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# WHAT'S NEWS

THE ICOMOS-EPWG AFRICA MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

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# EDITORIAL

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Alyssa K. Barry

Particularly affected by the situation currently facing our Sudanese brothers and sisters, we have chosen to dedicate this new issue to Sudan, highlighting its heritage and the people who bring it to life.

Besides affecting the lives of millions of people, the conflict that has gripped the country since April has also damaged its rich heritage, which bears witness not only to the identity of the Sudanese people but also to the history of our continent. We would therefore like to pay tribute to all those who, despite the situation, continue to safeguard this heritage.

We would particularly like to thank and encourage the ICOMOS National Committee in Sudan, recently established in March 2023, and in particular its president Dr Nouredin Elragig, for facilitating the production of this issue despite the difficult conditions.

From archaeology to zoology, from architecture to museology, the profiles and elements we highlight here bear witness to the plurality of aspects inherent in heritage, both on the scale of Sudan and of the continent in general, and to the challenges it can face in times of conflict.

With our thoughts on the Sudanese people and our prayers for the imminent restoration of peace, we hope you enjoy reading.

# 5 QUESTIONS TO REEM GASIM OMER

by Alyssa K. Barry

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## **1. From your bachelor in zoology/animal biology to National Coordinator at the Sudan Youth Biodiversity Network (SYBN)... Who is Reem Gasim Omer?**

I was born and raised in Sudan, I've always been in touch with nature and loved animals. Studying zoology at the University of Khartoum was a dream come true, especially courses about animal behavior and field trips to wildlife protect areas to get an up close look into the relationship between animals and their surrounding environment.

The most important was how we manage our protected areas and how we can as youth better inform the Sudanese people about our rich biodiversity in different areas in Sudan.

During our graduate year in 2012, with a group of friends who were also passionate about nature, we organized the first forum to discuss management issues, risk of poaching, and local community development at Al Dinder National Park under the slogan "**Dinder Shall Thrive Again**". This was supported by our faculty of Science and the professors committee of the faculty.

It brought the attention of the Wildlife Management Authority, academia, as well as NGOs.

## **2. Can you tell us more about the SYBN?**

The SYBN was created in coordination with the GYBN (Global Youth Biodiversity Network) in March 2020 by a group of young people interested in nature conservation and had work in this field.

Most of the members were my colleagues who worked at the NGO, the Sudanese Environment Conservation Society and other colleagues from academia who were experts in wildlife management.

The main objective was to inform and raise awareness about Sudan's rich biodiversity. This was to be achieved through empowering the youth and providing them with opportunities to capacity building and exposure into biodiversity conservation.

Most of our activities were online via social media platforms to raise awareness. I hope we can revive the SYBN and continue our activities.



## **3. In 2018, you participated in the World Heritage Young Professionals Forum. What did you gain from this experience?**

The forum contacted me with amazing young people who shared the same values in nature conservation for natural World Heritage sites. I participated to the forum to reflect on our recently enlisted (back then in 2017) first natural World Heritage site in Sudan, which is the Dugonab Bay and Mukkawar Island Marine National Park.

The main points that I learned from the forum were:

- Community participation is a key point when it comes to site management. This point was raised by most participants and it showed a huge gap in involving the community in the development of site management plans. Also in being involved in income generating plans such as ecotourism.
- The protocols as a State member at the World Heritage Committee Meeting. As part of the young forum activities, we did a simulation of the meeting, before the actual meeting. I got a closer look into the mandate of State members and how to address your position according to the meeting agenda.
- At last, I gained an amazing network of young people who shared the same values in community led nature conservation.

## **4. As someone with a lot of experience in the development and humanitarian sectors, how do you think heritage can contribute to development in Sudan, and in Africa in general?**

In Sudan where more than 40% of our population live below the poverty line, such topics as Heritage are not given priority by the government nor the interest by the Sudanese people.

In addition to that, insecurity and political instability play a big role in damaging the tourism sector beside the low investment.

The main nexus between the humanitarian aid sector and development sector is having a people centered approach in providing long term assistance.

In Sudan where we have both cultural and natural World Heritage sites, we still failed to get the local community development at the center of management plans. I believe that the start to get our heritage to contribute to development is to get the local community to be an integral part of heritage conservation and tourism by providing jobs to the local community. By this we create not just a sense of ownership but an actual involvement and income to the local communities which will lead to sustainable development.

### **5. Your message to young African heritage professionals!**

Unite our goals and keep empowering our youth to lead a better future.



# SENIOR'S VOICE: IKHMAS AKRM

by Alyssa K. Barry

## **1. From your Bachelor in archaeology to Culture Officer for tangible heritage at the Sudanese National Commission for UNESCO, ALECSO and ICESCO... Who is Ikhmas Akrm?**

I'm a senior curator at the National Museum of Sudan. I chose to pursue a degree in archeology to develop a deeper understanding of the history of my country, and by extension myself. I always knew Sudan has a rich and diverse history, one which was and unfortunately still is underrepresented both in Sudan and globally. Through my work I hope to educate both myself and my community on our history and its importance. I believe learning and understanding the history and culture of one's own is something of utmost importance, especially in a country like Sudan where many different communities exist alongside each other, each with a distinct identity and way of life.

From my bachelor's to working as a culture officer, it has always been my aim to preserve the Sudanese identity through history and culture.

Archeology has helped me understand our communities on a historical level, and this knowledge I carried into my work as a culture officer. At the National Commission I cultivated a better understanding of the logistical and organizational mechanisms of preserving Sudanese heritage. The task of preserving and promoting both tangible and intangible heritage is one Sudan cannot do in isolation. Organizations like UNESCO and ICESCO are integral to this mission and my work there has helped me understand where Sudan stands in this process. What has been done already and what still needs to be achieved.

## **2. You have been Senior Curator at the Sudan National Corporation for Antiquities and Museums in the Sudan National Museum for 15 years (2006-2021). What were your main tasks and what did you learn from this experience?**

As a curator at the National Museum of Sudan my role included two aspects; one within the museum and the other outside of it, as field work with archeological missions.

From each I acquired different skills relevant to my work. There exists an overlap between the two aspects, allowing me to draw knowledge from one into the other.



*The field work I did as a curator greatly influenced my work later as a culture officer, as it centred around working outside the city in remote locations and amongst different local communities. I learned from this experience the diverse cultures and experiences that make up Sudanese people. As for the archeological digs themselves, from these I learned how to handle and effectively manage archeological objects. This later became useful in my work within the museum.*

*Within the museum I was responsible for documenting and effectively storing objects gathered from archaeological digs. The documentation and storage aspect is very important to the National Museum of Sudan as it functions as the main storage and archive for all objects and pieces found from all missions across Sudan. Recently, as part of our documentation work, we began digitalising the documentation process and I was tasked with monitoring this transfer of archeological data from hard copy files to a computerized system.*

Another important aspect of my curation work had to do with the activities within the museum itself, from promoting the museum to community outreach programmes. Working with visitors to the museum and researchers in the field of archeology and culture, I gained valuable experience in curating interesting collections and displays that tell the story of Sudan beautifully.

Generally my work as a curator may seem broad and abstract to some degree but it actually ties in well together and from each aspect I gain skills valuable to the others. Museum curation is definitely a very intertwined process.

***3. Sudan counts 3 sites inscribed on the World Heritage List and 2 elements inscribed on the Intangible heritage list. Could you tell us more about them?***

Having Sudan on the World Heritage and Intangible Heritage Lists is something the historical community in Sudan strived and worked diligently towards. As I said earlier I believe Sudan's heritage (both tangible and intangible) is underrepresented globally and even within Sudan. I therefore believe having five sites on the UNESCO cultural lists begins bridging that knowledge gap.

The three World Heritage sites are all related to the Kushite Kingdom, one of the oldest and most important in Sudan. The Karma civilization is possibly one of the earliest in all of Africa.

***4. Sudan counts 3 sites inscribed on the World Heritage List and 2 elements inscribed on the Intangible heritage list. Could you tell us more about them?***

The current political situation is unfortunate for all Sudanese people and we pray our country will be restored soon. In these circumstances many people underestimate the adverse impacts war has on heritage and the losses that may occur.

Many museums in Sudan are currently located in the conflict areas; four in West Sudan (Al Fasher, Nayala, Al Ginena and Al Obayid) and several in Khartoum.

For these museums, we are unable to guarantee their security and therefore they are in critical condition. We are doing our best to gather information on the condition of these museums but because no one can access them, we can only speculate. We currently have departments working remotely to prepare a crisis plan and attempting to gather information and protect these heritage sites.

War threatens heritage greatly, and especially movable structures are in danger of being damaged, mishandled, looted, etc.

Unfortunately, as hard as we are working we cannot guarantee the safety of our heritage in the meantime.

***5. What is your wish for heritage in Sudan and in Africa in general for the future?***

As an archeologist and associate of the heritage and history field, my wish for Sudan and Africa is to be safe, protected and promoted.

It is sad to see the continent from which humanity began, be neglected in the historical scene. We in Sudan and many parts of the continent are only starting to give importance to our history and heritage and we have a long way to go.

Both Sudan and Africa possess unfathomable heritage and cultural diversity. I hope we at some point make a greater effort to learn and promote their beauty. There is so much we are yet to discover and learn about this country and continent.

I wish there comes a day where the whole of Africa flourishes and is able to share its diversity with the world.

# DID YOU KNOW? THE PYRAMIDS OF MEROË

by Alyssa K. Barry



The Pyramids of Meroë © Mohamed Zekry. 2011

Did you know that Egypt is not the only place where pyramids can be found on the African continent? In fact, the kingdom with the most pyramids in the world is not Egyptian, but Nubian.

Sudan has several pyramids on its territory, the Nubian pyramids. Nubia was a region on the banks of the Nile between what is now Sudan and Egypt, site of the oldest civilisations in Africa, motherland of the three Kushite kingdoms during antiquity: Kerma (XXVe - XVIe century BC), Napata (VIIIe - IVe century BC) et Méroé (IVe siècle BC - IVe century AD).

There are approximately 220 pyramids, a world record for number, in the desert that was once a vast, verdant land (Egypt has approximately 130 pyramids). They served as tombs for queens and kings of Napata, but mostly in Meroe, where around 40 of them were buried.

The main differences between the Egyptian and Nubian pyramids are their size and shape: the latter range from 6 to 30 meters and are much more vertical, while the Egyptian pyramids are around 130 meters and are flatter.

In addition, the wealth of the dead who rested there was stored inside these ingenious tombs. The mummies were adorned with beautiful jewelry and fine sarcophagi. Although some of these treasures were found by archaeologists around the 19th and 20th century, the vast majority of the Meroe tombs were desecrated and looted by the infamous Giuseppe Ferlini, who smashed the tops of some 40 pyramids in a "treasure hunt" in 1834, which had been sold when taken to Europe. He was not the only one who did such a heinous act against human history. Few Africans and their descendants in the diaspora know about these pyramids and their lost treasures are yet another of the countless examples of African riches that deserve to be known and preserved by Africans.





# FOCUS: CURRENT SITUATION OF HERITAGE IN SUDAN

*By Nouredin Elragig, President of ICOMOS Sudan*

## • **BACKGROUND**

Politically, before the war that has now erupted, the Sudanese people were waiting for the signing of an agreement that would lead to a civilian government running the country's affairs in a comprehensive peace in order to achieve sustainable development.

On the morning of April 15th, 2023, the Sudanese people woke up to the sounds of cannons, live bullets, and the buzzing of warplanes hovering over them, terrifying children, women, and the elderly. In the midst of this terror, many citizens discovered that this war is between two generals, one of whom leads a militia called the Rapid Support Forces, and the other is at the head of power representing the army.

Since that date, the war has not stopped, but has only intensified. Many citizens lost their lives, and many of them were seriously injured, including Dr. Muhammad Jalal Hashem, who works and is specialized in preserving the heritage properties that are threatened by wars, and he has an initiative that he launched to document the heritage of the people of Manasir, which is threatened by the waters of the Merowe Dam.

Dr. Muhammad Jalal Hashem was injured early this month by a shell that hit him in the leg, which led to its amputation above the knee. At that time, I felt the insignificance of what I was exposed to on the morning of May 8th, 2023, when a bullet was fired from a firearm inside my house, and it hit my left foot, causing a wound that has not healed until now.

Many citizens were forcibly displaced from their homes and moved to safe places in cities inside Sudan, and most of them crossed to neighboring countries after they lost everything.

Destroyed infrastructure can be restored, and private and public buildings such as homes, hospitals, factories, and commercial centers that have become abandoned have also had damage to their buildings, but it is also possible to rebuild.

But the systematic destruction of heritage sites and museums and the looting of the contents of those heritage sites and museums made us lose an important part of our history and negatively affected the features and identity that we cherish, which distinguishes us from others. We may not be able to recover it again.

## • **WORKSHOPS AND ESTABLISHMENT OF THE EMERGENCY COMMITTEE**

Under the management of the Sudan National Corporation of Antiquities and Museums, headed by prof. Ibrahim Musa, the General Manager, two workshops were organized in Cairo in June and July 2023 as a way to call for the protection of heritage under the auspices of UNESCO, ICCROM and ICOMOS.

The two workshops recommended the formation of an emergency room in Cairo temporarily, and a committee was formed to manage it. The committee communicates with site workers to update information and inventory lists, as well as to provide them with practical measures for protection and risk reduction, and on how to deliver first aid in times of crisis.

The Emergency Committee began its tasks, and carried out the following activities:

1. Formation of an organizational structure for the Emergency Committee, with defining tasks, with a sectoral division for all the regions of Sudan ;
2. Developing a methodology and plans for practical scientific protection, coordinating the efforts of site supervisors, guiding and supporting them, and providing them with aids ;
3. Communicating with international bodies working in the field and preserving heritage for support and training;
4. Preparing and updating inventory lists and documentation of the different sites and types of antiquities threatened by armed fighting, looting, theft and burning, in order to reduce them or evacuate them to safe stores, while setting priorities according to the importance and severity of the risks.



First aid workshop for cultural heritage in times of crisis (6-10 July 2023, Cairo, Egypt)

#### • **SITUATION ON THE GROUND**

A total of 77 sites and museums are considered to be at high risk, which include forts and historical cities, archaeological sites, rock inscriptions and UNESCO World Heritage Sites.

The risks identified are the following:

1. Looting and fire ;
2. Illicit trafficking ;
3. Illegal mining ;
4. Growing risk of attacks, active fighting.

An action plan was developed for priority sites and museums in the framework of risk preparedness and mitigation, including carrying out damage and risk assessment, establishing a communication system, conducting emergency stabilization of buildings, evacuating and documenting heritage collections or updating inventories.

A total amount of 12,114,960 USD (including 10% contingency) is estimated to cover all the costs associated with implementing the action plan. We call upon UNESCO, ICOMOS, ICCROM, ICOM and other international organizations working on heritage to contact donors to cover the cost.

#### • **OUR WISH FOR HERITAGE IN SUDAN**

Sudan has been the land of civilization for thousands of years, and our features and identity have been formed over time. We are proud of our ancestors who left us a legacy that we cherish, and we want to preserve, protect, and pass it on to our descendants. But this absurd war wants to kill our dreams and distort our features and identity. Therefore, we hope that national, regional and international efforts from organizations working on culture and heritage will be combined to stop this war and to work to restore what was destroyed by the war and affected heritage sites and museums.



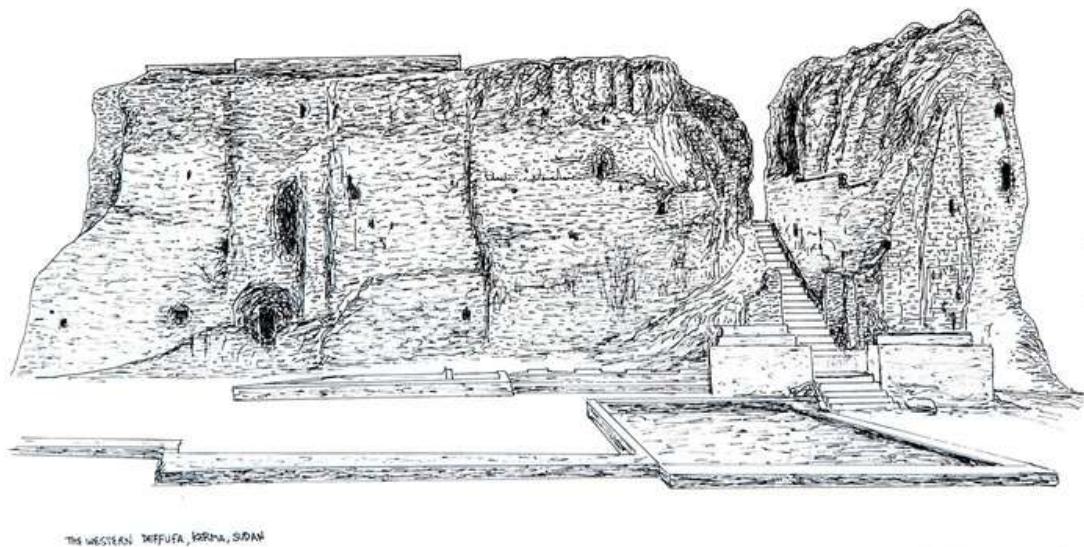
Collapse of the Directorate Building in El-Obeid city after it was hit by several shells

# YOUTH INITIATIVE: SACRAL ARCHITECTURE OF AFRICA

by Eduardo Verderame and Zainabu Jallo

**Sacral Architecture of Africa** pays tribute to the religious architectural expression in the African continent. We work towards mapping and detailing events that permeate structural materiality through drawings and texts, revealing the histories of some of the most important sacral structures. The project creates an accessible iconographic and historical database.

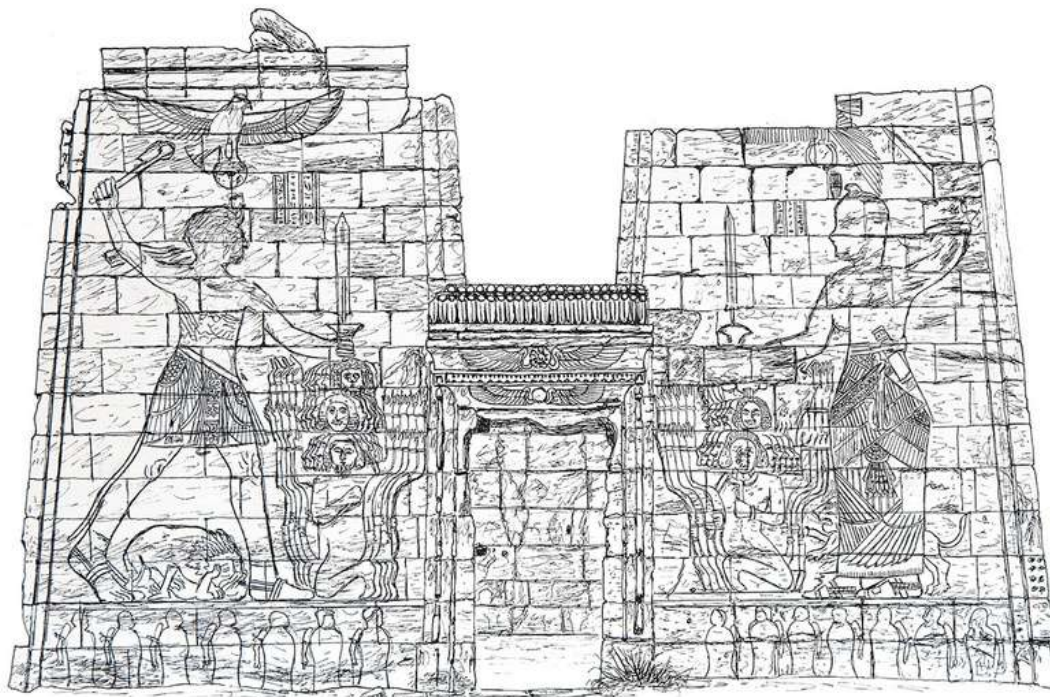
**Eduardo Verderame and Zainabu Jallo**, the principal investigators of the ongoing Sacral Architecture Africa project, take different historical periods into account – including the pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial periods. According to them, the inevitable delimitation affords analyses of religious styles and customs within their specificities, avoiding the risk of blurring distinctive expressions.



**The Western Deffufa,  
Kerma Kingdom Temple, Kerma,  
Sudan 19°36'02.2"N 30°24'35.9"E  
around 3500 - 3000 BCE**

**Material: mud and brick**

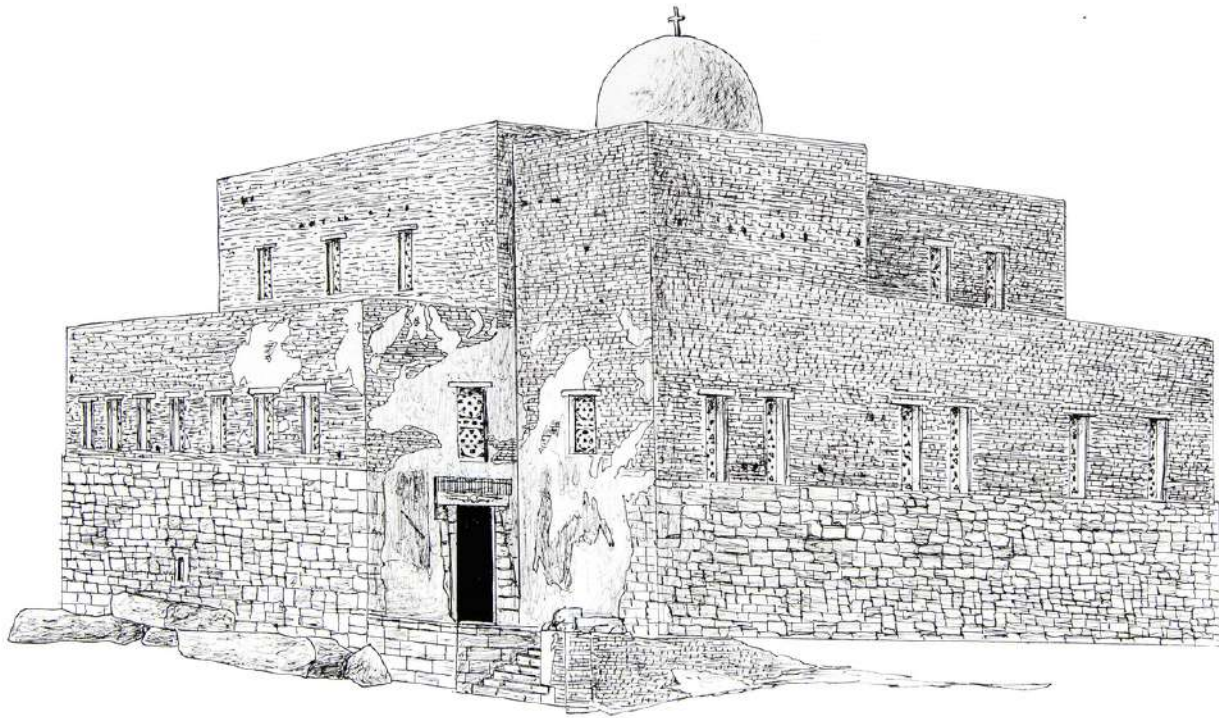
The Deffufas were ancient mud brick structures built by the Nubians close to the banks of Nile, some 5500 years ago. The word Deffuffa is possibly derived from the arabic word "Daffa"(piles), or mud brick in the ancient Nubian idiom. There are only three remaining "deffufas" today. The Western Deffufa of Kerma is believed to be a palace and temple, surrounded by a large urban settlement which population reached the number of 10.000 people. It was a massive building, with 52.3 m × 26.7 m. with many interconnected floors. Kerma was the capital of the kingdom that flourished between 2500 and 1500 B.C. and disappeared around 1450 B.C. after campaigns of Middle Kingdom of Egypt, but the region has been inhabited since 8350 B.C. The Eastern Deffufa, a few kilometers away, was a large burial structure from the Nubian kings, surrounded by a cemetery of around 30.000 graves. Kerma is one of the biggest archeological sites in Sudan, capital of the Kerma kingdom in southern Nubia. It was first thought to be a satellite city of the Egyptian empire, and the Western Deffufas was to be a fortification according to the excavations led by George Andrew Reisner between 1913 and 1916. The later excavations from 1977 to 2003 by the archeologist Charles Bonnet and his team proved the importance of Kerma as the capital and burial site of the kings of Kush.



Naqa, Sudan, Lion Temple of Apedemak

**Apedemak Temple (Lion Temple),  
Naqa, Nubia, Sudan Kingdom of Meroe  
1st century BC 16°16'07.7"N 33°16'22.0"E  
Material: carved stone**

Naqa or Naqa'a was an ancient city from the Kushian Kingdom, an important urban settlement situated 170 km north of Karthoum, 30 km from the Nile, in the confluence of two now dried rivers. The importance of Naqa emerged long after the fall of Kerma, when it gained independence from Egypt and was a commercial trade city connected with other towns of the kingdom of Meroe. The temple of Apedemak was one of the most important of those that existed in Naqa, as Apedemak, a lion-headed warrior god, was worshiped by people along the Nile river, inhabitants of Upper Nubia region. Many Meroitic temples were dedicated to this lion-headed deity from the Butana region: Naqa, Meroe, and Musawwarat es-Sufra. The Egyptian influence in architecture and the design of the temple is evidence of the mixture of those civilizations at the time, although there is no cult related to Apedemak in Egypt. At the façade, are depicted King Natakamani and Queen Amanitore, and the lion god appears at their feet. There is another temple in the complex where Apedemak stands, which is called the Roman Kiosque (or Chapel of Hathor) that shows a Hellenistic influence and evidences how connected Naqa was with the distant Roman Empire at that time. With the temple of Amun, the Roman Kiosque and Apedemak are the three temples excavated in Naqa since 1995. Naqa has been a World Heritage Site since 2011 (inscribed as the "Archaeological Sites of the Island of Meroe").



CATHEDRAL OF FARAS, SUDAN, WADI HALFA

## **Cathedral of Faras**

**Wadi Halfa, Sudan (submerged under Lake Nasser)**

**21°50'36.7"N 31°16'34.4" E (approx)**

**Materials: sandstone and clay brick**

On the west bank of the Nile, in present-day northern Sudan bordering Egypt, was an ancient medieval town in Nubia called Faras, now underwater in Lake Nasser behind the Aswan High Dam. Faras was a significant ancient Egyptian centre with temples of Egyptian gods built in the times of the New Kingdom. The formal introduction of Christianity dates from the arrival of missionaries at the invitation of Byzantine Roman emperor Justinian and his wife, Empress Theodora, who sent missionaries to Nubia through Egypt, resulting in the Christianization of northern Nubia. The three kingdoms in the region were converted, followed by the larger population and by c.580, all three kingdoms were officially Christian. Faras thrived economically and flourished in terms of architectural development. Churches were its most representative architecture, made of mud bricks and based on Byzantium Basilicas. The Cathedral of Faras is credited to Paulos, Faras' fifth bishop and King Merkuiros of Dongola, who reigned from 697 CE and unified the three Christian kingdoms in Nubia. With the site now deep below Lake Nasser, all that remains of this once-great city are the art and artifacts rescued between 1961 and 1964. What initially appeared as a fortress was a prominent Christian cathedral with two side chapels. A team of Polish archaeologists excavated the Faras Cathedral from the Nubian desert before the region was submerged. The interior was decorated with many frescoes, considered the finest examples of early Christian art. The operation of saving the wall paintings began almost immediately after their discovery. Following an agreement between Poland and Sudan, the findings were split. The National Museum in Warsaw holds 67 paintings and other artifacts from the cathedral, and the remaining monuments are in the Sudan National Museum in Khartoum.

# DIARY OF THE MONTH

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This month's agenda is devoted to the ICOMOS Annual Conference, which will be held in Sydney, Australia, from 31 August to 09 September 2023. All the information on this important event is available on the conference website: <https://icomosga2023.org/fr>.

The plenary sessions of the 21st ICOMOS General Assembly will be held through one online-only session, and two hybrid sessions from Sydney, Australia. To register and participate in the online session, click on the link <https://arinex.eventsair.com/icomos-ga-2023/virtual/Site/Register>.



## LATEST OPPORTUNITIES

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- ICCROM & the National Cultural Heritage Administration of China (NCHA) organize the International Capacity Building Course on World Heritage Management. To know more and submit your application: <https://bit.ly/3s6Rki2>. Deadline: 3 September 2023
- Museum International will publish a second "Open edition" in 2024, open to proposals relating to all areas of the museum field. All abstracts received will be assessed for their relevance to the current cultural landscape, and selected through an anonymous peer review process. For further information: <https://tinyurl.com/2s39ne9x>. Deadline: 02 October 2023
- Are you an Ambassador with expertise working for Indigenous Communities? Want to be a part of the first One Young World Indigenous Council? Apply here: <https://wkf.ms/3OBOxGs>.

## MASTHEAD

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