



SARS, from inception to the present day: a summary

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This issue of *Sudan & Nubia* marks the 25th anniversary of the founding of the Sudan Archaeological Research Society (SARS). Our first official meeting (as a registered charity) took place in the British Museum (still our base today) in November 1991. With the aim broadly of advancing public education in the history and archaeology of Sudan, SARS was established following two years of consultation with interested parties, not only in the UK, but involving the British Council in Khartoum and the National Corporation for Antiquities and Museums of Sudan (NCAM); an international colloquium, 'Sudan and Nubia' held in July 1991, in conjunction with the opening of a new BM exhibition (see below), had also formed part of the process. An indication of the widespread interest generated by the event, attendees at the first meeting included representatives of the Sudanese community in London, the British Academy, the British Council, the British Institute in Eastern Africa, the Egypt Exploration Society, the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge, University College London, and the University of Newcastle upon Tyne, as well as a considerable number of lay members. Present also was Sir Laurence Kirwan (1907-1999), the hugely respected veteran of north-east African archaeology (Plate 1), who agreed to be our first Honorary President. That same year, as already noted, the BM had opened a new permanent gallery (funded by the Raymond and Beverly Sackler Foundation), entitled 'Egypt and Africa' (recently retitled 'Sudan, Egypt and Nubia'), focussing for the first time on its extensive collections of material from Sudan and Egyptian Nubia. Both initiatives, the Society and the Gallery, had received impetus from a common concern, actively shared by NCAM: that Sudan's rich archaeological heritage, little known and relatively neglected (certainly by comparison with that of Egypt), was now seriously at risk from an expanding programme of modern development.

As stated in its constitution, the Society's primary objective – fully endorsed by NCAM – is 'to promote and carry out... research, surveys, investigations and excavations... and publish and disseminate the useful results of such work'. From the outset the Society has striven to fulfil this remit and has done so, it is fair to say, with considerable success. Over the last 25 years, in close collaboration with NCAM and the BM, and through the consistent generosity especially of the Bioanthropology Foundation/Institute for Bioarchaeology, we have pursued an extensive programme of fieldwork (much of it still on-going), covering hundreds of individual sites and including associated ethnographic and physical anthropological research: surveys (Bayuda Desert, Begrawyia-Atbara, Northern Dongola Reach, Fourth Cataract, Jebel Umm Rowag, Wadi Halfa-Kerma, Fifth Cataract;

excavations (Gabati, Kawa, Amri-Kirbekan, Kurgus); and epigraphy (Jebel Dosha, Tombos, Korosko Road, Batn el-Hajar, Kurgus). Over the period, we have also lent support to a number of projects run wholly by Sudanese colleagues, from both NCAM and the University sector.

The results of fieldwork have been published in 20 SARS monographs (several others are in preparation) and in nearly a hundred papers, many of the latter published in *Sudan & Nubia*, the Society's annual bulletin, first issued in 1997 and now the leading journal in its field. Our monograph series includes volumes on the results of important fieldwork originally carried out under other auspices, which might otherwise have remained unpublished, the majority authored by our current Honorary President, the distinguished archaeologist and anthropologist, Professor William Y. Adams.

Publication (traditional and increasingly on-line) has been complemented by an annual programme of public events: a colloquium devoted to recent fieldwork in Sudan and a special lecture (the 'Kirwan Memorial Lecture') delivered by a leading practitioner, each event held in the BM and followed by a reception (always an enjoyable social occasion), known to be much appreciated by SARS members and guests. Members of the Sudanese diplomatic service and of the wider community in the UK have been welcome and regular attendees at the events, as have NCAM representatives, most recently the current Director-General, Dr Abdelrahman Ali. In this context, it is worth noting that, shortly after the creation of SARS, a parallel society, the Sudan Archaeology Society, was founded in Khartoum (a joint initiative with the British Council office of the time), the aim being to present a domestic audience with up-to-date reports on discoveries in the field. Its officers now drawn from the home community, the Khartoum Society continues to thrive.

It is clear that SARS could not have pursued its aims without support from a number of organizations, the most prominent already mentioned above. Individuals too have played their part, notably our Patrons and volunteers, including our officers and successive committee members. SARS has certainly made a mark, a substantial one (Derek Welsby offers a more detailed account of activities below), but much more remains to be done. We offer huge thanks to all our supporters, past and present, and hope for an equally collaborative and productive future.

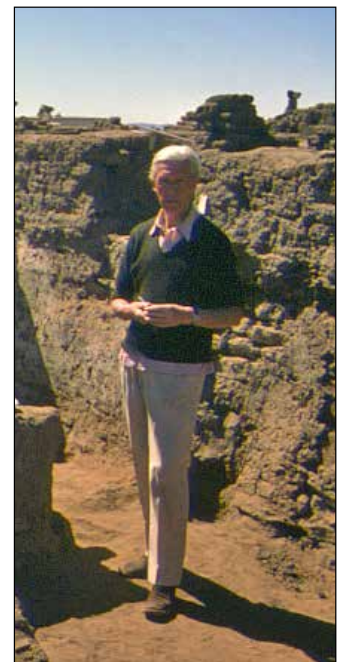


Plate 1. The Society's first honorary president, Sir Laurence Kirwan, on excavation in Nubia.