

The Archaeology of Nauri in the Third Cataract of the Nile: during the ancient, the Medieval, and Post Medieval periods

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Abstract

This article presents the results of the University of Khartoum archaeological project in Nuri, located in the Mahas region of Northern Sudan, for the seasons 2015-2018. The research findings shed light on the history of the region, specifically the Christian and Ottoman remains, which are clearly represented in terms of settlement and cemetery. The Christian remains at the site suggest an early Christianity that emerged with the arrival of the Aksumite kingdom under the leadership of King Aizan, who invaded the region of Meroe around 250 AD. Additionally, the article discusses the ancient place names resulting from historical entanglements in the region.

Keywords: Nauri, Christian period, Ottoman period, King Aizan

المستخلص

يعرض هذا المقال نتائج مشروع جامعة الخرطوم الأثري بمنطقة نوري الواقعة في منطقة المحس شمالي السودان، لموسمي 2015-2018م. وقد سلطت نتائج البحث الضوء على تاريخ المنطقة، وتحديد الأثار المسيحية والعثمانية، والتي تمثلت بشكل واضح من حيث الاستيطان والمقابر. وتشير البقايا المسيحية في الموقع إلى مسيحية مبكرة ظهرت مع وصول مملكة أكسوم بقيادة الملك عيزانا الذي غزا منطقة مروي حوالي عام ٣٥٠ ميلادي. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، يناقش المقال أسماء الأماكن القديمة الناتجة عن التشابكات التاريخية في المنطقة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: نوري، الفترة المسيحية، الفترة العثمانية، الملك عيزانا

1. General introduction:

Nauri is a village in the Mahas region. It is one of the 27 villages of the Third Cataract of the Nile in the district of Faraig “of Delgo” in the northern state of ‘Sudan. These villages are at risk of being flooded by a government plan to build a dam near the village of Kajbar downstream of the cataract (see Figure 1).



Figure (1), the general map of the Mahas shows important sites and places of interests

The Third Cataract of the Nile stretches between the village of Tombos in the south and the village of Sabu in the north. The Nile flows in its normal course to the village of Amla and then turns its course eastwards to the village of Nauri, a distance of about 15 kilometres on the right bank of the Nile and about 12 kilometres on the left bank. A large island called Ardwan covers a large part of this distance as the river splits into two branches at Amla.

The right bank runs straight east to Sabu, the left bank runs north for about 3 kilometres and then turns east at the village of Fageerafentti. This island is considered the second largest island in the Nile as it measures about 7/5 km at its widest point. The island is rough in most of its parts and has huge boulders extending outwards and a sandy patch on its eastern side that stretches for about 2 km, making travelling quite difficult.

The hilly rocks of Ardwan Island are made of ferruginous sandstone, locally called Jaw. The abundance of this type of stone gave the island and its region its name, Jarror. Most of these extensive granite and diorite boulders have a considerable number of rock gongs (Tahir. 2012. 24).



Figure (2), Rock Gongs

Nauri lies at the junction of the right branch of the Nile with the left branch, which forms the island. A third dry Khour of the Nile also flows back into the main Nile at Nauri and is called Khor “Sharq Fad”. The village of Nauri has no large agricultural areas, it only has land for (9) small sagias (water wheels), while the neighbouring village of Mashakaila has (27) large and medium sagias (water wheels). This fertile farmland is accessible from the Nile in Mashakaila and continues to the village of Sabu, with only two breaks through hilly terrain leading down to the Nile; it almost closes and separates the village of Mashakaila from the village of Farieg and Jedi and separates Jedi from Sabu.

The dry Khor (Khor Sharq Fad) is difficult to live in. There is reasonable running water here during high floods. In this case, the inhabitants store the fresh water in wells dug in the centre of the khor. They then use this water in the summer. There are still some notable villages on both banks of the dry Khor. The Khor was probably not as dry in the past as it is today, as there is an important mediaeval site in the village of Alliki. This village and other villages on the east bank of the dry Khor gain their importance from the fact that they overlook and accommodate the travelling routes from the south through the hinterland. One of these important travelling routes from the south passes through Khor Masaida, where one of the last small churches from the Christian period. It was built between two large blocks of granite rock.

The southern one of them bears a very interesting Meroitic graffiti showing a man leading a lamb, which we believe to be a religious graffiti. In fact, this graffiti and the mediaeval church make this place a sacred site that the villagers still visit secretly today.

The Mahas villages are made up of smaller units called irki, which form an extended family, with their own sagia (waterwheel) and agricultural land as well as their own farre (riverbank). Some of these Irkis have grown over time into larger units consisting of Maris. However, while the Irkis are usually named after the names of their members, the Maris are described by the directions, such as: Doro – n – mar, tawo – n – mar, oro – n – mar, kalo – n – mar. I.e. upper mar, lower mar, western mar, eastern mar, respectively.

The inhabitants of the mar–s, irki–s and villages intermingle and form a siirawi, which means a lineage. The members of such lineages may live in nearby or distant villages within the Mahas region and/or neighbouring regions. They may also live in the cities of Sudan or anywhere in the world. In all cases, however, they retain their ownership of land in their original irkis, even if it is only a decimal piece. Land ownership proves their historical rights and identity (Osman. 2004). The larger lineage of Nauri is Mashakaila, located in the east. The village of Mashakaila is larger than the village of Nauri. While Mashakaila consists of 27 irkis, Nauri has only 9 irkis. The two villages are usually called Mashakaila–Nouri or Nauri–Mashakaila, as if they were a single name.

However, while Mashakaila has an irki of the same name, as is common in many Mahas villages, there is no irki of the same name in Nauri. Research into the history of the two names has shown that Nauri is an old name, while Mashakaila is a relatively new name: probably from the Funj period (1504 – 1821).

Between 1530 and 1550, the Funj extended their rule northwards into the northern region of the Third Cataract. They occupied the area until around 1580, when the army of the Ottoman Empire expelled them south of the Third Cataract. It was the Funj's administrative system to divide the regions under their control into hafiers, and as Evliya Celebi's description of the Mahas region (1670 – 1672) shows, the region was divided into two hafiers. Al-Hafier Al-Kabier and Al-Hafier Al-Sagier, with the dividing line at Jebel Wahaba, opposite Kajbar.

Mashakaila is therefore a name made up of two words: Masha (Mishi), meaning great, and Kaila (Kul- la), meaning Hafier. (La) is the authoritative character. The oldest village in Mashakaila is related to Kush-an-irki, which is our village. It is registered in the land register of 1907 as Mashakaila No. 16. But since our great-grandfather's name is Haj; people now call our village Hajen-irki. Thus, our village retains the ancient name of the Middle Egyptian kingdom for the region, which is mentioned in the inscription of Senusret III at Semna on the second cataract of the Nile (1879 – 1841 BC) (Smith. 2003).

The name of the village and the insistence of the late Abdullahi Ameen, an elder from Nauri, in 1969 when I wrote my fifth year bachelor thesis entitled "The Third Cataract Region Through History" "that the names Nauri and Kush-an-Irki are twins, and the discovery by Professor V. Rondot (2008) of the cartouch of King Senusret III on the eastern mountain of Nauri makes me reconsider my earlier writings on the meaning of the name Nauri (Osman. 1984. 2004).

According to my current understanding, the name is made up of two Nubian words: Nau meaning Southern and iir meaning marker and/or boundary. So Nauri means southern marker or boundary (the last letter is a final sign). The projection of this meaning tells us that Nauri was the southern boundary of the land that was under the influence of the Middle Egyptian kingdom, though not under its direct rule. Nevertheless, I lack direct evidence to confirm that the stone-built fortresses of Marakool, Shofien, Nauri and Kush – an – Irki date from this period. The fortresses of Markool and Shofien are still intact. The remains of the fortress at the foot of the western mountain of Nauri still exist, with a bastion on the eastern wall. However, the fortress of Kush-an-Irki was dismantled and its stones were used to build the huge platforms and canals of the sagias of Kushanirki, udolirki, fark and Shageeg, with a very similar architectural style to the surviving sagias. There is also a gypsum quarry on the eastern side of the western mountain, which is believed to be as old as the fortress nearby at the foot of the mountain.

The eastern mountain of Nauri is therefore undoubtedly evidence of the presence of a new imperial administration at this location. There was also a new state cemetery on the edge of the agricultural land in and around the site of the new mosque, which was visible until the late 1960s (Osman and Edwards. 2012).

2. Previous archaeological works:

Earlier archaeological discoveries from Nauri are known. The one important document and the inscription in the eastern Gebel have been known for some time and have been published. The Nauri Decree of Setti the 1st was translated by: W.F. Edgerton 1947. The decree was published in the Journal of Egyptian Archaeology Vol. 38. December 1952, pp. – 24 – 33 by Griffith and Sir Alan Gardiner wrote some reflections on the decree. The main subject of the decree is the cession of land from Lower Nubia to Nauri to the temple of Abydos in Egypt. The other discovery was the famous Christian document that Syce had bought from a villager in Nauri. It is written in Old Nubian, and the subject of the document is an agreement between the owner of the sagia and a farmer "Turba" in Nubian.

Other important writings about Nauri are the descriptions of travellers who passed by Nauri or its surroundings. The most important of these was Ibn Saleem El-aswani, who does not clearly mention that he visited Nauri, but he wrote about the seven provinces of Nobatia and about the borders between the Nubian speakers and Dongolawi speakers. The border runs only about 20 kilometres to the south. Further important information comes from Sçelebi, the Ottoman traveller, who left a detailed description of Nauri (Osman. 2006). Sçelebi's description of Nauri is particularly important because he identified the Ottoman palace at the foot of the western Gebel and mentioned the official who built it.

3.1. The Archaeology of the Western Jebel:

The centre of the village of Nauri are two mountains, which were nicknamed "twins" by earlier visitors. They stand about 1 kilometre apart on the edge of a dense cluster of palm trees. Both mountains bear historical traces of man, and both are natural landmarks. The eastern mountain bears the important Egyptian inscription from the New Kingdom, which has been copied, studied and published (F. LI. Griffith. 1925).

The western mountain, which is the focus of this project, has been visited by many scholars, but no serious fieldwork has been done to record, plan and study the numerous, diverse and complex archaeological sites. We have divided the archaeological sites of the western mountain into five areas:

- Area (1) - the Western Mountain.
- Area (2) - the Ottoman palace.
- Area (3) - the village of Jeer.
- Area (4) - the gypsum quarry.
- Area (5) - Siw-in-doki(the sand dokki).



Figure (3), A general view of the buildings in front of the western mountain.

Area, one comprises a large stone-built fortress at the foot of the mountain with two partially preserved stone bastions and piles of scattered stones in what would have been the interior of the fortress. Among the piles of scattered stones is a stone wall about one metre high and two clay structures.



Figure (4), door and tower

The eastern wall of this fortress climbs further up the mountain to its uppermost level, where the entire circumference of the mountain is cut and flattened to house a series of buildings made of stone, mudbrick and clay, and cavernous geographical south.

These buildings form a complete mediaeval residential neighbourhood with churches and attached single rooms that appear to have been used and inhabited for a long time.

The churches and living quarters are spacious enough to have been the residence of some notables, e.g. Saheb Al-Gabel, the deputy king of the Christian kingdom of Dongola 700 – 1323 A.D. His Nubian title was Ojnoon, meaning the great Nubia, translated into Arabic as Kabier al-Nuba.

In the uppermost part of the Gebel there is a man-made platform that surrounds the entire Gebel. The following sites are located on this artificial platform. Two substantial large buildings on the eastern side, one residential and the other religious, probably a royal residence and associated church.

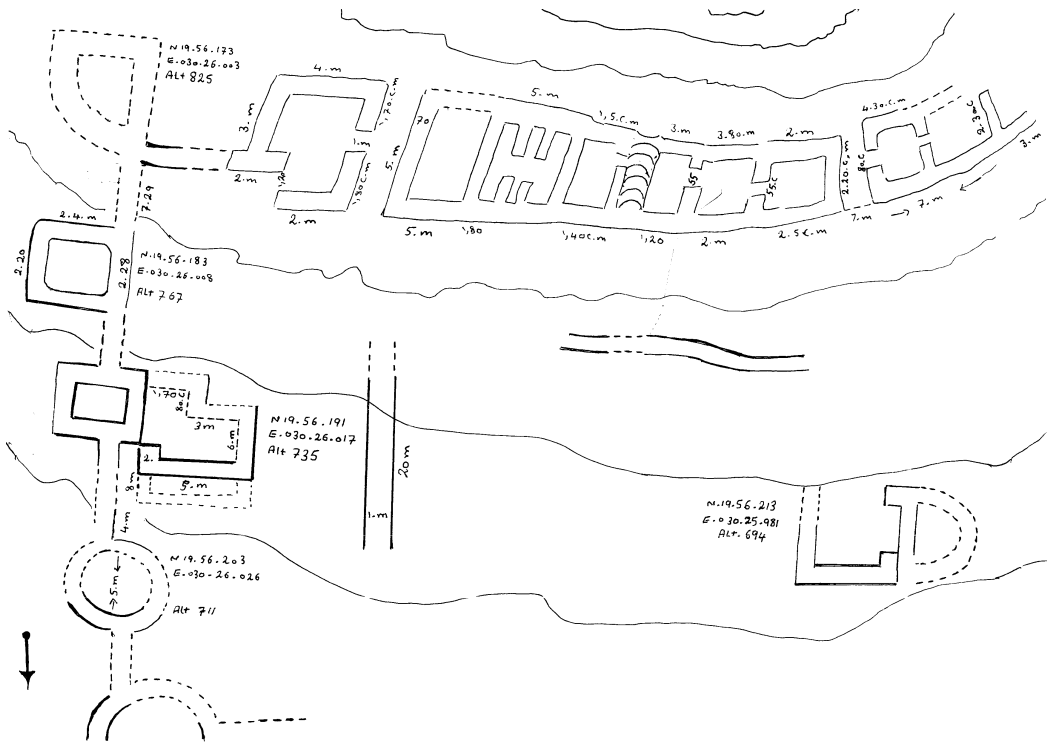


Figure (5), A general sketch of the buildings on the flattened area 880 feet up the western mountain.

To the left of these buildings is a curious replica of the cut mountain. To the right of these buildings, facing south, is a large cave with a flattened floor and more than 200 ancient crosses from the very early Christian period, usually known as Axumite crosses. "These crosses are known to be of South Asian origin and are attributed to a sect called "the sect of Julian of Halicarnassus" Halicarnassus, which originated in Egypt in 518 – 520 AD. It then spread throughout Arabia, thanks to the activities of a certain Eurtropius. He consecrated ten bishops in Arabia and sent them out in all directions. From 525 AD, the southern part of the Arabian Peninsula was under the rule of the Kingdom of Axum. Julian's belief system spread from southern Arabia to Axum. And from there to Soba in the kingdom of Alwa". No exact date can be given, but it can be assumed that the Afthartodoketic teachings were already being disseminated in Axum before 550 AD and that they reached Alwa before the arrival of Longinus in Alwa" (Vantini. 1987. 49). And that would take us to a quarter of a century before the arrival of Longinus in Alwa" (Vantini. 1978).

We were somewhat astonished to discover this cave and its ancient crosses, which are more than 200 in number, since supposedly only two examples have been discovered before, one in Soba and the other in Ikhemindi in Lower Nubia 'and since we also know from Longinus that the king of Alwa asked him to languish this hieratic Christian group whose Christian symbol was this cross.

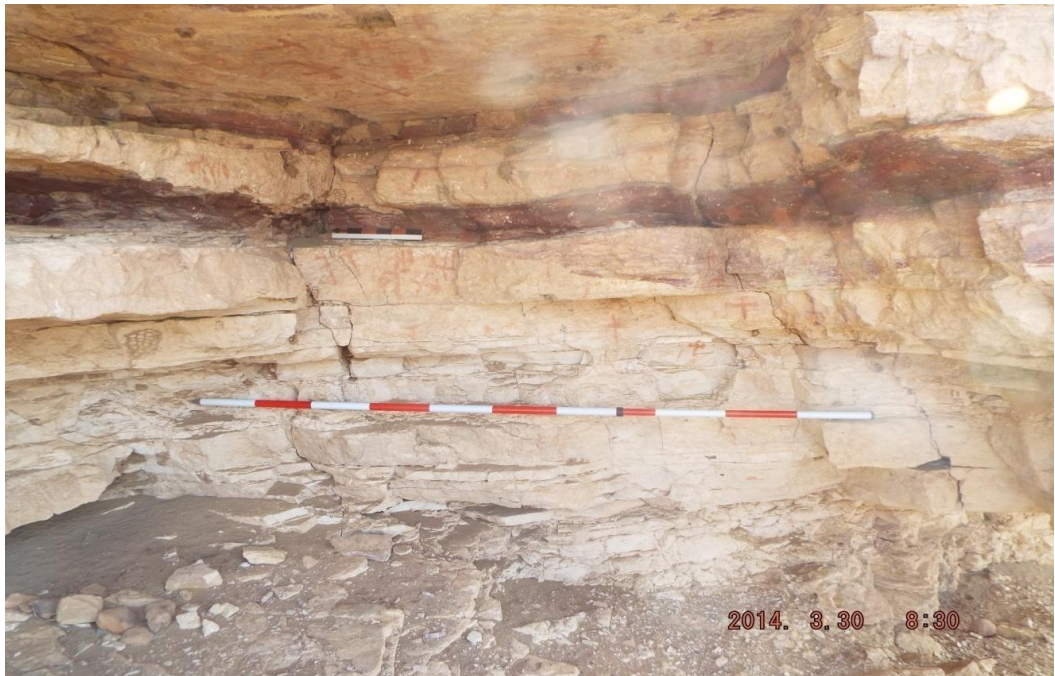


Figure (6-7), the main cave with red crosses

Later, however, we discovered the foundations of a circular building in the northernmost part of the modern Nauri cemetery, which is separated from the main cemetery by lorry tracks and almost belongs to the old village of Eastern Nauri. The round building is most likely the remains of a "Christian church of the Axumites", as we discovered at the Axumite headquarters in El-daiga north of Gebel Um Ali (Osman. 2013). Only heavily eroded parts of the foundation walls are still visible. We were unable to photograph these remains because many villagers gathered when they heard about some of our workers and

prevented us from completing the excavation, which we had reburied in the hope of excavating at a more favourable time later.

The church in Wadi Messida, which we assumed to be from the late Christian period, could also be attributed to the followers of this sect. In fact, there is still a binayia in the modern cemetery of Nauri, built in the same style as the church of Messida, but containing four Islamic tombs.

We do not know how the followers of the Julian sect arrived in Nauri and when this happened, but interestingly this western Gebel is called Gebel Isa by the locals, and we are told that it has been called this for generations. However, today's population seems to know nothing of these crosses, because the Gebel is still called Gebel Isa. Now the discovery of these crosses gives a clue to the name of the Gebel as such Gebel Isa. The presence of these crosses, which were left by a considerable number of believers from the early history of Christianity, is proof of the name of the Gebel.

It will be interesting to examine what happened to these groups when the official missionaries established their churches in Maquria and the Kingdom of Alwa. Another striking feature of the western Gebel is the remains of gypsum quarries. The attached picture shows that the gypsum deposits in the mountain were quite considerable. It is likely that these walls and activities began during the Egyptian Old Kingdom at Nauri, when a considerable amount of gypsum was needed for the stone buildings of Egypt.



Figure (8), the Quarry

We have no direct evidence for the presence of the Old Kingdom in Nubia, but the gate of a fortress at this Gebel and the fortress of Shofien on the opposite bank of the river

show great similarity to the fortresses of the Middle Kingdom in Lower Nubia. Professor Vincent Rondont` from the French Unit in NCAM discovered a previously unknown rock statue with the name Senusret III from the Middle Kingdom. The long inscription of King Setti I on the west side of the eastern Gebel indicates the presence of other Egyptians in the Nauri area.

The village was only moved to the hinterland of the old site in the 70s – 80s of the last century. This is the only known post-mediaeval village in Nubia so far, the other twin village Kushanirki in its eastern neighbourhood was completely destroyed for agriculture and gardens in 2002 – 2005.



Figure (9), an aerial photography of old Nauri

In front of the eastern gate of the stone fortress there is an area of about 10 by 10 metres that looks like an intact stratified deposit, well suited for a test pit and a complete excavation to check the dating and pottery classification. The building on the uppermost, flattened area also has well-filled soils that should be excavated. However, it is very difficult to say anything about the floor of the fort itself until the cairns have been removed, which will be a major undertaking for the coming seasons of work.

The northern shoulder of the eastern stone fortress gate is associated with a

mudbrick building of at least two storeys, which we had defined in the general survey of the site as the residence of the civil Ottoman governor of the region from c. 1585 to c. 1750, and which we hereafter call the Ottoman Palace.

This Ottoman neighbourhood (area 2) merges into the village of Jeer (area 3), where the houses of the region's inhabitants from the 17th, 18th, 19th and 20th centuries are located. These houses occupy the north-eastern side of the hill, with the exception of two or three houses that occupy the northern part of the stone fortress, outside its northern wall, to the west of the Ottoman palace. The last picture (3 and 10) shows the village of Nauri from the 60s – 20s of the last centuries, including the Ottoman palace. Clear evidence that Nauri was populated and an important place in the post-mediaeval period.



Figure (10), The village of Jeer from up the western mountain (the eastern mountain in the view)

South of the village of Jeer and on the sloping eastern side of the mountain is a stone wall running east-west and south of it is a gypsum quarry (area 4) that is still in use.

North of Jeer village, there is a raised platform of white sand (shore sand) between the palm trees that stretches from east to west. It is called siw-in-dokki (area 5).

Although there was a Misead (communal place) near this doki that was the social meeting place for all Jeer residents and their guests before the village was moved from here to the south beyond the agricultural lands, the sand doki was also a social meeting place until recently. I have noted elsewhere that this doki must have been a model for the doki of Old Dongola, on which the crowning palaces of the kings of Dongola (700 – 1323) were built. This doki was therefore possibly the seat of the Sahib al-Gebel (Ogjnoon), who I strongly

suspect lived in the palace of Gebel, as described above (Osman. 2013).

Doki (Tugul) in Donglawi is normally a low hill. It seems that it had some political and administrative importance in the Middle Ages. The settlement and the doki were and are a royal or semi-royal seat. Its political importance dates back to the Koka of the Fung period. The significance in the Nobeen and Tudi and or Togo, although, Tudi in an elevation within what could be understood as the main space of the pair. While Tudi is either in the hosh or outside the house.

Climbing the western mountain is a very dangerous endeavour. For the members of the project team, it was a serious and adventurous endeavour to achieve the goals of the first working season. But thank God we managed to finalise the documentation and planning of the various parts of the complex buildings on the mountain and on the flattened site at 880 feet. Nevertheless, we still have to manage to get a lifting platform for the coming seasons.

It has also become apparent that we need to carry out archaeological studies in other parts of the Nauri-Mashakaila region and outside the region, especially at the mediaeval royal burial site in Defoi where all the important personalities of the time were buried and where some interesting tombstones in Greek were collected (excavated!!) by some locals and are now in the National Museum in Khartoum.

3.2. Mashakaila:

A second important site within the village of Nauri is the large mediaeval, post-mediaeval and modern cemetery of Nauri. This is a continuously used cemetery from the Christian period and there is a church associated with it (see above). There are also some early Islamic tombs, as we described from Simit Island in the report on Maha's general investigation.

The cemetery of Mashakaila is also an important site. Although it has no Christian tombs, there is a possibility that it is a burial site from the Christian period. It also contains many early Islamic tombs.

Mashakaila also has many large sagia buildings and tall and long stone canals connected to them. The high platforms of many of these sagias are still preserved. These are also built of stone. These sagias must have been active in the Middle Ages.

The famous Nauri Decree, published by F. LI. Griffith in 1928, deals with an agreement (Nubian-Todan) between a sagia owner and a torbal (farmer).

So, to complete our picture and understanding of the mediaeval and post-mediaeval city of Nauri, we need to carry out archaeological work at the sites mentioned in 3.2. As well as restoration, conservation, protection and preservation work at all the sites of the Nauri-Mashakaila villages.

4. The Archeology of greater Nauri:

The archaeology of the village of Nauri, as described here, forms the largest part of the archaeology of the greater Nauri area. Following Ibn Saleem Elaswani, I have created a map showing the seven provinces of Christian Nubia. Of the seven provinces of Maris, five were in the Mahas region (see Map 1), the other two comprised the two northern provinces, Sikaut and Lower Nubia.

The province of the Mahas region, which comprised the region of the 3rd Cataract, marked as number (1) on the map, is our subject in this part of the article. In reality, it is the larger Nauri as the sites in these areas associated with the Nuari sites in this region include on the west bank Kajabar to Shofain including Diffoi where the important men who lived in Nauri were buried. It is called Tinniti (see “Osman and Edwards 2012. 248 – 249 especially Figure 8.5.4.). Tinniti is a compound Nubian word that actually means 'dia ain Utti', dia meaning death, ain meaning great and Utti meaning harbour. The image here was most likely a religious academy and a series of cemeteries.

To the west of the hill on which the academy is built, we discovered two large tombstones written in classical Greek. The two inscriptions are accessible to anyone interested. The religious complex at the top of the hill contained a two-storey church. To the east of this building in Halaiba are two castle houses, which are quite elaborate and well built. Most likely these were the residence of the priests. We have not excavated the cemetery and the two Greek inscriptions we have found are partially visible on the surface due to severe soil erosion. In the same area, east of Shofain and an open area called Kobodi. Ko means governor and Bood is synonymous with quarter or field. So, this was the governor's field or quarter. Shofain is also a compound name made up of Sho (book) and ain (big), so the word Shofien means the big book “The Bible”.

There is a church in Shofain, which stands at the back of the village towards the hill. About 5 kilometres west of Shofain is a place called Fageenfenti (see Osman and Edwards. 2012. 234 – 235). This was a caravan station and still is. It was connected to a church and a sagia. Several ostraca were collected from this church. We believe that this was a customs station for trade caravans between the north and the south. A deep khor called Kofarki, which leads to the river south of Fageenfenti and connects the official's place with the island of Ardwan. The governor's farki is most likely the occupant of the Fageerinfinti building.

On the east bank west of Nauri, west of the elongated curve of the Slarg foot, is a very large fortification called Malljab (see pages 406 – 408 in Osman and Edwards 2012, especially Figure 8.39.3). It opens directly onto the Nile. This was probably the most important harbour of Nauri. Another related site is at Massida (see page 322 to page 330, especially Figure 8.21.6), a large complex of buildings at Allikki. Other related sites were a church at Deffi noug, the castle houses of very fine architecture. In the hinterland of Massida and Allikki are the famous church of Messada and engraved details of rock drawings. The complex at Alikki appears to have been a barracks. The site of the church of Messada was a religious neighbourhood. Allikki may also have been a residential complex for the governor of Nauri (see Figures 8.21.18, 8.21.9 and other petroglyphs such as Figures 8.21.20 and

8.21.21 in Osman and Edwards. 2012). The name Massida is a compound name from Masi (Mahas in Dmgolere) and doki- Masi-N-Doki. Interestingly, the area west of Mesaida is called Ogjinoon, which means the great man, most probably Sahib Elgebel, who was called Azeem by some Arab travellers Arab travellers as Azeem Al-Nuba, Kabeer al-Nuba' and who I believe lived in Nauri.

5. Final remarks:

There has been much discussion about the character of the Nubian It was claimed that the two great sects of Christianity, the Monophysites and the Dyophysites, predominated in Nubia, since the missionaries who converted Nopatia and Maquria, as well as Alawa, belonged to these two different sects. However, there was never any talk of the presence of what Father Vantinni called Axumite Christianity in Nubia. The only moment that proves the existence of believers of these sects was when the king of Alawa ordered the official missionary who arrived in Alawa to kill the believers of this sect.

All in all, our findings in Nauri are very interesting and new. The worship cave in the western mountain of Nauri clearly proves the history of the presence of believers of this sect in Nopatia. They seem to have come to Nopatia in the early days of Christianity and stayed there. Besides these crosses, we discovered the round building in a very crumbling condition in the present cemetery of Nauri north of the old lorry track, as mentioned above just behind the houses of Awlad Mustafa Khairi, who are related to my family in Mashakaila. As we already had some difficulties and disagreements with some youngsters from Nauri who believe that the Ottoman palace at the western Gebel is the residence of their grandfather who they believe was the king of Nauri, we know from the detailed description of the Ottoman traveller Sçlebe who built this palace and when, and I could not have easily agreed with their claims. We have not said anything about this round building, which to me resembles the Axumite round church we discovered in El-daiga, the main town of Eizana (Osman. 2013). However, this happened during the last Islamic regime, so we will be able to reopen the building and define it. Yes, it is wise to let it rest now. In the same cemetery there is a building "Binaya" built exactly in the style and shape of the Messaida church, but those buried in it are 4 Muslims.

The Binaya and its shape gave me a clue. Even when I was writing my thesis on the history of Nauri over time, I had the feeling that the character of Christianity in this region was not comparable to that of Christianity in northern Nopatia or in Maquria. This feeling haunted me as I copied the rock drawings of Kidintakkar in the Jedi Sabu villages. I will include them here to show how different they are from the known churches. Later, Professor Tahir and his team reported that they had found church petroglyphs in El-Ga`ab that matched the Jedi and Nuri ones.

Could the Christians who drew these churches on the rocks of Kidintkkar and possibly in still unknown places in Nubia have drawn these churches only in their imagination' or were their churches built in the same style as they experienced and possibly prayed in?

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