

GALA ABU AHMED - THE SMALL FINDS¹

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During the excavation at Gala Abu Ahmed a number of fragmentary small finds were recovered². Most of the objects were beads or fragments of faience. Only a few objects of other materials (stone, metal) were recorded.

Faience

Beads

Small ring and disc beads were the most common finds from the excavated area. Their diameter varied from 2.4 to 8.8 mm, while the colours ranged from white, green, blue, red to (dark) brown. Other forms were cylindrical, barrel and ball beads as well as a few examples of tubular beads.

At least seven fragments of serrated lentoid beads (green and blue), typical in the Napatan period³, were found in the excavation; two more were gathered in the 1984 campaign. Also recovered were four small leaves, which were used as beads or small amulets, as well as a flower-pendant (Nr. 40, light green, 11.1 x 12.2 mm). The fragment of an eye-bead again hinted at the Napatan period, when this kind of bead was used abundantly⁴.

Other small finds

Among various fragments were :

- 1) A feathered crown of a Bes (Nr. 45, turquoise, 10.0 x 10.5 mm; Pl. 1.B)⁵,
- 2) a part of a cartouche (Nr. 15, blue, 8.7 x 7.3 mm)⁶,

¹ This is a summary of the extended publication Lohwasser 2004. I am grateful to Dr. Friederike Jesse and Dr. Rudolph Kuper for the permission to study these objects and for their generous assistance.

² Each of the altogether 111 small bags with often more than one item was numbered as I found them in the box. Therefore the number is no indication of the area or the depth it was found, except numbers beginning with "S", which means "Sammelfund" (gathered from the surface in the northeast corner of the fortress) and the numbers beginning with "BOS 1984" (finds of the campaign of 1984), which were gathered elsewhere on the surface within the fortress. The numbers given here correspond with the numbers of the tables in Lohwasser 2004 : 162-167.

³ Sanam : frequently, but published by Griffith in two figures only (Griffith 1923 : pl. LX.11, XXI.4); Mirgissa : Geus 1975 : fig. 7, 8, 10, 14, 15, 19, 23; Kerma (Napatan structure) : Ahmed 1992 : fig. 9.I A10, I B6a; Missiminia : Vila 1980 : fig. 189.13, 31, 32, 56. See also the bead index in Dunham 1963 : 355, Xa-c.

⁴ El Kurru : Dunham 1950 : pl. LXV; Meroe : Beg W 685 (Dunham 1963 : 309, fig. 180), Beg. W 802 (Dunham 1963 : 323, fig. 184); Sanam : Musées Royaux d'Art et d'Histoire, Brüssel, Inv.-Nr. E 5713/6, E 5701/10, E 5710/15 (not published in Griffith 1923); Kerma : Ahmed 1992 : fig. 9.IA.2.

⁵ Parallel : Beg. W 643 (Dunham 1963 : 42, fig. 28). See also a Bes crown at Tell Gemme of the 26th Dyn. (Herrmann 1994 : 382, Kat. 452).

⁶ Parallel : Macadam 1955 : 199, pl. CIII.c [1106], [1107].

- 3) a large fly (Nr. 47, light green with black paint, 17.2 x 11.8 mm), which was unpierced (!)¹,
- 4) fragments of at least six udjats. These may be described as follows : BOS 1984-14 (possibly a double udjat, green), Nr. S 5 (brow of an udjat, turquoise), Nr. 44 (light green udjat with black painting), Nr. 17 (brow of an udjat, green), Nr. 23 (brow of an udjat, light green), Nr. 11 (2/3 of an udjat, light blue).
- 5) Another fragment (Nr. 33, green, 19.8 x 25.5 mm) may be reconstructed as the lid of a faience vessel (Pl. 1.A)². It shows a lotus flower in relief, painted (white, green).
- 6) Additionally, there was a fragment of an amulet or plaque (Nr. 42, light green, 20.4 x 16.6 mm, Pl.1.C), consisting of a base and a feather (*shu* or *maat*). It is of good workmanship but the reconstruction is questionable.

There were several other engraved fragments, but due to their minute size it was not possible to reconstruct them or to understand what they were.

New Year's Flasks

The most interesting objects among the finds were fragments of at least seven different Egyptian New Year's flasks. There were eleven undecorated body fragments, six engraved fragments from the shoulders and six fragments from the circumference ridges, as well as one fragment of a spout³. The colour of the faience varied from pale green, to green or pale blue. The engravings on the shoulders manifest one or more rows of drops in high or low relief. These are sometimes light green on a dark green ground. The engravings on the ridge are rhombic or in a shingle pattern. These different motifs as well as the two visibly different faience fabrics (one very fine, one quite coarse) suggest the following number of New Year's flasks :

- 1) Nr. BOS 1984-13 (Pl. 3.E) : ridge : rhombic, pale blue, matching BOS 1984-35.
- 2) Nr. BOS 1984-35 (Pl. 3.E) : ridge : rhombic, pale blue, matching BOS 1984-13.
- 3) Nr. S 1 (surface, Pl. 3.D) : ridge : shingle pattern (small), possibly matching Nr. 39.
- 4) Nr. 37 (surface, Pl. 3.A) : ridge : rhombic.
- 5) Nr. 38 (surface, Pl. 2.D) : shoulder : one line of drops in high relief (fine), relief of the horns of a cow.
- 6) Nr. 43 (surface, Pl. 2.E) : shoulder : three lines of drops in high relief (coarse).
- 7) Nr. 16 : (-5 cm, Pl. 2.C) : shoulder : one line of drops in low relief (fine); matching Nr. 14.
- 8) Nr. 41 : (-5 cm, Pl. 2.B) : shoulder : one line of drops in high relief (coarse).
- 9) Nr. 7 : (-15 cm, Pl. 3.B) : ridge : shingle pattern (large).
- 10) Nr. 8 : (-15 cm) : Fragment of a spout (in form of a papyrus?).
- 11) Nr. 14 : (-15 cm, Pl. 2.C) : shoulder : one line of drops in low relief (fine); matching Nr. 16.
- 12) Nr. 39 : (-15 cm, Pl. 3.C) : ridge : shingle pattern (small), perhaps matching Nr. S 1?
- 13) Nr. 3 : (-20 cm, Pl. 2.A) : shoulder : one line of drops in high relief.

The Egyptian New Year's flasks are roughly datable to the early Late Period. They are most common in Dyn. 26, but until now no exact dating can be offered for most of them⁴. They may have contained oil or holy water, as argued by Felder (1988 : 130), substances which were used in rituals or for healing. The New Year's celebration, the water and the colours used (green, blue) were all symbols of regeneration and therefore their combination in the New Year's flasks suggests a function in rituals for renewal and regeneration. This very specific type of vessel is known to have been exported to the Mediterranean and the Near East⁵, but only a few examples, until now, have been recorded from Nubia⁶.

¹ Another fly of this size was found in the Napatan structure of Kerma, but this is pierced as usual (Ahmed 1992 : fig. 11.10).

² Parallel at the Napatan cemetery of Sanam : Griffith 1923 : pl. XXXII.6.

³ Two more undecorated fragments as well as one rhombic ridge fragment were gathered at the surface by another team at unknown date.

⁴ The New Year's flask found by Woolley in Carchemish in the context of the 27th Dyn. is the only example later than the 26th Dyn. But it is of course possible that the flask itself is to be dated to the 26th Dyn. but deposited in later times (see Felder 1988 : 4).

⁵ For the various examples found outside Egypt see Hölbl 1979 : 36 and Felder 1988 : 119.

⁶ Dorginarti : some fragments (Heidorn 1991 : 206), Missiminia, Tomb 2-V-6/311 : totally preserved New Year's flask with inscription (Vila 1980 : 121, fig. 127, 182, Frontispiece, 6), Kawa : Fragment with remains of a depiction of a kneeling figure and an inscription (Macadam 1955 : 160 [Nr. 0968], pl. LXXXIII.c.).

Stone

Beads

Only few beads from the find spot were stone. Five were disc beads of carnelian or red stone. One was a ring bead and one was a ball bead of carnelian. One was a tubular bead of grey/blue stone; another was a disc bead of white stone.

Udjat

A carnelian udjat amulet in perfect condition was found on the surface. Except for a small line on the lachrymal gland and shallow scratches on the brows, it is unengraved and represents the eye only in outline. It is also pierced on both sides but not all the way through. The evidence for this type of udjat -without engraving, without loop- starts in the Late Period¹.

Alabastra

Nine fragments of Egyptian alabastra were found in the excavation; five more had been gathered in 1984². One small rim fragment (Nr. 26) as well as a larger body fragment (Nr. 28) may belong to the same vessel. Since alabaster does not occur in the Sudan, at least the material, if not the vessels themselves, was imported from Egypt. Alabastra were found in abundance in the royal cemetery of Nuri, as well as in Sanam and Meroe³.

Other stone artefacts

During the 1984 campaign several objects of stone were gathered from the surface. Since I could study them only in photograph, I list them here without discussion. These were :

- 1) Two earstuds (BOS 1984-11, -22);
- 2) part of a bangle (BOS 1984-9);
- 3) part of a ring-shaped mace head (BOS 1984-26);
- 4) a pottery rocker (BOS 1984-16).

All the objects are not easy to date, since most of them were in use from the Neolithic to the recent past, and they were commonly used during the Napatan and Meroitic periods.

Metal

Beads

During the excavation five metal beads were found, three of them on the surface. They are all ring beads.

Fragments

Several fragments of metal were found, but it is impossible to reconstruct their former appearance.

¹ Griffith found two close parallels in the cemetery of Sanam : Ägyptisches Museum Berlin, Inv.-Nr. 3119, Rijksmuseum van Oudheden, Leiden, Inv.-Nr. F 1940/12.58 (both not published in Griffith 1923). As Griffith wrote in his diary, there should be some more examples in the National Museum in Khartoum and in the Ashmolean-Museum in Oxford.

² Three more fragments of alabastra were gathered from the surface by another team at unknown date.

³ For the royal cemeteries and Beg. S and W. see Gänsicke 1994 : 23. Sanam : Griffith 1923: 90-91, pl. XVI; Missiminia : Vila 1980 : fig. 37.2.

Udjat

A puzzling find is an udjat of silver with traces of gilding and moulds of inlays (Nr. 35, Pl. 1.D)¹. It must have been a luxury item for the inhabitants of Gala Abu Ahmed. There are only few udjats of silver that do not belong to royal persons in Egypt and these are of flat pressed foil and not three-dimensional objects like ours². An udjat of gilded silver was found at El Kurru in the pyramid of Shabaqo³. A similar udjat, but made of gold, was found in the grave of Taharqo⁴. In the "Kushite pyramid", found by the SARS survey at the 4th cataract, several gilded udjats came to light. As far as they are investigated, the core is of sandstone and faience⁵. At the excavation of the Napatan cemetery of Sanam, Griffith recorded udjats of silver; three of them are published in photographs of poor quality⁶. In contrary to the above mentioned, these are found in non-royal graves.

Discussion

Since the excavation spot within Gala Abu Ahmed fortress is very small in comparison to the large area of the structure and since the objects have no direct archaeological link to any feature in the fortress, it is difficult to offer a confident interpretation for this material. I can really make a discussion of the finds only and not of the fortress. Even the purely early Late Period (Egyptian) or Napatan appearance of the finds may be the result of accidental preservation. Nevertheless, it is possible to draw some conclusions :

1. The fortress of Gala Abu Ahmed was known and used during the Napatan period.
2. The fragments of the Egyptian New Years flasks as well as the alabastra suggest contacts between early Late Period 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. But the isolated place of Gala Abu Ahmed in the Lower Wadi Howar on the one hand and the great quantity of Egyptian material on the other hand may suggest the need to rethink the intensity of these contacts.
3. Two of the finds are extraordinary interesting. The silver udjat has only few parallels in the Middle Nile region and is rare even in Egypt. The New Years flasks came to light in a hitherto unknown quantity. The radius of their appearance is therefore enlarged considerably to the south.

Gala Abu Ahmed was clearly an important place during the Napatan period. Already the small excavation area produced such a quantity of material that the image of tight contacts between Late Period Egypt and the Napatan Middle Nile Region is strengthened. An excavation of the whole fortress as well as its surrounding could add much to our knowledge not only of Napatan contacts with Egypt, but also of Napatan management of the desert areas and peoples on the Kushite periphery.

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¹ See for the variants of gilding Lilyquist 1993.

² Müller-Winkler 1988 : 127.

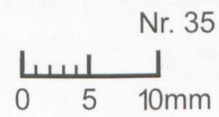
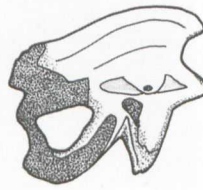
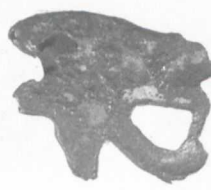
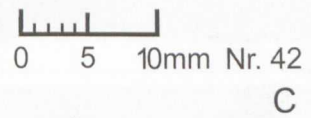
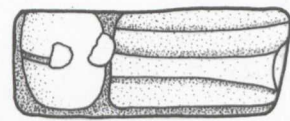
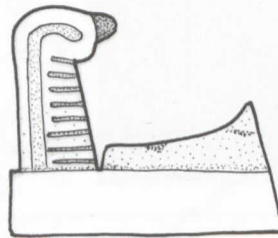
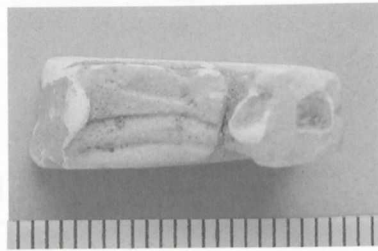
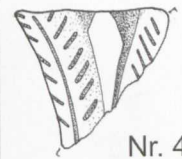
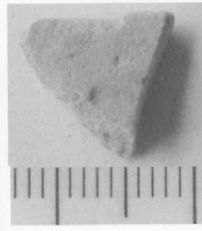
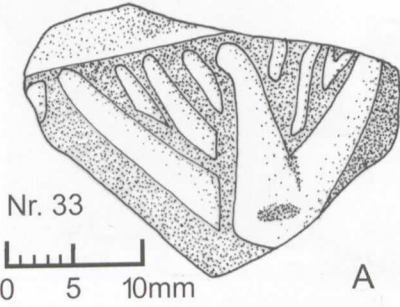
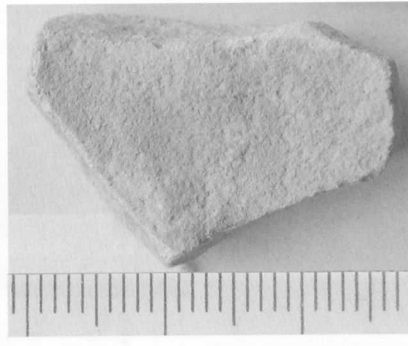
³ Ku.15, tomb of Shabaqo; Dunham 1950 : pl. LVIA1.

⁴ Nu. 1, Dunham 1955 : 11, fig. 5.

⁵ Welsby 2004 : 3, Colour Plate I.

⁶ According to the field notes there was found an udjat of silver in the following tombs : 385, 724, 827, 887 (gilt), 1498, 1531, 1620. See Griffith 1923 : pl. LVIII, 37, 38, 39.

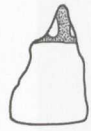
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D

A - Fragment of the lid of a faience vessel (Nr. 33); B - Fragment of the feathered crown of a Bes (Nr. 45); C - Fragment with feather (Nr. 42); D - Udjat of silver (Nr. 35).

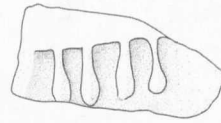
Pl. II



Nr. 3

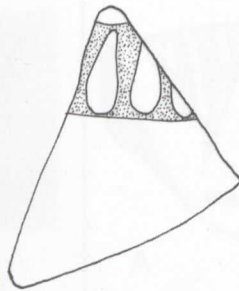
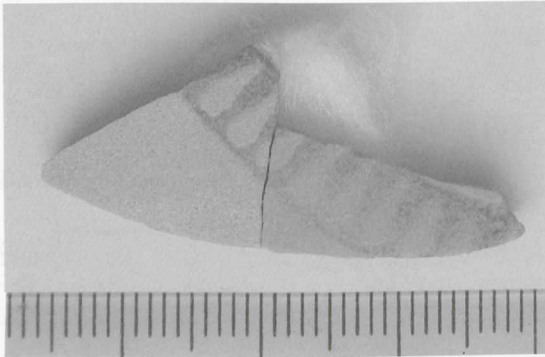


A

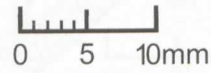
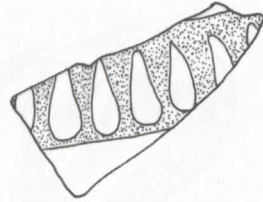


Nr. 41

B

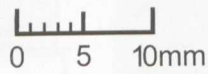
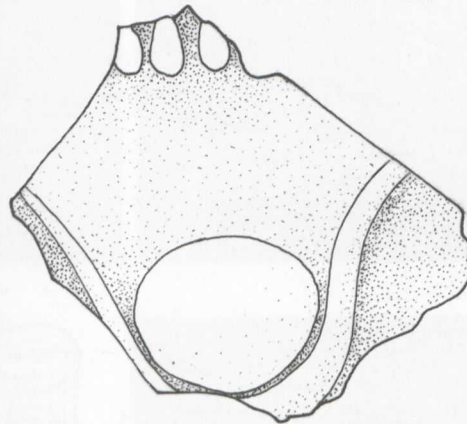


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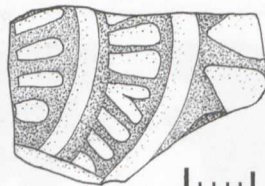
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C

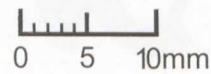


Nr. 38

D



Nr. 43

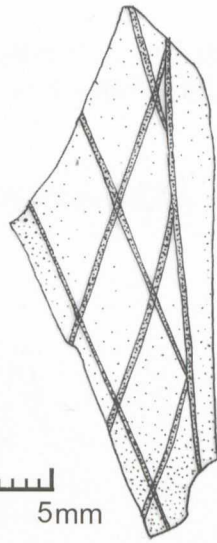


E

New Year's flasks : Fragments of shoulders.



0 5mm
Nr. 37



A



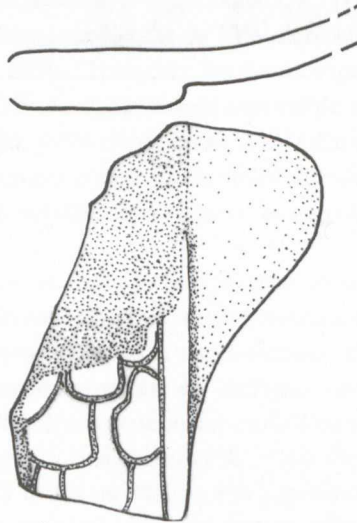
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Nr. 7



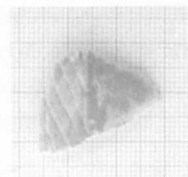
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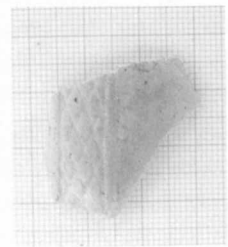
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C



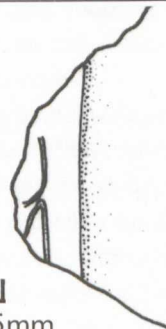
BOS 1984-35



BOS 1984-13



0 5mm
Nr. S 1



D

E

New Year's flasks : Fragments of ridges.