**A Review of Adams, W. *The Invention of Nubia***

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Within this article, entitled *The Invention of Nubia,* Adams seeks to layout, and refute the various ‘biases’ in how the subject of Nubia and Nubians has been addressed by different groups (both Academic and Non-Academic) through time. He takes up each ‘group’ before summarily dismissing each one in turn for its failings to see Nubia independently of any perceived or implied notions of superiority or inferiority, before suggesting that a way out of the morass is an adoption of modern Anthropology. He wants us to set aside history and ancient texts, and “turn our study to the habits, the society, and the culture of actual living peoples” (Pg. 20), based in a comparative natural science of man. Ironically, for a person who has just decided to dump the baggage of ‘history’ he chooses to voice his ideal paradigm of analysis through a historical person, namely the 14th century CE Arab philosopher Ibn Khaldun.

In the basic sense this article asks the right questions, but goes about it in completely the wrong way, and thus reaches substantially flawed conclusions. In this way it reminds me of the discussion presented in the article by MacDonald regarding Cheikh Anta Diops. I do not intend to go through each section in turn to look at how Adams has sought to discredit each model of though or analysis. However, I would point out that the section on Roman and Greek thought on Nubia is very simplistic. It is true that for some ancient Classical writers *Aethiopes* (as everybody south of North Africa was known) were to be idealized as the “noble savage” (Pg. 18), or the ‘people of burnt skin’, however, as with almost all cultural groups the range of representation was much greater that is allowed by Adams micro-treatment of the subject. We do have examples of the sophisticated representation of black Africans in terracotta sculpture and vase painting, but there are also many examples of the crude stereotyping of black Africans with curly hair, and almost grotesquely thick lips, in a way which is not too dissimilar to how black Africans were represented in 19th and 20th century western cartoons. To imply that the Greeks and Romans did not have any concept of ethnocentrism is untrue, in fact if anything, generally speaking, the Greeks and Romans felt everybody, even non-Greek speaking whites, were barbarians, and thus inferior, indeed by the end of the Republic most Romans felt that even contemporary Greeks were a degraded, inferior version of what had come before. The example of Adams treatment of the ‘Greeks and Romans’ is fairly typical of the whole article were he sets up a series of ‘strew-men’ which he proceeds to then contrast against the anthropological thought paradigm, or rather *his* anthropological thought paradigm. He does acknowledge that anthropology was not unaffected by the changes in scholarship brought about by Post-modernism, yet he wants to return to the halcyon days of the 1950s where everybody agreed what Anthropology was, to quote Adams on Post-modernism;

“No one who holds such a view [insert anything with the whiff of post-modernism] is entitled to call himself a scientist, or to assert that there can be such a thing as historical or social science. But there remain plenty of individuals , including myself, who continue to believe in the possibility of a historical science.” (Pg. 20)

In terms of situating this paper within the articles we have read this week, it is difficult, given that Adams is not working form a defined data set, but rather gives us a very loose historiographic treatment. However, I would suggest that Adams would approve of many of the articles which combined archaeological investigation and inference, with the middle range being supplied by contemporary Ethnographic parallels. Possibly, he might disapprove of Peters article on resource scheduling given its heavy reliance on geographical and climatic data sources, which is the first thing to get skewered in his article. It would seem that he would most approve of the cross cultural connections made between Eastern Africa and the Near East by Haaland (2006), of all the papers it seeks to build-up a larger paradigm that would conform to Adams ideal of ‘comparative natural science of man’. Yet, for all of the rasping of straw men (with apologies to Broodbank) emanating from this article it does point out some good questions we must ask given the position and training we have received in our scholarly tradition. Although, by 1994 most of the problems he points out had been recognized, if not dealt with, and had also been tackled in a much more nuanced way than he manages here. It is true that Anthropology is *an* answer, amongst many, but despite what Adams might feel, it is not *the* answer, on its own.