

The Deficiency of Archaeological Methodology in Understanding the Sudanese Civilization: Napatan Civilization as A Case Study

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1. Introduction:

Archaeology emerged in the Western World about a century and a half ago, and developed away from the African sphere. Thus, in Sudan at the time that archaeology began to be taught as a discipline in universities, there was no official educational institutions, except the 'Khalwas' –(Quranic Teaching schools), to care for leaving. The role of these 'Khalwas' was confined o memorizing the Holy Quran, and; teaching religious studies and Arabic language. So, there was an apparent deficiency in teaching other disciplines, despite the major role played by 'Khalwas'! All this is well know to historians and researchers. Hence there would be no need to expand about it.

2. The Development of Archaeology:

Archaeology is a pre-nineteenth century development. In the last decades of the 19th century. It became known as (Professional Archaeology). By 1880, there occurred several social and political changes in Europe, which were naturally reflected on archaeology. The said reflection took the form of weaker confidence in the previous archaeological studies. Accordingly, a real desire to develop this discipline came to light (Tigger, 1982: 223). The starting point was that the archaeological studies originally focused on the glorifying of the human faculties to innovate. But this has changed after sociologists brought above a supposition the man, by his nature is conservative and traditional in his outlook, in relation to human behaviour. This behaviour is governed by the biological instinct, especially with regard to ethnic groups. Sidewise, a dominated in that there are basic talents

and gifts, which are found in some ethnic groups, and not others. These have paved the way for the ethnic beliefs to delve into archaeology when the nations of variations in human faculties and capabilities emerged; together with the idea of their exploitation in the evolutionary and development process.

Meanwhile, these developments were also reflected in a new direction in archaeology; which is known as "Ethnic prehistory" (Trigger, 1982:223; Fagan, 1988:60, Ali Osman, 1992: 225). Thus, instead of interpreting the archaeological development, they were explained as developments of the ethnic groups. Therefore, this clearly reflected the dominance of the anthropologists over the spheres of archaeology. This period was followed by appearance of some archaeologists who invented a new concept about the archaeological knowledge. They viewed that the independent and parallel development in the previous periods is not linked to ethnic unity.

This concept emerged as a result of the development of the theory of migration and diffusions theories.

The archaeologist endeavored, through these two theories, to know the cultural changes in the ancient societies. Some, like the sermon archaeologist (Gustaf Kossina) gave recognition to both concepts. He saw that population mobility and the mixing of people together are the prime movers of cultural changes. Yet, (Flinder Petrie) returned all cultural changes to the ethnic diversity amongst the population of the ancient world. And yet, on another side, the proponents of the diffusionist theory believes that the ability of the people to absorb and innovate, stems from their neighbourhood. So, (Elliot Smith), who studied human skeletons during the campaign as sawing the Nubian archaeological objects and relics in 1911, went as far as saying that the Nile valley is the cradle of all civilizations; then they were diffused to all other parts of the world. The centre of civilization was assumed to be the pheronic Egypt (Fagan, 1988:62). But, as a matter of fact the old developments in archaeology have held fast of the concept of non-affection with a cultural vision, in a wider sense, as a mechanism to know the human characteristic and advantages. That means, simply, that the history of any nation may be interpreted independent of culture as a whole.

3. The Archaeological Research in Africa, with Focus on Sudan:

It is difficult to follow-up the archaeological studies in all Africa and assessing their methodologies in this short paper. Therefore, Sudan is taken as a case study. This is not for bias in favour of Sudan, but because of the similarity of the African situations in general, and the Sudan in particular, and the therefore cannot be separated from it.

The study of the ancient history of Sudan depended on the sources, which were discovered during the salvage campaigns and the excavations, which were conducted outside these campaigns; but following the same methodology. This has resulted in the limitations of the studies, and the evidences obtained from them. So, there were little benefits and faulty results (Torok.. 1992:111; Ali Osman, 1992:227). The succeeding generations of archaeologists followed suit; especially those who worked in the First Archaeological Survey.

The Archaeological studies, which were conducted in Africa and Sudan, in the beginning of the century, gave a rather complex picture about the region. This is because the research methodology was influenced by the racial view and the domination of the downgrading vision. The researchers were busy to discover the white empire in Africa (Tigger, 1982: 224). Thus, for example (Budge 1907) believed that all temples, fortresses, palaces, and monasteries in Nubia, were made by other races of Egyptian and Phoenician Empires, not by the Nubians.

Yet, the most important matter, is the diversity of the objectives and strategies of archaeology at the present time. So far, there is no agreement of opinions of the priorities and methodologies, which should be adopted, in archaeological research in Sudan. It is worth mentioning that all the curriculums and methodologies adopted, and still operative, have failed to draw the attention of the local society to archaeology. This is an unjustifiable contradiction in a country like the Sudan, which has thousands of archaeological sites and about a hundred local and foreign archaeological missions operating in the field of archaeological excavations and research. Despite all this, most of the people of Sudan do not know any thing about the civilization heritage.

In account of the intensive dates given to the Nubia, and the important treatments of the Nubian cultural and civilization periods, the archaeologist should be criticized. For example, Reisner (1908), in his theory, using the archaeological evidence, stated that the origins of the population of the A-group are the first Egyptian migrants. He depended on the Egyptian pottery during the Pre-dynastic period. A further criticism is levied materials on the archaeological collections, in most of the cases translations were found to be deficient and mistaken; therefore, they are obsolete for today's uses.

This was proved by the recent archaeological researches. Even more, the translations and interpretations. The best example for this is the Merotic settlement in lower Nubia. The written sources mentioned that this settlement occurred in the third century B.C. But, in the absence of the archaeological materials and evidences of that period its going back to the second – first century B.C. Hence, the first generations of archaeologist who worked in the Sudan were random in their work and misunderstood the Sudanese civilization. The principle reason for this, is the deficiency of their methodology.

4. The Napatan Civilization and the Torment Resulting from the Deficiency of Methodologies:

To be more precise of what has been mentioned above, and to give a clearer picture of the deficiency of the archaeological methodologies in understanding the Sudanese civilization, it is deemed suitable to take the Napatan Civilization (or the first period of the kushite civilization) as applied example. It is believed that this example is more explicit in supporting the arguments of this paper. The reason is simple. All the archaeological research, since the beginning of this century, and until now, has drastically failed to give a comprehensive perspective about the Napatan society. This especially applies to the preludes; which led to the formation of the Napatan kingdom. Thus, it was the early archaeologists who failed to distinguish the early Napatan layers during their excavations in the numerous sites of this civilization.

The principle reason in this context, is that they were attracted to study the royal tombs, which were preserved since the early centuries of the kings of the XXV dynasty. In this realm, its evident that these early archaeologists were influenced by their orientation as

Egyptologists, and were thus specialized in Egyptian archaeology; rather than the Sudanese.

The outcome was that before the study of any of the other aspects of the Napatan history and culture, which represent the appropriate dimension of the study the picture of the Kushite beliefs began to expose itself. This was a result of the confinement in the study of the written text sources. Thus, this has affected the historical and cultural classification of the ancient middle- Nile region (Torok, 1995: 11). Yet, despite the fact that the archaeologists who came later also Egyptologists, they succeeded to some extent in uncovering the local characteristics; as can be seen later.

In fact, the evolution of archaeological research methodologies is not an easy process. This task requires one to review all that was written in this realm. So, the start will be with Reisner, who is considered the first scholar to study the Napatan civilization when he came to Nubia at the very time of the first Archaeological Survey (1907- 1911). In that period, the above- mentioned concepts were dominating, (i.e. the racial concepts, the above- mentioned concepts were dominating, (i.e. the racial concepts, the diffusionist the theory, the research for the white empire in Africa and the migration theory), and the way in white empires in African and the migration theory). This is clearly seen in his views about the origins of the early Napatan kingdom was established (Reisner, 1919: 237- 254). He believes that this kingdom was established by some Libyan migrants. As he further described the Nubian region as the line of demarcation between the regions of the white race, and the black race. This, he interpreted the Nubian cultural history in a series of racial interpretations.

Arkell, on the other hand, followed the same orientation as Reisner; especially after the issue of the first impression of his book about the ancient history of the Sudan (Arkell, 1995). But; he changed many of this ideas; as the various old concepts were lightly touched and so they were less dominant than that was the situation with Reisner, especially in the second edition of the same book. This was also noted in the introduction of this latter issue (Arkell, 1961).

Reisner discovered the deficiency of his methodology; as well as his haste. So, in his death bed, he asked his assistant (Daws Dunham)

to review his studies and reports about the archaeological objects; in addition to another study and a book, which time did not allow him to finish. So, Dunham started to execute Reisner's will and there appeared some of his publications (Dunham, 1946, 1974, 1950, 1955 and 1970), in which numerous faulty ideas of Reisner were put right, Dunham made a wider study of the archaeological objects; which was based on abstract scientific facts. As Reisner's studies and research were limited in their scope, Dunham chose to follow the same course, but with a corrective manner only. Thus, he did not enlarge upon the topics, which Reisner ignored; such as the society and the repetition of the historical sequence...etc; which were corrected later by researchers. May be this is what triggered Tigger to say that all the archaeologists and the others which were discussed earlier (Tigger. 1982: 224). Even though, Reisner's studies remain the base for all the succeeding studies; since he was the first discover Napata (which is something we are grateful to him about).

In the period, which followed the year 1950 (i.e. in the post-Second World War period), Archaeology started to develop in new directions which widened its horizons. Thus, an important stage of the development of this discipline (Tigger. 1982: 225 Fagan. 1988: 60). The major factor behind this change, was the employing of some other disciplines in the service of archaeology; such as, the Philosophy of science, the statistical techniques and methods and the computer methods. These specializations changed the path of Archaeology, from the descriptive approach, to the intensive analytic approach in methodology. Likewise, further new methods and theories entered the field of Archaeology.

In the Sudan, the same period witnessed a clear change in the strategies of archaeological research. For example, the last campaign for saving the Nubian archaeological collections aroused more international interest in the Sudanese archaeology. So, archaeologists came to Nubia, with the advantages of the new phase of archaeology. They brought with them a wider methodology, which brings about a new understanding to the Sudanese archaeology and their civilization; based on "Anthropological Archaeology". This methodology aims at the understanding of human behaviour in a general way (Tigger, 1982: 225). Thus, the theories, which emerged in this stage kept away from

the domination of the traditional theories and old strategies of Archaeology.

The features of this state can be clearly seen in Dixon's (1964) study above the origins of the kingdoms of Napata and Meroe. He discussed this topic thoroughly and engaged some clear archaeological evidence, in out right criticism of Reisner's views. Thus, it could be correctly assumed that Dixon's study represented a stage of attending more to scientific facts and dependence on clear archaeological facts.

As for (Adams), his ideas carried within themselves the anthropological inclination, as he is an American. In America, archaeology is studied as a branch of anthropology. Thus, he interpreted the Nubian history, on the light of anthropology. Thus, he interpreted the Nubian history, on the light of anthropology, on the basis of continuity in the Nubian culture (Adams, 1977, 1984). He even used a new methodology in his study of the Nubian Civilization, in particular. This new methodology is represented by the culture ecology approach and the Techno-environmentalism approach. (Trigger. 1982: 225).

This stage formed the study bases from, which the modern and contemporary researches and studies of Napata. Several researchers were involved; such as, Kendall, Torok, Yellin and Morkot. The studies of these researches depended on the revision and review of these researchers depended on the revision and review of the previous archaeological research, analyzing same and review of archaeological proofs. In reality, these studies were of great value in correcting some of the faulty concretions, and opening new horizons for archaeological research about the Napatan era.

Also, there is Kendall, who is an archaeologist who worked at the museum of Fine Arts, Boston. He delved into the field of Kushite studies in 1982, through his book; (Kush: lost kingdom of the Nile (Kendall, 1982). Then, he started to investigate the Napatan period. So, he uncovered aspects which have not been researched before. This was especially concerned with the royal sacred Kushite religions and the chronology of El-Kuru cemetery. He also investigated the relation between the temples and the royal palaces.

In essence, all these studies may be considered in concurrence with

the present development of archaeology. This is because the computer graphics have been used for re-drawing of the graves and pyramids of El- Kuru cemetery (kendall, 1990a, 1990b, 1991, 1997).

As for the American researcher, Miss Janice Yellin, her study about the role of the Egyptian religion in the formulation of the Napatan political power, is considered a significant addition to our knowledge about the way the Nabatan kingdom came to light. She depended, for her sources on the archaeological collections and the reports about the excavations. The result of her endeavor was this valuable study which depended on the logical analysis and interpretations of the archaeological evidence (Yellin 1994).

Torok, on the other hand, is an art historian. He delivered into the sphere of archaeology, to specialize in Sudanese archaeology and the kushite civilization. He formed his opinions according to the previous excavation reports. Then he translated the written texts about the myth Napatan state; and the use of religion in politics (Torok, 1995). It may be worth mentioning that he never did any field work in the Sudan; except for a brief visit to some archaeological sites in 1988. He found out that excavations have occupied a wide time and horizontal extended dimension. So, he criticized the previous studies; and started his corrective endeavors, which could be summarized in what is known as the new concept in archaeology.

Likewise, there is Morkot, British Archaeologist, who adopted several theories on Napata and the new Egyptian kingdom's period in Sudan. He claimed that there is a dark period between these two periods. Yet it was he who opened a new path in research on Napata. He did this by linking the international events in Nubia, Egypt and the near East together. By doing so, he came out with the theory of the emergence of the Nabatan political authority and the condition and circumstances which wrote some ideas about the Napatan economy (Morkot, 1995).

It is noticed that the archaeological excavations which were done in the sites, which date back to the Napatan period, were large in number. But, the excavations were not complete. An example is the site of "Sanam un Doam" in which only some few parts were excavated and no studies were conducted on the remaining parts of the

site (Griffith, 1992, 1923). It is evident that the completion of work in these sites may provide researchers with new archaeological evidence, which may solve numerous problems related the historical sequence and the other ambiguous sides in the Nabatan Civilization in particular, and the Sudanese Civilization, in general.

5. The State of Archaeological Research Into the 21st century:

The question, which poses itself here is, are these developments, which occurred by end of this century, ample enough? In other words, did the archaeological methodology succeed in solving all the problems of the chronology and other problems related to the ancient Sudanese Civilizations in general, and the Napatan Civilizations in particular? This question may confidently be answered by NO. There are also many problems, which confront us now, but we have no solutions for them. Thus, all studies have failed to prove how and when did the political capital transferred from Napata, to Meroe. So, which is the solution may lead us to resolve all these issues?

The best methodologies to be adopted for resolving these problems (i.e. the Nationalist Archaeology; and the Ethnoarchaeology approaches). In the mean time, it is worth -a- while that professor Ali Osman Mohamed Saleh, spoke about the nationalist Archaeology approach and its importance to the archaeological studies and research in Sudan. In this realm, it is relevant to state that the experiment of the Archaeological, Autographic and Language Survey of the Mahas region, had proved a great success, through this methodology. Hence it could be adapted by the archaeological research institutions in the Sudan, to solve all issued and problems related to archaeology in Sudan.

As for the second approach; (i.e. Ethnoarchaeology), this was considered significant in the realm mentioned earlier in this paper. It could though, contribute to the resolution of many of the issues about the historical sequence and the material culture. It is also an important approach for the treatment of the deficiency of the archaeological record, which resulted from the flaws of the previous studies (Faize H. Osman, 1998). The efficacy of this approach can be clearly seen in that the Sudan is traditionally a country, which preserves its culture. So,

there are numerous practices, customs, crafts and industries, which date back to the ancient epochs, but still survive and continue, until this day. Thus, by studying these findings, we could also compliment the deficiency in the archaeological record.

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