

H.U.N.E. 2005: The Kirbekān Survey

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During spring 2005, a second season of archaeological reconnaissance and trial excavations was undertaken in H.U.N.E.'s concession at the Fourth Cataract. The following is a report on the activities of H.U.N.E. on the mainland.¹ The team reached its base in Dar al-Manasir, the village of Kirbekān², on February 10th. The season was closed on March 30th. For the duration of three weeks, our activities were limited to surface studies, field walking and mapping. During the second half of the campaign, trial excavations and rescue operations on selected spots were conducted. Four major cemeteries (KIR 090, 092, 214 and 297) and two Medieval settlement sites (KIR 054 and 106) were mapped using the total station.

This season's headquarters in Kirbekān provided a convenient daily departure point for the survey of the southern part of H.U.N.E.'s concession area. Since the present inhabitants consider all of the region from Gebel Musa (also known as Gebel Kirbekān or *Kirbekān Ridge*)³ in the south up to the village Kirbekān and its northern surroundings to belong to "Kirbekān", this name was chosen as a synonym for the 2005-survey.⁴ Consequently, all new sites discovered within this region were recorded as KIR (= Kirbekān) in numerical order, up to the number 345. The areas covered in detail during the survey include:

- the surroundings of El Kirbekān (including the part of the village named Umm Qatāṭīa, comprising sites UQ 001-006), following Wādī Kirbekān 4.0 km into the hinterland;
- a strip of 1 km parallel to the Nile from Kirbekān to Kereiti in the north;
- the southern end of H.U.N.E.'s concession area, which is marked by Gebel Musa (*Gabal Musa*), the site of the Battle of Kirbekān (*al-Kirbikān*) in 1885 (including the modern arable land, village areas and up to 2 km eastwards into the hinterland and around the Gebel);
- a strip of up to 2.5 km parallel to the Nile from Gebel Musa up to Kirbekān, including Kirbekān Island, which was entirely surveyed;
- in addition, several new sites were discovered north of Kereiti and in the area around Umm Jaghor (*'um Jaḡor*) and Mushra (*Mušr^c al-Ḥammīr*) (a total of 39 new sites including a large Kerma cemetery, MN 020).

General results

One of the main results of the 2005 season is the coverage of a considerable distance of the concession area by means of survey. The part that remains to be surveyed in future campaigns – a strip of about 8 km – is situated in the north around the village of Salamat. With this year's survey, we can now rely on a representative collection of sites. Altogether 384 new sites were discovered (466 types). Together with the results from 2004 there is a total

1 Team members of the 2005-season were beside the author: Karl Berbalk (camp & water installation), Dieter Eigner (architect), Thiqa Hassan (NCAM), Clara Jeuthe (archaeologist, lithics), Tim Karberg (archaeologist) und Uwe Sievertsen (archaeologist, pottery documentation). I would like to thank Amy Butner for editing my English.

2 For the modern village Kirbekān see Eigner 2005a.

3 Innes 1931: 188, pl. XI.

4 See also the corresponding caption on the map of the Geographical Survey of Sudan from 1929 = Budka 2004: fig. 1.

amount of about 600 sites. The types of sites most common in the area, and their presumed dating are now better understood. In addition, a representative sample collection of pottery sherds and lithics was recovered, thus providing an overview of the material culture within the area ranging from Palaeolithic to Medieval times.

Type	Tot. number
Rock art	132
Greek rock inscriptions	3
Arabic rock graffiti	35
Cemeteries (more than one grave)	(69)
with tumuli	22
with box graves of stone	12
with cist graves set on bedrock	3
with dome graves	27
with crevice graves	5
Isolated tumuli	22
Isolated box graves	2
Isolated dome graves	17
Isolated crevice graves	17
Grave/stone feature	12
Church	1
Shelters/stone structures	48
Settlements/stone huts	18
Scatters of occupation/artefacts	18
Occupation sites/working places	11
Abris	4
Stone rubble walls	15
Miscellanies	40

Tab. 1: Types of sites recorded in 2005.

All in all, the types of sites located, registered by GPS data, photographed and described include:

- cemeteries (primarily tumuli – of different earth work and stone setting types – and box graves, but also some isolated tombs, as well as dome graves and cairns, crevice graves and cist graves;⁵ thus comprising many different types and sizes belonging to a time span from Neolithic to Medieval times);
- places of occupation and settlements (most often Medieval dwelling places but also Neolithic as well as multi period occupation sites were found, frequently situated on flat hilltops overlooking the river or above ancient Nile branches);
- isolated shelters and huts (mainly of Medieval and/or post-Medieval date);
- various stone settings, enclosures and rubble walls (many of them probably of quite recent date, “others may be of some antiquity”)⁶;
- rock drawings (different motifs, dominated by camel and cattle; but also some giraffes, ostriches, equines, and goats as well as depictions of churches and other symbols), several Arabic rock graffiti as well as three Greek rock inscriptions;⁷

⁵ The latter are dubbed ‘tunnel’ graves by Welsby; see Welsby 2005b: 5f., pl. 5.

⁶ Welsby 2003a: 123; cf. also Welsby 2005b: 6.

- a Christian church (KIR 257) including a Medieval cemetery (KIR 324) at Gebel Musa (Kanisi, excavated, see below).

The span of time covered extends from the Prehistoric Period (Palaeolithic and Neolithic) to post-Medieval times. The bulk of the surface material seems to belong to the Christian and Islamic periods. Neolithic material, including both pottery and lithics, is also quite common among the finds collected from the surface. For most of the sites, a preliminary dating can be proposed according to the surface finds and the morphology of the superficial structures; 51 sites cannot as yet be assigned to a specific period.

Period	Number of sites
Neolithic	12
Kerma	52
Kerma to Napatan	9
Napatan	4
Meroitic	1
Post-Meroitic	33
Medieval	92
Medieval to post-Medieval	107
Post-Medieval	12
Recent	7
Multi period	5
unclear	51

Tab. 2: Dating of the sites of 2005.

In comparison to earlier and later periods, the evidence for the first millennium BC is scarce within the region. This picture is probably due to major problems of identifying Kushite sites by means of survey. A complete pottery series from Terminal Kerma to Napatan times is still lacking within the region.⁸ Trial excavation and survey finds in 2005 illustrated the difficulties connected with the material culture during this time span. Although some ceramic vessels attest to a clear development (e.g. wheel-made ribbed storage jars), the majority of vessels were produced locally and show the same characteristics as pottery of the Kerma horizon.⁹

On the whole, remarkable achievements were made in the field of funerary archaeology. A total of 44 sites with 119 dome graves were found situated on the slopes of gebels, mostly facing the Nile or ancient water courses. These tombs, found isolated or arranged in groups, were associated with pottery of distinctive Kerma and Napatan origin. Four of these graves were excavated and all proved to have been heavily plundered.¹⁰ Nevertheless, a Napatan cemetery with substantial, datable burial remains was excavated with KIR 208. Several major tumulus cemeteries came to light this season, comprising between 20 and 90 tombs. Based on the large quantity of tombs, it is possible to make some observations on the typology of tumuli, their morphology (as gravel covered mounds found with and without stone kerb, as cairns, etc.), and distribution (within beds of wadis, or on rocky ridges, hilltops etc.).

7 For the Greek inscriptions from Kirbekān see Tsakos in this volume.
8 Cf. Philipps and Klimaszewska-Drabot 2005: 119.
9 See Welsby 2003b: 32 and Budka in this volume.
10 See Budka in this volume for a detailed analysis.

In summation, the insights from the 2005 season confirm the results by Welsby, Wolf, Paner and others regarding the typologies of tumuli, box graves and other grave types.¹¹

Rock art

The rock art found in 2004 within the area north of Kereiti was clearly dominated by depictions of the camel; other animal motifs were scarce.¹² This year's survey in the area further south uncovered a considerable amount of drawings of cattle, but still a clear predominance of the camel was noted (55 % of the drawings are camels, 24 % are bovines). The distributions of motifs may eventually be explained by the topography of the region. In contrast to Kirbekān Island, where there are good conditions for herding cattle, rocky outcrops in the northern region, especially north of Kereiti, approach the river, leaving almost no arable land available. Consequently, the camel forms an important factor and is thus dominating the rock art repertoire in this rough area. Some of the rock drawings of cattle in the Kirbekān region are very likely of Kerma date. In many cases, Kerma graves, pottery and also Neolithic settlement sites were found in the immediate surroundings of the rock art in question (e.g. KN 048).¹³ Therefore, the rock art will be studied in both its natural and cultural/archaeological landscapes, and will thus hopefully provide important insights into the use of these landscapes throughout the centuries.¹⁴ A very good example of rock art in a prominent position – visible to all passing travellers¹⁵ – can be named with the rock art station KIR 333 which comprises a quite meticulous representation of a church with two towers (colour pl. 20).¹⁶ This depiction probably refers to the neighbouring site, the Christian church KIR 257.¹⁷

Different techniques can be observed on the rock engravings; pecked pictures in both outline and filled technique occur (e.g. camels drawn in outline and solid camels).¹⁸ The repertoire of motifs is quite limited, as is shown in table 3, and resembles the motif types known from other concession areas.¹⁹

Motif type		Number
Symbols	cross	53
	herding mark	2
	various	16
	human/symbol	15
Animals	bovine (unspecified)	228
	bovine (horizontal horns)	14
	bovine (vertical)	1
	bovine (with bell and herding mark)	1
	cattle (long-horned)	129
	cattle (humped)	3
	camel	495

11 For these typologies see Welsby 2003a: 122f. and 2005a: figs. 2f.; Wolf 2004: 21 and Paner and Borowski 2005: 110ff., figs. 36f.

12 See Budka 2004: 111.

13 See Budka 2005b: fig. 5; cf. also Paner 2003b: 168. Generally, we noted some kind of concentration of Kerma sites (cemeteries and possibly rock art; as of yet no settlement remains) around the village Kirbekān.

14 Cf. Kleinitz and Olsson 2005.

15 Cf. Welsby 2003a: 111.

16 Cf. Budka 2005b: fig. 1.3.

17 Cf. Eigner 2005b.

18 Welsby 2003a: 111.

19 See Welsby 2003a: 111, table 6.1.

Motif type		Number
Animals	horse/donkey	13
	donkey (recent)	1
	goat/ibex	17
	jackal	1
	giraffe	13
	ostrich	19
	dog	2
	hippopotamus	1
	quadruped	31
Animal with riders	camel	388
	horse/donkey	74
Animals with drivers	camel	17
	horse/donkey	3
	bovine	8
	donkey/goat	1
Humans	unspecified	23
	human face	2
	hunter	2
	warrior	20
Hunting scenes (animals & humans)	ostrich hunt by camel	3
Architecture/buildings	churches	5
	boats	10
	fortress?	1
	orb	7
	altar?	1

Tab. 3: Motif types of the rock art of H.U.N.E. 2005 (mainland).

The total number of individual rock drawings recorded in 2005 is 1624. The most prominent motif is the camel, comprising 55 % of the drawings found. Of a total of 900 depictions of camels, 495 are shown without riders, 388 with riders and 17 are depicted with drivers. The cattle motif, at 24 % of the total, follows as most frequent design. Other motif types include 90 equines, some humans and symbols, 6 churches, 9 peculiar signs of which it is unclear whether they depict a boat or a church (colour pl. 21),²⁰ 7 orbs (symbols with crosses)²¹ and 53 crosses (dating to the Christian period). Singular motifs were identified as a jackal (KIR 148.2), a pig or hippopotamus (KIR 117.1), which finds close parallels in the Eastern desert,²² a boat representation (KIR 146.2-10), a kind of altar with a human being in adora-

20 For more details and parallels see Budka 2005b: 71.

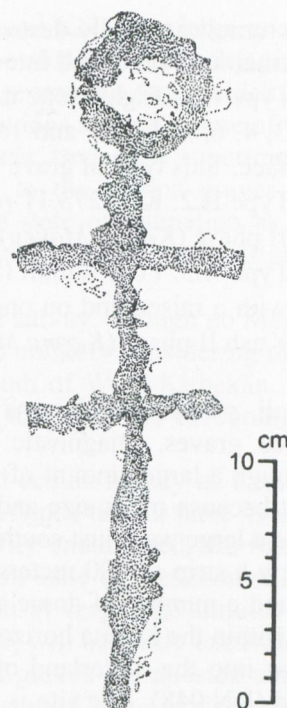
21 Also known from the SARS concession; see Kleinitz and Olsson 2005, fig. 1, type J (cross).

22 See Morrow and Morrow 2002: 35, Wadu Umm Hajalij, HAJ 3, G (no identification given) and 96, C, Site SAL 46, Wadi Umm Salam (hippopotamus). The only difference of these engravings is the shape of the tail: whereas KIR 117.1 has a pig tail, the others show a short, straight tail.

tion (KIR 310)²³ and a human face depicted *en face* (KIR 161.14)²⁴ as well as a representation of a human head and upper body in profile (KIR 028.8)²⁵.

Although some of the rock art is very likely of a Neolithic and Kerma date, the bulk of the material has been assigned to the Christian and post-Medieval period. However, it may be stressed that within the large newly recorded corpus of rock engravings some motifs were found that are expected to be of Meroitic origin. This holds especially true for one drawing of a cow depicted with a bell around its neck (KIR 028) and a particular herding mark that finds parallels in engravings at Musawwarat es-Sufra and on Meroitic potsherds.²⁶ This herding mark is not only depicted on the cow's hind leg, but can also be found isolated facing upwards in front of the tableau with the cow representation (fig. 1).

Fig. 1: Example of rock art: herding mark KIR 028.8 (drawing: J. Budka).



Cemeteries

Various cemeteries and graves from differing time periods were recorded in 2005. At this time, no Neolithic graves have been identified.²⁷ Within the surveyed strip of land – 2 km parallel to the Nile and following the major wadis up to 7 km into the hinterland –, different types of graves, covering tumuli, cairns and dome graves are now attested from the southern part of the concession at Gebel Musa up to Mushra in the north.²⁸ These graves are likely of Kerma date. A concentration of sites, which, according to their morphology, are presumably of this date,²⁹ was noted on the line between Gebel Musa and Kirbekān. The distribution and location of the Kerma cemeteries show a picture similar to that already known from areas in other concessions. These tombs are frequently located on the rocky hilltops towards the desert or on plateaus and slopes of gebels above wadis and the Nile.³⁰

The tumuli of this type of cemetery form both lines and clusters and can be subdivided into several types according to the morphology of their superstructures. Stone rings of circular or oval shape appear quite frequently. Conical cairns are also well known. In rare cases, simple circular stone settings of one layer have been observed. Another common type of tomb are the so-called dome graves.³¹

A typical example of a tumulus cemetery of the Kerma period is KIR 273. The site is located to the east of Kanisi along the edge of a rocky hill and comprises 17 graves. Four of

23 Probably of Christian date, cf. Kleinitz and Olsson 2005: 35, fig. 3.

24 Cf. similar motifs on painted Meroitic pottery – especially the motif of a head of Hathor; see Adams 1986, I: 283, fig. 135 (Meroitic fancy style). I am indebted to Eric McCann who pointed out this comparison to me.

25 See Budka 2005b: fig. 1.1.

26 Cf. Karberg 2005: 90, fig. 3.

27 Cf. Paner 2003a: 16 and Wolf and Nowotnick 2005: 186.

28 E.g. KIR 234, KIR 248, KIR 254, KIR 257, KIR 273-275, KIR 294 and KIR 343.

29 Cf. Paner 2003; Wolf 2004; Paner and Borowski 2005; El-Tayeb and Kołosowska 2005.

30 Cf. El-Tayeb and Kołosowska 2005: 53.

31 See Budka in this volume.

these tumuli are badly destroyed and cannot be classified. Following Paner and Borcowski, the remaining tombs fall into three types.³²

- Type II.1: Eight stone rings of circular shape with several layers of stones (KIR 273.2, 3, 4, 6, 9, 14, 15 and 16); the interior of the ring is on the same level as the outer surface. This type of grave is associated with *Kerma Ancien* (Old Kush I).³³
- Type II.2: KIR 273.11 represents a conical cairn, a type of grave assigned to Old Kush II phase (*Kerma Moyen*).³⁴
- Type II.3: Four tumuli (KIR 273.1, 10, 13 und 17) can be described as oval stone rings with a raised end on one side. Paner and Borcowski connect these graves with the Old Kush II phase (*Kerma Moyen*).³⁵

Tumuli, probably of Kerma date, are also attested in combination with dome graves and crevice graves. Diagnostic pottery was fortunately sometimes found on the surface.³⁶ Although a large amount of tombs have been plundered, cemetery MN 020 is of special interest because of its size and state of preservation. MN 020 is situated on the rocky hilltop above a large wadi just southeast of the village of Mushra. A minimum of 48 tomb structures occupy a strip of 800 meters (colour pl. 22). The grave types include tumuli graves of type II.1 and a number of dome and semi-dome graves. Various sherds on the surface suggest a date within the Kerma horizon (fig. 2).

Far into the hinterland of Kereiti a similar combination of various types of tombs was found (KN 048). The site is located on top of a rocky plateau which lies in the middle of a large wadi. Two tumuli of type II.1 are neighboured by a range of dome graves and some cist or 'tunnel' graves.³⁷ A number of undersized structures are located next to these graves. These structures, best described as stone heaps, are too small to have held real burials. These

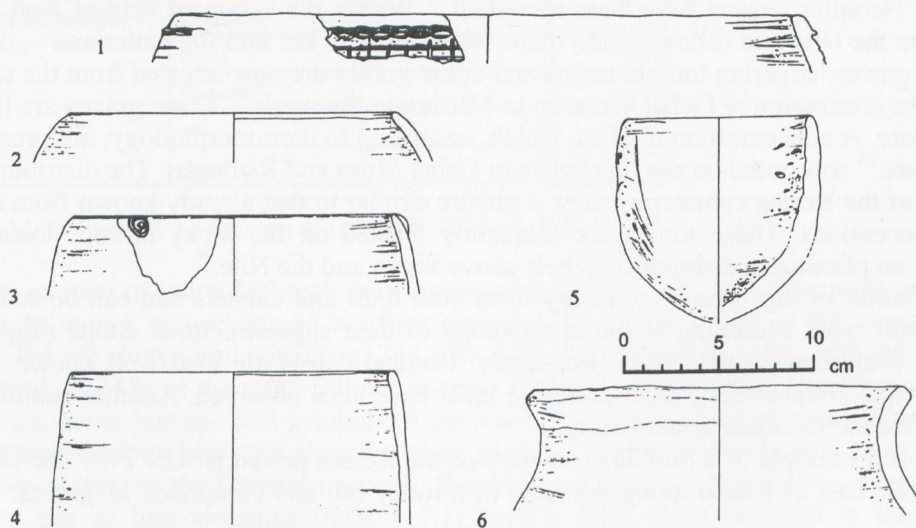


Fig. 2: Selected pottery from cemetery MN 020 (1=MN 020/3.6, 2=MN 020/3.5, 3=MN 020/3.4, 4=MN 020/3.3, 5=MN 020/1, 6=MN 020/3.1, drawings: J. Budka).

32 Paner and Borcowski 2005: 112.

33 Paner and Borcowski 2005: 112, fig. 36: 5-6 = type V of Welsby 2003a: 122 and Welsby 2005a: fig. 2.

34 Paner and Borcowski 2005: 112, fig. 36: 7.

35 Paner and Borcowski 2005: 112, fig. 36: 8.

36 See in more detail Budka 2005b.

37 For 'tunnel' graves see Welsby 2005a: 5f.

features find parallels in other concessions of the region.³⁸ Around KN 048 a large quantity of rock engravings of different time periods was detected – the slope of the rocky plateau where the graves are located was covered with rock art. Several prominent rocks which lie in close vicinity in the bed of the wadi are covered with rock engravings as well. Some of these drawings seem to be of ancient date, especially depictions of cattle, frequently superimposed by camels. While the cattle can be presumed contemporary to the Kerma graves (e.g. KN 049.4),³⁹ a large percentage of the camels show the same state of patination as later Christian crosses also attested in the repertoire of the site. The above mentioned cist graves might originate in the same time as this late rock art.⁴⁰

Meroitic sites and graves are difficult to identify by means of survey. Though no Meroitic sites have yet been attested, a total lack of sites of this period is unlikely considering the results from other missions and rock art of this period found south of Wadi Kirbekān. As a consequence, trial excavations are planned for the next season to clarify the chronology of some structures that might be of Meroitic date.

The post-Meroitic period is again very well represented and occurs mostly as tumuli of different shapes and sizes set in the sandy beds of large wadis. Since tumuli have been the specific targets of recent tomb robbery and are, therefore, heavily endangered, we found it important to map the most substantial cemeteries in their present state of preservation. The most intact examples will be excavated in the forthcoming season. A very large tumulus cemetery north of Kanisi (KIR 090), comprised 128 graves altogether, will be partly excavated in 2006. This site is of special importance since various types of graves are attested and the surface finds range from Neolithic to Medieval times, including some *Kerma Moyen* sherds.

The types of tumuli can be classified within the typology set up by Welsby as follows:

Type			Individual graves in KIR 090
A	flat topped/domed	kerb	9, 10, 11, 13, 15, 16, 25, 33, 41, 47, 49, 52, 54, 79, 80, 85, 86, 87, 88, 89, 90, 92, 96, 97, 98, 99?, 100, 101, 103, 110, 111, 112, 113, 117
	flat topped/domed	no kerb	45, 123, 124, 125
B	dished	kerb	5, 6, 7, 14, 19, 20, 26, 27, 28, 29, 31, 32, 50, 51, 81, 82, 83, 91, 116, 118, 119, 120, 121, 122, 126
		no kerb	46
C	flat (no elevation)	kerb	12, 109
	circular stone spread	-	1, 3, 8, 24, 44, 48, 55, 63, 84, 93, 94, 102, 104, 105, 108
	robbed blocks, unclear	-	1, 4, 42, 30 (plundered small pit)

Tab. 4: Tumuli types of KIR 090 (after Welsby 2003: 17, table 2.1).

Most of the graves fall, therefore, into the categories type III, IV and VI (after Welsby)⁴¹ and can be safely dated to the post-Meroitic period. A similar, smaller cemetery of the same period is situated to the south of KIR 090, again in the bed of the major north-south-wadi of the region. It was recorded as KIR 092 and comprises about 60 graves (fig. 3), including four

38 El-Tayeb and Kołosowska 2005: 55: "Occasionally, next to the grave superstructure stood a small stone cairn (El Argubm Wadi Umm Rahau), the purpose of which is unclear." It is possible that the stone heaps in question represent some kind of mark in connection with offerings or with funerary cult.

39 Budka 2005b: fig. 5.

40 Judging from the patination of the stones of these structures this quite recent date seems probable; see also Welsby 2005b: 5f.

41 Welsby 2003a: 122.



Fig. 3: Map of cemetery KIR 092 (drawing: T. Karberg).

small-scaled box graves on the western edge of the site. The majority of the tombs can be described as gravel covered mounds with a diameter between 9 and 16 m (type III, IV und VI after Welsby). These are less well preserved than in KIR 090 – maybe partly due to the fact that the current desert road runs right through the site (colour pl. 23).

Cemeteries of the Medieval period are numerous within the area and occur mainly as box graves. Quite frequently, modern Islamic graveyards lie adjacent to the Christian ones. This is illustrated in the area of Kirbekān by KIR 214, where a modern cemetery is situated to the east of the Christian graves. The Muslim graves copy the orientation of the Christian ones. The site comprises 39 box graves of Welsby's type 4.⁴² Judging by the differing sizes of the graves, both adults and children were buried at this place.⁴³ Thus, site KIR 214 illustrates the close relationship, vicinity (and symbiosis?) between Christian and Islamic cemeteries in the area of the Fourth Cataract which becomes obvious by numerous other examples.⁴⁴

Settlements and places of occupation

Neolithic as well as multi period occupation sites were found during the survey. As of yet, without excavation, no clear settlement features of the Neolithic period have been identified. However, some stone settings might turn out to be hut remains when excavated.⁴⁵ This would come as no surprise since numerous surface material of Neolithic date (both pottery and lithics) attest to the dense occupation of the region during this time period.⁴⁶

The identification of places of settlement becomes more difficult with sites originating in the Kerma, Napatan and Meroitic periods. Again, there are some possible candidates within the sites recorded, but only excavation has the potential to prove these dates. This holds true for KIR 106 which is located within the sandy bed of a small khor – leading towards the Nile and more or less orientated north-south (fig. 4). KIR 106 comprises seven small rock shelters or huts of irregular plan constructed of rubble. All are built of flat, angular rock fragments and incorporate natural boulders. The diameters of the roughly circular structures range from 3 to 5 m. The preserved height ranges from 0.40 to 1.50 m. The latter is attested at the point where structures are built against rocky outcrops of the slope of the khor. The two largest stone structures at the northern end abut up against boulders and are touching each other.⁴⁷ Some pottery fragments suggest the late Meroitic or post-Meroitic period as a date for KIR 106. However, the loose way of construction implies a quite recent, post-Medieval origin. Therefore, the date as well as the identification as small dwellings and/or stables must remain open to questions for now.

The picture of scarce occupation of the region changes during the Medieval time. Settlements of this period are comprised of both numerous surface finds and a large quantity of buildings in dry stonewall technique; at present, no brick buildings have been found. These places of occupation and small settlements are most often situated on flat hilltops overlooking the river or set above ancient Nile branches. Site KIR 054 on Kirbekān Island was studied in detail.⁴⁸ It illustrates a settlement pattern within small clusters of houses, which include stables and places for animals. The architecture of the stone huts took advantage of the local topography; large natural boulders were incorporated into the dry stonewall technique. The finds at KIR 54 (pottery, spindle whorls, grinders and grinding plates)⁴⁹ attest to the dwelling character of the site and its date within the Medieval period.

42 Welsby 2005a: fig. 3.

43 See in more detail Budka 2005b: fig. 8.

44 Cf. Budka 2004: 106.

45 E.g. KIR 200 and KIR 245; cf. Paner 2003a: 16 and Wolf and Nowotnick 2005: 186.

46 Cf. Wolf and Nowotnick 2005: 186. For an analysis of the lithic material from the Kirbekān survey see Jeuthe 2005.

47 Cf. Welsby 2003: 20.

48 See Budka 2005b: 77ff., fig. 7.

49 Three fragments of granite grinders were found; for the distinctive elliptical shape of one cf. Usai, in: Welsby 2003a: 106, pl. 5.11.



Fig. 4: Map of settlement KIR 106 (drawing: D. Eigner, adapted by: I. Säuberlich).

Numerous miscellaneous, stone-built sites were discovered as well, especially in the area between Kereiti and Kirebēkān on the edges or in the bed of wadis and khors. Four abri-sites were discovered on slopes and near hilltops. In one of these structures, KIR 229, a large fragment of a coarse, hand-made bowl was found which might be of quite recent date (fig. 5).

The large number of ephemeral stone features and single rows of stones are assigned to subrecent and recent periods. The same holds true for rubble walls, which frequently follow the edges of wadis and khors.⁵⁰

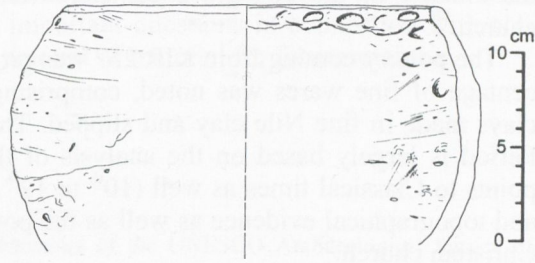


Fig. 5: Pottery bowl from abri KIR 229 (KIR 229/2, coarse, handmade ware. Drawing: J. Budka).

Excavation in 2005

Two major excavation sites were opened in 2005. The first site is the church at Gebel Musa (KIR 257) that was identified with the “Christian remains” marked on the map of the Geographical Survey of Sudan dating from 1929.⁵¹ At present, these remains consist of a shallow kom-shaped mound, measuring approximately 220 m², situated at a height of 285 m above the Nile within the modern arable area near the village Kanisi. This name itself indicates some kind of Christian activity in the area.⁵² The surface was covered with fragments from red bricks, some stone debris and a small amount of Medieval pottery sherds. This goes well with the observation by Jackson: “broken pottery and potsherds were obtained from [...] Kirebēkān (between the battlefield and the place where the army encamped before the fight)”.⁵³ One has to assume that in 1926 and 1929 the remains of KIR 257 were much more substantial.

We decided to spend two weeks to excavate and document the remaining structures (6th-17th March) at KIR 257. Excavations were conducted by Dieter Eigner and Tim Karberg, assisted by Thiqa Hassan and local workmen.⁵⁴ Within the debris of red burnt bricks and stones, the remains of two parallel walls of mud brick, orientated east-west, were revealed. These walls most likely belong to the foundations of the church. The mud bricks which are the only architectural remains of the building are sitting on top of a mound of natural soil.⁵⁵ The main building material aside from the mud brick foundations are burnt bricks as is quite common for Nubian churches.⁵⁶

The debris from KIR 257 yielded some interesting finds: spindle whorls, fragments from plastered window grille out of mud brick, plaster,⁵⁷ a red brick with finger impressions and fragments of large pottery basins.⁵⁸ The most remarkable find is a small fragment of a funerary stela with a Greek inscription.⁵⁹ A larger fragment of a similar piece was recovered from

50 Cf. Budka 2005a: 17.

51 See Budka 2004: fig. 1; Eigner 2005b: fig. 1 and Sievertsen, in this volume, fig. 1.

52 Cf. Jackson 1926: 27 and lately Eigner 2005b: 93.

53 Jackson 1926: 26.

54 For a detailed report see Eigner 2005b.

55 Excavation proved that what appeared in the first place as kom-feature is in fact a natural mound with no artificial layers. The location on top of a natural hill is typical for Nubian churches, see Eigner 2005b: 99.

56 See Eigner 2005b: 97.

57 Cf. Eigner 2005b: 98, fig. 6; no figurative decoration was preserved on the painted plaster fragments.

58 Cf. Sievertsen 2005: fig. 4.

59 Eigner 2005b: 99, fig. 7.

the vicinity of the box grave cemetery KIR 324, which lies just east of the site of the church.⁶⁰

The pottery coming from KIR 257 was processed by Uwe Sievertsen.⁶¹ A remarkable percentage of fine wares was noted, comprising both imports and local imitations of caoline clays made in fine Nile clay and slipped. The dating of the site into the Classical and Late Period is largely based on the analysis of the pottery. The fragment of the funerary stela points to Classical times as well (10th to 12th century AD)⁶². In summation, the architectural and topographical evidence as well as the pottery indicate the identification of KIR 257 as a Christian church.⁶³

Besides KIR 257, excavations were conducted on selected graves. The focus was on so-called dome graves⁶⁴ and crevice graves which were discovered in large quantities during the field reconnaissance in 2005. Although most of the graves are found plundered, pottery is often discovered scattered in the vicinity. These ceramics include both Kerma and distinctive Napatan shapes and wares. Consequently, some tombs within H.U.N.E.'s concession were selected for excavation, to prove the connection of this material with the date of the structures. Four isolated dome graves (KIR 087, KIR 221, KIR 222 and KIR 239) were excavated in 2005; all were looted in antiquity.⁶⁵

During the field reconnaissance, Napatan pottery, which was scattered on the surface, brought site KIR 208 to our attention. This small cemetery became the second major excavation site in 2005. KIR 208 is situated in a small plateau-like depression between two rocky hilltops on the foot of rocky outcrops of a gebel south of the village of Umm Meshera (N 18°56.256', E 32°24.454'). Eight dome and crevice graves, differing in size and construction, were documented. To ascertain the connection of the Napatan pottery with the small group of graves at KIR 208, four examples were excavated. All of the structures were plundered in ancient times, but two burials were still found *in situ* (including complete skeletons) and remains of two others with some burial gifts showed up. According to its finds, KIR 208 was used during the Napatan period (approx. between 850–600 BC). Since the graves form a small cluster, it is possible that KIR 208 was a family/clan graveyard. Another small assemblage of five dome graves (type Ib, KIR 334) is located on top of the gebel just 20 m south of KIR 208, literally overlooking the site. Possible models of kinship and/or relationships between these neighbouring sites must be checked by future research and anthropological analysis of the skeletal remains.

Prospects of future work

In summation, the 2005-season saw many new insights, especially within the field of funerary archaeology and sites of the Kerma and Napatan periods. Notable is the discovery of some Meroitic rock art as well as several Christian rock graffiti which provide new textual evidence from the region of the Fourth Cataract.

Next season and future work will see the continuation of the survey in the remaining northern part of the concession near Salamat. The second half of the campaign will be dedicated to small scale excavations. Some potential settlement remains will be tested. The focus of research will be on graves; as KIR 208 has clearly shown, each grave potentially raises new questions and yields new material.

Especially dome graves and different kinds of tumuli within the largest cemeteries of the region (KIR 090 and 092) will be excavated to clarify their chronology and association. So-

60 For both fragments see Tsakos in this volume.

61 See Sievertsen 2005 and his contribution in this volume.

62 Cf. Tsakos in this volume.

63 See in detail the analysis by Eigner 2005b and Sievertsen 2005.

64 This name was suggested by H. Paner in 2000; see id. 2003b: 18.

65 See in more detail Budka in this volume.

cial and cultural aspects of the grave constructions and inventories as well as the distribution of certain types will be considered. To answer important questions in connection with Napatān burial tradition, we are in need of a larger amount of material for future analysis.

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