

SUDAN & NUBIA

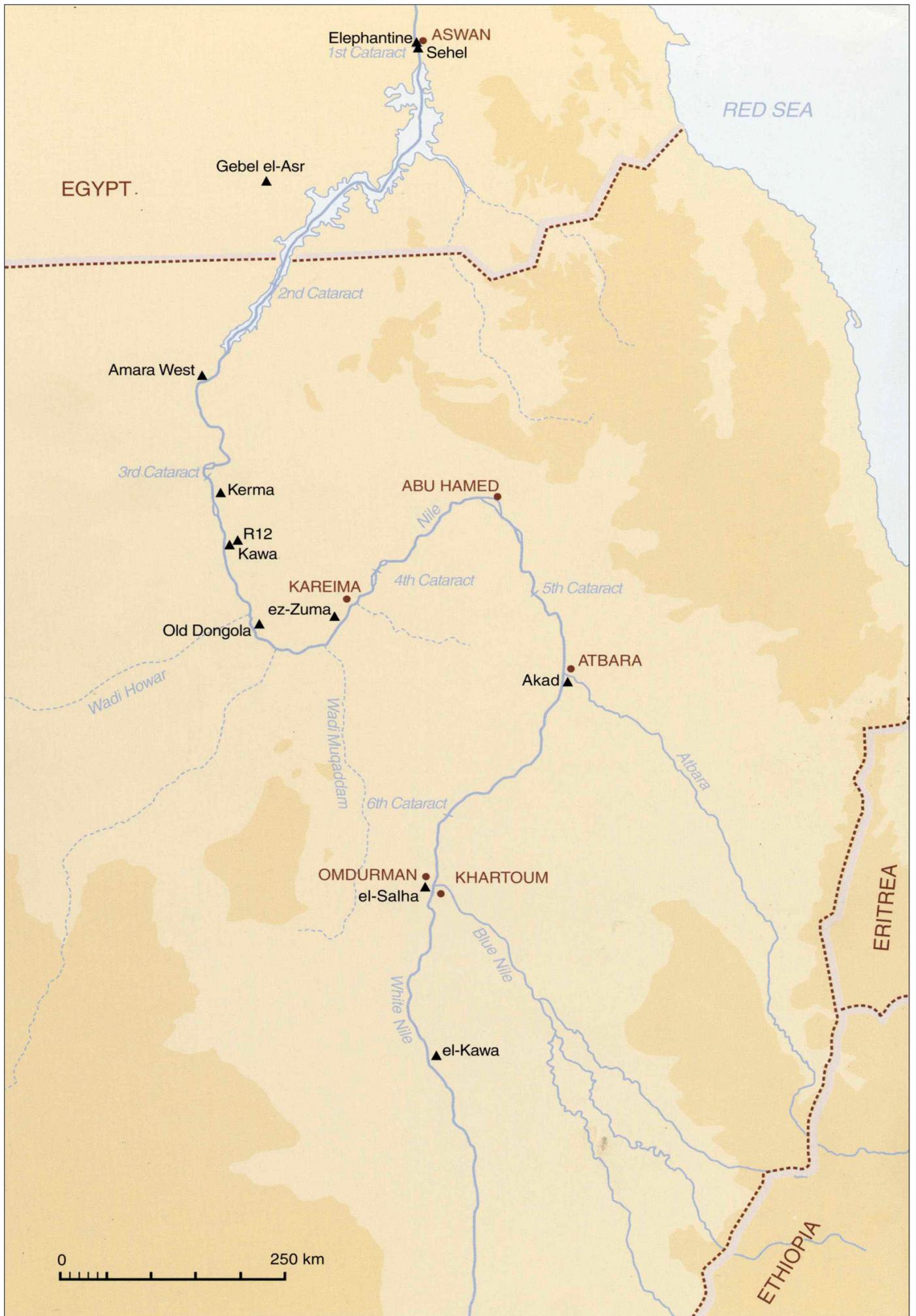
The Sudan Archaeological Research Society



Bulletin No. 6

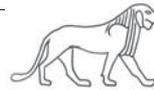
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Contents

Introduction

Vivian Davies 1

Reports

The Second Excavation Season at R12, a Late Neolithic Cemetery in the Northern Dongola Reach 2
Sandro Salvatori and Donatella Usai

Ceramic Traditions and Cultural Territories: the "Nubian Group" in Prehistory 8
Maria Carmela Gatto

Nubians on Elephantine Island 20
Dietrich Raue

Survey at Chephren's Quarry, Gebel el-Asr, Lower Nubia: 2002 25
Per Storemyr, Elizabeth Bloxam, Tom Heldal and Abdou Salem

The 2001-2002 Season of Excavation at Kerma: a summary 30
Charles Bonnet

Publishing Amara West: a progress report 31
Patricia Spencer

The Kushite Town and Cemetery at Kawa, the 2001-2002 season 32
Survey and excavations
Derek A. Welsby

Stabilisation and Investigation of the Wall Paintings 38
Claire Heywood

Does Aten Live On in Kawa (Kówwa)? 42
Herman Bell and Muhammad Jalal Hashim

Preliminary Report on Rescue Excavations at Akad 47
Mohamed Faroug A. Ali

Eastern Desert Ware, a first introduction 53
Hans Barnard

Old Nubian Houses of Sehel Island 58
Ossama A. W. Abdel Meguid

Archaeological Discoveries along the East Bank of the White Nile, 1997-2000 64
Khider Adam Eisa

The Is.I.A.O. el-Salha Archaeological Project 67
Donatella Usai and Sandro Salvatori

Survey and Excavations between Old Dongola and ez-Zuma 73
Bogdan Żurawski

Miscellaneous

86

Front Cover: An apostle from the mural in the chapel at Baganarti containing the king's portrait.

Introduction

Vivian Davies

At the time of writing (mid-September 2002), the 10th International Conference for Nubian Studies has just finished, generously hosted by colleagues in the Università di Roma "La Sapienza". The large number of papers delivered shows how rapidly the subject of Middle Nile studies is growing, with significant advances in knowledge achieved since the last conference held in Boston four years ago, an encouraging state of affairs, to which the content of this present volume bears further witness. There was, however, one hugely important issue which overshadowed the event: the looming crisis of the new dam at the Fourth Cataract.

As reported by the Sudanese delegation, preparatory work for the dam has now begun and actual building will start in two years. It is expected to take a further seven years to complete. In an unwelcome echo of the Aswan High Dam scheme, the reservoir created will flood over 170km of the Nile Valley between the Fourth Cataract and Abu Hamed, enveloping, as we now know from preliminary surveys, thousands of archaeological sites - artefact scatters, settlements, cemeteries and rock-drawings dating from the Palaeolithic to the Islamic Periods. Very little is known about these sites; for the most part only that they exist. Our Sudanese colleagues are urgently appealing for assistance, so that as much as possible of the record may be investigated and documented before the area is lost to knowledge for ever. In response, SARS is this winter launching a campaign of rescue excavation in a region which we recently surveyed (see *Sudan & Nubia* 4 [2000], 51-7), but an extensive international effort will be required if any serious impact is to be made. Our next international colloquium, to be held at the British Museum on 8 May 2003, will focus on the dam emergency. All colleagues with an interest in helping are invited to attend.



Ceramic Traditions and Cultural Territories: the “Nubian Group” in Prehistory

Maria Carmela Gatto

This paper¹ is devoted to defining the prehistoric “Nubian Culture Group” (*sensu* Clarke 1967) using pottery as the “cultural marker”.

deserts. Most groups analysed here are nomadic shepherds in the Nubian-Sudanese area, farmers in Egypt, and hunter-gatherers and fishermen in the Butana-Gash area. In the case of the A-Group, the economic structure seems to be based on both stock-raising and agriculture, as well as on trading (Nordström 1972; 1996; forth.; Gatto 1993; 1997; 2001).

Chronologically, this study covers a period of 2000 years, from the beginning of the 6th up to the end of the 5th millennium bp. For comprehension, the time span has been divided into four phases:

1st phase 6000 – 5500 bp (c. 5000 – 4500 BC)

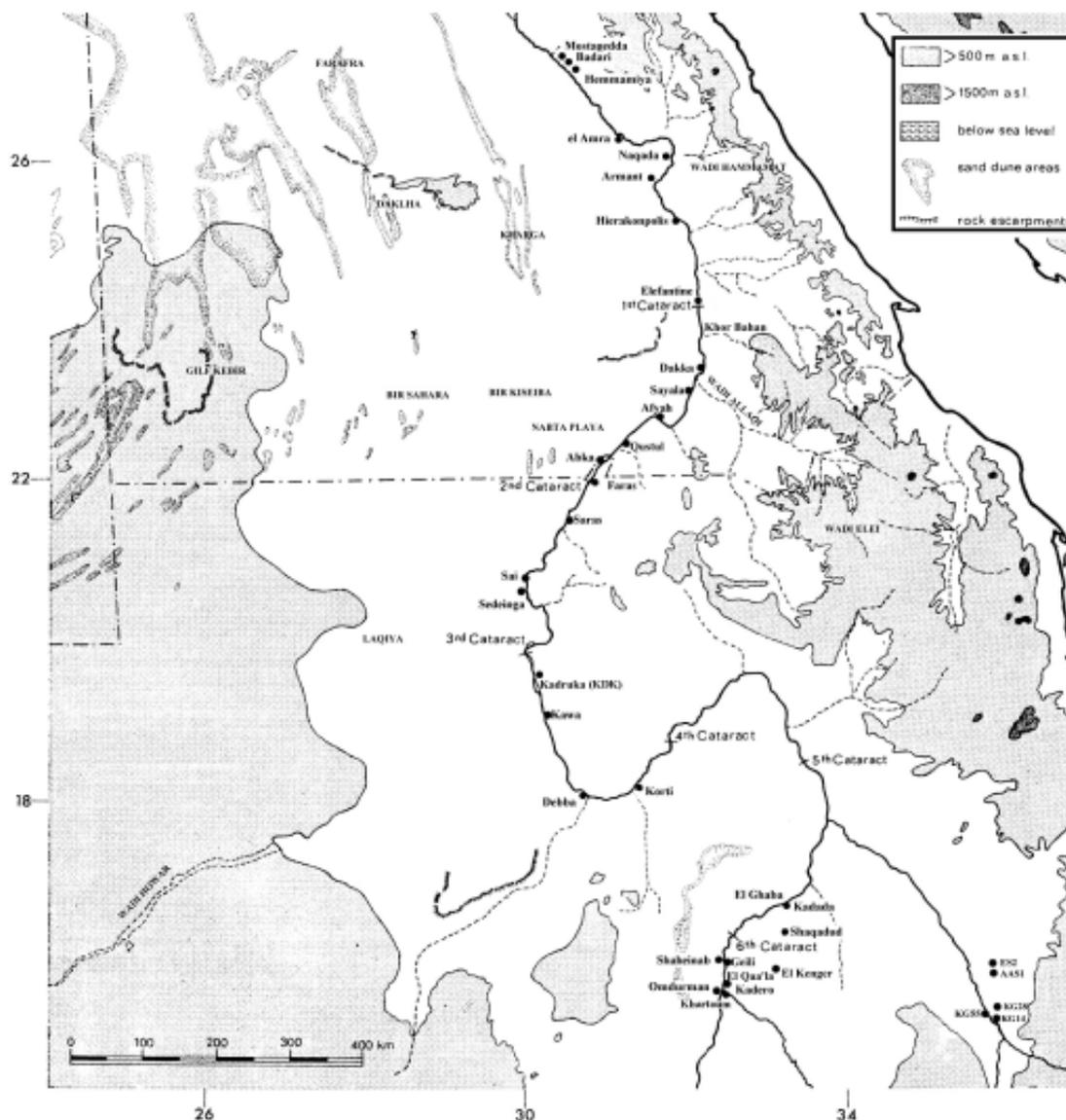


Figure 1. Map of the Nile Valley and surrounding deserts with key-sites mentioned in the text (revised version from Nordström 1972, Pl. 1).

The research area (Figure 1) includes the Nile Valley itself, from Middle Egypt up to Khartoum, and neighbouring

2nd phase 5500 – 5000 bp (c. 4500 – 4000 BC)

3rd phase 5000 – 4500 bp (c. 4000 – 3500 BC)

4th phase 4500 – 4000 bp (c. 3500 – 3000 BC)

¹ This is a short summary of my PhD dissertation on “Ceramic Traditions and Cultural Territories in the Late Prehistory of North-eastern Africa”, defended in 2001 at the Istituto Universitario Orientale, Naples

In order to define a culture group it is important first to delimit its territory, as well as those of surrounding groups. This is not an easy task, due to the high mobility of some

groups, resulting in few archaeological traces left in the territory itself.

The “Theory of Style”, defined by Wiessner (1983, 1984, 1985) can be very useful in this sense, as already proved by Sampson (1988) in his work, *Stylistic Boundaries among Mobile Hunter-Foragers*, in South Africa. Following this theory, an artefact’s shape and decoration are distinctive markers of a group. They are called by Wiessner “emblemic style”.

Emblemic markers are distributed in the territory following the kind of exploitation made by the group: in the core area their presence will be higher than in the annual range area, as well as in the lifetime range area. Of course, the same kind of distribution can be recorded for other groups. Therefore, a territory can be at the same time a core area, an annual range area and a lifetime range area of different groups.

The “Theory of Style” can be used also to detect a culture group. Instead of having territorial borders of a single unit, it is possible to single out territorial borders of units sharing some cultural elements but differing in others. Any-

the former case they are defined as ‘emblemic style’, in the latter case they are labelled “emblemic traditions” or “ceramic traditions”.

These terms are used to define pottery types that share the same attribute, such as the decorative technique, the stylistic motif, the surface treatment, the shape and the fabric, or more than one attribute. This means that a ceramic tradition can be determined by one attribute or a group of attributes not typical for others. For example, in this context Rippled and Black Topped Wares have the surface treatment as their main attribute, while Hard Pink Pottery is defined by the fabric and Beaker type by the shape.

The methodological approach used here has been partially conditioned by the heterogeneity of the available data. It should be remembered that research in many regions is still in a preliminary stage and the addition of new data will change our knowledge of these cultures.

In consequence, a revision of the social, cultural and economic aspects of each cultural unit, as known from the lit-

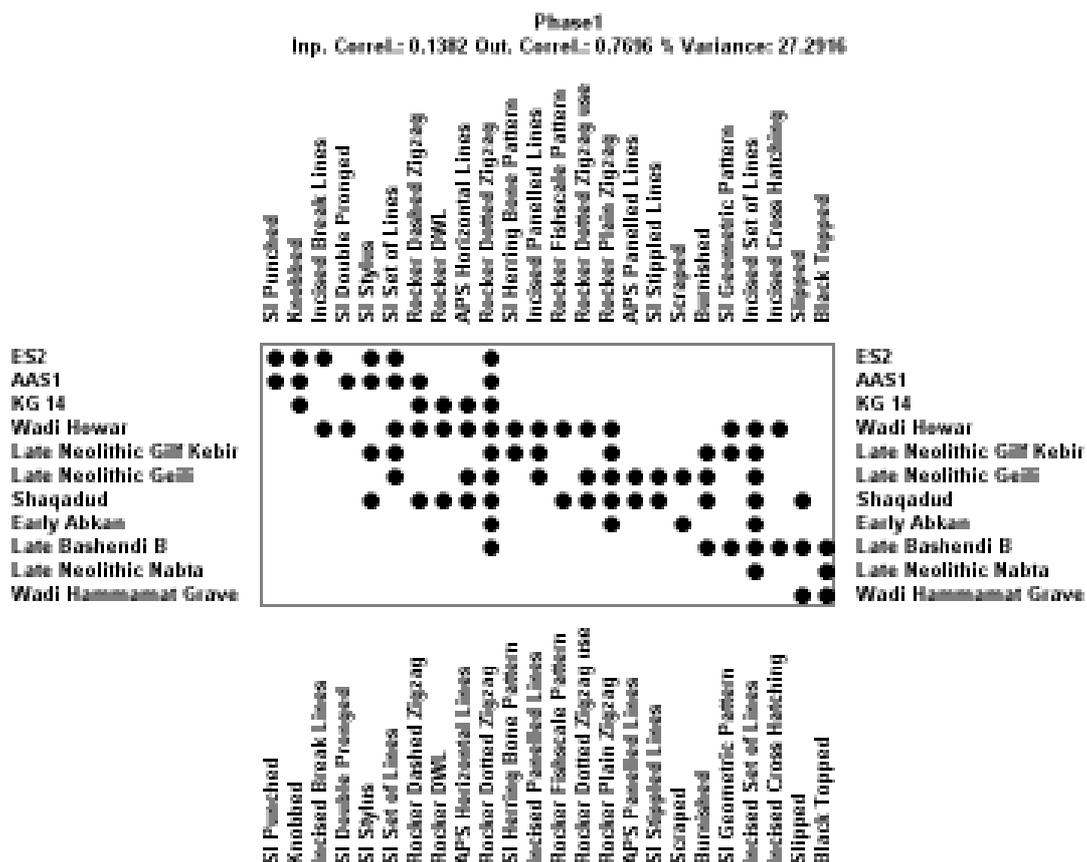


Figure 2. Seriation Analysis for Phase 1: 6000-5500 bp.

way, it is important to remember that territorial borders are always changing, for demographic, ecological and cultural reasons and, therefore, detecting them can be quite difficult.

Pottery is one of the best emblemic markers of a culture. It is possible to use single attributes or a group of attributes as markers of a cultural unit or an entire culture group. If in

erature, has been made in order to have an up-to-date catalogue. Single sites, related in a general way to the Neolithic phase of one area, have been described as a single unit, so as to find their exact cultural attribution afterwards. The catalogue includes published and unpublished data, the latest mostly collected by myself, both in museums² and on field



excavations³.

The next step was to formalise the ceramic terminology in use and to make a new description of every pottery type, published and unpublished, so to have just one comparable typology for all of North-eastern Africa. Following this revision many ceramic groups or ceramic traditions were singled out. They can be related to different cultural units, whether contemporaneous or not and found in different regions.

The main attribute chosen to define the groups is the decoration, particularly the technique, the implement used and the motif. A similar approach, based mainly on the analysis of the decorative technique, was proposed by Caneva (1987, 1988; Caneva and Marks 1990) for the Prehistoric Saharan and Sudanese pottery and is now accepted also for other African contexts. When this attribute was not distinctive of a group of pots, the shape or the fabric was chosen instead. In one case, the A-Group Incense Burners, the function became the main attribute. However, to date they are found only in the A-Group culture and, for this reason, are not relevant to this research.

In total, 105 types belonging to 18 main classes were recorded. From these, 49 ceramic traditions, emblematic markers of a cultural unit and/or a culture group, were identified:

1. Scraped
2. Burnished
3. Slipped
4. Black Topped (Colour plates IV-VII)
5. Black Rimmed
6. Rippled
7. Beakers
8. Pattern Burnished
9. Hard Pink
10. Painted
11. Knobbed
12. Red Topped
13. Incised Set of Lines
14. Incised Wavy Line Pattern
15. Incised Panelled Lines
16. Incised Arch-Shaped Lines
17. Incised Horizontal Break Lines
18. Incised Cross Hatching
19. Incised Chatter Marked
20. Incised Herring Bone Pattern
21. Incised Laqiya-Type
22. Incised Geometric Pattern
23. Incised Finger Channelling

24. Rocker Dotted Zigzag
25. Rocker Dashed Zigzag
26. Rocker Plain Zigzag
27. Rocker Dotted Zigzag Unevenly Serrated Edge
28. Rocker Zigzag Fish-scale Pattern
29. Rocker Opposed Triangles
30. Rocker Dotted Wavy Line
31. Rocker Leiterband
32. Rocker Geometric Pattern
33. Alternately Pivoting Stamp Horizontal Lines
34. Alternately Pivoting Stamp Dotted Wavy Line
35. Alternately Pivoting Stamp Panelled Lines
36. Alternately Pivoting Stamp Smocking Pattern
37. Simple Impression Thumb Pattern
38. Simple Impression Fingernail Pattern
39. Simple Impression Herring Bone Pattern
40. Simple Impression Cross Hatching
41. Simple Impression Set of Lines
42. Simple Impression Geometric Pattern
43. Simple Impression Stippled Lines
44. Simple Impression Dragged
45. Simple Impression Stylus
46. Simple Impression Double Pronged
47. Simple Impression Punched
48. Roulette/Mat Impression
49. Incense Burners

Rough Ware is not included in the above list because it is never a marker of any culture. Moreover, the same kind of decorative motif can be made using different techniques: the dotted wavy line pattern can be obtained with both the Rocker and the Alternately Pivoting Stamp Impressions, while the Herring Bone Pattern and the Cross Hatching can be made with both Incision and Simple Impression. That is why the technique is more important than the motif: the latter can be copied by other groups but not the former.

Some ceramic traditions are trans-cultural: they can originate in one group and then be adopted by another. Alternatively they can be produced at the same time, in two different groups, which are probably both part of a Techno-complex, a number of culture groups sharing some traits but differing in others (Clarke 1967, 357, fig. 40).

Emblemic styles change over time. In the first phase, from 6000 to 5500 bp, pottery is mostly decorated with impressed or incised motifs covering the entire exterior surface of the pot and forming many kinds of patterns. Later, decorations became fewer and quite standardised. At the same time, other emblemic styles, related to the development of new groups, appear. They usually do not have plastic decorations, but just surface treatments, such as burnishing, slipping and black topping, or different kinds of decorative techniques, for example, rippling and painting.

In order to have the presence/absence variable useful for statistical analysis, the 49 ceramic traditions were related to different cultural units found in the research area and were

²Thanks to J. Spencer, B. Adams, M. Trad, B. Barich, H.-Å. Nordström, I. Caneva, L. Kzyzaniak, J. Reinold, F. Wendorf, A. Marks, R. Fattovich, L. Sist.

³ I should like to thank Renée Friedman and Joseph Hobbs (pers. comm.; 2002), Colin Hope (pers. comm.; 2002), Fred Wendorf and Kit Nelson (pers. comm.) and Mathias Lange (pers. comm.; forth.) for giving me information about their unpublished data on the Wadi Hammamat grave, Dakhla sites, Nabta cemeteries and the Laqiya sites respectively.

divided into the already mentioned chronological phases. When the dates were uncertain, sites or cultural units were divided following only my direct analysis.

With the presence/absence variable, the only one available in this context, only seriation and the correspondence analyses have shown distinctive cultural groups. The seriation analysis for Phase 1 (Figure 2) shows that part of the ceramic tradition is exclusively connected with cultural units found in the Dakhla, Nabta and Wadi Howar regions, and some others to the cultures from the Butana-Gash area. However, the bulk of pottery traditions can be found in most units of the Western Desert and the Nubian and Sudanese Nile Valleys, even if regional differences can be brought to light, particularly between the Second Cataract Region and the other areas. In this respect, five cultural groups can be identified: the Egyptian, the Nubian, the Sudanese and the Butana-Gash; the Laqiya area has its own typical tradition that cannot be found anywhere else in the research area.

In Phase 2 (Figure 3) the distinction between the different culture groups starts to become quite clear. The Egyptian Group this time includes Nabta, Dakhla and Upper Egypt with the Badarian Culture. For this period there are no available data from the Eastern Desert, although, it can be readily assumed that this area was still within the territory of this group. The Sudanese Group, on the other hand, is confined to the Khartoum Region. Both the Wadi Howar and the Gilf Kebir areas are outside of the Nilotic circuit. Finally, the

Nubian Group includes not only the Abkan Culture of the Second Cataract Region, but also the Karat Group of the Dongola Reach and the Abkan-related Group found in Laqiya. Evidence from the Gilf Kebir and the Wadi Elei in the Atbai Region can also be added.

During Phase 3 (Figure 4) the relationship between ceramic traditions and culture groups becomes more confused. Apart from the Naqada Culture, the only one forming the Egyptian Group, which is quite different from the other units because of its connection with the Delta and the Near East, all cultures can be divided into two groups. One is the Sudanese Group, this time including the Khartoum Region, Upper Nubia and the Gilf Kebir; the other is the Nubian Group, which includes Lower Nubia, Nabta, Dakhla, the Wadi Elei and Site KG 28 in the Butana Region. However, it should be noted that within these groups two other sub-groups can be detected: respectively the Gilf Kebir/El Kenger Middle and the A-Group/Sheikh Muftah.

Seriation in Phase 4 (Figure 5) highlighted a new clear distinction between groups. The Egyptian Group is still composed only of the Naqada Culture, while the Nubian Group includes only the A-Group Culture from Lower Nubia and Laqiya. However, evidence from Upper Nubia and the Neolithic of Khartoum appears to indicate that the Egyptian Group was connected with both the Sudanese and the Nubian Groups. The presence in both Upper Nubia and Khartoum of sites related to two culture groups suggests an

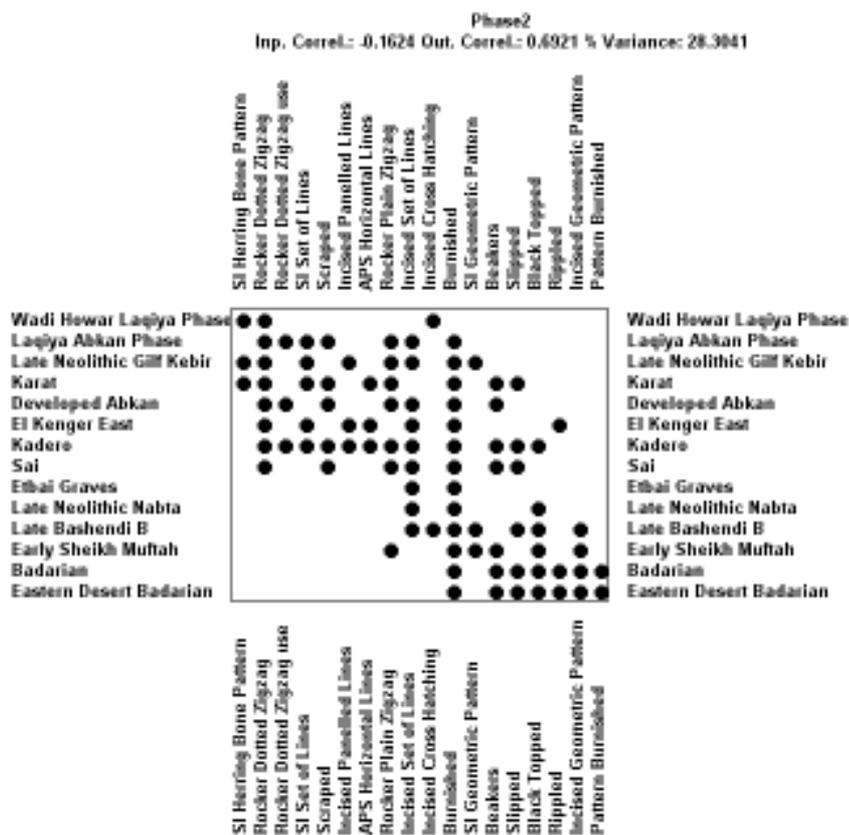


Figure 3. Seriation Analysis for Phase 2: 5500-5000 bp.

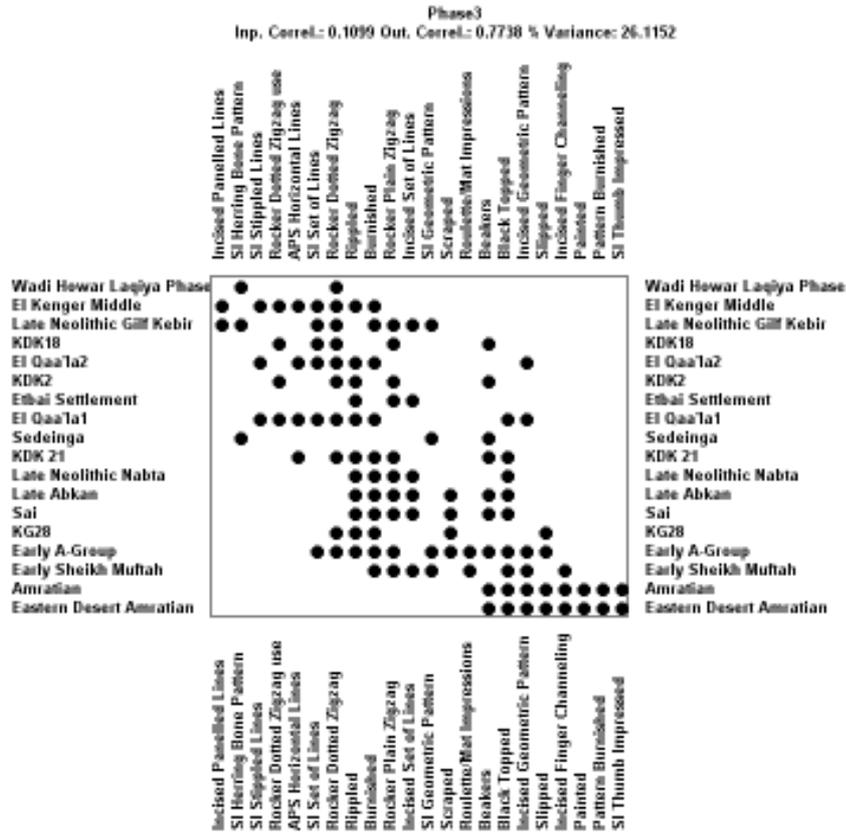


Figure 4. Seriation Analysis for Phase 3: 5000-4500 bp.

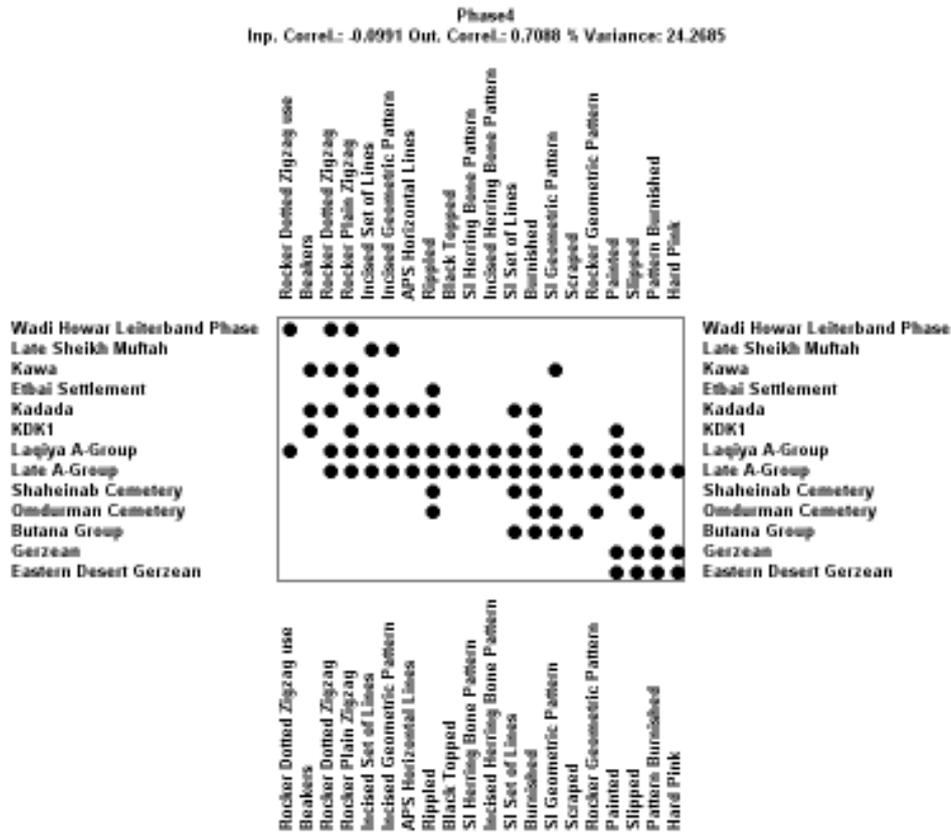


Figure 5. Seriation Analysis for Phase 4: 4500-4000 bp.

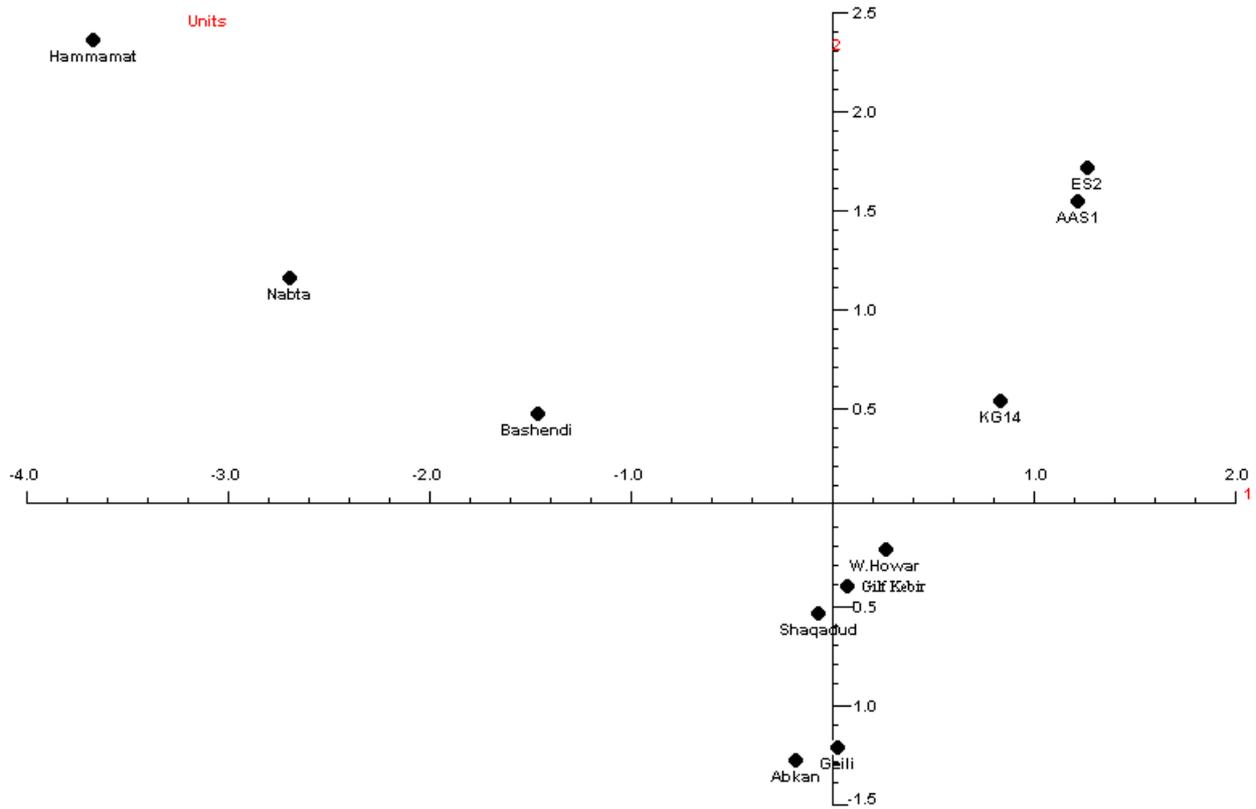


Figure 6. Correspondence Analysis for Phase 1: 6000-5500 bp.

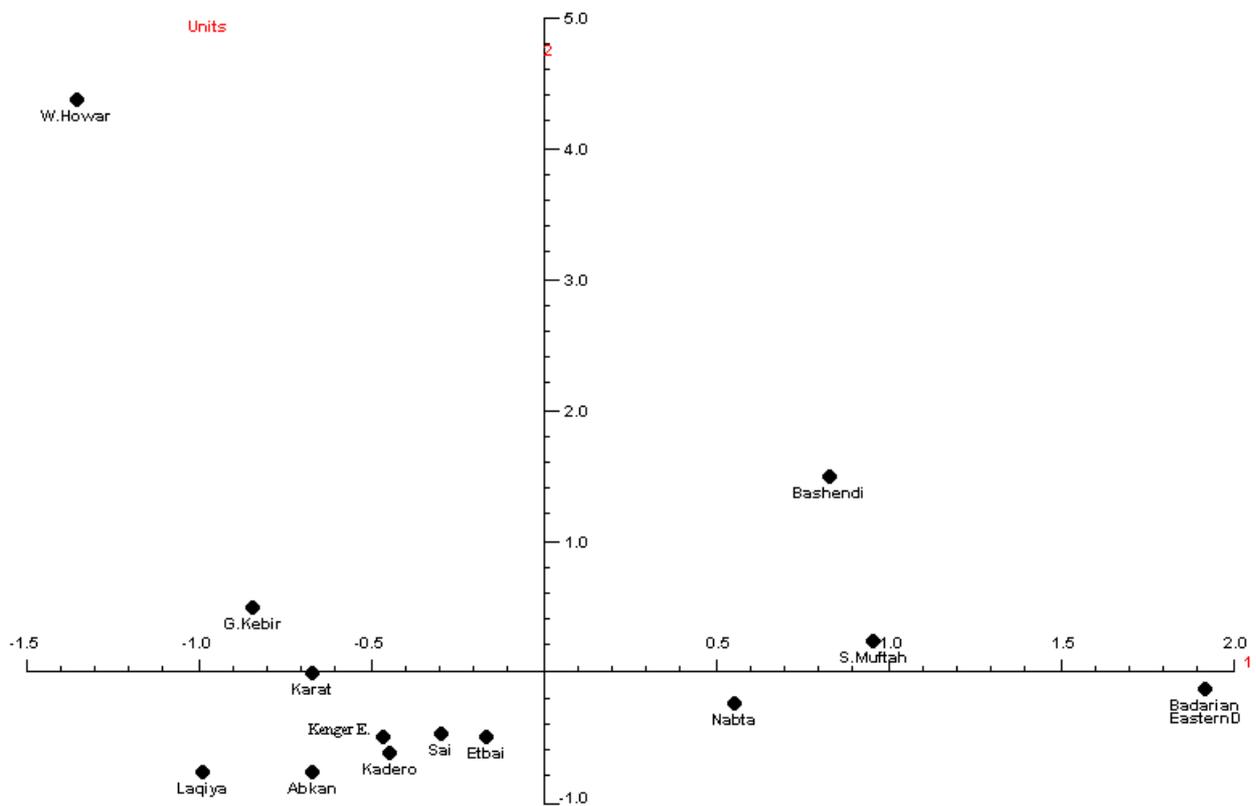


Figure 7. Correspondence Analysis for Phase 2: 5500-5000 bp.

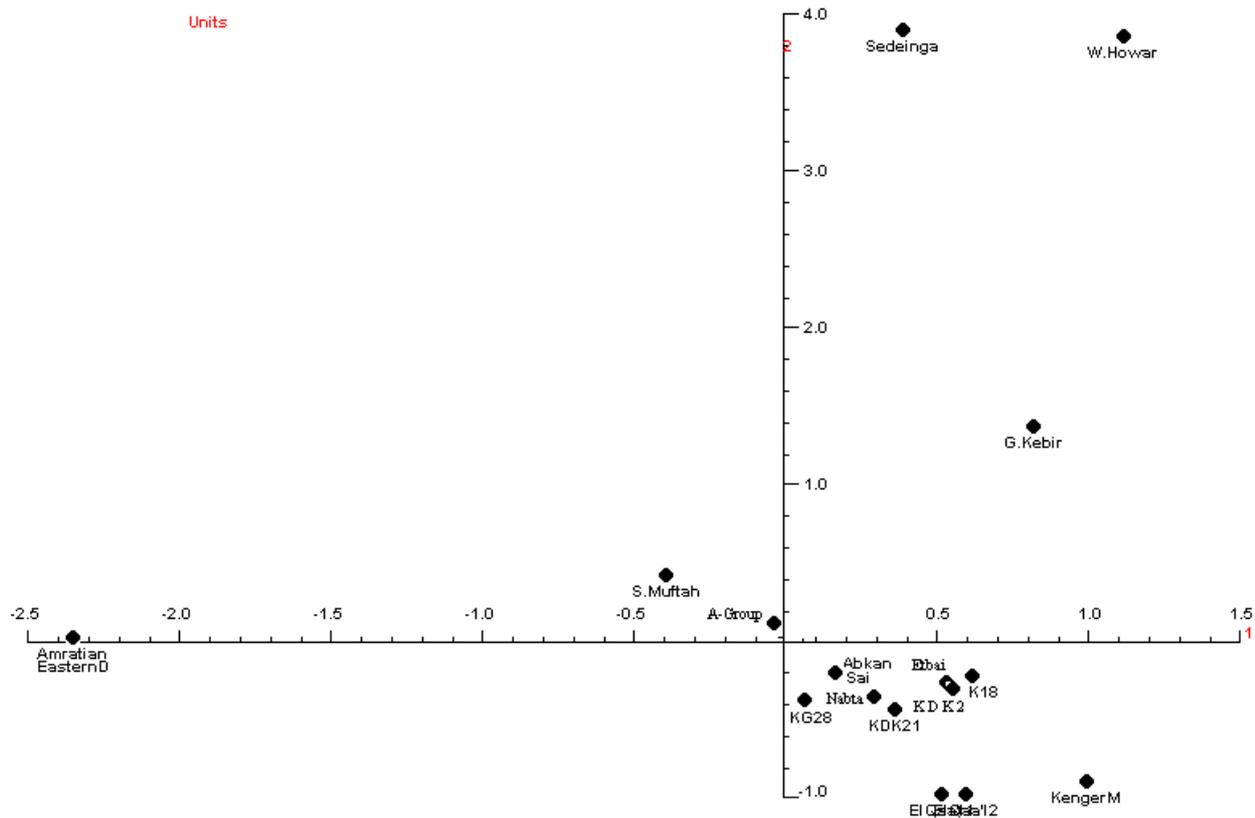


Figure 8. Correspondence Analysis for Phase 3: 5000-4500 bp.

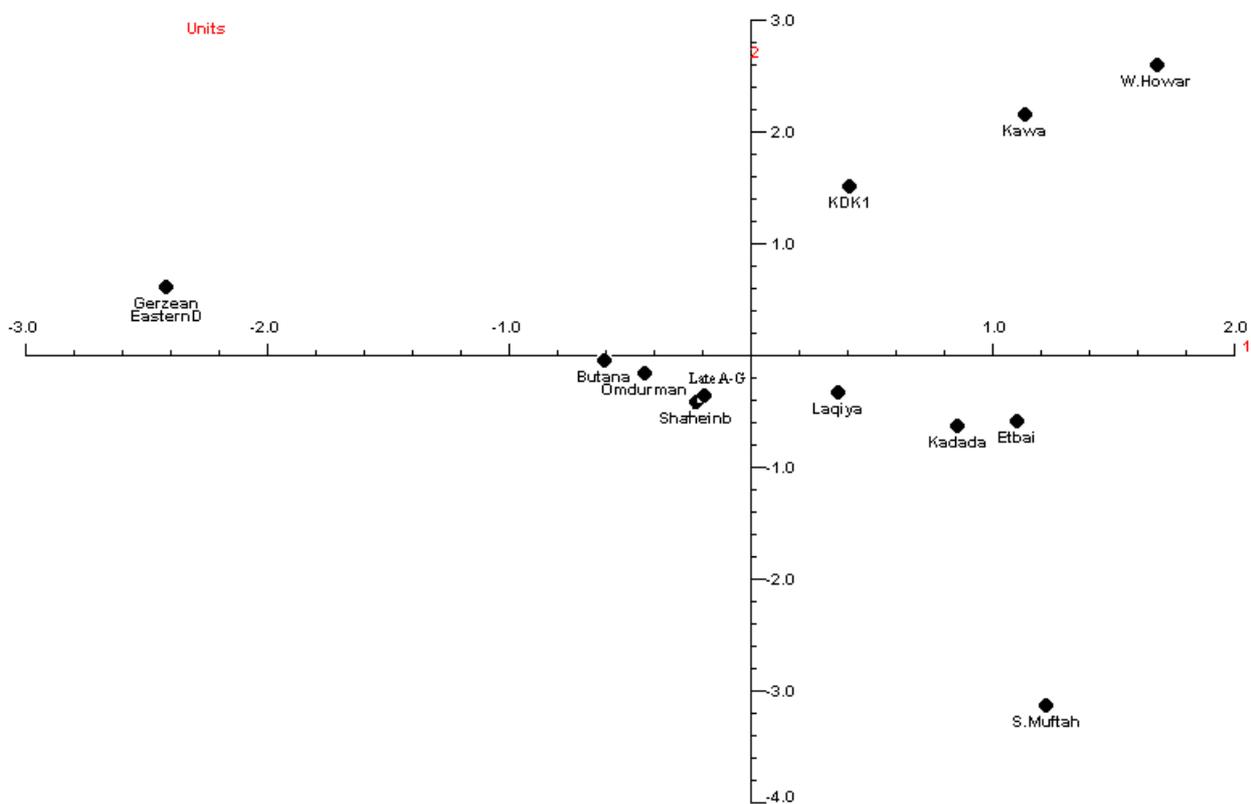


Figure 9. Correspondence Analysis for Phase 4: 4500-4000 bp.

intra-regional cultural dynamic much more complex than was previously thought. The Gilf Kebir, the Wadi Howar and the Butana-Gash areas remain outside the Nilotic circuit.

The correspondence analysis confirms the seriation results. Moreover, in the first phase (Figure 6) groups are clearly distinguishable. In the second phase (Figure 7) intra-group differences are noticeable, particularly within the Egyptian Group and between the Sudanese Group and the Nubian Group. During the third phase (Figure 8) most of the cultural units seem directly or partially related to the Nubian Group, this time composed of two different cultural units: the Abkan and the A-Group. Finally, in the fourth phase (Figure 9) culture groups became smaller as they were partially dismembered.

Focusing on the Nubian Group, the following development can be suggested. From around 6000 to 5500 bp the

Nubian Group originated in the Second Cataract Region with the Abkan Culture. Until now, it was thought that the Early Abkans were fishermen settled only along the Nile (Nordström 1972, 15-17).

From the end of this phase up to the end of the 6th millennium bp, the Abkan, with its developed phase, can be found in the core area; in other surrounding regions, such as Upper Nubia, there is evidence of this culture on Sai Island, in the Dongola Reach with the Karat Group, and at Laqiya. Unfortunately, the relationship with the Wadi Elei graves is still doubtful. If these graves were related to the Abkan Culture, as can be supposed, this funerary evidence would be the first for this culture and, so, for the Nubian Group. However, it is my opinion that some cemeteries in the Kadruka area can be related to the Developed Abkan culture as well. The economic structure of this phase is still related to fishing activities, while evidence from the deserts and from the

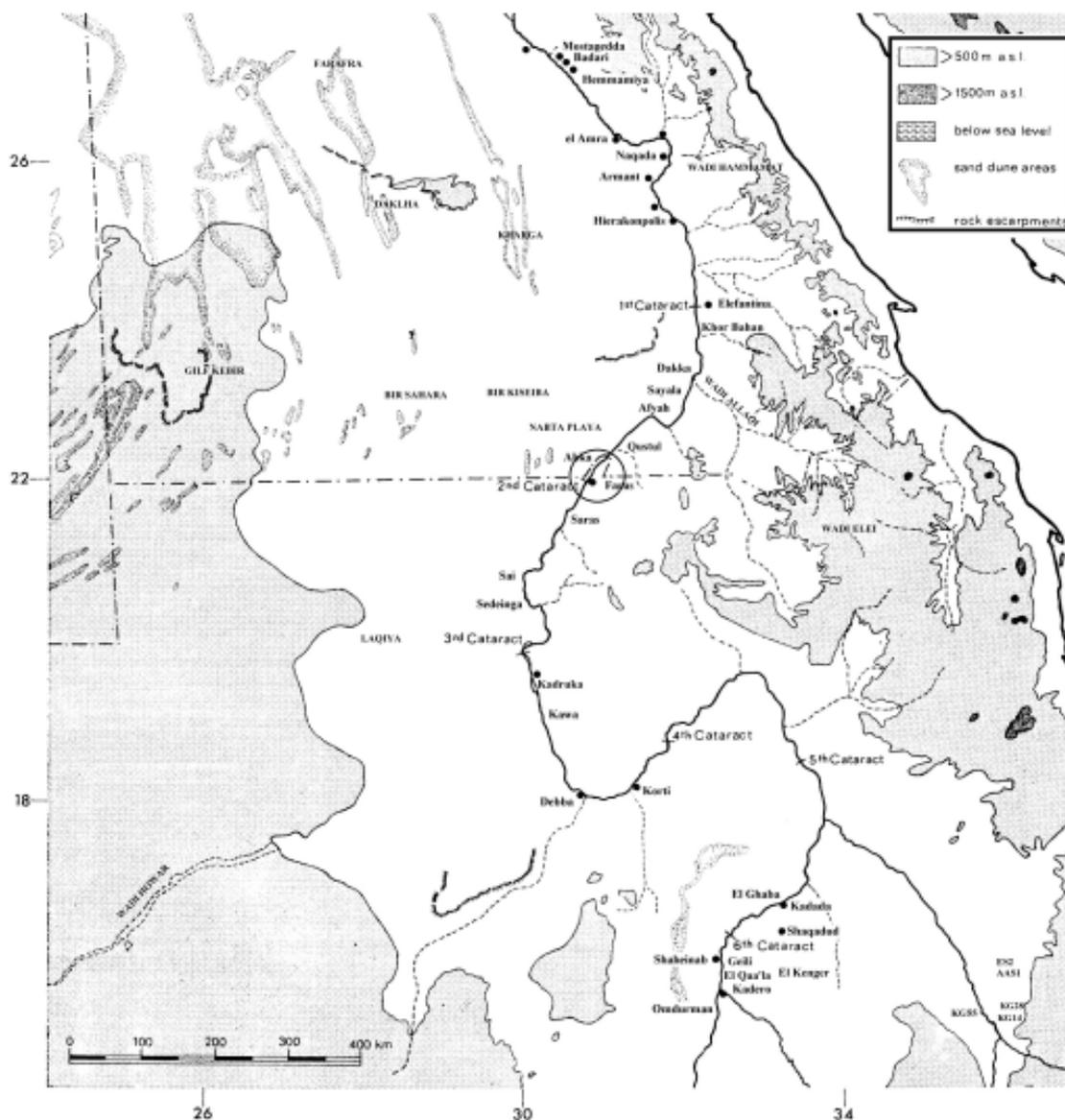


Figure 10. Hypothetical territorial borders of the Nubian Group during Phase 1.



Dongola Reach is clearly connected with pastoral groups. In consequence, it can be said that from this period the Nubian Group became a “Neolithic society”, with a productive economy mainly based on stock-raising.

From the beginning of the 5th millennium bp, the Terminal Abkan culture can be found along the Nubian Nile Valley, while evidence from the deserts and from the Dongola Reach is lacking. However, the cemeteries found in the Gebel Nabta area by the Combined Prehistoric Expedition can be related to this phase. It is my view that some cemeteries from Kadruka can be Terminal Abkan funerary sites, in spite of their radiocarbon dates. For this phase too the literature describes the Abkan economic activities as dominated by fishing. However, the newly available data appear to contradict this. Unfortunately, the Abkan Culture has never been studied in depth, which is why much information is still lacking. Regarding Abkan artefacts, in the last phase they are particu-

larly influenced by the Early A-Group Culture of Upper Lower Nubia.

The A-Group originated in the Dakka-Sayala area at the beginning of the 5th millennium bp (Gatto 1993; 1998; 2000). It can be suggested that this group came from the Atbai Region (Wadi Allaqi and surroundings), where possible pastoral segments of the Abkan Group, connected with the Egyptian Cultures from the North, were previously located (Gatto 2001). Moreover, the A-Group was strongly connected with the Naqada Culture, sharing with it many economic, social and religious elements.

During the second half of the 5th millennium bp the A-Group replaced the Abkan Culture in the Second Cataract Region. Pastoral segments of it have been recorded at Laqiya, but it seems quite sure they can be found in both the Eastern and Western Deserts. On the other hand, Upper Nubia does not seem to have been part of the A-Group territory, even

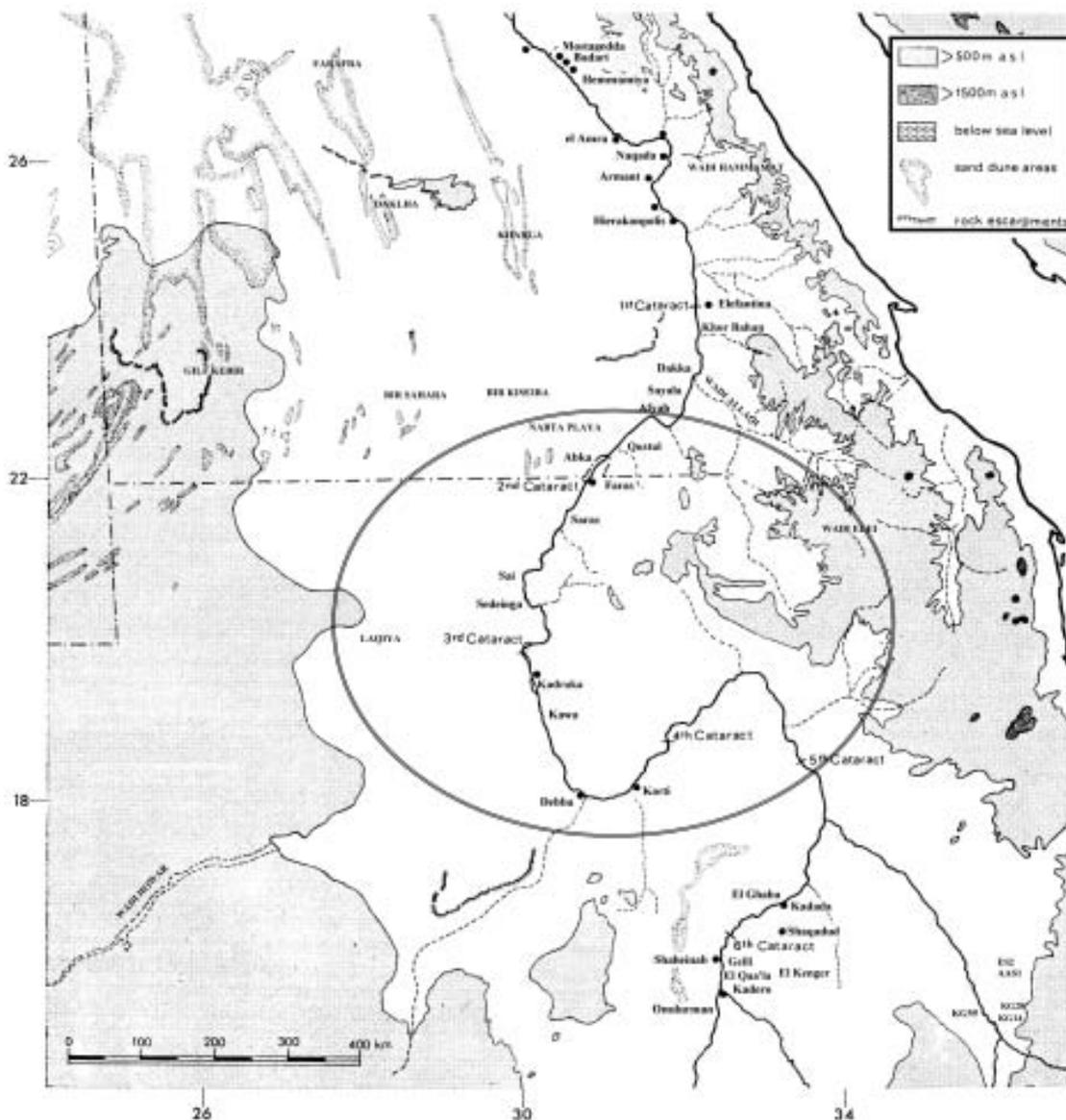


Figure 11. Hypothetical territorial borders of the Nubian Group during Phase 2.

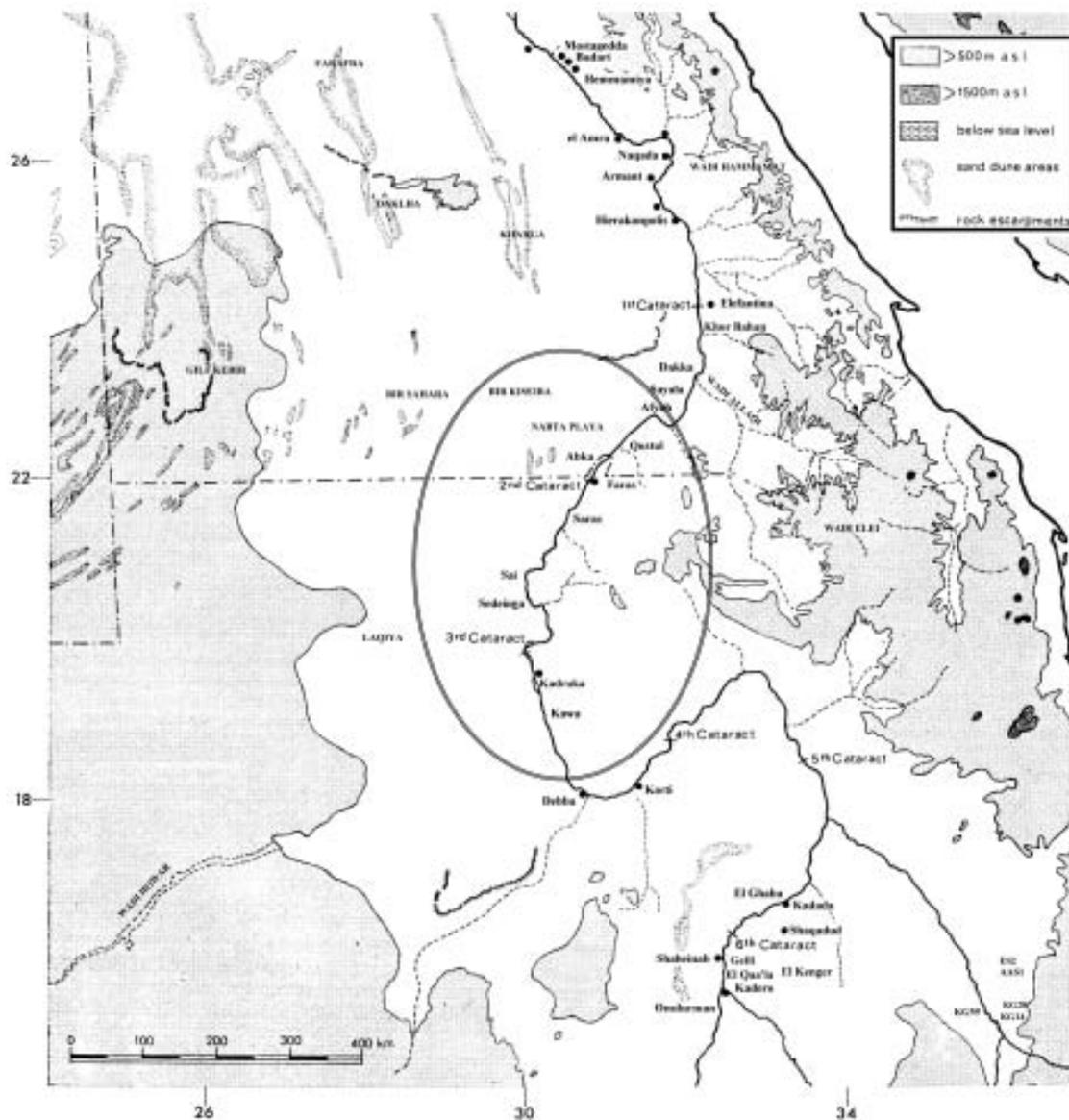


Figure 12. Hypothetical territorial borders of the Nubian Group during Phase 3.

if some pottery found there is very similar to that of the A-Group.

It can be suggested that after the Abkan, Upper Nubian cultures broke with the Lower Nubian A-Group and, due to a strong connection with the Khartoum Region, developed a proper Late Neolithic phase, maybe related to the succeeding Pre-Kerma Culture.

The Gilf Kebir, Nabta and Dakhla regions at different times and in different ways were part of the Nubian Group. In particular, Nabta, at the beginning of the Egyptian Group, was included in the Nubian Group during the Naqada period.

To summarise:

- the core area of the Nubian Group seems to have been the Second Cataract Region where, at the beginning of the 6th millennium bp, the Abkan Group likely originated (Figure 10).

- during the Developed Abkan the Nubian Group territory included the Second Cataract Region, Upper Nubia, Laqiya and maybe the Atbai (Figure 11).

- the Terminal Abkan phase, dated around the first half of the 5th millennium bp, can be recorded in the Second Cataract Region, Upper Nubia and probably in the Nabta-Kiseiba area (Figure 12). However, for this period new data are required in order to confirm this statement.

- at the same time, in the upper part of Lower Nubia, a new cultural unit originated: the Early A-Group adding, for the first time, the Sayala/Dakka area to the Nubian territory (Figure 13).

- finally, during the second half of the millennium, the A-Group Culture is found in Lower Nubia, Laqiya and probably also at Nabta and the Wadi Elei (Figure 14).

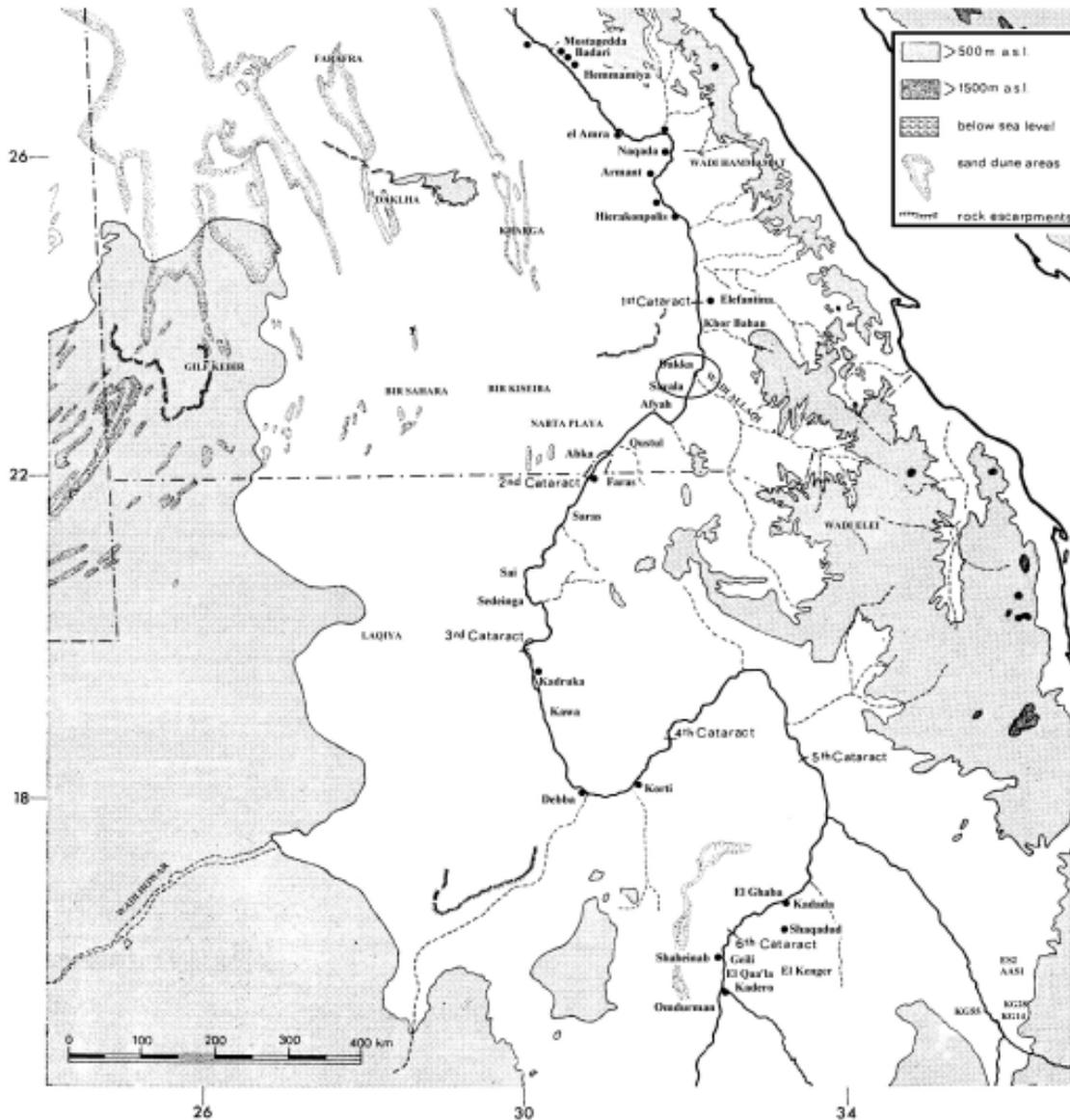


Figure 13. Hypothetical territorial borders of the Nubian Group during Phase 4: the A-Group and Abkan territories at the beginning of the phase.

At this point I hope it is clear that Nubian Cultures were not confined to the Nile, as the Nubian territory was much wider than previously thought. Unfortunately, the periphery of this territory is still almost unknown, while the core area, Lower Nubia, is already lost under Lake Nasser. In consequence, new research in the periphery areas should be expanded. At the same time, it may be noted that new data have been collected for the Abkan Culture: it is not a fishing group for the entire period of its development but a pastoral group, as are all the others in the research area, with a social organisation and funerary practices. Moreover, Abkan related sites are present not only in the Second Cataract Region but also in Upper Nubia and in both the Eastern and Western Deserts.

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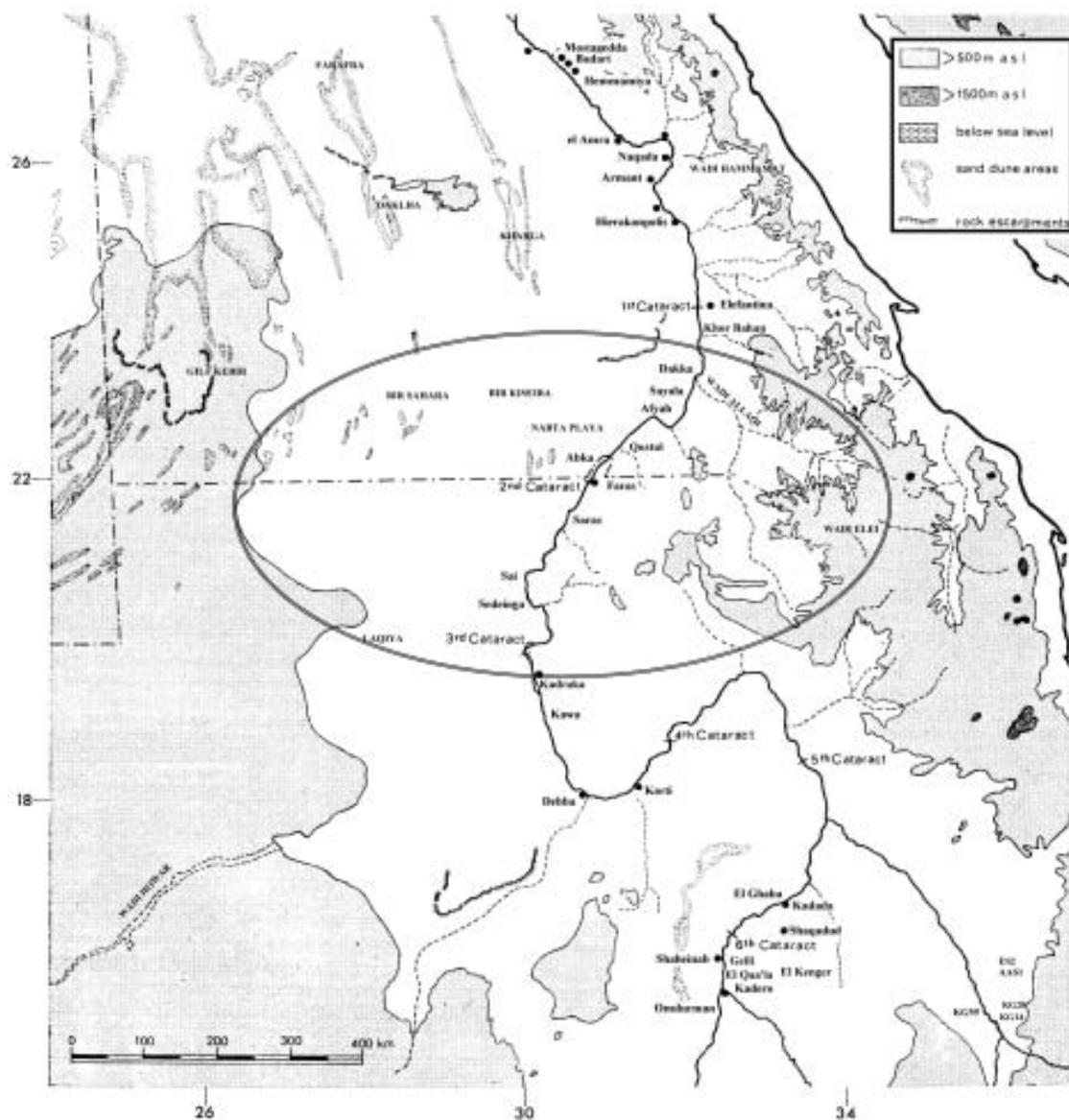


Figure 14. Hypothetical territorial borders of the Nubian Group during Phase 4: the A-Group territories at the end of the phase.

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