

# ORIENTAL INSTITUTE NUBIAN EXPEDITION (OINE) PUBLICATION PROJECT

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The OINE publication project embarked on a three-year program to publish excavations in the Fourth Cataract of the Nile in 2007 and 2008 (fig. 1). The fieldwork was supported by Packard Humanities Institute and the National Geographic Society. In particular, the team worked in the concession of the Gdansk Archaeological Museum Expedition led by Henryk Paner, who offered sites, support, and kindness at every turn. Preliminary reports of this work have been published.<sup>1</sup> Three major parts for the publications are projected. The sites at al-Widay I-III will be published as volume 19 of the Oriental Institute Nubian Expedition series. The gold processing site of Hosh el-Geruf and the survey and excavations on the island of Umm Gebir will subsequently be published.

An almost complete set of databases for al-Widay I-III, Hosh el-Geruf, and the 117 sites on the island of Umm Gebir were created by early 2020. The database files cover registered objects and locus records from all three areas. The objects, photographs, and digitized field records for each site and locus have been collated, although sherd recording and drawing are still in progress. The work of the co-directors, Heidorn and Williams, is augmented by the help of Adrian Chłebowski, who is creating the plans of our sites; Steve Cole, who is transcribing the written field records; and Carol Meyer, our artist and gold-mining expert.

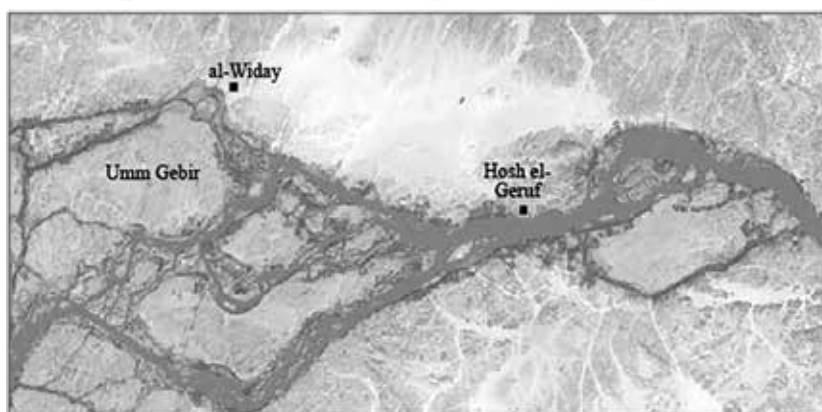
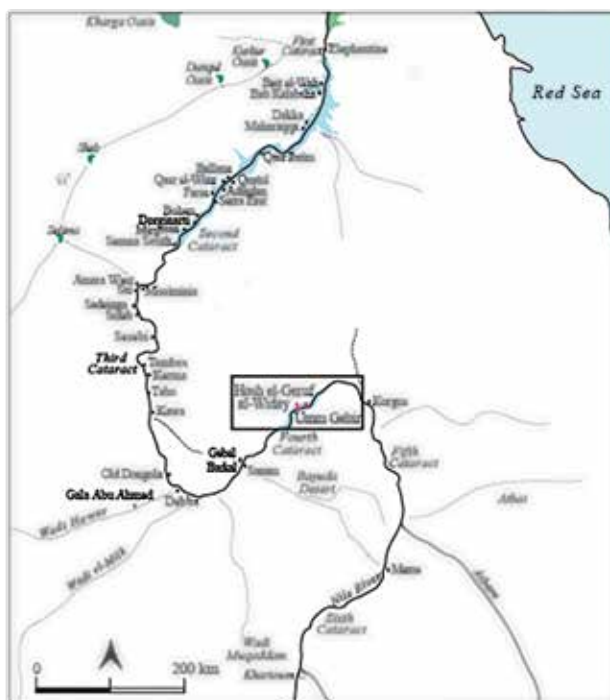


Figure 1. Map of locations:  
Hosh el Geruf, al Widay,  
and Umm Gebir.

All contacts between the staff are presently via emails and online servers due to the unfortunate arrival of the COVID-19 virus, which has affected the entire world. We are presently unable to access our archaeology lab with its shelves of sherds and objects, as active lab work stopped mid-March. Also unfortunate were the cancellations of scheduled study periods at the Oriental Institute for our lithics expert, Jacek Kabacinski; animal bone specialist, Sasha Rohret; and the bioarchaeologist Michele Buzon. These activities will most likely occur in year two of our publication process. Our work on the project, as some of you may know, has been funded by the three-year-long NEH Collaborative Grant and the White-Levy Archaeological Publication Grant.

Since the records have been digitized, we were able to proceed with the analysis of archaeological materials and the preparation of portions of the manuscript concerning the cemetery of al-Widay and its associated sites. Progress has also been made on the dating of the photographed and drawn sherds from Hosh el-Geruf and the Island of Umm Gebir, whose excavations and survey will be published later.

## AL-WIDAY

The most important of the sites is a cemetery at al-Widay I dating roughly contemporary with part of the Kerma culture downstream to about 1800–1600 BCE (fig. 2).

The archaeologists were impressed by the amount, or even the dominance of, Kerma-style pottery of the Classic Kerma (KC) phase when they encountered the archaeological remains in the region in the early 2000s—pottery that was identified at that time simply as Kerman in nature. However, as the salvage projects



Figure 2. The cemetery al-Widay I, as excavated.

developed, it became clear that there were many types of objects well known from Kerma that did not occur at the Fourth Cataract, and vice versa. Also, burial customs at Kerma and its provincial sites differed considerably from those found in the Fourth Cataract. A new term, Old Kush (OK), was devised to indicate its close relation with Kerma, a range of time that was then divided into OK I, II, and III. Al-Widay I began during OK II (Middle Kerma), and ended late in OK III, roughly coeval with the late Classic Kerma culture farther downstream.

With 112 tombs and deposits, al-Widay I was located a few hundred meters north of Umm Gebir and is large by the standards of the Fourth Cataract Old Kush sites, although provincial cemeteries downstream are sometimes very much larger. A comparable site, Ukma, near the Second Cataract, had well over two hundred burials. Kerma itself had about forty thousand! Interest in burials has revived considerably in recent years, because the study of osteology and bioarchaeology has increased our ability to study populations: their age, health, trauma, and diet, and even where they were raised.

After surveying and excavating at the gold-mining site of Hosh el-Geruf for some weeks in 2007, the OINE moved its main operation to al-Widay I, where the cemetery was sampled by excavating selected tombs. At the beginning of the 2008 season, we reviewed the site, estimating its potential, and with the encouragement of Mahmoud Suleiman el-Beshir, the NCAM inspector, decided to excavate it all. As it turns out, it was the only OK cemetery of this size excavated completely in the Fourth Cataract region, and the resulting complete sample will provide a clear framework for OK chronology and the foreign relations evident from pottery styles and manufacturing techniques, development of burial customs, and nature of the population.

Al-Widay I was situated on a low eminence a few hundred meters north and west of the hamlet of that name, which was so called after its location beside a wadi (fig. 3). Arranged north to south, the



Figure 3. View from the south end of al-Widay I toward the village and Umm Gebir.



Figure 4. Superstructure of Tomb AW I 35.

tombs covered the summit some three or four across for a time. At a point, the number of tombs expanded to eight or so, and the cemetery roughly split in half, part to the east and part to the west, ending in OK III (Classic Kerma) times at the south. Much later, in the Napatan Period, a large stone circle was erected at the north end (AW I-1), while a tomb of normal type was built in the southwest extension (AW I-51) and is apparently of a date contemporary with Egypt's New Kingdom.<sup>2</sup>

AW I did not have closely built superstructures, but enough stone was used for them that the plundering largely filled in the spaces between superstructures with displaced stones. The base of the superstructure was composed of larger stones, while smaller stones were placed above these, sloping inward to make a convex flattened tumulus (fig. 4). We had one team work to remove loose stones between the circular superstructures to define the tombs. Thereafter another team would clean the superstructure, record it, and remove half to make a section. They would then remove it to excavate the shaft, which was circular or oval and only 50 cm maximum depth (fig. 5). Arranged around the edge of the burial pit was a row of stones, apparently to support the stones of the superstructure. The team would clean to the bottom and only define the burial lightly, recording and removing objects and pottery. Finally, the osteology team of Megan Ingvaldstadt and Christina Riojas would clean, record, and remove the remains.

The typical tombs in the cemetery were quite shallow, as mentioned above, with the supporting stone ring just inside the shaft's bottom, often with pots deposited among the stones. The burial was placed in the center, with other objects around the neck and head or in front of the face. The substrate at al-Widay was mostly ochreous, and this hard, red, sandy soil was returned to the tomb during burial. Most of the burials were plundered in antiquity, which resulted in the stones from the center of the tu-



Figure 5. Burial pit of Tomb AW I 35.

mulus being removed and the area of the head exposed to reveal valuable jewelry. For the most part, the rest of the tomb was left unlooted and intact.

Imported pottery from Kerma became more common in OK III, although some local types continued. In addition, superstructures could be looser, and some shafts were sub-rectangular. In a few cases, there was a frame that indicated a bed burial. Despite these features, major parts of the Kerma culture were absent from these tombs, especially large amounts of wealth.

The cemetery AW I did not display great disparities in wealth. The tombs themselves were of modest size, measuring roughly 2.5–3.5 m in diameter in the north to approximately 2.0–3.0 m or less in the south, with smaller oval or circular burial pits. There were nine oblong burial shafts at the south end of the cemetery, about 1.20 to 2.30 m in length and a bit over 1.0 m wide. Rarely were there many objects. One or two bowls with one or two jars were a normal complement. Beads, even some of gold, were fairly common, and simple, small objects like bone awls and palettes occurred. There were only a few scarabs, two found in the burial of a young girl.

The archaeologies of Egypt and Kush are well known, as are the important Nubian group known as C-Group, and another, Pan-Grave, whose associations are under discussion. The Fourth Cataract culture, on the other hand, displays some features of both Pan Grave and the Kushite Kerma culture, as well as many of its own, thus the culture is referred to as “Old Kush.” There seem to be some differences within the region as well, indicating a cultural fluidity not as obvious farther downstream. A major focus of the project is sorting out the Kushite imports from locally made objects and identifying features that appeared later in the Pan-Grave culture. Almost all of this, as one might expect, is identified by pottery. Im-



Figure 6. Small Egyptian jar from AW I 30.

ports from Egypt are easy to identify, as they are wheel-made and often of the fine white clay from Upper Egypt. The imported Egyptian jars tend to be small in this area, because it is remote and transport is a challenge (fig. 6). From the early part of the cemetery came bowls covered with deep, incised decoration (fig. 7a–b). This is not a type found at Kerma, but it did occur at the Middle Kingdom Egyptian Fortress at Serra East (after ca. 1800 BCE) north of the Second Cataract, in quarry dumps where it is the only Nubian pottery (fig. 7c)<sup>3</sup>. From the middle part of the cemetery came bowls that were broad at the base and tapered or curved to a rib or line at the rim (fig. 8a–b). These are related to the Pan-Grave culture, although they do not belong to it, having slightly different shapes and the distinct pinkish color of locally made pottery. Last, in the latest part of the cemetery to the south, there are imports from Kerma, fine flared beakers, and small jars—even one with a spout—all black-topped with the distinct greyish bands below the black rim (fig. 9a–c). A few were made as local imitations, but most were brought from the

Kerma region downstream. It is probably not a coincidence that rock drawings on Umm Gebir showed large river boats of this period. Both the Serra East and the Kerma parallels indicate a date about 1800 BCE for the beginning and circa 1600 for the end of the cemetery, dates confirmed by scarabs. An early example relates to scarabs of the late Middle Kingdom (fig. 10a); one from the middle of the cemetery names an official who should date to the late Thirteenth Dynasty (1700–1650 BCE), “Captain of the First Battalion, Nebsumenu,” (fig. 10b); a Thirteenth Dynasty scarab bearing the name Nefer-ra’ (fig. 10c); and one in the late part of the cemetery showing a man holding a crocodile of the Second Intermediate Period (fig. 10d).

## CEMETERY POPULATION

In ideal circumstances, the chronological and social phases of the cemetery would be apparent; that is, there would be clear social groupings of tombs within each of the chronological phases. Archaeological materials almost never lend themselves to such straightforward analysis. The settled population represented by the people buried at al-Widay represents perhaps six to seven generations, with the construction of tombs around those of previous generations more spontaneous than planned. There is no clear evidence for a deliberate separation of the graves by social status or ethnic background of the deceased, although—despite the prevalence of looted graves—there are clearly tombs with more grave goods. With the chronology noted above, the cemetery could have had about one burial every two years. This might have come from a settlement not much different in population from modern al-Widay, about —twenty to thirty people, assuming that many infants were not buried in the cemetery.

The analysis of the skeletal remains of 114 individuals was conducted by Megan Ingvaldstad and provided us with sex and age data, as well as health indicators for each skeleton.<sup>4</sup> A majority of the tombs were looted, sometimes very badly, and skeletal elements were missing, so the sex and age of 43.9 percent of the skeletons was indeterminate. Taken as a whole, and disregarding the chronological phases, the cemetery contains more male individuals (31.6 percent) than females (24.6 percent),

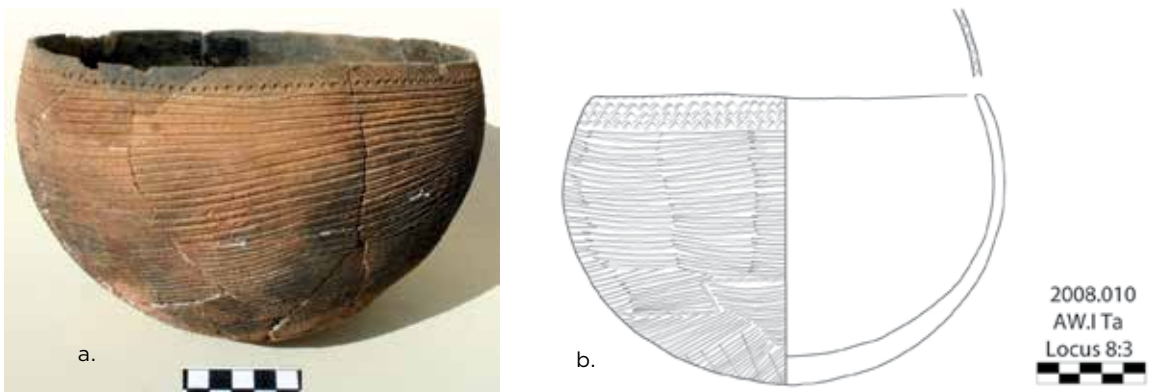


Figure 7. Overall deeply-incised bowls.

- a. from AW I 10 burial chamber (photo).
- b. from AW I-10 burial chamber (drawing).
- c. from Serra East quarry dumps.

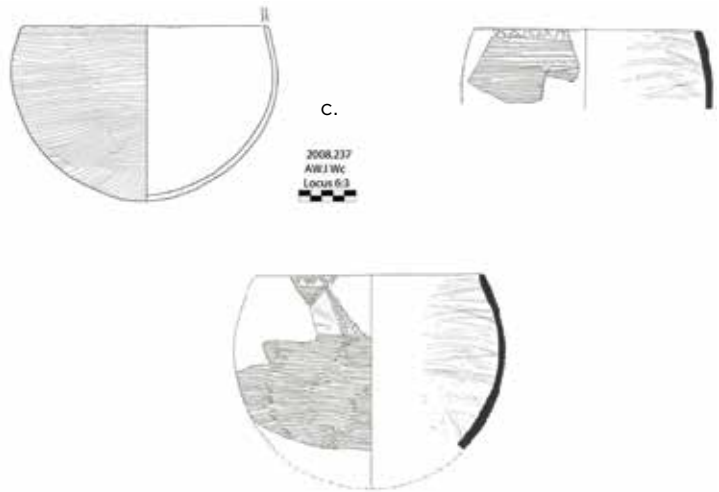


Figure 8. Pan-Grave related bowls.

- a. from AW I 88 (photo).
- b. from AW I 88 (drawing).

and as Ingvoldstad notes, about a third of the skeletons—not including fetuses or neonates buried with adults—belonged to individuals under the age of twenty years old.<sup>5</sup> This high percentage of young deaths is typical for ancient populations that have high fertility rates and are growing.

According to Ingvoldstad, the population at the cemetery showed developmental issues and conditions related to stress due to malnutrition and disease.<sup>6</sup> There are only seven incidents of trauma, and the types of skeletal occurrences are more likely attributed to accidents, hard labor, or developmental defects than interpersonal violence.

To explore any probable family or clan groupings, the twenty-six graves of infants and children buried alone were considered. Each of the four clusters that were identified perhaps represents the young of between one and two generations of the settled population. Adult single or double graves found near

each cluster of infant/child burials were then identified. This step is not yet clear enough for publication, since the later stages of the cemetery contain closely spaced tombs that might belong to one or another infant/child cluster. This work will be further clarified when all the pottery from the tombs is classified according to chronological phase.

Al-Widay I gives us a portrait of a small village through two centuries. More than that, it defines an interesting phase of a local culture in a little-known region of the Nile Valley. This was the age when the kingdom of Kush expanded south to the Fourth Cataract—and perhaps farther to the southeast—and north to the First. At some time during the late phase of the cemetery, the Kerman Kushites assembled an army and hurled it against Egypt. Drawing soldiers from its own population, but also from populations in Wawat (Lower Nubia), Khenthennefer, Medja-land (the Eastern Desert), and perhaps the Fourth Cataract and Punt, located on the Red Sea near Ethiopia. Recorded after its departure by a graffito in a tomb at el-Kab in Egypt, it was apparently part of the events that led to so many valuable Egyptian objects being deposited in the royal tombs at Kerma.

As noted above, the al-Widay I cemetery did not contain great wealth. Nevertheless, it was rich enough to import much of the pottery found there, and the local products were often quite good. Clearly, they had enough to trade, and they may actually have been part of the work force processing gold at Hosh el-Geruf, which was active at this time. Kerma was the great center in Nubia, so it is hardly surprising that its culture would be influential here, but it is clear that this was not an outpost.

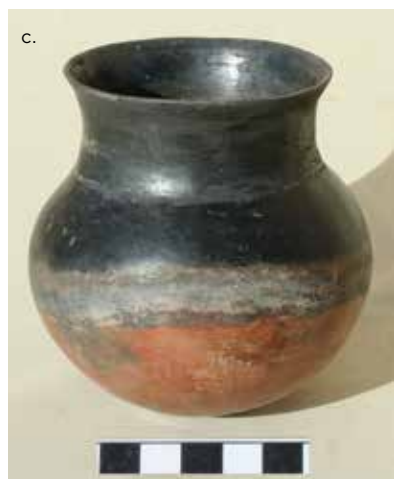


Figure 9. Pottery imported from Kerma.

- a. Carinated bowl with bulged base of Middle Kerma date from AW I 27.
- b. Kerma beaker of middle Classic Kerma date from AW I 97.
- c. Black-topped jar of middle Classic Kerma date from AW I 97.



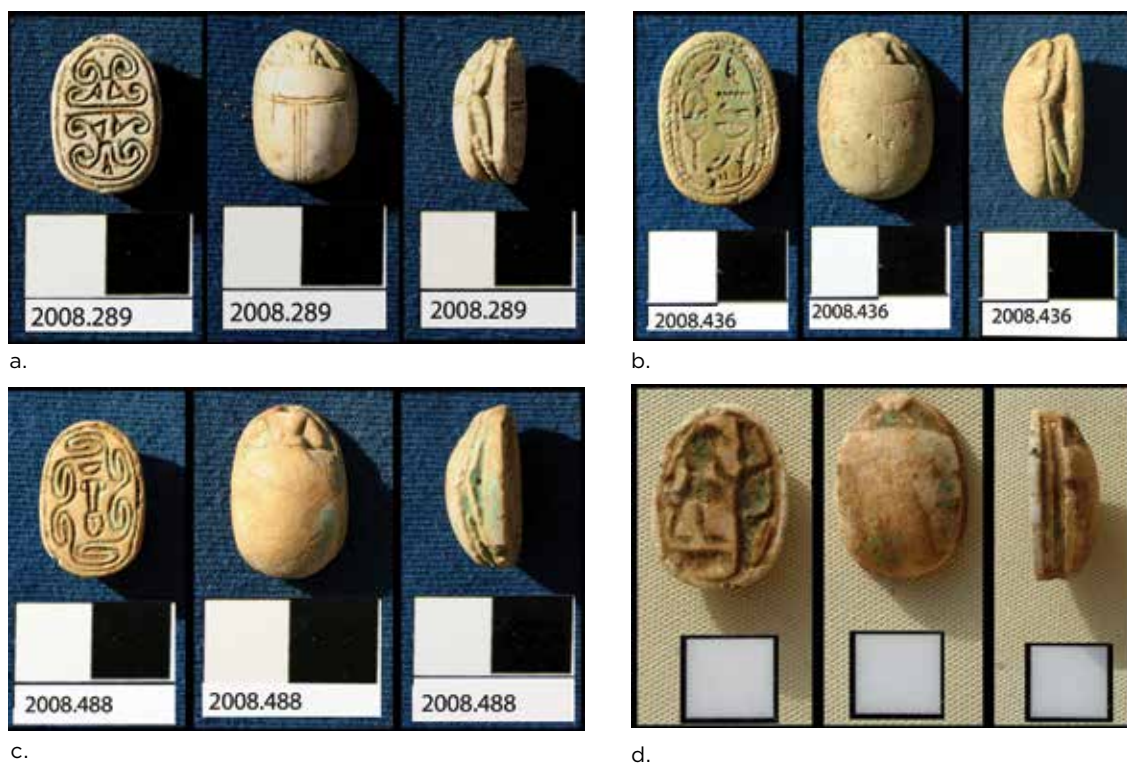


Figure 10. Scarabs from al-Widay I.

- a. Early scarab from AW I 10.
- b. Scarab of Nebsumenu, Captain of the First Battalion from AW I 37.
- c. Scarab of the Thirteenth Dynasty, oval with Nefer-Ra', from AW I 37.
- d. Second Intermediate Period scarab from AW I 77, showing a human holding a crocodile.

## References

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## ***Endnotes***

<sup>1</sup> Emberling and Williams 2007; Emberling and Williams 2008; Emberling, Williams, Meyer, Shonkwiler, and Harrell 2010.

<sup>2</sup> See Williams 1992, fig. 17bb for a large NK Wedjat Eye (R 35-45) and fig. 17f for a segmented bead (R 35-31c). The superstructure and shaft are otherwise like AW I-51.

<sup>3</sup> Williams 1986, 63-65, 85 fig. 34, 384 fig. 188d-i, and pls. 15-16.

<sup>4</sup> Ingvoldstad 2009.

<sup>5</sup> Ingvoldstad 2009, 7-8.

<sup>6</sup> Ingvoldstad 2009, 8-12.

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