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EXCAVATIONS ON TWO KERMA HORIZON CEMETERIES IN EL-GAMAMIYA

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Survey and testing in the El-Gamamiya district on the Fourth Cataract continued for another season (see above, report by M. Chłodnicki *et alii* in this volume), including sites like a Christian church (GM101) and a rock art gallery with images of common longhorn cattle as well as a “pastoral parade” and hunting scenes (GM67). The main

focus, however, was on numerous cemeteries composed of small stone cairns and tumuli, located on the summits of rocky hills near river terraces. They have been identified tentatively as Kerma horizon in terms of chronological and cultural provenience. Two of these cemeteries were excavated in order to clarify their chronology and character.¹

EL-GAMAMIYA 55

Numerous small stone tumuli were recorded on the slope and summit of a hill near the river terrace. Many graves bore traces of modern looting since the place is used nowadays as a stand for a huge water tank located between the houses. Fieldwalking determined the most eroded areas of the site to be on the southwestern slope where fragments of cream-colored wheel-made ceramics, obviously imported, were recorded.

Excavations concentrated on a place at the top of the hill, where four burials were visible on the surface. A layer 0.20 m thick of surface soil was removed from a square 10 by 10 m big. Altogether 12 graves were revealed [*Figs 2, 3*]: five female burials, both adult and juvenile (T.1, T.2, T.3, T.4, T.10), two that

may have been male burials (T.8, T.11) and the remaining five identified as children's burials (T.5, T.6, T.7?, T.9, T.12?).

The female burials formed a separate kind of grave consisting of a shallow chamber approximately half a meter deep, roughly square in shape, the sides revetted with big stones and the entrances blocked with slabs laid flat. The mound above the burial chamber was formed of cobbles and covered with a coat of quartz gravel, presumably also a mix of color pebbles — red, black, yellow and white — preserved in the lower part. Small black slabs ran around the mound, lining the sides up to 15 cm above ground surface (similar but not identical with the FT02f type in the Borowski and Welsby

1 The excavations were carried out between 22 November and 4 December 2007 under the direction of the author with team members: Marta Osypińska, archaeozoologist, field assistant; Dobiesława Bagińska, ceramologist; Musa El-Fadul Abdalla El-Tayeb, NCAM inspector.

classification, unpublished version of November 2009). The furnishings included numerous pottery vessels (for a catalogue of finds by graves, see following report by D. Bagińska with appendix on imported wares), as well as a bone pin [Fig. 1:a] made from a gazelle bone (identification by archaeozoologist M. Osypińska),² a copper knife or razor [Fig. 1:d] and faience-bead bracelets.

The next type of grave (T.8, T.11) was deeper, the oblong chamber reaching to a depth of 0.70 m. The dead, probably

men, were equipped with very few vessels, including imported ones. The blockages were made of heavy stones. The superstructure was a simple stone cairn smaller than the mound of the first kind of tombs (FC01b according to Borcowski and Welsby, 2009).

The child burials (T.5, T.6, T.7?, T.9, T.12?) were naturally the smallest of all the graves. The round chambers were cut approximately 0.60 m deep and the walls were sometimes revetted with stones. The blocking comprised slabs laid flat and the superstructures were simple stone cairns

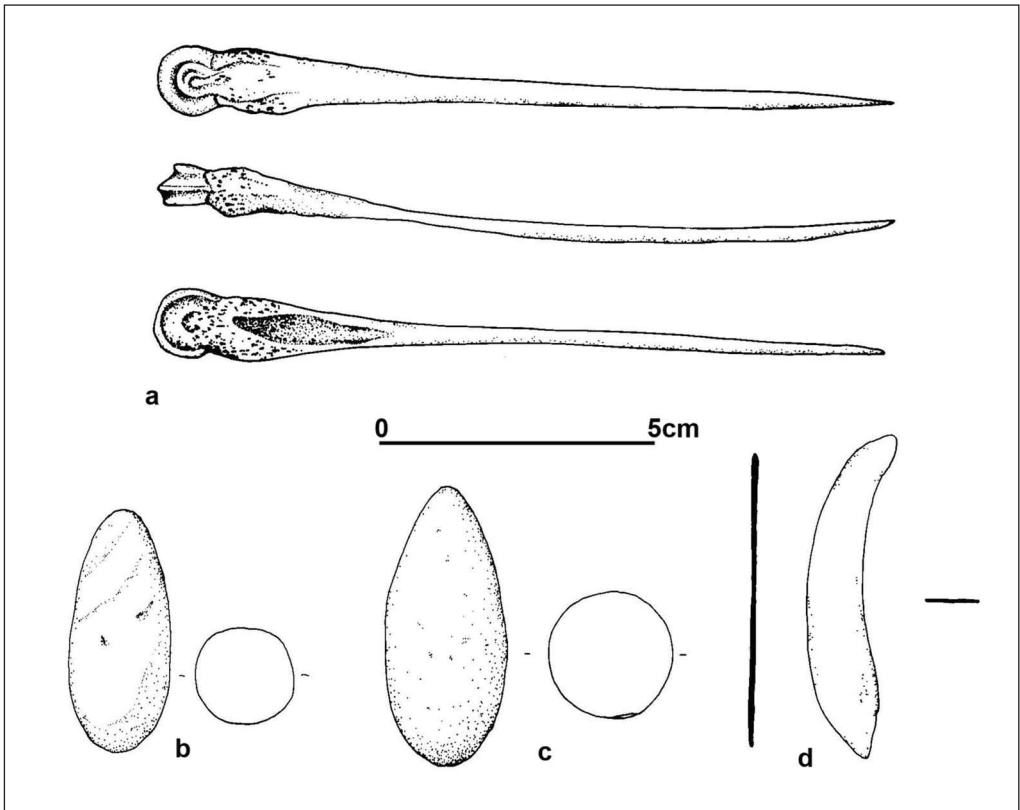


Fig. 1. Grave goods from the El-Gamamiya 55 burials: a – bone pin; b, c – stone pounders; d – copper-alloy knife or razor (Drawings M. Osypińska and P. Osypiński)

2 A parallel find from the town of Kerma is on permanent exhibition in the Khartoum National Museum.

FOURTH CATARACT
SUDAN

(FC01b). Single beads were the sole grave goods, although in one case there were also two poorly-fired pots.

The bodies were laid on the right side with flexed legs and arms in various positions. Traces of red ochre were observed around

the bodies and in one case also relics of palm-leaf matting were found covering an infant's body.

Looters missed only two burials — an adult male from T.11 and an infant from T.5 — but the inconsistent and unplanned



Fig. 2. General plan of the excavated area on the level of the grave superstructures (Drawing M. Osypińska and P. Osypiński)

FOURTH CATARACT
SUDAN

manner in which the pillaging occurred suggests that the robbers were not aware of the existing burial practice.

The finds, including pottery (for details, see following report by D. Bagińska),

date site GM55 to the Old Kush II and III period (as defined by the Gdańsk GAME team). This corresponds to *Kerma Moyen* and *Kerma Classique* in traditional chronology.

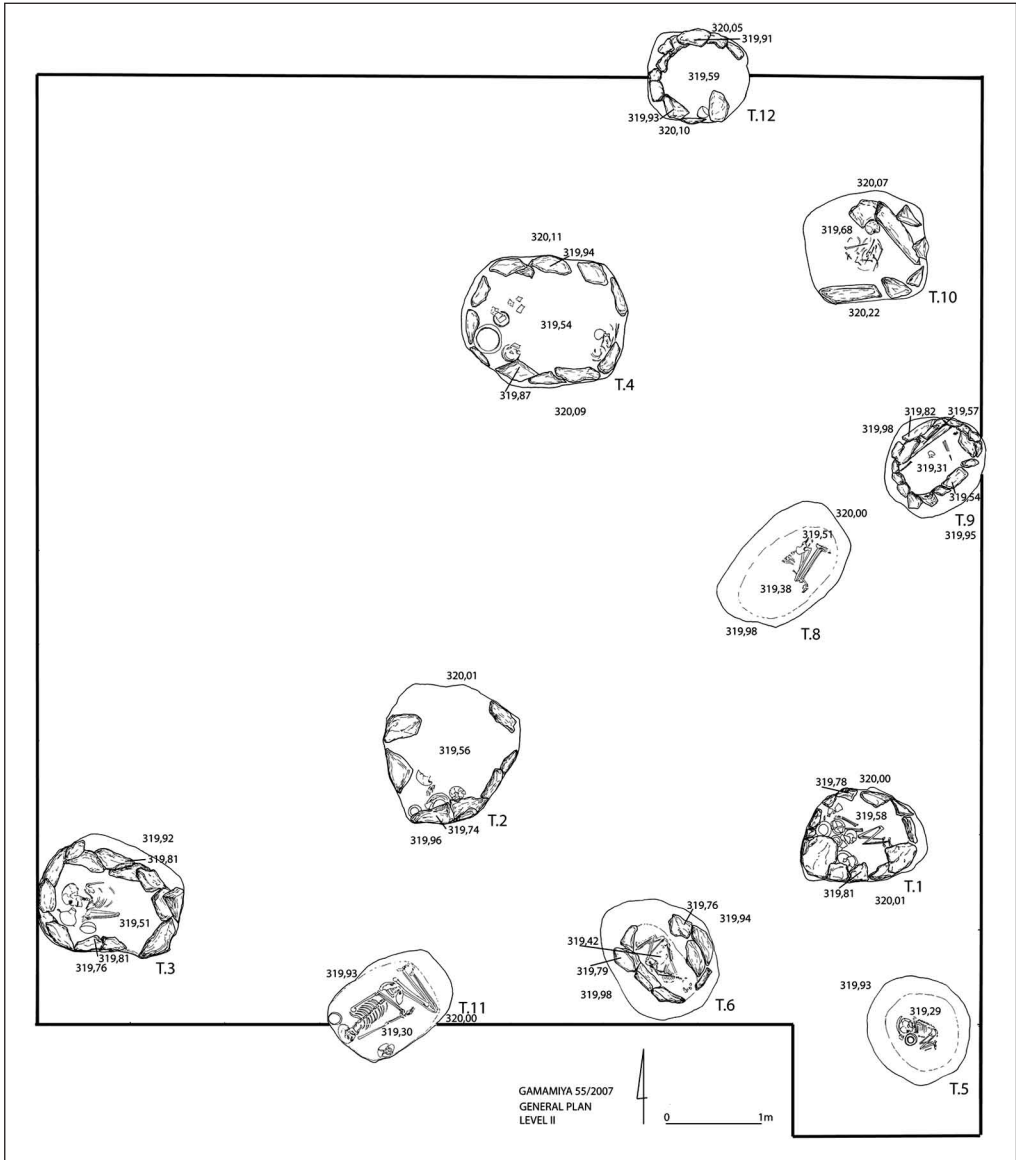


Fig. 3. General plan of the excavated area on the level of the burial chambers (Drawing M. Osypińska and P. Osypiński)

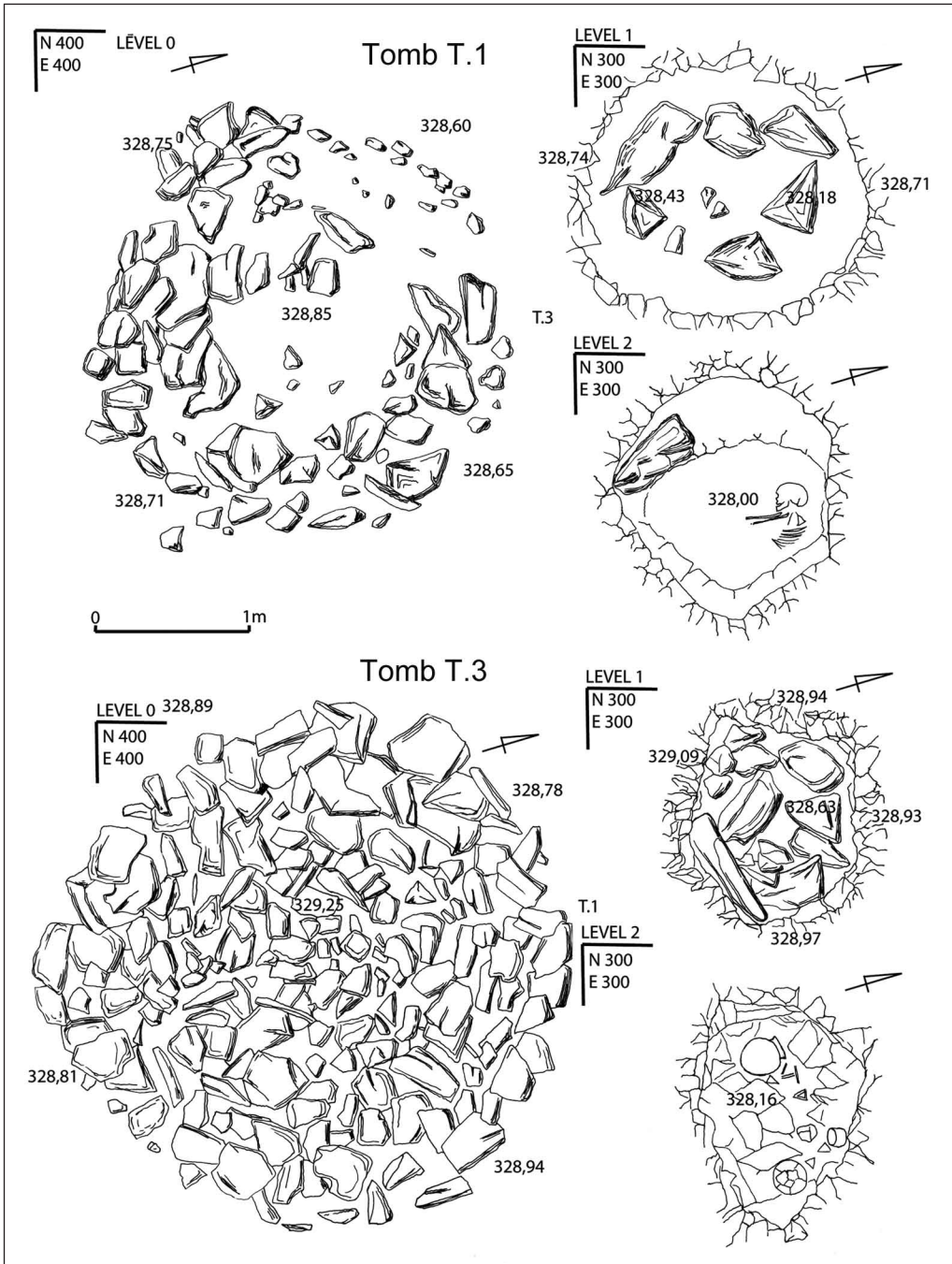


Fig. 4. Tombs T.1 and T.3, top plans at three successive levels: superstructure (Level 0), covering of burial chamber (Level 1) and burial in grave pit (Level 2) (Drawing M. Osypińska, M. Felis)

EL-GAMAMIYA 19

Another group of several stone cairns (FC01b) up to 2.50 m in diameter occupied the summit of a rocky hill in front of the village of El-Gamamiya. Single graves were also observed approximately 100 m away. The location of the graves, as well as their apparent undisturbed state in many cases, prompted archaeological testing (carried out on 2–4 December 2007).

Site GM19 appeared to be of Kerma date, but its location and spatial organization were sufficiently different from that of GM55 to warrant excavations in an effort to determine the cultural and chronological homogeneity of the two cemeteries.

One of the explored graves (T.1) contained an intact *iuvenis* burial which had been deposited in a rock-cut chamber approximately one meter deep [Fig. 4]. The skeleton was poorly preserved owing to

the penetration of water and small animals. The grave goods consisted of three pottery vessels: an imported globular pot from Egypt dating to the Twelfth Dynasty (see below, appendix to the pottery report by T.I. Rzeuska, 413–417), and a cup and bowl with grooved decoration [see Fig. 3:q,r on 410]. The upper part of the superstructure yielded large pieces of huge bowls ornamented with horizontal lines and dots under the rim [see Fig. 3:s,t,u on 410]. Pot-dating of the burial places it in the Old Kush II period (corresponding to *Kerma Moyen*, see D. Bagińska's report below, 404).

The other excavated tumulus (T.3) was plundered already in antiquity. Only the upper part of the body of a teenage girl was still found inside the burial chamber. A string of faience beads encircled the wrist.