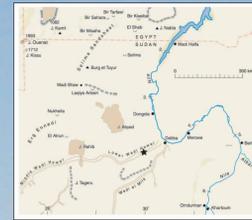


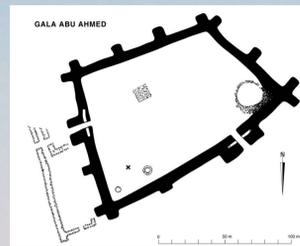
Gala Abu Ahmed - A Fortress in the Desert

A history of research

The discovery of a massive stone-walled building in Lower Wadi Howar (1) by a team of the B.O.S. project of the University of Cologne in 1984 was a small sensation. No comparable structure is known at such a distance from the Nile Valley. Datation, mainly based on the ground plan established in 1984 (2), pointed to Meroitic times, which made the building even more interesting. Small scale research done in recent years by the Cologne ACACIA project's work in Wadi Howar confirmed a Kushite presence in the area: Finds and radiocarbon dates oscillating between ca. 700 and 400 BC point to an use in Napatan times. The exact function of the structure still remains unknown: a post securing trade between the Nile Valley and inner parts of Africa or simply a military building?



1) The location of Gala Abu Ahmed.



2) Schematic ground plan.



3) The northern gateway.



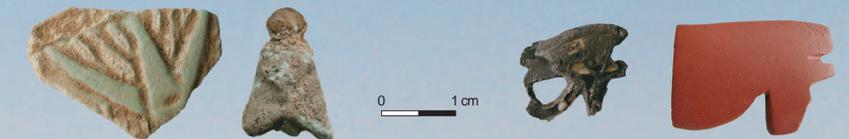
4) The northern wall of Gala Abu Ahmed.

Description

The fortress measures about 120 by 180 m (2). Entrances in the north and east allow access to the building. Staircases in the gateways lead to the top of the roughly 5 m thick walls (3). These are built of dry stone masonry and sometimes up to 4 m high (4). Rectangular bastions and a special method of wall construction, a combination of vertically and horizontally set sandstone slabs are prominent features. Even if large portions of the building are covered by sand, some stone structures of yet unknown function are visible in the interior.

Archaeological finds

Most of the objects excavated in 2002 in a sondage were beads or fragments of faience (5). Only a few pieces of stone and metal were recorded, among these several fragments of alabaster and an udjat of carnelian of excellent workmanship (6, right). A puzzling find is an udjat of silver with traces of gilding and moulds of inlays (6, left). It must have been a luxury item for the inhabitants of Gala Abu Ahmed.



5) left: lotus flower; right: fly

6) Udjat eyes

Most interesting are the fragments of at least seven different Egyptian New Year's flasks (7). The Egyptian New Year's flasks are roughly datable to the early Late Period (especially Dyn. 26). This very specific type of vessel has been exported to the Mediterranean and the Near East, but only a few examples, until now, have been recorded from Nubia.



7) Fragments of New Year's flasks

8) An incense burner.

9) Baboon (h: 4.8 cm).

Besides the small finds, pottery sherds, lithic artefacts, numerous ostrich eggshell beads, some bones (among them sheep/goat and cattle, det. N. Pöllath, Munich) and cowrie shells were also found. The pottery in general is very fragmentary and eroded. The fragment of an incense burner (8) may be of meroitic date. The small sandstone figurine of a baboon (9) was probably a votive offering.

First results

The small finds suggest contacts between Egypt and the Middle Nile region during the Napatan Period. These contacts have already been noted, since similar Egyptian products were buried in the royal cemeteries of Kush. The isolated place of Gala Abu Ahmed in the Lower Wadi Howar and the great quantity of Egyptian material may suggest the need to rethink the intensity of these contacts. Gala Abu Ahmed was clearly an important place during the Napatan period.

Aerial view of Gala Abu Ahmed in Lower Wadi Howar. The picture was taken with a photo kite in 2002.