

# The Prehistory of the Nile Valley

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The prehistory of the Nile Valley from its headwaters in the highlands of central Africa to the Mediterranean will be discussed in a half-day symposium on the afternoon of 26 December 1968, during the Annual Meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science in Dallas, Texas. Until the recent international campaign of archeological salvage in Nubia very little was known concerning the development of those human societies that lived along the Nile during prehistoric times.

It was generally believed that few Paleolithic sites would be found in this area because they would have been either deeply buried in the more recent silts of the Nile or destroyed by the intensive cultivation of these silts during the past several thousand years. It was further believed, on the basis of a few scattered finds, that the Nile Valley was a culturally conservative and backward cul-de-sac throughout most of the Late Paleolithic and the subsequent periods prior to the Dynastic era. These views are now known to be incorrect. Rich Paleolithic sites are very common along the Nile, and these sites have shown that most of the technological developments which characterize the later stages of human development in Europe

and the Near East occur at least as early along the Nile as elsewhere.

The field research in Nubia is now completed; the rising waters of Lake Nasser have covered almost all the recently discovered archeological sites in an area of over 300 miles along the river in southern Egypt and northern Sudan. The discoveries in Nubia, however, have focused attention on the Nile Valley as an important locus of human development and many of those prehistorians who were working in Nubia have continued their studies in several regions both above and below the reservoir. This symposium will summarize the data from these most recent excavations and consider the possible role which the Nilotic area may have played in the development of the Paleolithic in both North Africa and the Levant. The panel of speakers will present a series of papers on sites ranging in age from Early Paleolithic to Neolithic.

Roy L. Carlson (Department of Political Science, Sociology and Anthropology, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, British Columbia), "Excavations at Khor Abu Anga, Sudan." This important locality near Khartoum has yielded a stratified sequence of Early and Middle Paleolithic industries with a strong central African flavor. Three

industries are represented. From early to late, they are Acheulean, Sangoan, and Lupemban.

Joel L. Shiner (Department of Anthropology, Southern Methodist University, Dallas, Texas), "Early Paleolithic and Neolithic Materials from Khashm el Girba, Sudan." Surveys along the headwaters of the Atbara River near the Ethiopian frontier have disclosed a series of Lower Paleolithic sites containing hand axes and pebble tools in association with a well preserved fauna. A second group of sites was of ceramic age. Some of these ceramic sites were similar to the sites known near Khartoum; others were much larger and contained more evolved ceramics. This last complex has not been known previously and seems to have no evident relationship to contemporary materials from Nubia or farther north in Egypt. It has been radiocarbon-dated at 2460 B.C. A third group of sites, dated at 1100 B.C., was found with even more sophisticated ceramics.

James L. Phillips (Department of Anthropology, Southern Methodist Uni-



versity, Dallas, Texas), "The Nile Valley and the Levant During the Late Paleolithic." This paper deals with the material from a Late Paleolithic site near Isna in central Egypt. The site has yielded a very high frequency of backed bladelets, many of which have retouched tips. In the Levant these pieces would be termed "Epi-Gravette" or "Font-Yves" points. The total assemblage shows numerous resemblances to Upper Paleolithic VI in the Levant, especially from the recent work at Hayonim Cave and Ein Gev, Israel. The Isna site is estimated to date around 16,000 B.C., on geological evidence. Another site nearby, and of about the same age, has unmistakable typological and technological resemblances with early Ibero-Maurusian sites of Lalla and Sidi Mansour in Tunisia.

Joe Ben Wheat (Department of Anthropology, University of Colorado, Boulder, Colorado) and Henry T. Irwin (Department of Anthropology, Washington State University, Pullman, Washington), "Late Paleolithic Sites Near Wadi Halfa, Sudan." Although many

of the Paleolithic sites excavated in Nubia have been published this does not include the important group studies by the University of Colorado team near Wadi Halfa. This paper by Wheat and Irwin will summarize the data from these sites, most of which are of Late Paleolithic age, and compare the material with that already published from Nubia.

Anthony E. Marks (Department of Anthropology, Southern Methodist University, Dallas, Texas), "Early Ceramic Groups Near the Fourth Cataract, Sudan." Four distinct groups of early ceramic-using peoples have been defined in the vicinity of Dongola, Sudan. All four groups appear to date in the 4th millennium B.C. Two of them appear to have some resemblances to the contemporary groups known near Khartoum and Wadi Halfa. The other two, however, show no obvious connections with any previously known Nilotic group. These finds have shown that a uniform culture area clearly did not exist at this time along the Nile.

Some of the key problems which will

be discussed during this symposium are:

To what causes can we attribute the similarities which are evident between some widely separated industries in Africa?

What is the significance of the large communities on the upper Atbara at a comparatively early date?

Did they later combine to form the empire of Axum?

What is the nature of the origin of the "Neolithic" in Africa?

If the traditional view of Nilotic prehistoric development is not valid, how should the Nile be viewed within the context of North African and Mediterranean prehistory?

Was the Nile the source of the early Ibero-Maurusian industries of the Maghreb, or is the similarity due to convergence?

An examination of these problems will provide fresh insight into the role of Africa as a source of cultural developments in prehistoric time.

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