

# The History of the Peoples of the Eastern Desert



edited by

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The image on the cover is showing a dromedary race between riders of the Beja Khatmayah tribe as part of a religious festival (photograph by Lucy Skinner, Suakin Project, 2004). Such events are treasured celebrations of Bedouin life.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

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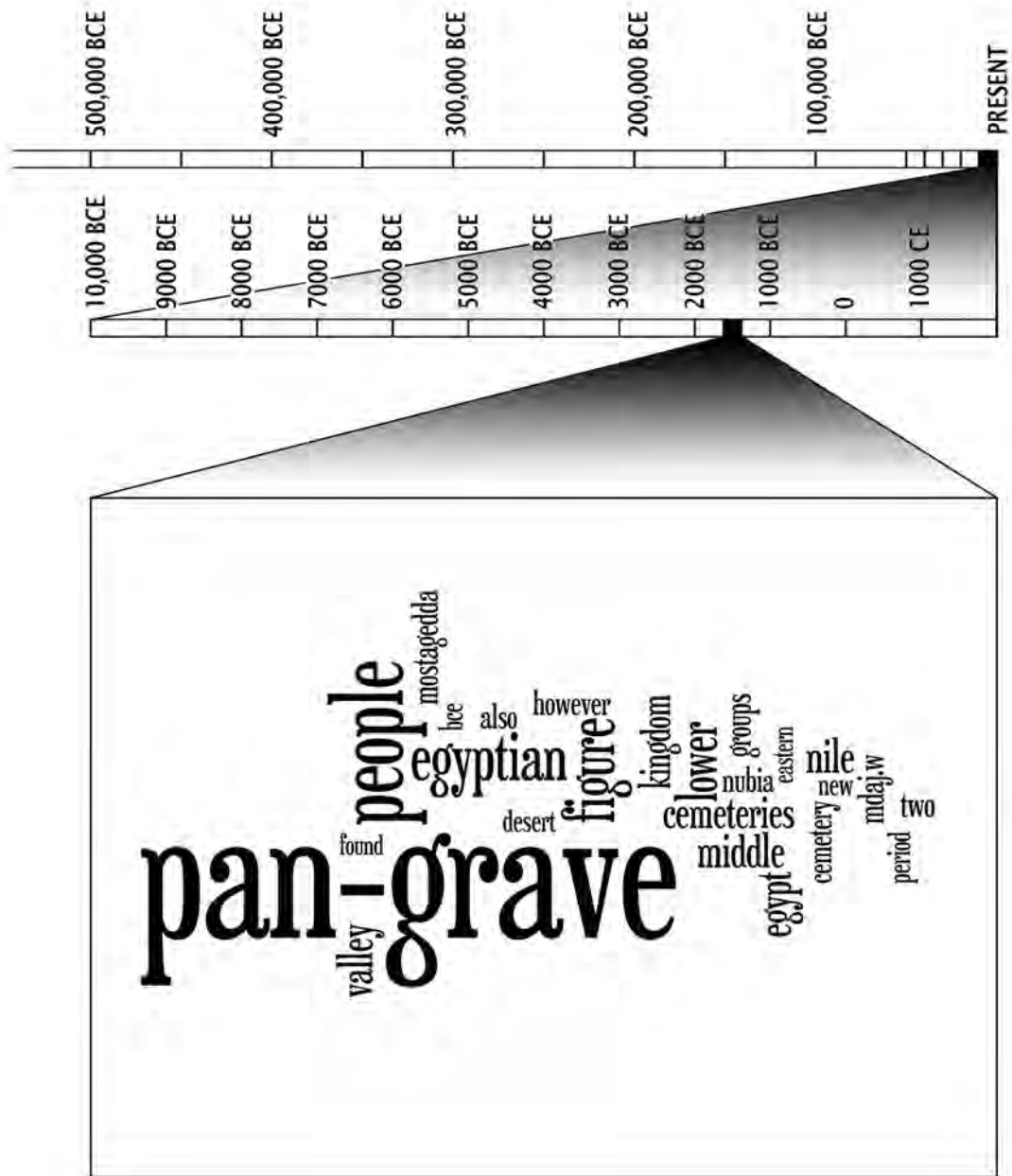
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Time line and word cloud created from Claudia Näser, *Nomads at the Nile: Towards an Archaeology of Interaction*. Word cloud by [www.wordle.net](http://www.wordle.net), written by Jonathan Feinberg (IBM Research); the cloud shows the 25 words that occur most often in the text (typefont Sexsmith, all lower case), giving greater prominence to words that appear more frequently.



# Nomads at the Nile:

## Towards an Archaeology of Interaction

CLAUDIA NÄSER

**T**HE PAN-GRAVE PEOPLE ARE GENERALLY considered to have been the inhabitants of the Eastern Desert during at least the second millennium BCE and possibly a much longer time period. Archaeologically, however, they are only known from the Egyptian and the Lower Nubian Nile Valley. What sounds as a paradox at first, is in fact an analytically interesting constellation. In this chapter I will focus on four of its aspects. First, I will briefly describe the evidence in hand on the Pan-Grave People, concentrating on the archaeological sources. Second, I will explore the basic parameters of their socio-economic organization and the circumstances of their appearance in the Nile Valley. Third, I will discuss a case study illustrating the central point of my argument, that the available record reflects a transitional stage and is strongly influenced by the interaction between the Pan-Grave People and their riverain neighbors. Finally, I will return to my introductory remarks about the analytical relevance of this special, but in archaeological contexts rather frequent constellation, and highlight some of the methodological problems and potentials that arise from it.

As stated above, the presence of the Pan-Grave People in the Eastern Desert has not yet been archaeologically

demonstrated. Rather, their remains are limited to the Egyptian and the Lower Nubian Nile Valley. Domestic sites of the Pan-Grave People are rare. In places, Pan-Grave pottery was found in Egyptian settlements or cemeteries, or in contexts of the Lower Nubian C-Group (2300–1550 BCE). Numerous additional stray finds exist of which the context is not recorded in great detail. The most important data set comprises more than 50 cemeteries, distributed over more than 30 sites (Figure 6.1).<sup>2</sup> The designation ‘Pan-Grave People’ here refers to the people who produced the material culture generally summarized under the heading ‘Pan-Grave.’ Notwithstanding the numerous problems connected with the term ‘people’ and its application in archaeology, I will use it here for lack of a better terminology.

### The Archaeological Record of the Pan-Graves

In general archaeological understanding, the Pan-Grave People are defined and differentiated from other groups

<sup>1</sup> This chapter is based on research carried out under the auspices of the Collaborative Research Centre ‘Difference and Integration: Interaction Between Nomadic and Settled Forms of Life in the Civilisations of the Old World,’ founded in 2001 at the Universities of Leipzig and Halle, <http://www.nomadsed.de/>. I particularly want to thank my colleagues Bernhard Streck and Jörg Gertel, University of Leipzig—working with them was a great privilege and a constant source of inspiration.

<sup>2</sup> For extensive, but not complete, compilations of Pan-Grave sites and finds, see Bietak 1966: 64-70 and Meurer 1996: 83-85 (limited to Egypt). Further sites have been reported by Williams 1983: 12, 111-113; Säve-Söderbergh 1989; and Williams 1993: 121-148). Recently Pan-Grave cemeteries have been located and partly excavated at Hierakonpolis (Friedman *et al.* 2001; Giuliani 2006), Kubaniya (Gatto and Giuliani 2006–2007: 123-124, figure 5-8; Pitre *et al.* 2007: 59-61, figure 1), and Mo‘alla (N) (Figure 6.1; Manassa 2009; and C. Manassa (2011), “El-Moalla to El-Deir,” in W.Z. Wendrich (ed.), *UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology*, stable resource, <http://digital2.library.ucla.edu/viewItem.do?ark=21198/zz00293erv>, accessed on April 25, 2012).

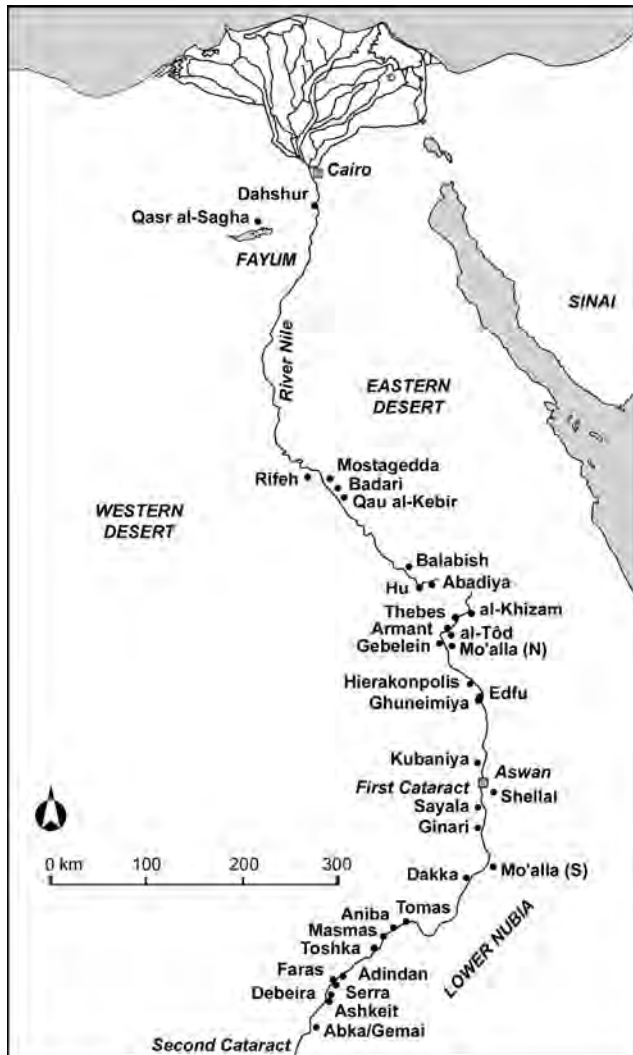


Figure 6.1. The distribution of Pan-Grave cemeteries in the Egyptian and Lower Nubian Nile Valley. Drawing by Ralf Miltenberger.

in the Nile Valley by their distinct material culture and especially their burial practices. An important and eponymous characteristic is the shape of the graves. The burial structures are circular, often fairly flat pits (Figure 6.2), which were first recognized as a diagnostic feature and labeled Pan-Graves at the cemeteries of Abadiya and Hu because of their resemblance to a frying pan (Petrie 1901: 45). The superstructures of these Pan-Graves, where present, are flat stone circles, usually 2–3 m in diameter (Figure 6.3). A further characteristic are deposits of the frontal parts of skulls of goats and sheep, and more rarely cattle (bucrania), around the burial pit (Figure 6.2), or the stone circle (Figure 6.3), or in separate offering pits. These skulls are often painted with ornamental decorations. Also distinctive of the Pan-Grave material culture are small, rectangular mother-of-pearl plaques worn “side by side . . . like

piano keys” (Brunton and Morant 1937: 118) as bracelets (Figure 6.4). Such bracelets are known from Pan-Grave burials of all ages and both sexes. A last diagnostic is characteristic Pan-Grave pottery, which is the most common burial good (Figure 6.5). Typical shapes are large, deep bowls with a broad decorative band of crossed lines, some of which show traces of being used as a cooking pot. Also typical are smaller, round-bottomed and black-rimmed vessels with a characteristic shape that distinguishes them from similar, and possibly related, vessels of other Nubian cultures; rather angular bowls with fields of incised lines at different angles; as well as the so-called four-horned dishes. It is notable that the Pan-Grave ceramic repertoire does not include any closed shapes (storage vessels). In funerary contexts this missing component is substituted by small amounts of Egyptian pottery (Figure 6.2). Combined with Pan-Grave sherds found in stratified Egyptian settlement contexts, these vessels form the basis of the dating of Pan-Grave sites to the late Middle Kingdom and the Second Intermediate Period of Pharaonic Egypt (1800–1550 BCE).

The Pan-Grave sites in the Nile Valley have not yet been chronologically differentiated or sequenced (but see Bourriau 1981). Although it must be assumed that not all known sites are contemporary and that especially the larger cemeteries were used over decades or even centuries, they still evade partitional dating. Pan-Grave pottery can so far not be phased and newer studies of late Middle Kingdom and Second Intermediate Period Egyptian pottery, often found associated with Pan-Grave material, still need to be analyzed in this regard. An exception is the meticulously studied stratigraphic sequence of Elephantine (ancient Aswan) material, where “the complete spectrum of the pottery production of the Pan-Grave Culture is present” (Raue 2002: 22) in Stratum 13, corresponding to the late 12th and early 13th Dynasties of Pharaonic Egypt (1850–1700 BCE).

The abrupt and massive appearance of Pan-Graves in the Nile Valley suggested already to Petrie (1901: 48) that they represent an immigrant population. He was, however, mistaken about their provenance, which he assumed to be the Western or Libyan Desert (Figure 6.1). Later research showed the area east of the Nile Valley to be the origin of the Pan-Grave People (Bietak 1966: 61–78). Among numerous pieces of circumstantial evidence, one specific argument is the massive presence of shells of the *Nerita* snail, a mollusc from the Red





Figure 6.2. A typical Pan-Grave excavated at Cemetery SJE47, Debeira, southern Lower Nubia. Adapted from Säve-Söderbergh 1989, volume 4.2.



Figure 6.3. Superstructure of a Pan-Grave at Cemetery C, Aniba, central Lower Nubia, with a deposit of horns of goats, sheep and cattle. Adapted from Steindorff 1935.



Figure 6.4. Jewelry found at Pan-Grave Cemetery 3100/3200, Mostagedda, Middle Egypt. Adapted from Taylor 1991.

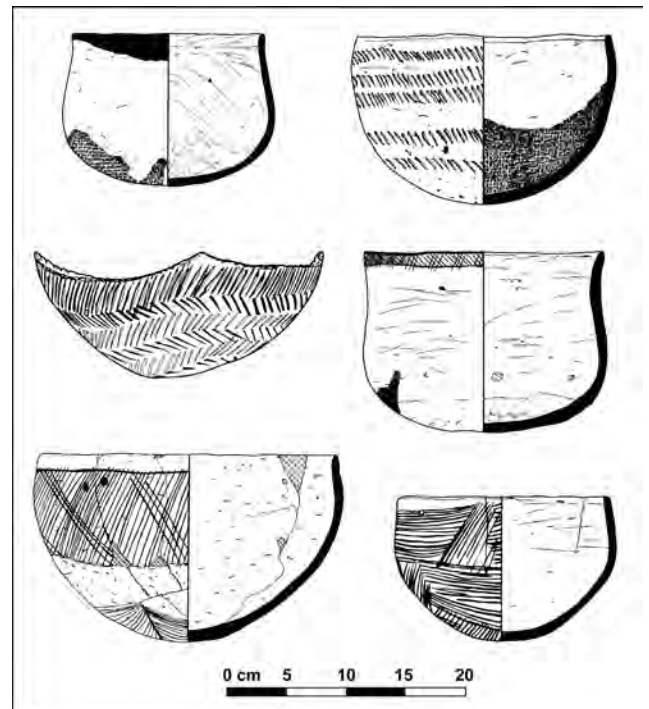


Figure 6.5. Typical Pan-Grave bowls from Cemeteries C and N at Aniba, now in the Ägyptisches Museum—Georg Steindorff—der Universität Leipzig (inventory numbers 4081, 4110, 4112, 4113, 4114 and 4223). Drawings by Jana Helmbold.

Sea, in Pan-Grave burials (Bietak 1966: 59-60). More information about their homeland was found in Egyptian texts of the Middle Kingdom (1975-1640 BCE). During that period the Egyptian state had extended its domain to include the Lower Nubian Nile Valley. The region was secured by a series of fortresses and remained, along with its local population, identified as the C-Group, under Egyptian control for about 250 years. Two entries in the so-called Semna Despatches, a dossier of administrative

texts from the Lower Nubian fortresses, report groups of people, named *mDAj.w* (Medjayu), who are said to have come from locations in the Eastern Desert and tried to enter the Nile Valley, but were turned back by Egyptian military patrols (Smither 1945: 7-9, plates 3, 3a, 5, 5a). It should be noted that the mentioned groups were small, 7-10 persons, and that they consisted of men, women and probably also children (the damaged texts do not allow a definite conclusion on this). *mDAj.w* also occur

in two other dossiers of similar nature, *pRamesseum 18* and the corpus of the Buhen papyri, but the poor state of their preservation makes it difficult to understand their exact content (Meurer 1996: 108). Thus, the two notes in the Semna Despatches and a handful of other sources led to the assumption that the term *mDAj.w* refers to an ethnic group whose initial homeland, designated by the associated toponym *mDA*, was in the Eastern Desert (Bietak 1966: 70-78). It is noteworthy that the toponym already occurred in the late Old Kingdom, around 2300 BCE, while the ethnonym appeared only about 200 years later, from the late First Intermediate Period onward (Näser in press-b). The link between the *mDAj.w* of the ancient written sources and the archaeologically attested Pan-Graves was established through a text of the late Second Intermediate Period (1630–1520 BCE). The Kamose stela reports that *mDAj.w* served as mercenaries in the army of the Theban ruler Kamose who came to reunite the Egyptian state (Meurer 1996: 105). Säve-Söderbergh (1941: 139) observed that Kamose's political sphere of influence matched the overall distribution of Pan-Grave sites in Egypt and concluded that the *mDAj.w* of the contemporary texts must be Pan-Grave People. This is also indicated by further circumstantial evidence, such as the name of an Egyptian fortress in Lower Nubia that “repels the *mDAj.w*,” in a region which saw a particularly heavy influx of Pan-Grave People. Some later scholars, however, expressed their doubts about this equation (most recently Barnard 2009). Indeed, two Pan-Grave cemeteries have since been reported in Lower Egypt, at Dahshur and Qasr al-Sagha (Figure 6.1, Meurer 1996: 83). In order to integrate these into the general picture of the presence of the Pan-Grave People in Egypt, more data on their dating and cultural context must be obtained. Even the confirmation of their identification, however, would not invalidate the principle behind Säve-Söderbergh's argument (Säve-Söderbergh 1989: 18-19).

### The Socio-Economic Constitution of the Pan-Grave People

The Pan-Grave People are usually described as nomads or semi-nomads. This attribution is based on the written sources, which picture the *mDAj.w* as non-sedentary groups, and the archaeological record, with the scarcity and the ephemeral character of Pan-Grave habitation sites, the scattered distribution and the small size of their cemeteries, the limited repertoire of material culture present in the burial equipment, and, last but

not least, the horn deposits which were interpreted as evidence for a pastoral economy. But the deciding criteria doubtlessly are an implicit or explicit comparison with the current inhabitants of the Eastern Desert, the sheep, goat and dromedary herding Beja, as well as the assumption that the environmental conditions in the region only permitted a mobile lifestyle from the third millennium BCE onward. These arguments, however, are insufficient to classify the Pan-Grave People as nomadic, an attribution that would anyway remain meaningless without a more precise definition of that term.

Recent studies in ethnology, social geography and increasingly also in archaeology, distinguish among numerous variations of nomadic lifestyles, depending on what segment of population is involved in the animal husbandry and the degree of mobility practiced by that segment (Irons and Dyson-Hudson 1972; Salzman 1980; Cribb 1991; Sadr 1991; Khazanov 1994; Streck 2002; Barnard and Wendrich 2008; Szuchman 2009). Only when mobility encompasses an entire society and permeates its entire economic and cultural life, should the term ‘nomadism’ be applied. At the same time, pastoral nomadism is not the only fully mobile way of life. It shares this characteristic with, for example, service nomadism (Hayden 1979), the prototypical representatives of which are the Sinti and Roma, as well as with most hunter-gathering societies. In contrast to foraging, pastoral and service nomadism have one thing in common: both are specialized ways of life that require a sedentary counterpart in order to compensate for the deficits of this mode of production. Both need an interrelation with a relatively complex sedentary society. Nomadic groups require access to agricultural produce and often also to other items which they do not manufacture themselves. Access to such products can only be guaranteed by a stable surplus production on both sides as well as a stable, often complex system for their exchange. In this understanding, nomadism and sedentism are ‘symbiotic’ forms of life (Näser in press-a).

It is of analytical relevance to my argument that these criteria are met in the historical context of the Pan-Grave People. As early as the First Intermediate Period, the late third millennium BCE, an Upper Egyptian district governor, Ankhtifi of Mo‘alla (N) (opposite Gebelein in Figure 6.1), reports that he sent barley to *wAwA.t*, a term, which at that period, designated the whole of Lower Nubia (Schenkel 1965: 45, 54; Näser

in press-b). Irrespective of which part of the Nubian population benefited from this specific delivery, the text indicates an agricultural surplus on the Egyptian side as well as the existence of a network for its distribution. Although in the subsequent Middle Kingdom sources evidence for these is scarce, at least one text, the inscription on the so-called Small Semna Stela, points to regular exchanges. It exempts those Nubians who wanted to engage in trade from a general prohibition to cross Egypt's southern border, which was at the time at the Second Cataract (Meurer 1996: 10-11). Without doubt, the Egyptian occupation of Lower Nubia in the early Middle Kingdom radically changed any regional network of interactions. On the one hand, many resources came directly under Egyptian control, rendering their exchange unnecessary; on the other hand, contacts among the different population groups were more regulated, as indicated by the text in hand. At the same time, the presence of Egyptians in Lower Nubia opened up new local markets. That the *mDAj.w* are not explicitly mentioned as providers of animals or animal product in the Egyptian texts of that period should not perturb us. Trade known to have existed with other Nubian populations, or indeed other neighbors of the Egyptian state, is similarly not reported unless the products are sweepingly declared as tributes paid by the respective peoples.

Only indirect information is available on the economic activities of the Pan-Grave People. The annals of 12th Dynasty Pharaoh Amenemhat II (1879–1842 BCE) enumerate, among other tributes, rather symbolic amounts of gold and cattle from *wbA.t-sp.t*, a region of *mDA* (Altenmüller and Moussa 1991: 9-10, 33-34). In other sources incense and other aromatics, and possibly again gold, from *mDA* are also mentioned (Zibelius-Chen 1988: 75-76, 98-100). Given the environmental conditions in the Eastern Desert, the region must have been a thoroughfare for most of these products rather than their place of origin (Edel 1984: 191-192). In a 13th Dynasty funerary inscription (1755–1630 BCE), however, an anonymous Egyptian official reports that he “roamed [the territories] of the *mDAj.w* to scour (them) for cattle for his god” (Vernus 1986: 141-144, plate 16). Independent of these sources, the Pan-Grave People have so far usually been characterized as cattle herders. An analysis of the funerary horn deposits, however, demands a revision of this hypothesis. Extensive material of that type came from Cemetery SJE47 in Debeira in southern

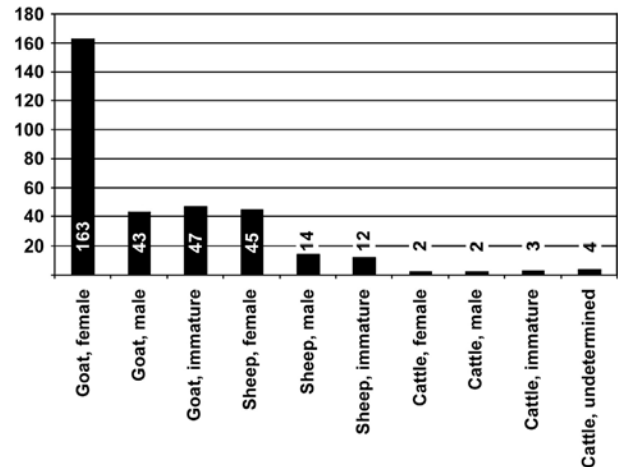


Figure 6.6. Graph summarizing the identification of the animal horns found at Pan-Grave Cemetery SJE47, Debeira, southern Lower Nubia. Data from Säve-Söderbergh 1989, volume 4.1; charted by the author.

Lower Nubia (Säve-Söderbergh 1989, volume 4.1: 166-174, volume 4.2: 19-22, plates 80-87). With 160 graves, it is the largest known Pan-Grave burial ground. Almost a fifth (17%) of the graves preserved horns, 335 sets in total. Among them, only 11 horn pairs (3.3%) were from cattle (Figure 6.6); most (75.5%) were from goats and about a fifth (21.2%) from sheep. Similar proportions occur at other cemeteries analyzed so far. It is known from (sub-)recent pastoral societies, however, that the composition of animal offerings does not necessarily represent the ratio of animals actually kept. Among the Sudanese Longarim, for example, only the main person involved in a ritual will sacrifice a bull, while other people contribute goats (Kronenberg 1961: 261). In any case, the horn deposits indicate that goats and sheep must have formed a considerable proportion of the livestock of the Pan-Grave People. They are therefore probably best characterized as having practiced a mixed animal husbandry.

The proposed model of a ‘symbiosis’ between nomadic and sedentary populations calls for further reflection on the reasons for the influx of the Pan-Grave People into the Nile Valley. So far, two factors have been named in this respect (Näser in press-b): a dramatic climatic change, which led to a deterioration of the living conditions in the Eastern Desert; and the collapse of the Egyptian state at the end of the Middle Kingdom, which led to a withdrawal from Lower Nubia and the abandonment of access regulations at the Egyptian borders. The latter will have facilitated access to the



Nile Valley, but cannot be recognized as its cause (Näser 2005, in press-a, in press-b). Regarding the first factor it should be noted that later New Kingdom sources also refer to *mDAj.w* living in the Eastern Desert and that the region was likely inhabited continuously throughout history until the modern era. It was probably only a small part of the population that migrated from the Eastern Desert into the Nile Valley during the late Middle Kingdom and the Second Intermediate Period. This movement can certainly not be accounted for by ecologically deterministic or opportunistic explanations; rather it should be situated within its specific historical framework. In view of the model of ‘nomadic-sedentary symbiosis,’ I would argue that the political changes at the end of the Middle Kingdom led to a collapse of the established networks of exchange and trade, which in turn resulted in a situation of economic stress for at least some Pan-Grave groups, which they countered by a search for new habitats and new sources of subsistence. A similar pattern of group-specific responses to economic crises emerges from ethnographic and ethnohistorical studies of the Beja, the more recent inhabitants of the Eastern Desert (Weschenfelder, this volume). In more general terms, socio-geographical research has shown that high economic vulnerability is a recurrent element of nomadic populations (Gertel 2002: 68-70). Under the described historical conditions at the end of the Middle Kingdom, it may have led to instability that in turn triggered the witnessed migration processes.

A relevant observation in this respect is that the known Pan-Grave cemeteries are generally very small. They rarely comprise more than 30 burials and only the cemeteries at Mostagedda, Balabish, Hierakonpolis, Debeira and Ashkeit (Figure 6.1) preserve more than 50 graves (Petrie 1901; Brunton and Morant 1937; Säve-Söderbergh 1989; Friedman *et al.* 2001; Giuliani 2006). From this and what is inferred from the Semna Despatches, it can be assumed that the Pan-Grave People entered the Nile Valley in small groups. The general distribution of Pan-Grave cemeteries has not yet been studied systematically and its analysis is beyond the scope of this chapter. It can be noted, however, that two of the larger cemeteries, SJE47 at Debeira East and SJE95 at Ashkeit, are part of a concentration of Pan-Grave burial grounds in southern Lower Nubia only a few kilometers upstream of the Middle Kingdom fortresses of Serra East and Faras (Figure 6.1). One of these two fortresses, probably Serra, was called *xsf-mDAj.w*, ‘he,

[the name of the pharaoh, in this case Senusret III, should be added here], who repels the *mDAj.w*’ (Meurer 1996: 49-51). This seems to indicate that this region saw a particularly large influx of Pan-Grave People; why this was so remains a subject for further studies.

At one of the other large cemeteries, Mostagedda 3100/3200 in Middle Egypt, sex and age of the recovered burials were determined (Brunton and Morant 1937: 114-133, plates 70-77). Of the 86 individuals investigated, almost half were adult women; men and children each constituted about a quarter of the population (Figure 6.7). This distribution confirms that the Pan-Grave People migrated into the Nile Valley in family groups, and that it was by no means only men, who came to be recruited as mercenaries. On the other hand, the relatively low number of male burials might be explained by that very activity. Most scholars assume that the Pan-Grave People that are attested archaeologically in Egypt, from the late Middle Kingdom onward, primarily served as mercenaries. It should be underlined that the textual evidence for this period is inconclusive. Contingents from *mDA* in the Egyptian army are mentioned several times in late Old Kingdom texts. Later employment of *mDAj.w* as mercenaries in Egypt proper is unequivocally attested only at the end of the Second Intermediate Period, on the Kamose stela. In one entry of the Semna Despatches, *mDAj.w* occur as scouts for a Lower Nubian fortress (Smither 1945: 7, plates 5, 5a). Possible references in the Naqada Inscription and the Admonitions of Ipuwer

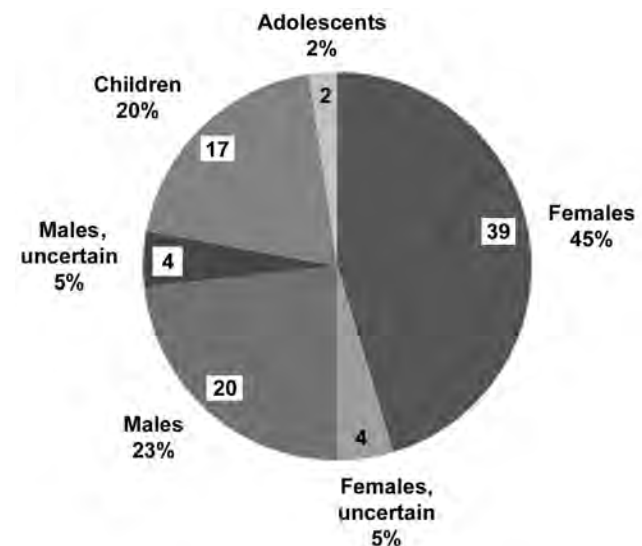


Figure 6.7. Graph summarizing the results of the anthropological analysis of the burials at Pan-Grave Cemetery 3100/3200, Mostagedda, Middle Egypt. Data from Brunton and Morant 1937; charted by the author.

are inconclusive, both in content and their exact dating (Meurer 1996: 101, 105). Thus, other occupations or services rendered by the Pan-Grave People in the Nile Valley should not be *a priori* ruled out.

Analysis revealed no gender- or age-related differences in the size or the equipment of the graves at Mostagedda 3100/3200. In general, there are no graves or grave inventories that stand out from the average in terms of quality or quantity. Thus, the social stratification of the Pan-Grave society was either limited, or failed to be expressed in funerary practices. In this respect, the Pan-Grave People differed markedly from their sedentary neighbors both in Egypt and in Nubia. The only exception is the horn deposits, which occur with the burials of men, women and children alike, but are usually limited to an average of 15–20% of the graves in a given cemetery. If these horn deposits were status indicators, as is suggested by their prominent placement in association with the grave superstructures and other peculiarities, it appears that social hierarchy was preserved along family lines, including members of all gender and age groups. This theory does, however, require further study before any firm conclusions can be drawn.

The grave goods at Mostagedda, and in many other Pan-Grave cemeteries, frequently include flint flakes, unworked pebbles, polishing stones and simple bone tools (Figure 6.8). The abundance of such objects, and indeed their raw materials, is reminiscent of a Neolithic technology (Gatto, this volume), which apparently continued to be in use among the Pan-Grave People, at least for some time, even in the Egyptian environment. Metal axes and daggers, which the Pan-Grave People obtained from the Egyptians, are sometimes incorrectly referred to as typical grave goods and as indicators for the mercenary activities of the *mDaj.w* (Säve-Söderbergh 1941: 139-140; Strouhal and Jungwirth 1984: 189; Bietak 1987: 124). It should be noted, however, that they are quite rare and that at least axes are also found associated with the burials of women, adolescents and children (Brunton and Morant 1937: 116-118, 127, plates 70-71).

Especially in Egypt, Pan-Grave cemeteries seem to show a gradual acculturation of their owners. In the funerary architecture, for instance, the rectangular shaft replaces the circular burial pit. However, attempts to statistically pinpoint such a diachronic development at Pan-Grave Cemetery 3100/3200 in Mostagedda have failed. The subsequent search for noisy factors produced a surprising result. Rectangular shafts are statistically

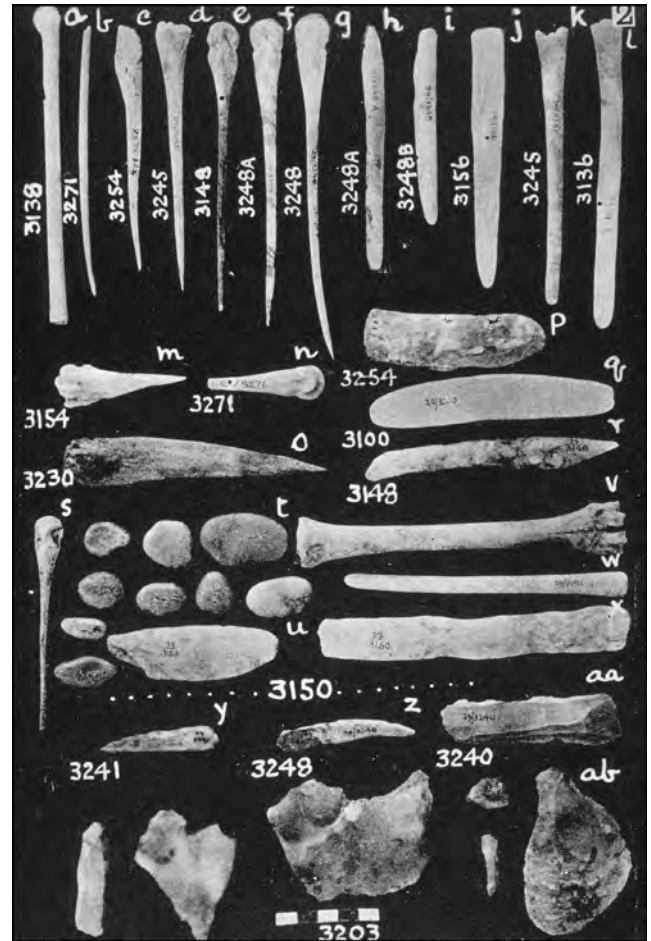


Figure 6.8. Bone, shell and stone tools found at Pan-Grave Cemetery 3100/3200, Mostagedda, Middle Egypt. Adapted from Brunton and Morant 1937.

significant more frequently associated with male than with female burials. This shows that acculturation was not an inevitable mechanical process, or an indiscriminate adoption of Egyptian cultural practices by the Pan-Grave People, but instead should be pictured and understood as a strategy of active agents, which must be analyzed case by case in its specific contexts and intentions. The example of the grave architecture offers an unexpected insight into the complexity of the process. It suggests that in this case there was a dichotomy in the adoption of new forms. Either the women of the Mostagedda community were more ‘conservative’ in the choice of their grave architecture, or else the social rulers inflicted a more ‘traditional’ burial style upon the female members of their group.

Despite recent efforts (Cohen 1993), research until now has failed to indicate other cultural and economic developments of the Pan-Grave People in the Nile Valley. It is thus still unknown for how long individual groups

retained their original culture, though we may assume that trajectories differed in different surroundings. It is my personal impression that the Pan-Grave People in Egypt were, at least in some aspects, closely linked to their 'host' society through the services they rendered, be they mercenary or otherwise. This, along with the loss of their traditional lifestyle and the extreme cultural alienation they must have experienced in their new environment, will soon, perhaps within a few generations, have led to almost complete acculturation. This process seems to have been completed by the early New Kingdom; at least there are no graves that contain typical Pan-Grave objects along with objects of the 18th Dynasty (1539–1292 BCE). In contrast, in Lower Nubia relatively complex processes of interaction can be inferred from the intrusion of Pan-Grave elements into the funerary culture of the C-Group.

### A Case Study of Two Painted Skulls

To underline the need for contextually oriented analyses and "thick descriptions (Geertz 1973)" of the interaction processes between the Pan-Grave People and their sedentary neighbors, I return to the animal skulls deposited at some of the Pan-Graves. Many of these preserve decorations on the front of the skull or on the horns themselves. The ornamental patterns comprise arrangements of dots and stripes, rarely also lozenges or zigzags, executed in red, black and occasionally also in white paint (Figure 6.9). In some cases the designs cover the whole skull in an unstructured fashion, while in others a line across the central axis of the skull divides it up into two halves that are bedecked with different motifs. These decorations have not yet been studied and no interpretation of their meaning or purpose has been put forward. From the overall corpus, two specimens are of note. These were found at Cemetery 3100/3200 in Mostagedda, together with about 40 other horn pairs, in a separate deposition pit identified as 3252 (Brunton and Morant 1937: 120-121, plate 71). One of the two skulls is from a goat and preserves a painted lotus flower flanked by a pair of eyes (Figures 6.9 and 6.10). Even more remarkable is the second one, a bucranium that bears a drawing of a man with a short hieroglyphic inscription in front of it.<sup>3</sup> This central motif is again

<sup>3</sup> Usually this inscription is read as *QskAnt* and thought to represent the name of the depicted man (El-Sayed 2004: 361-362). There are doubts, however, concerning this reading. The third sign, conventionally understood as *kA*, sign D28 in Gardiner's sign list, rather seems to be one of the group D37 to D44. Further study

flanked by a pair of eyes (Figures 6.9 and 6.10). The latter may provide a key for the interpretation of the entire composition. By applying eyes, the carrier of the motif, the dead skull, is made to see and is thus revived. This revival was probably not so much intended to affect the sacrificed animal, but rather the deceased. The objects chosen for this ritual manipulation may be understood by comparison with (sub)recent pastoral societies in East Africa, where close links between cattle and humans are commonplace and may include the proclamation of so-called favorite animals that become the focus of ritual activities and special adornments (Kronenberg 1961).

The two painted skulls from Mostagedda provide an insight into a thus far unnoted facet of the Pan-Grave acculturation process. They do not reflect the appropriation of ready-made objects, but are the result of a purposeful adoption of new cultural techniques, namely figured decoration and writing, to implement an originary Pan-Grave funerary concept. It is furthermore remarkable that this adoption is specific to its context. The depiction of the deceased and the preservation of his name are central elements of Egyptian funerary culture. In contrast, the Lower Nubian C-Group knows no figured representations of the deceased, but a central aspect of its funerary practice is the construction of stone-lined tumuli, which serve as both cult places and indicators of status. It may not be coincidence that stone circles with tumulus-like superstructures are so far only known from Pan-Graves in Lower Nubia and not from Egypt, with the possible and atypical exception of Hierakonpolis (Friedman *et al.* 2001: 34-36). It should be noted that at Hierakonpolis a C-Group cemetery is also present, with superstructures of sandstone slabs and mud bricks, in itself a testimony for the incorporation of new influences in traditional funerary practices (Friedman 2002; Friedman *et al.* 2004). Assuming that the decorations on the two painted skulls from Mostagedda represent a traditional concept while recruiting new techniques for its expression, it can be argued that the ornamental decorations, which are preserved on animal skulls from many Pan-Grave cemeteries all over Egypt and Lower Nubia, were similarly related to the revival of the deceased. It may have been the act of painting, however, as much as the chosen motifs, that evoked the desired significance. Moreover, the skulls themselves are

is required before a new reading can be suggested. I thank Hans Barnard for drawing my attention to this issue and Jacco Dieleman and Karola Zibeli-Chen for discussing it with me.



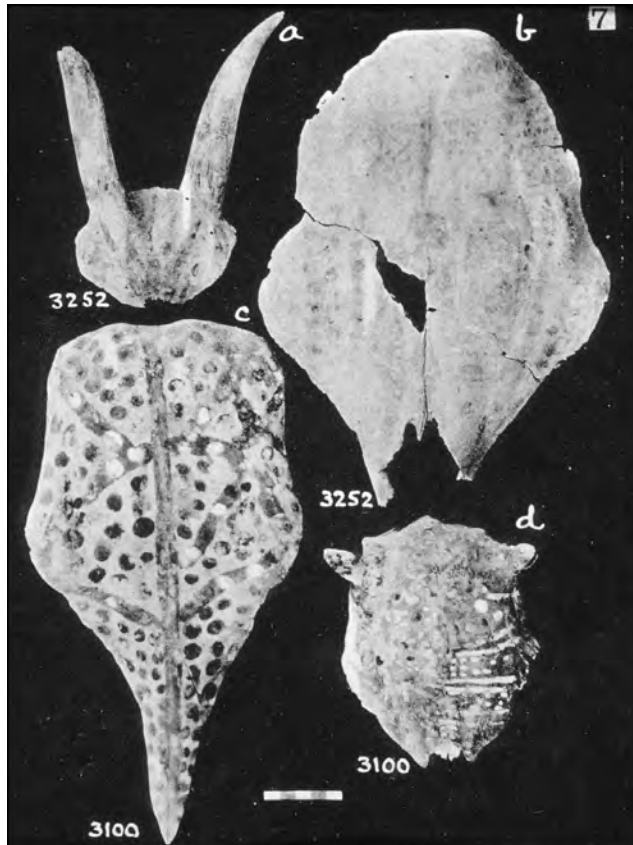


Figure 6.9. Decorated animal skulls found at Pan-Grave Cemetery 3100/3200, Mostagedda, Middle Egypt. Adapted from Brunton and Morant 1937.

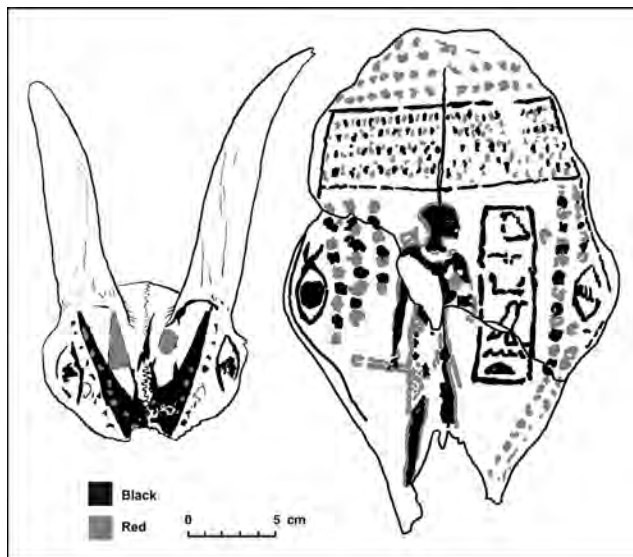


Figure 6.10. Painted decorations on two animal skulls found at Cemetery 3100/3200, Mostagedda, Middle Egypt. Adapted from Brunton and Morant 1937; drawing by Ralf Miltenberger.

consciously prepared objects. As the painting is directly on the bone, they must have been freed from hide and flesh, and cleaned, before they were decorated. These actions may well have been parts of rituals in themselves.

### Discussion: Towards an Archaeology of Interaction

From these final observations I would like to return to the beginning of my argument, which concerned the special nature of the archaeological sources of the Pan-Grave People. As I have shown, it is only the particular combination of circumstances at the end of the Middle Kingdom that forced individual Pan-Grave groups to seek new economic strategies, thereby becoming visible in the archaeological record. Pan-grave sites in the Nile Valley are no testimonies of a nomadic society of the Eastern Desert, although they have often been discussed as such. They do not represent the Pan-Grave People in their regular existence, but in an environment unfamiliar to them, in the process of abandoning their traditional way of life, thereby experiencing and practicing entirely new forms of interaction with their settled neighbors. This recognition is analytically relevant and a prerequisite for the adequate understanding of the available archaeological material. It may have a limited bearing on our understanding of the nomadic past of the Pan-Grave People, but it offers excellent data for the examination of the way in which some Pan-Grave groups left their nomadic life for good. The Pan-Grave sites in the Nile Valley are testimonies of a cultural transition in a hybrid situation, and this is where their great potential lies. A first step towards a cultural-historic relevant analysis of the existing archaeological data, beyond opportunistic explanations, is to position them within their specific historical framework and to relate them to the conditions and the processes of interaction that produced them. From this insight follows the question whether the same does not also apply to other types of archaeological and historical material representing mobile groups, or indeed other socially marginal communities. The sources in which these become tangible may not so much illustrate their regular existence, but rather historically specific situations, which are marked by transitions brought about by economically, culturally or otherwise critical developments. If this were indeed the case, it would have a huge influence on how we should approach such materials and what we can possibly learn from them.

## CHAPTER 32



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- und sich auff der Insul Mauritiues kuemmerlich nehren muessen biß ihnen Gott wunderlich wider nach Hauß geholffen: Wie auch Eine eigentliche Beschreibung der Ost-Indischen Kuest / Malabare genannt / und wie selbige im Jahr 1663 in der Niederlaendischen Ost-Indischen Compagnie Gewalt gekommen: Allen zur Verkürzung der Zeit und zur Nachricht fuer die Reysenden gar anmutig und nutzlich zulesen / mit unterschiedlichen Kupfer-Figuren gezieret / und auß der Hollaendischen in die Hoch-Teutsche Sprache uebersetzt durch Philemerum Irenicum Elisium, Frankfurt am Main, Wilhelm Serlin.
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