

LATE ANTIQUE HISTORY AND RELIGION 8

INSIDE AND OUT

Interactions between Rome and the Peoples
on the Arabian and Egyptian Frontiers in Late Antiquity

edited by

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PEETERS

PAPYROLOGICAL EVIDENCE ON 'BARBARIANS' IN THE EGYPTIAN EASTERN DESERT*

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Abstract

Of all the first-third century Greek ostraka found in the Eastern Desert of Egypt, only a few mention desert dwellers. Apart from unique occurrences of the ethnics Araps, Ichthyophagos, and Trogodytes, desert dwellers are always called *barbaroi* 'barbarians'. They become aggressive in the course of the first century, first in the southern part of the Eastern Desert, the Mons Berenicidis area; only later, from c. 150 onwards, are the imperial quarries to the north, notably those of Mons Claudianus, threatened. By the mid-third century, however, *barbaroi* cooperate with the Roman outposts of the Koptos-Berenike desert road. Their anthroponymy, and association with Eastern Desert Ware, link them to the 'Blemmyes'.

Introduction

The first 'papyrological excavations' in the Eastern Desert of Egypt began in 1987. Under the direction of J. Bingen, an international team started work at Mons Claudianus, an imperial granite quarry, the material of which was monopolized for the emperor's building programmes. The launching of the project was the idea of a group of papyrologists who had become aware of the papyrological potential of a large rubbish dump extending alongside the fort, which hosted the administration and the workforce. The Mons Claudianus project ended in 1993, and I managed, with the help of N. Grimal, then director of the Institut français d'archéologie orientale (IFAO), to start another project on the fortlets (*praesidia*) which monitored the Roman trade-routes linking Koptos to the two main Red Sea ports of the Principate, Myos Hormos and Berenike.¹ The strategy was the same as at Mons Claudianus, that is, to not neglect, as an operation led by hardcore archaeologists might have

* I am grateful to Adam Bülow-Jacobsen for correcting my English and to Jitse Dijkstra for the care with which he edited this paper.

1. This project has been financed by the French Foreign Office (MAEE) and the IFAO. The archaeologists who are mainly responsible for the excavation of the ostraka are J.-P. Brun (Collège de France), E. Botte (École française de Rome), and M. Reddé (École Pratique des Hautes Études).

done, the rubbish dumps, where roughly all the written documentation is located. This project ended in January 2013.

Thus far some 15,000 documents (including those from Mons Claudianus), practically all written in Greek on potsherds (ostraka), have been registered. Qualitatively speaking, they are not the best source a historian could dream of, for the official archives of these forts, written on papyrus, were returned to the Nile valley when garrisons were relieved and, in the end, when the forts were abandoned. What we find in the dumps are ephemeral, everyday documents, which even people in Antiquity did not think worth keeping: accounts, receipts, orders for delivery, passes, all sorts of lists (commodities, persons), and a huge number of private letters, generally exchanged between neighbouring places. Only rarely does the draft or the copy of a more elaborate or official writing throw a more informative light on the Roman administration of the Eastern Desert. Letters exchanged between the commanders of the *praesidia*, NCOs called *curatores praesidiorum*, are not infrequent and sometimes contain useful information.

Not long after Egypt had become a Roman province, the new masters started to explore the resources and potentials of the Eastern Desert and encountered its original inhabitants. Yet, these desert dwellers are seldom mentioned in the ostraka of the Roman settlements. The object of this paper is to gather this new papyrological documentation, whether published or unpublished.² The ostraka that will be discussed come from the following sites, which can be grouped into two areas (see Fig. 1):

1) The hinterland of Kaine (modern Qena)

This zone is structured by two large imperial *μέταλλα*,³ Mons Claudianus and Mons Porphyrites, linked to the Nile harbour of Kaine by the 'road of Claudianus' (ὁδὸς Κλαυδιανοῦ) and the 'road of Porphyrites' (ὁδὸς Πορφυρίτου).

- Mons Claudianus (excavations: 1987–93). Opened under Claudius or Nero. Activity is attested until Severus Alexander (222–35). The ostraka are referred to as *O.Claud.*⁴

2. For a previous survey of mentions of *barbaroi* in the ostraka, see H. Cuvigny (ed.), *La Route de Myos Hormos. L'armée romaine dans le désert Oriental d'Égypte 2* (Fouilles de l'Institut français d'archéologie orientale 48; Cairo, 2003), pp. 346–52.

3. In the ostraka, *μέταλλον* is an administrative/geographic concept, referring to a quarrying zone, including its buildings, whereas *λατομία* (except in the toponym Kaine Latomia) is an extraction site.

4. In what follows unpublished ostraka can be recognized by the addition of an inventory number (e.g. *O.Claud. inv. 7309*), whereas published ones have the number (in this



Figure 1. Map of the Eastern Desert of Egypt.

- Umm Balad (ex then, after Domitian, after Domitian Quarry'). Small flank of Gebel I itself of such a place are nevertheless the fort (*praesidium*: *O.Ka.La.*

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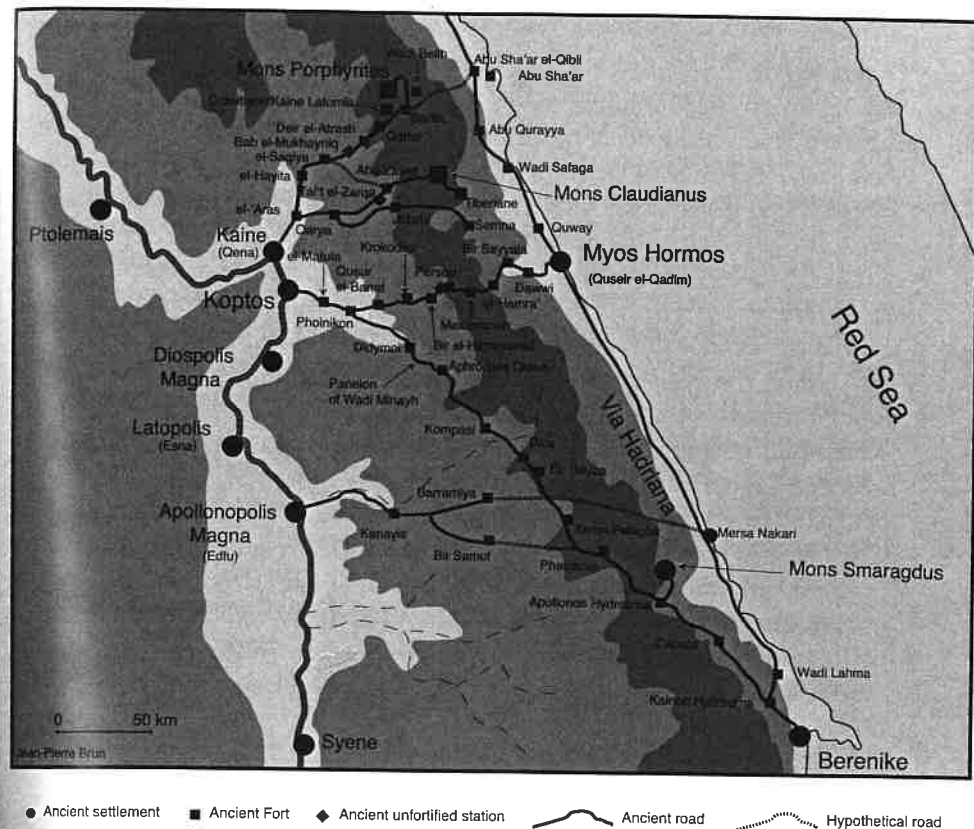


Figure 1. Map of the Eastern Desert, with sites discussed in the text (map J.-P. Brun).

- Umm Balad (excavations: 2002–2003). Ancient name: Domitiane, then, after Domitian's *damnatio memoriae*, Kaine Latomia ('New Quarry'). Small μέταλλον opened under Domitian in the southern flank of Gebel Dukhan (Mons Porphyrites) but the stone revealed itself of such a poor quality that the site was soon abandoned. Ostraka are nevertheless abundant and testify to a short-lived reoccupation of the fort (*praesidium*) under Antoninus Pius. Papyrological abbreviation: *O.Ka.La.*

case preceded by the volume) assigned to them in the papyrological edition (e.g. *O.Claud.* IV 851).

2) The desert of Berenike (Mons Berenicidis)⁵

During the Principate, this district was crossed by two main roads linking Koptos (modern Qift, on the Nile) to the sea ports of Myos Hormos (Quseir el-Qadim) and Berenike. The two roads served for the caravans of the 'Erythraean' trade. From Vespasian on, they were guarded by *praesidia* manned by some fifteen soldiers commanded by a *curator praesidii*.⁶ The governor of the desert of Berenike was a Roman *eques* of procuratorial rank, with the title of *praefectus montis/montis Berenicidis/Berenicidis*; usually, he was at the same time the commander (*praefectus alae*) of the cavalry unit stationed in Koptos (the *ala Vocontiorum* until c. 180, then the *ala Herculiana*). The ostraka containing references to desert dwellers were found in the following *praesidia*: the first one (Krokodilo) on the Myos Hormos and the following three (Didymoi, Dios, and Xeron) on the Berenike road:

- Krokodilo (excavations: 1996–97). Only ostraka from the reigns of Trajan and Hadrian were found here (the fort was apparently abandoned early because it was poorly situated in a *wadi* which flooded it from time to time). Papyrological abbreviation: *O.Krok.*
- Didymoi (excavations: 1998–2000).⁷ Founded in 76/77. Last dated attestation: 236 (Maximinus Thrax). Papyrological abbreviation: *O.Did.*
- Dios (excavations: 2006–2009).⁸ Founded in 115/16. Latest dated attestation: 245–49 (year 3 or 6 of Philip the Arab). Papyrological abbreviation: *O.Dios.*
- Xeron Pelagos/Xeron (excavations: 2010–13).⁹ Founded at the end of the first century; first dated attestation: 96. Last dated witnesses: year 11 of Severus Alexander (232) or Gallienus (264). Papyrological abbreviation: *O.Xer.*

In the three *praesidia* excavated on the Berenike road, ostraka were found in both external and internal rubbish dumps. The outside rubbish dumps contain the older material. For some time, the inhabitants of the

forts carried their gart Material found in depo: the third century, perha tury). The precise time difficult to establish (it surely have happened at which the forts may ha accumulate inside the poorly constructed spac presumably sheep and g different. Civilians are become scarce. People li causes the floor levels to as dumps (though perh are less Romanized: sold nacular name. Soldiers c myrenians, Emesenian: desert dwellers have cha

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Desert Dwellers Who Ar

The mention of *barba* the more surprising as dianus do not contain a are only mentioned in tv called Ἀραβες.¹² Their

5. In the Latin expression 'Mons Berenicidis', *mons* does not refer to a specific mountain range (as 'Mons Claudianus' to Gebel Fatira), but it is the equivalent of Egyptian *ḏw*, which means the 'desert' (mountainous or not) on either side of the Nile valley.

6. These *praesidia* are rough squares of which the sides are c. 30–50 metres in length, with a well in the centre.

7. Didymoi = 'Twins', referring to the Dioscuri (Castor and Pollux).

8. Dios = '(praesidium) of Zeus/Jupiter'; Iovis in the *Itinerarium Antonini*.

9. Xeron Pelagos = 'Dry Sea' (because of the sandy tracts); Aristonis in the *Itinerarium Antonini*.

10. We have not investiga

11. See J.-P. Brun, H. Cuv chronologie générale de Did dans le désert Oriental d'Égy 64; Cairo, 2011), pp. 157–63.

12. I do not understand w Trade', *British Museum Studi* writes that these Arabs are ' communicated with the inha

forts carried their garbage outside, and cleaned the inside regularly. Material found in deposits inside the forts is later (roughly first half of the third century, perhaps starting in the last quarter of the second century). The precise time when the garrisons stopped cleaning the forts is difficult to establish (it may have been a progressive process). It must surely have happened after the shock of the plague in 166–c. 176 during which the forts may have been abandoned. The habit of letting rubbish accumulate inside the forts goes along with a proliferation of small, poorly constructed spaces, partly meant to accommodate small animals, presumably sheep and goats. By then, the life style of the inhabitants was different. Civilians are less conspicuous because private letters have become scarce. People live in smaller rooms, and on their garbage, which causes the floor levels to rise. Cisterns are not filled anymore and serve as dumps (though perhaps not all of them).¹⁰ The names of the soldiers are less Romanized: soldiers of Egyptian origin have often kept their vernacular name. Soldiers of eastern origin now serve in the *praesidia*: Palmyrenians, Emeseniensians, even Parthians. And the relations with the desert dwellers have changed, as we shall see.¹¹

The Time of Conflicts

The earliest mention of desert dwellers in our corpus of ostraka may be *O.Ka.La.* inv. 847 (dating to Domitian or Trajan), a letter of a *curator*. The context is lost. They are already called by the name which is usually given to them in the ostraka: *barbaroi*.

Desert Dwellers Who Are Not Called Barbaroi

The mention of *barbaroi* in an early ostrakon from Umm Balad is all the more surprising as Trajanic ostraka from neighbouring Mons Claudianus do not contain any occurrence of *barbaroi*. There, desert dwellers are only mentioned in two letters on the same subject, and there they are called Ἀραβες.¹² Their author, Epagathos, writes in the first letter to

10. We have not investigated all the cisterns, which are filled with sand to the top.

11. See J.-P. Brun, H. Cuvigny, and M. Reddé, 'De Vespasien à la crise du III^e siècle: chronologie générale de Didymoi', in H. Cuvigny (ed.), *Didymoi. Une station romaine dans le désert Oriental d'Égypte 1* (Fouilles de l'Institut français d'archéologie orientale 64; Cairo, 2011), pp. 157–63.

12. I do not understand why R.I. Thomas, 'Port Communities and the Erythraean Sea Trade', *British Museum Studies in Ancient Egypt and Sudan* 18 (2012), pp. 169–99 at 176 writes that these Arabs are 'Greek speakers': we have no idea in which language they communicated with the inhabitants of Mons Claudianus.

Gaion,¹³ who is in Claudianus, about the Arabes, who are expected to bring fresh fish from the sea to Mons Claudianus: 'when the Arabs come, receive fish from them'.¹⁴ In the other letter, Epagathos asks Gaion, 'when the Arabs come, to [get?] as much fish as possible'.¹⁵ The fragmentary context suggests that the fish has been ordered by somebody who is in a third place, Kampe, which is not far from the unknown site from where Epagathos is writing.

The occurrence of these Arabes is unique in the ostraka from the Eastern Desert. Although it is not impossible that, at this latitude, these fishmongers were ethnically Arabs, we cannot infer it simply from this word. When Pliny (borrowing from Juba, himself quoting Hellenistic sources), or Ptolemy locate various people which they categorize as Arabes from the Gulf of Suez to the desert south of Berenike, at the latitude of the Dodekaschoinos, they do not take linguistic criteria into account. Their use of Arabes has multiple meanings: originally, this word is not an ethnic designation, but rather refers to a nomadic way of life in an arid landscape: so it is in Assyrian, in the Old Testament, and in south Arabian sources.¹⁶ This original meaning, in spite of other semantic evolutions, was never forgotten. Even in today's Egypt, inhabitants from the Nile valley call the Bedouins 'Arabs'.¹⁷ At the same time, the prevalence of this ethnic designation in literature is in keeping with the ancient concept, dating back to the sixth-century BCE Ionian geographers, that the parts of the world were separated by large rivers: the Nile, for instance, was the border between Africa and Asia, Arabia being the western part of the latter.¹⁸ In calling the fishmongers Arabes, Epagathos means desert

dwellers of a land which, at these times, considered as a desert, is the derogatory term *bar*.

Two other exceptions to the rule of the Desert ostraka come from an Egyptian amphora fragment which describes a Troglodyte man described as a Troglodyte which strongly suggests that this shard is the only documented Troglodyte period. His ethnic prob- south of Berenike.²⁰ It is a Paneion at Kanayis, which come back safely from the Troglodytic papyri, mainly from the ethnic Troglodytai has been in the category of guards or centurions.

The second exception comes from an Ichthyophagite addressee is probably the Troglodyte day-book from Krokodion, a pass carried by a certain Troglodyte Koptos.²² The pass took the form of the *praesidia* along

13. The names suggest that they are imperial slaves working in the administration of the quarries.

14. *O.Claud.* inv. 529.

15. *O.Claud.* inv. 830.

16. S. Honigman, 'Les divers sens de l'ethnique Ἀραβὶς dans les sources documentaires grecques d'Égypte', *Ancient Society* 32 (2002), pp. 43–72 at 45–46.

17. In Ptolemaic papyri, Ἀραβὶς often appears as the name of a profession (related to police) practised by people who are perhaps of nomadic origins, but who generally have Egyptian names. The ethnic is rare in Roman papyri, except in toponyms. The use of Arabes in Epagathos' letters to designate true desert dwellers is thus not typical of papyrological documentation.

18. J. Desanges, 'Arabes et Arabie en terre d'Afrique dans la géographie antique', in T. Fahd (ed.), *L'Arabie préislamique et son environnement historique et culturel* (Travaux du Centre de recherche sur le Proche-Orient et la Grèce antiques 10; Leiden, 1989), pp. 413–29 at 419–20; M.C.A. Macdonald, 'Arabians, Arabias, and the Greeks: Contact and Perceptions', in idem, *Literacy and Identity in Pre-Islamic Arabia* (Variorum Collected Studies 906; Farnham, 2009), Ch. V at pp. 1–7 (English trans. of 'Arabi, Arabia e Greci. Forme di contatto e percezione', in S. Settis [ed.], *I Greci. Storia, cultura, arte, società* 3. *I Greci oltre la Grecia* [Turin, 2001], pp. 231–66). This concept is even reflected in papyrological documents by the fact that when nomes (the traditional administrative

districts of Egypt) extend on the borders of the nome (this administrative district which extends eastwards) is illustrated by *O.Claud.* inv. 529.

19. *O.MyHo.* inv. 543 (end of the Trogodytes: Exploring the Trogodytes, J.C.M. Starkey (ed.), *Red Sea* Oxford, 2005), pp. 41–49 at 41.

20. Desanges, 'Arabes et Arabie'.

21. *O.MyHo.* inv. 512 (c. 1). This is his own transcription of this document, guessed on the basis of the Troglodyte Koptos. Although still unpublished articles: R.I. Thomas, 'The Administration and the Maintenance of Ider in the Red Sea III. *Natural Resources and the Troglodytes* Series 1661; Oxford, 2007), pp. 173, 177, 179.

22. *O.Krok.* 1.26 (c. 108, 1 footnote).

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dwellers of a land which was, in the geographical conceptions of the times, considered as a part of Arabia, while consciously avoiding the derogatory term *barbaros*.

Two other exceptions to the general use of *barbaros* in the Eastern Desert ostraka come from Myos Hormos. The first is a Greek *dipinto* on an Egyptian amphora found in Myos Hormos.¹⁹ It seems to refer to a man described as a Trogodytes. His name, incomplete, starts with Περ-, which strongly suggests that this Trogodytes had an Egyptian name. This shard is the only documentary evidence of Trogodytai in the Roman period. His ethnic probably refers to the African coast of the Red Sea, south of Berenike.²⁰ It should be related to the Ptolemaic graffiti of the Paneion at Kanayis, where travellers express their gratitude for having come back safely from the land of the Trogodytai, rather than to Ptolemaic papyri, mainly from the third-century BCE Zeno archive, where the ethnic Trogodytai has evolved into a sort of trade name designating a category of guards or couriers.

The second exception is a request addressed to a παραλημπτής called Avitus by an Ichthyophagos with the Egyptian name Pakybis.²¹ The addressee is probably the παραλημπτής Avitus mentioned in a postal day-book from Krokodilo, in which Avitus is mentioned as the author of a pass carried by a certain Modestus travelling from Myos Hormos to Koptos.²² The pass took the form of a circular addressed to the *curatores* of the *praesidia* along the road, asking them to give an escort to

districts of Egypt) extend on both banks of the Nile, the eastern bank is called the Arabia of the nome (this administrative Arabia is in the alluvial plain, and is exclusive of the desert which extends eastwards), see Honigman, 'Divers sens', p. 49. This use of Arabia is illustrated by *O.Claud.* inv. 7309 (see below, p. 180).

19. *O.MyHo.* inv. 543 (end of second–third century). Photo in R. Tomber, 'Trogodites and Trogodites: Exploring Interaction on the Red Sea during the Roman Period', in J.C.M. Starkey (ed.), *Red Sea II. People of the Red Sea* (BAR International Series 1395; Oxford, 2005), pp. 41–49 at 41.

20. Desanges, 'Arabes et Arabie', p. 417.

21. *O.MyHo.* inv. 512 (c. 108). W. van Rengen kindly sent me a good photograph and his own transcription of this ostrakon. Both confirmed the reading Avitus, which I had guessed on the basis of the published photographs. The name Pakybis is frequent in Koptos. Although still unpublished, the document is commented upon in the following articles: R.I. Thomas, 'The Arabaegypti Ichthyophagi: Cultural Connections with Egypt and the Maintenance of Identity', in J. Starkey, P. Starkey, and T. Wilkinson (eds), *Red Sea III. Natural Resources and Cultural Connections of the Red Sea* (BAR International Series 1661; Oxford, 2007), pp. 149–60; O. Nalesini, 'History and Use of an Ethnonym: Ichthyophagoi', in L. Blue *et al.* (eds), *Red Sea IV. Connected Hinterlands* (BAR International Series 2052; Oxford, 2009), pp. 9–18 at 14–15; Thomas, 'Port Communities', pp. 173, 177, 179.

22. *O.Krok.* 1.26 (c. 108, hence the date I assign to *O.MyHo.* inv. 512 in the previous footnote).

30. I owe to John Rea a b

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second century,²⁸ Egyptians, taking advantage of the Roman presence in the Eastern Desert, had migrated to the Red Sea coast and mixed with the autochthonous Ichthyophagoi, or that indigenous Ichthyophagoi had become Egyptianized. Such processes are nicely illustrated by the Egyptian name of the Ichthyophagos in the ostrakon. The fish which Arabes brought to Mons Claudianus may have been caught by Ichthyophagoi. Contrary to the garrisons of the Myos Hormos road, Mons Claudianus was not linked by an official road to the sea and had to rely on Bedouins for fresh sea fish.

Hostile Barbaroi

If desert dwellers do not seem to have been a threat at Mons Claudianus under Trajan,²⁹ the situation is completely different in Mons Berenididis. Evidence mostly comes from Krokodilo, where many fragments of circular letters received by the *curatores* of Krokodilo were copied on amphoras. *Curatores praesidiorum* probably kept a copy of official mail received on papyrus, whether in the form of a *liber litterarum adlatarum*, or of a postal diary also containing the date and time at which letters arrived, and the identity of the messengers who brought them and took them to the next station. These papyrus registers have disappeared, but, for unknown reasons, some *curatores* of Krokodilo also had these documents copied on amphoras which were eventually dumped. We shall discuss these texts in chronological order:

- O.Krok. 6 (year 12 of Trajan = 108).

Copy of a report concerning an action against eighteen *barbaroi*. 'We chased them with three horsemen and foot soldiers for x mile(s)³⁰ through a difficult ground and we fought (ἐπυκτεύ[σαμεν] [...]) Lucretius Priscus, horseman of the *cohors* [...], squadron of Sosinius [was killed?], NN of the same *cohors*, squadron of Iust... was cudgelled (ἐρ<ρ>απίσθη). Then, overtaken by darkness, we came back to the *praesidium*'. These events may have taken place around Mons Claudianus: the word Κλαυδιανοῦ occurs in a broken context. True, it could also be an anthroponym, but the cognomen Claudianus is infrequent in the papyri, especially before the mid-second century.

28. Ptolemy's sources are not posterior to Trajan, see J. Desanges, 'Les relations de l'Empire romain avec l'Afrique nilotique et érythréenne, d'Auguste à Probus', in *ANRW* 2.10.1 (1988), pp. 3-43 at 22-23.

29. But see the discussion of O.Krok. 6 below.

30. I owe to John Rea a better reading of line 7: ἐπιμε[→ ἐπὶ με[ίλιον/-ίλια.

– O.Krok. 47 (109)

Fragmentary copy of a report concerning a skirmish, presumably with desert dwellers. A horseman (or a horse) was slain (ἐσφάγη); another horseman (or a horse) was smitten on the side (ἐκ]ρούσ[σ]θη εἰς τὴν πλευράν);³¹ yet another horseman (or a horse) was cudgelled (ἐρ<ρ>απίσθη); and a Roman received an arrow in the head (] κεφαλὴν βέλ[ε]ι).³²

– O.Krok. 51 (109)

Badly preserved circular letter addressed by a *decurio* to the *curatores* of the *praesidium* to inform them of troubles caused by *barbaroi* on 13 Choiak.

– O.Krok. 26 (109)

Fragment of a mail register, mentioning a circular letter (*diploma*) of the *praefectus montis* concerning brigands (λησταί, Latin *latrones*). These words, applied to all sorts of rebels, are also well-known alternative designations for aggressive nomads.³³

– O.Krok. 49 (109) (Fig. 2)

Copy of a circular letter. The text is fragmentary: the prescript is lost, beginnings and endings of lines are broken, and the lacunae are impossible to estimate. The relevant lines are (lines 2–9):

- 4] . ἰχθυοφόρος α . αβιτησων ἀπο[
] . οσελθεν λέγων τρεῖς ἡμέρας σήμερον?
] . ζοντας τί ἀρπά[σ]ωσιν γενόμενοι . [
 α]ῦτῶν τὰς κοίτ[α]ς καὶ τὰ ἴχνη τασσ[
] . μενα ἔγραψα ὑμεῖν ἵνα ἐπέχητ[ε
8] . . ρδον γὰρ ἐφάνη ἡμεῖν εἰς τὴν ὁδὸν [
] . δράμετε μέχρι τοῦ κρατίστου
 [ἐπαρχου Ἀρτωρίου Πρισκί]λλου. *vacat*

4. ἀρπά[σ]ωσιν Rea, ἀρπά[ζ]ωσιν *ed. pr.* 8.] . δράμετε:] . . ρα 3–5 *ed. pr.*

At line 2, the enigmatic string of letters α . αβιτησων could be interpreted as Ἀλαβίτης ὄν (the dotted λ is not the only possibility). The word Ἀλαβίτης is new but the suffix -ίτης points to an ethnic, which would be

31. A correction by J. Rea of the first edition, which had εἰς πλευράν.

32. This is the only trace in Eastern Desert ostraka of the use of bows by *barbaroi*. The bow is called 'l'arme par excellence des Arabes' by Honigman, 'Divers sens', p. 46.

33. P. Briant, *État et pasteurs au Moyen-Orient ancien* (Collection production pastorale et société, Paris, 1982), pp. 51–55.

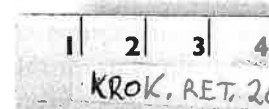
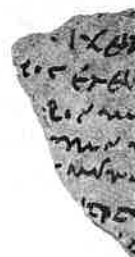


Figure 2. O.I

an unknown non-ger translation:

[an Arab/barbarian saying: it makes the rob [...] their dwelling you keep intent [...] lency [the prefect A

If this interpretation mentioned in the text who may have reported the fragmentary nature of

– O.Krok. 60 (end of

Letter addressed to the *praesidia* of the

34. A derivation from communication) and N. G does not convince me.

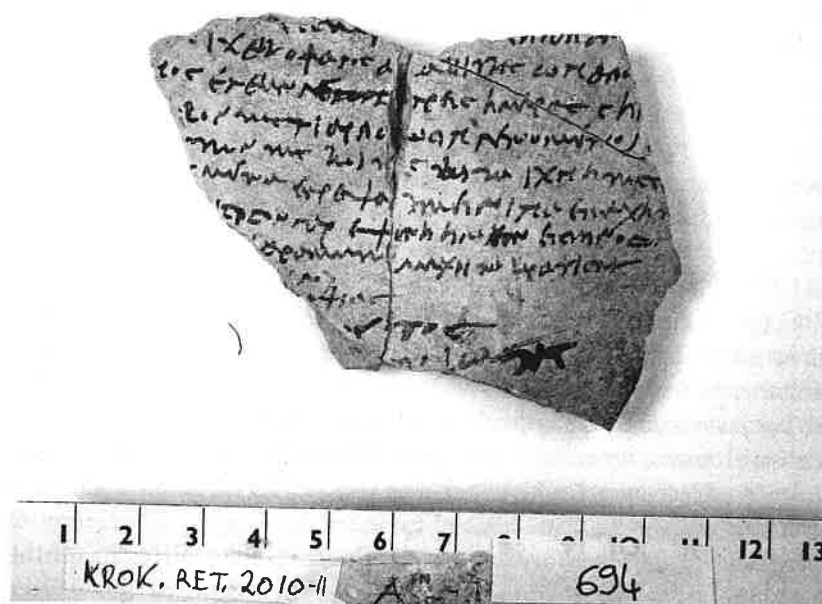


Figure 2. O.Krok. 49 (photograph A. Bülow-Jacobsen).

an unknown non-generic ethnic.³⁴ I therefore propose the following translation:

[an Arab/barbarian (?)] carrying fish, who was an Alabites (?) [...] came, saying: it makes three days today (?) that [...] searching (?) what they will rob [...] their dwellings and their footprints [...] I wrote to you in order that you keep intent [...] For ... appeared to us on the road [...] run to his excellency [the prefect Artorius Priscillus].

If this interpretation is correct, two sorts of desert dwellers would be mentioned in the text: a harmless fishmonger defined as an Alabites (?) who may have reported about robbers (*barbaroi* ?). However, due to the fragmentary nature of the text, this must remain speculative.

– O.Krok. 60 (end of Trajan's reign, c. 114/15)

Letter addressed by the prefect of the desert to the *curatores* of the *praesidia* of the Berenike road to inform them that wrongdoers

34. A derivation from the Nile fish name *ἀλάβης*, as proposed by J. Rea (personal communication) and N. Gonis, review of O.Krok., in *BASP* 46 (2009), pp. 217–18 at 218 does not convince me.

(mentioned in a lacuna) have stolen an object (also in a lacuna) and have killed three messengers of servile status.³⁵ The culprits are probably *barbaroi*: several letters of the prefect or other officers aim at informing the *curatores* of problems with *barbaroi* which have occurred in various places, and asking them to be watchful (see especially the following document). Such letters usually end with the demand to report quickly any such event, and this is also the case with this text.

– O.Krok. 87 (118, beginning of Hadrian's reign)³⁶

Copies of circular letters received at Krokodilo. Several concern attacks of *barbaroi*. The best preserved letter, written on 15 March³⁷ by Cassius Victor, centurion of the *cohors II Ituraeorum*, introduces a report which he has just received εἰς παρεμβολήν.³⁸ The report was written by one of his cavalrymen, detached in the *praesidium* of Patkoua (an otherwise unknown place name), which had been attacked by *barbaroi*: 'I want you to know that, on 13 March, sixty *barbaroi* attacked the *praesidium* of Patkoua. I fought them with my comrades from the tenth hour (of the day) until the second hour of the night. Then they sat down near the *praesidium* until dawn. On that day, Hermogenes, a footsoldier, of the century of Serenus, was killed (ἐσφάγη), one woman and two children were carried off (ἤρπαγη), one child was killed (ἐσφάγη). On 14 March at dawn, we fought them (ἐπυκτεύσαμεν). Damanaïos, horseman, of the century of Victor, [was killed?], Valerius Firm-- was struck (ἐπλ[ή]γη), and his horse as well...'

The following letter is written on 26 March by Arruntius Agrippinus (probably the second in command after the prefect of Berenike, who, at that time, seems to be Cassius Taurus/Taurinus). It is addressed to the *curatores* on the Myos Hormos road. Agrippinus informs them of an event (in a lacuna) which has prompted him to ask them to give escorts to transporters carrying supplies from Koptos, 'so as to deprive the *barbaroi* of any opportunity to do harm. Having read this letter, resend it quickly from *praesidium* to *praesidium*, and if you hear something clearer,³⁹ hasten to inform me at once'. Apparently, *barbaroi* were particularly active these days, as on 2 April the centurion Cassius Victor

forwards another report. Thonis Megale (otherwise remains to understand the

It is also in the reign of Serenus led a successful campaign, his capacity of *praefectus* commemorated his victory from the *basanites/bekhe*: he has erected an altar for days, he has chased the *agi*), the majority of whom suffered no loss or the camels.⁴¹ The choice usual *barbaroi*, may aim *plus Maris Rubri* (writer: *Alexandri Magni*, a literary third century.⁴² It is difficult phagoi are the same as the located some distance to Sulpicius Serenus venturi horses would not have resources. On the other hand comings and goings of camels they moved there since the of Nubian desert dweller

Sulpicius Serenus does but other documents give on the Theban west bank an inscription made on the inscription (partially preserved was (or had been) prefect of the desert. The inscription describes two positions at the same office while sightseeing of the wells (ἐπιμελητής

35. The Roman army used either military horsemen or slaves called μονομάχοι as messengers on the desert roads.

36. Therefore on the morrow of the Jewish revolt of 115–17, so disruptive in Egypt that normal activity may have stopped on the desert roads.

37. I have converted Egyptian into Julian dates.

38. 'At (the) camp', that is, of the *cohors*, or 'in Parembolē', a toponym, perhaps to be identified with Dabod in Lower Nubia. See O.Krok., p. 139.

39. Probably about the event mentioned in the lacuna.

40. I.Pan 87. The Myos Hormos

41. It is not clear whether stolen from a caravan.

42. *Historia Alexandri Magni*

43. I.Col.Memnon 20.

in a lacuna) and have
rits are probably *bar-*
aim at informing the
occurred in various
lly the following doc-
to report quickly any

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forwards another report, sent to Parembolē from the *praesidium* of Thonis Megale (otherwise unknown). The report is lacunose, but enough remains to understand that it concerns troubles with *barbaroi*.

It is also in the reign of Hadrian (year unknown) that Servius Sulpicius Serenus led a successful expedition against the Agriophagoi, probably in his capacity of *praefectus Montis* and *praefectus alae Vocontiorum*. He commemorated his victory on a bilingual (Greek and Latin) *stela* made from the *basanites/bekhen* stone of Wadi Hammamat.⁴⁰ Serenus says that he has erected an altar for Jupiter after a vow and relates that, during two days, he has chased the 'infamous Agriophagoi' (*nequissimos Agriophagi*), the majority of whom were killed in action, while the Romans themselves suffered no loss or even injury, and recovered all the loot as well as the camels.⁴¹ The choice of the rare ethnic Agriophagoi, instead of the usual *barbaroi*, may aim at a certain solemnity. Apart from in the *Periplus Maris Rubri* (written c. 30-40), the term also appears in the *Historia Alexandri Magni*, a literary text composed in Alexandria around the third century.⁴² It is difficult to avoid the thought that Serenus' Agriophagoi are the same as the ones mentioned in the *Periplus*. The latter are located some distance to the south of Berenike, and it is unlikely that Sulpicius Serenus ventured into the deep south, where his troops and horses would not have had the support of Roman forts and water resources. On the other hand, perhaps the Agriophagoi, attracted by the comings and goings of caravans, made incursions to the north; or had they moved there since the 40s? In any case, they testify to the migration of Nubian desert dwellers into the Egyptian Eastern Desert.

Sulpicius Serenus does not mention his official title in the inscription, but other documents give some clues. He visited the Memnon Colossus on the Theban west bank in the sixth year of Hadrian (121/22) and had an inscription made on the statue's leg to commemorate his visit.⁴³ This inscription (partially preserved) recalls his career: among other titles, he was (or had been) prefect of the *ala Vocontiorum*, and prefect of the desert. The inscription does not allow us to decide whether he filled these two positions at the same time or successively, nor if he was still in the same office while sightseeing. At an unknown date, a technician in charge of the wells (ἐπιμελητής ὑδρευμάτων) wrote a letter to him to ask for

40. *I.Pan* 87. The Myos Hormos road passes through these quarries.

41. It is not clear whether these camels belonged to the Agriophagoi, or had been stolen from a caravan.

42. *Historia Alexandri Magni* 1.2.2, p. 2 Kroll; *Periplus Maris Rubri* 2.

43. *I.Col.Memnon* 20.

tools and men to re-excavate a well which had dried up.⁴⁴ This ἐπιμελητής addresses him as ἐπίτροπος Σεβαστοῦ (*procurator Augusti*), a usual form of address for prefects of the desert. The letter is written on a pot shard which was found at Dios. One hypothesis would be to suppose that this ostrakon was the original letter, sent from another site⁴⁵ to Serenus who would then have stayed at Dios during his expedition. It would explain the dedication of the above-mentioned *stela* precisely to Jupiter—not the most commonly invoked deity in Roman Egypt—the tutelary god of that *praesidium* ([the *praesidium*] of Jupiter): the *stela*, purchased at Luxor, may then come from Dios.⁴⁶ More probably, however, the ostrakon was a draft of a papyrus letter sent from Dios to Koptos.

– O.Dios inv. 687 (second century)

Private letter. Apollonios advises Melanas: ‘wait these two days without going out to collect wood, until we get fresh news concerning the barbarians’.

– O.Xer. inv. 465 (c. 115–30, according to stratigraphy)

This is the only mention of *barbaroi* in the outer rubbish dump at Xeron (but this dump did not yield many ostraka). Letter addressed by Petronius to Gaius,⁴⁷ accompanying an oil flask: ‘I want you to know that the oil flask contains 6 *kotylai*.⁴⁸ [...] Know that, for the *barbaroi*, the price of the *chous* (= 12 *kotylai*), is 24 drachmas. Receive the oil flask through Biton’. I propose the following interpretation of this text: Petronius is sending to Gaius a flask of oil for him to sell at Xeron. He notifies Gaius that there is a special price if he sells the oil to the *barbaroi*. It may be higher than the price for non-*barbaroi*.⁴⁹ This text reveals, firstly, that the *barbaroi* used money in their everyday transactions with the inhabitants of the forts and, secondly, that even in the period when the relations of the *praesidia* with the *barbaroi* were characterized by conflict, some trade was conducted with them. This is not surprising: the desert dwellers should not be considered as a homogeneous block.

44. O.Dios inv. 90, on which see A. Bülow-Jacobsen and H. Cuvigny, ‘Sulpicius Serenus, *procurator Augusti*, et la titulature des préfets de Bérénice’, *Chiron* 37 (2007), pp. 11–33.

45. The neighbouring Xeron would be a good candidate: the thick and numerous rubble layers in its dump bear witness to the continuous troubles of the well.

46. I have demonstrated that I.Kanais 59bis, also purchased at Luxor, actually came from the *praesidium* of Didymoi. See H. Cuvigny, ‘Du nouveau sur l’inscription I.Kanais 59bis’, *BIFAO* 101 (2001), pp. 153–57 at 154–55.

47. Possibly, but not necessarily, soldiers, because of the Latin names.

48. 6 *kotylai* = 1.5 litres.

49. In O.Krok. inv. 524 1 *chous* of oil costs 20 drachmas and 5 obols.

In order to survive in their activities. According to the place (people), people belonging to the settled inhabitants: fishing, camel or sheep caravan guides or coa

– O.Did. 27 (dump)

Copy of a circular have happened on the

– O.Claud. inv. 488

Letter of Petearoeri for two days because βαρβάρων). Therefore otherwise, make an effort break down. For my self all I did in order to opening where you are tian craftsmen employed a satellite. The small unit is recorded mostly is quite isolated in the supplies were brought eat because raids of t

– O.Ka.La. inv. 31

A fragmentary list transportation and st a row. On 26 Mecheir

50. Modern illuminability: Cultural Diversity and K. Duistermaat (eds) *Red Sea and the Nile in Egypt* of Archaeology Press Mon T. Power, ‘The Material (Eastern Desert of Egypt’ *Abbassides. Peuplement e hout*, 2011), pp. 331–44 at

51. Not a soldier, but H. Cuvigny, ‘L’organigram du Mons Claudianus’, *Ch*

ip.⁴⁴ This ἐπιμελητής (*epimeletēs*), a usual form written on a pot shard: to suppose that this site⁴⁵ to Serenus who ion. It would explain ly to Jupiter—not the ie tutelary god of that , purchased at Luxor, ver, the ostrakon was s.

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ter rubbish dump at). Letter addressed by want you to know that , for the *barbaroi*, the . Receive the oil flask retation of this text: m to sell at Xeron. He the oil to the *barbaroi*. oi.⁴⁹ This text reveals, yday transactions with en in the period when were characterized by This is not surprising: a homogeneous block.

H. Cuvigny, 'Sulpicius Sere- érénice', *Chiron* 37 (2007),

te: the thick and numerous oubles of the well. ased at Luxor, actually came au sur l'inscription I.Kanais

Latin names.

and 5 obols.

In order to survive in hard natural conditions, nomads have to diversify their activities. According to the place where they live and the opportunities which that place provides to them (resources, contacts with settled people), people belonging to the same ethnic group can be involved in fishing, camel or sheep/goat herding, charcoal making, selling products to the settled inhabitants of coastal settlements or caravans, serving as caravan guides or coast guards, and raiding on caravans.⁵⁰

– *O.Did.* 27 (dumped c. 140–50 according to stratigraphy)

Copy of a circular letter concerning *barbaroi*; the incident seems to have happened on the Myos Hormos road.

– *O.Claud.* inv. 4888 (c. 145 according to stratigraphy)

Letter of Petearoeris to Bekis: 'I want you to know that I have not eaten for two days because of the fear of the barbarians (διὰ τὸν φόβον τῶν βαρβάρων). Therefore, please, father, if we are relieved, that is fine. Otherwise, make an effort to have me transferred. Otherwise, I am going to break down. For my salary has not yet been brought (?) to me. No matter all I did in order to come: nobody let me go. Let me know what is happening where you are'. The names of the correspondents point to Egyptian craftsmen employed respectively in Mons Claudianus (Bekis) and in a satellite. The small μέταλλον of Tiberiane (modern Barud), where activity is recorded mostly in the 140s, is a good candidate, all the more as it is quite isolated in the mountains, well off the *via Claudiana* by which supplies were brought in from the Nile valley. Petearoeris has nothing to eat because raids of the *barbaroi* have disrupted the provisioning.

– *O.Ka.La.* inv. 31 (146)

A fragmentary list of personnel mostly related to supply (including transportation and storage), classified by trade name, for several days in a row. On 26 Mecheir, the personnel consisted of a *tesserarius*,⁵¹ a herald,

50. Modern illuminating examples can be found in P. Weschenfelder, 'Towards Variability: Cultural Diversity in the Economic Strategies of the Beja Peoples', in H. Barnard and K. Duistermaat (eds), *The History of the Peoples of the Eastern Desert (between the Red Sea and the Nile in Egypt and Sudan) from Prehistory to the Present* (Cotsen Institute of Archaeology Press Monographs 73; Los Angeles, 2012), pp. 344–56 at 349–51. See also T. Power, 'The Material Culture and Economic Rationale of Saracen Settlement in the Eastern Desert of Egypt', in A. Borrut et al. (eds), *Le Proche-Orient de Justinien aux Abbassides. Peuplement et dynamiques spatiales* (Bibliothèque de l'Ant. Tard. 19; Turnhout, 2011), pp. 331–44 at 343–44.

51. Not a soldier, but a minor bureaucrat in the logistics of the quarries. See H. Cuvigny, 'L'organigramme du personnel d'une carrière impériale d'après un ostrakon du Mons Claudianus', *Chiron* 35 (2005), pp. 309–53 at 338–39.

two men collecting wood, a doorkeeper, two men (who had gone [?]) with the camels, eleven waterskin carriers, seven donkey drivers, four sick men, and so on. But, under the entries 27 and 28 Mecheir, one reads only *διὰ τὸ βαρβ(αρικὸν) ἀργία*: 'no work because of the barbarians'.⁵²

– *O.Claud.* inv. 7309 (c. 152/53 according to prosopography)

Letter of Diourdanos, probably a *curator* (of Raima?)⁵³ to Archibios, *curator* of Claudianus. Diourdanos sums up the contents of some official letters. One of them is a report in which Longinus Priscus, *curator* of a *praesidium* called --bola,⁵⁴ expressly said to be in the Dodekaschoinos, writes that he has observed five *barbaroi* and two camels taking water at the river on the opposite bank, the Arabia, and walking downstream. Therefore, he wrote 'to the downstream bank' (κάτω ῥίπα) to keep an eye on them. The army takes care that outposts are informed of the slightest movements of *barbaroi*, even if far away. There are more than 300 km between Claudianus and Syene (modern Aswan) as the crow flies, which is on the northern border of the Dodekaschoinos.

– *O.Claud.* inv. 7226 (150–90, according to stratigraphy)

Mutilated letter written by Alexandros to five comrades (all are probably soldiers). 'I heard that ... barbarians ... [I was happy?] to hear that nobody was struck (ἐπλήγη)'.

– *P.Bagnall* 8 (186/87)

Translation of a Latin covering letter of the prefect of Egypt to the *procurator metallorum*. This letter accompanied the verdict of the trial of two soldiers who had been tried 'because they have left their fellow soldiers behind, so that the latter were subjected by some weak and unarmed barbarians'.

– *O.Claud.* inv. 7255 (c. 189, according to stratigraphy and prosopography)

Letter of Aurelius Besarion, *curator* of Raima, to two comrades who are in Mons Claudianus. He advises them: 'Be on your guard because of the barbarians' (διὰ τὸ βαρβαρικόν).

52. The abbreviation τὸ βαρβ() is resolved thanks to *O.Claud.* inv. 7255 (cf. below), where this neutral name, semantically equivalent to οἱ βάρβαροι (cf. LSJ s.v. βαρβαρίζω), is written out in full.

53. Raima is the most frequently mentioned site in the ostraka found in Mons Claudianus. The context suggests that it was the first station after Claudianus on the *via Claudiana*. Therefore, it should be identified with the fortlet known today as Abu Zawal.

54. It seems impossible to read Παρεμβολά.

– *O.Claud.* IV 851

Draft of a fragment (perhaps a prefect). A work 'because of the barbarians' (διὰ τὸ βαρβάρων). The formula is an idiomatic phrase in the ostraka.

The fear inspired by the barbarians at facilitating the desertion of the garrisons began to derive from the simple fact that they were smaller. This is particularly true of Mons Claudianus. It is in the ostraka under c. 110, 917 persons of whom they were military, have deterred any barbarians. On the other hand, we know that it is tries to explain to them only two slaves (*φαν* eight water skins (old not enough personnel) able that the gate of *icula* added in front of Severus Alexander (the Porphyrites-Claudians) Balad, where *barbar* no blocking), neighbouring (blocking and *clavi*

55. *O.Claud.* inv. 488

56. Cuvigny, 'Organisme'

57. H. Cuvigny, 'Vibis' 77 (2002), pp. 238–48. H have been numerous.

58. V.A. Maxfield and 1987–1993 2.1. *Excavations* Cairo, 2002), pp. 18 and

59. Blocking and *clavies*. *Survey and Excavations* Exploration Society Exc.

60. The third station

61. S.E. Sidebotham and Wadi Semna', *JEA* 8

– *O.Claud.* IV 851 (end of second century)

Draft of a fragmentary letter addressed by the workers to a high official (perhaps a prefect). Apparently, they explain that they could not finish a work 'because of the fear of the barbarians' (διὰ τὸν φόβον τῶν βαρβάρων). The formula, which is found in an earlier letter,⁵⁵ may be an idiomatic phrase in the desert epistolography.

The fear inspired by the barbarians is also reflected in works aiming at facilitating the defence of the fort gates. From a certain point on, the garrisons began to feel less secure; of course, this feeling might also derive from the simple fact that, in later periods, garrisons tended to be smaller. This is particularly clear in the case of the main *praesidium* at Mons Claudianus. It is not surprising that *barbaroi* are never mentioned in the ostraka under Trajan when one considers that, on a certain day in c. 110, 917 persons were present in the *metallon*. Even if only sixty of them were military, this mass of robust craftsmen and labourers must have deterred any band of *barbaroi* to attack the place.⁵⁶ On the other hand, we know that in 189, a distraught vice-*curator* of Mons Claudianus tries to explain to the *procurator metallorum* that he has at his disposal only two slaves (*familiares*) out of twelve, one donkey out of five, and eight water skins (old), and that the cisterns are empty because there are not enough personnel to fill them.⁵⁷ In these conditions, it is understandable that the gate of the *praesidium* has been partly blocked, and a *clavicula* added in front of it. These works took place at the latest under Severus Alexander (222–35), perhaps years before.⁵⁸ Other *praesidia* in the Porphyrites-Claudianus district present a reshaping of the gate: Umm Balad, where *barbaroi* disrupted work under Antoninus Pius (*clavicula*, no blocking), neighbouring Badia,⁵⁹ el-Saqiya⁶⁰ (blocking), and Semna (blocking and *clavicula*).⁶¹ In Mons Berenigidis, among the *praesidia*

55. *O.Claud.* inv. 4888. See above, p. 179.

56. Cuvigny, 'Organigramme du personnel'.

57. H. Cuvigny, 'Vibius Alexander, *praefectus* et épistratège de l'Heptanomie', *Cd'É* 77 (2002), pp. 238–48. He does not mention the number of soldiers, but these could not have been numerous.

58. V.A. Maxfield and D.P.S. Peacock, *Mons Claudianus. Survey and Excavations, 1987–1993* 2.1. *Excavations* (Fouilles de l'Institut français d'archéologie orientale 43; Cairo, 2002), pp. 18 and 21.

59. Blocking and *clavicula*: D. Peacock and V. Maxfield, *The Roman Imperial Quarries. Survey and Excavations at Mons Porphyrites, 1994–1998*. 2. *The Excavations* (Egypt Exploration Society Excavation Memoir 82; London, 2007), p. 81.

60. The third station after Kaine on the Porphyrites road.

61. S.E. Sidebotham *et al.*, 'The Roman Quarry and Installation in Wadi Umm Wikala and Wadi Semna', *JEA* 87 (2001), pp. 135–70 at 157.

where we have excavated, Maximianon, Didymoi, Dios, and Xeron also present a partial blocking of the gate, the date of which is uncertain, but no doubt posterior to the time when 'barbarian' raids are mentioned in the ostraka. On the contrary, relations with the *barbaroi* may have been peaceful by then,⁶² but the garrisons, now probably smaller,⁶³ had become less secure.

Strabo's Testimony in the Light of the Ostraka

The situation in the Eastern Desert had changed since the times of Strabo. The geographer had spent some six years in Egypt and, in 27 or 26 BCE, he had accompanied Aelius Gallus, the second prefect of Egypt and a personal friend of his, on a trip to the Thebaid. Strabo confidently writes: 'but the country beyond the mountains is for a great distance uninhabited'.⁶⁴ By mountains, he means the desert plateaus on both sides of the Nile valley, which, seen from there, can appear imposing. Later on, he repeats that the Nile valley is protected on its two flanks by the 'desert mountains (ἐρήμοις ὄρεσι) of Libya and Arabia'.⁶⁵ Strabo's desert stops being empty only from Berenike southwards,⁶⁶ where he locates the Trogodytai,⁶⁷ Blemmyes, Noubai, and Megabaroi, all of whom he seems to gather under the category of 'the Ethiopians beyond Syene' and describes as nomads, and whom he distinguishes from 'the Ethiopians who extend towards the south as far as Meroe'.⁶⁸ For this list of nomadic peoples, his source is Eratosthenes, as appears from an earlier passage,

62. See the ostraka testifying to food distribution among the *barbaroi* at Xeron discussed below, pp. 188–94. They may, however, reflect only a short-term situation, and/or only with one group of desert dwellers.

63. Duty rosters allow us to estimate the number of soldiers at fifteen in the first period of the *praesidia*. In the second period, when the forts became 'shantified', we have no means of knowing the size of the garrison.

64. Strabo 17.1.4; trans. H.L. Jones, *The Geography of Strabo* 8. Book 17 and General Index (Loeb Classical Library 267; Cambridge, MA, 1932), p. 17.

65. Strabo 17.1.53 = *FHN* III 190.

66. The *Periplus Maris Rubri* 2, written some seventy years later, gives the same impression.

67. I use the spelling Trogodytes, plural Trogodytai, instead of Troglodytes, Troglodytai, which is found in the manuscripts and the Loeb translation. The spelling Trogo- is corroborated by the epigraphical and papyrological evidence. See the recent discussion by R.H. Pierce, 'A Blemmy by Any Other Name ... A Study in Greek Ethnography', in Barnard and Duistermaat, *History*, pp. 226–37 at 228–31, with references.

68. Strabo 17.1.53 = *FHN* III 190. So, recently, J.H.F. Dijkstra, 'Blemmyes, Noubades and the Eastern Desert in Late Antiquity: Reassessing the Written Sources', in Barnard and Duistermaat, *History*, pp. 238–47 at 239. Alternatively, Blemmyes, Noubai, and Megabaroi may be in apposition to Trogodytai (in Agatharchides, *apud* Diodorus Siculus 3.33.1, Megabaroi are precisely presented as a sub-category of Trogodytai). On the philological ambiguity of this text, see Pierce, 'Blemmy by Any Other Name', p. 264.

where he quotes the parts of the country (Red Sea, are inhabited the Ethiopians and Trogodytai'.⁶⁹ Strabo in his own day, since wrongly impressed by attack unprotected rather many nor warlike

When Strabo visited Berenike did not yet (Hormos only. The p commercial boom and t Strabo's remark on t Myos Hormos to Indi the adventure.⁷² Des ignores them, and 1 (Nubian) tribes sou Perhaps the φιλορώ the *pax Romana*. In necessary to fortify tl nor to condense the r similar dedications f that, in 76/77, it was where caravans had it had been 'opened', son why the Romans Berenicidis and forti (as well as perhaps tl

This suggests that the meantime. Possi probably saw the gar sion into their territ People from the val

69. Strabo 17.1.2 = *FF*

70. Presumably on tl which cut through the d

71. Strabo 17.1.53 = *F*

72. Strabo 2.5.12.

73. R.S. Bagnall, A. B Desert Roads: New Ligh pasian', *JRA* 14 (2001), p

ios, and Xeron also
 ch is uncertain, but
 ls are mentioned in
 arroi may have been
 naller,⁶³ had become

l since the times of
 Egypt and, in 27 or
 nd prefect of Egypt
 l. Strabo confidently
 for a great distance
 lateaus on both sides
 r imposing. Later on,
 flanks by the 'desert
 Strabo's desert stops
 here he locates the
 ll of whom he seems
 beyond Syene' and
 from 'the Ethiopians
 r this list of nomadic
 n an earlier passage,

he barbaroi at Xeron dis-
 ort-term situation, and/or
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no 8. Book 17 and General
 17.

ears later, gives the same
 id of Troglodytes, Troglo-
 ion. The spelling Trogo- is
 See the recent discussion
 in Greek Ethnography', in
 1 references.

tra, 'Blemmyes, Noubades
 ritten Sources', in Barnard
 Blemmyes, Noubai, and
 les, *apud* Diodorus Siculus
 Trogodytai). On the philo-
 her Name', p. 264.

where he quotes the third-century BCE Alexandrian scholar: 'The lower parts of the country on either side of Meroe, along the Nile towards the Red Sea, are inhabited by Megabaroi and Blemmyes, who are subject to the Ethiopians and border on the Egyptians, and along the sea by Trogodytai'.⁶⁹ Strabo seems to consider that this information is still valid in his own day, since he contrasts what the ancients (οἱ παλαιοί) thought, wrongly impressed by the fact that the mentioned nomads would often attack unprotected travellers,⁷⁰ with the present situation: they are 'neither many nor warlike'.⁷¹

When Strabo visited Upper Egypt, the road between Koptos and Berenike did not yet exist: the Erythraean trade transited through Myos Hormos only. The party around Aelius Gallus was intent on the commercial boom and the general mood was euphoric, as is reflected by Strabo's remark on the fact that in his time 120 boats navigated from Myos Hormos to India, whereas under the Ptolemies few dared to attempt the adventure.⁷² Desert dwellers were not a problem yet: Strabo totally ignores them, and the ones whom he acknowledges, the Ethiopian (Nubian) tribes south of Berenike, are, according to him, harmless. Perhaps the φιλορώμαιος Strabo was too eager to praise the results of the *pax Romana*. In any case, not before Vespasian was it considered necessary to fortify the wells on the roads of Myos Hormos and Berenike, nor to condense the network of what had become fortlets, *praesidia*: three similar dedications found in *praesidia* on the Berenike road have shown that, in 76/77, it was decided to reinforce the equipment of this track, where caravans had been satisfied with a few wells since the time when it had been 'opened', in c. 2 BCE.⁷³ Although no text mentions it, the reason why the Romans decided to strengthen the military presence in Mons Berenicidis and fortify the outposts may have been the nomadic threat (as well as perhaps the necessity to check smuggling).

This suggests that the desert dwellers had become more aggressive in the meantime. Possible reasons are easy to imagine. The desert dwellers probably saw the garrisons and the heavy traffic to be a significant intrusion into their territory, and they probably also saw both as a temptation. People from the valley were in competition with them for the desert's

69. Strabo 17.1.2 = *FHN* II 109.

70. Presumably on the caravan routes between the Kingdom of Meroe and Syene, which cut through the desert, thus avoiding the Nubian cataracts.

71. Strabo 17.1.53 = *FHN* III 190.

72. Strabo 2.5.12.

73. R.S. Bagnall, A. Bülow-Jacobsen, and H. Cuvigny, 'Security and Water on Egypt's Desert Roads: New Light on the Prefect Iulius Ursus and *Praesidia*-Building under Vespasian', *JRA* 14 (2001), p. 325–33.

scarce resources of pastures, wood, and game. They may have disliked that the Romans dug wells to which they themselves had no access. Strabo, who writes elsewhere that the desert is empty, remarks that 'the Arabes' work as miners in the emerald mines.⁷⁴ The context of this passage suggests that he heard this information during his 27–26 BCE trip to the Thebaid. We know, thanks to the dedication of a Paneion in Wadi Semna, that the emerald mines were, by 11 CE, as all the other μέταλλα, under the control of the prefect of Berenike.⁷⁵ If Strabo is reliable here, it appears that the Romans had taken the mines from them in the meantime. It surely caused resentment on the part of the 'Arabes'.

At this time, however, *barbaroi* do not seem to have represented a serious threat to the Roman outposts. Otherwise, sole couriers would not have carried official mail almost every day between the stations. Then again, if the *barbaroi* were principally interested in booty, there was no point for them in attacking a horseman only carrying mail and occasional bunches of salad!⁷⁶ The fact that even the slightest movements of small groups of nomads were reported and passed on to the entire network is rather a matter of bureaucratic routine. If the *praesidium* of Patkoua hosted around fifteen soldiers (with only about three horsemen) as the forts of Mons Berenicidis did, its garrison could be outnumbered by a group of sixty *barbaroi*. However, these did not manage to take the fort (not on the first day, anyway), and they could not prevent a message from being taken out to the *castra* of Parembolē. When the barbarians became a more significant threat (perhaps they had successfully attacked a caravan), an expedition led by the prefect of the desert subdued them easily. Their weapons (arrows, perhaps more wooden sticks than swords or daggers) were no match for Roman military equipment.

Raids started at first in Mons Berenicidis, under Trajan. In the Porphyrites-Claudianus district, the first signs of turbulence date to Antoninus Pius. Several explanations are possible for this time gap. First of all, Trajan's reign was the period when activity in the imperial μέταλλα reached a peak. *Barbaroi* would have been outnumbered by the population residing in the Roman sites. Secondly, the precious commodities transported to Mons Berenicidis were a more attractive booty than the supplies carried from Kaine to the μέταλλα. And, finally, the *barbaroi* operating north of the Myos Hormos road were not necessarily the same as the *barbaroi* operating in Mons Berenicidis.

74. Strabo 17.1.5.

75. *I.Pan* 51.

76. In *praesidia* where water was plentiful, herbs and vegetables were cultivated and the horsemen of the mail service were often asked, as a private service, to take bunches of greens for comrades living in the neighbouring forts.

The excavations in Dios, and Xeron) have the relations between continue to be called. The decade of the third century seem to have been the first. They are copies of original texts in the contexts do not contain any trace of the original. The 'Baratit dossier' is the same second phase of the same. Consider the *praetorium* relationships.

The Praetorium Ostraca

– O.Xer. inv. 620 (

(Circular?) letter of control of circulation κατελθεῖν ἐπιτρέψαι to travel down'. The the papyri.

– O.Xer. inv. 601 (

Fragmentary circular (unknown) to the *cu* barbarians and two copies of a letter written. The letter ends by the

– O.Did. 40 (c. 21)

Draft of a letter addressed to the desert Valerius to Koptos on 28 March. change, I brought back

77. Κάδοι are pots (a *praesidia*) on a pot-garlic expected in a pot-garlic would have been dumped

The Time of Truce

The excavations in three *praesidia* on the Berenike road (Didymoi, Dios, and Xeron) have produced ostraka betraying a radical change in the relations between the Roman garrisons and the desert dwellers, who continue to be called *barbaroi*. Ostraka precisely dated to the second decade of the third century were found in the dumps filling spaces which seem to have been the *curator's* quarters (*praetorium*) at Xeron. Some of them are copies of official correspondence mentioning *barbaroi*. The gaps in the contexts do not allow for certainty, but these documents do not contain any trace of the phraseology of violent encounters with *barbaroi*. The 'Baratit dossier' from Dios and Didymoi, belonging roughly to the same second phase of occupation of the *praesidia*, invites us to consider the *praetorium* ostraka from Xeron as witnesses of peaceful relationships.

The Praetorium Ostraka from Xeron of 217-19

– O.Xer. inv. 620 (SU 0802; 217; Macrinus and Diadumenianus)

(Circular?) letter of Vettius Gallianus, prefect of the desert, about the control of circulation on the Berenike road. The phrase βαρβάρων κτήνη κατελθεῖν ἐπιτρέ[ι] means: '(to?) authorize the animals of the barbarians to travel down'. The word for 'animals', κτήνη, often means 'donkeys' in the papyri.

– O.Xer. inv. 601 (SU 0702 + 0802; 28 May 219, year 2 of Elagabalus)

Fragmentary circular letter of Marcus Aurelius Signas (function unknown) to the *curatores* from Xeron to Phoinikon. Mention of three barbarians and two other men (barbarians?) who have been sent (?). Mention of a letter written by the prefect of the desert Valerius Apolinaris. The letter ends by the usual formula: 'I write you so that you know'.

– O.Did. 40 (c. 219)

Draft of a letter addressed by the *curator* of Didymoi to the prefect of the desert Valerius Apolinaris. 'I inform you, my lord, that I went down to Koptos on 28 Mecheir. Regarding the three κάδοι which I gave to change, I brought back all those which Petronius the barbarian made'.⁷⁷

77. Κάδοι are pots attached to a *saqiya*-wheel or (as was probably the case in the *praesidia*) on a pot-garland. They must have been of bronze rather than ceramic, as is expected in a pot-garland: if of ceramic, they would not have been given to replace, but would have been dumped on the spot.

Unless 'the barbarian' is a nickname, this κάδος-maker is a *barbaros* who works as a craftsman in Koptos, who does business with the Roman army, and who has taken on (or is called by) a Latin name.

– *O.Xer.* inv. 570 (SU 0802; c. 217–19, according to stratigraphy)

Letter of Iulius Kroni-- to [...] : 'could you please lend my bedroom (*contubernium*) to the barbarian?' Presumably, 'the barbarian' came to Xeron with this ostrakon.

– *O.Xer.* inv. 603 (SU 0801 + 0802; c. 217–19, according to stratigraphy?)⁷⁸

Account mentioning wheat, barley, κολοφώνια (a wine container), and 'barbarian' names (Masalit and Kintob, also spelled Kintub).

– *O.Did.* 46 (fort, SU 13401; dumped between c. 220 and 250)

Letter of the *curator* of Didymoi to the *curator* of Phoinikon (or vice versa): 'I inform you, so that you inform the prefect, that four barbarians, accompanied by three children, nine camels and four donkeys have come from the south [day (?), x hour] of the night, and that they went away on the 18th at the sixth hour of the day'. The group seems to have spent the night in or near the *praesidium*. It is highly probable that, contrary to Egyptian donkey drivers, the nomads did not have to ask for a pass, such as the ones issued by Roman officers, which were found in Mons Claudianus and on the Berenike road.⁷⁹ On the other hand, their movements were closely observed, both at the time when they were a threat and in the third century.

– *O.Did.* 44 (beginning of third century, according to stratigraphy)

Letter of a μονομάχος to a *tesserarius* who had sent him on a mission to Koptos.⁸⁰ He was going back to the *praesidium* (of Didymoi?) when he (and his companions) had an unpleasant encounter: 'Iekoun, who was going down with the barbarians, cudgelled us ("made us ξυλοκρουστοί", a new composite adjective literally meaning "struck with wood"), having found us alone, and we took flight for a mile'. *Barbaroi* are still dangerous for μονομάχοι, but they are not anonymous any more: the name of their chief is familiar. This ostrakon is the only 'late' document which positively suggests tensions between the Roman garrisons and the *barbaroi*.

78. If SU 0802 produced ostraka of 217–19, the more superficial layer SU 0801 did not. Perhaps this document, the anthroponymy of which reminds of the orders for delivery of year 11, is later. Yet, no order of year 11 was found in SU 0801.

79. *O.Claud.* I 48–82; *O.Did.* 47–51.

80. For the term μονομάχος, see n. 35 above.

The 'Baratit Dossier'

Several ostraka four of the *barbaroi*. The same layers do not all belong inside the span third century. The date the stratigraphy of Didymoi are probably contemporary of which is either

– *O.Did.* 41 (outer c. 220)

A memorandum: him, sent by Baratit, gave them one κολοφώνιον, see further the head of a wine jar. They have been originally Romans in Egypt as (for instance as the *barbaroi*) several sorts of work a δεκανός, be it work of Egyptian donkey- or the wells, or carrying of water. This vocabulary was applied to a two-day ration for the *barbaroi* brought an official lettering to the memorandum which closely reminds of the prescribed quantity of food at a *praesidium*. As soldiers and wine drinkers were wine drinkers 'Desert Ware' (Egyptian Desert Ware) found at Dios.⁸¹ *O.Did.* could have access to

81. *O.Did.*, p. 64.

82. Such memoranda periodical syntheses of the dossier.

83. Precisely on the ostrakon dated to the reign of Augustus see below, p. 196.

The 'Baratit Dossier'

Several ostraka found in Didymoi and Dios mention Baratit, ὑποτύραννος of the *barbaroi*. The stratigraphy and the contents of other ostraka from the same layers do not allow us to date these shards with precision, but they belong inside the span between the end of the second and the first half of the third century. The dates indicated below for each of them are based on the stratigraphy of Didymoi. But we must take into account the fact that they are probably contemporary with the orders for delivery found in Xeron, the date of which is either 232 or 264, and which are discussed below.

- *O.Did.* 41 (outer rubbish dump, phase 11; dumped between 176 and c. 220)

A memorandum: 'Mageiren, δεκανός, and the five barbarians with him, sent by Baratit, ὑποτύραννος of the barbarians, came to me and I gave them one κολοφώνιον and twelve pairs of loaves. 1 Phaophi'. About ὑποτύραννος, see further discussion below. The use of δεκανός to designate the head of a working team is meaningful. This word, which must have been originally a Macedonian military title, was revived by the Romans in Egypt as an equivalent of *decurio* in its civilian acceptance (for instance as the head of a servile *decuria*).⁸¹ In the Eastern Desert, several sorts of working teams, called δεκανίαι, are under the orders of a δεκανός, be it workers belonging to the imperial *familia*, or freeborn Egyptian donkey- or camel-drivers working in water transportation from the wells, or carrying goods on the roads of Mons Berenicidis. The same vocabulary was applied to *barbaroi*. The twelve pairs of loaves are at most a two-day ration for the six men. The μονομάχος Kylindros, who has brought an official letter to Didymoi, received two pairs of loaves, according to the memorandum *O.Did.* 24 (dumped c. 220–50), the phrasing of which closely reminds of *O.Did.* 41.⁸² Perhaps, two pairs of loaves was the prescribed quantity for people working for the network and stopping off at a *praesidium*. As seen above, a κολοφώνιον is a wine container: desert dwellers were wine drinkers, as is confirmed by a shard of moulded 'Eastern Desert Ware' (EDW) incised with motives of grapes and amphoras, found at Dios.⁸³ *O.Did.* 41 also shows on which kind of occasion *barbaroi* could have access to ceramic containers made in the Nile valley.

81. *O.Did.*, p. 64.

82. Such memoranda, written on an *ad hoc* basis, were presumably meant to elaborate periodical syntheses of the withdrawals from the stocks.

83. Precisely on the surface of the rubbish layer dumped in a cistern, where an ostrakon dated to the reign of Philip the Arab (248/49) was found. On Eastern Desert Ware, see below, p. 196.

- *O.Did.* 42 (fort, SU 10504; beginning of the third century?)

Letter of Baratit to the *curator* [of Didymoi]. Broken. The only significant word is ‘food’. Experienced hand of the same sloping type as the hand of the vouchers found at Xeron (see below).

- *O.Did.* 43 (fort, SU 12805; dumped between c. 220–50)

Letter of [NN, ὕπο(?)]τύραννος of the barbarians to ..narius (or a [*statio?*]narius), probably asking barley ‘for my donkeys’. The hand is not really awkward, but lacks the bureaucratic fluidity of *O.Did.* 42. The author is probably Baratit again. Instead of rendering the name of his tribe by a transliteration or a semantic equivalent, he is content to use the (originally) disparaging ethnic bestowed by the Romans on the desert dwellers when they stopped being peaceful Arabes.

- *O.Dios* inv. 481 (fort, SU 10902)

Incomplete letter of Baratit (no title) ‘to the soldiers’: ‘I want you to know that ... Do not neglect to ...’. The subject of the letter escapes us, as well as the general tone. The Roman garrison seems to lack a *curator*—absent *curatores* are not rare in ostraka of the end of the second to third centuries—and Baratit knows about it. The hand is experienced and different from the hands of the two other letters of Baratit: at least three scribes worked for him, who could earn the title ἐρμηνεύς καὶ γραμματεὺς held by the dedicant in a Trajanic inscription from Berenike.⁸⁴

The Orders for Delivery to Barbaroi from Xeron

In specific places of the south-west quarter of Xeron ninety-six orders were found for the delivery of wheat to people whose names cannot but denote *barbaroi*. Though this term is never used in the dossier, sufficient proof that these people were ‘barbarians’ is the attestation of Baratit among the names. Is this the same Baratit as the one mentioned in the ostraka from Didymos and Dios? We cannot exclude it. In any case, the names offer, for the first time, a unique glimpse into the language spoken by the dwellers of the Eastern Desert at this time.⁸⁵

All the vouchers are century sloping hand. Before being discarded prevent them from being texts is similar:

(ἔτους) ια// Φαρμοῖ
πυρ(οῦ) [quantity i
number].
οευρευεξ

11th year, Pharmo
quantity of wheat,
oeureuex.

We shall now discuss appearance (year, day typical example of a text as a whole.

After the year number after the 180s. There is According to the archaeological occupation of the fort from the *praetorium* long enough to have a The Julian year would latter for two reasons from year 6 of Philip I which had been dumped layer can be considered Dios. Secondly, according suggests that this *praetorium* study of the ceramic history science. This is why I

Both chronologically why the Roman garrison haps secured their help emperor himself, against the fact that in 231, fought by a *dux* (M. Aurelius

84. R.S. Bagnall, C. Helms, and A.M.F.W. Verhoogt, *Documents from Berenike 2. Texts from the 1999–2001 Seasons* (Papyrologica Bruxellensia 33; Brussels, 2005), p. 27 (no. 121.3).

85. See the paper of Satzinger, this volume, who conducts a linguistic analysis of these names.

86. P.J. Parsons, ‘M. A. Twelfth International Congress (1970), pp. 389–97 at 395–’

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γενὺς καὶ γραμματεὺς
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documents from *Berenike 2.*
a 33; Brussels, 2005), p. 27
a linguistic analysis of these

All the vouchers are written by the same experienced, typical third-century sloping hand. Their distribution must have taken place in Xeron. Before being discarded, the shards have been crossed out, obviously to prevent them from being used more than once. The formula used in these texts is similar:

(ἔτους) ια// Φαρμουθι x. μέτρ(ησον) τῷ δεῖνι ὑπ(ὲρ) ὀνόμ(ατος) τοῦ δεῖνος
πυρ(οῦ) [quantity in artabas or *matia* written in full], total: [quantity in
number].
οευρευεξ

11th year, Pharmouthi x. Measure out to NN, in the name of NN, such
quantity of wheat, total: x artabas/*matia*.
oeureuex.

We shall now discuss the various elements of this formula in order of appearance (year, day, names, quantity, and subscription), followed by a typical example of a text and some observations on the group of texts as a whole.

After the year number, the name of the emperor is omitted, as is usual after the 180s. There is no doubt that the shards date to the third century. According to the archaeologists, they come from the ultimate layers of occupation of the fort. Therefore, they are later than the 217–19 ostraka from the *praetorium* rubbish. Only two third-century emperors reigned long enough to have an 11th regnal year: Severus Alexander and Gallienus. The Julian year would then be 232 or 264. The archaeologists prefer the latter for two reasons. Firstly, the latest dated ostrakon found in Dios is from year 6 of Philip the Arab (248/49). It was found in a layer of rubbish which had been dumped directly on the floor of an unused cistern. This layer can be considered as a witness of the latest phase of occupation at Dios. Secondly, according to J.-P. Brun, the ceramic unearthed at Xeron suggests that this *praesidium* had a longer life than Dios. However, Brun's study of the ceramic has not been finished and stratigraphy is not an exact science. This is why I do not reject the earlier hypothesis.

Both chronological contexts contribute much towards understanding why the Roman garrisons came to terms with desert dwellers and perhaps secured their help. 232 is the year of the first campaign, led by the emperor himself, against the Sasanians. Tension in Egypt is shown by the fact that in 231, for the first time, the *praefectus Aegypti* is replaced by a *dux* (M. Aurelius Zeno Ianuarius).⁸⁶ The *exercitus Aegyptiacus* had

86. P.J. Parsons, 'M. Aurelius Zeno Ianuarius', in D. Samuel (ed.), *Proceedings of the Twelfth International Congress of Papyrology* (American Studies in Papyrology 7; Toronto, 1970), pp. 389–97 at 395–97. This *dux* is mentioned in *O.Dios* inv. 138.

provided troops (who mutinied) against the Persians.⁸⁷ The 260s are also marked by difficulties in Egypt. On 27 December 260, two envoys of the king of the 'Ethiopians' (that is, Meroites) left their inscriptions of the *proskynema*-type at the temple of Philae.⁸⁸ One of them, the ambassador Tamis, specifies that he made peace after a period (of war?) of seven years.⁸⁹ In 261, the prefect L. Mussius Aemilianus proclaimed himself emperor, and was subdued in 262. The *Historia Augusta* praises his energy and relates that he expelled the *barbari* from Upper Egypt.⁹⁰ From 251 to 268, the Roman empire was devastated by an epidemic which had come from Ethiopia: half the population of Alexandria died.⁹¹ Finally, in 270, the Palmyrenes invaded Egypt.⁹²

After the year comes the day. It should be stressed that this is the day when the voucher was written: the wheat was not necessarily withdrawn on the same day. We have no idea where these documents were written: in Xeron, in Koptos, in Berenike, or somewhere in the desert? Except for one voucher dated to 11 Pharmouthi, all the others were written within a span of seven days, between 22–28 Pharmouthi (17–23 April). However, most of them were written on the 22nd.

Continuing with the names, in the simplest case, the anonymous addressee of the order 'measure out' is asked to deliver a certain quantity to the voucher-bearer, in the name of another person. We shall refer to the bearer, who withdraws the wheat, as the middleman, and the other person as the beneficiary. The voucher often allows the middleman to withdraw wheat for several beneficiaries. Almost always, both middleman and beneficiary have 'barbarian' names.⁹³ These 'barbarian' names strike by their diversity, in clear contrast with the Graeco-Egyptian anthroponymy of that time, where names such as Apollonios, Apollinarios, Ammonios, and Sarapion recur with monotony. Apparently there was no problem of homonymy among those mentioned, and so no need for patronymics.⁹⁴

The quantities in these texts are expressed in Egyptian units, artabas (around 40 litres) and *matia* (here, 1 *artaba* = 12 *matia*). One *artaba* is the standard monthly ration in Roman Egypt for a soldier as well as, for

87. Herodian 6.4.7.

88. *I.Philae* II 180–81 = *FHN* III 265–66.

89. *I.Philae* II 181.3.

90. *Historia Augusta*, Tyranni triginta 22 = *FHN* III 282.

91. See *P.Oxy.* LXXIV 4996–98, introduction.

92. J. Schwartz, 'Les Palmyréniens et l'Égypte', *BSAA* 40 (1953), pp. 63–81 at 74–75.

93. See on these names further the paper of Satzinger, this volume.

94. One possible exception, where I am tempted to read the beneficiary's name as Πατερ υἱοῦ Ιεραβουκ, is *O.Xer.* inv. 336.

instance, for a quarry No such standardizati ciary vary from 2 *mat* frequently allocated: 5 *matia*: forty-one oc gets the impression th uted according to two one where it equals 10 These two scales do r ciary: some multiple l How the individual a

All the vouchers b in the same hand as t case, it would be eith or the name of the of in which case this offi Greek and his secreta could also be the trar the Greek σεσημειωμ vouchers are intended first sight that a 'barb: reinforce its value as : is anyway.

To end this discussi at one representative e

(ἔτους) ια// Φαρμουθι
Ενγοσαρεκ υπ(ερ) ονέ
ἀρτ(άβης) ἡμισου, γί(ν)
4 σαῖα ἀρτ(άβης) ἡμισοι
Μαχ ἀρτ(άβης) ἡμισο
μάτ(ια) πέντε, γί(νεται)
τρία, γί(νεται) μ(άτια)

8 ωευρευεξ.

11th year, 25 Pharmo
half an *artaba* of wt
artaba of wheat, equa
in the name of Khoia
matia, equals 3 *m.*, <
Oeureux.

We shall end this c general observations.

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ad the beneficiary's name as

instance, for a quarry worker or an imperial slave in Mons Claudianus. No such standardization is seen here. Quantities allocated to one beneficiary vary from 2 *matia* to 2.5 artabas. However, three amounts are more frequently allocated: 0.5 *artaba* (= 6 *matia*): fifty-two occurrences; 5 *matia*: forty-one occurrences; 2.5 *matia*: seventeen occurrences. One gets the impression that rations (if the term 'ration' is correct) are distributed according to two scales: one where the *artaba* equals 12 *matia*, and one where it equals 10 *matia* (both artabas are attested in Roman Egypt). These two scales do not seem to depend upon the status of the beneficiary: some multiple beneficiaries receive submultiples of both artabas. How the individual amounts were calculated is unknown.

All the vouchers bear the enigmatic subscription $\omega\epsilon\upsilon\rho\epsilon\upsilon\epsilon\zeta$, written in the same hand as the rest of the text. Is it a personal name? In that case, it would be either the name of the scribe who issued the voucher, or the name of the official who decided who would receive how much, in which case this official, Oeureuex, would not have been able to write Greek and his secretary would have subscribed for him. But $\omega\epsilon\upsilon\rho\epsilon\upsilon\epsilon\zeta$ could also be the transliteration of a 'barbarian' formula equivalent to the Greek $\sigma\epsilon\sigma\eta\mu\epsilon\acute{\iota}\omega\mu\alpha\iota$ ('I have signed') or $\epsilon\ddot{\upsilon}\delta\omicron\kappa\omega$ ('I agree'). Since the vouchers are intended for the eyes of a Greek reader, it sounds absurd at first sight that a 'barbarian' formula could be transliterated, but it could reinforce its value as a mark of authentication, which this subscription is anyway.

To end this discussion of the formulae used in these texts, let us look at one representative example, O.Xer. inv. 374 (Fig. 3):

- (ἔτους) ια// Φαρμουθι κ̅ε. μέτρ(ησον)
Ενγοςᾶρεκ ὑπ(ὲρ) ὀνόμ(ατος) Μακακ πυρ(οῦ)
ἀρτ(άβης) ἡμισου, γί(νεται) (πυροῦ ἀρτάβης) (ἡμισ), καὶ ὑπ(ὲρ) ὀνόμ(ατος) Χαν-
4 σαῖα ἀρτ(άβης) ἡμισου, γί(νεται) (πυροῦ ἀρτάβης) (ἡμισ), καὶ ὑπ(ὲρ) ὀνόμ(ατος)
Μαχ ἀρτ(άβης) ἡμισου καὶ ὑπ(ὲρ) ὀνόμ(ατος) Χοῖαπ
μάτ(ια) πέντε, γί(νεται) μ(άτια) ἑ, καὶ ὑπ(ὲρ) ὀνόμ(ατος) Ινκνετ μάτ(ια)
τρία, γί(νεται) μ(άτια) β̅, γί(νεται) (πυροῦ ἀρτάβαι) β̅ μ(άτια) β̅.
8 $\omega\epsilon\upsilon\rho\epsilon\upsilon\epsilon\zeta$.

11th year, 25 Pharmouthi. Measure out to Engosarek, in the name of Makak, half an *artaba* of wheat, equals ½ art., in the name of Khansaia, half an *artaba* of wheat, equals ½ art., in the name of Makh, half an *artaba* of wheat, in the name of Khoiap five *matia*, equals 5 m., in the name of Inknet, three *matia*, equals 3 m., <grand total> 2 art. of wheat 2 m.
Oeureuex.

We shall end this overview of the vouchers from Xeron with some general observations. The formula ὑπ(ὲρ) ὀνόμ(ατος) τοῦ δεῖνος is

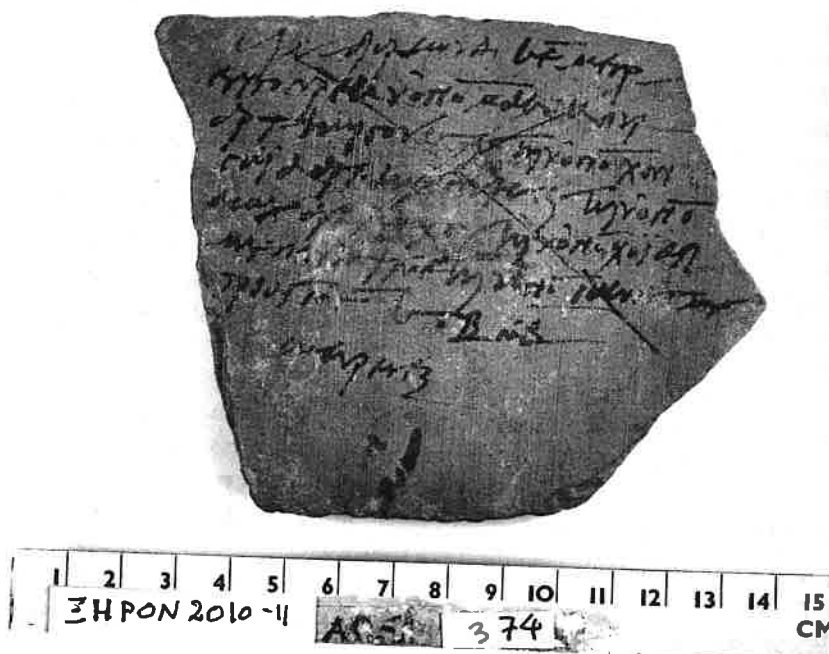


Figure 3. O.Xer. inv. 374 (photograph A. Bülow-Jacobsen).

well-known in tax-receipts from the second century onwards, but I have spotted no instance of it in an order for delivery. The idea which springs to mind is that the wheat is intended for the beneficiaries who, for some reason, did not come themselves to take it, but who sent other persons instead. There are fifty-two middlemen at the most (slightly less if some names are variant spellings). All have 'barbarian' names, except for one, who is a woman, Herakleia. Only two middlemen are given vouchers on two different days: Iantatos on the 22nd and 23rd, and Sogod on the 22nd and 24th. Beneficiaries, with a total of around 110, are twice as numerous as middlemen. Most have 'barbarian' names, but eight bear Roman,⁹⁵ at least three Greek,⁹⁶ and six Egyptian names.⁹⁷ Either some beneficiaries were not *barbaroi*, or they were acculturated, however this may be understood.⁹⁸ Some middlemen also act as beneficiaries in five cases, where

they withdraw for themselves appears as a beneficiary or the name of Masakin) with akleia is not the only woman Tamenrou (and Tamodo Mounkha[.] are also reveal pronoun.⁹⁹ Perhaps many nian' names. The fact that at wonder whether these women wheat they had withdrawn.

The scribe's working method systematic approach. When several beneficiaries, the scribe vouchers as there are beneficiaries several beneficiaries are given (is ten). This seems to depend the 22nd, Herakleia is given for eleven beneficiaries (one On the same day, Emporet i more) beneficiaries. Only instead of enumerating the $\text{ὕπ(ερ) ὀνομα(άτων) ἐπιβαλλ}$ to him/are his responsibilities Serekhem. On the same day three different beneficiaries. occasional effort at synthesis acts as middleman on the 22 one beneficiary, and the other nated several times as beneficiary same voucher.¹⁰⁰ Even if it always different.¹⁰¹ This seen by beneficiaries, but the latter

Finally, the sum of distribution and 1 *mation*, that is, around

95. Aprianus, Atius, Aurelius, Berenicianus, Claudius, Cornelius, Petronius, and Turannius.

96. Epagathos, Dioskoros, Komaros, and maybe Megalos, Morous, and Leda (the latter, if her name is Greek, as it seems, is a woman).

97. Kouei, Pebo, Tamenrou, Taphtaph, Tbokhini, and Khemmin.

98. Cf. Petronius the *barbaros*, who repairs *saqiya*-pots in Koptos, above, pp. 185–86.

99. In O.Xer. inv. 784, Koko is In O.Xer. inv. 367, Mounkha[.] is a 'in her own name'.

100. The woman Koko in O.Xe

101. E.g. on the 22nd, Aprianus three different middlemen: Bekr (5 *matia*), and Phada (3 *matia*).

they withdraw for themselves. To these cases, we could add Masaki, who appears as a beneficiary on the 22nd (middleman Aei) and who (under the name of Masakin) withdraws wheat for Khemmin on the 23rd. Herakleia is not the only woman in these texts. The morphology of the name Tamenrou (and Tamodora?) denotes a woman, while Koko and Mounkha[.] are also revealed as such thanks to the feminine anaphoric pronoun.⁹⁹ Perhaps many more women are hidden behind these 'barbarian' names. The fact that at least two 'middlemen' are women makes one wonder whether these women were not supposed to make bread with the wheat they had withdrawn.

The scribe's working method betrays a puzzling lack of a synthetic and systematic approach. When one middleman has to withdraw wheat for several beneficiaries, the scribe can write, even on the same day, as many vouchers as there are beneficiaries. But it also happens that the names of several beneficiaries are grouped on one voucher (the maximum number is ten). This seems to depend, not on the day, but on the middleman: on the 22nd, Herakleia is given ten vouchers with which she will withdraw for eleven beneficiaries (one voucher is in the name of two beneficiaries). On the same day, Emporet is given one voucher with the names of six (or more) beneficiaries. Only on the 23rd does the scribe use a shortcut: instead of enumerating the names of several beneficiaries, he writes ὑπ(ἐρ) ὀνομ(άτων) ἐπιβαλλόντων αὐτῷ, 'in the names of those who fall to him/are his responsibility'. But he proceeds so only for Iantatos and Serekhem. On the same day, three vouchers are issued to Terpou, for three different beneficiaries. This would seem to confirm the idea that the occasional effort at synthesis depended on the middlemen. Iantatos also acts as middleman on the 22nd: two vouchers are given to him, one with one beneficiary, and the other with three. Fourteen persons are designated several times as beneficiaries, often on the same day, once on the same voucher.¹⁰⁰ Even if it is on the same day, middlemen are almost always different.¹⁰¹ This seems to indicate that middlemen are not chosen by beneficiaries, but the latter are assigned to middlemen at random.

Finally, the sum of distributed amounts is 901 *matia*, or 150 artabas and 1 *mation*, that is, around 5820 litres, which would have taken

99. In *O.Xer. inv.* 784, Koko is allocated a second ration: ὑπ(ἐρ) τῆς αὐτ(ῆς) Κωκω. In *O.Xer. inv.* 367, Mounkha[.] is allowed to withdraw wheat ὑπ(ἐρ) ὀνό[μ(ατος)] αὐτῆς 'in her own name'.

100. The woman Koko in *O.Xer. inv.* 784, see the previous footnote.

101. E.g. on the 22nd, Aprianus appears as beneficiary in three vouchers issued to three different middlemen: Bekrabie who must receive 5 *matia* for him, Godenat (5 *matia*), and Phada (3 *matia*).

ow-Jacobsen).

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Cornelius, Petronius, and
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mmin.
Optos, above, pp. 185-86.

twenty-five camels to carry to Xeron.¹⁰² Evidently, this amount is a minimum, since many other vouchers must have disappeared. Which exceptional circumstances led to this distribution? What special service had the *barbaroi* rendered to the Roman garrisons? We shall probably never know.

The Ethnicity of the Third-Century Barbaroi

As we have seen, Baratit calls himself ὑποτύραννος of the *barbaroi*. The word *barbaros* is not a simple noun here (as it may have been in the second-century ostraka), but serves as an ethnic. Could Baratit be a scion of the *barbaroi* mentioned, along with the Ichthyophagoi, Agriophagoi, and Moschophagoi, in the *Periplus Maris Rubri*? The *Periplus* situates all these peoples in the βαρβαρική χώρα which extends south of Berenike.¹⁰³ Βαρβαρική χώρα is a generic phrase designating the territory of several peoples, but *barbaroi* may refer to a specific people:¹⁰⁴ they occupy the inner part of the βαρβαρική χώρα, whereas the Ichthyophagoi are on the coast and the Agriophagoi and Moschophagoi are 'after' (beyond?) the *barbaroi*; these peoples are organized in τυρρανίδες. However, the text as it stands does not prevent us from understanding *barbaroi* in its usual meaning, that is, as an indefinite noun referring to a people, or to peoples, whose name the author does not know. The *Periplus* does not use the ethnics Arabes, Trogodytai, or Blemmyes.

The date of the vouchers invites consideration of the possibility that the *barbaroi* in the third-century ostraka were Blemmyes (who are alternatively called *barbaroi* in later sources, as any hostile, 'uncivilized' outsiders can be).¹⁰⁵ Arguments in favour of this hypothesis are:

1) The fact that Blemmyes are active in Upper Egypt from the middle of the third century onwards (although the literary sources are not as reliable as one would wish). The earliest date is 249–51, if the fantastic account of the *Chronicon Paschale* which records that Decius repelled Nubians and Blemmyes from Egypt, with the help of snakes and hermaphrodites, is a distorted recollection of real events.¹⁰⁶ Blemmyan

activity is better documented in *Augusta*, but also Zosimos.¹⁰⁷ These events seen in the context of troop movements are noted in N. XII 1412. The first text of Oxyrhynchite ἐπιμελητήριον have given to soldiers. The receipt had been issued is lost, but prosopography nos. 279 and 284.¹¹⁰ It is a note of Oxyrhynchus for supplies for the soldiers intended for Upper Egypt even fifty years later than the first century.

2) The fact that the title of ὑποτύραννος is almost exclusively for Egypt from the fifth-century historical sources (from the fifth century), and three centuries later (from the sixth century).¹¹¹ According to three hierarchical degrees of authority (the ὑποτύραννος and φύλαρχος/τύραννος refers to a specifically Blemmyan ὑποτύραννος/τυρραννίς are the tribes and their chiefs.¹

107. *Historia Augusta* Probus. See discussion by J.H.F. Dill, *A Regional Study of Religion in the Roman Empire*, p. 137, and 'Blemmyes, Nubians and the Roman Empire', p. 137.

108. In this context, see also the discussion of the 'Blemmyes' in the *Chronicon Paschale*.

109. F. Mitthof, *Annona und Verwaltung in der Provinz Aegypten*, p. 137, and 'Blemmyes, Nubians and the Roman Empire', p. 137.

110. Mitthof, *Annona und Verwaltung*, p. 137.

111. Priscus, fragment 27 Blockley (= *FHN* III 33: 13.10 = *SB* XVIII 13633 = *F* *Philae and the End*, p. 166, a note on the text).

112. Cf. in the area the title of ὑποτύραννος in the *Chronicon Paschale* (I. Philae), the peoples south of Berenike, Blemmyes and Noubades, to 27 Blockley (= *FHN* III 318).

102. In Egypt, the usual charge for a camel is 6 artabas.

103. *Periplus Maris Rubri* 2. The *Periplus* is concerned only with the foreign countries encountered by sailors after leaving the Egyptian Red Sea ports, and therefore does not mention desert dwellers in Mons Berenicidis.

104. This is how L. Casson, *The Periplus Maris Erythraei. Text with Introduction, Translation, and Commentary* (Princeton, 1989), p. 98 understands the text.

105. E.g. Priscus, fragment 27 Blockley (= *FHN* III 318); Procopius, *Persian Wars* I.19.30, 33, 34, 36 = *FHN* III 328.

106. *Chronicon Paschale*, pp. 504–505 Dindorf.

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activity is better documented c. 280, when, according to the *Historia Augusta*, but also Zosimus, Blemmyes, as allies of Ptolemais, seize Kop-
 tos.¹⁰⁷ These events seem to be confirmed (although the reasons for the
 troop movements are not specified) by two papyri, *P.Oxy.* VIII 1115 and
 XII 1412. The first text contains the copy of a receipt delivered to two
 Oxyrhynchite ἐπιμεληταί¹⁰⁸ for 38,496 [*modii* (?)] of bread which they
 have given to soldiers and sailors gathered in Panopolis. The original
 receipt had been issued on 11 January 281.¹⁰⁹ The date of the second text
 is lost, but prosopographical evidence implies that it should be between
 279 and 284.¹¹⁰ It is a notification to attend a special meeting of the coun-
 cil of Oxyrhynchus for an urgent matter: the upstream transportation of
 supplies for the soldiers. The direction of the supplies shows that they are
 intended for Upper Egypt. However, these events are some sixteen or
 even fifty years later than the vouchers from Xeron.

2) The fact that the title ὑποτύραννος in *O.Did.* 41 is otherwise known
 almost exclusively for Blemmyes: apart from the ostrakon, it appears in
 the fifth-century historian Priscus, the Phonen letter (c. second half of
 fifth century), and three of the Gebelein documents (last quarter of the
 sixth century).¹¹¹ According to these late texts, ὑποτύραννος is the lowest
 of three hierarchical degrees, the other two being βασιλεύς/βασιλίσκος
 and φύλαρχος/τύραννος. However, the argument that ὑποτύραννος
 refers to a specifically Blemmyan organization is not compelling, because
 τύραννος/τυρραννίς are the usual words in Greek to designate nomadic
 tribes and their chiefs.¹¹²

107. *Historia Augusta* Probus 17.2–3 = *FHN* III 284; Zosimus 1.71.1 = *FHN* III 323.
 See discussion by J.H.F. Dijkstra, *Philae and the End of Ancient Egyptian Religion. A Regional Study of Religious Transformation (298–642 CE)* (OLA 173; Leuven, 2008),
 p. 137, and 'Blemmyes, Noubades and the Eastern Desert', p. 241.

108. In this context, superintendents responsible for the execution of public
 services.

109. F. Mitthof, *Annona militaris. Die Heeresversorgung im spätantiken Ägypten. Ein Beitrag zur Verwaltungs- und Heeresgeschichte des Römischen Reiches im 3. bis 6. Jh. n.Chr.* 1 (*Papyrologica Florentina* 32; Florence, 2001), p. 382, is the first to relate this
 papyrus to Probus' campaign against the Blemmyes.

110. Mitthof, *Annona militaris* 1, p. 374.

111. Priscus, fragment 27 Blockley (= *FHN* III 318); *SB* XIV 11957.15 = *FHN* III 319;
BKU III 350.13 = *FHN* III 331; *SB* III 6257 = *SPP* III² 132.7 (= *FHN* III 336); *P.Köln Ägypt.*
 13.10 = *SB* XVIII 13633 = *FHN* 339. For discussion of these attestations, see Dijkstra,
Philae and the End, p. 166, and the paper of Dijkstra, this volume, p. 318.

112. Cf. in the area the τύραννος of the Triakontaschoinos instituted by Cornelius
 Gallus in 29 BCE (*I.Philae* II 128 = *FHN* II 164), the organization in τυρραννίδες of
 the peoples south of Berenike (*Periplus Maris Rubri* 2), and the τύραννοι of both the
 Blemmyes and Noubades, to whom ὑποτύραννοι are subordinated, in Priscus, fragment
 27 Blockley (= *FHN* III 318).

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 , Part 2: The Last 2500 Years',
 Cf., however, K. Krzywinski,

If we nevertheless admit that several clues point in the direction of a connection between the third-century *barbaroi* of the Berenike road and Blemmyes, we should wonder why Baratit calls himself ὑποτύραννος of the *barbaroi*, a pejorative term, and not 'of the Blemmyes'. I would suggest that the ethnic 'Blemmyan' may at that time not yet have achieved its semantic evolution, towards a general sense of Eastern Desert dweller of African descent. In Eratosthenes, followed by Strabo, who in turn is followed by Ptolemy, Βλέμμυς 'Blemmyan' has a restrictive meaning and designates a nomadic people of the Nubian Eastern Desert, as distinct, for instance, from the Megabaroï. In sources from Late Antiquity, by contrast, Blemmyes are ubiquitous, while the other ethnics have vanished.¹¹⁹ It is difficult to decide whether this lexical standardization results from political conditions (the short-lived Blemmyan 'kingdom' in the fourth-fifth centuries, which may have consisted of a confederation of tribes which had different names but pushed forward the ethnic Blemmyan), or from the nature of our sources (the changes that occurred in the Eastern Desert from the third century onwards were not recorded by scientific expeditions as in Graeco-Roman times, a period of expansion and intellectual curiosity).¹²⁰ In any case, Blemmyes has become by then a generic term for African nomads.¹²¹ Although he presumably spoke some sort of Old Bedaue, the ὑποτύραννος Baratit probably did not consider himself as a Blemmyan (either because he was not one in the old restrictive sense, or because Blemmyan had not imposed itself yet as a generic ethnic). And he did not insist on being called by his own ethnic which would have been too complicated for his Roman partners. Both parties may have preferred to keep things simple and straightforward.

Conclusion

In the Graeco-Roman period, the nomadic inhabitants of the Egyptian Eastern Desert originated from northern Arabia as well as from the Nubian Eastern Desert. The African origin of the *barbaroi* in the third-century ostraka from Didymoi, Dios, and Xeron is well-established thanks to their anthroponymy and their association with Eastern Desert

'The Eastern Desert Tombs and Cultural Continuity', in Barnard and Duistermaat, *History*, pp. 140–55 at 151–54, for an opposite view.

119. Dijkstra, 'Blemmyes, Noubades and the Eastern Desert', pp. 239–40.

120. Cf. Dijkstra, 'Blemmyes, Noubades and the Eastern Desert', pp. 246–47, who argues for the first option.

121. The earliest occurrence of the ethnic Blemmyan with the new, generic meaning is found in *Panegyrici Latini* 11.17.4 = *FHN* III 279 (dated to 291), therefore about half a century before the Blemmyan 'kingdom'.

Ware. Were the *barbaroi* mentioned in the second-century ostraka also Africans? Probably, at least in Mons Berenicidis: the *barbaroi* who raided travellers according to Trajanic ostraka are probably cousins of those Agriophagoi against whom the prefect Sulpicius Serenus led a *Blitzkrieg*, and whom the *Periplus Maris Rubri* locates south of Berenike.¹²² In fact, if we accept the hypothesis that 'pan graves' are related to the Medjay, and that the Medjay are the ancestors of the Blemmyes/Beja, it appears that African nomads have been roaming the Egyptian Eastern Desert quite far to the north since time immemorial.¹²³

Did they progress as far as Mons Claudianus and Umm Balad? It can only be remarked that, roughly at this latitude,¹²⁴ Pliny locates the *Asaraei* (variant spellings *Abasaei*, *Asarri*) and defines them as *Arabes* who have been made wilder by intermarriage with *Trogodytae*.¹²⁵ This notation could reflect the fact that, in this region, Arabs from the Sinai and the northern Arabian Peninsula and African nomads had met (and stopped each other's progress?).¹²⁶ It also reflects an awareness, on the part of the ancient authors, that, although their idea of *Arabes* (and also of *Trogodytai*) was not clear, these people were ethnically different. This awareness is similarly shown by the fact that, in his praise of Cleopatra's linguistic abilities, Plutarch distinguishes the Arabic, Ethiopic, and Trogodytic languages.¹²⁷ In Plutarch's text, Ethiopic must be Meroitic, and Trogodytic the ancestor of Beja/Bedaue.

122. See above, pp. 177 and 194.

123. Krzywinsky, 'Eastern Desert Tombs'.

124. At some distance north of Myos Hormos.

125. Pliny, *Natural History* 6.168.

126. Today the ethnic border between African Ababda and Arab Ma'aza (who have come from the Arabian Peninsula in the eighteenth century) is the Qift-Quseir road. T. Power, 'The "Arabians" of Pre-Islamic Egypt', in Starkey, Starkey, and Wilkinson, *Red Sea III*, pp. 192–210 at 202 observes that literary sources of the fourth–seventh centuries suggest that Arabs settled as far as the Wadi 'Araba (which leads to St Antony's monastery), but archaeological finds (Byzantine huts, Eastern Desert Ware) compels him to also place the limit between Arabs and Blemmyes at the Qift-Quseir road. See also Power, 'Saracen Settlement', p. 338.

127. Plutarch, *Life of Antony* 27.4 = *FHN* III 218, on which see Desanges, 'Arabes et Arabie', p. 428.

TH ON THE THIRD

The 'barbarian' name of the Eastern Desert, could be Blemmyan names are mentioned in the first century found in the Tal and Coptic leather documents could be identified with the names look similar. The names are subjected to comparison with that of the le

In recent excavations in the Eastern Desert of Egypt, the names of the Blemmyes, among other ostraka, were written in 232 or 264 AD. These texts raise the question of the language of these people. The first name that comes to mind is Blemmye. To compare the names from the ostraka with the names that are known from the literary sources, we explore whether a relation

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There is Blemmye in the literary sources: inscriptions of the first century, and papyrol

1. See paper Cuvigny, 'The Blemmyes in the Eastern Desert', in par