Gdańsk Archaeological Museum

AFRICAN REPORTS
vol. 4, 2005

edited by
Henryk Paner and Stefan Jakobielski

Proceedings of
The Archaeology of the Fourth Nile Cataract
Gdańsk – Gniezno, 23–25 July 2004
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The Island Survey of the Humboldt University Nubian Expedition: Report of the 2004 Campaign

Claudia Näser

Lagin shiu fi hajarna da?
"What are you finding in our stones?"
— question of a woman, whom we met on the plateau of Sur during our survey.

In March 2004 the Humboldt University Nubian Expedition (H.U.N.E.) took up work in the area of the Fourth Nile Cataract. Following the international appeal of the National Corporation for Antiquities and Museums of Sudan in 2003, the newly founded Seminar for Archaeology and Cultural Studies in Northeastern Africa of Humboldt University Berlin had taken over responsibility for a concession in the centre of the flood area. It comprises a stretch of about 40 km length on the left bank of the Nile as well as the islands in the upper part of this reach. On the mainland the borders of the concession are Gebel Musa and the bend of the Nile immediately upstream of Salamat village. On the river the concession area includes the major islands of Us, Sur, Sherari and Shirri as well as all smaller islands within their reach. The main islands are up to 10 km long and 6 km wide.

The aim of the project is to survey this region, systematically document the archaeological sites and carry out excavations at least in the most important places.

The preliminary reconnaissance of the area in March 2004 comprised only ten days of effective fieldwork. For logistical reasons the concession was divided into the mainland and the island part. In the following, the results from the islands will be reported.

The team working there consisted of the author (archaeologist, project director), Daniela Billig (archaeologist) and Khidir Mohammed Ahmed (archaeologist). For part of the time we were joined by Fawzi Hasan Wahid (archaeologist, inspector of NCAM). In addition, the assistance of the local inhabitants was extremely important to our work. In every village we came to, they gave us information on the antiquities of the area and they often accompanied us while we traversed the islands. Antiquities are referred to as asar rum (Roman antiquity) or simply rum, i.e., literally “of the Romans”. However, in Arabic literature rum denotes Roman, as well as Byzantine, or Christian. It is surely this period to which the local use of the term refers. There is a general vague awareness of former Christianity in the area, as is witnessed, e.g., in the name of the village el-Kenisa next to the church site on Sur (SR22). Of course, the present inhabitants do not place themselves in any connection with the pre-Islamic population, but construct their history in terms of tribal genealogies (MacMichael 1922, II, passim, Index: 470 [Manasra, Mansurab] and Hasan 1967, 145–153. Cf. also Jackson 1926, 3–5).

For this season activity concentrated on the major islands Us and Sur, in the downstream part of our concession, as well as two smaller islands close by, Tibet and Umm Kieb. The outlines of the survey...
were greatly influenced by logistical considerations, especially with regard to where suitable crossing points existed and could be reached by car or on foot. The small island of Tibet, close to our home base, was the first area investigated. On Us, work concentrated on the downstream and central parts of the island; the upstream end being very sandy and with little evidence for archaeological sites on the aerial photographs. Likewise, we covered the downstream end of Sur, the crossing point to which we could easily reach by foot from our camp at Mushra. Further work was then carried out in its central and upstream parts, where some potentially interesting sites had been reported to us by the local inhabitants. For the same reason we also included the small island of Umm Kieb at the northern tip of Sur.

Within the ten days of fieldwork, altogether 61 sites were documented: five on Tibet, 27 on Us, 28 on Sur and one on Umm Kieb. It should be emphasized that these figures do not represent the total number of sites on the larger islands, where survey coverage is still incomplete.

As far as the results of the preliminary reconnaissance allow any statements, the most prominent feature of the local archaeological landscape is its diversity: types of sites and their location vary from island to island. Although sites of all periods are present on the two larger islands of Us and Sur, each displays certain characteristics in their structure and distribution. Thus, (pre)historical uses of the landscape were very specific. On the one hand, they were heavily influenced by local conditions, which offer a number of small favoured areas. On the other hand, the broken and barren surroundings apparently hindered close contacts and a continuous spread of influences, people and goods even on a local scale.

Like other parts of the region, the concession area is characterized by the exposed granite bedrock of the Fourth Cataract. The islands generally have high banks and very narrow areas of alluvial land, today used for intensive cultivation. The inner parts are desert. On Us, broad sandy wadis lead into the interior which is dominated by Jebel Us, a solitary remnant of a massive granite ridge. The interior of

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7 It had already been noted by Cailliaud (1826, 193). This is one of the few reports of the islands in the concession area by early travellers.

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8 For the lithic material and a drawing of the axe-head cf. the contribution of Mathias Lange in this volume. I wish to thank Prof. Dr. Norbert Benecke, Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Referat Naturwissenschaften, for the identification.

9 Cf. the contribution of Pawel Wolf in this volume.

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Fig. 1. The Neolithic occupation site US07.

Sur is a plateau with a pronounced edge towards the alluvial banks. The characteristics of these landscapes are mirrored in the location of the archaeological sites.

**Us**

The cultural sequence on Us, as represented by the material of our first survey, starts with two Neolithic occupation sites. US07 extends over c. 100 m on slightly elevated ground at the edge of a wadi (Fig. 1). The surface is littered with potsherds, lithic tools — among them a polished stone axe-head — and lithic waste, grindstones, animal bones — including some identified as cattle. Silicified rhizomes point towards much moister climatic conditions in earlier times. In later periods the site was reused: a few
badly preserved box graves as well as Muslim burials occupy its southern end. The second site, US12, is again situated on a slightly elevated wadi edge. Its full extent has not yet been determined, but it is also of a comparatively large size. On the surface it features a comparable mixture of cultural material, but also the foundations of a subcircular hut, with an outer diameter of c. 4.3 m, with an entrance to the east.

A prominent group of sites on Us are later prehistoric cemeteries, tentatively assigned to the Kerma period (Fig. 2). Four were recorded (US19, US20, US21, US24), and another example has been identified on aerial photographs. They comprise between nine (US20) and over 50 tombs (unrecorded site; US24: 46 units). Situated on long ridges or plateaux in the inner part of the island, they display some common features. They are organized in a linear way. In three cases (US21, US24, and an unrecorded site) they comprise several isolated large tumuli at one end and dense clusters of smaller tumuli at the other end. Although at present it cannot be excluded that this pattern results from the diachronic development of the cemeteries, it seems more likely that it reflects social hierarchies or a familial structure. All five sites are clustered around Jebel Us, which is a prominent landmark on the island.

The superstructures are tumuli with diameters from 2 to 6 m (Fig. 2). They are ringed with stones with a sandy central space devoid of stones, but occasionally covered with quartz pebbles. Whether this appearance is original or due to disturbances during which the stone cover of the central area was removed has yet to be determined. A subtype of this architecture is present only among the smaller structures in the clusters: they consist of shallow mounds of earth, covered with a layer of light brown quartz pebbles, onto which the stone cairns are built.

US13 is an isolated tumulus of the most common type. Thus, although no cultural material was discovered with, it can tentatively be attributed to the same period.

Another isolated circular stone structure is present at US23. Its atypical location at the edge of the plateau and the concentration of pottery and lithic material in and around the structure point towards this being an occupation site. If this is so, the stone circle may represent the foundation layer of a hut, and not a tomb superstructure — although

![Fig. 2. Cemetery US19 with Jebel Us in the background.](image_url)
its dimensions, with an outer diameter of c. 2 m and an inner diameter of c. 1 m, seem rather too small for this.

Returning to the funerary record: cemeteries probably dating to the Post-Meroitic period occur in two types of locations on Us. First, two tumulus cemeteries were located in the open spaces of wadi crossroads in the island interior, but closer to the river than the earlier burial-grounds. US06 comprises eight stone rings of up to 10 m diameter as well as a number of less well defined superstructures. US09 has a single stone ring and 29 steeply sloped earth mounds of up to 8 m diameter and 2.2 m height, covered with a layer of small stones (Fig. 3). Some of these structures have been robbed very recently.

In contrast, US26 and US27 are situated in the lowland, just beyond the cultivation zone. Both sites are what we called ‘multi-period’. Surface pottery includes early, i.e., Neolithic and/or Kerma sherds, probably Post-Meroitic and Christian material.10 At US26 a sherd of Meroitic fineware was also found. Structurally, the sites are very complex, comprising large earth tumuli of up to 7 m diameter and 4 m height, as well as small stone tumuli and box graves.

Superpositions, the reuse of building material and other disturbances make it difficult to clearly identify and describe the different phases of use.

According to the inhabitants of el-Uboli, another tumulus cemetery existed in their village, i.e., also in the lowland. It was removed when the local school was built on the site in the 1970s. We visited the compound, given the designation US10, but neither remains of the tombs nor any surface finds were left.

Christian box graves were recorded in four cemeteries (US01, US06, US07, US27). In two further instances it was uncertain whether the encountered structures represent disturbed box graves or small cairns (US09, US26).

In five of these sites, the (potential) box graves were associated with earlier, probably Post-Meroitic graves. At US01 a single stone ring was situated at the edge of a cemetery comprising 72 box graves. This situation suggests that it was more or less contemporary to the box graves, forming a last instance of the ‘old’ funerary monument within an environment already adapted to the new types. This interpretation is supported by the fact that with an outer diameter of 3.8 m the stone ring is of modest size. The ‘energy’ expended on it broadly compares to the effort put into the erection of the box graves. In US06 both

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10 For a remarkably early characterisation of these sites cf. Gray 1949, 121.
types of tombs occurred in larger numbers. Clearly here an older cemetery had remained in use or been reopened in Christian times. US09 contained substantial tumuli of earth work, but only three questionable box graves. Be they such, they cannot be regarded as a cemetery proper, but rather as 'extra-normal' discrete burials. A similar practice of placing individual burials into older cemeteries survived into the Islamic period. There is a single Muslim grave at the edge of US01. A repeatedly used location which is atypical in itself is US07, where a number of badly preserved box graves and Muslim burials, altogether over a dozen structures, were found at a Neolithic occupation site — much further inland than cemeteries of these periods are usually located.

A ‘normal’ continuous use of cemeteries is witnessed in the lowland, e.g. in the large multi-period site US27, which comprises tumuli, one or two groups of box graves and three locations used as regular Muslim cemeteries.

On Us, ten places with rock art were recorded. They must serve as a sample — more were noted in the field, but could not be documented in detail due to time constraints. Most frequently they occur along the lower courses of wadis and khors, often at intersections and turnings (US04, US05, US06, US11, US15, US16, US17). In at least one instance, they continued over several hundred metres (US05). A systematic and comprehensive survey is bound to reveal more of these ‘picture tracks’. A so far outstanding setting is a prominent rocky hill in a wadi intersection covered with dozens of pictures (US02). However, it should be noted that in other cases the rock art is hidden from the view of passers-by at the back sides of small boulder hills flanking the wadis (US03, US09).

While there are some isolated specimens, the pictures usually occur in clusters and it is often difficult to define the extent of a more or less synchronous phase of decoration or a repeatedly used rock art site. The most common motif were camels in various combinations. They comprise:

- camels with riders (US02, US03 [?], US05, US09)
- camels with crosses (US02, US05)
- camel with rider and cross (US09)
- camel next to a human (US05, US09).

Fig. 4. Rock engraving of a church at US04.

Bovines are also frequent (US04 [?], US05, US06, US11, US15, US17). Their occurrence is the more remarkable, since cattle is rarely present in the area today.11 Apart from one questionable case (US04), bovines are always represented in outlines. This distinguishes them from most other rock pictures, notably the camels in all variations, which are ‘filled’. Whether this observation holds true in general and might thus be of chronological significance, i.e., pointing towards the greater antiquity of the cattle representations, remains to be confirmed by future work. All the same, tentatively identified bones of bovines were found on the surface of US07, a Neolithic occupation site.

Further faunal representations comprise ostriches (US02), a gazelle (US02), a jackal (US16) and what is probably a turtle (US17). Other motifs are:

- boats (US02, US06, US17)
- human figures (US04, US15)
- crosses (US04 [?])
- a church (US04, Fig. 4). An identical one is published by Montluçon (1994, fig. 3).

11 Jackson (1926, 8) mentions a “limited number of cattle that the people have for turning their water-wheels”. On this cf. also Innes 1931, 186. This task became obsolete after the introduction of engine-driven pumps.
The motifs of boats and churches are notably absent from the corpus published by Derek Welsby (2003, 111–113). However, boats are mentioned in other sources (Monthuçon 1994, 310; Paner 2003, 168. Cf. also Jackson 1926, 24; Crawford 1953, 6, pl. 2.b and Ahmed 1971, 15, 19 for Mograt island).

In two sites, the rock pictures are situated immediately behind or above the remains of huts built against the rocky slopes of a wadi (US04, US05). Motifs in US04 include a church (Fig. 4), probably also camels and crosses. US05 designates an area of several hundred meters along a wadi ornamented mainly with camels, partially with riders and combined with crosses. Both assemblages point towards a Christian date. In two other sites, huts were found in the close vicinity of rock art (US14/15, US16). Again, camels were a prominent motif.

The architectural remains represent foundation courses of stones, mostly simple circular or otherwise curvilinear structures of a few metres diameter. Only US14 also comprises rectangular ground-plans. In all sites, satellite installations of set stone were found; their functions are so far uncertain.

US14 is situated close to the exit of a wadi to the lowland, near a modern village. It comprises a dozen structures, mostly along the western side of the wadi, over a range of c. 200 m. Further inland, US16 consists of at least four structures spread over 100 m. US05 is of a similar pattern, while US04 comprised only one hut.

So far, it is uncertain whether these sites and even the individual structures within each site were contemporary. What can be said about the nature of this occupation, which probably dates to the Christian period, is that it was scattered in the lower courses of the wadis, well away from the present day area of cultivation, and that it was architecturally of a very basic type.

US18, which is not associated with rock art, is located in a sheltered position beside a wadi. The site is much sanded up, but two hut foundations are exposed. No diagnostic finds were discovered. From its position in the island interior, this site might be prehistoric rather than Christian.

More substantial are the remains of another site in the eastern part of the island. US22 is situated at the edge of a plateau overlooking the river bank. The site includes two areas of about 450 and 700 m² littered with stones, red brick and small fragments of plaster. Individual structures could not be made out. Separated from these areas, on a small terrace between two rocky ridges, a kom contains the remains of a mudbrick house. The kom measures c. 11 x 13 m, and the original structure should only have been slightly smaller. Clearly visible is its central corridor, about 1.4 m wide and oriented east-west, from which at least two sequences of rooms lead off on either side (Fig. 5). Fragments of red brick, worked stone and stone slabs have been found on the kom. The associated pottery indicates a date in the Classic Christian period.

At the site US25, on the slope of the plateau near US22, a small part of a red brick structure was brought to light through recent diggings. Its nature and extension could not be ascertained. The site surface is covered with red-brick fragments.

A last and enigmatic site, US08, was recorded right in the centre of the village el-Uboli. It is an irregular kom of about 45 m diameter, loosely covered with stones. Pottery is rare, but recent digging had produced some bone fragments, which are probably human. Apart from this indication towards its funerary character, the nature of the site remains uncertain.

**Tibet**

The small island of Tibet was our first place of investigation. Omar, the ferryman, made us a remarkable introduction to the island, heading the way into the only village shouting loudly: “Here come the people of the dam!” Omar is a very jovial person, and in this case the joke was on us.
Five sites were recorded on Tibet. Three of them are Christian settlements. TB02 comprises the foundations of two or three huts, preserved as circles of laid stones, as well as three smaller structures. TB05, situated on the peninsula Umm el-Hajar, included a minimum of 14 huts as well as numerous satellite installations. Apart from simple circular and rectangular ground-plans, there also are some composite structures with up to four rooms (Fig. 6). Usually, the building foundations survived as rows of heaped stones, but there are also some walls of dry-stone masonry built as two faces with a rubble core.

TB02 occupies a sandy terrace on the island plateau close to a very steep escarpment falling away to the Nile. There is a window-like opening in the rocky edges of the plateau allowing a free outlook over the river towards the main bank in a southern direction. TB05 extends over three terraces of the same kind, the main one overlooking the river towards the east. TB04 is a third instance of these 'terrace settlements', again with a view towards the south. Structural remains visible on the surface in this case are limited to one circular hut foundation and a small shelter composed of dry-stone walls set against three natural boulders on the slope of a rocky hill.

TB03 is a threshing place close to TB02. It is out of use and may be of some antiquity. It has an outer stone lining of one to several layers—a feature which is not normally noted with modern specimens. There is also a stone setting in its centre. A second threshing place close by is somewhat smaller and much destroyed. Whether these installations are chronologically related to the nearby settlement TB02 is uncertain.

Finally, TB01 is an enigmatic kom which, comparably to its counterpart US08, is situated in the centre

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12 Namely towards the peninsula of Umm Domi; cf. Budka in this volume.

15 Recent threshing places are a frequent phenomenon in the area. They are circular spaces of several metres diameter, with a sandy surface, devoid of any stones or pebbles. Typically they are situated on elevated ground, open to the north wind. Some of them have a central stone setting which probably fixed a pole to which the threshing ox could be tied—although, according to local informants, animals are not used for this work nowadays.
of Tibet village in the lowland. It is somewhat smaller, measuring only 25 x 12 m. Again it is loosely covered with stones, there is only little pottery of apparently Christian date, and according to the local inhabitants, recent digging had produced the remains of burials — a report, which is substantiated by the presence of bone fragments on the surface.

Apart from a silex flake and an isolated early sherd from TB05, there was no direct evidence for an occupation of the island before the Christian period. Yet the area of TB05 includes an unusually large abri under an extensive rock overhang which at both sides has artificial stone settings. Although the area was searched carefully, no finds could be made either in the abri or on the slope in front of it. The entire site is though very much sanded up.

**Sur**

Work on Sur again concentrated on selected areas, namely the southern part and a stretch on the eastern side of the island. Moreover, following reports of the local inhabitants, the northern tip of the island was also examined.

As on Us and Tibet, the archaeological record on Sur has a number of characteristic features. The first kind of site is typified by SR24. This site comprises a number of circular stone structures which, according to surface finds, namely pottery and lithics, date from an early, i.e., Neolithic or Kerma, period. Thirteen of these structures form a dense cluster in the centre of the site (Fig. 7). Some of them have entrances to the east and the north. This substantiates their interpretation as foundation courses of huts. Immediately south of this cluster, a tumulus of heaped stones is situated, and a further five tumuli are scattered up to 50 m south and east. They seem to be graves — but the verification of this thesis must await excavation. If our interpretation is correct, the site represents a small settlement with an attached burial-ground.\(^{11}\)

It is situated at the edge of the plateau overlooking the lowland.

SR06 is a similar site in a similar position on a spur of the plateau. It comprises a dense cluster of circular stone structures, larger than SR24. South of it, a few tumuli were found. Against the hinterland the site

\(^{11}\) See Paner 2003, 175f. for a similar site.
is blocked by an elongated heap of stones c. 10 m long and 5 m wide, giving the impression of a very basic fortification. The density and the composition of the finds, including, apart from pottery, also bone fragments, snail shells, lithic tools and grindstones, point towards the domestic nature of the site.

SR12 has two dense hut clusters on a summit at the edge of the plateau. In this case, individual structures and their functions are still harder to identify. The central concentrations are surrounded by numerous pits. Some of them are placed at the foot of natural boulders and seem to possess a stone lining. Whether they represent graves is uncertain, but fragments of possibly human bones at the surface of some pits hint towards this.

At the site of SR07 the relationship seems to be reversed: an area of densely clustered structures comprises seven more or less massive tumuli, i.e., with only a small or no central space devoid of stones — apparently graves. One stone structure to the southeast possibly represents the remains of a hut: it has an opening with a kind of screening wall. A third installation is a tumulus with only a small central sandy space and substantial stone settings at its north-eastern side; whether it is a domestic or a funerary installation is completely uncertain.

A further ten sites, apparently all of early, i.e., Kerma or even Neolithic date, pose similar identification problems:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SR02</td>
<td>7 x tumuli: graves (?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SR04</td>
<td>1 stone ring: hut (?) with lithic cache and working place (?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SR05</td>
<td>2 tumuli: graves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SR09</td>
<td>1 tumulus: grave (?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SR10</td>
<td>3 tumuli: graves; 1 stone ring: hut</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SR11</td>
<td>stone structures; 2 concentrations of large quartz pebbles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SR14</td>
<td>1 stone ring with opening to the west: hut</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SR17</td>
<td>2 stone rings: huts (?); 1 stone ring of large quartz pebbles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SR18</td>
<td>1 stone ring with stone pedestal and monolith</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SR25</td>
<td>1 tumulus: grave; 1 stone ring: hut</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Among the most remarkable features of these sites is a small cache of cores and flakes of different raw materials at the outside of the stone ring in SR04, and an area rich in lithic and pottery finds, possibly a working place, adjacent to it.

One of the three structures in SR17 consists of very large, loosely set chunks of local quartz. Most conspicuous is the presence of this material in the enigmatic site SR11. It includes several much disturbed stone structures, among them two small tumuli, of the usual granite and two large concentrations of big quartz pebbles of up to 30 cm in diameter. The site is close to the modern village of es-Sur and seems to have been used as playground by the local children and through their endeavours partially rearranged. The pottery collected and the amounts of large stones, especially the quartz chunks, point, however, to its antiquity.

By far the most intriguing site is SR18 (Fig. 8). Situated in a small valley near the lowland, but relatively far away from the modern occupation, it seems to have remained intact. It features a circular stone structure with a diameter of c. 2 m. Its sandy central space is occupied by a stone-built pedestal onto which a monolith of conspicuously lighter colour than the surrounding building material is placed. The entire assemblage could not have been erected without effort and is doubtlessly ancient. The almost total absence of cultural material on the surface at present prevents dating, but it also points towards the non-domestic nature of the installation.

SR08 is a shelter in the island interior. It consists of a wall of small stones built against a large boulder. A few sherds of early date were found with it.

SR15 represents a hut with two walls protruding from a natural outcrop which thus forms the back wall. Finds are limited to a few undiagnostic sherds. Therefore, the date of the structure is uncertain.

The extensive presence of an early, i.e., Neolithic and/or Kerma, population is further testified by finds
of cultural material which are not connected with any structural remains (SR03 [?], SR16, SR20) or are mixed in at later sites (SR01, SR13, SR19, SR21, SR26, SR27).

SR03 comprises four small heaps of stone which, however, seem to be recent alamat, i.e., signposts close to a modern track. SR20 is a concentration of cultural material, covering a stretch of several hundred metres in the lowland. It yielded early, i.e., Neolithic or Kerma, pottery, lithics and grindstones as well as later ceramics. No structural remains could be detected.

SR21, at the base of the slope towards the plateau, includes three structures of stone-built walls with a rubble fill. They have circular and rectangular ground-plans, and undoubtedly are the remains of huts. An adjacent second occupation area comprised further small stone buildings, which are set against natural outcrops and boulders. Their forms are very unclear. Surface finds include early pottery, lithics (among them two reused Levallois flakes), grindstones, conspicuous balls of white quartz and some later wheel-made sherds.

Mirroring the situation on Us, multi-period cemetery sites on Sur in general are confined to the lowland. SR01 comprises two burial-grounds. One developed around two stone ring superstructures of c. 7 and 9 m diameter. It contains numerous smaller tumuli and a number of box graves — altogether a minimum of 70 units. The second area is dominated by a large tumulus, about 20 m in diameter and 5 m in height, which apparently was surrounded by further graves — however, the site is heavily disturbed and much of its layout is uncertain at present. Finds included several early sherds.

SR13 consists of two large tumuli of about 25 m diameter. On their summits and slopes secondary burials were placed (Fig. 9). The entire site is recopied by a Muslim cemetery, which, according to local informants, itself had been in use for at least 100 years.

SR19 is also much disturbed. Its central area comprises a few small earth tumuli and some oval structures, possibly dispersed box graves, all in all about 55 units. On the adjacent slope towards the plateau, some uncertain structural remains may rep-

Fig. 9. View from a monumental tumulus towards a second specimen, both covered with later graves, at SR13.
The prominent feature of the site is a roughly square kom, c. 22 m in width and up to 3 m high. It undoubtedly contains the remains of the church. Its surface is littered with red brick rubble (Fig. 11); a few intact specimens measured 36 x 18 x 6–7 cm. Some specifically shaped and ornamented bricks apparently formed part of the architectural decoration. Among them some specimens with semicircular finger marks are most conspicuous. They are also present at the site of Umm Kieb.

Fragments of plaster are also ubiquitous. At the ‘back’, i.e., eastern side of the kom, mud-brick was noted. A recently dug pit in this area revealed several pieces of wood, to some of which remains of mud plaster adhere (Fig. 11). One shaped fragment was tentatively identified as the bolt of a door. From the same pit, fragments of glass vessels were collected.

Some granite blocks which apparently belonged to a podium or mastaba along the western side of the church seem to be more or less in their original position. Especially at the corners of the mound further blocks, up to 56 cm long, protrude.

South of the church, a cemetery area of about 400 m² was detected. Structural remains are not discernible, but a fragment of an inscribed ceramic

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15 The village on the site itself is called el-Markha. It is a relatively recent foundation and that is why it does not bear the name Kenisa, which had already been given to the older village some distance away from the site. Whether this site is identical with ‘Kaniset el-Sur’ mentioned by Jackson (1926, 26) as a find-spot of medieval pottery is uncertain.

16 Cf. below. According to verbal information of several colleagues, similar bricks were found in other places in the Sudan as well. For some published specimens from a superstructure of a Christian tomb, where they were apparently in a secondary position cf. Vila 1984, 226, fig. 267.

17 Cf. the church on Mis island for this feature; Welsby 2003, 11, fig. 2.8.
stele confirms its nature (Fig. 12). More extensive burial-grounds are situated north of the church. Structural remains of stone, mud-brick and red-brick on the surface point towards the existence of superstructures of some form. Fragments of plaster were found as well. Both cemetery areas are much disturbed. The total north-south extent of the site is about 130 m; further extensions may have disappeared under the modern houses.

The slope west of these areas, especially in front of the church, is also covered with cultural material, again partially cleared by modern activities. Whether this was another cemetery or an occupation area cannot be determined at present.

In the lowland, about 300 m south-west of the church, a cemetery of 13 box graves is situated (SR23). Its chronological relation to SR22 is still uncertain. On top of a hill about 200 m south-east of the church, a site comprising seven small circular and oval stone tumuli as well as two stone rings was recorded (SR28). Ceramics are lacking, but in one of the tumuli a red brick was built in. Although an identification as burial-ground is feasible, the nature of the site remains uncertain.

**Umm Kieb**

The last site recorded in this season lies on Umm Kieb at the northern tip of Sur. This small uninhabited island consists of two hills separated by a valley, which is flooded during high Nile. On top of the north-eastern, i.e., upstream, hill a small fortress is situated. According to the surface finds it probably is of Christian origin, with a phase of (re)use in the Islamic period. It has a roughly rectangular ground-plan, and is about 44 m long and at its maximum 32 m wide (Fig. 13). Its outer boundary walls follow the line of the steep cliffs on three sides, and are 1.5–2.0 m thick. The entrance must have been on the fourth, south-western side, but no gate has been detected so far.

The inner space can be divided into three main areas: a courtyard in the south-west (Fig. 14), a sequence of rooms in the back, i.e., the north-east, and an architecturally enigmatic area in the south-east. In the courtyard area, a building with two rooms is visible. The back part, comprising about 260 m², is characterized by a number of standing walls which make use of natural granite outcrops. They differ in construction and strength, and may thus belong to several building episodes. The presence of the same type of red bricks as those found at the church suggest the possibility that the sites may be contem-
porary, or that there was some reuse of building material from SR22.

The complex and interpretively problematic south-eastern area is separated from the courtyard by a stone wall with a tumbled mudbrick lining, which may be a secondary feature. The portion of a room hewn in the rock at the north-eastern end of this partition may belong to a first building phase and points towards the original existence of further buildings in this area. Apparently later, a roughly square structure was erected in the south-western part of the partition. It seems to be a solid heap of rubble, red bricks and stones reused for this purpose. Complete bricks measure 37 x 18 x 6 cm. The structure may have been the basis for a bastion or a watch tower of perishable material.

Pottery collected from the surface is confined to coarse handmade wares. A murhaka, a large lower grindstone, was found in the back part of the site. The only other find, from the courtyard area, is a fragment of an archer’s loose of granodiorite, whose significance in this context remains unclear. A similar object was found in the Monastery at Ghazali (Shinnie/Chittick 1961, 26, fig. 5.3f).

The landscape and its use

The landscape of the concession area is extremely manifold. This small-scale variation is directly mirrored in its (pre)historical uses. The archaeological record of each of the islands has its own specific profile.

On Us, early, i.e., Neolithic and/or Kerma, cemeteries are situated on the ridges of the plateau in the inner part of the island. They are organized in a characteristic way, apparently displaying social hierarchies. It may be the solitary prominence of Jebel Us which leads to the impression that the cemeteries were oriented towards this mountain. Even today it is a focus of thought and a feature of local identification. Our ferryman Omar told us that he had been asked by an old man about the prospective level of the new lake. He had answered that all the land would be flooded. The old man had asked back: “Even Jebel Us?” On Omar’s affirmative answer he replied: “Then the Manasir will be no more”.

The location of two Neolithic settlement sites at the edges of wadis in the island interior confirms

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18 Cf. the contribution of Pawel Wolf in this volume.
a pattern present in the concessions further downstream. It has been suggested that it results from a moister climate in this period which had made the areas closer to the river swampy and thus unsuitable for occupation. However, both on Us and Sur, there exist multi-period cemetery sites in the lowlands which include an early component. On Sur, also sites without any structural remains are located close to the river bank. In contrast, the early sites combining settlement and cemetery areas were only found on Sur. Their location at the edge of the plateau rather than further inland is highly specific, too.

A feature common to Us and Sur are the extensive multi-period burial-grounds in the lowlands. In contrast, Post-Meroitic cemeteries with large tumulus superstructures in the junctions of wadis is another feature specific to Us. Likewise, the Christian hut settlements which are dispersed in the lower courses of the wadis are a characteristic of this island. On Sur, comparable sites are situated at the edge or at the bottom of the plateau, overlooking the cultivated land — a location which is shared on Us by the Christian site US22. Another unique feature is the large site SR22 with the church and the probably related fortress on the small island of Umm Kieb.

Tibet features three Christian settlement sites of a totally different nature. They are placed high up on the plateau, inconveniently far away from the agricultural land. This, as well as their look-out character, suggests that they were positioned there for protective or defensive reasons. No cemeteries were found on Tibet — apparently, its inhabitants still frequented burial-grounds on the adjacent mainland or the larger islands.

Another specific feature of Us are the rock art sites which have not so far been found on either Sur or Tibet.

Prospects

Another field season of H.U.N.E. is planned for spring 2005. Then, the reconnaissance shall continue on the two upstream islands of Shirri and Sherari. First excavations will take place on the island of Us. Further investigations will be directed towards the completion of the survey, enabling a review of the settlement history as outlined above, as well as its extension and enrichment in details. Excavation work will concentrate on the settlements and on clarifying the dating of the various types of sites.

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