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MUSEUMS IN THE SUDAN: HISTORY, CURRENT SITUATION AND CHALLENGES

INTRODUCTION

This paper addresses the history of museums in the Sudan, their current situation and the challenges they face as well as their development. Museums are institutions of conservation, restoration, research, display and education. As such, Museums of the Sudan are an interesting topic and deserve extensive investigation, despite data being very limited. The available literature on the history of these museums is rather basic and often even lacks the most elementary key data, such as the year of foundation or closure of the museum.

This research aims to address this gap in shedding some light on Sudanese museums with a focus on archaeological, ethnographic and natural history collections, showing that the museums can act as cultural tools, both to reinforce our national unity and to promote understanding and awareness of Sudan's ancient cultures in the Sudan and abroad. The latter would help to promote links with parallel international institutions, such as other museums in Africa and beyond. The main objectives of the study are to draw attention to Sudanese museums and their important role in education, social studies, society, research, etc., and to put forward suggestions for developing the museums in Sudan from the current situation and challenges.

A HISTORY OF MUSEUMS IN THE SUDAN

Museums in Khartoum

Museums are distributed geographically in several places in Sudan, but especially in Khartoum State, including the capital and largest city in Sudan, which is the centre of business, services and attractions. On the basis of their location Museums in Sudan can be subdivided into two groups in respect to their proximity to the nation's capital: the museums in Khartoum and regional museums.

The first evidence for establishing museums in Sudan dates back to the early part of the Mah-

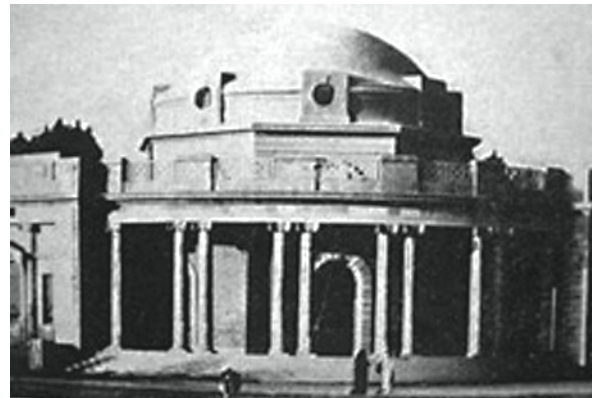
dia period (1881 -1885). Father Joseph Ohrwalder mentions in the book "Ten years captivity in the Mahdi's camp" some details about a small museum called "Beit Alantikat" which included some ethnographic and historic tools belonging to the Ababda and Masalit tribes from Darfur, in addition to some objects from Egypt and Ethiopia such as the crown of King Johannes (Wingate: 1892).



Pl. 1: First museum at the University of Khartoum

A second piece of evidence comes from Lord Cromer, one of the senior advocates of Westernization and colonists in the Islamic world, who cited in a report 1906 that in 1903 a museum had been established at the medical unit at Khartoum Bahry before transferring to Gordon College (the present University of Khartoum), to the western wing of the current library, and then to the office of the vice chancellor (pl. 1).¹ This museum contained, among other things, some economic and financial artifacts that make it

1 All tables and plates taken and made by researcher unless otherwise stated.



Pl. 2: Faculty of Medicine Museum 1932 (University of Khartoum)

clear that he refers to the “Economic and Financial Museum” which was included within the Wellcome Tropical Research Laboratories, founded at Gordon College in 1902 (Report 1906: 1).

In the British colonial era J.W. Crowfoot, the Director of Education, and the first official Acting Conservator of Antiquities, for twenty years visited the archaeological sites in conjunction with some schools. He began the work of receiving and registering the increasing number of archaeological objects discovered by chance to be displayed at the suggested museum. He also formulated the first Antiquities Ordinance of 1905.

The museum consisted of a small single room on the premises of Gordon College in Khartoum; also

another room was allocated in the Wellcome laboratories to display samples of tropical diseases. The museums the ‘Economic and Financial Museum’ as well as the one room by the library, which held the objects from Bahry were combined under the name of the “Museum of the Sudan Government” under supervision of a “Museums Committee”. (Report 1910: 29).

Sir Reginald Wingate established a Museum of Antiquities in Gordon College in 1905 and objects of interest gradually came into it and displayed as core of the museum. (Budge 1907: 501).

During the early years of the colonial era a large number of government employees contributed to the collection of ethnographic materials, especially



Pl. 3: Ethnographic Museum (Khartoum)



Pl. 4: The National Museum of the Sudan



Pl. 5: The first regional museum (Merowe 1922)

among the Nilotic and Zandi tribes in southern Sudan. These activities found encouragement by the senior staff of the British administration. The researchers in the Wellcome laboratories contributed significantly to the collection of ethnographic material. Over time, a large number of ethnographic pieces were collected, such as surgical and medical equipment displayed at the Faculty of Medicine Museum 1932, the heads of bayonets, and wooden headrests (pl. 2). Samples were collected for the first museum of Natural History, too, where various types of insect and examples of plants and birds were stored (Report 1915: 13).

In 1930 the first Sudanese staff arranged the display in new cases, including historic and ethnographic tools, and opened the museum to the public in 1932. In 1934 the museum was designated as the Museum of Khartoum, as it was opened to the public (Report 1944: 14). (pl. 3).

When Anthony Arkell became the first director of the Antiquities Authority in Sudan in 1938, the Director of Khartoum province suggested to the City Planning Committee to allocate a portion from the site of the River Hospital (The Current Building of the Ministry of Health in Khartoum) for the new museum. But the government did not provide funds for the project after the end of World War II, due to lack of funds and economic difficulties.

After the signing of the Convention on the Waters of the Nile between Egypt and Sudan in 1959, and

Sudan's consent to the establishment of the High Dam, it was necessary to accelerate the establishment of the National Museum of Sudan to serve as the headquarters for the collection and display of the Sudanese antiquities. In 1965 the new National Museum was founded in el Mugran area. The double-storied building was constructed with the store and the administration annex for preparing the material for the Museum. It was established as the National Museum of Sudan in 1971. It contains the largest and most important archaeological collection in the Sudan (References needed on the history of this museum) (pl. 4).

Regional museums

The first regional museum was founded in Merowe in 1922. The British employees of the museum collected a small group of artifacts found in scattered sites in the territory of the North Sudan, and saved them in a house adjacent to the presidency of the directorate in the city of Merowe (Report 1925: 10-16). In 1910 Peter Drummond, air force officer in Sudan (1894-1945), made an inventory and a classification of the collection and prepared its catalogue. Eventually, in 1924-1926, the Museum of Merowe was designed to display the granite statues and sarcophagi found by George Reisner in the excavations of Barkal and Nuri (pl. 5).



Pl. 6: Natural History Museum (1922 Madani) (1946 Khartoum)

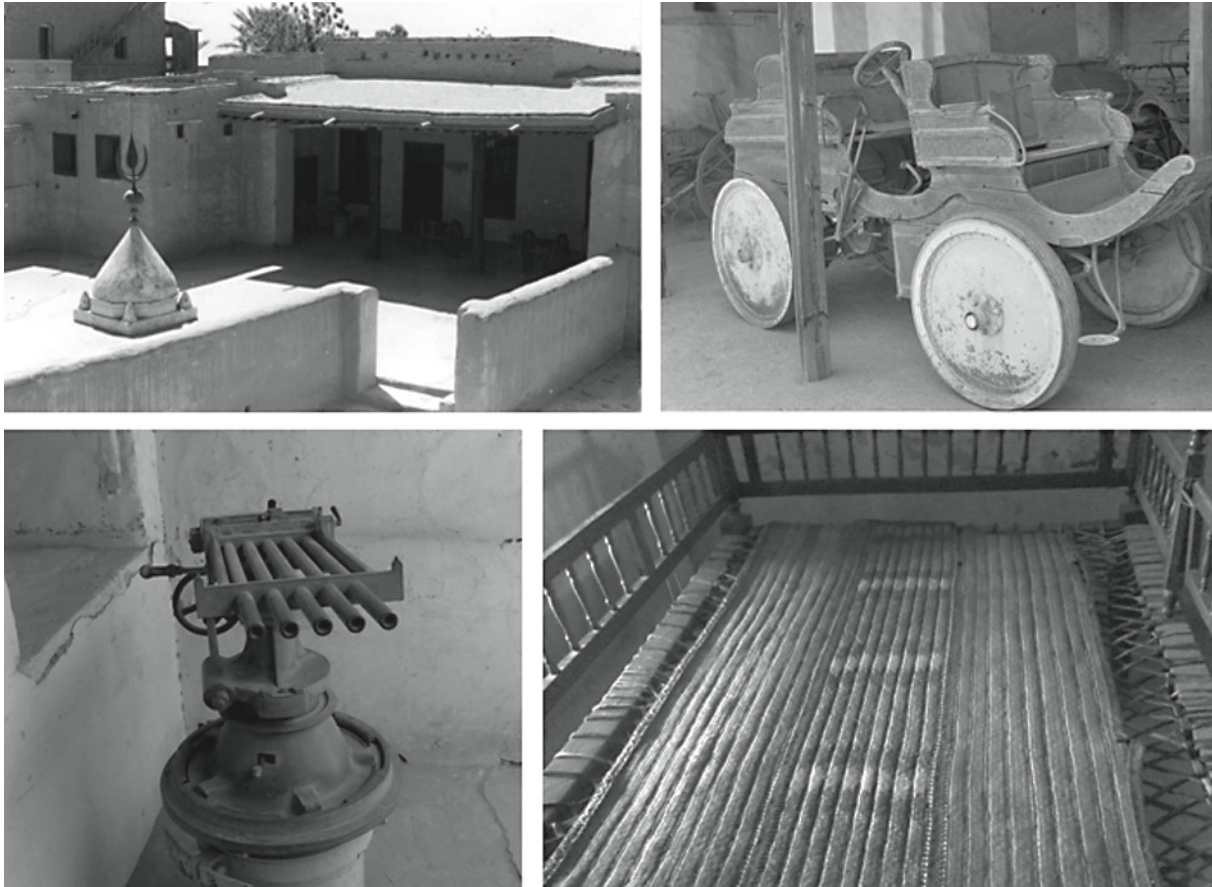
Starting from 1923 branches of the Khartoum museums were established in the major cities in Sudan. For instance, a branch of the Museum of Natural History in the Agricultural Research Unit in Wad Madani included a collection of insects representing agricultural pests or causative diseases of crops (pl. 6).

During the period 1927-1931 a building for the Museum of Wadi Halfa was established on a site overlooking the Nile. One of the primary considerations in the construction of the museum was that Wadi Halfa had become an important tourist attraction in the late twenties of the last century (Report 1944: 9).

In 1928 James Bramble, Inspector of Omdurman centre, began to transform the Khalifa Abdullah House into a historical museum. For this purpose, the historical exhibits were transferred from Gordon College to the Khalifa House in 1931. More exhibits were added when some British donated other material obtained by purchase from the property of the Mahdist State (pl. 7). The Governor of Port Sudan established a small ethnographic museum in Suakin in 1938, from where a limited number of exhibits

were transferred to the Museum of Khartoum. He also founded the Museum of Natural History in Port Sudan in 1940 in a house loaned by the governor of Khartoum which offered mainly a display of birds from the Red Sea area (Report 1944: 9).

Many states are interested in the establishment of museums in Sudan and, various further museums were founded, such as environmental museums, science museums as well as specialized museums, such as the Women's Museum and the Museum of Geology. Museums were also located within the institutions of higher education such as the Museum of Ahfad University for women, Wadi El Nil University Museum and others (pl. 8) In addition to the proposed museums (tab. 1), the museums in Sudan currently number about forty museums in all. There are also a number of regional museums at the important archaeological sites such as Jabel Barkal (opened in 1976), Kerma (opened in 2008), and Musawwarat (under reconstruction). Others are on-site or regional museums (pl. 9). Additionally, there are also regional and specialized museums which are owned by individuals, such as the



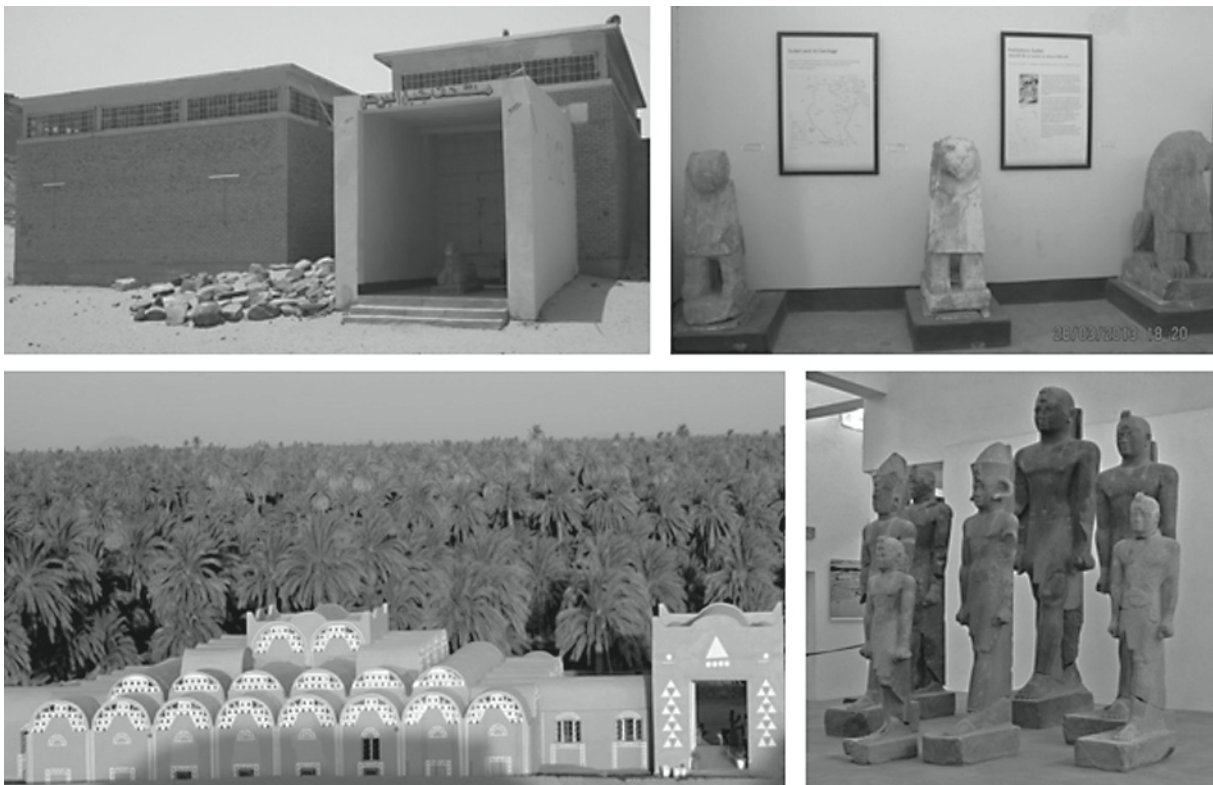
Pl. 7: Khalifa house museum

• University of Khartoum Museum	(Khartoum)
• Museum of Currency in Bank of Sudan	(Khartoum)
• Rail Way Museum	(Khartoum)
• Police Museum	(Khartoum)
• Maritime Museum	(Port Sudan)
• Museum of Trabil	(Begrawia)
• Berber Museum	(Berber)
• Museum of West Darfur (Sultan Bahar el Din)	(Geneina)
• Sennar Museum	(Sennar)
• Gezira Aba Museum	(Aba Island)
• Naqaa Museum	(Naqaa)
• Custom Museum	(Khartoum)
• Gadaref Museum	(Gadaref)

Tab. 1: Future museums (Abdelrahman 2016)



Pl. 8: Regional museum (Ahfad University museum and Wadi ElNeel University museum)



Pl. 9: Jebel Barkal Museum (above), and Kerma Museum (bottom)



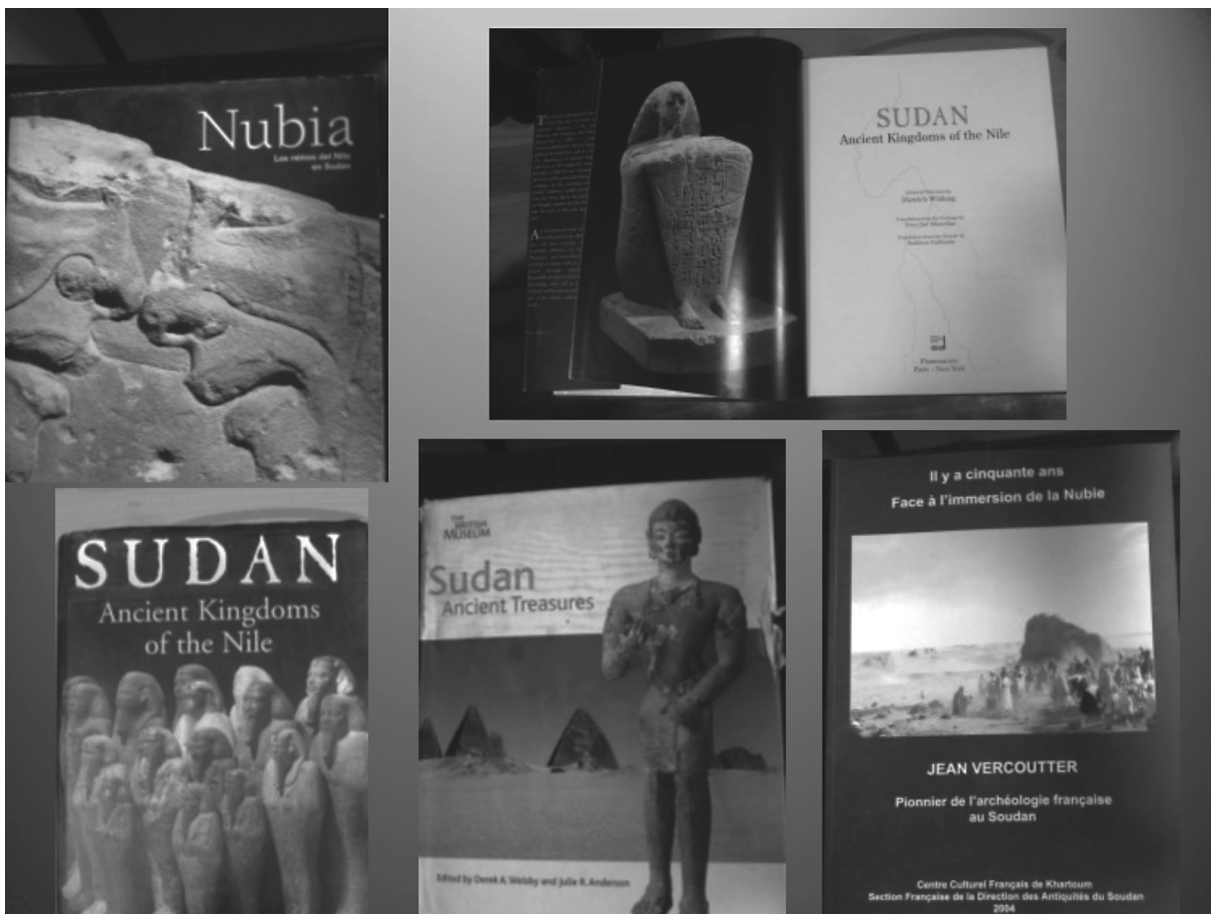
artist Ibrahim Hejazi Museum, who collected and displayed ethnographic items, and some pictures of cultural activities in Sudan.

One way of understanding the role of museum collections in education and their relation to social and political developments in Sudan is by analyzing visitor statistics of museums during different periods. The records of statistics began in 1932 in Sudan. The reports written by British administrators in Sudan about the museums classified visitors

to museums in Khartoum generally into two groups: the general public and students, then added a third category of soldiers after the World War II, based on records of ticket sales. These statistics also refer to social transformations; for instance Sudanese women have begun visiting museums for the first time in 1943 (tab. 2). Now the people who visit the museums are foreigners, local people, school classes, and students as the museums play a vital role in national identity, awareness and education in Sudan.

Year	Natural Museum	History	Ethnographic Museum	Archaeology Museum	Khalifa House	Merowe Museum
1922	148					
1923	263					
1924	232					
1925	226					
1926	355					
1927	381					
1928	524					
1929	394				977	
1930	262					
1931	394					
1932	167		179		725	
1933	786		668		581	
1934	571		442		708	
1935	631		609		776	
1936	764		793		793	
1937	1124		465		915	
1938	1206		469		1026	
1939	1424		553		977	
1940	795		1387		1530	
1941	Closed		1844		2934	
1942	Closed		1904		2952	
1943	Closed		2377		2210	
1944	Closed		2960		2108	
1945	Closed		3387		1997	
1946	Closed		4288		5324	
1947	2452		3631		4404	
1948	2466		Closed	194	7106	
1949	3613		Closed	3378	5945	65>
51 1950	6214		Closed	3227	4695	Not available
52 1951	15899		Closed	14148	37919	Not available
53 1952	22110		Closed	23356	49328	Not available
54 1953	79530		Closed	76534	81129	1949
55 1954	60665		Closed	61696	Not available	2075
56 1955	78107		Closed	59324	98655	1927
57 1956	Not available		15270	53543	81054	1840
58 1957	Not available		30135	56487	87753	3095
Year	Visitors	Schools	Students	Supervisors	Delegations	Notes
2013	30895	444	24078	1727	1385	The number of visitors according to the situation in Sudan, holidays and the month of Ramadan, etc...
2014	40935	437	23455	1880	930	The number of visitors according to holydays.
2015	16050	120	6400	640	370	The calculation till February 2016

Tab. 2: The Number of visitors to the Museums from 1922 to 1957/58 and to the Sudan National Museums from 2013 to 2015 (Su'da: 1997, and Abdelrahman 2016)



Pl. 10: The Exhibitions of the Sudan National Museum

MUSEUMS AND TEMPORARY EXHIBITIONS

There were many exhibitions carried out by the Sudan National Museum in Khartoum and several cities in Sudan. Beside internal exhibitions for the promotion of the ancient Sudanese civilizations and culture, the Sudan National Museum participated in several international exhibitions abroad like in Germany the exhibition of Sudan – Kingdoms of the Nile in 1996, the gallery of Durham in the UK in 2004, Monaco exhibition in France in 2004, at the British museum in the UK in 2004, the exhibition in United Arab Emirates about Treasures from Sudan and the history of 10 thousand years of ancient kingdoms in 2008, the exhibition of the Sudanese civilizations ('Meroe...') at the Louvre museum in Paris, France in 2010, and the Prague exhibition in 2014 etc. (pl. 10). These exhibitions helped to strengthen public diplomacy between the Sudanese and the people from abroad. They also helped in the promotion of tourism and cultural contribution to increase the number of tourists visiting the archaeological sites in the Sudan (Ali 2016:1-6).

THE CURRENT SITUATION

The National museum of Sudan and other regional museum now seem to be store rooms, despite the great number of the finds from the archaeological surveys and excavations, and the historic and ethnographic material from the beginning of early 19th century up to now. Very little museological attention has been given to this vast collection, mainly because museum theories, methods and techniques such as data base for the Sudanese museums, guide book for regional museums, and others have not been sufficiently applied yet (pl. 11).

The funds allocated for the museums are usually insufficient as the approved budget is far less than the proposed one. This is one of the main causes of retarding the museums activities. In addition, the high rate of inflation makes the approved budget meaningless (tab. 3).

The museums were under the control of the Ministry of Education from 1989 -2015. Since then, they have been shifted from ministry to ministry: the museums and antiquities belonged to the Authority of Antiquities and Museums, then the Ministry of



Pl. 11: The storage at the Sudan National Museum 2015

Year	Proposed	Approved	Fund for Temporary Exhibition
1993	5,000.000	300,000	60,000
1994	9,000.000	550.000	80,000
1995	10,000.000	700,000	100,000
1996	12,000.000	800,000	120,000
1997	160,000.000	500,000	500.000
2001	500.000.000	600.000	The fund granted from abroad for many exhibitions
2013	The fund proposed from Qatar state for the Islamic hall at the National Museum but not approved until December 2016		

Tab. 3: The Proposed and Approved Funds for Museums 1993 – 1997 and 2013 (Su'da 1997; Abdelrahman 2016)

Culture, the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports, the Ministry of Environment and Tourism, the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, the Ministry of Culture and Information, and finally, the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities and Wildlife. Sometimes they have been under a ministry for less than a year, which does not help in developing an integrated plan for the museums.

At all times the allocated budget was too small to achieve many of the museums' needs, beside the lack of staff both in quantity and qualification. Regarding the situation of the staff, many leave after one or two years due to the lack of training and job satisfaction, this includes both the professionals and the auxiliary staff (tab. 4).

The National Museum of Sudan in Khartoum and the Archaeological Museum of Jebel Barkal were substantially renovated with funds, to the extent of US\$ 230,000, provided under the UNESCO pro-

gram for the Preservation of Endangered Movable Cultural Properties and Museum Development. The project has been implemented over a period of several years from October 2003 involving conserving, cataloguing, labeling and presenting the exhibits, creating digital records of all collections and improving security measures (UNESCO: 2006). However, the plans have not been completed up to now.

The major problems of the museums in Sudan are the staff's lack of experience until 2013, funding, administrative problems and the ignorance of Sudanese about the importance of their ancient history.

Further problems are the following:

The Sudan National Museum is not responsible for some archaeological missions that work in the field, which have independent administration and are often not familiar with the idea of including the needs of museums for putting material on display.



Year	Number of Museum Curators	Number of Museum Technicians	Number of Museum Attendants
1976	14	10	132
1986	8	7	86
1996	6	6	32
1997	7	6	30
2001	10	3	300
2012	9	2	396

Tab. 4: Number of Museums staff 1976 – 1997 and 2001, 2012, 2016 (Su’da 1997; Abdelrahman 2016)

Therefore, the process of fieldwork and museum work must be integrated. These missions are used to prepare the fund for specific purposes, and therefore it is not possible to force them to collect material for the museum. The best way in this case that the museums secretariats should organize a special mission to collect what they need exactly for display in the museums.

There are too few current museum guides for visitors to understand the exhibits and their location within the context of the overall history of Sudan. Up to 2011 the educational role of the museums was limited to the routine museum tours offered to schools and the public in general. The first guide to museum exhibits was prepared by Frank Addison nearly eighty years ago when the archaeological finds occupied a single room at Gordon College. For the National Museum, guidebooks were only recently published: a bilingual Arabic-English book by Abdelrahman Ali Mohamed and Julie Anderson as well as one by the Section française de la direction des antiquités du Soudan (SFDAS) in French, English and Arabic. The guidebooks focus on the history of the Sudan and provide a description of the museum collections. While this is a good development, we need to further focus on the visitors who are using the museums asking what experiences these people seek and have when visiting the museums. What is provided for the visitor? What is the background knowledge of the visitors? How can they relate to the museums displays (e.g. via a guide book or interactive displays or an audio guide or films or a combination of these)? Often, the displays in Sudanese museums are rather poor and – although

there are many exciting objects – there are actually few exciting stories told about these objects (and the history behind them).

CURRENT PROJECTS AT THE MUSEUMS

- The Authority for Antiquities and Museums tries to complete a joint project in association with UNESCO that has led to a widespread and noticeable improvement in the museum environment. One of the objectives of this work relates to the importance of using digital technology. It has been started to create a museum site on the World Wide Web with the help of the British Museum suggested to start by the year 2007. However, this has not yet been achieved until mid of May 2015.

- There is also an attempt to improve the current situation of the Sudan National Museum by trying to add a hall of recent history including Islamic monuments, manuscripts, books, art and heritage. This project is nearly completed. There is also a new collaboration with the Louvre and the store rooms of the National Museum but still they haven’t complete re-organized it according to my last visit to the store room in August 2016.

The challenges

To enhance the role of museums in Sudan, the following approaches should be considered:

1. Exploring ways based on scientifically proved methods in which museums can reach beyond



- their traditional limitations to enhance their contribution to Sudanese society, to reinforce national unity and to establish international links.
2. Enhancing displays, mounting more special exhibitions, and improving storage, documentation and publications. There is too little money for education and culture but it is a general problem of cultural engagement in all countries.
 3. Development of media resources and capacity. This includes a) Resources for use in museums, such as guidebooks and audio-visual presentation. b) Resources for distribution via television, internet for data base and system record, DVDs and films.
 4. Children's educational programs to promote students' awareness of the importance of national heritage as the Ministry of Education agreed in 2013 to use the museums as educational and cultural centers.
 5. Strengthen the security of museums as some of the objects were stolen several time in last few years specially form the Archaeological sites and regional museum.

CONCLUSION

Despite that there are many museums in Sudan; they do not play their full role in society, such as culture, education, etc... There must be an independent administration of museums like a ministry of Archaeology and museums, which can develop a plan for the advancement of Sudanese museums in order to perform their function so as to enable researchers to gain access to materials, to encourage educational learning for students in the universities and other institutions, to enable post-graduate students and university staff and researchers to conduct research, to promote tourism by organizing exhibitions, and to promote the exchange of exhibitions between international Institutions. The fundamental question remains what is the cultural policy that should be followed to preserve and keep the material culture of Sudan? This is the central issue, which will remain a matter of discussion for some time to come. As actual efforts are often more disparate than need be, it would seem that a strongly collaborative approach in which NCAM (National Corporation for Antiquities and Museums), academic institutions, and NGO's such as SAS (Sudan Archaeological Society) work together closely, would be most beneficial and productive .

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ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Museen im Sudan sind ein Bereich, der dringender Aufmerksamkeit bedarf. Diese Aufmerksamkeit muss sich in kurz- und langfristigen Plänen niederschlagen. Diese Pläne wiederum müssen auf einer intensiven Voruntersuchung und laufender Begutachtung basieren. Dieser Artikel ist ein Versuch, Licht auf die Museen im Sudan zu werfen und ihre derzeitige Situation zu evaluieren.

Diese Studie beginnt mit einem Überblick über die früheren Perioden der Museen im Sudan. Museen spielen ihre Rolle aus verschiedenen Gründen nicht aus, da ihnen zu wenig Beachtung von Seiten der Regierung geschenkt wird. Außerdem sind die im Museum Angestellten zu wenig ausgebildet. Doch es ist zu hoffen, dass den Museen im Sudan in Zukunft mehr Aufmerksamkeit geschenkt wird, damit sie ihre volle Wirkung entfalten können.