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Front cover. Stone slab A3 used as a paving slab in Temple 4, Qasr Ibrim, showing Taharqa and Amun (photograph courtesy of F. Aldsworth).

Above. Frontal scan of lion head, Naga (Kroeper and Perzlmeier 2022, fig. 21, © Naga Project, 3-D scans by TrigonArt BauerPraus GbR).

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Building E at Damboya, the third and final season

Gabrielle Choimet



Figure 1. Aerial photo of Sector E after the 2022 excavations showing the neighbouring Building H at the bottom of the image (© SFDAS).

As was previously presented (Choimet 2020; 2021), the archaeological site of Damboya is located northeast of the modern city of Shendi, about 1km southeast of the archaeological site of el-Hassa. Since 2020, it has been studied by the French Archaeology Unit in Khartoum (SFDAS) under the direction of Marc Maillot. Located on the north slope of the main hill where a royal palace was recently uncovered (see Maillot and Poudroux, this volume), Building E is 21.1m long and 16.2m wide. Its main entrance is located at the southern corner of the building and is preceded by a ramp nearly 4m long of which the pavement has now disappeared. The building was also accessed by a lateral entrance (either a ramp or a staircase) built along the southwest façade.

Surface clearing was previously undertaken in this sector in 2020; on this occasion, a number of additional features were uncovered, including a second building to the southwest now known as Building H (Figures 1 and 2). Study of the interior of Building E began in the 2021 campaign when six rooms in the eastern half of the building were excavated down to the foundation level. The remaining six rooms were excavated early this year (2022). Twelve sondages were dug inside and outside the structure below the foundation level to investigate the foundations of the walls, particularly at the corners.



Figure 2. Plan of Building E and the northeast part of Building H (in grey) (© SFDAS).

Latest results from the 2022 campaign

This season enabled us to clarify certain points concerning the chronology of the construction of Building E. It quickly became apparent that the walls of the northwest bay (Rooms E10 to E12) were not perfectly aligned, nor even bonded with the rest of the structure, raising the question of whether or not they belonged to the original plan. In addition, several features abandoned during the construction were uncovered (Figure 2).

No elevations or floor levels of Building E were preserved. The remaining walls are those of a platform designed to raise the floor inside the building, and the lack of doors between the rooms, the presence of a ramp and the elevation of the exterior ground level¹ made it possible to restore an interior floor level of at least 1.2m above the exterior ground level (Choimet 2021, 182). As a result, the ‘rooms’ of Building E correspond to the compartments of a foundation platform, and the layers excavated inside are a fill later

¹ Average altitude: 359.79m above sea level.



Figure 3. Corner F 007-F 013 showing the reuse of red brick column drums in the foundations of the original building (© SFDAS).

covered by the building's floors, of which nothing remains.

Twelve sondages were made inside and outside the building. All the walls had foundations almost at the same level, since the foundation trenches were dug through a layer of almost sterile sand systematically stopping at the geological level of Nile silt, or a few centimetres above. The slight slope of the ground affected the foundations: the east corner was a few centimetres lower than the western and southern corners.²

Concerning Rooms E10 to E12, our first impression was quickly confirmed: an original square building comprising nine rooms (Rooms E01 to E09) was extended by the addition of a further three-room aisle. This bay's foundations, added at the northwest, are only slightly higher than the rest of the building (four bricks in the foundation instead of six). Although the bonding appears less carefully made, the bricks are extremely similar, at least to the naked eye: it is thus probable that this must have taken place relatively soon after the erection of the first nine rooms.

The disturbance of the north and west corners of the structure, as well as of Corners F 007-F 013 and F 006-F 007 by looters looking for red bricks, enabled us to observe that the foundations of the corners of the original building (Rooms E 01 to E 09) differed significantly from those of the later bay (Rooms E 10 to E 12). The foundation level of Corner F 007-F 013 shows an almost exclusive use of column drums (Figure 3), whole or fragmentary, and is reminiscent of that observed in 2021 in room E03, as well as in the external sondage at the foot of the corner formed by Walls F 005 and F 006 (Choimet 2021, 171, fig. 4). Similar column drums are visible in the foundations of Wall F 006, next to the corner with Wall F 007. In contrast, the north and west corners of the building (which correspond to the external corners of the

² For a more detailed description of the construction and natural levels in Sector E, see Choimet 2021, 170.

later bay (Corners F 010-F 013 and F 006-F 010), show completely different foundations of fragmentary red bricks embedded in thick grey mortar. Moreover, these foundations are shallower and comprise only four courses of bricks instead of six (Figure 4). The presence of architectural pieces inside the masonry indicates that building materials from a large edifice located nearby were reused for the construction of Building E. The outer façades were then coated with thick whitish plaster. The distribution and features of the fragments suggest that these façades were partly covered with yellow paint.

Inside the building, we observed striking differences in the filling of the casemates: Rooms 2 and 3 are particularly remarkable since they consist exclusively of mudbrick and red brick fragments, architectural pieces such as sandstone or red brick column drums, all mixed with pieces of plaster and a significant amount of the remains of plaster and pigment preparation (Choimet 2021, 174-175, fig. 10).

In contrast, the other rooms had a rather sandy or evenly mixed filling, as in the case of Room 4 where layers of rubble alternated with sandy layers and a mud matrix (Choimet 2021, 175-176, fig. 13). These variations may have been dictated by the availability of materials in the immediate vicinity of Building E, and not by any structural function. Nevertheless, the content of Rooms 2 and 3 could be explained by the need to support a heavy floor, for example made of red bricks or sandstone slabs (Choimet 2021, 177), although the absence of floors and walls does not allow us to say much about the respective functions of the different rooms.

Another significant discovery was of several changes made during the course of construction, indicating on the one hand that a new plan was substituted for the initial project and, on the other hand, that some mistakes made had to be corrected.

In Room E02, a trench c. 0.70m wide (F 048) was uncovered between its two long walls (Choimet 2021, 175, fig. 11). Intended for the foundations of a wall, it was never used and later filled with the same compact filling as the rest of the room. In Room 6, the foundations of a wall (F 072), situated in line with Wall F 014, also indicate a change, the wall being shifted by 0.45m towards the northwest, Room E09 the smallest in the building at only 9.5m² (Figure 5).

The remains of a probable staircase (F 087) were found in the south corner of Room E10 (Figures 6 and 7). Built directly on the construction level without any foundations, it consisted of a row of four stretchers along F 007, preceded by a c. 0.70m wide filling of headers and broken bricks resting on a bed of bricks on edge; the whole carefully faced with a row of red brick headers. When excavated, F 087 had seven courses along Wall F 007 and a single course of red bricks at the other end. As the staircase had not been cut by adjoining wall F 006, this probably means that this feature was never completed, but was abandoned during construction. It is difficult to determine whether the original plan was a lateral entrance - like F 004 on the southwest side of the building - or if it was perpendicular to the ephemeral façade represented by Wall F 007. However, the comparison with F 004 - especially in terms of layout and width - makes a side entrance more likely.

The decision to add an additional bay on the northwest side of Building E resulted in the modification of the secondary access; initially planned for the northwest wall of Room E07, it was finally replaced by an access in the southwest wall of Room E10. This entrance, together with Foundation Trench F 048 and Wall F 072, is further evidence of a change of plan during the course of the construction of Building E that resulted in the addition of three new rooms.

Finally, on the southeast side of Rooms 4 and 5, a wall was found in 2021, slightly offset from two partition walls partly built on top of it (Choimet 2021, 175-177, fig. 12). It is now clear that this feature (F 053) corresponds to a misalignment in the construction that had to be corrected with new walls (F 016 and F 017).

Regarding the construction characteristics of Building E, it should be added that, like Building H 3000



Figure 4. Corners F 006-F 010 (above) and F 010-F 013 (below) showing broken red bricks in the foundations of the new aisle (© SFDAS).



Figure 5. Wall F 072 with Wall F 012 in the background, view from the south (© SFDAS).



Figure 6. Staircase F 087, view from the northwest (© SFDAS).



Figure 7. Staircase F 087, view from above (© SFDAS).

at Hamadab, Building E at Damboya seems to have been designed using the Egyptian metric system, specifically the royal cubit. The original square building measured exactly 30 cubits each side, the addition of the extra bay bringing it to 40 cubits by 30 cubits.³ The original square was probably then subdivided into three bays measuring 9, 12 and 9 cubits wide respectively (Figure 8). As with Building H 3000, it may have been at this point that the original grid deviated slightly with the digging of Foundation Trench F 053, which was eventually abandoned to correct the original axis (Figure 9). This does not seem to have created a problem between Rooms E 03 and E 06, since the original wall (here labelled F 018) was preserved, but the slight offset to Walls F 016 and F 017 indicates a later adjustment. However, the shift of Wall F 012 after the abandonment of Wall F 072 at the foundation stage is deliberate and probably could be explained by the specific function of Room E09, which was thus reduced. A stairwell leading to the upper level might be restored here. In Room E02, the data is unfortunately insufficient to explain the abandonment of Trench F 048.

Another significant feature discovered during the 2022 campaign is Building H, a large building situated immediately to the southwest of Building E, the presence of which was suspected in 2020 after the discovery of two mudbrick walls perpendicular to each other – F 025 and F 026 – and because of the presence of a large number of red bricks and plaster fragments on the surface. Four more walls probably belonging to this second structure were uncovered during the 2022 campaign, of which at least the exterior walls seem to have been built of red bricks (Figures 2 and 10).

Chronology of Sector E

As observed on the rest of the site, the occupation of Sector E seems to have been quite short. The filling

³ The length of the Egyptian royal cubit during the New Kingdom is between 0.523 and 0.525m (Carlotti 1995, 138).

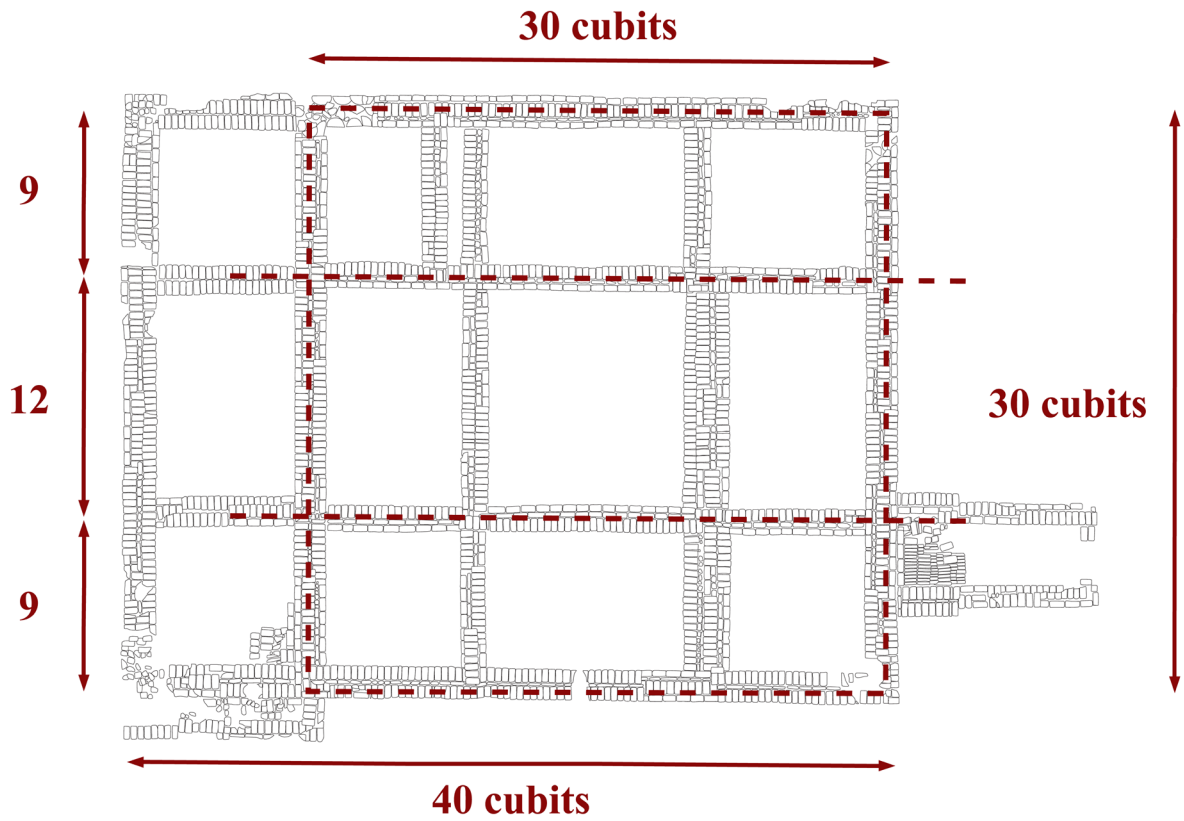


Figure 8. Sketch plan illustrating the probable use of the Egyptian royal cubit during the construction of Building E.

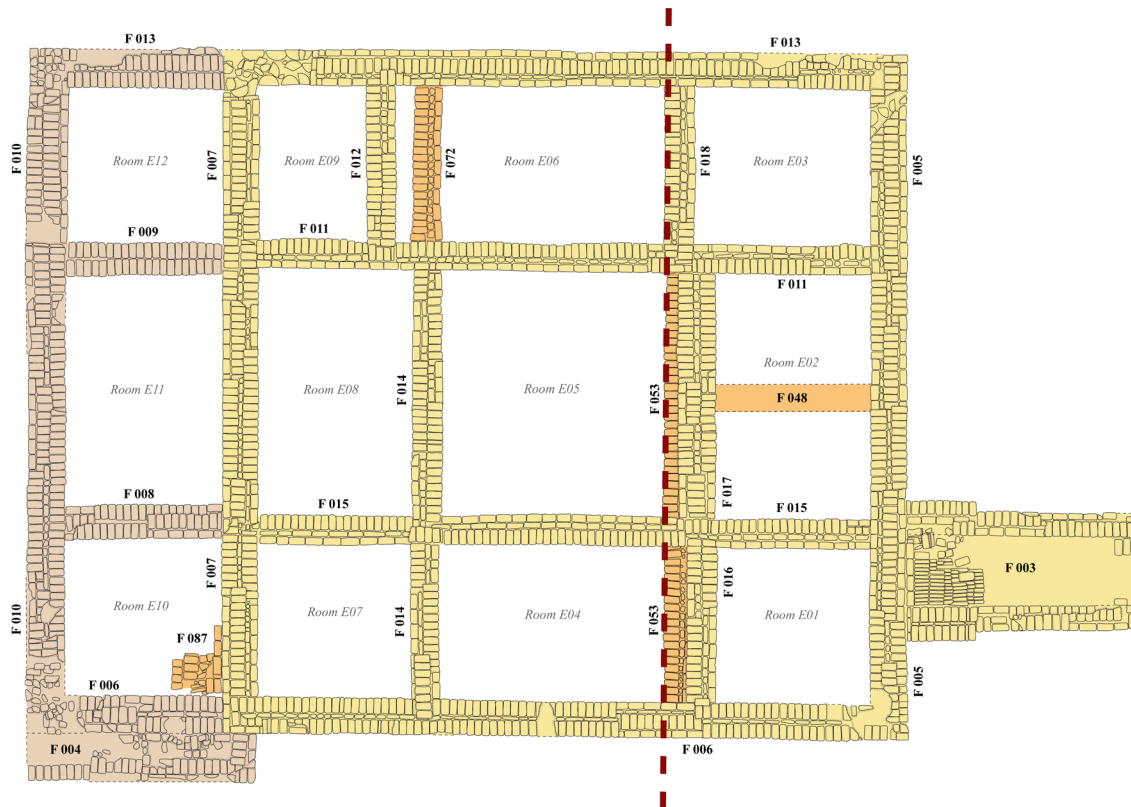


Figure 9. Loss of the alignment with Wall F 053 and reconstruction with Walls F 016 and F 017.



Figure 10. Red brick foundations of Wall F 026 of Building H, view from the northeast (© SFDAS).

of the casemates has been dated to the second half of the 1st century AD by the ceramic material and this was confirmed by the discovery of a Meroitic ostrakon dated between AD 50 and 90 (Choimet 2021, 174, fig. 9). The rest of the surface material belongs to the end of the 1st century AD and the beginning of the 2nd century. In contrast to nearby areas A and G (see Maillot and Poudroux 2022), nothing predating Building E was found in this sector. Only a few sherds, some lithic material and ashy spots in the sand dune on which the building was built prove that there was human activity before the second half of the 1st century AD.

During the last campaign, surface cleaning started along the southwest façade of Building E, with the aim of clarifying its relationship with neighbouring structures, some of which leaned against it. On this occasion, we identified a reoccupation phase, both along the structure and probably also inside, although these remains were heavily eroded. This later phase consists of several large vessels set into the ground and used as domestic ovens (Figure 11). In Room E07 two of these firing structures were installed after the abandonment of Building E, one along Wall F 007 (F 023) and the other one in the south corner of the casemate (F 077). F 023 actually contained two jars placed upside down inside each other. The jar on the outside had a short neck but no decoration, while the smaller was a globular vessel without a neck but painted with *ankh* motifs on lunar crescents. Around these, the sand was slightly reddened and hardened as a result of repeated heating. The interior of both jars was filled with sand, ashes and charcoal, some of which were isolated and collected. Outside Building E, at least two other firing structures were discovered along Wall F 006 (Ceramics F 121 and F 122). Probably contemporary were a few low red brick walls - most of them reduced to a single course - such as F 020 and F 070 and a sandy-ashy dump area filled with large quantities of broken bricks, sherds and burnt animal bones.

According to the relative homogeneity of the pottery in Sector E, the first two phases must have been relatively close in time. In this respect, it is interesting to recall that a large number of cracks were



Figure 11. Ceramic vessels F 077 (above), and F 023 (1) and (2) (below) set into Casemate E07 (© SFDAS).

observed throughout the building, sometimes extending down to the underlying Nile silt layer. This is reminiscent of observations at Naga and el-Hassa: an earthquake might have heavily damaged the temple of Amun at Naga, and also the cult complex of el-Hassa (Rilly 2017, 291-292; Rondot and Nogara 2019, 86).

Finally, a third phase of occupation in Sector E is represented by the establishment, probably in the Christian period, of a relatively large necropolis at Damboya. Nine burials were discovered in Sector E but, as the slope of the kom means greater erosion on its edges, and as the burials are generally located in the upper layers, it is possible that one or more tombs have now disappeared, which seems to be confirmed by the recurrent discovery of scattered human bones.

Except for a secondary deposit containing the skeletal remains of two adults, all graves in Sector E are primary deposits and individual burials - among which two immature individuals were found - like those found in Sectors A and G.⁴ All but one were placed in a supine position, sometimes slightly inclined to the right or the left. No funerary material was found apart from a few glass beads. Grave F 103 therefore stands out, as the deceased had been buried with an iron bracelet on the right forearm, a glass flask on the left side and a bronze ring on the chest, possibly worn on a string (Figure 12).

Remarks

The closest parallel to this type of rectangular casemate building is at Jebel Barkal, in the district of Abasiya, which is located about 700m northeast of the mountain. Here, a Spanish mission excavated a rectangular mudbrick building, 25m long and 15m wide. Its 14 rooms are organised in three bays, of which the central one was slightly wider, like that at Damboya. Also built on a podium, this had its floor level about 0.40m higher than the exterior ground level. It was accessed by a ramp or a staircase near the northwest corner, but a second access near the northeast corner has been considered probable (Diaz de Cerio 2007; 2018).

In view of this, it seems that these types of rectangular buildings built on podiums usually have a monumental entrance, relatively well-ordered bricklaying and were carefully decorated. They can be distinguished from palaces as they seem to systematically follow a tripartite plan, with the central bay being larger than the other two. They also lack the usual batteries of elongated magazines often found within palaces and, given the narrow width of the foundations⁵ (0.90m for the outer walls and 0.70m for the inner walls) and the size of the rooms, we can probably also exclude a second floor. Lastly, they are closely associated with cultic areas. In that regard, one thing worth mentioning about Building E at Damboya is that it yielded a great number of open ceramic containers (c. 250mm in diameter) with traces of fire on their inner walls, which could have been used as lamps or to burn aromatic fragrances. A religious function is thus expected although the details of the activities performed inside these buildings remain unclear. In any case, Building E is quite representative of its category, not to mention the fact that by excavating underneath the construction level, we gained a considerable understanding of its layout and building sequence.

⁴For further details on the graves and the contents, see Choimet 2021, 179-181.

⁵It should be noted that foundations are usually slightly wider than walls. In Building E, this difference ranges from 0 to 100-150mm.



Figure 12. Grave F 103 (above) with detail of the funerary material accompanying the deceased (bottom) (© SFDAS).

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