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Life in the Heart of Nubia

Abri, Amara East and Ernetta Island

ΑΠΡΙ

Life in Abri today

Abri is a vibrant town in the centre of the Sikoot region. It has local government offices, a *souq* (market), bank, hospital and secondary schools. But it was not like this before. Can you imagine what life was like 50, 100, 1,000 or even 3,000 years ago?

The area around Abri including Amara West, Amara East, Ernetta island, Tabaj and Abri, has a very long history of people living here. Over 10,000 years ago, people lived in the desert near Amara West.

Today's life in Abri is shaped by a long history. People from the past developed and collected a lot of useful knowledge, skills and technology. Learning about the continuity and changes now and before helps us to know about today's life.



Explore the cultures and history of your town in this book!

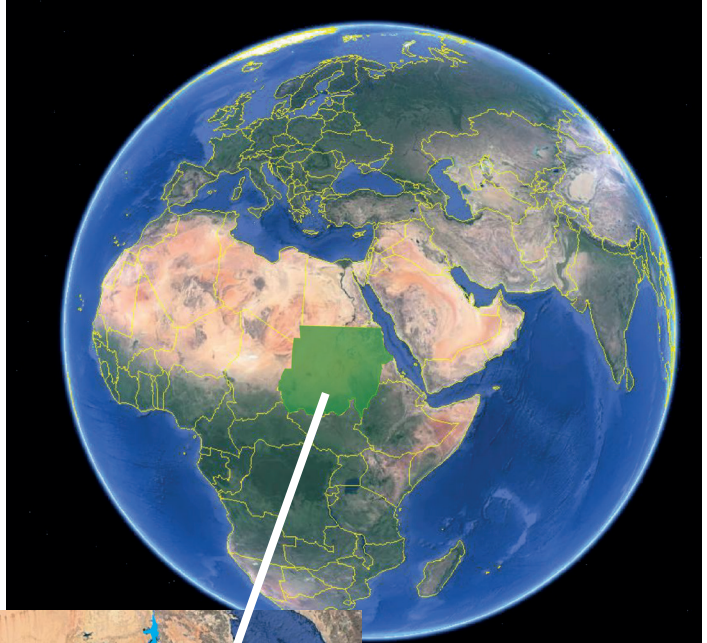
What has changed?
What things are similar to the past?

Ask your parents and grandparents more about what heritage is in your community!

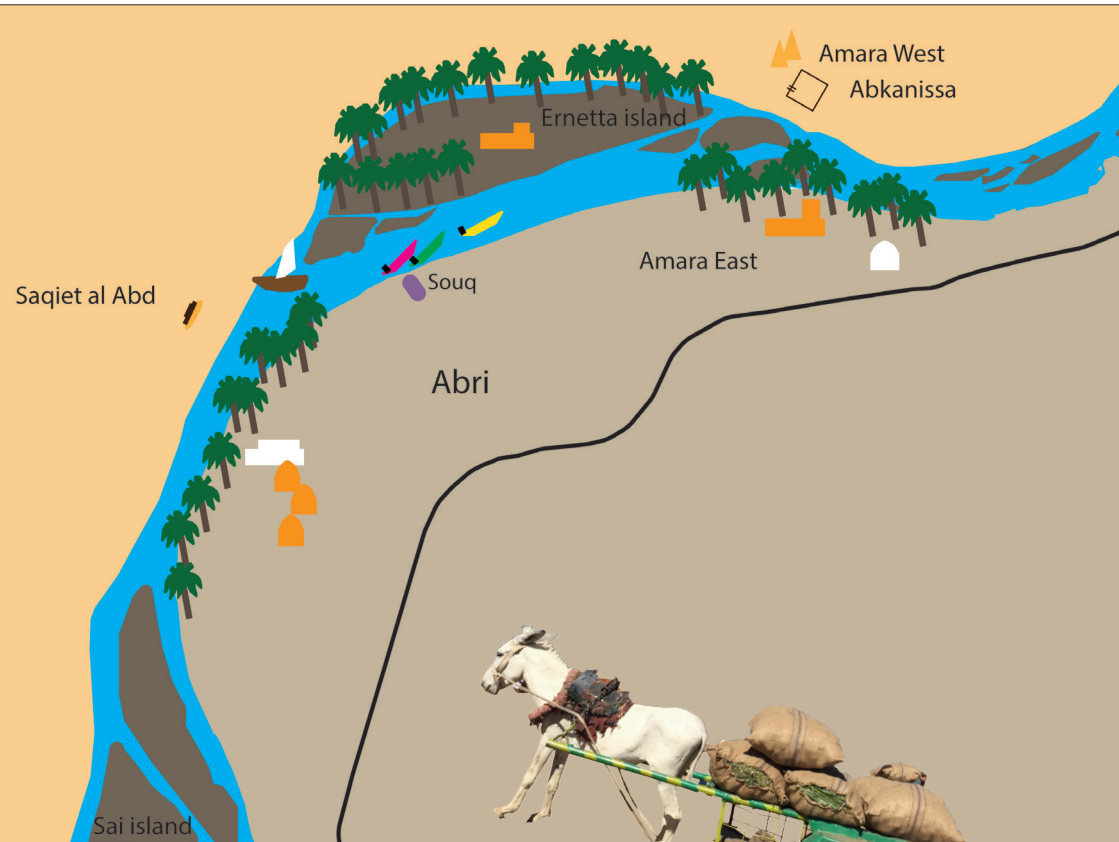


Locating Sudan and Abri

The Sikoot region is in the heart of Nubia, between Oshimatto and Sarkamatto. The town of Abri lies in the centre of Sikoot.



Map of the area of Abri



Houses

Old houses were made of natural materials which are available around the community. Do you know how to build and take care of these houses?



Old houses are made of mud bricks with plastered walls and floor. They often had a large gate with a heavy wooden door. The style of the houses – their gate, arched *veranda*, windows, decoration and building plan – have changed over time, often with unique colour or decoration in different villages. There is another way to build a wall with mud, called *jalous*.



Roofs are constructed with wooden beams and *julid* (palm branch) covered with mud on top. Building houses is usually men's work. Plastering mud walls and floors (*liasa* in Arabic or *kussi kussi* in Nubian), is women's work. The same material and technology was used to build houses in Amara West from 3,300 years ago: mud bricks, mud plaster and roofs from trees and mats.

Cooking and Food Storage



We sing when we grind grains! 🎵 🎵 🎵



Kitchen and food storage are essential in daily life. The new and old ones look different but have similar functions.

What is different between the old and new kitchens?



Agriculture

Abri is famous for agriculture.

Farmers know when to plant a certain crop and how to take care of each of them. They cultivate near their houses and the riverbank.

The development of technology has helped agriculture, especially getting water to the fields. *Babour* (water pumps) powered by diesel or electricity raise the water from the Nile. Before, the *saqia* (waterwheel) and *shaduf* were used to bring water up to the land. The *shaduf* is known to have been used for thousands of years.

There are also changes in what farmers grow.

Now, the major crops are dates and *foul* (beans) for selling, but 50 years ago people mostly grew crops for their own food.

What did they produce before?





How do the *saqia* and *shaduf* work?

The *babour* has reduced the amount of physical work for farmers.



Palm trees

Palm trees are an important part of day-to-day life in Abri. They produce dates for consumption at home and for trading. Dates can be preserved for long without a fridge! Families own date trees, and everyone knows which trees are for which family. Trees and dates were once exchanged like money.



Everyone helps to collect dates in the harvest season. Those who helped receive a share of the dates collected. The share is called *kery* in Nubian.



Not only dates, but the whole palm tree is useful in everyday life. Palm trees are used for roofing, fuel in the kitchen, and to make baskets and mats. Palm branches are also laid on tombs in the cemeteries. For what else are palm trees used?



Languages

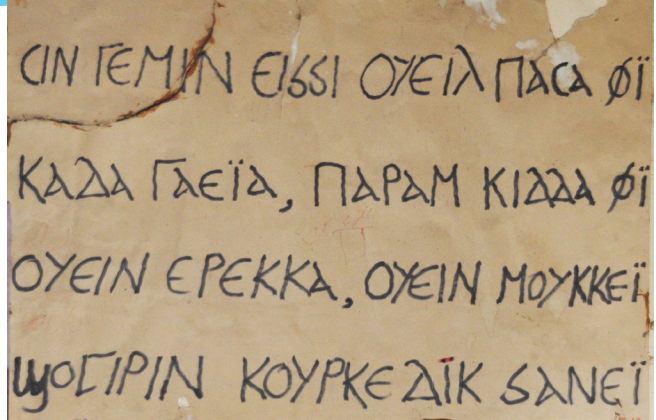
Arabic and Nubian are used in Abri today.

Nubian language is spoken across the Nubian region, from Aswan in Egypt to Dongola in Sudan. The dialect spoken in Abri area is called *Sikoot*. It is similar to *Mahas*. *Dongalawi* is used in the south and *Kenzi* is spoken to the north of Wadi Halfa (Egyptian Nubia).



Have you seen written Nubian language?

A poem by Makki Adris is written here in Nubian using Coptic/ Greek and Meroitic characters.



How many Nubian songs do you know?

Nubian people love songs, poems and dancing. There are many songs written and sung in the language.

Songs are important in the happy occasions like weddings. But also there are songs for all sorts of occasions in everyday life. For example, when using *jaai* (grinder), when closing doors... What else are songs sung about?

Let's ask your mother and grandmother!



Working together, Sharing culture

In old times, life was more difficult. Women had to bring water every day from the river. Neighbours helped each other to build mud brick houses, which needed to be repaired and plastered many times. Wheat had to be ground at home. Can you imagine life without cars, roads, mobile phones and electricity?

But the elders remember it was also a good time: people gathering, helping each other. Cooperation is an important culture for Nubian people. Children learn about skills and knowledge important for life as well as songs and stories from elder people. What tradition have you learned from your mother and father?



Do you ever picnic in the desert and on islands?

Some bring water and sacrifice goats, especially during the *Eids*. Before TV and electric lights at home, people sat, ate and talked for a long time, after the sunset, under the moonlight.

One of the places they went was called Amir Abdulla in desert. People thought it was a place of a famous *sheikh*, and went to make wishes and give a sacrifice.



People also visited *qubbas* – like those pictured here – on festival days in the past.

(left: Qubba Sheikh Mugheira, right: Qubbas Abri)



Storytelling

The river Nile is constantly changing. It moves, islands are created and disappear, and change shape. The name of Ernetta island is originally Nubian. The island begins from near the club. If you look closely at Ernetta, you do not find old houses and cemetery after the club. In 2001, the flood came high and the water flowed towards the south. So it means the southern end is lower and it is a new area.

Old people heard...

After the death of Mohamed Ahmed Al Mahdi in 1885, the soldiers of Abd al Rahman al Najumi came up to fight against Egypt. They didn't have enough equipment and ran out of food so they looted the local area on their way. When looting began, people left villages, including Ernetta island. They took boats made of palm branches called gay, and went down to the river. Some lost their lives. They arrived in Wadi Halfa and settled in Debeira. After Al Najumi's army was defeated in Toshika in 1889 they began returning to Ernetta island, after 10 to 12 years in Debeira.

Have you heard of any stories? There are a lot of stories in Abri, Ernetta and Amara East. They are usually not written in books but remembered by old people. These stories keep alive the history and culture of the area, and even remember famous people who visited or lived in your village. There're also mysterious or scary stories - no one knows if they are true or not. Find a few stories here and ask your grandparents for others!



Stories from Ernetta island

A story from Abri

Have you seen a building like this? A tall building made of stone blocks. It is in Abri Koin.



An elderly woman talks about this building. When a Turkish army came down to Abri, people in Abri fought. One day, they locked themselves up in this building. The Turkish army hoped they would come out when they ran out of water. But Hakim Hussein and other people inside dug a well in three nights, and threw water on the Turkish army from the roof, taking them by surprise. This building is a symbol of wise and strong people in Abri.

A story from Amara East



Do you know what this building is for? Have you heard of *kushaf*?

Kushaf were from Mahas and protected this area. Do you see a tall tower in the picture? It's called *diffi* or *kolfa* in Nubian. *Kushaf* sat in the tower to see who was coming to the community. When enemies came, they used bows and arrows with poisons and shot from small openings of the *diffi* to protect the village. There are buildings like this along the river and on islands to protect the people.

Amara West

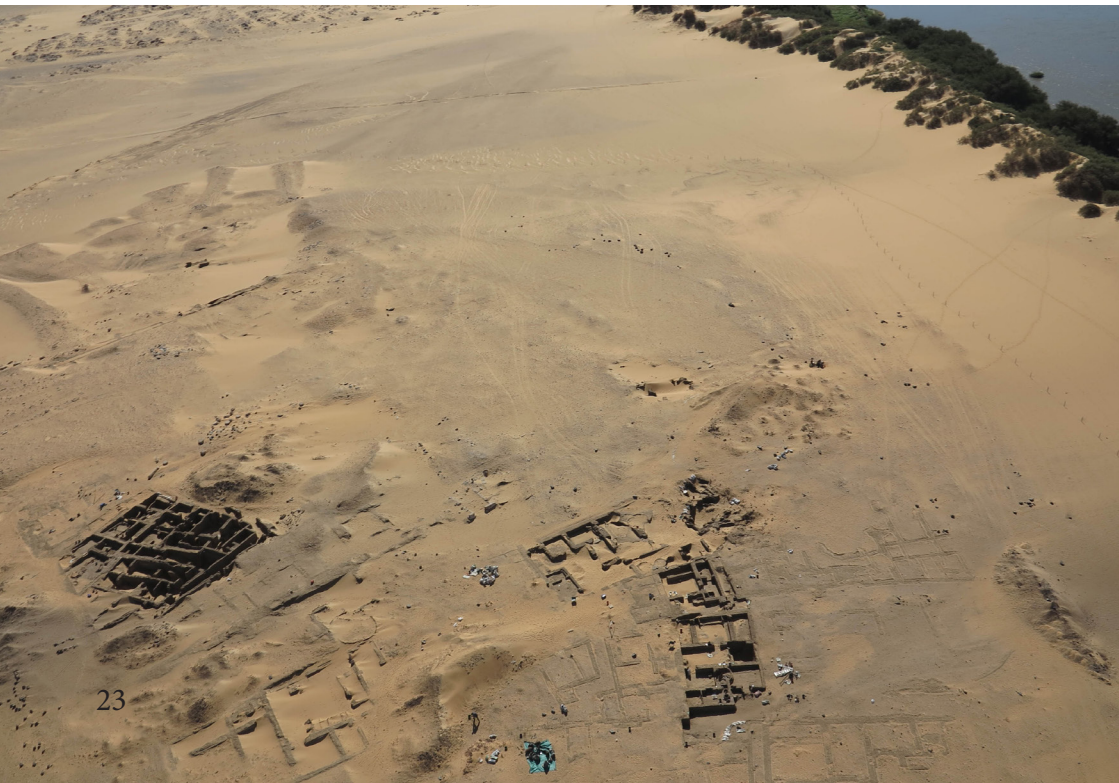
Archaeological sites are where we can learn what life was like in the even more distant past.



Seti I

Amara West is an ancient town at *Abkanissa*. Created in 1300 BC, by the Egyptian Pharaoh Seti I. The town was once on the island in the Nile, like today's Ernetta island. For about 200 years, people lived in the town. But one side of the river dried up and the wind brought sand from the desert in the town. It became difficult to live and grow crops so people moved to the east bank.

Even today, almost no one lives on the west bank.



What did ancient people eat?

People who lived in Amara West ate wheat, barley, lentils, melons, figs, doum-palms, cow, goat/sheep, pig. They made beer from bread and imported wine.



Did they get sick?

Human bones found in the cemeteries tell us they suffered from long-term physical labour, lung infections and even cancer. Many people had broken leg and arm bones, but these healed, showing the ancient community took care of the injured.



Study of these bones showed the man had cancer.



Archaeological remains built after the town of Amara West are also found in Saqiet al Abd (*kibieta*).

Archaeological sites at Sai

Today, there are modern villages and many people live on Sai island. There are also several archaeological sites. Have you visited any of them?

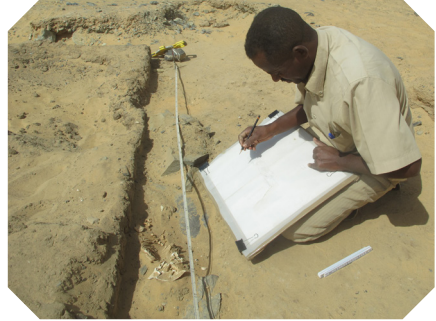
Sai is one of the biggest islands in the Nile in Sudan. It has a long history and presents us today diverse cultures which flourished in northern Sudan. People began living on the island from around 10,000 years ago. There are houses, temples, churches and tombs on Sai island, from nearly every period of the Nubian history.



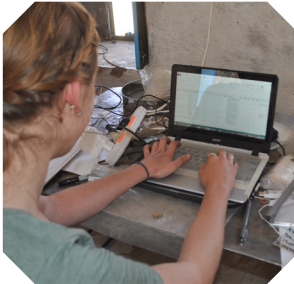
Archaeologists dig to find the remains of the past. They are not looking for treasures but for information about the past and what life was like: that might be broken pots, stone tools, remains of houses, remains of food. Many different types of specialists from Sudan and other countries work together to



1. Excavate carefully



2. Record what is discovered



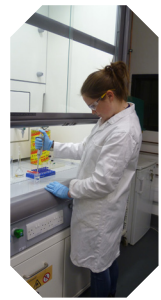
3. Number & register finds



4. Record & analyse finds (e.g. sherds, bones) and repair objects



5. Bring finds to the National Museum in Khartoum



6. Continue study in laboratories, and then write books to tell people about what we have learnt

Do you know what they are?

Answers are in page 30!



1. This is a bucket full of donkey dung. It is necessary for house maintenance. What is its purpose?

2. Do you find a bed like this at home? What is it used today?



3. Have you seen a big hole like this near your house? What is this hole for?

4. This is a skin of goat. What is its purpose?



In 1938-39 and 1947-50, a British team worked in Amara West with people from Ernetta, Amara East, Salim, Dal and Hamid etc. Many slept under trees by the river at Amara West. But people from Ernetta took an old boat, without a motor. It was difficult to cross the river in the wind everyday.

Stories of Amara West



Workers earned cash – it was precious then. Many merchants came to Amara West with old boats and sold tea, sugar, oil, and bread. Workers spent all the money buying goods from the boats!

Was there a tunnel?
People talk about a tunnel between Amara East and West under the river. But no one has ever seen it...!

Taking care of cultural heritage



This book shows you changes and continuity in the culture of Abri. Our culture today would not exist without the past: once people stop learning, practicing and taking care of their buildings, objects, activities, information and language, parts of that culture can be lost forever. Help preserve your culture for future generations!



Losing parts of local history

This statue was found in an ancient house of Amara West in 2010. But it was stolen in 2011. Now we only have pictures, and we cannot study or see one of the nicest objects made at Amara West. A part of the local history is lost.



Do you know there was an ancient temple in Amara East?

This stone is a base of a column which was a part of a Meroitic temple in Amara East. The temple had 6 large columns with names of Meroitic king Natakamani and Queen Amanitore. It was destroyed more than 100 years ago.

Once monuments are destroyed, the history disappears from the landscape, and it will be forgotten.

From life more than 3000 years ago Amara West in this book



They are ovens, probably used to bake breads. They were found in a house.



This bin was used for storage, probably of grains. Several of these were found in a large house at Amara West.



A fireplace was built in the centre of the main room in a house. It was probably used for cooking in pots, while also heating the house.



Plan a picnic!
A visitor centre in Amara West is for everyone. Come and learn about the ancient town!



A Nubian cooking pot. Nubian pottery was handmade while Egyptian style pottery was made on a wheel. Both types were made in Amara West.



A faience vessel found in the tomb at Amara West. 20 adults and children were buried there. Both Egyptian and Nubian cultures are represented in this tomb. The vessel is now in the Sudan National Museum in Khartoum!



This statue of a man with a wig was found in an Amara West house. It is made of sandstone and painted. This type of statue was used to communicate with dead family members.

Answers to Page 25

1. Donkey or cow dung are mixed with mud from the river and used for plastering floor and walls. Ask your mother how to mix it!
2. Wooden beds are carved with skill – look at the designs on the legs! These *angareeb* have been used for thousand of years, both for living and the dead.
3. This hole indicates where a *saqia* used to be!
4. This is a blanket for cold winter days (*faru* in Nubian).

Message to Parents and Grandparents

Life in Abri is quickly changing. New development helps to modernise life and make it more convenient. But everything that exists now is based on a long history. Not only written history but also information, objects, skills and technologies keep culture alive.

This book is made to help children explore heritage in the area of Abri. The Abri region has a long rich history and culture– all are parts of Nubian and Sudanese history and heritage. This one small book cannot cover everything.

Talk to your children about heritage or your family history, using this book as the starting point, so that they can appreciate and better understand the place they grow up in. This book also aims to teach them to take care of their heritage including archaeological sites, by understanding its importance and connection to their life now.

This book is about local heritage in collaboration with people from the region of Abri and archaeologists to put together their different knowledge.



Images: Students of Amara East primary school



Online resources about Amara West (free download)

Leaflet for children in Arabic

https://britishmuseumamarawestblog.files.wordpress.com/2016/02/amara-west_schools-leaflet_bm2016.pdf

Amara West book in English & Arabic

http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/research_projects/all_current_projects/sudan/amara_west_research_project/living_in_new_kingdom_nubia.aspx

Podcasts in English & Arabic

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCDmpT3He71KprHYYsLLLq9g>

British Museum Amara West Research Project website (English only)

<http://www.britishmuseum.org/AmaraWest>

British Museum Amara West Research Project blog (English only)

<http://britishmuseumamarawestblog.wordpress.com>



Book making team: Shireen Ahmed, Hassan Sorta and Fekri Hassan Taha
 Cover image & image on the right: Mosaab Surta

Image in page 4: Hassan Surta

Editing, text, book design: Tomomi Fushiya (Leiden University)

Oral histories: Jameela Mohamed Khalil Ali, Hujura Omda, Dawood Ahmed
 Dawood, Mohamed Saleh, Allah al Deen

Translation: Riham Nabil

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The British
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National Corporation
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THE TOYOTA FOUNDATION



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Soyta
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This book presents everyday life in Abri, Amara East and Ernetta island as a part of the broader history and culture of the area. Abri lies in the centre of the Sikood region which is located in the middle of modern Nubia, Sudan, some 725km north of Khartoum. This book is to engage children with local heritage, including the local archaeological sites.