

K E R M A

2010-2011

SOUDAN

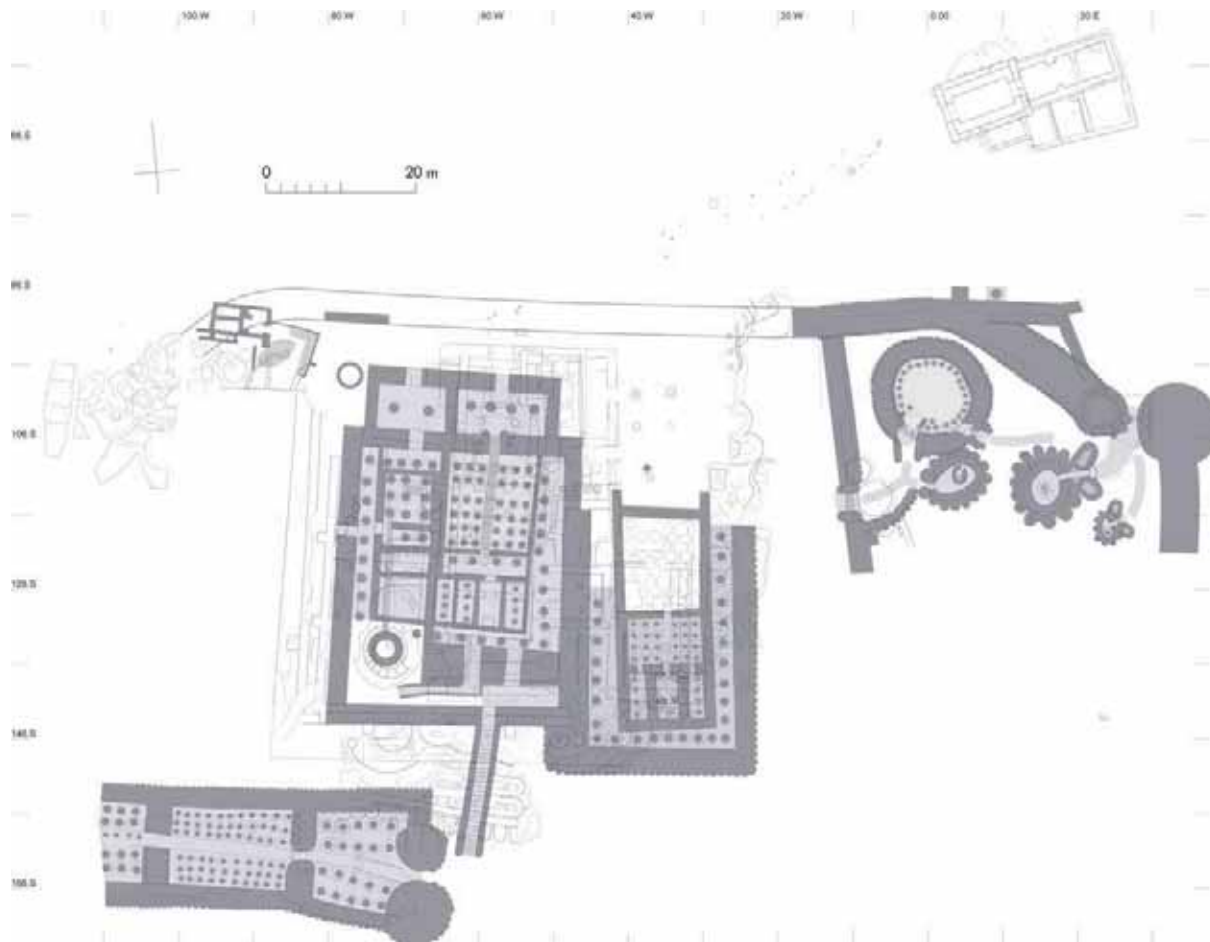
Matthieu Honegger • Charles Bonnet

Dominique Valbelle • Philippe Ruffieux • Camille Fallet • Marc Bundi • Jérôme Dubosson



The remains discovered during this season enhance our knowledge of the architectural programs carried out at Dukki Gel under the reigns of Egyptian pharaohs, from Thutmose I to Hatshepsut. The monumental aspect of the mud brick structures is impressive, as are the dimensions of the fortifications built by the Nubians. The modifications applied to these defensive lines, which were regularly reinforced, bear witness to the eventful moments of the early Egyptian conquest, which took place at the time of the peak of the Kerma cultures, so that the Egyptian invaders probably didn't have any problem finding the manpower necessary for the foundation of a city embodying their breakthrough abroad. When Nubians briefly retake power after several uprising attempts, the same manpower is certainly appointed to the defence of the indigenous agglomeration and of its religious area.

Figure 19 | Plan of the Nubian quarter and the Egyptian official complex of Tuthmose Ist.



The Egyptian town

The Egyptian town founded by Thutmose I comprises at least three temples protected by a precinct and a large building outside of it to the south-west. A long staircase would link it to the central temple. There were certainly other subsidiary constructions. The plan of these temples, characterized by the presence of a peripteral portico, suggests that these features, reminiscent of some monuments of Hatshepsut, already existed during the reign of her father Thutmose I (fig. 19 and 20).

The western temple

Under the brick pavement of the western temple dated to the reign of Hatshepsut were found the traces of a former state, represented by nine mud brick column bases belonging to a hypostyle hall, and by a wall running alongside the peripteral portico cleared during our last season. A column belonging to the pronaos was also spotted. The subterranean passage leading to the neighbouring well was already in use during this first state, as it would open onto the hypostyle hall, and a door in the side wall enabled to reach the peripteral portico.

Figure 20 | General view of the remains of the eastern temple



The eastern temple

Since we had already identified the Meroitic, Napatan, Ramesside and Amarnian phases, we didn't expect to discover an earlier state in the area of the sanctuary, since the latter had been partially invaded by a Nubian defensive line, as we found out last year. This season, we were very surprised to notice traces of orthogonal structures in places which had been cleared by the eolian erosion. These traces can be seen about 20 cm under the Nubian fortifications. We concentrated our work on this level, which could be related to the works commissioned by Thutmose I. The structures uncovered represent the southern half of the plan of a first temple built in mud brick, consisting in a tripartite sanctuary preceded by a hypostyle hall and surrounded by a peripteral portico. Ahead of the hall were found layers of sandstone fragments and negative imprints of columns, indicating that other elements dating back to the reigns of Thutmose I, Thutmose II or Hatshepsut are yet to be discovered.

The entrance axis towards the sanctuary was underlined by a brick-paved avenue showing a slight angle. The hypostyle hall comprised six rows of four columns, the foundations of which, made of mud brick, reach deep into the ground. Their proximity implies a much smaller diameter in the upper parts. Many post holes seen in the soil heaps of this level pertain to strengthening works carried out during the building process. The regular series of very small holes, with a diameter of 1.5 cm, which underline the perimeter of the concentric circles forming the foundations, may have been used as construction markers. They are found in very large amounts.

The central aisle would lead to a vestibule used as antechamber ; a thick wall would separate it from the holy of holies, which measures 2.75 m by less than 2 m. Wall benches were found on three sides. On the main axis, four steps would reach a quadrangular base with rounded angles, which was covered by a thick coating of silt, as were the lateral sides of the stairs. On this slightly decentred base was built a circular foundation, with a diameter of 90 cm. Made of several concentric mud rings, it was probably meant to support the base of an altar or a naos. In front of the entrance door, to the west, is found another mud foundation, with a diameter of 30 cm, which is probably related to the presence of a vessel.

All these developments were also found on the floor, as if drawn by double rows of very small circular holes, probably reeds driven in the ground. In the eastern half of the sanctuary, a deep drainage channel could be followed up to the peripteral portico, which enabled the evacuation of the water used for libations. Restoration works are suggested by post holes on both sides of this channel and in the walls separating the sanctuary and the antechamber (fig. 21).

Each of the two lateral annexes is equipped with a row of four columns erected rather close to the exterior wall, so as to allow an 80 cm wide passage in the space left. Behind the tripartite sanctuary were found the peripteral portico and the wide



Figure 21 | The sanctuary of the eastern temple.

precinct of the temple. This wall was strengthened by small rounded buttresses placed side by side, all of them in the same dimensions. To the south-western corner, the junction with the complex formed by the two neighbouring temples is completed with the same buttresses.

To the north of the sanctuary and of the hypostyle hall were also discovered the foundations of column bases pertaining to a hypostyle hall posterior to the remains of Thutmose I and Hatshepsut. The dimensions of these foundations are impressive: they consist in a circle of mud brick with a diameter of 1.9 m, inside which the bricks are aligned in rows. The inner rectangle probably matches the shape of the bases, which may have been of stone. There was no central aisle and the five rows of five columns would occupy the entire space.

The fortifications of the Egyptian town

In order to prepare the restoration works and the enhancement of the remains of the southern part of the Egyptian town, the excavations were continued on both sides of the staircase connecting the southern door with the central temple (fig. 22). The detailed plan of four bastions could be mapped, as the remains were in a good state of preservation. It is clear that these elements, which may have been erected at the end of the reign of Thutmose I, were enlarged and transformed several times.

Semi-circular facings, consolidated by rather large posts, strengthened the external walls. Their plan crosses narrow and transverse older bastions which protected the bottom part of the bastions. A thick wall equipped with narrow bastions pertains to one of the last modifications made, probably under the reign of Hatshepsut. We could note that this fortified line would continue for about 50 m before it would turn at a right angle towards the north.

The south-western structure

In front of the southern gate of the Egyptian town is a large building oriented east-west, which was reached through a narrow entrance flanked by two huge towers. The first room, with a trapezoidal plan, comprises four impressive colonnades ; the central passage shows a staircase meant to compensate for a steep slope of the ground. This room would open onto a hypostyle hall with 63 columns, which was entirely cleared during this season. It is followed by a second hypostyle hall, the columns of which were probably also impressive, as their identified foundations have a diameter of more than 2 m. The partly preserved southern lateral wall is 1.85 m thick and is also reinforced by a series of elongated buttresses with rounded ends.

Figure 22 | Southern part of the fortifications after restorations.



This huge building seems to have gone through a violent destruction, as suggested by a huge sapping pit dug under the lateral wall, traces of reddening and a layer of ashes and charcoal covering the remains of the hypostyle hall. The dimensions of this construction, as well as its location, closely connected with the central temple by a long staircase, suggest that it was related to the works carried out under the reign of Thutmose I. The style of the buttresses, identical with the one observed in the eastern temple, also supports this idea. As to the purposes of the edifice, it was probably a building depending directly on the sovereign and perhaps related to the government.

A ceremonial palace ?

In 2002, we had cleared to the north-east a palace associated to the Egyptian temples by an avenue paved with sandstone slabs, probably built under the reign of Thutmose III. The excavations carried out to the north of the Nubian religious complex enabled us to identify a column base made of mud brick, with a diameter of 1.80 m, built next to a thick wall (1.75 m) reinforced by a series of elongated buttresses with rounded end, of the same type as those flanking the constructions attributed to Thutmose I. Also surprising was the presence of a structure older than the palace of Thutmose III, which was probably destroyed by the Nubians during a rebellion or a return to power, and then rebuilt by a successor, some 10 or 20 m away.

The Nubian religious complex

During these last years, we could establish that the two oval temples were surrounded by fences which were progressively reinforced or doubled, thus enlarging the protected area accordingly. The discovery of large bastions of a military type, which were apparently leant against an older wall marking the northern limit of the Nubian complex, confirms that the relations between Nubians and Egyptians slowly deteriorated, which led to the proliferation of defensive devices on both sides (fig. 23).

A Nubian ceremonial palace ? The clearing of a new circular monument, with a diameter of about 15 m, was undertaken to the north of the oval eastern temple. Its mud brick wall, 2.20 m thick, is flanked on both sides by small buttresses made of galus, with vertical posts reinforcing the structure. Against the inner wall, there was still a crown of columns, each with a diameter of 0.75 m, which supported a probably cone-shaped wooden roofing (fig. 24).

Two doors, marked by towers, would open to the south : the larger one, to the south-west, would lead to the western oval temple, whereas the second one, less than 1 m large and placed to the south-east, would lead to the area of the main gate of the Nubian complex and of the eastern oval temple. Three door pivot holes have also been noticed in the earthen floor. On the same spot, but in a level corresponding to the Napatan period, we had found a deposit of earthen jar stoppers, some of them

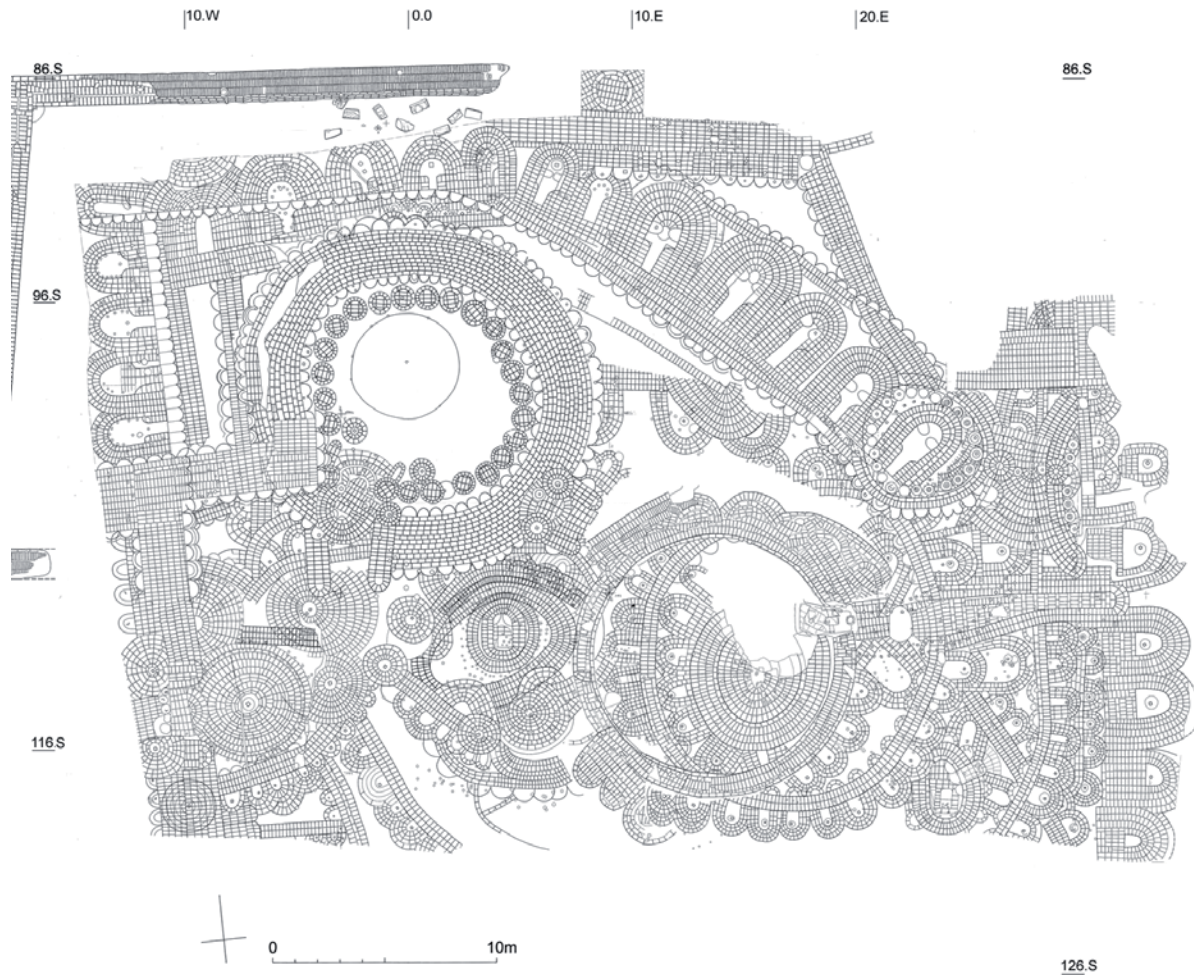


Figure 23 | Detailed plan of the Nubian complex.

bearing seal imprints, in a wooden structure. It would therefore not be impossible that this circular edifice played a similar role, i.e. a ceremonial palace connected with the temple (fig. 25).

The main gate to the north-east

The main gate of the Nubian complex, investigated this season, is made of two huge circular structures, with a diameter of nearly 6 m. These two « towers » mark the limit of the precinct of the Nubian agglomeration. In each of these structures, circles of galus were noticed, which would surround the square beams meant to reinforce the structure. The opening proper consists in two small towers with a diameter of 1.40 m, used as door uprights and perhaps topped by an arch. We also identified a doorstep and two door pivot holes in the earthen floor. A staircase with slightly convex steps would lead to a pathway lined with a double fence marked by a large number of negative postholes. This path would lead to the entrance of the eastern oval temple.

Figure 24 | Detailed plan of the ceremonial palace.

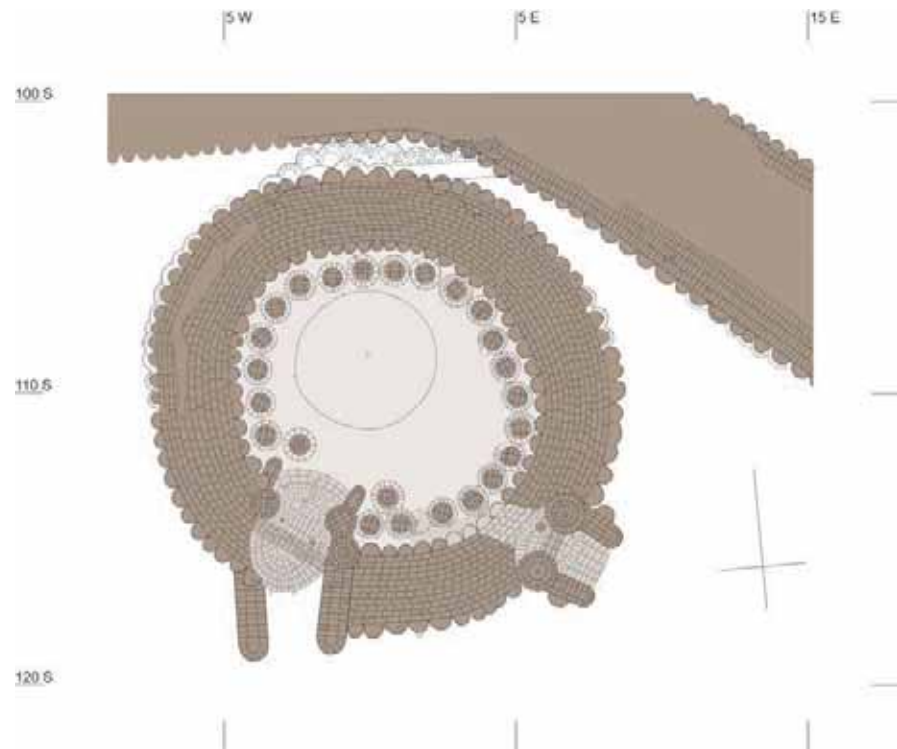


Figure 25 | General view of the ceremonial palace connected with the temples.

