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Front cover: Excavations in progress in the *Kerma Ancien* cemetery at site H29 in the Northern Dongola Reach (photo D. A. Welsby).

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Gebel Adda Cemeteries 3 and 4 (1963-1964)

Reinhard Huber and David N. Edwards

The excavation team of the American Research Center in Egypt, under the direction of Dr Nicholas B. Millet, first arrived at Gebel Adda in January 1963, for what were to be four excavation seasons. Excavations started in Cemetery 1, which included numerous tumuli, extending over c. 450m from the southern end of the concession to north east of the Citadel (Millet 1963). Work began in the south of the cemetery and excavated c. 127 tumuli, dated to the later post-Meroitic (X-Group) period. In the same area, amongst the tumuli, c. 30 medieval (Christian) graves were also found, thought likely to date to the earliest period of Christianization at Gebel Adda. Four examples of the double domed mud-brick tombs of the post-medieval (Islamic) period were also excavated in Cemetery One. In March 1963 excavations were also begun in Cemetery 3, lying some 160m south east of the Citadel hill (Figure 1, Plate 1), an area covered with much wind-blown sand, exposing c. 400 tombs during the first season (Millet 1963, 154). This work was continued in the second (1963-1964)



Plate 1. Cemetery 3 under excavation (February 1964), view east from Gebel Adda citadel. Tumuli and Islamic/Ottoman tombs of the north end of Cemetery 1 behind (photo R. Huber).

season (Millet 1964) and the third season, for which no preliminary report was published (see also Millet 1967b; 1968; 2005; Grzymski 2010).

Some preliminary observations of this area were published as the excavations were still underway by Millet (Millet 1963; 1964), but little else relating to this important work has yet been published. However, the first author (RH), as a member of the ARCE team can throw some further light on some

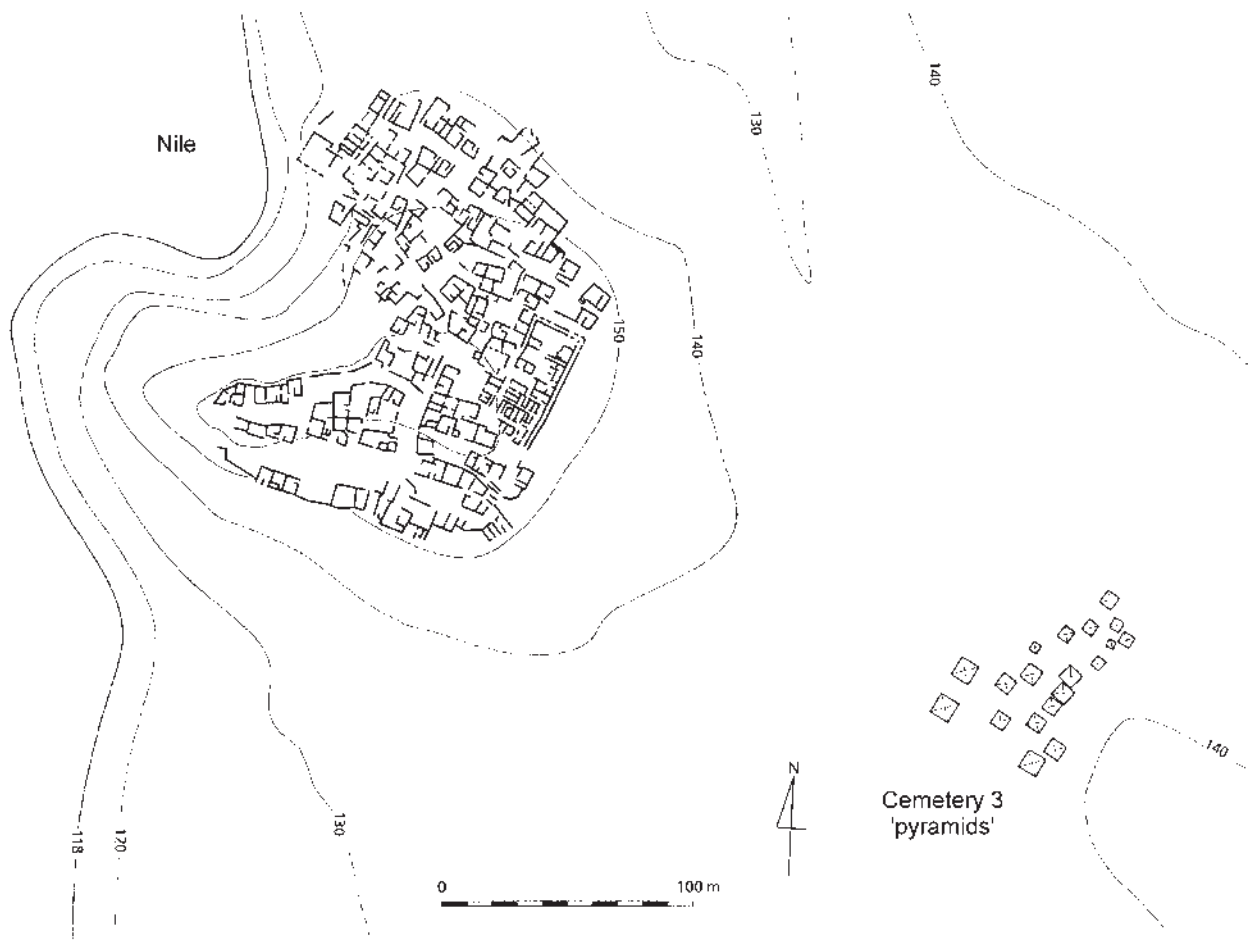


Figure 1. Gebel Adda and location of Cemetery 3 'pyramids', 1963-1964 (scale 1:3000) (survey by P. Mayer, drawn by R. Huber).

features of the excavations. Most importantly, having carried out much of the original preparation of site plans, it has been possible to reconstruct here some partial plans of Cemetery 3, which together with personal photographs of the site provide some useful new information concerning this part of the Gebel Adda excavations. Until the surviving site archives are more fully studied, and hopefully published, this brief report, as with previous reports (Huber and Edwards 2009; 2010) can provide a few further insights into the fascinating and clearly complex history of the Gebel Adda cemeteries.

Cemetery 3 and 4

This plan of the cemetery shown here (Figure 2) represents work carried out by February 1964 but does not show the full extent of excavation work in Cemetery 3, or the adjoining Cemetery 4 (see below). A more detailed plan, prepared from field notes (Figure 3), shows the first five stone ‘pyramids’ (Millet 1963, 159). These structures were surrounded by many other later Meroitic and post-Meroitic (X-Group) burials, as well as much later (presumably post-medieval) Islamic burials. It may be noted that all Meroitic and post-Meroitic (X-Group)

burials shared the same orientation; the Islamic burials can be identified on Figure 2 by their different (north-south) orientation. Medieval (Christian) burials seem to have been located elsewhere, some at the southern end of Cemetery 1, and also in the extensive Cemetery 2 (El Amir 1963), south east of the citadel (Millet 1964, 9, pl. V.15)

As is apparent from the plan, with these stone ‘pyramids’ the burial chambers were not set centrally, but were found beneath the north-eastern part of the superstructure. It may be suggested that the superstructures were constructed in this way in order to reduce the pressure exerted on the mud-brick vaults. Millet suggested that the nature of the local alluvial deposits precluded the construction of ‘tunnelled chambers’ (1963, 159). Figure 3 shows the mud-brick wall inserted in the unroofed portion of the substructure of pyramid 1, thought by Millet ‘to provide subsidiary chambers for offerings’ (1963, 161).

Millet’s description of pyramid 1 records the remains of three courses of horizontally positioned, rectangular stones, with a slight batter, still *in situ* (1963, 161), although this is not evident from site photographs available to us

(Plates 2-3). Here it should be noted that it is also apparent that some discrepancies may exist between the numbers assigned to some of the structures during on-site recording and drawing by Peter Mayer and Reinhard Huber, and those used in later reports by Millet. As was acknowledged at the time, whether the superstructures were in fact pyramidal remains open to question. Millet noted that fragments of ‘window-frame’ blocks, of a type thought likely to have been set in a pyramid superstructure were found in the cemetery area (1963, 161); similar features were recorded at Arminna (Simpson 1967, 189). However in the better-preserved superstructures the steep inclination of the stones would have made a construction of a pyramid from ground level improbable. One photograph shows a (unidentified) structure with three surviving courses of stone, apparently nearly vertical-sided (Plate 4). However, it is also possible that the surviving stone

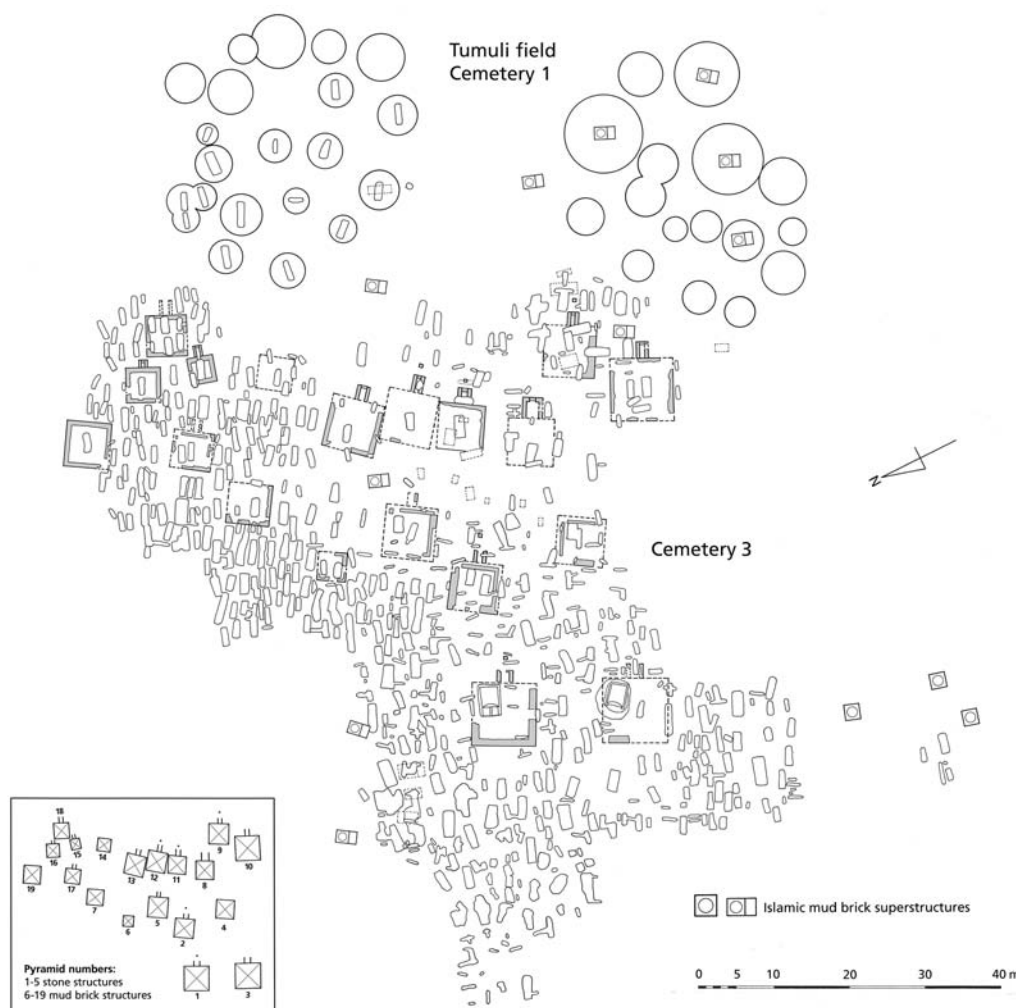
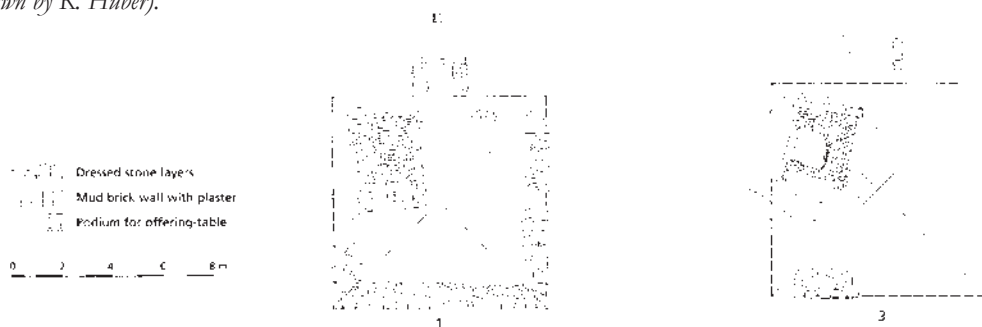


Figure 2. Plan of Gebel Adda Cemetery 3 in the 1963-1964 season, and adjoining tumuli at the north end of Cemetery 1 (scale 1:1000). Numbering of pyramids has been modified to reflect Millet’s description of them in the 1963 report (see Millet 1963, 159) (survey by P. Mayer, drawn by R. Huber).



Figure 3. Plan of Gebel Adda Cemetery 3 stone 'pyramids', excavated in 1963 (scale 1:300). (Survey by P. Mayer, drawn by R. Huber).



courses formed part of a *mastaba* superstructure, or indeed a platform on which a pyramidal superstructure could have been set.

Some of the small chapels, attached at the south-eastern face of the 'pyramids', still had the remains of the mud-brick sidewalls with traces of mud plaster on the outside. At pyramid 5 only a few foundation stones were left. In front of the chapels belonging to pyramids 1 and 2, the small mud-brick podia, used as a base for the offering-tables, were still in place. Next to the podium of pyramid 1 two displaced offering-tables, were found (Millet 1963, pl. XLVII). No traces of

enclosure walls were found around any of the 'pyramids'.

Millet recorded that during the second season clearing towards the north and east revealed the remains of another 16 pyramids (1964, 8). At least five had stone superstructures. These include two examples (Figure 2, no. 9, 10) on the south-east side of the excavated area illustrated by Millet (1964, pl. II, 3), and shown here under excavation (Plate 5). Figure 4 shows the plan of nine others which had mud-brick superstructures, with their rectangular tomb cuts. Some had a single burial chamber, located more or less in the centre. In other cases several tombs with the usual mud-brick vaults were inserted within the area of the original superstructures. In most



Plate 2. Cemetery 3 under excavation. Stone foundations of pyramid 1 visible lower left; looking towards the north west (photo H. Jaritz).



Plate 3. Cemetery 3 under excavation. Stone foundations of pyramid 1, with pyramid 2 behind (photo H. Jaritz).



Plate 4. Stone foundations of pyramid/mastaba, with distinctive stone tooling (photo H. Jaritz).



Plate 5. Cemetery 3 excavations underway in early 1964 in the area of stone-based pyramids 9 and 10, looking north east (photo H. Jaritz).



Plate 6. Ba-statues and statue fragments from Cemetery 3 and 4. Note paint-work on example on right, and offering table, centre right (photo H. Jaritz).



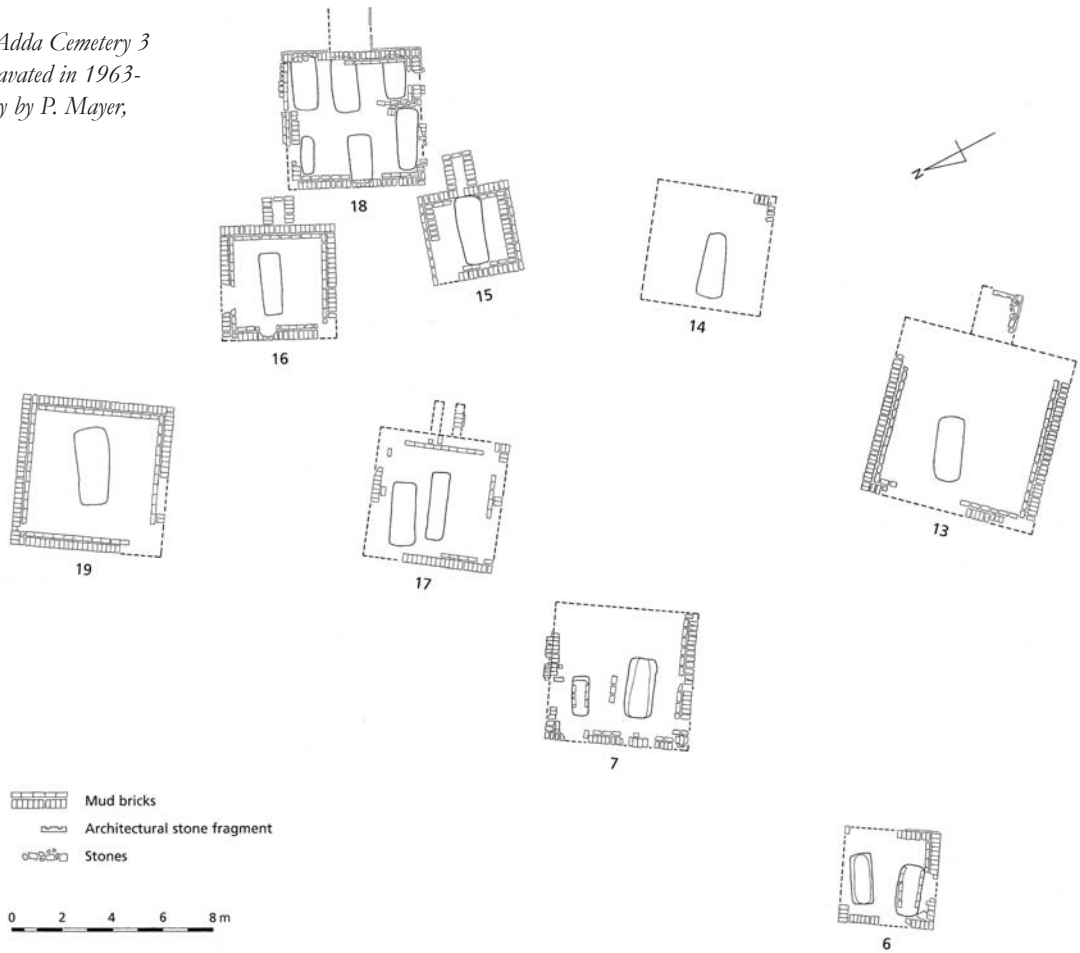
Plate 7. Mud-brick pyramid structures, probably Cemetery 4. Nearest structure has up to nine courses of brickwork surviving (photo R. Huber).



Plate 8. Stone and mud-brick pyramid structure, with vaulted chamber at Arminna West, (probably AWB6) with further stone foundations very close by (photo H. Jaritz).



Figure 4. Plan of Gebel Adda Cemetery 3 mud-brick 'pyramids', excavated in 1963-1964 (scale 1:300) (survey by P. Mayer, drawn by R. Huber).



cases elements of the mud-brick chapels could be recorded and in three cases (Figure 2, no. 9, 11, 12) the podium for the offering-table still survived. At the chapel of pyramid 18 the head of a sandstone ba-statue was found. Substantial parts of at least four more ba-statues were recovered elsewhere (Plate 6). These show many similarities to Lower Nubian examples from sites such as Faras and Qasr Ibrim.

In the short season of 1964-1965 (for which no interim report was published) the clearing of the surface material was then extended towards the north, into an area which was designated as Cemetery 4 (although this was essentially a continuation of the same cemetery). This clearance work revealed many more tombs, dating from the Meroitic through to the Islamic periods. Although this part of the cemetery, due to lack of time, was not completely excavated, the remains of a further stone and mud-brick pyramids were also discovered. Some mud-brick superstructures were preserved to up to nine courses, showing a significant batter (Plate 7). Other examples combining both stone and mud brick are strongly suggestive of the reuse and reconstruction of superstructures, possibly more than once.

Similar patterns of reuse (Plates 8-9) have been noted in cemetery AWB at Arminna West (Simpson 1967; Fuller 1999, 204-5). There, suggestions of familial reuse of tomb superstructures are also made, with the insertion of secondary burials, as also seen in a number of cases in Adda Cemetery 3.

This practice may be contrasted to what appears to be a more usual Meroitic practice of multiple burials utilising a single tomb chamber, which could be accessed for re-use through a sloping access ramp/steps (descendary). This practice may in turn be linked with the construction of covered/vaulted burial chambers, rather than the more usual excavated chambers, quite different constructional approaches.

Fuller's study of the Arminna West material favoured



Plate 9. Stone and mud-brick pyramid structure at Arminna West (AWB15). Note internal (secondary?) brickwork within the stone facing (photo H. Jaritz).

an interpretation of the superstructures as some form of mastaba, rather than pyramid, and such cases perhaps suggest that this was also the case at Adda. That some of the earlier structures might have been pyramidal in form cannot be ruled out, of course, but what may have been a lengthy history of secondary use and re-use would seem to preclude this possibility in relation to their later history. That some tombs may have been reused several times, possibly spanning several generations remains quite possible. Radiocarbon dates from Arminna West certainly suggest the possibility of such tombs continuing to be used well into the 4th century (Fuller 1999, 205, n.17). The continued reuse of the Cemetery 3/4 through the ‘early X-Group period’ (i.e. 4th century) is also reasonably clear on the basis of Millet’s published material, including the recovery of a coin of Theodosius I (AD 379-395). Some burials inserted in and around the stone pyramids are clearly of such later types, probably inserted when the original burials were already becoming masked by accumulations of debris and blown sand (Plate 10), in addition to others more obviously late Meroitic (Plate 11).

As at Arminna West, some unusual grave forms also appear amongst these post-Meroitic burials. One of these was Tomb 726, with a completely atypical shape and with its unusually large dimensions, it may have been the largest tomb in Cemetery 3 (Figure 5). No superstructure survived but on the surface was traced the outline of a low oval platform measuring c. 7.5 x 4.7m defined by a crudely excavated cut to a depth of 200-300mm. This perhaps suggests the original presence of a tumulus structure (since eroded), constructed of material quarried around it.

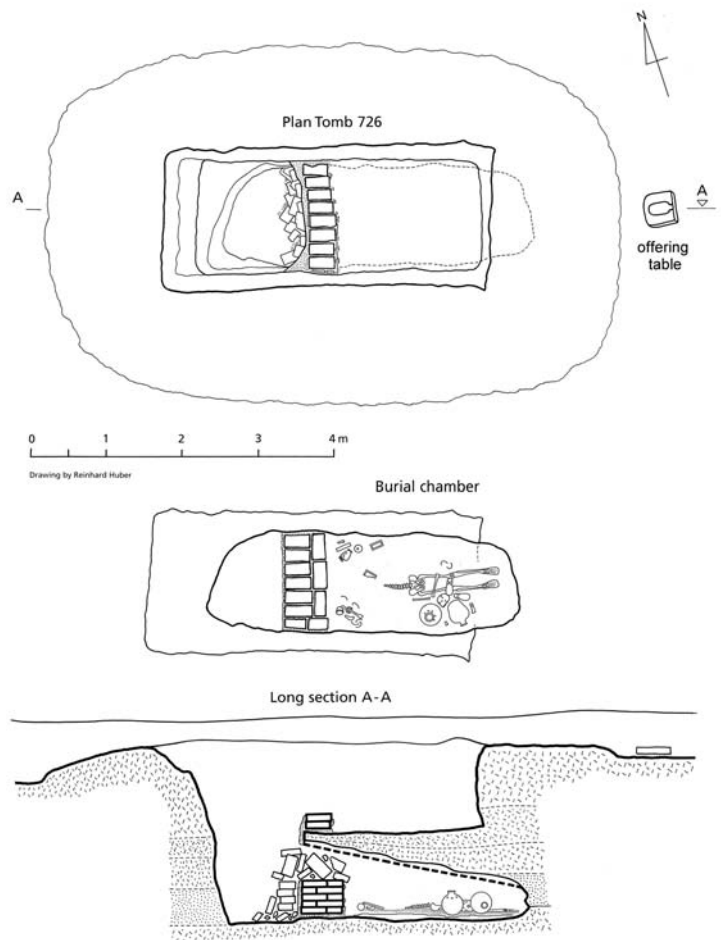


Figure 5. Plan and section drawings of (early X-Group?) Tomb 726 (scale 1:100) (drawn by R. Huber).



Plate 10. What must have been a shallow ‘Early X-Group’ burial inserted alongside an earlier stone pyramid structure (photo R. Huber).



Plate 11. Late Meroitic burial in narrow mud-brick vaulted chamber with two jars, copper-alloy bowl, amphora (Adams U18/LR3) and oil bottle (photo R. Huber).

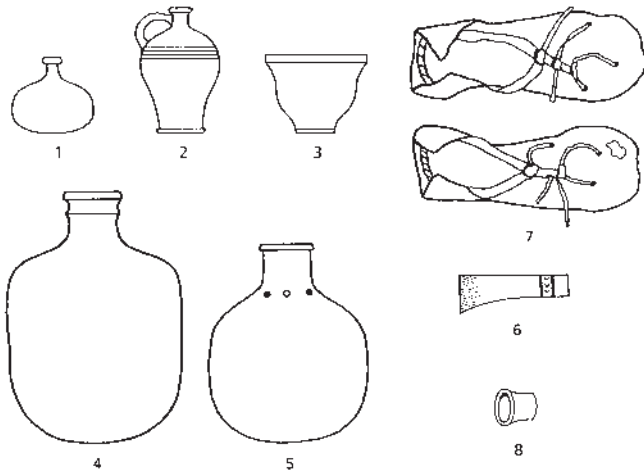


Figure 6. Field drawings of artefacts from Tomb 726 (drawn by R. Huber).

of this platform a sandstone offering-table was found, apparently *in situ*. In the centre of the platform a large rectangular shaft was cut to a depth of 1.2m. At the north-west edge a further shaft gave access to the burial. Unusually it was placed in an excavated chamber rather than in a pit with a mud-brick vaulted roof. Of the blocking only five layers of unusually large mud bricks, size 350 x 200 x 100mm, covered on the outside with mud plaster, were still *in situ*; the upper part had been removed by plunderers. On the outside of the blocking, fragments of a wooden box with ivory inlays, a fragment of a storage jar and an iron arrowhead were found in the debris.

As was to be expected, the inside of the burial chamber was also in a disorder and the tomb floor was partly covered with alluvial rubble, which had collapsed from the ceiling. Beneath the debris was found a much-disturbed skeleton of a male adult, placed on his back in the middle of the tomb. His feet, oriented south east, were clad with leather sandals and an additional pair was found above the leg bones. On the right of the lower extremities his skull, an axe-blade, an archer's thumb ring and two storage jars were found (Figure 6). At the other end of the tomb, scattered around at the left side of the blocking, were several pieces of a destroyed wooden box with ivory inlays, an iron arrowhead, a small oil bottle and an oil bottle with a handle. To the right of the entrance were a mandible, an upper arm and several ribs. Among the bones a few beads, date-stones, a possible bowstring and a fragile fineware cup were found. Similar jars and an inlaid box were found in the 'blacksmith's tomb' (Tomb 534) excavated in the 1963-1964 season (Millet 1964, 9, pl. III.8). Buried with what may be presumed to be the tools of this trade, that burial also included at least three bowls and three jars, two covered by fineware cups with some painted decoration (Plates 12-13). The crude offering-table may perhaps be compared to examples at Qustul (Williams 1991b, figs 73-74).

As recognised by Millet, the use of the cemeteries at Gebel Adda can be seen to fall into a number of distinct phases. Our understanding of ceramic chronologies are probably now sufficient to trace the broad patterns of the chronological de-



Plate 12. 'Early X-Group' Tomb 534 ('Blacksmith's tomb') with three jars on right side, with two fineware cups, and at least three bowls near the head (photo R. Huber).



Plate 13. Detail of decorated fineware bowls covering jar necks in 'Early X-Group' Tomb 534 ('Blacksmith's tomb') (photo R. Huber).

velopment of the cemeteries (Plate 14), should sufficient ceramic records survive in the site archives. A significant divide may lie between late Meroitic/early X-Group Cemetery 3/4 and the more 'classic' form of later post-Meroitic/X-Group tumulus cemetery (Cemetery 1), and indeed the first Christian burials (Cemetery 2), a shift which may be dated to the 5th and 6th centuries. Interestingly, just such a divide also seems likely to have been in evidence at Arminna West, marked by the shift from cemetery AWB to AWC (Fuller 1999, 207).



Plate 14. Field store of assembled pottery (mainly X-Group), from Gebel Adda cemeteries (photo R. Huber).

The glimpses of the cemeteries presented here are very suggestive that very similar changes in burial practices were underway at both Arminna West and Gebel Adda in the 3rd and 4th centuries, although Gebel Adda clearly had a much larger population than Arminna West. As Fuller suggested, it seems very likely that the major changes in burial practices apparent by the early 5th century may be linked to new social (and political?) identities associated with the emergent Nobadian kingdom. Within a few generations these would be manifested in the burials of new post-Meroitic elites at Qustul and Ballana. In passing, it may be noted that the constructional techniques evident in those later tombs maintain the tradition encountered here of constructing burials in vaulted mud-brick tombs, rather than excavated chambers (end-chambers or side-chambers). That some of the observed formal variability in grave substructures may have been determined as much by local geomorphology as by more profound cultural choices seems possible. There are, however, some indications that the construction of brick vaults may have been a generally later practice, also to be used in the (often very large) elite tombs at Ballana and Qustul. These might perhaps be seen as another manifestation of the development of regionally distinctive cultural patterns in Meroitic Lower Nubia, diverging from practices originally introduced from the Meroitic heartlands in earlier centuries.

This small body of material makes clear, yet again, the exceptional interest of the cemeteries of Gebel Adda and the mass of material excavated by Millet (Plate 15). That, at the time this represented one of the largest cemetery excavations of modern times must also be recalled, a truly monumental undertaking (Millet 1967a, 63). What we have seen to date of Arminna West and Gebel Adda suggests that the close analysis of such sites is likely to provide much crucial information likely to throw new light on the nature of the cultural transitions occurring in the 3rd and 4th centuries. There will also clearly be considerable scope for comparative studies with the large bodies of published material from both



Plate 15. Cluster of stone and mud-brick pyramid structures at Arminna West; Nicholas Millet is visible in the background during a visit from Gebel Adda (photo H. Jaritz).

Meroitic and post-Meroitic (X-Group) cemeteries at both Qustul and Ballana (Williams 1991a; 1991b).

Acknowledgement

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