



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

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with

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ABSTRACT: The fifth excavation season of the Archaeological Expedition to Wad Ben Naga focused on the continued excavation of the so-called Typhonium (WBN 200) and the continued conservation of the so-called Palace of Amanishakheto (WBN 100). The excavations of the Typhonium uncovered a substantial part of the temple building proper, including its main sanctuary. An intentionally destroyed statue of the seated dyad of the Nubian Amun with a ram's head and his consort Mut with the double crown of Upper and Lower Egypt was discovered in the temple ruins, as well as numerous stone architectural features. The conservation within the Palace focused on the southern entrance hall (WBN 154). Throughout the framework of the season, a geological survey of the concession and its surrounding was carried out.

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

The fifth excavation season of the Archaeological Expedition to Wad Ben Naga took place between 7 October and 23 December 2012. The archaeological and conservation works were launched on 13 October and were concluded on 16 December. The period

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between 17 and 22 December was dedicated to processing finds and study material, and to recording the orientation of the buildings at Central Wad Ben Naga.

The season was carried out under the guidelines 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 Dr. Pavel Onderka (director), Vlastimil Vrtal (chief archaeologist), Alexander Gatzsche (chief conservator) and Mohamed Saad Abdalla Saad (inspector of the National Corporation for Antiquities and Museums). The team further consisted of (in alphabetical order): Dr. Jiřina Dařková (geologist), Marie Hlouchová (archaeologist), Ramona John (archaeologist), Jakub Peřený (anthropologist), Dr. Pavel Ressler (archaeologist / expedition physician), Eric Spindler (archaeologist) and Dr. František Vacek (geologist).

The work of the fifth excavation season focused on [1] continued excavations within the complex of the so-called Typhonium (WBN 200), [2] conservation work in the area of the southern entrance to the so-called Palace of Amanishakheto (WBN 100), which had begun in the second season, and [3] geological survey of the site and its surroundings.

Several site management projects were pursued, including the preparation of the site for the addition to the serial cultural property of the *Archaeological Sites of the Island of Meroe*, which has, since June 2011, been included on the UNESCO World Heritage List.

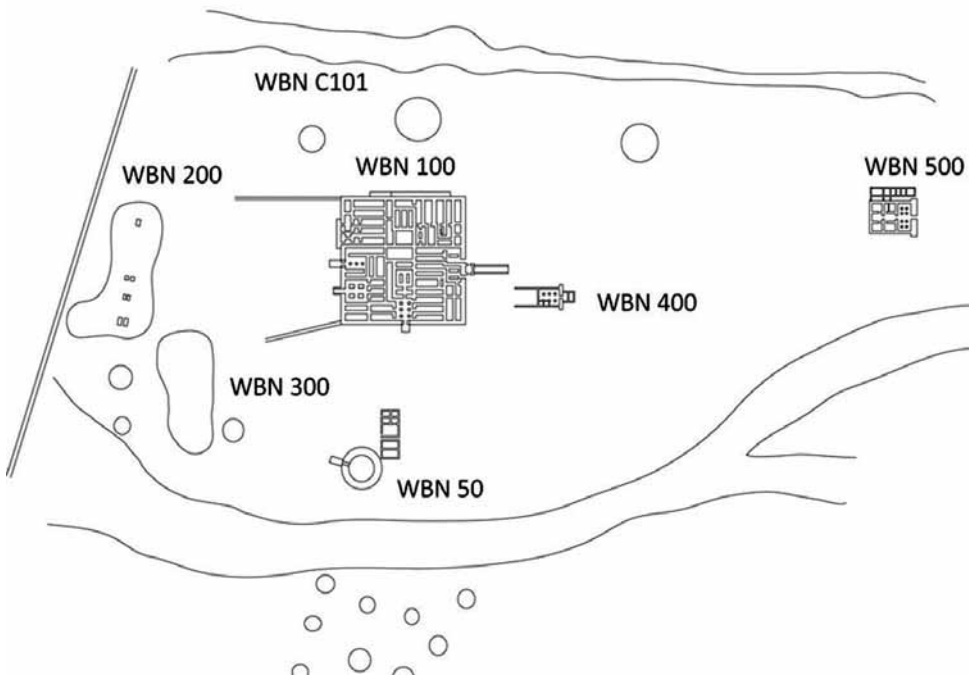


Fig. 1: Central Wad Ben Naga (after Hinkel – Sievertsen 2002).

1 Excavation of the so-called Typhonium (WBN 200)

The archaeological works confined to the exploration of the so-called Typhonium (WBN 200).

1.1 Excavation history

During the third and fourth seasons of the Archaeological Expedition to Wad Ben Naga, three squares (T4–T6) of 10 by 10 m were excavated in the area of expected location of the so-called Typhonium (cf. Onderka 2012; Onderka 2013). The temple was known to exist due to observations and plans of 19th century visitors to the site, namely Frédéric Cailliaud (Cailliaud 1823–1827), Linnant de Bellefonds (de Bellefonds 1958), George Alexander Hoskins (Hoskins 1835), Giuseppe Ferlini (Ferlini 1981) and Carl Richard Lepsius (Lepsius 1849–1859), etc. Current excavations have revealed remains of a complex religious building with multiple rooms and long history of use.

1.2 Individual squares (Fig. 2)

During the fifth season, four squares of 10 by 10 m were excavated. The squares were delimited to the south of T4 and T6 with respect to the orientation of the main axis of the temple. The excavations revealed that the main entrance to the temple and its central part were situated in this area.

Square T7 (Pl. 1)

The excavations in T7 revealed the main entrance to the building. Remains of a pylon flanking the main door were identified. The pylon, as well as walls, were built of a mudbrick core with a redbrick casing and were originally coated with plaster. In between the pylons, a large sandstone threshold was located. The door was originally two-winged, as indicated by two stone fixings with iron door pivots and another stone located in the centre with two holes and tracks of doorstops abrading the floor. A few large and many fragmentary violet sandstone blocks, some with relief decoration (a winged sun-disc; Pl. 2), were found in T7. These probably formed the original doorframe. The gate once opened to a large hall or possibly an open courtyard – *pro tempore* labeled as *Room N*. A few more sandstone objects were discovered in the room, namely a massive window grill with four square holes (cf. Welsby 2000: 7) and a small bark-stand. On its floor, two flat redbrick keyhole-shaped features were located symmetrically, but their function remains a matter of discussion. They may have been used as support or platform for columns or pillars (?), or as planters, but could be secondary as well. Evidence of heavy burning (including burned beams), contextually related to the first destruction of the building, was noted in many areas.

Square T8

The excavations in T8 unearthed walls forming part of a large room (or an open court), an antechamber and the main sanctuary of the temple, as well as adjacent subsidiary rooms towards the east. *Room N* was separated from *Room J* by a relatively thin wall of which only a redbrick foundation layer and remains of sandstone threshold were found. To the east, an entrance to a small *Room O* was located. The room comprised of a narrow staircase corridor originally leading to the roof. Only three steps were preserved *in situ*, the rest of the corridor was filled with mudbrick fragments. Several

large vessels were found by the entrance. In *Room J*, forming the porticus to the sanctuary, fragments of a deliberately smashed statue made of violet sandstone and treated with painted polychrome plaster were discovered. The statue depicts the god Amun in his cryocephalic form, dressed in a short folded kilt, and his consort, the goddess Mut, wearing the double crown of Upper and Lower Egypt and a long close fitting dress. Both divine figures were shown seated on thrones (Pl. 3). Traces of sinks

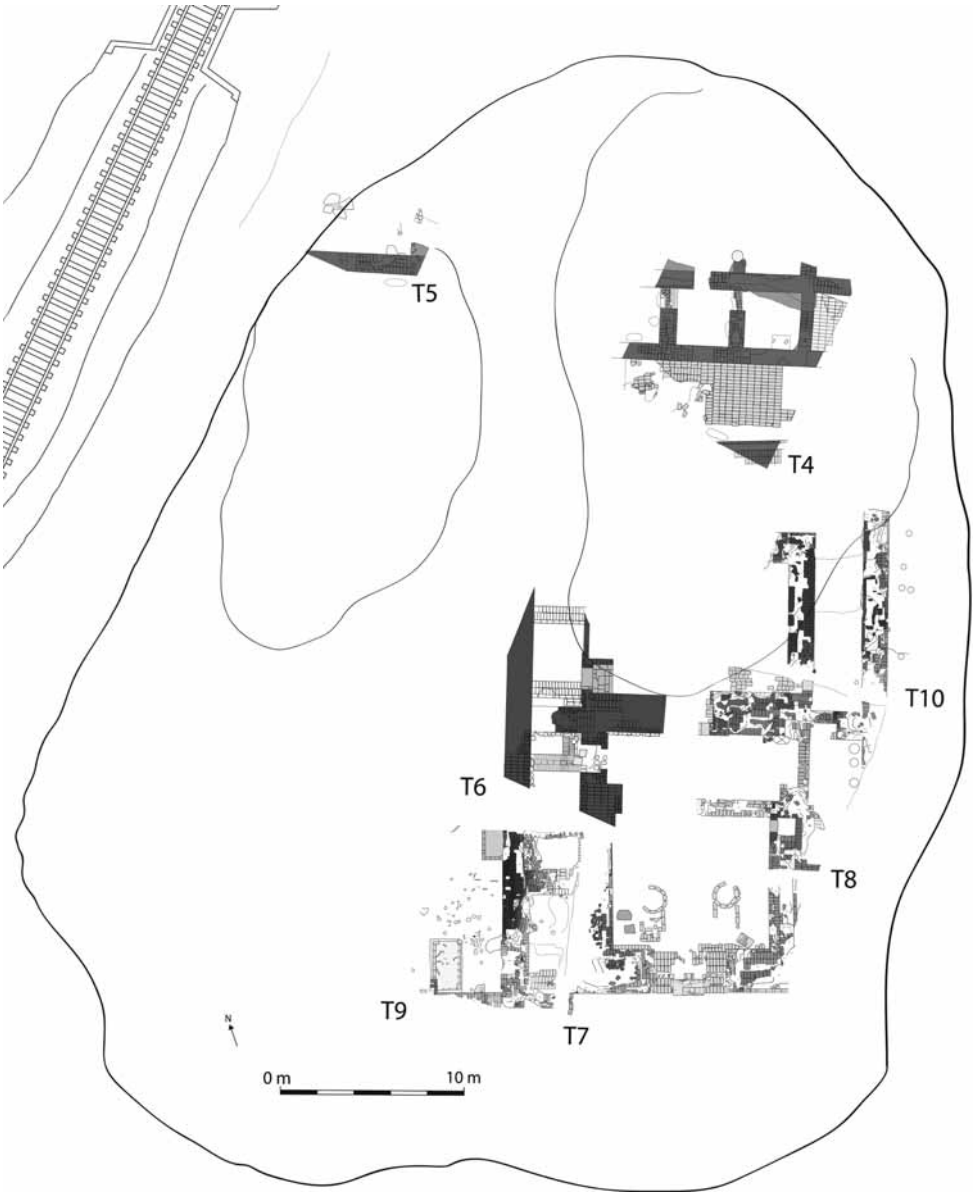


Fig. 2: Exploration of the Typhonium (Illustration by Vlastimil Vrtal).

by an axe were obvious on the surface of the statue attesting to its intentional destruction. The original height of the statue was around 1.5 (Egyptian) cubits, i.e. approximately 75 cm. The statue most likely flanked the door to the main sanctuary (*Room M*), from which *Room J* was separated by a massive wall. The position of doors was indicated by a large sandstone threshold, pivot stone and tracks of doorstops in the floor. The floor of *Room M* was paved with small sandstone blocks and was only partially preserved due to subsequent mining activities. Finds from this part of the room (a faience vessel, glass and beads) indicate cultic activities are likely to have been taking place in this area. To the east, another two rooms (*Room P* and *Q*) were located. They were separated by a door, which was secondarily blocked. These probably acted as service rooms for the activities connected with the maintenance of the cult. This function is indicated by a presence of three large vessels sunken into the floor and filled with ash, burned wood and bones. i.e. a clear evidence for cooking and other domestic activities. By the wall separating *Rooms O* and *P*, a part of a sandstone libation offering table (decorated with lotus flowers in raised relief) and another block with a curled hair-lock (?) were found.

Square T9

The square (located to the west of T7) covers the south-east section of the temple proper and adjoining areas. It comprises two rooms (*Room K* and *P*) and an outside space (*Room S*). The main massive wall with north-south orientation most likely formed the outer extent of the building. It was interrupted only by a single entrance with a sandstone threshold. It was built of mudbricks with a redbrick casing on the outward facing side (the west side). To the west, a large open area with remains of a low rectangular podium (probably of cultic significance) was located. Many postholes were identified there. These were embedded into the floor as well as into the podium indicating the existence of a light shelter or structure, the form of which cannot yet be specified. To the north, a rectangular pen was built by the wall. Outside near the main wall, a large finely worked sandstone lion's head shaped gargoyle (Pl. 4) was found. A mud brick wall continued further west of the pylon which may indicate the presence of external buildings on the temple's western side. The open area was used secondarily as the location of two burials of children.

Square T10

The square is located to the north of T8. It covers the eastern part of both the main sanctuary (*Room M*) and a corridor-shaped side room (*Room Q*). In the course of the excavations, two massive walls were uncovered in this area. The walls were made of mudbricks with a redbrick casing, for the most part on the outer wall-face (the eastern side). The surface treatment of the walls was well-preserved in this part of the temple and the excavations yielded large and beautiful examples of highly complex, sophisticated and vivid polychrome decoration (Pl. 5 and 6) applied on white plaster. Some parts of the depictions were even gilded. In the corridor room, an almost complete terracotta *ankh*-sign libation basin was found. To the east, an open area was located (designated as *Room T*), probably outside of the actual building. Several large vessels inserted into the floor were unearthed in this area. Later burials were located above the main sanctuary (cf. Fig. 3).

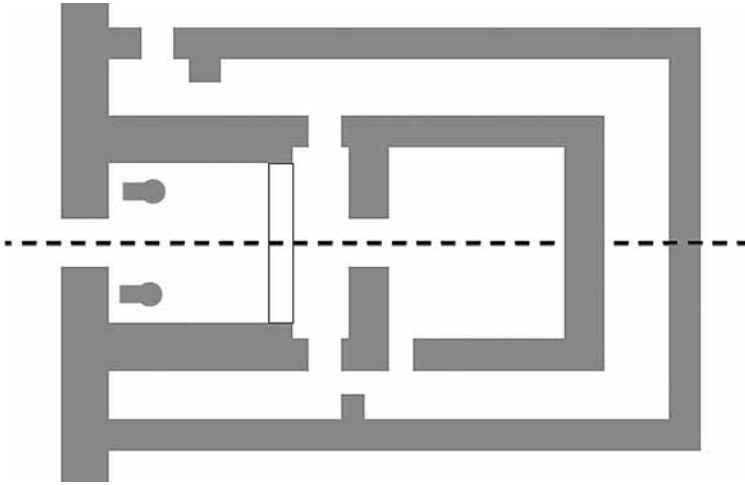


Fig. 3: A simplified ground plan of the temple (Illustration by Pavel Onderka).

1.3 Small finds

The excavations within *kom A* yielded a considerable amount of pottery and other small finds. The pottery was of various types and quality, from very coarse to Meroitic fineware (Pl. 7). Many examples of decorated wares were unearthed as well. The decoration consisted of incised, painted or stamped motifs. One owner's and two potter's marks were identified. Some sherds of pottery imported from the Mediterranean were discovered. The small finds included fragments of elaborate terracotta, glass and faience vessels, glass and faience beads, wool textiles, an iron nail, and a copper alloy hair pin.

1.4 Interpretations

Based on the archaeological evidence gained during the past three excavation seasons, it is possible to conclude that the Typhonium was a multi-roomed temple with Amun as the most likely principle cultic beneficiary. Other gods, including Amun's consort Mut, Osiris and Apedemak were worshiped as co-templers in the sanctuary (cf. Onderka 2012). Cailliaud's *kom A* was used for at least two later cemeteries (discovered already during the third excavation season). Altogether, the burials of four individuals were unearthed in this fifth season. One of the secondary cemeteries seems to have been exclusively reserved for children, while the other consists of burials of young adults. The cemeteries have not yet been chronologically fixed.

1.5 Methodological comment

The treatment of finds fully accorded with the Venice Charter, i.e. the objects were cleaned, consolidated and assembled with minimal intervention. Reversible adhesives were used exclusively. Highly fragile objects were removed in boxes from the excavation site and were treated carefully on the expedition premises. All discovered objects were catalogued and in addition, important stone architectural features were 3D-scanned. This technique made it possible to conduct detailed examination and creation of 3D virtual models. It proved to be of crucial importance in the virtual reconstruction and in planning the conservation of the dyad statue of Amun and Mut.

2 Conservation Work

The season's conservation work concentrated on the then not conserved walls of *Room 154* of the so-called Palace of Amanishakheto (Pl. 8), i.e. the southern main entrance. The treatment of the walls followed the technique used already during the past three seasons: the walls were documented, cleaned, covered with geo-textile and a layer of bricks and their tops were stabilized by a layer of concrete. However, this treatment does not represent the final solution for the preservation of the remains of the Palace. It only serves as a tool to consolidate the ruins while further excavations of the hitherto insufficiently documented structure may be carried out and a more effective conservation treatment designed. A number of important archaeological discoveries were made within the framework of the conservation treatment.

Two ground plans of the palace were published so far. The first one was included in Jean Vercoutter's report on the Sudanese excavations at Wad Ben Naga (Vercoutter 1962: 278, Fig. 8) and in *The Archaeological Map of the Sudan* (IX.75; Hinkel – Sievertsen 2002; cf. Fig. 1). The former is of a rather sketchy character (Fig. 4), while the latter shows a much higher degree of accuracy; however, it is not free of substantial inaccuracies. The most crucial difference from reality, when it comes to *Room 154*, is the absence of a doorway between *Rooms 110* and *154*. A number of potsherds were discovered on the walls and around them (in the secondary position). The interior of the room itself was explored during the second excavation season.

The walls treated by conservators in the previous excavation seasons were inspected and where needed, the protective cover was repaired.

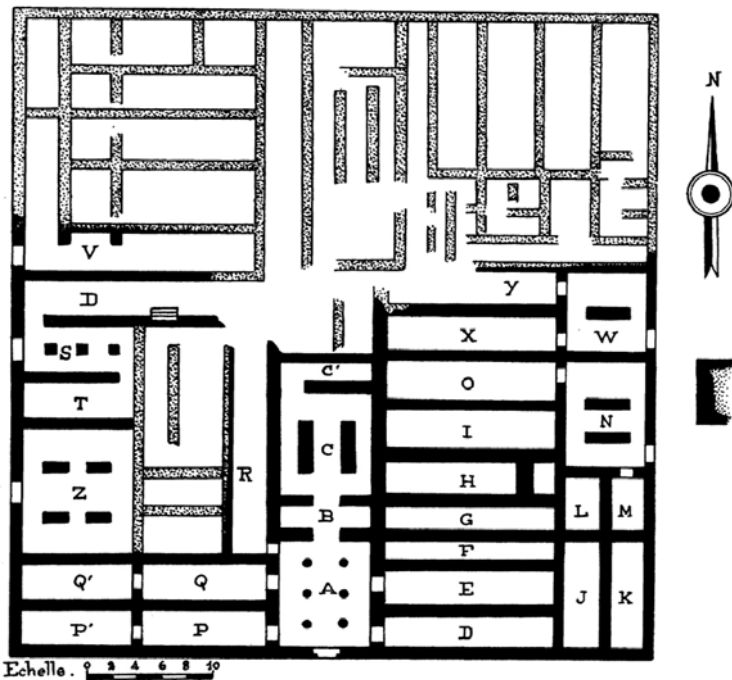


Fig. 4: Vercoutter's sketch of the ground plan of the Palace of Amanishakheto (after Vercoutter 1962).

3 Geological Survey (Pl. 9 and 10)

The first systematic geological survey of this area was carried out in November 2012. It focused on the area of the National Museum's archaeological concession (approximately 3 by 2 km). The aim of the study was to map the area and identify potential sources of materials used in the construction of the ancient monuments at Wad Ben Naga. The principal information on local geology before our field campaign came from the *Geological Map of the Sudan* in scale 1:2,000,000 published in 1981 with related explanatory notes (Yassin – Khalil – El Shafie 1984) and several papers dealing with various geological aspects of the broader area (namely the adjacent area of the Sabaloka granitic intrusion (Küster *et al.* 2008; Shang *et al.* 2010; Lisá *et al.* 2012).

Although part of the area is built-up and most of its surface is covered by gravel or sandy alluvium, there are numerous small outcrops that give a good image of local geology. Two principal geological units crop out here: [1] the basement complex of granitic intrusions (part of the "Gneiss Group") and [2] younger basal conglomerates of the Omdurman Formation (formerly referred as the Nubian Sandstone Formation). The basement is represented by coarse-grained granitoids with associated dykes (aplites, pegmatites, microgranites and microdiorites) of Neoproterozoic age (radiometric data are available from other localities [Küster *et al.* 2008; Shang *et al.* 2010]). It is overlain by horizontally bedded coarse-grained polymictic conglomerates with a majority of well-rounded quartz pebbles up to 4 cm in diameter. Other clasts represented by lithic fragments of dark-coloured fine-grained rocks occur less frequently. These conglomerates belong to the basal part of the Omdurman Formation that is probably of Cretaceous age, which may be supported by finds of fossilized trees in the area.

Local material can scarcely be found in the foundations of ancient buildings; however, it was apparently unsuitable for fine works. Columns, statues or altars found at the site were in fact made of medium to coarse grained sandstones from stratigraphically higher levels of the Omdurman Formation, which do not occur in the surroundings but had to be imported from distant sources. It appears for this reason that the majority of the buildings were built of bricks. One possible source of the stone lies approximately 20 km south-east of Wad Ben Naga in the vicinity of the ancient settlements of Naga and Musawwarat es-Sufra. Horizontally bedded sandstones and associated sediments of the Omdurman Formation form prominent extensive mesas there.

4 Site Management

The site management focused mainly on the yearly procedures concerning the protection of an archaeological site, which lies in proximity to a modern settlement, and the preparation of the site to be added to the serial cultural property of the *Archaeological Sites of the Island of Meroe* on the UNESCO World Heritage List.

4.1 Inspection of the sites of Wad Ben Naga and Idd el-Baggar

At the beginning of the season, an annual inspection of the site was carried out. Its results were to the satisfaction of both the National Corporation for Antiquities and Museums and to the Archaeological Expedition to Wad Ben Naga, as no illegal activities were recorded at the site. The only harm to the antiquities detected so far was

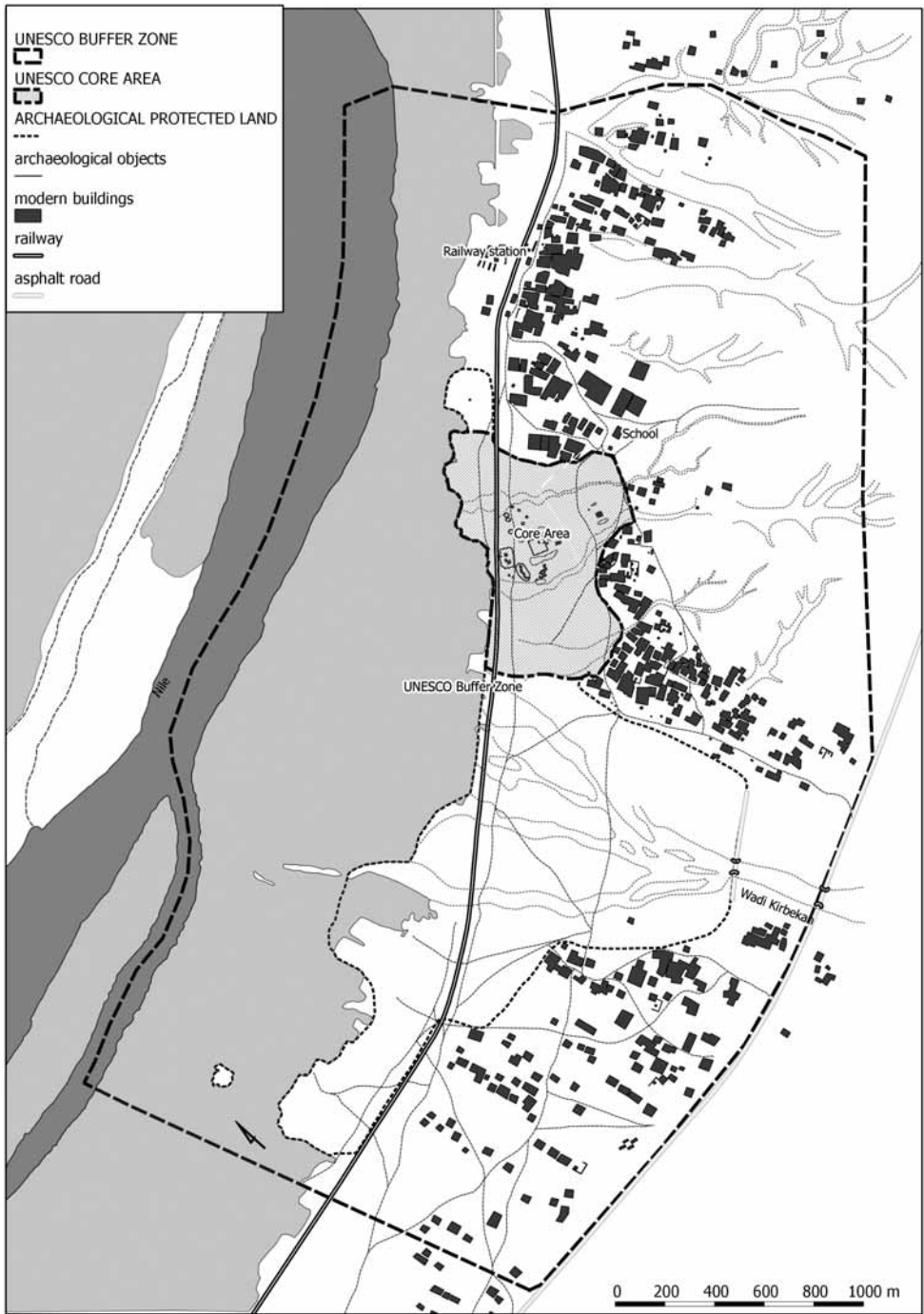


Fig. 5: Proposed protected areas in Wad Ben Naga (Illustration by Vlastimil Vrtal – Pavel Onderka).

the intentional damage to the conservations done to the walls in *Room 127*. In this context, the Expedition tried to encourage the ghaafir of the site, to intensify his inspections.

In the course of the excavation season, reports were filed with the National Corporation for Antiquities and Museums concerning digging activities in the vicinity of the archaeological protected land at Wad Ben Naga behind the main road connecting Khartoum and Shendi. On 31 October 2012, the area was inspected by Mohamed Saad Abdalla Saad who did not find any damage or loss to the cemeteries located there. The expedition visited the site thereafter as part of the geological survey of the general area of Wad Ben Naga. Some superstructures of (most likely) post-Meroitic tombs appear to have been used as a source of building material.

4.2 Implementation of the UNESCO's decision and recommendations (Fig. 5)

Within its decision 35 COM 8B.22, the UNESCO's World Heritage Committee inscribed the *Archaeological Sites of the Island of Meroe*, Sudan, on the World Heritage List on the basis of criteria (ii), (iii), (iv) and (v), while recommending that the State Party "consider, in the future, the addition of other important sites in the region to the property to give a complete vision of the 'Island of Meroe' during Meroitic times".

Within the Evaluation of Nominations of Cultural and Mixed Properties to the World Heritage List, or more precisely in the ICOMOS Report for the World Heritage Committee at its 35th ordinary session of June 2011 (WHC-11/35.COM/INF.8B1), ICOMOS presented in its comparative analyses objections to the selection of sites to be included within the serial property. The site of Wad Ben Naga is explicitly mentioned as a site to be added to the property.

The Expedition has prepared the map of the archaeological site with three different zones indicated – the already existing archaeological protected land and two UNESCO zones – the core area and the buffer zone. The Expedition has recently worked on the functional definition of the buffer zone. The material shall be evaluated with the NCAM and the relevant local administration in the course of 2013.

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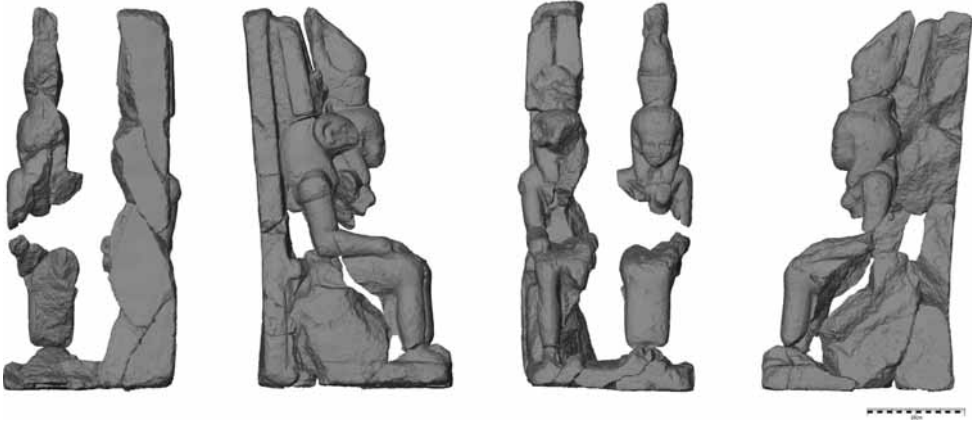
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Pl. 1: View on the remains of the pylon in square T7 (Photo by Vlastimil Vrtal).



Pl. 2: Fragment of an architrave with the sun disc (Illustration by Alexander Gatzsche).



Pl. 3: 3D reconstruction of the dyad statue of Amun and Mut (Illustration by Alexander Gatzsche).



Pl. 4: The lion's head-shaped gargoyle (Illustration by Alexander Gatzsche).



Pl. 5: A slot with plaster from the main sanctuary area (Photo by Alexander Gatzsche).



Pl. 6: Eastern wall of the main sanctuary with remains of plaster (Photo by Pavel Onderka).



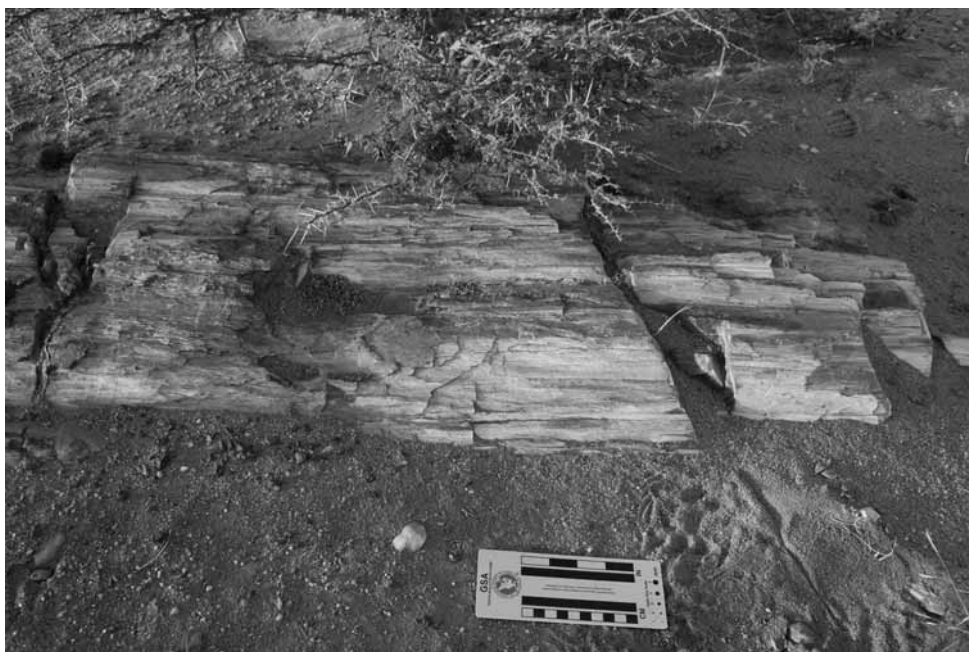
Pl. 7: Example of the fine ware (Photo by Alexander Gatzsche).



Pl. 8: View on the southern part of the Palace of Amanishakheto (Photo by Pavel Onderka).



Pl. 9: Typical example of a small-scale outcrop of mafic dykes and granites
(N 16° 30,858' E 033° 06,887') (Photo by Jiřina Dařková).



Pl. 10: Fossilised trunk from the basal conglomerates of the Omdurman Formation
(N 16° 30,418' E 033° 07,555') (Photo by Jiřina Dařková).