

# K E R M A

2005-2006 2006-2007

SOUDAN

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G E N A V A

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These last two field seasons have been rich in major discoveries, which improve our documentation for Prehistory as well as for the later periods. We greatly devoted ourselves to the layout of the site museum built near the western *deffufa*. In addition to the restorations carried out on several monumental ensembles of the Nubian town or that of Doukki Gel, we had to redefine the whole enhancement of our works, initiated a long time ago. The seven royal statues uncovered in 2003 are now entirely reassembled and installed on a podium in the central room of the Museum. The layout of the permanent exhibition is currently underway.

The Swiss National Science Foundation provided us with a decisive support to the continuation of our works and their publication. We are indebted to the Swiss Confederation, Mr. Pascal Couchepin as well as the Federal Office of Culture for a significant grant, allowing us to propose a museographic project of quality. The Museums of Art and History of Geneva have also contributed to the financing of our researches. The Institute of Prehistory of the University of Neuchâtel offers a collaboration as efficient as it is sustained, and the contribution of the students in prehistory is particularly appreciated. Our thanks are also addressed to the University of Paris IV-Sorbonne for its precious contribution in the building up of the epigraphic file. Finally, we would like to stress the active part taken in every step of our project by Mrs. Andréa Reichlin, Swiss chargé d'affaires in Sudan; her radiant personality, the interest and generosity she has shown during her invitations and trips have enabled fruitful exchanges between the concerned partners. May the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs and the Embassy find here the expression of our deepest gratitude.

Like in these last years, we benefitted from the support of Mr. Hassan Hussein, Director of the Sudanese National Corporation for Antiquities and Museums (NCAM). His two assistants, Messrs Salah Eddin Mohamed Ahmed and Abdel Rahman Ali, were also with us, notably on the occasion of a trip made last spring (from 6 to 13 June 2006) in order to prepare the exhibition at the Museum of Kerma. In fact, this trip was partly devoted to investigating the theft of one of the royal statues of the cache, that of Aspelta, which had just occurred. An absolutely incredible journey led us on the right trail on time and the statue, untouched, is now back in its place in the Museum.

The two field seasons began on 1 December 2005 and 30 November 2006, ending on 3 February 2006 and 2 February 2007 respectively. Once more, the *rais* Gad Abdallah, Saleh Melieh, Abdelrazek Omer Nuri and Idriss Osman Idriss directed about a hundred workers, among whom there are now several specialists. The inspectors Chadia Abdou Rabou and Abdel Hai Abdel Sawi devoted themselves without stint, particularly during the last season, as the works carried out within the Museum occasioned additional tasks. The restoration of the remains of the ancient town went on; some masonries, damaged by careless visitors, had to be repaired. A guard post and a 'Nubian' door of traditional architecture now show the modern entrance to the site. The door side, made of massive acacia wood and worked by an old craftsman of the inland navigation, has been equipped with an 'old-style' latch.

The prehistorical researches were concentrated, on the one hand, on the prospecting of the Kerma region and, on the other hand, on the excavation of three major sites. The prospecting enabled the discovery of 135 sites more or less well preserved, their dating ranging from the Lower Palaeolithic (one million years) to the Palaeochristian era. The distribution of these sites is particularly interesting, as it is linked to the climate changes that have affected the Saharan region. As to the excavations, they were concentrated on the Pre-Kerma town, where large-scale strippings allowed to clear fortifications made of six parallel rows of fences which could be followed over a length of 160 m. In parallel with these works, researches were pursued on the site of El-Barga, which comprises two cemeteries belonging to the most ancient necropolises known on the continent (7300-5500 BC). The discovery of 18 tombs gives us precisions on the funerary ritual and the organization of these cemeteries. Finally, a new excavation began on a vast site named Wadi El-Arab, covering more than two hectares. This place was occupied during about two millennia by Mesolithic and Neolithic populations (8300-6500 BC). Soundings and the excavation of a sector of 24 m<sup>2</sup> have revealed numerous stratified remains of habitations as well as burials. The presence of domestic ox bones in particularly ancient levels brings fundamental information on the beginning of African pastoralism.

Our researches rely on the experience of several collaborators who contribute to the smooth running of operations. Louis Chaix is in charge of studying the fauna and of establishing basic anthropological identifications of the human skeletons. Marion Berti and Daniel Conforti play an active part in the fieldwork and make the drawings. Michel Guélat is in charge of the geological studies on the different sites. Three students from the University of Neuchâtel have also taken part in the fieldwork: Jérôme Dubosson, Aixa Andreetta and Bastien Jakob. Stine Rossel, a student in archaeozoology from Harvard University, is entrusted with the analysis of the fish remains found at some sites. Sandro Cubeddu gave his assistance in activities linked to the management of supplies and the excavation. Finally, the study of the pottery benefits from the skills of Maria Gatto, a scholar associated with the British Museum.

At Doukki Gel, in the town founded by the Egyptians, the clearing of the religious quarter and its precincts was pursued, giving new elements on the many transformation phases that followed one another in the course of centuries. The different levels can be determined, since the buildings are not preserved in elevation. Moreover, late destruction trenches favour the analysis of the deep strata. In this way, we could discover the existence of an ambitious architectural programme attributable to Queen Hatshepsut, including the construction of a temple of Amun to the west and of porticos around the central temple. In the eastern temple, works by Thutmose III and then by Akhenaten have been identified. Lastly, more to the east, a temple of circular shape (Fig. 1) and a series of rounded bastions associated with the original precinct of the town evoke, in many respects, the Kerma traditions.

It remains to underline the excellence of our collaborators, who all put their heart and soul into their work. Our colleague Dominique Valbelle, assisted by Patricia Jaheger and Marc Bundi, analyses hundreds of decorated or inscribed blocks, thus giving us the means to replace them in a historical perspective and to get an idea of the original splendour of the uncovered monuments. The photographic coverage is provided by Jean-Michel Yoyotte. Philippe Ruffieux goes further into his study of the pottery collected during the excavation. The archaeological drawings are made by Inès Matter-Horisberger, Alain Peillex and Marion Berti; their quality is all the more remarkable since the climate conditions were relatively hard – strong wind of sand or heavy sun. The nature of some offerings

and food reserves could be determined thanks to the researches of Louis Chaix, archaeozoologist. In Geneva, the elaboration of the documentation benefits from the skills of Béatrice Privati, Nora Ferrero and Patricia Berndt.

The finishing works of the Museum of Kerma and the layout of its surroundings had to stand delays caused by some corps of workers. But we could count on the devotion and support of Mr. Sir el-Khatim and of the Committee responsible for the project. It is to Markus Bloedt that we owe the reassembling of the royal statues and their positioning in the central space. He was efficiently assisted by Marc Bundi, the operation being extremely thorough: on the one hand, the interior layout works were creating additional dust, and on the other hand the temperature, exceptionally low at the moment of the reassembling, was slowing down the drying of the special glue used for this type of restoration. Because of their weight, the stone fragments glued together tended to come apart... Fortunately, the know-how of the restorer enabled to overcome every obstacle and today, all the statues are in their final location (Fig. 2 and 3). The inauguration was nevertheless postponed, so as to be able to complete the inner and outer installations.

1. BONNET 2006; BONNET in press; BONNET/CASTIGLIONI in press; BONNET/FERRERO 2006; BONNET/VALBELLE 2006.1; BONNET/VALBELLE 2006.2; BONNET/VALBELLE 2006.3; CHAIX 2006; CHAIX in press; HONEGGER 2006.1; HONEGGER 2006.2; HONEGGER 2006.3; HONEGGER 2006.4; VALBELLE 2006; VALBELLE in press

The results obtained by the Swiss Mission have been widely publicized, through publications or during congresses and scientific meetings in which the members of the Mission participated<sup>1</sup>. The regular publication of our excavation reports in the *Genava* journal constitutes a precious asset, as well as the new layout of the room of Nubian antiquities at the Musée d'art et d'histoire, under the responsibility of Jean-Luc Chappaz, curator, and with the assistance of Nora Ferrero.

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- Les fouilles archéologiques de Kerma (Soudan) · Rapport préliminaire sur les campagnes de 2005-2006 et 2006-2007
- Le site de Doukki Gel après les derniers chantiers archéologiques
- Aux origines de Kerma
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- Ensembles céramiques napatéens découverts durant les campagnes 2005-2006 et 2006-2007 à Doukki Gel (Kerma)
- Empreintes de sceaux et bouchons de jarres d'époque napatéenne découverts à Doukki Gel (campagnes 2005-2006 et 2006-2007)

*English translations by Pierre Meyrat and Catherine M. Rocheleau*



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