This book explores the history of medieval Nubia through the Old Nubian documentary archives excavated at Qasr Ibrim in southern Egypt. It focuses in particular on a single archive of land sales from the late twelfth century AD. It argues that the evidence from this archive alters our understanding of medieval Nubian society and economy. We should no longer see medieval Nubia as an isolated society with a primitive, demonetized economy. Nubian sales and accounts show wide levels of monetization. The accounts reveal gold-to-silver exchange rates in keeping with those of neighboring Egypt, thus tying Nubia’s economy to the wider Mediterranean. The documents from Qasr Ibrim also reveal medieval Nubia’s deep ties to Roman and Byzantine civilization. Old Nubian land sales have Greco-Roman Egyptian land sales as their historical basis. These land sales also suggest the existence of land purchase for investment by high-ranking officials who carried the expenses of the state, much like late antique landholders in Egypt. But the documents from Qasr Ibrim also reveal Nubian cultural practices along side this Roman cultural inheritance. In particular, we see evidence for public feasts as a widespread practice: Communal eating is a way for medieval Nubians to confirm the legitimacy of their legal transactions and their social hierarchies. Thus our records for medieval Nubia reveal a hybrid civilization with African and Byzantine characteristics.
This chapter introduces the reader to Dotawo, the kingdom of medieval Nubia in southern Egypt and Sudan that remained independent from the seventh century to the fifteenth century AD. It introduces the reader to Qasr Ibrim, one of Dotawo’s major settlements in Lower Nubia, in southern Egypt, where archaeological excavations uncovered hundreds of texts from the later medieval period from the 1960s to the 1980s. It summarizes the key goals of the book: to identify the owner of one of Qasr Ibrim’s chief archives as Mashshouda the choiak-eikshil, to use Qasr Ibrim’s archives to demonstrate the existence of monetization and private land tenure in medieval Nubia, to show how Nubia’s legal tradition represented a fusion of Greco-Roman and indigenous practices, and to argue that medieval Nubia was a Mediterranean society in Africa.

Qasr Ibrim’s Land Sales
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in Medieval Nubia: A Social and Economic History

Published in print: 2012 Published Online: September 2012
Publisher: Oxford University Press
DOI: 10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199891634.003.0001
Item type: chapter

This chapter summarizes the published and unpublished land sales from medieval Nubia written in the Old Nubian language. It gives a commentary on the legal transactions taking place in the published twelfth-century texts from Gerald Browne’s Old Nubian Texts from Qasr Ibrim III. It also gives a summary of similar transactions found in unpublished texts from the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries AD. It then provides an analysis of the different types of land sales from Qasr Ibrim: Type 1, a direct sale of property from one person to another; Type 2, a sale between two parties in which a third party makes payment; and Type 3, a sale of one person’s land to another by a third party.