



Universiteit
Leiden
The Netherlands

The archaeology of the first farmer-herders in Egypt : new insights into the Fayum Epipalaeolithic and Neolithic

Shirai, N.

Citation

Shirai, N. (2010, April 29). *The archaeology of the first farmer-herders in Egypt : new insights into the Fayum Epipalaeolithic and Neolithic*. *Archaeological Studies Leiden University*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/15339>

Version: Corrected Publisher's Version

License: [Licence agreement concerning inclusion of doctoral thesis in the Institutional Repository of the University of Leiden](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/15339>

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

The Archaeology of the First Farmer-Herders in Egypt: New Insights into the Fayum Epipalaeolithic and Neolithic

Noriyuki Shirai

Propositions

1. It is important to understand how and why crop farming and animal herding started in a particular time period of prehistory in a particular region of Egypt.
2. Farming and herding started in Egypt at the transition from the Epipalaeolithic to Neolithic period due to the arrival of Levantine domesticates. The earliest Neolithic farming-herding culture in Egypt is known in the Fayum, which is a large oasis with a permanent lake in the Egyptian Western Desert.
3. The earliest Neolithic farmer-herders in the Fayum relied heavily on hunting and fishing, which had been the major subsistence activities since the Epipalaeolithic period. Moreover, there is no clear evidence to indicate that these farmer-herders lived a sedentary way of life.
4. Previous researchers have thus asserted that the Fayum people were nomadic and moved seasonally. However, it seems unrealistic that all the people moved far away from a permanent water source in the harsh desert environment even temporarily, considering their need to maintain a close link to drinking water and rich wild food resources at the water source.
5. Research on lithic artefacts left by the Epipalaeolithic hunter-fishers and Neolithic farmer-herders in the Fayum gives a clue as to how the people organised the procurement of lithic raw material and the production of tools while considering arising needs in relation to their mobility and residential strategy.
6. Fayum Neolithic farmer-herders preferentially procured larger lithic raw material from far more distant sources than Epipalaeolithic hunter-fishers did. In addition, the Neolithic people invented much larger and more elaborate hunting weapons than Epipalaeolithic ones. Questions are why Neolithic people took such longer distance trips, and why they invested more time and labour in making such weapons despite the arrival of domesticated animals.
7. Although the data are scarce, the number of hippopotamus and crocodile seem to have increased in the Neolithic faunal assemblage. A question is why such an increase occurred in the Neolithic.
8. It is plausible that Neolithic people had to take the herd of domesticated animals for grazing particularly when crops were growing in farming plots which would have been located around lakeshores. Collecting lithic raw material would have been embedded in the pastoral grazing trips. The appearance of new hunting weapons and the increase in the number of hippopotamus and crocodile in the Neolithic would be due to a new predator-prey relationship in the Fayum ecological system caused by the arrival of Levantine domesticates.
9. Farming and herding in the Fayum lakeshore environment would not have been possible without the protection of farming plots and herds from hippopotamus and crocodile by the people who resided on lakeshores. On the other hand, increasing dependence on farming and herding was not possible without a constant supply of larger raw material for toolmaking enabled by an increase of individuals' logistical moves.
10. The introduction of farming and herding would not have taken place in the Fayum without a lakeshore-tethered if not fully sedentary way of life, but the success of a farming-herding way of life in the Fayum would not have been possible without the reorganisation of mobility, which led to decreased moves of residential bases and increased logistical moves of individuals.
11. Lithic evidence suggests that the Fayum people kept exerting special efforts to make farming and herding reliable subsistence and to maximise the yield. The introduction of farming and herding in the Fayum would have been a solution to mitigate growing population/resource imbalances when the climate became drier and more people had to aggregate around permanent water sources in the 6th millennium cal.BC.