

SUDAN & NUBIA

The Sudan Archaeological Research Society



Bulletin No. 11

2007





Egypt

RED SEA

Sudan

Eritrea

Ethiopia

- The Sudan Archaeological Research Society Concession
- ▲ Ancient sites
- MODERN TOWNS



0 250 km



SUDAN & NUBIA

The Sudan Archaeological Research Society



Bulletin No. 11 2007

Contents

Kirwan Memorial Lecture

- Death at Tombos: Pyramids, Iron and the Rise of the Napatan Dynasty 2
Stuart Tyson Smith
-

The Merowe Dam Archaeological Salvage Project

- Survey and excavations in the vicinity of ed-Doma (AKSE) and et-Tereif (AKSCW), 2006-2007 15
Derek A. Welsby
- Preliminary Report on the Second Season of Excavations Conducted on Mis Island (AKSC) 20
Andrew Ginns
- The 4th Season of the SARS Anglo-German Expedition to the Fourth Nile Cataract 26
Pawel Wolf and Ulrike Nowotnick
- Rock art and archaeology: the Hadiab Survey 34
Cornelia Kleimitz
- The Value and Future Potential of Human Skeletal Remains Excavated at the Fourth Cataract 43
Tina Jakob
-

Reports

- A Century of Archaeological Salvage, 1907-2007 48
William Y. Adams
- The Nubian Cemetery at Hierakonpolis, Egypt. Results of the 2007 Season
- The C-Group Cemetery at Locality HK27C 57
Renée Friedman
- Overview of the Hierakonpolis C-Group Palaeopathology 63
Margaret Judd
- Overview of the Hierakonpolis C-Group Dental Remains 66
Joel D. Irish
- The Taharqo wall painting rescue project 72
Eric Miller, Pamela Rose and David Singleton
- Excavations in the Palace of Aspelta at Jebel Barkal, March 2007 82
Timothy Kendall and Pawel Wolf

- Bread Moulds from the Amun Temple at Dangeil, Nile State – an Addendum. 89
Julie R. Anderson, A. Catherine D'Andrea, Amanda Logan and Salah Mohamed Ahmed

- Rescue Excavation of a Late-Meroitic Tomb at Botri, South of Khartoum. Preliminary Report 94
Mahmoud Suliman Bashir

Akad Excavation Project

- Preliminary report on the 2005 and 2006 Seasons 98
Mohamed Faroug, Yassin M. Saeed and Alexandros Tsakos

- Report on the human skeletal material from Akad 107
Husna Taha el-Ata and Hwida Mohamed Adam

- Archaeological Reconnaissance in the Nuba Mountains, Sudan 112
Helen Taylor and Michal Bieniada

- The Sultan Ali Dinar Museum, el-Fasher. A window on Darfur's history 119
Pieter Tesch

- Victorian Gunboats in the 21st Century 122
Henry Keonn-Boyd

- A visit to a traditional leather tannery in Central Sudan 125
Lucy Skinner
-

Miscellaneous

Obituaries -

- Friedrich Wilhelm Hinkel (1925-2007) 127
Janice Yellin and William Y. Adams

- Patrice Lenoble (1942-2007) 128
Jacques Reinold

- Peter Lewis Shinnie (1915-2007) 129
Krzysztof Grzymiski

- Bruce Graham Trigger (1937-2006) 130
Krzysztof Grzymiski

Review -

- Włodzimierz Godlewski 2005. *Pachoras. The Cathedrals of Aetios, Paulos and Petros. The Architecture* 132
Julie R. Anderson
-

Front cover: Village on the Island of Dirbi in the SARS concession above the Fourth Nile Cataract (photo: D. A. Welsby).



Rescue Excavation of a Late-Meroitic Tomb at Botri, south of Khartoum. Preliminary Report

Mahmoud Suliman Bashir

Introduction

The National Corporation for Antiquities and Museums (NCAM) Sudan received a police report concerning the discovery of an ancient burial at Botri, in the vicinity of the capital Khartoum. The burial was found whilst digging a hole for a water tank, inside a resthouse. Two pottery jars and four bowls, one of them broken, were found inside the hole. NCAM decided to carry out a rescue excavation and survey the area surrounding the burial.¹

The Site Location

Botri (N 15° 28.507' E 32° 40.728') is a village situated on the left bank of the Blue Nile, 23.5km to the south of Khartoum, located almost on the border of the Gezira State. It lies directly south of Soba West and across the Blue Nile from the Medieval settlement at Soba East.

The Fieldwork

Survey on foot was carried out around the discovered burial. The main archaeological features found were clearly visible mounds located on the northern side of the modern Muslim cemetery at Botri. Two other features were recorded, in addition to the mounds. The first consisted of a concentration of pottery sherds around a sandstone grinding base and the second was a circular structure of red bricks with pottery sherds on the surface (Figure 1). The pottery sherds on the surface were not datable.

Eight mounds, covered with pottery sherds, red-brick fragments and remains of bones were recorded and have been identified as a Late Meroitic, or post-Meroitic cemetery. Similar mound-graves were found in the areas of es-Sururab, Geili, Kabbashi and el-Ushara in the region of Khartoum (Chittick 1957; Mahmoud et-Tayeb 1999). These

mounds vary in size, but they are generally large in diameter and high in elevation.

The largest mound at Botri is circular in shape and 28m in diameter. Some of the Botri mounds were disturbed by later Christian and Islamic burials, as well as by the modern construction of red-brick structures.

The rescued burial (Grave 1) is located in the eastern part of the cemetery, close to cultivated land. The modern pit is 3m deep and 3m in diameter. The level at which the pottery was found was 2m below the surface.

An excavation trench was laid out on the ground surface on the southern side to allow the burial to be reached. While the rescue excavation was in progress, loose sand around the burial collapsed. Therefore, our work concentrated on removing the sand in order to reach the depth of the grave floor where the pottery was found.

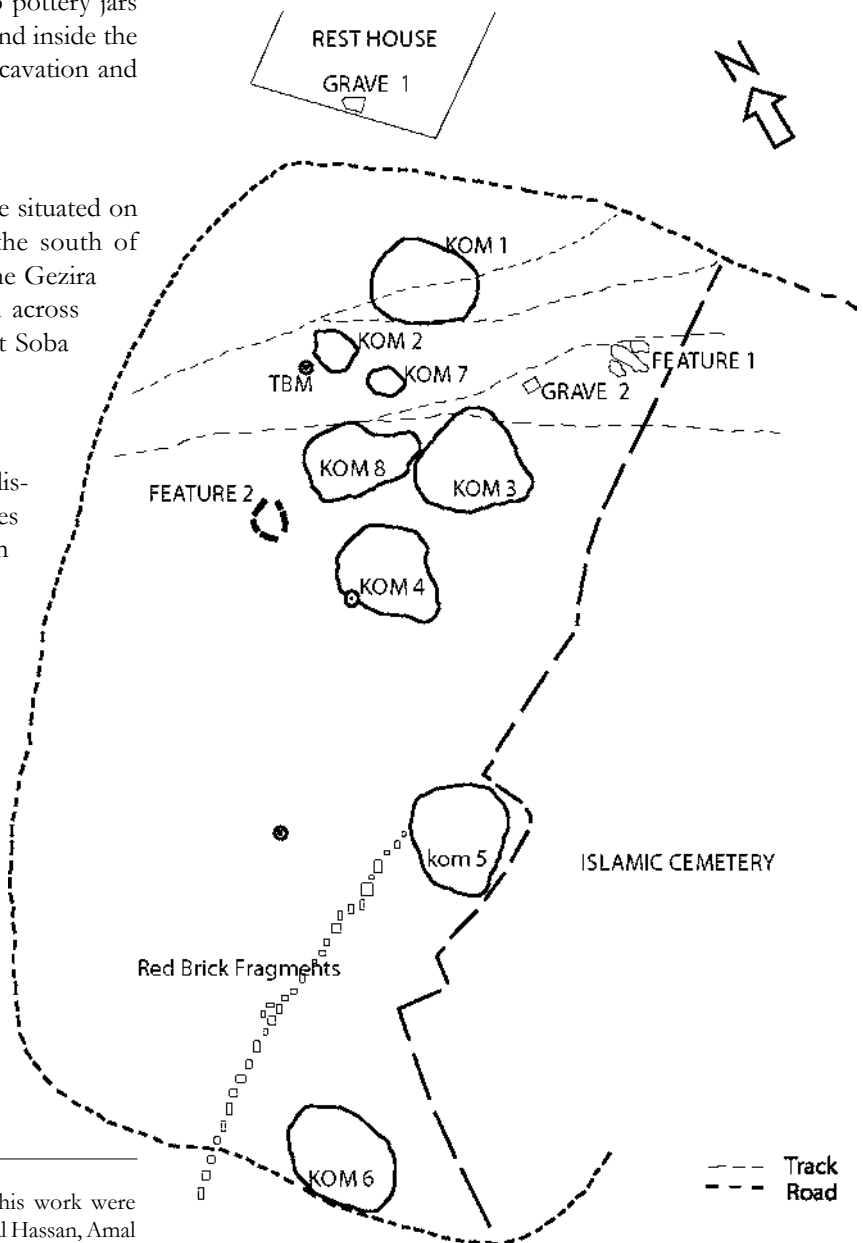


Figure 1. The site at Botri (scale 1:1000).

¹ The NCAM team members who participated in this work were Mahmoud Suliman, Yassin Mohammed (surveyor), Amal Hassan, Amal Awad, Rihab Khidir (antiquities inspectors), and Mohammed Saad (student).

At a depth of 2.27m human skeletal remains were recovered. They seem to have been *in situ* before their disturbance by the recent digging activity. The upper part of the skeleton was intact but the lower part had been affected badly by the digging of the hole.

The articulation of the bones indicates that the body was buried in a contracted position, laid on its right side, with the head to the south, resting on the hands and facing east (Plate 1).

Another tomb (Grave 2) was found uncovered. After checking, it was identified as that of a Muslim.

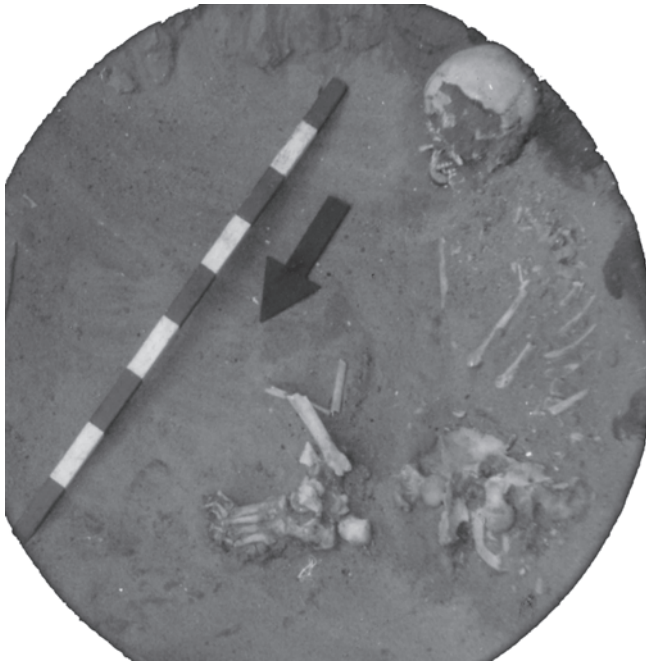


Plate 1. The skeleton in the rescued burial, Grave 1, at Botri.

The archaeological finds in grave 1

In spite of the damage, several objects were found in this burial, which indicate its rich nature. Besides the six pots mentioned above, iron weapons, a granite archer's loose and faience and stone beads were recovered.

One of the two pottery jars was light brown, measuring 450mm in height, 400mm in diameter, at its girth and 100mm in diameter at the rim. The second was dark brown 350mm in height, with a maximum diameter of 270mm and 80mm in diameter at the rim. Both are beer jars. The four bowls were black, their size ranging between 90-180mm in diameter and 100-120mm in height. The two beer jars have matt impressions on their exterior surface. The interior surfaces of the bowls, immediately below the rim, were decorated with wavy incised lines (Plate 2).

The ceramics recovered from this burial are



Plate 2. Pottery from the rescued burial at Botri.

typologically similar to those excavated at Meroe, and to those found in graves that were excavated in the region south of Khartoum (Mahmoud et-Tayeb 1999). These pottery types date to the period between the 4th and 5th centuries AD.

The iron weapons consist of a spearhead and group of corroded arrowheads, three of them complete. The iron



Plate 3. Iron weapons and granite archer's loose from the rescued burial at Botri.



arrowheads are similar to those of the Late Meroitic style with a single barb and a tang (Mahmoud Bashir 2006).

One of the most important finds in this burial, related to the iron weaponry, is the granite archer's loose, which was found *in situ* on the thumb of the left hand, beneath the head (Plates 3 and 4).



Plate 4. The granite archer's loose.

The faience beads were found concentrated around the neck of the skeleton. In addition, three larger beads, made from stone, were found near the lower part of the left leg; they had probably been used as an anklet (Plate 5).

A preliminary osteological analysis to allow an estimation of age, and an assessment of the sex of the skeletal remains recovered from this tomb, was made by Husna Taha.² The skeleton was that of an adult female (35-50 years old). The majority of the bones were found, although most of them were fragmentary.

Conclusion

On the basis of the recorded archaeological features, the site of Botri was used as a cemetery during several historical periods including the Late Meroitic, Post-Meroitic, Christian and Islamic periods. On the basis of a typological comparison of the pottery recovered, we believe that the burial belongs to the Late Meroitic period some time around the 4th century AD.

Archaeological research conducted in the region of Khartoum has provided similar kinds of Meroitic pottery, much of which was probably made locally. The pottery from Botri

is similar to that found at es-Sabeil recorded by Mahmoud et-Tayeb, and both are similar to pottery from Meroe excavated by Garstang, dating to the 4th century AD (Mahmoud et-Tayeb 1999).

The Botri burial, on the basis of similarities in grave goods compared with other cemeteries such as Geili, es-Sabeil, es-Sururab and el-Gereif East, provides further evidence for Meroitic rural communities in the region of Khartoum (Caneva and Vincentelli 1999).

The existence of Post-Meroitic and even Meroitic occupation, along the Blue Nile south of Khartoum, has been supported by evidence from different archaeological sites in this region. At Soba East, a very small amount of pottery similar to Meroitic types was recorded in Building G (Welsby 1999), although evidence for a Meroitic site there is extremely slim.

Pottery types have been recorded within burials in the region of Khartoum, which are comparable to Meroitic types. Iron arrowheads found with archer's looses are another common feature of these burials. The Botri burial contained iron weaponry in spite of it being that of a female. Strabo, the Greek Historian from the 1st century AD, records that the Meroites were famous as archers and that they even armed their women (Török in Eide *et al.* 1998, 816). The nature of the burial and of the associated grave goods, suggests that it dates back to the Late Meroitic period.

Further archaeological investigation may provide more

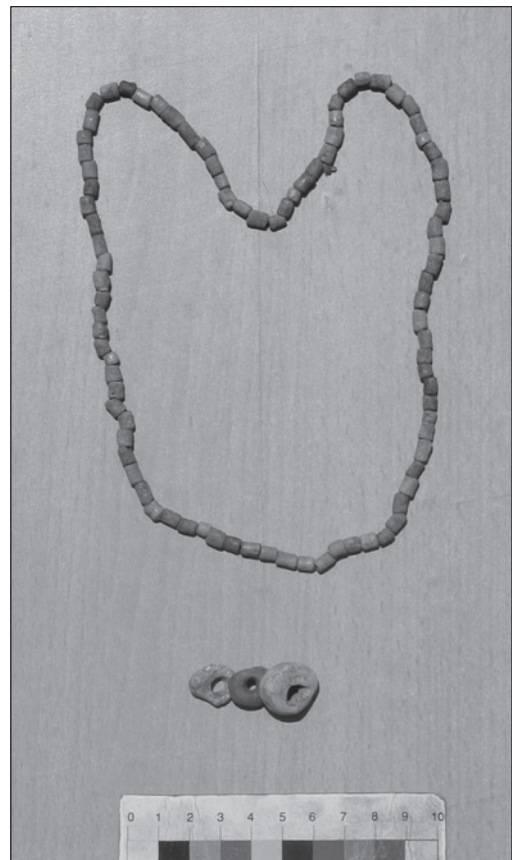


Plate 5. Ornaments from the rescued burial at Botri.

²Teaching assistant, Department of Archaeology, University of Khartoum.

clarification for dating and tracing the funerary traditions employed in this cemetery. A proposal for a second season of excavation has been submitted to NCAM's fieldwork section.

Acknowledgments

I would like to express my gratitude to the police officers at Soba West police station for their cooperation with the NCAM team and for protecting the discovered objects (the pottery finds) before our arrival. We displayed the finds from Botri in a one-day exhibition at Soba Police Station to foster the interest and positive attitude of the police officers towards our archaeological heritage.

Bibliography

- Caneva, I. and I. Vincentelli 1999. 'Research on Late Meroitic Funerary Remains in the Khartoum Province', *Meroitica* 15, 495-500.
- Chittick, H. N. 1957. 'A New Type of Mound Grave', *Kush* 5, 73-77.
- Eide, T., T. H., R. Holton Pierce and L. Török (eds) 1998. *Fontes Historiae Nubiorum Textual Sources For The History Of The Middle Nile Region Between The Eight Century BC And The Sixth Century AD*. Volume III. Bergen.
- Mahmoud et-Tayeb 1999. 'Rescue Excavation at El-Sabeil (Soba West)', *Meroitica* 15, 604-615.
- Mahmoud Suliman Bashir 2006. *Iron Objects from Meroitic and Post-Meroitic Periods. Discussion on Chronology, Contexts, and Rituals*. unpublished Masters Thesis, University of Bergen.
- Welsby, D. A. 1999. 'Meroitic Soba', *Meroitica* 15, 663-677.