

SUDAN & NUBIA

The Sudan Archaeological Research Society



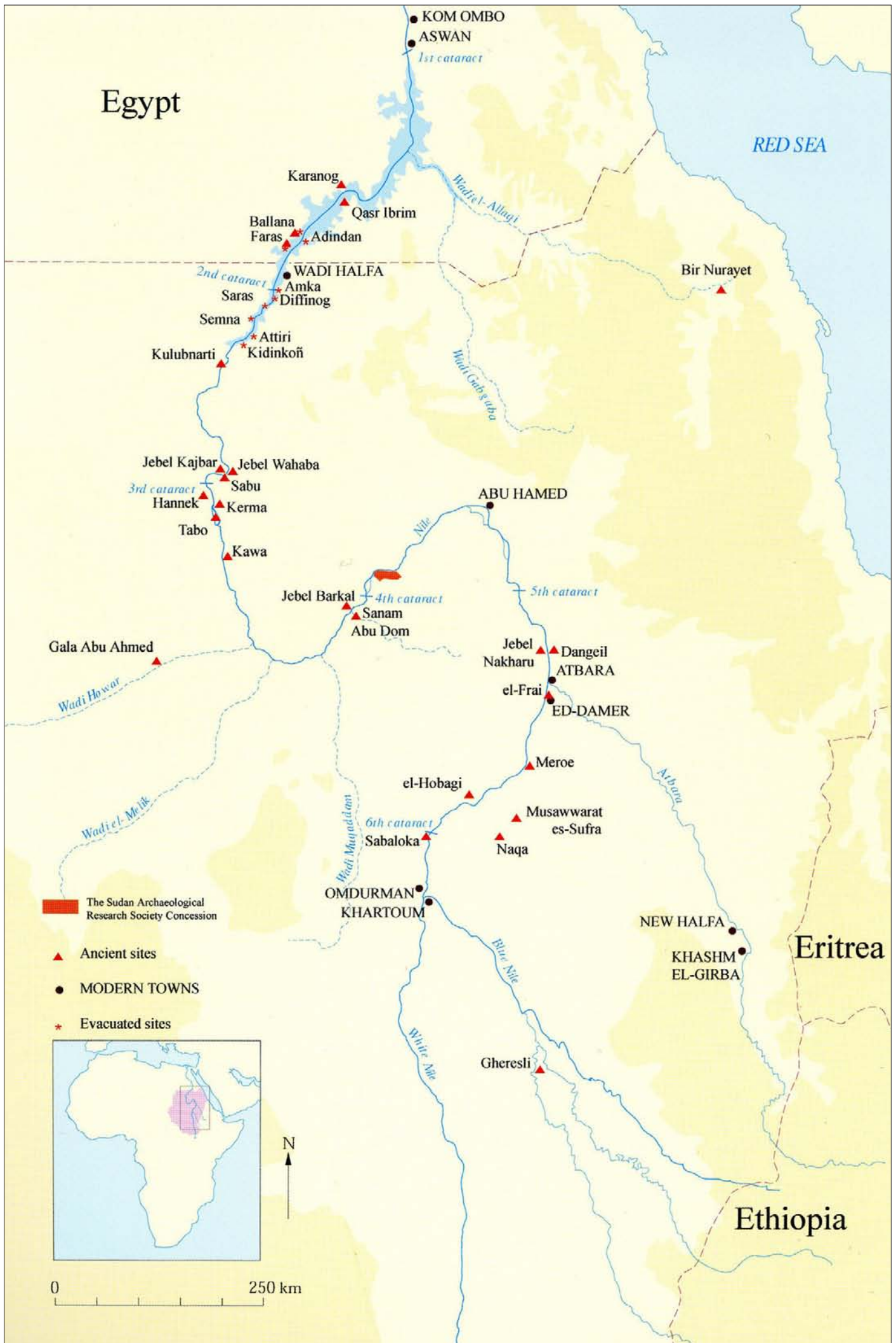
Bulletin No. 10

2006



Egypt

RED SEA



Bir Nurayet

WADI HALFA

Saras
Diffinog
Semna
Attiri
Kidinkoñ
Kulubnarti

Jebel Kajbar
Jebel Wahaba
Sabu
Hannek
Kerma
Tabo
Kawa

Jebel Barkal
Sanam
Abu Dom

Gala Abu Ahmed

ABU HAMED

5th cataract

Jebel Nakharu
Dangeil
ATBARA
el-Frai
ED-DAMER

Meroe

el-Hobagi
Musawwarat es-Sufra
Naqa

6th cataract
Sabaloka
OMDURMAN
KHARTOUM

NEW HALFA
KHASHM
EL-GIRBA

Eritrea

Ethiopia

KOM OMBO
ASWAN

1st cataract

Karanog
Qasr Ibrim
Ballana
Faras
Adindan

2nd cataract

3rd cataract

4th cataract

Wadi Howar

Wadi el-Malik

Wadi Maqaddam

Blue Nile

White Nile

Atbara

Wadi el-Ahagi

Wadi Garga

Nile



0 250 km

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Front cover: Beja man by the well at Bir Vario, Eastern Desert (photo K. Pluskota).



Paradise Lost: Nubia before the 1964 Exodus

Herman Bell

Introduction

Many Nubian people lost their historic homelands in 1964. As a result of the High Dam near Aswan, they were obliged to leave almost 500 kilometres of riverbank in southern Egypt and northern Sudan. For these people the past is vividly alive in the present. Their songs and poetry still reflect the traumatic experience. Many of them now look back upon their original homelands as a paradise lost.

It was not just their homes that they lost, but also an important link with their environment. Many of them had to leave the River Nile with its rich cultural associations. They left their boats, their fields by the river, their graveyards and the shrines of their saints. Some of them left villages with ancient and mediaeval monuments, or modern houses covered with traditional decorations. After the resettlement, they observed that many of the younger generation were losing the ability to speak the Nubian language, a medium of their traditions and a badge of their identity.

The 1964 *hijra*, or exodus, was a major event in the long history of the Nubian people. For many of them it represents the moment when they had to depart massively from the Nile Valley.

Nubians to the south of the evacuated region may have been spared the trauma of the exodus, but they share a sense of loss as their people are drawn away from their homes by economic opportunities. The Dungulawi Nubian Poems of Jalal 'Umar Gorja express a longing for a return to the traditional life along the river ('Abd al-Karim and Bell 1990).

Historic Environment

Singers and poets who experienced the evacuation and its aftermath have been studied by Muhammad 'Abd al-Salam 'Abd al-Mannan (1996). They have an intense emotional involvement with the lost homeland (Nubian: *irki* 'homeland'). An illustration of this is the poem *Irkúune Íni* 'Is This Our Homeland?' by Mustafa 'Abd al-Qadir from Adindan (Adindáan Nubian: *Andaan*) just north of the border between Egypt and the Sudan. I am particularly indebted to 'Abd al-Halim Sabbar for his English translation, but I have taken certain liberties and paraphrased the opening lines of the poem as follows:

I rejoiced when they told me that I would go ...
I rejoiced that before my death I would be able to see ...
That I would travel and see the homeland (*irki*) ...
That I would see the country for which we longed ...

I rejoiced when they told me that I would go ...

We went as we did long ago and we boarded the
postal steamer,

The 'Ibis' which we used to admire to death, the
white postal steamer.

The steamer set off with its paddle-wheel beating
the water.

My spirit rejoiced and my heart danced

For now I was going to see the homeland (*irki*).

Turning again, my spirit became anxious and my
heart uneasy.

Why was there only a lake?

South and north ... only a lake?

East and west ... only a lake?

My spirit became anxious.

Seeking here and seeking there

I did not find Nubia.

The poet proceeds to visualise the poignant details of the land that was once in that place: the mountain, the date-palms, the boats, the water-wheels, the children walking with the sheep and goats and the toy boats made of palm leaves.

The grand finale of the poem expresses passionately that the land will be restored and that our children will see that 'This is our homeland indeed.' (*Irkúunnin Iní*)

The postal steamer was the means by which the Nubian communities along the Nile remained in contact with each other and with the outside world. It brought visitors and news of births, marriages and deaths. Like the steamer 'Ibis' in the poem, the postal boats would leave Wadi Halfa in the Sudan, cross the international border between the Sudan and Egypt and continue on to the port of Shallal near Aswan.

A Border Community: Its Treasures and Its People

The border between the Sudan and Egypt was not a serious obstacle before 1964. Residents on one side of the border were closely related to residents on the other. Marriages took place across the border. However, in 1964 relatives on the Egyptian side were resettled far to the north near Kom Ombo and relatives on the Sudanese side were resettled even further away to the southeast near Khashm al-Qirba. Many of these relatives never saw each other again.

The community of Faras West was located in the Sudan just south of the Egyptian border in 1964 (Colour plate XLIX). A short walk towards Ballana (Nubian: *Balláanye*) in Egypt would lead to the large artificial mounds that were the burial places of the rulers of Nubia in the 5th and 6th centuries AD before the conversion to Christianity (Colour plate LIII). The great temples of Abu Simbel were located only 20km away from Faras to the northeast along the riverbank. Abu Simbel was a familiar sight for travellers on the postal steamer.

The flamboyant and hospitable Shaikh Hasan ‘Uthman Husain was actively involved in the community of Faras. He was to be seen everywhere, up a palm tree, steering a boat, standing in a newly dug grave to test its depth or carrying a seriously burned friend to the distant hospital in Wadi Halfa. He married Fatma Batti (Fatima ‘the Duck’, reflecting a widespread fondness for descriptive epithets used to distinguish individuals. Now, more than 40 years later she is still known as Fatma Batti). There were a number of children; Shaikh Hasan spoke of the prolific Kikiláañ, *abu’-mi’a, jidd al-alf* (father of a hundred, grandfather of a thousand), who was an ancient ancestor of the people of Faras. This corresponded with traditions collected in the early 20th century in Faras by F. Ll. Griffith (Griffith 1925, 267). He recorded ‘a certain Kikelañ or Kikelai, ... who lived long ago in the *diffi* or citadel, apparently as king ... a Christian.’ His study gave a number of opinions on the etymology and significance of the royal name. Shaikh Hasan could also trace his family tree back to a certain Mahmud Gireedóon (Nubian spelling: *Gireedóon*, approximate pronunciation: *Gireyd-omn*). Mahmud was said to have been the first Muslim in the family and Gireedóon was presumably a Christian. How well this coincided with the paintings of Nubian queens and kings that were just being uncovered from the sands of Faras! The queens and kings were presumed to be ancestors and occasionally bore a remarkable resemblance to the modern inhabitants.

In 1962-64 the cathedral of Faras was excavated by the Polish Expedition revealing spectacular mediaeval wall paintings. One of these was a painting of the three Magi on horseback (Colour plate L) rather than on camels (Plate 1). Like many of the paintings it is thought to have been executed by Nubian artists. It is a detail of an early 11th century mural of the Nativity.

The Nativity scene can be seen in its original position in Colour plate LI (lower left). Immediately in front of the

Nativity on the left pillar supporting an arch is a wall painting of the Virgin and Child with a Nubian ‘Queen’, which was brought to London by the British Museum for its Exhibition *Sudan: Ancient Treasures* in 2004 (Welsby and Anderson 2004, 18-19, exhibit 4). A copy of this painting had previously been given by the President of the Sudan to the Rt. Revd. George Carey, when he was Archbishop of Canterbury, and is now in the St. Edmund Chapel of Salisbury Cathedral (<http://www.salisburycathedral.org.uk/gallery.php>).

A Sudanese artist, ‘Abd al-Rahim Hajj al-Amin, had the duty of copying wall paintings from the Faras cathedral before the exodus as a precaution against damage or fading. In Plate 2 he is walking through old Wadi Halfa, now submerged. His copy of St. Anna, the mother of the Virgin Mary, may be seen in Plate 3.



Plate 2. ‘Abd al-Rahim Hajj al-Amin, artist.

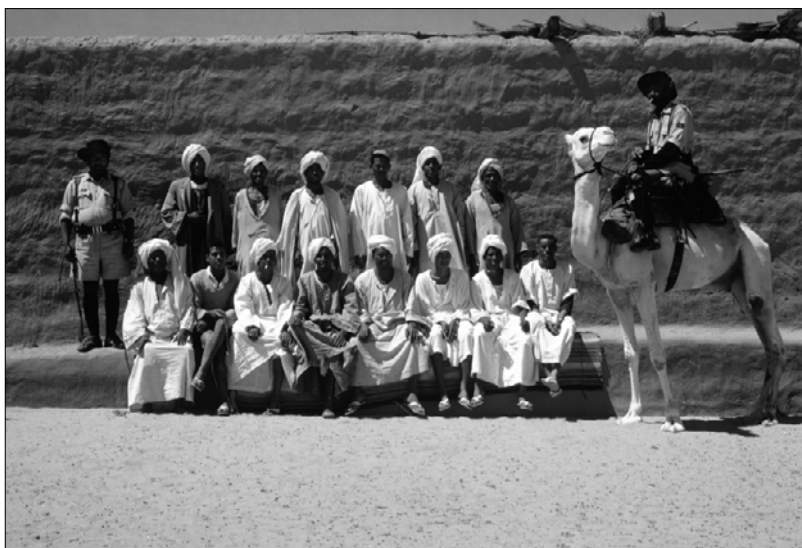


Plate 1. Camel policeman visits Faras.

Writing and Protective Texts

The long history of literacy in the Nubian language is a source of great pride. Nubian was written almost as early as English was. By the end of the 15th century AD the Old Nubian language had been written in its own alphabet for more than 700 years. Although this mediaeval alphabet was then eclipsed for over 400 years, it is now being revived to write modern Nubian (e.g. Khalil 1996; see also the website of the Nubian Studies and Documentation Centre <http://www.thenubian.net/nsdc.php>).

A particular source of pride was the efficiency of the mediaeval Nubian alphabet. Many scripts use complex alphabetic characters. Spanish resorts to an ñ with a diacritical mark (~) for the ñ in ‘señor’. English resorts to a digraph **ng** for the



Plate 3. 'Abd al-Rahim Hajj al-Amin's copy of St. Anna from the Faras Cathedral

medial consonant **ŋ** in 'singer'. These complexities had already been resolved in Old Nubian by the 8th century AD. A simple Old Nubian character **ϣ** was used for **ñ** and a single Old Nubian character **ϫ** was used for **ng** as in 'singer'. Today the Spanish word 'señor' could be written in the Old Nubian script as **ϫϣϣ** with no (~) and the English word 'singer' could be written as **ϫϣϣ** with no digraph (**ng**).

Griffith observed that the Old Nubian characters **ϣ** and **ϫ**, as well as **ϫ** (w), were probably derived from the Meroitic alphabet. The following table shows the probable development of these characters from Meroitic to Old Nubian.

In spite of problems with the original phonetic value of **ϣ** in Meroitic, these derivations are still considered to be likely (Browne 2002, 10).

However, there has always been a problem arising from the time gap between the last dated Meroitic inscription and the earliest dated Old Nubian text. The last assigned date for a Meroitic inscription was the first half of the 5th century, describing events possibly as late as the 440s [or immediately thereafter] (Török in Eide *et al.* 1994-2000, 3, 1195-6; Török 1997, 67). This was the inscription of King

Table 1. The probable development of Meroitic characters to Old Nubian.

Meroitic phonological value	Meroitic hieroglyphic	Meroitic demotic	Old Nubian	Old Nubian phonological value
ne (= ñ ?)	𐎎	Ⲏ	ϣ	ñ
kh (= ŋ ?)	𐎏	ⲏ	ϫ	ŋ
w	𐎐	Ⲑ	ϫ	w

Kharamadoye on the walls of the temple of Kalabsha. The earliest assigned date for an Old Nubian text was AD 797 (Łajtar 1997, 117; see Browne 2002, 1).

This leaves a period of approximately 350 years during which Meroitic and Old Nubian are not attested to have been written contemporaneously. Yet they must somehow have been contemporary if alphabetic characters were transmitted from one to the other.

Some light on this problem may come from the observation of Nubian life. In 1963 I was in the village of `Amka (Nubian: *Amke* or *Abke*) at the southern end of the Second Cataract. A certain woman there, Hajja Zahra, was reported to have the evil eye. Next door to her lived Shaikh Mahir Agha who could write an Arabic text that could protect an individual from the power of the evil eye. The fee was 25 piastres. In Plate 4, he can be seen writing such a text.

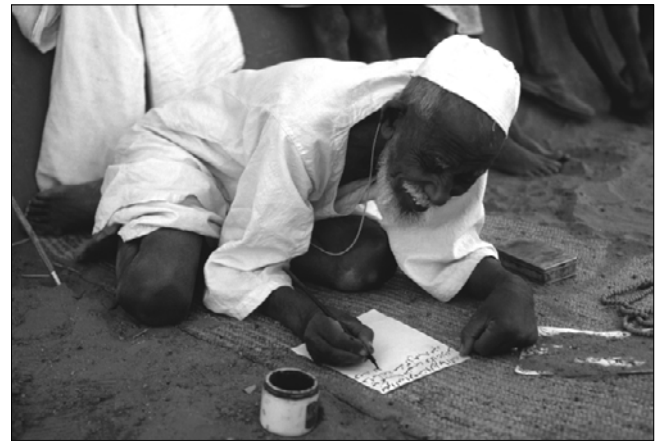


Plate 4. Shaikh Mahir writing a protection against the evil eye.

Writing is a source of power. Practitioners may find it profitable to exercise their writing skills long after any public texts have disappeared from view. Shaikh Mahir provides an hypothesis that may allow for the survival of Meroitic writing long after it was publicly attested.

An illustration of Old Nubian writing appears in Colour plate XLIX (centre right). The quotation is taken from a Nubian translation of Matthew 2:1 and says, 'ΔΟΓΔΡΙΓΟΥΛΜΑΨΔΛΟΚΛΩ' which means 'Magi from the East' (Browne 1989, 48-49).

The elements of this phrase together with glosses are as follows: **ΔΟΓΔ** 'Magus?'; **ΡΙ** animate suffix [This interpretation differs from Browne's, but is consistent with modern Nubian grammar.]; **ΓΟΥ** plural suffix; **Λ** subjective suffix; **ΜΑΨΔ** 'sun'; **Λ** subjective suffix; **ΟΚ** 'rise' (verb); **Κ**

habitual verbal suffix; $\lambda\bar{\text{O}}$ 'from'.

Browne (1996, 49) derives the modern Nubian word *dogir* 'sorcerer' from $\Delta\text{O}\Gamma\Delta$ 'Magus'. If so, then this would be a fascinating example of semantic development through the centuries. The modern *dogir* (or *aman-dogor*) was said to be a creature with hair sticking out from the head and with two long breasts, the left one slung over the right shoulder and the right one slung over the left shoulder. At any rate, it seems to have little resemblance to the mediaeval $\Delta\text{O}\Gamma\Delta\rho\bar{\text{I}}\Gamma\text{O}\Upsilon$ 'Magi' or to the horsemen in the Faras paintings.

River

Inhabitants of Nubia derive great inspiration from the river. It is the source of water and life. Nubian poetry often refers to the image of women drawing water from the river. The young woman in Plate 5 is making use of a convenient



Plate 5. Drawing water from the river.

petrol can. A child among the traditional wooden boats in Plate 6 finds it easier to drink directly from the river. Kettles are also available as in Plate 7.

In Colour plate LII Shaikh Hasan is steering a boat in his



Plate 6. Drinking from the river.



Plate 7. Transporting a kettle.

original homeland (*irki*). Some years later when I visited him after the resettlement in his new homeland called 'Village One', I discovered that he had painted a Nile boat on the wall of his house from memory (Colour plate LIX).

Further south along the Sudanese Nile at the cataract of Semna (Nubian: *Semne* and even *Sebne*) there were not only a number of wooden boats of local manufacture, but also



Plate 8. Raft in action at the Semna Cataract.

rafts made of reeds (not papyrus). Plate 8 shows one of these rafts in action just before the resettlement. Plate 9 shows a particularly attractive raft with gourds on either side. I sent this back to Virginia and presented it to the Mariners' Museum in Newport News, where it is on display as exhibit number 23 in their International Small Craft Center (Plate 10). The particular interest of these rafts was their similarity in construction to the Ra of Thor Heyerdahl who demonstrated the possibility of pre-Columbian voyages to the New World.

Plate 11 shows a boatmen of Semna dealing with the strong current near the island of Attūri, which is portrayed in Colour plate LIV. Before the flooding there was a functioning gold mine near this place. The name



Plate 9. Raft constructed with gourds at Semna.

of Nubia is often claimed to be derived from the word for ‘gold’: modern Nubian *nab*, Old Nubian $\Gamma\Delta\Pi$.

The Nile steamer has already been featured above in the



Plate 10. The same raft at the Mariners’ Museum in Virginia.



Plate 11. Controlling a boat near the rapids at Attiri Island.

section on poetry. The epic journey of the Nile steamer el-Thoraya [*al-Thurayya* ‘Pleiades’] to a safe haven in Khar-toum North was told by the late Hassan Dafalla [Hasan Dafa` Allah], who was responsible for the resettlement (Dafalla 1975, 194-207). I am grateful to the London publisher Christopher Hurst for having allowed me to preserve a set of old colour photographs entrusted to him by Hassan Dafalla. Some of these photographs had been published in his book *The Nubian Exodus* (Dafalla 1975). The original transparencies had suffered through the passage of time, but restored images were produced by Barry Phillips of the Photographic & Imaging Services of the Department of Geography at the University of Exeter. The results are illustrated here by two photographs as follows: the steamer as it appears on the unrestored colour slide (Colour plate LV) and the steamer on the restored Colour plate LVI. Similar comparative scenes are available on electronic slides for a number of other views of old Wadi Halfa before and during the flooding of 1964.

For approximately two millennia the backbone of the Nubian economy had been the water-wheel elaborately constructed of wood with ropes and pottery jars and normally driven by an ox (Nubian: *gor-ondi* ‘male bovine’) to lift the water into a system of canals and fields.

Bill Adams kindly provided a fine photograph of the water-wheel and its system of fields in Saras before the resettlement (Colour plate LVII). In the 1960s water-wheels were still flourishing even outside the areas being evacuated, but now they have generally been replaced by fuel-driven pumps. A close-up view of a water-wheel on the southeast bank opposite Kulubnarti (Nubian: *Kulubnaarti*) is shown in Colour plate LVIII.

Another photograph taken by Bill Adams shows an elaborate doorway of a Nubian house in Diffinog ‘Facing the



Plate 12. Door of a house in Diffinog (Photo W. Y. Adams).

Citadel' in Gemai (Nubian: *Jeméé*) (Plate 12). Details of this house decorated by the artist Dawud `Uthman are published by Wenzel (1972, 142, pl. 73). Often the domestic architecture of Nubia before 1964 reflected life by the river as in the case of the mural of two crocodiles threatening a duck in a house decorated for a wedding in Adúrma (Colour plate LX). The same house provided a colourful cupboard with real plates set into the wall (Colour plate LXI). The tradition of house decoration was severely affected by the resettlement.

The woman in Plate 13 lived her life beside a mountain known as the Stone Face (Nubian: *Kidinkoñ* or 'the upstream end of the stony region'). She communicated across the river by shouting as she had done all her life (Plate 14). She would soon board the train that would take her to a distant home with no river.



Plate 14. Calling across the river to fetch a boat.

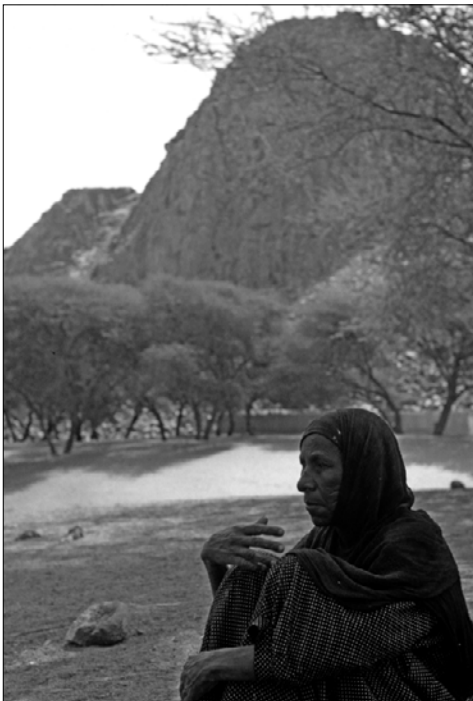


Plate 13. A mountain called *Kidinkoñ*, Stone Face.



Plate 15. Train carrying Nubians away from their old homes in 1964.

Train to the Future

The *hijra* or exodus of 1964 must now be acknowledged as one of the major events in the long history of Nubia. In 1964 my wife and I were allowed to take the two-day journey by train to Khashm al-Qirba together with the Nubians who were being resettled (Plate 15). The journey was exciting for the younger people who saw this as an adventure. Some of them had been able to use their compensation money to pay a dowry of £10 and get married (Plate 16). Older people often bore the trip in silence. At one point malaria tablets were distributed and they realised that they were heading for a region with new health risks.

When UNESCO launched its appeal to save the monuments of Nubia in 1960, the Nubian people became increasingly aware of world attention to the historic aspects of the land they were losing. Paradoxically their sense of loss stimulated a cultural revival. At the time of the resettlement few Nubians had photographs of their home communities. Copies of the present photographs and many others are being distributed to cultural centres and are helping the people to have a fuller record of their lost environment.



Plate 16. Newlyweds travelling in the train to new homes.

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The Magi from a Nubian wall painting of the Nativity (early 11th century). Their names appear as Batousōra, Melchēon and Thaddasia. The painting was discovered by the Polish Expedition while they were excavating the mediaeval cathedral of Faras just south of the border between Egypt and the Sudan. In 1963 Ann Bell was allowed to photograph the painting before it was moved to the Sudan National Museum in Khartoum. (inventory number 24369).

Permission to reproduce the photograph was granted by the Sudan National Corporation for Antiquities and Museums.

ΔΟΥΔΡΪΓΟΥΧ ΜΑΨΔΑΧΟΚΧΛΘ
 'Magi from the East' (cited from a Nubian language lectionary of the mediaeval period)



Discovering Nubia

www.exeter.ac.uk/iais/nubia

Colour plate XLIX. Nubian Exodus. Map of Faras West and its historic environment.



Colour plate L. Nubian Exodus. Magi from the mediaeval cathedral of Faras.

Colour plate LI. Nubian Exodus. The Nativity scene in situ within the cathedral at Faras.





Colour plate LII. Nubian Exodus. Shaikh Hasan of Faras (right) steering a boat.



Colour plate LIII. Nubian Exodus. X-Group tumulus in Ballana just north of Faras.



Colour plate LIV. Nubian Exodus. Panorama of Attîri Island.



Colour plate LV (left). Nubian Exodus. Steamer al-Thurayya, Collection of Hassan Dafalla, original.

Colour plate LVI (right). Nubian Exodus. Steamer al-Thurayya, Collection of Hassan Dafalla, restored.

*Colour plate LVII.
Nubian Exodus.
Water-wheel and
fields in Saras
(Photo W. Y. Adams).*



*Colour plate LVIII.
Nubian Exodus.
Water-wheel opposite
Kulubnarti.*



Colour plate LIX. Shaikh Hasan remembering a boat and a date palm seven years after being resettled far away from the Nile.



Colour plate LX. Crocodiles and duck created for a wedding in Adírma just before the 1964 evacuation.

Colour plate LXI. Cupboard created for the wedding in Adírma with several real plates fixed into the wall.