

Sire, il n'y a pas de Blemmyes. A Re-Evaluation of Historical and Archaeological Data

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In 1912 the Belgium politician Jules Destrée wrote in a letter to King Albert I 'Sire, (...) il n'y a pas de Belges' (Sire, there are no Belgians). This remark aimed to end the confusion started two millennia earlier by Julius Caesar when he wrote '*Horum omnium fortissimi sunt Belgae...*' (Of these [the Gauls] the Belgians are the bravest...)¹ It is unclear on what information Caesar based this remark, but later he writes '*...plerisque Belgas esse ortos a Germanis Rhenumque antiquitus traductos...*' (...most Belgians are descended from the Germans and came down the Rhine some time ago...)² The latter is a considerably less firm statement. No date is given for when the Belgians are supposed to have arrived in the area, nor is it indicated where the others identified as Belgians may have come from. It is, furthermore, remarkable that most are said to have travelled down the Rhine. This river is at the edge of the region in which Caesar locates the Belgians, rather than flowing through its centre like the Escaut (Schelde) or the Meuse (Maas). The name coined by Caesar appears again on Renaissance maps and helped to form the basis for the decision of the Congress of Vienna to create a Belgian state after the Napoleonic wars. Subsequently, it fuelled its struggle for independence from the Netherlands, which ended successfully in 1830. This was the final step to make a term put forward by Caesar, possibly as a convenient way to talk about various indigenous groups in north-western Europe, into an ethnic reality. Something similar may have happened at the opposite frontier of the Roman empire, in the south-eastern part of *Aegyptus* (Map 4), where the Blemmyes are said to have lived.

Ethnicity is a concept that evades definition.³ This is perhaps best illustrated by the difficulties encountered in Nazi Germany to define who was Jewish and who was not. Not until months after the Nazi Congress of 1935, where no consensus could be reached, a decision was made which was characterised by Joseph Goebbels as 'a compromise, but the best possible one'.⁴ In the following ten years, however, it became painfully clear that everybody not only has an intuitive knowledge of his ethnicity, and that of others, but that these feelings can be a very powerful force in motivating and altering human behaviour. Ethnic differences, real or invented, thus lend

themselves to be used for pursuing political objectives, as also shown by the recent events in Rwanda and former Yugoslavia.⁵ This may not have been different in the more distant past.⁶ In the study of antiquity it is therefore important to also take into account evidence that may provide information towards the ethnicity of the peoples studied.

The written sources

Until recently the study of this region, with the obvious exception of the Nile Valley, as well as the Blemmyes, limited itself almost exclusively to historical sources, sometimes complemented with cursory visits to the area.⁷ The most relevant texts have now been collected in the *Fontes Historiae Nubiorum*.⁸ The publication of several indices, in the fourth and final volume,⁹ made this compilation readily accessible, while current efforts to place the complete work on the Internet will make it even easier to use.

According to the indexes there are sixty-eight texts in the *Fontes* that somehow refer to the Blemmyes (Table 1). The earliest (no. 34 in the *Fontes*) is the seventh century BC enthronement stele, written in hieroglyphic Egyptian, of the Kushitic king, Anlamani (ca. 620–600 BC), in the temple of Amun in Kawa (near Kerma, Sudan). The latest (nos 331–43) are the so-called Blemmyan documents that are believed to originate from an island in the Nile near al-Gabalīn [Gebelein], just south of Luxor. Nine of these are in Greek, four in a mix of Greek and Coptic. They were written by three different scribes, most likely in the sixth century AD. In between these boundaries are fifty-four texts of which four more are bilingual: numbers 259 (hieroglyphic Egyptian/Meroitic), 305 (Latin/Coptic), 306 (hieroglyphic Egyptian/Demotic) and 307 (Greek/Latin). Of the fifty remaining texts two are in Meroitic, three in Coptic, seven in Demotic, twelve in Latin and twenty-six in Greek.

¹ Hanford. 1951. *De Bello Gallico* book I: 1, 2.

² *Ibid.* book II: 4, 2.

³ Ratcliffe 1994, Yinger 1994.

⁴ Kershaw 1998.

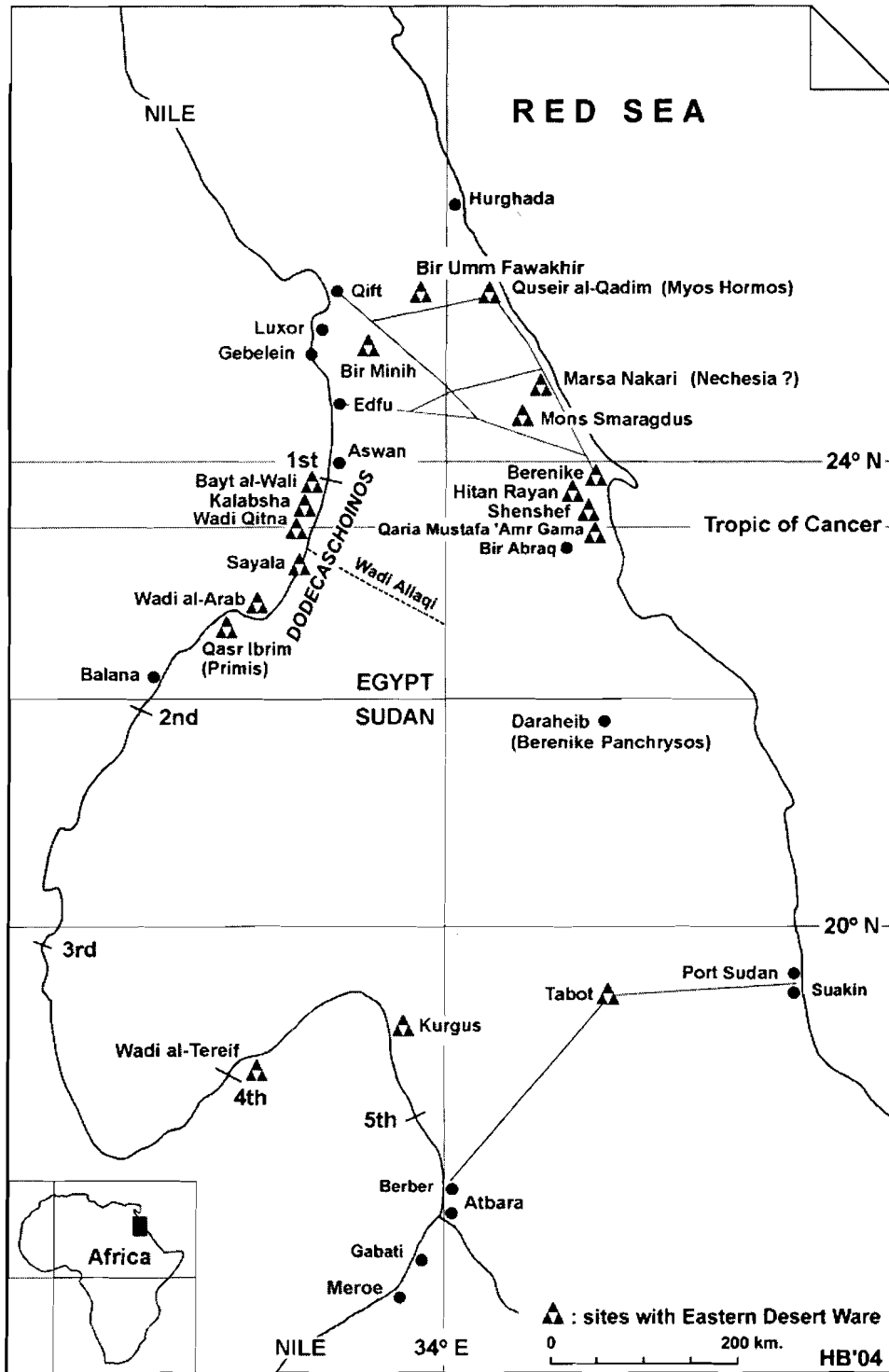
⁵ Smith, forthcoming.

⁶ Hutchinson and Smith 1996.

⁷ Krall 1900, Meredith 1958, Updegraff 1988.

⁸ Eide *et al.* 1994, 1996 and 1998, hereafter '*the Fontes*'.

⁹ Eide *et al.* 2000.



Map 4: Map showing the location of places mentioned in the text

Table 1: *An overview of the references to Blemmyes, Beja, Megabaroi and Trogodytes in the Fontes Historiae Nubiorum (Eide et al. 1994, 1996, 1998 and 2000)*

The table is presented here in three parts, the first (Table 1A) giving the provenance, date, title and language of the texts; the second (Table 1B) giving the author, a relevant quotation and the perspective of the author; and the third (Table 1C) giving the mentioned geographical and personal names.

No.	Pages	Provenance	Date	Title / Medium	Language
34	I: 216–28	Amun temple at Kawa	seventh century BC	Enthronement stela	Hieroglyphic
50*	I: 296–98	al-Hiba (Hibe, el-Hibeh, ancient: Teudjoi, Ankyronpolis)	513 BC	PRylands IX, 5/2–5	Demotic
56	I: 302–12	Mediaeval copies	450–430 BC	Herodotus 2.29–31	Greek
109	II: 557–61	Mediaeval copies	third century BC/ first century AD	Strabo 17.1.2	Greek
116	II: 569–70	Mediaeval copies	Third century BC	Theocritus 7.111–114	Greek
123*	II: 579–80	?	220–219 BC	PHauswaldt VI	Demotic
136*	II: 612–4	Philae?	180 BC	PDodgson	Demotic
190	III: 828–35	Mediaeval copies	first century AD	Strabo 17.1.53–54	Greek
259	III: 997–1000	Meroe (modern: Begrawīya)	Third century AD	Mortuary inscription	Hieroglyphic and Meroitic
260	III: 1000–10	Philae temple	AD 253	Graffito	Demotic
261	III: 1010–6	Philae temple	AD 253	Graffito	Demotic
272	III: 1041–3	Philae temple	AD 273	Graffito	Demotic
276	III: 1049–50	Philae temple	Third century AD?	Graffito	Meroitic
278	III: 1052–5	Mediaeval copies	AD 400	Carmina Minora 25.69–82	Latin
279	III: 1055–7	Discovered in 1433	AD 291	Panegyrici Latini 11.17.4	Latin
280	III: 1057–9	Discovered in 1433	AD 291	Panegyrici Latini 8.5.1–3	Latin
281	III: 1059–60	?	Twelfth century AD	Epitome Historiam 12.31	Greek
282	III: 1060–3	Isaac Casaubon	Fourth–fifth century AD?	Tyranni Triginta 22.6–8	Latin
283*	III: 1063–5	Isaac Casaubon	Fourth–fifth century AD?	Quad. Tyr. 3.1–3	Latin
Idem	Idem	Isaac Casaubon	Fourth–fifth century AD?	Aurelianus 33.4–5	Latin
284	III: 1065–6	Isaac Casaubon	Fourth–fifth century AD?	Probus 17	Latin
292	III: 1076–9	Aswan or Luxor	AD 321	SB I 4223:II	Greek
293*	III: 1079–81	Mediaeval copies	AD 336	Vita Constantini 4.7	Greek
294	III: 1081–3	Mediaeval copies	AD 311	Hist. Eccl. 2.1.13	Greek
295*	III: 1083–7	Dionysias (modern: Qaşr Qārūn)	AD 337–338	P. Abinn. 1. CPL 265	Latin
296	III: 1087–92	Mediaeval copies	AD 390	Vita Prima Graeca 85	Greek
Idem	Idem	Mediaeval copies	Fourth–fifth century AD	Paralipomena 9	Greek
300	III: 1103–7	Kalābsha temple	fifth century AD	Inscription	Meroitic
301	III: 1107–9	Sohāg	fifth century AD	Vita Senutii	Coptic (Bohairic)
302	III: 1110–2	Philae temple	AD 373	Graffito	Demotic
303	III: 1112–4	Mediaeval copies	fourth century AD	Ammianus Marc. 22.15.2	Latin
304	III: 1114–5	Mediaeval copies	fourth century AD	Ammianus Marc. 22.15.21–24	Latin

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No.	Pages	Provenance	Date	Title / Medium	Language
305	III: 1115–21	Mediaeval copies	AD 394	De XII gemmis	Coptic and Latin
306	III: 1121–3	Philae temple	AD 394	Graffito	Demotic and Hieroglyphic
307	III: 1123–5	Mediaeval copies	AD 395	Hist. Monachorum 1.2	Greek and Latin
308	III: 1125–6	Mediaeval copies	AD 400	Carmina Minora 28.15–23	Latin
309*	III: 1126–8	Mediaeval copies	AD 423	Olympiodorus 1.37	Greek
310	III: 1128–31	Kalābsha temple	fifth–sixth century AD	Graffito	Greek
311	III: 1131–2	Kalābsha temple	fifth–sixth century AD	Graffito	Greek
312	III: 1132–4	Tāfa temple (ancient Taphis)	fourth century AD	Inscription	Greek
313	III: 1134–8	Kalābsha temple	fifth century AD	Inscription	Greek
314	III: 1138–41	Philae?	AD 425–450	PLeiden Z.SB XX 14060	Greek
315	III: 1141–4	Philae temple	AD 434	Inscription	Greek
Idem	Idem	Philae temple	fifth century AD	Inscription	Greek
317	III: 1147–53	Kalābsha temple	Before AD 450	Inscription	Greek
318*	III: 1153–8	10 th century AD excerpt	fifth century AD	Priscus 21	Greek
319*	III: 1158–65	Qaṣr Ibrīm	AD 450	Letter of Phonon	Greek
320	III: 1165–71	Qaṣr Ibrīm	AD 450	Coptic Museum 76/50A	Coptic (Sahidic)
321	III: 1171–2	Qaṣr Ibrīm	AD 450	Coptic Museum 76/50B	Coptic
323	III: 1175–6	Mediaeval copies	Sixth century AD	Historia Nova 1.71.1	Greek
324	III: 1177–81	Philae temple	535–537 AD	Five graffiti	Greek
326	III: 1182–5	Luxor	third–fifth century AD	PBerol 5003	Greek
327	III: 1185–8	Mediaeval copies	after AD 529	Anecdota Graeca 5	Greek
328	III: 1188–93	Mediaeval copies	AD 545	De Bellis 1.19.27–37	Greek
329	III: 1193–4	Mediaeval copies	AD 551	Romana 333	Latin
331	III: 1203–5	al-Gabalīn?	Sixth century AD?	Blemmyan document	Coptic and Greek
332	III: 1205–6	al-Gabalīn?	Sixth century AD?	Blemmyan document	Coptic and Greek
333	III: 1206–7	al-Gabalīn?	Sixth century AD?	Blemmyan document	Coptic and Greek
334	III: 1207–8	al-Gabalīn?	Sixth century AD?	Blemmyan document	Greek
335	III: 1208–9	al-Gabalīn?	Sixth century AD?	Blemmyan document	Greek
336*	III: 1209–10	al-Gabalīn?	Sixth century AD?	Blemmyan document	Greek
337	III: 1210–1	al-Gabalīn?	Sixth century AD?	Blemmyan document	Greek
338	III: 1211–2	al-Gabalīn?	Sixth century AD?	Blemmyan document	Greek
339*	III: 1212–4	al-Gabalīn?	Sixth century AD?	Blemmyan document	Coptic and Greek
340	III: 1214	al-Gabalīn?	Sixth century AD?	Blemmyan document	Greek
341	III: 1215	al-Gabalīn?	Sixth century AD?	Blemmyan document	Greek
342	III: 1215–6	al-Gabalīn?	Sixth century AD?	Blemmyan document	Greek
343	III: 1216	al-Gabalīn?	Sixth century AD?	Blemmyan document	Greek

Additional references to ‘Beja’

No.	Pages	Provenance	Date	Title / Medium	Language
71	II: 425	Temple T at Kawa	fifth century BC	Inscription/graffito	Hieroglyphic
109	II: 561	Mediaeval copies	third century BC/ first century AD	Strabo 17.1.2	Greek
234	III: 953	Christian Topography	Second–third century AD/AD 550	Andulitana II (see 285)	Greek
285	III: 1068	Meroe	third–fourth century AD	Inscription (see 234)	Greek
298*	III: 1096–7	Aksum	fourth century AD	Inscription	Greek
299*	III: 1102	Aksum	fourth century AD	Inscription	Greek
331–343	III: 1199	al-Gabalīn?	Sixth century AD	Blemmyan documents	Coptic and Greek

Additional references to 'Megabaroi'

No.	Pages	Provenance	Date	Title / Medium	Language
189	III: 826	Mediaeval copies	first century AD	Strabo 16.4.8–17	Greek
198	III: 859	Mediaeval copies	first century AD	Naturalis Hist. 6.189–190	Latin

Additional references to 'Trogodytes'

Comments	I: 283	Elephantine	fifth–sixth century BC	Inscription	Hieroglyphic
57	I: 313	Mediaeval copies	450–430 BC	Herodotus 3.97.2–3	Greek
66	I: 331	Mediaeval copies	450–430 BC	Herodotus 4.183.4	Greek
147	II: 659–60	Mediaeval copies	Second century BC	Diodorus 3.33.2	Greek
171	II: 714	Philae temple	first century BC	Epigram	Greek
189	III: 826	Mediaeval copies	first century AD	Strabo 16.4.8–17	Greek
202	III: 869			Naturalis Hist. 6.172	
218	III: 917–8	Mediaeval copies	AD 110–115	Life of Anthony 27.3–5	Greek
224	III: 932–5	?	first–second century AD	P della raccolta Milanese	Greek
233	III: 947–8	Seventh century abstract	Second–fourth century AD	Rav. Ano. Cos. 5.28.3	Latin
274	III: 1046–8	Mediaeval copies	AD 350–375	Aethiopica 8.16.4	Greek

Table 1B: *Author, relevant part and perspective of the author from the references to Blemmyes, Beja, Megabaroi and Trogodytes in the Fontes Historiae Nubiorum (Eide et al. 1994, 1996, 1998 and 2000).*

Could the authors have had first-hand knowledge of the subject matter and are these authors presented as party in the text or mentioned as enemies, exotic or simply in a geographical or ethnological list?

No.	Author	Relevant Quotation / Abstract	First-hand?	Perspective
34	King Anlamani	... caused his army to invade the foreign country Bulahau.	Yes	Enemies
50*	Petrie	... came down and summoned Wahibremer, a Blemmyan.	Yes	Party
56	Herodotus	... there is a great lake around which nomad Aithiopians live.	No	List
109	Eratosthenes/Strabo	... toward the Red Sea the Megabaroi and the Blemmyes.	No	List
116	Theocritus	... beneath the rock of the Blemmyes, ...	Literary	Exotic
123*	Anonymous official	Marriage contract between a Blemmyan/Megabari and an Egyptian woman.	Yes	Party
136*	Anonymous official	... drinking with the Blemmyes, saying herdsman, night has come ...	Yes	Party
190	Strabo	... Blemmyes (...) these are nomads and neither many nor warlike ...	Yes	List
259	King Teqorideamani	Evidence for reign.	Yes	Party
260	Pasan	... the prayers which I made to you [Isis] in the desert ...	Yes	Party
261	Tami	Tami describes his career and prays to Isis.	Yes	Enemies
272	Teos (Djedhor)	Teos describes his career and prays to Isis.	Yes	Enemies
276	King Yesebokheamani	Not fully translated.	Yes	Party
278	Claudius Claudianus	... who once was ordered to watch over Meroe and the Nile.	Literary	Exotic
279	Anonymous	... Blemmyes (...) against the Aithiopians ...	Yes	Exotic
280	Anonymous	... Nile trophies under which the Aithiopian and the Indian ...	Yes	Exotic

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No.	Author	Relevant Quotation / Abstract	First-hand?	Perspective
281	Ioannes Zonaras	... was marching through Egypt against the Aithiopians ...	No	Enemies
282	Anonymous	... he drove back the barbarian peoples ...	?	Enemies
283*	Anonymous	... he also maintained close relations with the Blemmyes ...	?	Party
Idem	Anonymous	... there were Blemmyes (...) Indians (...) each with their gifts ...	?	List
284	Anonymous	... Coptos and Ptolemais had been liberated from the Blemmyes ...	?	Enemies
292	Anonymous official	The Roman army has restored peace in the region.	Yes	Enemies
293*	Eusebius	... both the Blemmyan and the Indian races and the Aithiopians ...	Yes	Party
294	Eusebius	... from the land of the Aithiopians ...	Yes	Exotic
295*	Flavius Abinnaeus	... to bring refugees from the Blemmyan people ...	Yes	Party
296	Anonymous	... the barbarians were waging war ...	Yes	Enemies
Idem	Anonymous	When he had done so, the Blemmyes released him.	Yes	Enemies
300	King Kharamadoye	Isemne (see 311), Kharamadoye (not fully translated).	Yes	?
301	Besa	... it happened one day that the Blemmyes came north ...	Yes	Enemies
302	Petesenufe	... the Blemmyes had gone against the Akhbewe (Nubians/Hibis?) ...	Yes	Enemies
303	Ammianus Marcellinus	... Elephantine and Meroe, cities of the Aithiopians ...	Yes	List
304	Ammianus Marcellinus	... have been driven to migrate to the land of the Blemmyes.	Yes	Exotic
305	Epiphanius	... Kalābsha, which is now held by the Blemmyes ...	No	Exotic
306	Esmetakhom	... Madulis, lord of Pure Island, the great god ...	Yes	Party
307	Anonymous monk	... the Aithiopians (...) Aswan (...) laid waste its surroundings ...	Yes	Enemies
308	Claudius Claudianus	... winds through Meroe and fierce Blemmyes ...	Literary	Exotic
309*	Olympiodorus (see 326)	... the barbarians around Aswan, the Blemmyes ...	Yes	Party
310	King Tamal	I, King Tamal ...	Yes	Party
311	King Isemne (see 300)	I, King Isemne ...	Yes	Party
312	Kola (Tesemaekhem?)	Silbanikhem (...) agent of the cult society Amati, built it.	Yes	Party
313	Presidents of three cults	... Altik[...] Pison president of the cult society of Abene ...	Yes	Party
314	Appion	... the Blemmyes (...) we suffer many attacks from them ...	Yes	Enemies
315	Pasnous	... I, Pasnous, son of Pachoumios, priest of Ptireus ...	Yes	Party
Idem	Pamet	... I, Pamet, son of Bereos, priest of Ptireus ...	Yes	Party
317	King Silko	... I fought with the Blemmyes and God (Mandulis?) gave me victory ...	Yes	Enemies
318*	Priscus	The Blemmyes and the Noubades, having been defeated ...	Yes	Party
319*	King Phonen	The most distinguished Phonen, king of the Blemmyes ...	Yes	Party
320	Viventius	... to Tantani, the tribal chief of the nation of the Anouba ...	Yes	Party
321	Yahatek	... to the Lord Tantani, the lord of the Nouba ...	Yes	Party
323	Zosimus	... Probus overcame both it and the Blemmyes, who were its allies ...	No	Enemies
324	Anonymous	Praise be to Apa Theodoros.	Yes	Enemies

No.	Author	Relevant Quotation / Abstract	First-hand?	Perspective
326	Olympiodorus? (see 309)	... the Blemmyes (...) the men whom he could catch he killed.	Literary	Exotic
327	Anonymous	... a huge army, (...) the so-called Blemmyes and Noubades ...	No	Party
328	Procopius	... drive off the Blemmyes and the other barbarians ...	No	Enemies
329	Jordanus	... he checked the Noubades and the Blemmyes ...	No	List
331	Sansnos	Transfer of ownership of a slave and the freeing of her children.	Yes	Party
332	Sansnos?	A loan, secured by a piece of land, to be used for ransom.	Yes	Party
333	Sansnos	A loan secured by a tavern.	Yes	Party
334	Agathon	Pokatimne entrusts the island Temsir/Tanare to Poae.	Yes	Party
335	Agathon	A loan secured by two slaves.	Yes	Party
336*	Sansnos	The king entrusts the island Tanare to his children.	Yes	Party
337	Dioskoros	Receipt of Noubadian coins.	Yes	Party
338	Sansnos	Receipt of Noubadian coins.	Yes	Party
339*	Agathon	Royal order to Sophia to stay in some unclear place or status.	Yes	Party
340	Sansnos	Acknowledgement of debt.	Yes	Party
341	Sansnos?	Acknowledgement of debt.	Yes	Party
342	Sansnos	Acknowledgement of debt.	Yes	Party
343	Sansnos?	Acknowledgement of debt.	Yes	Party
Additional references to 'Beja'				
No.	Author	Relevant quotation / Abstract	First hand?	Perspective
71	King Irike-Amannote	Ikike-Amannote defeats both the Rehrehes and the Meded.	Yes	Enemies
109	Eratosthenes/Strabo	... Megabaroi and the Blemmyes (...) along the sea live the Trogodytes.	No	List
234	Cosmas Indicopleustes	Having subdued Atalmo and Beja (...) up to the boundaries of Egypt ...	No	Enemies
285	Anonymous king	[...] and I pillaged the [...]	Yes?	Enemies
298*	King Aeizanas	... when the nation of the Bougaites once revolted ...	Yes	Party
299*	King Azanas	... King of (...) Khaso and Bougaites ...	Yes	Party
331-43	Three notary scribes	An archive of thirteen official documents (see above).	Yes	Party
Additional references to 'Megabaroi'				
189	Strabo	... the Aithiopian Megabaroi put iron knobs on their clubs ...	Yes	Exotic
198	Pliny the Elder	... opposite Meroe, live the Megabaroi (...) called the Adiabari ...	No	List
Additional references to 'Trogodytes'				
Comments	King Necho II	Necho II sent a riverine expedition against the Trogodytes.	Yes	?
57	Herodotus	... their neighbours (...) have subterranean dwellings ...	No	Party
66	Herodotus	The Aithiopian Trogodytes are the swiftest runners ... (see 274)	No	Exotic
147	Diodorus/Agatharchides	Their local burial customs are quite extraordinary. (see 189)	No	Exotic
171	Iunius Sabinus	... the tribes of the Aithiopians (Trogodytes?) ...	Yes	Exotic
189	Strabo	The Trogodytes lead a nomadic life ...	Yes	Exotic

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No.	Author	Relevant quotation / Abstract	First hand?	Perspective
202	Pliny the Elder	... the most important trading centre of the Trogodytes ...	No	List
218	Plutarch	... be they Aithiopians, Trogodytes ...	No	Party
224	Nicolaus Demascenus?	The Trogodytes who had been dispersed by Rufus [...]	Yes?	Enemies
233	Ravennas Geographus	... Aithiopia of the Trogodytes ...	No	List
274	Heliodorus	The Trogodytes inhabit a part of Aithiopia; they are nomads ...	No?	Exotic

Table 1C: *Geographical and personal names — and some additional remarks — as mentioned in the references to Blemmyes, Beja, Megabaroi and Trogodytes in the Fontes Historiae Nubiorum (Eide et al. 1994, 1996, 1998 and 2000)*

No.	Geographical names	Personal names	Remarks / Abstract
34	Bulahau (Blemmyes?)	Anlamani and Nasalsa (his mother)	Kawa is on the east bank of the Nile, 100 km south of the Third Cataract.
50*	Teudjoi, Blemmyes	Ahmose, Wahibremer (a Blemmyan)	Blemmyes seem to have acted as guards/policemen.
56	Elephantine, Aithiopians, Meroe	—	Description constructed from ‘hearsay’.
109	Red Sea, Megabaroi, Blemmyes, Aithiopians, Trogodytes, Nubia	Psammetich	Strabo (see 190) quotes Eratosthenes (both appear trustworthy).
116	Edonians, Hebrus, Aithiopians, Blemmyes, Nile	—	This ‘rock’ may well be one of the cataracts.
123*	Blemmyes, Black Land (Egypt)	Harmais (son of Harpaeis), Taese (daughter of Khahor)	Pabus, the son of Hamais, is elsewhere called Megabaroi.
136*	Elephantine, Blemmyes (see 312)	Petra (son of Pshenpoer/Peteharhensnufi)	Egyptians and Blemmyes drinking and disturbing the peace together.
190	Trogodytes, Blemmyes, Noubai, Magabaroi, Aithiopians	—	Strabo’s own ‘observation’ (see 109).
259	—	Teqorideamani	King Teqorideamus may have ruled the Dodecaschoinos (see 260).
260	Final Island (Philae), Pure Island (Abaton), Black Land (Egypt)	Pasan (son of Paese), Teqorideamani	The deserts may have been dominated by the Blemmyes (see 259).
261	Final Island (Philae), Pure Island (Abaton)	Bekmeti (son of Qerenya)	Tami’s career may be influenced by the conflicts in the region.
272	Pure Island (Abaton)	Teos (son of Peteos)	Teos may have been an officer of the fleet fighting the Blemmyes.
276	Not fully translated	Yesebokheamani	Meroitic control over the Dodecaschoinos made visiting Philae possible.
278	Danube, Tomi, Meroe, Nile	Celerinus	At this time ‘Blemmyan’ is synonym with ‘enemy of Christianity’ (see 293).
279	Blemmyes, Aithiopians	Emperor Maximian	Blemmyes are (partly) responsible for the troubles in the region.
280	Nile, Aithiopians, Indians (Blemmyes? see 283 and 293)	Emperor Constantinus I	It remains unclear after which unrest the region is said to be pacified.
281	Egypt, Aithiopians	Emperor Diocletianus	Connection between the Persian war and a campaign in Upper Egypt.
282	Egypt, Thebaid (Upper Egypt)	Lucius Mussius Aemilianus (Prefect of Egypt), Emperor Gallienus	These barbarians may well be the Blemmyes.
283*	Egypt, African Frontier, Blemmyes, Saracens	Firmus, Queen Zenobia, Emperor Aurelius	Firmus trade contacts aided Aurelius’s victory over Zenobia.
Idem	Lybia (Libya?) (North Africa), Blemmyes, Indians (see 280 and 293)	Emperor Aurelius	Captives are displayed in a procession for Aurelius in Alexandria.

No.	Geographical names	Personal names	Remarks / Abstract
284	Pamphylia, Isauria, Coptos, Ptolemais, Blemmyes	Probus, Narseus	Blemmyes aided the population in their revolt against the Romans.
292	—	Victorinus, Emperor Licinius	The route between Aswan and Philae had to be protected by a wall.
293*	Aithiopians, Blemmyes, Indians (see 280 and 283)	Emperor Constantinus I	Barbarian envoys (see 278) pay their respect to the Emperor.
294	Aithiopians	—	The Aithiopians are said to be ruled by queens.
295*	Diospolis (Luxor), Thebaid (Upper Egypt), Blemmyes	Emperors Constantinus and Constans	Flavius Abinnaeus was helping pro-Roman Blemmyes.
296	'Barbarians' (most likely Blemmyes)	Pachomius	These barbarians may have been Meroites or, more likely, Blemmyes.
Idem	Blemmyes	'the Great', 'the Blessed' (both most likely Pachomius)	Blemmyes as desert dwelling (like the monks) enemies of Christianity.
300	Luxor, Napata, Qurte, Philae, Karanog, Soleb (not fully translated)	Isemne (see 311), Kharamadoye (not fully translated)	Soleb is on the west bank of the Nile, 75 km north of the Third Cataract.
301	Blemmyes, Ptolemais	Shenute	With a miracle, Shenute frees the captives of Blemmyan raiders.
302	Blemmyes, Nubians?, Pure Island (Abaton)	Petsinamre (son of Page), Petesenufe (son of Harendotes)	Attacks from the south may have disturbed the regular cult life in Philae.
303	Elephantine, Meroe, Aithiopians, Red Sea, Catadupians, Saracens	—	The Blemmyes may have lived between the Nile and the Red Sea.
304	Blemmyes	—	The hippopotamus is hunted to extinction in Egypt, but not south of there.
305	Red Sea, Smaragdinum, Berenike, Elephanine, Kalābsha, Blemmyes	Emperors Nero and Domitian	Blemmyes have recently conquered Kalābsha and Mons Smaragdus.
306	Pure Island (Abaton)	Esmetakhom (son of Esmet)	The cult of Madulis accommodated both Egyptian and Blemmyes.
307	Aithiopians, Aswan, Thebaid (Upper Egypt)	Emperor Theodosius	Aithiopinians is used here for Blemmyes, Beja and 'barbarians'.
308	Nile, Lybia (or Libya?) (North Africa), Aithiopinias, Blemmyes	—	The Blemmyes appear to live in the Nile Valley.
309*	Luxor, Aswan, Kalābsha, Blemmyes	—	For a visit to the emerald mines in the region a royal order is needed.
310	—	Tamal, Sentaesis, Pateboras	Tamal may have been king of the Blemmyes between AD 394 and 453.
311	—	Isemne, Degou, Ploulan	The tribal Blemmyes may have seen Kalābsha as their cultural centre.
312	—	Kola, Tesemaickhem, Silbanikhem (son of Namous)	The Blemmyes must have integrated with society (see 136).
313	Kalābsha	Phonen, Gamatifant Psentaesis, Menroukhem Plokhkarour	The Blemmyes had non-Egyptian gods and non-Egyptian names.
314	Aswan, Elephantine, Philae, Blemmyes, Annoubades	Emperors Flavius Theodosius and Valentianus	Blemmyes and Annoubades (Nubians) threaten Upper Egypt.
315	—	Pasnous (son of Pachoumios)	The names of the writer and the god may be Blemmyan or Nubian.
Idem	—	Pamet (son of Bereos)	The names of the writer and the god may be Blemmyan or Nubian.
317	Noubades, Aithiopians, Kalābsha, Tāfa, Blemmyes	Silko (see 319)	Maybe the Noubades majority spoke Nubian and the Blemmyes Meroitic.
318*	Blemmyes, Noubades, Philae	Maximinus	Despite subsidies the raids continue (see 329).
319*	Blemmyes	Phonen (king of the Blemmyes), Abouti (king of the Noubades), Silko	Phones asks Abouti, the successor of Silko (see 317), to withdraw.
320	Egypt, Anouba, Aswan, Philae	Viventius, Tantani	The Blemmyes may also have had a tribal chief (phylarch).

PEOPLE OF THE RED SEA

No.	Geographical names	Personal names	Remarks / Abstract
321	Nouba, Talmis	Yahatek, Tantani	Yahatek may be a Blemmyan name.
323	Ptolemais, Thebaid (Upper Egypt), Coptos, Blemmyes	Probus	The revolt in Ptolemais and Coptos was supported by the Blemmyes.
324	—	Bishop Apa Theodorus	Philae turned from a surviving pagan shrine into a Christian sanctuary.
326	Blemmyes	Germanus	The text cannot be linked to a datable episode.
327	Himyarites, Negran, Coptos, Berenike, Blemmyes, Noubades	Emperor Justinus, King Ella Asbeha, Alamoundaros	The troops to help the Christians in Arabia were probably never sent.
328	Aksum, Elephantine, Blemmyes, Nobatai, Oasis, Philae	Emperor Diocletianus, Narses	Procopius' description may have served to explain the existing situation.
329	Alexandria, Noubades, Blemmyes, Aithiopia	Attila, Florus, Zeno	This account is probably based on that of Priscus (see 318).
331	—	Kharafrik, Mahanat, Apehset, Sentekhaynis, Munkokhnhiu	Tribal chief Khaias signed the document which does not free the mother.
332	—	Trempyoh (daughter of Phant)	The names are Egyptian.
333	—	Sulien (son of Wanaktikuta), Phant	The same parties as in 335.
334	Temsir (an island also known as Tanare, see 336)	Pokatimne, Poac	The location and final status of the island remains uncertain.
335	—	Sulien (son of Wanaktikuta), Phant (son of Kirbeetik), Todetes	The same parties as in 333.
336*	Blemmyes, Tanare (Temsir? See 334)	Kharakhen (both the king and his son, see 339), Kharapatkhur, Kharahiet	The 'Romans' might not agree to pay taxes to their Blemmyan overlords.
337	—	Ose	Actually two receipts, the relation between which remains unclear.
338	—	Argon (son of Laize), Noaymek	Invalid if written by Diokoros, valid if written by Sansnos.
339*	Blemmyes	Barakhia (king of the Blemmyes), Amnas/Sophia, Kharakhen (see 336)	Amnas was baptised Sophia, Barakhia succeeded Kharakhen.
340	—	Osian, Ose (see 341–343)	Ose is specified to be phylarkhos (tribal chief).
341	—	Sle, Ose (tribal chief, see 340 and 343)	The same parties as in 342, but a different date.
342	—	Sle, Ose (tribal chief, see 340 and 343)	The same parties as in 341, but a different date.
343	—	Tusikia, Hadetak[...], Ose (tribal chief, see 340–2)	—

Additional references to 'Beja'

No.	Geographical names	Personal names	Remarks / Abstract
71	Rehrehes (in the desert to the north), Meded (western desert dwellers)	Irike-Amannote, King Talakhamani (his predecessor)	These desert dwellers may have been groups of the Beja.
109	Red Sea, Megabaroï, Blemmyes, Aithiopiens, Trogodytes, Nubai	Psammetich	Blemmyes, Megabaroï and Trogodytes may be groups of the Beja.
234	Red Sea, Atalmo, Beja (Blemmyes?), Tangaites	—	The Beja may be the Blemmyes.
285	Aksum, Himyar	—	The first lacuna may have contained a reference to the Beja.
298*	Aksumites, Himyarites, Aithiopiens, Bougaites (Beja?)	Aeizanas, Sazanan and Adiophan (his brothers)	The Bougaites may be the Beja (see 299).
299*	Aksumites, Himyarites, Bougaites (Beja?)	Azanas	The Bougaites may be the Beja (see 298)'
331–43	Temsir, Tanare, Blemmyes	Chiefs Khaias, Kharakhen, Barakhia and Ose	The names and other peculiarities suggest a third language (Beja?).

Additional references to 'Megabaroi'

No.	Geographical names	Personal names	Remarks / Abstract
189	Trogodytes, Aithiopian	—	This description of the Red Sea coast from Aristocreon and Artemidorus.
198	Trogodytes, Red Sea, Meroe, Napata	—	Pliny's uncritical compilation includes many errors and fabulous tales.

Additional references to 'Trogodytes'

Comments	The text is too fragmentary to be fully understood	The text is too fragmentary to be fully understood	The text is too fragmentary to be fully understood
57	Aithiopians, Indians	Cambyses	This may refer to the Trogodytes.
66	Aithiopians, Trogodytes	—	Trogodytes may be used here to mean nomads.
147	—	—	Diodorus quotes Agatharchides; the observation may be accurate.
171	Aswan, Aithiopians or Trogodytes	Iunius Sabinus	Aithiopians may have to be read here as Trogodytes.
189	—	—	This description is partly similar to 147.
202	Sace, Daphnis, Adulites, Trogodytes, Ptolemais	—	The description follows the East African coast (Azania).
218	Aithiopians, Trogodytes, Hebrews, Arabs, Syrians, Medes, Parthians	—	The Trogodytes mentioned may have come from the Dodecaschoinos.
224	Aithiopians, Trogodytes	Rufus	The status and interpretation of the text remains unclear.
233	Aithiopians, Trogodytes	—	This may refer to the area between the Nile and the Red Sea.
274	Trogodytes, Aithiopia, Arabs	—	They are also mentioned to be swift runners (see 66).

The evidence of a Blemmyan language, possibly related to Meroitic, is limited to specific names of persons and gods, the use of 'pidgin' Greek in some texts and observations like that of Plutarch who wrote that Cleopatra VII could '... deliver her responses by herself [without an interpreter] to most of them, be they Aithiopians, Trogodytes, Hebrews, Arabs, Syrians, Medes or Parthians.'¹⁰ Five additional texts in the *Fontes* are listed as referring to the Beja, a name often seen as a synonym for the Blemmyes or as a later version thereof. Apart from a fifth century BC inscription in hieroglyphic Egyptian (no. 71) in Kawa, these are second- to fourth-century AD inscriptions, in Greek, found much further to the south, in Meroe, Aksum and Adulis, on the Red Sea coast.

Four of these seventy-three texts (taken here as 100%) must be considered literary, fifty-six (77%) of the remaining sixty-nine are written by authors who can justifiably claim first-hand knowledge of their subject. Only thirty-one (42%) of all texts actually mention Blemmyes or Beja, in the remaining forty-two the references are indirect to a variable extent. In thirty-seven texts (51%) Blemmyes or Beja somehow appear as more or less active participants. In the remaining thirty-six they are discussed as outsiders, either as part of a geographical

description, as an exotic phenomenon, or as enemies of the state or established religion. Only thirteen texts (18%) meet all three criteria of reliability; these are marked with an asterisk in Table 1. Although these criteria may be interpreted differently and some texts may be assigned to different groups, the above percentages provide a fair characterisation of the available sources.

It is not just the dearth of information that hampers the formulation of firm conclusions but even more so the fact that the sources are far from unambiguous. The 'father of history', Herodotus (no. 56), is now rarely considered to be a reliable source, but even the three best informed sources, Eratosthenes (*ca.* 275–194 BC)/Strabo (*ca.* 64/63 BC–AD 18) (nos 109 and 190), Olympiodorus of Thebes who visited the Blemmyes *ca.* AD 425 (nos 309 and 326?) and Procopius of Caesarea (*ca.* AD 490/507–560) (no. 328), do not agree on the area in which the Blemmyes live (the Nile Valley or the Eastern Desert) nor on their number, neighbours or life-style: some suggest a nomadic tribe or others a settled chiefdom. It is remarkable that Olympiodorus mentions the emerald mines in the report on his visit to *Dodecaschoinos*.¹¹ The only known sources

¹⁰ *Life of Anthony* 27.3–5, no. 218 in the *Fontes*.

¹¹ In Late Antiquity (the Byzantine Period) the area between Aswan and Hiera Sycaminos (near Sayala) was referred to as the Dodecaschoinos (Map 4), a name later also used for all of Lower Nubia (between the First and the Second

of this gemstone, actually beryl, in Egypt were in the Mons Smaragdus (Wādī Sikait) region, far from Kalābsha (Greek: Talmis) and indeed the Nile Valley (Map 4). Epiphanius (no. 305) also places these mines near Kalābsha as well as on an island in the Red Sea, probably confusing them with the peridot mine on St John's Island¹² near Berenike. Just as in Julius Caesar's account of the rivers in northern Europe, the geography of the area seems to have been distorted. On the other hand, the texts thought to be most closely associated with the Blemmyes were found as far apart as Qaṣr Ibrīm (nos 319 and 321), Kalābsha (nos 310, 311 and 313) and al-Gabalīn [Gebelein] (nos 331–43).

There is a similar confusion concerning the names of ethnic groups. Bulahau, Blemmyes, Beja and Bougaites may all refer to the same group, or different parts thereof, although there is precious little evidence to support this. The suggestion that the name 'Indians' may include or refer specifically to the Blemmyes (no. 280) seems less plausible as both names are mentioned simultaneously elsewhere (nos 283 and 293). The same holds true for Aithiopiāns (no. 17). It is remarkable that the son of the Blemmyan mentioned in PHauswaldt VI (no. 123) is identified as a Megabaroi in PHauswaldt XV. This may indicate that Blemmyes and Megabaroi were somehow connected or that it was possible to belong to more than one ethnic group at the same time, just as Jules Destrée could be Walloon, Belgian or European depending on the context. Alternatively, it could be that being Blemmyan referred to a certain life-style, independent of ethnicity, like Gypsy, Bedouin or Persian. The last was, at the time, used to point to a military background, as Blemmyan seems to do in PRylands IX (no. 50).

Despite the above and other problems, conclusions that seem relatively secure are that several groups must have roamed the desert between the Nile Valley and the Red Sea in antiquity, just as they do at present. And as there is today, there seems to have been some confusion concerning the ethnic units composing these groups.¹³ Both the ancient and the modern sources mention an unexpectedly large number of names for the relatively small number of inhabitants that this arid wasteland was ever able to sustain. It seems reasonable to assume that these groups had fluid edges and overlap in a way that is difficult for outsiders to comprehend. Blemmyan may originally have been one of the names used by the people themselves to whom it was meant to refer. It may also have been an invention of outsiders as a means to reduce the confusion and to be able to refer to the inhabitants of the area, just as Julius Caesar apparently invented the term 'Belgian'. For political reasons, following several hostile encounters in the Nile Valley and further

stimulated by the competition over scarce desert resources between the pastoral nomads and early Christian ascetic monks (nos 278, 296 and 301), the term evolved into an ethnic reality. The subjects started to use the term as well, if they did not already do so, as attested when and where they were powerful enough to leave their mark (nos 310–3). Most likely, however, there were always several rival groups in the region, at times united and at times divided by language, religion or chieftains. None of these will have unequivocally been defined as Blemmyes for any prolonged period of time. This may partly explain the limited success of diplomatic efforts to pacify the region (nos 293, 318, 328).

One ancient text that is not in the *Fontes*, but of interest here, is in the *Natural History* by Pliny the Elder: '*Blemmyis tradantur capita abesse ore et oculis pectori adfixis*' ('the Blemmyes are reported to have no heads, their mouth and eyes being attached to their chests').¹⁴ This curious remark developed into the best-known image of the Blemmyes, partly because it was utilised by the early Christian church in its efforts to demonise pagan peoples. Eugen Strouhal (Charles University, Prague) kindly pointed out that in 1974 a tall but narrow, oval shield was found in Qaṣr Ibrīm that was obviously designed to cover its bearer from the knees up to the nose.¹⁵ When used in this manner, and especially when then observed from some distance, the resulting silhouette fits Pliny's description rather nicely. Rarely, however, do the written sources and the archaeological record appear to complement each other so satisfactorily.¹⁶

Cataract).

¹² Zebirget [Zagbargad] Island, about 80 km south-east of Berenike (Map 4).

¹³ Murray 1935, Paul 1954.

¹⁴ Pliny the Elder. 1961. V, 46.

¹⁵ Plumley 1975.

¹⁶ Wendrich *et al.* 2003, Rosen forthcoming

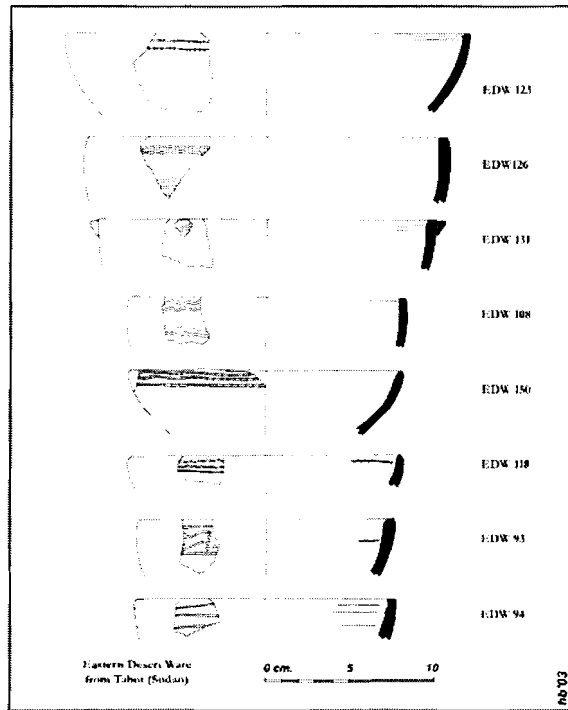


Figure 1: A selection of the Eastern Desert Ware (EDW) excavated in Tabot (in Sudan, 19°N 00'50"–35°E 55'22", Map 4), see Table 2 for a description

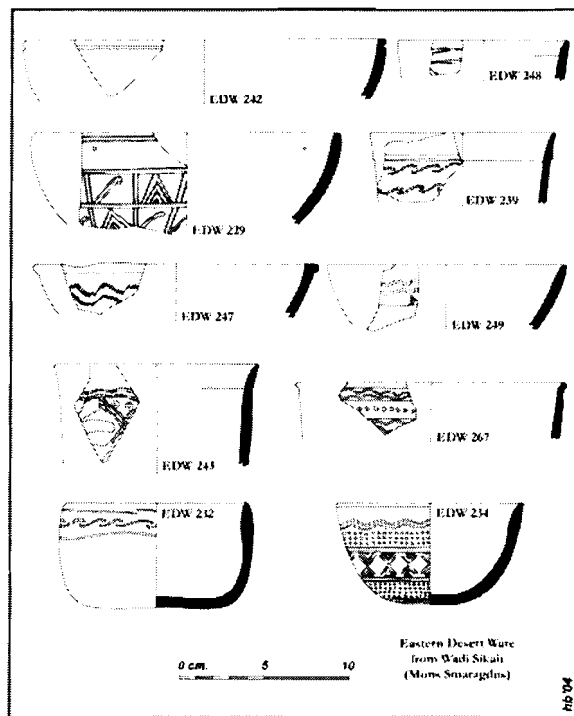


Figure 2: A selection of the Eastern Desert Ware (EDW) excavated in Wādī Sikait (in the Mons Smaragdus area, 24°N 37'57"–34°E 47'26", Map 4), see Table 2 for a description

Table 2: *Description of a selection of Eastern Desert Ware excavated in Tabot and Wādī Sikait*

Data are presented in the following format:

EDW number: provenance and context. Weight and average thickness of the sherd. Munsell colour and treatment of inside. Munsell colour and treatment of outside. Method of decoration, tools and direction. Rim diameter and estimated vessel equivalent. Munsell colour of break, fabric. Classification of form and lay-out, predominant motifs. Remarks and possible parallels.

Eastern Desert Ware from Tabot, see Figure 1 for illustration

- EDW 93 Tabot, 110 x / 118 y — LI, way-station (associated with mines and quarries?), third–fourth century AD. Weight 5 g. Average thickness 7.4 mm. Inside 10R 5/6, wiped. Outside 10R 6/8, smoothed. Decoration impressed, incised with triangular tool (direction unknown). Rim diameter 14 cm. (3% preserved). Break 2.5YR 5/2, fabric unclassified. Form and lay-out H 1d, D 2 (lines, triangles).
- EDW 94 Tabot, 109 x / 118 y — LI, way-station (associated with mines and quarries?), third–fourth century AD. Weight 5 g. Average thickness 7.3 mm. Inside 10R 4/1, wiped. Outside 10R 4/1, smoothed. Decoration incised with chisel (direction unknown). Rim diameter 15 cm. (3% preserved). Break 7.5YR 4/2. Form and lay-out H 1, D 0 (lines). Carefully squared rim. Possible parallels Sayala 76909 (Kromer 1967: 96–9, Abb. 31/5) and EDW 132 (Tabot).
- EDW 108 Tabot, 105 x / 106 y — LI, way-station (associated with mines and quarries?), third–fourth century AD. Weight 4 g. Average thickness 4.4 mm. Inside 2.5YR 5/4, burnished. Outside 10R 4/2, burnished. Decoration incised with chisel (direction unknown). Rim diameter 15 cm. (4% preserved). Break 10YR 4/1, fabric EDW–2. Form and lay-out H 2b, D 3 (waves). Possible parallels BE94/95–1 [bce] pb# 67 (Hayes 1996: 166, Fig. 6–15/5), EDW 57 (Berenike), EDW 126 (Tabot), EDW 207 (Wādī Qitna), EDW 210 (Wādī Qitna) and EDW 235 (Wādī Sikait).
- EDW 118 Tabot, 154 x / 106 y — LIII, way-station (associated with mines and quarries?), third–fourth century AD. Weight 3 g. Average thickness 5.5 mm. Inside 5YR 2.5/1, burnished. Outside 2.5YR 3/6, burnished. Decoration incised with chisel (direction unknown). Rim diameter 14 cm. (5% preserved). Break 7.5YR 4/1, fabric unclassified. Form and lay-out H 2b, D 3 (lines, waves).
- EDW 123 Tabot, 116 x / 125 y — LII, way-station (associated with mines and quarries?), third–fourth century AD. Weight 16 g. Average thickness 5.2 mm. Inside 10R 4/2, wiped. Outside 10R 4/3, burnished. Decoration incised, punctuated with chisel, filled in (direction unknown). Rim diameter 21 cm. (4% preserved). Break 5YR 4/2, fabric unclassified. Form and lay-out H 2b, D 2 (lines). Carefully squared rim.
- EDW 126 Tabot, 109 x / 024 y — LI, way-station (associated with mines and quarries?), third–fourth century AD. Weight 12 g. Average thickness 6.8 mm. Inside 2.5YR 3/1, burnished. Outside 2.5YR 3/1, smoothed. Decoration incised with chisel (direction unknown). Rim diameter 21 cm. (8% preserved). Break 5YR 3/1, fabric EDW–3. Form and lay-out H 2b, D 3 (waves). Carefully squared rim. Possible parallels BE94/95–1 [bce] pb# 67 (Hayes 1996: 166, Fig. 6–15/5), EDW 57 (Berenike), EDW 108 (Tabot), EDW 207 (Wādī Qitna), EDW 210 (Wādī Qitna) and EDW 235 (Wādī Sikait).
- EDW 131 Tabot, 107 x / 024 y — LI, way-station (associated with mines and quarries?), third–fourth century AD. Weight 6 g. Average thickness 5.9 mm. Inside 10R 5/4, wiped. Outside 10R 5/6. Rim diameter 19 cm. (3% preserved). Break 10R 3/1, fabric unclassified. Lug-handle with fragment of the rim of the vessel. Surfaces very worn, treatment and original colour uncertain. Possible parallels Wādī Qitna P 834 (Strouhal 1984: 163, Fig. 129), Hitan Rayan 51 (Sidebotham *et al.* 2002: 24, Fig. 20/51), EDW 15 (Berenike), EDW 59 (Berenike) and EDW 139 (Tabot).
- EDW 150 Tabot, 109 x 024 y — LV, way-station (associated with mines and quarries?), third–fourth century AD. Weight 41 g. Average thickness 6.4 mm. Inside 10R 5/4, wiped. Outside 10R 5/4, mottled, wiped. Decoration impressed, incised with round point (direction unknown). Rim diameter 16 cm. (14% preserved). Break 10R 4/3, fabric EDW–1. Form and lay-out H 2b, D 2 (lines, waves). Carefully squared rim. Possible parallels BE95–1 [080] (Hayes 1996: 174, Fig. 6–19/5) and EDW 37 (Kab Marfu'a).

Eastern Desert Ware from Wādī Sikait, illustrated in Figure 2

- EDW 229 Wādī Sikait, Greco-Roman beryl mine (Mons Smaragdus), third–sixth century AD. Weight 35 g. Average thickness 5.6 mm. Inside 10R 5/3, burnished. Outside 7.5R 5/4, burnished, mottled. Decoration incised with chisel (direction unknown). Rim diameter 18 cm. (6% preserved). Break 10R 5/6, fabric unclassified. Form and lay-out H 2d, D 3 (lines, triangles).
- EDW 232 Wādī Sikait, SK03–9 [012] pb#030, Greco-Roman beryl mine (Mons Smaragdus), late fifth century AD. Weight 53 g. Average thickness 6.1 mm. Outside 10R 5/6, mottled, smoothed. Decoration incised with chisel, filled in (direction unknown). Rim diameter 11 cm. (37% preserved). Break 10R 6/6, fabric unclassified. Form and lay-out H 1, D 2 (lines, running dog). Inside surface very worn, treatment and original colour uncertain.
- EDW 234 Wādī Sikait, Greco-Roman beryl mine (Mons Smaragdus), third–sixth century AD. Weight 88 g. Average thickness 5.9 mm. Inside 10R 5/6, wiped. Outside 2.5YR 5/6, burnished. Decoration impressed, incised with chisel (direction unknown). Rim diameter 11 cm. (25% preserved). Break 7.5YR 4/1, fabric unclassified. Form and lay-out H 2c, D 3 (waves, X-motif). Almost complete vessel, height 6.0 cm.
- EDW 239 Wādī Sikait, SK03–10 [140] pb#309 & [164] pb#336, Greco-Roman beryl mine, fifth–sixth century AD. Weight 10 g. Average thickness 3.9 mm. Inside 5YR 5/4, smoothed. Outside 10R 5/8, red slip, smoothed. Decoration impressed with chisel (direction unknown). Rim diameter 11 cm. (11% preserved). Break 5YR 2.5/1, unusual fabric with burnt organic remains. Form and lay-out H 1, D 3 (running dog). Red slip spills over on inside rim.
- EDW 242 Wādī Sikait, SK03–9 [015] pb#029, Greco-Roman beryl mine (Mons Smaragdus), late fifth century AD. Weight 12 g. Average thickness 5.8 mm. Inside 10R 3/1. Outside 10R 3/1, burnt. Rim diameter 21 cm. (7% preserved). Break 2.5YR 5/1, fabric unclassified. Form and lay-out H 2b, undecorated, may not be EDW. Carefully squared rim. Inside surface very worn, treatment and original colour uncertain.
- EDW 243 Wādī Sikait, SK03–7 [083] pb#148, Greco-Roman beryl mine (Mons Smaragdus), fifth–sixth century AD. Weight 11 g. Average thickness 5.5 mm. Inside 7.5YR 6/4, wiped. Outside 10R 5/6, burnished, red slip. Decoration impressed with chisel (direction unknown). Rim diameter 12 cm. (4% preserved). Break 5YR 5/1, fabric unclassified. Form and lay-out H 1c, D 8 (circles, waves). Red slip spills over on inside rim.
- EDW 247 Wādī Sikait, SK03–9 [023] pb#046, Greco-Roman beryl mine (Mons Smaragdus), fifth century AD. Weight 13 g. Average thickness 5.8 mm. Inside 10R 4/3, burnt, smoothed. Outside 10R 4/3, burnt, smoothed. Decoration impressed with chisel (direction unknown). Rim diameter 16 cm. (10% preserved). Break 2.5YR 4/3, unusual reddish brown fabric with abundant quartz. Form and lay-out H 2b, D 3 (waves).
- EDW 248 Wādī Sikait, SK03–9 [007] pb#014, Greco-Roman beryl mine (Mons Smaragdus), late fifth century AD. Weight 4 g. Average thickness 5.4 mm. Inside 2.5YR 5/4, wiped. Outside 7.5R 5/4, red slip, wiped. Decoration incised with chisel (direction unknown). Rim diameter 10 cm. (5% preserved). Break 10R 3/1, fabric unclassified. Form and lay-out H 1d, D 3 (lines). Red slip spills over on inside rim. Possible parallel EDW 71 (Marsa Nakari).
- EDW 249 Wādī Sikait, SK03–9 [007] pb#014, Greco-Roman beryl mine (Mons Smaragdus), late fifth century AD. Weight 10 g. Average thickness 6.2 mm. Inside 10R 5/6, red slip, smoothed. Outside 10R 5/6, red slip, smoothed. Decoration impressed, incised with chisel, filled in (direction unknown). Rim diameter 14 cm. (4% preserved). Break 2.5YR 5/6, fabric EDW–3. Form and lay-out H 2b, D 3 (triangles, waves). Possible parallels Sayala 76251 (Bedawi 1976: 29–30, Abb. 12/2, Tafel 28/2), Sayala 77183 (Kromer 1967: 96–9, Abb. 31/2), EDW 105 (Tabot) and EDW 287 (Sayala).
- EDW 267 Wādī Sikait, SK02–1 [004] pb#007, Greco-Roman beryl mine (Mons Smaragdus), fifth–sixth century AD. Weight 8 g. Average thickness 4.5 mm. Inside 2.5YR 5/6, wiped. Outside 10R 5/6, smoothed. Decoration coloured and impressed, incised with triangular tool (direction unknown). Rim diameter 16 cm. (7% preserved). Break 5YR 4/1, fabric unclassified. Form and lay-out H 2b, D 3 (grille, triangles).

The archaeological record

It is both tempting and problematic to connect what appear to be manifestations of a discrete material culture with a specific ethnic group,¹⁷ especially when the finds turn up isolated or mixed with material with a seemingly different origin. Careful analysis, however, may yield important insights. A relation between the Blemmyes and some of the many simple dwellings and graves in the region has been suggested but never satisfactorily demonstrated.¹⁸ Finds that similarly have been associated with the Blemmyes are the sherds of burnished cups and bowls, made without the use of a potter's wheel and decorated with incised and impressed patterns that are often enhanced with a partial red slip.¹⁹

In January 2002, a research group was formed to study this corpus of pottery, here more prudently identified as Eastern Desert Ware (EDW), both in museum collections and newly excavated sites.²⁰ Sherds of this kind of pottery have now been described at a large number of sites in Lower Nubia as well as in the Eastern Desert (Map 4), where they are usually found among much larger quantities of sherds from vessels that were produced in the Nile Valley in the fourth to the sixth centuries AD.²¹ Three radio-carbon dates suggest that the period in which they occur can be expanded from the third to the eighth century AD.²²

Eastern Desert Ware differs significantly from the pottery produced in the Nile Valley at the time, in both production technique and decoration (Figures 1 and 2). With few exceptions the vessels are made of a rusty red to orange fabric with clearly visible, poorly sorted white inclusions (quartz and limestone), rather than the usual

organic temper. The most common arrangement is now identified as EDW-1. Fabric EDW-2 is similar to EDW-1, but has some reduced organic material rendering the centre of the wall much darker. Other fabrics are similar to EDW-1, yet with a slightly different appearance and are therefore catalogued as EDW-3 (with micaceous surfaces), EDW-4 (with ground pottery, 'grog', added) or 'unclassified' (Table 2). Many decorations, most likely made with the thorn of a date palm (*Phoenix dactylifera*), are strangely asymmetric (for instance, EDW 93 and 229). The lay-out of the decoration could be classified using the system put forward earlier.²³ The classification system for the form of the vessels had to be slightly adapted.²⁴ Following the macroscopic description, a selection of sherds is prepared for petrologic study in thin-section, sourcing by trace element analysis (using ICP-MS) and determination of the organic residues (using GC/MS).

The evidence so far points to a small-scale industry of utilitarian ware in a variety of locations. This can be interpreted as the household production of a nomadic group whenever the need occurred or the opportunity presented itself. The resulting pottery must have served as a strong cultural and possibly even an ethnic marker, especially as they were most likely used as serving vessels. The association with the Blemmyes, however, is doubtful and not just because this name may not refer to a stable ethnic entity, as argued above. Even with the wider horizon indicated by the radio-carbon dates, the period in which Eastern Desert Ware was produced and used (third to eighth centuries AD) is much shorter than the period in which Blemmyes are present in the written sources (seventh century BC, probably to the present). And although the written sources are far from comprehensive, the region controlled by the Blemmyes seems smaller than the area in which Eastern Desert Ware is found.

In conclusion, it can be stated that the status of the Blemmyes as an ethnic group remains enigmatic. Neither historical nor archaeological research so far provides clear evidence for their existence other than as a construct by contemporary or modern outsiders. The lack of correspondence between the data from the different sources only adds to the confusion. Several groups may have shared the desert between the Nile and the Red Sea and probably also the Nile Valley between the First and the Third Cataract. But more data need to be gathered before any theory on their relations, life-style and (material) culture can be tested.

¹⁷ Dolukhanov 1994, Jones 1997.

¹⁸ Monneret de Villard 1935, Ricke 1967: 33–5, Sidebotham and Barnard 2002.

¹⁹ Strouhal 1991, Sidebotham and Wendrich 2001, Luft *et al.* 2002.

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²¹ Barnard 2002, Barnard and Magid, forthcoming, Barnard and Rose, forthcoming, and Barnard and Strouhal 2004.

²² Sadr *et al.* 1995, Magid 1998.

²³ Strouhal 1984.

²⁴ Barnard 2002.

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