

Abandoned Nubian villages in Upper Egypt: material culture in social anthropological field studies

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The following paper focuses on Material Culture of abandoned Nubian Villages in Upper Egypt dated to the turn of the last century, emphasizing their significance as unique witnesses and ephemeral memorials to the first historical Nubian exodus caused by the construction of the early British Dam. The special nature of this project resides in the close cooperation with the descendants of the village inhabitants and other Nubians still living in the surroundings of the affected area; this is an essential point for the overall success of the project. This case study aims to provide not only contributions to the scientific community in a variety of fields, but encourages also the Nubian community itself by strengthening the perspective on their unique heritage in combination with the scientific interest of outsiders.

Introduction

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the first efforts were made to control the irregular river stream of the Nile to improve and modernize agriculture in Egypt. One of these projects was the establishment of a dam at the first cataract near Aswan. The so-called British or Low Dam was begun in 1898 and was finished in 1902, creating a lake which flooded the Nile Valley for 225 kilometres and raised the water level 20 metres.¹ The first dam was intended to retain and regulate the flood waters of the Nile which would be released slowly to ensure the availability of irrigation water downstream.² The dam submerged the fertile river valley upstream and created a seasonal lake. The Nubians (Kenuzi group) living in the affected territories were forced to move further up the valley slopes or to migrate to new locations south or north of Aswan. As a result of two heightenings of the British Dam in the years 1907-1912³ and 1929-1934⁴ the

1. J. BALL, *A Description of the First or Aswan Cataract of the Nile*, Cairo 1907, p. 46.

2. W. WILLCOCKS, *The Nile Reservoir Dam at Assuan and after*, London 1901, pp. 1-4.

3. Official Report of Archaeological Salvage Campaigns in the Kenuz Area: G.A. REISNER, *The Archaeological Survey of Nubia, Report for 1907-1908*, Cairo 1910; C.M. FIRTH, *The Archaeological Survey of Nubia, Report for 1908-1909*, Cairo 1912.

4. Official Report of Salvage Campaigns further to the South: W.B. EMERY - L. KIRWAN, *The Excavations and Survey between Wadi es-Sebua and Adindan*, Cairo 1935; W.B. EMERY, *The Royal Tombs of Ballana and Qustul*, Cairo 1938.