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edited by

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Linen shroud, 2nd century AD, Thebes
Acquarulo Canettoli collection, Inv. no 133.159, MANN
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Introduction

The eighteenth edition of Current Research in Egyptology (CRE) conference has been held at the University of Naples “L’Orientale” on the 3rd-6th of May, 2017. It was the first time that this international event of exceptional relevance has been hosted in Italy, and in Naples in particular, which made us all very glad and proud. About 122 international scholars from all over the world gathered in Naples to attend three contemporary sessions of poster and papers, focused on a very large variety of topics (Graeco-Roman and Byzantine Egypt, Nubian Studies, Language and Texts, Art and Architecture, Religion and Cult, Field Projects, Museums and Archives, Material Culture, Mummies and Coffins, Society, Technologies applied to Egyptology, Environment). For the success of this event we certainly have to thank the exceptional generosity of the University of Naples “L’Orientale” (<http://www.unior.it/>) and its Interdipartimental Centre for Archaeological Services (CISA; <http://www.unior.it/ateneo/231/1/cisa-centro-interdipartimentale-di-servizi-di-archeologia.html>), in the person of our Dean, Prof. Edda Morlicchio, prof. Michele Bernardini (Head of the Asia, Africa and Mediterranean Department), Prof. Bruno Genito and Dr. Andrea D’Andrea (CISA President and Technical Director respectively) for their support. In particular, three travel bursaries and 10 inscription and dinner bursaries for CRE delegates have been made available, since this year for the first time ever the Egypt Exploration Society (EES) did not provide its traditional support to CRE, due to the decision of the Trustees to reduce expenditure until a new strategic plan has been developed. Nonetheless, we have been able to offer to CRE Naples delegates also a free guided tour of the Oriental Museum Umberto Scerrato (University of Naples “L’Orientale”, <http://museorientale.unior.it/>), a free access to the National Archaeological Museum of Naples, in order to visit the newly re-opened Egyptian Collection, and also guided tours to the archaeological site of Pompei and the Marine Protected Area “Gaiola underwater Park”. The participants had the chance to attend seven keynote presentation, held by Italian egyptologists and Nubian and Roman Archaeologists (Rosanna Pirelli, Andrea Manzo, Irene Bragantini from Naples University “L’Orientale”, Marilina Betrò from Pisa University, Patrizia Piacentini from Milan University, Christian Greco from Turin Egyptian Museum and Daniela Picchi from Archaeological Museum of Bologna), whom we would like to thank very much for providing us very interesting lectures.

This conference would not be possible without the enthusiastic and passionate work of all the CRE Organizing Committee members (Stefania Mainieri, Valentina Perna, Luigi Fabrizio, Maria Diletta Pubblico, Elena D’Itria, Anna Salsano, Francesco Michele Rega, Eleonora Minucci, Alessia Cesaro, Pietro Fusco, Serena Monaco and Daniela Moxedano - Pummy) who have devoted their time and energy for the good outcome of this event

Last, but not least, since all the Neapolitan Egyptologists nowadays come, directly or indirectly, from the school of Prof. Claudio Barocas, who inaugurated the teaching of Egyptology and Coptic language and literature in Naples in the early Seventies, we would like to pay homage to him with the publication of CRE 2017 Naples proceedings.

Ilaria Incordino

Recent Archaeological Discoveries in Aba Island – Sudan

Ahmed Hussein Abdelrahman 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 2013 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 in December 2016; the results were very interesting owing to the high prevalence and richness of sites discovered.

This paper presents results of the archaeological work thus undertaken and of the oral histories collected as an interdisciplinary methodology that emphasizes many applications of Ethnographical science, oral history, and strategies for fieldwork and collaboration among experts. In this article, the research philosophies and methods are presented and their application illustrated with results from the survey. Field survey in the northwestern Aba Island identified a host of Stone Ages and Historical Periods objects and thought likely to date, based on currently available evidence, to the transition between the Neolithic and the Meroitic periods to the twentieth century. The historical development of the sites are discovered in the northern Aba Island, is examined in detail to demonstrate the interpretive potential of data collected by these methods. This can be used as a working hypothesis for future research in the area.

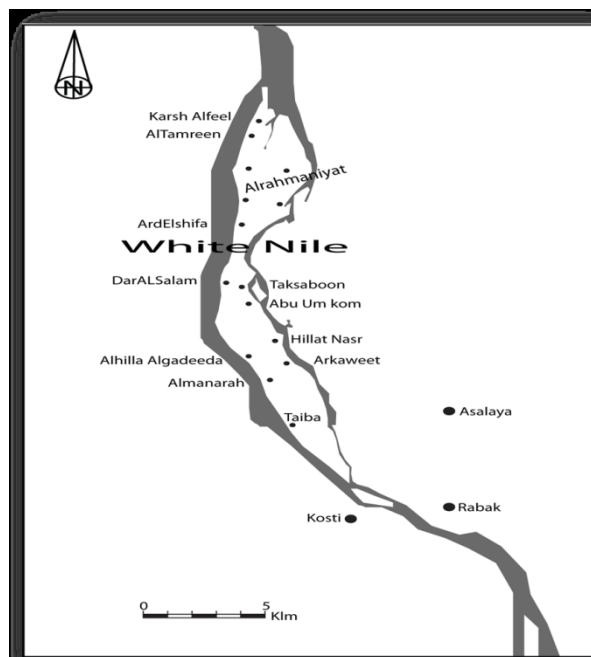


Figure 1. The Archaeological Sites discovered in the area (Season 1, 2).

The geographical location of Aba Island

Aba is an island near the right bank of the White Nile about 300km south of Khartoum (Fig.1). 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. It was the core of the Mahdia's 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.

This area geologically is part of the clay terrace of the western bank of the White Nile. There are many archaeological sites related to Sudanese civilization starting from Neolithic up to Islamic were registered

around the town by researcher in 2015 (Adam 2015). All were mapped by two measured bearings standing on the opposite bank. Some sites were large mounds, obviously settlements and could be workshop, in many cases with cemeteries connected to them at the lowest levels.

Objectives, Strategy and Methodology of the Research

The researcher expects to uncover evidence that may shed new light on the environment and life ways of the people who inhabited the area. The research aims to combine the knowledge and techniques from a variety of disciplines to develop a more complete picture of the past inhabitants of the area, both elite and commoner, as well as to investigate the Paleo environmental condition in the past.

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 area, in order to facilitate and organize the work, as we recorded in these seasons a total of 7 sites which revealed the depth, 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 carried out by Khider Eisa far from this area which were in 1997, 1999 and 2001 on the east bank (Eisa 2002). The work was conducted from north to south, with the first sites discovered and recorded being at the northern limit of the island.

The aim of this paper is not to present an analytic study of the subject as much as to throw some light on a long forgotten area of the White Nile by using it as an example for the threat facing archaeological sites in the Sudan. One of the most dangerous problems causing great damage to the antiquities is the lack of coordination between various governmental administrations and departments for the protection of the national heritage. The best example of this problem could be the new roads in the area beside the extend of the new buildings in the Island. Numerous sites were used as quarries for the soil needed to build the pavement until today. Among the most badly affected by such activity is the site of Tamreen North. The material consisted of pottery sherds, lithic tools, and even a complete bowl, most probably of a Meroitic and Post-Meroitic (350 BC –500 AD).

Archaeological survey work

Aba is the largest island on the White Nile and the private property of the Mahdi's family, Despite its archaeological richness Aba Island has received very little attention, as the history of scientific archaeological research in Aba Island is a relatively recent development. Research dates back to 1982 when Mahmoud Eltayeb (1996) conducted limited excavations in the northeast area of Aba Island. Similarly, other rescue excavations were carried out in Aljaser located in the eastern part of the island in 1983, It was visited for the first time by the Antiquities Service when a school teacher from the north part of Aba Island informed the Service about finding a human skeleton associated with a quantity of ostrich egg-shell beads, while preparing to install water-pipes in his house in the area of Rahmaniyah which situated on a slope of a huge ancient mound. The walls of the recent houses contain many pottery sherds, fragments of bones and snail shells, along the streets for newly introduced main water-pipes partial skeletons and fragments of human bones could be seen in clear greyish archaeological layer. Here also it seems that the cemetery is located at a lower level than the settlement especially Aradeib, Doweih site (Fig. 2). The pottery found at the site is very similar to the brushed ware of Kawa site 80 klm North Aba Island (Fig. 3).

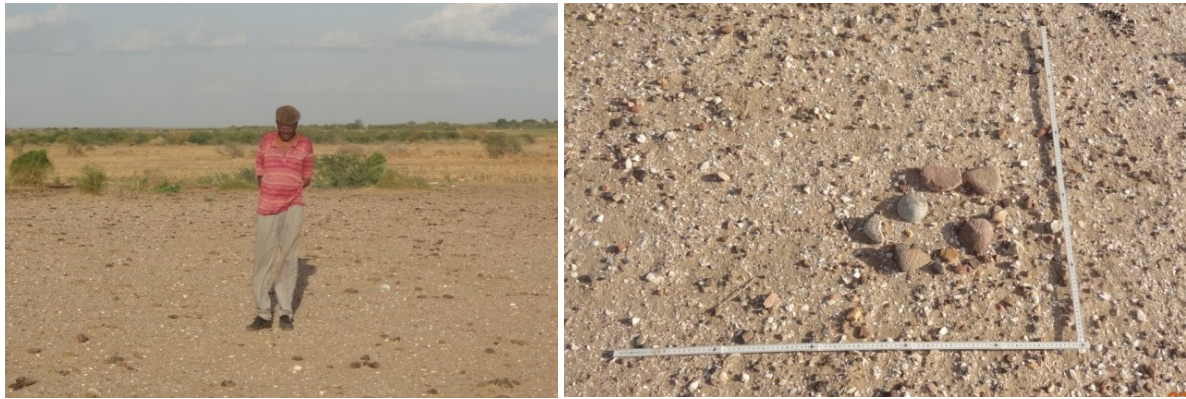


Figure 2. General view of Aradeib, Doweih site from the West.



Figure 3. Pottery sherds from the area.

Since then, random archaeological work was conducted in the area, beginning with the current author in 2012 and 2016. Unfortunately, little was done during the earlier surveys/test excavations, and most of the work focused on describing the sites and surface finds. Moreover, the data gained from these surveys was not enough to give a clear picture of the cultural history of the region in question. Archaeological research during this period was basically survey-oriented, and not unexpectedly, classifications based on surface stratigraphic evidence occupied a central position in the scheme of things. This research orientation was intended to give insights into sequences of events and chronologies. It is important to note that apart from the fact that these archaeological works were scattered (*i.e.*, few and far between), there were no well formulated strategies and/or research designs aimed at clarifying our understanding of the spatial dimension of the culture(s) being studied at both the intra- and inter-site levels.

The sites consist of different archaeological materials that belong to different time periods from the Neolithic to the Meroitic. Most of the sites discovered in Area are completely covered by shells, stone tools (Fig. 4), grinding stones and hammers. 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 with numerous shapes and sizes belonging to the Neolithic period.

Charred animal bones and fish remains were also noted on the surface. However, a large part of the archaeological sites have been destroyed by local residents through digging and taking soil to use for constructing new buildings and to grow tall plants. However, when looking in the area of Aba Island from the surface, all of the sites feature only desolate, low-lying mounds with scatterings of artifacts, including lithic tools and fragments of pottery that hint that something was here in antiquity. Indeed, lateral-oriented activities involving mapping and survey and some test pits were not considered vital to the operationalization of research work until 2015. Some of the concomitant effects of this development are as follows: artifacts collected from the area appear to remain isolated, without any significant connections between them and a given geographical configuration, thus making it impossible to recreate the extent to which a people had exploited the resources within their environment. Establishment of the nature and pattern(s) of the north area's relations among the peoples in different parts of the island in prehistoric and historic periods remains to be done.



Figure 4. Hand axe and lithic tools discovered in Aba Island 15/2016.

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 exhibits typical local features of the Neolithic and Meroitic 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.



Figure 5. Raw material spread extensively in the north of Aba Island.

Stone tools

Many lithic tools and raw material 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 (Fig. 5), 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.

Other materials

The other finds obtained during the fieldwork are small kohl stick (Fig. 6), snails and shells in diverse forms and sizes, which are scattered over most locations with many ancient remains of animal bones (Fig. 7). 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 accessories or tools made of ivory, including one incomplete piece similar to that used among many tribes in the region, particularly the Shilluk.

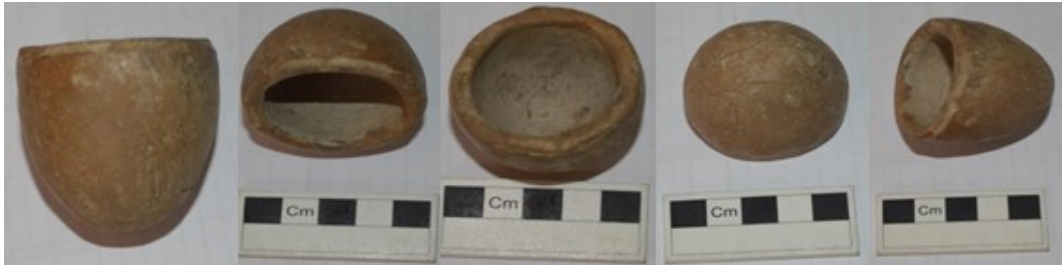


Figure 6. Kind of pottery from the site.



Figure 7. Ancient remains of animal bones from the site.

Conclusion

The result was very important as we have discovered some aspects of the Neolithic and Meroitic culture such as the pottery and beads in a far area from the basic center of Meroe, in addition to the Neolithic pottery are well known in the area which will be a basic for the archaeological study of the area in the future.

Many archaeological sites in the area are mostly interrupted by the new buildings and the soil diggers, therefore, we concentrated the survey in the threatened area in the north, the most important one among others, the surface of which is covered with a density of pot-sherds with varied decorations, and some complete destroyed pottery vessels (by local soil diggers), disturbed animal bones, and various types of stone tools (polished hand axes, upper and lower grinder stone ...), such as the handmade decorated pottery sherds similar to Meroitic ones, while others resemble the Neolithic, and various types of beads most probably Medieval.

Scientific studies of settlement archaeology of different parts of Aba Island face a number of problems ranging in nature from inadequate facilities to lack of archaeological work in the area. Up to now, no well-equipped dating laboratory is available in Sudan to process materials, and samples collected from archaeological work have to be sent abroad for processing. This delays the rate at which archaeological information is put into its proper time perspective.

Also, it seems that a great deal more time and attention is paid to the later phases of human settlement history than the earlier period. Consequently, much more is known of prehistoric settlements in Aba Island and the White Nile as a whole. A considerable amount of work has been done for these phases on the eastern bank of the White Nile. One reason for this interest in the later phase seems to rest in the fact that there is a meeting point between historic settlement archaeology and oral traditions for the region generally, and the

fact that people can identify much more easily with this phase because it is more recent and by this fact closer to our time.

Despite the nature of the soil chemistry (acidic soil) lithic tools are still better preserved than organic objects. But there are some problems in the ancient settlements buildings, because of the different building materials as well as techniques of construction as most of these buildings are constructed over the archaeological sites in the area.

Development in recent years have shown that these problems are now being solved by indigenous archaeologists. For example, abundant oral tradition and ethnographic resources in the whole White Nile State are being profitably harnessed.

This is with the view to clarify our understanding of aspects of the people and their archaeological settlement in Aba Island. Archaeological work confirms the richness of the island through the ages. The existence of pottery and grinding stones indicates that the area has in the past had conditions suitable for the practice of agriculture with the production of food, and intensive stable human occupations at least since the Neolithic (3000 BC) to the Meroitic period (AD 200) and beyond.

Therefore, much more archeological work and analysis need to be done before interpretations and conclusions can be drawn of the exact date of the settlements in the area. However, we will continue and take more samples for the specialists to examine and to determine the exact date and history of the island.

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