

Preliminary Report on the Archaeological Survey of Sennar State and the Southern Gezira State Project, (Western bank of the Blue Nile)

Fawzi Hassan Bakhiet and Abdelhai Abdelsawi

Based on the agreement between the National Corporation for Antiquities and Museums and the General Secretariat of Sennar Capital of Islamic Culture 2017, a team from the NCAM¹ and the General Department of Tourism and Antiquities in Sennar State has implemented the first part of the first stage of the project for survey and archaeological excavation of the area between Wad el-Haddad in Aljazeera state until Sennar (the old city), a distance of about 30km in length.

Survey of the strip of land on the western bank of the Blue Nile between the Wad Medani to Sennar highway and the river and the area of Jebel Moya was undertaken from 7th -17th June 2015. The aim of this project is to register and document the archeological sites in this area and also includes conducting archaeological excavations. It is hoped that these activities will provide students and researchers with information on the history of the area from prehistoric to modern times.

The Geographical Nature of the Area

Geographically, it is a part of what is known as the Gezira (Aljazeera), the area located between the Blue Nile and White Niles delimited arbitrarily to the south by the railway between Sennar and Kosti. Topographically it is a flat plain, covered with black cotton soil to a maximum depth of 17m in the middle, which was deposited in Pleistocene times by flooding of the Blue Nile. Within it lies the Gezira Agriculture Scheme. The generally flat topography is interrupted by a series of small hills between Sennar State and the city of Rabak, such as Jebel Moya, Jebel Sagadi, Jebel Beyout and Jebel Dood, composed of basic rocks, granite and gneiss, the oldest rocks in the Sudan. In addition, there is a number of *wadis* and *keheeran* that flow from the west into the Blue Nile. Most of these were created recently, after the change in the topography during the establishment of the Gezira Scheme.

¹ Amel Hassan, Habab Idriss, Enaam Abdelrahman and Fakhri Hassan (NCAM Inspectors), Gasim Hassan (photographer), M. Elshaikh (cook), Nashwa Awad (Sennar State).

The Method of Survey

Two pickup vehicles were used to reach the targeted search areas and then survey was conducted on foot. Enquiries made of the local people also played a significant role in guiding the team to the archeological sites. Each archaeological site was registered on a separate form, photographed and its location determined by GPS.

The Results of the Archaeological Survey

The area stretching from Mizaigila village in the south until the village of Tayba el-Batahin in the north has been surveyed (see Figures 1 and 2) and 33 archaeological sites were registered and documented. Due to the relatively humid climate of the area, and the existence of intensive agricultural and

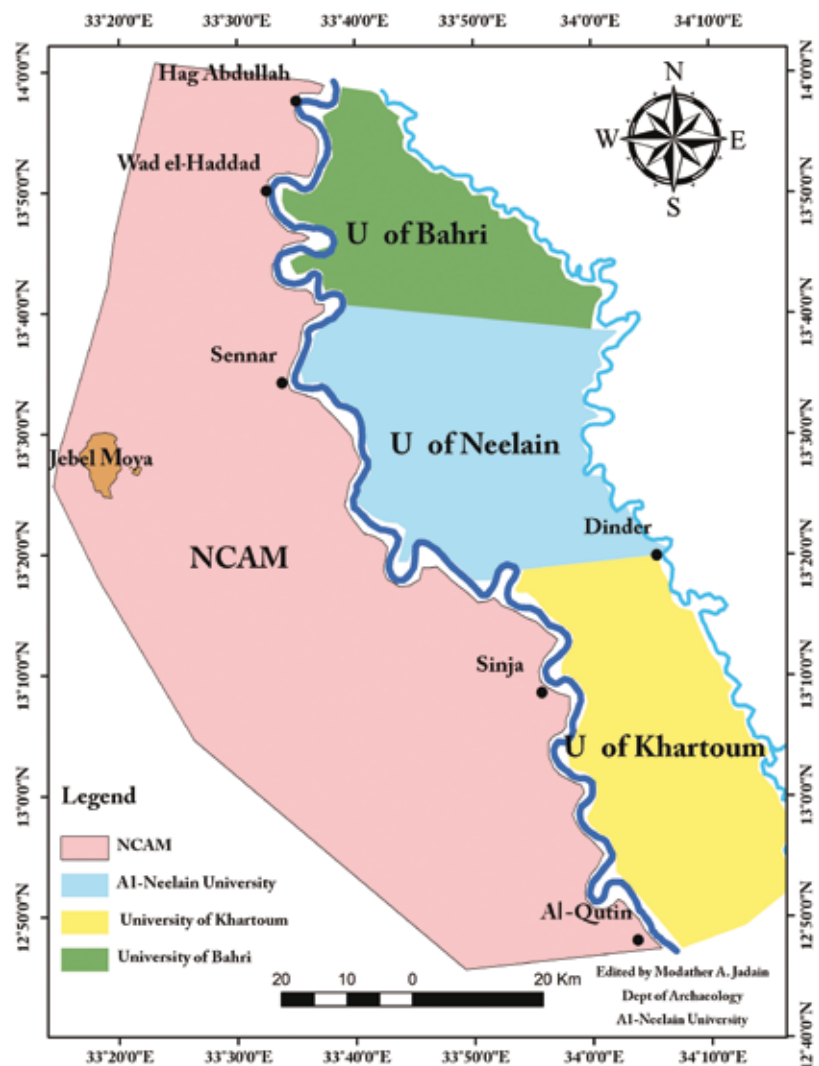


Figure 1. General map of the area with all concessions.

pastoral activity, it proved too difficult to determine the nature and history of some sites, because of the lack of archaeological artefacts on the surface.

Most of the registered sites can be attributed to the Islamic period but many of these are actually multi-period as is obvious from the presence of archaeological material on the

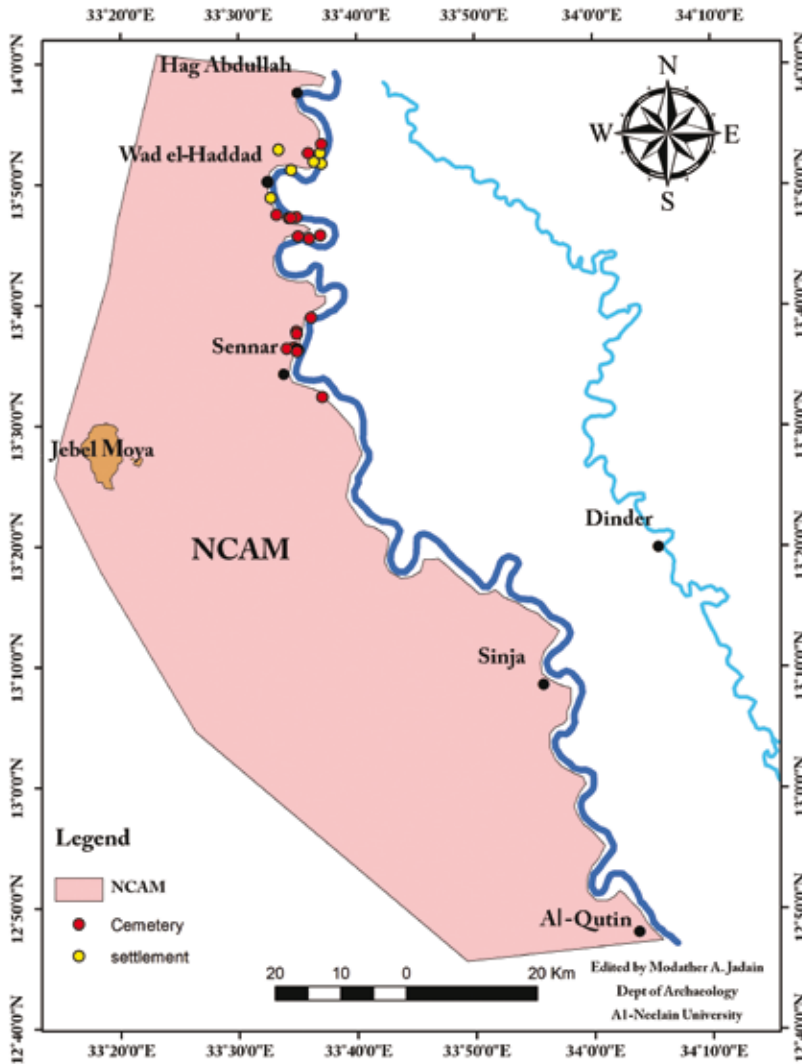


Figure 2. NCAM Concession with sites marked.



Plate 1. SEG/W 1(A): Part of small ceramic object.

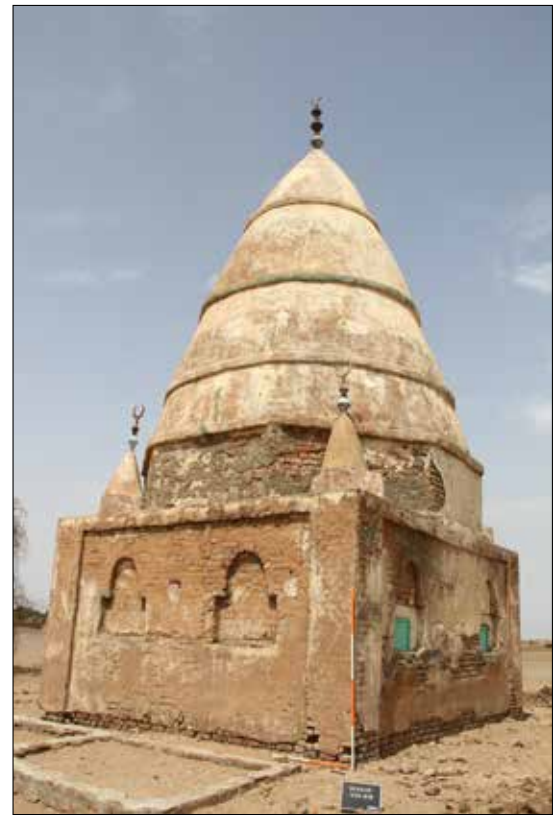


Plate 2. SEG/W 1 (B): Qubbat Sheikh Hamid el-Sumtobari.

surface of different historical periods, such as the Christian, Post-Meroitic and prehistoric periods, especially the Neolithic. The Islamic sites contain *qubbat* in the middle of Islamic cemeteries; the related oral stories have been documented in order to help in an attempt to date these sites.

Archaeological sites

SEG/W 1 A: N 13° 53.383' E 33° 37.32' settlement
Spread on the surface on a relatively high hill, north of Sumtobari village over an area of about 250 x 100m, are quantities of pottery sherds from vessels of various forms, in addition to a group of stone tools. There is an obvious concentration of archeological objects in the northern part of the site (Plate 1).

SEG/W B: N 13° 53.387' E 33° 37.037' cemetery and *qubbat*.
The *qubba* of el-Sheikh Hamid el-Sumtobari (Plate 2) sits on the top of a prominent mound, about 2km from the Nile. Located in the eastern part of the mound, at ground level it is rectangular in shape (6.75 x 5.75m externally and 5 x 4m internally). It has an entrance in the southern side and is decorated with closed windows, one in the southern wall

and two in the eastern and western walls while there are two windows opening through the north wall. Resting on this base is a low octagonal drum supporting the parabolic dome with four prominent horizontal cordons topped by a metal finial ending in a crescent. Flanking the octagon are four small '*qubba*' each with a metal finial of similar form to that on the apex of the main dome. It is rendered on the outside with beige coloured cement and on the interior with unpainted cement to the springing of the dome above which the brickwork is exposed. The most recent reconstruction of the *qubba* was in 1994 as is written on a cement sign. Inside are three graves, that of the sheikh in the center and

his grandsons, Sheikh Mohammad (to the left) and Sheikh Abdullah (to the right).

According to the oral tradition, the *qubba* has passed through three phases of construction, the first phase of circular shape, built of large size red bricks (390 x 160 x 60mm), the second phase was rectangular shaped and built of reused Christian red brick, and then the third current phase with the dome of modern red bricks. The *qubba* is surrounded by circular and egg-shaped graves delimited with red bricks. There is also a big fire place in the eastern part of the mound less than 8m in diameter; locally called *toggaba*. Such features are used to provide illumination in the evening for the ‘*Khalwa*’ students when they are studying the Holy Quran.

SEG/W 2: N 13° 52.646’ E 33° 35.910’ Islamic cemetery
On the flat land about 3km from the Nile, was a spread of decorated and undecorated pottery sherds on the surface over an area of *c.* 400 x 200m, in addition to a small amount of stone tools, mostly of quartz around the shrine of Sheikhha “Batoul el-Ghabsha”.

SEG/W 3: N 13° 52.637’ E 33° 36.937’ settlement
An area 17 x 17m, fenced with concrete posts entered through a gate in its north side. There is a rectangular building 1.75 x 7.75m in size in the middle for a holy woman called “Batoul el-Ghabsha”, constructed of red bricks rendered with a layer of cement in white and green color. It is a shrine visited by the local people.

SEG/W 4: N 13° 51.919’ E 33° 36.382’ settlement
Located about 3km south west of site SEG/W and more than 5km from the Nile, it is on a relatively elevated area about 250 x 100m in size, at a crossroads in the middle of the farms. Spread on its surface are pottery sherds, a few fragments of millstones and other stone material. There is an obvious presence of the archeological material in the centre and west of the site. The state of preservation is poor.

SEG/W 5: N 13° 52.637’ E 33° 36.937’ settlement
El-Gamri which is a high mound known locally located near the Nile, to the south-west of el-Dakhin village a site about 300 x 100m in size surround by *tundab* trees. On the site there is very little stone material, quartz and quartzite. The site has been exposed by rain water erosion; there is a number of small *kbeeran* which pour into the Nile.

SEG/W 6: N 13° 51.245’ E 33° 34.484’ settlement
A high mound located to the south of Faris village and bordered by the Nile. Over an area of about 400 x 200m there are decorated and undecorated potsherds, in addition to stone material, some of it quartz. Also human bones were found and a piece of ostrich eggshell.

The site is surrounded by *tundab* trees. A portion from the southern part of the site has been destroyed by agriculture. The site exposes to erosion by rain water.

SEG/W 7: N 13° 50.234’ E 33° 32.457’ Islamic cemetery and *qubbat*
The shrine of Sheikh Sharif Mohammad Sahnoun (Wad

Abu Sahnoun) is located to the east of Sheikh el-Dai village close to the houses (Plate 3). Built of red bricks of different sizes, it is oval shaped, 6.9 m x 8.5m internally and 10.8m x 38.55m externally, with an entrance in the south east. In the centre is the tomb of the sheikh (6.5 x 3m). There are also separate graves around the shrine. One of them is located on the western side of the *qubba* remains which belongs to one of his followers called Sheikh el-Zaki.



Plate 3. SEG/W 7: Ruins of *Qubbat Sheikh Wad Abu Sahnoun*.

SEG/W 8: N 13° 50.234’ E 33° 32.457’ cemetery with Neolithic settlement

Located to the east of the previous site, (SEG/W 7) is a high mound, 100 x 300m in size, the surface covered by large quantities of gravel, pottery sherds, and fired bricks, in addition to microliths of quartz and a few broken pottery vessels. The site is threatened by rain water erosion. There is also the evidence of removal of soil for construction purposes.

SEG/W 9: N 13° 48.932’ E 33° 32.738’ isolated building
A building of red brick, 23.58 x 7m in size, situated a few meter from the Blue Nile bank in Wad el-Haddad. It is considered to have been an administrative building sating to the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium (Plate 4).

SEG/W 10: N 13° 47.487’ E 33° 33.393’ settlement
Located in the east of the village of “Mekki,” about 3km



Plate 4. SEG/W 9: Building dating to the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium.



from the Nile, it is a large mound measuring approximately 1000 x 500m connected to a series of mounds. Spread on its surface are quantities of microlithic tools made of quartz and a few small pieces of pottery. The site is under threat from erosion by rain water, in addition to the removal of earth for construction purposes.

SEG/W 11: N 13° 47.521' E 33° 33.211' cemetery

Located to the east of the village of Mekki east the previous site, it occupies prominent mounds with an area of 8000m². There are some graves with associated potsherds visible as a result of robbing.

SEG/W 12: N 13° 47.317' E 33° 34.91' cemetery

The site is located west of the village of Mekki, about 3km south of an acacia forest. It is a high mound about 200 x 150m in size, on the surface of which are five skeletons in a poor state of preservation as a result of water damage. Also found were great quantities of black granite on the surface, the origin and function of which are equally uncertain.

SEG/W 13: N 13° 47.278' E 33° 34.253' cemetery

The site is located east of the village of Amara el-Nasri (Abdel Rahman Ali Mohamed 2003). It occupies a prominent hill, about 100 x 150m in size on which are visible on the surface skeletons in a poor state of preservation, as a result of rain water erosion. Also found on the surface are a few decorated and undecorated potsherds, in addition to microlithic tools. There is a clear intrusion on the site made by people seeking gold (with evidence of metal detection devices), which has revealed the contents of some graves (bones).

SEG/W 14: N 13° 47.271' E 33° 34.430' cemetery

The site is located about 3km south of Amarat el-Nasri village and contains the *qubba* of Sheikh el-Nasri, circular in shape with a diameter of 4.95m. It is open to the sky (Plate 5). Within are three graves in the center is the tomb of el-Sheikh (3.9 x 2m), the second is about 2.3 x 1m and third about 2.8 x 1m with a *mibrab* about 1.3 x 0.38m, in the northern part of the *qubba*.

The dome was built of red bricks of large size (300 x 100 x 60mm) and of the normal size (200 x 100 x 30mm), with an external layer of cement, whitewashed but discoloured



Plate 5. SEG/W 14: *Qubbat Sheikh el-Nasri*.

and damaged by erosion and rain; some parts of the cement render have fallen off. It is surrounded by seven circular graves of red brick.

SEG/W 15: N 13° 32.410' E 33° 37.84' cemetery

The site, covering about 200 x 100m, is located to the east of the *qubba* of Sheikh Amara el-Nasri and *c.* 1km south of the Nile. Spread on the surface of the relatively high mound is a very small quantity of potsherds and stone material. In the northern part of the site and on the slope was a group of four skeletons in a bad state of preservation as a result of erosion by rain in addition to the presence of many paths and tracks across the site. On the top of the mound there is a group of many oval-shaped graves surrounded by a circular enclosure of stones. The burials appear to be Islamic.

SEG/W 16: N 13° 45.713' E 33° 35.60' cemetery

The site is located west of Gondal Taiba village and to the east of el-Zahra school, about 200m from the Nile on a high mound cut by many *kebeeran* draining into the Nile. It is in a poor state of preservation, with rare finds of archaeological objects, a few potsherds and stone tools, on the surface of the site, due to the exposure of the surface to erosion by rain water and floods.

SEG/W 17: N 13° 45.564' E 33° 35.975' cemetery with *qubbat*

The site is located east of Gondal Taiba village, in an area about 300 x 200m, on a relatively high mound topped with gravel. It comprises many upper buildings constructed of circular and oval shaped stones circle, most of them exposed to erosion by rain and floods. One of them is well preserved (6 x 5.2m) and there was a small amount of pottery and stone tools. Locally called Sheikh Wad Shabbo people believe that it is a shrine and tomb of the sheikh but there is no detailed information about it.

To the north of the site there are graves covering a wide area around 100 x 100m with gravel forming the superstructure. The upper structure was exposed to erosion by rain, but some parts are still in place.

SEG/W 18: N 13° 45.564' E 33° 35.975' cemetery

The site is located east of the village of Gondal Taiba, about 500m from the Nile. It is a high mound about 500 x 300m, with a group of graves with circular and oval stone superstructures (7 x 2.4m) associated with a little archaeological material (Plate 6). The site has been exposed to erosion by rain water while agricultural activity threatens the site from the east.

Locally called el-Faki Abbas, people believe that the surrounding graves are religious fireplaces, *toggaba*, for the *khalwas* 'religious schools' of the sheikh.

SEG/W 19: N 13° 45.800' E 33° 36.927' cemetery

The site is located east of the village of Gondal Taiba and to the north of SEG/W 17 in an area about 100 x 150m. There is a range of ancient graves similar to the graves found in sites 17 and 18. There is a principal burial in the centre, the tomb of Sheikh Salah, about 10.5 x 2.56m in size, in addition



Plate 6. SEG/W 18: A ring made of copper alloy.

to three other graves for his family members. The site has been eroded by rain water. The northern part of the site is used as a cemetery for the village's residents.

It seems there are two types of Islamic grave monuments, oval-shaped graves dating to the early period and the rectangular shape marking the modern burials.

SEG/W 20: N 13° 45.564' E 33° 35.975' cemetery

The site is about 35km from Sennar and lies to the south of el-Jebal village, which is to the north of Jebel Moya (Addison 1949). It is located on the lower area, bounded by a chain of hills from the east, west and south, while the famous excavation house of Wellcome, the House of Boulders (Plate 7), is located in the northern part. Artefacts are densely spread across the surface of the site (pottery of different forms and decoration, stone tools and quartz), where there are grave monuments of a different shapes and sizes, the largest one (14m) stones. Some of them are flat topped with gravel and sand surrounded by stones, some are slightly higher in the center, ranging in size (3.8 x 3.15m; 6.7 x 4.9m; 1 x 0.85m), and others, concentrated in the western part of the site are circular with diameters between 3.1m and 1.5m.

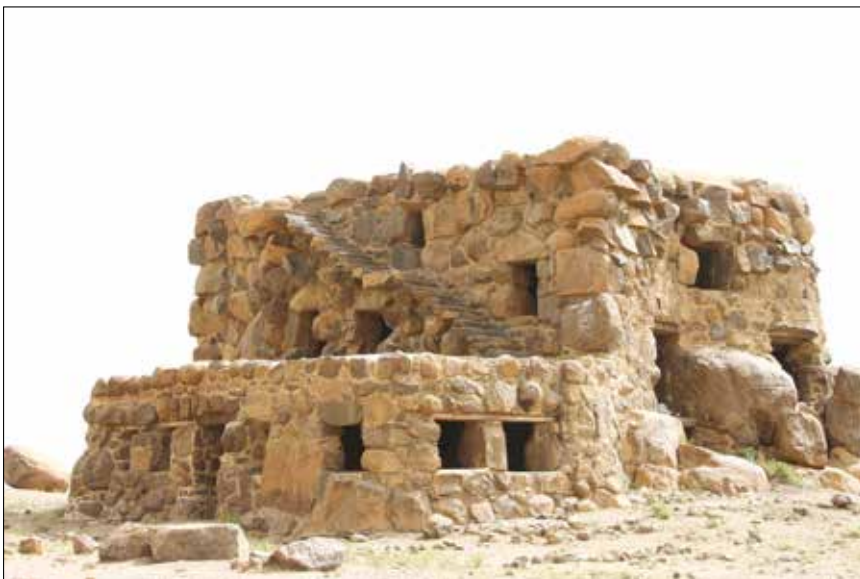


Plate 7. SEG/W 20: Wellcome's excavation house, the House of Boulders, at Jebel Moya.

Excavations were conducted in some parts of the site by Sir Henry Wellcome (Addison 1949, 13) but it appears that the graves, which are located in the northern and eastern part, were not investigated.

There is a stone wall in the northern and north-eastern parts of the site associated with the excavation house (Addison 1949, pl. XV) and also two buildings of stone, a dome-shaped one in the eastern part (Plate 8), and the other conical-shaped located in the western part. In the south-western part there are three wells with a single roomed building with an entrance and domed roof.

SEG/W 21: N 13° 38.990' E 33° 36.120' cemetery

The *qubba* of Sheikh Abdul Qader Wad Hamdan (Plate 9), is located in the village of Daim el-Mashaikha and is about

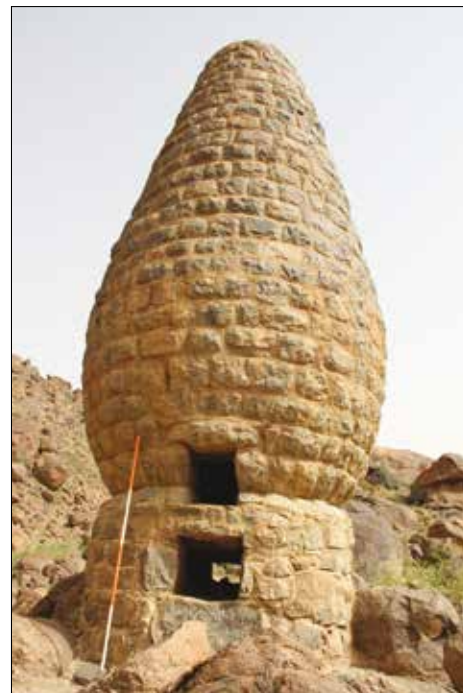


Plate 8.
SEG/W 20:
Wellcome
building at
Jebel Moya.

200m north of the Nile. The cemetery covers an area of about 250 x 250m. The *qubba* is circular in plan, 6.15m in diameter at the base from which level the parabolic dome springs, painted green and white. The doorway is in the south-eastern side. Within is the tomb of the sheikh (3 x 08m), on which is written the date of his death (1302 AH, AD 1881). Its floor is of white marble topped by a wall of iron. There are graves inside the enclosure for the followers of the sheikh (Plate 10). There are also other graves surrounded by bricks belonging to the residents of the area who still bury their dead in this place.

SEG/W 22: N 13 45.564' E 33 35.975' cemetery

The site is located to the south of the school of Daim el-Mashaikha village, in an area



Plate 9. SEG/W 21: *Qubbat Sheikh Abdul Qader Wad Hamdan.*



Plate 10. SEG/W 21: *Qubbat Sheikh Abdul Qader Wad Hamdan, interior.*

about 200 x 350m on a high mound. There are spreads of different types of potsherds in some parts of the site which is exposed to erosion by the rain water and in *keheeran*, which pour into the Nile.

SEG/W 23: N 13° 37.842' E 33° 34.896' cemetery

The site, about 500 x 300m in size, is located to the south of Daim el-Mashaikha village and to the east of Daim el-Amara village, and is south of the asphalt road leading to the middle of the Daim el-Mashaikha village about 3km west of the Nile. There is an acacia forest in the eastern part of the site. The site occupies low mound on which is a dense spread of pottery and stone artefacts. There is also a clear concentration of the archeological material in the north-east and north-west parts of the site. The site is exposed to erosion by rain water, and there are small *keheeran* on its surface running towards the Nile.

SEG/W 24: N 13° 37.646' E 33° 34.905' cemetery

The *bayan* of Sheikh Hassan Wad Hassouna is located south west of Daim Amara village in a flat area of about 100 x 70m. It contains the principal rectangular tomb around which is a group of four other graves surrounded by red bricks; all of them are enclosed by a fence of vehicle tires. There are six

further graves outside the fenced area, one with a red-brick superstructure and the others surrounded by stones. There is a dense concentration of red bricks in the south-eastern part of the *bayan*, previously probably a mosque. An isolated burial was found at a distance of 100m from the *bayan* surrounded by red bricks. Potsherds and stone tools pre-dating the *bayan* were also found. The site is threatened by rain water erosion and in the southern and south-western areas it has been ploughed in preparation for agriculture.

SEG/W 25: N 13° 36.508' E 33° 34.654' cemetery

The site is the most northern part of the old city of Sennar and consists of a group of separate necropolises. Each one contains old Islamic graves, with the oval-shaped superstructure made of brown conglomerate sedimentary stone. The site extends over an area of 1000 x 500m, adjacent to the acacia forest, which is located on the western side of the Blue Nile.

There are two tombs:

– The tomb of Sheikh Ibrahim Wad Sabur, to the east of Taiba el-Batahin village. Occupying an elevated position it is a circular-shaped monument of 12m in diameter, divided internally for three burials.

–The tomb of Sheikh Abu Zeid is located in the east of Sheikh Ibrahim Wad Sabur's tomb. It is a square-shaped, single-roomed, building with walls 580mm thick built of large red bricks (300 x 200 x 60mm) without a roof. It has an entrance in the eastern side 1.08m wide. In the centre is the tomb of the sheikh (4.48 x 3.08m). The tomb is surrounded by graves of different sizes. The tomb was re-built in 2010 with the same old bricks. Found there are archeological artefacts comprising potsherds and stone tools.

SEG/W 26: N 13° 36.411' E 33° 34.83' cemetery

The site is located east of Dar el-Salaam el-Kawahla village, west of Taiba el-Batahin village and north of the asphalt road. The site, covering about 150 x 100m is a flat area with a dense spread of artefacts, potsherds and various stone tools (upper and lower grinding stones, axes, and quartz microliths). The site is exposed to two principal threats, firstly erosion by rain water and secondly by the local inhabitants because it is located close to the residential area, between the two villages noted above.

SEG/W 27: N 13° 36.390' E 33° 34.929' cemetery

The site is located south east of the tomb of Sheikh Abu Zaid and east of el-Batahin village over an area of about 250 x 100m. It is a low lying area between the two hills which divides by *wadis* and *keheeran*, on the surface of which was a large quantity of funerary archaeological objects, decorated and undecorated pottery and stone tools mostly palettes. In the north-eastern part of the site there are more than three skeletons, completely exposed, extended in a north-south direction, the head to the south looking east as found in Islamic burials. The site is exposed to erosion by rain water runoff which has led to the destruction of graves.

SEG/W 28 (1): N 13° 36.342' E 33° 34.991' cemetery

The site is within the northern border of the city of Old Sennar in the residential area. It is located to the east of Taiba el-Batahin village and south east of the tomb of Sheikh Abu Zeid. It is a high mound rising to 6m above its surroundings. On the top of the mound are broken red bricks, with a few potsherds, while other sherds are scattered around the mound along with a few stone tools, remains of bone and an amulet. The site is exposed to erosion by rain water and also there is a *wadi* which passes through the northern part of the site.

SEG/W 28 (2): N 13° 36.314' E 33° 35.039' cemetery

The site is to the east of SEG/W 28 (1), and about 300m from the Blue Nile which is located in a south-eastern direction. The site is a high mound of about 5m in elevation. Spread on its surface are many artefacts that cover the whole mound (potsherds – one shaped into a disc, stone tools, many bones, ostrich eggshells beads and beads of quartz, along with aquatic snail shells (Plates 11-13). There is evidence of a wall in the middle of the mound extending eastward and of rooms in the western part of the site. The site is exposed to continuous erosion by rain water which has formed small *kebeeran* flowing in a south-eastern direction. It is also threatened by agriculture on the east side and there are brick-making areas in the south-eastern part of the site.



Plate 11. SEG/W 28 (2): Decorated sherds of pottery.



Plate 12. SEG/W 28 (2): Hammer stones.



Plate 13. SEG/W 28 (2): Part of a stone ring.

SEG/W 28 (3): N 13° 36.305' E 33° 34.996' cemetery and settlement

The site, located to the west of SEG/W 28 (2), occupies a prominent circular mound about 40m in diameter, spread on the surface of which are broken red bricks, which are concentrated in the centre of the mound, large quantities of decorated and undecorated pottery and a few stone tools. The mound is exposed to erosion by rain water, particularly in its southern part.

SEG/W 28 (4): N 13° 36.259' E 33° 34.914' cemetery and settlement

The site, located south west of SEG/W 28 (3), is on a high mound. Spread on its surface are potsherds, among them Islamic pieces and 'china', stone tools, human bones, an amulet and small beads some of ostrich eggshell. There appears to be remains of a wall in the middle of the mound. Rain water runoff has scoured deeply incised gulleys in the southern part of the mound and there is another gully in the northern part. (Plates 14 and 15). The site is also threatened by the residents as they use it as an occupation area during the rainy season, due to its altitude. On its surface are shards of modern of glass and evidence for corralling of animals.

SEG/W 28 (5): N 13° 36.194' E 33° 34.932' settlement

The site, the southern part of the old city of Sennar, is located to the south of SEG/W 28 (4), and to the west of Taiba el-Batahin village. It occupies a small mound between two valleys (Plate 16), over an area of about 40 x 48m, on the surface of which are broken red bricks, potsherds and stone tools (lithic and upper grinding stones). The site is exposed to erosion by rain water runoff.

Conclusion

During this short season many different sites were recorded, which can be dated from the Neolithic to the Islamic period (see Tables 1 and 2). Most of these sites were partly destroyed by human and natural factors, especially the old city of Sennar where it is now very difficult to recognize individual buildings. An ethnographical survey was also conducted to collect



Plate 14. SEG/W 28 (4): Deeply incised water runoff gulleys on the flanks of the mound.



Plate 15. SEG/W 28 (4): Different types of beads.



Plate 16. SEG/W 28 (5): General view over the old city at Sennar.

Table 1. Distribution of sites.

Islamic	Neolithic	unidentified	total
14	5	14	33

Table 2. Classification of sites.

Settlement	Funerary	unidentified
15	14	4

more information about the region, especially that related to sheikhs and their *qubbat* from the Fung period up until today.

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