

# SUDAN & NUBIA

The Sudan Archaeological Research Society



*Bulletin No. 2*

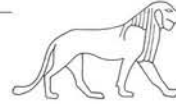
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## Introduction

*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.

## Survey and excavations at Kawa, the 1997/8 season

*Derek A. Welsby*

Excavations were conducted at Kawa in Northern Sudan from 1929–31 by Griffith and again in 1935/6 by Kirwan and Macadam (Macadam 1949; 1955). Apart from three graves, excavated in the eastern cemetery as an initial training for the workforce, the work focussed on an area at the northern end of the town. The discoveries made allowed a tentative history of the site to be advanced. The earliest evidence for occupation was a few sherds of Kerma Classique pottery. The identification of the town with ‘Gematon’ clearly has chronological implications for the Egyptian settlement there. Such a name, associated with the worship of the Aten, must date to the period between the later part of the reign of Amenophis III and that of Tutankhamun. With the general, though by no means complete, repudiation of the worship of the Aten, and the reinstatement of Amun–Re as the state god of Egypt, it is extremely unlikely that the name of Gematon – ‘The Aten is Perceived’ – would have been bestowed on a settlement at a later date.

The earliest structural evidence found was a temple (Temple A) built by Tutankhamun around 1350 BC. A continuing Egyptian presence is attested as late as the reign of Ramesses VII, *c.* 1145 BC. Thereafter there is a gap in the epigraphic record until the late 8th century BC, when a religious monument with inscribed columns was built by the Kushite ruler Shabaqo, columns later reused in the construction of Temple B. Major building activity is attested under Taharqo, who built the large Amun Temple (Temple T) between 684 and 680 BC. One of Taharqo’s inscriptions implies that there was an Amun temple at Kawa built, or at least used, by Alara, one of his predecessors, who may have reigned around 770 BC. Whether this was a new construction at that time or was one of the Pharaonic temples which had continued in use or had been refurbished is unknown. Occupation at the site is attested epigraphically as late as the time of Amanirenas and Akinidad in the late 1st century BC and artefacts of the later Kushite period suggest that occupation continued at least into the 3rd century AD. No post–Meroitic material has been recovered from the site nor was there occupation in the area in the medieval period.

Recent work by the Northern Dongola Reach Survey has defined the extent of the settlement and has examined its hinterland. In the immediate vicinity of the town there is some evidence for Neolithic occupation in the form of small concentrations of pottery and lithic material. During the Kerma period the area was more intensively utilised. Several small settlements were found within a kilometre radius of Temple T, as well as a large cemetery of Kerma Classique

date. A New Kingdom cemetery has not been noted, but one large and two small cemeteries of Kushite date are known (Welsby 1993; Salih 1994).

The excavations of the 1920s and 30s uncovered an area of approximately 3400m<sup>2</sup> of a site which extends over 36 hectares. The excavated area is thus less than 1% of the whole. At no point did the excavators reach the natural ground surface, usually stopping at the construction levels of the buildings they happened to be excavating.<sup>1</sup> Hence in many places they ceased work at the ground surface contemporary with Tutankhamun, with Taharqo and with the later Kushite period. The excavations were, therefore, not all encompassing either horizontally or vertically. What the excavations did demonstrate was the exceptionally fine preservation of the monuments. The whole of the temple built by Taharqo still stood to a height of over 4m, that is as high as the top of the pylons in the well preserved temple at Naqa. The sanctuary of the temple of Tutankhamun retained its roof slabs *in situ*. Smaller monuments, such as the altar before Taharqo’s temple, were completely preserved.

The high standard of preservation was due to the special circumstances pertaining at the site. Throughout its history it appears to have suffered from the problem of wind-blown sand and several Kushite rulers record how they were forced to remove this to uncover various structures. On the abandonment of any building it would, if conditions were then the same as now, have filled with sand very rapidly. The presence of the large numbers of objects in the temples excavated earlier this century suggests that this is exactly what happened towards the end of the Kushite period. There is no reason to think that special conditions apply to the area of the temples. The potential for the recovery of well-preserved structures, of stone, red brick and mud brick, of all types elsewhere on the site is very high. The rapid sanding up of abandoned structures may have favoured the construction of new buildings on the well-preserved remains of their predecessors rather than favouring the wholesale demolition of earlier buildings prior to redevelopment. Although the buildings which continued in use until the end of the occupation may be the best preserved, structures of all periods of the town’s history should be extant. The latest buildings will have been at risk from the very serious erosion from wind-blown sand and will have been denuded until the settled sand masked and protected their walls.

### The current project

For a number of reasons Kawa is probably the single most important site surviving in the Sudanese Nile Valley for the study of the period from the 18th Dynasty to the 4th century AD. As noted above structures of all periods can be

<sup>1</sup> However, note the remains of a temple and other structures pre-dating Temple T partly uncovered by Kirwan (Macadam 1955, text vol. 227, plates vol. pl. 7).

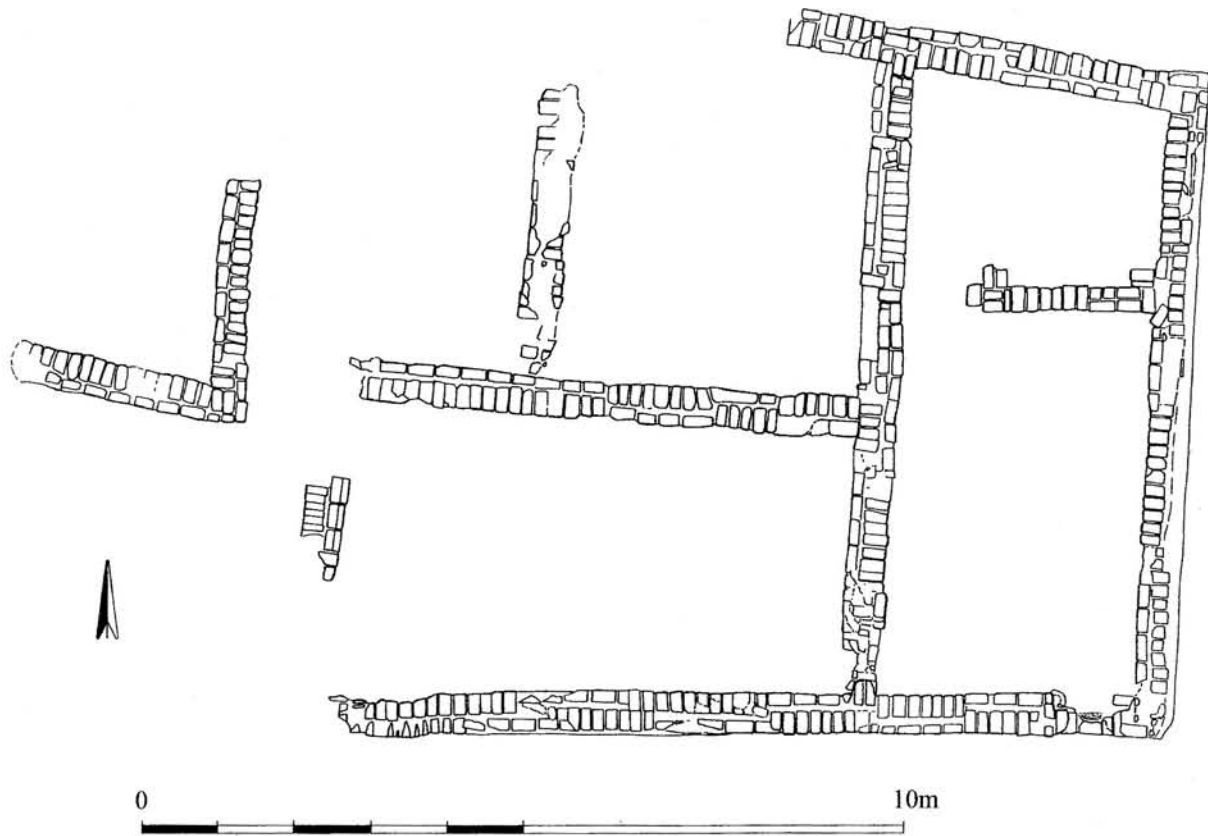


Figure 1. Building B1.

expected to be well preserved and the rapid build-up of wind-blown sand may have resulted in some clear stratigraphical horizons. Owing to the good preservation we can expect that all periods of activity on the site will be available for examination and the absence of occupation at certain periods would be significant, relating to an actual phenomenon rather than to the vagaries of survival.

#### The 1997/8 season

The team of eight archaeologists – from Sudan, the UK, Belgium and Sweden – was in the field from early December 1997 until early February 1998. The aims of this, the first season in a four season campaign, were:-

- 1 to produce a detailed topographic plan of the site
- 2 to plan the numerous buildings visible on the surface
- 3 to begin stratigraphic excavations
- 4 to take measures to protect the site

#### The survey

A detailed contour survey of the 36 hectares of the town was made using a Geodolite 606 Total Station, the contours being generated by the Digital Terrain Modeller in Minicad7. This involved the surveying of 500 points per hectare and is of a high level of accuracy and detail. It has provided an essential base plan onto which all other archaeological and topographical features can be added. The site

lies immediately adjacent to the east bank of the Nile and is partly covered by a belt of sand dunes along the top of the river bank. The northern half of the site occupies a prominent mound rising to a maximum height of about 11m above the level of the plain to the east and gradually merging with the raised levee of the river to the north (Colour Plate VII). The southern half of the site is generally at a level of about 2m above the plain and is relatively flat. Although part of the site may originally have been set on a natural mound, excavations immediately to the west of the northern pylon of Temple T in 1935/6 found occupation extending to a depth of 4.2m below the plinth level of that pylon, that is to approximately the same level as the plain. At least in that area the earliest occupation was not on a mound. Clearly the long period of settlement of the site has had a profound effect on the local topography with the formation of an impressive tell.

#### Planning buildings

Over large areas of the site the walls visible on the surface were cleaned and planned at a scale of 1:50. Extensive areas of buildings were visible on the southern slopes of the upper town and around its highest point. Although parts of at least 36 buildings were planned, many others remain to be recorded in this way both in the upper and the lower towns.

The plans of these buildings have now been digitised and will be integrated with the contour survey.

#### The excavations

An area of over 300m<sup>2</sup> towards the southern edge of the upper town and 300m south–south–west of Temple T was investigated, with the aid of 25 local workmen. Three buildings were examined (Figs 1 and 2) and the excavation of one of these was completed. The adjacent streets were also investigated. There had been extensive destruction in the area from sebakhin, which had removed large sections of walling and in some cases most of the floors within some rooms.

*Building B1* (Fig. 1) – Three major building phases were noted (Colour Plate VIII) with walls founded at different levels indicating that a number of rooms had been added to the building at a later date. There was also evidence for the insertion of doorways and for the blocking of others. Throughout the building floors were of sand and had been kept clean, occupation rubbish being deposited in the adjacent streets, presumably being dumped through windows. Features within the rooms included storage bins, hearths and pots set into the floor surfaces.

*Buildings B5 and B12* (Fig. 2) had a complicated history and as their excavation was not completed little can be said about them in detail.

*Building B5* – the alignment of a number of the walls varies so markedly as to suggest that they are of different periods although stratigraphically this could not be demonstrated. Three sides of the building were clearly defined but the position of the original southern wall was unclear. The earliest building had floors of sand on which two circular ceramic ovens were found. Elsewhere pots had been set into the floor. At a later period, after a considerable build-up of material had collected, new dividing walls were added at least in the eastern part of the buildings and rectangular storage bins were built. All the rooms appear to have filled with large amounts of mud-brick rubble which in some cases had been largely removed by sebakhin, the resulting pits filling with wind-blown sand.

*Building B12* – was added onto the west side of Building B5. This involved cutting along the centre line of the west wall of Building B5 and removing half the wall down to below its foundations. A new wall was then built along the same line and founded at the same level as the earlier wall. This new wall was the east wall of Building B12, which thus abutted the remains of Building B5. The adjacent room of Building B5 was then used as a repository for domestic refuse from Building B12 (Plate 1), although other Building B5 rooms to the east may still have been occupied. A circular ceramic oven was found in the north–west corner room

of the building and a series of three hearths was noted in the room to the east.

Where the sebakhin pits had penetrated below the level of the walls of Buildings B5 and B12 it could be seen that they rested on a layer of sand at least 300mm thick (Plate 2), within which was some charcoal, and in other places the walls rested on domestic rubbish material. No trace of walls

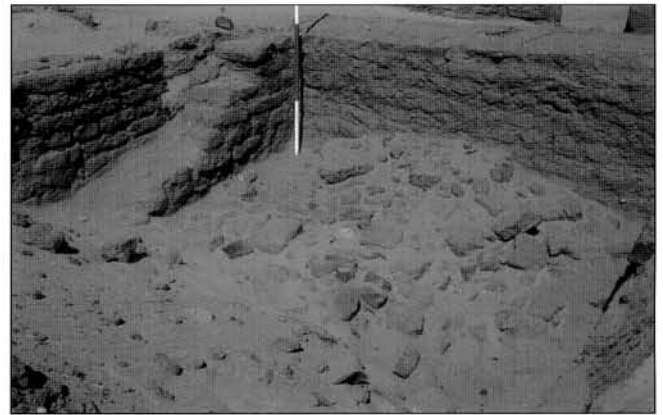


Plate 1. *Building B5, rubbish and rubble deposits within the western range of rooms, looking north west.*



Plate 2. *Building B5, sebakhin pits cutting through walls and floors*

predating the main phases of the buildings in this area was noted but earlier occupation can be assumed. These buildings were the latest to have been constructed in this part of the site.

#### Artefacts

Although the site appears to be extremely rich in ceramic material with the ground surface covered in sherds, below ground this was not the case. Presumably the large amount of pottery was partly derived from the erosion of upstanding mud-brick walls of which pottery sherds, often of considerable size, formed a sizeable proportion. However, artefacts were recovered from a number of stratified contexts, particularly domestic rubbish deposits in the streets and those dumped into abandoned rooms of the buildings. The study



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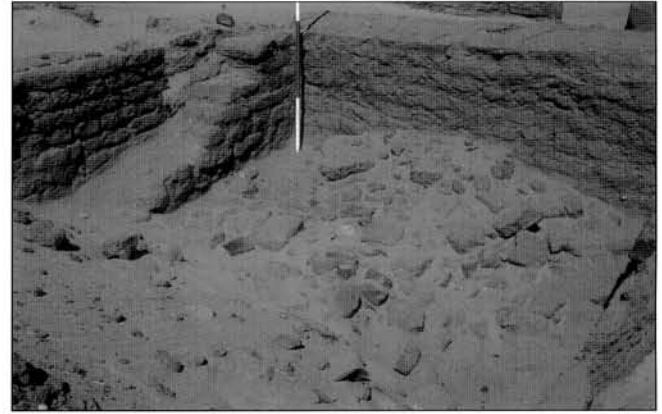
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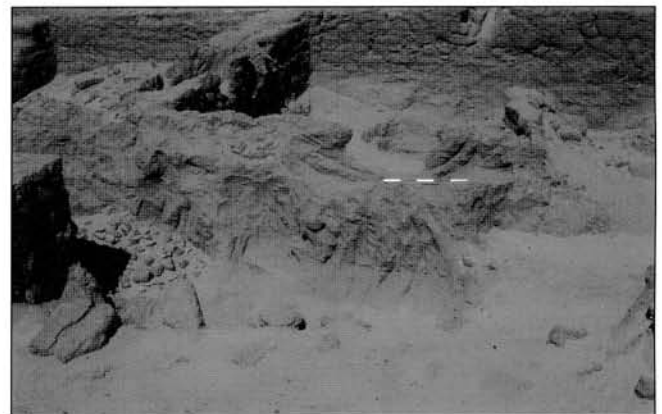
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of the material in these deposits should be of considerable value in assisting with the building-up of a detailed chronology of the site. Within these deposits was also abundant organic material including bone and wood.

Among the rubble in the excavated buildings was a large number of objects made from mud. Some of these were lumps of mud that had been moulded by hand with clear finger-tip impressions preserved. They were of no particular form. Others were more regular. There were small cubes and rectangular tablets, discs and tear-drop shaped objects, the latter ranging in size from 16mm in diameter and 30mm high to 61mm diameter and 102mm high. A small model of a quadruped was recovered. The most interesting object was the lower part of a steatopygous figure with incised decoration perhaps representing tattoos (Plate 3). The form can be readily paralleled in Neolithic and C-Group contexts (e.g. Wenig 1979, 114, 116, 124, 125-7), although Kushite examples, albeit of rather different style, are known (e.g. Wenig 1979, 220). How these objects came to be laid amongst the rubble is unclear.

The most impressive find was made as a result of very recent illicit digging activities in a building at the very southern end of the site. Digging in the corners of a number of the rooms in building A1 had unearthed a ceramic statue, partly broken before it was found, but also suffering heavily from *toria* damage with many new breaks and other damage. The statue was of a grotesque female figure, probably to be identified with the goddess Beset (Front Cover and Colour Plate IX). It exhibits many of the characteristics of the better known representations of Bes: the dwarf form, the plumed headdress, the dagger in the right hand held against the lower arm and the snake on the left arm. However, the figure is clearly female with prominent breasts and well defined pubic hair. Traces of paint survive in many areas and further decoration had presumably been affixed to the pierced earlobes and the headdress. The rear of the

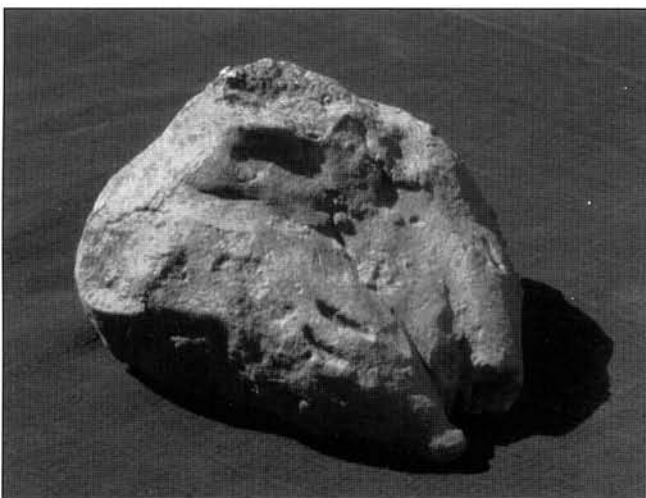


Plate 3. Steatopygous figure from Building B5  
(height 55mm)

statue was flat and was clearly not meant to be seen. The base extended 100mm beyond the back of the statue and had presumably been set into a wall, the statue standing flush against the wall face. Close by, the foot of another statue of similar form was recovered.

### Protection and preservation

At present the condition of the site is reasonably stable, although a few years ago an irrigation channel had been dug across the northern edge of the town to serve a now defunct irrigation scheme immediately to the east. Vehicle tracks criss-cross the site and damage is being caused in some areas. There is also evidence for plundering activities among the mud-brick buildings to the south west of the temples and destruction to the stone work of the so-called western palace. Tourists are partly to blame for the driving of vehicles up onto the mound by the temples and for uncovering the reliefs on the walls of Temple T, which are consequently at risk from erosion.

In an attempt to combat these threats concrete posts, 1.5m in height, have now been placed at regular intervals marking the boundary around the town site and also by the Kerma and Kushite cemeteries. Signs in Arabic and English have also been erected to inform people that the site is protected under the terms of the Antiquities Ordinance of 1952.

### The nature of the Kushite town.

Excavations within major Kushite centres have been very limited in scale. Only the work of John Garstang at Meroe, which was concentrated in the Royal City, an area which must have been atypical, and the current work at Naqa, have furnished evidence for the form of these sites. Naqa may well also turn out to be an atypical site with a special, perhaps largely ritual function. The quality of the buildings surveyed indicated that they were 'official' rather than the dwellings of a full cross section of an urban population. There is every reason to consider Kawa a true town with a religious enclave, and presumably with structures associated with its role as a nome capital, but also with buildings associated with a sizeable percentage of its population. The cemeteries contain, if one can extrapolate from the very small scale excavations undertaken, both medium and low status graves, the graves of individuals buried with only a few pots or no goods at all.

The recent work has already begun to change fundamentally our perception of the importance of the urban centre at Kawa in the Kushite period. The excavations of the 1930s had found evidence to indicate that the site was in use from at least the time of Shabaqo into the 3rd century AD and we had expected that the buildings we would be excavating immediately below the surface would be of, or would have been occupied into, that latest period. However, a preliminary study of the pottery suggests that the build-





ings investigated date to the earlier Kushite period and that there was no later occupation in the area. In fact the whole of the lower town appears to be covered in pottery of that date, apart from an occasional sherd clearly recognisable as later Kushite, or of much more recent date such as *qadus* knobs. If this initial impression is borne out by further study it would indicate that the heyday of Kawa was in the earlier Kushite period at a time when a number of inscriptions testify to its importance in the coronation rituals of the Kushite kings. Around the middle of the first millennium BC its fortunes may have taken a dramatic turn, occupation then being confined to a small enclave in the region of the *temenos* of the temples towards the northern edge of the upper town.

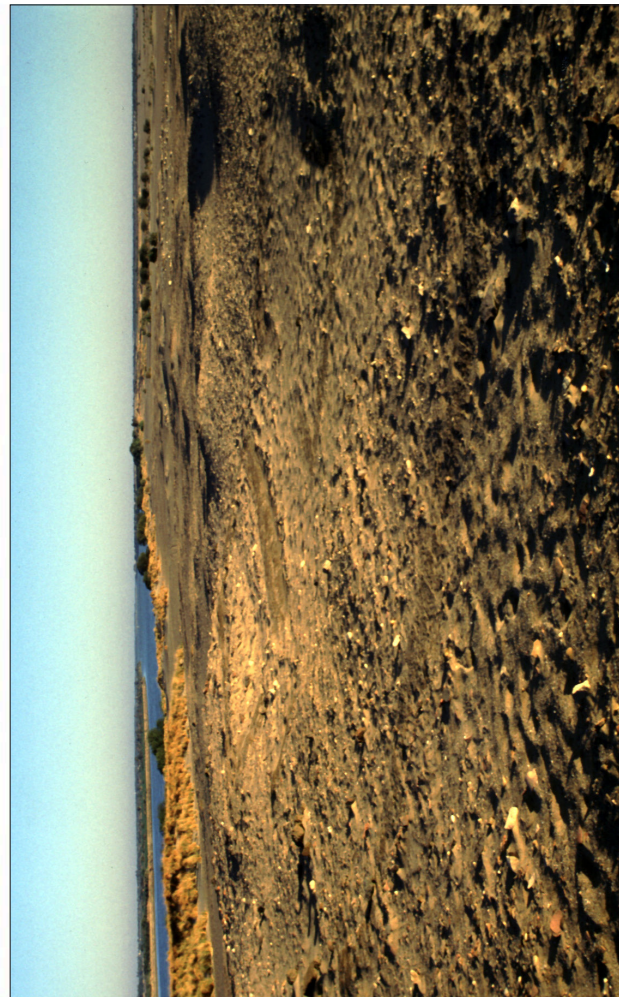
The opportunity to examine a wide area of an early Kushite town unencumbered by later occupation is very welcome. Already it is clear that the town was intensively occupied with regular well-built structures set close together. One building type has been recognised, a rectangular dwelling approximately 15 x 9m in size. Three of these are known to date, in and adjacent to the excavation area and 450m to the south near the southern limits of the site. Other buildings appear to have substantial staircases and may have been multi-storeyed. Clearly much further work is required at Kawa but the initial results are very promising.

#### Acknowledgements

The survey and excavations at Kawa were funded by SARS, which receives grants from a number of bodies, chief among them the Bioanthropology Foundation and the British Museum. The team was greatly assisted in Khartoum by the staff of the National Corporation for Antiquities and Museums, by the British Council and by the British Embassy. The team consisted of Abdelhai Abdelsawi Fedl-elmoula, Angela Brennan, Stephen Fletcher, Lisa Harris, Fred Heller, John Percival, Isabella Welsby Sjöström and Derek Welsby. The participation of Stephen Fletcher was funded by a scholarship from University College of Wales at Lampeter generously endowed by Lord St. Davids.

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*Plate VII. Kawa. View north over the Upper Town with mud-brick buildings visible in the foreground.*



*Plate VIII. Building B1 looking south west.*



*Plate IX. Kawa. Statue of Beset from building A1.*