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Od Redakcji

Główne części 56. tomu „Fontes Archaeologici Posnanienses” przynoszą prace poświęcone dwóm obszarom badawczym: wschodniemu Śródziemnomorzu oraz Niżowi Polskiemu. Obydwa łączy aktywność polskich archeologów, od lat z sukcesem prowadzących tam badania.

Tematem specjalnym jest zestaw artykułów skoncentrowanych na Egei oraz Egipcie, które naświetlają wybrane problemy archeologii śródziemnomorskiej. Blok tych pierwszych to głosy najmłodszego pokolenia adeptów archeologii, specjalizujących się w badaniach strefy egejskiej. Są one pokłosiem międzynarodowej konferencji studencko-doktoranckiej „Aegean Archeology Students’ Session”, która odbyła się w Muzeum Archeologicznym w Poznaniu w dniach 7-8 kwietnia 2016 r. Współorganizatorem sesji był Uniwersytet im. Adama Mickiewicza w Poznaniu. Zainteresowania młodych badaczy dotyczą przede wszystkim świata minojskiego i mykeńskiego. Uzupełnieniem tej części jest artykuł poświęcony zagadkowemu zabytkowi z Pustyni Zachodniej w Egipcie.

W dziale *Materiały* wracamy najpierw do dwóch znanych od wielu lat stanowisk wielkopolskich: Kotowa i Ciążenia. W obu przypadkach Autorzy proponują reanalizę dawnych źródeł pokazując, jak wiele nowych wiadomości można uzyskać pochylając się nad muzealnymi kolekcjami i archiwaliami. Cztery następne artykuły przedstawiają wyniki najnowszych badań, realizowanych w drugiej dekadzie XXI wieku. Cmentarzysko ludności kultury przeworskiej w Ochocicach, depozyt żelaznych wyrobów z Lubinicka, krypta kaliskiego kościoła pw. św. Wojciecha i Stanisława oraz fragment południowych fortyfikacji Poznania – to nowe źródła, które docenią zarówno archeolodzy i historycy, jak również wszyscy zainteresowani przeszłością naszego regionu i jego otoczenia.

Tom kończy dział *Varia*, w którym publikujemy sprawozdanie z działalności naszego Muzeum w roku 2019.

Marzena Szmyt

Clayton ring from Bargat El-Shab (Western Desert, Egypt)

PRZEMYSŁAW BOBROWSKI, AGNIESZKA MĄCZYŃSKA

Pierścień Claytona z Bargat El-Shab (Pustynia Zachodnia, Egipt)

Abstract: The paper focuses on the find of Clayton ring (a conical ceramic object open at both ends) at Bargat El-Shab and presents the results of its analysis. Moreover, the authors refer to the cultural context of the find in the Bargat El-Shab region and present a short overview of the cultural situation in the Western Desert at the end of the Holocene humid phase. The find from Bargat El-Shab is compared with other known Clayton rings registered in the Eastern Sahara. Although the largest number of rings is found in the Dakhleh Oasis and adjacent areas, they are also known in areas located within a 300 km radius from the oasis. The presence of rings is linked to the movement of pastoral groups of the Sheikh Muftah culture at the time of the desiccation of the Eastern Sahara in search of raw materials, food, water, pastures for animals, as well as in need of contacts and exchanges with other communities occupied the desert and the Nile Valley. The Clayton ring from Bargat El-Shab is the southernmost find of this artifact and the southernmost trace of Sheikh Muftah culture in Egypt.

Keywords: Clayton rings, Holocene humid phase, Sheikh Muftah culture, Western Desert

Abstrakt: Artykuł dotyczy znaleziska pierścienia Claytona (ceramicznego, stożkowatego przedmiotu otwartego na obu końcach) w Bargat El-Shab i prezentuje wyniki jego analizy. Ponadto autorzy odnoszą się do sytuacji kulturowej w badanym regionie, jak i szerszego kontekstu kulturowego na Pustyni Zachodniej pod koniec holocenijskiej fazy wilgotnej. Znalezisko z Bargat El-Shab zostało zestawione z innymi pierścieniami Claytona, znanymi z terenu całej Pustyni Zachodniej. Choć największa liczba pierścieni znana jest z Oazy Dachla oraz terenów przyległych, znaleziska tego typu rejestrowane są także na obszarach w promieniu 300 km od oazy. Obecność pierścieni łączy się z przemieszaniem się pasterskich grup kultury Sheikh Muftah w czasie procesu wysychania wschodniej Sahary w poszukiwaniu surowców, jedzenia, wody i pastwisk dla zwierząt, ale także z potrzeby kontaktu i wymiany z innymi społecznościami zamieszkującymi wschodnią Saharę i Dolinę Nilu. Pierścień Claytona z Bargat El-Shab jest obecnie najbardziej na południe wysuniętym znaleziskiem tego typu oraz najbardziej na południe wysuniętym śladem działalności kultury Sheikh Muftah.

Słowa kluczowe: pierścienie Claytona, holocenijska faza wilgotna, kultura Sheikh Muftah, Pustynia Zachodnia

1. Introduction

During the Early and Middle Holocene in the southern part of the Western Desert in Egypt, a prehistoric settlement was concentrated around seasonal lakes, supplied by rainwater in humid periods. These locations, referred to as playas, were natural depressions created as a result of very heavy deflation that occurred in the region during the Pleistocene. Water flowing from nearby hills and plateaus collected in these playas. Vegetation also flourished there, attracting animals as well as people. One such place was a relatively small playa at the foot of the Bargat El-Shab mountain (mountain of shining stones),

a very characteristic elevation situated in this part of the Western Desert, around 150 km west of the Nile Valley (in the area of Abu Simbal). The mountain is around 20 km south of the Gebel Nabta massif and southwest of the famous complex of prehistoric sites at Nabta Playa (Wendorf, Schild 2001).

The genesis of research at Bargat El-Shab goes back to the end of the past millennium and the beginning of the current century. The location was discovered during one of the surface surveys conducted within a radius of several dozen kilometers of Nabta Playa, organized by the Combined Prehistoric Expedition for students and inspectors of the

Egyptian Antiquities Service. Regular excavation was launched at the location in 2005 and 2006, the purpose of which was the search for the oldest Holocene settlement in the Western Desert associated with the so-called El Adam phase (9800-8850 cal BP per Schild, Wendorf 2013). Research work was focused above all on the Early Holocene site (site E-05-1), located on the eastern shore of the lake basin. The excavation was continued in a limited scope during the subsequent 2011-2012 seasons, and surface penetrations were conducted around the paleolake and in the closest surrounding area of the Bargat El-Shab mountain. The result of these activities was the discovery of intense traces of the presence of Late and Final Neolithic pastoral communities on the western edge of the playa and the discovery of the so-called Clayton ring on the northern forefield of the mountain. The location where it was discovered has been marked in the terrain as site E-12-1 (fig. 1). The authors of the article were not able to return to the analysis of the artefact (also due to formal factors) with the consideration of a wider archaeological and cultural context until broader scale research work within the scope of a new project was conducted from 2017 to 2019.¹

This paper focuses on the find of the Clayton ring – a conical ceramic object open at both ends at Bargat El-Shab and presents the results of its ceramological analysis. Moreover, the authors refer to the cultural context of the find in the research region and present a short overview of the cultural situation at the end of the Holocene humid phase in the Egyptian Western Desert. The objective of the paper is to establish a cultural affiliation and chronology of the ring as well as its function.

2. Cultural situation in the region of Bargat El-Shab

The oldest traces of human settlement in the Bargat El-Shab region go back to the Middle Paleolithic. A few cores and flakes made using the Levallois technique were registered on the summit of Bargat mountain (fig.1; site E-17-1), among other places.

¹ Managing work at the Bargat el-Shab site from 2005 to 2006 and 2011 to 2012 for the Combined Prehistoric Expedition was Przemysław Bobrowski. From 2017 to 2019, research at the location was conducted within the scope of NCN project no. 2015/17/B/HS3/01315 under the supervision of Professor Michał Kobusiewicz and Przemysław Bobrowski.

Research to date at Bargat El-Shab has uncovered above all excessive remains of Early Holocene settlement on the eastern shore of the paleolake (playa). Registered on the sandy surface of the small hill – erosional monadnock there were thousands of stone artefacts (tools made from a variety of raw materials, including querns or pestles), animal bones, ostrich egg shells, vessel ceramics, as well as various stone structures (fig.1; site E-05-1). However, the artefact material on the surface was heavily mixed and represented all the phases of Early and Middle Holocene settlement recognized in the Western Desert to date. The layer in which the artefacts were deposited was the effect of heavy deflation, while the initial surface of the site was probably situated around 1 m higher than at present. Fragments of a settlement with numerous utility pits featuring a characteristic bell-shaped cross-section, hearths, small pot holes, wells, and pits containing human burials (without burial goods) were registered in a few investigated trenches located at the site². Both the typology of stone inventories and ceramics as well as radiocarbon dating allow us to associate the site and burials with the communities of the Holocene climatic optimum in the Western Desert, i.e. the El Nabta/ Al Jerar phase (8050-7300 cal BP) (Schild, Wendorf 2013: 128).

The situation is much different on the opposite (western) shore of the paleolake basin, where an unusual concentration of megalithic features located on a small elevated monadnock was found (fig. 1; site E-12-4). Within the site, we registered a few tumuli, stone chests, and smaller stone structures, as well as the remains of numerous hearths. One of the most interesting finds is a well-preserved tumulus which holds the burial of a child aged 4-5 years. Similar concentrations with numerous megalithic features, stone structures, hearth complexes, or collections of stone steles with anthropomorphic shapes were

² Found within the fills of the features were rich stone materials, vessel ceramics, elements of personal decoration, animal bones and numerous macroremains. Moreover, a concentration of artefacts associated with various forms of economic activity, such as stone material treatment or the production of beads from ostrich egg shells, was registered on the surface of the site, (Bobrowski *et al.* 2010; Bobrowski 2019; Bobrowski *et al.* 2020). The geophysical survey conducted at site E-05-1 which took advantage of the enhanced magnetization of features in the ground (utility pits and hearths) allowed us to recognize the structure of Holocene settlement within the site and define its actual scope (Welc, Bobrowski 2020).

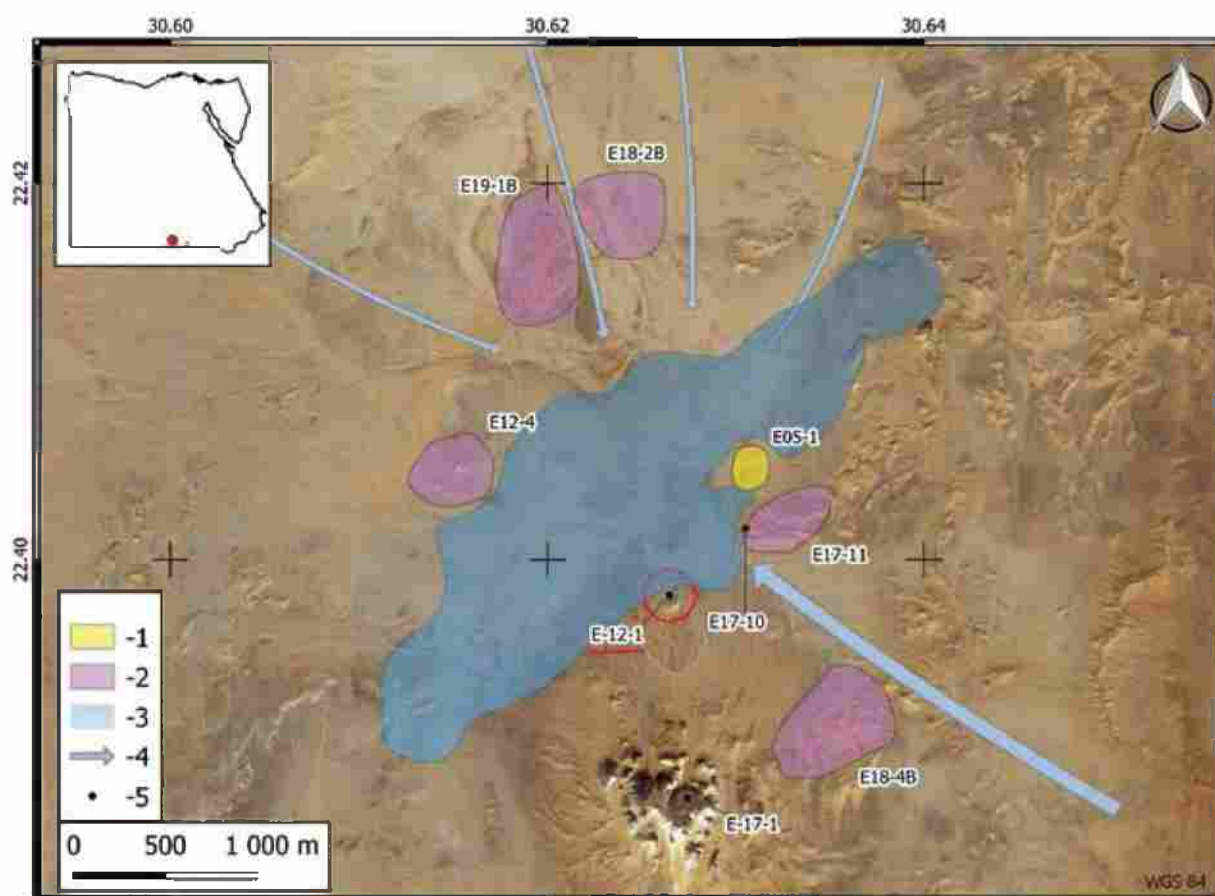


Fig.1. General map of Bargat El-Shab Playa and location of this site on the map of Egypt. 1 – Early and Middle Holocene settlement; 2 – Late and Final Neolithic (Ru'at El Baqar and Bunat el Asnam) settlements; 3 – reach of the deflation basin and the seasonal lake; 4 – the main directions of seasonally drains water to the basin of the lake; 5 – the most important single sites

also noted at several other sites located to the north and south-east of the lake basin (fig.1; sites E-18-2B, E-19-1B, E-17-10, E-17-11, E-18-4B). We are probably dealing here with remains of ritual places dated on wet interphases, defined in the Nabta Playa area as Ru'at El Baqar (6500-5800 cal BP) or Bunat el Asnam (5750-4800 cal BP) (Schild, Wendorf 2013: 128).

3. Clayton ring from Bargat El-Shab

3.1. Place of discovery

The location where the Clayton ring was found in Bargat El-Shab has been marked as site E-12-1 (fig. 1). It is located at the northern end of a small erosional monadnock, situated on the northern forefield of the Bargat massif (fig. 2). The monadnock has an elongated form and runs along the north-south axis with a slight deviation from the southwest to the northeast direction. It is made of heavily eroded

Nubian sandstone, with a layer of rock debris on the surface, consisting of larger slabs and small fragments thereof, and is partly coated with cover sand of Holocene origin. Its relative height in relation to the bottom of the adjacent wadi ranges between approx. 3 m to 4 m. Despite its relatively small size, it is however an extremely distinctive terrain form in the landscape. This is because it flanks the south-west estuary of the largest wadi which drains rain-water into the paleolake basin (fig. 1). On the opposite side, the wadi estuary was closed by a series of hills (of a similar geological structure), on which traces of Late and Final Neolithic settlements were registered (site E-17-11). These locations, strategic by nature, were probably of great cultural and sacral/ symbolic (?) significance (eg. Wendorf, Schild 2001: 669, fig. 3; Bobrowski *et al.* 2011: 78, ryc.2; Bobrowski *et al.* 2014: 294):

The Clayton ring was found directly on the surface of the monadnock on its north-western tip. It was recessed halfway into the ground, to a depth of about 4-5 cm (fig. 3). A small trench measuring 2 × 2 m was open in the place where the ring was found. Several layers of cover sand were removed to the bedrock, about 15 cm below the original surface. However, no settlement remains were found. A surface prospection within a radius of several dozen meters around the find did not provide a positive result either.

3.2. Technology and morphology

The ring from Bargat El-Shab is a conical ceramic object open at both ends. Its upper narrow part was destroyed, probably as a result of severe wind erosion. The lower part has a diameter of 12.5 cm and is finished with a pointed rim. The ring has a preserved height of 8.2 cm, while the thickness of the wall is between 4 and 5 mm. It was made of clay, which became red in color after firing. The clay was tempered with grains of sand (up to 0.1 mm), very fine irregular fragments of limestone (approx. 0.1 mm), and shale (up to 0.25 mm) in amounts of approx. 10%. The cross-section had a uniform red color without a core, indicating that the object was burned in an oxidizing atmosphere. The outer and inner surfaces of the ring have been smoothed. Moreover, the lower part of the find shows scratches on the outer surface left by smoothing by a hard object. Traces of turning on the inner surface were registered as well. The lower outer part of the ring has a potmark, which was engraved after firing. It has the form of a grid composed of 2 rows and 7 columns (fig. 4-5).

4. Clayton rings in Eastern Sahara

The rings owe their name to Patrick Clayton, who was the first researcher to have mentioned features of this type found 60 km east of Djebel Kamil near the Sudanese border in his report from the 1930-31 South-Western Desert Expedition (Clayton 1937). Currently, Clayton rings has been recognized in many locations of Eastern Sahara, from the central part of the Western Desert in Egypt to northern Sudan, although their largest concentration is in the Dakhleh Oasis and adjacent areas (Kuper, Riemer 2000; Riemer 2004; 2011; Warfe, Rickett 2019: 99).

Rings are primarily individual finds that are not accompanied by other traces of human settlement or activity. They appear together with discs with a hole usually made of fragments of vessels, with which they probably formed a functional set. In addition to individual finds, deposits made of several or even a dozen rings have been found (Riemer 2011: 62). Clayton rings are dated to the late Predynastic and Early Dynastic period (4th and 3rd millennium BCE) in Egypt. Additionally, they are considered to be the products of the community of the Sheikh Muftah culture which appeared at the beginning of the 4th millennium BCE in the area of the Dakhleh Oasis and probably the Kharga Oasis during the intense desertification of the Eastern Sahara associated with the climate change that began at the end of the Holocene wet phase. Pastoralism and the mobile lifestyle of the Sheikh Muftah culture enabled people to survive in harsh desert conditions until the end of the Old Kingdom period. The year-round cycle of pastoral movement guaranteed access to water and food, as well as pastures for animals, primarily goats (Riemer 2011: 260-272; Polkowski 2016: 10-13; Warfe, Ricketts 2019: 95-108). The function of Clayton rings has not yet been clarified, although several hypotheses exist in source literature. According to H. Riemer (2011: 281), they should be associated with the mobile lifestyle and movements of Sheikh Muftah groups in Eastern Sahara. To date, suggestions have also been put forth that they were used to collect honey, produce cheese or even collect salt (Riemer, Kuper 2000; Riemer 2004; 2011). The latest hypothesis proposed by H.-J. Pachur (2017) assumes that Clayton rings are devices for dry wood distillation. Products of pyrolysis obtained inside the rings, including wood tar, could have been used for medicinal and cosmetic purposes, for repelling insects, as well as for making tools or weapons from wood. Their wide spectrum of use was beneficial during travel in harsh desert conditions.

5. The Clayton ring from Bargat El-Shab in the context of other finds from the Eastern Desert

The largest number of Clayton rings is found in the Dakhleh Oasis and adjacent areas (Riemer 2011: Fig. 287), in an approx. 100 km radius from the oasis (fig. 6). According to H. Riemer (2011: 274-278),



Fig. 2. Bargat El-Shab, site E-12-1. A - View of the site from the opposite bank of the wadi from the north-east, from site E-05-1. B - View of the erosional monadnock and the site from the north-east. The exact location where the Clayton ring was found is marked by arrows. Picture: P. Bobrowski



Fig. 3. Bargat El-Shab, site E-12-1. The location where the Clayton ring was found is marked with a black arrow. Picture: P. Bobrowski

it was an area of intense activity of the Sheikh Muftah community. While during the dry summer season, pastoral groups limited distant travel and their presence was concentrated within the depression itself, making use of available resources, in the remaining seasons they moved in search of pastures for animals, game, and probably locust, which they probably collected. The zone within a 30 km radius from the oasis was an area of seasonal regular migration during the spring (March/ April); seasonal camps and short-term camps were established here. Large amounts of ceramics and flint tools are being found among the remains. Clayton rings also appear at the sites and they are additionally registered in special deposits which hold an average of 1 to 10 objects left in caches for use during subsequent trips. They were most often placed in niches or rock shelters and on the tops of small hills that could have served as landmarks during travels.

Occasionally, Sheikh Mutah groups would reach areas located further away from Dakhleh. We are aware of the signs of activity of groups of this culture in areas located within a 300 km radius from the oasis (fig. 6). Such distant travel was associated with contacts and exchanges with other communities operating at that time in the Nile Valley and the Nubian Desert (Riemer 2011: 281-288; Warfe, Rickett 2019: 103-104). The only remnants of these distant travels are primarily individual Clayton rings, which are not accompanied by any other traces of human activity and on a lesser scale, deposits made up of several or dozen rings and sometimes other vessels.

The best analyzed and most numerous Clayton ring assemblage registered so far was found at the El-Karafish 02/5 site located on the embankment towering over the Dakhleh Oasis in the southern part of the Libyan Plateau. It is made up of 108 rings or their fragments and 87 discs (fig. 7). Almost all the rings are red in color and they were made of fabric typical of the Sheikh Muftah culture pottery tradition with a mix of fine sand, shale, and limestone. Vertical or diagonal smoothing marks are visible on the outer surface of the rings as well. The top edges are flat, while the bottom edges are pointed (Riemer 2011: 62-73).

In the context of the analysis of the Bargat El-Shab ring, we need to mention two ceramic deposits

from Bir Sahara, located 120 km north-west of Bargat, in the area of distant travel of the Sheikh Muftah groups (Gatto 2001). According to M.C. Gatto (2001: 55), all the rings found in both deposits were made of Nile clay and are the products of Naqada cultures. The researcher associates them with the seasonal activity of Naqada culture from the Nile Valley and Nubian Group A, whose ceramics were also found in both deposits. The place where the vessels were hidden near the well was to be of a special significance and was associated with intercultural contacts and exchange (Gatto 2001: 55-56).

The context of the discovery of the Clayton ring in Bargat El-Shab suggests its close relation with finds of this type from other parts of Eastern Sahara. The hill on which the feature was discovered is visible from afar and could have been a landmark for migrating pastoral groups. Unfortunately, the disc which had accompanied the ring was not registered in Bargat El-Shab. It seems that it may have been destroyed due to severe wind erosion, which also affected the top part of the ring.

From a technical point of view, the Clayton ring from Bargat El-Shab appears to be similar to the rings of the Sheikh Muftah culture. Taking into account the rings found in the Western Desert, H. Riemer and R. Kuper (2000; Riemer 2004, 2011: 62-73) distinguished two technical groups. Group A is characterized by good workmanship, including smoothing of external surfaces, turning marks, and standardized shape and dimensions. The use of fine-grained silt with an organic temper is also a characteristic feature. Group B includes irregular rings of varying dimensions without precise surface finishing. The ceramic paste mainly contains silt with fine sand. In terms of surface treatment (even walls, smoothing, and turning), the Bargat El-Shab ring belongs to group A. However, the ceramic paste without the organic temper, containing sand, limestone, and shale, resembles the EK3 fabric (a ferruginous oases clay) characteristic of El-Karafish rings, of which almost all rings classified in group B were made (Riemer 2011: 41-50, Fig. 14). The difficulty in assigning the Clayton ring of Bargat El-Shab to one of the mentioned technical groups may result from the lack of detailed data on which the typologies



Fig. 4. Bargat El-Shab, site E-12-1. Clayton ring. Picture: M. Jórdeczka

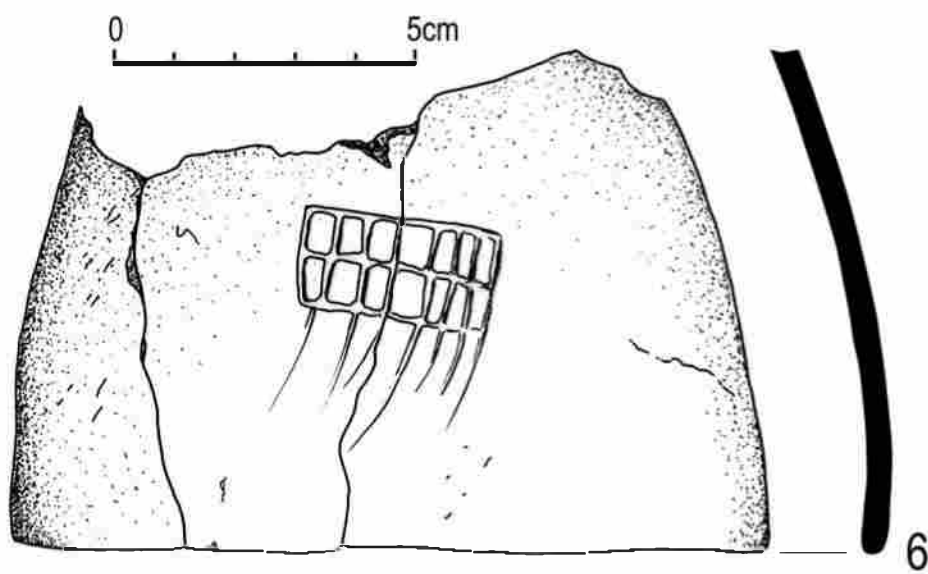


Fig. 5. Bargat El-Shab, site E-12-1. Clayton ring, drawing, and graphic design by P. Rutkowska and J. Kędelska

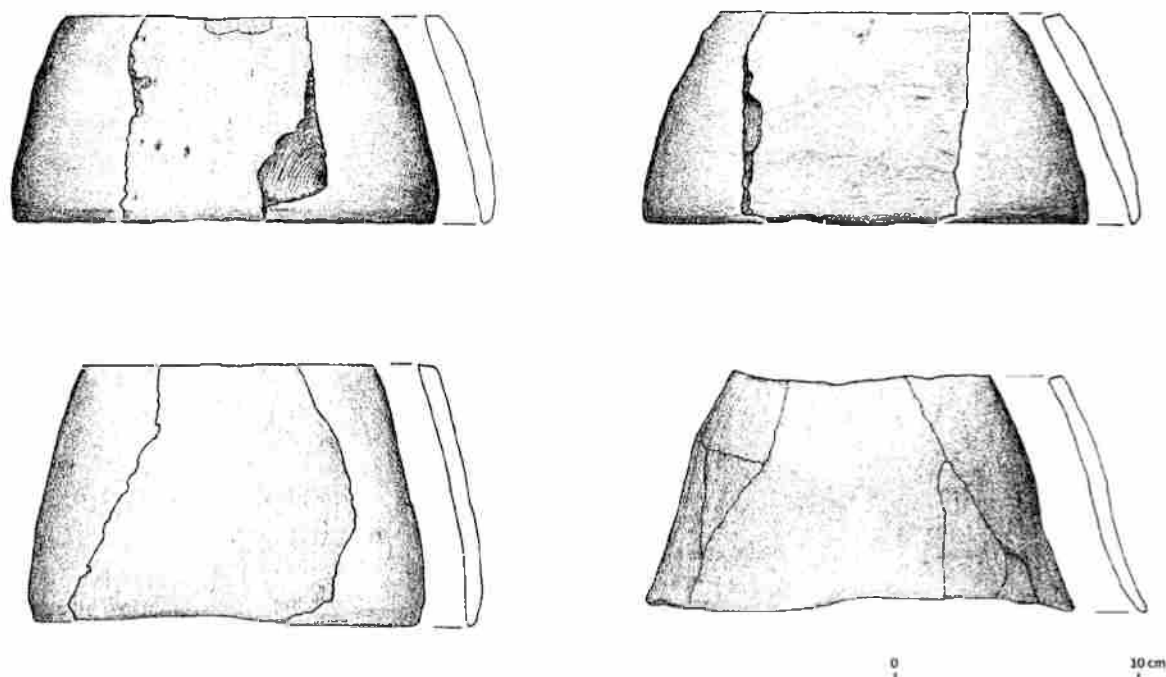


Fig. 7. Clayton rings from El-Karafish 05/2 (courtesy Heiko Riemer after Riemer 2010: fig. 27)

6. Bargat El-Shab on the route of the Sheikh Muftah pastoral groups

Climate change that affected the Eastern Sahara at the end of the Holocene wet phase had a huge impact on settlement in north-east Africa (Kuper and Kröplin 2006). Some of the inhabitants of the desert had decided to leave the inhospitable areas and settle in the delta or in the Nile Valley. However, certain Neolithic communities remained in oases, which guaranteed access to water and food. The communities of the Sheikh Muftah culture are a good example of the adaptation that enabled them to function in the Sahara from 3800 BC until the end of the Old Kingdom period, i.e. around 2200 BCE. A cycle of seasonal migrations guaranteed access to the most important raw materials necessary for humans and animals (Riemer 2011; Polkowski 2016; Warfe & Rickett 2019). The zone of migration in search of water, food, game, and animal pastures included the area of the Dakhleh Oasis and adjacent areas. However, Sheikh Muftah groups also reached areas located as far as 300 km from the oasis (Fig. 6). The purpose of such travel was not only raw materials and resources but also contacts and exchanges with other communities that had been developing at that time in Egypt and northern Sudan. Sheikh

Muftah groups were seasonal wanderers and probably had defined migration routes based on characteristic landmarks visible in the desert landscape. It is from the period in question the custom of hiding clay pots in places located on the travel routes for later use, comes. It seems rational to associate Clayton's rings, which are abundant in the areas of activity of Sheikh Muftah's culture, with a mobile lifestyle. Although their function is not entirely clear, their placement at points easily recognizable in the desert landscape - rock shelters or on hills - facilitated access to them and their possible reuse.

The find from Bargat El-Shab is a product of the representatives of Sheikh Muftah, as indicated by its technology and morphology. These communities were probably also the ones who used the object. The Clayton ring from Bargat El-Shab placed on a hill visible in the desert landscape was easily accessible to wanderers from the north. It is worth noting that in addition to the findings from Bir Misaha, which P. Clayton (1937) refers to, Bargat El-Shab is located approx. 20 km from the current border of Egypt and Sudan. It is thus the southernmost point where an artifact of this type was found; it is indeed the southernmost trace of Sheikh Muftah culture in Egypt.

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Pierścień Claytona z Bargat El-Shab (Pustynia Zachodnia, Egipt)

Streszczenie

We wczesnym i środkowym holocenie w południowej części Pustyni Zachodniej w Egipcie, osadnictwo pradziejowe skupiało się wokół sezonowych jezior, zasilanych w okresach wilgotnych przez wody opadowe. Miejsca te, nazywane playami, były naturalnymi zagłębieniami powstałymi w plejstocenie w wyniku silnej deflacji. W nich gromadziły się wody spływające z pobliskich wzgórz i wysoczyzn. Tam też rozwijała się roślinność, która przyciągała zarówno zwierzęta jak i ludzi. Jednym z takich miejsc była stosunkowo niewielka playa, leżąca u podnóża góry Bargat El-Shab, bardzo charakterystycznego wyniesienia położonego na Pustyni Zachodniej, około 150 km na zachód od Doliny Nilu (na wysokości Abu Simbal).

Geneza badań w Bargat El-Shab sięga przełomu ubiegłego milenium oraz początków obecnego stulecia i prac prowadzonych w tym rejonie przez międzynarodowy zespół badawczy Połączonej Ekspedycji Prehistorycznej (Combined Prehistoric Expedition). W latach 2017-2019 prowadzono w tym rejonie interdyscyplinarne badania wykopaliskowe w ramach nowego projektu finansowanego przez Narodowe Centrum Nauki (NCN nr 2015/17/B/HS3/01315) pod kierunkiem Michała Kobusiewicza i Przemysława Bobrowskiego. Efektem tych prac było odkrycie wielofazowego, wczesnoholocenijskiego osadnic-

twa na wschodnim brzegu paleojeziora (stanowisko E-05-1) oraz kilku dużych koncentracji obiektów megalitycznych, zlokalizowanych głównie na zachodnim i północnym brzegu (E-12-4, E-17-11, E-18-2B, E-18-4B, E-19-1B). Koncentracjom megalitów, położonych w obrębie charakterystycznych ostańców erozyjnych, towarzyszyły każdorazowo dziesiątki ognisk. Obiekty te łączy się z działalnością społeczności pasterskich późnego i schyłkowego neolitu w ostatnich wilgotnych interfazach środkowego *Holocenu- Ru'at El Baqar* (6500-5800 cal BP) i *Bunat el Asnam* (5750-4800 cal BP).

Przedmiotem badań prezentowanych w artykule jest pierścien Claytona, odkryty w Bargat El-Shab na szczycie samotnego pagórka na stanowisku E-12-1. Jest to znalezisko pojedyncze, któremu nie towarzyszyły inne ślady aktywności człowieka. Pierścien to stożkowata forma, otwarta na obu końcach, z silnie zerodowaną górną częścią. Średnica dolnej krawędzi ma 12,5 cm, a zachowana wysokość 8,2 cm. Grubość ścianek waha się między 4 a 5 mm. Pierścien wykonano z masy ceramicznej schudzonej drobnym piaskiem, wapieniem oraz łupkiem, która przybrała czerwony kolor po wypale w atmosferze utleniającej. Zewnętrzna jak i wewnętrzna powierzchnia pierścienia zostały wygładzone. W dolnej części formy na jej zewnętrznej powierzchni widoczne są rysy powstałe po gładzeniu twardym przedmiotem, a na wewnętrznych ściankach zarejestrowano ślady obtaczania. Cechą szczególną pierścienia jest znak garnarki w postaci kratki wryty po wypale w dolnej jego części.

Pierścienie Claytona znane są z terenu całej Pustyni Zachodniej, jednak ich największa liczba została zarejestrowana w Oazie Dachla i na terenach do niej przyległych w promieniu do 100 km od oazy. Najczęściej są one znajdowane pojedynczo, bez innych śladów aktywności człowieka i występują razem z przewierconym dyskiem, wykonanym z fragmentów naczyń. Depozyty złożone z kilku lub kilkadziesiątu obiektów także są rejestrowane. Tego typu znaleziska łączy się z aktywnością grup kultury Sheikh Muftah i datuje na późny okres przedynastyczny oraz okres wczesnodynastyczny. Kultura Sheikh Muftah pojawiła się na terenie Oazy Dachla oraz prawdopodobnie sąsiedniej Oazy Charga w IV tysiącleciu BC w wyniku adaptacji ludzi do skutków zmian klimatycznych, jakie objęły wschodnią Saharę pod koniec holocenijskiej fazy wilgotnej. Mobilny tryb życia oraz gospodarka pasterska umożliwiły ludziom przetrwanie w trudnych warunkach narastającej suszy i pozwoliły im przetrwać w niekorzystnym środowisku aż do okresu Starego Państwa. Oazy oraz obszar w promieniu 30 km były strefą największej aktywności pasterzy z kultury Sheikh Muftah, ponieważ nawet podczas gorącego lata zapewniony był tam dostęp

do wody niezbędnej dla ludzi i zwierząt. W strefie tej zakładano obozy sezonowe oraz krótkotrwałe obozowiska, a liczba zarejestrowanych pierścieni Claytona jest największa. Formy te występują w miejscach osiedlania się ludzi, ale również znajdowane były w niszach lub schroniskach skalnych, a nawet na szczytach wzgórz, które mogły stanowić rozpoznawalne drogowskazy na czas wędrówek. Największy znany depozyt pierścieni Claytona został odkryty na stanowisku El-Karafish 02/5 w pobliżu Oazy Dachla. Składa się on ze 108 obiektów lub ich fragmentów oraz 87 dysków.

Grupy Sheikh Muftah docierały również do bardziej odległych regionów oddalonych nawet o 300 km od oaz, w poszukiwaniu możliwości kontaktu i wymiany z innymi grupami funkcjonującymi na terenie wschodniej Sahary i Doliny Nilu. Śladami ich obecności są również pierścienie, znajdowane pojedynczo lub w mniejszych grupach. Dwa depozyty tego typu zostały zarejestrowane w Bir Sahara, 120 km na północny-zachód od Bargat El-Shab. Ich obecność interpretuje się w kontekście kontaktów i wymiany między kulturą Nagada oraz Grupą A.

Dotychczas nie została w pełni wyjaśniona funkcja pierścieni Claytona. Ich obecność na trasach wędrówek wskazuje na związek z przemieszczaniem się ludzi. Łączy się je ze zbieraniem miodu, produkcją sera lub nawet wytrącaniem soli. Najnowsza hipoteza wskazuje jednak wykorzystanie tych obiektów w procesie pirolizy i produkcji m.in. smoły drzewnej, która mogła mieć bardzo szerokie zastosowanie w czasie wędrówek na pustyni, jako kosmetyk, lekarstwo, środek na insekty lub składnik wykorzystywany przy produkcji drewnianych narzędzi i broni. W kontekście dotychczasowych odkryć pierścieni Claytona z Bargat El-Shab wykazuje duże podobieństwo pod względem technologii, formy jak i miejsca zdeponowania do innych pierścieni znanych z Pustyni Zachodniej. Jest on prawdopodobnie produktem ludności kultur Sheikh Muftah i został pozostawiony w Bargat el-Shab przez grupy pasterzy, które dotarli daleko na południe od Oazy Dachla w poszukiwaniu nie tylko zasobów, jedzenia czy wody, ale także prawdopodobnie innych grup ludzkich. Wydaje się, że wybór miejsca zdeponowania - szczyt wzgórza, widoczny z daleka, również nie był przypadkowy. Dzięki takiej lokalizacji odnalezienie pierścienia podczas ponownej wędrówki prawdopodobnie nie stanowiło dla pasterzy problemu.

Pierścien Claytona z Bargat El-Shab jest obecnie najbardziej wysuniętym na południe znaleziskiem tego typu w Egipcie oraz najbardziej na południe wysuniętym śladem obecności pasterzy kultur Sheikh Muftah.

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