Archaeological Park or “Disneyland”? Conflicting Interests on Heritage at Naqa in Sudan

Parc archéologique ou « Disneyland » ? Conflits d'intérêts sur le patrimoine à Naqa au Soudan

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ABSTRACT / RÉSUMÉ

ARCHAEOLOGICAL PARK OR “DISNEYLAND”? CONFLICTING INTERESTS ON HERITAGE AT NAQA IN SUDAN

The article explores agencies and interests on different levels of scale permeating the constituting, management and use of Sudan's archaeological heritage today as seen through the case of Naqa. Securing the position of “unique” and “unspoiled sites”, the archaeological community and Sudanese museum staff seem to emphasize the archaeological heritage as an important means for constructing a national identity among Sudanese in general. The government, on the other hand, is mainly concerned with the World Heritage nomination as a possible way to promote Sudan's global reputation and accelerate the economic exploitation of the most prominent archaeological sites. The voice and destiny of local people living near the sites is not present at the events studied here. This absence stands in striking contrast to the importance ascribed to Sudan's past and the sites themselves by the main agencies negotiating the future of Naqa.

PARC ARCHÉOLOGIQUE OU «DISNEYLAND»? CONFLITS D'INTÉRÊTS SUR LE PATRIMOINE À NAQA AU SOUDAN

Cet article étudie les agencements et les intérêts sur différents niveaux qui déterminent la création, la gestion et l'utilisation du patrimoine archéologique du Soudan à travers l'étude du cas de Naqa. Insistant sur la conservation de l'aspect « unique » et sur la « virginité » du site, la communauté archéologique et le personnel du Musée national semblent mettre l'accent sur le patrimoine archéologique comme un moyen essentiel de construction d'une identité nationale soudanaise. Le gouvernement, en revanche, est principalement concerné par l'inscription de ces sites sur la Liste du patrimoine mondial comme un moyen possible de promouvoir la réputation internationale du Soudan et d'accélérer l'exploitation économique des sites archéologiques les plus importants. Les populations locales vivant à proximité des sites semblent exclues des événements relatés ici. Cette absence contraste de manière frappante avec l'importance accordée au passé du Soudan et aux sites eux-mêmes par les principales agences en charge de l'avenir de Naqa.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL PARK OR “DISNEYLAND”? CONFLICTING INTERESTS ON HERITAGE AT NAQA IN SUDAN

There is, besides a few exceptions¹, a conspicuous silence when it comes to the politics of archaeology in Sudan. In international debate outside Sudan, however, works on the politics of archaeology have increased over the last fifteen years. The overall aim of this article is to explore the relation between archaeology and politics in Sudan through a particular case consisting of two succeeding events in 2006 commemorating ten years of fruitful research and cooperation between German and Sudanese archaeologists: first, an introductory lecture by Professor Dietrich Wildung about the Meroitic site of Naqa, held in the garden of the National Museum in Khartoum, and second, a rededication of the Temple of Amun, with speeches, entertainment, and refreshments, in the vicinity of the temple at Naqa.

After an outline of the methodological approach, I give a descriptive account of the archaeological site of Naqa and the two succeeding events with the different agencies and interests involved. I use the events as a starting point of an explorative procedure for discussing the relation between archaeology and politics-an intake to heritage in the making so to speak. The events function as focal points for organizing the material collected both at the events and in other parts of my fieldwork.² The investigation reveals agencies on different levels of scale interrelated through several interests concerning the interpreta-

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1. See for example Trigger, 1994, “Paradigms in Sudan Archaeology”; Haaland, 2005, “Cultural heritage: Objects of the past as symbols of identity in the present”; Leturcq, 2007, “National Identity and Heritage-making in the ‘post-conflict reconstruction’ of Sudan”.

2. Out of consideration for my informants, all of them are anonymous, except for persons holding official leadership positions, government officials, embassy staff and people giving public speeches at different events. If quoted, my anonymous informants are identified only by their general workplace.

tion and future management of the site and environment of Naqa, and I argue that the concept of a World Heritage site of Naqa is at the center of contradictory interests between the archaeological community working in Sudan and the Sudanese government.³

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

The article is based upon ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Sudan from the beginning of October until mid-December 2006, with a following month in February 2007. I stress the importance of not forcing any theoretical models upon the empirical findings but instead emphasizing an “open model” strongly inspired by certain aspects of the Norwegian anthropologist Reidar Grønhaug’s article “Scale as a variable in analysis: Fields in Social Organization in Herat, Northwest Afghanistan”. His article can be read as a methodological instruction for how to conduct studies of local communities, but it might as well be used as a guideline on how to approach different social situations. It is Grønhaug’s analytical concept of *scale* I find particularly useful. Grønhaug has defined scale in the following way:

“I will use ‘scale’ to designate size, the ‘scale’ of an organizational unit being the number of people involved and the unit’s extension in social space. An empirical system can be described in terms of scale, granted we can delineate its boundaries in social space and time, and can identify the social interlinking of involved personnel. I will attribute scale to social units which in any case encompass a set of individuals interlinked by organization and communication”.⁴

Even though Grønhaug used scale in relation to the concept of social fields in Herat, I think we can use the same procedure to untangle the linkages between agencies in Sudan archaeology, be they individuals or groups of people forming interaction systems at different levels of scale. Some of the agencies involved are local in character, some regional or national, while others relate to international and global processes. Following Grønhaug, relevant agencies and their scale cannot be known or determined a priori before the beginning of investigation. It is only through an explorative procedure⁵ that

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3. Quetzil E. Castañeda (2008) has recently argued that there is an ethnographic turn in archaeology making archaeology itself the ethnographic subject, that is, the very agent that does ethnography of its own activities and interactions with other social agencies.

4. Grønhaug, 1972, p. 79.

5. Grønhaug himself uses the term ‘discovery’ in his article (1972) suggesting that what he is looking for is ‘covered’ and has to be ‘dis’-covered by the scientist. I choose to use the term ‘explorative procedure’, which I hold to be more open than the concept of ‘discovery’. I must acknowledge Dr. Anwar Osman for first commenting upon this point.

we can identify agencies with their interests and their levels of scale. Case studies have been criticized as invalid because they are often based on only one case, and hence are seen as unique. J. Clyde Mitchell argued that the value of a case does not depend upon its typicality or representativeness. It is, rather, its explanatory power as embedded in an appropriate theoretical framework that is important.⁶

Artifacts, Interests, and Agencies

Lexically, an artifact may mean a product of art—from the Latin *ars* and *facere*. In a wider use of the term, artifacts can be all objects that are made by or worked upon by a human being, typically items of archaeological interest.⁷ Tools, weapons, sculptures, monuments, and painted objects, for example, are then looked upon as artifacts, and it is this meaning of the term I will use here. Artifacts are the items, movable or immovable, that archaeologists excavate; they stand as mediators between the past and the present. The ones commented upon here form part of Sudan's archaeological heritage. To understand how artifacts become acknowledged as archaeological heritage, not only through an antiquities ordinance, but by someone in the present, it is, in my opinion, important to draw attention to the duality of the artifacts. On the one hand, artifacts are material manifestations of a real past world surviving into the present. In terms of being remains from the past, the artifacts in Sudan are protected by a heritage law⁸ and are, therefore, by definition part of the country's archaeological heritage, whether discovered or not. On the other hand, artifacts are used as active elements in people's selective history of the past and thus may be ascribed different meanings by people in different situations in the present.⁹ They may, for example, be used in identity construction or serve important interests. It is this process between the artifact's two levels – developing them from being archaeological heritage by definition only to becoming artifacts permeated by *meaning* through thematization and historicization by people in the present – that is, in my opinion, a decisive part of constructing an acknowledged archaeological heritage in the present. It is here that the concept of *interest* becomes relevant.

It is the process of using the past for different purposes in the present, that is, how people relate to the artifacts and through them to each other in the present, that I designate by the concept of interests. The concept of interest

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6. Mitchell, 1983.

7. Cowie, 1989.

8. See Ministry of Tourism and National Heritage, 1999, *Ordinance for the Protection of Antiquities*.

9. See for example Myhre, 1994.

derives from the Latin *inter* meaning 'between' and *esse* meaning 'to be'. It thus designates something that relates or lies between two poles, for example, between a group of archaeologists and governmental authorities or between local people and specific artifacts.

I will use the term *agency* to designate such groups or individuals who are involved at any level of scale in the management of Sudan's archaeological heritage. Such groups or individuals may be tied together through their specific interests. Some of these agencies may not be clearly visible, while others may be more powerful, explicitly promoting economic or political purposes and thus developing relations of power to other agencies with different interests.

THE SITE

The two thousand year old temple of Amun is located among several other ruins at Naqa, about 200 km north-east of Khartoum and 30 km to the east of the main Nile (fig. 1). The site, covering approximately 1.5 km², is difficult to find without GPS or a driver well aquatinted with the area. Although 'off the beaten track' today, Naqa was the southernmost city in the Meroitic kingdom approximately 300 BCE – 350 AD and stood as a bridge between the African and Mediterranean worlds, as indicated by the presence of the Hathor Chapel or the so-called Roman Kiosk – a mix of Roman, Greek and Meroitic architecture.

Naqa was not visited by Europeans until 1822: first by the French archaeologist Linant de Bellefonds, and then a month later, by Frederic Cailliaud. In 1844, Richard Lepsius, the director of the Prussian Expedition, made the first scientific documentation of the ruins. No excavation was undertaken at Naqa until February 1994, when Professor Dietrich Wildung and his team from the Egyptian Museum of Berlin got a license to conduct excavations on the site. After completing a long career in Egypt, Professor Wildung is at the present director of the Egyptian Museum of Berlin and leader of the Naqa project. With financial support from the German Research Council (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft) and the Friends of the Berlin Museums, the Naqa project continues to conduct annual excavations.¹⁰

The research of Professor Wildung's team has mainly focused upon excavations of the Temple of Amun, situated on an artificial hill at the foot of Jebel Naqa. Meroitic inscriptions indicate the temple was built between 50 BC and 50 AD. Approaching the temple, visitors walk through an avenue of rams (fig. 2), the sacred animal of the God Amun, weighing more than a ton each. With their spiral curls they differ from the rams in pharaonic Egypt, obviously

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10. Wildung, 1999.

1. The Temple of Amun situated at the foot of Jebel Naqa.*

an invention of Meroitic artists. Restoration without reconstruction has been the leading philosophy for the German team – a marked contrast to the reconstruction of the damaged pyramids at Meroe in the 1980s when cement was used, against the will of Sudanese archaeologists at Khartoum University¹¹:

“We don’t want that at the end of our work Naqa looks like a Sudanese Disneyland. We want to keep the romantic spirit. Naqa will remain ruined, not only showing how did these temples look two thousand years ago, but also show the history of destruction over two millennia [...] We don’t want to reconstruct history by hiding the past”.¹²

The excavated artifacts will be exhibited in a museum at Naqa opening in 2009 built in a “Sudanese style, fitting and integrating perfectly into the site and landscape of Naqa”.¹³

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* All photographs credit: Ida Dyrkorn Heierland

11. Haaland, 2005.

12. Wildung, 2006.

13. *Ibid.*

2. Avenue of rams leading up to the Temple of Amun.

The speech at the National Museum

Professor Wildung's introductory lecture about Naqa was a joint undertaking by the Sudan Archaeological Society and National Corporation for Antiquities and Museums (NCAM). About fifty guests from Germany in addition to Sudanese archaeologists and museum employees, were present. First the director of the field section at the museum thanked all the German guests for their enthusiasm and help with preserving Sudan's cultural heritage – a heritage that, he underlined, is at the same time "a heritage of mankind". Professor Wildung's speech was, in my opinion, a highly political one, revolving around two major points. The first concerned the future management of the site of Naqa. Professor Wildung asked the government

"to do everything possible to keep this atmosphere and this character and to declare Naqa and other archaeological sites as archaeological parks without touristic overdevelopment, without Pepsi shops, without all you can find at the archaeological sites in Egypt killing the atmosphere of these places. The Sudan has a unique chance, to be still largely untouched by these wrong developments of tourism. Please, keep it! We know that our colleagues in NCAM follow this philosophy."¹⁴

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14. *Ibid.*

Further, he thanked the public and the authorities for the contribution they have made “for the rediscovery of the great past of this cradle of civilization in Northeastern Africa”:

“We can just give you a bit of material. You have to make your own identity out of this information. The mass media in Sudan are quite interested [...] the commitment of private companies here in the Sudan is astonishing [...] I think this is an enormous sign of public interest here in the Sudan and a high degree of identification with the early history of this country.”¹⁵

Second, Professor Wildung claimed to have identified a “change in mentality” among the local workers, many of whom had been working with the team for several years and thus become “skilled excavators, real specialists”.¹⁶ Although the *ghafir* (watchman) at Naqa, who had lived there more than thirty years, always had identified himself with “his ruin”, the local people first thought the archaeologists coming year after year were treasure hunters and presumably did not have any interest in the site. However, after some years this attitude had, according to Wildung, changed:

“Naqa has become *their* place. They identify themselves with their early history [...] this is the best protection for the site we can have. We have antiquities police there, but for our people in Naqa [...] it’s their town [...] they protect it [...] they feel responsible and they are proud of their great history. In this sense they are symptomatic for the Sudan in general”.¹⁷

To further illustrate this relation, Professor Wildung showed a picture of a block with a king’s profile and the local members of the excavation-team showing their profiles behind it, thus indicating an ancestral relation to the old king. This type of identification with the past is, according to Professor Wildung, the best protection Naqa can have. He further argued that the Bank of Sudan in the future should reprint a banknote with the representation of one of the ancient buildings: “I think it would make sense, especially now, where the great past is coming up rather quickly”.¹⁸

THE EVENT AT NAQA

The day after Professor Wildung’s speech at the museum, sponsors from Sudan and abroad, politicians, embassy officials and journalists, in addition to archaeologists, attended the rededication ceremony of the Temple of Amun

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15. Wildung, 2006.

16. *Ibid.*

17. *Ibid.*

18. *Ibid.*

at Naqa. Approaching Naqa, the guests drove through an avenue flanked by large sponsor flags and armed guards protecting the area from intruders; the ceremony was sponsored by corporate agencies such as the Byblos Bank Africa, Sudan Telecom, Mobitel Sudan, Enefeidi Group, BMW/Nissan, and Sudan Airways. Next to the temple there was a huge party tent with a stage and chairs and a food tent further down the hill (fig. 3) In the party tent, Sudanese men wearing their white jallabiyyas and immas had installed themselves in the first row, and behind them sponsors, ambassadors, invited European guests, and several cameramen. Outside the tent, a group of local members of the excavation team were sitting on the ground dressed in white jallabiyyas, accompanied by European archaeologists from the team.

The official program was a mixture of speeches and entertainment.¹⁹ The Governor of the River Nile State gave an opening speech in Arabic before the program continued with several pieces of music. The Minister of Culture, Youth and Sport (hereafter “the Minister”) then arrived by helicopter, obviously short of time, and made an improvised entrance in front of the stage accompanied by the director general at the NCAM, snapping their fingers in the traditional Sudanese way. Then the German ambassador held a speech and put forward a

3. Party tent raised among the ruins at Naqa.

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19. The official program was also accompanied by the publishing of the book *Naga. Royal City of Ancient Sudan*, Wildung and Kroper, 2006.

direct appeal to the Sudanese Government and people in general, receiving a big round of applause from the audience:

“Any German coming here [...] we are most impressed by the untouched environment of Naqa and [...] we ask you to leave it like it is. Not to change this site into another Egyptian, cheap touristic site [...] I think in the long run you will have much better touristic profit if you [...] leave it like this [and] make a national park out of it.”²⁰

The next speaker, the general director of the NCAM Dr. Hassan Hussein Idris, used the opportunity to highlight the close cooperation between German and Sudanese scholars, before handing the microphone to the Minister who acknowledged Naqa as one of the best preserved archaeological sites in Sudan (fig. 4):

“The Government promise all of you that we will keep and protect this site. We will also protect the natural environment surrounding this important area and work [...] that may destroy this valuable material and valuable heritage which is in front of us. The Government of the Sudan has succeeded

4. Sudan's Minister of Culture, Youth and Sport H.E. Mohamed Yousif Abdalla.

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20. Keller, 2006.

to register five archaeological sites on the national heritage list and is working now to register archaeological sites on Meroe Island as well."²¹

Accompanied by music from Eastern Sudan, the local inhabitants of Naqa, until then sitting on the ground outside the tent, started dancing, raising their traditional sticks and snapping their fingers while Europeans admired them from the outside through the lenses of digital cameras (fig. 5). Finally, Professor Wildung and his wife, expressed their gratitude to the Minister who had promised in front of everybody to protect the uniqueness of the site and its environment. By the end of the official program, people started moving towards the food tent where a large buffet was made ready. On the way The Bank of Khartoum was handing out bags with sponsor-material such as key rings and t-shirts with their logo. The party accidentally came to a sudden end when the spotlights stopped working and everybody rushed back to Khartoum.

Agencies

Professor Wildung's speech at the National Museum attracted a wide range of agencies. Foreign archaeologists, embassy staff, German sponsors, and friends of the Berlin Museum represented an international level and constituted the majority of the audience. The German Research Council, sponsoring

5. European guests observe local population through digital lenses.

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21. Abdalla, 2006a.

the excavations at Naqa, might in this regard be seen as a representative of a global interest supporting Professor Wildung's strategy for heritage management in Sudan. Sudanese archaeologists and staff at the National Museum represented a national level, being employed at governmental institutions. But, apart from the directors of NCAM, they had no visible role at any of the two events. Concerning Sudanese archaeologists, it is difficult to draw a strict line between their national and global position. The archaeologists present at the two events, both the foreigners and the Sudanese, are members of a global archaeological community. More particularly they also form a community of Sudan archaeology maintaining strong social relations and interactions.

The event at Naqa included an additional local and regional level represented by local members of the excavation team, or "workers" as they are called by some archaeologists and the governor of the River Nile State. Official politicians, in particular the Minister, represented a national level. Sudanese corporate agencies sponsoring the event at Naqa may be connected to both a national and a global level of scale. Although operating within the national borders of Sudan, their economic interests are related to the global tourist market.

FIELDS OF INTERESTS

In this section I take the two events outlined above as a point of departure in an exploration of concurrent and conflicting fields of interests between the identified agencies concerning the future management of the site of Naqa. Three intimately related fields of interests have been identified: "Archaeological park or Disneyland?", "Local nomads and the future of Naqa" and "Naqa as a world heritage site".

Archaeological park or Disneyland?

The central interest communicated at the two events concerns the future management of Naqa. Professor Wildung explicitly put forward a political request to the government in both his speeches to leave Naqa and other sites as they are and to keep their "romantic" atmosphere through the making of archaeological parks. Sudanese authorities, represented by the Minister, supported this by promising protection of the site and its surrounding environment. Thus, both German archaeologists and Sudanese officials have at least expressed a common interest in leaving the site as it is today. The German ambassador also expressed a marked interest in the future of the site, encouraging the Sudanese Government to follow the management strategy of Professor Wildung and avoid making Naqa an archaeological Disneyland; a statement based on the way Germans like to experience such a site – untouched compared to "Egyptian, cheap touristic sites." Hence, by promoting what he imagines

will be the interests of a German and European tourist industry, the German ambassador makes a relation to Sudanese authorities concerning the future management of the archaeological site of Naqa.

However, although the archaeologists and Sudanese authorities were in general agreement at Naqa, a closer look at the government's plans for developing tourism and exploiting archaeological sites for economic purposes reveals its relation to foreign archaeologists as a conflicting one. The Minister expressed the government's aims in a recorded interview in 2006:

"How can we use the museums and the cultural sites for developmental purposes? How can we use it for tourism? How can we use it for introducing ourselves to the rest of the world? We would like to start having small motels, about twenty–thirty beds near to the most important sites. And we would like to make a small theater [where] the people will be introduced to the history about the place before they start seeing the places...But we would like to get prepared first so people don't have trouble about where to sleep [...] to get food [...] This is one important thing we want to concentrate on – to use these activities for the economic purpose [...] It creates chances for many people to get employed: transportation, feeding the people, souvenirs."²²

The present "uniqueness" of the archaeological sites, as emphasized by Professor Wildung, was not on the Minister's agenda. A representative of the Ministry of Tourism and Wildlife confirmed these future plans for developing the most spectacular sites, but he made no mention of the present uniqueness of the sites:

"We feel that it is now high time that tourism is crucial for poverty reduction [...] then you have to build these facilities related to accommodation, related to restaurants [...] and within this framework you will get many jobs [...] and at the same time [...] develop the whole area by providing necessary infrastructure related to roads, communications system, airports, etc. Within the framework of tourism we can develop our rural areas."²³

The government is relying upon private initiatives to develop the country's tourism and is now opening up the sector to private companies encouraging them to invest money in infrastructure around the most prominent sites.²⁴ Their aim is to inspire private investors through governmental pilot projects to invest

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22. Abdalla, 2006b.

23. The Director of International Relations Department at the Ministry of Tourism and Wildlife, Interview with the author.

24. *Ibid.*

money in the tourist industry, which today is only beginning to appeal to frequent and experienced European travelers and foreign Khartoum residents with high incomes, looking for a new kind of travel adventure. During their travels, they expect to learn about nature, history, culture, and local people; many of them also attracted to undiscovered destinations and unique experiences.²⁵ One of the more established companies appealing to European tourists is the Italian Tourism Co. Ltd. registered in Sudan since 1999. The company has already built a luxurious tent-camp strategically positioned in the vicinity of the pyramids at Meroe. In Kerima, further north along the Nile, they have also built a Nubian rest house close to the mountain of Jebel Barkal (fig. 6).

According to the representative from the Ministry of Tourism and Wildlife, investors now want permission to build similar accommodation facilities near the most spectacular sites.²⁶ In February 2007 several Belgian investors and tourist operators visited the pyramids of Meroe, the old Kushite capital on the east bank of the Nile and probably Sudan's most important tourist attraction today. Accompanied by guides from the Sudan National Museum, official politicians, security police and cameramen, they were considering possibilities for expanding tourism from Europe (fig. 7).

6. Nubian rest house run by the Italian company seen from Jebel Barkal.

25. This information has been obtained from informal conversations with leading tour operators within the tourist industry in Sudan.

26. I was, however, not able to get any concrete names on companies that wanted to imitate this building.

For Sudanese corporate agencies, the Naqa event was a strategic place to build reputation. By getting their company's name on the program and the opportunity to distribute sponsor material, they announced their interest in the site. Their presence and development of relations with the Sudanese and foreign officials and archaeologists indicate an interest that stretches further than this particular event. For some archaeologists this is a welcome initiative. In fact, some archaeologists are today extending their work into the tourist business. From time to time archaeologists function as consultants and tou-

7. Considering future tourism at the pyramids of Meroe.

rist guides or provide other professional services and are thus creating ties of dependence between the archaeological community and tourist operators.

Summing up, the debate on the future management of the site of Naqa has focused on two major interests: the protection of the site as it is today through the establishment of an archaeological park and the development of infrastructure around the site making it suitable for expanding tourism. Several agencies involved in this debate have been identified: Sudanese authorities, foreign archaeologists represented by Professor Wildung, Sudanese and foreign archaeologists extending their work into the tourist business, corporate agencies and, finally, the tourist industry. The two major interests are not necessarily conflicting ones. One may to a certain extent protect the “uniqueness” of the site as it is today and at the same time develop a minimum of infrastructure. However, the complete absence of interest in the site’s uniqueness expressed in the two interviews with government officials referred to above may indicate

conflicting interests between foreign archaeologists on the one hand, in the case of Naqa represented by Professor Wildung, and Sudanese authorities on the other. Further, the material indicates an internal contradiction within the Sudan Government as indicated by the Minister's interest in leaving Naqa as it is today and at the same time aiming to develop restaurants and motels at the major archaeological sites. A third potential conflicting interest lies between Professor Wildung's future visions for the site and archaeologists extending their work into the tourist business. Aiming to bring more tourists to experience the sites, the tourist industry is in danger of undermining the "value" of the site turning it into a "Disneyland", making it one tourist destination among others.

Local nomads and the future of Naqa

The local nomads living around the site of Naqa do not constitute an *active* agency in the debate on the future management of Naqa. They are spectators on the sideline, as at the Naqa event, observing the other agencies negotiating the future of "their ruins", to use Wildung's expression. We can distinguish two major interests among local people in the archaeological sites: first, earning money through the selling of souvenirs to tourists and second, offering their labor to archaeological missions working on the sites.²⁷

Today, a small group of local people living in the vicinity of some archaeological sites have seen the possibility of earning money on tourism. At the pyramids of Meroe and the site of the Royal City, both situated north of Naqa, local people have put up small enterprises offering souvenirs to visiting tourists.²⁸ Near the main entrance at the pyramid site, they offer their personal belongings for sale, such as coffee-pots, musical instruments, ceramic bowls and other equipment (fig. 8). In addition, they sell small imitations of the pyramids and cheap, Chinese tourist jewelry, claiming to offer "authentic" things with an ancient origin. This activity is mainly confined to the entrance area, although from time to time they operate from the opposite side of the pyramid site where most tourists camp.²⁹ They also offer short camel rides. At the site of the Royal City, where the Meroitic kings lived, we find the same enterprise, although less extensive – local people selling their personal belongings and even stone artifacts picked up from the ground.

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27. There may of course be several other interests that local people have in the archaeological sites, which can only be identified through further empirical studies.

28. I have not, however, experienced this during my three visits to the site of Naqa.

29. This was the case when I was camping close to the pyramids in December 2006. At sunrise five men had lined up their small enterprises about a hundred meters from my temporary camp.

Currently, the relationship between the local inhabitants and the artifacts, is formally restricted through Sudan's Antiquities Ordinance of 1999. The law of 1999 is more thorough than those of 1905 and 1952; it restricts all activities on the archaeological sites, forbidding people to build or dig irrigation channels, to make cemeteries or water towers, or conduct any other activity leading to the erosion of traces of antiquities on archaeological or historically registered land.³⁰ Operating with guards and local ghafirs closely inspecting the visitor's tickets to the sites, bought in advance at the Antiquities Inspector office at the National Museum in Khartoum, the authorities control all activity on the sites.

8. Sudanese coffee pot bought at the pyramids of Meroe

The second interest observed is seen through local people offering their labor to foreign archaeological teams. Today local males, living in the vicinity of the ruins of Naqa, are employed by the German excavation team. This praxis is, however, not confined to Naqa. Being cheap labor, local people are employed by foreign archaeologists as excavators throughout the whole Upper Nubian region.

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30. See § 9.1 in Ministry of Tourism and National Heritage, 1999.

In addition to the two above-mentioned interests, Professor Wildung in his speech ascribed to the local people a third identity-constituting interest, which he held was new for the local “workers.” Finding a shift in “the mentality” of the local “workers” and stating that “now, Naqa has become *their* place”, he implicitly presumes their identification with the site has changed. He further explicitly pointed out the local people as the true protectors of the site for which they have come to feel responsible. This acknowledgment, in addition to the observation that German archaeologists were sitting on the ground outside the party tent at the Naqa event together with the group of local men from the excavation team, shows a potential alliance between the German archaeologists and the local people. The archaeologists working in Sudan are depending upon “goodwill” and also cheap labor from the local inhabitants. If the local community does not accept their presence, they have to find another area to dig. A more thorough involvement of these local nomads into the project in the future may be a move towards an indigenous archaeology incorporating local views of knowledge into the research. One may wonder, however, how the relations between local people and archaeologists, on the one hand, and local people and the alliance between the authorities, the emerging tourist industry, and corporate agencies, on the other hand, will develop in the future if the government’s plans of building infrastructure around the sites become reality.

Naqa as a world heritage site

At the Naqa event, the Minister announced that the government would apply for the site of Naqa, together with Musawwarat es-Sufra and Meroe, to enter the World Heritage list under the name “Archaeological Sites of the Island of Meroe.” The application was sent only a few weeks after the ceremony, this being the second attempt to register the sites on the list after a previous attempt in 2004. Only Jebel Barkal and the sites of the Napatan Region in Sudan have up until now been inscribed on the list (since 2003). The nomination of the Island of Meroe sites will be considered for the World Heritage list in 2008.³¹

The nomination of the sites was also mentioned in Professor Wildung’s speech. Earlier the same day, he had, together with colleagues at the NCAM, discussed the future of the site in meetings with the Minister. The consequence of an acceptance would be that all future development of the site must follow UNESCO’s international conventions, and accordingly that Professor Wildung’s vision of the preservation of the site as it is today would be feasible. Wildung explicitly stated that he knew his colleagues in NCAM followed his philosophy for the future preservation of Naqa. The emphasis on the site as a “heritage

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31. Aouak, 2007.

of all mankind” put forward by a representative from NCAM at the first event may, in a modest way, be said to confirm this common view. Following this we see an accordance between German and Sudanese archaeologists what the future of Naqa concerns. This close relationship between Sudanese archaeologists and their foreign colleagues has long historical roots in Sudan³², and is maintained through excavations, events, conferences, and exchange of staff between universities and museums. Many of my informants at the National Museum, both among the leadership and “ordinary” employees, confirmed this relationship. However, although admitting they needed foreign help, not everybody was satisfied:

“For us as Sudanese we can interpret some of the archaeological sites better than the foreigner because it’s our own culture [...] But [there is] no way for us to do it, with the current situation now with the museum and at the ministry, we can’t do it. I am very happy for having trustfull archaeologists working in Sudan.”³³

Another informant reflected upon the future of the strong foreign influence in the archaeology of Sudan:

“One day I think all this will be done by people from the Sudan for two reasons: one, because there will be a lot of nationals who will be doing archaeology, people will be more interested in archaeology, and second, because I think there will be less funding from the foreign countries to do archaeology in Sudan. I think one day everything will come to the hands of the Sudanese [...] it is not a nationalist movement I think, it is the nature of things [...] maybe in three-four generations. For the time being we are really in need of the foreign missions [...] I would like to keep contacts in all fields [...] we’ll have Americans with their techniques [...] the French with their techniques [...] and I think this will be the wealth of the coming Sudanese generations of archaeologists [...] I would like to keep the contact maybe at a medium level, but it should be there all the time.”³⁴

Although some are skeptical about foreign archaeologists, many express a high degree of admiration for the UNESCO and the ideology of a world heritage, often expressed at events such as those mentioned here gathering both Sudanese and foreign archaeologists, but particularly in conversations concerning the lending of artifacts to traveling exhibitions in Europe. Today artifacts are exported abroad either as the mission’s share after excavations, as loans for

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32. Heierland, 2008.

33. Key informant I, Sudan National Museum.

34. Key informant II, Sudan National Museum.

exhibitions, for research and conservation, or illegally as commodities³⁵ to be sold on the world antiquities market. One informant put it like this:

“I think the exhibition is one of the most important media to [...] put relations between nations [...] the cultural heritage is for all the people of the world [...] this will develop tourism [...] and give people a good idea about Sudan.”³⁶

Another informant, also seeing the artifacts as part of a common global heritage, is, however, more restrictive when commenting on artifacts that are removed from display at the National Museum and lent to traveling exhibitions abroad:

“The antiquities belong to the whole world [...] But I say that some pieces are individual. Individual [pieces should] stay here in Sudan [...] I am afraid the pieces won't be turned back.”³⁷

Thus, although there are critical voices at the National Museum concerning the close cooperation with foreign missions and the export of artifacts from the country, the speakers at the first event expressed a clear alliance between foreign and Sudanese archaeologists, at least among the leadership. This was followed up by the director general of NCAM at the second event, highlighting the intimate cooperation between the two countries in the field of archaeology. This alliance between foreign and Sudanese archaeologists is based upon the idea of a human world heritage in the framework of which it is possible to protect the site and its present “uniqueness.” The government, however, seems to have two other related interests in obtaining a world heritage status for the site: the question of identity and economic exploitation of archaeological sites.

Concerning the question of identity, the Minister, at the beginning of the interview in 2006, expressed the importance of using the archaeological heritage for building a Sudanese identity as a direct answer to the question of how archaeology may be important for Sudan today. He emphasized its value in teaching Sudanese people in general about the nation's memory, so that the inhabitants of Sudan can understand “how their great fathers were” and “how [the country] can build upon the past.” However, one thing is what is said to be important, but the main thing is how the archaeological heritage is *actually* being used and promoted in particular social situations. Towards the end of the interview, the Minister was more concerned with how the archaeological heri-

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35. Professor Wildung reported, for example, in his speech that ram number ten at the Temple of Amun was stolen and probably on its way to the illegal antiquities markets in Europe in 1992. Later, it was found badly damaged on a sandy road in the Atbara area and then brought to the National Museum for restoration.

36. Key informant IV, Sudan National Museum.

37. Key informant V, Sudan National Museum.

tage could be used to “introduce [Sudan] to the rest of world”.³⁸ This emphasis of using the archaeological heritage to connect relations abroad was reflected in the Minister’s speech at Naqa to foreign archaeologists, diplomats, and corporate agencies. He did not take occasion to promote a national Sudanese identity among the local people observing the program from the sidelines.³⁹ This interest in making global relations is also reflected in the government’s praxis of bringing foreign official visitors to the National Museum in Khartoum and the pyramids of Meroe.⁴⁰ Hence, it seems like the interest in nominating the site of Naqa to the World Heritage list is not first and foremost rooted in a wish to protect the site as it is today, nor is it to use the status to actively promote an internal campaign for constructing a national identity.⁴¹ Instead, it seems like it is the possibility of promoting Sudan’s rightful place within a global community, that is important.

This global interest is intimately related to the second interest concerning economic exploitation, which I also hold to lie behind the nomination of the site to the World Heritage list. For it is economic profit and rural development that is at the center when Sudanese authorities discuss the future management of their archaeological sites. It is particularly interesting to note that although there is an absence of interest within the present government in using the archaeological heritage in internal identity-building, it is today foreign archaeologists, exemplified through the case presented here, who actively and explicitly promote the relation between the Sudanese and their great past.

“Your presence, ladies and gentlemen, here this evening, is a highly impressive proof for the importance you assign for the early history of your country. We can just give you a bit of material. You have to make your own identity out of this information.”⁴²

Further, this advocacy of the archaeological heritage is followed up by Sudanese archaeologists, being part of the same international milieu as the

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38. Abdalla, 2006b.

39. In Sudanese schoolbooks on history, for example, chapters on the pre- and early history of Sudan is conspicuous by its absence. This thus supports the observation that archaeological heritage is not actively used to build a common national identity by the Sudan Government.

40. This I observed several times at both the National Museum and at the pyramids.

41. A comparison with Zimbabwe is interesting in this matter, where the absence of using archaeology by the country’s authorities in internal identity construction as identified in Sudan, is not recognizable. Since independence, archaeological findings, and the site of Great Zimbabwe, in particular, were turned into national symbols actively promoted by the authorities in the building of the nation. See Omrand, 1998.

42. Wildung, 2006.

foreign archaeologists. When I asked my informants what the most important task for archaeology in Sudan today is, one of them answered:

“I think the most important thing with the Sudanese archaeology today is to keep the national identity and national unity [...] this can be used in a completely negative way [...] so it has to be used intelligently [...] I think [this] should be introduced through the education system. I think within the next generation there will be much more awareness of this cultural heritage.”⁴³

Another informant stressed the relationship between past and future and complained about the government not seeing this issue as important:

“This is part of our civilization. If anyone have no back, they have no future. This is very important. But the big problem here [...] is that this is not important for the government.”⁴⁴

CONCLUSION

I have confronted the concepts of artifacts, interests, and agencies with an empirical material, stemming from an ethnographic fieldwork, through an empirical exploratory procedure. Using the Temple of Amun at Naqa as a point of departure, I identified how agencies on different levels of scale, through specific concurrent, conflicting and even ambivalent interests, are interwoven in the archaeological enterprise in Sudan today.

What is brought forward above through observations and quotes from speeches and interviews, shows that the question of World Heritage status for Naqa and the Island of Meroe is a complex issue with contradictory interests involved. I hold the main contradiction to be as follows: On one hand there is an alliance between Sudanese archaeologists and a wider world archaeological community in promoting the well known monuments of the Island of Meroe for the World Heritage List and thus further securing their position as “unique” and “unspoiled sites”. The archaeological community and Sudanese museum staff also seem to emphasize the archaeological heritage as an important means for constructing a national identity among Sudanese in general.

The government, on the other hand, is mainly concerned with the World Heritage nomination as a possible way to promote Sudan’s global reputation and accelerate the economic exploitation of the most prominent archaeological sites. The present government does not seem to use the archaeological heritage to build a Sudanese collective identity. Hence, the government’s attitude to the future management of Naqa is contradictory as revealed through the Minister’s speech at the Naqa event and the interview in 2006: at the same

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43. Key informant II, Sudan National Museum.

44. Key informant V, Sudan National Museum.

time supporting Wildung's plans for leaving the site as it is today and actively encouraging touristic development.

Local people are today involved through the selling of souvenirs at some sites and offering to work for foreign archaeologists. What their role would be in either an "archaeological park" or a "Nubian Disneyland" is unclear and should be explored in further empirical investigations. Their voice and destiny is not present at the events studied here except through Wildung's words. This absence stands in striking contrast to the importance ascribed to Sudan's past and the sites themselves by the main agencies negotiating the future of Naqa.

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