K E R M A

2013-2014 and 2014-2015

SOUDAN

Matthieu Honegger • Marc Bundi • Camille Fallet • Bastien Jakob • Léonard Kramer

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Institut d'archéologie
Espace Paul Vouga
CH-2068 Hauterive
Switzerland

Scientific Committee : Matthieu Honegger, Louis Chaix, Isabelle Crèvecoeur, Nora Ferrero
Translation : Caroline Rocheleau (preliminary report and paper on Wadi Farjar), Michael Templer (papers on Wadi El-Arab, Kerma archers and Exhibition-Conference)
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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

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Matthieu Honegger
Camille Fallet

ARCHERS' TOMBS OF KERMA ANCIEN

The winter 2013-2014 excavation season focussed primarily on Sector 23 of the eastern cemetery of Kerma, with the objective of completing its study. This sector had been excavated a first time by Charles Bonnet during the 1996-1997 season, when 30 tombs were investigated (Bonnet 1997). We decided to renew the excavations in this sector at the end of 2012, so as to be able to complete our understanding regarding the origins of the Kingdom of Kerma (Honegger 2012, 2013b). The sector contains a total of 116 tombs, 86 of which have been excavated and inventoried during these past three years (figure 13). It belongs to the second phase of Kerma ancien (Privati 1999) and has been radiocarbon dated to between 2300 and 2100 cal. BC. This ensemble is preceded by the first phase of Kerma ancien (2500-2300 cal. BC), which we had occasion to study during the excavations of Sector 27, as well as by an initial phase going back to the Recent Pre-Kerma (Sector 28), which is dated ca. 2550 cal. BC.

Generally speaking, pillaging within Sector 23 has been intense. With the exception of a female sepulchre found intact with poor grave-goods, all the burials have been substantially disturbed. As is their custom, the pillagers concentrated on the upper part of the cadavers, particularly in the neck-region, looking for body ornaments and metal objects. Whilst in the earliest sectors only the head tended to be displaced, in this case it is the entire upper part of the body down to the pelvis which has been disturbed. In the best of cases, the lower limbs have remained in place, with a few objects besides then, but very often the tomb has been completely emptied, in which

Figure 13 / View of the main part of the Sector 23 at the end of the excavation.

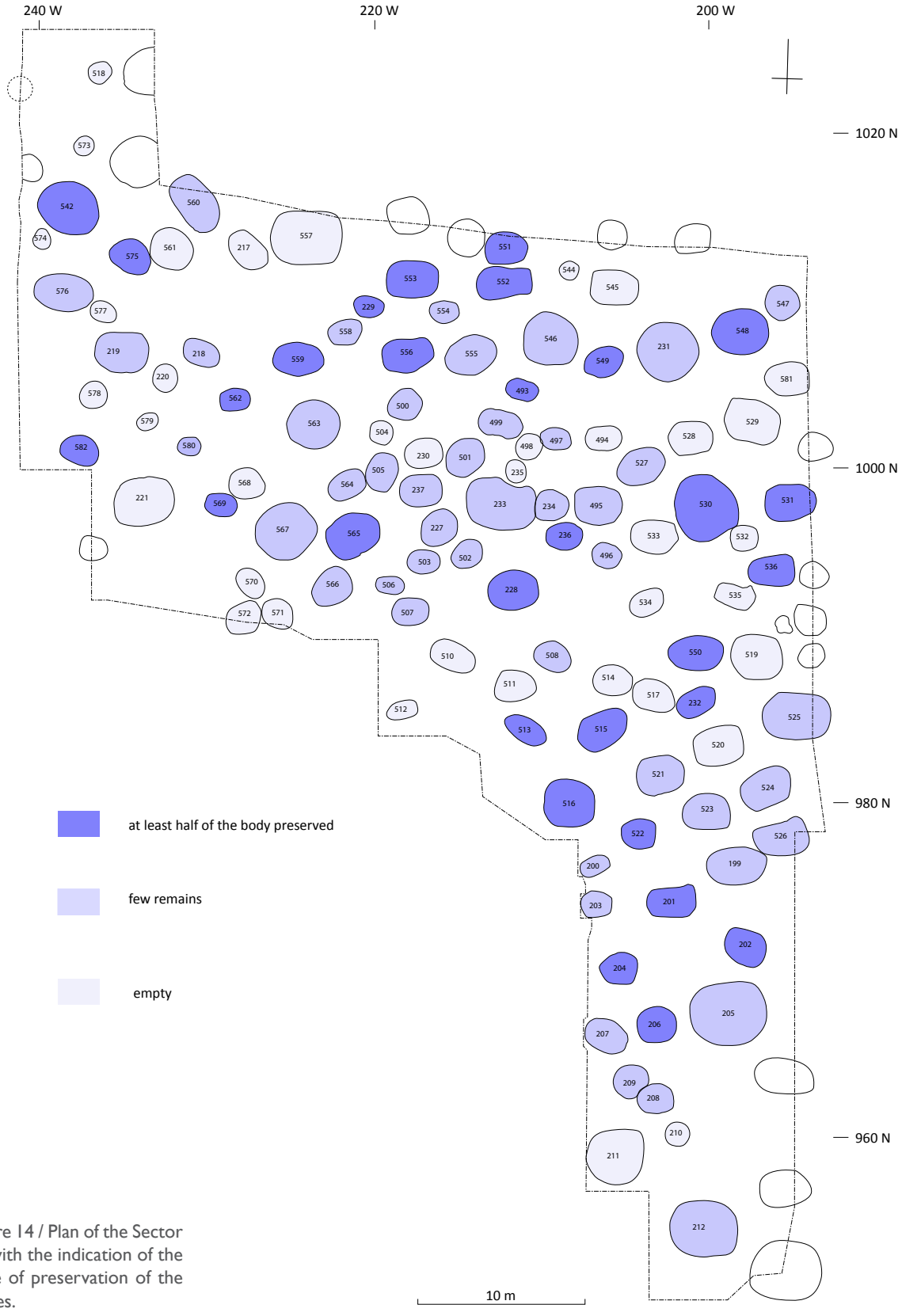

Figure 14 / Plan of the Sector 23 with the indication of the state of preservation of the graves.

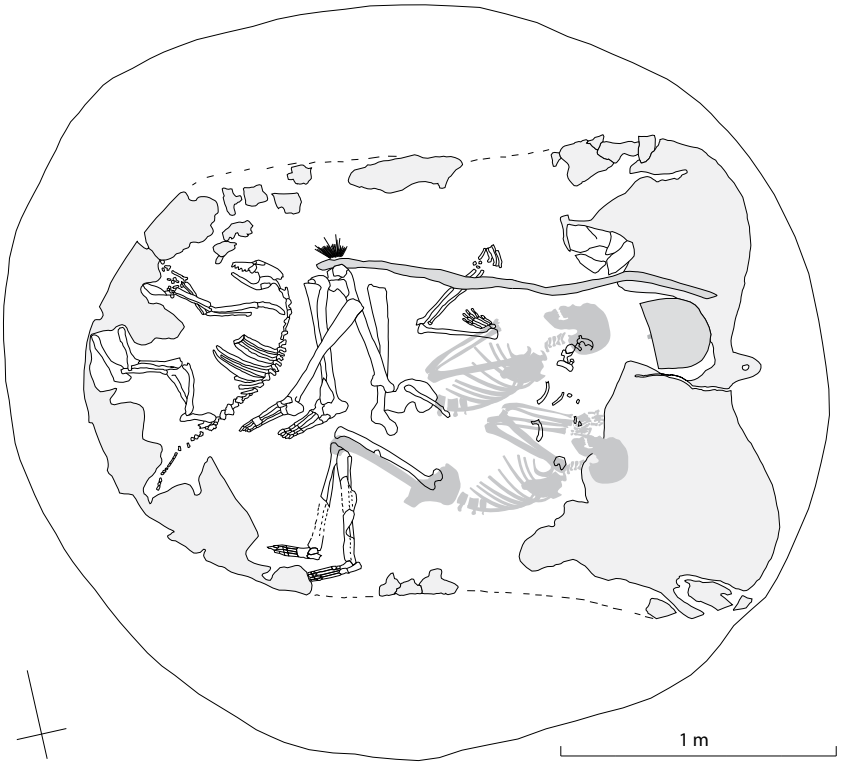

Figure 15 / Grave 530, Kerma ancien II. It was partially plundered and contained two individuals: a joung man in central position and a woman placed by his side. A dog, a bow, an ostrich feathers fan and a bronze mirror accompanied the young man.
At the top: view of the first cleaning with the bodies covered by a bovine skin. At the bottom: drawing of the grave with reconstruction of the upper part of the skeletals.

case the only evidence regarding the contents is the bones and other objects found in the back-fill of the grave-pit. By way of comparison, Sector 27, dating from the Kerma ancien I, yielded 27% of intact tombs, whilst in 34% of the cases it is the skull that has been displaced. Only 15% had been completely emptied. This proves that the first inhumations in the cemetery were less rich in objects of value and therefore less attractive to the pillagers. To the contrary, Sector 23 of Kerma ancien II appears to have been much more interesting as regards the richness of the graves. From the total of 116 tombs excavated, only 1% were still intact, whilst 33% had been completely emptied. The remaining inhumations were found with less than half of the skeleton in place and quite often contained only a few remains in situ. The distribution of tombs within this sector according to their state of conservation allowed us to determine which areas had been partially spared, and leads us to be cautious regarding generalised interpretative approaches from the best preserved graves (figure 14).

Notwithstanding this unfavourable situation, the fact that we meticulously collected the remains in the backfill of the grave-pits allowed us to dispose of reliable information regarding the ceramics and anthropology. Our estimates demonstrate that these remains are representative of the original contents of the tombs. On the other hand, the destructions brought about by the pillaging make it difficult to make any determination regarding the remainder of the grave-goods. By way of example, the presence of a bow or an ostrich feather fan often depends on little: if a small section of a sepulchre has not been damaged, their presence can be attested. By way of contrast, such objects are almost impossible to identify if mixed-in with the back-fill of the pit, which will have accelerated their destruction. For this reason, the tombs that have been completely emptied supply no information regarding funerary rites, other than that regarding the individual and the pots deposited with them or placed on top of the grave.

As we had indicated, Sector 23 and more generally the Kerma ancien II phase shows spectacular changes in the funerary rites, compared to the earlier phases in the cemetery (Honegger 2013b: 20-22). The tombs are generally larger and contain more objects. Animal sacrifices make their appearance (dogs, caprines) as well as bucrania in front of the tumuli. Tombs with multiple burials are also more frequent (figure 15). All these indices point to the emergence of a more marked stratification within society, whilst previously the image was one of relative equality of treatment in the face of death. The most outstanding finds in the sector are tombs containing one or two bows, occasionally a quiver, whilst others contain a stick, which it is tempting to interpret as a shepherd's accessory.

A total of 27 tombs with bow(s) and/or quivers have been identified, whilst 9 others contained a stick. The presence of the bow and its attributes (quiver, arrows) clearly evokes the importance of the bowmen in Nubia, particularly in the Kingdom of Kerma. We know that the Egyptians designated this region as early

Figure 16 / Scene representing archers on a rock engraving at the 3rd cataract (Wadi Es-Sabu, 3rd or 2nd millennium BC, height of archers about 15 cm). One of them wears a loin-cloth and all have a head dress made of an ostrich feather, a typical Nubian adornment frequently used by the Egyptians when representing their southern neighbours.

as the third millennium BC in the hieroglyph *Ta-Seti*, which signifies the land of the bow. The qualities of the Nubian archers were repeatedly stressed by their northern neighbours and they were recruited by them since the Old Kingdom. The archaeological evidence for the presence of Nubian archers is however scarce during the Kerma Period (2500-1500 BC). Their graphic representation is rare, but two of the most important are worth stressing. One, published recently (Honegger 2014b), represents a group of archers engraved on a sandstone rock in the Wadi Es-Sabu, at the third cataract (figure 16). The stick-form representation of their bodies, somewhat similar to the representations known at Kerma (Bonnet 1986: 10), the presence of a loin-cloth and a feather on the head, leads us to date this engraving to the 3rd or 2nd millennium BC. The five bowmen carry single arched bows with arrows in their hands. Some are dressed in loin-cloths and all wear a feather on their heads, which is an attribute also used in Egypt to designate Nubians. The second one is a stele made of fine-grained sandstone, found in the region of the second cataract, and dating from the end of the Kerma period (figure 17). It represents a Nubian king with a double bend bow with a triangular body in the style already alluded-to. He is flanked by royal attributes of Egyptian tradition, which is to say a mace held in his hand and the crown of Upper Egypt on his head. From these illustrations we can already identify two types of bow, one with a simple curvature and the other with a double one. As regards their size, it is not certain that the engravings are realistic

Figure 17 / Sandstone stele showing a Nubian king (Buhen, Kerma classique, ca. 1500 BC, height. 26 cm, Sudan National museum, no 62/8/17). The king holds a double bend bow and arrows.

enough for this information to be pertinent. Nonetheless, their dimensions are small on the engraving from Wadi Es-Sabu and would correspond to bows of 60 to 70 cm in length. On the stele from the 2nd cataract, the bow is substantially larger and could be as long as 140 to 150 cm.

It is quite unusual for archers to be identified in graves. For the Kerma Period, the most important discovery consists of an almost intact tomb of an archer naturally mummified, which Charles Bonnet discovered in the Kerma necropolis more than 30 years ago (Bonnet 1982). Also dating from the Kerma ancien II period, this sepulchre was excavated in Sector 4, 150 m to the north of Sector 23; it contained the body of a young man, only whose head had been displaced by the grave-robbers. He was accompanied by two bows of simple curvature 120 cm long, one of which was decorated with a plume of ostrich feathers (see cover picture of the present review). Arrow shafts were also noted. The tomb was not otherwise particularly richly endowed, if we make abstraction of the possible necklace made of copper or gold beads stolen by the robbers; it contained a stone pendant, another made of mother-of-pearl, a belt made of blue beads at the level of the hips and a red vase with a black rim.

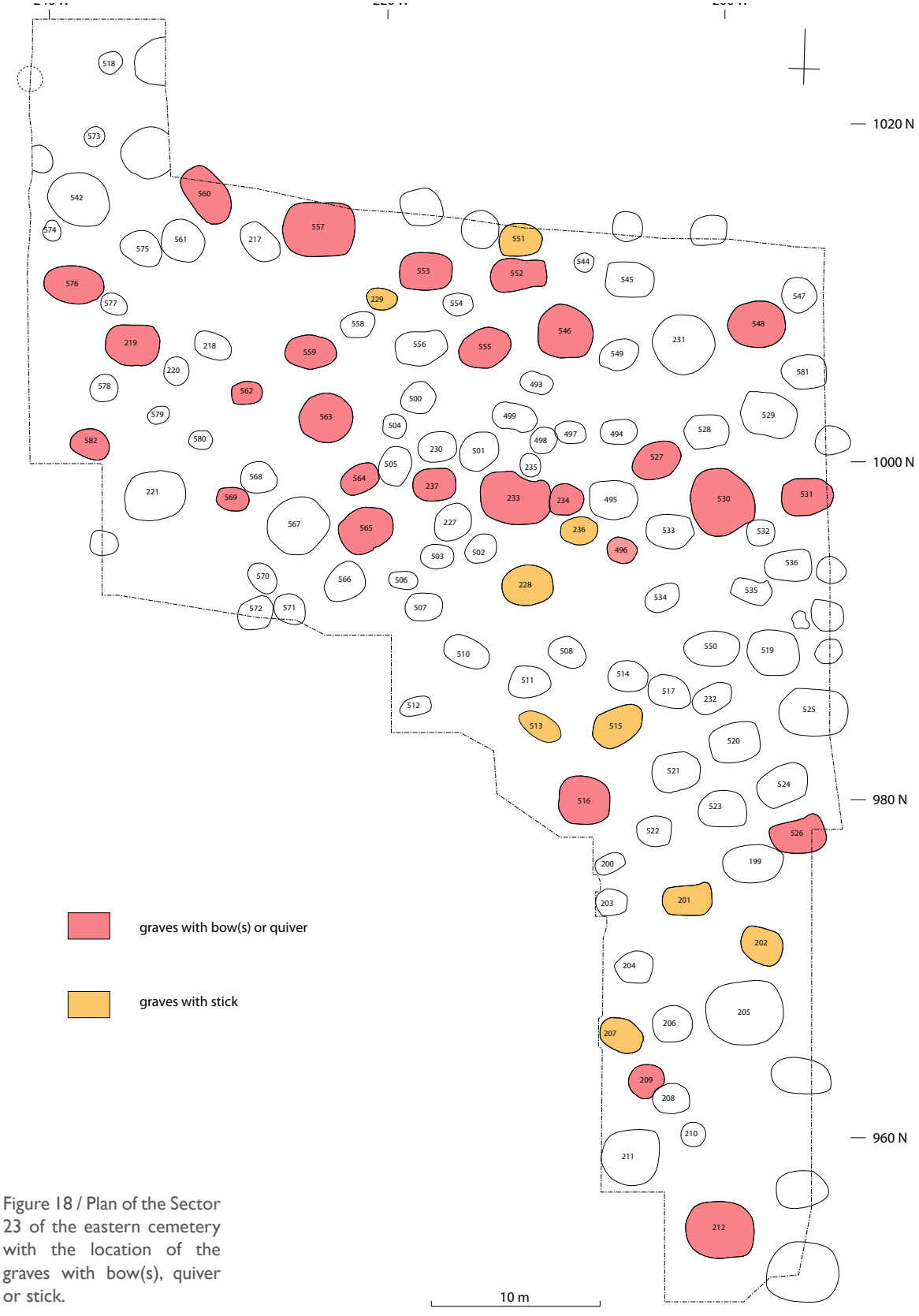

Figure 18 / Plan of the Sector 23 of the eastern cemetery with the location of the graves with bow(s), quiver or stick.

Due to the sparse information available regarding Nubian archers, the 27 tombs which we have studied add new data, notwithstanding the fragmentary nature of the remains uncovered. We will not only examine the characteristics of the bows, arrows and quivers, but also the contents of the tombs, which should permit us to express hypotheses regarding their social status. Their distribution does not indicate any particular tendency, other than their greater concentration in the area where the graves have been the least pillaged (figure 18). The diameter of their pits is often quite large but there are also smaller ones, some of which correspond to child burials. Proportionally, they represent 23% of the graves studied, but considering the destructions caused by the pillaging, their proportion should attain double this level. The presence of archers is thus well marked in this sector from Kerma ancien II. The fact that the famous archer's tomb excavated by Charles Bonnet should date from the same period, leads one to believe that the placing of the bow in a funerary context is a specific attribute of the second phase of Kerma. This practice is attested in other periods, as evidenced by a sepulchre containing a bow which we found dating from Kerma ancien I. In this instance however, it is the only such tomb out of more than 130, thus representing a very small proportion of the total. By the same token, a tomb in Sector 12 in the centre of the necropolis, dating from Middle Kerma, which contained 36 arrowheads, probably belonged to an archer (Honegger 2008). Here again, however, we are dealing with an isolated case. Finally, the rarity of archers' tombs mentioned in the context of other cemeteries excavated in Nubia dating from the Kerma Period, could be due to several reasons, such as the intensity

Figure 19 / Grave 546. Extremity of a bow with its string and a plume of ostrich feathers.

Figure 20 / Grave 569. Plundered grave containing an adult with his leather loincloth and a double bend bow. At the bottom: general view of the grave. At the top: detail of the bow which length is more than 1,5 m.

of the pillaging, the number of tombs excavated systematically and the care taken in the observation of organic materials. We must in fact stress that the bows are generally very poorly preserved, with their wood invariably attacked by termites, and in most instances only the imprint of their decomposition survives. It is the bow-string, manufactured of entwined tendon, which best survives (figure 19). The leather quivers decompose more slowly, whilst as for the arrows, only the imprint of their shaft survives, but the arrowheads made of flint segments have survived.

Out of the 27 tombs, 23 produced the remains of bows, whilst the remaining 4 yielded the remains of quivers. The remains of the bows are often too fragmentary to obtain an accurate idea of their shape and size. In some better preserved instances however, we have been able to identify bows with simple as well as with double curvature, both of which appear to have co-existed (figure 20). It seems to us that not too much should be made of this distinction, as suggested by J.-L. Le Quellec in his analysis of the archers on the rock-art of the Sahara (Le Quellec 2014). The bow with a double curvature does not necessarily imply that it is composite, which is a far more sophisticated manufacturing technique, since it is not attested in Africa at this time. On the other hand, ethnographic material describes simple techniques to

Figure 21 / Grave 542. Plume of ostrich feathers with a string which was rolled up at the extremity of the bow.

obtain a strong incurvation of the extremities of the bow, which consist in bending the wood by means of ligaments and forms (Le Quellec 2014: 62). It is probably the use of similar techniques which explain the well-attested differences in the Nubian bows.

The most common dimension is 120 cm, but two larger bows about 150 cm long have been found. In a child's tomb, a small model, 90 cm long, was discovered. The remains of bow-strings have often been found in situ alongside the bow. In some instances the extent of the bow's curvature leads one to believe that it was strung when placed in the tomb. The bow is always placed to the north of the cadaver, close to the hands. It is occasionally decorated with a plume of ostrich feathers at its extremity (figure 21). As regards the quiver, a well-preserved example manufactured of goat-skin, sewn at the edges, has been saved from the pillagers (figure 22). As with other instances, it contained the remains of arrow shafts with feathers and arrowheads made of small flint segments (figure 23).

As was the rule at that time, the skeletons of the archers were found lying on a complete ox hide and covered in another one of equal proportions. Dressed in a leather loincloth held at the waist by a belt and wearing sandals, they often held a fan made of ostrich feathers in their hand. In two tombs we found a small cup which

Figure 22 / Grave 555. Well-preserved goat-skin quiver found in a grave.
Figure 23 / Grave 560. Content of a quiver with the remains of arrow shafts with feathers.

Figure 24 / Grave 565. Incense burner made with the fragment of the bottom of a vase, with a piece of incense.
Figure 25 / Grave 530. Bronze mirror with its lether bag.

Figure 26 / Grave 530. Necklace with gold beads.

had been burned on the inside. It was the identification of the small piece of incense placed next to one of these that we understood that we were dealing with incense burners (figure 24). We must also mention the presence of bronze mirrors slipped into their leather bag (figure 25). Although these mirrors were almost systematically stolen by the grave-robbers, they were probably quite regularly placed in the tombs. The same goes for the pendants, necklaces and ear-rings made of gold (figure 26). Although these are rare discoveries today, these jewels probably regularly accompanied the deceased, particularly those in the richer tombs, which are of above-average size. At the feet of the deceased has sometimes been found a leather bag, whilst in the larger tombs one or two sacrificed dogs, or else a sheep (figure 27). In three graves we have been able to observe the presence genuine leads. In two instances they were round the necks of dogs and in the third that of a sheep. In the largest tombs, which are quite often identified as those of archers, there is occasionally an accompanying deceased person. This situation has been observed in six tombs, whilst in a seventh, the principal individual was accompanied by three other deceased.

Whilst the function of the bow is evident, that of the stick is a little less so. In the present-day African pastoral societies it is the shepherd's primary attribute, that of the flock or herd owner, or at least its carer. It can also be used in traditional dances,

Figure 27 / Grave 531. Archer (immature) with two dogs at its feet.

in which case it is not necessarily a male attribute. In societies that do not know the plough or the hoe, it can also be used as a digging tool, to till or to uproot. Should the need arise, it can also be used as an armament, or at least as a means of defence. In short, it can serve many purposes, but we will note that the presence of sticks accords well with the pastoral nature of the Kerma society. The tombs of persons with a stick are less numerous than those of archers (figure 28). They had been noted by Charles Bonnet, who had excavated two tombs of women with sticks, one of which was accompanied by a dog on a lead (Bonnet 1982). These tombs were located not far from that of the mummified archer, to the north of the necropolis, and are also dated to Kerma ancien II. In Sector 23, nine graves contained a stick, which represents 8% out of the 116 examined. As with those for the archers, the number is most likely substantially underestimated due to the pillaged state of the graves. Generally speaking, the tombs are smaller than those of the archers. They did however yield comparable grave-goods. The ostrich feather fan is present in several cases, one tomb yielded a bronze mirror and another a contained a dog. The sticks found were entirely destroyed by termites, in the same way as the bows and other wooden objects. They are always straight and are about 100 to 120 cm long and about 4 cm thick.

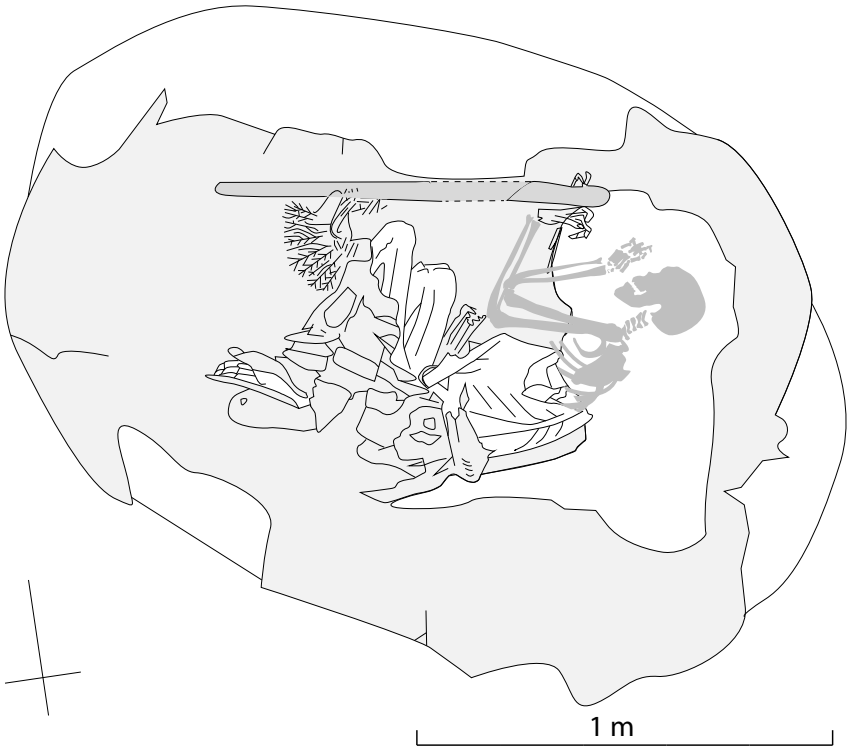

Figure 28 / Grave 202. Woman of 20-29 years old, with a wooden stick and an ostrich feather fan. The upper part of the skeletal, destroyed by the looters, has been reconstructed.

The anthropological study, undertaken by Camille Fallet, furnishes details on the age and sex of the individuals. About the possibility of a selection in the individuals buried in the necropolis, we must first note that Sector 23, taken as a whole, does not differ substantially from Sectors 27 and 28 excavated previously. All three show similar tendencies, which is to say an underrepresentation of immature individuals and a relative balance between the sexes (Fallet 2013). If we focus on the tombs of archers and those with sticks, we notice a marked contrast (figure 29). The tombs of archers are mostly represented by adult males (17 tombs), to which can be added four child burials and two others attributed to women. Notwithstanding the probability of errors flowing from the methodology used in determining the sex of the individuals, the presence of women archers cannot be gainsaid, particularly that of the oldest one, who has well-marked female characteristics, especially in the pelvic area. In the tombs containing sticks, the opposite is true, in that adult females are best represented, with the presence of one male only, and well as that of an immature individual.

This opposition between the two types of tomb is interesting. The graves of archers are clearly primarily the preserve of adult males, whilst those with sticks are for the most part associated with females. It is probable that that we are in the presence of

fundamental values of the society, tied in to those relating to power and prestige. The references to war, the hunt and pastoralism no doubt bore symbolic values. In Pre-Dynastic Egypt, hunting scenes in its iconography usually express the power of the elite (Hendricks 2013). Bows, dogs on leads, control of the natural world and their correlation with military triumphs are part of the recurrent themes which will later be found in Pharaonic Egypt. By analogy, it is possible that the references to the hunt or warfare at Kerma carry the same connotations.

Sector 23 dates from Kerma ancien II. Contemporary with the VIth Egyptian dynasty, it shows the emergence of an elite which expresses itself with richer tombs in which an important number are endowed with bows and to a lesser extent with sticks. In other contemporaneous areas of the necropolis we also find tombs of archers and others with sticks, accompanied by a similar range of grave-goods (fans, mirrors, animal sacrifices, etc.). This leads us to consider the bow and stick to be important attributes in the funerary rituals of a precise period in time. They would have been a constituent part of the visible expression of the power of the elite.

Graves with bow	**Sex**	**Age**
219	male*	15-19
530	male	15-19
552	male	15-19
209	male*	20-29
548	male	20-29
555	male	20-29
582	male	20-29
546	male	20-39
563	male	20-39
516	male	20-49
527	male	20-49
557	male	> 30
565	male	> 40
553	male	> 50
212	male*	adult
233	male*	adult
237	male*	adult
564	female	20-39
559	female	< 60
560	immature	1-4
526	immature	5-9
576	immature	5-9
531	immature	10-14
562	undetermined	20-29
569	undetermined	adult
234	undetermined	no skeletal
496	undetermined	no skeletal
Graves with stick		
201	male	> 60
202	female	20-29
513	female	20-29
551	female	20-29
228	female*	adult
236	female*	adult
207	female	> 60
229	immature	5-9
515	undetermined	adult

Figure 29 / Determination of sex and age of the main individual found in the graves with bow(s), quiver or stick. The majority of the determinations were made by Camille Fallet. The sexual diagnosis is based on coxal bone according to Bruzek (1991; 2002) and Murail et al. (2005). The determination of the ages is based on the methods described by Schmitt (2001). The determinations followed by an asterisk were made by Christian Simon in the 1990. For the determination of the sex, he used in particular the method of Bruzek (1991).

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FIGURES

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SUMMARY

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