Preface and acknowledgements

The texts of the Blue Nile Project dossier here introduced constitute the final report of the field archaeological work carried out from 1990 to 2000 in the Blue Nile basin, mainly in the areas of Wadi Soba, Wadi Rabob and Wadi el Hasib on the east bank near Khartoum, by personnel of different Spanish academic and research institutions. The main centre has been the Department of Prehistory of the University Complutense of Madrid (Víctor M. Fernández and Alfredo Jimeno), with the assistance of the Department of Physical Anthropology of the same university (Gonzalo Trancho and Beatriz Robledo), the Department of Prehistory and Ancient History of the National Open University (UNED) (Mario Menéndez), the National Museum of Natural Sciences in Madrid (Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, CSIC) (Javier Lario), and the Laboratory of Archaeobotany, Department of Prehistory, CSIC (Pilar López García and José A. López Sáez). Preliminary data on plants offered by examination of microscopic residues on pottery in a different laboratory were not substantiated by further analytical evidence and hence will not be referred herein. Researchers from other institutions, such as the Center for Development Studies of the University of Bergen (Anwar Abdelmagid Osman) and the Museum of Natural History of Geneva (Louis Chaix) also contributed to the work.

During a short field season in March 1990, members of the project (VMF, AJ, MM) began the surface survey on the East bank of the Blue Nile, in the Wadi Soba area. This zone is situated near Khartoum eastwards of the Neolithic site excavated in the 1989 season at the suburb town of Hag Yusuf. The survey was temporarily halted in 1991, then resumed in 1992 (between January 14th to February 5th by VMF, AJ, MM, JL), 1993 (January 15th to February 4th by VMF, AJ, JL), and 1994 (January 29th to February 14th by VMF, AJ, MM). The following seasons were dedicated to the extensive excavation of sites previously selected, under the direction of VMF, AJ, and MM. The Mesolithic sites of Sheikh Mustafa and El Mahalab were excavated from November 12th to December 6th 1994, January 20th to February 7th 1996, and February 8th to 13th 1996. The Neolithic site of Sheikh el Amin was excavated from January 25th to February 19th 1997, and from January 24th to February 15th 1998. No fieldwork was done in 1999. In the field season of 2000 an archaeological survey was carried out in the areas situated further east and south of Wadi Soba, investigating the Wadi Rabob, el Hag and el Hasib basins (January 21st to February 10th, directed by VMF). A general exploration of the Blue Nile basin south of Khartoum was also carried out during a week period in the 2000 field campaign (only days of fieldwork have been listed).


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Other specialists were involved in the post-excavation work, contributing reports or other assistance. Anwar Abdelmagid, Louis Chaix, Gonzalo Trancho, Beatriz Robledo, Pilar López and José A. López are credited in their respective contributed texts. A grateful acknowledgement goes to Víctor Manuel-Valdés (IES La Paloma, Madrid) for the chemical analysis of the Sheikh el Amin soils. Also to Juan Pedro Benito, Eduardo García, Alfredo González-Ruibal, Marta Mejías, Victoria Pérez, Antonio Chain and Sabah Walid for making most of the archaeological drawings, and Alfonso Fraguas for their support with the computer work. Emilio Hornero carried out the text formatting and thanks are here expressed to his great skill and patience.

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The archaeological finds of the survey are in the National Museum, Khartoum. The bulk of the material from the excavations at Sheikh Mustafa, Al Mahalab and Sheikh Al Amin—numbering in the tens of thousands of artefacts for the pottery material and hundreds of thousands for the lithic material—is stored in the Mission house at Soba village, property of Hassan Hussein Bashab. A small but representative sample of the recovered material both in the survey and excavations, the survey and excavation archive including field-notes, site and material summary data, maps and photographs are in the offices of the Department of Prehistory, University Complutense, 28040 Madrid.

This dossier is about both past populations and present day theories and methodologies. Our aim was to contribute to the historical construction in Northeastern Africa as a further step in its emancipation.