

SUDAN & NUBIA

The Sudan Archaeological Research Society



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Front cover: The descendency of Tomb IV T 1 near Sedeinga under excavation (© V. Francigny / SEDAU).

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Archaeological Survey of Aba Island: Preliminary Report

Ahmed Hussein Abdel Rahman Adam

Introduction

In the context of archaeological surveys that have been undertaken in most provinces and in various regions of Sudan, to survey and record the archaeological sites and include them in the archaeological map of Sudan, and in order to preserve the intangible and material culture of the area, the researcher conducted an archaeological survey on Aba Island during two seasons. The first season was carried out in July 2010 for 12 days, but then stopped as a result of heavy rains in the region, which was one of the obstacles to the fieldwork during that period. Work was then resumed between 20th - 31st March 2012; the results were very interesting owing to the high prevalence and richness of sites discovered.

The geographical location of Aba Island

Aba is an island near the right bank of the White Nile about 300km south of Khartoum (Figure 1). It is located at 13° 16' N / 32° 38' E. The island is about 54km in length from north to south, and 8km wide from east to west. It is situated between the main White Nile in the west and el-Gasir¹ in the east. Malaha village lies to the north, The Assalaya sugar factory and the city of Rabak to the east on the right bank and Kosti city and its harbour to the south on the left bank (Figure 2).

Aba was the core of the Mahdiya's² revolution in Sudan and the spiritual base of the Umma Party. This area includes several villages and small districts stretching from the north to the south: Karsh Alfeel, el-Tamreen, Rahmaniyyat, Ard elshifaa, Gar el-Mahdi, Dar as-Salam, Taksabon, Hilat Nasr, Abu Um Kom, el-Hilla el-Gadeedah, el-Manarah, Arkawit and Taiba, which lies at the southern limit of the island.

¹ A small channel of the White Nile in the east, built of earth in 1934 by Mahdi supporters. The appellation then became attached to the bridge and to the eastern channel of the White Nile.

² The Mahdiya is a name given to the period of the revolution in Sudan headed by the religious leader Mohammed Ahmed (the Mahdi) and his successor the Khalifa Abdullahi (1881-1898).

Archaeological survey work

There has been no systematic archaeological work in this area, and it has generally not received the archaeological study and methodology which it deserves, except for a rescue excavation carried out by Mahmoud el-Tayeb in 1981 in the south east of the island at a site being destroyed by workers from the water authority when they were digging modern water channels. The preliminary results of that work were limited (el-Tayeb 1996, 377-380). Therefore, the researcher conducted an archaeological survey in an attempt to fill the gap in the archaeological work on the island.

Strategy and methodology of the survey

The strategy of the survey mainly was to walk although sometimes a vehicle was used, since the total area to be covered was substantial and the whole area was to be surveyed. The team used the scientific method that is appropriate for this type of archaeological work, which also helps to achieve the desired results and objectives.

During this survey the region was divided into three sections: north, central and south, in order to facilitate and organize the work, as we recorded in these seasons a total of 11 sites which revealed the depth and history of the various cultures of this area (Figure 3).



Figure 1. The location of Aba Island in the Sudan.

Perhaps it is important to note here that we need to complete the archaeological survey in the area on the west bank to set the island in its context. To date the survey was limited to the island which complemented the three seasons already



Figure 2. Aba Island and its environs on the Google Earth satellite image.

carried out by Khider Eisa in 1997, 1999 and 2001 on the east bank (Eisa 2002, 64-66).

The work was conducted from north to south, with the first sites discovered and recorded being at the northern limit of the island. Details of the sites are as follows (Figure 3):

The northern sites

These sites lay in the districts of et-Tamreen and Karsh Alfeel and extend for a distance of 28km. The three archaeological sites recorded in this area are:

Karsh Alfeel site (Goz Abbas):

13° 20.997' N / 32° 36.139' E

This lies on the northern limits of et-Tamreen (known locally as Goz Abbas). It is small mound 600m in length and 250m in width, which slopes a little from east to west (Plate 1). The site is flanked by a group of small pools to the north and west, and it has been dug by various people.

Its surface is completely covered by shells and stone tools – grinding stones and hammers. Some human bones were also found, but the skeletons were destroyed. There are many pottery sherds on the surface, dominated by red and brown examples; most bearing different types of decoration (Plate 2). There are also some pieces of charred animal bones, and some skeletal remains of fish. However, a large part of the site has been destroyed by local residents through digging and taking soil to use for constructing new buildings (Plate 3).

Et-Tamreen 1 (North): 13° 20.656' N / 32° 36.552' E

Located in the north-eastern part of the village, this site is relatively elevated, and contains some pottery and the remains of stone tools, especially cores and flakes. There are some fossilized bones but they are few and poorly preserved as

a result of the erosion of the site's surface by vehicular traffic and pedestrians (Plate 4).

Et-Tamreen 2:

13° 20.291' N / 32° 36.252' E

This site is located in the centre of et-Tamreen village, bounded on the east by roads and some houses, and by the small mosque of et-Tamreen on the west. It is a semi-circular mound elevated slightly, with a length of 400m from east to west and a width of about 300m, containing multi-coloured but very eroded pottery. Many large shells and some stone tools were also found (Plate 5).

The central Aba Island sites

This area extends for a distance of 13km, and includes most of the residential neighborhoods and different institutions of the island which has led to the disappearance of most of

the archaeological sites and the loss of natural features and their contexts. Two sites were noted:

El-Gargoor site: 13° 18.154' N / 32° 36.248' E

Located to the south of the Universe Mosque in the mid-

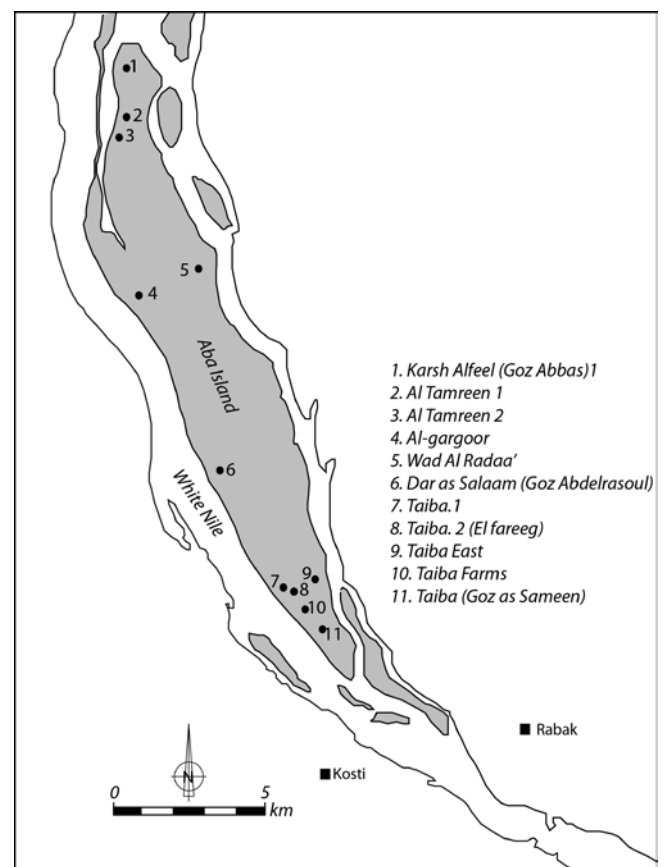


Figure 3. The archaeological sites discovered in the area.



Plate 1. *Goz Abbas: general view of the site from the west.*



Plate 4. *General view of the site of et-Tamreen 1 from the north.*



Plate 2. *Pottery sherds from Goz Abbas.*



Plate 5. *General view of et-Tamreen 2 from the west.*

dle of el-Gargoor,³ the area has a very steep slope from the middle to the west, and it is surrounded by houses on all sides. Many crushed pottery sherds were found; some incomplete examples were colored black and decorated with a variety of zigzag lines and others were decorated with dots and circles in regular shapes. Also found was an ivory object with an incomplete hole decorated with semi-circular lines (Plate 6).



Plate 3. *Goz Abbas: the pottery concentration on the surface.*



Plate 6. *Ivory object from el-Gargoor site.*

³ El-Gargoor is a local name, meaning 'shells', as there are a lot of shells on the site.

A skeleton was found on the surface accompanied by some fragments of beads, and an archers' loose which were uncovered due to the rainwater washing over the whole site. On its surface was a dense concentration of snails and shells (Plate 7).



Plate 7. El-Gargoor: a concentration of shells and pottery.

Wad er-Radaa' site: 13° 18.654' N / 32° 37.158' E

Located south east of the police station, this site extends for a distance of 2km along the Wad Alradaa' Canal, and 1km to the west of el-Gasir. Here were found some parts of artificial structures near the home of the administrative officer and others to the west of the police station, together with a spread of some fragments of stone and a very few crushed pottery sherds (Plate 8).



Plate 8. Pottery sherds from Wad er-Radaa' site.

The southern sites of Aba Island

The sites in this area which extends for a distance of 15km between the villages of Dar es-Salaam and Taiba at the southern limit of the island comprises six sites:

Dar es-Salaam (Goz Abdelrasoul):

13° 16.624' N / 32° 36.998' E

This site is located about 800m west of the village of Dar es-Salaam facing the Nile, flanked by farms on the south and the north, and has a length of 900m from north to south and is about 400m wide. The site is a low rounded mound, sloping a little toward the north and south (Plate 9).

There are some pottery sherds on the surface of different colours and forms. Some pots were found almost complete,



Plate 9. General view of Dar es-Salam site from the east.

but were eroded because of high humidity, a result of them falling on the bank of the Nile (Plate 10).

There are also some lithic tools fragments and grinding stones, especially the upper grinder. It was observed that the



Plate 10. Pottery sherds from Dar es-Salam site.

stone tools were made in a range of shapes (Plate 11).

A large part of the site has been destroyed owing to the movement of vehicles and agricultural expansion, while the eastern part has also been disturbed by animal-pens while a



Plate 11. Lithic tools and hammer-stones from Dar es-Salam site.

store was built for different crops on another part of the site.

Taiba 1: 13° 13.438' N / 32° 38.390' E

Located at the south-western tip of Taiba on the edge of the Nile, the site is a mound extending for about 700m among the village houses, which have been constructed over large parts of the site, especially on the east. There is some surface material on the site such as pottery, mostly red, and some shells of large sizes and different shapes, as well as many stone tools spread over large areas. The Nile water has affected the colour and shape of archaeological material, especially the pottery.

Taiba 2 (el-Fareeg): 13° 13.374' N / 32° 38.421' E

Located a little to the south of Taiba 1, this site consists of a small mound on which are a variety of stone tools and a few decorated pottery sherds. It was noted that the site was partially destroyed due to urban and agricultural expansion.

Taiba East: 13° 12.758' N / 32° 39.009' E

This site is located about 700m east of the Nile in the eastern part of Taiba village, to the west of the main road. It comprises a small semi-circular *kom* around 40m in diameter. There are many large fragments of stone, pieces of charcoal and fossilized bones on the surface. Also found were some pieces of iron that had been corroded by the water that covers some parts of the site during the flood season each year.

Taiba Farms: 13° 12.739' N / 32° 38.920' E

Located in the southern part of the Taiba area at the entrance to the farms, facing the Nile, the site has a length of about 1km, and ranges in width between 200-300m. Some pottery was found, decorated with straight lines and other sherds decorated with dots, but these were very few (Plate 12).

There are also some snails and shells. A long stretch of



Plate 12. Pottery sherds from Taiba Farms.

the site along the Nile was noted, but it is much destroyed by the movement of vehicles and new farms that border the site from the east, together with the continuing Nile flood every year.

Taiba (Goz es-Sameen): 13° 12.294' N / 32° 39.308' E

This is located in the eastern part of the village. It is a mound which extends for a distance of 1.5km from north to south and has a width of around 800m. It is the largest site discovered on the island, delimited by a stream on both the eastern and southern side. Spread on the surface of the site is a huge collection of pot sherds of numerous shapes and sizes belonging to the Neolithic period (Plate 13).

A range of grinding stones in large numbers and of different sizes was found, especially the upper grinders, and



Plate 13. Pottery sherds from Goz es-Sameen.

some well-made cylindrical hammer-stones. The use of different types of stones in the manufacturing process was noted (Plate 14).

The remains of elaborate stone axes were also found, spread in high density on the surface of the site; however, most of them had been broken as a result of the passage of vehicles (Plate 15).



Plate 14. Stone tools from Goz es-Sameen.



Plate 14. Lithics from Goz es-Sameen.

A preliminary analysis of the samples

Pottery

The most important items amongst the pottery samples found were those pieces decorated with stripes, vertical or crossed, corrugated, and painted black or dark brown or red. These are very similar to examples that have been found in areas of central Sudan and along the White Nile, where the pottery



Plate 15. Hammer and hand axe from Goz es-Sameen.

exhibits typical local features of the Neolithic in the White Nile area. Other examples are similar to Meroitic pottery, but these are relatively few compared with the Neolithic pottery. However, the final identification of the Aba Island pottery samples depends on the completion of the study of other samples on the eastern and western bank of the White Nile and comparison with other pottery samples in the Sudan National Museum in Khartoum and from other similar sites previously studied.

Stone tools

Many lithic tools were found on the island, and some grinding stones, especially upper ones, and other completely irregular stone tools. In addition, a large number of polished stone axes have been found, the original function of which we cannot determine. The use of different types of stone was noted, some of which was not available in the region, which means that it was brought from a distance perhaps in the form of raw material for the manufacture of the tools. One of the island sites appears to be a large workshop raising the possibility that the raw materials were brought from outside, but the manufacturing process took place locally (i.e. on the island). It probably came through exchange; while we cannot deny or confirm the existence of contacts between the White Nile and remote areas outside its borders, we can currently see that there were some relationships with local areas such as the site of Altomat Mount, Kosti and others (Haaland 1987).

Other materials

The other finds obtained during the fieldwork are snails and shells in diverse forms and sizes, which are scattered over most locations. This may be due to the proximity of the Nile, and to the presence of ponds and pools of rain-water in the area. These represent the most important source of nutrition for people who lived near the river banks and water bodies during earlier periods and are still used as food in some parts of the study area, apart from the existence of some small pieces which were used for ornaments. Also found were ac-



cessories or tools made of ivory, including one incomplete piece similar to that used among many tribes in the region, particularly the Shilluk.

Conclusions

The archaeological survey carried out by the researcher yielded many important results:

1. The richness of the region through the discovery of many archaeological sites, dating to the Neolithic, Meroitic, Christian as well as the Islamic periods.
2. Based on the existence of some common characteristics of pottery and grinding stones and lithic tools within the region, it could be argued that the region/area has in the past seen intensive stable human occupation, from different periods, including the Neolithic, Meroitic and Islamic.
3. Grinding tools indicate that the area has in the past had conditions suitable for the practice of agriculture with the production of food. We expect after a detailed analytical study of the rest of the tools discovered to provide a more detailed account of subsistence modes and agriculture in the region.
4. All these sites are under threat due to urban and agricultural expansion and flooding, along with continued unauthorised digging by the local people for the purpose of obtaining soil to be used in construction. All of this means that there is an urgent need to carry out excavations, especially in Goz es-Sameen and Goz Abbas.
5. These discoveries highlight the importance of archaeological studies in the region south of Khartoum, and supplements the existing record, by identifying new archaeological sites.

It must be pointed out that these are preliminary results; we cannot give absolute dates without expanding archaeological research in the region and finding more material for scientific analysis which can be obtained from systematic excavations.

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Gabati

A Meroitic, Post-Meroitic and Medieval
Cemetery in Central Sudan.

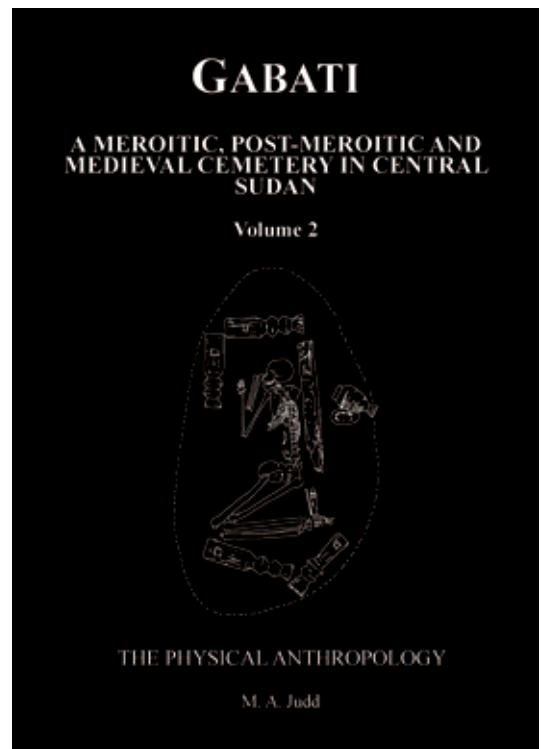
Vol. 2: The Physical Anthropology

by Margaret A. Judd,
with a contribution by David N. Edwards
London 2012

xii + 208 pages, 110 tables, 15 figures, 66 maps, 73 colour plates
ISBN 978 1 901169 19 7

The cemetery at Gabati, dating from the Meroitic, post-Meroitic and Christian periods was excavated in advance of road construction in 1994-5, the detailed report being published by SARS in 1998. This complementary volume provides an in-depth analysis of the human remains. A final chapter, a contribution from David Edwards, the field director of the project, in conjunction with Judd, assesses the archaeological results in light of continuing research in the region over the last decade and more.

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Sudan's First Railway The Gordon Relief Expedition and The Dongola Campaign

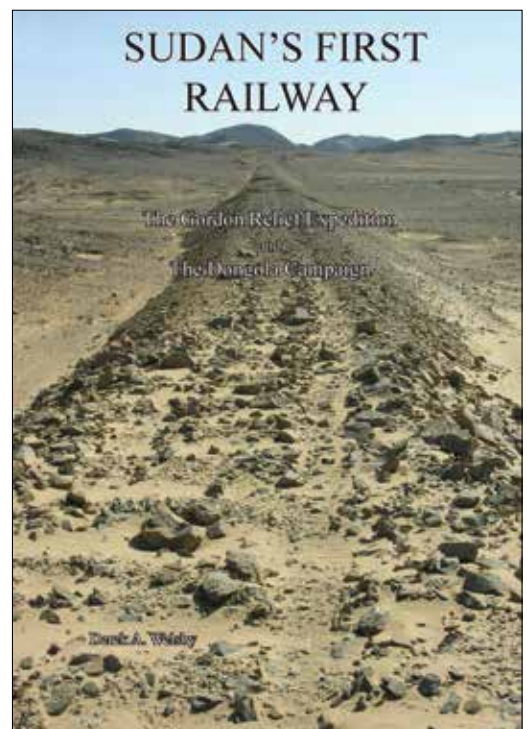
by Derek A. Welsby

London 2011

149 pages, 6 tables, 47 figures, 173 colour and 19 b&w plates
ISBN 978 1 901169 1 89

Begun in 1875 by the Egyptian khedive, Ismail Pasha, the railway played an important role during the Gordon Relief Expedition of 1884-5 and Kitchener's Dongola Campaign in 1896. It was abandoned and cannibalised to build other railways in Sudan during the first decade of the 20th century. For much of its course it runs through the desert and in those areas the roadbed, the associated military installations and the innumerable construction camps are extremely well preserved. This book is the result of a photographic survey of these installations together with the detailed archaeological surveys undertaken within them. A report on the artefacts, which includes personal equipment, ammunition, fragments of rolling stock, bottles, tins and ceramics, completes the volume.

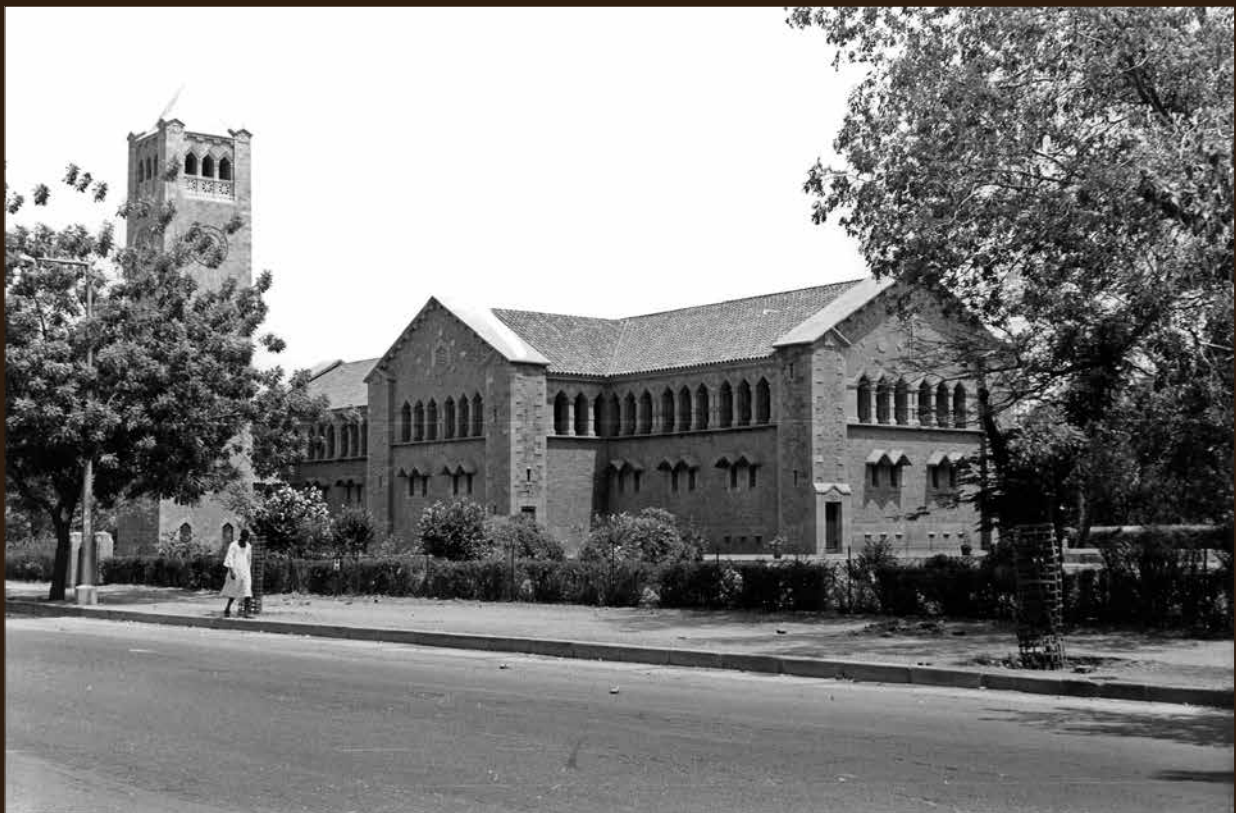
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Khartoum. The Republican Palace, once the Governor General's residence, in 1968 (photo SARS Hawkes Archive HAW P091.01).



Khartoum. The Anglican cathedral in 1968. Now minus its bell tower it houses the Republican Palace Museum (photo SARS Hawkes Archive HAW P090.01).