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## **Nubia and Nubians: The 'Museumization' of a Culture**

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## CHAPTER 6

### Visions and Evolutions of Nubian Collections in Their Homeland

There is only one place where this tour of the Nubian collection worldwide can begin, the homeland of the collections: Egypt and the Sudan. The criteria of presentation set out below coincide with the display policy adopted by each of the two countries. The description of the museums in Egypt follows a chronological order. From my point of view, Egypt is the country where it is easiest to follow the conceptual evolution of Nubian collections display: from the 'Land of the Unknown', exemplified in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo, to the creation of a Museum of the Nubian Civilization in Aswan/Nubia. It must be noted that, before the creation of the Nubia Museum of Aswan that absorbed most of the collections owned by other museums in the country, Nubian artifacts were distributed in museums according to their historical period: Pharaonic and contemporary Nubian items in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo,<sup>328</sup> the rest in the Greco-Roman, Coptic and Islamic Museums. The last locations in which they are presented in Egypt are the few objects displayed in new museums and a 'Sudanese curiosity' at the University Museum of Alexandria.

In the presentation of the museums in the Sudan, the criteria followed have taken into consideration the different display policies in the various states that make up the country. I shall begin with those located at the center of power: Khartoum. Here we find what are considered the most important museums for both archeology and ethnography, the Sudan National Museum of Khartoum, where Nubian heritage might give the impression of being as the only official heritage of the country, and the Ethnographic Museum. I have also decided to mention the University of Khartoum that, although in possession of only a small collection on Nubia, is considered the center of the intellectual power.

Museums in the Northern State (Nubia) are the next stop on this tour. Here we find what are essentially site museums built near archeological sites. Their primary functions are the keeping and showing of objects from these sites. These functions have been enhanced by socially conscious efforts that are also of equal benefit to the knowledge of the local community.

This tour is completed with a look at the museums in the 'other' areas of the country, in particular the west of the Sudan where local museums that also contain of Nubian artifacts have a special mission. The target of these museums is to show ethnographic and historical artifacts of the local history and a collection of Nubian antiquities as a way of presenting a course for the cultural trajectory of the development of 'all' the Sudan from Prehistory to Islam.

The 'geographical' tour of the collections - subdivided among collections in the homelands and abroad - will of course be linked to the categories of museums discussed in Chapter 5 (Egyptian Museums, Universal and University Museums, Nubia Museum, National Museum, Other specialized Museums, Regional Museums, Ethnographic Museums, Private Collections).

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<sup>328</sup> Part of this Museum is formed by a large collection of artifacts from the X Group or Ballana culture.

## Egypt: From the Egyptian Museum in Cairo to the Nubia Museum of Aswan

### *Egyptian Museum (Cairo)*

A number of valuable artifacts were taken from the Sudan during the Anglo-Egyptian protectorate of that country. However, the greatest flow of Nubian artifacts arrived at the museum from the salvage campaigns.

The Egyptian Museum in Cairo was created during the same period as the *First Archaeological Survey of Nubia*,<sup>329</sup> during which the remains of a hitherto unknown culture were brought to light. This huge systematic archeological activity, carried out over so large an area in such a short time, was considered a great event in itself. Unfortunately, the scholarly bias of the specialists involved, at the time part of a common western way of thinking, affected the interpretation of the Nubian materials, dismissing them as crude versions of the Egyptian material. Bowing to this judgment, the Egyptian Museum in Cairo never had a gallery specifically dedicated to Nubian culture and its development. Only one room, (at the time designated Room 44) displayed a selection of objects from one of the most important archeological discoveries of the area: the Royal Tombs of Ballana and Qustul.<sup>330</sup> Although the room was virtually hidden away, the life-size copies of horses buried with the owners of the tombs drew public attention. The presence of this 'single space' can unquestionably be attributed to the need to show the magnificence of this particular discovery made during the *Second Archaeological Survey of Nubia* (1929-1931).<sup>331</sup>

The rest of the Nubian collection was completely intermixed with the Egyptian collection, following the chronological order in which the ground floor of the museum is organized. The result is that the Nubian collection is almost invisible, perhaps even to the most careful observer. Its display reflects the traditionalist Egyptologists' perception of Nubia at the time.

Today the number of Nubian objects displayed has decreased notably. When the the Nubia Museum of Aswan was constructed in the nineties, part of the collection was moved there.

In an attempt to follow the 'invisible' Nubian tour of the museum, we can begin on the first floor balcony where items related to the Pan Grave, A and C Groups are displayed in three small showcases in a completely anonymous area (Fig. 35). The labels related to the Pan Grave material,<sup>332</sup> unchanged from the beginning of the last century, are illustrative of how the Nubian culture was considered a sort of mystery at the time. One says:

It appears that there were small colonies of this people scattered over Upper Egypt during the Second Intermediate Period who differ both in race and customs from Egyptians.

In the two showcases displaying A Group and contemporary Egyptian early-Dynastic artifacts as well as the best pottery production of the C Group,<sup>333</sup> neither the nature nor the origin of these objects is mentioned.

The two models of a regiment of Nubian soldiers in painted wood, found in a tomb at Assyut, is displayed in the nearby room to highlight the greatness of the Egyptian craftsmen rather

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<sup>329</sup> The Egyptian Museum opened its doors to the public in 1902 and the First Archeological Survey of Nubia was conducted between 1907 and 1912.

<sup>330</sup> Egyptian Antiquities Organization, 1980.

<sup>331</sup> Emery, 1938.

<sup>332</sup> The first showcase, dedicated to the Pan Graves, contains pottery, leather bags and sandals, parts of garments, and decorated animal bones from excavations at Mostagedda, Egypt (Brunton, 1937).

<sup>333</sup> It includes beautiful incised pottery, the typical terracotta figurines with an apotropaic character, jewelry and amulets.

than comment on a part of the Nubian culture. This explicative gap is filled by a copy of this masterpiece of wooden art transferred to the Nubia Museum of Aswan where the link with Nubia is clearly emphasized.



Fig. 35: Egyptian Museum in Cairo: C Group pottery showcase

The Nubian tour continues on the ground floor, in the area dedicated to the New Kingdom. At this point, I wish to highlight one of the examples related to the terminological problematic surrounding Nubia. In one corner are displayed the stelae and lintels from the temple of Wadi el-Sebua that belonged to the Viceroy of Nubia, Setau, who is called in the labels, according to one of the many definitions of Nubia, ‘Governor of Ethiopia’.<sup>334</sup> The use of an erroneous terminology, at variance with that which is considered correct, is certainly a misleading element with which visitors have to contend. A notable lack of information is glaringly apparent in the corridor dedicated to the 25th Dynasty and the Late Period.<sup>335</sup> Here the famous stela of King Piankhi, among other objects, brought here from Gebel Barkal during the Anglo-Egyptian occupation of the Sudan and considered one of the most important epigraphic document of this period,<sup>336</sup> has no label and no reference to its provenance.

The Meroitic artifacts<sup>337</sup> are displayed in the Greco-Roman section and are labeled but simply to say that they are Meroitic. The nub of the matter is whether the average visitor understands what ‘Meroitic’ means, if there is no explanatory text or chronological comparative table framework that might elucidate it.

The last artifacts that we encounter in this Nubian tour of the museum are those of the Royal Tombs of Ballana and Qustul, no longer in Room 44 but in the nearby corridor where the lack of the life-size horses,<sup>338</sup> now in Aswan, and of proper explanations impairs the visibility and the understanding of these objects (Figs. 36, 37). Several other artifacts belonging to the Nubian collections are still in storage.

<sup>334</sup> Barsanti and Gauthier, 1911: 64-86.

<sup>335</sup> The 25<sup>th</sup> Dynasty collection includes a lot of statuary.

<sup>336</sup> Grimal, 1981.

<sup>337</sup> These objects include statuettes, pottery, architectural elements, offering tables.

<sup>338</sup> In one showcase, there is now only a life-size head of horse (Fig. 37).



Fig. 36: Egyptian Museum in Cairo: X Group (Ballana Culture), Meroitic and 25<sup>th</sup> Dynasty artifacts



Fig. 37: Egyptian Museum in Cairo: horse's head cast - Ballana Culture

The Egyptian Museum in Cairo is an interesting example of how Nubian culture was perceived at the dawn of its discovery: 'the Land of the Unknown'. Although I would recommend a general approach (namely, that Nubian collections should be displayed separately or more clearly presented to better highlight the cultural diversity of Egypt and the Sudan), in the case of the Egyptian Museum in Cairo I would say that everything should be left as it is to keep track of the history of Nubian exhibitions. With new explanatory labels to highlight the story of the archeological interpretation and display of Nubian cultural materials, it would represent an example of the traditional perception of Nubia in the context of museums.

### *Coptic Museum, Cairo*

As we have seen in Chapter 5, Nubia is also being displayed in specialized museums according to its different historical phases. The Coptic Museum in Cairo is a specialized museum for Christian artifacts from wherever they might have been found in the Nile Valley. Since 1939,<sup>339</sup> it has been the institution assigned to hold the most important collection of Nubian objects from the Christian period, many of which, following the Salvage Campaign of the sixties, were displayed in a Nubian Gallery in the old wing of the museum.<sup>340</sup> The aim of the old Nubian wing was to show the Nubian dimension of the Christian artistic production of the area.

Although since 1997 the Nubia Museum of Aswan has absorbed most of the collection, the Coptic Museum continues to hold many objects of great importance<sup>341</sup> including a unique collection of manuscripts. In recent years, the museum has been subject to a large project of rehabilitation consisting in changes in the display, the installation of new showcases, the restoration of some artifacts and of the building itself. This new display, opened to the public on 26 June 2006, has a geographical arrangement of the objects. Only in a area of the first room the collection is displayed artistically.<sup>342</sup> A Nubian wing no longer exists and there are now a few artifacts dispersed over several galleries. The remaining objects would have still allowed a small meaningful individualized display of Nubia.<sup>343</sup>

### *The Ethnographic Museum in Cairo*

To those attempting to obtain a perception of the feeling of European colonialists and of that society of 'pioneers of enlightenment', rationalism and scientific thinking,<sup>344</sup> that held its meetings here, the Ethnographic Museum in Cairo is an interesting experience. It is located in the building of the National Geographic Society founded by Khedive Ismail as an independent organization on the 19 May 1875. The Museum, created in 1895, consists of five main halls labeled the Cairo Hall, the Africa Hall, Egyptian Ethnography and a general hall about Egypt. The organization of the museum is far from being either attractive or clear, especially for ordinary visitors. The display is very disorganized both in terms of showcases and labels, and this is compounded by the weak lighting.

Although the general organization of the museum leaves plenty of room for improvement, the wealth of information about the lifestyles of people in nineteenth-century Egypt and Africa is notable. Detailed information illuminates the habits and customs of Egyptians with special emphasis on geographical distribution. A whole array of different cultural customs are portrayed, including those for wedding ceremonies. Other topics include public baths, circumcision, smoking habits, women's ornaments, musical instruments and toys. There are also period paintings, statues and other artifacts.

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<sup>339</sup> In 1939, the Service of Antiquities decided to transfer the totality of the Christian antiquities exhibited in the Egyptian Museum, including those from Nubia, to the Coptic Museum. Since then, all finds from Christian sites have automatically gone to the Coptic Museum.

The outstanding collection was formed especially by the beautiful church frescoes from Abdallah Nirqi (the rest of these frescoes are part of the holding of the Museum of Leiden) as well as beautiful icons and texts from churches at Qasr Ibrim, Qasr el Wizz (notable is the famous codex of Qasr el Wizz) and from other Nubian sites (Gabra, 1990).

<sup>341</sup> They include the frescoes of Abu Oda, many of the gravestones from Sakinya, pottery, textiles, wood-work and basketry as well as a unique collection of manuscripts in Old Nubian and Coptic. (For the gravestones of Sakinya cf. Monneret de Villard, 1935:170 -175; Monneret de Villard, II 1935: 73 -74; Monneret de Villard IV, 1957: 172-173; Monneret de Villard 1933; Mina, 1942.

<sup>342</sup> Tomoum, 2010 : 27-33.

<sup>343</sup> I would like to thank Ezzat Salib for his cooperation.

<sup>344</sup> Cf. Chapter 4, 73-74.

How does Nubia fare in the arrangement? In the Cairo Hall (*Le Caire* Room) there are a few showcases exhibiting small statues of people in traditional dress from various regions of Egypt. The statues depict the types of people who perform different jobs. The Nubian, completely dark, with his white robe and turban depicts the trusted southern immigrant, keeper of many Egyptian buildings (Figs. 38, 39).

The Africa Hall (*L'Afrique* Room) displays various examples of handcrafted items, some of which were produced in the Nubian area (Figs. 40, 41). This arrangement - separating the African Hall from the Egyptian Ethnography Hall - including Nubian artifacts in both of them, reveals an obvious bias in the view of the creators of this part of the Museum: Egypt as separated from its continent and the ambiguous position of Nubia that is part of both.



Fig. 38: Ethnographic Museum in Cairo: showcase exhibiting small statues of people in traditional dress from various regions of Egypt ( Room *Le Caire*)



Fig. 39: Ethnographic Museum in Cairo: Entrance to the *Le Caire* Room



Fig. 40: Ethnographic Museum in Cairo: Sudanese/Nubian *angareb* (Room *L'Afrique*)



Fig. 41: Ethnographic Museum in Cairo: Entrance to the *L'Afrique* Room

*Aswan Museum, Aswan (Elephantine Island)*

As has the Egyptian Museum in Cairo, this museum has a traditional perception of the idea of Nubia. Nonetheless its geographical location, the history of its creation and the formation of the collection that interests us, have established a special and inseparable relationship with Nubia which makes it one of the most fascinating museums on the long list presented in this research.

The first link with Nubia, of a geographical nature, is its magnificent position that overlooks the first of the six cataracts that characterize the Nubian Nile Valley (Fig. 42). The museum is located on the island that is considered the border between Egypt and Nubia. The second link, the historical one, is the fact that the museum was originally the home of the main author of the project that changed the fate of Nubia forever. His name was Sir William Willcocks, a British civil engineer who proposed and designed the Aswan Dam. The building dates back to 1898, but the Antiquities Organization transformed it into a museum when the construction of the dam was completed in 1912. It is the oldest regional museum in Egypt, and it was founded to hold material from Elephantine Island and the Aswan area in general.



Fig. 42: Aswan/Elephantine Museum

The third link is related to contents. The period of the creation of the museum coincided with the termination of the *First Archaeological Survey of Nubia*, therefore it became one of the first homes for many of the artifacts unearthed during this survey. Today, most of these materials are part of the collection of the Nubia Museum.<sup>345</sup>

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<sup>345</sup> Cf. Nubia Museum sub- section.

In the nineteen most of the collection of this museum moved to the new Nubia Museum of Aswan. However, various objects from Nubia continue to be part of the museum holdings.

Four rooms in Willcocks's house contain, in chronological order, materials related to different periods of Pre-Dynastic and Pharaonic Egypt.<sup>346</sup> Intermingled with these materials are a few items from Egyptian Nubia.<sup>347</sup> The captions, unchanged from the time of the establishment of the museum, do not provide the precise names of the sites of provenance but only bear the general indication of 'Nubia'.

Although not directly dedicated to Nubia, this museum has a history linked to it, in spite of a certain lack of historical and archeological awareness related to some holdings. For example, a stela, currently the most important piece from Nubia in the museum, is located in the circular corridor (added later by the Egyptian archaeologist Labib Habashi) where Christian and Islamic artifacts are displayed. The stela is hidden by a heavy wooden frame and seems to resemble the many others exhibited in the same area. Only a few know that it is of paramount importance to the history of Christianity in Nubia; it is the foundation stone of Ikmindi, one of the most important Christian city-fortresses of Lower Nubia.<sup>348</sup> Probably when the largest part of the collection was moved to the Nubia Museum, where a *maquette* of the city-fortress of Ikhmindi is on display, the significance of this stela was not understood. This is confirmed by the caption which indicates that it is a 'Sandstone stela containing 15 lines in Greek language - Greek period'. In fact, the language of the stela is not Greek but Old Nubian.

The importance of the stela was confirmed in a letter accompanying the photos that Sergio Donadoni of the University of Rome La Sapienza (Italy) sent to the Nubia Museum in 2000 when it was enriched by the photo gallery *Nubia Submerged: through their eyes with their own words*, of which the author of this work was the motivator and curator.<sup>349</sup> The photo gallery is devoted to submerged Lower Nubia and houses a permanent exhibition of 168 photographs of those sites either today underwater or those dismantled and relocated elsewhere. The photos were taken by people who participated in the several salvage campaigns.<sup>350</sup>

The photo gallery exhibits a photograph of the stela kindly provided to the writer of this research by Donadoni who, at the time of the Nubia Campaign, investigated Ikhmindi. In a letter communicating his willingness to provide the photo Donadoni wrote:

I received the request to supply some photographs on our excavations and activities in Nubia, and passed the list on to Rome, where our archives are kept. I take this opportunity to suggest that you ask the Nubia Museum in Aswan to display the stela of Tokiltoeton, found by us at Ikhmindi, that we deposited in the Aswan Museum (Elephantine). It testifies to the advent of Christianity in Nubia. It is a document of particular importance, that is worthy of being displayed rather than reproduced.<sup>351</sup>

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<sup>346</sup> Old Kingdom, Middle Kingdom and New Kingdom periods.

<sup>347</sup> Red-polished and polished black topped pottery as well as Pre-dynastic palettes.

<sup>348</sup> Donadoni, 1959; Donadoni, 1981: 64-65.

<sup>349</sup> Marino and De Simone, 2000.

<sup>350</sup> More details will be given below in the section on the Nubia Museum.

<sup>351</sup> Italian original version of the letter: 'Ho ricevuto a suo tempo l'invito a fornire alcune fotografie relative ai nostri scavi e alle nostre attività in Nubia, e ho passato allora l'elenco a Roma, dove è conservato il nostro archivio [...] Con l'occasione le suggerisco di chiedere al museo di Aswan che sia esposta l'iscrizione di Tokiltoeton, trovata da noi ad Ikhmindi, che testimonia l'ingresso del cristianesimo in Nubia e che è stata da noi depositata nel Museo di Elefantina. E' un documento di particolare importanza che varrebbe la pena di presentare piu' che di riprodurre'. (Sergio Donadoni, 3/01/2000).

This stela, still anonymously displayed at the Aswan Museum, would be better used enriching the Christian section of the Nubia Museum. A few other materials from the Aswan Museum are in the storage.<sup>352</sup>

### *Nubia Museum, Aswan*

Its success has been in integrating the past, present and future by creating an educational institution dedicated to Nubian history, a contemporary focus for the revival of Nubian culture and a museum designed to promote and preserve cultural artifacts for the future in a single building.<sup>353</sup> (Fig. 43)



Fig.43: Nubia Museum: External wall bearing the name of the Museum

With these words the Nubia Museum of Aswan received, with nine other museums in the world, the Aga Khan Award for Architecture in 2001 from among the original 427 projects submitted to the jury. The construction of this museum represents the crowning glory of the Nubia Salvage Campaign, symbol of international cooperation and the history to the present-day Nubians.

The need to create a house for the artifacts from the area that was going to be submerged forever clearly emerged at the very beginning of the campaign. A contract to build the museum

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<sup>352</sup>I would like to thank Athef Naguib from Aswan/Elephantine Museum and Ossama Abdel Wareth for providing me with the complete list of stored objects, of which I include here only a summary. They consist primarily of a great quantity of coins (Ptolemaic, Roman, Byzantine and some with no date). There are god-goddess statuettes, beads, amulets, some jewelry of various materials, daily utensils and hunting equipment and pottery. It is impossible to give most of these objects a precise site provenance or date.

<sup>353</sup> *The Aga Khan Award for Architecture, 2001- The Eight Cycle, 1999-2001: Nubia Museum, Aswan, Egypt.* Aga Khan Development Network. July 3, 2002. <http://www.akdn.org>

was signed in 1967, but it took more than a decade before it became a reality. Constructions began in 1980 and the museum opened its doors to the public, in the presence of President Hosni Mubarak, on 23 November 1997.<sup>354</sup>

The building was designed by the Egyptian architect Mahmoud el-Hakim, and the museum display was planned by the Mexican architect Pedro Ramirez Vasquez. Both reflect the new and innovative architectural concern of the late seventies. Built to offer a complete picture of Nubia throughout time, the museum design incorporates spaces and galleries devoted not only to artifacts but also to the geography, geology, ecology and the economic and social life of the area. The result is a remarkable achievement in holistic architectural design and content, blending with the traditions and the sands of Nubia. The museum nestles on a series of terraces reminiscent of a Nubian village or *nugu*, molding architectural forms into the surrounding environment (Fig. 44, 45).

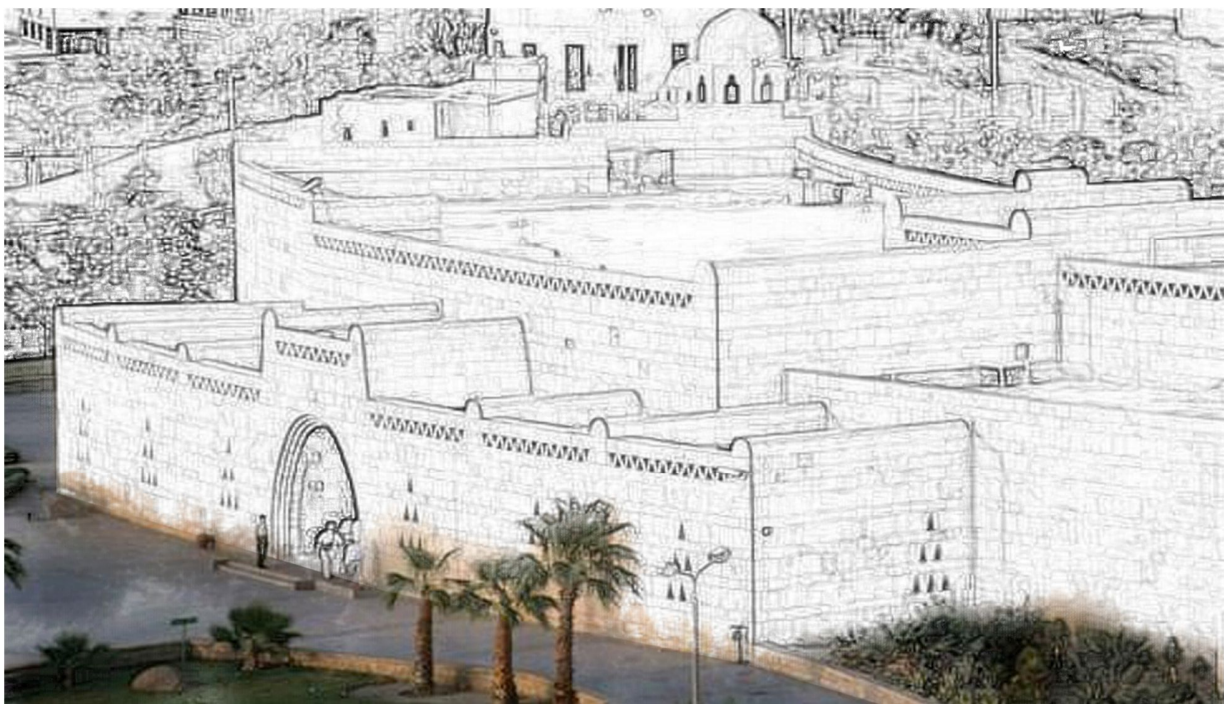


Fig. 44: Nubia Museum: View

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<sup>354</sup> Gaballa, 1997.



Fig. 45: Nubia Museum: Entrance to the main building

Traditionally these complexes once stood along the banks of the Nile, blending with terraces or appearing as a straight line rising slightly above a non-contoured riverbank (Fig. 46). This melding with the surrounding area exemplifies Nubian concerns and, on a practical level, provided camouflage for the inhabitants.<sup>355</sup>



Fig. 46: Nubia Museum: A watercourse and lakes running in the Open Air Museum

The museum includes more than 3,000 objects excavated from various sites in Nubia, during the Salvage Campaigns that commenced at the beginning of the 1900s and terminated in 1981 with the UNESCO campaign. They had previously been kept in the Egyptian, Coptic and

<sup>355</sup> De Simone, in press.

Islamic museums in Cairo, the Greek-Roman Museum in Alexandria, the Aswan Museum on Elephantine Island and in several storage facilities scattered all over the country.

The artifacts in the ethnographic section were collected from the Nubian communities of Aswan and Cairo. The display of the objects is organized chronologically beginning from the prehistoric period and finishing in the modern era. As they come from the Nubia Salvage Campaign, the collections are devoted to Lower Nubia in particular. Only a few objects, also found in Lower Nubian contexts, are representative of the cultures developed in Upper Nubia.

The route is one way, directing an uninterrupted flow of visitors, preventing any doubling back and getting in the way of the people behind. All the objects are well lit and labeled in state-of-the-art showcases. Efforts have been made to evoke the original surroundings of the exhibits, now of course lost, by the regular insertion of scale models of buildings from the historical periods represented.

The prehistoric section includes a large collection of material,<sup>356</sup> partially displayed in the open-air museum. Moving chronologically, the route continues into the world of the A and C Groups the first cultures that represent the original way of life of the Nubians before Egypt began to influence it. The A Group and C Group cultures are introduced principally by the effective use of text panels in the display. A selection of objects produced by both Groups, in particular ceramics, are among the most striking artifacts displayed. An A Group tomb shows burial customs. The section also demonstrates how Egypt began to fit into Nubian history.

The excessive and strategic use of Pharaonic objects in the exhibition has often aroused heated discussions among scholars who consider these objects an attempt to absorb the simpler material culture of Nubia into the Pharaonic wealth of material.

To give an idea of the impact of the display on Egyptologists and their reaction to this 'new typology' of museum, below are some comments the Egyptologist Olaf E. Kaper, part of an article on the Nubia Museum he published just after its opening. Aware of the location of the Museum (in Egypt), Kaper comments objectively on the presence of Egyptian/Pharaonic artifacts in the display and their role in highlighting the longstanding relations between the two areas and their interdependency:

The museum presents the history of Nubia in the terms coined for the history of Egypt. The terms Old, Middle, and New Kingdom are used throughout, which is rather artificial but it has the advantage, apart from being familiar terms of reference for the visitor, of highlighting the intimate association of the Nubian culture with the Egyptian. The museum displays highlight these connections specifically.<sup>357</sup>

I hasten to add that most of the Pharaonic objects in the Nubia Museum are from Nubia and therefore an integral part of the story that the museum wants to tell. The colossus of the Pharaoh Ramses II, originally part of the external court of the temple of Gerf Hussein and now exhibited in a central area of the museum, has been one of the main targets of criticism. I agree with Kaper that the exhibition of this statue and similar architectural elements reflect the technical expertise and achievements in excising, reassembling and saving these big monuments of which Abu Simbel and

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<sup>356</sup> They consist of rock drawings (petroglyphs) and flint tools.

<sup>357</sup> Kaper criticizes only the artificial way in which the Egyptian objects are grouped. The method follows an artistic rather than an historical criterion. He considers this policy a falsification on the part of the museum (Kaper, 1998: on line. cf. Annex V).

Philae are the most striking examples.<sup>358</sup> The colossus of Ramses II is flanked by the beautiful pieces of the 25th Nubian Dynasty originally from Napata, their southern capital, and from Luxor, the northern capital.<sup>359</sup> If the dimensions of the colossus of Ramses makes it a cynosure, the beauty of these pieces certainly do not make any less of an impact on the attention of the visitor (Fig. 47).

The second part of Kaper's article reveal that a more explicit clarification is required:

[...] Elsewhere, the chronological order of the objects in the museum has been sacrificed in favor of a more modern visual arrangement. The Kerma ceramics (four vessels) are displayed in the New Kingdom hall together with ceramics from Napata, Meroe, as well as the C-Group culture[...] The Meroitic culture was centered in Sudanese Nubia, and this important historical phase has, consequently, received only scant attention in the current museum display. Only some of the famous decorated ceramics from this period are shown and some of the characteristic funerary statues known as *ba*-birds. The scanty attention however is due not to neglect but simply to the lack of objects.<sup>360</sup>



Fig. 47: Nubia Museum: Statue of Ramses II surrounded by 25<sup>th</sup> Dynasty objects

The random presentation of some objects, favoring an artistic rather than an historical conceptual display, was adopted, as Kaper indicates, because of a dearth of artifacts. Most of the objects 'sacrificed' for an artistic display originate from the Sudanese part of the area and very few from Egypt. Unfortunately, in the textual part of the display (panels, captions, available guides), no explanation is given for this choice. The dearth of artifacts and the need to fill gaps in the museum itinerary has sometime penalized other contexts of Egypt, both in museums and on sites.<sup>361</sup>

<sup>358</sup> The chapel of the Viceroy of Nubian, Setau, carved on a cliff at Qasr Ibrim, and reassembled in the museum in the same area as the colossus is another example of the sense of these displayed architectural pieces.

<sup>359</sup> Among the artifacts displayed here are some that deserve to be mentioned: the head of King Taharqa, the statue of the notable Harwa, *the dream stela* of Tanutamun, the statue of Horemakhet from Karnak among many others.

<sup>360</sup> Kaper, 1998: on line.

<sup>361</sup> The Greco-Roman Museum in Alexandria and the Islamic Museum in Cairo have been deprived of their Nubian collections; the Coptic Museum has lost many of its masterpieces, de-motivating the authorities/curators to display, during the rehabilitation work, what is left. The recently reassembled temple of Gerf Hussein at Kalabsha is missing one of its colossal statue of Ramses II that was a pillar of the external court.

The criticism of the display gaps gives me the opportunity to bring this topic to a close with an observation: many academics think that a historical display should highlight all the phases of Nubian culture in the context of this Museum that is meant to be much more than a simple museum, as it contributes to the legitimation of the existence of a “Nubian culture”. The logical and ethical outcome would be that this would encourage other museums in the world to donate some of their artifacts (they have often stored- several copies of one typology of object) to the Nubia Museum, to fill the gaps in the present dearth of objects and historical periods. The historical and artistic display would then converge into a more complete and holistic presentation of Nubian culture and identity.

Moving chronologically, the life-size horses, as they did when they were displayed at the Egyptian Museum in Cairo, lend a weighty emphasis to the collection of Ballana and Qustul and represent an attraction not only for adults but also for the numerous children who visit the museum daily. The Christian and Islamic periods are represented in a small number of well-selected objects.<sup>362</sup>

As discussed in Chapter 5 if displays are to be fully comprehended they need to be complemented by other media. The whole collection of archeological artifacts exhibited in the Nubia Museum includes, within the display area, educational commentaries, wall texts, as well as films in Arabic and English. Maps, diagrams and models as well as Egyptian objects combine to give the visitor an idea of how Nubian history developed and of how events in Nubia fit into the greater context of Egyptian history.

Continuing the journey through the history of Nubia, model reconstructions of the distinctive Nubian folklore introduce us to the last chapter of the Nubian Kenzi in their own land. This last section of the museum display is considered by many visitors to be the most attractive (Fig. 48, 49). Its success owes much to the skills of the interior designer but the contribution of the local community, that has opened its doors to the museum curators responsible for selecting the artifacts, has been irreplaceable. The community’s houses and suggestions have generated most of what is displayed in this section. The models include distinctive Nubian architecture and reveal every aspect of life, including hand-painted decorations and woven baskets. Models of individuals carrying out household, social, and agricultural activities bring the ‘ancient way’ to life for members of the younger generation who might otherwise have no knowledge of the life led by their parents and grandparents. There is even a painting of the Post Boat that used to stop at each of the forty-six districts of Nubia *en route* from Shellal to Wadi Halfa, south of Aswan, in the early twentieth century.

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<sup>362</sup> The delicate church frescoes from Abdallah Nirqi, as well as beautiful icons from churches at Qasr Ibrim, have been transferred here from the Coptic Museum in Cairo and the institution of monasticism is represented by the objects found in Qasr el-Wizz, the most fully investigated monastic establishment in Nubia. Christian funerary architecture is presented in the reconstruction of a tomb. Alexandros Tsakos told me that more attention could be paid to the display of more manuscripts, in particular those written in Nubian. The Islamic display, represented mostly by tapestries and texts, includes some stunning textiles from the fourteenth century AD, found at Gebel Adda and Qasr el-Wizz and important texts.



Fig. 48: Nubia Museum: Ethnographic Section: Women sit in front of the house making mats and basket



Fig. 49: Nubia Museum: Ethnographic Section: Wedding party

The museum route terminates in an area in which panels tell the story of the construction of the High Dam and the principal achievements of the UNESCO Salvage Campaign, placing particular emphasis on the removal of the temples of Philae and Abu Simbel.

Although an area of the museum was programmed for rotating exhibitions on a regular basis to attract visitors as well as expand the community's knowledge of different topics, in fifteen years just two semi-permanent exhibitions have been organized in this area, one of which had a purely Egyptological content.<sup>363</sup> From time to time the museum does organize temporary exhibitions, but these are not based on a systematic policy and not set up in this specific space.

The outdoors, intermixed with the remains of the pre-existing Fatimid cemetery, complete the museum itself.<sup>364</sup> There is a prehistoric cave with replicas of primitive drawings of animals; a watercourse and lakes; an open-air amphitheatre for the performance of traditional Nubian folk music and dance. A typical Nubian Kenzi house, only recently furnished and opened to the public, is one of the most striking parts of the open-air museum.

In the last decade, with UNESCO technical support, the academic dimension of the museum has been enhanced by the creation of a Library and a Documentation Center on Nubia. The author of this work has implemented both activities.<sup>365</sup> The motivation behind the Documentation Center is not purely scientific, there is an especially strong ethical incentive. Part of Nubia no longer exists. Reports, maps, photos, notes, accounts, are all that remain of it. Despite this, various of these who are in possession of many such 'survived pieces' of Nubia are reluctant to share them, even in the form of copy, with the local community of scholars. Another instance of academic versus ethical reasons.

The Nubia Museum has been built as more than just a place to display objects but also to be a cultural space for the local community. The present impression is that this mandate is somehow still marginal. The Educational Department is engaged in activities for children: pottery and basketry workshops, traditional costume making, theater performances, journal writing and annual exhibitions are certainly organized to show the children's achievements. This might lead to the supposition that that the problematic does not concern community as such and there is a latent fear that involving adults might turn the museum into a place for 'Nubian activism', in the negative sense of the expression. My feeling is rather different. I think that the Nubia Museum is somehow still perceived as an archeological museum the sort of institution in which community participation has traditionally had a marginal role.<sup>366</sup>

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<sup>363</sup> A Temporary Exhibition Hall located on the left of the main entrance to the museum was set up for just such purpose. However, since 1997 only two exhibitions have been organized in this specific area: one on the Prince of Elephantine Heka-ib, (purely Egyptological but with outstanding pieces) that was held from 1997 till 2008, and the other on the ex-Czechoslovakian excavations in Nubia during the Salvage Campaign of the sixties that has been on display since 2009. In a corner of the same room, on permanent display there are 4 mummies of the Roman period, found at Koshtamna during the *First Archaeological Survey of Nubia* (1907-1912). They were formerly kept in the Aswan/Elephantine Museum.

<sup>364</sup> On display there are 80 items from the Egyptian and Coptic Museums; 22 rock drawings from various sites in Nubia and 26 objects saved from the Kalabsha and Sebu'a areas.

<sup>365</sup> De Simone, 2006; De Simone, 2009: 173-178.

<sup>366</sup> To cover the gap related to community activities, the Governorate in the village of Garb Sehel, has developed a survived Nubian village on the West Bank of Aswan, a project on community based eco-tourism. However, since culture tourism planning is never without side effects, although this project has increased the economic incomes of the community, it has also certainly dramatically changed the traditional behavior of the Nubians that is fully part of their intangible heritage. In the village the project has created a real phenomenon of 'Disneyfication' according to the term introduced by the British sociologist Alan Bryman (Bryman, 2004). Bryman uses this term, generally in a negative sense, to refer to the process of transforming a real place into a 'Disney park'. Through the Disney park's four trends

It is also important to note that Aswan is the last stop on a trip to the Nile Valley. Visitors who have undoubtedly bought Pharaonic souvenirs all over the country expect to buy publications on Nubia and in particular souvenirs and handcrafts of this area in the Nubia Museum. They are doomed to disappointment as the two museum shops offer only Pharaonic items.

To sum up, the Nubia Museum of Aswan, its name, the architectural style of its premises and its geographical position represent an evolution of the idea of Nubia in the museum context. Using different kinds of media, the display reflects its view of this Nubia concept and how it has evolved over time. If the route has some historical and cultural gaps, especially pertaining to the cultural phases in the part of Nubia which today belongs to the Sudan, this is no doubt owing to either an insufficient or a complete lack of objects from that area. A careful observer will certainly note that the gaps in the paths are filled with explanatory panels, pictures and models. The link between the Museum and the community, as explained above, should be improved, but is symbolically very strong. The Museum represents the space that tells the story of the formation of an identity that has its roots in ancient times, of which the Nubians of today are proud and which is part proud and which is part of the cultural diversity of today Egypt.

#### *Connecting Sites and Objects: The Exhibition 'Nubia Submerged' at the Nubia Museum of Aswan*

It is important to give a specific space to an exhibition included in the Nubia Museum, as this method is helpful to creating an understanding of yet another approach in the museological perspective and perception of Nubia. In a corner of the Temporary Exhibition Hall of the Nubia Museum, a section curated by the author of this work is dedicated to vanished Nubia: *Nubia Submerged: through their eyes with their own words* (Fig. 50).<sup>367</sup>



Fig. 50: Nubia Museum of Aswan: Panel to the exhibition *Nubia Submerged*

This section was actually set up in 2000, three years after the opening of the museum and was supported by the Scientific Office of the Italian Embassy in Cairo in cooperation with the museum staff.

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of theming, hybrid - consumption, merchandising and performative labor, this process polishes everything thought negative or ugly, transforming it into something altogether more pleasant and approachable.

<sup>367</sup> Marino and De Simone, 2000.

The 164 photographs are unique. They were taken by those involved in the rescue work in the area right from the beginning in 1900. They document the breadth of the work as well as the individual visions of many of those who saw the projects through to their conclusion. The commentaries to the photos invoke the spirit of the time and visions of how they viewed this heritage: finding the 'link,' the connecting path in our human story between the remains left by others and our mind's eye is the *raison d'être* for the *Nubia Submerged* exhibition.

Following a geographical north-south path, the exhibition highlights the history of the various salvage campaigns and their main features: the enthusiasm of the first archeological missions, at the beginning of the past century, eager to discover a hitherto unknown culture; the technical challenges faced by the UNESCO campaign in the sixties and the involvement of local populations in the rescue of their heritage.

The charm exerted by *The First Archaeological Survey of Nubia* is expressed by the words of its director George Andrew Reisner that is used in the label to comment on the photo of Shellal, the site that Reisner was to use to develop his detailed typology and chronology of Nubian culture and history:

In September, my attention was drawn to the broad sandy plain east of the railway station at Shellal by the mass of Coptic potsherds lying on the surface along the valley edge ... the level plain in which lies Cemetery 7 is formed by a hard substratum with a broad low ridge across the western end, a few knolls in the middle and a series of ridges running out from the eastern and south-eastern sides] (G.A. Reisner 1910).

The huge efforts and technical achievements of the salvage of the temples in the UNESCO Campaign are evoked by the words of Silvio Curto, used in the label of the photo depicting the saving the temple of Ellesiya:

The moment finally arrived for carrying out the extraction of the temple and this was a very difficult task. Between 1962 and 1963 the Nile had regularly decreased, however, in 1964 the phenomenon was not repeated. By September, the Torinese expedition could only observe from the boat, a few holes in the temple wall over the door which rose over the turbulent waters [...] The dire predictions which we mentioned before having materialized, the project of salvaging the monument found itself forced to limit the scope of its activities. We had to give up hope of being able to strengthen the rocks and explore the surrounding area. In such an extreme case we decided to save the temple from the increasingly high waters of the dam, prompted the Antiquities Service to organize a team of their most experienced workmen to remove the temple. On the 19<sup>th</sup> we were grounded, isolated from the world. With a couple of derricks and tackle; rock saws; an electric generator; torches and a little food, the workmen worked frenetically twenty-four hours a day for twenty days cutting entirely and perfectly all the inscriptions and reliefs from the rock façade and the upper part of the socle. Carrying the block one by one directly to the boat, in the end the total number of reliefs and inscriptions came to 66 blocks . Most were one-ton cubic meters each, but many were larger. After 5 days, the Nile became to rise another time and soon the boat was floating toward Wadi es- Sebua and the precious contents were unloaded safely (S. Curto, 1970, translated from the Italian).

The involvement of Nubians, who often paid for their participation with their own lives and were then forgotten, is commented on in this account of the French mission at Mirgissa, on the label which accompanies the photos of this site:

On returning towards the motor-boat, we saw it well out from the landing place, and drifting rapidly downstream with Hussein [Nafadi] on it. He appears to have been moving the boat along the bank of Dabenarti without having the engine running and got adrift somehow just before we appeared. He tried to get the engine going, but we could not hear whether he succeeded; he managed to get the boat round, meaning to go through the cataract head-on-but before the boat was much more than broadside - on to the stream he was in the cataract. The boat went down at once, and Hussein jumped or was thrown clear, as we saw him once swimming – below the cataract. After that he was not seen, and the local men say that he must inevitably have gone into a second cataract, which is only about 150m below the first. When last seen in the boat, Hussein had got his coat off, and was at the tiller trying to hit the rapids bows-on] (Diary of the Excavations of Mirgissa Fort: November 14, 1931-February 3, 1932).

This exhibition has been set up to create a link between the objects displayed and their original context and to remind also to the public of what has been irremediably lost, often overshadowed by the acknowledged worldwide success of the salvage campaigns. The intrigued face of the then Minister of Culture Farouk Hosny and other people who attended the opening was a sign that this second meaning had achieved its aim.

### **Nubia in the New Museums of Egypt**

Over the last few years, Egypt has constructed many new museums for various purposes. Some of them are regional museums certainly built for the sake of improving community knowledge but also to highlight pieces of art kept in dusty storage rooms for many years. Some Nubian pieces of the Christian period, in particular mural paintings, have been sent to these museums: two at the National Museum of Alexandria, six at the Museum of Sharm el Sheik, one at the Museum of Suez, one at the Museum of El Arish in Sinai and one at the Museum of Minia. Some others are destined for the National Museum of Egyptian Civilization in Cairo.

The concept of these museums is to educate local communities and provide information about the development of the history of Egypt in its various phases. The scope of these paintings, detached from the churches of Nubia during the Salvage Campaign of the sixties, is to enrich the Christian display. Their Nubian provenance is clearly mentioned in the labels.

### **A Sudanese ‘Curiosity’ in Alexandria**

The relationship between the University of Alexandria and Nubia consists in its participation in the Salvage Campaign of the sixties with a mission to the site of Gebel Adda.<sup>368</sup> The Faculty of Medicine also cooperated with the University of Michigan, under the direction of James E. Harris, in a field research study of the craniofacial variation in the ancient Nubians from Gebel Adda and Ballana (AD 250 to AD1300).<sup>369</sup>

However the collection I want to discuss at this point does not come from these periods of fieldwork but has been donated by the Sudanese authorities. I define the collection a ‘curiosity’

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<sup>368</sup> El Amir, 1963.

<sup>369</sup> The original archive of this Anthropological Study is kept at the University of Michigan. James Harris, who was the director of the mission to Nubia, wishes to donate the archive to the Documentation Center on Nubia at the Nubia Museum of Aswan.

since it is the only ‘Sudanese’ display defined as a such that I found in Egypt.

The University Museum was formed by three sections: The Egyptian, the Greek-Roman and the folklore section. The ‘curiosity’ is located in the Egyptian hall and consists in a collection of 160 objects from Sudanese Nubia, as said<sup>370</sup> donated to the museum by the Sudanese authorities and considered an important part of the museum’s acquisitions. This collection is almost unknown to the public at large or to researchers. Although I have lived in Egypt for a number of years and have specialized in Nubian studies, I was not aware of its existence until I began this research. The objects were displayed along with the Egyptian collection but in a showcase labeled ‘Sudanese Collection’. There is no descriptive catalogue of these objects. Only a few of them are published in scientific periodicals.<sup>371</sup>

The name of this display might raise the question of whether its existence is attributable to recent and current trends in Sudanology. Judging from academic and sociopolitical interests, it actually refers instead to the ‘modern’ origin of the objects that were donated by the Sudanese authorities. Local Egyptologists are not involved in the current of Sudanology because they do not work in Sudan. Besides this, they show very little interest in contributing to a new Nubia paradigm that might contradict interpretations based on traditional Egyptological approaches. My impression is that this collection, although small, is greatly appreciated by the museum staff, not only for its content value, but also for the fact that it was a donation by the Sudanese authorities. The museum is currently closed.

### **Museums and Collections in Khartoum, Sudan as a Centre of the Power**

#### *Sudan National Museum*

The Sudanese tour of Nubia in museums commences with the museum where Nubian heritage appears as to be presented as the expression of national identity and the only heritage classified as national antiquities: the Sudan National Museum of Khartoum (Fig. 51). Built in 1971 with UNESCO technical support, near the spot where the Blue and White Niles meet on the south bank of the Blue Nile, the Sudan National Museum houses the most important collection of Nubian antiquities in the world. It displays artifacts from the Paleolithic to the Islamic period from every single site excavated in North Sudan.

The collection is growing annually, as the finds from many national and international archeological expeditions working in the Sudan are being catalogued each year.<sup>372</sup> The objects are displayed in three main areas: the Main Hall on the ground floor, the Christian Gallery on the first floor and the Open Air Museum in the garden.

The main gallery is organized chronologically, beginning with Prehistory and ending in the Meroitic period showing objects from the key sites in North Sudan and the neighboring deserts<sup>373</sup> (Fig. 52).

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<sup>370</sup> El Saady Hassan has provided me with a complete and detailed list of objects which I summarize as follow: most of the items are dated Early Khartoum and consist of various daily utensils and hunting equipment. Seven Paleolithic hatches originate from Atbara area. Items from later periods include five 25<sup>th</sup> Dynasty *shawabtis* from Nuri as well as potsherds from Meroitic and Christian Periods with no precise provenance.

<sup>371</sup> El Saady, 2008.

<sup>372</sup> Welsby, 2004.

<sup>373</sup> Prehistory, specifically the Paleolithic period, is illustrated by a group of materials from the Early Khartoum site and Wadi Howar; objects from Sheinab represent the Neolithic and Late Neolithic. Lower Nubian cultures of the A and C Groups are represented by material from the Second Cataract sites (Ashkeit, Serra East and Faras). They are shown in the same area as the contemporary Upper Nubian Kerma culture. Relations with Egypt are highlighted by



Fig. 51: Sudan National Museum in Khartoum: Main Gate



artifacts from the area of the Second Cataract (forts) and from the New Kingdom Egyptian towns founded in the area of the Third Cataract: Sai, Soleb, Sedeinga, Sesebi and Kawa. The Napatan region is the main source of objects, in particular statues and stelae, illustrating the history of the 25<sup>th</sup> Dynasty. The gallery ends with Meroitic material from the most representative sites of this cultural phase, Meroe, Musawwarat es Sufra, Naga, and some materials of the contemporaneous Roman Period.

Fig. 52: Sudan National Museum in Khartoum: Main Gallery

With its amazing collection, the Christian Gallery on the first floor is unquestionably an important part of the museum. Of particular interest are the wonderful paintings from Faras, detached from the walls of various churches by the Polish Mission during the UNESCO Salvage Campaign<sup>374</sup> (Fig. 53). The gallery, originally organized on the basis of esthetic criteria, has recently (2007) been rearranged thematically.<sup>375</sup> Alexandros Tsakos explained the change as the attempt to ‘make sense’ of the materials presented in the exhibition:

The new exhibition was completed with a rearrangement of the architectural elements and the construction of new independent spaces for the display of the various medieval inscriptions. A lot more should be done in the Gallery before one considers the work completed, it is a reality that after two months there, an awareness of the structures, of the contents, and of the importance of the exhibition was awoken in the minds and hearts of all those involved in the project.<sup>376</sup>



Fig. 53: Madonna protecting a Nubian princess (Mid-12<sup>th</sup> century fresco from Faras Cathedral (Sudan National Museum in Khartoum))

<sup>374</sup> Michalowski, 1962: 3-8. Michalowski, 1965; Michalowski, 1966; Geiser, 1967.

<sup>375</sup> This work was conducted following the UNESCO project ‘Preservation of the Endangered Objects of the National Museum of Khartoum and the Archeological Museum of Jebel Barkal’, of which one of the specific aims was the enhancement of the display in the main hall and the improvement of the museum security system. Mallinson, 2006.

<sup>376</sup> Tsakos, 2008. More details on this projects are give in Annex VI.

As a UNESCO expert monitoring this activity, I fully supported the idea of this change which highlights the content but in no way diminishes its esthetical side. The change was also welcomed by the national and international community of scholars.

Following the Salvage Campaign of the sixties, a number of important monuments from Sudanese Nubia have been relocated in the Open Air Museum. Friedrich Hinkel, the German architect, who loved the Sudan deeply and who carried out the work, comments the relocation of the monuments as follows:

As a result of the building of the High Dam at Aswan, the temple of Ramses II at Aksha, the temple of Hatshepsut at Buhen, the temple of Khnum at Semna East - Kumma, and the temple of Dedwn and Sesostris III at Semna West were considered suitable for removal [Figs. 54, 55]. The monuments are re-erected in the Garden of the Sudan National Museum according to the same orientation of their original location surrounding an artificial strip of water symbolic of the Nile. Walking in this part of the garden, visitors have the view of at least one of the temples on the other side of the water. Transparent structures enclose each temple so as to give protection against unfavorable weather conditions. Also the five granite columns from the Coptic cathedral in Faras West and the tomb of Djehuti-hotep found their new place in the museum garden.<sup>377</sup>



Fig. 54: Sudan National Museum in Khartoum: Nubian Temples

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<sup>377</sup> Hinkel, 1965: 96-101.



Fig. 55: Sudan National Museum in Khartoum: Nubian Temples

A new annex is under construction to display the Islamic collection.

An indication of the perception of Nubia that has prevailed in the arrangement of the Sudanese Museum is given by the entrance to the Main Hall on the ground floor: it indicates the importance of the modern context, as well as of the southern leadership. This can be perceived in a panel which had been displayed beside the door to the entrance of this Hall until a couple of years ago. The panel, with a chronology of Nubian history, mentions the 25<sup>th</sup> Dynasty as the ‘Sudan in Egypt’. Following this line of thought, at the entrance we find a large map of the modern Sudan and a big statue of the 25<sup>th</sup> Dynasty Pharaoh Taharqa in front of the door welcoming visitors (Fig. 56).



Fig. 56: Statue of the 25<sup>th</sup> Dynasty Pharaoh Taharqa in front of the door to the Main Hall

To understand what this museum represents for a Nubian, in 2009 I invited Mohamed el-Khedir, who lives in Khartoum but whose family originally came from the Wadi Halfa area, to visit the museum and to give me his impressions. His comment was the following:

The SNM is considered to be the most important museum of Sudan. The contents of the museum mainly focus on the exhibition of archeological artifacts relating to all phases of the history of the country. The display contains collections related to different civilizations of Nubia. It must be noted that the labels of the display are in need of additional information, such as the name of the item, its place of origin and the local use of it. To be noted [is] the lack of ethnographic objects belonging to modern Nubian culture. On the other hand there are many objects of the archeological collection that are similar to those still used by Nubians. Although the labels are not sufficient to describe the richness of Christianity in Nubia, the gallery devoted to this period is undoubtedly the richest.<sup>378</sup>

In addition to this comment, he has prepared a detailed list<sup>379</sup> of those objects from the past in the museum collection that have survived in the material culture of Nubians today. In his eyes, they testify a continuity in the cultural development of this northern part of the Sudan and prove the existence of a Nubian identity that has its roots in this ancient and glorious past.

I have posed the same question to two Sudanese of non-Nubian origin, Omar Babekir, from Kassala (engineer) and Ahmed Hussein from Nyala-Darfur (teacher). Their reply was almost the same: the Sudan National Museum represents the most important museum in the Sudan and the objects are a testimony to the great civilization that developed in this country. They added with regret that so many people living in peripheral areas of the country have never seen it.

In substance, in its content the Sudan National Museum, considered the most important of the nation, is a museum of Nubian archeology. This might lead us to believe that Nubian archeology, as celebrated in this museum, is the only 'official' heritage of the country. The choice of the name of the museum might only help to buttress this perception, although it is primarily because it is the first big museum to be constructed in Sudan. The exclusive presence of Nubian artifacts is based on two reasons: 1) at the time these objects were the only well known ones available, and 2) the museum was built in the context of the International Nubia Salvage Campaign of the sixties. I think that the proud rather than critical reply of the two non-Nubian Sudanese is a sign of their awareness of the *raison d'être* of this museum and of the context in which it was built.

#### *The National Ethnographical Museum of Sudan (NEMS), Khartoum*

Despite the wealth of artifacts and the great tradition in the field of anthropology in the Sudan, there is only one large ethnographic museum in the country located in Khartoum.<sup>380</sup> In order to explore the potentialities and weaknesses of the ethnography of Nubia in this museum, a survey was conducted in 2009 in cooperation with the Nubian Language Society of Khartoum whose members are all Nubians, some of them specialists in folklore.

The museum, created in 1955, displays artifacts and cultural and folkloric materials from the different ethnic groups in the Sudan, including a separate section about the northern Nubians. Although Nubian artifacts have a separate exhibition space, they are not highlighted in a proper

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<sup>378</sup> I would like to thank Mohamed el Khedir, Omar Babekir and Ahmed Hussein for their comments on the Sudan National Museum.

<sup>379</sup> Cf. Annex VII.

<sup>380</sup> In 1955, the Antiquities Department transformed the building of the British Army Club into a museum to display the numerous and various artifacts coming from all over the Sudan, including Nubia. They had been stored since 1945.

way and the information that accompanies them is inadequate. Another fly in the ointment is that some of the Nubian artifacts are also displayed in other sections as part of the heritage of other ethnic groups, as will be shown in Annex VII. There is no specific reason for these inaccuracies. The museum, just as some others, simply needs to be updated.

Scholars of ethnography should continue to strive to collect and document modern Nubian artifacts which are rich in interest and well-worth studying. The modern part of the Nubian culture has obviously been neglected compared to the greater interest that the archeology of the area has received on account of the salvage campaigns.<sup>381</sup> Much of this living heritage has been lost in the past because of this neglect, and even more will be lost in the future if the planned dams become a reality.

The Ethnographic Museum of Sudan is one of the few to display modern Nubian artifacts. This field ought to be the subject of serious scrutiny and careful inspection, otherwise there is a serious danger that this gap in the study of Nubia could mislead researchers working in this field. The objects need to be better presented and explained more succinctly because their existence is linked to many aspects of the daily life of modern Nubians.

In the future it is to be hoped that this heritage will not be confined to local museums but will also become part of Nubian exhibitions abroad. Modern artifacts can easily be collected from local communities who, I am sure, will be happy to contribute in promoting modern Nubian material culture outside Nubia. Such a step will serve to minimize the disjuncture between the practice of Nubian archeology and its interactions with contemporary Nubians.

#### *University of Khartoum, Khartoum*

The University of Khartoum has a leading position in the field of archeology in Sudan and cooperates actively with the National Corporation for Antiquities and Museums. As another contribution to the composition of the Nubian puzzle, I want to point out the presence of a small collection of objects in the Department of Archeology of this University. The artifacts have not yet been displayed, but kept in a storeroom awaiting the establishment of a museum on the university premises. Some are at the drawing lecturer's office where they are used for student training.<sup>382</sup>

#### **Sites Museums in the Northern State of Sudan (Nubia)**

The museums built in the Northern State of the Sudan or Nubia are mostly site museums. This kind of museum has essentially been built for the display of the artifacts from nearby archeological sites. However, they are also highly beneficial to the improvement of the knowledge of the local community, in particular if outside archeological sites and therefore without any access restrictions.

The problems arising from peripheral museums are various: limitation of objects, that sometimes affects the historical objectivity of the display; limitation of funds, generated by marginalization by the central authorities and by low tourist attendance, often creates problems for museum maintenance, security and updates; community issues are also involved, since most of the

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<sup>381</sup> Cf. Chapters 1 and 2.

<sup>382</sup> A few complete jars from a Post-Meroitic site north of Omdurman called Sarorab as well as a piece of a broken female statuette and potsherds from a Neolithic site called al-Sour. S. Intisar el Zein (Personal Communication, 2010). In the former Sir Lee Stack Tropical Laboratories premises, built by the Welcome Trust in 1925 and attached to Khartoum Hospital (University property), a Pathology Museum will shortly be set up. The Pathology Museum will exhibit tropical and traditional medicine interactively. Abdel Rahman Ali (Personal Communication, 03/21/2012).

time, the involvement of the local community in these peripheral museums is higher than that in museums located in large cities.

Site museums in the Sudan differ from site museums in Egypt. Usually the latter are located inside the archeological site and built to serve the interests of foreign tourist, while local communities are almost completely cut out.<sup>383</sup> In Northern Sudan they are almost invariably built at the request and with the involvement of the community. Therefore the creation of these museums is often surrounded by interesting stories that add meaning and context to these collections and to the very *raison d'être* of the museum. They permeate the display target, thoughts on the idea of Nubia, the hopes and fears of the communities, the position of the central government and the maintenance of the museum. With this in mind I shall discuss them briefly below.

### *Gebel Barkal Museum (Karima)*

One of the oldest site museums in North Sudan is the Gebel Barkal Museum, built on the eastern side of Jebel Barkal, at Karima. This site museum is located in one of the most important archeological areas of North Sudan, whose the sites are listed as UNESCO World Heritage.

The project for the construction of the museum was launched in 1970s by the Sudan Antiquities Service under the auspices of its Commissioner for Archeology Nigm ed-Din Sharif and completed in 1979. Initially this small 'essential museum' was a sort of museum/storage for the artifacts from excavations conducted in the temples, pyramids and palaces of Gebel Barkal after 1970. It also accommodates the antiquities from the old Museum at Meroe, which was badly damaged by two great floods of the Nile in 1978 and 1988. It also contains Sudanese arms and armor of the nineteenth century (Mahdiya period).

The multiplication of findings by the various missions working there (American, Italian and Spanish) and the presence of a School of Archeology at the University of Dongola in Karima had two effects: it led to the nomination of a representative of the National Corporation of Antiquities and Museums *in situ* and to the conversion of the concept of this building from being a 'storage depot' into a fully fledged museum. The first Sudanese curators and inspectors were sent to the site and to the museum by the Antiquities Authorities in 1997. Since then national and international experts and community members have made various attempts to reorganize the premises and improve the museum, cataloguing and photographing the most significant artifacts.<sup>384</sup>

The old storeroom of the pottery findings of the Italian missions was turned into the cell to house the reconstruction of a Christian era box-grave. It now contains the naturally mummified body of a bearded adult. Informative posters complement the collection. Such events as the organization of temporary exhibitions have become a regular part of the museum activities.<sup>385</sup> This museum, although very simple, is significant to the local community of people and scholars

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<sup>383</sup> Cf. the Imhotep Museum at Saqqara.

<sup>384</sup> In April 2004, the archeologist Timothy Kendall, Field Director of one of the missions working in the area, attempted to catalogue and photograph the most prominent possessions of the local museum, as part of his plan to create a Barkal Research Center in the area, so far uncompleted. The local staff, in cooperation with the Greek archeologist Alexandros Tsakos, carried out a full reorganization of the museum premises. By May 2004, with the financial support of the 'friends of the Barkal Museum' in Khartoum and mobilized by the local team and Tsakos, the first gallery of the museum building was opened to the public, but the other two remained closed: one to be used for a temporary exhibition and the other as the storeroom of the museum. In February 2005 the latter was rehabilitated and the objects arranged methodically. The National Corporation for Antiquities of Sudan (NCAM) undertook the construction of the entrance of the museum.

<sup>385</sup> Perhaps to obtain the loan of the very important stele of Pianky to London for the exhibition 'Sudan Ancient

### *The Kerma Museum (Kerma)*

The Kerma Museum is located in the North Sudan, in the area of the Third Cataract of the Nile.

Kerma was the place where the First Nubian Empire, whose the remains were discovered by the American archeologist George Reisner in the first decades of the last century.<sup>386</sup> The investigation of the site by a Swiss team<sup>387</sup> is continuing and is still reaping success. There are many archeological remains here and the most imposing of them is certainly the Deffuffa.<sup>388</sup>

In 1999 a Sudanese High Committee for the Cultural Complex of Kerma was formed to cooperate with the National Corporation for Antiquities and Museums of Sudan (NCAM). The aim was to reinforce the importance of the area, to preserve its movable heritage and present it to the local and international community. The Committee also proposed the construction of a local museum which began in 2003 funded by a Sudanese-Swiss partnership.

The museum, which presents the history of the site and its surroundings, opened its doors to the public in January 2008, and is located near the archeological site and has direct access to the ancient city. The structure of the building with its vaulted roof pierced by triangular openings which allow daylight into the museum galleries reflects local Nubian architecture (Figs. 57, 58, 59).



Fig. 57: Kerma Museum: View

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Treasures' at the British Museum in 2005. All the work achieved in the museum were presented on a poster during the Eleventh International Congress on Nubian Studies held in Warsaw in late summer 2006 (Murtada Bushara Muhamed, A. Tsakos, *The Renovated Museum at Gebel Barkal*). The detailed information for the description of this museum has been borrowed from the text of this poster which complemented the data I obtained during personal visits to the museum and the discussions with the poster designers.

<sup>386</sup> Reisner, 1923; Bonnet, 1990.

<sup>387</sup> For a complete bibliography of the work of the Swiss mission to Kerma cf. the Web site: [www.kerma.ch](http://www.kerma.ch)

<sup>388</sup> Cf. Chapter 1.



Fig. 58: Kerma Museum: The *deffufa* in the background



Fig. 59: Nubian house before its submersion

The purpose of the museum is to present the history of the site and its surroundings using materials found in the area and displayed over a surface of 500 square meters.<sup>389</sup>

In a central room, that serves as the focal point of the building, seven huge statues of the Black Pharaohs of the 25<sup>th</sup> Dynasty are on display in an interesting setting,<sup>390</sup> (Fig. 60) stressing (as in the Museum in Khartoum) the idea of southern leadership.

<sup>389</sup>I have been provided with a complete and detailed list of the objects in this museum by Abdel Rahman Ali Mohamed. Here I give a summary: pottery from the Kerma necropolis (West and East), École des Filles and Alibakit-Napata construction (IH2). Also from Kerma are some offering tables and other cultic objects. Dukki el Gel is the source of many architectural fragments (*talatat*, stele, lintels, columns, inscribed blocks), *plaquettes*, cartouches, statues and statuettes. There is also a lintel from Sedeinga. The prehistoric material has come from is the site of El Barga.

<sup>390</sup> This room includes central columns and a podium about 70cm high on which are exhibited the statues of the Black Pharaohs, their figures are highlighted by a white backdrop.

The inhabitants of the modern town of Kerma are in daily in contact with their glorious past, not only because they live near the archeological site, but also because the past is very well beautifully explained in the museum. Various small rooms open onto a central hall where the objects are displayed in forty display cases illustrating the history of Kerma and its evolution over time (Fig. 61).<sup>391</sup> They regard the museum not just as a scientific space, it is also a venue for entertainment and will certainly serve to give a greater boost to the cultural tourism that is hoped will be attracted by the recently constructed asphalted road. A few years will have to pass before it will be possible to tell whether this road will bring this untouched part of the world into the era of globalization.



Fig. 60: Kerma Museum: 25<sup>th</sup> Dynasty statues



Fig. 61: Kerma Museum: Ethnographic display

### *Merowe Dam Museum*

Although I have categorized this museum as a site museum, in reality its archeological sites have been lost, disappeared under the water of the Merowe Dam which has submerged 173 kilometers of the Nile Valley at the Fourth Cataract and forced 78,000 people to be resettled elsewhere.<sup>392</sup>

<sup>391</sup> Three scale models of the Mesolithic hut from el-Barga (7500 BC), the proto-urban agglomeration of the Pre-Kerma (3000 BC) and the ancient city of Kerma (2500-1500 BC) show the traditions of the local inhabitants and the evolution of the settlements throughout history, from the period of the huts up to the construction of the monumental architecture. The reconstruction (life-size) of three tombs belonging to different periods of history shows the evolution of architecture and funerary rituals; in some galleries several pieces of blocks with engraved or painted representations of Napatan (25th Dynasty) and Meroitic period, discovered at the site of el Dukki Gel, are also displayed. The New Kingdom is represented by various stone statues and figurines.

<sup>392</sup> The inhabitants of the flooded region were forcibly displaced along a timeline corresponding to the proximity of their land to the dam site: the Shaiqiya of Hamadab to Al-Multaga in 2003, the Shaiqiya of Amri to Wadi Muqaddam in 2007, and the Manasir to Al-Mokabrab and Al-Fidah in 2008 (Hafsaas, 2011).

Following the decision to build the Merowe Dam, NCAM (National Corporation for Antiquities and Museums of the Sudan) proposed the construction of a museum at Al-Multaga, the first resettlement site.<sup>393</sup> Later, this plan was altered by NCAM which proposed the construction of the museum at the dam site rather than at the place where the inhabitants had been relocated. This change of plan was strongly opposed by the representatives of the local community of Manasir, who took this decision as an insult. In their eyes, the proposed new museum site represented a symbol of the destruction of their own homeland and also the homeland of the neighbouring Shaiqiya tribe.<sup>394</sup> The diatribe came to an end with the creation, with the support of the Dam Implementation Unit, of a new museum and tourist resort in Merowe, in the 'park' directly downstream from the *Old Beit el Athar* of Merowe that does not exactly serve the Fourth Cataract but the region of Merowe and Napata.

The museum was officially opened by President al Bashir on 3 March 2009 - the same day he inaugurated the Merowe Dam. It is essentially an archeological museum with an exhibition presenting artifacts from Prehistory to the Islamic period.

If the hope of the resettled local community to be able to keep the land has gone forever, they have not abandoned their dream of having a cultural space in which their historical remains continue to be preserved. During the rescue campaign participated in the fieldwork, the Norwegian archeologist Henriette Hafsaas wrote in a 2011 article:

The heritage that archeologists uncovered in the Fourth Cataract will become an important focus for identity maintenance in the future, as the people of the Fourth Cataract have been uprooted from their familiar natural and cultural landscape. It is thus essential that they have access to the interpretations of their history as well as the collected remnants of their heritage, so that they can use archeology to form their own narratives and understandings of their past and thus grasp the implications for their present and future.<sup>395</sup>

#### *Damar Museum*

Damar differs from the concept of other museums built in North Sudan, but does resemble those built in other regions of the country. The goal of the museum is to present the development of the history of the Sudan chronologically from Prehistory to Islam. The material exhibited comes from all over North Sudan. The Islamic period is particularly highlighted in the exhibition of images of the Gubba mosque. Some of the artifacts belonging to this period have been collected from the local community.<sup>396</sup>

The emphasis on the Islamic period is because the Wadi el Nil Centre for Archeological Research is located in Damar. Since the area is very rich in remains of this period, the Centre focuses on the Ottoman and Mahdia periods.

#### *Planned museums in the northern Sudan*

Other site museums in northern Sudan are planned or under construction. The construction of a small site museum in the Butana Desert, at the Fifth Cataract of the Nile in Sudanese Nubia, began

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<sup>393</sup> Ahmed, 2003: 40.

<sup>394</sup> Askouri expressed his feelings in these words: 'Our history is given to another community' (Sudan Tribune, 27 February 2007). In: Hafsaas, 2011: 64-65.

<sup>395</sup> Hafsaas, 2011: 65.

<sup>396</sup> The display includes objects related to the following periods: Paleolithic: 2; Mesolithic: 10; Neolithic: 14; A Group and C Group: 15; Kerma: 16; New Kingdom: 20; Napatan: 12; Meroe: 22; Post-Meroitic/Christian: 12. Abdel Rahman Ali (Personal Communication, 2010).

in 1985. This museum is intended to display items from the city and the royal cemeteries of Meroe. The structure of the museum has been designed to reflect the architecture of Meroitic houses and was inspired by the houses of the Meroitic priests located near the temple. After a long break, the construction of the museum resumed in 1999 and is ongoing.<sup>397</sup>

A museum for the archeology and the modern history of Dongola is planned to be built in an old colonial building in the area. At Naga, experts from the Egyptian Museum in Berlin are raising funds to build a site museum near the archeological site which they have been excavating for some time.<sup>398</sup>

### **Museums in the Western Sudan: Nyala, Sheikan and Sultan Ali Dinar**

In the Western Sudan there are several museums. They are far away from the monumental archeological heritage of the North Sudan (Nubia), that they cannot ignore as it is the most representative of the country, but they have their own local heritage that in most cases is ethnographic. The concept of these museums reflects this reality: a local ethnographic collection and a Nubian archaeological collection from Prehistory to the Islamic Period. This concept shows the dichotomy discussed in Chapter 4 between the importance of the archeological heritage of Nubia and the richness and diversity of the ethnography of the rest of the Sudan.

The *raison d'être* of the museum in Nyala, inaugurated by the President of Sudan Omar Al Bashir on 12 July 2006, is to show what is considered to be the heritage of the area, combining ethnographic materials and a collection of archeological artifacts from Nubia, whose function is to present the shared cultural development of the diverse areas of Sudan.<sup>399</sup> Significantly, Nyala is the capital of South Darfur, an area in full conflict. In spite of this, as proof that heritage plays an important role in the process of rebuilding the whole country, the Sudanese authorities have promoted a policy of building museums even in areas that so far have been considered to be peripheral compared to the cultural heart of the country, generally considered to be the north (Nubia) and the area of Khartoum.

The collection in Nyala is exhibited in five rooms. The first room contains objects belonging to the A Group, Kerma and the Middle Kingdom. The exhibits in the second room are from the Egyptian New Kingdom and Napata; the third hall houses Meroitic objects; the fourth the post-Meroitic, Christian and Islamic periods. The fifth room is dedicated to the ethnography of South Darfur.<sup>400</sup> The other peripheral museums at Fashir and El Obeid have a similar concept.

The El-Fashir Museum in Northern Darfur State, created in 1971, is housed in the residence of Sultan Ali Dinar, who was the Great Sultan of Darfur and ruled until 1916 when his kingdom was overthrown by the then British Government of the Sudan. Part of the museum still

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<sup>397</sup> I would like to thank the Sudanese architect Khaled Babikir Awad El Karim for his cooperation.

<sup>398</sup> The creation of the Nubia Museum at Wadi Halfa has been presented in detail in Chapter 5.

<sup>399</sup> Abdel Rahman Ali has provided me with the complete and detailed list of the objects, that I summarize here: various prehistoric items, with no specific site provenance, with the exception of one cluster that comes from Wadi Howar. Pottery, tools, jewelry made of different kinds of stones dated to the A Group, Kerma, Middle and New Egyptian Kingdoms. A large number of objects belong to the 25<sup>th</sup> Dynasty: royal and divine statuettes and *shawabtis*, pottery, jewelry, beads. From the Meroitic period, the collection contains a Isis statuette, a *shawabti*; containers of different material (pottery, granite, glass, ceramic, ostrich-shell); tools. Dated to the post- Meroitic period are a grinder and a bottle.

<sup>400</sup> Khaled Babikir Awad El Karim (Personal Communication, 2010).

holds some of the Sultan's possessions, including his throne. The rest of the collection derives from Northern Sudan (Nubia).

El-Obeid is a town in North Kordofan State and home to the Sheikan Museum. The name Sheikan is derived from a site near El-Obeid, where the Mahdist forces vanquished a large British force in a battle in 1880. The museum was initiated in 1965 and holds a substantial number of historical and ethnographic elements that reflect the various stages of Kordofan history. The museum also exhibits archeological artifacts from the Early Stone Age (Paleolithic) to the Funj Islamic era (1405-1820). The museum likewise displays some interesting relics and items from the Sheikan battle.

This 'virtual tour' of Nubian collections, kept in museums in Egypt and Sudan, has provided evidence to support the analysis presented in Chapter 5, unveiling the visions and evolution in the 're/deconstruction' of Nubia, by looking at its cultural material, in its own homeland. Geopolitical motivations and different perceptions and approaches have also irrevocably influenced the exhibition of these collections.

Egypt is the place to which the beginning of the evolution of the concept of Nubia in museums can be traced back. Archeologically embedded in the wealth of Pharaonic in particular, but not forgetting Coptic and Islamic materials kept in different museums of Egypt, Nubia merged into a single place where it is presented, from its origins to the present day, as a cultural entity in its own right. This evolution can certainly be traced back to the great impact on Egypt of the *International Campaign to Save the Monuments of Nubia* in the sixties. This Campaign is still considered one of the greatest events involving preservation of cultural heritage and international solidarity, that Egypt, perhaps the whole world, have ever come across.

In the Sudan, the situation is different. Here the archeological heritage located in Nubia, North Sudan, enjoys the greatest fame and as a such the most important. Other areas of the country, with the exception of some sites, have principally been studied and 'exploited' ethnographically. This reality has strongly impacted the policy of 'making museums' in the country. The most important museums of Archeology and Ethnography located at Khartoum, centre of the power, are testimony to this policy. In the Sudan National Museum of Khartoum, a Nubian archeological collection, the only one on exhibition, is presented as it is the expression of national identity. In the Ethnographic Museum, Nubia is just a component of the variety of other ethnographic artifacts belonging to other areas of the Sudan, that are an expression of the modern cultural diversity of the country. In North Sudan (Nubia), site museums have multiplied, creating a link between the past and the present of the local communities. In other areas of the country, away from Khartoum, the 'centre of the power', and from Nubia, Nubian collections, as said above, are used as a way of presenting a scheme for the cultural trajectory of the development for 'all' the Sudan from Prehistory to Islam, while the modern history is illustrated by local ethnographic materials.