

# Social Geographical Survey of Dar al-Manasir

by David Haberlah

## Introduction

The research presented in the lecture has been conducted during the first half year of 2005 as a subproject of the "Humboldt-University Nubian Expedition" (H.U.N.E.) of the "Seminar of Archaeology and Cultural Studies in North-Eastern Africa". The aim of this project has been to document the cultural landscape and local material and non-material traditions of the Manasir tribe (المناصير) in Northern Sudan. Since their homeland Dar al-Manasir (دار المناصير) is located at the area of the Fourth Nile Cataract it will be submerged by the reservoir lake of the Merowe High Dam (Hamdab Reservoir, خزان الحامداب) in the near future. The construction of the dam causes the flooding of a 170 km long stretch of riverbanks along the Nile, including many islands and most Manasir villages and agricultural land. About 60.000 residents, mostly of the Manasir tribe, will be relocated to distant areas (cf. Al-HAKEM 1993, LAGNAH 2005).

The traditional ways of cultivation, cultural life and many traditions of the Manasir are inseparably connected to the riverine landscape of the Fourth Cataract with its arid climate and the remoteness of its many small islands with their specific settlement patterns. All these factors will change drastically once the Manasir people have to leave their homeland towards an uncertain future. It is to be expected that their unique way of life and culture will transform and adapt to the new realities and surroundings and that during this process traditional knowledge and skills are going to be lost.

In order to at least document the present culture of the Manasir and preserve some knowledge and memories from the unique cultural landscape of Dar al-Manasir there is an urgent need of anthropological research and programs of cultural preservation. H.U.N.E., otherwise responsible for salvage archaeology, responded to this task by carrying out the mentioned social geographical subproject dealing with aspects described in the following lecture. The research has been conducted by David Haberlah and Jutta von dem Bussche, joining the archaeologists' team headed by Prof. Dr. phil. Claudia Näser during their field work in February and March 2005. The project was financed by the "Programm Kulturerhalt" of the German Department of Foreign Affairs as a contribution to the preservation of the culture of the Manasir. The research concentrated on the concession area of H.U.N.E. which is situated in the heart of the Manasir Country including the left bank of the Nile between the village of Salamat (سلمات) and Gebel Musa (جبل موسى), and the four major islands of Us (اوز), Sur (سور), Sherari (شرري) und Shiri (شيري).

## Land classification

When approaching Dar al-Manasir from the surrounding deserts, the most striking feature of the landscape is the sudden green narrow band of palm trees lining the shores of the Nile. This strip of land is called *Ashu* (أشو), and is generally not more than 20 m wide. It

is situated between the seasonally inundated land of the river bank called *Gerif* (جرف) and the traditional "waterwheel land" called *Saqiah* (ساقية), (cf. SALIH 1999:99). Nowadays irrigation water is provided by diesel water pumps (cf. BECK 2001).

Date palm trees and Doum palms (*Hyphaene thebaica*) are perfectly adapted to the regional climate of Dar al-Manasir. They are drought resistant and can withstand the exceptionally hot dry and rainless summers and cold dry winters. The proximity of *Ashu* land to the river Nile makes the water table accessible to the deeply penetrating roots of fully grown palm trees throughout the year, making it the most valuable class of land (cf. LEACH 1919:101, SALIH 1999:47, 99). Since dates constitute the most relevant cash crop in Dar al-Manasir their cultivation is not limited to *Ashu* land only, but expands along the irrigation channels of the *Saqiah* land. During recent years date trees even substitute seasonally irrigated crops such as wheat, beans and okra on the traditional *Saqiah* land.

## **Date Cultivation in Dar al-Manasir**

Sudan is among the countries that produce good quality dates. Date trees are cultivated from the Egyptian border in the North all the way along the Nile south of Khartoum until Sennar. Bilad al-Mahas, Sukut, Dongola, Dar al-Shaiqiyah, Dar al-Manasir, Dar al-Rubatab and the areas around Bauqah and Berber along the Nile boast extensive date groves. In each date growing region a particular composition of palm tree varieties, including endemic species, are grown (cf. YUSIF 1995:273-274). During the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium (1899-1955), Dar al-Manasir had been described as the southernmost limit of date cultivation in the Sudan (cf. JACKSON 1926:8).

### **Propagation of date trees**

In order to multiply the number of fruit-bearing trees traditional offshoot propagation is practised all along the Nile in Sudan. Lower offshoots called *Shatla* (شتلا) develop from axillary buds at the lower trunk of a parent palm and are cut off during early spring season. A well chosen offshoot will not only guaranty a female fruit bearing palm tree but also inherit the same qualities of its mother plant (cf. ZAID 2002). The date trees in the region of the Fourth Cataract attain an age of up to 150 years and consist most often of multiple shoots from a single clump called *Bu'rah* or *Hufrah* (بؤرة or حفرة), (cf. LEACH 1919:102). Satisfactory date production ceases with an age of 90 to 100 years. With increasing age and height the palm tree becomes more difficult to climb in order to be pollinated and harvested.

### **Pollination of date trees**

Pollination of the female fruits is conducted in late February and beginning of March which is, according to the Coptic calendar still used for agricultural purposes by the Manasir, the end of the month *Amshir* (cf. SALIH 1999:162). During this season the stout male spathes split and their inflorescences reach maturity. Fresh strands of flowers are carefully picked out of the male clusters and packaged to strands of two called *Rabetah Qaru'ah* (ربطة قرعة). The Manasir consider the variety of a potent male seedling irrelevant and pollinate all their female inflorescences from the same male tree. The process of

pollination is called *Qaffes* (قفز) and can be carried out by any person physically able to climb the palm tree. In each spathe of female inflorescence about 8-15 packages are tucked between the fruit bearing spikelets. An adult female palm produces around 15 to 25 spathes, each spathe containing 150 to 200 date bearing spikelets (cf. ZAID 2002).

### Stages of growth

Dates have to pass five stages of growth before developing into ripe fruits (*Timar*, تمار) that are harvested in August and September:

- 1) *Tamim* (تميم): During the first 15 days up to one month the emerging fruits are of no use.
- 2) *Dafiq* (دفيق): The subsequent green stage lasts for about 2 ½ months and the growing fruits are still bitter. Depending on the variety a certain ratio of the fruits falls off prematurely. These green dates are fed to the livestock.
- 3) *'Aifanunah* (عيفنونة): This interval lasts in-between 10 and 15 days during which the fruits acquire their sweetness. Children will start eating fruits that are about to fall off.
- 4) *Safuri* (صفوري): During the following month the maturing fruits don't fall off easily anymore. Some date varieties can already be harvested.
- 5) *Umm Ra's* (أم رأس): This final stage of ripening is also called *Rutab* (رتب). The fruits are turning brown from their end towards the perianth. The Manasir never cut the whole fruit bunch called *Shakhlub* (شخلوب) but only single spikelets, with the result of thinning out the clusters and letting the remaining fruits gain in size.

### Harvest of dates

Once a date tree is successfully planted it constitutes an economic plant returning good yearly yields for little labour. A mature date tree supplied with sufficient water and natural fertilizer (*Sibalah*, زبالة) will produce in-between two and three sacks (*Shawal*, شوال) each about 75 kilos (1 *Shawal* = 15 *Ruba'* = 123.75 litres, cf. CORKILL 1948:126). The exact amount depends strongly on the date variety, the specific growing conditions and age of the palm tree. SALIH who surveyed the region in 1995 reports an average ownership of 26 date trees per household, producing approximately 900 kg annually (1999:48).

Traditionally the harvest is stored in old water jars (*Zir*, زير or *Gerr*, جرّ) that are preparatorily lined with ash. A further layer of ash on top seals it and protects the fruits from maggots (*Sus*, سوس).

[Information by 'Abdallah Ahmad al-Hassan Abu Qurun from Mideimir (عبدالله أحمد الحسن) and 'Abd al-Hafidh from Al-Dum (عبد الحفيظ من الدوم, شرري) on Sherari Island]

### Cultural relevance of dates and related traditions

Each farming household in Dar al-Manasir owns or at least shares a number of date trees (cf. SALIH 1999:47-48). They are a viable source of income and nutrition.

Date and Doum palms are not only important because of their edible fruits. The by-products of these trees make up the essential raw material for locally produced tools and handicrafts.

In addition, date seeds (*Nawa*, نوى) and the *Dafiq*-fruits are used as fodder. They are recommended to improve the taste of both meat and milk of the livestock. The seeds are crushed on lower grinding stones (*Tahwanah*, طاحونة - originally used for grinding flour). Surplus is sold at the weekly local market *Suq Salamat* and is the most expensive kind of fodder.

Date trees also constitute a constant source of pride and belonging. The special relationship between the Manasir and their palm trees is reflected in local traditions and sayings:

Whenever a new date shoot is planted the process is accompanied by a traditional invocation; the *Basmallah* is followed by the sentence "*The intention (نية) is white and the soil (طين) is black. The fruits of this tree are freely offered (صدق) to the beggar, freely offered to the thief*". That is to say that the tree should provide alms in the name of Allah to whoever is in need of it, and therefore should be under His protection.

SALIH recorded a similar saying in Birti: "*It has been planted for hungry people, passing by guests, wayfarers, thieves, good will seekers, enemies and friends*" (SALIH 1999:47). The author is further bringing a custom to attention that permits everybody in Dar al-Manasir to collect date fruits for immediate consumption. This custom, usually applied only to dates fallen to the ground and for women and children, differs from the national Islamic and statutory law on that matter (SALIH 1999:47-48,200).

### **Monetary value and compensation of date trees**

The mentioned economic, cultural and social factors result in a practical inconceivability of selling palm trees as real assets among the Manasir. The situation in the twenties of last century described by LEACH (1919:99-100) with the following words is still very much true of today; "... a man being in need of money, but disliking the thought of parting from the whole of his property, might sell half a tree. This however was a very rare occurrence, and was only resorted to occasionally in cases of real distress and only in [...] the poorest part of the province. [...] In ordinary circumstances it was a disgrace to sell either land or date trees". To quote the Mansuri 'Abdallah Ahmad al-Hassan Abu Qurun (عبدالله أحمد الحسن أبو قرون) in 2005: "*I have almost seen all of Dar al-Manasir and I know of whole gardens being sold in the [neighbouring] Shaiqiyah Country and Rubatab Country. But I know of no more than two instances when a Mansuri ever sold his palm trees. And in both cases they only sold one, two or three trees reacting in an emergency situation. Usually, in such situations of financial difficulties the people will ask the person to be patient until they collectively manage to come up with the necessary money. This is why you cannot put a price on a palm tree; you would not be able to sell it. Date trees do not have a price! Your palm trees and your offspring are regarded as one (التمر (دي و جنك واحد)*"<sup>1</sup>.

This attitude of the Manasir is reflected in the practice of local merchants issuing loans to peasants in exchange for prospected harvests of particular trees.

For most Manasir it is therefore inconceivable to receive monetary compensation in exchange for their palm trees which are going to be flooded together with their villages and other agricultural land as a result of the erection of the Hamdab High Dam (Marawi Multi-Purpose Hydro Project). According to AL-HAKEM (1993:6) about 675000

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<sup>1</sup> The original Arabic statement has been translated by the author.

productive date trees will be lost in the course of flooding the reservoir lake. The information brochure of the Manasir Committee (LAGNAH 2005:6) is speaking of 250000 productive and 300000 male or not yet fruit-bearing date trees in the year 2003 (تقدير النخيل المثمر فى عام 2003 = 250000 نخلة تقريبا و تقدير النخيل الغير مثمر فى عام 2003 = 300000 (نخلة تقريبا).

In spring 2005 there still has not been any reliable information and therefore much confusion among the local population on the matter of which palm trees (depending on the status of land, age of trees and amount of taxes previously paid) are eventually going to be compensated and for how much. Apart from the monetary compensation, each 120 date trees on private property are supposedly to be compensated with one *Feddan* (0.47 ha) of land in the new relocation areas (cf. BECK 1997:84).

Since the local peasants are still kept unclear about the actual level of the reservoir lake and its consequences for the Nile water regime and the banks of the artificial lake, many nourish hopes to be able to continue living and cultivating their homeland. As a consequence only months ahead of forced resettlement new shoots of date trees are transplanted to higher areas and irrigated with much effort.

Even in the unlikely case of a reasonable monetary compensation, the loss of their date trees would pose a hardship especially for the older Manasir, who laboriously cultivated these trees to be able to live from their harvest in their old age when they can't work in the agriculture anymore (cf. BECK 1997:85).

### **Date varieties**

The Manasir are renown all throughout the Sudan for cultivating a wide range of date palm trees. Any small farming household tends to grow a variety of dates in order to be less vulnerable both to annually changing market prices and diseases affecting only specific types (cf. LEACH 1919:104, SALIH 1999:260).

The people are very proud of the taste, sweetness and nourishing merits of their dates and believe that these originate from their rocky land containing special minerals (cf. SALIH 1999:48). The dates from Dar al-Manasir compare well with dates of other regions in Sudan, although earlier reports qualify them as being of inferior quality not fetching the market price of fruits from (Old) Halfa and Dongola (cf. JACKSON 1926:8).

Date varieties and the average wholesale price during the harvest season 2004:

(Sudanese Dinar per sack [*Shawal*, شوال – at about 75kg; 1 *Shawal* = 15 *Rub'* (ربع) = 123.75 litres, cf. CORKILL 1948:126]):

<i>Wad Laqai</i>	(ود لقاى)	SD 6000
<i>Wad Khatib</i>	(ود ختیب)	SD 5000
<i>Barakawi</i>	(بركاوى)	SD 7500-8000
' <i>Abid Rahim</i>	(عبد رحيم)	SD 7500-8000
<i>Bur</i>	(بور)	SD 6000
<i>Bireir</i>	(بيرير)	SD 6000
<i>Qundeil</i>	(قندیل)	SD 7500-8000 SD
<i>Bit Tamudhah</i>	(بت تموضه)	SD 6500

[prices reported by Al-Tayib Babikir Ahmad Muhammad from Mideimir (بابكر أحمد الطيّب) (مديمر محمد من), local peasant who studied agriculture in Halfah al-Gadidah.)

### Meals and beverages from dates

The date fruit is nutritious, sweet and can easily be stored all year long. The Manasir believe that human beings can survive for years if they just have enough dates and water (cf. SALIH 1999:47). The Bedouin Manasir alternatively call dates *al-Zad al-negidh* (الزاد النجيز) with the meaning of "the 'real' food for travelling"

Dry dates are washed, moistened in water and offered in-between and following the two daily meals. Date fruits constitute the traditional substitute for sugar and are consumed with tea.

The Manasir kitchen also uses dates for the following dishes:

- **Madidah Balah** (مديدة بلح) is a date pudding. The dates are boiled until they thicken and subsequently are let to cool. Butter can be added on top.
- **Kurasah al-Balah** (كراسة البلح) is a simple dish that consists of the traditional fresh bread called *Kurasah* topped with small pieces of dates. It can be kept for a few days and is used by the Bedouin Manasir as a sweat bread for travel.
- **Barbur** (بربور) is the traditional diet for women during the first three days after having given birth. No other meals are allowed in order to "*let the blood out*". Pieces of dried dates are boiled in water until they develop a consistency between pudding and soup.

During festivals alcoholic beverages made from dates have been consumed traditionally:

- **Sharbut** (شربوت) is a common date wine. The dates are soaked in water and are fermented in a closed up *Zir* for three to fifteen days.
- **Nabid** (نبيد): The *Nabid* is a stronger variety of *Sharbut*. A handful of sorghum grains that have just reached the stage of sprouting are dried in the sun and added to the young *Sharbut* as a substitute for yeast.
- **Baqaniah** (بقتية) is a date beer. Small dried sprouting seeds of sorghum are mixed with dates and are laid out on a watered *Birsh*. After a couple of days the *Birsh* is strained and the resulting liquid is cooled in a *Zir*. The drink is considered *hilal* (حلال) and given to ailing old people.

[information by 'Abdallah Ahmad al-Hassan Abu Qurun from Mideimir (عبدالله أحمد الحسن) (أبو قرون من مديمر) and Muhammad al-Mansuri from Al-'Atamanin on Shiri Island (محمد) (المانصوري من العظمانين في شري)]

### Material Culture of the Manasir

The material culture of the Manasir is very basic primarily relying on the by-products of palm tree cultivation. Date trees not only constitute the main source of income and an important supply of nutrition in Dar al-Manasir, but the Manasir also make intelligent use off all different parts of the palm tree. They are producing diverse household items, tools

for the daily garden work and building material for their traditional mud houses (*Galus*, جالوص) from it.

The following account lists the different raw materials and the various products manufactured from them:

### **Garidah** (جريدة)

*Garidah* is the midrib part of the palm leaf. In order to be used as a raw material the *Garidah* is stripped of its leaflets and spikes and its broad petiole is removed. *Garidat* are an esteemed raw material for the production of robust containers and furniture.

The Manasir use it to manufacture small boxes (*Sunduq*, صنضق) in which they carry vegetables to the weekly market at *Suq Salamat* (سوق سلامت).

Additionally, *Garidat* are a good fencing material used for making small hutches called *Qafas* (قفص) to protect the chicken against wild animals. The Manasir also use it as roofing material to thatch their traditional mud houses.

### **Sa'fah** (سفة)

*Sa'fat* are the leaflets of palm leaves and the most important raw material for a variety of household items and baskets for the garden work.

Household items of particular cultural and practical significance are woven mats called *Burush* (sing. *Birsh*, برش).

Mats that are called *Segagah* (سجاجة) are two ells wide and are laid out on the traditional beds called '*Anqarib* (عنقريب). A plain uncoloured *Segagah* is kept aside in every household to be used for washing and carrying the body of a deceased.

A second type of *Segagah* is dyed in different colours and laid out by the bride groom during bridal night and further marriage festivities. It is reused for the period of forty days (ربع) after a woman has given birth and during which she is not supposed to leave the house.

A different kind of *Birsh* can be found in many households and in community places such as the guest house (*Madeifah*, مضيفة) of the village. It is four ells long, and will be rolled out on the floor during banquets or for prayer and is called *Birsh Ruba'i* (برش رباعي).

The best *Burush* are woven from the leaves of *Mishriq* palm trees, prominent for their soft and flexible leaflets, although leaflets of other varieties are added for higher durability. Old *Burush* are reused for mending holes in the ceiling or for supporting small window openings in the rooms.

Another very specific mat has a circular shape with a central hole the size of a head. It is called *Nutu'* (نطع). Once a week most Manasir women apply a "smoke mask" called *Dukhan* (دخان) to their face and body. They burn the wood of Acacia seyal (*Talh*; طلح) in the kitchen hearth or a buried earthen pot in the courtyard. When the burning wood starts to produce smoke the woman will place herself on the *Nutu'* above the hole, covered by a big piece of coarse fabric and fumigate parts of her body until the upper skin peels off. As a result of this weekly procedure the colour of her skin will appear more pale (cf. CROWFOOT 1918:127-128). The *Dukhan* can also be used for medical purposes burning additional wood of Acacia ehrenbergiana (*Salam*; سلم) and *Balanites aegyptiaca* (*Higlig*; حجليج).

One very common household item made from palm leaflets is the *Mi'laq* (معلق), also called *Mishle'ib* (مشلعيب). It is a simple loop big enough to hold a food container. It is made from two crossed straps of plaited palm leaflets. The *Mi'laq* is hanging freely from the ceiling, from wooden beams in the courtyard or in doorways. It is a simple and effective local utensil to protect small quantities of food from animals.

Another storage device made from palm leaflets is the *Shedifah* (شدفة), a tightly plaited container for storing sorghum (*Dhurah* or 'Ayish, ذرة or عيش).

For their work on the fields the Manasir generally rely on a minimum of equipment.

The most important and much diversified objects are baskets made from palm leaflets. A multitude of different sizes with somehow similar shapes are in use, each type of basket meant for certain materials to be carried in.

The *Quffah* (قفة) is the most common basket and used for carrying dates and clothes.

The *Kunshibr* (كونشبر) is a slightly smaller basket in which earth (*Turab*, تراب) and manure (*Maruq*; ماروق) are transported (cf. NICHOLLS 1918:24). A proper builder and cultivator (*Turbal*, تربال – both working with mud and therefore not further distinguished by the Manasir) is expected to employ his own *Kunshibr*.

The *Ghutaiah* (غتاية) is another very common small basket used to carry dates and seeds. Its size is exactly defined, since this basket is used as a local measurement for sorghum.

*Ghutaiah* are exceptionally tightly plaited from leaflets of *Gau* palm trees.

The *Saqataiah* (سقتاية) is a multipurpose basket, its size in-between a *Quffah* and a *Ghutaiah* (سقتاية لاهها قفة ولاها غتاية).

Special baskets are used for mounting on animals. The Bedouin Manasir have large containers for transporting sorghum on the back of camels called *Qalibah* (قلبية).

A very particular funnellike basket is the *Rahal* (رحل). It is always used in pairs of two, attached to the sides of a donkey by placing a transverse wooden stick through their handles. *Rahal* are used to carry manure, mud or dates. The lower end of the funnel consists of a narrow hole (about 10 cm wide) that is plugged with a piece of cloth or *Lif* (ليف). In order to unload the cargo the plug is simply pulled out from below. Nowadays *Rahal* are mostly substituted by a combined pair of reworked plastic sacks of wheat.

Other items plaited from palm leaflets are the *Tabaq* (طبق), a flat tray for winnowing wheat and sorghum during the threshing process and a small fan called *Hebabah* (هبابة), for heating the coal during the preparation of the traditional coffee (*Gabenah*, جبنة).

### **Lif** (ليف) or **Ashmiq** (أشميق)

The connective tissue between young fronds, which eventually develops into a dried brown vascular bundle of rough fibre, attached to the lower edges of the midribs ensheathing the trunk, makes up a very durable tough fibre (cf. ZAID 2002).

*Lif* can be woven to different strengths of ropes called *Hibal* (sing. *Hibl*, حبل). Ropes are used for the handles of baskets, the bridles for donkeys and camels, for carrying water containers attached to a stick and to string the frames of the traditional beds.

*Lif*, preferably from *Gau* date trees is also used as a soft but durable filling material called *Lihaf* (لحاف). Among the older Manasir *Lihaf* is preferred to cotton for filling mattresses and considered very healthy.

*Lif* is further employed to fill of the lower parts of donkey saddles in order to prevent sores by friction and called *Libdah* (لبدة) or *Bedidah* (بديدة – the "ة" can be substituted by a



"ى"). The Bedouin Manasir employ *Lif* for the same purpose in their camel saddles and call it **Tillah** (تلة).

*Lif* further plays an important role in the Sudanese coffee tradition as the straining plug **Lifei** (ليفى) in the spout of the *Gabenah*.

### **Sabitah** (سبيطة)

The fruit bunch of the female palm tree is also called *Shakhlub* (شخلوب) and consists of a central stem and about 100 to 150 strands of spikelets.

The whole cluster can be used as a broom to sweep the ground whereby it is called **Hanquqah** (حنقوقة).

But also some of the finest basketry of the region is created by wrapping palm leaflets, preferably of the *Dum* palm around a strand of spikelets. The resulting strand is spirally plaited to dishes. They are either used as a **Kabbet** (كبّت) for covering meals or the earthen water containers (**Zir**, زير), or as a **Tabaq** (طبق) in the shape of flat bowl for serving the traditional *Kisrah* bread (كسرة) on special occasions. The central part of *Tabaqat* can be worked from leather. Straps of cloth or plastic may be added to the leaflets in order to make the work more colourful and water resistant.

### **Other raw materials**

Apart from the listed by-products of palm trees, wood of other trees and the leather of the animals are used by the Manasir to manufacture tools and household items.

The finest but rarely found handicraft of the region are big bowls (**Tabaq**, طبق), skilfully crafted out of the soft wood of *Faidherbia albida* (*Haraz*, حراز). *Haraz* wood is also used for the lower parts of donkey saddles. Nowadays the practise of fine wood carving has declined rapidly, one reason being the shortage of the particularly suitable *Haraz* tree.

The most common agricultural tools in Dar al-Manasir are the **Turiah** (طورية), a hoe with an angular blade that proves very functional in opening and closing irrigation channels, and a small sawed sickle. Whereas the blade of the *Turiah* is bought from outside and often even imported from China, all wooden handles are locally produced.

A different local impediment entirely manufactured from wood is the rake-like **Arbil** (اربيل) used for levelling the ground.

Very popular among the Bedouin Manasir is the **Qirbah** (قربة), a hose made from the entire skin of a goat. Filled with a liquid it becomes moist and flexible. The *Qirbah* is hung in a shady windy place, either from the ceiling, a beam or on a wooden tripod. Due to constant evaporation its content is cooled down considerably. The riverain Manasir employ the *Qirbah* primarily for cooling fermented milk since their water is cooled in huge permeable earthen jars called **Zir** (زير). These jars are placed in the shadow of a tree or lined up in a row in isolated covered mud structures called **Mazirah** (مزيرة).

[Information by 'Abdallah Ahmad al-Hassan Abu Qurun from Mideimir (عبدالله أحمد الحسن) (أبو قرون من مديمر) on the western bank of the Nile, Halimah Hassan al-'Aqib from Khaliwah (حليمة حسن العقيب من خليوة في سور) and Al-Tahir 'Uthman al-Tahir from Musari' (الطاهير عثمان الطاهير من مزارع في سور) on Sur Island]

## Architecture and Settlement Patterns in Dar al-Manasir

The arid climatic conditions and the abundance of alluvial clay throughout Dar al-Manasir are a perfect supposition for developing a tradition of mud house architecture (*Galus*, جالوص). The Manasir are renowned for their skills of building mud houses all over Sudan (cf. SALIH 1999:152).

An intensive case study in the village Atoyah (عطوية) on Sherari Island has been carried out resulting in detailed information about the development of architectural styles and functional demands of single buildings and settlement patterns in Dar al-Manasir during the last six generations (cf. HABERLAH & VON DEM BUSSCHE 2005).

## Non-material culture in Dar al-Manasir

In order to understand how the Manasir perceive themselves, their history and homeland, it is important to understand and document their non-material culture. Young men are fond of singing local songs accompanied by the *Tambur* whereas older Manasir recite poetry and narrate legends of the region.

### Poetry by Ibrahim 'Ali Salman

Ibrahim 'Ali Salman (إبراهيم علي سلمان) is the most famous contemporary poet of the Arab Manasir who inhabit the area of the Fourth Cataract of the Nile in Northern Sudan. He is referred to by the Manasir simply as "Ibrahim the poet" (إبراهيم الشاعر).

Ibrahim 'Ali Salman was born in 1937 as the youngest son of his father "The poet 'Ali" (al-Sha'ir 'Ali, الشاعر علي). Ibrahim died on the 30th March in 1995.

The poetry about his homeland Dar al-Manasir and the ongoing issue of the relocation of his tribe as a result of the Hamdab High Dam project is written in the Colloquial Arab language of the Manasir.

The poems of Ibrahim al-Sha'ir had been collected and compiled by his former student al-Nadhir Tag al-Sirr al-Bashir (النذير تاج السر البشير), currently working as a teacher in the elementary school on Sherari Island. Al-Bashir made his copy of the collection called "The Genius Diwan of the Manasir" (ديوان عبقرية المناصير) available to the Humboldt-University Nubian Expedition allowing them to digitalize, translate and publish the document (cf. BASHIR 1997) in order to reach a wider audience. The compilation comprises the poet life's work and is called "The Genius Diwan of the Manasir" (ديوان عبقرية المناصير). It probably is the only literary document from within Dar al-Manasir.

With the help of Sudanese Prof. Khidir A. Ahmed from the University of Neelein, Faculty of Arts (Dep. of History) and Abu Bakr Hamza Mohammad al-Sha'iri (أبو بكر همزة محمد الشاعر) from Siwa in Egypt, the following most relevant poems have been translated into English so as to allow an insight into the rare material.

The following poems are representing the affection Manasir people are showing for their homeland. The first poem has been written by Ibrahim while being on temporary work migration, a common step in the life of young male Manasir (cf. BECK 1999):

One day in the evening Ibrahim went home from the Sudanese Club [in Libya] after his fellow expatriates left him. He started to remember his friend Bashir 'Umer and wrote the following lines:

النادي السوداني وبعد أن فارقتي أخوتي وظللت وحيداً تذكرت صديقي البشير فكانت هذه الأبيات:

Oh Bashir I am tied down here  
Allah decided on his will  
Our people used to *travel* to Upper Egypt  
And not as remote as my own journey  
My situation becoming only more miserable  
The food consists of macaroni and salted meat  
And rain keeps falling down and snow  
My sleep is unstable and disturbed  
But the strangest thing will be the oncoming feast  
The father of *Sha'ib* will feel so lonely  
Where is *Shiri* and where are the black people  
Where is *Bisawi* with its pleasant breeze  
Life does not work out the way you wish for  
My longing is satisfied not growing anymore  
Exactly like the *old poet* was predicting  
The service to serve your people is a challenge  
And a man can't escape his destiny  
And fly but don't fly too far away  
Even if one would have to stay selling palm leaves  
Or irrigate the middle of the desert during summer  
It is all better than *travelling* so far away  
No money and no happy circumstances

يا البشير في انطبل قيد  
وقادر الله فيما يريد  
الناس قبيل تسفر للصعيد  
ما هو زي سفري أنا ده البعيد  
حالي زايد ديمه تنكيد  
اللعل مكرونة وقديد  
والسقط نازل والجليد  
ونومي بالليل كلو غميد  
والعجيبه إن حصل العيد  
أب شعيب وسط الناس وحيد  
وين شيري وين ناس العبيد  
وينه بسوي النسامه هيد  
الأمر ما يتمشي بالليد  
والطمع نقص ما بزيد  
زي ما قال الشاعر التليد  
إن خدم خدمة ناس عقيد  
ما بتقوت القاسمه السيد  
تاني طر طيره لا صعيد  
إن قعدت وبعث الجريد  
واللا سفته الصيف في الهويد  
ما بسافر السفر البعيد  
لا قروش لا حالاً صعيد

Another poem describes the initial hardships the Manasir faced at the time of the introduction of the diesel water pump (*Barbur*) during the sixties and seventies which revolutionized their agriculture schemes (cf. BECK 2001) as well as settlement patterns and architecture (cf. HABERLAH & VON DEM BUSSCHE 2005).

ولما كثر علل البابور فكر أهلها في إيجاد كسب غير الزراعة فكانت قصيدة الشاعر التي تصور حال الذين امتهنوا  
غيرها:

Oh *Barbur* of Bisawi your breakdowns exhaust us  
Your daily failings freeze our nerves

ابور بسوي من مرضك غلبنا  
وقوفك كل يوم برد عصبنا

<sup>2</sup> *travel*: temporary labour migration is locally referred to as "travelling". For male Manasir rotational migration is a regular stage in their life cycle and has become a cultural tradition (cf. BECK 1999:206-207)

*Sha'ib*: son of the poet

*Shiri*: biggest island and administrative and educational centre of Dar al-Manasir

*Bisawi*: small village in Dar al-Manasir, home to the family of Ibrahim al-Sha'ir

*old poet*: the father of the poet al-Sha'ir 'Ali

We brought a mechanic who took apart everything  
 We brought another one for the spare parts  
 Every morning anew we would ride and row to 'Uthman  
 And from the weight of our load we'd become tired  
 We have changed each and every single part of you  
 We became like a donkey stuck in mud  
 Oh Merciful Lord please relief us now  
 The credit from the bank is growing like long beans  
 If we manage we shall never raise one again  
 What is it with us and the *Barbur* stealing our money?  
 Our hair turning grey from expensive Diesel and the iron  
 parts  
 We should return to our animals, breaking firewood  
 Or else to singing and twirling our moustaches all day  
 long

جبنا صديق بالحديد طير قلبنا  
 وجبنا فتاح برضو بالأسبير جلبنا  
 كل صباحاً جديد بالعقبة لي عثمان ركبنا  
 ومن كثرة شواليتك تعبنا  
 لي عند الطرمبة غيارة جبنا  
 والحمار في طينو حد ما تكررنا  
 يا رب يا كريم تعدل دربنا  
 نحل دين العدس ومن بعده تبنا  
 مالنا ومالو بابوراً سلبننا  
 من جازو وحديدو الغالي شبننا  
 نرجع للغنم وكسير حطبنا  
 وللا نرجع للغنا وبريم شنبنا  
 واللا نرجع لي تخاريجنا وكضبنا

The river Nile is the source of life of the riverain tribe, constituting the sole supply of water both for consumption and irrigation. The following excerpt of a poem is a vivid description of the annual inundations of the Nile:

The waters turn red and cloudy  
 Its banks black like date molasses  
 Its waves rising sounds of a *Mismar*  
 Carrying with it stalks and driftwood  
 Returning quite with no more reason  
 Becoming clean so that we can drink it

البحر حمر واتكرب  
 خلا هدامو يسوي رب  
 موجو بالزمارة جقلب  
 جاب معاهو القش والحطب  
 قام رجع كين بطل السبب  
 دابه مويتو صفت وانشرب

...

...

The Manasir have a precise idea of the borders of their homeland "Dar al-Manasir". Many features of the landscape are believed to have been important historical settings which are remembered through legends. The following poem by Ibrahim is a good example:

On one occasion Ibrahim blamed Qamr Suleiman, Sheikh of *Birti*, for asking *Merowe* to incorporate *Birti* into their administrative district for reason of its proximity in comparison to Abu Hammed. He was sending him the following Qasidah:

لوم وعتاب الى قمر سليمان (شيخ برتي) الذي قدم طلباً للمسئولين يريد فيه الانضمام لمحافظة مروى معللاً قربها من برتي إذا قورنت مع محافظة أبي حمد وكان معه زمرة من حاشيته فوصل الخبر إلى الشاعر وأرسل إليه القصيدة التالية:

<sup>3</sup> *Barbur*: four stroke single combustion diesel pump that revolutionized irrigation agriculture all along the Nile. The first such pump was introduced in Dar al-Manasir in 1955, the last traditional *Saqiah* operated until 1975 (cf. BECK 2001:69-70)

*Uthman*: name of the only merchant of spare parts on *Shiri* Island at that time

<sup>4</sup> *Mismar*: traditional single or double reed wind instrument

Oh messenger hurry from me swiftly  
 To a diminutive Sheikh called Qamr  
 Tell him I have news about him  
 People say they are gypsies of *King 'Awan*  
 The people of *Hamadi* and you people of *Si Anwar*  
 Did they divide the land of the sons of Qamr?  
 Our boundaries are known and rooted firmly  
 From the time of our hero *Nu'man*  
 Is it the devil appearing before us?  
 This talk is evil oh Qamr  
 Never to be expected from a Mansuri man  
 To voluntarily join the *Shaiqi Varans*  
 After being king of the Nile  
 To become a yellow toothed crocodile  
 Your reputation will be looked down at  
 Remember the history and legacy around you  
 The war drums of the castle resounding  
 And men crouching in the trenches  
 Your forefathers' horses went straight ahead  
 Sharpening their swords shouting "Allahu Akbar"  
 Moving the heart of the castle until it split  
 Even when defeated keeping their reputation  
 But victory became their providence  
 Be strong like your tribe previous to you  
 Don't let the *palm trees* stand to your back  
 And don't swim on top of an illusion

يا مريسيل طير مني فر  
 روح لي شيخ الخت قمر  
 قولو واصل عنك خبر  
 قالو لاملك عوان عجر  
 ناس حمادي وناس سي أنور  
 دا تقسم دار ود قمر؟  
 حدها المعروف منجزر  
 من زمن نعمان الأغر  
 ما هو شيتاً دابو يظهر  
 الكلام دا كعب يا قمر  
 حاشا منصورياً ضكر  
 ما بلم الشايقي الورر  
 من بعد شقيق البحر  
 يبقى تمساح نايبو اصفر  
 ويسمعو بو الناس اتحدر  
 أذكر التاريخ والأثر  
 النحاس في القبر نقر  
 والرجال لبدت في الحفر  
 جدك الفوق قارحو دفر  
 وسلا سيفه الله أكبر  
 هز كبد القير كسر  
 خت سمعه انكان ما انتصر  
 والنصر مكتوب مقدر  
 أبقى زي القبلك وعر  
 لا يكون نخلك مأخر  
 ولا تعوم فوق طوف العشر

The Merowe High Dam and the issue of relocation are very much discussed by the Manasir, although until now they don't have much say in the final decisions. The following translations highlight the controversial views and fears:

The Hamdab High Dam has been a very old thought and the Manasir people have been saying that if it would ever become reality it would be similar to Judgement Day. The

<sup>5</sup> *Birti*: Island and Sheikdom in Dar al-Manasir, bordering the downstream Shaiqiyah Country

*Merowe*: big town and administrative centre in downstream Shaiqiyah country

*King 'Awan*: former legendary King of Merowe

*Hamadi*: Abu Hammed, not belonging to Dar al-Manasir

*Si Anwar*: ridicule address to Sheikh Qamr Suleiman

*Nu'man*: Nu'man Wad Qamr is the grandson of the legendary king al-Sukari. He was the leader of the Manasir in the al-Debbah Battle on 29/06/1884, where he died a hero despite their defeat against the Turko-Egyptian forces led by Abdel Qadir Basha (cf. AL-TAIYEB et al. 1969:7)

*Shaiqi Varan*: according to Manasir tradition female crocodiles carry their eggs to the river; the ones drifting upstream become crocodiles, the ones drifting downstream varans

*yellow toothed crocodile*: varans, metaphor for the downstream Shaiqiyah tribe

*palm trees*: according to Manasir tradition palm trees standing in sight are a sign of good luck and a donkey in front of anything is considered to be a good omen, having both of them to your back is considered bad luck

new government that came to power after the last revolution [1989] reintroduced the idea once more, referring to it as the "Star of opportunity for Sudan". The government started to survey the area, counting the concerned families and investigating possible relocation areas for the Manasir. There are some Manasir poets disagreeing with the whole project saying the dam should be build in another place. One of these poets is called Abu Hureiba and he recited the following verses:

خزان الحمداب كانت فكرة إنشائه قديمة فربط الناس قيامه بيوم القيامة ولما جاءت ثورة الإنقاذ أصبح هاجساً يؤرق  
بالها لما له من فائدة عظيمة تكون نجم سعد السودان القادم. فكان حصر الأسر وتحديد مناطق التهجير لقبيلة المناصير  
هي المعنية بذلك، ومن شعرائنا ما هو رافض له لما للمنطقة من مزايا خاصة قل إن توجد في منطقة أخرى حيث  
الأمن والهواء الطلق من هؤلاء الشعراء أبو حريبة الذي يقول:

Oh our Lord, please stop the dam!  
Holy Men read the *Fatihah* aloud  
Saying: Allah, please prevent the dam!  
Oh *Khalwah* of *Shiri* mother of the Qur'an  
Always reciting for the troubled souls  
There is blessing here from such a long time

يا ربي تبطل الخزان  
شيلو الفاتحة يا أهل الشأن  
قولوا الله يبطل الخزان  
يا خلوة شيري أم قرآن  
وديمة تقري في الحيران  
فيها البركة ليها زمان

A young person looking ahead for the future disagrees  
with him and says:

فرد عليه الشاب المتطلع للغد المشرق:

Oh our Lord, please bring us the dam!  
We will mount the camels and move to prosperity  
Our journey will open the door to the West  
We will be living in *Omdurman*  
Feeding on the liver of young sheep

يا ربي تجيبوا ده الخزان  
ونشدد فوق جمال بطران  
ويبقى سفرنا باب غربان  
ويبقى سكونا في ام درمان  
وناكل من كبده الضان

<sup>6</sup> *Fatihah*: (alt. al-Fatiha) the opening Surah of the Qur'an  
*Khalwah*: Qur'an School, the only educational institutions in the area until 1946, the year the first primary school was  
established on *Shiri* Island (cf. AL-TAIYEB et al. 1969:4)  
*Omdurman*: one of the three cities of Greater Khartoum

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