

Qatar in biggest ever funding for Sudan archaeology

KHARTOUM: Sudan's rich but under-developed archaeological heritage has received an unprecedented \$135-million (98 million euros) in funding from the Gulf state of Qatar, Sudanese officials said on Sunday, 23 March 2014.



Photographer: B N Chagny

The money will support 29 projects including the rehabilitation of ancient relics, construction of museums and study of the Meroitic language, said Salahaddin Mohammed Ahmed, the project coordinator.

He said the funds will support archaeological work by several Western nations as well as Sudan over five years.

"This is the biggest amount of money for Sudanese antiquities in their entire history," Abdurrahman Ali, head of the country's museums, told reporters, adding that the project will lay the foundation for "archaeological tourism".

Sudan's remote and relatively undiscovered pyramids, north of Khartoum, contrast with their grander and better-known cousins in Egypt, which occupied northern Sudan for about 500 years until roughly 1,000 BC.

Two Sudanese sites are on UNESCO's World Heritage list.

These are Gebel Barkal and surrounding tombs, temples and other relics from the Napatan and Meroitic periods that followed Egyptian rule.

Also listed are the pyramids of Meroe and nearby sites including Naqa and Musawwarat es Sufra.

The first archaeological digs in Sudan took place only about 100 years ago, much later than in Egypt or Greece.

French, Polish, German and other foreign teams are working on various sites in northern Sudan and will benefit from the Qatari funding.

Claude Rilly, director of the French archaeological mission in Sedeinga, says sponsors are hard to come by in his profession.

Qatar's funds "will give a new start, I hope, to archaeology" in Sudan.

The money will be used to help protect the sites, develop small local museums and tourism booklets, restore the National Museum in Khartoum, and build two presentation and conference centres at the UNESCO sites, he told AFP.

Some of the funds will also help to excavate and restore the monuments themselves, including at Sedeinga where the French team is digging about 200 kilometres (120 miles) from the Egyptian border.

Rilly said work has begun with Qatar's assistance to reinforce the sandstone blocks of a temple there.

Tourists at the Sudanese pyramids and other relics often have the attractions to themselves, though the few visitors have still managed to leave litter behind.

The stonework of some monuments has collapsed, they are poorly guarded and there are no explanatory signs.

Source: AFP

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