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## MUTUALITY IN EXPLORING THE PAST: ETHNO-EXPERIMENTAL AND COMMUNITY ARCHAEOLOGY

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### ABSTRACT

*Throughout most of its history the discipline of Egyptology has incorporated some form of anthropology, ranging from physical anthropology and cultural anthropology to anthropological archaeology. In the last few decades Egyptologists have become much more aware of the critical discourses that take place in sociology, anthropology and anthropological archaeology worldwide. The debates around poststructuralist, postcolonial, and gender theory are important for the development of the epistemology of the discipline, and should result in adaptations of how we do, think and teach Egyptology. The attitude of European and Euro-American Egyptologists towards Egyptian colleagues and the communities living in the vicinity of archaeological sites has changed, but in many cases it is unclear how the theoretical underpinnings of Egyptological interpretations relate to the every-day scholarly and archaeological practice. This paper explores how we can use ethnoarchaeology and experimental archaeology to move from doing lip service to community archaeology, to integrating local communities fully in our work. Being serious about community archaeology requires mutual understanding, mutual benefit and a mutual effort.*

*I dedicate this article to the memory of Mustafa Ayoub, policeman and friend, who was shot and killed in 2015 in the Fayum by Islamic extremist militants on his way home from work.*

### INTRODUCTION

Egyptology is a rich field of study that developed in the 19th century into a discipline that became increasingly specialized and inward looking. It was considered exceptional and unique in method and theory, but also in subject matter.<sup>1</sup> The presence of a large textual corpus inscribed on monumental architecture, and the excellent preservation of organic materials, including thousands of papyri and ostraka, provided a heavily text-based discipline in which archaeology for a long time was ancillary to the historical interpretation of texts. Furthermore, the country was described as unique because of its long continuous history in which the same people inhabited the same geographical space, without interference from the surrounding lands.<sup>2</sup> Increasingly, Egyptologists have realized that the traditional isolation of Egyptology, both as a regional topic and as a discipline, has caused a set-

back in theory forming and in communication with colleagues world-wide.<sup>3</sup> Comparison between and integration of anthropology and Egyptology is an important step towards useful augmentations to both, at a theoretical and at a methodological level.

Before the publication of several volumes that explicitly juxtapose anthropology and Egyptology,<sup>4</sup> Egyptologists were already regularly involved in anthropological interpretations of Egyptian archaeology, history and texts. The understanding and definition of what anthropology was, however, differed markedly from the present, ranging from physical anthropology to cultural anthropology and, in the mid-20th century, anthropological archaeology. In the 19th and early 20th century anthropology was often understood in a limited sense as biological or physical anthropology. Archaeologists working in Egypt were particularly concerned with questions of the origin of the Egyptian population, based on anthropological research of large-scale excavations of cemeteries, especially in Upper Egypt and Nubia. The comparisons of ancient and modern skeletal features and measurements were used as racial, and racist,

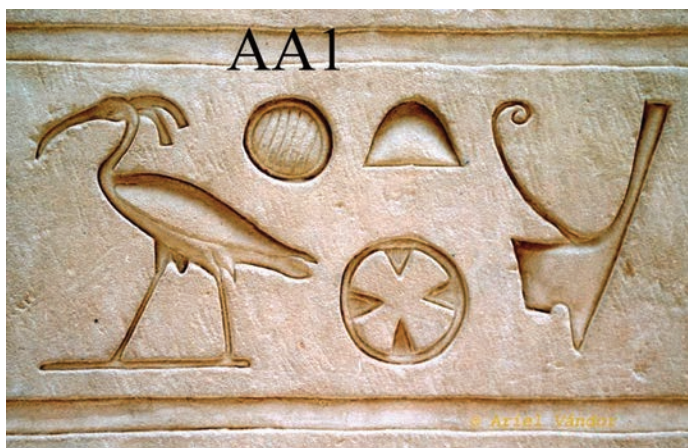


FIGURE 1: The hieroglyph classified in Gardiner's grammar as AA1 (unknown), which has been considered to be derived from a placenta or a sieve. Courtesy of the Academic Team at Volant Systems. Courtesy of the Academic Team at Volant Systems, <http://egyptianhieroglyphics.net/?s=ibis>.

underpinnings of Egypt's historical developments.<sup>5</sup> Although far-reaching conclusions on ethnic changes based on anthropometry were criticized already in 1905,<sup>6</sup> its use in Egypt lasted into the second half of the 20th century.<sup>7</sup>

The equation of "anthropology" with Cultural Anthropology or Ethnography has been used sporadically in Egyptology. Some early 20th century Egyptologists looked towards contemporary ethnographic work in Africa as suitable parallels for understanding the "primitive" phases of Egyptian culture. The pre-dynastic and early dynastic Periods were explicitly linked to modern African cultures through a Hamitic "blood" relation, which allowed a comparison of ethnographically described cultural features of the present with poorly understood early Egyptian phenomena.<sup>8</sup> For instance, the suggestion that the hieroglyph classified in Gardiner's grammar as AA1<sup>9</sup> (Fig. 1) might perhaps represent a placenta is directly related with such parallels.<sup>10</sup> This comparison relies on the assumption of a geographic and cultural continuity, in which change is explained in cultural evolutionary terms.

More recent and effective combinations of cultural anthropology and Egyptology are ethnoarchaeological studies. Ethnoarchaeology is an approach of studying the tangible and intangible material remains in their present day contexts to aid in interpreting the past through analogous reasoning.<sup>11</sup> The methods of ethnoarchaeology are mostly similar to those of cultural anthropology or ethnography,

but the research questions are usually focused on the interpretation of material culture from an archaeological context. The discussion on the value and validity of ethnoarchaeology is ongoing and the approach has been criticized for being superfluous in, misleading, or limiting interpretation.<sup>12</sup> Alison Wylie's seminal article on the use of analogous reasoning in archaeology established that "though a candid appreciation of limitations is appropriate where analogical inference is concerned, its use in archaeological contexts is neither dispensible nor radically faulty."<sup>13</sup> A candid assessment of ethnoarchaeological analogy ranges from the reproach that it is not

a scientifically rigorous approach, that it merely provides inconsequential "suggestions" or "caveats," to that it actually hampers an interpretation based on retrieved data, limiting the range of conceivable explanations. Additionally, valid critiques by anthropologists have addressed the problem that archaeologists tend to focus on a limited part of a society, and thus isolate their subject of study, e.g. pottery technology, from its social, political and even material context.<sup>14</sup> The proposition that ethnoarchaeology is especially useful if the study of archaeology and present day society is done in the same region, shows a tacit belief in cultural continuity and tends to ignore change. Such an approach is naive at best, and bigoted at worst, since it denies agency and independent development of the societies under study (ancient *and* modern). Very recently, ethnoarchaeology has once more been declared superfluous, based on a similar set of arguments: ethnoarchaeological methodology is undeveloped; ethnoarchaeology is unscientific and has no power of explanation; ethnoarchaeologists consider groups under study as unchanged and unchanging.<sup>15</sup> These are very valid points, but even the most avid critic acknowledges that archaeology always depends on analogy. Ethnoarchaeology is a form of analogous thinking that, done correctly, is a powerful explication and expansion of the analogous reasoning that every archaeologist is involved in, whether (s)he is aware of it or not. The problem is not the use of anthropological analogies, but their simplistic and implicit use. There are good reasons to do ethnoarchaeological research in the same region as ongoing archaeological work, however. Cultural continuity is not one of them, but as I will illustrate below, community archaeology is.

The third field that the term "anthropology" can

allude to is anthropological archaeology, a discipline characterized by a strong theoretical slant. Anthropological archaeology is usually considered in contrast with historical archaeologies, which traditionally depend heavily on written accounts.<sup>16</sup> Integrating and adapting theories used in anthropological archaeology increasingly allows Egyptian archaeology to contribute to the scholarship of the human past more broadly and in fundamental ways. Rather than seeing Egypt as an exception, it has paid off to look at the well-preserved remains, textual and non-textual, to build an understanding of the variability of human existence. Rather than focusing on the wealth of surviving objects and architecture, approaches have changed, and the attention in Egyptian archaeology has shifted to considerations of period, location, socio-economic stratification, age, gender and other vestiges of identity.<sup>17</sup> The incorporation of anthropological theory and participation in conferences and publications that do not focus solely on Egypt has broadened the relevance of Egyptological research. Theories of state-formation based on the sometimes scant remains in other regions of the world, can, for instance, be tested and compared to the different types of evidence available in Egypt. These can be textual sources, but also better preserved house inventories, field boundaries, building materials or grave goods.

An increasing number of Egyptologists identify themselves also as anthropological archaeologists. The shift in focus in Egyptology has moved from questions of what happened and when it took place (dating grand historical events), to interpretations of how we can distinguish change and why change occurred.<sup>18</sup> Looking for change and variability, rather than emphasizing the static aspects of a seemingly unchanging society is an important part of this shift in focus.

Post-colonial critique has made its mark in anthropology, archaeology and increasingly also in Egyptology, in two very different ways: the focus is either on colonialism in the past or the present. Critics have addressed, for instance, how the relation between the colonizer and the colonized were interpreted. Initially such power differentiations were seen as the cultural dominance of one group (the colonizers), and the willing or grudging adaptation by the other (the colonized). The interpretation of material culture, combined with social theory, provides a very different interpretation, in which the agencies of and within

both groups are recognized.<sup>19</sup>

A historiographic post-colonial critique has gained influence in Egyptology as well. The history of Egyptology, Egyptian archaeology and of their methods, theory and interpretation, are reflected upon against the background of the its disciplinary history. Egyptian historiography has seen considerable changes in the last two decades and is slowly recognizing and addressing its colonial past.<sup>20</sup> Egyptology has, however, not yet escaped its contentious history, and it has taken a long time to recognize that Egyptian Egyptologists can be trusted with the protection of Egypt's cultural heritage, let alone provide a useful contribution to Egyptological knowledge.<sup>21</sup> Attitudes of Egyptologists towards the population of Egypt have been paternalistic at best, openly racist at worst. The realization is slowly growing that archaeology is not free of politics and that every archaeologist has to negotiate a complicated landscape of power differentiations, including the power structures in which (s)he is embedded. Wendy Doyon's well-researched chapter on archaeological labor in Egypt highlights the inequality in division of labor between archaeologists (highly educated, upper-middle-class) and low-status agricultural workers, and how this colonial relationship might have fundamentally influenced the interpretation of ancient Egyptian society by those in power.<sup>22</sup> Her conclusion provides another argument for the very explicit use of analogies, rather than the tacit acceptance of power relations or perceived ethnographic similarities.

Wendy Doyon describes the recent past, but does not take its conclusion forward to present day Egyptology and Egyptian archaeology. If we try to update the narrative of racial, political and social tensions in the early 20th century for the early 21st century, the protagonists are vastly different. I would contend that post Arab Spring, in an Egypt that for half a decade has lived through a period of renegotiating the position of the security services, the military, the police force and the government ministries, including the Ministry of Antiquities, the opinion of foreign archaeological institutions has dramatically decreased in importance. These institutes, which are vastly better equipped, have larger budgets and better libraries than any of Egypt's own academic or governmental archaeological institutions, are a visible remainder of the colonial past. They still boast support of their embassies, but the role of archaeology has changed. From being at the forefront of a European and Euro-



American nationalistic contest of who would decipher hieroglyphs first,<sup>23</sup> or who had the largest collection of antiquities, the international archaeological research establishments have become budget drains and are regularly threatened with being closed down, while for the Egyptian government, archaeology's main importance is the attraction of tourist income.

#### COMMUNITY ARCHAEOLOGY

Most archaeologists in Egypt spend long periods in the field, usually in rural areas. Field work typically means living and working in a team of people, often from different countries, in sometimes uncomfortable, basic or sub-hygienic circumstance. Archaeological teams stay in hotels, in rented houses, or in specially built field compounds, depending on how well-endowed the organizing institution is. These temporary homes are physically removed from those of the local workers who are hired by the archaeologists to do the heavy work: digging, sieving, carrying dirt. Even if the entire group, archaeologists and workers, come from elsewhere, the archaeologists are typically housed in different, more comfortable, circumstances than the workers and they are provided with different food and perhaps also different drinking and washing water. The entire group of excavators functions according to a pre-determined hierarchy: the dig director, the government representative ("inspector"), the specialists, the site supervisors, the students, the foreman (*rais*) and the workmen.<sup>24</sup> Gender, race, class and age play an unspoken, or sometimes quite open role in creating conflicts within the organizational hierarchical structure.

Because archaeological excavation seasons typically last only two or three months, the interaction of the local community with the archaeological team is limited in time. Furthermore, contact between team members and surrounding population is often actively discouraged by the excavation director, or by the Egyptian authorities, for fear of misunderstandings, behavior of team members that can create a bad reputation for the project, or incidents that might be misinterpreted. The position of the government representative is often precarious in a triple tension field of power, national and urban identity. The situation is improving rapidly,<sup>25</sup> but the representative often used to be the only Egyptian team member in a fully European or Euro-American team, distinct because of nationality, but also because of an urban versus

rural identity. The government representative is an educated specialist, distanced from the surrounding population by class and learning. The assignment of the "inspector," whose task is to ensure that the expedition members are not breaking the law, and are doing work of sufficient quality, potentially brings her or him in conflict with the director or other team members.

The use of *Quftis*, specialized workers from the town of Quft in Upper Egypt, who were first hired and trained by Petrie and developed in a specialized work force,<sup>26</sup> create a further isolation of the excavation teams from the communities surrounding the archaeological sites and effectively living in the archaeological landscape.

So if archaeologists are physically removed from local communities, what then does "community archaeology" entail? There is a conflation of terminology in which community archaeology, public archaeology and community outreach more or less are used interchangeably for public outreach and informing the public of the results of archaeological work with the expectation that familiarity will result in a better protection of cultural heritage.<sup>27</sup> It results in a quite instrumental approach to convince people living around an archaeological site to protect it, sometimes with the recognition that income trumps the vagaries of history. Community archaeology, therefore often is combined with a promise of economic benefit.<sup>28</sup>

Community archaeology is not just stressing that if we want to protect cultural heritage, we need to enlist the population surrounding the ancient sites. It also is not just educating the population and explaining why cultural heritage is important nor convincing the local communities that they have (or we can provide) economic skin in the game. That too is paternalistic. One of the important elements of a definition of community archaeology is "relinquishing of at least partial control of a project to the local community."<sup>29</sup> The use of "relinquishing" reflects a sense of hesitance and loss which is too negative. In my experience community archeology is an enriching experience and helps bringing the past to life in the imagination of archaeologists and audience alike. A past without people does not convey to the local public why archaeological remains are important. Drawing parallels between the past and our lives at present is a great way of forging connections, even if such comparisons can be very problematic.

My involvement in community archaeology,

although I did not know to call it that, dates to 1987 when, as an undergraduate student, I participated in my first excavation in Egypt. Through my work on ancient basketry and a fascination with objects of daily life I felt a great need to talk to local basket makers to benefit from their expertise, but also to break my isolation from the village and have a reason to get out of the dig house. In publications this was, of course, provided with a theoretical underpinning and methodical reasoning. In practice I thoroughly enjoyed the connection with local basket makers, in particular the one who took me under his wing and taught me the finer details of sewing baskets out of long plaits. After the initial misconception that my goal was to learn the trade in order to set up my own basketry workshop, there was understanding and trust. He was fascinated by the ancient materials I showed him and every time I came back to visit him, he showed me yet a new type of basket he made, such as a basket made specifically for pollinating date palms. In return I shared my income from the publication. From this work I gleaned that ethno-archaeology, if done well, is by definition a form of community archaeology. Furthermore, it behooves us as strangers in a strange land, to make use of the local expertise if we want to do experiments. This does not only have the benefit of working with people who have experience with raw materials, landscape features and climatic circumstances, but also of generating interest in the work. Thus the threesome ethno-archaeology, experimental archaeology and community archaeology are closely connected.

Lessons learned from the work that I have done over the past thirty years can be summarized with the term *mutuality*, which in practice means sticking to six simple guidelines:

1. Spending time
2. Being honest
3. Learning and teaching
4. Sharing benefits
5. Deciding on representation together
6. Defining responsibilities

These guidelines to mutuality map onto the seven components of a strategy for community involvement in archaeological work, as developed by a project in Quseir el-Qadim (Egyptian Red Sea coast). These comprise: communication and collaboration; employment and training; public presentation; interviews and oral history;

educational resources; photographic and video archive; community controlled merchandising.<sup>30</sup> The emphasis of the Quseir team is different, because rather than a strategy, my list of six points above are behavioral guidelines for ethically sound and effective research relationships. "Communication and collaboration" map onto "spending time," "being honest," "deciding on representation together" and "defining responsibilities." "Employment and training" relate to "learning and teaching," as well as "sharing benefits." "Public presentation" is comprised in "deciding on representation together." "Interviews and oral history" and "educational resources" are part of the "learning and teaching." "Photographic and video archive" is addressed by the "Deciding on representation together" guideline, and so is "community controlled merchandising," which at the same time falls under "defining responsibilities."

Below I elucidate the six guidelines to mutuality, which I developed in my work over the years. Underlying all of these is the realization that all relations with others (including team members, visitors, officials, women in the village, children and educators in the local schools, excavators hired from the local workforce, landowners, etc.) are determined by differentiated power relations. This is a fact of life that should not be forgotten, or underplayed.

#### SPENDING TIME

Ethnoarchaeology and community archaeology are only successful if they are based on a relationship of mutual appreciation and trust. Ethnoarchaeology is not a one-day visit to look at a potter at work and shoot some video footage. Building a relationship takes time and social acumen. Working in Egypt and Egyptian Nubia on ethnoarchaeological research on the social context of basket makers I spent two periods of three months in the excavation house at Amarna, and from there I would visit one female basket maker in the village of Et-Tell and a male and female basket maker in the nearest village of El-Hagg Kandil. In a time that archaeological projects in Middle Egypt were not yet isolated from their surroundings by increasingly severe security measures, it was easy to wander over into the village and spend time at the houses of the basket makers. For my research in New Nubia I stayed for two months in the village of New Dabud, traveling on the back of a 50 CC motor cycle, driven by the owner of the house, whom I knew from work in Qasr Ibrim,





FIGURE 2: (a, above; b, below) Survey assistants carrying ranging rods, tripods and kalashnikoffs. Baynun, Yemen, 1997. Photographs by the author.



to different villages in the region. Apart from spending time, having the right introductions are perhaps equally important. For acceptance as guest into a community it makes a difference who vouches for you.

Depending on the purpose, the research might focus on one person, or on an entire village or region, but even if the work entails a one to one relationship, the village is involved. A local partner does not live in isolation, but is part of a family, a neighborhood, and other social structures. All aspects that we typically mention in one breath in social historical essays, such as position decided by gender, age, ethnicity, family, health and socioeconomic status can cause real issues in research relationships. Individual character traits and previous experiences are additional aspects that may have to be taken into account. As a researcher we are maybe entering political or religious factions and our presence can easily cause serious disruptions.

This was our experience working in 1997 in the highlands of Yemen. We were asked by a community leader to come to the village of Baynun to map out an ancient site on top of a plateau, near two famous rock cut irrigation tunnels. Upon arrival it turned out that the community was split in two factions. One was led by the young sheikh who pushed for innovation, was in contact with the central government and obtained funding to build a hospital, a school and a small museum. His predecessor contested his power and was loath to see our arrival. We were denied access to the ancient site and instead, upon instigation of the supporters of the young sheikh, did a survey of the region around Baynun.<sup>31</sup> In Yemen a community conflict

involves unavoidably Kalashnikovs (AK-47s), and our three-person survey team traveled with an entourage of twelve men with guns (some of whom are shown in Fig. 2). The person who had urged us to come and work, stayed in the capital Sanaa and refused to discuss the matter with the opposing party. A mediator was sent, but could not solve the issue. It was not until much later that I understood that the young sheikh was not able to come to our assistance and had to stay in the capital Sanaa to avoid starting a local war-like situation. Because we were outsiders, we did not realize

that we were used in a political game, but neither party held use responsible for the disruption our presence caused.

Experimental archaeology is another great avenue to work together. It spurs an exchange of knowledge and ideas, and in the process it often leads to explanations and insights that only an experienced crafts person can develop. Experimentation brings knowledge to the fore that would not become apparent through interviews or observation. It requires people who are open to doing things differently, because often the ancient ways differ from the present day ones. As in any community of practice, there will be local experts who are curious and interested in experimentation, and specialists who are rooted in their tradition. They can be indifferent or even hostile to considering alternatives. One way to mitigate such hesitance is to show how old the archaeologically attested objects are, and consequently, that there existed an even older tradition in the region than the one cherished at present.

#### BEING HONEST

Ethnoarchaeology as community archaeology only works if both sides are honest in expressing their purpose and expectations. Hidden agendas have no place in a balanced relationship based on mutual respect. Explaining what the work entails, why it is important and how you expect all parties will benefit from the work is fundamental, but also difficult. It is not just a matter of speaking the language, but also on clarifying unstated expectations and perceptions. It is not always possible to speak the same language, literally, and if an interpreter is involved, then this person should be an integral part of the research team, with the same shared goals, because listening and hearing are different things. Hearing is determined by anticipation and prior knowledge. In my experience, translators, especially if they are involved in a social situation in which they feel superior because of better education, or an urban, versus rural upbringing, might hear what they expect to hear. A good example is a situation I found myself in during research in Middle Egypt. I had learned Arabic to a level at which I understood most of what was said in daily conversation, but had difficulty expressing myself in the language. A well-educated colleague volunteered to come with me as translator. Apart from my study of basketry, the female research partner involved me in all of her daily activities. I found myself assisting her with

bread baking and also churning butter. For this, she poured milk in a goatskin, inflated the skin by blowing into the neck-opening, and suspended the skin on a tripod over a low fire. I asked her, via the translator, what she was doing, and he told me she put the milk in a goat's bladder. I clearly saw that this was a complete skin of the goat and I asked whether this was a complete goatskin or just the bladder. He answered, without asking the woman, that it was a goat's bladder. In this example translation went awry at several levels. "Bladder" to me meant the specific part of a goat that held the urine. This was certainly not the object that was being used to churn the butter. To this day it is unclear to me whether my colleague who translated considered "bladder" in a more general sense of "any inflated animal part," or whether he was convinced that it was the anatomically specific part of a goat which held the urine. What was clear to me at the time, however, was that he thought his knowledge was superior to that of a village woman and that his translation was more of an interpretation, or enhancement of what the woman actually said. Apart from an educational difference there was also an urban-rural and male-female differentiation at play.

Elsewhere I have published the account of how I was pleasantly surprised by the enthusiasm with which my Egyptian research partners reacted to my request to show them what they did with their garbage.<sup>32</sup> I carefully explained to them why an archaeologist is interested in garbage disposal. Contrary to my expectations that garbage disposal was something that might be surrounded by negative connotations, shyness or shame, they were completely open and involved in showing me what they recycled and what finally ended up on the municipal garbage heap.

Above I referenced a brief misunderstanding by the basket maker who taught me most, that I was interested to start my own basketry workshop in the Netherlands. Once I realized this, I tried to explain that my interest was based on my archaeological work, and I brought him to the dig house to show him the remains of the ancient basketry. In the conversation I mentioned that I could not even make a career out of date palm leaf basketry, because there are no palm trees in the Netherlands. His apprehension on hearing this was genuine: if there are no palm trees, what were we poor Dutchmen going to eat, use for our roofs, for stairs, for baskets, for crates, for chicken coops, for beds, for tables, for



chairs, for brooms, for rope, for fires, for cleaning pots, the list went on and on and gave me but a glimpse of the ubiquitous use of the date palm in Egypt. Being honest and spending time has repeatedly proven to provide unexpected gems of insight, excitement and shared knowledge.

#### LEARNING AND TEACHING

Studying basketry or pottery production I found that the best method to find out what I wanted to learn, was to ask whether I could become an apprentice. At the other hand, I also shared what I had learned from my study of ancient basketry, and how the past and present techniques compare. Being a teacher and apprentice at the same time, creates an equality and unpressurized learning environment in which sharing knowledge is a pleasant, gratifying experience.

Starting excavations at the site of the Greco-Roman harbor of Berenike (Egyptian Red Sea coast) I made the conscious decision to engage with the local Ababda nomads, rather than involving people

from Quft. It meant that we needed to train our local collaborators in basic excavation techniques, rather than have them supervised by an experienced foreman from Quft. In the complicated social network of the Red Sea mountains, this was a good approach. The Ababda comprise a number of "tribes" (*kabila*), each with a sheikh who represents their interests. These groups differ in the way they interact with "Egypt," meaning the Nile Valley and those towns along the Red Sea coast that are under tight control of the Egyptian government. In the 1990s in an area of 5 km around the ancient site, one group was settled in government-built concrete houses, in a village which also had a large government provided water tank, a defunct clinic and a school. The other group lived spread out in the landscape and the wadis of the Eastern Desert. The excavation had to make sure that the men hired to work with us were divided equally between these two major tribes. A third group, consisting of young Ababda men who were from families that had settled in the Nile Valley, came to work with us as



FIGURE 3: Ababda training program in Berenike. Photograph by Hans Barnard.

well. They had gone to school and were interested in history. Most of them came back year after year from 1994 to 2001.

The Ababda who knew the landscape of the Eastern Desert and the location of ancient remains, guided the project survey team. Several of the archaeological specialists too benefited from local knowledge. The textile specialist, for instance, was at a loss to discern sheep's wool and goat hair textiles, since the ovicaprids from the Roman Period, like the sheep and goat of today, had very coarse, sturdy hair. The Ababda, herders of sheep, goats and camels, had no difficulty in distinguish sheep from goat in the ancient material and were very interested to see the textile production of 2,000 years earlier.

Teaching the Ababda excavation techniques turned out to be surprisingly easy. These are people who know their sand, and could indicate with ease when a soil change occurred. After a year they were involved in sorting, bagging and tagging, including writing labels (it took the registrar little time to realize that ENOB equaled BONE written from right to left). The apparent interest of the Ababda in the history of the region and the intricacies of archaeological work resulted in the establishment of a training program. A group of ten volunteers were introduced to the archaeological workflow, including the computerized registry and the work of the on-site specialists (Fig. 3). This included taking turns in the sorting of archaeobotanical dry sieved remains, using a binocular microscope. Some of the Ababda asked to continue this work after the training program had ended and developed an excellent eye for discerning botanical remains. This group also worked with the archaeobotanist to collect plants in the neighboring wadis as comparative material.

#### SHARING BENEFITS

Archaeologists even nowadays tend to talk about "my site," while anthropologists used to feel possessive about "my tribe." Such a sense of ownership is problematic, especially when the research focus is a present day society, but also when the claim belies the fact that European and Euro-American researchers are but guests on land that is not theirs. By recognizing that the people we work with to study ancient remains or present day society have claims and rights that predate ours, we begin to give due where it is due. It is not just a matter of changing the language and acknowledge that "workers" are doing specialized tasks as skilled

excavators, or observant, knowledgeable surveyors and guides. It is also the realization that we should share the benefits of our work. This starts with being explicit and honest with outlining what those benefits are. Whether that honesty is believed is not a given, however, because how can we make clear that we excavate to write a book which will give tenure and a good income, when the people we encounter are convinced that we use our sophisticated equipment to find gold that we whisk outside the country. Here too, having the patience to spend time and share the work and being honest is the only thing that might enable us to convince people that we are sincere.

Sharing the benefits of our work can have many forms. It can be applying for grants for education of the local community, building a visitor's center, supporting the local school with a donation. It could also be sharing the income from a book with your local research partners, or keeping in touch and helping out financially if they are in need. It is the consequence of realizing fully that the information shared has made a vital contribution to your present professional situation.

#### DECIDING ON REPRESENTATION TOGETHER

The Ababda group that hailed from Wadi Khareet, the Ababda settlement in the Nile Valley, asked me at some point if I wanted to write a book about them. We had many conversations about their culture and how life was changing rapidly with the fast development of the Red Sea coast for mass tourism. We decided that we should try to retain memories by building a collection of materials that they remembered their parents or grandparents using. I obtained a grant from Netherlands Embassy in Cairo to create the collections and to build a small visitor's center in Wadi Gamal. The young men that were most interested in this endeavor were involved in recording the objects, making descriptions, drawings and photographs. In the end they created three collections: one to be shown in Berenike, one to form an exhibit in Quseir and one which would become a traveling exhibit and would return to Wadi Gamal afterwards. They were closely involved in determining which object should go to which of the three exhibits. The most important audience, in their opinion, were the museum visitors in the Netherlands. This was the exhibit that literally would put them on the world map and should contain the best examples of the objects that in their mind represented the Ababda best.





FIGURE 4: Sewing clothes in the desert. Photograph by Mohamed Eid.

In the first place they selected everything that is needed for the coffee ceremony: a coffee roaster, mortar and pestle to powder the coffee, the *jabana* coffee pot and the basket in which it could be transported, a wooden carved sugar pot, a basket containing 6 small porcelain coffee cups, a ring to support the *jabana*, a round mat to fan the fire. The second group of objects were all elements needed to deck out a camel: riding saddle, blanket, saddle bags, tassels, head gear, and a rider's leg protection. The third group of items were a dagger, shield and sword, the last two part of a man's gear, but nowadays only used in a dancing ritual.

The project also provided the Ababda with cameras and film (this was 1995, before digital photography became viable) with the request to photograph whatever they thought was important. For all this was the first camera they had ever

owned. The narrative of these photographs has a strong focus on family, house and rituals, such as the offer feast. Very few women appeared in the photos, apart from the collection of one person, who created a touching portrait of his wife, sitting in the sand, sewing on a hand-crank sewing machine (Fig. 4).

We all know the gorgeous photographs that National Geographic publishes, with people from all over the world depicted in a to my mind almost voyeuristic manner. If we take our relationships with local communities in a post-colonial world serious, then we should give our "subjects" the final word on what should and should not be published. Even better, they should wield the camera and have full say in the context in which those images can be used (N.B. I did ask Mohamed Eid permission to publish his photo, which also graced the cover of a book<sup>33</sup>).



#### DEFINING RESPONSIBILITIES

Finally, it is important to decide on who speaks for the community and to whom. There can be valid strategic reasons to enlist a European or Euro-American researcher to bring a request, grant proposal or plan to the fore. This should be done, however, in consultation and agreement with the people of a community or their representatives. A researcher who publishes an article has a responsibility to a scholarly or scientific audience, but also to the community who provided the information. This is particularly true for ethnoarchaeological and experimental community archaeology, but also for “purely” archaeological excavations where community members, students, and specialists all contribute to the final result and deserve credit for their contributions.

A complicating factor is that “the community” does not exist. As indicated above, in each group of people there are tensions, conflicting interests, differences of opinion, and power imbalances. As researchers we enter and quite possibly change the existing relationships. We choose or are manipulated into working with some, and not others, often without even being aware of the social constellations of which we are now part.

#### CONCLUSION

Archaeological method, theory and practice today need to take into account insights from poststructuralist, postcolonial, and gender theory critiques. The way to do this is to be well aware that the current research relationships are determined by a past and present built on inequality. Six guidelines



**FIGURE 5:** The Fayum Neolithic Team, including inspector Ashraf Sobhy and policeman Mustafa Ayoub (URU Fayum Project). Photograph by the author.

for mutuality are helpful in seeking a balanced relationship with colleagues and community members in Egypt. Rather than focusing solely on the economic benefits of the preservation of cultural heritage, mostly in relation to the development of tourism, this relationship should also be built on a common understanding of why ancient remains are important for different stakeholders. A first step is explaining what our academic interests are, and what our scholarly research aims to achieve. A second important approach is to focus on issues that the inhabitants of the region are concerned with. Involving local inhabitants in analyzing and interpreting ancient remains, has the potential of bringing a mutual understanding of the subject matter, and the research interests. Experiments in close collaboration with local specialists, such as potters, metal workers, basket makers, weavers, have the advantage of gaining insight and strengthening connections with the archaeological work. Researchers who share their interpretation of the people who lived in the region in the past, their way of life, and the material remains that witnesses their existence may find that this is a way to connect as well. Such a focus on people, rather than monuments, can provide a connection that is based



on the recognition that ancient inhabitants of the region were contending with similar circumstances and may have had the same concerns in their daily lives as people at present.

Whereas the approach of mutuality works well in my current work in Ethiopia, and in the remote area of Berenike, it was much more difficult in the Fayum. Because of the present political situation in Egypt, much of this work has to be done under the radar. Contact of foreign archaeologists with the surrounding population is regularly discouraged or made impossible by security measures. To enable this kind of important work European and Euro-American Egyptologists need to work closely with Egyptian colleagues, who have better access to administrative levels, and speak fluent Arabic. The same rules apply in dealing with those who hold power such as the police or security services, who might enable or frustrate ethnoarchaeological, experimental, or community research. Spending time and effort to explain the reasoning, involving the police in the work and being honest about the goals can go a long way (Figs. 5 and 6). Ethnoarchaeology and Experimental archaeology are not a goal in themselves, but they can contribute to the research objectives. Most of all they form a good basis for a more mutual approach to archaeological practice and interpretation.

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FIGURE 6: Mustafa Ayoub, sectioning the concreted lid of a Neolithic storage pit (URU Fayum Project). Photograph by the author.



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## NOTES

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