QASR IBRIM

The Ottoman Period



JOHN ALEXANDER AND WILLIAM Y. ADAMS
with contributions by Nettie K. Adams and Boyce N. Driskell

QASR IBRIM

THE OTTOMAN PERIOD

ONE HUNDRED AND THIRTEENTH EXCAVATION MEMOIR

EDITED BY J. R. ANDERSON

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BY

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Editorial foreword

By William Y. Adams

Publication of this volume completes the documentation of excavations at the Nubian site of Qasr Ibrim, conducted by the Egypt Exploration Society between 1983 and 1986. It continues the tradition of documenting the history and archaeology of the site phase-by-phase. Previous monographs in the series dealt with the Ballaña phase, *c.* AD 350–600 (Adams 2013), the earlier medieval phase, *c.* 600–1172 (Adams 2010), and the later medieval period, *c.* 1172–1500 (Adams 1996).[1] The present work carries the story forward to the final abandonment of the site in AD 1812. This was the period when Lower Nubia was annexed to the Ottoman Empire, and an Ottoman garrison was installed at Qasr Ibrim itself. In earlier publications, this period was designated as 'Bosnian', based on a local tradition that the earliest garrison was made up of Bosnian soldiers (cf. Burckhardt 1819: 34), but the term 'Ottoman' is clearly more appropriate.

The remains described here were excavated piecemeal over many seasons, sometimes without much documentation. Half or more of them had already been destroyed, either by dismantling or by flooding, before John Alexander's arrival at Qasr Ibrim in 1980. As excavation co-director, he immediately made it his first priority to excavate all of those that remained, a job that largely occupied the 1980 and 1982 seasons. Most of the actual excavation was undertaken by others, most notably by graduate assistants Roger C. Allen and Boyce N. Driskell. Readers need to be aware therefore that very few of the architectural remains described in these pages were excavated by either Alexander or me; the descriptions offered are based very largely on field notes, plans, and photographs of others. Great reliance has been placed on a site-wide aerial photograph taken before the beginning of excavations (Plate 1). The interpretations, however, are those of either Dr. Alexander or me.

As a valedictory to the excavations, Dr. Alexander undertook to prepare the final report on the Ottoman period, which he completed not long before his untimely death.

Very extensive editorial preparation was then undertaken by Dr. Pamela Rose, but she was unable to complete the work because of the press of other duties. The manuscript was then, at my request, passed along to me.

It was my original intention to publish the work virtually as it stood, but I found that professional considerations made this impossible. The original manuscript combined historical interpretation and archaeological description (Parts I and II of the present work) in a highly imaginative way. This scheme of presentation made for good reading, but it also involved difficulties. To begin with, the historical and archaeological records do not readily mesh; they seem at times to be telling quite different stories. History, at least as interpreted by John Alexander, pictures a site that was first and last a military installation. Archaeology on the other hand presents in most respects a typical peasant village, having no recognizable military features other the surrounding girdle wall that had stood since Roman times.

Still more problematical was the fact that archaeological description and historical conjecture were interwoven in such a way as to suggest that the two were equally factual. Readers of the present, revised volume will be able to recognize that this was not the case. Dr. Alexander's overview of history is based on a truly admirable amount of archival research, yet the texts are virtually all of an official nature; they fall far short of providing a record of mundane activities at Qasr Ibrim. The original author supplied the deficiency with a great deal of interpretive conjecture that is plausible, but without either historical or archaeological confirmation.

In the interest of scholarly integrity, I felt that the most appropriate procedure was to separate conjectural history from factual archaeology, and present them separately, comprising Parts I and II in the present volume. Out of respect for Dr. Alexander's very extensive historical researches, I have left the historical passages included in Part I almost exactly as written, apart from a few corrective footnotes. They have been excerpted

1 Additional volumes have dealt with the Meroitic temple (Rose 2007) and the cathedral (Aldsworth 2010).

from a good many different places in the original manuscript, but the wording is unaltered.

The archaeological chapters, however, have been very much revised, on the strength of my more extensive knowledge of the site and of Nubian history and archaeology generally. Dr. Alexander's militarized perspective had allowed him to envision the existence of gun emplacements, ammunition depots, and other military features that cannot be identified archaeologically. In keeping with accepted professional practice, I have eliminated discussion of these and other features for which there is no empirical confirmation, in the form of field notes, maps, and/or photographs.

I have also departed from the author's description of archaeological remains according to the sequence of historical periods he has employed in Part I, for it does not relate in any way to the actual stratigraphy of the site. I have instead grouped the described remains on the basis of visible stratigraphy, in Chapters 8 and 9. Most of the surviving text is still that of Dr. Alexander, but I have done so much deletion, rearranging, and reinterpretation that it has been considered necessary for me to be listed as co-author of this section. At the conclusion of Part II, I have inserted a brief summary chapter reviewing the history of Ottoman Ibrim as it is suggested to me by archaeology.

Readers will recognize that I do not wholly agree with my co-author's militarized viewpoint; in particular, I see no reason to suppose that Qasr Ibrim ever was, or could be, a frontier defence. I note that Ottoman documents do not actually mention fortifications at Ibrim; they only mention a garrison. My own view is that the Ottomans took possession of Nubia simply in order to control the once lucrative Nile trade route, but then found that its value had diminished to almost nothing as a result of the opening of maritime trade with the West African coasts. However, Dr. Alexander is clearly entitled to his say, without interruption, in view of the enormous labour and thought he has put into the preparation of this work. My dissent in any case does not take away from the fact that Part I represents an enormously valuable piece of research, providing far more documentary information about Qasr Ibrim than is available for any earlier period.

The drawings and plans

Most of the maps and plans accompanying the text are printed as submitted by Dr. Alexander, except for a number of corrections necessary to bring them into conformity with the printed text. The originals were prepared by several different architects, in different seasons, and employing somewhat different cartographic conventions. It would be desirable, ideally, to redraw them to common standard, but this is no longer within my capacity. Thanks to the assiduous editorial work of Pamela Rose, I can anyway vouch for their accuracy. Their main deficiency is the lack of a scale bar in most cases, and of a directional orientation in many. House numbers and room numbers are in all cases those adopted by Dr. Alexander; they do not in all cases correspond to numbers appearing in earlier publications, or in field notes.

The appendices

Dr. Alexander's original manuscript contained no discussion of the artefacts from the Ottoman period, which were supposed to be reserved for a later volume. There seems little chance now that the necessary studies will be undertaken, and I have therefore included, in Part III, brief chapters summarizing such information as I am able to provide on the artefacts in general, and on the pottery in particular. Fortunately, extended studies of the Ottoman basketry and of the textiles had already been taken, respectively by Boyce Driskell and by Nettie Adams, and I am happily able to include them in this volume.

Acknowledgements

Both the quantity and the quality of preliminary editorial work undertaken by Pamela Rose, on both the text and the illustration, are beyond praise. Without her initial efforts, I could certainly not have completed the preparation of his publication. Although she declined the offer, she truly deserves to be listed as co-editor.

Julie Anderson at the British Museum has been most helpful in hunting out some of the object registration cards as well as photographs.

Revising the work of a deceased colleague who was also a valued friend has been at best a painful task, and I can only take comfort in one of John Alexander's last letters to me, in which he wrote that 'I really ought to rewrite the Ottoman volume, but am not sure I am up to it.'



Plate 1. Aerial photograph of the complete Ibrim site, taken just before the beginning of excavation (1963). All the visible remains except the outer cathedral wall are of Ottoman date.

PART I

THE HISTORICAL RECORD

By John Alexander, edited by William Y. Adams

Preface to Part I

In this section, the historical evidence for the most recent occupation of the site, by the garrison of a frontier fortress of the Ottoman Empire from the 1560s to 1812 AD, is considered. The archaeological evidence for the same period is considered in Part II, and the artefactual evidence in Part III. An understanding of the Ottoman occupation has been greatly helped by the discovery and speedy translation and publication of a large number of dated manuscripts in Turkish and Arabic. Together with research in the Cairo and Istanbul archives, they reveal much of the history of the garrison and allow the association of the excavated materials with the documentary evidence.

Three periods in the Ottoman occupation can be recognized historically. The first (*c.* 1550–1583) saw the creation of the *sanjaq* of Ibrim (a subdivision of an imperial province), in which Qasr Ibrim, or Qal'at Ibrim, as it was then known, was the main frontier fortress of the Ottoman empire in the Nile Valley. In Period II (*c.* 1583–1798), first the *eyalet* (province) of Ibrim and then the second *sanjaq* of Ibrim were created, and a new frontier fortress was built on Sai Island, some 250 kilometres further south. Period III (1798–1812) saw the French invasion, which cut the Ibrim and Sai garrisons off from Egypt north of Aswan, and, after the French withdrawal, the occupation of the fortress by refugee Mamluk households fleeing Mohammed Ali Pasha. In 1812, after a siege by Mohammed Ali's army, the fortress was abandoned, though the families of the last garrison members continued as landlords in the neighbouring riverside villages.

This volume is dedicated to the descendants of the garrison, who are now living near Kom Ombo and their ancestors.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to the many institutions and individuals whose help has made this volume possible. Firstly, thanks are due to the Egypt Exploration Society and the British Academy who, after the concession to the site had been granted by the Egyptian Government during the UNESCO Nubian rescue campaign, undertook and funded its excavation, and still continues to honour what has proved to be a very long-term commitment of resources. I am personally grateful to the University of Cambridge and St. John's College for the grant of repeated sabbatical leave which enabled him to work at Qasr Ibrim, and to Pamela Rose for preliminary editing of the manuscript.

Excavation or survey of the Ottoman remains has taken place in every campaign between 1963 and 1986 under J. M. Plumley, W. Y. Adams, and J. Alexander. The personnel of each team varied, but for the early years much is owed to the surveys and photographs of G. Dales and K. Frazer, and the excavation notes of W. H. C. Frend. In later years, more detailed architectural recording was carried out by M. Mallinson, M. Morris, K. Fernie and L. M. V. Smith. The field notes of the excavations conducted by Alexander, W. Y. Adams, R. Allen and B. Driskell, and the finds' records of P. French and P. Rose, have been invaluable. We are indebted to A. Bonner for many excellent photographs.

Since the condition of many of the buildings deteriorated greatly between the abandonment of the fortress and the start of excavation in 1963, early accounts and photographs have been most important in understanding the site as it existed at the time of its abandonment. This is especially true of manuscript notes compiled by Somers Clarke on visits to the fortress in 1894 and 1899, made available by the Griffith Institute of the University of Oxford, and James Breasted's photographs of 1905–1907, made available by the library of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago. My thanks for permission to use other photographs go to the Cairo Documentation Centre for the UNESCO Nubian Campaign.

Post-excavation studies owed much to translations of Arabic and Turkish manuscripts by Martin Hinds, Hamdi Sakkout and Victor Ménage; we are especially grateful to Professor Ménage for his advice and encouragement, and for reading and commenting on the reappraisal of the buried archive cache discussed in Chapter 2. In preparing the text for publication we have been much helped by Mrs S. Mansfield. The first editing was undertaken by P. Rose.

CHAPTER 1

The Geographical and Political Context of Qasr Ibrim

The physical setting

The significance of the site of Qasr Ibrim and the reasons for its occupation over at least 3000 years have often been discussed (for example, Alexander 1988, Adams 1996), and need not be further elaborated here, although the relevance of the site's geographical and topographical situation for the period of the Ottoman occupation should to be outlined. Qasr Ibrim lies on the east bank of the Nile in the 400 kilometres of pure desert, the eastern Sahara, which divides the Mediterranean littoral from the savannahs of central Africa. The Nile valley has been, for the last 6000 years, the only relatively easy route connecting these areas, and control of it has been important for both northern and southern polities.

The local topography of the Qasr Ibrim region provides the specific reason for the importance of the site. The isolated hilltop on which the fortress stood lies 240 kilometres south of Aswan and the First Cataract, and 80 kilometres north of the Second Cataract (**fig. 1**). It dominated and controlled the river valley for many kilometres, and for much of its history served as a frontier fortress held by polities based further to the south or north. When not serving as a military post, it attracted religious communities, but only in times of insecurity has its waterless and barren location attracted civil populations.[2]

The hill on which the fortress stood was at the western end of an east-west ridge of Nubian sandstone (**fig. 2**). Here the Nile had eroded through the sandstone and created a 70 metre-high cliff face. On its eastern side, the hill was isolated by a dry valley, probably an early braided river channel, which separated it from the continuation of the ridge eastwards. The isolation of the hill was completed by long-dry watercourses immediately to the north and south.

For several kilometres in both directions the eastern river bank was narrow, and little agriculture was possible until the districts of el-Gineina to the south and Qatta, some distance to the north, were reached. Beyond them, both to the north and south, long stretches of fertile alluvium, cultivable in part after the annual flooding and in part by irrigation, could support considerable agricultural populations, and did so throughout the period considered here. Those to the north of Ibrim had as their district centre al-Dirr, which was in the Ottoman period the seat of the *sanjaq* government and the largest settlement in Lower Nubia, with a palace, law court, shops, artisans, and several hundred inhabitants. The region to the south had Qasr Ibrim as its district centre, and this region, some 70 kilometres in length, was known as the Wadi Ibrim. In the Wadi Ibrim wheat, barley, sorghum and lentils grew well, especially on *saqia*-irrigated land, and date palms were particularly successful; dates from the Wadi Ibrim were famous throughout Egypt (Burckhardt 1819: 29). Bovids, caprids and equids could also be kept in considerable numbers if fodder was grown for them.

The above illustrates several of the different usages of the name 'Ibrim', and it is important to distinguish between them. It may be a shortened form of the Wadi Ibrim, of Qasr Ibrim (the fortress), or, as will be discussed below, the name of larger territories, the first and second *sanjaqs* of Ibrim and the *eyalet/vilayet* of Ibrim.

South of the Wadi Ibrim lay some 200 kilometres of thinly populated, stony valley including the Second Cataract; this comprised the regions of Sukkot and Mahas. Tahe Second Cataract was a major barrier to north–south communication in the Nile valley, and a fortress at Qasr Ibrim would have controlled the approaches to Egypt from this direction very effectively.

2 Ibrim was an important commercial centre during the Ballaña and earlier Christian periods, and also had cotton-spinning and wood-turning industries.