

Old Dongola community engagement from a Sudanese perspective



Abstract: Amid growing threats to cultural heritage in Sudan – even prior to the outbreak of conflict in April 2023 – the National Corporation for Antiquities and Museums (NCAM) and various national and international archaeological missions emphasized an urgent need for capacity building to support the conservation and management of archaeological sites. Community work has proved effective in this regard. Training Sudanese archaeologists and university students, developing educational programs for learners at various levels, and involving local communities in the protection and management of heritage sites can significantly contribute to the sustainable development and long-term preservation of cultural heritage. This article provides an overview of the latest two community engagement projects conducted by the Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology, University of Warsaw (PCMA UW) at Old Dongola.

Both projects, the training program in 2021 and the Baraka project, aimed to establish and strengthen the connection between archaeologists and local communities by fostering engagement and collaboration to raise awareness of cultural heritage and encourage community involvement in its preservation and protection. This was achieved by training Sudanese graduates in Archaeology and Tourism from various universities, particularly those of local origin, to serve as facilitators and instructors in community engagement programs targeting diverse local groups, including school students.

Keywords: Old Dongola, Sudan, training programs, Baraka project, community engagement, cultural heritage, capacity building

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Polish Archaeology in the Mediterranean 34.2 | Idriss and Siedahmed 2025: 33–64
<https://doi.org/10.37343/uw.2083-537X.pam34.2.4>

received 10 September 2024 | received in revised form 30 January 2025 | accepted 30 January 2025 | available online 15 September 2025
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Acknowledgments

The authors sincerely thank the National Corporation for Antiquities and Museums (NCAM), the authority responsible for permissions and a facilitator of field research, the Old Dongola Archaeological Expedition of the Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology, University of Warsaw (PCMA UW) represented by its director, Artur Obłuski, and Tomomi Fushiya, the instructor of the community programs and member of the Polish mission. Thanks are also due to the local communities of Ghaddar, Hammur, Bokkibul, and Ghaba. We are indebted to the heads of the government offices and departments of Old Dongola and Goulid for facilitating our work and participating in the activities: Abeer Babiker, Head of the Tourism Office of Old Dongola, Alameen Mukhtar, Head of the Old Dongola Unit, and Mona Hassan, Head of the Department of Tourism in the Goulid District. Our grateful thanks go also to the Old Dongola Community Council for Archaeology and Tourism in Ghaddar for their contribution to the programs. Our sincere thanks go to the directors and teachers of Ghaddar primary, middle, and secondary schools for boys and girls, especially to the teachers Mamdooh Awad and Hajir Ibrahim for their cooperation during the heritage education programs in 2023 and 2024. We are much obliged to Osama Al-Khaleefa from the social office of the Ghaddar Committee. We also thank the trained local facilitators: Mosheera Abdelmonem, Mona Osman, Asmahan Saif Aldeen, and Enas Atta. Special thanks to the students who actively participated in the workshops, the site guard, the Tourism and Antiquities Police, and the Regional Tourism Office in Dongola City for their unwavering support and dedication. Their understanding of the importance of community work, its role in the development of the region, and their efforts to raise awareness of the significance of heritage and its preservation were key to the success of the projects. Without their contributions and cooperation, these achievements would not have been possible.

INTRODUCTION

For generations, archaeology has been practiced by, and shared among, small groups of scholars. This attitude has now greatly changed, and archaeologists consider community engagement to be an important part of their work. Together with heritage managers, they attempt to understand the past and share this knowledge (Kusimba 2017: 218). In collaborative archaeology, archaeologists and local communities—both officials and ordinary people—aim to work together for the sake of knowledge sharing. This method relies on partnership, respect, and mutual trust between the parties involved (Colwell-Chanthaphonh and Ferguson 2008: 9). Four core principles underlie community-based participatory research (CBPR): collaboration with communities through the entire research process, appreciation of multiple knowledge systems, delivering reciprocal benefits for communities, and building capacity in the local community (Atalay 2012: 24).

Researchers applying the community engagement approach have long praised its benefits, such as increased sense of identity, pride, or community cohesion (Marshall 2002; Moser et al. 2002; Chirikure and Pwiti 2008; Atalay 2012; Little and Shackel 2014). Several scholars have even claimed that the future of archaeology as a discipline depends on community involvement, collaboration, co-creative methods, and improved knowledge dissemination (Atalay 2012: 7; Guilfoyle and Hogg 2015; Kajda et al. 2018; Kusimba 2017: 218; Nilsson Stutz 2018: 55). Archaeologists make special efforts to share their interpretations in ways that are more ac-

cessible to a wide audience than scholarly publications. Members of local communities at and around archaeological sites often feel a strong connection to these places, to the point of altering their daily routines so as to visit the place or hold community events there, while many make efforts to safeguard the sites against looting (Plumer 2018).

In the context of heritage education for younger generations, Egypt offers a valuable example to follow. Fatma Keshk, who participated in a British Museum project in Egypt, authored a book titled *The Tale of Shutb* to share recent archaeological discoveries from the village of Shutb with its local community. Written in Egyptian Arabic, the book aims to both entertain and educate by weaving historical information into a fictional narrative, encouraging young readers to form personal connections with the past and consider its relevance to their present lives (Keshk and Regulski 2020–2021).

Local community engagement projects were rare in Sudan before the implementation of the Qatar–Sudan Archaeological Project (QSAP). Most archaeological expeditions communicated only with Sudanese scholars and excavation workers from local communities. In 2013, by financing about 40 archaeological teams working in Sudan, QSAP provided financial means for archaeological teams to expand their research and develop additional facets of their projects, including greater involvement with local communities (<http://www.qsap.org.qa/en/about-us.html>). During implementation of QSAP, and after it was concluded in 2019, several

community engagement projects were realized in Sudan also with funding from other governmental and non-governmental organizations. Some have opted for more traditional outreach methods (e.g., lecture, site tour, book, children's book, on-site exhibition and presentation), while others have worked more closely with communities and integrated local perspectives and/or co-produced tools, materials, and exhibition spaces (Humphris and Bradshaw 2017; Anderson, El-Rasheed, and Bashir 2018; Kleinitz 2019; Näser and Tully 2019; Spencer 2019; Beyin et al. 2020; Drzewiecki et al. 2020; Fushiya 2020: 191–228; Mallinson et al. 2020; Spencer et al. 2024). The community engagement programs and collaborative research continued at several archaeological sites in Sudan (Bradshaw and Emberling 2022; Fushiya and Siedahmed 2024).

Local communities benefited from the extensive community engagement projects funded by the QSAP and other funding bodies, mainly thanks to the absence of strict guidelines or burdensome regulations imposed on community engagement. The QSAP project requirements were to produce a bilingual book about the site, to prepare interpretation panels, and to implement site protection measures. NCAM, in turn, encouraged variation of design and approach (Spencer et al. 2024), allowing each field project to adapt outputs to different needs and interests of various regions and communities.

These community engagement projects began to bridge the gaps between the communities and the archaeologists. In some cases, for instance in Amara West, community members learned about

the history of the site (Fushiya 2017). The present authors' observations and long-term experience in participation in community engagement projects at various archaeological sites in Sudan have shown that such measures increase the local communities' appreciation of nearby archaeological sites and their awareness of a need to protect them.

One of the leading international archaeological expeditions in Sudan to have adopted an effective system of involving the local community is the Polish archaeological expedition to Old Dongola. It started by reviving the relations with the community through increased interaction so as to understand the perspectives and knowledge of the local residents (Fushiya and Radziwilko 2019). The archaeological work of the PCMA UW at Old Dongola started in 1964. Since then, the expedition has interacted with many Sudanese scholars and with the local community in Ghaddar. The Ghaddar residents were the neighbors of the archaeologists and some became involved in the research as excavation workers. Besides neighborly relations, oral histories relating to Old Dongola were collected by another Polish team as part of a field project in the area "to support archaeological work and analysis" (Bashir 2003: 519). Already in 2008, the Polish expedition to Old Dongola developed a plan for the first community project within the framework of a grant funded from the Polish Aid program, which focused on conservation and renovation of the mosque, raising awareness of the local and regional history, as well as making the building accessible for visitors (Obluski et al. 2013). Not limited to archaeology, recent communications

with the Ghaddar residents revealed that there had been some efforts to support local schools in the past by the former expedition director, Stefan Jakobielski. This initiative has recently been revived thanks to the support of an international school in Warsaw, Niepubliczna Szkoła Podstawowa British International Academy Primary Warsaw (MyVinci School), which funded the renovation of two classrooms in Ghaddar schools. Another routine developed by the expedition members was the so-called “Thursday

afternoons” — weekly visits paid by the mission members to their neighbors for tea in order to maintain their ties with the community (Fushiya and Radziwiłko 2019). This article presents a Sudanese perspective on the capacity building and outreach programs conducted as part of the two recent community projects led by Tomomi Fushiya and implemented within the framework of the Polish expedition to Old Dongola. Both authors participated in the programs as engagement facilitators and instructors.

OLD DONGOLA AND ITS COMMUNITIES

Old Dongola is situated on the right bank of the Nile, in Sudan’s Northern Province, 350 km north of the nation’s capital, Khartoum (see Fushiya 2025a: *Fig. 1*, in this volume). Old Dongola (Tungul in Old Nubian, Dongola (دنقلا) in Arabic) was the most important center of the medieval kingdom of Makuria (Godlewski 2013). The city was founded in the late 5th to early 6th centuries by one of the first kings of Makuria (Godlewski 2013). During the Funj period (1504–1821 CE), Old Dongola became part of the Funj Sultanate (Obluski and Dzierzbicka 2021).

The site is located next to the Ghaddar village, and three other villages —Bokkibil and Hammur in the south and Ghaba on

the left bank of the river Nile— are located in its near vicinity. These four villages have a unique connection with the site and represent the local communities of Old Dongola, especially the latest phase of the site’s history. Their residents’ ancestors lived in what is now the southern part of the archaeological site, in Hillat Dongola (حلة دنقلا), the so-called Abandoned Village. A few scholars and residents with a personal interest in the local past have written about Old Dongola, mostly on the history of notable families and local heritage. In addition, for a long time, a number of the community members participated in the excavations as workers hired by the Polish archaeological expedition.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PROGRAMS AT OLD DONGOLA

Relations between the expedition and local community paved the way for the recent community engagement project of the Polish expedition, which began with meetings with the local communities in Ghaddar and later in Bokkibil

(Fushiya and Radziwiłko 2019; Fushiya 2021a). Siedahmed observed that the local communities were well integrated and had good contact with the archaeologists during and after the community engagement project [*Table 1*].

Table 1. Community engagement programs at Old Dongola in 2019–2024

Program Name	Year	Activity
Dialog project	2019–2022	Poster workshop and Open Day
	2021	Training program
Baraka project	2023	Training program; “My House, My Heritage”; “My Heritage, My Identity”; Open Day
Emergency program	2024	“Enriched by Our Heritage”

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN THE DIALOG PROJECT

Although community archaeological work has only recently begun to constitute part of some archaeological projects in Sudan, as mentioned above, a number of archaeological expeditions have shown particularly notable progress in this field. One such initiative is the Dialogue community project in the Old Dongola area, launched in February 2019 (Fushiya and Radziwiłko 2019). Originally part of the Old Dongola project of the PCMA UW, it was designed for implementation over the course of two years (2019–2021), but ultimately continued for three seasons. Its main aims were to understand local standards and values of the Old Dongola community and to revive the relationship between the archaeologists and the communities in order to establish groundwork for working together for sustainable

heritage management and community development (Fushiya 2021a). One of the key achievements of the Dialogue project at Old Dongola was the establishment of a strategic foundation for community engagement by the Polish expedition and stakeholders, along with the development of a plan for heritage protection and sustainable development. The development component was expanded, and a local sustainable development plan was formulated by Peter Larsen (2021; 2024). A series of discussions and workshops were held with other stakeholders at local, national, and international levels to identify issues and priorities concerning local development and their role in the plan (Larsen 2021; 2024; Fushiya 2021a). The project also helped foster the relationship between the expedition and the local



Fig. 1. Discussion, questions, and exchange of ideas among participants of the training course (PCMA UW | photos M. Reklajtis)

community through formal and informal interactions, including interviews and outreach programs (poster workshops for primary school students and a Site Open Day for the community) (Fushiya and Radziwilko 2019; Fushiya 2021a; Radziwilko 2025, in this volume). In addition, the project assessed the potential for developing community-based handicraft businesses and provided local producers with guidance on quality and design. It

also explored market opportunities and promoted local products, particularly — but not exclusively— within the context of site-based tourism. The project also succeeded in marketing basketry products and encouraged local women to take up basketry production (Fushiya 2025b, in this volume). The engagement team and archaeologists supported them by purchasing the products directly, offering an additional source of income.

THE 2021 TRAINING PROGRAM

The PCMA UW team provided several training opportunities for the Sudanese archaeologists and university students of Archaeology (Drzewiecki et al. 2023; Stark 2025, in this volume). Within the framework of the Dialogue community project, university students and NCAM employees had a chance to strengthen their skills in community archaeology and values-based heritage management (Fushiya 2021b). The need to build the capacity of Sudanese experts in conservation, protection, and management of archaeological sites is particularly urgent, given the increasing threats to cultural

heritage (Tabet and Seif 2019). Regrettably, these specialized fields are not included in the curriculum of archaeology departments of the Sudanese universities. To respond to the current lack of training opportunities, a nine-day training program, “Values-Based Heritage Management and Community Archaeology”, was organized at Old Dongola from 23 March to 2 April 2021.

It is important that this type of training program is supported and implemented by international missions, as it benefits both Sudanese archaeologists and students, as well as the international



Fig. 2. Group exercise (PCMA UW | photos T. Fushiya)

researchers. For Sudanese participants, such programs enhance their ability to act as community engagement facilitators and instructors. At the same time, international archaeologists gain valuable insight that enables them to shape future community engagement agendas that incorporate Sudanese perspectives.

The program aimed to look at the archaeological site beyond its archaeological scientific aspect, from the perspective of the social value of its features (Mason 2002). It involved theoretical and practical training designed specifically for the Old Dongola archaeological site and used an interactive learning method encouraging active participation in discussions [Fig. 1], group exercises [Fig. 2], and presentations. The lectures aimed to teach concepts and methodologies combining them with case studies, which stimulated discussions among the participants. The course also offered a great opportunity for an actual interaction with community in various settings, such as meetings and chatting (*wanasa*, وناسة)¹ with the members of local communities [Fig. 3], with a women’s group [Fig. 4], and with school students through poster work-

shops. Nine graduate students from four Sudanese universities (Khartoum, el-Neelain, Bahri, and Dongola) —the latter one represented by four local (from Ghaddar and Letti) recent graduates— and three NCAM inspectors participated. One of the authors of this paper, Habab Idriss, also took part in this program. We were a group of ten females and two males. To better understand the participants and to enliven the discussions, the lectures included case studies with videos recorded in other countries. Since the training was conducted in English, Idriss also helped with English–Arabic translation.

Already a year before the actual training took place, the instructor —Tomomi Fushiya— created a WhatsApp group to facilitate communication with her and among the participants. This significantly enhanced preparations for the course: participants were given tasks to complete before the training and advised to read materials on general public archaeology, Old Dongola, and the UNESCO World Heritage Program, all distributed in digital form. They were also asked to bring a laptop, if they had one. The course



Fig. 3. A *wanasa* between course participants and the Community Council (PCMA UW | photos T. Fushiya (left), H. Idriss (right))

1 *Wanasa* is a Sudanese Arabic word for “chat”.

was held in Old Dongola and conducted by the instructor, who was in charge of community work on behalf of the Polish mission. Most participants and the instructor stayed at the Polish House next to the site. Everything was well prepared thanks to the dedicated efforts of our colleagues: Zakieldeen Mahmoud (a member of the Polish mission), Abas AlKhalifa Mohamed (the cook), and Anwar Ahmed Mohamed (the housekeeper).

Idriss found the course design engaging for the participants, as it encouraged them to share their experi-

ences on various topics related to archaeology and its role in Sudanese communities. Learning from case studies and examples from different countries broadened the participants' understanding of "collaborative archaeology" and its relevance to their daily lives. These examples helped raise awareness among archaeologists and recent graduates in Archaeology about the importance and benefits of interaction between archaeologists and local communities. One of the key concepts thoroughly discussed during the course



Fig. 4. A *wanasa* between course participants and a women's group (PCMA UW | photos M. Reklajtis)

was heritage values, particularly in relation to their constructed, rather than intrinsic, nature (Mason 2002). In keeping with the title of the training —“Values-Based Heritage Management and Community Archaeology”— the participants had a valuable opportunity to give presentations on the values associated with various heritage places (e.g. the mosque, the *qibab* (قباب) — domed tombs) at Old Dongola, allowing them to apply and deepen their understanding of these concepts.

The program participants engaged in practical exercises and gave presentations on various topics related to heritage values, stakeholders, concepts and methodologies of community archaeology, and the UNESCO World Heritage Program — with particular focus on the challenges of heritage management at Old Dongola. The training also helped them improve their skills in giving pres-

entations, planning engagement programs, and writing project proposals in English. To foster closer interaction with the local community in Ghaddar, the program offered two valuable opportunities. One was a poster workshop with primary school students [Fig. 5], and the other was a *wanasa* (ونسة) — an informal meeting with a women’s group and the Old Dongola Community Council for Archaeology and Tourism. These encounters inspired an exchange of ideas and reflections on the knowledge gained during the training course. The participants were able to discuss the role of archaeology in the community and listen to the local communities’ expectations regarding tourism and community development in the area. Such discussions and experiences are likely to encourage the trainees to develop their own programs and activities for heritage management.



Fig. 5. Poster workshop: Umm Salma Abu Alzine (local participant) and Sajda Ahmed (NCAM inspector) working with pupils from a local school on their posters (PCMA UW | photos R. Alamin)

For the local communities of Ghaddar, Idriss observed that the discussions helped strengthen their sense of belonging and ownership, and encouraged them to contribute to the protection and management of the heritage of Old Dongola. More importantly, community members felt more at ease and were open to freely sharing their opinions with the Sudanese training participants, as they spoke the same language and were working toward the same goal.

At the end of the course, the participants presented their final assignment—a draft project proposal on community engagement and heritage management—incorporating the knowledge and experiences they had gained. These proposals were presented in the presence of all the participants. The last day ended with a closing ceremony attended by representatives of the local community, and certificates were awarded to the successful participants [Fig. 6].

The training course was a valuable experience not only for the students but also for the NCAM inspectors. Although some had previously participated in similar initiatives, this was the first time they took part in a training program specifically focused on community engagement. This was true even for those who had participated in community work with national and international missions, as they had mostly served as translators. Idriss had prior experience, having participated in a community engagement project at Meroe—a site upstream of Old Dongola—where she worked as an inspector and a member of the community engagement team of the UCL Qatar mission directed by Jane Humphris (Humphris, Bradshaw, and Emberling 2021). She was involved in a program called the “Heritage Festival”, which aimed to involve the local community in sharing and interpreting their heritage with the



Fig. 6. Closing ceremony, participants receiving certificates of completing the course from the Community Council (PCMA UW | photo M. Reklajtis)

mission team. Many community members brought objects they felt represented their heritage and spoke about them. Idriss was involved in all stages of the festival — from preparation, through data collection and translation into English, to publishing a book about the local community of Meroe–Royal City (Humphris 2020). She confirmed it was a deeply rewarding experience from which she benefited greatly and which increased her knowledge of community engagement methods and practice.

Although the students' experience was incomparable to that of inspectors, this contrast actually contributed to a productive exchange of ideas and experiences among the participants, allowing everyone to benefit. A minor drawback of the training course was its limited duration, which made it difficult to fully absorb all the materials and concepts presented.

The course was a valuable experience not only for the trainees, but also for the Sudanese archaeologists and the local community. It was equally beneficial for the international archaeologists to better understand the interests of Sudanese archaeologists, which is essential in developing future community engagement activities. Fushiya, herself an instructor experienced in community engagement work, remarked: "It was also an important opportunity for me to understand the degree of interest in and need for these subjects among Sudanese archaeologists and reconsider the activities of community engagement programmes" (Fushiya 2020: 100). More broadly, Idriss believes that increasing the number of Sudanese archaeologists and students who can participate in projects as engagement facilitators and lead community programs is crucial for fostering greater involvement in community engagement programs among Sudanese archaeologists.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN THE BARAKA PROJECT

The "Baraka: Revitalization of the Oldest Preserved Mosque in Sudan" project was launched in January 2023 at Old Dongola with funding from the ALIPH Foundation. The project aims to document and assess the condition of the structure and its wall paintings and to conduct a holistic conservation of the mosque. An exhibition space, interpretive tools, and a visitor management scheme will also be developed to showcase the building's significance to both Sudanese and international audiences. The mosque, located on an elevated plateau within the Old Dongola archaeological site, is the most distinctive preserved building in the area.

Its significance to local, national, and global heritage is undeniable. As mentioned above, some local residents are descendants of the former inhabitants of Old Dongola, including the Funj-period royal family and the families of *sheikhs* (شيخ, holy men) buried in *qibab* (قباب, domed tombs) or near their *khalwas* (خلوة, Quranic schools).

The project incorporates capacity building and community engagement programs and has been planned to implement three types of training in conservation and community engagement (see *Baraka...* 2023). The first is on-the-job training for Sudanese conservators

and architects, focused on documentation, conservation interventions, and site monitoring. For the time being, as no institution in Sudan offers formal courses in conservation, this represents a valuable opportunity for the Sudanese to gain practical training in this field. The second type of initiatives targets local technicians, training them to conduct regular monitoring and reporting under the supervision of the site manager. The third is aimed at training engagement

facilitators. Several residents of Ghaddar, along with students from Khartoum, were trained as facilitators in community engagement programs. This training program allows young local residents to deepen their appreciation of both tangible and intangible heritage in the area, and to understand the importance of its protection and conservation. The present authors served as the lead instructors in this training program and also developed new engagement activities.

TRAINING COURSE IN 2023

The second type of training at Old Dongola (8 February–7 March 2023) aimed to raise awareness about the importance of tangible and intangible heritage and conservation work for long-term heritage protection and tourism development. It also sought to build the capacity of recent Sudanese graduates, many of whom came from the local community. Participants were expected to acquire the skills needed

to design, implement, and evaluate heritage education programs upon completion of the training. In other words, the objective was to train future engagement facilitators and visitor guides at Old Dongola [Fig. 7]. Holding another training course in Old Dongola —targeting, more specifically, members of the local community— can further strengthen the partnership between the community and



Fig 7. The community engagement team (PCMA UW | photo M. Hassan)

the archaeological mission, reinforcing the role of the community in preserving the cultural heritage of the area. The program was led by Fushiya, with the present authors serving as the main instructors.

Idriss participated in the course in a dual role: as an instructor and a member of the community engagement team. Siedahmed has also co-organized several community engagement programs at Old Dongola and Amara West and teaches tourism at the college level. The intensive four-week program began with six participants and three instructors. For two of the participants, this was a continuation of previous training; for the other four —members of the Ghaddar community with Bachelor’s degrees in Tourism, Archaeology, and Social Development— it was a new experience. The program included lectures by Fushiya, Idriss, and Siedahmed on a range of topics, such as tourism industry, visitor guiding, relevant legislation, international and national organizations, and

the archaeology and heritage of Sudan. In addition to the theoretical components, the training also included practical exercises. For instance, participants drafted tourism development plans for Sudan in general and for Old Dongola specifically. A schedule for a Site Open Day and heritage workshops for local children has been devised as well.

Idriss delivered a series of lectures on various aspects of cultural heritage under the title: “The Role of National and International Legislations and Laws in Heritage”. The lectures provided an overview of the importance of both international and national organizations responsible for implementing cultural heritage legislation in Sudan, and how these frameworks contribute to the protection of cultural heritage as an international, national, and local legacy. From the outset, it was clear that the trainees were already familiar with these organizations, which allowed the lecturer to focus more closely on their history



Fig. 8. Idriss in discussion with the trainees during her lecture (PCMA UW | photo T. Fushiya)

and the specifics of the Ordinance on the Protection of Antiquities (1999). The legal provisions set out in this ordinance were also examined in detail. This topic was also discussed among the trainees, especially in the context of land ownership, which has become an increasingly pressing issue in various places in Sudan, especially in times of conflict.

The second topic of Idriss's lectures was "Oral Tradition as a Source for Collection and Interpreting Data". She first explained the importance of oral traditions in the context of the Baraka project. The main reason for launching the revitalization project was to promote appreciation of the mosque building as a part of Islamic heritage and a place from which Islamic teachings had been disseminated since the 14th century. The project intends to adapt the ground floor of the building as an exhibition space where its symbolic and spiritual values for Muslim communities in Sudan and beyond will be highlighted alongside local

heritage represented through objects and stories. The lectures aimed to raise the trainees' awareness of the importance of collecting oral traditions from the local community as part of heritage preservation and to encourage them to continue to do so. The trainees themselves acknowledged that there are many stories worth remembering and saving from oblivion. A long discussion followed on the rights of storytellers and how their data can be preserved and used in different contexts and for various purposes [Fig. 8]. Ethical issues related to collecting data, including appropriate conduct during both individual and group interviews, were covered in the lecture as well. The trainees appeared to appreciate learning these essential methods of collecting oral traditions in their own community. Idriss considered them ready to take part in collecting data and materials to be displayed in the new museum with attention to ethical aspects of handling both material finds and oral histories.



Fig. 9. Mohamed Siedahmed gives advice on creating an evaluation form (PCMA UW | photo T. Fushiya)



Fig. 10. Trainees enter workshop evaluation data into a spreadsheet (PCMA UW | photo T. Fushiya)

Siedahmed lectured on tourism, tourism-related organizations in Sudan, relevant regulations, tourism development in the Northern State, and heritage education through both lectures and practical training. These sessions aimed to prepare the trainees to guide visitors at sites in the Northern State, especially Old Dongola [Fig. 9]. The lectures and discussions addressed professional conduct when handling tourists, cross-cultural differences, and other aspects related to the tour-guiding profession. Training local tour guides is one of the key steps in developing community-based tourism in Old Dongola. On a more practical side, several lectures on tourism topics and package tour planning were followed by exercises such as business planning and designing a package tour visiting various tourist attractions in the Northern State. Each participant presented their own plans in class.

Computer skills and the use of software (Microsoft Word and Excel) were also practiced [Fig. 10]. The trainees then used these new skills to create evaluation forms and invitation letters for two heritage programs and the Open Day (see below).



Fig. 11. Dorota Dzierzbicka in the citadel during a site visit (PCMA UW | photo H. Idriss)

An important part of the training — following the lectures on the history of archaeological expeditions in Old Dongola and their results— was a visit to the excavation area arranged by members of the mission team: Dorota Dzierzbicka [Fig. 11] led a tour of the citadel area and the monastery of the Holy Trinity, while Zakieldeen Mahmoud, Kacper Wasilewski [Fig. 12], Magdalena Skarżyńska, and Tomomi Fushiya provided a tour of the mosque, focusing on the Baraka project. The visit helped the participants appreciate the recent discoveries and provided them with archaeological information useful for guiding visitors during the Open Day. To further familiarize the trainees with archaeological methods, special sessions were held: on pottery processing and analysis by Katarzyna de Lellis-Danyś, on archaeobotanical sample processing and sorting by Mohamed Nasreldein Babiker, and on documentation methods by Tomomi Fushiya.



Fig. 12. Kacper Wasilewski at the mosque during a site visit (PCMA UW | photo H. Idriss)

These activities offered the trainees valuable opportunities to go through the whole process of archaeological fieldwork and to get to know the members of the mission. The visit to the mosque was especially meaningful, as they were able to meet the Baraka project team. Trainees listened attentively, asked questions about the team's work, and learned about the engineering, conservation, and archaeological challenges the team faced. They later shared what they had learned with their families and friends.

The training concluded with an evaluation session. Alongside suggestions gathered during the *wanasa* (وانسة), the participants' feedback and new ideas will help to improve the program in the future. During the closing ceremony, the participants met Artur Obluski, general director of the Baraka and Old Dongola projects. They shared with him how the program had developed their knowledge, skills, and motivation, and received their certificates from him [Fig. 13].

NEW HERITAGE EDUCATION PROGRAMS

The poster workshop initiative began in 2019 and continued until 2022, targeting local students and teachers from schools in Ghaddar and Hammur (Fushiya 2021b). The idea behind these activities was to familiarize local children with the history of the area and the ongoing archaeological excavations. They provided opportunities for students to meet archaeologists, learn about the site and recent discoveries, and then present what

they had learned at the archaeological site on their posters. In 2023, two new heritage education training programs were introduced: "My House, My Heritage" and "My Heritage, My Identity". The programs were also used as hands-on practice in the heritage management training program — the trainees helped the students collect data, assisted during the poster workshop, and entered data into the program evaluation forms.



Fig. 13. Completion ceremony, participants meeting the director of the Old Dongola project and receiving their certificates (PCMA UW | photos T. Fushiya)

The “My House, My Heritage” program, designed by Siedahmed, aimed to introduce the concept of heritage in a simple way that would capture the students’ interest. The focus was placed on tangible heritage in their immediate surroundings, especially old houses and historical buildings in their villages. What makes Old Dongola stand out in this respect is the presence of buildings representing different architectural styles, constructed from various building materials. Through “My House, My Heritage”, students explored and documented this important aspect of their heritage — a key part of our broader strategy to raise the local students’ aware-

ness of their heritage. Unlike previous one-off initiatives, this program was planned as a recurring event to gradually develop young people’s knowledge, skills, and sense of commitment to heritage protection.

“My House, My Heritage” was designed as a three-day activity. Day one focused on selecting participants, explaining the program’s goals, and helping them choose their topics. Day two consisted of a three-hour fieldwork session during which the participants collected data about the selected houses (see below for more details) [Table 2; Fig. 14]. Day three was devoted to student presentations of their fieldwork results at school [Fig. 15].

Table 2. “My House, My Heritage”: objectives and materials

Objectives	Materials needed for the activity
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To train history and arts teachers in interpretative tools, conservation of local culture, and heritage education activities • To raise awareness and understanding of local heritage through involvement of schools • To teach students about local vernacular architecture • To assist students in gaining a better understanding of a house in their community • To raise awareness of the architecture and space-planning of local houses • To generate interest in and curiosity about traditional architecture • To introduce basic concepts in architecture and the art of building • To develop skills in interviewing, photography, and drawing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing and drawing materials for 20 students • 20 pencils, eight rulers, and eight rubbers, one A4 paper packet • Four poster boards (or similar heavyweight paper) • Four cameras



Fig. 14. Students collecting data (“My House, My Heritage” – Ghaddar) (PCMA UW | photos H. Idriss)

In the fieldwork part of the workshop, students were instructed to select a house they wished to focus on in their activities. The house could be their own, a relative's, or any other house in the neighborhood. The main objective of the exercise was to learn something new about the house and its history. It was explained that, like people, many houses have stories to tell, and the selected house should have a history that the students found interesting and wanted to share with their peers. Equipped with pens or pencils and notebooks, the students visited the houses of their choice. They spoke with the owners and

recorded the answers to their questions. In addition, each student was also asked to produce two drawings of the house: one showing the view from the street, and the other a floor plan.

The activity was a good starting point, and the lessons learned during this first implementation would help improve the program in the future, as outlined below. Siedahmed observed one particularly positive outcome: the school teachers found "My House, My Heritage" to be effective and useful for the students. The teachers were also actively involved in explaining the principles of the activity and its significance. The students, who greatly enjoyed the activity, documented various house designs and architectural details, noted differences between old and modern houses, and came to appreciate preserving houses located in Ghaddar, Hammur, and Bokkibul. In addition, the need to share and discuss their observations boosted the children's self-confidence.

For the next phase of "My House, My Heritage", Siedahmed plans to focus on houses in Hillat Dongola, Funj-period houses within the fortified city (the citadel), as well as churches, the monastery, and the mosque at the archaeological site of Old Dongola.

The second heritage education program — "My Heritage, My Identity" — was designed by Idriss and targeted secondary school students (14–16 years old). Its aim was to enhance the students' understanding of Sudanese history from an archaeological perspective, introduce the Antiquities Law, and explain the institutional framework for the protection and management of archaeological sites in Sudan. The program sought to raise the



Fig. 15. Students' presentations ("My House, My Heritage" – Ghaddar) (PCMA UW | photos H. Idriss)

students' awareness of their role in safeguarding Sudanese heritage. The training took place on 5 March 2023 at the girls' and boys' secondary schools in Ghaddar and consisted of a lecture followed by a discussion [Figs 16, 17]. 250 male and 270

female students took part in the lecture. The lecture concluded by emphasizing the shared responsibility of all citizens in protecting cultural heritage. It also aimed to strengthen the students' sense of identity as Sudanese.



Fig.16. "My Heritage, My Identity" workshop for girls at the secondary school in Ghaddar (PCMA UW | photos T. Fushiya)

The feedback received highlighted the need for further awareness campaigns, educational programs, and community involvement initiatives. These insights will help develop strategies to deepen community engagement in cultural heritage preservation.

The Site Open Day, held on 25 February in 2023, provided a good opportunity to present the outcomes of the archaeological work, including the ERC-funded UMMA project, the new conservation initiative, and the Baraka project funded by the ALIPH Foundation, to members



Fig. 17. "My Heritage, My Identity" workshop for boys at the secondary school in Ghaddar (PCMA UW | photos T. Fushiya)

of the local community. The training course participants collaborated to organize and run the event, starting with the production and distribution of invi-

tation letters and posters [Fig. 18]. They also put up leaflets on shop walls in the Ghaddar market — souq (سوق). On the day of the event, posters created by local



Fig. 18. Poster made by local students displayed by the training team on Open Day (PCMA UW | photo T. Fushiya)



Fig. 19. Preparations for the Open Day (PCMA UW | photos T. Fushiya)

school students during previous heritage education workshops were displayed at the site's information point. Here, visitors were also introduced to a set of recommendations and awareness signs (“no graffiti”, “no climbing walls”, “protect our heritage”, etc.), which were explained

before the start of the site guided tour [Fig. 19]. Following recommendations from local representatives, the day was divided into two separate sessions: for women (from 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m., i.e. after housework and before the men returned from work) and for men (3:30 p.m.



Fig. 20. Open Day: guiding the visitors; visitors leaving comments after their visit (PCMA UW | photos T. Fushiya)

to 5:30 p.m.). The trainees, who had studied hard during their course, acted as guides during the Open Day, with one trainee leading each group of visitors. The visits' starting points were the Cruciform Church, fortification walls, Gate Church, House of the *Mek*² (المك), the excavations at the Funj-period settlement, the Royal Palace, and the Church of Archangel Raphael. During the visits, the trainees also answered the visitors' questions to the best of their knowledge acquired during the lectures and discussions during the course. In the mosque, where conservation work was ongoing, the visitors were guided by the present authors. For safety, all visitors were instructed by the

mosque's guardian to wear helmets due to the works in progress. At the end of the visit, the visitors left their feedback about the program on a comment board [Fig. 20]. The Open Day turned out to be a great success. Visitors particularly appreciated the opportunity to visit the site and learn about the monuments of Old Dongola, referring to their experience as "wonderful" and "beneficial".

The Open Day was an opportunity for the local community to observe the progress of the ongoing work, find answers to their questions (e.g. whether archaeologists find any gold during excavations, or what happens to the excavated objects), and see the scale of the archaeological



Fig 21. Habab Idriss explains the aims of the Baraka project to Mona Hassan, Head of the Department of Tourism in the Goulid District (PCMA UW | photo T. Fushiya)

2 *Mek* is Sudanese Arabic for "king".

mission’s efforts to uncover their heritage. This certainly helped raise awareness of the importance of protecting the site. About 70 local residents came to the site, including official representatives: Mona Hassan, Head of the Department of Tourism in the Gouliid District [Fig. 21], Abeer Babiker, Head of the Tourism Office in

the Old Dongola Unit, and Alameen Mukhtar, Head of the Old Dongola Unit. Their presence testified to the interest of the local administration in these programs — comprehensive, all-encompassing, and conducted by the Polish mission for many years — which actively involved the local community at all levels.

ACTIVITIES IN 2024

In 2024, due to the crisis in Sudan, our colleagues from Poland were unable to travel to Sudan to continue their research and conservation projects at Old Dongola. Instead, a new emergency program was created and implemented in the winter of 2024, with the support of NCAM and the PCMA UW. A twelve-day training course, “Tourism and the history of Old Dongola”, was held at

Old Dongola from 17 to 29 February 2024. The training aimed to build the capacity of 15 recent graduates from the local community with Bachelor’s degrees in Tourism, Archaeology, or Social Development from eight Sudanese universities [Fig. 22] — University of Dongola, University of Khartoum, National Ribat University, Shendi University, Omdurman Islamic University, Alzaiem Alazhari University, University of Gezira, and Red Sea University. This program, designed and led by Mohamed Hassan Siedahmed and Zakieldeen Mahmoud [Fig. 23], had three main objectives: 1) to familiarize the participants with the history of Old Dongola; 2) to raise heritage awareness among the local community; and 3) to train participants to become tour guides and educators in heritage management at local schools. As part of the program, the trainees organized a poster workshop —“Enriched by Our Heritage”— for middle school students (20 boys and 20 girls) from two schools in Ghaddar, including middle school students displaced from Khartoum following the outbreak of the conflict [Fig. 24]. The program’s objectives were largely achieved.



Fig. 22. Participants of the 2024 training course: recent graduates from the local community (PCMA UW | photo I. MohammedAli Mohammed Elgadi)

The new heritage education program, “Enriched by Our Heritage”, for middle school students was designed and implemented in collaboration with local teachers and facilitators who had been trained in 2023 as part of the Baraka project. It resembled the “My House, My Heritage” program in that it aimed to introduce the concept of heritage in a simple way, to make students aware of the heritage around them, especially historic buildings in Old Dongola. The “My House, My Heritage” program, on the other hand, sought to attract students’ attention to houses, heritage materials, and architecture. “Enriched by Our Heritage” was, in fact, an emergency plan to accommodate the needs of middle school students who studied Old Dongola’s history in local schools and who

came from Khartoum due to the current crisis in Sudan. The workshop generally went very well. The students took good notes about the site’s history, drew plans of the buildings, and took pictures. The activity expanded the young people’s knowledge and skills. The experience was new and exciting for the students from Khartoum, as they had not visited the site before. Unlike the local students, they had only heard about the programs conducted in the previous year, but they participated for the first time. It was a valuable experience for all of them.

We hope to continue the “My House, My Heritage” program when the conflict ends. The “Enriched by Our Heritage” program is designed as a recurring event, like “My House, My Heritage”, as described above.



Fig. 23. Zakieldeen Mahmoud gives a lecture to participants of the training course (PCMA UW | photo I. MohammedAli Mohammed Elgadi)

DISCUSSION

Among the programs implemented in Old Dongola, the most important were the training programs addressed at local and Khartoum-based students and archaeologists. They offered valuable opportunities for the participants. Firstly, the training programs facilitated the sharing of knowledge and experience among participants from different backgrounds. Secondly, they allowed the locally trained guides and facilitators to improve their knowledge of the site's history, as well as cultural heritage protection and management. In addition, the programs helped to strengthen the relationships between the local community and the site, fostering a shared sense of responsibility and interest in its preservation. The programs proved successful and

beneficial, as they were the first among those offered by archaeological missions to focus on capacity building for Sudanese archaeologists and newly graduated students not only in Archaeology, but also in Tourism and Social Development. It was also a rare case where the main instructors of the second training program were Sudanese specialists. The trainees showed great interest in collecting information on various topics related to archaeology and tourism and discussed issues of interest both among themselves and with the local community (e.g. teachers, women's group, students). The visit to the site and the mosque provided the trainees with more information about the building and its history. In addition, it was an opportunity to



Fig. 24. A poster made by students during a workshop (PCMA UW | photo I. MohammedAli Mohammed Elgadi)

see what archaeologists actually do in the field and to learn about the latest discoveries. The participants were well integrated into the discussions, actively exchanged ideas, and gave informative presentations, which may benefit them in the future.

The trainings were empowering for the present authors as well, enhancing our experience in designing community engagement programs, enabling us to act as instructors and facilitators, and helping us improve our teaching methods.

Although the community engagement program in Old Dongola has been largely successful, it also faced some challenges. One of these was language. Learning English is essential for Archaeology graduates from various universities to effectively communicate with foreign visitors and work as tour guides at the site. Without adequate language skills, their ability to engage with international teams and tourists remains limited.

Additionally, despite the Polish mission's long history in the area and more

than five years of community engagement in Ghaddar, the concept of site protection is still not fully understood. This is evident from the continued encroachment on the archaeological site by residents who have expanded their houses or agricultural plots into protected areas, a trend that has intensified during the ongoing conflict. With the influx of people into the region, such violations have increased, leading to official complaints against certain individuals.

The lack of awareness about the need to protect the site appears to concern only a few, while for others, agricultural expansion takes precedence — especially as many have lost their sources of income and turned to farming for survival. In such difficult circumstances, securing daily provisions becomes a priority over protecting the site. Addressing these challenges requires continuous education and efforts to balance heritage conservation with the community's pressing economic needs.

CONCLUSIONS

Old Dongola has recently witnessed significant interactions between the local community and the archaeological expedition, particularly through the Dialogue and Baraka projects. The present authors observed that community members have become more aware of the site's importance and the need to protect it. The local community appears to feel a strong connection both to the site itself and to the archaeologists and the Polish mission. In this article, we have traced the development of community engagement programs, focusing on three main aspects:

capacity building for recent graduates and archaeologists, poster workshops for primary and middle school students, and the Site Open Day. We also discussed their significance and impact from a Sudanese perspective.

The training programs had a significant impact on the local community, as they involved diverse community groups and spanned more than four years. Both community members and archaeologists benefited from the experience. The first program, launched in 2021, laid the foundation for training Sudanese archae-

ologists and students of Archaeology and Tourism to serve as facilitators and instructors in community engagement initiatives.

Working with school students within the framework of local heritage education programs is also worth highlighting, as today's students are the future custodians of the cultural heritage of Sudan. Raising awareness of their heritage and drawing their attention to archaeological sites not only broadens their knowledge but also helps shape their identity. Reaching out to younger generations has proved highly successful, as students can positively influence others by sharing their newly acquired knowledge with family and friends. Their participation in these programs also fostered a sense of belonging. For Sudanese archaeologists and students of Archeology and Tourism, the impact of the programs was even greater. Training and preparation for community engagement work helped them recognize the importance of linking archaeology with the community and reinforced the value of this connection. This experience motivated them to further develop their skills and abilities to create their own plans and proposals. They not only have scientific expertise, but also belong to the community in terms of culture and language, which makes their contribution to community engagement efforts

especially valuable. Moreover, they can be relied upon to organize heritage programs, which are particularly important in the light of the war that has severely affected Sudan's cultural heritage.

In the future, we aim to build on the success of the two projects already implemented. The plan includes training university graduates from the local community to develop and implement community work programs in schools at various levels. In addition, further efforts will be made to raise awareness of the importance of heritage and the role of local communities in its protection. These efforts are hoped to contribute to sustainable development in the area by fostering collaboration, building local capacity, and promoting long-term growth.

The current dire circumstances, caused by the ongoing war and resulting in the displacement of many people, make the need for training Sudanese specialists in heritage management even more urgent. This situation underscores the critical importance of raising awareness about the value of archaeological sites and the need to preserve them. Empowering local communities to protect their heritage is essential to safeguarding the region's cultural identity and ensuring its preservation for future generations.

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How to cite this article: Idriss, H. and Siedahmed, M.H. (2025). Old Dongola community engagement from a Sudanese perspective. *Polish Archaeology in the Mediterranean*, 34.2, 33–64. <https://doi.org/10.37343/uw.2083-537X.pam34.2.4>

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