

SUDAN & NUBIA

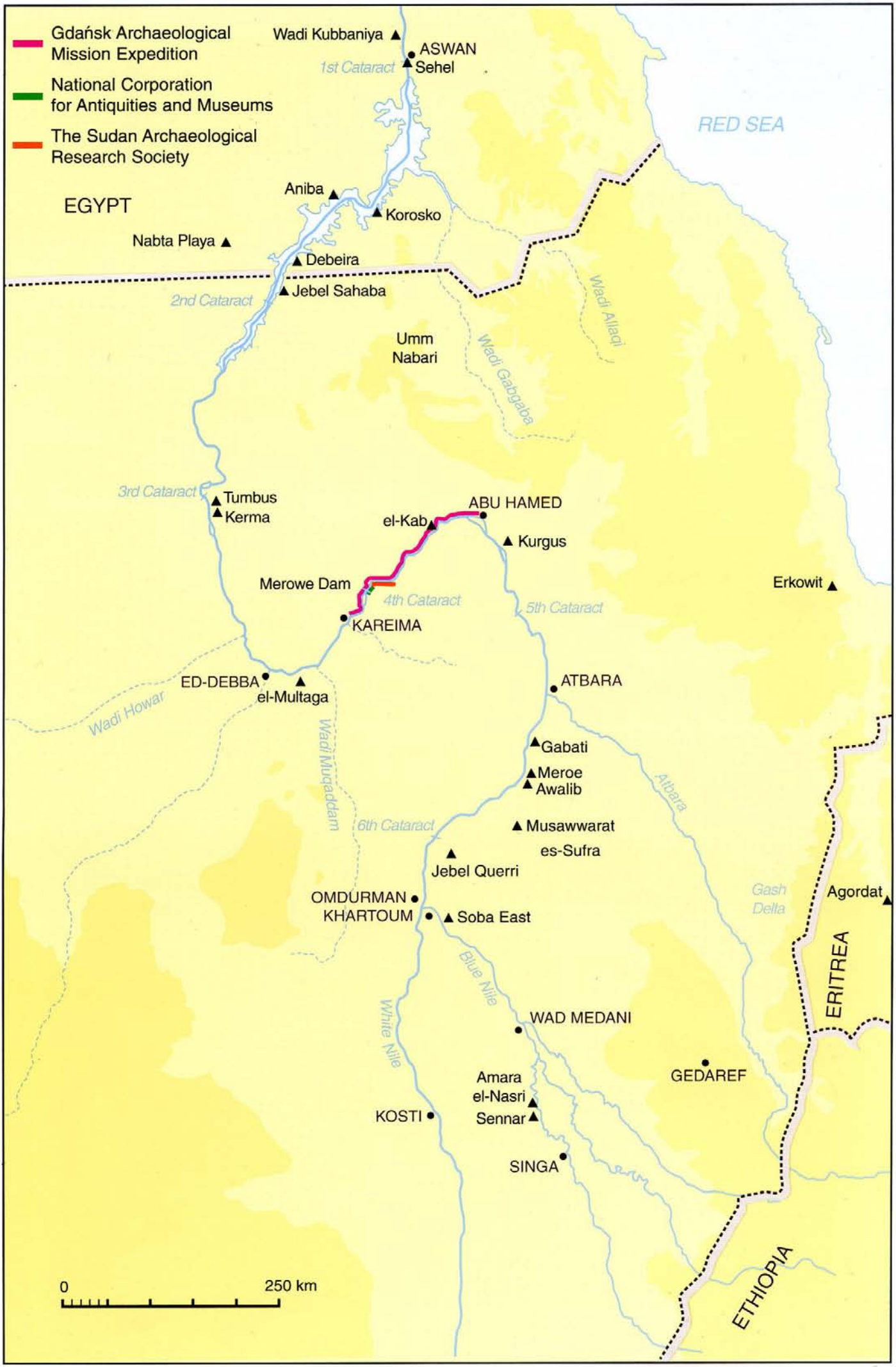
The Sudan Archaeological Research Society



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Introduction

Vivian Davies

The Society's two major events of the year, the results of which are published here - the Kirwan Memorial Lecture delivered in October, 2002, and the colloquium on recent fieldwork held in May, 2003 - were extremely well attended. The colloquium incorporated a special session, led by Dr. Salah Mohamed Ahmed, NCAM Director of Excavations, on the Merowe Dam salvage project. The response has been encouraging. Since the colloquium, several organisations have applied for concessions, joining the existing four missions of Gdańsk, NCAM, the French Unit and SARS. Many more are still needed. Interested parties should contact Dr Salah at NCAM tel./fax. 249 11 786784 or the International Society for Nubian Studies c/o dwelsby@thebritishmuseum.ac.uk.

Old Kush in the Fourth Cataract Region

Elżbieta Kołosowska, Mahmoud el-Tayeb and Henryk Paner

In 1996 the Gdańsk Archaeological Museum Expedition embarked on a project of systematic fieldwork, encompassing both survey and trial trenching, in the Fourth Cataract region. The Museum's concession covers a broad tract of about 250km in length, stretching along the right bank of the Nile from Kareima to Abu Hamed.

Up until 1996 the existence of the Kerma culture in the Fourth Cataract region was merely the subject of conjecture by a number of prominent scholars. Jean Vercoutter, Charles Bonnet and Brigitte Gratien had all suggested that Kerma may have reached this far upstream.

Seven consecutive seasons of fieldwork in this area have confirmed the presence of a culture which bears many of the same characteristics as the Kerma culture. As the term

the Middle Kingdom to the beginning of the New Kingdom in Egypt.¹ In contrast to the term 'Kerma culture' this new name has historical connotations rather than geographical ones only. In order to make the chronological framework easier to follow, terminology established for the Kerma culture will be used throughout this paper.

To date, an area of about 124km, starting from Kareima and heading upriver, has been fully surveyed and some test excavations have been conducted on selected sites. In addition, the rest of the concession area up to Abu Hamad has been reconnoitred, both from the air and by land. This has resulted in the recording of 711 sites, representing different cultural periods from the Palaeolithic to Early Islam. Of this number, about 93 sites, including both settlements and cemeteries, can be associated with the Old Kush culture. These sites are situated between Ab-Silaem (around 20km north-east of Kareima) and el-Lamar (about 124km upstream of Kareima). A noteworthy concentration of Old Kush sites exists between Ab-Silaem and el-Jebel in an area about 70km in length (Figure 1).

Old Kush occupation in these territories is evidenced both in the form of small habitation sites and extensive settle-

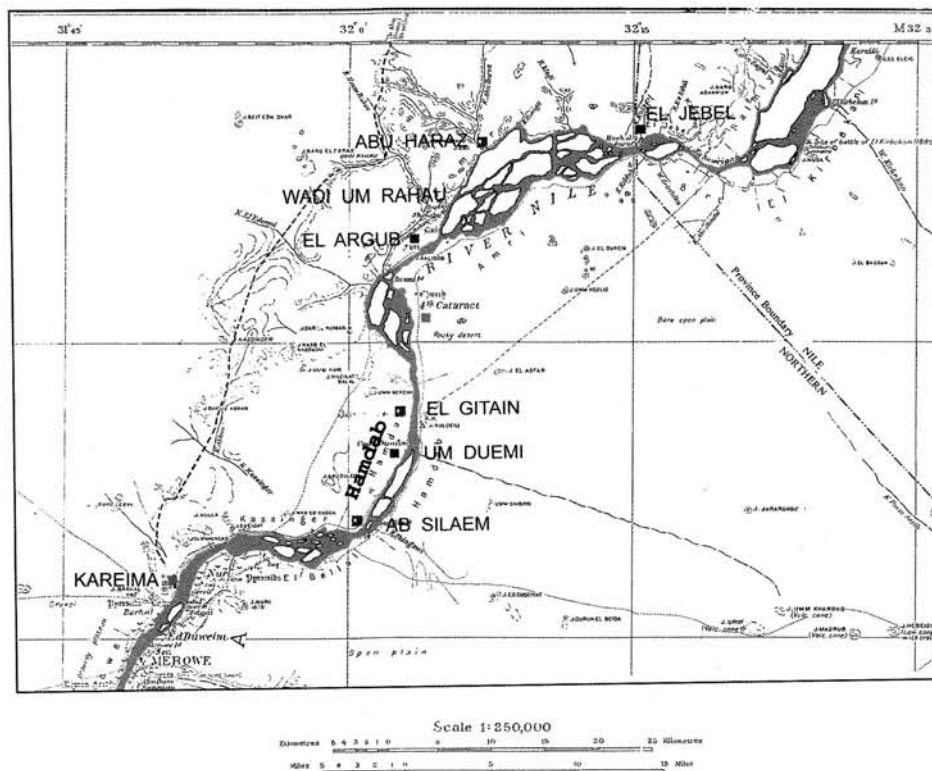


Figure 1. Detailed map showing Old Kush in the Fourth Cataract region.

Kerma takes its name from a contemporary place-name, it seems synonymously linked to a specific geographical location and, because current research results have enabled only some aspects of the culture present in the Fourth Cataract region to be identified, it seems justifiable to introduce a new term – the Old Kush Culture. This name could be applied to the culture which emerged in Upper Nubia from the time of

ments covering several hectares. These settlements lie either directly adjacent to the Nile, just above the floodplain, or in the vicinity of a wadi, on its banks or on islands in the centre of the wadi. They are best represented by one site in Wadi

¹ For evidence of the earliest phase of the Kerma culture in the region see Welsby, this volume, p. 31 (Ed.).



Um Rahau near el-Argub village, at a distance of about 48km from Kareima. This site consists of an island located in the middle of a long-dried-up branch of the wadi. The site is relatively well preserved; a number of rounded stone structures are still visible on its surface. A limited number of trial trenches revealed that these structures were circular huts or shelters of about 2.5 to 3.5m in diameter. They consisted of a wooden framework and were partially dug into the ground, to a depth of around 600mm. Some are reinforced at the base with a mass of tightly packed but unbonded stone. Surface finds comprise enormous quantities of pottery sherds of different phases and types including some imported varieties of Egyptian origin. Grinding stones, stone bracelets and other stone implements were found in large numbers. The results of preliminary investigations indicate that the site was inhabited by a community over a long period of time before being deserted and was not used thereafter.

It is difficult to establish what type of subsistence economy was associated with this culture based on the current state of research, although we can probably assume that it was agrarian-pastoral and trade. Numerous rock-drawings depicting longhorn cattle have been recorded in the Fourth Cataract region, often in the vicinity of Old Kush sites (Colour plate XIII). These can be linked to the period in question and provide indirect evidence of animal husbandry, as does the clay animal figurine discovered on one large settlement site (Figure 2).

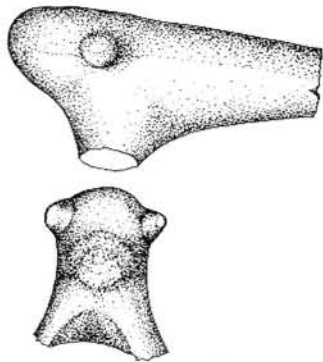


Figure 2. Animal clay figurine (scale 1:2).

Pottery production was undoubtedly at a highly advanced level. Ceramic material has been recovered both from settlement and cemetery sites. Typological analysis and analogies show that these vessels date from the Middle to Terminal Kerma. The most common type of pottery found in this region consists of hand-made vessels, mostly hemispherical bowls. Their exterior surfaces are red, unsmoothed and decorated with incised lines in various combinations, from simple parallel to combined geometric designs (Figure 3). This sort of decoration is typical both of vessels produced by Middle Kerma societies and the C-Group and Pan-Grave cultures (Gratien 1978, 174, Fig. 49.4, 177; Privati 1999, 58-67; Bietak 1968). Numerous examples of hand-made, burnished wares with black interiors and rims and red exteriors

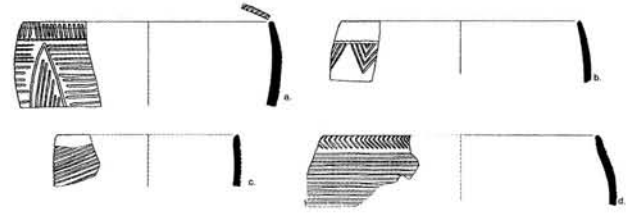


Figure 3. Middle Kerma bowls (scale 1:4).

were also found. These were predominantly hemispherical bowls dating from the Middle to Classic Kerma periods (Bonnet 1990, 191, T. 177-180; Gratien 1978, 178, Fig. 51; Privati 1999, 58-69), short-necked jars with either cylindrical or out-flared rims, characteristic of the Middle and Classic Kerma periods (Gratien 1978, 178, Fig. 51, 234, T. II; Privati 1999, *ibid*) (Figure 4a) and tulip beakers typical of the Classic Kerma period (Bonnet 1990, 229-230; Gratien 1978, 211, Fig. 62; Privati 1999, 68-69). Laboratory analysis indicates that the majority of this pottery was locally produced using Nile silt as its basic ingredient. Imported pottery has also been identified in the form of high quality black-topped wares from Kerma, dating from the Classic period, and wheel-thrown vessels from Egypt (Daszkiewicz *et al.*, 2002, 76-85). The presence of imports provides evidence of trade links between the Fourth Cataract region and its neighbouring territories.

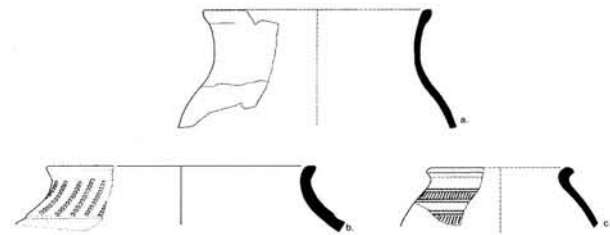


Figure 4. Middle and Classic Kerma jars (scale 1:4).

A separate group of ceramic finds is represented by pottery combs, which were made from sherds and used as pottery brushing and smoothing tools (Plate 1). The majority of the examples recovered from the Fourth Cataract region were made from sherds of high quality, red burnished vessels with black rims and interiors — tulip beakers or pots characteristic of the Classic Kerma period (Kołosowska and Mahmoud 2003). Similar tools, both ceramic and stone, were used by the Kerma culture and are dated to the Middle and Classic Kerma periods (Bonnet 1990, 155).

Stone artefacts were also found in abundance at Old Kush sites in the Fourth Cataract region. Most common among these were querns and grinding stones, indirect evidence for crop cultivation. Other lithic finds included polished axeheads of Middle and Classic Kerma date (Bonnet 1990, 153) (Plate 2), sandstone smoothing tablets of Middle Kerma date (Bonnet 1990, 156) (Plate 3) and various types of cosmetic palette. The latter were made from a wide range

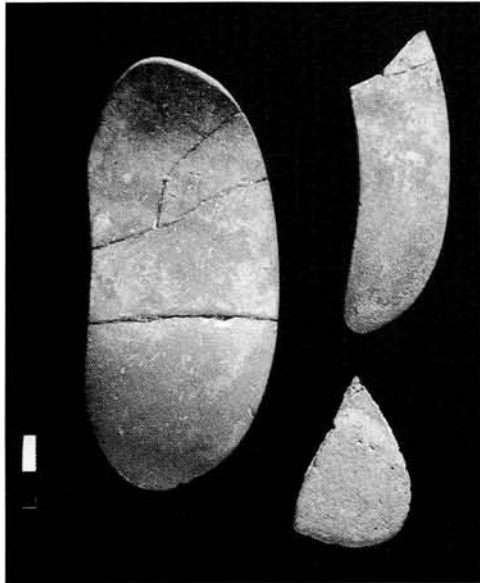


Plate 1. Classic Kerma pottery combs.

of materials, and included a reused quartz palette (Plate 4) of A-Group date (Nordström 1972, Pls 54, 191) found in a burial dating from the Classic Kerma period (Bonnet 1990, 149, Pl. 9; Gratien and Le Saout 1994, 90–91, Figs 95–96) and natural pebbles which had been adapted for use as palettes (Kołosowska and Mahmoud 2003, 121–2). Large numbers of bracelets and rings made from various types of stone were also recorded.

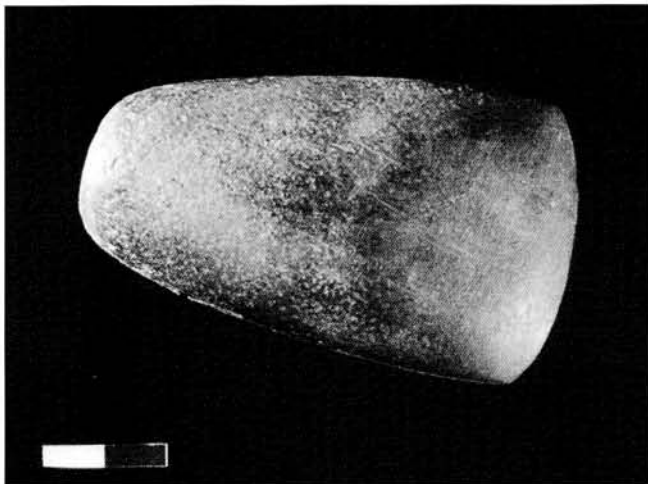


Plate 2. Polished axehead.

Cemeteries were situated very near settlements, usually at the edge of the raised plateau which runs the length of the habitable territories along the Nile, or on the banks of a wadi. The cemetery sites recorded so far date from the Middle and Classic Kerma periods (Colour plate XIV).

Two Middle Kerma graves have been excavated. Their superstructures consisted of a single row of stones laid out in a ring measuring 3.5 to 4.5m in diameter. These concealed irregular oval burial pits of about 3.2 by 3m, dug to a depth of around 600 to 700mm and lined with medium-sized

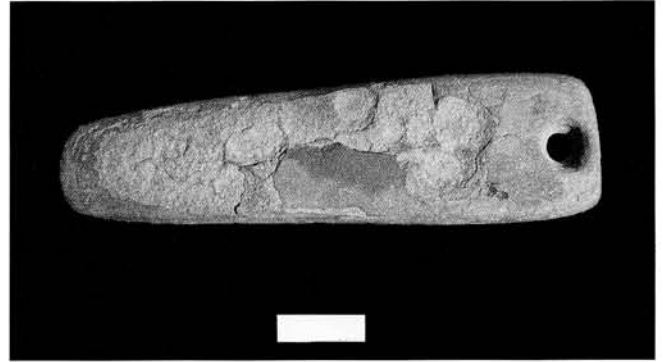


Plate 3. Sandstone smoothing tablet.

stones. The bodies were laid on a roughly east-west axis in a slightly contracted position, on their right side. In one of the burials the head pointed east and the face was turned to



Plate 4. Quartz palette.

the north, whilst in the other the head pointed west and the face was turned to the south. An offering of a sheep had been placed next to the knees of one of these burials (Plate 5). Grave goods included pottery - bowls (Plate 6) and one jar (six vessels in one grave and one in the other). These were all items of hand-made black-topped pottery. Some



Plate 5. Middle Kerma grave.



Plate 6. Middle Kerma bowl.

had been decorated with an incised geometric pattern and some only lightly burnished. One bowl resembles a Pan-Grave type (Plate 7). A necklace of faience and ostrich egg beads was also discovered in one of the graves. Similar burials have been discovered at Kerma (Bonnet 1980, 53) and in the Northern Dongola Reach (Welsby 1997, 5-7; 2001, 215-224).

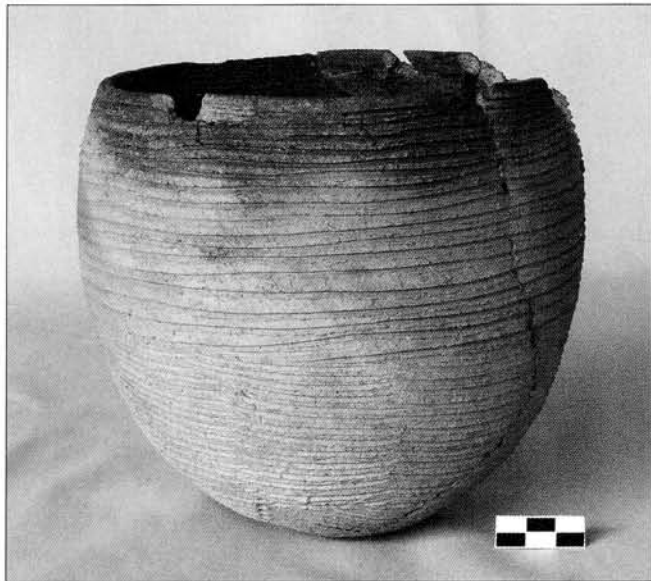


Plate 7. Middle Kerma bowl.

Ten graves were excavated at two Classic Kerma cemeteries. These burials had low stone superstructures consisting either of a single layer of stones forming a solid circle (Plate 8) or a single stone ring (Plate 9). In both instances the diameter measured from 3.2 to 4m. Grave pits were generally rectangular in shape and relatively shallow, at around 200 to 700mm deep. Their dimensions varied from about 1.6 to 2.5m for the longer sides, and 0.8 to 1.2m for the shorter sides. Most of these pits had stone-lined sides, and some were even sealed with capstones. Two types of orientation were noted. In the first grave the longer side of the



Plate 8. Superstructure of Classic Kerma grave.

pit lies on an east-west axis, and the body is placed on its right side in slightly contracted position, head pointing east and face turned to the north (Plate 10). Graves of the same type have been excavated at Kerma (Bonnet 2000, 37-44). In the second type the long axis of the pit is orientated south east to north west with the body placed on its left side in a slightly contracted position, the head in the south corner with the face turned to the south west. This orientation was found only in two cases out of ten.



Plate 9. Superstructure of Classic Kerma grave.

Remnants of well-prepared leather were found next to most of the bodies. This leather either was originally a skirt or had probably been used to wrap the dead in. In one case the body had been placed on a type of stretcher consisting of interwoven strips of leather fixed to a wooden frame.

The grave goods consisted mainly of pottery. A large proportion of this was hand-made, black-topped red-burnished wares characteristic of the Classic Kerma period (Colour plate XV). Other types of ceramics include local wares, as well as wheel-thrown vessels imported from Egypt. Further burial goods were found in the form of beads made of ostrich eggshell, faience, glass and semi-precious stones, which would originally have made up necklaces, belts and rings. Cosmetic palettes, including a reused example of

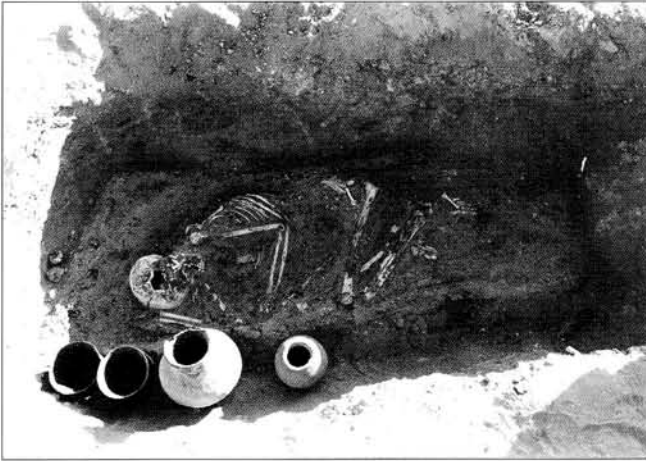


Plate 10. Classic Kerma grave.

quartz, related to palettes of the A-Group, and polished stone axeheads were also among the grave goods.

To summarise, there is evidence in the Fourth Cataract region for the presence of an Old Kush culture. Analysis of burial customs and artefacts from the region in question, including pottery, indicates a correlation with three phases of the Kerma culture: Middle, Classic and Terminal. Thus far we have failed to recognise any remains which can be clearly connected with pre- or Early Kerma, although some pottery fragments are suspected to be associated with these earlier periods. Old Kush centres south of the main site of Kerma have to-date been identified along the palaeochannels in the Northern Dongola Reach (Welsby 1997, 2-9, 2001, 572-589), in the Letti Basin (Grzyski 1987, 29-30) and in Abkor (Żurawski 1998) (Figure 5). The limited observations made so far on the opposite bank of the Nile and upriver from el-Jebel have shown that material from the Old Kush period is quite sparse. The Fourth Cataract region appears to represent the most south-easterly extent of this

culture. It is worth considering whether the spread of this culture took place only along the Nile, or whether the search for sites of this period should also incorporate the desert territories between Kerma and the Fourth Cataract.

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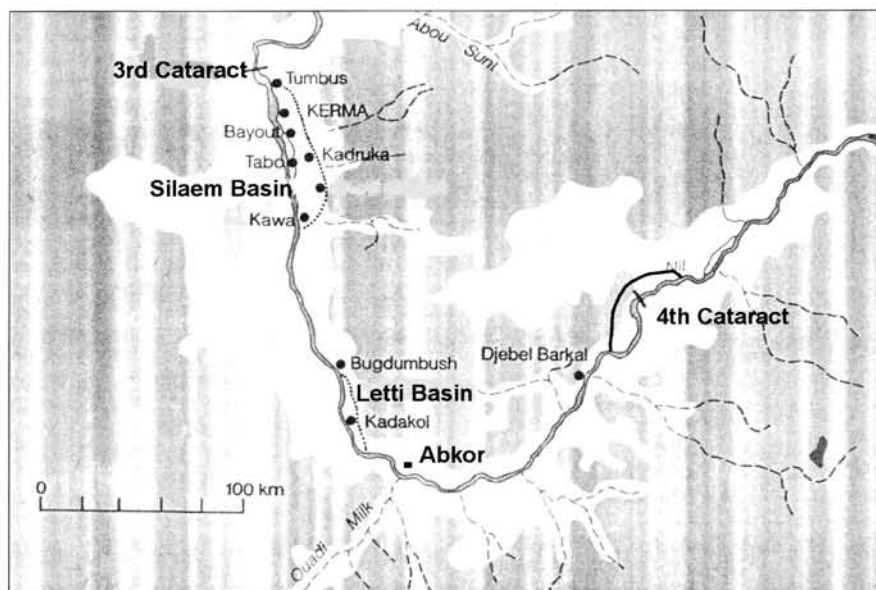
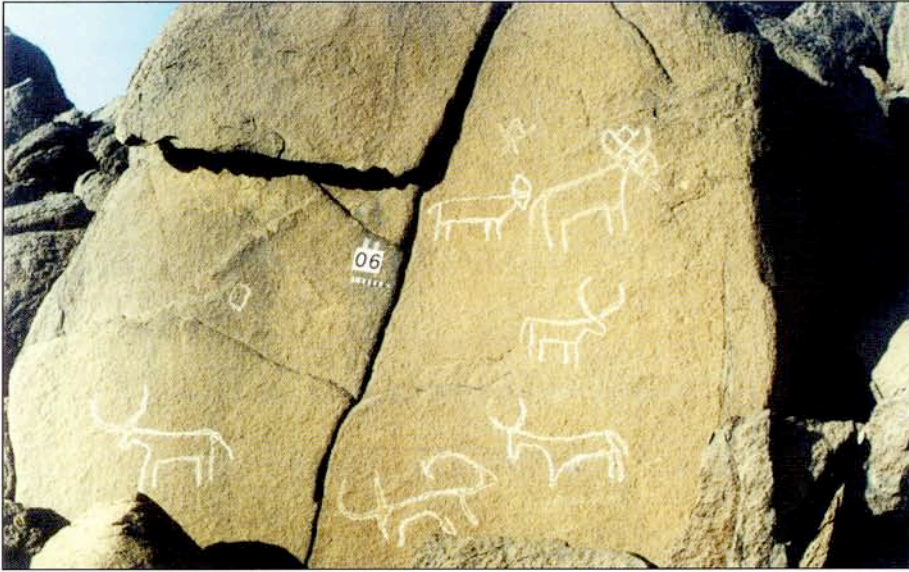


Figure 5. Map showing Kerma sites in Upper Nubia.



*Colour plate XIII.
Old Kush. Rock-
drawings of longhorn
cattle.*

*Colour plate XIV.
Old Kush. Middle
Kerma cemetery.*



*Colour plate XV.
Old Kush. Classic
Kerma tulip beaker.*