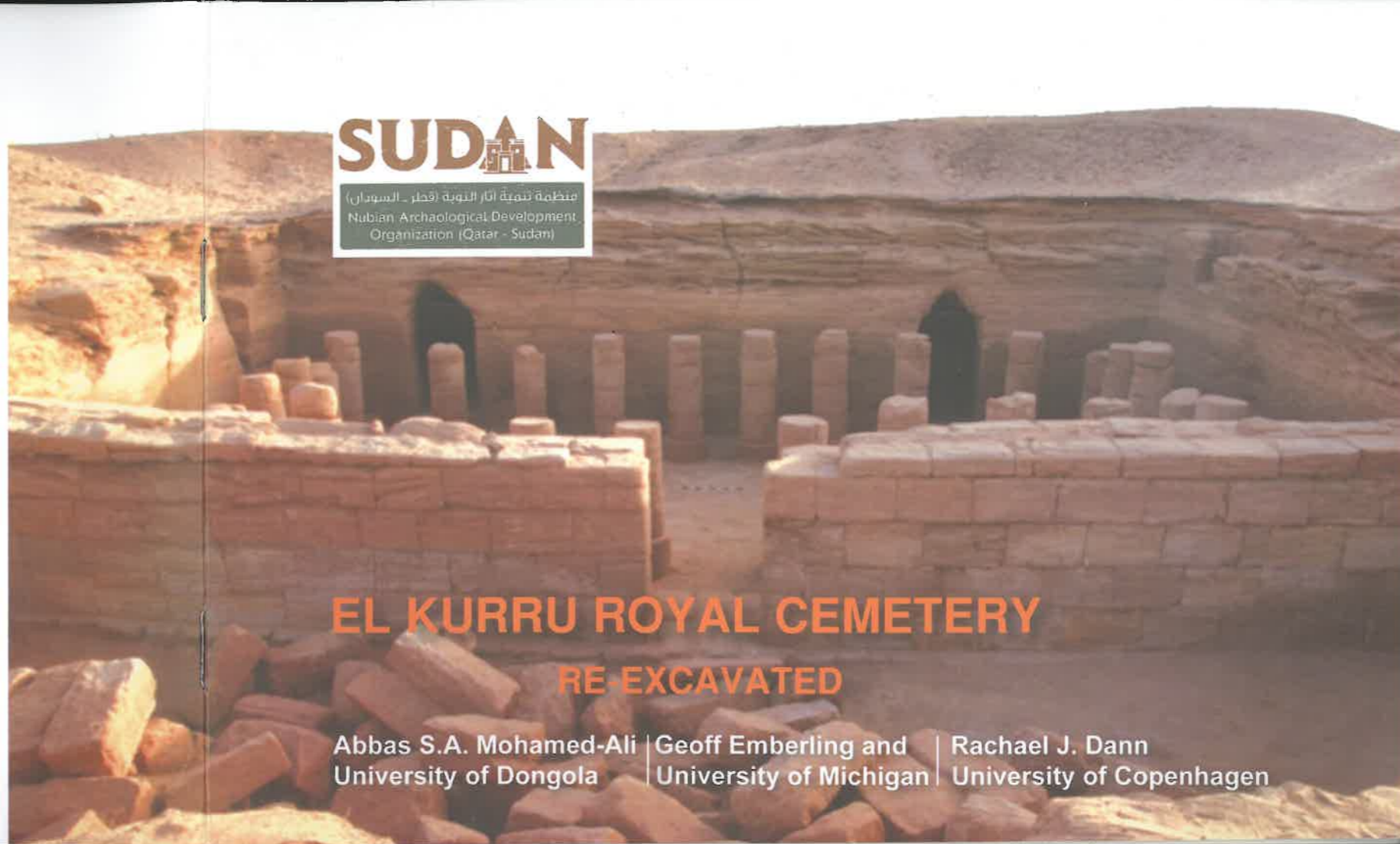




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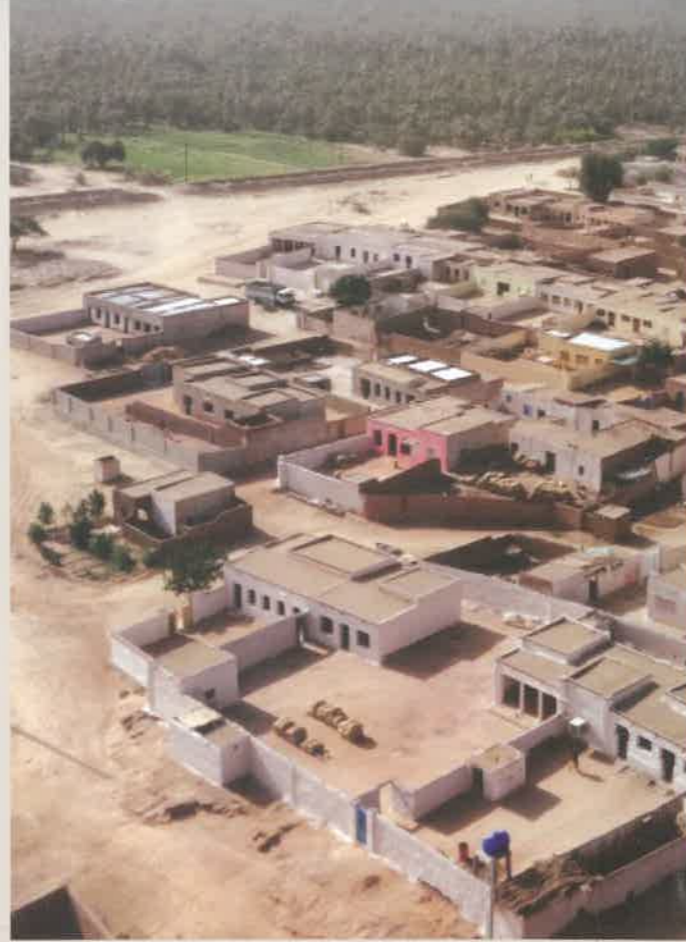
منظمة تنمية آثار النوبة (قطر - السودان)
Nubian Archaeological Development
Organization (Qatar - Sudan)



EL KURRU ROYAL CEMETERY

RE-EXCAVATED

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El Kurru

As part of a UNESCO World Heritage site, El Kurru village is rich in archaeological features. The best known part of the site is the royal cemetery as much as 3000 years old, but other burials and traces of ancient settlement have also been found in areas now covered by the modern village.

Visiting the Royal Cemetery

The sandstone plateau behind El Kurru village contains the remains of 25 royal burials of a dynasty of ancient Kush that date from about 1000 to 650 BC. The dynasty is called the Napatan Dynasty, named by scholars after the ancient city of Napata, believed to be located at Gebel Barkal, the early ritual center of the kingdom. Although many of the burials at El Kurru were originally covered by pyramids, most of the stones have been removed over the centuries, leaving only traces of the original structures and the underground burial chamber.

The Dynasty of Napata is known for having conquered Egypt, ruling as the 25th Dynasty of Egypt from about 715-653 BC. One of the best known of these kings is Piankhy (also known as Piye), whose conquest of Egypt is the subject of an exceptionally vivid text known as the Victory Stele, and whose burial (Ku. 17 on the map) is



located next to the largest preserved pyramid in the middle of the site.

The cemetery traces the rise of the Dynasty of Napata from traditional burials of a local dynasty to increasingly Egyptian styles of burial. The earliest burials are called tumuli ("mounds"). Even the earliest burials contained unusual wealth, which suggests that they were the beginning of a sequence of elite or even royal burials.

The burial architecture developed over time from simple mounds, rounded enclosure walls were added, then rectangular tomb structures with rectangular enclosure walls, and then small mortuary chapels. At some point in the sequence, the burials were covered by pyramids. The tombs of the 25th Dynasty kings (Piankhy, Shabaqo, Shebitqo, and

Tanwetamani) all have burial chambers deep underground that were accessed by stairways. By the time of the 25th Dynasty, the cemetery was divided into an area of Queens' burials to the south and further Kings' burials in the north, and some of these later tombs were plastered and painted. The painted decoration survives in two of the tombs (described in detail below).

In addition to the royal cemetery itself, clusters of other possibly royal burials were found to the north—a group of 5 likely queens' burials is visible now, while groups of 2 and 3 further north are not as accessible.

A group of 24 royal horse burials was also found and these pits are now under the modern village. The horses were buried in rows, each row belonging to one of the four kings of the 25th Dynasty. This is known because the burials of the horses contained objects inscribed with the names of the kings. The horses were buried standing up, and had been lowered into pits that were shaped to support their bodies. Most of them had also been decapitated, possibly by looters.

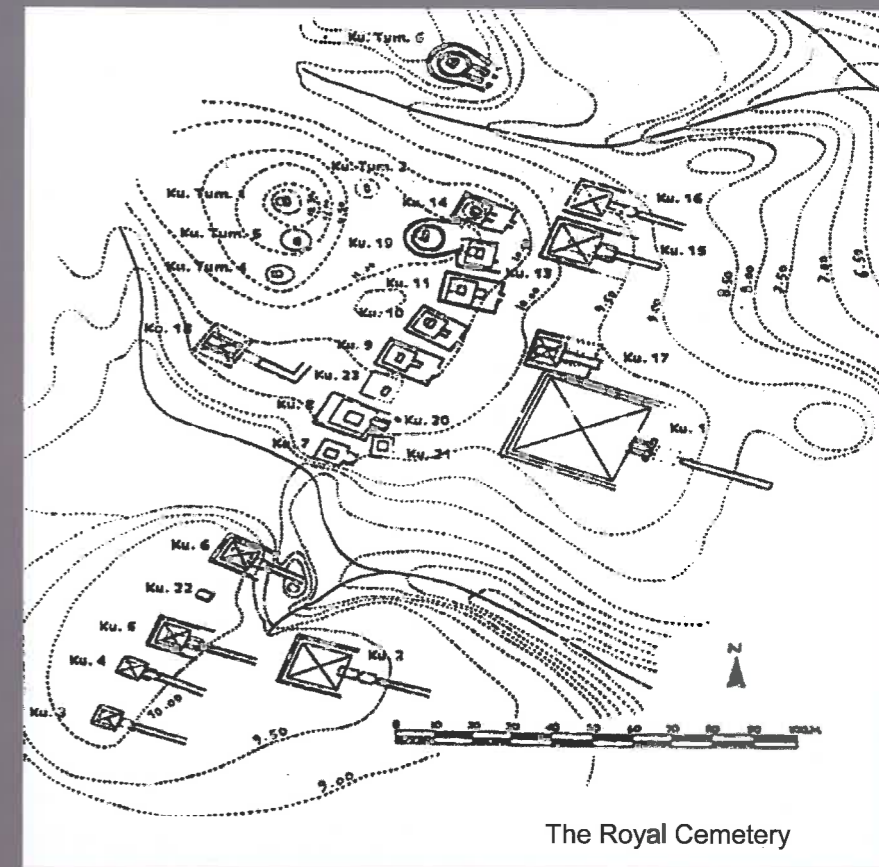
In addition to adoption of pyramids and wall paintings, other elements of Egyptian elite culture were introduced to Kush during the time of these burials. These include the use of hieroglyphic writing, worship of Egyptian deities including Amun in his ram-headed form, and the introduction of mass-produced pottery.

Two other pyramids at the site were built much later—the large surviving pyramid that dominates the site, and what seems to be the corresponding queen's tomb which has been robbed of stone. We do not yet know when these pyramids were built, but they seem to date to at least 200 years

later than the others at the site due to the originally steep angle of these pyramids.

Political considerations probably played a role in the location of royal burials. One of the best known Napatan kings, Taharqa son of Piankhy, began a new cemetery at Nuri, 25 km north of El Kurru. His cousin Tanwetamani returned to El Kurru for his burial, but the

Al Khandaq was significant during the last two centuries as an important river port which received goods from Egypt and handled exports from the heart of successors of Tanwetamani were all buried at Nuri. The return of royal burial to El Kurru centuries later remains a mystery.



The Royal Cemetery

El Kurru in Detail

The History

Sometime in the early 1st millennium BC, shortly after the Egyptian empire's control of Nubia came to an end, a native family was able to establish itself as ruler of the region. The names of its early rulers buried in the top most of the plateau, were not recovered, as the tombs were robbed in antiquity. Later the name of one of these rulers, Alara, came to be known from an inscription of one of his daughters. But the first of the local rulers to be known for certain was Kashta (760–747 BC), who expanded its northern limit as far north as Aswan. Kashta's son and successor, Piye or Piankhy (747-716 BC) was able to take the rest of Egypt as far north as the Nile Delta.

When the northern boundaries of the state were threatened by one of Delta princes, Piye, in his 20th year of reign, led an army from Napata heading north to Thebes, and the campaign continued to recapture the towns of the Middle and Lower Egypt before he turned back to Napata. The details of this campaign were recorded in one of his stelae recovered at Jebel Barkal, currently in the museum of Cairo.

Piye was succeeded by his younger brother, Shabaqo (716-702 BC), who also campaigned in Lower Egypt and brought the whole of Egypt, once more, under his control. Shabaqo's successor was Shebitqo (702-690 BC), Piye's elder son. He came into conflict with the Assyrians over Palestine and the two powers, Kush and Assyria, broke into state of hostility.

Taharqo (690-664 BC), Piye's younger son, took the throne after Shebitqo. His name was known from many sources, amongst which was the Bible. He was known for constructing many monumental buildings including shrines and temples, mostly for Amun, all over the kingdom, from Memphis to Meroe. But the conflict stimulated by Shebitqo with the Assyrians brought Taharqo into direct collision with the Assyrians. Severe battles were fought. Taharqo was defeated and forced out of Memphis in 669 BC and retreated to Napata where he died, apparently suddenly a few years later.

Tanwetamani (664-653 BC), Shebitqo's son, succeeded his nephew. After a serious attempt, he was able to recapture Egypt. The Assyrians turned back, and this time they pushed the Kushites finally out of Egypt and brought an end to the 25th dynasty. Thereafter the Kushites ruled the Middle Nile, from the 1st cataract to somewhere south of Khartoum, for one thousand years after (until about AD350).

Burial Types

Tumulus burials

Tumulus burial (a burial in the ground with a mound raised over the top) is a practice with a very long history. It is found throughout Sudan from prehistoric to Christian times. The earliest burials at El Kurru appear to have been tumulus burials, and they are located in the North-West of the cemetery, behind the later line of pyramids. The body was placed in a pit with grave goods such as pottery, jewelry and arrowheads around it, then the rubble mound was raised over the top. Some of the slightly later tumuli are marked with slices of dark ferrous rock that mark out the mound itself. Some are also enclosed by a circularshaped wall of well-cut stone blocks. Later this enclosure wall was rectangular in shape.



Pyramid burials

The pyramids at El Kurru were constructed from sandstone, which appears to have been quarried locally. Instead of using the cardinal points to orientate pyramid construction, the pyramids are aligned using the river Nile as a reference point. Therefore the staircases of the pyramids, and the chapels, all point towards the Nile. The pyramid structures were surrounded by a rectangular wall to enclose both the pyramid and chapel. Most of the stones from original pyramids have been removed.

The staircases led down to one chamber in the earlier pyramid burials (Piye) and two chambers in the later ones except in one case. Many of the burials contained servant figurines known in Egypt as shawwabtis. Inscriptions on these figures named the owner of the tombs. Some burials contained canopic jars (used in Egypt to place organs of the deceased after mummification), but no traces of mummification were found, and

it seems likely that the canopic jars were symbolic rather than used as in Egypt. Yet even though many aspects of Egyptian culture were adopted, the Kushites were still buried on beds; four holes for the bed legs are preserved in the benches of the inner burial chamber.

Tomb Painting

The two tombs at El Kurru with surviving painted scenes belong to queen Qalhata (Ku. 5) and her son Tanwetamani (Ku. 16). Traces of plaster and paint have been found in other tombs at El Kurru that also belonged to kings and queens of the 25th Dynasty. Each of the tombs has two chambers cut into the bedrock, and they are approached by staircase which is longer than the tomb itself. The decoration of the tombs should be understood as a circular design which begins in each tomb on the south (left hand) wall of chamber A, continues on to the south wall of chamber B, then the north (right hand) wall of chamber B, followed by the north wall of chamber A.



Tomb of Queen Qalhata (reigned 707-690 BC)

Queen Qalhata is thought to have been the wife of King Shebitqo (Ku. 18), and the mother of Tanwetamani, the owner of the other surviving painted tomb at Kurru. She is shown in her tomb in both life and death.

Chamber A: Decoration of South Wall

Queen Qalhata stands in the middle of the picture and wears a tight white dress and long shawl draped around her. Her hair is cropped short and she wears a golden vulture head-dress denoting that she is a mother. Qalhata is escorted into the tomb by two of the Four Sons of Horus: the baboon headed Hapy and the jackal-headed god Duamutef.

Decoration of Archway

Poorly surviving painted hieroglyphs are visible on the west face of the archway, and inside the archway itself, the goddesses Isis (left) and Nephthys (right) are visible. They both face in towards the burial chamber itself, and have their arms raised and their hands in front of their faces in a gesture of mourning for the dead queen.

Chamber B (burial chamber)

In the centre of chamber B is the rock bier on which the queen's body would have been placed during the burial. The hieroglyphic inscriptions which are arranged as a frieze around the top of the two chambers are now in poor condition. It may be the case that (particularly in chamber B), the pigment has decayed away from the walls, leaving a ghost outline of the original hieroglyphs

Decoration of South Wall

Queen Qalhata's mummy, in multi-colored wrappings, is present inside its sarcophagus. In front of and behind the sarcophagus are various gods and goddesses watching over the queen and witnessing her journey to the afterlife.



Decoration of North Wall

Queen Qalhata's mummy lies on its stomach inside the sarcophagus. In the presence of different gods and goddesses a priest performs part of the Opening of the Mouth ceremony. The priest points an ankh sign (the hieroglyph meaning 'life') at the Queen's face, 'opening' the orifices of the face and allowing her mummy to breathe and receive sustenance during her afterlife.

Decoration of West Wall

The decoration of the west wall is damaged, but was probably never completed. It may have gone through a number of design phases before being abandoned. Painted vertical lines are present which would have divided up the space on this wall in order to receive a hieroglyphic inscription.

Chamber A: Decoration of North Wall

Queen Qalhata, having successfully negotiated the transformation into the afterlife is escorted from the

tomb by two of the four sons of Horus: Qebhsenuf with a falcon head, and Imsety with a human head.

Tomb of King Tanwetamani (reigned 664-653 BC)

The tomb was originally covered by a sandstone pyramid and was entered via a staircase cut into the rock. The tomb was robbed in antiquity.

Chamber A: Decoration of South Wall

Tanwetamani is the central figure (see photo above). He is shown wearing a golden diadem with double protective serpent (uraeus), which indicates his rule of both Egypt and Sudan. Around his neck he wears a pendant with a ram's head, which is the sacred animal of the god Amun. The other males in the pictures are two of the Four Sons of Horus, here pictured with human heads, unlike their images on the archway.

Decoration of Archway

The goddesses Isis (left) and Nephthys (right), flank the entrance to chamber B. Above the arch is a depiction of the solar disk in the solar boat. The sun is worshipped by baboons (animals which were associated with the rising sun due to the chattering sound they make in the early morning), and the jackal god of the necropolis, Wepwawet.



Chamber B (burial chamber) Decoration of Archway:

The decorations on each side of the arched doorway mirror each other. The depiction shows the four sons of Horus. The four sons of Horus were minor deities who were associated with the process of mummification. In an ideal mummification process, the lungs, liver, intestines and stomach would be removed from the body, individually prepared and wrapped and placed in one of four jars, each topped by a stopper depicting one of the four sons of Horus, who acted as a protective deity for the organ.

Decoration of South Wall

The sarcophagus of Tanwetamani is depicted on the south wall and it is flanked at both ends by depictions of various gods and goddesses who watch over it. These are also the deities who must be properly addressed before the king can pass on to the afterlife. They are also present to observe a ceremony involving the heart which is depicted on the West wall. The large scarab beetle is a sign relating to the god Khepre ('becoming'), a deity associated with rebirth and renewal.

Decoration of North Wall

Within the sarcophagus itself, the mummified King Tanwetamani is visible. A priest holds an ankh sign (the sign for life) towards the King's face, as he performs a fragment of the traditional Egyptian 'Opening of the Mouth' ceremony when a priest symbolically opens the mouth and nose of the mummy in order to allow it to receive sustenance in the afterlife. This ceremony is being observed by gods and goddesses.

Decoration of West Wall

Parts of the decoration on this wall are poorly preserved, but also appear to be unfinished, particularly the images and hieroglyphs on the right of the wall. The images are unusual, and incorporate some elements of Egyptian ritual, but others which are probably a Kushite re-imagining of them which is difficult to understand. The left part of the depiction may show King Tanwetamani kneeling in adoration of an object that probably represents his heart, which must testify to his good character to the gods who stand and watch. The human headed bird is a 'Ba' bird, and represents the soul of the dead king, which will fly between his body and the afterlife for eternity.

The depiction on the right is highly unusual and is difficult to interpret. A kneeling mummiform god holds a fragment of an ankh sign. Another depiction of the heart may have formed the central portion of the scheme whilst a male figure stands to the right.

Chamber A: Decoration of North Wall

This image complements the depiction on the south wall of chamber A, and shows two Sons of Horus escorting the reborn King Tanwetamani out into the world again.



The Archaeological excavations

El Kurru was first excavated in 1918 and 1919 by George Reisner of Harvard University and The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. He found that all of the burials had been looted, but enough evidence remained to present a picture of the original wealth of the cemetery. The objects found are divided between the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston and the Sudan National Museum in Khartoum. Reisner was also responsible for the first excavations at the other important Kushite sites of Jebel Barkal, Nuri and Meroë.

New Archaeological Work at El Kurru

The International Kurru Archaeological Project began new work at El Kurru in 2013. The project has three parts. Professor Abbas Sidahmed Mohamed-Ali of the University of Dongola at Karima has begun a project to clean and protect the site and present it for visitors. Dr. Geoff Emberling of the University of Michigan and Professor Rachael J Dann of the University of Copenhagen have begun work to put the royal cemetery in a broader context that will help understand the development of the Dynasty of Napata and the eventual



move of the center of authority within Kush to Meroë. These projects are all generously funded by the Qatar-Sudan Archaeological Project in association with the National Corporation for Antiquities and Museums in Sudan, and excavations are undertaken with help from workmen who live in the village at El Kurru.

Settlement Remains at El Kurru

Investigations into ancient settlement remains at El Kurru began with notes in George Reisner's 1919 field notebook in which he listed five possible elements of a settlement—two fortification walls, two structures that he thought were temples, and a large well cut into rock that he thought might have been part of a palace. As of early 2014, four of these settlement elements have been identified and two are being investigated: a temple and a section of a large fortification wall.

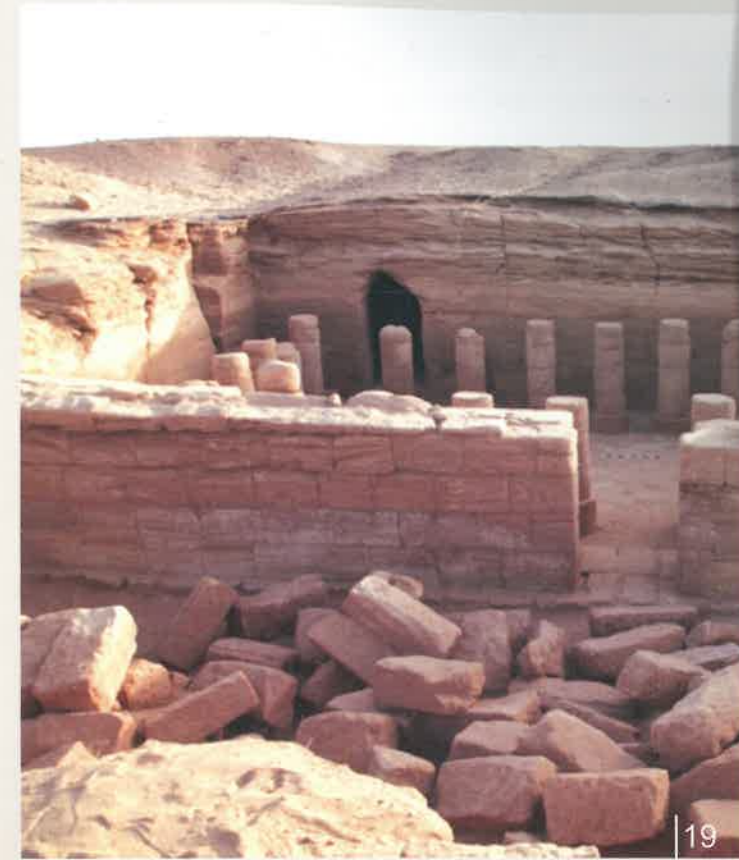
The Temple

Located near the Royal Cemetery, the temple was almost certainly a stone quarry before being converted to other purposes. Because it is located near the cemetery, it is likely to have been a "mortuary temple" dedicated to the cult of dead kings. It has a highly unusual plan with only one parallel, found at the site of Nuri (but currently covered by sand and not visible).

A staircase from the east (Nile) side leads into an outer room that is distinguished by the collapse of its outer wall, almost certainly because of a powerful flood from the nearby wadi. The inner room

contains 26 columns as well as two doorways into inner chambers cut into the rocks. These inner chambers, two of which were also decorated with columns as well as roofing beams, were found almost entirely empty of material. One clue to their function may be the ancient door locking system—the first set of underground rooms had doors that could have been locked with bolts into the stone, and the rooms directly behind them could also be locked from the inside. Precious materials may have been stored here, and removed when the building was abandoned.

In the outer rooms is ancient graffiti that was probably carved into the walls and columns after the original use of the building was abandoned (perhaps because of the flood). These carvings were likely associated with a domestic re-occupation of the temple with cooking installations, grinding stones, and a layer of ash across the sand. This occupation dates to the classic Meroitic period (100 BC – AD 100) and provides the clearest evidence for the last use of the structure.



City Wall

Close to the line of palm trees along the Nile, another excavation has begun to expose and document a city wall more than 2 meters thick that is preserved over 1 meter high. Built of shaped stone blocks along each edge and filled with stone and rubble, it is built much like other known walls of the Napatan and Meroitic periods (700-100 BC). One gateway in the wall has been uncovered, and it preserves door socket stones, an original street on the sandstone bedrock, and a threshold stone made of a log of petrified wood.

Surprisingly, our excavations have so far recovered only remains of a classic Christian period village dating to about AD 900. Continuing work in this area of the site may resolve the historical confusion. We plan to clear the wall along its entire length, which Reisner noted was close to 200 meters.

Pyramid One

The largest pyramid at the site is also one of the latest in date, along with a likely contemporary



queen's pyramid across the wadi to the south, the stones of which have been removed. It is also the only pyramid at the site that was not completely excavated by George Reisner's excavation in 1919. In an inner chamber of the burial he noted that a large portion of the ceiling had collapsed. He was concerned about the danger of further collapse and stopped excavation.

Excavation was renewed in 2014 with a plan to construct iron support structures in the inner chamber to allow for exploration of this chamber. We hope that continuing excavation will reveal the name of the king for whom this pyramid was built.

Conservation of the Painted Tombs

Conservation of the two painted tombs at El Kurru will be undertaken in collaboration with the Royal Danish Conservation School. A first step in the conservation process has been initiated, and involves measuring

the temperature and humidity in the tombs over a year and monitoring the changes. Small (about the size of a fingernail) samples of paint have been taken from the tomb decoration in order to analyze the pigments and other ingredients that were used to make the different colored paints in the tombs. These paint samples, and also small samples of the rock are being analyzed to determine their porosity and salt content. Once all of these measures are known, conservation work can begin, in order to preserve the paintings for future generations.

Reisner's Camp

The archaeologist George Reisner worked at El Kurru between December 1918 and May 1919, and was resident at El Kurru between February and May 1919. During his stay at El Kurru he lived in the small stone built structures visible in the desert, behind the tumuli burials. The smaller structure was probably a kitchen, but in his diaries, Reisner also describes a series of tent structures in his camp. Work has begun to survey the areas around these structures and to record them and the debris that is nearby, in order to have a greater understanding of what it was like for the first excavator of El Kurru to live at the site. oral data is being collated from the elders of the village.



Summary remarks

Sometime in the early 1st millennium B.C., after the end of the Egyptian control of northern Sudan, a local family was able to establish itself as ruler of Kush, before they were able to expand their authority north and south and turn the chiefdom into a kingdom, then to an empire.

The Kushites were culturally different from ancient Egypt even if they adopted some elements of Egyptian culture. Their burial customs were purely local at the start before they ruled Egypt. Thereafter, they took some Egyptian customs but they did not abandon theirs completely. A combination of native and Egyptian customs remained in use to the end of the Kingdom. In their religious belief, they worshiped local and foreign deities, some with specific duties, cults and forms, and others with a combination of some. Among these were Amun (of Napata) Isis, Osiris, Horus, and Mut. Finally, unlike the Egyptians, the royal succession seems to have followed a matrilineal rather than a patrilineal

system—it followed the mother's line, with the deceased to be succeeded by a brother from his mother's side or a son of a sister. This was supported by a custom of a brother–sister marriage.

Though chronologically the Kushite 25th Dynasty is closest to the Egyptian New Kingdom, the Kushites revived features and customs of Egypt's Old and Middle Kingdoms. They took Memphis as a capital, returned to the pyramid burial, and adopted older forms of sculpture in statues of their kings.

Glossary

Amun: Principal god of the Kushite pantheon. Sometimes represented as human, the ram (with curly horns) was his sacred animal. He was believed to reside inside the sacred mountain at Gebel Barkal. Another form of Amun resided in Egypt at Thebes.

Ankh: Hieroglyphic sign meaning 'life', in the form of a cross with a loop at the top.

Ba bird: A representation of the dead person's soul in the form of a bird with a human head. The Ba could move freely inbetween the mummified body and the world of the living, receiving sustenance from the offerings that had (hopefully) been left for the dead person in their funerary chapel. The image of the Ba bird and statues of it became an increasingly important aspect of

Kushite funerary belief and practice.

Chapel: Small stone-built sacred space usually on the East side of a burial place or pyramid in which offerings could be left for the dead person. It was located on the East side to associate the space with the rising sun, the new day, and the idea of resurrection.

Duamutef: Jackal-headed god. One of the Four Sons of Horus.

Four Sons of Horus: Four gods usually depicted each with a different head (human, baboon, jackal, falcon) but sometimes depicted all with human heads. In Egyptian funerary practice, an ideal burial would involve the mummification of the body and the removal of the internal organs. Each of these would be placed inside a canopic jar, and the lid of each of the canopic jars

depicted one of the Four Sons of Horus. Each son (or each god) was associated with a particular internal

organ: the liver (Imsety, human-headed), stomach (Duamutef, jackal-headed), lungs (Hapy, baboon-headed) and intestines (Qebehsenuef, falcon-headed).

Hapy: Baboon-headed god. One of the Four Sons of Horus.

Horus: Falcon-headed Egyptian god of Kingship.

Imsety: Human-headed god. One of the Four Sons of Horus.

Isis: Egyptian goddess, mother of Horus. A great magician.

Khepre: Egyptian god in the form of a

scarab beetle, which writes the hieroglyph for the word 'becoming'. Scarab beetles roll balls of dung in front of them and for the Egyptians this mirrored the movement of the sun across the sky. The dung ball contains the eggs of the beetle, from which the young beetles emerge, therefore the god is also associated with the concept of rebirth.

Mortuary Temple: Large stone-built structure linked with an individual royal burial, but not physically associated with it. Ceremonies to commemorate the dead monarch and to ensure that his soul survived in the afterlife would be celebrated here.

Nepthys: Egyptian goddess, sister of Isis.

Qebhsenuf: Falcon-headed god. One of the Four Sons of Horus.

Tumulus: Mound of soil, sand or rubble placed over a burial to mark it.

Uraeus: Depiction of a rearing cobra. The outcrop of stone at Gebel Barkal was believed to represent the cobra, and a double uraeus is worn by the Kushite kings on their crowns. The cobra rears up ready to spit poison into the eyes of the king's enemy.

Wepwawet: God usually depicted in the form of a jackal, and associated with the necropolis. This may be because jackals were often viewed roaming about in burial grounds hoping to find bones.



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