

SUDAN & NUBIA

The Sudan Archaeological Research Society



Bulletin No. 15

2011

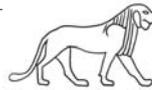




The map reflects the new territorial situation following the independence of South Sudan in July 2011.

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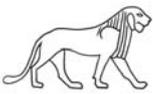


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Pottery from Sites Surveyed in Sodari District, Kordofan Province. An Interim Report 2008-2009

Howeida M. Adam and Abdelrahim M. Khabir

Introduction

North Kordofan State, with its capital at el-Obeid, is located in the centre of Sudan (lat. 16° 36' 16" - 14° 13' N / long. 32° 31' 30" - 30° 56' 36" E). Delimited by six states (Northern State, Khartoum, White Nile, South Kordofan, North and South Darfur), it has an area of 240,974km² and an estimated population of 2,529,370 (2006). Geographically and climatically the state is generally arid and desert. During the rainy season from July to September, the area is fertile, but in the dry season, it is virtually desolated. Traditionally, the area is known for the production of gum arabic.

History

The Funj of Sennar settled in the area of North Kordofan at the beginning of the 16th century and at the end of that century it was conquered by the Sultan of Darfur, Suleiman Solon. There followed considerable migrations of Arab tribes and local people from Sennar and Dongola. Caravans brought products from Abyssinia and Egypt into el-Obeid and Bara, from which the greater part was dispatched to other parts of Africa. The Mahdi captured el-Obeid in 1883. After the British occupation in 1898, Kordofan was added to the existing provinces of the Sudan.

Archaeology

Although more than a century has passed since the beginning of archaeological fieldwork in Sudan, North Kordofan state has still not been thoroughly explored. This may be due to several factors, including:

The vast area of the state.

The paucity of data relating to its history, etc.

To address this situation the University of Khartoum began research on a more regular basis in the state to implement the following objectives:

To complete the Archaeological Map of the Sudan.

To pay attention to this virgin state.

To document other branches of the social disciplines (folklore, local languages).

To trace the current and past trade routes of the area in different directions especially to and from the Nile.

To rescue endangered sites and help with the launch of new developmental schemes.

To encourage cultural activities and local tourism.

Study Area

Archaeological survey in the vicinity of Soderi and Wadi el-Malik (Figure 1) covered an area of *c.* 50km in which a total of six sites were located in the branches of *wadis*, mapped and systematically sampled. All these localities are surface ceramic scatters and have been affected to some extent by natural agencies. The natural habitat of the surveyed sites is comprised of small acacia shrubs and short grass that grows during the short-term rainy season (from July to September). Sources of surface water are the seasonal *wadis* and *keheeran* whereas underground water is accessed from scattered wells, some of which are in close proximity to the settled areas (see *infra*).

Pottery

In this paper the writers present an interim report on pottery collections from the abovementioned surveyed sites in Kordofan. The pottery specimens were systematically collected by the first author from the surface of sites in Sodari district namely Adid Raha (AR), Abu Sinan (AS), Abu Zumam (AZ), Alerbid (AL), el-Qala es-Safra (AQS) and Jebel el-Godran (GN) (Figure 1).

In this study attribute analysis has been used despite the fact that the pottery vessels are limited in number. This is because this type of analysis is more informative than the subjective evaluation which depends upon personal experience and bias. The present study has employed a series of



Figure 1. Location of the surveyed sites (Department of Survey, Sudan 2008).

attributes including vessel form, decorative pattern, surface treatment and method of manufacture.

As indicated in Table 1, the number of pottery sherds at each site is variable and in some cases notably sparse. Complete vessels are entirely absent in the collections. The pottery repertoire presents a limited number of vessel forms.

Decorated sherds account for 53.4% of the total collection. The other specimens (46.6%) are either undecorated or

Table 1. Distribution of decorative patterns per site.

No	Type of decoration	Adid Raha	Abu Sinan	Abu Zumam	Alerbid	el-Qala es-Safra	Jebel el-Godran
1	Zigzag dotted straight	14	0	0	8	9	6
2	Dotted lines	7	0	1	0	2	10
3	Impressed straight lines	0	0	3	0	0	0
4	Linear impresions		0	18	0	0	1
5	Chevrons	1	0	0	0	0	1
6	Herring-bone	0	0	2	0	0	0
7	Zoned	2	0	0	2	0	0
8	Fingernail	5	0	1	0	0	2
9	Mat impression	4	0	6	0	0	11
10	Catfish impression	0	0	0	0	0	1
11	Plain (F)	6	0	5	0	1	0
12	Plain (C/0)	27	5	33	6	4	47
13	Total	66	5	69	16	16	79



Plate 1. Decorated pottery sherds.

their surface finish has been obliterated and hence cannot be determined for certain (Tables 1 and 2, Plate 1).

The surface colour of the pottery varies but is mostly light brown (7.5YR 6/4 Munsell soil colour chart). Fractures

mainly exhibit dark grey (5YN4/1; 7.5YR N4/0) and black (9.5YN3/0; 5YR 2/1) colours.

The potsherds indicate possible rim diameters between 120 and 270mm and probably belong to medium and large bowls. Almost all the rim-tops have been left undecorated (Table 3). The rare decorated rim-tops, ornamented with vertical and linear impressions, were from Jebel el-Godran (GN) and el-Qala es-Safra (AQS) respectively.

Bases are entirely absent in the collections. This could suggest that the pottery was mainly comprised of bowls in which the base has nearly the same thickness as the rest of the pot.

It seems that coiling was utilized in building the vessel walls. This could be inferred from some sherds that were broken along the coil-lines. Irregularities of several sherds also raise the probability that paddle and anvil technique could have been in use for thinning and smoothing.

The pottery fabrics demonstrate that both sand and chaff were utilized as tempering materials. The fabrics are hard and well-fired.

The pottery collections include three main groups that cover a wide time span from late prehistoric (Neolithic) to the historic (Jebel Moya and Meroitic) periods. The prehistoric pottery group represents the “Khartoum Neolithic”. The historic pottery group includes two components: Jebel Moya type pottery and a late Meroitic one that has been reported from several sites in Khartoum and the Blue Nile regions.

Table 2. Distribution of decorated and undecorated pottery. Specimens as percentages.

	AR	AS	AZ	AL	AQS	GN
Decorated	51.5	0.0	45.0	62.5	68.7	40.5
Undecorated and/or obliterated	48.5	100.0	55.0	37.5	31.3	59.5
No.	66	5	69	16	16	79

AR = Adid Raha; AS = Abu Sinan; AZ = Abu Zumam; AL = Alerbid; AQS = el Qala es-Safra; GN = Jebel el-Godran

Khartoum Neolithic type of pottery

The sherds of this group are similar to “Khartoum Neolithic” wares as represented at esh-Shaheinab (Arkell 1953, pls 31:3-5, 32:2-5, 34:9-10) and other related sites. The pottery of this category is occasionally coated with a red ochre slip. Surfaces of the potsherds are frequently burnished (Plate 1, rows 3, 5 and 6).

This type of pottery is represented by potsherds reported from most of the surveyed sites (Jebel el-Godran, Adid Raha; Alerbid, el-Qala es-Safra). The decorated specimens dominate the assemblage, amounting to 83% of the recorded sherds. A straight dotted-line zigzag is the most popular pattern.

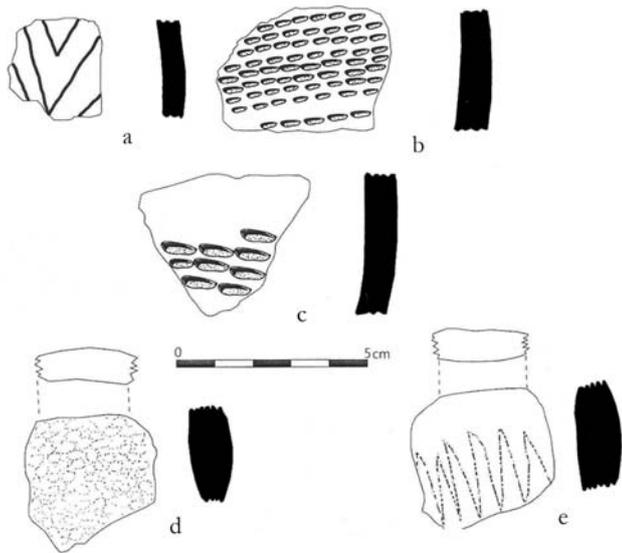


Figure 2. Adid Raha, decorated sherds, a - chevron, b - dotted straight lines, c - fingernail, d - mat, e - dotted zigzag, scale 1:2.

Linear impressed patterns are frequent (Figures 3b; 5; 6a-c, e). Less frequent motifs include mat impressions, dotted lines, fingernail and impressed straight lines whereas the catfish spine pattern is exceptionally rare (Table 1, Figure 6c, Plate 1, B.R., 6).

The colour of the sherds is mainly reddish brown with various shades (Munsell 5YR 6/4,7, 8YR6/4). Potsherds of light-red colour (2.5YR;1,10YR 6/5) though present are

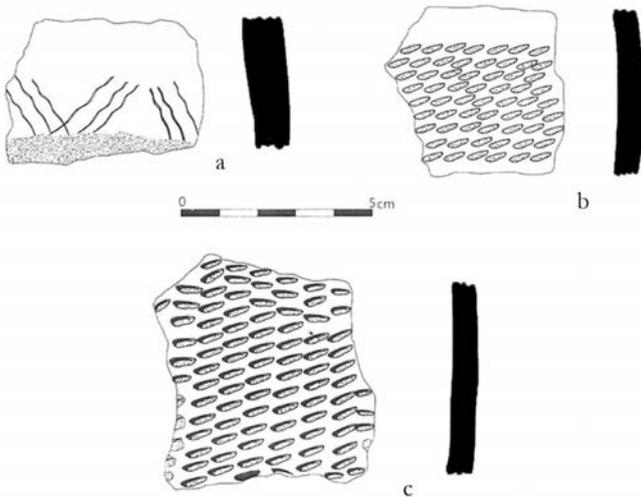


Figure 3. Abu Zumam, decorated sherds, a - herring-bone, b - linear impressions, c - fingernail, scale 1:2.

infrequent. Fractures are usually grey (5YR 5/1) whereas a pale red shade (10R 5/2) is rare. Rims are scarce comprising only 8% of the total “Khartoum Neolithic” potsherds.

Rims in most instances are a direct continuation of the vessel walls and they display pointed, rounded and flat tops (Figure 7 a, b1, b2, e1, e2). Everted (Figure 7-2 b3, b4) and inverted examples are in evidence (Figure 7-3 c1, c2).

Wall thicknesses generally range from 4-9mm with a few examples up to 14mm. Rims are usually between 3 and 7mm

Table 3. Distribution of rims and body-sherds as percentages.

	AR	AS	AZ	AL	AQS	GN
Rim Sherds	12.2	0.0	13.0	18.8	26.6	5.1
Body Sherds	87.8	100.0	87.0	81.2	73.04	94.9
No.	66	5	69	16	16	79

AR = Adid Raha; AS = Abu Sinan; AZ = Abu Zumam; AL = Alerbid; AQS = el-Qala es-Safra; GN = Jebel el-Godran

thick although some measure up to 11mm. Rim diameters are between 120-220mm and possibly belong to small and medium-sized bowls of hemispherical shape.

Coiling technique was used as could be inferred from the transverse breakage and uneven thicknesses of sherds. The pottery is of a hard fabric, mainly sand tempered and well fired.

Jebel Moya type of pottery

Pottery sherds decorated with a chevron pattern (Figure 2a) from Adid Raha and Jebel el-Godran are akin to some examples found at Jebel Moya (cf. Addison 1949, 204-205, pls XCVA, B: 1, 6, D: 1). On the other hand, herring-bone patterns (Figure 3a) from Abu Zuman are comparable to ones associated with large pots reported from Jebel Moya (cf. Addison 1949, pl. CX-1), Abu Geili (Addison 1951, pls

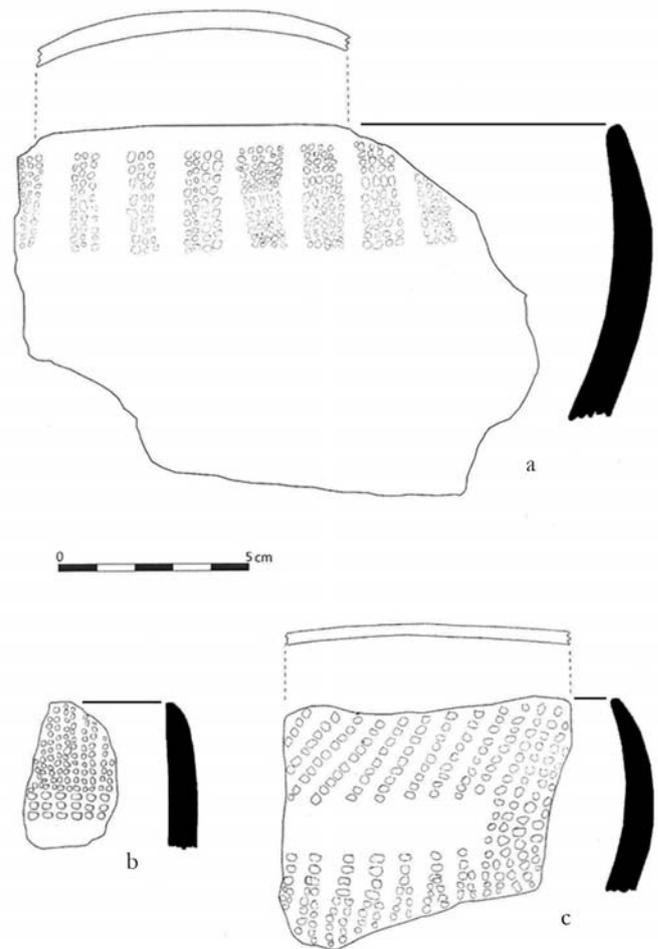


Figure 4. Alerbid, decorated sherds, a - zoned, b - atypical zoned, c - dotted zigzag, scale 1:2.

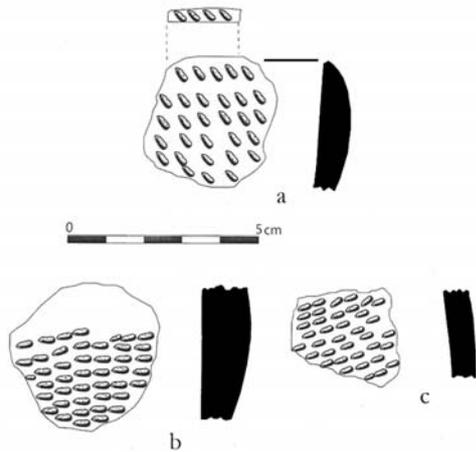


Figure 5. El-Qala es-Safra, decorated sherds, a - dotted oblique lines, b and c - possibly part of dotted zigzag decoration, scale 1:2.

XX111-V118, 12, 13; XXX III, 3, 5), Saqadi (Addison 1951, 122, pl. LXVII, A, 3, 5) and Dar el-Mek (Addison 1951, 65-167, pl. LXXXIII, A, 6-10; Eisa and Khabir 2006, 38, fig. 2) in the Blue Nile Province. Atypical linear patterns in the form of tiny finger impressions from Jebel el-Godran (Figure 6d) are comparable to the ones recorded from Jebel Moya (Addison 1951, pl. XC11, R1).

The surface colour of the sherds with chevron patterns is mainly light brownish-grey (10YR 6/2) whereas the fracture is dark grey (7.5YR N5/0). Herring-bone specimens are in a variety of brown shades (7.5YR 6/4, 10YR 6/4). Fractures are grey (7.5YR N5/0) or dark grey (7.5YR N4/0) in colour. Sherd thicknesses range from 9-10mm and rarely measure up to 13mm. The fabrics tend to show mixed tempering material (sand and chaff). The pottery is hard and well fired.

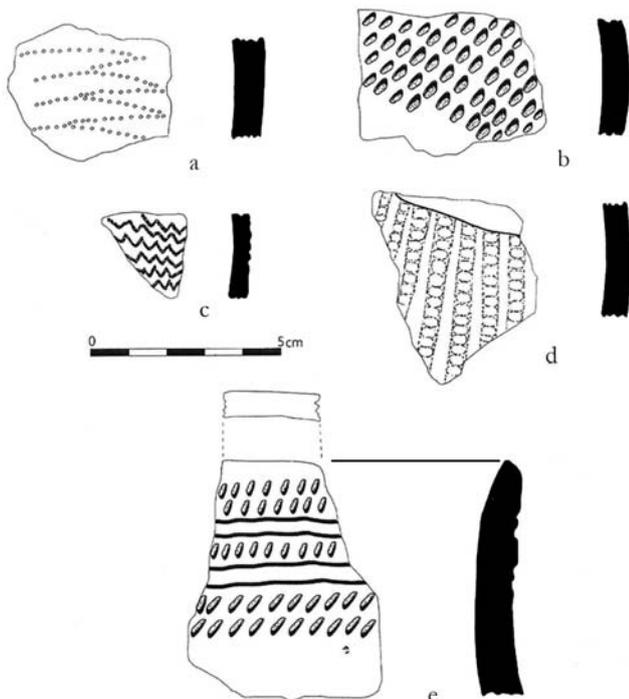


Figure 6. Jebel el-Godran, decorated sherds, a - dotted zigzag, b - fingernail, c - catfish, d - atypical linear, e - dotted straight lines, scale 1:2.

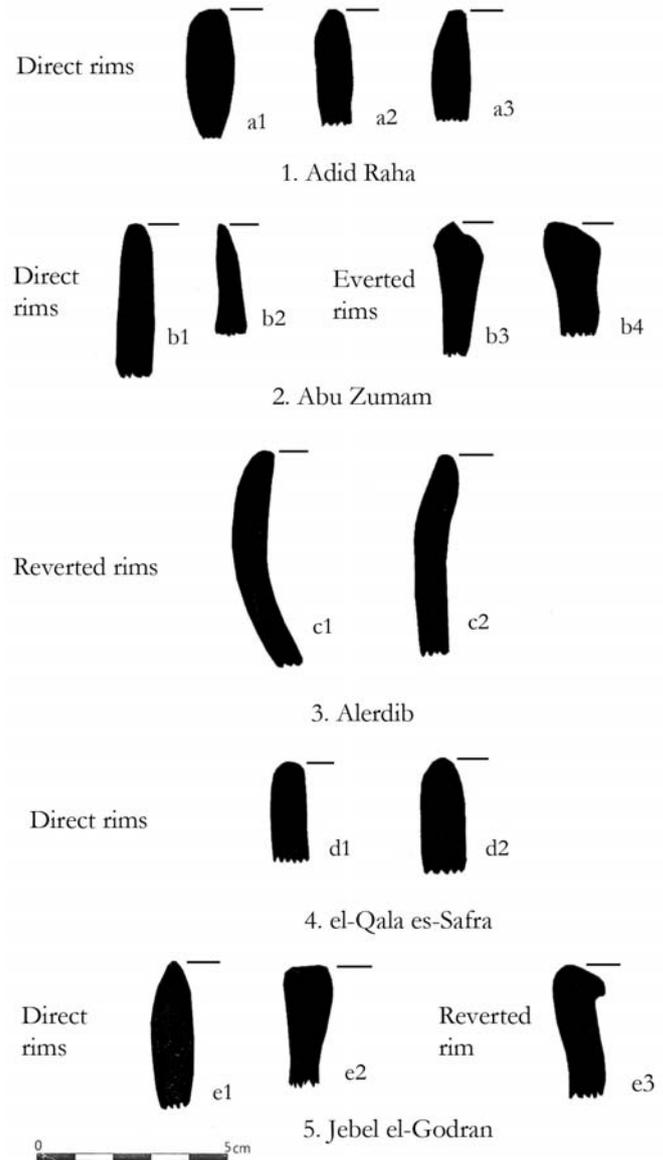


Figure 7. Rim types in the pottery samples, scale 1:2.

Meroitic type of pottery

Potsherds with zoned designs were attested at Alerbid and Adid Raha in very low percentages (Table 1, Figure 4a, b). The zoned designs on the pottery consist of rectangular dots arranged in a series of rows. This kind of decoration shows clear affinities with examples recorded from late Meroitic contexts at Abu Geili in the Blue Nile Province (cf. Addison 1951, pl. XXXIX-5). This type of zoned design is different from those found in the late Meroitic contexts at Khartoum (cf. Arkell 1949, 120, pls 106, 4; 107, 5; 108, 6; 110, 3; el-Hassan 1979, 179, fig. 19a-e and pl. G2); in the Blue Nile (Addison 1949, pl. XCVI, A, D, I; 1951, M46, pls XXXIX, B, 3, 1; LXV, 27-28; LXXXV-I; Gerhaz 1994, fig. 48; Manzo 1995, 13-15, fig. 2, C, d) and White Nile (Eisa and Khabir 2006, 38, fig. 2) regions.

The surface colour of the sherds ornamented with a zoned design is light brown (7.5YR 6/4 Munsell) whereas the fractures are grey (5YR 6/1) to very dark grey (7.5YR N/3) in colour.



Wall thicknesses range from 5-11mm. Rims are mainly direct or reverted in profile (Figure 7). Rim diameters are in the order of 200-250mm, often reaching 300mm, and were probably parts of medium-sized and large hemispherical bowls. The pottery is of a hard fabric, tempered with mixed material (chaff and sand) and well fired.

Concluding Remarks

The pottery reported from the six surveyed sites in Sodari district in northern Kordofan presents three pottery components covering a wide time span from the Neolithic to the late Meroitic periods. The pottery components (Neolithic, Jebel Moya and late Meroitic types) show developmental trends manifest in the occurrence of more refined workmanship over the passage of time. Chevron and herring-bone patterns tend to suggest cultural ties with pottery of the “Jebel Moya tradition” in the Blue Nile Province, Khartoum and along the White Nile. Pottery ornamented with zoned design differing from that recorded from the southern Meroitic provincial centres has been encountered on some of the surveyed sites (Adid Raha and Alerbid).

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