

Fortifications erected once served to the further generations, next kings and successive kingdoms. New residents of fortresses consciously or not, destroyed traces of their predecessors. In this way, after centuries it **becomes extremely difficult to find traces of the earliest occupation and establish the origins of the fortifications**. Such a situation is often faced by archaeologists in the Middle Nile valley (modern Sudan).

Despite these difficulties, researchers attempted to determine when fortified sites had been erected. Often, these efforts give only general chronology of the sites, which make it hard to answer the questions **who and why built** these usually the biggest in the Middle Nile valley structures. The work of generations of archaeologists resulted in conclusion that these fortifications were built in the region over many centuries, in various political circumstances, as well as in times of successive centers of power and kingdoms.

Scientists have pointed out that some of those sites could have been built in the late Antiquity period (c. 3rd-6th century AD). This is a very general dating covering approximately 300 years of **turbulent history** of the Middle Nile valley. During this time the Meroitic Kingdom ended its long reign and their territories were seized by Nubian kingdoms that ruled these lands till the end of the Medieval period (about 15th century).

The question is who built these fortifications? **Meroitic rulers**, in the last centuries of their hegemony, thus marking an attempt to defend the disintegrating realm? Or **Nubian kings** to strengthen their emerging governing structures? Researchers are divided in this matter and explanation is unreachable without more detailed information on the origins of these archaeological sites.

"Progress in historiography is available only in the confrontation of different interpretations of the same events"¹ - this project is the case. It will involve fortifications' architecture studies using different methods **to clarify** the problematic issue. As part of the investigations, fieldwork will be undertaken at selected sites dating generally to the period in question. The aim of this will be to acquire samples from the mortar used for the earliest fortifications. Samples will consist of:

- **Organic materials** for radiocarbon dating (measuring the decay of carbon isotope C14, which is regular and begins with the death of the living matter);
- mortar from deeper, **unexposed parts of the walls** for dating using optically stimulated luminescence method, which measures the last time the material had been exposed to sunlight;
- **fragments of pottery** that have been used to reinforce mortar (analysis of forms, ornamentation and technology of these objects may indicate what kind of vessels had already existed or were used at the time of fortifications' construction).

Application of all three methods at the same time will enable detection of variety and unforeseen errors that distort the results of the analysis. This will allow to **narrow the time period in which fortifications had been built** and by this it will contribute to verification of the research hypotheses.

In summary, the studies that are planned within the framework of this project has been designed so that the **procedures are strict and results firmly establish**. It is undoubtedly a strong point of this project. The results therefore have the potential to become the basic information on which researchers will be able to build on further studies and formulate hypotheses.

Fieldwork during the project will be carried out on the archaeological sites located near Khartoum, the capital and the largest city of Sudan. The rapid development of this agglomeration, where the population already exceeds 4,000,000, causes progressive destruction of those sites. Thus, this project will also be an effort **to document endangered cultural heritage** of this region.

¹ The words of Raymond Martin, a prominent historian and philosopher of history at the University of Maryland.