

Report of the Survey in the Wadi Abu Dom, 24.2.-16.3.2009

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2. Proposed work

The aim of this first campaign in the Wadi Abu Dom was to become acquainted with the density and diversity of sites in the area. Therefore we planned to investigate a region at the end of the Wadi Abu Dom, starting from about 31°53'50"E, and hoping to get beyond Ghazali, situated at 31°55'50"E. The northern and southern limits of our survey were calculated about 2-3km on either side of the banks of the Wadi.

The scientific aim of the preliminary campaign was to get knowledge of the hinterland of Napata, the center of the Napatan Period, with the sites at Sanam and Nuri on the left bank of the Nile and Jebel Barkal and El Kurru on the right bank. We hoped to find visible remains of Napatan or Meroitic activity, which would suggest the importance of the Wadi for food supply as well as the trade route to Meroe.

3. Realized work

Being 15 days in the field, we surveyed intensively an area of about 35 km². We started at 18°27'00"N / 31°53'50"E and ended at 18°25'50"N / 31°56'30"E, which is about 1,5 km behind Ghazali. We covered also the areas about 2-3km (depending on the condition of the region) north and south of the Wadi itself.

We discovered 106 sites. Some were cemeteries with diverse features. Some were single burials or shelters (listed below). The datation was done according to surface finds because we agreed to make no excavation in this preliminary campaign. Thus, the many of the datations given in the site list will probably be changed by excavations. We collected some surface finds to establish a sample collection for further works (listed below).

Twice we made a tour to already known sites deeper in the Wadi Abu Dom, namely Umm Ruweim, Quweib, Beida, Umm Kharfour and Khala. These journeys should help us to estimate the work and complexity of sites for future campaigns. We collected sherds for a small sample collection from the surface of all of these sites.

4. Results

- a. The Wadi Abu Dom was a region of intensive activity in both ancient and medieval times. The green landscape of the Wadi supported an amazing number of people, especially in medieval times.. A townsite, several camp sites, as well as numerous cemeteries near the well-known monastery of Ghazali attest to its great fertility in the Christian Period. These remains are centered in the area of between 18°26'31"N / 31°55'47"E and 18°26'06,2"N / 31°56'02"E. West and East of this Christian center we found numerous remains of the so-called Kerma-culture, represented in this concession as stone tumuli and cleft burials with sherds of Kerma domestic ware. Near these features were also tumuli which may be dated to the Post-Meroitic period, but in this case the evidence is not very clear. Especially at the western end of our survey there were traces of Neolithic activity, but this period is less visible east of Ghazali. On the ridges of the surrounding mountains we identified several Palaeolithic workshops. Tools such as bifacial artefacts, blades and many flakes were made in abundance, and we collected samples of each type.
- b. Up to now, Napatan or Meroitic remains are lacking. It might be the result of the decision to exclude excavation in this stage of the project. If in the period of the Kingdom of Kush the area was as fertile as in medieval times, we can expect ancient remains below the Christian settlement sites. But we were surprised not to find any funerary structure or even sherds of this date, so the continuity of occupation has to be proved. We especially wish to prove the assumed trade route between Napata and Meroe, which is usually identified with the Wadi Abu Dom.
- c. In comparison to the results of the surveys of the 4th cataract, the small number of rock pictures is noteworthy. The landscape with its flat rock boulders reminds us very much of the landscape of the 4th cataract, where numerous rock engravings were noted. In the Wadi Abu Dom there are only two outcrop-features where rock art was intensively used (sites 29 and 31), both at the southern bank of the Wadi. There are single rock pictures on very few other rocks, but all of them are in the area around Site 29. Two single rocks are covered with Christian symbols and inscriptions (site 40, 42), and these are situated at the footpath to Ghazali (1,5 km south of the Wadi).
- d. Apart from surveying the overall area, we also followed the visible footpaths. These are in use today, as we saw donkeys and camels with riders using them.. But it seems that the same paths were in use also in ancient times, since significant amounts of sherds are concentrated exactly along these tracks. Also the small number of rock pictures and graffiti are beside the paths, as well as the numerous tethering stones we identified. It would be worth studying the continuity of the road network of this area.
- e. We mentioned that the distribution of sites varies between the north and the south bank of the Wadi. Most of the sites are situated on the southern bank, and even the paths and features in the hinterland of the southern bank are more numerous than on the northern bank. For example, the townsite and the cemeteries of Ghazali are on the south bank, whereas opposite this site only (seasonal?) camp sites were identified. This pattern may be a result of the flooding of the Wadi and the accumulation/erosion of sediments, but this has to be investigated.

As examples of the diversity of sites we present here some different types with figures:

Site 13 (see fig. 1-4): Hills of bedrock outcrop, approx. 12m high, on the south bank of the Wadi, nearly 4 km west of Ghazali. Around and on the hills 15 tumuli of Kerma and probably Post-Meroitic date. Between the rocks of the hills several cleft burials and possible shelters. The pottery found in the rocky area dates to the Kerma as well as Post-Meroitic period.

Site 29 (see figs.5-7): One outcrop hill directly at the south bank of the Wadi, 1,5 km west of Ghazali. On the hill stone architecture, maybe of Medieval age (only very few sherds were found). In the rocks numerous rock pictures, mostly cattle, as well as an extended rock gong with at least ten different sounds.

Site 73 (see fig. 8): South bank of the Wadi, ca. 1,5km west of Ghazali. Outcrop hill with at least four shelters, pottery of Medieval age. The situation of simple shelters in the rocks near the center of Ghazali leads to the assumption that there might have been different patterns of subsistence (pastoral, hunting?). It should also be considered that the shelters may have been used by patrolling guards.

Site 30 (see figs. 9-10): On the south bank of the Wadi, directly south to Site 29. Palaeolithic workshop. Different types of palaeolithic tools.

Site 58 (see figs. 11-14): On the north bank of the Wadi, opposite of Ghazali. Quarry of millstones with at least four millstones in different stages of preparation. The suggested date of Medieval time is based on some sherds found in the quarry. To find four mill stones (1,3 m in diameter) of hard stone let us suggest that the region of Ghazali functioned as center of supply for the area.

5. Proposal for future activities (5 years)

- a. After this preliminary campaign we plan to follow the Wadi Abu Dom, surveying intensively within the same parameters as we did in the first part. From now on the survey should include some sondages or trial excavations to establish the chronology of the human activity in the Wadi.
- b. To investigate the route between Napata and Meroe, trial excavations at some specific features would be helpful. We propose to make sondages especially at Umm Ruweim1, which seems to be a very important tradepoint in Medieval times. Since the site is situated at an anglepoint of roads and in the distance of a day-trip to Napata, we expect to find traces of activity in Napatan/Meroitic times at least at that site. In contrast to the notes of Chittick, who reported rough Meroitic sherds, we identified only Post-Meroitic and Medieval pottery.
- c. We plan to make sondages at foot paths, too, to investigate the continuity of the road network from ancient times up to now. It might be helpful to interview the recent inhabitants of the area according to their moves on the paths.
- d. To investigate the social complexity of the area of Ghazali, we would propose making a trial excavation in one of the camp sites on the north bank of the Wadi, opposite the known town site of Ghazali. As the surface finds on these camp sites are all of Medieval date, it would be useful to

know if these camp sites really date to this period or if the numerous sherds were spread over the abandoned site. In case the camp site is also of Medieval date, an investigation of the different patterns of habitation sites (town/camp site), possible economic background (industrial/pastoral) and religious beliefs (Christian/Pagan) in this restricted area would be fruitful.

6. Endangered sites

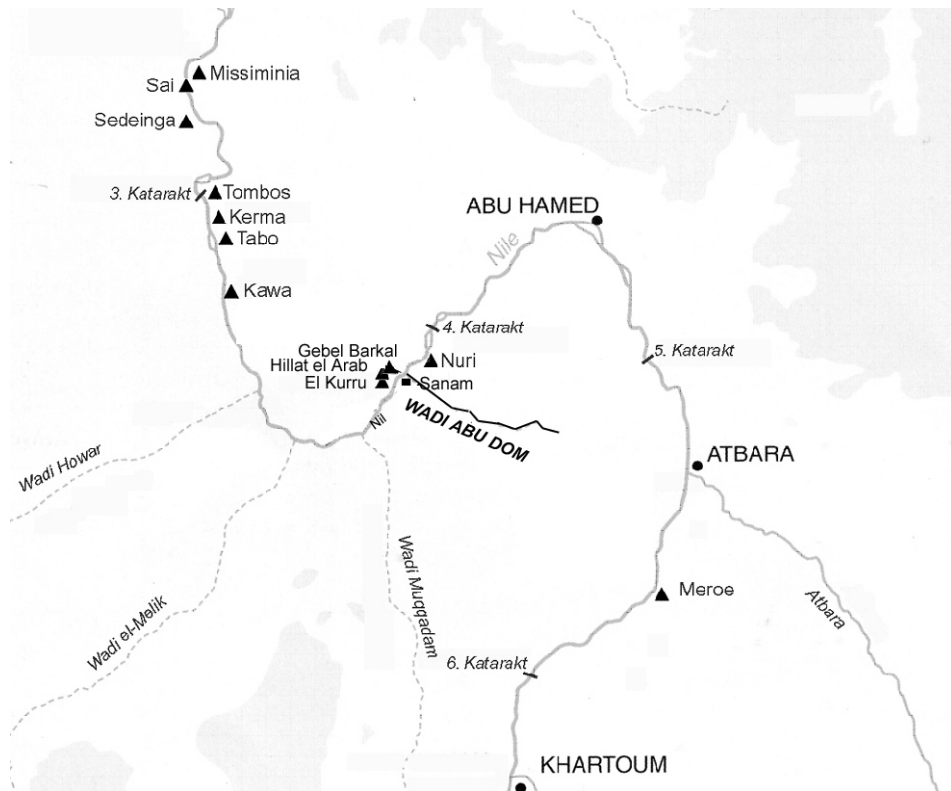
We have to point out that most of the recognised tumuli seemed to be plundered, maybe already in ancient times. In three instances the damages look very recent.:

- a. Site 13, tumuli of Kerma (18°27'03"N b/ 31°54'08"E): In the SW of the site tracks of a truck led directly to a tumulus, it seems that stones of the grave were transported. This is alarming, since the tumulus next to that one seems to be intact.
- b. Khala (18°25'01"N / 31°58'29"E): Post-Meroitic tumuli, two of them seemed to be opened more or less recently. At the top of one sherds of smashed pottery were collected by us..
- c. Cemetery east of Quweib (18°24'18,5" / 32°03'24,6"): Post-Meroitic tumuli, one opened very recently, smashed pottery near the hole and inside (collected by us).

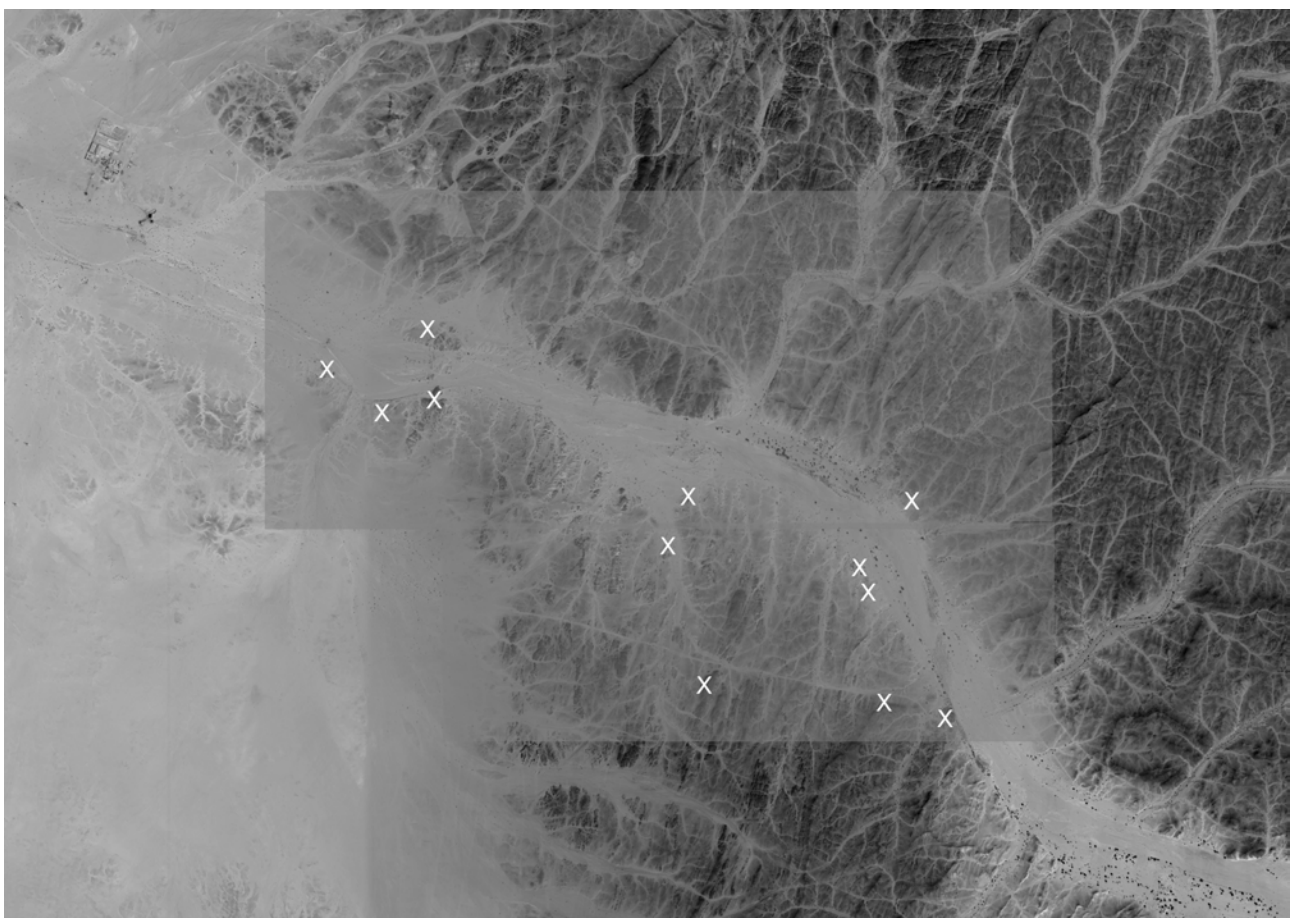
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Map 1: Location of Wadi Abu Dom in Northern Sudan



Map 2: Survey Area (grey) and most important sites (X)



Fig. 1: Feature 30 of site 13, tumulus at the bottom of hill.

Fig. 2: Feature 32 of Site 13, Cleft burial in the rocky area



Fig. 3: Kerma sherd (at Cleft burial, Ft. 18 of Site 13)

Fig. 4: Post-Meroitic (?) sherds (at a path in the rocky area of site 13)



Fig. 5: Site 29, stone architecture at the top, rock pictures on the hill.



Fig. 6+7: Site 29, Rock pictures of various cows.



Fig. 8: Site 73, Shelter 2.



Fig. 9: Site 30, palaeolithic blades (dorsal and ventral)



Fig. 10: Site 30, Palaeolithic bifacial artefacts (both sides)

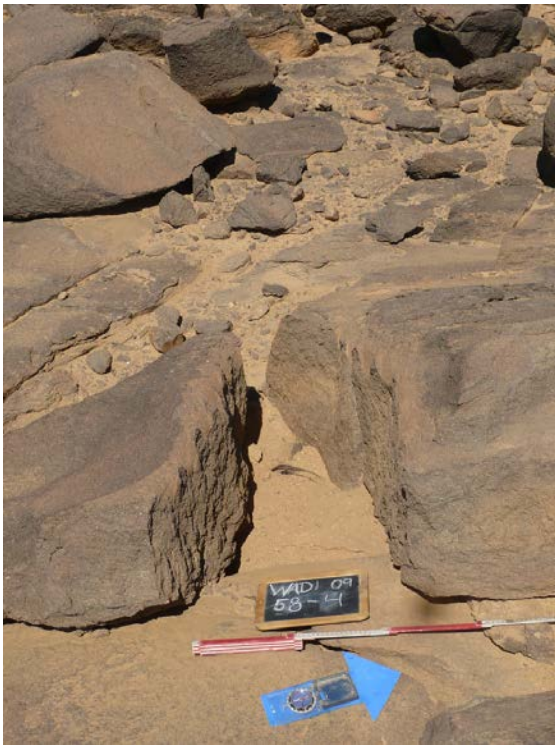


Fig. 11-14: Site 58, four stages in the production of mill stones