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The Egyptian Expansion into Nubia

التوسع المصري في بلاد النوبة

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الملخص:

نهدف من خلال هذه الدراسة التعرف على الحملات التوسعية التي شنتها مصر على بلاد النوبة الواقعة بالجنوب منها، وذلك بسبب موقعها الاستراتيجي وما تزخر به من خيرات، احتاجتها مصر في بناء حضارتها، لاسيما من المعادن سواء النحاس أو الذهب. ومرت هذه الحملات التوسعية بمراحل تفاوتت في قوتها بحسب الظروف السياسية التي مرت بها مصر، وقد بلغت أوجها في عصر الدولة الحديثة، أين وصل اتساعها إلى دولة كوش الواقعة على أراضي السودان الحالية. وعليه سنقوم باتباع المنهج الوصفي التحليلي للتطرق لمراحل التوسع المصري في بلاد النوبة، مبينين دوافعها والأساليب التي اتبعتها لتثبيت وجودها في تلك الجهات، وهذا للتعرف على السياسة التوسعية التي انتهجتها مصر في هذه المنطقة، والتي استطاعت بفضلها أن تثبت وجودها فيها لعدة قرون، مما ساهم في تمصير سكان هذه المنطقة.

الكلمات المفتاحيّة:

مصر القديمة، بلاد النوبة، التوسع العسكري، الحملات التوسعية، الحصون.

Abstract:

Through this study, we aim to identify the expansionist campaigns launched by Egypt against Nubia, which is located south of it, because of its strategic location and its wealth of resources, which Egypt needed to build its civilization, especially minerals such as copper and gold. These expansionist campaigns went through stages that varied in strength according to the political circumstances Egypt went through, and reached their peak in the era of the New Kingdom, where they reached the state of Kush, located in the territory of present-day Sudan.

Therefore, using a descriptive and analytical approach, we will examine the stages of Egyptian expansion in Nubia, indicating its motives and the methods it used to establish its presence in these areas, in order to identify the expansionist policy adopted by Egypt in this region, thanks to which it was able to establish its presence in it for centuries, which contributed to the Egyptianization of the population of this region.

Keywords:

Ancient Egypt; Nubia; military Expansion; expansionist campaigns; fortresses.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Ancient Egypt launched expansionist campaigns against Nubia, located to the south, because of its strategic location and wealth of resources, which Egypt needed to build its civilization, especially minerals such as copper and gold. These expansionist campaigns went through stages, initially characterized by limited military incursions. However, during the Middle Kingdom, Egypt changed its expansionist policy by establishing a series of fortresses, which later facilitated the full conquest of Nubia during the New Kingdom.

Therefore, using a descriptive and analytical approach, we aim to address the Egyptian expansion in Nubia, explaining its motives and the methods it used to stabilize its presence in these areas. In light of this, we pose the following question: What are the motives of the Egyptian expansion in Nubia, and what are its stages?

2. The location and importance of Nubia:

Nubia, as is well known, occupies the area between southern Egypt and northern Sudan, between the first waterfall south of Aswan and the sixth waterfall north of Khartoum. Nubia is divided into two main parts: Lower Nubia, called Wawat, which is almost entirely within the Egyptian borders, between the first and second waterfalls, and Upper Nubia, called Kush, south of the second waterfall to Dibba in Sudanese territory[1] .

This region is characterized as part of the Sahara Desert, which stretches from east to west in the northern part of the African continent, located at 23°N latitude. Although the great Nile River cuts through Nubia, the arable land does not exceed a narrow strip of land on either side of the river[2], about one or two miles on each side, and beyond that narrow strip lies a waterless desert that is not suitable for life at all, except in some places[3].

Nevertheless, the Nubian country, which stretches along the banks of the Nile River and is located on the highlands and desert, occupies a strategic location, as it is a corridor linking North and Central Africa, which gave it great importance for trade routes with Africa. The Nile also occupied an important value for the Nubians as a means of transport and trade, as well as the main source of irrigation for agricultural lands, so Walter Emery considered it one of the most important regions of the African continent[4]. (confer the map n.1).

3. The beginnings of Egypt's relationship with Nubia:

Not much is known about the history of Nubia before the contemporary date of the beginning of the First Dynasty in Egypt, due to the fact that the region did not receive wide attention from specialized archaeologists in the prehistoric era. Excavations have been limited to the Nile Valley and the desert, and the high mountain terraces have not been explored in an organized manner[5].

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Archaeological research has proven that the inhabitants of Lower Nubia, who had been settled in their homeland since at least the fifth millennium B.C, lived at a similar level of civilization to the Egyptians in prehistoric times, and even followed the same cultural style as the Egyptians, including pottery of various types, flint tools, decorative objects and others[6].

This undoubtedly confirms the civilizational link between the two parts of the valley since ancient times[7], especially since both Egypt and Lower Nubia were settled by the same human lineage and belonged to the same geographical environment[8].

Our knowledge of Nubian civilization in the period from about 3800 B.C to about 3100 B.C is still poor, which is the same period in which pre-dynastic civilizations emerged in Egypt[9]. However, a group of researchers believe that this period witnessed the emergence and development of a new civilizational group called "A Group". Its late phase coincided with the events of the unification of the two parts of Egypt and the establishment of the First Dynasty[10].

The manifestations of the "A Group" coincided with the civilization of Egypt at the dawn of history[11], and this seems to be due to the arrival of people from the north, who did not differ much from the race that existed in Egypt and belonged to the pre-dynastic era, in terms of human race and type of civilization[12].

There is archaeological evidence that the people of "A Group" traded extensively with Upper Egypt in the pre-Assyrian period, with Egypt transporting various goods such as honey, oil, cheese, wine, and possibly grain, as well as copper, stone, jewelry, and more. As for Nubia, it mostly supplied them with raw material-type goods such as raw ivory, raw ebony, possibly gold, etc[13].

The flourishing trade between Egypt and Lower Nubia benefited "A Group", especially with the availability of peace, which led to an improvement in the living conditions of its inhabitants, and consequently to their multiplication and prosperity[14]. However, this prosperity did not last long after the unification of the Egyptian country and the establishment of the First Dynasty.

Thus, we can see from the above that Egyptian relations with Nubia before the period of unification were characterized by peaceful relations, as they were predominantly commercial in nature. This made us wonder whether the unification of the two parts of Egypt and the emergence of a centralized authority in Egypt was the reason for the change in relations between them, and the shift to an aggressive nature?

Before addressing the stages of Egyptian expansion in Nubia, we will try in the next element to explain the motives of this expansion.

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4. Motivations for Egyptian expansion in Nubia:

Nubia has always been known for its hot, dry and arid land, with scarce resources and a limited standard of living. However, the Nile between Aswan and Khartoum gave it the only reliable route across the Sahara Desert, the only link between the civilized world and Africa, and a place where cultures, products, and the driving forces of blacks and whites could meet and mix. It was not matched until the opening of the trans-Saharan caravan trade in the last millennium B.C[15].

Nubia also produced many of the goods that Egypt needed. Its pastures and forests contained species of animals and birds not found in the Egyptian environment, such as elephants, leopards, monkeys, and ostriches. There was also gold, copper ore, many types of precious and semi-precious stones, building stones such as granite, as well as stones for making statues, such as diorite and basalt. It also had strong men who were used for hard labor, such as digging canals, cutting and carrying stones, etc. In addition, Nubia was a popular market for Egyptian goods such as pottery and stone household utensils, metal tools such as axes and knives, and some types of food such as cheese and honey[16].

Egypt witnessed a great development of its state apparatus during the Old Kingdom, which undoubtedly required enormous economic and human resources, perhaps beyond what Egypt alone could provide, so it was necessary to look for additional resources from outside Egypt, legally or illegally. Egypt dealt with its southern neighbors in this context, with whom it chose a different method than its dealings with Asian countries, which were characterized by peaceful (commercial exchange)[17].

Considering that the Nubia region was Egypt's strategic dimension from the south, it was necessary for Egypt to explore the region and follow all peaceful and military means to ensure the balance of its relationship with Egypt and secure its southern borders. Hence, a strong deterrent was needed to control this region[18].

Thus, from the early dynasties until the New Kingdom period, Egypt undertook expansionist campaigns towards Nubia in order to capitalize on the region's rich resources on the one hand, and to secure its southern borders on the other.

Accordingly, the following will attempt to trace the stages of Egyptian expansion into Nubia from the era of the ancient state to the era of the modern state, and indicate the areas it reached.

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5. Stages of Egyptian expansion in Nubia:

5.1- During the Early Dynastic period and Old Kingdom (3400-2475 B.C.):

Historically, with the beginning of the unification of Egypt into one kingdom by the kings of the First Dynasty (3400 B.C.), the population of Nubia increased greatly in its northern region (Lower Nubia), and it witnessed relative prosperity during this period, under the "A Group" civilization. However, the peace and prosperity did not last long[19].

Pharaonic-Nubian relations changed since the reign of the First Dynasty kings, who launched military campaigns to expand Egypt's southern borders, with annals mentioning a victory in those areas during the reign of Hor-Aha, the second king of the First Dynasty. Another piece of evidence is a rock tablet found in Jebel Sheikh Suliman, south of Buhen, which records King Jer's conquest of the area[20]. In addition, fragments of stone vessels from that era, found in Buhen dating back to the First Dynasty, indicate Egyptian influence to the south[21].

According to historian Bakr, this is not unlikely, as the kings of this dynasty needed Nubian gold, from which they made many of their royal monuments. Thus, they tried to subdue the country with these campaigns, ensuring that the sacred metal reached the royal palace in the north[22].

However, historian A. J. Arkell has stated that the question of a hostile Jur campaign remains unclear, as there is not enough evidence to prove it. On the other hand, he saw evidence of a more explicit act of aggression towards Nubia, dating back to the Second Dynasty, by King Kha-Sekhemui[23]. Walter Emery argues that the abrupt end of the "A Group" occurred with the conquest of Nubia under this king[24].

The real subjugation of Nubia, i.e. the occupation of Nubia, clearly took place during the reign of King Seneferu (2900- 2877 B.C.)[25], the first king of the Fourth Dynasty (2900- 2750 B.C.), ostensibly to carry out a punitive campaign against rebellious Nubians. However, it seems that the real purpose of sending it was to obtain booty, especially live animals, as it returned with seven thousand captives and two hundred thousand head of cattle[26]. This expedition was so devastating that there was no sign of any further military operations for many years afterwards[27].

Lower Nubia was subsequently conquered, and the Egyptians found it easy to exploit important mineral wealth, including copper. Archaeological discoveries have shown the existence of a large Egyptian colony in Buhen, during the Fourth and Fifth Dynasties (2750- 2625 B.C.) without interruption, containing furnaces for smelting copper, and they found papyrus seals containing a large number of names of the pharaohs who built the pyramids, such as Khafre, Menkaure, Oserkaf, and others. A large quantity of Egyptian-made pottery was also found, proving that the city was a very important trading center[28].

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Egyptian interest in Nubia increased from the late Fifth Dynasty onwards, as relations with Lower Nubia became more frequent and they began to see it as an integral part of their southern borders. An important new position called the 'governor of the south' emerged. His task was both political and economic, as he worked to minimize unrest in the region, improved communication with southern tribes, ensured transportation for trade and mining expeditions beyond the First Cataract, and other tasks[29].

In the era of the first transition, Egypt shrank within its borders after the fall of the central administration, and its sovereignty in Nubia deteriorated[30], due to the chaos in the country during this period, between the end of the Sixth Dynasty (2625- 2475 B.C.) and the beginning of the Eleventh Dynasty (2160 B.C.), which led Egypt to lose all its possessions in the south[31].

5.2- During the Middle Kingdom (2160-1788 B.C.):

It is generally clear that the policy of the Eleventh Dynasty, especially the first half, was focused on unifying the country and restoring order, so it did not concern itself with the south[32]. However, after the country was finally unified under Mentuhotep II, one of the kings of this dynasty, Egypt was able to turn its attention to its southern neighbors. A number of archaeological evidences from his reign show his military activity in Nubia, including rock engravings from the site of Buhen, proving the extent of his penetration to the south[33].

In general, evidence of Egyptian military activity of a generally punitive nature in Lower Nubia during the second part of the Eleventh Dynasty is evident on several rock inscriptions, especially in the Buhen area, showing the extent of Egyptian penetration to regain control of the place[34].

During the Twelfth Dynasty (2000- 1788 B.C.), Egypt's policy towards the south in general and Nubia in particular changed from soft policy and limited quiet penetration to fully annexing the northern region of Lower Nubia under Egyptian rule, while building a huge series of forts for a permanent Egyptian presence, and the Egyptian border extended as far south as Semna[35].

Some scholars suggest that the return of Egyptian sovereignty over the peoples of Nubia during the Middle Kingdom was during the reign of King Amenemhat I (2000-1970 B.C). Rock inscriptions found in Lower Nubia at Wadi Jarjawi near Korosko, dated in the 29th year of his reign, say: "We came to over-throw Wawat". This is evidence that the relations between the two countries were not friendly, but there were wars that indicate that the king sent an Egyptian expedition to Lower Nubia[36].

This expedition seems to have had two objectives: The first was colonial expansion to exploit the mining wealth of the place and some other southern crops, and the second was the need to maintain Lower Nubia as a barrier between Egypt and Kush[37].

Senusret I (1980- 1935 B.C.) followed his father Amenemhat I's policy of expanding southwards. Senusret I recorded the news of his victories in Nubia on a tablet in Buhen, in which he mentioned the names of ten provinces south of Egypt, all of which came under his authority. In addition, Senusret I built a series of fortresses and castles, which remained for years an impenetrable dam that limited Kush's power against Egypt[38].

Lower Nubia was conquered by Amenemhat I, but the actual conquest took place during the reign of Senusret I, who controlled it by means of huge fortresses on both sides of the Nile and on the islands along the area between Elephantine and Semna[39]. (confer the map n.2)

Although the citadels were built primarily for defensive military purposes, i.e. to protect Egypt's southern borders from the Kushite or other threats, they were used for various additional purposes, whether for commercial purposes, where they were used to store goods temporarily, and the soldiers residing in the citadels could assist in the loading and unloading process. They were also used as rest houses for Egyptian travelers, employees, workers and traders. In addition, some of them were located on the eastern bank, controlling the Bedouins of the eastern desert and monitoring the Wadi al-Allaqi leading to the gold mines[40].

Senusret III (1887- 1849 B.C.) was able to defeat the rebellious Nubians through four campaigns, which enabled him to consolidate security in Nubia and bind it to Egypt with strong ties. In order to ensure the continuity of his military victories, he built a number of fortresses between the First Cataract and Semna (just south of the Second Cataract) to keep an eye on any aggressors. He also placed Egyptian garrisons in these fortresses, which could provide immediate deterrence if necessary, confirming the defensive nature of these fortresses against Kushite threats[41].

Thus, the Twelfth Dynasty kings were able to expand Egypt's borders to the south and secure them against threats from the Kingdom of Kush, as well as ensure the continuity of trade with the south and the exploitation of mines and quarries to extract gold and precious stones, thanks to the series of military forts they built in the southern Nile Valley until the second waterfall[42].

However, as events unfolded in Egypt at the end of the Twelfth Dynasty, Egypt's control over Nubia gradually weakened, and matters were further complicated when the Hyksos took control of Egypt[43], and according to Walter Emery, at one point allied themselves with Kush tribal chiefs, putting the princes of Thebes and their followers between two fires and forcing them to be on the defensive for several years. Things remained the same until the Seventeenth Dynasty, which gradually strengthened the Egyptian spirit[44].

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Under these circumstances, this dynasty was able to liberate Egypt from the clutches of the Hyksos, and then reunify the Egyptian country under the Eighteenth Dynasty (1580- 1350 B.C.), after which Nubia once again came under Egyptian rule with a more assertive policy than before.

5.3- During the New Kingdom (1580-1150 B.C.):

Documents confirm that Kush became a unified and independent state during the 150 years between the fall of the Middle Kingdom and the rise of the New Kingdom (1730-1580 B.C), headed by a ruler known as the 'Ruler of Kush', who stood on an equal footing with the two states that divided the northern valley: The Thebes-based Egyptian state, later called the Seventeenth Dynasty, which stretched from Aswan in the south to Qusiya in Central Egypt in the north, and the Hyksos state, which controlled both the Delta and Central Egypt[45].

However, after the expulsion of the Hyksos by Ahmose I (1580- 1557 B.C.), the founder of the Eighteenth Dynasty, the latter sent three military campaigns to Nubia in order to restore Egyptian sovereignty there, after the Hyksos-Kush alliance had almost eliminated the re-establishment of an independent Egyptian state, during which he was able to achieve victory, as his expansion reached the Second Cataract region[46].

As for Thutmose I, since his accession to the throne in 1525 B.C, he undertook an expansionist campaign towards the south, through which he reached the last Dongola, and the city of Napata at Jebel el-Barkal became part of his borders, and remained so at the fourth waterfall for about five hundred years without change, and the Egyptian influence extended far to the south until it reached before Khartoum. In order to organize the affairs of this southern kingdom, he placed it under the rule of an official whom he called 'the royal son of Kush'. From this period, this region became purely Egyptian, and the local culture began to gradually disappear until it almost disappeared with the passage of time[47].

Thutmose I built a series of fortresses at Tombos and on the island of Sai, and there is no doubt that by the end of his reign, all of Nubia and Dongola were in strong hands. He rebuilt many of the Middle Kingdom forts and expanded some of them. According to W. B. Emery, he chose Buhen as the new center of administration in the south and rebuilt and strengthened the walls of its fortresses. Other fortresses in Lower Nubia such as Kuban, Ikkur and Aniba were strengthened, while the fortresses south of the second Cataract in the Batn al-Hajar area remained abandoned[48]. (confer the map n.2)

Upon the death of Thutmose I in 1505 B.C., revolts erupted in the south, which led his son Thutmose II (1496- 1493 B.C.) to launch a punitive campaign against Kush in the first year of his reign, enabling him to restore peace and consolidate it strongly for many years to come. Thus, Nubia remained peaceful both during the reign of Queen Hatshepsut (1493- 1480 B.C.) and Thutmose III (1493- 1447 B.C.), although

the latter conducted a campaign in the last years of his reign, but it was a show of military power, as the fame of his victories in Syria was enough to deter any revolutionary idea in Kush, while Wawat became an integral part of Egypt[49].

Thus, Thutmose III witnessed the end of the phase of Egyptian expansion in the southern region, extending from Aswan to the Fourth Cataract, which became administratively subordinate to Egypt, supervised by a governor-general, whose duties included collecting taxes, delivering them himself to Egypt, and supervising the gold mines. He was assisted by two officials, one of whom was assigned to the Wawat region and the other to the Kush region[50].

The annexation of Nubia under the New Kingdom resulted in the organization of Nubia on the Egyptian model in terms of governance and administration. In this regard, we find that many Egyptians migrated to the Nubian provinces to contribute to the success of the Egyptianization of this region[51]. They tried their best to spread Egyptian beliefs and cultures by building temples for Egyptian gods and encouraging members of the upper class to adopt Egyptian customs and traditions. On the other hand, they also worked to exploit the economic resources, including agricultural land, livestock, and minerals, which were sent to Egypt[52].

The policy adopted by the New Kingdom pharaohs, starting with the Eighteenth Dynasty, to achieve the Egyptianization of Nubia seems to have paid off in this era, as this policy was clearly reflected in the behaviour of the Nubians, who changed their outlook towards the Egyptian influence on their lands and became more accepting of their new life and not as troublemakers as before[53].

The Eighteenth Dynasty was a time of military and political glory for Egypt, and it expanded beyond its traditional borders. The 19th (1350- 1205 B.C.) and 20th (1200-1190 B.C.) dynasties had to try as much as possible to maintain their influence outside their territories. However, by the late Twentieth Dynasty, it was in decline. Its borders shrank back to their pre-modern state status after being attacked by sea peoples. To make matters worse, internal problems and political disputes increased[54].

This situation continued until the eighth century B.C., when a strong family of Nubian princes emerged, which took advantage of the opportunity of the turmoil and conflict that Egypt witnessed since the ninth century B.C, and tightened its grip on all Nubian regions, and then tried to seize the throne of the Pharaohs, which was achieved by "Piankhi" one of the Nubian princes, and formed the 25th dynasty of Egyptian History (722-661 B.C.)[55], which we see as an opposite response to the centuries of Egyptian domination.

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6. CONCLUSION:

The conclusions reached at the end of this article include the following:

-Egypt's endeavor since the beginning of historical times to expand at the expense of Nubia to achieve various purposes, including expanding its territory in the south, controlling trade routes leading to Africa, and exploiting the bounty of the region, especially from minerals (copper and gold), which played a role in the revival of its economy at that time.

- Egyptian kings insisted on subjugating and integrating Nubia with Egypt's provinces, following a settlement approach since the Middle Kingdom, by settling Egyptians in the fortresses that were established throughout this region, the main purpose of which was military (security and defense), and later turned into centers for the spread of Egyptian civilization in the region.

- The kings of the Middle Kingdom launched military campaigns against Nubia, which enabled them to control the Lower Nubia region only at this stage. However, with the increase in the threat of the Kingdom of Kush since the New Kingdom, the latter (Upper Nubia) was annexed along with Lower Nubia, thanks to the policy of the kings of the Eighteeth dynasty in this region, which contributed to the stability of security and the absence of liberation revolts against them. This proves that the attempts to integrate the Nubian society, which began in the Middle Kingdom, were successful during this period.

-The seizure of the throne of Egypt by the Kushite dynasty, which was an adverse reaction to the many centuries of Egyptian control over Egypt.

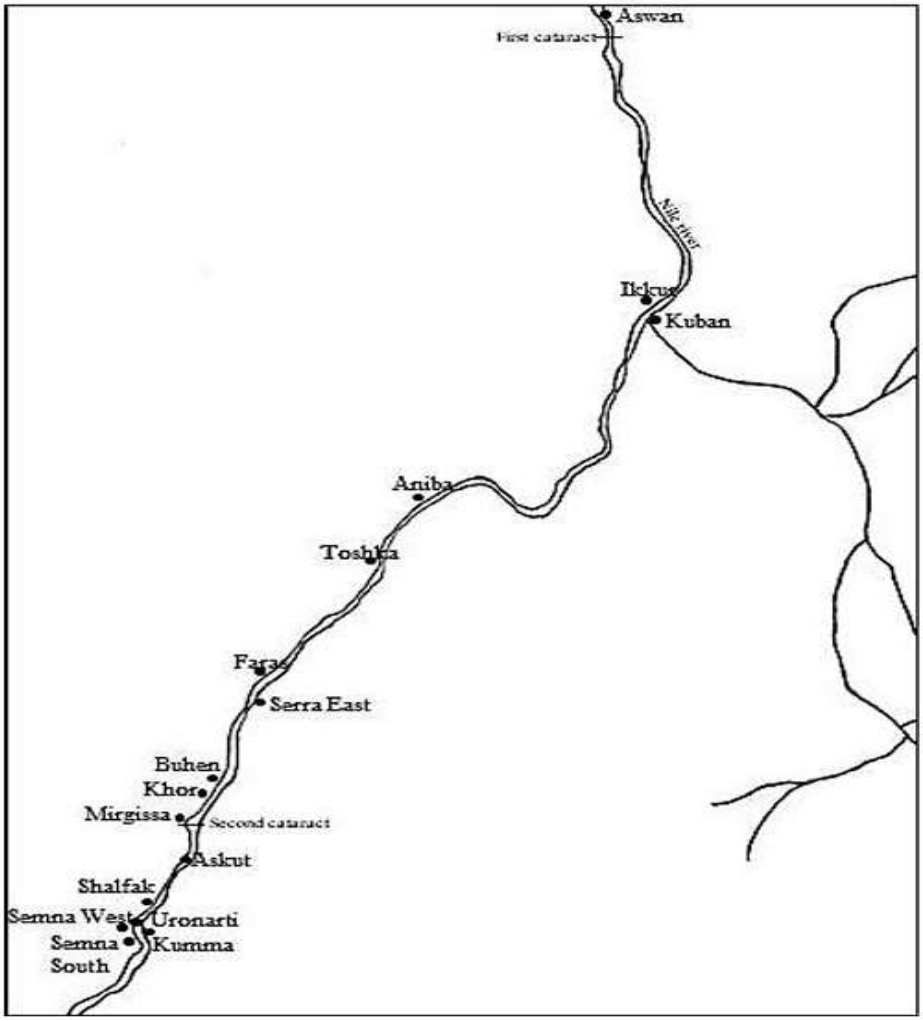
7. *Maps*:



map1: The geographical location of Nubia.

The source: https://www.britannica.com/place/Nubia

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Map2: Map of Egyptian Middle Kingdom Fortresses in Lower Nubia.

The source: E.Ferreira (Jan. 2019), The Lower Nubian Egyptian Fortresses in the Middle Kingdom: A Strategic Point of View, In Athens Journal of History, Vol. 5,Issue1, p.36.

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[48] Emery, op. cit.; pp. 182- 183.
[49] Ibid.; pp. 191- 192.
[50] Dafallah, op. cit.; pp. 279- 280.
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[52] Dafallah, op. cit.; pp. 283- 284.
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