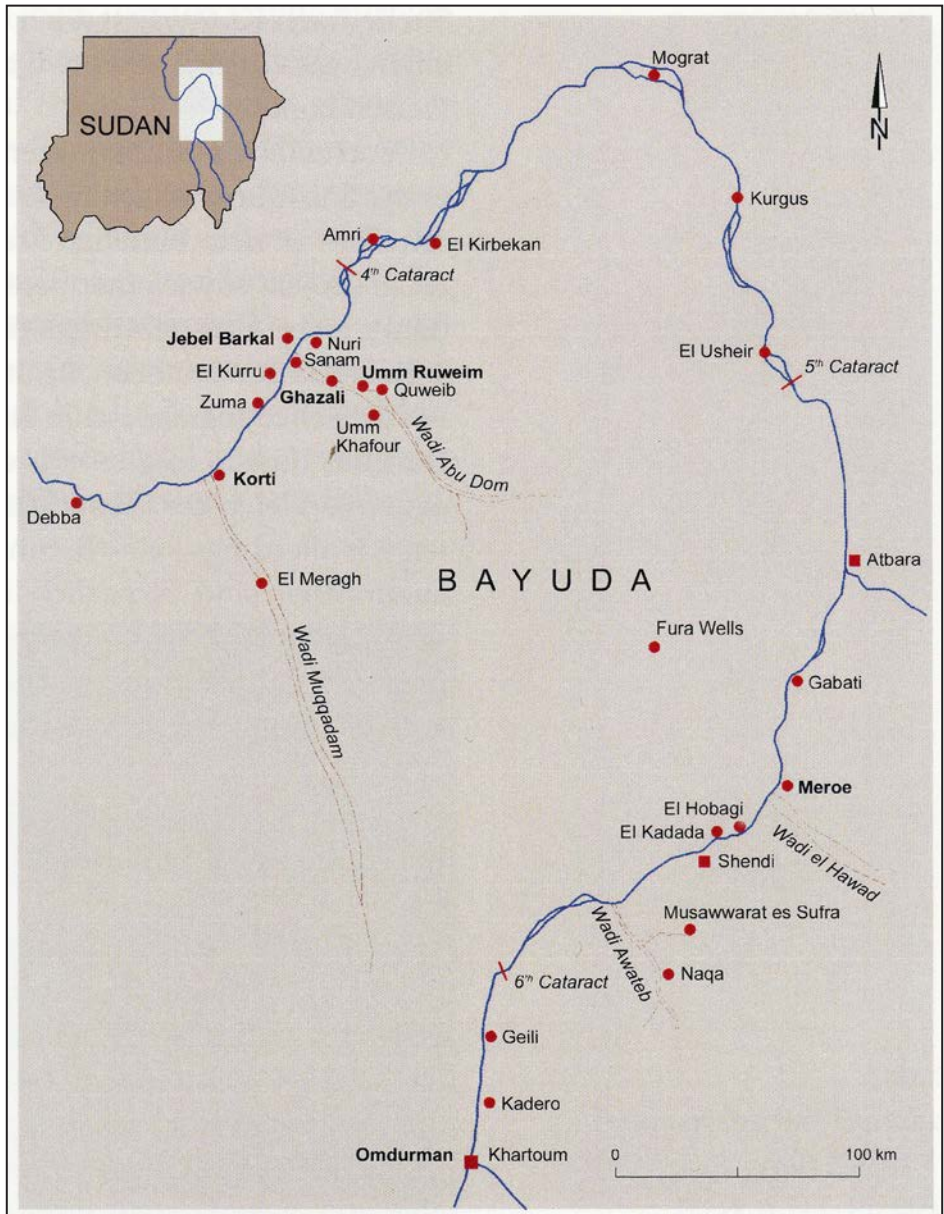


# Wadi Abu Dom and its archaeological sites





Map of the Bayuda

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[www.wadi-abu-dom.de](http://www.wadi-abu-dom.de)

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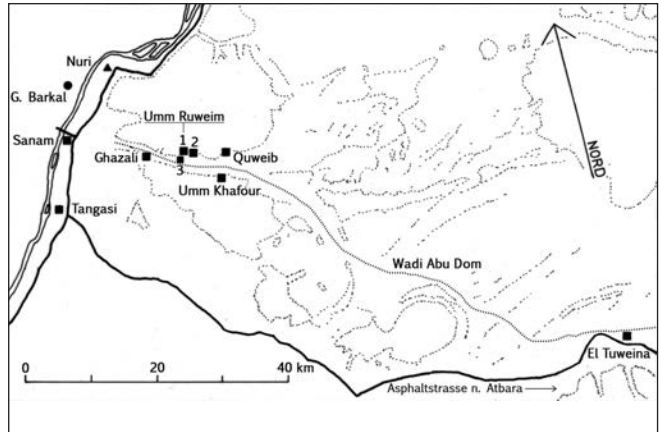
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## The Wadi Abu Dom

The extensive desert enclosed by the Great Bend of the Nile, between the city of Omdurman and the town of Korti in Sudan, is called the Bayuda. The landscape includes rocky areas, sandy plateaus and broad wadis, which conduct seasonal rainfall to the Nile, the most important being, from west to east, the Wadi Muqqadam and the Wadi Abu Dom.

The source of the Wadi Abu Dom, subject of this guide, is in the center of the Bayuda. In its winding course, several small channels join the broader khor (wadi that joins the Nile), which leads to a mouth near the city of Merawi. In the upper part of the wadi, the landscape is quite arid and the water table is far below the surface.



Map of the Wadi Abu Dom

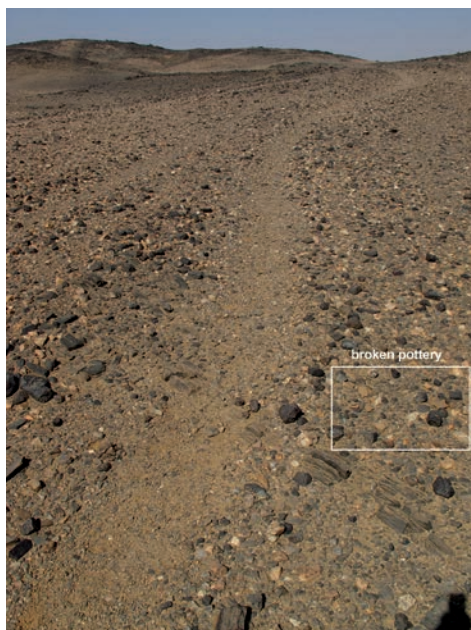
There, modern inhabitants live mainly as pastoralists. Closer to Merawi, especially near the ruins of Umm Ruweim, Umm Khafour, and the monastery of Ghazali, the water table is much higher, permitting fields to be irrigated from wells and settlement in these small oases by farmers. In addition to the permanent residents of the Bayuda, both pastoralists and farmers, there are more transient groups of nomads or semi-nomads who live in seasonal campsites and use the wadis of the Bayuda to pasture their camels.



The landscape of the Wadi Abu Dom near Umm Ruweim

At present, our knowledge of past climate and subsistence in the Bayuda is quite little. However, some archaeological remains give some hint of past conditions. Remains of camp sites and ephemeral shelters indicate that land usage did not differ very much in the past from the present. Now, the two groups of people inhabiting the Wadi Abu Dom, farmers and pastoralists interact, but live separately from each other. However, since the various sites of huts and camps have not yet been dated in detail, this assumption could easily change.

The wadi also serves as a route for movement. Toward the south, there is a modern asphalt road, and there are indications that it follows an ancient trade route. There is also a network of paths which overlay the rocky desert, leading from Wadi Abu Dom north and south and providing shortcuts between khors that branch from the main wadi. These pathways are even visible in satellite images, such as Google Earth. If nomads crossed the Bayuda in the past as they do today, it is likely that they used the Wadi Abu Dom as a major route. The sometimes sparse and sometimes rather abundant vegetation is a clear marker and there is a sufficient water supply. The Bayuda may be a desert, but the Wadi Abu Dom is a green oasis where the logistics of travel, or at least survival on a journey, are relatively easy.



Pathways, used in antiquity and today



Sidekhor and Hinterland

## Traces of the past

Since 2009, the Wadi Abu Dom Itinerary (W.A.D.I.) Project has been conducting a survey to map all pre-Islamic remains on both banks of the wadi. We have identified numerous sites, mostly very small, consisting of single burials, shelters, or camps ranging in date from the Paleolithic to the Medieval Period. At least two Paleolithic sites may be identified as workshops for tools. In fact, artefacts like blades, dated to 200,000–40,000 BP were so plentiful and densely concentrated on the outcrops that we can interpret the sites as remains of a concentrated production process. The Neolithic phase (5th–3rd millennium BCE), is represented by sherds and lithic artefacts, including one stone axe. It was found mostly on higher ground than remains of later periods.



Neolithic material (axe, pottery and lithic)

Kerma remains (2500–1500 BCE) consisted of tumuli located on top of the ridges, dated by sherds found with them. These were conical mounds that consisted of stones varying roughly in size from about 10–25 cm in diameter. Unlike Kerma graves elsewhere, these were quite poor, with grave goods consisting only of pottery up to now.



Kerma tumulus and Kerma Sherd

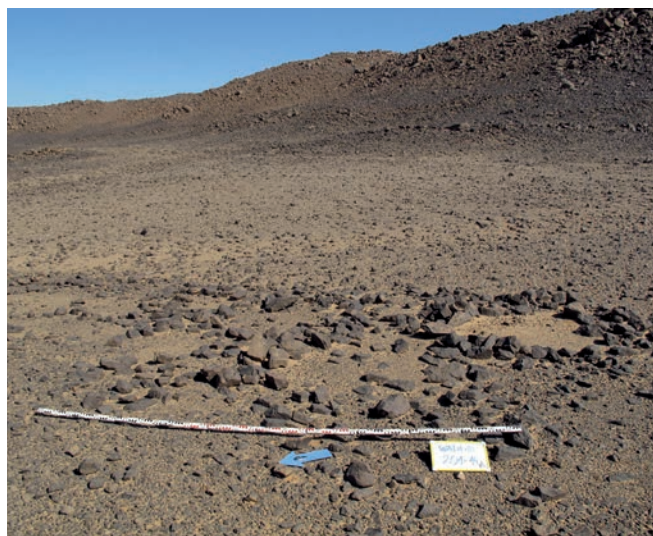


The next phase of datable remains are Post-Meroitic, 350–550 CE, and these, too, were tumuli. The Post-Meroitic tumuli were located in the plain and were relatively flat, consisting mostly of a ring of stones surrounding a center of finer material. These graves, too, were poor, with only pottery as grave goods left. The largest cemeteries were tumulus-fields at el-Beida east of Quweib and beside the ruins of Umm Ruweim, described below. The ruined buildings and largest cemeteries in the area show that the oasis was the most fertile and densely populated area in the wadi, as it is today, although the ancient inhabitants were as poor as the modern ones.

The most important remains in the western part of the Wadi Abu Dom date to the Medieval Period (6th–14th centuries CE). These include the monastery of Ghazali, several cemeteries of Christian box graves (rectangular graves with rough stone superstructures), hut structures, campsites, fireplaces, and small shelters. Apart from Ghazali, the sites are difficult to date



Post-Meroitic tumulus



Hut-structures

because there are only a few pottery sherds and the Christian graves contained only the burials. Nevertheless, the evidence points to a small, rural, poor community living in the Wadi Abu Dom.

The most impressive structures in the Wadi Abu Dom are the monastery of Ghazali and the buildings of Umm Ruweim, Quweib, and Umm Khafour, which will be detailed in the following chapters.

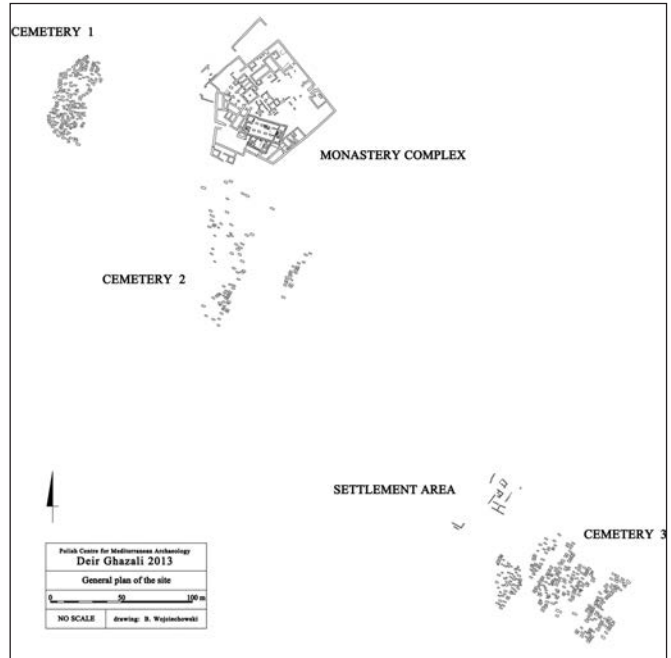
## The church and monastery of Ghazali

The monastery of Ghazali is a site of the utmost importance for the history of Sudan, but also for the economy as one of the most spectacular tourist destinations in the country. Its size, some 86 by 75 meters, is comparable to that of the monastery of St. Catherine in Sinai. In the Nineteenth Century, it was visited by all of the well-known travelers, such as Louis Maurice Adolphe Linant de Bellefonds and John Gardner Wilkinson, but also the great scholar Richard Lepsius. In the Twen-

tieth Century the scholar of Christian Nubia, Ugo Monneret de Villard who visited there suggested that Ghazali could have been the scene where dramatic events recorded by



Church of Ghazali



Plan of the areal of Ghazali

the Arab historian al-Mukarrim took place. He reported the story that Solomon, king of the Nubian state of Makuria in the Eleventh Century decided to abdicate and spend the rest of his life as a monk. When news of this reached Badr al-Jamali, wazir of Fatimid Egypt and one of the most powerful people of the Middle Ages, he





Clearing in the monastery (south of the church)

resolved to kidnap Solomon and take him to Egypt. During the next year, the wazir visited the ex-king often to discuss spiritual matters. After a year, Solomon died and was buried in a monastery on the outskirts of Cairo.

Except for the churches, the monastery was built almost entirely of the local ferrocrete sandstone. Although excavated partly in the 1950's, much remains to be discovered about the monastery. For example, the only monastic building identified so far is the refectory located in the north-

western group of buildings. The main church of the monastery (katholikon) has been dated by C14 to the second half of the Seventh Century CE. Well-cut sandstone blocks were used for the lower part of the walls, and baked brick for the upper, while the floors had tiles of sandstone, marble, granite, and terra-cotta. The walls were covered with lime plaster, as was the floor, a paving which covered the entire building except the sanctuary and possibly the northwestern room. The walls had painted decoration, which survives only in the northeastern room and the central western bay.

Excavations at Ghazali have recently been reopened by a Polish-Sudanese expedition which has discovered a second, later, church adjacent to the katholikon. Although made of mudbrick, it possesses all of the features of the typical Nubian church mentioned above. By analogies to other churches, and by C14 dating, it can be assigned to the Tenth or Eleventh Century.

The epigraphic finds make it one of the richest Nubian sites for written material. 159 inscribed tombstones and over a hundred wall inscriptions have been found in addition to about 200 inscriptions on pottery.

In addition to the monastery, Ghazali has large mounds of slag, a settlement, and cemeteries that attest to its importance as an industrial site in the Christian Period.

Ghazali was first excavated by the Sudan Antiquities Service under the direction of Peter Shinnie and with the participation of Neville Chittick and Nigm ed-Din Sherif in the 1950's. The renewed excavations, directed by Dr. Artur Obluski, have been sponsored by the Polish Center for Mediterranean Archaeology and the National Corporation for Antiquities and Museums.

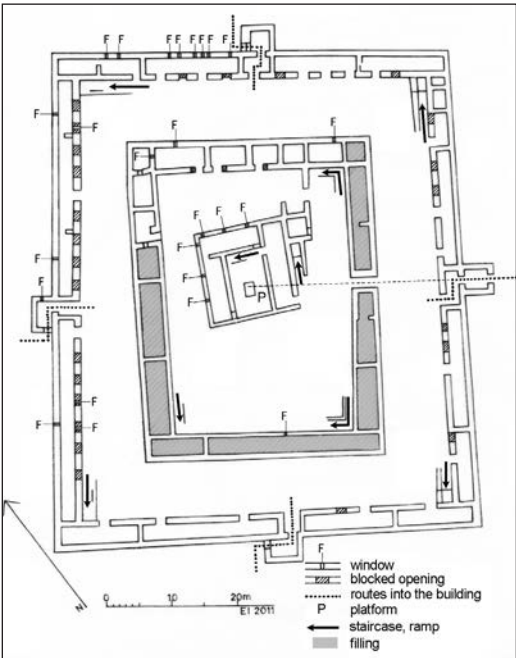


Graffito of Jesus

# The buildings of Umm Ruweim



Umm Ruweim 1 (aerial photo © Paner)



Plan of Umm Ruweim 1

The rectangular walled complex at Umm Ruweim (Umm Ruweim 1) consists of a double enclosure with partitions to make rooms and a central building. The structure is built of dry-stone masonry, with joints and gaps filled by stones and clay, but no mortar. This dry stone masonry probably supported brick walling above, since a few mudbricks were found and the stone debris is too sparse to come from walls of a reasonable height. Each side of the complex has an entrance with an L-shaped passageway, with the main entrance to the east. The north, west, and south entrances were subsequently blocked. There are staircases in each corner of the outer enclosure, and staircases or ramps are in three corners of the courtyard, and there is one in the central building. The structures



Window in the wall of the enclosure

are not entirely visible at present, since they are covered by sand and debris. Although the courtyard appears empty, magnetometer and ground-penetrating radar (GPR) show anomalies that can be interpreted as pits. One of these in the southern courtyard is surrounded by a circular structure, perhaps a flat ring of bricks surrounding a planter.

The central building is oriented differently from the main enclosure. The structure is square, some 14 m x 14 m with a staircase and small room added to the eastern side. In

its central court is a massive cuboid platform of stones. It could be a throne base or altar, but without direct evidence, it is difficult to interpret.

The rooms in both enclosures were about 2.2 m wide, but the lengths are very different, one in the outer western enclosure being 30 m long. The rooms were modified from time to time, with some internal partitions; others had their doorways blocked. All of the rooms in the inner enclosure except those to the north were later filled in to construct an elevated terrace. A test excavation (sondage) showed that at least one window was blocked and the fill of the rooms consisted of sand and gravel.

Many doorways were located in various parts of the building, some of them later blocked with dry-stone masonry. In addition, every wall had irregularly-spaced small openings that could provide ventilation and some light. Their irregularity indicates that they were not holes for scaffolding.

The inner wall of the inner enclosure was plastered on both sides; at least the northern face of the wall had two plastering, the original and a restoration plastering.

C14 dates from charcoal indicate a date between 240 and 330 CE, thus dating the structure to the late Meroitic or early Post-Meroitic Period. Sherds from test excavations confirm this date, but only for Umm Ruweim 1, the other ruins remaining undated.



Staircase in the inner enclosure

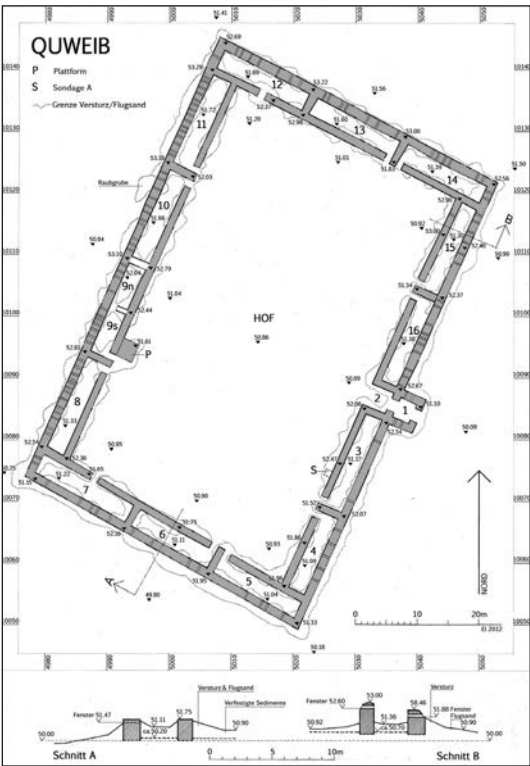


# The buildings of Quweib and Umm Khafour

Quweib is a rectangular structure, measuring some 50x80 m, located about 6 km east of Umm Ruweim. The building consists of 16 rooms arranged as a rectangular enclosure around an open courtyard with a platform in the center of the western wall and an entrance in the east side. Limited exploration indicates that the platform is built of



The structure of Quweib (aerial photo © Zurawski)



Plan of Quweib

massive stones. Like the platform at Umm Ruweim, its function is unclear, as is the function of the building generally.

The masonry and certain features of design, such as the platform, resemble Umm Ruweim 1 closely enough that Quweib looks like a simplified version of it, although traces of mudbricks are lacking, as are staircases or ramps. However, like Umm Ruweim 1 there are several windows in the walls, those in the outer wall located about 1–1.5 m above the original floor, looking out of the building. Windows in the inner wall were about 2 m above the original floor indicating that they were intended to block the view of the courtyard.

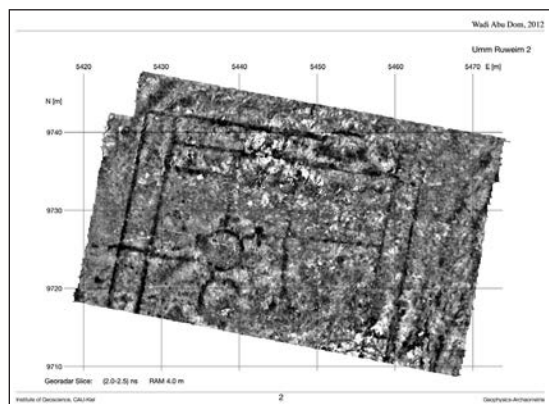
The structure of Umm Khafour is situated on the south bank of the wadi. It consists of a square enclosure with entrances on the east and west. Magnetometer and GPR tests yielded some very weak anomalies indicating

remains of rectangular mud-brick walls below the surface. A small cemetery with rectangular Christian superstructures (box graves) in front of one entrance shows that the enclosure ceased to be used by Medieval times.

The interpretation of all of these ruins is far from clear. It seems that a funerary function can be excluded, since no burial ground except some box graves are located in the vicinity. Also to be excluded is a military function, since there is no evidence for fortification or defense elements. On the contrary, there is a disadvantage in the topographical situation, since the ruins are located close to hills which can hide enemies easily and allow them a covered advance to positions quite close to the buildings or the use of long-range weapons from the elevated terrain. Another possibility is an economic function, but there are neither big storerooms like in the treasury in Sanam, nor an adequate means of access. No large animal can enter the enclosures because of the narrow L-shaped entrances. Of course it is possible that only people entered the enclosures, but even then the few and narrow rooms are not suitable for a store building.



Umm Khafour



Plan with the results of soundings of Umm Khafour

None of the structures looks like a palace, as far as we can compare them with Egyptian and Kushite ones. There are some elements which we know from Meroitic architecture, like elevated terraces and ramps, but the complex as a whole does not look Meroitic. In fact, we may have to deal with the architectural manifestation of another independent culture; but we will have to wait for the excavations to obtain a greater insight. The same is true for the interpretation as religious complexes. The structures do not look

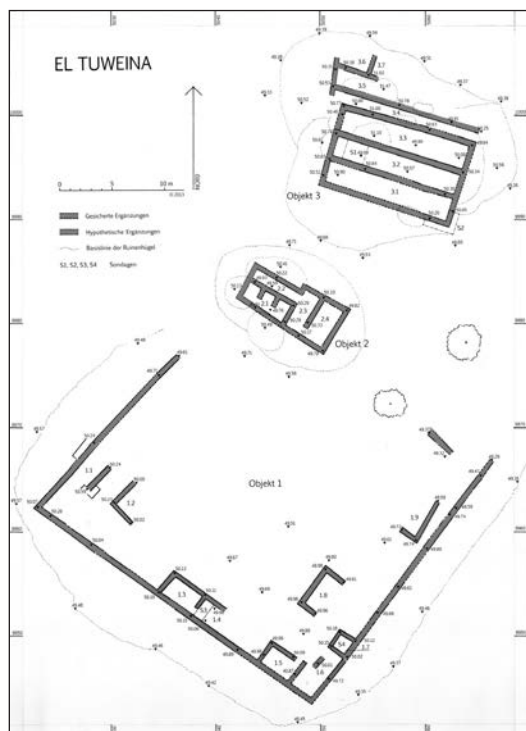
like temples, although there are some elements which are known from the heartland of Meroe. There are several indications that at least Umm Ruweim I had a ritual function – if in connection with a natural or supernatural authority is difficult to say. The same may be true for Quweib, where an altar and the eastern entrance have ritual connotation. Also the different levels of the windows can hint to this interpretation. But these are only hypotheses and we will have to wait for the excavations to solve this problem.

## The ruins of el Tuweina

In 2012, the W.A.D.I. team discovered a ruined structure that had not been previously documented, and named it after the nearby well of el-Tuweina. The site has three buildings, a rectangular hosh (enclosure) with an open courtyard and some single rooms built against the wall and two nearby buildings with long, narrow rooms.



El Tuweina



Plan of El Tuweina

In this location, there are no traces of the wadi oasis like that found in the lower Wadi Abu Dom, el-Tuweina was probably a center for more nomadic and pastoral people

Despite differences in layout and masonry, C14 dates from charcoal indicate a date in the Late Meroitic Period, most probably around 230 CE.

The larger hosh closely resembles other Late or Post-Meroitic elite settlement buildings, but the other two remain enigmatic. They may have been storage structures, with long, narrow, windowless rooms that lack any evidence of entrances, perhaps entered from above. Whatever their purpose, the existence of such buildings proves that the complex society of late antiquity with its wealthy elite could construct large and prestigious quarters remote from the comparatively fertile lower Wadi Abu Dom and the Nile.





The church and monastery of Ghazali



Landscape near the Wadi Abu Dom



The Wadi Abu Dom is one of the largest valleys in the desert called Bayuda in the north of the Sudan. In its more fertile sectors, some considerable archaeological sites are visible, among them the monastery of Ghazali and the structure of Umm Ruweim. This small guide gives an insight into this antique landscape.



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