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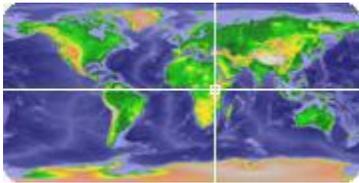
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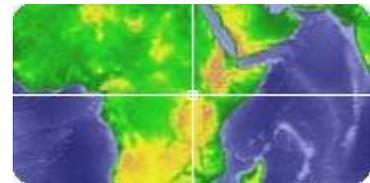
The Madi, Displacement and Resurrection of an African Population: The Dufile Research Project, Uganda 2005-2006

By Merrick Posnansky
Director, Dufile Project, UCLA



The Dufile project in the West Nile of Uganda was initiated in 2004 to find out more about the Madi, one of the African societies most heavily impacted by the 19th century slave trade. The African slave trade, contrary to some beliefs, did not end in the early 19th century with the restrictions on trade in the Atlantic, but has continued until the present day. The abuses of power in the Darfur region of the Sudan are currently leading to women and children being transported hundreds of miles to the northern Sudan for domestic slavery in Khartoum and parts of Middle East. Reminiscent of the Darfur terror was the 19th century slavery in the Upper Nile.

In the 1830's Egypt moved south into the Sudan. The attraction was ivory then in high demand for piano keys, billiard balls and cutlery handles. The other commodity eagerly sought were slaves who were used in Egypt but also shipped to Arabia and the Arab Gulf. The acephalous societies of the Upper Nile, amongst the most materially impoverished communities in Africa, were particularly vulnerable. The abuses of the traders were noted by such Nile explorers as Samuel Baker in the early 1860's and ultimately led to an attempt by the Egyptian Government to establish an administration to control the trade and extinguish slavery. Baker and later Colonel Gordon were appointed as Governors of the area and began establishing military stations to enforce Egyptian control. The Sudanese troops, Egyptian officers and European commanders represented the first Imperial contact with an area that had had virtually no contact with the outer world. The rise of the fundamentalist Islamic leader, the self proclaimed Mahdi, in the early 1880's, ultimately led to the collapse of Egyptian power in the Sudan. Khartoum fell and Gordon was killed in 1885. The Ugandan portion of the Upper Nile, part of the Sudanese province of Equatoria, remained under the control of Emin Pasha who in turn left the area in 1889.



The Egyptian Military stations were substantial. Dufile, surrounded by banks, up to 15 feet high from the bottom of the surrounding ditches, and with a man made harbor for 4 steamships, covered nearly 12 acres and at its height may have housed up to 4000 troops, their families, workers and camp followers. The fieldwork in 2005-06 seeks to accurately survey the fort, locate the battleground where the forces of the Mahdi were repelled, and find out where the Madi who did the grunge work at the fort lived. Some of the settlements have already been located. It is hoped to discover much more about the process of acculturation using

linguistic research as well as ethnographic and historical accounts and studies of present material culture. It is hoped that the work will provide information on the impact of an Imperial force on an African population already severely afflicted by the Arab slave trade. In 1891 the rump of Emin Pasha's troops were taken over 300 hundred miles south to the Kampala area of Uganda to form the nucleus of the Uganda Rifles, Uganda's first army. More than 9000 family members, most of them Madi wives and children and servants acquired by the Sudanese troops, were brought down. Over the last century these people have developed into a significant Muslim minority population of over 100,000, locally known as Nubians, dispersed over a significant area of Uganda and Kenya. The project aims to look at both their language and material culture to gain insights into cultural transformations over the past century that should help in understanding some earlier population displacements of the African Diaspora. Previous work on the Equatoria forts, like Patiko and Wadelai, had concentrated on the forts themselves paying little attention to the contacts between the Imperial forces and the local population.

The lead archaeologist of the 2005-06 fieldwork is Professor Christopher DeCorse of Syracuse University who will be joined by up to 20 participants from UCLA, the British Institute in Eastern Africa in Nairobi, Ugandan students from Makerere and Kyambogo universities in Kampala and the University of Ghana.