

Dar al-Manasir

location

At the height of the Island of Muqrat (N 19°30') the river Nile is blocked from its northward course taking a sharp turn SSW for 280 kilometres before continuing to flow North. In the middle of this S-shape between the Bayudah Desert to the South and the Nubian Desert to the North the Nile is forced by the topography to split up into a multitude of tributaries forming a fertile river oasis of small rocky islands described by the traveller GRAY (1949:120) with the following words: "Whereas usually [agriculture] in the Nile Valley [...] is confined to the belt on two banks on which the river has deposited silt, in this cataract area, where islands are scattered like a flock of goats, the number of silt-covered river banks in any given 10 kilometres may be up to a dozen".

It is this region of the Fourth Cataract, the most impassable of all rapids of the Nile, which is the homeland of the Arab tribe of the Manasir and therefore called Dar al-Manasir (دار المناصير). Until today the water rapids cannot be shipped by any bigger boats making the region accessible only via a sandy and rocky desert track.

extension

The extension of Dar al-Manasir is confined by the upstream living Rubatab tribe (الرباطاب) in the area of Abu Hamed (أبو حمد) (E 33.18°) and the downstream Shaiqiyah tribe (الشايقية) past the village of Birti (E 32.15°), (cf. LAGNAH 2005:2). Dar al-Manasir is covering a distance of approximately 130 km along the Nile with most villages lined up along the left river bank called "western side" (...). But the heart of Dar al-Manasir consists of 14 islands, twelve of them permanently inhabited; al-Qanaweit (القناويت), Shiri (شري), Kidir (كدر), Sherari (شرري), Sur (سور), Us (اوز), Tibit (...), Dumag (دماج), Buni (بوني), Arag (ارج), Dirbi (دربي) and Birti (برتي), (cf. SALIH 1999:8, LAGNAH 2005:2).

climate

The climate is arid with an annual rainfall of about 50 mm in good years. The exact amount and spatial distribution of the precipitation during the rainy season in the months of August until October is highly variable and therefore unpredictable. The rainy season coincides with the flood season of the Nile (cf. SALIH 1999:9).

economy

The Manasir pursue small scale agriculture in the immediate vicinity of the Nile. Tiny pockets of alluvial sediments and the seasonally inundated riverside land are intensively irrigated and cultivated. The most important cash crops of the region are dates (cf. Date Cultivation in Dar al-Manasir).

During good rainy seasons in which grazing grounds are abundant many male Manasir join members of their tribe in the adjacent Bayudah Desert.

administration

Politically Dar al-Manasir belongs to the Wilaiah Nahr al-Nil (نهر النيل ولاية, River Nile Province). The administrative centre with the only local run police station, branch of the Agricultural Bank and Secondary Schools for both sexes is Shiri (شري) on Shiri Island.

Dar al-Manasir is among the most neglected areas in Northern Sudan. Apart from basic educational institutions virtually no public infrastructure such as tarred roads, bridges or ferry boats and hospitals exist.

But the Manasir are also aware of advantages of this situation and describe them in terms of exceptional safety and honesty (في أمان), tranquillity (و نظيف الجو هادئ), untainted beauty of their country (سمح البلد) and cleanness of the water which they drink straight out of the Nile. The landscape, described by INNES (1931:184) as "most barren and the most beautiful" along the Nile, is rocky, picturesque and referred by the inhabitants happily as "our rocks" (حجرنا).

Dar al-Manasir with all its villages and agricultural land will be successively flooded in the coming months by the Hamdab High Dam project. Its residents are going to be moved, but the exact relocation area is still not clear and a matter of ongoing discussion.

References and External Links

- Gray, T. (1949): The Fourth Cataract. In: Sudan Notes and Records, Vol.30, p.120-121.
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- Lagnah al-Tanfidhiyah lil-Muta'thirin (2005): Khasan al-Hamdab wa Qissah Tahgir Ahali al-Manasir. 20 p.
- Salih, A. M. (1999): The Manasir of the Northern Sudan: Land and People. A Riverain Society and Resource Scarcity. 282 p.

(Look for the updated and illustrated text on Wikipedia: [Dar al-Manasir](#))