SUDAN & NUBIA

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Front cover. Stone slab A3 used as a paving slab in Temple 4, Qasr Ibrim, showing Taharqa and Amun (photograph courtesy of F. Aldsworth).

Above. Frontal scan of lion head, Naga (Kroeper and Perzlmeier 2022, fig. 21, © Naga Project, 3-D scans by TrigonArt BauerPraus GbR).

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A hotel in modern Dongola and remains from Christian Nubia: the columns of Tabo Temple Church

Michael Zach



Figure 1. The four columns in Qaṣr aḍ-Þiyāfa car park in 2018 (photograph by R. Ruzicka).

In Sudan & Nubia 3 (1999), a note authored by Isabella Welsby Sjöström is dedicated to the travels to Sudan in 1906 and 1909/10 by the Egyptologist Frederick William Green (1869-1949), and was written on the occasion of the presentation of his 15 diaries to the British Museum by his son in 1998. The significance of Green's documentation concerning the relics of the ancient and medieval periods of Sudan was also highlighted by Vivian Davies in the 2013 Kirwan Memorial lecture, where he referred to selected objects recorded and sketched by Green during his journeys, tracing their present whereabouts, and delivering revised readings of inscriptions, therefore presenting a state of the art interpretation, published in Sudan & Nubia 18 (2014).

Remarkably, Isabella Welsby Sjöström (1999, 87, pl. 2) also published a photograph of two columns originating from a medieval Nubian church, standing by the river walk of modern Dongola. In her description she stated that according to Green they had been brought there from Argo Island. However, four more columns were re-erected in the courtyard of the Qaṣr aḍ-Ḍiyāfa hotel, where the present author came across them in February 2016. An additional column shaft is to be found in the courtyard of the adjacent school and several others, as well as bases and capitals, in the vicinity of the local National Corporation for Antiquities and Museums office.¹

¹My sincere thanks to Derek A. Welsby and W. Vivian Davies for their information and photos of the columns.



Figure 2. Two of the columns at Qaṣr aḍ-Ḍiyāfa in 2016 (photograph by M. H. Zach).

There seems to have been some kind of rearrangement of the four columns in Qaṣr aḍ-Ḍiyāfa, as in February 2016 they were located near the south-east corner of the courtyard, whereas two years later they flanked the corners of a roughly square-shaped plastered area in the centre of the hotel's car park (Figure 1). Another difference can be recognised when compared to the arrangement recorded in 2016, as only three were then equipped with capitals (Figure 2) in contrast to the re-arranged scenario. Comparison with photographs supplied by Vivian Davies reveals that one of the columns was dismantled and replaced by another one originally erected outside the hotel, identifiable by a modern sprayed graffito of the letter 'A' in red (Figure 3). It was combined with the capital originally lying to its front (also with a sprayed graffito), whereas its original capital was placed upon another of the columns at Qaṣr aḍ-Ḍiyāfa.

Green's stay in Dongola was on 4th January 1910, and in his unpublished diary he mentions:

'We went across the river today to see some inscribed stones and pillars belonging to a church which were brought from the island of Argo, somewhere in the centre I understand and therefore to the North of where we were at Tebo. We had the *felucca* belonging to the Mamuria or police office, put at our disposal and accompanied by the medical officer took ship a little to the N of the island in front of this place – We took nearly an hour to get across, landing at the house of the Engineer in charge of the new canal (Selima) which waters a large tract of land on the East bank. We had been told that the stones were in the house, but the engineer was away, and his deputy told us that they had been taken to Merowi.'²

Although several European travellers have visited Argo Island since 1821 and were fascinated by the two colossal statues lying in front of the Meroitic temple dating to the reign of King Natakamani in the

² I am most grateful to W. Vivian Davies for supplying me with the relevant excerpt of Green's diary and the permission to publish it.



Figure 3. Column standing outside Qaṣr aḍ-Ḍiyāfa in 2016, later removed to the car park (photograph by W. Vivian Davies).

mid-1st century AD (and also referred to other antiquities e.g., the statue of four baboons now in the Jebel Barkal museum), the existence of a church on the site was first proposed by Richard Lepsius. During his stay on 19th June 1844, he recognised a 'Coptic' column made of granite, used as doorstep in the house of a local official (Wreszinski 1913, 248).

Detailed research was not undertaken until the Swiss excavations at Tabo temple on Argo Island, which took place between 1965 and 1975. During the third campaign, the foundations of a brickbuilt church were unearthed, using the ruin of the abandoned Meroitic structure as its base. It was built in the court of the temple with its apse on the east side set into the doorway of the first pylon. Architectural elements such as a capital, lintels, door jambs, columns of the iconostasis and many fragments of window grilles were also discovered (Maystre 1969, 7 and 12; Maystre 1973, 198ff; Jacquet-Gordon 1999, 260). Since the activities concentrated on the temple, the remains dating to the Christian period were only poorly published and neither a plan of the

church nor documentation of the finds, except for the image of one capital, is available (Maystre 1973, pl. XXXVIIc). The only monograph so far is exclusively dedicated to the gilded bronze statuette of a Meroitic king identified with Arnekhamani on stylistic grounds, exhibited nowadays in the Sudan National Museum (SNM 24705; Maystre 1986). So it is not surprising that the church is only mentioned in the form of short notes in studies on Nubian Christianity, specifically church architecture, without further detail (Welsby 2002, 36; Adams 2009, 412, where it is designated 'Tabo temple church'; cf. also Edwards 1989, 109).

However, knowledge of the former existence of columns – even though of undisclosed date – at the site was still vivid when the British travellers George Waddington and Barnard Hanbury spent three days on the island (5th to 7th January 1821) during their journey to Upper Egypt and Nubia. They report: 'We had been assured that there were some columns in another part of the island, but after making every possible inquiry, and questioning, in particular, an old man, who had lived forty-five years there, and boasted to know every spot in the place, we were obliged to believe that our information had not been correct' (Waddington and Hanbury 1822, 243). If these columns can be identified with those now re-erected in New Dongola (supporting Green's commentary), we may propose a rough date for their transfer some time between the end of the 18th and the first two decades of the 19th century. The reasons for the move of the columns remain unclear.

Not unexpectedly, particular decorative elements of their capitals (especially the cross motif in the centre; cf. Figures 4 and 5), not encountered in Lower Nubia, reveal close parallels to Makurian churches (cf. Ryl-Preibisz 1986, 381 and fig. 2; Ryl-Preibisz 1990, figs 6, 10, 11, 16; Hafsaas-Tsakos and Tsakos 2016, 404, fig. 7), but are also attested in the Alwan capital Soba (Duemichen 1868, final plate entitled 'Aus einer auf dem Ruinenfelde von Soba am blauen Nil aufgefundenen altchr. Basilika'; Ward 1905, 140 ill. 3). Dating





Figures 4 and 5. Capitals from Qasr ad-Diyāfa car park (photographs by R. Ruzicka).

of the Tabo temple church and of the columns must await publication of the excavation report. The form and decorative style of the capitals was introduced towards the end of the 7th or the beginning of the 8th century (Gartkiewicz 1990, 189 ff; Ryl-Preibisz 1994, 262 and fig. 2).

Post scriptum

Experiencing the remains of Nubian churches either *in situ* or after having been transferred to museums in and outside of Sudan and Egypt to attract visitors and/or promote tourism, the question arises: what remains beyond archaeological attestation of cultural identity or academic discourse? Is there yet another contemporary approach in Sudan? The answer is yes, which the present author realised when passing a workshop manufacturing architectural elements north of modern Dongola. Though produced



Figure 6. Workshop north of modern Dongola (photograph by E. Cerny).

in a smaller size, copies of medieval Nubian church columns (without the cross motif on their capitals) nowadays serve as house decoration (Figure 6). This seems to be a regional phenomenon, and obviously reflects popular awareness of the local archaeological landscape.

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Sudan & Nubia

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Unfortunately small grants from the Society will not be available in 2023.

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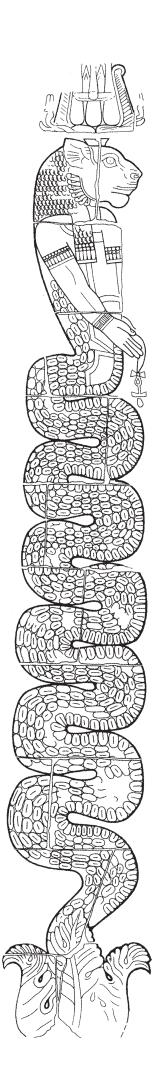
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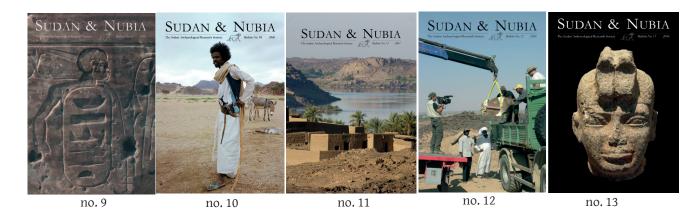
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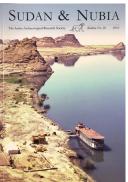
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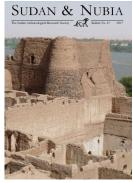






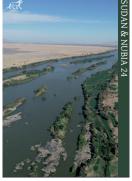


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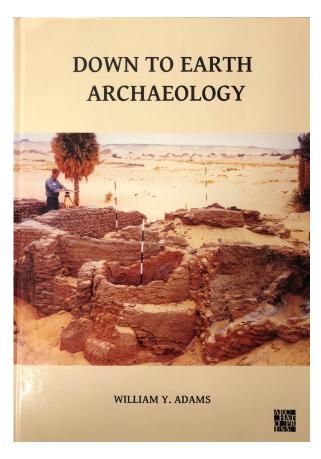
Down to Earth Archaeology

W. Y. Adams, 2022

244 pages; 29 figures, 23 plates, 1 map (colour throughout). ISBN 9781803272290.

This volume collects 16 archaeological papers by Professor William Y. Adams, written at various times during his lengthy and productive academic career for different purposes and for different audiences. They range from reflections upon the successes, failures and lessons learned from the UNESCO International Campaign to Save the Monuments of Nubia in the 1960s, to discussions and criticisms of the theoretical framework of 'New' or 'Processual Archaeology', as well as his work at sites such as Meinarti, Kulubnarti, Qasr Ibrim and Faras. This volume makes them available to a wider readershop and was described by the author as his 'dernières pensées'.

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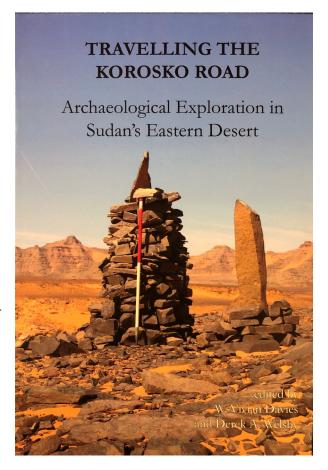
Travelling the Korosko Road. Archaeological Exploration in Sudan's Eastern Desert.

Edited by W. Vivian Davies and Derek A. Welsby, 2020.

252 pages; 493 plates, 74 figures (colour throughout). ISBN 9781789698039.

This volume publishes the results of archaeological exploration carried out during the last 30 years in the Sudanese Eastern Desert. It is divided into two parts; the first detailing the work by the Centro Ricerche sul Deserto Orientale (CeRDO) along the Korosko road between 1989-2006; and the second outlining a short season of documentation by the Sudan Archaeological Research Society in 2013.

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