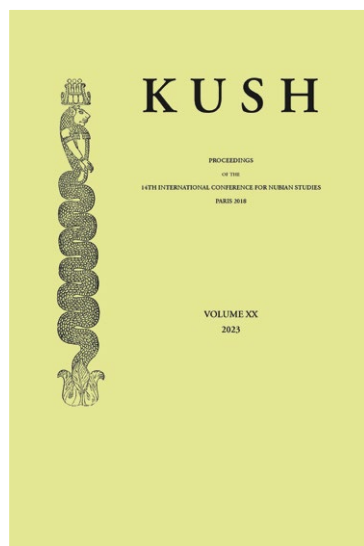


Book review



Marie Millet, Vincent Rondot, Frédéric Payraudeau, and Pierre Tallet (eds), *Proceedings of the 14th International Conference for Nubian Studies, Paris 2018* (=Kush XX). Cairo: Institut français d'archéologie orientale (IFAO), 2023; ISBN 978-2-72470-988-9 (hardcover); 1004 pages (2 volumes)

The publication of the proceedings of the 14th International Conference for Nubian Studies, collaboratively hosted by the Musée du Louvre and Sorbonne Université from 10 to 15 September 2018, marks the most recent in a prestigious line of such collective volumes. The focus of the proceedings of the quadrennially held conference of the International Society for Nubian Studies (ISNS) centers around investigations of the geographic region of ancient Nubia, adjacent zones of interconnectivity, and associated contemporary cultural aspects in what is today parts of Sudan and Egypt. The published proceedings of each ISNS conference effectively provide a field-encapsulating benchmark of cultural heritage-oriented research in Nubian and associated contexts, signposting research trends and projects, the state of

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discourse within Nubiology as a discipline, as well as where ongoing and future research may be heading.

Published in 2023, these proceedings signal more than the content of the papers within. As the twentieth volume presented under the imprimatur of *Kush*, the longstanding periodical established by the Sudanese Antiquities Service (SAS), now the National Corporation for Antiquities and Museums of Sudan (NCAM), and presented via the Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale (IFAO) press in Cairo, these proceedings demonstrate a commitment to the preservation, promotion, and protection of cultural heritage in Sudan writ large. Though celebratory in its realization, these proceedings also arrive on the heels of the ongoing conflict in Sudan, which erupted on 15 April 2023. The preface provided by Salah Eldin Mohamed Ahmed, General Coordinator of the Qatar-Sudan Archaeological Project (QSAP), makes clear in no uncertain terms the stark realities of the unfolding humanitarian crisis. Though dire, it is a hopefulness for a better future that pervades the preface and so fittingly encapsulates the perseverance of the Sudanese community. It is thus in turbulent times that these latest International Conference for Nubian Studies proceedings have been presented, a message from the past echoing a hope for the future and a commitment to all of our Sudanese colleagues that we stand with them as a community and hope for an immediate return of peace and wellbeing.

Comprising 55 papers across two volumes (XX.1 and XX.2), contributions within this publication are divided into sections primarily along temporal lines,

proceeding from accounts of Prehistory through Late Antique and Medieval periods. No dedicated section is provided for post-Medieval contexts, though several papers do address aspects of this time period, namely in the Survey, Site Management, Cultural Heritage and Museums section with Julie R. Anderson discussing Mahdist era materials and Marina d'Errico presenting 19th- and 20th-century living spaces in Omdurman, while in the Late Antique and Medieval Periods section Artur Obłuski addresses first contacts between Islam and Nubia. The papers presented cover a wide geographical range, from eastern Sudan (Andrea Manzo) to the western Sahara (Yahia Fadl Tahir) and the central Bayuda (Jana Eger and Tim Karberg), the southwestern desert of Egypt (Hebatalah A.A. Ibrahim and Maciej Jórdeczka) and contexts around Thebes (Elena Pischikova), to Jebel Sabaloka and the 6th Cataract region (Lenka Varadinová and colleagues), as well as consideration of evidence for distant Indo-Pacific connections (Joanna Then-Obłuska and Barbara Wagner). Such breadth of regional coverage demonstrates the wide range of investigative avenues being pursued within the Nubiological discourse, which, as demonstrated in these proceedings, in recent years has increasingly sought to look beyond the vicinity of the Nile Valley to consider peripheral zones of cultural contact and interaction.

In addition to the chronological ordering, several “breakout” sections are presented. These sections comprise Main Papers, being the keynote addresses contributed by the respective presenting authors, with the lone exception being the

keynote delivered by Mahmoud El-Tayeb (1957–2024) whose untimely recent passing makes the absence of his paper all the more noticeable. The Workshops section provides discussion summaries from topically specific focus groups, while the Survey, Site Management, Cultural Heritage and Museums section addresses a mélange of topics, mainly focused around historic documentation, intangible cultural heritage, museology, and cultural heritage management.

While the bulk of papers presented address materials from archaeological excavations and associated post-excavation analyses, it is within the later grouping of Survey, Site Management, Cultural Heritage and Museums papers that a number of broader topics of intangible cultural heritage and more recent history are engaged. Julie R. Anderson presents a unique vexillologically oriented look at the textile characteristics of a number of Sultan Ali Dinar and Mahdiya-era banners, colors, and flags curated in the Khalifa House Museum in Khartoum as well as in the British Museum in London. This paper seeks to provide to readers a deeper insight to the nature of these textiles as signaling devices, numerous of which show signs of use in the field, including at the Battle of Karari, otherwise referred to as the Battle of Omdurman, on 2 September 1898. It is within this section as well that we see critical consideration of Nubian nomenclature and the importance of nuanced toponym interrogation as presented by Herman Bell, with Samia Dafa'alla additionally imploring researchers to take caution in how “Nubia”, being both an ethnolinguistic and a geographical term, is used. Shadia

Taha's contribution unfolds a *longue durée* perspective on the enduring importance of fragrance, namely frankincense, myrrh, incense, and aromatic plants for intangible cultural heritage among many Sudanese communities. Such topical engagement reflects the broad scope of the ISNS as an organization, signaling commitment not only to the ancient cultural landscape, but also a dedicated interest in contemporary and intangible aspects of Sudanese cultural heritage.

In part, these proceedings also seek to problematize how specific terminology is employed, with the unconsidered use of terms running the risk of becoming entrenched and thus utilized where they may not be entirely appropriate or clearly applicable. To this end, Anna Pieri and colleagues present an engaging bioarchaeological synthesis regarding a series of post-temple use Medieval burials in the Amun Temple at Dangeil, located south of the 5th Cataract. The eight graves documented are positionally divergent from typical Medieval Christian burials and are accompanied by atypical grave goods, including numerous beads. The graves discussed serve as a useful foil for bringing into question the use of the term “Christian” as a synonym for the Medieval period in Nubia. Though Christianity became the dominant faith of the region during the Medieval period, the spread and complete adoption of this religious identity may have been more regionally and culturally varied and nuanced than is often evident from the literature, further reiterating the importance of careful terminological consideration. Beyond ongoing discussions within Nubiology around term use, this contribution, among others

within these proceedings, also highlights additional avenues of insight that can be provided by bioarchaeological research.

The inclusion of an Arabic-script title page as well as Salah Eldin Mohamed Ahmed's preface in Arabic within Vol. 2 is a welcome endeavor at linguistic inclusivity. A next step that would be additionally beneficial to see in subsequent ISNS conference proceedings would be the inclusion of paper titles and abstracts in Arabic, if not, ideally, full translations of each paper into Arabic.

At the time of writing, only a print copy of the proceedings is available. The division of these printed proceedings into two volumes helps to make the proceedings more manageable to read without them being oversized. It is hoped that a digital version, ideally open access, may also eventually become available, which would make the proceedings more globally accessible and remove financial barriers to access. High-quality color figures and line drawings abound throughout the two volumes, providing helpful illumination to the broader text discussions. The text

itself is also well printed and of a suitable size and quality for easy reading.

The publication of these proceedings reflects a monumental task. Though this most recent contribution reaches over 1000 pages in length, it could just as easily have double the page count and still remain only a small aperture into the vast breadth of Nubiology as a field. One need not see the wide-ranging and disparate topics covered in these proceedings as a full synthesis of the field but rather as a state of affairs. With this in mind, readers may find aspects preliminary and speculative, ephemeral, and in-progress. This is not a detraction of the publication, as the intention of such proceedings is not to fully illuminate all extant lacunae but rather to serve as a lighthouse beacon for guiding the way forward. This task has been met. These proceedings will be of most use to those seeking to gain a sense of the field of Nubiology as it stood during the 14th ISNS conference and among archaeological and cognate field researchers. This publication will make a welcome addition to research institute and university libraries alike.

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