

# HEINRICH-BARTH-INSTITUT

für Archäologie und Umweltgeschichte Afrikas e.V.

Heinrich - Barth - Institut, Jennerstr. 8, D-50823 Köln Telefon: 0221 55 66 80 / 55 44 40 / 55 80 98 Telefax: 0221 55 02 303 E-Mail: kuper@uni-koeln.de

# AHMED FAKHRY DESERT CENTER

#### DAKHLA

Proposal 24.4.2004

# Focus Dakhla

@1712

SUDA

200 km

Situated in the centre of Egypt and at the same time being the country's most remote oasis, the history of Dakhla and its surrounding deserts reflects in a particular way the long lasting struggle of Egypt against the challenges of an increasingly inhospitable desert world around. This close interdependence between man and environment, is mirrored already in Herodotus' statement that "Egypt is a gift of the Nile", and also today it still defines all plans for future shaping of the country.

#### A Gift of the Desert

Recent research, however, has shown that there have been periods of much better living conditions and that remote areas such as the Gilf Kebir and the Great Sand Sea - today the most lifeless parts of the desert - once experienced enough rainfall to create a savannah-like environment. From about 10,000 to 5,000 years ago people could live there, making substantial economic, technological and cultural achievements that, with the banishment of the population by the growing Sahara, became vital parts of the Pharaonic civilisation in the Nile valley. So, in turn, one might argue now for the notion that Egypt also is "a gift of the desert".

#### Egypt's Return

This new view of the roots of the Egyptian civilisation meets with a growing public awareness of Egypt's deserts, which is mainly related to the nation-wide discussion of the Toshka and Wadi Gedid land reclaiming projects. Now, since "Egypt returns to where it came from", it is more and more recognised that the vast wastelands that cover more than 90% of the country's surface are an unexploited treasure and have a great economic potential, including an attraction for tourists. But the desert's values can only be maintained as long as its natural environment and the omnipresent heritage of its past remain undisturbed an will be protected.

# Centre of Information and Safeguarding

With regard to this it seems important to bring these new ideas to the minds of the local people especially the coming generation - as well as to foreign visitors. So the idea of a local museum at Dakhla oasis, that has started from discussions with Egyptian colleagues, is planned to be realised now as an education and information centre raising awareness of the rich history, present problems and future opportunities of the area. At the same time it could work as a centre for safeguarding the cultural and natural heritage of the desert. This could for instance be developed by disseminating information to desert travellers, by providing a base for controlling staff and training the personnel.

# Prerequisites

Concerning the practical requirements for realising such a plan the situation at Dakhla seems to be ideal. With the Canadian multidisciplinary Dakhla Oasis Project (DOP), the French long-term excavations at Balat (IFAO) and the desert research by the German project ACACIA, three major research groups have already their base there. Their experts from different scientific fields (including Egyptology, Prehistoric Archaeology, Geology, Geography, Climatology, Botany, Zoology, Ethnography, Oriental Studies) and different nations (France, England, Canada, Germany, Belgium, Netherlands, Poland, USA) will be willing to contribute to such a common project.

Since H.E. the Governor of the New Valley has yet appointed a suitable piece of land in the centre of Mut, the next step will be to design a first concept for the building and its internal structure and to raise necessary financial support inside and outside of Egypt.

# Basic Concept

The building, following the intentions of the Governor to encourage a wider use of traditional construction techniques, shall be carried out mainly in mud brick with domes shaping its general appearance. The exhibition concept should perhaps follow the idea of *water as a limiting factor throughout history*, and stimulate the awareness that water, oil and other resources are sensitive and exhaustible in the same way as environment and archaeology. It should bring about that the desert is not a dead land, but of value for the future. Generally scientific perceptions should be detectable, but sequence must not necessarily be chronological and the concept is still open for any idea.

The building should comprise - dependent on funds and in an adequate scale - the following:

- 1) Reception hall / Central court
- 2) Exhibition rooms (e.g.)

The shaping of the landscape (Geology, Geomorphology) Climate and Palaeo-environment Early human adaptation The Sahara savannah From prehistory to history The Pharaohs' Far West Persians and Romans Early Christians From Islam to 19<sup>th</sup> century Invaders and visitors The New Valley Environment and future

- 3) Room for special exhibitions
- 4) Lecture and cinema hall
- 5) Gift shop
- 6) Children's work room
- 7) Seminar room
- 8) Study room / Library
- 9) Administration offices

- 10) Staff rooms
- 11) Store rooms
- 12) Laboratories
- 13) Cafeteria
- 14) Lavatories
- 15) Garden (Rock art exhibition)
- 16) Parking area