

The Potential for Historical Archaeology in the Sudan

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Introduction

Traditional archaeologies of the Middle Nile and the modern Sudan have long-focused on the more obvious and monumental achievements of its early ‘civilizations’. The archaeology of more recent periods, however, remains largely neglected; such work as has been undertaken has tended to be framed simply in terms of an ‘Islamic’ archaeology, in succession to a ‘Christian’ medieval archaeology. What this paper wishes to explore is the possibility of developing some rather different approaches to the archaeology of the postmedieval and more recent periods in the Sudanese Middle and Upper Nile. Drawing on methodological and theoretical approaches being developed in the practice of ‘historical archaeology’ in other parts of the world (e.g. Andrén 1998, Falk 1991, Funari *et al* 1998) it will discuss a few possible areas where research might be directed and some of the possibilities for developing more fruitful dialogue between history and archaeology. At this time we are still very much talking of the *potential* for future work. However, within one regional research programme, still ongoing in the Nubian Third Cataract region of northern Sudan, it is proving possible to begin to explore some of the potential of historical archaeology, with encouraging results.

If we choose to look beyond traditional religion-based periodisations, one possible line for the development of research is to begin to explore some of the concerns of historical archaeology, as practiced in other parts of the world. There is clearly considerable potential, for example, for developing research concerned with the postmedieval spread of Europe and its values, the development of capitalism and ‘modernity’. If we wish to avoid the Eurocentrism (apparent in many definitions of the scope of historical archaeology), we also need to look at the specific local contexts and particularities of the history of the Middle Nile. What may be termed ‘capitalist’ forces were certainly an important element of the intrusive institutions and social forces which were to destroy the Sinnār Sultanate during the eighteenth century (Spaulding 1985: xiii-xiv). However, the appearance of these forces and the growth of more general global linkages during the postmedieval period were not however initially through European contacts. Instead they came through the great powers of the Near East, notably the Ottoman Empire, while new intellectual links were mediated through Islamic traditions, entering the Middle Nile from a number of directions. The slow infiltration of coin and the growth of monetary economies were also rooted within long-established regional trading traditions. When the first steps towards modernization, ‘improvement’, and small-scale industrialization were made in the nineteenth century, they were mediated through exploitative policies of the colonial government of the Turkiyya, inspired in turn by the policies for modernizing Egypt of Muhammed Ali and his successors.

If historical archaeology may suggest new areas of research for us, its theory and methods may also have significant implications for the practice of archaeology in the region, not least in promoting an active concern for, and dialogue with, historical research. One aspect of such concern is to encourage an interest in and much greater use of what are potentially considerable resources, largely untapped by archaeologists. For many parts of the Middle Nile, for example, we have a wealth of ethnographic accounts. Many have a significant historical component; often dating back more than a century, they may also be valuable historical documents in their own right. While these are often closely linked to colonial rule during the Condominium, there are also some useful earlier accounts, both by early European travellers, as well as rare Arab and Ottoman sources. Perhaps more important, however, we also have the possibility to look beyond the written word and explore the potential of oral traditions, historical sources which have come to occupy such an important place in Africanist history in recent decades (Vansina 1985). While these have been used to great effect in a number of historical studies in the Sudan (e.g. Ewald 1985), they have yet to figure in any significant way in archaeological research in the region.

The value of oral traditions is enhanced where they may both supplement and challenge written sources. What may be termed ‘Orientalist’ traditions of textual scholarship (which have been almost totally focused on Arabic sources) have been criticized for the partial and incomplete view of the postmedieval history of Sudan which they create (e.g. Spaulding and Kapteijns 1991), not least in excluding large numbers of ‘Sudanese’ who did not aspire to, or qualify for, ‘Arab’ identities. This is an area where studies of alternative historical sources, working with archaeology, would also seem to have considerable potential for developing very different histories of relations of power and identity. They may be especially valuable in relating to recent centuries, the time in which the ‘master narratives’ of cultural and social identity of the modern Sudan were being forged (Johnson 1997, 2003). Oral traditions may provide a means through which the complexities of race, identity and social status may be explored, reaching beyond, for example, the written genealogies which

established 'Arab' ancestry and identities for a wide range of 'northern' Sudanese. Since the Condominium, such genealogies have been one major focus of Sudanese historiography (e.g. MacMichael 1922; Hasan 1967) as well as being hugely influential in forging more popular perceptions of Sudanese history.

Listening to local voices may also prove useful in directing research interests in other directions which have come to figure large in many areas of historical archaeology, such as the exploration of issues of domination and resistance (e.g. Miller *et al.* 1995; Funari *et al.* 1999). Issues such as these have begun to be explored by historians and anthropologists of the Middle Nile, concerned especially with the 'peripheries' during the postmedieval and more recent periods.

Islamic Archaeology or Historical Archaeology?

Traditional approaches to the more recent history and archaeology of the region have, to date, largely been framed around a perceived Christian-Islamic divide. However, this seems increasingly inadequate on a number of counts. At a general level, such an approach would seem to fail to reflect the richness and diversity of the many histories of the Middle Nile, regional and local, of the last 1000 years. While the spread of Islam in the Sudan is certainly a key theme which needs to be explored during the postmedieval period, it cannot be restricted to that period as it was a process which began much earlier, during the medieval period (el-Zein 2000). We may also question the extent to which religion may be the most appropriate way of defining this period and organizing our master narratives. The ways in which Islam was to transform the Middle Nile should really be the object of our investigations, rather than being taken for granted as the definitive characteristic of the postmedieval period. The more recent history of the Sudan cannot fail to remind us that even today, Islam defines the identity of by no means all of its citizens, and often in very different ways; Islam itself may be manifested in many different ways. Similarly, the extent to which Christianity was the defining characteristic of medieval ('Christian') culture, even within the core riverine regions of the Middle Nile, is an area of research which clearly requires further examination (Edwards 1999, 2001).

Rather than framing research simply in terms of an 'Islamic Archaeology', a number of different approaches to the archaeology of the last 500 years may be possible. The traditional political periodisations may well prove useful in structuring our research, exploring the archaeology of the Funj Sultanate dominating much of central Sudan, the Kayra Sultanate lying to the west in Darfur, and the Ottoman Empire extending into northern Nubia, as well as along parts of the Red Sea littoral. In the nineteenth century we then have the imposition of the Turco-Egyptian colonial government over much of the region, followed by that of the Mahdiyya, which survived until 1899. These units were in turn surrounded by numerous smaller-scale societies on their margins. Addressing other themes and long-term processes may also be possible, however, cutting across these periodisations. Amongst these, the spread of Islam will be only one of several.

In view of the sheer scale of the Sudan, comprehensive large-scale studies of these periods are unlikely to be achievable in the foreseeable future. However one way forward is to develop local and regional research programs, combining archaeological and historical research but with an explicit concern to locate local histories within their wider context, and relate them to larger historical issues. From its origins in the chronicles and histories of the literate religious and political elites of the Funj period, Sudanese historiography remains heavily biased towards the centres of power, especially the central riverine region. Historical archaeology has the potential to move beyond the limitations of written sources to begin to reclaim some of the complexity of the numerous and diverse histories both within and around the major kingdoms.

The Funj and their neighbours

As yet, we have very little knowledge of the archaeology of central Sudan during the Funj period (Crawford 1951). The little data we have relating to 'Funj' material culture is limited to a small amount of material, largely pottery, from early excavations at Abu Geili (Crawford and Addison 1951). Many fundamental questions remain unanswered, however, not least concerning the extent to which this material, from close to Sinnār, is really representative of the Funj domains as a whole. Some potentially similar material has been reported from the Abdallab centre at Qarrī, near the Sixth Cataract (al-Sanjak 1978), but we really still in no position to judge whether there existed a specific style of 'Funj pottery' which was widespread across the Sultanate. We are even more ignorant of the material evidence for the opening of Sinnār to contacts with the 'outside world', a process which has begun to be studied on the basis of historical records (e.g. Spaulding 1985), but is otherwise known only from occasional reports of glass shards and glazed pottery on the surface of postmedieval sites. Even the major urban centres of the Funj Sultanate, Sinnār and Arbajī, remain largely unexplored. We possess some contemporary descriptions of Sinnār and some sketchy reports of the site (Fitzenreiter 2000) but Arbajī remains all but unknown. A brief survey in the 1970s suggested that the settlement may have covered 7-8 hectares and had a substantial *qubba* cemetery associated with it (Khalifa

1979). However the site is now reported to have almost entirely disappeared beneath modern cultivation and settlement.

Beyond the western margins of the Funj in Kordofan, the other great power of the period was located in Darfur under the Kayra Fur sultans (O'Fahey 1980). Beyond preliminary studies of some of the more impressive architectural monuments of the region (see Reed 1994 for one of the more recent) we still know very little of the archaeology of this period in Western Sudan, although McGregor (2001) has recently provided a useful synthesis of existing data linked with a study of oral traditions and histories of the region. As in the Funj domains, we have a number of potentially valuable historical studies of long-distance trade into the region from the sixteenth century (O'Fahey 1971; Walz 1978, 1979).

One area where the beginnings of a postmedieval archaeology have begun to be established is in northern riverine Nubia. By the mid-sixteenth century, Nubia north of the Third Cataract was dominated by the Ottoman Empire, which established frontier garrisons there as well as its own regional administration. Recent work is now highlighting the extent to which this period was probably crucial to the formation of modern Nubian identities, not least in the apparent isolation of much of northern Nubia from the Funj state, and many of the socio-political and religious developments taking place in central Sudan during this period. John Alexander's work on the Ottoman archaeology of Nubia over the last decade (Alexander 1994, 1995, 1997, 2000) has really for the first time begun to explore the postmedieval period with an explicit concern for wider historical context. As such, we are beginning to get some idea of the complexities of local cultural developments within Ottoman Nubia as well as their relationship to larger historical processes at work within the Ottoman Empire. It now seems likely, for example, that the material remains of Ottoman garrisons such as those at Qasr Ibrim and Sai, far from being representative of 'Islamic-period Nubia' as a whole, actually relate to very specific military communities, which formed only one element of a complex tapestry of different populations and identities.

While some of the more salient features of the archaeology of the Ottomans in Nubia are now beginning to emerge, the relationship of Ottoman Nubia to areas further south still remains far from clear. Historical sources suggest that the southern end of the Third Cataract region, at Hannek, became a de facto frontier between the Ottomans and the Funj and later rulers of the Dongola Reach. However, how the Funj presence in the Dongola Reach was marked materially is still unknown, while oral traditions suggest that the Ottomans to the north may have influenced both the cataract region, and areas further south (See also el-Zein this volume).

Archaeology and Islamic holymen

The spread and growing influence of Islamic holymen is one of the dominant themes of the postmedieval history of the Sudan, marked by the settlements which grew up around them and their *qubba* tombs, potentially new 'Islamic' settlement landscapes and new landscape of religious power. These same individuals, as the historians and chroniclers of their society, have also played a fundamental role in the construction of northern Sudanese historical consciousness through their written legacy, notably compilations of biographies of religious notables such as the *Kiṭāb al-Ṭabaqāt* of Wad Dayf Allah. These have in turn become primary sources for more general historical studies of the period (e.g. McHugh 1994; Spaulding 1985).

However, many questions about the religious enclaves which grew up around these holymen still remain to be addressed. To what extent were they new foundations? How did their development change existing settlement landscapes? The origin of most of these religious centres remains far from clear. Ed Damer, for example, rose to prominence in the eighteenth century as the centre of the Majdhubiyya *tariqa*, who enjoyed a great reputation and wielded considerable power in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (e.g. Burckhardt 1819). While their accumulation of estates and followers in the area can be traced in historical documents (Spaulding 1985), how they related to existing communities remains far from clear and, as with most of such sites, no archaeological investigations have been undertaken to explore their early histories. Only in rare cases do we have even basic descriptions of such sites, such as Abu Haraz on the Blue Nile (e.g. al-Hassan 1978). Old Dongola is a rare example of a site where we may trace some kind of continuity between the medieval period, when it was the capital Christian kingdom of Makuria, and its emergence as the seat of a number of notable Islamic teachers and holymen. The details of this transition are still far from clear, although the material marks of this new class of Islamic notables is very apparent in the great *qubba* cemetery of Old Dongola.

The appearance of the such *qubba* monuments associated with Islamic sheikhs is a widespread phenomenon, local manifestations of similar historical processes underway in many parts of the Middle Nile. Their

importance as early monuments to the spread of Islam is increasingly well-recognised and some work has begun on their recording and description (e.g. el-Zein 1987). However, from what we currently know of their distribution it seems likely that there is much more to be learnt from their systematic study as part of broader historical investigations. Most obviously, the spread of such monuments across northern and central Sudan appears quite uneven. They are, for example, prominent features of parts of the northern Dongola Reach and further north, as well as being found in many of the religious enclaves of the more open landscapes of the Gezira and central Sudan (McHugh 1994; el-Zein 1987). By contrast, in other areas however, north of the Atbara and in the Rubatab, for example (Ahmed el-Mutassim *pers. comm.*) they seem to be largely unknown.

Existing written sources on their own can throw little light on such patterns. The biographies contained in the *Tabaqāt*, for example, are very much biased to a relatively limited area of central Sudan. If their geographical coverage is uneven, what they also do not record are the histories of a myriad of lesser religious figures, many of whom never enjoyed more than local reputations. As such, for large numbers of religious foci we have no significant written histories at all. In such cases, archaeological studies working with the collection of oral traditions seem our best chance of throwing light on the histories of these holymen, at the regional and local level.

Within the Third Cataract region, for example, recent survey has identified numerous *qubba* tombs and associated monuments to local *fuqara*, in some 20 *qubba* cemeteries (fig. 1). These range in date from the relatively recent, relating to individuals whose histories are well-known, to others who are fading into near mythical status, their names largely forgotten. While certainly interesting as monuments, they, and traditions associated within them provide numerous insights into the social and religious world of the region over several centuries, as well as an interesting counterpoint to the more official histories of the centres of power in the central Sudan. The major written historical sources, with their central Sudanese bias, have highlighted the way in which many *fuqara* of northern origin, including a number of Mahasi Nubians, founded many of the religious enclaves of central Sudan, notably among the Blue Nile. Such Mahas migrations to central Sudan are now a well-established part of conventional histories, represented by communities claiming Mahas origins, and links with Mahasi *fuqara* and their monuments (Lobban 1984). One of the more famous early figures was Idris wad al-Arbab, who died in the mid-seventeenth century. Typically, his reputation for piety is credited with attracting settlers to his home at Aylafun, creating an unusually large village at its Blue Nile site. His *qubba* tomb remains an important pilgrimage centre to this day.



Fig. 1. Qubba Faqīr Arabi, Habarab al-Mahas.

Back in his Mahas homeland, however, oral traditions are beginning to reveal some local histories which complement the stories of such high-profile individuals. Mobility is one common theme; interesting in itself when we may be predisposed to imagine conservative and deeply rooted Nubian peasant communities. Virtually every local *faki* of the Mahas region would seem to be an immigrant of one form or another, if only from village a few miles away. Many, however, may be credited with a non-Mahas origin, perhaps coming from one of the religious schools (*khalwas*) to the south in the Dongola Reach, or the Shendi Reach, or more rarely from outside the Sudan, from Egypt, Arabia, or even West Africa. For every ‘successful’ individual

emigrating from the Mahas, making a reputation and founding a centre of religion in central Sudan, there were others moving within the region, as well as non-Mahas immigrants arriving, settling and becoming Mahas. Local followings were also secured, but not of a type to earn a mention in the *Tabaqāt*. We have, for example, a series of ancient *qubbas* and shrines at Shadda (fig. 2), in the central part of the Mahas, reputed to have been a centre of pilgrimage for the whole region in the nineteenth century and probably long before. The identities of the holymen buried there however, interestingly known only by Nubian names, are now no longer clear.



Fig.2 Early tomb of Mahas holyman ('Martinassi') at Shadda

Oral traditions may also, on occasions, add something to the canonical written sources. It is noticeable that the original homes of so many of the great holymen seem not to have been recorded for posterity. While a Mahas origin and genealogy may be noted, links with specific places do not seem to have been recorded, or at least do not seem to have made it into the histories. Within the local traditions of the Mahas region, these emigrants are also rarely visible, although we occasionally catch a glimpse of some of them. Within the general archaeology we may also begin to something of the background from which they came. One local tradition, for example, suggests that Idris wad al-Arbab's family may be linked with a settlement at Jebel Kadamusa, just north of the Third Cataract (Edwards and Osman 2000). Following recent work, this site emerges as a potentially very interesting, and certainly unusual settlement, displaying a distinctive range of very late medieval/early postmedieval material culture, as well as an apparently Islamic cemetery with unusual tomb forms. The available dating evidence would also place its occupation probably in the fifteenth, or early sixteenth centuries. As yet this is one of the very few sites in the region which currently can be dated to this period in which the first Mahas *fugara* were appearing in the central Sudan, but suggests there may be scope for investigating the origins of such diaporas.

Turkiyya

Another area we may consider is the archaeology of the Turkiyya, the Turco-Egyptian colonization and rule of the Middle Nile from 1820 to 1885. This period is of central importance in the development of the modern Sudanese state, in beginning processes of geographical expansion and definition which established the form of the modern state. The period also sees the Middle Nile becoming engaged, really for the first time, in processes of 'modernization'. At one level we can identify processes of global capitalist development impinging on the region. At the same time, however, this global framework may be balanced by the presence of the Ottoman Empire which, even at this late date, still retained some of its influence as 'its own World Empire' (Baram and Carroll 2000).

Economic changes were also being accompanied by new forms of government and order. While the exploitative character of Egyptian rule has been quite well documented (e.g Björkelo 1983), that this should not be seen as a purely local, colonial phenomena could be further explored. The experience of the Sudan during the nineteenth century cannot really be detached from larger-scale processes effecting Egypt, and the Ottoman Empire as a whole, during this period. From the later eighteenth century the increasing incorporation of Egypt into European world trade was becoming evident (Crecelius 1981), and by the early nineteenth

century Egypt was largely producing commodities, notably cotton, for European consumption. Muhammed Ali, conqueror of the Sudan, was also instigator of far-ranging series of 'modernizing' social and economic reforms in Egypt (Mitchell 1988, ch.2). The period which saw the colonization of Sudan was also one of a new engagement of government in the processes of production. In Egypt, these were replacing earlier models which had been largely extractive, with attempts to "discipline, coordinate and increase what were now thought of as the 'productive powers' of the country" (Mitchell 1988: 35). Across Egyptian society, new disciplinary mechanisms were appearing, building on military reforms - the *nizam jadid*, the 'new order' - begun at the same time as the conquest of the Sudan. With the Egyptian conquest, historical records improve markedly. There is increasing official documentation as well as unofficial accounts from a small but growing band of foreign observers, notably Europeans working for the government or making their way as adventurers, often engaged in trade of one form or another (Santi and Hill 1980).

Turkish rule also had a considerable impact on the settlement landscapes of the region, with the founding or revival of settlements as regional and local administrative centres, military bases and trading and market centres. However, as yet there has been little attempt to record or investigate the built-heritage of this period, although some early interest was shown by O.G.S Crawford (1953). Much of what remains is fast being eroded; one notable provincial example is the town of Al-Khandaq, in the Dongola Reach (el-Zein 2000). Largely depopulated today, the abandoned shell of the nineteenth century town is still an imposing monument to the Turco-Egyptian government of the nineteenth century, but is fast decaying. Its mosque which remains largely intact is a rare example of early nineteenth century mosque architecture.

Local manifestations of this period are clearly highly variable. In more isolated regions the government presence may often have been slight. Written sources, however may not be very informative, and local studies are required to further investigate this. Areas of Nubia north of the Third Cataract, in the Mahas region, very rarely appear in histories of this period. The local population had offered no resistance to the initial invasion of Ismail Pasha's army in 1820-21 and subsequently remaining relatively isolated from most of the major political dramas of the period, as a relatively thinly populated rural area. In histories of the Turkiyya (e.g. Hill 1959), northern Nubia rarely appears except as lying on the route between Egypt and central and southern Sudan. However, current work is beginning to expose what appear to be often turbulent local histories during this period which actually have much in common with those of better-researched areas of central Sudan. Some official presence seems to have been installed at Kokke, the seat of the Mahas Mek. This is represented by a large fortified compound (*diffi*), known locally as the 'Eshlaag', built close to the 'palace' *diffi* of the local Mahas meks. Beside it a mosque was built (fig. 3), reputedly the oldest in the region, dated by one inscription to 1828-99 (fig. 4).



Fig.3. Turkish Mosque, Kokke



Fig.4. Turkish inscriptions from the Kokke mosque

In other parts of the Middle Nile we may find evidence for the concerns of the government to be engaged with the processes of production, with a number of initiatives of both direct and indirect involvement in promoting economic activity. Early industrial ventures included soapworks, indigo workshops and gold washings, notable examples of the latter were the gold extraction plants established up the Blue Nile at the end of the 1830s. Another prominent area of government economic policy may be found in the encouragement of indigo-growing and processing, following Muhammed Ali's establishment of a government monopoly in 1824. In Egypt, Armenian specialists were imported from Bengal to oversee the development of new factories. (Balfour-Paul 1997) and factories had certainly been established in the Sudan by the 1830s. As in Egypt, farmers were forced to cultivate indigo, along with other crops like cotton. As in Egypt, these measures inspired huge resentment and often active resistance. Desertion of the land and even revolts was a common problem in Egypt (Rivlin 1961) as it was in central Sudan (Bjørkelo 1983).

The location of a number of the nineteenth century indigo factories can be established from documentary, although more detailed information on them is scarce. While apparently more common in central Sudan, a number were established in the north, in the Dongola Reach. The presence of one indigo factory was noted at al-Khandaq in 1834 (Santi and Hill 1980: 45) while another, probably the northernmost in the Sudan was operating at Mushu, just south of the Third Cataract (Hoskins 1835). An 'industrial archaeology' of such enterprises is still to begin.

If the Turkish government made relatively little positive impact on the local economy of the Mahas region, the more general influx of Egyptian and other minor craftsmen in the wake of the Turco-Egyptian army does seem to be reflected in a number of families of craftsmen and traders who arrived in the region in the nineteenth century. One of these was a family of potters whose descendants were still active in the late twentieth century. Working as travelling craftsmen, they seem to have been able to meet most of the local needs for pottery over most of the Mahas and Sikoot area. Their assimilation into the Mahas community, becoming Nubian-speaking and effectively becoming Mahas (although not acquiring land rights) also provides another interesting example of the ever-changing composition of Mahas ethnicity.

Another area where Mahas Nubia shared in the wider experience of the Middle Nile in this period seems to have been in relation to the an ever-increasing tax burden. The area seems to have suffered from the relatively high rates of *saqia* and land tax imposed on Dongola province, markedly higher than those in Berber province (Hill 1959: 41). These new taxes inspired an armed revolt in April 1833, of which we have a near first-hand account provided by Hoskins (1835), an English traveller passing through the area. While a relatively minor affair for the government, significant numbers of Mahasi, running into hundreds, seem to have been killed during its suppression, a loss of life likely to have caused major social disruption in their communities. About the history of the revolt, its suppression and aftermath, very little information seems to survive in total traditions. Indeed the identity of its leaders, and where they came from remain unclear, although some links with the local elites and the Mahas *mek* seems likely.

As well as direct resistance, the increased taxation appears to have caused significant disruptions to land-holdings during the Turkiyya as elsewhere in the Sudan. One effect seems to have been a decline in cultivation. In both Berber Province and Dongola Province there seems to have been a significant decline in

the number of saqias by the time of the Mahdist revolt. In Berber numbers may have fallen from an estimated 3,500-4000 to 3,000, while in Dongola the estimated 5,250 which were worked at the time of the conquest had declined to some 3,590 by the 1870s (Bjørkelo 1983: 143). No figures exist for the Mahas region, but it is unlikely that the region was unaffected by this process. More generally, the Turkiyya does seem to have been a period of considerable upheaval and insecurity. What oral traditions do record is that excessive taxation was responsible for effectively dispossessing many individuals, who were forced to relinquish their claims to saqias for which they couldn't afford to pay the taxes. In several instances, while researching settlement histories, we encountered family traditions recording ancestors who had been forced to abandon their lands and relocate to found new settlements during this period. Their lands were often then acquired by others more able to meet the tax burden. It seems likely that in these uncertain times, many families will have prospered while others were dispossessed. The latter may have included many who chose to leave their homeland, joining the *jellaba* and other adventurers who were seeking new opportunities on the expanding frontiers of the state.

It was within this context that we see one of the most prominent markers of this period appearing in the settlement landscape, in the form of fortified *diffi* houses (fig.5). These seem to represent a relatively distinctive regional form of architecture, mainly found in Mahas and Sikoot Nubia. While some fortified sites are certainly significantly older, it seems that a large proportion of surviving *diffi* represent houses constructed during the Turkiyya. As fortified enclosures they probably well-reflect the insecurity of the period. They may also be seen as relating to those who still managed to survive and perhaps prosper during the Turkiyya. Unlike many, their owners retained enough property to warrant such protection. Why they are such a feature of the Mahas-Sikoot landscapes and not other areas of northern Sudan as yet remains unclear. That their distribution falls very much within the Ottoman frontier zone may well be significant and needs further investigation.



Fig.5. 19th century Diffi in Mashakeila (Mahas)

Whether this period saw other significant changes to the composition of local communities remains less clear. This may also have been the period where slaves were becoming more abundant in the region as slave-trading and slave-owning became more widespread, although soldiers and other household slaves seem to have been present among the Kokke 'kings' and others of the local elite in earlier times. Hoskin's account of the Mahas revolt in 1833 notes the presence of many slaves, or ex-slaves, among prisoners captured by the government forces (1833:241) and they also figure in other early accounts of the region, such as Burckhardt's (1819). Recent work has also identified a number of communities of ex-slaves, liberated at the start of the Condominium (Muhammed Jelaal pers.comm).

The issue of slaves may in turn draw us to other interesting questions relating to the fast-expanding trading and other networks developing during the Turkiyya. Following the final collapse of the Funj state, the Turco-Egyptian government was responsible for major changes in trading relations in the region, especially with regard to the Upper Nile. While the eighteenth century seems to have seen the final erosion of the royal monopolies on long-distance trade (Spaulding 1985), the new regime brought new trading imperatives linking in to ever wider world markets, as well as government attempts to assert new controls on trading activities.

The expansion of such activities into southern Sudan was one major development following the exploratory voyages made up the White Nile by Salīm Qapūdān during 1839-42, which seem primarily to have been interested in assessing the commercial possibilities of the region. However, as the century progressed, private trading expeditions greatly increased, in the hands of growing numbers of northern *jellaba* traders, many encouraged to seek new opportunities on the state's peripheries due to repressive conditions at home, as well as small numbers of European adventurers, interested mainly in slaves and ivory. With attempts to control the slave trade during the later nineteenth century, the major exports were increasingly ivory and gum Arabic, while textiles ('Manchester Goods') seem to have been the major import (Santi and Hill 1980: 3), reflecting changing conditions in Egypt.

Trade up the White Nile was operating in a non-monetary market and beads seem to have been the primary exchange item, although cowries also acted as a form of currency in some areas, as in Kordofan. As in other parts of Africa, the appearance of a wide range of new 'fashion items' along the Upper Nile is likely to be the most obvious indicator of the huge quantities of ivory extracted during the nineteenth century (Lonsdale 1992). Large quantities of imported beads, mainly from European factories seem likely to have transformed 'traditional' bead usage in the Upper Nile. Rare first-hand accounts of the mid-nineteenth century, such as that of J.-A. de Vaissière (Santi and Hill 1980) give us some insights into the variety of trade beads, as well as their exchange value: an elephant tusk might be had for 2 pound of blue glass beads and 4-5 pounds of glass trinkets along the Upper White Nile in the mid-1850s.

Some of the significance of beads in this region in the more recent past has already begun to be explored in ethno-archaeological studies (Kleppe 1982, 1986). It is certainly an area of research with considerable potential for development, for example in tracing longer-term patterns within the bead culture of the Upper Nile. Something of the 'trajectory of meanings' followed by trade goods can be seen in action during the nineteenth century. De Vaissière observed in early 1854 at one stop on a trading voyage: "there has been a popular revulsion against glass beads. The matrons and local lordlings have decided that glass beads, previously cherished as fashionable, were no longer good taste. This means that we have as good as nothing to offer them in exchange of tusks .." (Santi and Hill 1980: 142). As more traders entered the Upper Nile region, different types of beads swiftly passed from the highly desirable back to the realm of more everyday things, losing their value as goods for barter. From a longer-term perspective, some of these nineteenth century trade goods may have continued to play a role into recent times. Among some Dinka groups, for example, antique 'guen-jang' beads, types "selling during the Turkish Rule" have maintained a considerable value as items of personal property: "since its source of production have become extinct it has become so precious that no one can correctly state its value" (Makec 1986: 129).

Elsewhere we get hints of differing local tastes, suggestive in terms of the material representation of identity during this period. De Vaissière also recorded how: "the Galla [Mangala] ask for round, red glass beads, cowries .. the people of the Lokkaia mountains want instead bracelets of red leather and dada of the kind called *franji*, while the Bilin ask only for *keri* or round, black and white, glass beads.." (Santi & Hill 1980: 150). The great importance of personal adornment as markers of social identities has previously been discussed by Mack (1982) amongst others. It is interesting to reflect, however, on the extent to which imported trade goods, especially beads, may have vastly enhanced the possibilities for personal decoration during the nineteenth century. Changing styles of 'traditional' Lotuxo or Didinga coiffure, for example, traceable from the 1860s (Mack 1982) may ultimately be seen as part of networks of relationships linking them with 'jellaba' or European traders, all the way back to the Murano bead factory in Venice. One by-product of Europeans' insatiable demand for ivory in the nineteenth century may have been an explosion of elaboration of personal adornment in these far distant regions.

Mahdiyya

The Mahdist era (1883-98), which saw the expulsion of Turco-Egyptian colonial government, forms an interesting and potentially distinctive period, one which saw considerable social upheaval as well as economic change, accompanying a political revolution. The strong military character of the Mahdist state also left its marks on the landscapes of the Middle Nile. The new state order which emerged and was maintained by the Khalifa is now commonly represented, and celebrated, as an early manifestation of Sudanese nationalism. Behind such popular representations of this period what is often much less apparent is that alternative histories may be found, in many parts of the Middle Nile, of those for whom the Mahdist state was alienating and oppressive, and a new form of internal colonialism (Johnson 1993, 2003). Material traces of the Mahdiyya still survive in many parts of the region, if now being fast eroded and they, together with oral traditions, certainly have the potential to provide us with many different histories of this crucial period which still remain largely undocumented.

One obvious feature of the Mahdist period which awaits archaeological investigation is its legacy of military sites. At the centre of the state there are the fortifications in Omdurman – Khartoum, elements of which still survive (Fitzenreiter 2000). To these may be added relatively high-profile sites which often appear in histories of the period, such as the Mahdist gun positions on the Sixth Cataract, still quite well-preserved in the 1970s (al-Sanjak 1978). Important garrison settlements also existed in many areas, with notable examples in the north being at (New) Dongola, Firka and Saras. The one at Dongola is believed to have disappeared between the modern town, although at least one aerial photograph from the 1930s exists (Edwards 1996). Elements of the garrison settlement at Firka may still survive while contemporary photographs may exist; the Breasted archive in Chicago, for example, holds a photograph of the ‘dervish village’, apparently still largely intact, taken in 1907 (Oriental Institute 2003)

Again, the possibilities for exploring the archaeology of this period in a more systematic way have become apparent during recent work in the Third Cataract region. Field survey has identified a number of sites which seem to have served as Mahdist stations for managing transport and river traffic passing through the Cataract region, linking the northern frontier garrisons with their sources of supply in the Dongola Reach and central Sudan. The largest of these was probably the substantial fortification on Jebel Wahaba overlooking the Kajbar cataract. This may have been the post of the Mahdist ‘agent’ al-Safi walad Hajj Abdallah in 1886, who appears in Babiker Bedri’s rare first-hand account of this period (Bedri 1961: 52-3), and later Uthmān al-Azraq, according to local tradition. Within the cataract zone itself are a number of simple stone enclosures which, according to oral traditions, were part of a system of outposts which provided safe accommodation and fodder for passing Ansar.

As oral traditions also make clear, in many areas there was considerable local resistance to the Ansar presence and especially their requisitions, often leading to bloodshed. Several areas seem to have seen open fighting between the local inhabitants and Ansar groups, often with some of the larger *diffi* serving as defensible refuges. Fear of Ansar ‘tax-collectors’ (e.g. Bedri 1961: 44-5) also encouraged the hiding-away of valuables; old storage pits, located in isolated areas, are often linked with this period. At the local level, traditions associated with individual *diffis* and their owners also help to show some of the diversity of local experiences during this period. Some were temporarily abandoned by families, including the Mahas *mek*, who fled to Egypt, only returning after the Reconquest. More rarely, oral tradition and written accounts of the period come together. Babiker Bedri recounts an encounter in 1886 with one ‘Fadl Shanbū’ in ‘a village in the Mahas country west of Dalqu’, whose house with ‘a spacious yard’ was later pillaged by Walad al-Nujūmī’s army (Bedri 1961: 48). In 2000, the *diffi* of Fadl Shambo was identified, still standing in the village of Turaa’, near Kokke (fig.6).



Fig.6. Diffi Fadl Shambo - Turaa' al-Mahas

Local resistance notwithstanding, local traditions also recall others who joined the Ansar army, fighting in the north. Following the destruction of Walad al-Nujūmī's army at Toshka, we also find survivors of his army and their dependents settling in the region, as is also reported in the Batn el Hajar (Adams 1977: 630-31).

Sudanic links

A rather different feature of the postmedieval period is the incorporation of the region into wider social networks, not least through a new mobility based on Islamic pilgrimage. Trans-Sudanic routes were one important element in these networks, bringing parts of central and northern Sudan in contact with populations from central and western Sudanic Africa. Of these, one important group have been Hausa/Fulani locally known as 'Fellata' groups. Early manifestations of such movements seem likely to have been focused more on caravan routes linking West Africa and Egypt rather than the central Sudan (Levtzion 1986), although some West African 'Takruris' may have passed taken more southerly routes through Chad, Darfur and Kordofan. Such movements seem to have markedly increased during the late nineteenth century, one result being the establishment of significant settlements in a number of localities in central and eastern Sudan, while more scattered groups and individuals, popularly labelled 'Fellata' settled elsewhere (Abu Manga 1999; Yamba 1995). Today the Fellata settlements are well-recognised and significant parts of the settlement landscapes in central Sudan. The extent to which West African cultural traditions are present are not well-documented. Many Fellata settlements eschew permanent houses, reflecting their status as pilgrims, although there are reported cases of mosques being constructed in the Gezira region in a typical West African style (Herman Bell pers. comm.; Yamba 1995:74).

Again, local studies in northern Nubia suggest that even this area was affected by such movements, certainly as early as the beginning of the nineteenth century, if not before. Endemic insecurity during the eighteenth century seems to have encouraged trading caravans to avoid the riverine route through Nubia. However, it still seems to have remained a route, albeit dangerous, for small-scale traffic. We find reports from 1813 of small groups of Takruri pilgrims going north to join Cairo Haj caravans (Burkhardt 1819: 45), some with reputation as *fuqara*. Such encounters do not seem to have been unique and similar groups were also encountered passing Akasha in 1821 by Linant de Bellefonds (1958: 10). Looking to oral traditions, there are interestingly some indications that some at least of these pilgrims also stopped and settled in the region. Genealogies recently collected in the Third Cataract region (in the village of Mashakeila) include at least one 'Takruri', known as 'Udul' who settled there, and whose tomb still survives, in the hamlet of Udulikki.

Wider global linkages

While the traditional political periodisations may prove useful in organizing some areas of research, there is also potential for looking beyond these to more generalized themes, operating on different time scales. During both the medieval and post-medieval periods we might choose, for example, to focus on changing agricultural regimes in the Middle and Upper Nile, notably with the spread of new crops coming both from the south and north (Rowley-Conwy 1989; Dirar 1993), as the region became part of new, and increasingly global linkages. Within a wider African context, some have become incredibly important. Maize, for example seems to have entered Africa in a number of different areas, probably appearing first as a niche crop within existing complex cropping systems. Through the twentieth century, however, it has developed into a mono-cropping grain staple in many countries, although its success within the Sudan in ousting existing staples seems to have been rather less than in most other parts of the continent.

While such crop histories have yet to receive much attention, we may already identify a few issues which need to be pursued. During the postmedieval period, those parts of Nubia at the extreme southern end of Ottoman domains on the Nile (Alexander 2000) are particularly well-placed for studies of the impact of new crops likely to be entering the Middle Nile, both from Asia and from the New World. While cobs of maize have been found in 'Ottoman' levels at Qasr Ibrim (Rowley-Conwy 1989) we cannot be more precise in suggesting a date for when this crop first made an appearance in the region, while how significant it may have become within Nubian agriculture in general, away from the Ottoman military posts, is unknown. That it developed no more than as a niche crop seems likely, and while still known in the area (Nobiin: *makaada*) it is rarely eaten. It was certainly not deemed an appropriate crop to replace existing grains (mainly wheat and sorghum) which were used for making fine flat breads (Nobiin: *kisra*) which seem to have been a staple form of food at least since the early first millennium AD.

The appearance of maize in other parts of the Sudan may be linked to other historical processes, not necessarily relating to the north. While recorded in Ethiopia as early as the seventeenth century, it only appears to develop as a significant crop in the highlands in the early 1800s, today being its most abundant grain crop. Other routes may have been followed into more southerly parts of the Sudan. Early travellers'

reports certainly indicate its presence in Sudanese Upper Nile by the mid-nineteenth century. Unlike northern Nubia, its presence there seems likely to link into East African developments. Following its introduction to the east African coast by the Portuguese in the sixteenth century, maize seems to have followed caravan routes into the interior, being well-established in garden agriculture of Ugandan kingdoms by the 1860s (McCann 2001).

Another significant alien introduction is tobacco, which also seems to have been widely grown, and used, in the region by the early nineteenth century (Burckhardt 1819). By the late nineteenth century it was quite widely grown in central Sudan, in Darfur, Kordofan, the southern Fung and Equatoria, as well as in Nubia (Bacon 1948). However, while probably entering the region with the Ottoman army, the history of its use and development as a local crop remains unknown. As yet unrecognized in archaeobotanical research in the Sudan, its spread can potentially be traced in the archaeology of clay pipes, known, for example in Ottoman sites in the north, but as yet not the subject of any systematic research.

We might also look at other important crops such as Okra (*Hibiscus esculentus*), an important food resource in parts of Sudan, and certainly a major element in the Nubian diet (Nobiin: *weka*) in recent times. Okra apparently originated in the 'Abyssinian' center of origin of cultivated plants (an area that includes present-day Ethiopia, Eritrea, and the eastern, higher part of the Sudan). However, little is known about its early history and distribution. If certainly present in Egypt by the medieval period, its earlier history there is still unclear.

Tracing the history of new foods, and new culinary culture may also reflect on questions surrounding the development of new identities in the region. The appearance of bread foods in Nubia during the early medieval period seems likely to have gradually displaced long-established use of grain for a repertoire of porridge and beer foodstuffs. It is traceable both in the spread of wheat from Egypt into northern Nubia, as well as the appearance of new ceramic forms associated with the preparation of flat breads/pancakes, in more southerly areas, adapted for preparing sorghum breads. In the post-medieval period, such changes may be linked with major political changes with the Funj state during the eighteenth century, where traditional elites were challenged and ultimately displaced by new Islamicised and Arabised elites, whose identities were linked with, among other things, the rejection of alcohol and the traditional beers. An association with a culture of wheat (and bread) among a new emerging class of powerful Islamic teachers and holymen was explicitly noted by Burckhardt (1819) when visiting central Sudan in the early nineteenth century. Similar patterns may also be seen elsewhere in Sudanic Africa where the spread of wheat and bread has again been associated with Arab-Berber influences in the west, favoured by merchants as well as local elites (Lewicki 1974: 39-41) developing new identities increasingly linked to Islam.

Over the long-term, this expanding frontier of wheat and bread, spreading from the riverine core has been a slow, and still incomplete process; but one with strong political impetus. Promoted at the expense of indigenous Sudanic crops and foodstuffs, this shift is a continuing leitmotif of processes (and rhetoric) of 'Development' and 'Modernisation' favoured by those with power, notably the urbanized, and often foreign, decision-makers, while also associated with the highly politicised 'Islamicisation' of the modern Sudan underway since the 1990s.

Conclusion

While the spread of Islam and its impact on social and political institutions is certainly one key theme in the archaeology of the postmedieval period in the Sudan, framing researching in this period as a whole in terms of an 'Islamic archaeology' is clearly very unsatisfactory. The spread of Islam in the Sudan, and the development of some of its more distinctively Sudanese manifestations is clearly of great importance, but is only one of many themes, albeit often interconnecting, running through the more recent history of the Middle and Upper Niles. If we focus on Islam, there is certainly much more for archaeologists to do than simply describe and record 'Islamic' monuments. Instead these may be explored within the context of a range of historical processes, in terms of shifting patterns in settlement, the development of new foci of religious and political power, and the development of broader social horizons, both within Africa and beyond.

The uneven spread of Islam, and its limited impact on large parts of the Sudan even today may also remind us of the need for regional and local archaeologies, which may capture something of the diversity of historical experiences. As historical archaeologists, working with documentary history as well as oral traditions, we may well produce very different histories, not least those concerned with conflict and resistance to the shifting power of the central riverine states. The need for such regional histories is perhaps most pressing on the

margins of the states, both to the west and east, but especially in the south of the Sudan, areas still largely marginal to the dominant historical narratives. However, as we are discovering in Nubia we can also find local histories, probably repeated in many parts of the riverine 'core', of resistance both to the colonial rule of the Turkiyya, and by many, to what probably appeared to be a new internal colonialism of the Mahdiyya.

Considerable other potential certainly exists for developing research in many of the common themes of historical archaeology currently being explored in other parts of the world. Archaeology has yet to make any significant contribution to our understanding of agricultural history in the Sudan, although we know that many new crops were coming into the region, from many directions over an extended period. The development of new trading conditions and new trade networks also remain largely unexplored, while there is certainly the potential for an 'industrial archaeology', linking with the forces for 'modernization' and 'improvement' within the Turco-Egyptian administration. Above all there is a need to establish dialogue between archaeology and other forms of historical enquiry.

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