

# 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



ASWAN  
1st cataract

Aniba  
Qasr Ibrim

WADI HALFA  
2nd cataract

3rd cataract  
Tombos  
Tabo  
Kerma/Dokki Gel

Kawa

KARIEMA  
Jebel Barkal  
4th cataract

ED-DEBBA

ABU HAMED

5th cataract

Dangeil

Akad  
ATBARA

6th cataract

OMDURMAN  
KHARTOUM  
Soba East

Botri

WAD MEDANI

KOSTI

SENNAR

KASSALA

GEDAREF

Wadi el-Allaqi

Wadi Gabgaba

Nije

Wadi Howar

Wadi el-Meilik

Wadi Muqaddam

Atbara

White Nile

Blue Nile

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The Sudan Archaeological Research Society



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

# The Merowe Dam Archaeological Salvage Project

Survey and excavations in the vicinity of ed-Doma (AKSE) and et-Tereif (AKSCW), 2006-2007

*Derek A. Welsby*

As its continuing contribution to the Merowe Dam Archaeological Salvage Project, this winter the Sudan Archaeological Research Society put five teams into the field (Figure 1):

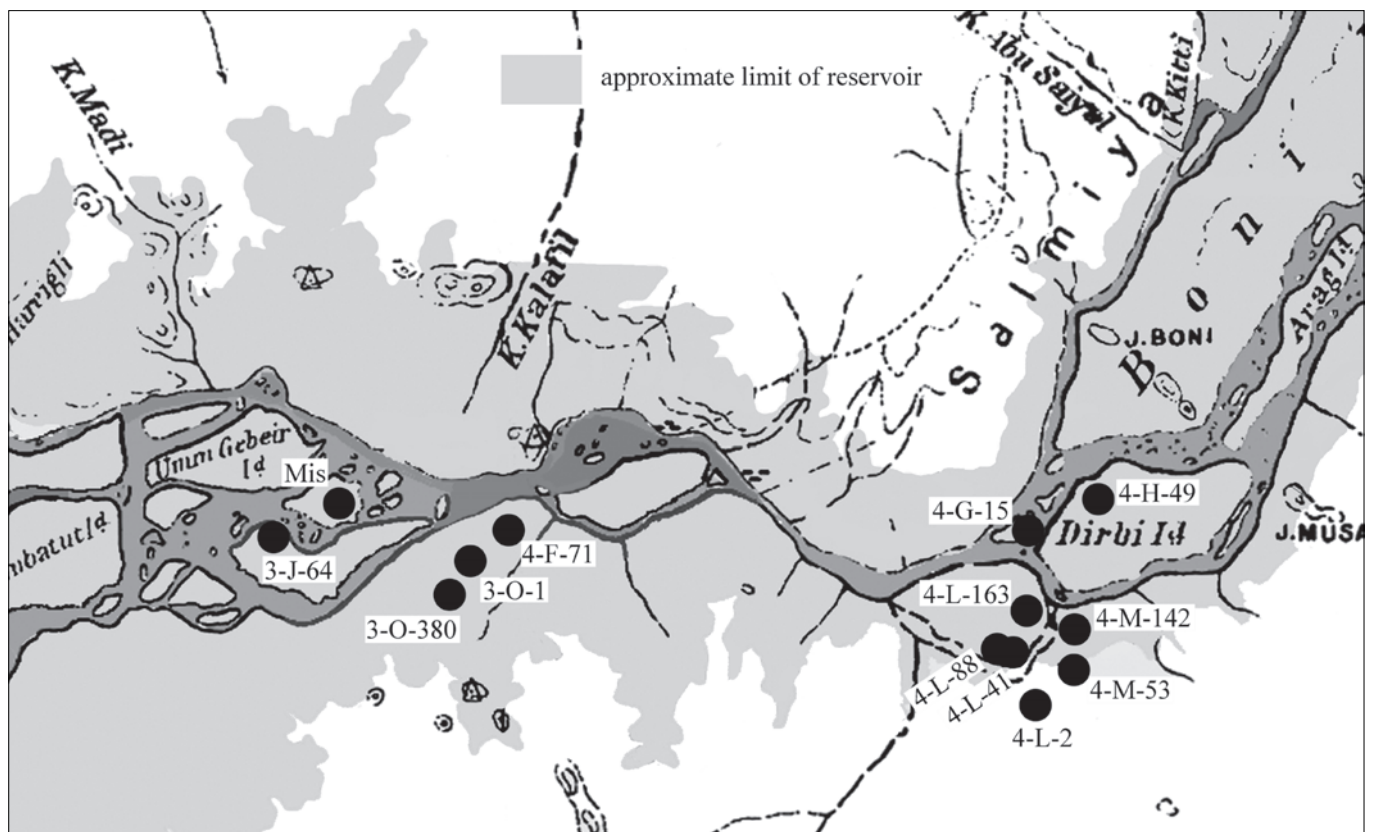


Figure 1. Location of the major sites investigated by the AKSE, AKSC, AKSCW and Peruvian teams.

The Anglo-German team (AKSW) under the direction of Pawel Wolf worked in the region immediately to the west of the village of Hadiab.

The rock art survey directed by Cornelia Kleinitz worked with the Anglo-German team and then with the AKSE and AKSCW teams in the regions of ed-Doma and et-Tereif and on the islands of Ishashi, Dirbi and Umm Hajar.

The AKS Peruvian team under the direction of Rosio Diaz worked in the regions of ed-Doma and et-Tereif.

The AKSE and AKSCW team, directed by Derek Welsby, worked around ed-Doma, on the island of Umm Hajar, around et-Tereif and on Ishashi Island.

The AKSC team directed by Andrew Ginns excavated the medieval cemeteries, a church and a medieval settlement on the island of Mis.

The report which follows deals with the work of the AKSE and AKSCW team; the activities of the other teams are reported elsewhere in this volume. The team<sup>1</sup> was in the field from early December until 7<sup>th</sup> February.

The work programme of this, the last fieldwork season by SARS in the region of the Fourth Cataract, was to focus on the excavation of a number of sites in the vicinity of ed-Doma, some begun in the previous season. One site was also targeted for excavation on the island of Umm Hajar. This was to be followed by additional survey on the eastern

<sup>1</sup> The team consisted of Julia Fan (physical anthropologist), Henriette Hafsaas (archaeologist), Matthew Nicholas (archaeologist), Julian Newman (archaeologist), John Payne (archaeologist), Ross Thomas (pottery specialist), Isabella Welsby Sjöström (assistant director, pottery specialist), Derek Welsby (director), Habab Idris Ahmed (NCAM inspector, archaeologist) and Mohammed Ibrahim Mohammed (cook). Tom Crowley and Ida Herland participated in the project for four and two weeks respectively.



end of Dirbi Island, where some very large cemeteries had been identified from aerial photographs. Survey was also to be conducted along some of the *wadis* leading down to the Nile.

Among the sites excavated were the following:-

**Site 4-M-142** was a Christian cemetery continuing in use into the Islamic period. The bulk of the Christian graves were excavated in the 2005-6 season (Welsby 2006, 11-12). This season one grave without a tomb monument was excavated (Plate 1) along with two box graves completing the work on the site. The smaller of the two box graves partly covered the grave of an infant and another very shallow grave of a small child wrapped in textile.

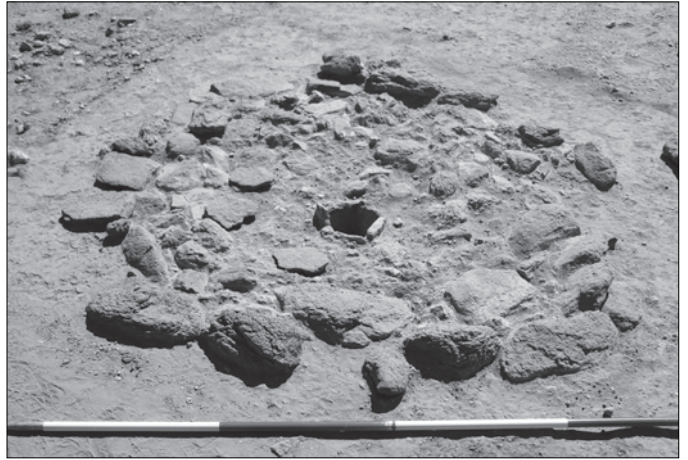


Plate 2. Site 4-L-163. Base of one of the possible storage features with the central stone-lined post-pipe.



Plate 1. The BBC filming the excavation of a Christian burial at site 4-M-142.

**Site 4-L-88.** This *Kerma Classique* cemetery had been partly excavated in the 2005-6 season. Unfortunately, since we left the site in February last year it had been severely plundered and a considerable amount of pottery and human bone was strewn across a large area. This material was collected and the spoil heaps were sieved to recover additional material. Excavation of the one grave which the robbers had missed was begun.

**Sites 4-L-163, 4-L-257 and 4-L-258.** A complex of three sites consisting of a number of settlement features, a series of *wadi* walls and a small cemetery. First recorded in 2005 the site has been damaged by illicit digging on two occasions since then, one tumulus in the cemetery being extensively damaged. A number of areas within the settlement were excavated. Most of the features consisted of roughly circular rings of stone of poor quality construction (Colour plate XIII). Within a few were traces of hearths. A semi-circular wall built up against the bedrock provided shelter for another hearth where there was extensive burning. Of particular interest were three pavements of small stone slabs one of which had a stone-lined pit (post-pipe?) in the centre (Plate 2). No deposits were found associated with these. It is assumed that they may have been the bases of storage

features but there is no hard evidence to support this.

In the surface below that associated with the stone structures were large numbers of post-holes among which several arcs could be recognised.

All the *wadi* walls were excavated. These were single lines of stones running across the shallow valley and served no obvious purpose. They were not associated with any timber features which would have served to make them a more effective barrier. The area of the cemetery was cleaned, the tomb monuments planned and then removed.

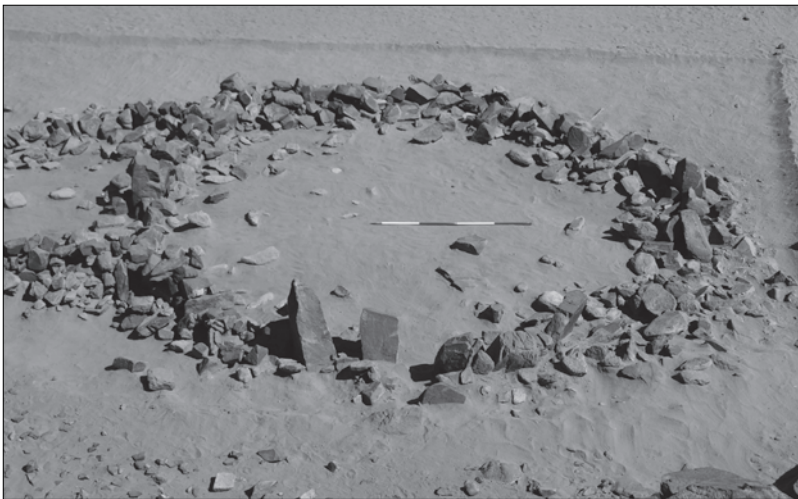
**Site 4-M-79** was a post-medieval village which was, according to a local informant, only abandoned in the 1940s. One of a number of such sites in the area abandoned at that time, it was chosen for excavation as there were extensive deposits of occupation material, both within and adjacent to the houses. It was hoped that the origins of this settlement type could be explored. The interiors of several houses, which were preserved to a height of approxi-



Plate 3. Site 4-M-79, general view.

mately 2m, were excavated along with the circular low-walled hut used as a kitchen.

**Site 4-G-15** is situated on the island of Umm Hajar and consists of three groups of structures including a number of stone hut circles, some of considerable size and utilising large upright slabs in their construction. The wind-blown sand was removed from a few of these features over a two-day period before the work was halted by the local people. They claimed that this was the property of one of them who had lived there until 10 years ago, and that he may want to reoccupy the site in the near future. The pottery evidence recovered clearly indicated that the date of construction and main use of the structures on the site was in the medieval Christian period.



*Plate 4. Site 4-G-15, one of the huts after initial cleaning.*

**Site 4-H-49.** Two well-preserved crevice graves on Dirbi Island were excavated and extensive remains of the two buried individuals were recovered. In the absence of grave goods dating is problematic.

The excavations of sites 4-L-88, 4-L-163, 4-L-257, 4-L-258 and 4-M-79 abruptly ceased on 22<sup>nd</sup> December 2006 when a member of the Monasir Higher Committee passing through the area demanded that the work be stopped



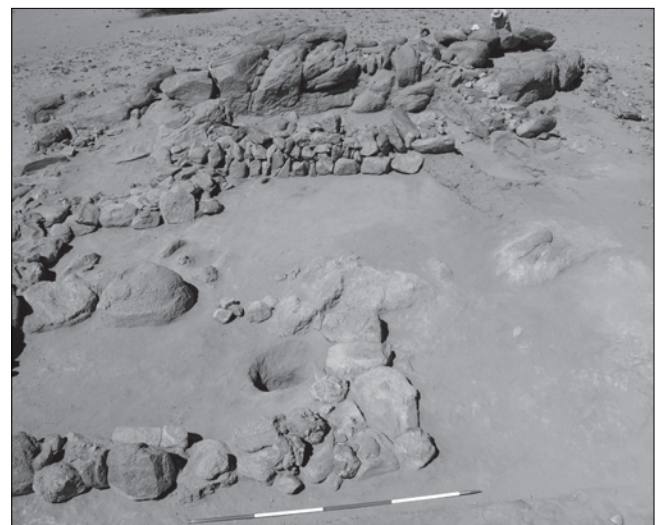
*Plate 5. Site 3-J-64, south wall of Room A.*

immediately. He gave us 24 hours to leave the Monasir region. Our activities and continued presence in the area were supported by all the local people and by the head of the local committee. However, this decision could not be overturned and as we were informed that should we remain our security could not be guaranteed, we had no alternative but to abandon our work in the region of ed-Doma. The work of the Peruvians was also terminated in this area.

Fortunately, the SARS concession is partly in Monasir and partly in Shagiya territory. After discussion with members of the Shagiya Committee, who were happy to welcome us to their region, we moved on 26<sup>th</sup> December to the village of Hadiab occupying the house only recently vacated by the Anglo-German team, while our Peruvian colleagues relocated to et-Tereif.

Quickly developing new research objectives we began survey immediately to the west of et-Tereif extending the area studied in detail in 1999 (see Welsby 2003). We also worked on the western end of Ishashi Island where limited survey and some excavations had been undertaken by the SARS/UCL mission under the direction of Dorian Fuller in 2003 (Fuller 2004, 4-5). The survey was followed by the excavation of a number of the sites discovered. Of these, two were of particular interest, site 3-J-64 on the northern side of Ishashi and site 3-O-380 near et-Tereif.

**Site 3-J-64** was a substantial stone-walled structure utilising a large rock outcrop on its northern side. It consisted of a three-roomed building partially enclosing a courtyard, all the walls built of stone (Plate 5). One internal doorway had a mud-brick threshold, while a porch of mud brick led up to another of the doorways (visible upper right on Plate 6). Traces of a few timber posts were found, two in the courtyard close up to one of the walls, and one in room B. Also in room B was a deep circular pit with much evidence for burning within it. In



*Plate 6. Site 3-J-64, general view.*



Plate 7. Site 3-O-380, general view.

room A a large jar had been used as an oven. The associated pottery was of post-Meroitic date.

**Site 3-O-380** was at first sight a typical *Kerma Moyen* tumulus of MDASP Type FT04b (Plate 7). However closer inspection revealed a walled structure, approximately 2m square, in the centre revetted by a battered wall of rubble (Plate 8). The eastern side of the square structure was built of mud brick but the central part had subsequently been extended a little on the exterior by a wall of stone. This rested on traces of a mud floor to the east of the building, sealed by the revetment. The revetment was of two periods as stones from it both ran under the extension wall and abutted it. The interior of the structure was filled with loose earth and some rubble. A soft area in the south-west corner suggested the position of a robber pit. After



Plate 8. Site 3-O-380 after preliminary cleaning.

removal of this deposit, two ceramic bowls of coarse wheel-made manufacture were found set upright while to the west a large beer jar of typical post-Meroitic form was set into the upper fill of the sub-rectangular grave pit which was aligned east-west. On excavation this led to a side-niche dug into the bedrock, the niche extending some way under the north wall of the structure.

The grave contained the complete skeleton of a cow aligned east-west, laid on its right side, head to the east, with the legs in a flexed position. Beyond the back legs was a copper-alloy bowl wrapped in textile while in front of the forelegs was a fine conical glass beaker (Colour plate XIV) and a very well made ivory *kobl* pot in the shape of a pomegranate (Plates 10 and 11) resting on a collection of large, but coarse, quartzite beads. In the centre of the structure was a square pit while another sub-



Plate 9. Site 3-O-380, the cow burial with its grave goods.

rectangular pit aligned north – south was cut in the south-west corner. Both were completely empty.

#### **‘River’ walls**

During the survey of the western end of the island of Ishashi several very substantial walls were discovered running across seasonal Nile channels. Similar walls have been noted elsewhere and are among the most massive constructions to have been made in the region. Those recorded this season were up to 2.1m in width, constructed of large facing stones, some set as headers, others set vertically, infilled with rubble (Colour plate XV). They were presumably designed to retain both water and silt in the channels following



Plate 10. Site 3-O-380, detail of the cow's head with the glass, stone and ivory grave goods.

the annual flood to facilitate and maximise the growing of crops in the river bed. All are now in a very ruinous condition and some are way above the present high flood level. Conversely, a little upstream of ed-Doma a wall of this type appears to run across the present major river channel, which today is perennial. The period of use of these impressive installations is uncertain.



Plate 11. Site 3-O-380, ivory kohl pot (scale 100mm).

A considerable amount of time this season was devoted to recording and packing the finds from the several seasons of SARS work in the AKSC and AKSE areas and these were transported to Khartoum on two lorries. Subsequently a further lorry load with material from the Mis Island excavations was brought to Khartoum. The bulk of this material comprises human skeletons and naturally mummified bodies but there is also a fine collection of Kerma and post-Meroitic pottery.

**The rock art survey.** Attached to the project were the two rock-art specialists. They continued their surveys around ed-Doma, but their work was also brought to an abrupt conclusion by the directive from the Monasir Higher Committee. For further details of this work, see Kleinitz and Koenitz elsewhere in this volume.

One important activity of the season was the identification and numbering of those rock-art panels which it is hoped can be removed to Merowe by the British Museum/Iveco/New Holland team in October 2007. The 390 blocks from the early Kushite pyramid at site 4-F-71 were also marked ready for their relocation to the projected Fourth Cataract museum.

With the completion of the work on Mis Island in March 2007 SARS and the British Museum have brought their work at the Fourth Cataract to a close. Much has been achieved over the last eight years but much still remains to be done. However, the problems caused by the Monasir Higher Committee in conjunction with the looming threat to the archaeology of the Northern Dongola Reach, where SARS holds a concession covering approximately 1200 square kilometres, makes this a suitable time to move on. Potentially the development in the Northern Dongola Reach will affect a greater area than that to be inundated by the reservoir impounded by the Merowe Dam and we know from the results of the SARS survey in the 1990s that the region of the concession is extremely rich (Welsby 2001). Among the sites noted were approximately 150 Kerma period rural settlements and 50 Neolithic cemeteries as well as the extremely important urban centre with its associated cemetery at Kawa.

### Acknowledgements

SARS and the British Museum would like to thank the National Corporation for Antiquities and Museums for all its assistance in the Society's work and the British Council (Khartoum). Funding came from a variety of sources including the Institute for Bioarchaeology, The British Museum including the Townley Group, The Packard Humanities Institute, Emory Museum, Atlanta and a number of SARS patrons.

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*Colour plate XIII. The Fourth Cataract AKSE and AKSCW project.  
The settlement at site 4-L-163, general view.*

*Colour plate XIV. The  
Fourth Cataract  
AKSE and AKSCW  
project. Site 3-O-380,  
glass vessel.*



*Colour plate XV. The Fourth Cataract  
AKSE and AKSCW project. The 'river'  
wall at site 3-J-70.*