

# ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATIONS ON THE TUMULUS CEMETERIES AT EL-AR 7 AND 29 (SHEMKHIYA)

Marek Chłodnicki

The El-Ar 7 and El-Ar 29 sites were discovered during the November survey in 2007. The graves were of two types — semi-domed, which are connected with the Napatan Horizon as a rule, and small flat

tumuli from the Kerma period — but neither could be dated for lack of surface archaeological material. Excavations of chosen features were undertaken to verify the dating of these two small cemeteries.

## EL-AR 7

The El-Ar 7 site is situated on the edge of the highland, on the left bank of the old Nile river bed (N 19°27'07.8"; E 32°55'09.8"). The site is divided into three parts (northern, central and southern) by a small wadi leading to the old river bed. The survey identified a group of small tumuli, each 3–4 m in diameter and no more than 0.30 m high, some stone circles, and a group of semi-domed graves. Two of the latter located in the rocks in the central part and a small tumulus in the northern part were selected for testing.

The two graves in the central part (nos 1 and 2) lie next to a large rock formation which is up to 1 m in diameter. It rises approximately 0.60 m above the ground, thus serving as a natural wall. Originally, there seem to have been at least four such graves around this particular formation, but they were plundered and the stones of the mounds scattered. The construction and preservation are identical to that from the

Kirbekān 208 cemetery, which is dated to the Napatan period (Budka 2007: 78–81), and match type II.g in Paner and Borcowski's classification (2005: 112–113), which is dated to the Old Kush III through Napatan periods.

Excavations of the first grave indicated that the original rock mound, which had been disturbed by the plunderers, was about 2 m in diameter. The burial chamber contained scattered human bones, but sufficiently in position to suggest that the skeleton had lain on its right side. A piece of skull lying in a niche in the rock suggested where the head could have been. No offerings were found in the grave.

The other tomb that was tested had a superstructure consisting of a mound 2 m in diameter, formed of stones which were 10–20 cm in diameter [*Fig. 1*]. It filled a niche between the stone blocks of the rock formation and covered the skeleton completely. The load of the stones caused massive



*Fig. 1. Grave 2 at the El-Ar 7 site  
(Photo M. Chłodnicki)*



*Fig. 2. Grave 3 at the El-Ar 7 site  
(Photo M. Chłodnicki)*

damage to the bones. Anthropological examination identified the burial as being of a woman in her prime (*adultus/maturus* according to the mission's anthropologist Karol Piasecki). She was buried on her right side with head to the northwest. It is believed that the direction of the head was mostly conditioned by the rock formation. Fragments of at least four different ceramic bowls were discovered at the edge of the mound. They were decorated with engraved ornaments and with fingerprints on the bottom. The type of decoration dates the pots to the *Kerma Moyen* period (see Gratien 1985: 313).

The third explored grave is a small tumulus, 4 m in diameter [Fig. 2]. The hole at the center indicated earlier plundering. The outer rock circle consisting of large rocks was present only at the southern edge of the grave, the northern part taking advantage of

bedrock. A relatively shallow (0.50 m deep) grave pit was dug. Slabs of rock and loose stones covered this pit which was approximately 1.00 by 0.60 m. The slabs around the head had been removed by the grave robbers. Inside the pit, there was the body of an adult woman? (*maturus*) placed in contracted position with head to the northwest and hands by the face. Four small ostrich eggshell beads were found by the hands and head. The construction of the tumulus puts it in the FT02d category of the Borcowski and Welsby unpublished classification of 2007<sup>1</sup> (corresponding to type T.IIa, Welsby 2005: 4): a low flat tumulus with outer and inner stone kerb composed of a single row of stones. Borcowski and Welsby date this type to the *Kerma Classique* period. Therefore, the El-Ar 7 cemetery is from the end of the *Kerma Moyen* and the *Kerma Classique* periods.

## EL-AR 29 (SHEMKHIYA)

The El-Ar 29 site is a flat area located in the desert (N 19°27'09.3"; E 32°55'16.2"), between two wadis leading to the old valley of the Nile, approximately 300 m to the east of the El-Ar 7 site. Sporadic potsherds of Neolithic date prove that there was a camp in the area. Individual stone features were difficult to identify: one was an irregular mound approx. 4 m in diameter, the other, of the same size, was clearly a classic low tumulus with telltale signs of plunder in the form of a central cave-in [Fig. 3].

Upon excavation the first mound proved to be the superstructure of a grave containing a single burial of a woman identified as an *adultus/maturus* individual

[Fig. 4]. She was buried in tightly contracted position, in a very narrow crevice cut in the rock ground. No equipment was found inside the grave, and outside it only a single fragment of pot decorated with incised lines. The vessel may be assigned to the Kerma Horizon.

In the second of the graves, under the rock mound, an empty burial chamber, 0.60 m deep and filled with rocks, was found. No signs of burial were discovered. A single ostrich eggshell bead lay among the stones, along with a sherd fragment of a thick-walled pot, most probably used as a digging tool by the robbers. Among the stones forming the rock mound there were six fragments of

1 A provisional type series of monuments for the MDASP project was prepared by Zbigniew Borcowski and Derek A. Welsby and sent to participants of the Fourth Cataract salvage project; see also [www.nubiansociety.org](http://www.nubiansociety.org).



*Fig. 3. The two tumuli excavated at site El-Ar 29  
(Photo M. Chłodnicki)*



*Fig. 4. Grave 1 at the El-Ar 29 site  
(Photo M. Chłodnicki)*

grain grinders, possibly gathered from the Neolithic site nearby.

The two tumuli can be assigned to the FC01b category (corresponding to Welsby T. VII, according to Welsby 2005: 4, and type II.4 according to Paner and Borcowski 2005: 112): circular, shallow dome-shaped

cairn. This category is dated by Borcowski and Welsby (2009) to the *Kerma Moyen* period.

Following the excavations, both cemeteries can be assigned to the Kerma Horizon despite the absence of solid evidence in the form of well-preserved artifact material.

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