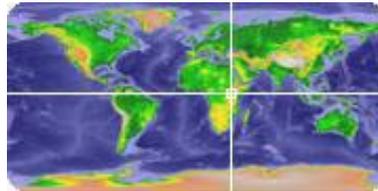




March 2008 Newsletter

The Archaeology of Imperialism: A Contribution to African Education

By Merrick Posnansky*



A positive achievement of archaeology in Africa has been its ability to discover historical truths not available from the written record. In eastern Africa these truths include the earliest evidence of Homo sapiens, early contacts across the Indian Ocean, the expansion of Bantu agriculturalists and the solid evidence of early interior complex societies linked by trade to the east African coast. Later archaeology has perhaps been overlooked since many states have excellent, intensively studied, oral histories stretching back for up to 20 generations or 400-500 years. Historical archaeology is facilitating a redressing of the balance both providing a more accurate history of Imperialism and revealing substantial monuments that can excite and educate the interest of visitors and schoolchildren alike. I have elsewhere attempted to define the archaeology of Imperialism. In this paper I shall deal solely with early Imperialism in northern Uganda and the teaching of Uganda history.¹ (Table 1, below, provides a chronology of some of these key events from 1831 to 1920).

In Uganda the historical mantra has been that the first important external contacts, or globalization as is the current term *du jour*, were provided by European explorers and missionaries who made contact with, and began work in, the then most important state Buganda on the shores of Lake Victoria from around 1875-1877. Such missionaries were said to have built the first non vernacular architecture of adobe with the earliest sun-dried brick structure from one of the mission stations dating to the 1890s. British administrative control arrived with Captain Lugard in 1890 and eventually the British and their Baganda acolytes fanned out to the north and west of the administrative centers of Kampala/Entebbe on Lake Victoria into the rest of Uganda. This is not unlike the historical scenario in western Africa where action begins on the coast with the European arrival and spreads north. These interpretations, however, are based on the skewed information of Imperial control and a later colonial educational system. History is written from a metropolitan perspective, or the view of the victors. This is the same way that I learnt history in Britain in which the perspective was skewed to a Britain in which half the globe was colored red and the meridian line passed through London.

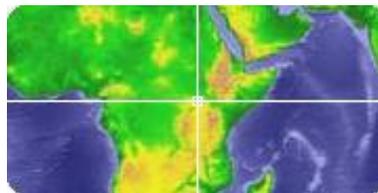
What we have shown in our research using both historical sources and archaeological investigation is that the first major Imperial advances were made from the north by Egyptian forces and not from the south by Europeans. These forces controlled Sudanese troops under European command at a date earlier than the arrival of English and French missionaries at the Buganda court. Their dozen military stations, with their burnt brick buildings, still remain as tangible and visible evidence of that impact. Their impact was overlain to some extent by the adverse effect of Christian missionary propaganda that denigrated everything Islamic as uncivilized and thus to be avoided. As a result educational services and economic opportunities spread from the Kampala area. The umbilical cord that linked the north of Uganda to Egypt from the 1860s, reinforced by the importation of metal steam ships on the Nile from the late 1860s was cut by the rise of the fundamentalist Islamic forces of the Mahdi who had by 1885 wrested the control of the Sudan from Egypt, captured its capital Khartoum and slain the English General Charles Gordon.

Whereas the European missionaries and the British soldiers and administrators in the south were literate, writing voluminously in English that supplemented an oral historical record that was relatively rapidly compiled by principally Baganda supporters of the British, our knowledge of the north of Uganda comes largely from non-English sources. The northern oral historical sources were only recorded many years after the events described by missionaries and administrators who hailed from the British centers of authority. In recent years Arabic writings, inaccessible or neglected by English historians, have been accessed. A further complicating factor was that the Egyptian force was far from monolithic and once their commander, Emin Pasha was relieved by Henry Stanley in 1888 the Sudanese army disintegrated. Part of this army was taken down to Kampala in 1891 by Captain Lugard to form the core of the African Rifles, the future Uganda army. Others moved to settle in trading stations that developed as some of the first towns in the area whilst some stayed behind in their abandoned military stations. For a time the Belgians governed a sector of the former province as Equatoria along the Nile as the Lado enclave. By 1909, that too was gone and a new British administration had spread from the south and the Sudan had become a separate colony with only tenuous links to the south following the defeat of the Mahdists at Omdurman in 1898.

The military stations were abandoned. Their memory was tied to an era that the Uganda historians had reasons to forget even though they represented a foreign footprint in Uganda far larger than that of the early British missionaries, traders and administrators. Cumulatively there had been several thousand foreigners in the northern stations, regular postal services carried mail from the eastern Congo to Europe in far shorter time than mail sent via rail to the East African Coast and through mailship services via the Suez canal.

Presently three excavations and two archaeological surveys have been undertaken on the Egyptian military stations in Northern Uganda and each has added to the sum of Uganda's history. In 1962 a team of Ugandan and British school boys surveyed and excavated the fort of Patiko built in 1862 by Samuel Baker, who was the first European to plot the position of Lake Albert, or what we formerly misguidedly termed its discovery. Patiko was built to help to control the northern slave trade. In the 1860s and 1870s up to 30,000 slaves were seized annually in northern Uganda and the southern Sudan and taken to Khartoum and later Egypt. For every slave sold in the slave market more than 9 had been killed in the devastated areas or

died on the long march north. This compares with the one in seven slaves lost in the Middle Passage of the Atlantic Slave trade. At Patiko we discovered that the fort had been enlarged and was reused up to the late 1880s. In 1963, again using schoolboys, we dug Wadelai established around 1876, the favorite fort of Emin Pasha that gave us some idea of the size of the Egyptian military stations and also revealed Emin Pasha's use of canned food. In 1965 a team of 6 students from Imperial College in London, supported by the Royal Geographical Society, surveyed 4 Egyptian forts and also 5 forts thrown up by the Kiganda General Semei Kakungulu in eastern Uganda. In 2004-2005, Dr. J.E.G.Sutton surveyed the fort of Foweira, where Samuel Baker dug in against the Bunyoro. The fort had a long history being occupied by a Baluchi regiment after the 1897 mutiny when it maintained a postal station. In the dry season of 2006-2007, Dufile, the fort from which Emin was relieved, was surveyed and test excavations conducted.²



At Dufile we established a two stage occupation, the first by the Egyptians who built square burned orange brick buildings 1876-1888 and a later Belgian occupation 1902-1907 when the bricks were darker in color and of a consistent European dimension. In both occupations it was obvious from the overwhelming abundance of hand made cord and wood roulette decorated pottery that local women served as wives and did the cooking. Their food was however dictated by northern tastes with beef and lamb stews, little game meat and surprisingly few Nile fish, the staple of present diets. The scale of the earthen ramparts, up to 6 meters in height from ditch bottom to rampart peak, surrounding a military station of 11 acres, indicated the nature of Egyptian involvement and confirmed the estimates of the 1,000 or more people who manned or lived in such stations. All of this was taking place at a time when in the Kampala area the number of foreigners was less than a hundred and early churches were built in vernacular fashion of grass and reeds.

Though the emphasis of Ugandan history after the 1890s was based on European activities around Lake Victoria our work has indicated that a correct understanding of Ugandan history must take into account Egyptian and European activities from the 1860s through 1890s in northern Uganda. One major impact of the arrival of Sudanese troops was the development of a distinct Muslim 'Nubian' population that now numbers over 120,000 and is a significant ethnic minority particularly in northern towns and in areas where Nubian mercenaries served the British in the areas nearer Lake Victoria. The development of Islam, now at least 15% of the Ugandan population (or 5.8 million), resultant from intermarriage, trade development and military service also can be explained by a better understanding of northern Ugandan history facilitated by both Historical Archaeology and purely documentary history.

An essential aspect of our work has been to design a master plan, in consultation with the local government, for the development of Dufile as a sustainable historical monument. We hope that this will be only one of the historical sites in Uganda that will serve Ugandan education by

providing monuments illustrative of its history. The creation of Visitors Centers, with clear didactic displays, is seen as essential as further archaeological research.

Table 1

1910-20	Baganda missionaries fan out in northern Uganda preaching the gospel and facilitating British administration.
1909	The Lado Enclave ceded by Belgium to the Sudan and later Britain.
1905-06	First secondary boarding mission schools established in Kampala area.
1902-07	Dufile operated as a military station as part of the Belgian Lado Enclave .
1898	The battle of Omdurman -- Mahdists annihilated -- creation of the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium of the Sudan.
1891	Captain Lugard brings down 700 of the Sudanese soldiers to Kampala to form the African Rifles -- descendants form the Nubian minority population of Uganda.
1888-89	Stanley and Emin Pasha abandon Nile forts and retreat to the coast with part of the Equatoria Sudanese army. Emin falls off a balcony in Bagamoya, Stanley returns to England, Emin joins the German East Africa Company and is murdered in the Congo in 1892.
1887-88	Henry Stanley marches across the Congo forest to relieve Emin Pasha losing two thirds of his Zanzibari porters.
1884-85	Charles Gordon goes to Khartoum, is besieged by the Mahdi and killed in January 1885 days before a British relief column is due in Khartoum.
1883	British army of 10,000 commanded by William Hicks is annihilated south of Khartoum (18 senior British officers - generals and colonels were to die in battle with the Mahdists 1883-1885).
1878	Emin Bey (later Pasha) appointed Governor of Equatoria province of the Sudan by Gordon. Dufile established as a major station with port for steam ships on the Albertine Nile. Soldiers for military stations mainly drawn from middle Nile area.
1877-79	Christian missions established in Kampala area of Uganda.
1875	Stanley at the court of the Kabaka of Buganda
1874-79	Charles Gordon Governor of the Sudan, establishment of Egyptian forts along the Nile.

- 1869-73 Sir Samuel Baker appointed Pasha to annex Upper Nile and squash slave trade. Patiko military station established.
- 1869 Opening of the Suez canal.
- 1863 Samuel Baker maps Lake Albert and determines the course of the White Nile.
- 1858-62 Burton, Speke and Grant ‘discover’ Lake Victoria and the sources of the Nile.
- 1831 Egyptian conquest of the Sudan and expansion of the ivory and slave trade from Khartoum to the Upper Nile.

Notes

* The author is Professor Emeritus, Department of History, University of California, Los Angeles. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 2008 Annual Meeting of the Society for Historical Archaeology in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

1. A fully annotated paper that includes the basic information contained in this note will appear in the *Uganda Journal*, 52 “The Northern Factor in Uganda’s history.”

2. A full (40 page) report on Dufile, with a plan of the fort, and color illustrations, can be obtained from Merrick Posnansky, 5107 Rubio Ave, Encino, CA 91436 for \$10. For an earlier report on a research plan related to this project, see Merrick Posnansky, “The Madi, Displacement and Resurrection of an African Population.” *African Diaspora Archaeology Newsletter*, September 2005, <http://www.diaspora.uiuc.edu/news0905/news0905.html#1>.

Return to March 2008 Newsletter:

<http://www.diaspora.uiuc.edu/news0308/news0308.html>