

## No More Miracles: On the Origins and Futures of Nubian Studies

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ISNS Keynote

45-60 min: 5400–7200 words

Good afternoon, thank you for all being here.<sup>1</sup>

As we speak, the people of Sudan continue their daily struggle against a genocidal military regime that refuses to relinquish its stranglehold on power in the face of massive, courageous, and peaceful civil resistance. I want to acknowledge their struggle and sacrifice here today, and thank those colleagues attending from Sudan for their presence despite the turmoil in their home country. For all those who believe in the fearless pursuit of intellectual inquiry, there is no doubt that our solidarity ought to lie with the struggling people of Sudan and not with its military regime.

A few years before the beginning of the revolution, in February 2016, I gave my first lecture series on the Old Nubian language at the Linguistics Department of University of Khartoum at the invitation of department chair Abeer Bashir and Angelika Jakobi. At that point I was in the midst of writing my *Reference Grammar of Old Nubian*, which last year was published by Peeters. It was only upon arriving at the university that the cultural importance of these lectures dawned on me. [x] A celebratory procession had been organized with Nubian musicians leading the participants onto the colonial university premises. The welcoming lecture was held in Nobiin, the first time this indigenous language was spoken at an official occasion at the university. [x] An exhibit had been organized with publications about Nubia and Nubian language materials. The lectures themselves were a social event of the Nubian community in Khartoum, where discussion of grammatical aspects of Old Nubian was alternated with reflections on Nubian languages and customs by many of the attendees. This experience taught me the enormous importance of the Nubians themselves for the flourishing of Nubian Studies. So when Artur Obłuski and Robin Seignobos invited me to give another lecture series at the PCMA and

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<sup>1</sup> Many of the thoughts in this lecture were first formed in conversation with my esteemed colleague Alexandros Tsakos, who paid a heavy price for his outspokenness in defense of the Nubian people and lands. I owe him a great debt of gratitude. I would be amiss if failed to mention here my Nubian friends and colleagues, who have all contributed to my thinking and love for Nubia in immeasurable ways: El-Shafie El-Guzuuli and his family, Dimah Mahmoud, Arbaab Eujayl, Mazin Khalil, and Menna Agha. This lecture is dedicated to them.

IFAO in Cairo in 2019, I insisted that at least half of the students should be Nubians or Egyptians engaged with Nubian culture. This greatly benefited all those who participated.

Now that I find myself invited to present a keynote with a focus on the medieval, or rather Makuritan, period, I would like to take this opportunity to reflect on the state of the field of Nubian Studies itself from my own perspective as a specialist of the Makuritan Nubian language and with the experience of teaching it to and with the Nubian community. The origin of Nubian Studies is intimately linked to the Makuritan period. It is fifty years ago that the Faras Gallery in the National Museum was opened, at the occasion of the second ISNS conference, here in Warsaw. [x] The discovery of the Makuritan wall paintings exhibited in this gallery by the Polish archeological mission under the direction of Kazimierz Michałowski has very much shaped the field of Nubian Studies as we know it today. In fact, there have been claims that our scholarly field *originates* in the so-called “Miracle of Faras.” The iconography from the Makuritan period has retained its relevance today in practices of Nubian artists, as can be seen be Arbaab Eujayl’s adaptation of the blessing of Bishop Marianos featuring Hemedti as Virgin Mary blessing General Bourhan, and former Prime Minister Hamdok as his little child [x], and his more recent work integrating multiple iconographic lineages in his stunning illustrations of scenes from the Qur’an [x]

In recent years, Medieval Studies more broadly has become increasingly aware of its enmeshedness with fascist ideologies, as white supremacists in the United States and Western Europe weaponize medieval imagery, entering the scholarly debate as it plays out, in part, on social media. But not only white supremacists, also Islamist and Hindu extremists derive much of their imaginary and fantasmatic origins from what we can broadly refer to as the medieval period.<sup>2</sup> These developments have in turn cast a spotlight on how Medieval Studies as a discipline has its origins in the colonialist and racist epistemic frameworks of 19th-century scholarship. The main drivers of this awareness have been precarious and early career scholars, often of color, taking considerable risks in their own academic careers. Naturally, there has also been considerable resistance within the field against reckoning with its problematic foundations, unsurprisingly mostly from white, senior faculty with entrenched academic positions. What once again becomes clear is that our scholarship of the past is always a scholarship of the present. Our interpretation of the past is informed and inflected by the biases we hold as human

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<sup>2</sup> See Jonathan Hsy and Julie Orlemanski, “Race and Medieval Studies: A Partial Bibliography,” *postmedieval* 8, no. 4 (2017): 500–531 for many resources in a wide range of medievalist subfields.

beings alive right now, at this temporal juncture of climate collapse, a sixth extinction event, and the renewed rise of authoritarian regimes against a backdrop of collapsing liberal democracies and rule of law. It is through this lens of the wider debate in Medieval Studies that I now want to turn to Nubian Studies.<sup>3</sup>

The “Miracle of Faras”<sup>4</sup> and the origin story of Nubian Studies is deeply rooted in a history of colonialism, nationalism, and cultural genocide. In this story of the suffering of the Nubian people, we should be well aware of the choice of words here: “miracle.” A miracle is a discontinuity, an irruption and interruption of the present. A miracle has no causal relation to its context, spatial or temporal, and in that sense is by definition violent in nature. This word, “miracle,” thus powerfully captures and condensates the attitude of many in our field toward the political events in Egypt and Sudan: a complete dissociation of the present from the past. This dissociation manifests itself in how Nubian Studies frequently has disconnected the current carriers of Nubian culture and their political and social contexts from the past cultures in the Nubian Nile Valley uncovered by archeology and the very conditions of possibility of such an archeology. For these conditions of possibility are precisely predicated on the erasure of Nubian culture and heritage. [x]

The first Nile dam at Aswan was built between 1899 and 1902 under the British colonial occupation. This dam caused inundations along 200 kilometers of the Nubian Nile valley, destroying innumerable archeological, residential, agricultural, and burial sites without any precautions or considerations for their Nubian inhabitants.<sup>5</sup> In 1904, the Egyptian government took the decision to raise the dam. This time, several salvage-archeological precautions were taken. First, the Department of Antiquities ordered a consolidation and recording of all the major monuments, whose results were published as *Les temples immergés de la Nubie*. The required funds were gathered by Gaston Maspero, the Director-General of the Egyptian Antiquities Service.

The inventory made in *Les temples immergés de la Nubie* is extensive, and shows the attitude of the Antiquities Service toward the local Nubian population, which they systematically fail to connect to the

3 A brief overture may already be found in Catherine E. Karkov, Anna Kłosowska, and Vincent W.J. van Gerven Oei, “Disturbance,” *Disturbing Times: Medieval Pasts, Reimagined Futures*, eds. Catherine E. Karkov, Anna Kłosowska, and Vincent W.J. van Gerven Oei (Earth: punctum books, 2020), 15–25.

4 The first reference to this phrase is in an article by G. Gerster in the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* of October 13, 1962.

5 Jean Vercoutter, “L’archéologie nubienne et soudanaise: Passé, présent et futur,” in *Egypt and Africa: Nubia from Prehistory to Islam*, ed. W.V. Davies (London: British Museum Press, 1991), 1–4, at 3.

heritage sites. Maspero himself considers Nubia to be a “desert basically without population or culture, where it’s difficult to recruit workers and where it’s embarrassing to feed those brought from elsewhere.”<sup>6</sup> [x] Howard Carter writes in his 1901 report about the temple of Kalabsha: “As the approach to the temple is a *fine example*, both as to preservation and building, it is *essential* to do something. Upon the latter there are many native houses, and saggiehs, etc., that want removing.”<sup>7</sup> The report of A. Basanti of the actual consolidation work on the temple only briefly mentions a squad of workers who in 1907 “threw down the ruins of modern houses that cluttered the surroundings.”<sup>8</sup> What happened between 1901 and 1907 to turn “native houses” into “ruins of modern houses” remains unexpressed. Nubian concerns were clearly irrelevant. [x]

The second project ordered by the Egyptian government was an archaeological survey of Nubia managed by the Survey Department, which was entrusted to Harvard University and the Boston Museum of Fine Arts and to be headed by the US Egyptologist George A. Reisner. William Adams called Reisner the “mythological father” of the so-called “enlightened colonial paradigm,” characterized by a “persistence of 19<sup>th</sup> century racism and of the colonial mentality.”<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, as recently as 2018, Lawrence M. Berman called Reisner unreservedly “a man of lofty principles and uncompromising high standards.”<sup>10</sup> Recent attempts at critically reviewing Reisner’s heritage, such as Elizabeth Minor’s article “Decolonizing Reisner,” do so while affirming him as “one of the founding fathers of Nubian archaeology.”<sup>11</sup>

At the time of Reisner’s appointment, Egyptology itself was struggling with its identity, as the 19<sup>th</sup>-century development of *Altertumswissenschaft* and Classical Studies had ejected Egypt from the center

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6 Gaston Maspero, *Les temples immergés de la Nubie: Rapports relatifs à la consolidation des temples, tome premier: Texte* (Cairo: IFAO, 1911), xix.

7 Ibid., xii.

8 Ibid., 61.

9 William Y. Adams, “Paradigms in Sudan Archaeology,” *Africa Today* 28, no. 2 (1981): 15–24, at 18. See also Bruce G. Trigger, “Paradigms in Sudan Archaeology,” *The International Journal for African Historical Studies* 27, no. 2 (1994): 323–45.

10 Lawrence M. Berman, *Unearthing Ancient Nubia: Photographs from the Harvard University–Boston Museum of Fine Arts Expedition* (Boston: MFA Publications, 2018), 13.

11 Elizabeth Minor, “Decolonizing Reisner: A Case Study of Classic Kerma Female Burial for Reinterpreting Early Nubian Archaeological Collections through Digital Archival Resources,” in *Nubian Archaeology in the XXI<sup>st</sup> Century: Proceedings of the Thirteenth International Conference for Nubian Studies, Neuchâtel, 1st–6th September 2014*, ed. Matthieu Honegger (Leuven: Peeters, 2018), 251. This is an adoption of what Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang refer to as decolonization as metaphor, as proper decolonization work in Nubia would entail the repatriation of all Nubian artifacts and a return of the Nubians to their ancestral lands. See Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, “Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor,” *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1, no. 1 (2012): 1–40.

of European civilization to the margins on account of its unacceptable African nature.<sup>12</sup> While Egyptology fell prey to the rise of racist and eugenicist arguments that whitewashed Classical Studies,<sup>13</sup> it tried to establish itself as legitimate discipline by in turn recasting the ancient Egyptians as explicitly “white.” In order to do so, any “Black” aspect of Egyptian culture had to be rejected, and Nubia itself had to be relegated to the backwaters of cultural borrowing, copying, and the absence of any form of originality.<sup>14</sup>

Reisner’s records of his archeological discoveries are indeed structured by the doubly racist attitude of an Egyptologist deprecating Nubia and a Western colonialist dealing with “locals.” In fact, Reisner imagines a static, unchanging continuity between the communities whose buildings, artifacts, and burials he excavates and the Nubian population living among them:

I take my picture of the time largely from Lower Nubia as it is to-day, living its isolated, primitive agricultural life in political security, relying for its few luxuries on the sale of dates, goats, and basket-work, and on its income from servitors in the employment of Europeans. The population is now, I imagine, much the same in numbers, and much the same in culture, as it was then. The largest centers of population had then, as now, a few Egyptian officials, bullying the local inhabitants and cursing their place of exile. The imported objects were largely Egyptian [...]. But the local culture, which has produced none of these things and is incapable of producing or even fully utilizing them, still remains practically late neolithic in its conditions of life. I take it that a race which cannot produce or even fully utilize the products of higher culture must, from an historical point of view, still be counted in its former state. The evidences of the fortuitous possession of the products of a higher culture only deepen the impression of cultural incompetence.<sup>15</sup>

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12 See Martin Bernal, *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization*, Vol. 1: *The Fabrication of Ancient Greece 1785–1985* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1987) for a sweeping overview.

13 See the work of Uroš Matić, for example “De-colonizing the Historiography and Archaeology of Ancient Egypt and Nubia. Part 1. Scientific Racism,” *Journal of Egyptian History* 11 (2018): 19–44.

14 Some of this much mirrored some of the attitudes the ancient Egyptians themselves held toward their Nubian neighbors. See Stuart Tyson Smith, *Wretched Kush: Ethnic Identities and Boundaries in Egypt’s Nubian Empire* (London: Routledge, 2003).

15 George A. Reisner, *Excavations at Kerma: Parts I–III* (Cambridge: Peabody Museum of Harvard University, 1923), 7.

That this conception of Nubia as cultural wasteland has continued to dominate the field of Nubian Studies is also clear from the writings of the figure who has dominated Makuritan Nubian studies for most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, my predecessor Gerald M. Browne, who wrote in 1985:

But Egypt, at least in the areas responsible for the production and diffusion of texts, must have been more cosmopolitan and sophisticated than Nubia. [...] Cultural wastelands can often be conducive to the refinement of intellectual pleasures: faced with a bleak and dismal landscape, the mind seeks solace within itself, and the gentle art of philology – as I have learned from practicing it in an area culturally not unlike Nubia – is a remarkably effective anodyne for boredom and despair.<sup>16</sup>

Reisner's views, usually referred to euphemistically as the "diffusion hypothesis," represent the most extreme form of the dissociation of Nubian cultural heritage from the Nubians, in the sense that *not even Nubian heritage of the past belonged to those who actually produced it*.

Although these early missions set the tone for Nubian Studies, it was only with the construction of the High Dam that the salvage-archeological core of our field became firmly established. In 1959, the decision to forcibly evacuate the villages along the Lower Nile Valley was taken, which led to extensive demonstrations in Wadi Halfa and elsewhere in Sudan that were repressed by the imposition of martial law,<sup>17</sup> while at the same time the High Dam project was perversely marketed as "married" to Aswan, here depicted as stereotypically Black woman. [x] This clearly marks the dam project also as the product of racist policies. Also in 1959, the Egyptian Minister of Culture made an appeal for aid to UNESCO, upon which its Director-General called for an international collaboration.<sup>18</sup> The resulting campaign became the largest salvage-archeological campaign ever undertaken, with a record number of countries, institutes, museums, and universities participating. Even though some of these had previous experience in Nubia, many had not, thus leading to a massive reorientation of scholars from

16 Gerald M. Browne, "Old Nubian Philology," *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 60 (1985): 291–96, at 296. See also Vincent W.J. van Gerven Oei, "The Disturbing Object of Philology," *postmedieval* 5, no. 4 (2014): 442–55, at 451.

17 Isma'il Hussein Abdalla, "The Choice of Khashm al-Girba Area for the Resettlement of the Halfawis," *Sudan Notes and Records* 51 (1970): 56–74; Wendy M.K. Shaw, "In Situ: The Contradictions of World Heritage," *International Journal of Islamic Architecture* 6, no. 2 (2017): 339–65, at 355–56.

18 Louis-A. Christophe, "La campagne de Nubie," in *Actes du Symposium International sur la Nubie, organisé par l'Institut d'Égypte et tenu au siège de l'institut les 1er, 2 & mars 1965* (Cairo: L'Institut d'Égypte, 1969), 10.

Egyptology, Coptic philology, classical archeology, and adjacent fields toward Nubia, all of course bringing with them their respective theoretical outlooks.<sup>19</sup>

Following the appeal of UNESCO, the Sudanese government approached the Polish Centre for Mediterranean Archaeology (PCMA) in Cairo in the summer of 1960 to participate. Kazimierz Michałowski, then director of the PCMA, chose Faras as his site, basing his selection on “little known excavation reports” of Francis Ll. Griffith which suggested that the site “had played an important role in the history of Ancient Egypt, and later in that of Christian Nubia.”<sup>20</sup> It is noteworthy that Griffith’s excavations had not touched the main mound (*kôm*) of Faras, considering that Nubian still lived on the site in a village called Farasin Diffi (“the settlement<sup>21</sup> of Faras”).

Reisner, when excavating the Semna East fortress, had “found a Nubian village built of Twelfth Dynasty bricks inside the fortifications. He compensated the villagers, destroyed their huts and re-used the bricks to build his campsite.”<sup>22</sup> In the 1960s, however, the political situation had changed. As the forced relocation schemes set up by the government were already underway,<sup>23</sup> the evacuation of the village had become less problematic. So the Sudanese state evicted the Nubians from Faras, expropriating a site inhabited for millennia. It is shocking to read the violent casualness with which the forced removal of the Nubian village is described:

So when I decided to take up excavations at Faras, I immediately asked Dr J. Vercoutter, then director of the Department of Antiquities in Khartoum [...] to evacuate this modest peasant

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19 Kazimierz Michałowski, “Introduction,” in *Nubia: Récentes recherches: Actes du Colloque Nubiologique International au Musée National de Varsovie* (Warsaw: National Museum, 1975), 7–8, at 7: “plusieurs chercheurs, dont l’activité auparavant restait dans le cadre d’égyptologie, de la philologie copte et de l’archéologie, même classique [...] s’adaptèrent et concentrèrent leur attention et celle des équipes auxquelles ils étaient liés sur les problèmes de la Nubie.”

20 Kazimierz Michałowski, *Faras: Wall Paintings in the Collection of the National Museum in Warsaw* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Artystyczno-Graficzne, 1974), 63–64.

21 I use the neutral “settlement” here to translate *diff* since the Nobiin word can refer to a broad range of settlement sizes. For example, Constantinople, Rome, and Qasr Ibrim were all considered a *dippi* in Old Nubian. See Gerald M. Browne, *Old Nubian Dictionary* (Leuven: Peeters, 1996), 46, s.v.  $\Delta\bar{\eta}\eta$ .

22 Rex Keating, *Nubian Twilight* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1962), 40. One wonders what actual “compensation” was offered in these cases, if at all.

23 See Mohamed Fikri Abdul Wahab’s euphemistically titled “Problems of Nubian Migration,” in *Nubian Encounters: The Story of the Nubian Ethnological Survey 1961–1964*, eds. Nicholas Hopins and Sohair Mehanna (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2010), 227–36 for a particularly propagandistic account.

settlement in order to be able to excavate the whole area of the hillock. This request was granted.<sup>24</sup>

With their eviction forced upon them, it is not surprising that the villagers from Faras weren't very keen to assist in the dismantling and excavation of their former habitat, as Michałowski remarks: "The inhabitants of the Faras village and the surrounding settlements didn't display any zeal to take up the spade for an expedition unknown to them."<sup>25</sup>

[x] But not only was Farasin Diffi expropriated at the stroke of a pen, the more recent archeological layers were immediately dismantled without further study to get to the interior of the mound.<sup>26</sup> Once the murals on the inside of the cathedral were discovered, this specific, Makuritan layer of architectural finds, already surmised by Griffith, became the primary focus of research. [x] The local Nubians, whose ancestors had painted the beautiful murals, were ignored when it came to dividing them between Warsaw and Khartoum:

The division of the finds which closes an excavation campaign is a difficult job for the head of the mission. For as the objects are discovered and become at once the object of study, are inventoried and documented, every archaeologist quite unconsciously becomes attached to them; *he considers them his own*. At Faras this took on a special meaning because of the exceptional value of the finds. The division was carried out on the spot.<sup>27</sup>

The discovery of the murals from Faras brought the UNESCO campaign into broad public view, while also essentially reframing Nubia from neglected Egyptian and Egyptological backwater to medieval Christian bulwark, a shift in identity that those who self-defined as Nubiologists were all too eager to embrace, as it appeared to provide a clean break from the racist narrative that up to then had dominated the nascent field. The Nubians, however, were not in the position to profit from any of this.

24 Michałowski, *Faras: Wall Paintings*, 64.

25 Kazimierz Michałowski, *Faras, die Kathedrale aus dem Wüstensand* (Zurich: Benziger Verlag Einsiedeln, 1967), 14: "Die Bewohner des Dorfes Faras und der umliegenden Siedlungen legten keinen Eifer an den Tag, für eine ihnen unbekanntes Expedition den Spaten in die Hand zu nehmen."

26 Michałowski, *Faras: Wall Paintings*, 64: "There was no question of beginning 'at the beginning' that is from documentation and dismantling of the ruins of the [Ottoman] citadel and the [Coptic] monastery, for it was imperative to know first what surprises might be concealed in the interior of the mound on the slopes of which remnants of the mudbrick walls of old building were protruding from the sand."

27 *Ibid.*, 68–69. My emphasis.



Immediately after their discovery, some of the murals from Faras were put on display in exhibitions in Warsaw (December 1962) and Villa Hügel in Essen (May 3–August 15, 1963), before traveling onward to Zurich, Vienna, and Paris as part of the *International Coptic Exhibition*. They were then displayed in the main UNESCO Hall in Paris as proof of the success of the campaign in Nubia. A larger collection traveled subsequently, under the exhibition title *The Miracle of Faras*, to Berlin, Essen, The Hague, Zurich, and Vienna.<sup>28</sup> [x] Eventually, one part of the paintings became permanently exhibited in the Faras Gallery at the National Museum of Warsaw, while another part was put on display at the Sudan National Museum in Khartoum. The second exhibition at Villa Hügel in Essen was accompanied by a scholarly conference between May and September 14, 1969. According to Michałowski, “one of the results of this conference was the decision to found a new branch of science called Nubian Studies and comprising all the historical questions concerning Nubia,” with a coordination center to be set up in Warsaw “in view of the fact that the most valuable set of historical monuments and extensive documentation of the finds were in [Polish] possession.”<sup>29</sup> Thus the ISNS was formally established. In a later publication, Michałowski shifts the origin of Nubian Studies from Essen to Warsaw, while continuing to emphasize Nubiology’s supposedly medieval Christian roots: “Nubiology, the new discipline whose birth is directly linked with Warsaw, puts the issues of Christian Nubia at the forefront.”<sup>30</sup> [x]

During the 1980s, however, when the salvage-archeological missions had been completed and the scholarly impact of the hastily uncovered remains of Nubian cultures, of a variety and complexity far beyond the discoveries of Christian cultural artifacts at Faras, became more apparent, a different consensus emerged, namely that the origins of Nubiology should be rather linked to the UNESCO salvage-archeological campaign as a whole, and thus with the construction of the High Dam and ensuing destruction of the Nubian lands. For example, J. Martin Plumley, director of the Egypt Exploration Society excavations at Qasr Ibrim, states that “It is one of the ironies of history that the events which have brought about the almost total destruction of Egyptian Nubia and a large part of Sudanese Nubia have also resulted in the recovery of much of the history of those regions which might

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28 Michałowski, *Faras: Wall Paintings*, 7–8.

29 *Ibid.*, 8.

30 Kazimierz Michałowski, “Avant-propos,” in *Nubia Christiana* (Warsaw: Akademia Teologii Katolickiej, 1982), 5–6, at 5: “La Nubiologie, discipline nouvelle dont la naissance est étroitement liée avec Varsovie, met au premier rang les questions de la Nubie chrétienne.”

otherwise have remained for many years largely unknown.”<sup>31</sup> A few years later, Helmut Satzinger is even more explicit: “After all, the sinking of a thousand-year-old cultural landscape has – a small consolation? – ultimately resulted in the emergence of a distinct historical discipline called ‘Nubiology’.”<sup>32</sup> This revised origin story has now also been embraced by the ISNS, which states on its website: “Modern Nubiology was born in the early 1960s, when an international salvage campaign was launched by UNESCO to save the monuments of Lower Nubia being flooded by the construction of the Aswan High Dam and the creation of Lake Nasser.”<sup>33</sup>

Indeed, salvage archeology continued to be an important component of our field, as the Sudanese Bashir dictatorship came up with their own neo-colonialist, extractivist dam projects, such as the Merowe Dam at the Fourth Nile Cataract, which by now again has flooded much of historically Nubian lands and cultural heritage after a process marred by human rights violations.<sup>34</sup> In their account of the Humboldt University archeological mission, Cornelia Kleinitz and Claudia Näser state that “The apparently close association of the archaeological missions with the increasingly unpopular dam authorities became one factor in alienating local communities from the salvage project,” which was perceived as “divorced from their needs and interests.”<sup>35</sup> Furthermore, “Due to language and other communication barriers, and perhaps lack of interest, the archaeological community [...] was largely unaware of the extent to which their work and associations alienated the local people.”<sup>36</sup> Henriette Hafsaas, who was among the founding members of the Committees for Preserving the Middle Nile,<sup>37</sup> is more critical, concluding that archeologists “still lack a self-reflexive critique that would involve a deconstruction of the Merowe Dam Archaeological Salvage Project – its truths, motives, knowledge, and power relationships.”<sup>38</sup> Her conclusions are as correct as they are damning:

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31 J. Martin Plumley, “Nubia: A Retrospect,” in *Nubian Studies: Proceedings of the Symposium for Nubian Studies, Selwyn College, Cambridge, 1978* (Warminster: Aris and Phillips, 1982), 1–5, at 1.

32 Helmut Satzinger, “Review of Gerald M. Browne’s ‘Griffith’s Old Nubian Lectionary’ and ‘Chrysostomus Nubianus,’” *Bibliotheca Orientalis* 43, nos. 1/2 (1986): 104–8, at 104: “Das Versinken einer vieltausendjähriger Kulturlandschaft hatte immerhin – ein kleiner Trost? – letztlich das Entstehens einer eigenen historischen Disziplin ‘Nubiologie’ zur Folge.”

33 “About ISNS,” *International Society for Nubian Studies*, <https://nubianstudies.org/>.

34 A particularly damning account is given by Nicholas Hildyard, “Neutral? Against What? Bystanders and Human Rights Abuses: The Case of the Merowe Dam,” *Sudan Studies* 37 (2008): 19–38.

35 Cornelia Kleinitz and Claudia Näser, “The Loss of Innocence: Political and Ethical Dimensions of the Merowe Dam Archaeological Salvage Project at the Fourth Nile Cataract (Sudan),” *Conservation and Management of Archeological Sites* 13, nos. 2–3 (2011): 253–80, at 260.

36 *Ibid.*, 261.

37 See European Committee for Preserving the Middle Nile, “Petition to Stop the Dams in Sudan,” *African Archaeological Review* 29 (2012): 1–5.

It is a global problem that archaeologists conduct their business as if they are not implicated in the representations and struggles of living people. In this way, we ignore the ethical dimensions of our work and hide behind research agendas and scientific objectivity [...]. The idea that our work is retrospective rather than prospective and passive rather than active needs to change [...].<sup>39</sup>

This scholarship shows a growing awareness of the complicity of archeology in these inevitable post-colonial dynamics, and we can point to recent community archeology projects, such as developed by Tomomi Fushiya in Old Dongola for preliminary ways of mitigating them,<sup>40</sup> yet as Jane Humphris, Rebecca Bradshaw, and Geogg Emberling point out, “Compared to some other regions of Africa, community-based approaches in Sudan seem to have lagged behind.”<sup>41</sup> [x] We should also mention projects such as NubiaFEST and The Nubia Initiative, which have been actively connecting scholars of Nubia with Nubians, leading for example to the groundbreaking work of the “Geri Fai Omir” project, developing a proper Nubian typeface and releasing for children’s books in Nubian languages and Arabic. [x]

However, the failure of other scholars such as Derek Welsby, who indignantly decry their expulsion by local populations as “vandalism of the highest order” and “wanton disregard,”<sup>42</sup> despite the fact these people are desperately struggling for their livelihoods, shows that the powerful forms of projection engrained in generations of imperialist and colonialist exploitation die hard. We should also not fail to mention here that Welsby was publicly lauded for this position during the closing session of the 2010 ISNS conference in London. All of this begs the question, as Hafsaas wondered already more than a decade ago, why the ISNS has not yet established a clear Code of Ethics, following the example of other scholarly organizations, such as the Society of Africanist Archaeologists.<sup>43</sup>

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38 Henriette Hafsaas-Tsakos, “Ethical Implications of Salvage Archaeology and Dam Building: The Clash between Archaeologists and Local People in Dar al-Manasir, Sudan,” *Journal of Social Archaeology* 11, no. 1 (2011): 49–76, at 67.

39 Hafsaas-Tsakos, “Ethical Implications of Salvage Archaeology and Dam Building,” 68.

40 Tomomi Fushiya and Katarzyna Radziwiłko, “Old Dongola Community Engagement Project: Preliminary report from the first season,” *Sudan and Nubia* 23 (2019): 172–81.

41 Jane Humphris, Rebecca Bradshaw, and Geoff Emberling, “Archaeological Practice in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Reflecting on Archaeologist-Community Relationships in Sudan’s Nile Valley,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Ancient Nubia*, 1127–47, at 1131. They also provide an overview of other recent community-archeological projects.

42 Derek Welsby, “Dams on the Nile: From Aswan to the Fourth Cataract,” *Sudan Studies* 37 (2008): 5– 18, at 14 and 15.

43 Hafsaas-Tsakos, “Ethical Implications of Salvage Archaeology and Dam Building,” 68. See “SAfA Bylaws and Policies,” *Society of Africanist Archaeology*, <https://safarchaeology.org/SAfA-By-Laws>.

As the academic byproduct of cultural genocide and the forced expulsion of at least 100,000 Nubians from their ancestral lands,<sup>44</sup> Nubiology is fundamentally uncertain and anxious about its complicity in the havoc wreaked by the High Dam's construction, a complicity that has been made explicit, for example, by Ali Osman when he stated that

There is no doubt in our minds and sentiments that the building of the High Dam was a selfish political and cultural aggression mounted by the non-Nubian governments of Egypt and the Sudan against the peaceful Nubians of historic fame and cultural innovation. This aggression was made more bitter and sour by the international response which lamented the Nubian artifacts and not the Nubians themselves.<sup>45</sup>

Indeed, when we return to the UNESCO campaigns, the Nubian people themselves are conspicuously absent from the excavation narratives, and it often seems as if in the archeological imaginary Nubia was already empty when the archeologists arrived, as if no inhabitants were present in this perfect archeological *tabula rasa*. As William Carruthers states, “The Nubian campaign ignored the people who lived in the region, even as they lived their lives around the ancient remains located there.”<sup>46</sup> If Nubians are figured at all, then largely as anonymous “workers” assisting in the unceremonious excavation of their own ancestors’s abodes and remains, or, as in the case of the Faras excavations, as an inconvenience to be removed before the research can start in earnest. Alternatively, Nubians are treated as “living excavation sites,” objects of anthropological study seemingly without any form of agency. They are portrayed as musealized beings, fixed in time and space just like the monuments that surround them. For example, photographer Rex Keating, in his publication *Nubian Twilight*, describes how “The rising waters will destroy [...] a unique open-air museum containing scores of ancient monuments, [...] and people whose customs and way of life have persisted from antiquity,”<sup>47</sup> “one of

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44 Thayer Scudder, *Aswan High Dam Resettlement of Egyptian Nubians* (Cham: Springer, 2016), 1.

45 Ali Osman Mohamed Salih, “Nubian Culture in the 20th Century,” in *Nubian Culture Past and Present: Main Papers Presented at the Sixth International Conference for Nubian Studies in Uppsala, 11–16 August, 1986*, ed. Thomas Hägg (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1987), 419–31, at 421.

46 William Carruthers, “Records of Dispossession: Archival Thinking and UNESCO’s Nubian Campaign in Egypt and Sudan,” *International Journal of Islamic Architecture* 9, no. 2 (2020): 287–314, at 288. See also his forthcoming *Flooded Pasts: UNESCO, Nubia, and the Recolonization of Archaeology* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2022).

47 Keating, *Nubian Twilight*, 15.

the few places on the face of the Earth which has not been sullied by the hand of man.”<sup>48</sup> Nubia, the photographer tells us, is “a land where time is suspended.”<sup>49</sup>

The reality, of course, is rather the contrary: Nubia has been inhabited by humankind for thousands of years and shows every sign of continuous human intervention. Keating’s words invoke a timelessness often attributed in colonial, orientalist narratives to non-Western people, untouched by history, yet – to the white Western gaze – at the same time its origin. Thus the nationalist infrastructural project of the Aswan High Dam, funded with money from (former) colonial powers is reframed as a mythical relation between Egypt and Nubia, their destinies eternally bound together, “even to this day when Nubia is to be destroyed so that Egypt may live.”<sup>50</sup> The dehumanization of Nubians at work in Keating’s book reaches a tasteless apex when he relates the harrowing details of a daily confrontation between a Nubian elder and a Spanish archeologist: [x]

An amusing indication of how Nubians feel about their forebears was provided by the Spanish Expedition from Madrid who were digging an early C-group cemetery among the scattered houses of a modern village. Each morning with unfailing regularity an old woman appeared on the dig to lay claim to the property of her ‘ancestors’ as she described these people who died at least 4,000 years ago. She demanded half of all the pots and human remains found, ‘but you can keep the cattle horns.’ She could be silenced only by the leader of the expedition, Dr Blanco y Caro, demanding that she, in return, pay half the cost of running the expedition (*Plate 80*).

The photograph, entitled “the morality of excavation,” shows a Nubian woman, dressed in black, at an excavation site in conversation with Blanco y Caro.<sup>51</sup> She sits on the ground as he has come down onto one knee, hat and notebook in hand, as if to hear her words better. The woman – who remains unnamed – is talking with intent, her hands gesticulating. The caption states that she is claiming “half the remains, pots and other objects discovered in the surrounding tombs of the C-group people, her ‘ancestors’.”<sup>52</sup> Keating’s quote marks around “ancestors” and his usage of the adjective “amusing” are

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48 Ibid., 17.

49 Ibid., 33.

50 Ibid., 19.

51 Also discussed in William Carruthers, “On Irrigation, Ecology, and Disaggregated Pasts in Nubia, *Fragments*, November 17, 2018, <https://williamcarruthers.wordpress.com/2018/11/07/on-irrigation-ecology-and-disaggregated-pasts-in-nubia/>.

52 Ibid., 96.

telling; they openly doubt the woman's claim to her land and her heritage, as if her narrative, the lived narrative of her people, would be questionable in the face of an abstract archeological classification: "C-Group." In a recent article, Rennan Lemos refers to the same quote from Keating and affirms that "such an attitude that disconnects past and present is further reinforced by certain historical narratives that little take into consideration the present-day nature of historical/archaeological naratives, despite cultural practices that connect past and present today."<sup>53</sup>

This is a clear illustration of what Menna Agha has called Nubian archeology's "commitment to necropolitics, which requires *me* to die (material and or social death) for *them* to be able to tell *my* story uninterrupted."<sup>54</sup> Blanco y Caro wields his "scientific" knowledge of the C-group over the Nubian woman's claims to ancestry and silences her, while she is already subjected to social and material death by the impending inundation of her lands and livelihood to the benefit of capitalist and nationalist exploitation typical of a necropolitical regime, which Achille Mbembe calls "a sacrificial economy, the functioning of which requires, on the one hand, a generalized cheapening of the price of life and, on the other, a habituation to loss."<sup>55</sup>

What appears from the scant references to Nubian people in the documentation of the UNESCO campaigns is, to put it mildly, rather damning to the entire enterprise. As Carruthers has pointed out, colonial practices pervade the archive of the UNESCO campaigns, which "disaggregat[ed] past from present and future" and "was intended to coalesce around certain visions of ancient Nubia that would give historical basis to the two newly independent nations."<sup>56</sup> This necropolitical disaggregation of the Nubian people from their heritage was to have far-reaching consequences, as it became the basis for an institutional definition of "world heritage,"<sup>57</sup> in which archeological heritage is decontextualized from people whose history it represents. [x]

The nation-building exercise that the UNESCO campaign had become, using ancient Nubia as historical prop rather than lived reality, eventually led to the attempt to erase Nubia wholesale from the

53 Rennan Lemos, "Can We Decolonize the Ancient Past? Bridging Postcolonial and Decolonial Theory in Sudanese and Nubian Archaeology," *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* (2022): 1–19, 13. DOI: 10.1017/S0959774322000178. Lemos's article only appeared after I had finished writing this lecture, so unfortunately I was unable to incorporate many of the other important points he makes.

54 Menna Agha, p.c. My emphasis.

55 Achille Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, trans. Steven Corcoran (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019), 38.

56 Carruthers, "Records of Dispossession," 299, 288.

57 *Ibid.*, 299.

study of the Lower and Middle Nile valley. In 1989, a brigadier general of the Sudanese army, Omar al-Bashir, led a military coup that ousted the elected government of Sadiq al-Mahdi and established himself as ruler of Sudan. This had an immediate effect on Nubiological discourse. Whereas in the decades preceding the coup the research object of anyone studying the area upstream of the First Cataract had been called Nubia, the scholarly discourse now slowly, albeit it not decisively, started to pivot towards “Sudan Studies.” The new emphasis on “Sudan Studies”<sup>58</sup> can be read as a direct response of the scholarly community to the changing political narratives in the region, possibly motivated by a desire to keep access to the country by recasting the object of their research from “Nubia,” which had become politically suspect within the newly created Islamist, Arabized, nationalist context, to “Sudan.” At the same time, this pivot from Nubia to Sudan was facilitated by precisely locating the origin of Nubian Studies in the Makuritan, “Christian” period; as it extended its temporal scope, Nubian Studies could more easily loosen its connection to “Nubia” as classificatory term.

The first scholarly fallout of the Bashir coup can be located in the proceedings of the 7th Congress of the ISNS in Geneva, 1990, where we find a session on the “neolithic and protohistory of *Sudan and Egyptian Nubia*.”<sup>59</sup> The shift in nomenclature here is subtle but innovative. The same proceedings also feature a paper by then director of the Department of Archaeology of the University of Khartoum Ali Osman, titled “Nationalist Archaeology: The Case of the Sudan.” The same archeologist who at the previous ISNS congress in Uppsala had denounced the “selfish political and cultural aggression” against the Nubians<sup>60</sup> now fully erased Nubia from his presentation, aligning himself with the nationalist policies of the new ruler: “The Sudan is an African-Arab country. This is a fact of life. [...] As far as the Sudanese people are concerned, their country is African and Arab culturally and philosophically.”<sup>61</sup> The adjective “Nubian” is only introduced in conjunction with “Christian” and basically relegated to the past when he states that the Sudan “is not Afro-Arab and it became so toward the end of the Nubian-Christian period of its history.”<sup>62</sup> In this new narrative, the Makuritan period is

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58 An eponymous journal had been released since 1987 by the Sudan Studies Association (in 2016 renamed Society for the Study of the Sudans UK) focusing largely on non-Nubiological research.

59 Charles Bonnet, ed., *Études nubiennes: Conférence de Genève. Actes du VIIe Congrès international d'études nubiennes 3-8 septembre 1990, Volume I: Communications principales* (Geneva, 1992), 237-73. My emphasis.

60 Salih, “Nubian Culture in the 20th Century,” 421.

61 Ali Osman Mohamed Salih, “Nationalist Archaeology: The Case of the Sudan,” in *Études nubiennes: Conférence de Genève. Actes du VIIe Congrès international d'études nubiennes 3-8 septembre 1990, Volume I: Communications principales* (Geneva, 1992), 225–36, at 226.

62 Ibid.

recast from a foundational period for Nubian Studies to an inconvenient footnote in a narrative of progressive Islamization and Arabization of Sudan since Late Antiquity.

The British Museum, a major cultural institution of Sudan's former colonial occupier which to this day has an abominable track record with regard to its colonial legacy,<sup>63</sup> played a key role in adhering to the Sudanese nationalist demand to pivot from Nubiology to Sudan Studies. It led in the establishment of the Sudan Archaeological Research Society (SARS) in 1991, which, according to its website, "provides a focus for anyone interested in the archaeology of Sudan and Egypt south of the First Nile Cataract."<sup>64</sup> [x] This ideological pivot from "Nubia" to "Sudan" is also echoed in a 1991 British Museum/Egypt Exploration Society catalog with the curious title *Egypt and Africa: Nubia from Prehistory to Islam*. Not only does the main title suggest that Egypt itself is not part of Africa, the subtitle adds further confusion as to the precise relation between Nubia, Egypt, and Africa. A similar uncertainty colors the introductory contributions to this catalog, published at the occasion of the inauguration of Raymond and Beverly Sackler Gallery of Egypt and Africa,<sup>65</sup> which prominently included the discoveries made by the Egypt Exploration Society in the Nubian fortress at Qasr Ibrim. The catalog's editor and Keeper of Ancient Egypt and Sudan, Vivian Davies, speaks of "Egypto-Nubian and ancient Sudanese studies,"<sup>66</sup> whereas Vercoutter uses a different inflection, namely, "Nubian and Sudanese archeology" and "Sudano-Nubian archeology,"<sup>67</sup> despite the entire volume being dedicated to Nubian archeology.

The partial shift from Nubian to Sudan Studies has been accompanied more generally by a resurgence of early-twentieth-century racist arguments that modern-day Nubians would be fundamentally disconnected from their past. In 1908, Elliott Smith, who was involved in Reisner's excavations, stated:

at present we are not justified in calling both the early and the late inhabitants of Nubia 'Nubians': in fact, it is very doubtful whether we ought to apply this name to the pre-hellenic

63 See Dan Hicks, *The British Museums: The Benin Bronzes, Colonial Violence and Cultural Restitution* (London: Pluto Press, 2020).

64 *The Sudan Archaeological Research Society*, <http://www.sudarchrs.org.uk/>.

65 Raymond Sackler is the former chief executive of Purdue Pharma and his wife, a board member of the same company, who created their fortune largely by selling the painkiller OxyContin, which caused the opioid crisis in the United States. See Joanna Walters, "Meet the Sacklers: The Family Feuding over Blame for the Opioid Crisis," *The Guardian*, February 13, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2018/feb/13/meet-the-sacklers-the-family-feuding-over-blame-for-the-opioid-crisis>.

66 W.V. Davies, "Preface," in *Egypt and Africa: Nubia from Prehistory to Islam* (London: British Museum Press, 1991), vii.

67 Vercoutter, "L'archéologie nubienne et soudanaise," 1.



population of the Nile valley between Aswan and Meroe. [...] However, if it is agreed that we call the country south of Aswan ‘Nubia’ and that the early dynastic inhabitants of this territory are to be referred to as ‘Nubians,’ then we must use some distinctive designation for the modern population.<sup>68</sup>

Iterations of this argument have in turn fed into the nationalist arguments developed by some Sudanese archeologists during the dictatorship. Ironically, in this case they are not employed in order to distinguish Nubian from “white” Egyptian culture, but so as to assimilate Nubian to Sudanese culture. As recently as the ISNS Conference in Paris in 2018, Samia Dafa’alla, by means of spokesperson Omar el-Hajj, issued a “call for avoiding using the adjective ‘Nubian’ to designate cultures and inhabitants of Nubian during the period ? B.C.–550 A.D.,” demanding that the adjective “Sudanese” be used instead. During the Q&A, el-Hajj openly threatened me for questioning the scholarly rigor of Dafa’alla’s argument and the propriety of such unfounded “demands” at an academic conference, claiming I would no longer be allowed in the Sudan if I persisted in my criticism. Other scholars, often proponents of what is referred to as “Islamic archeology,” actively try to erase Nubian culture from the larger narrative of “Islamization” that would start in the 7<sup>th</sup> century and conclude with the present Republic of Sudan, “from prehistory to Islam,” as the British Museum publication would have it. A recent case in point is Intisar Soghayroun’s contribution to the *Oxford Handbook of Ancient Nubia*, where she states that “Historical and literary sources include texts written in Arabic by Muslims or in Greek by Christians,”<sup>69</sup> clearly omitting that large amounts of records in Makuritan Nubian and Coptic, while claiming that “the Middle Nile valley [...] is in effect the present Republic of Sudan.”<sup>70</sup> [x]

The ambiguity within a certain contingent of Nubiologists toward “Nubia” is also present in more recent publications, for example David Edwards’s *The Nubian Past: An Archaeology of the Sudan*, a sweeping overview in the tradition of Adams’s monograph *Nubia: A Corridor to Africa*. Although initially Edwards claims to provide “a new introduction to the archaeology of Nubia and the wider Sudan,” a paragraph later it “aspire[s] to represent an archaeology of the Sudan as a whole,” while

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68 G. Elliott Smith and F. Wood Jones, “Anatomical Report,” In *The Archaeological Survey of Nubia, Bulletin No. 2: Dealing with the Work from December 1, 1907, to March 31, 1908* (Cairo: National Printing Department, 1908), 29–54, at 35–36.

69 Intisar Soghayroun, “Islam in the Funj and Ottoman Periods in Sudan: A Historical and Archaeological Approach,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Ancient Nubia*, eds. Geoff Emberling and Bruce B. Williams (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 875–91, at 876.

70 Ibid., 877.

noting at the same time that “[a] new ‘Sudanese’ archaeology is struggling to emerge.”<sup>71</sup> The shift from genitive construction “of the Sudan” to the adjective “‘Sudanese’” (between scare quotes!) is illustrative here for the ambiguity that Edwards seems to grapple with already in the title. This is of course a political question, namely *who or what is the subject of archeology?* That Edwards would like to get to a Sudanese rather than a Nubian archeology is suggested later on, when he laments “Outside the Sudan, Sudanese archaeology is rarely taught, it is usually as a ‘Nubian’ adjunct to Egyptological courses, in which archaeology may also be only a small part.”<sup>72</sup> Again, what do the scare quotes around “‘Nubian’” mean here? That the “Nubian” “adjunct” is not truly Nubian? Should it be rather Sudanese, or “Sudanese”?

In the first chapter of his book, Edwards dedicates a few additional paragraphs to this issue. After a minimal discussion of the polysemy that has haunted “Nubia” since the beginning, he admits that “For archaeologists, privileging modern political boundaries, often so arbitrary in their construction, has its obvious problems, particularly in Africa.”<sup>73</sup> Nevertheless it remains unclear what these “obvious problems” are, and why they would “particularly” affect Africa.

As Uroš Matić suggests, “Epistemological de-colonization of our discipline should not only be a postcolonial criticism of its past, but a fundamental rethinking of its colonial remnants in the present, and how these remnants still shape our interpretations of Egypt and Nubia.”<sup>74</sup> Edwards’s “obvious problems” remain unarticulated because such a “fundamental rethinking” is currently not happening in a systematic manner, and it appears to me that such rethinking cannot be done without meaningful participation of the Nubian community itself. As Rennan Lemos and Samantha Tipper point out, “Current and future challenges include efforts to further decolonise Nubian Studies in order to allow us to think completely ‘out of the shadow of Egypt’ [...], and to emphasise Nubian viewpoints on their own continuous history.”<sup>75</sup> We may for example point to strong Nubian voices such as Menna Agha, who poignantly argues against the archeological necropolitics and “habituation to loss”: “The difference [...] between the perception of loss for Nubians and scholars is vivid. To Nubians, the

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71 David N. Edwards, *The Nubian Past: An Archaeology of the Sudan* (London: Routledge, 2004), ix–x.

72 *Ibid.*, x.

73 *Ibid.*, 1.

74 Matić, “De-colonizing the Historiography and Archaeology of Ancient Egypt and Nubia,” 40.

75 Rennan Lemos and Samantha Tipper, “Sudanese and Nubian Archaeology: Scholarship Past and Present,” in *Current Perspectives in Sudanese and Nubian Archaeology: A Collection of Papers Presented at the 2018 Sudan Studies Research Conference, Cambridge*, eds. Rennan Lemos and Samantha Tipper (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2021), 1–12, at 6.

paradise, but not Nubia itself, was lost. Nubians refuse to acknowledge the New Nubia but also refuse to acknowledge the vanishing of Nubia as long as they are alive.”<sup>76</sup>

This brings me to my final point: the question of the representation of the Nubian community within Nubian Studies. Despite the effective displacement of the origins of Nubiology from the racist colonial paradigm embodied by Reisner to the UNESCO salvage-archeological campaign, Adams has already pointed out, back in 1981, that the ISNS effectively continues his ideological position, by its “steadfast refusal [...] to admit a Sudanese or Nubian scholar to its governing council, despite the presence of eminently qualified candidates, [...] an indication that the colonial mentality dies hard.”<sup>77</sup> We may very well repeat this question here today: where is the strong Nubian representation on the ISNS board? Where, indeed, are the Nubian keynote speakers at this anniversary conference? Certainly, as in 1981, there are many eminently qualified candidates. How can we come here together to celebrate 50 years of an organization that fails to provide travel costs and accommodation to our Nubian colleagues, many of whom do not have the means to travel to an EU country like Poland? How is it that we systematically fail to reciprocate the hospitality shown to us whenever we visit Nubia?

And considering the most urgent need of Nubians to keep their culture alive, how can it be that we forsake our minimal responsibility of swiftly publishing our excavation results? In my own work as a philologist of Makuritan Nubian, most of the materials I work on were excavated one if not two generations before me rather than in my own lifetime. Many of the originals have been lost, records misplaced, metadata are missing. Is this really the responsible stewardship of these objects that we constantly wield as weapon against those calling for their repatriation? Is it responsible to excavate at a rate faster than we can publish our results? Among colleagues we have running jokes, often made in desperation, about scholars sitting on excavation materials for decades without publishing them, hoarding them like valuable treasures to which no one, not even those whose heritage and rightful possession they actually are, has access.

[x] None of this is ours. If these objects, texts, human remains, and so on belong to anyone it is the Nubians themselves. Their so-called discoveries are no “miracles.” They are the logical result of a community thriving for millennia on the shores of the Nile. At the same time, it is essential that we as a

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<sup>76</sup> Menna Agha, “Nubia Still Exists: On the Utility of Nostalgic Space,” *humanities* 8 (2019), art. 24, 3.

<sup>77</sup> Adams, “Paradigms in Sudan Archaeology,” 20.

community of scholars continue our constant interrogation of what the term “Nubia” means in our scholarly discourse, be that from geographic, linguistic, temporal, or political perspectives. This also holds for the many intersections between Nubian and Sudan Studies, and Byzantine Studies, and Classical Studies, and African Studies, and so on, that may well be extraordinary productive. But it should be beyond doubt that it is primarily the right of those who consider themselves Nubian to decide what *is* Nubian. And we, as scholars of Nubia, have a fundamental responsibility to listen to them. Nubia is very much alive, and our field should stop acting as if it’s not.

[x] Thank you.