
Residential Mobility and Sedentism from Early to Mid-Holocene in the Oases and the Egyptian Western Desert

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Abstract

The structural arrangements shared by the main habitation clusters of the Egyptian Western Desert, from the Nabta Playa region on the southern border, to the oases further north (Kharga, Dakhla, Farafra), reveal indisputable signs of a progressively more intense and prolonged presence of human groups in the various areas. This process follows shortly after the reoccupation of the Egyptian Sahara at the end of the Younger Dryas (11,500 cal BP) and accelerates during the Middle Holocene (between ca 8100 to 7700- 7300 cal BP). Some indicators of the intensive use of the territories, and of the consequent increasing stability, may be the abundance of abandoned artefacts, the presence of heavy and difficult to transport tools (e.g. millstones), the proximity to sources of raw materials, the importance of stratified deposits and the abundance of meal residues (floral and faunal remains) but, above all, stone buildings indicating expenditure of labor work. One of the most important indicators is undoubtedly the presence of large settlements, sometimes taking the form of villages, which arose in relation to water basins and the supply areas of local resources, stone raw materials and, above all, plant resources. Although settlement organization may have been influenced by the characteristics of the environment, it also reflects conditions of a social and cultural nature. Settlement pattern, rather than the study of the artefacts it returns, allows us to understand the situation in which human activities took place. The paper dwells on these issues, noting the chronological and hierarchical relationships that can be established between the different habitation nuclei of the Egyptian Western Desert and the consequences that these social entities may have had in relation to the Nile Valley Neolithic communities.

Keywords: Egyptian Sahara, Holocene, environment, sedentism, social organization, cultural exchanges

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