

Meroitic Urbanism and Settlement Patterns in the 'Island of Meroe': Discoveries from (Hamadab), Kabushiya

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Abstract

Hamadab is an archaeological site located 3 km south of Meroe City on the eastern bank of the Nile. It thrived during the Meroitic period, spanning from the 3rd century BC to the 4th century AD. Excavations began in 2000/2001 through a collaboration of Sudanese and German team, yielding significant discoveries such as monumental stelae and a bronze statuette depicting the Meroitic god Sebiumeker. Current research efforts include mapping the settlement, conducting stratigraphic excavations, and investigating Meroitic iron metallurgy. The site is named after the Jaaliyin family and the indigenous Dom palms, and it plays a vital role in enhancing our understanding of the daily lives of ordinary people within the Kingdom of Kush. While much research has focused on royal burials and temple constructions, information regarding the lives of common citizens has remained limited. This research presents the findings from recent investigations at Hamadab, providing a comprehensive understanding of the non-elite population. It reveals important details about domestic quarters, family organization, diet, and material culture. The town primarily consisted of sun-dried mud brick—a common building material in the region since ancient times—and featured architectural elements reminiscent of fortified settlements in Egypt and the Near East. However, the lack of evidence for military activity suggests that Hamadab served as a typical urban settlement rather than a military outpost.

Keywords: Hamadab, daily life, ordinary people, domestic quarters, Kingdom of Kush

المستخلص

إن دومة الحماداب هو موقع أثري يقع على بعد 3 كم جنوب مدينة مروي على الضفة الشرقية لنهر النيل. وازدهرت خلال الفترة المروية، الممتدة من القرن الثالث قبل الميلاد إلى القرن الرابع الميلادي. بدأت التنقيبات في عام 2000/2001م من خلال التعاون بين فرق سودانية وألمانية، مما أسفر عن اكتشافات مهمة مثل اللوحات الأثرية والتمثال البرونزي الذي يصور الإله المروي سيبيومكر. تشمل الجهود البحثية الحالية رسم خرائط للمستوطنة، وإجراء الحفريات الطبقية، والتحقيق في تعدين الحديد المروي. تم تسمية الموقع على اسم عائلة الجعليين وأشجار الدوم الأصلية، ويلعب الموقع دوراً حيوياً في تعزيز فهمنا للحياة اليومية للناس العاديين داخل مملكة كوش. في حين ركزت الكثير من البحوث على المدافن الملكية وبناء المعابد، إلا أن المعلومات المتعلقة بحياة المواطنين العاديين ظلت محدودة. يعرض هذا البحث نتائج التحقيقات الأخيرة في الحماداب، مما يوفر فيما شاملاً للسكان من غير النخبة. يكشف عن تفاصيل مهمة حول المنازل العادية وتنظيم الأسرة والنظام الغذائي والثقافة المادية. تتكون المدينة في المقام الأول من الطوب اللبن المجفف بالشمس، وهو مادة بناء شائعة في المنطقة منذ العصور القديمة، وتتميز بعناصر معمارية تذكرنا بالمستوطنات المحسنة في مصر والشرق الأدنى. ومع ذلك، فإن عدم وجود أدلة على النشاط العسكري يشير إلى أن الحماداب كانت بمثابة مستوطنة حضرية نموذجية وليس موًعا عسكرياً.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الحماداب، الحياة اليومية، الناس العاديون، الأحياء المزلية، مملكة كوش

Introduction

The Domat-el Hamadab project is dated back to 2000/2001 by initiative to launch joint excavations expedition promoting archaeological training of Sudanese and German students by, Professor Ali Barri, Vice-Chancellor of Shendi University, and Steffen Wenig, Professor at Humboldt University of Berlin (head of project of German team: Pawel Wolf, co-director of Sudanese team: Abdelmonim Ahmed Abdalla). National Corporation for Antiquities and Museums joint the project in 2001.

Starting from 2001 to 2006 the project operations started by mapping the Meroitic settlement by large scale surface clearings, geophysical prospection, excavations at town's temple, first stratigraphic soundings, rescue excavations of endangered Meroitic graves on the South Mound, protection measures against illegal land seizure.

Until 2006 the project was funded by private donations, the cooperation partners and the voluntary initiative and gratuitous help of students and scholars.

Since 2007: stratigraphic excavations of the town's main features complement the surface cleanings, cooperation with the German Archaeological Institute (DAI) and the project Meroe Royal Baths, join project Hamadab und Meroë funded since 2008 by the DAI and the German Research Fund (DFG).

In 2012 a team of University College London/Qatar started research on Meroitic iron metallurgy at the North Mound, large scale ground penetrating radar conducted in the Town.

Since 2013: funding by the Nubian Archaeological Development Organization (Qatar-Sudan Archaeological Project QSAP), project housed at the Orient Department of the DAI and at the Faculty of Arts of Shendi University, cooperation with the Beuth University of Applied Sciences.

In 2014 detailed map of the Town and schematic plan finalized, site management and protection measures, start of landscape-archaeological research on the history of natural environment and human occupation in the Meroe-Kabushiya region.

Domat el-Hamadab

Domat el-Hamadab is the first urban town revealed with its full plan on the east bank of the Nile in the region of present Butana just 3 km south of Meroe City. Fig(1&2). It flourished in the Meroitic period (3rd century BC to 4th century AD).



Fig (1). Hamadab - Meroe



Fig (2): Hamadab and Meroe.

The site HAMADAB takes its name from Hamad of the Jaaliyin, whose family – according to oral accounts – settled at this place about 300 years ago. While DOMA refers to the Dom palms growing on the site.

Compared to our ample knowledge of Kushite temple building and royal burials, virtually nothing is known about what life was like for the ordinary people in the kingdom. Hamadab is one of the few archaeological sites in Northern Sudan, where good preservation adds to a comprehensive picture of living conditions of a non-elite population in the “Island of Meroe” in Middle Nile Valley (Anderson and Salah. 2008).Fig (3).

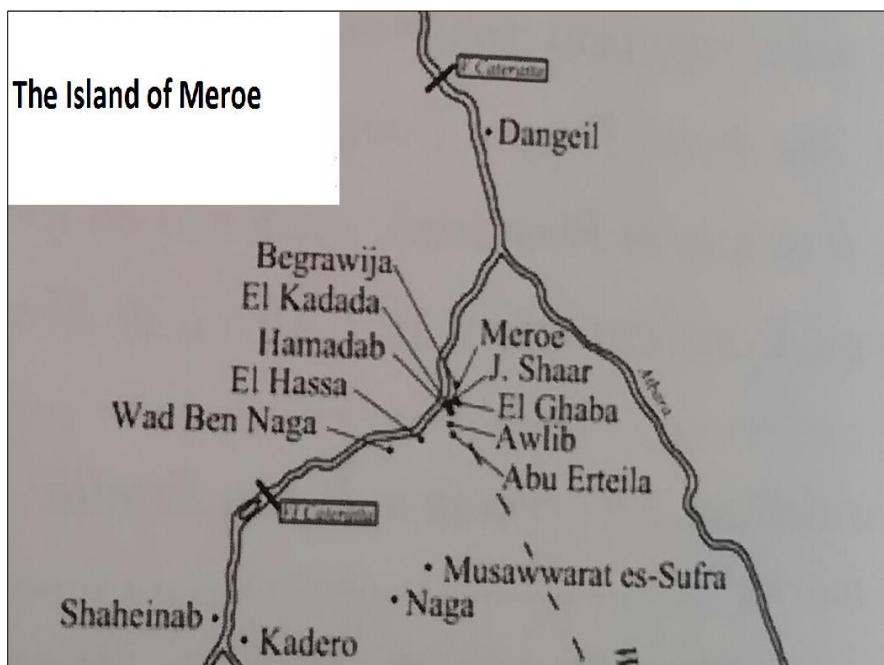


Fig (3): The Island of Meroe. After(Anderson, J. & Salah eldin Mohamed Ahmed, 2008).

Archaeological research at Hamadab focuses on town's domestic quarters to gain information on the daily life of its residents, their family organization, household activities, diet and material culture.

Latest research has contributed to the first complete map of a Meroitic urban settlement (Goldman et al. 2007).

Throughout all its occupation periods (ca. 300 BC to 400 AD) the town was almost entirely built of sun-dried mud brick – the effective and easily available building material that offers comfortable indoor conditions in hot climates. This traditional African adobe architecture was common in the Middle Nile Valley since the 3rd millennium BC and is still used in Sudan.

Remarkably, the Town shows certain similarities with fortified settlements of the 1st to 4th centuries AD in Egypt and the Near East reminiscent of Roman military forts. Like the principia in Roman forts, the temple at Hamadab was situated opposite the town gate at the end of a main street (Wolf. 2002, 2004). Fig (4).



Fig (3): Complete plan of the Temple (Reconstruction)

However, no clear evidence for military use of the Town has been found so far. The archaeological evidence suggests that Meroitic Hamadab was an ordinary urban town and that most of its houses were primarily residential buildings for common people following an urban lifestyle. Fig (5&6).



Fig (5). Finds from Hamadab (Domestic)

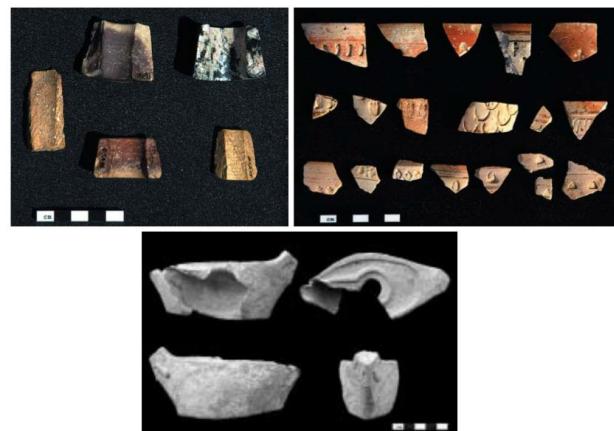


Fig (6). Finds from Hamadab

Visiting Hamadab in 1914, John Garstang director of the University of Liverpool excavations at Meroe unearthed two monumental stelae covered with Meroitic cursive script that were attached to a small temple, typical for Meroitic official architecture (Garstang et al. 1911). Fig (7).



Fig (7). Hamadab Stelae of Amanirenas and Akinidad. After (Garstang, et al. 1911)

Amongst the preserved cult furniture and votive objects, there was a wonderful bronze statuette. This figure revealed features of the Indigenous Meroitic god Sebiumeker which apparently was a member of the 'divine crew' of a procession bark. It can stylistically be attributed to the late 3rd or early 2nd century BC. Fig (8).



Fig (7). Small bronze statuette of the Meroitic god Sebiumeker

The Hamadab building reproduces the architectural features of a higher authority or an administrative institution to control the town's communal or commercial matters.

Conclusion:

As the first urban town revealed with its full plan, Hamadab is a good example to study living conditions in the Nile valley during Meroitic times, featuring a temple, administrative buildings, fortifications, storage facilities, common housing and industrial areas.

The greater Meroe region might therefore be characterized as the kingdom's grain

basket, which provided surpluses of staple food for the surrounding regions and settlements.



Fig (8). The Fieldwork team 2014



Fig (9). Institutional Cooperation

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