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Closer to the Ancestors. Excavations of the French Mission in Sedeinga 2013-2017

Claude Rilly, Francigny Vincent

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SUDAN & NUBIA

The Sudan Archaeological Research Society



Bulletin No. 22

2018





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Front cover: Funerary stela of the Lady Ataquelula, from
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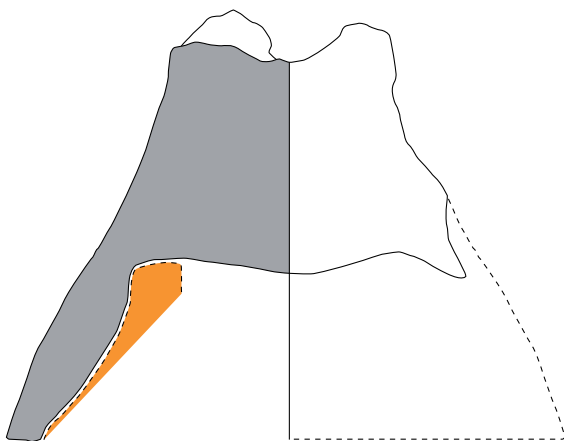
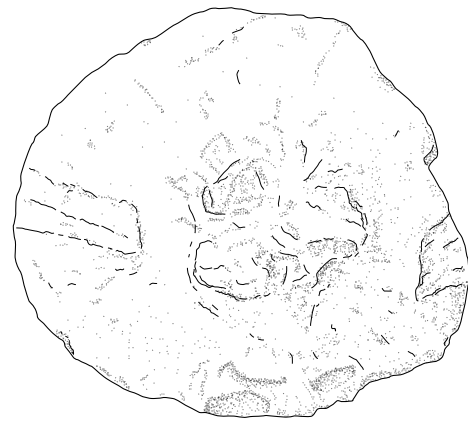
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*Mud bung of unusual form from within the Kushite town at Kawa.
On the underside is preserved the imprint of the pottery vessel
it had been used to seal – scale 1:2 (drawing: A. Pascal).*

Closer to the Ancestors. Excavations of the French Mission in Sedeinga 2013-2017

Claude Rilly and Vincent Francigny

As the last report published in *Sudan & Nubia* on the excavations in Sedeinga dates from 2013, the following paper will summarise the results of the last five archaeological seasons conducted on the Kushite necropolis.¹ These seasons exactly match the second four-year programme of the present team (2013-2016), plus a last season in 2017 which was partly devoted to excavating the graves discovered in 2016. The first four-year plan (2009-2012) focused on the topochronology of the Kushite necropolis.² We could demonstrate that the development of the cemetery did not occur in a linear way, for instance from west to east, but in different funerary clusters, some of them active at the same time. A funerary cluster gathers together several dozens of graves around one or two 'patron pyramids', whose owners are the founders of the cluster, and which are soon surrounded by satellite pyramids and finally by simple tombs without superstructures for humbler individuals.

The zone excavated since 1995/1996, first under the direction of Mrs Berger-El Naggar and since 2009 under our direction, comprises two funerary clusters separated by the large western sand quarry (see Plate 1). The cluster located west of the quarry (Cluster 1)



Plate 1. Aerial view of the zone under excavation, west of Sector II. November 2017 (© V. Francigny/SEDAU).

¹ The French archaeological mission in Sedeinga consisted of Claude Rilly (director and epigraphist, CNRS-LLACAN), Vincent Francigny (co-director and photographer, SFDAS), Agathe Chen (anthropologist, HADES), Vincent Colard (field director), Romain David (ceramic specialist), Juliette Larroye (ceramic specialist, 2015), Sandra Porez (draughtswoman), Simone Nannucci (archaeologist), Marzia Cavriani (archaeologist), Sidonie Privat (archaeologist, PhD student in Montpellier III), Axelle Brémont (archaeologist, PhD student in Paris-IV Sorbonne), Belsam Abdelhamid (2013), Ayman Eltaieb (2014) and Huyam Khalid (2015-2017) (NCAM inspectors). The team of workmen was placed under the supervision of our rais Abdelrahman Fadl, also guardian of the site. The cooks were Marcel Attinsoussi (2013) and Rufai Saleh (2015-2017). We extend our thanks to the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to the Unit UMR 8167 (University of Paris-Sorbonne, Institute of Egyptology), to the French Unit in Khartoum (SFDAS) and to the National Corporation for Antiquities and Museums and its Director General, Dr Abdelrahman Ali Mohamed, for their kind help and support.

² See Rilly and Francigny 2010; 2011; 2012; 2013.

was progressively built around the patron pyramids II 131 and 134, whereas the next cluster to the east (Cluster 2), was established around pyramids II 255 and 169. In order to determine at which date Cluster 2 appeared, C¹⁴ analysis was conducted on organic elements sealed in a mud brick from pyramid II 255. The monument was accordingly dated to the late 5th century BC.³ The highest date obtained by C¹⁴ in Cluster 1 comes from the burial in tomb II T 163 and is securely fixed to the first decades of the 4th century BC.⁴ The two funerary clusters have been, therefore, active during the same period.

The second four-year programme was focused on the transition between the Napatan and the Meroitic periods. During the two last seasons of the previous programme, we

³ Precisely 2365 ± 30 BP, Cal. 537-387 BC (95.4%) (Centre de Datation par le Radiocarbone, Université Lyon 1, 09/10/2017).

⁴ This date results from a double analysis conducted on the remains of a decorated coffin from tomb II T 163. The sycamore wood was dated to 2350 ± 30 BP, Cal. 515-375 BC (95.4%). The painted linen glued on the coffin was dated to 2275 ± 30 BP, Cal. 401-210 BC, with best probabilities from 401-351 BC (54.6%) and from 300-210 BC (40.8%) (Centre de Datation par le Radiocarbone, Université Lyon 1, 09/10/2017). The comparison of these two results points to a short span of time between 401 BC and 375 BC. Grave II T 163 lies immediately north of the patron pyramid II 131 and might, therefore, have been dug slightly later. Note that we had previously analysed the bones from undisturbed immature burials (graves II T 171 and 175) dug under the flanks of pyramids II 134 and 131 respectively. The child from II T 171 was dated to 2220 ± 30 BP, Cal. 375-203 BC (95.4%), and the child from II T 175 to 2255 ± 30 BP, Cal. 396-208 BC (95.4%) (Centre de Datation par le Radiocarbone, Université Lyon 1, 01/06/2015). Only the highest calibrated dates match the time interval obtained from the coffin.



had noticed that the core of Cluster 2 looked more Napatan than Meroitic (Rilly and Francigny 2013, 63-64). It was, therefore, desirable to continue our excavation work in this area. In 2009, when we resumed Catherine Berger-El Naggar's excavations, we had decided to stay in the same zone, i.e. in the part of Sector II immediately east of the camel track. This decision was chiefly based on the belief that this part of the necropolis was largely Meroitic, a period which fitted in with our field of expertise. The previous team had actually unearthed almost exclusively Meroitic burials, as shown by the material found in the graves and particularly by several Meroitic inscriptions on stelae (REM 1337, 1339, 1342, II T 169d1) and lintels (REM 1281, 1340, 1341).⁵

As we had found in 2011 Classic Meroitic material⁶ under a pyramid located some 20m north (six rows of monuments) from the core of Cluster 2, we thought that this core was begun in Napatan times and the cluster developed progressively during the Meroitic period (Rilly and Francigny 2012, 62-63). In 2016, at the suggestion of our partner laboratory for C¹⁴ analyses (CRDC-Lyon 1), we started to date mud bricks by recovering their organic material (charcoal, twigs, seeds, etc.) through flotation. Against all odds, the pyramids that were tested, even the most remote from the core, were Napatan, ranging from the 5th to the early 3rd centuries BC.⁷ We had to accept, as strange as it may seem, that all the graves in Cluster 1 and 2, their superstructures as well as their substructures, were built and dug in Napatan times. By contrast, most of the burials found in them were Meroitic reuses of the Napatan structures. For instance, the patron pyramid II T 255 in Cluster 2 was erected at the end of the 5th century BC (see here n. 3) but the burial we unearthed in the funerary chamber was Meroitic. The remains of a bow, found upon the coffin, were dated from about the 2nd century AD.⁸

Reuse of funerary structures in the Kingdom of Kush is commonly mentioned in archaeological reports and essays⁹ but no reason is generally given for this practice other than a 'lack of space' in the cemeteries. In a previous article, we noted how the core of Cluster 2 was 'literally packed with monuments' and mentioned some cases of reuse with or without restoration of earlier monuments. We concluded that 'one may suspect that the families wanted to be buried in close vicinity to prestigious individuals, possibly those for whom the 'patron pyramids' were built' (Rilly and Francigny 2012, 61). Now that it is clear that all the Meroitic burials in this

area reused Napatan structures, the question becomes more acute as to what motivated this systematic reuse in Sedeinga. Lack of space can be ruled out, as the nearby area west of the camel track was available and remained devoid of any funerary structure. Practical reasons also can be discarded. Refurbishing funerary structures that were centuries old often proved more difficult than building new ones. In II T 337 for example (Plate 2), the funerary chamber had to be restored



Plate 2. Entrance of funerary chamber in II T 337, with ancient offering-table reused to reinforce the ceiling (© A. Brémont/SEDAU).

before reuse, as some bricks of the pyramid II 337 had collapsed into the grave. A broken Napatan offering-table¹⁰ and a slab of schist were inserted in the ceiling to reinforce the structure. It would, of course, have been simpler and safer to dig a new burial chamber elsewhere instead of reusing a Napatan substructure which was small and fragile. This case demonstrates how reusing of Napatan tombs was not an opportunistic practice, but had a deeper meaning, probably the desire for magical protection and possibly the belief that the ancestors can act as intercessors with the deities of the underworld.

Incorporating the past into the present seems to be a distinctive mental attitude of the Kushites throughout their history. All civilisations, to varying degrees, show reverence for the monuments of the past, at least for those they consider part of their own history. The Kushites apparently pushed this reverence to the extreme. When rebuilding, for example, the great Amun temple in Jebel Barkal, which had been left derelict since the departure of the Egyptians, two centuries earlier, the first rulers of Napata replaced the sandstone columns that had collapsed, but they incorporated in the new structure several columns from Ramesses II's temple, although they were 'badly worn by blowing wind and sand' (Kendall 2002, 11). In this respect, it is obvious that the reuse of ancient elements was by no means an economy measure, but was motivated by the highest value placed on the remains of the past. In this particular case, the Egyptian ruined columns not only had a religious or symbolic importance, but

⁵ See Carrier 2000, 2; 2001, 57-60. The small stela II T 169d1 is still unpublished and is presently kept in the stores of the Sudan National Museum (SNM 31562).

⁶ Tomb II T 219, with ceramics datable to the 1st century AD: see Rilly and Francigny 2012, 63 and n. 7.

⁷ For the patron pyramid II 255, see above n. 3. Pyr. II 337, belonging to the last row of monuments in the north, in the vicinity of the wadi, was dated to 2280 ± 30 BP, Cal. 403-211 BC (95.4%), with 60.1% probability for Cal. 40 -352 BC (Centre de Datation par le Radiocarbone, Université Lyon 1, 09/03/2016).

⁸ More precisely to 1860 ± 40 BP, Cal. 64-243 AD (95.4%) (Centre de Datation par le Radiocarbone, Université Lyon 1, 05/05/2014).

⁹ De Voogt and Francigny 2012; Francigny 2016, 151-154.

¹⁰ For reused offering-tables as architectural elements in Meroitic tombs, see Francigny 2016, 85.

were also invested with political significance, since the Kushite rulers considered themselves the heirs of the Egyptian pharaohs and drew their legitimacy from this belief.

In Sedeinga, grave WT1 can be regarded as the most extreme exemplar of this kind of pious reuse. It is located in Sector West, a small hill that was chosen for the burials of the Meroitic governors of Sedeinga.¹¹ The pyramid, built in the very centre of the eminence, covers a small cemetery from the late Neolithic period. It was already the resting place of the members of a local elite (about 3900 BC), as shown by the high quality of the goods buried with the dead.¹² The Meroitic (or late Napatan) builders of WT1 very probably knew of these graves and, in this case, were required not only to leave these early burials undisturbed, but also to seal them under the pyramid. In addition, the gate of the columned hall erected by King Taharqo in front of the Temple of Queen Tiye was transported to the pyramid and reused as the monumental entrance of the *temenos* which was built around the funerary compound. The temple had collapsed between the 7th and the 5th centuries BC and some parts of walls and columns had similarly been reused in the Napatan necropolis.¹³ It is of course no coincidence if the most significant part of the temple for the Kushites, namely the gate bearing the figure and the names of King Taharqo, was reused in the largest monument of the necropolis. The governor of Sedeinga, for whom doubtless this pyramid was erected,¹⁴ was in this way placed under the protection of the greatest pharaoh of the 25th Dynasty.

The process of reuse in most cases also involved the construction of new funerary chapels on the ruins of the Napatan (or early Meroitic) chapels. More often than not, a new pyramid was also built east of the first monument. In Sector II, these secondary monuments are all Meroitic. They are of smaller dimensions and of poorer workmanship than the Napatan pyramid they accompany. Only in Sector West

(WT 2, 3, 6, 7, 9) are the secondary pyramids fully preserved (see Plate 3). They are dated to the early Meroitic period and



Plate 3. Aerial view of Sector West (coupled pyramids WT 3 A and B, single pyramid WT1). November 2017 (© V. Francigny/SEDAU).

were built east of the original pyramids that are just slightly earlier (see n. 11). In this case, rather than a 'pious reusing', the second interment might be an instance of collective burial (Francigny 2016, 151-154) as the family link between both of the deceased would have been still well known. In Sector II, the time interval between both burials is such (frequently six centuries) that the names and families of the Napatan occupants were certainly forgotten. The two monuments form a double superstructure that shares the same descendary and funerary chamber. The Schiff Giorgini team, when excavating Sector West, termed these compounds 'coupled pyramids' (Leclant 1970, 254, 262-263). In the core of Cluster 2, we found for the first time a secondary pyramid (II 251) built in Meroitic times on the ruins of the chapel of II 169, one of the two Napatan patron pyramids of this funerary cluster. The remains of this Meroitic monument were so scanty and fragile that it was at first sight difficult to identify them as a pyramid.¹⁵ This western part of Sector II was originally covered by the large track, a branch of the 'Forty Days Road' (*Darb el-Arba'in*), taken by the caravans in the past and more recently by camel herds from Darfur en-route to Egypt. When Catherine Berger-El Naggar, former director of the mission, started to excavate this area, she wisely decided to place the spoil heaps west of the last pyramid row, so as to create a natural fence to offer protection against the damage caused by the trampling of camel herds. However, after centuries of traffic, the remains of Meroitic chapels and secondary pyramids, closer to the surface and made of a fragile mud-bricks, were completely destroyed in this part of Sector II.

¹⁵ See provisional plan of Cluster 2 in Rilly and Francigny 2013, 63, fig. 2.

¹¹ See Leclant 1970; Rilly 2013. The publication of Sector West by V. Francigny is in preparation. Recent C¹⁴ analyses show that, except for WT1, which might be late Napatan (see n. 14 below), the pyramids of Sector West date approximately to the 1st century BC. The results are as follows: WT3 (pyr. A): 2045 ± 30 BP, Cal 165 BC-AD 24 (95.4%); WT3 (pyr. B) 2025 ± 30 BP, Cal 151 BC-AD 55 BC (Centre de Datation par le Radiocarbone, Université Lyon 1, 09/10/2017); WT2 (pyr. A): 2020 ± 30 BP, Cal 107 BC-AD 59 BC (95.4%); WT6 (pyr. A): 2025 ± 30 BP, Cal 112 BC-AD 55 (94.5%) (Centre de Datation par le Radiocarbone, Université Lyon 1, 22/06/2018).

¹² The report of the excavations can be found in Reinold 1994.

¹³ One of the best examples is a fragment of wall from a chapel, reused as a funerary bench in II T 244 after it had been carefully cut so as to isolate the god Amun from the rest of the relief (Rilly and Francigny 2013, 4-5, pl. 7). This is clearly also a 'pious reuse'.

¹⁴ Neither the monument (only schist blocks are preserved, the mortar is modern), nor the burial, in a poor state of preservation, could be dated. The rare potsherds are Napatan (Romain David, pers. comm.). The grave was probably not reused in Meroitic times. The considerable width and depth of the descendary, originally left unfilled and covered with a wooden structure, may have precluded the masons from building a secondary pyramid (as they did in WT 2 and 3) or even a simple chapel east of the Napatan monument.



Only the sandstone elements of the Meroitic chapels (lintels, stelae, offering-tables) have been preserved.

When in 2015 and 2016 we shifted our excavations to the east, we entered a zone which had been in large part spared from the camel herds. Even if the Meroitic structures were also of poor quality, at least they were better preserved and the Meroitic reuses were more visible. Surprising instances appeared, like a Napatan pyramid (II 199), whose remaining courses of reddish mud bricks had been levelled and crowned with a Meroitic pyramid (II 200) in grey mud bricks. Further east, a large Napatan pyramid (II 352) was also levelled in order to accommodate, not one, but three Meroitic pyramids (II 362, 363, 364). No Meroitic chapel was found unscathed, but in several cases, many sandstone elements (door-jamb, lintels, stelae) were discovered amidst the collapsed mud bricks of chapels, providing for the first time an archaeological context for these objects.

Not all the Napatan monuments were reused. In the southern part of Cluster 2, made of impressive monuments and deep descendaries (II T 298, 304, 306-310, 312, 314, 315, 317, 318), the Napatan burials were found disturbed and plundered, with almost no material left by the robbers, perhaps because systematic looting was accomplished soon after burial. Dates could be obtained from charcoal (remains of the ultimate censing in the burial chamber) and from human bones. They indicate a chronological range extending from the 4th century to the early 3rd century BC, i.e. around the end of the Napatan era.¹⁶ The burials are, therefore, contemporaneous with the graves and the structures have not been reused by the Meroites, for reasons that are not clear. Admittedly, these graves had very deep chambers and steep descendaries, but several Napatan tombs with similar features in the core of Cluster 2 were reused.

Another particularity of these graves located south of the core of Cluster 2 is the presence of sandstone basins on platforms, east of the pyramids II T 292, 298 and 304. In one case (II T 298, see Plate 4), the platform was built against the rear wall of the earlier pyramid II T 299, located immediately east of II T 298, and a rectangular sandstone block inserted between the basin and the pyramid wall possibly protected it from crumbling mortar. Initially we thought that the sandstone basins, never documented elsewhere, could represent a transition from the ceramic basin, frequent in Napatan graves (see Plate 5) and also originally placed on platforms,¹⁷ to the



Plate 4. Sandstone basin on a platform in II T 298/Pyr. II 299 (© V. Francigny/SEDAU).



Plate 5. Napatan ceramic basin, with crocodiles figures on the rim (II S 065) (© V. Francigny/SEDAU).

Meroitic sandstone offering-table. However, from charcoal fragments sealed under the basin of Pyr. 304, a very high C¹⁴ date was obtained, at the end of the 5th century BC.¹⁸ It is, therefore, more probable that these sandstone basins, carved in blocks from the ruined Egyptian temple, were alternative options to the ceramic basins and used at the same time.

In the last report in *Sudan & Nubia* (Rilly and Francigny 2013, 64), we described the discovery of a brick tumulus (II T 262) in the 'esplanade' located in the core of Cluster 2, behind the patron pyramids II 169 and 255. An immature individual, less than two years old and adorned with typical Napatan jewellery, was buried in this deep undisturbed tomb. The burial was dated by radiocarbon to the first half of the 4th

¹⁶ Charcoal from II T 317 dated to 2185 ± 30 BP, Cal. 361-172 BC (95.4%); charcoal from II T 312 dated to 2220 ± 30 BP, Cal. 375-203 BC (95.4%); human bones from II T 310 dated to 2275 ± 30 BP, Cal. 401-351 BC (54.6%) or Cal 300-210 BC (40.8%); human bones from II T 318 dated to 2250 ± 30 BP, Cal. 395-206 BC (95.4%) (Centre de Datation par le Radiocarbone, Université Lyon 1, 09/10/2017). The high range of the results is preferred because of the more accurate date obtained for charcoal from II T 304 (see n. 18).

¹⁷ Remains of many ceramic basins were found in the core of Cluster 2. They often have on the rims small crocodiles shaped in the clay, as can be seen in Plate 5, and mat impressions underneath. A similar artefact with a crocodile on the rim was found in the pyramid of King

Baskakeren in Nuri 17 (Dunham 1955, 220, fig. 169 [17-3-391]) dated to the late 5th century BC (FHN II, 435 [76]; Rilly 2017, 120). Remains of clay offering-tables were also found in connection with platforms. At Kawa a very similar basin with applique crocodiles on the rim was found by the shrine at the southern end of the Kushite town (see Welsby Sjöström, cat. entry no. 139 in Welsby 2004, 155).

¹⁸ More precisely 2415 ± 30 BP, Cal. 746-401 BC (95.4%), with best probabilities (78.1%) from 554-401 BC (Centre de Datation par le Radiocarbone, Université Lyon 1, 09/03/2016).

century BC.¹⁹ During the 2015 season, two similar tombs were discovered south of II T 262, making a north-south line of three burials of immature individuals in the esplanade, all of them fortunately undisturbed.²⁰ The second grave (II T 297) was also topped with an oval brick tumulus (Plate 6). The child was 7/8 years old and was not accompanied by any material. The C¹⁴ dating of charcoal found in a closed context in the tomb gave results very similar to the infant of II T 262.²¹ The third and southernmost grave (II T 311) had no tumulus and



Plate 6. Tumulus II T 297 before excavation, between the chapels of pyramids II 292 and II 235 (© V. Francigny/SEDAU).

also contained an immature individual, slightly older than the child from II T 297, wearing two necklaces, one with three large serrated faience beads, typical for Napatan children. The date obtained from a femur is comparable.²² Napatan juveniles are usually buried in small side chambers dug in the descendaries of adult tombs or at the foot of the pyramids.²³ We do not know why those three children have been buried in such a special way in the core of Cluster 2.

During the 2016 season surface clearing was completed in the excavation zone and we joined the area excavated in

¹⁹ 2305 ± 30 BP, Cal. 408-233 BC (95.4%) with best probabilities (79.4%) from 408-356 BC (Centre de Datation par le Radiocarbone, Université Lyon 1, 23/07/2013).

²⁰ The tombs of immature individuals, usually dug in the walls of the descendaries of adult tombs or under the bases of pyramids, were generally left undisturbed by plunderers, probably because they contain little or no burial material. However, these three child burials are so atypical that they may have been confused with adult burials by the plunderers and consequently disturbed like all the adult tombs in the vicinity. As they were found undisturbed, we have to suppose that the robbers knew that immature individuals were buried there, in spite of the unusual aspect of their graves. The two tumuli were left untouched, with all their bricks in place. Once again, it shows that plundering took place shortly after the burials, at a time when people still knew who was buried where.

²¹ 2260 ± 30 BP, Cal. 397-209 BC (95.4%), with best probabilities (55.7%) from 309-209 BC (Centre de Datation par le Radiocarbone, Université Lyon 1, 23/07/2013).

²² 2340 ± 30 BP, Cal. 507-366 BC (95.4%), with best probabilities (94.4%) from 491-366 BC (Centre de Datation par le Radiocarbone, Université Lyon 1, 09/02/2016).

²³ See Francigny 2016, 150-151.

1994 by Catherine Berger-El Naggar's team in the central part of Sector II (see Figure 1). No fewer than 37 pyramids were unearthed, bringing the total number of monuments in Clusters 1 and 2 to precisely 100. Many sandstone elements from the Meroitic chapels built upon the ruins of the Napatan pyramids were found in the upper fills of the descendaries. Most of them were decorated (lintels, door-jambes) and several bore funerary texts in Meroitic cursive. In November-December 2017, we began a new four-year programme, focused on the origins of the necropolis. To achieve this a team started to clear the surface in a new zone from the eastern part of Sector II. However, another team carried on the excavations of tombs in the former area, since they were so numerous that a single season was not enough to complete this work. More inscribed lintels and stelae were found in the descendaries. Short descriptions of four important graves are given below, including the material that was found in them in 2016 and 2017.

II T 302 (Plate 7)

*Ceramics*²⁴

Numerous Napatan sherds. A fragment of a Meroitic bowl with polished red slip might come from the neighbouring tomb II T 303 (see below).

Burial

Four skeletons were found disturbed in the huge round funerary chamber. This is probably a Meroitic reuse of this tomb, which was originally Napatan.



Plate 7. Tomb II T 302, descender and small pyramid II 302 (© C. Rilly/SEDAU).

²⁴ The description and interpretation of ceramics are drawn from the report of Romain David.



Figure 1. South-east zone of the excavated area west of Sector II (CB = tomb excavated in 1994 by Catherine Berger's team, original number unrecorded) (© V. Francigny/SEDAU).

Material from the chapel

Sandstone base for a ba-stature (?) found in the descendary (Inv. No II T 302d1), see Plate 8.

Lintel inscribed with four lines of Meroitic, (Inv. No II T 302d2). See Plate 9. Paleographically dated to the first half of the 3rd century AD, the epitaph was composed for a lady called Adatalabe, daughter of a 'areqebre (title) in Sedeinga' and of a woman curiously named Khammaluwiteke (probably meaning 'who likes a good meal'). The descriptive part of the inscription mentions several important individuals in her family. There was a 'royal prince' (*pqr qori-se-l*), a tax collector (?) (*aribet*) and a 'high priest in Sedeinga' (*beloloke Atiyete*) in her mother's lineage. She was the mother of a 'first priest of Amun (?)' (*womnise-lb*) and the sister of a *mdek* (title) of Taleya, the goddess of Victory so far known only by a



Plate 8. Base for a ba-stature (?) II T 302d1 (© V. Francigny/SEDAU).

Plate 9. Inscribed lintel (II T 302d2) found in the descandary of II T 302 (© V. Francigny/SEDAU).



hieroglyphic caption above her image in the Arikankharor tablet from Winchester Art Museum (REM 1005, see Zach 2017). She also bears a title, namely *snmdese pqrli-se* 'snmdese of the prince', which is rare in the extreme for women, although there is another occurrence of this title for a woman from Faras (REM 0534). However, the role of this dignitary, often placed under the viceroy's authority, is unclear.

II T 303 (Plate 10)

Ceramics

Napatan sherds in the descandary and chamber, two belonging to a ceramic offering table. Two fragments of the body of handmade Meroitic jar (until end of 1st century AD). Two fragments of the body of a painted Meroitic jar (1st/2nd centuries AD). Meroitic bowl with polished red slip (2nd/3rd centuries AD) in the funerary chamber, also in the descandary and a part of the same vessel found in the descandary of II T 302.



Plate 10. Descandary of II T 303 and the entrance of the funerary chamber before excavation (© C. Rilhy/SEDAU).

There were three successive burials in this grave, according to ceramic analysis: Napatan (5th/4th centuries BC) / Classical Meroitic (1st century AD) / Late Meroitic (2nd/3rd centuries AD).

Burial

Only scattered bones in a poor state of preservation were found in the chamber of II T 303. Remarkably, the coffin, long ago destroyed by termites, was placed on a funerary bench carved from a sandstone block from the upper part of a wall of the temple of Tiye, where the characteristic feathers, projecting outward, of an Egyptian cornice can still be seen (Plate 11. No Inv. II T 303 d1). The small dimension



Plate 11. Cornice from the Temple of Tiye reused as a funerary bench in II T 303 (© V. Francigny/SEDAU).

of the block (1.016m) suggests that the deceased for whom it was prepared was a child and thus was probably not the Napatan dignitary for whom this impressive grave, with its huge staircase, its sophisticated chamber entrance and its large pyramid, originally was built.

Material from the chapel

A sandstone door-jamb with the image of the goddess Maat in bas-relief (see Plate 12. Inv. No II T 303 d1) was discovered in the surface of the descandary in 2016. Dimensions: 682 x 247 x 148mm. The high quality of the representation, contrasting with the usual depictions in incised relief, is unique at Sedeinga. Only one other door-jamb found on the



Plate 12. Left door-jamb of funerary chapel, found in surface of II T 303, with a figure of the goddess Maat (© V. Francigny/SEDAU).



Plate 13. Descender and entrance of the funerary chamber in II T 355 (© C. Rilly/SEDAU).

surface of Sector II in 1963/64, representing Anubis and kept in Pisa University Museum (Italy), is comparable, although the carving was unfinished. They might have belonged together (the Pisa jamb has a longer base, which anyway was fixed in the ground). The inclusion of Maat among the funerary goddesses, beside Isis, Nephthys and Meret, is also attested on door-jambs from Faras (south of T. 84) and Karanog (T. 71) but it is particularly frequent in Sedeinga: last year, we found no less than three door-jambs bearing Maat's image. It cannot be ruled out that this sophisticated door-jamb belonged to the same chapel as the inscribed lintel found in II T 302 and that both fell into different descendaries when the chapel was destroyed.

II T 355 (Plate 13)

Ceramics

Sherds mostly of Napatan date were found in the descender. Two fragments of a handmade Meroitic jar (until end of 1st century AD) were also uncovered in the descender. Fragments of a Meroitic jar and a long-neck bottle (2nd/3rd centuries AD) were unearthed in the funerary chamber and the descender. At least two successive burials can be suggested for this grave, according to the ceramic analysis proposed by Romain David: one in Napatan times (5th/4th centuries BC) and another in the Late Meroitic period (2nd/3rd centuries AD). The ceramics from the Classical Meroitic period (1st century AD) are present only in the descender and possibly come from the neighbouring tomb II T 303.

Burial

This tomb is associated with pyramid II T 355. It contained the remains of three individuals, scattered in the descender and the funerary chamber, where the three skulls were still present.

Material from the pyramid

Two sandstone objects were found in the descender, a funerary stela in the upper fill in November 2016 and a pyramid capstone in November 2017, during the complete clearing of the grave. The capstone (see Plate 14) is shaped as usual, like an opening lotus bud, an Egyptian and Meroitic symbol

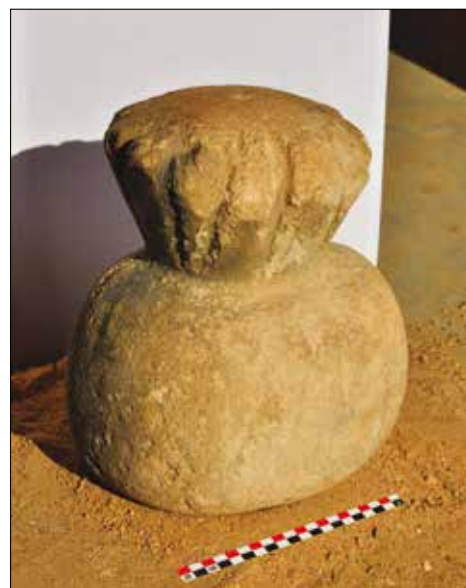


Plate 14. Pyramid capstone (II T 355d1) (© V. Francigny/SEDAU).

of rebirth. It is impossible to know which of the two neighbouring pyramids it crowned, either II 355 or II 303. The first is indeed the monument built upon the grave II T 355, but the second is located north of the descendency and remains of ruined monuments were often toppled southward by the prevailing north wind. Although the two pyramids were originally built in Napatan times, the capstone is doubtlessly Meroitic. It has been found in the filling of a plundered Meroitic burial and it seems impossible that the upper part of a Napatan monument would have survived for six centuries. It must, therefore, be hypothesized that the monument has been restored and a new chapel built in the 2nd/3rd century AD, when the grave was reused for a late Meroitic burial. All the traces of this restoration, as in many other similar cases, have disappeared.

The splendid funerary stela of the Lady Ataqelula was found in the upper fill of the descendency in November 2016 (Plate 15 and Front cover. Inv. No II T 355d1). It belongs to the Meroitic burial that has reused the grave. It was found in vertical position, trapped between grey bricks derived from the destruction of the chapel which explains the extraordinary preservation of the colours, including the fragile blue pigment adorning the last row of feathers of the wings around the sun-disk and inserted in the separation lines of the text. Yellow ochre was used for the sun-disk, the cobras and the first row of feathers, red ochre for the second row of feathers and inside the engraved characters. The dimensions of the stela

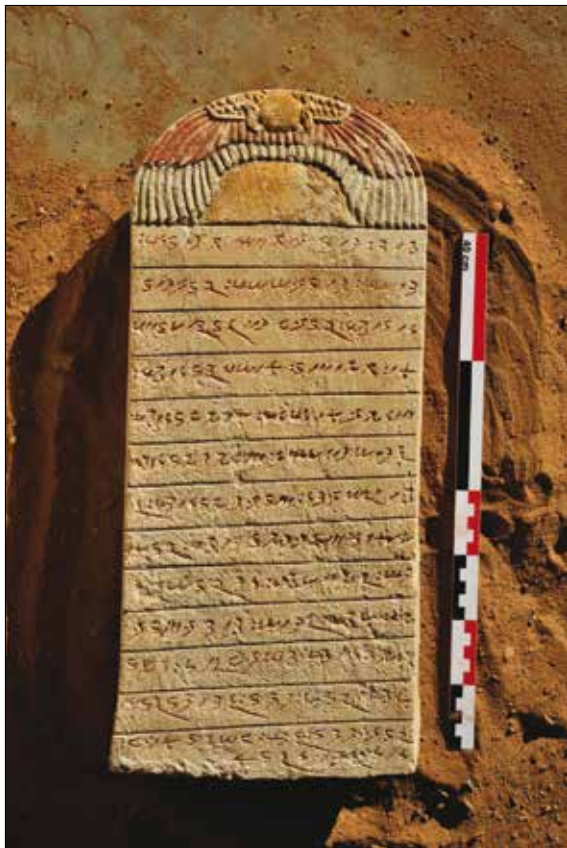


Plate 15. Funerary stela of the Lady Ataqelula, found in November 2016 (II T 355d1). (© V. Francigny/SEDAU).

are as follows: height 513mm, width 229mm, maximum thickness 97mm. It includes 14 lines of Meroitic cursive, whose paleographical features point to the 3rd century AD, in line with the ceramic dating of the secondary burial (see above).

The deceased is again a lady, named Ataqelula. She was the daughter of a priest from Pnubs, that is Doukki Gel/Kerma. This is the first certain occurrence in Meroitic of this place-name, spelt *Penbese* in the text. Ataqelula had in her maternal descent no less than a royal prince (*pqr qorise*), but also a first prophet of Amun (*womnise-ll*) and a temple musician (*wrtxn*, from Egyptian *wr.t dhn* 'great of rhythm'), one of the rare female titles. One of her brothers was an *ateqi*-priest, a title generally attached to the cult of Isis in Sedeinga and another brother was a 'great of Horus' (*ll Ar-se-l*), an honour which is here attested for the first time. One of the major contributions of this stela is the evidence it sheds on the close links (including matrimony) between the elite of Sedeinga and the ruling class in other great centres of the kingdom such as Kerma and Meroe.

II T 410 (Plate 16)

Ceramics

Napatan potsherds scattered in the descendency and funerary chamber. Fragments of the body of an egg-shaped Meroitic jar (2nd/3rd centuries AD) in the descendency.

Burial

The tomb is associated with pyramid II 370 but is not the main grave. A small tomb for an immature was found at the top of the descendency (II T 411). It was undisturbed but devoid of any material. The individual buried in II T 410 was an adult. The bones were scattered in the descendency



Plate 16. Descendency and entrance to the funerary chamber in II T 410 (© M. Cavriani/SEDAU).



(fragments of skull) and the chamber. Many fragments of dark wood were uncovered in the descendary, doubtlessly the remains of the coffin, dragged out of the chamber by robbers. Radiocarbon analyses unexpectedly indicate a late Napatan date, around the beginning of the 4th century BC. As it is improbable that the remains of an earlier coffin were reburied in the descendary after a first plundering, it is suggested that the body and the coffin are both Napatan and that this grave was not reused in Meroitic times. If so, the Meroitic stela found in the descendary (see below) might have fallen from a new chapel erected east of pyramid 370 for a deceased buried, not in II T 410, but in the main grave of the pyramid II T 370, which will be excavated next winter.

Material from the chapel

A fine Meroitic stela of small dimensions (390 x 225 x 120mm) was found in the descendary (Plate 17). As discussed above, it



Plate 17. Funerary stela of the Lady Malimvarase (II T 410d1) (© C. Rilly/SEDAU).

is not connected with the burial of this tomb, which is Napatan, but probably with the closest grave, II T 370. The stela was found lying on one of its edges, which is the optimum position for a good state of preservation. Only a small part at the end of line 1, with two signs missing, was broken. The rest is in perfect state of preservation. The text comprises 11 lines in cursive script. The palaeography of the signs is a late phase of Transitional C (Rilly 2017, 348), between the end of the 2nd and the beginning of the 3rd century AD.

The deceased is once again a high-ranking woman, Malimvarase (*Mlimrse*),²⁵ daughter of ‘a high governor’ (*xrpxne lx-l*) whose name and posting are not given. One of her maternal uncles was a *ategi*-priest, a title generally connected to the cult of Isis in Sedeinga. Two of her brothers were ‘two high priests in Primis’ (*beloloke Pedeme-te 2*), that is either in Qasr Ibrim or in Amara, since the two cities have the same name (*Pedeme*) in Meroitic. Among her sons, one was priest of Masha, god of the Sun (*ate Ms-ó*), another ‘first one (?) of the king’ (*keroro qor-i-se-l*), a title of obscure meaning, another ‘governor of Faras’ (*xrpxene Phrse-te-l*). It is of course not insignificant that a governor of Faras, one of the most important Meroitic cities of Lower Nubia, was the son of a woman from Sedeinga. This shows that the two northernmost provinces of the kingdom of Meroe, namely Lower Nubia and the region of Sedeinga, were administered by closely related elites.

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²⁵ The name means ‘the beauty of Wara’ and can be compared with the name of prince Natemakhora’s mother, *Mlimdse* ‘the beauty of Sada’ (see Rilly 2013, 98).

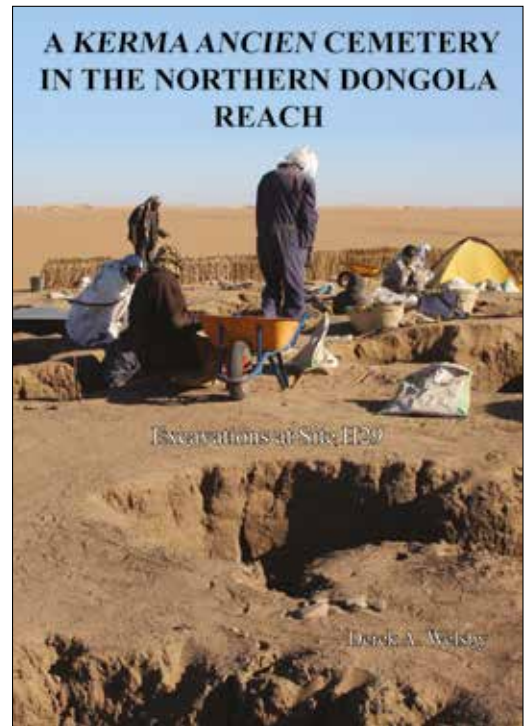
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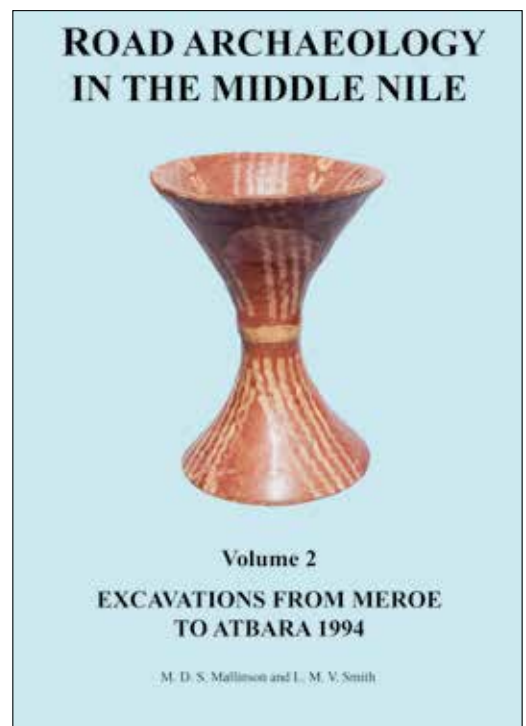
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