

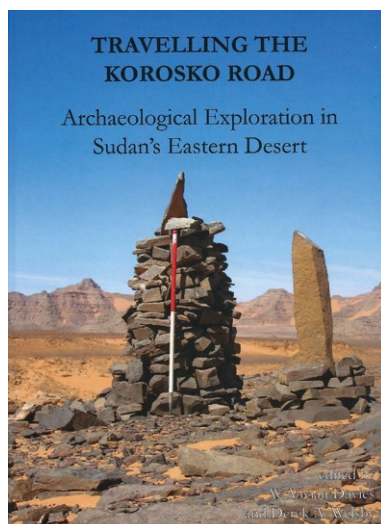
Book review

W. Vivian Davies and Derek A. Welsby (eds), *Travelling the Korosko Road. Archaeological exploration in Sudan's Eastern Desert*, Sudan Archaeological Research Society 24, London: Archaeopress, 2020; ISBN 978-1-78969-803-9 (print); ISBN 978-1-78969-804-6 (e-Pdf); 220 pages color; Hard cover (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0)

The Korosko Road is one of the most important desert shortcuts in the Nile Valley, hence its frequent presence in general studies on Nubian history and archaeology. The volume, edited by William Vivian Davies and Derek Anthony Welsby, with contributions by Alfredo Castiglioni, Angelo Castiglioni, Mahmoud Suliman Bashir, Andrea Manzo, Serena Massa, Francesco M. Rega, Philippe Ruffieux and Donatella Usai, has long been awaited, at least by this reviewer, hoping to clear up much of the uncertainties surrounding the Korosko Road until now.

The book is available in hardcover and full colour. Its layout follows that of other volumes in the series, although the binding leaves something to be desired. A pdf version of the book with Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International licence is available at <https://www.archaeopress.com/ArchaeopressShop/Public/download.asp?id={31462240-A8CD-48FD-9524-5E5888C2D482}>. The book is dedicated to the memory of Alfredo Castiglioni, Sudan's Eastern Desert explorer and co-founder of the Centro Ricerche sul Deserto Orientale (CeDRO) and the co-author of seven of the 15 chapters in the volume.

The publication is divided into two parts, the body proper preceded by lists of tables, plates and figures and a short Preface by the Editors. The first part, composed of ten chapters, describes the fieldwork conducted by Alfredo and Angelo Castiglioni between 1989 and 2006



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in various parts of Sudan's Eastern Desert (Chapters 1–7) and the small finds from these surveys (Chapters 8–10). The second part reports on the results of the Korosko Road Project (fieldwork in 2013) directed by William Vivian Davies (Chapters 11–15). There is no index at the end of the publication.

Chapters 1–7 written by the Castiglioni brothers are a splendid introduction to the region and its nature. Metaphors and a skilful use of language immerse readers directly in an experience of the Eastern Desert. Savor this as an example: “We stop, switch off the engines to lower the temperature of the radiators, and we are immediately enveloped by silence” (Chapter 4, p. 23). Such a clear and illustrative narration contributes to a better understanding of the landscapes described, the changing environments and the people crossing the desert. What this reviewer found truly appealing were the passages comparing ancient gold mining techniques with gold extraction by the Bisharin in 2006 (Chapter 3, pp. 11–12).

Skilful narration and imaginative tales of adventures aside, the true scientific value of the first part is the new insight into the history and archaeology of the region, such as locating hypothetically Wawat and Amu (Chapter 4, p. 35) and identifying the Mountains of Irtjet (Chapter 4, pp. 37–38). The text is handsomely complemented by numerous photographs, taken both by handheld and balloon-borne cameras.

Chapters 1–7 often have the form of a journal with small inconsistencies that are common for this genre. There are some deficiencies, too. Photos without scales make the true size of the depicted objects hard to estimate. Radiocarbon dates are quoted

without references to detailed information. This said, the most confusing, however, are the locations of place names and archaeological sites in the field. There is only one map (Pl. 1.1) relating to Chapters 1–3 and it lacks some of the locations mentioned in the text. Following the narrative becomes easier from Chapter 4 on, once satellite imagery is introduced to mark the itineraries, sites and other locations.

Chapter 8 is a turning point towards a scientific type of narration, which is continued throughout the remaining part of the book. Andrea Manzo focuses in this chapter on pottery material from the surveys deposited in the Castiglioni Museum. He presents a typology of the finds and establishes a chronological sequence: prehistoric (before mid-5th millennium BC), late prehistoric (mid-5th–end of 4th/early 3rd millennium BC), protohistoric (mid-3rd–2nd millennium BC) and late antique (3rd–8th century AD). In all four phases, parallels with the pottery from the Nile Valley are easy to find, which could suggest relations between the two regions. Gaps in the chronology of the phases, identified by the author, may be attributed to a reliance on the Nile Valley chronology where, however, the dynamics of changes could have been different.

Chapter 9, by Serena Massa, draws attention to imported wares from the survey conducted in 2004. Her detailed study puts to use macro- and microscopic analyses to identify, primarily, vessel types and fabrics, as well as their functionality. The study, in Massa's view, can be a good starting point for further archaeometric analyses aimed at establishing patterns of pottery distribution and use in desert environs.

In the last chapter of this part, Francesco Michele Rega discusses the macro-lithic tools collected during the CeDRO surveys. This preliminary report is detailed and well illustrated (all of the artifacts have photographic images). The chapter ends with an in-depth reflection on the chronology and function of macrolithic tools and a comprehensive table listing and describing each find (Table 10.1, pp. 114–124).

The chapter by Derek A. Welsby on the history of modern (18th and 19th century) traffic along the Korosko Road (Chapter 11) opens up the second part of the book. It gives fascinating insight into the use of this desert shortcut in Turkish times and the shift that took place following the construction of the railway in 1897. As a matter of fact, this is the only chapter of the book with the Korosko Road itself as the protagonist.

The chapter that follows, also by Welsby, is in fact a gazetter of archaeological sites visited and discovered by the team of the Korosko Road Project (the acronym ‘KRP’ with a subsequent number). Each site is well illustrated. The chapter abounds in details, including geographical coordinates, name/s, location, types of site and chronology. The sites, especially the rock art galleries, such as KRP2, KRP 10, KRP 22, and KRP 23, are highly complex sites with numerous traces of human activities. From this reviewer’s professional perspective, the details of the Wadi Murat forts were of particular interest. The listed Arabic inscriptions are translated giving brief insights into past travellers’ reflections, for example:

“We stayed
Here
Then we travelled again
Life is like that
Staying and travelling”
(site KRP 19a, p. 155)

Chapters 13–15 form an integral whole with the preceding site gazetter. Chapter 13, by Philippe Ruffieux and Mahmoud Suliman Bashir, focuses on pottery from the Korosko Road Project. The pottery types and chronology identified by the authors draw heavily on parallels with the Nile Valley typologies, leaving, in the authors’ own words, “many sherds” unidentified (p. 181). In addition, it seems that the authors had little contact with the authors of the CeDRO surveys pottery (Chapters 8 and 9).

The final two chapters provide insight into the material culture of the region. Donatella Usai’s note is brief and concerns two stone tools (Chapter 14). In turn, Vivian Davies’ chapter on the pharaonic inscriptions, the last in the volume, provides a lengthier discussion, giving detailed information as well as new texts, translated and interpreted in the context of written sources. Most of the texts provide names and titles of individuals, whose presence in the desert, according to the author, was related to gold extraction, transportation and protection of the mines/miners. The chapter provides numerous references to other texts and inscriptions, found elsewhere, listing the same individuals. Each inscription is well described, photographed and drawn. From the perspective of an epigrapher, the narration is very well executed.

But for the specialist in rock drawings, a detailed description of only one type of rock carvings, while the same panel features also other motifs and representations, seems highly selective. For example, a text is said to be in a “shrine” or on a panel with “huge quantities of native rock-drawings” (p. 210). It may also happen that some of the motifs are covered by or overlap the inscriptions and then it is the contextual analysis that may help to understand the reasons behind the location of the text.

Concluding, *Travelling the Korosko Road. Archaeological Exploration in Sudan's Eastern Desert* is a must read for all researchers dealing with Nubian history and archaeology. It brings together specialists with various backgrounds to work on material and documentation collected in the highly difficult conditions and of-

ten hostile environments of the Eastern Desert. It presents new data and information on the Korosko Road, as well as other routes connecting various regions of the Desert with the Nile Valley. The book lacks a concluding chapter, which would collect observations made by the authors into a single narration. However, in the opinion of this reviewer, it should not be treated as a closed and complete work, but as one more step toward systematic studies of Sudan's Eastern Desert and the Korosko Road. Numerous questions about this inhospitable land still remain to be answered.

This reviewer's expectations concerning information on the longest Nile Valley desert shortcut have been satisfied, albeit not quite how expected. The volume has succeeded in presenting the rich and diverse heritage of this desert.