



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

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ABSTRACT: The seventh excavation season of the Archaeological Expedition to Wad Ben Naga focused on the continued excavations of the so-called Typhonium (WBN 200). A substantial part of the main sanctuary of the temple was uncovered, yielding large amount of finds including statues of Amun and Mut and god Apedemak. Excavations proceeded also to the south of the pylon of the temple. The expedition carried out re-excavation and continued conservation in the area of the western entrance of the Palace of Queen Amanishakheto (WBN 158), and geological survey of the hinterland of the site.

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

The seventh excavation season of the Archaeological Expedition to Wad Ben Naga took place between 6 November and 22 December 2013. The mission inspected the site on 8 November 2013. Archaeological works were launched on 13 November and concluded on 18 December 2013.

The mission was headed by Dr. Pavel Onderka (director), Vlastimil Vrtal (chief archaeologist), Alexander Gatzsche (chief conservator), Murtada Bushara Mohamed Bushara and Juweriya Osman Mohamed Zain (inspectors of the National Corporation for Antiquities and Museums).

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The mission further consisted of (in alphabetical order): Dr. Jiřina Dařková (geologist), Ass. Prof. Marie Dufková (archaeologist), Ema Medková (conservator), Dr. Pavel Ressner (anthropologist), Eric Spindler (archaeologist), Ass. Prof. Jaana Toivari-Viitala (archaeologist) and Dr. Frantiřek Vacek (geologist).

The work of the seventh season focused on [1] the continued excavation of the temple complex of the so-called Typhonium (WBN 200); [2] the continued conservation and re-excavation of the Palace of Queen Amanishakheto, explored by the Sudanese expedition between 1959 and 1960 (WBN 100), namely the so-called western entrance (WBN 158); [3] geological survey of the hinterland of the site (focusing on the location of ancient quarries which served as sources of material for the constructions at Wad Ben Naga); and [4] the construction of a guarding house on the northern slope of *Kom C*, i.e. to the north of the Isis Temple (WBN 300).

Inspections of the archaeological protected land

During the inspections of the site carried out on 8 November and after the beginning of the archaeological work, several violations of the archaeological protected land were detected. For several weeks a Chinese contractor had been renovating the rail track connecting Khartoum and Atbara. Heavy vehicles ran over the western part of the *kom A* (i.e. the Typhonium; WBN 200) and caused substantial damages to its surroundings, including intrusions of archaeological contexts. Subsequently, building material was deposited within the boundaries of the archaeological protected land and has never been used entirely. The NCAM inspectors contacted the police and railway authorities, who were instructed as to how to approach the archaeological site.

Several newly-built houses on the eastern edge of the archaeological protected land violated its boundary. Several boundary stones, set up during the second excavation season of 2010 (Onderka 2011), were removed or damaged in connection with their construction.

Due to the high level of water during the past rainy season a low-rise dam was built on the northern bank of Wadi Kirbikan. The dam's construction incorporated a *kom* with several tumulus tombs. Records of the dam have been made for further reference.

[1] Continued excavation of the Typhonium (WBN 200)

The continued excavation of the Typhonium (Fig. 1) focused on two areas:

- (a) the main sanctuary (square T14)
- (b) the area in front of the pylon (square T15; T16)

T14 (located between T4 and T6 excavated during the previous excavation seasons) revealed a substantial part of the temple's main sanctuary and the corridor surrounding it (Fig. 2). The walls were preserved up to a height of 1.8 m maximum and were made mostly of mud bricks, except for corners of the wall surrounding the main sanctuary and of the niche set into the wall, which were built of fired bricks. The northern outer wall of the temple included two openings (most probably niches) set into the wall 0.9 m above the floor level (i.e. above the lowest register of polychrome decoration; cf. below).



Fig. 1 Current state of the exploration of the Typhonium (Illustration by Vlastimil Vrtal).

The debris that filled the corridor contained numerous fragments of bricks, potsherds (including several almost complete bowls dated preliminarily to the period ca. 50–150 CE), as well as pieces of plaster still carrying wall paintings. The latter were found almost exclusively in the upper strata of the debris. Their motifs were limited to a frieze with stars. Several large fragments of plaster were found still *in situ* on the lower parts



Fig. 2 The archaeological situation in the square T14; walls and the floor level in dark ink (Illustration by Vlastimil Vrtal).

of the walls. The motifs identified so far include water plants growing in the Nile marshes, in the lowest register of the wall's decoration, which is topped by a yellow band. A number of small finds come from the corridor, *inter alia* a weight and a glass bead.

A substantial part of the main sanctuary of the temple was uncovered (Pl. 1). An altar – a huge sandstone block (120 x 74 cm, height 75 cm) – was set into the niche in the very center of the sanctuary's rear wall (i.e. on the main axis of the temple). The block was painted yellow on the exposed upper and front sides. The front side was also decorated with a representation of the Nile marshes, painted in red. The niche itself was decorated with polychrome depictions of standing figures, whose feet were preserved *in situ*. The lowest register was decorated with a representation of the Nile marshes (cf. Onderka – Vrtal 2014: 71–73, Pl. 2). Smaller fragments of wall paintings retrieved from the debris of the walls from the vicinity of the altar included a frieze of *ankhs* and *was*-scepters on *nb/hb*-signs, a crowned *uraeus*, and a piece of a folded kilt. The debris

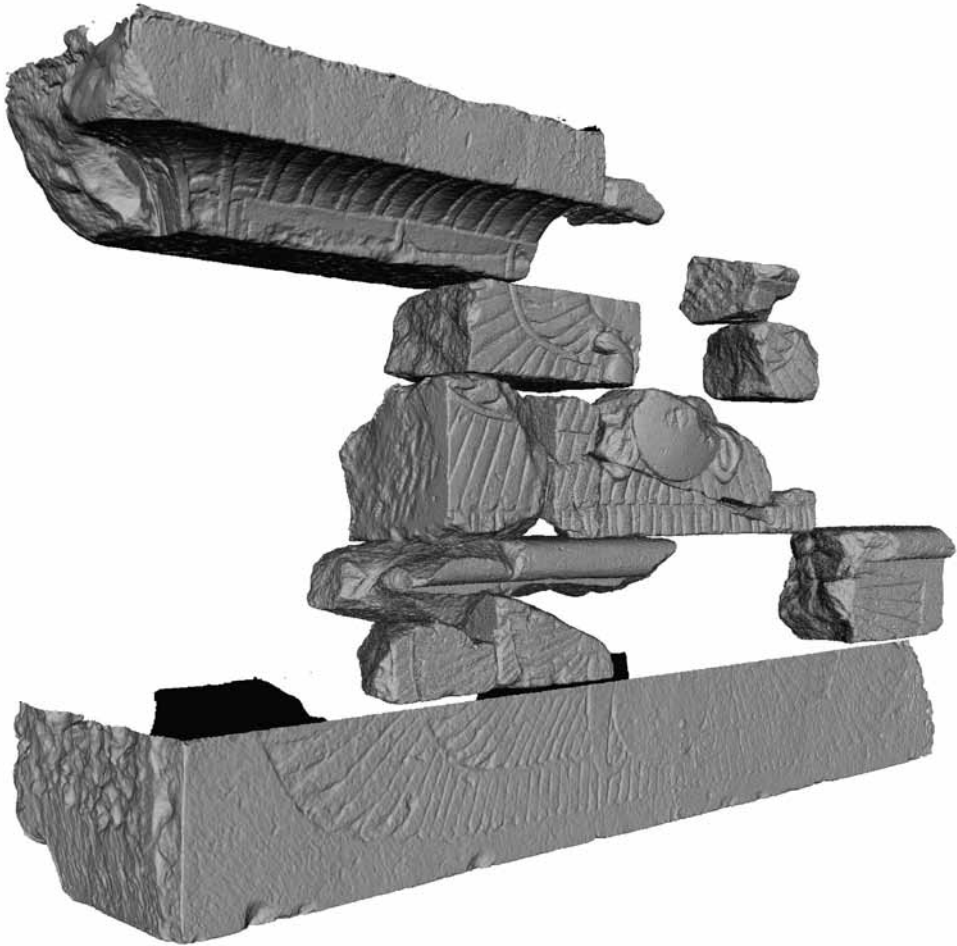


Pl. 1 The north western part of the main sanctuary showing the “cachette” in the corner of the room, block with cornice, large architrave block with fixings for doorjambs, and the altar set in a niche in the wall (Photo by Vlastimil Vrtal).

within the main sanctuary yielded further fragments of wall paintings, including a crown with two *uraei* wearing the *atef* or *hemhem* and double crowns, respectively.

The niche with the altar seems to have been framed by a gate with a massive architrave decorated with two winged solar discs encircled by cobras (Pl. 2). The blocks of the architrave were found lying on the floor in front of the altar. Their collapse destroyed the floor of the room, paved with finely dressed sandstone flagstones. Further destruction of the floor followed as the small blocks were quarried for building material. Some of them had already been found, during the previous two excavation seasons, displaced in other parts of the main sanctuary.

In the area in front of the collapsed architrave a pair statue showing Amun of Karnak and his consort Mut was discovered lying on the floor (Pl. 3). It is the counterpart to the pair statue discovered during the fifth excavation season (Sudan National Museum, inv. No. 36100; cf. Onderka – Vrtal – Dašková – Vacek – Gatzsche 2013; Onderka – Gatzsche 2013; Pl. 4) showing Nubian Amun (with ram’s head) and Mut. The statues were originally located in the portico (WBN 202) at the side of the entrance to the main sanctuary. While the statue showing Mut together with ram-headed Amun was smashed into pieces during an assumed attack on the temple, the other statue was damaged only marginally. After the attack, the pair statue with Amun of Karnak was moved into the main sanctuary.



Pl. 2 Visualisation of the architrave based on 3D-scans of preserved relief blocks (Illustration by Alexander Gatzsche).

Fragments of other statues were ritually buried in what appeared to be a “cachette” (offering place) built of fired bricks laid without mortar in the northwest corner of the main sanctuary. Its ground plan had the shape of a quarter circle with a semidiameter of ca. 1.7 m. Among the fragments of statues was an almost complete stone statue of a seated lion, the feet of another seated lion with remains of yellow paint and a bust of the god Apedemak, made of limestone with its surface gilded and inlaid (Pl. 5). The god is dressed in a scale shirt, and both arms are decorated with armlets. The lower parts of the mane and headdress are preserved. The pedestal of the statue bore an inscription in Egyptian hieroglyphs: “[... determinative of a “foreign land”] he gives life...” (...[toponym] *dj=f ḥnh n...*) which suggests that the statue may be dated to the reign of Natakamani and Amanitore. The statue may thus be ascribed to the builders of the temple, and it seems that it belonged to the original cultic inventory of a temple built by these rulers at Wad Ben Naga. The first hieroglyph in the column is most likely



Pl. 3 The archaeological situation in the main sanctuary with the position of the pair statue of Amun and Mut (Photo: Pavel Onderka).

the final sign of a toponym included in an epithet of a god (a determinative of a foreign land = *ḥ3s.t*) and probably refers to the god's role as the protector of the kingdom, while the following part of the inscription stresses his creative powers. Such three-dimensional representations of the god Apedemak are very rare, one example being a fragment of statue kept in the collections of the Louvre museums (AE, E 11157B; Baud 2010: 196, cat. no. 255), another possibly a fragment of a lion's head from Meroe (Näser 2004: 264–265).

Outside the cachette numerous pieces of gilded terracotta plaques were found (Pl. 6). The most complete fragment bore a depiction of the winged sun disc in a lunette above a divine figure of the goddess Mut (of which only the crown of Upper and Lower Egypt remained; for a similar design cf. plaque SNM 762a; Baud 2010: 140, cat. no. 188). On another piece, a head of the goddess with a vulture headdress was preserved. Motifs on other fragments included *ankh*-friezes, rows of *uraei* with sun discs and a ram's head with sun disc. In addition, numerous three-dimensional features of the main sanctuary's decoration made of mud were discovered. They were vividly painted in red, blue, yellow and black, and selected sections were also gilded. Gold leaf was found almost everywhere on the sanctuary's floor. The main sanctuary was secondarily altered, judging from small, regular fired brick structures constructed on the sanctuary's paved floor.

Among the small finds from the main sanctuary were a spindle whorl (cf. Török 1997: II, Pl. 144), a faience amulet in the form of a ram's head with sun disc, several large glass beads, numerous tubular faience beads, fragments of the lower part of Roman



Pl. 4 Visualisation of the pair statues of Amun and Mut found in the Typhonium; to scale (Illustration by Alexander Gatzsche).

unguentarium made of green glass (of the form Isings 82 B2), a piece of perforated copper sheet, the handle and floral (?) decoration of a bronze vessel and a pierced circular faience object of unknown function.

In the corridor around the main sanctuary, a system of walls was uncovered at floor level, belonging to the structure designated during the fourth excavation season as WBN 700 (cf. Fig. 1). It was built of mud bricks (with an evidently high sand content). In connection with the construction of the Typhonium temple complex the walls of this early building were graded.

T15 (located immediately to the south of T9 excavated during previous excavation seasons) has revealed the remains of a wall, the foundations of which were made of fired bricks and local flat stones. The wall once ran south from the western edge of the



Pl. 5 Fragment of the statue of Apedemak discovered in the “cachette” in the main sanctuary of the Typhonium (Photo by Alexander Gatzsche).



Pl. 6 Fragments of gilded terracotta plaques found in the main sanctuary of the Typhonium (Photo by Alexander Gatzsche).

pylon, to which it is perpendicular. A doorway opening inwards the space in front of the pylon was set into the wall. A layer of ash (which included smaller pieces of burnt palm tree beams) west of the wall is interpreted as the remains of a burnt roof. Therefore



Pl. 7 Fragment of Lepsius' *Altar B* with depiction of Queen Amanitore and inscription with her name (Photo by Alexander Gatzsche).

the space east of the wall seems to have been fully or partly roofed. This area also differs from the west of the wall by the presence of a floor made of hard-packed crushed sandstone. The wall gradually disappears towards the south, where there is a small modern-day wadi. The finds there include several offering balls, fragments of a bark stand (possibly *Altar B* which was recorded by the Lepsius expedition and parts of which were discovered during the fourth excavation season; Priese 1984; Onderka 2013a; Onderka 2013b), potsherds (including some fine ware), etc. The top layer has been intruded upon by modern building material from the construction and reconstructions of the railway line. A layer of ash is absent to the west of the wall, where a number of postholes were located. These are located mostly in front of the doorway, which possibly indicates the existence of a kind of a shelter or corridor-like structure constructed of light materials and built in front of the door. Another cluster of postholes surrounds a rectangular structure of an unknown character, but paralleled in T9, in the northwest corner of the square. The last group of postholes is located in the southeast corner of the square. Close to the middle of the square's western edge, in the unroofed areas, a vessel was found set into the floor. It likely served as a cooking pot.

T16 is located to the east of T14 and to the south of T7, and hence it lies on the temple's main axis. The square did not yield many archaeological features or finds. The top layer contained a substantial amount of modern building material, especially stone used in the past renovation of the railway line. A wall which starts in T14, and continues in an easterly direction, runs through the entire square; however, it is preserved only in the negative. A doorway was once set into it at the axis, but it has not been preserved at all. A base, probably of a column or a pillar, was unearthed in the northern section of the square. Floors were identified both to the north and to the south of the wall (which suggest that the temple building continued further to the south). The first of these floors was covered with a mixture of lime and mud and the second with a mixture of crushed sandstone and mud. Several fragments of stone architectural elements were discovered in the square, including one assumed cavetto cornice fragment, a part of a sandstone threshold and another fragment of the *Altar B* from the side with a depiction of Queen Amanitore (Pl. 7). The fragment captures the back of the queen's head, her right arm, which is making the gesture of "supporting the sky" and a cartouche with her throne name (*Mr-k3-R*) in Egyptian hieroglyphs.



Pl. 8 Archaeological situation in the western entrance to the Palace of Queen Amanishakheto (WBN 158) recorded by means of the stereoscopic method (Illustration by Alexander Gatzsche).

The archeological situations in the squares excavated during the season were documented, together with the progress of excavations, using the stereoscopic method (Structure from Motion). The acquired data were set into images from previous seasons providing a detailed 3D-visualization of the excavated parts of the Typhonium.

[2] Continued conservation and re-excavation of the Palace of Queen Amanishakheto (WBN 100)

The work in the Palace of Queen Amanishakheto continued in the room WBN 158, sometimes labeled the (main) eastern entrance (hall). The jamb and the architrave of the gate were made of plastered sandstone, as were three columns that once supported the roof of the room. To the north of the room there was a ramp (WBN 160) leading to the upper floor of the Palace (cf. Vercoutter 1962; Hinkel – Sievertsen 2002). An elongated room (WBN 159) adjoined the entrance hall (WBN 158) to the south. The room was cleaned of sand and mud scoured from the mud brick walls. The fired brick sections of the surrounding walls were conserved and covered with protective concrete layer. Like the excavations in the Typhonium, the archaeological situation in the Palace was documented using the stereoscopic method (Pl. 8).

[3] Geological survey of the hinterland of the site

The aim of the geological survey was to determine the quarries from which the stone employed in the construction of the ancient buildings at Wad Ben Naga originated.

For the sake of comparison, quarries located in the vicinity of the site of Musawwarat es-Sufra were visited before the survey itself began. The survey on the right bank of the river, within the archaeological hinterland of the site, was followed by a survey of the left bank. While on the right bank of the river Nile no possible sources of sandstone were identified in the diameter of almost 20 km (i. e. as far as the source material areas for the site of Naga), a locality with sandstone of qualities similar to those employed in the buildings at Wad Ben Naga was found some 8 km upstream from Wad Ben Naga on the left bank of the river.

[4] Trench on the northern slope of kom with the Isis Temple

During the season a request to build a guarding house came from the local tourism police. The site of the house was picked with regard to the ongoing excavation. Before the construction of the house began, the chosen area on the northern slope of the kom covering the Isis Temple was archaeologically surveyed. The trench revealed a graded floor with no other archaeological features.

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