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Seventy years of prehistoric work in Sudan (1940-2010)

Sudan is not only the biggest country in Africa, but also one of the richest countries in cultural heritage. With its unique location and cultural and ethnic diversity represents a harmonic meeting between Africa and other parts of the world, have played a very important role of communication. The Sudan Government has become more aware of the role that ancient Sudanese culture might play in the flow and richness of human civilization. The ministry of Antiquities Tourism & Wild life has a fundamental commitment to the preservation and presentation of the cultural heritage through temporary exhibitions that strengthen the cooperation with archaeological missions working in the Sudan. The scientific archaeological research to reveal the importance of the archeological sites in a country as big as Sudan as well as its protection are the main aims of the National Corporation for Antiquities & Museums.

Most of the archaeological research in Sudan have focuses on prehistory, Kushite kingdoms (Kerma, Napata, Meroe), Christian and Islamic kingdoms. It is the policy of NCAM according to its law which issued in 2003, and 1999 Antiquities Protection Ordinance to preserve the cultural Heritage of the Sudan, and develop the scientific research and to rescue the endangered areas.

The prehistoric cultural sequence of the Khartoum Province was the earliest, among the Saharan and sub- Saharan regions, to be broadly defined. The oldest traces of early humans - Homo erectus - in Sudan were discovered by A. J. Arkell (1949) in Khor Abu Anga in Omdurman. The same scholar also carried excava-

tions at Khartoum Hospital (1940), which revealed a non-producing civilization using pottery which he called the Khartoum Mesolithic. He continued on a more recent site at Shaheinab, which gave him the possibility to define a Neolithic culture published in 1953 as esh-Shaheinab were soon followed by accurate interdisciplinary investigations conducted by him.

The combined data brought to light the Mesolithic culture, defined “Khartoum Hospital”, followed by a Neolithic and later by a Pre- Dynastic culture. His last contribution from the field work was published in 1964 (An archaeological reconnaissance in the South – West Libyan Desert).

Except the attempts made by Arkell, only few works occur in prehistory before the Nubian Campaign, just to remember the works of Myers at Abka and the survey of Butana by the Humboldt University with the discovery of a cave at Shaqadud site which was latter excavated by Marks and Abbas and published in 1991, as the Late Prehistory of the eastern Sahel–the Mesolithic and Neolithic of Shaquaud.

The Nubian Salvage Campaign can be considered the most important enterprise ever made in the field of archaeology. The task of the Campaign was to save and document works of art and monuments of history and science belonging to Sudan and Egypt. A Combined Prehistoric Expedition including specialists in different fields of several nationalities (Americans, Poles, Belgium’s, French’s, & British) directed by Fred Wendorf, and Romuald Schild participated in the Nubian Campaign. It is in charge with prehistoric occupations in the whole area, excepted for the concessions attributed to the Joint Scandinavian Expeditions and the University of Colorado, which started their researches before. In 1966 the part of the Combined Prehistoric Expedition, directed by J. L. Shiner conducted archaeological survey and excavations between Debba and Korti, which resulted in the discovery of about 90 prehistoric sites.

No account of the Polish contribution to the archaeology of the Sudan would be complete without reference to the work of the Polish scholars in the Combined Prehistoric Expedition. The expedition undertook the most extensive prehistoric work during the Nubian Campaign (W. Chmielewski, M. Chmielewska, R. Schild) and also carried out further research in the Dongola Reach (W. Chmielewski, H. Więckowska, M. Kobusiewicz).

The contribution of the Polish scholars for studying the prehistory was not confined to northern areas only. In winter 1967/1968 the group of Polish archaeologists from the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology, Polish Academy of Sciences (W. Chmielewski, H. Więckowska and M. Kobusiewicz) took part in the extensive archaeological investigations conducted by the Combined Prehistoric

Expedition, led by J. Shiner in the vicinity of Khashm El Girba. A number of rich sites dated to the Old Stone Age and the Neolithic were discovered and examined.

In 1972, Lech Krzyżaniak, director of the Poznań Archaeological Museum, conducted the archaeological survey between Khartoum and the Sixth Cataract and located a number of prehistoric sites. Since that date Prof. Krzyżaniak started the excavation of the Neolithic site of Kadero. This campaign lasted seventeen seasons and brought the important discoveries throwing light on the way of life of the first cattle-keepers and early farmers dwelling in Central Sudan in the V-th century B.C. (L. Krzyżaniak, M. Kobusiewicz, M. Chłodnicki, T. Dzierżykray-Rogalski, M. Kaczmarek, K.M. Ciałowicz, W. Stankowski, J. Kabaciński and a number of other scientists and students from Poland and from other countries).

In 1983 the Poles L. Krzyżaniak and M. Kobusiewicz carried the survey along the western bank of the Blue Nile from Sennar to Roseires. It resulted by the discovery of rich sites from the Old Stone Age and Neolithic. Some of them were excavated in 1984 (L. Krzyżaniak, W. Chmielewski and S. K. Kozłowski)

Puglisi and I. Caneva worked at el-Geili and R. Haaland investigating on the Atbara area. The French Unit conducted a systematic survey south Dal Cataract and a rescue survey and excavation at Shendi Reach, at el-Kadada and el-Ghaba (F. Geus, J. Reinold). In the 80th the Kassala and Khashm el-Girba were surveyed by a joint expedition with A. Marks, K. Sadr and R. Fattovich, after this preliminary study, Fattovich conducted excavations around Kassala, and Marks and Sadr at Shaqadud. During this periods, also begin the work of the Germans (with R. Kuper and B. Keddig) in the Wadi Howar, Gilf El Kebir and other areas which show a dense human occupation related to the river and decreasing with the climatic changed conducting to the use of wells as the only possibility for water.

In 1989 when the Sudan Government decided to build a new Dam at Merowe (4th Cataract area) a plan was put by NCAM to rescue the area endangered by the Dam. In 1980 the University of Rome, led by S. Donadoni and I. Caneva, conducted a preliminary inspection of the area situated immediately up-stream. Between 1990-91 NCAM undertook preliminary archaeological survey recording more than 700 sites. The results of the previous reconnaissance to the 4th cataract area, shows that a systematic archaeological survey on both banks of the Nile to about 170 km is essential. From these surveys a framework for the archaeological rescue excavation and a comprehensive field strategy for the endangered area has been developed.

Later on, during the six seasons (2005-2009) of the rescue company Polish archaeologists from the Poznań Archaeological Museum (M. Chłodnicki, M. Lemiesz and a large number of other specialists and students) as well as the scientists

from the Gdańsk Archaeological Museum (H. Paner) carried intensive works on the area of the IVth Cataract as well as along the Nile north of Khartoum bringing to light and saving numerous monuments from different periods of the Sudanese prehistory and early history.

In 1993-94 researchers from the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology, Polish Academy of Sciences (M. Kobusiewicz, J. Kabaciński) and the Poznań Archaeological Museum (M. Chłodnicki) conducted archaeological survey and excavations at a number of Old Stone Age and Neolithic sites near Letti Basin and Ghaddar.

Another project carried by the Polish Academy of Sciences Expedition (B. Żurawski) conducted archaeological survey between Old Dongola and El Zouma settlements and cemeteries of various ages were located.

Quite lately, in 2010, the team of Polish archaeologists from the Polish Academy of Sciences and Poznań Archaeological Museum (P. Bobrowski, M. Kobusiewicz, M. Chłodnicki, K. Pluskota and M. Jórdeczka) started the investigations of an extremely rich concentration of prehistoric rock art discovered in 1999 by K. Pluskota. This site is located by the Bir Nurayet in the northern section of the Red Sea mountains. The rock art is accompanied by other evidence mainly concerning the prehistoric cult of fertility.

The future of prehistoric study in Sudan is quite fascinating, as the areas already under survey give us data which show variations from a common trunk. Of course a country as big as the Sudan must have seen different answers for the settling of the population due to the variety of local conditions. The Archaeological Survey and excavation work will continue so as to complete the archaeological map of Sudan. Creating public awareness of Sudan cultural heritage and the necessity of studying and safe-guarding is an ongoing activity of NCAM in collaboration with national and foreign archaeological missions between protection, conservation, sustainability and development.

However, the Sudan Government has shown its indebtedness to all foreign archaeological missions working in the Sudan during the last century. We do hope that the opening of the Sudan to the outside world through scientific research, traveling exhibitions, will result in contact with other people in all over the world. Finally, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the Poznań Archaeological Museum and the Poznań Branch of the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology, Polish Academy of Sciences for organizing this Conference. In particular, I would like to express our gratitude and indebtedness to Dr. Marek Chłodnicki and to all who have contributed to the organization of the conference.