

SUDAN & NUBIA

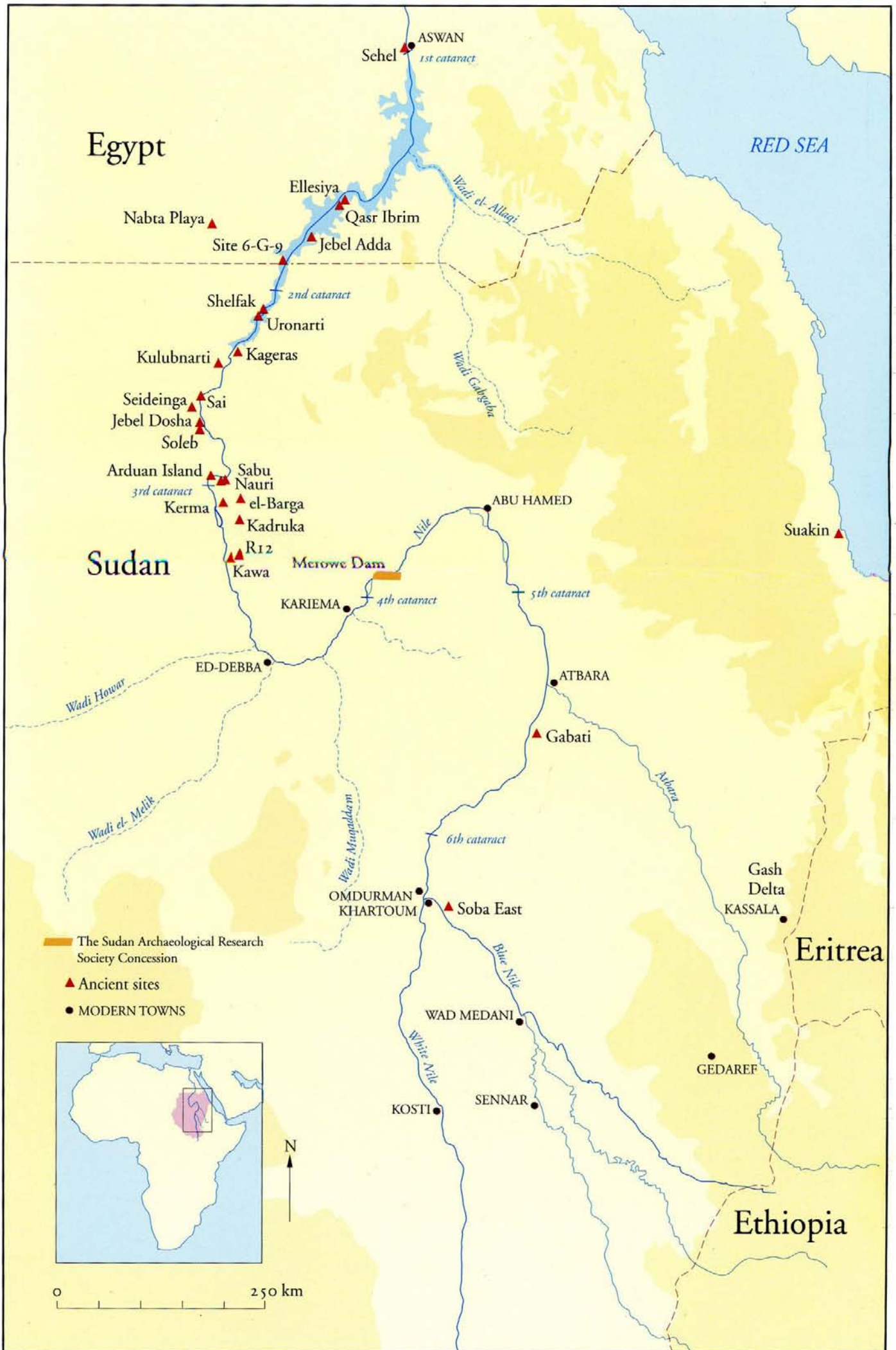
The Sudan Archaeological Research Society



Bulletin No. 8

2004





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Suakin 2003/4

Michael Mallinson

Suakin (Colour plate XXXIX) is the largest Islamic site of record in Sudan, containing remains of monuments from the 9th through to the 19th century. The seven islands in the lagoon (Colour plate XL), two of which have been inhabited, and surrounding mainland also are a unique environment recalling the development of trade relations along the coast. Possible Roman remains on Condensor Island have been identified with the site of Ptolemy Theron.

Suakin became the principle port of Sudan following the demise of Aydhab in 1492 and controlled a large proportion of the spice and coffee trade along the coast and mainland trade across to the Hadradeb. It is also a major route for both Islamic and Coptic pilgrims on the way to Jeddah and Suez. The port was under Ottoman control from the 1520's onwards, following a brief Funj occupation. The surrounding cemeteries contain *qubbas* and tombs from this prolonged history, and the many mosques in the port date from the 16th to the 19th centuries.

During the Mahdiya 1883-7, it was besieged by Osman Digna and the remains of the Anglo-Egyptian defences from this period surround the port. Although largely abandoned with the creation of Port Sudan 64km north in 1903, the port has been revived by the construction of a passenger and Liquid Petroleum Gas terminal, and the newly created Duty Free Zone. The population has grown again in the surrounding area but the old centre is uninhabited and desolate. There is now considerable pressure to re-develop the area and a strategy for protection of the historic zone is required, as well as archaeological studies of an as yet unexcavated site, and interpretation/museum facilities for its visitors. This is needed for both tourists and the 40,000 modern pilgrims who come here during the Hajj.

The Suakin Project (Colour plate XLI) was created in 2000 with the support of Hassan Hussein Idris, Director General of the National Corporation for Antiquities and Museums (NCAM), to initiate conservation and archaeological studies at Suakin and in preparation for its registration as a World Heritage Site. The first season, funded by the British Institute in Eastern Africa (BIEA), carried out survey and test excavations at Khorshid Effendi House, No. 35. It was followed by an exhibition in March 2003 in the Sudan National Museum on Suakin and the Greenlaw Model, with financial support from the Sudan Archaeological Research Society (Plate 1).

The purpose of the second season of the Suakin Project was to develop the studies of 2002 in three areas, excavation, survey and conservation and development.

1) The excavation work on the test sites of 2002 was

completed by the clearance of the early buildings of Khorshid Effendi House (Plate 2, Colour plate XLII). This allowed the completion of recording of the stone blocks by Laurence Smith, the excavation of the front of the *roshan* window by Jacke Phillips and Balsaam Abdel Hamid, and the completion of the internal surveys from photographic work (Plate 5).

New excavations were begun at two sites (Figure 1); the possible "House of the Mufti" (Colour plate XLIII) identified as an early 15th century house site by the maps recorded by Le Jean in 1860; and a possible Roman site beside the hospital on Condensor Island. The first excavation, carried out by Henrietta Koefoed and Hans Barnard, revealed the extent of the walls of both the Mufti House and the later houses to the east that were demolished when



Plate 1. Copy of the model of Suakin produced by Jean-Pierre Greenlaw.

the telegraph was created. The chance discovery of one of the canons from the battery marked on Le Jean's maps and small finds from within the walls, which included a Turkish button, confirm the original suggested function of the area. Large deposits of burnt material under the walls and a deep stratigraphy show that the waterfront evolved over a considerable period. The burning may be evidence of the sacking of the town by the Portuguese in 1541 (Plate 3), or it may be an early attempt at waterproofing. Samples were taken to investigate these possibilities.



Plate 2. Photomosaic of House 35 after the excavations of 2003.

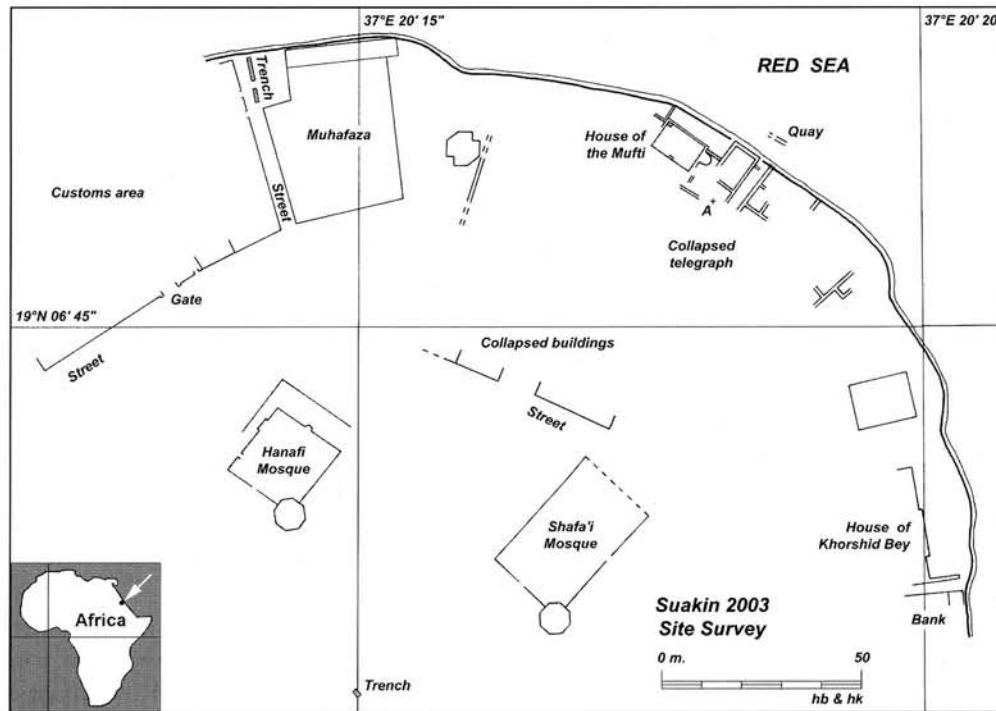


Figure 1. Plan of the sites excavated in 2002-3.

Excavations at Condensor Island showed that the test site had no Roman material, although extensive evidence of the late British occupation was recovered (Figure 2). The excavation was carried out by a team from Ulster consisting of Colin Breen and Wes Forsythe, with Paul Lane, Director of the BIEA.

2) The survey work and test digging was continued by Ulster – underwater (Colour plates XLIV-XLVI). They made extensive underwater surveys around the island, and established that the island had been radically altered at the start of the British occupation. As a result of this observation, after discussion with Andrew Cooper, their unit director

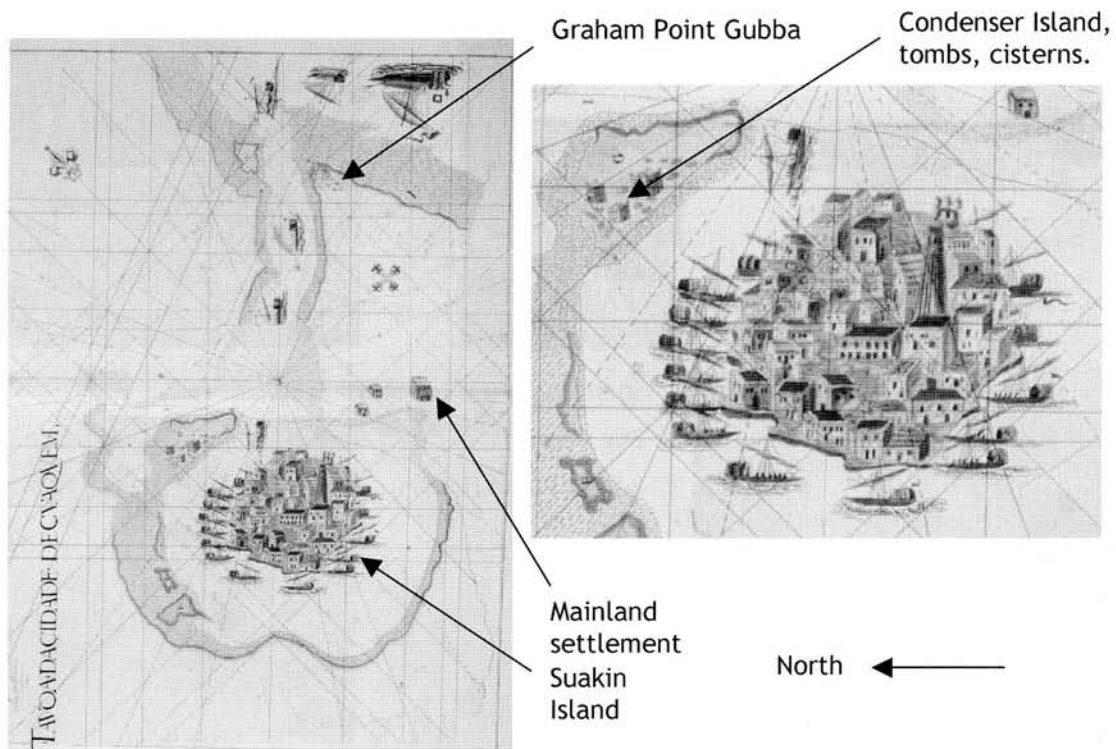


Plate 3. Suakin as recorded by Joam de Castro, Admiral of the Portuguese fleet in 1541 (published 1866).

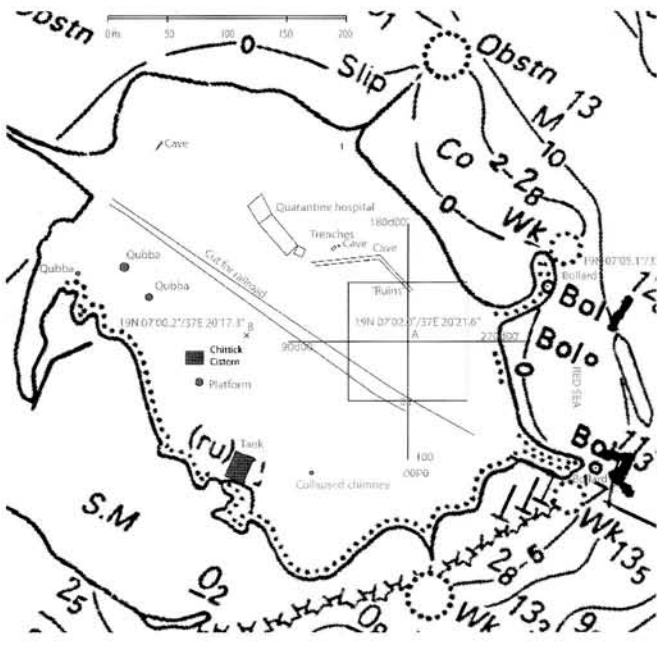


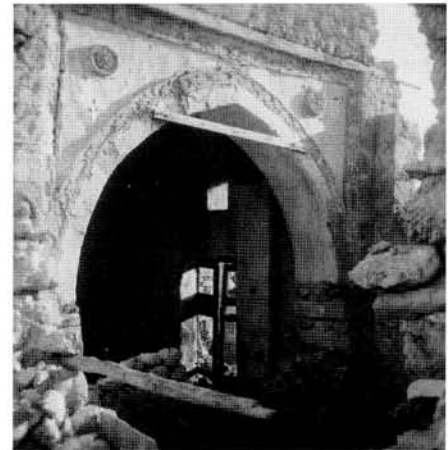
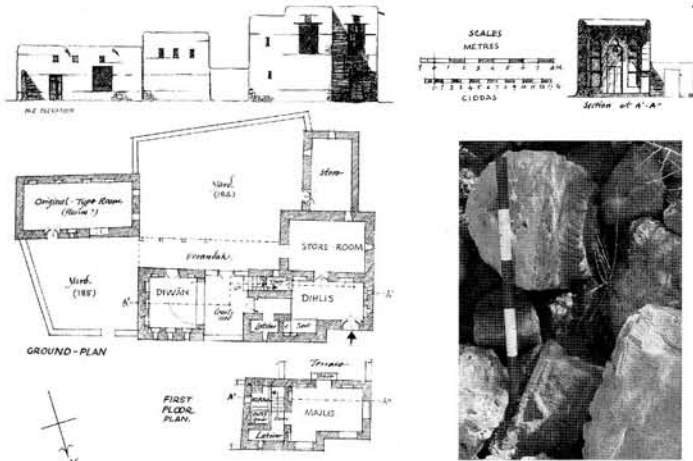
Figure 2. Condensor Island survey and location of test excavations.

who came out for three days to access the safety aspects of their work, a test excavation was undertaken in Custom House Street (Figure 1). This revealed an earlier 18th century wall at the base of the house beneath the Muhafisa that continues west under the later customs buildings across

the customs enclosure. The new wall, built some 7m in front of this, was back-filled with rubble taken from collapsed buildings, as is evident from their lime washed plaster finish. This evidence combined with the early maps of the site shows conclusively the extent of the rebuilding, probably to create an easily defensible perimeter for the guards who could patrol it from their posts at Gordon Gate. It also explains the seeming perfection of Suakin's form compared with that represented on Le Jean's map, and why so little evidence of earlier wharfs under the water is apparent, as they now are all underground.

Continued survey of Condensor Island by Hans Barnard (Figure 2) has now probably identified the original site of Chittick's 1960's excavation as not beside the hospital to the north and east as recorded by Hinkel, but on the west side, where a tree in a depression marks a probable cistern. This site will be tested, with a number of other structures on the west side, next season.

Finally survey was made of the interior of Suakin island to establish if the earliest material was not within the island proper concealed by the later rebuilding. Beit el-Pasha was examined, and a test pit excavated in the central city area (Plate 4) This showed relatively shallow stratigraphy in the centre, and also that Beit el-Pasha was on a mound 2m high relative to the local coral base level. The initial survey indicated that it was desirable to excavate this area and the



- Shennawy
- Bey House
- Beit El Pasha House
- Tell



Plate 4. The early Ottoman Beit el-Pasha - no. 184

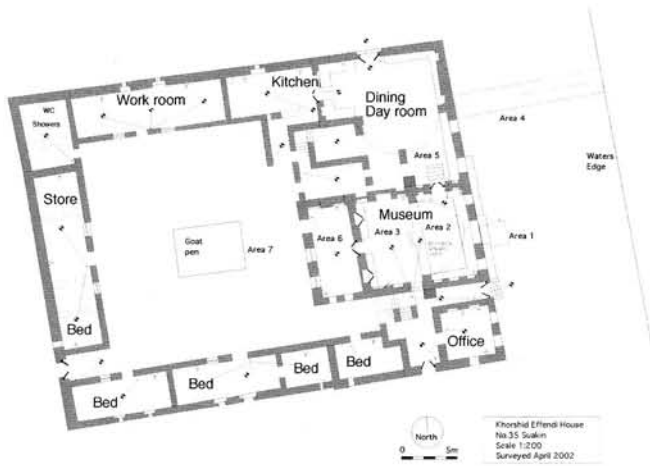


Figure 3. Plan of the Khorshid Effendi House being restored as a museum - 2004.

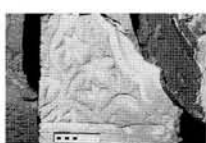
neighbouring house of Shennawy Bey. This would both help in the studies of two different periods of house construction on the site and also establish their relative stratigraphy.

3) Conservation work this year concentrated on three different areas, building works, survey and development/funding (Figure 3).

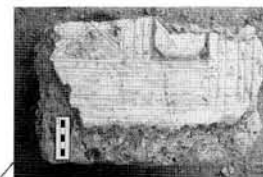
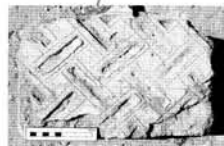
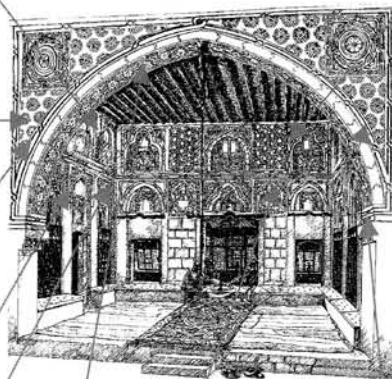
Building conservation works were started on the Khorshid Effendi House. The lime pit constructed last year allowed

test samples of mortar to be made. The remaining walls were excavated and the timber and foundations recorded, showing the development of the 15th century house with the addition of the later *diwan* and arch. All loose fittings were recorded and removed such as a panelled door supposedly given by the Turkish Government in 1860's to the Khorshid family. Renewal of the walls commenced and areas of walls with cracks had their joints filled and grouted with lime mortar. The work was supervised by NCAM's architect Khalid Karim. Moulds were taken of the decoration and studies made of the remaining *rosban's* in the Muhafisa to allow for limited restoration of these elements of the buildings. Contact has been made with lime plaster carvers in Yemen (Plate 5), and hard-wood joinery specialists in Kenya to restore the detailed elements recorded by the studies.

Conservation surveys were made of other buildings notably the Shafai Mosque, the Muhafisa and the law courts building. It was decided to try and prop these up before further collapse occurred. Unfortunately we were unable to prevent further damage to the Muhafisa and the law courts this year, although an emergency scaffold is under discussion with the Port Authority for the Shafai Mosque. Next year a fuller survey of the entire urban area is proposed



EARLIER AND LARGER TURKISH HOUSES



Blocks to be Re-carved in plaster with training by Yemen craftsmen



Moulds taken of decoration for records and display in museum.



Plate 5. Khorshid Effendi House, Area 2-3, decorative blocks recovered.



using a GPS; reports on the buildings are in preparation as is the provision of signs and guides for visitors.

The final area of work involved co-ordinating the project's efforts with local interests in the area. Requests for support from General Hatim Elwasiela Alsamai, the Red Sea Governor, and Mr el-Fadlaby of the Port Authority with the assistance of Salah Ali Adam the Minister for Culture and Sports resulted in a donation towards the museum reconstruction and offers of logistic support. This has resulted in building work continuing over the last four months, and in the Khorshid Effendi House being reconstructed up to the upper floor level, offering the possibility of it being ready for internal finishing in the coming winter. The larger issues of the area's development were also discussed, as regional development effects much of the island and old town site; the area is now encircled by the port and gas plant development, refugee cities and new infrastructure. All would like to claim land in the central area. The

of local culture has been supported by local groups. "Beautiful Port Sudan" and other tourist related organisations keen to utilise the island for their purposes have contacted the project as the need for all diving trips to have a rest day at the end of their diving results in many divers visiting the site. In the winter small boat cruises bring many foreign visitors. In total, this represents more than most of the rest of Sudan. The ferry boat now leaves twice a day to Saudi Arabia and has made Suakin again a major transit point for pilgrims and small scale trading activities. These elements need to be co-ordinated once the area develops and a development plan produced if World Heritage status is to be achieved.

This project has been supported by funds from the Macdonald Institute in Cambridge and the BIEA, as well as donations from members of the team. The forthcoming season has received a further Macdonald grant and support from a British Academy grant award. Future projects will

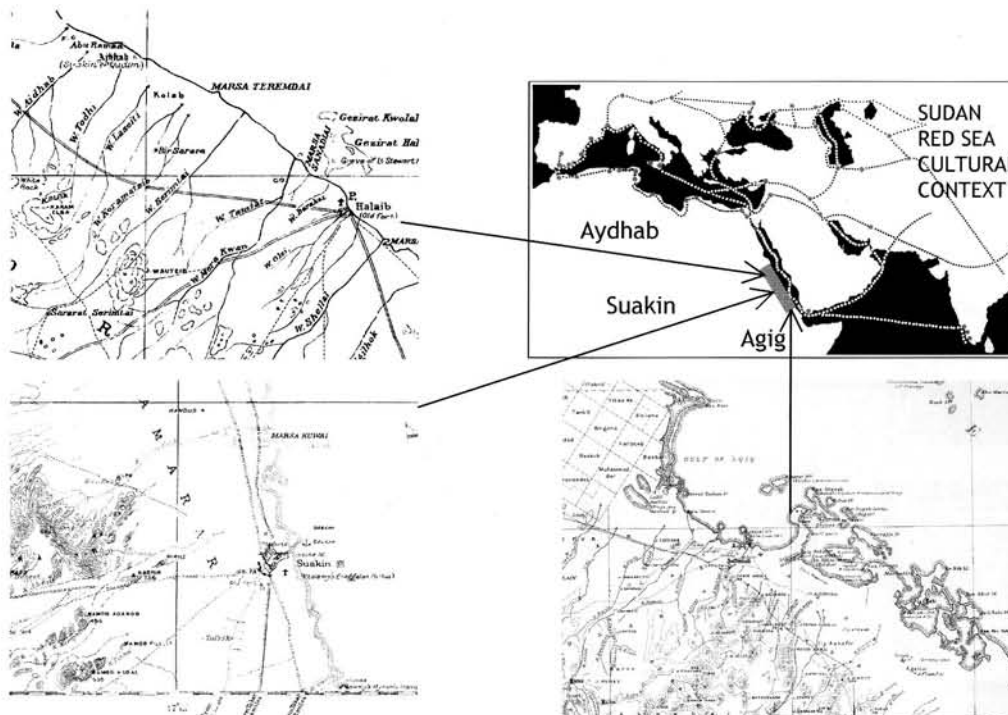


Figure 5. Sudan Red Sea Coast Survey.

mayor is determined to clear as much of the old Gerf as possible for this purpose. The entire coastal strip of Sudan will be transformed by the new oil economy and development encroaches on both archaeology and natural resources. In an attempt to try and rationalise this for the area, a survey is proposed, with support from the BIEA, of the coastal strip, using both radar and ground survey (Figure 5). The important sites of Aydhab and Agig will be included and efforts made for the region to become a designated World Heritage Site over the next few years, in co-ordination with the Ramsar Wetlands Protection.

For Suakin itself, its development as an important part

bring new forms of archaeology to Sudan not seen previously, from marine archaeology studies to side scan radar surveys. The work will be continued with Khartoum University and we hope to see within a year a regional museum and site protection/development office created, thanks to the initiative of NCAM and their officers.

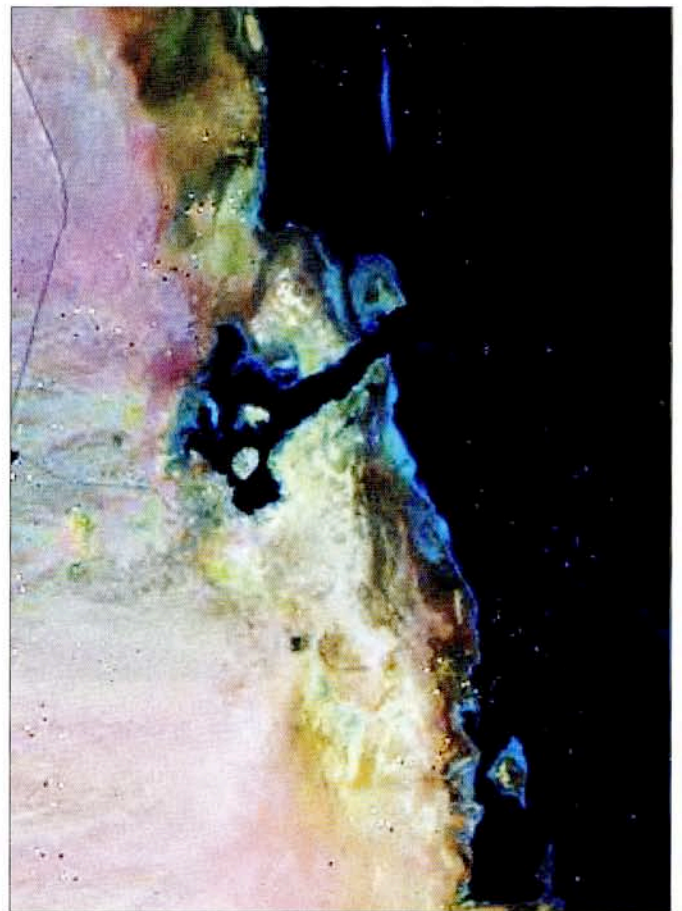


*Colour plate XXXIX.
Suakin from the north, 2002 (Courtesy
Randy Olson, National Geographic)*

*Colour plate XL.
Satellite photograph of Suakin and its environs.*



*Colour plate XLII. Suakin. Khorshid Effendi House.
Excavated section of the Great Roshan found in 2003.*



*Colour plate XLI. Suakin. Panormaic
view of the island looking towards Condensor Island.*

Suakin Island Project 2002-4

Hanafi Mosque

Customs

Muhafisa

Condensor Island

Shafai Mosque

Beit El Mufti

Port Entrance

Beit Khorshid

Egyptian Bank





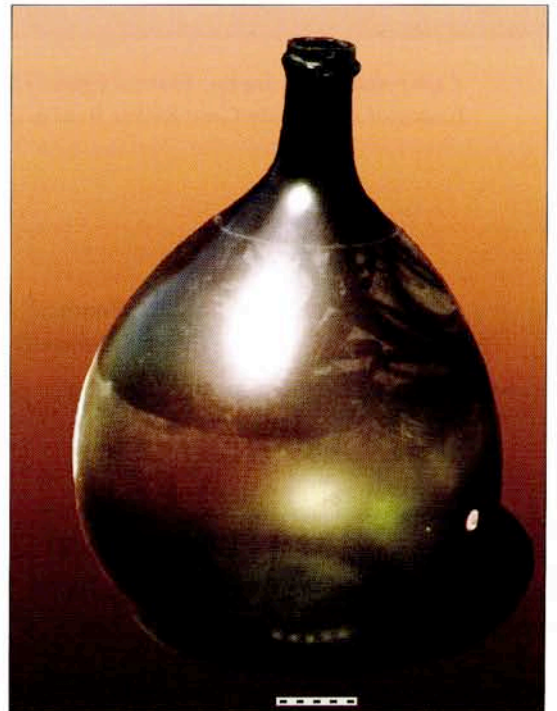
Colour plate XLIII. Suakin. Excavations of the "House of the Mufti".



Colour plate XLV. Suakin. Underwater archaeology in the harbour.



Colour plate XLIV. Suakin. Wrecks by Condensor Island.



*Colour plate XLVI.
Suakin. Glass vessel
recovered from the harbour.*