

New Eastern Desert Ware Finds from Sudan and Ethiopia

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This paper deals with some recent discoveries of Eastern Desert Ware (EDW) from Sudanese and Ethiopian sites and with some more general issues on the distribution and meaning of the EDW. The EDW discovered at some sites in the Sudanese Eastern Desert investigated by the Centro Ricerche sul Deserto Orientale, and the EDW from the site of Jebel Qoqay/ Romeladid and from some sites near Aksum investigated by expeditions of the University of Naples "L'Orientale" are described and comparisons with known EDW types are proposed. These new Eastern Desert Ware finds seems to fill some spatial gaps between the northern sites, in the Egyptian Eastern Desert and in Lower Nubia, where this kind of pottery was collected and the southern ones, in the Eritrean-Sudanese lowlands. Moreover, the sherds from Aksum represent the southernmost EDW finds. Some remarks which may explain such a broad distribution for this kind of pottery are proposed as well as some remarks on the meaning that this class of material culture may have had in the formation and affirmation of the identity of the inhabitants of the Eastern Desert.

1. Introduction

The professional life of Professor Wenig was mostly devoted to the study of the Nubian-Sudanese cultures, stressing their originality and the continuous dialogue with the northern cultures of Egypt and the Mediterranean. Nevertheless, Steffen Wenig always thought that it was no less important to view the history and the cultural development of ancient Northeastern Africa also from further South than Nubia itself. I always remember his encouragement when in the Conference of Nubian Studies of Geneva, in 1990, he was chairperson of the session in which I, with my colleagues C. Perlingieri and G. Capuano, was going to give my first conference presentation on the ceramics from the Sudanese-Eritrean (at that time Ethiopian) lowlands.¹ Since then, every time we met, I was always honored by his encouragement and suggestions, including his repeated invitation to start a joint systematic survey of the Sudanese and Eritrean coast looking for the harbors of the Pharaonic Punt trade, whose location was considered as a fascinating scientific problem both by Professor Wenig and by my mentor, Rodolfo Fattovich. Pursuing these interests in the regions South of Nubia, in the last years Professor Wenig also started projects on the Ethiopian and Eritrean highlands. Therefore, the broad perspective he always considered necessary to fully understand the history and cultural development of Northeastern Africa should be considered a hallmark of his scholarly life. Certainly, this broad

view is crucial in understanding the Eastern Desert Ware, a class of pottery widely distributed in the whole region. For this reason, I decided to devote this paper dedicated to Professor Wenig to some recent discoveries of Eastern Desert Ware in Sudanese and Ethiopian sites and to some more general remarks on Eastern Desert Ware.

The identification and definition of Eastern Desert Ware, a substantial ceramic corpus which can be quite safely ascribed to the inhabitants of the Eastern Desert,² certainly represents one of the most outstanding recent results of the research into late antiquity in Northeastern Africa. The distribution of these ceramic materials is very broad.³ Eastern Desert Ware has been discovered in the Egyptian Eastern Desert South of the Wadi Hammamat and in the Roman and late Roman ports on the Egyptian Red Sea coast, in the Sudanese Eastern Desert, in the area of the Wadi Allaqi and of Tabot, and also in some sites in Lower Nubia in the Kalbsha-Wadi Qitna region. Moreover, isolated Eastern Desert Ware finds have also been recorded in the Nile Valley, in the Fourth Cataract region, at the upstream limit of Upper Nubia, and at Kurgus, between the Fourth and Fifth Cataracts. Other sites characterized by the occurrence of ceramic collections largely consisting of Eastern Desert Ware are the Khatmiya Group sites

1 Capuano, Manzo, Perlingieri 1994.

2 Barnard 2002; 2006; 2008; Barnard, Rose 2007, 197-198; Barnard, Strouhal 2004, 32-33.

3 Barnard 2008, 1, 20, Fig. 1-1; Barnard, Rose 2007, 185-186, Fig. 7-1; Barnard, Dooley, Faull 2006; Barnard, Strouhal 2004, 32-33.

in Eastern Sudan, which seem to cluster East of the modern town of Kassala.⁴

Interestingly, usually the Eastern Desert Ware ceramics represent only a small percentage of the ceramic collection from the sites in the Egyptian Eastern Desert and from Lower Nubia.⁵ Therefore, it was suggested that the occurrence of Eastern Desert Ware at these sites can be related to the presence of limited groups of people from the Eastern Desert in settlements mostly inhabited by Lower Nubians or inhabitants of the Egyptian Nile Valley. The association in some necropolises near Kalabsha, in Lower Nubia, between the Eastern Desert Ware and a specific type of cylindrical platform tumulus, completely different from the usual gravel or soil mound tumulus of the contemporary tombs in the rest of Nubia and from the contemporary Egyptian tombs, suggested that this specific type of funerary structure may also be ascribed to the Eastern Desert peoples.⁶ This hypothesis was more recently confirmed by the occurrence of the same association between Eastern Desert ware and this type of structures also in sites of the Eastern Desert.⁷ Nevertheless, although our present knowledge of the distribution of the Eastern Desert Ware seems to be consistent with the suggested relationship with the groups inhabiting the Eastern Desert, some points still remain obscure. First, several geographic gaps between the northern sites characterized by Eastern Desert Ware in the Egyptian Eastern Desert and the southern sites in the Sudanese Eastern Desert remain. Of course, this is also due to the fact that the archaeological exploration of several sectors of the Sudanese Eastern Desert is very limited. Second, the sites with Eastern Desert Ware elements in the Khatmiya Group of Eastern Sudan seem isolated, far away from the other sites characterized by Eastern Desert Ware. Moreover, the problem of the southern limits of the distribution of Eastern Desert Ware is not yet solved, if indeed it has been properly posed.

These issues will be addressed in the following paragraphs thanks to fresh data made available by the field work conducted by the Centro Ricerche sul Deserto Orientale (CeRDO) in the Sudanese Eastern Desert and of the University of Naples "L'Orientale"

(UNO) in Eastern Sudan and in Northern Ethiopia (Aksum).

2. New sites with Eastern Desert Ware in the Sudanese Eastern Desert

So far, except for the ones in the region of Tabot⁸ the only explorations in the Sudanese Eastern Desert to register the occurrence of Eastern Desert Ware were the ones conducted by the CeRDO in the region of the Wadi Allaqi and Wadi Gabgaba from 1989 to 1994.⁹ Interestingly, according to these finds, in this region of the Eastern Desert as elsewhere in the Nile Valley and in the Egyptian Eastern Desert, Eastern Desert Ware is apparently associated with cylindrical stone funerary platforms.¹⁰ Additional evidence for the Sudanese Eastern Desert is provided by the occurrence of Eastern Desert Ware at Bir Nurayet¹¹ and at the settlement associated with a gold mine of Aliakateb.¹² More recently, from 2001 to 2008, the CeRDO expedition mainly focused on the exploration of the roughly East–West oriented tracks and routes leading from Upper Nubia to the gold bearing regions of the Sudanese Eastern Desert, and on the track connecting Korosko with the Kurgus region and by-passing the Upper Nubian bend.¹³ So far, no detailed description of the archaeological finds from the more recent field work of the CeRDO has been published, with the exception of two papers focusing on the prehistoric sites and limited to the explorations conducted up to 2005,¹⁴ and some insights on the pottery from the 2nd millennium BC sites to be ascribed to Middle Nubian cultures.¹⁵

In 2010 I had the chance to study the late antique material from the 2004–2008 field seasons kept in the CeRDO storeroom in Varese.¹⁶ Several sites proved to be characterized by the occurrence of Eastern Desert Ware ceramics¹⁷ (Fig. 1).

4 Manzo 2004, 77–80.

5 Barnard 2002, 54; 2008, 19, 103, 105; 2012 a, 179; Strouhal 1982, 217; 1984, 103.

6 Lassányi 2012, 265; Strouhal 1984, 270; see also Lassányi 2010 a, 600.

7 see e.g. Castiglioni, Castiglioni, Sadr 1997, 163–164; Krzywinski 2012, 151; Lassányi 2010 a, 595–596; 2010 b; Sadr, Castiglioni, Castiglioni 1995, 220–221; Sadr, Castiglioni, Castiglioni, Negro 1994, 71–72.

8 Magid 2004; Magid, Pierce, Krzywinski 1995.

9 Castiglioni, Castiglioni, Sadr 1997; Sadr, Castiglioni, Castiglioni 1995, 212–221; Sadr 1995, 157–163.

10 Castiglioni, Castiglioni, Sadr 1997, 164–166; Sadr, Castiglioni, Castiglioni 1995, 220–221; Sadr 1995, 159–161.

11 The materials from Bir Nurayet were studied by M. Chłodnicki. I thank him for having sent me the images of these materials and for allowing me to make reference to them.

12 Klemm, Klemm 2013, 374, Fig. 6.31.

13 Castiglioni, Castiglioni 2007; Castiglioni, Castiglioni, Bonnet 2010.

14 Gatto 2012; Lanna and Gatto 2010.

15 Manzo 2012, 80–82.

16 I thank the directors of the CeRDO, Angelo and Alfredo Castiglioni, for allowing me to study these materials.

17 The sites where Eastern Desert Ware was collected by the

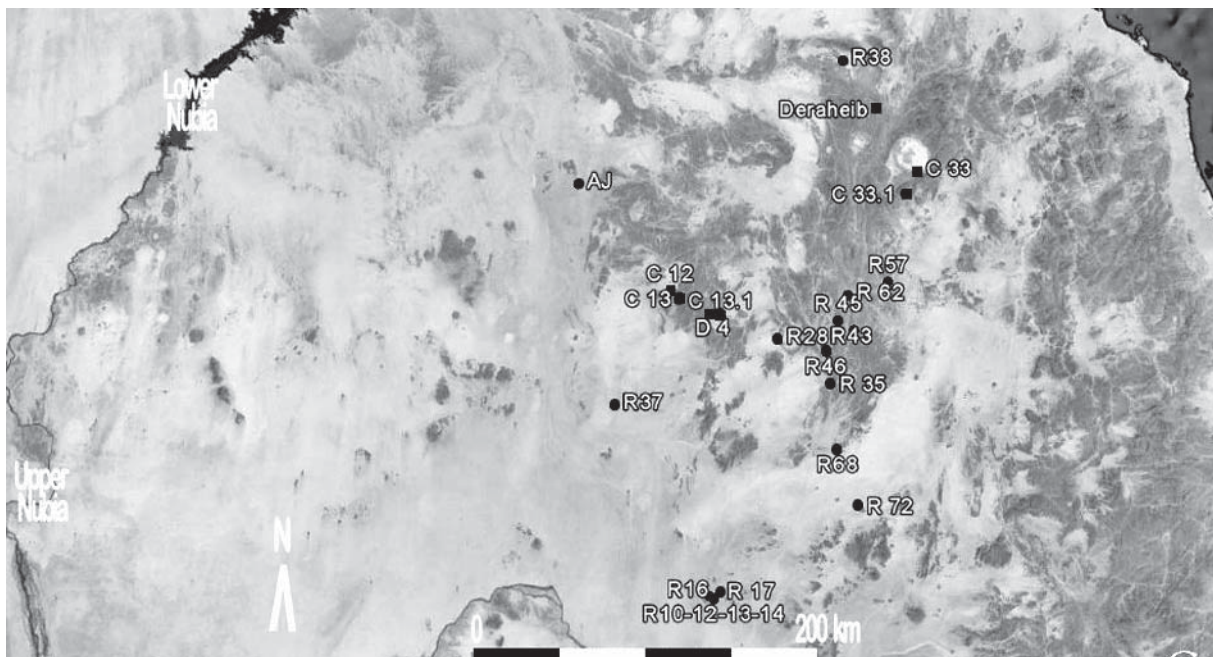


Fig. 1: The sites with Eastern Desert Ware in the sector of the Eastern Desert investigated by the CeRDO. The squares show the sites recorded in the first phase of the CeRDO research project, the circles the sites recorded from 2004 to 2008 and examined in this article (based on Google Earth satellite imagery).



Fig. 2: Sherds with bands consisting of notches framed by parallel incised lines which are sometimes crossing each other, a-b from site R 38, c from site R 37 (courtesy of CeRDO).

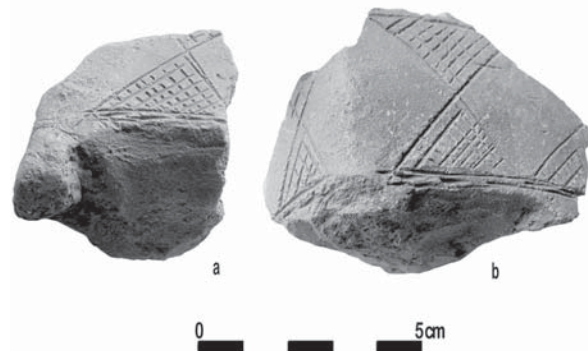


Fig. 3: Sherds with decoration consisting of "X" shaped incised sectors filled by oblique parallel crossing lines from site R 37 (courtesy of CeRDO).

Given the generally bad state of preservation of the finds from surface collections, it was very rarely possible to identify the original shape of the vessels and sometimes the sherds could be ascribed to the Eastern Desert Ware only on the basis of their decoration and associated surface treatment. Moreover, in some cases the original surface may have been damaged by erosion.

The following decorative and morphological features typical of the Eastern Desert Ware were noti-

ced in the materials from the sites in the Sudanese Eastern Desert:

1. Sherds with bands consisting of notches framed by parallel incised lines which sometimes cross each other (Fig. 2). They recall well known Eastern Desert Ware decorative patterns.¹⁸
2. Sherds with decoration consisting of triangular incised sectors filled by oblique parallel crossing lines (Fig. 3). The decorative pattern is not unknown in Eastern Desert Ware assemblages and it was labeled

CeRDO expedition are the following: R 10-12-13-14, R 16, R 17, R 28, R 35, R 37, R 38, R 43, R 45, R 46, R 55, R 57, R 61, R 62, R 68, R 72.

¹⁸ see e.g. Barnard 2008, Fig. 11-1, EDW 4; Castiglioni, Castiglioni, Sadr 1997, Fig. 1; Lassányi 2010 b, 287, 91; Sadr, Castiglioni, Castiglioni 1995, Fig. 26; Strouhal 1984, Fig. 129, P 849.

as “X-motif”.¹⁹ In the case of the sherds from R 37, a site associated with a gold mine in the Wadi Gabgaba region, a specific feature consists in the fact that the pattern was obtained exclusively with incisions and not, as often happens, with the combined use of incision and impression.²⁰ Nevertheless, the exclusive use of incisions to produce this pattern also characterizes other finds from the Sudanese Eastern Desert, and especially from the Wadi Allaqi region.²¹ Also the shape of the vessels from R 37, two fragmentary squared polypod brown ware vessels (Fig. 3), may recall footed vessels from the sites with Eastern Desert Ware in the Wadi Allaqi region.²²

3. Sherds with incised parallel lines at least in a single case forming a band parallel to the rim (Fig. 4) which may be labeled as “zig-zag” pattern.²³ Sometimes the “zig-zag” pattern rim band is associated with more

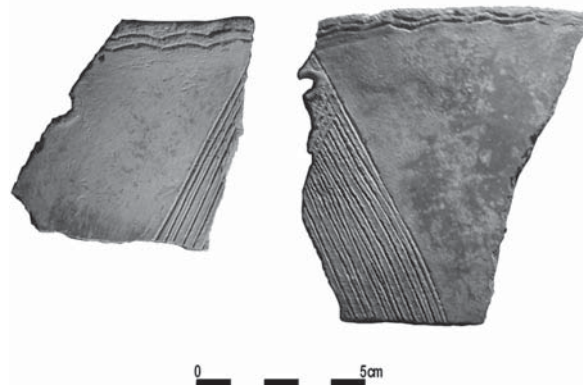


Fig. 4: Sherds with “zig-zag” incised pattern forming rim bands from Mine 36. The rim bands are associated with complex incised pattern on the body of the vessel (courtesy of CeRDO).

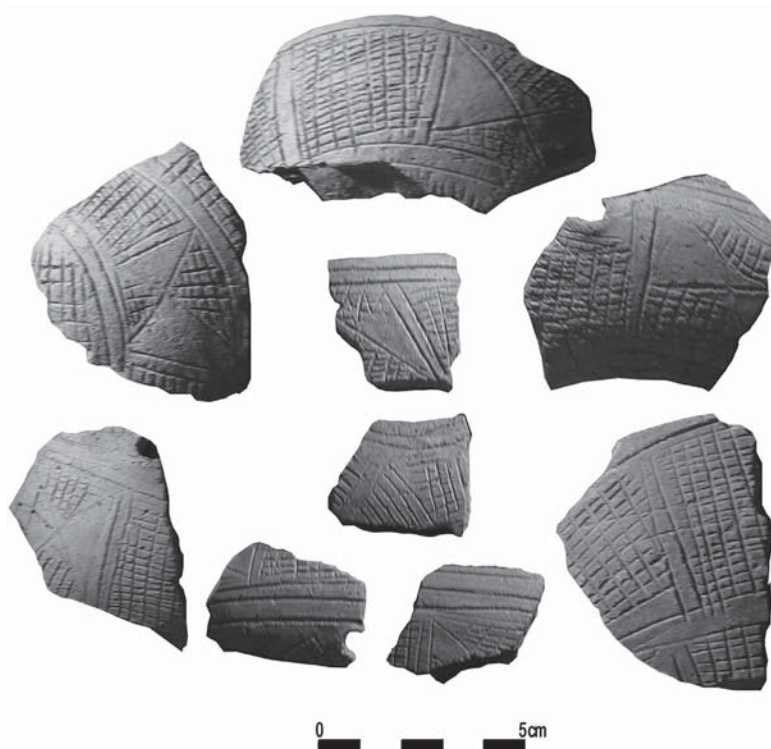


Fig. 5: Sherds with “griddle” incised pattern from Mine 27, sometimes associated with “X” shaped incised sectors in more complex patterns (courtesy of CeRDO).

complex zoned incised decoration on the body of the vessel, as sometimes recorded in the sites in the region of the Wadi Allaqi.²⁴

4. Sherds with a “griddle” incised pattern²⁵ often forming bands parallel to the rim of the vessel (Fig. 5). Sometimes these patterns were associated with the bands consisting of notches framed by parallel incised lines (see above n. 1), and arranged in vertical metopes,²⁶ which were also remarked in some sites in the Wadi Allaqi area,²⁷ where they could be sometimes associated with the “X-motif” (see above n. 2).

5. Sherds with impressed comma-shaped notches, which were labeled as “running dogs”²⁸ and often forming horizontal bands parallel to the rim (Fig. 6). In the case of finds from site R 16, this decorative pattern occurred on thickened and pointed rims of

19 Barnard 2008, 147, Table 10-3; Lassányi 2010 b, 287, 91; Sadr 1994, Fig. 3; Strouhal 1982, Fig. 9, 12; 1984, Fig. 126, P 185; Fig. 128, P 1278.

20 see e.g. Magid, Pierce, Krzywinski 1995, Pl. IV, b.

21 see e.g. Sadr, Castiglioni, Castiglioni 1995, Figs. 25-26.

22 Castiglioni, Castiglioni, Sadr 1997, Fig. 1; Sadr, Castiglioni, Castiglioni 1995, Figs. 25-26.

23 Barnard 2008, 147, Table 10-3, see also Fig. 11-17, EDW 256; Lassányi 2010 b, 286, 82; Sadr 1994, Fig. 3.

24 Sadr, Castiglioni, Castiglioni 1995, Fig. 25.

25 Barnard 2008, 146, Table 10-3, see also Fig. 11-3, EDW 31; Fig. 11-4, EDW 33, EDW 35; Fig. 11-15, EDW 240; Lassányi 2010 b, 287, 92; see also Sadr 1994, Fig. 3.

26 see Barnard 2008, 144, Table 10-2.

27 Sadr, Castiglioni, Castiglioni 1995, Fig. 25.

28 Barnard 2008, 147, Table 10-3, see also Fig. 11-1, EDW 5; Fig. 11-2, EDW 12; Fig. 11-3, EDW 21; Fig. 11-11, EDW 168; Fig. 11-12, EDW 191; Fig. 11-15, EDW 239; Fig. 11-16, EDW 244, EDW 252; Lassányi 2010 b, 286, 84-85; Strouhal 1984, Fig. 127, P 799; Fig. 128, P 1126; Fig. 130, P 842, P 852.

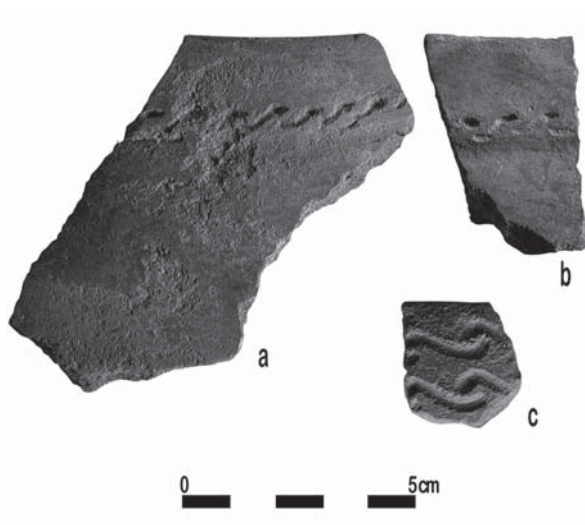


Fig. 6: Sherds with “running dogs” bands, a-b from site R 16, c from site R 46 (courtesy of CeRDO).

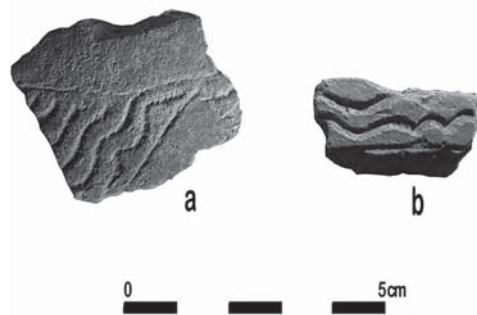


Fig. 7: Sherds with impressed or incised, single or multiple “waves”, located on the body or forming rim bands, a from site R 28, b from site R 17 (courtesy of CeRDO).

closed vessels (Fig. 6, a-b) and thus paralleled specific Eastern Desert Ware morphological types.²⁹

6. Sherds with impressed or incised, single or multiple “waves”, located on the body or forming rim bands (Fig. 7), a very distinctive and common feature of the Eastern Desert Ware corpus widely occurring at several sites in the Eastern Desert and in the Nile valley.³⁰

²⁹ Barnard 2008, 171, Fig. 11-3, EDW 26.

³⁰ Magid, Pierce, Krzywinski 1995, Pl. IV b, V a; Barnard 2008, 147, Table 10-3, Fig. 11-1, EDW 7; Fig. 11-2, EDW 16-20; Fig. 11-4, EDW 37; Fig. 11-5, EDW 51, EDW 55, EDW 57, EDW 60; Fig. 11-6, EDW 61, EDW 75-77; Fig. 11-7, EDW 79, EDW 83-84, EDW 86, EDW 89-90; Fig. 11-8, EDW 99, EDW 102, EDW 105, EDW 108, EDW 114; Fig. 11-9, EDW 132; Fig. 11-10, EDW 150; Fig. 11-11, EDW 161, EDW 164, EDW 166-167, EDW 170-171, EDW 176-177; Fig. 11-12, EDW 179-182, EDW 185, EDW 188-190, EDW 192; Fig. 11-13, EDW 194-195,

3. Jebel Qoqay/Romeladid

In 2010 a survey in the sector of the Eastern Sudanese Desert West of Derudeb was conducted by the Italian Archaeological Expedition to the Eastern Sudan of the UNO.³¹

Actually, one of the reasons for resuming the field-work of the expedition in 2010 after a gap of fifteen years was to investigate the relationships between the Eritrean-Sudanese lowlands and the Eastern Desert from prehistoric to late antique times.³²

The site of Jebel Qoqay/Romeladid was actually recorded in an area which is intermediate between the central Nubian Eastern Desert and Eastern Sudan (Fig. 8). The site proved to be a large necropolis characterized by the occurrence of tumuli and funerary superstructures of different types on the southern slopes of the Jebel Qoqay/Romeladid. Most likely these tumuli and superstructures go back to different periods but some of them may also be ascribed to different human groups inhabiting the region in the same period of time.³³

Significantly, some of these structures consisted of cylindrical stone platforms (Fig. 9) very closely recalling the type widely recorded in the Egyptian and Sudanese Eastern Desert, usually dated to the 4th-7th century AD and sometimes associated with Eastern Desert Ware.³⁴ Others may be identified with a type widely distributed in the Eastern Desert and often labeled as “crevice graves”, where the body is placed in a crack or crevice in exposed boulders and covered with stones (Fig. 10). Also this type of grave was sometimes ascribed to the 4th-7th century AD,³⁵ but, as this is a very opportunistic and simple type of structure, it is likely that it was used over a long period of time.³⁶ Therefore, “crevice graves” are difficult to date without a proper excavation.

EDW 199, EDW 202-204, EDW 207, EDW 210; Fig. 11-14, EDW 213, EDW 217, EDW 222, EDW 225-227; Fig. 11-15, EDW 230, EDW 234-236, EDW 238, EDW 241; Fig. 11-16, EDW 243, EDW 246-247, EDW 249-250; Fig. 11-17, EDW 267, EDW 271; Fig. 11-18, EDW 281-282, EDW 286-288, EDW 290; Hayes 1996, Fig. 6-15, 5, Fig. 6-19, 2, 5; Lassányi 2010 b, 286, 83, 88, 90; Sadr 1994, Fig. 3; Strouhal 1984, Fig. 125, P 810; Fig. 126, P 802, P 813, P 896; Fig. 127, P 798; Fig. 128, P 958, P 1202 a, P 1278, P 1303, P 1391 a; Fig. 130, P 840, P 841, P 891; Fig. 132, P 959, P 1237; see also Barnard, Strouhal 2004, Pl. 1.

³¹ Manzo 2011, 18-27.

³² Manzo 2011, 2.

³³ Manzo 2011, 19-23.

³⁴ Lassányi 2010 a, 595-596, 599-600; 2010 b; 2012, 262-265; see also Krzywinski 2012, 144.

³⁵ see e.g. Lassányi 2010 b, 264, Fig. 11; 2012, 262.

³⁶ see e.g. Paner, Pudło, Borowski 2010, 65; see also Manzo 2011, 23.

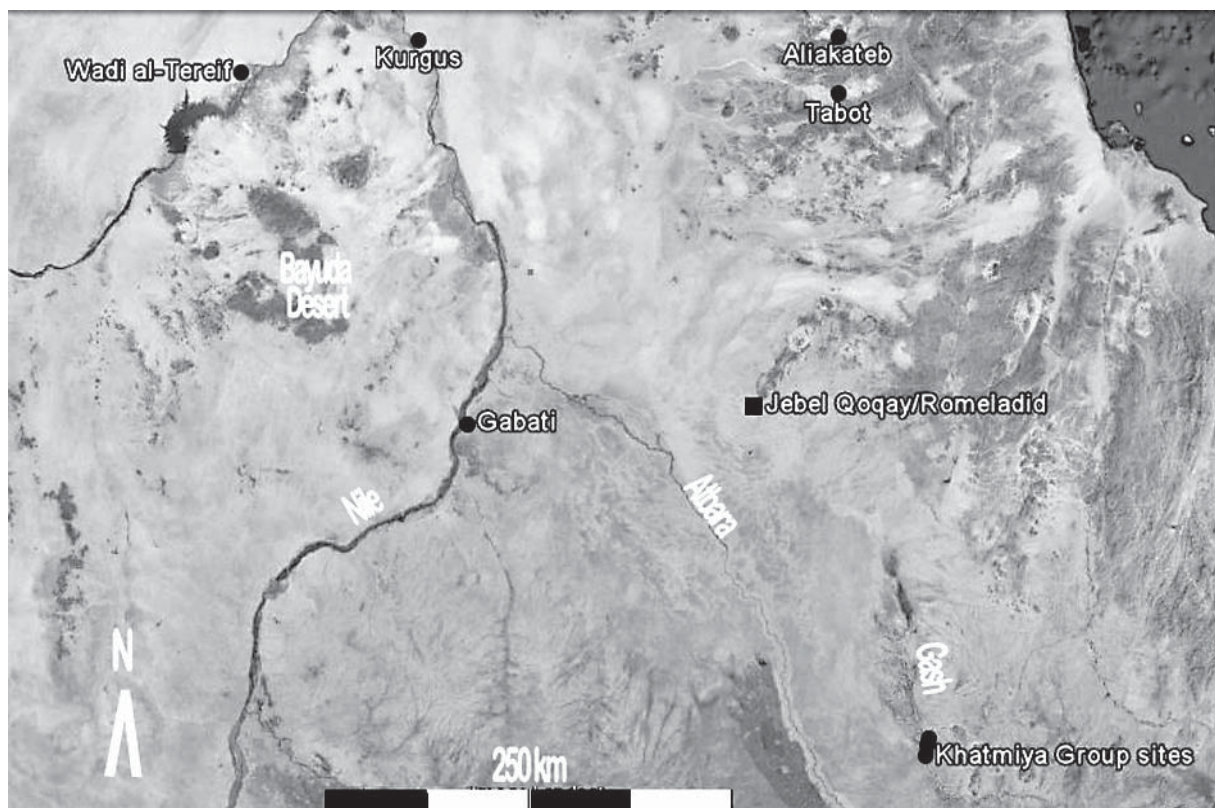


Fig. 8: The location of Jebel Qoqay/Romeladid. The nearest sites where EDW was recorded are also shown (based on Google Earth satellite imagery).



Fig. 9: Cylindrical funerary stone platform at Jebel Qoqay/Romeladid.

Although the pottery proved to be quite rare on the surface of Jebel Qoqay/Romeladid, a few sherds were collected and some of them can be ascribed to the horizon of the Eastern Desert Ware.³⁷ These are:

1. Gray ware body sherd with remains of red slip on the external surface where two parallel grooves and a band of parallel oblique comb impressions occur as

well (Fig. 11a, col. fig. 10). For both its surface treatment³⁸ and decoration³⁹ this sherd recalls Eastern Desert Ware vessels.

2. Brown ware body sherd with remains of red slip on the external surface also characterized by an incised decoration consisting of rectangular incised panels filled by incised horizontal parallel lines (Fig. 11b, col. fig. 10). The surface treatment as well as the decoration recalls Eastern Desert Ware types.⁴⁰ The internal surface of the sherd is flaked in a way suggesting it may have been part of a footed vessel, perhaps similar

to the ones discovered at some sites with Eastern Desert Ware in the Wadi Allaqi region.⁴¹

3. Red ware rim sherd of a closed bowl or cup with a lug handle on the rim of the vessel, smoothed surfaces

³⁸ see e.g. Barnard 2008, 21.

³⁹ Barnard 2008, Fig. 11-2, EDW 13; Fig. 11-4, EDW 41.

⁴⁰ see Barnard 2008, 21, and Fig. 11-15, EDW 233 respectively.

⁴¹ Sadr, Castiglioni, Castiglioni 1995, Fig. 25.

³⁷ Manzo 2011, 24.



Fig. 10: Crevice grave at Jebel Qoqay/Romeladid.

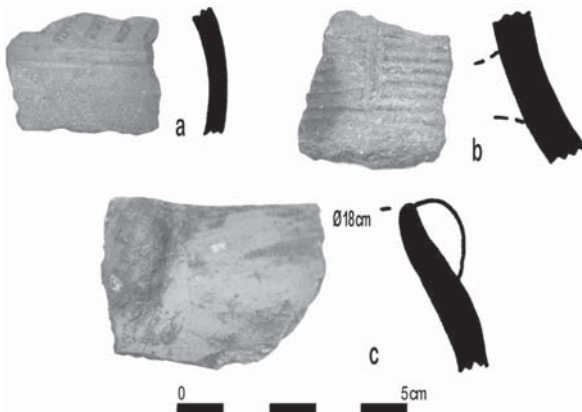


Fig. 11: Possible Eastern Desert Ware sherds from Jebel Qoqay/ Romeladid.

(Fig. 11c, col. fig. 10). This fragment can be ascribed to a well known Eastern Desert Ware type of bowls with lug handles on the rim.⁴²

4. Eastern Desert Ware from Aksum

Other Eastern Desert Ware finds also giving new information on the contacts between ancient Sudan and the northern Ethiopian highland were found in the region of the capital of the ancient Aksumite kingdom.

In 2005 some exotic sherds were collected during the excavation of an Aksumite monumental structure dating to the Late Aksumite phase (6th -8th centuries AD).⁴³ The structure, which can be iden-

⁴² Barnard 2008, Fig. 11-10, EDW 139, but see also Fig. 11-2, EDW 15 and Fig. 11-9, EDW 131; Strouhal 1984, Fig. 129, P 834.

⁴³ The excavations were conducted by the Italian Archaeo-

tified as a church, is located at Mahraf, northeast of Aksum, on a traditional route leading to the valley of the Mareb-Gash and the Eritrean-Sudanese low-lands (Fig. 12).

The Eastern Desert Ware finds from Mahraf were:

1. An almost complete globular beaker with everted rim, brown mineral and vegetal tempered paste, polished surfaces, which was characterized on the upper part of the body of the vessel by incised grooves parallel to the rim forming two horizontal bands with triangular incised zones between the bands. A

band of rounded lines is incised in the lower part of the vessel, and an incised cross consisting of parallel lines framing bands of notches inscribed in a circle characterizes the base. Despite the acid soil characterizing the site of Mahraf, it was remarked that the different geometric zones on the surface of the vessel are characterized alternatively by a reddish brown or dark brown colour, while white paste occurred in the incisions and impressions. A horizontal handle with two vertical holes was on the shoulder of the vessel (Fig. 13, col. fig. 9). The shape⁴⁴ and the general organization of the decoration of this vessel⁴⁵ recall the Eastern Desert Ware types. Moreover, the decoration consists of elements like parallel lines framing bands of notches⁴⁶ and round brackets⁴⁷ typical of Eastern Desert Ware. Also the use of white inlay and of alternated red and brown slipped sectors of the surface⁴⁸ is consistent with the attribution of this vessel to the Eastern Desert Ware.

2. Two red ware rim sherds characterized by a wavy incised band under a horizontal groove parallel to the rim (Fig. 14, a). In the larger of the two rim sherds a second groove parallel to the rim occurs and a further horizontal groove also occurs on the body; moreover

logical Expedition at Aksum of the UNO directed by Rodolfo Fattovich. I thank Professor Fattovich for allowing me to study these materials.

⁴⁴ see e.g. Barnard 2008, Fig. 11-1, EDW 3; Fig. 11-2, EDW 13; Lassányi 2010 b, 287, 98.

⁴⁵ see e.g. Strouhal 1984, 157, Fig. 125, P 797; Fig. 126, P 815; Fig. 128, P 1278.

⁴⁶ Barnard 2008, Fig. 11-1, EDW 4; Castiglioni, Castiglioni, Sadr 1997, Fig. 1; Lassányi 2010 b, 287, 91; Sadr, Castiglioni, Castiglioni 1995, Fig. 26; Strouhal 1984, Fig. 129, P 849; see also above n. 1 in paragraph 2.

⁴⁷ Barnard 2008, 146, Table 10-3.

⁴⁸ Barnard 2008, 21.

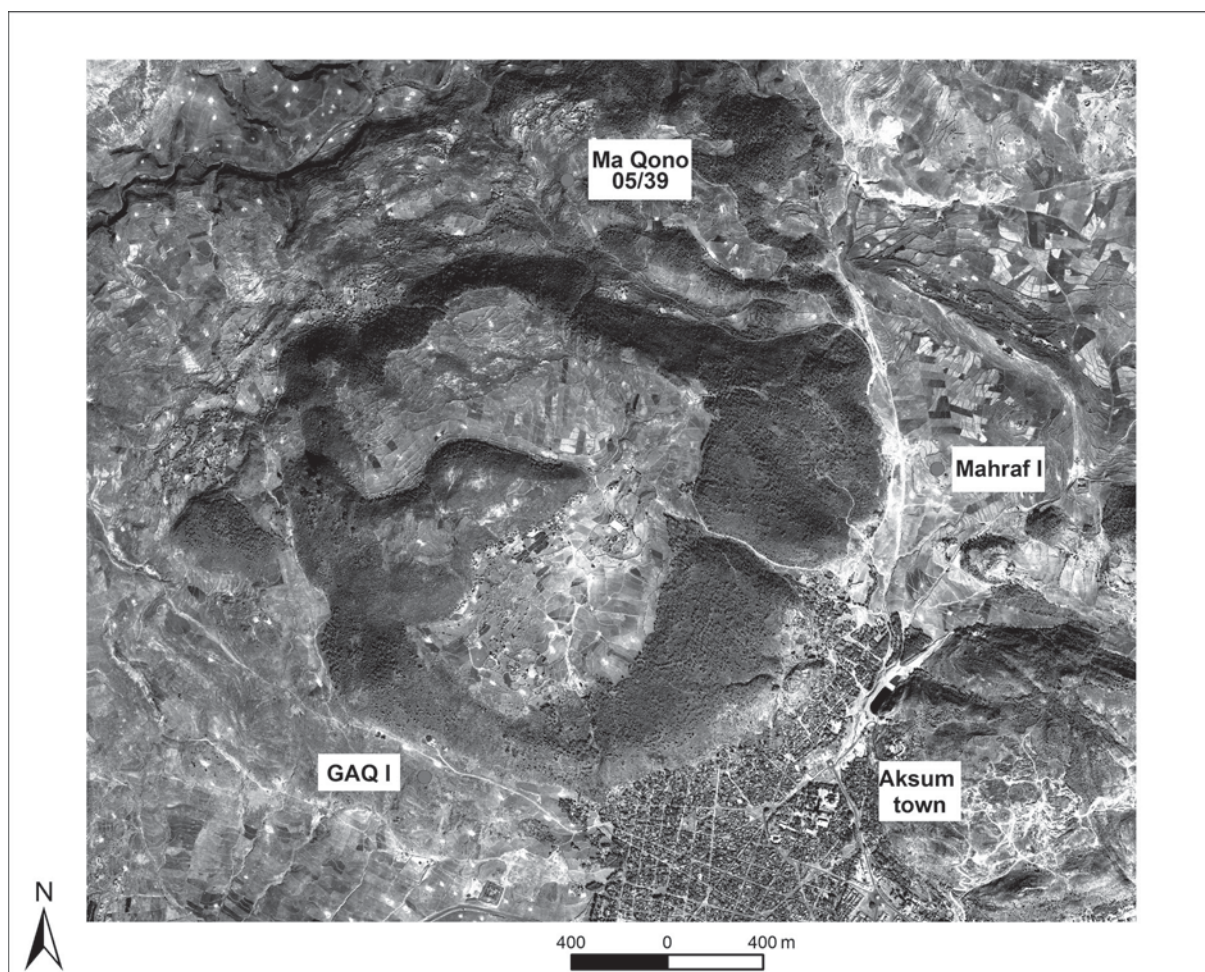


Fig. 12: Map showing the location of Mahraf, Ma Qono and Graat Abba Qaly, the sites near Aksum where Eastern Desert Ware was discovered (map by Luisa Sernicola).

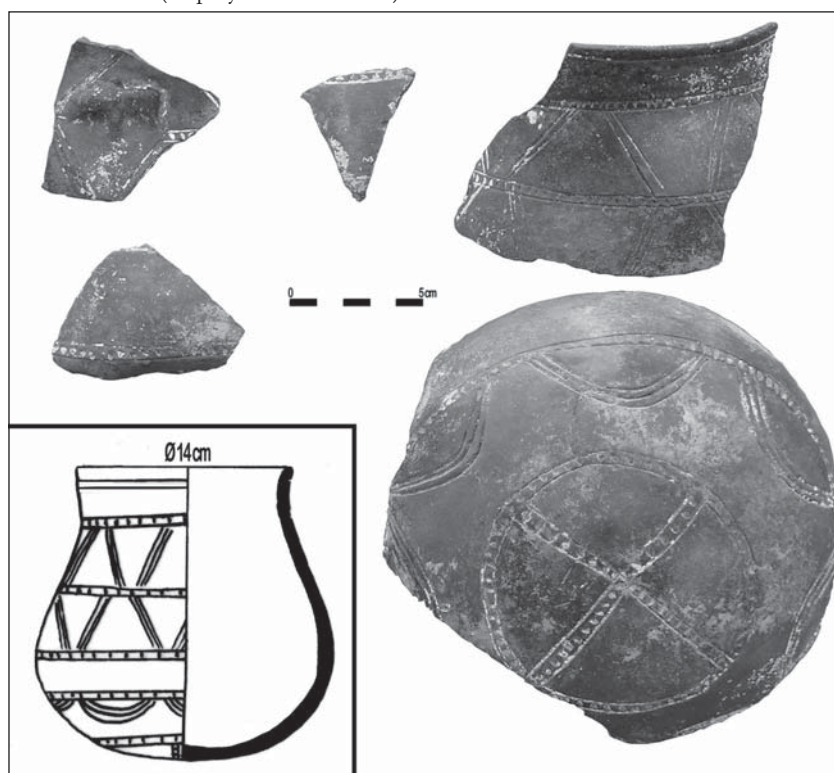


Fig. 13: Eastern Desert Ware almost complete globular beaker from Mahraf, Aksum, with the reconstruction of its shape and decoration.

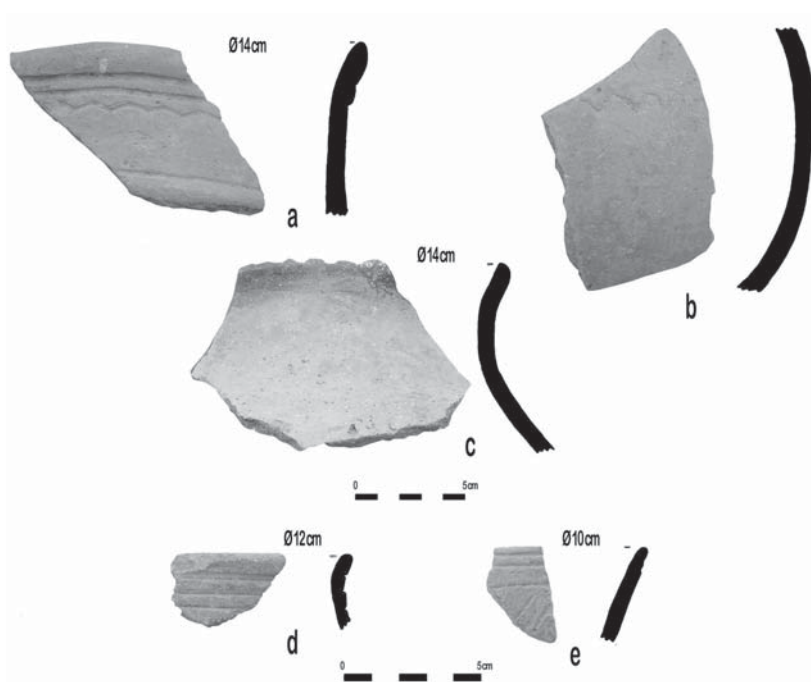


Fig. 14: Possible Eastern Desert Ware sherd from Aksum, a-c from Mahraf, d from Ma Qono, e from Graat Abba Qaly.

its profile seems to be carinated. Both the rim sherds are also characterized by remains of a red slip on the external surface. The decoration,⁴⁹ and, when a hypothetical reconstruction is possible, the shape⁵⁰ can be ascribed to the Eastern Desert Ware. A further red ware and red slipped body sherd from the same assemblage was characterized by the usual Eastern Desert Ware wavy incised pattern⁵¹ (Fig. 14, b).

3. A brown ware rim of a small flask or bottle blackened on the rim and characterized by notches on the lip (Fig. 14, c) recalls rare flasks with decoration on the lip which, although not very frequent, have been ascribed to the Eastern Desert Ware.⁵²

In addition to these finds from Mahraf, other sherds which can be ascribed to Eastern Desert Ware were recently discovered at Ma Qono and Graat Abba Qaly, other sites around Aksum (Fig. 13, col. fig. 9). 4. A rim sherd of a dark gray beaker or small bowl with external polished surface, and internal smoothed surface decorated with three incised lines parallel to the rim and recalling Eastern Desert Ware types

in surface treatment, decoration, and possibly shape,⁵³ was discovered at the site of Ma Qono, in the valley north of Bieta Giyorgis hill, not far from Maharaf (Fig. 14, d).

5. A dark brown ware rim sherd of a cup with burnished to polished surfaces and characterized by three incised horizontal lines parallel to the rim and, underneath, an oblique band consisting of two parallel incisions framing some notches, was found at Graat Abba Qaly, north-west of Aksum, at the foothills of the Bieta Giyorgis hill, in an assemblage from a Middle Aksumite monumental building dating to the mid-4th-early 6th century AD (Fig. 14, e). This sherd can be ascribed to a cup comparable to well known Eastern Desert Ware types.⁵⁴

5. Final remarks

All these finds can contribute at least to give new insights into, if not actually to clarify, the issues raised in the introduction.

The sites with Eastern Desert Ware identified by the more recent investigations conducted by the CeRDO (paragraph 2) bridge the spatial gap between the occurrences of Eastern Desert Ware in the Egyptian Eastern Desert and Lower Nubia and the ones in more southern sites, such as Tabot and the sites in Upper Nubia and between the Fourth and Fifth Cataracts (Fig. 15). In turn, the occurrence of Eastern Desert Ware and of cylindrical stone funerary platforms at Jebel Qoqay/Romeladid (paragraph 3) may represent a bridge across the second spatial gap between sites with Eastern Desert Ware in the Sudanese Eastern Desert and the ones of the Khatmiya Group in the Kassala region characterized by a ceramic assemblage in which the Eastern Desert Ware represents an important component⁵⁵ (see again Fig. 15).

49 see e.g. Barnard 2008, 147, Fig. 10-3; Fig. 11-3, EDW 24, 32; Fig. 11-14, EDW 217, 222.

50 see Barnard 2008, 142, Table 10-1, H 1 b; Fig. 11-1, EDW 10; Strouhal 1984, Fig. 126, P 802.

51 see Barnard 2008, 147, Table 10-3, and further references above in paragraph 2 n. 6.

52 Magid 2004, Fig. 6; Barnard 2008, Fig. 11-9, EDW 128; Lassányi 2010 b, 286, 82.

53 see Barnard 2008, Fig. 11-14, EDW 221, see also Fig. 11-8, EDW 97, EDW 101, and, for the possible shape, Lassányi 2010 b, 287, 98.

54 Barnard 2008, Fig. 11-1, EDW 3; Hayes 1996, Fig. 6-5, 2; Strouhal 1984, Fig. 125, P 797.

55 Manzo 2004, 77-79.

In fact, the extension of the distribution of Eastern Desert Ware to the Eastern Sudan is not surprising if we admit the relationship between Eastern Desert Ware and groups of Eastern Desert people and if we consider that seasonal movements from the Eastern Desert to Eastern Sudan could take place in summer, which corresponds to the dry season in the Eastern Desert and to the rainy season in Eastern Sudan, as ethnographically recorded for some Beja groups in more recent times.⁵⁶ Nevertheless it should also be stressed that a certain degree of isolation of the Khatmiya Group sites already suggested by the lack of sites related to this cultural unit in the Gash delta, North-West of Kassala⁵⁷ was recently confirmed by the extension of the area surveyed in the Eighties West and North of Kassala in the framework of the rescue archaeology campaigns launched by the National Corporation for Antiquities and Museums and by the Italian Archaeological Expedition of the UNO in 2010 as a consequence of implementation of the Upper Atbara Irrigation Scheme.⁵⁸ Even following these more recent investigations,

no further Khatmiya Group sites were recorded between the Gash and the Atbara.

Is this lack of sites with Eastern Desert Ware in an area intermediate between Jebel Qoqay/ Romeladid and Kassala related to the modality of frequentation of this region by the Eastern Desert people, which may have just crossed it without leaving significant traces, which can be expected on the contrary only in the areas where they stopped for longer periods? Were the movements of the Khatmiya Group people for some still unknown reason restricted to the East of the Gash river, in an area still largely unexplored?

56 Barnard 2008, 13-14; Bintliff, Barnard 2012, 438; see also Starkey 2012, 322; Weschenfelder 2012, 351.

57 see Fattovich 1989, 800; Manzo 2004, Fig. 1.

58 see Manzo 2011, 2-16, 36-39.

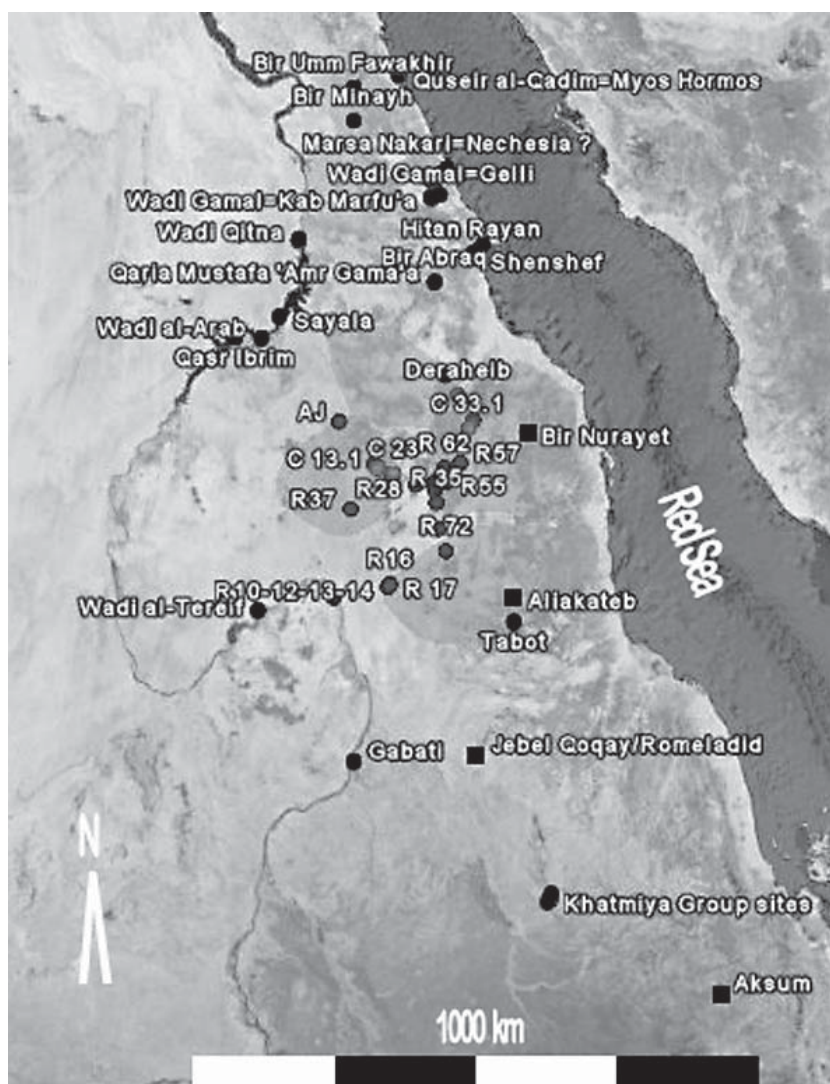


Fig. 15: The sites with Eastern Desert Ware finds. Black circles: sites after Barnard 2008 and Manzo 2004; gray circles: sites recorded by the CeRDO expedition; black squares: other recently recorded EDW sites, including Jebel Qoqay/ Romeladid and the ones near Aksum. The shadowed areas show the main gold bearing areas in the Nubian-Sudanese Eastern Desert (after Klemm and Klemm 2013).

Otherwise, we should admit that the presence of sites characterized by archaeological materials related to the Eastern Desert Ware East of Kassala cannot be explained by the seasonal movements of groups moving between the Eastern Sudan and the Southern Eastern Desert but by different factors. Relationships involving the exchange of goods between this specific area of Eastern Sudan and the Eastern Desert can be suggested. Nevertheless, it should be stressed that, given their open shapes,⁵⁹ it is difficult to surmise that the Eastern Desert Ware vessels were used as containers for goods to be exchanged, in which case the vessels may be interpreted as tableware of caravan traders. Other explanations for the isolation

59 Barnard 2008, 32.

of the Khatmiya Group sites in the Kassala region may be related to historical facts like the resettlement of groups of Beja, possibly from the Eastern Desert, inside or at the edge of the Aksumite territory referred to in a mid-4th century AD inscription by king Ezana.⁶⁰ The mobility of the Beja groups mentioned in the inscription would have made their control by the Aksumite state very difficult, which might explain the establishment of agreements and alliances with some of these groups, such as the ones in Ezana's inscription, who were allowed to settle in the Aksumite territory with fairly advantageous conditions.

Only further investigations of Khatmiya Group sites may help to clarify these issues and to understand the meaning of this culture of Eastern Sudan and of its component related to the Eastern Desert Ware.

The relationships referred to above between groups from the Eastern Desert or Eastern Sudan and the Aksumite kingdom may certainly also explain the occurrence of Eastern Desert Ware at Aksum (paragraph 4). Actually, these finds not only considerably extend the area of occurrence of the Eastern Desert Ware to the South, but also provide the first undisputable archaeological confirmation of the establishment of relationships between the Aksumite kingdom and peoples of the Eastern Desert and/or Eastern Sudan referred to in the inscriptions (see above and below). Of course, the Eastern Desert Ware bearers might have arrived at Aksum as servants, possibly as slaves taken after the military campaigns conducted by the Aksumite kings in the Eastern Desert or in the Eritrean-Sudanese lowlands, or as members of larger groups living in the Aksumite kingdom and perhaps even close to the capital city after the resettlement of Beja groups which occurred at least once during the reign of Ezana. Nevertheless, these finds also point to further possible interpretations. The spots where the Eastern Desert Ware finds from Aksum were collected are located at the end of traditional tracks leading to the Eritrean-Sudanese lowlands. Together with the ceramic materials imported from Egypt and the Mediterranean at Tabot, a site located in a strategic spot along the tracks of the Eastern Desert,⁶¹ and found in the Khatmiya Group sites in the Kassala area, all dating to a phase when Mediterranean imports were extremely rare in Upper Nubia and central Sudan,⁶² the Eastern

Desert Ware finds from Aksum may also demonstrate the efficiency of the North-South routes for crossing the Eastern Desert and connecting Egypt and the Ethiopian highlands. In particular, it has already been suggested that some of the imported Mediterranean ceramic materials from the Khatmiya Group assemblages may have arrived to Eastern Sudan via the Ethiopian highland.⁶³ One of these North-South routes between Egypt and Aksum is referred to in the late 3rd century AD anonymous inscription from Adulis known as *Monumentum Adulitanum*,⁶⁴ and this same route may also be referred to by Procopius of Caesarea⁶⁵ and by Cosmas Indicopleustes.⁶⁶ Certainly this route was also closely related to the East-West tracks connecting the Nile Valley to the Red Sea, especially if one considers a possible active involvement of the people of the Eastern Desert, the Blemmyes of the sources, in the Red Sea trade network.⁶⁷ The movements of trade caravans along the East-West and North-South tracks connecting Ethiopia and Egypt at the end of the Middle Age⁶⁸ may have overlapped this earlier network. Of course, further research is needed to assess the degree of direct involvement of the Eastern Desert people in the management of the caravan routes and trade, and to prove that the control granted to the Beja on the caravan routes in Fatimid period⁶⁹ extended to more remote times.

The routes along which the peoples of the Eastern Desert moved seasonally, related to a nomadic style of life and perhaps also in their function as caravan leaders, may have touched if not crossed the main gold mining areas of the Nubian and Sudanese Eastern Desert.⁷⁰ Many of the new sites with Eastern Desert Ware recorded by CeRDO (see paragraph 2) are especially located in these gold bearing areas (Fig. 15). This may suggest some kind of involvement of the groups using the Eastern Desert Ware, most likely the local inhabitants of the Eastern Desert, in the mining activities. The above described fresh data may support this suggestion as shown by the association between Eastern Desert Ware and villages of miners or mines, as in the case of Aliakateb (see above paragraph 2) and of some CeRDO sites associated with ancient mines, like R 37 and R 38, Mine 26 and Mine 27. It has been already suggested that the Blemmyan

60 see Bernard, Drewes, Schneider 1991, 241-250, n. 185, 185 bis; 363-370, n. 270, 270 bis; Eide, Hägg, Pierce, Török 1998, 1094-1100, n. 296.

61 Magid 2004, 164-165, Fig. 7; Magid, Pierce, Krzywinski 1995, 169; for comparisons see Adams 1986, 581-583.

62 Manzo 2004, 80.

63 Manzo 2004, 80.

64 Bernard, Drewes, Schneider 1991, 378-382, n. 277.

65 Eide, Hägg, Pierce, Török 1998, 1189-1190, n. 328.

66 Wolska-Conus 1968, 356-357, II, 48.

67 see Dijkstra 2012, 246-247.

68 Monneret de Villard 1938, 322.

69 see Roe 2012, 389.

70 see Klemm, Klemm 2013, 341-568.

kingdom may have been involved in the exploitation of the gold resources in the Wadi Allaqi region⁷¹ although probably in an indirect way.⁷² Actually, the fact that mining activities in the Eastern Desert were not directly conducted by the local people seems to be suggested by the rarity of Eastern Desert Ware in better explored mining sites such as Deraheib⁷³ and by its absence in other mining sites.⁷⁴ Significantly, also the sources referring to the Blemmyan control over the mines of emeralds,⁷⁵ sometimes described as a Blemmyan royal monopoly,⁷⁶ do not clarify if their exploitation of these resources was direct or indirect, i.e. if the Blemmyes themselves were working in and managing the mines, or if they were just taking advantage of the work of groups of miners mostly coming from the Nile Valley. Therefore, also in this case the issue remains open and further research is greatly needed with the systematic exploration of the ancient mines and mining sites in the Sudanese Eastern Desert.

Of course, along the routes and in the sites of the Eastern Desert not only did different people meet and exchange goods, but also ideas and beliefs were shared. In this perspective too some of the above described finds can give new insights into the problem of the spread of Christianity among the people of the Eastern Desert. In the written sources, some elements point to the adoption of Christianity by single Blemmyes living in Upper Egypt⁷⁷ and the recently published ostrakon bearing a translation into the Blemmyan language of Psalm 29, 3-5⁷⁸ also suggests that the Christian faith had some diffusion among the people of the Eastern Desert. Archaeological evidence for studying the spread of Christianity among the people of the Eastern Desert is for the moment very limited. It was suggested that the cross characterizing some Eastern Desert Ware decorative patterns may be related to the adoption of the Christian faith by some groups living in the Eastern Desert,⁷⁹ but this is difficult to prove. The occurrence of extended burials in graves marked by a cylindrical stone platform in the Mons Smaragdus area may be a more reliable element, also because these graves are close to a structure which may be

identified with a church.⁸⁰ In the latter case, we see that archaeology may also suggest how and where conversions may have taken place, i.e. in the mining sites where Christian traders or workers may have arrived from the Nile Valley. Here too there are some archaeological elements to support this hypothesis: in the Mons Smaragdus area, a cross was engraved on a pagan altar also bearing hieroglyphs in a temple at Sikait.⁸¹ The possible occurrence of a church was also suggested for Deraheib⁸² and, if confirmed, the structure in an important center in the hinterland of the Blemmyan kingdom should be regarded at least as proof of tolerance towards Christianity. Moreover, monastic communities may have settled in the Eastern Desert, as is shown by the possible Christian monastic anachoretic site (lavra) in the region of the Mons Smaragdus.⁸³ Certainly, the relationships which were established between monastic communities and the local inhabitants of the Eastern Desert were not limited to the periodic raids described in the sources.⁸⁴ In all probability they also extended to the exchange and symbiotic sharing of resources, as traditionally happened in more recent times,⁸⁵ which may have favored the conversion to Christianity of some local inhabitants of the Eastern Desert too.⁸⁶ The fresh data on the Eastern Desert Ware may offer new elements also for the study of this fascinating problem. Actually, it may be interesting to note that most of the Eastern Desert Ware sherds from the region of Aksum were found in assemblages from the Aksumite church of Mahraf (see paragraph 4). These finds can give some insights into a new and so far unexplored route through which Christianity may have been adopted by some inhabitants of the Eastern Desert, i.e. from the Aksumite kingdom, where Christianity had already been adopted as the state religion in the mid 4th century AD.⁸⁷ Certainly, similar contacts with Aksumite Christianity affected the Middle Nile area, as related by John of Ephesus when describing the arrival of Longinus in Alwa and his encounter with two Aksumite Christians.⁸⁸ Significantly, to go back to the ostrakon bearing a translation into the Blemmyan language of a Psalm, the words in the text were separated following a

71 Sadr, Castiglioni, Castiglioni, Negro 1994, 72; see also Sadr 1995, 158.

72 Castiglioni, Castiglioni, Sadr 1997, 163, 166-167.

73 Castiglioni, Castiglioni 1997, 156, see also Lassányi 2012, 266, note 13.

74 Sadr 1995, 161.

75 Eide, Hägg, Pierce, Török 1998, 1115-1121, n. 305.

76 Eide, Hägg, Pierce, Török 1998, 1126-1128, n. 309.

77 Eide, Hägg, Pierce, Török 1998, 1199, 1212-1214, n. 339.

78 Browne 2003.

79 Castiglioni, Castiglioni, Sadr 1997, 166; Sadr 1995, 161.

80 Krzywinski 2012, 149-150.

81 Sidebotham, Nouwens, Hense, Harrell 2004, 20, Fig. 43.

82 Sadr 1995, 161.

83 Sidebotham, Nouwens, Hense, Harrell 2004, 23.

84 see e.g. Eide, Hägg, Pierce, Török 1998, 1107-1109, n. 301.

85 see e.g. Starkey 2012, 319-321.

86 Sidebotham, Hense, Nouwens 2008, 144-149.

87 see last Phillipson 2012, 91-99.

88 Vantini 1975, 15-21, n. 20.

convention which may be related to the one used in the Ge'ez manuscripts.⁸⁹

Finally, to go back to more general functional remarks, it may certainly be of interest that also in the case of the new Eastern Desert Ware finds described above (paragraphs 2-4), this class of pottery almost exclusively consists of bowls and cups,⁹⁰ i.e. of ceramic shapes we may expect for serving and consuming food and drinks.⁹¹ The kind of food which may have been served in these vessels, the fact that Eastern Desert Ware vessels were not exclusively used as drinking vessels, and perhaps some first insights into the variability of the diet in different sites where Eastern Desert Ware was found, have all been demonstrated by lipid residue analysis.⁹²

Not only should the communal consumption of food and drinks be regarded in general as a highly meaningful activity for the production and reproduction of social practices,⁹³ but there are clear elements to suggest that this was the case in the specific cultural and chronological context where the Eastern Desert Ware was used. From this point of view, some structures in Sayala⁹⁴ and in Bab Kalabsha⁹⁵ which were interpreted as "Weinstuben" when they were excavated, being characterized by benches along the walls where people could recline while drinking, and by concentrations of cups and containers for wine, can be regarded as highly meaningful. These structures are still today often given the functional label "Weinstuben", sometimes translated into English as "rest house".⁹⁶ Nevertheless, it was also alternatively suggested that these could be places where people used to gather to feast and, especially, to drink.⁹⁷ These habits may be considered as the continuation of earlier Meroitic social and ritual practices,⁹⁸ which continued to be practiced in Lower Nubia and were adopted in the X-Group.⁹⁹ But, as Sayala and Bab Kalabsha were in the part of Nubia which was controlled by the Blemmyes in the early 4th-mid-5th century AD,¹⁰⁰ and as Eastern Desert Ware

was found in these structures, it is highly possible that similar habits were also adopted by the Blemmyes themselves. Perhaps the rituals taking place in the "Weinstuben" at Sayala and Bab Kalabsha were conducted by organized groups similar to the Blemmyan cult associations recorded in two inscriptions commemorating their involvement in building activities in a temple at Taphis, North of Kalabsha, and in the temple of Kalabsha itself.¹⁰¹ Moreover, the importance of the communal consumption of wine in the rituals performed by the Blemmyes even before the period of flourishing of the Eastern Desert Ware may be suggested by the fact that two out of four demotic Ptolemaic administrative documents mentioning the Blemmyes are, although somehow obscure, in some way related to wine and to temples.¹⁰²

As Eastern Desert Ware vessels were frequently discovered in the areas around or on top of the funerary superstructures,¹⁰³ also the funerary ceremonies were highly ritualized occasions in which Eastern Desert Ware may have been used. This may suggest that these vessels were used in funerary offerings as well as possibly in funerary banquets¹⁰⁴ taking place around the funerary structures, perhaps in areas which are often delimited by walls¹⁰⁵ or, at least at Wadi Qitna, even on the flat top of the rounded funerary platforms which were sometimes accessed through stairs and where uninscribed steles were erected.¹⁰⁶ In particular, it was suggested that the footed vessels characterizing the Eastern Desert Ware assemblages associated with some funerary cylindrical platforms in the Wadi Allaqi region and also found at site R 37 in the Sudanese Eastern desert (see paragraph 2), were used as incense burners,¹⁰⁷ which may show a further aspect of these rituals. Nevertheless, stone basins comparable to the ceramic vessels from the Wadi Allaqi and from site R 37 were discovered near Kalabsha¹⁰⁸ and at Wadi Qitna¹⁰⁹ in funerary assemblages, and also at Bir Minayh¹¹⁰ both in funerary and settlement assemblages. As these stone basins do not bear any trace of firing on them, it is difficult to surmise that they

89 Wedekind 2010, 79.

90 Barnard, Dooley, Faull 2006, 49; Strouhal 1982, 215.

91 Barnard 2008, 39, 100, 113.

92 Barnard 2008, 74, 82, 106.

93 see e.g. Bray ed. 2003; see also Edwards 2005, 116; Smith 2008, 359; Wendrich 2008, 530-531.

94 Kromer 1967.

95 Ricke 1967, 1-15, 20-25.

96 see e.g. Barnard 2008, 1; Barnard, Dooley, Faull 2006, 49.

97 Dann 2009, 26-27, 222; Edwards 2004, 209-210; Millet 1984, 114.

98 Millet 1984, 114; Manzo 2006, 83-85.

99 Dann 2009, 224, 245.

100 Török 2009, 522-525; see also Eide, Hägg, Pierce, Török 1998, 1126-1128, n. 309.

101 Eide, Hägg, Pierce, Török 1998, 1134-1138, n. 312-313; Török 2009, 529.

102 Pierce 2012, 233.

103 see e.g. Castiglioni, Castiglioni, Sadr 1997, 164; Strouhal 1984, 101; see also paragraph 3.

104 Lassányi 2012, 265, 268; see also Barnard 2012 b, 280.

105 Lassányi 2012, 263-265, Fig. 18.12.

106 Strouhal 1984, 92-94.

107 Castiglioni, Castiglioni, Sadr 1997, 164-166.

108 Ricke 1967, 68-70, Abb. 81.

109 Strouhal 1984, 203, Fig. 144.

110 Lassányi 2010 c.

were incense burners; on the contrary they might have been altars.¹¹¹ Thus, both these stone and the ceramic items may have been used with the associated Eastern Desert Ware vessels in ritual occasions mostly related to the funerary context. Only an accurate investigation of further funerary structures associated with Eastern Desert Ware and of their surrounding areas may clarify the kind of ceremonies and activities taking place there and may provide more details on the use of the Eastern Desert Ware vessels in these contexts. Nevertheless, it is already evident that Eastern Desert Ware occurs in a further context such as the funerary one which should be regarded as crucial for the formation and affirmation of identity.¹¹²

Therefore, these remarks suggest that the Eastern Desert Ware could have been used in specific occasions when the identity of the groups was expressed and reaffirmed. In fact, some of the attributes of this class of pottery are remarkable in this perspective: the outstanding aesthetic properties usually characterizing the Eastern Desert Ware vessels may be related to the fact that they were used in these solemn occasions.¹¹³ This may support the hypothesis that Eastern Desert Ware was given a special meaning in the domain of the expression of the cultural, and perhaps even ethnic, identity.¹¹⁴ Significantly, also the apparent flourishing of the Eastern Desert Ware in a specific and well defined chronological phase was considered as a reaction of groups of Eastern Desert people to the intensification of contacts with neighboring regions in the 3rd-6th century AD, which could have been crucial for the formation and affirmation of the identity of the inhabitants of Eastern Desert.¹¹⁵ If the extension of the regions where Eastern Desert Ware occurs according to our present knowledge is considered also in the light of the new finds described in this paper (paragraphs 2-4, Fig. 15), it may seem perhaps strange that a class of handmade ceramic could maintain a certain uniformity over such a wide area despite the fact that it was probably not produced in workshops organized for a serial, large scale and standardized production. Such a somehow surprising fact may be better understood if this special value in the expression of the identity that Eastern Desert Ware could have had is precisely considered.

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111 Lassányi 2010 c; 2012, 265.

112 see e.g. Lucy 2005, 105-107.

113 see also Strouhal 1984, 157, 191.

114 Barnard, Dooley, Faull 2006, 49; Barnard, Strouhal 2004, 33; Strouhal 1982, 217.

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HERAUSGEGEBEN VON

ANGELIKA LOHWASSER & PAWEL WOLF



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TITELBILD: Säulenbasis mit Löwe, Große Anlage von Musawwarat es Sufra, Raum 108
(Foto: Claudia Näser)

FRONTISPIZ: Der Jubilar im Garten seines Hauses in Berlin-Karow
(Foto: Jane Humphris, Bildbearbeitung: Frank Joachim)

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DANK

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