

# SUDAN & NUBIA

The Sudan Archaeological Research Society



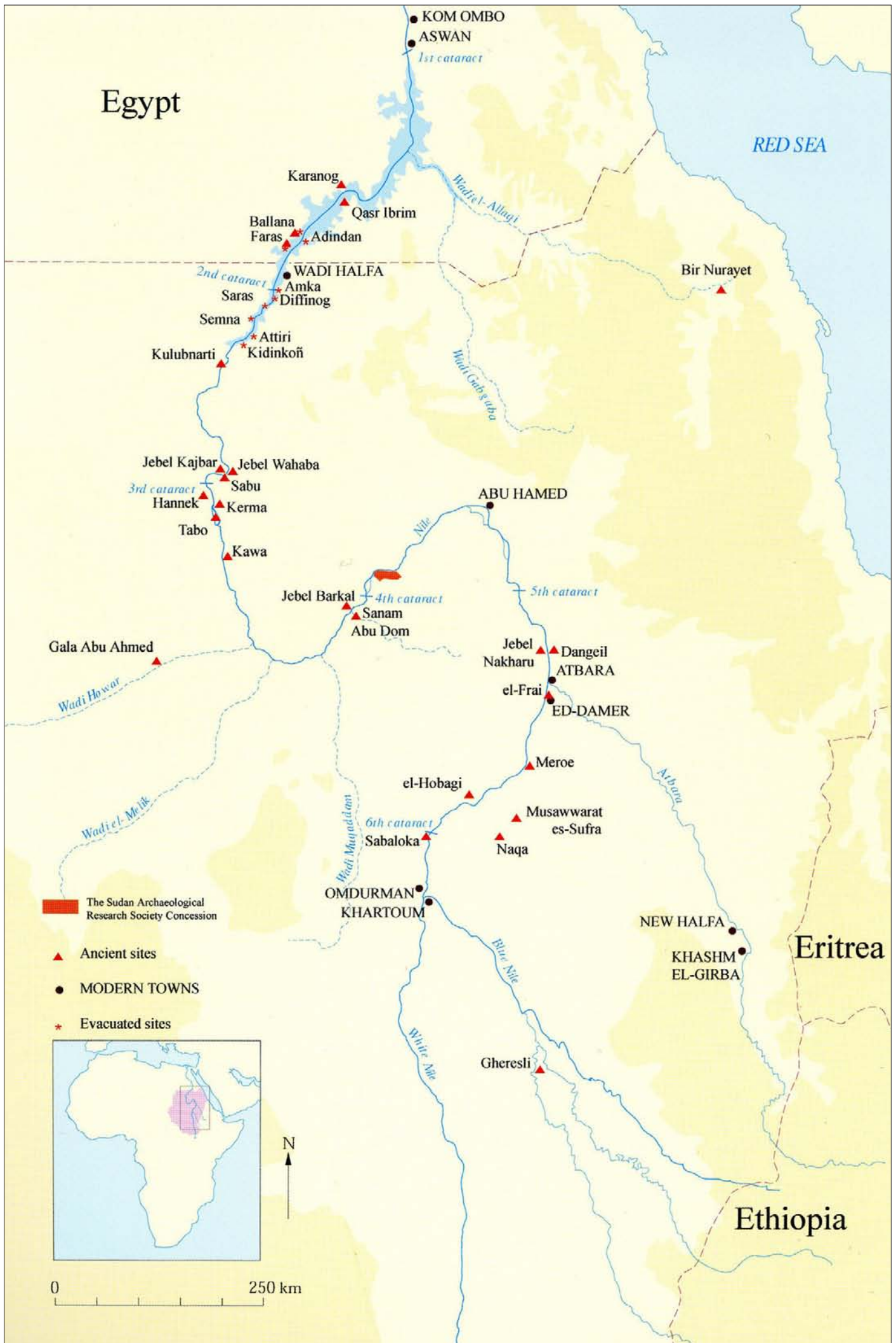
*Bulletin No. 10*

2006



# Egypt

RED SEA



# SUDAN & NUBIA

The Sudan Archaeological Research Society



Bulletin No. 10 2006

## Contents

---

### Kirwan Memorial Lecture

- Bir Nurayet – the Rock Art Gallery of the Red Sea Hills 2  
*Krzysztof Pluskota*
- 

### The Merowe Dam Archaeological Salvage Project

- Excavations in the vicinity of ed-Doma (AKSE), 2005-2006 8  
*Derek A. Welsby*
- Preliminary report on the excavations conducted on Mis Island (AKSC), 2005-2006 13  
*Andrew Ginns*
- The Third Season of the SARS Anglo-German Expedition to the Fourth Cataract of the Nile 20  
*Pavel Wolf and Ulrike Nowotnick*
- Comments on the two Egyptian jars found at Tomb no. 1 of site 3-Q-94 32  
*Robert Schiestl*
- Fourth Nile Cataract petroglyphs in context: the ed-Doma and Dirbi rock-art survey 34  
*Cornelia Kleinitz and Roswitha Koenitz*
- 

### Reports

- Cattle, sherds and mighty walls – the Wadi Howar from Neolithic to Kushite times 43  
*Friederike Jesse*
- Drawings on rocks: the most enduring monuments of Middle Nubia 55  
*David N. Edwards*
- Roman Artillery Balls from Qasr Ibrim, Egypt 64  
*Alan Wilkins, Hans Barnard and Pamela J. Rose*

- Antaios the Giant and Antaios the God, or how could the Greeks have got it so wrong? A statuette in the Nubian Museum: a case of understated syncretism 79  
*Donald M. Bailey*

- Apedemak and Dionysos. Further remarks on the “cult of the grape” in Kush 82  
*Andrea Manzo*

- Bread Moulds and ‘Throne Halls’: Recent Discoveries in the Amun Temple Precinct at Dangeil 95  
*Julie Anderson and Salah Mohamed Ahmed*

- El-Frai: a new Meroitic habitation site in ed-Damer 102  
*Mohamed Faroug Abd el-Rahman*

- Gheresli: a post-Meroitic activity centre in the Blue Nile region 104  
*Mohamed Faroug Abd el-Rahman*

- Paradise Lost: Nubia before the 1964 Exodus 110  
*Herman Bell*
- 

- Miscellaneous 117

---

*Front cover:* Beja man by the well at Bir Vario, Eastern Desert (photo K. Pluskota).

# Preliminary report on the excavations conducted on Mis Island (AKSC), 2005-2006

Andrew Ginns

The island of Mis, situated in the central portion of the SARS concession (Figure 1), had previously been surveyed in 1999 by a team directed by Derek Welsby (Welsby 2003). A total of fifteen archaeological sites were noted on Mis Island by this survey. Six of these sites were investigated further through extensive excavation over a ten week season during the winter of 2005-06.<sup>1</sup> The majority of the work conducted was concerned with archaeology dating to the medieval period. This included the excavation of a Late Christian church and its associated cemetery, a further two Christian cemeteries, a medieval settlement and an isolated tumulus. A cemetery of the Kerma period was also investigated.

## Church 3-J-18

Set on a gentle incline sloping down from the centre of the island were the remains of a Late Christian church and its associated cemetery (Colour plate XI). Prior to excavation, the surviving elements of the church structure were buried under layers of wind-blown silts and rubble from its eventual collapse/demolition. Excavation of the silt and rubble layers revealed three structural phases of the church and a phase of activity after the de-roofing of the church.

### Phase 1

Clearance of the wind-blown deposits and the collapse material revealed the plan of the church (Figure 2). The layout of the architectural components of the building resembled most closely those of Type 4 Late Christian churches (Adams 1965). The church was constructed of mud bricks  $30 \times 15 \times 7$  cm in size. The external face of the outer walls and the four central pillars were of fired bricks

of the same size. The outer, load bearing walls were 80cm thick and the internal walls averaged 40cm in width. The overall dimensions of the church were 13m east-west and 11m north-south with the structure surviving to 1.2m at its highest point.

All the rooms of the building were positioned within the rectangle formed by the external walls; none protruded beyond it. The sanctuary chamber containing the altar was a square room in the centre on the east side of the church (Plate 1). The remains of the altar were a 1m square arrangement of fired bricks two courses in height. This altar structure was laid on a layer of ash, seemingly of some religious/ritual importance. The altar was separated from the nave by mud-brick screen walls abutting, but not incorporated into, the east-west orientated walls of the sanctuary chamber and eastern bay of the nave.

The sanctuary chamber was flanked by the *prothesis* to the north and the *diaconicon* to the south, both entered from the sanctuary chamber. These entrances from the sanctuary chamber may well have been arched. Two fired bricks set on edge, at the top of the surviving wall between the

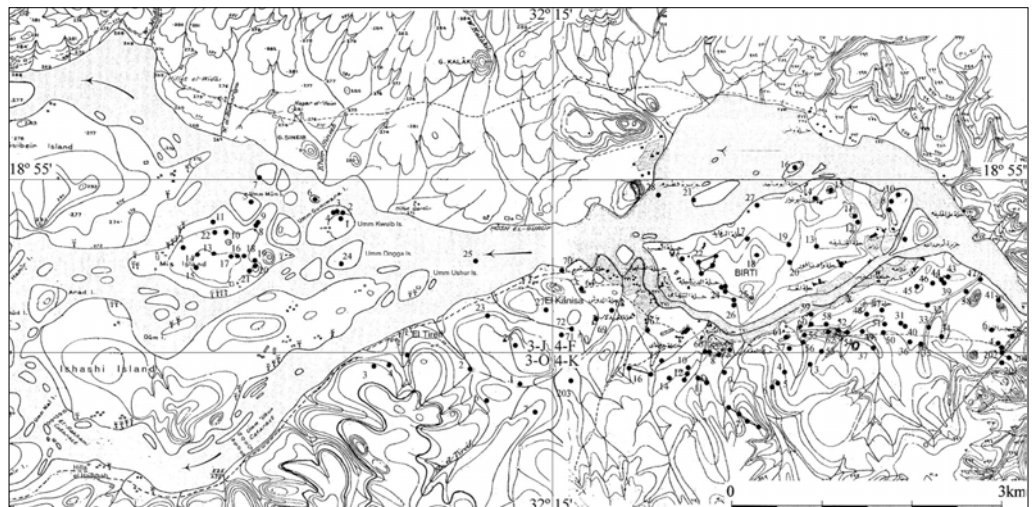


Figure 1. Map of the Central Region of the SARS Concession.

sanctuary chamber and the *prothesis*, are seemingly the first course of an archway. The wooden doors to these rooms were both placed within the *diaconicon* after they had been unhinged. The wood of these doors had been severely eroded by termites, making it very fragmentary. Round metal decorative studs were still present on the doors. In the central south portion of the church was an additional room not typical of later Christian ecclesiastical architecture. This room was entered from the southern aisle; its exact function is uncertain, although an association with the font and baptism is plausible.

The entrances to the church were on the north and south sides, their position being slightly to the west of the centre of these walls. In the centre of the building were the four fired-brick pillars. Their shape suggests that they were designed to support brick arches running between them,

<sup>1</sup> Team members – Eric McCann (ceramics), Carina Summerfield, Lavinia Ruffano, Marcus Brittain, Scott Haddow (osteologists), Paola Pugsley (illustrator), Aminte Thomann, Neal Spencer (archaeologists), Andrew Ginns (director), Hassan Mosa (cook), Showgi Dow Elbid (Antiquities Officer).

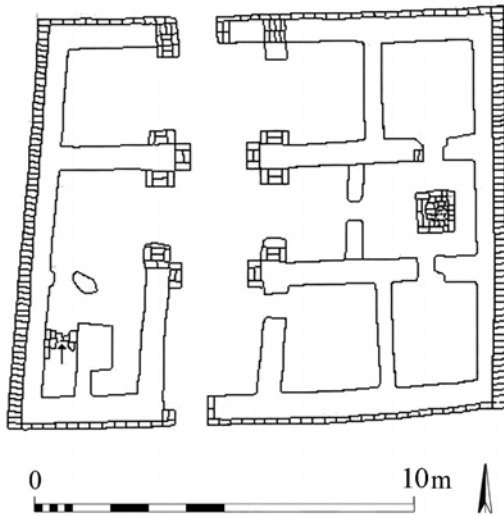


Figure 2. Church Phase 1 (scale 1:200).

these arches perhaps supporting a cupola above. There is some evidence for arches running from the northern pillars to the northern exterior wall; fired bricks within the northern wall, in line with the pillars, hint at this. Each of the pillars is built abutting a wall, they are not isolated components. Three of these walls run in line with the nave of the church (east-west) demarcating the nave from the aisles. The wall abutting the south-western pillar ran north-south from this pillar to the southern exterior wall. This wall enclosed the staircase in the south-west corner of the church. The staircase (Plate 2) was constructed of fired bricks set on a foundation of compacted silt and sand, between the large mud-brick newel and western external wall. The stairs survived to a height of four flights; they would have encircled the newel, climbing upwards in an anti-clockwise direction. The absence of any silt/sand fill on the east side of the newel which would have supported the upper steps indi-



Plate 2. Internal stairs and remains of stairwell doors.

cates that these would have been of wood. The upper steps may have been constructed of beams running from the newel to the wall to its east, probably set into those structural components.

#### Phase 2

The second phase of construction within the church (Figure 3) saw the addition of a pulpit and the strengthening of the northern pillars. The pulpit was built of fired bricks laid in a rather haphazard fashion and not to the same quality as the original fired-brick structural components (Plate 3). The west end of the pulpit is a single course of bricks set in a semi-circular shape; this represents the first step with the structure rising to six courses high at its east end. The shape of the pulpit with the steps leading from the nave is indicative of its purpose being for sitting on rather than for standing. This addition lies stratigraphically 10cm above the north-east pillar against which it is built. It probably replaced an earlier pulpit, perhaps built of a less durable material. However, no signs of an earlier pulpit were evident.

The strengthening additions to the northern pillars were both built mainly of mud bricks but with

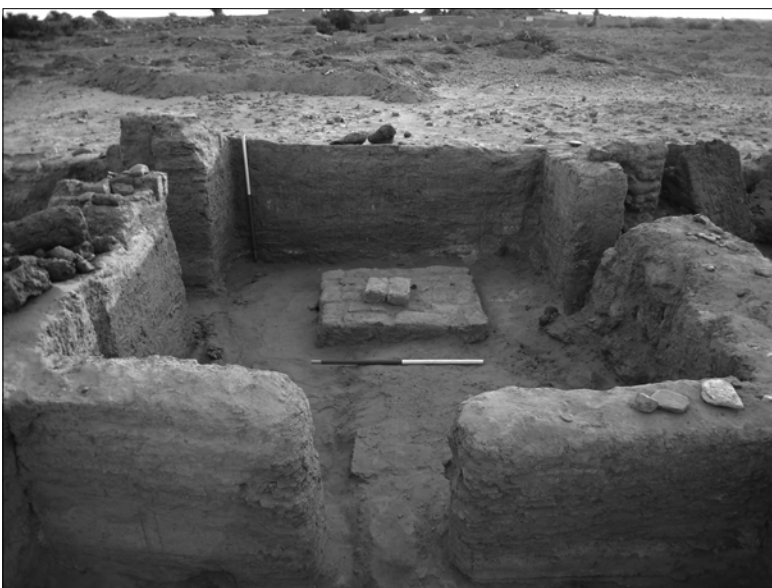


Plate 1. The sanctuary chamber and altar.



Plate 3. The pulpit looking north.

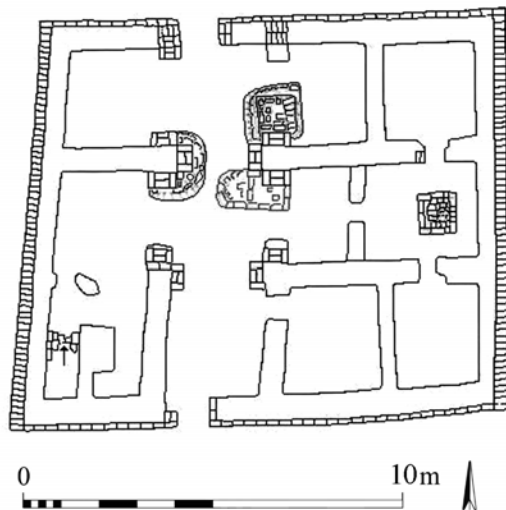


Figure 3. Church Phase 2 (scale 1:200).

fired bricks also used in their construction. Their form suggests they were hastily manufactured with their function obviously being of primary importance and with little emphasis placed on their aesthetic qualities. During excavation it was noted how soft some of the fired bricks had become over time, with the mud bricks proving more durable. In a single pillar, a failure of a few fired bricks could result in a roof/dome collapse. The pillar-strengthening additions are seemingly a realisation of this by the church guardians. The two pillar additions differed in form to one another. The north-western addition was a sub-semicircular shape encasing the original pillar on three sides and, therefore, together with the wall abutting this pillar, providing stability in all directions. The addition to the north-west pillar necessitated a different form due to the location of the pulpit. This reinforcement was built on the north side of the original pillar and provided support on that side. Perhaps this was as a result of that pillar being forced in a northerly direction. The shape of this pillar may also be a result of an attempt to provide extra support to an overhead gallery. This addition also had the result of creating another room to the west of the prothesis, a room entered from the northern aisle. If it had a function separate from that of the aisle, this is unknown. The creation of this room provided a greater degree of symmetry to the internal arrangement of the church but whether it was ever intended as a *bona fide* room is open to question.

### Phase 3

The last structural phase of the building relating to its use as a church was the addition of a large external staircase at the north-west corner (Plate 4), and the addition of a perimeter of stones (Figure 4). These perimeter stones were generally 40-70cm in size, laid in a single line and a single course. Openings through the perimeter respected the entrances of the main church building. The perimeter stones were stratigraphically 20cm above the base of the walls of

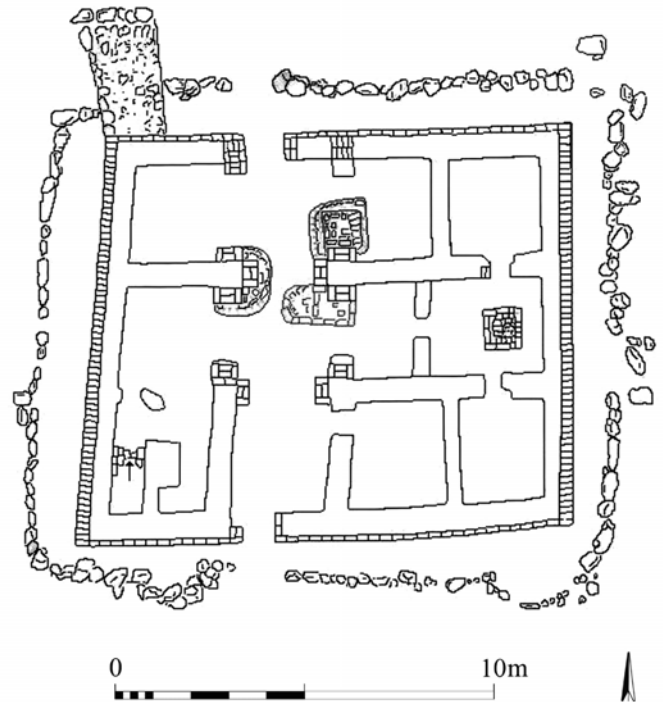


Figure 4. Church Phase 3 (scale 1:200).

the church, laid directly onto aeolian silts and sands. The purpose of this rather crude addition of perimeter stones is seemingly as a sand restraining feature.

The building of a large external staircase is quite possibly a result of a collapse of the internal staircase. The upper elements of the internal stairs were possibly heavy wooden cross beams set well into the mud-brick newel and adjacent wall. Rebuilding of this would have been a substantial undertaking and it may have been judged that building a new external staircase was an easier option. The outer faces of this external staircase were of large unworked stones laid neatly together and surrounding a fill of gravel, stones and fired-brick fragments which seemingly originate from the church itself.

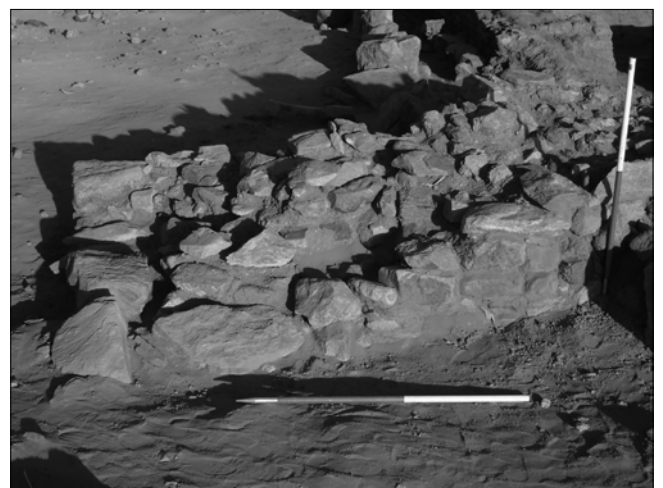


Plate 4. External staircase.



Plate 5. The north-western corner of the church/west of northern aisle.

At the western end of the northern aisle were five wooden pillars (Plate 5). These were set into holes cut into the original floor level and respected the shape of the end of the aisle. As with the internal steps, galleries utilising wood would have had a limited lifespan. These wooden posts may, therefore, be supports for a replacement gallery entered from the external staircase.

### Inhumations

Contemporaneous with the church as a functioning entity were two burials. The grave pits undercut the western wall at its centre, and the bodies were laid directly under that wall, orientated north-south, with the heads facing westward. The bodies were then left in a void and the grave cuts were sealed with blocking bricks. One of the graves was cut from outside the church, the other from inside. Burials in such a location hint at the social standing of these persons. Both were provisionally identified as being adult males. The quality of the preserved textiles on the body placed in its cut from the inside of the church certainly attest to the status of that individual, who may have been a priest or perhaps a patron of the church.

Three burials that predated the building were present within the perimeter of the church. Two of these were Christian and were aligned northwest-southeast. The third was heavily disturbed by the later west wall burial cut from the outside of the church; its location is suggestive of its also being of Christian date. The church, therefore, appears to postdate and to be built over an existing Christian cemetery. A further two burials within the church dated to a period after the collapse of the roof. These burials were both aligned north-south, one being located against the inside face of the western wall, the other lying immediately east of the newel. Both burials were within grave shafts cut from the top of wind-blown silt layers 60cm above the floor of the church.

### Post-collapse activity

After the collapse of the roof and upper parts of the church,

the remaining structure was covered by wind-blown silts. These silts were up to 1.2m thick, deepest where the church walls were surviving highest. Deposited within these silts, at different stratigraphic heights and in various locations throughout the church, were many ceramic vessels. Most of these were complete and placed right side up; often the vessels were grouped together. Some vessels were of imported origin, others were cruder local wares, some being made of unfired mud. The purpose of these vessels is unclear; however, it can be seen that they were carefully positioned and that that positioning was then respected with the vessels remaining intact and *in situ*. Although the exact function of these vessels is unknown, they undoubtedly signify ritual activities taking place within the confines of the building after it has ceased to function as a church. Plate 6 illustrates an example of one of these ritual pot deposits.

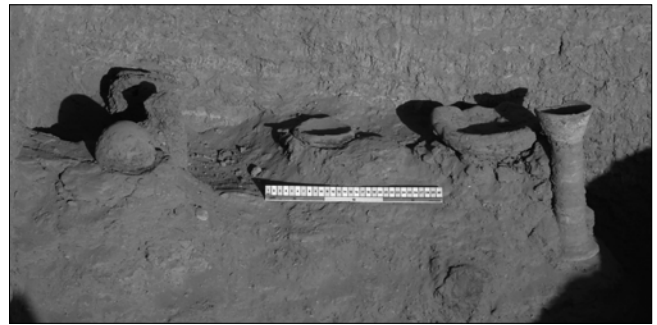


Plate 6. Ritual vessels within post-collapse wind-blown silts.

### Associated cemeteries

As mentioned previously, the church was built over an existing cemetery. The majority of this cemetery survived to the north of the church, the church occupying its southern part. The earlier graves were all aligned northwest-southeast; they were all marked by stone box monuments.

Burials contemporary with the functioning life of the church were located on the east (Plate 7), south and west sides of the building. These were aligned east-west and



Plate 7. Grave monuments on the western side of the church.

marked by stone boxes, mud-brick and lime-rendered fired-brick monuments. All three monument types were seen to be contemporaneous, with the material used being associated with prestige rather than confined exclusively to one particular phase.

The total number of individuals exhumed within the church and in its associated cemetery was 96. Many of these were naturally mummified and many also had textiles surviving to a high degree of preservation. The sex and age estimation of the individuals was carried out on site after a preliminary inspection; more detailed studies will be conducted at a future time (Figure 5). The results as they stand

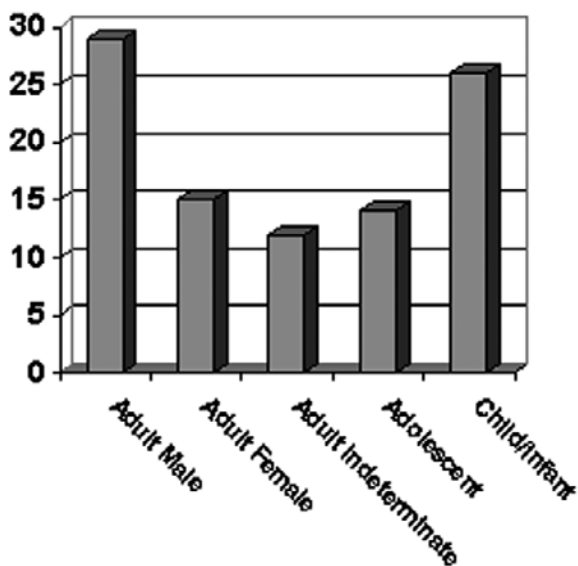


Figure 5. Preliminary identifications of inhumations excavated within church and cemetery site 3-J-18.

did, however, show a zoning of burials, the graves on the southern side of the church containing exclusively male burials with those in other parts of the cemetery were of males and females.

### Cemetery 3-J-10

The cemetery 3-J-10 was situated 300m north-west of the church. It was located in an area of alluvial deposits surrounded by bedrock outcrops. This cemetery is possibly where the last Christian burials on Mis were laid. The stone box monuments are the best preserved on the island and there is a change to the Muslim burials in the south-west side of the site. A visible transition of belief is marked by a change in grave monument type with the early Muslim burials being placed near to their Christian ancestors. Forty-four of the Christian burials were exhumed from this site; most were found to be laid on their backs and were without grave goods. The on-site identifications recorded 12 child/infants, three adolescents, 17 adult males, eight adult females and four adults of indeterminate sex.

### Cemetery 3-J-11

Christian cemetery 3-J-11 was the largest burial site on the island of Mis. It contained over 500 grave monuments and would have contained more but for extensive agricultural disturbance in recent years. Monuments where they survived were of the standard stone box type. Successive phases of medieval burials within this site resulted in there being more individuals buried here than were represented by grave monuments. A total of 163 individuals were exhumed, taken from several different areas in order to produce a broad sample of the site (Figure 6). The number of individuals

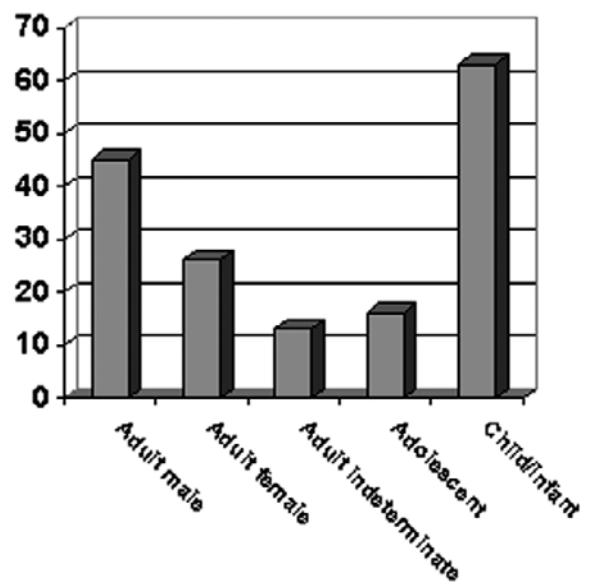


Figure 6. Preliminary identifications of inhumations excavated from site 3-J-11.

exhumed account for perhaps 20% of the total burials present within the cemetery.

It was found that there were several variations in burial practices within this cemetery. The multi-phased nature of the cemetery is reflected in changes in the burial customs. The differing styles of burials suggest three main trends or phases:

1. The oldest were those where a body was placed on its back and then large flat blocking stones were placed on ledges in the grave cut above the body. This created a chamber where earth was kept away from the deceased. Grave goods, primarily ceramic vessels, were not uncommon from these types of burials whereas in other types ceramic vessels were rare.

2. The large flat blocking stones were dispensed with. The bodies were placed on their backs, facing upwards, they had rectangular stones or mud bricks placed either side of the head and a third placed across these, thereby protecting the head of the deceased from the grave backfill.

3. The body was laid in a grave cut without any structural elaboration. These bodies were laid on either side or on





their backs, the latter being the more common.

### *Meroitic grave*

During the excavation of medieval graves on site 3-J-11, a burial dating to the Meroitic period was encountered. If this was originally marked by a monument, this has long since disappeared following extensive damage by robbing activity perhaps only a few years after the burial and then complete clearance of the site in the medieval period. The grave cut consisted of a stepped slope, descending gently westward. This led to a subterranean chamber which was blocked off by a construction of mud bricks. Robbing activity in antiquity was evident from the missing mud bricks on the left side of this construction. The robbing activity had also severely disturbed the burial; the skeletal remains were broken and spread across the floor of the chamber. It is of course unknown as to what articles were taken from this burial; however, two faience beakers and a faience box lid (Colour plate XII), four large ceramic vessels, two of which were painted (Colour plates XIII, Plate 8), and two small ceramic beakers remained.

### **Tumulus 3-J-12**

Roughly 300m south of site 3-J-11 and 300m west of site 3-J-18 was an isolated mound (Plate 9). This was set on a gently undulating area of ground near the centre of the island. The mound was constructed of a sand/silt matrix with gravel and angular stones. It was constructed in one event and contained potsherds of medieval date. It was



*Plate 8. Painted jar from the Meroitic tomb at site 3-J-11.*

roughly circular with a diameter of 5m and a height of 0.65m. Its purpose is unclear; full excavation revealed that it did not mark a burial or any other deposit. It could theoretically have been a marker within the landscape, but this is unlikely considering its island location.

### **Settlement 3-J-19**

The north-western corner of the ruins of settlement site 3-J-19 lies 50m east of the church 3-J-18. This site is heavily denuded with much of it being a scatter of stones from collapsed buildings, and potsherds of late Christian date. A preliminary study of the ceramics suggests that this site is contemporary with the church. The settlement occupies an area roughly 130 × 130m, and it is bounded by rock outcrops.

Due to the size of the site, it was decided to excavate test pits in two different locations, both in places where it was felt structural remains could be discerned. Excavation involved removing silt and sand and leaving rocks *in situ* in order to ascertain if these remaining rocks made any structural sense. It was found that the silt/sand deposits did not contain any stratigraphic layers. It seems, therefore, that this settlement was either of one phase, or new buildings were not built where old ones had been, or that older buildings were completely razed before being overbuilt.

A test pit dug near the centre of the site revealed two circular rings of unworked rocks with further rocks forming walls leading off from these (Plate 10). The absence of a clear archaeological horizon within the dirt layers in and around these structures meant that a precise function could not be attached to them. The circular shape would suggest that the rocks are not foundations of mud-brick structures but are the lower courses to dry-stone walls. The small size of these structures is suggestive of their being animal pens.

### **Cemetery 3-J-22**

Located 50m south of cemetery 3-J-11 was site 3-J-22, a cemetery dating to the Kerma period. The cemetery consisted of several very poorly defined tumuli which were disturbed to such an extent as to make identification of individual tumuli impossible. This mass of tumuli was set at the base of a rock outcrop with an alluvial basin to its north. Prior to excavation fragments of human bone and pottery were collected from the surface.



*Plate 9. Tumulus 3-J-12.*



*Plate 10. Circular structures: round houses/ animal pens.*

Excavation of the site commenced with the stripping of the upper surface deposits across the west of the site in order to ascertain the limits of the separate tumuli. Unfortunately both this and the cutting of trenches running through the entire site did not allow the separate tumuli to be identified. During these activities further Kerma potsherds were recovered as well as human-bone fragments. Total removal of the southern third of the site did not expose any grave cuts in the alluvial layers that the mounds were constructed on. The lack of a grave cut into the alluvial layers may be a result of bodies being laid above the alluvial surface and then simply covered with a mound of earth.

### **Bibliography**

- Adams, W. Y. 1965. 'Architectural Evolution of the Nubian Church, 500-1400 A.D.', *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt* 4, 87-139.
- Welsby, D. A. 2003. *Survey above the Fourth Nile Cataract*. Sudan Archaeological Research Society Publication no. 10. London.



*Colour plate XI. Mis Island. Site 3-J-18, the church, looking north.*



*Colour plate XII. Mis Island. Faience box lid from the Meroitic tomb at site 3-J-11.*



*Colour plate XIII. Mis Island. Painted pottery vessel from the Meroitic tomb at site 3-J-11.*