New Discoveries of Mesolithic Sites in Gazira Reach (Central Sudan) Formatting

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Introduction

Gazira Reach is one of the territories that has not received intensive archaeological study. This is because the Gazira Agricultural Project, which was established in the 20th century, damaged the archaeological sites in this region. Moreover, interest in rescuing the antiquities that would be flooded by dams in northern Sudan resulted in the authorities neglecting sites in Gazira. Damage, which threatens the Gazira sites, includes environmental factors and people. There are archaeological sites that need systematic archaeological work in the region and these may represent some features of later prehistory in this reach.

Previous Archaeological Studies in Gazira Reach

There were some previous studies in the Gazira Reach, including Henry Welcome’s work in Jabel Moya, which is situated in southern Gazira near Sin
nar (Addison 1949); studies at Jabel Tomat, situated about 50km northeast of Rabak town; at Esh-Shawal village 10km east of the White Nile (Clark and Stemple 1975); and the Goz sites that include wad Shana, Goz Kabaro, and Goz Bahkit. All of these Goz sites were surveyed by Balfour-Poul in the mid-20th century (Balfour-Poul 1952), and were resurveyed by the Spanish Campaign in January-February 2000 (Fernandez 2003; Fernandez et al. 2003).

Goz Abdel- Salam N14°47’9.77” E33°05’ 5.55”

Geographic Location. The site is located in the eastern side of the palaeo channel where it is close to a stream. It is bordered by the village of Goz Abdel-Salam to the west and the village of Wad El-Asha to the southwest of the site (Figure 1). This site is located on a slightly higher area that is flat and slopes toward the edge of the palaeo channel.

The sediments in this region consist of clay that contains some sand and pebbles of various shapes with an abundance of white pebbles. It is clear that the earth is solid and cohesive and that the area contains archaeological remnants concentrated at the top of the site. The vegetation includes a large amount of shrubs that spread in this region, such as acacia and other types of small trees that grow in the poor savannah and semi-desert areas.

Previous Archaeological Studies at the Site.
No clear archaeological studies included this site although it is one of the most important sites representing the Goz culture in this region. Balfour-Poul (1952:203) claims Goz Abdel-Salam is one of the existing sites in this region but no information about this site is available. It was also mentioned by El- Zubair Abdullah (2006: 47) when he conducted a general survey of archaeological sites in “Haleweem” area to prepare his graduation thesis.

Archaeological Study of the Site. A comprehensive survey was conducted to identify the nature of the site and to see its geographical location, the composition of its topography, the nature of the samples in the surface of the site, and to determine its environs, as well as threats to its conservation. The site is in an isolated area and archaeological materials cover an area on the surface that extends for over 1km. The site is located about 700m from the nearest village, which is Goz Abdul Salam. Naturally, the land is unsuitable for cultivation because the soil is
characterized by a lack of friability and it contains gravel that makes it infertile. This is different from most agricultural land in the Gazira State. However, there is land located 1km on the eastern side of the site that is cultivated but not annually because it is not included in the map of the irrigated land in the Gazira Project.

Archaeological samples have been collected from all parts of the site. The information collected through the survey revealed that there is diversity in the archaeological data that dates to the mesolithic. Artifacts include the remains of pottery with wavy lines and dotted wavy lines. It is noted that the archaeological relics that have been collected from this site have clear decorations. Although, it has been affected by environmental factors, it is clear that there is an extensive microlithic presence in this site. In addition, there are some grinding stones, and it is noteworthy that in this location, we find different types of mollusks spread on the surface of the site and in the areas that were excavated by local people. Due to the existence of the site near the palaeochannel, mollusks survived in appropriate conditions around the streams and swamps.

Because of the intensity of relics on the surface of the site, it was important to follow-up these discoveries with sub-surface testing. The northern part of the site and in the area with a high density of archaeological materials on the surface was chosen. A 1x1m square was laid out and it was excavated to the depth of 30cm (Figure 2). It was noted that the relics became very rare, as the soil was very tough and fragile. Certainly pottery sherds were found and there were some broken pieces of milling tools. Wherever the digging went down to 30cm below the surface the material became scarce. This probably can be attributed to two reasons:

- The ground level, in addition to the depth of the excavation, is the level of human occupation from the earliest period of human habitation in this region; there are no residential layers deeper than 30cm.
- It is probable that there was an occupation represented in the upper layers and that this evidence

Figure 1: The archaeological sites appear near palaeochannels.
was eroded away and is found now in the surface scatters; so most of the archaeological remains on the surface disappeared except a few scatter as well as to the depth of the test pit.

- We suppose that the test pit is too small to support this argument; it is possible that the area selected to excavate has no deeper levels; but complete excavations could lead to more robust results. These justifications are related to habitation layers that were discovered in the test pit excavated at this site.

Archaeological Findings at the Site. A variety of samples were collected from the surface of the site representing wavy lines and dotted wavy line pottery, as well as zigzag patterns. Most of these were influenced by environmental factors, which has resulted in fragmentation of the pottery sherds and it has effaced some of the decorations. Stone tools and grinding stones in different samples were also collected. It is noticeable that there is a density of various kinds of mollusks.

Goz Shikaira Al-Wadi N14°49’7.24”
E33°02’6.20”

Geographic Location. This site is located 7km to the northwest of Goz Abdal-Salam. It lies in the western part of the palaeochannel and to the west of Shikaira Al-Wadi village. It is bordered by thistle forest in the southern part, the main road directly to the west, and Al-Mehaireeba town about 1km toward the west.

Description of the Site. The site is a medium elevated hill; it consists of mud soil mixed with sandy soil, in addition to white quartz and chert that are scattered around the site. The site is located in alluvial deposits because it is close to the palaeochannel.

Figure 2: The test pit at the site of Goz Abdel- Salam.
The surface of the site is not flat and it slopes away to its outside parts. There is a density of shrubs and several kinds of acacia because of its closeness to the palaeochannel.

Previous Archaeological Studies at the Site. No detailed studies were conducted at this site previously, but the preliminary survey undertaken by the English researcher Balfour-Boul did not mention this site nor did the Spanish Mission. However, we conducted a general survey of the site in 2011 when we carried out preliminary studies in the region (Hayati 2011). This study was the first indication of this site, and it provided a strong motive to carry out advanced and specialized studies at this site.

Archaeological Study of the Site. A general survey of this site was conducted as one of the existing sites near the palaeochannels. The geography of the site and its environs were identified as well as the topography of the site. In addition, the conditions that encompass the site and factors affecting its destruction were investigated. Various archaeological samples at the site were identified.

A variety of archaeological samples were gathered from the surface of the site within the general survey. Then these samples served as indicators of the existence of the culture of the mesolithic in the region in middle Gazira. This is attributed to the concrete presence of remains of the mesolithic including the wavy lines and dotted wavy lines pottery and the pottery with zigzag patterns that are obvious on the surface of the site and found in small pieces (Figure 3). Most of these sherds are fragmented by destructive factors. There was the appearance of microliths (Figure 4) as well as different milling stone tools. There were many types of snails that are found extensively on the surface of the site. These cultural components prove that there was a presence of early man in this region during the mesolithic.

Figure 3: Wavy line pottery (Goz Abdel-Salam).
Geographical location. This site is located on the eastern side of the palaeochannel. It is located in the north of Al-Mehaireeba town and southeast of Abu Shnaib village. It is surrounded by buildings and a farm to the east. However, it is about 25km west of the Nile (Figure 1).

Description of the Nature of the Site. The same topographic features that are dominant in this region are applicable to this site. The soil is muddy and mixed with sand; the surface of the site is flat, which suggests that the region was a swamp and it is deeper than the general level of the Goz sites. It is noted that the site is close to the palaeochannel. There are few spiny trees found in the other sites, which may be because of their location near to the houses (Figure 5).

There were no previous studies of this site, so none of the studies conducted in this area included this site. This is because the previous studies in the region did not follow all parts of the palaeochannel as they were limited to the southern part. This is the first preliminary study of this part of the palaeochannel.

Archaeological Study of the Site. A general survey was conducted on the site in order to study all of its natural, cultural, and geographical features. The overall characteristics of the site were also recognized. The surface of the site contains various archaeological samples that resemble archaeological relics identified in the other sites. The most prevalent remains in this site represent mesolithic pottery sherds and microliths and its debitage, in addition to grinding stones (Figure 6). Also there are remains of fossilized bones found on the surface of the site. Several kinds of mollusks that could live in fresh water were also found.

Preservation and Destruction Factors of the Sites

It is noted that the environmental and human factors surrounding the sites, as well as the area where the sites are located, may help to preserve the sites. However some of these same factors can lead to site destruction. These can be detailed as follows:

Conservation factors.
- The nature of the hard earth does not encourage digging. The citizens have no interest to transfer the sand from the sites to the villages in general.
- Some of the sites are located in isolated areas away from villages and agricultural lands, fac-
Figure 5: General view of the site of Goz Abu Shnaib.

Figure 6: Grinding stones (Goz Abu Shnaib).
tors that have a significant impact in preserving the site from the movement of people and from humidity caused by irrigation.

Destruction factors.
- Some of the sites are located in areas sloping towards the palaeochannel, which leads to the erosion of archaeological materials by surface water flow across the sites in autumn. This has the significant impact of cracking the surface of the sites.
- We find that this type of surface erosion has also affected the surface of the pottery sherds and concealed or eroded most of the decorations.
- There are also human factors causing destruction. Although the ground is characteristically hard in this region, some residents dig to remove sand in some of the sites using heavy machinery. This represents the biggest threat to these sites.
- The presence of residential buildings within some of the sites and the continuous encroachment of the population toward the sites is causing destruction of the sites.

Conclusion

It is clear that the area studied contains evidence of the mesolithic and its multiple types of material culture. There is a strong cultural relation between this area and other regions in central Sudan; mainly to the area of Khartoum. These sites must be excavated soon because we know that they are neglected and suffering from many dangers.

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