

SUDAN & NUBIA

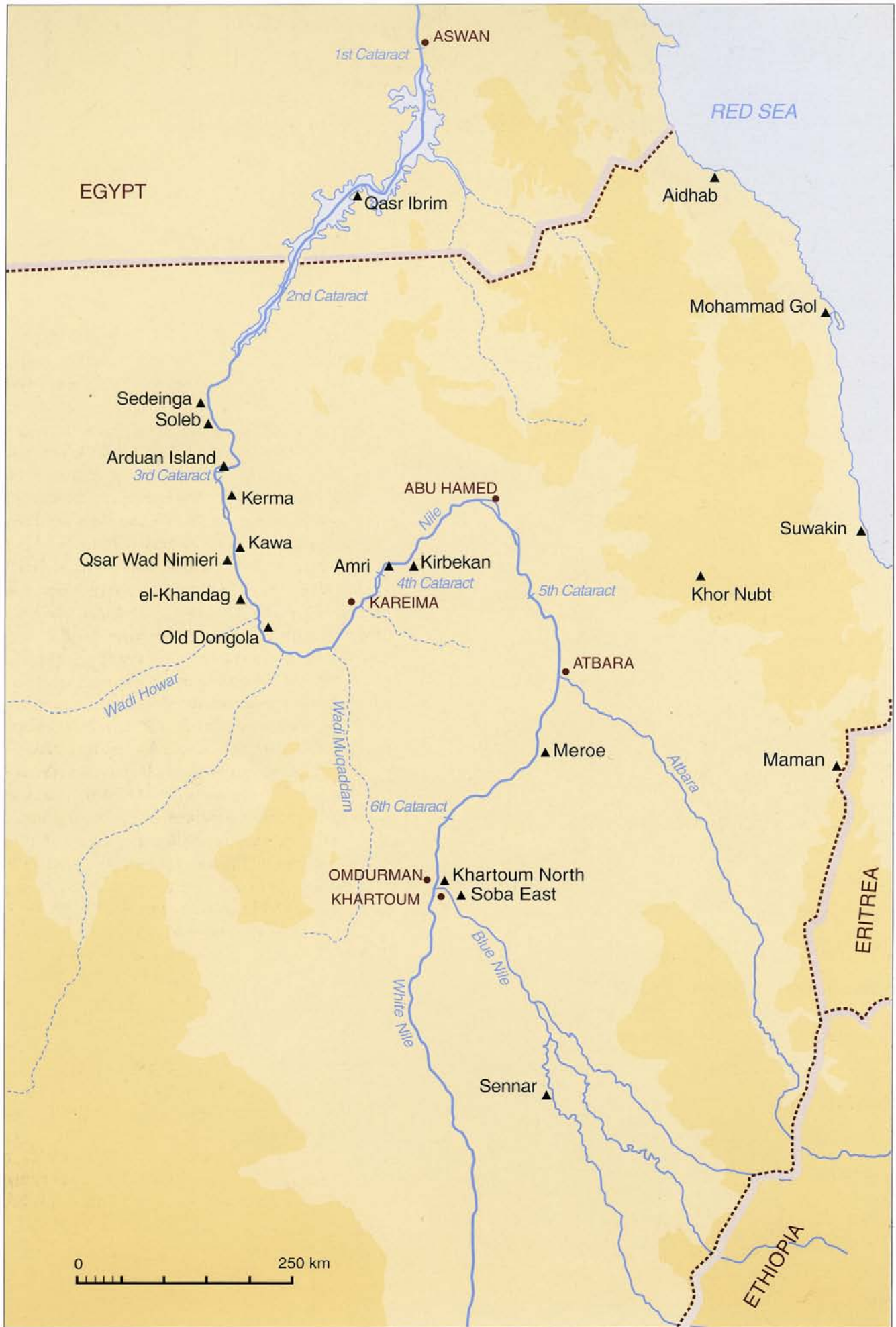
The Sudan Archaeological Research Society



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Front Cover: Meroe. Pyramid BEG N 18 (type XII) before restoration work on the chapel. In the background pyramid BEG N 9 (type VII). Photo taken by F. W. Hinkel in 1980 from the top of BEG N 19 (slide 5467).

Introduction

Vivian Davies

During the last winter the Society resumed its flagship project at Kawa, among other things uncovering more of the early Kushite town, including an extraordinary mud-brick building once decorated with wall-paintings showing royal and divine figures and containing the remains of large ceramic figures of the gods Bes and Beset (see Welsby below). We also responded to the international appeal for help from the National Corporation for Antiquities and Museums to document sites threatened by the planned Merowe Dam, carrying out a survey on the left bank of the Nile and on the islands between Amri and Kirkeban above the Fourth Cataract which identified well over a hundred sites of different types and periods (Welsby). Qasr Ibrim, for many years under excavation by the Egypt Exploration Society and still yielding information of first-rate importance (Rose), embodies an acute reminder of the destructive consequences of dams and of the loss to knowledge that such schemes entail.

The need for rescue-work in response to various threats (environmental as well as man-made) is a thread running through much of this issue, which also includes reports on the study and conservation of the monuments at Meroe (Hinkel), excavation necessitated by road-building at Soba East (Abdel Rahman Ali Mohamed), archaeological survey in the little-known Fifth Cataract region (Yousef El-Amin and Edwards), and continuing investigation of the Mahas region at the Third Cataract (Edwards and Ali Osman), the latter an interdisciplinary project which now valuably incorporates ecological, ethnographic and linguistic components (Muhammad Jalal Hashim and Bell). We are also very pleased to include two papers on aspects of Islamic archaeology in the Sudan (Intisar Soghayroun el-Zein and Salah Omer Elsadig), hitherto a chronically neglected subject but clearly one with great potential for further research.

It is an enormous pleasure to report that Professor William Y. Adams, one of the great names of modern Sudanese archaeology, has accepted our invitation to become Honorary President of SARS, in succession to the late Sir Laurence Kirwan. Professor Adams takes office in time to preside over our tenth anniversary in 2001, a year in which SARS celebrates a decade of progressive achievement and looks forward to the formidable but exciting challenges that lie ahead.



Reports

Excavations at Qasr Ibrim

2000

Pamela J. Rose

This year saw the continuation of excavations by the Egypt Exploration Society at the Lower Nubian site of Qasr Ibrim. Since the last season in 1998 (Rose and Edwards 1998), the condition of the site has deteriorated further as the waters of Lake Nasser continue to rise. The most noticeable impact of this is in the southern part of the site, where the areas excavated over the last 10 years, including the earliest feature so far identified on the site, the gate and walls enclosed within the south bastion, have now disappeared. Water percolation has progressed to such an extent that the burial crypts at the east end of the Cathedral now have water in them, and since these lie more or less at the centre of the site it shows that all of the rock underlying Ibrim is saturated, and that all of the surviving deposits on the site are now under threat.

Another casualty of the lake level is the temple of the 25th Dynasty pharaoh, Taharqo, which was later converted into a church. Here most of the mud-brick outer walls have disintegrated, leaving only the apse of the church and one wall of the room in the temple into which the apse was inserted still standing. The surviving walls of this room were painted with images of Taharqo before the gods; one of these walls has now collapsed, but the other is still intact, although water percolation has affected its lower part. It is hoped to be able to remove this in the next field season.

As a result of the higher water level, it proved necessary to begin excavation in areas of the site last worked on nearly 20 years ago. Two new areas were opened. They lay, respectively, to the west and north of the Cathedral (using Cathedral orientation). Both areas had been excavated in the early 1980s, and work then had ceased after the removal of the Christian levels. In the area north of the Cathedral it was already clear that Meroitic remains lay immediately below the present surface because of the discovery of Temple 6 (Driskell *et al.* 1989), so it was clear in that area that early remains were to be expected.

The western terraces

Here the area in which excavation took place lies north of the podium and extended from the current edge of the site, which is now some 2m in from the line of the collapsed girdle wall, and the roadway at the foot of the gebel platform on which the Cathedral stands. Its northern boundary is an expanse of Christian buildings which rises above the level of the terrace surface. Earlier excavations suggested that the area

was a deliberately constructed open space for much of the Christian period, forming part of the landscaped terrain around the Cathedral and the neighbouring church.

The results of the excavations here suggest that the fill of the area was indeed laid down in the early Christian period, on an area which had either been deliberately cleared of earlier structures or had remained free of buildings throughout the site's use. Only in one area were traces of an earlier structure found, and here fragmentary walls and a small area of flooring came from a building of early post-Meroitic date. It remains unclear how far the terrace extended southwards, or how the substantial amount of fill involved was retained, due to wholesale removal of deposits in this area in early seasons of work at Ibrim.

The terracing fill does not appear to have been laid down in a single event. Changes in the nature of the fill making up the terrace, and various activity surfaces low down within the fill, indicate that it built up in phases, although all within the early Christian period. Thus, within the fill, were arrangements of post-holes, some with the lower part of the posts still *in situ* (Plate 1). A small pit full of crushed radish



Plate 1. Wooden posts in situ [QI00 3/32].

seed pods attested to the preparation of radish oil. Close to the eastern limit of the area was a rectangular structure of mud brick, c. 1.9 x 1.4m in size, with traces of a short extension southwards (Plate 2). It bears some resemblance to Christian tombs discovered south of the Cathedral in 1964, but its north-south orientation makes this unlikely. At some time a fire had affected the structure, which was then dismantled and the debris from it dumped nearby. This may have been done as a further attempt to level the area.

The northern end of the terrace was formed by a much denuded east-west wall. Excavation north of this showed the area to be a continuation of the area of housing lying further north, and accessed from that direction. Here was found a long sequence of ceramic ovens, all within the same area but rarely directly overbuilt, standing in what was probably an open courtyard. Each stood within a low mud-brick enclosure. All appear to be of Christian date.

At the southern edge of the excavations, remains of a sub-



Plate 2. Burnt mud-brick feature [QI00 11/10].

stantial stone feature were found under the early Christian fill. This was a wall-like construction of large unshaped stones, which were laid in rough courses. These appear to stand on a shallow base of flat slabs, but insufficient of this is yet visible to make this certain. The feature ran east-west and extended from close to the western edge of the site for some 5m, where it was truncated by a pit and disappears. As preserved, it is some 1.5m thick and terminated on the northern side against a shallow gebel cut. The few sherds found amongst the stones are of Meroitic and earlier date. This feature remains to be further investigated in future seasons.

The podium itself is now in very poor condition. A large crack has opened between its outer face and the pavement it encloses, as the rock footings on which the facade stands are eroded. In archaeological terms, this has had some benefit, in that it has shown that the pavement is bedded on a thick accumulation of soil. The poor state of the pavement, some blocks of which had already disappeared into the lake, made it worth lifting some of the slabs to look at the underlying deposits. In the time available, all that could be demonstrated was the presence of two adjacent structures along with a substantial amount of collapsed masonry. The alignment of the walls does not follow that of the podium facade, nor that of any known structure in the immediate vicinity. The area also remains to be further investigated in coming seasons.

North of the Cathedral

Here the tops of substantial stone walls had been revealed during the clearance of Christian levels in 1984 and 1986. As currently traceable, they define an area roughly 12 x 16m in size, but the building of which they form a part was originally larger, since the walls disappear under later deposits on the north and west, and may also do so to the east. The deposits lying against the exterior of the south wall, exposed where part of the wall has been robbed out, indicate that the building was constructed in or before the early Kushite period. Sections visible inside certain of the rooms show that it remained in use into the Meroitic period. Whether this occupation was continuous or not is at present unknown. Over time, the building underwent a number of alterations, including enlargement to the east and the addition within this new extension, at a later period, of a stone staircase to an upper level.

Only a small part of the building has yet been excavated. A small 'room', roughly 6m square, was investigated. It was found to have no doors, a poorly preserved rough mud floor, and unlike the neighbouring rooms, its walls were unplastered. These features suggest it may have been a light well for a building of more than one storey. By the Meroitic period, however, the room had gone out of use, and masonry from the walls had fallen into it. Over the rubble had accumulated thick, evenly bedded deposits of the late Meroitic period (Plate 3). These included large quantities of



Plate 3. Excavation of organic layers [QI00 2/36].

very well-preserved plant remains, both of crops (including cultivated and wild sorghum, barley, and castor oil) and the weeds that grew amongst them, and a substantial amount of pottery. Amongst these late Meroitic deposits there were also a number of finds associated with textile manufacture: bone points, part of a weaving comb, spindle whorls, hanks of thread and loom weights. The evenness of the bedding suggests that the room still served some purpose, perhaps as a store. By contrast, a brief investigation of the room immediately to the south showed that though this too had gone out of use by or in the Meroitic period, it had been filled over



time by material tipped into it from a high spot to the southwest.

To the east, excavation concentrated on the area linking the stone building with Temple 6. In the small area so far uncovered a complex sequence of building activity has been revealed, though as yet it is not possible to make sense of it. All the activity here is pre-Meroitic and pre-Roman in date, although the precise chronology and duration of the occupation have yet to be established through the study of the pottery and other finds. Three aligned but flimsy mud-brick walls run into the robber trench left by the removal of the south wall of the stone building, and were on a different orientation to it. East of these, and running under Temple 6, was a thick redeposited layer of soft sandy fill which contained a rich selection of finds. These included many fragments of papyrus inscribed in hieratic, amongst which were two complete folded documents, one of which had a seated figure of a lion-headed god or goddess drawn on it. Bronze



Plate 4. Bronze figurine of Ptah [QI00 FCS2/14].

figurines of gods (Plate 4) and decorated *menat*-counterpoises, fragments of a wooden frieze or openwork box decorated with religious figures, a wooden palette showing a dog attacking a deer, and numerous faience figurines and amulets came from here. It is probable that these finds derived originally from a sacred building somewhere nearby, but its location is as yet unknown.

To the south of this area, adjacent to the south wall of Temple 6 and also running under it, are a number of thin, often curved, stone and mud-brick walls. These are not all

contemporary, but were clearly added to and modified over time. However, all the walls are heavily mud plastered, and the surviving plaster makes phasing the sequence of construction difficult. An unusual feature is what appears to be a small niche or cupboard in one wall of what appears to be the earliest of the structures, floored by a large, reused, piece of wood. In the rubble overlying this area were bundles of halfa grass loosely tied around with string (Plate 5). They

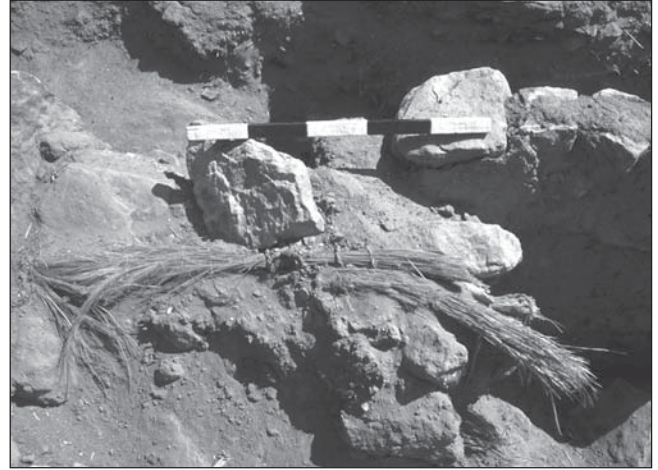


Plate 5. Bundle of halfa grass, possibly from roofing [QI00 7/10].

may come from the roofing of the structures.

As of now, too little has been excavated in the areas described above to be able to interpret them with any confidence. However, with the continuation of the work in future seasons, it should be possible to shed considerably more light on the early occupation of Qasr Ibrim.

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