
Newsletter of the Society of Africanist Archaeologists in America.

Edited by P.L. Shinnie and issued from the Department of Archaeology, The University of Calgary, Calgary, Alberta, T2N 1N4, Canada. Typing and editorial assistance by Ama Owusua Shinnie.

The editor begins to wonder if Nyame Akuma is read! In spite of Mr. Kenses editorial comments on the length of contributions and the 'Notes to Contributors' on p.3 of the cover long articles with full bibliographies and in some cases un-reproducible figures are still being sent in. With the hope of making the point clearer a separate sheet on rather vividly coloured paper is being sent with this number.

The 'coat-trailing' comments on the use of B.P. in dating and a citing non available authorities which I hoped would provoke some discussion produced only one comment, from Dr. Newton of the University of Science and Technology, Kumasi: The relevant part of his letter says:

"In my teaching I often have to refer to some particular time in the distant past, e.g. when dealing with such topics as evolution, palaeontology, and past events associated with phyto-geography. In some cases I need to refer to relatively recent events, for which radio-carbon dates are available. I always refer to events occurring so many years ago, even when something approaching an absolute date is involved. Although we cannot now abandon the Gregorian calendar for modern dating, now that it has been shown that the whole Jesus story is a myth I prefer to avoid using the terms B.C. and A.D. when possible. My vote is for sticking to B.P.

It seems that the 'references' at the end of a paper serve two functions. These are a) to state the author's sources of data used in preparing the paper, and b) to guide readers to sources of additional information if they wish to read further on the topic. For the first function there is no reason why an author should not list items that are not generally available, and indeed, some authors even refer to private letters (usually as 'personal communication'). As a mere statement of the author's source material this practice is quite acceptable. However, such references can certainly be most frustrating for a reader wishing to use the reference list in its other capacity, i.e. as a guide to further reading. I would agree, therefore, that references to material not generally available should be avoided. Perhaps this should be seen as an argument in favour of encouraging people to publish their results in periodicals of wide distribution, instead of allowing such data to stagnate in theses and departmental reports".

P.L. Shinnie.

GENEVA UNIVERSITY EXCAVATIONS IN THE SUDANReport on the 1979-1980 Season

The University of Geneva's archeological mission in the Sudan took up its work once again this winter. Several work sites were developed in the ancient city of Kerma and its cemeteries. Consequently, new discoveries complete the observations already made during the past years. In the city's north-western area, houses situated on a small street were unearthed. These latest discoveries prove that in Middle Kerma (about 2050-1750 B.C.) spacious living quarters existed, containing two or three big rooms disposed around a courtyard. Secondary brickwork housed small livestock while cows were kept on the outskirts of the city or, in case of war, behind the enclosure wall.

We continued work on the western Deffufa. This large edifice, which marks the center of the city, was probably a temple. Additions to the eastern side of this monument have been re-examined. Under the floor of a chapel, which had a ceiling supported by a series of wooden pillars, the remains of a former room were uncovered. The bottom part of the walls and the floor of this room, entirely painted in red ochre, have been preserved. Other remains related to these levels of occupation may indicate the organization of the place of worship with its storerooms. This compound dates from Classic Kerma (1750-1450 B.C.) but covers vestiges of more ancient dwellings and public monuments which will have to be dug up progressively. Several layers of ash and charcoal revealed by the stratigraphy show that political troubles occurred in this part of the city. Holes left by the poles of light constructions made of wood and reeds can be observed. They may belong to the periods of destruction which seem to have followed the wars conducted by the kings of Kush.

The city could thence be reorganized with other buildings made of unbaked bricks. These remains have been observed up to 2,50 meters in depth.

The excavations in the tombs of Middle Kerma were continued in the eastern necropolis. Certain funeral rites have now been proven. For example, it is known that live goats or sheep were placed in leather bags next to the deceased's bed. In two tombs, the remains of a sacrificed adolescent were found. A rich variety of ceramic illustrates once again the quality of the craftsmen. After a tractor passed over the ground in the eastern cemetery so as to provide new farm land, an emergency work site had to be set up, because tombs of Ancient Kerma (about 2500-2050 B.C.) were unearthed. The dead were dressed in leather clothing, in one case decorated with beads made of bones.

We also had to intervene very rapidly when houses were constructed in the modern town. A part of the meroitic cemetery has been excavated. This rather poor area has nevertheless furnished very interesting anthropological information. The necropolis appears to be very vast for we found approximately 800 meters further north an important series of meroitic burial sites. Judging from the furnishings of these tombs, they must date from the 2nd to the 4th centuries A.D. Thus, we are dealing with a relatively later period and it can be assumed that the cemetery expanded from south to north.

It is in the remains of the ancient city that we unearthed the chambers of these tombs dating from the end of the meroitic period. One of the burial chambers, carefully vaulted, possesses a special arrangement. On the descending passage to the tomb, an amphora was smashed at the time of the funeral ceremony, perhaps during a banquet, for certain fragments of the broken vase were put into the closing wall of the entrance. In spite of extensive looting, it is still possible to reconstitute the position of the deceased woman. Her jewels, scarab bracelets, silver rings, anklets and pearl necklaces, are part of quality finery. Other ceramic wares complete this discovery.

The last weeks of the mission were devoted to the preparation of a scientific film for the Swiss television network. Mr. Pierre Barde, producer, considered that a presentation of the Kerma civilization was an excellent occasion to increase the public's awareness of the Sudanese past. This film is being co-produced by the community of French-speaking television networks.

Charles Bonnet

BRITISH INSTITUTE IN EASTERN AFRICA

Peter Robertshaw (BIEA), John Mack (BM), Gerrit Dimmendaal (University of Leiden), Dick Grove (Cambridge U.), Paul Harvey (Cambridge U.), Andrew Mawson (Cambridge U.), Amum Tor (Sudan Antiquities Service), and Serge Tornay (University of Nanterre) write:

The third expedition to the Southern Sudan by the British Institute took place between January and March 1980. The original aim of the expedition was to investigate archaeological sites related to the former overflow channel between Lake Turkana and the Nile, together with linguistic and anthropological research on the present inhabitants of the area. However due to the exceptionally bad drought and poor state of roads it was not possible to work at the overflow channel. Therefore more widespread survey and excavation was carried out in Eastern Equatoria.