NUBIAN EXPEDITION PUBLICATION PROJECT

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AL-WIDAY I

The 2024–25 year was marked, first, by undertaking some revisions to the manuscript on the cemetery al-Widay I, which was resubmitted following external peer review. Nubia, including the Eastern Desert (Atbai), is a place of considerable distances and significant cultural, social, and political relationships that are often not easy to detect or defend. Therefore, al-Widay I's relationship with the Pan Grave culture of Lower Nubia and Egypt and with the southern Atbai was reexamined using significant scholarship by Julien Cooper and Andrea Manzo, who clarify comparisons that are clear and exclusive to the three cultural units. The relationship is particularly interesting, as all three major regions of this broad cultural grouping are distinct.

HOSH EL-GERUF

The major effort this year focused on Hosh el-Geruf, the gold-processing site. As the volume manuscript has developed, especially through the contributions by Carol Meyer and James Harrell, it has become clear that this site was the gold-processing center for materials from a wider area. Instead of hard-rock mining, a kind of extraction known as "wadi works" was practiced in the Fourth Cataract region. Granitoid gneiss breaks down into small, crumb-like fragments, progressively exposing veins of auriferous quartz. These quartz bits in turn break down into angular fragments, gradually reduced to the size of sand, which are found in areas near the basement rock exposures. Miners have long dug pits in this mix of sand and gravel to recover the quartz and ship it, probably by boat, to Hosh el-Geruf. There are fields of such pits among the rock outcrops from one end of the cataract, at Shirri Island, to the other, near the present-day dam, with some fields having hundreds or even thousands of pits (fig. 1). One such area, on Sherari Island at Shirri between two cemeteries of Old Kush date, was especially extensive (figs. 2–3). Thus the industry of grinding and washing gold at Hosh el-Geruf was not a local enterprise but a regional one.

As pointed out in previously published articles and annual reports, the two phases of gold-processing activity at Hosh el-Geruf took place in the Old Kush period, between roughly 1800 and 1500 BCE, and part of the Napatan period, corresponding to the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty of Egypt, between roughly 750 and 600 BCE. In the Old Kush phase the pottery is overwhelmingly local (fig. 4), with only a few imported vessels from either the Kerma region or farther afield, a situation that may reflect the general independence of the Fourth Cataract from the Kerma kingdom. In the Napatan period, on the other hand, most vessels are either the same as those found in the area of Napata near Gebel Barkal or are closely related to them (fig. 5), a relationship further evidenced by a sealing of Queen Khensa found at Hosh el-Geruf.

The fact that Hosh el-Geruf was the center of a regional industry raises the question of what form of social organization supported operations on such a scale. In a wide-ranging discussion of evidence about desert polities in northeastern Africa, Julien Cooper noted a strong tendency of scholars to downplay the

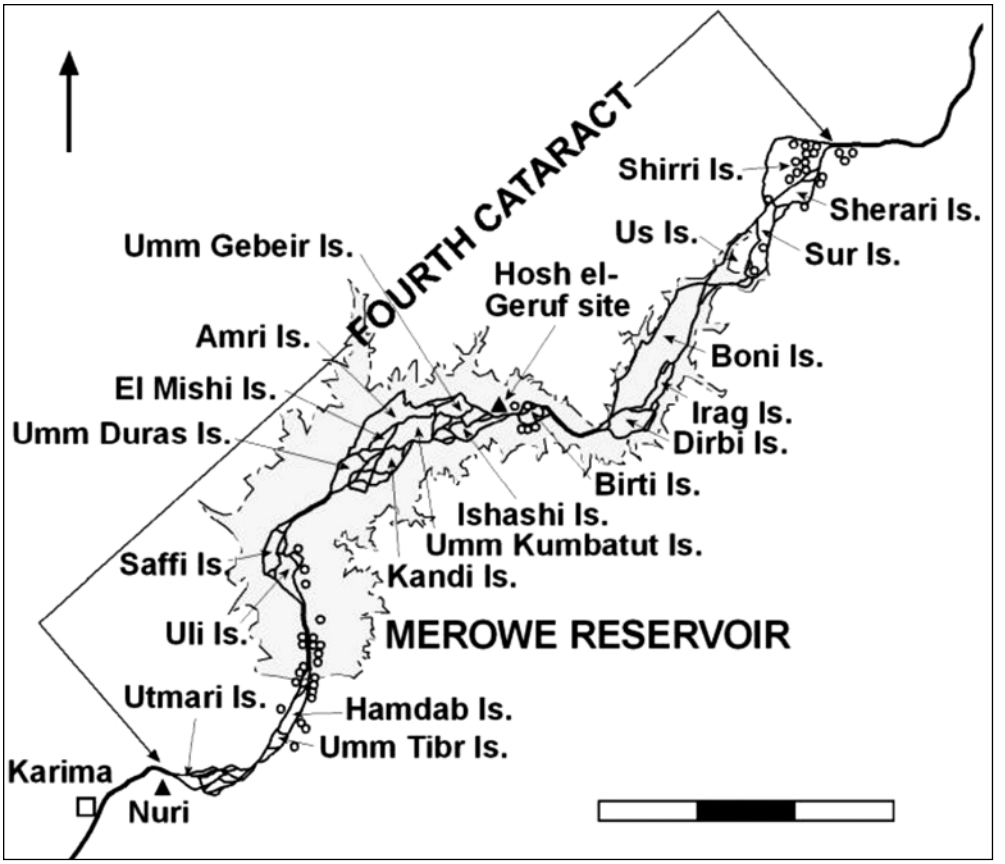

Figure 1. The Fourth Cataract. Map by James Harrell.

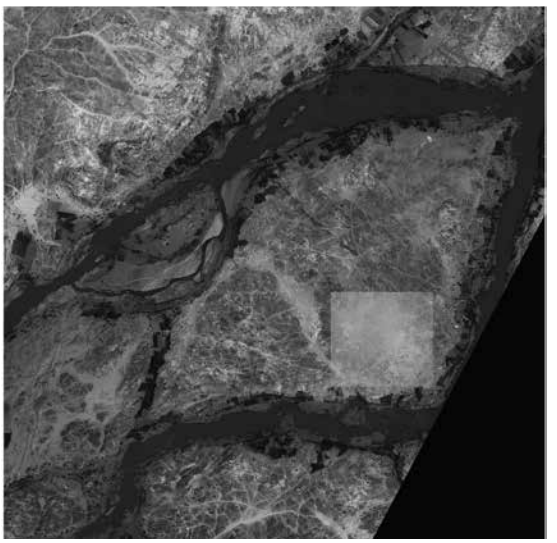

Figure 2. Satellite image of Sherari Island North, with inset showing the area of figure 3.

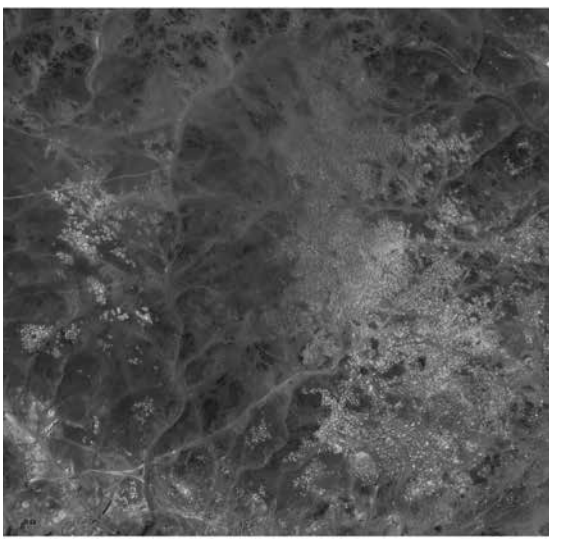

Figure 3. Detail of satellite image, showing Sherari Island's systematic wadi works.

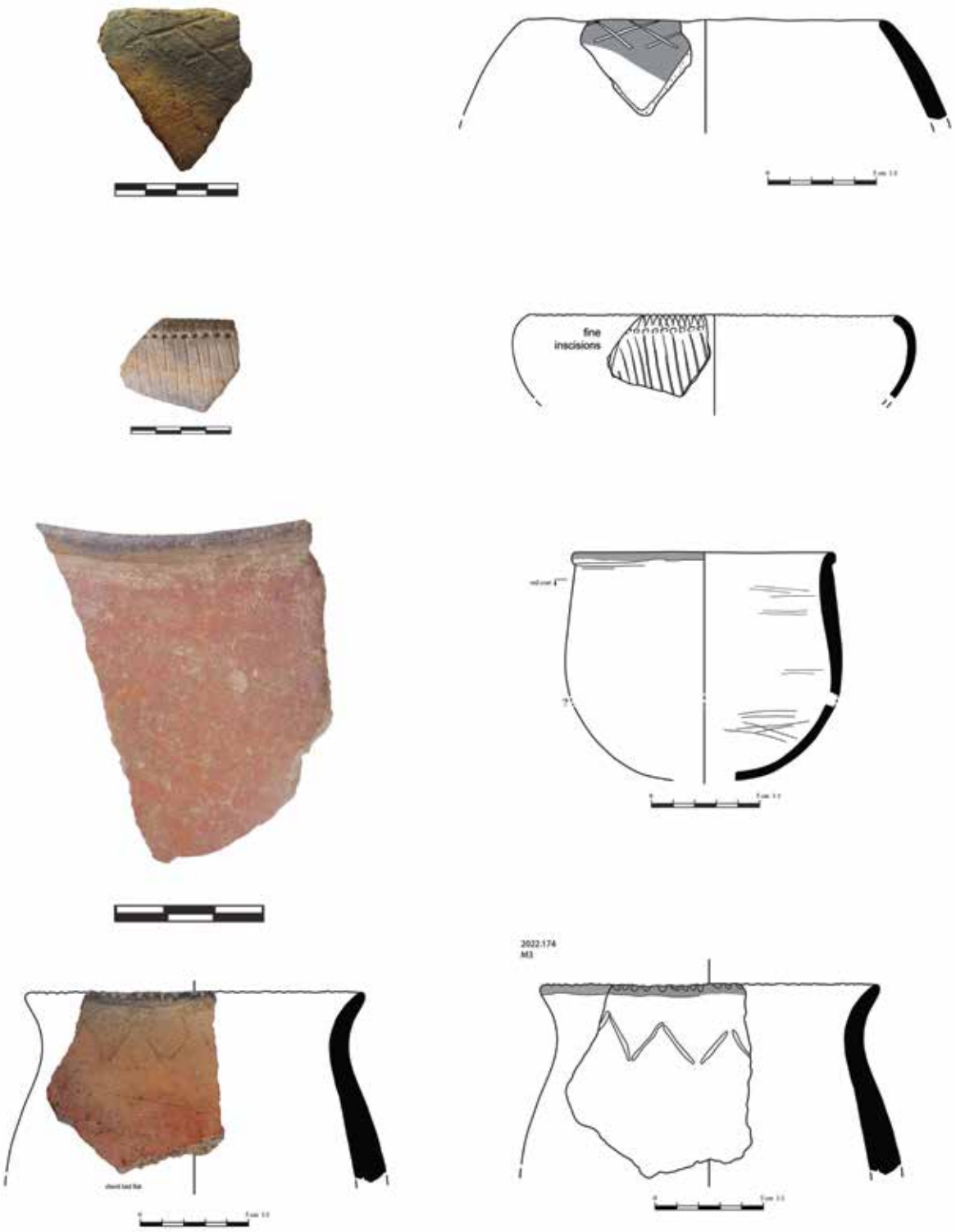

Figure 4. Old Kush pottery from Hosh el-Geruf made from local alluvium. Photographs by Larry Lissak. Drawings by Lisa Heidorn and Carol Meyer.

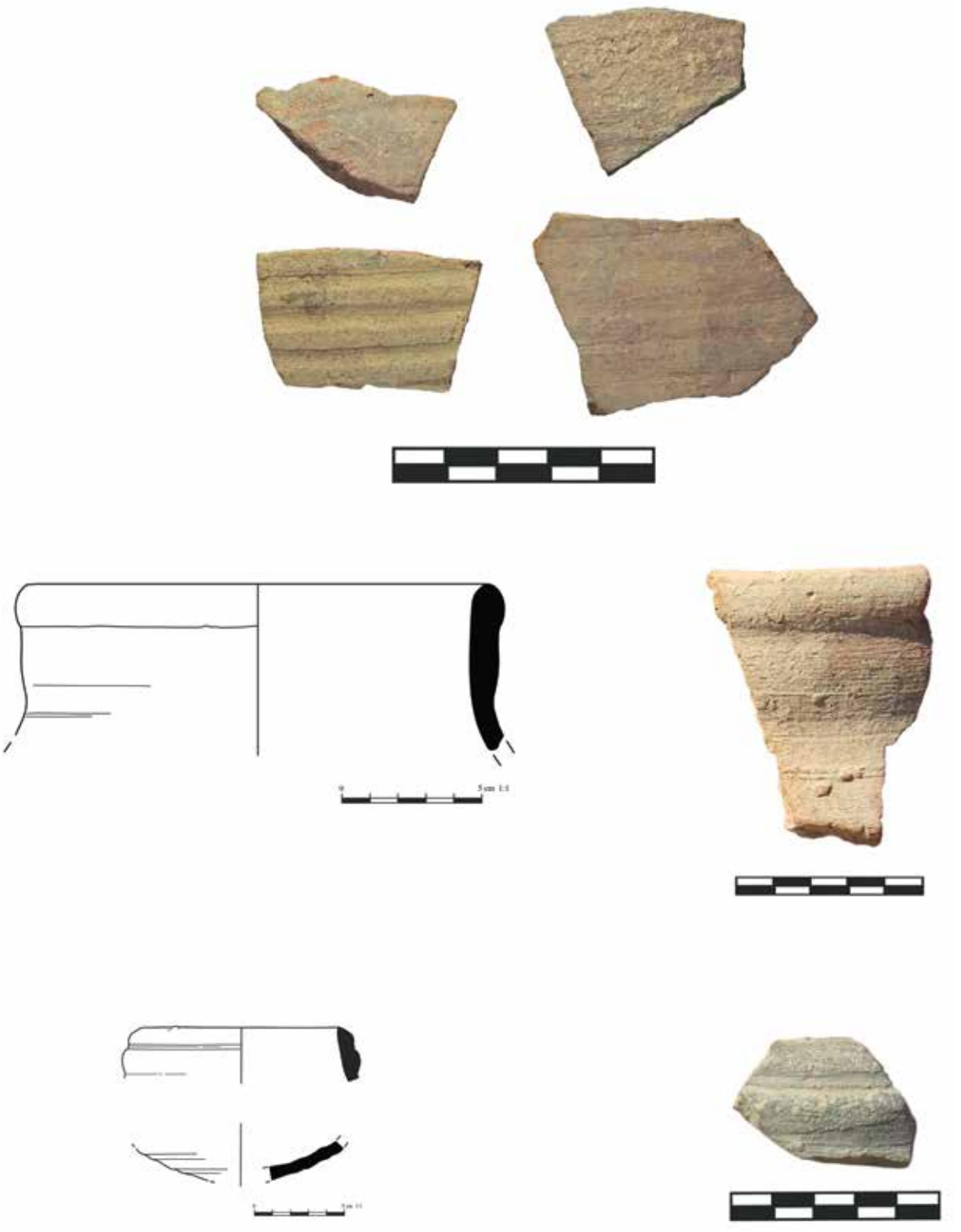

Figure 5. Napatan jars from Hosh el-Geruf: top and bottom fragments made from marl clays; middle fragment made from silt. Photographs by Larry Lissak and Bruce Williams. Drawings by Lisa Heidorn and Carol Meyer.

complexity and scale of organization outside both Egypt and the later states. While the specifics he cited are not to be found directly in the Fourth Cataract region, rulers over wide areas in Nubia were specifically recorded from the late Old Kingdom for entities such as Irtjet, Setjau, and Wawat. Even though the archaeology in each of these regions does not reveal wide disparities in wealth or status, the texts indicate the emergence of rulers who claimed pharaonic royalty (Williams 2013). A regional rule along this line, as also evidenced in the Middle Kingdom Execration Texts, is thus a reasonable conclusion.

One of the major questions about the Fourth Cataract region is whether it was specifically recognized in the written records of the time. From the Old Kingdom onward, the major regions of northern Nubia were named, traversed, and sometimes occupied by Egypt. In the Middle Kingdom, countries not occupied were named in execration texts, including Kush, with its center at Kerma just above the Third Cataract; Sai (Shaat), a large island above the Second Cataract; and two major entities in the Eastern Desert populated by Medjay. Late in the Second Intermediate Period, a *dipinto* in the tomb of Sebeknakht at Elkab mentions a large-scale attack from the south led by Kush, with forces from Wawat, Lower Nubia, the Isles of Khenthennefer, Medjay, and Punt (Davies 2003). All these entities are known, and their general locations clear, except for Khenthennefer. Although there are concentrations of islands in the Second and Third Cataracts, they are subsumed under the names Wawat and Kush and not Khenthennefer.

Further information is gained from the biography of Ahmose, son of Ebana, who served in the Egyptian military from the end of the Second Intermediate Period into the early Eighteenth Dynasty. He recounts a campaign to Khenthennefer to "suppress violence in the highlands," in the course of which he showed "bravery in bad water" (i.e., rapids) and in the passage of the ship through a bend in the river (Breasted 1906–7, vol. 2, no. 80). This comment suggests that the Fourth Cataract, and possibly the entire region as far as Mograt Island, was at that time known as Khenthennefer. Further confirmation may be found much later, in the eighth century BCE, when the ruler of Upper Egypt, Osorkon (the first high priest Osorkon, who became Osorkon III of the Twenty-Third Dynasty) acquired "fine gold from Khenthennefer" (Breasted 1906–7, vol. 4, no. 770; Caminos 1958, 126, no. 196). As this time would correspond to the earliest phases of the Napatan dynasty, the observation offers another correspondence. If the identification is thus far only a proposal, it should be kept in mind that in these records there is only so much geographical space for named Nilotic entities, and the Fourth Cataract fits well with the records' contexts.

Although the dating and interpretation of materials from archaeological salvage excavations often march into unknown territory, they can yield surprises. When we went to Hosh el-Geruf, it was to study a site. What we found has changed our understanding of the economy, society, and associations of a region that may be that of the previously unknown area of Khenthennefer.

Finally, this year ISAC was visited for almost a month by a PhD student at the Sorbonne—Gabrielle Brugnacchi, who came to study the Middle Kingdom pottery from Serra East. A draft manuscript for the fortress's publication exists, but since the original study was completed many years ago and museum storage has in the meantime been reorganized, much new material has been registered since the original manuscript was written. Brugnacchi was thus able to study previously inaccessible material and, in the process, found new vessels that need to be documented for publication.

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