

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

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ABSTRACT: The twentieth excavation season of the Archaeological Expedition to Wad Ben Naga primarily focused on the continued excavations of the so-called Isis Temple (WBN 300). The excavation focused on the area in the rear of the temple explored by the Royal Prussian Expedition in 1844. Altogether ten rooms were revealed which allowed the assessment of the whole complex inner disposition of the temple. During the excavation, various pieces of the original cultic equipment were recovered, including pieces of Meroitic statuary and a new lion altar (*Altar D*). The original locations of the so-called *Altars A, B, and C*, discovered by the Royal Prussian Expedition, were identified. Outside the so-called Isis Temple, the work focused on uncovering of the Stone Building (WBN 1100) identified next to structure WBN 250.

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

The twentieth excavation season of the Archaeological Expedition to Wad Ben Naga took place between 11 February and 5 April 2021. Archaeological works commenced on 15 February 2021 and concluded on 31 March 2021. The season was carried out under the guidelines for ‘archaeological excavations’ defined in the *Ordinance for the Protection of Antiquities of 1999*.

The mission was headed by Pavel Onderka (director) and Juwariya Osman Mohamed Zain (inspector of the National Corporation for Antiquities and Museums). It further consisted of Vlastimil Vrtal (archaeologist), Peter Pavúk (ceramicist), and Tiana Brazzale (assistant).

The works of the twentieth season focused on [1] the continued excavations of the so-called Isis Temple (WBN 300), namely the rear part of the temple and [2] the continued excavations of a Stone Building, newly designated as WBN 1100 [Fig. 1].

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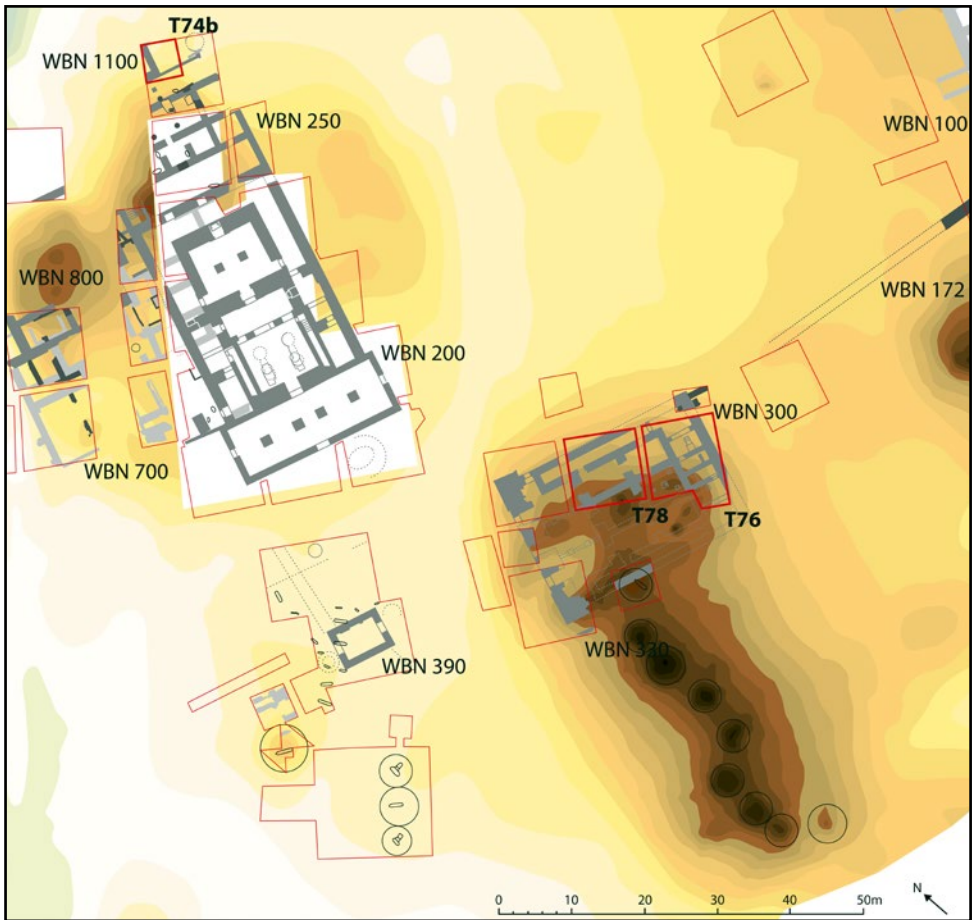


Fig. 1. Plan of the western part of central Wad Ben Naga; areas excavated in the twentieth season are marked by bold red. (Illustration: Vlastimil Vrtal).

[1] Continued excavations of the so-called Isis Temple (WBN 300)

A recapitulation of previous works

Archaeological excavations continued in the area of the northern limit of kom C, or more precisely, in the northern half of the so-called Isis Temple (WBN 300) which had been partly excavated by the Royal Prussian Expedition led by Carl Richard Lepsius (1810–1884) in 1844.² The Archaeological Expedition to Wad Ben Naga began to explore the proper Isis Temple in 2018. Between 2018 and 2019, the remains of the pylon were recorded in trenches T64³, T72⁴, and T73.⁵ The exterior walls of the

2 Lepsius 1849–1859, V, pp. 337–338, X, Taf. 55; Erbkam 2007, 18 March 1844.

3 Onderka et al. 2019, p. 109; Onderka et al. 2021b, pp. 69–71.

4 Onderka et al. 2021b, pp. 71–72.

5 Onderka et al. 2021a, pp. 150–151.



Fig. 2. Plan of the so-called Isis Temple at Wad Ben Naga. (Drawing: Pavel Onderka, Vlastimil Vrtal, and Jiří Honzl).

proper temple were localised archaeologically in trench T70 (in connection with the exploration of tumulus WBN C301)⁶ in 2019 and in trench T75⁷ in 2020. The Isis temple appears to have been 29.5 m long and 20.3 m wide with the width of the pylon being 22.3 m [Fig. 2].

The so-called Isis Temple was fronted by two towers of the pylon. Next to the main gate set between the towers and equipped with sandstone jambs, a pair of side gates were installed in the bodies of the towers. The constellation of the gates resembles that of the Great Temple of Isis at Philae, which has been identified as a major source of architectural, as well as inscriptional inspiration for the Isis Temple at Wad Ben Naga.⁸ Analogically to the main gate, the side gates possessed sandstone jambs carrying relief decoration. Only the lowermost courses of sandstone blocks were found *in situ*, carrying the lowermost registers with reliefs depicting fecundity figures bringing gifts of the Nile in the form of tall bouquets. Blocks decorated with figural depictions and inscriptions (including a caption to the figure of a king [?] 'supporting the sky as (the god) Shu

6 Onderka et al. 2021b, pp. 77–78

7 Onderka et al. 2021a, pp. 151–153.

8 Onderka and Vrtal, *forth.*

(does it)',⁹ which once formed the jambs of the main gate, were discovered in the space in front of the temple recorded in trench T72.¹⁰ Next to the outer side of the side entrances, ferriferous sandstone plinths, which once supported flag poles, were found bearing inscriptions similar to those of the flagpole niches of the Great Temple of Isis at Philae. The mass of the pylon tower was built mainly of fired bricks. The brickwork was covered by a thick layer of lime plaster into which the relief decoration was applied. The preserved plaster fragments confirm the theme of the façade's decoration was as traditionally the depictions of the Meroitic sovereigns smiting enemies/prisoners of war. In the lower part of the façade, there were six to seven shields representing suppressed regions or ethnicities.

Behind the pylon towers a pair of side doors were identified. Behind the northern side door a staircase leading to the roof of the temple was unearthed. Trench T64 also captured the northern part of the temple's hypostyle hall (WBN 301). The roof of the hypostyle hall was supported by two pairs of columns richly decorated with depictions of royal and divine figures, as well as texts in Egyptian language and hieroglyphs. In a later period of the temple's occupation, the hypostyle hall was evenly divided into three sections partitioned by (screen) walls which incorporated the four columns.

Current works: trenches T76 and T78

In the course of the twentieth excavation season, two new trenches, namely T76 and T78, were excavated (the former entirely, the latter partly) [Fig. 3]. The two trenches covered exactly the area where the Royal Prussian Expedition excavated in 1844¹¹ which are the locations where the so-called *Altars A, B, and C* were discovered. A number of the Prussian pits were identified in the course of the excavations. Archaeological works in the area led to the discovery of four separate complexes of rooms (out of the original five complexes the temple possessed), including a main sanctuary, subsidiary sanctuaries, vestibules, corridors, and an open court.

Trench T76 (originally 10.0 × 10.0 m; later expanded at its south-east corner by means of a square with dimensions of 3.0 × 5.0 m) covered the northern section of the rear part of the Isis Temple (WBN 300). The surface of the square was covered with a stratum of soil mixed with fired brick fragments and sandstone chips. In the western part, the square's surface was covered by a substantial layer of sand (FEA 312) which, as it later turned out filled an area which had been excavated by the Royal Prussian Expedition in 1844, namely the original location of the so-called *Altar A*.¹² Another accumulation (FEA 313) of sand at the surface of the square was located in the north-east sector of the trench. The wind-blown sand covered a destruction of the upper part of the rear, i.e. eastern, exterior wall (FEA 314). The destruction primarily included fired bricks from the outer casing; while preserved pieces of mudbricks were highly eroded. The rear wall of the temple was 1.20 m thick with the core made of mudbricks. Fired bricks were used for the casing of the outer side of the wall. A thick layer of lime plaster was applied on the fired brick casing. No colour decoration was detected on the outer

9 Onderka et al. 2021a, p. 149.

10 Onderka et al. 2021b, pp. 71–72

11 Lepsius 1849–1859, V, pp. 337–338.

12 Egyptian Museum and Papyrus Collection in Berlin, Inv. No. 7261; Lepsius 1849–1859, V, p. 337; Porter and Moss 1981, p. 263; Leclant et al. 2000, no. 0041; Griffith 1911, pp. 67–68; Priese 1984a; Priese 1984b; Onderka et al. 2013, pp. 104–105 Onderka and Vrtal, *forth.*

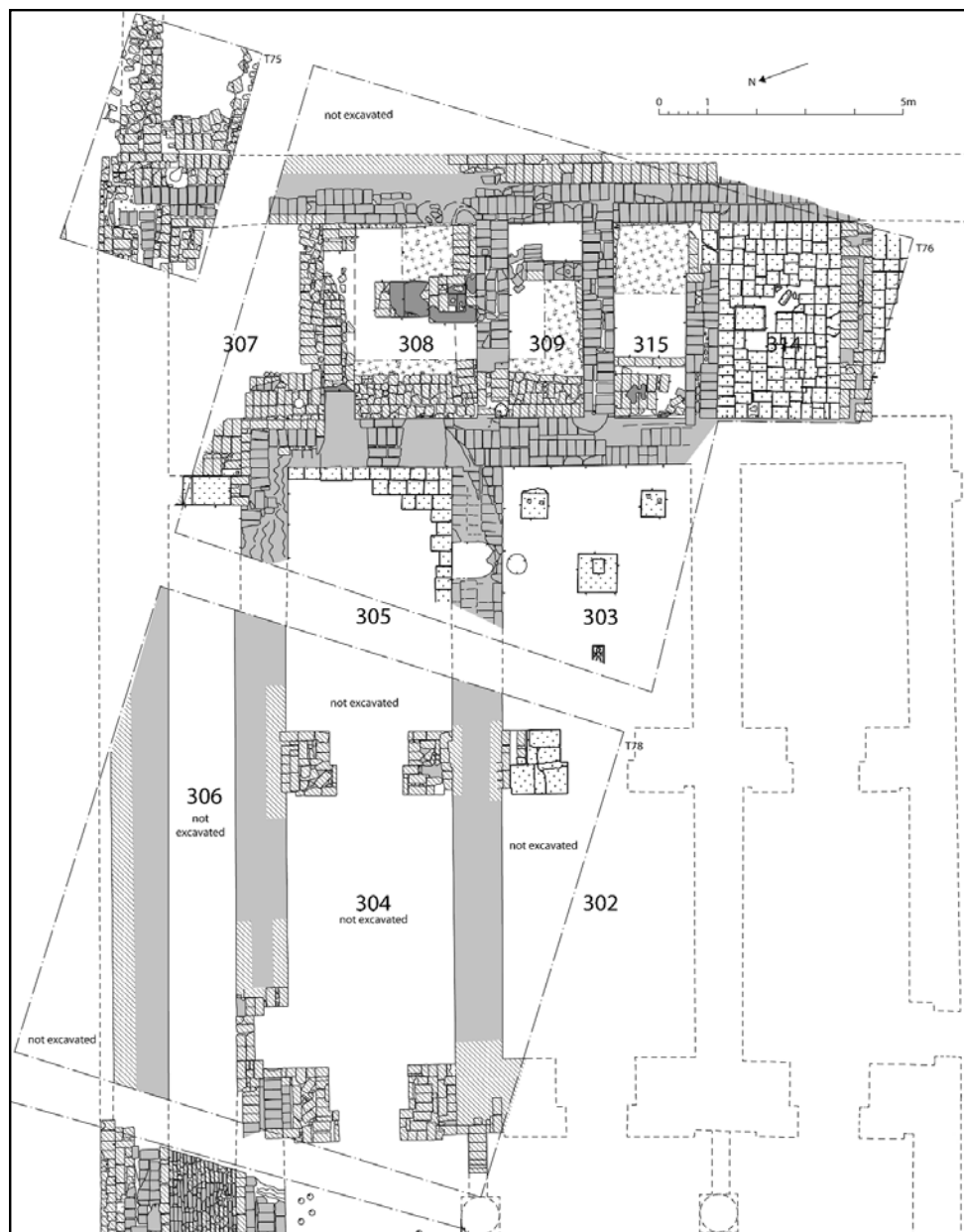


Fig. 3. Plan of trenches T76 and T78.
(Drawing: Pavel Onderka and Vlastimil Vrtal).

walls of the section of the temple in question. For the casing of the inner side of the wall, both fired bricks and mudbricks were used depending on the presence or absence of roofing of individual rooms they delimited. On the contrary, several inner walls unearthed in the trench (with the width of ca. 90 cm) were made almost exclusively of mudbricks (as they have not been exposed to weathering).

Trench T78 (10.0 × 10.0 m) was set west to T76. Originally, only the uppermost strata were excavated in order to establish the ground plan of the northern part of the temple. In the middle of the square was a rather massive depression filled with blown-in material (FEA 405). The excavation enabled to precise the reconstruction of the ground plan suggested by Karl-Heinz Priese in 1984.¹³

The excavations in trenches T76 and T78 revealed ten rooms forming the inner part of the temple (WBN 302–309, WBN 314–315). The present state of excavation allows the establishment of the total number of rooms in the temple being fifteen. Relations between individual rooms may be set with a fair level of certainty. The rooms located behind the hypostyle hall (WBN 301) may be divided into five independent complexes.

The first complex (WBN 301c–302–303) followed the main axis of the temple and consists of the hypostyle hall (WBN 301c; central section), the central vestibule/ hall of offerings (WBN 302), and the main sanctuary (WBN 303).

In the middle of the main sanctuary (WBN 303) [Pl. 1], there was a square sandstone podium decorated on top with the depictions of the Nine Bows bound together by a tripartite or tripled rope, representation of the traditional enemies of the realm, as well as with the alteration of *ankh*, *djed*, and *was*-signs (standing for ‘life’, ‘stability’, and ‘domination’, respectively) placed over alternating symbols *neb* and *heb* (standing for ‘all’, and ‘festival’, respectively; FEA 369, F21/040) [Pl. 2].¹⁴

On top of the podium a statue stand in pinkish sandstone was positioned (FEA 366).¹⁵ The surface of the statue stand was originally treated with yellow colour only. However, at one point in time the surface of the upper part of the statue stand was covered by calcite plaster. Judging from the bend at the lower end of the covered section, the floor of the main sanctuary was circa 20 cm higher than the original floor when the stand was plastered.

Finally, on top of the latter a statue of a Deified Queen [Pl. 3] depicted in a Meroitic fashion with well-rounded contours of her body and short curly hair decorated with a diadem stood. Small figures representing winged goddesses were carved at the back of the head. An opening likely serving for embedding of a royal crown is located on the top of the head. The statue is incomplete; the upper part of the body between neck and waist (including arms) is missing. The queen wears sandals in which she steps on three bound prisoners of war under her feet (a reduplication of the symbolism of the Nine Bows shown on top of the podium). The deified queen carried a bow over her shoulder. The statue was originally some 50 cm high and was produced

13 Priese 1984b, Abb. 3–4.

14 Sudan National Museum, Khartoum, Inv. No. 41030.

15 Sudan National Museum, Khartoum, Inv. No. 41029.

from high-quality sandstone. Remains of polychrome decoration are preserved on its surface.¹⁶ In front of the podium a ceramic libation basin (F21/042)¹⁷ with the *ankh*-design¹⁸ was set into the original floor.

Two statue bases (FEAs 392 and 393) [Pl. 1] were found symmetrically inserted into the initial floor in the back of the room, i.e. to the east of the podium. Two holes were hollowed into each of the statue bases to anchor a life-sized, or slightly over-life-sized statue (either made of wood or metal, or a combination of both).

At some point in time the roof of the room formed by large wooden beams collapsed into the interior. It was on this occasion that the statue of the deified queen was damaged (split into two halves, one of which gradually disintegrated into smaller flakes).

The walls of the room (FEAs 325 and 406) were decorated in yellow, red, and blue. The original decoration may not be reconstructed. Based on the parallels from other rooms one might expect depictions of fecundity figures bringing the gifts of the Nile (see below).

Only a section of the central vestibule (WBN 302) has been excavated so far. The only conclusion one can draw at the moment is that the door between rooms WBN 302 and WBN 303 was equipped with sandstone jambs.

The second complex (WBN 301n–304–305) followed the axis of the temple's northern nave and consisted of the northern section of the hypostyle hall (WBN 301n), the northern vestibule (possibly a chapel of Hathor; WBN 304), and the northern sanctuary which likely served for the worship of Isis (WBN 305). Rooms WBN 305 and WBN 304 originally hosted *Altar A* and *Altar B* respectively. The second complex (along with the fourth complex) spread across the area which was excavated by the Royal Prussian Expedition in 1844.

The northern sanctuary (WBN 305) [Pl. 4] was paved with sandstone flagstones (FEA 340). In the middle of the room, at the assumed original location of *Altar A*, a hole was cut into the floor. In the hole a core of *Altar A* was discovered. The members of the Lepsius expedition cut the altar apart using saws¹⁹ and left an inner piece which did not bear any decoration (FEA 372) at the original location. Lying upside down on the original floor a sandstone libation basin with one corner broken off (F21/029)²⁰ was discovered [Pl. 5]. During their work in the temple, the Lepsius expedition discovered two sandstone libation basins. One of them was taken to Berlin, while the other was

16 Sudan National Museum, Khartoum, Inv. No. 41028. The closest parallels to the Statue of the Deified Queen from Wad Ben Naga are the golden statuette of Queen Nawidemak discovered at Jebel Barkal (Sudan National Museum, Khartoum, Inv. No. 5457; Shinnie 1959; Török 1990) and relief depictions of Queen Amanishakheto from her stela discovered in Naga (e.g. Kröper et al. 2011, p. 37, Abb. 37, Kat. Nr. 14), as well as depictions of Queen Amanirenas (Bar. 4: Chapman and Dunham 1952, Pl. 13C–D), Queen Nawidemak (Bar. 6: Chapman and Dunham 1952, Pl. 13A–B), Queen Amanishakheto (Beg. N6: Chapman and Dunham 1952, Pls. 16A–B, 17; Vercoutter 1962, Fig 11; jewellery in the Treasure of Amanishakheto), Queen Amanitore (Beg. N1: Chapman and Dunham 1952, Pl. 18D; Lion Temple in Naga: Lepsius 1849–1859, V, Bl. 56–57, 59, 63–65; Amun Temple at Naga [N 100]: Lepsius 1849–1859, V, Bl. 66–68; Temple of Amara: Lepsius 1849–1859, V, Bl. 69–70), etc.

17 Sudan National Museum, Khartoum, Inv. No. 41037.

18 Malykh 2018, the most common type, dating is problematic.

19 A fragment of a saw used by the Royal Prussian Expedition (SM21/162) was discovered in the course of the current excavations.

20 Sudan National Museum, Khartoum, Inv. No. 41025.

left at Wad Ben Naga, as it was partly damaged.²¹ In his diary, Lepsius made an allusion to: 'ein Nilschlüssel, kolossal (ein anderer war zerbrochen)'.²² It is without a doubt that the discovered piece is identical to the specimen left at the site by the Lepsius expedition. As of now, the northern chapel is the only room of the temple where substantial remains of the wall paintings have been unearthed. The lowermost register was again filled with depictions of fecundity figures bringing the gifts of the Nile.

In the northern vestibule (WBN 304) a refilled pit above the original location of *Altar B* was recorded. The pit (FEA 405) continued all the way to a disrupted floor paved with flagpoles (FEA 406) into which the base of *Altar B* was set [Pl. 6]. During the excavations of the pit large fragments of *Altar B*²³ were discovered, along with fragments of a large sandstone stela inscribed in cursive Meroitic script (F21/044) [Fig. 4].²⁴ As the members of the Royal Prussian Expedition found it too difficult to dismantle the altar using saws, at one point they decided to employ explosives brought to Wad Ben Naga from Khartoum. *Altar B*, in all likelihood, served as a testing piece. The experiment resulted in disaster; the explosion brought fragments of the bark stand up to 60 m away from the original location (the rear part of the Typhonium [WBN 200]).²⁵ The treatment of the Meroitic stela, fragments of which were found some 30 m away from the original location of *Altar B*²⁶ might have followed a similar scenario. Situations in both room WBN 305 and WBN 304 indicate that the Royal Prussian Expedition dumped the fragments of *Altar B*, the Meroitic stela, as well as the core of *Altar A* into the pits from where these objects were excavated.

The archaeological situation suggests that, in compliance with the plan sketched by Georg Erbkam (1811–1876),²⁷ *Altar B* was situated north of the axis of the temple's northern nave between the doors leading to the northern sanctuary (WBN 305) and a northern corridor (WBN 306).

The third complex (WBN 301s–310–311) is tentatively reconstructed based on an assumed symmetry of the temple and excavations carried out in trench T70.²⁸ Hence, in its structure and equipment it likely resembled the second complex.

The fourth complex encompassed four rooms which were entirely or partly unearthed in T76 [Pl. 7], namely the northern corridor (WBN 306) stretching nearly from the pylon of the temple to its rear part, an open court, located in the corner of the temple (WBN 307), a roofed room with the northern/frontal side open (WBN 308), and a roofed chapel with a mastaba at its end (WBN 309); the latter's southern wall (FEA 343) followed the prime axis of the temple. The complex of rooms was entered from the northern vestibule (WBN 304).

21 Egyptian Museum and Papyrus Collection, Berlin, Inv. No. 2257 (lost during the World War II).

22 Lepsius, *Notizbuch* III, p. 282; Priese 1984b, p. 13.

23 Fragments of the bark stand are, as they appear in the course of archaeological exploration of Wad Ben Naga, being handed over to the Sudan National Museum, Khartoum, where they are registered under Inv. No. 36353; see also Priese 1984b; Onderka et al. 2014, p. 142, Cat. No. 48; Onderka and Vrtal, *forth.*

24 Records of the Royal Prussian Expedition did not make any allusion to the stela. Other fragments of the same stela were discovered by the Archaeological Expedition to Wad Ben Naga in the course of the first season in 2009 (cf. Onderka and Dufková 2011, p. 45, Fig. 4, Pl. 12).

25 Onderka 2013, p. 8–9, Pl. 8.

26 Onderka and Dufková 2011, p. 45, Fig. 4.

27 Erbkam, *Skizzenbuch* I, p. 215; Priese 1984b, p. 16, Abb. 3.

28 Onderka et al. 2021b, pp. 77–78

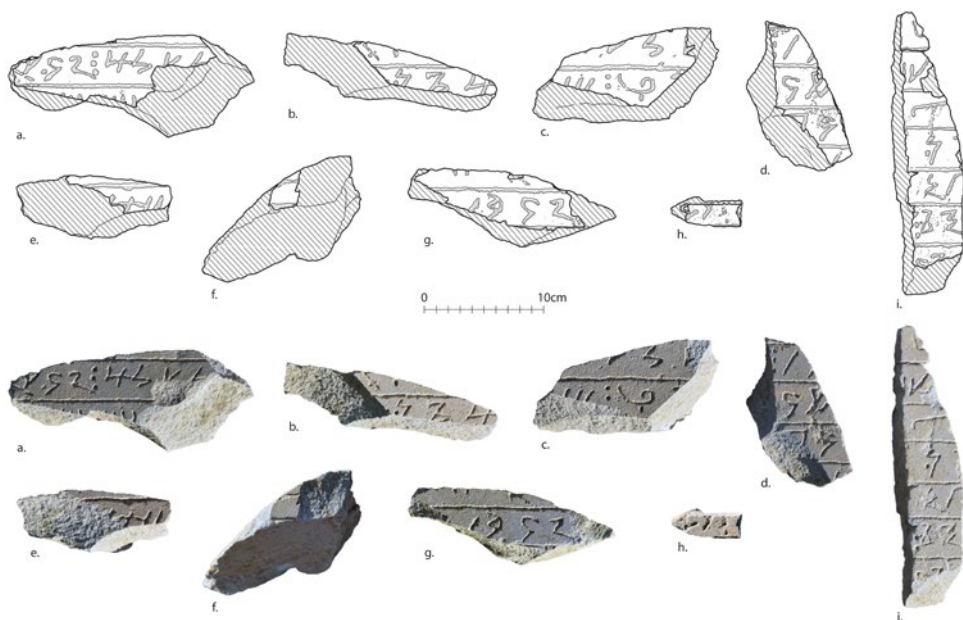


Fig. 4. Fragments of a Meroitic stela (F21/044) discovered in the pit over the original location of *Altar B*. (Illustration: Vlastimil Vrtal; Photo: Pavel Onderka).

On the western end of the northern corridor (WBN 306) was a staircase (FEA 212) leading to the roof of the temple. Rooms WBN 306 and WBN 307 were divided by a doorway paved with a threshold consisting of two sandstone blocks (FEA 331). The jambs of the door were bolstered with fired bricks. In front of the doorway towards the open court (WBN 307) the floor was paved with fired bricks.

The space labelled WBN 307 was an open-air room. Its surrounding walls were cased with fired bricks and equipped with lime plaster. No trace of polychrome decoration applied on the plastered walls of the room were identified. Two fireplaces (FEAs 327 and 329) and a negative imprint after a storage jar (FEA 407) inserted into the floor were recorded. Massive fired brick foundations were identified under the walls of the court.

The roofed room with the frontal side open (WBN 308), a loggia, was dominated by a plastered brick podium (FEA 321). The podium consisted of a rectangular platform to the top of which a staircase of three stairs ascended. Based on the evidence, above all Erbkam's sketch,²⁹ it appears *Altar C* stood at the podium (FEA 321). *Altar C* was discovered by the Royal Prussian Expedition along with *Altar A* and *Altar B*. Unlike the two, it only bore representations of the divine couple and two goddesses, but no texts. The current whereabouts of the altar are not known.³⁰ A piece (or more) of wooden furniture stood between the podium and a door leading to the northern sanctuary with a mastaba. Its existence has been suggested by the discovery of pieces of wood with elaborate joints to other pieces.

²⁹ Erbkam, *Skizzenbuch I*, p. 215.

³⁰ Lepsius 1849–1859, V, p. 338; Priese 1984b, Abb. 3.

In the loggia (WBN 308) and the northern chapel with mastaba (WBN 309) twelve complete bronze statuettes of Osiris [Pl. 8] and over a dozen of their parts were found. Shared characteristics of most of the specimens of Osiris statuettes is their flatness and a specific form of the *atef*-crown. A single torso of a bronze statuette of the goddess Isis suckling her son Horus was found (F21/028). Among the finds was also a faience amulet in the shape of a ram's head (F21/019).

Behind the loggia, the sanctuary with the mastaba (WBN 309) was located. In its south-west corner, 19 well-preserved ceramic plates with flat base were discovered assembled in the corner of the room. At the eastern end of the sanctuary a mastaba built of fired bricks and mudbricks stood. During the temple's use, the mastaba was turned into a form of cachette with ritually buried, used and damaged cultic equipment. Objects discovered in the cache included the upper part of a granite statue of the goddess Mut (F21/030) [Pl. 9],³¹ two tops of goddesses' lotiform scepters made of wood with metal appliques (F21/045), fragments of a faience bowl, and other minor finds.

The structure of the fifth complex of rooms mirrored that of the fourth complex. It too consisted of four rooms – a southern corridor (WBN 312), an open court (WBN 313), a loggia (WBN 314), and a sanctuary (WBN 315). The open court and loggia were paved with sandstone flagstones. The loggia sheltered a 140 cm high lion altar (*Altar D*) [Pl. 10]³² the top of which was decorated with two reclining lions. An altar of this type is depicted on a column of the Lion Temple at Musawwarat es-Sufra.³³ The altar with two crouching lions on top is placed between the figures of the ram-headed form of the god Amun and the goddess Isis.

A fragment of a faience statue, namely the foot of a seated person (the foot is not touching the ground) (SM21/160) and a piece which resembles a feather pattern from the cloth or a piece of armor worn by gods were found. It is highly likely that the fragments come from a statue representing the goddess Isis suckling (costume fragment) her son Horus (foot).

At the end of the southern chapel (WBN 315) was a mastaba made of fired bricks and mudbricks. Small traces of original decoration of the room were preserved.

Conclusion

The excavations at kom C contributed considerably to the understanding of the inner disposition of the so-called Isis Temple, allowing even a preliminary reconstruction of its complete ground plan. Five distinct complexes consisting of a series of rooms were identified, all equipped with specific religious installations. Although only remains of the original decorative program of the temple could be recorded, these installations together with plentiful finds of cultic equipment allowed to approach the character of the cult in the temple both in terms of its topicality and performance.

In the central sanctuary (WBN 303), remains of a notable statue tentatively identified as a Deified Queen were uncovered in an absolutely unprecedented context. Numerous smaller finds came from the rooms in the rear part of the temple, attesting to the cults of Isis and Osiris. In the series of rooms along the northern exterior wall of the temple and in the overlying debris numerous traces were recorded of the excavations of the Lepsius expedition carried out 177 years earlier. Most notably, the original positions of

31 Sudan National Museum, Khartoum, Inv. No. 41026.

32 Sudan National Museum, Khartoum, Inv. No. 41027.

33 Hintze 1971, Taf. 93, 5/2/1.

Altars A, B, and C could be established (and additional remains of the two former bark stands were uncovered) and the notes and sketches by the expedition members could be compared with the actual situation. The find of an altar with reclining lions (*Altar D*) showed potential to match the archeological findings with iconographical data from other sites, thus making it possible to grasp the religious ideas the altar (and other finds) manifested and the nature of rituals they were used for despite the nearly complete destruction of relevant iconographical program from the walls of the Isis Temple itself.

Altogether, findings from trenches T76 and T78 contributed considerably to the gradual reconstruction of the religious landscape of Wad Ben Naga raising many questions at the same time, amongst others the identity of the likely worshipped Deified Queen in the central sanctuary and ideological circumstances of her cult.

[2] Continued excavations at the northern limit of kom A (structures WBN 250 and WBN 1100)

Introduction

Archaeological excavations continued also in the area covering the northern limit of kom A. In 2011 the central part of a monumental multi-roomed brick structure, labelled WBN 250, was uncovered in the area, in trench T4.³⁴ The probable eastern, western, and northern limits of the structure were recorded between the years 2016 and 2019 in trenches T36,³⁵ T44,³⁶ and T69.³⁷ Its southern limit was defined by an exterior wall of the so-called Typhonium (WBN 200), a temple dedicated to the goddess Mut which structure WBN 250 abutted from the north. It can be determined that the construction of building WBN 250 was roughly concurrent with that of the latter temple.³⁸ Topographically, it followed its axis, and it could thus be considered to have been an integral part of the Typhonium complex.³⁹ In terms of function, the attribution of structure WBN 250 to the class of religious buildings (as a contra-temple?)⁴⁰ turned out problematic, however, not only on account of the untypical ground plan but mainly due to the presence of an upper storey, evidenced by a staircase in the south-western corner of the building.⁴¹ In later times, the function of the building may have even altered, since significant constructional development was recorded in several places, comprising the blocking of doors, the reuse of sandstone architectural elements – mainly column drums and lintels – and the formation of irregular brickwork features.⁴²

In 2019 and 2020 the archaeological exploration affected also the area farther north, covering the building's exterior. A column base was recovered *in situ* 1.4 m from the likely exterior wall of structure WBN 250, roughly along the north-south axis of the Typhonium

34 Onderka 2012, pp. 127–132, Pls. 8–9.

35 Onderka et al. 2017, pp. 115–116, Figs. 2–3.

36 Onderka et al. 2018, pp. 99–100, Fig. 3, Pls. 1, 2b.

37 Onderka et al. 2021b.

38 Onderka et al. 2021b, p. 73.

39 Onderka 2013, p. 118.

40 Onderka et al. 2017, p. 115.

41 Onderka et al. 2018, pp. 99–100.

42 Onderka 2012, Pl. 8–9; Onderka et al. 2021a, pp. 73–75, Pl. 4.

complex.⁴³ A plastered brick drainage was uncovered in trench T74, running parallel to the northern exterior wall of the building in the distance of 2.9 m and presumably leading (rain?) water to a deep depression in the bedrock that was interpreted as a tree pit or a water reservoir.⁴⁴ Notably a considerable mass of sandstone debris was recorded in the close exterior of structure WBN 250, which included fragments of sandstone columns, lintels, cavetto cornices, ledges, buttresses, and blocks preserving rich relief decoration with floral and figural motifs.⁴⁵ The sandstone debris could not be linked directly to any architectural features of structure WBN 250 – save for the sandstone pieces reused for the alterations – and its stratigraphic position indicated that it was introduced to the area only following the latter structure’s destruction, presumably from the north (trench T69) and west (trench T74).

Trench T74b

In the course of the twentieth excavation season, the remaining part of trench T74, the excavation of which was initiated in the previous season,⁴⁶ was examined. Dimensions of this remaining, western part of the trench were 5 × 5 m; only the uppermost layer of sand had already been removed.

The archaeological work led to uncovering the south-eastern corner of a structure built of large sandstone blocks (WBN 1100; FEA 597) [Fig. 6; Pl. 11]. It shared orientation with the structures to the south, WBN 200 and WBN 250.⁴⁷ The walls of the building had the thickness of 0.84–0.86 m; solid sandstone foundations were up to 0.1 m wider on all sides. Only the lowermost course of blocks was preserved above the foundations, with the exception of the northern section of the eastern wall, from which only the foundations could be recorded. In the presumed interior, the wall was plain and undecorated up to the level of preservation. On the outer side, the wall was modelled by lesenes/buttresses and recessed panels (southern side) and decorated in sunken reliefs (southern and eastern sides) [Fig. 5; Pl. 12]. The eastern face was decorated with a frieze of lotus buds and flowers (the latter distributed across two levels). The southern face was decorated with the same frieze in its eastern part. To the left of this frieze, a recessed panel was inserted framed by low vertical lesenes on both sides. The panel preserved the lower part of a striding male figure (about

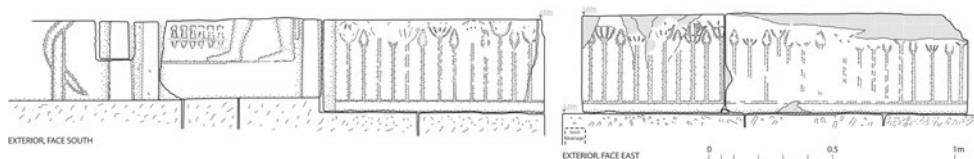


Fig. 5. Reliefs on the southern and eastern faces of the exterior wall of structure WBN 1100. (Illustration: Vlastimil Vrtal).

43 Onderka et al. 2021b, p. 72, FEA 547, Figs. 4, 6, Pl. 4.

44 Onderka et al. 2021a, p. 154.

45 Onderka et al. 2021a, pp. 154–156, Pl. 10; Onderka et al. 2021b, p. 76, Figs. 4, 6.

46 Onderka et al. 2021a, pp. 153–156.

47 The difference was about 1°.

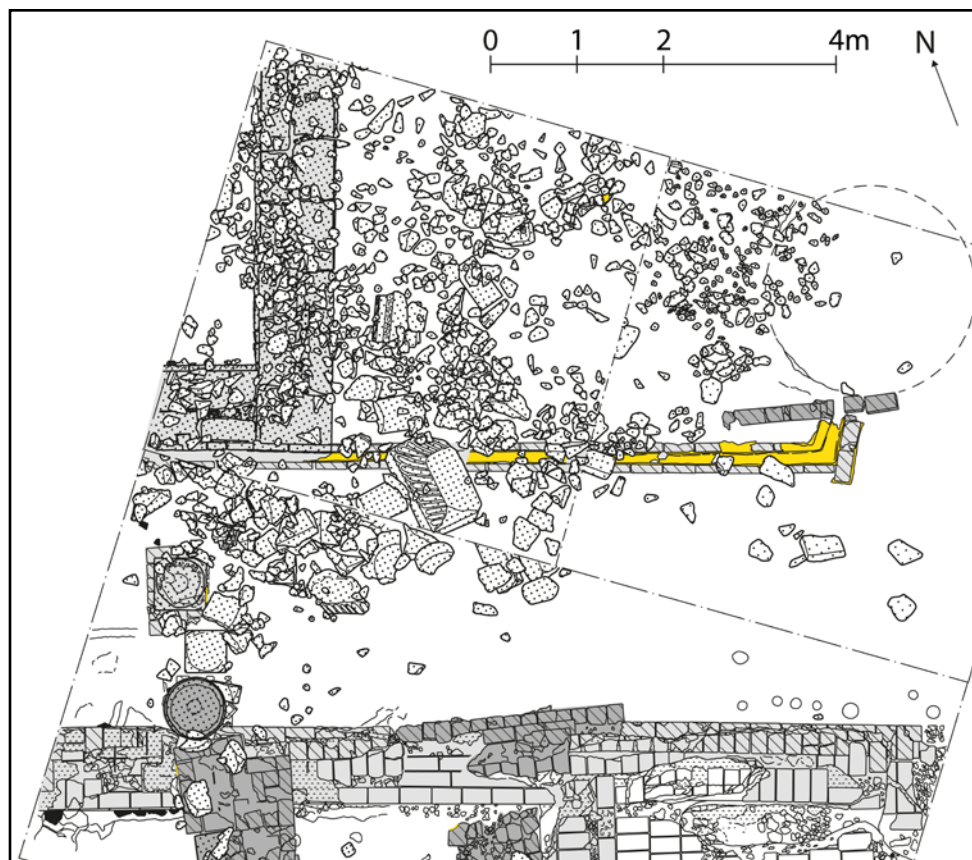


Fig. 6. Top plan showing excavated section of structure WBN 1100, the northern exterior wall of structure WBN 250, drainage FE 590, and the sandstone debris recorded in trenches T69 and T74. (Illustration: Vlastimil Vrtal).

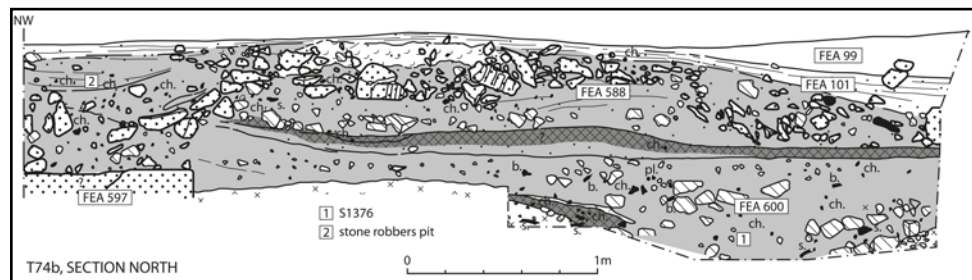


Fig. 7. Section north in trench T74b. (Illustration: Vlastimil Vrtal).

half-life-size) with a tail (?) running along the left leg. The figure was facing the left and holding (?) an unclear object, possibly (but not demonstrably) a plate loaded with offerings. Still further to the left there was a high lesene/buttress followed by a relief depiction of a uraeus wrapped around a pole/stem⁴⁸ (or alternatively, but less likely, a lotus stem wrapped around a pole).⁴⁹

In the interior of the structure the floor was made of crushed bedrock (FEA 599). It was underlying a dense layer of muddy soil with small fragments of fired bricks (FEA 598) divided into two by a thin deposition of ash. In the exterior there was also a floor made of crushed bedrock (FEA 592)⁵⁰ whose structure was looser, however. In the north-east corner of the trench, the floor was disturbed by fired brick fragments that marked the position of a pit with unclear limits [Fig. 7]. A test pit with dimensions of 2.3 × 1.2 m was established to examine it. In the fill (FEA 600) a lion gargoyle (S1376) and a campaniform column capital (S1375) were found [Fig. 8] besides additional fired brick remains (including a torus moulding brick) and pottery fragments (including parts of well-datable shallow kaolinitic bowls, ledge-rimmed bowls, and tall-necked jars). The origin of the two sandstone architectural elements in structure WBN 1100 is uncertain, but possible. The exterior floor was underlying a layer of muddy soil (FEA 589),⁵¹ containing small fired brick fragments and numerous potsherds (including again, parts of several shallow kaolinitic bowls). Transition to the overlying debris was marked by an indistinct layer of ash and some notable clusters of burnt wood, particularly by the eastern wall of structure WBN 1100.

A plastered fired brick drainage (FEA 590) was inserted in the exterior floor. It was a continuation of the drainage uncovered in the previous season in trench T74a, and – as it turned out – earlier in trench T69 (FEA 578).⁵² The drainage joined structure WBN 1100 at its south-east corner and continued to the west, its northern wall being formed by the sandstone foundations of the building from that point.

In the whole area excavated in the twentieth season, strata FEA 589 and 598, as well as the walls of structure WBN 1100 were covered by massive sandstone debris (FEA 588) [Figs. 6, 8; Pls. 13–14], similar to the situation in trenches T69 and T74a.⁵³ Large and better-preserved blocks tended to be deposited on the lower limit of the stratum, while the upper limit was marked by greater distribution of sandstone split and weathered stones. A stone looters' pit could be noted in a section over the walls. The debris was removed in mechanical layers (0.1 and 0.2 m). Blocks with relief decoration and parts of modelled architectural elements were numbered, photographed, drawn, and their positions recorded in order to allow reconstruction of the building. In addition, block corners were recorded for estimating the minimum number of blocks present in the building. Altogether, 213 sandstone fragments were recorded in this manner during the twentieth season (stones S1160A–S1373⁵⁴) out of which 185 represented the decorated or modelled pieces.

48 See Chapman and Dunham 1952, Pls. 3H, 7A; Roeder 1911, Taf. 96–98.

49 See Chapman and Dunham 1952, Pl. 18B.

50 See Onderka et al. 2021a, p. 154.

51 See Onderka et al. 2021a, p. 154.

52 Onderka et al. 2021b, Fig. 4, very north-west of the trench.

53 See Onderka et al. 2021a, pp. 154–156. See also Onderka et al. 2021b, FEA 551(/529/544).

54 Only part of the series represented blocks from stratum FEA 588, some numbers refer to blocks from other trenches.

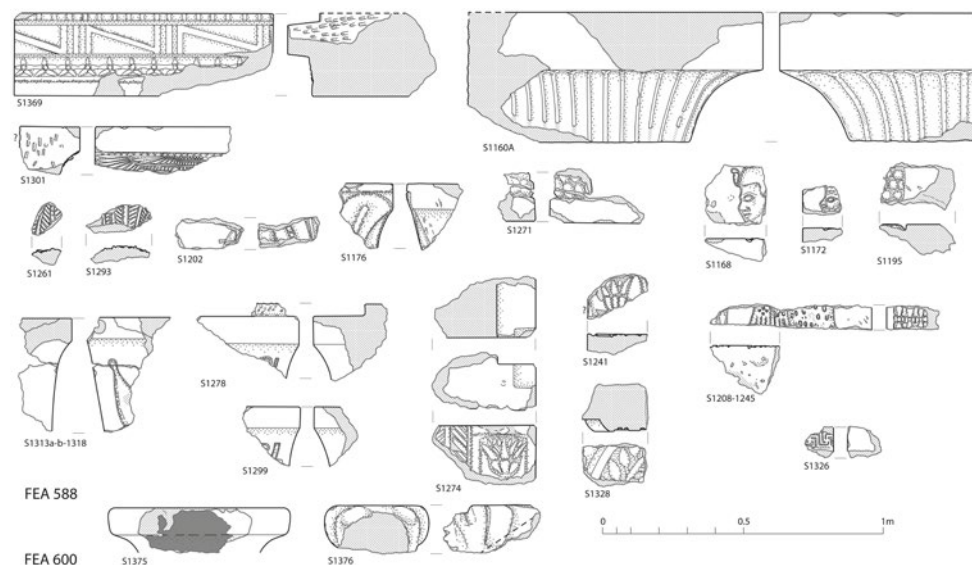


Fig. 8. Selection of fragments of modelled architectural elements and blocks with relief decoration retrieved from trench T74b. (Illustration: Vlastimil Vrtal).

The range of iconographic motives and types of sandstone architectural elements recorded in debris FEA 588 [Fig. 8; Pl. 14] corresponded perfectly with those already unearthed in trenches T4, T36, and particularly T69 and T74a.⁵⁵ Amongst the architectural elements cavetto cornices (32 fragments, including well-preserved corner block S1160A) with multiple widths of panels were found as well as lintels with a projecting ledge decorated with stylised mat binding and a star frieze underneath (17 fragments) from which some of the cavettos rose, crowning the structure. Besides various parts of lesenes and buttresses, a single additional complete column drum (S1337) one fragment of another drum (S1171), and a lintel with a winged sun-disc (S1301) were also retrieved from the trench. Adding to previously recorded campaniform capitals, two other capital (?) types were noted, possibly from pilasters and engaged columns rather than true columns: palm capitals (?)⁵⁶ (S1261, S1293) and lotus (?) capitals with a pointed sprout in the corner (S1176, S1202). The base and a paw from a statuette of a seated lion (S1271) may represent remains of architectural statuary. Fragments of cavetto lintel(s) decorated with uraei (?) crowned with the White Crown (S1313-S1318) and the Red Crown (S1278, S1299) may be linked to the above-mentioned depiction of a uraeus wrapped around the pole.

Additional relief figural motifs which could be identified despite the fragmentary state of preservation included two male faces, one with a uraeus (and a beard?) (likely a king, S1168) and one without (S1172), two possible animal eyes (S1193, S1213),

55 See Onderka et al. 2021b, Fig. 6; Onderka et al. 2021a, Pl. 10.

56 The closest analogy to the relief decoration on the two pieces and to its spatial distribution are palm capitals and the plume crown of Arensnuphis from statue-columns in chapel MS 108 at Musawwarat es-Sufra, see Wenig 1974, 135, Abb. 6.

possible rendering of a scaled shirt (S1195), and a figure (?) dressed in leopard skin, the depiction of which bordered a frieze of *ankh*-signs on another side of the same block (S1208-1245). Amongst flower motifs lotus flowers in bloom were clearly depicted in at least two instances (S1241, S1274). In one case, the depiction bordered on a herringbone frieze, which was attested on several other fragments. Another fragment showed branches of a tree with drop-shaped leaves (S1328). The last notable piece to be mentioned captured part of a Greek cross meander frieze (S1326).

Preliminary observations

It seems indisputable that the sandstone debris and reused blocks uncovered in trenches T4, T36, T69, and T74 originate from structure WBN 1100, the south-east corner of which was uncovered during the twentieth season. At the present state of research, WBN 1100 is the only structure known from Wad Ben Naga in which sandstone was employed to such an extent.⁵⁷

The relation of the structure to the Typhonium complex is unclear. Its distance from the presumed northern exterior wall of structure WBN 250 is only 3.2 m, there is nevertheless good reason to believe that an entrance opened towards the south. The latter can be suggested based on the presence of a lintel with a winged sun-disc in this area in trench T69,⁵⁸ as well as the position of the lesene/buttress and the decoration in the form of a uraeus wrapped around a pole on the southern wall of WBN 1100.⁵⁹ This hypothetical entrance could not be situated on the axis of the Typhonium complex, however, as it would have been too narrow for reasonable use. Its alignment with the northern off-axis opening of the central room in structure WBN 250⁶⁰ may prove more likely, although it would still seem rather inappropriate for a building of this status. The existence of a nearby entrance is not the only possible explanation behind the presence of such elements, however.⁶¹

The type of building that structure WBN 1100 represented is similarly enigmatic in the present state of research. Provided that the relief of uraeus wrapped around a pole marked an axial entrance, it might have been only a very small structure.⁶² Similar estimate can be suggested based on the orientation of stone wall WBN 171, which probably respected the northern limit of the structure. Its decoration clearly points to the religious function, and it thus may have been a single-room chapel or a kiosk. The number of architectural elements that can be linked to structure WBN 1100 is nevertheless already quite extensive: In the vicinity, at least four column bases were already found (only one *in situ*), as well as several campaniform capitals and a couple of possible pilaster capitals. The possibility that the building employed columns or pillars in the exterior walls and that it was thus relatively open, is supported by traces of fire

57 See Vacek et al. 2013.

58 Onderka et al. 2021b, Fig. 4.

59 Crowned uraei were flanking the gate of Arqamani at Dakka, Roeder 1911, Taf. 96–98; and are depicted in this context also in Begrawiya, Chapman and Dunham 1952, Pl. 3H.

60 Onderka 2012, Fig. 6, room B.

61 Besides entrances, the decoration in the form of uraei wrapped around poles was also commonly used for edges of large panels with offering scenes in Ptolemaic and Roman temples. These panels were also crowned with winged sun-discs.

62 A symmetrical disposition would allow the width of only ca 6–7 m and the length of ca 9.5–11.5 m (based on the ideal ratio 8:5).

on the lower sides of several blocks with the star frieze and a ledge with mat binding, which thus possibly represented lintels. It is already clear that the latter decoration, supplemented by a cavetto cornice, crowned the top of the exterior wall along the whole of the building's perimeter. Furthermore, fragments of cavetto cornices of various sizes were found which would fit well with a kiosk with panelled screen walls as would the estimated vertical size of the figural panel on the southern face. On the other hand, other figural motives seem to have necessitated more space on the walls of the building than a kiosk could provide. It is thus necessary to verify the size of the building archaeologically so that its form and function may be properly assessed from the data.

The preserved fragments of iconographical and decorative motives do not yet allow to propose their attribution to specific thematic cycles. Some cautious observations are nevertheless already possible. The inclusion of royal figures is hardly surprising; the possible scaled shirt may nevertheless hint at a warrior context (smiting of enemies?). The presence of some other figural motives, such as the relatively frequent occurrence of lions⁶³ and the figure(s) of Bes⁶⁴ in combination with common lotus flowers, which are plentiful both in numbers and iconographic variants, already echoes some concrete Meroitic analogies.⁶⁵ In this context, the depiction of a tree with drop-shaped leaves may hint at its identification as the Pnubs-tree⁶⁶ rather than the *jšd(?)*-tree of the Osirian myth.⁶⁷ A striking feature of structure WBN 1100 is the employment of the Greek cross meander frieze, through which it ranks amongst a few other Meroitic buildings with decorative elements borrowed from Classical architecture through the sieve of Hellenistic Egypt.⁶⁸ In Nubia the employment of this frieze is unparalleled. In the northern part of the Nile valley it is attested relatively shortly after the Macedonian conquest,⁶⁹ although its application in architecture remains scarce.⁷⁰ In the case of WBN 1100, the frieze clearly formed the base of a figural scene (see below), and its function may thus have been analogical to the identical frieze on the outer sides of the influential Ara Pacis Augustae in Rome.

Finally, the recent finds allowed to link several older sources with structure WBN 1100. It is now clear that its remains were captured with great topographical precision already by Cailliaud who included the same corner of the building in his plan of the Typhonium, along with nearby cavetto cornice blocks and a lintel with a winged sun-disc.⁷¹ The depiction of one of the former blocks matches perfectly the above-mentioned block S1160A found just under the surface. The fragment capturing Greek cross meander frieze (S1326) is closely related to a distinctive piece from the Sudanese excavations (or in this case clearly a survey) at Wad Ben Naga in 1959–1960. The find spot of this piece, accessioned in the Sudan National Museum under Inv.

63 Onderka et al. 2021b, p. 76, Fig. 6, S1070; Onderka et al. 2021a, p. 154, Pl. 10, S1124; lion statue S1271.

64 Onderka et al. 2021a, pp. 154–156, Pl. 10, S1148; the figure dressed in leopard skin on fragments S1208-1245 (?).

65 *Inter alia* Hintze 1971, Taf. 85, 89, 93; Lepsius 1849–1859, V, Pl. 72a.

66 See *inter alia* Griffith 1922, Pl. XLIX; Kormysheva 1999.

67 See Chapman and Dunham 1952, Pl. IVE; Hölbl 2004, Abb. 98.

68 *Inter alia* Hathor Chapel at Naga, temple at Basa, and palace B 2400; see Török 2011; Sist 2011, Figs. 2–4.

69 For example, on the Stag Hunt mosaic from Shatby, see Breccia 1932, Pl. LV, no. 197.

70 See, for example, a stela in the form of naiscos from Beheira; Breccia 1932, Pl. XXIII, no. 86.

71 Cailliaud 1826, Pl. IXa–b.

No. 62/10/139, was previously erroneously, although with due reserve, localised to the Palace of Amanishakhete.⁷² The fragment captures the same meander frieze forming the base of a scene with an unknown male striding figure. Furthermore, fragments of sandstone reliefs scattered over the surface that were later photographed by Hinkel at Wad Ben Naga⁷³ can be also linked to structure WBN 1100 with reasonable confidence because they include relief depiction of a uraeus with the Red Crown and particularly a lotus pilaster with pointed sprout perfectly analogical to fragments S1176 and S1202. The same blocks were captured in the 1980s by an expedition of the Vienna University,⁷⁴ later kindly shared with the present authors by Zach and, being unfamiliar, published by the latter author.⁷⁵ Finally, the obvious similarity of fragments S1169 and particularly S1328 to some sandstone relief fragments uncovered during the third excavation season in the superstructure of tumulus WBN C101⁷⁶ and the geographical proximity of the two structures indicate that the remains of building WBN 1100 were used for the construction of this tumulus. This would also speak for the destruction of WBN 1100 prior to the Transitional or post-Meroitic Periods, to which other tumuli at Wad Ben Naga could be dated.⁷⁷

Conclusion

The discovery of sandstone structure WBN 1100 presents great potential for shedding more light on the appearance of the broader area of the Typhonium complex and on the religious landscape of Wad Ben Naga. Further archaeological research in the area will be necessary for the better understanding of the form and function of the building and particularly the topicality of its relief decoration. Necessarily, the result will depend on the rate of preservation of the remaining sections of walls, as well as additional relief fragments that can still be expected to be found in great amount in the sandstone debris in their close vicinity.

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72 Vrtal 2021, pp. 111, 554, Cat. No. 238; Vrtal, *forth*.

73 Deutsches Archäologisches Institut Zentrale, Friedrich-Hinkel-Forschungszentrum, Archiv Friedrich W. Hinkel, photographs D-DAI-Z-Arch-FWH-F-KB-sw-211-51, D-DAI-Z-Arch-FWH-F-KB-sw-211-53.

74 Photographic archive Inv. Nos. 505–506.

75 Zach 2012.

76 Onderka 2012, pp. 132–133, Figs. 8–9, Pl. 12.

77 Onderka et al. 2015, p. 102; Onderka 2016, p. 46.

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Pl. 1. View into the main sanctuary of the Isis Temple. (WBN 303; Photo: Pavel Onderka).



Pl. 2. Podium decorated with the depiction of the Nine Bows. (F21/040; Sudan National Museum, Khartoum, Inv. No. 41030; Photo: Pavel Onderka).



Pl. 3. Statue of the Deified Queen from the main sanctuary of the Isis Temple. (Sudan National Museum, Khartoum, Inv. No. 41028; Photo: Pavel Onderka).



Pl. 4. View into the northern sanctuary (WBN 305) (right), the original location of *Altar A*. (Photo: Pavel Onderka).



Pl. 5. Libation basin discovered on the floor of the northern sanctuary. (F21/029; Sudan National Museum, Khartoum, Inv. No. 41025; Photo: Pavel Onderka).



Pl. 6. Pit over the original location of *Altar B*. (Photo: Pavel Onderka).



Pl. 7. View on the fourth complex of rooms of the Isis Temple with a podium for *Altar C* in the centre. (Photo: Pavel Onderka).



Pl. 8. Statuettes of the god Osiris discovered in the fourth complex of rooms. (Photo: Pavel Onderka).



Pl. 9. Statue of the goddess Mut discovered in the cache. (F21/030; Sudan National Museum, Khartoum, Inv. No. 41026; Photo: Pavel Onderka).



Pl. 10. *Altar D*, the lion altar from room WBN 314. (Sudan National Museum, Khartoum, Inv. No. 41027; Photo: Pavel Onderka)



Pl. 11. Top view of trench T74b at the end of excavations. (Photo: Vlastimil Vrtal).



Pl. 12. Reliefs preserved *in situ* on the southern face of the exterior wall of structure WBN 1100. (Photo: Vlastimil Vrtal).



Pl. 13. Sandstone debris FEA 588; view from the north-west. (Photo: Vlastimil Vrtal).



Pl. 14. Selection of fragments of modelled architectural elements and blocks with relief decoration retrieved from trench T74b. (Photo: Vlastimil Vrtal).