

FOREWORD

This volume celebrates the 60th anniversary of research conducted by the Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology, University of Warsaw (PCMA UW), at Old Dongola, Sudan. It brings together contributions that reflect on how archaeological work at the site has engaged with archaeology, heritage, and society. The articles stem from a call to researchers who have participated in the Polish expeditions to Old Dongola over the past six decades. Together, they explore Old Dongola in a broad social context using diverse methodologies and perspectives.

In recent years, community archaeology has gained prominence globally, and projects in Sudan—including the fieldwork at Old Dongola—have incorporated its principles over the past decade. However, archaeology in Sudan has long engaged with local communities even before the term “community archaeology” was coined. The Anglo-Egyptian Condominium administration made an early effort in public outreach by establishing museums to educate the Sudanese people about their history—though this was a top-down approach, and viewed through a colonial lens. Local people have always participated in archaeology—as excavation workers, drivers, household staff—and Sudanese archaeologists, conservators, and inspectors have conducted research alongside foreign archaeologists. Their involvement was indispensable to the accomplishments of Sudanese archaeology. Beyond archaeology, some teams also supported local communities in practical ways, such as renovating schools, providing assistance during medical emergencies, or digging wells.

Likewise, the Polish mission to Old Dongola has engaged with Sudanese communities since the beginning of the fieldwork at the site in 1964. The team has provided assistance to the local community and built personal rapport with its members. Stefan Jakobielski, a former mission director, recalls the archaeologists saw the community members “as our neighbors” who often invited the team to their homes “because hospitality in Sudan is infinite”. Many villagers also worked in the excavations, not only because of the economic incentives but also because it was a social occasion. Jakobielski noted that “many people came to work only to socialize” (PCMA UW 2022). As the concept of community archaeology evolved, approaches to engaging different groups became more structured and inclusive, challenging older modes of communication and traditional archaeological practices. Today, a key goal of community archaeology is to practice archaeology with greater social sensitivity, improving relationships with communities that have cultural, historical, or geographic ties to the sites and objects under study. This is particularly important in countries like Sudan, where archaeology began under colonial rule. In the colonial era, archaeological research was often used to justify colonialism and assert control over both people and resources. Community archaeology in Sudan should seek to transform these legacies by collaborating with various communities. In pursuing a model of community archaeology in Sudanese Nubia, I learned that genuine collaboration cannot rest solely on the archaeologist’s efforts; it requires

active involvement of both the archaeologists and the community members. This involves understanding different perspectives and needs, respecting diverse forms of knowledge of the past, cooperating in production of educational materials, sharing skills, and fostering respectful personal interactions. Achieving this requires a shift in mindset on both sides.

The contributions in this volume illustrate how diverse approaches in archaeology can strengthen the relationships between archaeologists and communities. De Lellis draws on his experience working with excavation workers to explore the importance of community engagement and how it can be integrated into field practice. Sudanese specialists Idriss and Siedahmed recount their experiences in designing and leading engagement programs, as well as training new facilitators at Old Dongola. They reflect on what community engagement entails and how it might evolve during and after the current conflict. Stark calls for an “engaged bioarchaeology”, emphasizing the importance of involving diverse Sudanese communities in dialogue around bioarchaeological research. He addresses its colonial legacies and stresses the need for capacity-building and knowledge transfer to Sudanese students and specialists.

The volume also explores the economic and social aspects of heritage engagement. I discuss community-based business initiatives at Old Dongola carried out over five seasons, highlighting how local social networks, traditional craftsmanship, and community management capacity were indispensable for implementing such projects. I also note that the Sudanese tourism sector remains underdeveloped and vulnerable to both local and global trends. Radziwilko presents the results of a 2019 community survey of Ghaddar residents, examining their interest in, familiarity with, and expectations regarding archaeology, heritage, and tourism development. Understanding local perspectives can contribute to a more effective design of site presentations aimed at diverse audiences. Michalik and Trawiński employ the eye-tracking method both to investigate how Sudanese and Western visitors visually engage with the Nubian wall paintings at Old Dongola and to compare their aesthetic choices. Kurcz, a cultural anthropologist, reflects on his ethnographic fieldwork at Old Dongola and other sites, examining the social impacts of ethnographic research on local communities and on the researcher himself. His personal account offers nuanced insights into the nature of “engagement” with communities.

A central focus of this volume is people — the local communities, students, and specialists in Sudan and, more broadly, the Sudanese society with whom we work. All those we have worked with, worked for, or written about in the studies presented here, including the two Sudanese authors, have endured many grave challenges since the outbreak of armed conflict in April 2023. Every aspect of life in Sudan has been affected: many civilians have lost their lives, and over 11 million people have been internally and internationally displaced, according to the International Organization for Migration (2025). Food and fuel shortages are widespread, while essential services such as education and healthcare have been severely disrupted. There have also been reports of irreparable damage to museums, universities, libraries, and cultural centers

across the country. At the same time, exceptionally heavy rains and flash floods in 2024 have had a serious impact on the preservation of archaeological sites, complicating proper assessment and conservation efforts.

Since the outbreak of the war, the National Corporation for Antiquities and Museums (NCAM) —currently operating from Cairo— has allocated its resources to emergency heritage protection and community engagement initiatives. While Old Dongola and the surrounding villages have not been directly affected by the armed conflict, the impacts of the war are evident — many displaced families have sought shelter there, as in other parts of northern Sudan. Although we mark 60 years of Polish–Sudanese archaeological cooperation, a true celebration must wait until the war ends. In the meantime, we stand in solidarity with our friends and colleagues in Sudan.

I thank all the authors for their contributions to this volume, which represents the first collective examination of archaeology–community relationships at Old Dongola and beyond [Fig. 1]. I am also grateful to the reviewers for their indispensable feedback, and to the *PAM* editorial team —especially Chief Editor Dorota Dzierzbicka and editors Agata Czamara and Aleksandra Zych— for their support and commitment to publishing this volume promptly.

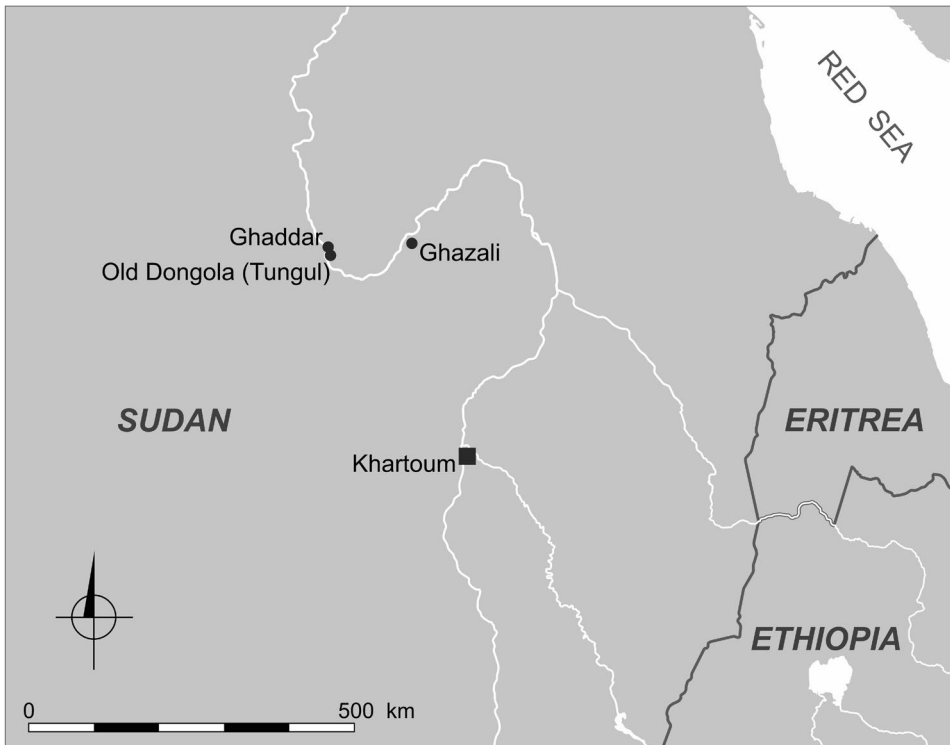


Fig. 1. Map of the north-central part of Sudan, showing the locations of the places discussed in this volume. Old Dongola (Tungul in Old Nubian) is located in the northern Sudan on the right side of the river, about 522 km north of the capital, Khartoum (Drawing M. Momot)

We also thank the National Corporation for Antiquities and Museums (NCAM, formerly the Sudan Antiquities Service) for granting permissions and supporting our work, as well as the field inspectors, guards, and all excavation workers led by local *rais* (foremen), whose participation made this research possible.

We appreciate the kindness and cooperation of many residents of Ghaddar and Bokkibil, as well as the support of local institutions: the High Council of Tourism, Northern State, and the Department of Tourism at the Goulid Locality, the Old Dongola Unit, especially the Tourist Police Office and Tourism Office, the Ghaddar Public Council, the Women's Association, and the Council for Archaeology and Tourism at Old Dongola. Their assistance has been essential, especially since the start of our collaborative work on sustainable development and nomination of Old Dongola to the UNESCO World Heritage List.

It is not possible to trace back six decades and name everyone here, but I would particularly like to acknowledge those who have worked closely with our team in recent years: Abdelwahab Jaden, Abdelrahman Mohamed Saleh, Abeer Babikir Sie-dahmed, Abu Gashim, Anwar Ahmed, Abo Bakr Khalifa Mohamed Zyada (who is known as Sheikh Babiker Khalifa), El-Nour Ali Salah, Hasiena, Mamdouh Awad Hassan, Sheikh Mohamed Sati Babiker Hilali, Abugassim, Sumeyya, Mustafa Abugassim, Nahla Abdelgadir, Nasra Hassan Ali, Salah Mousa, the late Faki Sati Mohamed Ahmed, Swar elDahb Mahjoub Imam Hilali, Touma, Umm el Hassan, and Umm el Hussein.

Guest editor
Tomomi Fushiya
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