Collective graves and ba-statues. The 2018 and 2019 campaigns at Sedeinga

Claude Rilly, Vincent Francigny and Romain David

Introduction

In 2017, a new four-year plan was inaugurated by the French Archaeological Mission at Sedeinga. The previous two plans focused on the chronology of the graves and on the Napatan/Meroitic transition.[1] They showed that the necropolis developed, not in a linear way, but through accretion of different funerary clusters that were progressively built around one or two 'patron' pyramids. Much to our surprise, several radiocarbon analyses of organic material included in mud-bricks revealed that the main structures of the zone under excavation (namely the western part of Sector II), including pyramids, descendaries and funerary chambers, were all built in Napatan times.[2] The structures were reused by the Meroites, sometimes seven centuries later and with minimal refurbishment such as the building of new chapels.

The new programme is focused on the search for the origins of the Napatan-Meroitic necropolis. Ideally, we hoped to discover burials going back as far as the 18th dynasty, like at Soleb. For this purpose, a new area in the middle of Sector II was selected in consideration of its vicinity to the temple dedicated to Queen Tiyi, and the large quantity of New Kingdom potsherds found on the ground (Figure 1). It was surveyed and rapidly excavated at a surface level in 2017, as there was no trace of superstructures. Later builders doubtless demolished them in order to reuse their mud-bricks. The work on the 'new squares' was conducted along with the excavations of the numerous tombs of the previous zone. In 2018 and 2019, we still had to undertake two excavations during the same seasons, one on the new zone in the middle of Sector II and another on the western part of Sector II, where we had unearthed, between 2009 and 2019, no less than 78 pyramids and 204 tombs.[3] The excavations of the subterranean part of these graves took much longer than we initially thought, particularly because of the large number of skeletons found articulated but in a bad state of preservation, so that it took much time and patience to dig them out. The last tomb of the western zone was finally cleared at the end of the last season, the day before we left, on December 13th, 2019.

Excavations in the central area of Sector II

Surface clearance was carried out in December 2017. Twelve 10x10m squares were surveyed west of a sondage conducted in 2011. An early Napatan grave, which had been looted and reused several times, was found and excavated at that time.[4] Compared to the western part of Sector II, where we conducted our previous excavations, the area is not densely occupied and the distance between the graves is greater (Figure 2). Although no pyramid has been preserved, the existence of the superstructures is attested by fragments of two inscribed Meroitic lintels found on the surface of the descendaries of Tombs II T 399 and 400, in the northern portion of the area under excavation (see Epigraphic section below). They belonged to Meroitic funerary chapels that were added to ancient Napatan pyramids, like in the western area of Sector II. The palaeography of the inscribed lintels shows that Tombs II T 400 and 399 were reused in the late 1st century BC and the late 1st century AD respectively, whereas most of the Meroitic inscriptions from the western area of Sector II date from the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD. The existence of original superstructures is also evidenced by the presence of several pits between the graves, which were obviously used as sand quarries for making

---

[1] For further details about the first two programmes, see Rilly and Francigny 2018, 65-66.

[2] A few graves may go back to the 25th dynasty: see the *Ceramic Report* at the end of the present article.

[3] The team included Claude Rilly (director of the mission and epigrapher), Vincent Francigny (co-director of the mission and photographer), Romain David (ceramic specialist), Vincent Colard (director of excavations), Agathe Chen (anthropologist), Loïc Bouffard (archaeologist, photogrammetry), Jean Montandon-Clerc (archaeologist), Cécilia Populaire (draughtswoman), Marie-Paule Jung (archaeologist, photographer), Simone Nannucci (archaeologist), Olivier Cabon (photographer), Sidonie Privat (PhD student, Montpellier), Axelle Brémont (PhD student, Paris-IV Sorbonne), Karen Henderson (PhD student, Paris-IV Sorbonne), Jessica Mathieu (master's student, Paris-IV Sorbonne), Floriane Canovas (master's student, Paris-IV Sorbonne), Léa Legouix (master's student, Ecole du Louvre), Wafa Al-Sharif (master's student, el-Nilein University, Khartoum). Our NCAM inspector was Huyam Khalid, to whom we are particularly grateful for her invaluable collaboration. We worked with 26 workmen from the nearby villages of Qubbat Selim and Nilwa, under the direction of our *rayyis* Abdelrahman Fadl. We extend our thanks to the NCAM, to the Qatar-Sudan Archaeological Project and the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs for their support. We are grateful to Abbie Hantgan-Sonko for checking the English text.
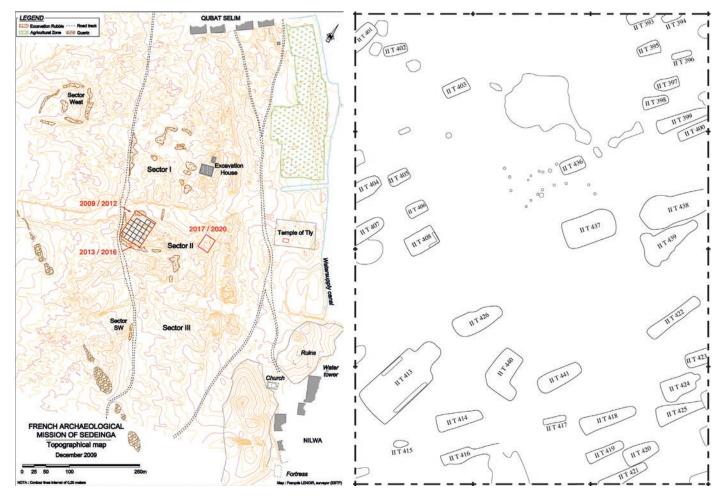
[4] Tomb II T 238, see Rilly and Francigny 2012, 65-66.

Figure 1. Map of the archaeological site with areas under excavation, 2009-2019 (© SEDAU/F. Lenoir).

Figure 2. Middle area of sector II (Excavations 2017/2019) (© SEDAU/V. Francigny).

bricks and mortar, like the two large pits found in the western area.

Most of the graves follow the usual pattern of the Napatan substructures we found in the western zone: a long descendary, a blocking wall and a rectangular funerary chamber. This is the case for Tombs II T 395, 397-400, 414, 416, 418-425. The small Tombs II T 393, 394, 415 and 417 have a lateral chamber. Some graves have, in contrast, a rectangular plan. This is the case with tombs II T 405, 406 and 408. In the latter grave, a brick pavement and some courses of a mud-brick wall were unearthed. However, only the surface of these tombs was cleared so far, so we are still ignorant of the details of their inner structures. The largest tomb in the area, namely II T 413, also includes a large rectangular pit, reinforced by mud-bricks walls, and a short, steep descendary on the east side. The pit was once covered by a vaulted ceiling, which collapsed onto the floor of the tomb. In Tombs II T 426 and 439, the vaults were fully preserved. In II T 441, a large rectangular pit was also discovered, but the tomb had been plundered and reused so many times that it was impossible to identify the original structure, and particularly if it included a vaulted ceiling whose remains had disappeared. However, the size and the proportions of those rectangular pits are utterly different from simple pit-graves such as those found in the western area north and west of the great sand quarry (see Rilly and Francigny 2010). All the rectangular pits found in the middle area of Sector II, in all likelihood, included vaulted ceilings, many of which have collapsed and were cleared away when the tombs were reused. Considering that the pits were once covered by pyramids, these vaulted ceilings were necessary to protect the burials. During the 2019 campaign, the last tomb we excavated in the western area of Sector II, namely II T 432, still had all these elements in place: a pyramid covering a chamber with vaulted brick ceiling (Figures 3 and 4). It is noteworthy that the pyramid was shifted south, so that the greatest part of its weight was not resting on the vault.[5]

The excavation of a vaulted structure in II T 426 provided an opportunity to investigate the construction of a 'Nubian vault'. The top layer of bricks of the impressive tubular structure was removed, revealing a construction

---

[5] This particular layout was already noticed in Jebel Adda, see Huber and Edwards 2012, 81.

Figure 3. Pyramid over vaulted chamber (II T 432) (© SEDAU/L. Bouffard).

technique, which had been first described in the archaeological report of the excavations of the Meroitic necropolis of Karanog (Woolley and Randall-MacIver 1910, 18). The inner layer consisted of bricks that were held in a quasi-vertical position by large potsherds embedded in mortar (Figure 5). The structure was constructed to a depth of nearly two metres. The pit was extended to the southeast in order to accommodate a small side cavity where a secondary burial was excavated. The two burials were disturbed by plunderers, so that nothing else was found but a great quantity of scattered bones and potsherds.

The graves of the central area were of two kinds, rectangular pits with vaulted brick chambers or subterranean substructures with descendaries. In both cases, we believe that a pyramidal superstructure was built over the chambers, as shown by the chapel lintels found in II T 399 and 400, though they both are among the smallest graves of this area. The question arises as to whether these two structures were contemporaneous or used in different periods. Due to the systematic reuse of Napatan tombs by the Meroites at Sedeinga, dates for the original structures can only be obtained from organic elements sealed in mud-bricks, because all the material from the first burial has disappeared or cannot be distinguished from later remains. This excludes the second category of tombs, for which the only bricks available, since no pyramid is preserved, belong to sealing systems that were of course rebuilt for the final burial. For the first category, a sample of organic material (charcoal, straw or seeds) was collected from one of the bricks of the large pit in II T 413. The C^{14} analysis that was conducted by our partner laboratory CDRC Lyon 1 showed that the sample was dated to cal. 781 to 511 BC (probability rate 95.4%), that is, between the beginning of the 25th dynasty and the early Napatan kingdom. This was unfortunately much later than the Egyptian tombs we were searching for, but it was nevertheless the earliest C^{14} date obtained so far for a grave in the necropolis.

This C^{14} analysis shows that vaulted chambers are not specifically late Meroitic, but also occurred in early Napatan times.[6] In addition, the similar structure excavated in the western area (II T 432) was dated to the late 1st century BC/early 1st century AD, thanks to an inscribed potsherd from an imported Aswanese ceramic container that was discovered within the mortar of the pyramid.[7] On the other hand, the graves that include subterranean axial chambers go back to the origins of the Napatan burials, as shown by the royal graves from el-Kurru and Nuri from the reign of Shabaqo onwards. The tombs of Kashta (Ku. 8), Piankhy (Ku. 17) and Shabataqo (Ku. 18) still include a pit with vaulted ceiling (Dunham 1950, 55-63; Dunham 1955, 6-16). In the central area of Sector II, vaulted pits mingle with subterranean chambers. Tomb II T 441, for instance, was originally a pit with a vaulted ceiling. It is surrounded to the west and east by two large tombs with subterranean axial chambers (resp. II T 414 and 422) and in the south by a small grave with a lateral chamber (II T 417).[8] It seems therefore that the two construction types (three if including lateral chambers) were roughly contemporaneous. Lateral chambers were often used for small tombs, especially for immature individuals, as in II T 394 and 415. In contrast, the choice between axial chambers and vaulted pits in the

---

[6] In his excavations in Faras, Griffith considered the tombs with vaulted chambers to be the latest burial places of the necropolis: see Francigny 2014, 78-79. In Jebel Adda, most of the late Meroitic tombs included vaulted brick chambers; see Huber and Edwards 2012, 82.

[7] The palaeography of the Demotic text, mentioning an Egyptian individual called Peteise, son of Nas[..., confirmed the date of the ceramic. We are grateful to Dr Damien Agut-Labordère for his assistance with this inscription.

[8] See Figure 2. The structure II T 440, located north-west of II T 441, has proved to be a simple pit without any burial. It was probably a sand quarry for brick or mortar.

Figure. 4. Vaulted chamber after removal of the pyramid (II T 432) (© SEDAU/L. Bouffard).

Figure 5. Vaulted chamber in II T 426: second layer of bricks with potsherds (© SEDAU/A. Chen).

Figure 6. Imported coloured glass bead (II T 332 c1) (© SEDAU/ V. Francigny).

same zone is not fully understood.[9]

As in the western portion of Sector II, all the Meroitic burials that replaced the original Napatan interments have, in turn, been plundered, leaving only a glimpse of the splendid material accompanying the deceased. Among the jewels that have been discovered, exquisite coloured glass beads (Figure 6) were probably imported from Alexandrian workshops. On the other hand, several signet rings of copper alloy or gold, found in II T 422 and 439, were obviously manufactured in the Meroitic kingdom. During the excavations of Sector West from 1964 to 1970, many similar signet rings in gold, silver or copper-alloy were discovered, either on skeleton hands or stored in a wooden box, in tombs W T 3, 6 and 7 (Leclant 1970, 264 and n.1, 265 (Fig. 9 A and B), 266 (Fig. 11)). The treasure of Queen Amanishakheto found by Ferlini in Beg. N. 6 also included many such signet rings, all locally made, of very fine workmanship (cf. Labia 2017, *Catalogue*, 37-142). Two signet rings from the middle area of Sector II are particularly notable. A copper-alloy ring found in II T 422 (Figures 7 and 8) bears the depiction of two scorpions on each side of a vegetal element. A gold ring, found on the floor of the vaulted chamber in II T 439, alongside with other rings in copper alloy, shows the figure of a bird of prey, wearing the *hemhem*-crown and holding a flagellum with its wing (Figures 9 and 10). The bird is trampling a snake with its long legs. Its tail is small. The feathers on the back of its head are dishevelled. These features match the depiction of a brown snake-eagle (*Circaetus cinereus*), a species that lives in sub-Saharan Africa.[10] Its ability for chasing and killing snakes makes it a symbol of the victorious fight against evil.

An unexpected reuse of previous funerary material was found in II T 425. This was not a former Napatan grave but a Meroitic tomb, limited to a simple pit. For unknown reasons, the axial chamber that was initially planned was never dug and the descendary was converted into a funerary chamber. The builders covered it with a ceiling made with various elements reused from other graves, such as schist slabs and a pyramid capstone of white sandstone. Instead of a frame topped with a lotus bud, a common Egyptian and Meroitic symbol of rejuvenation, this capstone includes two frames side by side, topped by two twin lotus buds (Figure 11). This strange artefact is probably connected to a double ba-statue found on the surface in Sector II at the start of the excavations, in 1963 (Figure 12). The report stated '(the human part) shows a double bust, with only two feet. The top of the fragment includes the start of two necks and the base of two hairstyles' (Schiff Giorgini 1966, 258). The statue was apparently made for two twin sisters. The uniqueness of this representation, unparalleled on the site and elsewhere, and the unprecedented duality of the pyramid capstone suggests that the two elements come from the same funeral.

Collective graves

Tomb II T 418, a spacious grave carefully dug in Napatan times, is a textbook case of Meroitic reuse of Napatan structures. It was redesigned into a collective tomb (Figure 13).[11] The original chamber was large enough to become the resting place of four individuals. The lower part of the descendary was converted into a second chamber. For that purpose, the original edges of the descendary on the north and south were excavated to a depth of 1.5m in order to create two benches supporting a ceiling. The northern bench, which was probably too fragile, was reinforced by a

---

[9] Builders preferred vaulted pits when the soil was too soft for subterranean chambers topped by pyramids (Francigny 2014, 79). This was perhaps the case of the central area of Sector II. It is probably significant that the axial chambers of II T 414 and 422 are unusually deep and partly hewn in the schist bedrock.

[10] See *https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brown_snake_eagle*.

[11] For collective graves, during the Meroitic period, see Francigny 2014, 151-154.

Figure 7. Signet ring in copper alloy featuring two scorpions (II T 422 c1) (© SEDAU/ V. Francigny).

Figure 8. Impression of signet ring II T 422 c1 (© SEDAU/ V. Francigny).

Figure 9. Gold signet ring featuring a brown snake-eagle (II T 439 c1) (© SEDAU/ M.-P. Jung).

Figure 10. Impression of signet ring II T 439 c1 (© SEDAU/ M.-P. Jung).

Figure 11. Double pyramid capstone reused in II T 425 (© SEDAU/ V. Francigny).

Figure 12. Double female ba-statue found in 1963 (© SEDAU/ V. Francigny)

brick wall. No trace of a vault was found and very few bricks were discovered in the filling of the descendary, so that it is probable that the ceiling was made of perishable material such as wood, which is typically eaten by termites. A new blocking wall was built east of this new chamber, where five other deceased individuals, two immature and three adult, were laid. They were probably encased in coffins that were consumed by termites and placed there in two successive layers. These last burials are unambiguously dated to the Meroitic period by characteristic artefacts such as a corroded iron kohl stick and a shard of fine ware with a décor of black scales. Two copper alloy bowls, associated with two of the skeletons buried in the descendary, were also unearthed. The considerable work required by the rearrangement of the original Napatan grave, including an unusual masonry structure, is another example of 'pious reuse', in which Meroitic individuals were buried in the same place as their ancestors. In this case, it would have been easier to dig a new tomb.[12]

In the western part of Sector II, several collective burials in reused Napatan graves were found in the last three seasons. The huge twin tombs II T 389 and 390, located on the southern edge of the eastern sand quarry, have yielded four and seven skeletons respectively. In II T 390, the chamber hosted five individuals and a cat's skeleton and two additional burials were stacked in the western part of the descendary. In II T 390, potsherds from ceramic basins typical of Napatan burials were the only trace of material from the original interment (Rilly and Francigny 2018, 68, n. 17 and pl. 5). Incense charcoal from this first burial was found behind the entrance of the chamber and collected for C_{14} analysis. The sample was dated to Cal. 753 to 410 BC (probability 95.4%), with the highest probability (57%) between 593 and 410 BC, that is, in mid-Napatan times. As for the date of the Meroitic reuse, the poor state of preservation of the skeletons did not allow any C^{14} dating, but an intact Meroitic jar from the 2nd/3rd century AD was found with the skeletons in II T 389.

During the last campaign, in 2019, another large Napatan grave reused for collective burials in Meroitic times, II T 347, was found. It contained no less than 13 skeletons, in various state of preservation, buried in the descendary and chamber. Unlike in II T 389, 390 and 418, the remains of four coffins were found within the chamber (Figure 14). The wood had been eaten by termites but the white plaster, decorated with red stripes, has preserved the shapes of the coffins, forming an empty shell within the filling accumulated in the chamber. No funerary material was associated with the Meroitic burials, but a fragmentary Napatan offering-table, with a decoration of loaves, running water and perhaps ears of wheat, was unearthed in the descendary (Figure 15). This artefact, which had fallen into the descendary after the destruction of the funerary chapel, is probably all that remains from the original burial.

The three Meroitic collective burials (II T 347, 389, 390) have not yielded any significant material. No trace of

---

[12] See our recent article in *Sudan & Nubia* 22, appropriately entitled 'Closer to the Ancestors' (Rilly and Francigny 2018, 66).

Figure 13. Meroitic rearrangement of Napatan tomb II T 418. A. original burial chamber reused; B. original descendary converted into a second burial chamber; C. benches dug in the ground to the north and south; D. remains of retaining wall built to the north; E. new blocking wall (© SEDAU/ V. Francigny).

Figure 14. Collective burials in II T 347 (orthophoto © SEDAU/ L. Bouffard).

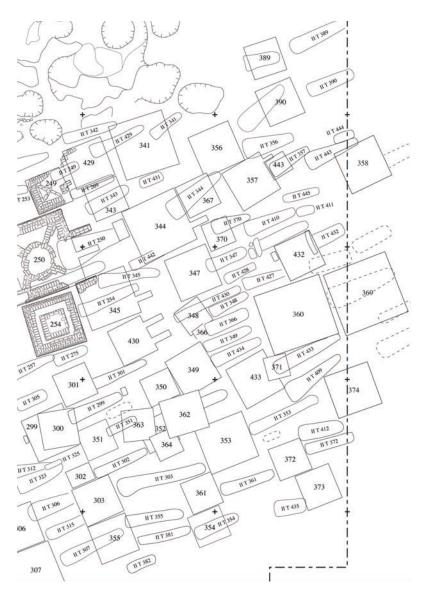Figure 15. Napatan ceramic offering-table from II T 347
(© SEDAU/ M.-P. Jung)

Figure 16. Western area of Sector II (Excavations 2009/2019)
(© SEDAU/V. Francigny).

glassware or decorated fine ware was found. Very few beads and no precious rings were present, even on undisturbed skeletons. No Meroitic offering-table or funerary stela were discovered in connection with the deceased. These three Napatan graves, which are away from the centre of the funerary cluster, may have been reused by lower-class families, whereas the tombs located in the core were reused for the burials of higher-class individuals.

Excavations in the western area of Sector II

It took three seasons to excavate the 80 tombs that were found in 2016, when the surface clearing of the western area in Sector II joined the zone excavated between 1991 and 1994 by the previous team. In 2018 and 2019, the last 44 graves were addressed (Figure 16). Most of them are small tombs with short descendaries, except for the collective graves II T 390 and 347, as well as II T 250, 254, 299 and 353, which are the main burials of the largest pyramids in the area. Here again, the original monuments and their infrastructure date back to the late Napatan, as evidenced by a C[14] analysis of organic sediments collected in 2016 from a brick of Pyr. 337, which delivered a date between 403 and 211 BC, with the highest probability of 60%, from 403 to 352. Most of the graves, probably plundered shortly after the burial, were reused in the Meroitic period, particulary in the 2nd/3rd centuries AD, as shown by the palaeography of the funerary texts that were found in this area (Rilly and Francigny 2018, 73-74).

Among these tombs, five are of particular interest, either because of their structures (II T 254 and 432) or for the material that was found in them (II T 299, 340 and 361). We discussed above the architecture of II T 432 (cf. Figures 3 and 4), the only case in Sedeinga where a vaulted chamber and its pyramid were both preserved. The large substructure of II T 254 is a unique feature at Sedeinga. It includes a wide and deep descendary whose walls are tilted outward as is often the case in Napatan times. The first part is flat and moderately inclined, but after 3.10m, the slope becomes steep and ends with five irregular steps carved into the bedrock, giving

access to two funerary chambers. This twin substructure was reused by the Meroites, as shown by the discovery of a small fragment from a chapel lintel written in Meroitic.[13]

Tomb II T 430 is associated with Pyramid II 346. Its descendary is very long (5m) and is partly located under the poorly preserved remains of the small pyramid II 348, which had to be dismantled after it was photographed and drawn. The substructure has the characteristics of the beautiful Napatan tombs on the site, with four steps regularly cut into the substrate and a harmoniously hewn doorway. It was reused in Meroitic times, as shown by a set of brown glass fragments, found in the descendary. This type of glassware, imported from Alexandria, was very valued at Sedeinga and is found in large quantities in Meroitic burials of the 2nd/3rd centuries AD (Francigny 2014, 133-134).

However, the most amazing find in this tomb is two stone vessels typical of the Pharaonic period and especially of the 18th dynasty, when the temple of Queen Tiye was built at Sedeinga. The first item is a calcite basin with decorated handles (Figure 17) and the second a flat mortar of black granodiorite, with three handles and a spout, and its pestle (Figure 18). The excellent state of preservation suggests that the two containers were stored in a secure place, possibly a grave, for centuries. This cultic material probably came from the temple of Tiye, but its adventures en-route to the tomb remains a matter of speculation.

Meroitic ba-statues

Two nearly complete ba-statues, a male and a female, were unearthed during the last season. Unusually, the discovery of the male statue and its context was actually distributed over three seasons. In 2016, during the surface clearance east of Pyramid II 353, three sandstone artefacts were found together, alongside with some bricks probably from the funerary chapel. The first object was a broken offering-table (II T 353 d1) with a Meroitic inscription for a person whose fragmentary name read *Wil*[... Underneath it was a stela (II T 353 d3), complete but badly eroded by friction with the offering-table (see Epigraphic section below). From its palaeography, the text can be dated to the second half of the 3rd century AD.

In 2018, Tomb II T 361 was finally excavated. At the end of the descendary, the head of a ba-statue was found. It had been severed from its body at the base of the neck but was otherwise in a perfect state of preservation. It displays the usual features of this type of statue from the first centuries AD. The short hair is cut at right angles on the temples and circled with a headband. The neck is massive, the ears are oversized, perhaps to emphasise the listening ability of the deceased who has possibly become an intercessor between the living and the deities. The top of the skull has a hole for the insertion of a painted sun-disc, made of wood or sandstone. Finally, in 2019, the tomb II T 354, located directly south of II T 361, was excavated. Although it was associated with a pyramid, the grave is small and includes

Figure 17. Egyptian basin in calcite from II T 430
(© SEDAU/V. Francigny).

Figure 18. Egyptian mortar and pestle from II T 430
(© SEDAU/V. Francigny).

[13] It reads [k]*roro* 'elder', 'first' (specification added to a title) and was the only inscription found in 2018.

a lateral chamber. The missing body of the ba-statue was discovered at the bottom of the descendary. The statue was obviously beheaded by tomb robbers out of fear of the deceased's spirit. The head and the body were subsequently thrown in these two different locations. Sandstone splinters from the statue's shoulders were found in the descendary of Tomb II T 353, suggesting that this was its original location.

The statue is nearly complete (Figure 19). It is about 0.75m high. Only the left shoulder and the right arm are missing. The avian features, which dominated in Napatan times, are reduced to a sort of long cape reminiscent of the wings and tail of a falcon (Figure 20). The rest of the body is entirely human, as is typical for late Meroitic ba-statues.[14] It features a young man, dressed in a fringed tunic with a tasselled belt, upon which a richly decorated apron[15] reaches to his feet. He holds in his hands the handle of a stick ending with straps, probably a flywhisk. However, the most conspicuous part of his clothing is a leopard skin (more likely a cheetah) that covers the upper part of the body. In Egypt, this was the specific dress of the *sem*-priests, in charge of the funerary rites such as the 'opening of the mouth' on the mummies. In Kush, until this discovery, leopard skins were only associated with royal power. The ruler, whom this garment marks as the incarnation of Iunmutef, god of filial piety, wears it in front of his divine father Amun.[16] The ba-statue found at Sedeinga shows that there were also *sem*-priests in ancient Sudan, even in the late Meroitic period.

Figure 19. Ba-statue with leopard skin
(© SEDAU/O. Cabon).

Figure 20. Ba-statue with leopard skin, rear view
(© SEDAU/O. Cabon).

[14] For a typology of the ba-statues, see Francigny 2014, 38-48. A similar piece is the beautiful ba-statue of viceroy Maloton, now in the Nubian Museum in Aswan, dated to the mid-3rd century AD (Wenig 1978, 196).
[15] See Yvanez 2018, 110-112 for a similar apron from Jebel Adda.
[16] See for instance Abdel Rahman and Rilly 2008, 135, Pl. 1 a-b; 136, Pl. 2b.

They were probably, like their Egyptian colleagues, in charge of the funerary rites performed on the deceased, even if there was no mummification in Kush.

The Meroitic stela II T 353 d3, originating from the chapel where this ba-statue once stood, provides an extraordinary confirmation of the office this man held. His name is Pawarite-wada (*Pwrite-wd*) and, as was often the case in Kush, it is a contextual name given to an individual during the course of his lifetime and not his birth-name (Rilly and Francigny 2012, 68; Rilly and Francigny 2018, 70).

The translation of *pwrite* is certain. It means 'life', particularly in the translation into Meroitic of the Egyptian royal formula 'given life'. It is the Meroitic reflex of a Northern East Sudanic proto-form meaning 'strength' (Rilly 2010, 136, 363; Rilly 2017, 237)[17] and is better translated as 'vital force'. The second element *wd* can only be a verb, since an adjective would be followed by the article. It is attested in REM 1141, a stela from Qasr Ibrim in the name of Queen Amanishakheto. In line 25, the phrase *ato ape-se-l wd-te* probably means, 'pour the water of Ape!'[18] The same verbal stem is found in Nubian, extended with the suffix *–ir*, Nobiin *udir* 'to put, lay, pour', Old Nubian *outir*, 'to lay, put, hold, deposit', Dilling *otir* 'put in' (Kauczor 1920, 121; Browne 1996, 141; Khalil 1996, 85).[19] The meaning of the name *Pwrite-wd* is therefore '(the one) who pours vital force'. This is precisely the definition of the role of the *sem*-priest when performing the 'opening of the mouth'.

Soon after the discovery, in November 2019, a second ba-statue was found in the excavations of Tomb II T 299 (Figures 21, 22 and 23). This Napatan grave was reused in Meroitic times. The superstructure is a rare instance of the restoration of an ancient pyramid. The Meroitic masons levelled the base of the Napatan monument, with its characteristic pinkish bricks and mortar, and built a greyish pyramid upon it. A new chapel was added on its east side. The funerary chamber was reused for the burial of a high-ranking lady and closed by a large and heavy schist slab, held in place by a strong buttress of bricks and mortar. The plunderers probably destroyed the chapel to get access to the substructure, but they could barely move the schist slab and pushed it just enough for a child to crawl into the chamber. In this process or later, the fragments of the ba-statue, which the robbers might have broken for the same reasons as for the male statue, fell inside the tomb. The body was found in the descendary, in front of the door, along with the broken right hand. The head was split in two parts, which were found on each side of the schist slab. The feet are missing.

The statue was approximately 0.50m high when complete. It is slightly smaller than the male one and of lesser quality. It is probably contemporaneous with Pawarite-wada's statue (mid-3rd century AD), since they follow a similar pattern, that is, a human body with a large cape in form of a bird's wings and tail. This second ba-statue is of a mature woman, with naked pendulous breasts. The lower part of her body is cloaked in a long skirt, fastened at the waist by a broad belt. Her hands are to her side. The neck is thick and displays folds that are also found in the Candaces' depictions, symbolising richness and

Figure 21. Female ba-statue from II T 299 (© SEDAU/O. Cabon).

---

[17] Another word, *wte* 'existence', was used to translate 'given life' in archaic texts, for instance in Taneyidamani's cartouche in his great stela from Barkal (REM 1044A).

[18] It is tempting to equate 'Ape' with the Egyptian Nile god Hapi, with the usual loss of the initial glottal consonant, like in *Ar* 'Horus' or *Atri* 'Hathor'.

[19] The verb *twd-*, used for the offering of milk in benediction L (Rilly 2007, 179-180), may also mean 'to pour' and be related to the verb *wd-*.

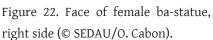Figure 22. Face of female ba-statue, right side (© SEDAU/O. Cabon).

Figure 23. Face of female ba-statue, left side (© SEDAU/O. Cabon).

abundance. The hair is short and shown by a roughly incised grid pattern. Apart from a possible ear ornament (this detail is not clear), the statue is devoid of any decoration, in sharp contrast to the male ba-statue.

Epigraphic material

Two fragments of inscribed lintels from the central area of Sector II were the only texts that were found in the 2019 season. Another inscription was discovered in 2018 in tomb II T 254. It comprises only four signs and is therefore not studied here (see above, n. 13). The funerary stela of Pawarite-wada is added to this study, though discovered in 2016 in the western area of Sector II, because of its particular connection with the ba-statue of the same person studied above.

Stela II T 361 d3

Dimensions: height: 457mm; width: 266mm; thickness: 115mm (Figures 24 and 25).

The paleographical style is Late A, about AD 230 to 300. As mentioned above, this stela was found under an offering-table and its surface was partly eroded for this reason. From the original twelve lines of text, only the first three are entirely legible.

Transliteration

(1) *wos: qetneyineqeli* (2) *sori qetrri: pwri* (3) *te wd qowi sekeseki* (4) *netelw: w̱lene[..]lw: k* (5) *ror[o] [...]lh [.]telw* (6) *qorepse[...]lebw̱* (7) *qor[...]lhlo* (8) [...] (9) *w̱lṭel [...] ḍẹ* (10) [...] (11) [...] (12) [...]

Syntactic groups

Initial invocation	[1]*Wos: qetneyineqeli* [2]*Sori qetrri:*
Nomination	*Pwri*[3]*te-wd qowi*
Description (1)	*sekeseki*[4]*netelw:*
Description (2)	*w̱lene[..]l-w:*
Description (3)	*k*[5]*ror[o] [...]lh [.]telw* [6]
Description (4)	*qorepse[...]lebw̱*
Description (5)	[7]*qor[...]lh-l-o*
	[8] [...] [9]*w̱lṭel [...] ḍẹ* [10] [...] [11] [...] [12] [...]

The first lines include an extended invocation to Isis and Osiris, in which relative clauses, which are not yet understood, follow the names of Isis and Osiris: 'Oh Isis, the one who ...! Oh Osiris, the one who ...!'. The name of the deceased, Pawarite-wada (*Pwritewd*), follows the invocation ('This is Pawarite-wada'). From this point the text diverges from the usual pattern of funerary inscriptions. There is no mention of the parents ('filiation'), although
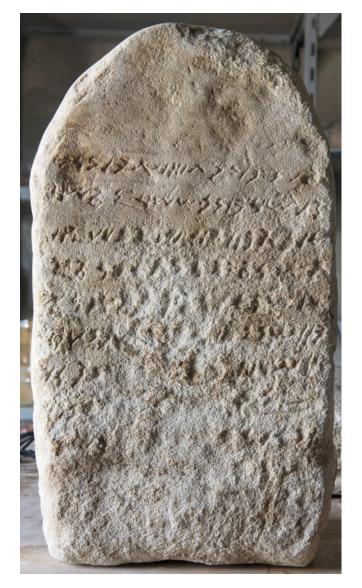
Figure 24. Stela of Pawarite-wada, II T 361 d3
(© SEDAU/J.-F. Gout).

Figure 25. Stela of Pawarite-wada, II T 361 d3, facsimile
(© SEDAU/C. Rilly).

it possibly occurred in the final illegible lines. The individual description is directly added to the nomination. It should include titles, followed by the article *-l* and the copula *-o* ('he was a ....'). Unexpectedly, the copula is replaced here by the element *w*. This suffix is known as an object marker.[20] However, this function is impossible here, since the syntactic context is exactly the same as in sentences ending with the copula *-o*. The only reasonable solution is to analyse *-w*, not as an object marker, but as a late – and possibly local – variant of the copula. In REM 1072, a late inscription from Sector West at Sedeinga that bristles with difficulties, it seems that the long description of the deceased alternates copulas *-o* and *-w*.

The first title of Pawarite-wada is the obscure term *sekesekinete*. The viceroy of Nubia Netewitara, in his funerary stela from Karanog (REM 0278), is described, among other titles, as *sekesekine:ssimete*. The difference between *sekesekine* and *sekesekinete*, if any, is unknown. It is probably not the Meroitic counterpart of the Egyptian word *sm* or *stm* 'sem-priest'. Another title is shared by the two officials: *qor(e)pse* 'the one of the kings', one of the rare words that can be identified in the central lines of the stela. The rest of the text is hardly legible.

Inscribed lintel II T 400d1

Dimensions: length: 769mm; height: 62mm; thickness: 93mm (Figures 26 and 27).

Inscribed lintels are a peculiarity of the Meroitic chapels from Sedeinga. A dozen of them have been found in Sector II and Sector West of the necropolis, four of which were complete. Most of them can be dated to the 2nd/3rd centuries AD. Here, the paleographical style is Transitional A, around 20 BC/AD 20. The similarity to several inscriptions from

---

[20] For example in REM 1116: *mk-l-**w** mlo-l-o-wi* 'he was good **to** the god' (Rilly 2007, 538).

the reign of Queen Amanishakheto is striking. It is therefore, by far, the earliest inscribed lintel found on the site.

The block was discovered in seven fragments, which could be fitted together except for a small piece with two characters. It seems that the inscribed part of the lintel is complete in height, so that the original text was written in two lines. However, the extended invocation to Isis is almost entirely missing at the beginning of the first line and the final element te is lost at the end of line 2. Taking into account the dimensions of the signs, the missing part of the lintel was approximately 340mm long, so the original length was around 1.1m. This is the size of the longest inscribed lintels found so far at Sedeinga.[21]

Transliteration

(1) ...]neqel[i:] asori: qettri[: ..]disblo

(2)...]l[:]ho[l]kte ato mxe: [pis]ohte a[t]mxe: pisixrk[te]

The seventh fragment (see Figure 26) bears two letters, *m* and probably *l*. It may be part of the phrase *xmlol* 'a good meal' and originally placed to the right of the remaining portion of line 2.

Syntactic groups

Initial invocation	¹[Wos: qetneyi]neqe-l-i[:] Asori qetrr-i[:
Nomination	..]disb-l-o
Description?	² [c. 10]
Benediction C	[x-mlo-]l[:]ho[l]-kte
Benediction A	ato mxe: [pis]o-h-te
Benediction B	a[t] mxe: pisi-xr-k[te]

The beginning of line two is lost. It originally included approximately ten signs. This is not enough for the filiation (names of mother and father) or for a further benediction formula. A short descriptive phrase giving a single title followed by the article and copula is more likely.

Translation

'[Oh Isis, the one who ...!] Oh Osiris, the one who ...! This is [..]dibala. [...] May you serve him/her a good meal. May you

Above: Figure 26. Inscribed lintel II T 400 d1 (© SEDAU/C. Rilly).

Below: Figure 27. Inscribed lintel II T 400 d1, facsimile (© SEDAU/C. Rilly).

[21] By way of comparison, the inscribed lintel W3 (REM 1091) from Sector West is 1.10m long (for the dimensions of this chapel, see Rilly 2013, 94, n. 10). The lintel REM 1341 (from tomb II T 104) is 0.81m. The inscribed lintel from tomb II T 302, recently discovered, is 799mm long (Rilly and Francigny 2018, 70-71 and pl. 9).
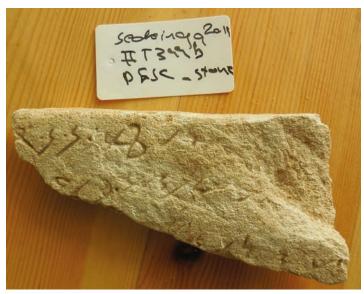
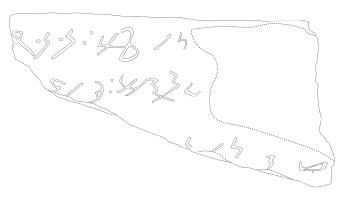Figure 28. Inscribed lintel II T 399 d1(© SEDAU/C. Rilly).

Figure 29. Inscribed lintel II T 399 d1, facsimile (© SEDAU/C. Rilly).

make him/her drink plentiful water. May you make him/her eat plentiful bread'.

Early as it is, the text already includes some elements that will become common much later. This is for example the oldest instance of an extended invocation at Sedeinga. The offering-table REM 1092 from Sector West, which is slightly earlier, has a simple invocation. Similarly, this is one of the first attestations of the benediction formula C in private epitaphs, along with the offering-table of viceroy Khalalakharura from Faras (REM 0521), which can be dated to the same period (See Rilly 2007, 170, 182). In both cases, this benediction, borrowed from the royal funerary texts, precedes the other two. In Sedeinga, this order (CAB), though less frequent than ABC, is not rare and can be found in later texts, such as REM 1234 and 1370.

Fragment of inscribed lintel II T 399

Dimensions: length: 142mm; height: 68mm (Figures 28 and 29).

This small fragment is all that remains from the lintel of a Meroitic chapel built upon Tomb II T 399. The upper edge is regular and probably the original edge of the lintel. The third line comprised the benediction formulae, which are generally at the end, so it is very likely the last line of the original text. The paleographical style is Transitional A, around AD 50/100.

Transliteration

(1) ...]*lowi: ttne*[
(2) ...]*χmni: qe*[
(3) ...]*to mlo p*[

The name of the owner is lost. The term *ttne* that appears in line 1 could be the owner's title or a relative's. It is an administrative office attached to a nomarch, a viceroy or even the king. Line 2 includes a proper name ending with the god-name Amun (*Mni*), which may belong to a member of the royal family. Unfortunately, the context is obscure. Line 3 contains the benediction formula A: *[a]to mlo p[sohte]* : 'May you make him/her drink plentiful water'.

Ceramic Report (R. David)

Since the previous reports (Rilly and Francigny 2018, 69-73), more precise documentation has been collected which allows a better understanding of the ceramic production of the first period of use of the necropolis. A few ceramics, mainly scattered on the surface could belong to burials dating to the 7th to 6th centuries BC (Figure 30). Their number increased when excavations reached the graves located on the eastern margins of the sector and in another trench opened a few hundred metres to the east. Jars, and less frequently open shapes imported from the Theban region, match assemblages dated to the 25th and 26th dynasties in well preserved contexts in Egypt (Aston 1999; Boulet and
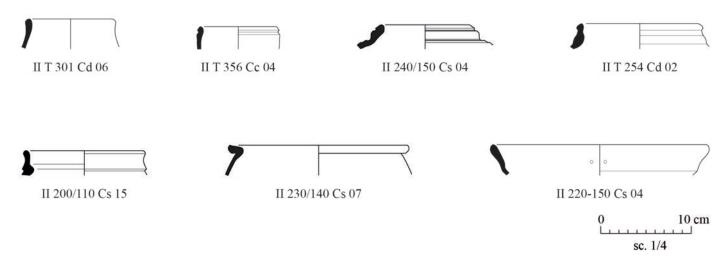
Figure 30. Early Napatan ceramics from Sector II (© SEDAU/R. David).

Defernez 2014; Boulet 2017; Boulet 2018). This earlier material is sufficient in Sedeinga to evidence older burials than those highlighted by C^{14} analyses and could be linked with the resumption of activities at Sedeinga in the reign of Taharqo (see Rilly and Francigny 2018, 63). All the sherds from Sector II might come from a small number of graves, since the Minimum Number of Vessels seems to be low (approximately 20 pots for now).

One of the most striking elements of the ceramics connected with Late Napatan burials found in Sector II is their relatively coarse appearance, which is reminiscent of ceramics usually found in settlements rather than material specifically selected for burials, as observed during the Meroitic period. Some Egyptian imports and their local
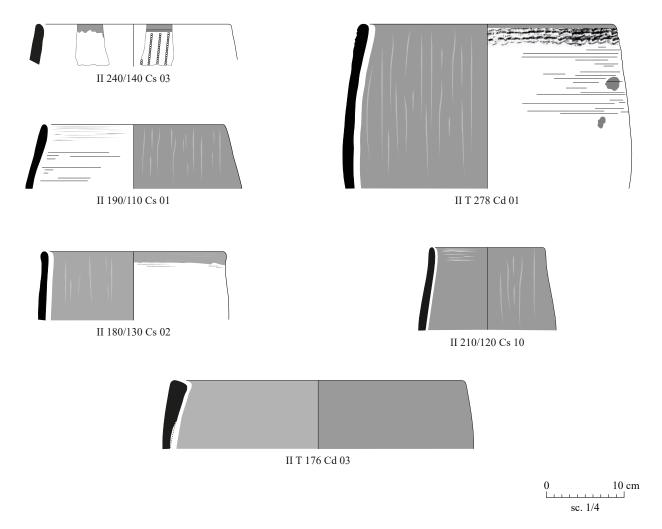

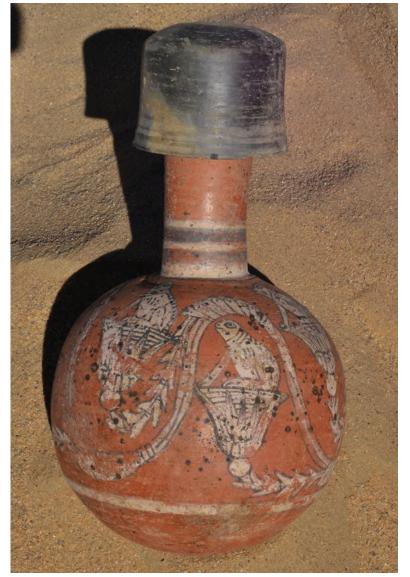Figure 31. Napatan jars and bowls made of a thick paste (© SEDAU/R. David).

Figure 32. Meroitic globular bottle with painted décor and black cup (II T 361 c1) (© SEDAU/R. David).

imitations are noted,[22] but most containers consist of large bowls and wide-open jars with a rough finish. The contrast with Meroitic productions is obvious on this point. The poor quality of the finish and the poor state of preservation of the fragments are barriers to the classification of Napatan ceramics so there has been more attention paid to characterise these assemblages. One of the most remarkable consists of bowls and jars whose surface is covered with a thick and browned red slip (David 2020). The typology is quite extensive, ranging from cups to wide-open jars but each type seems relatively standardised. The frequency of some forms, including bowls and jars with a thick base (Figure 31), nevertheless suggests a certain specialisation. As these ceramics are linked to Napatan tombs that were reused and looted many times, it is very difficult to assign a precise chronology to them. Some comparative data from the excavations of the city of Kerma or the Napatan necropolis of Qustul confirm the Napatan dating without reducing the proposed chronological range.[23] The radiocarbon analyses have provided dates to around the late 5th century BC and the beginning of the 4th century BC for the allegedly earliest pyramids of Sector II. Other results from immature burials in the neighbourhood corroborate these late Napatan dates.

In addition to the study of the Napatan material, the Meroitic ceramics unearthed during the excavations were also collected and examined. The most unusual discovery in 2018 was a long necked globular bottle, the form of which is well-known at Sedeinga, but the decoration, depicting frogs seated on lotus flowers, has no parallel at this site or elsewhere (Figure 32). The bottle was capped with a wheel-made cup whose slip was blackened by post-firing in a reducing atmosphere, in order to resemble the bronze cups that this item imitates.

References

Abdel Rahman A. M. and C. Rilly 2008. 'Royal and Private Devotion to Amun of Napata. Two Meroitic graffiti recently discovered in Jebel Suweigat', *Kush* 19, 127-137.

Aston, D. A. 1999. *Elephantine XIX. Pottery from the Late New Kingdom to the Early Ptolemaic Period. ArchVer* 95. Mainz.

Boulet, S. 2017. 'Les productions céramiques de la XXVe dynastie dans le secteur du temple de Ptah à Karnak', *Bulletin de liaison de la Céramique Égyptienne* 27, 53-62.

Boulet, S. 2018. 'Interactions entre les productions céramiques égyptiennes et nubiennes du VIIIe au VIe s. av. J.C.', in R. David (ed.), *Céramiques égyptiennes au Soudan ancient.* CCE 11. Cairo, 153-175.

Boulet, S. and C. Defernez 2014. 'Ceramic Production in the Theban Area from the Late Period: New Discoveries in Karnak', in E. Pischikova, J. Budka, K. Griffin (eds). *Thebes in the First Millennium BC.* Newcastle, 603-624.

---

[22] Egyptian imports into Nubia appear to be less numerous after the 6th century: see Boulet 2018, 161.
[23] See David 2020 for more details.

Browne, G. M. 1996. *Old Nubian Dictionary*. Leuven.

David, R. 2020. 'Message in a Bottle… Napatan Hand-made Red-slipped Ceramics from Sedeinga', in M. Vidale, D. Usai and S. Tuzzato (eds), *Tales of Three Worlds, Archaeology and beyond, Asia, Italy and Africa. A tribute to Sandro Salvatori*. Oxford, 250-254.

Dunham, D. 1950. *El Kurru*. Boston.

Dunham, D. 1955. *Nuri*. Boston.

Francigny, V. 2014. *Les coutumes funéraires dans le Royaume de Méroé. Les enterrements privés*. Paris.

Huber, R. and D. N. Edwards 2012. 'Gebel Adda Cemeteries 3 and 4 (1963-1964)', *Sudan & Nubia* 16, 80-87.

Kauczor, P. D. 1920. *Die bergnubische Sprache (Dialekt von Gebel Delen)*. Vienna.

Khalil, M. M. 1996. *Wörterbuch der nubischen Sprache (Fadidja/Mahas-Dialekt)*. Warsaw.

Labia, C. 2017. *Étude iconographique du trésor de la reine Amanishakheto*. Mémoire d'étude de Master 1. École du Louvre, Paris.

Leclant, J. 1970. 'La nécropole de l'ouest à Sedeinga en Nubie soudanaise', *Comptes Rendus de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres* 114 (2), 246-276.

Rilly, C. 2007. *La langue du royaume de Méroé*. Paris.

Rilly, C. 2010. *Le méroïtique et sa famille linguistique*. Leuven – Paris.

Rilly, C. 2013. 'Sur les traces de Jean Leclant à Sedeinga: les textes méroïtiques du prince Natemakhora', *ArchéoNil* 23, 91-110.

Rilly, C. 2017. 'Histoire du Soudan, des origines à la chute du sultanat Fung', in O. Cabon (ed.), *Histoire et Civilisations du Soudan*. Paris, 25-445.

Rilly, C. and V. Francigny 2010. 'Excavations at Sedeinga. A New Start', *Sudan & Nubia* 14, 62-68.

Rilly C. and V. Francigny 2012. 'Excavations of the French Archaeological Mission in Sedeinga, Campaign 2011', *Sudan & Nubia* 16, 60-71.

Rilly C. and V. Francigny 2018. 'Closer to the Ancestors. Excavations of the French Mission in Sedeinga 2013-2017', *Sudan & Nubia* 22, 65-74.

Schiff Giorgini, M. 1966. 'Sedeinga 1964-1965', *Kush* 14, 244-261.

Wenig, S. 1978. *Africa in Antiquity. The Arts of Ancient Nubia and the Sudan II. The Catalogue*. Brooklyn.

Woolley, C. L and D. Randall-MacIver 1910. *Karanòg. The Romano-Nubian Cemetery.* Philadelphia.

Yvanez, E. 2018. 'Se vêtir à Djebel Adda. Nouvelles perspectives de *recherche* sur l'identité culturelle en Nubie méroïtique', *Routes de l'Orient H.-S.* 3, 103-123.