Sudan & Nubia

The Sudan Archaeological Research Society

Bulletin No. 14 *2010*




Egypt
Sudan
Eritrea
Ethiopia
RED SEA
ASWAN
1st cataract
Gebel Adda
2nd cataract
Wadi el- Allaqi
Wadi Gabgaba
Amara West
Sedeinga
Sai
Soleb
3rd cataract
Kerma
Kawa
Qasr Wad Nimieri
Old Dongola
Hammur
ED-DEBBA
Wadi Howar
Wadi el- Melik
ABU HAMED
Nile
4-F-71
KARIEMA
4th cataract
ez-Zuma
Tanqasi
5th cataract
Dangeil
Berber
ATBARA
Atbara
Wadi Muqaddam
6th cataract
OMDURMAN
KHARTOUM
Soba East
Gash Delta
KASSALA
Blue Nile
WAD MEDANI
White Nile
KOSTI
SENNAR
GEDAREF
Ancient sites
MODERN TOWNS
N
0
250 km

SUDAN & NUBIA

The Sudan Archaeological Research Society

Bulletin No. 14 *2010*

Contents

The Kirwan Memorial Lecture

The Post-Meroitic from Kirwan to the Present 2
Mahmoud el-Tayeb

Reports

Nubian architecture in an Egyptian town? Building E12.11 at Amara West 15
Neal Spencer

Cemetery D at Amara West: the Ramesside Period and its aftermath 25
Michaela Binder, Neal Spencer and Marie Millet

Golden Accessories: a link to the outside world from the pyramid at site 4-F-71 (Fourth Cataract, SARS Concession) 45
Isabella Welsby Sjöström

Excavations at Kawa, 2009-10 48
Derek A. Welsby

The Meroitic Necropolises of Sai Island.
Second season at the Meroitic Cemetery 8-B-5.A 56
Vincent Francigny

Second report on the ceramics from the Meroitic Cemetery 8-B-5.A 60
Romain David

Excavations at Sedeinga. A New Start 62
Claude Rilly and Vincent Francigny

A Recently Discovered Meroitic Cemetery at Berber, River Nile State, Sudan. Preliminary Report 69
Mahmoud Suleiman Bashir

Dongola after the 2008-2010 Seasons: Royalty, Saints and Blessed Bishops 75
Włodzimierz Godlewski

Gebel Adda Cemetery One, 1963. Post-medieval reuse of X-Group tumuli 83
Reinhard Huber and David N. Edwards

Qasr Wad Nimeiri and its *Qubbas* 91
Intisar Soghayroun el-Zein

Ethnoarchaeology and post-holes: building a Bisharin house 96
Julie R. Anderson and Salah eldin Mohamed Ahmed

Miscellaneous

Obituaries

Salah Omer es-Saddig (1950-2009), a personal appreciation 107
Abdelrahim M. Khabir

Giovanni Vantini 107
Bogdan Żurawski

Book review

William Y. Adams 2009. *The Road from Frijoles Canyon. Anthropological Adventures on Four Continents* 109
Derek A. Welsby

Front cover: Berber Meroitic Cemetery. Tomb, BMC 8, showing grave goods, the extended position of the skeleton and the remains of a coffin (photo: Mahmoud Suleiman Bashir).

Sudan & Nubia is a peer-reviewed journal

The Meroitic Necropolises of Sai Island

Second Season at the Meroitic Cemetery 8-B-5.A

Vincent Francigny

After a break of five years following the death of the former director Francis Geus, Meroitic excavations on Sai Island, south of the Dal Cataract and downstream of the major site of Sedeinga, resumed in 2009. Unlike previous fieldwork, which was divided over four different cemeteries (see Geus 1994a; 1994b; 1995; 1998; 2002; 2006; Geus *et al.* 1995), we decided to focus our attention on site 8-B-5.A, a small hillock facing the ancient town, where remains of the Meroitic period have been identified (Azim 1975, 93; Francigny (forth.)). This necropolis, which had been partly excavated between 1997 and 2004, was relatively untouched with regard to the study of the material. Our first mission in 2009 had been dedicated to analysis of the ceramics, as well as implementation of a new strategy in the field (David 2009, 97-99; Francigny 2009, 92-96).

So began our second season this year, with an excavation progressing north to south from 17th January to 18th February. During this period, an area of 700m^2 was explored, resulting in the discovery of seven Meroitic graves (T 21 to T 27) and vestiges of four pyramids (Pyr. 25, 26, 27 and 29), all of them having been heavily plundered and badly preserved. Apart from the work in the northern part of the site, we also completed the cleaning of previously excavated areas, aiming to properly reveal the monuments and backfill with sand all the shafts left open over the years. Surprisingly, this operation revealed that some adjacent pyramids had been built with differing foundations. Since we know that during the Meroitic period the original ground surface comprised hardened sand mixed with gravel and small pebbles (Francigny 2009, 93), it is clearly visible if the base of a monument is on this level. In the case of pyramids 6 and 7 (Plate 1), the first one, which is also bigger and earlier in date, follows this pattern; while the second is built on a lower silt layer. According to the few monuments we found to date, small-size "satellite" pyramids, built close to the main graves, are always constructed using the second solution, involving excavation through the gravel to reach stronger soil.

During the process of linking our new recording system with previous fieldwork, we also drew our first plan of the excavations (Figure 1). It clearly shows that the Meroites were the first to install their graves in this area. A few Post-Meroitic graves follow in which mostly immature individuals were buried at the edge of the tumuli field nearby. They were followed by some Christian graves that still avoid the Meroitic structures, while later Ottoman burials are found everywhere on the site. Most of the Meroitic monuments make use of mud brick as their construction material, and only one rectangular structure has a base made of schist.

Even if excavation is far from complete, the spatial organization of the cemetery as shown on the plan confirms that smaller graves cluster around larger ones; a pattern well-known in many necropolises of that period. Although we can still draw lines oriented north-south on the basis of shaft alignment, it is necessary to refer to groups of graves in the case of 8-B-5.A. This season, we probably reached the northern and western boundaries of the Meroitic cemetery, but its east and southern parts remain untouched. Unfortunately, the southern parts of the site are partly covered by a modern Muslim necropolis, meaning that it will never be possible to explore it totally.



Plate 1. View of the different foundations of the monuments.

By the time we approached the heart of the cemetery, our work had been impeded by very thick gravelly sediments, derived from the rubble used to fill the monuments (Colour plate XX). This archaeological layer, a mix of many broken pieces of mud brick, dissolved mortar and plaster, was sometimes more than 1m thick. It also contained fragments of capstones, *stelae* and *Ba*-statues, hence its removal required much caution.

While cleaning the surface of the site, as in the previous year, we noted the presence of Christian burials, concentrated on top of the Meroitic shafts (Plate 2). Made of pottery vessels[1] (Colour plate XXI) which were reused as coffins, they contain foetuses or stillborn babies, wrapped in shrouds, without grave goods.

All the Meroitic graves excavated this year have a similar design, with a sloping descendary and axial chamber to the west. Remains of many late blocking systems were found; however, only few traces of the original walls were discovered. In those cases, the walls were systematically made with mud bricks and built directly on the floor of the shaft (Plate 3). Several slabs of schist, together with some mortar, were also used to close the cavity of the last burials, at a time when the graves were still filled with the remains of previous

[1] Amphorae possibly produced in the region of Old Dongola.

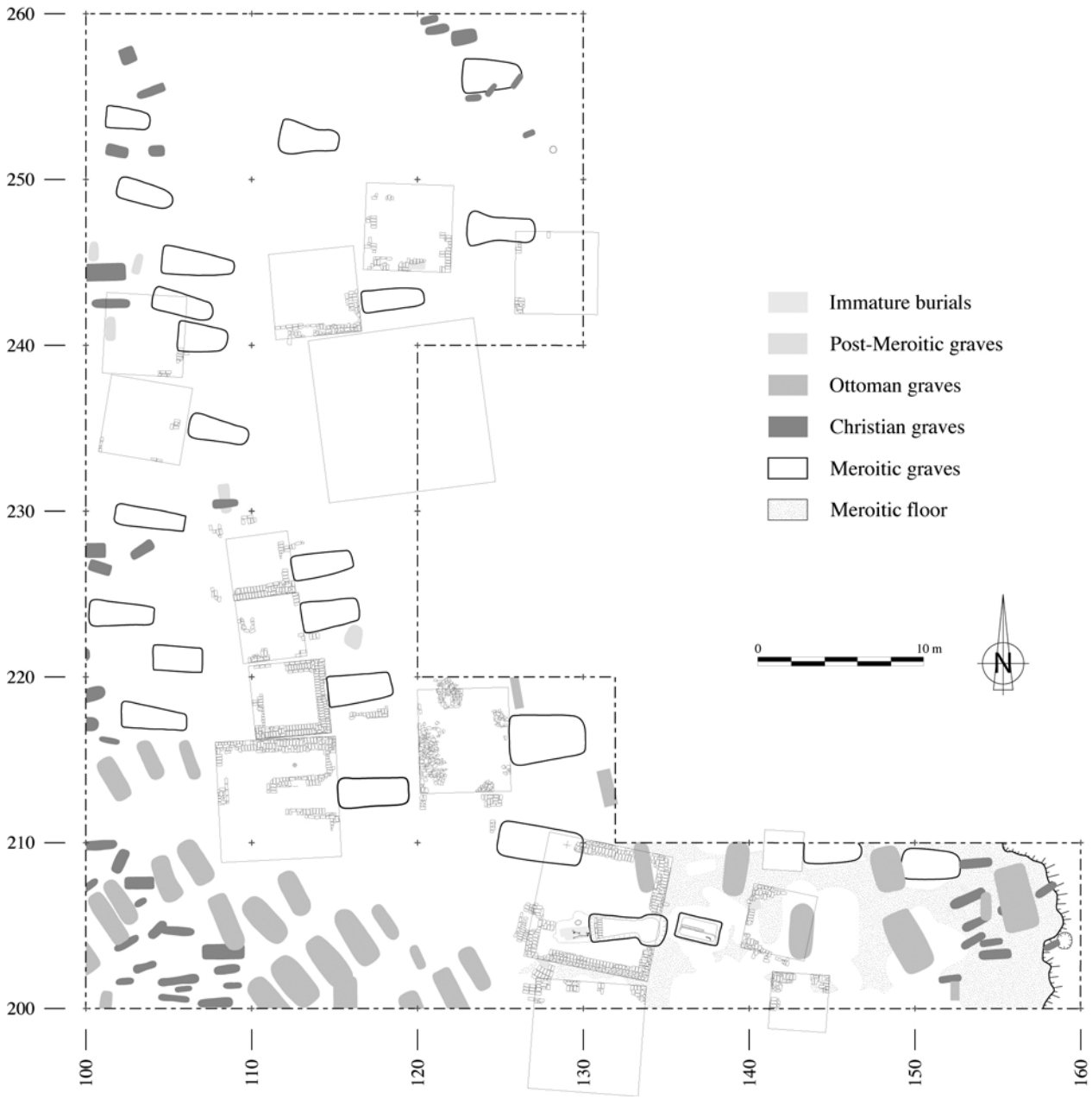


Figure 1. Plan of the cemetery 8-B-5.A (scale 1:400).

occupants that had been completely disturbed by plundering activity (Plate 4).

Inside the cavity, multiple burial and robbery sequences created a high level of confusion for archaeologists. In many cases, only the last burial was understandable providing information on the position of the body, its orientation and the possible existence of a coffin. In every grave, we were surprised to discover two shallow trenches (one at the entrance and the other at the end of the cavity) or four holes, indicating the existence of a funerary bed in the primary burial (Plate 5). Traces of wood were found in a few of them.

As with the ceramic material in the previous year, the anthropological study had to start with a huge backlog of human remains, which had been stored for many years in the dig house. Thanks to Husna Taha Elatta, who began this huge task, the skeletons of 88 individuals from 10 collective graves were studied and registered this year, among which 59 adults and 29 sub-adults were identified. Analyses of the entire group of individuals reveals a generally healthy population with protein and iron-rich diets, which protected their bones from several pathological conditions and manifestations. The general profile of the group is of a "peaceful" population with no violence-related traumas or fractures. Furthermore, the muscle attachment areas of the skeletons also attest to a relaxed lifestyle with no extra pressure on muscles and bones.

The theoretical presence of familial relations between occupants of the same collective burial can be suggested by skeletal analyses that showed, in several examples, the presence of some shared non-metric traits among the individuals, such as septal apertures of the humeri (Plate 6). This hypothesis

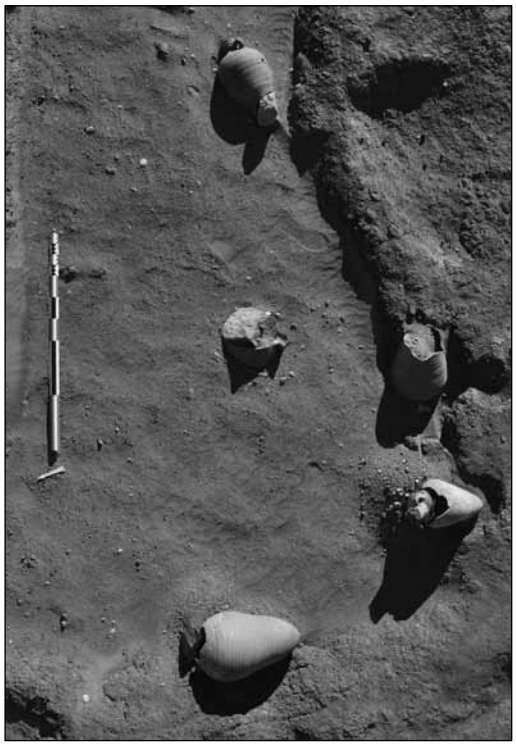


Plate 2. View from the top of the Meroitic grave T 027, with Christian burials on its surface.

can be validated or negated by the DNA extraction analysis of the remains of these individuals, for which dental samples were taken from several skulls by Dr Alex de Voogt (Plate 7).

In the light of the cemetery's small size and the nature of the discoveries, it seems that 8-B-5.A can be compared

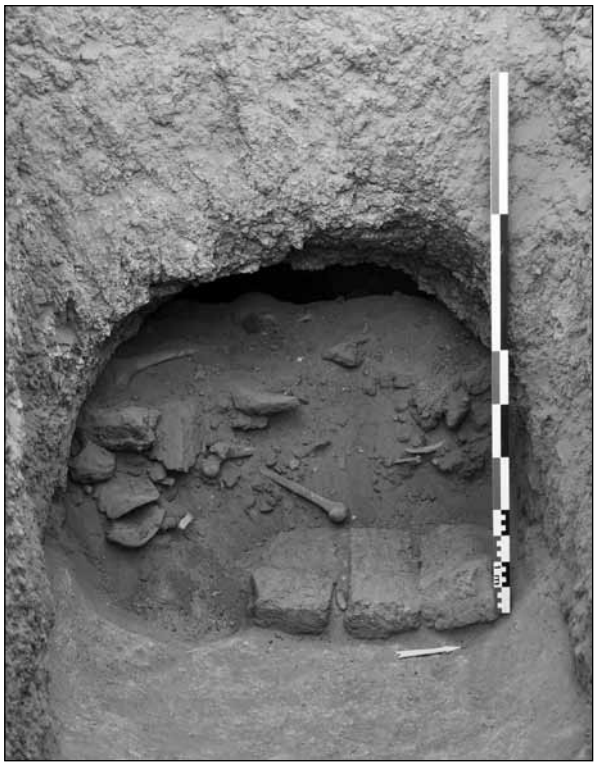


Plate 3. Remains of the original blocking wall built with mud bricks.



Plate 4. Late door built with slabs of schist.

to a well-known model from the same period in the capital Meroe, where elite burials were separated from the rest of the population. Grave goods which survived plundering also suggest the presence of a rich community. Although mostly discovered in a very disturbed context, they include a significant amount of fine pottery, ornaments, copper-alloy and glass objects. Apart from the usual funerary material, we also found an object pre-dating the Meroitic period in one grave. Such interesting cases have already been noted a few



Plate 5. Holes in the floor of the burial chamber.

times in Middle Nubia.[2] The pottery vessel, a *Kerma Classique* annular base plate, was discovered almost intact in a Meroitic layer at the bottom of the cavity. Its exceptional condition indicates that the object could not have normally survived during the millennium which separate Kerma from Meroe; meaning that the Meroites must have taken it from the only stable and secure environment known on the island for this

[2] See for example the Nagada pottery found in a Meroitic grave of the cemetery in Missiminia, Vila 1982, 70.



Plate 6. Septal apertures of humeri.

kind of artefact: a Kerma grave. Most likely fitting with the liturgical material used during the Meroitic funerary ceremony, it was finally returned to a grave, accompanying another deceased individual. Other finds from the graves include pieces of shrouds, fragments of an ivory kohl pot, as well as a copper-alloy loop that was initially attached to a piece



Plate 7. Dr Alex de Voogt taking samples for DNA analyses.

of wood (Plate 8) and most probably came from a casket. No inscriptions were found this year, but on the surface of the site there were many fragments of *Ba*-statues (Plate 9), including a very unusual piece of a sun disk made of stone, which must have been fixed onto the head of the statue with the help of a wooden pin (Plate 10).

By the end of the season, we were able to estimate that three more years in the field would be necessary to complete the excavation. With this long-term perspective in mind, we decided to build a low stone wall around the perimeter of the necropolis in order to avoid destruction by cars which is of increasing frequency on the island. Mud-brick structures

Plate 8. Copper-alloy loop with wood residue.



unearthed in the 1990s have already suffered greatly from erosion and we hope that in the near future, with the support of Lille 3 University and the people of Sai Island, we will be able to properly preserve and present the site.



Plate 9. Right part of an anthropomorphic Ba-statue.



Plate 10. Fragment of a solar disk with hole in the middle.

Second report on the ceramics from the Meroitic Cemetery 8-B-5.A

Romain David

This second year's excavation has been devoted to the study of ceramics, which were left by our predecessors (David 2009, 97) and are still stored in the dig house. Among them, material from 8-B-5.A cemetery and from other Meroitic necropolises of Sai Island can be found. The comparison of this material with that recently discovered during the last two seasons gives us a better understanding of the ceramic production. Furthermore, pot sherds collected this year have completed earlier fragmentary shapes, providing new forms and increasing the size of our typology.

8-B-5.A, 8-B-5.SN/SAS2, 8-B-52.B and 8-G-49 necropolises

On the basis of similar productions that were found, the analysis of the ceramic material from the Sai Meroitic necropolises suggests that different inhumation sites were in use at the same time.[1] Indeed, some goblets of Al 1 fabric, which drew our attention last year (David 2009, 93, n.13), have been unearthed in each necropolis. They are covered with a red slip outside and on the lip, and a whitish wash begins just below the rim. These products are dated around the second half of the 2nd century AD and later. As they seem to correspond to the latest use of the necropolises at Sai, a late date would be appropriate for them, just before the Post-Meroitic products.[2] Other ceramic forms that have been noted, such as long-necked bottles and small lekythoi, indicate the diversity of the ceramic production.

8-B-5.A fabrics and forms

Through the excavation of the northern part of the necropolis, we found fragmentary as well as complete vessels that correspond to a very long chronological sequence. During Pharaonic times, our site, close to the town, was probably used as a dumping ground for rubbish. That is why the quantity of Pharaonic pottery is often greater than that of the Meroitic period, even in the graves.[3] Moreover, 8-B-5.A was also used as a cemetery during the Post-Meroitic and Christian eras. Christian people buried their still-born babies in cooking-pots or amphorae on top of Meroitic shafts. All these factors explain the striking low proportion, less than 5%, of Meroitic ceramics found in some grave entrances.

Fortunately, some other members of the mission working on Pharaonic and Christian sites could assist in identifying potential intrusive material during the classification process. If we compared only sherds without complete profiles, we found that coarse alluvial wares from the Pharaonic to Christian periods may sometimes resemble each other. We should consider that the majority of these vessels have been produced on the island, as suggested by the location of a production centre of the New Kingdom and a later one of Christian date (Hesse 1981, 15-23; Hafsaas Tsakos and Tsakos 2010, 80-81). Unfortunately, Meroitic pottery workshops have still not been located on the island.

Late Meroitic forms still represent the bulk of our material, amongst them ledge-rimmed bowls of different fabrics, which were studied during this season (Figure 1). Samples presented here are red-slipped. The second has a white wash inside, similar to goblets produced at the end of the Meroitic period. We have also found red-burnished, simple bowls in a finer fabric than the Al. 1 (David 2009, 97), with less organic temper. Small *lekythoi* have been discovered in tombs T 020, T 025 and T 027 (Colour plate XXII). Some of them are made of kaolinitic clay, while others are imported ware, probably from the Aswan region (pink clay with black and red particles, see Adams 1986, 526). The last ones seem to be a local imitation of an Aswan product. These various productions might indicate large-scale trade.

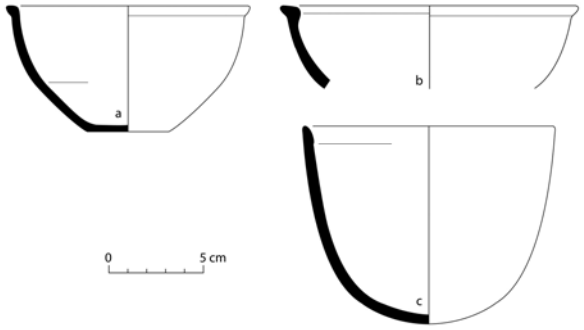


Figure 1. Late bowls from 8-B-5.A (scale 1:4).

The amount of new material led us to determine more criteria of variation in the composition of each fabric. Indeed, the quantity of mineral, or organic temper may vary according to the shape of the object, without suggesting a different production centre. Hence, we have collected samples representing different fabric types, for which petrographic analyses are expected in 2010.

After this second season, we established that most of the material discovered in the Meroitic contexts is of late date. The evidence from the other Meroitic necropolises of Sai Island is very important to further our understanding of the 8-B-5.A ceramics. We can also relate this material to other Nubian sites in order to have a better definition of local ceramic production. Petrographic analyses may provide new references for this area and clarify the nature of the ceramic production for the material used in the 8-B-5.A cemetery.

[1] For an overview see Francigny 2009, 92.
[2] For further details see David 2010.
[3] A fabric recorded as Al 7 is in fact a Nile C variant. See David 2009, 97.
I am grateful to L. Mielle for helping me to recognize Pharaonic fabrics and H. Hafsaas Tsakos and A. Tsakos for showing me their material.

Bibliography

Adams, W. Y. 1986. *Ceramic Industries of Medieval Nubia*, Lexington.

Azim, M. 1975. 'Quatre campagnes de fouilles sur la forteresse de Saï, 1970-1973', *Cahiers de Recherches de l'Institut de Papyrologie et Égyptologie de Lille* 3, Lille, 91-125.

David, R. 2009. 'First report on ceramic material from Meroitic Cemetery 8-B-5.A', *Sudan & Nubia* 13, 97-99.

David, R. 2010. 'Saï Méroïtique, quelques illustrations du matériel céramique', *Cahiers de Recherches de l'Institut de Papyrologie et d'Égyptologie de Lille* 28, (forth.).

Francigny, V. 2009. 'The Meroitic Necropolises of Sai Island. First Season at the Meroitic Cemetery 8-B-5.A', *Sudan & Nubia* 13, 92-96.

Francigny, V. (forth.). 'The Meroitic Temple at Sai Island', *Proceedings of the 11th International Conference for Meroitic Studies*, Vienna.

Geus, F. 1994a. 'L'île de Saï à travers l'histoire du Soudan', *La Nubie. L'archéologie au Soudan*, *Les Dossiers d'Archéologie* 196, 22-27.

Geus, F. 1994b. 'Saï méroïtique', in C. Berger, G. Clerc and N. Grimal (eds.), *Hommages à Jean Leclant*, vol. 2, Le Caire, 141-150.

Geus, F. 1995. 'Saï 1993-1995', *Archéologie du Nil Moyen* 7, 79-98.

Geus, F. 1998. 'Saï 1996-1997', *Archéologie du Nil Moyen* 8, 85-126.

Geus, F. 2002. 'Saï 1998-1999', *Archéologie du Nil Moyen* 9, 95-134.

Geus, F. 2006. 'Saï 2000-2002', *Archéologie du Nil Moyen* 10, 87-134.

Geus, F., Y. Lecointe and B. Maureille. 1995. 'Tombes napatéennes, méroïtiques et médiévales de la nécropole nord de l'île de Saï. Rapport préliminaire de la campagne 1994-1995 (Archéologie et anthropologie)', *Archéologie du Nil Moyen* 7, 99-142.

Hafsaas Tsakos, H. and Tsakos, A. 2010. 'First Glimpses into the Medieval Period on Sai Island', *Beiträge zur Sudanforschung* 10, 77-85.

Hesse, A. 1981. 'L'enclos SAV2 de l'île de Saï (Soudan)', *Cahiers de Recherches de l'Institut de Papyrologie et d'Égyptologie de Lille* 6, 7-24.

Vila, A. 1982. *La nécropole de Missiminia*. La prospection archéologique de la vallée du Nil, au Sud de la cataracte de Dal, Fascicule 13, Paris.



Colour plate XX. Sai. General view of the site during excavation.



Colour plate XXI. Sai. Christian amphora *used to contain a burial.*

Colour plate XXII. Sai. Lekythoi *from 8-B-5.A.*





Aerial photograph of the Fifth Cataract looking downstream (photo D. A. Welsby).



The fort on the northern end of Usheir Island at the Fifth Cataract (SARS Haycock Archive, HAY S035.11).



Ruined mosque on the island of Mari at the Fifth Cataract (SARS Haycock Archive, HAY S029.15).

 ISSN NUMBER 1369-5770