

**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**

**Netherlands-Flemish Institute in Cairo (NVIC), Zamalek Cairo  
Tuesday 25 - Thursday 27 November 2008**

**PROGRAM and ABSTRACTS**

**Tuesday 25 November 2008**

8:30- 9:00 Welcome and registration

Morning session: *The Natural Environment and Prehistory of the Desert*

Chair: Jennifer Gates-Foster

9:00- 9:30 K. DUISTERMAAT and H. BARNARD

Welcome, Announcements and Introduction

9:30-10:00 G.L. ANDERSEN

Vegetation and Management Regime Continuity in the Eastern Desert

10:00-10:30 K. PLUSKOTA

Bir Nurayet: A Rock Art Gallery in the Red Sea Hills

10:30-11:00 Coffee break

11:00-11:30 P.M. VERMEERSCH

Contributions to the Understanding of the Prehistory of the Egyptian Eastern Desert

11:30-12:00 F. LANKESTER

Rock Art in Egypt's Eastern Desert

12:00-12:30 D. HUYGE

Proto-Bedouin? Eastern Desert Dwellers in the Late Palaeolithic and Epipalaeolithic Periods

12:30-13:00 Knut KRZYWINSKI

The Eastern Desert Tombs and Continuity in Funerary Cult

13:00-14:00 Lunch

Afternoon session: *Development of Research and the Desert*

Chair: Michael Jones

14:00-14:30 Suzan Bakri HASSAN

Sustainable Desert Tourism: A Tool for Competition

14:30-15:00 Mohamed AL-AAWAH and C. DE SIMONE

The Establishment of a Trans-Boundary Biosphere Reserve in Wadi Allaqi

- 15:00-15:30 P. WESCHENFELDER  
Prolegomena to the Ethnohistory of the Eastern Desert Dwellers
- 15:30-16:00 Tea break
- 16:00-16:30 C. NÄSER  
Nomads at the Nile: Towards an Archaeology of Interaction
- 16:30-17:00 A.-K. RIEGER and Th. VETTER  
The Desert Dwellers of the Marmarica (Western Desert) as a Case Study for the Eastern Desert
- 17:00-18:00 Plenary discussion
- 18:00-20:00 Reception

### **Wednesday 26 November 2008**

Morning session: *The Graeco-Roman Heyday?*

Chair: Claudia Näser

- 8:30- 9:00 J.H.F. DIJKSTRA  
Blemmyes, Noubades and the Eastern Desert in Late Antiquity
- 9:00- 9:30 J.L. HAGEN  
Beside Christian Nubia and Muslim Egypt: The Blemmyes or Beja Around 758-759 CE According to Written Sources from Qasr Ibrim
- 9:30-10:00 B. TRATSAERT  
Wadi Bakariya: A Roman Gold Mine Settlement in the Eastern Desert of Egypt
- 10:00-10:30 J. GATES-FOSTER  
The Ptolemaic Eastern Desert in its Theban Context
- 10:30-11:00 Coffee break
- 11:00-11:30 A. REICHERT  
Rock Art in the Sinai and the Eastern Desert: A Methodological Approach
- 11:30-12:00 Jonatan KRZYWINSKI  
The Culture of the Blemmyes: A Graeco-Roman Construct or a Genuine Desert Culture?
- 12:00-12:30 Gábor LASSÁNYI  
On the Archaeology of the Late Antique Population of the Eastern Desert
- 12:30-13:00 R.H. PIERCE  
The Blemmyes, by Any Other Name...
- 13:00-14:00 Lunch

Afternoon session: *Guests in the Desert*

Chair: Francis Lankester

- 14:00-14:30 A.D. ESPINEL  
Gods in the Red Land: Developments of Cults and Pious Activities in the Eastern Desert
- 14:30-15:00 Rageh Z. MOHAMED  
Nabataeans in the Eastern Desert During the Roman Period
- 15:00-15:30 T. POWER  
The Material Culture and Economic Rationale of Sedentary Arabs in the Late Roman Eastern Desert of Egypt
- 15:30-16:00 Tea break
- 16:00-16:30 Monica HANNA, Fatma KISHK and Sarah ABU BAKR  
"Sinai:" Another Name for Cultural Exchange in the Mediterranean
- 16:30-17:00 K.M. KLEIN  
To See or Not to See: Invisible Monks, Human Eyes and the Eastern Desert in Late Antique Hagiography
- 17:00-17:30 M. JONES  
Nomadism and Monastic Life in the Eastern Desert of Egypt
- 17:30-18:00 Plenary discussion

#### **Thursday 27 November 2008**

- 10:00-13:00 Discussion with Ma'aza and Ababda Bedouin
- 18:00-19:00 Cleveringa Lecture by J.L. BINTLIFF  
Professor of Classical Archaeology at Leiden University (the Netherlands)  
followed by a reception
- The History of the Peoples in the Eastern Deserts of Egypt and Sudan,  
Summary and Discussion

The strip of land between the Red Sea and the Nile Valley in Egypt and Sudan is referred to as the Eastern Desert. The desertification of this region started with the end of the Holocene pluvial period and continues until today. The mobile hunter-herder-gatherers that left the region at the end of the Holocene pluvial period to settle in the Nile Valley are regarded as one of the driving forces behind the advent of Pharaonic civilization. The mineral wealth in the Eastern Desert has also attracted outsiders from early times onward, who in turn have been the focus of the attention of historians and archaeologists. The same is true for the trade routes that connected the Nile Valley with sub-Saharan Africa, Arabia Felix, India and the Land of Punt. Despite environmental degradation and scholarly neglect, the Eastern Desert has native inhabitants and a history of its own.

The study of the Eastern Desert is hampered by limitations in the textual sources, by ambiguous ethnographic parallels and by the low archaeological visibility of the remains of the desert dwellers. Many studies have been biased towards Pharaonic and Graeco-Roman Egypt, disregarding Napatan, Meroitic, Nubian and Arabic sources. The vast majority of the historical sources were written by outsiders who never visited the area and were prejudiced towards a settled way of life. Ethnographic information on the region is limited and has been shown to provide only incomplete parallels between modern and ancient groups in the region. Archaeological evidence on the dwellers of the desert is equally scarce. The emphasis of the research has been on the better visible and easier to interpret remains of the mines, quarries, inscriptions and trade routes left by outsiders. It has only recently been appreciated that sufficient archaeological remains may be present to allow conclusions on the lifestyle and culture of the native dwellers of the desert. Anthropological theories 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 a more symbiotic relationship. Our current terminology, with fixed categories for mobile and sedentary groups, may not be applicable to the ancient situation.

A conference organized by the Cotsen Institute of Archaeology (University of California, Los Angeles) at the Netherlands-Flemish Institute in Cairo (NVIC) aims to address the problems and possibilities of the study of the dwellers of the Eastern Desert, as well as to provide an overview of the current state of our knowledge. The preliminary conclusions of this conference will be presented in this Cleveringa Lecture. The region and its inhabitants, ancient and modern, also bring into sharp focus some ethical issues, especially appropriate since this lecture was instituted to commemorate the courageous moral stance taken by Professor Cleveringa during the Nazi occupation of the Netherlands. This conference will aim to bring into the limelight peoples, cultures and ways of live that have been misunderstood or marginalized by archaeology and history in favor of dominant civilizations around them. In a related way, current global concern with environmental change and human impact have a particular resonance in a region of climatic and ecological extremes, with a long past of human positive and negative interactions with the Eastern Desert. Both the human and environmental issues are the focus of several inspiring papers to be presented at the conference.

## **ABSTRACTS**

### **Vegetation and Management Regime Continuity in the Eastern Desert Gidske L. Andersen, Unifob Natural Sciences, Bergen (Norway)**

The Eastern Desert is among the most extreme deserts of the world, but even so has supplied its local inhabitants and their animals with sufficient resources to support their pastoral lifestyle for millennia. The skills required to survive and manage the desert environment in a sustainable way is a vital part of the indigenous culture that leaves few or ephemeral traces in the archaeological record. Understanding this aspect of nomadic culture, and more fully the lifestyle of the people, both at present and in the

past, thereby contributing essential information to the history of the people, require basic knowledge of the ecosystem and the key species that they depend upon.

In the pastoral nomadic lifestyle the arboreal vegetation is a key resource. The contracted vegetation pattern characterizing the region today is the result of a desiccation process that started around 5500 BP. The Eastern Desert, however, remained and still is relatively rich in trees, mainly due to the special hydro-topographical conditions resulting from relatively high mountains (up to 2000 m asl) and the vicinity of the Red Sea. Nevertheless, the tree populations are particularly vulnerable to changes in use, from a sustainable utilization for fodder and fuel for local consumption into commercial charcoal production that kills trees. The preservation of mature trees, that can get several centuries old, is of great importance because these tree populations are governed by remnant population dynamics. The tree population long-term survival depends on extremely rare, but large recruitment events. For such events to be successful there needs to be a constant input of seeds from mature trees.

The management regime traditionally used among pastoral nomads in the region reflects a basic ecological knowledge to sustain the resource base; killing green trees is not allowed and the use of trees for fuel, building material, fodder, etc. is done in a way that conserves trees, in some cases even improving their survival and growth conditions. There is a long-lasting cultural continuity in resource management; the same management practices that can be seen practiced in the Eastern Desert today are depicted in sources dating to the Egyptian New Kingdom.

This contribution will elaborate on the vegetation changes that have taken place in the Eastern Desert since the desiccation of Sahara and consider traditional management practices in the light of the current ecological understanding of arid lands.

**Sustainable Desert Tourism: A Tool for Competition**  
**Suzan Bakri Hassan, Assistant Professor, Faculty of Tourism and Hotels**  
**Fayum University (Egypt)**

Egypt is predominantly desert. An area of only 35,000 km<sup>2</sup>, 3.5% of the total land area, is cultivated and permanently settled. Most of the country lies within the wide band of desert that stretches from Africa's Atlantic Coast across the continent and into southwest Asia. The ancient Egyptians thought of Egypt as being divided into the "black land" and the "red land." The "black land" was the fertile land on the banks of the Nile which can be used for growing crops because of a layer of rich, black silt deposited every year by the Nile. The "red land" was the barren desert that protected Egypt on two sides. These deserts separated ancient Egypt from neighboring countries and invading armies. They also provided the ancient Egyptians with precious metals and semi-precious stones.

Current research aims to develop the Egyptian deserts as tourist destinations in a spirit of sustainable development criteria. Tourism in desert destinations is a niche market, but in constant growth. Although the majority of tourists travel into the desert on their own, deserts or desert regions increasingly feature as destinations in packages offered by tour operators and travel agents, attracting customers who are eager for new discoveries and sensations. Desert tourism is for travelers who seek solitude, authenticity, cultures and traditions, as well as encounters with local people and unspoiled landscapes. The size of the groups and the choice of travel method must be governed by rules that ensure a high quality of interaction, a good travel experience and customer satisfaction. Each of the world's deserts is unique and has its own cultural diversity, traditions and potential to develop and

host new activities. Some, like tourism, have not always been suitably planned or implemented in a sustainable manner so that tourism in these regions can have an adverse impact, resulting in harm to desert ecosystems.

Desert areas need to benefit from all opportunities created by tourism but, given their fragility, appropriate regulations and preservation mechanisms need to be put in place. Desert tourism can be a sustainable development solution if it is planned by professionals who are aware of and concerned about the impact of their activities. There is a need, then, to create and develop mechanisms to enable the different actors concerned, among others governments, NGOs, local communities, the public and private sectors, to work effectively together to find the balance required for the sustainable development of desert tourism.

### **Blemmyes, Noubades and the Eastern Desert in Late Antiquity (4th-6th Centuries CE)**

**Jitse H.F. Dijkstra, University of Ottawa (Canada)**

Most textual sources on the Blemmyes date to the Late Antique period and place them not in the Eastern Desert, but in the Nile Valley. For the 4th-6th centuries CE the sources, notably Procopius and Priscus, tell us about “the Blemmyes” and another people, “the Noubades,” who apparently lived in Lower Nubia and frequently raided into Egypt. On the basis of these sources, historians have tried to write a coherent history of the region in which the Blemmyes and the Noubades struggle for the area south of Egypt after the Kingdom of Meroe had lost its influence in that region. Yet such reconstructions place too much weight on sources which offer only a Roman “outside” perspective. Moreover, they fail to take into account the complexity of tribal societies.

In this light I have recently reinterpreted the sources (Philae and the End of Ancient Egyptian Religion, Leuven 2008). The resultant picture, of an intricate web of tribes living side by side in the Nile Valley for whom different interests were at stake (such as tribal honor, cattle, trade, gods, etc.), will be presented. It will be demonstrated that the few surviving sources from the Blemmyes themselves (the “inside sources”) provide us with a more reliable, more complex picture of the situation south of Egypt at the time. The question will also be addressed what the relationship of these tribes was with the dwellers of the Eastern Desert. This leads to some concluding comments on the nature and limitations of the written sources, and on the question if progress can still be made in interpreting them.

### **The Establishment of a Trans-Boundary Biosphere Reserve in Wadi Allaqi Mohamed al-Aawah and Costanza De Simone, UNESCO Cairo Office (Egypt)**

Protected areas that meet across international borders are referred to as “border parks.” Such parks provide ecological models as well as political symbols of effective conservation and can be used to promote peace, protect the environment, improve resource management, and to preserve and enhance cultural values. All these factors can contribute greatly to the sustainable development of the indigenous people, who live near or on both sides of international boundaries and wander nomadically in search of available grazing.

The Wadi Allaqi region, located in southern Egypt extending into northern Sudan, is a globally important eco-region. The area is bounded to the west by Lake Nasser and to the east by the Red Sea.

It contains the largest desert valley (*wadi*) in the southeastern part of the Eastern Desert of Egypt with a length of 200 km, of which approximately 50 km is in Sudan. The Wadi Allaqi area possibly supports the highest plant biodiversity within the Eastern Desert, while fifteen species of globally endangered or threatened animals and birds are found in the area. Wadi Allaqi and its tributaries are also rich in archaeological remains. The contemporary inhabitants of the region are virtually unique. They are related to the Beja cultural group and speak an ancient, non-semitic language. Their material culture is distinct from that of the Nile Valley as well as from that of other Bedouin groups further north, retaining a rich heritage of folklore traditions (see Roe below).

The region was declared a conservation area in 1989 with a protected status administered by the Egyptian Environmental Affairs Agency. Because Wadi Allaqi is an ecologically sensitive zone and a plan for its sustainable management and protection was necessary, UNESCO designated the area as a Biosphere Reserve in 1993 within the UNESCO Man and Biosphere Program (MAB). Since then, the UNESCO Cairo Office, through various collaborative initiatives at national, bilateral and international levels, has supported research and training activities to cover a wide range of issues related to arid zone ecology and resource use. For several years, the UNESCO Cairo Office has been seeking the establishment of a trans-boundary biosphere reserve in the Wadi Allaqi region as a border park. Such reserves contribute to the protection of the seriously threatened global biosphere. The creation of such a trans-boundary reserve will have a positive impact on the conservation of the natural resources, and provide sustainable development of the indigenous communities in the area. The creation of the trans-boundary biosphere reserve could be the first important step to the creation of a border park, within the framework of a worldwide program, "Parks for Peace," in unison with the other three unique ecosystems shared by Egypt and Sudan: Gebel Elba, the Red Sea, and Lake Nasser.

### **Gods in the Red Land: Developments of Cults and Pious Activities in the Eastern Desert**

**Andrés D. Espinel, Spanish National Research Council, Madrid (Spain)**

This contribution intends to present a brief account of the possible development of Pharaonic cultic activities in the Egyptian and Nubian Eastern Desert. That evolution will be studied by the analysis of some divinities related to that region, such as Min, later identified as the god Pan, and by the examination of some landscapes and natural places that could inspire the establishment of certain sacred spaces. Such is the case of the Min/Pan cultic chapels (*Paneia*) in the desert related to caves or rock shelters, the cults of falcon gods connected to possible natural perches, and the relation of other religious activities with features such as prehistoric rock art, odd natural rock shapes or special landscapes. These cultic patterns, as well as possible continuities and changes from the Pharaonic Period, or even prehistory, to the Roman Period, will be discussed. Their dissimilarities with contemporary religious activities in the Nile Valley will also be taken into account in order to suggest the possibility that these cults had indigenous roots.

On the other hand, some remarks will be made regarding the necessity of questioning the real meaning of Pharaonic rock inscriptions. Even though several of these are obviously related to religious practices, many others were probably created in accordance to more secular intentions and activities. The separation between both functions can be inferred from a detailed record of the relation of rock inscriptions with the landscape (the natural features of the place where they were inscribed, the presence and date of other nearby rock inscriptions or representations, etc). In that sense, rock inscriptions will be more informative if they are better documented in relation to their location.

**The Ptolemaic Eastern Desert in its Theban Context**  
**Jennifer Gates-Foster, Assistant Professor, Department of Classics**  
**University of Texas at Austin (USA)**

Recent archaeological surveys of the Egyptian Eastern Desert between Edfu, Coptos and Berenike by the University of Delaware and the University of Michigan have yielded striking new evidence for Ptolemaic settlements and activities in this region. Taken together with archaeological material recovered from Berenike itself and from sites in the Nile Valley, a new picture of Ptolemaic-era interest in this area emerges. Patterns observed in surface assemblages collected from a range of site types, including mining settlements, road stations and pottery scatters, suggest periods of intense exploitation in the third and first centuries BCE, with substantial variation in the quantity and character of the desert deposits over time.

This contribution synthesizes the current archaeological evidence for site use in the Eastern Desert during the Ptolemaic Period and considers how the resulting picture intersects with our understanding of regional dynamics in Thebes and Upper Egypt during the 300 years of Greek rule. Drawing on observations gleaned from surface pottery, the relationship between the desert sites and the economic and political structures of the Nile Valley are explored, as is the possible presence of groups not represented in the recorded archaeological remains. These connections demonstrate that the desert was an evolving “internal” frontier between the Nile Valley and the Red Sea coastal zone, punctuated by settlements supporting the opportunistic exploitation of mineral resources and dynamic roadways.

**Beside Christian Nubia and Muslim Egypt: The Blemmyes or Beja**  
**Around 758-759 CE According to Written Sources from Qasr Ibrim**  
**Joost L. Hagen, Graduate Student, Leiden University (the Netherlands)**

This contribution presents new sources for the history of the Blemmyes or Beja tribes of the Eastern Desert: a dossier of five papyrus scroll letters from the 8th century CE, excavated at Qasr Ibrim (Lower Nubia) in 1972. One letter is in Arabic, the remaining four are in Coptic, the vernacular of Christian Egypt and one of the languages used in Late-Classical and Medieval Nubia (5th-15th centuries CE). The Arabic scroll has been published and commented on several times; the Coptic ones have only been discussed in a cursory fashion. I am currently preparing these four letters for publication in my doctoral dissertation on the Coptic texts from Qasr Ibrim, together with many other documents. Thus far, my study of these papyri has led me to disagree with several of the findings that have been published about them in preliminary reports and secondary literature.

The five letters, written round 758-759 CE, provide an insight into the political and economic contacts between Christian Nubia, the Kingdom of Nobatia (later Makuria) and Abbasid-period Muslim Egypt. They are important sources concerning the functioning of the *baqt*, the treaty that the Arabs concluded with the Nubians after failing to conquer them about a century earlier (640-650 CE). One of the recurrent themes in these five documents are the problems that both parties were having with nomads referred to as Blemmyes in the Coptic scrolls and Beja in the Arabic one. Indeed, these letters are the very source that was regarded as proof of the identification “Beja = Blemmyes” by the excavators and subsequent scholars. Several instances of raids by these nomads in southern Egypt and northern Nubia are mentioned in what seem to be unique sources relating to an otherwise little known period in the history of the Blemmyes or Beja: the 8th century CE. In my contribution, I propose to give the first



balanced overview of the contents and possible significance of both the Arabic and the Coptic letters, focusing on the Blemmyes or Beja in the Egyptian-Nubian border region.

**“Sinai:” Another Name for Cultural Exchange in the Mediterranean**  
**Monica Hanna, Graduate Student, University of Pisa (Italy),**  
**Fatma Kishk, Guide and Archaeologist, and Sarah Abu Bakr, Anthropologist,**  
**Center for Documentation of Cultural and Natural Heritage (Egypt)**

The Sinai Peninsula has been an important geographical area in the history of the Eastern Mediterranean. It witnessed the “Ways of Horus,” a major trading route that is considered one of the oldest in the world. Large mining operations had started in the area by the Old Kingdom during which the temple of Serabit al-Khadim was built. North of the mines a series of forts was built to protect Egypt’s Eastern border, as well as to secure the trade routes with the Levant. The Nabateans were also present in the area as evident by the temples in Qasraweit and Wadi Mukattab. In Graeco-Roman and Byzantine times, the Sinai played a role during early Christianity. Pilgrims arriving by boat in Alexandria continued on their way to Jerusalem in caravans and passed sites such as Abu Mina, in the Western Desert, some of the sites believed to have been visited by the Holy Family, as well as St. Catherine’s Monastery in the Sinai. During the Islamic Period the Sinai witnessed the Darb al-Hajj, during which Muslim pilgrims from different parts of the Mediterranean, such as Andalusia and Anatolia, gathered in Central Sinai.

The historic importance for the Mediterranean region has affected the nature of the Sinai Peninsula as well as its inhabitants, the Bedouin. The origins of those tribes vary from those who have lived there since antiquity to those who migrated at various times from the Arabian Peninsula. Despite their importance, these groups have been understudied, underdocumented and underdeveloped. This contribution discusses the importance of the Sinai in Antiquity and the 21st century CE, as well as the need for its cultural development through its native inhabitants, the Bedouin.

**Proto-Bedouin? Eastern Desert Dwellers in the Late Palaeolithic**  
**and Epipalaeolithic Periods**  
**Dirk Huyge, Royal Museums of Art and History, Brussels (Belgium)**

Whereas data for the Nile Valley abound, very little information is available regarding human use and occupation of the Eastern Desert of Egypt during the Late Palaeolithic and Epipalaeolithic Periods (from about 21,000 to 8000 BP). Nevertheless, recent investigations of Palaeolithic sites in the Quseir area, and both old and new rock art data allow us to infer some general ideas about activities in the desert in the late Pleistocene and earlier Holocene periods.

This contribution focuses on the late Pleistocene and early Holocene rock art traditions of Qurta and al-Hosh in the Nile Valley. It aims to identify the probable archaeological context of these traditions and their relationship to the Eastern Desert. Whereas the exploitation of Eastern Desert resources in the Late Palaeolithic seems to have been limited and restricted to its margins, perhaps because of climatic reasons, the information available for the Epipalaeolithic suggests a more intensive human presence throughout the whole area. It can be suggested, for example, that the “Nilotic” al-Hosh rock art, which is supposed to be at least 8000 years old, can be linked to rock art sites in the Eastern Desert, more in particular in the Wadi Atwani, about 50 km east of the town of Qift in the Nile Valley. Possibly related archaeological assemblages, both in the Nile Valley and in the Eastern Desert, further

support the idea that Epipalaeolithic people fully exploited the resources of both riverine and desert environments. Their long-haul Egyptian wanderings can be explained both in terms of economy and ritual.

**Nomadism and Monastic Life in the Eastern Desert of Egypt**  
**Michael Jones, American Research Center in Egypt**

Two very different communities living in the northern part of the Eastern Desert participate in nomadism. These are the monks of the ancient monasteries of St. Anthony and St. Paul and their Bedouin neighbors. Before the spread of modernization to the Red Sea coast, in the last 25 years of the 20th century CE, monks and Bedouin benefited from a symbiotic relationship which had been maintained for many centuries. Both communities experienced the same hardships and risks of desert life. The monks' reliance on vulnerable caravans bringing food through the desert from the monasteries' farms in the Fayum made good relations with Bedouin neighbors essential. Sharing water from the monastery springs, as well as dates and olives grown in their gardens were an established part of this reciprocity. At times of insecurity this inclusiveness broke down and both monasteries experienced well-documented periods of abandonment in the 15th-18th centuries CE, and possibly others in earlier times that have gone unrecorded. Nowadays the ancient connections are maintained through the distribution of food, clothing and medicines by the monasteries.

Monks who leave their homes in Egypt to withdraw into the desert attempt to emulate the ascetic lives of their ancient monastic fathers. The tradition of St. Paul living alone in the desert for 90 years has fostered a special relationship between his monastery and the Bedouin. The monks' mobility as desert dwellers contrasts strikingly with those living in the Nile Valley, the "children of the countryside" (*ahl al-rif*). This is further elaborated with today's improved communications as the monasteries engender other forms of mobility by the numerous organized visits and pilgrimages made to the monasteries on holidays and feasts. Recent demographic changes and increased contacts with the outside world have already altered the significance of the interconnections between the intra-mural and various extra-mural communities. It is now more important than ever to document and record the changing circumstances while there are still monks alive who remember the days before modernization. New possibilities for travel have simultaneously brought the monasteries into close proximity with the modern world outside the desert and provoked a withdrawal into greater self-reliance.

**To See or Not to See: Invisible Monks, Human Eyes and the Eastern Desert**  
**in Late Antique Hagiography**  
**Konstantin M. Klein, Graduate Student, Oxford University (UK)**

Antony the Great (*ca.* 251-356 CE) was by far the most famous inhabitant of the Eastern Desert. The *Vita*, written down by Athanasius of Alexandria around 360 CE, became one of the best known works of Early Christian literature and was used as a model for the ascetic ideal of Late Antique Christianity. In the *Vita*, Athanasius frequently depicts Antony as an enthusiastic devotee to his anchoritic desert-life. But the desert between the Nile Valley and the Red Sea was to Antony much more than just a final retreat. He is described as deeply tied and connected to this spot, for "he fell in love with it as if it had been offered to him by God." This harsh environment developed into the *conditio sine qua non* of Antony's ascetic struggle. The landscape allowed him, as well as other Egyptian ascetics (the so-called Desert Fathers and Desert Mothers), to be completely cut off from civilization and to become

almost invisible to bothersome obstacles which they believed hindered their personal path to salvation. However, asceticism did not remain confined to the boundaries of Egypt. In the 250 years after Antony's death around 356 CE, Christian asceticism spread over the Near East. Hundreds of miles north of the Eastern Desert, the Lives of the ascetics of Syria, Palestine and Anatolia were collected by Theodoret of Cyrrhus, Cyril of Scythopolis and John Moschos.

This contribution investigates the question how the image of the desert as an ascetic dwelling place of perfect solitude was further developed in the Lives following Athanasius' Life of Antony. The focus is especially on areas where the circumstances for the Early Christian ascetics were far less harsh than in the Egyptian Eastern Desert. I will demonstrate that the image of the Eastern Desert remains crucial to the genre of ascetic Lives, even after ascetic life began to move to more inhabitable desert zones. The descriptions of Antony's desert and the Egyptian wilderness were substituted by literary *topoi*. The natural attributes of the desert were substituted by supernatural descriptions often referring to the vocabulary of sensory perception. Especially the metaphors of visibility and invisibility, which occurs in the vast majority of the later Lives, reminiscence Antony's desert.

**The Culture of the Blemmyes: A Graeco-Roman Construct or  
a Genuine Desert Culture?  
Jonatan Krzywinski, Institute of Archaeology, History, Cultural  
and Religious Studies, Bergen (Norway)**

In the Eastern Desert and the Red Sea Hills there are a number of sites with durable, well-constructed buildings which have been under discussion for some years now. These include, among others, sites near Berenike, Shenshef and Hitan Rayan; near the emerald mines at Mons Smaragdus; and similar sites in the Wadi Jumal area. There are, moreover, similar sites in the Red Sea Hills in Sudan and the southernmost sites with such buildings found so far is in the Sinkat Haya region. About 7 km south of Tabot, partly excavated by Anwar Magid in 1995, there is another set of these buildings at Samadi. At Nubt, a similar distance to the east, there is a stratified sequence of such buildings associated with tumulus graves (*ekratels*) which also remain to be excavated.

The debate about these villages concentrated on who built them and who controlled the areas around them when they were in use. Relevant written material is scarce and often general in character. About the emerald mines in the north Olympiodorus (around 423 CE) tells us that the king of the Blemmyes controlled access to them. For the rest of the area we have no written sources that identify these sites or their inhabitants. A key point in this discussion is the question of who the Blemmyes were in light of our static perceptions of nomadic people as weakly organized and dispersed groups with no strong central organization and identity.

This contribution brings to this discussion the organization of the Beja and how their flexible society linked to various layers of tribal identity oppose our static perception of nomadic societies. I focus on how Beja identity structure and social organization is stratified by circumstances in the light of contemporary strands of a tradition that links desert people from south to north in the very area indicated in the written sources as the land of the Blemmyes.

## **The Eastern Desert Tombs and Continuity in Funerary Cult** **Knut Krzywinski, Professor, University of Bergen (Norway)**

Nomadic people do not leave the same type, amount, or concentration of debris as sedentary people and ephemeral traces of desert dwellers often appear difficult to understand. The desert does, however, preserves such remains and exposes them in its never changing scenery. The most prominent remains of Eastern Desert people are graves scattered all over the desert.

The oldest graves found in the Eastern Desert proper are ring-formed. Such graves (pan-graves) are attributed to the Medjay and are best known from the fringes of the Nile Valley in Upper Egypt. Such graves are, however, frequent in the Sudanese Red Sea Mountains and adjacent desert valleys (*wadis*). Situated in the sandy or gravel-filled wadis, on gentle slopes and on the plains, they vary in architecture. They occur with and without a central superstructure and with single or double rings. Not infrequently the space between these rings is filled with gravel to form a wall. Flash floods (*seyls*) that have cut through several such graves exposed skeletons in contracted position.

The most prominent tombs in the area from the ancient Coptos-Myos Hormos road in the north to Suakin in the south are, however, the tumulus graves that the Sudanese Beja call “ekratel.” These represent an area-specific and common burial tradition. It is unclear whether or not the ekratels are a development of the pan-grave rings, but the characteristic ring of large flagstones around and leaning against the outer wall strengthens the visual association with pan-graves. While most Egyptian ekratels have been robbed, most Sudanese ones are intact and highly respected by the population. The so-called “fishtail ekratels” with a similar type of masonry are rare, distinctive and complicated structures found mainly in the Sinkat-Haya area in Sudan. These may date to the early medieval period. There is, as far as we know, no counterpart in the western and northern part of the Eastern Desert.

This contribution focuses on cultural continuity, not only in the spatial and temporal distribution of Eastern Desert grave cults, but also on the fact that different grave types may be located and associated with Muslim tribal graveyards that are still in use. It also highlights, as traditional links to the past, the ekratels as places for secondary burial and their similar distribution to that of modern sheiks’ tombs.

## **Rock Art in Egypt’s Eastern Desert** **Francis Lankester, Graduate Student, University of Durham (UK)**

Many boat petroglyphs have been recorded in the Nile Valley and nearly 800 have been found in Egypt’s Eastern Desert in a roughly rectangular area of 125 x 50 km. (which equals 6250 km<sup>2</sup>, about 3% of the entire Eastern Desert). Prior to 3500 BCE, the climate in the region was less arid and depictions in the rock art show a richer floral and faunal resource base. The principal sources considered in this contribution are the Eastern Desert Survey (2000) and the Rock Art Topographical Survey (2002), both of which were inspired by the work of Weigall (1909), Fuchs (1989-1991) and especially that of Winkler and the Robert Mond Expedition (1938). These surveys re-recorded about 100 sites and discovered over 120 new ones.

On the basis of analogy with dated motifs in the Nile Valley petroglyphs are from Predynastic, Pharaonic, Greco-Roman and Arab times. Distribution of the rock art indicates a preference for low

and easily accessible locations as 85% of sites are found 1-5 m. above desert valley (*wadi*) floors. Motifs include approximately 2000 animals, 700 anthropomorphic images and 800 boats. The main animal motifs are ibex, oryx or antelope (>1000), ostrich (368), dog (277), cattle (244), giraffe (83), elephant (59), wild ass (44), crocodile (31) and hippopotamus (29). Riverine animals are rarely depicted and, apart from groups of ostriches, few herds are shown. Unlike in the Sahara, cattle are often shown isolated (44% of all sites with cattle) and in 20% of the images a human controls the animal with a rope attached to one of its horns. Packs of dogs are common and are often seen chasing down prey or grasping it by the snout or the rear. Plumed hunters accompany a number of these scenes. In addition, there are scenes of conflict involving mounted horse and camel riders.

Most boats are simple hull depictions and dating is often problematic. However, a number have a distinctive incurved lay-out and are associated with human figures with raised arms analogous to those depicted on D-Ware pottery (Naqada II, *ca.* 3600-3300 BCE). This contribution provides an overview of the published rock art from the Eastern Desert and touches upon unpublished and related motifs in the Kom Ombo drainage basin. It describes the distribution and subject of the motifs and proposes interpretations of the Eastern Desert rock art.

### **On the Archaeology of the Late Antique Population of the Eastern Desert Gábor Lassányi, Aquincum Museum, Budapest (Hungary)**

The last two decades have seen a significant increase in published information on the archaeological sites in the Eastern Desert dating to Late Antiquity (3rd-7th centuries CE). The first part of this contribution focuses on what data is currently available in the literature on the material culture of the native populations inhabiting the Eastern Desert in Late Antiquity.

Between 1998 and 2003 a Hungarian archaeological expedition, lead by Prof.Dr. Ulrich Luft, documented and excavated a Late Antique “deep desert” settlement with associated cemetery in Bir Minih (Egypt). Using Bir Minih as a case study, I will present a comprehensive answer on the origin and function of many similar “enigmatic settlements” scattered throughout the Eastern Desert in Egypt and Sudan. I will also discuss the burial traditions of the native population of the desert, comparing the deep desert sites with the cemeteries on the edge of the Nile Valley.

Cemeteries like al-Moalla, Elkab and Kalabsha South, as well as Wadi Qitna, on the edge of the desert offer good opportunities to observe Late Antique interactions between the desert-dwellers and the settled populations in the Nile Valley. In these area, particularly al-Moalla and Kalabsha South, the connection between archaeological data and written sources can also be probed.

### **Nabataeans in the Eastern Desert During the Roman Period Rageh Z. Mohamed, Curator, Nubian Museum, Aswan (Egypt)**

As the Nabataeans grew in power and wealth, they attracted the attention of their neighbors. Diodorus reports, presumably on the authority of Agatharchides of Cnidus, on the growth of the Nabataean economy after they took to piracy on the Red Sea. Strabo also makes reference to this when he writes: “these Nabataeans formerly lived a peaceful life, but later by means of rafts took to plundering the vessels of people sailing from Egypt on the Red Sea.” In 106 CE, Cornelius Palma, Trajan’s legate in Syria, moved against Petra and crushed the Nabataean Kingdom. Petra was included in the Roman province of Arabia, and the Nabataeans melted away into the shadows of the history.

The Nabataeans were Arabs who used an Aramaic dialect as is evident from many of the names mentioned in their inscriptions. It is noteworthy that the Arabs did not come only to the Sinai Peninsula during the first century BCE and the first centuries CE, but also into Egypt. This can be inferred from the inscriptions in the Wadi Hammamat, at Qusur al-Banat, al-Hamra, Bir al-Nakhel, Bir Umm Enab, Bir Umm Dalfa, and many other sites both the north and south. Most of the graffiti seems to have been hastily scratched into the rocks alongside the main valleys between the Nile and the Red Sea. The Nabataean inscriptions at Qusur al-Banat are near the watering station (*hydreuma*); the inscriptions at al-Hamra are on one of the doorposts of the *hydreuma*. The word “cameleers” appears frequently in the inscriptions which were most likely made by ancient traders who, after landing at one of the ports on the Red Sea, followed the Wadi Hammamat to reach the Nile Valley at Qift.

One must pose the questions why the Nabataean Kingdom developed in such an extraordinary way and what role the Red Sea played in that development? Also, which points on either side of the Red Sea were effectively part of the Nabataean sphere? The Nabataean administrative center certainly provided a forceful stimulus, but the main reasons must have been social and economical. Vital to the development was the location of the Kingdom at the meeting point of several geopolitical regions, and near the main land- and waterways connecting those. The role of the Red Sea, which provided an effective route for goods from Arabia Felix and beyond, should not be neglected. The importance of the cities along the caravan route brought about Nabataean domination over the north Arabian oases. As they controlled the nodes in the most important trade routes of the time, the Nabateans had contact with all the ancient empires and kingdoms. Many aspects of Nabataean history, not known through Nabataean sources, can thus be studied from the reports of their neighbors.

**Nomads at the Nile: Towards an Archaeology of Interaction**  
**Claudia Näser, Professor, Humboldt University Berlin (Germany)**

When searching for early nomadic societies in Africa, a most relevant group are the so-called Pan-Grave People. Their homeland is considered to be the desert east of the Nile Valley. In this vast and widely unexplored region they could, however, not yet be archaeologically proven. Instead, known sites are concentrated on the edges of the Lower Nubian and Egyptian Nile Valley. Habitation sites are rare and the main database form over 50 cemeteries, distributed over more than 30 sites from Middle Egypt to southern Lower Nubia. Additionally, pan-grave pottery has come up in Egyptian and C-group contexts. Information about the Pan-Grave People derives from these finds and a limited number of ancient Egyptian texts. This material forms the basis for the socio-economic classification of the Pan-Grave People as nomadic as well as the superficial descriptions of their social, cultural and economic constitution that have been presented so far.

This contribution focuses on four aspects:

- 1) The methodological implications of the fact that the sources on the Pan-Grave People derive not from their “normal existence,” but rather from a hybrid context, namely a specific contact situation. Additionally, the Egyptian texts are not “personal testimonials,” but “second-hand information.”
- 2) A general evaluation and critical analysis of these sources as to their informational contents.
- 3) A short review of the social, economic and cultural constitution of the Pan-Grave People.
- 4) A discussion of the scenario prominent in the available sources, namely the interaction of the Pan-Grave People with their neighbors in the Nile Valley, the Egyptian society and the C-group,

specifically addressing the axiom of a nomadic-sedentary symbiosis and picturing the Pan-Grave People as active agents in this context.

**The Blemmyes, by Any Other Name...**  
**Richard Holton Pierce, Professor, University of Bergen (Norway)**

The focus of this contribution is on ethnicity and cultural continuities among peoples attested in the Eastern Desert of Egypt and Sudan during roughly the last two millennia. Primary written sources are of greatest concern, but their associations with archaeological remains are also addressed.

In this context, ethnicity is construed as a set of socially defined identities elicited by interaction across a spectrum of actors ranging from individuals to collectivities of differing scale. Particular attention is paid to the factors that elicit identity and to the perspectives of the sources.

The ethnicity of the people referred to as Blemmyes is elaborated as a case in point inasmuch as they feature prominently among the written sources and have been the subject of recent publications. The paucity of those sources in relation to the time span and geographical extent of the scope of the discussion is also considered, and the usefulness of a cultural landscape approach for the integration of the disparate sources for the Eastern Desert is emphasized.

**Bir Nurayet: A Rock Art Gallery in the Red Sea Hills**  
**Krzysztof Pluskota, Archaeologist (Sweden)**

In December 1997, a team of two travelers, Arita Baaijens (biologist) and the author (archaeologist) left al-Damar, in the Sudanese Nile Valley, for a six week walk through the Nubian Desert to Mohammed Qol, on the Red Sea coast; a distance of more than 500 km as the crow flies. The caravan, however, had to follow paths through desert valleys (*wadies*) and passed dispersed wells (*birs*), so that the trip finally covered about 900 km. Our visit was intended as a reconnaissance of the vast areas of the Nubian Desert and the Red Sea Hills populated by different tribes of the Beja people. It allowed us to collect observations concerning the landscape, weather conditions, location of archaeological remains, and to meet dwellers of the region on their temporary pasture as well as in their settlements.

A second trip was undertaken in December 1998. This time the route led the team through the mountains near the border between Sudan and Egypt. On New Year's Eve of 1999, the team reached Bir Nurayet, a well of great importance to the camel breeders of the area. The stopover, which was intended to give our dromedaries and their offspring time to feed and relax, led to the discovery of a huge gallery, or a combination of several galleries of petroglyphs. Cliffs, boulders and stones in the small, labyrinth-like valley adjacent to Wadi Diib are covered by hundreds of representations of cattle, sheep, dromedaries, game animals and people. The unique landscape, a solitary monolith (Gebel Magardi) dominating Wadi Diib at Bir Nurayet, seems to provide an answer as to why this place was chosen by pastoralists to leave rock drawings of their livestock for millennia. The presence at Bir Nurayet of a large number of depictions of cows is the first clear indication of the existence of livestock raising in the Red Sea Hills of northern Sudan around the fifth millennium BP. The discovery of the rock art gallery at Bir Nurayet was immediately reported to the National Corporation of Antiquities and Museums, and steps for systematical research at the site were undertaken.

**The Material Culture and Economic Rationale of Sedentary Arabs in  
the Late Roman Eastern Desert of Egypt**  
**Tim Power, Graduate Student, University of Oxford (UK)**

The settlement at Shenshef is located about 20 km. southwest of the Graeco-Roman emporium of Berenike in the Egyptian Eastern Desert. The site has attracted a fair amount of attention, owing partially to its unusual courtyard houses and hill-top shrines, and moreover advertises no obvious function, such as mining or farming. Early explorers interpreted the site as an autumn retreat for the population of Berenike or else as a medieval Arab slavers' station. Recent examination of the site suggests a 5th-6th century CE date, on the basis of ceramic analysis, and notes that "it is still not clear whether the population consisted of Romans, a Romanized local population (Blemmyes?) or a combination."

There are, however, problems with the "Romano-Blemmyes" hypothesis. The housing typology of Shenshef has no parallels in the Romano-Egyptian architectural tradition, nor does an association with the essentially nomadic Blemmyes makes sense, especially if certain of the "enigmatic settlements" in the late Roman Eastern Desert and Nubia are interpreted as Blemmyes architecture. Instead, excellent *comparenda* can be found in the domestic architecture of Arabia. Whilst the pre-Islamic Arabian Peninsula remains poorly known archaeologically, the historically attested Arab population in late antique Syria has been convincingly linked to the site of Umm Jimal, and an undoubtedly Arab domestic architecture has been unearthed in post-conquest layers at Sétif in Algeria. The housing typology further fits with descriptions of the Prophet's house at Medina, and remained current in the Red Sea region as late as the Ottoman period at Suakin and Jeddah. The parallels between the architectural traditions of Arabia and the courtyard houses of Shenshef are striking and borne out in the particulars, as will be shown. This raises the possibility that the population of Shenshef was of Arab extraction.

Finally, it remains to consider the historical circumstance of a pre-Islamic Arab involvement in the Red Sea and Eastern Desert. The Red Sea island of Iotabê was captured from the Romans and held for a number of years by the Saracen pirate Amorkesos, suggesting the power of the Arab maritime presence. The Yemenis have a long-standing tradition of sea voyaging, and were found in Sri Lanka by Cosmas Indicopleustes and in Aila at the time of its capitulation to the Prophet. At Berenike, dates have been accorded an Arabian provenance, but Arabia was also known for its leather and gold exports, which have perhaps not been recognized. As for Arabia's principal imports, aside from manufactured goods and Egyptian grain, it is clear from that slave trade was flourishing, with Nubia as a likely source of many of these unfortunates. It is perhaps this, more than anything else, which provided the economic rationale for an Arab mercantile colony in the Eastern Desert of Egypt.

**Rock Art in the Sinai and the Eastern Desert: A Methodological Approach**  
**Andreas Reichert, University of Tuebingen (Germany)**

During an archaeological survey in central Sinai in 1981-1982, I discovered over a hundred rock drawings and rock engravings, recorded and subsequently published them in the "Festschrift" for Hellmut Brunner, an Egyptologist at the University of Tuebingen. This archaeological survey was undertaken in the period of returning the Sinai to Israel and in connection with excavations at the Iron Age II (*ca.* 1000-550 BCE) fortress in the centre of the oases of 'Ain al-Quderat, which the excavator R. Cohen thought to be biblical *Qadesh Barnea* on the Exodus route. The Tuebingen survey covered a



wide area and included a second oasis, 'Ain Qudes, as well as the hilly plateau between there and 'Ain al-Quderat.

The abundance of rock engravings was astonishing, especially as only two of them appeared to have been published previously by E. Anati, a renowned specialist on Arabian and Sinai rock art (although he erroneously attributed one of the two to a different region). Within the general aim of the survey to establish a chronology of the period in which the area was populated, which was the case from the Palaeolithic unto modern time onward with the notable exception of Late Bronze and Early Iron Age (*ca.* 1400-1000 BCE), it seemed important to include the information from the rock art as an indicator of specific periods. As Anati's periodization for the Sinai and the Negev (seven styles and periods from the Stone Age to the Muslim era) seemed to be stretched too far, an attempt will be made to use parallels from the Eastern Desert (as for example recorded by the Frobenius expedition and published by Pavel Cervicek in 1974).

**The Desert Dwellers of the Marmarica (Western Desert) as  
a Case Study for the Eastern Desert  
Anna-Katharina Rieger, Martin-Luther-University Halle Wittenberg (Germany)  
and Thomas Vetter, University of Greifswald (Germany)**

The scarce ecological resources make the Marmarica on the Northern fringe of the Libyan Desert, embedded between Cyrenaica and the Nile Valley, a marginal economic and political region at the periphery of the classical world. But despite its arid environment, this region provided the economic basis for a combined system of pastoralism and agriculture and was a place of transit and exchange of goods in Ptolemaic and Roman times. This contribution deals with the recently investigated agro-pastoral systems, route network and settlement pattern of the Marmarica, more precisely in a research area between Marsa Matruh and Siwa Oasis. The study of the semi-arid and arid region undertaken by archaeologists, soil scientists and geographers addressed the question of economic strategies and the relation between nomadic and sedentary groups (within the context of the Collaborative Research Center 586 "Difference and Integration", University of Halle-Wittenberg and University of Leipzig).

Data about water and soil harvesting systems, agricultural production as well as the extension and utilization of rangelands, the route network and the necessary waypoints at cisterns (all mainly of Greco-Roman age) were compiled. The combination of methods like satellite image remote sensing, geographical, pedological and archaeological surveys and analysis, as well as "classical" archaeological field work yielded a broad spectrum of results. They enable to reconstruct adapted economic strategies by which the scarce resources of the region were utilized most efficiently by combining sedentary and nomadic life-styles and give for the first time a detailed view of ancient life in the northern part of the Libyan Desert. The presented research approach may be compared to similar ones in (parts of) the Eastern Desert.

**Wadi Bakariya: A Roman Gold Mine Settlement in the Eastern Desert of Egypt  
Barbara Tratsaert, Graduate Student, University of Gent (Belgium)**

Wadi Bakariya lies in the central portion of the Egyptian Eastern Desert, along the asphalt road from Edfu to Marsa Alam on the Red Sea coast. The settlement covers an area of 3,4 km<sup>2</sup> consisting of five parallel valleys (*wadis*), intersected by narrow side wadis. The site is named after the wadi that cuts

the site in half; the mine was found to be on top of primary deposits with some minor alluvial pits near outcropping veins.

The organization of the mining settlement was inferred from six distinctive areas designated to industrial, administrative and domestic functions, and most probably also for religious purposes, with indications for at least two phases. During Phase I the mine was an enlargement of the wadi at the center of the site; the mine expanded to its current perimeters in Phase II. Each section has its own type of architecture; administration and defensive buildings are near the centre of the mine, residential buildings in the southeast section of the settlement, while industrial architecture covers large parts of the site.

Open trenches and two shafts show the location of the once auriferous veins. A large number of stone tools have been discovered on site. These are three types of grinding stones, saddle querns (most likely the oldest querns on site), rotating querns and a third type most likely used for milling grain, as well as hammers, pounders, polishing stones and anvils. The washing tables, which have previously been mentioned to be present in Wadi Bakariya, and also furnaces are yet to be found.

**Contributions to the Understanding of the Prehistory of  
the Egyptian Eastern Desert  
Pierre M. Vermeersch, Professor, Catholic University Leuven (Belgium)**

The Belgian Middle Egypt Prehistoric Project of the Catholic University Leuven has organized, during the last decade, a restricted survey in a limited area of the Egyptian Eastern Desert. This resulted in the discovery and excavations of prehistoric sites dating to very different time periods.

Excavations in the Sodmein area, near Safaga, provided some data on the Middle Palaeolithic. In addition to some surface sites, the most important data were recovered from Sodmein Cave. This gave us a stratigraphic sequence of occupation by Middle Palaeolithic hunter-gatherers, mainly during the last Interglacial. Faunal and botanical remains provided elements for the reconstruction of the environment during that period. The lithics can be compared with what has been recorded in the Nile Valley.

A rather well preserved surface site on the right bank of Wadi Bili, near al-Gouna, with a typical Levallois assemblage, seems to integrate into the Middle Palaeolithic in which a laminar flaking technology is already observed. Its chronological position remains unclear. During the Oxygen Isopic Stage 4-2 (OIS or MIS 4-2: 110,000-12,000 ka) the area was deserted by humans. Indeed, no occupation remains have been localized, with the possible exception of Level 2 from the Sodmein sequence. If this hypothesis is correct, it implies that the "out of Africa" hypothesis for modern humans, that is so often is correlated with a route along the Red Sea, is difficult to maintain.

Reoccupation of the area started around 8000 BP with the Epipalaeolithic occupation of the Tree Shelter, near Safaga. In this small shelter the stratigraphic sequence starts with a microlithic assemblage, attributed to the Elkabian. The assemblage, associated with a subsistence still entirely based on hunting and gathering, points to contacts with the Nile Valley and the Western Desert. However, no ceramics are associated with this occupation. The remains of ovicaprid herders appear around 7000 BP in the Sodmein cave as well as in the Tree Shelter. Ceramics are present but rare. The youngest occupation is probably related to the Tasian or the Badarian. At both sites, the prehistoric visits came to and end around 5000 BP.

Along the coast, near al-Gouna, the presence of shell mounds from around 5000 BP is attested. In Wadi Bili, Stein Plätze from the same time period have been recognized. At the Rens Shelter, near the Sodmein Cave, a large assemblage of flaked flint was found in association with a hearth. From this site a small sculpture, apparently representing a human foot in white translucent calcite-alabaster, was found. A radiocarbon date suggests that the area was occasionally used by people who, around 1250 CE (cal.), still used flint as a major raw material.

**Prolegomena to the Ethnohistory of the Eastern Desert Dwellers**  
**Petra Weschenfelder, Graduate Student, Humboldt University Berlin (Germany)**

In recent years archaeologists working in Northeast Africa have become increasingly interested in the desert east of the Nile Valley and excavations have contributed significantly to our knowledge of the Eastern Desert dwellers. However, the rich corpus of ethnohistorical data on the contemporary peoples of the Eastern Desert, the various Beja groups, has received little attention, although interconnections between the modern and ancient Eastern Desert dwellers have been proposed.

Ethnohistorical sources on the peoples of the Eastern Desert include cultural anthropological accounts compiled during the 1970-80s, detailed reports of British government administrators from the beginning of the 20th century, books written by European travelers in the 18th-19th centuries, as well as descriptions by Arab writers dating back to the Middle Ages. These provide not only vivid accounts of Beja life, but also include information on the settlement areas of the various Beja groups, on the routes taken during their transhumance cycles and on the tracks used for trading. As the sources also point to various political and environmental shifts in the region, they allow for the partial reconstruction of the history of the Beja people. The written accounts are of great interest to archaeologists, as their critical use may provide a more solid foundation for the interpretation of various archaeological data in the region, while they indicate areas that merit new archaeological projects.

In my contribution I will follow some of the pathways created by preceding scholars. By focusing one specific geographical area of the Eastern Desert, I will present a range of sources dealing the Beja nomadic life. Step by step I will show how these sources contribute to the (ethno)history of this region and which potential they hold for the archaeological research of the Eastern Desert.