

In: Krings, M. & Platte, E. (eds.) Living with the lake: perspectives on culture, economy and history of Lake Chad. – Westafrikanische Studien, Köln (Köppe).

Environmental Instability and Cultural Change in the Later Prehistory of the Chad Basin

Peter Breunig

Introduction

It is an almost trivial remark that regions exist whose cultural development basically depended on the inclusion and maintenance of external stimulation. And it is also trivial that other regions are opposite, being places of change for not always conspicuous reasons. The Chad Basin has been and still is among the latter region, playing the pivotal role for innovations in the cultural history of prehistoric Middle Africa. Its role as a centre of cultural innovation in the past is the central idea of this paper and will be discussed particularly on the basis of the results of archaeological research carried out in North Nigeria, south of Lake Chad, since 1990. Another central idea, which is placed more in the background, concerns the explanation of this specific role as a core area of innovation, and that the unusual features of the natural environment of the Chad Basin should be consulted in this connection. Of course, natural environment does not determine human behaviour, but marks out the margins within which human behaviour can take place; the enormous variability of the environment is one of the characteristics of the Chad Basin. The variability becomes evident by examining long periods of time – not decades or centuries, but millennia. From this point of view the Chad Basin was an area of exceptional environmental instability. The present paper regards this instability as the prime mover behind cultural change in prehistoric times.