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[Review of: C. Kleinitz, C. Näser (2012) *Nihna nâs al-bahar - we are the people of the river: ethnographic research in the fourth Nile cataract region, Sudan*]

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KLEINITZ, C., and C.NÄSER (eds.) – "Nihna nâs al-bahar – We are the people of the river." Ethnographic Research in the Fourth Nile Cataract Region, Sudan. (Meroitica 26). Verlag Otto Harrassowitz, Wiesbaden, 2012. (25 cm, IX, 304). ISBN 978-3-447-6891-8. ISSN 0138-3663. € 68,-.

This ethnography consists of ten articles that represent reports of short anthropological, archeological or architectonic surveys carried out by the German Humboldt University Nubian Expedition from 2004 to 2008 in the area of the Fourth Nile Cataract in North Sudan. The political background of the book pictures an exemplary image of present-day Sudan and is well explained in the introducing and especially the concluding chapter. The latter is not devoid of self-criticism and includes significant recommendations for archeologists in development projects.

In 2008 the Hamdab Reservoir at the Merowe Dam has submerged the Nile valley at the Fourth Nile cataract, constituting a lake of about 170 kilometres in length and a maximum of more than 10 kilometres in width. This dam, situated at about 350 kilometres north of Khartoum, the capital of Sudan, is after the Aswan Dam, the second major dam on the main Nile and the largest hydropower project currently completed on the African continent. Its primary purpose is to generate electricity: its output is expected to nearly double Sudan's power capacity. Moreover, the project is planned to supply water for the irrigation of large-scale agricultural schemes. The dam is thus expected to play a vital role in Sudan's economic growth (p. 270).

However, the region now flooded is part of Dar al-Manasir, 'the homeland of the Manasir'. The Manasir are one of the main ethnic groups of Arabic speaking Muslims who inhabit the area and are affected most by the vast undertaking of the Merowe project. In the discourse of their resettlement, they claimed to be *nâs al-bahar*, 'the river people' (p. 195), part of the title of this volume. The new lake did not only expell them from their homeland but the water also overflowed their homes, other belongings and archeological sites.

Prior to the flooding, several international organisations have tried to study various but mainly archeological aspects of interest in the Fourth Nile Cataract Region under the umbrella of the Merowe Dam Archeological Salvage Project (MDASP). Nonetheless, 'while the region's past was given ample attention by the scientific community, the concerns and

the cultural knowledge of the present-day inhabitants of the Fourth Nile Cataract received little interest' (p. 1). This lack of interest and knowledge led to the following misunderstanding. Representatives of the Manasir community associated the researchers' presence with the Dam, the lake to be and the undesired way they were supposed to be resettled elsewhere. They therefore expelled the researchers from their homeland, the working field of the researchers. Since the scientist were not well aware of the Manasirs' interests and their struggle for human life and rights, this came to a complete surprise to them (p. 2 and 275-280). Fortunately, the editors of the present volume have not only neatly ordered the field work reports of the relatively small-scale but interesting research projects that could be carried out before the expulsion of the researchers. Moreover, in their introducing and particularly in their final chapter, they render a comprehensive account of the political framework in a praiseworthy and responsible manner.

The first chapter is the largest one, written by the anthropologist Kurt Beck. He portrays the effects of changing irrigation technology among the Manasir. His detailed description of the *sâgiya*, a waterweel pulled by a team of oxen, includes drawings and is extensive and admirable. Apart from the building, functioning, ownership and what he calls the lifestyle of the *sâgiya* (p. 18), Beck elaborates on the social context of the transition to water pumps starting in the fifties, on the basis of interviews with the local Manasir and literature. Wording such as 'extreme violence'; 'tragic irony'; (p. 6) 'miserable situation'; 'derogatory views' (p. 7) 'remote but not unwordly or lethargic' and 'hostile deserts' (p. 8) stress the tough conditions in which the Manasir lived and were expelled from their land. This vocabulary might come across as biased but seems justified, given the reality and the explanation of the situation in other articles of this book.

The book contains four other articles on the Fourth Cataract region and around that are also written from an anthropological angle: David Haberlah's on the cultural landscape of the Manasir; Petra Weschenfelder's on Manasir women; Valerie Hänsch' on the chronology of displacement of the Manasir before and while the Hamdab Reservoir came into being; and Sandra Calkins on social stratification in Tukna (part of the resettlement area of the Manasir). Hänsch deserves special attention and complements here for her graphic description of the actual flooding. She describes the misunderstandings and the and lack of communication before and during the forced displacement of the Manasir from the affected area. Her accurate and detailed portrait of how the Manasir underwent the actual flooding, including their disbelief and flight before getting drowned, contains a tangible tension

reminding of a thriller. It is impressive to realise it is not fiction; the remaining Manasir were actually washed away as Hänsch describes so vividly here.

Four subsequent chapters are written from an architectonic perspective. Most of them are descriptions of the buildings that are now submerged, mostly houses made of *jâlûs*, sundried packed mudbrick. The articles include quite a few drawings and pictures and hence contribute to the registration of what is lost now. Yet, statements like 'houses (...) can be situated along a scale from adjacent to relatively far' (p. 98) and 'The climate affects the architecture of houses in the region' (p. 118); remain either too general or go without saying. The bibliography of Frances Welsh is not impressive and her claim that the architecture is 'aesthetically pleasing' (p. 125) makes one wonder whom she has in mind as her reader. Dieter Eigner's article seems a bit disparate and his notes like 'Salih (...) just quotes a stereotype' (p. 142) and 'the material is only manually applied in lumps, and that is all' (p. 155) raise questions on what really happened and the depth of the research. Hence the architectonic articles sometimes make wonder what scholarly framework is intended.

Only one article is historic-archeological of nature. It is written by Khidir Abdelkarim Ahmed, who meanwhile passed away, regrettably. He appears to be well informed and committed; it makes the reader question why only one of the thirteen contributors to this volume is Sudanese, especially in the light of a matter that is from many perspectives typical of Sudan.

In the last chapter the two editors put the Merowe Dam project in a broader framework of other dam projects. More importantly, they expound on the highly complex and completely politicised backdrop of the Merowe Dam project, the salvage project, the expulsion of the involved researchers and eventually the expulsion of the Manasir. 'Indeed, the title and content of this volume reflect the strong bias in mitigation planning and in research on the sedentary riverine population of the Fourth Cataract, leaving the (semi-)nomadic people of the region all but forgotten' (p. 4). This critical assessment bears witness to an intelligent and open mind and it is a plea for political and social commitment as well as a more interdisciplinary approach by archeologists. I propose this concluding chapter as compulsory reading for archeologists, (commercial) investors, contractors and politicians aiming for projects in developing countries.