

**ON THE EVE OF NEOLITHISATION: SOCIAL, ECONOMIC AND SPIRITUAL STRATEGIES OF LATE HUNTER-GATHERERS BURIED AT THE SIXTH NILE CATARACT**

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This paper presents results of multidisciplinary analyses of one of the largest Early Holocene burial grounds in Northeast Africa. The habitation site of Sphinx at Jebel Sabaloka in central Sudan was occupied by hunter-gatherers of the Early Khartoum culture between ~11,000 and 7,000 cal BP. The associated burial ground was used for 800 years between ~8,700 and 7,900 cal BP. Its large size (~300 m<sup>2</sup>) is ~30% of the entire 940m<sup>2</sup> of the combined area of the settlement and cemetery. Of an estimated 400–450 burials, 52 individuals have been uncovered, and 48 have been subjected to archaeological and natural scientific analyses.

The key findings on the buried population from the point of view of biology, demography, habitual activities, burial rite, spiritual habits, subsistence and mobility will be presented. This evidence will be integrated in the broader settlement and historical context, and with the framework of other Holocene hunter-gatherer burial grounds in Northeast Africa. Jebel Sabaloka provides evidence for 4000 years of developments in Early Khartoum forager economy, ecology and society that set the stage for the transition to food production in the Sahel and Sahara. Models that prioritize the processes of diffusion of economic innovations and peoples in the spread of food production need to be revised to integrate the long trajectory of developments within this region. Our aim is to begin to define the social, economic and spiritual strategies of one uniquely documented population that shall serve as the basis for discussion of the circumstances of and reasons for Neolithisation of central Sudan.

**Keywords**

late hunter-gatherers, community burial grounds, Early Khartoum (Mesolithic), Sudan

**Note/comment**