

NUBIAN EXPEDITION

Geoff Emberling and Bruce Williams

The Oriental Institute Nubian Expedition conducted six and a half weeks of excavations and survey in the Merowe Dam Archaeological Salvage Project from January 24 to March 8, 2008. As in the 2007 season, we were not able to work in our concession area, which centered on Shirri Island in the heart of Manasir territory, and we worked instead in the Gdansk Archaeological Museum concession with the generous agreement of the Gdansk team's director Henryk Paner. It is a pleasure to thank the staff of the National Corporation for Antiquities and Museums in Sudan, particularly Director Hassan Hussein Idris, Director of Excavations Dr. Salah Mohammed Ahmed, and our Inspector, Mahmoud Suliman Bashir, for their collegial and professional support. We also acknowledge the Pagoulatos brothers and their staff at the Acropole Hotel, who provide support far beyond accommodation. Our work was made possible by the very generous support of the Packard Humanities Institute (PHI). Most important, we thank the people from the threatened area called Amri in the Fourth Cataract and their Omda for kindness, hospitality, and hard work, without which little would have been accomplished.

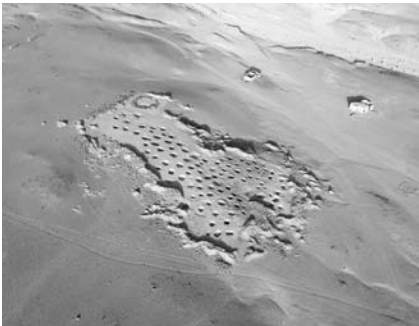


Figure 1. Area of excavation of the Al-Widay I cemetery, looking northeast (courtesy of the Gdansk mission)

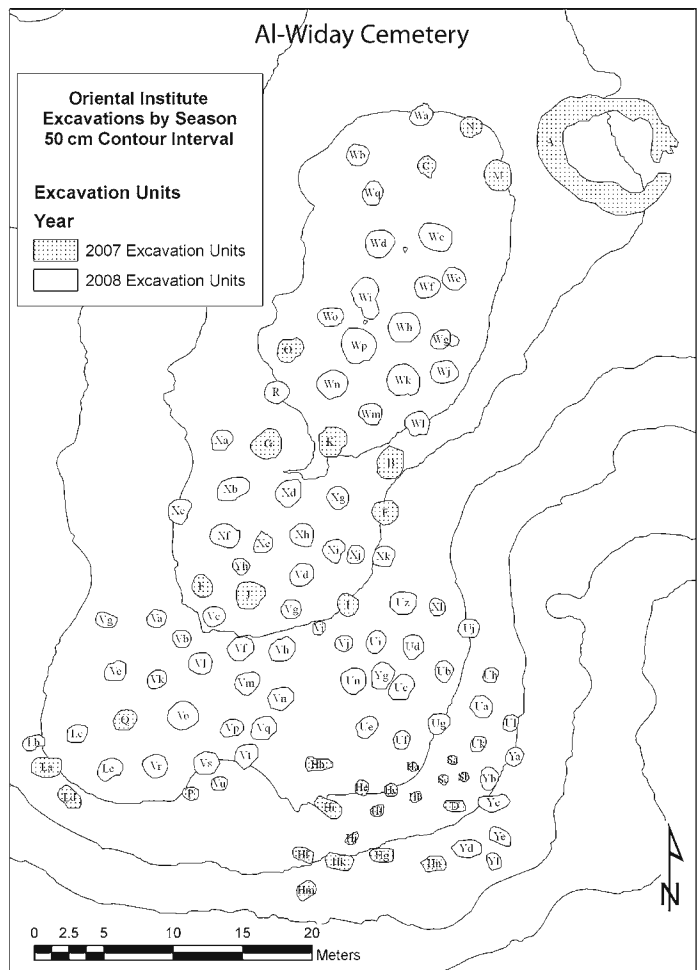


Figure 2. Plan of Oriental Institute excavations at the Al-Widay I cemetery

NUBIAN EXPEDITION

We worked this season in a number of areas around Al-Widay village, where we rented two houses from the family of Hassan Ahmed Ali. Our work included excavations in two cemeteries of mostly Kerma date (Al-Widay I and Umm Gebir Survey Site UGS 101) and one dome grave cemetery (UGS 049), test excavations at three settlement sites of Neolithic (UGS 045), Kerma-Napatan (UGS 112), and Kerma and Christian (Al-Widay 3) date.

Al-Widay I (Middle and Classic Kerma Cemetery)

Our main effort was focused on the Middle and Classic Kerma cemetery of Al-Widay I. In 2007 we excavated thirty-two graves. This season, we aimed not only to excavate all graves in the cemetery, but also to excavate the entire area down to the ground surface contemporary with the construction of the tombs in order to identify possible funerary deposits outside the tombs (figs. 1–2). Using this method, we discovered four deposits of bowls placed upside-down in a manner reminiscent of C-Group burials (fig. 3) and two areas with signs of burning, evidence of sacrifice, or preparation of funerary meals.

We also excavated seventy-six burials, of which the majority appear to be Middle Kerma in date. At least four (L-c, S-c, V-k, and Y-c) are Classic Kerma, although further analysis of the finds will be needed to clarify the date of these burials. Many of the graves had been looted in antiquity, but we recovered a great deal of material including over 150 ceramic vessels (fig. 4).

Superstructures were constructed almost directly above the shaft. They comprised circles of large stones filled with soil, gravel, and stones, smaller ones piled above, and curving inward to a height of about half a meter and paved over, in a kind of cushion-shape (figs. 5–6).

A basic set of ceramic burial offerings included a cup, a larger bowl or jar, and a small pot that probably contained incense. The body was laid on its right side, hands near the head and legs tightly flexed (fig. 7). The orientation of the graves was not entirely consistent, but most had the head to the northeast (or pointing upstream). Some Middle Kerma graves contained faunal remains, either the horns of a goat or an entire animal. A few burials contained more than one individual, this season mostly an adult female and a fetus or infant. Middle Kerma



Figure 3. Two upside-down bowls outside a tomb in Al-Widay I (Locus W-3, pot 1 to right; photo #442)



Figure 4. Selection of pottery vessels from Al-Widay I. Clockwise from upper left: Pan-Grave-type beaker; Kerma carinated black-topped bowl; Egyptian Middle Kingdom jar; small, coarse local bowl with impressions and holes for suspension near the rim (it contained ashes, possibly from incense); Classic Kerma black-topped jar; Classic Kerma beaker



Figure 5. Tumuli in the Al-Widay I cemetery (photo #446)

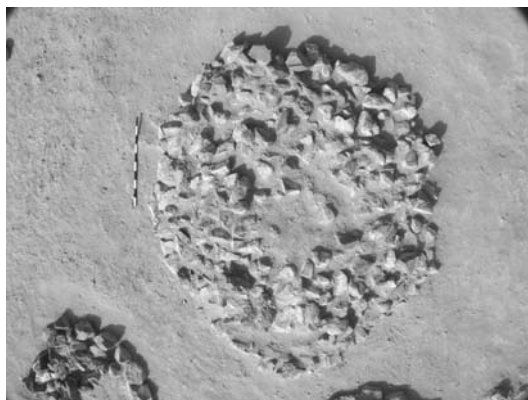


Figure 6. Overhead of a tumulus at Al-Widay I

graves had a round burial shaft with stones placed around the edges, while Classic Kerma shafts were rectangular and lined with stones. The Old Kush III/Classic Kerma burials found this year also confirmed a difference of location from the earlier phase, being all at the south end of the cemetery. In addition, we found a few Napatan graves at Al-Widay I, dated by the distinctive beads and amulets of the period (fig. 8).

Among the most interesting burials in the Al-Widay cemetery was the Middle Kerma burial of a child of about ten years old that contained ten pots, more than 850 shell, faience, and carnelian beads (fig. 9), an imported sandstone palette, a large oyster shell perhaps also for cosmetics, and two scarabs, one of which (fig. 10) was inscribed with the name and rank of an Egyptian officer (and thus, certainly, not belonging originally to the child buried in the tomb). The officer was named Nebsumenu with the rank *Shemsu n Remen-tep*, Retainer or Captain of the First Battalion, who apparently served in one of the Egyptian fortresses near the Second Cataract, for sealings of these officers are known from Uronarti and Serra East.

Another Middle Kerma burial contained a necklace of over 100 small gold beads (fig. 11) along with five pots (one an Egyptian imported marl jar) and a sheep or goat.

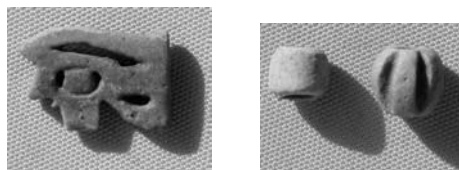


Figure 8. Wedjat-eye amulet (photo #6535), and beads of the Napatan period from Al-Widay I (photo #6538). Scale 1:1



Figure 7. Burial at Al-Widay (photo #514)

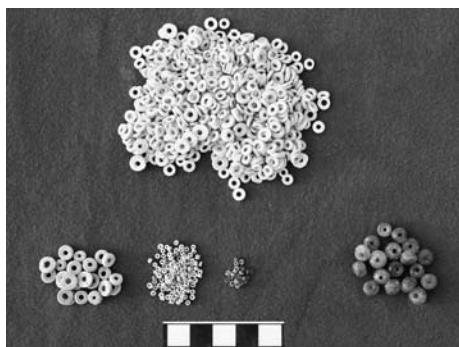


Figure 9. More than 850 faience, shell, and carnelian beads from Al-Widay I, tomb W-h (2008.501; photo #6666)

NUBIAN EXPEDITION



Figure 10. Scarab inscribed with name and rank of Egyptian officer, from Al-Widay I, Tomb X-h (2008.436; photo #7285)



Figure 11. More than 100 small gold beads from Al-Widay I, Tomb W-k (2008.288; photo #7302)



Figure 12. Top to bottom: Scarab with protective signs and "Nefer-re," Tomb X-d (2008.315; photo #7282); scarab with floral design from Tomb W-c (2008.289; photo#7294); and scarab with man and crocodile from Tomb L-e (2008.21, photo #7288)

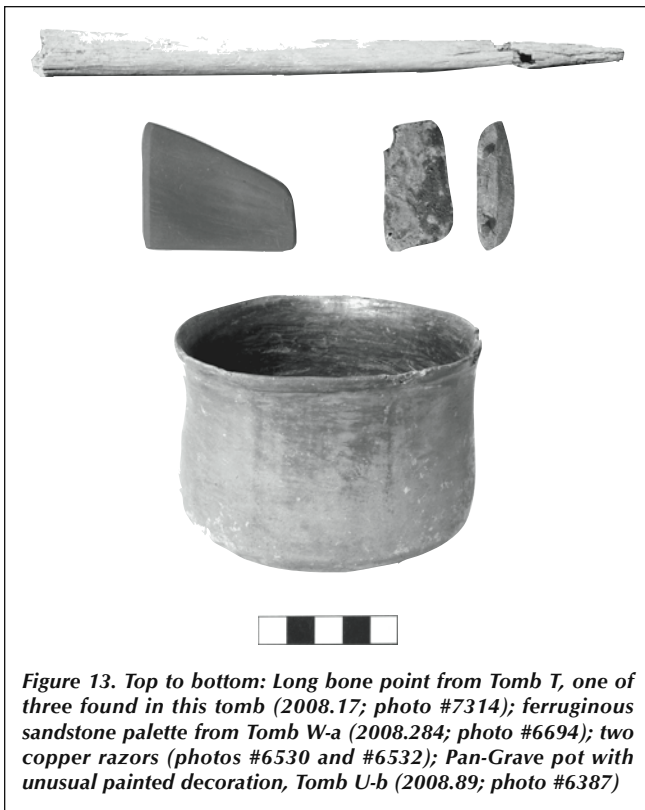


Figure 13. Top to bottom: Long bone point from Tomb T, one of three found in this tomb (2008.17; photo #7314); ferruginous sandstone palette from Tomb W-a (2008.284; photo #6694); two copper razors (photos #6530 and #6532); Pan-Grave pot with unusual painted decoration, Tomb U-b (2008.89; photo #6387)



Figure 14. Ivory bracelet in situ in Tomb U-n (2008.118; photo #338)

Other intriguing individual finds included three additional scarabs (fig. 12), long bone points, trough-shaped palettes made of imported iron-bearing sandstone, two bronze razor blades (one with the remains of a wooden handle), a relatively large number of imported Egyptian ceramic vessels, a number of pots very similar to those known from Pan-Grave burials farther down the Nile (fig. 13), as well as an ivory bracelet (fig. 14).

The excavation of an entire single cemetery will provide rich possibilities for further analysis of change over time, including osteological analysis of a single community, analysis of plant residues (phytoliths and starches), as well as studies of spatial groupings and the distribution of ceramics within the cemetery.

Umm Gebir Survey

A walking survey of Umm Gebir Island located some 112 sites ranging in date from Neolithic to Islamic (fig. 15) and several sites were selected for test excavations. In the western part of the island, these included a Neolithic site (UGS 045; fig. 16) with remains of fieldstone structures, a surprising result in an area where Neolithic structures are rare. Two Napatan dome graves (structural chamber tombs constructed of fieldstones) of a cluster of four were excavated at UGS 049 (figs. 17–18), part of a larger group of clusters arranged around a hillside, itself a kind of cemetery. While clusters of dome graves, a tomb type unique to the Fourth Cataract, are well known, the cemetery complex is of special interest.

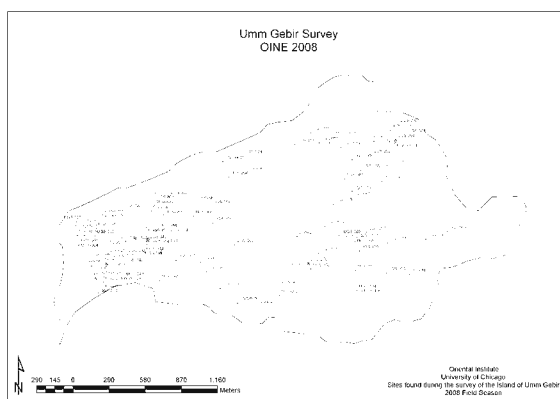


Figure 15. Map of sites discovered in walking survey of Umm Gebir Island



Figure 16. View of feature on Neolithic site UGS 045 on Umm Gebir Island (photo #7321)



Figure 17. Dome graves on Umm Gebir Island (photo #7244)



Figure 18. Pilgrim flask from Napatan dome grave (photo #6649)

NUBIAN EXPEDITION



Figure 19. View of “post-classic” Kerma cemetery on Umm Gebir Island (UGS 101; photo #6801)



Figure 20. Left: “post-classic” Kerma pot (black-topped red ware with painted yellow spots) from UGS 101, Tomb C-a (2008.496; photo 6644); Right: painted jug of the Egyptian Eighteenth Dynasty from UGS 101, Tomb C-a (2008.527 and 535; photo #6747)

In the eastern part of the island, a cemetery of perhaps 75–100 burials turned out to be “post-classic” Kerma, at least in part (UGS 101; figs. 19–20), and tombs there were definitely dated by imported pottery well into the Egyptian Eighteenth Dynasty. This is important, for it shows the continuation of traditions of the Kerma period into the New Kingdom, a time otherwise quite poorly known in the Fourth Cataract. A settlement site nearby was partially excavated by the Gdansk mission (UGS 112; figs. 21–22) who invited us to continue their work. It may be partially contemporary with the cemetery, but it definitely continued into the Napatan period, when a number of remarkable structures with stone-slab foundations were built with some circular stone outlines, probably bins, nearby. Further investigation of the cemetery and settlement together should enhance our knowledge of a region that escaped the effects of the otherwise pervasive Egyptian New Kingdom cultural penetration of Kush.



Figure 21. View of “post-classic” Kerma or Napatan settlement on Umm Gebir Island (UGS 112; photo #6804)

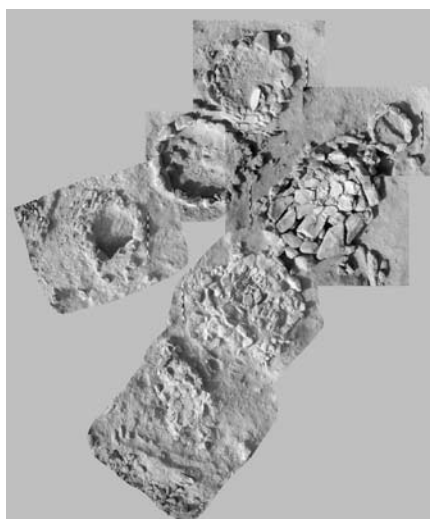


Figure 22. Overhead view of stone platforms and circles associated with burned layers in “post-classic” Kerma or Napatan settlement on Umm Gebir Island (UGS 112); features toward the north (above) were excavated by the Gdansk mission (photo montage)

Geological Work Related to Gold Processing

Following our work last year at the Kerma/Napatan gold-extraction site at Hosh el-Guruf, James Harrell continued investigation into possible local sources of gold. After local surveys and discussions with local gold miners, who also showed small bars of gold they had mined, he was informed that they select sand for gold panning based on the visible presence of “*feyrous*,” in this case, garnets. Garnet and gold are both dense, heavy minerals and so would settle in similar places in alluvial environments. He was able to predict the location of garnet deposits with some accuracy in the vicinity of Al-Widay.

Conclusion

The complete excavation of a cemetery, the first fully excavated Kerma (Old Kush) cemetery in the region, a Neolithic site with structures, a Napatan dome-grave cemetery, a Kerma (Old Kush) cemetery of demonstrable New Kingdom date, and a Napatan settlement with a previously unknown type of structure, are strong results for so brief a time. Given the fact that so much has only been sampled, and so much has not even been surveyed, the richness of these discoveries makes the impending loss of this entire region all the more poignant.

This field season was demanding, and we gratefully recognize the contribution of the excavation staff, who worked on a difficult task in challenging circumstances: Kathryn Bandy, archaeologist; Scott Bierly, archaeologist; Christina Fojas, human osteologist; James Harrell, geologist; Debora Heard, archaeologist; Megan Ingvaldstad, human osteologist; Megaera Lorenz, archaeologist; Justine James, archaeologist; Thomas James, archaeologist; Edyta Klimaszewska-Drabot, archaeologist; and Margaret Wilson, paleobotanist.
