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The Humboldt University Nubian Expedition 2006 to the Fourth Nile Cataract: Fieldwork in the island concession

Abstract

The 2006 field season of the Humboldt University Nubian Expedition to the Fourth Cataract was short and eventful. Due to the political situation, the mission was asked to leave within days after arrival in the concession area. This report relates the results from archaeological investigations undertaken in this short period of fieldwork, during which both the general survey on Us Island and the excavation at US025 of a brick kiln, which had supplied building material to the church site US022, were continued. In addition, the events which preceded our premature departure are outlined in order to offer a chronicle which may one day be of historical interest itself.

Keywords: Fourth Nile Cataract · archaeological survey · brick kiln · Meroitic decorated pottery · rock art · Palaeolithic · Early Khartoum · Kerma period · Meroitic period · post-Meroitic period · Christian medieval period

The third field season of the Humboldt University Nubian Expedition (H.U.N.E.) was conducted from February to the beginning of April 2006.¹ As in 2004 and 2005, the mission worked in two teams. In the following, the activities on the islands within the concession area will be presented. They comprise three large islands, Us, Sur, and Sherari, as well as several smaller ones, which stretch over an area some 16 km long (**Fig. 1**).²

The 2006 H.U.N.E. island team included the author (archaeology, project director), Mathias Lange

1 Financial support for the campaign was provided by the Humboldt-Universitäts-Gesellschaft. Further, we would like to extend our thanks to Thomas Reuter from the German Leprosy Relieve Association (GLRA) in Sudan, Dr. Abdelrazig O.M. Ahmed, Director General of the Geological Research Authority of Sudan (GRAS), and the German Embassy in Khartoum for logistical help.

2 For general information on H.U.N.E. and its concession area see KAMMERZELL (2004) and NÄSER (2005a: 75). A fourth island, Shirri, which had originally been assigned to the H.U.N.E. concession, was returned to the National Corporation for Antiquities and Museums in 2005 when it had become evident that an adequate coverage could not be achieved prior to the flooding of the Merowe Dam reservoir. For the 2004 and 2005 campaigns in the island part of the H.U.N.E. concession see NÄSER (2004; 2005a,b; 2007).

(archaeology), Daniela Billig (archaeology), Khidir Mohamed Ahmed (archaeology, cultural anthropology), Reinhold Schulz (archaeology), Ralf Miltenberger (archaeology), Alexandros Tsakos (archaeology, epigraphy), Ewa Bukowska (cartography), Peter Becker (architectural documentation), Jürgen Dombrowski (photography) and Fawzi Hassan Bakheit (inspector of the National Corporation for Antiquities and Museums). Unfortunately, the rock art survey on Us, which had been initiated by Cornelia Kleinitz in 2005, had to be suspended due to our premature departure from the Fourth Cataract. I wish to thank all members of the team for their commitment under the difficult conditions and developments of the 2006 campaign. Our gratitude also goes to our host family in Umm Hisai, especially to Abdelhai and Iqbal.

1. The general archaeological survey on Us

One main target of the 2006 field season was the continuation and completion of the general archaeological survey on Us Island. As in 2005, the mission set up camp in the hamlet of Umm Hisai, an ideal

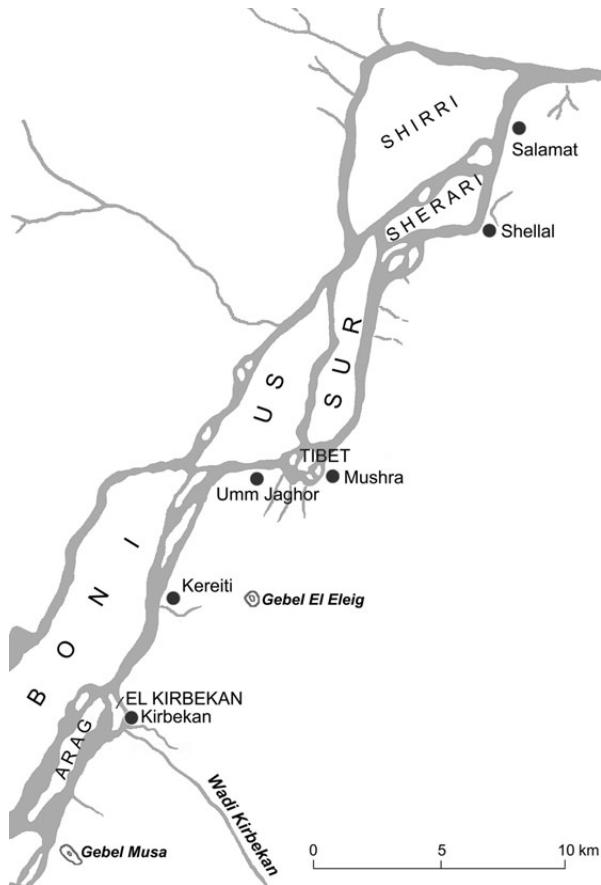


Fig. 1 The H.U.N.E. concession area at the Fourth Nile Cataract (drawing: I. Säuberlich).

departure point due to its convenient position on the eastern bank in the central part of the island.

Within five days of effective fieldwork a total of 65 new sites were recorded in the northern and southeastern parts of Us. They confirmed and widened the picture of the settlement history of the H.U.N.E. islands – both chronologically and in terms of the topographical distribution and morphology of sites – that had already been gained from the previous campaigns.

1.1. Sites of the Palaeolithic to Neolithic periods

The evidence for a Palaeolithic presence on Us is scarce and restricted to isolated finds of stone tools (US028; US040). This result corresponds with findings from the previous campaigns and stands in marked contrast to records from mainland conces-

sions where sites of this period are more frequent and more substantial (e.g. WAS 2005; WOLF 2004: 19; WOLF & NOWOTNICK 2005a: 184 ff.; 2005b: 23). The significance of this observation remains subject to further analysis.

Three sites (US077; US095; US064) produced pottery of Early Khartoum type. Whereas no architectural structures were visible on the surface of site US077, at site US095 about ten rudimentary stone structures of different shapes were observed. However, it remains unclear whether these were associated with the Early Khartoum pottery or were erected during a later occupation of the site.³ Further, US064 also comprised several stone structures among which some relatively well-preserved quadrangular installations of dry-stone masonry are clearly of more recent date.

Neolithic pottery was associated with six sites. US042 and US047 are later cemetery sites (see section 1.2.) that had apparently been installed within earlier Neolithic habitation or activity areas. US078 is an artefact concentration which, apart from pottery, also included lithics, animal bones and grindstones. A grindstone was also found at US080. At US042 grindstones and two circular grinding hollows in the bedrock were recorded. US065, US080 and US095 contained stone structures of again uncertain date.

As previously observed, all Palaeolithic to Neolithic sites are situated either on the plateau or in adjacent valleys of the today arid island interior.

1.2. Sites of the Kerma and Napatan periods

US071, a concentration of ceramics and lithics covering an area of c. 200 x 60 m in what is today a sandy palaeochannel in the southeastern part of Us, probably represents a Kerma period habitation site. The date and nature of US062, a heavily disturbed site at the outlet of a small *khor*, adjacent to alluvial land, and about 500 m north of Umm Hisai, are unclear. On the basis of surface finds, which included Kerma pottery, US062 might be interpreted as a further habitation site of this period.

Kerma cemeteries are among the most frequently represented site categories (US042; US046; US047; US055; US069; US070; US092; US098). The

³ For a similar situation at site SHE017 see NÄSER (2005b: 51).

newly recorded examples are relatively small in comparison to cases documented on Us and Sherari in 2004 and 2005.⁴ Six of the sites comprise only 2–10 superstructures. US098 has 16 superstructures, and the heavily disturbed site US055 was estimated to have had 10–15 superstructures. All superstructures belong to the common stone ring type. In addition to isolated specimens, honeycomb-like closely clustered structures occur in some cemeteries (US047; US055; US092; US098). A similar pattern was also recorded in previous campaigns and has already been discussed by NÄSER (2005b: 52 with note 6; 2007: 122).

The sites US046 and US069 also comprise several installations which use natural rock formations as burial places. A discussion of the local variants of this grave type has led to the emergence of a detailed typology (BORCOWSKI & WELSBY, this volume; PANER & BORCOWSKI 2005b: 112 f.; WELSBY 2005: 3 ff.; NÄSER 2005b: 53 f., Figs. 8 f.; 2007: 124 f.). On the islands of the H.U.N.E. concession, the so-called crevice and alcove graves are the most frequent (PANER & BORCOWSKI 2005b: 113, II.8, II.9). They are situated in the rocky hills, mostly at the edge of the interior plateaus, and use natural clefts between boulders and small spaces under overhanging rocks. The dead were simply placed in the open spaces, the openings of the clefts and the open sides of the alcoves then being blocked with stones. These constructions are very diverse in form as they were adjusted to the natural formations. Sometimes, the constructed parts are limited to three or four large stones stuck into the crevice. In other cases, wider openings were closed by heaps of stones or simple dry-stone walls (**Fig. 2**).

While numerous examples of these 'hidden' tombs were recorded on Sherari (NÄSER 2005: 53 f., Figs. 8 f.; 2007: 124 f.), few examples were found on Us.

⁴ For Us see NÄSER (2004: 119 f., Fig. 2; 2005a: 76 f., Fig. 2), for Sherari NÄSER (2005b: 51 ff., Figs. 3 ff. [read Sur instead of Sherari on p. 51, 3rd line from bottom on the right]) and NÄSER (2007).

⁵ Deposit sites were first discussed at the 2006 Cologne Conference (NOWOTNICK & TSAKOS, this volume). So far, they have not been systematically documented by the missions working in the Fourth Cataract, but it seems that many ephemeral installations, which occur at sites of different periods but also singly in the rocky hills, may be such 'deposition places'.

⁶ For this type see PANER & BORCOWSKI (2005b: 112 f., II.6, II.7. (Semi)-dome graves have meanwhile been reported by many missions (see the following note).



Fig. 2 Crevice grave at US090.

Apart from the specimens in the Kerma cemeteries US046 and US069 further examples occur in small numbers at sites US041 and US090 (**Fig. 2**). As all of these were disturbed, their typological attribution is sometimes difficult. Some of these installations may also represent the remains of simple shelters or protective constructions for deposits – or may have been re-used for such purposes.⁵

It is noteworthy that a further variant of this grave type, the dome grave with its various architectural realisations, while common in the mainland concessions of the Fourth Cataract, has not so far been detected on the H.U.N.E. islands.⁶ However, the significance of such slowly emerging distributional differences can only be fully assessed after the analysis of all recorded material.

Many missions active in the Fourth Cataract have documented dome and semi-dome graves with (partially) intact burials. Their dating seems to

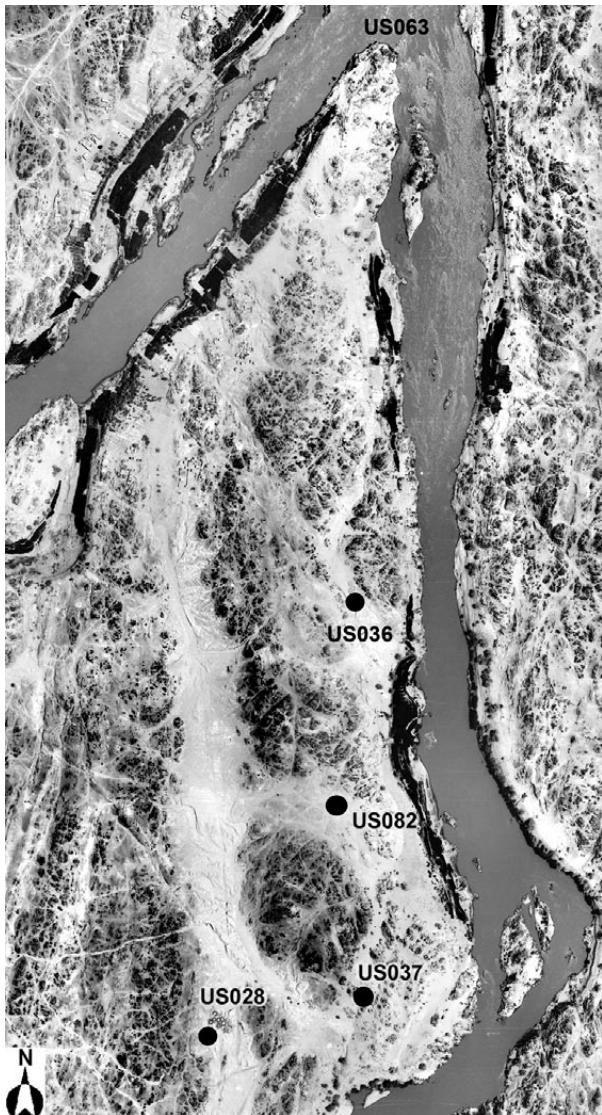


Fig. 3 (Post-)Meroitic cemeteries and a medieval settlement (US063) at the northern tip of Us.

range from the late and post-Kerma to the Napatan period.⁷ Whether this time frame is also valid for crevice and alcove graves remains to be demonstrated, as no intact specimens have so far been investigated. Of importance in this respect may be that crevice and alcove graves – as well as dome graves – are often found close to, or in direct association with, Kerma cemeteries (see above: US046 and US069; ditto on Sherari).

⁷ See e.g. BUDKA (2005: 75 f.); EL-TAYEB & KOŁOSOWSKA (2005: 60 ff.); PANER & BORCOWSKI (2005a: 207 ff.; 2005b: 96 ff.); WOLF & NOWOTNICK (2005b: 25).

1.3. Meroitic to post-Meroitic cemeteries

Burial grounds of post-Meroitic – and Meroitic? – times again belong to the most conspicuous sites recorded in 2006. Four prominent examples were documented within a reach of less than 1 km in the northeastern part of Us (**Fig. 3**). They confirm the observation that broad sandy valleys were a preferred location for cemeteries of this period. As argued earlier (NÄSER 2005b: 55), this attraction is probably related to the fact that sediments at these locations could be easily dug into, facilitating the excavation of large substructures and the construction of monumental tumuli.

This is also true for cemetery US028 (**Fig. 4**) which comprises twelve superstructures in the form of stone rings and low tumuli with a stone skirt. As some of the structures were heavily disturbed by recent plundering their original shape cannot always be accurately determined. Their diameters range from *c.* 6 to 10 m. As already observed in the previous campaigns on Us and Sur (NÄSER 2004: 120 f., 126 f.; 2005a: 78 f., 84 f.; 2005b: 55 f.; 2007: 126 f.), these post-Meroitic cemeteries were often reused in medieval Christian and Islamic times. This was also the case with several sites recorded this year (US028; US036 [?]; US039; US056 [?]; US072/73; US086). In addition to the stone rings and tumuli, US028 included two groups of typical medieval box graves. A row of twelve structures were built at some distance away from the post-Meroitic part of the burial ground; they are clearly visible in the aerial photograph (**Fig. 4**). They belong to the type of box graves with a height of *c.* 0.7 m, filled with sediment and covered with pebbles. At the southern end of this row, there is located a small tumulus with a stone setting at its base. A further five box graves were distributed among the post-Meroitic tombs in the eastern part of the cemetery. Three other structures in this area are too badly disturbed to determine whether they were originally tumuli with a stone skirt or box graves.

While at US028 recent plundering was limited to a few structures, US036 was far more affected (**Fig. 5**). Numerous pits, partly still open, testify to very recent extensive robbing. Moreover, the entire site is cut by fluvial gullies. The resulting disturbances prevent an exact count of superstructures and an accurate definition of their shapes and dimensions. However, it would appear that the cemetery comprised over 20 tombs, mainly stone rings and low tumuli

with a stone skirt, with diameters of up to 8.5 m. Several structures may also represent disturbed box graves.

The most remarkable find from US036 are three pottery fragments which were collected from the site surface (**Fig. 6; Pl. 30,5**). These stem from the upper part of a large vessel (rim diameter c. 36 cm) which can only tentatively be identified as a big wide-mouthed jar. It is wheel-made, from a badly prepared, strongly tempered Nile clay. The rough fabric forms a marked contrast to the complex, if not very accurately executed decoration. It comprises two rows of stamped uraei beneath the rim, bordered by incised lines and partly obscured by a cream slip and painted red and orange bands. On the basis of this decoration the vessel can be dated securely to the Meroitic period.⁸ Pottery with stamped and painted decoration – in other regions of Nubia a key form of this era – is exceedingly rare in the Fourth Cataract.⁹ Its presence at US036 suggests that the cemetery also has a Meroitic component, which, however, cannot be tied to a certain type of grave superstructure or a certain area of the site. Its continued use into post-Meroitic times is testified by numerous sherds diagnostic of that period on the site surface.

The third cemetery, US037, comprises 14 superstructures with diameters between 2.0 and 9.5 m. Due to the pronounced disturbance at this site it remains uncertain whether these superstructures belonged to the stone ring type or were low tumuli with stone skirts. US082, the last cemetery at the northern tip of Us, consists of a central cluster of at least 20 graves which are recognisable owing to sanded-up robbery pits and the remains of circular stone settings. At the periphery of the site, several stone rings with diameters of up to 4.8 m survived. The almost complete absence of pottery on the site surface complicates the chronological classification. At the same time this phenomenon, as well as the site's general appearance, and the prevalence of small stone slabs used in the construction of the super-

⁸ According to formal criteria it can be assigned to ADAMS' (1986: 457 f.) ware W25. However, I know of no parallels for the shape and a stamped decoration on such a large vessel.

⁹ NÄSER (2004: 120; 2005a: 78); PAYNE (2005: 13, Colour Pl. 7). See also WOLF (2004: 22) and WOLF & NOWOTNICK (2005a: 183, 189).

¹⁰ A similar observation was made at SR013 and SHE058 (NÄSER 2004: 127; 2005b: 55).

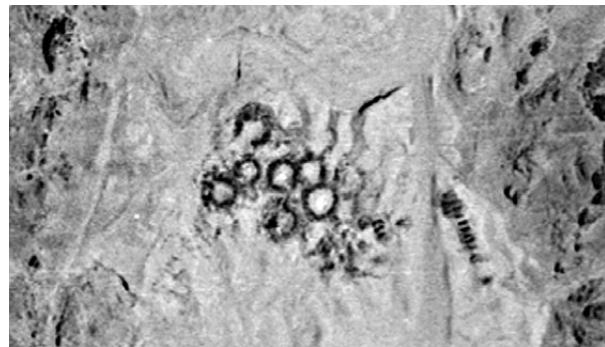


Fig. 4 Aerial view of cemetery site US028.



Fig. 5 US036: the northern part of the cemetery with the largest structures; fluvial gullies in the foreground and at the left margin.

structures, are all reminiscent of the Meroitic cemeteries described by the Gdansk mission (PANER & BORCOWSKI 2005b: 98 f., Fig. 17 f.).

US039 is located on the west side of Us, about 1 km from the cemeteries discussed above. The site comprises a minimum of nine stone rings and low tumuli with stone kerbs with diameters of up to 2.2 m, as well as 34 box graves (**Fig. 7**). About 40 m from the central burial field, an Islamic children's cemetery with eight graves and an excavated pit, ready for burial, was located. The latter does not necessarily indicate that the cemetery is still in use – such pits can be seen in almost all Islamic cemeteries of the area, even when, according to local informants, they have not been frequented for several decades. Apparently, graves were regularly prepared in advance, regardless of actual deaths, and simply remained open when the cemetery was given up.¹⁰ However, it cannot be excluded that such places are still used for 'abnormal' burials, especially of children, on which our informants were reluctant to report.

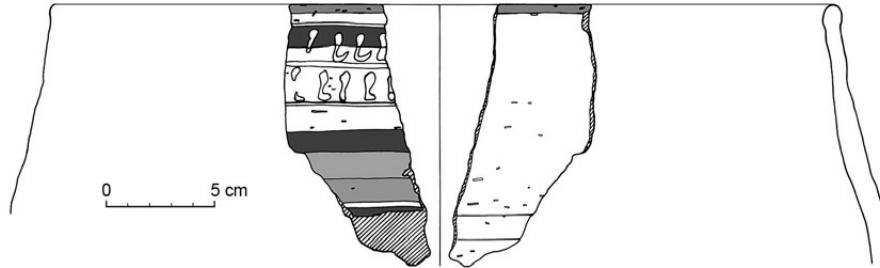


Fig. 6 Fragments of a decorated Meroitic pottery vessel from US036 (drawing: R. Miltenberger; adaptation: I. Säuberlich).

1.4. Medieval sites

On Us, as on the other islands of the H.U.N.E. concession, medieval Christian sites are the most abundant. Three cemeteries, which comprise the typical box graves besides older archaeological relics, have been discussed in the previous section (US028; US036; US039, **Figs. 6–7**). Whether they represent a continued occupation or a discontinuous re-use cannot be decided on the basis of the surface survey.

US086 is a small cemetery close to the village of Ikeisha in the northwest part of Us, with probably five heavily disturbed box graves built in one row. Some distance away is a single isolated tumulus with a stone kerb. Immediately north of the medieval graves, there is a recent open-air mosque (**Fig. 8**). It is laid out in the usual fashion: its area is cleared from stones, thus differing from its surroundings by the sandy surface, and outlined by a row of loosely set stones. Similar prayer places were for instance located close to the Kerma cemeteries US042 and SHE098 (see above; NÄSER 2005b: 52 f.; 2007: 122–124), indicating that their positioning in the vicinity of older culturally marked sites is a repeated pattern.

At US072, a small cemetery in the southeast of the island, all (probably six) graves have recently been disturbed. Of their superstructures only scattered stones remained. The east–west orientation of the burial pits suggests a date in the medieval period. About 30 m southeast of US072, an isolated tumulus of the usual flat shape with a stone skirt and a diameter of c. 6 m was recorded under the designation US073. About 150 m north of US072, another cemetery, US056, is situated. It comprised some 20 structures, among them at least 13 box graves; heavy disturbance prevents a typological classification of the remaining structures.¹¹ Another site, US058, contained three isolated box graves.

The medieval cemeteries documented on Us in 2006 are notable for their relatively small size, most containing between three and twenty structures, with only US039 being slightly larger with 34 units. This contrasts with the sites recorded on the island in 2004, the largest of which, US001, had 72 graves (NÄSER 2004: 120 f., Fig. 3; 2005a: 78 f.). This suggests that the recent settlement distribution with occupation concentrated at the southwestern tip of the island – where US001 is also situated – and much sparser settlement in the southeastern, central and northern parts of the island corresponds at least in broad outlines to the medieval situation. Such a pattern may perhaps be traced back even further. The southwest part of Us also features the largest post-Meroitic cemetery (NÄSER 2004: 120; 2005a: 78, Fig. 3, US009), and prehistoric sites so far unparalleled by density and extent on the islands of the H.U.N.E. concession (LANGE 2007; NÄSER 2004: 119, Fig. 1; 2005: 60, Fig. 17, US007). Scaling up this picture, it may be noted that the island of Sherari, which was surveyed almost completely in 2005, had only one large box grave cemetery with 86 counted structures (NÄSER 2005b: 56, Fig. 13; 2007, SHE067), and also on Sur only one cemetery of comparable size has so far been recorded (NÄSER 2004: 127; 2005a: 85, SR027).

Ten sites on Us contained habitation remains, which can be dated with some certainty to the medieval period (US054 [?]; US059; US063–US065; US075; US081; US085; US097; US099). The most remarkable of this group is site US063. It covers the entire northern

¹¹ According to informants, US056 is the place of origin of a mummy, which in 2005 was confiscated from local grave robbers by undercover police agents. The mummy is presently kept in the storerooms of the National Museum in Khartoum where it was briefly examined by the author. It is completely wrapped in textiles and certainly dates from the medieval period.

tip of Us, extending over an area of c. 200 x 100 m (Figs. 3; 9). In this rather rocky spot, remains of numerous structures of dry-stone masonry were found. On the slopes towards the river, terraced platforms are preserved, which also carry the remains of buildings, and in some areas sections of what we interpreted as enclosure walls were detected. The fortified character conveyed by the building remains and the general location is also reflected in the local tradition which calls the site *Ghala Kadjob*, Kadjob fortress, Kadjob being the name of the closest present-day village. The surface pottery suggests that US063 was frequented from Christian to Islamic times; a considerable use-life can also be inferred from the occurrence of divergent building techniques. Today, part of the site is used for stables and threshing floors. A stone-lined canal at the western slope is probably of subrecent date and served to pipe the water from a *saqia*.¹² For reasons related at the end of this paper, US063 was only recorded in the general survey; an envisaged detailed mapping which would have allowed a more precise functional and chronological attribution could not be realised.

It is remarkable that apart from US063 no large settlement sites of the medieval period have been noted on Us. None of the other sites had more than eight building units. Well-preserved structures of dry-stone masonry with walls, some of which still stood up to 1.0 m high, were found at US064, US097, and US098. US097 comprised one structure with four room units, among them probably a walled courtyard, which was built within a group of boulders. Three other structures at the site consisted of one room each. The surface finds, namely wheel- and hand-made pottery, glass, iron nails, bones, as well as grinding and hammer stones, represent the typical finds repertoire of the medieval period.

US061 is another unusual site. It is situated at the edge of the interior plateau in a rocky area and covers an area of some 100 x 50 m. Around its periphery several one-roomed structures – one apparently rectangular, the others semicircular – had been built against the rocks. The northern half of the site shows many pits, more or less sanded-up, which have disturbed numerous stone structures; these latter may originally have been of circular shape, though their

12 Similar canals, some of which could be followed over several hundred metres, were documented on Sherari in 2005.



Fig. 7 US039: box graves and small tumuli in the background.



Fig. 8 Open-air mosque at US086; in the background Gebel Us.



Fig. 9 US063: part of the enclosure wall with a terraced platform above; in the background a recent threshing floor.



Fig. 10 US053: a possibly quadrangular stone structure at the peak of Gebel Us.

building material is now scattered over the site. Among the surface finds are Christian pottery, as well as some hammer stones and glass fragments. Kerma sherds were present too, and it is possible that the structures in the northern part of the site represent a devastated Kerma cemetery. However, in their density and extent the described pits do not resemble those of grave robbers so that, more likely, they derive from mining activity, as identified at several other sites in the region, but not any more closely definable at the site under discussion. The hut remains indicate a more than transient occupation of the area which, according to the surface pottery, might date to the medieval period.

Concentrations of medieval pottery also occur at two sites lacking visible structural remains. US050 has an area of c. 40 x 15 m and displays a high density of pottery, bones, grinding and hammer stones. At US079, pottery and grindstones are scattered over an area of c. 50 x 30 m.

1.5. Sites of problematic attribution

Several sites which comprise a limited number of shelters or hut foundations are of uncertain date (US032; US048; US049; US051; US060; US069 [?]; US074; US087; US091; US093; US094). Structures were erected against rocks and boulders and may be differentiated according to the extent of the built part: While shelters consist of only a few heaped

stones or short walls enlarging the protection of a natural rock formation, huts were mainly constructed, with the natural rocks serving only as elements of one or two walls.¹³ The huts may be of rectangular or circular ground plan. Often the sites in question also contain further, even more ephemeral stone structures. The absence of diagnostic finds does not only impede the dating of these sites, but also prevents statements about their function and life span.

1.6. Mountainous sites

During the 2006 field season, several members of the expedition climbed Gebel Us, a quartzite ridge which is the most prominent landmark of Us Island, towering c. 100 m above the surrounding landscape (Fig. 8).¹⁴ Unexpectedly, this mountaineering excursion also brought new archaeological sites. US052 is a disturbed stone construction on the saddle between the two peaks of the Gebel, probably consisting of two abutting (sub)circular stone settings with an overall length of c. 2.2 m. Associated pottery unfortunately was undiagnostic, so the date of this structure remains uncertain.

US053 comprises not less than ten stone settings on the absolute peak of Gebel Us. These have also been disturbed recently, their building material being scattered and sometimes hard to make out in the stony surroundings. Judging from the remains, nine of the structures seem to have had a roughly circular ground plan. The last one is situated slightly apart, on a small separate peak, and appears to have been quadrangular (Fig. 10). There were no surface finds.

The functional identification of US052 and US053 is problematic; at least the circular constructions may have been graves; but they could also represent symbolic markings or *baniyat*, i.e. prayer or offering places.¹⁵ It cannot be excluded that the original installations are of substantial age, but were converted into *baniyat* at later times. In all structures, the central

13 For a discussion of these types see also NÄSER (2005b: 51).

14 See NÄSER (2007). For the symbolic importance of this mountain see NÄSER (2004: 129, Fig. 2; 2005b: 50, 62, Fig. 20).

15 For *baniyat* in general and further examples from the Fourth Cataract see NÄSER (2005b: 55 f., Fig. 12).

space had been cleared and the thin sediment layer dug up. This may be indicative of attempted looting which, however, would not have led to any result, as the rocky ground prevents the excavation of pits and thus subterranean burials. On the other hand, it is also possible that the sediment was removed because of presumed beneficial effects which are often attributed to elements of *baniyat* and link them to different ritual practices (NÄSER 2005b: 56). In view of the local importance of Gebel Us this seems to be the more plausible explanation, though there was no time to substantiate it by statements from local informants.

1.7. Rock art

Rock art was recorded at 13 sites. Their absolute number is of importance insofar as it shows that the areas of Us surveyed in 2006 have a much lower density of petroglyph sites than the southwestern and central parts of the island investigated in 2004 and 2005 (KLEINITZ 2007; NÄSER 2004: 121 f.; 2005a: 79 f.; 2005b: 60 ff.). The difference is also mirrored in the size of the sites and the range of motifs. The following motifs were documented:

- camels (US044; US045; US068; US069; US087; US088; US089; US091; US097; US099);
- camels with riders (US089; US097);
- camels with leader (US099);
- camels with load (US084);
- camels and crosses (US066; US097);
- unidentified quadrupeds (US043; US044; US045[?]);
- cattle (US045).

Depictions at US066 also included two medieval monograms, three or four crosses, and a curviform image which may represent a boat (Fig. 11). Further elements of the panel are obscured and were possibly obliterated intentionally. However, a deletion of religious symbols has not previously been noted in the rock art of the Fourth Cataract.

The petroglyphs were repeatedly found in association with medieval habitation sites (US097; US099), undated huts and shelters (US069[?]; US087; US091), and ephemeral stone constructions (US084).



Fig. 11 US066: main panel with two monograms, crosses, and a possible boat.

1.8. Summary

All in all, the results of the 2006 survey on Us confirm the findings of the earlier campaigns, i.e. all major chronological periods are present, and the quantitative and topographical distribution of sites conform to previous findings, which could be further supplemented in several aspects. The first two field seasons showed the most conspicuous characteristic of the local archaeological landscape to be its diversity, and that each island had its own specific profile. The 2006 survey contributed to a better understanding of the variation on and between the islands. Thus, the southwestern part of Us emerges as a favoured microregion – the wide valleys south of Gebel Us show a concentration of late prehistoric settlement, and they also preserve the largest cemeteries of the post-Meroitic and medieval periods. Kerma cemeteries with more than 20 graves are concentrated in the central part of the island, around Gebel Us (NÄSER 2004: 119, 129; 2005a: 77, 87). Both in the southwestern and central parts of Us the rock art is also more extensive and manifold than to the southeast and the north (KLEINITZ 2007; NÄSER 2004: 121 f.; 2005a: 79 f.; 2005b: 60 ff.).

The parameters and conditions of these variations will have to be analysed after the conclusion of field-work and the synthesis of all data at hand. However, it can already be observed that the (pre)historic use of the local landscape was specific, varying diachronically and diatopically. One reason for this lies

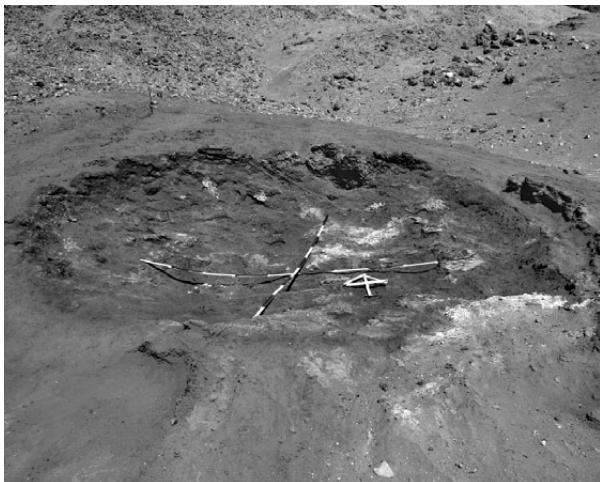


Fig. 12 US025: brick kiln.

doubtlessly in the geomorphological and ecological situation which varies from island to island, and even within the individual islands. Thus, the apparent concentration of settlement in the southwestern part of Us can certainly be connected with its favourable natural conditions. Apart from this, other factors seem likely to have influenced the distribution and the course of the occupation. The positioning of medieval settlements did not depend exclusively on the extent and the optimal accessibility of arable land; at least during certain periods the defensibility of a location may also have been an important selection criterion.¹⁶ Another factor, evident for example in the distribution of the rock art, is the orientation towards routes of traffic and transportation. Finally, the symbolic conditioning of the landscape, arising from older occupations, utilisations and markings, taking them up, appropriating them or changing them, also need to be considered. As the recorded examples show, patterns of re-use sometimes span many periods.

16 See above for US063, and NÄSER (2004: 123 f., 130; 2005a: 80 ff., 88) for the medieval settlements on Tibet.

17 For the use of red bricks in the construction of church US022.A see the discussion in NÄSER *et al.* (2007). As surface finds of bricks and plaster show, fired bricks were also used in grave superstructures of the adjacent cemetery, US022.B.

18 On the Manasir, their current situation and their future prospects see KAMMERZELL (2004: 101 ff.), NÄSER (2005b: 62 ff.) and HABERLAH (2007) with further references.

2. Excavations at US025

In order to supplement the 2005 investigation of the church US022.A (NÄSER 2005a: 57 ff.; NÄSER *et al.* 2007), a small-scale excavation at US025 was carried out. The site lies at the foot of the hill on which US022 is situated, about 60 m southeast of the church. Fragments of red bricks and marks of burning at the site surface had indicated a workshop area. Indeed the excavation revealed an installation which had served as a brick kiln (Fig. 12). It is a fireplace in a shallow subcircular pit, c. 3.4 x 3.9 m in diameter, and lined with mud.¹⁷

3. *Higerti fi bigerti*

At this point, the archaeological part of this paper comes to a close and the report turns to events beyond archaeology. Upon our arrival in Khartoum at the beginning of February 2006 we had already heard reports of civil unrest and resistance of the Manasir against the terms of their imminent resettlement.¹⁸ However, after the alarming news and our fears concerning the viability of our field season had been resolved by the colleagues we talked to and by representatives of the National Corporation for Antiquities and Museums, we returned to the Fourth Cataract where we resumed our work on 15th February. However, just three days later we were informed by our hosts that the rumours which we had heard earlier in Khartoum had been substantiated: the independent committee of the Manasir had decided to expel all archaeologists from Manasir territory and asked us to stop our work. We had already been in contact with members of the committee in the previous year in another context, namely the social geographical survey carried out by H.U.N.E. (NÄSER 2005b: 62 ff.; HABERLAH 2007). The committee is an independent body, elected by the Manasir to represent their interests regarding resettlement and compensation towards government institutions.

How should we react? Our host had informed us that the next meeting of the committee would be on the subsequent market day, Monday 20th February, in Salamat, a market place at the northern end of our concession area (Figs. 1; 13). We decided to go there and try to arrange a meeting with the committee. We booked places on the boat which went from Us to Salamat on Monday morning, and I went together

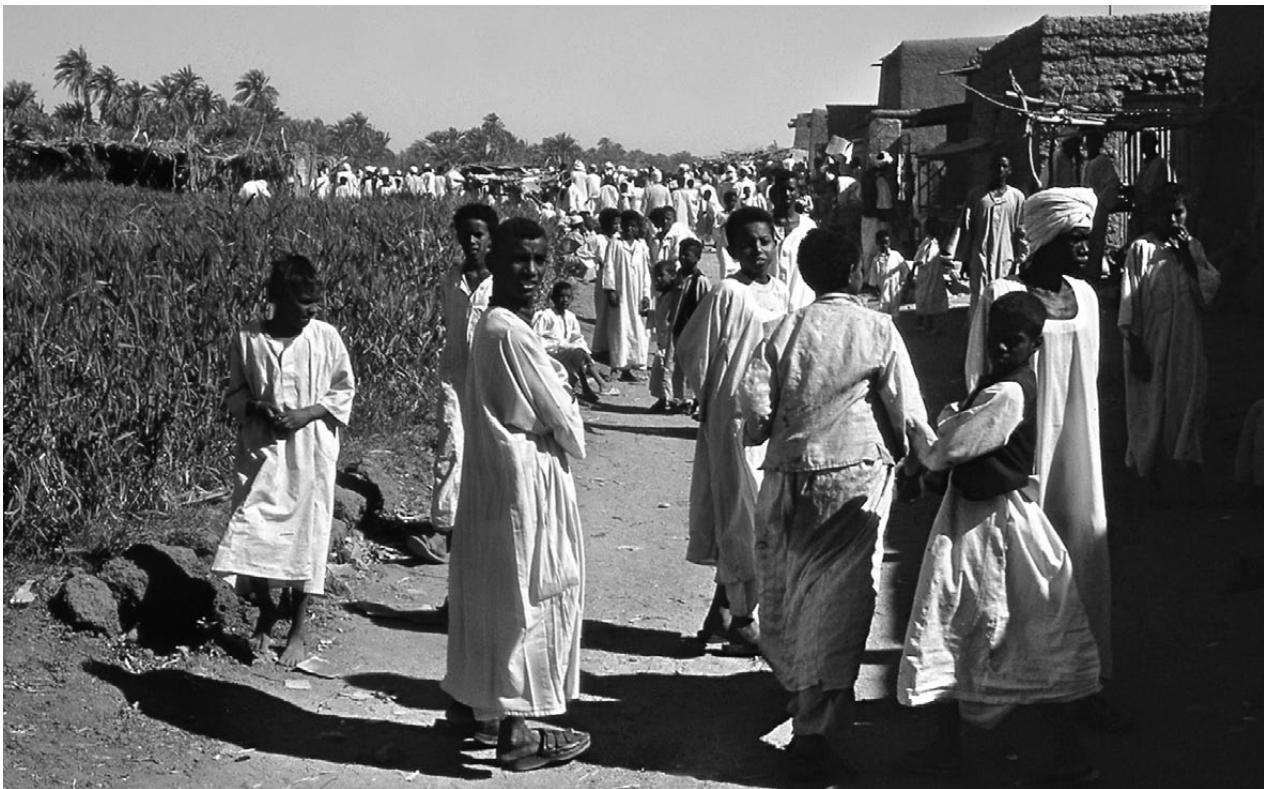


Fig. 13 Market in Salamat.

with Khidir Mohamed Ahmed and Fawzi Hassan Bakhet to the market. The meeting finally took place in the early afternoon in the local flour shop. In a talk which lasted well over two hours, we tried to find out the reasons for the decision of the committee and to state our opinions and objections. We reported on our work, presented extracts from our homepage <www.daralmanasir.com>, which is a direct outcome of the social geographical survey undertaken in 2005, and we presented a film which ZDF German Television had produced in 2005 on the Manasir and our work in the Fourth Cataract.¹⁹ It was very well received: the small shop was stuffed with people, and in front of the door and the windows a large crowd had assembled. Our demonstration was reported to those who had to stay outside, and all pictures received lengthy and lively comments. The general atmosphere was positive, and for some minutes at least I was optimistic.

19 <www.zdf.de/ZDFde/inhalt/8/0,1872,2277480,00.html> (18 Feb. 2009).

However, after two hours it was confirmed that the members of the committee would stick to their decision. They named three reasons. First, in a way which seemed quite naive to us, they hoped that a prevention of the archaeological work would delay the imminent flooding of the Merowe Dam reservoir; second, by their action they hoped to gain national and international publicity for their situation; and third, they could no longer rule out that things might escalate, and they did not wish to be held responsible should foreign archaeologists become caught up in the conflict. Beyond these reasons, which we discussed extensively, there were certainly other sensitivities, on the grounds of which the committee decided to adhere to its original decision. For many Manasir, the archaeological salvage campaign appeared as part of the official activities connected with the building of the Merowe Dam. Moreover, they complained that more was being done for the archaeological monuments than for the living people – a charge which is hard to rebut. It should be underlined that at no point did we face any personal hostilities from the Manasir.

That not all Manasir thought that way, we experienced the next day. Babiker from the village al-Marcha on Sur, where we had recorded a church in 2004 which we had planned to excavate in the pending field season, commented upon the decision of the committee with the Manasir saying “higerti fi bigerti”. It is difficult to translate, but means something like ‘one can only maltreat his own cows’, meaning ‘to cut off one’s nose to spite one’s face’. This sententious remark spread within a few days, and earned Babiker the reputation of having summed up the situation both shrewdly and aptly.

For us, however, the end of the market day in Salamat had brought certainty that we, along with four other missions also underway in *Dar al-Manasir*, would have to leave. To ignore the decision of the committee was out of the question. It would not only have brought our host family into a difficult position – as the local policeman and thus a representative of the official authorities and head of the village our landlord was in a tricky position anyway. We also felt that at this point we had to subordinate our plans to the interests of the Manasir. They would have to leave

their homeland within a few months, moving into an uncertain future. If they felt that our expulsion would achieve something, could we deny it to them?

We returned to Umm Hisai. Thus, after an intense search for funding and long preparations we were forced to stop work just one week after our arrival, give up all plans for the season and leave the Fourth Cataract. The same night we talked to some of our colleagues who were in the same situation over the satellite phone. The next day we started to pack.

It took us 24 hours to come up with a new plan. Once found, we pursued it energetically. Again by phone we contacted the National Corporation for Antiquities and Museums (NCAM) in Khartoum and asked for a new concession – preferably an island, with a long chronological sequence and sites which would match the composition and specialisation of our team. Within one hour it was decided that we would continue our field season on Mograt, about 100 km upstream of our concession area in the Fourth Cataract, in Rubatab country. We are extremely grateful to NCAM for their quick and generous offer – which finally granted us a successful 2006 H.U.N.E. season in spite of everything.²⁰

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²⁰ For first results of our work on Mograt see NÄSER (2006: 101 ff.) and LANGE (this volume).

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Plate 30 Petra Weschenfelder (1–4); Claudia Näser (5).



1 Fetching drinking water from the Nile.



2 Preparing the *fattur*.



3 Women presenting the result of an afternoon's harvest of caraway.



4 Alsina in her shop at Kurbekān.



5 Fragments of a decorated Meroitic pottery vessel from US036: section and outer surface.