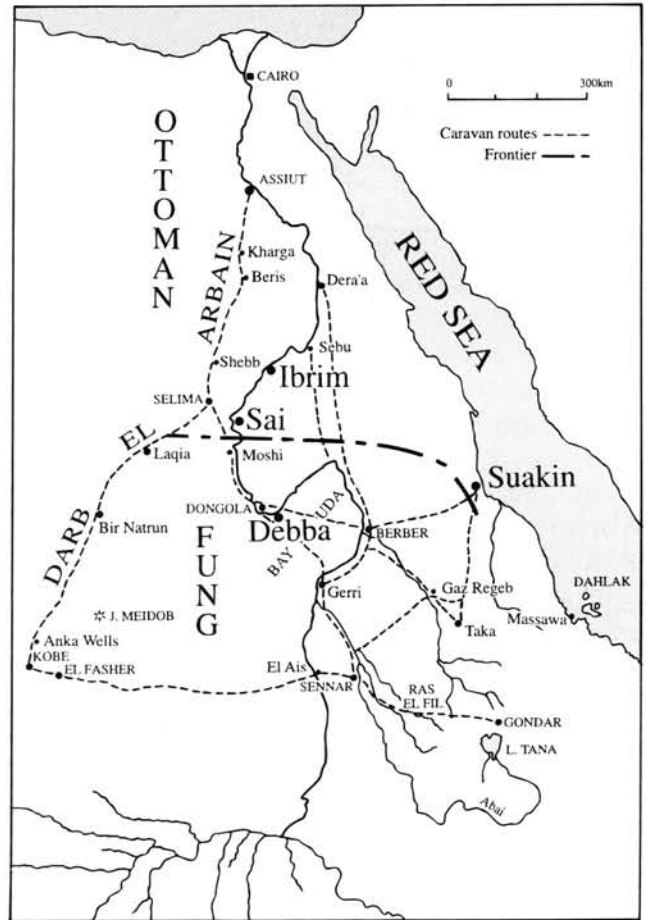


Figure 1. Map of the Fung and Ottoman Sultanates 1585-1826

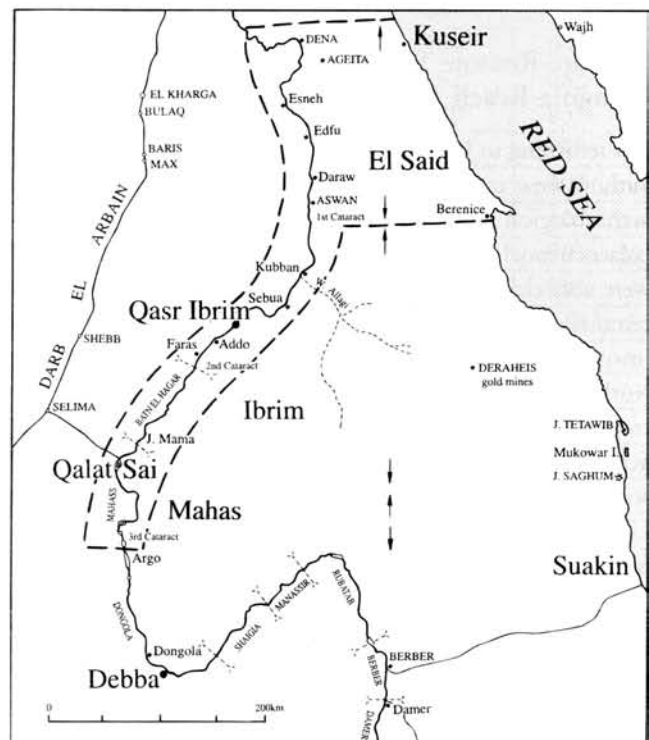


Figure 2. Map of the Eyelat of Ibrim 1584-5

¹ The figures were redrawn for publication by Claire Thorne of the Department of Egyptian Antiquities at the British Museum.



Plate 1. Aerial photograph of the fortress at Sai taken in the 1930s. The line of trees marks the other side of the island (courtesy - Institute of Archaeology, London)

A new fortress was needed, for the existing one, Qasr Ibrim 180 kms further north, was too far away to defend the frontier. During local wars in the previous 500 years many fortresses had been built in the Third-Second Cataract region and one of them on Sai Island was selected for the new forward base. It was well chosen; it was near the frontier, it controlled north-south and east-west caravan routes, and local agriculture, through taxes in kind, could provide many of the needs of the garrison.

A survey carried out at Sai in January 1997 and research at Qasr Ibrim (Alexander 1996) allow an outline of the history of the fortress to be offered. The site was a knoll of rock on the east side of the island forming a 10m cliff at the riverside. On it and the plateau behind it the

pharaohs of the New Kingdom (1580-1050 BC) had built a large town and over its ruins a later rectangular mudbrick fort had been erected (Vercoutter 1958). It was on the ruined walls of this fort that the new one was erected, the intention being to make it suitable for defence by the artillery and other firearms with which Ottoman armies were exceptionally well equipped. At least one of its four corner bastions (pl. 1), the south west one, was newly built as a solid mudbrick base for cannon, and another, the north-west one, was also much enlarged and reinforced (colour plate VI). The two eastern ones were built on rock and guarded the river front. A Barbican, loop-holed for muskets, was added to the main gate and a small postern gate gave access to the

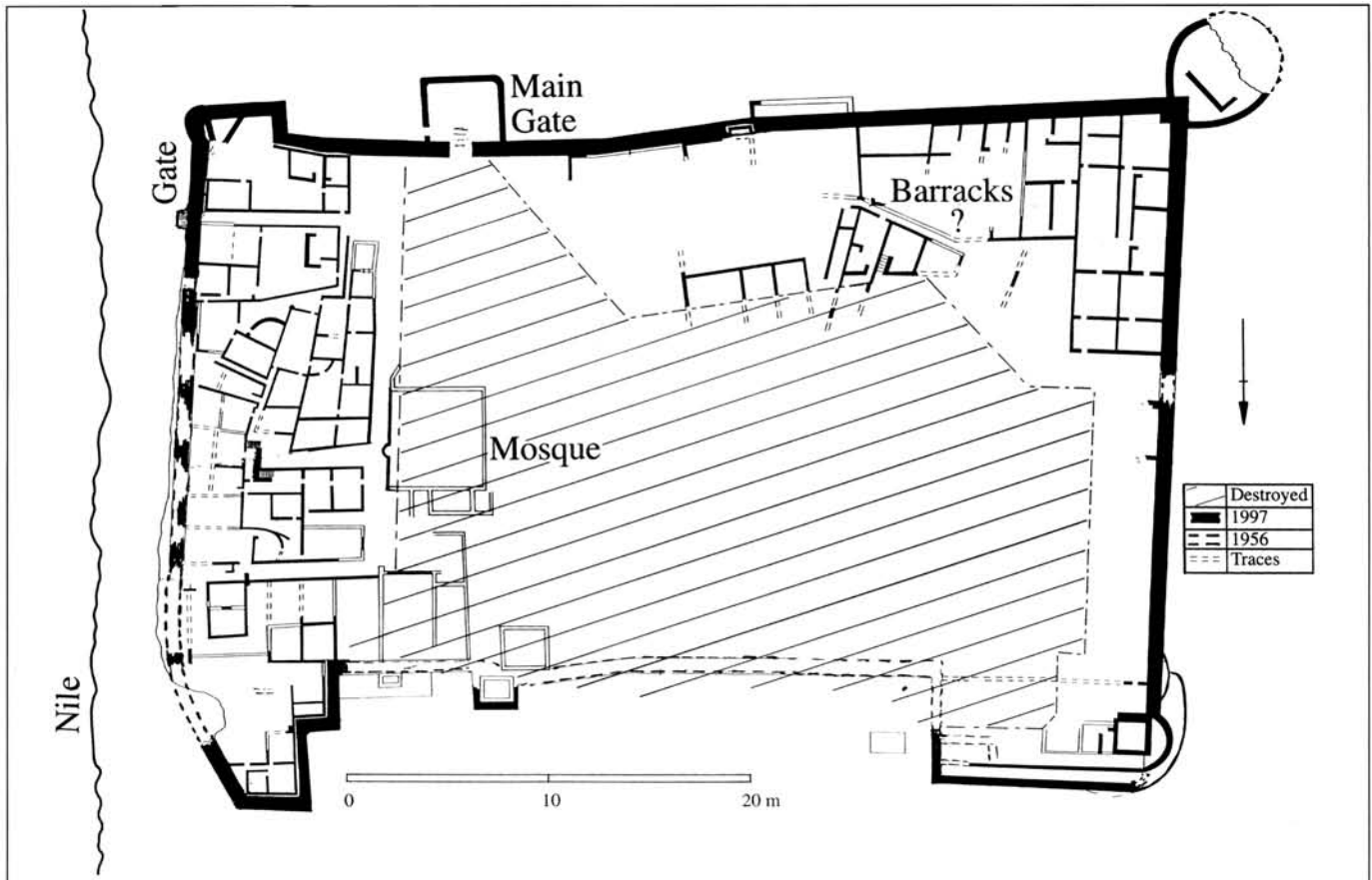


Figure 3. Plan of Qalat Sai.

water. The curtain walls were rebuilt of 30 x 10 x 10cm mudbricks.

For the next eighty years (1585-1660), while the Fung sultanate was at the height of its power, there must have been danger in the frontier region and the Cairo archives show Qalat Sai with the largest garrison (800 men) of which there is record (Shaw 1962). It was probably composed of detachments (*bülüks*) from the janissary units stationed in Lower Egypt as was the much smaller garrison at Qasr Ibrim (Hinds and Ménage 1992). A possible barrack-block was located in the 1997 survey but since, in this period, army regulations were being relaxed and janissaries allowed to marry and live outside barracks, family dwellings may have been built. At Qasr Ibrim documentary evidence shows that soon after 1600 houses in the fortress were being built, owned and inherited by soldiers' families.

When the Ottoman army arrived, the interior of the Sai fortress was an unevenly surfaced tell up to 3m high through which protruded the walls of earlier structures. The buildings of the new garrison were probably erected piecemeal for the fragmentary street plan suggests conflicting alignments were used in different areas. The only public building located has been the Friday Mosque not far from the main gate (colour plate VII) which at 12 x 12m should have been big enough for the whole garrison and would have been built soon after 1585 (pl. 1). There was probably, as at Qasr Ibrim, a headquarters building and armoury, but as

17th century visitors noted (Celebi 1938), and the excavations have demonstrated, there was no market, no artisan shops, no caravanserai and no baths; Qalat Sai was probably similar. Parallel to and east of the mosque (fig. 3) was a well-defined street from which four lanes led down to the ramparts at the cliff edge, and in the case of the most southerly, to the water-postern. In spite of much destruction nine long-used dwellings of conventional Islamic type could be recognised. As at Qasr Ibrim and Suakin, the two other Ottoman foundations which have been studied, these consisted of large high walled enclosures with one main entrance. Inside, by the entrance, were the male-entertaining rooms (*divan*), and across an open courtyard the domestic complex (*harim*). Several of the larger houses had two or three storey towers and mudbrick stairways leading to roof terraces. Houses abutting the eastern ramparts had large windows through them looking out across the river some of which, from Linant de Bellefond's 1823 drawing (pl. 2), had screened wooden balconies (*rushans*). The living-rooms were well plastered, furnished with wall niches, some of them for lamps, and often whitewashed. In general the houses seem better paralleled at Suakin than Qasr Ibrim (Greenlaw 1994). Elsewhere in the fortress fragments of houses survive but only one (by the south west Bastion) was complete.

A general reduction in tension on the frontier probably took place after AD 1660. The Shagia confederation south of Dongola (fig. 2), which controlled 150 kms of the river valley,

successfully revolted against the Fung and retained, under their four meks, virtual independence until 1820. This made any Fung thrust northwards much more hazardous and there is no evidence that any was ever planned. Fung ambitions were now confined to the savannahs resulting in wars with Abyssinia and Darfur. Their main trade and pilgrim link was eastwards to Suakin and Massowa but the Sultanate declined in influence and power through the 18th Century.

Army mutinies in Egypt, the increasing power of Mamluk households (slave-mercenaries from the Caucasus and Kurdistan) and the Hawwara confederation in the Aswan region completed the isolation of the frontier garrisons and the genealogies of soldiers' families at Qasr Ibrim (Hinds and Ménage 1992) show that for at least five generations soldiers were recruited locally and enjoyed profound peace. Like the Roman 'limitanei' already mentioned they became soldier/farmers. Evlya Celebi's visit in 1671 showed that reinforcements and supplies still reached Qalat Sai (Celebi 1938) but by 1702 it was no longer listed among the imperial fortresses, and recruitment, as at Qasr Ibrim, was probably increasingly from among the sons of established soldier-families. Their farmlands, tilled by slaves (a slave manumission of 1632 from Sai is the oldest legal document known from the Sudan) and irrigated by *sagias* (water wheels) would, again as at Qasr Ibrim, have made them a local elite. The semi-independence of the Meks of Dar Mahas (Kokka) described by Evlya Celebi has been independently confirmed by Osman (1978). Whether Mek Kor Hussein temporarily captured Qalat Sai, as a late 17th Century Turkish map suggests, must await further confirmation (I am indebted to Mr John Udal for this information); there is little doubt, however, that Dar Mahas was acting as a buffer state between the Fung and Ottoman sultanates. Further north, between the First and Second

Cataracts, the semi-independent Kachefs of El Dirr were now sometimes described as Meks of Nubia.

The last phase in the history of Qalat Sai began when Napoleon conquered Egypt as far south as Aswan in 1798-9. Garrison pay for Sai and Ibrim must have stopped in 1798 and all connection with the Ottoman government ceased. The Sanjak of Ibrim was the only surviving part of the province of Egypt which remained independent and from it a jihad against the French was mounted from 1798 until 1803. Whether any of the Sai garrison joined the jihad is as yet unknown but the ghazis (mojhadin) known to have come from Arabia to fight the infidel probably came through Suakin, and on their way north some from the garrisons may have joined. Much more disturbing at Sai must have been the arrival in 1812 of a force of well-armed rebel Mamluks escaping from Mohammed Ali Pasha's Egypt. They seem to have made no attempt to capture Qalat Sai and passed south to set up an independent state in Dongola where they maintained themselves until 1820.

In 1820 Mohammed Ali Pasha's army marched south to the conquest of the Fung Sultanate and there is no evidence that any of the Qalat Sai garrison (which had not been paid for 25 years) joined it. According to local oral traditions (recorded in 1997) the fortress was lived in by farming families through the 19th century until the Mahdist advance of 1889. Several land owning local families on Sai Island still claim 'Turkish' origins but no genealogies linking them to the garrison have yet been recorded.

Today the fertility of the island is being developed, the wooden *sagias* found everywhere until the 1950s have been displaced by diesel-driven pumps. The island, however, at present reached only by boat (usually sailing boat), retains a character of its own and the French archaeological



Plate 2. View of Qalat Sai in 1822 (Drawing by Linant de Bellefonds 1822, courtesy of the Bankes Collection, The National Trust)

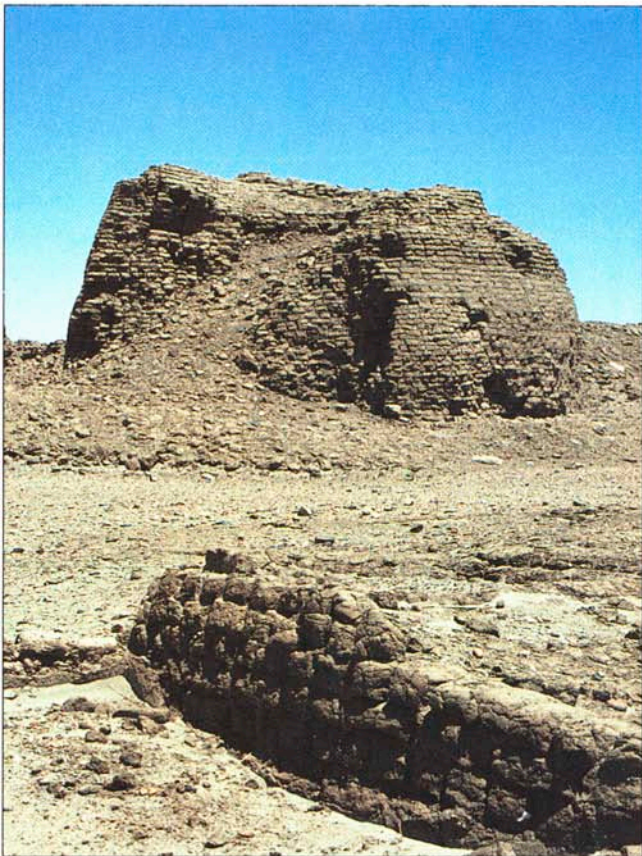


expedition working there is uncovering evidence of its occupation from Palaeolithic times onwards. My work there was at the invitation of the Director of the French Expedition, Professor F Geus, and I offer my thanks for his hospitality and for being allowed to study a fortress, which I first visited in 1949, of such outstanding importance.

The Sai Project is funded by the French Ministry for Foreign Affairs and is sponsored by Mobil and Bittar in Khartoum.

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*Plate VI. Sai. North-west bastion, exterior showing repairs.
(Derek Welsby) (see p. 17)*

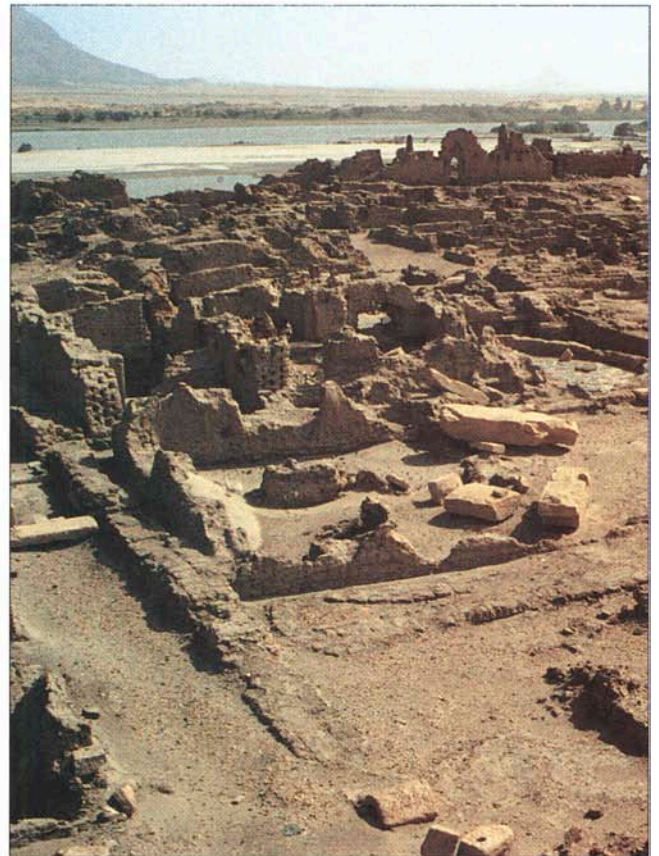


Plate VII. Sai. General view with Ottoman buildings, including the mosque, in the background. (Derek Welsby) (see p. 18)