

K E R M A

2012-2013

SOUDAN

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I M P R E S S U M

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Cover figure : Mesolithic pottery sherds from Waydi El-Arab. Photo: Matthieu Honegger

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATIONS AT KERMA (SUDAN)
PRELIMINARY REPORT OF THE 2012-2013 SEASON

The investigations of the Swiss Archaeological Mission started on 2 December 2012 and were completed on 1 February 2013. As usual, the mission was organised in two teams.

The team directed by Matthieu Honegger worked in the eastern cemetery at Kerma and at the site of Wadi El-Arab. Additionally, a survey in the area of Wadi Farjar was begun, in anticipation of the possible building of a dam at Kajbar, 30 km north of Kerma. The team was composed of rais Khidir Magbul, who supervised eight local workers for the excavation of graves in the eastern cemetery. Marc Bundi was in charge of management and logistics (supervision of the construction of walls protecting the eastern cemetery, work in the Museum and in the new rest house) and pursued his PhD work. Seven collaborators or students from Neuchâtel participated in fieldwork (Camille Fallet, Bastien Jakob, Léonard Kramer, Ellinor Dünning, Leyla Duvannel and Deborah Locatelli). They were accompanied by two students from the universities of Geneva (Noémie Monbarron) and Basel (Salomé Keller). As is customary, a curator of the Kerma Museum (Shahinda Omer) joined our team. This year, the team benefited from the presence of Dr. Isabelle Crèvecoeur (CNRS, Bordeaux), who worked on the Mesolithic skeletal remains of Wadi El-Arab and El-Barga.

The team led by Charles Bonnet pursued its works at Dukki Gel and conducted restoration projects in the ancient city of Kerma and at Dukki Gel. This second group comprised rais Gad Abdallah, Saleh Melieh, Abdelrazek Omer Nuri and Idriss Osman Idriss, who supervised 60 local workers. Three specialists from Switzerland worked in their respective domains: Philippe Ruffieux (ceramology), Alain and Pauline Peillex (archaeology and drawing) as well as two French specialists, Severine Marchi (archaeology and drawing) and Jean-Michel Yoyotte (photography). Prof. Dominique Valbelle (University of Paris IV, La Sorbonne) worked on the publication of the engraved blocks at Dukki Gel.

The Swiss Mission was 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 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 and Research of the Swiss Confederation, the Foundation Kerma and the University of Neuchâtel (Switzerland). For more information, see www.kerma.ch

This year, the mission was reorganised and, from now on, its two contingents will operate independently. The team directed by Matthieu Honegger will continue its

work in the eastern necropolis as well as at the pre- and protohistoric sites located within the Kerma concession. Regarding the other team, Charles Bonnet will pursue the excavations at Dukki Gel and continue the conservation programme at both this site and the city of Kerma. With this aim in mind, he is associated with NCAM as well as with French colleagues and the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Bonnet's activities report will be published in Genava, as was always the case in the past, while our excavation report and the results of our first analyses will continue to be published in the present journal.

The investigations of this campaign focused on the following sites:

Wadi El-Arab, where we expanded the excavation of more recent levels over an area of 160 square metres eastward. The goal was to clear the bottom of more huts in the horizon that has already revealed three (7300-6800 cal BC) and to find sectors where more recent levels (6500-5400 cal BC) are still preserved, in order to understand the transition to a production economy.

- El-Barga, the skeletal remains of which are being studied by Isabelle Crèvecoeur. A new tomb dated to the Mesolithic was discovered on the surface during a site visit and this increased the total number of interred individuals to 45. El-Barga is the one of the largest African necropolis of pre-Neolithic date and, due to the paucity of cemeteries of this period, its study is of utmost interest (Crèvecoeur 2012). For this reason and the fact that the site must surely contain more tombs in the unexcavated sectors, we decided to undertake during the 2013-2014 campaign a new excavation of more than 100 square metres, relatively close to the large concentrations of Mesolithic burials.
- The eastern necropolis, where the clearing of tombs was focused on sector 23, dated to the Kerma ancien II and previously excavated by Charles Bonnet, but where only a sample of tombs was studied. Our goal was to complete the systematic documentation of the burials in order to study the spatial distribution of this entire sector and later compare the data with those of sectors 27-28, the excavation of which is now complete. We also cleared an area west of sector 28 with the hope of reaching the limit of the necropolis. Furthermore, with this sector having revealed Neolithic remains (hearths, postholes), the aim was to understand a section of the settlement from this period (5th millennium BC). We are aware that to date there are no known excavations for this period in either Nubia or Sudan, with the exception of what has been uncovered in sector 12 of the eastern cemetery (Honegger 2001).
- Wadi Farja, which we surveyed over a three day period. This is today a dry valley, located in the bend of the Nile 20 km north of Kerma. This area was the subject of an earlier survey (Osman and Edwards), but the possible construction of a dam downstream at Kajbar led us to respond to NCAM's appeal, looking for

teams to evaluate the threatened sectors and conduct excavations if necessary. The sector selected, Wadi Farja, includes Mesolithic, Neolithic and Kerma settlements and fits well into our research programme. We have checked 18 previously discovered sites and, in certain cases, were able to refine their dating using pottery discovered on the surface. Four new sites were also discovered.

- Dukki Gel, where Charles Bonnet continued his work on temples, sanctuaries and fortifications of Nubian or Egyptian traditions (18th dynasty). He also continued restoration works at the site by reconstructing in mud brick the foundations of the main buildings.

We will present here the results of the work conducted at Wadi El-Arab and the Kerma necropolis. Research undertaken at El-Barga and the survey at Wadi Farja will be presented at a later time, when investigations are further advanced. Further studies presented in this report include contributions by Maria Gatto, who a few years ago had undertaken a first analysis of the oldest mesolithic pottery from the Kerma region, and Marc Bundi, who discusses recent results obtained for his PhD research on the perception and the functioning of the two principal archaeological museums in Sudan, those at Khartoum and Kerma.

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