

MAHMOUD EL-TAYEB

1957–2024

Mahmoud was born in Gedaref in Sudan. The first time he came to Poland was in 1975, on a scholarship from the International Union of Students, to begin his master's studies at the University of Warsaw. Under the supervision of Prof. Jadwiga Lipińska, he graduated from the Institute of Archaeology in 1982, defending his master's thesis "History of excavations in Sudanese Nubia, from A to X-Group period".

He then returned to Sudan, where he worked from 1983 to 1990 as an inspector in the Sudan Antiquities Service and participated in many archaeological projects. He specialized in the archaeology of Sudan, with particular interest in the Meroitic (300 BCE–350 CE), and post-Meroitic/Early Makurian (450–600 CE) periods.

In 1990–1995, he completed his doctoral studies at the University of Warsaw in Poland, earning a PhD degree with the dissertation on "The Genesis of Makurian Culture in light of archaeological sources", written under the supervision of Prof. Włodzimierz Godlewski.

From 1996 to 1999, Mahmoud worked as a curator at the Archaeological Museum in Gdańsk. In the academic year 1997–1998, he lectured on the history of Egypt and Nubia at the Faculty of History of the University of Gdańsk. From 1996 to 2009, he also worked at the University of Warsaw's Institute of Archaeology, his alma mater, teaching courses on Sudanese archaeology and Arabic for archaeologists. From 2009 to 2024, Mahmoud was a staff member of the Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology at the University of Warsaw. Under the aegis of the PCMA UW he headed the Research Centre in Khartoum from 2018 until his passing.

In 2013, he earned his habilitation based on the monograph "Burial Traditions in Nubian Early Makuria". In 2024, he was nominated to a professorial position at the University of Warsaw.

Mahmoud participated in archaeological missions in Sudan and Lebanon. For over 20 years (2004–

2023), he directed the "Early Makuria Research Project", his very own project designed to investigate an immensely important period of transition from Meroitic culture to the Christian kingdoms of Nubia. Within the frame of this project, he investigated cemeteries at El-Zuma, El-Detti, and Tanqasi in the Dongola Reach region in Sudan. He published articles, chapters in scientific publications, and monographs. Most recently, with a team of collaborators, he summed up the research at the elite tumuli cemetery from the 5th–6th centuries CE at Zuma with a three-volume people-oriented monograph "Early Makuria Research Project. El-Zuma Cemetery" published by Brill in 2020.

Prof. Mahmoud El-Tayeb was a member of several international scientific organizations, including the International Society for Nubian Studies, the Sudan Archaeological Research Society, the Society for Africanist Archaeologists, and the Sudanese Archaeological Society.

Having achieved so much in the world of Sudanese archaeology, he felt an obligation to share his knowledge outside the archaeological world. In Sudan, he would spend much time with local residents and students from local schools and universities; when in Poland, he never declined when invited to meet with Polish schoolchildren and students. For his students and collaborators in Sudan, he was always on the lookout for job openings and paths to further their archaeological careers, to connect those in need of archaeological skills with the experts that he knew could help to develop them, especially in academic writing.

He shared far more than just his knowledge. For years he was involved with local charities wherever he worked. Together with the Artibus Mundi Foundation, he helped the local communities in El-Zuma, El-Detti and Tanqasi by organizing collections of clothes, sponsoring outfits for local youth football



(photo: M. Rekłajtis/M. Momot).

teams and funding a playground for children at a school and kindergarten in El-Zuma.

Mahmoud was the gentlest of people, always smiling, always ready to help. Even in his later years, when illness troubled him, he always had time for everyone. He would say, "If you feel sick, say 'Sheikh Mahmoud' seven times, and you will surely get better". Sadly, in the end, it did not work for him...

He was from Sudan, but Poland had become a second home. His whole life he was torn between the two. He passed away on June 12, 2024. He is buried in the Tatar Muslim Cemetery in Warsaw.

Mahmoud never said "goodbye". It was always "See you later, alligator"...

EWA CZYŻEWSKA-ZALEWSKA



Mahmoud in 2013 (photo: U. Wicenciak-Núñez).

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