

# STEFAN JAKOBIELSKI

## 1937–2024

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Stefan Jakobielski passed away on 14 October 2024. His departure is symbolic for the international community of scholars dealing with the history and culture of the Middle Nile Valley. Stefan was the last surviving participant in the rescue excavations conducted by the Polish mission led by Kazimierz Michałowski in Faras in the frame of the Nubian campaign in the early 1960s. As a participant in the conferences in Essen in 1968 and Warsaw in 1972, he witnessed the establishment of the International Society of Nubian Studies, remaining an active member to the end of his days. For many years, he directed the research of the Polish archaeological mission in Dongola, the capital of the medieval kingdom of Makuria, bringing to light breathtaking monuments of Christian Nubian culture and thus contributing, to an extent that is difficult to overestimate, to enriching our knowledge about this forgotten episode in the history of northeastern Africa.

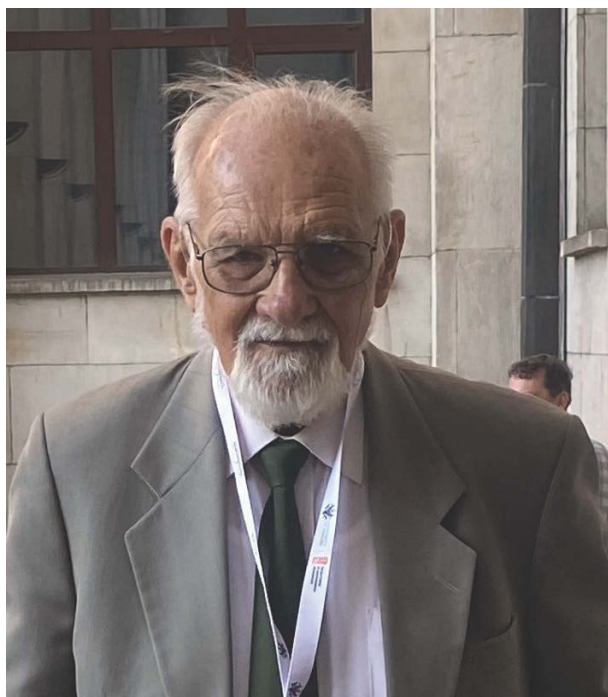
Stefan, whose name was inseparably connected with the archaeological work in Sudan, had no formal archaeological education. He was a linguist and philologist by heart and training. He wanted to study Arabic but began his studies at the University of Warsaw in classical philology, eventually ending up as a student in the Chair of Egyptology, where he obtained his master's degree based on a thesis on Coptic manuscripts kept in Poland. As an expert in oriental and classical languages, he was invited by Michałowski to Faras with the task of documenting, studying and publishing textual finds obtained during excavations. The result of this task was a doctoral dissertation defended in 1969 and published in 1972 as the third volume of the *Faras* series. Its subject was the reconstruction of the history of the Faras bishopric, based on a detailed analysis of Coptic

and Greek inscriptions found within the cathedral and the buildings surrounding it. For most of these inscriptions, Stefan's dissertation provided their *editio princeps*. The texts discussed by him included such important documents as the Greek and Coptic foundation inscriptions of the cathedral of bishop Paul, as well as the list of the bishops of Faras, providing, together with the epitaphs of the bishops, a framework for the chronology of Faras and the chronology of Christian Nubia in general.

Stefan never abandoned his youthful linguistic and philological passions, even though in the later years of his professional life he devoted himself to other issues. In Dongola, his favorite activity was reading and copying inscriptions, for which he had a talent, an excellent paleographic eye and an exceptionally skillful hand. A few years ago

he handed over an impressive set of inscriptions facsimiles from the monastery on Kom H in Dongola to the writer of these words for further study. He personally published two particularly important texts: the epitaph of Joseph, bishop of Aswan, who died in 668 or 670 in Dongola and was buried there (edited with Jacques van der Vliet) and an otherwise unknown creed, perhaps the baptismal symbol of the Makurian Church (together with Adam Łajtar).

Just as he never abandoned his interest in inscriptions, Stefan never abandoned his interest in Faras, where his nubiological path began. In the later years of his professional life, he was primarily interested in the paintings from the Faras cathedral, and in particular the issue of their chronology. He devoted his *magnum opus* to this topic, a wonderfully illustrated catalogue of all 153 wall paintings discovered in the cathedral in Faras during the research of the Polish mission. This monumental work, prepared in coop-



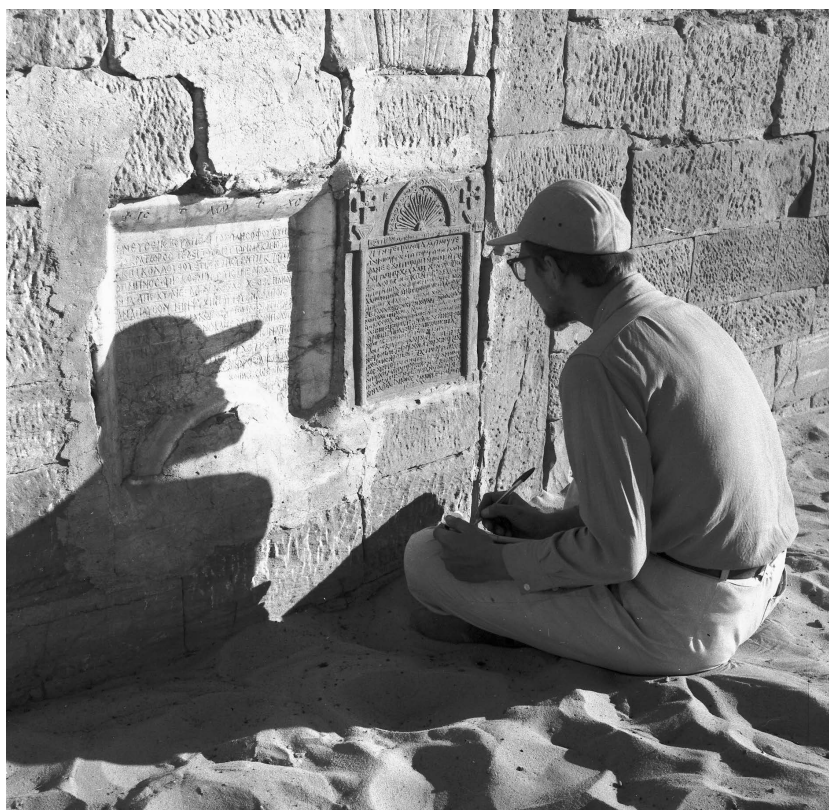
Stefan Jakobielski at the 15<sup>th</sup> International Conference for Nubian Studies in Warsaw, 2022 (photo: Agata Deptuła).

eration with Małgorzata Martens-Czarnecka, Bożena Mierzejewska, Magdalena Łaptaś and Bożena Rostkowska, will certainly be an indispensable tool and a reference point in studies on Christian Nubia for many years.

Stefan appeared in Dongola as an archaeologist/epigraphist in the second season of research of the Polish mission, in 1965/66. Starting from the third season of research in 1966/67, he directed the mission's work for forty subsequent years, until 2006, first as field director on behalf of Kazimierz Michałowski, and then, after Michałowski's death in 1981 as full-fledged director. Under his direction and largely with his participation, such important structures of the medieval town were unearthed as the Church of Granite Columns, the Cruciform Church, fragments of luxurious residential buildings in the northern suburbs, the monastery complex on Kom D, the church on Kom E (the so-called mosaic church), and the ceramic and metallurgical production sector. Research was also carried out in the structures that were still visible above ground: the mosque and the North-Western Church. The culmination of Stefan's archaeological activity in Dongola was the excavation of the monastery complex on Kom H, which began in 1989. The exceptionally well-preserved rooms of the complex, especially in its western part, provided a rich set of wall paintings, which in terms of technique, style, iconography and quality of workmanship can only be compared to the paintings in the Faras cathedral. In this way, as Stefan liked to emphasize, his scientific life had come full circle: from the paintings in Faras to the paintings in Dongola.

Stefan not only conducted field research and published its results, but was also active as an editor of journals and collective volumes devoted to the archaeology of Sudan. For many years, together with Henryk Paner, he edited *Gdańsk Archaeological Museum African Reports*, which published many important studies on archaeological activity in Sudan, including rescue excavations in the area of the fourth cataract.

A complete bibliography of Stefan Jakobielski up to 2019 may be found in *Études et travaux* 32 (2019),



Stefan Jakobielski in Faras (photo: Institute of Mediterranean and Oriental Cultures of the Polish Academy of Sciences).

pp. 13–22. A list of selected publications accompanies his wikipedia-biogram: [https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stefan\\_Jakobielski](https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stefan_Jakobielski)

As a person, Stefan was a warm and charming character. He was characterized by highly developed empathy and a readiness to offer his help to everybody who was in need. It was he who provided first medical assistance to the local population in Faras, and continued to do so for many years also in Dongola. He had a unique ability to establish contacts and shorten the distance between himself and those with whom he dealt. Everyone addressed him by his first name, which is rather unique in Polish, characterized by extensive forms of politeness. Directness in contacts was particularly well visible in Sudan: Stefan liked and knew how to talk to workers on the dig, residents of the village of Ghaddar neighboring the excavation site, and people he accidentally met in the suq. Thanks to this ability, as well as his good knowledge of Arabic and his patriarchal gray beard, he was a widely known figure in northern Sudan. He left a lasting mark there and in the hearts of the entire Nubiological community.

ADAM ŁAJTAR



## Gematon: Living and Dying in a Kushite Town on the Nile

Isabella Welsby-Sjöström 2023.

416 pages; 172 figures, 42 plates, 29 tables (colour throughout).

ISBN 9781803276786

This volume presents the pottery from Sudan Archaeological Research Society excavations at the site of Kawa, Northern Dongola Reach, between 1997 and 2018, fully illustrated with photographs and line drawings. This is the third in the series focusing on the fieldwork conducted at this important site. Volume III presents a comprehensive catalogue of the pottery found across the site, focusing on the forms, decoration, marks and fabric, as well as incorporating a discussion of the character of relevant areas. This includes a detailed discussion of the Napatan amphorae found in Building F1 and the cemetery remains at R18. The material at Kawa represents a unique collection of contextualised material invaluable for reconstructing activity patterns in this region during the Napatan and Meroitic periods and contributing towards an increased understanding of this time period.

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## Archaeology by the Fourth Nile Cataract

Derek A. Welsby (ed.), 2023.

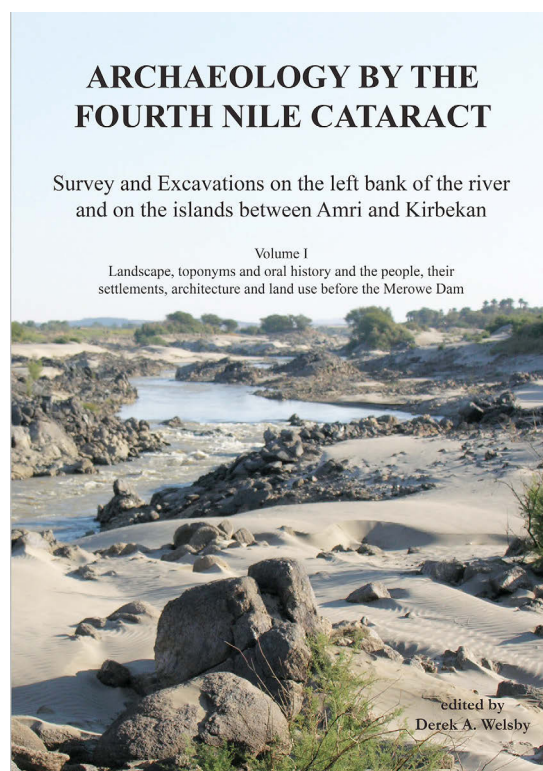
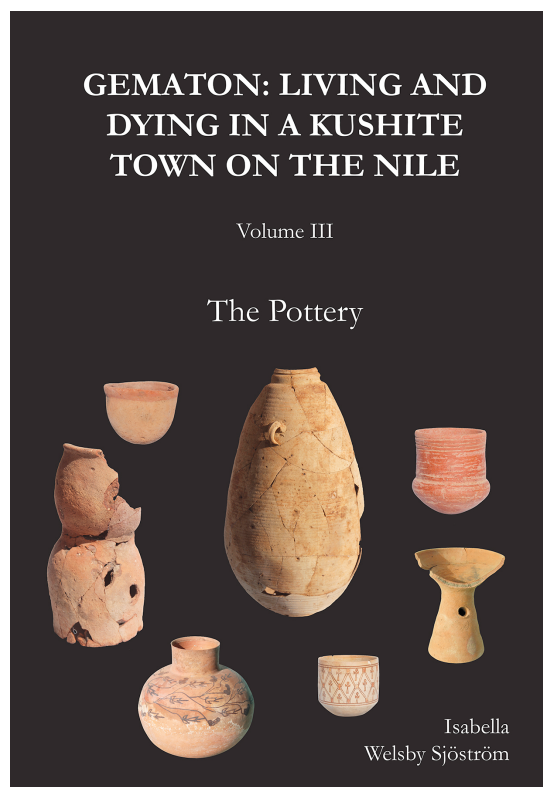
280 pages; 540 plates, 52 figures (colour throughout).

ISBN 9781803274959.

This volume is the first of several devoted to publishing the results of the Sudan Archaeological Research Society's surveys and excavations in the region of the Fourth Cataract. This, a component of the Merowe Dam Archaeological Salvage Project, was conducted along a 40km stretch of the river on the left bank and on the islands.

Following an introduction to the project, chapters focus on the palaeoenvironment in the concession area between Amri and Kirbeka, on the flora and toponyms, and on the folklore, agricultural practices, architecture and the life styles of the Manasir and Shaiya inhabitants immediately before the inundation of the region by the Merowe Dam.

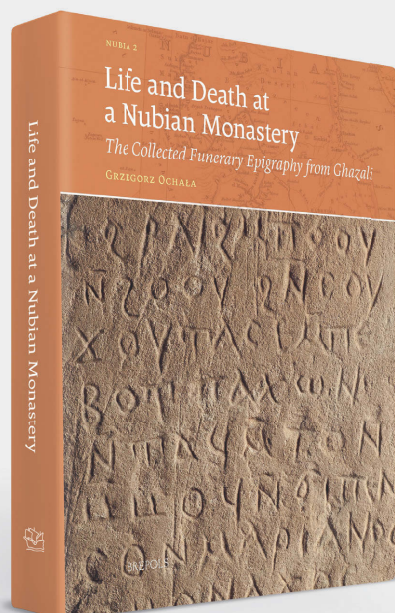
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The Christian monastery of Ghazali, located in Wadi Abu Dom in northern Sudan, is one of the most famous archaeological sites within the country. Built by the Makurians in the seventh century AD, it flourished until its abandonment in the thirteenth century, and its picturesque ruins became a popular tourist attraction in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. During the period of the monastery's activity, it was an important religious centre, a place where monks lived, worshipped, died, and left important information about their lives buried in the archaeological record.

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