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## **Jebel El-Khazna – a Late Prehistoric Site in the Fifth Cataract Area**

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### **Introduction**

The Fotwar area is located at the extreme south of the Fifth Cataract and north of El-Bauga. It is bounded on the south side by El-Jul area and to the north by Al-siliamania area. From the eastern side of the Nile it is bordered by Mebierieka and El-Swiageat and to the western side lies the extended range of the Bayuda Desert Mountains (Fig. 1).

The Nile and steep valleys of surrounding area are the main natural features of the Fotwar area and typical for the Fifth Cataract landscape. The fact that due to its geographical location Fotwar and its surroundings contain mountains as well as plains can be regarded as privileged as it ensured the availability of fertile land and a multiplicity of natural resources. In addition, this area stimulated cultural interaction between the inhabitants of the Nile valley and those of the desert. These inter-regional contacts can be assumed from the prominent position of the Jebel El-Khazna in the landscape as well as from the archaeological materials found at the site. Furthermore, the area of the Fifth Cataract is a very important study area for its geographical location between Central and Northern Sudan, which have been studied independently from each other in the past. Besides, this region is currently subjected to human disturbance manifested in the planned construction of the Al-Shereik dam, which could negatively contribute to the ar-

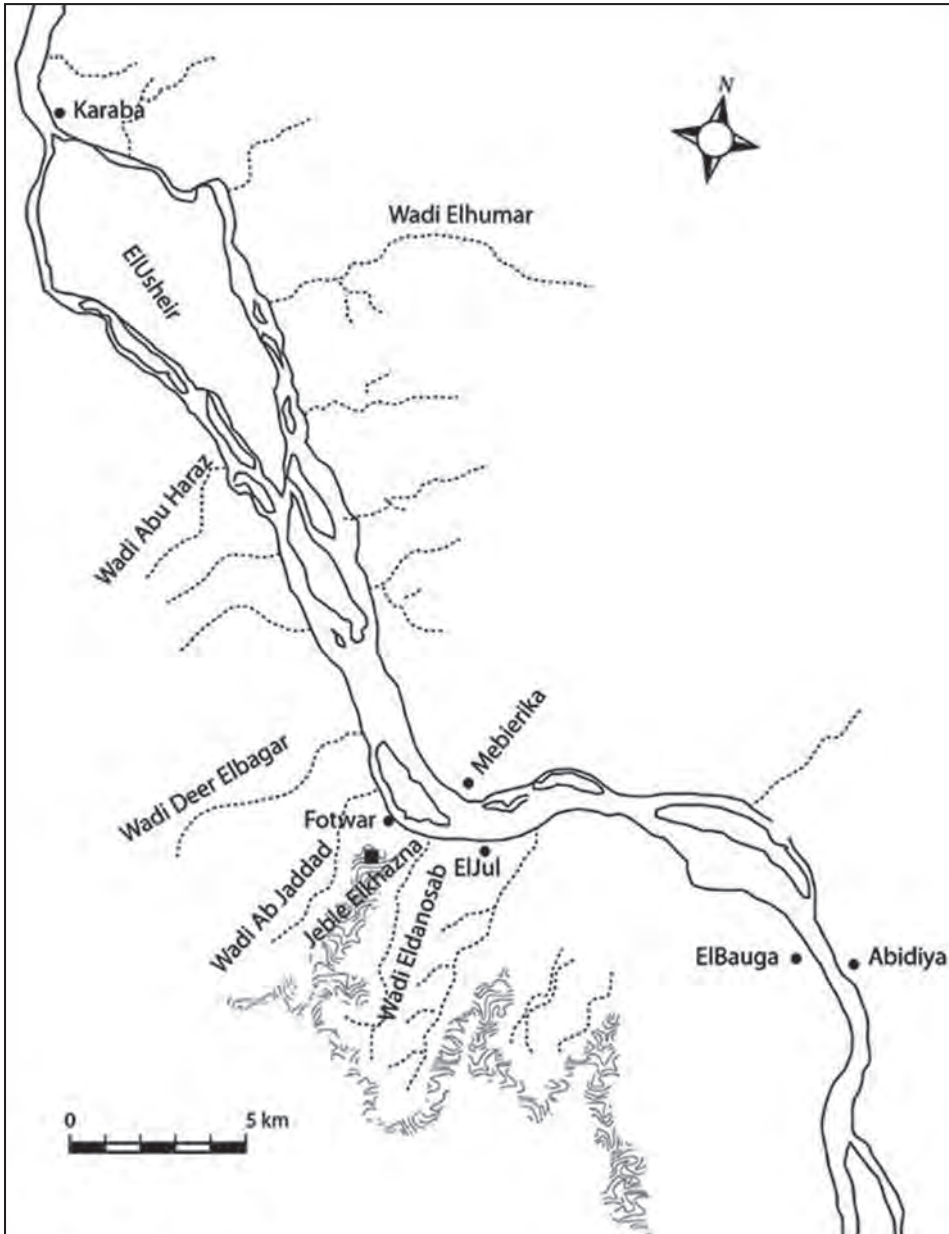


Fig. 1. Fifth Cataract area (acc.to Edwards and Elamin 2000)

chaeological heritage of this landscape given the lack of archaeological studies in the region (Edwards and Elamin 2000: 46).

In December 2011 an archaeological survey was carried out at Fotwar area by the author on behalf of the Archaeological Department of Shendi University. During this survey important archaeological sites were discovered, among them Jebel El-Khazna and other sites dating back to different periods. As a continuation to this study, the Department of Archaeology of the University of Khartoum conducted test pit excavations at the Jebel El-Khazna site to collect archaeological materials, to investigate this site in detail and to study the role of the environmental resources in the area. The Jebel El-Khazna site is located at the southern end of Fotwar, near Um Bala village at a distance of 660 m to the west of the Nile. Eldnosab wadi passes to the south, and to the north-west it is bounded by Khor Um Buwa. The site rises at a height of 353 m a.s.l. and 6 m above its surrounding, covering an area of 360 x 240 m (Fig. 2), with longer axis oriented north-south. The site is situated about 22 km north of the known Paleolithic site of Jebel Nakhro (Arkell 1949: 12). The site's surface is build of the Nubian sandstone formation. Traces of grinding and rock drawings have been found there as well.

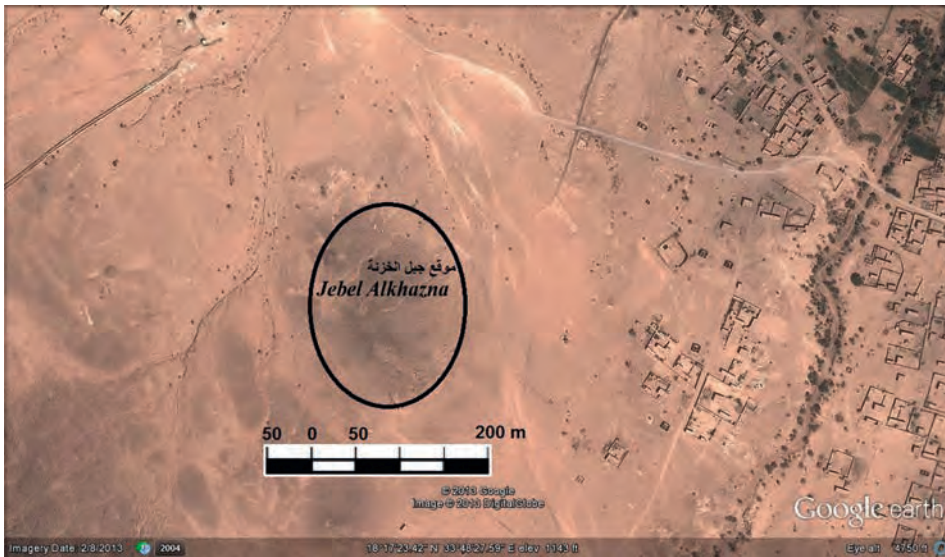


Fig. 2. Aerial photo of the Jebel El-Khazna site

## 1. Field work

In order to collect material from the surface at the eastern and western part of the site we decided to explore surfaces of two squares (3 x 3 m), while in the third square was excavated to recognize site stratigraphy. The latter was situated in the western part of the site and measured 1.50 x 1.50 meters horizontally and 0.45 meters in depth. The field work yielded a variety of archaeological materials such as stone tools, potsherds and organic remains that have been classified as follows:

## 2. Stone tools

A large amount of lithic materials has been identified, including finished and unfinished tools and scattered small debitage that can be considered as the evidence of a workshop. The assemblage contains 113 tools, different in shape and type, made out of various raw materials such as quartz, rhyolite, basalt, agate, Nubian sandstone and granite. The raw materials found at the site are quite similar to



Fig. 3. Lithic tools

those reported from the Neolithic site of Shaqadud in the western Butana (Marks and Mohammed-Ali 1991: 23). The typological classification revealed different types of scrapers, burins, hammer stones, borers, denticulated pieces, and geometrically-shaped tools like crescents and lunates (Fig. 3), which are typical for Neolithic industries. Furthermore, the tools were retouched at one side – except for some bifacial scrapers – while some tools had sharp edges, which is similar to Qalaat Shanan tools regarding the form and the retouch of edges (Nassr 2012: 10).

Grinders have been found in different levels from the test pit. One grinder found on the surface could be an early indication for stone ring grinders. Besides, a disc grinder with a diameter of 70 mm was collected, similar to those known from Shaheinab which Arkell had described as mace heads (Arkell 1953: 50). One

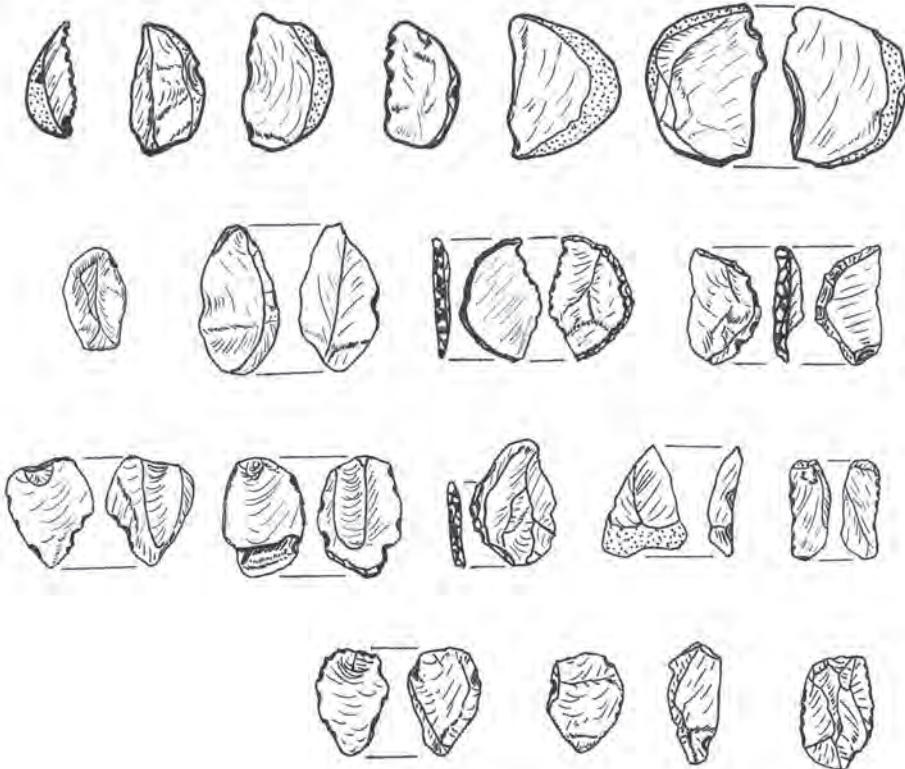


Fig. 4. Stone tools

flint gouge with a sharp end on one side, measuring 55 mm in length and 40 mm in width was found (Fig. 4). It is identical to the Shaheinab gouges that have been described as tools used for carving wooden canoe boats. (Arkell 1953: 25).

### 3. Pottery

It appears that for pottery manufacturing locally available resources such as clay of different kinds, quartz sands and the black valley soils (containing mica) were used. We have classified our finds into three different kinds of pottery: fine smoothed ware, hard ware and friable ware, depending also on the burning techniques. Accordingly, we have concluded that these kinds of pottery resemble Neolithic pottery found by Mohammed-Ali (1991: 63-66) at the multi-phase site of Shaqadud in the western Butana.

A representative sample of the pottery finds is shown on Fig. 5. For a relative dating we would suggest that although the pottery types from Jebel El-Khazna



Fig. 5. Decorated potsherds

vary in shapes and sizes they are generally similar to those found at Shaheinab site (Arkell 1953: 87-88). The study also revealed differences in the firing temperatures. Of 692 identified potsherds 417 are burnished while 275 unburnished. The resulting different colors – among them black, grey, and red, can be explained by the apparent development of the pottery manufacturing techniques similar to those at al-Kadada site in the Shendi region (Geus 1984: 32).

A great variety of decoration was recorded: out of total 692 potsherds only 30 pieces without decoration were found. The comb impressed decorations comprised dotted straight and wavy lines as well as curved such as the large dots and complex lines. This type of decoration is in accordance to the general features of Neolithic pottery decoration in Central and Northern Sudan, e.g. at the Kadruka site (Reinold 2001: 37).

Another kind of decorations are curved lines and zigzags impressed with a plain edge tool. Some decorations consisted of a combination of incised lines and dots, with different patterns of large dots, dotted wavy lines, single dots or incise parallel dots (Fig. 5). The incised line decoration is comparable to types known from the sites of Shaheinab (Arkell 1953: 70-72) and Shaqadud (Mohammed-Ali 1991: 68-72) while the single dots with curve line decorations and impressed patterns composed by large and small dots (Fig. 5) are similar to pottery decorations that have been identified in the Shendi area (Sadig 2010: 178).

Besides, there are some indications of earlier pottery (Late Mesolithic and Early Neolithic), similarly to late prehistoric sites noted along Atbara River, namely Aneibis, Ed-Damer and Abu Darbein (Haaland and Magid 1995:42).

#### 4. Organic remains

A large amount of organic materials was excavated at the site and included bones of different size as well as mollusk shells and ostrich eggshells. While it seems that some of the bones belong to big and small ruminants, we have also excavated fish bones such as thorns, heads and thick ribs. The bone materials we found are very similar to those excavated from Al-Gaab basin in Northern Sudan (Tahir 2012: 107). Organic remains included also large quantities of shells of different shapes, size and type, among them specimen of *Pila wernei*, conical in shape (Fig. 6). Some shells have single perforations made to extract eatable content of the shell. This treatment resembles what Arkell observed at shells from the site of Shaheinab (Arkell 1953:23-24). Other shells, that appeared to be larger in size and more elongated, most probably belong to the species *Spathopsis rubens* (Fig. 7).



Fig. 6. Shells of *Pila wernei*, note the piercing hole at the left specimen



Fig. 7. Shells of *Spathopsis rubens*



Other organic remains included circular beads with more than 1 cm in diameter made of ostrich eggshells and may have been used as personal ornaments. These finds also find equivalents in beads types excavated by Arkell at Shaheinab (Arkell 1953:22).

## **Conclusions**

The inhabitants of the site of Jebel El-Khazna were economically depending on local natural resources such as plants and animals which in turn reflects the cultural homogeneity between the Nile and the desert. Comparison of the archaeological materials with that of other Neolithic sites in the Nile valley showed that the site Jebel El-Khazna most probably belongs to the Neolithic period and may hence be regarded as one of the most important site of the late prehistoric period that has recently been discovered in the Fifth Cataract area. Furthermore, its resemblance of Neolithic settlements known from Central and Northern Sudan proves large expansion and wide spread of such sites at that time. It seems Jebel El-Khazna may constitute a suitable area to facilitate and enable cultural comparison between Central and Northern Sudan. The biggest problem threatening the archaeological heritage in this area is presently caused by humans: plans for the construction of Al-Shereik dam. During Neolithic times, Jebel El-Khazna was used as a permanent settlement over a certain period of time, during which different activities have been carried out, as shown by numerous archaeological remains excavated from a depth of 45 cm only. Our future plan is to expand archaeological investigations in this area to obtain further data.

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