

Qatar- Sudan Archaeological Project

(QSAP)

Report From Season 2015

Number of Mission: QSAP 13

Mission: University of Dongola

Project: El- Kurru Archaeological Project

Site : El-Kurru

Director: Professor Abbas S. A. Mohammed- Ali

Duration of Field Activity:

From Jan 1st to Apr 30 th

Post- excavation activity: From:May 1st to 30th (with intervals)

Summary of Season's Activity :

1- Introduction

Logistical preparation for 2015 field season at El-Kurru started in early January 2015, before the team embarked on work on January 16th , and continued till April. Conduction of survey and post-excavation analysis and presentation of reports, budget...etc, with intervals, continued thereafter.

Members of the mission involved are:

Abbas S.A. Mohammed-Ali : Director, University of Dongola

Mohammed Fathi Rahman : Field director, University of Dongola

Gamal Al-Ghali : Archaeologist, University of Dongola

Al-Rasheed Ibrahim : Archaeologist, University of Dongola

Faisal Omer: Archaeologist , University of Dongola

Hanaa M. Hafiz : Archaeologist, University of Bahri

Mohammed Saad : Inspector, NCAM

Murtada Bushra : Inspector, NCAM

Besides, a driver, a foreman, a cook and a group of workmen.

2- Objectives of 2015 season

As most of our 2014 objectives were fulfilled (2014 Report), we continued on rest and embarked on those of 2015. The latter are:

- a- To resume the reconnaissance survey in the vicinity of the site and the village.
- b- To continue excavating the remaining royal tombs.
- c- To remove as much of the spoil heaps.
- d- To selectively sample sifting the spoil heaps to recover their contents of small finds that have escaped observation.
- e- TO mark the UNESCO boundaries for the site and its buffer zone on the ground, dig the wall foundation and start fencing.
- f- To locate the sand stone mason blocks removed from the site.
- g- To conduct preliminary analysis of the recovered material.

3- Survey:

The question regarding El-Kurru as a burial ground for the royal Kushite dynasty, and most likely, its earliest administrative center, lies in the core of our objectives. No habitation sites or cemeteries predating the rise of Napatán royal family were, as yet, known in the area. Few middle achuelean artifacts and a Neolithic site were reported (Mohammed-Ali per.com:Garcea 2006). A long chronological hiatus followed till the rise of the Napatans (ca.900 B.C). Accordingly, a survey was conducted in the vicinity of the village searching for earlier settlement and burials suggestive of ancient habitation sites

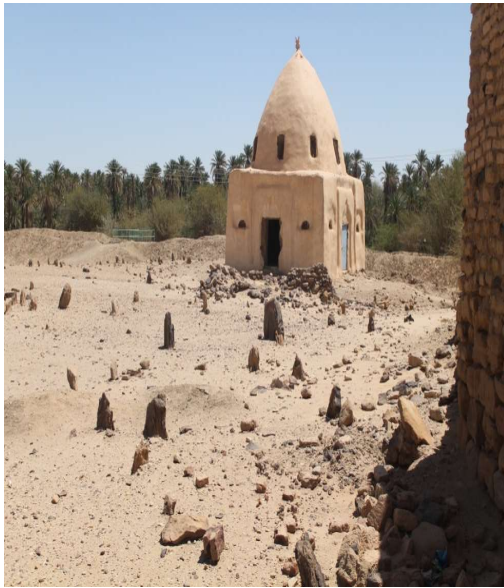
15 km. west of the site, on the edge of Mehaila desert few graves of circular superstructures, 2m. in diameter, revealed few potsherds recalling Bronze age types remained to be analyzed .

Dahaseira, at the Southern end of the village, circular mounds graves surrounded by scatter of potsherds were also recovered waiting analysis. This will continue in the coming seasons with the hope that some of these graves can be chronometrically dated to shed light on the chronological hiatus separating the stone age and the historic era in the area.

Part of our survey was to trace the mason blocks removed from the superstructures of the tombs. Our search succeeded in identifying localities within the village, where some blocks were reused, a mosque, a cemetery and a resident, all dated to the 19th century (fig1 a,b)

. The fourth was Reisner's camp constructed of broken blocks, apparently Reisner was unable to relate to any burial. Search for inscribed or epigraphic marks on them continues.

It was also noticed that huge petrified tree trunks of a type similar to those of the petrified forest, spread on various parts of the sites. A distribution map is to be drawn to see whether they were related to the site in any functional manner.



(fig1 -a)



(fig1-b)

4- Excavation and Re-excavation

In fulfillment of our plan for 2014 field season, excavation and re-excavation were conducted in 3 of the remaining burials, ku-2, ku-51 and ku-52.

4-1- ku- :

2

This pyramid burial was assumed by to be the resting place of a queen of the king buried in ku-1 (Dunham 1950 :25) given a date in the mid-4th century B.C. Earlier excavations by Reisner were not finished due to the burials state of preservation and its weak ceiling . The burial has

a short staircase and two chambers , all cut in a limestone and sand stone formation. Work has progressed in slow rate to clear the staircase and the first burial chamber .The cleared rubble yielded only potsherds.

4-2-ku-51:

On the Northern cliff, across the Northern channel are located 5 shaft burials of queens, given the numbers ku-51- ku-55. Reisner's excavations revealed the names of some of Piye's queen in some.

Ku-51 is a rock cut shaft rectangular burial 4m. 2.7m with no trace of a superstructure. Accumulation of 3.7m. of soil and trash was cleared down to the original floor before it reached a sandstone bench meant for resting the deceased bed.

4-3-ku- 52:

Next to ku-51 lies another twin vertical shaft burial given the number ku-52. Similar to the rest, it was filled with drifted sand and trash. Once more, no trace of the superstructure was observed on the surface. The Rectangular shaft pit of the substructure measures 3,59m×2,54m down to2,74m in depth, revealing a sandstone platform on which the deceased wooden bed was laid.

5- Presentation:

The spoil heaps of the 1918/1919 excavation and the current work in the site resulted in a number of rubble mounds of sand stones and trash, forming its most prominent feature and dominating its landscape. It stands in the way of visitors blocking every passway to the site features, obstructing the passage of the drainage for the rain water, and turning any attempt for a full-scale magnetometer survey unlikely .

Mounds were removed, first by loosening the soil, then carry it by wheelbarrows to a point where a backhoe can lift it in into a truck to dump it at a point out of the site and its buffer (fig.2). Part of the site is now open to light, but much remains to be done, despite the high cost of labour and low the budget (fig 3)

While the heaps were being removed, two sub-activities were concurrently on going.

Every mound was sectioned and a sample of the spoil was sifted looking for any archaeological object that might have escaped attention. Close look was also given looking for any larger

objects in the heaps. Potsherds were found in abundance and the sifting has brought to light a number of broken shawabties yielding parts of royal cartouches. Few soft stone fragments, blue in colour , were picked from the rubble. They might have been used, among others, for painting the chambers.



(fig2)



(fig 3)

6- Restoration:

The absence of most of the superstructures, or part of them, in the tombs is suggestive of them being used in other constructions, most likely within the village. Some of them were expected to yield inscriptions or carved decorations. Locating them may provide information of great value.

A brief survey in the village and inquiries among the villagers resulted in the following:

- 1- Some of the blocks were taken to a Muslim cemetery near-by .
- 2- Three other localities in the village were recovered.
 - a- an ancient deserted mosque.
 - b- an ancient deserted resident.
 - c- Reisner's camp.

Those in (a) and (b) above are regular shaped mason cut with smooth surfaces, similar in size and shape, these of the royal cemetery (figure 1,a,b above). The others in Reisner's camp are broken blocks, reused after he failed to restore or relate to any particular tomb (fig 1,c).

This has inspired the inquiry regarding the quarries that have provided the building material for the tombs construction. Tentatively, two areas were located waiting investigation.

7- Protection:

According to the UNESCO plan, the boundaries of the site and its buffer zone cover a length of ca 4.2 kms. Its topography is interrupted by two channels dividing the site into three sub-fields, characterized by natural rocky mounds. The whole site, is currently surrounded, on three sides, by houses and gardens.

Since Reisner, security of the site remains a dream, it was decided to build a mud wall harmoniously compatible with the surroundings (fig 4). It is to follow the UNESCO boundaries with 1.5 m high. Clay soil had to be brought from over 20 kms., water was to be pumped from a dug well through pipes to an artificial pond close to the site. Then by

barrels carried by trucks to the builders (fig 5. Ten teams of them were involved, each consist of 4-5 men. The work is in its initial stage. The channels in the course of the wall, remain to be dealt with (fig 5).



(fig 4)



(fig 5)

8- Number of excavated or re-excavated graves:

Five graves: 2 in the survey, common people, may be Bronze Age. 3 in the site, royal graves , Napatan

9-Main structures recovered:

- a- Two groups of common people graves
- b- Three royal tombs
- c. Located buildings with reused stone blocks
- d- Located possible quarries

10- Main achievements:

- a- Conduction of a reconnaissance survey
- b- Conduction of excavation and re-excavation
- c- Removal of huge spoil mounds
- d- Dug the foundation for the UNESCO boundaries for the site and its buffer
- e- Constructed mound wall 4.2 kms. Long 0.5- 1.5 m. high
- f- Recovery of many finds

11- list of finds:

Objects	Location	State	Description
Potsherds	spoil heaps	Broken	Napatan
Shawabtis	spoil heaps	Broken	Napatan
Coloured stone blocks	spoil heaps	Broken	Napatn
metal pendant	spoil heaps	Fragments	Napatan
Coloured limestone	spoil heaps	Broken	?
Potshers	survey sites	Broken	?



(fig 6)

12- Security:

See protection above.

13- Others:

We are indebted to the bodies involved in this work, most of all NCAM, QSAP, University of Dongola administration, University of Michigan team headed by Dr. G. Emberling, and the people of Kurru. All for their continuous stream of generosity and encouragement setting a good example of cooperation.

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