



SOCIÉTÉ DES CULTURES NUBIENNES

POUR EN SAVOIR PLUS ...

GEOGRAPHY

ANNEXE 1

In 1798, one of the scholars on the French expedition of Bonaparte, Louis Costaz, mentions in the book *'Description de l'Égypte'*: *'Nubia is located between Aswan and the black Moslem kingdom of Sennar'*. In reality, the term *'Nubia'* applies in our current state of excavations and knowledge to the territory situated between the First and Sixth Cataracts. It includes the cultures and the civilisations of the A-Group, of the C-Group, the Kingdom of Kerma, that of the Black Pharaohs and Kingdoms of Napata and Meroe. By extension, the term *'Nubia'* has been applied to the Christian kingdoms that developed between the First and Second Cataracts (Nobadia), between the Second and the Fifth (Makouria), and between the Fifth and Jebel Moya, further to the south (Alwa).

The ancient Egyptian texts, locate the land of Wawat between the First and Second Cataracts, that of Kush between the Second and the Third, Yam in the area of the Third.

ANNEXE 2

This levelling causes a subsidence in the north-west of Africa, followed by the invasion of the continent by water. It is thus that thick layers of sandstone are deposited by immense, unstable channels. Around 420 million years ago (middle of the Primary period) the sea covered all of North Africa and deposited graptolite clays, the future reservoirs of the Saharan oil.

At the humid Equatorial latitudes of Africa the continent is covered by coniferous forests. The latter make up the remains of the fossilized wood that are still found in the middle of the desert. Great rivers transport sand and clay, allowing them to accumulate in lakes and swamps. These materials, once they hardened, formed Nubian sandstone, the reservoir material of the present-day water table.

The Mediterranean, the famous Tetis, will not emerge until around 95 million years ago.

During the Tertiary (around 65 million years ago), an immense complex of lakes and rivers sculpt the landscape. On the edges of the great plateaux, the run-off water fashions large valleys, creating labyrinths of tabular form called *gours*.

ANNEXE 3

The transition from the Pleistocene to the Holocene (ca. 10 000 B.C.) was a crucial period in paleo-climatology. There is a melting of ice in the north of Europe and a return of rains to the edges of the Sahara. This episode was called the Pluvial. Around 16 000 BC the Saharan desert extended between 400 and 500 kilometres further south than it does today. The important quantity of rain of the Pluvial Period between ca. 10 000 and 5 500 BC, created a climatic and ecological barrier at the level of the 22nd degree north parallel with different floras and faunas on either side of this latitude. Multi-disciplinary expeditions published a first report in 1992. It concluded that diluvian rains had fallen on the equatorial lakes, forming immense bodies of water. During almost forty centuries, the Nile valley was permanently submerged under between 6 to 9 metres of water. After the waters fell, any settlement in the valley remained impossible because of the high level of the waters. What happened to the areas to the east and west of the river? The Red Sea hills, crossed by numerous rivers, welcomed the semi-sedentary populations. The western part offered a wooded savannah, allowing the nomads to live and move about.

In the middle of the VI millennium, the rains stopped, allowing man to approach the river. Five hundred years later, a new phase of aridity returned to the area. It began above the 22nd degree north parallel, around 4800 BC, ending around 3000 BC; the 22nd degree is located at the level of the Second Cataract, including Lower Nubia. The drying out affected both the areas to the east and the west of the river, which re-centred itself on the valley. On the western part, it was continuous, without a humid phase. On the eastern area, it was later, thanks to the mountain ranges that caught the rain. After 3000 BC, a period of aridity settles on a north-south axis, beginning with the 'Belly of Stones', a rocky prolongation of the Second Cataract. It reaches the 'Island of Meroe' in the first centuries of our era. In Sudanese Nubia, the desertification progresses in irregular fashion. It was two millennia later than that in the North, which explains the interest of the ancient Egyptians for these rich areas, since the end of the IV millennium.

ANNEXE 4

According to Jean Vercoutter, of ten floods, three were beneficial for the land and man. The others generated famine and destruction. This lack of constancy was aggravated by progressive desertification, which settled itself over Nubia, on a north-south axis beginning in the III millennium BC. The Nubian artery is characterised by the famous granite barriers, wrongly called 'cataracts' since they cut the river without generating any spectacular waterfalls. Sometimes they project several kilometres into the desert. They narrow the river bed. They form gorges through which the Nile waters have difficulty in passing, creating whirlpools and rapids. Ancient Egypt had personalized the power of the flood and the virtues of the waters as saviours in the persona of the god Hapy. He had imagined an abyss, where the primordial waters were called *Nun*, emerged from the entrails of the First Cataract.

What is the reality of the inundation? Monsoon rains that fall in the spring on the Ethiopian highlands. The inundation brings, through the tributaries of the Blue Nile, the Atbara and the Sobat, a more significant deposit of silt than the usual one. At the beginning of summer, the flood reaches the White Nile at Khartoum. Subsequently it enters the narrow beds of the cataracts and the channels that link them. By following the course of the six cataracts, few such channels are navigable. The only exception is the one below the Fourth and above the Third. At the border between Egyptian and Sudanese Nubia there is an impressive area of granite outcrops, called Batn el-Haggar, heralds the most grandiose among them: the '*Great Cataract*'. By its sheer size, it had captured the imagination of Champollion: '*it stops me by the impossibility to have my squadron made up of seven sails cross it, and in the second case, because famine awaits me beyond and it would promptly end an impulsive attempt on Ethiopia*'. From this point onwards, the bed of the valley becomes a corridor encased in the mountains of sandstone. It led the traveller towards the final point, which was the First Cataract (the sixth from the source of the river). There followed well earned rest among the last Nubian islands of Philae and Elephantine.

Today, the rock formations of the first barrier have been exposed by the Aswan High-Dam. It has created a reservoir lake 500 kilometres in length, causing the disappearance of the Second Cataract, the Batn el-Haggar and a whole swathe of unstudied Nubian history. A land, much loved by its inhabitants, was erased from the map.

In another chapter we will refer to the International Campaign for the Saving of the Nubian temple, sponsored by UNESCO (1960). In Sudan, the means made available to the foreign archaeological missions were unable to match the expectations of the researchers. Jean Vercoutter, an eminent Egyptologist and Nubiologist, was bitter: '*We have learnt a lot, but also lost a lot more, and the world will never know how much*'. The duty to give a decent economic development to Sudan forced the building of dams. Currently the one of Merowe is under construction, located below the Fourth Cataract, will join the three others already in place on the Blue Nile (Roseires in 1966, Sennar in 1958) and on the Atbara (Khashm el-Girba in 1964). Under the Anglo-Egyptian mandate, the dam at Jebel Aulia (1937) was erected on the White Nile and had supplied Khartoum. Today, further complementary projects are being studied with the dam of Nimule and the Jonglei canal.

Finally, two dams on the White Nile, above the Sixth and Fifth Cataracts, will have as their aim to control the deposits and the quantity of water that feeds Lake Nubia (also called Lake Nasser).