

SUDAN & NUBIA

The Sudan Archaeological Research Society



Bulletin No. 17

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Front cover: The descendency of Tomb IV T 1 near Sedeinga under excavation (© V. Francigny / SEDAU).

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Archaeological Survey in El-Metemma area

Nada Babiker Mohammed Ibrahim

Introduction

The town of Shendi lies to the north of Khartoum on the east bank of the Nile in northern Sudan, at 16° 40.964' N / 33° 26.213' E, and is 45km to the south west of the Royal City of Meroe (Begrawiya). It is considered to be the centre of the Jaalien tribe and has a long history as a major trade centre with important commercial land routes passing through it. On the west bank of the Nile lies el-Metemma, a suburb of Shendi.

The Shendi area contains archaeological sites relating to different civilizations on the east bank of the Nile, of which the most famous is that of Kush, remains which have attracted the attention of foreign missions since the beginning of the 20th century and where they excavate annually. The west bank of the Nile has not been so well studied except for some activities by the French unit in el-Hobagi and by Khider Ahmed Abdel Kareem in Qoz Borrah. This article reports on recent archaeological research on the west bank of the Nile so as to integrate it into the archaeological research.

The Climate of the Shendi Region

The Shendi region lies in the south of the River Nile State extending alongside the Nile. The climate here is desert and semi-desert. The temperature reaches 45° C in the summer and the humidity becomes progressively lower in May and June which are the hottest months of the year. In winter, the temperature falls to 15° C in January (Abdelatif and Ahmed 2008, 58). Rainfall ranges from a few millimeters to 200mm a year. In 1999 the area from Shendi to Atbara witnessed heavy rains, something not repeated in the last decade (Abdelatif and Ahmed 2008, 60).

The natural environment of the Shendi Region

In the Shendi region, the granite basement complex emerges in the form of mountains (Whiteman 1971), with the largest outcrops extending on both sides of the Nile, producing the Sabaloka Cataract (Sixth Cataract). Downstream of the Sabaloka Cataract, the Nile flows in a wide channel through silt soil on both of its banks. Although the River Nile changes its course from side to side over the years, there are always areas to be irrigated, today by mechanized water pumps, in the past using the *saqia* wheels (Barbour 1961, 35). Because of its changing course the Nile has formed low lying areas which, when the river floods, are covered, allowing flood water irrigation to be carried out which augments the irrigated land.

The Archaeological Survey in el-Metemma Area

The el-Metemma region lies on the west bank of the Nile, a long strip of about 168km parallel to the river. To the north it is bounded by ed-Damer and to the south its boundary is the Karari locality in Khartoum State. To the 'east' is the Nile, to the 'west' is the Bayuda. El-Metemma is divided into two parts, an old and modern town, within which are several districts. Amongst the archaeological sites that were recorded are graves, a factory for producing pigments, *qubba*, battlefields and *kehalany*.

The Archaeological Sites in el-Metemma

Esh-Sheikh Wad Abbaro qubba

16.70696° N / 33.40782° E

This *qubba* is considered to be one of those which still retain their ancient form, as they are surrounded by a building of red bricks preserving their old features (Figure 1, Plate 1).



Plate 1. Qubba of Wad Abbaro surrounded by the modern building which has preserved it.

It is the only *qubba* in the vicinity of el-Metemma which was not rebuilt in the modern style. It lies to the east of Hillat Farah to the south east of the Wad Himmedah *qubba* and to the east of the el-Metemma - Shendi bridge about 300m from the Nile. The area is surrounded by cultivated land and



Plate 2. Wad Abbaro qubba. The remains of the cemetery to the east.



sand dunes. The *qubba*, built from mud bricks, is conical. The diameter is 5m and it is 10m high. To the east of the *qubba* are the remains of old graves (Plate 2), covering an area of 36 × 26m, that are scattered on the surface, which were disturbed by natural factors, in addition to the el-Metemma - Shendi bridge which was built before an archaeological survey was made in this area. In front of the *qubba* there is a circular area that is surrounded in part by black sandstones which according to a local man, Mohammed Suleiman Wad Filleil, is called 'Hoor' (Plate 3) and is a place for giving blessings to the people of this region.

The outline of the 'Hoor' seems to be an old grave, and some of the graves that are to the east indicate that there



Plate 3. The Hoor in front of the Wad Abbaro qubba.

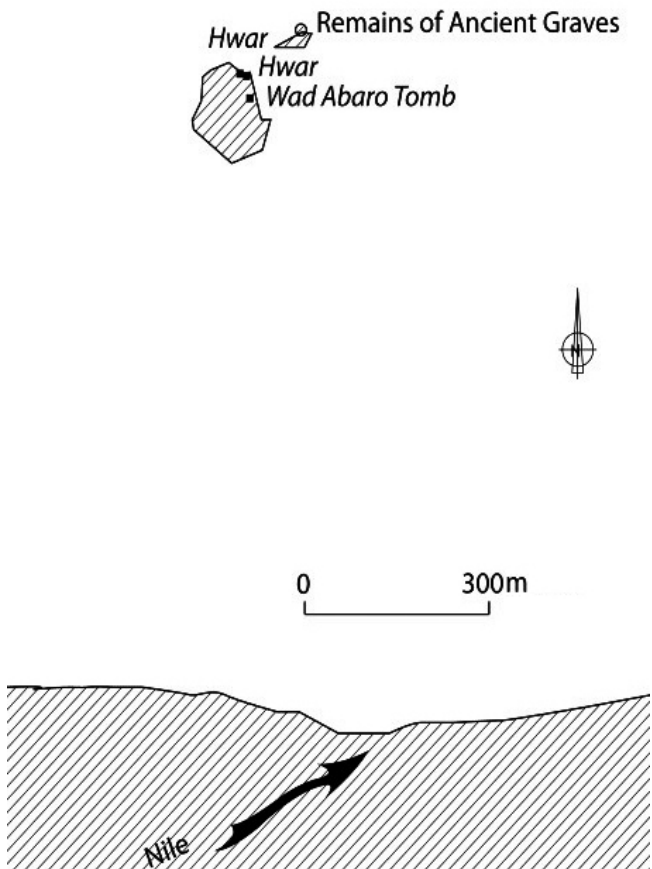


Figure 1. Wad Abbaro qubba and the remains around it.

are graves from the Meroitic or maybe of the Post-Meroitic period in this area.

Shengiti cemetery 16.70774° N / 33.3574° E

This cemetery (Plate 4), the earliest grave in which is said to



Plate 4. *Shengiti cemetery*.

date to 1885, lies to the south of the Sanahir district in el-Metemma, 2km from the Nile. It takes its name from Sayid Mohamed, the son of Mukhatr esh-Shingiti, who established the Tigania in Sudan in the 12th century of the Hegira and settled in el-Metemma until his death. The cemetery covers 38 × 28m, with nine grave monuments remaining built of bricks covered with plaster. These are of rectangular shape, 3-4m long and 1.6-2m wide and 0.95-1m high.

Abu Khorog and Abu Ramad Sites

16.69021° N / 33.32813° E and 16.69154° N / 33.32943° E

The site lies about 2km to the west of el-Metemma and about 100m from the Nile. During the Funj period it was a place for memorizing the Quran. Nothing now remains from that time and it is occupied by modern cemeteries.

Abu Toleih Site

Abu Toleih is a watering point for caravans crossing the Bayuda Desert on the route between Merowe and el-Metemma. The battle at Abu Toleih (Abu Klea) between the Mahdiya army and the British army's Desert Column occurred in the valley here, about 32km north west of el-Metemma, on the 17th January 1885. The tombs of the British officers who were killed in the battle still remain and on a small monument is a plaque on which are the names of those officers (Plates 5 and 6).

El-Metemma Slaughtering Sites (known as katla i.e. slaughtering)

Historical background of el-Metemma Slaughtering

According to Abdullahi Wad Saad, the son of Abdullah Wad Saad:

'When Slatin, the Austrian, escaped, Elkhalifah Abdullahi accused the Jaaliyin tribe; it was they who helped him to escape as they hated Mahadiyah in

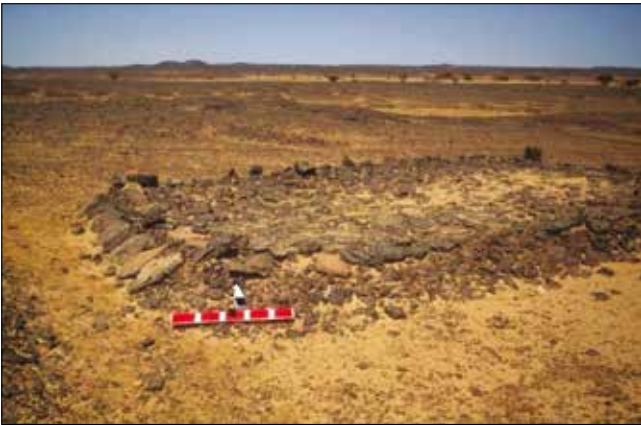


Plate 5. The grave of one of the British officers killed in the battle at Abu Toleih.



Plate 6. The monument on which are inscribed the names of the British officers who were killed in the battle at Abu Toleih (Abu Klea).

the era of the Khalifah, and that it was Ibrahim Hamza from Berber who made the way for Slatin. And so he accused the Jaaliyin since they did not arrest him on the road and so he invited the Meks (the kings), of the Jaaliyin, and when they arrived, before him, in Omdurman, he set free some of them and exiled others but he offended Abdullah and when he talked to the prince Yaagoub he accepted to set Abdullah free; and before the Meks reached Elgaili, he sent twelve Mulazims to follow them. Abdullah said to their leader, 'It's better to go to my home and then come back for me'.

But they made an attack on him and so he shot them and killed them all, except two, and Abdullah came back home to Matamma. Then a message came from Al-Khalifa denying knowledge of the killing of those Mulazims, telling him that Alamir Mahmood would arrive there. So Abdullah gathered the Meks of the area and the scholars. They came out with a pronouncement that

'if a man is killed because of his wealth or his family then he is 'Shahid' i.e. the one who died for

the sake of his family, wealth or his religion'. Then they sent to the government in Egypt for salvation, but when Al-Khalifa had knowledge of this plan, he encourage Mahmood to hurry to Matamma to arrive there before this plan could take effect. Mahmood arrived there on Wednesday at night and on Thursday he attacked in the morning and when it was noon he finished this matter of Matamma defeating and killing Abdullah Wad Saad and the people fled and some of them were killed. And on the same day the Government relief force came, accompanied with groups of Jailiyin and Ababda tribes and some of other tribes lead by Ibrahim Bey. When the battle of Atbara at Nikhila took place the army of Mahmood was defeated and Mahmood was killed'

(Mahmoud Mohamed Ali Namir and Mohamed Saaed Maroof 1947, 30).

As a consequence of this slaughter, el-Metemmma retains some of the remains of sites that witnessed this event.

Bir Alarais site i.e. (Brides' Well)

$16^{\circ} 0.476' N / 33^{\circ} 35.176' E$

The well is now buried. It is in Hillat el-Gala'a in el-Metemmma. According to the natives in the area, as recounted by one of them,

'When the Khalifa Abdullahi asked Abdallah Wad Saad to give Mahmood Wad Ahmed, the leader, what he asked from their property, even if he asked to marry any woman, his request had to be accepted. Abdallah Wad Saad refused, and upon his refusal of this demand, i.e. the women refused to become wives of Mahmood and his soldiers, some of the women of Matemma committed suicide by jumping in this well, and so it is called the Brides' well - 'Bir Alarais' [Alarais meaning brides in English]. The place is known to the people of the area.' (pers. comm. Babiker Aljarmak).

The Hoor of el-Geili Jar Nadhif

$16^{\circ} 0.955' N / 33^{\circ} 35.813' E$

This lies near the Nile, south of the middle of el-Metemmma (Plate 7). In a meeting with Babiker Aljarmak he mentioned



Plate 7. The Site of Hoor of el-Geili Jar Nadhif.



Plate 8. *El-Medan el-Gadeem.*

that ‘This site is the second place of the slaughtering and there are some of the tombs of those killed and it is surrounded by black stones as a sign so as to keep the site.’

El-Medan el-Gadeem 16.70568° N / 33.35312° E

This is an elevated place (Plate 8) that lies to the east of ‘Hil-lat Wara’ i.e. the back place of the city, and it is bordered by cultivated land to the south. It is the location of the graves of some of those who were killed in the slaughtering. The people of this area said that whenever they dug in this place, there appeared human bones and nails, proving the existence of graves there.

Battlefield Sites

There are two battlefield sites registered:

Deim Mahmood Wad Ahmed

16.72507° N / 33.3652° E

The site lies to the east of el-Metemma stadium and the Regional Government offices 320m from the Nile. It consists of the remains of Mahmood Wad Ahmed’s camp where the remains of trenches appear inside the camp. There is also a circular building made from red bricks, and according to Babiker el-Jarmak, we know that it was a watch post for observing Abdallah Wad Saad’s army. The site is covered with red sandstones.

Khalawy

One of el-Metemma’s inhabitants, El-Said Osman, said that ‘Matemma was a place where there were a lot of *khalawy*, some of which existed for a hundred years or more, and some of them are rehabilitated but they stay empty, and there also are only some parts of the old *khalawy*’.

Khalwat Es-Sayed el-Hassan

N16.77852° N / 33.5237° E

This *khalwa* lies to the west of el-Metemma’s market in Hil-lat West i.e. in the centre of the town. Its courtyard walls are rebuilt from the outside, and a new hall has been added, although a small room built of mud remains as it was, with an area of 2 × 2m and with a narrow entrance (Plate 9). It is said to be a tomb of one of the holy men. There is also a part of the yard remaining that was built from mud (Plate 10).



Plate 9. *The entrance of the small room inside Khalwat El-Sayed el-Hassan.*



Plate 10. *Part of an old wall inside Khalwat El-Sayid el-Hassan.*

Khalwat Sheikh Mahmed el-Mahaboub

16.70752° N / 33.3582° E

This *khalwa* lies in Hay Souk el-Gash in el-Metemma and it is about a kilometre from the Nile. There only remains part of a mud wall and the well which was used for over 100 years. From a meeting with Kamal Nouh we learnt that the father of Sheikh el-Majzoub taught in this *khalwa*, illustrating how old it is. There is also a Sheikh el-Mahboub who is mentioned in the book called *Azabir, Elriyad* by Esh-Sheikh Abd el-Mahamoud the son of Esh-Sheikh Noor el-Daim, who said,

‘and of them is El-Rayih Mohamed the son of El-Mahboub en-Nafaabi, mercy be upon him, was one of those whom people benefitted from. He was more or less a humble man and tended not to be famous. There were many blessed deeds known about him. He died, mercy be upon him, in Matemma and was buried in it. As a matter of fact, Khalawy el-Metemma and the religious scholars who taught in them played an effective role in spreading the instructions of Islam, and participating in the education as well. The khalawy at that time represented an important institution of education but sadly, the old building has been removed and it is now rebuilt’

(Sheikh Noor Eldaim nd, 342).



Plate 11. A part of the Colour Khana.

The Colour Khana Pigments Site

16.71043° N / 33.36015° E

This is a factory for producing pigments, and it was established during the Turkiya. The factory lies in Hillat Hosh el-Mek, i.e. 'The royal courtyard', in el-Metemmma 1km from the Nile (Plate 11). The building consists of 5m-high walls



Plate 12. The walls of the Colour Khana.

built of red brick (Plate 12), within which are tanks and channels for draining the water to the outside. It is known, amongst the dwellers of the area, as the 'Kira Khana'. During a meeting with Osman Hamid he mentioned that the Turks brought some Egyptians for cultivating the Nilah plant, from which the pigments were produced, to many areas such as el-Metemmma, Sagadi, el-Gibalab and Berber. The selection of these areas may be because of the existence of the local weavers, women who used a '*mitrar*' (spindle) to produce cotton fabric.

Conclusion

-The *kbalamy* and the *qubba* reflect the religious importance of the area.

- Most of the archaeological sites which survive in el-Metemmma go back to the era of the Mahdiya.

-The progress of the local weaving tradition with the establishment of factories during the Turkiya (The Colour Khana Factory).

-The disruptive influence of the agricultural projects, and the el-Metemmma-Shendi Bridge on the archaeological sites that lie on the banks of the Nile is noted.

- There is an absence of monumental buildings on the west side of the Nile comparable to the palaces and temples found on the east bank of the river. Maybe, the west bank was the dwelling place for the labourers and for agricultural production, as it is still a highly productive agricultural region on which the dwellers of the east bank rely.

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Babiker Elgrmak, teacher, 50 years old, el-Metemmma.	June 2008
Kamal Nawh, farmer, 55 years old, el-Metemmma.	June 2008
Osman Hamed, teacher, 53 years old, el-Metemmma.	June 2008



Gabati

A Meroitic, Post-Meroitic and Medieval
Cemetery in Central Sudan.

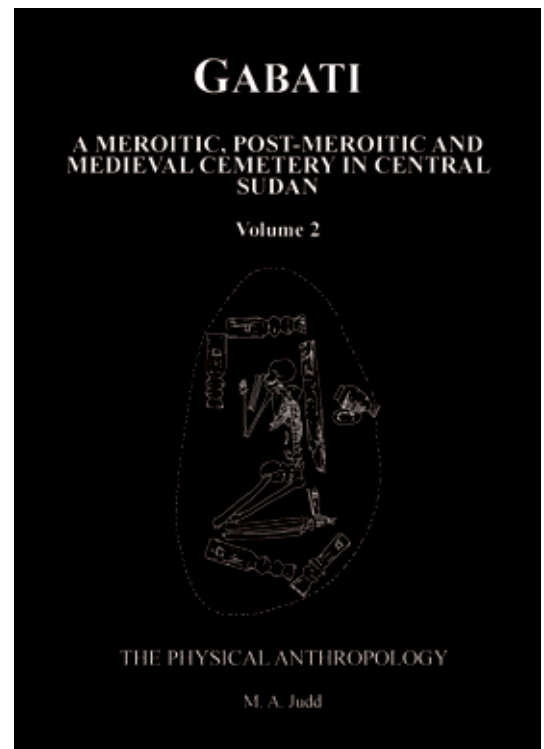
Vol. 2: The Physical Anthropology

by Margaret A. Judd,
with a contribution by David N. Edwards
London 2012

xii + 208 pages, 110 tables, 15 figures, 66 maps, 73 colour plates
ISBN 978 1 901169 19 7

The cemetery at Gabati, dating from the Meroitic, post-Meroitic and Christian periods was excavated in advance of road construction in 1994-5, the detailed report being published by SARS in 1998. This complementary volume provides an in-depth analysis of the human remains. A final chapter, a contribution from David Edwards, the field director of the project, in conjunction with Judd, assesses the archaeological results in light of continuing research in the region over the last decade and more.

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Sudan's First Railway The Gordon Relief Expedition and The Dongola Campaign

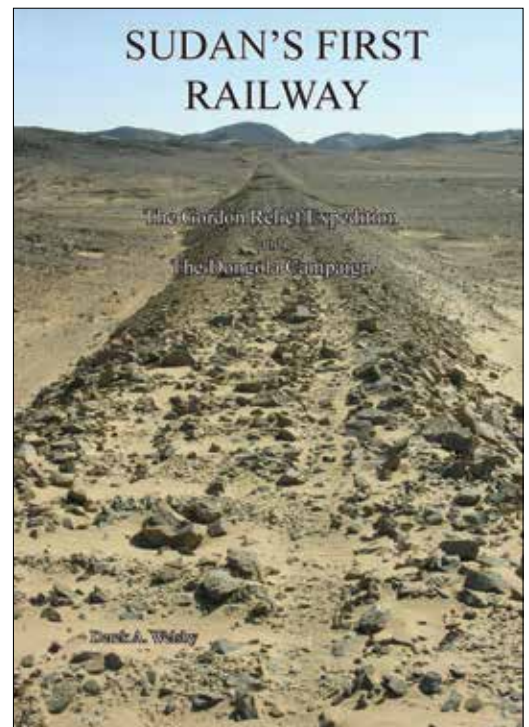
by Derek A. Welsby

London 2011

149 pages, 6 tables, 47 figures, 173 colour and 19 b&w plates
ISBN 978 1 901169 1 89

Begun in 1875 by the Egyptian khedive, Ismail Pasha, the railway played an important role during the Gordon Relief Expedition of 1884-5 and Kitchener's Dongola Campaign in 1896. It was abandoned and cannibalised to build other railways in Sudan during the first decade of the 20th century. For much of its course it runs through the desert and in those areas the roadbed, the associated military installations and the innumerable construction camps are extremely well preserved. This book is the result of a photographic survey of these installations together with the detailed archaeological surveys undertaken within them. A report on the artefacts, which includes personal equipment, ammunition, fragments of rolling stock, bottles, tins and ceramics, completes the volume.

Retail price £22. Available to members at the discounted price of £20 (p&p £2.50, overseas £5.50).



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Khartoum. The Republican Palace, once the Governor General's residence, in 1968 (photo SARS Hawkes Archive HAW P091.01).



Khartoum. The Anglican cathedral in 1968. Now minus its bell tower it houses the Republican Palace Museum (photo SARS Hawkes Archive HAW P090.01).