

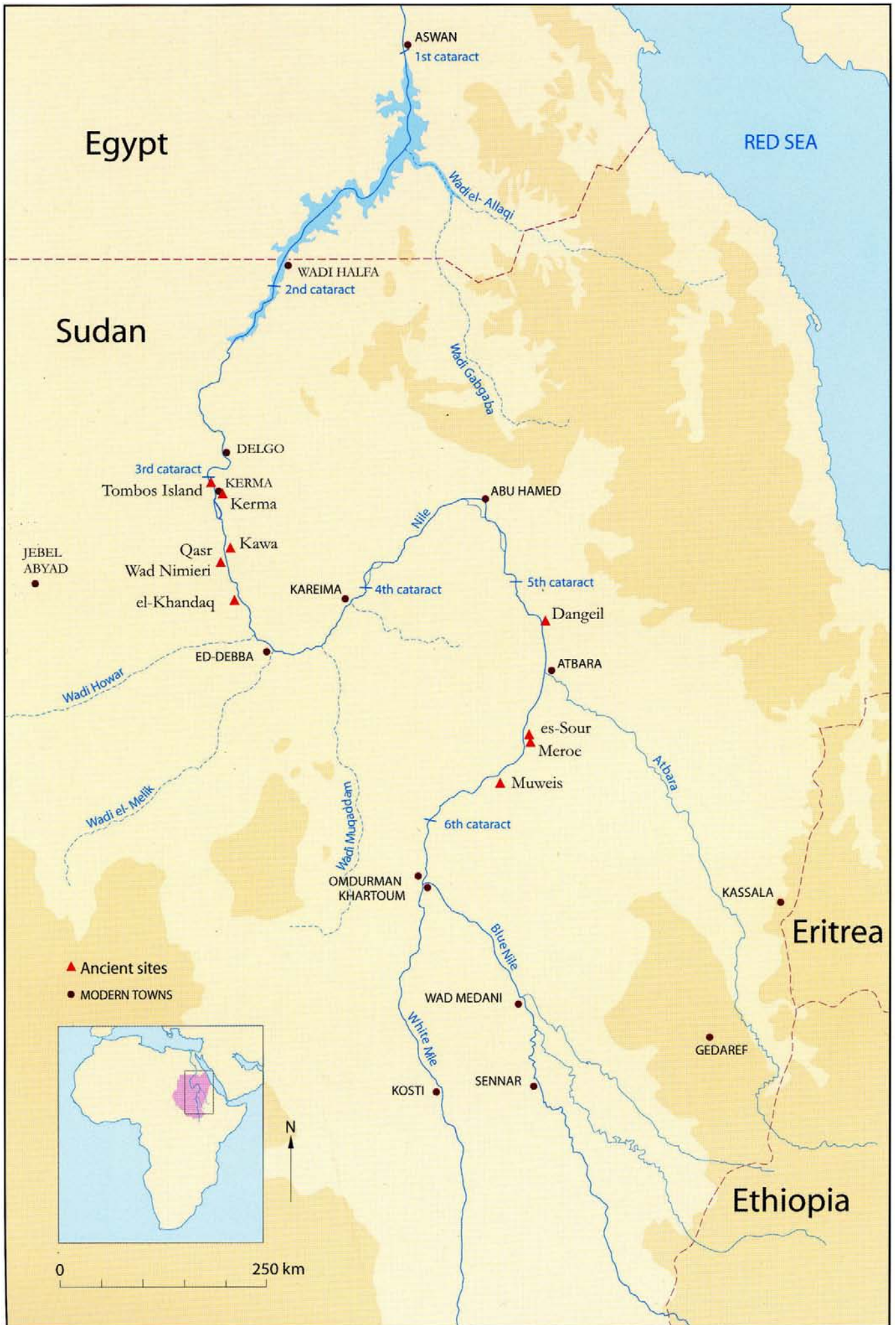
SUDAN & NUBIA

The Sudan Archaeological Research Society



Bulletin No. 12 2008





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Front cover: Rescuing rock art from the Sudan Archaeological Research Society's concession at the Fourth Nile Cataract. This collaborative project between the British Museum, Iveco and New Holland was undertaken in November 2007 and resulted in the removal, from the SARS concession, of over 50 boulders bearing rock art or used as rock gongs. The pyramid, offering chapel and enclosure wall from site 4-F-71 were also relocated. Here the work is being filmed by a cameraman from the Italian TV news channel Rei Due (photo D. A. Welsby).



The Archaeological and Cultural Survey of the Northern Dongola Reach, West Bank, from el-Khandaq to Hannek. First Season's Report 2007

Intisar Soghayroun Elzein

Introduction

This is an interdisciplinary project which aims to document and study archaeological sites and all cultural aspects including cultural contact situations (Nubian-Arabic) and Islamisation. The region is a very important one since it made up one of the major cultural, economic and political regions of the Kingdom of Makuria, and the area which received the early Muslim settlers.

The population of the region is mostly Danagla Nubians, but there is a noticeable presence of Darfurians and possibly West Africans. Also el-Khandaq, having been an important commercial centre, attracted other ethnic groups: Nubian – Mahas-Shaigyia, Sa'idi from Egypt and 'Attiyab from Morocco.

Limited archaeological work in the area has taken place since the last major survey by the Institute of Archaeology, University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) in 1997, when key sites were located (Smith 1998-2002). To complete a survey of the area is increasingly urgent in the face of imminent threats from natural and human factors. Like many areas of the Sudan, the region is undergoing a major transformation through the effects of development (irrigation schemes, agricultural and settlement expansion).

The area has been subdivided into four regions to make the work-programme manageable and to assist in its evaluation. These are from south to north:

1. El-Khandaq and its environs.
2. Wad Nimeiri and its environs.
3. Magasir Island and Kabtod.
4. Hannek-Koya

The primary focus will be the in-depth study of particularly threatened sites such as el-Khandaq and Wad Nimeiri, where the castles are in a deplorable state. El-Khandaq was significant in the past as an important river port which received goods from Egypt and handled exports from the heart of western and southern Sudan. The project also aims to study all archaeological material with an emphasis on the different kinds of cemeteries, pottery, and other material culture items. Industrial archaeology is another field which has potential in the area, e.g. limestone extraction by women and its processing and application.

The fieldwork: synopsis

Fieldwork was carried out in two periods: February/March 2007 and November 2007. During the first period, 13th February - 11th March, a comprehensive archaeological survey was carried from el-Khandaq (18° 37.173' N, 30° 33.912' E) and northwards to Sori (18° 42.643' N, 30° 32.533' E). Approximately 35 sites were registered within el-Khandaq, five at Sali and one at Sori. Most of the sites are of the Islamic period (*qubbas*, cemeteries, *kehalwa* ruins) but there are also a few Christian remains and prehistoric sites, as well as the remains of the old town of el-Khandaq and the fort (*Qaila Qaila*) (see Table 1).

For the duration of the second period, 11th-26th November, the work was concentrated at el-Khandaq, as one of our primary aims is the in-depth study of the particularly threatened sites. The following tasks have been achieved:

1. Plotting of the fort, using a total station (a major undertaking made possible through the support of SARS).
2. Measurement of five houses.
3. Rescue excavation of a Christian multiple burial.
4. Analysis of the skeletons of the above-mentioned burial.
5. Conservation of the grave after the reburial of the skeletal remains.
6. Ethnographical observation of a female oven maker.
7. Collecting of oral traditions.
8. Erecting signs for the fort, multiple graves and the University of Khartoum's plot of land (suggested location of a rest house).

This season was funded and supported by the University of Khartoum, SARS and the citizens of el-Khandaq, who provided lodging.

Details of the work undertaken

El-Khandaq town

The fort known as "*Qaila Qaila*" dominates the town, its south-west tower (Plate 1, Colour plate XXVI) is visible from both north and south, whilst its western wall, with the remains of the south-western and interval towers, dominates the area, looking from the west. Its remains are in desperate need of urgent support, especially the towers. The project was able to produce a detailed plan, which was a great achievement. The northern wall, which runs east-west, has largely disappeared and is cut by a track used by the town's people and their animals, at its eastern end (Plate 2). It seems that most of the stone has been reused to build the police station in the early 20th century and later on some of the houses. Further adding to the destruction of the site is the presence of large quantities of animal dung inside the fort (Plate 3, Colour plate XXIX), which the local people excavate to use as fertiliser. The surface pottery sherds date back to the Christian and Islamic periods. The town, which

Table 1. Site coordinates.

	Latitude	Longitude		Period
el-Khandaq				
1a.	18° 37.173'	30° 33 910'	Royal cemetery	Islamic
1b.	18° 36.289'	30° 33 791'	Royal cemetery	Islamic
1c.	18° 36.368'	30° 33 894'	Royal cemetery	Islamic
2.	18° 36.203'	30° 33 909'	Group burial (<i>Toskiya</i>)	Islamic?
3.	18° 36.208'	30° 33 873'	(Hidden Graves)	Islamic
4.	18° 36.267'	30° 33 317'	(<i>Qubba</i> Cemetery)	Islamic
5.	18° 36.408'	30° 33 840'	<i>Toskiya</i> with inscribed stone?	Islamic?
6.	18° 36.435'	30° 33 868'	Base of <i>qubba</i>	Islamic
7.	18° 36.452'	30° 33 873'	Ancient well of Said el-Nour el-Khabier	Islamic
8.	18° 36.452'	30° 33 873'	Graves (coordinates to be checked)	Islamic?
9.	18° 36.493'	30° 33 899'	Graves built with red bricks	Islamic
10.	18° 36.504'	30° 33 920'	Graves near Babkeir's House	Islamic?
11.	18° 36.519'	30° 33 886'	Buildings <i>Rikabiya</i>	Islamic
12.	18° 36.555'	30° 33 970'	Wad et-Tash Grave and cemetery	Islamic
13.	18° 36.604'	30° 33 981'	Cemetery	Islamic
14.	18° 36.610'	30° 33 996'	Buildings and ancient pottery, possibly Kerma pottery?	Kerma? Christian, Islamic
15.	18° 35.494'	30° 33 897'	Graves <i>Baniya</i> ?	Islamic
16.	18° 35.449'	30° 33 920'	Graves <i>Baniya</i> Shiekh Musa	Islamic
17.	18° 35.441'	30° 33 977'	Graves <i>Baniya</i> ?	Islamic
18.	18° 35.565'	30° 33 892'	Graves <i>Baniya</i> Haj Arab	Islamic
19.	18° 36.145'	30° 33 888'	Shrine of Sheikh Shahoda el-Garih	Islamic
20.	18° 37.135' - 18° 36.707'	30° 33.907' - 30° 34 047'	Cemetery Gourish and others	Islamic
21.	18° 35.811'	30° 33 798'	Scattered pottery and red bricks, possibly one damaged grave	Islamic
22.	18° 35.989'	30° 33 880'	Large cemetery, at least 3 <i>Toskiyas</i> , 1 damaged	Islamic?
23.	18° 36.038'	30° 33 916'	<i>Qubba</i> of Abd el-Nour	Islamic
24.	18° 36.043'	30° 33 931'	Graves	Islamic
25.	18° 36.070'	30° 33 940'	Cemetery (south of el-Khandaq school)	?
26.	18° 36.082'	30° 33 955'	Structures and remains of Indigo Factory	Islamic
27.	18° 36.123'	30° 33 935'	Structure and Cemetery (north of el-Khandaq school)	Islamic and ?
28.	18° 36.707'	30° 34 005'	Related to cemetery of Gourish south west	Islamic
29.	18° 36.655'	30° 33 944'	Cemetery south west of Gourish	Islamic
30.	18° 36.449'	30° 33 806'	Cemetery Hasanab	Islamic
31.	18° 36.455'	30° 33 810'	Cemetery Hasanab scattered potsherds (coordinates to be checked)	Christian
32.	18° 36.565'	30° 33 914'	Rekabiya Cemetery, Findspot Paleolithic acheulian	Paleolithic
33.	18° 36.579'	30° 33 857'	Lithics of Middle and Late Paleolithic type	Paleolithic
34.	18° 36.579'	30° 33 901'	Grave undiagnostic, probably Post-Meroitic?	Post-Meroitic?
35.	18° 37.747'	30° 33 667'	Graves <i>baniyas</i> (red bricks)	Islamic
Sali				
1.	18° 37.973'	30° 33.811'	<i>Baniyas</i> and children graves and scattered finished lithic tools	Neolithic – Islamic
2.	18° 38.481'	30° 33.664'	Grave and scattered lithics	Neolithic – Islamic
3.	18° 38.777'	30° 33.628'	Rubbles of stones, Christian pottery	Christian - Islamic
4.	18° 39.873'	30° 33.127'	Big boulders, pottery: Neolithic Christian, lithics Neolithic	Neolithic - Christian
5.	18° 40.000'	30° 32.779'	<i>Baniya</i> , lithics	Neolithic - Islamic
Sori				
1.	18° 42.643'	30° 32.533'	<i>Qubba</i> , <i>baniya</i> and <i>khalva</i>	Islamic

was once a thriving river port, was the residence of wealthy merchants, to which the size and quality of the houses testify (Colour plates XXVII and XXX). There are two-storey houses of mud brick, with many rooms, as well as one-storey houses (Colour plate XXXI); these have been deserted since the early 1970s, when the trade declined and the merchants moved to Khartoum and Omdurman.

There are two mosques in use: el-Hassanab and el-Khatibiya. The el-Hassanab's minaret is not included in the mosque structure, i.e. it is free-standing, whilst the other mosque's minaret

is an integral part of the building (Colour plate XXVIII).

Burials

It seems that the town of el-Khandaq was built upon a large cemetery. Graves are everywhere, inside inhabited houses, along the roads, beside the graveyards, and include burials with vaulted roofs, group burials (*Toskiya* - local term) and others tunnelled into limestone hills (concealed graves). Today there are two royal cemeteries and the main town cemetery which is divided spatially among many factions of



Plate 1. Qaila Qaila, general view of the fort from the west with the south-western tower clearly visible (photo I. Welsby Sjöström).



Plate 3. Qaila Qaila, deposits of dung within the fort (photo I. Welsby Sjöström).

the town i.e. Hassanab, Musiab etc. and naturally by gullies. The royal cemeteries contain the graves of the Funj meks who ruled between the 17th-19th century. Sources indicate that the castle (*Qaila Qaila*) was the palace of Mek Chowes (Crawford 1951, 36). The local people still remember the names and the genealogy and even the burial places of the later meks. In the Hasanab cemetery is a tombstone of Safia, daughter of mek Hakim. According to tradition most of them were of the Bedariyya tribe.



Plate 2. Qaila Qaila, general view of the interior of the fort looking north to the river path (photo I. Welsby Sjöström).

Grave superstructures vary. There are ordinary oval-shaped graves, with two tombstones, whether inscribed or plain, with stone pebbles scattered on their surface; some have a sort of low mastaba of red brick, or mud brick, again with tombstones. Others are surrounded by a mud, or mud-brick enclosure with a height ranging between 200-500mm (*baniya*) (Plates 4 and 5). The cemeteries, the different types of grave superstructures and the inscribed tombstones are ripe for further in-depth study.

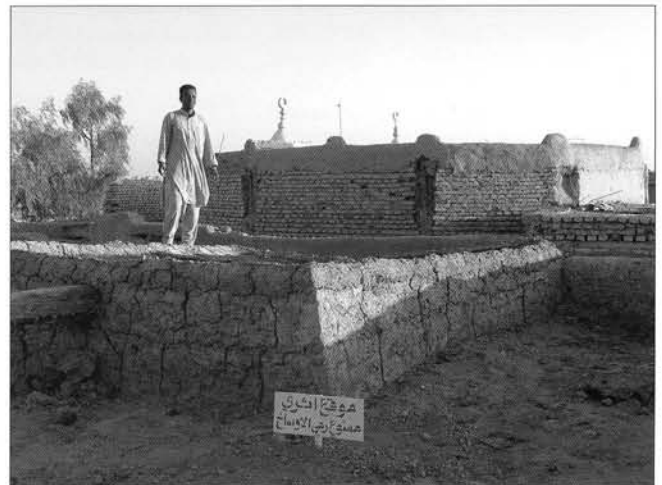


Plate 4. The restored tomb (photo I. Welsby Sjöström).



Plate 5. The restored tomb (photo I. Welsby Sjöström).

Infants and newborn children are usually buried either next to a *qubba*, or a sheikh's grave. Some of the cemeteries to the north of el-Khandaq are for children, arranged around the grave of a sheikh. Females' graves, even those of infants, are marked by a third tombstone in the middle of the grave; this is a unique trend which so far is unreported elsewhere.

The *qubbas* and shrines of sheikhs are numerous within el-Khandaq and to its north. The latter includes remains of an old cemetery with remains of *qubbas* and structures, some of which consist of two rooms of which the eastern bears a *mibrab*. According to oral tradition these are the remains of *kbalwas* (Quranic school) and mosques.

Oral traditions

The project carried out interviews with the older inhabitants of el-Khandaq. We were lucky enough to meet the grandson (94 years old) of the famous el-Nour el-Khabir, the Sultan of Darfur's caravan leader, and the famous merchant who carried trade between Egypt and the Sudan. Mohammed Mohi ed-Din has a very good memory of the first half of the 20th century and also of what he recalled of events mentioned to him by his father and grandfather, concerning trade items, routes, boats, sailors and booze houses. Ahmed Hassan Khairi (75) a maternal relative of Ali Abd el-Latif, the hero of the 1924 revolution, together with some of the town residents, still remembers the house in which Abd el-Rahman el-Nijoumi, the Mahdi army leader, had been accommodated and the story of Abd el-Latif, father of Ali, who arrived with el-Nijoumi's army and of his stay in el-Khandaq. They showed us where Ali was born and the story of his father's marriage. Oral tradition can throw light upon the trade, the genealogy of the inhabitants and the subsistence economy of the town, during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Hanim Jar el-Nabi (75) has her own memories of the sailing canteens and their stop at el-Khandaq, of the shops that once lined the river side road, of the traded items and the subsequent decline of trade.

Ethnographic observations and women's crafts

The women of el-Khandaq were famous for making objects out of palm leaves and wheat stalks. These ranged from the food covers '*tabaq*' to baskets used as food containers, or for food carrying, roof hanging devices to keep food fresh, mats etc. Women also prepared hearths, or stands out of lime mixed with animal dung. The extraction of lime to use for flooring and the making of hearths was once one of their jobs. An ethnographic observation of a female oven maker was carried out as remains of ovens were observed in the deserted houses and are still used by some families elsewhere in the town.

Public buildings

The police station, established in 1902, survives but the post office and the customs house no longer exist. The remains of the old butchery are still visible to the north of



Plate 6. The unexcavated tomb (photo I. Welsby Sjöström).

the boys' elementary school. The indigo factory is represented by large granite stones and traces of the basins but the main area has been used for cultivation. The rest-house which was established in 1905, overlooking the river from its high position, is still standing, but in urgent need of restoration.

Rescue excavation

A skull protruding from the south-east corner of a vaulted burial at 18° 36.235' N, 30° 33.945' E, prompted the excavation (Plate 6). The burial had been used as a dumping area since the collapse of its roof. The excavation area was 4 x 3m and the upper layer, to a depth of 600mm, consisted of garbage. Below that appeared the remains of the fallen roof, consisting of mud bricks of large size, 500 x 200 x 70mm. After another 100mm bones, skulls and complete skeletons began to appear. They were in different positions, some lying north-south, others east-west. The solid ground was reached after another 500mm. When we set to work, we expected to find no more than one or two skeletons but we ended up with more than 30 individuals, according to the analysis undertaken by our team member Yahia Fadl Tahir. According to his study, males represent 75% of the deceased, whilst females represent 25%. They seemed to have been well-nourished as there was only one instance of tooth decay, and the general status of the skeletons revealed no injuries, fractures, or even noticeable disease, although they were middle-aged people, 30-50 years old at their time of death. Their stature was between 162-175cm. (See Table 2).

Conclusion

The fieldwork served as a field school, which has helped in developing the skills of junior staff, as well as students (this season we were accompanied by a fifth year student, who carried out her fieldwork in the area and its environs for her BA thesis). Supervision and training was also provided for an



Table 2. The measurements of bones of the upper and lower extremities in cm.

	Ulna	Radius	Humerus	Fibula	Tibia	Femur
1	28	29.5	25	36.5	40	45
2	28.5	27.5	32	35.5	30	40.5
3	29	27	33.5	41.5	38	41.5
4	24.5	28.5	30	40	41	44
5	27	28	35	33	29	48
6	27.5	31	34.5	41	28.5	46
7	24.5	28	31	38	38	46.5
8	23.5	30	32	33	36	46
9	24	28	30	36.5	28	43.5
10	26.5	26	34	39.5	39	49.5
11	24.5	26.5	32	37	41	43.5
12	24.5	27	31	40.5	39	50
13	26	29.5	33.5	38	42	45
14	27	26.5	30	42	39	45
15	28.5	29.5	34	37	42.5	44
16	27.5	28	33.5	29	38.5	49
17	26.5	26	33.5	36	41	44
18	24.5	29	34.5	40.5	36.5	46
19	25	30	32.5	38.5	42.5	45
20	26	26	33	40	40	49
21	27	26	34.5	37	40.5	48
22	25.5	26	34.5	38	37.5	45
23	27	29.5	30	43.5	38.5	45
24	26	31	29	28.5	38	45.5
25	26.5	29.5	30	28	37	44
26	25.5	28.5	32	37	37.5	41
27	24	25	30	39	43	46.5
28	24.5	25	32.5	34	43	46.5
29	28.5	29	34.5	40.5	43	48
30	24	25	31	36	36.5	48
31	25	26.5	35	37.5	36.5	44
32	25.5		35	38.5	38	48
33			33	35	39	46
34			31		40	48
35			29.5		35.5	41.5
36			33		39	44.5
37			34		41.5	45
38			30.5		36	45.5
39			29		37	49
40			32.5		43	48.5
41			30		44	44
42			31		40	46
43			33		41.5	46
44			32.5		37	47
45			29		41	41
46			30		38	46
47			34		39	44
48			33		40.5	48
49			34.5		34	46
50					39	45.5
51					40	48
52					39	44
53					36.5	44.5
54					39	
55					29	
56					42	
57					36.5	
58					36.5	
59					43	
60					37	
61					39	
62					39	
63					41.5	
64					42	
65					36	12 Broken

MA student, who studied the archaeological remains of Maqasir Island. (Part 3 in our survey strategy).

As already mentioned the project area is large and has its own internal complexes, thus we have subdivided it into four regions to aid the control of the work, data and evaluation. Now that we have finished surveying el-Khandaq and its environs, we will start next season at Wad Nimeiri and in its environs. We intend to complete the survey of the second area and simultaneously a small group will survey Qasr Wad Nimeiri and its surroundings.

The project has realised the importance of maintaining and preserving one of the two-storey houses as a nucleus for a museum. It has been agreed that this will be the house of Mohammed Mohi el-Din Sayid el-Nour el-Khabir, as the owners still occupy part of the house and welcomed the idea, as well as the fact that it is still standing and in good condition. A lot of stored objects in the same house may form part of the exhibition. The Khatibiya family also owns a lot of objects and the Khanadaqa promised to collect further objects from Metemma and Khartoum. This house, together with the fort and the rest of the town, can present a real tourist attraction in the area and the area might flourish again after more than half a century of stagnation.

Team members

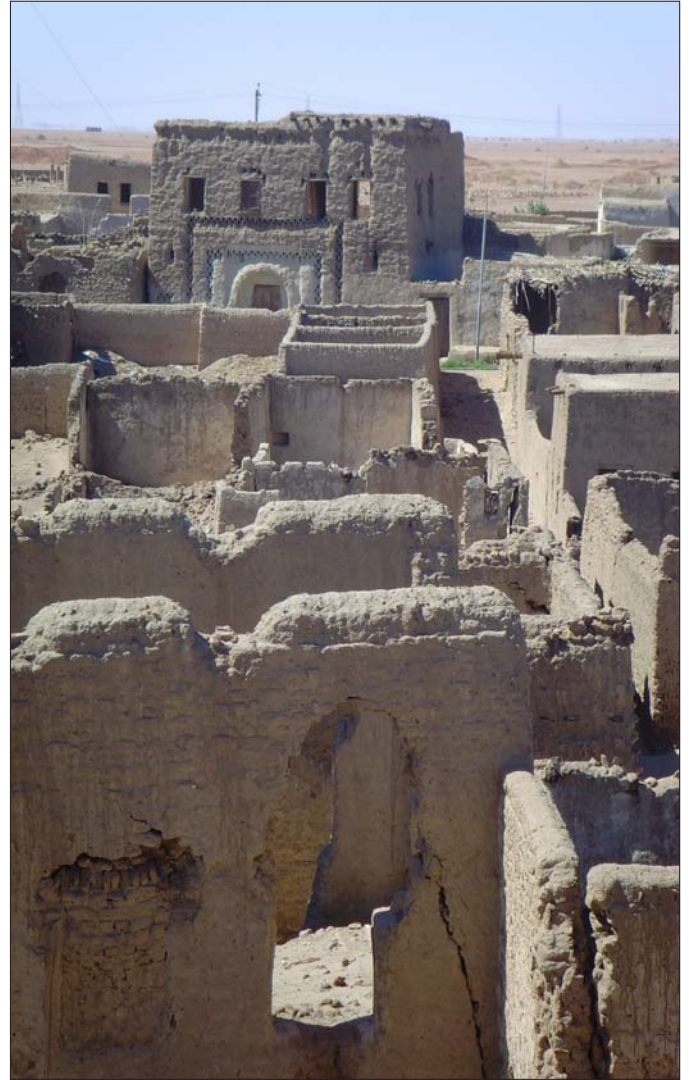
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- Husna Taha el-Atta - Department of Archaeology, University of Khartoum.

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Colour plate XXVI. El-Khandaq. The south-western tower of the fort at Qaila Qaila (photo D. A. Welsby).



Colour plate XXVII. El-Khandaq. View across the town from the fort at Qaila Qaila towards the house of Mohammed Mubi el-Din Aayid el-Nour el-Khabir (photo D. A. Welsby).



Colour plate XXVIII. El-Khandaq. The Khatibiyya mosque (photo D. A. Welsby).



Colour plate XXIX. El-Khandaq. General view across the interior of Qaila Qaila looking downstream (photo D. A. Welsby).



Colour plate XXX. El-Khandaq. Decorated door lintel in one of the town houses (photo D. A. Welsby).



Colour plate XXXI. El-Khandaq. The town from the south-western tower of Qaila Qaila (photo D. A. Welsby).