

This is an interview with William and Nettie Adams for the University of Kentucky Libraries, Society For Applied Anthropology Oral History Project. The interview was conducted by John Van Willigen on September 17, 2001 in Lexington, Kentucky.

[An interview with William and Nettie Adams]

VAN WILLIGEN: . . . recording of an interview with Bill and Nettie Adams and it's the 17th of September, 2001 and I'm John Van Willigen. So, okay . . . three, two [laughs]. So, as this program beginning to start with this . . . but the first thing, you . . . you were mentioning something about how UNESCO got involved in this archaeological . . . these archaeological activities in the . . . in the '50s and so it might be good to start with that to give me some sort of overview.

W. ADAMS: Yeah. Okay. UNESCO is one of many United Nations organizations that were created right after World War II and it's . . . its headquarters are in Paris by the way, its mandate specifically was to try to foster international cooperation in the fields of science, education, and culture. It never was very much involved in archaeological activities because its focus was much more on academic affairs and culture, affairs of one kind or another. Well, when the decision was made to build the Aswan High Dam it was obvious that huge areas of . . . of archaeological . . . especially a lot of temples were going to be flooded in . . . in Egypt and . . . and the effort to rescue those before they were . . . before they were inundated was far beyond the resources of the Egyptian government and they really did not know quite where to turn but there was a very influential French Egyptologist, Madame [Christiane] Desroches-Noblecourt, who had a lot of influence with the Egyptian Antiquity Service. Also in UNESCO and she was the one who really had the idea and told the Egyptians why don't you apply to UNESCO and see if they will help to collect funds for this activity.

VAN WILLIGEN: So, there wasn't any . . . there wasn't any necessary relationship between this problem and UNESCO? It just . . .

W. ADAMS: It just happened like so many things [chuckle] in the world. In fact, of course, United Nations agencies typically do not take initiatory actions but they rather react to requests from member states and this is what happened here. And in fact, the institutional people in UNESCO and the Division of Mission and Monuments were opposed to their taking this on the ground that they had no experience and no infrastructure but the . . . the Director-General of UNESCO, Vittorio Veronese, was a man who was rather enamored of the grand gesture and so he said . . . he decided unilaterally we're going to do this. And then the Division of Unes . . . of . . . of Museums and Monuments in the UNESCO had to take it on, at least create some kind of an institution.

VAN WILLIGEN: Of . . . of . . . of these people that you both ended up . . . did you ended up dealing with?

W. ADAMS: Well, I was em . . . employed by UNESCO.

VAN WILLIGEN: I see.

W. ADAMS: That . . . that's . . . under that . . . under that division thing. Now, they had to . . . they had to create a whole separate division just for the Nubian Monuments Campaign. In fact, that . . . it . . . it eventually became the tail that wagged the dog in the house. But the whole focus in the case of Egypt was on the conservation of temples

because there are thirty-two major Pharaonic temples in the Egyptian Nubia that would either be inundated or would have to be dismantled and rebuilt. And of course, that's a hugely expensive undertaking. So, the focus of the campaign in Egypt was on "collect money and technical expertise" which means mainly engineering to get these things taken apart and rebuilt. But one third of the lake created by that dam was to be in the Sudan where the problem was quite different and the director of Antiquities in the Sudan got the idea, well, heck, if they're doing all that for Egypt they ought to be doing something for us as well and so he approached UNESCO and they said, "Well, prepare some kind of a . . . a plan of what you like." And so, his idea originally was, well, we got this set of aerial photographs that had been taken in a flying strip up and down the Nile and they had the wish to get an expert on air photos to come out and look at those and see what he could see in the way on antiquities that needed to be saved. And so the UNESCO appro . . . approved that request and that the po . . . position in due time was offered to Ralph Solecki at Columbia who was engaged otherwise and turned it down. He recommended Richard Woodbury who was also engaged otherwise and turned it down. He recommended me and so that's how [chuckle] the job was offered to me.

VAN WILLIGEN: Yeah, so, of course, Solecki and Woodbury had aerial photography experience?

W. ADAMS: Solecki a lot. Woodbury somewhat less though it was one of those questions . . . it became . . . became more and more a question of finding someone who was free to go so to speak. Now, mind you this was only a four-months consultant contract.

VAN WILLIGEN: Oh, so . . .

W. ADAMS: So, it was not very appealing to, you know . . .

VAN WILLIGEN: Yeah.

W. ADAMS: . . . people that had a longer-term commitment. But the fact is that I was in the process of leaving . . . I'd been directing of Archaeological Salvage for the Museum of Northern Arizona in the Glen Canyon area and I was in the process of looking for something else besides that for a variety of reasons and not wanting to continue.

VAN WILLIGEN: And all of your research experience as far as I recall was in the Southwest?

W. ADAMS: Oh, I didn't even know where Nubia was. That's absolutely right. Sure. So, by the time it came to me it was really just a question, well, here is a guy who might be free to go and would be willing to go and . . . and . . . so, it was offered to me on that . . . on that basis, so to speak. And I took it on that basis. And that on my way to . . . to go to Nubia report I bought a book on aerial photography [both laughing] but . . .

VAN WILLIGEN: Do you remember what the name of the book was?

W. ADAMS: I'm sorry, I don't. It was written by some . . . it . . . it . . . it wasn't any archaeology . . .

VAN WILLIGEN: I see.

W. ADAMS: It was a technical book.

VAN WILLIGEN: And so did you think that this was a good . . . a good deal for for you, this job?

W. ADAMS: You know, I had no idea whether it would be or . . . John . . . or not, John, but the fact is I don't know why . . . well, all my life I'd been willing to play my instincts without really examining . . .

VAN WILLIGEN: Uh-huh.

W. ADAMS: . . . I always trusted my instincts and my instincts somehow or other said to me, this looks like a very unstructured situation . . .

VAN WILLIGEN: [inaudible]

W. ADAMS: . . . and I've . . . I've always been a planner as you probably know, I'm really good at organizing things. And I think that . . . if that's really the case I can go there and get something organized and . . . and . . . and things can go on from there.

VAN WILLIGEN: So, but you . . . the . . . the Canyon Dam . . . the time when this was offered to you didn't necessarily say, this is . . . I'm really fortunate to have this happen?

W. ADAMS: Well, yes and no. I was fortunate because I was looking for anything . . .

VAN WILLIGEN: Sure.

W. ADAMS: . . . at that point, in fact. But the fact is, if you remember, of course, my . . . I was trained as an ethnologist. My dissertation . . . my first interest was always in doing ethnology. I went into Salvage Archaeology on the Glen Canyon area because I couldn't get a job, a teaching job or an ethnological job. There never was the idea that I'd make a career of archaeology. And then, as I like to say, you know, one "dam" thing after another so to speak [chuckle], I went to the . . . to the Aswan Dam but I was still interested primarily in getting back into . . . into ethnology before too long. So, I . . . I . . . I approached it as a stopgap, very definitely. Oh, I approached all archaeology as a stopgap until I could get back into studying living people. Now, when we got over there and had been going for year or so, I actually applied for and received a Guggenheim fellowship to study the resettlement of the Nubians who were being moved out of the dam area. And that was going to be my springboard back into ethnology . . .

VAN WILLIGEN: Sure.

W. ADAMS: . . . so to speak but the fact is that by that time I had put in place such a large and successful sort of operation on the ground and in fact, the Sudan government had become so dependent on me in a manner of speaking . . . "our men up there," I felt like it would be unethical for me to just drop it and run. And so that's why I stayed and actually turned down the Guggenheim.

VAN WILLIGEN: I see. Then . . . but there was this . . . well, I'm interested in the relationship between the Egyptians and the Sudanese in terms of any funding for continuing this?

W. ADAMS: Well . . .

VAN WILLIGEN: When you said that there . . . there was the . . . the Egyptians were funded and then the Sudanese . . .

W. ADAMS: Yeah. Well, the . . . the way that worked out in fact, was . . . it was pretty clear about what was needed in Egypt and they sort of geared up for that. But the challenge in the Sudan was really entirely different and the Sudanese themselves were not too clear just about what they ought to be trying to do and Sudan even less so . . . I'm sorry, the UNESCO even less so. UNESCO's whole perspective was, let's do something for the Sudan to keep them happy . . .

VAN WILLIGEN: Uh-huh.

W. ADAMS: . . . you see because they're . . . they're another member state and so on and so they were waiting for the Sudan to take the initiative. And the Sudan was really waiting for this expert to come out and tell them what they ought to be doing, you see, in a manner of speaking. Well, I came out and looked at these aerial photographs and they'd been taken from an elevation of about 25,000 feet [chuckle] and there was a few of the great, big monumental sites you could barely make out in the photos but any idiot could see them on the ground. [chuckle]

VAN WILLIGEN: [inaudible]

W. ADAMS: Yeah. The photos were useless in actual fact.

VAN WILLIGEN: Umhmm.

W. ADAMS: And so I made this clear. Well, what happened . . . all these things are accidental, John, they . . . everything fell into place accidentally. The . . . the Sudan Survey Department had an aerial photography aircraft that was working systematically on photographing various parts of the country. Well, they had two days a week with that aircraft where they were allowed to use it for various kinds of testing . . . things of . . . pretty much do anything they wanted with it and the . . . the aerial photographer with that team got interested in archaeology from Day One and he just decided, well, we'll use this plane for Bill Adams and we'll take photos for him during these two days.

VAN WILLIGEN: Who . . . who is the . . . who is that person?

W. ADAMS: Oh, his name was Peter Allen. The whole crew of that plane . . . it was a DeHavilland Dove with a four-men crew, they're all R.A.F. veterans and really a bunch of characters as you can imagine, had a big hole cut in the belly and very fancy cameras established in it and Pete Allen, who's remained a very dear friend from that day to this in fact, but he just . . . just . . . he and his wife were friends of us from Day One in the Sudan and . . . and so it was . . . they . . . they just decided to put this plane at our disposal. So I went up with those guys two days a week about four months and we flew up and down over this country, a very low level. Now, I was really just trying to fulfill my rubric as an aerial photography specialist [chuckle].

VAN WILLIGEN: I see.

W. ADAMS: Learning it . . . I actually was flying in the copilot's seat in this aircraft and . . . and for no other reason basically than to tell the pilot when to turn around [chuckle] on these different runs but I didn't know the country very well myself and some days we got so far out of Egypt . . . over Egyptian territory it's a wonder we weren't shot down [chuckle]. But we did, in fact, over a period of four months succeeding in taking a whole series of very, very low-level air photographs from which we made a mosaic of the area that was to be flooded. Now, these things were not really of any value in terms of locating archaeological sites. I mean, in fact they are all buried under sand, you got to find on the ground. What they did do in the absence of any kind of decent maps was make us a base map . . .

VAN WILLIGEN: A base map . . .

W. ADAMS: . . . of site locations and so that was the virtue of it.

VAN WILLIGEN: So, so, one of the elements of this is a fundamental misunderstanding about . . . on the part of the . . . the people that were initially organizing this what aerial photography could do?

W. ADAMS: Absolutely correct. In fact . . . now, John, the fact is the whole reason I had a successful career in the Sudan was that I took maximum advantage of

misunderstanding [chuckle] on the part of both the Egyptians and the . . . I'm sorry, the Sudanese and UNESCO. In fact . . . because, you know, the . . . the truth is this structural ambiguity will kill you if you don't understand it but if you do understand it you can take advantage of it. [chuckle]

VAN WILLIGEN: Right. So, they thought it would work . . . it didn't but . . .

W. ADAMS: No, in the meantime – if I could fill in a little bit more . . .

VAN WILLIGEN: Sure.

W. ADAMS: . . . Nettie and I had come to realize during our two years in Glen Canyon that we were repeating a lot of work that had already been done without realizing it.

VAN WILLIGEN: I see.

W. ADAMS: And the fact is that if there's anything you can not afford to do in a salvage program where time is of the essence . . .

VAN WILLIGEN: Right.

W. ADAMS: . . . just to spend your time replicating the known.

VAN WILLIGEN: Right.

W. ADAMS: So, we determined we are going to . . . to learn about this area and lay down the baseline of the known before we do anything else. And so, fortunately, the Sudan Antiquity Service had a good archive but also a wonderful library that had been bequeathed to them and so we just set ourselves to read everything in the files and go through them. I was . . . so we could get an idea, okay, what's known of this stuff.

VAN WILLIGEN: This is the Flinders Petrie . . .

W. ADAMS: The Flinders Petrie Library . . .

VAN WILLIGEN: . . . Library . . .

W. ADAMS: That's right.

VAN WILLIGEN: . . . in Khartoum?

W. ADAMS: Right. Flinders Petrie was one of the great pioneer Egyptologists as you probably know. When he died his . . . in his will specified that his library should go to whoever was the most deserving applicant and the . . . the . . . the then director-general of Antiquities of the Sudan was one who applied and . . . and the . . . the trustees of the will decided this is the place for it to go. It's a wonderful library.

VAN WILLIGEN: It . . . does that library still exist?

W. ADAMS: It does but it hasn't had a proper cure . . . a curatorial librarian for years and so I think it's virtually unused, in fact. I feel nobody knows where anything is and a . . . things get mislaid. So, it's definitely still there and acquires more stuff. But anyway to get back to the st . . . the . . . the story is of course . . . my contract was due to run out in December . . .

VAN WILLIGEN: Umhmm.

W. ADAMS: . . . but I had already persuaded the director-general, look these . . . you know, I mean these air photos aren't getting jumped on it. If . . . if the question is really to finding what the resources are we got to go up there and start . . . and start a survey on the ground. And so he then agreed and asked UNESCO for an extension of my contract another four months and then Nettie and I then moved to the area and we simply decided that the only way to do this is to just start right on the Egyptian border with our backs against the border [chuckle] and start moving south with . . . with a team of men and they put on originally a team of about 25 or 30 laborers.

VAN WILLIGEN: Tell me . . . tell me what . . . I'm trying to visualize what that team would do on a given day.

W. ADAMS: Okay, what we would do on a given day . . . well, first of all you had . . . something about the structure of the team. You have a small cadre of trained Egyptian excavators. They are called Quftis, they come from the village of Quft to start archaeological work. Now they understand nothing about archaeological strategy but do know the basics of tactics . . . of moving dirt. So and then you have under them . . . those guys like a bunch of non-coms, you see, and at the head of them you have a guy that is like a top sergeant, just called your Reis and then a bunch of local laborers who we hire locally just simply spread them . . . stretch them out in a line from the riverbank back to the . . . to the top pool contour and start moving southwards so to speak and looking around as you go. And various things can happen. Now the whole West Bank of the Sudan is absolutely inundated under wind-blown sand. So all the sites are buried. And what you find at the surface is either discoloration, which shows there's something under there or a whole lot of potsherds, which is very common. Well, sometimes you take a step and your foot doesn't go down in the sand like it should [chuckle], you say, "Hey, there's something under there!"

VAN WILLIGEN: Uh-huh. Now this . . . this distance from the top of the pool to the bank how . . . how long is that?

W. ADAMS: Well it varied enormously. Sometimes half a mile, sometimes a hundred yards or so . . .

VAN WILLIGEN: I see.

W. ADAMS: . . . and depending on . . . we sometimes we'd have to come back and . . . and start further out . . . and you start by the riverbank and some. But it was just a question of keeping your eyes open for telltale signs so to speak. It didn't take you long to realize what telltale signs would be. But when you run across one of those things, okay the next thing is . . . it . . . it simply starts scratching away the sand. Now the basic excavation instrument is a short-handled, heavy plated hoe called a turiya. It is used by bending over, raking the sand toward you with this thing and the sand is raked into baskets which is then carried away by . . . by basket carriers and dumped wherever you decided . . .

VAN WILLIGEN: The basket carriers are low level . . .

W. ADAMS: Yes.

VAN WILLIGEN: . . . [inaudible]?

W. ADAMS: That's correct. That's exactly right.

VAN WILLIGEN: Would they be also surveyors?

W. ADAMS: No, nothing of the sort. The only surveyor is me.

VAN WILLIGEN: Oh, I see.

W. ADAMS: Now one thing to bear in mind, throughout the whole time I was there was no technical personnel of any kind except Nettie and me.

VAN WILLIGEN: So, there wouldn't be any of these Quftis that were participating in the actual walking the line?

W. ADAMS: Oh, yeah, there would certainly be that. That's right. I mean . . .

VAN WILLIGEN: But they would find something and you would . . .

W. ADAMS: That's right. Everybody is a searcher but nobody is a recorder. I mean that's my point . . .

VAN WILLIGEN: I see. I see.

W. ADAMS: . . . because none of these guys could read or write.

VAN WILLIGEN: Sure.

W. ADAMS: You know, I mean the . . . all the recording and that means all the mapping, all the photography, all the cross sections, shooting levels, everything was done by us because there was nobody else to help out on that. But it was just a question of trudging along finding something and then scratching and getting an idea. Okay then here is where the critical point comes in of course of triage. Well, okay, you found something now what? [chuckle] You see, now what?

VAN WILLIGEN: Umhmm.

W. ADAMS: Are we going to dig this thing? Are we going to . . . on what basis do we decide this kind of thing, you see? And well this job went on for five years and for a fact is the first couple of years we were just absolutely flying blind in terms of decision making of this kind and we made a lot of mistakes, not digging things we should have and digging things we shouldn't have [chuckle] as a fact. But it was one of those cases . . . theoretically what one ought to do is make a preliminary reconnaissance of course, an inventory of all the areas to be flooded and we got a lists of sites and say, let me bank, say, okay we need to do this and this and this and this . . . well, the fact is, A, there wasn't enough time to do that. The other thing is that you got to move so much sand off of these damn things before you can see what you've got, that if you're going to dig it at all you might as well go ahead and do it then, you see.

VAN WILLIGEN: I see.

W. ADAMS: . . . because it's all going to blow back . . . back in again over the off-season.

VAN WILLIGEN: So the whole notion of the surface survey is like radically different there?

W. ADAMS: Absolutely.

VAN WILLIGEN: There . . . there wouldn't be a . . . a farmer's field in the central Kentucky .

W. ADAMS: You just can't tell what you've got. Remember that you've got 5,000 years of historic remains and I'm talking about mud-brick villages and . . . and temples and churches . . .

VAN WILLIGEN: Oh, yeah.

W. ADAMS: . . . and all the rest of that plus pre-historic on top of that. So it . . . it's an area that is just absolutely littered with remains of its own past over an enormous long, long time. And one of the first things that when asked of me of course was just figuring out a chronological fix on the different sites because a mud-brick structure could be anything from 2000 B.C. up to 1800.

VAN WILLIGEN: As an aside. That's one of the reasons why you ended up being a ceramics expert?

W. ADAMS: That's exactly right. Well, the fact is starting south of . . . from the Egyptian border the very first site we hit was a pottery making factory. And I . . . it had been . . . someone dug before but the report on it was not very interesting and I . . . in the course of stra . . . of . . . of stripping off some sand off this thing it . . . it . . . it turned out the be a mud-brick complex of about thirty rooms. But I could recognize right away that there was real important stratigraphy in the . . . in the remains and that the

pottery showed a very definite clearly distinguishable evolutionary sequence and I thought . . . and this is from the medieval period where . . . Christian Nubian period nobody never been much interested in, it lasted a thousand years. My God, here is a potential key for da . . . dating all these sites. And so, I spent the whole of my first season working on that one site, much [chuckle] to the consternation of the director of . . . of Antiquities but . . . but I . . . I just wasn't going to let it go because I thought this is too important, providing us a key. And that of course is where my previous background in the Southwest really came into play because we understood the importance of ceramic sequences in using for date sites. Now nowadays since the radiocarbon revolution, which was still in its infancy then, of course people are going to say, "Well, what did you need pottery for when you have all these other aids for dating, you see. You could just, you know, collect charcoal, well, here . . . two things on that. Of course one is . . . is the fact that . . . that radiocarbon dating was still very little developed and there . . . there only . . . there were only about two or three labs in the States that could handle these things. The other thing is that radiocarbon dates were and are expensive and I can hire a hundred men . . . I'm sorry, I can hire ten men for a week's work for what one radiocarbon date cost. And it's just much more cost effective to me was the pottery to date the sites and have the money to hire the men.

VAN WILLIGEN: So, one of the first steps in all this is to create a kind of an intellectual infrastructure then?

W. ADAMS: Yeah.

VAN WILLIGEN: And . . . and that became . . . did the UNESCO people understand that very well?

W. ADAMS: No. The UNESCO . . . let . . . let . . . let me come at it from the other side . . .

VAN WILLIGEN: Yeah.

W. ADAMS: . . . if I may. The Sudan at this time was a military dictatorship and it was run by a junta of . . . of mostly army officers headed by General [Ibrahim] Abboud who had overthrown the civilian government.

VAN WILLIGEN: Yeah.

W. ADAMS: Under him the cabinet it was . . . was almost all military men except for about . . . there were three civilians one of whom was the ed . . . the Minister of Education. Now Antiquities were not a high priority in this and the Sudan has never been much interested in its pre-Islamic past and secondly, have very little idea that they had much of interest. But General Abboud was very content to leave this whole thing in the hands of the Minister of Education and not have to think about it because Sudan has a lot bigger problems than this.

VAN WILLIGEN: Yes.

W. ADAMS: So, the Minister of Education also had a lot of other things to think about, so, he was very happy to leave the . . . the . . . the Nubian Campaign in the hands of the Commission for Archaeology, was this Frenchman Jean Vercoutter and not have to think about it. And Jean for a variety of reasons had to spend his time at his desk in Khartoum because it . . . and . . . and no government minister can ever be . . . afford to be . . . be away from his desk very long, he kinds of like . . . so, he was very happy to leave things in my hands on the ground in Nubia, you see. So, it really came down to the early fact that . . . that they . . . more or less each one had to basically trust the person below them

and . . . and Jean Vercoutter just decided well, you know, I've got a guy up there who seems to know what he's doing and so, that kept Jean happy. He kept the Minister . . .

VAN WILLIGEN: Was he . . . he was an archaeologist?

W. ADAMS: He's an Egyptologist, which is not quite the same thing in fact because he wasn't very . . . he had done some digging but he had not proper training and he wasn't really prepared to dig and deal with this kind of situation, a lot of sites and a lot of different periods and no . . . no focusing.

VAN WILLIGEN: So, this kind of . . . his intellectual equipment is different from yours?

W. ADAMS: Absolutely so. And there's fundamental difference between me and most of almost all the other people that worked over there as being an anthropologist. The difference there, of course, is that anthropology's approach to culture is normative. Everything is interest . . . everyone is interesting, all the different. . . especially the life of the common people, the remains of common people interested not just the elite sites and so on. And that was always my perspective. I . . . I . . . so, I . . . in fact, that . . . that remains to this day I'm almost the only person over there who has done peasant archaeology. I've done a lot of small sites and little impoverished cemeteries and such, whatever came along.

VAN WILLIGEN: And this is consistent with the . . . say, the temples thrust versus the rest of the . . .

W. ADAMS: Well, the . . . what . . . the way it worked out in practice is that saving the temples in the Sudan turned out to be a very small part. There were, of course, temples in the Sudan but we got that taken care of without much trouble. The big thing there is that while in Egypt it had been . . . let me back up a little bit. The Aswan Dam . . . High Dam was actually the third Aswan Dam and the Aswan Low Dam had already inundated the area all the way back to the Sudanese border before. So, most of the archaeology as distinguished from engineering had been done. It was only a question of working on the fringes from a higher pool contour. But in the Sudan there hadn't been any previous archaeology.

VAN WILLIGEN: Oh, I see.

W. ADAMS: So here it was almost terra incognita. So, while in Egypt it was all temple removal and just a little odds and ends of archaeology. It was the other way around in the Sudan, it was getting archaeology done. You see. and so, going into it with no preconceptions, no background, no any idea what ought to be interesting or what shouldn't interesting, it was just a question of just, you know, tackling everything so to speak and making decisions on the basis of what . . . what an anthropologist would decide, you see, what would interesting. Well, that . . . that . . . one of the interesting sidelights of that, of course, is . . . as an anthropologist to me, habitation sites and village sites are much more interesting than cemeteries.

VAN WILLIGEN: Right.

W. ADAMS: And so, I concentrated as much as I could on town sites and so on and . . . well, we had to do some cemeteries but . . . but I never particularly enjoyed them because to think about human skeletons as I . . . when you see one you see them all [both chuckling].

VAN WILLIGEN: So, uh, your . . . your identity and background as an . . . as an American mid-century anthropologist was really important?

W. ADAMS: I think it's pretty well so, that's right. Because, of course, that mid-century anthropologist perspective was fundamentally humanistic. And that certainly speaks for me. In fact, I wanted to try to see the world through the eyes of these people who were . . . who we were digging up, so . . .

VAN WILLIGEN: So, so, what are the . . . what are the things that were characteristic of . . . I mean, of . . . of that kind of a professional at that time, the . . . the American perspective?

W. ADAMS: Oh, I think that . . . that the . . . uh, what we're looking at, of course, is . . . is the last phase if you like of a Boasian paradigm when it passed through the hands of people like Margaret Mead and . . . and Ruth Benedict and Clyde Kluckhohn and so on whose interest was in culture but in . . . in . . . in . . . in culture in . . . in rather a different sense than that of . . . of . . . of the earlier Boasians so to speak. It was . . . it . . . it was a very humanistic perspective on culture and the idea was really maximally tried trying to write ethnography in such a way that you made the world in . . . intelligible as it would be with the people you were studying. And I think of some of the marvelous works that came out of that like . . . like Laura Thompson's, *The Hopi Way* or Kluckhohn and Leighton's *The Navaho* or . . . or Gordon McGregor's *Warriors Without Weapons* and so on. These were . . . these were . . . well, I suppose one of the most fundamental differences between that kind of ethnography and the earlier one, of course, is that all the earlier ethnologists were really doing salvage ethnography in trying to reconstruct pictures of pre-contact cultures, so and by plumbing the memories of old men whereas the . . . the works that I'm talking about were looking at the . . . at the situations, that existed at that time and . . . and in fact describe the culture as they . . . as they saw it so to speak. This was the . . . this . . . this was before the . . . the days of honest-to-God participant observation.

VAN WILLIGEN: This was a major transformation, those studies?

W. ADAMS: Oh, yeah, very much so indeed. Now, they were . . . of course, this is an era that's often characterized in the literature as culture and personality so to speak but that really doesn't . . . is a misnomer in . . . in the sense that . . . that . . . that insofar as they are talking about a personality these people are not really talking about personality of an individual, they're talking about the personality of a culture as a whole . . .

VAN WILLIGEN: Umhmm. Right.

W. ADAMS: . . . characterized. So, it's not the same thing as psychological anthropology.

VAN WILLIGEN: But looking . . . looking over this period of time what were you . . . working on these Sudan projects, what are some of the . . . the highlights, the . . . the things that you . . . you think are especially important in terms of your accomplishments?

W. ADAMS: Well, just learning [chuckle] . . . learning to see so to speak. Creating . . . almost I . . . create . . . almost if you like creating a paradigm . . .

VAN WILLIGEN: Umhmm.

W. ADAMS: . . . in the Sudan and I think that really that's true, of course, that we did create a paradigm based . . . based on the fact that we were looking at all the remains of all the different series. But just trying to get the parts to fit together to make an overall picture of Sudanese cultural development over . . . over a period of time. And it . . . it's hard to say that I was sitting down and really mulling over these things, they just . . . you know, we were busy, busy, busy, busy as you can imagine. We were running big crews,

there were just the two of us and . . . and staying out on the dig all day and then coming back and having to work by the light of a Petromax lantern working on plans and stuff like that, so, there wasn't a lot of time to think about anything and yet, somehow or other it was taking shape in my mind nevertheless, it just . . . just creating an overall picture. You know, think back if . . . if you can to the days of the 1920s and '30s in American archaeology, of prehistoric archaeology when the . . . when the . . . the parts started falling together in all the different chronological schemes and cultural classifications . . .

VAN WILLIGEN: Umhmm. Right.

W. ADAMS: . . . and of course, what really happened was . . . and the Sudan was still in the pre-classificatory stage and we were the ones who created the sort of a classificatory approach with . . . with the different cells if you like re . . . respon . . . you know, related to different areas and different periods of time so the things would be plugged into an overall scheme on that basis. Now assume these archaeology before we've got there was completely dominated by the old fashioned paradigm of migrationism so to speak . . .

VAN WILLIGEN: Oh.

W. ADAMS: . . . every major cultural change was attributed to the migrating . . . the coming of a new people.

VAN WILLIGEN: Uh-huh.

W. ADAMS: And, you know, we looked at [chuckle] that and it just didn't make sense to us because there's so much evidence of continuity you see from stage to stage and so it was not very long before we realized this . . . this paradigm is not sustainable, it just is not sustainable. In fact, so, something else is going to have to be put in place in a . . . in . . . in place. And so, I really developed a paradigm based on the idea . . . we are looking at a continual cultural evolution, never mind the coming and going of individual people. There certainly have been some but that's not the point, the culture has been evolving. So, it's really a cultural-logical paradigm if you like. And actually I guess . . . I'd only been there for less than two years when I wrote that article for the *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* hadn't I and I wrote an article which ended up actually appearing in three successive numbers of the *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* called *Post-Pharaonic Nubia in the Light of Archaeology*, which really simply challenged the old . . . the old ideas and . . . and . . . and laid down this notion of continuity of development and so on. And that . . . that article became very seminal and it . . . in a certain sense led to my later writing *Nubia: Corridor to Africa*, you see, which is now really regarded the Bible of Nubian study by everybody. They used that term themselves and has been translated in Arabic.

VAN WILLIGEN: Is . . . is there a red-letter edition? [chuckle]

W. ADAMS: [laughs] Not yet. Working on it. But I don't think I answered your question but . . . but what became important to me I was trying to see the whole picture in ways that were intelligible to me.

VAN WILLIGEN: And that . . . but that . . . that was a . . . an outcome of what . . . what you were doing without necessarily being part of the job description?

W. ADAMS: Not at all. Not at all. [Van Willigen laughs] Nothing I planned. The fact is, during my whole seven years in the Sudan I never mentioned in my annual reports to UNESCO that I was actually doing archaeology in the field because that was not what I had been hired to do.

VAN WILLIGEN: Uh-huh. So, what did you talk about, you know, after the initial step of the . . . aerial photography?

W. ADAMS: Well, I was supposed to im . . . implementing and formulating and coordinating [chuckle] and liaison, and all those things . . .

VAN WILLIGEN: I see.

W. ADAMS: Well, there . . . there . . . there is more to it than that. The . . . the fact is that before the campaign was . . . was over while we were there we had seventeen foreign expeditions that came and took concessions to work on parts of the area and I had quite a large part . . . first of all, in actually recruiting a couple . . . three American expeditions that came but . . . but also in working out the . . . the terms of their concessions, the boundaries of them and what they were expected to do and all that. And . . . and I did it in such a way that . . . that the parts would end up to a . . . to a whole so to speak. In other words, you know, that we didn't duplicate what . . . what others were doing and they didn't duplicate what . . . what we were doing and . . . and we started . . .

VAN WILLIGEN: So, did you broker all of them or just some Am . . . the Americans?

W. ADAMS: No, over all of them, in fact.

VAN WILLIGEN: I see.

W. ADAMS: And I did have the advantage of being able to speak French and Spanish because we had French and Spanish expeditions working out there.

VAN WILLIGEN: I see. I see.

W. ADAMS: No, I had a major part in . . . in . . . in that and also then maintain the liaison with them, helping them getting labor, helping to get housing and things like that. We'd been on the ground by that time, we'd learned the ropes, we learned Arabic language, which was absolutely critical and we . . . we could be a lot of help with getting through . . . things through customs and that's . . . all that sort of thing and . . . but . . . but especially we had our clientele now because everything is patron-client relationships . . . we have are clientage networks in place and that was the thing we can tap into to help others. And that's the sort of thing that I reported to UNESCO, that . . . that I was liaising you see . . .

VAN WILLIGEN: Oh, I see, that was the essential task from their perspective . . .

W. ADAMS: From their perspective and the other thing is with the Sudan Government in . . . in . . . in Khartoum, you see. Of course all that amounted to was just telling them what I was doing.

N. ADAMS: But we do have the office in Wadi Halfa that was the headquarters of the Nubian Campaign in the Sudan.

W. ADAMS: Right.

N. ADAMS: And we dispensed air photos and maps for people and also indicated the system of recording that we hoped they would use.

W. ADAMS: Yeah, we created an overall system of site recording and . . . and we may . . . we visited the camps of the . . . of the other foreign expeditions frequently to . . . you know, to keep tabs on what they were doing and make a recording and we . . . we plugged all their sites into our central archives. So, we had a central file of all of them and as Nettie says, we provided them with air photos to . . .

VAN WILLIGEN: So, sort of like an office of state archaeology?

W. ADAMS: Yeah. It . . . precisely so. Exactly so. It was called a Documentation Center and [chuckle] you know, the UNESCO is very happy to have you running a documentation center. So, that's the sort of thing that I . . .

VAN WILLIGEN: That sounds like a U . . . UNESCO sort of place . . .

W. ADAMS: That's exactly right. But actually, of course, it was something we did in our spare time, because most of the time we were in the field. Now, we had . . . oh, we liked to call a townhouse in . . . in . . . Wadi Halfa was a town of about 10,000 people within this . . . it's the only real town in the area but there were peasant villages everywhere. We had a house in Wadi Halfa that had electricity and it did have running water on the back porch [chuckle] and that is where we . . . we lived when we were not actually doing fieldwork. When the digs were going on we always rented houses . . . Nubian houses in the villages near the digs. And we had a succession of those as we worked southwards on the Egyptian border and . . . and so, in those circumstances we were just living like everybody else, you know, under mud walls and on . . . on mud floors and hauling our water from the Nile and so on. But . . . but we would go into to Wadi Halfa, you know on Fridays . . .

VAN WILLIGEN: So, Wadi Halfa would be a more comfortable place to live?

W. ADAMS: Well, yeah, it was more comfortable. It had electricity [chuckle] I'll say. We liked the Nubian houses though. They were very nice and spacious in a manner of speaking. They sure were cold in the middle of the winter I'll say you that but so was our . . . the main thing in Wadi Halfa though was that we could take a shower.

VAN WILLIGEN: So, let . . . let's think . . . think about this Wadi Halfa documentation center/residence.

W. ADAMS: Now the residen . . . now, the residence was . . . was quite a ways. Now the document . . . there was a museum in Wadi Halfa. There had been a little museum there and one room of it . . . which was a room was simply turned over to us, a large room . . .

VAN WILLIGEN: Umhmm.

W. ADAMS: . . . and we had . . .

VAN WILLIGEN: So, that Wadi Halfa museum had existed for some time?

W. ADAMS: It had existed for some time, yeah, because Thomas Cook was responsible for setting that up. They were on the steamers up from Aswan to Wadi Halfa in the old days . . .

VAN WILLIGEN: Oh, I see.

W. ADAMS: . . . and people came by steamer to Wadi Halfa with the idea that they were dipping a toe in darkest Africa and so they created this little museum with a whole bunch . . . bunch of heads of Central Africa animals and stuff [laughs] on the wall.

VAN WILLIGEN: So, it was the . . . the gateway to sub-Saharan Africa?

W. ADAMS: That's right. Exactly right. And . . . and they, you know, they get off the team and they take them out for a night in a tent and they sit on camels and stuff like [chuckle] you see. And so here we were in this . . . with . . . with all these heads of okapis and elands and stuff like that which hadn't existed in that area for a millennia but that's what . . .

N. ADAMS: And all the artifacts from the Southern Sudan.

W. ADAMS: Oh, yeah, spear points and crocodile spears from Southern Sudanese tribes.

N. ADAMS: And . . . and shields and traps . . .

W. ADAMS: Yeah.

N. ADAMS: . . . hides . . .

W. ADAMS: Yeah. It was . . . it was all . . . almost totally an ethnographic museum of Southern Sudanese material.

VAN WILLIGEN: I see.

W. ADAMS: But this had . . . of course ceased to have any relevance. And so we took over this room and . . . and among other things, of course, at . . . our . . . our excavations were producing enormous numbers of artifacts and so . . .

VAN WILLIGEN: Uh-huh.

W. ADAMS: . . . we had to create shelving and more shelving and more shelving just to . . . to store the stuff we were finding but also the potsherds, of course, came up in enormous quantities and the reason that I created the first pottery typology so I could throw these damn things away [chuckle]. But the fact is that when you got a bunch of stuff and you don't know what it is and you think it's going to tell you something, of course, you don't throw it away. But it was using up all our excavation baskets you see. And so, I created the initial pottery typology so that I could . . . I could recognize some of the big obvious utility types of pottery and just pull them out and throw them away so to speak after making counts [chuckle], you see.

VAN WILLIGEN: So, these excavation baskets these were something that had been used through a long period of time. I mean it was sort of a way archaeology got done?

W. ADAMS: Well, we . . . we found them 2,000 years old in our excavations. Yeah, they're made of palm fiber with the handles on each side.

VAN WILLIGEN: So, kind of conical?

W. ADAMS: That's exactly . . . I think we got them inside but . . . but . . .

N. ADAMS: And we got some . . . several in the museum.

W. ADAMS: Yeah. But all . . . all of these are ba . . . basic carrying baskets for everything and . . . and the only sort of container that we had. We were desperately short of containers when we started out . . .

VAN WILLIGEN: Sure.

W. ADAMS: Su . . . Sudan was totally unprepared. And we saved every kind of little plastic vial, cardboard box, toothbrush boxes . . .

N. ADAMS: Cigarette packages . . .

W. ADAMS: . . . any damn thing we could put beads and things in, you see . . .

VAN WILLIGEN: I see.

W. ADAMS: . . . and have anything. But bigger things had to go in these baskets and after a while we were running short of excavation baskets [chuckle] and so we . . . and also shelf space and so I started making the pottery typology just to clear out a lot of these potsherds. See, practicalities were definitely the tail that wagged the dog [chuckle].

VAN WILLIGEN: So, then also part of this would be the way the Qufti and . . . and others tended to work? I mean they had a way of operating?

W. ADAMS: Yeah. And . . . and essentially one has to . . . you cannot really change that because it is largely dictated by this instrument itself.

VAN WILLIGEN: Uh-huh.

W. ADAMS: You see the . . . the turiya in fact . . . you are working in soft sand it would . . . it absolutely cannot hold any kind of a vertical face.

VAN WILLIGEN: Oh, I see.

W. ADAMS: And so, you . . . you have to adapt yourself to the available labor methodologies and . . . and instruments in fact . . .

VAN WILLIGEN: So, tell . . . tell me . . . tell me more about how these Sudanese archaeologists, these commu . . . people from the . . . the communities, the Qufti and others, and how do they . . . how did you recruit them?

W. ADAMS: I . . . I didn't have to do that. The Sudan Antiquity Service did all that for me. Now, I would like to say at this point that . . . that if I had a successful career there – and I certainly did – a lot of what I had to do with the fact I was getting absolutely maximum logistic support from Sudan. Now I've been . . . I've been director of other digs since that time when I had to recruit the people and pay them and feed them and house them and listen to their complaints and doctor their broken fingers and all, I didn't have to do any of that in the Sudan. I could be one hundred percent archaeologist.

VAN WILLIGEN: I see.

W. ADAMS: I just simply told the Antiquity Service I need so many laborers and they went and got them, they put up tents for them to live in, they came out on . . . on Sat . . . on . . . on Thursday afternoon and paid the men, the whole . . . absolutely the whole works, so I didn't have to think about that.

VAN WILLIGEN: So, their . . . the works . . . the work schedule would be . . . what, Saturday through Thursday?

W. ADAMS: Yeah, from 6 a.m. to 2 p.m. and that . . . that . . . that's . . . that's the way most manual laborers got in that part of the world. People then knock off and . . . and have lunch at that . . . these . . . these people have their big meal in the middle of the day after they get off from work. What we did in fact was that they could have some kind of breakfast before 6, then there's some breakfast break from 9 till 9:30 on the site . . .

VAN WILLIGEN: Yeah.

W. ADAMS: . . . where they would have stuff and then . . . then work again until 2 . . .

VAN WILLIGEN: And they . . .

W. ADAMS: . . . and then they knock off and they . . . they come home.

VAN WILLIGEN: . . . and you provide them with some food?

W. ADAMS: Well, again, they provided that themselves or the Antiquity Service did.

VAN WILLIGEN: I see.

W. ADAMS: They had a tent camp not very far away and their cook in camp would fix the stuff and then it was brought . . . or else they went back to camp. Now, I also had usually some local laborers from the immediate villages who just went home and came back. We housed the others. But as the . . . as the seasons progressed and I got to be working with larger and larger and larger crews as I felt that I could manage them, you see, I ended up . . . see, my last year I was working with a crew of 250 men and only a very small proportion in those camps were from the local area, the rest of them were all . . . and some of them were actually Southern Sudanese laborers that had been . . . had been hired by contract labor and brought to work.

VAN WILLIGEN: And they . . . would they be like professional archaeologists in a sense?

W. ADAMS: Well . . .

VAN WILLIGEN: I mean . . . you . . . you know what I mean, I mean they have a career in archaeology or . . .

W. ADAMS: No, none of these . . . none of these other guys . . . the only people who had had any kind of career whatever in archaeology were the . . . were the . . . the Quftis

. . .

VAN WILLIGEN: I see.

W. ADAMS: . . . from Egypt and I had seven of those. The rest of these guys were used to . . . used . . . just . . . just . . . just being peasant farmers and so, they were used to digging in that sense. The Southerners didn't have that in a manner of speaking because their farming was done in very different ways. They all had to just learn from Day One how to do the kinds of work that we did. Now, I can't express too strongly . . . of course, the importance of non-coms on this because they knew, hey, how to do that kind of thing and how to . . . how to oversee the other guys, you see. And when I had the . . . you want to stop that and turn it over or are we okay for the time being?

VAN WILLIGEN: Uh, there's just a little more. Oh, I see.

W. ADAMS: When I get out on the dig first thing in the morning I check with my . . . my top sergeant, the Reis as he's called and so, "Okay, here's what we want to do for the day, here's where we are," and talk it over and then I would go on and look at where the other groups of Quftis are . . . are working. Now, one of my main jobs was to dispose the labor force in places where I wanted to work and keep them off the places where I didn't want to work and stop them when I wanted to stop them and so on. But apart from that I could leave the supervision in the hands of these guys and work down through the . . . through the Reis primarily.

VAN WILLIGEN: How did you work with the . . . because you . . . you talked about the sand . . . the . . . the sand being unstable and the tools being what they were and the fact that you couldn't produce actual faces and things like that? How . . . how did you deal with the issue of stratigraphy?

W. ADAMS: The stratigraphy revealed itself as we stripped off layer by layer and that's how it's done. Fortunately that was be the only way I'd ever wanted to do it anyway because if you . . . if you dig vertical trenches all you see is sequence but you don't see patterns.

VAN WILLIGEN: Uh-huh.

W. ADAMS: You see, a trench or a pit reveals nothing except the sequence of the events in one particular spot . . .

VAN WILLIGEN: Right.

W. ADAMS: There was a fire at this time and there was a collapse at this time, [inaudible] some of it, you don't know whether you can generalize from that . . .

VAN WILLIGEN: Uh-huh.

W. ADAMS: . . . to a large area or not. If you strip large areas you can see what the village looked like in any given time. And so that's how you get the stratigraphy. It's just . . . just by stripping. In fact . . . now, the last major site I did was Meinarti. Meinarti was occupied for 1400 years and it ended up as a mound almost fifty feet high. And I took half of that mound and I stripped the whole thing layer by layer, 18 layers one after another all the way down to . . . down to the bottom.

VAN WILLIGEN: There were arbitrary layers or . . .

W. ADAMS: No-no, this is all natural stratigraphy . . .

VAN WILLIGEN: I see.

W. ADAMS: . . . because there isn't . . . again with this kind of very soft, unconsolidated sand and so, you don't get clearly . . . you . . . you . . . you can't define arbitrary surfaces . . . you had to find a real ones so you . . . you just follow out. And my men by the time they'd been with me they got very good at following the surface so to

speak. The . . . the . . . the turiya in the hands of a skilled worker – and I’ve used them myself – becomes quite a . . . a sensitive instrument because you drop it in the sand and rake it towards you and you can feel that you’re hitting anything more firm. Now, of course, you do displace the artifacts but [chuckle] while you’re doing that but you . . . you do preserve the floor levels that way.

VAN WILLIGEN: Oh, so these tools that you . . . you described earlier it was like a three-foot handle . . .

W. ADAMS: Uh, no longer than three feet I would say . . .

VAN WILLIGEN: Right.

W. ADAMS: . . . made of local acacia and the blade is very heavy wrought-iron blade, like . . . like a hoe blade but a little bit narrower and much heavier, slightly curved . . .

VAN WILLIGEN: I see.

W. ADAMS: And the whole technique is to . . . is to rake it towards you and pull the sand into a basket. Now, I had two baskets also sitting in front of every turiya man and one to collect all the potsherds from that site and the other to . . . to collect everything else collectible. These had tags attached to the handles identifying them with the [inaudible]. And one of the things that my men were trained to do is come and tell me if the basket was getting full so I could go and put another one there with a tag on the handle.

[End of Tape 1, Side 1]

[Begin of Tape 1, Side 2]

VAN WILLIGEN: . . . three guys to scrub potsherds?

W. ADAMS: Yeah because you can’t identify the ware when they are dirty and so the three guys would scrub the potsherds and then they dry in no time in the direct overhead sun. And they would sit in the baskets until I could find the time to go through them and sort them and that would usually be either I’d come out on a Friday or I would stay afternoons after 2 o’clock and sort the potsherds. And I . . . by this time I had . . . in the later phases I had made up my typology and had some tally sheets made up. So, I would just . . . just record the number . . . the number of shards of each type from each . . . each locality and that’s basically what gave me my chronological fix.

VAN WILLIGEN: Umhmm. So, how long . . . as . . . as . . . as you were going you’re developing this sort of a typology . . . I mean it was an active . . . ha . . . do you contributed it to your understanding of ceramic typ . . . typology virtually everyday?

W. ADAMS: That was absolutely right, in fact. And in the process, of course, I dis . . . I . . . I developed the understanding which I then put into that book *Archaeological Typology and Practical Reality* which I wrote . . . in which I pointed out that working typology really have to be continued development, continual feedback between your ideas and the things themselves, in fact, if you just study the things and then you refine your ideas and go back and you see more in the things but the feedback continues all the time. So, I guess I was refining the . . . the typology . . . I was also learning how to dig all the time, I was learning all kinds of things. I never . . . I never had any training with plane table survey for example. I had to teach myself that. I never had any training using India ink and instruments to draw maps. I had to teach myself that. I never worked in a

darkroom before. I had to teach myself that because we did all our . . . our developing and printing ourselves also.

VAN WILLIGEN: And so you learned most . . . most of what you ended up doing in . . . on the job?

W. ADAMS: On the job. That's right. And see, and the great . . . great advantage I had is nobody was looking over my shoulder.

VAN WILLIGEN: Uh-huh. That's really interesting.

W. ADAMS: And it makes a lot of difference in fact. Like I say, you know, my boys had a lot of confidence in my [chuckle] ability to tackle things anyway but if I had been assailed by self-doubt [chuckle] where I would've been. But it worked out pretty well. Of course, I could look back afterwards and see some really dumb mistakes I made too but . . . but John we were putting in seasons of seven, eight, or even nine months a year and quite literally I think I did more archaeology in one season than most archaeologists do in a lifetime, just the number of sites at the . . . the varied kinds of sites. Altogether during the five years we worked in the area we dug a 131 different sites of all different ages and some of these were big villages too.

VAN WILLIGEN: So, and . . . and all this was done without necessarily the . . . a official sponsorship by the people . . . the organization?

W. ADAMS: Well, now, that's not true in fact. There's another story in here and I guess if you have the time I might as well get into it.

VAN WILLIGEN: Yes.

W. ADAMS: After my first year when I started the potteries exclusively so to speak, I came home on . . . on . . . on leave after that first year partly for our oldest son to be born because he was conceived in the Sudan and we came home and . . . and . . . I was also was . . . was given a commission to . . . to go around and try to recruit American expeditions. So, during the time I was gone the . . . the French commissioner for archaeology that hired me was replaced by a Sudanese. This was known as Sudanization and was usually done very suddenly without advance warning. So, suddenly the guy who had been working under him as assistant-commissioner, Thabit Hassan Thabit was then the commissioner for archaeology. Well, Thabit had it in his mind that I was a "Vercoutter man" and therefore not to be trusted. And so he wanted to clip my wings or keep me under some kind of control and, of course, he couldn't be up at Wadi Halfa . . . because like every other minister he had to be at his desk, you know, or he'd be in danger losing his job. You know how it is in those kinds of . . . so, he wanted to bring me to Khartoum also and put me in an office beside his. I said what the hell afire that's not going to accomplish anything, I've got something started. By the way I was still working on four-months contracts that were renewed every four months and each one was always going to be the last. [chuckle] But . . . of course, UNESCO started asking, well, hasn't he go done studying those damn photos [chuckle]. And so, the second year I was there . . . by that time I had acquired a Dutch assistant and a Swedish assistant, young fellows, and . . . who were helping me out with the fieldwork . . .

VAN WILLIGEN: Umhmm.

W. ADAMS: . . . and they were sent by UNESCO also. And eventually I . . . the . . . the Scandinavians had a big joint expedition and the head of that Torgny Säve-Söderbergh was a man of tremendous political influence so . . .

VAN WILLIGEN: So . . . Söderbergh?

W. ADAMS: Säve hyphen Söderbergh. It was a . . .

VAN WILLIGEN: Säve-Söderbergh?

W. ADAMS: That's right. Now, he . . . he was really one of the . . . the most respected Egyptologists in the . . . in the world, in fact. And he had or . . . he had organized a Scandinavian joint expedition of four Scandinavian countries and they were there taking a good size concession on the East Bank. Well, I went to Torgny Säve-Söderbergh and I asked him if he would use his influence because he was on . . . on the UNESCO Commission with Thabit to try to loosen up my position a little bit so I could work back in Nubia, you see. So, he used his influence and we eventually came to a compromise where I was supposed to be in Wadi Halfa but not out in the field. And these two assistants of my would do the actual fieldwork, the Swedish guy and the Dutch guy. Meanwhile I was supposed to be drawing a contour map with . . . based on these air photos of the . . . of the area that was to be flooded. So, I spent most of the second year actually at a plane table just . . . and I did . . . I drew a set of contour maps, which were subsequently published by the Sudan Government [chuckle] . . .

VAN WILLIGEN: I see.

W. ADAMS: . . . of this area. But, of course, I was checking up on these guys all the time, sort of giving them directions and so on and so but, of course, I was frustrated as hell stuck in Wadi Halfa and first of all it's dull work drawing a map anyway. But in the spring . . . and this is . . . this is . . . that's the story I think will interest you, the connection . . . the way things worked out. I was at my home with Nettie about 10 o'clock in the evening in Wadi Halfa and there came a knock on the door and here was Thabit, the commissioner for archaeology, and Torgny Säve-Söderbergh, had come to my door and they had obviously been in an argument and what ha . . . happened was that the . . . the Oriental Institute of Chicago had been given a concession on the East Bank to dig a big Pharaonic fortress. In . . . within their concession, unbeknownst to us, there turned out to be a large cemetery belonged to one of the late prehistoric periods and so on. And they in theory were not interested in this and Säve-Söderbergh was particularly interested in these things and so he wanted to have this thing withdrawn from the Oriental Institute concession and, you see, and given over to him so to speak. Well, these . . . you know, these concession values are drawn up and they have pretty much the status of a . . . a treaty if you like, you see. Well, the Oriental Institute people said, "No, we want to dig this thing." The point being, of course, that cemeteries turn up all kinds of loot, you see, that's in the graves that you can show in museums and town sites don't. So, they said they wanted to . . . well, Torgny said, "Well, we ought to override them because it's not in their . . . you see, it . . . it's not really what they're interested in, it wasn't any . . . any what they came out to do whereas we are more interested." So, he was trying to persuade Thabit and Thabit dug in his heels and he said, "No, the . . . the concession is made and that's that." And so, Torgny said, "Well, let's lay it before the UNESCO man and see what he says [chuckle] and see what is what." He came to my door . . . well, I was . . . by great good fortune . . . you know, style has a lot to do . . . I happened to be wearing an Arab jellabiya, you know, when he arrived because I usually did in the evening and so, after work and of course, that made a positive effect . . . impression on Thabit, you see. Well, Nettie could see, bless her soul, you know, she is the most wonderful diplomatic person in the world, she could see right away that this was going to be a tricky situation so, she went off and fixed some . . . some coffee and stuff for us to have and we sat down

and I listened to the two sides and I said, you . . . you know, “Torgny, you see, all the logic is on your side but the law is on the other side and you . . .”

VAN WILLIGEN: The . . . the law is on the side of the . . .

W. ADAMS: . . . of the commissioner . . .

VAN WILLIGEN: . . . of . . . of Thabit.

W. ADAMS: Of Thabit. That’s right. I said, “and . . . and the . . . the fact is that . . . that if . . . if we . . . if we don’t respect the authority of the commissioner for archaeology we got no campaign at all because he is the one who’s making all these . . . these arrangements and . . . you . . . you know, laying out the concessions and all the rest, so, you know, I . . . I said, you know, that I . . . I think there’s no . . . there . . . there’s no issue that can be argued here. If . . . if Thabit says, that’s the way it’s going to be, that’s the way it’s going to be and that’s that.”

VAN WILLIGEN: So, how long did . . . it started out about 10 . . .

W. ADAMS: Oh, I don’t . . . 11:30 or something like that by the time we got through and so, and Torgny took it with fairly good grace. Well, from that day on Thabit decided I was on his side. And, you know, in that part of the world all relationships have personal really and if you’re alright in what you want to do it’s alright . . . and once he decided I was alright then what I wanted . . . and from that point on I got everything I wanted.

And so, it just made all the difference in the world. And . . . and . . .

VAN WILLIGEN: So, you can work on the projects that you thought were important?

W. ADAMS: I could work and the next year there was never anything more said about my not working in the field. I worked fulltime in the field for the next three years, you see, and so on and working with bigger and bigger crews and just asking him and . . . and when I . . . I think in . . . it was towards the end of the third season I was working with a crew of . . . of I think 85 men or something like that and then all of sudden this mound site I was telling you about fell into our laps. Now, that was . . .

VAN WILLIGEN: What was the name of that site?

W. ADAMS: Meinarti.

VAN WILLIGEN: Oh, yes.

W. ADAMS: Meinarti. Right. That had been in the concession of the British who had been out there, oh, even before we got there. The British had a concession to dig a fortress and this island, Meinarti, was also in their concession and they had been making noises about wanting to do it because they thought there was a big temple buried in it, you see. And they went on and on and on and . . . and weren’t doing it and I could look at Meinarti and see this is really an important stratified site and so I started getting after Thabit to get after the British to either do something or give it up. And he went in this third year, I guess, to the Brian Emery, the excavation director and he said, “You simply got to do something about Meinarti and Bill Adams [chuckle] got to . . .” And . . . and Brian Emery said, “Alright, I’ll give it up if you make Bill Adams dig it.” [both laughing] So well . . . so I was actually out on the dig on another island further up there when Thabit came out and go . . . and . . . and he said, “You have to start Meinarti on Saturday morning.” And I said, “Okay, let me have a 150 men there.” And “Okay”, he said and they were. And so that was just . . . just off the top of my head a figure I . . . that I thought I could probably manage.

VAN WILLIGEN: So, this . . . this site was . . . had never excavated before?

W. ADAMS: Never been excavated before.

VAN WILLIGEN: And you had some sense about its . . . this is . . . relates to your concern about stratigraphy and the ceramic . . .

W. ADAMS: Well, not just ceramics but the sequence of cultural development. The thing is, if you have a . . . if you cover a village site that's been occupied for centuries and you've got a series of layers like that you've got all these wonderful subtle changes in the plan . . .

VAN WILLIGEN: Right.

W. ADAMS: . . . from century to century and you can see houses growing and houses shrinking and new walls built and new doors knocked through and others blocked up and you . . . you see that, you know, you see . . .

VAN WILLIGEN: Right.

W. ADAMS: . . . the picture of life as it unfolds . . .

VAN WILLIGEN: Right.

W. ADAMS: . . . from . . . if . . . if you do . . . if you go out in that way and that was my reason for wanting to do it. But the site had been eaten into by floods in such a way that there was a . . . a reasonable steep scarp, you know, on the . . . on the upstream side where you could see things sticking out of it . . .

VAN WILLIGEN: Uh-huh.

W. ADAMS: . . . you see, so I knew it was . . .

VAN WILLIGEN: This flooding was from the dam construction?

W. ADAMS: No, this flooding was just a way of . . .

VAN WILLIGEN: Just a regular . . .

W. ADAMS: . . . coming down, was just the regular Nile flood . . .

VAN WILLIGEN: I see.

W. ADAMS: . . . that comes down and . . . and, you know, every . . . every few years or so there's an extra high flood that . . . that really hit and, of course, it would hit the face of the mound and then, you know, breaks it up and slide it down. So, I could see all these things, you see, that just . . . just . . . just sticking here and there so I knew it was a very important site. And so when I actually got on it and I . . . I . . . I looked at it and I looked at the time available, which was basically part of one season and the whole of the next, and I said, "Well, I'm going to start on half of this," because I couldn't possible handle more than the half. So, the . . . the mound was about a 180 meters long and about 85 meters wide and 12 ½ meters high. I drove . . . drove a line across the middle, across the waist of it and took the higher half and we just started stripping it down.

VAN WILLIGEN: Umhmm.

W. ADAMS: This was, I think, in February or something like that and I started with 150 men after I'd had it for . . . oh, a month or so, I . . . I realized I was sufficiently on top of it so I could probably handle another 50. So, I asked Thabit to give me another fifty men [chuckle] and he did.

VAN WILLIGEN: I see.

W. ADAMS: And so we finished out that season with . . . with . . . with 200 laborers and we had gotten down about a third of the way through the mound something like that.

VAN WILLIGEN: Must have been a real commotion on the site. I mean . . . I can't imagine . . .

W. ADAMS: Well, it really was and trying to figure out disposing the men, also keeping the routes open to the dumps so to speak . . .

VAN WILLIGEN: Right.

W. ADAMS: . . . so that they weren't getting in each other's way is a major challenge in fact. But it's something I got to be very good at is . . . is this disposing of troops so to speak.

VAN WILLIGEN: Right.

W. ADAMS: One of the great advantages of working on that island and on a mound is you can dump in any direction . . .

VAN WILLIGEN: Uh-huh.

W. ADAMS: . . . you see, where you are taking stuff out any way and that was a big help but I realized that we had to shut that dig down about the 1st May, we always used to stop the digs about then because it was getting up over a hundred degrees by then. And . . . but I realized that I'm going to have to start that dig the very first day it's even reasonable cool in the . . . in the fall, keep it going and . . . and I need 250 laborers [chuckle], so to start . . . to start me out with . . . with 250 laborers and . . . and we worked on that for nine straight months and two days with that . . . with that . . .

VAN WILLIGEN: Well, I can imagine the . . . the heat with . . . you know, being in India it just . . . it's like an oven, I mean it's just desperately dry..

W. ADAMS: Yeah, it's absolutely dry heat but we were really, really, really fortunate that year, unlike any other year, because it came along May and instead of getting unbearable we had week after week of reasonably decent weather, I think in the low 90s and without the powerful winds storms you usually have, and that continued clear into June. So, the gods were definitely favoring me because we kept that dig going until the 11th of June which happened to be my wedding anniversary, nine months and two days from the day we started to dig. But talking about support from Thabit, you see, by that time anything. And there was a lot of pressure to economize toward the end of the second season and Thabit came up to see me and asked if I could shut down the dig and I said, "No, absolutely I cannot, this is too important because we got started in it now." And then, "Well, then couldn't you just trench here and there?" And well, you can't trench in this soft sand anyway but I said, "That is not going to answer the kinds of questions we're going to answer here." We had quite a long argument and set to and I finally did agree to reduce the labor force to some extent but then he more or less said that he . . . "Well, I don't know what I'm going to tell the minister but if you say so, why, that's the way it's going to be." And so, he went back to Khartoum. Of course, he was the guy whose head was on the block so to speak, and told the minister, "My man Adams says we got to go on so we got to go on." Now, you cannot ask for more support than that.

VAN WILLIGEN: Yes, so, Thabit . . . uh, he continued in . . . in archaeology and . . .

W. ADAMS: Well, he continued to be the commissioner for archaeology for several years after that and then eventually he . . . he resigned and I think he went into banking [chuckle] . . . had a career as a banker. [laughs] So, I don't . . . why he chose to go into archaeology in the first . . . he'd been sent to England . . . for training, you see, by the Antiquity Service . . .

VAN WILLIGEN: I see.

W. ADAMS: . . . and had taken some kind of a . . . a credential in . . . in . . . in Egyptology I think in England and so . . . but . . . but why he ever chose it is beyond me because he never really showed any interest in . . . in archaeology qua archaeology.

VAN WILLIGEN: Uh-huh.

W. ADAMS: He was an interesting guy though. He was very hardheaded and bullheaded as he could be and it was . . . in . . . in that government of . . . of . . . of military guys and so, I mean it was really the right personality to have because he could just be as stubborn and obnoxious and [chuckle] no reasoning at all. Nettie could tell you some things about Thabit too.

VAN WILLIGEN: So, what . . . how were the living arrangements in Wadi Halfa? What was going on there?

N. ADAMS: We had a hou . . . a UNESCO field house . . .

VAN WILLIGEN: Uh-huh.

N. ADAMS: . . . which had our family and a . . . a Swedish assistant . . .

VAN WILLIGEN: Uh-huh.

N. ADAMS: . . . and a . . . a English . . . ac . . . actually a Canadian . . . a Canadian assistant. And we all lived there together and shared the expenses of the . . . of the house. And we had tiled floors so it was very clean.

W. ADAMS: That's right.

N. ADAMS: And running water in the backyard so, that was nice.

VAN WILLIGEN: That was like a hydrant in the backyard?

N. ADAMS: Yeah. Uh-huh. And we also had a shower toward at the back of the house too which was nice. In the wintertime if you turned on the water and got right under it right away the water was warm enough because the pipes were on the surface of the ground so you could get a quick shower.

W. ADAMS: See, things were not very [inaudible] because it never froze [chuckle].

N. ADAMS: But if you did that in the summertime it was almost scalding. So, in the summertime you had to let the water run out before you got in until the cooler water came on.

VAN WILLIGEN: Uh-huh. So, what . . . how warm would it be in the winter?

N. ADAMS: Oh, it would . . . I . . . it . . . I don't think it ever got below, say, 45 degrees but it feels extremely cold at 45 degrees . . .

VAN WILLIGEN: Sure.

N. ADAMS: . . . because, you know, you're constantly sw . . . you're constantly evaporating because the air is so dry. You're just . . . your . . . your body is constantly evaporating and it feels extremely cold. And the houses are built to hold the . . . the coolness, to keep the heat out. So, even . . . even in the middle of the day the houses don't really warm up in the wintertime. Of course, they do warm up in the summertime but not anything like what they would do if they weren't well insulated.

VAN WILLIGEN: And so then did you have a cook?

N. ADAMS: Yes, we had a cook and then a general servant who . . .

W. ADAMS: A bearer.

N. ADAMS: . . . kept the house clean and . . . and did the laundry. The laundry was a pretty big part of his job.

VAN WILLIGEN: Did you have the house cleaned almost every day?

N. ADAMS: No, he just would sweep it . . . well, he would come in and . . . and sweep the bedrooms and . . . and . . .

W. ADAMS: [inaudible].

N. ADAMS: Yeah.

VAN WILLIGEN: I'm just reflecting on the . . . the Indian deal, you know, you . . . if you rented a place they would tend to encourage you to have someone come virtually everyday because of the . . . because of the dust.

N. ADAMS: Well, they did . . . they did come in six days a week. Friday was their day off.

W. ADAMS: They didn't live in.

N. ADAMS: They didn't live in, no. They . . . and . . . and our cook did most of the shopping . . .

VAN WILLIGEN: Uh-huh.

N. ADAMS: . . . the shopping for our . . . all of our food.

W. ADAMS: The kitchen was in a separate low building in the back of a wall enclosure as is usual and we had gotten a . . . shipped over from the States a . . . a chemical toilet and we'd set that in the corner of the yard and then . . . then our one servant took the bucket out.

VAN WILLIGEN: Uh-huh.

W. ADAMS: There was a . . . there was a . . . most of the . . . most of the houses in Wadi Halfa were on a bucket system and a cart came around every day and . . . and collected the stuff. So, our . . . our . . .

VAN WILLIGEN: I see.

W. ADAMS: . . . our servants took the shit out so that . . . then we had . . . we . . . you could get from the city we'd get phenol to put in . . . in the toilet . . .

VAN WILLIGEN: Umhmm.

W. ADAMS: . . . in the bucket.

VAN WILLIGEN: And then . . . so, there was a market nearby you to buy food, what . . . what was the diet like?

W. ADAMS: Not so bad. Well, in the wintertime you get all kinds of quite nice vegetables and that actually . . . and . . . and John was just asking about the diet.

N. ADAMS: Oh, well, we had . . . we had act . . . a very good diet really, lots of fish . . .

VAN WILLIGEN: Umhmm.

N. ADAMS: . . . and meat, uh lamb, other kinds of meat probably beef, probably camel. We didn't inquire too closely.

VAN WILLIGEN: You did . . .

N. ADAMS: but . . .

VAN WILLIGEN: It . . . it . . . it was . . . it was great that you didn't worry about the species that much.

N. ADAMS: That's right. But our cook was an excellent cook . . .

VAN WILLIGEN: Uh-huh.

N. ADAMS: . . . and he could ma . . . make a lot of different things, stews and roasts, see, what . . . you know, if he got a good piece of meat he could make a nice roast or a leg of lamb he could roast that. And we had potatoes and carrots and lots of squash, you know, what the British call marrows and eggplant and two different kinds of cucumbers . . . and . . . and then we had fruit. We had oranges and grapefruits, dried fruit in the form of dates, lots of dates . . .

W. ADAMS: Dates and dates and dates and more dates [chuckle]. Yeah.

N. ADAMS: . . . and . . . and dried apricot . . . uh, dried apricot sort of roll, like a fruit roll today . . .

VAN WILLIGEN: Oh, I see.

N. ADAMS: . . . made of dried apricots. And then there was canned fruit that we could buy in the . . . in the . . .

VAN WILLIGEN: Was there an expatriate community in Wadi Halfa?

N. ADAMS: Well, there was a Greek community . . .

VAN WILLIGEN: Uh-huh.

N. ADAMS: . . . and a . . . a Coptic . . . Egyptian community . . .

VAN WILLIGEN: Uh-huh.

N. ADAMS: . . . and then some Syrians and other nationalities that had been there since the British have been there.

W. ADAMS: See, Wadi Halfa was a market town so you tend to get these market diaspora populations. We were the only European . . . Euro-American . . .

VAN WILLIGEN: I see.

N. ADAMS: Who lived there all-year-round.

VAN WILLIGEN: And they . . . people would come in . . .

N. ADAMS: The other archaeological expeditions came and left but we were the only ones who came and stayed and we were the only European . . . Europeans or Americans who were there in the town all the time.

W. ADAMS: The thing is for . . . for four months a year you couldn't have mustered a more distinguished intellectual community anywhere in the African continent than we had right in that area . . .

VAN WILLIGEN: Uh-huh.

W. ADAMS: . . . just, you know, we had all the major European countries plus the U.S. and the University of Ghana were all foreigners and . . .

VAN WILLIGEN: Who were some of the people that sort of floated by?

W. ADAMS: Well, there was the . . . the University of . . . that Museum of New Mexico which I recruited, the University of Colorado which I recruited, the Chicago Oriental Institute which, of course, has been in business for a long time, the Polish Expedition, the Spanish Expedition, the Franco-Argentine Expedition which later broke up [chuckle] in separate parts, a . . . a East German Expedition, and uh . . .

N. ADAMS: Scandinavian . . . a Joint Scandinavian.

W. ADAMS: . . . trying to think . . . Joint Scandinavian Expedition, that's right, a Finish Expedition later on. And these were headed by some really, you know, distinguished intellectual scholars.

VAN WILLIGEN: Yeah.

N. ADAMS: And the British were there.

W. ADAMS: Yeah, the British, of course. And the nice thing about it was, unlike the situation in . . . in Egyptian archaeology where they all live on their elegant houseboats and sort of insulated from the community, everybody except the Chicago Oriental Institute . . . rented houses in the villages like we did. So, they lived close to the people and . . . and close to the scene. They created a camaraderie that was completely lacking in Egypt among the different expeditions, just the fact that we were all living this kind of village life. Now our village life . . . houses, of course, are very different from the . . . from Wadi Halfa because our water was just hauled from the Nile and filled into these

big pointed-bottom pottery vessels and so, there were no showers or anything like that. We did bring our portable toilet with us out there . . . out to the field.

VAN WILLIGEN: But much . . . much of . . . that might have mystified your Sudanese colleagues?

W. ADAMS: No, I think they were sort of used to the idea. There never was any . . . we . . . the . . . the Nubians are an incredibly clean people, just wonderfully clean. And they were always willing to rent us a house in the village even if it meant the family moving out just for the sake of two or three pounds rent a month.

VAN WILLIGEN: Right.

W. ADAMS: And there was no glass in the windows. The one concession that we did is, we bought plastic screen and nailed screen up in the . . . plastic screen up in the windows to keep the flies out. And we also brought in nice, lovely clean golden sand from the desert spread it around on the mud floor was to keep the dust down [chuckle] so . . . but otherwise, we . . . we lived in a [meswa] so to speak.

VAN WILLIGEN: They had like doors and stuff?

W. ADAMS: Oh, yeah, they had wooden . . . wooden doors and wooden shutters for the . . . for the window.

VAN WILLIGEN: I see.

W. ADAMS: I imagine you seeing similar mud houses in [chuckle] . . . in India plenty. They're spacious. The . . . the . . . the interesting thing about the . . . the Nubian houses by comparison of other parts of the Sudan is that they're quite spacious.

VAN WILLIGEN: Uh-huh.

N. ADAMS: That's because the roofs are made from . . . from rails from the railroad that was laid down . . .

W. ADAMS: By Kitchener.

N. ADAMS: . . . in the early . . .

VAN WILLIGEN: Oh, I see.

N. ADAMS: . . . and in the late 19th century.

VAN WILLIGEN: The steel rails.

W. ADAMS: That's right.

N. ADAMS: Yes, steel rails and when they decided to change the course of the railroad to put it through the desert instead of along the Nile the Nubians were told, well, you can have these rails . . .

W. ADAMS: [inaudible] rails.

N. ADAMS: So, they started . . . they took them up and started making, you know, roofs that were the width of the rail . . . a railroad rail.

W. ADAMS: See, the earlier ones had always had barrel-vaulted roofs and . . .

VAN WILLIGEN: Oh, I see.

W. ADAMS: . . . and only a rather narrow room can support one of these barrel-vaulted roofs.

VAN WILLIGEN: Uh-huh.

N. ADAMS: Or else the roof was supported by palm trunks . . .

W. ADAMS: Right. Yeah, but these . . .

N. ADAMS: . . . which is not very strong.

W. ADAMS: A palm is a very weak wood, it sags in no time at all. So, they were delighted . . .

VAN WILLIGEN: Sounds very dangerous to me.

N. ADAMS: But the rails . . .

W. ADAMS: Well, they . . . they were just . . . just light thatch on top of those.

N. ADAMS: . . . the rails provided a wonderfully spacious rooms. So, you know, the Nubians were used to living in a very nice house.

VAN WILLIGEN: Then . . . so, you . . . your sons were there.

N. ADAMS: Yes. Uh-huh.

VAN WILLIGEN: Did they enjoy it?

N. ADAMS: Well, they were very small. They were both brought over when they were less than two months old.

VAN WILLIGEN: That must've been quite a challenge.

N. ADAMS: Well, I . . . it would've been if I hadn't gone there first . . .

VAN WILLIGEN: I see.

N. ADAMS: . . . but I was there before they were born so I knew what it was like.

VAN WILLIGEN: I see.

N. ADAMS: And I knew what was available and what wasn't and what I needed to bring and how it was going to be and so I didn't really consider it much of a challenge.

VAN WILLIGEN: I see.

N. ADAMS: I mean there are lots and lots of children being . . . who've been brought up there so why . . . why can't mine too?

W. ADAMS: Sure there are a lot of challenges. [laughter]

VAN WILLIGEN: I guess that's maybe not one of them.

N. ADAMS: The hardest thing was keeping the flies off their face. That was the hardest thing to do because there were always flies around and I didn't like to use a whole lot of Shelltox which is what we were using at that time to kill flies and so, you know, like we had little . . . their beds had a screen on them, they had lids that let down the screen on it so they could be . . . they could sleep without having flies.

VAN WILLIGEN: So, you . . . you had these things made or . . .

N. ADAMS: No.

VAN WILLIGEN: . . . they . . . there were available in the . . .

N. ADAMS: They . . . they were . . . they were available in this country. In fact, I brought both . . . both of the beds . . .

W. ADAMS: We had them shipped over to from here.

VAN WILLIGEN: Oh, I see.

N. ADAMS: One . . . one of them was a regular-size baby bed but it was called a Kiddie Koop and it had a screen all the way around the sides and the top, which led down over it. The other one was just a small portable bed that folded up but it also had screen all over it and a zipper top. So, you just zipped your kid in there and . . . and the screen pro . . . protected them from the flies.

VAN WILLIGEN: Was . . . was there . . . was there a physician available?

N. ADAMS: There was a clinic . . . actually a walk . . . a hospital in Wadi Halfa . . .

VAN WILLIGEN: Uh-huh. I see.

N. ADAMS: . . . and I don't think there were any clinics maybe for the next seventy or eighty miles south of there.

W. ADAMS: I think it'd be a hell of a lot further than that . . .

N. ADAMS: Not a great . . .

W. ADAMS: . . . that would only take you to Akasha, I think you're talking Kerma probably.

N. ADAMS: Well, I don't know. I . . . Akasha might have had some kind of a clinic but . . . but Wadi Halfa did have a hospital with a doctor, an Egyptian doctor and I did take Ernest, our . . . our older boy, I took him there twice, once for a throat infection, a sore throat with . . . with a fever and the second time with an eye infection. And in both cases they were dealt with very much as though they would . . . would've been in this country.

W. ADAMS: I went in once with a scorpion sting.

N. ADAMS: Yeah.

VAN WILLIGEN: And so then what . . . what about the . . . the . . . the kind of so . . . social life. Of course, there's a . . . you know . . . you know, the . . . the group of the Adams's I suppose.

N. ADAMS: Well, the . . . the UNESCO House . . .

VAN WILLIGEN: Oh, I see.

N. ADAMS: . . . we had . . . you know, we had these other two assistants . . .

VAN WILLIGEN: Oh, yes, that's right. That's right.

N. ADAMS: . . . and . . . and then on Fridays we would go and visit other expeditions or they would come and visit us.

VAN WILLIGEN: Umhmm.

N. ADAMS: There was not, you know, any social life on any day except Friday . . . but Friday nobody worked, so, you know, so, we could get out and visit other people or they could come and visit you. You . . . we didn't feel the need for any more social life. We were so involved in . . .

VAN WILLIGEN: Sure.

N. ADAMS: . . . in our work and it was so interesting and so exciting . . .

VAN WILLIGEN: Uh-huh.

N. ADAMS: . . . that, you know, I couldn't conceive of what we could do with two days off like a weekend because there . . . there was just . . . it . . . it . . . it really took up all your interest and your time.

VAN WILLIGEN: This sounds really . . .

W. ADAMS: A very self-contained family.

N. ADAMS: Yeah.

W. ADAMS: We had some books that we could read . . .

N. ADAMS: Oh, yeah.

W. ADAMS: . . . in the evening and so . . . so, yeah.

N. ADAMS: But occasionally on Fridays we would go to the Nile Hotel which was about a mile and a half away and we had . . . carried a little stroller we could push the babies in and have to [inaudible] something, sit in the garden. The Nile Hotel had a nice lawn and planted flowers which was the only place in town that had those because everybody else's house was just like deserts surrounded by four walls, so, . . .

W. ADAMS: Well, the Nile Hotel was uninhabited a lot of times because it was built for Europeans. Actually . . . to back up a little bit, the reason for Wadi Halfa is it's a transshipment point just below the Second Cataract of the Nile. And the Second Cataract is not navigable and the steamers, you see, came up from Aswan as far as Wadi Halfa and

everything went on from there by train and the Nile Hotel was actually built by [inaudible] for travelers coming up on the steamer, you see . . .

VAN WILLIGEN: So, this is . . . this was Thomas Cook the original . . .

W. ADAMS: Originally but it had been taken over by the Sudan Government by this time [inaudible].

VAN WILLIGEN: What was the last time you were in Wadi Halfa?

W. ADAMS: Well . . .

N. ADAMS: Not too . . .

W. ADAMS: . . . that Wadi Halfa is under water.

VAN WILLIGEN: Oh, I see.

N. ADAMS: The last time was 1965.

W. ADAMS: Well, the last time for me was 1979 but, of course, that was in . . . what happened is, you see, they moved the town back when the . . .

VAN WILLIGEN: I see.

W. ADAMS: . . . when the . . . when the lake rose and so and . . . and comes but the . . . the . . . the . . . the train when we were living there was still the main link between Egypt and the Sudan and so the train ran three times a week and the steamer came three times a week up from Aswan but now most things come in and out by air and I think there's only one train a week and the steamer is really pretty local whereas it . . . it was really nice in those . . . of course, it was still leftover from Cook's steamers and we loved the steamer trip but it was two and a half days from Wadi Halfa to Aswan but it was a gorgeous trip.

VAN WILLIGEN: Sounds wonderful.

N. ADAMS: Very, very pleasant, you know . . .

VAN WILLIGEN: No doubt.

N. ADAMS: Nice rooms and with good food and you could sit down on the deck.

W. ADAMS: Nicely. The . . . the hotel was originally built for . . . for passengers on the old Imperial Airways that, you know, the . . . the flying boats that came out and serviced the East African colonies and so and they always landed at Wadi Halfa because it's as far as they could get from Malta on a tank of fuel and so they . . . you know, [chuckle] standard stop and so they overnights in Wadi Halfa and that was the main thing for [inaudible] those . . . for original [inaudible].

VAN WILLIGEN: So . . . so, when you are doing all this what was . . . what was going on in American anthropology sort of . . . what . . . was there any response to what you . . . your work?

W. ADAMS: Absolutely . . . absolutely not. And I really quit trying to keep . . . I . . . I quit my membership in the Society for American Archaeology when . . . because when we were going over there everybody said, well, too bad you're leaving anthropology [chuckle], you see.

VAN WILLIGEN: I see.

W. ADAMS: So, I . . . I . . . I really, you know, it was a . . . it was a . . . you wouldn't believe what a revelation it was to us to come back to American after seven years and see the whole scene so utterly transformed not just anthropology but the university scene in general was so utterly transformed.

VAN WILLIGEN: Right.

W. ADAMS: And, boy, I came into teaching at . . . at UK and, you know, with . . . with ideas about . . . based upon our student years ten years before that were way out of date.

VAN WILLIGEN: So, you came from Wadi Halfa to Lexington basically?

W. ADAMS: Well, not quite so. After five years we had more or less planned the campaign that we were going to work through the first 65 kilometers of flooded area and that was as . . . as . . . as much as they were going to give . . . and one of the reasons for this is from the time that Ernest was born we had decided when that boy is six years old we're coming home so he could go to school in his own and not grow up with an expatriate mentality so to speak and . . .

VAN WILLIGEN: So, you went from Wadi Halfa to Picadome [Elementary School, Lexington, Kentucky]?

W. ADAMS: No, we went from Wadi Halfa to Khartoum because after five years we had finished out the first area that we had ourselves to do . . .

N. ADAMS: Well, that was also the level of the . . . the flooding by the coffer dam.

W. ADAMS: The coffer dam, that's correct. Right.

N. ADAMS: And then there would be another length of time before the flooding of the actual lake began.

W. ADAMS: But the other thing is that . . . that working the length of seasons that we were doing we hadn't had time for an awful lot of the documentation that one should normally do but . . .

VAN WILLIGEN: Uh-huh. That's right. I . . . I . . . I remember reading about this.

W. ADAMS: Yeah. So, all the collections were packed up and shipped to Khartoum and it was in Khartoum that we cataloged the objects and photographed and we drew them and that whole site of . . . and I inked up the maps of so many of the sites and all that, so, we spent two years in Khartoum doing that and that was the interval between us leaving Wadi Halfa and coming home. And for us having lived the way we were in Wadi Halfa we were more than halfway home in Khartoum because we had an apartment with an elevator coming up to it and . . . and a . . . and the . . . the air conditioning which we never had in . . . we never had anywhere in the Sudan and, you know, flush toilets and all that good stuff. [chuckle] Was real elegant really, I'm not going to say elegant but it was a very modern apartment, quite new . . .

N. ADAMS: Very, very comfortable.

W. ADAMS: Very comfortable but . . .

N. ADAMS: Nice kitchen with a refrigerator . . .

W. ADAMS: There was a new dimension to living there because this is right at the time when the Abboud government was overthrown and there was a lot of political disturbance for a long period of time and so we had to sort of live with that while we were in . . . in Khartoum. And when . . . there was a lot of times it was unsafe to go out in many areas and you'd run into demonstrations and . . . and, you know, and they'd be walking along with a big old banner in Arabic, well, I can't read Arabic, you know, okay, what are they out after this time, you know. [laughter]

VAN WILLIGEN: So, anyway you left there and ended up here and those . . . it's a big transformation, I . . . I was trying to get some feeling for your relationship with the American anthropology establishment during this time and . . . and how they may have seen this kind of work?

W. ADAMS: Well, I . . . my only connection with the American anthropological establishment at all was just those expeditions that I recruited from New Mexico . . .

VAN WILLIGEN: Uh-huh.

W. ADAMS: . . . and . . . and Colorado. And the fact is they simply never got into it. I was really disappointed in them in fact because I . . . they just couldn't adapt themselves to the circumstances of the kind of work that we were doing there . . .

VAN WILLIGEN: I see.

W. ADAMS: . . . and I tried to warn them from Day One now, you cannot bring over a whole bunch of student diggers, in fact, because it is against the law to hire . . . well, you know, and so and when they came over there was far too many Indians . . . or Chiefs and not enough Indians, you see, and they had a lot of these guys hanging around with basically nothing to do. But the main thing is they just didn't get into the cultural problems. And, you know, doing archaeology without knowing why you're doing it so to speak and so on is . . . is . . . is pretty bad stuff. The New Mexico got right off . . . immediately on to just concentrating wholly on early . . . early stone-age stuff. Well, that's fine by me because I couldn't care less [chuckle] about that myself but neither one of them really got interested in the paradigm of . . . of . . . of Nubian cultural history at all. So it was a very tenuous connection that I had with . . . with the American establishment and, of course, not having any institutional base at all in this country . . .

VAN WILLIGEN: Oh, I see.

W. ADAMS: Yeah. I . . . I . . . meant that I didn't have anybody to . . . to liaise with so to speak. And so, I was really . . .

VAN WILLIGEN: That sounds like . . . that got to be pretty difficult . . .

W. ADAMS: Well, myself . . .

VAN WILLIGEN: . . . psychologically, you know.

W. ADAMS: Oh, I didn't mind a bit. [laughter] John, I always marched to my own drum, you know that.

VAN WILLIGEN: Well, you know, this kind of a . . . you know, just sort of isolated. I mean I'm reflecting on my own experience . . . a much shorter period of time but I . . . I felt very kind of isolated.

W. ADAMS: Well, you . . . you know, in a sense I've always been isolated because doing archaeology at all I was isolated from what I had meant to do but mainly . . . see, I always regarded anthropology as first and foremost as a teaching profession and that's what I wanted, it was to be a professor and a teacher and I was not doing that and so I went into archaeology, so, I . . . I was isolated from Day One in that sense, you see. And I came back prepared to do exactly what I had been prepared to do when I got my Ph.D., that is get into a department and teach whatever courses needed to be . . . needed to be taught and . . . and . . . and become a teacher. And so it's just like my . . . my beginning as a teacher was delayed by . . . by ten years but in the meantime, of course, the structure of teaching had changed so. For example, there used to be lots of yearlong courses back in the . . . in the earlier time when I was used to having the Introductory course over two years and so and then everything was in term of this . . . chopped up into semesters and so on and . . . and, you know, the whole curriculum had changed into much more of a supermarket where you, you know, just take stuff off the shelves rather than something a structured undergraduate curriculum. The other thing is that I had never thought of

anthropology teaching was focused in primarily on the graduate area. I always thought of it as a message that all undergraduates ought to hear . . .

VAN WILLIGEN: Right.

W. ADAMS: . . . and the kind of the philosophy of life that's important to teach and so and . . . and so when I got back again, of course, I found the whole emphasis was on the graduate area and that undergraduate areas had been very much neglected and that, of course, as you know that's why I threw myself so much into undergraduate teaching and taught so many undergraduate courses because I felt so import . . . so much, so strongly that this is . . . is really what it's all about so to speak.

VAN WILLIGEN: Hm, well, that's . . . that's really interesting. I think Bill it would be better for you to stop at this point?

W. ADAMS: Fine by me. I think I smell dinner [laughter]. Come back anytime.

[End of interview]