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The South Necropolis of the Fatimid Cemetery of Aswan
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† ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to summarize the investigations of the South Necropolis of the Fatimid Cemetery in Aswan, carried out since 2006 by a team from the German Archaeological Institute (Cairo). The aims of the project are a thorough documentation and analysis of the site and its mausoleums and for the first time a large number of ordinary tombs. The investigation was extended to include some aspects of the history of Aswan and the preservation of the site and its monuments.

Keywords: Egypt – Aswan – Fatimid – cemetery – South Necropolis – typologies of tombs – archaeology – restoration

‡ RÉSUMÉ

L'article résume l’étude de la nécropole sud du cimetière fatimide d’Assouan, entreprise par l’Institut allemand d’archéologie au Caire depuis 2006. Le projet a pour buts la documentation et l’analyse du site et de ses mausolées et, pour la première fois, l’analyse de nombreuses tombes modestes. Il inclut également des aspects historiques d’Assouan et tient compte de la protection de l’ensemble et de la restauration de certains monuments.


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** Our thanks go to Linda George for editing the text.
The purpose of this article is to summarize the investigations of the South Necropolis of the Fatimid Cemetery in Aswan, carried out from 2006 to 2014 by our team and our workmen from Quft and Aswan. These investigations were supported by the German Archaeological Institute (Cairo) in cooperation with the Ministry of Antiquities and the Institut für Baugeschichte und Stadtbaugeschichte of the Technische Universität Berlin. The aims of the project are a thorough documentation and analysis of the site, its geomorphologic composition, its quarries and its mausoleums and tombs. For the first time a large number of ordinary tombs were recorded because they are as essential as mausoleums for the understanding of the cemetery. Ugo Monneret de Villard, who documented the cemetery during the 1920’s, did not have the time and money to do it, and Creswell, who studied the cemetery during the 1930’s, was more interested in mausoleums. The investigation was soon extended to include spiritual dimensions, such as tomb rites and the worship of saints. Last but not least, the preservation of the site, its monuments, and its spiritual life have become important issues for the project.

History of Islamic Aswan

Aswan or rather Syene, as it was called by Greeks and Romans, was occupied by the Arab invaders in 641-642. Aswan was known as a military stronghold controlling the southern borders of Egypt. It was also politically important, as it was the seat of the governorate of Upper Egypt up until the 11th century AD. Under the Mamluks, the city of Qūṣ, north of Luxor, became the spiritual centre of Upper Egypt. During the first centuries AH the town was the gathering place of the Egyptian and North African pilgrims en route to Mecca. At this time the safest and easiest route was to travel up the Nile Valley to Aswan, and from there to cross the Eastern Desert. From the harbour of ʿAyḍāb, on the Red Sea coast, pilgrims sailed to the Arabian Peninsula. The city developed strong ties with the Hejaz over many centuries, and there were also quite a few Arabs from the Hejaz who had settled in Aswan even before the Arab conquest. Within this context a stela points to a descendant of one of the Prophet Companions. Aswan was also an important centre of learning, with many fuqahā’ and hadith scholars. The city of Aswan also played a role as an economic centre. The historical gold and
Emerald mines were reopened in the Eastern Desert in the Wādī ‘Allāqi (southeast of Aswan) during the 9th century, and this led to an important economic revival and attracted more people. Aswan also became an important way station for trading caravans. According to a well-known treaty between the Muslim authority in Egypt and the Nubians, the latter had to supply a number of slaves who passed through Aswan each year. The town also got involved in the international trade of goods from the Far East, which passed through Aswan before they were shipped down the Nile Valley to the Mediterranean Sea. This phenomenon seems to be linked to the insecurity of the traditional route through the Persian Gulf and Iraq in the 10th and the early 11th centuries. But unfortunately we know very little of how this trading reflected on the city itself.

**Historic Description of the “Old Arab Cemetery”**

Several travellers mention the cemetery. The most detailed description is provided by the famous orientalist scholar Edward Lane, who visited Aswan in 1820 and wrote: “On the south of the ruined town is the old Arab Cemetery; which presents a striking scene. It is very extensive; occupying an irregular, rocky tract: the hollow places among rocks, which are of granite, being partly filled up with dark, granite sand, and rubbish; and the eminences of the rock showing themselves in many places among the tombs. By the modern inhabitants of Aswa’n, this is called the cemetery of the Sahha’beh (or Companions of the Prophet); and this appellation has probably not been given to it without reason; for doubtless many “companions” were buried here; soldiers of the first Arab army which took Syene, and founded the town of which the ruins have been described; and besides these there must have been many “companions” among the Moos’lim’s who first settled, and engaged in commerce, at Asw’an. I could not, however, distinguish the tombs of any of these revered individuals... The tombs are constructed with crude mud brick, with few exceptions; and are, or have been, plastered and white-washed. Many of them are surmounted by copulas. They are mostly very small; and much ruined. Among them are many small tablets, or tomb-stones, from a foot to three feet high, inscribed in Koo’fee (or old Arabic) characters: generally in the *flexuous* style... These tombstones are very numerous in the souther(n)most quarter of the cemetery. I saw a few of marble: but almost all of them are of sandstone... On the hill to the west of this cemetery are several large sepulchral mosques. The tract on which the cemetery lies is bounded on the east, as well as on the west, by granite hills... Through the old Arab cemetery lies the most frequented route towards Philae.”

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8. Lane, *Description of Egypt*, pp. 428-429, fig. 132.
9. The ruined town is well indicated on the map, in: *Description de L’Égypte, État moderne*, Atlas, pl. 2.
10. Parts of the region mentioned last are now built over by the Nubian Museum, which was constructed during the 1990’s. One does not know how many tombs and mausoleums were demolished then. In fairness one has to say that some tombs and mausoleums located in the park have been preserved and have been restored.
The description is supplemented by a detailed sketch, on which one can identify even some of the mausoleums still existing (fig. 1). Text and drawing give a good impression of how the cemetery must have looked before the construction of modern roads and buildings during the 20th century. Amongst other items, Lane mentions “the tract”, or path, to the Philae temple, which dates back to the Old Kingdom. Its northern end is still visible on site nowadays, including some contemporaneous rock inscriptions. This can be considered one of the oldest manmade paths hewn in bedrock.”

From Lane’s description, one gets the impression that the cemetery was no longer in use, which explains why it is called the “Old Cemetery” by the local population. Historically that might well be correct, as the memorial cenotaph of Sheikh al-Disūqī looks as if it was rebuilt in the second half of the 19th century or even later. The custom of burying in the historic necropolis began again in the 1950’s only, and this practice now poses a certain threat to the historic fabric.

Lane’s comments on the tombstones are telling, as he says they were numerous and they are visible on his sketch. Nowadays they are rather rare because almost all (several thousands) were removed to storehouses in Cairo and the Aswan Museum on nearby Elephantine Island during the 1890’s after a heavy rainstorm. Creswell made a humorous comment on the disconnection of the epitaphs from each tomb, in claiming that he saw a photo taken by Teynard in 1851-1852 that showed the interior of a mausoleum filled with a pile of tombstones. In 2010 an international workshop was held in Aswan discussing ways of editing the tombstones.

The historic Islamic necropolis (fig. 2) was located extra muros, east and to some extent south of the historic town. Its area stretches over 2 km from north to south and measures in certain areas approx. 500 m from east to west. The size of the area of the necropolis was comparable to the City of the Dead in Cairo and is rather amazing for a provincial capital. Italian-born architect Ugo Monneret de Villard noted in the 1920’s the existence of three smaller cemeteries dispersed over the plain; the first is located at the north end and embedded today in the urban district of el-Anani. Two groups of nine mausoleums noted by Monneret in the 1920’s and a number of simple tombs still exist (fig. 3). The second group of burials halfway south was centred on the fortress called al-Ṭābiya, which was replaced some decades ago by the monumental Badr Mosque. Monneret de Villard counted fourteen dispersed mausoleums

11. The Philae temple that has been transferred during the 1970’s and rebuilt near its place of origin lies at a distance of approx. 8 km from the necropolis.
12. The reason for it must be the recent dramatic demographic development of Aswan linked to the construction of the High Dam during the 1950’s and 1960’s.
13. After a torrential rainfall in 1887, as Wallis Budge called it, almost all of the tombstones were removed and are stored now in Cairo and Aswan with a few exceptions that are kept in European and American museums and in private collections. On this topic cf. also Creswell, The Muslim Architecture of Egypt I, pp. 131-133; Comité, Exercice, p. 8.
15. Monneret de Villard, Necropoli di Assuan, two maps n/n.
as being part of the middle cemetery; ninety years later we identified only three. The others
gave way to recent urbanisation. The third largest and best preserved cemetery or South
Necropolis is located at the south end and is our study area, which will be described below.
Most alarming is the loss of at least three quarters of the historic necropolis’ surface through
urbanization since the 1930’s, reflecting Aswan’s enormous growth from 15,000 inhabitants at
the end of the 19th century to more than 500,000 in the early 21st century.

South Necropolis

After those preliminary remarks on the entire cemetery we will give a more detailed account
of the South Necropolis, our study area, which is better known as the Fatimid Cemetery and
was decribed by Edward Lane. It measures approx. 600 by 500 m totalling 30,000 m². This area
is quite well preserved but encircled by historic and modern roads. It is built on bedrock made
of the famous rose granite continuing for several kilometres toward the south. It represents
one of the most important quarry fields of Pharaonic and Greco-Roman times. Quarrying
must have ceased at a time, when it became much easier to “quarry” building material from
ancient monuments.

It is a natural plain that stretches in its most southern part from the obelisk quarries
(in the east) up to the heights in the west, which are overlooking the Nile. In the 1960’s a road
was constructed leading to the modern urban districts of southern Aswan. This road divides
the necropolis (artificially) into a western and an eastern part. Most of the larger monu-
ments in the western part are positioned on the heights, mainly martyrs’ tombs or mashhads.
We do not know how this positioning can be explained. It might have to do with the fear of
rising water during the flooding of the Nile. Unfortunately some of the heights have been
built over. In 1902 a very fine mosque containing nine domes was demolished and replaced by
water installations for the Old Cataract Hotel. The building for the pump was designed in neo
Pharaonic style. Somers Clarke wrote about this act: “A most unnecessary act of vandalism
in the destruction of a picturesque and interesting object in the immediate neighbourhood of
Aswan has just taken place.” Only some years ago more modern structures were built, such
as the Nubian Museum, including its park, and two modern hotels.

17. One mausoleum is part of the fortress Hārūn, which is not accessible.
18. Cf. supra.
   pp. 97-102, pl. 19-21.
20. Oral information from Wolfgang Müller.
21. A plan of that monument is published in: Creswell, Keppel, in The Muslim Architecture of Egypt I, p. 145,
   fig. 71.
22. Egyptian Gazette (10 January 1902).
23. It remains unknown how many tombs and mausoleums were demolished by modern constructions. Only
   some tombs and mausoleums located in the park of the Nubian Museum have been preserved and restored.
The eastern part (of the South Necropolis) begins behind another modern building and continues in a gentle slope 600 m towards south. It has two large groups of funerary monuments (north and south group) separated by a small wadi, which might have served as a connecting trench or as an overflow towards a historic pond further northeast.\textsuperscript{24} A detailed site map (1:1000) of the South Necropolis was prepared by a professional surveyor, recording the topographic features as well as quarries,\textsuperscript{25} rocks, and swamps, and the exact location of the tombs and mausoleums (fig. 4).\textsuperscript{26} The mapping process resulted in precise observations on the spot, including geo-morphologic drillings\textsuperscript{27}. All this collected data leads to a much better understanding of the site, its history, and ultimately to its protection.

**Catalogue of tombs**

One of the main tasks was the recording of the mausoleums and tombs. We identified 30 of the 31 mausoleums Monneret had documented during the 1920’s and we recorded 17 mausoleums unknown until now and approx. 350 tombs in addition. Right from the beginning we focused our research on tombs as much as on mausoleums, because as mentioned before the tombs in Aswan that occupy the main area have never been documented.

**Typology of tombs**

Now we are in a position to present eight different types of tombs (fig. 5).

I. Burial below ground indicated by an oblong enclosure of one course of roughly hewn stones.

II. Burial below ground with a rectangular framing made of two courses of mud brick. The southern part of the frame is about 1 m high separating a platform made of brick added at the south end and featuring a model prayer niche.\textsuperscript{28} Many of those niches were damaged.\textsuperscript{29} This elevated part of the framing indicates according to some experts a place for prayer but it might also just indicate the Mecca direction for the dead. Usually the tombstone was inserted in the heightened south part of the frame.

\textsuperscript{24.} Observation communicated by M. de Dapper.
\textsuperscript{25.} A number of quarries were investigated by Adel Kilany in 2012.
\textsuperscript{26.} Cf. pl. 2, author Giorgio Nogara.
\textsuperscript{27.} The drillings were carried out by Morgan de Dapper of Ghent University and Ilka Klose of the German Archaeological Institute in 2010, 2012 and 2013.
\textsuperscript{28.} It is well known that the Mecca direction is indicated inside the burial chamber e.g. tomb of Tatar al-Ḥiğāzīyya or the tomb of Sheikh Sinān in Cairo both dating from the Mamluk and Ottoman periods. The mausoleum of Iḥwār Yūsūf, dating to the later part of the Fatimid period in the Qarāfā Kubrā in Cairo features a decorated triple mihrab. A mausoleum dating to the second half of the 8th c. AD (tomb no 25) of the excavations of Iṣṭabl ʿAntar (Fostat), also features a triple mihrab. See Gayraud, “Iṣṭabl ʿAntar (Fostat) 1994”, pp. 3-5 and fig. 4, 5, and 7.
\textsuperscript{29.} One wonders if this kind of destruction is the due course of weathering or due to a shift in religious practice? Only in some tombs the mihrab remained intact.
III. Burial below ground with high (up to 1 m) panelled and decorated sides and a platform at the south end (cf. II).

IV. Enclosure up to 2 m high for several burials below ground and a platform at the south end (cf. II).

V. Burial below ground with an elevated cover, its surface in some cases is decorated by a horizontal niche and a platform at the south end (cf. II).

VI. Burial below ground with a cover made of steps of mud brick and a platform at the south end (cf. II).

VII. Burial chamber above ground covered by an Egyptian tunnel vault with oblique courses a flat top and a platform at the south end (cf. II). This tomb is also called mastaba type.30

VIII. Burial below ground with an elevated cenotaph covered by an ancient Egyptian vault decorated by rows of small niches.

Furthermore as mentioned above all tombs except type I were covered by plaster and whitewashed, which must have given a rather pure impression of white structures resplendent in the sun of Nubia. The tombs differ obviously if they are made for burials below ground (I to VI and VIII) or for burials above ground (VII). The positioning of the actual burial depended on the nature of the ground rock or debris. The tombs also differ in terms of decor reflecting probably the social position of the deceased. Two kinds of decors are very frequent. A horizontal relief positioned on the surface representing a niche featuring a pointed arch (on the south end). Its spiritual meaning remains unclear so far.31 The second concerns the outer walls and is made of vertical recesses of different width interrupting the outer face.32

Type VI is found very frequently in the most southern cluster containing large mausoleums, which might have been built later than most tombs and monuments. The line of development or evolution of the tomb types remains uncertain. Type I looks like an early form of a tomb, but that impression might have to do with the rather crude use of stone debris from the quarries. This might have been just the cheapest way to build a tomb.

On tomb arrangement Creswell writes:33 “The tombs are scattered all over the place without any order or arrangement, partly because of the nature of the ground which is also cut deep wadis and encumbered by enormous blocks of granite, so that level surfaces are scarce.” He is quite right, there was certainly no overall planning concept for the cemetery possible but there are some frequently used patterns how to lay out tombs. So we found ordinary tombs (type I and II) aligned in perfect rows (fig. 6). The smallest unit is formed by two tombs with a conjoint wall, remains of plaster showing clearly which tomb was built first. Such topographical closeness hints at a special relation between the buried e.g. a married couple but it could

30. There is also the variation featuring a small burial chamber above ground covered by a tunnel vault. Sides show elaborate niche decor. The size suggests a burial for a child of a certain status.
31. Jan Lindemann argues that it might indicate the abstract shape of a dome. Robert Hillenbrand is of the opinion it indicates a holy place.
32. The width reflects either the width 13 cm or the length 26 cm of the mud brick in use.
well be also other family members, we just do not know yet. In complexes 106, 115, 115bis, 200 and 201 up to six tombs are laid in a perfect row featuring a common platform at the south end. Alignment with conjoint walls feature also mausoleums and tombs of type III and type IV, cf. complex 110 (fig. 7).

If one takes the section west (of the modern road) the tombs look different from most of the tombs, belong to Type VII and look like boxes or small mastabas. The reason for the choice of this type was that tombs are built on the bedrock (made of granite or in some instances of sandstone), an underground where it is impossible to excavate a pit for the deceased. Such an arrangement (platform and qibla) for praying was part of almost all ordinary tombs as well as of the mausoleums if the latter do not feature a mihrab inside. It is unclear how many dead were put in one such mastaba tomb during the centuries. The fact that there is only one niche for one tombstone hints at a single occupancy initially. Some of those tombs are also arranged in rows with conjoining walls.

**Dating**

Although the majority of tombstones have been removed, we found over twenty in the rubble and one fragment. All we can say is that from the tombstones we found only one fragment was in situ (Mausoleum M9). It reads as follows: “Hosna, daughter of al-Hossin, son of Mohammed son of Hossin. She died on safar in the year 500, which corresponds with 1106 AD.” The recording and transcription of our epigraphic finds was done by Egyptian colleagues. What is interesting is that they all had dates from the Fatimid Period (969-1171 AD), which coincides with Lane’s observations: “... These tombstones are very numerous in the souther(n) most quarter of the cemetery. I saw a few of marble: but almost all of them are of sandstone...” This might be the reason the South Necropolis is called the Fatimid Cemetery by the local population. This range of dates was confirmed again during the February 2014 campaign when we were able to extract a tombstone from the original masonry of mausoleum M 10, which includes the name and death date of the deceased: “… ʿUlwiyya, Ibnat Abū Rūs, Ibn Muḥammad, Ibn Abū Rūs, died H. 415 Muḥarram…”, which gives a construction date post quem for the monument: 1024 AD.

34. In most cases the succession of building phases is clearly visible as the tombs and the platforms are usually separated by a layer of plaster or whitewash.
35. Muhammad Rageh (Nubian Museum) and Inspector Ismail Muhammad Ismail.
36. Among the published stelae a large amount belong to the 9th c. AD (2nd-3rd c. AH). It may very well be that the South Necropolis was largely used in the Fatimid times but one must not forget that the whole necropolis has a much longer span of life, ranging from the early days of Islamic Egypt until the Ayyubid period. The workshop concerning the stelae of the Islamic Necropolis of Aswan that was held in Aswan in February 2010 gave abundant information about stelae that are stored in various places in Egypt and in some collections outside the country, and have so far not been published. A fair amount of these belong to the Fatimid period but a large number are earlier or later (presentations of Dr. Rageh Zaher Mohamed, Dr. Mohamed Abbas, Inspector Ibrahim Abd al-Rahman).
The detailed dating of the site, as of the necropolis as a whole, is a delicate matter, although we have elaborated a typology of tombs, it must be clear that this typology does not square with a chronological dating. No true excavations were possible that could give clearer dating data. Some dating arguments could be obtained through comparison with other Islamic necropoli’s or mausolea throughout Egypt. But cemeteries such as those of Zāwiyat al-Almāt near al-Minya have not been studied in a historical or archaeological aspect. The great mausolea of Cairo’s cemeteries such as Ibn Ṭabāṭabā, the Sab’ Banāt in al-Qarāfa al-Kubrā (10th c. AD), the mashad of al-Ǧuyūšī (11th c. AD), and the tombs and mausolea of the necropolis unearthed at the site of Iṣṭabl ʿAntar (Abbassid, Tulunid and Fatimid periods) may give some comparative material. As far as research stands for the moment we cannot give any precise dating to our various tombs, but more than confirm Lane’s hypothesis, that the southern cemetery seems to have been largely constructed in the Fatimid days.

Pottery

One might argue that there must surely be the possibility of access to stratified material. Unfortunately this is not the case, since most of the tombs have been built on bedrock and excavations are not allowed for obvious reasons. Therefore we have to rely on the analysis of the pottery for dating. Gillian Pyke is currently preparing a catalogue. She writes: “The brief assessment of the ceramic material collected during 2008 season at the Fatimid Cemetery has shown that a significant amount of information can be gained from a small number of sherds. While the pottery predates proposed date for the foundation of the cemetery, it is all from the immediately preceding millennium, known from rescue excavations to be well represented archeologically in this area. It is also possible to distinguish between material derived from industrial activities (early Roman to early Islamic periods), and that from domestic use (early Medieval), reflecting changes in use of the area. Ceramic material of dynastic date was absent from the samples, which is also in keeping with what is known of the development of Aswan. The current strategy of sampling sherds incorporated into the walls of the tombs, conducted by members of the survey team has proven to be satisfactory, producing useful results.”

Restoration and Site Management

Most tombs and mausoleums are in need of conservation and restoration and the South Necropolis on the whole is a site of neglect of which the authorities are well aware and asked us to put forward some proposals. It was quite clear from the beginning (2006) that a total restoration of over fifty mausoleums and several hundred tombs was beyond the financial scope of our project. Therefore a feasibility study was drawn up by a member of our team.

38. Quoted from Gillian Pyke’s internal report on the 2008 season.
in 2009. The overall concept is: the sector of the South Necropolis west of the modern road and adjacent to the park of the Nubian Museum should become an extension of the latter. This proposal has not been implemented so far.

For the part east to the modern road, which has been fenced off already, a decisive step was to identify and separate the different users. We identified locals using the cemetery as a short cut, mourners participating at internments, family members visiting the dead, bridal processions and tourists. One idea that came up was to create a new footpath for tourists, leading from the mosque of Sheikh al-Disūqī on the eastern fringes that are very close to the quarries of the Unfinished Obelisk up to the north end of the site next to the offices of the Ministry of Antiquities.

As it turned out that this would be again a too costly and complex affair it was decided to single out an area stretching from the north end of the necropolis about 100 m further South averaging a width of about 60 m thus covering 5000 m². In this area a visitor’s path is now indicated by ground elements made of red brick and ten information points have been selected where descriptive panels in Arabic and English will be placed.

We concentrated our conservation and restoration efforts in this area. In order to understand the complexity and the costs involved in the restoration work we did a pilot scheme. A mausoleum (113) of moderate size was selected, which showed frequent damages: the dome was missing; the external walls had suffered badly (fig. 8). Our civil engineer discovered that the walls were disintegrating not only due to exposure to the climate and age but much more due to weak foundations and he drew up a first conservation concept. He pointed out in his report that most mausoleums especially the domes show identical vertical cracks and suffer from a structural weakness, which could be remedied by placing an iron traction ring at the foot of the dome above the octagon. The foundations were stabilised by adding a reinforced belt made of lime mortar at foundation level and reinforced with steel; the missing dome was reconstructed and its shape was reinvented as well by comparison with other domes and in accordance with a few remains on top of the tomb (fig. 9). The whole structure was covered by one coat of mud and one of lime plaster. Almost identical work was needed and done to Mausoleum 114 which resembles 113. The little water store M6 or sabīl located at the north end of the cemetery is part of the complex of M 7 and was reinforced by rebuilding the courses of the outer walls using fired brick and stabilized by horizontal steel rods. It received a new coat of mud and one of lime plaster. The pendentif domes outer plastering was in large parts still existing and completed only.

Complex M7 consists of a mausoleum, attached to that building is a two nave prayer hall which must have been covered by two tunnel vaults. The vaults have disappeared long ago.

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41. Such traction rings made of iron do exist on the 16th c. domes built by Sinan in several towns of the Ottoman Empire.
42. The mausoleum must have been restored in the 1940’s or 1950’s. It showed a few vertical cracks which were closed and the exterior was re-plastered.
The Mecca direction is indicated by a mihrab that is inserted into the qibla-wall; the wall itself has suffered through times but is still standing up. For this element very careful and limited conservation measures were enacted and only the mihrab has been rebuilt. The original floor of the hall was covered by a new floor made of red brick.³³ The other mausoleums (M 8, M 9, M 10 and 112) and the adjacent tombs have been secured and restored as well. During the restoration work we noticed that new burials took place in the vicinity of Mausoleum 113. We were told by our ethnologist that it was a good sign as the locals think the Saint buried in the (restored) mausoleum regained strength.

Conclusions

From 2006 to 2014 sixteen working campaigns of about one month were held, during which: a detailed map was drawn up (1:2000), a large number of tombs and mausoleums were documented, a catalogue of pottery was elaborated, a site management concept developed, a visitors zone adorned with a foot path and with information plates. In this area one sabīl and no less then six mausoleums were consolidated and restored, including the rebuilding of two missing domes (mausoleums 113 and 114). A general clean up of the whole south cemetery including emergency consolidations was carried out as well. Epigraphic work became a very important issue. It included the recording of over twenty stelae found by clearing the debris and some fragments.⁴⁴ In 2010 an international conference held in the Nubian Museum was organised by the German Archaeological Institute exploring ways of editing the tombstones, which are no longer on the site but in various storerooms in Egypt.⁴⁵ During February 2014 a team of young Egyptian researchers copied a large number of historic graffiti in the mausoleums M 10 and M 25.

What started as a modest documentation project conducted by two persons has become a major undertaking over the years including more than twenty researchers and not to be forgotten a large number of workmen from Quft and Aswan. All this would not have been possible without the exemplary cooperation and support from the State Ministry of Egyptian Antiquities. Our combined efforts should underline the importance of the unique South Necropolis in Aswan (fig. 10).

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³³ During this work the skeleton of a crocodile was found underneath the historic floor in front of the mihrab, the animal facing Mekka. According to ethnologist N. Shohoumi it represents a sign of protection according to local customs. Such animals are often found fixed above the entrance gate of Nubian houses. It is unclear when the animal was buried there.

³⁴ Three of them come from the site of the so-called Fatimid Minaret located on the western fringes south of the Basma Hotel and were used most likely as building material.

³⁵ The organiser was Ralph Bodenstein, who heads also a pilot scheme in this field.
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Fig. 1. Sketch by E. Lane, *Description of Egypt*.

Fig. 2. Aerial view of Aswan indicating location of the Necropolis (Google Earth).

Fig. 3. Mausoleum located in the North Necropolis (Photo: A. Paasch).
Fig. 4. Sitemap of the South Necropolis (Map: G. Nogara).
Fig. 5. Tomb typologies (Drawing: B. Schäfer).
Fig. 6. Plan of Tomb complex 110 (Drawing: C. Straße).
Fig. 7. Tomb complex 110 (Photo: D. Zahn).

Fig. 8. Mausoleum 113 before restoration (Photo: J. Lindemann).
The South Necropolis of the Fatimid Cemetery of Aswan

Fig. 9. Mausoleum 113 after restoration (Photo: J. Lindemann).

Fig. 10. View of South Necropolis (Photo: A. Paasch).