

World Archaeology Seminars – »Future Archaeology: Fragile Past« Lecture Series

Heritage in a Time of Crisis

Conflict, Climate, and Community in Sudan

Tomomi Fushiya

Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology, University of Warsaw



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Start: 5:30 pm

Otto Wagner-Postsparkasse
Seminar room 1, 3rd floor
Georg Coch-Platz 2
1010 Vienna

Abstract

Sudan's archaeological heritage faces growing pressure from overlapping political, environmental, and economic crises. Since the outbreak of armed conflict in April 2023, archaeological sites, museums, and collections have become increasingly vulnerable to both direct and indirect forms of damage. Direct impacts include looting, vandalism, and destruction affecting museums and archaeological sites across the country. At the same time, the conflict has weakened heritage management and security structures, leaving many sites exposed to increased climate-related hazards and economic pressures. In this sense, the conflict has accelerated pre-existing vulnerabilities affecting Sudan's cultural heritage.

Beyond the immediate impacts of conflict, longer-term processes, such as climate change and the rapid expansion of gold mining, have further intensified the deterioration of archaeological sites and historic buildings across Sudan. Socio-political instability has disrupted institutional protection. While international organisations and archaeological project teams have explored ways to provide support from outside the country, the role of archaeological professionals on the ground has become essential. Together with local communities, they have assumed key responsibilities for monitoring and safeguarding heritage, amidst one of the worst humanitarian crises of this century.

Drawing on research and collaboration with local communities from the pre-conflict period, this lecture examines how these intersecting pressures are reshaping the ways archaeological heritage is understood, managed, and cared for. Particular attention will be given to community-based initiatives and collaborative efforts, using cases from Old Dongola and the Sikoot region, which illustrated how the challenges triggered discussions about vulnerability and the importance of caring for heritage, highlighting persistence and resilience. The lecture will also touch upon early initiatives that sought to document damage to cultural heritage and raise awareness during the initial phase of the conflict, including work undertaken through the Sudan Heritage Protection Initiative (2023–2024), bringing together the efforts and care of civil society for heritage protection.

CONTACT

M. Bianca D'Anna
Austrian Archaeological Institute
Maria.DAnna@oeaw.ac.at

REGISTRATION

Registration until 19.05.2026:
Maria.DAnna@oeaw.ac.at