SUDAN & NUBIA

The Sudan Archaeological Research Society

Bulletin No. 2 *1998*


ASWAN
1st Cataract
RED SEA
EGYPT
Karanog
Aniba
Qasr Ibrim
Ballana
Faras
Qustul
Buhen
2nd Cataract
Amara West
Firka
Soleb
Sesebi
3rd Cataract
Dabaki
Northern Dongola Reach
Kawa
ABU HAMED
Nile
Kiliseikal
Kurgus
Suakin
Jebel Barkal
4th Cataract
KAREIMA
5th Cataract
Old Dongola
Bakheit
Soniyat
GABOLAB
Istabel
Jebel Nakharu
Wadi Howar
Wadi Muqaddam
Meroe
el Kadada
Atbara
6th Cataract
Naqa
Jebel Umm Marrahi
Geili
OMDURMAN
KHARTOUM
Soba East
Blue Nile
White Nile
ERITREA
Sennar
ETHIOPIA
0
250 km

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Contents

Front Cover: Ceramic statue of the goddess Beset from Kawa.

Introduction

Vivian Davies

Members will note that this second issue of *Sudan & Nubia* is already considerably larger than the first, a clear signal, I am pleased to say, both of our Society's commitment to fieldwork and of the growing interest in Middle Nile archaeology in general. With the four-year programme of survey in the Northern Dongola Reach completed, we began last season a significant new project at Kawa (see Derek Welsby below), a major Pharaonic and Kushite cult-centre and one of the most important archaeological sites in the Sudanese Nile Valley, now threatened by modern development. At the same time our interest in the hydrological research on the Nile palaeochannels in the Dongola Reach continues (Mark Macklin and Jamie Woodward), and we have also supported archaeological survey both in the Bayuda desert in advance of the building of a new road (Michael Mallinson, Laurence Smith and Dorian Fuller) and at the site of Kurgus, the point where the Egyptians appear to have marked the southern boundary of their empire in the New Kingdom (Vivian Davies and Isabella Welsby Sjöström).

Among our guest contributors, two of our Sudanese colleagues report on valuable rescue projects, one on a site affected by the building of the Shendi-Atbara road (Abdel Rahman Ali Mohamed), the other in the area of the Fourth Cataract, where a new dam is being planned (Mahmoud el-Tayeb). Also under threat is the site of Soniyat in the Debba Bend, now very plausibly identified by a Polish expedition as the 'Tergedum' mentioned in Book II of Pliny's *Natural History* (Bogdan Zurawski). Rescue is also very much the theme of the Egypt Exploration Society's latest excavations at Qasr Ibrim, the last remaining site in Egyptian Nubia, where an unexpected rise in the level of Lake Nasser/Lake Nubia is damaging strata previously thought to be safe, necessitating urgent work on those areas (Pamela Rose and David Edwards). Fortunately there is no such threat to the Wadi Howar, a long dried-up tributary of the Nile, evocatively known as 'the Yellow Nile', where a German research project is producing fascinating new data on changes in environment and shifts in settlement patterns (Birgit Keding). A different kind of research, on the records of an important early traveller, is represented in our final paper (John Ruffle). Lord Prudhoe, its main subject, will be familiar to many of our readers for his association with the two great lion sculptures from Gebel Barkal, which now grace the Egyptian Sculpture Gallery of the British Museum.

Pliny's 'Tergedum' discovered

Bogdan Zurawski

In February 1997, a short reconnaissance survey conducted in the Abkur region brought to light the remains of a sandstone *temenos* with a sandstone temple within. The locality nearest to the ruins is called Soniyat (meaning in the local dialect 'plenty of sandstones'). The 1997 reconnaissance was a prelude to the Polish-Sudanese *Southern Dongola Reach Survey*, organised jointly by the Research Centre for Mediterranean Archaeology of the Polish Academy of Sciences, National Corporation for Antiquities and Museums of the Sudan, Centre for Mediterranean Archaeology of the Warsaw University, Poznan Archaeological Museum and the Faculty of Mediterranean Archaeology of the Jagiellonian University in Cracow.

The ruin was first visited by the author in 1991 (accompanied by Dr Jacke Phillips and Mr Wojtek Chmiel). At the time of its discovery the temple was barely visible on the surface. The *temenos* was marked only by two foundation blocks of the gateway.

The site (N 18° 01.96', E 31° 05.99) is situated 900m from the river (measured at the highest flood water level). Before 1991 the temple was periodically concealed under the wandering dunes which abound in the so-called Debba Bend and that is probably why it escaped the attention of all the 'riverbound' travellers but one. Lord Prudhoe was in Soniyat on 11th February 1829. In half an hour after leaving Abkur he '.. passed the foundations of a temple without inscriptions, and afterwards reached Adsut (?) having had a good road and variety of ground' (Prudhoe 1829, 47).[1]

A 2.1km long stretch of sand dunes separates the Soniyat *temenos* from the modern village of Abkur (Abkur is both a name of the village and name of a *mantiqa* [region/district]). The Istabel fortress (marked on the Map Sheet 45–E) (Plate 1), which sits on the northern periphery of Abkur, is 2.4km away from the ruins. The Istabel fortress hill (Colour Plate XLV) is locally called Jebel El Gren, after a local *sheikh*, Mohammed Gren, who lived at the foot of the hill in the 18th century (data obtained from local informants who could not agree on some important dates from Abkur's modern history).

Today's buildings in Soniyat (some *rukubas* [temporary timber structures], a couple of mud dwellings and not even one of sandstone) have virtually nothing in common with its proud name. The etymology of this place-name is much

[1] Access to Prudhoe's *Journal* (typescript) was kindly granted by Dr J. Malek of the Griffith Institute in October/November 1997.

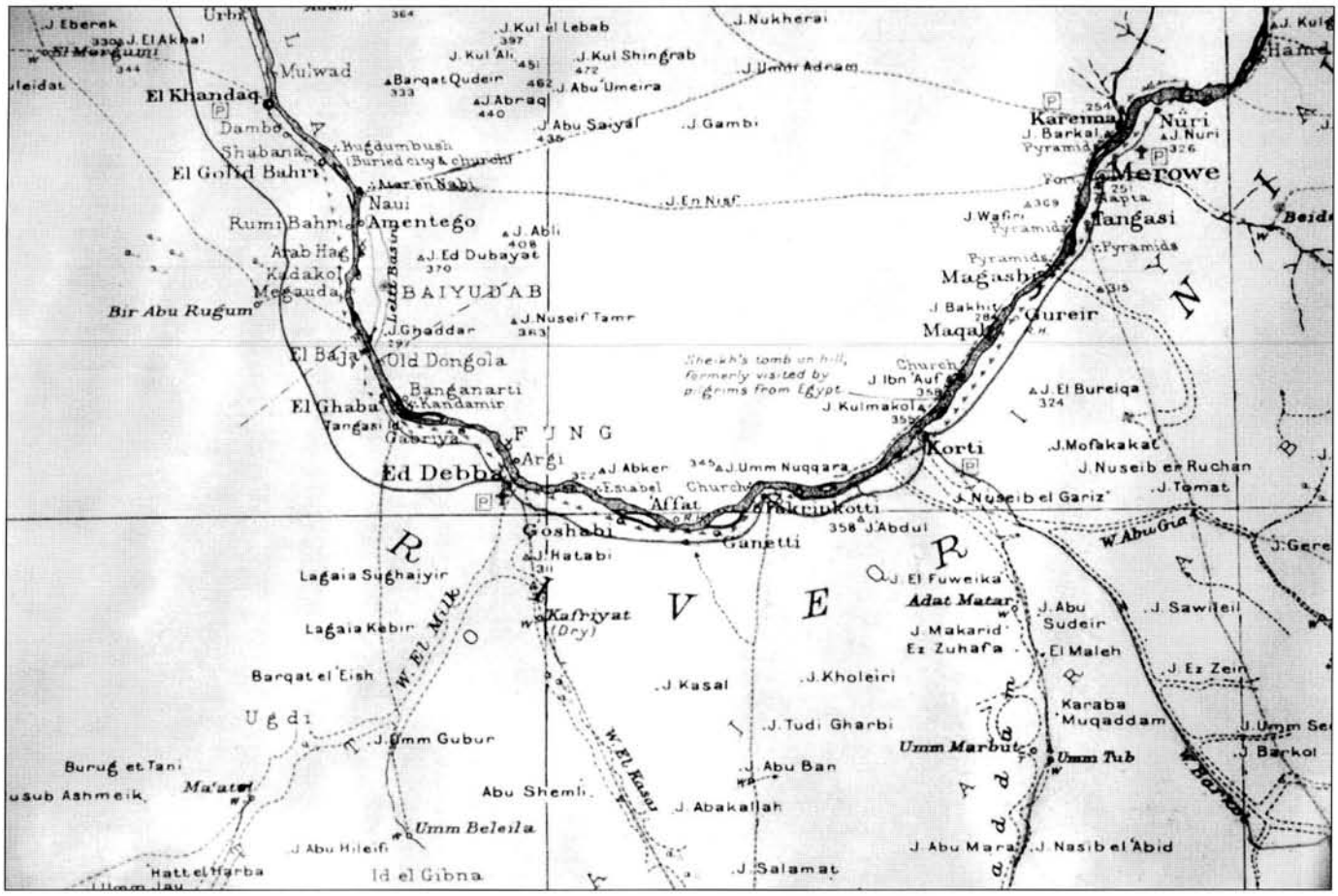

Plate 1. Map of "Debba Bend" of the Nile.

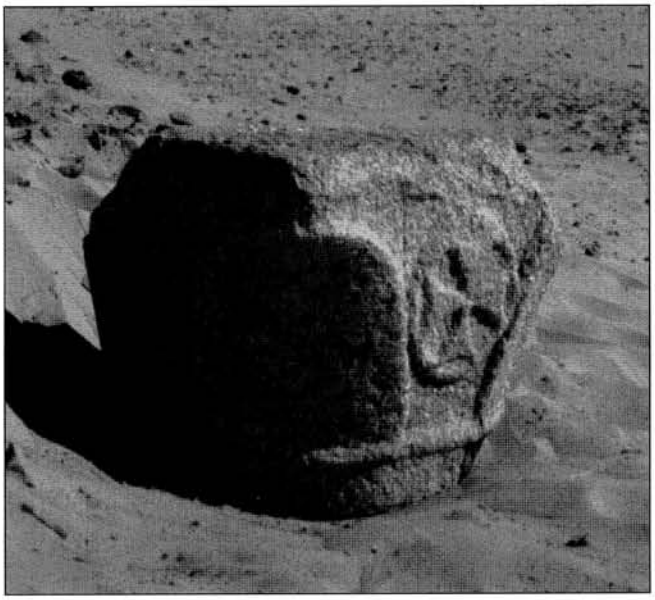

Plate 2. Istabel. Granite capital lying by the fortress.

elucidated when one moves 400m to the south, to the place where the sandstone *temenos* begins.

The first and most elevated structures encountered are two huge monoliths, respectively 2.77 x 1.1m and 3.54 x 1.1m, set parallel to each other. The sondage dug in February 1998 revealed that those two blocks are the foundation stones of a gate leading into the temple enclosure. Small fragments of the *temenos* wall contiguous to the gate were found. Two vertical notches in the corner sections of the larger (eastern) monolith were made to make a better bond with smaller blocks which were robbed out (the monoliths survived *in situ* since they were simply too heavy to be moved).

The gate's main axis points to the modern Abkur village and to the historic catchment area located on the highly cultivated Girra Island and western bank (Debba El Fugara). One should expect a contemporaneous townsite or a settlement somewhere near the religious complex. However, no pre-Christian remains have been found on the Istabel fortress hill and in its nearest vicinity. The granite capital (Plate 2) and granite column lying on the southern (riverward) slope of the fortress hill are the earliest architectural remains in Abkur and its surroundings.

Two kilometres to the west of Istabel along the road from Abkur to Argi and further north there is a huge post-Meroitic tumulus field which is one of the largest post-Meroitic cemeteries between the Third and Fourth cataracts.

Istabel fortress constitutes an important link in the chain of right-bank Christian strongholds of the Nile linking the majestic stronghold at Bakhit (Helleila) *via* Degga, Duffar, Abkur, Selib(?), Sinada(?), with Old Dongola. No proof for pre-Christian occupation in these citadels has been found so far. However, at least some of them were settled at the very onset of the Christian period in Nubia (e.g. Bakhit, Old Dongola). The affinity of general layouts and construction features (e.g. gates) between Bakhit (Colour Plate XLVII) and the Byzantine stronghold at Pelusium (Tall al-Farama) is striking (El-Maksoud *et al.* 1994, 95-103). The Southern Dongola Reach strongholds were able to shelter the local populations (living mostly on the left bank) only from attacks by nomads. Having the riverside virtually unprotected (e.g. at Bakhit) they were apparently not intended to endure a regular siege from an enemy with boats.

The Soniyat temple lies 95m to the south of the *temenos* gate. It sits on a table-plain alluvial terrace covered by wandering sand-dunes. Abandoned fields, once irrigated by a straight-lined channel system which is seen on a Sudan Survey Department Air Photo (AK2, O37 done in 1994, scale 1:30 000), lie 900m to the east. Nothing can be said at the moment on the date of the abandonment of these fields. They are not contiguous with the Affad Basin where an agricultural project was undertaken during the *Mahdiya* (Edwards 1989, 95).

Shortly before 1990 a small agricultural project was started in the immediate vicinity of the Soniyat temple. A local investor dug the *matara* (well-hole) and irrigated a huge patch of land south of the temple, removing all the stones from it. This ill-fated endeavour had a disastrous effect on the temple and its surroundings. The southern part of the ruins was soaked with water. The full scale of the damage cannot be estimated until the southern part of the temple structure, its main entrance and the foreground are excavated. The temple was saved from more serious damage thanks to the failure of the project. The level of water in the *matara* dropped significantly, the sand accumulated in the fields and the undertaking collapsed soon after 1991.

Today the temple stands at a sharp angle to the course of the Nile, whose right bank makes a curve southwards exactly at the position of Soniyat (the river flows around the cultivated Tambanarti island). There are firm grounds to believe that originally the temple's main axis was at 90° to the course of the Nile, which ran significantly closer. The last episode in the southward shift of the Nile's riverbed, caused by southward drift of the dunes, happened in the quite recent past. As late as the second half of the 17th century the river bank opposite Soniyat ran in a straight line to the north-west, cutting off what is now Abkur village from Istabel fortress hill. In 1673 Abkur was visited by Evliyi Muhammad Dervish Celebi (despite his poor reputation as the Turkish Baron von Münchhausen, Celebi gave a surprisingly accurate picture of Old Dongola, Tangasi and Abkur, Diffar, Argi etc). When describing Abkur, Celebi mentioned that the fortress sits on the riverbank (Prokosch 1994, 161). That is a situation rather inconsistent with the present topographical realities (today Istabel fortress is situated a mile from the river). However, Celebi's credibility was

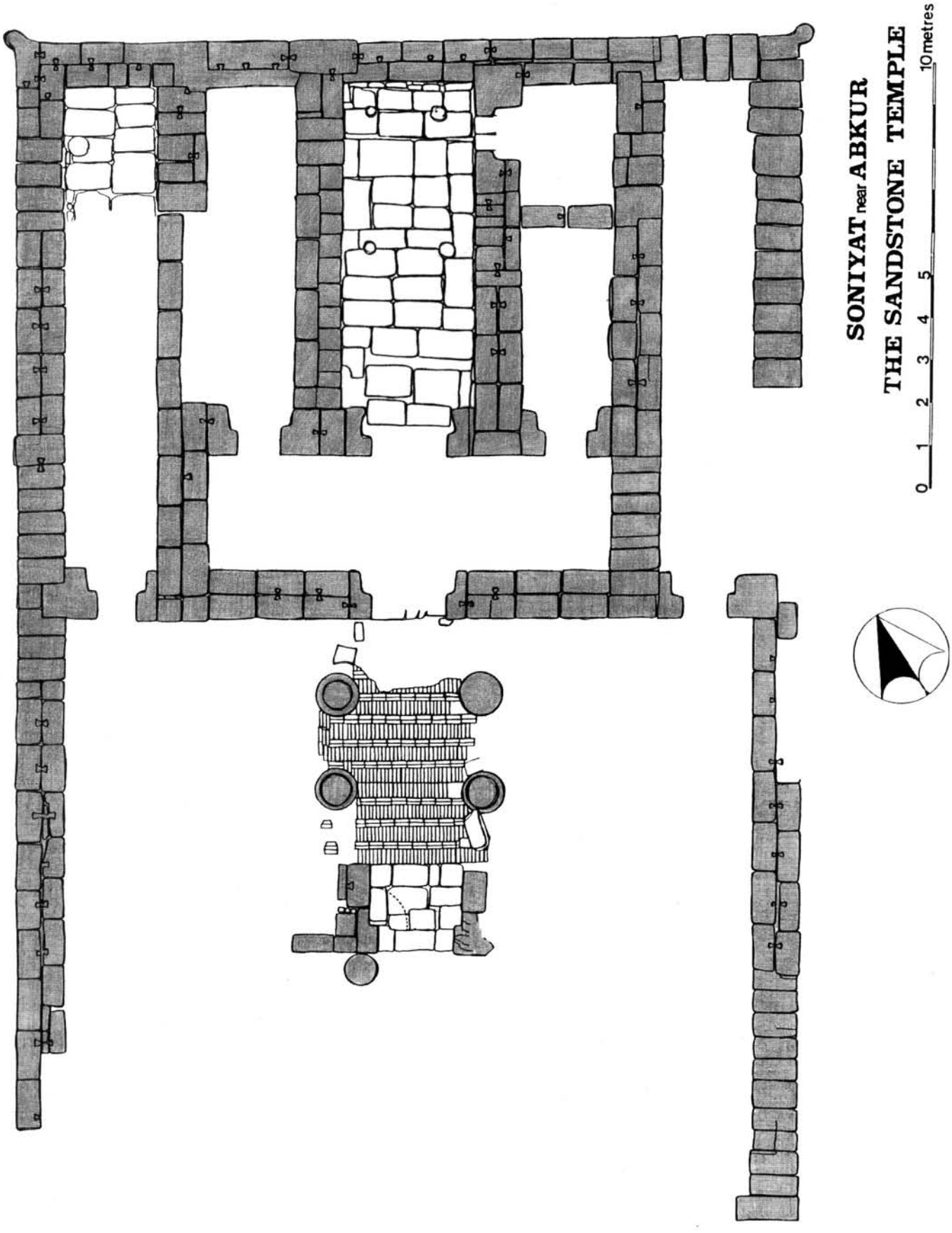

Figure 1. Plan of the Soniyat temple (after the 1998 Season).

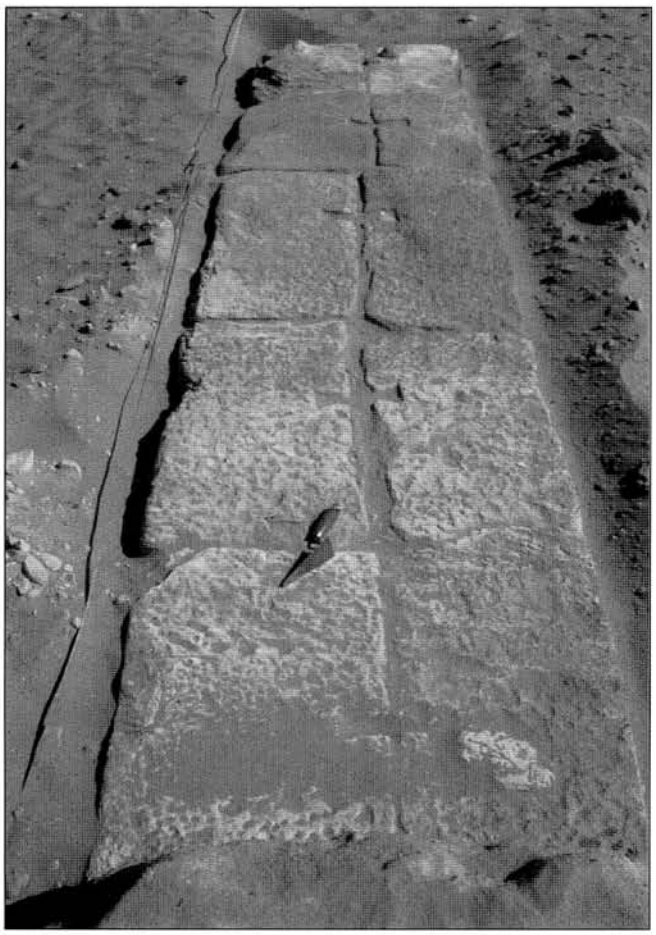

Plate 3. Soniyat temple, fragment of the Western (outer) wall.

corroborated by the inhabitants of Abkur, who say, in somewhat epic form, that 200 years ago the crocodiles basked in the sun at the foot of the fortress's hill. In more recent times the existence of the Nile's palaeochannel was mentioned by Lord Prudhoe: 'The old town of Abcor is seated on a hill and walled, looking like an English castle. Tradition says the Nile once ran at its foot, and the steep but not deep valley of sand in that direction may have given rise to the report. The river is now a mile distant' (Prudhoe 1829, 46–7). There is also a note in Margaret Shinnie's edition of Linant de Bellefonds' Journal pointing to the local oral tradition which confirms the southward shift of the Nile's riverbed in the mantiqa of Abkur (Shinnie 1958, 36, fn. 3).

The temple and the *temenos* in Soniyat were extensively quarried for dressed, easy to use, stones during the past three thousand years. This devastating anthropogenic factor was much helped by the wind erosion which undercut the walls at ground level, left deep hollows in the stone and stripped the walls of any traces of plaster. Soniyat blocks were apparently used during construction of the Istabel fortress and the church within. Other blocks were utilised locally as *saqia* sockets, for roofing of burial pits etc. However, the most disastrous event for the temple was the discontinuation of the technique of building brick arches, arched openings being then replaced by stone lintels. Despite this dilapidation there is still plenty of worked sandstone in the sand-covered alluvium around the temple.

Among the surface potsherds there is a conspicuous amount of Early Christian wares, some with scratched monograms (a superb Late Christian jar [SDRS 38/98] decorated with diamond-shaped design was found by a Soniyat inhabitant on a Christian settlement-site just outside the temple *temenos*). In the sub-surface layers Kushite wares greatly predominate.

The temple, as revealed by the surface cleaning and sondages dug in 1997–98, measures 18.35 x 27.9m (Colour Plate XLVI; Fig. 1). The better preserved northern part is built on a regular, symmetrical plan of a tripartite *naos* with a transversal *pronaos,* flanked on both sides by a long corridor-like chamber. *Naos, pronaos* and the side-chambers were provided with jambed entrances. The *cella* was connected with a western subsidiary chamber (being a part of the eastern nave of the *naos*). The entrance to this subsidiary space was also provided with stone jambs.

The floor in the side-chambers, *naos* and *pronaos* was paved with big sandstone slabs covered with lime-plaster which is nowadays almost totally worn away. In the stone pavement of the *cella* there are four holes of irregular shape and of average depth of 30cm. These cavities may have been cut in order to accommodate the four legs of an altar or stand but the holes are too close to the walls. (They would hardly allow a man to squeeze his way between the would-be altar or stand and the walls). They perhaps served as, for example, a canopy's post-sockets, apertures to accommodate the lamps or censer-stands etc.

The doorway of the passage-way from the *pronaos* to the *cella* is twice as wide as the doorway of the entrances to the nave of the naos. The doorway of the passage-way from the *pronaos* to the hypostyle (Colour Plate XLVIII) is slightly wider than that to the *cella.* It was near the southern jamb of this passage that a *cache* was found in 1997 (originally, before the wall was reduced to its present height, it was a

Plate 4. Soniyat temple. A selection of the objects found in the cache. *(Photo K. Kotlewski).*

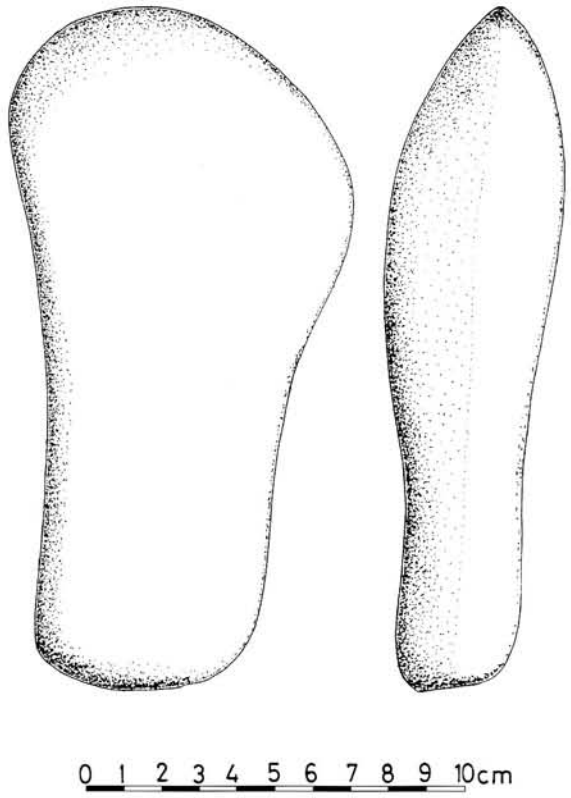

Figure 2. Quarzite celt (SDRS 35/98) found among the oddly-shaped stones in the temple's cache.

niche in the northern wall of the hypostyle). The bottom of the hole in which the *cache* lay was worked with a toothed chisel.

In the *cache,* and in the space around it, 140 bizarre-shaped stones have been found (Plate 4). Among other objects there were two Osiris figurines, one complete (SDRS 36/98) and one half preserved (SDRS 37/98) (Plate 5), and a stone (quartzite) celt (SDRS 35/98) (Fig. 2). The Osiris figures were cast from copper-alloy (the copper-alloy objects from Soniyat recently underwent technical analyses in the Laboratory of the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology, Polish Academy of Sciences. It is hoped that the results will be published in the next issue of *Sudan & Nubia).*

Why were the oddly-shaped stones gathered in the desert and brought to the temple? There is no satisfactory answer to this question at the moment. The custom of bringing stones (as *vota*?) to the temple did not die out with the Kushite period. In 1994, in the north-western part of the Mosaic Church on Kom E near Old Dongola, a mud brick compartment set against the wall was found. It was filled to the rounded edge with desert pebbles. On top of the pebbles a lamp was placed which left a conspicuous amount of soot on the wall. The painted plaster fragments found in the vicinity suggest that there was a mural on the wall above the pebble-compartment. It was venerated in

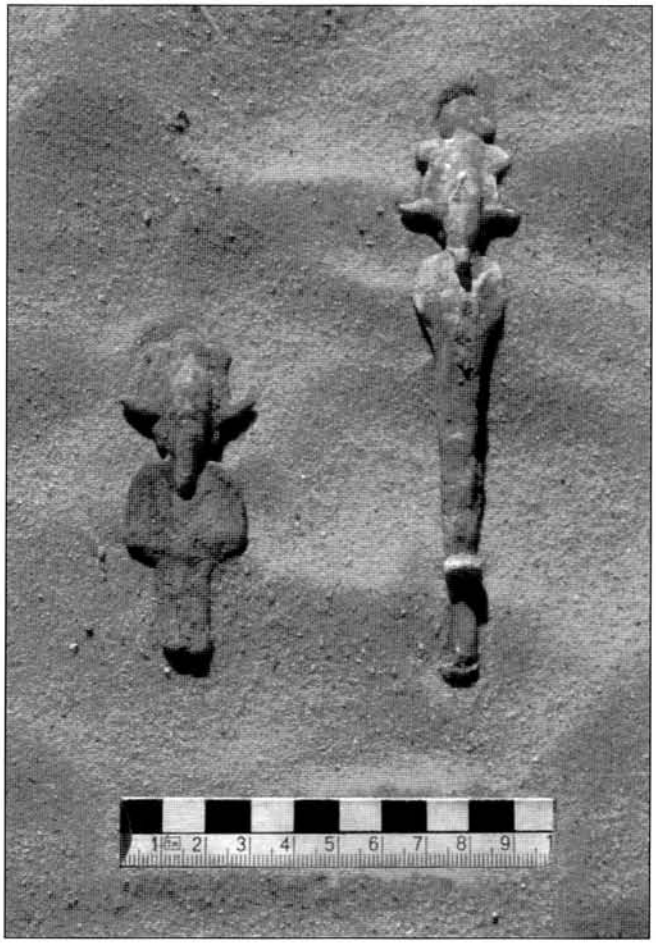

Plate 5. Two copper-alloy Osiris figurines (SDRS 36/98 and SDRS 37/98) from the temple cache. *(Photo K. Kotlewski).*

dual form, by the burning of the lamp and by the oblation of pebbles which were afterwards deposited in the special compartment. Is there a link between both customs, separated by 1000 years in time and only 50 kilometres in space? (cf. my paper read at the Lille Conference where I stressed the connection between the Nubian Christian custom and the very peculiar habit of placing pebbles on Muslim graves in Nubia and the Sudan (Zurawski 1997, 186).

The oddly-shaped stones (and two prehistoric implements) found in the Soniyat *cache* bring to mind the 'rain stones' used in rain- magic by the Upper Nilotes. Were similar stones used by the Kushites to similar effect? The importance of rain for the Middle Nile economy in the Kushite period seems to have been paramount. The rains visited this region on a yearly basis even 150 years ago. Joseph Russeger gave a most valuable note on this subject (Russeger 1846–1849, 51–52). Rain was also a phenomenon much prayed for in the Dongola Reach in the Middle Ages. John the Deacon, the biographer of the Coptic Patriarch Michael I, wrote about AD 770 on Cyriacus, the Bishop of Dongola : '(...) when he was dead, the people of his country visited his tomb, and prayed him with many tears to beseech God to send down rain upon them (...)'(Vantini 1975, 42).

There is also the conspicuous resemblance of the Soniyat would-be rain-stones to the oddly-shaped stones found in the grave of Queen Khensa, wife of Piye (el-Kurru, Tomb Ku.4), published by T. Kendall (1984, 26–31, fig. 25 a–f). A similar deposit was found by Reisner in a cache associated with B. 700 at Gebel Barkal (this information was kindly provided by Dr T. Kendall).

The part of the temple south of the wall with the *cache* is less visible on the surface since it is buried deeper in sand. The terrain descends riverwards, as did the temple flooring. The anthropogenic factor was not the only one which contributed to the lamentable state of repair of this part of the temple. During the highest floods the river could reach the area in front of the temple and its southern (entrance) section.

The roofing in the southern part of the temple was supported mostly on columns, of which five have been found. The columns were raised on the flat round bases placed directly on the mud-brick floor (of the five bases three were superimposed by the column drums). The regular pattern of the brick flooring is disturbed in some places as a result of multiple repairs. Mud-brick paving was recorded in the middle section of the hypostyle, where the sondage was dug in 1998. Nothing can be said about the paving technique in other sections. However, it looks as if the dividing line between mud-brick paving and stone paving is the southern wall of the *pronaos.*

On average the temple is preserved to a height of four to five courses of sandstone blocks. The blocks of the superstructure are of a standard size, 112 x 56 x 36cm, while the stones below (in the foundation courses) are much smaller, the tendency being the deeper they are the smaller the blocks.

The above-ground blocks were long exposed to the action of the elements which have inflicted heavy damage on the outer walls. Almost all the traces of wall plastering have gone.

The only plaster which has survived in Soniyat temple is the lime mortar bonding the blocks. There is no fixed rule in the application of the clamps. Some more vulnerable blocks (which have been exposed to strong outward pressure) were clamped but some (even more at risk) are not. The clamp sockets were cut when the blocks were put in their right place in the walls (Plate 3).

Not even one clamp survived in situ. However, no blocks were raised to check whether the clamps survived in undisturbed foundation courses (cf. Welsby 1996, 133).

The Soniyat *temenos* is located in the *mantiqa* of Tergis (the borderline between the *mantiqas* of Abkur and Tergis runs halfway between the temple and the Istabel Fortress). The archaeological evidence gathered so far, augmented by the literary sources, is strongly suggestive that the Soniyat *temenos* is the nucleus of a larger sacral, and probably also urban, centre located south-west of the Istabel fortress, west of the cultivable land of the Tergis-Affad Basins and opposite the agricultural district on the left bank.

The topographical situation of the Soniyat *temenos* leaves no doubt that it is a part of an agglomeration identical to Pliny's *Tergedum* mentioned in the itinerary of the Neronian expedition to the sources of the Nile (*Historia Naturalis* Book VI. XXXV. 184–185; Rackham 1947, 474–477). The location of *Tergedum* in Tergis was already suggested in 1971 by Karl-Heinz Priese (Priese 1973, 123), who calculated the distances in Pliny's text. The figures contained in *Historia Naturalis,* compared with the actual distances, speak for themselves. The resemblance of the names (Tergedum – Tergis) is also most suggestive.

Soniyat is situated at the very beginning of the *mantiqa* of Tergis (pronounced locally as Tirgis), exactly 99 English miles (159 km) from Kawa (Pliny's *Pitara*) when measured by the river (Gleichen 1905, 27–31). Pliny's distance from *Pitara* to *Tergedum* was 103 Roman miles (155 km, Priese 1973, 126). The slight difference probably reflects the fact that Nero's centurions marched along the right bank following the inner curve of the river, and cutting across the slight bends of the river (e.g. the distance from Wadi Halfa to Dongola is 280 English miles by the river and 228 English miles by the camel track along the right bank of the river [Gleichen 1905, 22]). Similarly the distance from Soniyat to Gebel Barkal (Napata) is 69.5 English miles (112 km) when measured by the river (Gleichen 1905, 34). If Napata was in Sanam Abu Dom the above distance is reduced to 65.5 English miles (105 km). The stretch of the right bank between *Tergedum* and *Nabata* is, according to Pliny, 80 Roman miles (120 km, Priese 1973, 126). Pliny's distance is respectively 8 and 15 kilometres longer simply because the road from Soniyat to Gebel Barkal along the right bank is longer than by the river, due to the dunes blocking the tracks along the river and the rocky terrain which starts opposite Korti and continues with intervals until ez-Zuma. To avoid the famous right bank dunes of Argi, Abkor, Tergis, Affad and el Hau, the Roman party could have taken the left bank track (as is usually done today) and proceeded directly to the left bank Napata (Sanam Abu Dom). Since they would walk along the outer perimeter of the Debba Bend, the actual distance they covered would be longer (thus roughly equating with Pliny's figure).

Tergedum was most favourably situated on the right bank opposite the highly cultivable stretch of the left bank (and the islands). It was probably also a flourishing trading centre controlling the mouth of the Wadi El Melik, which was a very important trade route for African products (it sits exactly opposite the confulence of the Wadi El Melik and the Nile). Since one of the determining factors behind the Kushite settlement pattern was suitability for trade (Welsby 1996, 139) *Tergedum* was in a most advantageous position.

Plate 6. Soniyat temple. Meroitic graffiti and hieroglyphs on the upper side of the column base.

Moreover there is another plausible source of *Tergedum's* income. The site lies at the furthest upstream point that Nile cargo boats could reach (one cannot sail northwards against both the northern wind and the swift stream of the river). In *Tergedum,* or in its immediate vicinity, the merchandise (coming from the north) travelling upstream to Napata and further south would have to be transferred onto pack animals (the boats can proceed at the most to Affad some 8 miles upstream). The river simply does not allow navigation any further upstream (Gleichen 1905, 34). This last statement brings to mind an 'epigraphical episode' from the Psammetich II expedition to Nubia. The Greek graffiti in Doric dialect scratched on the left leg of Ramesses II's statue at Abu Simbel suggest that Psammetich's armada reached the place beyond *Kerkis* as far as the river allowed. In his comments on the graffito L. Török (FHN I, 289) says that Kerkis should be somewhere at the foot of the Second Cataract, contradicting Sauneron and Yoyotte, as well as Goedicke's opinion that Kerkis was somewhere in the Napata region (Sauneron and Yoyotte 1952, 169, 188–191; Goedicke 1981, 198). However, during the inundation (the usual starting time for Egyptian expeditions to Nubia), when also Psammetich's expedition was organised (Goedicke 1981, 190), the cataracts are negotiable. The river definitely 'permits' passage further upstream, beyond the Third Cataract, but does not allow one to navigate beyond Tergis.

Is the place-name Kerkis to be identified with Pliny's *Tergedum*? In my opinion, yes. However, further survey in the region might reveal other data. Of crucial importance seems to be the Argi 'island', which is now a part of the right bank but was as late as 1905 an island (Gleichen 1905, 31). Arkell reported the presence there of a Napatan/New Kingdom cemetery lying 2 miles east from the river (Arkell 1950, 35–36). During the first season of the Southern Dongola Reach Survey, the existence of the Napatan cemetery in Argi (N 18° 07.92' E 30° 49.28') was fully confirmed. The burial ground, robbed by the Bedouins, extends westwards (i.e. riverwards) from the gubba of Wad Idris. It is marked on the surface by large quantities of crushed bones, stone and crude Napatan ceramics. The settlement contiguous to this cemetery remains to be found during the next season of the SDRS.[2]

Before the coming seasons of the SDRS shed more light on the complicated problem of Kushite settlement pattern in the Debba Bend, one more suggestion should be made. If historical *Tergedum*, lying in modern Tergis, sits at the southernmost point that the Nile allows boats to reach, in the place where the historical Kerkis was situated, at the ultimate point reached by Psammmetich's armada, why then not identify *Tergedum* with the place-name *trgb* known from the Tanis stela as the southernmost point reached by Psammetich's army (FNM I 284)? The similarity of both names is compelling, as are the topographical realities. If *Tergedum* was *trgb* we should expect the residence of the kwr to have been in Tergedum (FNM, 284) or in its vicinity. In fact there was a *kwr* residence, somewhere in the Debba Bend. The town called *Krtn* (known from section 6 [cols 43–48] of the Irike-Amannote coronation inscription from Kawa [FHN II, 407]) should be situated somewhere in the middle of the route from Gebel Barkal to Kawa, if the calendar of the Irike-Amannote coronation pilgrimage can be taken at its face value – the more so in that the standard localisation of *Krtn* in the Korti area (Welsby 1996, 33, after Zibelius 1972, 163–164) does not seem to find any endorsement from the archaeological evidence (at least the SDRS team failed to find any while reconnoitering the right bank opposite Korti in 1998).

The archaeological, topographical and epigraphical data gathered so far strongly suggest that the place-names *Krtn,* Kerkis, Tergis and Tergedum denote one (or two) centres lying nearby. The royal residence of *kwr* attested in Irike-Amannote's text and the Tanis stela could be perpetuated in the name Abkur, the locality nearest to Soniyat.

The location advanced here for *Tergedum* authenticates Pliny's text and the topographical realities of the Neronian expedition. Moreover, there are other data contained in Pliny's narrative which archaeology seems to confirm. In Pliny's description of the stretch of the Nile Valley downstream from Napata there is a strong undertone of desertness, desolation and destruction. The country, when visited by Nero's centurions, had already been deserted '... but nev-

[2] Argi cemetery is situated *c.* 10 miles from Soniyat, which rather precludes the 'funerary contiguity' of both sides. On the one hand, it is hard to believe that a townsite and its cemetary could be separated by the 16km long stretch of sand dunes; on the other, the situation of the Kushite cemeteries (el Kurru, Nuri) in relation to the religious and urban centres proves that logic has no 'voting rights' in mortuary complexes.

ertheless it was not the arms of Rome that made the country a desert' (Rackham 1947, 475). According to Pliny Napata was the only town which survived. On the upper side of the column base standing in front of the southern entrance to the columned vestibule (the divider is very fragmentarily exposed) at Soniyat, there are plenty of Meroitic graffiti (Plate 6) and at least one Meroitic hieroglyphic sign (h). It is evident that the graffiti could only have been applied to the base's upper surface after the column had been overturned. It means that the temple had fallen into ruins well before the Meroitic script went out of use. The fact that there are no Meroitic ceramics in the Soniyat area strongly suggests that the temple had been demolished before the visit of Nero's centurions some time between AD 61 and 63 (Török 1997, 464).

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Plate XLV. Istabel (Gebel El Gren) fortress, seen from the north.

Plate XLVI. Soniyat temple in February 1997.

Plate XLVII. Bakhit fortress. Oblique kite photograph.

Plate XLVIII. Soniyat temple. The entrance to the hypostyle (seen from the south). (Photo K. Kotlewski).