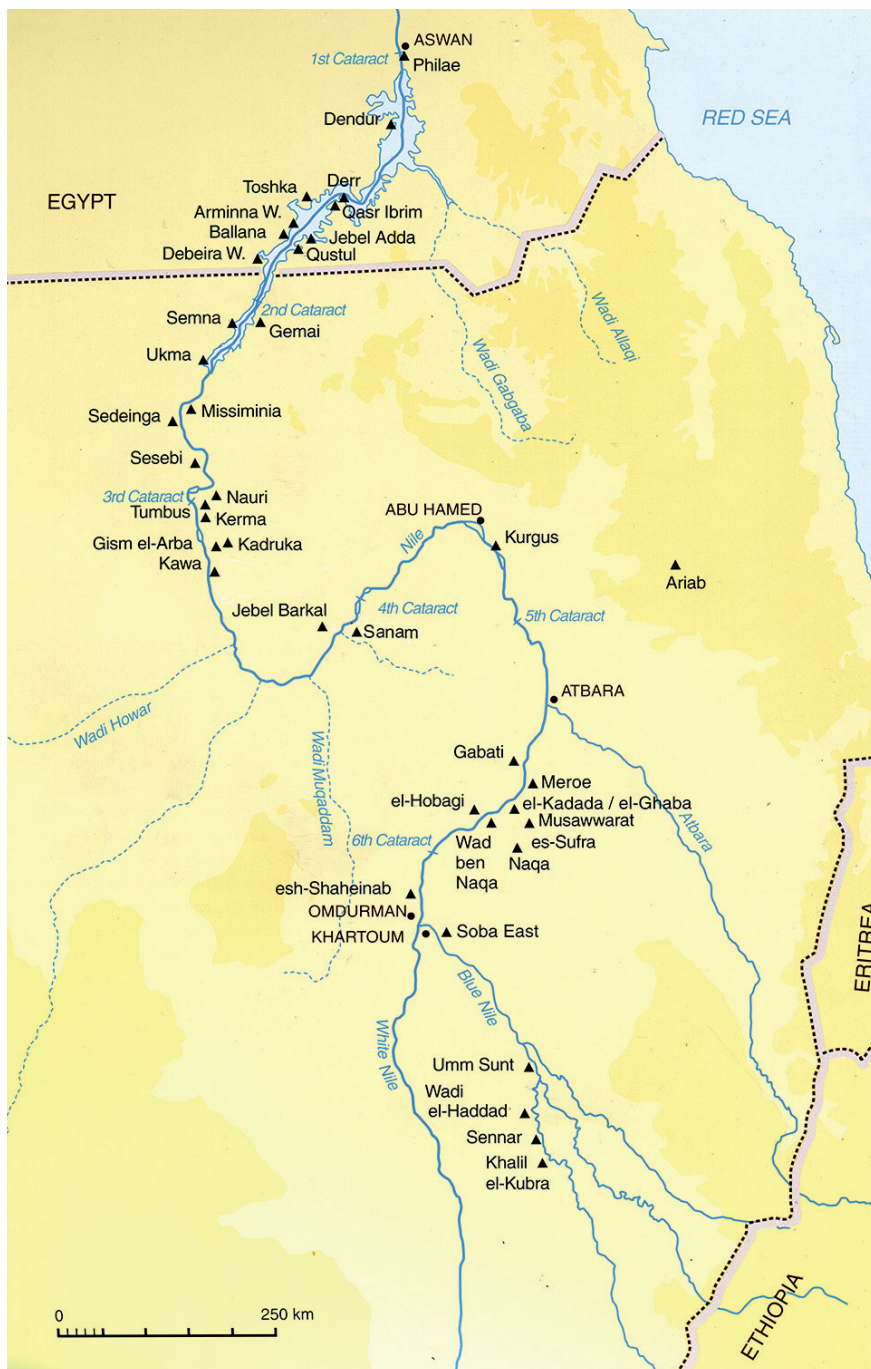


SANAM ABU DOM

Irene Vincentelli



SANAM ABU DOM



THE SITE

The site of Sanam owes its name to a large statue (*sanam*) anciently found in the *wadi* Abu Dom that crosses the town.

The archaeological area, reported by 19th century travellers, was first excavated extensively and methodically by Ll. Griffith on behalf of the Oxford University at the beginning of the 20th century. At that time the site consisted of a large cemetery with 1550 graves, a temple dedicated by Taharqo to the God Amun of the Nubians, a large and enigmatic building, the so called 'Treasury', and several other structures, barely emerging from the sands, that Griffith did not have the time to investigate.



Egyptian flask

Ninety years after these initial excavations were abandoned, they have been resumed by the Joint Sudanese-Italian Mission directed by Abdel Rahman Ali and Irene Vincentelli.

The archaeological remains are spread over a large strip

3



View of the site with part of the Treasury

of desert (900 by 650 m). In addition to the buildings excavated up to now, we have located others, which in a continuous line reach the Amun temple. On the ground they are marked by the abundance of sherds, all of the same period, and by fragments of stones and ivory, which give the ground a whitish hue. This was an area for imposing buildings, which had no space restrictions. Therefore, it seems clear that the buildings had been planned and built away from the settlement area and the cemetery, which lay in the cultivated strip near the river. Over time, unfortunately, the whole area has been repeatedly



People at work in the Treasury

plundered and the buildings became a convenient source for building materials. At present, the only visible features are the Taharqo's temple and the three buildings named 'the Treasury', SA.C 400 and SA.K 300.



General map of the site

THE CEMETERY

The cemetery is no more visible, being presently buried beneath the buildings of the modern town. It consisted of around 1500 non-royal graves dug in the mud in the fertile strip near the river.

The cemetery had been in use for a long period between the late New Kingdom and the reign of King Aspelta. People buried there should have been officers and clerks employed by the temple and the royal administration. Common people were present too.

Unfortunately the many interesting items found in the cemetery are not in Sudan. Most part of them is kept in the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford while others are dispersed in various museums in Europe.

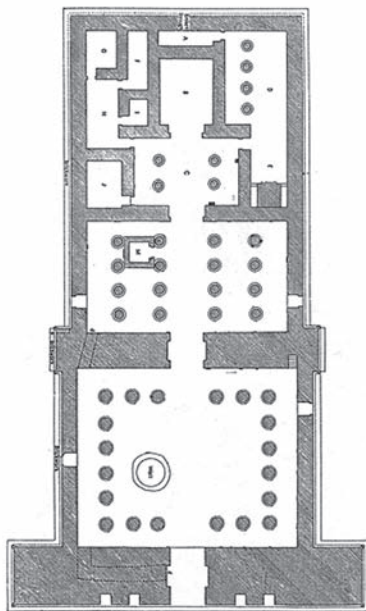
Recently in the site of el-Tamer, in the strip of land near to the river, a late New Kingdom and Napatan cemetery is being excavated by Mortada Bushara Mohamed, on behalf of the National Corporation for Antiquities and Museums (NCAM). The graves, dug in the mud, although plundered and stripped of almost all their

goods, seem to be elite graves. In the same area a large grave was accidentally found of a different typology that closely remembers the royal tombs of Kurru.

THE TAHARQO'S TEMPLE

The temple lay in the most crowded part of the town, the market. At present it is surrounded by a chaine-linked fence but easily visible.

It was dedicated by King Taharqo to the god Amun 'the mighty bull of the Nubians'.



Plan of the Taharqo's temple
(after Griffith 1922, pl. V)

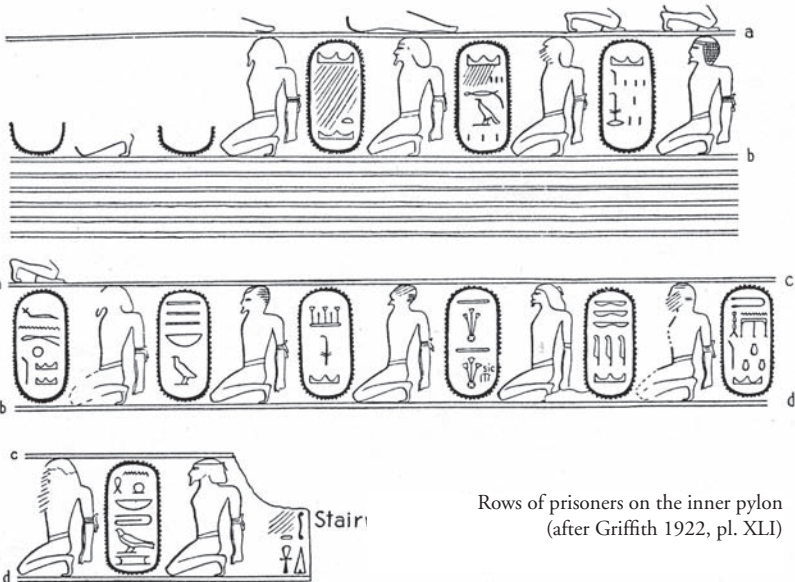


Remains of the Taharqo's temple

The temple was built in sandstone on a typical Egyptian plan. It is 68.8 m long and 41 m wide. The main entrance, looking to the West, was sided by two monumental pylons and led into a court surrounded by columns. From here an inner pylon led into a hypostyle hall

with 16 columns supporting the roof. A doorway gave access to the *pronaos* with four columns. The holiest part of the temple, the sanctuary stood on a higher level and was surrounded by some small rooms.

Later on mud brick walls were built to create smaller rooms



Rows of prisoners on the inner pylon
(after Griffith 1922, pl. XLI)

inside the temple. Here was a workshop for making faience *ushabtis* and amulets.

The temple was decorated with beautiful reliefs. Scenes of procession, offerings of food and religious celebrations



Prisoner engraved on the inner pylon of the Taharqo's temple

were carved on walls and columns. Rows of enemies were carved on the pylons. The scenes were well executed and in some cases unusual, as the procession of donkeys and horses with riders.

The temple was still in use in Meroitic times as it is witnessed by some inscription.

By the time it suffered many injuries and lastly the British 'Fort of Kitchener' was built on it. Its beautiful reliefs were largely destroyed by wind and sand and at present only a few fragments survive.

THE TREASURY

The Treasury is outlined on the sand by a long colonnade going from East to West at a distance of 500 m from Taharqo's temple. It is a huge building about 267 m long and 68 m wide on an East-West axis. The rooms are arranged around a large

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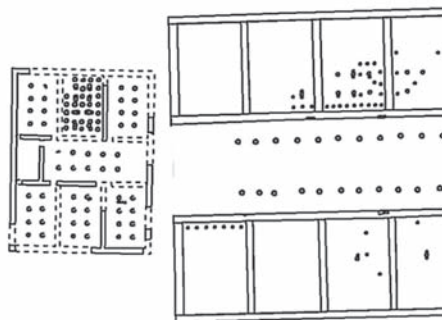


Ivory pawn from the Treasury



Faience finger ring with well wishing
for the New Year

SA.C 400



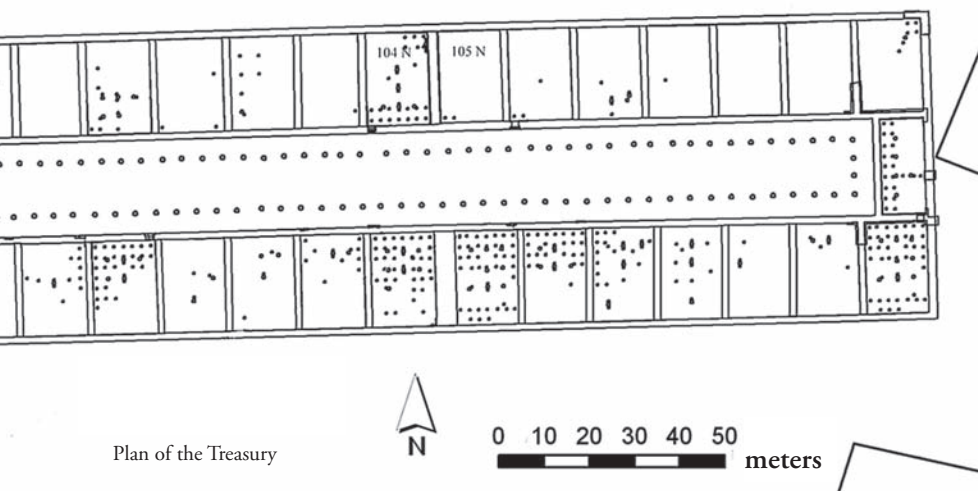
It seems that the Treasury had been abandoned slowly and stripped of all its furnishings. What little is left, small objects and fragments of faience, alabaster and copper alloy, is nevertheless indicative of an overall wealth. Ivory was found

View of the columns from the Treasury,
room 104 North



courtyard with porticoes. There are 35 rooms in all. The portico provides access to the rooms via doorways with stone thresholds and steps. Some evidence suggests that the entrance to the building was on the Western side, even if the wall here had been completely removed in the past.

The rooms are huge, with a white sandstone floor and literally, a 'forest' of columns: 76 of them. It is not clear what their function might be. Certainly, the columns must have helped anchor the building to the ground and also as holding up the roof which was made of large beams supporting a flat terrace made of mud-bricks and therefore very heavy indeed.



both in the form of unworked tusks and worked fragments. A large quantity of granite, green feldspar and other gemstones fragments was also found.

The pottery is mostly of Egyptian type and provenance. It consists of large flasks for liquids and two-handed amphorae used to contain

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Faience beads and pendants



Fragment of inlaid ivory box

grains. Also present in large quantities are Phoenician amphorae for oil.

Of enormous importance, given its implications for the building's chronology, was the discovery of clay-sealings. Clay-sealings consist of clay lumps that were applied on doors and jars while still moist. On the outer surface of the lumps seals were impressed. This action was asserting the king's ownership of all that was kept within the Treasury.

The seals found in Sanam, generally, consist of a cartouche



Stone plaque with an engraved udjat-eye



Udjat-eyes amulets



Copper alloy situla

topped by two tall feathers with the sun-disc. Inside the cartouche were the names of the kings of Kush, from Piankhy to Aspelta. One of the commonest seal-imprints found in the Treasury is that bearing the cartouche with the name of king Anlamani, by itself or followed by the epithet “beloved of Amon (who is) in the holy mountain”.

The items found, valuable objects and raw materials, would suggest that the main activity here was one of storing and processing. The many finger-rings with wishes for a good New Year as well as a seal-imprint and other objects bearing a good New Year wish for Piankhy, Atlanersa and Senkamaniskén lead us to believe that this might have been the place where they celebrated the beginning of the new administrative year, a key ceremony in the life of the state. The structure of the building, as well as the finds discovered here, led Griffith to name it the “Treasury”, adopting a term used by Egyptian to describe the place where the revenue from taxation was stored, processed and redistributed. We can add that it was primarily used to store valuable goods from trading. This makes this particular structure extremely interesting from the point of view of civic architecture and provides us with some rough idea of the quantity of goods the state dealt with – be they goods for export (ivory, gemstones) or goods obtained in exchange for these (alabaster, grains, oil or wine).

BUILDING SA.C 400

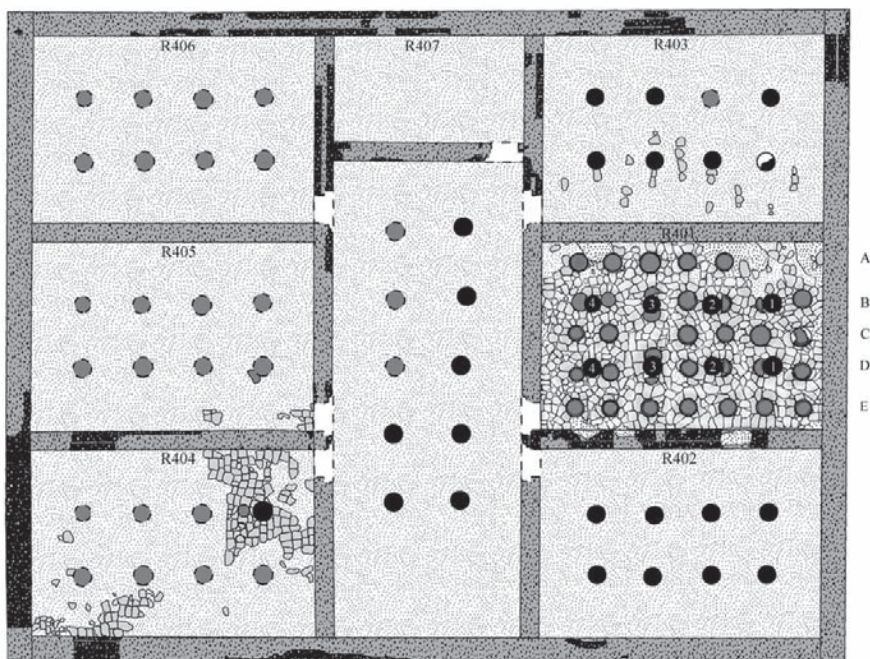
Immediately opposite the Treasury, a short distance (about 4 m) from its West side and slightly out of line with it, there was another building (Building SA.C 400). This was significantly smaller in size but very similar in layout.

The building is rectangular in shape with the shorter sides to the north and south (40 m x 31). The entrance appears to be on the East side, immediately opposite the entrance to the

Treasury. The two buildings are separated only by a narrow road and this suggests that they were somehow related, although it is difficult to be precise about in view of the severe deterioration of the two structures.

It seems that an excavation had been made in 1908 by A. Deiber and M. d'Allemagne. At that time the building was intended as a royal palace but, at present, we are not able to confirm such an interpretation.

SA.C 400 is only barely visible and much of the floor has been



Plan of Building SA.C 400



Two faience heads of divinities

reduced to white powder. The rooms, as in the Treasury, are arranged around a courtyard with porticoes supported by columns. The floors are made of discarded stones, many of which are actually column discs and the connections between the slabs are imprecise. Overall the impression is that of less careful, even hasty, workmanship. Of the rooms, only one preserves its complete layout; this is the central room of the north row. The presence of triple and double columns is reminiscent, albeit in a more haphazard fashion, of the Treasury but here it is possible that the smaller columns were simply supports for counters or shelves.

There were very few finds since the building lies almost on the ground surface. The pottery is identical to that found in the Treasury. Some small objects are of some interest; these are two faience heads of divinities with a hook on the back, a copper alloy ram-headed sphinx and an oval weight made of limestone breccia of



Breccia limestone weight

the type used for precious materials, such as gold or silver. Although this does not amount to much, nevertheless, the presence of a small weight may confirm that valuable items were processed in Building SA.C 400.

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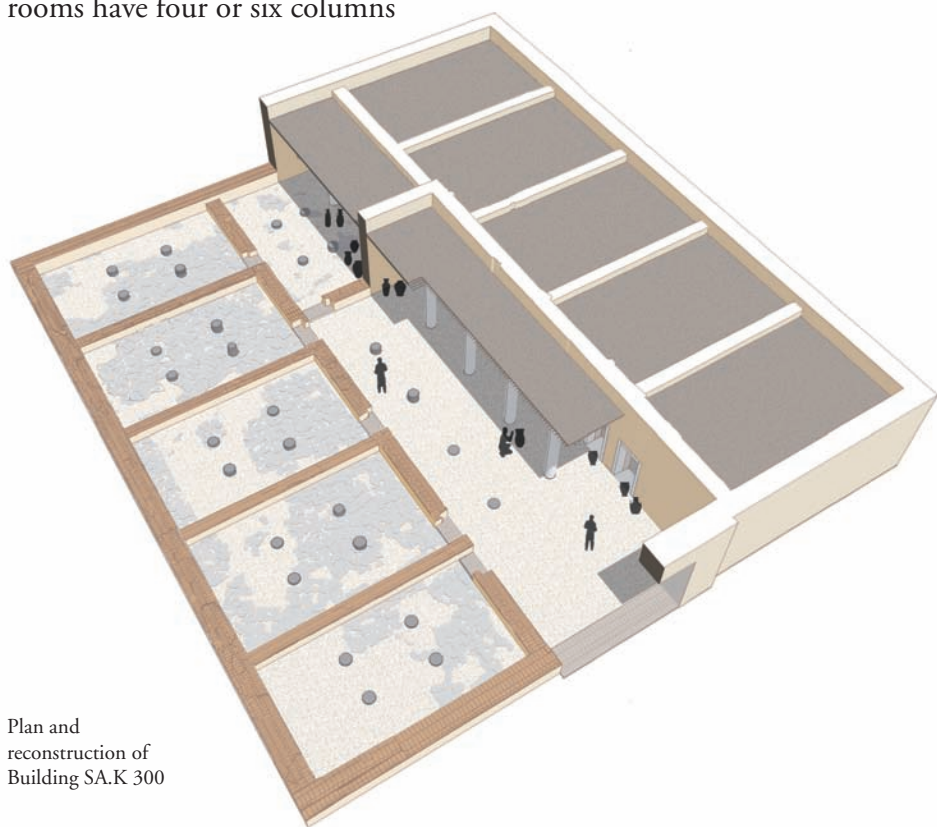
Copper alloy
ram-headed sphinx

BUILDING SA.K 300

About 150 m North-West of SA.C 400, towards the fields, a third building was found. SA.K 300 stands on slightly sloping ground, it is oriented South-North and measures 39 m by 35. In this case, too, the layout is very simple and regular. A long internal courtyard (25.5 m x 8.4) with porticoes supported by columns gave access to nine of the eleven rooms. All the rooms have four or six columns

supporting the roof. Floors, thresholds and the skirting running around the perimeter walls are all made of sandstone. The main entrance was on the South side.

The northern part of the building, where the walls were partly preserved, yielded some interesting finds that allowed us to make some hypothesis about the use of the building. One of the rooms contained such a large



Plan and
reconstruction of
Building SA.K 300

amount of pottery that it even overflowed into the courtyard. All the pottery was fragmentary and had, obviously, been broken under the weight of collapsing walls and ceilings. Relatively few shapes were represented: flasks for liquids and large amphorae for grains, all of Egyptian provenance. Work to restore the pottery has only begun, but we are confident that we will be able to fully reconstruct a substantial number of flasks and large amphorae. In the adjoining room we were surprised to discover, heaped up in a corner, a large quantity of broken elephant tusks.



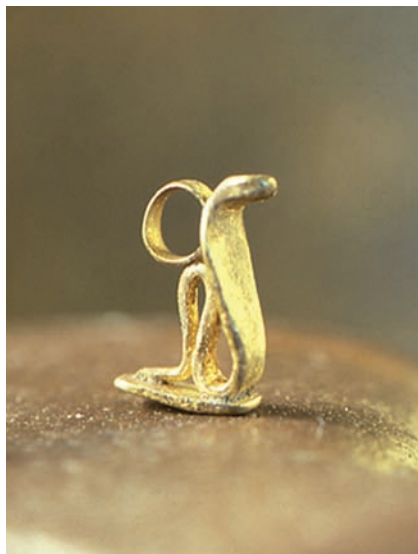
Cartouche topped by the two tall feathers with the name of king Senkamanisken

Clay sealing fragment with king Senkamanisken seal impression





Egyptian storage jar



Golden pendant representing an Uraeus

Although the building is on the whole in a poor state of preservation, as it is barely below the ground surface, numerous and varied personal ornaments were found: amulets in the form of *udjat*-eyes, beads of various shapes and materials, plaquettes depicting divinities, statuettes, pendants and other objects of



Faience winged Uraeus

copper alloy and faience. Stone objects, though fragmentary, were numerous: white and grey marble, white or veined alabaster, red jasper, red porphyry, agate, granite and gabbro were all present in a huge variety of shapes. Of some interest was the discovery of a large quantity of pumice stone. A single object, an *alabastron*, small and perfectly formed, survived intact in a crack in the floor. Carnelian and green feldspar were present both in the form of manufacturing by-products and small objects. Other interesting findings were a quantity of coral and different kinds of shells. The only element



Gemstone and ostrich eggshell beads



Udjat-eye mould



View of Building SA.K 300

of architectural decoration found was a small grey marble capital in the form of a lotus flower, unusual and of fine workmanship.

Numerous clay-sealings were found in the building. Most of these are of the type used to seal doors. Over 300 fragments were

found and they record the door closing and opening operations. Most of them bear the name of Senkamanisken but we found also some fragments with the names of Shabataka, Taharqo and Anlamani; therefore, this building can also be dated with some degree of certainty to



between the eighth and seventh century BC. Building SA.K 300 does not seem to have been residential, since rooms of a private nature are not present. It is more likely that this was a building where valuable goods belonging to the kings were stored and crafted. At least two rooms must have been



Fragments of green feldspar



Green feldspar scarab



Golden and silver rings and nugget



Faience divinity pendant



Grey marble capital in the form of lotus flower



Carnelian arrowhead and flake

used for goods storage. Other rooms must have been used as workshops for the cutting and polishing of stones, as suggested

by the heaps of manufacturing waste and the pumice, which, in all probability, was used for surface polishing.



Ivory fragments

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Around the eight century BC the Kushite kingdom was well established in the Northern Sudan and extended its control over the Southern regions too. The capital city was Napata, at the foot of Gebel Barkal, from where the founders of the kingdom originated. Piankhy and his successors were strong enough to conquer and establish their control over Egypt for around one century (747-656 BC).

This particular historical period witnesses a great flow of goods in the land of Kush and a substantial increase in the wealth of the state. In view of



Alabastron





Two faience plaquettes with the Udjat-eye



Seal impression
with the name of king Anlamani



Cartouche with the name of king Anlamani



Red Sea shells

the growing need for storehouses and workshops and the growth of their economic resources, Piankhy and even more so Taharqo, both of them great

builders, sought to bridge the gap in a country where monumental buildings must have been in short supply. In addition to the temple, an administrative district



Golden and silver ram-headed pendants



Faience plaquette representing ram-headed Amun



Two fragment of faience vessel with Nilotic scene

was created just opposite the Napata sacred area.

This is the framework within which we must see the complex of the buildings in Sanam: these must have been an imposing sight, able to project the power and wealth of those sovereigns who built them.



Fragments of faience amulets

A reconstruction of the history of Kush starts from the assumption that the very prosperity which allowed the Nubians to conquer and dominate the Egyptians was due

to the control of the caravan routes. Through these routes, which were difficult for all others, came all the luxury goods, gold, ivory, ebony, incense, which the rich societies of the Mediterranean basin sought and considered most indispensable. In exchange Nubia required foodstuffs, mostly grains, oil and luxury artefacts.

In Sanam large stores and workshops materials coming from distant lands of difficult access were stocked and crafted. These goods satisfied the needs of the long distance trade as well as the internal demand. Such were the difficulties and complexities of this type of trading that it was a royal monopoly.

The foremost of the materials, in terms of quantity and importance, was ivory, which was used for the internal needs but, and above all, for foreign markets. In building SA.K 300 we found 160 kg in total, both in small fragments and in crafted items. It is possible that ivory came from the Sudanese savannah where, in that time, the presence of elephants is certain. This ivory was en route for Egypt, the Syro-Palestinian coast, Assyria but also Cyprus and other

countries of the Mediterranean basin.

As to alabaster and the various type of gemstones found in the three buildings, there is little doubt that they were to meet the demands of the internal market. In building SAK 300 there were 23 kg of alabaster. A substantial quantity that allows us to think that all the alabaster vessels, found in both royal and elites tombs in the region, most probably were manufactured in the Sanam workshops.

Sanam Abu Dom, whose ancient name we do not know yet, was the terminal point of trade routes. They came from the South from where the large quantities of ivory we have found originated; they went deep into the Eastern Desert from whence came a large part of the stones worked in building SAK 300. Other routes went to the Red Sea, from where shells and corals originated. The frequency of use of these routes is becoming increasingly clear even though not all periods of Nubian history are equally well documented.

Wadi Abu Dom, that joins the Nile at Sanam, in the past

was the main road that crossed the Bayuda desert toward Meroe and the Butana. It is being explored by the W.A.D.I. project, directed by Angelika Lohwasser, that, up to now has shown the existence of a number of light campsites and paths marked by repeated use. The many wells made the Wadi Abu Dom a sort of oasis where travelling was easy.

Sanam is also the very place where it was possible to sail the Nile to and from Kawa. It is most likely that via Kawa foodstuffs of Egyptian and Near Eastern provenance arrived in exchange for the valuable goods kept in the royal stores. Sanam Abu Dom, then, was the very place where the wealth of the kingdom was concentrated, whether in-coming or out-going.

In order to deal with this huge administrative and processing activity the kings of Kush planned a set of imposing buildings. It seems that all the buildings, till now excavated, were all in use at the same time and that they were all destroyed at the same time. After Aspelta, in fact, we find no trace of activity in the storehouses and workshops of Sanam.

VISITING SANAM

The site of Sanam is in the middle of the modern town of Marawe, the capital city of the Northern Province.

Marawe is easily accessible from Khartoum by bus or private cars, thanks to a tarmac road crossing the Bayuda Desert. An international airport is ready and we hope that in a near future it will offer direct flights to and from Khartoum and abroad.

The town offers some small hotels and restaurants. A Tourist Village has been built near the Nile, in the area where in the past

was the so called 'Jackson House', an interesting building that is being restored. It has beautiful bungalows, swimming pool and a supermarket. In this same area a new Museum has been built.

All the region is rich in antiquities, easily accessible from Marawe, such as Jebel Barkal, the ancient Napata, the royal cemeteries of Kurru and Nuri and, a few kilometers inside the desert, the Monastery of Gazali.

Finally for those who are interested in more contemporary attractions it is possible to visit the impressive hydro-electric dam, just a few kilometers north of Marawe.

The 'Colonel Jackson's House'





The new Marawe Museum

CHRONOLOGY OF THE KUSHITE KINGS WHOSE NAMES ARE FOUND IN THE SANAM CLAY SEALINGS

| | |
|---------------|---------------|
| Piankhy | c. 747-716 BC |
| Shabaqo | c. 716-702 BC |
| Shabataqo | c. 702-690 BC |
| Taharqo | c. 690-664 BC |
| Tanwetamani | c. 664-653 BC |
| Atlanersa | c. 653-643 BC |
| Senkamaniskén | c. 643-623 BC |
| Anlamani | c. 623-593 BC |
| Aspelta | c. 593-568 BC |

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SUDANESE-ITALIAN
ARCHAEOLOGICAL MISSION
AT SANAM ABU DOM

NATIONAL CORPORATION
FOR ANTIQUITY AND MUSEUMS
ISTITUTO ITALIANO
PER LA STORIA ANTICA

