



## Excavations at Site 3-J-23, et-Tereif, Sudan

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This excavation was a contribution by the Centro Mallqui (The Bioanthropology Foundation Peru), to the emergency archaeological program of The Sudan Archaeological Research Society, in the region of the Fourth Cataract.<sup>1</sup> The cemetery, site 3-J-23, was identified during the first season of the SARS Amri to Kirbekan Survey in 1999.<sup>2</sup> It was partly excavated in the winter of 2002/3 when 47 burials were examined and three others located, all dating from the Medieval Christian period (Welsby 2003, 26-28). The site is located on the left bank of the Nile. The surface of the low mound is irregular with clay concentrations from post-fluvial processes. Seventy one funerary monuments were identified on the surface (Colour plate Per.I). During the 2004 – 2005 season 11 Post-Meroitic and 134 Christian burials were excavated (Colour plate Per.II).

The main objective of the project was to rescue as much of the archaeological evidence as possible from the site prior to its inundation.

### Post-Meroitic burials

The main characteristics of these include:-

- 1) Trapezoidal shape with a descendary to allow the deposition of the body inside an ovoid vault.
- 2) Some bodies slightly flexed.
- 3) West-east body orientation.
- 4) Associated artefacts: beads, pottery (in seven burials).
- 5) Most burials were disturbed in antiquity, others were intruded by Christian tombs.

### Christian burials

The Christian burials were characterised by box grave monuments on the surface covering ovoid-shape tombs. Many burials however do not have funerary monuments. The bodies were dorsally extended, hands over the pubis, and with the legs together. They were orientated west-east and wrapped in shrouds (Plate 1). Grave goods were rare, confined to metal (probably copper) or stone

crosses and rings. Some burials showed partial or complete covers made of stone slabs over the body. Two types of covers were noted:

- 1) complete cover with stone slabs oriented north-south, supported on ledges in the long sides of the grave cut, forming a sort of vault.
- 2) three stone slabs, pottery fragments or mud bricks, over the cranium

A number of graves exhibited unusual features:-

**Burial 57** - Post-Meroitic. Located at the center of the cemetery in the highest place, the grave was associated with a pit containing four pottery vessels (Colour plate Per.III). No other bodies were deposited in a radius of at least 3m, the area perhaps covered by the tumulus.

**Burial 109** - Post-Meroitic. The only grave of this date that retained its tumulus.

**Burial 80** - Post-Meroitic. Shallow burial with a pot offering associated with the body.

**Burial 29** - Circular pit cut by a Christian tomb.

**Burial 62** - Two circular pits cut by a Christian tomb

**Burial 41** - Christian, burial of an infant with the body oriented east-west (other examples from this cemetery were noted in the 2002-2003 season).

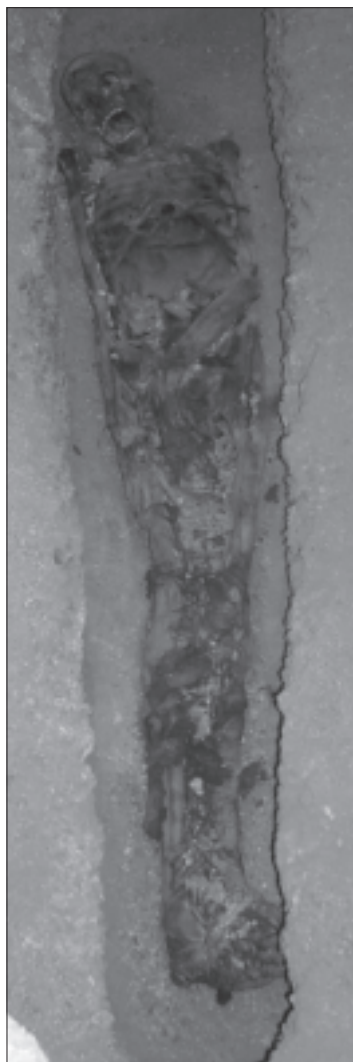
**Burial 99** - Christian, the only example where several body parts were absent: cranium, part of thorax, and right leg (Plate 2). Was this the result of a traumatic death? Where these body parts lost before burial?

**Burial 140** - Christian, pregnant woman.

### Conclusions

Twenty two units were opened, each of 64m<sup>2</sup>, a total of 1408m<sup>2</sup> of which Units 12, 14, 30 had been partially excavated during the 2002-2003 season. A total of 145 burials were investigated, of which four had no contents and 11 were disturbed. Of the 141 graves that contained bodies 113 were preserved as skeletons, there were 20 complete naturally-mummified bodies (Plate 3) and eight disarticulated mummies. Funerary monuments were associated with 34 graves. Post-Meroitic burials made up 4% of the total assemblage, the rest being Christian. It was not possible to estimate the sex of 71 individuals (50%), including the covered mummies and the bodies of the young and infants. Of those which could be identified

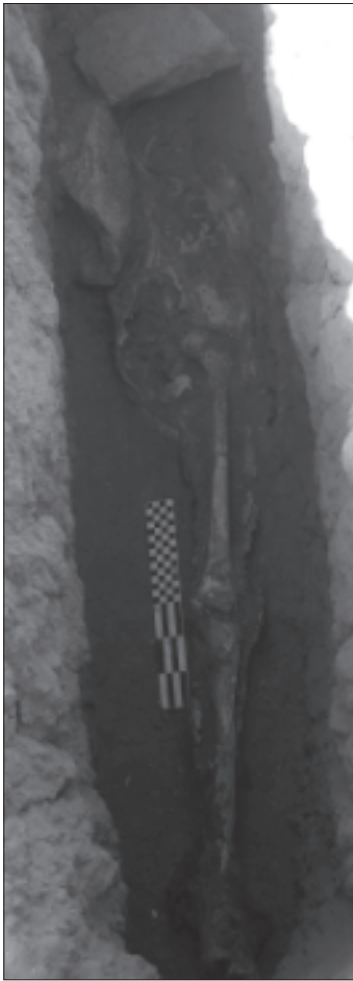
34 were male (24%): one post-Meroitic, 33 Christian; and 36 were females (26%): four post-Meroitic, 22 Christian.



*Plate 1. Body wrapped in a shroud in Grave 48.*

<sup>1</sup> The team consisted of Gerardo Carpio, Rosio Diaz, Lucia Watson and Alvaro Vasquez.

<sup>2</sup> For the location of the site see Colour plate Payne I.



*Plate 2. The skeleton in Grave 99. The ritual protection of the head by stones has been provided even in the absence of a skull!*



*Plate 3. Naturally mummified body in Grave 113.*

### **Acknowledgements**

The team would like to thank the Institute of Bioarchaeology for its financial support which made the project viable. The staff of the National Corporation for Antiquities and Museums facilitated the work of the project. Little could have been achieved without the help and support of the local people from et-Tereif and adjacent villages whose hospitality was much appreciated.

### **Bibliography**

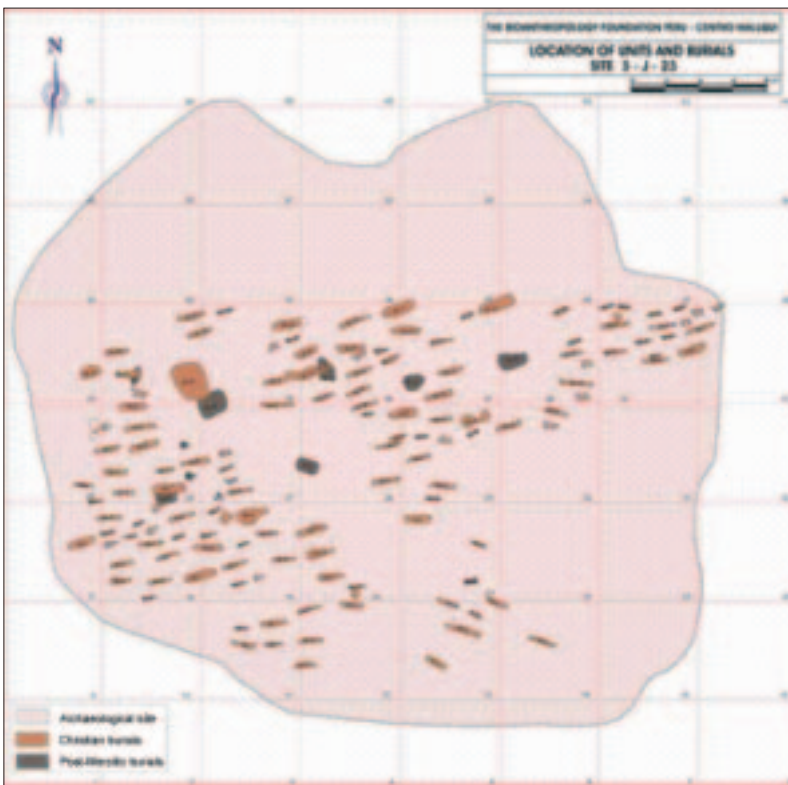
Welsby, D. A. 2003. 'The Amri to Kirbekan Survey: the 2002-2003 season', *Sudan & Nubia* 7, 26-32.



Colour plate P.I. Site 3-J-23. Plan of the cemetery showing the tomb monuments, both box graves and tumuli.



Colour plate P. III. Site 3-J-23. Pottery vessels in a pit associated with Grave 57.



Colour plate P.II. Site 3-J-23. Plan of the cemetery showing the grave cuts.



Colour plate P. IV. Site 3-J-23. Post-Meroitic crouched inhumation in the very shallow Grave 72.