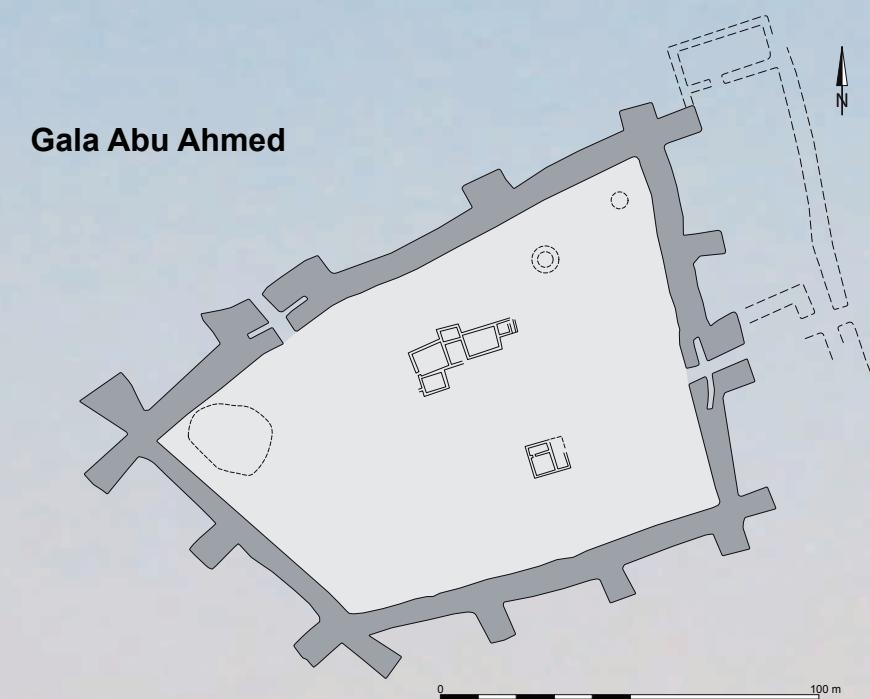


Gala Abu Ahmed - A Fortress in the Desert

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 (2), pointed to Meroitic times, which made the building even more interesting. Research done in recent years by Cologne University's projects work in Wadi Howar confirmed a Kushite presence in the area: Finds and radiocarbon dates oscillating between ca. 1100 and 400 BC point to an use in Napatan and even Pre-Napatan times. The structure very probably functioned as a post securing trade and traffic between the Nile Valley and inner parts of Africa and certainly also fulfilled military purposes.



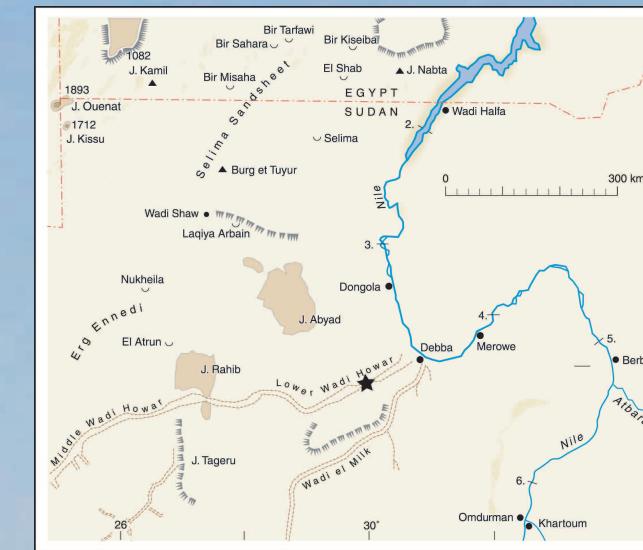
2) Schematic ground plan.



3) The northern gateway.



4) The northern wall of Gala Abu Ahmed.



1) The location of
Gala Abu Ahmed.

Archaeological finds

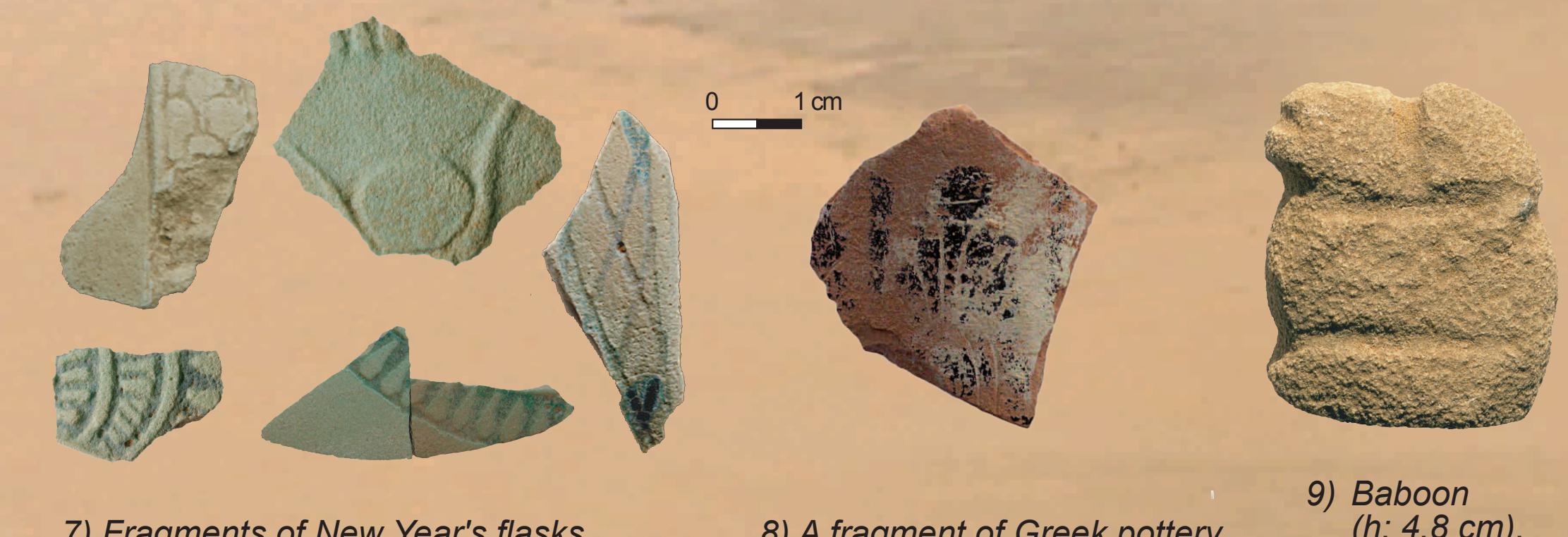
Remarkable is the great number and quality of small finds, among them numerous disk beads and fragments of faience (5). Some inscribed pieces show the names of Kushite kings written in Egyptian hieroglyphics (5, right). Objects of stone and metal were recorded, among these several fragments of alabastra, an udjat of carnelian of excellent workmanship (6, right) and a small statue of the Egyptian god Thot (6, left). Small sandstone animal figurines (9) were probably votive offerings.



5) left: lotus flower; right: inscribed piece

6) left: Statue of Thot (h: 5.5 cm); right: Udjat eye

Most interesting are the fragments of several 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) A fragment of Greek pottery

9) Baboon (h: 4.8 cm).

Besides the small finds, pottery sherds, lithic artefacts, numerous ostrich eggshell beads, animal bones (mostly sheep/goat and cattle) and cowrie shells were also found. The pottery displays a large variety of wares and types. Besides numerous hand-made sherds wheel-made ones are also present and there are fine as well as utilitarian wares. Some sherds show a very coarse surface and might belong to cooking pots. Contact with the Egyptian sphere is indicated by pieces made of marl clay. Surprising was the discovery of several fragments of Greek pottery (8).

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. A clearing of the surface in 2008/09 revealed remains of different stone buildings of yet unknown function in the interior (2).



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

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 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 and even earlier.