

HISTORY

David N. Edwards. *The Nubian Past: An Archaeology of the Sudan*. London: Routledge, 2004. xii + 348 pp. Photographs. Tables. Illustrations. Bibliography. Index. \$125.00. Cloth. \$44.95. Paper.

David Edwards's book is a major contribution to, and major synthesis of, the archaeology of the Sudan. Combining archaeological evidence accumulated over the last thirty years with earlier materials, this volume brings to light the history of Sudan from 10,000 B.C.E to 1900 C.E. Edwards's book is not the first book along these lines. The first significant synthesis was A. J. Arkell's *A History of the Sudan: From the Earliest Times to 1821* (Athlone Press, 1961 [1955]), in which an Egyptological approach was dominant and the ancient history of Sudan was viewed mainly in the light of Egyptian sources, with an emphasis on Nubia as the core region in the cultural history of the Sudan. The geographical focus was the Nile valley, as most early archaeologists working in the Sudan were trained as Egyptologists and thus were more inclined to explain the cultural developments in Sudan in terms of Egyptocentrism and Egyptian influence rather than local dynamism. The second synthesis was W. Y. Adams's *Nubia: Corridor to Africa* (Allen Lane, 1977), in which the history of the Sudan was still equated with the history of Nubia (and Egypt still considered a crucial actor in this history). Edwards's synthesis, however, based on an extensive archaeological record ranging from prehistoric times to the Islamic period and including new interpretative frameworks, introduces local contributions.

By bringing up to date the archaeology of the Sudan over the last thirty years, Edwards's book breaks new ground. It incorporates the macro-regional archaeological investigations of the Nile Valley south of the Third Cataract, in the western regions in the Libyan Desert and Darfur, in eastern regions that include Kassala, and in the Southern Sudan up to Equatoria. Such a comprehensive macro-regional approach changes our perceptions of the archaeology of the Sudan. It also contributes to shifting the conceptual approaches, moving from more traditional site-focused reports to settlement and landscape archaeology, and from Egyptocentric perspectives to macro-regional contexts, thus diminishing the previous isolation of the archaeology of Sudan from the larger field of African archaeology. To this end Edwards juxtaposes the archaeological evidence of Meroe with textual evidence from mid-fourth century Axum to question the narrative of the "end of Meroe" and its relationship with Axum (183). Yet he avoids speculation and advances his case on fully archaeological grounds. With these characteristics in place, his work provides a major contribution to the debate on the relationship of Axum and Meroe.

However, it would have been of interest had he addressed the problem of Punt, especially given the recent convincing argument advanced that the land of "Punt" must be related to eastern Sudan and not the Abyssinian

coast (see K. A. Kitchen, "The Elusive Land of Punt Revisited," in Paul Lunde and Alexandra Porter, eds., *Trade and Travel in the Red Sea Region*, [Archaeopress, 2002]). The problem of Punt, as Jacke Phillips notes ("Punt and Aksum: Egypt and the Horn of Africa," *The Journal of African History* 38, 3 [1997]: 423–57), has been addressed by specialists who have to deal with the Egyptian data but are not themselves Egyptologists. Rodolfo Fattovich argues the problem of Punt is strictly an archaeological problem ("Punt: The Archaeological Perspective," in Gian Maria Zaccane and Tomaso Ricardi di Netro, eds., *Sesto congresso internazionale de egittologia: Atti*, Vol. 2 [Italgas, 1998], 399–405). Edwards's book could have contributed to this major debate from his extensive Southern Sudan archaeological data by testing this argument.

Nevertheless, this book provides the best synthesis of the Sudanese archaeology available; it will benefit Sudanese and African archaeologists, historians, and social scientists, as well as the general public curious about the history of Northeast Africa.

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Stephen J. Rockel. *Carriers of Culture: Labor on the Road in Nineteenth-Century East Africa*. Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann, 2006. Social History of Africa Series. xix + 345 pp. Photographs. Illustrations. Maps. Tables. Notes. Bibliography. Index. \$124.95. Cloth. \$29.95. Paper.

In this critical addition to East African historiography, Stephen Rockel brings together social, economic, and cultural history sensibilities to produce a compelling foundational work on East African caravan porter culture. Long-distance trading networks linked East Africa's interior with the global trading system and enabled all manner of European interventions in the continent; it is no exaggeration to say that these trade networks would have been impossible without porters: "Without porters, nothing would have moved" (4). Nonetheless, "the omnipresent porter has become almost invisible [in African historiography]" (5). To reconstruct the social history of this vital group, Rockel expertly synthesizes an impressive array of evidence—oral interviews, colonial documents, mission materials (though he seems not to have used any archives in Germany), and published memoirs by well-known European explorers.

Layers of misconceptions abound on caravan culture, perpetuated by imperialist and humanitarian defenders of European antislavery interventions in East Africa and by subsequent historians who uncritically accepted these perspectives. Rockel's careful study shows that East African porters were by and large not captives, as the "slave myth" asserts, but profession-