Excavations of the French Archaeological Mission in Sedeinga, 2011 Season

Claude Rilly, Francigny Vincent

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Egypt

ASWAN
1st cataract Hisn al-Bab

Afyeh

RED SEA

Wadi el- Allaqi

Gebel Adda

2nd cataract

Wadi Gabgaba

Amara West
Sedeinga Sai

Sudan

3rd cataract Tombos

ABU HAMED

Nile

El-Ga'ab
Basin

H29

KAREIMA
Napata 4th cataract Wadi Abu Dom

5th cataract
Abu Sideir

Dangeil

Wadi Howar

ED-DEBBA

Gala
Abu Ahmed

ATBARA

Wadi el- Melik

Atbara

Meroe
Qalaat Shanan

Wadi Muqaddam

6th
cataract Jebel Sabaloka

KASSALA

Eritrea

OMDURMAN
KHARTOUM

Blue Nile

MODERN TOWNS   Ancient sites

WAD MEDANI

White Nile

GEDAREF

KOSTI

SENNAR

N

Ethiopia

0   250 km

South
Sudan

Azaza

Sudan & Nubia

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

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Excavations of the French Archaeological Mission in Sedeinga, 2011 season

Claude Rilly and Vincent Francigny

The lastest excavations of the French archaeological mission in Sedeinga (SEDAU) took place from 1st November to 17th December 2011.[1] The first two weeks were dedicated to digging sondages in search of Neolithic and Protohistoric remains on the western margins of the site, under the direction of Hélène Delattre, and to the physical anthropological study of the material from the previous season by Agathe Chen. The general excavations started with the complete team on 18th November and focused on the central part of Sector II of the Meroitic necropolis, in an area contiguous with that explored in the last two seasons. The core of the second funerary cluster was reached at the end of the season.[2] Two additional sondages were dug, one south of the Temple of Queen Tiye, and a second in the easternmost part of Sector II.

Neolithic and Protohistoric sondages

During the previous season, a general survey in search of Neolithic and Protohistoric material was conducted by Hélène Delattre on the site, especially in the western part, along a small schist outcrop called Jebel Aswad and further south (Rilly and Francigny 2011, 72). Four sondages were opened this year in the most promising zones: the SW and NW sectors, Jebel Aswad and the western outskirt of Pyramid WT1, under which a spectacular group of 29 Neolithic graves had been unearthed by Jacques Reinold in the early 1990s. The SW sector, where a Pre-Kerma assemblage was found last year, did not yield any significant results. Once a thin layer of

sand was removed, the natural soil appeared and no structures could be found, probably because they were removed long ago by wind and rain erosion which left on the spot only the ceramic material. The situation was similar in Jebel Aswad. Nor did the excavations west of WT1 yield any significant result: the Neolithic cemetery seems to have been limited to the area sealed later by the Napatan pyramid. Finally, only in the sondage in the NW sector was excavation met with success. Two 2 x 2m squares were opened, revealing two pits, empty but for some bones and Pre-Kerma sherds. A further square was opened north of the pits, in a place where some schist slabs were visible. There, another pit was found, surrounded by stone slabs. In the filling, some Pre-Kerma sherds and an ostrich eggshell bead were discovered. The pit had been emptied but rodent droppings and bones found in the bottom, mixed with numerous remains of vegetal fibres, indicate that it probably had contained grain. The sondage will be extended in the next season to uncover the zone between the pits, where more granaries can be expected.

Excavations of the Meroitic cemetery in Sector II

The main work was the continuation of the excavations in the Meroitic cemetery (Plate 1), more precisely in the part of Sector II extending east of the camel track, where two perpendicular rows of pyramids had been discovered in the 1990s by the previous team under the direction of Catherine Berger-El Naggar. In the two last seasons, the W/E row of pyramids has been completely unearthed and its boundaries cleared.

This L-shaped ensemble constitutes a single funerary cluster (Cluster 1), which started with a pair of "patron pyramids" (Nos 134 and 131) and extended northward until the central *wadi*, and from there eastward along the *wadi*. The inner part of the "L" is occupied by a large sandy area where no monument was built (the first "sand quarry"). The western boundary cannot be established with certainty because some monuments might still lie under the camel track. The eastern and southern boundaries are nothing more than the junction with a second funerary cluster (Cluster 2), which is so intermingled with the first that it was difficult to trace a clear-cut limit between their respective graves. A second "sand quarry" extends to the east.

This year, we extended the clearing operations to the south, in order to reach the core of the second funerary cluster, where the previous team had opened a sondage, 12 years ago, in the descendary of II T 169. Four 10 x 10m squares were totally cleared (210/110, 220/120, and 220/130) and two further squares were opened (210/120 and 210/130). Two factors were responsible for this unexpected speed of work. Firstly, the core of the second funerary cluster is actually located upon a small hill, so that the depth of sand to clear off was not as much as we expected. Secondly, this part of Sector II was literally packed with monuments: no less than 13 pyramids were discovered this year in an area approximately 500 square metres.

Plate 1. Aerial view looking south of Sector II (2012 © B.-N. Chagny/SEDAU/SFDAS).

This is one of the puzzling issues of this season. Instead of extending the burial space or starting a new funerary cluster in another part of this huge necropolis (as the rulers of Meroe did in Begrawiya), the families of the second funerary cluster did their best to bury their deceased in the same area, generation after generation. Frequently, they just reused the funerary chambers after a more or less careful cleaning. The old pyramids, most of them easily recognized by the pinkish hue of their bricks, were left untouched, even if they were already eroded: as were for example Pyramids 235, 248 and 250. However, some monuments were restored before reuse, as was the case with Pyramid 233. The latter was connected to the neighbouring pyramid 232 by a north-south wall, probably at the time when Pyramid 237 was inserted between two earlier monuments (Pyramids 232 and 244), filling all the empty space and sealing the earlier tombs, with

the result that robbers demolished it in order to get access to the funerary chambers. The wall created an exclusive space within this particular burial area, entirely dedicated to the new monument 237. Even places unfit for superstructure construction were marginally colonized; Pyramid 234 was partly erected on the southern sand quarry, into which a L-shaped brick base was first constructed. The reasons for this obstinacy are still unclear, but one may suspect that the families wanted their deceased to be buried in close vicinity to prestigious individuals, possibly those for whom the "patron pyramids" were built.

The superstructures unearthed during this season, as in the previous one, are extremely variable in size, ranging from 6m wide (Pyramid 169, probably a "patron pyramid") to 750mm (Pyramid 242, which we initially thought to be a simple stand for an offering-table). They are generally square,

but the small pyramid 241 was rectangular (like Pyramids 85 and 237), with central reinforcement masonry that at first looked like the party wall between two twin square pyramids. As for the inner structures, the same variability was observed. When present, cross-braces are diagonal in this part of the necropolis. They were mainly used in early superstructures (Pyramids 244, 248 and 131 found by the previous team, see Figure 1). A new pyramid with inner cupola was uncovered
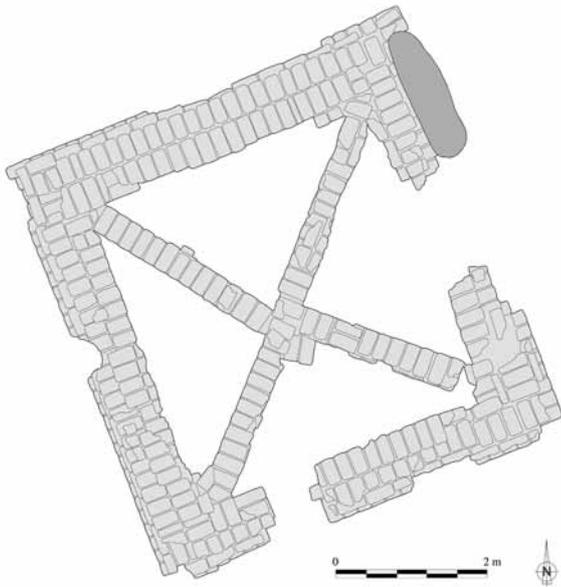

Figure 1. Pyramid 131, with diagonal cross-braces (scale 1:100).

at the end of the season in the south-eastern zone, bringing their number to no fewer than four for the two funerary clusters under excavation. The internal structure is the same as in Pyramid 232 (Plate 2) discovered last year:[3] the cupola does not fill the interior of the pyramid, but only occupies its central part and is connected to the angles of the building by cross-braces, forming on the ground a pattern resembling a French formal garden. This new monument is made of the pinkish bricks that are typical of early superstructures and bears witness to a long-lasting architectural tradition, which seems for the moment mostly restricted to Sedeinga. The only similar structure attested from a different site is located in the western cemetery at Meroe (Beg. W. 2), where a pyramid in red bricks with inner cupola was erected on the ruins of a former sandstone monument.[4] The alleged dome-topped

Plate 2. Pyramid 232, with inner cupola and cross-braces.

monuments found in Karanog were clearly ruined pyramids where the eroded cross braces gave a vaguely rounded appearance to the inner structures.[5] Since our article in the last issue of *Sudan & Nubia*, where this question has been dealt with at length, no new interpretation other than a possible religious solar symbol could be advanced for this complicated architectural device that did not add either to the solidity or to the external aspect of the monument. The interior of Pyramid 232 (with cupola and cross-braces) has been excavated to the natural without any significant discovery: in the eastern part, which collapsed when robbers dug holes in order to reach the burial chambers, some pieces of wood were found but they probably originate from the chamber. Some sheep or goat bones were unearthed between two cross-braces. They were, however, too close to the surface to be associated with certainty with the monument.

The distribution of the Meroitic burials in funerary clusters, which we hypothesised two years ago, appears to be confirmed. After close examination of the architectural succession, mainly based on the way monuments and descendaries are overlapping, a great part of the tombs and superstructures uncovered last year actually belonged to Cluster 2, so that the excavations are already more advanced into this second ensemble than expected (Figure 2). The core of this second cluster was built on a small hill. Interestingly, a small drain was discovered, dug south of Pyramid 216 at the northern foot of this rise, in order to divert the rainwater flowing downhill during the rainy season into the sand quarry and thereby protecting the monuments situated below. A first chronological scenario in four stages can now be suggested for the two funerary clusters under excavation. In the first stage, which cannot yet be dated accurately but occurred before the 1st

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[3] See Rilly and Francigny 2011, 74, where it was still registered as no. 231.

[4] This was, at the time of its discovery, by far the best preserved example of a pyramid with an inner cupola, due to the original stone base being still in place when the brick walls were erected (Dunham 1963, 83, fig. 62 and 84, fig. 63b). The author suggested that the dome was designed as a funerary chamber built on ground level, although he does not mention any human remains found in this room. The evidence from Sedeinga shows that these blind spaces were used neither as burial chambers nor as chapels. A date in the mid-1st century AD for the two successive monuments was derived from architectural parallels only, since no material was found in them, apart from four simple gold wire rings used as foundation deposits.

[5] Woolley and Randall-MacIver 1910 (Text), 12-13. Compare for example the description of G259 (*ibid.*, 160) and the photo (pl. 112). The dome-shaped superstructures are already questioned by Griffith 1925, 64. For a recent extension to the pyramidal form to all the Meroitic superstructures, see Francigny 2008, 27-45.
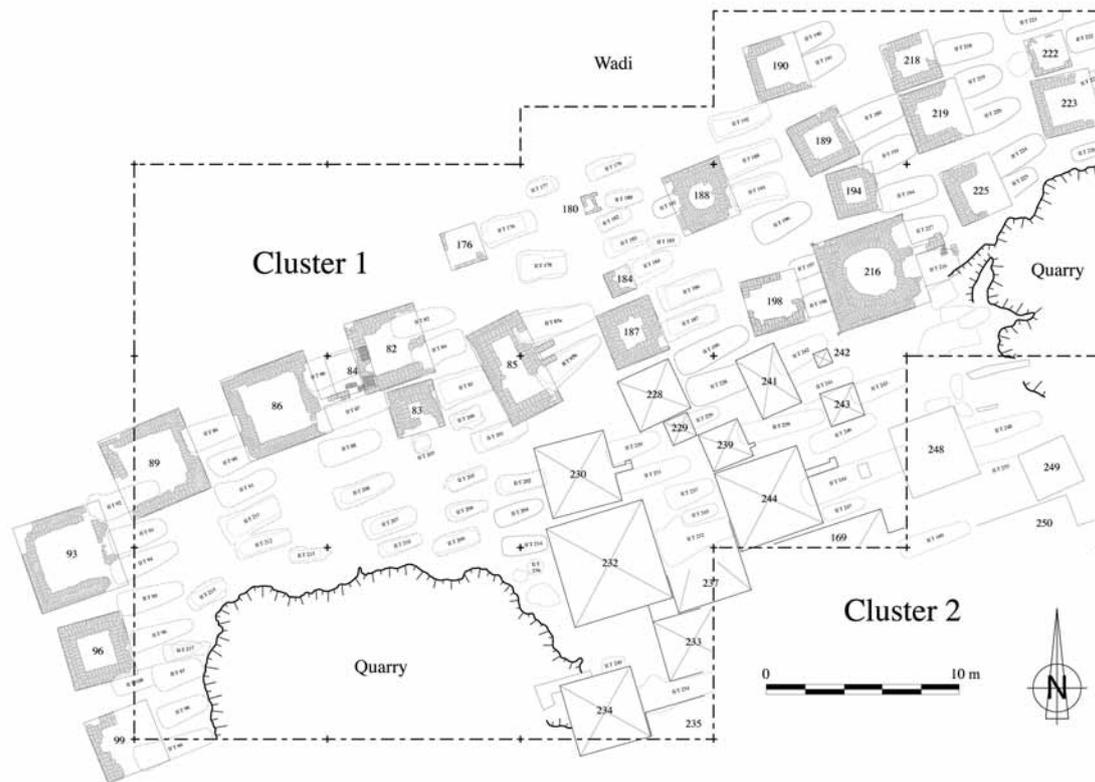
Figure 2. Plan of the excavation in Sector II during campaign 2011 (scale 1:400).

century AD,[6] the patron pyramids were built in pinkish or greyish mud bricks in Cluster 1 and 2. The earliest satellite monuments were erected around them. The second stage can also be dated to the 1st century AD thanks to the discovery of a typical ceramic bottle in II T 219. At this time, Cluster 2 was extended northwards in the direction of the *wadi*. Cluster 1 probably followed the same development, resulting in two parallel rows of superstructures. All the monuments are now built in grey mud bricks. During the third stage, dated to the 2nd and 3rd century AD, based on the palaeography of the stelae and offering-tables, Cluster 1 was extended eastward along the *wadi* and met the northern extension of Cluster 2. In both clusters, many tombs were reused and new pyramids were built in the available space. The final stage, from the end of the 3rd century until the beginning of the 4th century AD, is marked by systematic reuse of most of the ancient tombs and the building of coarse superstructures, often laid without foundation on the ruins of earlier monuments.

In the meantime, the rest of the numerous graves discovered last year (II T 181, 188-191, 193, 194, 196, 199, 204, 214, 216, 218-220, 224, 225, 227, 228) and several of the new tombs found during this campaign (II T 237, 240, 242, 246) were excavated. Once again, the tomb robbers did not leave much material and no complete skeletons. The only intact burial was a child's tomb (II T 240) dug under the northern side of Pyramid 240. It contained only the bones

of a 3 to 6 month old baby, included in the remains of an 800mm long coffin carved from the trunk of a dom palm-tree, cut along its length into two pieces and tied with a rope after the body was inserted into it. In II T 191, one of the twin tombs associated with Pyramid 190 and belonging to the northernmost extension of Cluster 2, large coloured conical clay beads were found associated with a considerable number (1597 in all) of Nile spiral shells (*Lymnaeidae*), scattered around the blocking system of the funerary chamber. After cleaning and reassembling on a modern thread, a heavy double length necklace could be reconstructed, although it is uncertain if the beads originally belonged to a single piece of jewellery (Plate 3). In II T 219, a neighbouring tomb, which contained the remains of two very tall individuals, a nearly complete fineware bottle was found. It is decorated with a frieze of unidentified elements, though attested elsewhere, resembling double axes and separated by small stars (Plate 4). This decoration and the shape of the bottle point to the 1st century AD for its date of manufacture. It was accompanied by a white fineware bowl that imitates a bronze vessel and can be ascribed to the same period. This bowl was broken but could be nearly reconstructed in its entirety. Although the items were not found *in situ* but in the descendary, there is no doubt they belonged to the initial burial in the tomb. In addition, many potsherds of handmade ceramics from the same period were found scattered in the vicinity.[7] In II T 220, the other tomb connected with II T 219, a copper-

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[6] On the basis of a black "African" ware jar found in the tomb connected with the patron pyramid No. 134, a date in the 2nd/1st century BC can be suggested for the beginning of Cluster 1.

[7] All these details are drawn from the field report of our ceramologist, Romain David.

Plate 3. Long necklace made of coloured clay beads and Nile shells from tomb II T 191.

Plate 5. Tomb II T 220 with a copper-alloy bowl in situ.

Plate 4. Classic Meroitic bottle from tomb II T 219.

alloy bowl was found *in situ* (Plate 5). It looks very similar to the copper-alloy bowls found by the previous team in the northern extension of Cluster 1 but the original decoration will be visible only after restoration.

Sondage north of the Temple

Upon our arrival on the site, we were told that an agricultural machine had unearthed architectural elements some 200m

north of the Temple of Tiye, mostly remains of mud bricks and sandstone blocks. One of the main archaeological issues at Sedeinga is the complete lack of any settlement remains. The destruction of the temple is obviously due to exceptional floods in the two *wadis* that come from the mountain across the necropolis. Architectural elements of this temple and of a chapel built by Taharqo have been reused in some Meroitic tombs.[8] The Egyptian and Kushite religious compound was, therefore, ruined by that time. In Sector II, pyramids were erected along the bank of the northern wadi. This area would not have been used if the catastrophe was still fresh in the minds of the Meroites. The catastrophe presumably occurred in early Napatan times and might have also destroyed the early settlement. However, we could not find any traces of a second event of this magnitude in the Meroitic cemetery. The *wadis* remained moderately active until the present, as shown by higher seepage in graves located in the bank area, but cannot be responsible for the destruction of the Meroitic settlement.

The 5 x 5m square sondage dug north of the temple did not offer much hope for finding this settlement. Among the sandstone elements, four parts of a broken lintel engraved with the image of a winged sundisc were recovered (Plate 6). The lintel is clearly Meroitic and was too large for a funerary chapel. It might have belonged to a sanctuary, possibly of the Isis temple whose priestesses are frequently mentioned in the Meroitic texts found in the cemetery. But this material and some traces of red and mud bricks were

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[8] A stela showing Amenhotep III in front of Amun was found reused as blocking device in tomb II T 77. The two blocks representing King Taharqo, found by Michela Schiff Giorgini's team in W T 1 (which had been interpreted at the time as the king's real grave), come from a chapel which comprised also columns, later reused in the Nilwa church, and probably two inscribed blocks that are kept in our excavation stores.

Plate 6. Left part of Meroitic lintel with engraved winged sun, found north of the temple of Tiye.

Plate 7. The descendary and doorway blocking of tomb II T 238.

nothing more than refuse, thrown into several round pits used as dumps. As the bottom of these pits is now only a few centimetres under the current surface, it is clear that the ancient deposits have been completely erased over the course of time. Centuries of agricultural activities to the north and the south of the temple, much likelier than natural events, are probably the cause of this destruction. It is impossible for now to confirm that the Meroitic settlement was actually in this place and no significant remains have ever been unearthed farther away, in the neighbouring villages of Nilwa and Qubbat Selim.

Sondage in the eastern part of Sector II

Another puzzling issue of the site is the location of the New Kingdom Egyptian tombs. Contrary to Soleb, where they were dug some 800m west of the temple (Schiff Giorgini 1971, 79-340), they have never been discovered in Sedeinga. During the last campaign, a general foot survey of the necropolis, focussing on the architectural remains and the potsherds scattered on the surface, was conducted (Rilly and Francigny 2011, 72). An area with large quantities of Egyptian ware was spotted in the eastern part of Sector II, facing the temple. Several slabs of schist, lying on the surface, were reminiscent of the Egyptian graves in Soleb and Sai Island, where such slabs were used to cover the shafts opening under the chapels or, inside the grave, the access to the funerary chambers.

The sondage zone was chosen around one of the largest schist slabs. A 10 x 10m square (290/260) was rapidly cleared as the sediment layer was shallow, probably because of wind erosion. A series of three small pits appeared, together with five more or less rectangular structures. The pits once again were nothing but rubbish pits, but the rectangular structures resembled the descendaries of graves. The largest, on the western part of the sondage, was opened and revealed a flight of seven stairs, finely cut in the hard soil (Plate 7). The skeleton of a small dog was discovered in the intact filling

of the descendary, buried in front of the door. A fine head from a double ba-statue, with traces of bright paint, was also found in the descendary (Plate 8). Its small size and its style are typical of the early Meroitic period. The door was a massive slab of schist (1.7 x 0.8m), still standing *in situ*.

Plate 8. Fragment of a polychrome double ba-statue found in the descendary of II T 238.

These tantalising beginnings gave way to disappointment when we realised that the grave had been plundered by a hole dug in the ceiling, which was not visible at first glance because it was located outside the excavation area. The tomb (II T 238) comprises two chambers, oriented east/west on the same axis as the descendary. The first room is approximately 4m square and 2m high and was full of sand and sediment. It was very carefully cut in the rock with an approximately square plan and a vaulted ceiling, which collapsed onto the

floor after plunderers dug a hole to enter the tomb from the top. The chamber comprises two benches whose function remains unclear, as they seem too high for storage purposes. At the foot of the western wall, an oblong aperture gave access to the second room, of smaller size, which is 1m below the floor level of the first chamber. The structure of grave II T 238 differs obviously from the Egyptian tombs discov-

Plate 9. A small bottle of late date,
probably Post-Meroitic or Christian.

ered in the neighbouring sites at Soleb or Sai Island, which comprise a deep shaft giving access to the chambers, but is clearly Napatan and has architectural parallels in Sector I at Sedeinga. The scanty material discovered in the grave covers different periods (Plate 9), as the tomb has been reused many times before the hole in the ceiling appeared, and the first chamber was used as a dump, as shown for example by the presence of cooking-pots from the Christian period. However, two stone scarabs (Plate 10) might belong to the original Napatan burial. No less than seven skeletons were found in the tomb, sealed by the collapse of the ceiling. Five individuals were laid in the large chamber, and two were dragged out of the second room by tomb raiders. After the last burials, the doorway was secured with a large schist slab and the dog was buried in front of it.

This discovery, even if of great historical interest for the

Plate 10. Napatan steatite scarab found in the first chamber of tomb II T 238.

knowledge of the successive periods of the necropolis, did not advance our quest for the Egyptian graves. A further sondage is planned in the vicinity for the next season.

Epigraphic study

Two inscribed funerary monuments were found during the last season in Sector II of the Meroitic necropolis, an offering table and a stela. Unfortunately, neither was found in its original archaeological context. Thanks to their palaeography, they can be ascribed to the 2nd century AD, a period which was apparently the heyday of the production of funerary texts in Sedeinga.

Offering Table II S 044 (Figure 3, Plate 11)

This offering table was found by chance by Ms Sandra Porez in the remains of a late pyramid (II 161) built without foundations upon the remains of the chapel of Pyramid II 136. As she cleaned the environs of this pyramid for drawing the structures, she saw the apex of the offering table, jutting out of the debris, which had escaped the excavations of this part of the cemetery by the previous team in the 1990s. The offering table was carved in a block of yellowish sandstone. It measures 432 x 345mm. It is complete but has been badly

Plate 11. Offering table II S 044.

eroded by wind-blown sand and rain. In addition, a large crack in the upper right corner has erased two signs at the top of the stela. The inscription runs from left to right in large signs with wide intervals on a broad band. The apex is located at the bottom of the table. The central scene includes a goddess, presumably Isis,[9] on the left side, and Anubis on

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[9] The three-tiered crown on the head of the goddess, which also appears in REM 0278 in Karanog, may be a Meroitic reinterpretation of Isis' traditional seat-sign. Another offering table from Sedeinga (REM
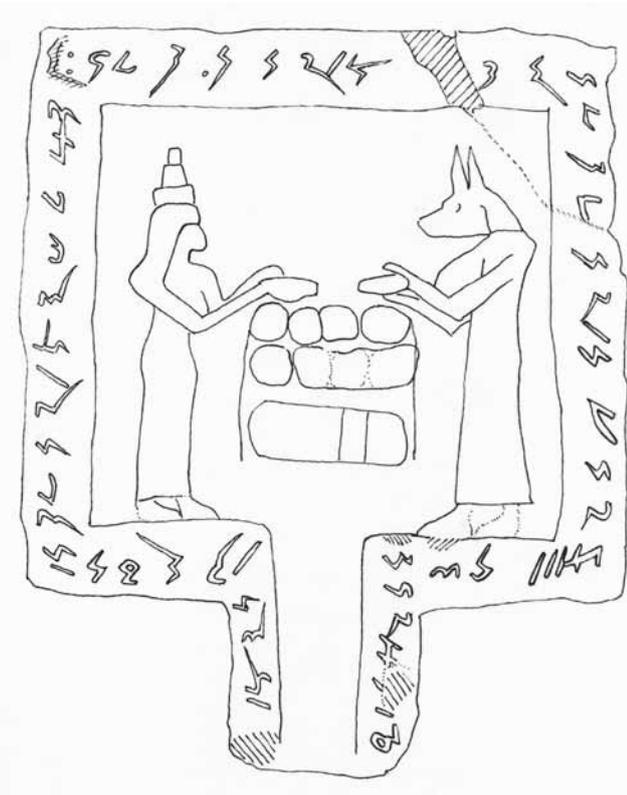
Figure 3. Offering table II S 044 (facsimile).

the right side, both wrapped in garments extending to their feet, performing a libation from small jugs upon an altar covered with eight bread loaves. Directly under the altar, an oval basin with two miniature stairs imitates the sacred ponds of the temples.

Transliteration[10]

    (1) *wo⌈s⌉i as[o]*

1092) features Nephthys with her correct Egyptian emblem.

[10] After years of hesitation, we have decided to abandon the traditional transliteration with diacritic signs. It was admittedly a part of our Egyptological legacy but had no practical justification, since there are fewer Meroitic signs than Latin letters, and it inevitably resulted in misprinting in publications, whatever care is brought both by editors and publishers in using the right fonts in the right place. The transliteration which is introduced here has been first used in the forthcoming volume of the Cambridge University Press (Rilly and de Voogt forth.). The last publications of our colleagues Nick Millet (2003; 2005) and Jochen Hallof (2011, 15) have paved the way for this change. Here, as in Millet's last articles, *x* replaces *ḫ* and *h* replaces *ẖ*. These two transliterations are not accurate renderings of the Meroitic sounds because the former consonant was most certainly the voiced velar stop transcribed [ɣ] in IPA and the latter was the same consonant with an added velar appendix [ɣʷ]. They together offer the advantage of simplicity and typographic convenience. Note that *g*, which was suggested by Hintze in his late articles for *ẖ*, would be acceptable too: the Dutch value of this letter, for instance, is also [ɣ]. However, it is not impossible that [g], which in early Meroitic became [ɣ] by spirantisation, found its way again in to the Meroitic consonant system as the voiced realisation of single /k/ in internal position (intervocalic or after liquid, cf. Arkamani /Gr. *Ergamenes* and possibly Natakamani / Eg. *Ntg-Jmn*).

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    (2) *reyi*
    (3) *ablo atomxe*
    (4) *ps[oh]te atmxe:p*
    (5) *sixrkte axmlo*
    (6) *lwpho*
    (7) *lkte*

Palaeography

Neither the text nor the figures are masterpieces of Meroitic art, even if the offering table has suffered from exposure to rain and wind. The inscription and the figures were carelessly engraved. The scribe for example was content with a single separator (end of line 4) throughout the text. Poor workmanship is more often than not the hallmark of late periods. However, a closer look at the original forms of the signs reveals that the text is not late, but rather fits in with the transitional C palaeographic period, included between the beginning of the 2nd century and the first decades of the 3rd century AD. The long characteristic oblique tails of late signs are missing here, the *te*-signs still display a full three-stroke "cedilla", the upper stroke of the *x*-signs is still more or less upright. To these palaeographic means of dating an orthographic one can be added, namely the verbal endings in *-kte*, which are more frequent before the beginning of the 3rd century and later shifted to *-kete*. All these elements point towards a date in the 2nd century for the offering table. It is, therefore, earlier than the remains of the late pyramid (II 161) where it was found, but probably two centuries later than Pyramid II 136 on which the late monument was erected.

Syntactic groups

    Initial invocation: *¹Wos-i As[o]²r-eyi*
    Nomination: *³Ab-l-o*
    Offering formula A: *ato mxe ⁴ps[oh]-te*
    Offering formula B: *at mxe: p⁵si-xr-kte*
    Offering formula C': *ax-mlo-⁶l-w p-ho⁷l-kte*

Translation

    Oh Isis! Oh Osiris!
    It is Aba-la.
    Make her drink plentiful water;
    Make her eat plentiful bread;
    Make her be served a good meal.

Comments

There is no mention of the parents: the maternal and paternal nominations are absent. The text includes some early features such as *Asoreyi* instead of *Soreyi* "oh Osiris!". The absence of extended invocation is known in the early funerary inscriptions from Sedeinga (REM 1092) but also in REM 1240 (II T s2). The text displays many rare particularities. The added *a-* at the beginning of *x-mlo-l* ("a good meal") is attested only here and in REM 1240.[11] The directive case-ending *-w* is generally written out in royal funerary texts from Meroe (formula C') but rarely in private epitaphs apart from some

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[11] REM 0049, an archaic stela from Meroe, has *amlol*, but this is clearly a mistake.

instances in Karanog (REM 0276), Shablul (REM 0383) and Sedeinga (II T 215 s1, perhaps also REM 1240). Finally the alternative spelling *mxe* is used for *mhe* "plentiful" (also in REM 1240). This list shows many common points between this inscription and REM 1240, an offering-table found on the surface in 1994 (Leclant and Clerc 1996, 339) in the "core of Sector II". REM 1240 also includes the figures of a goddess and Anubis around an altar, similarly placed upon an oval pound in which stairs have also been carved. This layout is a variant of Hofmann's Type 11g, not chronologically significant as the examples range from the 1st century BC to the 3rd century AD.

The name of the deceased, Aba-la, including the article *-l* = /la/, is a nickname rather than a birth-name. The comparison with other Northern East Sudanic languages suggests a plausible translation as "the Grand-mother": Proto-NES *ab-ɔn, Proto-Nubian aba(n).[12] Moreover, this designation confirms an important point of Meroitic onomastics: many names are not birth-names, but secondary names given later to the individuals in the course of their lives. Surprisingly, these secondary names gained an official status, such as to replace the birth-names in funerary texts. A man of Sai Island is for example named *Br lh-l* "the Chief" (lit. "the big man") in REM 1273. In this respect, these secondary names can hardly be termed "nick-names". We do not know if the original birth-names were used again.

Funerary Stela II S 055 (Figure 4, Plate 12)

<u>Description</u>
This small stela (length: 321mm, width: 194mm) was found in square 220/130, outside any funerary context, close to the eastern sand quarry, south of Pyramid II 216. It is made of yellowish sandstone and comprises 13 lines of finely engraved cursive Meroitic. The top is slightly rounded but does not include any decorated lunette. The stone has been badly eroded on the right side between lines 2 and 9, so that the names of the deceased and his/her mother and father unfortunately have almost totally disappeared.

<u>Transliteration</u>
(1) *wos: qet⌐ne⌐yi*
(2) *ne[qeli: so]ri*
(3) *[qetrri: a]mero*
(4) *[c. 8]wi: yi*
(5) *[c. 8]⌐te⌐rike*
(6) *[lo][ca. 4]itedxe*
(7) *[lo][ca. 2]e[ca. 1]⌐o⌐se atie*

[12] Better than *awo and *awa (?) given respectively in Rilly 2010: 462. The recent publication of Kaargedi (Shalkota) vocabulary, a dialectal form of Midob, in which "grand-mother" is *àbà* (Mohamed Jalal Hashim and A. Hamid Mugaddam 2012), has caused some marginal revisions in my reconstructions of Proto-Nubian and Proto-NES, including this one. Note that this might also have been already the name of Taharqo's mother, generally transcribed Abar or Abalo. Her name is not attested earlier than her son's reign, which might already have started as she was over 50 years old. See Lohwasser 2001, 141-142.
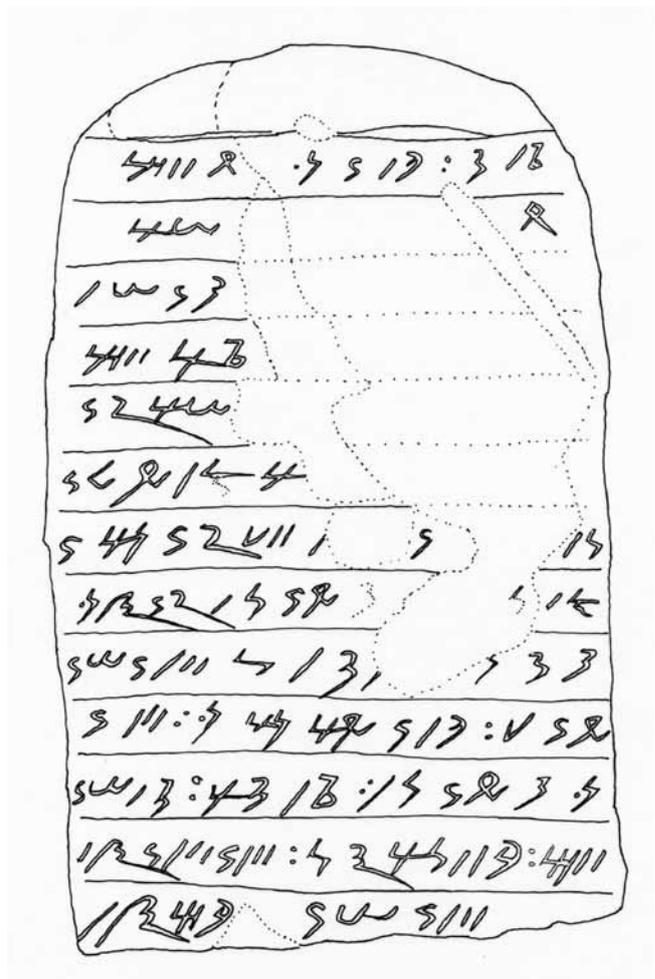
Figure 4. Stela II S 055 (facsimile).

(8) *te⌐l⌐[yetm]delo ant*
(9) *ms⌐t⌐[s]⌐d⌐hotoyere*
(10) *deb: qeditit: ye*
(11) *tmdelo: wosi: sore*
(12) *yi: qolikl: yeyeno*
(13) *yereqino*

<u>Palaeography</u>
The slab was originally not perfectly carved from the sandstone block, as a large flake, detached at the bottom, compelled the scribe to space the letters of the last line. However, the text was carefully designed. The signs are broad and high, filling all the available space between the guide-lines, and are finely engraved. Though there are some archaizing forms (for instance *q* in lines 12 and 13, *d* in line 11) mixed with later forms, the script fits generally with the Transitional C period, and more precisely around the end of the 2nd century or the beginning of the 3rd century AD.

<u>Syntactic groups</u>
Initial invocation (extended): [1]*Wos: qet⌐ne⌐yi*[2]*ne[qe-li: So]ri*[3] *[qetrr-i:]*

Nomination: *[a]mero* [4]*[c. 8]wi:*
Paternal filiation: *Yi*[5]*[c. 8] ⌐t-e⌐rike*[6]*[-l-o]*
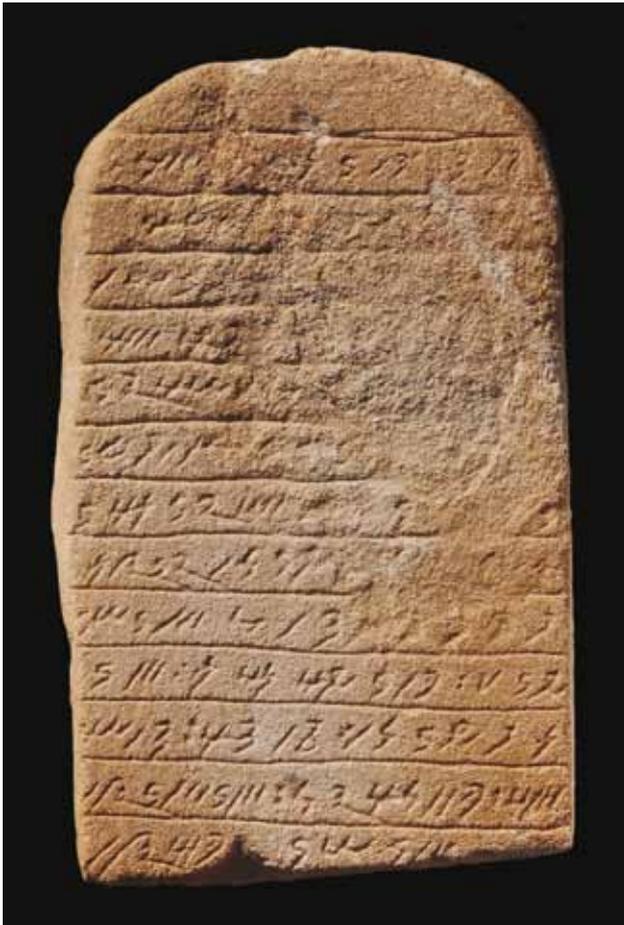
Plate 12. Stela II S 055.

Maternal filiation: [*c.* 4]*i te-dxe*[7][*-l-o*]
Relative description 1: [*ml*]*e*[*y*]⌐*o*⌐*se Ati*<*y*>*e*[8]*-te*⌐*-l*⌐
　　　　　　　　　[*yetm*]*de-l-o*
Relative description 2: *ant* [9]*Ms*⌐*se-l*⌐ [*s*]⌐*d*⌐*hose-l-o*
Relative description 3: *yere*[10]*deb: qedise-li-se-l:*
　　　　　　　　　ye[11]*tmde-l-o:*
Final invocation: *Wos-i: Sor-e*[12]*yi:*
Benediction formula (?) 1: *qoli kl: ye-ye-no*
Benediction formula (?) 2: [13]*y-ereqi-no*

Translation

Oh Isis, the *qetneyineqe*! Oh Osiris, the *qetrr!*
This is the *amero* […].
He was the child begotten by Yi[…],
he was the child born of […]i.
He was the nephew of a *mleyose* in Sedeinga;
he was the *sdhose* of a priest of Masha;
he was the nephew of a *yeredeb* of Aqedis;
Oh Isis! Oh Osiris!
[???]

Comments

The text starts with the extended invocation which is usual in Sedeinga probably from the second half of the 2nd century AD. The final invocation in lines 11-12 is, also as usual, a simple one, without the obscure epithets that follow the names

of the deities in the opening part. The name of the deceased, which unfortunately was located in the damaged part of the stela, is lost. From the nomination, only the beginning, [.] *mero*, and the last syllable of the predicative *qowi* ("this is") are preserved. Considering the number of missing signs, it is probable that a title was introduced before the noun and that this title was *amero*, attested in texts from Karanog (REM 0324), Nag Gamus (REM 1075, 1076, 1078), Qasr Ibrim (REM 1202 (?), 1322). This might be a priestly title since it is connected in several instances with the cult of Amanap. The deceased was very likely a male since there is no example of this title associated with a woman. However, he does not bear any other title by contrast with his colleagues from Nag Gamus. He might have died at the beginning of his *cursus honorum*. The specification of the title within the nomination is known in rare instances from Karanog and Faras. It is attested here for the first time in Sedeinga. The titles of the deceased are usually mentioned in separate sentences after the filiation.

The names of the father and mother are also lost, reduced to the first syllable *Yi-* for the father and the last vowel, *i*, for the mother. The father's name is given first, this order being the most frequent in Sedeinga (69% vs 17% in the complete Meroitic corpus of funerary texts).

The description comprises exclusively the relatives of the deceased: he was the "nephew" (actually a younger member in the maternal lineage) of a *mleyose* in *Atiye* (Sedeinga), this place-name being oddly written *Atie* with an archaizing spelling (Rilly 2007, 292, 306). The title, reduced to a few letters, is however certain. Its meaning is unclear. It is derived from *mlo* "good, beautiful" to which a common suffix *-(y)ose*, originally an adjectival converter, is added (Rilly 2007, 295). In a stela from Karanog (REM 0241), the word occurs after another title, *ssimete*, as if it were an adjective and is followed by the genitive *Mnpte-se-l* "of Amanap". From this single instance, it has been suggested that it was a religious dignity. The title was not yet attested in the texts found in Sedeinga, but several individuals described as *mleyose Atiye-te*, "*mleyose* in *Atiye*", are mentioned in three inscriptions from Faras (REM 0129/16, 0504/3) and Karanog (REM 0256/7-8). Two of these texts are particularly significant for the study of the present stela. The stela REM 0256 belonged to a man called Qoretakara[13] who was not only the "nephew" of a *mleyose* in *Atiye* but bore himself the title of *ant Ms-se* "priest of Masha", a honorific which is also attached to one of the relatives of the deceased from Sedeinga. The stela REM 0504 commemorates a person called Dokhatelito who was the "nephew" or "niece" of several *mleyose* in *Atiye* and of a priest (*trtekese*) named *Atiyxr*, probably "the son of Atiye".[14] In addition, the deceased

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[13] This name includes the phrase *qore Tk* "King Taka", followed by the anthroponymic element -*r* (/ara/ = "male child"). It is reminiscent of the title *semte qore-tk-se*, perhaps "*semte*-priestess of King Taka", which appears in the description of a woman of Sedeinga in her inscribed lintel found in Sector II of our site (REM 1281). "King Taka" could be Taharqo, who built a temple in Sedeinga or, with less likelihood, king Takideamani. See Rilly and Francigny 2011, 78.

[14] Compare with personal names such as Napatadakheto (King Takidea-

probably originated from Sedeinga because he/she is called *mlomrse Atiye-te* "good person of the city (?) in *Atiye*". These two stelae can also be ascribed to the 2nd century AD from their palaeography.

The second descriptive clause connects the deceased with a priest of Masha, the mysterious Sun-God[15] known only by the mention of his priests in some 20 funerary inscriptions from Lower Nubia (Karanog, Shablul, Gebel Adda). This is the first time this god's name appears in Sedeinga, where the main deity was Isis. The link between the Sedeinga stela and REM 0256 from Karanog, where a man is described as "priest of Masha", has been stated above. The kinship term *sdhose* that connects the deceased with this priest of Masha is of uncertain meaning. It is attested only in Sedeinga, in 1061/3 and 1234/8, two stelae commemorating also male individuals. The word probably contains the stem *dxe* (becoming *dh* before the rounded vowel *o* of the same suffix *-(y)ose* as in *mleyose*), whose meaning is "to give birth", and describes a family relation between two males, maybe "uterine brother" or the like.

The third descriptive clause is again a *yetmde* relation ("nephew" in a broad sense) with an individual whose function is expressed by the compound *yeredeb qeditit*, which can be reconstructed according to Griffith's law as *yeredeb qedise-li-se-l* "a *yeredeb* of the *Qedise*". *Aqedise*, later spelt *Qedise*, "Aqedis", is a god well known by his figure on the wall of Apedemak's temple in Naqa, where he is depicted with the same features as his Egyptian counterpart, the lunar god Khons. In the texts from the Amun temple in the same site, *Aqedise* is by contrast an epithet of Amannote, Amun of Thebes. It is not a real name, but a noun which is generally followed by the article *-l(i)*, as is the case in the Sedeinga stela. The meaning is probably "the shiny one",[16] a designation of the moon in many languages. This is the first clear mention of a specific priesthood of Aqedis. In the only other instance from REM 0230 (Karanog), the title followed by the same genitive *qeditit* (*qedise-li-se-l*) is illegible. The title in the stela from Sedeinga is *yeredeb*, once again a very rare noun, which is attested elsewhere only in REM 0088. In this late inscription from Mediq, the title occurs twice and is specified not by a god-name, but by *qorpse* (< *qore-leb-se*) "of the kings". In the first occurrence, it follows another title, *pelmos ato-li-se,* "strategus of the water", for which a priestly (and not military) function has been suggested. The examples from Mediq and Sedeinga are too different to shed any light on the meaning of the title *yeredeb*.

The most unexpected feature of this stela is the replacement of the traditional final offering formulae by two obscure

clauses of which there are no instances anywhere else: *qoli kl: ye-ye-no y-ereqi-no*. The two words ending with *-no* are obviously verbal forms. This suffix is known in a frequent sequence *y-dx-no* (early form *dx-no*) that occurs in pilgrims' graffiti in the temple of Amun in Kawa and in the Great Enclosure in Musawwarat. In these graffiti, the verb follows the god's name (Amanap or Apedemak) and conveys, therefore, an expression of worship. The only complete (but short) graffito of the kind reads: *Amneptete dx-no* (REM 0664), without any mention of the pilgrim's name, so that the translation might be something like "may Amun-of-Napata be praised", rather than "I praise Amun-of-Napata". The same suffix also occurs in REM 0075, an early text inscribed on the back of a statue of Isis, where the name of the goddess is followed by a noun and a verbal form *eqe-tx-no*. In this last compound, the stem *tx* is a verb that occurs in the benediction formulae D, G and J of the funerary inscriptions, where the god is requested to provide the deceased with "a large meal" or with "offerings". In these two occurrences, pious graffiti or prayer to Isis, an optative meaning and a passive voice are probable. This tenuous piece of evidence tends to suggest that, in the Sedeinga stela, we are also dealing with prayers to the gods. The two clauses could, therefore, be an unusual version of the traditional final formulae inviting Isis and Osiris to supply the dead with water and food. The first element, *qoli*, is a demonstrative pronoun meaning "this one", which probably refers to the deceased. The second element *kl* is not separated from *qoli* by a word-divider, so that it could be an unknown postposition. However, other examples of missing word-dividers can be found in this stela. If this is the case here, *kl* could be the object of the verb. It is tempting to link this word, pronounced /kala/, with Nara *kalo* and Proto-Nubian *kal (Dongolawi *kal*, Kordofan Nubian *kàl*, Birgid *kallì*) "food, porridge".[17] The verbal form that follows, *ye-ye-no* or *y-eye-no*, is built on a very short stem *ye-* or *eye-* which is reminiscent of Nara *aî-,* Nobiin *àày-* and Mararit *eini / ei*, "to make", which verb can be also used for the preparation of food. A tentative translation of the first clause, *qoli kl: ye-ye-no*, could, therefore, be "may food be prepared for this one" (lit. "may this one be prepared food"). This would be a "light" version of the traditional funerary formula C ("Have a good meal served to him / her"), but more lexical parallels in Meroitic texts are required to ascertain the translation and to confirm the evidence from related languages.

The second and final clause is reduced to the verbal form *y-ereqi-no*. It is built on the same morphological pattern as the former one. The subject is almost certainly the same *qoli* "this one" of the first clause. The verb is probably the same

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mani's mother), which means "Napata has born her" (REM 0060).

[15] For a linguistic confirmation of this hypothesis already suggested by Griffith, see Rilly 2010, 371-372. For possible depictions of this god, see Breyer 2005.

[16] The term, pronounced with a retroflex [ɖ] which is a frequent reflex of Proto-Northern East Sudanic *r, has cognates not only in languages closely related to Meroitic (Proto-Tama *agit "moon" < Proto-NES *agur-ti "glowing thing", hence also "embers", see Rilly 2010, 430), but also in Nilotic languages (branch of Eastern Sudanic) in which the stem is used for the sun (Dinka *akɔl*, Turkana *akolong*).

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[17] In spite of chance resemblance with Arabic *akil* "food", the word is a genuine Northern East Sudanic stem. It is chiefly used for the traditional porridge made of sorghum. Another Meroitic word for "food", *xre*, is attested in funerary formula B and C (Rilly 2010, 68-71) but it plausibly means "meal" and is probably connected with hard food such as meat or bread. Many African languages have two different verbs for "eating hard food" and "eating soft food".

as that in REM 0094, where King Kharamadoye is described as *Mni-tke* "beloved of Amun" and *mk-leb yereqe* "whom the gods ???". Millet suggested "to exalt" because of a possible common stem with *yireqe* "south" (Millet 1973, 40 and pl. 1). However, the semantic connection was rather weak and he later abandoned the idea (Millet 2003, 60). No translation can be advanced so far, but this verb obviously conveys the benevolence of the gods towards the king and, in the Sedeinga text, towards the deceased.

Though disconnected from any definite archaeological context, the epigraphic harvest of this season is significant. Both inscriptions can be placed in the 2nd century AD, at a time when this part of Sector II was fast developing. The offering table found in the debris of Pyramid II 161 yields interesting information about Meroitic onomastics. The small stela found south of Pyramid II 216 bears witness to the links between the elite of Sedeinga and the officials of Karanog and Faras. It confirms the importance of the cult of the god Masha in Nubia and includes the first clear mention of a priesthood specific to the god Aqedise. The unprecedented final formulae show once again that the Meroites displayed flexibility and inventiveness in religious matters by contrast with the rigid formulae used by the Egyptians.

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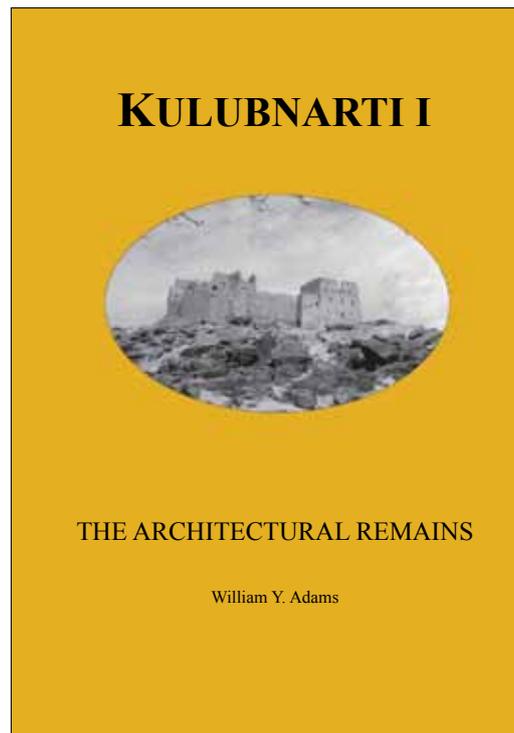
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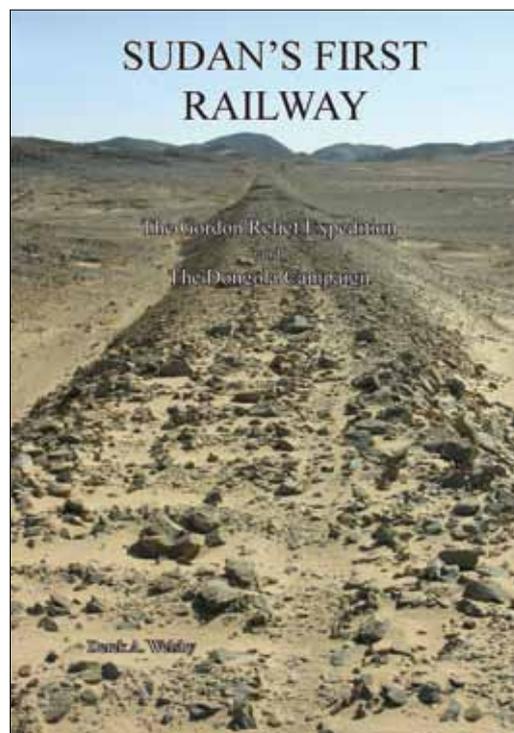
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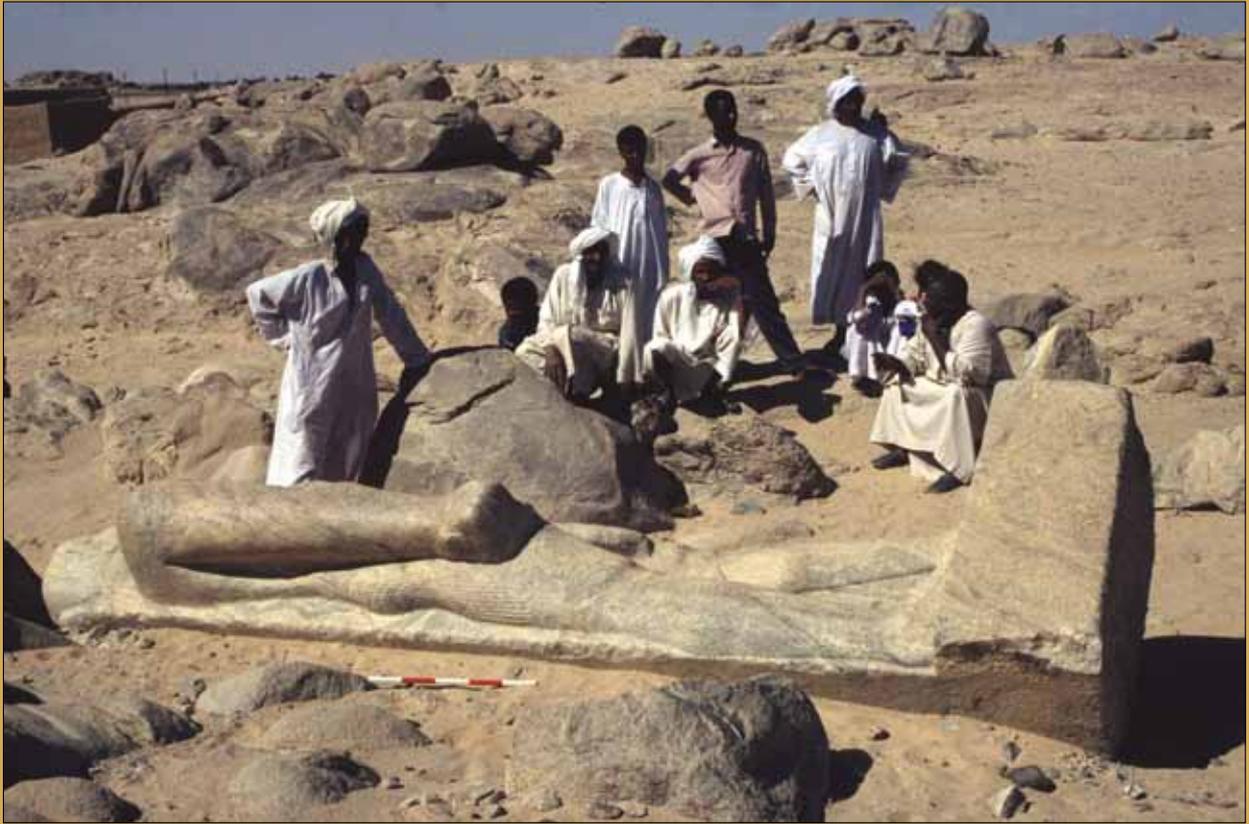
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