



A R I D

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8 2019

MONOGRAPHS

Papers from the 1<sup>st</sup> Workshop

## Archaeology in Africa

Potentials and perspectives on laboratory  
& fieldwork research

Edited by

Savino di Lernia and Marina Gallinaro

### Arid Zone Archaeology, Monographs

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SAPIENZA UNIVERSITÀ DI ROMA  
DIPARTIMENTO DI SCIENZE DELL'ANTICHITÀ

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# Archaeology in Africa

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with contributions by

M. I. Ahmed, F. Altamura, B. E. Barich, A. Barili, J. Ben Nasr, J. Bogdani, Y. Bokbot,  
G. Boschian, C.A. Buccellato, P. Buzi, E. Cancellieri, M. Cherin, A. Colonna, A. Dekayir,  
S. di Lernia, E.B. Ichumbaki, D. A. Iurino, M. Gallinaro, M. Guirguis, E. Janulardo,  
L.-I. Manfredi, G. Manzi, F. T. Masao, A. Mastino, S. Menconero, A.M. Mercuri, P. Mitchell,  
J. Moggi Cecchi, S. Ribichini, I. Rossetti, C. Rossi, N. Santopuoli, S. Sarmati, S. Tusat

with foreword by S. di Lernia



*All'Insegna del Giglio*



# 1. Introducing the 1<sup>st</sup> Workshop on “Archaeology in Africa”

Savino di Lernia, Marina Gallinaro

**Abstract.** This chapter introduces the workshop “Archaeology in Africa”, providing a synthesis of the contributions and placing the event in the international scenario.

**Key Words.** Africa; conflict & turmoil; resources; fund raising.

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**Authors’ contribution.** The authors equally contributed to the chapter.

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## 1. Background

With the increasing number of conferences, congresses and workshops devoted to African archaeology, one wonders if there is room for another one. More so if with the explicit hope, or unconscious admission, that this workshop would have been the first of a (long) series. And finally, in Italy, where in the past other attempts to create a flexible but permanent structure did not last for long (see Barich, this volume).

This workshop comes after a long theoretical gestation, mainly due to the essential questioning – do we really need it? – and many perplexities (in particular of one of us, SdL). One of the main factors driving our decision to organize this meeting was the awareness of the lack of a network in Italy (both for Italians and Italy-based researchers) for those who work in Africa.

This is particularly surprising, given the very long tradition of Italian research in Africa, particularly active in Northern and Eastern Africa since the 1930s (e.g. Di Caporiacco and Graziosi 1934; Graziosi 1942; Mori 1965). Although this geographical focus could be in some way related to our colonialist past, the expansion of

Italy-based research to several other African countries that not suffered the Italian occupation likely reflects a genuine scientific, cultural and ultimately political choice. Notwithstanding scientific research should be borderless, and cultural heritage should not be considered property of a country, we should regrettably admit that all of us belong to places and we all are strongly influenced by traditions, political institutions and legislations of (our) respective countries. This hugely affects the way we do research, raise funds and the ways we work in other places, including teaching, publications and dissemination. Since these topics have not been discussed in Italy over the last 25 years (if ever), we thought that a meeting calling for contributions to consider these aspects, regardless of place of fieldwork, cultural, chronological and historical time frame, and methodological approaches, would have represented a ‘novelty’ in our scientific panorama. We thought that Africa was the key-word to be used to keep all these contributions together, convinced that doing scientific research in Africa has a distinctive value, as recalled several times (e.g. di Lernia 2017; Mitchell and Lane 2013; Stahl 2005).

Another trigger for this meeting was (and it is) related to the so-called ‘Arab Spring’. The outcome has been particularly effective for those who work in the Mediterranean basin, and, in Africa, for those working in the northern regions. Turmoil, social and political instability, terroristic threats, however, had a severe impact also in several other African countries. The death in February 2017 of two Nigerian colleagues, Anas Ibrahim and Adamu Abdulrahim, who tried to abort the kidnapping of Peter Breunig and Johannes Behringer, from Germany, is probably one of the most dramatic events. As we write these notes, after nearly two decades the Algerian president Abdelaziz Bouteflika will not stand for re-candidacy in the next elections. In Sudan, after 30 years, Omar Hasan Ahmad al-Bashir Bashir Al Assad has been deposed, following protests that have long inflamed the country. In Libya, more than eight years after the death of Gheddafi, Khalifa Haftar, military leader of the so-called Libyan National Army (LNA), is attacking Tripoli, home of the UN-backed government of Fāyez al-

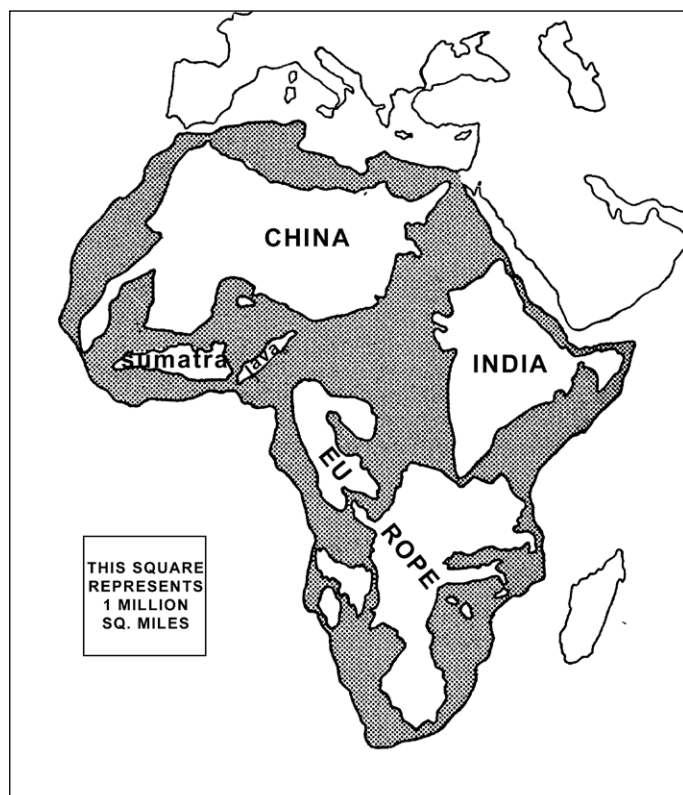


Fig. 1.1 – Map of Africa (modified, after Clark 1975).

Sarrāj: at the United Nations, Russia, and in the European Union, France, blocked any motion of condemnation.

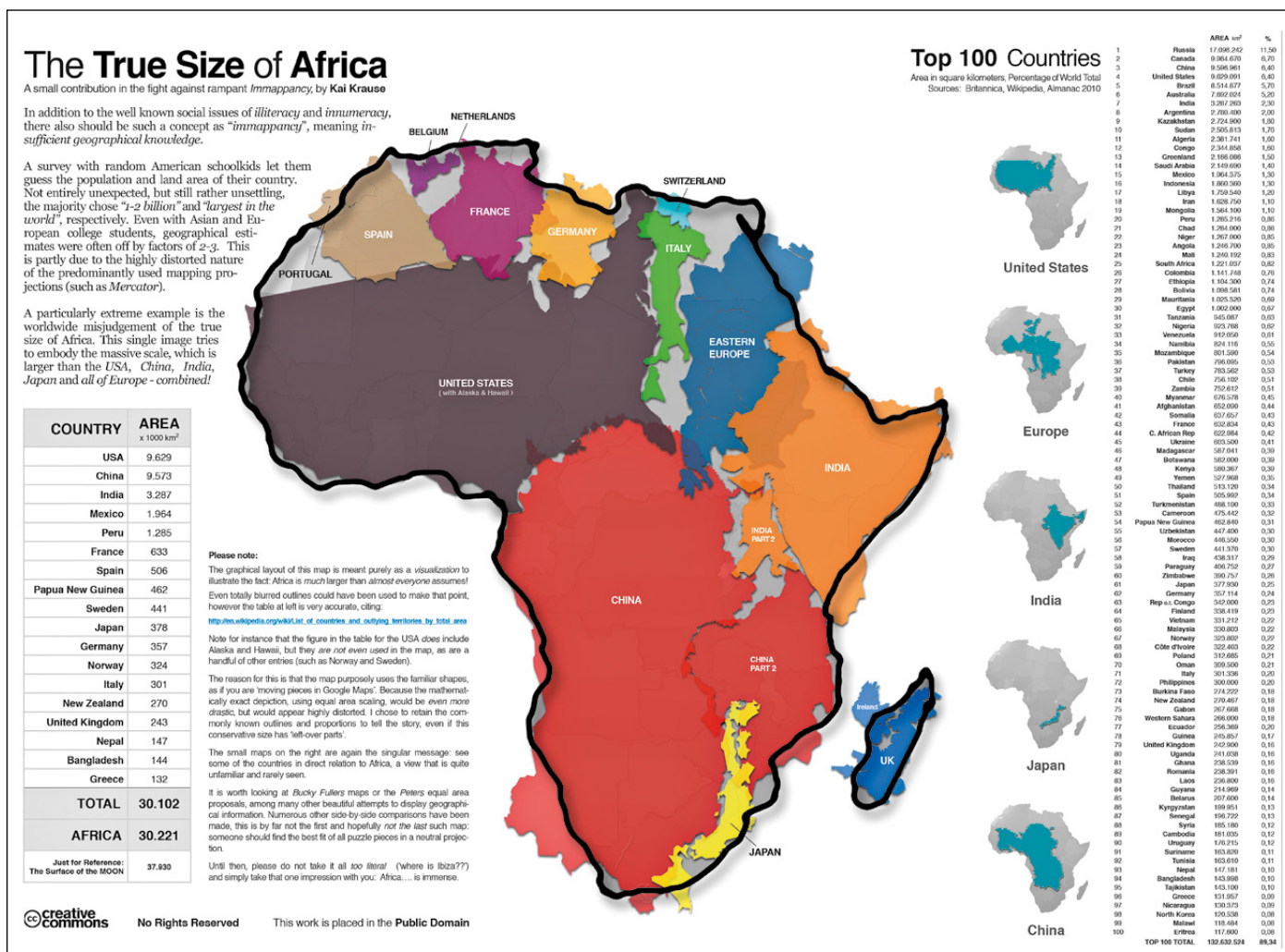
The list of anguishing problems affecting Africa's local populations, travellers, businesspeople, tourists, as well as scientists is long. In our specific and quite narrow field, we undoubtedly entered a post-colonial phase of archaeology, where aims and methods are no longer driven by the need of the 'global north' but by several other factors, starting from the specific requests of local institutions (e.g. di Lernia 2015). After 2011, the scarce (if any) activity in the field in Egypt, Libya, Chad, Mauritania, Niger and to some extent Tunisia and Algeria had a positive counterpart in a strong resumption of publications, but it is hard to believe that this could last for long. In the fundraising process, fieldwork still plays an important role, although more voices urge for a different use of money and the ways we practice archaeology (Mitchell, this volume).

The aims of the workshop and the ways we look at the African continent are brightly evident in the choice of the two images we used in the website and workshop leaflets (<https://archaeoinafrica.wordpress.com>). The first illustration (Fig. 1.1) is from the seminal ar-

ticle published by John Desmond Clark more than forty years ago (1975): in a sense, the question "*Africa in prehistory: peripheral or paramount?*" is still valid, although needs, problems and perspectives are dramatically changed since then. The second image is dated to 2010 and realized by Kai Krause, a German graphic artist for an exhibition organized by the Royal Geographic Society in London (Fig. 1.2). Both convey the same, basic meaning: Africa is a vast landmass and could include many countries of the planet. At the same time, the problems and potentials of the African continent are relevant to the planet, and we believe that this has emblematic value also for archaeology. In a sense, Africa's territorial vastness is a metaphor of the greatness of this continent in the archaeological domain, and the ways this greatness could potentially contribute to theoretical, methodological and interpretative issues. An important objective of the meeting was also to stimulate the confrontation between different perspectives and to set the platform to create a synergy between research groups and to intensify national and international cooperation.

## 2. Structure and contributions to the workshop

This volume collects 14 contributions, out of 21 talks presented at the workshop that engaged ~45 researchers from 8 countries, with a strong focus on Italy-based researches (Fig. 1.3). Its structure is basically geographic, with chapters organized from north to south and from west to east, following a chronological order for each area. Peter Mitchell, who generously addressed the workshop's keynote, provides here a manifesto of archaeological practices in Africa, strongly recalling the need to engage local communities since the preliminary phases of any project. Anna Maria Mercuri provides a supra-regional view of archaeobotanical research in North Africa, placing ethnobotany at the centre of any current and future agendas. The need to combine archaeological practice with the safeguard and valorisation of cultural (and natural) heritage is put forth by Barbara Barich's contribution, which focussed on different case studies in Egypt. Emanuele Cancellieri and Jâafar Ben Nasr summarize the limits, and the potentials, of archaeological research in southern Tunisia, one of the regions greatly affected by the 'Arab Spring'. With particular sadness we report of the contribution by Sebastiano Tusa and Cecilia Buccellato: Sebastiano, tragically died in March 2019 air crash near Addis Abeba, was one of the leading Italian archaeologists. In this chapter, he and Buccellato synthesize the numerous projects carried out in Libya, indicating the severe

Fig. 1.2 – The artwork "The true size of Africa" (<http://kai.sub.blue/en/africa.html>)

risks for coastal archaeological sites, not only for the problems related to global warming, but also because threatened by illicit excavations and indiscriminate building expansion. Lorenza-Ilia Manfredi, Abdelilah Dekayir and Yousef Bokbot present here an innovative project focused on the ancient mining activity in the Maghreb, combining fieldwork in different countries and with a strong attention towards the training of young African colleagues. The issue of preservation of archaeological contexts in Egypt is one of the topics tackled by Paola Buzi, Julian Bogdani, Angelo Colonna and Ilaria Rossetti in their chapter. They diligently list a series of archaeological sites – of different cultural phase – that "are now in danger of being either swallowed or heav-

ily damaged by the expansion of the modern agricultural installations", calling for more reports of this kind that could help to preserve Egypt's cultural heritage. The oasis of Kharga in Egypt's Western Desert is the geographic focus of the chapter presented by Corinna Rossi and Mohamed Ibrahim Ahmed, who also focus on the risks connected to the expansion of modern agriculture. Ettore Janulardo gives a suggestive commentary on ancient Egypt's view through the eyes of influential artists in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. An interesting 'African connection' is the focus of the chapter by Michele Guirguis that reports the relations between Tunisia and Sardinia in the context of the diffusion of Phoenician culture between the 9<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> centuries BC. In particular, this



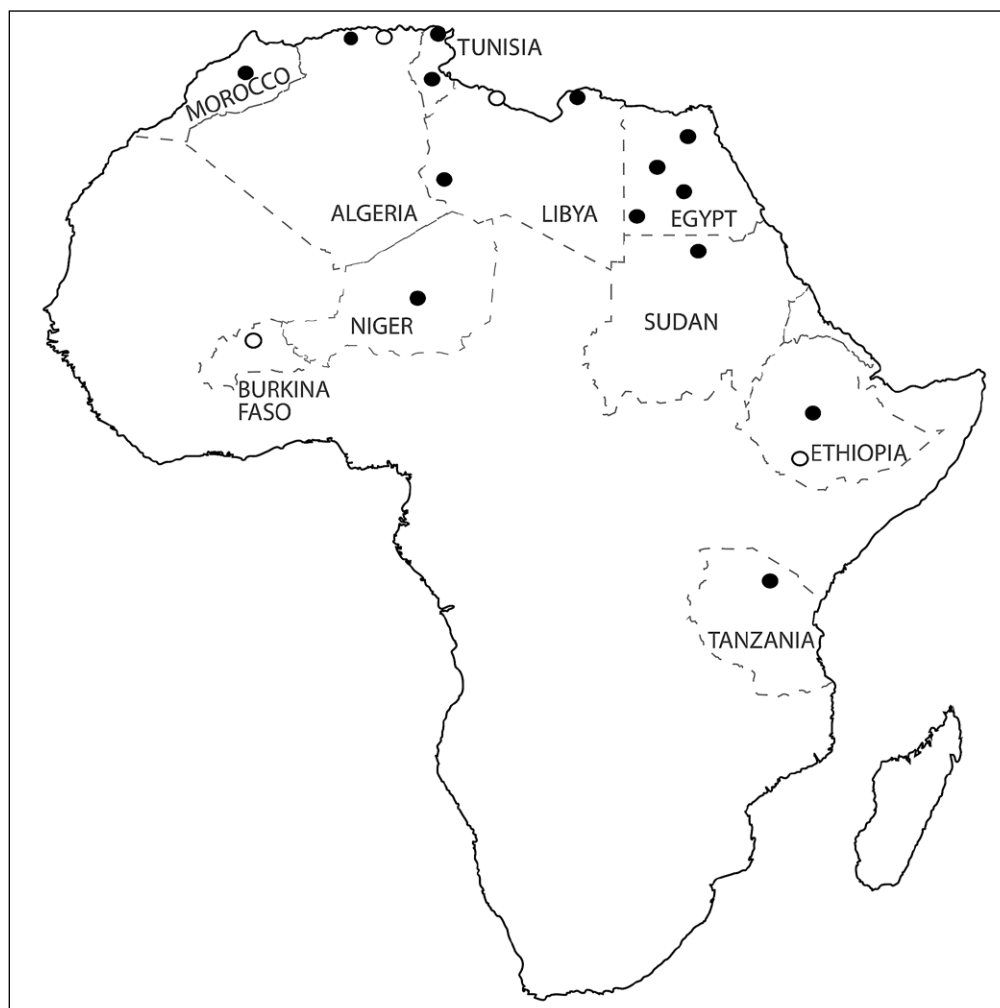


Fig. 1.3 – Map of Africa with location of the contexts presented and discussed during the workshop (empty circle) and those published in this volume (solid dot).

paper urges to reconsider with a fresh approach the nature and mechanisms of the cultural contacts in the central Mediterranean in the first millennium BC, a particularly timely theme. Flavio Altamura – who summarizes the importance of faunal ichnology and the need to (re)organize our field methods in order to be able to *find* and record these evidences – and Marco Cherin *et alii*, with the updates on Laetoli footprints in Tanzania, move to East Africa the pendulum of the contributions to the book.

The last contribution, by Attilio Mastino and Sergio Ribichini, elegantly outlines the remarkable results of the SAIC, Italian Archaeological School of Carthage, born in 2016. In a way, this experience represents an ideal epilogue of our first workshop,

and of this volume. It is hoped that this type of association, with solid relations in African countries, will be able to develop a better practice of archaeological research with the instruments of cultural diplomacy and with the increase of the connections and bi- and multilateral mobility, ultimately favouring the protection and safeguarding of a particularly fragile cultural heritage.

### 3. Future perspectives

Since 1947, the congresses of the Pan African Archaeological Association gather, usually every four years and in different coun-



tries in the continent, the Africanist community at large. Similar audience characterizes the Biennial Conference of the Society of Africanist Archaeologists that has been alternating since 1996 between Europe and North America. Since 2002, yearly international conferences on African archaeology are run in the UK (African Archaeological Research Days: AARD). Many other conferences punctuate our calendar, also driven by the recent tremendous advances in the field of molecular biology, that now have in Africa a relevant ‘battlefield’ (Skoglund *et al.* 2017; Vai *et al.* 2019; van de Loosdrecht *et al.* 2018). Although the ‘genetic revolution’ is today pivotal in the scientific debate (also for its intrinsic potential to operate on museum collections thus mitigating the lack of fieldwork), we believe that cultural cooperation and bilateral and multilateral mobility centred on fieldwork is still an essential part of the process. The idea that a new generation of African (and Africanists) archaeologists does not have access to the field in many regions of the continent is serious and potentially dramatic on the middle- to long-term: it is, therefore, necessary to reorganize our schedule and, if necessary, to re-interpret our ‘archaeologies’.

The organization of this workshop and the ensuing discussions, including this volume, will hopefully go in this direction.

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