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Front cover. Cattle and two goats\gazelle from Site GRD-14 in the Wadi Gorgod (photo Hamad Mohamed Hamdeen).

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Dialogue Community Project in Old Dongola (2019-2021)

Tomomi Fushiya

Introduction

The Dialogue Community Project in the Old Dongola area was instigated in February 2019 (Fushiya and Radziwiłko 2019), and two additional seasons were conducted as part of the Old Dongola project of the Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology, University of Warsaw (PCMA, UW). The two-year project was conceived with the aim of understanding the local values of Old Dongola, and to revitalise the archaeologist-community relationship in order to work together with local communities for sustainable, mutually beneficial heritage management and community development. It considers collaboration as a way to introduce a humanistic aspect and method in archaeology, and to contribute to decolonising Sudanese archaeology (McAnany and Rowe 2015).

The PCMA team has been excavating at Old Dongola, the capital of the Kingdom of Makuria, since 1964. It has investigated the history of the city, urban development, and churches and monasteries through material culture, iconography and inscriptions from the establishment of the capital in the 6th century AD to the 14th century AD. Over these 57 years, the team has communicated and engaged with the people living around the site, and provided various support to the communities, while the communities provided a workforce for the excavations. A community project was previously planned at the time when the conservation and stabilisation of the Mosque were undertaken (Obłuski *et al.* 2013). However, over the course of this long-term relationship, some mistrust emerged among some parts of the communities. Though we cannot point to a single cause, the fact that the excavations had largely focused on Christian heritage was certainly relevant. Old Dongola kept its importance in later periods after a Muslim member of the Makurian royal family took over the throne in the early 14th century AD, when it grew as a regional centre, and as the hub of Islamic teaching in northern Sudan. Presumably (see below), this is the period that the local Muslim communities could directly relate to. The Dialogue community project was initiated when the research foci at the site shifted to the post-Makurian period (see Obłuski and Dzierzbicka, this issue). Active engagement began with the residents of el-Ghaddar in 2019, and we have expanded our work to Bokkibol/Hammor in the 2021 season.

This article summarises some of the activities of the February 2020 and January–April 2021 field seasons, and the key achievements and lessons learnt in the last two years. Some other parts of the project will be published in the forthcoming Old Dongola archaeological reports. As it includes aspects that the author observed, the first-person singular form ('I') is used to clarify the parts of her observations.

The Old Dongola narrative

An important achievement over the last two years was the shift in the narratives of Old Dongola from a site to a landscape. Landscape here means a broad concept that encompasses the land, nature, human activities and consciousness, and is created by interactions of people with the place (Bender 2006). Thus, the introduction of the landscape concept adds the perspective of local residents and their interactions with the space and time. It locates Old Dongola in a continuous time where cultural and social activities take place from the past to the present, and within the space that is defined by use, meanings, and associated knowledge and practice of the local communities. It is a shift from understanding Old Dongola solely as an isolated space of the past, represented by excavated archaeological objects, structures, wall paintings and textual records (i.e. an archaeological site), to a space where values and meanings are attributed by different people (e.g. archaeologists, local residents, government) in contemporary society and forms part of the active social practice. What drove the shift was a clear recognition of the link



Figure 1. Mohamed Hassan and the author interviewed the residents in el-Ghaddar, the former teacher, Sati Mohamed Sati shared many local stories (image: PCMA, UW).



Figure 2. *Khalwa* of Suwar al-Dahab in Hila Dongola (image: PCMA, UW, Tomomi Fushiya).

between the site and the modern-day local communities. Old Dongola is a landscape that has been shaped by the economic, social and spiritual activities of people who lived, visited and controlled it for over 1300 years, and it is still evolving.

The numerous ongoing ethnographic studies, oral history collections, and the excavation of the Funj-period remains (see Obłuski and Dzierzbicka, this issue) shed light on different threads of connections between the site and different social and cultural practices of the communities. The interviews and conversations with the local residents in el-Ghaddar informed us that it is not an unfamiliar place (Figure 1). Rather, many people find a direct ancestral relationship with Hila Dongola (the so-called ‘Abandoned Village’), and the *shuyukh* (plural of *sheikh*) buried near the *khalwa* (Quranic school) in the village or under *qibab* (domed tombs) in the eastern (Muslim) cemetery of Old Dongola (Figure 2). Some buildings in Hila Dongola are owned, cared for and used for festive occasions by the descendants of the former residents who now live in el-Ghaddar, Bokkibul, Ghaba and other nearby villages. I was often told that many families in the village have their ‘own’ *qubba* (a domed tomb). This familial relation is maintained by a visit on festive occasions and by being a part of ritual processes. They – especially women – make a visit to the *qubba* of the ancestor of the family to ask for blessings (*baraka*) over a marriage, fertility, childbirth, or health issues. In el-Ghaddar, the visit to the ancestral *qubba* is also incorporated in a ceremony widely practiced in Nubia. *Youm al-arbaein* (the 40th-day ceremony) is the last of a series of ceremonies related to childbirth, practiced in different parts of Nubia, though its process, participants and/or offerings show some regional variations (e.g. al-Guindi 2005). Women and children in el-Ghaddar gather on the 40th day after childbirth at the house of the mother and newborn child, and go to the Nile where the mother washes her face and child’s face, and then some sweets and sorghum are offered to the angels of the river by elder women. The procession continues on to the eastern cemetery, and visits the *qubba* of the mother’s ancestor where the mother takes some sand from around the grave of the sheikh and rubs it on the neck and cheeks of her and the child. The accompanying women also take sand for *baraka* and they return home. After this ceremony, the mother and child are free to leave the room where they stayed for 40 days after the birth.

With a more tangible link, the farmlands just below the Old Dongola citadel are still tended by the local residents. The Nile provides an essential resource (drinking water and farming) and a means of



Figure 3. The settlement was developed facing the Nile at Old Dongola (image: PCMA, UW, Adrien Chlebowski).

transportation. Inhabitants of riverine northern Sudan have developed knowledge of how to maximise the resources for their livelihoods and economy (Figure 3). Cultivation of the low-lands on the riverbank (*jarf*land) and use of the islands for farming is part of such knowledge (Ryan 2017). The knowledge is, thus, certainly not specific to Old Dongola. However, the changing river flow and subsequent available river-side farmlands were an important reason that the inhabitants of Hila Dongola abandoned the former capital city and moved to other nearby villages (Figure 4). The history of Old Dongola is interlinked with the changing environment and associated knowledge and skills.

The ongoing excavation of the Funj-period remains further contributes to uncovering tangible evidence of the link between the past residents in Old Dongola and the living families in the surrounding area. For instance, a letter sent from King Kushkush was discovered in 2020 in a building, previously



Figure 4. The riverside land below the Citadel is still used for cultivation and herding animals (image: PCMA, UW, Tomomi Fushiya).

called the residence of *mekk* (king) (Godlewski 2018). The descendants of King Kushkush live in the locality; in Ghaba, the village across the river, and in Bokkibul, the village to the south of Old Dongola – one I spoke to told me the family is known as ‘the King’s family’ in the communities. In turn, the local knowledge has been contributing to identification of names, uses and materials of excavated objects, while the community members gradually realised and were proud that their knowledge and lifeways are useful to research the history of the site.



Figure 5. Discussions regarding the excavated objects between local people and archaeologists (image: PCMA, UW, Mateusz Reklajti).

The Knowledge Exchange sessions (a part of heritage *wanasa*¹), were organised to discuss the recently excavated objects. It was one of the opportunities where the existing local relations and value of the site were clearly pronounced and empowered the local communities (Figure 5). Several local people who showed interest and knowledge in the archaeological research and heritage during the interviews that I conducted were invited to the session, and they showed up with his/her friends, family and neighbours. The participating archaeologists selected the objects they would like to discuss with them (see also Obłuski and Dzierzbicka, this issue).

Integration of local knowledge and practice as part of the overall narrative of Old Dongola was also reflected in site tours. During a site tour for visitors, not only do the archaeologists speak about the archaeological aspects, but the local *sheikh* also explains important buildings and their history such as the *khalwa* in Hila Dongola and *qibab* in the eastern cemetery and their relationship to the modern



Figure 6. Sheikh Mohamed Sati Babiker guides the site tour for Sudanese archaeologists at the Hila Dongola (image: PCMA, UW, Tomomi Fushiya).

communities (Figure 6). This aspect should be further expanded in the future, to introduce intangible heritage (e.g. local myths, language, ritual and handicrafts) and other heritage locations shown by local guides. UNESCO's Khartoum office is currently supporting the collection of local stories around Old Dongola and this is being conducted by Baloula Mohamed Baloula Abbas. When the stories become available, they would be a great resource for tour guide training.

The landscape narrative is a key element for the nomination of Old Dongola as a World Heritage site. The site was previously described in the Tentative List (WHTL-652: <https://whc.unesco.org/en/>

¹ *Wanasa* is a Sudanese Arabic term that means an informal meeting or chat where friends and neighbours spontaneously gather and discuss issues such as community, family or social-economic matters in between jokes, gossip and stories. In this project, occasions of 'heritage *wanasa*' were created to build relationships with local residents and speak about heritage in a relaxed, informal atmosphere.

tentativelists/652/), submitted to UNESCO in 1994, with its significance largely formed by the remains and history in the medieval period (see Larsen, this issue). However, Old Dongola is a rare example of a continuously lived environment from the 6th to the 19th century, and is deeply associated with modern-day communities' knowledge and practice, including farming, Nubian language, and the use of natural resources and basketry production skills. This was discussed in the 'Validation Expert Meeting for Proposal of New Natural and Cultural Heritage Sites in the Sudan: Tentative List for World Heritage Sites', organised by UNESCO's Khartoum office, in January 2021, and further with the National Corporation for Antiquities and Museums (NCAM), and then during the Stakeholder Meeting for 'Heritage and Sustainable Development Strategy of Old Dongola' in February 2021 (see below, and Larsen, this issue). A consensus was agreed with the stakeholders that 'cultural landscape' is the most suitable category in which to nominate Old Dongola to the List.

Training Course

A nine-day training course on *Values-Based Heritage Management and Community Archaeology* was organised at Old Dongola from 23rd March to 2nd April 2021. Twelve postgraduate students from universities (Khartoum, el-Neelain, Bahri, and Dongola) in Sudan and employees of the National Corporation for Antiquities and Museums (NCAM) participated. The current situation in Sudan – looting, encroachment, development of tourism – requires an urgent improvement in heritage management for better protection and sustainable use of archaeological heritage. Community archaeology has become an important archaeological methodology in Sudan, and has already been embedded in some archaeological projects. Yet, these specialised fields are not included in the curriculum of the archaeological departments at the Sudanese universities. The training course was conceived as a response to the current lack of opportunities, and also as an opportunity to share the experiences of the PCMA Old Dongola mission.

The course was comprised of a site visit, as well as lectures, discussion sessions, group-work, presentations, writing a project proposal, a *wanasa* with the residents of el-Ghaddar, and running a community engagement programme. It covered a wide range of topics from heritage values, participatory heritage management, community archaeology, and World Heritage, to interview methods. The lectures also included videos to introduce case studies from different countries, which helped the participants to understand the topics better and enhanced the discussions. The course was given mostly in English and was translated by one of the course participants and NCAM inspector, Habab Idriss.

It was generally well-received by the participants, with comments such as it was a good learning opportunity, suggested a new way of practicing archaeology, and provided a better understanding of community archaeology. It was also an important opportunity for me to understand the degree of interest in and need for these subjects among Sudanese archaeologists and reconsider the activities of community engagement programmes. According to the course evaluation, a longer course (e.g. two weeks), and a follow-up course/workshop or continuation (e.g. yearly) of the course for different students was suggested by eight participants. In order to establish a longer-term course and be part of the archaeological curriculum in Sudanese universities, training for instructors would be an important next step.

A few also recommended increasing the involvement of local communities in the course, and wished to speak more with the elders and women in the communities. There were four sessions of *wanasa* with the Old Dongola Community Council of Archaeology and Tourism, and a group of women. The *wanasa* meetings were successful and beneficial for both sides. I found that the community's side was more relaxed and opinions were more freely shared with the Sudanese participants than with the archaeological mission alone. For instance, the Community Council shared their motivation, fulfilment with a new cooperation

Programme	Date	Main target/participants
Introductory meetings	Feb. 2019	The Old Dongola Unit; el-Ghaddar Women's Union; el-Ghaddar school teachers; Magauda volunteer group and school teachers
Open Day	Feb., Oct., Nov. 2019, Feb. 2020, Feb. 2021	All local people
Poster workshop	Feb. 2019, Feb. 2020, Feb. & Mar. 2021	El-Ghaddar, Bokkibul and Hammur primary school students
Public lecture	Mar. 2020, March 2021	Residents in el-Ghaddar

Figure 7. The community engagement programmes at Old Dongola (2019-2021).

with the Polish team, but also concerns regarding how to proceed with the tourism development and collaborative work, which is new to them. Unsurprisingly, the Sudanese archaeologists better understand the communities' ideas, concerns, and implications as well as the language. The participants provided practical advice, examples from other parts of Sudan, and suggestions as to how the Council's work could be better presented and conducted.

The participants also had direct engagement with local schoolchildren through a poster workshop. In the workshop, one participant led a group of four students, from a site tour through to making a poster. As one participant wrote in the course evaluation: 'I felt I did something good for [the] future'. It was a meaningful experience for them as an archaeologist to contribute to the society. At the same time, the local teacher found it efficient and more enjoyable for students to have Sudanese archaeologists working with the students. An increase in the number of Sudanese archaeologists and students involved as engagement facilitators and leaders could improve the learning efficiency of students, the empowerment



Figure 8. Tohamy Abugassim asks a local man questions. He supervised the survey team (image: PCMA, UW, Tomomi Fushiya).

of archaeologists, and perhaps reduce the image of archaeologists being (mostly) *khawajaat* ['white' foreigners] (Humphris and Bradshaw 2017; Näser and Tully 2019; Fushiya 2020).

Engagement programmes

The engagement programmes were designed for local residents to share archaeological information about Old Dongola, create opportunities to observe excavations, and to interact with archaeologists. Four programmes were implemented over two years (Figure 7). To evaluate the engagement programmes and other community activities, questions regarding the participation and

	Women	Men	Unknown	Total
Participated	11	22	2	35
Not participated	71	61	3	135
Unaware	2	0	0	2
No answer	11	6	0	17
Total	95	89	5	189

Figure 9. The second community survey showing the participation in an engagement programme and/or other activities organised by the PCMA mission.

the beneficial aspects of the programmes were asked as part of the second community survey (Figure 8). The survey was conducted² to determine whether there had been any changes or improvement in awareness and interest in heritage, archaeology and development from the first season of the community project (Fushiya and Radziwiłko 2019). Out of the 189 respondents (Women: 95; Men 89; No answer 5), 35 participated in at least one of the programmes and activities, 135 did not participate, while two respondents did not know about them and 17 did not answer (Figure 9). The participation, thus, was limited to about 19% of the respondents.

The participation of women was lower than men; however, this does not necessarily indicate less interest. There was a request from a group of women to organise a site tour because they were unable to attend on previous occasions, while when we organised the first Open Day, the word spread in the village that it was an event for women and many showed up (Fushiya and Radziwiłko 2019). Several reasons could explain the gender gap. Firstly, it is a mobility issue. Transportation is limited for women who do not drive. They have to either pay or ask a man who owns a car to drive them to the events. This was especially evident as many women who attended the site Open Days came by foot or in a pick-up truck full of people, while some groups of men showed up with a few friends by private car. Secondly, certain spaces are considered reserved for men or if men are present some women feel hesitant to attend. The end-of-the season lectures given by Dorota Dzierzbicka were held at a *nadi* – the community space where men usually gather in the evenings, generally not a space for women. The first Knowledge Exchange session featuring both men and women taught us that women found it uncomfortable to speak in front of men, especially older men, and the need to separately organise events for men and women was observed;

Site open day	28
Meetings	4
Discussion about excavated objects	3
Lecture	1

Figure 10. The engagement programmes and activities (multiple choice) participated in.

² The survey was conducted in five different areas of el-Ghaddar from 6th-15th February 2021 by Tohamy Abugasim Khalifa Altohamy, Abeer Babiker, Umm Salma Abu AlZine Mohamed, Wafa Ahmed and Manal Mohamed. Most of the questionnaire was created by the author and Katarzyna Radziwiłko in the 2019 season and some modifications and additions were made by the author for the second survey. The questionnaire was translated from English to Arabic by Mohamed Hassan Sied Ahmed and Tohamy Abugassim. 195 samples were collected and six were considered defective due to incomplete responses and were omitted from the analysis. A more detailed analysis of the survey is to be published in a separate article.

however, it did not mean women needed to be invited and consulted separately all the time. Three local women attended the Stakeholder Meeting (see below), and one of them led the discussion group on local tourism. After several *wanasa* with a group of women in el-Ghaddar, they often had practical ideas about how they could make a contribution to the communities and about what support they needed. It is important to have their presence and direct participation in the decision-making process concerning local heritage (Old Dongola).

Open Days

Open Days were organised five times in two years. One in November 2019 saw over 1000 people visit the site. The number of participants and repetition of the event was clearly reflected in the survey result (Figure 10). Among the respondents who participated in at least one programme, the Open Day was the most attended (28 people) while a smaller number attended the meetings (4), knowledge exchange session (3) and lecture (1). A large number of the respondents found the programmes to be a learning opportunity about Old Dongola and archaeology (Figure 11).

The event invited the communities to visit the site from 10am to 2pm, and, if interested, they joined a guided tour by an archaeologist from the Polish mission. The number of participants varied. Different methods of advertising the events were tested to find the most suitable method, such as individual phone-calls, mosques, posters on walls of shops and cafés in the market, and having a car with a loudspeaker that went around the village. Although these tools are often used to announce events or news in the communities, they were noted as insufficient, especially for reaching women. Participants instead suggested using a group function in a mobile application (e.g. Whatsapp), since the former Ghaddar Women's Union was well organised and active, and the network remains alive even though the Union was technically dissolved after the fall of the last regime. It can be a useful communication tool with women in el-Ghaddar, while announcements at the mosque seem to be efficient to reach men. The posters in the

I learned about Old Dongola	19
I learned about archaeology	9
What I learned strengthened my identity as Sudanese	3
I had an opportunity to speak with the archaeologists	2
I received information about the history of my local area from the archaeologists	2
I contributed to the archaeological research	1
I became more interested in local history	1
I became more interested in our heritage	1
I don't have any opinion	0
I feel proud of my area from the information I learned in the event	0
I had a good time in the event	0
I became more interested in archaeology	0
No answer	3

Figure 11. The benefits of participation (multiple choice).

Heritage Festival	72
Site Open Day	66
Public talk	25
Discussion and knowledge exchange with archaeologists	8
A short film	8
I have a suggestion	4
No answer	6
Total	189

Figure 12. Types of activities in which the respondents wished to participate.

market had little effect, and the Open Day in February 2021 advertised by the poster saw a small number (total 36) of participants,³ although the fuel shortage probably affected participation.

An Open Day has been held five times in the last two years, and remains a popular event among the communities according to the survey (Figure 12). This also means that the advertisement and the availability of transportation are key towards encouraging more participation. The survey result also indicates that on-site events that can be participated in with friends, neighbours and family are preferred. A Heritage Festival was suggested by community members as a future collaboration with PCMA. If the Covid-19 situation permits, a festival is planned for the winter of 2022.

Sustainable development and women's empowerment

There were two parts of the project that focused on sustainable development. One was the development of a sustainable development strategy around Old Dongola led by Peter Larsen (see Larsen this issue), while the other was the study of handicrafts and their potential to contribute to the local economy. After a survey, we focused on basketries for the handicraft programme. As previously reported (Fushiya and Radziwiłko 2019), some women in el-Ghaddar produce basketry out of dom and date palm fronds. The women's group identified skillful producers in the village who pass the skills to other women. Baskets are widely made by many women, so an increase in sales could bring many benefits. In addition to the practical aspects, basketry is an important heritage that is associated with other tangible and intangible heritage in Sudan and beyond. The skills and knowledge relating to date palm trees have been recently recognised as Intangible Cultural Heritage by UNESCO.⁴ Sudan has a great potential for tourism development through heritage. Identifying and cultivating existing skills and knowledge of handicrafts and their re-design for a commercial purpose would bring an economic benefit, and sustain traditions.

The biggest challenge to harnessing basketry for sustainable development is marketing and creation of a commercial channel. It is also important for the producers to know that their traditional skills and products are attractive for both international tourists and city-dwelling Sudanese. A perceived lack of demand is one of the reasons skillful women in Nubia have stopped producing handicrafts. I found a high-quality, well-designed *tabaq* (food cover) and *birsh* (mat) made in Tombos. However, the woman who made them no longer works in basketry, as no one was interested in buying them. Many basketries sold in Khartoum and the Omdurman market are made in Darfur, which has different designs and shapes from those from the north. Some shop owners I spoke to were interested in handicrafts from the

³ The advertising method is probably not the only reason for reduced participation, as the severe fuel shortage undoubtedly contributed. Only two cars showed up while the others came by donkey cart or foot to the Open Day of February 2021.

⁴ It is inscribed on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity as 'Date palm: knowledge, skills, traditions and practices in Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates and Yemen'.



Figure 13. Small baskets and covers (*tabaq*) made by women in el-Ghaddar were sold in Khartoum in 2020 (image: PCMA, UW, Tomomi Fushiya).



Figure 14. A variety of basketries made in el-Ghaddar (image: PCMA, UW, Tomomi Fushiya).



Figure 15. The House of Geiri was prepared for tourists, located between the palm groves and local houses. (image: PCMA, UW, Tomomi Fushiya).

workshop, Leila Osman and Jarfar Osman gave lectures on community tourism, its benefits and challenges, and provided ideas of a village-homestay and handicraft sales to recent university graduates, women and men in el-Ghaddar. This has further motivated the women by demonstrating how to make tourism beneficial for them through the skills they already have – basketry and cooking. There is also a need for tourist accommodation. Several tour companies I spoke to hope to have places to stay for their tour groups around Old Dongola, which would allow tourists to stay longer. With the support of the PCMA, a local house was renovated in 2021 to provide accommodations in el-Ghaddar (Figure 15). Furthermore, through their own initiative, the women’s group is currently preparing a semi-permanent space to sell their products near Old Dongola. Some professional help in product design and quality control would be helpful for the next step of this initiative.

Old Dongola – a contested landscape?

As part of the World Heritage nomination process, a management plan is under preparation in cooperation with NCAM and PCMA. A management plan has been previously formulated by PCMA, and it has been carefully reviewed to match with UNESCO’s World Heritage programme.

The current planning process is participatory, with a range of stakeholders and the Old Dongola *nafeer* (see Larsen, this issue) involved in decision-making and having responsibilities for the management and preparation of the plan. The local communities' participation and the meanings and values they attribute are crucial in the process. Integration of local perceptions could help in gaining their support and involvement, promoting sustainable management, and ethical practice; however, it would not be straightforward.

The efforts to integrate local perceptions subsequently poses questions that should be further explored, for which consensus needs be built among the stakeholders, including NCAM and PCMA (or the archaeological community in general). For instance, a seemingly simple question such as 'what to call the most prominent building in Old Dongola?' needs discussing. The last function of the building was a mosque, and the communal prayer during the *Eids* by local people still takes place outside the building. Yet, it is locally called '*kanisa* (church)' today and this goes back to at least the 19th century (Insinger 2004, 112). It has also been attested as a 'Throne Hall' (Godlewski 2013). A decision on how to label the building is relevant in order to respect the local use/view and visitor management. The Imam of el-Ghaddar takes off his sandals when he enters the prayer space in the upper floor of the mosque/*kanisa*, just like visiting any other mosque. Should all visitors take off their shoes when they enter the room?

One important question has not yet been explored at Old Dongola – what do the local Muslim communities think about the Christian heritage (churches, monastery, iconography) at the site (Figure 16)? When the project began, it was necessary to build trust between the archaeological team and the communities before this question was asked, particularly because there were rumours in the communities about the team, including that they were going to convert people to Christianity. For the archaeologists, these were totally baseless stories. Yet, it indicated that a scepticism towards the team existed in the communities. After two-years of engagement programmes, inviting them to the archaeologists' house, informal conversations and participation in communities' events, some of the team members – including myself, Zaki ed-Deen and Artur Obłuski - feel the most critical misunderstanding has been resolved and trust started to be firmly built during the 2021 season. This would not have been possible without the painstaking conversations and meetings that Zaki ed-Deen Mahmoud had with different parts of the communities, especially with the religious authorities. I was able to feel this reconciliation smoothed the conversations with community members and more frank, honest statements were heard. For instance, I was told what their



Figure 16. The participants in the Stakeholder Meeting visit the monastery (image: PCMA, UW, Mateusz Reklajt).

concerns were about interacting with the archaeological team in the past. From the next season onwards, more sensitive questions could be asked in interviews and *wanasa*.

The local perception of Christian heritage is an important research topic to explore by itself in relation to the concept of heritage and archaeology among the Muslim Sudanese communities (e.g. Näser 2019). However, this understanding has to be integrated in to the management plan – how to present and protect the site, and manage visitors. Such a conflicting situation

is not only found in Muslim societies but is seen in other non-western contexts. Participatory heritage management approaches that have been devised, such as the people-centred approach, call for the integration of knowledge, worldview, conservation and the management system of local communities, (Wijesuriya *et al.* 2016). Thus, the participation of local communities is essential to understand local values. It would facilitate heritage management concepts and methodology developed in western institutions in adapting to reflect the local context, and a more locally-embedded approach could be sought.

The knowledge and worldview of the local communities, Sudanese, or African-Islamic at large, can be different from the concepts of heritage and European conservation ethics that the conservation profession work within. These are potentially conflicting. The differences and conflicts of the Arab-Islamic worldview with the modern heritage conservation principle – which is often criticised as a material-centred, Eurocentric approach – have been pointed out (Mahdy 2020). Where a difference is expected, the need for an in-depth study of the heritage values in the specific context is even greater, and for heritage professionals to stay humble; ‘such differences should not be taken lightly, or be viewed superficially or with the assumption that they are due to carelessness or lack of education’ (Mahdy 2020, 138). Local participation and sharing the responsibilities of management and protection would create the foundations to build a consensus and integrate different perspectives into practice (Johnston and Myers 2016).

Future prospects

The Old Dongola Dialogue project was devised as a preparatory project for future collaboration projects with local communities. It included multifaceted activities and studies regarding heritage, archaeology and local communities conducted over a short period of time. Some areas of the study did not develop as much as had been expected, simply for lack of time. However, it allowed us to meet, interact and work with a wide range of people in el-Ghaddar and beyond – from schoolchildren, women, youths, different families, teachers, religious leaders, tourist police, to government officers of the Old Dongola Unit, el-Goulid County and Northern State. It provided the PCAM Old Dongola team with an overview of the communities, their interests and attachment to Old Dongola and heritage, and their views of archaeologists and international tourists. At the same time, it cultivated motivation among the local communities and they re-evaluated familiar heritage. Now they work on a new project – community-based tourism. The Old Dongola council of archaeology and tourism and women’s group have many different ideas about how they would like to protect their heritage and improve their lives through heritage-related opportunities. The two-year experience was certainly an asset for the next phase of the Old Dongola project.

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