

SUDAN & NUBIA

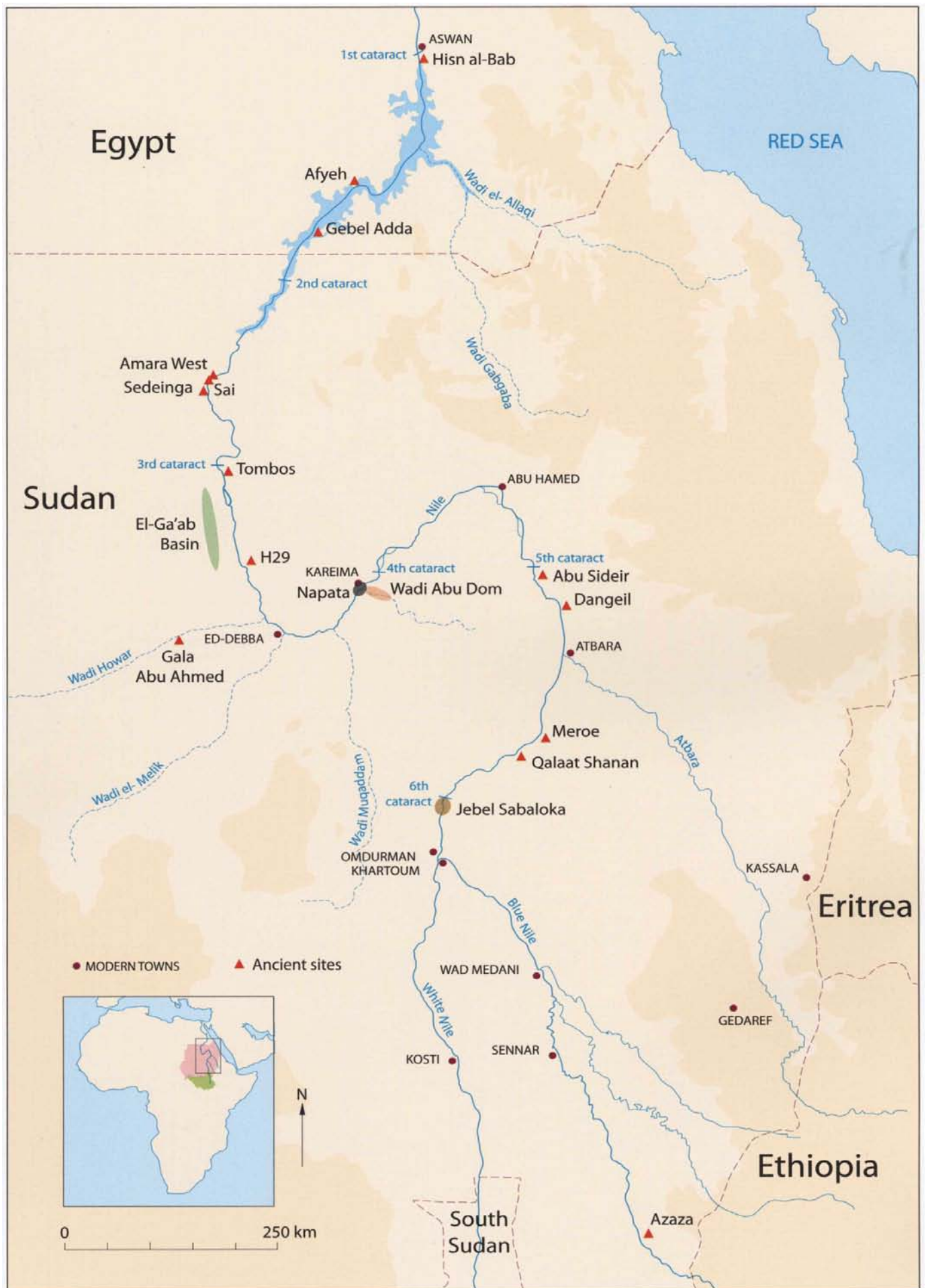
The Sudan Archaeological Research Society



Bulletin No. 16

2012





SUDAN & NUBIA

The Sudan Archaeological Research Society



Bulletin No. 16 2012

Contents

The Kirwan Memorial Lecture

- Quarrying for the King - the Sources of Stone for Kushite Royal Monuments 2
Abdelrahman Ali Mohamed

Reports

- Qalaat Shanan: a large Neolithic site in Shendi town 8
Ahmed Hamid Nassr Hamd
- Social Complexity Set in Stone? The A-Group Site of Afyeh 13
Alice Stevenson
- The *Kerma Ancien* cemetery at site H29 in the Northern Dongola Reach 20
Derek A. Welsby
- Merymose and others at Tombos 29
Vivian Davies
- Re-assessing the abandonment of Amara West: the impact of a changing Nile? 37
Neal Spencer, Mark Macklin and Jamie Woodward
- The round structures of Gala Abu Ahmed fortress in lower Wadi Howar, Sudan 44
Michael Flache
- Preparing for the afterlife in the provinces of Meroe 52
Vincent Francigny
- Excavations of the French Archaeological Mission in Sedeinga, 2011 season 60
Claude Rilly and Vincent Francigny
- Meroitic Building Techniques: a few observations from Dangeil 72
Julie Anderson, Salah Mohamed Ahmed and Tracey Sweek
- Gebel Adda Cemeteries 3 and 4 (1963-1964) 80
Reinhard Huber and David N. Edwards
- The forts of Hisn al-Bab and the First Cataract Frontier from the 5th to 12th centuries AD 88
Alison L. Gascoigne and Pamela J. Rose
- Fortresses of Sudan Project. Abu Sideir case study 96
Mariusz Drzewiecki and Tomasz Stepnik

- The Archaeological, Ethnographical and Ecological Project of El-Ga'ab Basin in Western Dongola Reach: A Report on the First Season 2009 100
Yahia Fadl Tahir

- A Survey in the Western Bayuda: The Wadi Abu Dom Itinerary Project (W.A.D.I.) 109
Angelika Lohwasser

- Preliminary report on the exploration of Jebel Sabaloka (West Bank), 2009-2012 118
Lenka Suková and Ladislav Váradžin

- Rosieres Dam Heightening Archaeological Salvage Project. The Excavations at Azaza Site ROSE 5, Preliminary Report 132
Mahmoud Suliman Bashir, Murtada Bushara Mohamed and Mohammed Saad Abdalab

- Aeolian sand landforms in parts of the Sudan and Nubia. Origins and impacts on past and present land use 140
R. Neil Munro, Mohammed Abdel Mahmoud Ibrahim, Hussien Abuzeid and Babiker el-Hassan

Miscellaneous

Obituaries

- Svetlana Bersina (1932-2012) 155
Eleonora Kormysheva
- Michel Baud (1963-2012) 155
Vincent Rondot
- Tomas Hägg (1938-2011) 156
Adam Łajtar
- Khidir Abdelkarim Ahmed (1947-2012) 159
Intisar Soghayroun Elzein
- Jean Leclant (1920-2011) 160
Catherine Berger -el Naggar
- Andre Vila (1923-2011) 162
William Y. Adams

Front cover: Excavations in progress in the *Kerma Ancien* cemetery at site H29 in the Northern Dongola Reach (photo D. A. Welsby).

Sudan & Nubia is a peer-reviewed journal



Fortresses of Sudan Project¹

Abu Sideir case study

Mariusz Drzewiecki and Tomasz Stepnik

Karaba is a small village in the Fifth Cataract region in central Sudan. It clings to the slope of a broad *wadi* near the Nile. Railway tracks, laid by the British at the end of the 19th century run alongside the river. There have been no passenger trains down this route for a number of years and goods trains are a rare event. The railway embankment is the only leveled surface and is now used as the main route. The surrounding landscape is one of granite rocks burnt by the sun, sculpted by the wind, sand and water, many hills and the valleys of seasonal streams. As far as the eye can see, up to the horizon, there is nothing but solid rock or crushed fragments of it. The hills descend directly to the Nile and apart from a narrow band running along the river there is no level ground.

It is here that a medieval fortress built of stone and silt mortar, with corner towers and walls which are in some places up to 4m thick, is located (Figure 1). At the start of the 20th century it was still in perfect condition, but the recently built village exploited the fortress as an excellent source of ready-to-use stone. Thus, as the village grows so the fortress shrinks. Even so, it is still the largest building in the area. The fortress was described by Khider Adam Eisa (1995, 55) who also drew a sketch plan of the complex.

The walls of the fortress now reach up to 3m in height (Plate 1). The stonemasons placed stones of various shapes and sizes in such a way as to make the face of the wall as smooth as possible (Plate 2). In the surviving sections of the

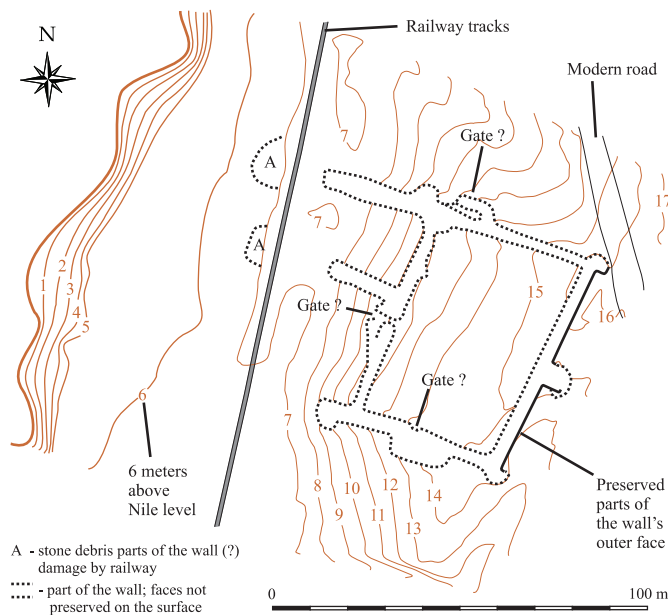


Figure 1. Site AS 1 – plan of the enclosure (scale 1:2000)
(drawn by M. Drzewiecki and A. Chlebowski).



Plate 1. Site AS 1 - south-east corner of the fortifications
(photo. M. Drzewiecki).

wall no clear joins are visible which would indicate further building stages. The entire complex is made of two sections. The first, damaged by the railway track, is on a level area along the Nile and extends to cover part of the rocky hillside (42 x 18m). The second is joined to the first on the slope and encloses a area higher up within a rectangle of walls measuring 55 x 38m. To enter, one could pass through one of three gates, the remains of which were found in the northern,



Plate 2. Site AS 1 – junction of the eastern projecting tower with the enclosure wall (photo. M. Drzewiecki).

southern and western wall (from the side facing the river). The gateways were most probably additionally strengthened, the design of which was similar to Roman *clavicula* (Wiewióra 2007, 81). There was no way into Abu Sideir from the hillside above, perhaps it was expected that the greatest threat would come from this direction.

Unfortunately, there are no surface traces of any buildings in the interior. Only small groups of stones are visible which are probably connected to later periods or perhaps even the contemporary exploitation of the complex.

The fortress can be dated back to medieval times. The region was then most probably under the control of the Dongolan rulers. In order to guarantee the stability of their territory the kings of Makuria built a line of relatively closely-spaced fortresses along the Nile which was the main thoroughfare and indeed the backbone of the whole kingdom. It seems that Abu Sideir is one of the fortresses which controlled both trade and the movement of the nomads who could be

¹ Preliminary reports can be found on www.sudan.archaeo.edu.pl

unpredictable in this region and if need be, protect the goods and people traveling along the river. We discovered traces of nomadic groups in the vicinity of the fortress (Plate 3).

The results of this year's survey² show that an area of 1.5km from the fortress is one vast archaeological site. We came across the remains of settlements, cemeteries and even a gallery of rock drawings (site AS 23). The cemeteries in this region are all burial mounds located on the summits of hills. We discovered extensive necropolises, some of which number tens of burial mounds, as well as isolated small groups of one larger and several smaller graves (Plate 3).

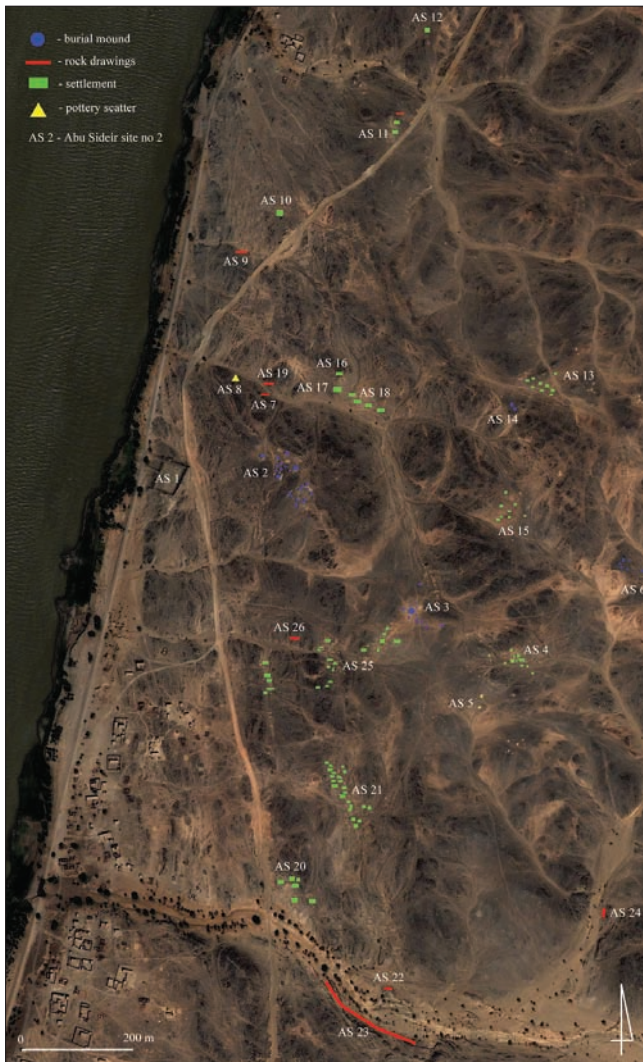


Plate 3. Abu Sideir area on satellite image (Google Earth) with archaeological sites registered during this year's fieldwork.

The majority of the settlements which we recorded during fieldwalking had certain features in common connected to their location and construction type. Settlements were most often situated in *wadi* valleys. We observed three types of

buildings within the vicinity. Most visible were the round stone buildings constructed without the use of mortar, now standing approximately 1m high with a clear entrance where there was a stone threshold and vertical stone pillars forming a kind of door jamb. The entrances were usually placed on the south side of the buildings. The walls were built of local stone slabs. The upper part of the walls and the roof, which was probably conical, were most likely made of organic material - wood and grass - which has not survived. We noticed that this type of building was located in the higher parts of the *wadi* valleys or on the edge of higher ground and were clearly raised above the rest of the settlement. However, the majority of the buildings were the remains of shelters, they formed characteristic complexes laid out in a semi-circle of stone without the use of any mortar. The height of these stone "walls" was quite low, indicating that they could have served to stabilise light wooden-frame constructions with walls of textile or animal hide or were an additional element perhaps used to protect the cooking area from the wind (Bradley 1992, 44-45). This type of building was most often found lower down in the valleys or at the bottom of the wadi. The small amount of pottery or more often the lack of any ceramic remains may indicate they were used only seasonally and, therefore, the probable nomadic lifestyle of the inhabitants.

On some sites (AS 4, AS 11) we noted the presence of unusual stone constructions, the function of which is not always clear. Most often these were stone circles of varying size. In one such circle the stones on the interior side were black and white on the exterior (Plate 4). Furthermore, to the east there were two stone stelae, too small and spaced too close together to form an entrance. The interior diameter of the circles measured from 2.5m to 6m. The edges of the circles were often marked by regularly spaced narrow stone slabs, placed vertically into the soil, which also created a kind of stelae. Those remains were located in the central part of the settlement. Circular buildings with vertical stone slabs were recorded in Wadi Khashab (Iwona Zych, pers. comm.). Test pits carried out there indicated the presence of cattle bones within the circles.



Plate 4. Site AS 4 – stone circle with two stelae (photo. T. Stepnik).

² The *Fortresses of Sudan* project is part of the Joint Poland-Sudan Expedition. Project partners are the National Corporation for Antiquities and Museums of Sudan and Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznan.



A particularly interesting group of finds are the petroglyphs discovered close to the settlements though none were found actually within one. The rock engravings are usually to be found in very characteristic places, groups of rocks clearly visible in the landscape at the edge of the valleys. Most of the petroglyphs were engraved on the northern side of the rock face. The most common subject was cattle (Plate 5), less frequent were representations of humans and camels. We also came across images of giraffes (Plate 6) and individual symbols as well as modern Arabic writing.



Plate 5. Site AS 22 – rock drawings outlined (prepared by T. Stebnik).



Plate 6. Site AS 23 – one of many parts of rock art 'gallery' (photo. T. Stebnik).

In this landscape there is a stark contrast between the hills and valleys with the lack of anything in between such as extensive plains or high plateau. In the analysis of the dispersal of the archaeological sites in the Abu Sideir fortress region a clear division of zones where human activity occurred could be seen. The first zone encompassed the Nile Valley within which the fortress was built and also the *wadi* valleys or the passes between the hills which were usually linked to seasonal watercourses. This zone contained the settlements located on the valley bottom and on the slopes. The second zone covered the peaks of the hills where the cemeteries could be found. These two types of sites were clearly separated, as the graves were concentrated on the tops and in some places reached down to the edge of the hilltop but never further. The third zone covered the edges of the valley but was focused on the groups of rocks which were characteristic features in the landscape and where the engravings were to be found. This zone was saturated with symbolism and may have been a sort of link between the world of the dead, visible in the landscape in the form of the burial mounds on the hill tops and the land of the living represented by the settlements in the valleys. The petroglyphs showing sometimes more, sometimes less, complicated scenes could have described or referred to both the land of the living and the dead. Cattle were the most common subject and may have had an important significance in rituals from as early on as the Kerma period. The images show both single animals and groups. Some of the images were made very quickly and not very carefully whereas others were quite precise. Different techniques were used which, along with the degree of patina may indicate that the animals were the focus of attention for an extensive period of time.

Rarely were there any images of humans in such scenes but when they did appear no aggressive behaviour was portrayed nor were there any weapons. Very occasionally were images of wild animals observed, though the pair of giraffes is rather interesting (Plate 6). It is very difficult to date particular scenes. The various techniques used and the patina covering the surface indicates that the "gallery" (site AS 23) was a very special place and the petroglyphs were made in different periods. Cattle were domesticated about 5000 BC and the oldest scenes may well date this far back. Some scenes contain images of cattle with deliberately deformed horns (often just one), archaeologists have determined such practices existed in the Kerma period (approx. 2500-1500 BC) but are likewise known to contemporary cattle herders in southern Sudan. At the beginning of the 20th century oxen with horn deformations called *ma gut* played an important part in the ritual of Nuer man initiations (Evans-Pritchard 2007). It is problematic to transfer exactly the same meaning for prehistoric or even early historic times but it could give idea of their use and significance in rituals (Chaix and Hansen 2003).

Giraffes were probably a common enough sight in the landscape around 4000 BC but ongoing desertification could cause their disappearance (Huyge 1998; 2002). However,

it is also possible to find references to giraffes in medieval written sources. The kings of Makuria presented them as gifts to other rulers. John of Biclar, a guest at the palace in Constantinople, witnessed the arrival of a delegation from the king of Makuria and an audience with Emperor Justin II. The Byzantine emperor was presented with gifts of elephant tusks and a giraffe (Vantini 1975, 27-8). The presence of camels in Nubia is attested early in the 1st millennium BC. However, their depictions are rare and appear at the beginning of our era in sacred contexts in the Meroe chapels of the royal cemetery (Welsby 1996, 155).

It is worth noting that in places the scenes overlap. In one there is an image of a man holding a cow by its tail and in the other hand an object reminiscent of a lasso (Plate 7). Next



Plate 7. Site AS 23 – outlined scenes from the 'gallery'
(prepared by T. Stepnik).

to this, using a different technique, there is an engraving of a horse-rider, below which the words *Altaib 1972* written in Arabic partly overlaps one of the cows. Of particular note is one gallery, approximately 100m long, which contains many overlapping engravings and numerous scenes even though other suitable groups of rocks were nearby.

Our investigation of the Abu Sideir area provides an unusually complex image of worlds which cross over one another. On one side there was the Christian kingdom of Makuria which ruled the Nile valley, represented by the fortresses and the world of the nomadic tribes driving herds of cattle and regularly settling for a while in neighbouring *wadis*. The other side is a world full of symbolism and signs in the form of the rock engravings. To our eyes they show a changing world, landscape and climate. Each of the groups inhabiting the region made their mark on the area in the form of graves, settlements, buildings and petroglyphs which often differ significantly.

Bibliography

- Bradley, R. J. 1992. *Nomads in the Archaeological Record. Meroitica* 13, 1-237.
- Chaix, L. and J. W. Hansen 2003. 'Cattle with "forward-pointing horns": archaeozoological and cultural aspects', in L. Krzyżaniak, K. Kroeper and M. Kobusiewicz (eds), *Cultural Markers in the Later Prehistory of Northeastern Africa and Recent Research*. Poznań, 269-281.
- Evans-Pritchard, E. E. 2007. *Religia Nuerów*. Kęty (Polish translation Kamila Baraniecka and Mikołaj Olszewski).
- Huyge, D. 1998. 'Giraffes in Ancient Egypt', *Nekhen News* 10, 9-10.
- Huyge, D. 2002. 'Cosmology, ideology and personal religious practice in ancient Egyptian rock art', in R. Friedmann (ed.), *Egypt and Nubia: Gifts of the Desert*. London, 192-206.
- Khider Adam Eisa 1995. 'The history and antiquities of Karaba-Sheriek in the Middle Nile Region', *Archéologie du Nil Moyen* 7, 53-58.
- Vantini, G. 1975. *Oriental Sources Concerning Nubia*. Heidelberg and Warsaw.
- Welsby, D. A. 1996. *The Kingdom of Kush: The Napatan and Meroitic Empires*. London.
- Wiewióra, M. 2007. *Architektura obronna w Nubii od V do XVI wieku studium archeologiczno-architektoniczne*. Toruń.