

# SUDAN & NUBIA

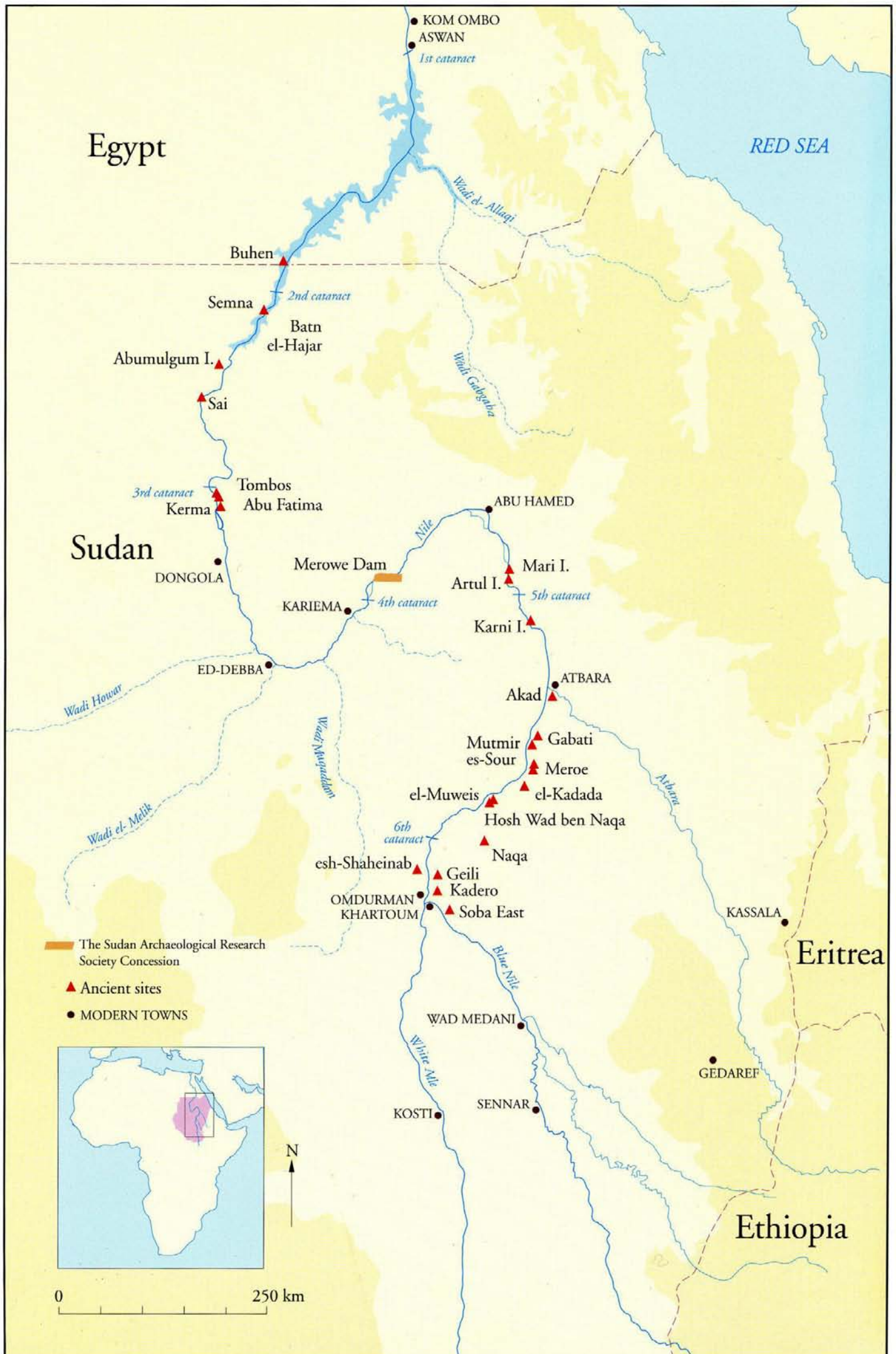
The Sudan Archaeological Research Society



*Bulletin No. 9*

2005





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The Sudan Archaeological Research Society



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*Front Cover:* Representation of a bound Kushite from the  
Mortuary Temple of Amenhotep III at Kom el-Hettân  
(photo © Memnon/Amenhotep III Project).

## A forgotten Meroitic agglomeration in the region of Meroe: el-Muweis (NE-36-O/8-H-2)

*Patrice Lenoble and Ahmed Sokari*

El-Muweis is missing from past inventories of Meroitic sites in the region of Meroe. Archaeological remains had been hidden under the village until a catastrophic flood obliged residents to rebuild their homes on a higher and less exposed terrace of the Nile. The existence of the site was reported orally by Sobhi Iskander as early as 1969, and it has been registered since that date in the manuscript of the archaeological map of Sudan (Hinkel, manuscript) under number NE-36-O/8-H-2. Its location can be distinguished on aerial views. To the west of the vast agricultural basin of Shendi and its irrigated black silts, a large clear area identifies Qal'a el-Hawara and draws attention to its uncultivated soil upon which vegetation - widely spaced *seyyal* acacias - holds down the aeolian sand. The zone photographed by the 1979 flight made by the Survey Department is the clearest. Farmed land surrounds the ancient remains and the fields outline the archaeological zone perfectly. More recent aerial views, on the other hand, provide a more confused image because of the disastrous invasion of the *mesket*.

Meroitic inventories created since 1969 have continued to omit el-Muweis (Geus 1974; Khidir Abdelkarim Ahmed 1984; Edwards 1989; Bradley 1992) most probably because it is unusual or on account of its supposed erosion. At least the site is finally noted, without neighbouring Hosh Wad ben Naqa being precisely mentioned, in several articles (Lenoble 1987, 214; 1992, 92; 1994, 223). Ceramics enabled Sobhi Iskander to date one monument, a ruin reduced to a *kom*, to the Christian era. Regular inspections made by the National Corporation for Antiquities and Museums, which were intended to protect this mound from encroaching agriculture, have gradually increased the outer perimeter and the chronological spread.

The last inspection was conducted at el-Muweis on December 20<sup>th</sup>, 2003 by Ahmed Sokari, the Antiquities Officer responsible for NCAM's Shendi office, in order to report on any new deteriorations. It was at this time that the first author, who is directing a mapping mission in the region of Shendi funded by the Schiff-Giorgini Foundation,<sup>1</sup> located the observed remains.

<sup>1</sup> The project entitled 'Géographie humaine de la région de Méroé (de Wad ben Naqa à Gabati)' attempts to provide a map of Meroitic sites registered by the A.M.S. (dwellings, village and urban centres, cemeteries) with particular emphasis on the evolution of funerary rites during the late Meroitic period.

**Ruin noted in 1969** still survive, to a height of 3m (Plate 1).

North 16° 40.417' East 33° 21.566' Adindan<sup>2</sup>

Fired and unfired bricks (Colour plate XXVIII) from Meroitic or Christian moulds. Small-sized ferricrete sandstone slabs. Bricks used for arches or vaults with deep finger-made grooves. Fragments of various lime mortar wall coatings.

Four recently dug pits have revealed among ash levels a structure made up of complex walls. Unearthed was a large number and variety of ceramic sherds (Colour plate XXIX), and more particularly Meroitic ones. Among other periods, the Late Meroitic is recognizable through the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD pottery, (so-called 'transitional beer-jar', a small vessel with a burnished interior and exterior and with zigzags on the interior of the everted rim, a.s.o).



*Plate 1. El-Muweis, the ruin.*

### **Large flattened and destroyed zone**

North 16° 40.444' East 33° 21.614'

During the late 1980s, 2-3ha east of the ruins were raked with tractors. The coordinates locate the site of foundations, most probably those of an edifice, pushed back to the western limit of the new field and now forming a large mound. Fragments of fired bricks over an area of 20-30m. Lime-mortar fragments. Abundant pottery from Late (1<sup>st</sup> - 4<sup>th</sup> century) and Terminal (4<sup>th</sup> - 5<sup>th</sup> century AD) Meroitic periods, including fine wares.

### **A pit recently dug with a mechanical digger** (Plate 2)

Surface of 10 x 5m, 2.5-3m deep

North 16° 40.526' East 33° 21.562'

All new sections contain material characteristic of dwellings. Unfired brick walls, buried 500 or 600mm deep, built upon foundations made of bricks set on edge (Plate 3). Large ceramic pots reused as braziers, buried at depths from 0.8 to 1m. A large ashy pit, revealing bricks still joined (from the oven wall or floor?) and a baked round brick from a torus moulding. Large ceramic containers with a square

<sup>2</sup> To enable the use of the 100,000 scale map coverage published by the Survey Department since 1975, the remains are located according to the Adindan geodesic system. The recent restitution of all of the American global positioning system signals enables a satisfactory cartography of the sites, while waiting for the more accurate Galileo system in 2008 and the G.P.S. Block IIF in 2009 or 2010.



Plate 2. *El-Muweis, pit recently dug in the settlement.*

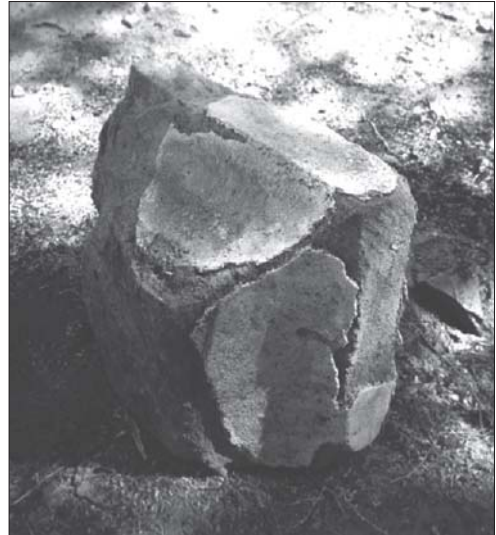


Plate 4. *El-Muweis, architectural block.*

section rim. Jars (Dunham 1963, types K5 or L8), bottles (*ibid.*, types I 7 to 12), goblets and cups, all types dated to Late Meroitic times, are exactly comparable to those from el-Kadada and Meroe.

#### **Older, almost filled pits, north of those mentioned above**

North 16° 40.539' East 33° 21.560'  
Traces of a section of a wall and its foundation. Five large architectural blocks made of grey fine-grained sandstone. One is a corner of an Egyptian grooved cornice, with the faces still coated in lime mortar (Plate 4), with approximate dimensions of 700 x 450 x 250mm.



Plate 3. *El-Muweis, wall of unfired bricks.*

#### **Layers of artifacts**

North 16° 40.578' East 33° 21.585'

Several layers, either plain superficial paving after the deflation of sand and ash or industrial heaps. Iron slags are visible in places, but it is not possible to distinguish whether they result from smelting or smithing. The given point is the most northern layer with large-sized fragments, which might come from a waste heap.

It is clear that the surface of el-Muweis covers an agglomeration of several monuments and a time span of at least the transitional period between the Meroitic and Christian eras. The site is situated within a network of religious centres,<sup>3</sup> on the right bank of the Nile, stretching between Wad ben Naqa and Meroe. This network, with settlements covering several hectares, interweaves village-like housing which is signalled by the presence of tumuli fields. All of the iron producing sites that have been discovered on the territory of the Kushite Empire so far are part of this network. Three of them, Meroe, Hamadab, and el-Hassa, are being explored. It is desirable, considering that el-Muweis is a site which is particularly threatened, to begin a programme there and to seek an institution which would be responsible for it.

#### **Hosh Wad ben Naqa**

To avoid confusion, the coordinates of this important Meroitic site are given last.

North 16° 40.006' East 33° 21.242' Adindan

Mound with a height of 2-2.5m and 40m in diameter, covered with brick fragments. Locally called: Qal'a el-Fideil or el-Fedel, to the west of the famous 150 year old *qubba*. The

<sup>3</sup> First of all, Gadu, Hamadab, Awlib and Abu Erteila, satellite settlements focussed on temples, close to the main urban centre at Meroe; then, as the crow flies from the capital, el-Hassa, 18 or 19km away, Taragma-Sideir, 25km away, el-Muweis, 46km away and Wad ben Naqa, 78km away.

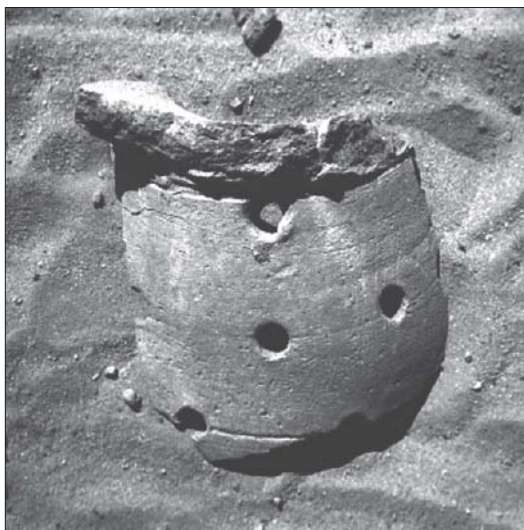


Plate 5. Hosh Wad ben Naqa, sherd from a ceramic brazier.

contemporary cemetery next to the *qubba* reuses some Meroitic bricks.

Bones, exhumed by erosion, on the east and west sides at least. Exploratory holes and some robber pits. Relatively abundant large potsherds: braziers (Plate 5; Dunham 1963, type I, 1 to 4) or ceramic tables (*ibid*, type H), jars (Colour plate XXX; *ibid*, type K, 5 or L, 8).

The site certainly has a funerary character and dates at least from the Classic and Late Meroitic periods. In the absence of a systematic survey or questioning of the inhabitants, it is difficult to conclude with certainty that Hosh Wad ben Naqa is the site of the cemetery of el-Muweis, which lies at a distance of, at the most, one kilometer away.

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*Colour plate XXVIII. El-Muweis, bricks extracted from buried walls.*



*Colour plate XXIX. El-Muweis, Meroitic and Pre-Christian sherds.*

*Colour plate XXX.  
Hosh Wad ben Naqa,  
sherds from jars.*