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HAGAR EL-BEIDA 2
SAVING SUDANESE ANTIQUITIES

Intensive archaeological research currently conducted in the 4th Nile Cataract region are an answer to an appeal of the Sudanese Service of Antiquities. Due to dam construction on the 4th Cataract an artificial lake will appear in this area, measuring c. 170 km in length and a few to a few dozen km in width. Thousands of archaeological sites will therefore be gone forever, traces of presence of men that in these region go back to the stone age. Numerous institutes and scientific institutions have been invited to cooperate in the endangered area¹. Until recently the 4th Cataract region remained a white spot on the archaeological map of Sudan. The sparse works conducted there only pointed to the existence of archaeological sites in the area².

Poles also participate in the campaign to save Sudanese antiquities. A number of Polish expeditions currently work in the area endangered by flooding³. One of them is a mission organized by the Center of Mediterranean Archeology of the Warsaw University, the Poznań Archaeological Museum, the Patrimonium Foundation and the Institute of Archeology of the Jagiellonian University. The

¹ Ahmed M. Al.-Hakem, *Merowe (Hamada) High Dam and its Impact*, Kush, XVI, 1993, p. 1-25.

² Salah Mohammed Ahmed, *Merowe Dam Archaeological Salvage Project (MDASP)*, Sudan & Nubia, 7, 2003, p. 11-14.

³ The first Polish expedition to start works in the 4th Cataract region was organized by the Gdańsk Archaeological Museum. Further research was conducted by the Centre of Mediterranean Archeology of the Warsaw University and the Institute of Mediterranean Archeology of the Polish Academy of Sciences. The above mentioned institutions run excavations on sites both directly endangered by flooding and those within the influence region of the emerging reservoir. H. Paner, Z. Borcowski, *Gdańsk Archaeological Museum Expedition. A Summary of Eight Seasons' Work at the Fourth Cataract*, GAMAR, 4, 2005, p. 117-124.

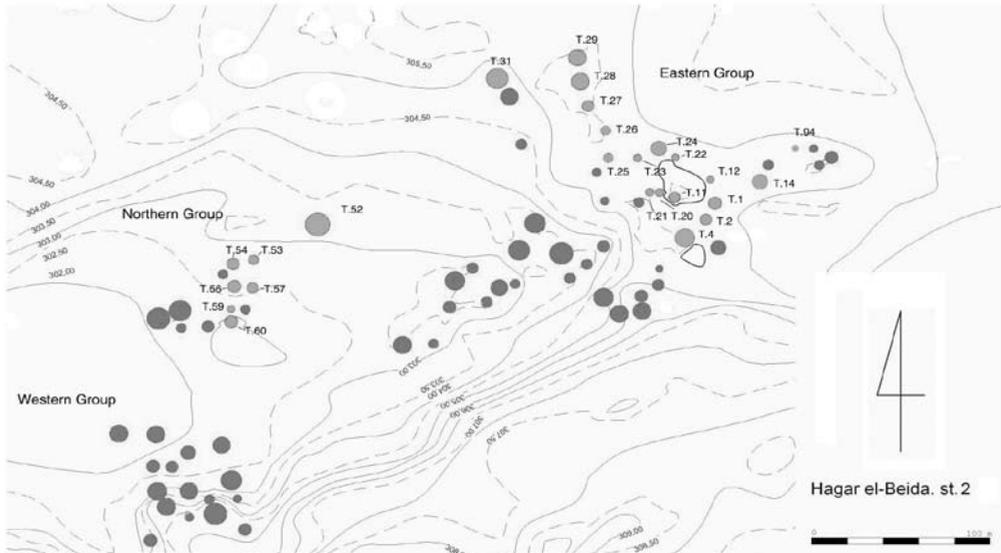


Fig. 2. Plan of the HB2 site. Graves excavated in the 2005 season marked as lighter (drawing by Michał Sip, Anna Longa)

On the basis of research conducted up to date it was established that the Hagar el-Beida 2 cemetery was a burial site for the people inhabiting this area during the Late Meroitic and Post-Meroitic periods, that is in the first centuries A.D. In the 4th Cataract region the Late Meroitic period is characterized by changes in burial rites. Equipping the deceased with objects to be used in the afterlife is a significant change in burial rites in comparison to the previous period. The objects are usually ceramic vessels, probably containing food, jewelry and weapons. The deceased were buried in a sleeping position, surrounded by funerary gifts. The basic features allowing to distinguish between graves from various periods are: superstructure type, grave chamber type and the quality of gifts placed with the deceased⁷. In both periods barrows were raised to mark the burial site.

The graves discovered within the boundaries of the Hagar el-Beida 2 site have ground level superstructures shaped as mounds. Some of the constructions were equipped with a stone crown surrounding the mound (Fig. 3). A horizontal section of such a mound may be round, oval or tear-shaped. Simple earth mounds without crowns are also present at the site, loose pebbles were arranged on their surface. The underground sections of the graves were quite

2005), PAM XVII (2005), 2007, p. 374-384; A. Longa, *Zabytkom Górnej Nubii na ratunek*, Alma Mater 99, 2008, p. 224-227.

⁷ M. El-Tayeb, E. Kłosowska, *Burial Traditions on the Right Bank of the Nile In the Fourth Cataract Region*, GAMAR, 4, 2005, p. 51-74.



Fig. 3. Mound of a Post-Meroitic grave discovered on the HB2 site (phot. Anna Longa)

diverse. Niche graves are the relatively most common type on the cemetery. They have a vertical oval shaft and a side chamber for depositing the deceased and his equipment. Another types of graves are equipped with a chamber at the bottom of the shaft or graves with rectangular shafts and rectangular chambers, or L-shaped chambers. Only two of the three grave groups have been researched. Large differences are visible when comparing graves from the two researched parts of the site.

The east group is the largest on the site. 48 graves were found here with their upper parts visible on the ground level. During two seasons of excavations 17 of these burials were examined. Ground level structures in the east group may be equipped with a stone crown or they are only simple mounds covered with pebbles. Tumuli with stone crowns may be either round, oval or tear-shaped. In case of the latter category they are always oriented on an east-west axis. Grave shafts are usually located in the central part below the mound. They are only asymmetric in case of tear-shaped graves, where they are shifted to the west.

In the east group the bodies of the deceased were curled, usually lying on the left side (Fig.4). Their heads were directed to the east, facing south towards a grave chamber wall, with their hands placed on the face. Usually ceramic vessels were placed at the head and/or legs. Military equipment was discovered near, and jewelry on the body. The chambers were blocked by stone slabs and in one case in this part of the site the blockage was made of mud bricks.

In this part of the cemetery ceramic vessels are the most common group of burial gifts placed with the deceased. They were objects of various types, large and small, kitchen pottery and tableware. Bowls were the most common items deposited in this part of the cemetery. Those vessels were decorated in geometric motifs under the rim. The decoration was made with a number of techniques, often combined. The second most numerous group are bottles. Those vessels were used for storing liquids. They have high, quite wide necks, squat bellies and rounded bottoms. Small mugs were also discovered

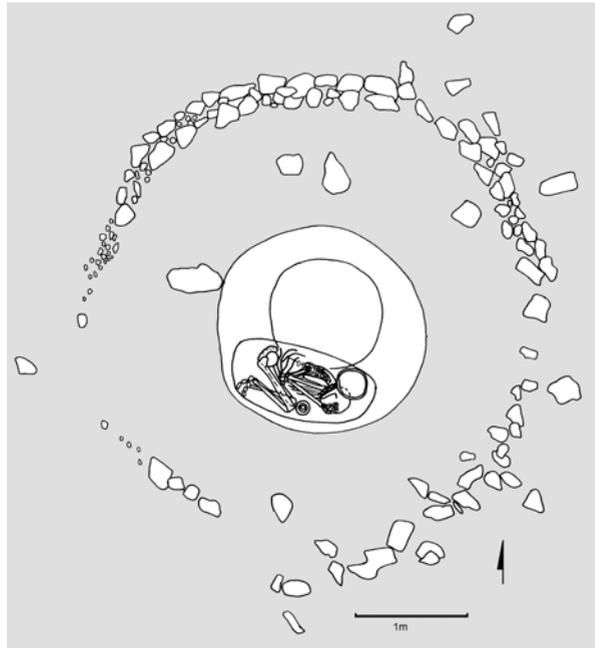


Fig. 4. Horizontal section of burial T. 25
(drawing by Anna Longa)

in some graves. Examples from the east part of the cemetery are hand made, beautifully decorated objects. Incised or stamped decoration in registers covers the entire surface of the vessel. Vessels discovered on the HB2 cemetery were mostly hand made. Wheel made vessels constitute a small percentage of the finds. They were probably a group of treasured tableware. Commonly used hand made vessels are representatives of the local pottery tradition⁸. A particularly interesting set of ceramic vessels was discovered in grave No. T11. In the burial niche except from arrowheads, faience beads and tanned leather, four vessels had also been deposited. Two of them were mugs, including a wheel-made one. A large vessel with a spout and painted decoration was also discovered. A wheel-made vessel made of quality pottery was also included in the set of vessels from the discussed grave. The vessel is a small, flat-bottomed bowl (Fig. 5). Two registers of stamped decoration were made below the rim. Those registers are separated by incised lines and a decoration painted in red. In the upper part below the rim there are two sets of drilled holes. The damaged bowl had been repaired by its owner in that way. This vessel is quite unique in comparison to other ones discovered on

⁸ M. El-Tayeb, E. Kłosowska, *Pottery from the Fourth Cataract Region (Sudan)*, GAMAR2, 2003, p. 117-126.



Fig. 5. Thin-walled wheel-made vessel with painted and stamped decoration
(phot. Łukasz Gauza)

the cemetery. It must have been made in a good pottery workshop, probably in some craftsman center.

The bodies of the deceased were richly equipped. Coils of beads made of various materials were discovered on their necks. Faience, stones, glass and ostrich eggshells were used as material. Strings of beads were wrapped around hips, examples of bracelets are also known. A bone amulet was discovered in the grave of a man marked as T 12. This small object was shaped to resemble the Egyptian falcon – Horus (Fig. 6)⁹. Rings were also discovered on the site. One of them, made of silver, is a simple piece of wire, while the other one is decorated with a carved decoration arranged in registers.

Military equipment is a very important group of burial gifts. Because they were particularly accumulated in the east group of graves, this part of the site was named “warrior graves”. The burials discovered here were mostly of males¹⁰. The warriors were equipped with iron arrowheads, and in one case a spearhead was discovered. Stone archer’s rings are also a proof that the buried warriors practiced archery. Objects of that type are quite typical for the Meroitic and Post-Meroitic periods. Their use was defined on the basis of ethnologi-

⁹ A. Longa, *The Late and Post-Meroitic Tumuli Field of Hagar El-Beida 2 (Two seasons in 2005)*, PAM XVII (2005), 2007, p. 375.

¹⁰ Anthropological research of human remains discovered in Hagar el-Beida 2 were directed by Karol Piasecki.

cal analogies. Often arrowheads accompanied them in graves. In the graves of that period they were usually discovered on right-hand thumbs¹¹. In Hagar el-Beida 2 they were also thus discovered. Stone rings had helped archers to draw bowstrings.

Grave mounds and underground constructions in the east part of the cemetery show a number of similarities. Ceramic vessels deposited in graves are also quite a homogeneous group. The graves of that type match the late Meroe burials known from the Fourth Cataract region. Pottery tradition also indicates Meroitic characteristics from the first centuries A.D.¹². Therefore this part of the wadi must have been a burial place for people that inhabited the Fourth Cataract region during Late Meroitic times.

The second, partially researched group of graves is located in the north part of the wadi. 7 of the 13 graves discovered here were researched. All mounds in this part of the site are surrounded by stone crowns. Their horizontal sections are either oval or round. Grave shafts are always located in the central part under the mound. One of the graves (T. 52), the largest on the site, measuring 13 m in diameter, had a rectangular shaft and an L-shaped burial chamber oriented on a north-south axis. The arrangement of the bodies was not so scrupulously kept in this part of the cemetery. The bodies were curled, but it was entirely optional as for which direction the body was oriented to. Grave chambers, as in the east group, were blocked by stone slabs. In one case, the grave with an L-shaped chamber, the blockage was made of mud bricks.

Graves in this part of the cemetery seem slightly poorer in terms of burial gifts. The grave no. T.52 is an exception. This mound, the largest on the site, was surrounded by a crown of stones. Exactly in below the center of the mound a rectangular grave shaft was situated. An L-shaped burial chamber was oriented on a north-south axis. The chamber, after the deceased had been placed there, was secured by a blockage of mud bricks. Ceramic vessels were deposited in the north part of the grave – two large and three medium bottles, all hand-made. Except from the bottles the grave also contained a wheel-made



1cm

Fig. 6. Bone amulet
(phot. Łukasz Gauza)

¹¹ Hades R. Oldfield, *The Distribution of Meroitic Archer's Rings: An Outline of Political Borders*, Meroitica 1, 1973, p. 113-122.

¹² M. El-Tayeb, E. Kłosowska, *Pottery...*, p. 117-126; M. El-Tayeb, E. Kłosowska, *Burial Traditions...*, p. 51-74



Fig. 7. Grave chamber of tumulus T.52 with traces of robbery and displaced skeleton bones (phot. Anna Longa)

red slipped bowl. The grave had been damaged by grave robbers in the section where the skeleton was located (Fig. 7). The position in which the skeleton was discovered was not anatomical, while the wheel-made vessel was discovered in the grave shaft. Despite the fact that the grave had been damaged, a quite numerous collection of burial gifts was discovered. Five iron, single-barb arrowheads and personal jewelry were discovered. Beads discovered in the burial chamber were made of faience, a few types of stones, ostrich eggshells and glass.

The remaining six graves are not that impressive. Burial gifts are limited to ceramic vessels, usually one or two pieces. Jewelry was also discovered, but no military equipment. Two of the excavated graves contained children's bodies. They only contained jewelry, that is beads and a ring made of spiral iron wire.

The vessels discovered in this part of the cemetery are large bottles, small mugs or pots with squat bellies. Jewelry encountered here repeats the forms and materials discovered in the east part of the cemetery – that is various types of beads made of colorful stones, glass, faience and eggshells.

Since the site was only partially excavated, we are not able to draw final conclusions. However, it has been ascertained that the wadi in proximity to

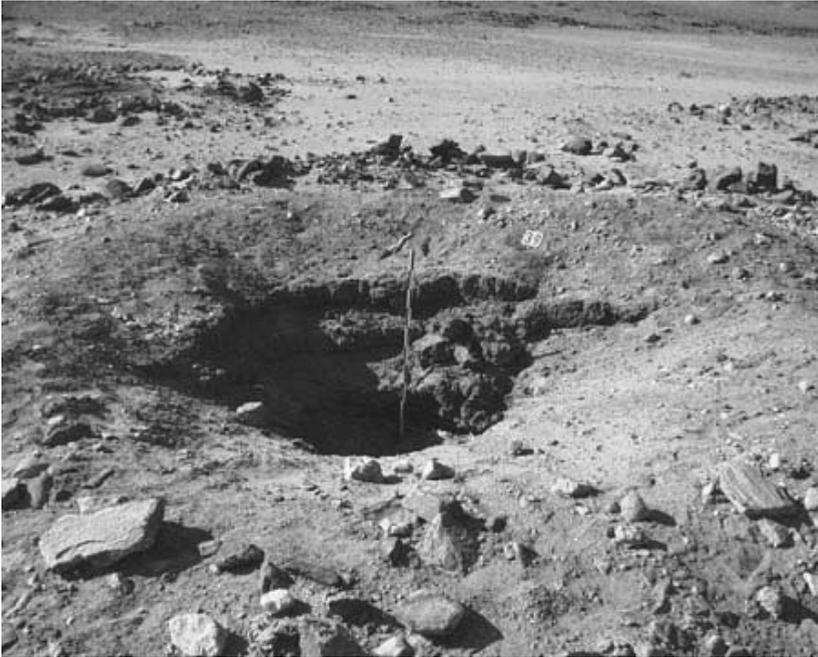


Fig. 8. Robbed grave from the eastern part of the site (phot. Anna Longa)

the modern Hagar el Beida village had been used as burial grounds during two subsequent periods. Burials in this area began during the Late Meroitic period and was continued during the Post-Meroitic period. The two excavated groups of graves represent different periods in the history of Sudan. It is hard to answer a question in what were the Post-Meroitic people inspired to use this site as cemetery by graves that previously existed here. We may only assume that they realized that graves of people that lived here before them were situated under the mounds.

In case of both groups of graves some rituals connected to the belief in afterlife were visibly practiced. The body was placed in the burial chamber in a curled position, resembling a sleeping person. The blockage of burial chambers separated the space reserved for the dead from the world of the living. The deceased were placed on animal skins, with their bodies decorated with jewelry. Weapons and pottery were deposited around them. Until now no traces of foods, such as animal bones or grains, were discovered on the site. The bottles found in graves probably contained liquids (wine, beer?)

Grave robberies are a very important problem in Hagar el-Beida 2. In case of this cemetery we are dealing with robberies that took place shortly after the burials, as well as with modern grave robbers. Ancient robbers dug into graves with “spades” made of pottery fragments. Such tools are quite a com-

mon thing on the site. The robbers would dig into the central part of the mound to enter directly into the burial chamber. It is interesting that in case of graves with asymmetrically located shafts they always knew where the chamber was. Large parts of the skeletons were often shifted, which may also point to the fact, that the robberies took place shortly after the funerals. Ancient robbers were not interested in pottery, which they usually left in graves, sometimes destroyed, perhaps disappointed by the fact they were empty. The most common trace of robberies is a displacement of the upper parts of a skeleton. They probably counted on finding the most valuable objects here (jewelery made of precious materials?).

Grave robberies are also observed on the cemetery nowadays. Some of the graves had been dug into during the few months prior to the archaeological excavations. Modern robbers use the commonly known technique of digging into the central part of a grave mound (Fig. 8). Contrary to ancient diggers, however, they steal all objects deposited in the grave. Traces of their activity observed by archaeologists are destroyed graves lacking human remains. Unfortunately this devastating activities are to some extent caused by increased interest that archaeologists took in this area.

Research in the Fourth Nile Cataract region is very intensive. Soon those areas will be gone under the waters of an artificial lake. Let us hope that before the rescue excavations end this region will uncover many of it's secrets before us.

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