

SUDAN & NUBIA

The Sudan Archaeological Research Society



Bulletin No. 2

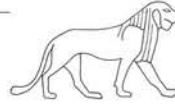
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Introduction

Vivian Davies

Members will note that this second issue of *Sudan & Nubia* is already considerably larger than the first, a clear signal, I am pleased to say, both of our Society's commitment to fieldwork and of the growing interest in Middle Nile archaeology in general. With the four-year programme of survey in the Northern Dongola Reach completed, we began last season a significant new project at Kawa (see Derek Welsby below), a major Pharaonic and Kushite cult-centre and one of the most important archaeological sites in the Sudanese Nile Valley, now threatened by modern development. At the same time our interest in the hydrological research on the Nile palaeochannels in the Dongola Reach continues (Mark Macklin and Jamie Woodward), and we have also supported archaeological survey both in the Bayuda desert in advance of the building of a new road (Michael Mallinson, Laurence Smith and Dorian Fuller) and at the site of Kurgus, the point where the Egyptians appear to have marked the southern boundary of their empire in the New Kingdom (Vivian Davies and Isabella Welsby Sjöström).

Among our guest contributors, two of our Sudanese colleagues report on valuable rescue projects, one on a site affected by the building of the Shendi-Atbara road (Abdel Rahman Ali Mohamed), the other in the area of the Fourth Cataract, where a new dam is being planned (Mahmoud el-Tayeb). Also under threat is the site of Soniyat in the Debba Bend, now very plausibly identified by a Polish expedition as the 'Tergedum' mentioned in Book II of Pliny's *Natural History* (Bogdan Zurawski). Rescue is also very much the theme of the Egypt Exploration Society's latest excavations at Qasr Ibrim, the last remaining site in Egyptian Nubia, where an unexpected rise in the level of Lake Nasser/Lake Nubia is damaging strata previously thought to be safe, necessitating urgent work on those areas (Pamela Rose and David Edwards). Fortunately there is no such threat to the Wadi Howar, a long dried-up tributary of the Nile, evocatively known as 'the Yellow Nile', where a German research project is producing fascinating new data on changes in environment and shifts in settlement patterns (Birgit Keding). A different kind of research, on the records of an important early traveller, is represented in our final paper (John Ruffle). Lord Prudhoe, its main subject, will be familiar to many of our readers for his association with the two great lion sculptures from Gebel Barkal, which now grace the Egyptian Sculpture Gallery of the British Museum.

A preliminary note on a rescue excavation at el-Zeidab, NE-36-K/16-M-9

Abdel Rahman Ali Mohamed

Introduction

The route of the 'Challenge Road' (Geili-Shendi-Atbara-Haya) has been reasonably well covered by intensive archaeological rescue work. The first phase of the Road (Geili-Shendi) was inaugurated in July 1995. The activities of the second phase (Shendi-Atbara) are almost completed. On the other hand, the third phase (Atbara-Haya) requires less effort to rescue its antiquities.

The site of El-Zeidab is located on the eastern bank of the River Nile, some 104 km north of Shendi, and around BM¹ 210. The site is composed of 400–500 tumuli and mound graves of varying size scattered within and around a single granite outcrop. The tumuli and the mound graves are either of rounded or oval shape. They were built of a mixture of sandy silt, gravels, pebbles and boulders of igneous origin. Their diameters range from 2.5–13m, and their heights from 0.4–3.5m.

The objective of this rescue excavation was to clear some burials which are scattered within a granite outcrop, since this site was suggested by the Road Company as a quarry site for the building material of the road. This granite outcrop is the only suitable igneous outcrop in the area. However, other igneous outcrops are exposed on the western bank of the Nile (Whiteman 1972).

A group of eleven tumuli and mound graves were excavated during the season. The burial chambers were dug into the natural gravel deposited by the palaeohydrographic systems of the area and were 50–80cm in depth. Nine of the burials contained extended inhumations with the deceased laid in an east – west orientation.

These burials are classified into three types:

Type (A): The deceased dorsally extended facing to the north (Fig. 1).

Type (B): The deceased in an extended position laid on the right hand side facing to the north (Fig. 2).

Type (C): The deceased laid in an extended position on the left side facing to the south (Fig. 3).

In graves 4 and 6 traces of grass were found covering the deceased. Grave 3 is furnished in the bottom with a thin deposit of coarse grey sand. The graves were characterised by the good state of preservation of the bones due to the dry

¹ Bench Marks: Survey points, set in place by STIPE SPA, the Italian Road Engineers. They are numbered from Shendi and placed at approximately 500m intervals.



Figure 1. Dorsally extended burial facing north.



Figure 2. Extended burial laid on the right side facing north.

nature of the soil, or due to the prevailing aridity of the area since it is located within the dry continental climatic zones with low and irregular precipitation rates (Magid and Nadi 1995). Similar graves in the area have been identified as Christian tumuli (Mallinson and Smith 1993; Mallinson *et al.* 1994).

The individual buried in grave 10 (Fig. 4) is laid in a tightly contracted position, on its right side, probably in an east – west orientation, facing to the north and in a shallow pit 20cm deep. Traces of reddish pigment were noted on the left arm. The deceased was an adult male and the bones were in a poor state of preservation.

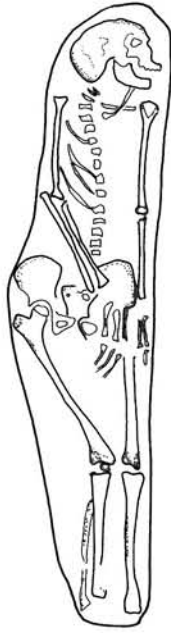


Figure 3. Extended burial laid on the left side facing south.

Ceramics were very rare, only a few sherds being found, and in poor condition. The lack of sherds may be due to the erosion of the site, and due to the fact that some sherds were removed by running water especially along the sides of the slopes.

Some lithic tools and blades have been collected from the site, indicating that it may have been used as early as Prehistoric times.

General Geology

The site is underlain by the Nubian Sandstone Formation. There is no indication of the basement complex except for

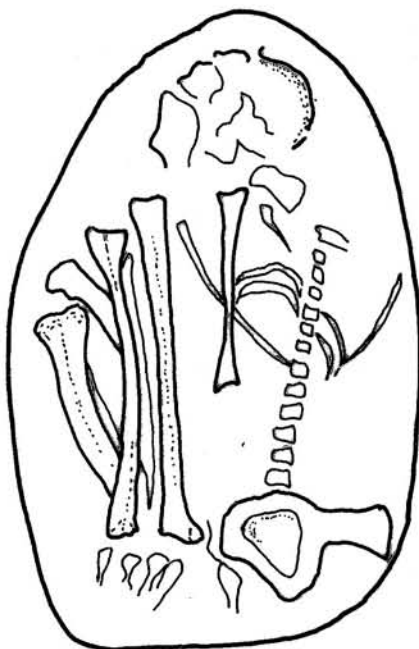


Figure 4. Grave 10.

this granite outcrop, which may be of Pre-Cambrian Age. However, the basement complex is clear in many areas on the western bank of the River Nile (Whiteman 1972).

The area is part of the great desert plateau, gently sloping and extending from Umm Ali Village in the south towards El Damer in the north. The plateau is marked by a gravel plain sloping towards the Nile. The surface is covered by a mixture of sandy and calcareous soils, and spotted with pebbles and conglomerates. This is in addition to the brownish and red-grey wind blown sands and residual gravels, mainly quartzite, which are the dominant raw material for stone implements (flakes and blades) in the area. The granite outcrop, a unique geological feature here, could have served as a good shelter for early man.

The alluvial flood plain is sometimes wide, having a width of 2.5 km. It consists of Nile silt and sandy clay. The sterile soil in which the grave pits were dug consists of clayey soil and gravel formed by the weathering of the uppermost clayey and clayey and calcareous sandstone.

This work is one of the attempts of the Fieldwork Section of the National Corporation for Antiquities and Museums (NCAM) to rescue antiquities endangered by the establishment of many development projects. It took place in the second week of January 1995, and was conducted by a team consisting of Abdel Rahman Ali Mohamed (Inspector) and Abu Sarry H. Lazim (Technical Assistant).

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