

PRELIMINARY REPORT ON THE TWENTY-FIRST EXCAVATION SEASON OF THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXPEDITION TO WAD BEN NAGA

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ABSTRACT: The twenty-first excavation season focused on the continued exploration of the so-called Isis Temple (WBN 300) and chapel WBN 1100. In the temple, the area of the northern corridor, the northern vestibule, and the southern sanctuary were primarily examined, confirming its assumed internal distribution. Numerous fragments of the temple's iconographic and epigraphic program were retrieved. Furthermore, the southern sanctuary was uncovered and parts of a bark stand that stood in it were found. Amongst notable finds from the temple, there was also a fragment of an abacus previously documented by the Royal Prussian Expedition. Two burials were uncovered in the secondary cemetery over the temple. The excavations in the area of chapel WBN 1100 allowed to estimate its spatial limits and architectural layout. Dozens of fragments of architectural sandstone elements and reliefs coming from the chapel were recorded, adding to the growing evidence of its architectural design and iconographical program. A discard area with remains of cultic equipment and goods presumably used for the management of the cult was documented.

KEYWORDS: Sudanese archaeology – Meroitic Period – Wad Ben Naga – Isis Temple (WBN 300) – Stone Building (WBN 1100).

The twenty-first excavation season of the Archaeological Expedition to Wad Ben Naga took place between 4 March and 10 April 2022. Archaeological works were launched on 8 March and concluded on 5 April 2022. The season was carried out under the guidelines for archaeological excavations as defined by the Ordinance for Protection of Antiquities of 1999. The archaeological works were preceded by works in the Sudan National Museum, namely the processing of finds from previous excavation seasons.

The mission was headed by Pavel Onderka (director) and Juweriya Osman (inspector of the National Corporation for Antiquities and Museums). It further consisted of Vlastimil Vrtal (archaeologist), Jiří Honzl (ceramicist), and Jana Urbánková (conservator).

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The works of the twenty-first season focused on [1] the continued excavations of the so-called Isis Temple (WBN 300), [2] the continued excavations of chapel WBN 1100, the processing of finds, above all pottery, and the conservation of *Altar B*, fragments of which were discovered in the course of previous excavation seasons. All fragments of *Altar B* which were still at Wad Ben Naga were transported to the Sudan National Museum at the end of the season (Sudan National Museum, Inv. No. 36347).

[1] The so-called Isis Temple (WBN 300)

Introduction

Archaeological research continued at the northern limit of *kom C* with the exploration of the inner parts of the so-called Isis Temple (WBN 300) [Figs. 1–2], namely the temple's northern body (rooms WBN 304–305) and its southern chapel (WBN 311). Two trenches, labelled T77 and T78, had already been established during previous seasons.² In the course of the temple's exploration, two burials (WBN C311–C312) were uncovered. Burial WBN C312 was largely disturbed, while burial WBN C311 was found intact.

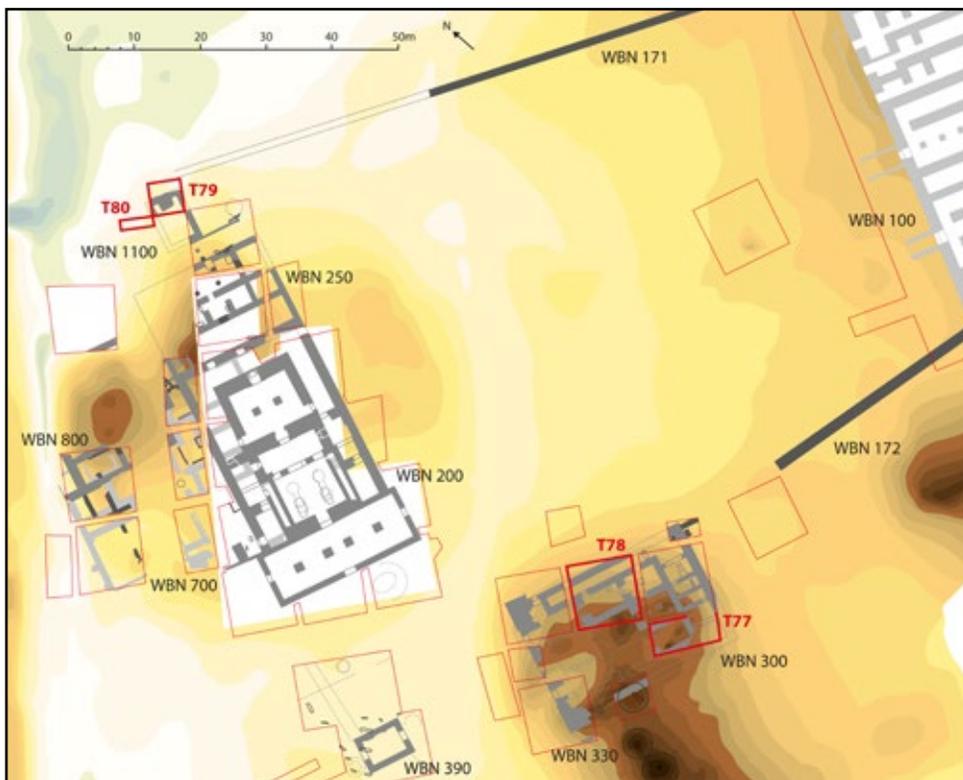


Fig. 1. Plan of western central Wad Ben Naga; trenches of the present season are marked in bold red. Shading of structures reflects chronological grouping. (Illustration: Vlastimil Vrtal).

2 See Onderka and Vrtal 2022, p. 84, Fig. 2.

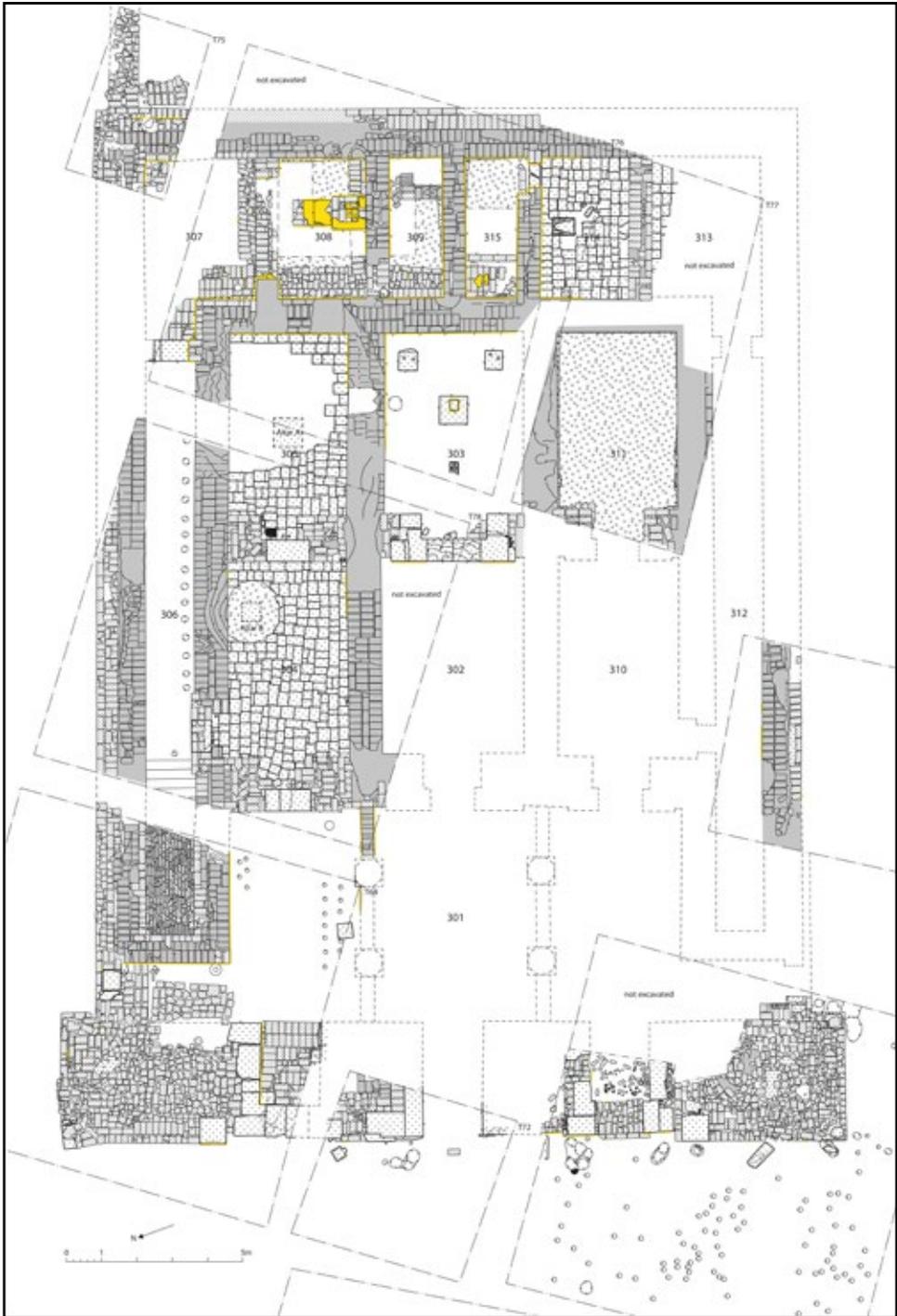


Fig. 2. General plan of the Isis Temple at Wad Ben Naga (WBN 300) – state of excavations after the 21st excavation season (Illustration: Vlastimil Vrtal, Pavel Onderka, Jiří Honzl, Gabriela Vrtalová).

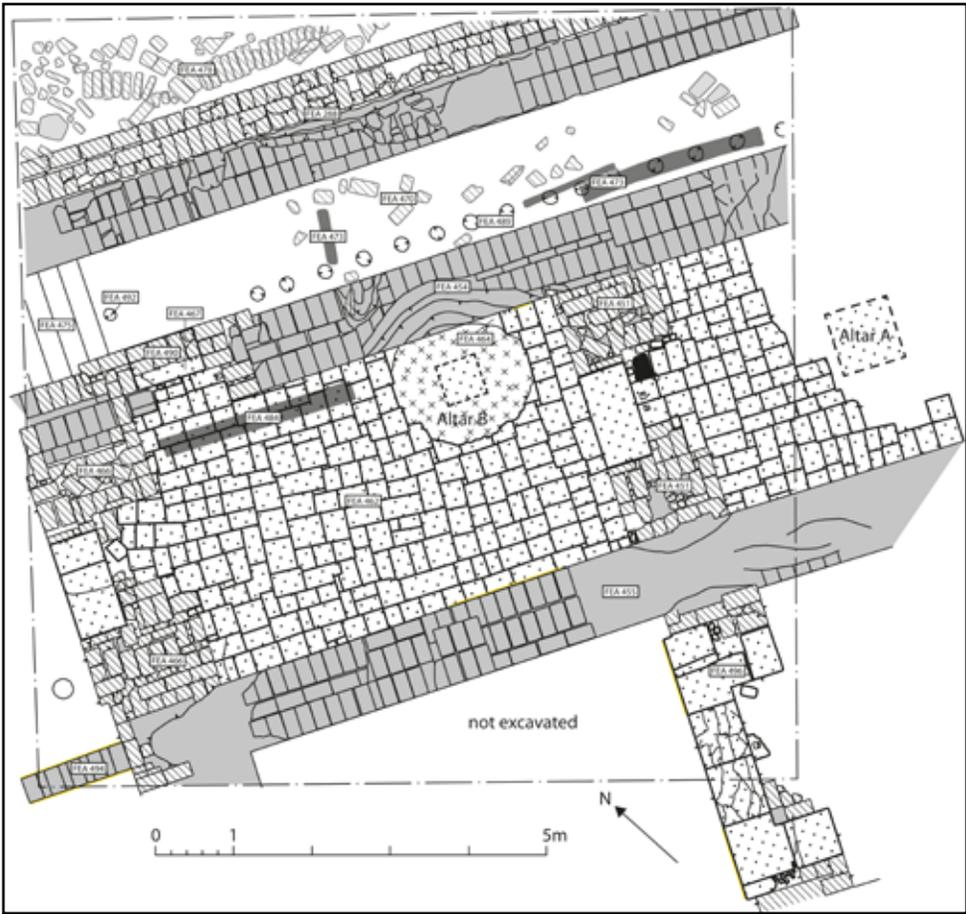


Fig. 3. Trench T78 at the end of excavations; some features of the removed debris are included as semi-transparent (Illustration: Vlastimil Vrtal, Pavel Onderka).

Trench T78

Trench T78 [Fig. 3] covered the central part of the northern side of the temple. Over the course of the present season, the northern body of the inner part of the temple was entirely cleaned. The cleaning extended the extremities of the trench [Pl. 1].

North of the northern exterior wall (FEA 288), remains of its upper parts were found (FEA 478), including a series of specially-shaped bricks which were used for the creation of the cavetto cornice (FEA 479) and placed on the summit of the exterior wall.³

The wall stood on firm foundations (FEA 282) consisting of regularly-laid fired bricks, including brick fragments. The exterior wall was ca. 115 cm thick (i.e. its width corresponded to three brick lengths). The outer casing of the wall was made of fired bricks, while the core and the inner side were made of mudbricks. The fired brick foundations extended the wall by half of a brick on the exterior side.

³ Similar archaeological situation was in trench T64; Onderka et al. 2019b, p. 109.

The first room behind the exterior wall was a long corridor (WBN 306) that formed part of the halved ambulatory of the temple. At the western end of the corridor, there was a staircase (FEA 475) once leading to the temple's roof. At the other end of the corridor was a door leading to the open courtyard (WBN 307) located in the north-eastern corner of the temple. The corridor was accessible from the northern vestibule (WBN 304) through a gate that was – on two consecutive occasions – blocked by fired bricks. The earlier blocking (FEA 490) began to be built at the height of ca. 20 cm above the original threshold; the height likely corresponded to an early secondary floor. The blocking was made of fired bricks arranged in the stretched bond. The blocking was later removed, except for the two lowermost courses of bricks. The floor likely rose again. The later blocking (FEA 491) was built of fired brick fragments and its bonding may not be ascribed to any specific type. It began another 15 cm above the upper course of the earlier blocking.

The walls of the corridor were originally plastered with the interior type of plaster, which was, at the moment of excavations, preserved only in fragments. No clear traces of polychrome decoration were detected. The casings of the walls facing the corridor were made of mudbricks, with the exception of door jambs.

The construction of the staircase (FEA 475) was of a more sophisticated nature. It consisted of a massive brickwork, primarily made of fired bricks that filled the entire width of the corridor.⁴ Each step was two bricks high (i.e. ca. 10 cm). The surface of the steps was plastered with the exterior type of plaster or mortar which was used in roofed rooms only rarely. The edge of the step consisted of a wooden beam, ends of which were inserted into the wall.

At the foot of the staircase, several offering moulds (form G⁵) and a complete jug were found, together with a large fragment of a plate (form A6), akin to the size and shape of plates discovered in the corner of the northern chapel (WBN 309).⁶

In the eastern part of the corridor, four fragments of Osiris bronze statuettes – namely the upper part of an Osiris statuette (F22/011), an ostrich feather from the *3tf*-crown of a bigger Osiris statuette (F22/010), the lower part of a small Osiris statuette (F22/009), and a fragment of a ram's horn coming from the *3tf*-crown (F22/007) – were discovered. These finds further increased the number of bronze statuettes and their fragments found in the complex of rooms in the north-eastern corner of the temple, in trench T76.⁷

Above the western part of the corridor, fragments of exterior plaster coming from the destruction (FEA 471) of the exterior wall (FEA 288) were found. The fragments were incised and equipped with polychrome decorations. One of the fragments bore lower parts of the Egyptian cartouches of Queen Amanitore: '[Amanitor] e [Mer]-ka[-Ra]' (*jmn-ḫry.t mr-k3-rꜥ*).⁸ Other fragments bore incised crescents and lines. All the fragments likely came from the cavetto cornice around the summit of the temple's exterior walls that was decorated by alternating leaves and royal names inscribed in cartouches.

4 Onderka et al. 2019b, p. 109, Pl. 1; Onderka et al. 2021b, p. 69, Fig. 2.

5 For the classification used here and below, see Onderka et al. 2019a; Vrtal et al. 2019; Vrtal 2021.

6 Onderka and Vrtal 2022, p. 88.

7 Onderka and Vrtal 2022, p. 88, Pl. 8.

8 Eide et al. 1998, no. 902.e.

In the debris (FEA 470), which filled the remains of the corridor, disintegrated long wooden beams were found (see below), presumably having fallen from the roof. By the time of the collapse of the roof, the floor was covered with a layer of hard-packed soil containing lime of a whitish-grey colour. The beams themselves were deposited crossed one on top of the other in a layer of a mixture of windblown sand and soil. Fifteen post holes (FEA 489), placed at a distance of ca. 20 cm from each other were found cutting into the floor along the southern wall of the corridor (FEA 454); their distance from the wall was ca. 15 cm, their diameter ranged between 15 cm and 20 cm. The holes might have served for fixing the scaffolding during the construction of the temple.

At various places in the trench, large wooden beams coming from the roof of the temple were discovered. [a] In the northern vestibule two such beams (FEA 484) were discovered aligned to its northern wall. Their section was an almost perfect square with the sides measuring ca. 20 cm. Their total length could not be measured as they originally extended into the pit (FEA 452) that Georg Erbkam used in 1844 for the excavation of *Altar B*; one may assess that they were longer than 200 cm. [b] In the debris (FEA 470), which filled the remains of the corridor, disintegrated long wooden beams (190 × 20 × 20 cm; FEA 473) fallen from the roof were also discovered. [c] The collapsed roof is also attested from the main sanctuary of the temple (WBN 303).⁹

The floor of the northern vestibule (WBN 304), similarly to that in the north sanctuary (WBN 305), was paved with sandstone flagstones. In the north-eastern part of the vestibule, a pit excavated by the Royal Prussian Expedition with the purpose of extraction of *Altar B* was identified and re-excavated. The pit had a round shape and was limited to the very location of the bark stand. During the cleaning of the pit, fragments of *Altar B* along with fragments of a large stela inscribed in the Meroitic cursive script were discovered.¹⁰ The pit which went through the floor of the room (FEA 462), exposed the fired brick foundations (FEA 468) of the northern wall (FEA 454). On the floor of the northern vestibule (WBN 304), a fragment of a Bes amulet (FEA 461; SM22/158) was discovered.

The entrance to the northern vestibule from the hypostyle hall (WBN 301) was flanked by jambs made of fired bricks. The doorway was equipped with a sandstone threshold. Walls (FEAs 454–455) of the northern vestibule (WBN 304) were decorated with depictions of Hathoric heads. Numerous inner plaster fragments with polychrome decoration in yellow, blue, red, and black showing part of a Hathoric head were discovered in the lowermost strata (originally part of FEA 454). The Hathoric heads likely formed a decorative frieze on the tops of the walls. Another decorative frieze on the walls consisted of stars, most likely forming the starry heaven [Fig. 4].

The jambs of the doorway (FEA 451) connecting the northern vestibule (WBN 304) with the northern chapel (WBN 305) were made of fired bricks. The brickwork of both jambs was imperfect; a number of fragments and intentionally-cut bricks were used. Similar to the northern vestibule, also the northern chapel was paved by sandstone flags. Only the westernmost part of the northern sanctuary was located within trench T78.

The south-eastern corner of trench T78 extended to the main sanctuary (WBN 303) and its vestibule (WBN 302). In the respective part of the main sanctuary, minor

9 Onderka and Vrtal 2022, p. 85.

10 Onderka and Vrtal 2022, p. 86, Fig. 4.

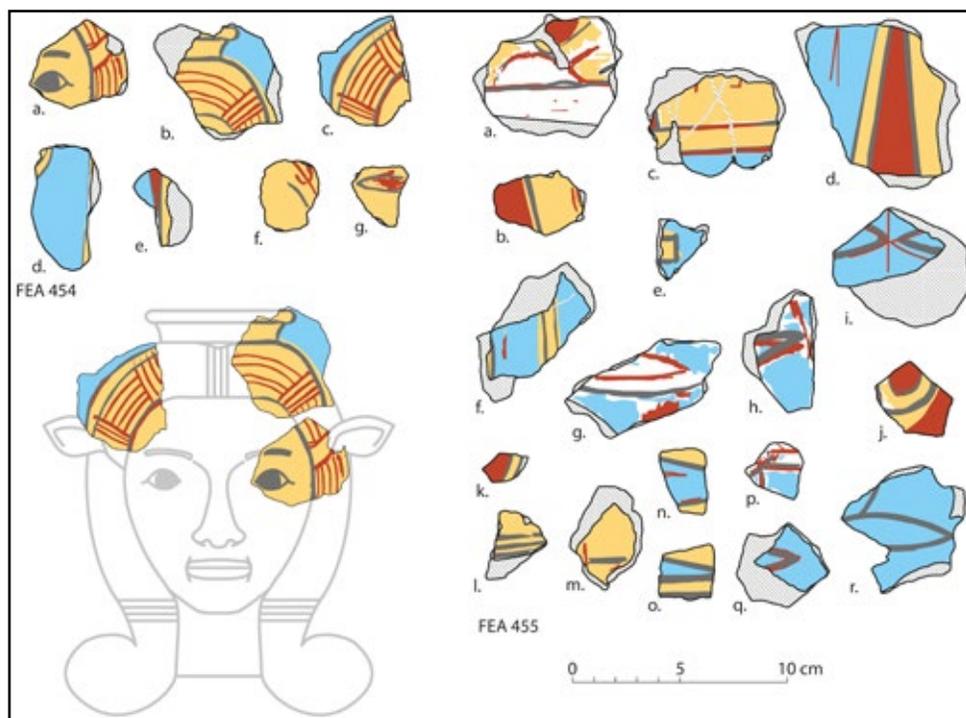


Fig. 4. Fragments of plaster from the walls of the northern vestibule (WBN 304; top left, right) and a hypothetical reconstruction of a Hathoric head from fragments belonging to multiple heads (bottom left; illustration: Pavel Onderka, Vlastimil Vrtal).

fragments of the room's original polychrome decoration were discovered. One of the fragments attests to the presence of the starry heaven decorative elements in the main sanctuary.

The jambs of the door (FEA 496) dividing the two rooms were made of sandstone blocks and had on them Egyptian inscriptions which on a number of occasions, mentioned Queen Amanitore [Pl. 2–3]. The texts were arranged in columns separated by dividers. The sandstone blocks seem to have been inscribed from all open sides. The nature of the texts is still under study. In front of the gate leading to the main sanctuary, a statue stand was discovered (FEA 493) [Pl. 4]. Neither the central vestibule, nor the central chapel were paved.

At the southern edge of the trench above room WBN 302, the torso of an abacus (FEA 480) recorded by the Royal Prussian Expedition in 1844 was discovered in the uppermost layer. Three sides of the abacus bearing relief decoration were partially preserved, while the fourth one was entirely missing. The best-preserved side was that showing a pair of gryphons surrounding the crowned cartouches of King Natakamani and Queen Amanitore, which was reproduced in the plates of the *Denkmäler*¹¹ [Fig. 5].

Trench T78 encompassed a part of the hypostyle hall. Excavations revealed part of a secondary partition wall (FEA 494), the top of which was recorded by both the

11 LDT V, p. 336; LD V, Pl. 55c.

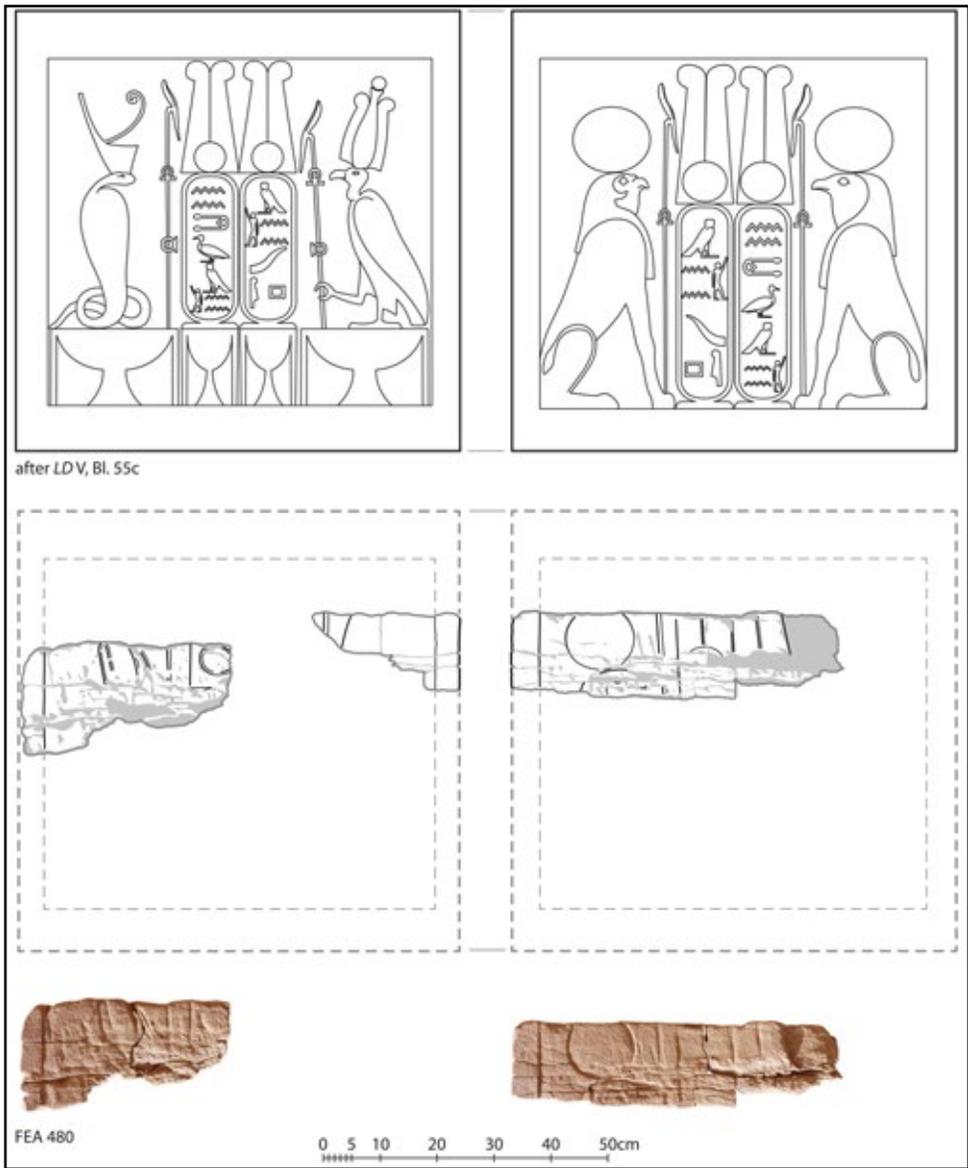


Fig. 5. Preserved parts of the abacus with the names of King Natakamani and Queen Amanitore (bottom) and its original appearance according to the *Denkmäler* (top; illustration: Vlastimil Vrtal).

Royal Prussian Expedition,¹² as well as our works from previous seasons.¹³ The wall was plastered on both sides with exterior plaster which was covered by a now badly-preserved figural decoration accompanied by texts in Egyptian hieroglyphs. These inscriptions, despite largely illegible, attest to a relatively long tradition of maintaining

12 Priese 1984, Abb. 3.

13 Onderka and Vrtal 2022, p. 82.

the knowledge of Egyptian language and script by the temple personnel as they were able to compose Egyptian texts not only at the time of the decoration of the temple but also at a later date when the hypostyle hall was divided into three sections.

In the area of the north-eastern corner of the hypostyle hall (WBN 301), an accumulation of sandstone fragments (FEA 483) was discovered. The largest amongst these fragments was one coming from the corner of a block with a multi-sided decoration, showing the ibis-headed god Thoth (S1501). The head of the ibis was adorned with a wig and an *3tf*-crown (only its base was preserved on the fragment). No remains of the assumed polychrome decoration were preserved [Pl. 5].

Three relatively well-preserved fragments of an inscription, arranged into columns were found (S1502, S1503, S1504). The inscription was engraved into the stone, the carved surface was plastered, the background was painted blue, hieroglyphics red, and the dividers between the columns yellow. The largest fragment (S1502) bears the beginning of the epithet of Amun-Ra: 'Lord of the throne of [Both] Lands' (*nb ns.t t3(.wy)*).

Burial WBN C311

Under more recent layers, at a depth of ca. 50 cm, and ca. 130 cm above the original floor of the temple, an intact human burial (FEA 482 = WBN C311) was found [Pl. 6]¹⁴. The burial belongs to cemetery WBN C300,¹⁵ located on top of *kom* C, covering the ruins of the Isis Temple (WBN 300) and at least three other monumental structures located to its south.¹⁶ The burial was deposited in a narrow pit (l. 180 cm, w. 30 cm), cut into destruction layers above the original room WBN 302. The grave's superstructure consisted mainly of fired brick fragments, which were originally believed to be debris from Erbkam's excavations as the tumulus' characteristics differed greatly from those of others located on top of the *kom*. The body was laid down into the grave enshrouded extensively into four layers which at the time of the discovery had a dark black colour. The shroud possessed nicely sewn rims, some of which had fringes attached. The fringes were preserved especially above the individual's belly and pelvis. The body wrapped in several layers of the shroud was further enfolded into a mat, fragments of which were retrieved during the excavation of the burial pit. The body was laid down in a stretched position, leaning slightly on the left side (probably due to the small width of the pit). The height of the individual was ca. 150 cm. The hands were placed over the pelvis. The head was oriented towards the south-east (138 degrees).¹⁷ No funerary equipment except the shroud and the mat were included in the burial.

Trench T77

Trench T77 was set above the anticipated location of the temple's southern chapel (WBN 311). A small tree which grew in the middle of the trench signalled previous digging activities at the spot (like at many other places at central Wad Ben Naga). Digging

14 Burial WBN C301 was excavated during the eighteenth excavation season (Onderka et al. 2021b, p. 77, Fig. 7), while numbers WBN C302–310 have been reserved for other well-visible tumuli located on top of *kom* C.

15 Onderka 2016, p. 47, Fig. 27.

16 Ullrich et al. 2018.

17 The anthropological examination of the body will be published separately.

activities were detected already in the upper stratigraphic layers. In the western part of the trench, a wide pit that went all the way to the bedrock was identified. The pit stretched from the northern wall of the room (FEA 501) to its southern counterpart (FEA 502). The pit was refilled with windblown sand and soil, as well as with the material excavated during its digging. At the perimeter and on the bottom of the pit flagstones from the floor were found (FEAs 504–506).

The diggers of the pit disturbed a human burial (WBN C312) which belonged to cemetery WBN C300, located on top of *kom* C. The skeleton was found incomplete and dispersed on both sides of the pit. The skull and several long and most of the small bones were missing. The majority of the bones was discovered scattered in an unnatural position leaning against the southern wall (FEA 502) and surrounded by flagstones (FEA 506). Another part of the burial was discovered on the opposite side of the trench (FEA 507). Remains of a black shroud were discovered on one of the femurs. It appears that the burial rite was similar to that of burial WBN C311, discovered to its west (see above).

The original floor of the room was entirely dismantled. Only flagstones at the very sides of the room were discovered *in situ* (FEA 510). A large block that was once the threshold of the doorway between the southern chapel (WBN 311) and the southern vestibule (WBN 310) was found displaced in the chapel's western part. Two door stoppers were discovered *in situ*. The door to the chapel once opened inwards. Jambs of the doorway leading to the southern vestibule (WBN 310) were made of fired bricks and they were largely damaged.

The walls (FEA 501, FEA 502, and the eastern wall FEA 511) were built on fired brick foundations (FEA 509), which were bolstered in the room's corners. The foundations were laid carelessly, and their general orientation differed slightly from that of the walls. The walls were covered with interior plaster and painted with the typical Meroitic colour repertoire (yellow, blue, and red + white and black). The polychrome decoration extended all the way to the foundation which clearly proves that the floor paving was laid only after the walls were fully decorated.

In the lowermost refill layer above the bedrock, three fragments of a bark stand (designated as *Altar D*) [Pl. 7] were found. It appears that the original bark stand was similar in size to *Altar A*.¹⁸ While two of them were anepigraphic, the third one bore part of an inscription, in all probability an invocation text similar to those on *Altar A* and *Altar B*.¹⁹ The text seems to be another version of the texts inscribed on the sides of *Altar A* and *Altar B* decorated with the figure of the goddess Tuayet; *Altar A* represents a closer parallel.

The surface of the text retained its original polychrome decoration (in red and yellow, blue is not attested). The polychrome decoration has not been recorded in the case of *Altar A*²⁰ and *Altar B*. The part of the text captured on the newly discovered fragment represents the initial part of the second column of the text and reads: *nms=f m=s* [...], i.e. 'may he glow in it [...]'. The fragment is of a special importance as the first suffix pronoun of the phrase relates to the deity, in this case a male one, to whom the bark stand was consecrated.

18 *Altar A*'s original dimension: 84 × 84 cm, height 140 cm; see Priese 1984, p. 13.

19 See Priese 1984; Vrtal 2015.

20 Pia Lehmann, Egyptian Museum and Papyrus Collection in Berlin, *personal communication*.

A highly abraded fragment of an offering table (S 1506, F22/012) possibly with traces of some Meroitic cursive signs was discovered inside of the pit.

[2] Chapel WBN 1100

Introduction

Archaeological research continued at the northern limit of *kom A*, in the area of which remains of a sandstone chapel (WBN 1100) were previously recorded in the form of extensive sandstone debris²¹ and most notably the south-eastern corner of the building itself.²² Previous research has indicated that the building had a cultic function. The poor state of preservation of both the building's walls and the remnants of its relief decoration allowed only tentative estimates of the building's dimensions, architectural plan, and topicality of its rich iconographic program.²³

The archaeological works of the present season were thus aimed mainly at establishing the limits of the building in northern and western directions and uncovering additional pieces of architectural elements and relief decoration.

Trench T79

Trench T79 was situated to the north of trench T74b²⁴ [Fig. 1; Pl. 8] and had dimensions of 5 × 5 m. It covered a substantial part of the interior of structure WBN 1100, as well as what transpired to be likely exterior space to the north.

The structure was built over denuded granitic bedrock (*sāra*, FEA 612), the upper limit of which proved to continually descend in the northerly direction.²⁵ A large part of the uncovered section of the building's exterior wall (FEA 607) was preserved only in the form of massive²⁶ foundations, composed of irregular hardstone (mainly at the base) and sandstone of a variety of shapes and sizes, joined by mortar and mud and directly resting on the bedrock [Fig. 6; Pl. 9]. Small fired brick fragments were also included scattered around the foundations. Only in the south-east of the trench, several regular sandstone blocks were preserved, forming a line and representing a direct continuation of the foundation course of the wall recorded in the northern part of trench T74b.²⁷ The foundations of wall FEA 607 formed two corners, captured only on their inner sides. From the centre of the northern section of the wall, a cluster of sandstone blocks projected towards the south, arranged to form a rough rectangle of ~2.2 × ~1.1 m.

The space between the walls was covered with an artificial floor made of *sāra* bedrock (FEA 610), formed into a 12 cm layer. The floor was cut by a test pit along the eastern wall which showed that the upper limit of the floor was elevated ~0.56 m over the bedrock, the intermediary space being filled with soil consisting of mud, sand

21 See Onderka et al. 2017, pp. 115–116, Figs. 2–3; Onderka et al. 2018a, pp. 99–100, Fig. 3, Pls. 1, 2b; Onderka et al. 2021a; Onderka et al. 2021b.

22 See Onderka and Vrtal 2022, pp. 89–96, Figs. 5–8, Pls. 11–14.

23 See Onderka and Vrtal 2022, pp. 94–96.

24 See Onderka and Vrtal 2022.

25 See Onderka et al. 2021b, p. 72. The elevation of the lowermost point was 0.8 m below the level of bedrock by the presumed northern limit of structure WBN 250 and 1.32 m below its level in the rear of the Typhonium.

26 Together with the foundation course of more regular blocks, they were ~0.76 m high in trench T79.

27 Onderka and Vrtal 2022, FEA 597.

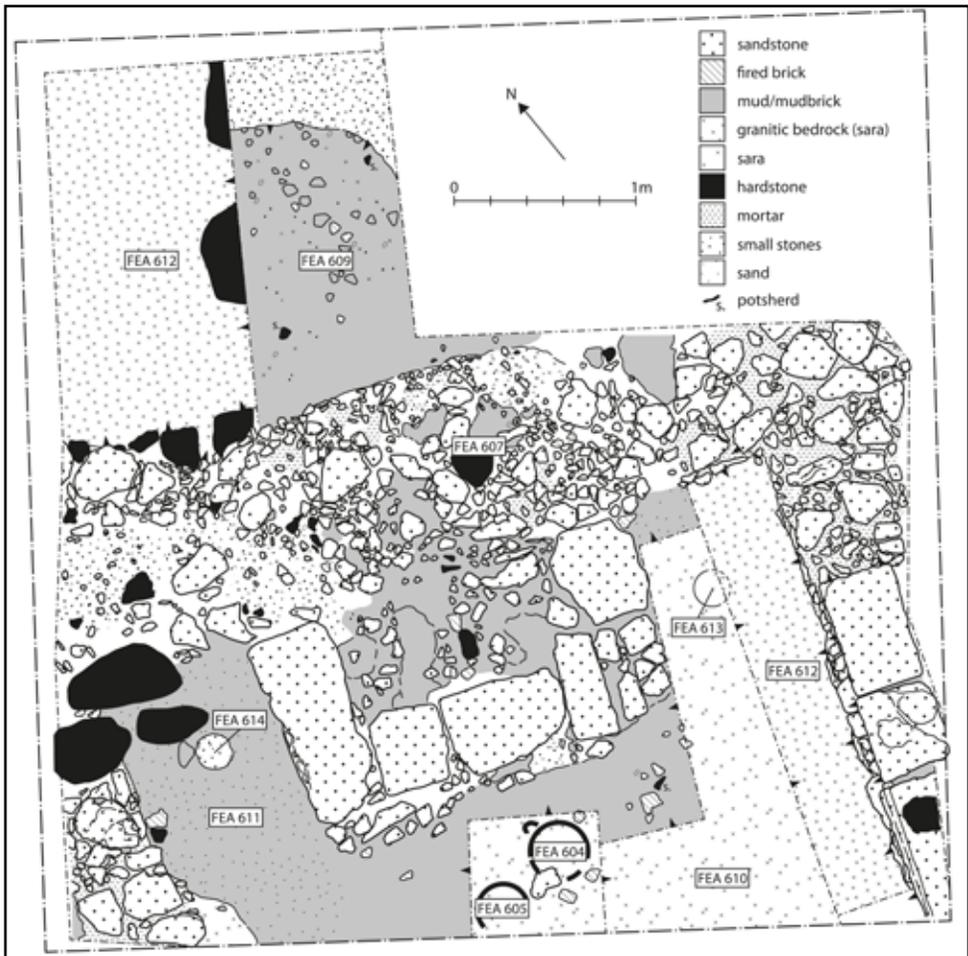


Fig. 6. Top plan of trench T79 at the end of excavations (Illustration: Vlastimil Vrtal).

(particularly in the west), and bedrock particles (FEA 611). In the soil, fragments of silty mudbricks were found, as well as pieces of charcoal and occasional potsherds [Fig. 7]. Amongst the latter, fragments of an open conical vessel (sub-form M8a) and a stripe-painted jar (non-diagnostic) were identified. The floor was disturbed in two areas by circular holes (FEAs 613–614), ~18 cm wide. The holes were situated by the sides of the rectangular cluster of stones. One of these was recorded in section, which indicated that the hole was ~0.2 m deep and at some point filled with detritus of sandstone, fired bricks, and mudbricks, and a mixture of soil and *sāra* particles. Interestingly, the floor covered also the rectangular cluster of sandstone blocks by the northern wall.

The floor of *sāra* was underlying a relatively shallow layer of soil with a high distribution of *sāra* particles and sandstone chips (FEA 608). It reached roughly the upper limit of the foundation course of sandstone blocks in the eastern wall, and thus it possibly represented disturbed section of the floor which may have been originally situated higher than the upper limit of FEA 610. Comparison with the situation in trench

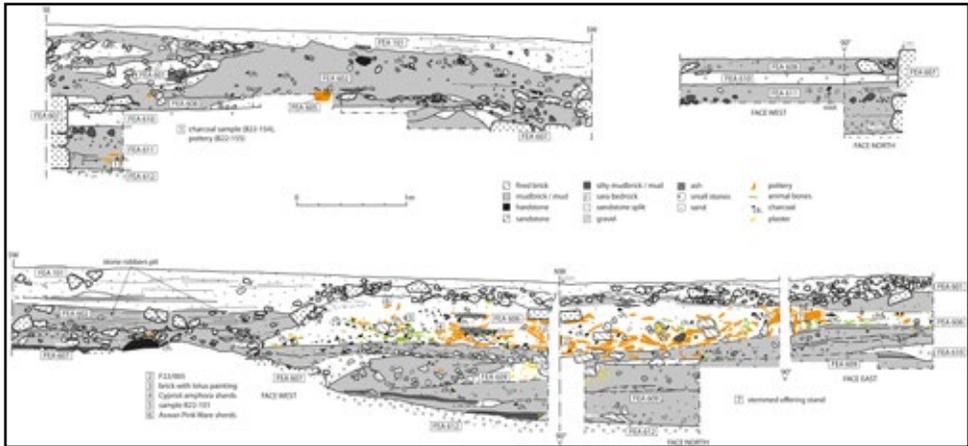


Fig. 7. Trench T79, sections south (top left), west and north (bottom), and a test pit through the floor in the interior of chapel WBN 1100 (top right; illustration: Vlastimil Vrtal).

T74b seems to confirm this assumption.²⁸ Two vessels (FEAs 604–605) were embedded in the layer just south of the rectangular sandstone cluster. Nearby patches of ash and pieces of burnt wood indicate that they served as ovens.

The stratigraphic situation north of the northern wall differed greatly. Although only the north-western part of the area was excavated, it evidently lacked a similarly elevated floor. Instead, the slope of the bedrock was moderated with a layer of sandy soil with bedrock particles and pebbles, interspersed with occasional lenses of coarser soil and thin layers of mud [Fig. 7]. Above, there was an already horizontal layer (both marked as FEA 609) with a higher distribution of fired brick and mudbrick fragments and a distinct heap of *sāra* or lime particles. The latter were mixed with fired brick fragments and numerous pieces of lime plaster painted in red, blue, and yellow. One such fired brick fragment retained a coating of lime plaster, covering its front, top, and back. On the front side, the plaster was decorated with lotus flowers and buds, painted in red, blue, yellow, and black over a yellow background [Figs. 7–8]. Only by the northern wall, this layer was cut by a pit – no doubt to lay the foundations of the northern wall – the remainder of which was later filled with solid layer of *sāra* resembling floor FEA 610. A thin layer of soil with numerous small fired brick fragments formed over the latter. Above, it was followed by a ~0.5 m thick layer of coarse sand (FEA 606) in which there were found pieces of larger fired brick and mudbrick fragments, charcoal and ash, large quantities of animal bones and potsherds, and numerous other artefacts [Fig. 7; Pl. 10]. Amongst the potsherds, from which complete vessels can be often reconstructed, one could note not only distinctive Meroitic forms – such as several stemmed offering stands (form M4) of various sizes, jars with short modelled narrowing neck (form J14), a jar with wide neck and vertical handles (or ‘krater’, form J16) with a painted rosette, and a flask/alabastron – but also an abundance of imports: a carinated jug of Aswan provenance and numerous amphora types, including distinctive Peacock and Williams class 45 (form F4), Egyptian Dressel 2–4 (?) (form

28 Onderka and Vrtal 2022, p. 92, FEA 599.

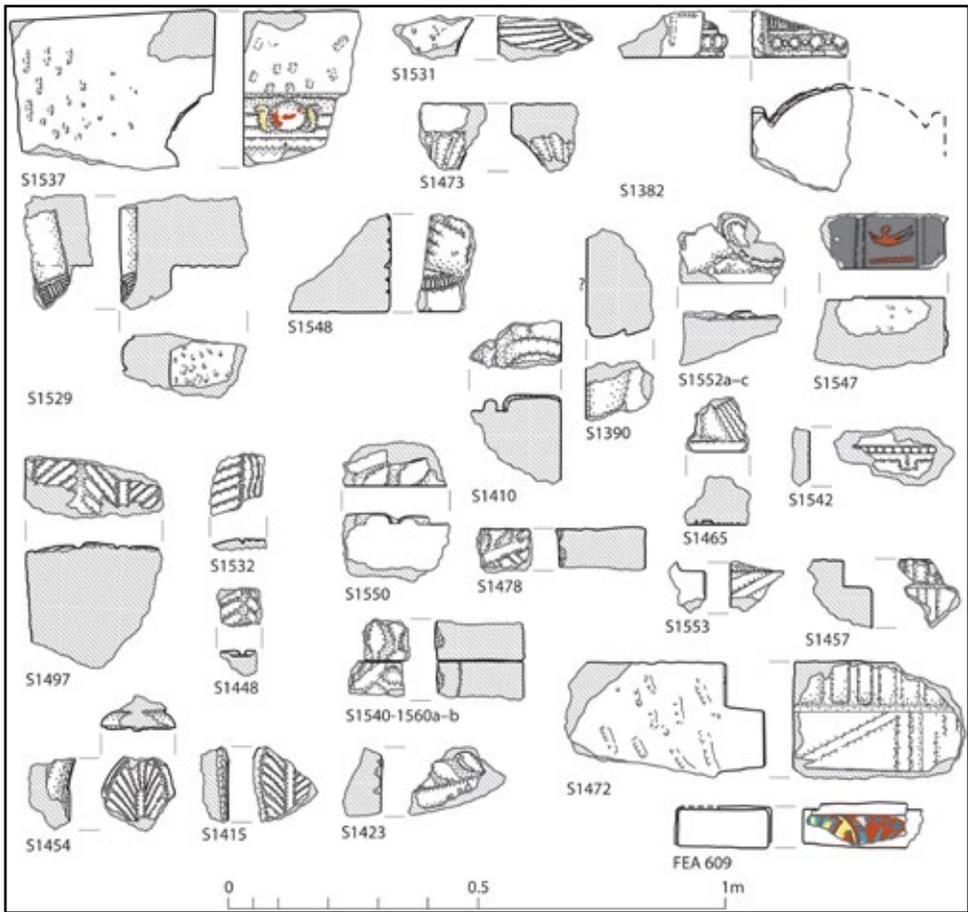


Fig. 8. Selected fragments of architectural elements and relief decoration retrieved in trench T79 (Illustration: Vlastimil Vrtal).

F3), pinched handle amphora (?) (form F2), and Gempeler K704.²⁹ The collection of artefacts found in the same context was formed by pieces of a fine-grained sandstone altar (?) with relief decoration (F22/001), a handful of ceramic *ḥnh*-libation basins (F22/002, F22/005, F22/006a–b), a fragment of a sandstone statuette of a seated lion (F22/003), pieces of a libation table with relief decoration of an offering table, *ḥbh*-vase, and a bunch of lotuses (F22/004a–b), a faience bowl with collar rim (SM22/053), balls of unfired clay (SM22/054), several fragments of faience tiles (SM22/057a–j, 069, 082), a ledge-rimmed bowl with pigments, two nuggets of yellow pigment, bedstone (SM22/052), and several *Wundersteine* (four quartzites, one polished basaltic boulder, and one ferricrete sandstone; SM22/055–056) [Fig. 9; Pl. 11].

Throughout the trench, the above-mentioned strata were covered with massive debris of sandstone blocks and chips and fired brick fragments (FEA 601³⁰) from the

²⁹ Gempeler 1992, p. 189, Abb. 120.

³⁰ See Onderka et al. 2021a, FEA 588; Onderka and Vrtal 2022, FEA 588.

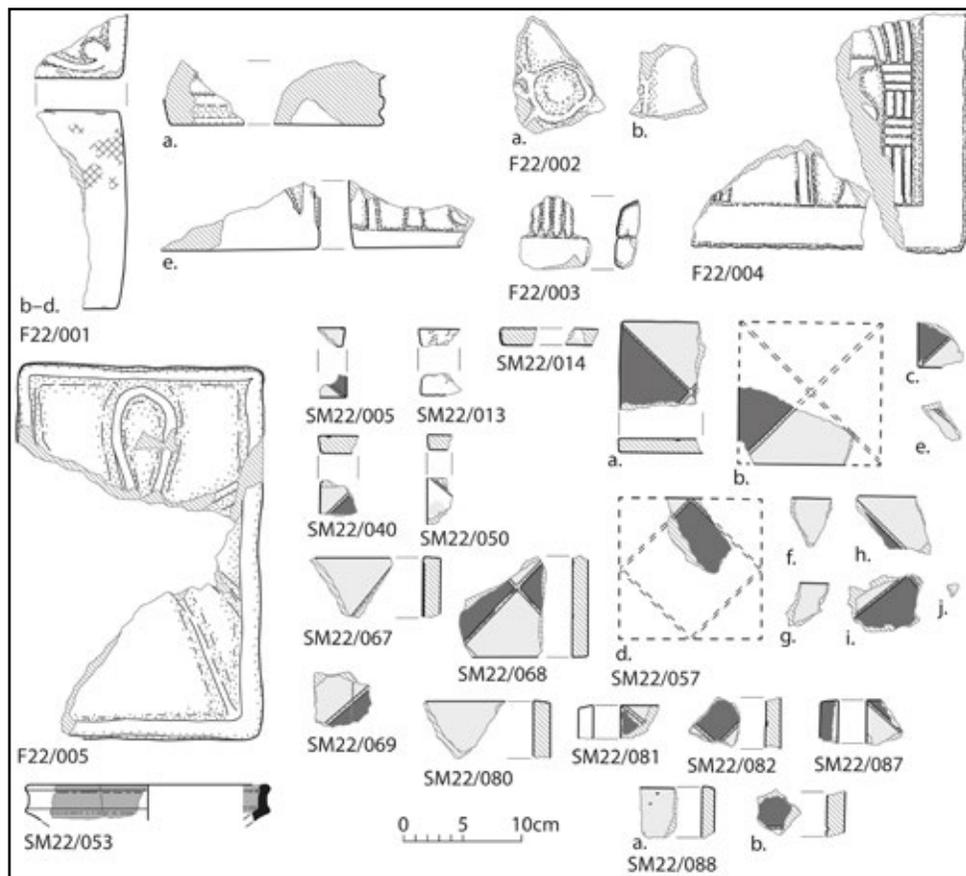


Fig. 9. Selected finds from trench T79 (Illustration: Vlastimil Vrtal).

structure's walls and roof. Over the walls, the stones were directly overlying their remains. In the lower part of the space between the walls, they were distributed together with fired brick fragments in a muddy soil (FEA 602) with occasional ash lenses, pieces of charcoal, and chunks of burnt palmwood. Further up, the soil was sandier, and particularly in the south-west, one could note surface deposits of wind-blown sand (FEA 101) that have formed in an apparent stone looters' pit. In the north and north-east, the debris took the form of a ~0.2 m thick solid crust of minute chips.

The sandstone debris was removed, while recording pieces of modelled architectural elements, blocks with relief decoration, and block corners. One hundred and seventy-six fragments from trench T79 (S1377–1500, 1520–1569) were recorded in this fashion by drawing, photography, and – selectively – photogrammetry [Fig. 8; Pl. 11]. The range of recorded architectural elements largely conformed to those from previous trenches. Besides fragments of lintels with winged sun-discs (S1537, S1531, S1445?), cavetto cornices (S1450, S1459, S1460, S1462, S1473, S1475, S1477, S1482, S1494, S1496, S1536, S1554), or ledges with a mat binding motif and a star frieze (S1412, S1417, S1436–1437, S1457, S1463, S1472, S1474, S1543, S1553), there were some interesting additions, previously unattested: ledges with a mat binding motif of the opposite orientation,

numerous fragments of rectangular corner guards, some still whitewashed and painted red and yellow (S1392, S1414, S1455, S1480, S1481B, S1490, S1492, S1566), the capital of an engaged column (?) with bead moulding under a slightly extending bunches of lines and square(s) (S1382), and tips of curious plastic palmettes (S1415, S1454) as if coming from very plastic column capitals or some sort of *acroteria*.

Amongst the reliefs, several figural motifs could be identified. Three pieces formed another depiction of a reclining lion (S1552a–c).³¹ One fragment may be tentatively attributed to a leg of the god Bes (S1410), also attested previously.³² There were also several parts of human body, namely a male calf (S1390), a left hand holding a rope (S1548), and the right arm (?) of a royal or divine figure with a segmented armlet (S1529), possibly from an engaged statue. Other motifs included a uraeus *en-face* (S1404) and a falcon (S1465). As previously, floral motifs were abundant in trench T79. One should particularly note several additional fragments of the Pnubs-tree (?) with drop-shaped leaves (S1423, S1478, S1540, S1550, S1560a–b),³³ a motif which – with regard to the size and find spots – may have been quite central to the decorative program. In addition to the plastic palmettes, many others were found, with different sizes and designs. Some were rendered in a rather organic fashion (S1556), while other were more regular (S1448, S1497, S1521, S1527, S1532). The latter were sometimes set in a slightly rounded surface, with too great a diameter, however, to have come from a column. Finally, there were fragments of reliefs with symbolic motifs, such as *ḥnḥ*-signs and *w3s*-scepters over *nb/ḥb*-signs, clearly in a frieze, but curiously executed both in sunken relief (S1538) and *bas-relief* (S1541). Another whitewashed block (S1547) had a relief resembling a column of text with red-painted characters; the ‘column’ dividers were not identical, however, and the characters did not correspond unambiguously to any Meroitic or Egyptian hieroglyphs. The nature of the motif thus remains obscure.

In the stratum of sandstone debris, some other notable finds were made, namely a piece of a small-sized fired brick, associated with the construction of the roof,³⁴ a substantial collection of faience tile fragments (SM22/014, 040, 050, 057a–j, 067, 068, 081, 087, 088a–b), pieces of a faience vessel (?) (SM22/070), and querns [Fig. 9].

Trench T80

Trench T80 was situated to the west of trench T79. Its dimensions were 5 × 1.5 m. The aim of the excavations was to record the western limits of structure WBN 1100.

The excavations revealed a surface layer of wind-blown sand (FEA 101), corresponding to the stone looters’ pit in trench T79. Up to ~0.3 m of the stratum was removed, revealing a sandstone and fired brick debris (FEA 603). The debris was accumulated mostly in the eastern part of the trench [Pl. 8]. It was sloping to the west where only a few stones were deposited haphazardly in a bed of sand. The debris clearly represented remains of the western wall of structure WBN 1100 in its likely exterior. The debris was not removed and only its surface was documented. A piece of a whitewashed rectangular corner guard or a high lesene with remains of red paint was noted.

31 See Onderka et al. 2021b, p. 76, Fig. 6, S1070.

32 See Onderka et al. 2021a, pp. 154, 156, Pl. 10.

33 See Onderka and Vrtal 2022, pp. 94–95, Fig. 8, Pl. 14.

34 Grzymiski and Grzymaska 2008, p. 49. See also Onderka et al. 2021b, p. 76.

Survey of stone wall WBN 171

In connection with the exploration of structure WBN 1100, the western continuation of stone wall WBN 171³⁵ was surveyed in order to record its course. The westernmost limit of the wall which could be noted on the surface was situated ~63 m west of the north-west corner of the Palace of Amanishakhete (WBN 100), in the area of the present-day local communication [Fig. 1]. Provided that the wall continued in a straight line farther west, it would terminate ~2 m north of the northern wall of structure WBN 1100 or pass it in the same distance.

Discussion

The excavations of the present season were successful in recording the likely spatial limits of structure WBN 1100. Nearly the whole course of its eastern and northern walls and a section of its western wall were uncovered albeit only in the form of foundations. The presence of the elevated floor exclusively south of the northern wall indicated that the area farther north was already situated in the exterior. This would mean that the structure had dimensions of only ~8.4 × ~5.8 m.³⁶ It would rank the building amongst the smaller-sized Meroitic cultic establishments,³⁷ being even smaller than the so-called Small Temple at Wad Ben Naga (WBN 400).³⁸ Notably, the axis of the building thus established proved not to correspond to the axis of the Typhonium (WBN 200), as had been assumed.³⁹ It was not only skewed to the south-west by ~1° but also situated slightly to the west. The anticipated entrance to structure WBN 1100 thus likely faced the off-centre doorway(s) in the northern part of structure WBN 250.⁴⁰

Given its size, the presence of any partition walls can likely be ruled out, and structure WBN 1100 thus most probably represented the *Einraumtempel*⁴¹ type of Meroitic cultic building [Fig. 10], although the already large number of lintels with winged sun-discs might indicate the presence of multiple entrances. The rectangular cluster of sandstone blocks abutting what may be now understood as the likely rear wall of the chapel is notable, even though it was situated only under the floor. It probably served to support (a podium with) an altar, bark stand, throne, or naos.⁴² The two post holes in a symmetrical disposition to the cluster may have served for fitting standards or to reinforce the construction of a wooden naos/baldachin. It can be suggested that with high probability, the floor of the chapel was tiled with faience black-and-white tiles of minimum two complementary designs, parallels of which are found in many Meroitic temples.⁴³

The finds of new types of architectural elements in the sandstone debris added to the already surprisingly abundant and diverse collection, particularly if one considers the

35 See Onderka et al. 2015, p. 98, Fig. 4; Vrtal 2021, pp. 75–78, 256.

36 Roughly in concord with the ideal ratio of 8:5, see Hinkel 1991.

37 See *inter alia* Hintze 1962, p. 188, 190, 195; LD I, Bl. 140, 145.

38 See Onderka et al. 2019a, p. 147.

39 See discussion in Onderka and Vrtal 2022, p. 89.

40 *Ibid.*

41 *Inter alia* Kuckertz 2019, pp. 813–814; Wolf 2014.

42 Similar position of cultic installations was observed in the Lion Temple at Naga, see Perzlmeier and Schlüter 2016, p. 8, Fig. 4; and the Lion Temple and Temples IIA and IID at Musawwarat es-Sufra, see Hintze 1962, pp. 174, 189, 191, Figs. 3a, 16, 20, Pls. Lib, LXa; Hintze et al. 1993, p. 63.

43 Garstang et al. 1911, p. 25, Pl. XXXII.1; Shinnie and Anderson 2004, p. 29, Fig. 20; Török 1997, *passim*.

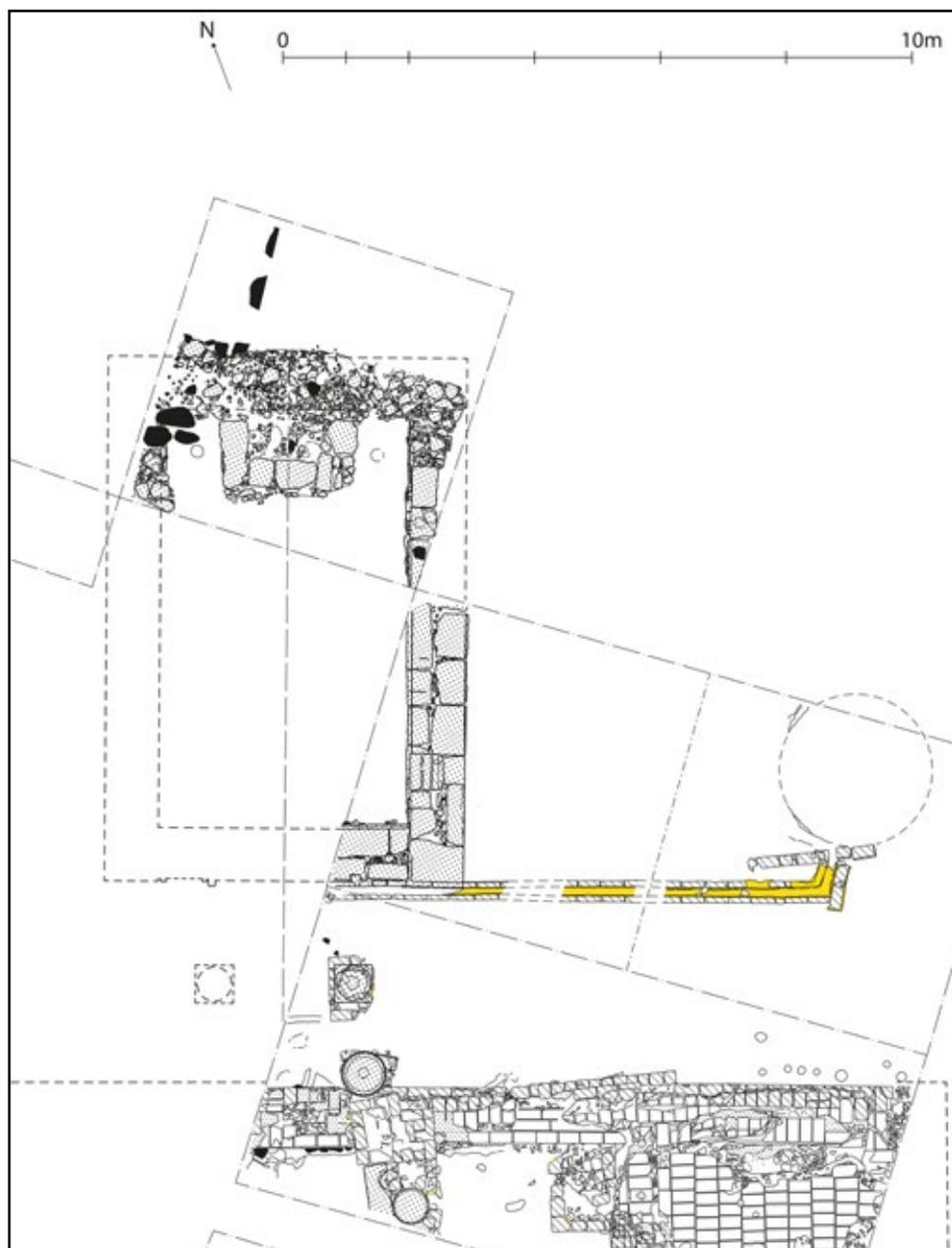


Fig. 10. Top plan of structure WBN 1100 at the present state of research (Illustration: Vlastimil Vrtal).

minor size of the building. The likely capital of an engaged column with bead moulding on the necking, and possibly the plastic palmettes, stress the eclectic architectural style of the chapel, manifested already by the Greek cross meander frieze.⁴⁴ The influence of Hellenistic Egypt on the bead moulding is clear,⁴⁵ although it was possibly mediated by closer models, as indicated by columns from Musawwarat es-Sufra and Naga.⁴⁶

The understanding of the iconographical program was only a little enhanced. Emphasis on certain topical motifs, such as lions and the Pnubs-tree (?), was confirmed. As was the abundance of other floral motifs, namely various palmettes. Their setting in the architectural and/or iconographical program of the chapel nevertheless remains puzzling. Clearly, some of the figural motifs must have occupied a significant part of the space, as both the hand holding a rope (leading to an animal⁴⁷ or captives⁴⁸) and the arm with a segmented armband come from life-size figures. The figures can nevertheless be identified only very broadly as divine or royal.

The data from the foundations of the chapel allow the initial preliminary dating of its construction. *Terminus post quem* (in the 1st century BCE?) is indicated by the inclusion of fired brick fragments in the base of the wall, and particularly by the presence of an open conical vessel in the fill of the floor. Several vessels of the same form were retrieved at Wad Ben Naga from the foundations of the Palace of Amanishakhete,⁴⁹ the Small Temple,⁵⁰ and structure WBN 700.⁵¹ Laboratory analysis of charcoal samples from the fill of the floor might provide additional clues.

The performance of cultic activities in the chapel is likely reflected by the collection of artefacts and ecofacts from the space behind its rear wall, which likely represented a discard area, possibly used during an initial looting (judging from the presence of faience tile fragments). While the pieces of an altar, a libation table, libation basins, *Wundersteine*, and a lion statuette represent remains of cultic equipment and *ex vota*, the vast quantities of animal bones and numerous examples of a common range of imported containers attest to regular presentation of offerings. The dating of some of the pieces would indicate that the discard took place in the late Meroitic Period.

Conclusion

The excavations of the twenty-first season in the so-called Isis Temple allowed to confirm the assumed distribution of rooms in the northern and south-eastern parts of the temple. The finds of remnants of the internal and external decoration and accompanying texts, uncovered both *in situ* and detached, contributed to the understanding of the topicality and distribution of the iconographic program of the temple. It also confirmed the dating of its construction by additional attestations of the name of Queen Amanitore. The find of the same piece of abacus that was likely recorded by the Royal Prussian

44 Onderka and Vrtal 2022, pp. 94–95.

45 See Pensabene 1993, Fig. 13.

46 Cailliaud 1826, Pl. XXX, no. 4; Hintze 1971, Taf. 89; Kröper et al. 2011, Abb. 141.

47 *Inter alia* Hintze 1971, Taf. 63, 71; Gamer-Wallert 1983, Bl. 9a, 9b.

48 *Inter alia* Chapman and Dunham 1952, Pl. 17; Gamer-Wallert 1983, Bl. 6a, 11a; Hintze 1971, Taf. 81.

49 Onderka et al. 2015, p. 99, Fig. 6; Onderka et al. 2018b, p. 141; Vrtal 2021, pp. 81, 92, 208, Fig. V.30.

50 Onderka et al. 2019a, pp. 164, 166.

51 Onderka et al. 2016, Fig. 2.

Expedition in 1844 added to the previously documented traces of its work in the temple. Fragments of a previously undocumented inscribed bark stand in the southern sanctuary provided important evidence concerning the deity worshipped in this part of the temple, although only its gender could be determined from the scanty remains of the text. The two burials uncovered in the area of the temple provided additional information on the burials and the character of funerary customs in the secondary cemetery that developed over the remains of the temple following its destruction.

The excavations at the northern limit of *kom A* succeeded in establishing the likely spatial limits of sandstone chapel WBN 1100 and its orientation. The size and internal disposition indicate that it was a sanctuary of the *Einraumtempel* type with a cultic area at the rear of the interior. From the foundations, the first archaeological data on the dating of the construction of the building were retrieved. Numerous fragments of architectural elements and relief decoration were retrieved from the chapel's debris which gradually contribute to the understanding of the chapel's eclectic architectural design and the topicality of its iconographical program. Finds from the interior of the chapel and particularly from the discard area behind its rear wall attested to the performance of cult and elucidated its character and dating.

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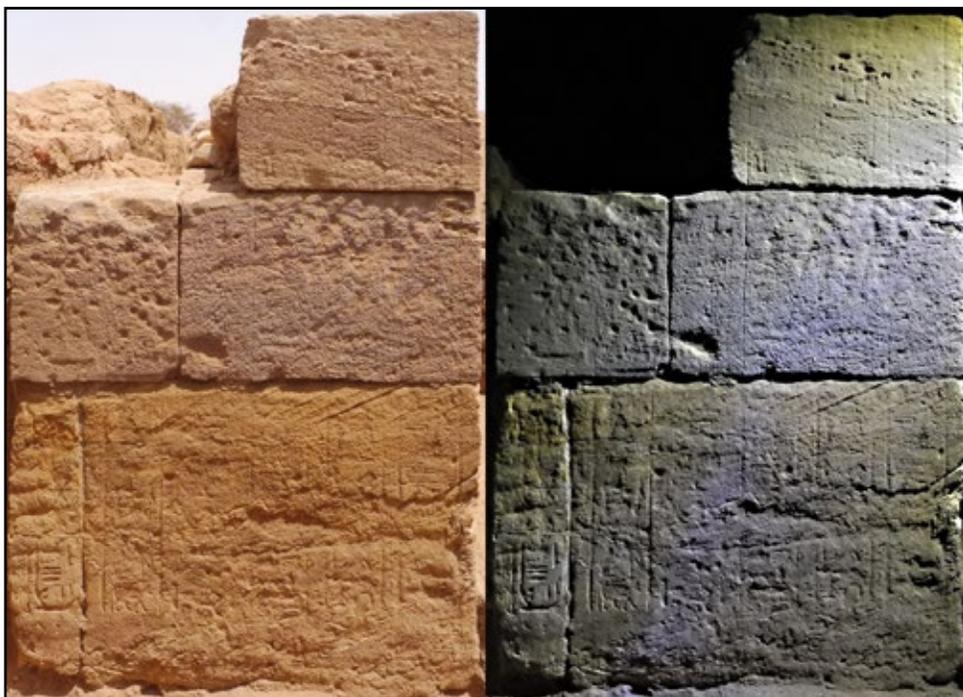
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Pl. 1. Northern nave of the Isis Temple; view from the east (Photo: Pavel Onderka).



Pls. 2-3. Jambs of the main sanctuary with the inscriptions of Queen Amanitore (Photo: Pavel Onderka).



Pl. 4. Statue stand from the vestibule of the main sanctuary (Photo: Pavel Onderka).



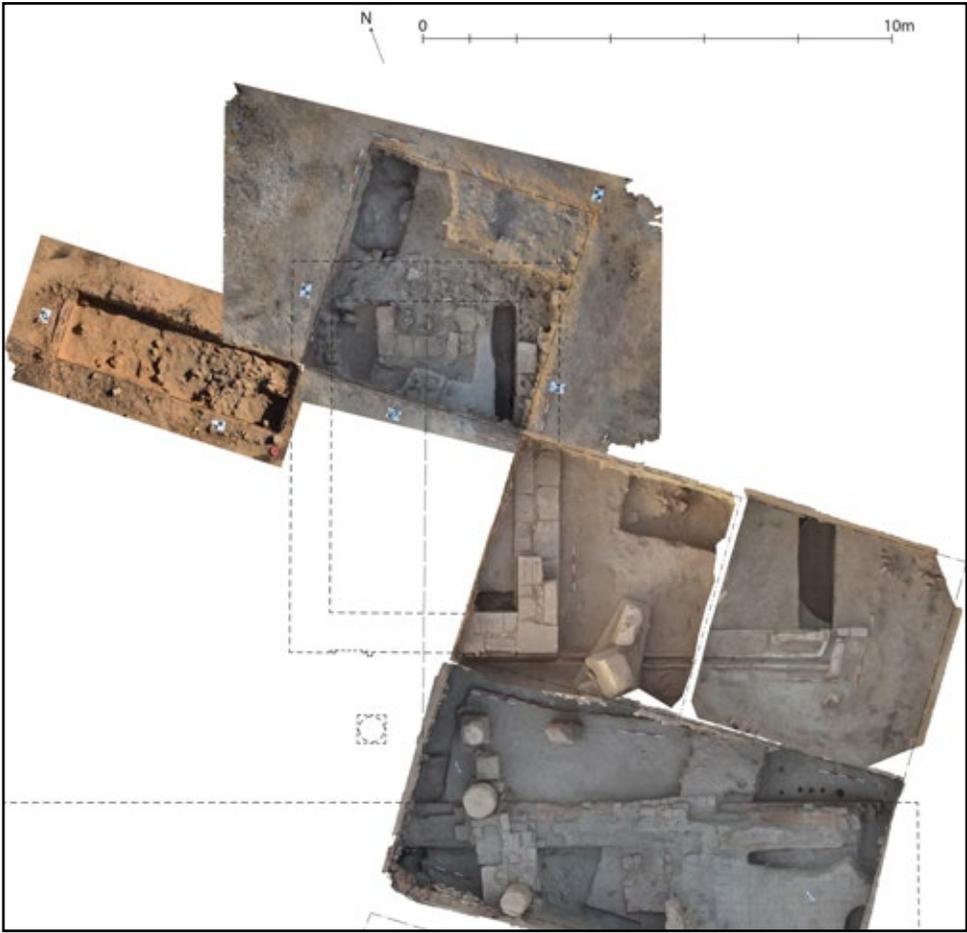
Pl. 5. Relief block with the depiction of the god Thoth, held by Tahir Abdulkareem al-Fadil (Photo: Pavel Onderka).



Pl. 6. Burial WBN C311 (Photo: Pavel Onderka).



Pl. 7. Fragment of Altar D, discovered in the southern chapel (WBN 311; photo: Pavel Onderka).



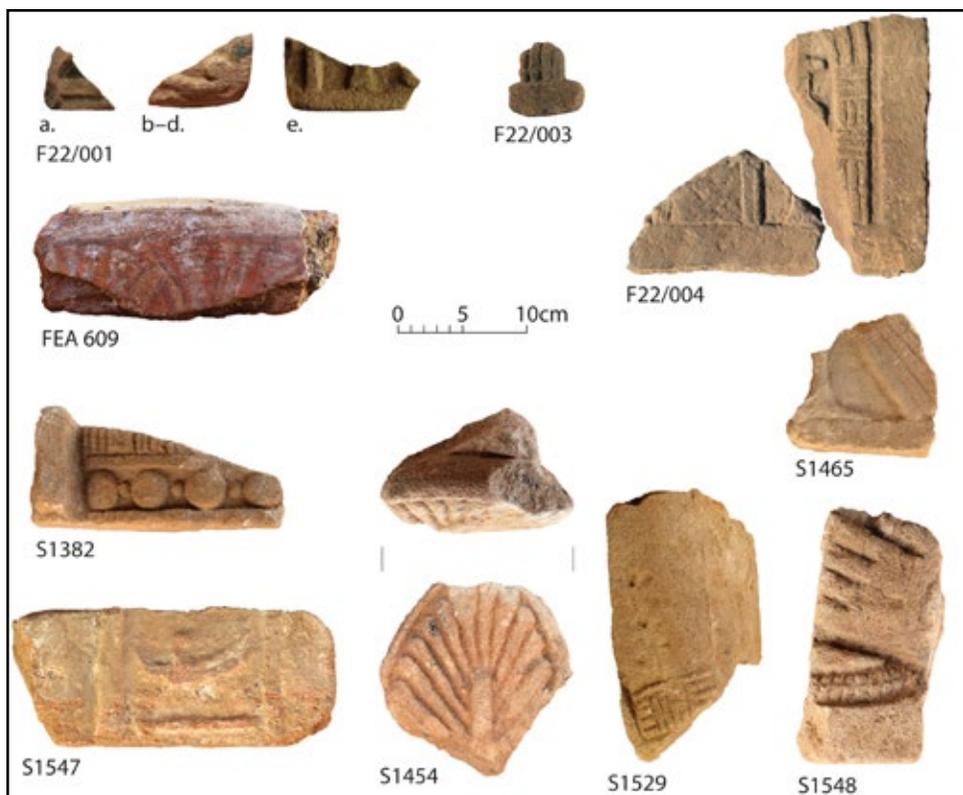
Pl. 8. Orthophoto of structure WBN 1100 at the present state of research
(Illustration: Vlastimil Vrtal).



Pl. 9. Trench T79 at the end of excavations; view from the west.
(Photo: Vlastimil Vrtal).



Pl. 10. Upper limit of the stratum with discarded artefacts and ecofacts (FEA 606)
in the north-west of trench T79 (Photo: Vlastimil Vrtal).



Pl. 11. Selected finds and architectural fragments from trench T79 (Photo: Vlastimil Vrtal).