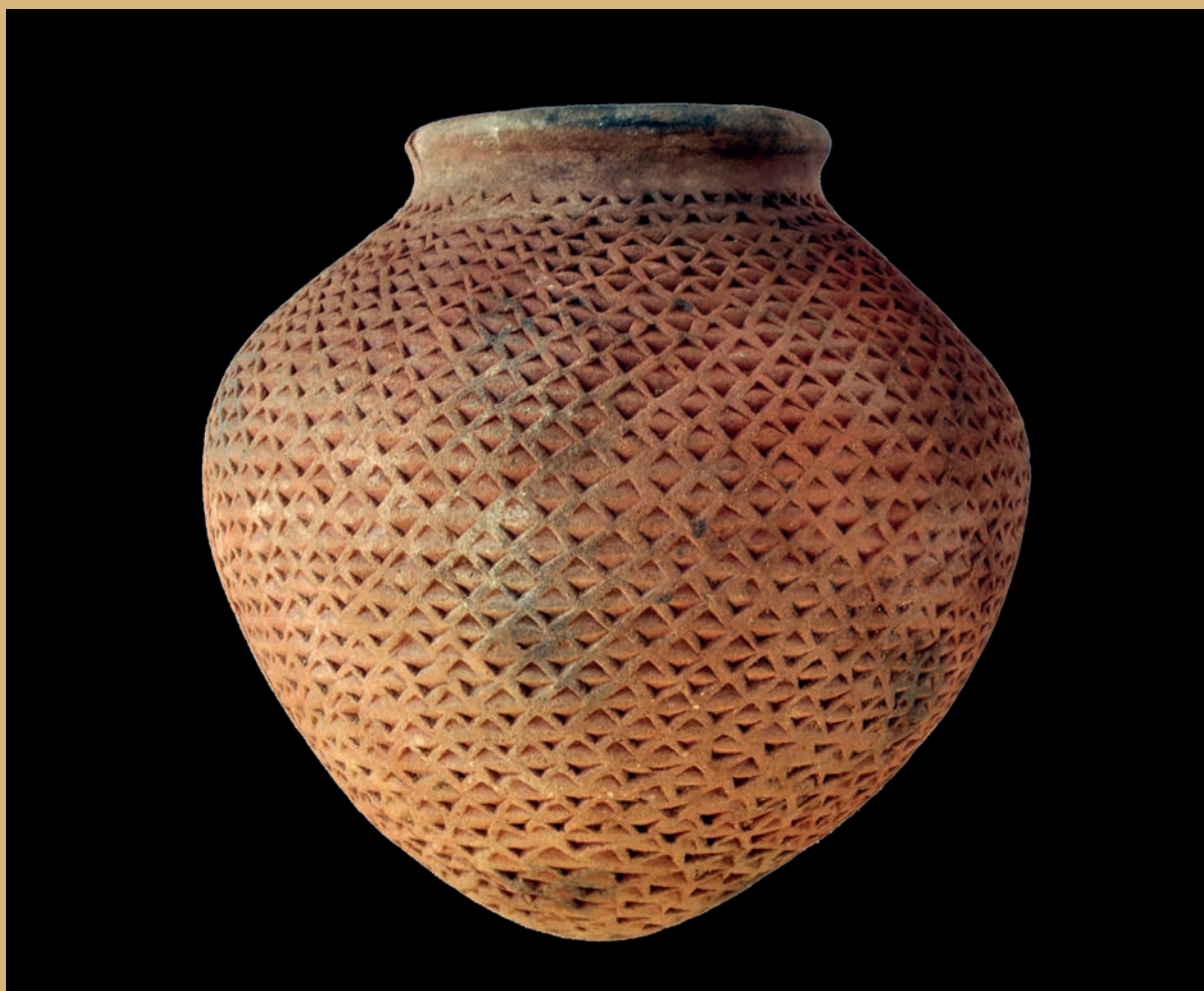


K E R M A

2015-2016 and 2016-2017

SOUDAN

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Documents de la mission archéologique suisse au Soudan
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Cover figure: Early Kerma pottery found in the tomb T672, Sector CE29 (ca. 2100 BC).
Photo: Matthieu Honegger

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATIONS AT KERMA (SUDAN)
PRELIMINARY REPORT OF THE 2015-2016 AND 2016-2017 SEASONS

We present in this report the activities of the Swiss Archaeological mission covering two winter seasons. These two archaeological seasons allowed us to concentrate on the excavations of the Early Kerma area of the Eastern Cemetery. The objective is to publish next year a monograph of the site, to include the original occupation of the site (Neolithic and Pre-Kerma) as well as the initial phase of the necropolis, covering the Early Kerma period. At the same time, we continued the work of protecting the necropolis, enhancing the visible remains and putting the finishing touches to the Kerma Museum. Finally, a special effort has been made to study the remains prior to publication.

In 2015-2016, the investigations of the Swiss Archaeological Mission began on December 7, 2015 and were completed on January 28, 2016. The first part of the season was supervised by Marc Bundi and Leonard Kramer. With the help of a Sudanese team of 10 workers supervised by the gaffir, Khidir Magboul, they extended the excavated area of Sector 8 in the Eastern Cemetery, which was first investigated by Charles Bonnet some 30 years ago. A 500 square metres surface was cleaned and the pits of 30 graves were emptied. The second part of the season started on January 4, 2016. The team, directed by Matthieu Honegger, was reinforced by five Swiss students (Maria Smoljan, Delphine Schiess, Florence Gilliard, Sandra Gubler and Christian Kny), a specialist (Daniel Conforti), as well as a zooarchaeologist (Louis Chaix), who stayed for a week to study the sheep and dog remains found in the graves. The team worked on the excavation and analysis of the 30 graves, and studied a part of the material found during the previous seasons.

A Swiss delegation visited the Kerma excavations, stopping for a day of official meetings in Khartoum (figure 1). The delegation was made up of the State Secretary for Education and Research (Mauro Dell'Ambrogio), two ambassadors (Mauro Moruzzi and Martin Strub), the director of the Swiss Universities (Martine Rahier), the president of the Human Sciences Commission of the Swiss National Fund (Paul Schubert) and a professor in Egyptology from the University of Basle (Susanne Bickel). They stayed three days in Kerma and met the director of the National Corporation of Antiquities and Museums (Abdelraman Mohamed Ali). On this occasion they officially donated to the Sudan National Museum, four museographic objects conceived by the Swiss Mission, which had been exhibited in the Laténium Museum in 2014-2015: the mummy of the archer, the small scale models of the town of Kerma and of the huts of Wadi El-Arab, and the copy of the statue of Tanutamon. In Khartoum, the Swiss delegation also met Osama Daoud, director of the DAL group, who expressed his wish to support the costs of the rehabilitation of the Kerma museum.

Figure 1 / Swiss delegation to Kerma in January 2016.



In 2016-2017, the fieldwork of the Swiss Archaeological Mission began on December 12, 2016 and ended on January 31, 2017. As during the previous season, this first part of the campaign was supervised by Marc Bundi and Leonard Kramer. A part of the work, which was supported by Swiss funds, concentrated on the excavation of graves from the early sectors of the Eastern Cemetery. The other part of the activities was supported by the Qatar-Sudan Archaeological Project (QSAP) funds, and consisted in the protection and valorisation works of the Eastern Cemetery, as well as rehabilitation work of the Kerma Museum. A new sector in the Eastern Cemetery (Sector 29) was opened with the help of a Sudanese team of 15 workers under the supervision of the gaffir Khidir Magboul. It is a easterly extension of Sector 23 (*Kerma Ancien* II, ca. 2300-2100 BC). The objective was to try to understand the end of *Kerma Ancien* (III and IV) and the beginning of Middle Kerma, which is characterized by the appearance of large tumuli of about 20 metres in diameter. Moreover, we wanted to better understand the ancient excavations of George Reisner in Cemetery N, which was published by Dunham in 1982. In this publication, 170 graves are documented but only 35 are located on a map. Our objective was to try to locate the larger graves, in order to update and compare Reiner's findings with our own. A surface of 1200 square metres was cleaned and the pits of 51 graves were emptied. At the same time, Marc Bundi began, with 15 other workers, the final protection works of the Eastern Cemetery. They cleared sand and vegetation from some parts of the site, rebuilt some sections of the 5 km-long wall, covered with earth (*liaza*) other sections, and manufactured 500 cement posts 120 cm long, to erect along the edges of agricultural fields, in order to prevent their extension.

The second part of the season began on January 2, 2017. The team, directed by Matthieu Honegger, was reinforced by seven Swiss students (Delphine Schiess, Lauriane Vieli, Déborah Locatelli, Nathalie Grenon, Sandra Gubler, Jean Montandon and Nathanael Sordat), a field specialist (Daniel Conforti), a bioanthropologist (Agathe Chen) and a ceramologist (Marie-Kristin Schröder). Fifty-one graves in Sector 29 were carefully excavated and we opened a new sector (Sector 30) 40 metres to the south, in order to better-understand the extension of the Early Kerma cemetery. In this new sector, only four graves were excavated because their infill was composed of hard silt which made for difficult digging. Part of our time was spent studying the remains found in the graves during previous seasons. Marie-Kristin Schröder studied the C-Group pottery from Sectors 27, 28 and 23, made up of 180 sherds and pots. Agathe Chen studied the skeletons from Sector 8, excavated the previous year (34 individuals), as well as those from Sectors 29 and 30 (61 individuals). Matthieu Honegger studied the Kerma pottery found in Sectors 23, 27, 28, 29 and 30, made up of 1425 complete or fragmentary pots.

During the second part of the season, Marc Bundi, with his team of workers, continued the protection works of the Eastern Cemetery. At the same time, we decided to construct an open structure close to the cemetery, in which to place five large panels with pictures and explanations in English and Arabic for the visitors. The rehabilitation of the Kerma Museum was begun during this season, consisting of different maintenance projects as well as improvements (reconstruction of some walls and the creation of new rooms, updating the electric installations, transformation of the podium for the statues, etc.).

The Swiss Mission is supported by Dr Abdelrahman Ali, director of the National Corporation of Antiquities and Museums of Sudan (NCAM) and his collaborator, Mr El-Hassan Ahmed Mohamed. Shahinda Omer of the NCAM was the inspector of the mission during the two seasons, and followed our fieldwork. The project is supported by the Swiss National Fund (SNF 100011_163021/1), the State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation of the Swiss Confederation, the Kerma Foundation and the University of Neuchâtel (Switzerland). After a year of interrupted work between 2015-2016, we have once again benefitted from the support of the Qatar Sudan Archaeological Project for the protection and valorisation of the Kerma archaeological heritage, and in particular that of the Eastern Cemetery and the museum.

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