



PRELIMINARY REPORT ON THE THIRD EXCAVATION SEASON OF THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXPEDITION TO WAD BEN NAGA

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ABSTRACT: During its third excavation season, the Archaeological Expedition to Wad Ben Naga carried out [1] the revision excavations of the so-called Eastern Temple (WBN 500), [2] the first phase of the excavations of the complex of the so-called Typhonium (WBN 200) and [3] the conservation of the rooms WBN 103, 128 and 143 in the so-called Palace of Amanishakheto (WBN 100).

KEY WORDS: Wad Ben Naga – Nubia – Meroitic culture – Meroitic architecture.

The third excavation season of the Archaeological Expedition to Wad Ben Naga² took place between 9 November and 22 December 2011. The Expedition reached Wad Ben Naga on 11 November and launched field work on 17 November. The archaeological and conservation works were concluded on 20 December.

The work of the third excavation season focused on [1] the revision excavations of the so-called Eastern Temple (WBN 500), [2] the first phase of the excavations of the complex of the so-called Typhonium (WBN 200) and [3] conservation of the rooms WBN 103, 127 and 148 of the so-called Palace of Amanishakheto (WBN 100) [cf. Fig. 1].

The season was carried out in the regime of the “archaeological excavations” as defined by the *Ordinance for the Protection of Antiquities of 1999* of the Republic of the Sudan.

The mission was headed by Pavel Onderka (director), Dušan Nováček (deputy director, conservator), Jitka Barochová (deputy director, chief conservator) and Mohamed Saad Abdalla Saad (inspector of the National Corporation for Antiquities and Museums). The mission further consisted of (in alphabetical order): Ramona John (archaeologist), Eric Spindler (archaeologist), Markéta Tymonová (archaeologist), Vlastimil Vrtal (archaeologist) and Jana Zemanová (architect).

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² For the reports on the first and second excavation season cf. Onderka – Dufková 2011 and Onderka 2011, respectively.

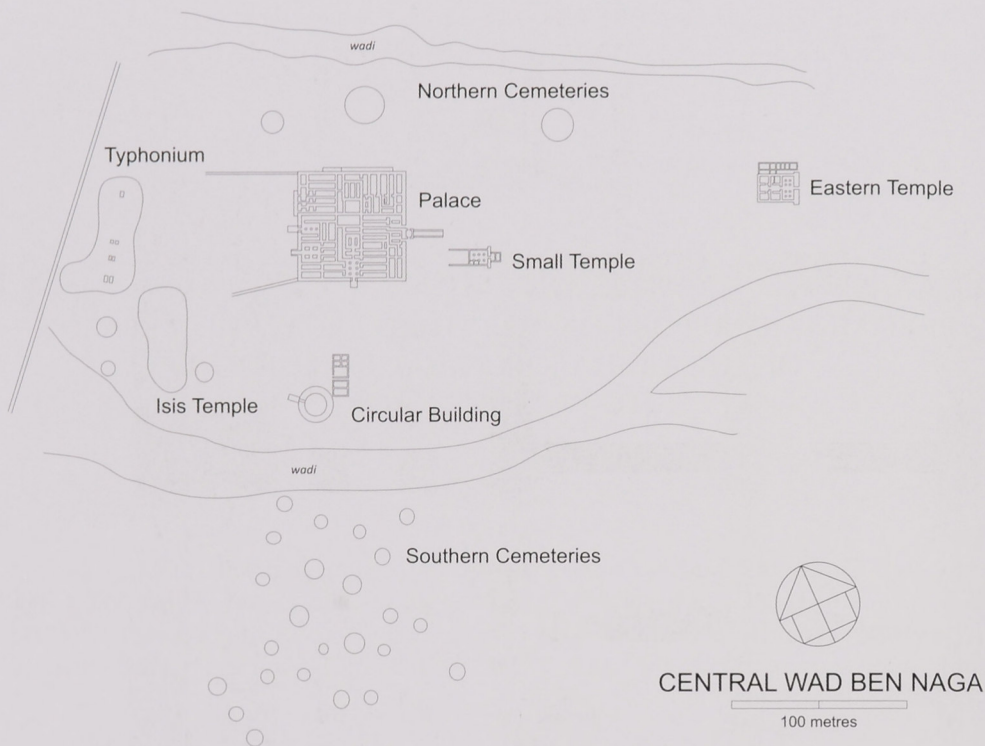


Fig. 1: Central Wad Ben Naga (Illustration by Pavel Onderka).

1. Revision excavations of the so-called Eastern Temple [Fig. 2, Pl. 1]

1.1 Excavation history

The so-called Eastern Temple (Calliaud's *kôm E*)³ was discovered during the first excavation season of the Sudanese Antiquities Service expedition to Wad Ben Naga headed by Thabit Hassan Thabit in the winter of 1958/1959.⁴ Later on the Temple was surveyed by Ahmad Mohamed Ali Hakem⁵ and was referred to on a number of occasions by Karl-Heinz Priese.⁶ Most recently Caroline Rocheleau compiled the temple's bibliography.⁷

The temple was studied and documented in a cursory fashion by the Archaeological Expedition to Wad Ben Naga in the course of the first⁸ and the second⁹ excavation season. The remains of the temple's pylon traditionally mark the eastern limit of Central Wad Ben Naga.

³ Calliaud 1823–1827.

⁴ Vercoutter 1962: 271–273.

⁵ Ali Hakem 1988: 322.

⁶ Priese 1984a: 11–29; 1984b: 347–350.

⁷ Rocheleau 2008: 49.

⁸ Onderka – Dufková 2011a: 45.

⁹ Onderka 2011: 60–61.



Fig. 2: Ground plan of the Eastern Temple (Illustration by Vlastimil Vrtal).

The Eastern Temple is badly preserved. Ever since it was unearthed more than 50 years ago it has been exposed to erosion and weathering. Not even the foundations of the temple are completely preserved. The original width of the pylon was 18.50 m, the original width of rear part of the temple was 15.50 m and the length of the temple was 23.70 m.

The debris from the past excavations is located to the south of the temple's ruins. Stone architectural features found *in situ* in the temple ruins were assembled by the Sudanese expedition to the east of the temple.¹⁰

1.2 The temple precinct

The Eastern Temple was a medium-size multi-roomed temple most probably dedicated to Amun.¹¹ A pylon stood at the entrance of the temple. The following hypostyle hall (WBN 501) with eight columns arranged into two lines opened to a

¹⁰ Cf. Onderka – Dufková 2011a: 45.

¹¹ Rocheleau 2008: 49.

small vestibule (WBN 503) from which two lateral rooms (WBN 502, 504) and the triple sanctuary (WBN 505–507) – or more precisely the main chapel (WBN 506) – could have been entered. The lateral chapels (WBN 505, 507) were accessible only through the temple's main sanctuary (WBN 506). In the southern lateral room (WBN 502) remains of a podium were preserved. The proper temple building was flanked by a subsidiary building (WBN 508–516) which gained its final form in at least three chronological and construction phases.



Pl. 1: Remains of the Eastern Temple (Photo by Pavel Onderka).

1.3 The proper temple building

The recent state of preservation allows us to assume that the foundations of the temple were built of reused red bricks originally employed in the facades of the Palace (WBN 100) which indicates that at the time when the Eastern Temple was built, the Palace must have already fallen (partly or fully) into ruins or major changes must have been done in the upper floor. Numerous bricks with one side covered by calcite plaster (occasionally with polychrome decoration – red, blue and yellow colors) were found in the foundations [Fig. 3].

The walls of the temple were built of newly produced mud bricks. The walls were covered with a layer of mud plaster bearing polychrome decoration (red, blue and yellow colors were employed).¹² The polychrome decoration of the temple's walls is positively attested in the triple sanctuary (WBN 505–507). Vercoutter mentioned that "les murs de la chambre médiane axiale portaient des traces de peinture polychrome : animal passant à droite (bœuf au taureau), et des étoiles sur un fragment provenant du plafond."¹³

¹² Vercoutter 1962: 272.

¹³ Vercoutter 1962: 272.

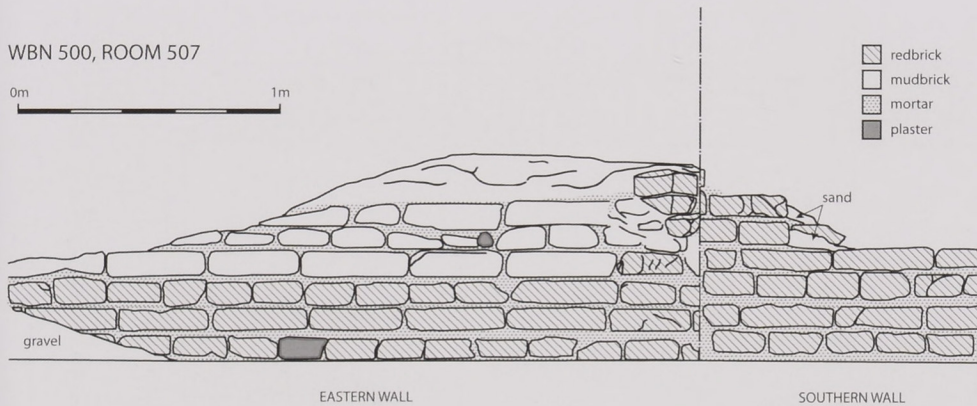


Fig. 3: Profile of the walls and foundations of Room WBN 507 (Illustration by Vlastimil Vrtal).

The employment of the stone in the temple's construction was rather limited. The columns of the hypostyle hall were made of pink soft sandstone which was covered by a layer of white plaster. Harder grayish ochre sandstone was used for drainage, a bark stand (find no. 2011/008) discovered in WBN 510 and a statue of a seated lion (already given over to the Sudan National Museum).

WBN 501 [Hypostyle hall] [Fig. 4, Pl. 2]

The temple's entrance was originally flanked by two towers of the pylon, out of which only lower courses of the red bricks are preserved. The hypostyle hall included two rows of four columns with open lotus capitals each centred on the temple's axis. The bases of the columns were made of red bricks, while the columns themselves were made of soft sandstone covered with white plaster on the surface. Several objects were found in the very centre of the room, namely the upper part of an amphora and a fragment of richly painted cup (no. 2011/007). Vercoutter mentioned that "une boucle d'oreille en or, en forme de croissant, a été trouvée dans la salle hypostyle."¹⁴

WBN 502 [Throne room]

Remnants of a destructed feature located by the western wall of the room believed to have been a throne (or more precisely a podium) were found in the western part of the room. This assumption offers the possibility that the room actually was a throne hall¹⁵ or alternatively a solar sanctuary¹⁶ which has parallels in other Amun temples from both the Napatan and Meroitic Periods, namely:

1. Great Temple of Amun of Napata, Jebel Barkal (B500), chapel B520¹⁷ reigns of Piye (747–716 BCE) and Taharqo (690–664 BCE)
2. Temple of Amun-Bull-of-Nubia, Sanam Abu Dom, rooms D and E¹⁸ reign of Taharqo (690–664 BCE)

¹⁴ Vercoutter 1962: 272.

¹⁵ Coppens 2007: 215.

¹⁶ Török 1997.

¹⁷ PM VII: 215–223, Rocheleau 2008: 33; Dunham 1970, Ali Hakem 1988: 107–130, etc.

¹⁸ PM VII: 198–202, Rocheleau 2008: 32; Griffith 1922: 79–124, Ali Hakem 1988: 138–139, etc.

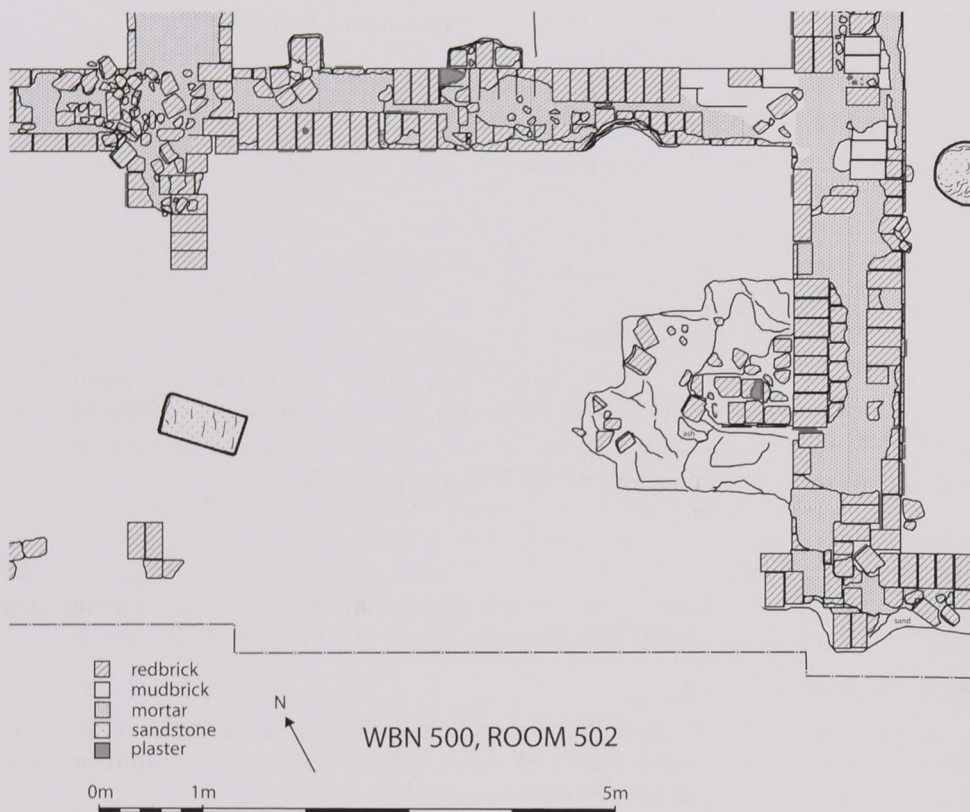
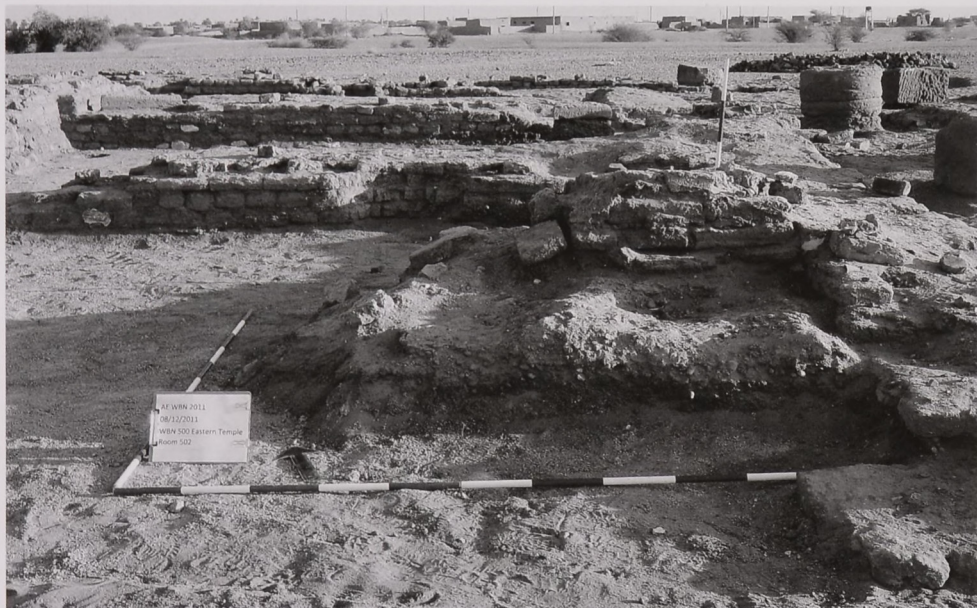


Fig. 4: Ground plan of Room WBN 502 with the podium (Illustration by Vlastimil Vrtal).



Pl. 2: 'Podium' in Room WBN 502 in the Eastern Temple (Photo by Pavel Onderka).

3. Temple of Amun of Gematon = Temple T, Kawa, rooms D and E¹⁹
reign of Taharqo (690–664 BCE)
4. Postulated Temple of Amun of Pnubs (?), Tabo (Argo Island)²⁰
reign of Taharqo (690–664 BCE)
5. Temple M260 = Great Temple of Amun, Meroe, chapel M266²¹
second half of the third century BCE
6. Amun Temple (N100), Naga, chapel N106²²
reign of Natakamani (ca. 1–20 CE) a Amanitore (ca. 21–30 CE)
7. Amun Temple²³, Dangeil
reign of Amanitore (ca. 21–30 CE)

Preliminary dating of the Eastern Temple, i.e. the late 2nd to early 3rd century CE (cf. below), makes the room WBN502 the latest known example of the Throne Room in the Nubian Temples:²⁴

8. Wad Ben Naga: Eastern Temple (WBN 500), room WBN502
late 2nd to early 3rd century CE

Room 503 [Vestibule]

The vestibule served as the most important communication junction connecting the triple sanctuary (WBN 505–507) the access to the side halls (WBN 502 and 504).

Room 504 [Libation room (?)]

Judging from the drainage set into its northern wall, the room could have served as a place where libation offerings were performed. A later wall was built within the room located behind the original door leading to WBN 503.

WBN 505–507 [Triple sanctuary] [Pls. 3–6]

The temple most likely possessed a triple sanctuary consisting of the main sanctuary located on the temple's axis and two side sanctuaries.

The southern wall of the southern side sanctuary (WBN 505) is almost fully destroyed. The room was similarly to its northern counterpart (WBN 507) accessible from the main sanctuary (WBN 506).

In the very centre of the main sanctuary, i.e. Room WBN 506, numerous fragments of gray sandstone were discovered. The fragments may originate from a bark stand or an altar located in the axis of the temple. Vercoutter made an allusion to a libation table found by the Sudanese expedition: "Dans la «cella» centrale, une table à libation en grès a été retrouvée en place dans l'axe longitudinal du temple. La base d'un vase en forme de calice était encoure debout devant la table de grès."

The revision excavations within the northern side sanctuary yielded a number of important finds. In the south-east corner of the room, a deposit consisting of two complete vessels (2011/003, 2011/004), potsherds, 34 pieces of wooden boards (2011/006) and two seal imprints (2011/005a, b) were found.

¹⁹ PM VII: 184–191, Rocheleau 2008: 28; Macadam 1955, Ali Hakem 1988, etc.

²⁰ PM VII: 180, Rocheleau 2008: 25, etc.

²¹ Garstang 1910: 57–70; Grzymiski 2003; Rocheleau 2008: 41; Török 1997: 116–128.

²² Kroeper – Wildung – Schoske 2011.

²³ Anderson – Salah 2006–2007.

²⁴ Cf. Onderka – Coppens (forthcoming).



Pl. 3: South-east corner of Room WBN 507 in the Eastern Temple (Photo by Pavel Onderka).



Pl. 4: 'Deposit' under the floor of Room WBN 507 in the Eastern Temple (Photo by Pavel Onderka).



Pl. 5-6: Altar discovered within the triple building (Photo by Pavel Onderka).

1.4 Northern complex (WBN 508-516) [Fig. 5-6]

The complex of rooms located to the north of the proper temple building seems to have been constructed in at least three phases. Vercoutter claimed that the rooms were “sans doute postérieurs en date au bâtiment principal sur lequel ils s'appuient”.

Contemporarily to or shortly after the construction of the proper temple building, a three-roomed building (WBN 510-512) was built. While the foundations of the proper temple employed exclusively complete bricks, fragments of bricks were used for those of the three-roomed structure. Some time later a wall was added between the south-west corner of the building and the proper temple (the later wall between WBN 509 and 513) which created a closed room (WBN 509). Whether it was roofed or not is not known. Another room was built to the north of the pylon (WBN 508) by means of an additional wall. Lastly the complex of four rooms (WBN 513-516) was added.

1.5 Dating of the Eastern Temple

Vercoutter suggests the following dating of the Eastern Temple: “Deux niveaux d'occupation de ce temple ont été notés : le niveau le plus récent étant à 35 cm. au-dessus du niveau de construction. Ce niveau de construction pourrait, si l'on en juge par les objets trouvés, être daté de la seconde moitié du II^e et de la première moitié du III^e siècle de notre ère. Le niveau le plus élevé deterait, dans ce cas, de l'extrême fin de l'Empire méroïtique, du IV^e siècle ap. J.-C.”

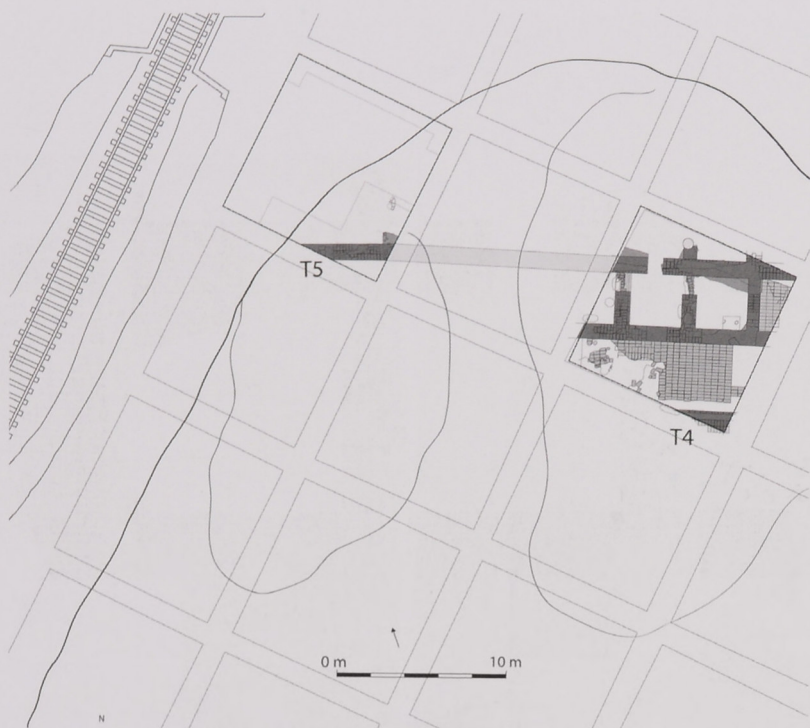


Fig. 5: Kôm A with the remains of the Typhonium (Illustration by Vlastimil Vrtal).

Vercoutter's dating is in full accordance with the anticipated relative chronology as established by the present writer. The Palace (WBN 100) would be hence abandoned at latest at the beginning of 3rd century CE and its ruins would be then mined for building material.

2. Excavations of the so-called Typhonium (WBN 200) [Fig. 5]

2.1 Excavation history

During the third season, excavations within Cailliaud's kôm A were begun. The early visitors to the site, including Frédéric Cailliaud²⁵, Linnant de Bellefonds²⁶, George Alexander Hoskins²⁷, Giuseppe Ferlini²⁸ and Carl Richard Lepsius²⁹, described ruins of a temple dominated by pillars decorated with the images of the originally Egyptian god Bes, identified by them with the Greek mythological creature Typhon. Cailliaud, Hoskins and Lepsius included depictions of the pillars and the ruins in their publications. In later works the temple is occasionally referred to as the northern temple at Wad Ben Naga.³⁰

Ever since Lepsius's visit to Wad Ben Naga, the destiny of the pillars is unknown. Some claim that they disappeared in the connection with the construction of the rail

²⁵ Cailliaud (1823–1827).

²⁶ de Bellefonds (1958).

²⁷ Hoskins (1835).

²⁸ Ferlini (1981).

²⁹ Lepsius (1849–1859).

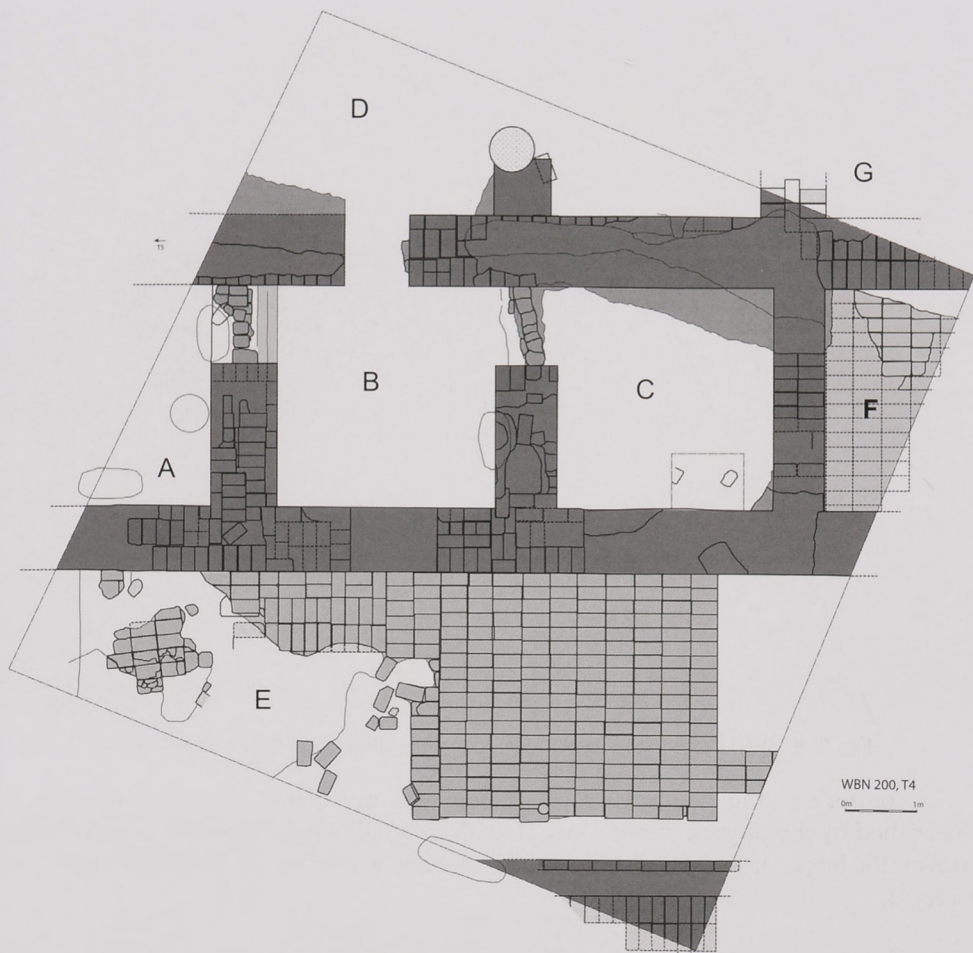


Fig. 6: WBN 200, square T4 (Illustration by Pavel Onderka and Vlastimil Vrtal).

track between Khartoum and Shendi carried out between 1898 and 1901, but it is more likely that this had happened much earlier.

2.2 Surface collection

The task of the first phase of excavation of the kôm A was to carry out the surface survey with the aim of ascertaining the dimension of the temple and its orientation. From the surface of the kôm much material was assembled, including several sandstone blocks bearing remains of relief decoration, a fragment of a Meroitic stela (2011/011), a fragment of an offering scene relief or of an offering table (2011/014), etc.

2.3. Excavations at the kôm A [Fig. 6, Pls. 7–10]

Two squares (T4 and T5) with the side of 10 m were opened. While T5 (located in the direct neighborhood of the rail track) revealed a section of a wall and a part of

³⁰ E.g. Arkell (1961).



Pl. 7: Kôm A, square T4 before excavations (Photo by Pavel Onderka).



Pl. 8: Corridor room in T4, the Typhonium (WBN 200) (Photo by Pavel Onderka).



Pl. 9: Central room within T4, the Typhonium (WBN 200) (Photo by Pavel Onderka).



Pl. 10: Statue of Osiris found within T4 (Photo by Pavel Onderka).

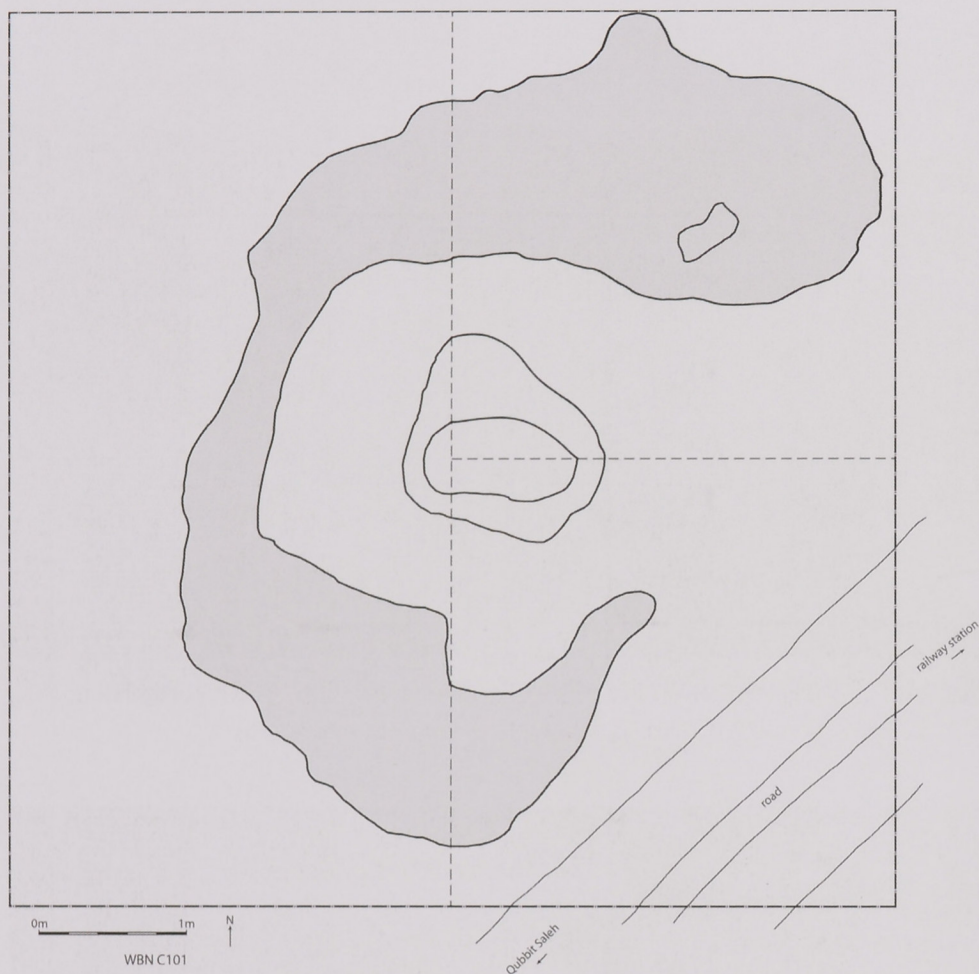


Fig. 7: Ground plan of Tumulus WBN C 101 (Illustration by Mohamed Saad and Vlastimil Vrtal).

cornice likely documented by Calliaud in his plan of the Typhonium, T4 brought to light a complex of eight rooms (A to G).

The complex of rooms in T4 displays a rather complicated building development with several phases of use and occupation. *Room A* yielded a set of offering dishes (2011/016), *Room G* a seal ring (likely with the depiction of the bust of Apedemak).³¹ The entirety of *Room E* was once paved with red bricks covered with plaster.³² In the western part of the room, the plaster was covered by a layer of mud. The rooms most likely possessed vaulted roofs. *Room D* was likely an outer space from which the complex was entered from the north. The presence of several collapsed beams and charred roofing material indicates that this part of the temple complex was destroyed by an extensive fire.

³¹ Vincentelli 1993, 2001.

³² Cf. description of Ferlini's excavations at Wad Ben Naga (Ferlini 1981).



Pl. 11: Tumulus WBN C 101 (Photo by Pavel Onderka).



Pl. 12: Fragment of a relief block with the depiction of a tree branch from Tumulus WBN C 101 (Photo by Pavel Onderka).

The kôm A was used as a secondary cemetery most likely in the post-Meroitic period or possibly even in the early Christian times. Altogether four complete skeletons with no or minimum funerary equipment were found.

2.4 Excavation of the tumulus WBN C101 [Fig. 7, Pls. 11–12]

The tumulus C101 is located ca. 50 m north-east of the kôm A. It was excavated within the framework of the exploration of the Typhonium. Already the surface survey proved that the tomb's superstructure was mainly constructed of re-used fragments of relief blocks positively coming either from the ruins of the Isis Temple (WBN 300) or more likely from the closely located Typhonium. The tomb was most likely looted already in the antiquity. Two heaps of debris were located on the eastern and western edge of the



Fig. 8–9: Fragments of relief blocks employed in Tumulus WBN C 101 (Illustration by Vlastimil Vrtal).

tumulus. The tomb was partly damaged by a modern road running along its south-east edge.

The tomb attests to both the post-Meroitic occupation of the site and to the existence of an extensive temple in construction of which high quality sandstone was widely employed. Altogether almost 300 re-used fragments were discovered out of which 30 bore interpretable traces of decoration. The fragments give us a unique insight into the original decorative program of either the Typhonium or the Isis Temple. The blocks have confirmed the presence of depictions of a tree, Bes figures, fecundity figures, large-scale depictions of divinities, a winged sun disc, etc.

3. Conservation of the Palace of Amanishakheto [Fig. 8–9, Pls. 11–12]

The expedition's conservators continued in conservation of the so-called Palace of Amanishakheto. Their work focused on red brick pillars within Rooms 103 (in SW corner of the Palace), 127 and 143 (in the eastern part of the Palace). All procedures applied are fully reversible.³³

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³³ For the conservation techniques cf. Onderka 2011: 60.

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