

K E R M A

2013-2014 and 2014-2015

SOUDAN

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Cover figure : The "grave of the archer" found in the cemetery of Kerma by Charles
Bonnet in 1982 and reconstructed for the exhibition "Aux origines des pharaons noirs,
10'000 ans d'archéologie en Nubie" held at the Laténium Museum (2014-2015).

Photo: Laténium, Marc Julliard

Since 2014, the Swiss Archaeological Mission at Kerma benefits – for a period of four years – from financial assistance granted by the Qatar Sudan Archaeological Project (QSAP). While the excavations and the post-excavation research are funded by other sources, the QSAP activities of the Swiss Archaeological Mission are implemented at the following three levels: protection of archaeological sites, development of visitor facilities and final installations at the Kerma Museum.

Protection of the archaeological sites within the concession area

Kerma is one of the most important archaeological sites of the Nile Valley. Under excavation by Swiss experts for more than forty years, it has revealed exceptional archaeological remains, monumental temples and vast necropolises buried in the ruins of ancient cities. The remains of three consecutive ancient towns (the Pre-Kerma agglomeration; the ancient town of Kerma, capital of the first Kingdom of Kush and the Egyptian town of Pnubs on the site of Dukki Gel), within a perimeter of no more than five miles, document a highly sophisticated civilization and demonstrate the continuous evolution of the first African urban centre over three millennia.

The Swiss Mission has made huge efforts to protect and conserve these archaeological remains, and to date two of the main sites of the area – the site of the ancient capital of Kerma and the site at Dukki Gel – are well protected against the trespass of vehicles as well as against the extension of agricultural lands. However, this is not yet the case for the site of the royal cemetery, which is one of the most important necropolises of the Sudan. It covers 70 hectares and contains an estimated 50'000 graves. In 1945, Anthony J. Arkell – then Commissioner for Archaeology and Anthropology in the Sudan – evaluated the possibility of erecting barbed wire fencing around the site, but due to war-time budget constraints this was never realized.

In 2009, the growth of motorized traffic and the development of irrigation with the consequent agricultural intensification in the area of the royal cemetery, led us to decide on the protection of the cemetery by the erection of earthen barriers and by sections of a low wall in *galous* (rammed earth). While the earthen barriers erected by tractors proved not to be lasting, the rammed-earth walls are simple to construct and very durable; they are at the same time real and symbolic barriers as the means of exercising territorial control over the archaeological areas protected by federal decree. The funding from the QSAP project now permits the acceleration of this enterprise and the completion of the enclosure wall over the next three years. However, it must be stressed that traditional earthen architectural techniques require regular and ongoing maintenance and there lies the challenge for the future.

Figure 39 / Construction of the enclosing wall by Awadalla Khalifa Osman and his team. Kerma, royal cemetery.



The main focus of the 2014–15 campaign was on the construction of new sectors of the enclosure wall at the northern and eastern limits of the royal cemetery (figure 39). This work included the construction of 430m in the north-western sector, 550m in the north-eastern sector and 890m in the south-eastern sector. For this purpose it was necessary to transport large amounts of earth and sand to the site as well as providing the water needed for the construction work. Two separate teams consisting of four members each undertook the construction work. We wish to express our deepest gratitude to them and at the same time pay tribute to their skill and dedication.

It proved necessary to refurbish the roads next to some of the newly built sectors of the enclosure wall in order to grant farmers access to their fields (figure 40). Finally, we also decided to manufacture almost 100 cement posts and place them in order to signal and delimit the protected perimeter of the necropolis, as well as to impede the adjacent landowners from expanding their fields onto the cemetery. Even though we are investing a great amount of time and effort to explain and defend our approach, we are aware of the necessity of further raising the awareness among the local population of the importance of the eastern necropolis as a critical element of Nubian heritage. The NCAM inspector assigned to the Swiss Mission, Abdelmajed Mahmoud, has assisted and supported our operations with great dedication and expertise. We would like to take this opportunity to express our sincere thanks for his continuous support and cooperation.

The upcoming campaigns will ensure the careful continuation of the works on the enclosure wall. Additionally, we plan to restore the foundations of the Pre-Kerma agglomeration (dated to the 3 millennium BC), which is the most ancient fortified settlement of the Nile valley. Here, our focus is on the exemplary reconstruction of selected elements of the defensive system and of the habitat. The architecture follows a Sub-Saharan tradition which includes a series of palisades and buttresses made of posts and lumps of rammed earth, erected either in a circular arc or as parallel rows around the habitation huts, animal pens and storage pits. The main challenge is to give the visitors a vision of the past in strict accordance with the archaeological evidence.

Development of visitor facilities at the archaeological sites

Possessing the first examples of African monumental architecture, the region of Kerma offers a variety of archaeological attractions for visitors to explore. It is therefore a major concern of the Swiss Mission to enhance the visitor experience and to increase the general awareness of the archaeological remains. On the other hand, it is important to take into account the impact of archaeological tourism on the sites and on the natural environment in which they are located.

As in previous years, we have devoted much effort to the upkeep of excavation sites and of the monuments. Apart from the measures referred to above, this included clearing the sites of plant growth and the collection of plastic waste. In collaboration with the NCAM inspector we have installed a number of signposts to demarcate the borders and billboards bearing basic information on the sites. Within the scope of the QSAP project we plan to publish a booklet on the archaeology of the region of Kerma, providing additional background information on the history and setting of the archaeological sites.

Also included in the scope of the QSAP project is the establishment of a visitors information centre at the south-western edge of the royal cemetery. Here, visitors will find detailed information both regarding the history and development of the necropolis, as well as regarding the history of its discovery and subsequent exploration.

Museographic presentation of the archaeological heritage of Kerma

The completion of the museographic project in the Kerma Museum, which was inaugurated in 2008, is another priority within the QSAP activities of the Swiss Mission. Within the scope of the QSAP project, we plan to implement the following activities at the Kerma Museum:

- Repainting of the exterior façade of the Museum;
- Replacement and upgrade of the lighting system;
- Mounting of a protective glass panel over the reconstructed graves;
- Refurbishment of the showcases and preparing new displays of museum objects;
- Creation of two supplementary information panels for the gallery devoted to the Middle Ages;
- Publication of a museum guide in Arabic and English.

In parallel with the works planned for the museum within the region, we have proposed that certain museographic objects regarding the archaeology of Kerma be displayed in the National Museum of Khartoum, which is soon to be renovated. We are convinced that a presentation enriched by discoveries made at Kerma, within the museum in the capital city, will enhance the awareness of the Nubian archaeological heritage, and bring this to the attention of the public. For this reason, funds from the QSAP have been used in 2014 to partially fund the making of two models, one involving the reconstruction of the Mesolithic huts found at Wadi El-Arab, the other a 1/100 scale model of the town of Kerma. This last is a remarkable object both in terms of quality and in terms of importance, since it covers a surface of 24 square metres and represents one of the oldest towns of the continent. A replica of the statue of the black pharaoh Tanutamun has also been realized with the help of QSAP funds, with the same objective as the models. Presenting this replica in Khartoum will compensate for the fact that the seven statues of the black pharaohs discovered in January 2003 at Dukki Gel cannot be moved. Key exhibits at the Kerma Museum, they are at the centre of the exhibition and have been anchored in their concrete podium so as to render them untransportable elsewhere in future. Discovered fragmented, they have been restored in situ using metal pins and glue made of two components, but remain nonetheless fragile. Their transport over long distances would risk the degradation of their state of conservation and not ensure their safe return.

Figure 40 / Construction of the enclosing wall and the bypass road. Kerma, royal cemetery.

The two small scale models and the replica of the statue were first presented to the public during the exhibition on the activities of the Swiss Mission in Kerma («Aux origines des pharaons noirs: 10'000 ans d'archéologie en Nubie»; Neuchâtel/Switzerland; September 3, 2014 to May 17, 2015) and will in few years become a part of the attractions of the Sudan National Museum.

The presentation of the archaeological heritage to a wider public and the transfer of knowledge to those interested is a core concern of the QSAP project. It represents an opportunity as well as a challenge, which we gladly accept with passion.



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