

MtoM

EARLY MAKURIA RESEARCH PROJECT, SEASON 2006

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Project MtoM focuses on a study of the beginnings of the Kingdom of Makuria in the region between the Third and Fourth Nile Cataracts, in an effort to identify the nature of social changes occurring in the area in the 4th and 5th centuries. A core issue of the program is the process and circumstances of the transformation of Meroitic into Makurian society (Godlewski 2007). The first step in the project was the excavation and documentation season at el-Zuma in December 2004 – January 2005 (El-Tayeb 2007a; 2007b; Obłuski 2007; Osypińska 2007).

The present season lasted from 15 January to 22 February, 2006. The Project concentrated on: 1) research and mapping of the architectural complex at Merowe Sheriq, including fortifications, town with partly preserved wall and well, and cemetery; 2) mapping survey and testing at the Tanqasi burial ground; 3) some additional mapping at the el-Zuma cemetery. An opportunity afforded itself to make a photographic record of the fortifications at Bakhit and el-Deiga.¹

The theory behind the archaeological topographical mapping is presented by W. Małkowski in a separate contribution below, in this volume.

1 The team was headed by Włodzimierz Godlewski and comprised: Mahmoud El-Tayeb, co-director; Anna Błaszczuk, archaeologist; Edyta Klimaszewska-Drabot, archaeologist-ceramologist; Wiesław Małkowski archaeologist-surveyor; Bartosz Wojciechowski, student of archaeology from the University of Warsaw. The NCAM was represented by Sami Mohamed el-Amin whose all-encompassing assistance permitted effective and successful work.

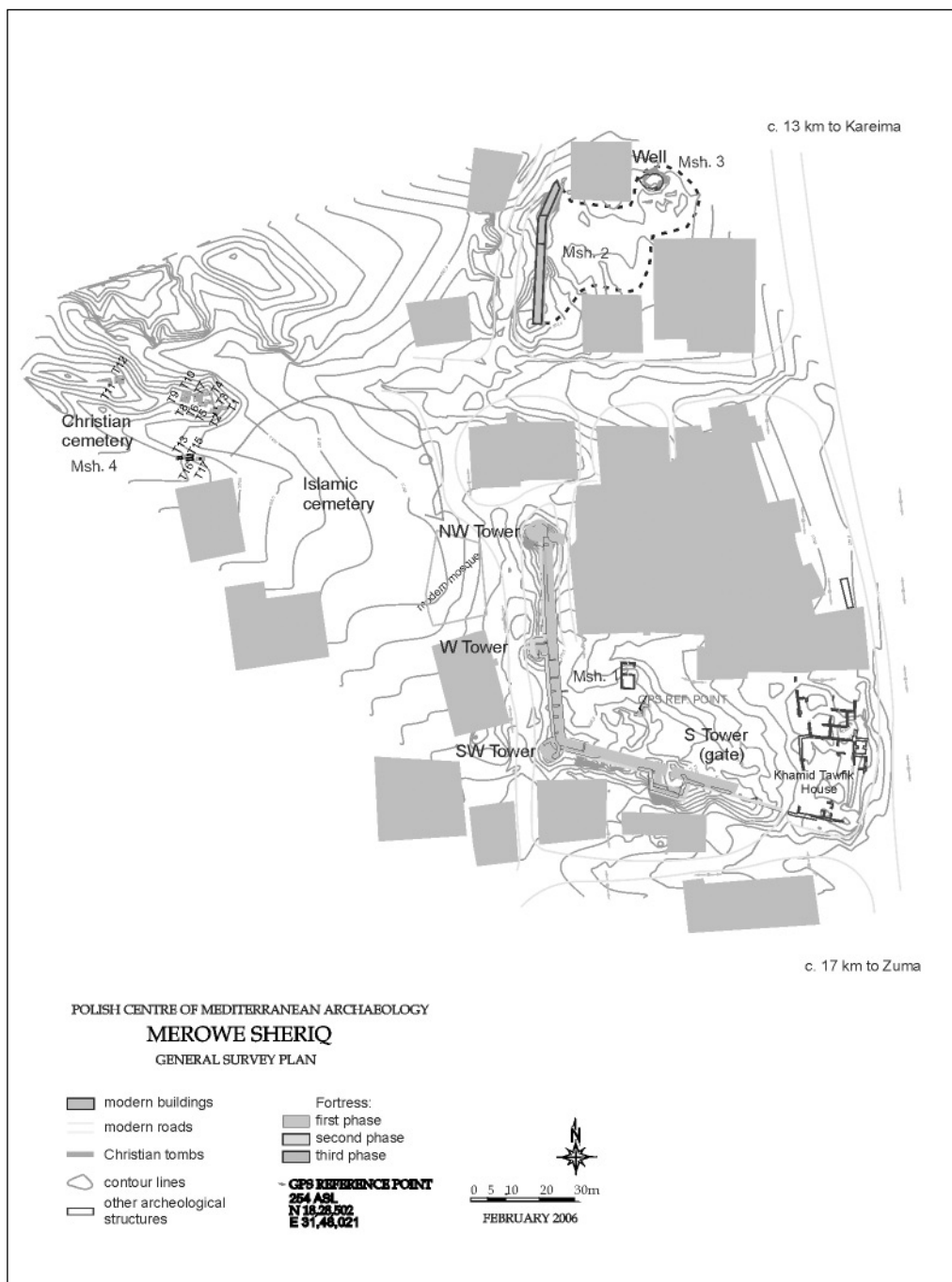


Fig. 1. Merowe Sheriq general survey plan showing the location of sites Msh.1, Msh.2 with well Msh.3, and the Christian cemetery Msh.4 (Mapping W. Matkowski)

MEROWE SHERIQ

The archaeological site located in 1992 by an Italian-Sudanese Mission directed by I. Vincentelli Liverani (1997: 163, 172) and identified as a medieval fortress with numerous blocks of hieroglyphs and reliefs reused in wall construction, is in fact much more extensive. It comprises a fragmentarily preserved fort (MSh.1), a fortified settlement (MSh.2) and a Christian burial ground (MSh.3) [Fig. 1]. In 2005, Artur Obłuski working for the MtoM program at el-Zuma (for that work, see El-Tayeb 2007; Obłuski 2007) surveyed the site and located some graffiti from the Makurian period on the rocks nearby. The site was recorded in 2006 and a test pit was dug inside the southern fort gate to establish site stratigraphy.

FORT (MSh.1)

The estimated size of the fort was originally 105 by c. 133 m. Only the southwestern

part has been preserved, the eastern section having been destroyed by the 19th-century 'Khamid Tawfiq House', now in ruins, and the northern part overbuilt with modern village architecture. The west and south curtain walls stand high. Inside the walls lie some structures of unrecognized function, preserved at ground level, which is here flat and rocky. The location is neither strategic or defensive. To the west there are some rather high rocky hills, to the east the wide valley of the Nile with greening palm-tree gardens.

The high-standing walls give the impression of a fortress, but the site was actually more of a fortified settlement, much like site MSh.2 which is immediately adjacent on the north and which has fragmentarily preserved fortifications and settlement architecture. This latter site seems to have been part of the same

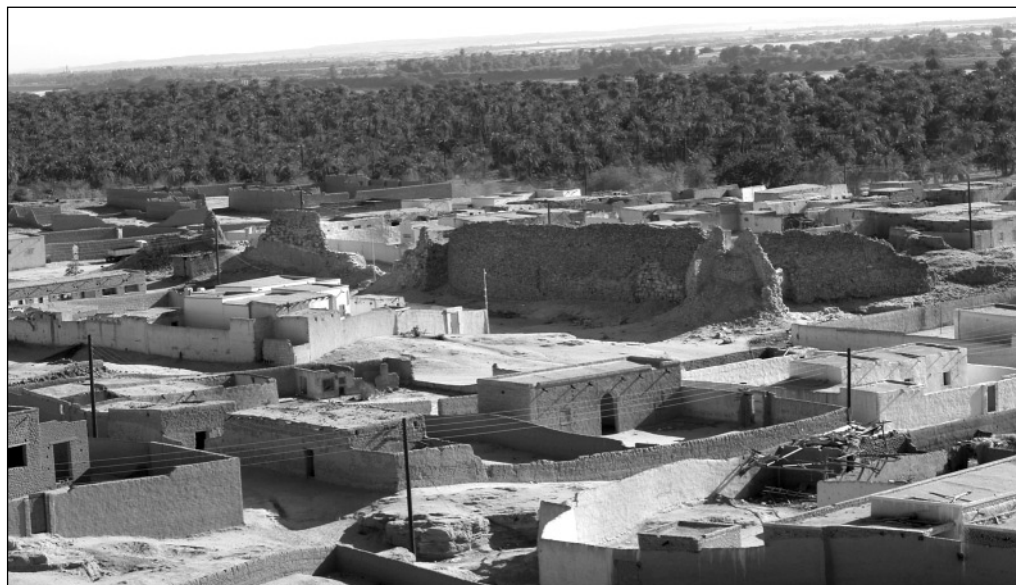


Fig. 2. Fort MSh.1. West curtain wall with towers, view from the west
(Photo W. Godlewski)

agglomeration, although of subsidiary importance with regard to MSh.1. We thus have in one complex a double set of fortifications with the southern part being obviously the dominating feature.

An examination of wall construction revealed that the outer part built of broken stone was not connected structurally with the original fortifications of the settlement. The preserved western and southern stretches of the wall were built directly on the rocky ground. They were 4.50 m wide at the base, the bottom parts – up to 1.50 m in the southern stretch and 2.20 m in the western one – being constructed of irregular sandstone blocks bonded in mud mortar. Above that, the walls were erected of mud brick. Today, they stand to a maximum height of 3.70 m, but they must have been

higher; the original walls of the south gate tower rise to 5.00 m in height.

The west curtain, 90 m long, had two round towers at the corners and a square one midway [cf. *Figs 1, 2*]. Regular sandstone blocks salvaged from a Napatan temple were used in their construction. The square tower shows good building technique, but the northwestern corner tower appears to have been erected quite hastily, blocks from the temple walls and polychromed column drums being thrown in without any special guiding idea.

The ruins of the south curtain have a length of c. 75 m today. A corner tower resembling the standing southwestern one may have occupied the destroyed southeastern end. Midway in this face of the fortifications there was a gate. It was built



Fig. 3. Fort MSh.1. Inside south face of the south gate in Trench 1 (Photo W. Godlewski)

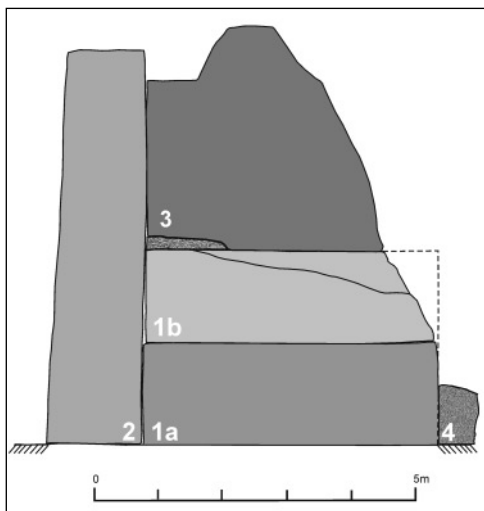


Fig. 4. Fort MSh.1. Cross-section through the southern curtain wall: 1a - first-phase wall of broken stone, 1b - first-phase mud-brick wall, 2 - second-phase stone wall, 3 - late mud-brick structures, 4 - fill inside the fortifications (Drawing W. Godlewski and E. Klimaszewska-Drabot)

on a rectangular plan and changed into a tower when an outer wall of stone was added to the original enclosure. The distance between the western face of the gate and the standing corner tower is 42 m.

The original south gate was built of sandstone blocks in the outer part and mud brick and stone blocks in the inner part [Fig. 3]. Blocks from the Napatan temple are in evidence in the wall structure here as well. The outer gate wall was 3.20 m thick and now rises to a height of 5 m. The gate was entered from the east and had a bent-axis approach. It measures, on the outside, 14.70 m in length and 7.50 m in width. Close parallels have been noted in northern Nubia, at Faras, Ihmindi, Sheikh Daoud, Sabagura and Kalabsha.

In the second building phase, a wall of undressed sandstone blocks was added in front of the earlier fortifications, reaching a width of 1.50-1.70 m at the base and narrowing to 0.90 m at a height of 7.70 m [Fig. 4]. Structurally, this outer curtain at Merowe Sheriq resembles the fortifications at Swueqi East (Wiewióra 2005) and Redab (Paner 2005), both in the Fourth Cataract region. Assuming K. Pluskota's ceramic dating of the stone fortifications at Swueqi East and Redab to the 6th century at the latest is correct (2005), then the original set of walls from Merowe Sheriq should be considered as earlier; a date in the 5th century is suggested provisionally at this point. Testing inside the southern gate unfortunately brought no dating material to verify this view. Surface pottery finds from a survey of the MSh.1 and MSh.2 sites yielded nothing earlier than the 6th century (see below, contribution by E. Drabot-Klimaszewska in this volume). On the other hand, a piece of ceramics observed in the wall structure of an analogous fortification at Bakhit (Żurawski 2003: 369-373),

15 km north of Merowe Sheriq on the left bank of the Nile, which the team visited in 2006, can be dated to the second half of the 5th century based on parallels from the burial chambers of tumuli excavated in el-Zuma (red-slipped wheel-made bowls with a groove below the rim, see El-Tayeb 2007b). The walls of the Bakhit fort were evidently not constructed in one phase only, and the southern curtain west of the gate demonstrates an analogous technique with the lower part built of irregular stone blocks bonded in mud mortar and the upper part of mud brick. As for the west and north fortifications, they appear to have parallels in walls built entirely of broken stone in the Fourth Cataract region.

FORTIFIED SETTLEMENT (MSH.2)

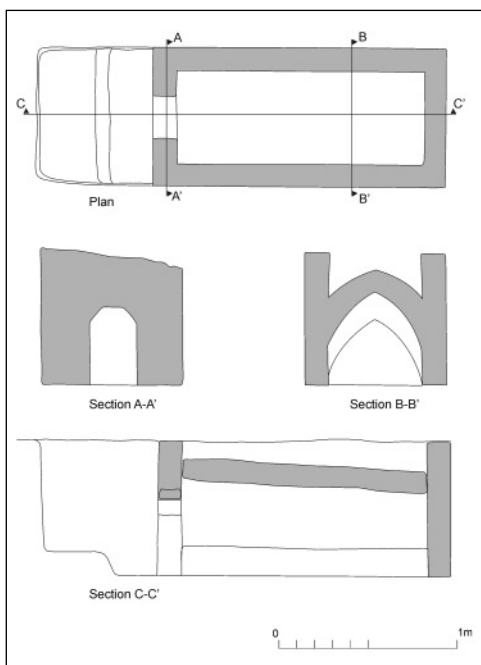
Scattered among the modern village houses immediately north of the fort remains are modest relics of a settlement, which was also fortified [Fig. 6]. Surface pottery finds represent the entire chronological horizon of the Kingdom of Makuria, from the 6th through the 14th century. The original structures were either completely dismantled or incorporated into later buildings. A fragment of the wall has survived, c. 63 m long. It was 3.50 m wide and built of blocks of broken stone bonded in mud mortar in the lower part and mud brick (40 x 20 x 9 cm) in the upper part. No towers are in evidence on the ground, but the evident break in the preserved stretch of the fortification suggest the existence of some such structure. Wall structure and a missing stone curtain on the outside indicates the contemporaneity of this wall with the original fortifications from the MSh.1 site.

A rock-cut shaft 7.00-7.80 m in diameter, almost completely filled at pre-

sent, is located to the east of the fortifications. What is to be determined without actually excavating the feature is the presence of an internal staircase and some graffiti undoubtedly of Christian origin (including images of crosses) on the inner walls. This may have been a kind of well functioning inside the fortifications and it could be much earlier than the settlement. It may be connected with some sacred precinct of Napatan date somewhere in the vicinity, the only evidence of which are the salvaged blocks of stone reused in the MSh.1 fortifications.

CHRISTIAN BURIAL GROUND (MSH.4)

A Christian cemetery is located just west of the Moslem one, only a short distance from sites MSh.1 and MSh.2. At least 17 rock-cut substructures of graves were observed, but no superstructures, which must have been destroyed. The graves were all obviously disturbed. One tomb was cleared and



*Fig. 5. Tomb 1 in Christian cemetery MSh.4
(W. Godlewski and E. Klimaszevska-Drabot)*



*Fig. 6. Walls of the settlement MSh.2
(Photo W. Godlewski)*

documented [*Fig. 5*]. It consisted of a rock-cut pit, 3.50 by 1.20 m, 1.15 m deep, containing a vaulted burial chamber erected of mud brick, measuring 2.10 by 0.80 m inside, and reaching 0.70-0.80 m in height. A step on the western side gave access from a vertical shaft, 1.00 by 1.20 m; the opening

itself was 0.65 m high and 0.40 m high. The mixed bones of one human burial were discovered inside the chamber with no accompanying material, which is not surprising when dealing with the Christian period. There is no evidence for a more precise dating of this burial ground.

TANQASI CEMETERY

The cemetery at Tanqasi has been known since R. Lepsius provided a sketch plan (Lepsius 1897-1913:124 and Text V, 255-256) and G.A. Reisner surveyed it for the first time. In 1953, P.L. Shinnie mapped it and excavated three tombs (Shinnie 1954). No further work was ever done, even though the site, believed to be among the most important for the formative stages in the development of the Makurian Kingdom, is referred to in various contexts in Nubian studies. Today, modern architecture is starting to encroach on the cemetery from the west and north, and an irrigation project, fortunately interrupted for the moment, is threatening to destroy the tombs. The thick layer of Nile alluvia found here, overlain by a thin sand cover, can easily be cultivated and in 2006 the southern part of the necropolis had already been divided up into plots.

Mapping of the site by the team in 2006 added new features to Shinnie's map of 1953. A large group of tombs was surveyed in the southeastern part and new tombs were identified in the central section; also the extent of encroaching modern architecture was recorded [*Fig. 7*]. The 2 km² or so of the burial ground with its 288 recorded tombs was documented, measured, and described, distinguishing two separate complexes of tumuli, Tanqasi 1 and Tanqasi 2, differentiated by the size and location.

Tanqasi 1 covers the central part of the necropolis. Here, the tumuli are the biggest, reaching 7.00 m in height (Tnq.8), and they are surrounded by numerous smaller tombs (the present count is 206). The group of biggest tumuli with a base area of more than 1000 m² and height from 0.70 to 7.09 m consists of 22 tombs. Fourteen of these are situated along a line running from north to south, while another seven form a small cluster in the western part of the necropolis. One (Tnq.274) lies in splendid isolation in the eastern part of the cemetery. The smaller tumuli here demonstrate a tendency to cluster in the northern and western parts of the burial ground.

Tanqasi 2 is the newly mapped cluster of 82 tumuli in the southeastern part of the cemetery. The tombs follow a generally NE-SW line, extending in a strip some 200 m wide for a distance of about one kilometer. These tumuli are relatively small and flat, measuring 50-150 m² at the base and up to c. 1.00 m in height. The two biggest tombs in this cluster (Tnq.189 and Tnq.205) have a base area of 225 m² and 400 m² respectively. So far, no testing has been carried out in this part of the necropolis.

TUMULUS TOMB TNQ.87

Tumulus tomb Tnq.87, which was explored this season, has become the fourth tumulus

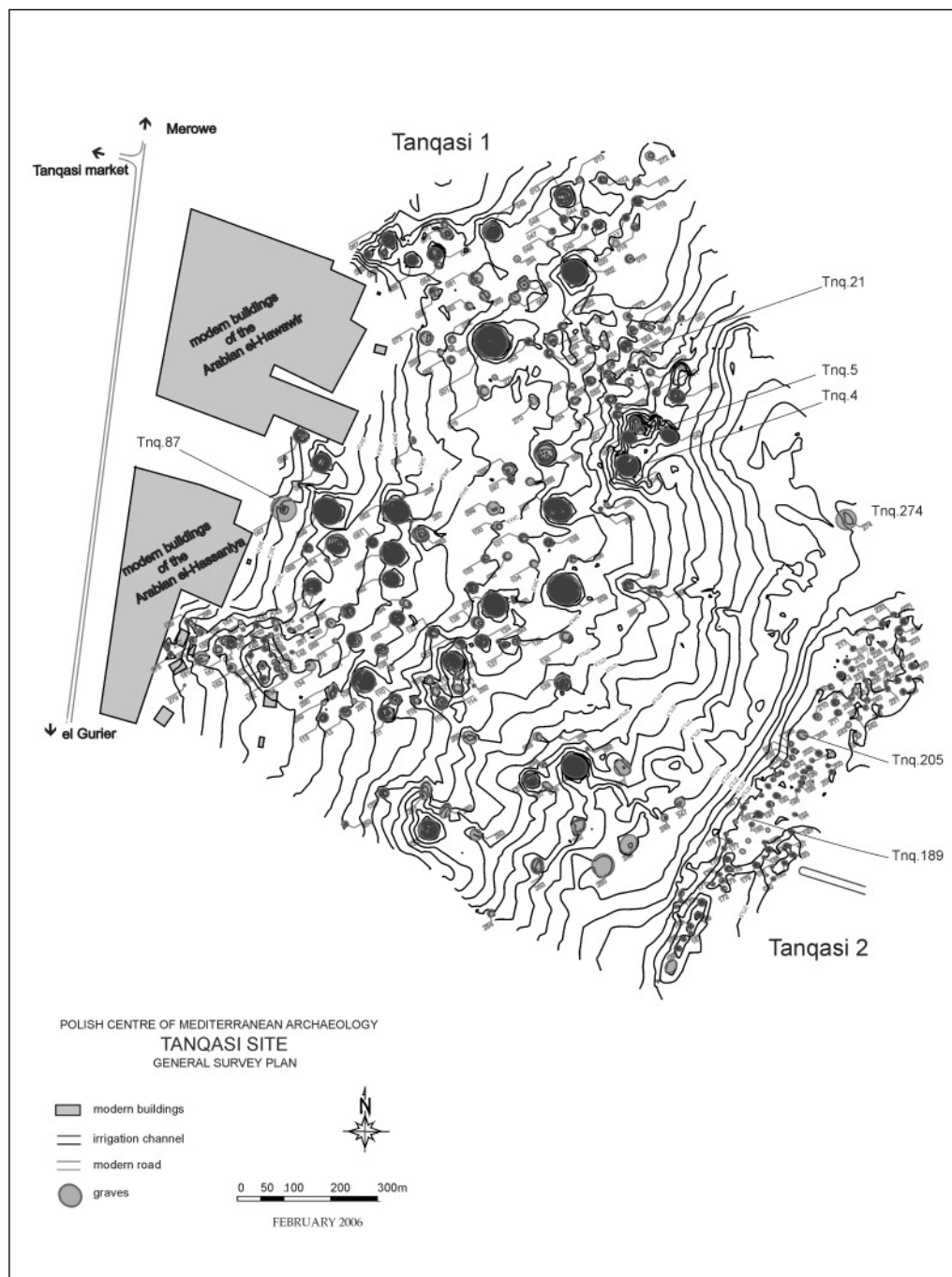


Fig. 7. Tanqasi cemetery general survey plan
(Mapping W. Matkowski)

to be excavated at Tanqasi. Shinnie had previously dug three: Mound I (=Tnq.4), Mound II (=Tnq.5) and Mound III (=Tnq.21).

It is one of the biggest tombs in this cemetery and it is part of the eastern group of big tombs in the Tanqasi 1 cluster. The base area of the tumulus was 2309 m². The mound itself has disappeared (although residual traces suffice for its extent to be determined) and a comparison with Shinnie's plan indicated that it was no longer visible in 1953. It is most likely to have been a loose soil mound with no stone casing and consequently has suffered heavy wind erosion.

The substructure is a U-shaped excavation in the rock, open to the east, almost rectangular in plan (4.15-4.40 by 4.65 m) [Fig. 8]; the depth is more than 4 m below present ground level. The eastern part of the northern arm has not been completely explored and steps, if any existed, may be located there. Small platforms with worn top surfaces were discovered against the eastern rock face, c. 1.50 m above the bottom of the pit; they may have been useful in drawing up baskets with excavated rock material from the tomb.

Chambers opened off the three sides of the shaft at the bottom: one on the south, two on the west and one on the north. The largest, southern chamber with two entrances was recognized as a burial chamber; the other three were offering chambers. The entrances were blocked with mud-brick walls and additionally protected with bricks and fragments of bricks filling the bottom of the shaft in front of the blocked entrances. Despite this, the

southern chamber (S) and one of the western chambers (W.1) were found to be penetrated and looted.

The southern chamber (4.30 by 1.10-1.30 m), 1.05 m high, had two entrances from the shaft, separated by a rock pillar (0.40 by 0.75 m), and blocked with a mud-brick wall (0.80 m thick). The robbers entered through a hole made in the top of the blocking wall in the western entrance, reached from a pit dug in the southwestern corner of the central shaft. The burial inside the chamber was most probably that of a woman;² accompanying the partly preserved skeleton were three red bricks, several very small fragments of wooden furniture (*angareb*-bed or box) and four wheel-made cups *in situ*, not to mention a bottle in secondary position [Fig. 11], as well as a considerable number of beads made of stone, glass and faience (for a report on the pottery from the burial, see below, contribution by E. Klimaszevska-Drabot in this volume).

The small chamber W.1 (1.90 by 1.40 m) was empty except for some beads. The original blocking wall of mud-brick was 0.46 m thick. Its top had been opened by tomb robbers who may have recognized the contents of this chamber as being more precious than that in the others.

The other chamber on the west (W.2) and the one on the north (N) were both found blocked with undisturbed mud-brick walls. Chamber W.2 was smaller (2.50 by 1.00 m; H. 0.90 m). The tomb offerings were all in place in the center of the unit: two bottles and two beakers, one of which covered the mouth of one of the bottles, a large handmade bowl standing next to the other bottle, containing four wheel-made

2 Anthropological examination of the bones was carried out by B.J. Baker from Arizona State University, who visited with the mission, and Karol Piasecki from the University in Szczecin.

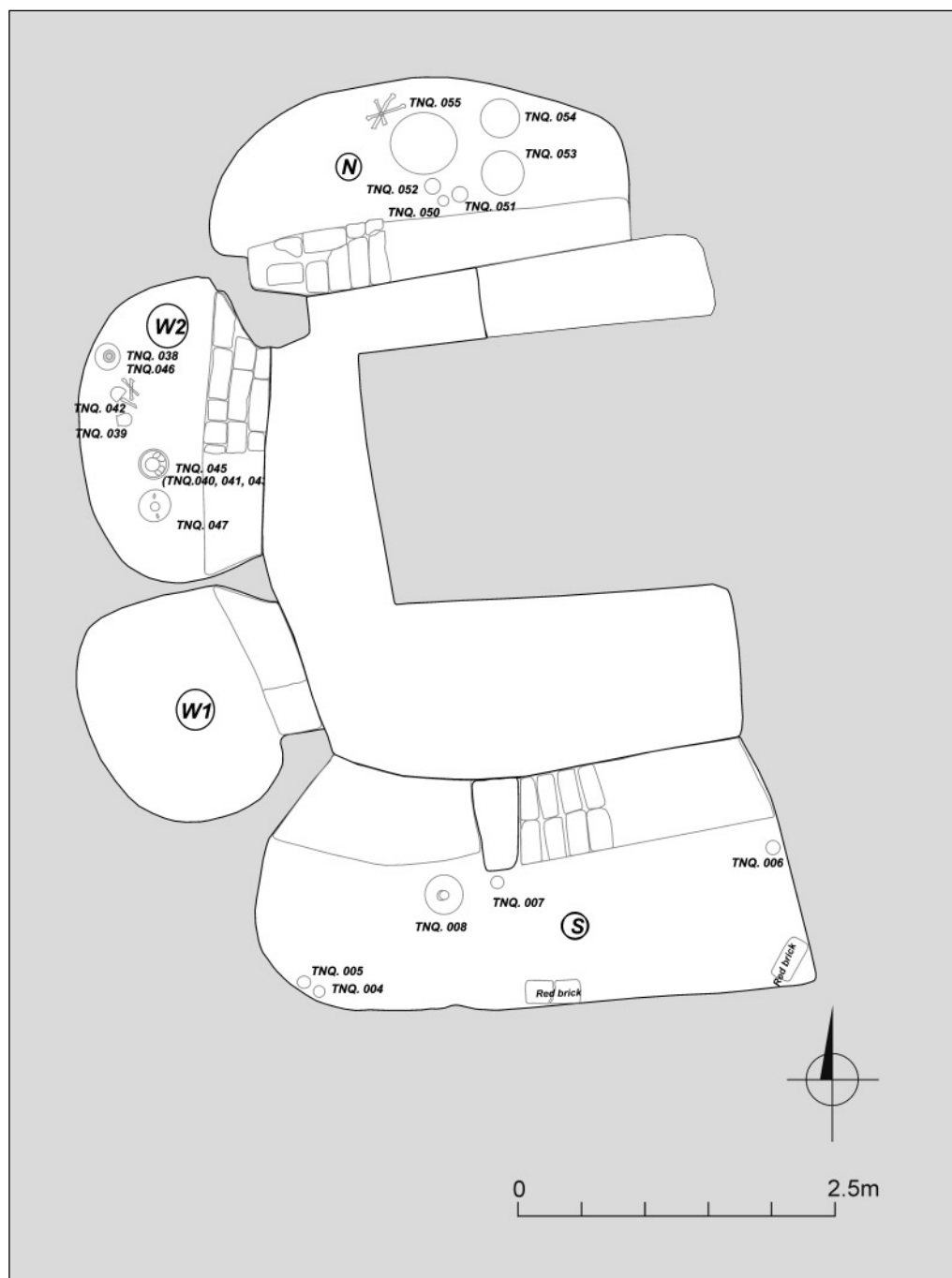


Fig. 8. Plan of the tumulus and burial chambers of Tnq.87 in Tanqasi
(Drawing W. Godlewski and E. Klimaszewska-Drabot)

beakers, and nearby a small wheel-made bowl, lying on its side, with animal bones spilling out from it [Figs 9, 10]. The meat in this offering was either goat or sheep (see below, contribution by M. Osypińska in this volume).



Fig. 9. Pottery offerings in place in the northwestern chamber (W.2) of tumulus Tnq.87, on right, toilet set in situ (Photo W. Godlewski)

The northern chamber was much bigger (3.40 by 1.10 m; height 0.90 m). It was damaged clandestinely by unknown perpetrators and all the pottery was smashed at the bottom of the shaft. Although the position of the vessels inside the chamber has been lost, recombination of the sherds demonstrated that there had been six pots: three big handmade bowls and three wheel-made beakers. Bones found inside the chamber came from a cut of goat meat left in offering.



Fig. 10. Part of the pottery from the northwestern chamber (W.2) of Tnq.87 (Photo W. Godlewski)



Fig. 11. Pottery from the burial chamber (S) of the tumulus Tnq.87 (Photo W. Godlewski)

The recovered pottery assemblage from tomb Tnq.87, despite being incomplete, totals 31 vessels: 19 wheel-made cups and bowls, and 12 handmade cooking pots, two of which were of extraordinary size (the bigger one – Tnq.87.053 – had a diameter of 33 cm and height of 34.5 cm, cf. *Fig. 13:1* on p. 487). There were also beads from the dead woman's attire, found in the burial chamber (S) and in small quantities in chamber W.1. Beads differed in shape



Fig. 12. Droplet beads of quartzite from the tumulus Tnq.87 (Photo W. Godlewski)

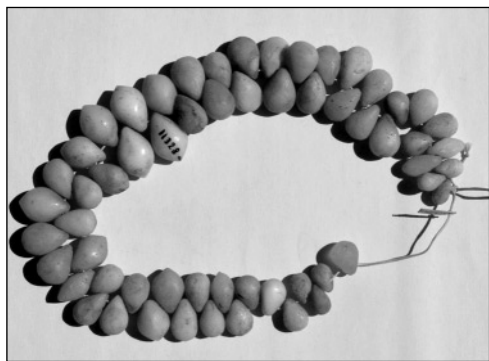
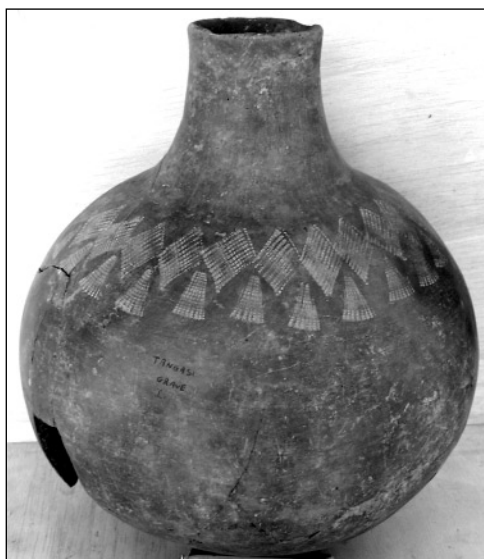


Fig. 13. Droplet beads and bottle from Mound 1 (Tnq.4) at Tanqasi (Courtesy National Museum in Khartoum)

(circular, conical, oval, droplet, barrel) and they were made of various materials: white quartzite, agate, ivory, ostrich eggshell, faience and glass paste of black, white, orange, blue, red and green color [*Fig. 12*].

The tomb has been dated on the grounds of a single C¹⁴ sample and the pottery from the burial and offering chambers. The wood sample, which was taken from a bed or box found in the burial chamber (S), has yielded the date 1715 ± 30 BP, after calibration AD 250-410 (95.4%) or AD 250-390 (68.2%).³ Naturally, the object from which the sample was taken, was made earlier, but not that much earlier than the tomb. The wheel-made pottery resembles in shape and technology of production the wares from el-Zuma and Hammur, although they are surely from another workshop and probably earlier. It seems justified to date the tumulus Tnq.87 to the beginning of the 5th century.



³ The analyses were carried out in February 2007 by the Poznań Radiocarbon Laboratory.

The architectural form and equipment of Tnq.87 is different from that of Tnq.4 (Mound I) excavated by P.L. Shinnie (1954: 68-70 and 75-85), but they obviously share some important features. Both have four chambers, a burial chamber on the south and three offering chambers,⁴ but the entrance was different. In Tnq.4, the ramp went down from the east to the level from which separate shafts led to the chambers, similarly as in Tnq.5 (Mound II), which was a single-chamber tomb with a blocking wall of mud brick. The wheel-made bottle and bowls from Tnq.4 (Mound I) are earlier than the pottery from Tnq.87, but the jewelry is much the same with regard to the shapes and the material of which the beads were made [Fig. 13].

The very characteristic droplet beads of quartz have close parallels in beads from Late Meroitic tombs. It seems justified

therefore to consider tomb Tnq.4, as well as Tnq.5 and Tnq.21, as earlier than Tnq.87, perhaps of the 4th century. The architectural form of Tnq.4 appears to precede the type of Tnq.87 with its U-shaped shaft, known also from el-Zuma and Hammur. The two tumuli in Tanqasi (Tnq.4 and Tnq.87) are among the biggest there, which fact leads us to believe that the base size of the tumulus regardless of its height, coupled with the developed form of four chambers, indicates a high-status burial in early Makuria from the end of the 4th and early 5th century.

Further excavations of the cemetery at Tanqasi will surely contribute more information on the social structure and material culture of the Early Makurites, undoubtedly a settled population with a wide range of workshop skills, both technological and aesthetic.

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