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EARLY MAKURIA RESEARCH PROJECT.
LATE ANTIQUE BEADS AND A NAPATAN AMULET FROM THE
EARLY MAKURIA PHASE II TUMULI CEMETERY AT EL-DETTI
(ABOUT AD 450-550), SEASON 2015

Seven tumulus graves were excavated in 2015 at El-Detti, Sudan, by the joint Polish-Sudanese team from the Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology of Warsaw University (PCMA) and The National Corporation for Antiquities and Museums (NCAM), under the direction of Mahmoud El-Tayeb.¹ El-Detti village lies about 13 km downstream from Karima and 7 km upstream from El-Zuma. The explored tombs have been dated to the Early Makuria Phase II period, otherwise called the late post-Meroitic period (about AD 450 – 550).

Seven hundred and eight beads and pendants, together with some fragments, have been recorded during the excavations. They were usually found in grave chambers or shafts that were already robbed. Since the beads and pendants were picked up as dispersed items, types of beadwork cannot be indicated.² The beads and pendants are made of a variety of materials (ostrich eggshell, bone, stone, glazed composition, glass, and metal-in-glass) and using diverse techniques. The majority of items can be paralleled at contemporary post-Meroitic sites. Some specimens find analogy in Lower Nubian royal tombs. Additionally, one pendant amulet is an earlier object and was clearly a reused item. Although no imports have been recognized in the pottery assemblage from the excavated tombs,³ several glass beads appear to be Indian or Sri Lankan products.

AN OVERVIEW OF MATERIALS AND TECHNIQUES

Beads and pendants are described below according to the material they were made of. They are illustrated in fig. 1 and colour fig. 3.

Ostrich eggshell

Twenty-six beads were made of ostrich eggshell. They are small disc cylinders perforated from both ends (figs. H.1, L.1). They belong to one of two types that have been recognized in the region.⁴ Small disc cylinders were especially common at post-Meroitic Lower Nubian sites.⁵ The El-Detti assemblage lacks the type of large discs with retouched edges that are observed at El-Zuma, a site that is contemporary with El-Detti.⁶

Bone

A bone pendant (fig. 1) is flat with a plain back and incised details on the slightly convex side. A lateral perforation runs through the head. The pendant consists of a head, a toroidal chest, and almost trapezoidal bottom. The head features big almond-shaped eyes, eyebrows, a triangular nose, very small mouth, and one preserved ear. The hair line at the top might be a feathered crown, and a vertically incised line between the head and chest could be a simplified beard. Tiny traces of blue/green glaze can be discerned in the incised lines delineating the nose and arched legs. Similar items made of faience, sandstone and glazed steatite have been identified as Bes or pseudo-Bes amulets with pentagonal face, and they were found between the First and the Third Cataract: in the Faras Region, at Buhen, Abri-Missiminia, and Amara West and ascribed to the Napatan Period.⁷ For another item the place of discovery is unknown. It might have been found in the Kawa or Napata region.⁸ Other example comes from the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston collection, but it remains unprovenanced.⁹ In general this type of Bes is considered to

1 El-Tayeb and Czyżewska-Zalewska forthcoming

2 An overview of preserved objects made with beads and dated to late antique Nubia is given elsewhere (Then-Obłuska in press a)

3 El-Tayeb and Czyżewska-Zalewska forthcoming

4 Then-Obłuska in press a: Z24/49.1

5 Then-Obłuska in press b

6 e.g. Then-Obłuska in press a: Z28/15.1, Z28/17.1

7 Petacchi 2014: Fig. 2A-D, Table 2 and references therein

8 Ibid.: Fig. 2.E, Table 2: "Sample E"

9 MFA 72.4032

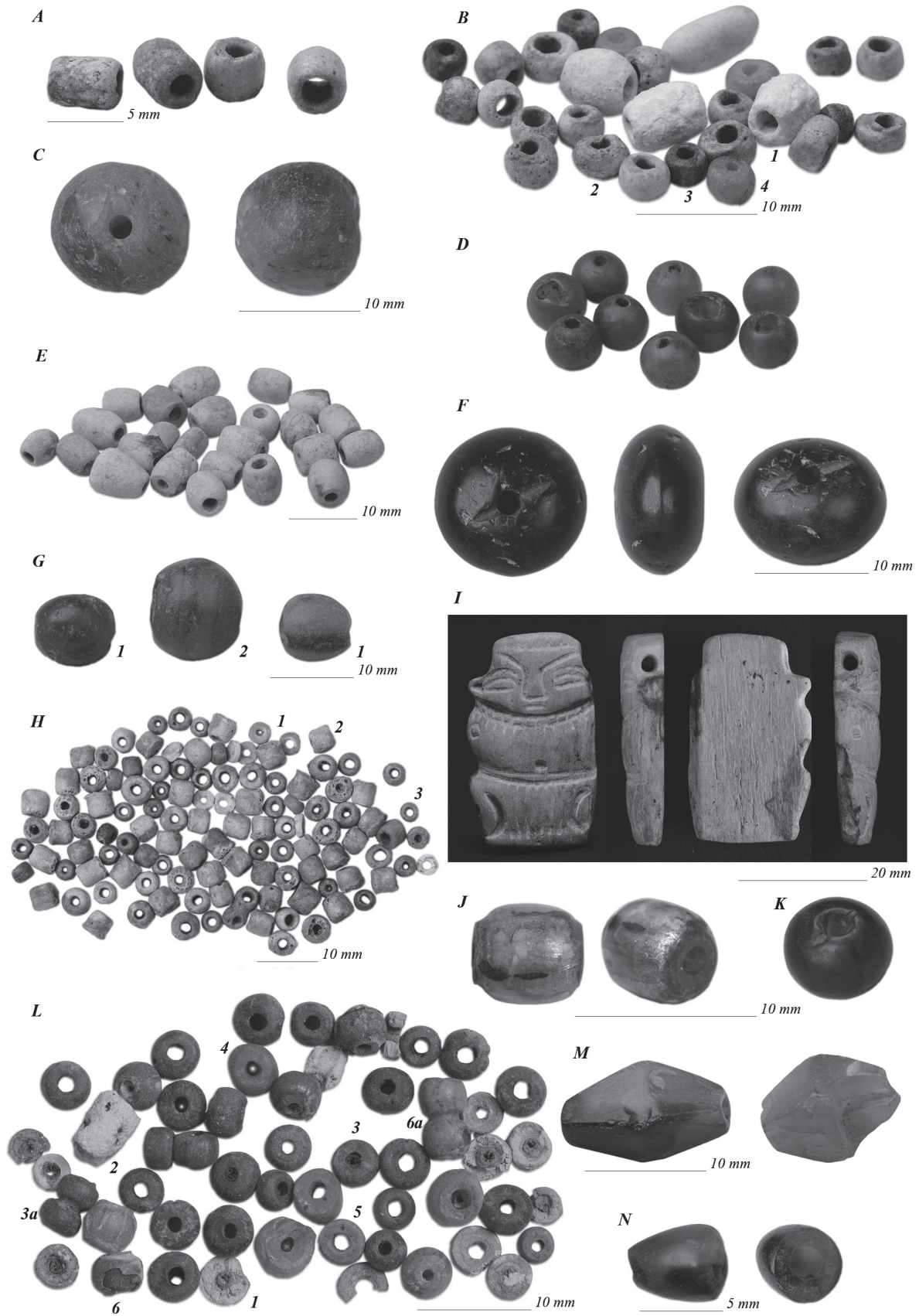


Fig. 1: Beads and pendant from El-Detti tumuli: A (D2/21), B (D2/22), C (D4/14.1), D (D4/23.1), E (D4/23.2), F (D4/23.3), G (D4/23.4), H (D4/23), I (D4/27), J (D5/9.1), K (D5/9.2), L (D5/9), M (D6/7.1), N (D7/8.1). Photos by Adam Kamrowski; plate design J. Then-Obłuska.



be made in a style that combined Egyptian tradition and indigenous form.¹⁰ Although found as a reused Napatan item in a post-Meroitic tomb, the El-Detti bone specimen is a new addition to the corpus of local variants of Bes. The re-use of Napatan and Meroitic Bes amulets has already been recorded in post-Meroitic and later contexts at Nubian, Eastern Desert and Red Sea sites.¹¹

Stone

Some long barrels or conical whitish beads might be made of marble (figs. B.1, E.1, L2). Similar beads can be observed from many post-Meroitic sites in the Fourth Cataract and to the south. For example, together with other beads they were part of circlet found at El-Ashamin¹² and most probably a necklace from Kassinger Bahri.¹³

Many small well-shaped globular beads were made of red agate and carnelian (fig. D). They were perforated from one end and show traces of a saw next to the larger hole opening. Larger specimens measure ca. 8 mm in diameter (fig. K).

Other small stone beads of unpolished red agate and black stone have elongated shapes, either oblate or conical (figs. G.1, N). Small stone beads of elongated shapes have already been identified from the region.¹⁴ Among unpolished red agate specimens, there are large globular beads measuring ca. 10 mm in diameter (figs. C, G.2).

A large lenticular bead is most probably made of dark carnelian or garnet (fig. F). It measures ca. 13 mm in diameter. It was pierced from both ends, which resulted in a double cylindrical shape of the perforation. What is more, traces of sawing are visible next to the hole opening, which is a characteristic feature of Egyptian and Nubian stone bead perforating.¹⁵ Similar large lenticular beads were found on a man's left arm in Ballana Tomb 9. The man on whose skeleton the armband was found was apparently a warrior.¹⁶ Another two bracelets were found on the right and left wrist of an adult in Ballana Tomb 47.¹⁷ Both tombs were dated by László Török to the sec-

ond quarter of the fifth century AD.¹⁸ This type can be recognized among stone beads from El-Zuma.¹⁹ Similar beads are exhibited at the Sudan National Museum, SNM 3230. According to the Museum catalog card of SNM 3230, the beads come from the Oxford Excavations in Nubia at Firka. Indeed, the beads were found as a bracelet for body E, that of an adult in tomb A.11 at cemetery A.²⁰ The Firka site has been considered rather late in date, that is, 490-570 AD.²¹

Two carnelian beads were made in the shape of long square bicones (fig. M). Similar specimens are known from the contemporary site of El-Zuma.²² the Lower Nubian site of Qustul, which is dated between AD 370/380-410,²³ the Fourth Cataract sites dated to the Transitional LM/PM,²⁴ and up the Nile at Gabati.²⁵ They were also recorded from Early Byzantine Berenike, Egypt,²⁶ and Tall as-Sin and Deir ez-Zor, Syria.²⁷ Whether copper drills and abrasives, or single and double diamond drills were used is not certain. The latter method would indicate an Asian origin.²⁸

Glazed composition/faience

The overwhelming majority of beads is made of faience (n=565). They are small blue-glazed oblates (figs. B.2, H.3) and standard to long tubular beads (figs. A, H.2) that are well recognized in the Fourth Cataract region.²⁹ Since the tradition of producing faience beads ceased in Egypt in the third century AD, they were most probably Nubian products.

Glass and metal-in-glass

Forty-four beads were made of glass and nine of metal-in-glass.

Drawn and segmented beads

Small blue glass beads were made of drawn tubes that were most probably segmented in molds. Such molds

10 Petacchi 2014

11 Then-Obluska in press d

12 Then-Obluska 2014: Fig. 2, cat. 225

13 Ibid., cat. 220

14 Ibid.: Z16/20a, Z16/20b, Z16/20c, Z16/21, Z16/23

15 Then-Obluska in press b

16 Emery and Kirwan 1938: Pl. 38A: B.9-3 (described as carnelian); Wenig 1978: 309, cat. 309, Egyptian Museum in Cairo – personal observation

17 Emery and Kirwan 1938: Pl. 38A: B.47-26-27 (described as carnelian)

18 Török 1986: 197

19 Z7/10.1 and Z7/16 – personal observation of the 2015 season assemblage

20 Emery 1939: 6, object A.11/62, Pl. XX: Type 5a (described as carnelian)

21 Williams 1991: 12

22 Ibid.: Z9/10, Z9/17, Z24/55

23 Then-Obluska, in press b

24 Then-Obluska 2014: Pl. II, cats 215, 216

25 Edwards 1998: Fig. 10: 74

26 Then-Obluska 2015: Fig. 3.6-7

27 Montero Fenollós 2008: Pl. LX:1

28 Kenoyer 2003

29 Then-Obluska 2014; in press a



were found at Alexandria.³⁰ Single- and double-segment beads could be discerned (figs. B.3, 3a, L.3).

Tubes made of a metal foil between two transparent glass layers were also drawn and then segmented into single- or double-segment beads (figs. J, L.6, 6a). The color of the foil is silver and silver-in-glass beads are often found in post-Meroitic assemblages in the region of the Fourth Cataract.³¹

Drawn, cut and rounded beads

In contrast to beads that were sections of segmented tubes, other drawn tubes could be simply cut and more or less rounded. Semitranslucent green (n=8) and opaque orange (n=2) beads have been recorded at El-Detti in two graves (figs. B.4, L.4, 5). Drawn and rounded beads belong to the South Asian bead tradition and they have been recognized at Red Sea port sites³² and at other post-Meroitic sites in Nubia.³³ Moreover, a study of the chemical composition of beads from Quseir port has recently confirmed their South Indian/Sri Lankan origin.³⁴

SUMMARY

More than seven hundred beads have been registered from seven tumulus graves excavated during the 2014–2015 seasons at El-Detti. The site has been dated to the Early Makuria Phase II, otherwise called the late post-Meroitic period (about AD 450–550). In general, the El-Detti bead repertoire can be compared to that at the contemporary site of El-Zuma.

Among beads made of organic materials, many of them were disc cylinders made of ostrich eggshell. They are well recognized at other Nubian Nile Valley and Red Sea port sites. An outstanding pendant in the form of a Bes amulet must be a reused item, as it finds parallels only in objects described recently as Napatan. Finds of Napatan and Meroitic Bes amulets at post-Meroitic and later Nubian sites has been previously affirmed.

In comparison to the post-Meroitic assemblages in Nubia³⁵ and at El-Zuma's tumulus cemetery,³⁶ the El-Detti collection lacks the well-known stone tear-drop pendants. The stone beads were perforated

from one end, and show traces of a saw next to the larger hole opening. In addition to the small well-shaped globular carnelian beads and long square bicones, one large bead has a lenticular shape. This large bead finds parallels at El-Zuma, Firka, and the royal cemetery at Ballana. In the Ballana and Firka tombs these beads were found as elements of bracelets/armlets.

As at other post-Meroitic sites in Upper Nubia,³⁷ the majority of beads from El-Detti was made of blue glazed composition/faience. Since the tradition of producing faience beads ceased in Egypt in the third century AD, they were most probably Nubian products.

Drawn and segmented blue glass and silver-in-glass beads dominate the glass bead assemblage at El-Detti. They are also very common finds in contemporary Egypt and Nubia. Green and orange glass beads, that were drawn, cut and rounded, are well known at Late Roman Red Sea ports and post-Meroitic Nubian sites, including the royal cemeteries in Lower Nubia. They are most probably of South Indian/Sri Lankan origin.

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30 Rodziewicz 1984 – for molds found in a Late Roman context; Kucharczyk 2011 – for molds found in an Early Roman context.

31 Then-Obłuska 2014

32 Francis 2002; Then-Obłuska 2015; in press c

33 Then-Obłuska in press a, b

34 Then-Obłuska and Dussubieux 2016

35 e.g. Then-Obłuska 2014; in press b

36 Then-Obłuska in press a

37 E.g. Then-Obłuska 2014: Plate 3; Then-Obłuska in press a



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ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Mehr als 700 Perlen konnten aus sieben Tumulusgräbern, die in der Saison 2015 in El-Detti ausgegraben wurden, dokumentiert werden. Der Altertümerplatz wird in die späte postmeroitische Phase (ca. 450–550 n. Chr.) datiert. Allgemein kann das Perlenrepertoire aus El-Detti mit dem des zeitgleichen Friedhofs von El-Zuma verglichen werden.

Unter den aus organischem Material gefertigten Perlen sind viele schmale zylindrische bzw. scheibenförmige aus Straußeneischnalen, die es auch in anderen Altertümerstätten im nubischen Niltal sowie an Häfen des Roten Meeres gibt. Steinperlen sind von einer Seite aus angebohrt und zeigen Spuren einer Säge nahe der größeren Öffnung. Zusätzlich zu kleinen gut gearbeiteten Kugelperlen sowie langen quadratischen bikonischen Perlen ist eine große linsenförmige Perle aus Karneol vorhanden. Diese große Perle hat Parallelen in El-Zuma, Firka sowie dem Königsfriedhof in Ballana. In Ballana und Firka sind diese Perlen als Bestandteile von Armbändern gefunden worden.

Wie auch in anderen postmeroitischen Friedhöfen in Obernubien ist der Großteil der Perlen in El-Detti aus einer blau glasierten Fayence hergestellt worden. Da die Fayenceproduktion in Ägypten im 3. Jh. n. Chr. ihr Ende fand, sind diese Perlen höchstwahrscheinlich aus nubischer Produktion.



Gezogene und mehrteilige blaue Glas- und Silber-Glasperlen dominieren die Glasperlensammlung in El-Detti. Sie sind sehr häufige Funde im zeitgleichen Ägypten wie auch Nubien. Grüne und orange Glasperlen, die gezogen, geschnitten und abgerundet wurden, sind gut aus spätrömischen Häfen des Roten Meeres sowie postmeroitischen Stätten in Nubien

(z.B. den Königsfriedhöfen Unternubiens) bekannt. Sie stammen höchstwahrscheinlich aus Südindien bzw. Sri Lanka.

Ein außergewöhnlicher Knochenanhänger in der Form eines Bes-Amuletts muss ein wiedergenutzter Anhänger sein, da Parallelen dazu nur aus dem napanischen Kontext bekannt sind.

ANZEIGE

Dotawo ▶
Monograph 1

The Old Nubian Texts from Attiri
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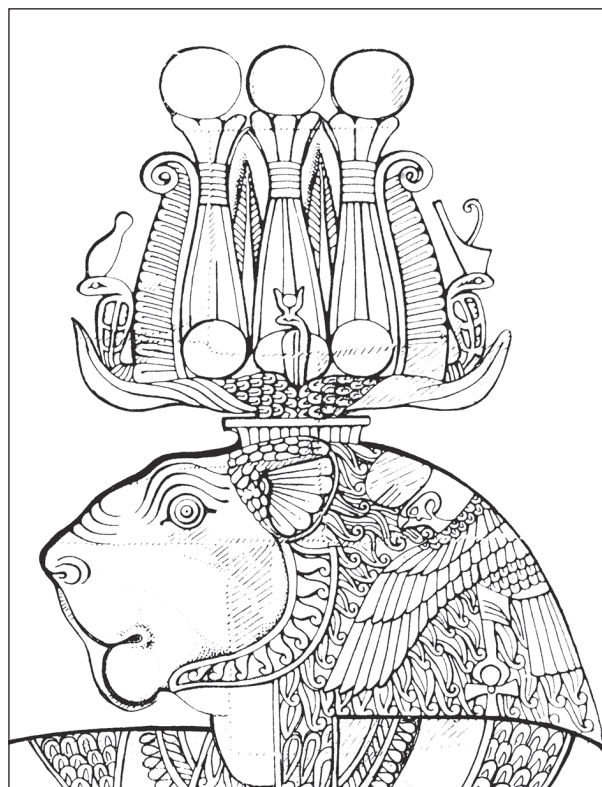


The Old Nubian Texts from Attiri is the first publication in the *Dotawo ▶ Monographs* series. It presents heretofore unpublished material, an edition of a series of manuscripts discovered in the frame of the Aswan High Dam campaign at the site of Attiri, a rocky island in the Batn el-Hajjar region in the Sudan, and does so in an innovative way, through an intense collaboration of the editors under the name of the Attiri Collaborative. By bringing together their diverse backgrounds in linguistics, archeology, Bible studies, history, anthropology, and philology, the editors hope to have provided an example of a new model of collective manuscript editing and the results such collaboration can attain.

The collection consists of fifteen manuscript fragments that were all written in Old Nubian. Among these manuscripts special mention should be made of two parchment leaves from a codex dedicated to works on the Archangel Michael, a lectionary containing fragments from the Gospel of Matthew and the Second Letter to the Corinthians, as well as a rare letter written on a leather sheet.

The Old Nubian Texts from Attiri is available through all major online booksellers and
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