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The Humboldt University Nubian Expedition 2005: Works on Sherari and Us

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The second campaign of the Humboldt University Nubian Expedition, H.U.N.E., in the Fourth Cataract was conducted from February to the beginning of April 2005. As in 2004, the mission worked in two teams. In the following, the activities in the island part of the concession area will be presented. It comprises four large islands, Us, Sur, Sherari and Shirri, as well as several smaller ones, which stretch over an area of altogether 20 km length (fig. 1).¹

The principal aims of the 2005 field season were the continuation of the general archaeological survey and first excavations. In the 2004 campaign a first reconnaissance had been undertaken on the islands of Us, Sur and Tibet. The 2005 survey concentrated on the island of Sherari which archaeologically was a complete blank. For the excavations, two sites on Us which had already been identified as promising in 2004 were chosen. Two new projects were also started in 2005: a detailed study of the rock art on Us and a survey of the modern social geography of the entire island part of the concession.²

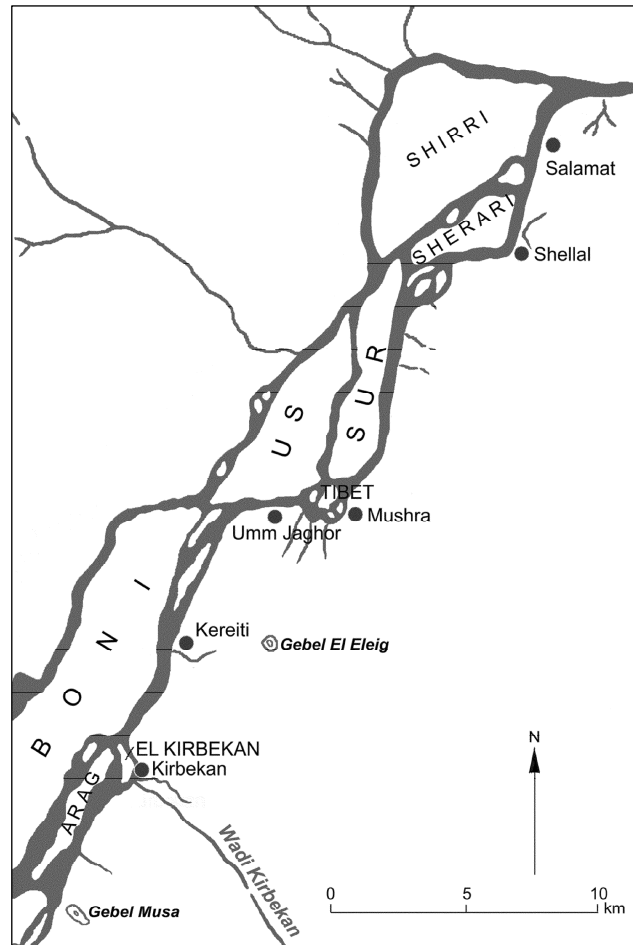


Fig. 1: General map of the H.U.N.E. concession area (drawing: I. Säuberlich).

1 For the mainland part of the concession cf. Budka in the present volume. For general information on H.U.N.E. and its concession area cf. Kammerzell 2004 and Näser 2005a: 75. For the works and the results of the 2004 campaign see Budka 2004, ead. 2005, Lange 2004, id. 2005, Näser 2004 and ead. 2005a. I thank David Haberlah and Cornelia Kleinitz for contributions to and comments on the present report.

2 These projects were financially supported by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Federal Republic of Germany and the Society of the Humboldt University, Humboldt-Universitäts-Gesellschaft. Both institutions deserve special thanks. We also thank all donors in our sponsorship scheme on www.nubianexpedition.com as well as the staff of the German Embassy in Khartoum, the Geological Research Authority of Sudan, the German Development Service in Khartoum, Karl Berbalk/Vienna and finally Frank Vorpahl and Jürgen Dombrowski, both of the Second German Television (ZDF), Berlin.

Work on the islands of the Fourth Cataract is logistically demanding. As vehicles cannot cross to them, transport to and movement on and between the islands is limited to rowing boats, donkeys and walking. In order to minimize the distances which had to be covered everyday, two camps were set up successively. The first one was in Mi'alima, a small hamlet of two farmsteads in the central part of Sherari, east of the village Sulha. Mid season we moved to the village of Umm Hisai on Us, close to our first excavation site, US022.

The island team of H.U.N.E. 2005 consisted of the author (archaeology, project director), Mathias Lange (archaeology), Daniela Billig (archaeology), Khidir Abdelkarim Ahmed (archaeology, anthropology), David Haberlah (social geography), Jutta von dem Bussche (social geography), Cornelia Kleinitz (rock art), Alexandros Tsakos (archaeology, epigraphy), Uwe Sievertsen (ceramology) and Thiqa Hassan (inspector of the National Corporation for Antiquities and Museums). I wish to thank all colleagues for their commitment under the sometimes difficult logistical conditions; Khidir again was heart and soul of the enterprise. Our gratitude goes also to the local population, especially to our host families in Mi'alima and Umm Hisai, our excavation workers on Us, the teaching staff of the primary school on Sherari and the numerous people with whom we talked during our trips around the islands. They supported us in all possible ways.

The Survey on Sherari

Geologically, the Fourth Cataract is a region in which the Nile, diverted from northeast to southwest, cuts its way through frequently metamorphically altered bedrock of mostly proterozoic age. Over roughly 100 km the river traverses a landscape of innumerable smaller and larger rock formations of granite, gneiss and migmatite. They comprise stony plateaus with erosional surfaces and meso-scale landscapes of weathered rocky hills. Repeatedly the Nile breaks through massive weathering-resistant quartzite dykes of several kilometres length oriented almost perpendicular to the course of the river. These dykes stand out as prominent ridges, towering above the landscape of Dar al-Manasir. One such ridge, Gebel Us, dominates the landscape of our concession area and forms an important local landmark (colour pl. 32; Näser 2005a: 87). Diverted by these resistant geological features, the Nile repeatedly branches out into several arms, which embrace innumerable small and a number of large islands. Within our concession area the main islands are Us, Sur, Sherari and Shirri, which make up areas between 6.5 and 25 km².

The islands of the Fourth Cataract are characterized by high, rocky river banks with a narrow fertile strip of fine-grained alluvium (pl. 1). These river-derived sediments are the basis of the labour intensive agricultural system as it is practiced today. The more recent settlements of the Manasir are situated at the edge of the fertile strip, in an area which is difficult to irrigate and therefore bare of any vegetation. Beyond the narrow agricultural zone and the modern farmsteads, all together often not more than one or two hundred meters wide, the arid island interior follows. These geographic conditions are reflected in the distribution of the archaeological sites, which basically can be divided into two sections: the rear part of the alluvial river banks which is too elevated or remote from the Nile to be irrigated, and hence undisturbed, and the barren interior.³

The southwestern, relatively level part of Sherari is dissected by a number of palaeochannels. Under the present climatic and hydrologic regime, they are annually inundated by the Nile. Following the retreat of the flood, these so called *hauwi* are cultivated and make up

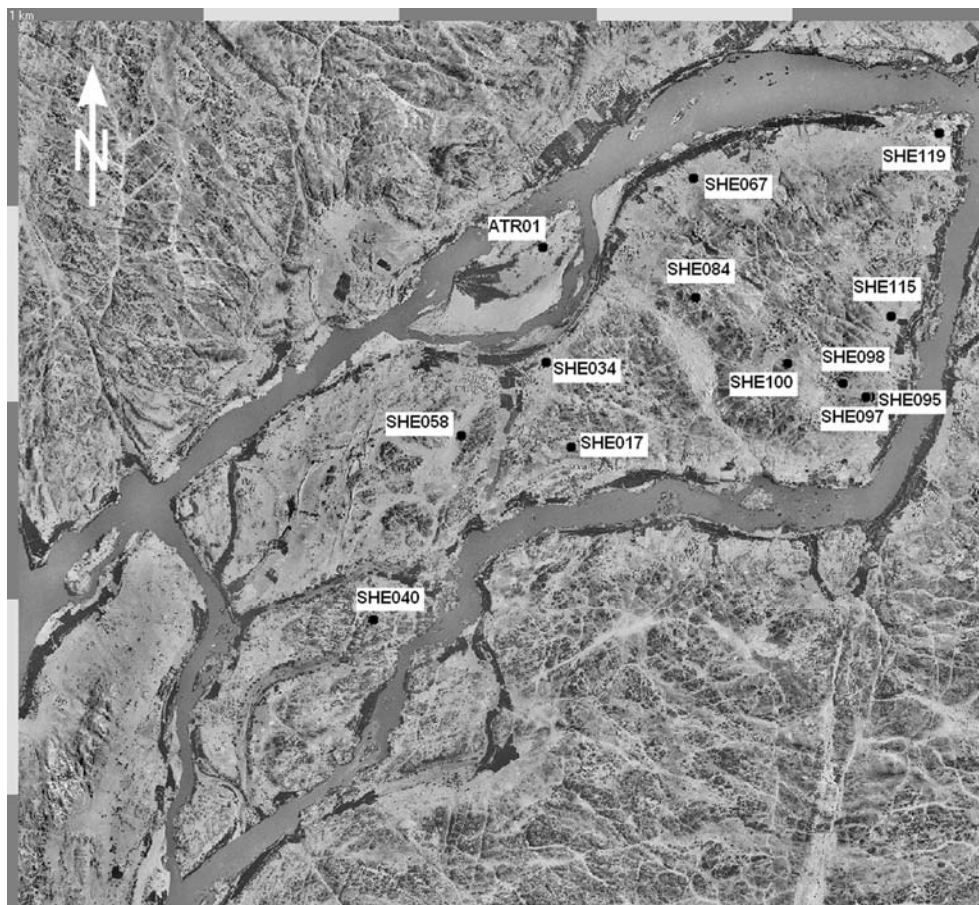
³ In areas under cultivation, virtually no archaeological structures are detectable. In some instances parts of burials grounds have been spared from the fields due to the difficulties connected with the removal of stone superstructures or the levelling of monumental tumuli – or because of religious scruples. However, these sites are mostly heavily disturbed, not least from the reuse of the stones as building material for the near-by watering channels. The margins of such sites are often cut back by encroaching fields. The same holds true for sites within or at the edges of recent villages.

fertile green strips penetrating into the arid island interior. At its northwestern side, Sherari encloses a small island, Atram, which was also included in the survey. The northeastern, upstream part of Sherari is characterized by an elevated rocky plateau. Its metamorphic assemblage is marked by numerous quartzite and pegmatite intrusions, containing traces of gold. Thousands of shallow pits, none wider than a few meters, testify the extensive exploitation of this resource. The sanded up interiors of these pits show clearly even on the aerial photographs as light areas of substantial extension (pl. 5).

The history of gold washing in the region of the Fourth Cataract has not yet been investigated, but could be of substantial antiquity. Maqrizi quotes al-Aswani with the story of Abdalla al-Umari, an Arab adventurer and gold prospector. At the head of a private army, al-Umari invaded Nubia in the late ninth century AD. His gold prospecting activities included a region called Shanqir, which might be identified with the area of the Fifth or the Fourth Cataract.⁴

Other archaeological features within these gold pit fields are largely destroyed. Stray finds range from sherds of the Khartoum Mesolithic to Christian and Islamic pottery – although the latter may actually derive from periods when the fields were exploited, no definite archaeological context could be established.

On Sherari 141 sites were documented, one further site was located on Atram (pl. 1). The northern and central parts of Sherari were intensively covered in the survey, whereas the downstream part was beyond walking distance from the camp in Mi'alima and awaits future



Pl. 1: The island of Sherari with the sites mentioned in the text, except rock art sites.

4 Vantini 1975: 607, 708f.; cf. also Hasan 1967: 52f. For recent gold panning in the area of the Fourth Cataract see Salih 1999: 49.

investigation. With the exception of several prehistoric sites and some Kerma cemeteries, the findings on Sherari are more ephemeral than on Us and Sur. In comparatively many cases, the structures visible on the surface and the associated finds do not allow a functional or chronological classification. This especially applies to two types of sites. Stone circles with interiors void of stones and diameters between 2 and 5 m are typical grave superstructures on the one hand (pls. 3, 5, 11). However, when they do not occur in the agglomeration of a cemetery, but isolated or in small groups, it may not be possible to distinguish between graves and the remains of circular hut structures (pl. 2).⁵



Pl. 2: Stone circle in SHE017 (photo: C. Näser).

The second problematic type of sites are stone structures built against or between rock formations. Often they are partially disturbed so that their original appearance is hard to discern. They may be the remains of alcove or semi-dome graves (cf. below p. 7f.) or simple shelters, which according to their position in the hills or near the “pit fields” in the island interior or at the slopes of the plateau towards the palaeochannels and the river bank may have been constructed and used by gold diggers, hunters or herders. Sparse surface finds rarely suggest concrete dates for these structures. It can be suspected that they range from prehistoric to recent times.

Prehistoric sites

The cultural sequence on Sherari starts with some isolated stone tools of the Middle Palaeolithic. Stray finds of Khartoum Mesolithic sherds were repeatedly found in the “pit fields” of the gold diggers and in the Kerma cemeteries on the plateau of the island interior. One dense concentration of pottery and stone artefacts allowed the identification of a habitation site of this period in SHE017 (pls. 1f.). It is situated at the edge of the rocky plateau overlooking the river bank. Whether three stone circles on the site belong to this or a later occupation phase, cannot be ascertained without excavation.

Sites of the Neolithic period are generally sparse. The upstream i.e., northeastern tip of Sherari was a habitation site or at least a place of substantial presence in this period: SHE119

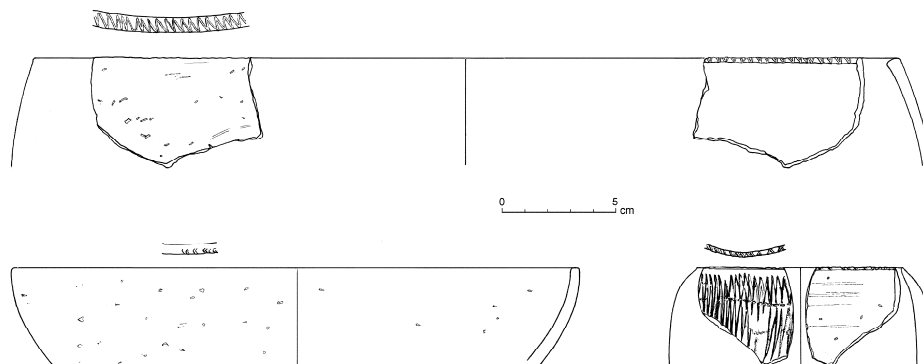


Fig. 2: Pottery fragments from SHE119 (SHE119/2.1; drawing: I. Säuberlich).

⁵ Cf. Näser 2004: 125, ead. 2005a: 83 and Welsby 2005: 5ff. for a more general discussion of problematic and enigmatic sites.

produced the largest concentration of Neolithic pottery on the entire island (fig. 2). Whether several large hut circles of up to 6 m diameter belong to this phase of the site again remains open.

The Kerma period

As in most other areas of the Fourth Cataract, Kerma sites are ubiquitous on Sherari. Numerous burial grounds of this period were recorded. On average, they comprise less graves than the cemeteries on Us and Sur. Frequently groups of less than ten graves occur, as well as isolated structures. Only five cemeteries comprise 19 or more superstructures. The burial places of the Kerma period are mostly situated close to the edge of the plateau, few are further inland. Most remarkable was a constellation of three Kerma cemeteries in the upstream part of the island.

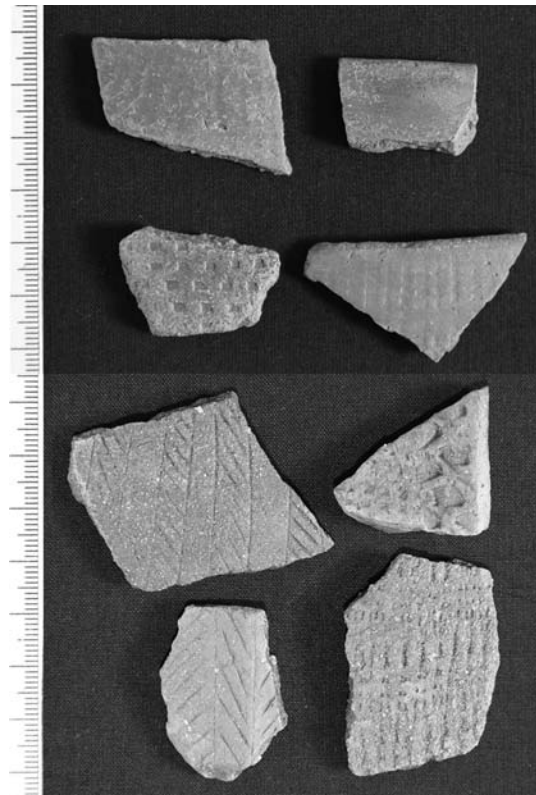
SHE084 was located in the centre of the plateau, on one of the highest points of the island above a large sandy valley (pls. 1, 3). The site comprises eight partially displaced grave superstructures consisting of small stone circles with exterior diameters between 1.8 and 3.2 m. Further stone structures at the slope are more disturbed, but could be the remains of additional graves. Bone fragments and pottery (pl. 4) on the site surface show that the burials were disturbed. Fragments of bowls with incised stripes and of rippled ware point towards a date in the Early Kerma period (c. 2500–2000 BC).

SHE100 is situated further east, on a wide gravelly plain on the plateau (pls. 1, 5). The site comprises 46 grave superstructures of the usual stone ring type. The largest, at the northern end of the cemetery, has an exterior diameter of 5.5 m. The main field consists of stone rings with diameters between 0.9 and 3.1 m, with only one larger example of 4.0 m. They are closely clustered, forming a honeycomb-like structure – which corresponds to what Welsby (2005: 3, pl. 3) calls a *nucleated cemetery* and dates to Middle to Classic Kerma. This is the most common cemetery type of the Kerma period on the islands of the H.U.N.E. concession. It has also been observed in several instances on Us and was interpreted as an expression of social relations and hierarchies (Näser 2004: 119; ead. 2005a: 77). Again, in SHE100 the smaller stone rings seem to have been satellite structures of the larger specimens.

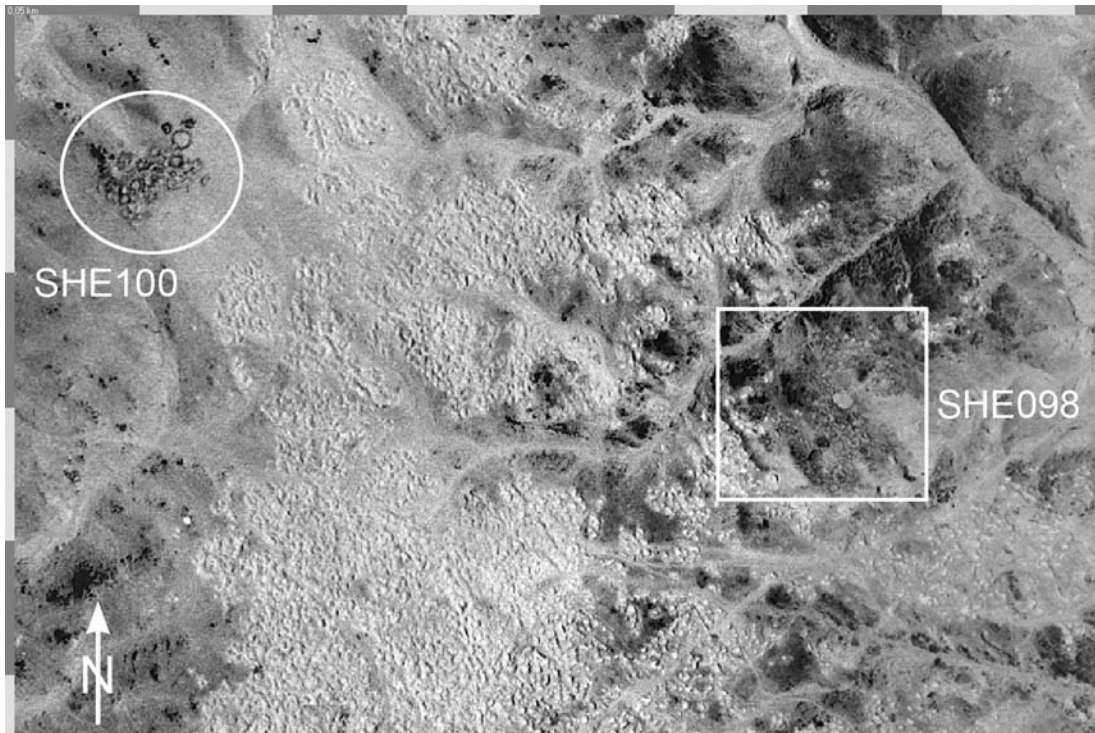
The most striking site of the Kerma period on Sherari is SHE098. It is situated within sight of SHE100, but closer to the river bank, on the fissured slope of the rocky



Pl. 3: View over SHE084 (photo: M. Lange).



Pl. 4: Sherds from the surface of SHE084 (photo: M. Lange).



Pl. 5: SHE100 and SHE098 in between gold mining pits.



Pl. 6: View over SHE098 (photo: C. Näser).



Pl. 7: SHE098, rectangular structure of upright stone slabs (photo: C. Näser).

plateau (pls. 1, 5). It was not recognized in the aerial photographs, but only identified during the ground survey. Being in fact the largest Kerma cemetery so far recorded on the islands of the H.U.N.E. concession, it extends over c. 75 x 65 m. According to the counts in several transects, the minimum number of graves is 150. The identification of individual structures is hindered by the fact that the occupation is extremely dense, with many superstructures abutting and partly superimposing each other (pl. 6). Moreover, the entire site is heavily disturbed. Therefore it is hardly possible to gain more detailed data on the number of graves, the structure of the cemetery and its spatial development from the surface appearance.

Apart from a few exceptions in the highest, western part of the cemetery, the superstructures are relatively small with diameters between 1.5 and 2.5 m. In the southern part, instead of the usual stone rings, rectangular structures of vertically set stone slabs were found (pl. 7). As rectangular superstructures are not known from the Kerma period, they could be the upper parts of

grave pits lined with stones which were uncovered by erosion.⁶ Excavations would be required to clarify this issue.

Several fragments of Kerma beakers amongst surface finds allow a dating of the site, or at least one main occupation phase, in the Classic Kerma period (c. 1750–1550 BC). Further finds include fragments of imported Egyptian marl clay jars⁷ and a fragment of a small alabaster vessel.

SHE098 may be contrasted with the previously mentioned site SHE100, where neither Egyptian pottery nor Classic Kerma beakers were found. SHE100 produced the usual ceramic repertoire of the Middle Kerma period (c. 2000–1750 BC), as recorded in the cemeteries elsewhere in the Fourth Cataract. Taken all evidences together, it may be suggested that SHE100 and SHE098 were used successively, or that if SHE098 has an older so far not identified occupation phase, it was frequented longer. SHE084, discussed above, may represent the beginning of this sequence of Kerma cemetery sites.

Most interesting are the changes in the topographical positioning and the spatial development of these cemeteries (pls. 1, 5). Like most of the previously recorded Kerma burial grounds on the H.U.N.E. islands, SHE100 occupies a prominent location on a wide open plain and can be spotted from quite some distance. SHE098 is closer to the river, but in a much less favourable position on a fissured slope, hindering not only the free development of the cemetery but also its visibility. The increase in the number of graves in SHE098 may point either to a longer use, population growth or – an explanation which I favour – the centralisation of burials in Classic Kerma times. Whereas on Sherari there are numerous cemeteries which resemble SHE100 in their spatial organisation, grave morphology and finds, and thus seem likely to date to the Middle Kerma period, SHE098 is the only certain Classic Kerma site on the entire island.

“Hidden tombs”

The features which we recorded under the heading “hidden tombs” in the field gradually develop into one of the main categories of archaeological findings in the Fourth Cataract. Our colloquial term refers to the main characteristic of these features on Sherari: they were hardly recognizable at first sight, and sometimes still hard to identify upon a second look (pl. 8). The “hidden tombs” are situated in the rocky hills both at the edge of and on the plateau, using natural clefts between the boulders or small open spaces under overhanging rocks. As they were adapted to available natural formations, they are morphologically extremely varied. Most appropriate for an attempt of classification seems the typology suggested by Paner and Borcowski (2005: 112f.). They distinguish between dome (or corbelled) graves, semi-dome graves, crevice (or cleft) graves and alcove graves.⁸ As the findings show, the transition between these types is fluid, as individual solutions, namely the shape and the extent of the built parts, depend on the existing natural conditions – the same holds true for the layout of the burial installations i.e., the reduced or altogether missing grave pit.

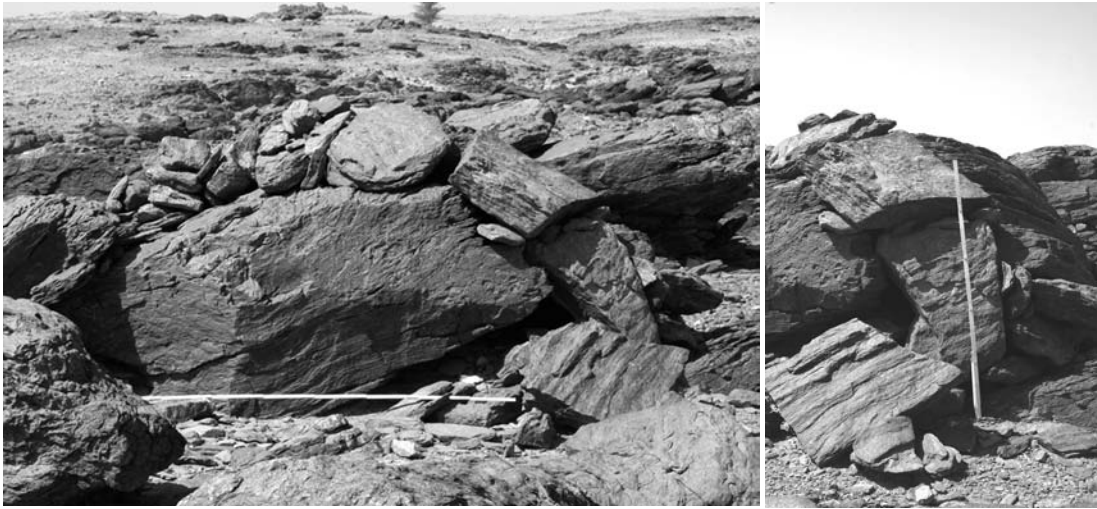
On Sherari only crevice and alcove graves were identified with certainty. In some cases the built part was limited to a few stones tucked into the opening of the crevice. In other cases a larger opening was closed with a dry stone wall or heaped stones (pl. 8). Several of these specimens, although disturbed, still show parts of the skeleton *in situ* (pl. 9). Apparently, the burial had been placed on the surface in the crevice, without a burial pit and probably even without a sediment cover.

With the more disturbed and obscured examples of the semi-dome and the alcove type, it is not always possible to differentiate them from relics of simple, small-scale shelters or abris (cf. above p. 121). The same goes for specimens which might be either minimalistic versions

6 For such a construction cf. Wolf and Nowotnick 2005: 24f., colour pl. 14. Cf. also Welsby 2005: 3 for a circular pit lined with stones.

7 Of ware A2 according to the Vienna system; cf. Nordström and Bourriau in Arnold and Bourriau 1993: 176.

8 Cf. also Welsby 2005: 5f.: crevice and tunnel graves, and Budka in the present volume.



Pl. 8: Crevice grave in SHE095: side and front (photo: C. Näser).

of the crevice type or purely natural formations. The existence of a grave is unambiguously indicated only by scatters of human bones.

Not least because of their exposed position and their easy accessibility none of the graves in question recorded on Sherari was intact. From the available evidence, their dating remains difficult. Potsherds found in or next to the graves in most cases are nondiagnostic. Furthermore, episodes of plundering may have resulted in the presence of later pottery on the sites, which was brought there e.g. as digging sherds. In general the rocky hills which hold the crevice and related graves seem to have attracted attention in many periods as places of hunting, resting, sheltering or even storage, e.g. by the workers of the nearby gold fields. Thus, surface finds from the vicinity cannot *a priori* be attributed to the tombs within these hills. In other areas of the Fourth Cataract, graves of these types have been dated to the New Kingdom and the Napatan period.⁹ On Sherari no pottery diagnostic for these eras has been found associated with them.



Pl. 9: View into a crevice grave in SHE097 (photo: C. Näser).

The post-Meroitic period

Chronologically, the next period attested on Sherari is the post-Meroitic. Its cemeteries are situated either in the rear part of the river banks or in sandy valleys which lead into the island

⁹ E.g. by Paner and Borcowski 2005: 96ff., Wolf and Nowotnick 2005: 25 and Budka in the present volume.

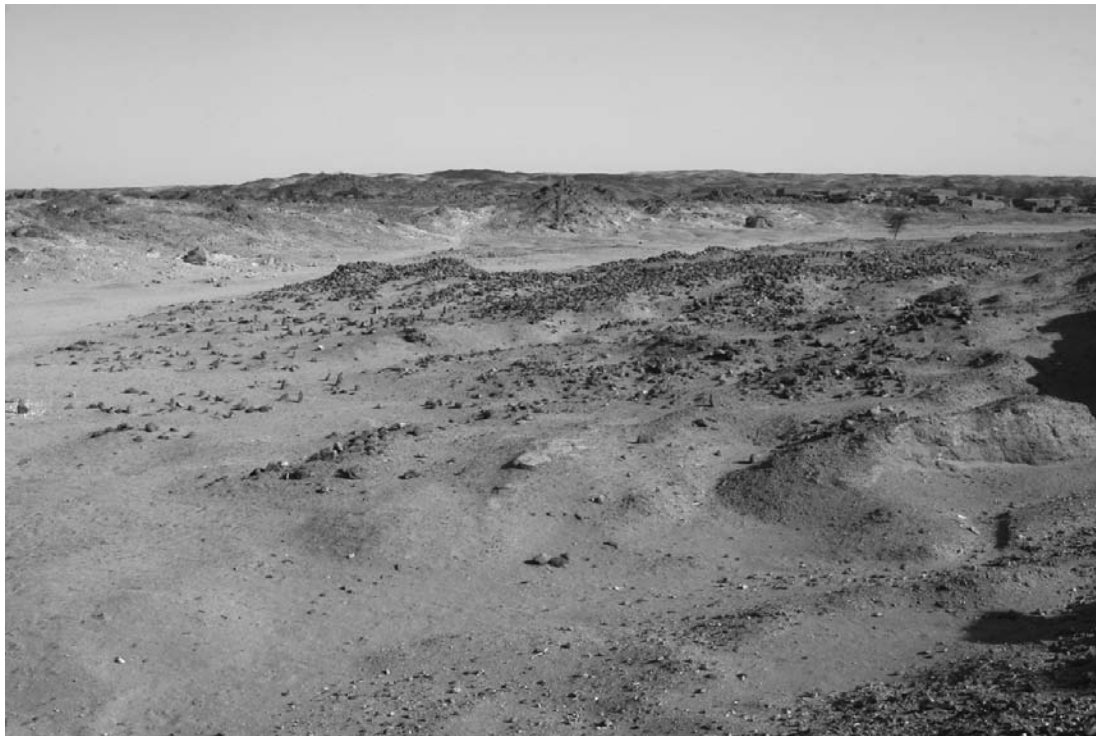
interior. As on Sur (Näser 2004: 126f., fig. 9; ead. 2005a: 84f., fig. 9), several monumental earth tumuli with diameters of up to 20 m were found in the former location (SHE034, SHE115).

The largest post-Meroitic cemetery on Sherari is SHE058 (pls. 1, 10). At its centre are five partially disturbed monumental tomb superstructures: one stone-covered earth tumulus with a maximum diameter of 10 m and a preserved height of about 1.2 m, and four stone rings with diameters of up to 6 m. These tombs are surrounded by an extensive burial ground covering an area of c. 150 x 60 m. Parts of it were (re)occupied in Islamic times. Older structures are so much obscured that no reliable counts of the original occupation are possible.

SHE058 is situated in a wide open valley in the central part of the island (pls. 1, 10). The massive dark superstructures of the graves form an impressive contrast to the light sand of the valley floor. The site shares this dramatic setting with a number of post-Meroitic cemeteries on Us which were also built in the ground or even in the crossroads of big sandy valleys in the island interior (Näser 2004: 120; ead. 2005a: 78, fig. 3: US006, US009). As there are no indications of post-Meroitic settlement activities close-by, other reasons for this preferred position must be sought. They may literally lie in the sediments of the valleys, which can be easily dug and facilitate the construction of extensive substructures and the piling-up of large tumuli. But perhaps also the dramatic visual effect influenced the choice of these locations.

Patterns of Islamic reuse

A common feature of the post-Meroitic cemeteries is their reuse in Christian and Islamic times.¹⁰ In several cases, local informants reported that the Muslim graves were all children's burials. This also goes for SHE058 (pl. 10, colour pl. 33), which shows the most extensive



Pl. 10: View over SHE058: Islamic graves on the left hand side, in the background the large stone-covered tumulus (photo: C. Näser).

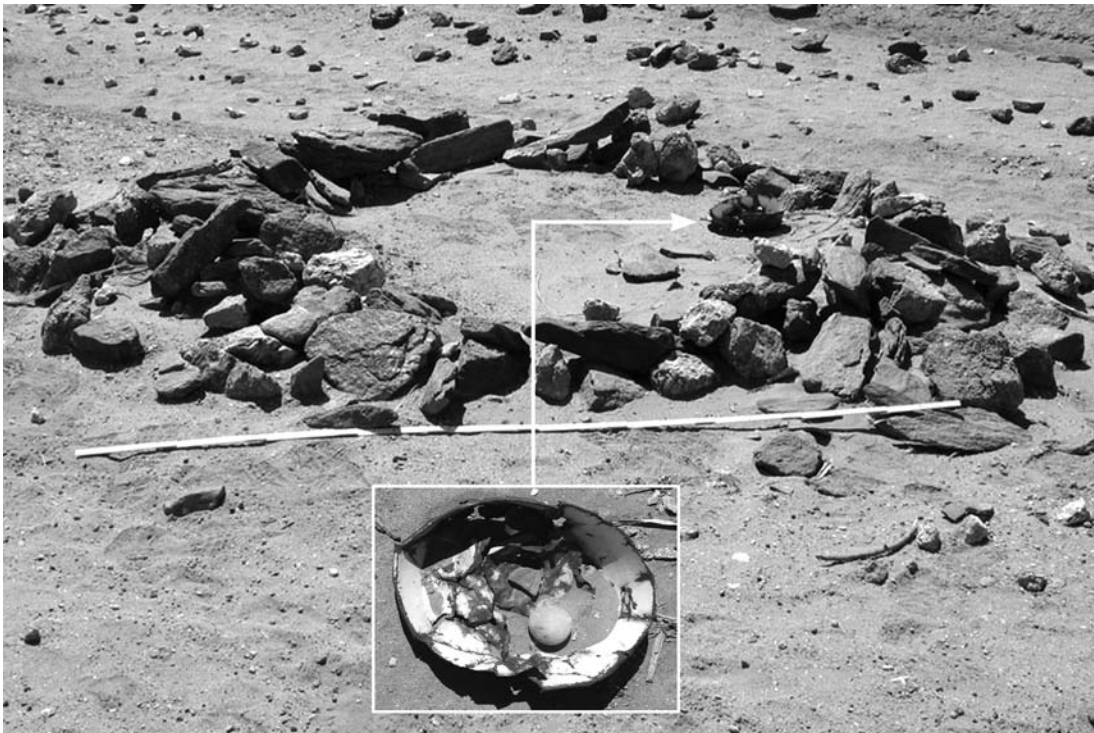
¹⁰ Cf. Näser 2004: 119, 121, 127, fig. 9; ead. 2005a: 76f., 79, 84f., fig. 9; ditto Wolf and Nowotnick 2005: 30.

reuse recorded so far with a minimum of 80 graves. This secondary occupation is itself of some antiquity: according to local informants, SHE058 had not been used for burial for the last two generations.

Ancient sites became a focus of later attention also in another kind of “reuse”. In 2004 we had recorded a multi-period cemetery on Us (Näser 2004: 120; ead. 2005a: 78f.: US027). One of its post-Meroitic stone rings was situated next to the crossing of two recent donkey tracks. In and next to the superstructure we found several grinding stones and a peculiar assemblage: an old, dented enamel bowl which contained a decorated potsherd of the Christian period and a quartz pebble (pl. 11). This year an inhabitant of the nearest village told us that the structure is considered to be the grave of a *salih*, a Muslim saint, and therefore a *baniya*.

The Arabic word *baniya* in the first place means “built structure” and “built-up area”, but specifically denotes (built) places, in which according to local belief Muslim saints manifest themselves.¹¹ *Baniyat* are places of veneration and ritual activities evoking blessings. Thus, according to local informants, the herds were driven past the *baniya* of US027 and sprinkled with sand from it in order to increase their fertility. Likewise, the flour for baking at specific festivities was ground there – explaining the grinding equipments at the superstructure. According to one informant, the saint of the *baniya* at US027 manifests himself on Thursday evenings. Whether the described ritual activities go on until today or were given up in the recent past could not be ascertained, as informants, especially when interviewed in groups, were reluctant to relate to and associate themselves too closely with this matter. The reasons for this attitude, though interesting in themselves, have not been followed up.

Neither in the Fourth Cataract nor in other areas of the Sudan, *baniyat* have been investigated systematically so far. However, they are described as an ubiquitous phenomenon and – as the *qubbat* – related to “popular religion”. Especially noteworthy is the



Pl. 11: *Baniya* in US027 (photo: C. Näser).

¹¹ An alternative term for these locations is *bayan*, “manifestation”; cf. Trimmingham 1949: 139, 143ff., 233. Cf. also Walkley 1936: 92 and Humoudi 1977: 110. I am much obliged to Martin Fitzenreiter for these references.

identification of preislamic monuments as *baniyat*, as this specific variant may shed light on the historical development of the *baniyat*, the attitude of the (sub)recent Islamic local population towards the relics of their predecessor cultures and the transformations to which they subjected the cultural landscapes which they had inherited.

Further examples in our concession area show that US027 is not an isolated case: two *baniyat* which were especially well known among the local population and often referred to in interviews were situated on Shirri island next to an extensive medieval site which comprises the remains of a church. Both *baniyat* had been destroyed a year or so ago by wahabbistically inspired inhabitants. The site has not yet been recorded in the archaeological survey; but it was visited by David Haberlah and Jutta von dem Bussche when they gathered the related information during their social geographical survey.

The Christian period

As in the other parts of the H.U.N.E. concession area, the medieval period is the most prominent in the archaeological record also on Sherari. However, it is noteworthy that box grave cemeteries – occasionally in a very good state of preservation – are generally smaller and less common than on the islands further downstream. With 86 counted graves, SHE067 is by far the largest example on Sherari (pls. 1, 12). The same holds true for settlements. The most extensive, SHE040, comprises about 24 structures, mainly consisting of one room only, built of dry-stone walls.



Pl. 12: Box graves in SHE067 (photo: M. Lange).

Atram Island

The small island of Atram is situated in a bay at the northwest side of Sherari (pl. 1). It is about 1 km long. The separating Nile channel can be waded through in the dry season. Whereas the southern half of the island is a large blank sand bank, the entire northern half – apart from areas used for agriculture or occupied by recent buildings – is densely covered with cultural material, representing an extensive habitation site. Innumerable potsherds, a bronze ring and a faience bead were found. On the surface, there were no traces of architectural structures. Subject to further analysis, the ceramic finds indicate a post-Meroitic date for the site.

Rock art

On Sherari, 21 rock art sites were recorded. This was a keenly awaited result, as the distribution of rock art is very uneven on the islands of the H.U.N.E. concession. In the 2004 reconnaissance survey not a single petroglyph was found on Sur and Tibet, whereas Us presented an extremely rich record, both in quantity and diversity of motifs.¹²

In comparison, the rock art on Sherari is limited in its quantity, its subjects and its spatial distribution. With one exception it is confined to the central plateau of the island. The most frequent motif are camels, which occur at eleven sites. SHE004 comprises a cow, a dog and a giraffe. Indeterminate quadrupeds were recorded in ten sites, at least some of them probably represent further camels. Riders on donkeys or camels occur at three sites (SHE001, SHE003, SHE011). Humans otherwise associated with animals were found in four instances (SHE001, SHE005, SHE010, SHE032).

¹² Cf. below p. 129ff.; Näser 2004: 121f., 129, figs. 4f.; ead. 2005a: 79f., 88, fig. 4, and Kleinitz in the present volume.

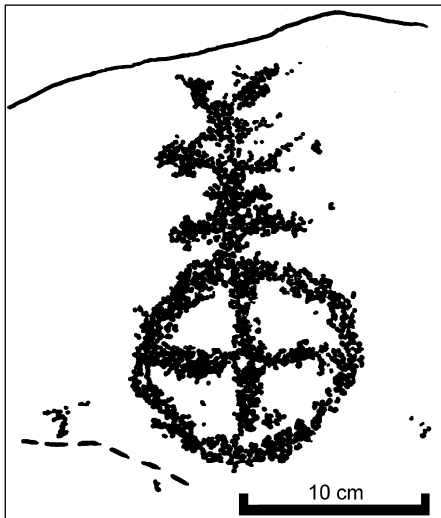


Fig. 3: SHE006: cross sign (drawing: C. Kleinitz).

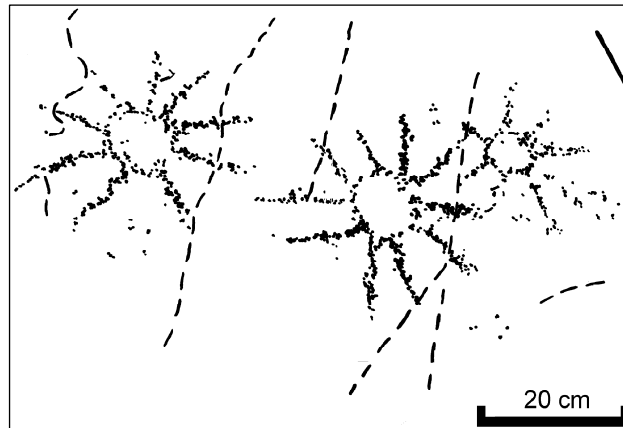


Fig. 4: SHE002: detail with three repetitions of the "sun" motif (drawing: C. Kleinitz).

Cross signs were recorded at three sites (SHE004, SHE006, SHE128). They include one representation of a complex type with a cross on top of a circle, into which another cross is inscribed (SHE006: fig. 3).¹³ A further geometric motif is a circle with linear, radial external rays which occurs four times at SHE002 (fig. 4): it resembles a drawing of a sun – which in fact it might be, if it is not a summarily executed ornamental cross sign.¹⁴

Excavations on Us

In the analysis of the 2004 reconnaissance survey, two sites on Us were chosen for more detailed investigations and excavations. One of them, US022, belongs to the most complex sites so far recorded in the H.U.N.E. concession (Näser 2004: 123, fig. 6; ead. 2005a: 80, fig. 5). Its most conspicuous feature was a kom containing the remains of a large mudbrick building. As its state of preservation seemed promising, it was decided to return for excavations. Their main result, the discovery of a small church of Late to Terminal Christian date, is presented elsewhere in the present volume (Näser, Billig and Lange).

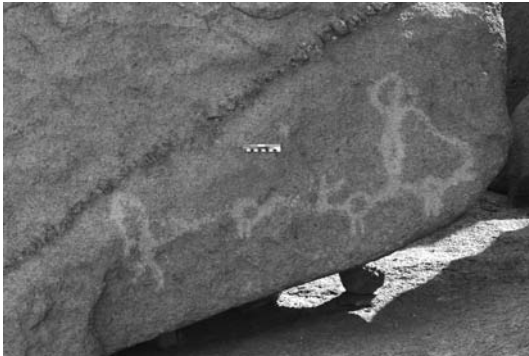
Towards the end of the season, a second site was investigated in a trial excavation. The site US007 had also already been recorded in the previous year and on the basis of rich surface finds identified as a Neolithic habitation site, and worthy of further examination (Näser 2004: 119, fig. 1; ead. 2005a: 76f., fig. 1; Lange 2004: 131, fig. 1). The results of the 2005 activities on the site again are presented elsewhere in this volume (Lange).

The rock art survey on Us

The 2004 reconnaissance survey had revealed an unusually rich and interesting rock art landscape on Us. It comprised not only very large and complex sites, but also a number of hitherto unique motifs and compositions, which enlarge the motif repertoire known within

¹³ For this type cf. Kleinitz and Olsson 2005: fig. 1: a combination of types C and J.

¹⁴ For a more sophisticated version cf. Kleinitz and Olsson 2005: fig. 1: type E.



Pl. 13: US213, panel with a woman, a row of birds and a second figure (photo: C. Kleinitz).



Pl. 14: US213, panel with two churches and a horse rider (photo: C. Kleinitz).

the Fourth Cataract. Therefore, in 2005 a specific rock art survey was inaugurated and conducted by Cornelia Kleinitz. Concentrating on the downstream and the central part of Us, altogether 160 rock art sites were documented. They all comprise pecked petroglyphs; in several cases hammer stones that appear to have been used in their manufacture could still be identified at the sites (colour pl. 32). Among the most interesting motifs and compositions recorded are:

- what appears to be a woman in dancing pose with one arm raised over her head on top of a row of three birds, possibly stylized ostriches, which are followed by another figure with a decorative headgear or a whip (?) (US213; pl. 13); the combination of women and ostriches, whose symbolic meaning is not yet understood, is repeatedly found in the pottery decoration of the C-group (e.g. Steindorff 1935, pls. 54-57)
- a complex scene of giraffes feeding from trees, attacked by hunters (US191; colour pl. 34)
- dogs pursuing small prey and birds (e.g. US205)¹⁵; in style and apparent motif content these and the aforementioned tableau can be compared to representations on Meroitic pottery
- two churches and a horse rider, who perhaps can be understood as the patron of the churches and in this case would represent an equestrian saint, as St. George (US213; pl. 14).

Rock inscriptions are scarce: they comprise a monogram (US180) and several cryptograms (e.g. US213) of the archangel Michael. Moreover, several rock gongs were identified, among them one of the largest known from Sudan so far (US101). Dozens of percussion zones of substantial size and depth attest the long use life of this gong. Further details on the rock art, visual and acoustic, as well as on the rock inscriptions are given elsewhere in the present volume (Kleinitz; Tsakos).

Conspicuously many rock art sites of all periods were found on the extremely barren and inhospitable rocky plateau at the foot of Gebel Us or in locations further off, but with a good view towards this mountain, whose solitary ridge is the main landmark of the area (colour pl. 32; cf. above p. 119). This is the more remarkable as its immediate surroundings had been occupied only until the Neolithic period (cf. Lange in the present volume; Näser 2005b: 60). Later, with the increasingly dry climate the settlements moved closer to the river banks, although significantly many Kerma cemeteries lie within the immediate vicinity of the mountain (Näser 2004: 119f., fig. 2; ead. 2005a: 77, fig. 2). The rock art shows that also

¹⁵ One of these had already been recorded previously; cf. Montluçon 1994: fig. 2.

throughout the later periods a symbolic landscape unfolded around Gebel Us, whose structure and diachronic development remains to be investigated.

The social geographical survey

As the last project of the 2005 campaign, a social geographical survey was carried out on the islands within the H.U.N.E. concession area. Its main aim was to document the Manasir cultural landscape and the traditions and the material culture linked to it. The survey focused on the following areas of investigation:

- sociocultural aspects of the local economy centering on subsistence agriculture and the main cash crop i.e. date palms
- traditional settlement patterns and building styles, and their development over the past decades
- the interrelationship between the natural environment and the cultural landscape i.e., the characterization of the Manasir way of life under the specific conditions of the cataract region
- specifics of the Manasir material culture in settlement architecture, agricultural production and their derivations
- aspects of the nonmaterial culture and perceptions which go along with these complexes, especially the conceptualisation of the local way of life and economy.

In sum, these aspects constitute an important part of the Manasir identity. Resettlement away from the Nile, centralised irrigation schemes and increasing urbanisation will have a severe impact on the Manasir culture. Many of the mentioned aspects are closely connected with the current habitat and the current lifeways of the Manasir and will inevitably be lost with them.

Selected results of the survey are published elsewhere (Haberlah and von dem Bussche 2005; Haberlah in the present volume; Näser 2005b: 62ff.). Apart from collecting data for scientific analysis, an important objective of the project was to make all data and the entire photographic documentation easily accessible for the wider public and the Manasir themselves. For this reason, the internet was chosen as the primary medium for publication. The project is presented via the gateway on www.daralmanasir.com, linking all further contributions and publications. Several encyclopaedic topics were published as Wikipedia and Wikisource articles, allowing the incorporation of contributions by other researchers and the Manasir themselves at a later stage in an unproblematic way. The Wikipedia entries initiated are: Manasir, Dar al-Manasir, Date Cultivation in Dar al-Manasir and Material Culture of the Manasir. Parts of “The Ingenious Diwan of the Manasir”, a collection of poems by the Mansuri poet Ibrahim Ali Salman (1937–1995), are presented in Wikisource, along with an introduction to this material and a partial English translation.

The photographic documentation was conducted digitally with a professional Canon 20D SLR in RAW format. High resolution 6 Mega-pixel JPGs were generated, thematically arranged, commented and uploaded to an online server of the Humboldt University. Moreover, they are uploaded to the interactive photosharing and blogging site Flickr which allows the addition of further comments and discussions in all languages including Arabic. All these sites have already become well frequented; at the time of writing (May 2006) the top five Google hits for ‘Manasir’ link to them.

In order to involve the Manasir themselves, one set of photographs was printed, labelled in Arabic and distributed among the local communities of the H.U.N.E. concession area in the 2006 field season. The labels include references to the project and the URL of the homepage www.daralmanasir.com. It can be expected that many Manasir will leave the resettlement areas and move to the larger cities or abroad as labour migrants. Sooner or later mem-

bers of the younger generation will get into contact with the internet and can then visit the archives of their homeland online.

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