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■ SUDAN

Archaeological Mission of the University of Geneva at Kerma (Sudan): Report on the 1992–1993 Campaign

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Once again, the excavations led by the Swiss Mission at Kerma from December 12, 1992 to February 4, 1993, took place under favourable conditions. More than 120 workmen whose work was directed by the raîs from Tabo, Gad Abdallah, and Saleh Melieh, attended the working sites. The restoration of certain monuments, and more particularly that of the warehouses of the large roundhouse of the palace, occupied a

group of twenty builders and their assistants. Many other specialists built a 300 m long surrounding wall so as to protect the eastern side of the site where the wire fence had disappeared.

A considerable effort was made towards excavating the southwestern part of the ancient city. Outside the protected site, the spread of population and traffic threatened the archaeological remains. Thus, after having come upon the remains of the palace during the previous campaign, the foundations of many peripheral buildings were brought to light. A true secondary built-up area appeared; therefore works on this area will have to go on for some time. Nearer the royal residence, a large dwelling completes the image of the city with its western quarter. This urban area is limited to the south by fortification ditches that could be traced on a length of over 140 m. The study of the fortified western entrance resumed together with a stratigraphic sounding near the *deffufa*. A specific investigation was undertaken in the eastern necropolis where several tombs were superficially cleaned so as to study funerary rites.

The Ancient City

The city grew progressively; thus one sometimes comes upon the layout of old ditches under more recent houses. The western fortified entrance was razed to the ground when the city expanded. Repeated cleaning made the understanding of its organisation possible. The access route ran perpendicular to the general east-west axis, between two enormous round bastions. Those massive mounds, several times refaced, were crowned with rectangular or originally circular towers. On the inside, facing the entrance, an impressive bastion blocked the entrance once more.

Near the gate, a large dwelling (M122) was unearthed. Before it were two houses (M126-M127), the orientation of which corresponds to quite a different axis from the neighbouring area. This spread towards the west is associated with the Middle Kerma Period (2050–1750 B.C.). House 122 is identified with several plots of land within a 29 m square. At least three dwellings were erected in the housing perimeter. Round silos enabled us to situate the enclosed land to the north destined for food storage. As for the long courtyard, the southern entrance of which was protected by a low winding wall, one may presume that it had a religious function. Traces of big pillars could belong to the first outlay of a chapel.

During the Classical Kerma Period (1750–1500 B.C.), the whole dwelling area was reshaped, disregarding the older developments; the chapel was enlarged to a square shape. The neighbouring courtyards with their silos were still in use but stronger walls marked the bounds of the dwelling unit; two blocks of buildings were added.

Other houses in the same area or further to the west are known to us. The collapse of the pilaster-supported side walls enabled us to check the original height of the buildings, which were at least 3 m high.

Further to the south, the dried-up ditches that surrounded the city gave us a first piece of intelligence regarding the defence works. As a consequence of the dumping of debris outside the city walls, these ditches filled up and made a new space. After a while, the slope of the ditch was reinforced with a layer of hardened mud. The close study of these layers brought out some of the layouts. On a portion of the newly gained space, three minor buildings undoubtedly point to the location of the casemates.

The Secondary Suburban Settlement

The boundary of the ancient city of the southwest seems to skirt an area near the centre of which there is a mound, understood to be a tumulus. As a matter of fact, a few soundings proved that a religious neighbourhood had developed on this site. So far, about ten cult buildings have been traced, lined up along both sides of the street. Their outlay varies from a simple square room to complex units made of a sanctuary and two side annexes, preceded by a peristyle courtyard. Former construction phases often point to the permanence of a place of cult that was generally enlarged.

The walls of the Holy of Holies were carefully built and may be quite thick (up to 0.70 m). On the other hand, the courtyard walls had shallow foundations and must have been lower. They had wooden supports, two carbonized posts acknowledged as doum palm tree having been well preserved underground. These wooden column bases showed an unusual feature; they were circular structures made of brick and stone clustered together with mud. While these buildings seem to have been destroyed by fire, the traces of many fireplaces must also be linked with functions or activities that took place within or around the monuments.

Little archaeological material has been recognized in the layers of destruction (the only ones that have been excavated up to now); three fragmentary jars were still in situ, and some dozens of sherds were also recovered. These elements mostly belong to the Middle Kerma Period, though some are of the Classical Kerma Period.

A building complex borders the religious structures to the west and to the south; the buildings may have been designed as workshops, places of storage, or sometimes even dwellings. Three polished stone axes were found in one of the units consisting of two rooms side by side.

A general outlook of this neighbourhood is still unavailable but an entry is indicated by rounded walls at the far end of the main street, and a large elongated structure closing the area to the east defining a 70 m square for the central part.

A definite interpretation of functions of this religious neighbourhood would of course be premature. It seems obvious that an institution based on an Egyptian model ruled its activities and that providing offerings for the chapels kept a great number of people busy. This may have involved a Nubian adaptation of the Egyptian worship dedicated to the memory of deceased kings or governors, in some way a funerary complex close to the city of the lviing. A necropolis which remains to be studied is included in the ruins of this religious complex at the end of the Classical Kerma Period.

The Eastern Necropolis

The thorough cleaning of several tumuli enabled us to understand how the bucranes were placed to the south of the tombs. Close to these were some jars that were used for libations. Two ceramic plates placed on the tumulus seem to represent a snake game; the model of a bird was also noted.

The overall shape of the tumulus, with its black stone ring, may be completed by an almost flat cover of white quartzite pebbles. Only a burial place was excavated; it had been totally plundered.

Archaeological Material

An investigation of the ditches is focussed on the search for seal impressions. Some twenty-or-so of these objects were found and will complement other findings fo the kind. They demonstrate the close links between Kerma and the Egyptian administration of the fortresses of the Second Cataract.

Large fragments of an ostrich shell skilfully engraved show an interesting iconography. Giraffes, a crocodile, and a bovine-type animal belong to the Nubian traditional bestiary. A character placed under a geometric garland seems to stand out as the centre of the composition, whereas other human figures give a precise and detailed account of their clothing. The prow of a ship is also represented.

Discovery of Middle Stone Age Sites near El Ghaddar (Sudan)

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