

Field Manual for African Archaeology



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FOREWORD

Alexandre Livingstone Smith, Els Cornelissen, Olivier P. Gosselain & Scott MacEachern

Pierre de Maret retired from the university in October 2015. A prominent scholar with a worldwide reputation, his scientific contributions to the field of African archaeology could have been celebrated through a *Festschrift* bringing together an international panel of friends and colleagues. Yet Pierre also dedicated an important part of his academic career to the training and funding of students in African archaeology, many of whom became professional archaeologists and currently occupy academic positions.

A large number of these students had spent time at the Royal Museum for Central Africa, a Belgian federal institution with which Pierre has been associated since the early 1970s. Besides consulting documents and analysing collections, they often sought practical advice for conducting fieldwork in Africa. They asked basic – but critical – questions, to which Pierre's colleagues and friends tried to provide effective, non-nonsense answers. Through this process, we gradually realised that despite the wealth of books dedicated to African archaeology and to field archaeology, there was no publication specifically devoted to field practice in African archaeology. Keeping that in mind and wanting to celebrate Pierre's commitment to the tutoring and supervising of young researchers, we decided to edit a *Field Manual for African Archaeology*, drawing on the expertise of the international community to which Pierre belongs.

This manual is about how to find, excavate and study archaeological sites in sub-Saharan Africa. Obviously, archaeological methods in Africa do not differ from excavations in any other part of the world and any student with an Internet connection will easily find references on how to do things in the field. But knowing about the tool is not the same thing as using it. This is where the experienced professionals contributing to this manual make a difference. Sharing tips, describing possible pitfalls, contextualising field methods and research orientations, they help prospective Africanist archaeologists becoming more knowledgeable and autonomous out in the field.

Readability and ease of access were a crucial issue. First, we wanted the text to be as clear and concise as possible. Hence authors were asked to submit short contributions, avoiding jargon and focussing on essential and straightforward concepts and methods. References were kept to a strict minimum, focussing on key and accessible sources. Second, in order to reach as large an audience as possible, especially in Africa, we chose to publish in French and English and opted for an online open-access format. We also decided to offer each chapter as a separate download, which might prove useful where Internet access is expensive and irregular.

This manual is certainly not perfect. Not all topics could be covered and there are overlaps between chapters, which sometimes correspond to slightly different perspectives or field conditions. Also, the sheer number and diversity of contributors may lead to some stylistic heterogeneity. At the same time, it definitely opens a wider perspective on doing archaeological fieldwork in Africa. The manual might thus best be viewed as a work in progress, liable to evolve in parallel with the field of African archaeology.

On a final note, we would like to thank all the authors involved in this unusual project, as well as the people who helped them directly or indirectly. Special thanks are due to Isabelle Gérard and her team at the Publications Service of the RMCA and to the Belgian Development Cooperation for funding the translations.

To Pierre, with respect and admiration for all he has achieved.