

VICTOR M. FERNÁNDEZ

A new Neolithic site near Khartoum

In the month of February 1981, the Spanish Archaeological Mission of the Foundation Durán-Vall Llosera in the Sudan had ended its work in Abri (Northern Province), completing the excavation and record of the Kerma and early Meroitic cemeteries at the site known as Amīr Abdallāh (Fernández 1982; 1984; 1985) and was projecting to continue its investigation of Sudanese archaeology in the vicinity of Khartoum. The Sudan Antiquities Service suggested some Neolithic sites in the area, specially one that was seriously menaced by house construction in Gereif East, at a very short distance, following the telephone line, from the Meroitic cemetery later excavated by Patrice Lenoble of the French-Sudanese unit in Khartoum (Geus 1983: 27; Geus and Lenoble 1983: 26). A short survey and sherd collection was made by the members of the mission on February 18, awaiting the beginning of archaeological work in the next season. Unhappily, financial shortages on the one hand, and the painful illness of Prof. Almagro, general Director of the Mission (that ultimately brought him to death on August 28, 1984) made those plans unfeasible. For the time being, the site is still unexplored, and the purpose of this paper is to present and shortly comment on the finds from our surface survey.

The site is small, and it was already partially eroded three years ago. The sherds were conspicuous in an area smaller than about a thousand square meters, very close to a well delimited kôm of historical date. The site is very probably the same one referred to by Arkell (1953: 108), with the Khartoum Antiquities Service Catalogue No. 4580 and it is known as Hag Yousif (P. Lenoble, pers. communication).

A total of 43 pottery sherds seemed interesting enough to be collected, most of them with impressed or incised decoration, and a representative selection is shown on Figures 1 and 2. The fabric is apparently homogenous in all of them, with mineral temper of small particles of brown quartz and some mica, the fracture colour ranging from reddish to dark brown. The surface treatment is difficult to assess at the outer, decorated face but the inner is normally well smoothed, and sometimes the thin strokes of actual burnishing are conspicuous (*cf.* Arkell 1953: 69; Abbas 1982:

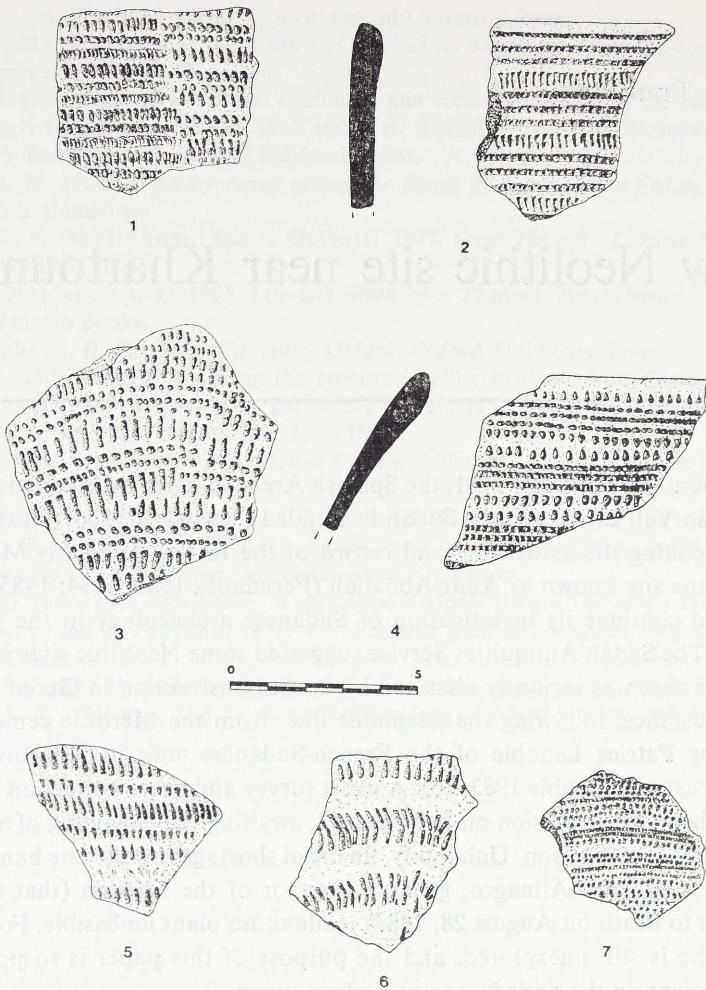


FIG. 1. Gereif East. Neolithic potsherds

79); the sherds with fine incisions show a similar, almost polished surface on both faces. The presence of a red slip is beyond doubt on the latter sherds and on a few plain ones (e.g. Fig. 2: 9 only at the external face), while the remainder show a colour similar, though lighter to its fabric. The detected shapes are spheric bowls more or less open, yet one case narrows toward the top (Fig. 2: 9), a type not registered by Arkell (1953: Pl. 36).

With regard to the decoration, the collected sherds are entirely typical of what has been called the Khartoum Neolithic, or the Gouge Culture, after Arkell's (1953) excavations at Esh Shaheinab, north of Khartoum. Almost all the types of

decoration were described by Arkell, but neither the dotted wavy line nor the black topped classes were present in the pottery collected on surface in our site.

The most abundant impressed decoration is the combination of straight or curved lines of triangles and lines of dots (20 fragments). The subtypes are: a) one line of triangles and two of dots (2 sherds, Fig. 1: 1); b) one line of triangles and three of dots (5 sherds, Fig. 1: 2); c) two lines of triangles and one of dots (4 sherds); d) two lines of triangles and two of dots (8 sherds, Fig. 1: 3), this type was the favourite at Shaheinab (*cf.* Arkell 1953: 69); e) two lines of triangles and three of dots (1 sherd,

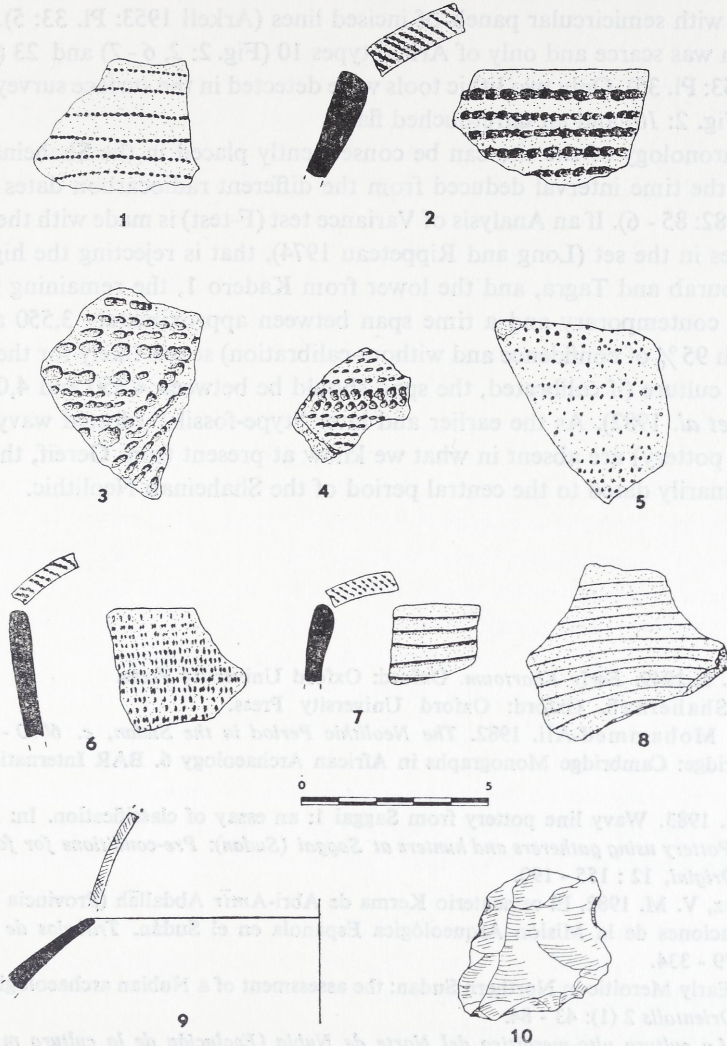


FIG. 2. Gereif East. Neolithic potsherds and a rough scraper

Fig. 1: 4). Finally, five sherds showed a combination of lines of triangles, that occasionally were seen as true v's as Arkell (1953: 70) remarked (Fig. 1: 5 - 6).

The example of single lines of dots are less abundant, with seven cases of small dots in straight parallel lines (Figs. 1: 7, 2: 1) and only two with bigger impressions (Fig. 2: 2 - 3); the sherd of Fig. 2: 4 is a combination of both types. Only four sherds (Fig. 2: 5 - 6) were indisputably impressed with the rocker technique of zig-zag lines of dots, as has been described by Arkell (1949: 83) and Caneva (1983: 169).

There were only five sherds with incised decoration, of broad (2 sherds, Fig. 2: 7) and fine (3 sherds, Fig. 2: 8) parallel lines; the example of Fig. 2: 8 is perhaps a part of a bowl with semicircular panels of incised lines (Arkell 1953: Pl. 33: 5). The rim decoration was scarce and only of Arkell types 10 (Fig. 2: 2, 6 - 7) and 23 (Fig. 2: 9; Arkell 1953: Pl. 35). Only two lithic tools were detected in the surface survey, a rough scraper (Fig. 2: 10) and an unretouched flake.

The chronology of the site can be consequently placed in the Shaheinab phase, that is in the time interval deduced from the different radiocarbon dates available (Abbas 1982: 85 - 6). If an Analysis of Variance test (F-test) is made with the more reliable dates in the set (Long and Rippeteau 1974), that is rejecting the higher ones from Sorourab and Tagra, and the lower from Kadero 1, the remaining five dates appear as contemporary and a time span between approximately 3,550 and 3,300 B. C. (with 95% of confidence and without calibration) seems likely for the flourishing of the culture (if calibrated, the span should be between 4,350 and 4,000 B. C.; cf. Klein *et al.* 1982). As the earlier and later "type-fossils" (dotted wavy line and black top pottery) are absent in what we know at present from Gereif, the site can be preliminarily dated to the central period of the Shaheinab Neolithic.

References

- Arkell, A. J. 1949. *Early Khartoum*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
 — 1953. *Shaheinab*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Abbas, S. Mohammed-Ali. 1982. *The Neolithic Period in the Sudan, c. 6000 - 2500 B.C.* Cambridge: Cambridge Monographs in African Archaeology 6. BAR International Series 139.
- Caneva, I. 1983. Wavy line pottery from Saggai 1: an essay of classification. In: I. Caneva (ed.), *Pottery using gatherers and hunters at Saggai (Sudan): Pre-conditions for food production*. *Origini*, 12: 155 - 190.
- Fernández, V. M. 1982. El cementerio Kerma de Abri-Amīr Abdallāh (Provincia del Norte). Excavaciones de la Misión Arqueológica Española en el Sudán. *Trabajos de Prehistoria* 39: 279 - 334.
- 1984. Early Meroitic in Northern Sudan: the assessment of a Nubian archaeological culture. *Aula Orientalis* 2 (1): 43 - 84.
- 1985. *La cultura alto-meroitica del Norte de Nubia (Evolución de la cultura material y el ritual funerario en el Norte de Nubia del siglo III al I a.C.: la necrópolis de Amīr Abdallāh)*. Tesis Doctoral 132/85. Universidad Complutense de Madrid.

- Geus, F. 1983. *Rapport annuel d'activité 1980 - 1982*. Direction Générale des Antiquités et des Musées Nationaux du Soudan. Section Française de Recherche Archéologique.
- Geus, F. and P. Lenoble. 1983. Excavations at Gereif East. *Nyame Akuma* 23 : 26.
- Klein, J., J. C. Lerman, P. E. Damon, and E. K. Ralph. 1982. Calibration of Radiocarbon Dates. Tables based on the consensus data of the Workshop on Calibrating the Radiocarbon time Scale. *Radiocarbon* 24 : 103 - 150.
- Long, A. and B. Rippeteau. 1974. Testing contemporaneity and averaging radiocarbon dates. *American Antiquity* 39 (2): 205 - 215.

Anthropological examination of human remains from Geili (Central Sudan)

In February 1973 Italian Mission for Prehistoric Research in Egypt and Sudan, headed by Professor Salvatore Puglisi invited T. Dmierzkray-Rogalski and me to examine human skeletons discovered in Geili. These skeletons are only a sample of many skeletons discovered there, dated at the back as Early Khartoum, Neolithic and Merotic times. Only in 1973 - 1974 34 burials were found there. However, we had an opportunity to examine the whole material, so I would present only the results of anthropological analysis of ten skeletons, examined, just to point to some questions originating from this investigation. The site of Geili consists of a large settlement and cemetery similar to those of Job-Shabeinah and Kadery, at least for findings coming from the upper two layers (four strata were discovered at Geili).

The graves indicate that the site was used as a burial place already in Early Khartoum times. Skeletons from these graves were found in a strongly contracted position, the same was the position of the Late Neolithic ("protodynastic") burials. Later on, the site was used intensively for Merotic burial where skeletons were found in loosely contracted position. The position of the skeletons was therefore typical for the burial customs known from the Central Sudan.

It should be emphasized that the site was used as both a settlement and burial ground for many centuries, like those in Geili or Kadery, are situated near the river, but there were probably other settlements, too.

In seven examined graves 10 individuals were buried. In one grave dated as Early Khartoum (T-16) were two individuals: one male 35 - 40 years old and a child 3 - 7 years old. The male was about 177 cm tall, massively built. His bones were covered with ochre.

In three Late Neolithic ("protodynastic") graves we distinguished five individuals, all females, aged: 60 years, 55 - 60 years, 25 years, 15 - 20 years and 16 - 18 years. In two graves (T-9 and T-10) two persons were buried; in one case (T-21) only one very young woman was buried. In T-9 a woman about 60 years old and another one about 45 years old was buried. In T-10 we found also an older woman 55 - 60 years old buried together with the young one, aged 18 - 20 years.