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EXCAVATIONS IN 2009 IN THE ENVIRONS OF EL-AR VILLAGE (FOURTH CATARACT REGION, SUDAN)

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Abstract: Three sites were excavated in January and February 2009 by a Polish team near the village of El-Ar in the Fourth Cataract area. The most interesting was site P1 where fragments of three caliciform beakers were found.

Keywords: Fourth Cataract, Middle Kerma, caliciform beakers

Continued research in the territory of the PCMA concession on the Fourth Cataract within the framework of the international MDASP effort included, among others, excavation of three sites in the immediate environs of the village of El-Ar (for an overview of the Polish contribution in 2009 see Chłodnicki 2012, in this volume). Sites designated as P1, P37 and P38 were explored by the present author in January and February 2009.

SITE P1

Site P1 had been investigated once already in 2007. It is located in the immediate vicinity of the modern village on a promontory at the edge of the high desert, towering over the Nile Valley, cut off by *khors* (seasonal stream beds). In 2009 the team excavated three tombs, adding to the ten graves investigated there in the first season in 2007: one late Meroitic and nine dated to the Middle Kerma period (Longa 2010).

Tomb T.11 had a stone superstructure nearing a rectangle in shape, 1.20 m by 1.80 m in size. The grave pit was oval, the long diameter being 1.50 m. Buried in the grave was a child aged 3 to 4 years, the body aligned east–west in a slightly contracted position, head to the east and facing south. An inner ring of stones surrounded the pit. At the southern end of the grave there was a ceramic vessel placed by the head of the skeleton. A bracelet of faience beads adorned one wrist. The tomb could be dated to the Middle Kerma period.

The stone superstructure of tomb T.13 was oval, measuring approximately 1 m across. The grave pit, which measured 1.10 m by 1.15 m, was encircled by an additional ring of stones laid on top of the skeleton. The body was of a child 18 months old, aligned north–south with head to the south, facing east. It was slightly contracted. There were no grave goods to specify the dating of the tomb,

but the construction technique placed it in the Middle Kerma period.

Tomb T.12 had a stone oval superstructure measuring 2 m along the long axis. A ceramic vessel lay concealed under the southern part of this superstructure. The oval grave pit, 1.20 m across at the longest, contained the tightly contracted skeleton of an adult male (25–35 years), aligned north–south, head towards the south facing east. Grave goods included a ceramic vessel, an iron arrowhead and a necklace of beads made of diverse materials: glass, ostrich eggshell and faience. The grave was late Meroitic in date [Fig. 1].

Research in 2009 provided an overall understanding of the use of the cemetery at El-Ar P1. The eleven Middle Kerma tombs formed a relatively small burial ground with individual tombs being situated quite close together, limited to the promontory. Dating was based on a pottery analysis with parallels coming from other burial contexts recorded in the Fourth Cataract region. An examination of tomb construction confirmed the pottery dating (El-Tayeb, Kołosowska 2003: 117–126; 2005: 53; Kołosowska, El-Tayeb 2006–2007: 205–218; Longa 2009: 129–135).

Fragments of at least three caliciform beakers found scattered on the surface of



Fig. 1. Late Meroitic tomb T.12 at the El-Ar P1 site
(Photo M. Jawornicki)

the site indicate that human occupation of the area started in the Neolithic [Fig. 2]. These vessels have an extremely characteristic shape with convex bottom and flaring flat rim, and commonly bear an elaborate geometric decoration. They are found extensively on Neolithic sites in northeastern Africa, in the Nile Valley from Middle Egypt to Kadero and in the Eastern and Western Deserts from Dakhla Oasis to Wadi Howar and the Fourth Cataract region (Chłodnicki 1987: 141–148; Reinold 2001: 2–10; Darnell 2002: 156–177; Hope 2002: 39–61; Braddock 2003: 52; Welsby 2003: 20; 2010: 182; Gatto 2006: 103–106; Jesse 2008: 33–48; Kobusiewicz *et alii* 2009: 147–174). Common as grave goods, they were placed by the head or the pelvis of the body, mainly in rich male burials. They constitute a unique group among the grave furnishings, being used presumably

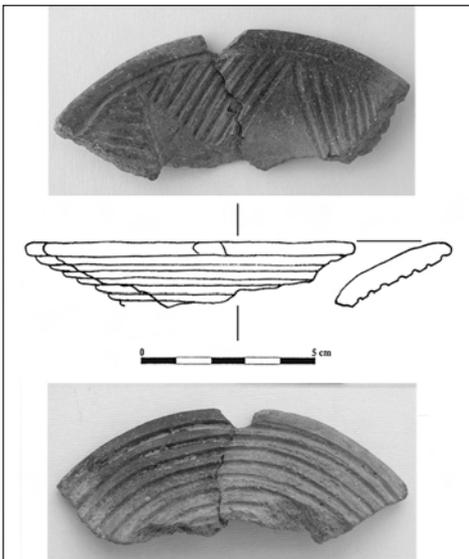


Fig. 2. Caliciform beakers from the El-Ar P1 site (Drawing A. Longa; photo M. Jawornicki)

for ritual libations during the funeral. No Neolithic structures were recorded, but it should be assumed based on the surface pottery finds that some had existed and had been destroyed by the later occupants of the area (Longa 2011: 14).

To recapitulate the phasing of the site, it began to be used in the Neolithic, was occupied again as a burial ground around 2050–1750 BC (Middle Kerma) and one last time in late Meroitic times (approximately AD 150–350).

Ground surveying around the P1 site revealed scatters of pottery attributed to the Middle Kerma period on surrounding heights. Two of these were examined.

SITE P37

Site P37 comprised a single grave with oval stone superstructure with a maximum length of 2 m. The oval grave pit was 1.20 m by 1.80 m [Fig. 3]. The body of a man aged 40–45 years had been deposited north-south with the head to the north facing west. The body was strongly contracted and lay on its right side. There were no grave goods, but the body had been wrapped in a mat. The pottery assemblage from the surface and the fill of the grave is typical of the Middle Kerma period, but the absence of grave goods with the burial does not permit the burial itself to be dated, as the ceramics could have accumulated in the area prior to the digging of this grave.

SITE P38

The other examined site, P38, was a stone structure of oval shape by a quartzite outcrop. It was most probably a dwelling [Fig. 4]. A hearth was traced inside the hut. An extensive assemblage of pottery from the site was dated to the Middle Kerma period.



*Fig. 3. Site P37 during excavation
(Photo Maciej Jawornicki)*



*Fig. 4. Site P38 before excavation
(Photo M. Jawornicki)*

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