

# 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

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATIONS AT KERMA (SUDAN)  
PRELIMINARY REPORT OF THE 2013-2014 AND 2014-2015 SEASONS

We present in this report the activities of the Swiss Archaeological Mission to Kerma of not one, but two winter seasons. As described below, the organization of an exhibition at the Laténium Museum and the International Conference for Nubian Studies both held in Neuchatel have taken up much of our time and energy. As a result our field activities were somewhat modified. While the 2013-2014 season consisted of excavations involving specialists and students, as it has been the case for several years, the 2014-2015 season was restricted in its scope. This time no excavations were conducted, but a small team focused on the inventory and study of the abundant archaeological remains gathered over the last few years as well as on the protection of the Kerma necropolis.

In 2013-2014, the investigations of the Swiss Archaeological Mission started on 11 December 2013 and were completed on 27 January 2014. The first part of the season was conducted by Marc Bundi (11 to 31 December). He worked with a Swiss specialist, Bastien Jakob, and a Sudanese team of 7 to 13 workers under the supervision of gaffir Khidir Magboul. They cleaned ancient sectors of the El-Barga cemetery and opened three new sectors corresponding to a surface area of 116 square meters. In the eastern cemetery of Kerma, they emptied grave pits in sector 23 where we began work during the preceding season. This sector was opened by Charles Bonnet 15 years ago; however, he had studied only a few graves in this area. The aim of this campaign was to finish the excavation of the sector. The director of the Kerma Museum, Abdelmagid Mahmud, was the inspector during this first part of the season, which consisted of preparatory work in advance of the upcoming excavations by the entire Swiss team as well as the study of the remains. From 1st January 2014 onwards, Matthieu Honegger took charge of the team and excavations were started in the eastern cemetery and at El-Barga. They were joined by six Swiss students (Léana Catalfamo, Camille Fallet, Charlotte Hunkeler, Déborah Locatelli, David Chavez, François Ghiringhelli) and two specialists (Léonard Kramer, Daniel Conforti). At the beginning of January, Dr. Marc-Antoine Kaeser, Laténium Museum Director, came for a one-week visit on site along with filmmaker Stéphane Goël, who took photographs for the upcoming exhibition organised by the Laténium Museum in Neuchâtel. Finally, a French specialist from the CNRS, Isabelle Crèvecoeur, stayed in Kerma for about three weeks (6-29 January) to study the collection of Mesolithic skeletal remains of Wadi El-Arab and to participate in the excavation of the new graves discovered at El-Barga. In addition to this, we continued the survey in the area of Wadi Farjar, in anticipation of the possible building of a dam at Kajbar, 30 km north of Kerma. During this second part of the season, the mission's inspector was Shahinda Omer, but Abdelmagid Mahmud continued to support us.

In 2014-2015, the investigations of the Swiss Archaeological Mission started on 18 December 2014 and were completed on 2 February 2015. Marc Bundi, who directed this mission, started the season by himself. Other than general logistics and management, his work focused on the protection of the Kerma necropolis, notably the construction of a new road that would prevent vehicles from crossing the site and destroying the archaeological remains on the surface. He also oversaw the construction of the earthen wall that will enclose the entire cemetery—an area covering 70 hectares—thereby stopping the expansion of agricultural fields and vehicular traffic. The director of the Kerma Museum, Abdelmagid Mahmud, served as antiquities inspector. Three specialists from Switzerland arrived in early January to study the archaeological material discovered within the last few years. Bastien Jakob, whose doctoral dissertation will focus on the lithic industry, studied the thousands of flint flakes, tools and nuclei from Wadi El-Arab. Léonard Kramer drew up a detailed inventory of the entire corpus of material from the 320 Kerma ancien burials excavated between 2008 and 2013. Finally, Clément Vorlet worked on the description of the ceramics from the site of Wadi El-Arab as well as the sherds discovered during surveys at Wadi Farjar. A selection of the most interesting objects were drawn and photographed.

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. Abdelmagid Mahmud, director of the Kerma Museum and inspector of the Swiss team, followed our fieldwork. The project is supported by the Swiss National Fund (SNF 100012-137784/1), the State Secretariat for Education, Research and Education of the Swiss Confederation, the Foundation Kerma and the University of Neuchâtel (Switzerland). In 2014, we obtained the support of the Qatar Sudan Archaeological Project for the next four years.

The investigations focused on the following sites:

- El-Barga: after the discovery of a Mesolithic grave during the 2013-2014 season, we conducted new surface cleanings in December 2014 in order to estimate the full extension of the Mesolithic and Neolithic cemeteries. These are of great importance in the understanding of the transition between Mesolithic and Neolithic in Africa. We found six new graves, three dating to the Mesolithic and three others from the Neolithic. The excavation was conducted by Isabelle Crèvecoeur, who is in charge of the bio-anthropological study of the human skeletons found in this cemetery. The Mesolithic remains were in good condition (figure 1) but the Neolithic ones, found close to the surface, were badly preserved. We estimate today that the site is larger than previously thought (Crèvecoeur 2012, Honegger 2007) and that it may still contain about 10 to 30 graves. The preserved sections of the cemetery are located in the north of the site, under a thick layer of sand and gravel, as well as in the south of the site, in a sandy area. The cleaning will be considerable in order to continue excavations at the site and

we thus decided to publish what was excavated these last ten years before even considering starting a new project. The site is outside the alluvial plain, in an area without any habitation. Until now, it has not been particularly exposed to human destruction and we have not notice any degradation since 2008.

The three Mesolithic graves (graves 142, 143, 145) contained adults without any funerary material, which is common for this period. However, the vertebrae of individual 142, most probably a female, were perforated by three arrows heads (lithic segments). The three Neolithic graves contained remains of children with adornments (graves 144, 146, 147). A badly preserved ivory bracelet, two amazonite beads and one carnelian bead were found in the first grave. In the second burial, three bone pendants were located near the neck and, in the third grave, 9 ostrich eggshell beads were discovered at the base of the cranium, the rest of the skeleton being completely eroded.

- The Kerma cemetery: during the season 2013-2014 we finished the excavation of sector 23 by studying 51 graves, many deeply plundered. This sector of the Early Kerma II period (2300-2100 BC) is contemporaneous of the Egyptian Sixth Dynasty. It is precisely at this period that we notice in the Kerma civilisation the beginning of social stratification with the appearance of richer and larger graves, the multiplication of funerary offerings, the frequency of sacrificed individuals and the intensification of plundering (Honegger 2013b). Many of the graves were completely empty, but the careful study of their contents gave important information, in particular on the pottery around the tumuli and in the graves. This season's exceptional find was the discovery of twenty-seven graves belonging to Nubian archers, which were in general the richest tombs of this sector. When it was possible to observe the shape of the bows, we noticed simple curved ones; however, in five graves, we found recurved bows like those seen in certain Egyptian representations of Nubian archers. Some of these archers were accompanied by a dog, occasionally with a leash preserved.
- Wadi Farjar: we continued in January 2014 the survey in Wadi Farjar, where we started to work during the season 2013-2014. The area is located about 20 km north of Kerma. Twenty-eight sites discovered by Ali Osman and David N. Edwards years ago were checked (Osman and Edwards 2011). Nineteen new sites were located. Sherds were collected in order to date more precisely these sites. Some of them seem to be of great interest, dating to the 6th millennium BC and the Pre-Kerma period. We hope to conduct trial excavations there in one or two years.

Figure 1 / Mesolithic grave of an adult female excavated in El-Barga.



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