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## CHAPTER 5

### **Nubian Collections: A Comparative Analysis of Museum Policies**

The *display or non-display* policies of Nubian collections in museums throughout the world is the subject of this chapter and, and with Chapters 4, 6 and 7, forms the core of this research project in which I present and discuss the innovative data and analysis of my investigation on Nubia in museums. A survey of various museums and my exchange of ideas with many of the museum curators lays bare a number of relevant aspects for understanding the logic of display and the (re/de)construction of Nubia through exhibitions.

The concept of 'Nubia' often appears to be far from clear in the museological context. Nubia's lack of political boundaries, and its location in two different nations, has also complicated issues on the museological front. Nevertheless, the existence of cultural boundaries between the area traditionally called Nubia and its surroundings is an incontestable reality.

Undeniably, until now a sort of 'lack of social awareness' has characterized the policy of displaying Nubian artifacts in museums. A 'tour' of Nubian collections worldwide, represented in Chapters 6 and 7, will provide evidence for the arguments discussed here. Such a characterization has given rise to differing and often opposing constructions of Nubia's past, the most obvious being whether Nubia should be considered culturally as an individualized appendix of Egypt or whether it should be included as part of Egypt itself. Most of the Nubian collections, included those coming from Sudan, are in fact located in Egyptian contexts, both on exhibition and in storage. As discussed in Chapter 3, the complex system in which the museum is trapped has contributed to the worsening of this situation. Only in the last two decades has Nubia been displayed in a number of temporary exhibitions and permanent installations which have showcased material long dismissed as merely provincial versions of Egyptian art.

The concept of Nubia in museums has evolved in parallel with the knowledge of Nubia in the field of scientific research and can be divided into three stages: 1) exhibitions prior to the *International Campaign to Save the Monuments of Nubia* in the 1960s; 2) exhibitions following this Campaign; 3) recent exhibitions that are part of something which I would suggest characterizing as a 'Sudanological' stage. In Egypt and Sudan, identity and political reasons have also been influencing factors in the exhibition policy of Nubian collections. These stages have also determined the categories of locations where Nubian collections are today displayed or stored.

### **Academic Stages and Categories of Location of Nubian Collections**

#### *Exhibitions prior to the International Campaign to Save the Monuments of Nubia*

These exhibitions are those in which Nubian collections were completely mixed with Egyptian ones, without any distinction between the two. These earlier exhibitions were an expression of their time. In the nineteenth century, European colonizers constructed the history of archeology around a number of paradigms displayed in museums throughout the industrialized world, and later transplanted to the non-industrialized nations of Africa. They followed the imperialist philosophy of presenting non-European material as an essential and exotic counterpart to the cultural development and identity of Euro-American society.<sup>243</sup>

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<sup>243</sup> Preziosi, 2006.

In Egypt, Nubian collections were distributed in the various museums of the country according to their historical period, to enrich Egyptian collections of different periods thematically and typologically. Until the sixties, at least in the context of museums, Nubia was in fact perceived as part of Egypt without any special need felt for it to have a separate space of its own.

Abroad, particularly in European museums, the first Nubian objects were introduced as part of what has popularly been referred to as the age of *Egyptomania*.<sup>244</sup> The discoveries of European travelers merged with the romantic tendencies of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Nubian artifacts were seen and presented as part of Egyptian collections with no distinction made between the two civilizations. The society at that time was not very much interested in the social value of the objects, but was attracted by their artistic aspects and in the legendary and exotic ambience the objects evoked. This trend also involved artifacts from Nubia. Meroitic objects were paid more attention because of their indisputable beauty and the mysterious aura of 'fabled Meroe'. The treasure of Queen Amanishaketo and Ferlini's story about its discovery, as well as materials referring to the *Black Pharaohs* of the 25<sup>th</sup> Dynasty,<sup>245</sup> exemplify this approach. In these earlier exhibitions, the Egyptologists' perception of Nubia was paramount, and Nubia was not even considered an appendage of Egypt, but a rough, 'barbarous' version of Egypt itself. It is for these sorts of reasons that other Nubian material contemporary with the Pharaonic is often consigned to oblivion.

In the Sudan, the history of museums goes back to 1924 when a first site museum was established in Meroe. In Khartoum, a space with collections of archeological artifacts was created in 1932 in a building now used as a government office. Actually the first big archeological museum of the country, the Sudan National Museum, was constructed in 1971 in the framework of the *International Campaign to Save the Monuments of Nubia*. Others followed.

#### *Exhibitions Following the International Campaign to Save the Monuments of Nubia of the 1960s*

If, in recent years, museum professionals have begun to enter into dialogues about cultural and social identities, the recognition of Nubia as an independent cultural entity, and appreciation of the socio-artistic values of its artifacts, can certainly be attributed to the influence of the Salvage Campaign of the 1960s. The leading specialists in this Campaign were in fact anthropologists/archaeologists without a specific background in Egyptology. Therefore they were able to approach the study of Nubian history without inherited preconceptions.

In Egypt, the Campaign led to the creation of the first - and so far only - *Nubia Museum* which presents Nubian civilization from prehistory to the modern era. In Sudan itself, one of the

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<sup>244</sup> The Napoleon Expedition to Egypt gave birth to the phenomenon generally called *Egyptomania*, a sort of exotic sandstorm invading the western imagination. The impact that this phenomenon has had, and still generates, is manifold and concerns many fields. Among which the 'most cultural' effects, Verdi's opera *Aida*, the Glass Pyramid of the Louvre Museum, the Egyptian Bridge in St Petersburg, plus some others are perhaps the most famous. Among the most appalling, was the 'mummy' party, during which a mummy was unwrapped in an sphere of pseudo-scientific pretense. Likewise, craniums were used to identify Egyptians as black or white as part of the fledging field of eugenics, often interpreted as a justification for the inequality between lighter skinned peoples and the institution of slavery. Some others are more recent and quite *kitsch*, among them the Luxor Hotel in Las Vegas, where parties are organized with people dressed in pseudo-Pharaonic fashions, whose interiors include furniture and advertising material produced in the same style. More than a simple love of what was exotic, it was also commonly thought that *Egyptomania*, at least in the beginning, was a full part of colonial sentiment, expressing the desire on the part of some in the west to 'possess' what was eastern. Some interesting reading on the subject includes: Whitehouse, 1997; Ikram and Dodson, 1998.

<sup>245</sup> Cf. Chapter 7.

results of the Salvage Campaign was the creation of the Sudan National Museum in Khartoum that displays the magnificent archeological heritage of Upper Nubia (North Sudan).

Abroad, the Campaign clearly had a stronger impact on American museums than European ones. In this respect, the American William Adams and the Canadian Bruce Trigger, leading personalities in the rescue work, with their unbiased approach signaled a turning point in the study of Nubia. The presence of Afro-Americans also indirectly contributed to invigorating Nubian studies in America. Whereas they have had to face various problems in addressing the African roots of Egyptian civilization, in Nubia, where the protagonists are unequivocally 'Black', the task has proved to be much easier.

Specific galleries for Nubia were mounted. Some of them trace the entire history of Ancient Nubia from the prehistoric period to the Islamic era. Institutions that focused their work on a specific site based the organization of the gallery specifically on the history of that site. In the absence of space, other museums have displayed some of their Nubian artifacts in specific showcases in their Egyptian galleries.

Some of the most important Nubian galleries opened following the Salvage Campaign, among them those at the Museum of Fine Arts of Boston and the University of Pennsylvania/Museum of Archeology and Anthropology in Philadelphia, are now closed. While Boston is awaiting funds to enlarge the gallery to be able to display as much as possible of the huge collections in possession of the museum, Philadelphia has shut down the Nubian door forever as the new display testifies.

#### *Recent Galleries*

Since the construction of the Aswan High Dam, Egyptian Nubia is no longer available to archeological research that has consequently moved to the Sudan. Among the researchers working in the area, this circumstance has resulted in the creation of a 'Sudanological' current of thought. This attitude is reflected in museum displays in which the term 'Sudan', and political reasons also have to do with this, is increasingly replacing that of 'Nubia' or being added to it.

The academic evolution of the concept of Nubia presented above has determined the display of its collections of objects in the below categories or types of specialized museums:

- 1) Egyptian museums dedicated to Pharaonic art (the most famous are in Cairo, Turin, Berlin). The fact that Nubian objects are part of this kind of specialized museum is already a sign that Nubia is seen as belonging to this field of specialization. In Cairo, the display and the comments on the labels (when they are there) still reflect the very traditional approach to Nubia as it was perceived by the archeologists working at the beginning of the past century summed up in the phrase 'the Land of the Unknown'. In Turin, the collection is also completely interwoven with the Egyptian one, making a Nubiological view invisible. However, in an exhibition area designated 'Nubia', the relocated temple of Ellesya is now displayed in an attempt to celebrate the Salvage Campaign and the achievement of the Italian mission in Nubia. In Berlin, the entity has become 'Ancient Sudan', that indicates a more recent trend. These variants, linked to the above mentioned stages, can be also recognized in Universal and University Museums below.

2) Universal and University Museums: both these contexts are not specialized in a field but they are repositories of various subjects or of a subject present in many areas or worldwide. It was in such museums, I found most of the Nubian collections. In most cases, they are displayed in Egyptian galleries where most of the time they are completely assimilated into the rest of the collection and where their Nubian provenance or nature is often barely mentioned, if at all. In some venues they are found in separate showcases set off from the rest. Separate Nubian galleries first appeared following the Salvage Campaign of the 1960s, although some of them are today closed, but others are now progressively becoming 'Sudanese'. Some of these separate galleries are dedicated to a specific site that usually was the excavation concession of the holding institution. In some of the university museums, the collections are in storage or only on temporary loan as objects for research.

3) Nubia Museum: the only one is the Nubia Museum of Aswan dedicated to the Nubian civilization from the prehistoric period to modern times. It is the direct Egyptian Authorities and UNESCO follow-up of the *International Campaign to Save the Monuments of Nubia* in the sixties.

4) National Museum: it is the Sudan National Museum in Khartoum. Actually every museum is a national museum in the sense that it belongs to the nation in which it is located. However, in the context of museum studies, the term 'National Museum' or 'Civilization Museum' is more often perceived to be the one offering an overview of the history of the country. The museum in Khartoum is, in particular, a museum of Nubian antiquities and makes this heritage appear as if it is the only one that could be considered as the 'official' national heritage in Sudan.

5) Other specialized archeological museums: Nubian artifacts are kept in the Coptic Museum in Cairo. Before the construction of the Nubia Museum at Aswan, where many collections moved in 1996, other specialized museums in Egypt were in possession of related Nubian antiquities (Greco-Roman, Islamic).

6) Site Museums: these museums are built close to archeological sites to display related artifacts. Those today spread throughout northern Sudan (Upper Nubia) are also very beneficial to local communities who live far removed from the center and from the opportunities it offers.

7) Regional museums: they serve not a city but an area in the country. Nubian collections are located in several regional museums of Sudan, in particular in the west of the country. Generally speaking, their display policy is to show the development of the history of the country from prehistory to the Islamic period, and the most recent history is that of the region in which the museum is located. The few Nubian pieces found in the regional museums of Egypt are meant to enrich the thematic collection (in particular Egyptian and Christian).

8) Ethnographic Museums: I found only three museums of this kind holding Nubian collections: the Ethnographic Museum of Khartoum which displays items from all over

Sudan, the Ethnographic Museum in Egypt, and the Museum of Ethnography - Adelhauser Museum in Freiburg-im-Breisgau.

9) Private Collections: I found private collections in Europe and in the USA that hold Nubian artifacts. These objects are considered 'Egyptological acquisitions'.

Having discussed the various stages of the concept of Nubia and introduced the categories of museums in which they are found, it is time to move on to attempt an analysis of the 'museumization' of Nubia in the countries of origin and abroad, taking into consideration the different mandates the above mentioned categories of museums have. Evidence of their scientific arguments discussed below will be presented in the 'tour' of Nubia collections in museums worldwide in Chapters 6 and 7.

### **Nubia in Museums in Egypt**

#### *Museums and Identity in Egypt*

Until the mid-nineteenth century, European imperialist powers played on the differences between the industrialized 'West' and the underdeveloped 'East' to support specific political and economic agendas. In a 2003 essay, Donald Preziosi affirms that, during this period museum exhibitions of non-European material served socioeconomic and political agendas that presented an exotic version of the story detached from its present. In the case of Egypt, the Pharaonic era, because of its strong impact on the western imagination, through the lenses of the Orientalist view or process was able to erase both the realities of its own history and eclipse all other aspects and components of Egyptian history right up to the present.<sup>246</sup>

The late Palestinian scholar Edward Said describes this phenomenon in his now iconic use of the word 'Orientalism', an ideology based on an ontological and epistemological distinction between 'the Orient' and (mostly) the 'Occident'. Said summarizes it as a form of Social Darwinism in which 'the modern Orientals were degraded remnants of a former greatness'; the ancient, or 'classical', civilizations of the Orient were perceivable through the disorders of present decadence, but only (a) because a white specialist [...] could do the sifting and reconstructing, and (b) because a vocabulary of sweeping generalities (the Semites, the Aryans, the Orientals) referred not to a set of fictions but rather to a whole array of seemingly objective and agreed-upon distinctions.<sup>247</sup>

The first museums in Egypt began to appear in the late nineteenth century, when awareness of the importance of conserving cultural heritage began to emerge. The decision of the local Muslim ruler who for the first time ordered the creation of a museum to preserve endangered antiquities<sup>248</sup> coincided with the emergence of Egyptology as a scientific discipline. This led to a shift in archeological activities as well as museums exhibitions from an abstract to a rational perspective.

The first collection of Egyptian antiquities located in Cairo was created in the district of

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<sup>246</sup> Preziosi, 2003.

<sup>247</sup> Said 1979: 2 and 233. Quoted in Merolla 2013, see also [Http://old.unior.it/diprapa/conf\\_afr\\_2010/panel%2014.html](http://old.unior.it/diprapa/conf_afr_2010/panel%2014.html)

<sup>248</sup> The museum was prompted by the Viceroy of Egypt, Mohammed Said's decision to create a space for the conservation of ancient endangered objects. At the time, this was considered the first action by a Muslim ruler to support the conservation of antiquities.

Boulaq in 1863. After various vicissitudes, it was transferred to its permanent location in Tahrir Square in 1902. This museum can be considered the first in the Arab region designed to be a museum and not just a temporary place for the display of archeological materials. During the same period, other museums related to other periods of local history were created. In 1892, Giuseppe Botti, a member of the Italian community in Alexandria, founded the Greco-Roman Museum. In 1902, the Islamic Museum was created by the Egyptian architect Mubarak Ali Pasha, although, by 1881, by decree of Khedive Muhammad Tawfik Pasha, the *Comité de Conservation des Monuments Arabes* was already beginning to collect Islamic artifacts in the Mosque of El-Hakim Bamrailla. The Coptic Museum was founded in 1908 by Marcus Simaika Pasha on behalf of the Coptic Church.<sup>249</sup> In the same period, an Ethnographical Museum was created by the Khedivial Geographical Society (1895). In more or less the same period, a Botanical Museum (1898), a Geological Museum (1904) and an Entomological Museum (1907) were created. Apart from the one in Alexandria, all these museums were in Cairo. Later, in 1912, the Aswan Museum, that is considered to be the first regional museum in Egypt, was set up.

In recent years, the number of museums in Egypt has grown exponentially. Their multiplication has been encouraged by several reasons. First of all, they allow the conservation and display of many objects of great historical and artistic interest that, because of space, had been kept in storage for a long period. Significantly, the museums constructed in peripheral areas are very important to local dissemination of historical knowledge to the communities. In recent years, many of the numerous Islamic monuments in the country have been restored and re-used as museums or for temporary exhibitions. Other museums are devoted to local personalities of some significance in the country's more recent history or literature, or to a specific artifact (for example the Textile Museum).<sup>250</sup> Whereas Pharaonic art as a unique subject of exhibition is only typical of site museums, whose basic target is tourism,<sup>251</sup> these other rural or peripheral museums are based on a display which incorporates Egypt's past and present.

The National Museum of Egyptian Civilization in Cairo (NMEC) - still under construction - will be a great example of how, today, Egyptian specialists conceive the history of their country in all of its developmental phases and in its holistic vision.<sup>252</sup> The NMEC will present Egyptian culture from prehistory to the present day. It is the first of its kind, not only in Egypt, but also in the Middle East region. A scientific committee, formed by a group of Egyptian experts, archeologists and anthropologists, prepared the concept of the museum, to which UNESCO gives technical assistance. The exhibits revolve around nine topics (arranged in five main entries): The Nile, Craft and Trades, Arts and Architecture, Government and Society, and Beliefs and Folklore. The report on 'Exhibition Philosophy' prepared by Egyptian specialists for UNESCO refers to Egypt as follows:

The civilization of Ancient Egypt was characterized by consistency and stability since time immemorial. For over five thousand years, Egypt produced great art, literature, and feats of

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<sup>249</sup>In the original formulation, the Egyptian Antiquities Museum at the heart of Cairo came to represent an indigenous Egyptian culture and the other three collections were presented and viewed as ethnic diversions. Of the Pharaonic, Classical, Byzantine, and Islamic pasts, only the first would serve as a synonym for Egyptian. There would be some overlap between Pharaonic and Classical Antiquity in early museum collections, but the Coptic and Islamic traditions remained isolated (Doyon, 2008).

<sup>250</sup> For the Egyptian Authorities' view on the concept of these museums cf. Hawass 2005; for a detailed analysis cf. Doyon 2008.

<sup>251</sup> For example the Imhotep Museum at Saqqara, The Solar Boat Museum at Giza.

<sup>252</sup> El-Moniem, 2005: 24-30.

engineering and science; these have provided us with an extraordinary heritage unmatched by any other ancient civilization. Pharaonic Egypt has fascinated humankind for millennia, and will continue to influence us far into the future.<sup>253</sup>

This concept is best reflected by the research Wendy Doyon carried out on the topic in cooperation with the American Research Center in Cairo. The result of the analysis, which was conducted in over twenty-five museums in the country, led to the following conclusion:

The structure of meaning in Egyptian museum display represents a formal relationship between archeology and national identity in Egypt. While adapted from earlier museum structures of colonial import, contemporary exhibition structures in Egypt signify Egyptian traditions from prehistory to the present. Most of the institutions integrate the representation of Pharaonic Egypt with the interpretation of succeeding cultures, including several themes of modern Egyptian history such as the development of agriculture, craft, technology and science. The basic narrative structure of Egyptian museum display is thus framed by a visual affinity of cultures through time. The primary use of time-frame in the arrangement and distribution of material culture throughout Egyptian museums, along with supporting methods of interpretation, illustrate an institutional pattern of cultural correspondence between historically distinct between archeology and national identity in Egypt. While adapted from earlier museum traditions, this visual correspondence is a function of both the unity and diversity of material culture through time impressions of prehistoric, Pharaonic, Greco-Roman, Coptic, Islamic and modern traditions form a collective representation of Egyptian heritage and identity.<sup>254</sup>

The new forms suggest that these cultural traditions are significant not in isolation from, but in relation to one another, as they share an essential 'Egyptian-ness'.<sup>255</sup>

While acknowledging the Egyptian specialists' efforts to valorize all the phases of their history, using museums to educate local populations about such subjects, the main attraction for foreigners is still Egypt's Pharaonic archeological heritage. Few people are unaware of the pharaohs and the pyramids that they built. However, Egypt has so much more to offer, one of the most obvious aspect being its leadership in the number of institutions related to the teaching of Islam that makes Cairo a point of reference for intellectuals from all over the Arab World.<sup>256</sup>

From the touristic point of view, although in constant competition with the Pharaonic heritage, these Islamic treasures and the intangible heritage of their context, also surely elicit a certain appreciation of their charm from the visitor. Cairo, where most of these monuments are located, is a fascinating city, that, for the tourists, thrillingly embodies the Orient as constructed by myriads of western texts, at a time other countries in the Arab region are somehow losing this intangible cultural dimension. Nonetheless, the primary reason for the mass flow of tourists that visit the country are the most popular remains of the Pharaonic period. The monuments related to other historical phases are common to other areas of the region, whereas the Pharaonic heritage is unique and belongs to Egypt only.<sup>257</sup>

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<sup>253</sup> National Museum of Egyptian Civilization in Cairo, *Exhibition Philosophy*, Ministry of Culture, UNESCO, 2004.

<sup>254</sup> Doyon, 2007 : Abstract.

<sup>255</sup> Doyon, 2008 : 13.

<sup>256</sup> Also notable is the Coptic heritage, even though its monuments are much more simple than the majestic mosques and other Islamic monuments of the country.

<sup>257</sup> The Egyptian Museum attracts around 1.7 million visitors per year, twice the average admission to all other major antiquities museums in Egypt combined (Doyon, 2008).



The tourist imagination playing on the idea of 'exotic' - however subject to criticism on scientific and ethical bases - 'works' well as an individual drive for people to visit Egypt, and has considerable economic power. It is evident that the touristic emphasis contributes to intensifying general identification of present-day Egyptians with this specific and unique period of their history. This archeological heritage, contributing greatly to the economic well-being of the country through tourism, has become intimately connected with the everyday life of the people who live here and is present virtually everywhere. The problem is that such a tourist gaze still fixes Egypt in a far-away past, although it also belongs to a past shared with Europe, and tends to neglect other historical periods of the country and the much more recent and present conflicts. In Egypt, as in several other countries in the Middle East, museums are not used as a sphere for competition, but as a space for reconciliation, moved by the conviction that once peace and stability will have been achieved, the country can begin to debate its past. Here, as explained in Chapter 3, museums tend to simplify what they represent giving a homogeneous and therefore more easily digested picture of what, in fact, is much more complex and diversified.

The events that began on January 25, 2011 as part of the general phenomenon called the 'Arab Spring', have currently absorbed the minds of most Egyptians. The social revolution in Egypt, prompted in particular by young people with the help of modern social networks such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, has also expressed itself in material products on sale in the streets of Cairo (Egyptian flags, images of the martyrs and so forth). This new chapter in Egyptian history will also be part of one of the most important museums in the country, the already mentioned National Museum of Egyptian Civilization (NMEC). Events of the 25th January 2011 will be added to its original concept by stressing their positive aspects: the involvement of young people and the nascent democracy.

#### *Perceptions of Nubia in Museums in Egypt*

Until the construction of the Nubia Museum in Aswan, Nubian collections in Egypt were displayed as part of a chronological ordering of Egyptian history, but without a specific gallery devoted to them.<sup>258</sup> The general purpose of museums in Egypt as bodies devoted to tourism with its short-term, one-time only access, made such a choice reasonable. Nubian history was interwoven into the fabric of Egyptian history from the Orientalist view of the Europeans who had established the foundations of museum work in Egypt. Its distinct character has only recently been recognized as this research is dedicated to demonstrating.

Egypt is the only country where a 'Nubia Museum', designated as a Nubia Museum, exists.<sup>259</sup> With the completion of the *International Campaign to Save the Monuments of Nubia* in 1981, a committee was organized by UNESCO Headquarters in Paris to discuss how best to advance the study of the artifacts of this civilization which had been collected. Those working in the field had become aware that the singular historical strand of Nubian history had an independent trajectory and complexity, although part of the cultural diversity of the geographic area where

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<sup>258</sup> The Egyptian Museum in Cairo contains coeval Nubian material; the Greek and Roman Museum of Alexandria, the Coptic and Islamic Museums in Cairo; the Aswan Elephantine Museum in the Nubian area. Only in the Coptic Museums was there a wing devoted to Nubian objects dismantled when the museum was rehabilitated.

<sup>259</sup> The choice of this name for the museum did not happen automatically. To avoid possible ethnic sensitivity and show that Nubia and Nubians are fully part of the Egyptian national context, other names were proposed such as 'Museum of Aswan' and the 'South of the Valley Museum'. When Amadou-Mahtar M'Bow (Director-General of UNESCO) called for the establishment of a 'Nubia Museum in Aswan' to display some of the most outstanding items discovered in the course of the rescue campaign in 1982, was the current name finally approved.

Nubia is located. However, the Egyptian authorities were still the only ones to attend,<sup>260</sup> and who decided on the launching of a new *Campaign for the Establishment of the Nubia Museum of Aswan and the National Museum of Egyptian Civilization in Cairo*. The outcome of this meeting was the construction of the Nubia Museum of Aswan was begun in 1985. The recommendation made by the UNESCO experts concerning the exhibition program of the museum in the early eighties was the following:

To give an overall picture of a region that not only has its own, well-defined patterns and rich cultural heritage [...] but has also been deeply transformed in modern times due to the construction of the Aswan High Dam, and has been the scene of an international archeological campaign. Illustrated-through an interdisciplinary approach-the history of man and his environment, from the beginning to the construction of the Aswan High Dam.<sup>261</sup>

This concept won the Nubia Museum the Aga Khan Award for Architecture in 2001.<sup>262</sup> The building of this museum, as well as the use of the term 'Nubia' in the name given to it, represents an acknowledgment of the Nubian culture as an independent cultural identity. In this capacity, it has found its place among the most important museums in the world.

Despite this acknowledgement, some scholars feel the museum is still beset by some weak points. Their main argument is that the entire organization of the museum is chronologically based on Nubia's interaction with Egypt, a point of departure I find quite understandable: the museum is located in Egypt and the government's intention was to emphasize the Nubian culture in its own right as well as to demonstrate how it has fitted into the wider context of the Egyptian culture. In her assessment of museums, Wendy Doyon in Egypt defines the Nubia Museum:

A celebrated example of new museum culture in Egypt, integrating as it does a traditional exhibition space aimed primarily at tourists with its role as a local community center. In this capacity, the museum hosts extensive school programs and public events that encompass the art, archeology, culture, and environment of the region. In some cases, and with the aid of foreign funding, museum-based programs for tourists have grown to include lectures, films, interactive guides, theme exhibits, and didactics.<sup>263</sup>

Although museum/community relations have been paid considerable attention in this manner, there is still room for improvement. The choice of Aswan, as a site for the museum, rather than Kom-Ombo, the place where the people were resettled, shows that the guiding force behind the choice was the needs of tourism, including the proximity to the archeological sites, and reasons of sustainability, rather than being perceived as an emotional compensation for relocated communities. Admittedly, Aswan is unquestionably culturally 'Nubian', whereas Kom Ombo is an Egyptian optional offered to Nubians. The Nubia Museum of Aswan is the Museum of all Nubians and not only of those resettled. It can serve the numerous Nubian community living in the city and its neighbors and can be easily reached by the Nubians living in Kom Ombo as well as by those

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<sup>260</sup> The Sudanese authorities were also invited to participate, but I have no information about the reason they did not attend the meeting.

<sup>261</sup> Nubia Museum, Architectural and Exhibition Program, EAO-UNESCO, November 1982.

<sup>262</sup> Cf. Chapter 6, sub-paragraph on the Nubia Museum of Aswan.

<sup>263</sup> Doyon, 2008: 11; Abdel Wareth Abdel Meguid, 2005.

living in the Nubian villages that are now springing up on the shores of the Lake Nasser. Aswan is the economic, commercial and intellectual center of all the Nubians living in Upper Egypt.

There is a particularly interesting series of interviews conducted by Sally-Ann Ashton in several locations of Nubia from Aswan through the Northern Sudan to Khartoum. Curator of the Egyptian collection at the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge, where Nubian collections are on display, she felt the need to consult local curators, so as to be able to understand their feelings, their perceptions and their scientific approach to Nubia.<sup>264</sup>

The most relevant questions addressed in these interviews dealt with the creation of the Nubia Museum of Aswan and the relationship between the curator and the academic staff and the community. Ossama Abdel Wareth, at the time director of the Museum and a Nubian himself, expressed the special meaning that the museum has for the people of Aswan:

When I spoke with the community about the creation of the diorama of the museum I told them that they should have conceived it as the mirror of their daily lives. The community, which feels separated from its heritage, opened their houses to me in Cairo and in Aswan where the objects, brought from their submerged homeland, were kept as relics rather than displayed. The traditional house for the Nubian is not a house but a sort of temple where design, colors, furniture, objects for decoration, and the common way of behavior of Nubians are part of this holy place (Fig. 29).

This warm interaction and feeling for the community runs even deeper. Ossama Abdel Wareth goes on to remark that, despite being an academic, in his eyes the Nubians are those of today with all their rich cultural baggage of unique traditions. Unlike many in the academic community, out of touch with the realities on the ground, Ossama is well aware of the Nubian community in their legacy. What amazes him is that most of the Nubians of today are proud of their past and he frequently ears older members of the community, sometimes totally illiterate, speak about the history of Meroe and its queens, temples, kings and so forth.

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<sup>264</sup> Cf. Chapter 7, Sub-section on the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.



Fig. 29: Interior of a Nubian house

The second interview was with Rageh Zaher Mohamed, former curator and currently Director of the Museum. Asked the question of who or what Nubians were, this Egyptian from a city in the Delta replied:

I like Nubian culture very much. Nubia has an old history. Nubians who live from Aswan to the Fourth Cataract have special traditions which are not only reflected in the history of the past but also in the history of today. I have heard from them many stories linked to their homeland and the villages that are now submerged. These traditions need to be preserved and the museum is doing its best to do this with several programs.<sup>265</sup>

The local community represents the largest touristic component of the Nubia Museum of Aswan,<sup>266</sup> however, so far it has not been sufficiently engaged in the activities of the museum. Children are more involved than adults. This leaves a generational gap in understanding in the community. The biggest obstacle is that finding ways in which to engage the whole community in

<sup>265</sup> Rageh Zaher is also a specialist in Nubian Islamic history. To a question of the role of Islam in Nubia, he replied that, like most other civilizations, Nubians went through, many religious changes; they were pagans and then became Christians and then Muslims. The Islamic religion was not an occupation, but just a mixing of people who met for different reasons like trade at which Muslims were skilled. Many Muslims married Nubian women since they are famous for their beauty.

<sup>266</sup> The Nubia Museum earns a much smaller percentage of national museum revenue than the Luxor Museum, but on average receives more visitors. In 2005, 57% of the Nubia Museum's total visitorship (179,951) was non-tourist and 40% of those admissions were students from local schools, representing an average of 112 Egyptian students per day (Doyon 2008). Cf. also Kamel, 2010: 35-56; Gerbich, 2010: 57-69.

museum activities is, here as elsewhere, no simple undertaking.

In 2009 women from nearby Nubian villages were allowed for the first time to display and sell their domestically produced crafts that they had often offered on sale on the doorways of their homes inside the museum. The diorama of the Ethnographic Section sprang into life and, according to some interviews I had with locals and foreigners, the museum acquired an aura of a living place rather than being a static entity. This demonstrates that a deeper and more direct involvement of community in the museum's activities could provide a fuller realization of the museum's *raison d'être*.<sup>267</sup>

The *Ethnographic Interactive Village* of the Nubia Museum of Wadi Halfa (under creation)<sup>268</sup> should, according to its concept, compensate the rather overwhelming archeological character of the Nubia Museum of Aswan. This should be achieved, as we shall see below, by the establishment of a synergy between the two museums, specifically oriented to community development.

The Children's Civilization and Creativity Center in Cairo, best known as the Children's Museum, has not forgotten to represent Nubia as part of the cultural diversity of Egypt and Sudan in its range of educational activities based on hands-on exhibits, inter-actives and computer games. In the River Nile Hall, children watch a videotape of scenes of the courses of the Nile from its sources to its mouth. The pictures are combined with a dialogue among children wearing the costumes of the various regions of the Nile Valley. The River Nile Hall exhibits three communities in their respective contexts: the inhabitants at the source of the Nile, the Nubia region and the countryside in Upper and Lower Egypt. The videotape also plays songs and music characterizing the culture and activities of the people of the Nile. In the new museum, a section on the rescue of the monuments of Nubia has been added to the existing concept that uses a film of the Salvage Campaign of the 1960s and also two interactive games: *Isis in Crisis - Rescue Philae Temple and Rebuild It on Agilka Island*, and *A Submarine to Rescue Abu Simbel* (Fig. 30).<sup>269</sup>

Since the creation of the Nubia Museum in Aswan, the Greco-Roman and Islamic Museums (located respectively in Alexandria and Cairo) have been deprived of their Nubian collections, but the Coptic Museum in Cairo still holds several objects which are currently in storage. Some Christian mural paintings have been moved to the new regional museums at Port Said, Ismailia, El Arish and Sharm el Sheik, the intention being to enrich the display related to this historical period.

Even though the bulk of its Nubian collection has been transferred to the Nubia Museum in Aswan, the Egyptian Museum in Cairo still possesses a large number of objects. The policy of display of such objects, as we shall see in more detail in Chapter 6, is still anchored in a strong Egyptocentric view reflecting a conservative historiographical interpretation of Nubia in the context of museums. The same holds true of the Aswan Elephantine Museum.

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<sup>267</sup> In the specific case, the Nubia Museum is one of the few in Egypt to have facilities to allow it.

<sup>268</sup> The writer of this research has prepared the concept for this museum which will be discussed later.



Fig. 30: The Children's Civilization and Creativity Center in Cairo: Cast of Abu Simbel Temple

In recent years, a remarkable collection of artifacts, including jewelry, was found in the antiquities storage of Giza, fifty years after it had been discovered by the Cairo University expedition at the site of Aniba during the Nubia Salvage Campaign in the sixties. It seems that some of these artifacts will be used to enhance the display of the Nubia Museum in Aswan, others will be exposed at NMEC. Also selected for display in this last museum are some Christian mural paintings previously part of the Coptic Museum collection.

In conclusion, the creation of the beautiful Nubia Museum of Aswan, although not yet completely fulfilling its mandate, certainly represents an important contribution to Egypt's acknowledgment of this cultural entity called Nubia, a vital and living part of the cultural diversity of the country.

### **Nubia in Museums in Sudan**

#### *Geo-political Background of 'Making' Heritage and Museums in Sudan*

Because of the various historical and political circumstances affecting Sudan, the framework in which Nubia is located and perceived in the Sudanese context is as different from that in Egypt, as is its geographical location. This political and geographical situation is also reflected in the policy defined by Jean Gabriel Leturcq of 'making heritage,'<sup>270</sup> and, therefore, museums. A brief outline

<sup>270</sup> In the article *Heritage- Making and Policies of Identity in the 'Post-conflict Reconstruction' of Sudan*, Leturcq critically examines the political instrumentalization of identity and cultural heritage in the Sudanese context. By taking the assessment of the concept of heritage as a mean of political recognition, he tried to understand how the Sudanese authorities, as well as dissident groups, are using the heritage-making process as a political resource and a means of pacification or, conversely, for political contestation (Leturcq, 2009).

of this geo-political background will follow here, as a means of locating these museums in the time and space in which they are currently operating.

The Sudan is a vast country, that, until recently, occupied about 8 per cent of the African continent. This dimension has been greatly reduced since South Sudan became an independent state at midnight on 9 July 2011. It is also a young country, born in the post-colonial era, and it is characterized by great geographical, ethnic, religious, linguistic and cultural diversity. This diversity has inevitably made it difficult to create a Sudanese identity.

From 1956, when it obtained its independence from the British, until 2005, the country was the scene of a major civil war fuelled principally by the dichotomy between northern Arab Muslims (including Nubia and the region of Khartoum) and southern African Christians and animists. From a religious point of view, the ethnic and cultural dichotomy is characterized as follows: North versus South, Muslim versus Christian, and Arab versus African.<sup>271</sup> In the sphere of power, the opposition, located in the economic margins (which also includes the Nubian region), competes with the center, represented by the Khartoum regime in whose hands is concentrated the decision-making power.<sup>272</sup> The position of Nubia in this context seems ambiguous as it is a member of the power group because it is Muslim and to the opposition since it is the margin.

This dichotomy between North and South has given rise to a 'divided nationalism'.<sup>273</sup> By 1991, the conflict had extended to other regions, as among them the provinces of the Upper Nile, Kordofan, the Eastern Region and to Darfur in the west. War in the Sudan became a 'network of internal wars',<sup>274</sup> involving many actors on different fronts, whether these were geographical or political.

In January 2005, the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) was signed in Naivasha (Kenya), by the Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir and John Garang, leader of SPLM (Southern People Liberation Movement). The purpose of CPA was peace building in the Sudan and the explicit recognition of the southern part of the country by the ruling elite of the North. CPA also included provisions for an interim period until 2011, when South Sudan would have held a referendum to decide about the possible secession of the region. However, the marking of the final separation of South Sudan from the rest of the country, on July 9, 2011, has still not ushered in the end of the conflict.

#### *The Policy of 'Making' Heritage and Museums in Sudan*

The following discussion highlights the current situation of the process, defined by Jean Gabriel Leturcq as *Heritage-Making* in the Sudan,<sup>275</sup> and it addresses the question of how Nubia is perceived, in particular in the context of museums. The division of the heritage of the Sudan is rooted in the British colonial system. On the one hand, there is the Northern Nile Valley (Nubia), important to archeologists, and on the other, the other areas of the country relevant to anthropologists in particular. Archeological research in the North was developed in the early nineteenth century simultaneously with Egyptology. The British colonial regime used archeological data to demonstrate the superiority of Egypt to Nubia, and the archeological approach used for research was based on the paradigm of Evolutionism. This policy constructed a strong bridge between the perceptions of the Ancient Egyptians and those of the traditional

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<sup>271</sup> Leturcq, 2009: 295-328.

<sup>272</sup> Woodward, 2003: 39.

<sup>273</sup> Deng, 1995:101.

<sup>274</sup> Johnson, 2006: 21.

<sup>275</sup> Leturcq, 2009: 295-328.

scholars making these last quite worse. Nevertheless, the Sudan Antiquities Service was one of the first governmental offices to be created at the very beginning of the colonial era. The first Antiquities Ordinance was issued in 1905.

Unlike the North Sudan (Nubia), for almost a century other areas of the country were thought to be devoid of historical interest. Only in the twentieth century did the British initiate a series of anthropological research projects designed to acquire a better knowledge of the area. This marked the emergence of British African anthropology.<sup>276</sup> At the same time ethnographic materials related to the different areas of Sudan were being collected. The Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford has one of the most remarkable Sudanese ethnographic collections. Despite the enormous wealth of the ethnographic material the country has to offer, the only significant ethnographic museum in Sudan is that in Khartoum.

The National Corporation for Antiquities and Museums (NCAM) is the government body appointed to safeguard and promote the archeology of the country. It cooperates with various international partners, particularly museums and universities, that conduct archeological research especially in the Nubia region. Recently, the research has been extended to other areas that until now were archeologically untouched.<sup>277</sup>

In the Sudan, the importance of the archeological heritage of Nubia influenced not only the content but also the choice for the location of the first museum in the country created in 1924 at the famous archeological site of Meroe. Only a few other museums followed, two in Nubia, another in Khartoum and a couple in other 'peripheral' areas of Sudan.<sup>278</sup> In 1971, in the framework of the *International Campaign to Save the Monuments of Nubia*, the Sudan National Museum of Khartoum, was built the first big museum of the country.

In 2005, NCAM began the construction of a network of various museums in different states of the country, because the few existing museums in the area had badly deteriorated. This plan included the renovation of old museums and the construction of new ones in the capitals of the regional states, as well as the creation of educational programs for schools and children.<sup>279</sup> Museums are considered an essential tool in the reconstruction and reconciliation of the Sudan, an assertion affirmed by as by the first 'peripheral' museum to be constructed in the post-conflict era in Nyala, Darfur, an area still in the full throes of conflict.<sup>280</sup> Abdel Rahman Ali Mohamed, former director of the Sudan National Museum in Khartoum and current Director of the National Corporation for Antiquities in Sudan states that:

Current objective of the Museums Section is to gain more space and organization structure to deal with the archeological artifacts and preserved sites. Furthermore a main goal in a country with a broad variety of ethnic groups is to meet with the local tribes and create places of identification for the people.<sup>281</sup>

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<sup>276</sup> Abdel Gaffar, 2003.

<sup>277</sup> French Mission to Zankor, Kordofan, Sudan.

<sup>278</sup> Details on these museums will be given in Chapter 7.

<sup>279</sup> This policy was also in line with the recommendations of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPC) which included heritage as an important tool in the process of peace building in the Sudan. CPA did state that it is difficult to reach a political agreement without achieving a cultural understanding first.

(Cf. <http://www.unmis.org/English/documents/cpa-en.pdf>.)

Planned Museums: Dongola; Wadi Halfa, Naga; Juba (capital of the independent South Sudan); Kassala (capital of the Eastern Region); El Obeid (capital of Kordofan); Wadi Madani (capital of the Gezira Region); Fashoda (Blue Nile State); El Geneina (Western Darfur State) and Al Damazin.

<sup>280</sup> Some interpret this as a paternalist gesture since, the area is still indubitably being torn asunder by conflict.

<sup>281</sup> This view emerged in the many friendly conversations I had with him and he has also stated it officially in the



Whatever attitudes and policies might have been adopted, the immediate perception of any examining the situation of museums, is that the archeological material excavated in the Northern Sudan (Nubia) is the only heritage classified as a national antiquity. The other areas of the Sudan are still only researched 'ethnographically'. The Sudan National Museum of Khartoum is considered to be the state museum *par excellence*, and is, therefore, the expression of national identity. In reality, in content it is primarily a museum of Nubian archeology, admittedly still the best known and most important to the country at this moment. Khartoum is also the location of the most important Ethnographic Museum in the Sudan. It displays the richness and variety of the ethnography of all country, including Nubia.

Museums in Northern Sudan (Nubia) are basically site museums, whose purpose is to exhibit antiquities from the area besides improving local community knowledge. In these museums nothing is exhibited from other areas of Sudan.

Museums built outside the center of power (Khartoum) and outside Nubia, that possesses the most representative archeological heritage, are programmed to show the particularity of the culture of the area, most case an ethnographic one, but by exhibiting some Nubian archeological artifacts, they do make an attempt to show the cultural development of all of the Sudan from prehistory to the Islamic era.

The perception of Nubia expressed by local curators/policy makers echoes that of the Nubia Museum's curators, but does tend to stress, at least in the context of museums, the southern leadership. Those cultural phases that have developed on the Egyptian side of the area (like A and C Groups) are considered to be part of the Nubian general heritage, whereas all the Sudanese parts of the area are usually promoted, with nationalist aims in mind, as the 'heritage of Sudan.'

In the interviews conducted by Sally-Ann Ashton at the Sudan National Museum of Khartoum<sup>282</sup> with the curators Iklas Abdel Latif Ahmed and Amanu Nur el-Din Mohamed, this leadership goes even farther as the interesting observation made by Iklas Abdel Latif's reveals. She stressed the southern origin of the royalty, focusing on the black origin of several royal figures in Egyptian history: Narmer, the king who united Upper and Lower Egypt; the mother of the Pharaoh Amenemhat I (Middle Kingdom); and the wives of Pharaohs Akhenaton and Amenophis III. It is also intriguing that she mentions that the Sudan and Egypt, and therefore Nubia, are united through blood links or kinship ties.

State officials responsible for museums try to promote Sudanese culture on the basis of the concept of 'unity in diversity' and use the full potential of cultural provision: the monumental archeological heritage of the North (mostly Nubian) and the rich ethnographic heritage of other areas of the country. The archeological heritage of the North is undeniably the most important, but the ethnographic wealth of other areas of Sudan is equally remarkable.

In conclusion, the cultural dichotomy between the North and other 'peripheral' areas of the country, including the now independent South, is often thought to have originated in the *modus operandi* of British colonialism. The 'tangible' archeological heritage of the North (Nubia) on the one hand, and a multiplicity of regional and/or tangible ethnic heritage of the large Sudanese periphery (East, West, and South before the separation) have constituted the bulk of the sources on which British colonialism constructed its views of the Sudan. Jean Gabriel Leturcq affirms that:

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CIPEG Meeting held in Hannover / Hildesheim in 2008.

<sup>282</sup> Cf. above the interview conducted by Sally-Ann Ashton at the Nubia Museum. These results also emerged during the numerous conversation I have had on the topic with colleagues both in Egypt and Sudan.

The archeological heritage became valorized for the 'use' of the people from the political centre, i.e., riparian populations living on the Nile River banks, from where the Sudanese rulers and economic elites originated. Some of the possible effects of this increased gap might be a division reflecting general political trends - a tangible heritage of the dominant groups and an intangible heritage of the 'others'.<sup>283</sup>

However, this analysis is not reflected in what is happening in the northern part of the country where the Sudanese government continues to pursue a policy of damming which can be expected to bring about the disappearance of almost the whole Nubian area in a few years.<sup>284</sup> On February 2, 2012, a tough email reached the inbox of Nubia specialists. The email was sent by Vincent Rondot, current *President of the International Society for Nubian Studies* (ISNS) and states:

[...] the government of Sudan has maintained its decision to build a dam at Kajbar and, amongst the various hydro-electric projects currently underway, this is undeniably the project with the most disastrous consequences for the archeological and historic heritage of the Sudan. As the President of the Society, I was asked to forward the attached message received from the National Corporation for Antiquities and Museums (NCAM); an appeal of our Sudanese colleagues for a salvage and study campaign before the construction of two dams, the first between Kajbar and the Third Cataract (Mahas country); and the second at Sherei (Fifth Cataract) [...]

### **Nubia in Museums Abroad**

The policy of displaying Nubian collections outside Egypt and the Sudan is not overly concerned with questions related to social and identity issues. Instead they tend to be disciplinary developments related to the discovery of Nubia and the various perceptions to which this gave rise, the submerging of parts of its territory and the restriction of the bulk of archeological activity in the Sudanese part of the area, all of which played an important role. Nor are political factors overlooked, since most of the owner institutions of the collections are still linked to the countries of origin of the collections by on-going archeological activities.<sup>285</sup>

If academic trends play an important role in the selection of those objects to be exhibited, collections displays are also dramatically affected by a number of issues - such as museum targets,

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<sup>283</sup> Leturcq, 2009: 325.

<sup>284</sup> A circular, quoted integrally in Annex III, had already been sent by Derek Welsby, former President of the *International Society for Nubian Studies*, on 25/09/08 to all the members of the society, informing them of the tragic decision, (albeit not final), of the Sudanese Government to build 12 Dams in Sudan, most of which were to be located in the Nubian area ( Northern Sudan). For the already built Merowe Dam cf. also: Askouri 2002; Askouri 2004a; Askouri 2004b; Askouri 2007; Boulding 2008; Mojon 2007; Bosshard, 2005.

<sup>285</sup> For the study of semiotic and metonymic strategies in museum exhibitions related to the subject of Europe and the Near East in the 19-20th centuries, cf. Reid, Frederick Bohrer (in Preziosi and Farago, *Grasping the World*) and Wendy Shaw (*Possessors and Possessed*). Shaw's work in particular illustrates the metonymic function of museums in shaping the identity of Near Eastern nations as a form of resistance to European colonial influence. She examines the distributive arrangement of antiquities in late 19<sup>th</sup> century Ottoman museums as an express effort to institutionalize a modern nationality in response to European imperial overtures. Her discussion of the adaptive use of Western museum structures in the Ottoman Empire relates to modern Egypt by demonstrating the repossession of a regional patrimony through the selective use and modification of inherited exhibition practices. The particular adaptations Shaw describes are dissimilar to those in postcolonial Egypt, but she establishes an important precedent with this work by emphasizing the political and cultural agency of reformulated display structures as self-reflective narratives (Doyon, 2008).

space limitations, aesthetic criteria, touristic programs and lack of funds - referred to earlier as part of the 'museum system'. These matters are often beyond the control of museum curators.

Criteria for exhibiting Nubian collections abroad evolved conceptually over time in accordance with the three stages outlined above. Europe is not only the first continent other than Africa to have received Nubian artifacts as part of Egyptian collections, it is also the continent with the highest number of museums holding such artifacts. The creation of these collections has been the result of the work of adventurers, colonialists and, at a later stage, scientific research. In Europe, Nubia is here generally embedded in Egyptian exhibitions/contexts. Initially Egyptian (and Nubian) material was presented in a non-systematic way to prevent the construction of a narrative or sequence which would have informed visitors about the existence of distinctive cultural histories in Antiquity. In fact, the displays were arranged to educate visitors about the rise of Western art.<sup>286</sup>

The Salvage Campaign of the 1960s as well as the shift of the archeological activities in the Sudan have played a role in carving out a 'single space' for some of these Nubian collections kept in Europe, although, in one way or another, they are still treated as part of larger Egyptian contexts. Chapter 7 will guide the readers through these variants (sometime contradictory) of displaying Nubia in the numerous museums of Europe.

In America, on the wave of the interest aroused by the *First Archaeological Survey of Nubia* (1907-1912) under the supervision of Americans, but above all by the general enthusiasm for the *International Campaign to Save the Monuments of Nubia* of the 1960s, in which Americans were innovators, Nubian collections first found their 'single space'. Here the first Nubian Galleries were created. Some of those institutions which have raised their voices against the Nubia bias, now again have Egypt as the main protagonist of their galleries. Despite this, a 'Nubiologist' current of thought is still kept alive in America by both the memories of this glorious American involvement in Nubia and the Afro-American community. Nubiology represents an opportunity for the tentative new studies of African scholars to show that African continent has generated some of the most ancient and illustrious cultures of the world.

In many museums, especially those which are currently involved in fieldwork in Sudan, 'Nubiology', principally for political reasons, is increasingly transforming into 'Sudanology'.

Now and then Nubian objects have undertaken long journeys, as a result of particular policies adopted by some archeologists or institutions. Australia and Canada, for example, never participated in rescue works in Nubia but they did benefit from the British strategy of giving findings in exchange of financial support to some British archeological missions. In Australia the objects are stored but in Canada, thanks to the deep and innovative involvement of some Canadians archeologists in Nubia, the Royal Ontario Museum of Toronto has a Nubian Gallery.

In Chapter 7, I have entitled one section 'Unusual Locations' and in it I present three collections kept in countries that had nothing to do with adventures or 'colonial' archeology, but, despite other priorities, were touched by the need to save the important heritage of Nubia. They are: Ghana, India and Argentina.

Their contribution to the salvage of Nubia was not only practically, but also symbolically important. Ghana and India keep the objects they brought back from Nubia in storage. In India, I found, to my amazement, many Egyptian collections, brought into the country by the British colonialists, on display. However, the Nubian collection, fruit of the only direct archeological activity of the country in Nubia, languishes forgotten in storage. In the last years Argentina has

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<sup>286</sup> Moser, 2006.

succeeded in organizing an 'Egyptian Hall', displaying part of the collection from the Nubian site of Aksha.

### *The Disjuncture of Archeology and Ethnography*

Living for many years in continuous contact with the Nubian community both in Egypt and the Sudan, I clearly sensed their frustration not only aroused by the fate of their archeological heritage, much of which is today abroad, but also by the feeling of being marginalized in the context of archeological studies.

In the reality of these Nubians, threatened by more than a century by the specter of dams, and the water that used to be their primary source of life is now progressively becoming the tomb of their culture are caught up in the vortex of the most recent socio-political events that have affected all the region, the link with their immense archeological heritage located in museums or still *in situ* has become vitally important. It legitimizes their 'being Nubians' and their attachment to the land where they were born and where these monuments are located.

One result produced by this research has confirmed what I discussed at length in previous chapters: the archeology of Nubia, at least abroad, has submerged its ethnography. Only five out of the 101 museums abroad discussed in this research houses Nubian ethnographic objects. The Naprstek's Museum of Asian, African and American Cultures in Prague, the University of Pennsylvania/Museum of Archeology and Anthropology in Philadelphia, the Archeological Museum of Gdańsk, the Museum of Ethnography/Adelhauser Museum in Freiburg-Breisgau and the University of Aberdeen-Marischal Museum, in Britain.

The Prague Ethnographic collection is unequivocally from Nubia, collected directly from the now submerged villages during the Salvage Campaign. The 370 objects kept in the American museum are of uncertain provenance in the Sudan. Yet another confirmation of the lack of good research and thorough knowledge as far as this topic is concerned. Both collections are stored. The only institution with ethnographic material from the Sudan (including Nubia) on display integrated into an archeological display is the Museum in Gdańsk where archeology and ethnography complement each other, linking past and present. The collection in the Ethnographic Museum of Freiburg is almost unknown to the specialists in this field. Whereas archeological objects are anchored in archeological/Egyptological contexts, ethnographic collections are presented or stored in African contexts. This is revealed in the way the Nubia Campaign of the 1960s was particularly concerned with monuments, even though the living cultures which continue to exist is, as were the monuments, under threat.

Archeology and Ethnography, although their nature can be seen to run parallel, are seen as separate disciplines with different research methods. This is clearly reflected in museum contexts. The opening of archeological museums to a confrontation with the ethnographic 'world' is especially important in some specific cases like the Nubian one. They not only share similarities in the objects displayed but they are also associated by the particularly strong link with the territory of the provenance of such objects. The archeological museum was born of the need to preserve the past for the benefit of future generations and it has been strongly influenced by the complexity and contradictions of modern society. It is specifically its educational mission, that aims to communicate ideas and concepts of life inexorably distant in time, that makes it an ideal place for confrontation and cultural mediation. I am aware that this approach is difficult to apply in western society where, particularly ordinary visitors, are used to the split in the two disciplines. However difficult does not mean impossible. Educating about the archeological heritage in an intercultural key could be an interesting training experience, that can be done not necessarily through objects

but also through ‘less invasive’ virtual media.

In Nubia, characterized by so many conflicts of identity, evidence of the link between the past and the present are important and this is the reason I advocate this approach, that is being increasingly used in the Nubian area, both in Egypt and in the Sudan, for Nubian collections so vociferously.

### *Stored collections*

One dramatic outcome of this research has been the discovery of the large quantity, above all in museums abroad, of Nubian material in storage. It seems that the destiny of Nubia is to be submerged, either by water or by dust. This fact appears to be related to the original organization of the Nubian collections that arrived in Europe and other regions of the world as part of Egyptian collections, with which they were later ‘naturally’ exhibited or stored.

Conservative views of the area as well as other museum restrictions (as argued in Chapter 3 and as we shall see in Chapters 6 and 7) have often played an important role in the relegation of Nubian artifacts to obscurity. The basic concept was to tell an ‘elegant’ version of the story rather than to include what was considered crude and peripheral. ‘Elegant’ in this sense refers to the beauty of a logical and mathematical proof or argument in which evidence that contradicts the hypothesis can be ignored as statistically insignificant. Consequently, the submersion of Nubia as a distinct subject for serious curatorial consideration has become almost irretrievably linked to the ensemble of points raised by this research. These include: the lack of a clear concept of ‘Nubia’ and of a scientific program, compounded by the long-term impact of the colonial perception of Nubia ingrained in the Egyptologist paradigm.

The Salvage Campaign of the sixties represented a great achievement in the field of preserving cultural heritage, as well as a major change in the interpretation and perception of Nubia. It was also a high profile demonstration of the advances of archeology in the sharing of which everybody, including museum curators, was interested. In the United States, the less strong Egyptologist ‘historical’ tradition - compared to that found in Europe - and the strong interest of the Afrocentrists, meant that the effect of the Campaign was stronger. This led to a change in policies for displaying Nubian collections. The origins of the artifacts, history and culture earned Nubian collections their own spaces in museum exhibitions in the climate of the Civil Rights movements. Unfortunately, in some cases this new attitude was a temporary enthusiasm which evaporated as soon as the exhibitions closed. Strangely enough, this process frequently occurred within the confines of those museums that had raised their voices against the Egyptological biases of both their predecessors and contemporary critics.<sup>287</sup> The upshot is that the policies of many museums unfortunately remain unchanged. The historical backgrounds of European museums in particular are often pervaded by a patina of exoticism intermingled with legends and exciting stories of adventure. These romantic tales have fed the popular imagination almost as much as the collections themselves. In short, some museums are visited less often for their collections than for the story of how the collections were formed. When Nubia is showcased, it has to fit into this crystallized and exotic scenario. As a result, we often find an assemblage of pieces of fabled Meroe; temples as ambassadors that testify to the magnitude of the Salvage Campaign of the

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<sup>287</sup> The Nubian gallery of the Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archeology and Anthropology is definitively closed. The gallery of the Museum of Fine Art of Boston is temporarily closed to be, funds permitting, properly displayed in a larger space. Also in Madrid the Nubian exhibition is currently closed for renovation work. In this case we don’t know if Nubia will be again part of the new display.

sixties,<sup>288</sup> Black Pharaohs' artifacts, that in many cases are considered to be 'Egyptian' only and objects from other phases that show the less appealing periphery of Egypt. In many cases, the material witnesses to this peripheral appendix to Egypt remain in storage.

Most museum curators with whom I have interacted to produce this work have expressed the will to give Nubian material culture more emphasis, as we shall see in the next chapters. Often, unfortunately their positive attitudes do not result in concrete actions. In most cases this has been stymied by the above mentioned museum-system restrictions, the most important being those related to finance, space, touristic priorities and politics.

My conclusion, considering how long Nubian collections have been, and in many cases still are, relegated to storage, is that what has been most neglected is the recognition of the social and cultural urgency of their display.<sup>289</sup> This is a confirmation of the argument presented in Chapter 3: if it is true that the 'museum' is undergoing fundamental and existential identity changes in an attempt to resolve and be sensitive to current issues of cultural identities that characterize modern societies, accordingly, as a consequence of its nature and systemic restrictions, the museum, as an ideological construct and active participant in the creation of history, is bound to face problems in addressing these new role. Specifically, the museum must clarify its role as part of the educational process, the repository and archive of histories or theater and entertainment. Socioeconomic and political realities play themselves out in such conflicts and venues. Those involved in the current evolution of museums have unprecedented opportunities to shape the messages of the past in the temporal realities of the present for a future as yet to be experienced.

### *The Lack of Return Policy*

As we will see in the following Chapters, the dynamic activity of travelers and adventurers, as well as the international nature of archeological research in Nubia from its very beginnings, has led to a spectacular exodus of Nubian antiquities, now widely scattered in various institutions all over the world. In several of these institutions, the collections are so rich and the available spaces so small, that they have been confined to storages for decades, while storerooms of museums in the countries of origin are being more and more emptied, especially in Sudan.

Notwithstanding heated discussions on the subject, many institutions do not espouse a policy of the repatriation of objects, at least of those most significant to the local populations. Such policies have the advantage of advocating local histories and promoting local culture by making repatriated artifacts accessible to indigenous scholars residing in the country in which the artifacts originated. An argument raised against repatriation is that museums abroad are more accessible to

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<sup>288</sup> This is an overview of the relocated temples: In Egypt 14 temples were cut out and relocated in highest places of the same area organized in 5 clusters which, starting from north, are: Philae, on the nearby island of Agilkia; Kalabsha, Beit el Wali, Qertassi, Gerf Hussein on the nearby island of Kor el Ingi; Wadi es Sebu, Dakka and Maharraqa not far from the original site of Wadi es Sebu; Amada, Derr and the tomb of Pennut, nearby the original site of Amada; the two temples of Abu Simbel are moved 200 m. higher than the original location; the temple of Ellesya is at the Egyptian Museum of Turin; the temple of Dendur at the Metropolitan Museum of New York; the Gate of Kalabsha in Berlin; the temple of Taffa at the National Museum of Antiquities of Leiden; all the temples cut from the Sudanese part of the area (the temple of Ramses II at Aksha; the temple of Hatshepsut at Buhen; the temple of Khnum at Semna East – Kumma; the temple of Dedwn and Sesostris III at Semna West) were moved to the garden of the Sudan National Museum of Khartoum.

<sup>289</sup> An interesting and useful report on how to improve the use of stored collections was produced by the Museums Association (MA) in Britain: *What's in store: Collections review in the North West* (2008).

visitors.<sup>290</sup> The problem, as already said, is acute not only for Nubian culture, but extends to most African countries and cultures.<sup>291</sup>

The display of the Nubia Museum of Aswan, unique in its kind, was formed by objects belonging to other museums of Egypt, some of which have now been completely deprived of their Nubian collection (the Greco-Roman and the Islamic museums). Nevertheless, none of the museums in the world, whose curators are often those who criticize the gaps that characterize the itinerary of the Nubia Museum, have offered any of the artifacts in their large collections, often stored in depositories and remained untouched for decades. The problem is that objects are usually considered purely a simply work of art, although they are imbued with a meaning that extends well beyond artistic merit. For example, without a doubt, the treasure of Queen Amanishaketo, today in Berlin and Munich, is one of the most significant collections of objects found in the Sudan. Yet the Sudan does not possess any object from this treasure which is imbued with such an inestimable symbolic value.

Although ethically correct, the return of these objects is, at the moment, only a pipe dream. The stumbling block is that they were legally acquired (even though often against the will or awareness of the local people). Nevertheless, dreams could still come true, if responsible authorities and museums are made aware of the crucial importance of these objects to the cultural 'salvage' of local communities and their identity. Such actions could launch a voluntary policy of at least partial repatriation. A first important step could be long-term loans, not only to foreign museums but also vice-versa. According to Thurstan Shaw,

Works of art are better studied and better understood in the milieu that gave birth to them, apart from the examination by technical equipment often not locally available. In this last sense, if the holding country really wished to fulfill its obligations towards the heritage of mankind, it could not only return the objects to the poorer country and shoulder the financial responsibilities, but also share its experience in handling and housing such objects in safe and secure ways.<sup>292</sup>

Viewpoints favoring the retaining of objects in environments where advanced curatorial conservation and preservation abilities and facilities are far more likely to be present than in the country of origin, argue that promoting a culture beyond a country's borders helps to break down insularity and isolationism and promotes international understanding. I have derived this insight from personal conversations with many of the curators I have met in the course of my career.

Relevant to this discussion is the wide range of local issues regarding repatriation even within a country's borders. For example, in North America heated discussion has arisen about the repatriation of Amerindian bones and skeletons claimed by communities so that they can be buried with all due respect.<sup>293</sup> The sensitive religious and cultural issues involved in such discussions have also been reflected in similar controversies about the repatriation of artifacts. The Egyptian concern has been with reclaiming and restoring the longevity of its history and establishing itself as a qualified caretaker for artifacts removed from its land. In this discussion, body parts such as skeletons and bones for the purposes of reburial have not been an issue.<sup>294</sup> In Egypt, a heated

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<sup>290</sup> Thomas, 1982: 3.

<sup>291</sup> Shaw, 1986: 46-48.

<sup>292</sup> Shaw, 1986:46-48. I agree with this vision since knowledge of the contexts from where the objects originated is essential to understanding the meaning of the objects.

<sup>293</sup> See the Pitt Rivers Museum's proposal at <http://www.prm.ox.ac.uk/human.html>.

<sup>294</sup> Needless to say that human remains from Nubia are among them.

debate has surrounded the repatriation of mummies, but no claim has been made for skeletons and bones, thereby significantly highlighting the distinctive nature of these debates in local contexts.

### **Points of Reflection and Discussion**

From the time ‘of the land of the unknown’, great strides have been made in understanding and appreciation of the culture that developed between the First and Sixth Cataract of the Nile, commonly named Nubian. The work is far from finished, in particular in the context of museums. Nubian collections displayed or not displayed in different areas of the world distinctly show that a positive avalanche of ‘selective amnesia’ confusion still affects the meaning of what is Nubia. Historical circumstances, academic trends, priorities and the availability of space are factors that have often given birth to strange arrangements of material artifacts in Nubian exhibitions. The consequences of this ‘selective amnesia’ and the vagaries of time that have simultaneously interwoven themselves into Nubian history, has led to the construction of different paradigms of Nubian culture.

Museums are not forums for a limited number of scholars, but ‘open’ spaces where ordinary visitors are not aware of the complications behind the curtains of an exhibition of objects. Certain choices often depend on the system in which the museum itself is trapped rather than on curators’ views. This reality is no longer compatible with the social ‘mission’ many museums are adopting, which requires a greater awareness of the intrinsic meaning of each object.

Having discussed the scholarly approaches to Nubia and the ways in which it is being presented in museums, I have no definitive solution to offer. However, as a conclusion to this chapter, I round it off with some points of discussion to raise awareness for a renewed policy of display of Nubian collections locally and worldwide:

1) Despite the fact that the construction of dams is encouraging, the creation of museums as a kind of cultural emergency, in particular in the Nubian area, this research has laid bare a certain lack of ‘social awareness’ in the policy of displaying Nubian collections in museums worldwide. This contradiction is also evident in the scarcity of literature on the subject. I can safely say that, at this moment, this piece of research is the only one of its kind that has attempted to present a comprehensive idea<sup>295</sup> of how Nubia, as idea and archeological presence, is perceived and presented in the context of museums around the globe. The research results clearly show the absolute necessity for a more detailed and inclusive assessment and interpretation of these collections. Precise information about the objects will help to develop strategies that will bring them to their fullest possible use.<sup>296</sup> The creation of archives of documents related to the objects is another important aspect. Sometimes documents are the only link between the objects and their original context. I have personally experienced this with the establishment of the Documentation Center on Nubia at the Nubia Museum of Aswan.

2) What appears immediately blatantly obvious from this research is that most of Nubian collections are submerged either by Pharaonic artifacts in majestic Egyptian galleries or by the accumulation of the dust of storage. This policy has deprived the objects of their

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<sup>295</sup> Cf. Chapters 6 and 7.

<sup>296</sup> Cf. the report *Collections for the Future*, Museums Association Enquire, London, 2005, 11.



individual complexity and trajectory and has prevented them to properly contribute to our understanding of the development, on all levels, of human civilization. The research has in fact noted a lack of appropriate explanations of the social meaning of single Nubian artifacts, usually displayed randomly to complement exhibitions of Egyptian galleries thematically, typologically or chronologically. A deeper analysis of their technomic, sociotechnic and ideotechnic meanings would reveal that they belong to an individual cultural entity, although part of the cultural diversity of the area where Nubia is located. Collections will accrue in significance when their objects are accompanied by information about their origin, utility, users, their role in the value-systems of the society concerned and so on.<sup>297</sup>

3) Coining new terms is a trend in the field of Nubian studies and the history of Nubia in general. In this research, I have often referred to this variety of terminology, that is undoubtedly related to the complex history of the area. In museums, the terms ‘Nubia’, ‘Egypt’, and the ‘Sudan’ to define the region between the First and the Sixth cataract vary according to the history of the context in which they are used. In some cases, even the term ‘Ethiopia’, that does not reflect a past or represent reality but the earlier interpretation of the area by outsiders, is used. *Kush* and *Wawat* (Upper and Lower Nubia as defined in the hieroglyphic texts) are also part of the choice of some museum curators to indicate the area. The situation becomes even more complicated with the terminology of the various cultural phases of the history of the area beginning from those coined by Reisner (A, C, X Groups and so on.). They are often used in Egyptological contexts without an explanatory text or chronological comparative table framework. Such a variety of terminology, unaccompanied by an introductory note on its use, is certainly misleading.

4) One aspect on which this research is particularly focused is the complexity of the term ‘Nubia’ and the problem of its geographical and cultural boundaries. Despite the awareness of the difficulty that this term poses when it is materialized in the context of museums, my research has identified shortcomings in the way museums present the problematic surrounding the term. Clarifying the problem rather than simplifying the display would greatly facilitate the understanding of non-specialized readers and visitors. Furthermore, community consultation and participation would bring more clarity to matters which are often not immediately obvious. Nubiology, as is archeology in general, has neglected the social aspects of the past. However, the dialogue between archeology, history and the vast body of ethnographic literature could lead to a better understanding of both past and present. In the case of the formation of modern ethnicities, the use of oral traditions for guidance and confirmation of particular interpretations of their data material is very useful. In Nubian collection displays, museums could shed new light on the visual reinterpretation of a number of historical events that have for so long been depicted as if no other interpretation seemed possible. With the help of researchers, a model similar to that developed for the audio-visual series *Verba Africana*,<sup>298</sup> used for didactical purposes

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<sup>297</sup> Svašek, 2008: 203-204.

<sup>298</sup> The *Verba Africana* series, under the direction of D. Merolla (Leiden University), publishes video recording of oral performances on CDRoms, DVD's and the Internet, for documentation, research and the e-learning of African languages and oral literatures. The video recording of such African oral genres as poems, songs and tales, is integrated

and for research, could also be produced for Nubia and used as a means to involve, inform and engage the local populations, as well as sources of information for students and tourists.

5) A better coordination among institutions holding Nubian collections, that pays heed to the above points, is worth deliberating on.<sup>299</sup> As Wendy Doyon states, all forms of archeological representation, that is the production of meanings through a visual language of communicating the past, rely on the repetition of certain themes to establish social legibility. Museums are one of the most important media of archeology, adding a material dimension to the visualization of history. By observing patterns in the arrangement and composition of archeological displays, museum exhibitions can be read as visual narratives that negotiate ideological associations with the past.<sup>300</sup> The patterns observed in the arrangement of Nubian collections are characterized by a variation of interpretations in the different locations. A major homologation in the presentation of such collections would not only clarify visitors' understanding but would also contribute to strengthening the individuality of this culture. Since part of the area no longer exists, virtual tours could be created from collection to collection, especially, among those that might complement each other.<sup>301</sup>

The role of temporary exhibitions is also significant. Since the time of the Salvage Campaign in the sixties, many temporary exhibitions on Nubia have been organized worldwide, sometime involving several museums accompanied by the exchange of material and generous loans from the countries of origin. All very commendable but it has rarely happened that temporary exhibitions of archeological objects kept in museums abroad have been used to organize exhibitions in the countries of origin. There are numerous unique Nubian masterpieces of art preserved abroad that locals have never had the chance to see. To reverse this one-way policy, it is desirable that temporary exhibitions, exhibiting significant objects now kept abroad, may also be organized in countries of origin.

To tackle the problem of capacity-building activities in the management of collections, I would suggest a sort of North-South organization. Management of collections covers several areas, among them registering and cataloguing objects; care and preservation; and the interpretation and display of artifacts. Training in the first two topics would benefit the curators in the countries of origin of the objects, and take place abroad where the institutions are more advanced in these fields. In the meantime, this

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into the presentation of relevant aspects, as among them language, form, content, performance, literary, social and historical context. The videos and the accompanying material allow researchers and the interested public to approach oral literary productions as 'total event' distributed in several 'layers'.

(<http://www.hum.leiden.edu/research/africanliteratures/verbaafricana/verba-africana.html>)

<sup>299</sup> A good example is represented by the Association of Curators of Collections of Egypt and Sudan (ACCES) founded in May 2006. It is a Subject Specialist Network for museum curators responsible for looking after archeological collections from Egypt and Sudan in the United Kingdom in order to share information and good practices. (<http://www.acces.org.uk/>) (Cf. also Chapter 7).

<sup>300</sup> Doyon 2008: 12; Bal, 1996: 201- 218; Bal, 2004: 23- 28; Bennet 1998: 25-35; Moser, 2001: 262 - 283; Moser, 2006.

<sup>301</sup> Just to give some examples, the Nubia Museum of Aswan, with a collection from the area between the First and Second Cataracts, could virtually connect, through images of objects and sites, with the Sudan National Museum in Khartoum and its collection from Sudanese Nubia. Those institutions that have worked in different sectors of a single site could virtually join in with their objects.

would help the countries of origin to become independent and self-sufficient in these fields. Training on content issues should take place in the countries of origin of the collections in order to benefit curators of museums abroad. In this respect I want to mention what emerged in the audit of the Egyptian and Sudanese collections kept in the Britain carried out by Margaret Serpico from Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archeology, University College London.<sup>302</sup> The audit, based on the information provided by Cornucopia, the Museums Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) database,<sup>303</sup> aimed to make information about the content and scope of Ancient Egyptian and Sudanese collections in the Britain fully available to the public for the first time.<sup>304</sup> The audit, as Margaret Serpico says, has produced, besides the targeted results, an additional and unexpected result:

Recent publications have emphasized the need to increase public engagement with collections. This engagement can take many forms, including display, on-line access to objects or associated knowledge, publications, scholarship, loans to other museums or to non-museum venues, open storage or study tours and handling sessions. Concomitant with that goal, however, is the recognition that all of these avenues of access need to be underpinned by fundamental knowledge of the objects in the collection: the most basic need is for museums to be clear about what their collections contain. This necessity for documentation has highlighted a paradox whereby the growing demand for a better understanding of the contents of a collection as a means of making it more dynamic is restricted by the general lack of specialist curatorial knowledge.<sup>305</sup>

The approach used by Sally-Ann Asthon of the Fitzwilliam Museum<sup>306</sup> is a good example of the policy I would suggest. On account of a lack of knowledge, the context of the origin of the objects often risks remaining no less problematic than the discovery of their intrinsic and spiritual value.

### **Nubia Museums in Synergy: Wadi Halfa and Aswan**

Below I present a personal experience of approaching the subject of Nubia in museums. In 2005, following a joint mission to Nubia organized by UNESCO, the Sudanese and Egyptian authorities signed a memorandum of understanding to cooperate in the field of cultural heritage. One point of cooperation on the agenda was the creation of the Nubia Museum of Wadi Halfa, thought to be the

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<sup>302</sup> Serpico, 2006. The project was part of the Museums Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) 's Subject Specialist Network initiative.

<sup>303</sup> Aware of the large number of Egyptian [and Nubian] collections present in Britain and the scarcity of detailed information about them, a survey organized by staff of the Petrie Museum and the British Museum, with funding from the Museums Libraries and Archives Council (MLA), has striven to provide an audit of British holdings of Egyptian [and Nubian] material. Museums, Galleries and historic houses were sent questionnaires asking for details of the size, provenance and approximate make-up of their Egyptian holdings, and their experience in curating an Egyptian collection. The information from over 200 replies was standardized and added to Cornucopia (<http://www.cornucopia.org.uk/>), the MLA database of collections. It is now possible to search Cornucopia reliably by site-name, object type and excavator or collector name (Hardwick, 2010).

<sup>304</sup> The data generated by the survey are of great use to the ACCES, the Association of Curators for Collections from Egypt and Sudan, in the future planning of increased assistance to collections, notably with regard to documentation, public access and development of education resources (Serpico: 2006, 6).

<sup>305</sup> Serpico, 2006: 6.

<sup>306</sup> Cf. Chapter 7, sub-section on the Fitzwilliam Museum.

counterpart of the Nubia Museum of Aswan, which Egypt opened in 1997.<sup>307</sup> As a researcher and a UNESCO expert in this field, I developed, in cooperation with the local authorities and the Nubian community, a museum concept which aims to build on the achievement of other museum displays of Nubia while trying to overcome the shortcomings indicated in the present research.<sup>308</sup>

### *Wadi Halfa*

Before presenting the new museum concept, it is necessary to introduce Wadi Halfa as a modern historical site. Wadi Halfa is located in northern Sudan, on the east bank of the Nile, a few miles south of the border with Egypt, only 50 km away from the famous site of Abu Simbel, in the core of the Nubian area. Like all 'big-border' cities, it has always had a strategic function. Throughout its history, it was the most important post on the Egyptian frontier, as it was situated at the terminus of the navigation route from Aswan. Moreover, it was located at the end of a dangerous cataract, the Second, which made it almost impossible to navigate the river there. The ancient Egyptians, whose presence in the place was preceded by that of others for thousands of years, built massive fortresses on the Second Cataract whose primary function was to control trade with the South.<sup>309</sup>

The modern town of Wadi Halfa was founded in the nineteenth century. During their occupation of the country, the British made it their headquarters, and during the Second World War, it was a communication post of the Allied Forces. In order to facilitate their activities in the country, the British built a railway whose construction began in 1877 under the governorship of General Gordon.<sup>310</sup> Wadi Halfa was certainly the most important town between the First and Second Cataracts, with all the administrative offices, schools, a mosque and an important market at its core.<sup>311</sup> The modern Nile Hotel was architecturally the most appealing building of the city. Until the destruction of the city in 1963, its rooms housed rich traders, administrators and tourists in the winter as well as famous international personalities, in particular academics, during the Salvage Campaign. Although the strip of cultivable land was limited, it was very fertile and rich in palm trees. The famous Date Palm Avenue, shaded with two rows of thick date palms, was also the first of its kind in the country.

The character of border city, port of arrival and of the departure and transit of people representing a variety of cultures, strongly influenced the character of the population. The residential area was, in fact, divided into tribal and national sectors. The 11,000 inhabitants and the distribution of its quarters are living proof of the diverse and heterogeneous character of the population.<sup>312</sup> If Wadi Halfa, as every border city, displayed this heterogeneity of population and therefore of traditions, the villages, isolated and reticent to mix with other ethnic groups, that were part of their district, were a reflection of what was then Nubia. Many of these villages were

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<sup>307</sup> De Simone, 2007.

<sup>308</sup> De Simone, 2007.

<sup>309</sup> The fortresses of Buhen, Mirgissa, Semna, Kumna.

<sup>310</sup> Barakat and Daud, 1959.

<sup>311</sup> Mubarak, 1903: 38.

<sup>312</sup> Traders of Syrian and Egyptian origin lived in the northern market area. In the East, the Arkawit quarter was occupied by Elegait, Kenuz, and families of Egyptian origin, while Kenuz families and non-Nubian Sudanese workers used to live in the Tippets quarter. Migrant Egyptians occupied the Basalawa quarter. They had migrated from Upper Egypt searching for a better standard of living and settled here adopting Sudanese nationality, but without forgetting their traditions of Egyptian *fellah*. A community of black people from the Nuba Mountains of Kordofan lived in the Gebel district. The only district to be inhabited only by Nubians and with Nubian characteristics was the Dabarosa one. (Described by Dafalla 1975:15-19; personal communications by old members of the Wadi Halfa community).

composed of beautiful traditional houses, examples of the architecture that along with the Nubian language is the most representative aspect of modern Nubian culture. It was here that the traditional architecture and the language of the Nubians were kept almost intact.<sup>313</sup>

The remains of the ancient civilization, scattered all over the area, were sources of pride to the people living beside them.<sup>314</sup> The history of the High Dam and the *International Campaign to Save the Monuments of Nubia* in the Sudan is the history of Wadi Halfa and its district. The construction of the High Dam raised the awareness among Nubians that the loss of their monuments could cause something the loss of more than a simple building of mud: that of their identity.

The monuments of the area, the city of Wadi Halfa, and twenty-seven surrounding villages were drowned by submerged in the waters of Lake Nasser (or Lake Nubia as it is obviously called in the Sudan). Fifty thousand people were relocated in foreign places, at Khasham El Qirba, in the Kassala area, 300 km. east of Khartoum. The new environment has placed restrictions on a number of the activities that characterized the social life in the previous location, as among them the observance of the ceremonies linked to the Nile<sup>315</sup> and the daily life of the extended family. In Wadi Halfa area, the family network was based on sharing the same house and the wealth of palm trees, that created a form of social cohesion.<sup>316</sup> The compounds of the new areas have limited space for shared family life. To sum up: values, patterns of social relationships, ways of subsistence, art as expression, language, local architecture and the fashioning of objects to be used in everyday life are now in danger of disappearing.<sup>317</sup> Nubians are struggling to save their past and their continuity, their identity is undergoing dramatic changes and even disappearing, linguistically speaking, in the context of the new places in which they live. Connecting with the past is important to saving a people's future, and in this respect museums can play a key role. In spite of the strong pressure by the Sudanese government to force the indigenous dwellers of Wadi Halfa to leave the area in 1964, a few of them refused to budge, preferring to stay in their homeland that had contributed so much to the formation of their identity. In the beginning these inhabitants persevered and continued to live on the banks of Lake Nubia (Lake Nasser) enduring desperately difficult living conditions, until they finally settled in their current location. The city of Halfa today spreads out at least 50 km southward away from the original location of the city and consists of a series of connected villages. The Nubia Museum of Wadi Halfa is planned to be built in the locality of *Ahir el Bohaira* (The End Lake), on a piece of land of 9.69 *feddan*: (40,720 m<sup>2</sup>) obtained by community and authorities participation.

The museum will also be built by local community participation. Paraphrasing the words of the famous Egyptian Architect Hassan Fathy, the museum can fulfill the dream of those old Nubian pioneers to preserve not only the antiquities by the creation of its buildings but also by allowing Nubians to participate in the revitalization of their folk architecture and their intangible local heritage. Hassan Fathy has written:

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<sup>313</sup>Wenzel, 1972.

<sup>314</sup> The involvement of Nubians in the Salvage Campaign of the 1960s was notable, despite the sadness for what they were losing at the same time.

<sup>315</sup> Kennedy, 1978.

<sup>316</sup> Cf. Chapter 1.

<sup>317</sup>Fernea, 1973. Although the survey was limited to Egyptian Nubia, its analysis can be also applied to the Sudanese part of Nubia. In the framework of the project for the creation of the Wadi Halfa Museum, an Ethnological Survey of the Nubian communities of Wadi Halfa is currently being carried out. A first phase was executed by the UNESCO Cairo Office and implemented by the Nubian Language Society in Khartoum. Most of the members of this Society are from Wadi Halfa.

The vernacular architecture traditions witnessed in Old Nubia prior to the construction of Aswan High Dam in Egypt and the subsequent flooding of Nubia, mean more than just a unique aesthetic and ingenious method of building. It represented an 'owner-builder' system by which architecture could express all the intricacies of the community's socio-economic, political and cultural heritages. The processes involved in constructing and completing buildings were in many ways important to Nubian culture than the material end product they yielded. The structures of Old Nubia were the manifestation and perpetuation of a necessary social environment based upon communal interaction and harmonious interdependence. The cooperative effort which was so essential in the creation of a Nubian village not only served to strengthen social ties, but developed a firm sense of place and the bonds of pride and mutual respect which are so strongly tied to community achievement.<sup>318</sup>

The creation of this museum can offer a new platform for all future relevant social, cultural and economic development of the city. If this museum is successful, it will encourage many forcibly displaced immigrants to return to their homeland.

#### *A new museum concept*

The planned Nubian Museum of Wadi Halfa has been conceived as a cultural space where the local environment, traditional architecture, the Nubian community and their intangible heritage and archeological artifacts interact as integral parts of the same whole.

The community, in cooperation with the authorities, is contributing to the museum creation by symbolic remuneration or voluntary work. This obviously does not represent a condition but a symbol of interest.<sup>319</sup>

In the proposed concept, the museum will have a dual function: 1) to preserve Nubian contemporary culture and, 2) to connect it with its millennial past of which it is a direct continuation. This dual function has to be put into practice in an appropriate manner if we want to avoid what happened with the Nubia Museum of Aswan: this museum has been primarily transformed mainly into a place of commemoration of the past and its link to the present is weak. If this mistake is to be avoided, the new museum needs to be above all a community-based museum conceived as a compound, including a building for the historical and archeological artifacts and an *Interactive Nubian Village*. This combination will constitute a sort of eco-museum emphasizing the importance of the whole and the interdependence of all its parts which will be presented below.

The building for the historical-archeological artifacts will display an archeological collection composed principally of objects discovered in Wadi Halfa during the *International Campaign to Save the Monuments of Nubia* in the sixties. The collection, currently kept in Khartoum,<sup>320</sup> where it was moved when the old museum in Wadi Halfa was closed, will be brought back to the original homeland after more than fifty years. This building for the historical and archeological artifacts will consist of five major display halls. A first gallery will introduce

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<sup>318</sup> Fathi, 1999: i.v.

<sup>319</sup> Owing to the current economic difficulties, the fund raising for the museum is not going as quickly as might have been hoped but, despite this, the community is not stopping its efforts. Training programs in traditional architecture, commenced by UNESCO, are continuing in order to allow the community to participate both in creating the museum building and to its future maintenance.

<sup>320</sup> The largest pieces of the collection are stored at the National Museum in Khartoum, all the rest is in the storage at the Khalifa Museum.

Nubia from Prehistory to Islam. This gallery will be a reduced version of the Sudan National Museum in Khartoum, offering the local community a comprehensive idea of ancient Nubian civilization. The gallery, for those who visit Wadi Halfa from Aswan, will offer a complementary view of those missing elements of the Nubia Museum of Aswan caused by a lack of pieces originating from Sudanese Nubia.

By placing objects and images in their original context, a second gallery will present *The International Campaign to Save the Monuments of Nubia* that, in the Sudan, is the history of Wadi Halfa. Intertwined with the archeological display will be an exhibition of ‘the exodus’ of the resettled local communities. No less than the stones, these communities were moved but in many cases the proper documentation of their ‘story’ has been neglected. This topic is still missing in the Nubia Museum of Aswan.

A third section will focus on the history of the city of Wadi Halfa: situated in the core of the Nubian area and entry point from Egypt to Sudan, it has been always strategically important in the history of the country. The city was the headquarters (1895-1898) of the British-led forces whose purpose was to defeat the forces of Abadallah El Taayishi, the second leader of the *Mahdia* Rebellion. These events led to the construction of the famous railway which runs from Wadi Halfa, to Khartoum.

A fourth space will be dedicated to the links between Wadi Halfa and the Nubian Desert. The gold-mines of this desert were the principal lure for the Pharaohs and will be also the main subject of this room, which at its center will feature a model of the beautiful archeological site of Berenix Panchrisos, discovered in the middle of the desert.<sup>321</sup>

Finally, there will be an area for temporary exhibitions serving not only to create events and attract potential visitors, but also to educate the community about new cultural subjects. This room could also be a space for dialogue with present-day cultural forms (songs, films, TV, Internet) as these are experienced by Nubian youths.

An *Interactive Nubian Village* will be the other and more ‘original’ component of the museum compound. The village will be used to revive and protect the intangible Nubian heritage. It will be integrated into the local environment and constructed, as in traditional architecture, of local *jalous* (mud-bricks). The mission of the Nubian Museum of Wadi Halfa is to compensate the mostly archeological character of the Nubia Museum of Aswan by emphasizing and protecting the intangible heritage of the Nubians. In the Wadi Halfa Museum this heritage, captured in the Ethnographic Section of the Nubia Museum of Aswan in the form of a diorama, is performed by people bringing a sense of ‘living history’.

The objective of this museum concept, emphasizing the role of the *Interactive Village*, will be to preserve the traditions of the modern Nubians through concrete activities. The role of professional folklorists and folklore institutions in documenting and preserving the records of the endangered traditions of Nubia has sustained the traditions themselves by supporting the practitioners. This support for the practitioners has entailed a shift from artifacts (tales, songs and customs) to people (performers, artisans, and healers), highlighting their knowledge and skills. This approach will enlarge the scope of intangible heritage and the measures to protect it.<sup>322</sup>

The first component of the *Interactive Village* will be *The Nubian House*. As farming is known to have been the main work of Nubians throughout history, the local Nubian houses reflect farming principally as a social activity through their motifs and decorative styles. For the ancient

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<sup>321</sup> Artifacts and images of the Eastern Nubian Desert are exhibited in Varese, Italy, at the ‘Dependance’ of Villa Tosplitz (Cf. in Chapter 7 related sub-section).

<sup>322</sup> Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 2004: 221-222.

farmers, the *Nubian House* was much more than a mere family dwelling. It represented their entire daily life on the banks of the Nile and all the rituals to which this gave rise, inspiring the decorative style of the houses. These farming traditions will be depicted in the *Nubian House* together with the original folk art of Nubia, in which decorative symbols refer to different religions and different cultural influences, as among them ancient rituals, African cults, Christianity, Islam and so on.<sup>323</sup>

Rashid Adam, architect/designer of the museum and a Nubian himself, has selected three models of Nubian house in North Sudan to be reproduced in the museum building. The façades will be similar to those of some houses recorded in an archive of photographs by Marian Wenzel before the construction of the Dam (Figs. 31, 32, 33). Some of these photographs show the name of the house's owner. In such a case, the house in the museum will be named after him.



Fig. 31: Ancient Fedija houses before their submersion

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<sup>323</sup> The first two houses are under creation with the support of community members, specifically women, trained with the technical support of UNESCO Cairo Office to use their folk heritage in decorating Nubian houses. In Old Nubia, women decorated their dwellings.





Fig. 32: Wadi Halfa Museum (General plan of the museum which recalls the layout of an ancient Fedija village: Rashid Abdelfattah Adam's drawing)



Fig. 33: Wadi Halfa Museum (Façade of one of the houses of the *Interactive Village*: Rashid Abdelfattah Adam's drawing)

The shift in perspective from artifacts to people is clearly differentiated by the other components of the *Interactive Village*. A group of Nubian traditional houses constituting the *Handicraft Centre* will be devoted to the production and display of eight different forms of Nubian

handicrafts.<sup>324</sup> Of particular concern is the general neglect of the production of art and handicrafts as the community had to adjust to adopting new lifestyles to cope with its new environment.

As Ossama Abdel Wareth, formed director of the Nubia Museum of Aswan and a Nubian himself states:

The arts and crafts, as essential parts of the cultural material folklore, embody and reflect the history and beliefs of the Nubians. Today very few Nubians below the age of twenty are knowledgeable about these traditional arts and the folklore associated with their intangible heritage and history, while members of the older generation with the knowledge and skills are passing away the museum has to recognize the potential loss of Nubian cultural wealth with the passage of the older generation (this holds for all cultures everywhere) as well as to seek practical ways of stemming this loss in a particularly fragile socio-historical context. A feasible approach is to facilitate opportunities for the older generation to educate and train interested members of the younger generation. This is a realistic attempt to resuscitate Nubian handcraft skills, and to involve young Nubian women in income-generating activities.<sup>325</sup>

The museum will also host a *Centre for Revitalizing, Promoting and Teaching Modern Nubian Language (Nobiin language)*. *Nobiin*, the language of the modern Nubians, is considered an endangered language and faces the risk of extinction. The new generations of Nubians, raised elsewhere, speak almost exclusively Arabic. It is predicted that, in less than twenty years, the *Nobiin* language will completely disappear, if appropriate measures are not being taken. The revitalization of the Nubian language is one of the tasks of the Nubia Museum of Wadi Halfa. An inclusive program will be prepared in cooperation with members of the local community, interested in this field, to transmit this language to the community at large using different curriculum levels to address child and adult groups. The curricula will be designed to use documented oral culture such as folk tales, songs, poems for children and adults, proverbs, tongue twisters and folk history.

Another space in the *Interactive Village* will be devoted to the *Nubian Theatre* in an effort to preserve and sustain Nubian music, singing and musical instruments. The *kisir*, used for different folk dance performances characterized by handclapping and agile body movements, is one of these instruments. These dances, which include both male and female participants, are also accompanied by the use of various folk percussion instruments. The *Nubian Theatre* will not only be a tool by which to preserve traditional Nubian music and songs, it will also keep alive the atmosphere of the village. Special musical events will be organized on a regular basis and perhaps institutionalized on a fixed day so as to become events that could attract visitors. These events could also include new music (in Arabic as well) to draw attention to modern cultural forms.

A space will also be devoted to the *Nubian Cuisine*, and there will be a *Nile Ships and Boats Cruises Centre*. The *Nubian Cuisine* will serve typical Nubian meals and is included in the *Interactive Village* of the museum to ensure the preservation and promotion of Nubian food. The products will be supplied through the idea of the *Local Farm*, created in dedicated parts of the land near the lake, to be cultivated by the local farmers using traditional Nubian farming tools and a traditional water-wheel for irrigation. Moreover, the presence of the lake has inspired the architect

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<sup>324</sup> The exhibition and workshops will focus on the following subjects: pottery; woodwork; palm-frond weaving; cotton textiles; jewelry; women's ornaments; traditional farm tools; a Nubian wedding display; a traditional Nubian therapy display; and a Nubian ruler's house (*goortin noog*) display.

<sup>325</sup> Abdel Wareth Abdel Meguid, 2005: 225-226.

to add to the original concept the local activity of sailing within the museum project landscape. Sailing on the waters (once those of the Nile) could attract many visitors to the site. The sailing activity will take place on the lake and nearby there will also be a sort of display/workshop in which tools and techniques for making and preserving local boats and ships will be on display.

*Nobiin*, along with Arabic and English, will be used to label the whole area to ensure that the character of the museum is properly demarcated and will allow locals and visitors to familiarize themselves with this language. Ethno-archeological research, covering a number of archeological topics, will be also be activated. The greater part has been devised to show how the archeological record is formed and how to work back from the record to the behavior and society that produced it. Ceramic ethno-archeological studies, for example, include such topics as production, style, longevity, use, disposal and function, as well as changes in any of these areas.

### *Museum Tourist Development Strategy*

Although issues relating to tourism development are not relevant to this dissertation, they do need to be addressed briefly since tourism will play an important role in the success of the museum. Museums located in peripheral areas are often afflicted with problems of maintenance and operability on account of their failure to attract large hordes of tourists, and those who do come are often not very affluent, and because of their marginalization by the authorities.

One of the practical problems of the Wadi Halfa Museum is not its construction, but the design of its future cultural and tourism *raison d'être*, that has to be done in a way that it ensures that it is sustainable, successful and able to attract visitors. Wadi Halfa, although seen by Sudanese as a remote area, is located on the border of Egypt and this makes it a strategic place. Abu Simbel, considered to be one of the most famous archeological sites of the world and situated just 50 km north from Wadi Halfa, represents a vantage point in the touristic master plan of the museum. It will certainly encourage the large number of tourists who visit the famous temples of Abu Simbel on a daily basis to visit Wadi Halfa with a two-day visa extension for the Sudan.

Included in this holistic vision, which also embraces Egyptian Nubia, is the fact that Wadi Halfa lies at the heart of the Nubian area and can take advantage of tourists coming from both north and south. It will represent the core of the Nubian area, a scientific and cultural center of propulsion for the region between the First and the Third Cataract of the Nile, rich in important archeological sites and beautiful Nubian villages. A specific tour to Nubia, with trained guides, commencing from Aswan and continuing through the sites of Lake Nasser, culminating at Wadi Halfa, or continuing farther south, could offer a deeper and clearer view of the history of Nubia. At the moment, the surviving monuments are explained in a vacuum of local history and a modern context.

Wadi Halfa can also be the entry point to the Eastern or Nubian Desert with its interesting gold- mines and archeological remains. This tour can be facilitated by the historical Wadi Halfa-Khartoum railway, that crosses the most barren part of this desert. Here, besides the archeological remains, visitors can also have interesting encounters with the local Bedja and be able to appreciate their particular and unique traditions.<sup>326</sup>

This concept proposal has been specifically designed to make the Wadi Halfa Museum into a dynamic institution and an integral part of the Wadi Halfa community, linking past and present to make a better future.<sup>327</sup>

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<sup>326</sup> Briggs *et al.*, 2009.

<sup>327</sup> The foundation-stone of the Museum was laid on April 22, 2008. The ceremony accompanying it was also shared with Nubians who came from Egypt, specifically from Aswan (Fig. 34).



Fig. 34: Nubians from Wadi Halfa and Aswan celebrating the laying of the foundation stone of the Nubia Museum of Wadi Halfa (04/ 21/2008)