

THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE PASTORAL NOMADS BETWEEN THE NILE AND THE RED SEA

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The archaeology of Egypt has long been overshadowed by the wealth of textual sources, from monumental to informal, further augmented by the relatively early translation of hieroglyphic Egyptian and the initial emphasis on finds of museum quality. Initially, Egyptian archaeology was perceived as a technique to find more texts and objects, while archaeological observations were readily explained from the textual data. Only recently has the archaeology of Egypt become a specialism in its own right, generating its own specific data, although often still haunted by legacies of the past. The latter also concerns the study of the pastoral nomads that regularly occur in the Egyptian textual records, most famously the *Medjay* during the Middle Kingdom (1975–1640 B.C.) and the *Blemmyes* in Greco-Roman and Byzantine times (332 B.C.–A.D. 641). These groups are often associated with specific archaeological phenomena; the *Medjay* with the pan-graves, so called because they are shaped like a frying pan; the *Blemmyes* with Eastern Desert Ware, well-burnished hand-made cups and bowls with incised decorations.

A recent study of Eastern Desert Ware, which included chemical analysis of the ceramic matrix and the organic residues in the vessels, as well as ethnography and experimental archaeology, indicated that it was probably made and used by a group of pastoral nomads, but did not provide any evidence toward their identification nor an association with any specific group mentioned in the textual sources. Such is further hampered by the scholarly interest in the remains left in the Eastern Desert by outsiders, miners, traders and quarry-men, while little research has been done on the pastoral nomads living in the area. The archaeological study of the latter requires a specialized approach, combining the study of ephemeral campsites and low-density surface scatters with data on the environment, the available resources, and the routes of the nomads. This methodology will be very similar for the study of pastoral nomads, mobile groups of hunter-gatherers, or sections of a settled population that have temporarily been displaced. Specialists in these fields should work together to come to an archaeology of mobility to increase our understanding of people on the move.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Egypt is not just a gift of the Nile, as famously stated by Herodotus, but also of the deserts surrounding it (Friedman 2002). At the end of the Holocene pluvial period (or Holocene “wet phase,” 8500–5300 B.C.) the desiccation of North Africa drove most of the mobile herder-hunter-gatherers inhabiting the area into the Nile Valley, where they settled and gave rise to the Pharaonic civilization (Kuper 2006; Kuper and Kröpelin 2006). The desert west of the Nile, the Libyan or Western Desert, became all but uninhabitable save for a few oases (such as Fayum, Siwa, Bahariya, Farafra, Dakhla, Kharga, Kufra, and Salima). In contrast, the

desert between the Nile and the Red Sea, the Nubian or Eastern Desert, has no oases but can support a small number of inhabitants due to shallow aquifers that are replenished by occasional rainfall in the Red Sea Hills (Kaper 1998; Krzywinski and Pierce 2001). As Pharaonic Egypt developed, any communal memory of the past quickly disappeared and was replaced with respectful apprehension for the vast arid areas referred to as “dšr.t” (*desheret* = red land) and a deep affection for “km.t” (*kemet* = black land), the fertile Nile Valley that was previously mostly avoided because of its marshes and dangerous wildlife (Butzer 1997; Kuper and Kröpelin 2006). As a consequence, the inhabitants of the desert were usually mistrusted. The fear for the desert and the marginalization of its inhabitants carried on into modern times, in Egypt and beyond. On the other hand, there were frequent contacts between the population of the Nile Valley and the desert dwellers, at times hostile but more often friendly (Adams 1984; Barnard 2005; Cappers 2006; Christides 1980; Dafa‘alla 1987; Dahl and Hjort-af-Ornas 2006; Dijkstra 2008; Eide et al. 1998; Giuliani 1998; Hafsaas 2006; Kaper 1998; Krzywinski and Pierce 2001; Lassányi 2005; Sadr 1987, 1990; Sidebotham, Barnard, and Pyke 2002; Updegraff 1988; Zibeli-Chen 2007). Cooperation included the employment of the desert dwellers as mercenaries, guards, or guides and their aid with the harvest, in exchange for part of the yield and the right to have their flocks graze on the stubbles afterward, leaving their droppings as fertilizer for the next crop. The desert dwellers are also known to have brought medicinal herbs, charcoal of the species *Acacia*, and of course their animals to markets in the Nile Valley, as they still do today (Cappers 2006; Dahl and Hjort-af-Ornas 2006; Kaper 1998; Krzywinski and Pierce 2001; Sidebotham, Barnard, and Pyke 2002).

In Egypt, the enormous wealth of Pharaonic monuments and the early translation of Egyptian hieroglyphs (in 1822–1824 by Jean-François Champollion, partly based on the work of Thomas Young, Johan David Åkerblad, and the baron Silvestre de Sacy) have long overshadowed the archaeology of settlements and daily life. Historical and archaeological research each produces data sets that can be analogous, complementary, or contradictory (Bietak 1979; Rosen 2006; Wendrich et al. 2006). These different sources of information should be pursued more or less independently, although their confrontation can serve as an additional heuristic tool, and one cannot replace the other, or be considered superior. The dearth of archaeological data is all the more significant in areas not comprehensively covered by the texts, such as pastoral nomads or the Eastern Desert. Here we are confronted with extremely limited information, written by outsiders and strongly biased toward a settled life in the Nile Valley, which nevertheless dominates the interpretation of the relevant archaeological finds (table 2.1). At the very beginning of his monumental work on the Middle Nile region, Adams writes that “Egypt at the lower end of the Nile has the longest recorded history in the world. Inner Africa, at the headwaters of the same river has almost the shortest. Nubia, the land between, alternates for 5,000 years between history and dark ages” (Adams 1984: 1). During that time, Nubia was often perceived as a potential threat to the ancient Egyptian universe and often amalgamated with the Eastern Desert, not only by ancient authors but subsequently also in the minds of modern scholars. The authority of the written sources is thus responsible for the ongoing ambiguous association of people, archaeological objects, and even places both with Nubia and with the Eastern Desert (Barnard 2005; Burstein 2008). The fact that much of our current knowledge is based on research done within the framework of the UNESCO International Campaign to Save the Monuments of Nubia, working in Lower Nubia before it was lost under the water of Lake Nasser in the 1960s (Bietak 1966; Rieke 1967; Strouhal 1984; Williams 1983), only adds to this confusion.

MEDJAY AND PAN-GRAVES

Three groups are usually associated with the Eastern Desert: the Medjay (in Pharaonic times), the Blemmyes (in Greco-Roman times), and the Beja (in modern times). The Medjay (*mdꜣj.w*, fig. 2.1; Faulkner 1962; Gardiner 1947) are mentioned in a number of Egyptian sources, mostly dated to the Middle Kingdom and the Second Intermediate (Hyksos) Period (table 2.1), but they also feature in earlier and later texts (Bietak 1966; Giuliani 1998; Hafsaas 2006; Sadr 1990; Zibelius-Chen 2007). From these, they appear to be part of a southern Nilotic, “Nubian,” and dark-skinned conglomerate (Gardiner 1947; Giuliani 1998; Hafsaas 2006; Posener 1958), or to live as pastoral nomads in the Eastern Desert (Bietak 1966; Hafsaas 2006; Sadr 1990; Smither 1945). Elsewhere, especially in later texts, “*mdꜣj.w*” seems to refer to mercenaries (bowmen) or guards, often without obvious ethnic connotation (Bietak 1966; Gardiner 1947; Zibelius-Chen 2007). Such different modern interpretations of one ancient Egyptian term could indicate changes over time (Bietak 1966; Hafsaas 2006; Sadr 1990), or the simultaneous existence of different sections of the same ethnic group (Sadr 1987, 1988, 1990). More likely, however, it results from the ancient classification system, in which ethnic terms were differently defined and less static than expected from a modern point of view (Barnard 2007; Burstein 2008; Dolukhanov 1994; Hutchinson and Smith 1996; Jones 1997; Mayerson 1993; Ratcliffe 1994; Rosen 2006; Sadr 1990; Yinger 1994). Instead of referring to an entity resembling a nation-state, “*mdꜣj.w*” was probably used in a way closer to modern and equally problematic terms like “Gypsy” or “Jew” (Barnard 2005; Kershaw 1998: 563–72).

Other ancient Egyptian names of nomadic groups include “Aamu” (now usually placed in the Sinai and said to have survived by cattle raiding; Weinstein 1975), “*jwntj.w*” (Cairn-people, although descriptive is believed to refer to a specific ethnic group, like the Medjay said to be bowmen from the Eastern Desert; Behrens 1982; Lansing 1947; Meredith 1957), and “Tjehenu” or “Tjemehu” (now usually identified as Libyans, but said to be at war with Nubian peoples; Breasted 1962; Murray 1965). More general terms for (pastoral) nomads include “*ḥrjw.š*” (sand-people), “*nmjw.š*” (sand-walkers) and “*ḥtjw.t*” (vagabonds); these could possibly have been used for representatives of more than one of the peoples mentioned above. The existence of such descriptive terms suggests that the other terms, with no obvious meaning in ancient Egyptian, are based on a foreign language. These terms could indeed have referred specifically to a certain people, like modern “Beja” (Barnard 2007; Dahl and Hjort-af-Ornas 2006). They could also have been related to the lifestyle of segments of the group, such as “Bedouin” (Cole 2003), or have a more complicated etymology like “barbarian” (βάρβαρος), originally an ancient Greek derogatory onomatopoeia with no previous meaning in any language; or “Eskimo” (Algonquian for “eaters of raw meat” or Montagnais for “speakers of a different language,” Mailhot 1978), a pejorative taken from the language of a third people.

Two often cited ancient texts that mention the Medjay are the *Biography of Weni (Uni)* and the *Semna Dispatches*, dated circa 2250 B.C. and circa 1800 B.C. respectively. The *Biography of Weni* was carved into a slab of limestone that was part of the tomb or cenotaph in Abydos for the high government official Weni, who served under Pharaohs Teti, Pepi I, and Merenre (Sixth Dynasty). Near the beginning of the text, Medjay are listed among the people recruited for the army of Pepi I, as part of a larger group, the *Nḥsyw*, which is alternatively interpreted as “southerners,” “Nubians,” or “colored people.” Near the end of the text, the rulers of the Medjay are said to have provided some of the wood for the seven boats that Pharaoh Merenre requested of Weni (Giuliani 1998; Lichtheim 1975). The *Semna dispatches* are a collection

of official missives from occupied Nubia, written during the reign of Pharaoh Amenemhet III (Seventh Dynasty) and shortly afterwards copied onto a length of papyrus that was found in a Middle Kingdom tomb on the grounds of the Ramesseum (near Luxor) in 1896. Medjay occur in several of the dispatches, when they arrive from the desert or are encountered on its edge (Sadr 1990; Smither 1945). The latter source may indeed refer to (pastoral) nomads, but seems hardly consistent with the former, while neither provides a basis for the proposed link between the Medjay and the pan-graves.

Pan-graves were first described at Hu (ancient Seshesh, the capital of the seventh *nome* of Upper Egypt, between modern Denderah and Abydos) and later found in relative abundance in Lower Nubia, the Nile Valley between the First and Second Cataracts (fig. 2.2; Bietak 1966; Hafsaas 2006; Sadr 1987, 1990). Originally they were interpreted as atypical manifestations of the C-Group (table 2.1), later they were recognized to represent a contemporaneous but distinctly different group: the Pan-Grave Culture (Bietak 1966; Säve-Söderbergh 1941). Pan-graves are round to oval pits in which the body of the deceased is buried, in a crouched position, on its right side with the head either to the north or to the west (fig. 2.3; Bietak 1966; Friedman 2001, 2004; Hafsaas 2006; Sadr 1987, 1990; Säve-Söderbergh 1941). Some graves are lined or covered with stones or have a simple superstructure, others preserve evidence that the burial was preceded by the application of resins or ashes to the floor of the grave (Friedman 2001, 2004; Hafsaas 2006). Grave goods usually include pan-grave pottery (fig. 2.3), mostly hand-made bowls characterized by thin walls, thick rims, and cross-hatched incisions (Bietak 1966; Kemp 1977; Williams 1983). Other gifts include weapons, bracelets and necklaces of seashell beads, sometimes with characteristic “spacers” (Bietak 1966: pls. 32, 36; Hafsaas 2006: pl. 7), and, often in a secondary pit, one or more painted skulls of goats, gazelles, or cattle (fig. 2.4; Friedman 2001, 2004; Hafsaas 2006). Pan-grave cemeteries are usually small, although cemeteries with more than 100 pan-graves have been described at Dibeira and Ashkeit, near the Second Cataract, and at Mostagedda (north of Abydos). Most are some distance from the Nile, others are located on the fringes of cemeteries of the C-Group (Bietak 1966; Hafsaas 2006; Sadr 1987, 1990).

Scholars often connect the pan-graves with the Medjay (Adams 1984; Bietak 1966, 1979; Friedman 2001; Hafsaas 2006; Sadr 1987; Säve-Söderbergh 1941, but see Friedman 2004; Sadr 1990), an association that is reflected in more popular scientific literature (Berg and Berg 1998). This conclusion was originally based on the abundance of weapons in the pan-graves near the Egyptian forts in Lower Nubia and the robust appearance of the bones, which led to the inference that these must be the graves of Medjay mercenaries known from the historical sources (Bietak 1966, 1979; Sadr 1987; Säve-Söderbergh 1941). The fact that these Medjay were considered to be directly related to the pastoral nomads of the Eastern Desert was seen reflected in the shell beads, mostly of Red Sea *Nerita* and *Conus* sp., and the interment of animal crania (Bietak 1966; Friedman 2001, 2004; Hafsaas 2006; Posener 1958; Sadr 1987, 1990).

There are obviously several problems with this interpretation (Bietak 1966; Sadr 1990). First is that the Medjay feature in the ancient sources from the Old to the New Kingdom, while most pan-graves were relatively securely dated, by associated finds, to the Second Intermediate Period (table 2.1). This could be explained by assuming that pan-graves and the associated material culture went in and out of fashion among the Medjay. Funerary practices, however, are usually an essential part of the cultural heritage or ethnic identity of a people and tend to be preserved throughout their history. Second is the distribution of the graves (fig. 2.3), which were mostly found in or very near the Nile Valley, on both the east and the west bank,

and not in the Eastern Desert proper. Intensive archaeological surveys in the Kassala area of eastern Sudan (fig. 2.3) have revealed many potsherds with great similarity to those of the Pan-Grave Culture (Sadr 1987, 1988, 1990). These were dated to around 1500–1000 B.C., just after pan-graves and Medjay disappear from the Egyptian archaeological and historical records. The producers and users of these vessels were identified as the Mokram Group, after Mount Mokram near Kassala. This shows that archaeological research of the pastoral nomads in this area, although at times logistically and politically vexing, is technically eminently possible (Bar-Yosef and Khazanov 1992; Chang and Koster 1994; Cribb 1991; Sadr 1988; Veth, Smith, and Hiscock 2005; Wendrich and Barnard 2008). The relationship between the Mokram Group and the Pan-Grave Culture of the archaeological record, or the Medjay of the historical sources, however, remains unclear (Sadr 1988, 1990). Third, as discussed above, “mḏj.w” may not have referred to a political, ethnic, or cultural entity that can be connected one-to-one with a corpus of archaeological finds. Finally, there is no evident reason to connect the archaeological finds with the Medjay, rather than with the Aamu, “jwntj.w” or the Tjehenu (Tjemehu), or even the “ḥrjw.š’,” the “nmjw.š’,” or the “ḥtjw.t.” There may have been a group of people in ancient Egypt that was specifically identified, or identified themselves, as “mḏj.w” and it is possible that the pan-graves were indeed constructed by groups of pastoral nomads, but their equation can only be assumed and is, so far, quite tentative.

BLEMMYES AND EASTERN DESERT WARE

An argument remarkably similar to that on Medjay and pan-graves above can be made concerning the proposed connection between the Blemmyes (Βλέμμενες or Βλέμνες) of the Greco-Roman sources on Egypt and its hinterland, dating from 332 B.C. to A.D. 641 (table 2.1), and Eastern Desert Ware (fig. 2.5; Bietak 2006; Rose 1995; Sidebotham and Wendrich 1996, 2001). The Blemmyes appear in the historical record between 620–600 B.C., on the enthronement stele of King Anlamani, and A.D. 500–600, in the so-called “Blemmyan documents” (Barnard 2005, 2007; Burstein 2008; Christides 1980; Dafa‘alla 1987; Eide et al. 1996, 1998, 2000; Krall 1900; Lassányi 2005; Updegraff 1988; Vycichl 1958; Zaborski 1989). They are depicted as “nomads and neither many nor warlike” (Strabo 17.1.53–54) and are “reported to have no heads, their mouths and eyes attached to their chests” (Pliny the Elder, *Natural History* 5.46). More comprehensive sources, such as Procopius’ *De Bellis*, Priscus (fragment 21), and Olympiodorus (quoted in Photius, *Bibliotheca* 80, 62a9–26), describe the Blemmyes as living in a kingdom (or chiefdom) in Lower Nubia (Dijkstra 2008; Updegraff 1988), but somehow controlling the *Mons Smaragdus* region in the Eastern Desert (fig. 2.6), or as brigands raiding Egypt and Lower Nubia (presumably from the surrounding desert). This again illustrates both the confusion between Nubia and the Eastern Desert and the problems with understanding ancient ethnographies from a modern perspective (Barnard 2005, 2007; Burstein 2008; Dolukhanov 1994; Hutchinson and Smith 1996; Jones 1997; Mayerson 1993; Ratcliffe 1994; Rosen 2006; Sadr 1990; Yinger 1994). Many more names of people that appear to live a nomadic life in the Eastern Desert are mentioned in the written sources, including Adulites, *Akridophagoi* (Locust-eaters), Annoubades, Balahau, Bougaites, Catadupians, *Elephantophagoi* (Elephant-eaters), *Ichthyophagoi* (Fish-eaters), *Kreophagoi* (Meat-eaters), *Kynamolgoi* (Dog-milkers), Nobatai, Noubades, Noubai, *Rhizophagoi* (Root-eaters), *Spermaphagoi* (Seed-eaters), *Strouthophagoi* (Ostrich-eaters), *Troglodytes* (Cave-dwellers), and Trogodytes (Barnard 2005, 2007; see also Murray and Warmington 1967).

Only few contemporary texts have been preserved that may contain reliable information on the Blemmyes (Barnard 2005, 2007; Eide et al. 1998, 2000). Two often cited are the *Inscription of Silko* and the *Letter of Phonen*, dated to around A.D. 450. The inscription of Silko is incised in the west wall of the forecourt of the temple of Mandulis at Kalabsha (ancient Talmis near Aswan). It celebrates the victories of Silko, “Little King (βασιλίσκος) of all Aithiopians,” over the Blemmyes and the Noubades, allowing him to occupy their cities (Eide et al. 1998). The letter of Phonen, found in 1976 in Qasr Ibrim (in Lower Nubia), is written on papyrus in poor Greek which makes it rather difficult to interpret (Eide et al. 1998). It was written by Phonen, who identifies himself as King (βασιλεύς) of the Blemmyes, and is addressed to Abourni, King of the Noubades, and his sons. Phonen acknowledges the conquering of Talmis (Kalabsha) by Silko and Abourni respectively and claims this city back, together with its temple and surrounding lands, in exchange for a ransom of silver, sheep, and camels (part of which has apparently already been paid). This letter is a rare instance of self-definition as Blemmyes, probably because Phonen, writing in a language that was obviously not his own, chose this convenient term to classify himself, much like a Chief of the Navajo may identify himself as Indian, Native American, Navajo, or as an inhabitant of *Diné* (the Navajo Nation), Arizona or the United States of America, all depending on the context. It is more remarkable that Phonen claims to be king, with all the implications associated with such a title, and demands his belongings back, notably a city in the Nile Valley. All this seems hardly concurrent with the notion of the Blemmyes as pastoral nomads and marauders roaming the Eastern Desert and it certainly provides no basis for the proposed link between the Blemmyes and Eastern Desert Ware (EDW).

Eastern Desert Ware vessels are hand-made cups and bowls that are usually smoothed or burnished and frequently decorated with impressed or incised decorations (fig. 2.5). Their remains have been found in fourth to sixth-century A.D. contexts in the Nile Valley between the First and the Fifth Cataract, as well as in the Eastern Desert between there and the Red Sea coast (fig. 2.6). Eastern Desert Ware invariably forms only a small percentage of the ceramic finds, the majority being the remains of Cream Ware and Red Ware associated with the Late Meroitic Nubia (table 2.1; Barnard 2007; Strouhal 1984), or with Egyptian Red Slip A and B associated with Late Roman Egypt (table 2.1; Barnard 2007; Tomber 1998, 1999). Eastern Desert Ware has now been studied in some detail (Barnard 2006; Barnard and Rose 2007), including chemical analysis of the ceramic matrix and the organic residues in the vessels (Barnard, Dooley, and Faull 2006; Barnard and Magid 2006; Barnard and Strouhal 2004), as well as ethnographic and experimental archaeology (Barnard 2008). It was concluded that Eastern Desert Ware was probably made and used by one of the indigenous groups in the area at the time, which is concurrent with earlier assumptions based on more cursory studies of the material (Luft et al. 2002; Ricke 1967; Rose 1995; Sidebotham and Wendrich 1996, 2001). The identification of this group with the Blemmyes, however, remains problematic for the same reasons that the pan-graves cannot readily be associated with the Medjay.

Like the Medjay, the Blemmyes feature in the historical sources well before and after Eastern Desert Ware appears in the archaeological record (Barnard 2005, 2007). Furthermore, Eastern Desert Ware is found far outside the area in which the written sources seem to place the Blemmyes, near or in the Nile Valley between the First and Second Cataracts (fig. 2.6; Barnard and Rose 2007; Burstein 2008; Dijkstra 2008; Updegraff 1988). Obviously, pottery can be traded over long distances (Tomber 1998, 1999), either for its contents or its intrinsic value; and production methods, shapes, and styles can change rapidly without an evident relation to historical events (Adams et al. 1979). On the other hand, the highly recognizable

appearance of Eastern Desert Ware, which comprised mostly serving vessels, would have set its users apart and it may well have functioned as a cultural or ethnic marker (Barnard 2007; Barnard and Rose 2007; Smith 2008). Like “mḏꜥj.w,” Βλέμμυες did probably not refer to a political, ethnic, or cultural entity, but was more likely used as a convenient term to talk about outsiders (Barnard 2005), or to outsiders if the need for that occurred (as, for instance, in the case of Phonen). And again, there is no apparent reason to connect the archaeological finds, including the tumulus graves (sometimes referred to as *ekratels*) in the desert (Krzywinski and Pierce 2001; Sadr et al. 1994; Strouhal 1984) in which Eastern Desert Ware has been found and several enigmatic petroglyphs in the Eastern Desert (Barnard 2007; Huyge 1998; Winkler 1938), with the Blemmyes rather than with any of the many other groups mentioned in the ancient sources.

MEDJAY = BLEMMYES = BEJA?

Although the Eastern Desert continues to desiccate and human activity has caused considerable ecological degradation during the last century (Colston 1879; Floyer 1893; Krzywinski and Pierce 2001; Vermeeren 1999, 2000), the region can still support a number of nomadic and semi-nomadic inhabitants (Cappers 2006; Dahl and Hjort-af-Ornas 2006; Hobbs 1990; Keimer 1951, 1952a–b, 1953a–b, 1954a–b; Krzywinski and Pierce 2001; Magid 2008; Murray 1935; Paul 1954; Wendrich 2008). Many of them are considered, and also consider themselves, part of the Beja confederacy; others are Ma‘aza or Rashaida Bedouin, who came from the Arabian Peninsula during the eighteenth and nineteenth century A.D. (Hobbs 1990; Paul 1954). The Beja conglomerate is an amalgam of clans and tribes, including the Ababda, Amarar, Arteiga, Ashraf, Beni Amer, Bishareen, Fellata Melle, Hadendowa, Halenga, Hamran, Hassanab, Kammalab, Kimmeilab, Melhitkinab, Morghumab, Shaiab, and the Sigolab (fig. 2.6, table 2.2). Many speak Arabic as a first or a second language, others the Cushitic (Afro-Asiatic) *Beja* language (*To-Badawi*) or the Semitic *Tigre* (*Xasa*). Some are pastoral nomads, herding sheep, goats, and camels; many others are semi-nomadic cattle herders, settled agriculturalists, or day-laborers. It is often stated that the Beja are the direct descendents of the Blemmyes and the Medjay and have lived in the Eastern Desert since time immemorial (Dahl and Hjort-af-Ornas 2006; Zibelius-Chen 2007). This seems to be supported by elements of their material culture (fig. 2.7), but in fact replaces the “tyranny of texts” (Rosen 2006), discussed above, with a “tyranny of ethnography” (Wobst 1978), as this point of view is based on the misapprehension that the mobile groups in the past were identical or very similar to the pastoral nomads in the desert today (Bernbeck 2008; Burstein 2008; Khazanov 1984; Saidel 2008; Wobst 1978). Our annotations and connotations with words like “nomad,” “Bedouin,” “tribe,” and “clan” may be too much influenced by modern biases (Abu-Lughod 1989; Bar-Yosef and Khazanov 1992; Barnard and Wendrich 2008; Cole 2003; Porter 2002; Ratnagar 2003; Salzman et al. 1999; Veth, Smith, and Hiscock 2005), effectively denying the modern pastoral nomads at least 4,500 years of ethnic, cultural, and historical development, while at the same time freezing the people of the past in both space and time.

The iconic Bedouin “black tent” (بيت الشعر, *bayt al-sha‘ar*), although not often seen in the Eastern Desert, may be a relatively recent phenomenon (Saidel 2008), whereas the Medjay did not raise camels, the Blemmyes did not drink coffee, and neither adhered to the Muslim faith. There has been a constant influx of people into the area (Christides 1980; Dafa‘alla 1987; Dahl and Hjort-af-Ornas 2006), Ma‘aza Bedouin and Banu Kanz from the north (the Arabian Peninsula and Mesopotamia; Adams 1984; Hobbs 1990), Rashaida Bedouin from the

east (the Arabian Peninsula; Paul 1954), *Tigre* speakers and Funj from the south (Eritrea and the Sudd; Adams 1984), and possibly also groups from the Nile Valley, such as the Medjay (Sadr 1987, 1990). Others seem to have left for the Nile Valley, as reflected in the historical sources, and presumably also elsewhere. Cultural developments include the constant adjustments of the inhabitants of the Eastern Desert to the changing climate and ecology of the region, their conversion to Christianity and later Islam, and the introduction of camels, coffee, the Arabic language, and, more recently, plastic containers, cars, and cellular telephones into the area (Krzywinski and Pierce 2001; Wendrich 2008). Contacts with the successive kingdoms, empires, and governments must have also left their traces on the desert communities (table 2.1; Adams 1984; Barnard 2007). Even if the modern dwellers of the Eastern Desert have preserved remnants of the past (fig. 2.7; Cappers 2006), these are appreciated very differently now than they were during a previous era, like our Christmas trees and Easter eggs. The difficulties with the interpretation of the data have led some to denounce the use of ethnoarchaeological research and parallels in the study of ancient mobile people (Bernbeck 2008; Wobst 1978), whereas others urge to do so only with great caution (Bar-Yosef and Khazanov 1992; Cribb 1991; Saidel 2001; Wendrich 2008). One thing that may be inferred from comparing the present and the past is that the ethnic and cultural landscape of the Eastern Desert was always a patchwork of interlinking groups and that the history of the region is far more complex than that of the three static groups now usually associated with the area (tables 2.1–2).

It is also often maintained that the current (nineteenth–twentieth century A.D.) Beja culture is disappearing because of the increasing influence of the outside world (Cappers 2006; Dahl and Hjort-af-Ornas 2006; Krzywinski and Pierce 2001). Such remarks echo the notion of the “noble savage” and implicitly deny the Beja access to their cars and telephones, but also modern education and health care (Barnard 2007; Wendrich 2008). The fact that the culture of the Beja can “disappear” or, in more positive terms, adapt and develop, illustrates how similar changes happened in the past and will continue to happen in the future. The society of the dwellers of the Eastern Desert was never frozen in time or more rigid than that of the inhabitants of the Nile Valley (table 2.1). Like the Medjay and the Blemmyes and all other groups mentioned above, the Beja deserve the recording and study of their culture and history, but they also deserve to be the principal agents of their own destiny.

TOWARD AN ARCHAEOLOGY OF MOBILITY

Further research on the available archaeological material and data is unlikely to produce significant new insights into the history of the Eastern Desert and, unless substantial new textual sources are discovered, the historical research on the region seems exhausted. Archaeological research in Lower Nubia, between the First and Second Cataracts, is no longer possible and the same is true for the area between the Fourth and Fifth Cataracts after the Merowe High Dam near Hamdab will be closed in 2008. The data collected during the rescue excavations in this area, similar to the UNESCO International Campaign to Save the Monuments of Nubia, will be published in the near future and shed more light on life in the Eastern Desert in ancient times (Welsby and Anderson 2004). Much more can be expected, however, from additional archaeological and ethnographic work in the Eastern Desert itself as the archaeological research in this area has so far mostly concentrated on the quarries, mines, settlements, roads, and petroglyphs left by outsiders, while much of the ethnographical research has looked for the simplistic parallels discussed above.

During the past decades the anthropological theory on the relationship between the settled majority and the mobile minority in the Near East has developed from the permanent conflict reflected by the historical sources to the more symbiotic relationship that can be deduced from archaeological and ethnoarchaeological data. Our current terminology, with fixed categories for mobile and sedentary groups, is no more applicable to the ancient situation, in which these groups were even more intertwined, than to the present situation. Much like the ancient ethnic names, such as Medjay and Blemmyes, do not correspond with our modern use of similar terms, so may our understanding of words like “clan,” “tribe,” “Bedouin,” or “nomad” not correspond to reality (Abu-Lughod 1989; Bar-Yosef and Khazanov 1992; Barnard and Wendrich 2008; Cole 2003; Porter 2002; Ratnagar 2003; Salzman et al. 1999; Veth, Smith, and Hiscock 2005). It has recently been appreciated that nomadic people are not archaeologically invisible (Childe 1951; Finkelstein 1992, but see Rosen 1992), but leave traces that are discernible and often specific for a nomadic way of life (Bar-Yosef and Khazanov 1992; Barnard and Wendrich 2008; Chang and Koster 1994; Cribb 1991; Haiman 1995; Rosen and Avni 1993; Veth, Smith, and Hiscock 2005). New archaeological tools and techniques (such as GoogleEarth, geographic information systems, chemical residue analysis, and fingerprinting, etc.), and techniques adapted from other scientific disciplines (such as geology, paleontology, climatology, statistics, etc.) will dramatically increase the amount of sites and artifacts, as well as the information gleaned from them (Barnard, Dooley, and Faull 2006; Barnard and Strouhal 2004; Sadr 1987, 1988, 1990; Sadr et al. 1994; Wendrich and Barnard 2008). Only after such an archaeology of mobility has been developed, applied to the Eastern Desert as well as to selections of finds from that region, and confronted with the historical sources in a heuristic rather than a bellicose fashion (Bietak 1979; Rosen 2006; Wendrich et al. 2006), can the above issues be comprehensively addressed and more convincing associations be made between the Medjay, the Blemmyes, and the archaeological record of the Eastern Desert. Until then, the inadequate links between material culture and historical terminology must be severed to allow each discipline to freely expand and interpret its own specific data set. We must keep in mind that archaeology, ethnography, and history are independent disciplines that will produce different narratives. Inferring links between those is often too simplistic to be heuristic and we must be prepared to find that it may prove impossible to pinpoint the material culture of all the groups mentioned in the historical sources, or to connect all archaeological finds to a specific name from those sources.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Sincere thanks are due to Jitka Barochová, Manfred Bietak, Roswitha Egner, Sharon Herbert, Knut Krzywinski, Anwar Abdel-Magid, Richard Pierce, Elfriede Reiser-Haslauer, Pamela Rose, Valery and John Seeger, Steve Sidebotham, Jana Součková, Eugen Strouhal, Roberta Tomber, Isabella and Derek Welsby, and Henry Wright, for making the necessary material available; to Ram Alkali, Alek Dooley, Kym Faull, Hector Neff, and Dave Verity, for their help with the analysis of Eastern Desert Ware; to Anna Barnard-van der Nat, Kym Faull, Hector Neff, and Chip Stanish, for their logistical and financial support; to Jacco Dieleman, Jitse Dijkstra, and Claudia Näser, for their comments; and to Willeke Wendrich, for her unending encouragement and love.

Southeast Egypt		Northeast Sudan		Eastern Desert	
Lower Paleolithic 500,000–100,000 B.C.					
Middle Paleolithic 100,000–35,000 B.C.					
Upper Paleolithic 35,000–20,000 B.C.					
Late Palcolithic 20,000–8,000 B.C.					
Epipaleolithic (Mesolithic) 8000–6000 B.C.					
Early Neolithic 6000–5000 B.C.					
Prehistoric Egypt	Fayum–Badarian 5000–4200 B.C.	Khartoum Neolithic 5000–3000 B.C.			
	Merimde–Naqada 4200–3100 B.C.	A-Group 3800–3000 B.C.	Khartoum Neolithic		
	Predynastic Egypt 3100–2575 B.C.	Lower Nubia Depopulated?	Pre-Kerma Culture 3000–2500 B.C.		
Pharaonic Egypt	Old Kingdom 2725–2125 B.C.	C-Group 2300–1520 B.C.	Kingdom of Kerma 2500–1520 B.C.	Medjay	
	First Intermediate Period 2125–1975 B.C.				
	Middle Kingdom 1975–1640 B.C.				
	Second Intermediate Period (Hyksos) 1630–1520 B.C.				
	Pan-Graves				
	New Kingdom 1540–1075 B.C.				
	Third Intermediate Period 1075–715 B.C.	Kingdom of Napata (Kushite Kingdom) 1075–300 B.C.			
	25th Dynasty 770–657 B.C.				
	Late Period (Persian Invasions) 664–332 B.C.				
Greco-Roman Egypt	Ptolemaic Empire 332 B.C.–A.D. 30	Kingdom of Meroe (Kushite Kingdom) 300 B.C.–A.D. 350		Blemmyes	
	Roman Empire A.D. 30–330				
Eastern Desert Ware					
Byzantine Egypt	Byzantine Empire A.D. 330–616	Kingdom of Nobatia (Ballana Culture) A.D. 300–700	Kingdom of Makuria (protected by the <i>baqt</i>) A.D. 500–1323		
	Persian Invasion A.D. 616–628				
	Byzantine Empire A.D. 629–641				
Islamic Egypt	Rashidun Caliphs A.D. 641–658	Banu Kanz (Awlad Kenz) A.D. 1323–1517			
	Umayyad Caliphate A.D. 658–750				
	Abbasid Caliphate A.D. 750–969				
	Fatimid Caliphs A.D. 969–1171				
	Ayyubid Sultanate A.D. 1171–1250				
Mamluk Sultans A.D. 1250–1517					
Ottoman Egypt	Ottoman Empire A.D. 1517–1798		Sultanate of Sinnar (Funj) A.D. 1504–1821		
	Invasion of Napoleon A.D. 1798–1801				
Modern Egypt	Khedives and Kings of the Dynasty of Mohamed Ali Mohamed Ali (1805–1848)–Fu'ad II (1952–1953)			Beja	
	Increasingly Controlled by the British Empire		Mahdi Revolt A.D. 1883–1898		
	Unilateral Independence 22 February 1922	Anglo-Egyptian Sudan A.D. 1899–1956			
	Republic of Egypt 18 June 1953				
	Full Independence 18 June 1956	Republic of Sudan 1 January 1956			

Table 2.1. General Chronology of the Lower and Middle Nile Region from 500,000 B.C. to 1956, also Indicating the Three Groups Generally Believed to Have Inhabited the Desert between the Nile Valley and the Red Sea (after Adams 1984; Baines and Malek 2000; Barnard 2007) as well as the Finds usually Associated with Them. Note the Extremely Limited Differentiation in the History of the Eastern Desert (on the far right)

<i>Beja Clans and Tribes</i> (after Murray 1935: 423; Paul 1954: 137–39; Wendrich 2008: 513–15)				<i>Ancient Desert Dwellers</i> (after Eide et al. 1996, 1998)
CLAN (<i>aila, wasm</i>)		TRIBE (<i>qabila, bayt</i>)		
ABABDA(?)	Bilalab	‘Amirab		Aamu
		Batranab		Adulites
		Firhanab		<i>Akridophagoi</i> (Locust-eaters)
		Jahadab		Annoubades
		Jidalab		Balahau
		Kiriab		Blemmyes
		Rajabab		Bougaites
		Saadallab		Catadupians
		Selimab		<i>Elephantophagoi</i> (Elephant-eaters)
		Tamanab		<i>ħrjw.š</i> ‘ (Sand-people)
		Zeidab		<i>ħtjw.t</i> ‘ (Vagabonds)
	Haranaab			<i>Ichthyophagoi</i> (Fish-eaters)
	Hareinab	Hareinab		<i>jwntj.w</i> (Cain-people)
		Nafaiab		<i>Kreophagoi</i> (Meat-eaters)
	‘Ibudiyeen			<i>Kynamolgoi</i> (Dog-milkers)
	Jileiliyeen			Medjay
	Meleikab	Meleikab		<i>nmjw.š</i> ‘ (Sand-walkers)
		Fuqara		Nobatai
	Muhammedab	‘Abdeinab		Noubades
		‘Amranab		Noubai
		‘Atiyaiab		<i>Rhizophagoi</i> (Root-eaters)
		‘Adwallaiab		<i>Spermaphagoi</i> (Seed-eaters)
		Edidanab		<i>Strouthophagoi</i> (Ostrich-eaters)
		Faraiab		Tjehenu
		Fishaiab		Tjemehu
		Hameidab		<i>Troglodytes</i> (Cave-dwellers)
		Jaralab		Trogodyte

Table 2.2. Selection of Known Ethnic Names Associated with the Dwellers of the Desert between the Nile Valley and the Red Sea Coast at Present (on left) and in the Past (on far right). The Social Organization in Ancient Times May Prove Difficult to Reconstruct from the Historical and Archaeological Records

<i>Beja Clans and Tribes</i> (after Murray 1935: 423; Paul 1954: 137–39; Wendrich 2008: 513–15)				<i>Ancient Desert Dwellers</i> (after Eide et al. 1996, 1998)
CLAN (<i>aila</i> , <i>wasm</i>)		TRIBE (<i>qabila</i> , <i>bayt</i>)		
		Jubranab		<i>jwntj.w</i> (Cain-people)
		Malakab		
		Rahalab		
		Siedanab		
		Shafab		
		Sheinab		
		Shuweimab		
	Shanatir			
	“Broken Tribes”	Anqaraiaab		
		Hamei		
		Heteimiyah		
		Hukm		
		Kimeilab		
		Qireiab		
AMARAR	Amarar	Esheibab		
		Fadlab		
	Otman	Ailaib	Arfoiab	
			Keilab	
			Manfolab	
			Minniab	
		Gwilai	Abdel Rahimab	
			Abdel Rahmanab	
			Musiab	
			Omar Hassanaiaab	
			Sindereit	
		Kurbab		
		Nurab		
ARTEIGA				
ASHRAF				
BENI AMER	Egeilab			
	Hadareb	Ad al Khasa		
		Ad Kokoi		
		Beit Awat		
		Beit Goreish		

<i>Beja Clans and Tribes</i> (after Murray 1935: 423; Paul 1954: 137–39; Wendrich 2008: 513–15)				<i>Ancient Desert Dwellers</i> (after Eide et al. 1996, 1998)
CLAN (<i>aila, wasm</i>)		TRIBE (<i>qabila, bayt</i>)		
		Beit Musa		
		Hadoigoboiab		
		Labat		
		Libis		
		Sinkatkinab		
		Sogaiet		
	Nabtab			
	Tigré	Abhasheila		
		Ad Fadil		
		Aflanda		
		Almada		
		Asfada		
		Hamasein		
		Meikal		
		Rigbat		
		Targeila		
		Wilinnoho		
BISHAREEN	Umm Ali	Alaib		
		Amrab		
		Hamadorab		
		Shinterab		
	Umm Nagi	Adloiab		
		Batran		
		Eiraiab		
		Garab		
		Hammadab		
		Madakir		
		Mansurab		
		Mashbolab		
		Nafi’ab		
		Wailaliab		
FELLATA MELLE(?)				
HADENDOWA	Beiranab			
	Buglinai			
	Bushariab			
	Emirab			
	Gemilab			

<i>Beja Clans and Tribes</i> (after Murray 1935: 423; Paul 1954: 137–39; Wendrich 2008: 513–15)				<i>Ancient Desert Dwellers</i> (after Eide et al. 1996, 1998)
CLAN (<i>aila, wasm</i>)		TRIBE (<i>qabila, bayt</i>)		
	Gerʿib			
	Gurhabab			
	Hakolab			
	Hamdab			
	Kalolai			
	Meishab			
	Rabamak			
	Samarandowab			
	Samarar			
	Shaboidinab			
	Sharaʿab			
	Tirik			
	Wailaliab			
HALENGA				
HAMRAN				
HASSANAB				
KAMMALAB				
KIMMEILAB				
MELHITKINAB				
MORGHUMAB				
SHAIAB				
SIGOLAB				

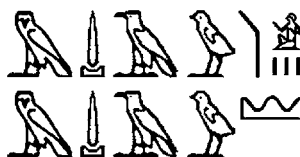


Figure 2.1. *Md3j.w* (Medjay; Faulkner 1962; Gardiner 1947) Is Written with the Bound Prisoner or the Throw Stick and Seated Man Determinatives (top), in this Context Signifying Enemies of Egypt (Redford 1963), or with the Foreign Land Determinative (bottom), Indicating a Geographical Area outside the Egyptian Heartland (the Nile Valley north of Aswan)

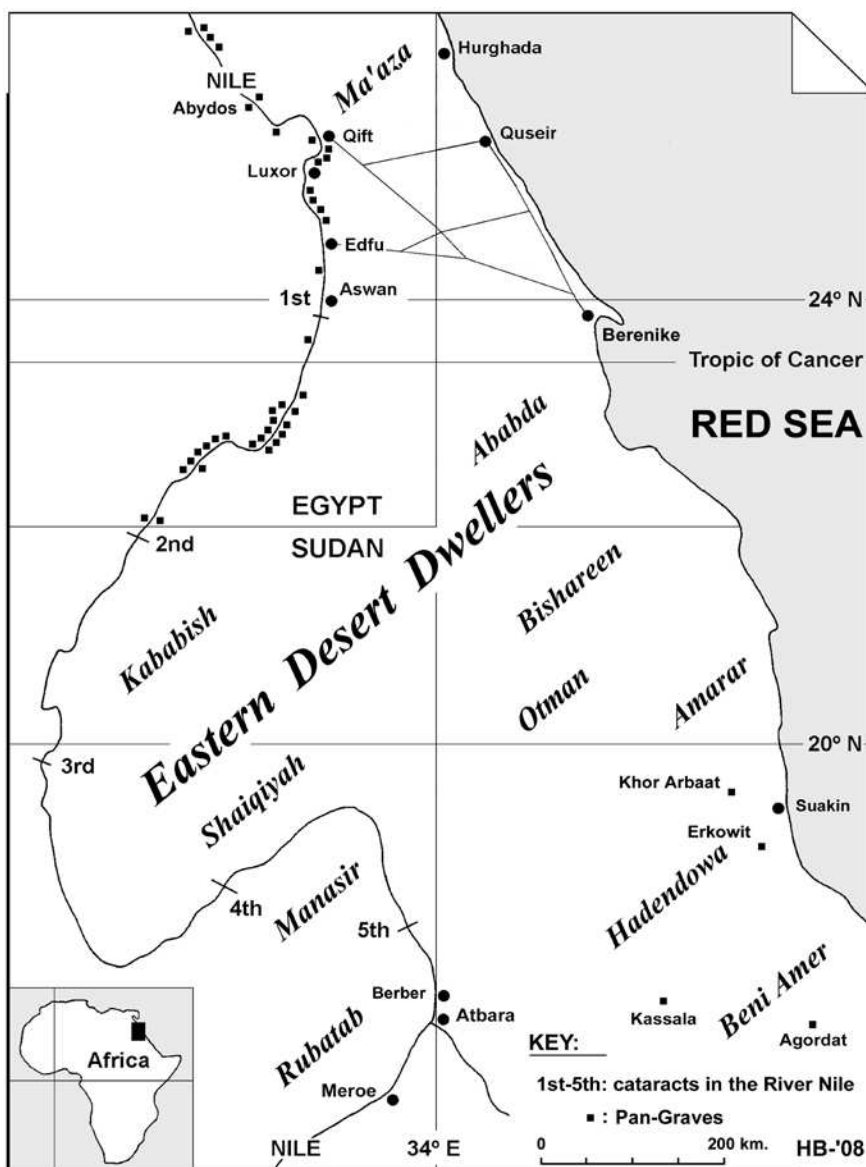


Figure 2.2. Map of Southern Egypt and Northern Sudan, Showing the Distribution of Pan-graves (after Bietak 1966: 66; Sadr 1987: 266), as well as the Approximate Territories of the Modern Bedouin Tribes in the Area (after Hobbs 1990; Magid 2008: 442; Paul 1954; Sadr 1988: 386)

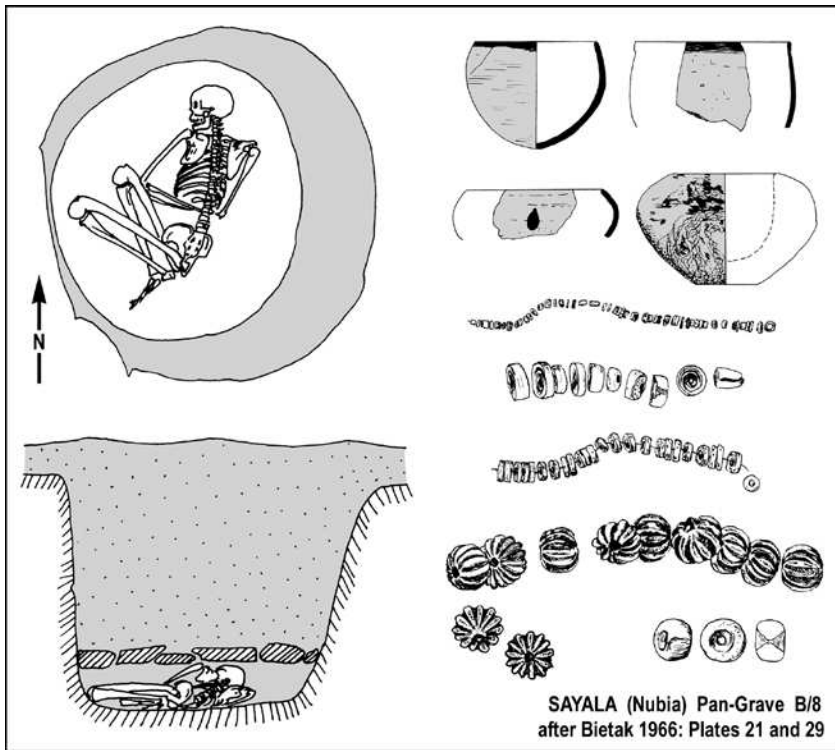


Figure 2.3. Layout of a Typical Pan-grave (B/8 in Sayala, Lower Nubia, now lost under Lake Nasser) with Associated Finds (after Bietak 1966: pls. 21, 29)



Figure 2.4. Bucranium (41.5 × 75.0 cm) Decorated with Blocks and Bands of Red and Black Paint, White Dots Have Been Applied to the Red Areas. Found in a Pan-grave at Abydos in Contexts Dating to the Second Intermediate Period (1630–1520 B.C.), now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York), Roger Fund 1916 (16.2.23). Image courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art



Figure 2.5. Examples of Eastern Desert Ware (EDW), KHM 76918 is from Sayala (courtesy of the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna), EDW 17 is from Berenike, P 840 is from Wadi Qitna (courtesy of the Náprstek Museum, Prague) and EDW 234 is from Wadi Sikait in the Mons Smaragdus Region (after Barnard 2008: fig. 19.1)

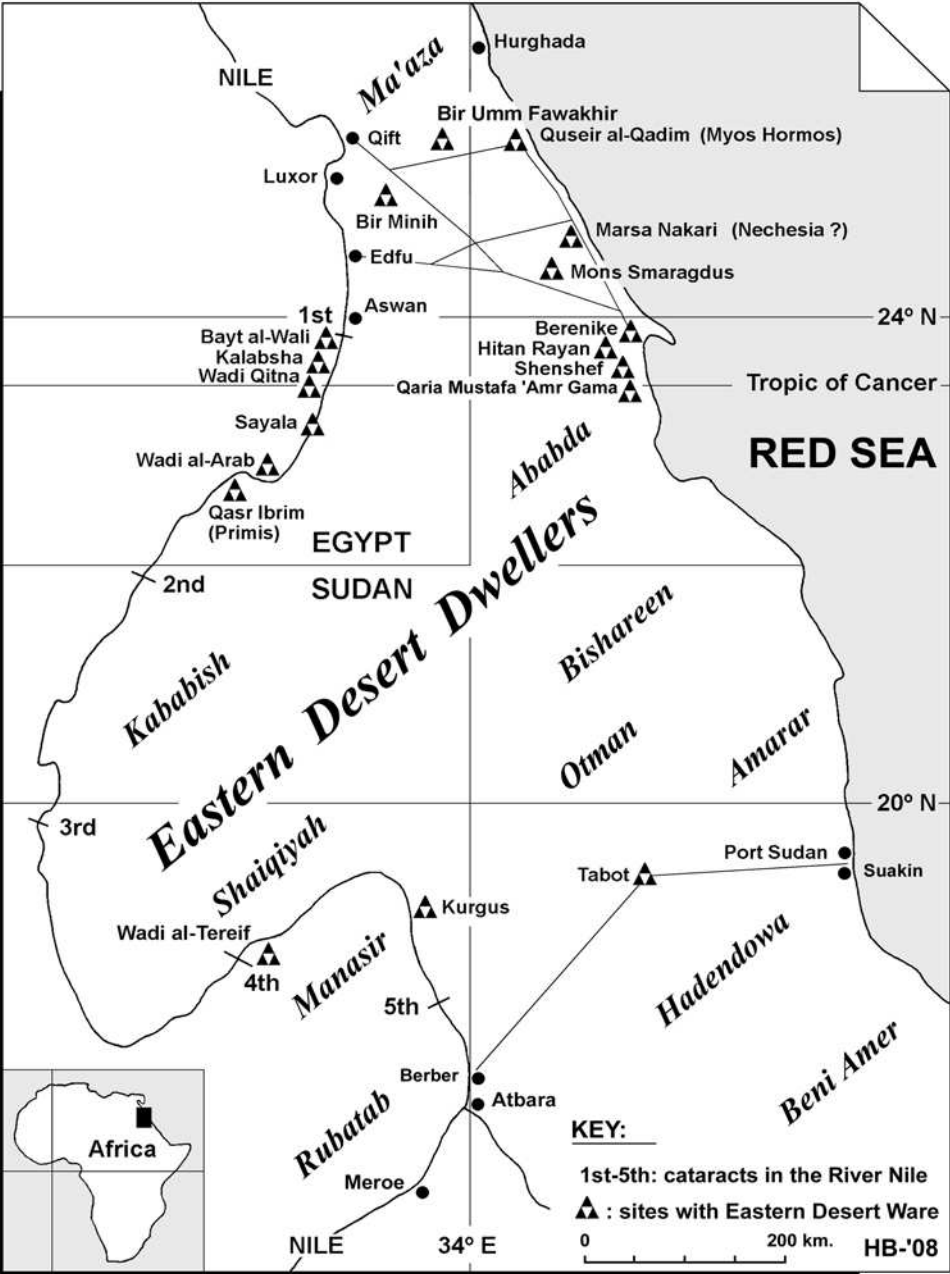


Figure 2.6. Map of Southern Egypt and Northern Sudan, Showing the Distribution of Eastern Desert Ware (after Barnard 2006; Barnard, Dooley, and Faull 2006; Barnard and Magid 2006; Barnard and Rose 2007; Barnard and Strouhal 2004), as well as the Approximate Territories of Some of the Modern Bedouin Tribes in the Area (after Hobbs 1990; Magid 2008: 442; Paul 1954; Sadr 1988: 386)



Figure 2.7. The Headrests Used by the Beja Show Great Similarity with Those Found in Ancient Egyptian Tombs and Have Been Interpreted as Evidence for Cultural Continuity (Cappers 2006; Dahl and Hjort-af-Ornas 2006; Hafsaas 2006; Keimer 1951, 1952a–b, 1953a–b, 1954a–b; Krzywinski and Pierce 2001; Zibelius-Chen 2007), Despite Evidence to the Contrary (Barnard 2005, 2007; Burstein 2008; Christides 1980; Cole 2003; Dafa‘alla 1987; Wendrich 2008). Photograph Courtesy of the EDAPP/Bayt al-Ababda Museum (after Wendrich 2008: fig. 23.7)

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