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COMMUNITY ARCHAEOLOGY IN SUDAN: DISCOVERING MOGRAT ISLAND TOGETHER

The first season of the community archaeology component of the Mograt Island Archaeological Mission (MIAMi) focused on building relationships with local communities living in close proximity to excavation sites.¹ This involved formal and informal interviews, site visits and home visits with the aim of starting a dialogue on the interpretation of archaeological sites and their contemporary usage, as well as encouraging knowledge exchange between local residents and archaeologists. Collaboration in this form was felt to be essential to build mutual understanding of life on the island, past and present, for the benefit of all interested parties whether foreign archaeologists, local residents or other stakeholders, such as people migrating to the area for work or simply visiting the region.

One main outcome of the first season, in January 2014, beyond spreading awareness of the project, was to recognise and explore the requests of many of the local people for information about the island's history to be disseminated in printed form and made widely available. Currently, there is no access to archaeological, historical or cultural information about life on Mograt Island at local level and knowledge is mainly passed on and shared through oral traditions and family histories. To add additional insights to this existing knowledge, a short information booklet was developed, which answered many of the questions posed by local people during the first field season. As requested, the booklet made connections between archaeological perspectives on all eras of Mograt's history and the wider history of Sudan, and included many illustrations.

A draft version of this booklet was taken out for consultation with communities in the second field season, in January 2015, in order to finalise content for printing with the hope that the printed information will act as a springboard for further dialogue between archaeologists and community groups on Mograt in the future. Fieldwork therefore set out to consult school children, teachers and others living

on the island regarding the suitability and relevance of this forthcoming publication, "Discovering Mograt Island Together – لنكتشف معاً جزيرة مقرات". Targeted at school-age children (from 9–16 years), and written in English and Arabic, the booklet presented the work and aims of the Mograt Island Archaeological Mission. Alongside an explanation of the mission's purpose, the text and images provided general information on the long history of the island and wider Sudan, discussed archaeological methodology and the project's aims to develop further collaborations with communities on the island.

School children were chosen as the central target audience for the publication as the 2014 field season had revealed how curious this demographic is to know more about the MIAMi team and our work on their island. School-aged children also make up about one quarter of the population of the island (approximately 2,500 out of 10,000 people), and almost every family will have at least one child in school. As children are keen to share their learning and experiences with their families, working directly with this demographic will also mean that knowledge about the project will spread to members of the community of all generations. The information booklet will also be uploaded to the newly installed project website (www.mogratarchaeology.com) so that other stakeholders and interested members of the Sudanese public, as well as those beyond the country's borders, can gain access.

In terms of our focus groups with the children on Mograt, two primary schools, one in Kalasaikal (the school closest to the excavation of the multi-period burial site in al-Karmal²) and one in al-Hilla (where the excavation of a fortress began this season³), were visited (fig. 1). The author and the team's NCAM inspector, Hassan Mustafa Alkidir, spent one to two days in each school and met with students from class eight (12–13 year olds) from both schools to discuss the booklet (fig. 2). The author and Hassan Mustafa also visited the girls' secondary school in

1 Tully 2014. For a general overview of the mission see <http://www.mogratarchaeology.com>

2 See Weschenfelder, this volume.

3 See Rees, Lahitte and Näser, this volume.



Fig. 1: The author explaining the archaeological excavation of the fort at al-Hilla to the girls from Class 8 from al-Hilla primary school (photo: Gareth Rees).

Maqall (the commercial and transport hub of the island) and worked with the third classes (15–16 year olds), specialising in both the Science and Arts curricula. Unfortunately, due to time and logistics it was not possible to visit the boys' secondary school in Maqall. However, having worked with over 100 children from across the three schools, as well as talking to many children and families within their home environment, it became clear that certain key questions, themes and additions for the booklet were common to both boys and girls across the age range.

Suggestions included:

- Adding an English and Arabic vocabulary page so that archaeologists and locals can learn the most important words related to the project in both languages. Example words would include: archaeology, excavation, pottery, skeleton, heritage and so on.
- Add quotations from school children on what the island means to them and link the quotes with different aspects being discussed in the booklet. Example quotes include:
'It is good to have knowledge and to remember our ancestors so that other people will remember us' (quote from a Class 8 student at al-Hilla school).
'We need to know how archaeology tells us about how people lived, what their community and life was like, what was special about Mograt at different times and what links us together from the past, present and future' (quote from a student from Class 8 at Kalasaikal school).

'It is most important for us [the people of Mograt] to know about the objects, people and places of the past as this knowledge makes me feel good in my heart – to know how I am connected to other people' (quote from a Class 8 student at al-Hilla school).

'We want to be proud and to know about our place and the life different people lived here' (quote from a Class 3 student from the Salah al-Din Karrar girls' secondary school).

'It is a good thing when people come from outside to study our history and community' (quote from a Class 3 student from the Salah al-Din Karrar girls'

secondary school).

'We used to think archaeologists just came for gold – this is what everyone thinks – and we didn't really know anything about the long history of Mograt. We need to tell everyone what archaeology is about and about our history as most people don't realise and don't learn about it' (quote from a Class 8 student from Kalasaikal school).

'We hope that Mograt will be famous if we discover archaeological sites and that we will tell the world about Mograt' (quote from a Class 3 student from the Salah al-Din Karrar girls' secondary school).

'It is good for us [the people of Mograt and the archaeologists] to work together as many people search for answers here, but there are no resources and people don't know where to go to find out more' (quote from a Class 3 student from the Salah al-Din Karrar girls' secondary school).

'It is important to have information about the life and community on Mograt today so that others in the future will be interested and want to research more and to add more to the story of the island – our story' (quote from a Class 8 student at al-Hilla school).

'People in the future need to know about the past and they need to know about us – we are the next part of the story' (quote from a Class 3 student from the Salah al-Din Karrar girls' secondary school).

- Add a map of Mograt in English and Arabic as many people, especially school-aged children, do not get the opportunity to explore much of the island and they do not have many visual resources



to help them understand the island's shape and layout.

- Explain the meaning of the name of the island – 'Mograt'.⁴
- Add more detailed information about the techniques and reasons behind environmental archaeology (e.g. were there different animals on the island in the past, what do the remains tell us about the land, how did the remains survive in the ground?), human osteology (e.g. how do we know the age and sex of skeletons?) and excavation in general (e.g. how do we know/decide where to dig, why don't we excavate everywhere – i.e. why some villages have not seen any archaeologists, how do we work, how do we know how old something is, why do we cover everything up again at the end/backfill?).
- Explain how we know which artefacts are from different times and exactly what happens to the artefacts that we find; what do we use them for, where do they go, who studies them, where do they end up after our work has finished?
- Clarify our motivation for doing archaeological work on Mograt. Enhancing our knowledge of the history of Sudan therefore needs to be explained as a motivation.
- Help the community make connections with the past by showing continuity and change on the island, how there are layers of history which overlap, how different people come and go, how sites are reused and how parts of the island's history are incorporated into the modern fabric of the island, e.g. remains (human and artefact) in people's gardens or village surroundings, as markers in the landscape, reused stone in later buildings etc.
- Add more detail to photo captions, e.g. if a photograph shows a piece of pottery from Mograt, say exactly where on the island it came from.
- Explain what will happen to all the information that we instead of? Will the world know about Mograt?
- Explain whether there is archaeology in other places in the world, e.g. in Europe, and help peo-



Fig. 2: Class 8 from Kalasaikal primary school (photo: Gemma Tully).

ple understand why we come to Mograt if we have archaeology in our own countries.

- Explain what people should do if they find old things/places on the island, or if they have items from their family history, or that have been found in the past, that they would like to know more about.

With these ideas in mind, "Discovering Mograt Island Together – لنكتشف معاً جزيرة مقرات" was then rewritten after the end of the field season and expanded and edited to incorporate local suggestions and new information from the most recent season's fieldwork in both English and Arabic.⁵ The resulting book, the first of its kind in terms of a collaborative process in Sudan, will be taken to Mograt in its final format during the 2015–2016 field season. Around 1000 copies will be distributed through the school network meaning that every family on the island will have access to information on the project and, should they choose, will be able to engage further with the mission either through the MIAMi website (www.mogratarchaeology.com), or by getting in touch directly with the MIAMi team during the field season.

The team hope that the sharing of knowledge and the invitation to get more involved with the archaeological work, as promoted through the book and general community engagement throughout the project, will enhance the experience of MIAMi for both local communities and the archaeologists. On a larger scale, the team are also hopeful that the publication and the inclusive collaborative method-

⁴ From Old Nubian, meaning 'dog island' because of the island's shape.

⁵ Tully and Näser 2015.



ology developed by the MIAMi project will challenge traditional means of presenting archaeological knowledge and try to find new ground for dialogue which leads from the questions and perspectives of local people, rather than from the expectations of the archaeological team, at every stage of the research process. This approach to collaboration is essential to balance power relations within archaeological research between all parties with a vested interest in sites, monuments or cultural practices through equal access to, and recognition of, the full range of narratives which surround all forms of heritage and its contemporary use. Thus, it is only when collaborative, community-centred archaeology becomes the norm – building mutual understanding and respect between archaeologists, residents and other stakeholders – that the lingering colonial legacy of archaeological work in Sudan and other developing nations will finally be challenged and a more socially conscious, culturally integrated approach to research can begin to take its place.

werden. Die Mitarbeiterinnen des Community Archaeology-Projekts hoffen, dass dieses Vorhaben Interesse an und Verständnis für unterschiedliche Sichtweisen auf Mograt und sein archäologisches Erbe für alle Beteiligten – die Bewohner der Insel, Archäologen, Besucher sowie die sudanesisch und die internationale Öffentlichkeit – steigern wird. Das Projekt versteht sich außerdem als Beitrag zur Entwicklung inklusiver Forschungs- und Publikationsstrategien und hofft, die Überwindung kolonialer Vermächtnisse in der Sudanarchäologie durch die Etablierung sozial verantwortlicher und kulturell integrierter Zugänge zu archäologischer Forschung zu unterstützen.

REFERENCES

- Tully, G. (2014): Community archaeology on Mograt Island: Sharing spaces, understanding sites, *MittSAG. Der antike Sudan* 25: 155–160.
- Tully, G. and C. Näser (2015): *Discovering Mograt Island Together – لنكتشف معاً جزيرة مقرات*. Berlin.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Der Beitrag stellt das aktuelle Vorhaben des Community Archaeology-Projekts der Mograt Island Archaeological Mission sowie Inhalte und Ergebnisse der Feldkampagne im Januar 2015 vor. Ziel des Feldaufenthalts war die Diskussion eines ersten Entwurfs der Publikation „Discovering Mograt Island Together – لنكتشف معاً جزيرة مقرات“ in Fokusgruppen mit insgesamt zirka 100 Schülern an drei Schulen in Kalasaikal, al-Hilla und Maqall. Die Anregungen aus dieser kollaborativen Auseinandersetzung mit den Inhalten und dem Format der Publikation sind nach Abschluss der Feldkampagne in die Erstellung einer stark erweiterten Fassung (Tully und Näser 2015) eingeflossen. Exemplare des daraus entstandenen, zweisprachig englischen und arabischen Buchs sollen in der kommenden Feldkampagne an alle Schüler auf Mograt verteilt werden, um so den Weg in alle Haushalte der Insel zu finden. Das Buch soll außerdem als Download auf der neuen Webseite des Projekts (www.mogratarchaeology.com) bereitgestellt