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[...] no history of archaeology is innocent of perspective or purpose [...].  
Every history has different emphases.  
Tim Murray 2007:XX

History is the past we choose to remember.  
Schmidt and McIntosh 1996:112

To the memory of Khidir Abdelkarim Ahmed who is missed.

### **Abstract**

The objects and research fields of the archeology of Nubia, i.e. the topics we pursue, the sources we consult, and the approaches we use in making sense of them, are historically and socially contingent constructs. Present-day knowledge about the Nubian past and the frame within which archaeological practice in the Middle Nile valley operates derive from a history of archaeological interest and work that spans almost 200 years. They resonate manifold influences, among which the colonial and imperial aspirations of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries are the strongest. Other dominant themes that permeate the archaeology of Nubia —indeed the construction of the entity “Nubia” as it is used today, also in the present publication—include Egyptocentrism, the divorce from a wider African archaeology, the concept and the practices of archaeological salvage and the idea of universal heritage. After looking into these aspects, the chapter will also deal with the transposition of the archaeology of the Middle Nile valley into the postcolonial present and the potentials and challenges it faces today.

### **Keywords**

Critical history of research, archaeology of Nubia and the Middle Nile valley, colonialism, imperialism, postcolonial archaeologies

### **Introduction**

The archaeology of Nubia<sup>1</sup> and its practitioners are guided by the aim of revealing the history of the Middle Nile valley from the earliest prehistory up to (sub)recent times—and by the belief of being well equipped to do so. The archaeology of Nubia is not a coherent discipline, but a complex conglomerate of

differing research traditions. Outlining the topics, sources, and methods applied in this field will therefore best follow a history of research approach, as the decisions about which sources are tapped for the study of the Nubian past, which methods are used in their analysis and which questions are asked depend on the social context in which these enquiries are situated as well as on the historical genesis of the discipline and the intellectual traditions in which their protagonists live and work (Trigger 1994, 2006; Murray 2007). This paper aims to reflect on how the construction of the Nubian past(s) is embedded in these wider settings of academic practice and knowledge production.

The history of Nubia as it is represented in the contributions to this book as well as the categories and methods of archaeological research from which this history derives are not natural givens, but constructs and results of specific discourses and practices of envisioning and investigating the past. There are other ways of looking into the Nubian past and other narratives about it, e.g. those related by members of Nubian ethnicities themselves<sup>2</sup> or those produced within the Afrocentric movement (e.g., Monges 1997; Harkless 2006). But geopolitics of the last two hundred years made the narrative of Western<sup>3</sup> academia the privileged one. If this narrative is to become a valid and fruitful base for future engagement with the subject, it is vital to de-essentialize this discourse and to critically engage with its own history, the conditions of its formation and the role it plays in the current production of knowledge about the Nubian past in academic and wider social contexts.<sup>4</sup>

## **Shaping Research Traditions: The History of Archaeology in the Middle Nile Valley**

### Mapping the World: The Quest for Origins and Empires

The archaeological investigation of Nubia started in 1821, when Turco-Egyptian forces invaded the Middle Nile valley and made it a Turco-Egyptian province. This rendered the region easily accessible to outsiders, and in the wake of the conquest, a stream of scholars, adventurers, antique dealers and diplomats—in disciplinary histories usually subsumed under the heading “early travelers”—set out to explore this recent addition to the colonial world.<sup>5</sup> Up to that point, classical writers had been the main source for making sense of the history of the Middle Nile valley. It was the travelers and researchers of the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century who turned the archaeological monuments themselves into the most important resource for reconstructing the history of Egypt and Nubia.

In a veritable race up the Nile, Frédéric Cailliaud and Louis M.A. Linant de Bellefonds were among the earliest, traveling up to the area of Sennar on the Blue Nile. Their goal was to record and classify the historic monuments along their way and find the sources, not of the Nile<sup>6</sup>, but of the “civilizations” that created the monuments on its banks. The travelers strove for knowledge as well as for images and objects to illustrate their discoveries back home. Travel journals were a major literary and scientific genre of that day (Pratt 2008; Regard 2009). Tim Murray (2007:129) called this phase “the archaeology of origins, nations, and empires”. Many also had outright mercenary intentions, collecting antiquities to

sell them in the booming European market. One of the most notable figures in this respect in Nubia was Giuseppe Ferlini who lifted an assemblage of golden jewelry, the so-called Ferlini treasure, from one of the royal pyramids at Meroe in 1834 and successfully sold it to the kings of Bavaria and Prussia (Priese 1992).

Access to the Middle Nile valley was usually through Egypt, which had started to experience a scramble for antiquities only two decades earlier. The Napoleonic Expedition of the years 1798 to 1801 had “brought Egypt to Europe” (Scham 2003:173), making its heritage known to a wider public all over the continent and provoking a wave of interest in the Pharaonic past. The travelers who went to Nubia were familiar with Egyptian monuments and the exploding efforts to unravel ancient Egyptian culture. Their aim was not only to explore the archaeological landscape of Nubia and document its monuments for a European audience; they were also searching for discoveries that could live up to or even rival their Egyptian counterparts—therefore their primary interest was in sites with monumental architecture and rich finds.

The climax of this pursuit was the Royal Prussian Expedition under the direction of Karl Richard Lepsius. From 1843 to 1847, this enterprise investigated the archaeological monuments of the Nile valley, both in Egypt and Nubia. The declared aim of the expedition’s expansion into the Middle Nile region was to investigate the relationship between the Pharaonic “history and civilization” and the cultures south of Egypt (Lepsius 1849:8–9). When Lepsius reached the area of Meroe on the evening of 28 January 1844 he instantly rushed to the pyramids, examining them by moon and candle light. His disappointed conclusion that they were of “relatively very late” date (Lepsius 1852:145–48) effectively put an end to the theory that the origins of the Pharaonic culture lay in the south, an idea which had been favored by several “early” travelers and scholars, including François Champollion, through their reading of the Classical sources (Trigger 1994:325; cf. Burstein 1995:29–30). From this conclusion, Lepsius moved on to establish the historical culture of Nubia as an entity separate from Egypt and in consequence published the results of the “Nubian” part of the expedition in a separate section, while all Egyptian monuments were organized chronologically in the previous four sections (Lepsius 1849–59). With this, Lepsius introduced topography and chronology, i.e. distribution and dating, as guiding principles in the ordering of the archaeological monuments in the Nile valley. It is worth noting that race did not figure in his interpretations. Instead, Lepsius’ understanding of Nubia was largely informed by historical readings of the monuments which he recorded and the distribution of past and present languages which he studied – in the case of the Middle Nile valley above all the Nubian languages (Fitzenreiter 2011). By defining this corpus of material and these principles of classification, Lepsius laid the foundations for the conceptual world which the archaeology of Egypt and Nubia has come to inhabit ever since (Fitzenreiter 2011). His framework exerted a strong normative force and many of the perspectives, valorizations, interests, and boundaries introduced by Lepsius tacitly inform the discipline to the present day.

Lepsius’ ordering not only separated the monuments of the Middle Nile valley from their Egyptian counterparts, it also established the view of the Nubian culture(s) as the Other, a late reflection of the Egyptian Pharaonic culture (Fitzenreiter 2011). The devaluation inherent in this perspective may not have been in the intention of Lepsius, for whom the history and particularly the languages of Nubia were

important research interests. But the appreciation which the wider Western audiences showed for the travel reports and the antiquities from Egypt translated into pejorative assessments of the Nubian monuments and objects. Employing Edward Said's concept of the construction of Self and Other in an orientalist discourse (Said 1978), one could even argue that this perception of Nubia helped to move ancient Egypt closer to its 19<sup>th</sup> century appreciators. Distancing the Middle Nile valley turned Egypt into a non-Other, a part of the Self, thus assisting its appropriation and inclusion into the Western cultural canon.

This onset of the archaeological exploration of Nubia unfolded in two wider political and social contexts. The first was the Anglo-French competition about the political and strategic domination in Europe and in the colonial projects in North America, Africa, the Pacific, and the Far East which led to a geopolitical interest and exertion of influence in Egypt and, in consequence, the regions further up the Nile (Murray 2007:167–70). The second was the rise of the middle classes in the wake of enlightenment and industrialization in Western Europe in the course of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. The social value system and the world view with which these classes bolstered their newly won privileges and ambitions of domination, encompassed an emerging understanding of history as an evolutionary process towards "civilization", and a growing interest in the ancient counterparts of modern "civilizations" and their social, technological and cultural "achievements" (Trigger 1994:325; Murray 2007:139–45). Within this framework, Western Europeans laid claims on the archaeological heritage of the Nile valley, as they saw themselves as the heirs of the "civilizing achievements" of Pharaonic Egypt. The "early travelers" and the great expeditions realized these claims, establishing the Nile valley as an arena of Western scientists and naturalizing their presence in territories they considered theirs. Exploring, mapping, and classifying the world were ways of appropriating it. Through these configurations and practices, if not through intention, the Egyptian and Nubian past became a field of imperialist aspiration and colonial domination, and the colonizing societies have "controlled cultural production about it ever since" (Scham 2003:173).

In sum, the archaeological exploration of the Middle Nile valley in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was firmly rooted in the imperialist and colonialist agendas of that time. Archaeological research in Nubia unfolded as an offspring of the emerging field of Egyptology. Both disciplines were tied together in a dialectic of opposites: The archaeology of Nubia was primarily viewed in relation to Egypt, and Egyptocentric perspectives governed professional practices, topics and interpretations (Edwards 2004:7–8)—a constellation which resonates in many academic institutionalizations down to the present day. Egyptocentrism also influenced much of the subsequent research, until archaeologists with other disciplinary backgrounds entered the scene almost a century later (see below XXX).

#### Institutionalizing the Archaeology of Nubia and Sudan

In the 1870s Egypt became an informal British protectorate when the English sought a greater role in the region to protect their interests regarding the Suez Canal. They assumed responsibility for managing most of Egypt's internal and external affairs and with this, Sudan effectively became part of the British Empire, too. From 1885, the Mahdist movement fought for and temporarily achieved the liberation

from colonial rule. After its suppression in 1898, Britain and Egypt formally shared the governance of Sudan, but on the ground Sudan was a British colony. With this, also the administration of the Sudanese past passed into the hands of British colonial officers (Hakem 1979).

The first Antiquities and Museums Ordinance for Sudan was drafted in 1905. It provided for the establishment of a Board of Museums and the appointment of an Acting Conservator of Antiquities. But practically, archaeological affairs played a minor role and employees of the Department of Education fulfilled the named position besides other tasks. As they were usually also staff members of Gordon College Khartoum, then Sudan's prime institution of higher education, this was the obvious place for a modest museum of antiquities to be established in 1904 (Addison 1934). Much of the archaeological and museum's work depended on the commitment and the genuine curiosity of individual protagonists, to whom an interest in the past was a side effect of the educational canon of Western colonial officers.<sup>7</sup> This is exemplified by Anthony J. Arkell who had been a member of the Sudan Political Service since 1920. He held several administrative posts and was deputy governor of Darfur before he was appointed Commissioner for Archaeology and Anthropology in 1938. One year later, the Sudan Antiquities Service was officially established and Arkell became its head for almost one decade (Hakem 1979:42). As a keen scholar in prehistory, he established this field of research in Sudan. He was followed in office by Peter L. Shinnie (1948–1955), who was also responsible for drafting the Second Antiquities Ordinance of 1952, and Jean Vercoutter (1956–1960). In 1960, four years after Sudan's political independence, Thabit Hassan Thabit became the first Sudanese Commissioner for Archaeology.

The minor importance which the colonial administration attached to the management of archaeology in Sudan, and in consequence the limited resources allocated to it, differ widely from conditions in Egypt. There, a first decree banning the unauthorized export of antiquities had been issued as early as 1835 (Reid 2002:55–57; Colla 2007). The Egyptian Service d'Antiquités was founded in 1858 with Auguste Mariette as its first director. Its upper echelons stayed in French hands until 1953, when Mostafa Amer became the first Egyptian director of the then re-named Department of Antiquities.<sup>8</sup> In comparison to this trajectory, the archaeology of Sudan was institutionalized much later, *en passant* and without much oversight with regard to regulating the investigation and the management of its monuments and sites. This institutional downplay stands in contrast to the increased attention which archaeological sites in the Middle Nile valley received from international missions at that time. After the suppression of the Mahdist movement in 1898, European and North American scholars were fast to return to Sudan and resume work. Most of the expeditions were funded by museums, while universities and private sponsors were involved at a lesser degree. A particularly influential publication, which was widely read and also had a major impact on the public imagination of the region, was *The Egyptian Sudan* by E.A. Wallis Budge. The book appeared in 1907 and presented the results of a series of travels and eclectic excavations that the Keeper of Egyptian Antiquities in the British Museums had undertaken in Sudan between 1897 and 1905.

While Budge's work was still tied to the spirit of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in many ways<sup>9</sup>, the archaeology of Nubia received a major impulse through the salvage campaigns connected with the heightening of the Aswan Dam. A first barrage at Aswan had been built between 1898 and 1902 without any archaeological

supervision. The first heightening, realized between 1907 and 1912, was accompanied by a systematic archaeological exploration organized by the Egyptian Antiquities Service, as the surveyed area lay completely on Egyptian territory. Starting in 1904, this campaign is considered the global birth of salvage archaeology (Adams 1977:90; Ahmed 2012:254). It comprised several fact-finding missions, a preliminary survey of the prospective flood zone (Weigall 1907), a survey dealing with the affected Pharaonic temples (Maspero 1911a, 1911b and further volumes in this series) and an archaeological survey that started under the direction of the American Egyptologist George Andrew Reisner in 1907.

Reisner's year with the survey revolutionized archaeological fieldwork in Nubia. He gave systematic attention to non-monumental remains, particularly cemeteries, introduced a standard recording system—for the first time systematically including drawing and photography in the documentation process (Manuelian 1992)—and employed a multidisciplinary team. This allowed him to collect and synthesize a huge corpus of data: During the first season in Nubia alone, his team excavated more than 5,000 graves in 55 burial grounds. Based on this record, Reisner drew up a cultural sequence spanning 4500 years of Nubian (pre)history from the Terminal Neolithic/Chalcolithic to Late Antiquity (Reisner 1910). He used similarities and differences in the morphology of burial practices and their material repertoire, primarily pottery, to differentiate a series of archaeological cultures, which he called "groups", using letters (A, B, C etc.) for their designation. He thought that the individual "groups" represented succeeding peoples of potentially different ethnicity. Thus, his work is a classic example of the culture-historical approach that had started to supplant earlier evolutionist theories in the later 19<sup>th</sup> century (Trigger 1994:326–35).

With his innovative methodology and his magisterial analysis, Reisner established himself as the founding father of scientific archaeology in Nubia. Cornerstones of his chronological sequence as well as several of his cultural entities, namely A-, C- and X-Group, are still in use today. Two points, however, need critical mention: the way he employed physical anthropological research and his overarching interpretive paradigm (cf. Trigger 1994:331-35). By enlisting the eminent anatomist Grafton Elliot Smith and his colleague Frederic Wood Jones for the Archaeological Survey to Nubia, Reisner had broken new ground, too (see the chapter by Buzon, this volume). While Smith's advances in field methods and paleopathology (Smith and Wood Jones 1910) have been praised (Murray 2007:343–44; Baker and Judd 2012:212–15), his racist and hyper-diffusionist interpretations have been condemned (Adams 1977:91–92; Trigger 1994:329–31) and ultimately brought his work into wide disrepute. Reisner (1910, v. 1:348) himself followed similar preconceptions e.g. when he described the ancient peoples of Lower Nubia as "a negroid Egyptian mixture fused together on a desert river bank too far away and too poor to attract a stronger and better race" (Reisner 1910, v. 1:348). He saw the "infusion" of new "racial" elements, "use or neglect by Egypt" and "changes of the Nile and the climate" as the prime sources for cultural change (Reisner 1910, v. 1:347-48). These statements echo stereotypes that characterized much of the culture-historical colonial archaeology of that day. Bruce Trigger (1994:335) mused whether the widespread adherence to these racist tenets "reflects the inherent power of a paradigm to influence the interpretation of archaeological evidence, the commitment of all Egyptologists who worked in the Sudan to a colonial ideology, or the lack of enough data to call into question the relevance of accepted ideas about how the past, and more specifically the African past, should be interpreted". While disciplinary

histories still largely shy away from critically engaging with this question and the heroes of its field, postcolonial studies have shown that the colonial project lives off internal ambiguities and contradictions, oscillating between compassion and suppression, assimilation and segregation (e.g. Spivak 1999). How racist prejudices thrive next to, and eventually overbear, the clear-sighted reading of the archaeological record as well as a personal “attach[ment] to the Sudan and its people” is apparent from the biographies of several of Reisner’s colleagues, too (see e.g. Trigger 1994:333-35 for Anthony J. Arkell). This illustrates the pervasive powers of the racist paradigm and the wider arrays of colonial ideology.

Reisner resigned from the Archaeological Survey of Nubia during its second campaign, leaving the remainder of the work to Cecil M. Firth (1912, 1915, 1927). But he continued his activities in Nubia for almost two decades, from 1913 to 1932, under the umbrella of the Harvard University-Museum of Fine Arts Boston Expedition. Having an almost free choice, he picked the most promising sites in terms of data and objects—with many of the latter going to the Museum of Fine Arts Boston. Working at great pace and moving on almost every year, he managed to excavate at a dozen sites, including the main burial ground at Kerma, all royal cemeteries of the Napatan and Meroitic eras, the Barkal temples and five Middle Kingdom fortresses in Lower Nubia. Other contemporary missions employed similar strategies of exploration and exploitation, which led William Y. Adams (1977:89–90) to characterize this period as the “selective” phase, as opposed to the 19<sup>th</sup> century “random” phase, in the archaeology of Nubia. In a way, this era came to a close with the Second Archaeological Survey of Lower Nubia which was conducted between 1929 and 1934 in the wake of the second heightening of the Aswan Dam (Emery and Kirwan 1935, 1938; Batrawi 1935). Generally operating within the framework established by Reisner, it was enriched by a component dedicated specifically to the Medieval remains (Monneret de Villard 1935). With this, the three main fields in the archaeology of the Middle Nile valley—namely prehistory, “historical” archaeology which dealt with the periods from the Bronze Age up to Late Antiquity, and Medieval archaeology—had been spelled out. Feeding into the traditions which had been inherited from earlier periods of research, this differentiation was to characterize disciplinary developments and the organization of fieldwork in the subsequent decades, up to the present day.

#### The Globalization of the Nubian Past: the UNESCO Campaign

The third major period in the archaeology of Nubia was heralded by Sudan’s independence in 1956, the Nile Waters Agreement between Sudan and Egypt in 1959, and the subsequent International Campaign to Save the Monuments of Nubia which was launched by UNESCO in 1960. The campaign was a child of its time and a highly political enterprise. It advertised the universal nature of cultural, and natural, heritage and made its preservation a global affair, enlisting international solidarity to that end. This was a powerful vision amidst the Cold War and at a time when the European colonial hegemony broke down.<sup>10</sup> Unprecedented on a global scale, the campaign took effects in several directions. Promoting the political message, it paved the way for the 1972 UNESCO World Heritage Convention which lastingly valorized heritage and its preservation for humankind (e.g. Keough 2011:393-45; Harrison 2013:56–61).

At the same time, it also established the archaeological heritage of Nubia as a global “property”—proclaiming the world’s duty, and right, to study and rescue the monuments of the Nubian past.

Next to the political dimension, there were immediately scientific factors which influenced the trajectory of the UNESCO campaign. The 1960s saw a stormy development within some archaeologies, primarily in the United States, which was later summarized under the label New Archaeology (for this see e.g. Trigger 2006:392–444; Johnson 2010:12–34). It aimed at the advancement of archaeological methods and theories in order to approach the discipline to an objective science, with accountable data generation and a rigorous analytical framework following law-governed deductive principles. To that effect, proponents of the New Archaeology favored areas of research where quantitative approaches could best be applied. Within this climate emerged what William Y. Adams (1977:89) labeled the “comprehensive” phase of Nubian archaeology, which according to him started when archaeologists turned attention “from the great monumental remains to smaller and less dramatic sites, and a region-wide effort [was] made to sample sites of every type and of every historic period”.

Coincidentally, some of the protagonists of the New Archaeology were also involved in the Nubian Campaign. One of them was Arthur Saxe who worked with the University of Colorado’s Nubian Expedition in the Wadi Halfa region. The data he collected from an Early Holocene cemetery (6-B-36) were incorporated into a paper which he contributed to a highly read volume, *The Social Dimensions of Mortuary Practices* edited by James A. Brown in 1971. This volume became a classic in the methodology of funerary archaeology as it heralded the advent of a systematic use of data from funerary contexts to explore the organizational patterns of past societies (Chapman 2003). In his paper, Saxe discussed several hypotheses developed in his PhD research. His main argument was that formal cemeteries emerged when social groups started to legitimize control of resources through reference to their ancestors.

In all, the Nubian Campaign merged very different approaches to and ideas of archaeology. Still it was not a melting pot of these influences, as individual missions worked side by side rather than developing a common language, methodology, and vision. The focus was on getting done as much fieldwork as possible, while resources did often not suffice to cover subsequent analyses and publications. Consequently, much of the work did not see final publication until many years later, or was only published in preliminary reports. By 1970, after three extensive salvage campaigns, Lower Nubia probably was the archaeologically most densely researched area worldwide. But in many respects the record was painfully incomplete—and after its drowning any chance to remedy this situation has gone.

The UNESCO campaign was decisive in setting the profile of the Middle Nile archaeology for subsequent decades. Once more, salvage appeared as the momentum of archaeological exploration. The focus was on rescuing monuments and data. Indeed, data acquisition was expansive, with many new sites being identified and documented in the general chronological framework established by Reisner in the first Nubian Survey. Major advancements were made in the field of prehistory and the study of Medieval Nubia. The discovery and rescue of the wall paintings in the cathedral of Faras deserve a specific mention in this respect (Michałowski 1967). But the campaign also cemented the global seizure on the



archaeology of Nubia, translating colonial power relations into a discourse of international solidarity (for a critique of this rhetoric see Carruthers 2016:41-46). Many of the resources spent in the UNESCO campaign came from outside Sudan and Egypt, and much of the expertise rested with institutions in the Western world. Several of the most spectacular objects, among them five small temples, shrines and architectural assemblages, were given to major donor countries as “grants-in-return” (Allais 2012). They have been taken to signify what perhaps is the most important outcome of the UNESCO campaign: It firmly established Nubia as a “proto-international” land (Allais 2012), its archaeology as an international affair, and its past as a global property. In the public presentations and repercussions of the campaign in the 1970s and 1980s, it became a model for what a new international cooperation for the preservation of world heritage should be. However, the campaign largely bypassed local audiences and stakeholders, first of all the Nubian communities themselves. Also the chance to boost academic expertise in the two receiving countries, Egypt and Sudan, went largely unused. A remarkable exception in this respect was the founding of the Sudan National Museum in Khartoum, which was built between 1964 and 1971. It not only became the home of the monuments relocated from the Sudanese part of Lower Nubia, but also comprised new premises for the Sudanese antiquities service, the National Corporation for Antiquities and Museums. This improved working facilities and enhanced the resources of this administrative body. The Nubia Museum in Aswan was realized only decades later, opening in 1997. Following concepts of the New Museology, it was conceived as a community museum and recent research suggests that it fulfills this role in a way unprecedented in the landscape of museums in Egypt and Sudan (Kamel 2009:191-98).

### The Last 50 Years

The years after the termination of the UNESCO campaign were determined by the efforts to master its outcomes. This concerned outstanding publications as well as the task to synthesize the results obtained in Lower Nubia and put them into a wider perspective. In 1977, William Y. Adams who had served as the organizer and director of the salvage program on the Sudanese side published his magisterial *Nubia: Corridor to Africa* which is the everlasting milestone of this period of research. Another prominent topic of the 1970s and 1980s was the representativity of the Lower Nubian data in relation to the record from the more southerly regions of the Middle Nile valley (e.g. Adams 1976). Fieldwork increasingly turned to these parts, and several long-term projects were started, e.g. at Old Dongola, Kerma, and Meroe. In sum, the concentrated efforts in the analysis of the Lower Nubian data and renewed, research-oriented fieldwork massively expanded the knowledge about the (pre)history in the Middle Nile valley. Consequently, new questions and fields of research emerged. Periods which had been under-represented in previous work, such as the prehistoric, the post-Meroitic and the Medieval Christian eras came to the fore. At the same time, methods and approaches to the individual topics diversified.

Present-day archaeology of the Middle Nile valley unites practitioners, not from all over the world, but from all major Western contexts, i.e. Europe and North America, as well as from Sudan itself. They bring the academic traditions and educational backgrounds of their respective home countries to the field,

which has made for a conglomerate of methodological approaches regarding all aspects of scientific practice, from very straightforward issues of excavation and recording strategies, to analytical agendas and interpretive paradigms. This internal diversity is a characteristic of many archaeologies in former colonial territories. In a sense the other side of the coin is that these archaeologies often have become microcosms of their own, formed along former political boundaries and administrative lines. Members of these small scientific communities may entertain only loose ties to the disciplinary developments in their countries of origin and other regional archaeologies around them. This adds a degree of self-referentiality, conservatism, or even isolationism to their practice (cf. Moreno García 2015 on Egyptology). In the case of Nubian archaeology, this is even more acute as its object of study is at the geographical and disciplinary periphery of the major conventional units of research, i.e. Africa, the Circum-Mediterranean, the Medieval Christian and the Arab world. In addition, the archaeology of Nubia faces a particularly strange, perhaps unique situation. Many of the sources that served to define the outlines of its chronological and culture-historical framework, namely the Lower Nubian sites investigated in the three salvage surveys, have irretrievably been lost. There is no chance to return to and possibly amend the basis upon which much of the subsequent research was founded. This truncation, i.e. being constantly thrown back on a corpus of source material which only survives in a widely outdated form of documentation and presentation, has effects on both current research agendas and the narratives about the Nubian past resulting from them.

The last two decades have seen a tremendous boost in fieldwork activities. Towards the end of the 1990s, a new challenge arose with the Merowe Dam, then Africa's largest hydropower project under construction. The projected reservoir lake was to flood 170 km of the Middle Nile valley above the Fourth Cataract. The archaeological salvage started under conditions which differed markedly from the previous Lower Nubian campaigns. Although the participating missions, one dozen in all, were formally organized under the umbrella of the Merowe Dam Archaeological Salvage Project (see Salaheldin Mohamed Ahmed, this volume), this was of no practical consequence in terms of support for their work. All international missions had to come up with their own funding. The salvage campaign and its protagonists became part of a conflict arising from the contested nature of the overall dam project, with local residents eventually halting the archaeological work to lend weight to their demands in connection with the resettlement and the conditions of their compensation (Näser and Kleinitz 2012). This trajectory heralded a new era with regard to the role of archaeology in the negotiation of wider social issues, involving archaeologists, local communities and other stakeholders (Kleinitz and Näser 2013). A second major impetus for fieldwork in the Middle Nile valley came from the Qatar-Sudan Archaeological Project which started in 2013 (see Salaheldin Mohamed Ahmed, this volume). It not only provided substantial resources for archaeological research and the management of archaeological sites, it also changed the terms of this support. For the first time, major funding came from a non-Western donor, the Emirate of Qatar, who thus also set the agenda of the project.

It is difficult to evaluate the present state of archaeological research in the Middle Nile valley in terms of its future position in disciplinary history. However, the Merowe Dam Archaeological Salvage Project and the Qatar-Sudan Archaeological Project outline what may emerge as a central theme of the current

period of research, namely the ongoing effort to accommodate the academic discipline of Nubian archaeology and the narratives it generates in the increasingly complex and contested socio-political realities of their production. The challenge comprises both, to come to terms with the looming legacies of the discipline's colonial past and to engage in a meaningful way with the full range of its many and diverse audiences in the present.

## **The Archaeology of Nubia and Sudan Today**

### Dominant Legacies and New Perspectives

The fields of research that characterize the archaeology of the Middle Nile valley today reflect the disciplinary history discussed in the previous sections, and they do bear its marks. At the outset, interest in Nubia was primarily relational, privileging Pharaonic monuments and the testimonies of the Napatan-Meroitic era which were studied to establish the relative chronological position of these two "civilizations". The reverse side of this formative history is that Nubian archaeology from its beginnings was widely set apart from Africa in the minds of most of its practitioners (ditto already Crawford 1948). Nubia belonged to Egypt, and Egypt was part of Europe.<sup>11</sup> Until today, many researchers come to the field with disciplinary backgrounds in Egyptology, European, North American, or Near Eastern archaeologies. Most recently, the shrinking of fieldwork options across North Africa and the Middle East due to social unrest and armed conflict has led to another such influx. In contrast, Nubian archaeology is not fed by disciplinary movements in African archaeology. Still, a growing number of contributions from within Nubian archaeology shows how an African perspective can enrich understanding of the Middle Nile cultures, e.g. with regard to the rise and the trajectory of the Meroitic state (Edwards 1996) or the symbolic investment into domesticated animals in the Bronze Age (see chapters by Hafsaas-Tsakos and by Dubosson, this volume).

Another major influence on the archaeology of Nubia came from the salvage projects connected with the Aswan Dam and, more recently, other dam projects throughout the Middle Nile valley (Näser and Kleinitz 2012). On the upside, they favored a generalistic fieldwork profile, widening attention for sites of all periods and physical appearance. On the downside, the specifics of the salvage context, primarily the truncation of the overall record, have severely restricted interpretative options and potentials—a fact which the "salvage euphoria", i.e. the rhetoric commonly surrounding these projects, has not sufficiently acknowledged. To recognize and embrace it as one of the main methodological challenges in the archaeology of Nubia, both with regard to past salvage missions and upcoming projects, is one of the major tasks in the future development of the discipline.

Today, fieldwork in the Middle Nile valley, both research- and salvage-oriented, is thriving. Topics and methodologies brought to the field have never been so wide and diverse. The multiplication of actors, interests and approaches which has characterized the past two decades shows no signs of slowing

down. The impact which the Qatar-Sudan Archaeological Project (see chapter by Salaheldin Mohamed Ahmed, this volume) alone has had on the disciplinary landscape shows the degree to which external factors like political conditions, funding, and the requests that go with it influence the direction of archaeological work. Other developments mirror more widespread trends. Thus, in the Middle Nile valley as in many other parts of the world, scholars, national authorities and funding bodies have started to put a stronger focus on conservation, site management, and presentation in the past two decades. After the archaeology of Nubia has primarily catered for a Western audience in its first 150 years, it has recently started dialogues with local audiences, too. Initiatives in the field of collaborative archaeology are taking ground (Tully 2014, 2015; Tully and Näser 2016; Näser et al. 2017). The latter turn was accelerated, if not actually triggered by a bitter lesson—the halting of archaeological salvage by local residents in connection with the Merowe Dam (see previous paragraph; Näser and Kleinitz 2012). The way that project was conducted and promoted had resulted in the impression that archaeological heritage received more attention than the living communities. By taking the archaeological sites hostage and turning them into a political weapon, affected residents hoped to lend weight to their demands with regard to their resettlement and compensation (Kleinitz and Näser 2013). The incident was a forceful reminder for archaeologists to review their priorities and their role in present-day society. With a stronger emancipation of local communities and a growing interest and influence of other audiences, we can expect that the justification and the social relevance of archaeology, its tasks and its modes of knowledge production will increasingly be challenged by a diverse range of stakeholders. Whether archaeologists like it or not, this will continue to change their disciplinary practice and the narratives they generate in the future.

#### Sudanese Archaeology: Between Authority and Participation

One interesting point is how the dynamics outlined in the previous section will affect the role and the professional practice of Sudanese archaeologists. Reviewing current archaeologies in Africa, Peter R. Schmidt warned that the post-liberation period must not be equated with postcolonial conditions, and that political independence and national self-determination have “not resulted in a miraculous release [...] from colonial hegemonies” (Schmidt 2009:3). Indeed, “it is astounding how archaeologists moved into the post-colonial period with so little reflection of how much colonial baggage they were carrying in their books, packs, and heads” Schmidt (2009:19)—and, I would add, in their academic and institutional self-organization.

While archaeology was a domain of almost exclusively Western actors until the national independence of Sudan in 1956, there now is a strong force of Sudanese colleagues. Archaeology is taught at a number of universities in Khartoum and throughout the country. Apart from this, however, the institutional structure of archaeology is completely different from that in much of Europe and North America. Like in other former colonial territories (cf. Chakrabarti 2012), it converges in one administrative body, the antiquities service, which in the case of Sudan is the National Corporation for Antiquities and Museums (NCAM). The employees of NCAM shoulder much of the everyday business of archaeology in Sudan. In

many Western countries, the documentation and preservation of archaeological sites was integrated into the legislation and planning regulations on a systematic basis in the last 25 years, and this in turn led to the development of a vast sector of commercial archaeology. While a similar ethic in the handling of archaeological heritage, at least in the case of large-scale infrastructure and development projects, is gaining ground in Sudan and has also been anchored in the current Antiquities Ordinance of 1999, the step towards commercialization has not been taken. Instead, archaeology has remained a monopoly of the state. Thus, NCAM single-handedly is responsible for managing the protection of sites and monuments, coordinating the activities of international missions, and conducting those salvage projects for which they cannot enlist international participation.

In a way, this concentration of authority and the focus on control represent a continuation of colonial power relations, only by inverting them. The problems that arise from this setup are obvious, not least since they are magnified by a lack of resources on the part of NCAM which severely limits their capacity to fulfill the tasks ascribed to them. One could even see this as a vicious circle: Archaeology in Sudan is still dependent on calling in foreign experts, which means that vital resources are kept within these missions, and much of the knowledge about the Sudanese past continues to be produced in the Western world. The present volume illustrates this situation—of its planned 58 authors, only six were Sudanese. The stark imbalance of these conditions is the basic ingredient for their constant reproduction, i.e. the perpetuation of the lack of resources which would allow local academics to participate in the discipline on equal terms. This concerns e.g. the quality of education on all levels, career opportunities, and the access to literature, equipment and skills which are necessary to master the advanced techniques of recording and analyzing data and publishing research results.<sup>12</sup> In addition, Arabic is not a recognized language in the international discourse on the subject, not least since most Western practitioners cannot read and write it.<sup>13</sup> It is symptomatic for the pervasiveness of this situation that until today learning Arabic is not considered a requirement in Western curricula training future archaeologists for working in the region (cf. Hansen 2008).

William Carruthers (2016) analyzed the multilateral discourse that was used to negotiate and regulate access to resources in terms of funding and sites in post-World War II Egyptology and in the run-up to the UNESCO Nubian campaign. He deconstructed the internationalist rhetoric, showing how it was developed and employed to further interests of several stakeholder groups, including Egyptian Egyptologists. Against this background we must be aware that any change in power relations will not result in the emergence of a pristine “indigenous Nubian archaeology” (cf. Narayan 1993). Sudanese archaeologists are as much part of the complex issues of access to and control over resources and prestige as their international colleagues and other stakeholders. No critical discussion has been directed toward this point so far, but it may be a start to acknowledge that the colonial past still permeates the supposedly independent present—and that to overcome its legacy and the looming power imbalances in today’s disciplinary practices is a second major challenge in the future of Nile valley archaeology.

## Outlook

The history of archaeology in the Middle Nile valley is a textbook example of the pervasive mechanisms of colonial and imperialist acquisition of the past and its academic spin-offs in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Despite being propelled by curiosity, the longing for knowledge and a range of other ostensibly politically correct motifs (cf. Spivak 1999), its protagonists from the outset were voluntarily or involuntarily deeply entrenched in the processes of colonization. In consequence, the archaeology of Nubia until today occupies two arenas: the territory of its object of study, i.e. the Middle Nile valley, and the territory of scientific production, i.e. Western academia. The resulting representations of the past follow Western narrative forms and objectives. This certainly is why they “continue to appear so foreign” in many social contexts in present-day Sudan and “so attached to [their] European origins” (paraphrasing a statement on India by Trigger 1984:368).

Bruce Trigger (1994:345) concluded his survey of Sudanese archaeology with the resigned statement that “the time when the findings of archaeology will be of interest to most Sudanese seems far off”. In order to identify at least some benefit, he states that “Western archaeologists must derive what satisfaction they can from having exorcized the most baleful influences of racism and colonialism from their profession and presenting a more accurate and dynamic view of African history to the world”. This unsparring view deserves credit, not least since it stands alone in the otherwise applauding rhetoric which unfolded in the wake of the UNESCO Nubian campaign. Two decades later, there may be reason for optimism. Archaeologists working in the Middle Nile valley explore a wider range of topics and venture further into archaeological method and theory than ever before. They have started to critically examine their disciplinary history and to confront the looming legacies of its colonial past. They began to engage with local communities in a meaningful way, searching for a more inclusive voice and a dialogue with a widening range of publics. They have gone some way to not only accept, but actually embrace the fact that their research cannot be divorced from the socio-political conditions in which it is undertaken, from the realities of human life which surround it and from the interests of the publics which take up, use or even reject archaeological interpretations. It will be a continuous task to critically reflect upon the position which archaeologists and their narratives take in the contemporary world, particularly in former colonial contexts, and to explore approaches which invite and facilitate dialogue between archaeologists and the full range of their (potential) audiences. In case of success, this may actually be rated as the most important contribution of the current period of research to the archaeology of the Middle Nile valley in the long run.

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<sup>1</sup> In my use, the term “Nubia” refers to the region of Egyptian and Sudanese Nubia as characterized by the presence of Nubian speaking groups in the present and the recent past, plus the wider Middle Nile valley up to the confluence of the Blue and the White Niles in present-day Khartoum. This also represents the area onto which archaeological enquiries discussed in this paper have focused.

<sup>2</sup> As Adams (1992:19) remarked “the chronicling of history as such has never been a Nubian literary tradition”, but see e.g. Hāshim 2014.

<sup>3</sup> I use the terms “West” and “Western” to denote a common cultural background in the industrialized countries of Europe and North America which has been shaped by the traditions of Christianity, European enlightenment and

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the expansive colonialism and imperialism of the past five hundred years. While I acknowledge that there is a wide internal diversity within the “West” as defined in this way, my discussion concerns social and political configurations which have evolved, and arguably still function, along these lines.

<sup>4</sup> With this perspective my contribution supplements the chapter of Salah Eldin Mohamed Ahmed, this volume, which relates the history of archaeology in the Middle Nile valley as the story of an emerging national archaeology, whose evolution is signalled by the continuously widening scope and diversity of its fieldwork activities.

<sup>5</sup> The presumed previous impenetrability is relativized e.g. by the fact that the Swiss Johann Ludwig Burckhardt had visited the area already earlier, in 1812 and 1814, in the disguise of Sheikh Ibrahim. See also the next note.

<sup>6</sup> James Bruce, who had actually traveled to “discover the source of the Nile”, had passed the Middle Nile valley several decades earlier, in 1772. He re-identified the town site of Meroe which he knew from classical sources (Bruce 1790, IV:538–539).

<sup>7</sup> See Kirk-Greene 2000:164–201 for the idiosyncratic institution of the Sudan Political Service and the biographical and educational background of its agents.

<sup>8</sup> With this, the French managed to assert their imperialist interests in Egypt vis-à-vis British and Turco-Egyptian forces at least in the realm of archaeology (Reid 2002; Colla 2007).

<sup>9</sup> For an appraisal of Budge’s scientific frame of mind and his contributions to the study of Egypt’s and Sudan’s past see Reade 2011.

<sup>10</sup> In 1960 alone, about one third of the former African colonies became independent. Another third achieved this status in the decade before and after 1960.

<sup>11</sup> For an analysis and critique of the Eurocentric perspective on ancient Egypt see e.g. Reid 2002, Scham 2003, and O’Connor and Reid 2003:1–6.

<sup>12</sup> For thorough analyses and a forceful critique of current working conditions and power relations in which native archaeologists operate in a range of African contexts see the contributions, and particularly the introduction, to Schmidt (ed.) 2009.

<sup>13</sup> A notable exception in this context is the translation of Adams’ magisterial *Nubia: Corridor to Africa* of 1977 into Arabic by Mahgoub El-Tigani Mahmoud.