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## **Some New Reflections on Islang and Nofalab Neolithic Sites in Khartoum Province, Sudan**

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The present interim report sets forth  $^{14}\text{C}$  results of four radiocarbon samples retrieved from two Neolithic sites in Khartoum Province (Fig. 1) namely Islang (15°53'N, 32°32'E) and Nofalab 2 (15°52'N, 32°32'E).

The two sites were test-excavated by the present writer during July-August 1990. The cultural material recovered labelled Islang 2 and Nofalab 2 to distinguish it from el-Anwar's earlier work at these localities (el-Anwar 1981: 42-45 and 1982).

### **1. Islang 2**

The site is located some 28 km north of Omdurman (Fig. 1). It is situated on a gravel ridge at ca. 39 m above the sea level and it lies two kilometres west of the Main Nile. The site is a small one and a total of 200 m<sup>2</sup> was excavated. The previously partially excavated area by el-Anwar totalling ca. 496 m<sup>2</sup> (el-Anwar 1981: 21). The excavated units yielded cultural material down to a depth of 50 cm in most places and exceeding that depth (ca. 60 cm) in rare instances.

#### *1.1. Archaeological finds*

The site yielded considerable amounts of finds comprising pottery, lithic artefacts, molluscan and faunal remains.

The pottery of this settlement (n=1312) is mainly decorated (ca.68% of the total collection). Zigzag is the most favourite motif. Further frequent motifs include triangles with dots, dotted lines, triangles, incised, combed, scraped, semicircular panels, impressed straight lines and slanting serration. Rocker stamping, combing, incisions and impressions were used to execute these decorations. (Fig. 2). The pottery is sand-tempered and mainly burnished by a hard-smoothed tool to get a compact lustrous surface of which plain specimens

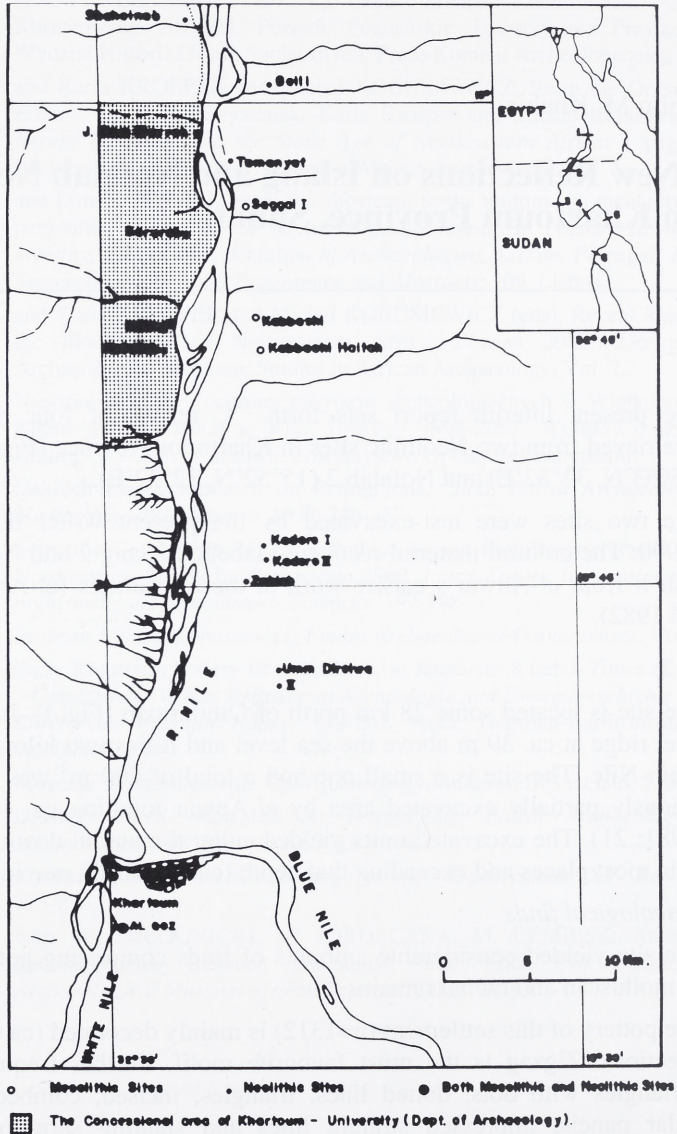


Fig. 1 The main Mesolithic and Neolithic sites in Khartoum province

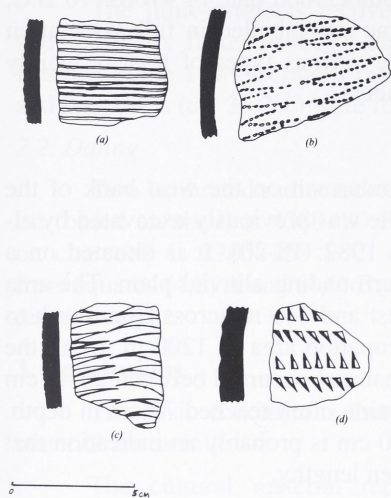


Fig. 2. Islang pottery

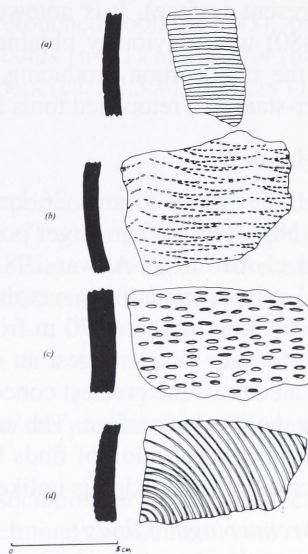


Fig. 3. Nofalab pottery

are the most frequent. The sherds are often smoothed on the inside only. The surface colour is mostly brown (7.5YR 5/2 Munsell soil colour chart 1975) generally breaking with grey (5YR 5/1) or dark grey (5YR 4/1) fractures of various shades. Complete pots were devoid in the collection. It could be judged from the rim-sherds that the present ceramic repertoire represents a limited number of vessel forms. Most are hemispherical bowls, cups are present but apparently rare. Wall thicknesses range from 2-11 mm with 4-9 mm thickness predominating. Notably, the horizontal breakage and uneven thickness of the walls raise the probability that Islang 2 pottery was made by coiling-technique.

The lithic artefacts include retouched tools ( $n=207$ ), primary and secondary flakes ( $n=2390$ ), blades ( $n=12$ ), cores ( $n=11$ ), chips ( $n=537$ ) and ground stone ( $n=106$ ). The raw material used consists primarily of quartz. Rhyolite was mainly used for retouched tools. Ground stone artefacts were exclusively made of silcrete sandstone.

### 1.2. Dating

The site has got a couple of calibrated radiocarbon dates; the oldest (based on shell material) is  $4490 \pm 150$  B.C. (SMU-2575), being derived from square (1)



AL3 (30 cm below the present surface) and the youngest (based on charcoal) is 4330±90 B.C. (SMU-2565) being obtained from square (3,4) L2 (20 cm below the present surface). It is noteworthy that a radiocarbon date of 4706±170 B.C. (T-3880) was previously obtained for the same site labelled in full association with the radiocarbon producing levels include various types of pottery mainly rocker-stamped, retouched tools and stone grinders.

## 2. Nofalab 2

The site is located 26 km north of Omdurman on the west bank of the Main Nile (Fig. 1). The larger portion of the site was previously excavated by el-Sayed el-Anwar (el-Anwar 1981: 42-43 and 1982: 18-20). It is situated on a gravel ridge elevated two metres above the surrounding alluvial plain. The area of occupation measures 70 m from east to west and 140 m across from north to south. Surface finds suggest an estimated occupation area of 1200 m. In all the excavated units the greatest concentration of material occurred between 20-40 cm below the present surface. The cultural occupation often reached 70 cm in depth. The high concentration of finds between 30-40 cm is probably an indication that the period of occupation is unlikely to have been lengthy.

### 2.1. Archaeological finds

Cultural finds comprising abundant pottery, lithic artefacts, molluscan and faunal remains were recovered. Considerable quantities of pottery (n=2981) were solely found in fragmented condition, the bulk of which is decorated (ca. 76%). But unlike Islang 2 pottery (see supra and el-Anwar 1981: 44-45 and 1982: 68-77) „Vees“ decoration in this collection is the most popular motif (ca. 22%), zigzag decoration is the second most prominent motif. Further frequent motifs consist of incised, impressed, dotted lines, triangles, combed and linear impressions whereas black-topped red ware is scarce (Fig. 3)

The pottery is sand-tempered, of hard fabric and well-fired. The surface colour is mostly reddish brown (5YR 5/3 Munsell soil colour chart 1975). The fractures usually break with grey (5YR 5/1, 5YR 4/1, 10YR 6/1 Munsell) or dark grey (7.5YR 4/0, 5YR N3/0 Munsell) colours. The bulk of pottery is burnished, though surfaces are often smoothed on the interior only. Most of the pottery is slipped, particularly the fine plain sherds which are overwhelmingly coated with red or reddish brown slip. A red pigment of ochre was, in most instances, applied to the outer surfaces of the sherds when the clay was in the leather-hard state and prior to firing. The potsherds indicate direct rims probably belonging to large or medium-sized bowls. A few thin rims, probably cups, are in evidence and are exclusively of fine-textured ware. Vessel bases are not present in the collection. Wall thicknesses vary from 2 to 14 mm but the majority have thicknesses ranging

from 5-10 mm. It could be inferred from the uneven thickness of the walls that coiling technique was used.

The lithic artefacts recovered include retouched tools (n=343), primary and secondary flakes (n=697), blades (n=14), cores (n=11) and debris (n=606). Besides, some 119 specimens comprising grinders (ca. 52.3%), rubbers (17.6%) and fragments (ca. 30.2%) were found.

## 2.2. Dating

Two calibrated radiocarbon dates were reported from the this site; the oldest (based on shell) is 4380+80 B.C. (SMU-2577) whereas the youngest (based on charcoal) is 2705+259 B.C. (SMU-2561). These two dates were obtained from squares (4,3) A and (4,6) B, (ca. 70 cm and 30 cm below the present surface respectively).

## 3. Conclusions

The basic conclusions that I can draw at the present from the excavated material are as follows:

The cultural material reported in association with the radiocarbon-producing levels comprises pottery overwhelmingly executed with rocker-stamping technique as well as considerable quantities of retouched implements and groundstone artefacts.

With the exception of the sole radiocarbon sample of Nofalab 2 (SMU-2561) clustering around the 3rd millennium B.C. (Late Khartoum Neolithic), the rest of the samples from this site and Islang 2 have provided dates in the magnitude of the 5th millennium B.C. (see *supra*) and hence fall within the time range of „Khartoum Neolithic“ tradition (e.g. see el-Anwar 1981: 42-43; 1982; Hassan 1986: 85 and Haaland 1987: 60-61).

The pottery inventory of Islang 2 and Nofalab 2 which is mainly impressed and burnished, falls within the norm of „Khartoum Neolithic“ tradition as represented by Esh Shaheinab (cf. Arkell 1953: 68- 77, Pls. 29-33) and related sites. The close affinities in ceramic traits of the three sites (Islang, Nofalab and Esh Shaheinab) seem to confirm this partial synchronism which has already manifested in the radiocarbon dates obtained.

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