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The Sudan Archaeological Research Society



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Front cover: Excavations in progress in the *Kerma Ancien* cemetery at site H29 in the Northern Dongola Reach (photo D. A. Welsby).

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Rosieres Dam Heightening Archaeological Salvage Project The Excavations at Azaza Site ROSE 5, Preliminary Report

Mahmoud Suliman Bashir, Murtada Bushara
Mohamed and Mohammed Saad Abdalab

Introduction

At the request of the Dams Implementation Unit (DIU) the National Corporation for Antiquities and Museums (NCAM) undertook a salvage project aimed at rescuing the endangered archaeological sites in the area to be flooded as a result of the heightening of the Rosieres Dam along the Blue Nile. The first phase of the salvage project was a survey conducted by an NCAM team in 2009. The survey along the targeted area recorded 14 sites on the western bank and a total of 55 sites on the eastern bank (Figure 1). These archaeological sites range in date from the prehistoric to the Turco-Egyptian period.

Recommendations were made throughout the survey report (Abdelhai Abdelsawi and Mahmoud Suliman Bashir 2012) to the need for an additional phase of the project with excavations on both banks. A rescue excavation proposal accompanied by a detailed budget was submitted to the Dams Implementation Unit directly after the completion of the survey in 2009. The late response to the NCAM proposal from the DIU has had a direct impact on the excavation program.

The National Corporation for Antiquities and Museums organized an urgent campaign which lasted from the 11th March to the 11th May 2012 to conduct intensive archaeological rescue excavations in the area that will soon be flooded by the extension of the lake.

The newly recorded archaeological sites along both banks of the upper Blue Nile were diverse ranging from scattered archaeological material on the surface to clearly recognisable, rich settlement mounds and cemeteries. The sites vary considerably in size and importance; hence the consequent rescue operations differed from one site to another. The rescue interventions for the recorded sites vary from incorporating collection of surface materials, docu-

mentation and test pits to partial and complete excavations. Only 14 sites were examined in the targeted area through test excavations; 10 on the east bank and four on the west bank.

The main focus of the NCAM team¹ on the eastern bank was site ROSE 5 located some 12km south east of the town of Rosieres. This site was identified during the survey as a prehistoric settlement. The dense scatter of archaeological material indicated the important archaeological potential of the site. Therefore, carrying out excavations at Azaza ROSE 5 was considered a priority in this salvage project, since it was the richest, largest and most important site to have been recorded in the targeted area.

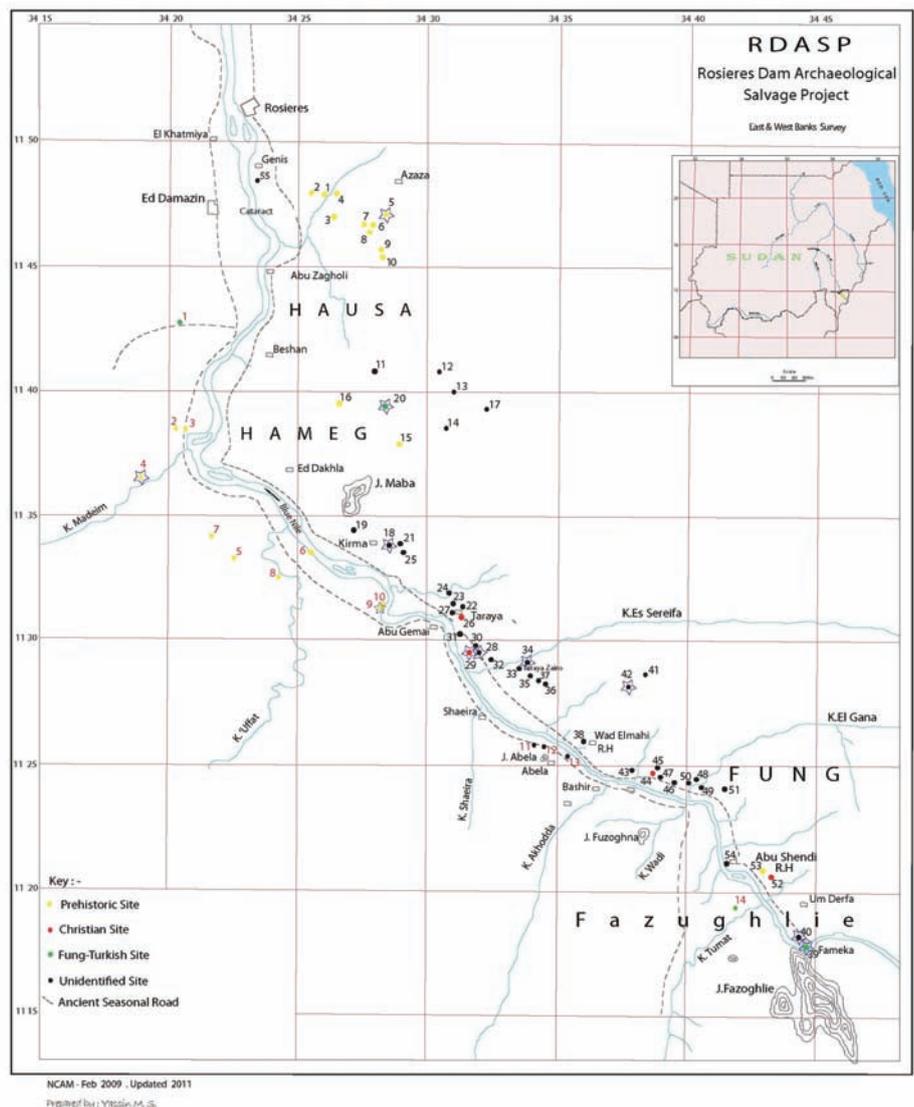


Figure 1. Map showing the distribution of the sites recorded during the survey.

¹ The team members on the eastern bank were Rahima el-Hadi (archaeologist – Administration of Tourism, Sennar State), Sami Mohamed al-Amien (archaeologist), Gassim Hassan Nassir (photographer), Mohamed Saad (archaeologist), Rihab Khidir (archaeologist), Ahmed al-Amien al-Sokari (archaeologist), Murtada Bushara (archaeologist), Habab Idriss Ahmed (archaeologist), Yassin Mohamed Saeed (topographer), Al-Shiekh Mohamed Zyada (cook), and Mahmoud Suliman (field director).

ROSE 5 Azaza

The site is situated on a clearly visible high mound, which is originally a natural old silt terrace about 200m diameter located south of the village of Azaza (Plate 1). The local term *azaza* is given to the soil which is composed of a mixture of clay and sand. Such soil is rarely found in the region since the cracked black clay soil represents the original formation.



Plate 1. *A zaza* ROSE 5, general view.

The surface of the site is covered with a dense scatter of potsherds, lower and upper fragments of grinding stones and beads of stone and pottery. In addition clear fireplaces have been observed in different parts of the site. Therefore, the preliminary interpretation on the basis of the surface collections indicated the possibility of different occupation layers in this mound. Also the activities of the traditional gold mining led to the recovery of human remains and pottery vessels, indicating a possible use of the site as a burial ground. A large hole 2 x 2m in size and 2m deep was found in the south-west side of the site, where it attains its greatest elevation. It seems that originally the site was circular and that the eastern part was subsequently heavily eroded. The central part was used later as a water reservoir (*hafir*).

On the basis of the surface observations the site was considered a priority for urgent excavation. To facilitate the test excavations the site has been divided to two areas, A and B, selected on the basis of the different features on the surface as well as their geographical location (Figure 2).

Area (A)

This area is situated on the northern side of the mound. Here the dense scatter of decorated potsherds was the main distinguishing feature. A trench 20 × 20m was laid out, divided later into smaller squares of 10 × 10m numbered A1-4. However, after intensive surface collection of the scattered archaeological material in Area A, test excavations were concentrated in A1.

Excavations in A1

This trench is situated in the south-west part of Area A. Excavation commenced in this trench with the removal of the

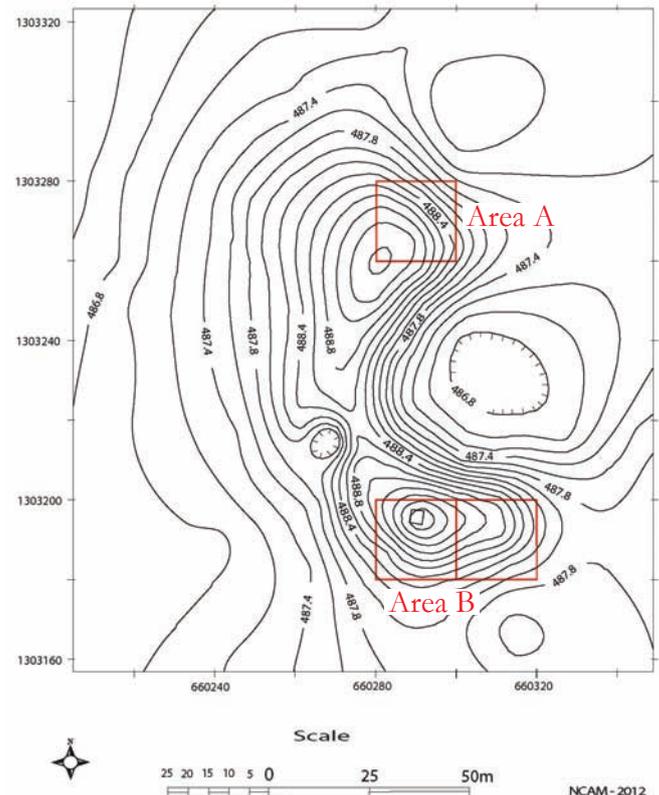


Figure 2. Topographical plan of ROSE 5 showing the excavation areas A and B.

surface layer 50-100mm in thickness. This level was greatly disturbed by human activities and the movement of cattle across the site. However, during the removal of the deposit large amounts of pottery sherds and stone tools consisting of upper grinding stones and fragments of lower ones, together with beads of stone and ostrich eggshell, were found.

During the excavations complete but broken pottery bowls were found directly beneath the surface in different places associated with traces of fireplaces and ash layers. Therefore, we laid out two test trenches A1 – 1 and A1 – 2 to examine these features.

Excavations in A1 – 1

This trench 4.5m east-west × 2.5m north-south was situated in the north-east part of A1. The main aim of digging here was to identify any cultural deposits which could be traced down towards the level of the surrounding ground surface. As a result, several layers of ash and fireplaces were recorded in different levels (Plate 2). Some were associated with stone hearths, animal bones and scatters of pottery sherds. Such rich layers indicate the use of the site for occupation, which we assume, on the basis of the information obtained, was of a seasonal nature. These features were frequently found in this trench down to the natural at a depth of more than 2.2m (Plate 3).

The archaeological material found in association with settlement features include fragments of a flat cooking pot showing traces of use together with a number of complete pottery bowls found at different depths scattered all over the



Plate 2. Excavation in A1-1 showing fire places.



Plate 3. Section showing the repetition of burnt layers of soil.

trench. The evidence for the use of this part of the site for occupation is overwhelming. Many fireplaces with stone hearths in association with pottery were found on the eastern part in this trench (Plate 4). The pottery vessels included a reused dish with holes like a sieve and small jars (Plates 5 and 6).

The excavation in this test trench also revealed a number of human skeletons of both adults and children. The discovered graves contained bodies with differing orientations, the



Plate 4. Occupation layer in A1-1.



Plate 5. Pottery jar from A1-1.

Plate 6. Decorated black pottery jar from A1-1.



most common position was extended on the back. Associated with the skeletons were large amounts of beads concentrated on the hands, at the pelvis and around the neck. In one example, a child's burial, there was a necklace of animal teeth (Plate 7). Also there was a group of pottery bowls consisting of two to three pots found one covering the other; evidence for the tradition of providing offerings (Plate 8).



Plate 7. Burial of a child with a necklace of animal teeth.



Plate 8. The deposition of pottery vessels one over the others.

Excavations in A1 – 2

This trench, 4m square was situated in the south-west corner of A1. The main aim of digging in this part was also to identify any cultural deposits which could be traced all the way to the level of the surrounding ground surface. There was a scatter of large stones and a dense concentration of pottery sherds on the surface of this trench, which were features we aimed to examine. When the excavation began with the clearance of the surface deposits, we observed a large amount of pottery sherds in this material; a complete small pottery cup was found at a depth of about 100m.

The layers excavated in this test trench are similar to those in trench A1 – 1. The clear traces of fireplaces associated with cultural material consisting of potsherds, stone hearths, hammer and grinding stones were observed in different loci across the trench and continued to the natural at a depth of 2.2m (Plate 9). However, the finding of complete pottery vessels was more common in this trench; a small pottery cup was found almost on the natural.



Plate 9. The excavation trench in A1-2.

The use of this area for burials was again evident with the presence of number of human skeletons, mainly infants but with one well preserved adult skeleton found at a depth of

1.21m accompanied by four pottery bowls. The body was oriented north west/south east in an extended position on its back with the head to the west facing north (Plate 10).



Plate 10. Skeleton accompanying with pottery vessels in A1-2.

Area (B)

This area is situated on the southern side of the mound. On the surface are concentrations of stones forming the main feature that is most probably related to disturbed tomb monuments. A large trench 40m east-west \times 21m north-south was laid out later divided into five squares numbered B1-5. However, after intensive surface collection of the scattered archaeological material in Area B, test excavations were concentrated in B2, B3, B4, and B5.

Excavation in B2

The 10 \times 10m trench was located in the north-east corner of area B. The surface was covered by a large amount of potsherds and upper grinding stones. There was also a scatter of human bones and beads of different type from eroded graves.

The clearance of the surface revealed a number of graves. The skeletons were in a poor state of preservation and were incomplete in some cases. The best preserved example was found between B2 and B4. It was a complete skeleton oriented east-west. Most of the burials were located in B4.

Excavation in B3

This was also a 10 x 10m trench located in the middle along the south side. A test trench 3m north-south \times 2.5m east-west has been excavated in B3 to examine the edges of the higher part of area B. The fillings of this trench consisted of a mixture of loose clay and sandy soil. In the north-east corner a fireplace has been observed at a depth of 270mm associated with a 500mm diameter pit containing ash, charcoal and a few small potsherds.

An articulated male skeleton was recovered lying on its back in an extended position oriented east-west with the head to the east facing south. The arms were extended with the hands resting on the pelvis while the legs were extended. No accompanying material was found. Below this level in



the south-east corner of this trench another articulated skeleton was found in a flexed position oriented south east/north west, head to the north west facing east. It lay with the left arm extended along the body and the right arm flexed, crossing the left one and resting in front of the pelvis. Both legs were flexed, the right in front of the left. Two pottery bowls were found, one placed upside down to the east of the head, the other on top of the left arm in front of the chest (Plate 11).



Plate 11. The skeleton from B3.

Excavation in B4

This trench is 10 × 11m in size and situated in the centre of the north part of area B. The excavation began with the clearance of 50mm to 100mm of surface deposits, at which point human skeletons began to appear in shallow pits showing that the latest use of this part of the site was as a burial ground. However, while the excavation proceeded evidence for reuse of the site as a cemetery was revealed. A unique example was two graves in different levels one cutting the other in the north-east corner of B4 (Plate 12). Both burials extended from trench B4 into B2. The lower had an oval-shaped pit 1.85 x 0.7m in size oriented east-west and cut by the upper burial on its eastern side. An articulated female



Plate 12. Skeletons in different levels from B4.

skeleton was recovered lying on its back oriented east-west, head to the west, with arms extended and the hands resting on the femurs. A necklace of beads and a pendant of iron were found around the neck. One iron ring and another made of copper alloy were also found. A number of ceramic vessels were found within this burial. Two pottery bowls were found deposited upside down as covers for other two small jars close to the pelvis.

The upper burial was placed in an oval-shaped pit measuring 2 x 0.55m oriented north east/south west. A complete articulated skeleton was recovered buried in an extended position lying on its back and oriented north east/south west, the head to the north east facing up. The arms were extended with the hands resting on the femurs. One pottery bowl was found upside down on top of the ribs on the right side of the body. Around the neck were a number of arrow heads in a very poor state of preservation.

One of the graves in B4 contained evidence for animal sacrifices accompanying the deceased (Plate 13). It was an oval-shaped pit 1.6 x 0.9m in size, oriented south east/north west and about 750mm in depth. An articulated skeleton of a young adult male oriented south east/north west was recovered in an extended position lying on its left side. The head was to the south east facing west and rested on the left hand. The right arm was flexed with the hand resting on pelvis. An unidentified animal was buried behind the deceased. The horned animal was probably a goat or gazelle.



Plate 13. The skeleton in B4 with animal sacrifice.

This skeleton was found surrounded by a number of ceramic vessels. One small black jar was found north of the head. To the south of the head a bowl was found covering the jaw of the deceased, and another black pot was on the west side.

Among the recovered objects in this tomb were two arm-lets of ivory in a poor state of preservation found *in situ* one on each arm (Plate 14). Also a necklace of beads of stone was found in addition to beads around the pelvis.

The observed orientation of the bodies on the site are varied, however the extended position on the back with the hands resting on the pelvis or alongside the body is the most



Plate 14. An armband of ivory from B4.

common. The discovered skeletons in the first layer are in bad state of preservation, which is a result of erosion and movement over the site.

The excavation in this trench demonstrated the considerable amount of material that accompanied the deceased, mainly different types of beads and small pottery bowls and jars. In fact, pottery is the main item has been observed as part of the funerary furniture. The position of the bowls one over the other or one covering the others is a common feature on this site.

Excavation in B5

This trench, 21m north-south x 20m east-west, was situated at the western side of Area B. The surface in this area has concentrations of stones in some parts, and also contains the most elevated part of the site, which is recently damaged by a 2 x 2m robber hole. The looters' activity left human bone fragments, pottery sherds and beads scattered around the pit.

The work started in this part of the site with the clearance of debris from the robber pit fill and the surrounding surface. Skeletons found were all buried in shallow pits and some were associated with pottery vessels and fireplaces.

After cleaning the profile inside the robber pit we observed a thick layer of ash and traces of a fireplace on the southern face section. This observation was the reason that a test trench to check this feature was made. Therefore, a 3 x 3m square B5-T4 was prepared in the south-east corner extending from the robber pit (Plate 15). The excavations in this trench revealed a number of skeletons found below the surface with no finds in association with them. At about 200mm below this level more skeletons were found (Plate 16) among them a skeleton of a young female containing a large quantity of black stone beads in the pelvis area in well ordered form which may be the remains of a skirt, which is locally known as *rahat* (Plate 17).

There are clear traces of settlement in Area B where the presence of a large number of upper and lower grinding stones together with the existence of different layers of ash



Plate 15. Test trench B5-T4.



Plate 16. Seven skeletons in different levels in B5-T4.

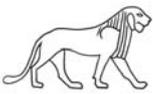


Plate 17. Dress of stone beads (Rahat).

and fireplaces provide a quite clear picture of the use of the site for occupation as well as its funerary use.

The Archaeological Materials from ROSE 5

The recovered archeological objects from this site are varied in type and quantity. However, the most common are pottery, stone tools and beads. All are found scattered on the surface of the site and their presence continued to the maximum depth reached by the excavation trenches.



The recorded pottery forms among the collection consisted of small jars, large and small bowls and cups. Decoration consisting mainly of incised lines and dots in a geometric style is common (Plate 18), however there are large amount of undecorated pots some of which are fineware (Plate 19).

The presence of large amounts of beads is the main feature observed on this site. The recovered beads are made of pottery (Plate 20), stone and ostrich eggshell.



Plate 18. Decorated pottery bowl from Azaza ROSE 5.



Plate 19. Fineware undecorated pottery bowl from Azaza ROSE 5.



Plate 20. Pottery beads from Azaza ROSE 5.

Stone tools consisting of upper and lower grinding stones and hammers have been found in association with the settlement layers (Plates 21 and 22).



Plate 21. Hammer stone from Azaza ROSE 5.



Plate 22. Stone tool from Azaza ROSE 5.

Among the small finds are a number of amulets of stone (Plate 23), and different types and sizes of stone lip plugs (Plate 24). An example of a fish bone tool was also recovered in Area B (Plate 25), which could have been used for decorating pottery.



Plate 23. Stone amulet from Azaza ROSE 5.

Concluding Remarks

The archaeological evidence revealed through the rescue excavations at ROSE 5 indicates that the site can be identified as an example of one of the large and important ancient occupation sites used by nomadic groups moving through the



Plate 24. Lip plug of stone from Azaza ROSE 5.



Plate 25. Fish bone tool from Azaza ROSE 5.

area along the upper Blue Nile. The reuse of such natural old terraces for settlement and burial sites is a well known feature in such environmental conditions where limited options for living are available.

On the basis of the excavation results; Area A is mainly considered as settlement area rather than as a cemetery although some graves were found but very few in comparison to Area B. The excavated test trenches in Area A revealed repeated layers of ash and burnt soil all the way to the natural. These layers are most probably the result of the continual burning of the grass and trees to clear a space to make land available for settlement or other purposes. We have observed similar practices in the surrounding area and in other sites in the region. For dating the associated cultural layers we have adopted a systematic sampling technique for C^{14} dating from the burnt layers. Thus, we can date all features to before or after particular phases of burning.

An understanding of the function and dating of the site at Azaza can be advanced both through further analysis of the samples and examining comparable material from other sites. The nearest and the most similar site for comparison with the excavation results from Azaza is Jebel Moya, where there are both similarities and differences. For example on the surfaces of both sites there were extensive scatters of potsherds and stone implement which suggest residential activity. On both sites there was an enormous variety of burial orientation and grave goods (Addison 1949, 39).

The use of the same locale for occupation as well as a burial ground is a feature of both sites. This has been interpreted as evidence that the bodies may have been buried either in the huts where they lived or just outside, or that they were buried in a temporarily unoccupied area with nothing to indicate the position of the grave, people then occupying

the area at a later date. This may well have been the case at Azaza (Addison 1949, 40).

Another similarity is the presence of a baby and a woman in the same grave which may relate to the custom in southern Sudan of burying a baby with its mother who had died during childbirth (Addison 1949, 40).

The occupation layers at Azaza have created the large mound, which is more than 2m high above the surrounding ground surface with clear traces of cultural phases. For a greater understanding of the cultural history of the site, further laboratory analysis during the post-excavation studies is essential.

The post-excavation study for this site should incorporate:

- C^{14} analysis for absolute dating.
- Soil analysis for botanical studies.
- Animal bone identification.
- Physical anthropological studies.

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