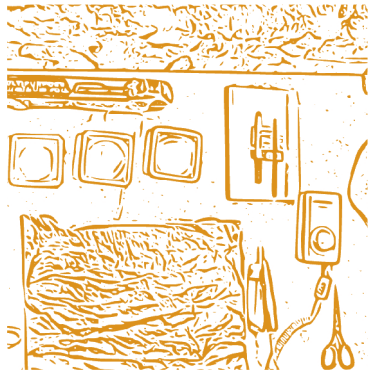
“The People of Ghazali”: a consideration of community engagement in bioarchaeology



Abstract: Community engagement approaches, along with the development of capacity building and knowledge transfer under the aegis of such, have grown rapidly in recent years within archaeology as a discipline. With increasing adaptation of community-engaged methodologies among archaeological projects in Sudan have come additional opportunities for further engagement in the realm of bioarchaeological research. Given the unique aspects of bioarchaeology centered around documentation of burials and analyses of skeletal remains, a key arena of engaged approaches has been the development of dedicated workshops to provide methodological training in conjunction with hands-on opportunities during fieldwork. Such capacity development plays an important role in facilitating bioarchaeological inquiry and remains a component of project development in Sudanese contexts that discussion with local stakeholders has demonstrated to be desirable and sought where possible. Such capacity development through three methodologically driven bioarchaeology workshops in conjunction with opportunities for engaging with individuals in Khartoum around bioarchaeological approaches was undertaken in the winter of 2022 as a component of “The People of Ghazali: Tracing the Human Experience in a Nubian Desert Monastic Community (680–1275 CE)” project. This paper explores the dynamics of capacity development and community engagement in the context of bioarchaeological research in Sudan.

Keywords: community engagement, knowledge transfer, Sudan, ethics, isotopes and DNA

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INTRODUCTION

The field of archaeology has reached a point in its development such that it can demonstrably be shown that discussion, engagement, and involvement of local communities in archaeological processes, from conception to completion and beyond to site management, is not only an ethically informed imperative, but also stands to provide a beneficial synergy to researchers and local communities alike, allowing for mutually beneficial relationships to be formed. As Obłuski and Dzierzbicka (2021b: 67) point out, archaeological projects must seek to go beyond simply excavating a site and endeavor to work with local communities: research does not exist in a bubble and the realities of local communities as stakeholders in the heritage realm should be recognized and fostered (Atalay 2006; 2012). The principles of community-engaged approaches to archaeology and the need to take such into account have been more and more frequently recognized and embraced among archaeological projects in Sudan, with aspects of community engagement becoming key components of project design and implementation at Meroë (Humphris and Bradshaw 2017; Humphris, Bradshaw, and Emberling 2020), Tungul (Old Dongola) (Fushiya and Radziwiłko 2019; Fushiya 2020a; 2021a; 2021b; Larsen 2021), Soba (Drzewiecki et al. 2023), Amara West/Abkanisa (Spencer et al. 2024; Fushiya forthcoming), and Mograt Island (Näser 2019; Näser and Tully 2019), among others (see also Hafsaas-Tsakos 2011; Bradshaw 2017; 2018), adding to the broader global development of community-engaged archaeological approaches (see Atalay 2006; 2012; Marshall 2009; McDavid 2014; Fushiya 2018; Acabado and Martin 2022).

While community-engaged approaches to bioarchaeology, which is to say the documentation, excavation, and analyses of burial contexts and associated biological, primarily human, remains (see BABAO 2019; Binder 2019; Buzon 2020; Sutton 2020), are comparatively nascent in the archaeological landscape of Sudan, the field of bioarchaeology has a rich, but also at times problematic, history in the region, with most research to date primarily being undertaken along the northern sections of the Nile River valley within the region referred to as Nubia (Binder 2019; Buzon 2020; Dafa'alla 2023). As a geographic region, Nubia comprises areas of what are today southern Egypt and northern Sudan, with Budka and Lemos (2024: 11) proposing a definition of this territory as extending from the First to the Sixth Nile Cataract. While the conceptual geography of "Nubia" as a place is broadly understood, the physical limits of this region have proven challenging to uniformly define and are often context-dependent to the extent that multiple "definitions" of Nubia as a place exist (Auenmüller 2019; Williams and Emberling 2020; Dafa'alla 2023). By contrast, the modern nation of Sudan, which borders Chad, Central African Republic, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Libya, South Sudan, as well as the Red Sea to the east comprises both parts of Nubia and regions beyond Nubia (FAO 2015; Williams and Emberling 2020). Additionally, the term "Nubian" refers to a

Nilo-Saharan ethnolinguistic group with ancestral connections to the geographic region of Nubia, contemporary individuals belonging to this group being known as Nubian and among whom Nubian languages are spoken, most notably for the areas discussed herein, Dongolawi and Nobiin; the nature of ancestral connections between Nobiin and Old Nubian remains an area of research and ongoing discussions (Edwards and Bell 2000; H. Bell 2009: 264–273; Bechhaus-Gerst 2011; van Gerven Oei 2021; Dafa'alla 2023; Hammarström et al. 2024; Wafa 2024). Contemporary Nubians have historically primarily resided in areas of geographic Nubia, though not exclusively, particularly more recently following resettlements and migrations in conjunction with land lost to dam floodwaters (see H. Bell 2006; 2009). As with archaeology in the region, foundational bioarchaeological research was undertaken in Sudan in the face of impending destruction in relation to the construction of dams and associated rising water levels threatening surrounding communities and heritage sites in the flood zones (Säve-Söderbergh 1987; Waldron 2000; H. Bell 2006; 2009; Hassan 2007; Andersen 2011; Hafsaas-Tsakos 2011; Rowan 2017; Edwards 2020; Welsby 2020: 310; cf. Carruthers 2022). Näser (2020) points out that by 1970, after three extensive salvage campaigns undertaken in advance of inundation in association with dam infrastructure development, Lower Nubia was quite likely the most densely archaeologically researched area globally.

While the "race to save the monuments" in advance of reservoir flooding associated with the Aswan High Dam, conducted under the International Campaign to Save the Monuments of Nubia UNESCO campaign in 1960–1980, is perhaps the most recognizable, particularly for the relocation of large monuments like Abu Simbel (UNESCO 2020), the flood zone imperative for archaeological survey and excavation in the geographic region of Nubia has been a factor for over a century now (see Rowan 2017; Salah Mohamed Ahmed 2020; Dafa'alla 2023). Early modern efforts at damming the Nile from the time of the first dam at Aswan effectively placed at odds two schools of thought referred to by Andersen (2011) as "muscular modernization" (i.e., those seeking to leverage control of the Nile River to facilitate economic development) and "paternalistic preservation" (i.e., those who saw preservation of cultural monuments of the past as a key stewardship responsibility). In the early 20th century, research undertaken by the Archaeological Survey of Nubia (ASN) in parts of southern Egypt and northern Sudan under the direction of George Reisner and Cecil Firth, in advance of additional flooding associated with the raising of the Aswan (Low) Dam, ultimately resulted in the excavation of 151 cemeteries over four seasons in 1907–1911, from which Metcalfe (2023: 1) estimates about 7500 individuals were recovered from approximately 20,000 graves reflecting contexts from early A-Group (around the 4th millennium BCE) through the early Christian period (around the mid-late 1st millennium CE). The skeletal remains excavated were variously analyzed by Grafton Elliot Smith, Frederick Wood Jones, and Douglas Erith Derry (see Waldron 2000), though it is only truly the remains from the first season

of the ASN in 1907–1908 that have been comprehensively published (G.E. Smith and Jones 1910), with the remaining three seasons being only partially presented (Derry 1909a; 1909b; Firth 1912; 1915; 1927; Metcalfe 2023).

The anatomical analyses undertaken by the ASN set a benchmark for today's bioarchaeology in the region and the field more broadly; the extensive qualitative and quantitative analyses of a diverse range of time periods and proposed "social classes" was atypical for the time, an era more readily defined by preferential collection of mummified individuals, cranial remains, novel cases of skeletal variation and pathological impacts, limited analyses of "elite" burials, and in many cases simply ignoring human remains in archaeological contexts (Metcalfe 2023). As such, the oft-cited ASN bioarchaeology results can be seen as a milestone and bellwether of subsequent research developments. This monumental survey project, however, also highlights a paradoxical component of the field that continues to be grappled with today. Undertaken by Western scholars in evident isolation from local voices, not to mention the largely unaccounted for members of the local workforce (cf. Quirke 2010; Baird 2023; Spencer et al. 2024), one of the key questions of the analyses of the ASN was to assess the degree of Egyptian influence and expansion into contexts in Nubia, as well as biological affinities among Nubian populations; adopting a primarily Egyptocentric, diffusionist, racialized model, project results were broadly steeped in the colonial rhetoric of the period (G.E. Smith 1914; 1923; Trigger 1978; Molleson 1993; Brace 2010; S.T. Smith 2021; Buzon and Marshall 2022; Schrader et al. 2024). Waldron (2000: 367) echoes the voice of Grafton Elliot Smith himself (see G.E. Smith and Jones 1910: 7) in noting that a primary incentivizing factor for Smith as an anatomist on the ASN project was the possibility of determining race from skeletal remains.

In a similar vein regarding contexts in Nubia documented by the expansive antecedent Royal Prussian Expedition conducted by Karl Richard Lepsius and colleagues in 1842–1846 (Lepsius 1849; 1852; 1849–1859; Fitzenreiter 2011; Loeben 2020), one of numerous contemporary and later foreign exploration forays into the region (see Ahmed M. Ali Hakem 1978; Salah Mohamed Ahmed 2020), Näser (2020) points out that Lepsius's chronology and historical grounding of Nubian monuments gave rise to what Said (1978) refers to as an "imaginative geography" that conceptualized Nubia as "the Other" in reference to Pharaonic Egypt. Such inferences tacitly put in place a notion of Nubia and Nubian history by extension as of less intrinsic importance and relatability than the *sotto voce* superior Egyptian cultural legacy (see also Budge 1907; Lemos 2024). This rhetoric would not only continue to be evident during the subsequent ASN, but is evident and often directly restated across numerous investigative contexts in Nubia for a substantial period into the 20th century (see Trigger 1994), with the work of Reisner (1923) at Kerma, where an Egyptian association was presumed on the basis that a local cultural group could not have been so sophisticated, being a commonly invoked lodestone (Matić 2018; Minor 2018; van Gerven Oei 2022;

Schrader et al. 2024). Consultation of the bibliographies presented by Rose (1996), which covers to varying extents the period up to 1995, and Sabbahy (2018), which presents sources published from 1995 to 2016, further demonstrate this particular vantage of inquiry within bioarchaeology and the progressive movement of the field away from such. Despite clear progress and increasing awareness of the implications of long established, often now questionable, paradigms, the legacy impacts of early contributions remain challenging to fully expunge from Nubiology, with, for instance, the A-, C-, and X-Group terminology, originally established by Reisner, remaining common touchpoints of cultural group reference and contestation in the literature (for recent examples of such see Dann 2020; Gatto 2020; Hafsaas 2020; Mahmoud El-Tayeb 2020; Näser 2020).

The legacies of colonialism, racism, and orientalism in bioarchaeology have been conceptualized and addressed at length in numerous venues (see Murphy and Klaus 2017; Meloche, Spake, and Nichols 2020), with probing consideration focusing on instances in Sudan most recently presented by Schrader and colleagues (2024). Additionally, as Spencer and colleagues (2024) note, most international and Sudanese archaeologists have long studied the past in isolation from local communities, effectively making local communities passive consumers of their own heritage (see also Humphris, Bradshaw, and Emberling 2020).

While a broader discipline familiarity with the implications of the 1990 Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) (United States Senate, Select Committee on Indian Affairs 1990) in the United States of America is often engaged as a paragon of progress in the realm of ethically engaged bioarchaeology, the dynamics of different global realities are such that the advances gained under NAGPRA are neither inherently transferable nor universally applicable. Yet the sentiment of NAGPRA as an ethically motivated and community engagement advocating path forward has spurred conversations and discourse development around the need for and manner of engaging with local communities in the execution of bioarchaeological research. Informed consent has increasingly become the norm in bioarchaeological research along with broader recognition and inclusion of indigenous and local community knowledge and voices in research scope development, both in terms of what can be learned and what the bioarchaeological research being conducted can contribute to enhancing the desired knowledge of extant indigenous/local communities. In line with such progress, increasing codification and advocacy for explicit permission around the examination and analyses of human skeletal remains has been included within the codes of conduct of numerous (bio)archaeological organizations (see WAC 1990; AAPA 2003; Roberts 2018; Turner, Wagner, and Cabana 2018; BABAO 2019; Squires, Errickson, and Márquez-Grant 2019; SAA 2021; Buikstra et al. 2022; ISNS 2022; AmSARC 2023; PPA 2023). Community engagement expectations and standards have also been developed and implemented across numerous global contexts (see Okamura and Matsuda 2011), with proactive engagement and transparent

community-engaged approaches advocated for by, for instance, the San (South African San Institute 2017; Schroeder et al. 2019), and numerous communities in North America in regard to cultural resource management (CRM) approaches (e.g., Ministry of Tourism and Culture [of Canada] 2011; Saugeen Ojibway Nation 2011; Kleer 2012; Curve Lake First Nation Chief and Council 2016; Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation 2018), among other global contexts. Embodying an engagement model in particular, the Paleopathology Association Bylaws (PPA 2023) under Article IX, 9.1 Statement of Ethical Principles, §1g implores that researchers "[m]ake results of study available to the scientific community, communities of interest, and non-specialist audiences promptly and responsibly", in addition to which §3c advocates that, "[w]hen members work outside their own countries, engage with local scholars in building mutually beneficial relationships and infra-structure". It is within this arena of introspection, reflexivity, advocacy for decolonizing methodologies, and progress in ethically grounded community engagement and capacity development that the global field of bioarchaeology finds itself striving towards today.

Within the purview of community-engaged archaeological practices, capacity building and knowledge transfer of skills remain prime areas of engagement. The specific skillsets held by archaeologists and bioarchaeologists can be operationalized through the provision of workshops with local researchers, the key lens here being an informed process of discussion around what skills local researchers and communities may wish to acquire and what can be provided to help make such possible. Workshops as such are not, and should not be, developed from a position of delivering skills that "need to be taught" (see Näser 2019: 396) based on some perceived insufficiency, but rather on the basis of reciprocity, informed dialogue, and capacity development collaboration around areas from which local communities, researchers, and colleagues may wish to gain further experiences and transferable skillsets (cf. Greer 2014). To this end, programs and workshops have been developed to facilitate opportunities for researchers to share knowledge with local students, fellow archaeologists, and community members, with a recent example from Sudan seen in the extended programming focusing on remote sensing and geomatic methods in archaeology delivered by Drzewiecki and colleagues (2022; 2023) in Khartoum in conjunction with ongoing field excavations at nearby Soba. Several capacity development and community engagement events with a focus on bioarchaeology have also been undertaken, with workshops held at the National Corporation for Antiquities and Museums of Sudan (NCAM), the University of Khartoum, Al-Neelain University, International University of Africa, and the House of Heritage (Schrader et al. 2024: 10) as well as the establishment in 2019 of the M. Bolheim Bioarchaeology Laboratory at NCAM in Khartoum, the first such bioarchaeologically oriented research center in Sudan (Saad and Antoine 2021).

The concept of community engagement, while seemingly cohesive in terminological succinctness, is in reality a notion of practice more than a codified

doctrine, with Näser (2019: 380) noting how diversity of global contexts, unique cultural-historical situations within such, and diversity of approaches to engagement with local stakeholders being so variable and multifold as to inhibit any singular, universal definition as well as the need for such, presenting opportunities for case-by-case innovation and adaptation (see also Marshall 2009; Byrne 2012; Moshenska and Dhanjal 2012; McDavid 2014; Schroeder et al. 2019). The present contribution focuses on a series of capacity development and knowledge transfer events undertaken in February and March of 2022 as part of a broader bioarchaeological project entitled "The People of Ghazali: Tracing the Human Experience in a Nubian Desert Monastic Community (680–1275 CE)", hereafter referred to as the "People of Ghazali" project.

The site of Ghazali (18.441944, 31.931389; approximately 281 m a.s.l.) is located along the Wadi Abu Dom in the Bayuda desert region within the great bend of the Nile River, being situated approximately 15 km from the Nile Valley. Initially, excavations were conducted by Peter Shinnie, Neville Chittick, and Nigm ed-Din Sherif (Shinnie and Chittick 1961) and subsequently by the Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology, University of Warsaw (PCMA UW) (Obłuski 2018). The site of Ghazali is most prominently defined by the presence of a large, around 5000 m^2, walled monastery occupied from the late 7th century CE into the late 13th century CE (Obłuski 2018; 2019). In addition to the monastery, iron production facilities, a lay settlement, and four cemeteries are also present at the site (see Ciesielska, Obłuski, and Stark 2018; Obłuski 2018; 2019; Stark and Ciesielska 2018). Along with the bioarchaeological analyses completed as part of the "People of Ghazali" project (Stark and Sirak forthcoming), a key component of the project was engaging with Sudanese students, colleagues, and community members through the development of workshops focused on bioarchaeological methods and sampling of skeletal materials for the purposes of isotope and DNA laboratory analyses, as well as research results dissemination focusing on what has been bioarchaeologically documented to date at Ghazali.

A diversity of understandings exist around what constitutes a "community", and by extension "local communities", such that case-specific contextualization is needed. A challenging concept to clearly define, "community" has come under increasing scrutiny as an encapsulating term for what in reality are often multiple and overlapping regional and personal iterations, with Pyburn (2011: 29) noting the idea of community itself as being the most undertheorized aspect of community archaeology, while Waterton and Smith (2010: 4) critique the use of the term "community" as often akin to an affix. This is to say that different communities can reside in the same locality forming other larger communities, and that individuals can simultaneously belong to more than one community, resulting in the reality that "communities" are not often monolithic nor monocultural and thus making the term both appropriate and in need of clarifying definition when utilized to discuss groups (see C. Bell and Newby 1974; Alleyne 2002; Marshall 2002; Neal and Walters 2008; Anderson 2016; Bessant 2018).

This article speaks of community in the broadest sense as an agglomeration of individuals who share common aspects of background experience and reside or have a direct connection to a given place. In terms of the discussion presented herein, that "place" is Sudan, namely Khartoum, a city inhabited by individuals from diverse backgrounds and regions of Sudan. An "us and them" dialectic is not intended, rather the conception of community utilized is intended to reflect broader commonalities of experience, worldview, and epistemology. "Community" as a term in the present work thus connotes Sudan and Sudanese individuals who have shared geocultural backgrounds and habitus of living and engaging with the cultural landscape in Sudan. This attribution is made with the knowledge that "Sudan" itself is a synecdoche for what is in reality a broad tapestry of ethnolinguistic backgrounds and cultural-community identities such that speaking of the "Sudanese community" as a succinct singular belies the nodal levels of diverse communities, identities, and realities within the nation of Sudan shaped by belonging, or exclusion, spanning from the micro- to the macro-level, from village and town levels, to regional and national levels, as well as along lines of ethnic affiliation. As such, "community" as elaborated herein is employed at the inclusive "Sudanese" level, with additional sub-specification beyond this macro-scale elucidated where necessary to the discussion presented.

The term "local" is also a challengingly vague term given that locality and, by extension, being local are inherently subjective measures. Must one permanently reside in a location to be local to it and, if so, where is the border between local and non-local, and should such be geographically or culturally determined (see Bessant 2018; Scherzer et al. 2020)? To this end, "local" is used herein in a multimodal manner, both to encapsulate communities that reside in direct local proximity to the sites discussed, namely Old Dongola and Ghazali, as well as Sudanese individuals in Khartoum who participated in the workshops and public presentation, of whom it can be said that they both reflect the local community within Khartoum, as well as in many cases belong to local communities elsewhere in Sudan, from which they have come to Khartoum for multifold reasons.

METHODOLOGY

In total three capacity development workshops focusing on topics related to bioarchaeological inquiry, with a particular focus on isotopes and DNA, and a community presentation of bioarchaeological research findings from Ghazali were undertaken by the author. The opportunity for English to Arabic translation was offered for each of the events.

The three capacity development workshops were each approximately 2–3 hours in duration and were held respectively at the University of Khartoum (n=around 30 participants) and Al-Neelain University (n=around 15 par-

ticipants), where students would have ample opportunity to attend, participate, discuss, and ask questions, as well as at the National Corporation for Antiquities and Museum of Sudan (NCAM) (n=around 30 participants), where the majority of attendees comprised professional archaeologists and heritage specialist authorities along with students. While numerous universities and community institutions in other regions of Sudan would also have been suitable locations for such workshop development, and at which it is hoped future workshops and engagement opportunities can be further developed, the University of Khartoum and Al-Neelain University were chosen given their substantial archaeological programs, while NCAM is the governmental authority for antiquities and archaeological excavations in Sudan, being a primary institution at which a large contingent of heritage professionals are employed and through which all archaeological research in Sudan is authorized.

The focus and intention of these capacity development and knowledge transfer workshops was to provide opportunities for engagement and heuristic learning around bioarchaeological practices and methods. Topics covered focused namely around bioarchaeological excavations and findings along with the methodologies involved in sampling skeletal materials for the purposes of radiocarbon dating, conducting isotope analyses of carbon ($\delta^{13}C$), nitrogen ($\delta^{15}N$), oxygen ($\delta^{18}O$), and strontium ($^{87}Sr/^{86}Sr$), as well as the manner of obtaining samples for ancient DNA (aDNA) analyses, with a primary focus on the cranial base drilling method (CBDM) developed by Sirak and colleagues (2017; 2020; 2021; 2022). While acquisition of sample materials for DNA analyses from both dental and cranial remains were discussed at the workshops, the bulk of the focus was on the CBDM method, as acquiring sample material from within the petrous part of the temporal bone via this method requires a particularly precise familiarity with the target locale and often must be conducted on site in the field in lieu of sampling in a laboratory environment. Participants in the workshops had the opportunity to engage with this method to gain familiarity for employing such while working in the field.

Along with slide-based material presentation and discussion, participants engaged with the dynamics of using a handheld micro-motor flex shaft portable K1030 Foredom drill with carbide burr, a device type commonly used to acquire samples for isotope and DNA analyses. Discussion was had around how to choose and locate which parts of the skeleton are ideal for sampling, namely around which elements are commonly selected for collagen acquisition and the formation periods of teeth in relation to which tooth might be sampled for oxygen ($\delta^{18}O$) and strontium ($^{87}Sr/^{86}Sr$) analyses at different stages of the life course. Capacity development also focused on identifying the anatomical landmarks for locating the point along the bony ridge that is situated between the jugular foramen and the carotid canal on the inferior surface of the petrous part of the temporal bone on the base of the skull, by

way of which the cochlear area of the osseous labyrinth can be accessed via a narrow aperture to acquire a sample for laboratory-based DNA analyses using the CBDM method (see Sirak et al. 2017: Fig. 1). Isotope and DNA analyses from Ghazali were utilized as the introductory foundation for discussing these methodologies along with the broader dynamics of bioarchaeological research inquiry with a focus on contexts in Sudan.

The objective of the workshops was not quantitative, but rather a qualitative process of engagement and discussion around bioarchaeological methods. While metrical approaches such as surveying can provide helpful feedback about workshop goals and knowledge transfer, they also do not necessarily fully encapsulate outcomes in a meaningful or superiorly insightful way (see Walton 1995; Rowe et al. 2008; Kolek 2013; Jerolmack and Khan 2014; Ketokivi 2019; Shekhar et al. 2019). Feedback on workshop experiences as such was undertaken through directed and open conversation. It was seen as most beneficial to all parties to engage with workshop participants through dialogue, both open to comment and questions as well as focused inquiry as to what might be of use in future endeavors around knowledge transfer engagement and bioarchaeology in the context of Sudan.

In conjunction with the three capacity development workshops, a presentation of bioarchaeological research findings from Ghazali and broader contextualization of what such research can tell us about past inhabitants of the region was held at the House of Heritage in Khartoum 2, at which around 35 individuals attended. The House of Heritage, established in 2016 and directed by Dr. Ismail Ali El-Fihail, is a community-centered location that presents cultural programing, training, advocacy, and capacity building with a focus on Sudanese cultural heritage, both ancient and modern, both tangible and intangible (Sudan Memory 2022). The House of Heritage effectively serves as a cultural heritage nexus, which while located in Khartoum focuses on the broad diversity of the multifold Sudanese cultural communities, providing opportunities to speak with and hear from an array of individuals from various Sudanese regions and backgrounds.

Following the presentation of bioarchaeological research findings from Ghazali at the House of Heritage, an open discussion was held. The use of a conversational approach in conjunction with question and answer allowed for extended opportunities to hear from Sudanese community members as well as discuss further in a candid fashion the findings, different angles of interpretation, and future avenues that the community highlighted might be of use to pursue for investigating further in subsequent excavation and analyses endeavors. Much as in the three workshops, the emphasis in the House of Heritage presentation was not centered around quantitation but rather focused on advancing dialogue aimed towards gaining insight to future routes of meaningful and beneficial engagement for return of research findings and avenues of additional inquiry.

DISCUSSION

To date in Sudan, aspects of community engagement in the realm of bioarchaeology have been comparatively less frequently addressed, leaving lacunae around the practice and how to approach such. While numerous protocols and ethical discussions have developed within bioarchaeology (see Lambert and Walker 2019), particularly in recent years around descendant communities and sampling for DNA (see Buikstra et al. 2022; Fleskes et al. 2023), there has not been an evidently equal push towards community engagement and efforts to provide on-site, in-community capacity development and discussion around bioarchaeological project goals. It has thus been, and should be, the initiative of researchers within contexts in Sudan, and elsewhere, to further extend engagement models developed within archaeology to endeavor where possible to more inclusively integrate local Sudanese learners (i.e., students at all levels) and community members (i.e., individuals in the communities in which bioarchaeological research is undertaken) —these categories need not be mutually exclusive nor finitely defined— who may wish to participate and engage both with the methods of bioarchaeology as well as facilitating community discussions around project development, research goals, and results return at local and broader national levels (see Borofsky 2019; Boutin 2019; Lambert and Walker 2019; Supernant et al. 2020; Schrader et al. 2024). This is not to say that such processes have been entirely absent, but rather to say that many such efforts have been comparatively ad hoc and there remains room for additional development and integration.

Engagement processes and more broadly knowledge transfer opportunities provided by non-local individuals while undertaking research in Sudan are also not without question. While numerous post-secondary programs in bioarchaeology exist outside of Sudan, at the time of writing, no dedicated bioarchaeology training programs nor course offerings yet exist among Sudanese educational institutions (see Jakob and Magzoub Ali 2011; Schrader et al. 2024), making opportunities to engage with the field of bioarchaeology directly through defined curricula in Sudan relatively limited (see also Strouhal 1981: 241; Jakob and Magzoub Ali 2011: 519–520). Such a reality results in a Catch-22 of sorts, as opportunities to undertake bioarchaeological training in Sudan are presently limited while opportunities to attend foreign programs outside of Sudan at the graduate level often require a degree of prior experience and can be highly restrictive at all educational levels, often requiring visas and significant financing to attend, which can add substantial burdens and impediments, to say nothing of additional challenges of living abroad, the common necessity of bilingualism, access to library resources, lab equipment, and advanced skills training broadly (see Abusharaf 2002; Schmidt 2009; Caldwell and Hyams-Ssekasi 2016; Rose-Redwood and Rose-Redwood 2017; Agbor 2021; Abdalla 2024; Elgadal and Glade 2024). In conversation with participants during the workshops undertaken as part of the "People of Ghazali" project

and at other times, the presently limited opportunity for formal bioarchaeology training in Sudan has been expressed by Sudanese colleagues as an avenue of capacity development for which further knowledge transfer events such as those discussed herein and, as previously mentioned, conducted by other researchers in recent years (see Schrader et al. 2024), would be further welcomed. The establishment of the M. Bolheim Bioarchaeology Laboratory at NCAM (see Saad and Antoine 2021) is a further testament to the advances and interest in bioarchaeological research in Sudan and signals the potential for continued capacity development and collaboration at the facility.

Language must also be considered here. In the context of Sudan, the publications of novel research findings are rarely produced or translated into Arabic, the main common language of Sudan, not to mention any of the Nubian or other languages spoken among the various local communities within which archaeologists conduct research (see H. Bell 2006; 2009; 2023; Medani 2016; Rowan 2017; *A crowdfunder…* 2021; Taras Press 2021; Mazhar, Morsy, and Radwan 2024; Spencer et al. 2024). As Hansen (2008) critiques, it is not even necessary that foreign archaeologists learn Arabic as a necessity of working in Sudan, and comparatively few actually do, with Spencer and colleagues (2024) adding the lack of capacity in local Nubian languages, such as Nobiin (see also Osman 1987). While this reality remains truer than not, Arabic translations of the bioarchaeological work of Schrader and Buzon (2017) by Mohamed Faroug Ali as well as the 2004 translation of William Yewdale Adams's monumental 1977 text "Nubia: Corridor to Africa" by Mahgoub El'Tigani Mahmoud, among select others (see AmSARC 2024), and a recent special issue on Sudanese archaeology with contributions in Arabic published by *Ādāb Al-Neelain Journal*, a publication of the Faculty of Arts of Al-Neelain University in Khartoum, signal progress, or at least effort, towards linguistic equity, though there quite clearly remains a long way to go.

Calls for further action have also emerged around language limitations and colonial legacies among digital resources with a focus on living up to FAIR principles (viz. findable, accessible, interoperable, and reusable), which, while widely beneficial, can also come with significant challenges in terms of functional viability. Hunnell Chen (2023) discusses how using local and/or non-Western names (e.g., Tadmor vs. Palmyra) as search terms when consulting digital databases can often artificially truncate search results, or in the worst case provide no search results at all, if specific efforts to include local names and simply the ability to search in non-Western scripts (e.g., Arabic) are not taken into account when scaffolding data on digital platforms. Beyond simply stymieing a broader multilinguistic discourse, the inability to search for data using non-Western scripts or terms also poses an artificial and arbitrary barrier to access among many of the communities from which the source data originate, effectively maintain European languages as a necessity for research participation. To mitigate these challenges, Hunnell Chen (2022; 2023) advocates for further development of linked open data (LOD) (see Berners-Lee 2006) protocols through

broader use of URIs and accessible and inclusive multilinguistic searchability and reporting, focusing in particular on the use of Wikidata which can facilitate search terms, metadata labeling, and editing in hundreds of world languages. Multilinguistic online access, as Kamash (2023) discusses, however, does not instantly equate with accessibility, as "technological solutionism" (see Huggett 2004; Morozov 2013) often belies the pragmatic practicalities of costs and accessibility centered around bandwidth and viewability on mobile devices, which remain barriers that future research should aim to ameliorate (see also Elmgrab 2011).

The question of language also introduces an interesting dynamic in the context of workshop orchestration. Among the workshops discussed herein, the nature of Arabic provision was mixed. At each of the four events discussed, there was the opportunity for Arabic translation. Yet in the end, such translation was only fully utilized at the University of Khartoum and House of Heritage events. At Al-Neelain and NCAM, despite the opportunity to do so, the workshops were held primarily in English as impelled by the directive of local colleagues with the imperative "everyone here speaks English". How then should engagement proceed when faced with a voice of local authority speaking for all members in an audience? Which is to say, when interlocution with local group leaders results in the imposition of an approach that not all local participants may equally be comfortable with, or with which it is not possible to individually gauge the degree of comfort of all participants, or in response to the voice of authority participants may not wish to speak up to express their linguistic delivery preferences in opposition to that chosen. Though no participants at these events voiced a concern with content being delivered in English, nor was any evident during the workshops, the question still remains. What, then, is the best solution? Is the impetus in such situations to insist that full local Arabic translation be provided with a view to ensuring equity or to respect the request of local groups with whom the decision to engage or not engage ultimately falls? Though only one example, what such situations illustrate is that there is no singular solution nor uniformly correct answer, but as previously mentioned by Näser (2019: 380), the multifold nature of engagement is a framework towards a discussion that seeks to represent all stakeholder voices as equitably as possible, such that each instance of engagement must and should be negotiated and navigated in that instant rather than endeavoring to fit a situation to a preconceived notion of "engagement".

During the undertaking of the workshops discussed herein, across all three events, students and professional archaeologist colleagues expressed interest in the methods presented. Among participants of the workshops, a desire for more hands-on, heuristic learning opportunities was widely expressed, with participants providing feedback in regard to wanting further opportunities for training in laboratory methods, osteobiographical assessments of age, sex, stature, and pathological conditions, and sampling procedures (e.g., for isotope analyses), among other avenues of inquiry — in short, hands-on experiences. Such

feedback in consultation with Sudanese stakeholders has provided the opportunity to further consider areas for future engagement focused on bioarchaeology.

In conjunction with the desire for further bioarcheology-oriented workshops, numerous individuals who spoke with the author expressed a strong interest in opportunities to collaborate in the field and gain practical experiences in the processes of excavation and cemetery documentation itself. While numerous opportunities have been possible on various projects over the years, a continued advocacy for developing ongoing collaborative opportunities for training in bioarchaeological field methods on-site in Sudan remains an area of aspiration for developing further engaged bioarchaeological approaches moving forward.

Engagement practices and, as part thereof, the development of workshops and knowledge transfer opportunities, have not been without criticism. Arguing via Musila (2019), Abd el Gawad (2023) posits that numerous research grants and career paths have been built on the *fata morgana* of global Western researchers endeavoring to redress the harms of colonialism through engaged processes, of which Abd el Gawad (2023: 289) further notes that "privilege is invisible to the privileged". This privilege-blind prerogative dovetails with the notion of "strategic narcissism", which is to say "'defining the world through and only in relation to Western eyes,' and then to assume that courses of actions taken, based on these views, will lead to favourable outcomes" (Abd el Gawad 2023: 292; cf. McMaster 2021). Under the aegis of strategic narcissism, one might also choose to include the performativity of "virtue signaling", viz. the attempt to demonstrate to others that you are a good person, also referred to as moral grandstanding along with which comes a sense of "recognition desire" (see Tosi and Warmke 2016; Orlitzky 2018; Levy 2023; cf. Táíwò 2022). Though much discussed in recent years, the philosophical undergirding of virtue signaling has also been questioned and challenged, with Levy (2021) arguing its basis in moral action and Hill and Garner (2021) questioning the foundations of such an inference (see also Táíwò 2022). One can see, then, in this rhetoric a veritable fork in the road around the concept of intention. Intention as a notion of practice is nebulous and all but impossible to quantify beyond the internal rationale held be any one individual. This is to say that bases of engagement are multifold in intention, some —hopefully less and less and ideally none— undoubtedly fall into the previously noted category espoused by Abd el Gawad (2023), of self-serving, strategically narcissistic, and colonialist paradigm reaffirming. But to see all endeavors at engagement as such Machiavellian machinations is also not fully reasonable, as the other side of the intention coin is one of genuine empathy and interest in community, which comes not from a primary place of career advancement or strategic gain, but rather from efforts to truly open the conversation with local communities and provide opportunities for knowledge transfer as expressed by community members and within the capacities of researchers who have the privilege to work with and within those communities. There are undoubtedly those who will not accept this as a basis of engagement, choosing rather to see any

global Western engagement processes as yet another attempt at control. And that is OK, for without checks-and-balances in the discourse, questionable intentions can indeed grow and once again become the dominant paradigm as has been the case on countless occasions throughout global history. It is then empathy, that must lie at the heart of engagement processes; not sympathy, not apathy, but empathy (Yorke 2023), the power of which, Abd el Gawad (2023: 297) notes, lies in how it fosters connection.

Yet, despite this emphasis on empathy, the colonial legacies of despoilation and disenfranchisement that have played an uncontestable role in the history of Sudan must also be kept in mind, with Schmidt (2009) pointing out the all too often true reality that colonial hegemonies are not miraculously resolved with the advent of national independence, both in the literal sense of the removal of structural systems but also, and arguably even more perniciously so, changes in mentality, but rather can linger in reified forms of hauntological persistence (see Derrida 1994). The manner in which Abd el Gawad (2023) frames "strategic narcissism" suggests the primary motive of engagement processes is self-serving, which is to say the purpose of such is to serve the deliverer rather than the participants/local communities. While one could construe such efforts in this way, the undertaking of knowledge transfer events need not be viewed exclusively through the lens of recolonization mentalities (cf. Atalay 2012; Abd el Gawad 2023; Spencer et al. 2024). Rather, if attempts at reparation and progress are to be envisioned and made, the Nubiological and more broadly global archaeological communities collectively need to concretely work towards moving past this rhetoric by ensuring that projects, programing, and engagement through knowledge transfer are not orchestrated from positions of power and capricious provision of scarce resources, but rather as a genuine interface for development, collaboration, and progress (see Atalay 2006; 2012; Byrne 2012).

Published in 2017, the San Code of Research Ethics, the first of its kind by an indigenous group in Africa, was established by the San of southern Africa to outline expectations of engagement for proposed research to be undertaken in San communities (South African San Institute 2017; Chennells and Schroeder 2019). The basis of this code was one centered around fairness, respect, care, and honesty in the research process. Rather than outlining strict requirements, the code establishes a "spirit of the law" basis for transparency in research when involving San community members, necessitating engagement and approvals by local communities; such a principle can readily be extended and applied far beyond San communities and in many cases has been, and in others where such efforts remain nascent or absent, arguably should be (see Schroeder et al. 2019). The San Code of Research Ethics (South African San Institute 2017) stresses the need to "…include co-research opportunities, sharing of skills and research capacity…", engraining the principle of knowledge transfer and capacity development opportunities as key aspects of engaged community approaches and areas of investment expectation by local communities.

Beyond the three methodologically driven workshops undertaken at the University of Khartoum, Al-Neelain University, and NCAM, the event held at the House of Heritage provided opportunities to speak with a wide array of individuals, primarily non-archaeologists, to hear their feedback about the research conducted at Ghazali. Through direct dialogue with individuals from a diversity of Sudanese communities it was possible to gain a sense of what aspects of bioarchaeological research individuals were interested in and identified with, as well as avenues for which further details, through future bioarchaeological research, might additionally contribute to the inquiries posed by participants — which is to say, avenues of inquiry that community members wish to learn more about through the directions pursued by bioarchaeological research. It is important to recognize that interest in components of the past and the community utilization of archaeological spaces may play different roles in different communities; as well, within community engagement must always remain the right to not engage: local communities need not be expected to engage if they do not wish to do so (see Abu-Khafajah 2011; Greer 2014). While this event was conducted in Khartoum, which is to say, away from the most proximate communities to the site of Ghazali, it nonetheless reinforced the interest of community members and provided an initial foundation of dialogue that, it is hoped, can be developed further in the coming years through additional community engagement in the communities around Ghazali, namely in the vicinity of Karima and Merowe.

A perceived disjunction between current, predominantly Muslim, Sudanese communities and earlier communities in the region has time and again been invoked as a basis of disconnect and therefore an inhibition to meaningful community engagement in regard to pre-Islamic cultural contexts in Sudan (see MacMichael 1967; Elzein 2004; Näser 2019; Soghayroun 2020). Though disjuncture may play a role, reflecting cultural change over the extensive regional history, the event undertaken at the House of Heritage, as well as more general anecdotal encounters experienced by the author over the years, have affirmed that regardless of religious identity and sense of direct filiation, there remains a general broader interest among Sudanese community members in regard to earlier inhabitants of the region and what their lives were like in the landscape that contemporary communities now inhabit. Questions around what people ate, theories about mobility and rationales for mobility, as well as manners of burial practices were all discussed during the question-and-answer session at the House of Heritage. Beyond inquisitiveness, individuals at the event also proffered explanations and insights from their own experiences and preserved community histories as to dietary practices, how food was gathered and prepared, mobility events, and health, topics of interest that have also been noted in other community contexts as well, with Spencer and colleagues (2024) noting similar avenues of inquiry and insight among community members in the area of Amara West/Abkanisa. This is to say that there was an exchange of ideas in which the information gathered from

bioarchaeological research was further informed and additional directions for future research provided through dialogue with Sudanese community individuals who attended the event, demonstrating the capacity for additional development of increasingly community-engaged models of bioarchaeological research (see Fushiya and Radziwiłko 2019; Fushiya 2020b; 2021a; 2021c).

The open dialogue which such events sought and continue to seek to develop falls within what Spencer and colleagues (2024: 23) elaborate upon as *turath*. *Turath* is an Arabic term conceptualizing "heritage"; heritage not only in the sense of archaeological heritage but at its broadest conceptualization, a notion encapsulating past and present, tangible and intangible heritage, incorporating local knowledge of an area, community practices, foodways, the findings of past archaeological excavations, linguistic dynamics, and community maintained knowledge about ancestral lineages and occupational histories of the landscape (El-Fihail 2014; Amel 2021). The concept of *turath* adopts a Janusian perspective, using a diachronic lens to examine the broadest scope of socio-cultural history, which also provides a model framework for approaching engagement in that it recognizes no singular narrative as monolithic and encompasses the spirit of many voices to generate a tapestry of past and present experiences. So too here can the types of bioarchaeological workshops and community engagement opportunities discussed herein be further integrated.

Though PCMA UW excavations at Ghazali were completed in 2017, there remains ample opportunity for further bioarchaeological research at this site. While the conflict in Sudan at the time of writing, of which it is hoped an immediate ceasefire can be realized, has forestalled further on-site development of research as a whole, following the end of conflict in the region, the "Life in the Makurian Metropolis: A Bioarchaeological Inquiry into Medieval Old Dongola, Sudan", project will seek to continue the community-engaged models that have been initiated and developed to date at Tungul (Old Dongola) by Tomomi Fushiya and colleagues under the Dialogue community engagement project (DIALOG Grant 0298/2018: ArcheoCDN) and the ERC Starting Grant, "UMMA. Urban Metamorphosis of the Community of a Medieval African Capital City" (Grant agreement ID: 759926) (see Fushiya and Radziwiłko 2019; Fushiya 2021a; 2021b; 2021c; Obłuski and Dzierzbicka 2021a; 2021b). As Larsen (2021: 89) notes, both cemeteries and Hillat Dongola, the so-called "Abandoned Village" (see Fushiya 2021a; 2021b), at Tungul (Old Dongola) form part of contemporary communities in the area of Ghaddar, placing the present within the past (see also L. Smith and Waterton 2009).

Community-engaged research focused on the Islamic domed tombs (*qibab*) of Tungul (Old Dongola) has already demonstrated a strong imbrication of contemporary and past communities and an interest by local communities to share their experiences, practices, and insights to the *qibab* as part of the preserved heritage and intangible cultural heritage of their communities (see Fushiya 2020b; 2021b; Larsen 2021; Stark and Fushiya

forthcoming). While such opportunities for discussion and engagement have been welcome and informative, to be clear, excavations within the Muslim cemetery at Tungul (Old Dongola) have not and will not be conducted as under the rule of law in Sudan disturbance of Islamic graves is forbidden and it is a widely accepted principle of undertaking archaeological research in Sudan that Muslim burials are not excavated (Jakob and Magzoub Ali 2011: 518). At Tungul, the Muslim cemetery remains in use by the Muslim majority communities living in the area, many individuals within which have relatives buried in the cemetery and feel a strong cultural connection with the Islamic history of the burial landscape comprising the Muslim cemetery. The community model to discuss burial spaces in relation to the *qibab* has established a network of engagement points that can be further developed in regard to other burial spaces at the site, namely earlier medieval Christian cemetery contexts and the associated burial landscapes of such which are situated between and around later developed Muslim cemetery spaces at Tungul (Old Dongola)/Ghaddar.

In the vein of engagement, both being open to engagement processes in developing bioarchaeological research goals and budgeting in grant applications, where possible, for funds to allow for fuller community engagement, including knowledge transfer/capacity development and equipment to facilitate such, come to mind as readily achievable shorter-term foci from which subsequent long-term engagement endeavors can be further developed (cf. South African San Institute 2017). Continued presentation of bioarchaeological research results in local communities where work is undertaken should remain a key aspect of research output. In addition to such opportunities, the possibility of creating a plain-text account, audio-visual representations, and/or graphic novel style account, with Arabic and ideally Nubian language translation, with the question also remaining of which script to use, of "what life was like" for the individuals assessed from a given site, remain important avenues to pursue. On the graphical front, numerous archaeological projects have already completed such publications for the work they have undertaken, particularly in relation to the Qatar–Sudan Archaeological Project (QSAP) (see Spencer et al. 2024), including iron production at Meroe (Humphris 2017), the archaeology of Sudan (SFDAS 2021), local heritage perspective in Abri, Amara West, and Ernetta Island (Fushiya 2017), crop agriculture (Ryan, Hassan, and Saad 2018), Mograt Island (Tully and Näser 2016), and the community collaborative Kushite Kingdom Manga (Ford Spora 2021). Yet, to the author's knowledge, no similarly oriented bioarchaeology-themed productions have been created to date; it is an aim of ongoing research that such can ultimately be realized for bioarchaeologically analyzed contexts at Ghazali and Tungul (Old Dongola).

While many goals remain for the furtherance of community-centered approaches to bioarchaeology in Sudan, so do many opportunities. As Näser (2020: 39) intimates, the future of Nubiology lies at the nexus of integrating and ac-

commodating disciplinary findings with the realities of the culturally complex zones of socio-political contestation within which such findings are generated. As Herman Bell (2006: 86) points out, the world has long known and appreciated the monuments of ancient Nubia, but overall still has a great deal to learn about the qualities of modern Nubia. Experiences working within various communities in Sudan, at Ghazali and Tungul (Old Dongola), as well as in consultation with colleagues and researchers in Khartoum, have demonstrated an interest in bioarchaeology and bioarchaeological findings by community members. Continuation of ongoing local collaborations and development of future ones around what bioarchaeology can tell us will remain imperative in the coming days as excavations continue to illuminate past cultural landscapes.

CONCLUSIONS

It is imperative that engagement, capacity development, and knowledge transfer remain processes of openness and provision and not obfuscation and prevarication. In addition to consideration of capacity development and knowledge transfer, the discourse around community-engaged bioarchaeology in Sudan is at present in a comparatively early stage of development. Nonetheless, the process is ongoing and has ample potential for meaningful development and collaborative opportunities between local communities and bioarchaeologists moving forward. Though it is often the case that a perceived disconnect between relatedness to past populations among modern Muslim majority populations of the Nilotic north of Sudan exists, it has been the author's experience that an interest in past populations by present populations persists regardless of a sense of direct filiation and ancestry. Questions remain among community members as to who lived in the landscape over the past, how old they were when they died, where they may have come from, and what they may have eaten, among other interests, providing ample engagement opportunities for bioarchaeologists to address local community questions and areas of research interest to collaboratively take forward in future research. Conversely, the knowledge preserved within local communities has time and again been of great importance and assistance to archaeologists, particularly around narratives of mobility and dietary practices, areas of topical inquiry that have direct implications to bioarchaeological research. How community-engaged approaches may unfold in regard to bioarchaeological research in Sudan need not be codified or monolithic but rather should seek to derive from an organic willingness to engage, to inquire, and to discuss, developing upon models that have found meaningful implementation among other disciplines and avenues of archaeological inquiry. It is with this hope and with this advocacy that a future of community engaged bioarchaeological practices may continue to emerge and fruitfully develop within and among the Sudanese communities in which research is ongoing or may seek to be developed in the coming years.

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