



PRELIMINARY REPORT ON THE EIGHTH EXCAVATION SEASON OF THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXPEDITION TO WAD BEN NAGA¹

Pavel Onderka² – Vlastimil Vrtal – Alexander Gatzsche

ABSTRACT: The eight excavation season of the Archaeological Expedition to Wad Ben Naga focused on the continued excavation of the main sanctuary of the so-called Typhonium (WBN 201) and documentation of finds from previous excavation seasons, namely wall paintings from the main sanctuary.

KEY WORDS: Wad Ben Naga – Sudan – Meroitic culture – Meroitic architecture – ancient Nubia

The eight season of the Archaeological Expedition to Wad Ben Naga took place between 20 February and 1 March 2014. Its main task was the continued excavation of the main sanctuary of the Typhonium (room WBN 201). The mission consisted of Dr. Pavel Onderka (director), Vlastimil Vrtal (archaeologist), Alexander Gatzsche (conservator) and last but not least Juweriya Osman Mohamed Zain (inspector of the National Corporation for Antiquities and Museums). [1] The works focused on the cleaning of the southwest sector of the main sanctuary of the so-called Typhonium (located within the square T6; Fig. 1). [2] Within the season, the 3D documentation of the so-called Small Temple was carried out. [3] Another task of the season was the study of the repertoire of the decoration preserved on the fragments of wall paintings from the main sanctuary.

¹ The article was written within the framework of the project “Exploration of the Meroitic Royal City at Wad Ben Naga (Sudan)” supported by the Czech Science Foundation (grant no. 13-09594S). The Archaeological Expedition to Wad Ben Naga wishes to express its sincerest thanks and gratitude to the National Corporation for Antiquities and Museums (Dr. Abdel-Rahman Ali Mohamed and Dr. Hassan Hussein Idris), the Honorary Consulate of the Republic of the Sudan in the Czech Republic (Dr. Petr Pelikán), the Honorary Consulate-General of the Slovak Republic in the Republic of the Sudan (Dr. Nasreldin Shulgami) and the Delegation of the European Union in the Sudan (H. E. Tomáš Uličný) for their help and support.

² Contact: Pavel Onderka, Vlastimil Vrtal & Alexander Gatzsche, National Museum – Náprstek Museum of Asian, African and American Cultures, Curator of Egyptian and Nubian Antiquities; e-mail: pavel_onderka@nm.cz.

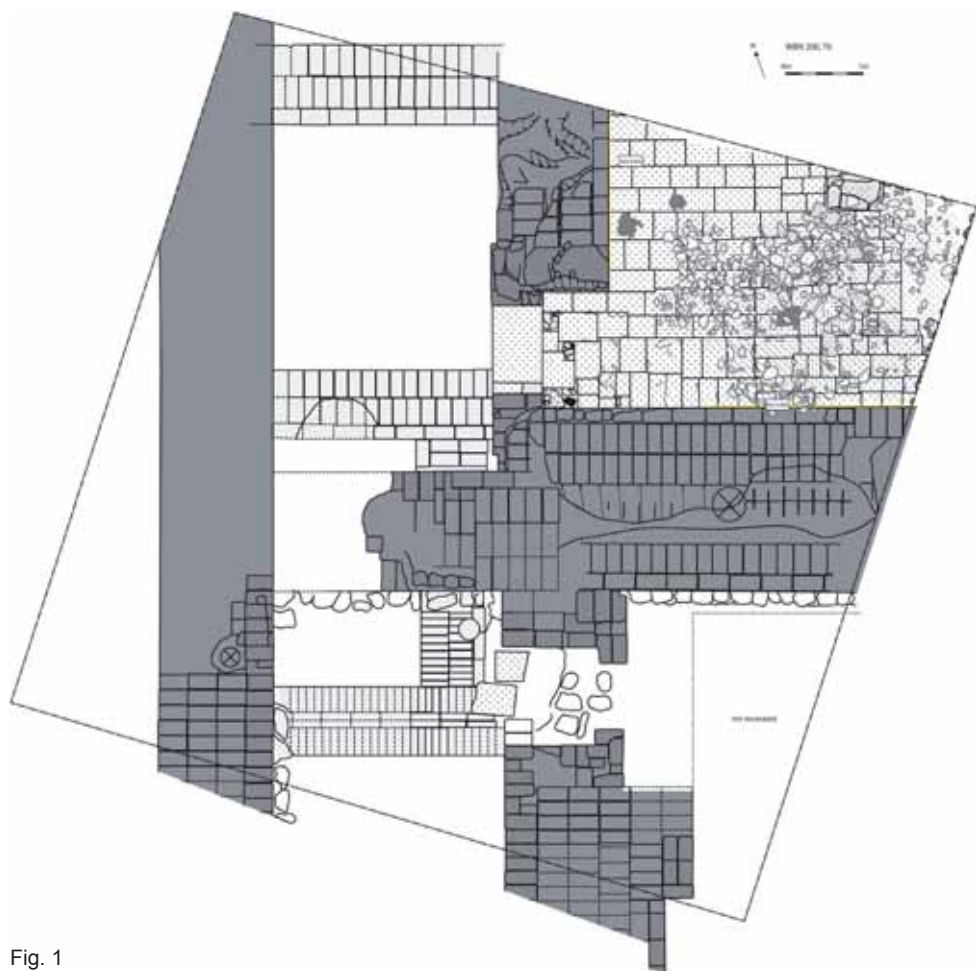
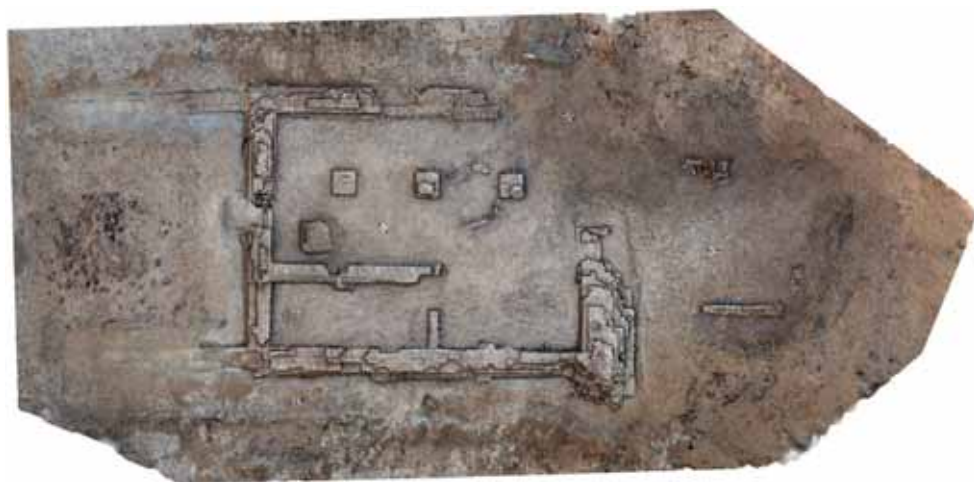
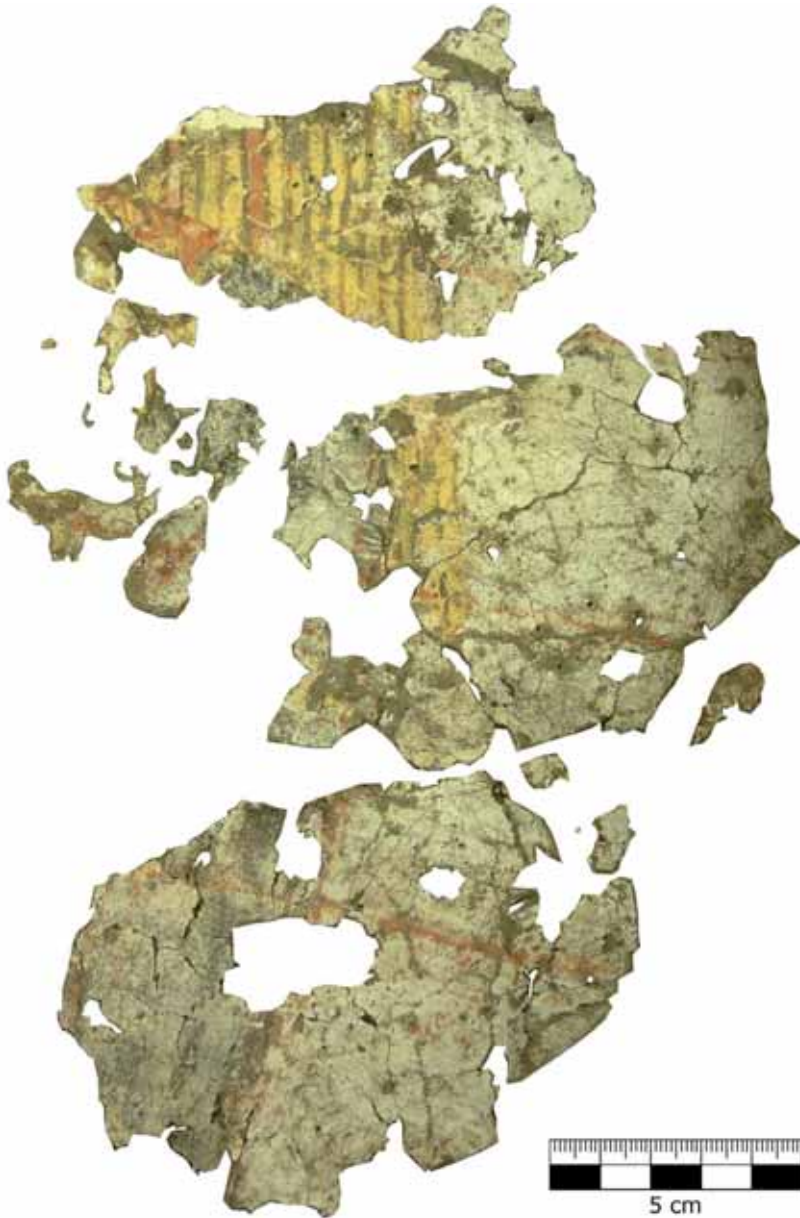


Fig. 1



Pl. 1



Pl. 2

1. Archaeological Exploration of the Main Sanctuary (WBN 201)

Since 2011, the Expedition has been exploring the so-called Typhonium, recently identified as a sanctuary of the originally Egyptian goddess Mut. The temple (Onderka – Vrtal *et al.* 2013: 111–120; Onderka – Vrtal *et al.* 2014: 164–167) possessed an unparalleled ground plan, possibly imitating – not only in terms of architectural layout – the only other temple dedicated to Mut in the present-day Sudan, the hemispeos B300 at the foot of Jebel Barkal (cf. Robisek 1989).

The archaeological situation in the southwest sector of the main sanctuary (WBN 201) consisted of a thick surface layer of sandstone fragments of at least four different kinds, which probably represented a stone crushing area of a rather recent date. Many fragments of sandstone were dressed. Two pieces of these even showed a hieroglyphic inscription, positively identified as coming from the western and eastern sides of *Altar B* (Pls. 1–2), previously recorded by the Prussian expedition led by Carl Richard Lepsius in 1844. Underlying strata represented debris coming from periodically dissolved mud brick walls of the main sanctuary, which were preserved to the height of ca. 0.6m within the trench T6.

In the debris, many fragments of wall paintings were found, originally covering the walls of the room. At places, the lowermost registers of wall paintings were preserved still *in situ*. The depictions still on the walls show a 12cm thick blue band just above the floor level, symbolising the waters of the Nile, above which a floral decoration of interchanging lotus flowers in bloom and lotus buds (in red and yellow) were depicted. Still above these, at the height of ca. 0.5m, a yellow band, a blue band and another yellow band were located, representing a lower border of the main register of the wall decoration. The wall paintings well corresponded to the previously documented examples from other parts of the room, and the temple as a whole (cf. Onderka – Vrtal 2013: 72, Pl. 2).

The floor of the room was paved with fine sandstone blocks, preserved in a large part of the excavated area. On these, traces of burning were found at three places. Only very thin stratum of floor deposits that belonged to the period prior to the destruction of the temple was identified. A limited amount of finds come from the lowermost layers. Besides examples of pottery, a copper alloy nail and a fragment of gilded and painted mud stucco were found.

In the western wall, an opening provided entrance to subsidiary rooms around the main sanctuary. The opening was equipped with a single-wing door, as showed by a pivot stone set in the southwest corner of the room.

Towards the centre of the room, a partially preserved fired brick pillar was located that served as a secondary support for the roof of the main sanctuary. Its construction was seemingly connected to increasing instability of the architecture of the temple. A few blocks of compact mud showing imprints of well-made reed matting were identified in debris within the room possibly indicating the technique used for the construction of the roofing. The floor of the main sanctuary rested on levelled terrain (*sāra*) and a thick layer of compact mud.

2. 3D-Documentation of the Small Temple (WBN 400)

In the framework of the eighth season, documentation of architectural remains of the Small temple (WBN 400) was carried out, using Structure from Motion (SFM) technology. For the first time, the temple building was an object of archaeological excavations during the first season of the Sudanese expedition to Wad Ben Naga in 1958/1959 (Vercoutter 1962: 273). During the second season of the Archaeological expedition to Wad Ben Naga in 2010 (Onderka 2011: 57–58; cf. Onderka – Vrtal *et al* 2013: 75–82; Onderka – Vrtal *et al.* 2014: 148–149), the structure was re-excavated, in order to gain more information on building's architecture and history of its use. The documentation of the architectural remains of the building through Structure from

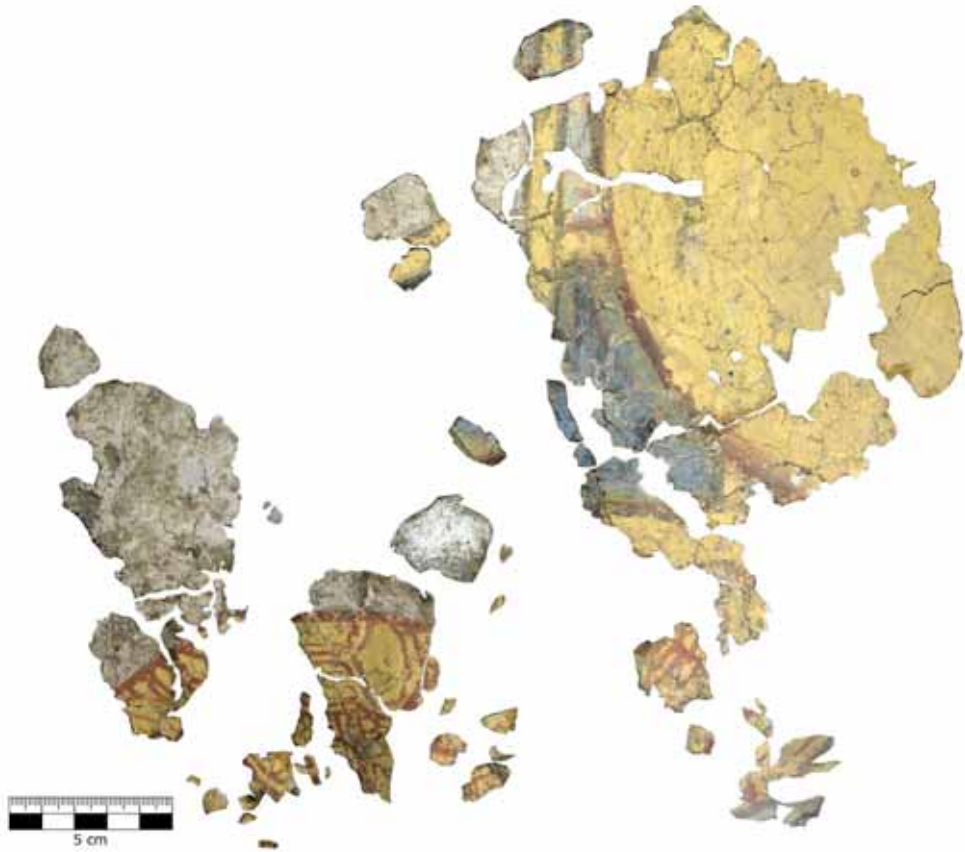


Pl. 3



Pl. 4

Motion technology provided a detailed 3D-image of the structure, thus recording in virtual space its present state of preservation. The virtual image of the remains of the temple proved to be invaluable as a further evidence for the observed divergence of the orientation of the foundations of the temple (made of fired bricks laid in the style known in Arabic as "ala seif") and the orientation of the building itself, indicating a complex building history, including total reconstructions.



Pl. 5

3. Wall Paintings from the Main Sanctuary (WBN 201)

Recovery and conservation of the fallen wall paintings found within the debris in the main sanctuary of the Typhonium which began during the fifth season continued intensely during the present season. Since November 2012 altogether 30 blocks of soil containing remains of wall paintings were recovered. The eighth season provided the necessary framework for their conservation and their detailed study. New blocks were isolated from the trench T6 which covered the southwest corner of the main sanctuary which due to several objective reasons remained unexcavated.

The process of isolation and conservation of the wall paintings consisted of preparation of individual fragments out of the soil of the block within the expedition premises at Wad Ben Naga. Records of the position of individual fragments within the block as well as the original orientation of the block within the archaeological context have been kept.

Different treatment was employed for the recovery of wall paintings depending on the orientation of the painted side in the layer. If the painted side was turned down, the back part would need to be uncovered without damaging the front side first. The wall painting was then consolidated with the solution of Paraloid B44™ 10% in acetone. To

stabilize the back of the wall painting, the back surface was laminated with glass fibers and solution of Paraloid B44™ 20% in acetone. Once the solvent sublimated the wall painting could be taken out of the block and turned around. Then, the front side was carefully uncovered.

In cases that the painting was oriented with the painted side turned up, it must have been uncovered in that position. The treatment comprised of photographic documentation of the painted surface in position and of application of several layers of cyclododecan to the painted surface in order to temporally support its stability. After the layers were applied the wall painting was taken out of the soil and treated from the back in the same way as in the first case.

After the complex conservation treatment of the fragments, it was possible to proceed with the detailed examination and identification of materials, painting techniques and decorative program. The preliminary results of the analysis of the main sanctuary's decorative program hint to a possible inspiration in the decorative program of the above mentioned temple B300 at Jebel Barkal.

Number	Block	Layer	Trench	Related frgm.	Description	Notes
WP 001	MF	–	T8	–	(decorative pattern)	Found in the vicinity of WP 002.
WP 002	0	–	T8	–	Feather (?)	
WP 003	1	1	T10	WP 004	(rough painting)	
WP 004	1	1	T10	WP 003	(rough painting)	
WP 005	2	–	T10	–	(rough painting)	
WP 006	1	2	T10	WP 007, 008	(rough painting)	
WP 007	1	2	T10	WP 006, 008	(rough painting)	
WP 008	1	2	T10	WP 006, 007	(rough painting)	
WP 009	–	–	–	–	–	Not assigned yet.
WP 010	–	–	–	–	–	Not assigned yet.
WP 011	<i>in situ</i>	–	T10	WP 013	Part of a tree	Probably from the same segment as WP 013.
WP 012	6a	–	T10	–	Leafs of a tree	
WP 013	<i>in situ</i>	–	T10	WP 011	Part of a tree	Probably from the same segment as WP 011.
WP 014	9	–	T10	WP 015	Part of a wig	
WP 015	10	–	T10	WP 014	Part of a wig and shoulder	
WP 016	13	–	T10	WP 017	(decorative pattern)	

WP 017	13	–	T10	WP 016	(decorative pattern)	
WP 018	22	–	T10	–	Segment of the starry heaven	
WP 019	MF	–	T10	–	Part of a figure	
WP 020	MF	–	T10	–	(rough painting)	
WP 021	4	–	T10	–	(unidentifiable)	
WP 022	MF	–	T10	–	(rough painting)	
WP 023a	X	–	T10	WP 023bcd	Cartouches of Natakamani	
WP 023b	X	–	T10	WP 023acd	Necklace	
WP 023c	X	–	T10	WP 023abd	(unidentifiable)	
WP 023d	X	–	T10	WP 023abc	Lotus flower	
WP 024	X	–	T10	–	Segment of the starry heaven	
WP 025a	X	–	T10	–	Double feather crown of a queen	
WP 025b	X	–	T10	–	(unidentifiable)	
WP 026	15	–	T10	–	(rough painting)	
WP 027	6a	–	T10	–	(rough painting)	
WP 028						Not assigned yet.
WP 029						Not assigned yet.
WP 030						Not assigned yet.
WP 031	X	–	T14	–	Crown	Cf. below.
WP 032	7	–	T10	–	(unidentifiable)	
WP 033	X	–	T10	–	Part of a figure	
WP 034	25	–	T14	–	King's ureus and top of the <i>was-scepter</i>	Possibly from the same segment as WP 031.
WP 035	17	–	T10	–	Double feather crown with the sun disc	
WP 036	–	–	T10	–	Segment of the starry heaven	
WP 037	29	–	T10	–	Part of a garment	
WP 038	–	–	T14	–	Crown	Possibly from the same segment as WP 031.
WP 039	X	–	T14	–	(unidentifiable)	
WP 040	MF	–	T14	–	Fragments with <i>was-sceptre</i> , <i>ankhs-signes</i> and <i>neb/heh-signs</i>	

WP 041	MF	–	T14	–	Ankh-signs	
WP 042	MF	–	T14	–	(unidentifiable)	
WP 043	MF	–	T14	–	(rough painting)	
WP 044	MF	–	T14	–	(rough painting)	
WP 045	MF	–	T14	–	Parts of garment	
WP 046	25	–	T14	–	Garment decorated with feather patterns	
WP 047	MF	–	T14	–	(unidentifiable)	
WP 048	34	–	T14	–	Ankh-signs	
WP 049	X	–	T6	–	Garment decorated with stars	
WP 050	30	–	T14	–	Was-sceptre, ankhs-signes and neb/heh-signs	
WP 051	MF	–	T6	–	(rough painting)	
WP 052	MF	–	T6	–	Bow-knot	
WP 053	MF	–	T14	–	Ornament	

Literature:

ONDERKA, Pavel. Preliminary Report on the Second Excavation Season of the Archaeological Expedition to Wad Ben Naga. *Annals of the Náprstek Museum* 32, 2011, pp. 55-70.

ONDERKA, Pavel – VRTAL, Vlastimil *et al.* *Wad Ben Naga 1821–2013*. Praha, 2013.

ONDERKA, Pavel – VRTAL, Vlastimil *et al.* *Nubia. A Land on the Crossroads of Civilisations. /Núbie. Země na křižovatce kultur. Wad Ben Naga 2014*. Praha, 2014.

ONDERKA, Pavel – VRTAL, Vlastimil. Preliminary Report on the Sixth Season of the Archaeological Expedition to Wad Ben Naga. *Annals of the Náprstek Museum* 35/1, 2014, pp. 69-80.

VERCOUTTER, Jean. Un palais des 'candaces' contemporain d'Auguste (fouilles à Wad-ban-Naga, 1958–1960). *Syria* 39, 1962, pp. 263-299.