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## Religious encounters on the southern Egyptian frontier in Late Antiquity (AD 298-642)

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## 2. An Egyptian Sanctuary Looking South: Philae and the Southern Peoples

Today, Philae is known as the 'Pearl of Egypt', but at least part of its splendour was non-Egyptian. We have already seen that the Noubades were a Nubian people living south of Philae in the Nile valley. From their earliest appearance in the Graeco-Roman sources, the Blemmyes have been located between the Nile and the Red Sea, that is, in the Eastern Desert. For example, Strabo locates them there along with two other peoples, the Megabaroi and the Troglodytai.<sup>49</sup> In Late Antiquity, these peoples from the Eastern Desert came to be known under a single name, the Blemmyes. Thus far, scholars have tried to write a coherent history on the basis of too few sources, often with a strong bias towards political history, without taking into account the complexity of tribal societies and the nature of the concepts that lay behind the Graeco-Roman perspectives on 'the Blemmyes'. Before we create another, highly hypothetical, 'study of the Blemmyes',<sup>50</sup> we should therefore first discuss the basic problems.

The Late Antique sources concerning 'the Blemmyes' can be divided into two categories: the first category is the mainly literary sources that mention 'the Blemmyes' ('outside' sources), the second category is the documentary sources in which people speak of themselves as 'the Blemmyes' ('inside' sources). These sources come from or pertain to the settlements in the Nile valley, in particular the Dodekaschoinos, and may not have had any bearing on the dwellers of the Eastern Desert. Therefore, conclusions drawn from the literary sources only say something about the Blemmyes living in or near the Nile valley. These people may have been 'marginal', both with regard to the other people living in the Nile valley and to the dwellers of the Eastern Desert. In this chapter, we will focus on these marginal people, who became visible in the sources at the end of the fifth century. In particular, it will be asked how they came to be living alongside the indigenous, Nubian population, the Noubades. To learn more about these settlement patterns, we will turn to anthropological models and apply these to the information obtained from the sources.

However, we will first go slightly further back in time in order to trace the relationship of the southern peoples with Philae. We then will discuss the sources from the fourth and fifth centuries from the 'outside' (the Roman perspective) and the 'inside' (the southern perspective) and, particularly, Philae's role as a medium between both sides of the frontier.

### Historical Background of the Relations with Nubia

From earliest times, Philae was oriented, quite literally, to the south: the main approach to the island was from that direction (Fig. 3).<sup>51</sup> The 'Black Pharaoh' Taharqa of the Kushite 25th dynasty was probably the first to dedicate a shrine to Amun of Takompso (690-664 BC) on the island.<sup>52</sup> In the Ptolemaic period, Philae remained under Nubian influence. Gradually, it won the struggle with the cult of Khnum at

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<sup>49</sup> Str. 17.1.2.

<sup>50</sup> A good example is Updegraff, *Study*, the only comprehensive, if outdated, synthesis on 'the Blemmyes'.

<sup>51</sup> *L.Philae.Dem.*, p. 42.

<sup>52</sup> On the Kushite 25th dynasty see D. Wildung (ed.), *Sudan. Antike Königreiche am Nil* (Tübingen, 1996) 167-71; D.A. Welsby, *The Kingdom of Kush. The Napatan and Meroitic Empires* (London, 1996) 19-56; L. Török, *The Kingdom of Kush. Handbook of the Napatan-Meroitic Civilization* (Leiden, 1997) 131-88; Edwards, *Nubian Past*, 112-40. On the identification of Takompso with the region around Maharraqa at the southern end of the Dodekaschoinos see Locher, *Nilkatarakt*, 259-65. Cf. G. Haeny, 'A Short Architectural History of Philae', *BIFAO* 85 (1985) 197-233 at 201-2; Dietze, 'Philae', 68. The suggestion by Rutherford, 'Island', 231, that Taharqa may have founded the shrine as a Nubian counterpart to the Khnum cult at Elephantine is unfounded.

Elephantine for the position of dominant cult in the First Cataract area.<sup>53</sup> Ptolemy IV erected a temple dedicated to the Nubian god Arensnuphis, and a rather modest sanctuary was built for another Nubian god, Mandulis, at a later, though unknown, date. King Arqamani (Ergamenes) of Meroe, the kingdom that dominated Nubia from the third century BC until the third century AD, even seized Philae at the end of the third century BC.<sup>54</sup> Building blocks of his successor Adhikhalamani have also been found on the island.<sup>55</sup>

Conflicts between Romans and Meroites reached a head in the period between 30 and 21/20 BC.<sup>56</sup> Eventually, the Roman general Petronius defeated the Meroites.<sup>57</sup> As in the case of the treaty of Philae in AD 298, in the peace treaty on Samos (21/20 BC) the glorious victory that our sources suggest contradicts with the contents of the treaty. The Emperor Augustus decided to withdraw the Roman frontier from Buhen to Hiera Sykaminos (Maharraqa; in other words, to reduce Roman territory from the Thirty Miles Land or Triakontaschoinos to the Dodekaschoinos), and to cancel the tribute that the Kingdom of Meroe had to pay.<sup>58</sup> The motivations behind this decision resembled those of Diocletian in later times: the emperor preferred to relinquish territory and to play safe than to renew conflict.

The reign of Augustus instituted a break with the Ptolemaic tradition of temple building as the priestly rights of asylum and other privileges were curtailed. From now on, the central government kept strict control over priests and temple lands. Roman power was also manifested by several building programmes throughout Egypt.<sup>59</sup> Undoubtedly to promote the stability in the new frontier region and to impress Meroe, Augustus launched a costly building programme. Several new temples were constructed and these were all connected with the Isis temple of Philae. Although the emperor sanctioned this project, its effectuation was probably more a concern of the local elite and the responsible officials,<sup>60</sup> who constructed temples of Isis at Maharraqa (with Sarapis), Dendur (with Osiris, and Peteisis and Pahor), and Tafa (two temples and a bark station),<sup>61</sup> a kiosk at Qertassi,<sup>62</sup> and a pylon at Biga.<sup>63</sup> The temple of Isis at Dabod was extended and placed in a monumental setting. Finally, the temple island of Philae was thoroughly reorganised. In front of the first pylon of the temple of Isis, a new trapezoidal court was built, the *dromos*, surrounded by colonnades to receive pilgrims (Fig. 3).<sup>64</sup> A kiosk, known as the 'Kiosk of Trajan', was erected as well as a small temple dedicated to Augustus on the northern part of the island.<sup>65</sup>

<sup>53</sup> Dietze, 'Philae', 73.

<sup>54</sup> On the Kingdom of Meroe, see L. Török, *Der Meroitische Staat 1. Untersuchungen und Urkunden zur Geschichte des Sudan im Altertum* (Berlin, 1986), and 'Geschichte Meroes. Ein Beitrag über die Quellenlage und den Forschungsstand', *ANRW* II 10.1 (1988) 107-341; Wildung, *Sudan*, 207-17.

<sup>55</sup> Haeny, 'Short Architectural History', 201-2, 220-2; Rutherford, 'Island', 231-2.

<sup>56</sup> Monneret de Villard, *Storia*, 7-15; Demicheli, *Rapporti*, 66-94; Török, *Meroitische Staat*, 17-8, 'Augustus and Meroe', *OrSu* 38-39 (1989-1990) 171-90, *Meroe. Six Studies on the Cultural Identity of an Ancient African State* (Budapest, 1995) 115-27, and *Kingdom of Kush*, 448-55; J. Locher, 'Die Anfänge der römischen Herrschaft in Nubien und der Konflikt zwischen Rom und Meroe', *AncSoc* 32 (2002) 73-133.

<sup>57</sup> Str. 17.1.54, Plin. *nat.* 6.181-2; D.C. 54.5.4-6.

<sup>58</sup> Locher, *Nilkatarakt*, 252-6.

<sup>59</sup> G. Hölbl, *Altägypten im römischen Reich. Der römische Pharao und seine Tempel I* (Mainz, 2000) 17.

<sup>60</sup> Baines, 'Temples', 229-30.

<sup>61</sup> A bark station is a sanctuary where rites were performed as part of processions, in which the statue of a deity, on its way to another deity, was carried in a processional boat or bark, see K.A. Kitchen, 'Barke', *LÄ I* (1975) 619-25; D. Arnold, 'Barkenraum', *LÄ I* (1975) 625-6.

<sup>62</sup> W. Helck, 'Kiosk', *LÄ III* (1980) 441-2: 'eine offene Säulenhalle mit Schranken'.

<sup>63</sup> The monumental entrance to the temple was called by the Greeks 'pylon', see B. Jaroš-Deckert, 'Pylon', *LÄ IV* (1982) 1202-5.

<sup>64</sup> H. Jaritz, 'Die Westkolonnade von Philae', *MDAIK* 47 (1991) 179-86.

<sup>65</sup> Kaper, 'Temple Building', 140-1; Arnold, *Temples of the Last Pharaohs*, 235-44; Baines and Málek, *Cultural Atlas*, 73-4, 180-1. For details on the temples see the series of volumes known as *Les temples immergés de la Nubie*. On the 'Kiosk of Trajan', see Hölbl, *Altägypten*, 36, cf. Haeny, 'Short Architectural History', 228-30, who dates it to before Trajan.

The building programme in the reign of Augustus both kept the Dodekaschoinos open to the south and emphasised political reality, namely that the region was Roman territory.<sup>66</sup> Between 207/206 and 186 BC, the Meroitic king Arqamani had dedicated a temple to the Nubian god Mandulis at Talmis (Kalabsha).<sup>67</sup> In the Augustan building programme the shrine was enlarged and Mandulis genealogically connected to the triad of Philae consisting of Osiris, Isis and Horus. From now on, Mandulis was 'the son of Horus, Lord of Talmis'.<sup>68</sup> The same is true for the veneration of the local, according to legend, drowned brothers Peteisis and Pahor at Dendur, who were worshipped alongside Isis and Osiris.<sup>69</sup> This situation was also reflected in the traditional donations of the temples of the Dodekaschoinos to the temple of Isis, which continued into the Roman period, albeit under Roman control.<sup>70</sup> Thus, the sacred landscape of the Dodekaschoinos was reshaped: oriented as it was towards the temple of Isis at Philae, new and old cults were joined under its aegis.

In the following centuries, the policy of Augustus and his successors seems to have worked: we hear no more of conflicts. Moreover, the emperors tried to keep the peace by sending diplomatic missions to Meroe.<sup>71</sup> From the reign of Augustus onwards, Meroitic officials became gradually more involved in the important temples of the Dodekaschoinos, including Philae. Clearly, Roman emperors tolerated Meroitic interference in the religious sphere, an interest the Nubians probably had had from earliest times. The greatest Meroitic involvement in the religious life of the Dodekaschoinos seems to have occurred in the third century. In this period, several demotic graffiti reveal that Meroitic officials frequently visited the temples.<sup>72</sup>

Some scholars have even argued that the Meroites took over the Dodekaschoinos from the Romans in the third century, or that the Romans and the Meroites shared the power in the region.<sup>73</sup> As an argument, demotic graffiti of Meroites with titles such as 'the prophets of Isis, the *qereñs*, the agents of Isis, the agents of the king of Ethiopia' are adduced.<sup>74</sup> However, the demotic graffiti of the area show continuity with the previous centuries and not the Meroitic hegemony that

<sup>66</sup> Török, *Meroe*, 127-9. For building activity after Augustus, see Hölbl, *Altägypten*, 36.

<sup>67</sup> Mandulis is often seen as a Blemmyan deity, but the evidence is entirely based on fifth-century sources. It is better to say that the originally Nubian god Mandulis was worshipped by Blemmyes of Talmis in the fifth century. Cf. L. Török in Updegraff, 'Blemmyes', 100.

<sup>68</sup> *IKal.Dem.* 2.2-3 and 3.2-3. Cf. *I.Aju.Dem.* 1.3, in which Mandulis is called 'Son of Horus, great god, lord of Talmis (?)', and *I.Philae.Dem.* 436.1-2 = *FHN* III 306 (hieroglyphic text accompanying a demotic graffiti), in which Mandulis is called 'Son of Horus', and 'lord of the Abaton, great god'.

<sup>69</sup> Blackman, *Temple of Dendûr*, 82-4.

<sup>70</sup> A. Burkhardt, *Ägypter und Meroiten im Dodekaschoinos* (Berlin, 1985) 14-6; Locher, *Nilkatarakt*, 152-3, 249, 345-7. For donations in the Ptolemaic period, see Dietze, 'Philae', 90-7. For a donation of a vineyard near Esna, dating to the reign of Marcus Aurelius (161-80), see H. Junker, 'Schenkung von Weingärten an die Isis von Philae unter Marc Aurel', *WZKM* 31 (1924) 53-81. For private donations in the late Ptolemaic period, as mentioned on a bilingual stela from the cemetery at el-Hesa where the priests of Philae were buried, see J.D. Ray, 'A Pious Soldier: Stele Aswan 1057', *JEA* 73 (1987) 169-80.

<sup>71</sup> On Nero's mission to Meroe, according to Pliny (*nat.* 6.181 = *FHN* III 204) a military expedition, but according to Seneca a scientific mission to search for the sources of the Nile (*nat.* 6.8.3-4 = *FHN* III 209, cf. Lucan. 10.188-92), see Demicheli, *Rapporti*, 94-103, and Kirwan, *Studies* Ch. V ('Greek and Roman Expeditions to the Southern Sudan', 1982<sup>1</sup>).

<sup>72</sup> The clearest example of such Meroitic officials is the so-called Wayekiye family, which can be followed for six generations. See Monneret de Villard, *Storia*, 16-23; A. Burkhardt, 'Zu den Verwandtschaftsverhältnissen in der meroitischen Beamtenfamilie des Wayekiye', *AfO* 9 (1982) 33-41, and *Ägypter*, 17-8, 77-96.

<sup>73</sup> 'Condominium': Adams, *Nubia*, 337; Burkhardt, *Ägypter*, 16, 87-9; Rutherford, 'Island', 243-4. Expanding upon a remark in *I.Philae.Dem.*, p. 113, on the basis of a handful of inscriptions L. Török several times tries to demonstrate a short occupation of the Dodekaschoinos in 240/1-248/9, after which he describes the political situation as a 'status quo', see his *Economic Offices and Officials in Meroitic Nubia* (Budapest, 1979) 93-107, 'To the History of the Dodekaschoenos between ca. 250 B.C. and 298 A.D.', *ZÄS* 107 (1980) 76-86, 'Contribution', 216, *Late Antique Nubia*, 25-6, 'Geschichte Meroes', 150, 282-5, *Meroe*, 145-6; *Kingdom of Kush*, 470-9, and *FHN* III, pp. 998-1000, 1014-6.

<sup>74</sup> *I.Philae.Dem.* 410.4-5 = *FHN* III 249.

could have been expected if the Kingdom of Meroe had really taken over Roman territory.<sup>75</sup> Moreover, a recent re-edition of an inscription on a milestone from Kalabsha dating to the 290s proves that the Dodekaschoinos was indeed Roman territory until the peace treaty of 298, and thus confirms Procopius' account.<sup>76</sup>

Meroitic officials were therefore not administrators of the temples in the Dodekaschoinos. As ambassadors of the Meroitic king they took part in festivals and donated money and gifts.<sup>77</sup> On one such occasion, in 251 or 252, the king sent Pasan, son of Paese, to Philae:

He ordered the King's Son together with the *qêreîs* of Isis to come to Egypt with me so that we could hold the festivals and the banquets which they celebrate in the temple complex of Isis [and the] whole [town].<sup>78</sup>

Pasan was sent a second time in 252 and then stayed with the *qêreîs* of Isis at Philae for four months, after which the 'King's Son' (probably a title) joined them. However, the celebration of the festivals was only part of Pasan's mission, because afterwards he left for Rome with his colleague Harutsha, who was 'the great envoy to Rome'.<sup>79</sup> Since the Roman Empire was an ally of Meroe from the first century onwards, the Meroitic ambassadors formed a stabilising factor, not the enemy, for an empire in crisis.<sup>80</sup>

By the end of the third century, Rome had probably lost its sway over the Dodekaschoinos, as southern Egypt was suffering from Blemmyan raids at this time.<sup>81</sup> According to the *Historia Augusta*, a collection of imperial lives from 117 until 284 and dating to around 400, the Romans had to liberate the towns of Koptos and Ptolemais (el-Mansha) in the Upper Thebaid from the Blemmyes in 280.<sup>82</sup> In another version of the event, the historian Zosimus (c. 500) tells us that Ptolemais revolted against Koptos with the help of the Blemmyes.<sup>83</sup> In 291, the Blemmyes are reported to be fighting with 'Ethiopians'.<sup>84</sup> The instable situation on the southern frontier deteriorated into the chaotic 290s with their revolts and raids led to the treaty of 298, in which Diocletian abandoned the Dodekaschoinos to the Meroites. The Kingdom of Meroe also happened to be in crisis, so that the Dodekaschoinos became, as it were, a void in the first half of the fourth century.<sup>85</sup> What happened after 298?

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<sup>75</sup> Burkhardt, *Ägypten*, 88-9.

<sup>76</sup> The inscription is *CIL* III 14148<sup>3</sup>, see S.M. Burstein, 'The Roman Withdrawal from Nubia: A New Interpretation', *SO* 73 (1998) 125-32.

<sup>77</sup> For example in *I.Philae.Dem.* 410.8-9 = *FHN* III 249, it is explicitly stated: 'when they come annually from Ethiopia and perform the services for Isis'.

<sup>78</sup> *I.Philae.Dem.* 416.6-7 = *FHN* III 260 (slightly adapted). See also *FHN* III, pp. 1008-10, and F. Hoffmann, *Ägypten. Kultur und Lebenswelt in griechisch-römischer Zeit* (Berlin, 2000) 234-8.

<sup>79</sup> *I.Philae.Dem.* 416.18.

<sup>80</sup> Demicheli, *Rapporti*, 58-63; Locher, *Nilkatarakt*, 251.

<sup>81</sup> See, generally, J. Desanges, 'Les relations de l'Empire romain avec l'Afrique nilotique et érythréenne, d'Auguste à Probus', *ANRW* II 10.1 (1988) 3-43 at 31-40.

<sup>82</sup> *Hist.Aug. Prob.* 17.2-3, 6 Paschoud (= *FHN* III 284). This part of the *Historia Augusta* contains many fictitious elements, see T.D. Barnes, *The Sources of the Historia Augusta* (Brussels, 1978) 13-22; F. Paschoud, *Histoire Auguste V 1. Vies d'Aurélien et de Tacite* (Paris, 1996) xii-xliii; A.R. Birley, 'The Historia Augusta and Pagan Historiography', in Marasco, *Greek & Roman Historiography*, 127-49 at 133.

<sup>83</sup> *Zos.* 1.71.1 Paschoud (= *FHN* III 323). On the trustworthiness of this source, see F. Paschoud, *Zosime. Histoire Nouvelle I-II* (Paris, 2000<sup>2</sup>) lxiv-lxxx.

<sup>84</sup> *Paneg.* 11.17.4 = *FHN* III 279, in which the 'Ethiopians' are most probably Meroites.

<sup>85</sup> Adams, *Nubia*, 383-90; Török, 'Geschichte Meroes', 287-90, *Late Antique Nubia*, 33-46, *Kingdom of Kush*, 476-87, and 'The End of Meroe', in D.A. Welsby (ed.), *Recent Research in Kushite History and Archaeology* (London, 1999) 133-56; Kirwan, *Studies*, Ch. VI ('The Decline and Fall of Meroe', 1960'); Edwards, *Nubian Past*, 182-5.

## The Void of the Fourth-Century Dodekaschoinos

The sources from the fourth century are so scanty that we can only suggest a very tentative reconstruction of what probably happened. Thus far, scholars have disregarded the fourth-century situation in the Dodekaschoinos and failed to fill in the gap between the almost silent fourth century and the better documented fifth century. Nevertheless, although the documents fall almost silent after 298, archaeological remains from the area abound.

This material culture is designated as the 'X-Group' or 'Ballana Culture'. It is dated to the fourth to sixth centuries and consists of more than one hundred and fifty sites, mostly cemeteries, from the First Cataract region up to the Abri-Delgo Reach, far to the south. The archaeologist George Reisner (1867-1942) coined the name 'X-Group' after the discovery of characteristic tombs south of Aswan during the first of two well-known surveys of Nubia.<sup>86</sup> Reisner attached a strong ethnic and racial label to the archaeological finds, although such an identification is rarely so straightforward.<sup>87</sup> Today, the name 'Ballana Culture' is more commonly used, since Ballana, excavated in the 1930s, is one of the major sites.<sup>88</sup>

From 394 onwards, several documentary sources testify to the settlement of Blemmyan tribes in the Dodekaschoinos. The Blemmyan presence after 394 has often been interpreted in terms of 'conquest' and 'occupation', and some scholars even speak of a centralised 'Blemmyan State' occupying the region.<sup>89</sup> In a more nuanced view, it has been argued that the Blemmyes dominated the Dodekaschoinos from 394 until the middle of the fifth century. Several probably fifth-century sources have been adduced in order to show that at the time of the treaty of 452 or 453, as stated by Priscus, the Noubades took over from the Blemmyes.<sup>90</sup> The problem with this interpretation is that the sources never speak of a complete, Blemmyan occupation of the Dodekaschoinos, and this is also not to be expected of a group of nomadic or semi-nomadic tribes coming from the desert.<sup>91</sup> This interpretation also leaves obscure what happened in the fourth century. It must have taken some time before the nomadic tribes became settled and the lack of historical sources seems to have led historians to cluster the events in the century about which we are best informed.<sup>92</sup>

We will therefore interpret the sources not literally in terms of an abrupt 'conquest' and 'occupation', but rather in terms of a longer and more gradual process in which the nomadic Blemmyan tribes became settled among the indigenous,

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<sup>86</sup> G.A. Reisner, 'The Archaeological Survey of Nubia', *Bulletin of the Archaeological Survey of Nubia* 3 (1909) 5-30 at 15-6. On the first (1909-11) and second (1929-32) archaeological surveys of Nubia, see W.B. Emery, *Egypt in Nubia* (London, 1969) 33-56.

<sup>87</sup> See the discussion by Kirwan, *Studies*, Ch. XV at 205-10.

<sup>88</sup> First used by L.P. Kirwan, 'The Ballaña Civilization: A Note on the Historical Geography of Lower Nubia', *BSGE* 25 (1953) 103-10. For the excavations see W.B. Emery, L.P. Kirwan, *The Royal Tombs of Ballana and Qustul*, 2 vols (Cairo, 1938). See also W.B. Emery, *Nubian Treasure. An Account of the Discoveries at Ballana and Qustul* (London, 1948), and *Egypt in Nubia*, 57-90.

<sup>89</sup> Updegraff, *Study*, 179; Christides, 'Ethnic Movements', 136; H. Belçaguy, 'Some Remarks on the Documents concerning the Blemmyes and the X-Group Culture', in N.B. Millet, A.L. Kelley (eds), *Meroitic Studies* (Berlin, 1982) 228-31; Welsby, *Medieval Kingdoms* 16-7.

<sup>90</sup> Török, 'Contribution', 220-36, *Late Antique Nubia*, 47-63, 'Notes on the Kingdom of the Blemmyes', in *Studia in honorem L. Fóti* (Budapest, 1989) 397-412, *Kingdom of Kush*, 487, *FHN* III, pp. 1156-8, 1165, and 'End of Meroe', 148, 152-3. Cf. Kirwan, *Studies*, Ch. IV at 28-9 ('The International Position of Sudan in Roman and Medieval Times', 1959'), Ch. X at 40 ('The problem of the Nubian X-Group', 1939'), Ch. XV at 196-9, and Ch. XXV at 76-86 ('Studies in the Later History of Nubia', 1937'), who opts for an incidental Blemmyan occupation of the Dodekaschoinos somewhere between 421 and the second half of the fifth century.

<sup>91</sup> Papadopoullos, *Africanobyzantina*, 17-8; E. Fantusati, 'I Blemmi in Bassa Nubia: la fine del paganesimo e i primordi dell'evangelizzazione', *SMSR* II 17 (1993) 209-24.

<sup>92</sup> Just as in the case of the Greek colonisation of Italy, in which the dates are clustered in the eighth century BC on the basis of Thucydides, see A.J. Nijboer *et al.*, 'A High Chronology for the Early Iron Age in Central Italy', *Palaeohistoria* 41-2 (1999-2000) 163-76.

Noubadian population of the Nile valley. The proposed reconstruction of settlement patterns in the fourth and fifth-century Dodekaschoinos is based on the model of the anthropologist Elman Service (1915-1996), which describes the evolution of societies from bands into the more complex forms of segmentary society, chiefdom and state.<sup>93</sup> Although this model has been criticised in the past, it is now generally accepted as a useful classification of societies in which 'analytical terms such as 'chiefdom' and 'state' (are to be regarded) as flexible ranges of organizational variation rather than as tightly defined structural types. By explicitly viewing chiefdoms and states as protean forms of political organization rather than as monolithic, structurally static social types, one can move beyond rigid typologies based on trait lists'.<sup>94</sup>

After entering the fourth century, the Dodekaschoinos went through some radical changes. The Romans withdrew from the land that had been theirs for centuries, and this withdrawal must have struck a severe blow to the trade links between Egypt and Meroe.<sup>95</sup> What do we know of the decline of other early states? The term 'early states' denotes states in their earliest stage of development that lack the complexity of modern states with their monetary economies, bureaucracy, mass media and complicated infrastructures.<sup>96</sup> Examples from other ancient societies show that a dominant society influences peripheral societies considerably, and its decline therefore has far-reaching consequences.<sup>97</sup> The decline of a state and therewith the disintegration of its socio-political structure does not necessarily mean the end of its culture, however.<sup>98</sup> On the contrary, many examples show cultural continuities with a preceding era.<sup>99</sup> In the same way, the archaeological remains of the Dodekaschoinos from the fourth century onwards 'point unmistakably to cultural and social continuity', yet 'give the impression of a decentralized agrarian society, poorer but more self-sufficient than the society of Meroitic times'.<sup>100</sup>

It seems likely that the Blemmyes were still nomadic to a large degree in this century, for there is no sign of sedentarisation in the documents. In two Greek inscriptions from the middle of the fourth century, King Ezana of Aksum, a powerful successor kingdom of Meroe, commemorates victories over both the Bougaeitoi (Βουγαῖτοι, that is, Blemmyes?) and the Noba (Νῶβα).<sup>101</sup> In 373/374, the

<sup>93</sup> E.R. Service, *Primitive Social Organization. An Evolutionary Perspective* (New York, 1971<sup>2</sup>).

<sup>94</sup> Quote from M.S. Rothman, 'Introduction Part I. Evolutionary Typologies and Cultural Complexity', in G. Stein and M.S. Rothman (eds), *Chiefdoms and Early States in the Near East. The Organizational Dynamics of Complexity* (Madison, 1994) 1-10 at 4.

<sup>95</sup> Adams, *Nubia*, 383-90.

<sup>96</sup> H.J.M. Claessen, *Verdwenen koninkrijken en verloren beschavingen. Opkomst en ondergang van de Vroege Staat* (Assen and Maastricht, 1991) 25-32, 203-5; H.J.M. Claessen (ed.), *De ondergang van de vroege staat* (Leiden, 1992) 1-2. The notion of the 'early state' as a heuristic concept was developed by H.J.M. Claessen and P. Skalnik (eds), *The Early State* (The Hague, 1978). Cf. the recent reconstructions of the 'early state' of the Kingdom of Meroe, D.N. Edwards, 'Power and the State in the Middle Nile: Meroe in Context. An Example for the Study of State Development in Sudanic Africa', *Archaeological Review from Cambridge* 13 (1994) 5-19; D.Q. Fuller, 'Chiefdom, State or Checklist?', *Archaeological Review from Cambridge* 13 (1994) 113-22; D.N. Edwards, 'Meroe and the Sudanic Kingdoms', *Journal of African History* 39 (1998) 175-93.

<sup>97</sup> Claessen, *Verdwenen koninkrijken*, 187.

<sup>98</sup> Cf. Claessen, *Verdwenen koninkrijken*, 197.

<sup>99</sup> E.g. C.H.J. de Geus, 'Waarom verdwenen de vroege staten uit de Levant?', in Claessen, *Ondergang* 49-60.

<sup>100</sup> Adams, *Nubia*, 390-413 (quotations on pp. 392 and 404), 420. Cf. Török, *Late Antique Nubia*, 209-19; Welsby, *Medieval Kingdoms*, 20-4; Edwards, *Nubian Past*, 201-2.

<sup>101</sup> *SEG* XXXII 1601, XXVI 1813 = *FHN* III 298-9. The name Bugaeti may be a local name for Blemmyes that resembles modern Beja. On the Beja, see A. Paul, *A History of the Beja Tribes of the Sudan* (Cambridge, 1954), and A. and A. Castiglioni, 'I Beja e le miniere del deserto nubiano', *Aegyptus* 79 (1999) 65-82. On the identification of Blemmyes with Beja, which has generally been accepted, see, most recently, G.M. Browne, 'Blemmyes and Beja', *CR* 54 (2004) 226-8. The Noba are of Nubian origin but are considered to have lived to the south of the Noubades, see Adams, *Nubia*, 386-7; Török, *Kingdom of Kush*, 482-3; Edwards, *Nubian Past*, 182-3. For the Kingdom of Axum, see S. Hable-Selassie, *Beziehungen Äthopiens zur Griechisch-Römischen Welt* (Bonn, 1964); H. Brakmann,

Blemmyes are reported to have been raiding as far north as the Sinai desert.<sup>102</sup> In the last quarter of the fourth century, Ammianus Marcellinus situates the ‘Ethiopians’ south of Egypt, and the Blemmyes somewhere else, apparently outside the Nile valley, although he may have followed earlier sources.<sup>103</sup> These reports do not give another picture than that for the period before 298, in other words, they do not indicate the settlement of Blemmyan tribes in the Nile valley.

Two fourth-century sources suggest connections of some sort with the Roman Empire. In 336, foreign envoys, among whom were Blemmyes and ‘Ethiopians’, visited Constantine on the celebration of the thirtieth anniversary of his reign, or *tricennalia*.<sup>104</sup> Further evidence comes from a Latin papyrus in the archive of Abinnaeus, cavalry commander (*praefectus alae*) at Dionysias (in the Faiyum) from 342 until 351.<sup>105</sup> The text is a petition to the Emperors Constantius and Constans, dating to 345, in which Abinnaeus lists his prior occupations. He writes that with the *comes limitis* he escorted refugees (*refugi*) from among the Blemmyes to Constantinople in 337/338. He returned with them to their land, where he stayed for three years.<sup>106</sup> It is not easy to say what status these refugees had, but evidently the tribes at times called in the help of the Romans to resolve conflicts beyond the southern frontier.<sup>107</sup>

A remarkable text from November or December 373, a demotic graffito on the temple walls of Philae, records an incident between the Blemmyes and the ‘Nubians’:

In the year in question the Blemmyes (*Ble.w*) had gone against the Nubians (*Nwbe.w*). They had handed over hostages in regnal year 90 of Diocletian.<sup>108</sup> In the year in question the bark of Isis, having been away for two years, had gone to Pure-island (the Abaton).<sup>109</sup>

Although it is not clear whether the peoples exchanged hostages or one people was forced to do so by the other, the Blemmyes apparently attacked the Nubians. This conflict seems to have disturbed the cult of Isis at Philae because the processional boat or ‘bark’ in which the statue of the goddess was transported was away from the island for two years. The text is the first evidence for the involvement of the Blemmyes in the Isis cult at Philae and a confirmation of the later source of Priscus that the Blemmyes and Noubades carried the statue of Isis for consultation to ‘their own country’, that is, to the Dodekaschoinos. The graffito may also be a possible indication of Blemmyan settlement in the Nile valley, a process which had, after all, been completed, as appears from the sources from around 394 onwards, and cannot have occurred overnight.

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Τὸ παρὰ τοῖς βαρβάροις ἔργον θεῖον. *Die Einwurzelung der Kirche im spätantiken Reich von Aksum* (Bonn, 1994), and ‘Axomis (Aksum)’, *RAC* Suppl. I (2001) 718-810.

<sup>102</sup> Mayerson, *Monks*, 148-63 (‘The Ammonius Narrative: Bedouin and Blemmye Attacks in Sinai’, 1980<sup>1</sup>).

<sup>103</sup> Amm. 22.15.2 = *FHN* III 303; Amm. 22.15.24 = *FHN* III 304.

<sup>104</sup> Eus. *v.C.* 4.7 = *FHN* III 293. On the passage see Av. Cameron, S.G. Hall, *Eusebius. Life of Constantine* (Oxford, 1999) 312-3.

<sup>105</sup> *P.Abinn.* 1.5-9 = *FHN* III 295. On Abinnaeus and his archive, see *P.Abinn.*, pp. 1-33.

<sup>106</sup> According to T.D. Barnes, *From Eusebius to Augustine. Selected Papers 1982-1993* (Aldershot, 1994) Ch. XV at 369-72 (‘The Career of Abinnaeus’, 1985<sup>1</sup>), the Blemmyan ambassadors visited Constantinople on the same occasion as the one Eusebius describes: the *tricennalia* of 336. This suggestion was already made by Kirwan, *Studies*, Ch. XV at 196. For a similar embassy of ‘Ethiopians’ at Panopolis, see *P.Ammon* I 3 iii 18-26 (dated 348), with Van Minnen, ‘Letter’, 191.

<sup>107</sup> *P.Abinn.*, pp. 9-11.

<sup>108</sup> One of the chronological systems of Late Antiquity was that the years were counted from the first year of the reign of the Emperor Diocletian onwards (284/5), see Bagnall and Worp, *Chronological Systems* 63-87.

<sup>109</sup> *I.Philae.Dem.* 371 = *FHN* III 302 (adapted). E. Bresciani, *Graffiti dénotiques du Dodécaschoene. Qertassi, Kalabcha, Dendour, Dakka, Maharraqa* (Cairo, 1969), adopted by J. Desanges, *Recherches sur l'activité des méditerranéens aux confins de l'Afrique* (Paris, 1978) 364 (n. 338), Burkhardt, *Ägypter*, 25, and *FHN* III, p. 1110-1, reads *zḥbi.w*, i.e. Hibis in the Kharga oasis, but this reading is convincingly refuted by D. Devauchelle in G. Wagner, *Les oasis d'Égypte* (Cairo, 1987) 397 (n. 1).



If we accept an increasing sedentarisation of Blemmyan tribes among the indigenous, Nubian people of the Dodekaschoinos in the fourth century, how did this work? An exemplary study on the settlement of nomads defines their sedentarisation as 'a voluntary, uncoerced shift from one available pattern to another in response to changing pressures, constraints, and opportunities both internal and external to the society'.<sup>110</sup> In other words, there can be various reasons for nomads to settle and, conversely, they can again pick up their old way of living, if necessary.<sup>111</sup> It is tempting to suggest that after the economic, social and political changes at the end of the third century, Blemmyan nomads settled among the Noubadian population of the Nile valley and increasingly sedentarised over the course of the fourth century. The symbiosis of nomadic tribes and sedentary people has been studied and described in a model.<sup>112</sup> From these studies, it appears that pastoral nomads of the desert are economically dependent upon their sedentary neighbours who produce basic commodities like grain. As a consequence, both groups specialise: the sedentary people in agriculture and the nomads in herding. When the economic system of the sedentary people collapses, nomads cannot continue their specialisation in herding, for their basic commodities have fallen away. They then gradually become agriculturalists and are forced to sedentarise in the existing agricultural land.

This model has been successfully applied to the settlement of nomadic pastoralists in Iron Age Israel from the end of the thirteenth century BC onwards.<sup>113</sup> The Israelite process of settlement was gradual and long lasting, since the majority of the population was fully sedentarised only at the end of the eleventh century BC. When the agricultural land became more crowded, local conflicts between sedentarised nomads and the original, Canaanite population led to the destruction of several cities.<sup>114</sup> As has been pointed out, this process was the consequence of a series of trends and events.<sup>115</sup>

The model of the symbiosis of nomadic tribes and sedentary people may explain the situation of Blemmyan and Noubadian tribes in fourth-century Dodekaschoinos. Thus, the society of the Dodekaschoinos seems to have declined in complexity from what is in Servician terms called a 'state' to a 'segmentary society'.<sup>116</sup> We can get a clearer picture of such a society by comparing it to the Nilotic tribes of the Nuer and the Dinka, living in modern Sudan; the former was studied extensively in the 1930s by the English anthropologist Sir Edward Evans-Pritchard (1902-1973).<sup>117</sup>

<sup>110</sup> P.C. Salzman, 'Introduction', in P.C. Salzman (ed.), *When Nomads Settle. Processes of Sedentarization as Adaptation and Response* (New York, 1980) 1-19 at 14.

<sup>111</sup> Cf. F.M. Donner, 'The Role of Nomads in the Near East in Late Antiquity (400-800 C.E.)', in F.M. Clover, R.S. Humphreys (eds), *Tradition and Innovation in Late Antiquity* (Madison, 1989) 73-85; A.M. Khazanov, *Nomads and the Outside World* (Madison, 1994<sup>2</sup>). For further bibliography see P. Horden, N. Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea. A Study of Mediterranean History* (Oxford, 2000) 551.

<sup>112</sup> The model derives from S.H. Lees and D.G. Bates, 'The Origins of Specialized Pastoralism: A Systemic Model', *American Antiquity* 39 (1974) 187-93.

<sup>113</sup> I. Finkelstein, *The Archaeology of the Israelite Settlement* (Jerusalem, 1988) 346, and *Living on the Fringe. The Archaeology and History of the Negev, Sinai and Neighbouring Regions in the Bronze and Iron Ages* (Sheffield, 1995) 37-42.

<sup>114</sup> Finkelstein, *Israelite Settlement*, 341-51.

<sup>115</sup> Finkelstein, *Israelite Settlement*, 345-6: 'Egyptian military campaigns, economic exploitation of Canaan by Egyptian overlords, conflicts among the Canaanite city-states, possible long-period droughts, and, finally, the pressure exerted by the Sea Peoples all shook the foundations of the political and economic order of Canaan and weakened the fabric of urban and rural life to an unprecedented degree (...). These same factors ultimately led to the settlement of non-sedentary groups'.

<sup>116</sup> C. Renfrew, P. Bahn, *Archaeology. Theories, Methods and Practice* (London, 2000<sup>3</sup>) 169.

<sup>117</sup> E.E. Evans-Pritchard, *The Nuer. A Description of the Modes of Livelihood and Political Institutions of a Nilotic People* (Oxford, 1940), followed by *Kinship and Marriage among the Nuer* (Oxford, 1951), and *Nuer Religion* (Oxford, 1956). See also E.E. Evans-Pritchard, 'The Nuer of the Southern Sudan', in M. Fortes, E.E. Evans-Pritchard (eds), *African Political Systems* (Oxford, 1940) 272-96, and, recently, D.H. Johnson, *Nuer Prophets. A History of Prophecy from the Upper Nile in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Oxford, 1994). For the Dinka, see G. Lienhardt, *Divinity and Experience. The Religion of the Dinka* (Oxford, 1961). Cf. C.G. and B.Z. Seligman, *Pagan Tribes of the Nilotic Sudan* (London, 1932)

What are these societies like? The tribes of the Nuer, who call themselves ‘*Nathi*,<sup>118</sup> have no common organisation, central administration or government, they are, in the words of Evans-Pritchard, an ‘ordered anarchy’, simply living together and forming, if necessary, loose federations.<sup>119</sup> In anthropology, such a society is generally referred to as an ‘acephalous kinship state’, that is, the structure of society is based on lineages of kinship without developed leadership.<sup>120</sup> The structural relations within tribes, between tribes, and even vis-à-vis other peoples, are maintained by warfare. Raiding happens frequently but on a small scale, for example to acquire cattle from neighbours or as an institutionalised action (*pec*) against the neighbouring people, the Dinka.<sup>121</sup> On the other hand, however deep this opposition Nuer-Dinka may be, Nuer society remains open to Dinka, provided that that they integrate into the Nuer tribe.<sup>122</sup>

The case of the Nuer suggests that the inhabitants of the Nile valley possibly also had their own, Nubian name. It cannot be a coincidence that they are referred to as ‘Noubades’ only in the Roman sources from the fifth century onwards. Perhaps they called themselves ‘Anouba’ as several Late Antique sources from the area itself do.<sup>123</sup> In any case, the use of the name Noubades may be considered as evidence of a growing organisation among the Nubian tribes on the southern Egyptian frontier, which probably took shape in the course of the fourth century.

In view of these developments, the account by Procopius cannot be an accurate description of the treaty of 298, in which the emperor deliberated with the Blemmyes and Noubades, for power remained in the hands of the Kingdom of Meroe throughout the third century. Therefore, Procopius’ description of the treaty of 298 is probably an anachronism.<sup>124</sup> As Priscus was one of his sources, Procopius may well have based himself on this fifth-century description of the situation on the southern frontier, and transposed it back to 298.<sup>125</sup> It is to this fifth-century situation that we will now turn.

### ‘Barbarian’ Threat and Roman Diplomacy: The Dodekaschoinos in the Fifth Century

At the end of the fourth century, the integration of Blemmyan tribes in the Dodekaschoinos had been completed. The first author to report this development is Epiphanius of Salamis, who wrote a work on the gems in the breastplate of the biblical

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135-238. On the Modern British School of anthropologists, see A. Kuper, *Anthropology and Anthropologists. The Modern British School* (London and New York, 1996<sup>3</sup>). For Evans-Pritchard’s *The Nuer*; see pp. 83-91.

<sup>118</sup> Evans-Pritchard, *Nuer*; 3.

<sup>119</sup> Evans-Pritchard, *Nuer*; 5-6.

<sup>120</sup> Evans-Pritchard, *Nuer*; 192-248.

<sup>121</sup> Evans-Pritchard, *Nuer*; 152, 161, 190. Cf. R.C. Kelly, *The Nuer Conquest. The Structure and Development of an Expansionist System* (Ann Arbor, 1985).

<sup>122</sup> Evans-Pritchard, *Nuer*; 221-8.

<sup>123</sup> *P.Leid.* Z 6 = *FHN* 314 (Ἀννουβάρδων, in the petition of Appion, 425-50); Cairo, Coptic Museum inv. 76/50A.4, 21 = *FHN* 320 (ἈΝΟΥΒΑ), 76/50B.1 = *FHN* 321 (ΝΟΥΒΑ, from the letters of the Noubadian chieftain Tantani, probably second half of the fifth century); *Life of Aaron*, folia 18a (2x), 18b, 19b, 26b, 40b (sic), 41b, 42a, 42b (4x), 51a (ἈΝΟΥΒΑ, Coptic hagiographical work, probably sixth century); W.E. Crum, *Theological Texts from Coptic Papyri* (Oxford, 1913) no. 29 (ἈΝΟΥΒΑ, papyrus fragment found 30 km south of Dendara, sixth/seventh century); Munier, ‘Stèles coptes’, nos. 7.4-5 = *SB Kopt.* I 504, 26.5-6 = *SB Kopt.* I 523, 28.2 = *SB Kopt.* I 525, 39 [bis] 6 = *SB Kopt.* I 537, 49.4-5 = *SB Kopt.* I 547, 50.5-6 = *SB Kopt.* I 548, 127.6 = *SB Kopt.* I 625 (spelled variously: ἈΝΩΒΑΣ, ἈΝΟΥΒΑΣ, ἈΝΟΒΑΣ, Coptic stelae from Aswan, seventh century or later?). Cf. Kirwan, *Studies* Ch. IX (‘A Survey of Nubian Origins’, 1937<sup>1</sup>) 53-4.

<sup>124</sup> Demicheli, *Rapporti*, 166; Török, *Late Antique Nubia*, 31; Greatrex, *Procopius*, 240-1. Cf. Heather, *Foedera*, 57-60, for a similar anachronism. Procopius here describes a treaty between Constantine and the Goths in 332 from a sixth-century perspective.

<sup>125</sup> On Procopius’ use of Priscus, see Blockley, *Classicising Historians* 1, 49.

Aaron around 394. He relates that Talmis (Kalabsha) 'is now held by the Blemmyes'.<sup>126</sup> This information is supported by the poet Claudius Claudianus who, around 400, situates the Blemmyes between Meroe and Syene.<sup>127</sup> In addition, Palladius wrote around 408 that he 'was kept under guard in the neighbourhood of the Blemmyes or Ethiopians (Βλεμμύων ἢ Αἰθιόπων ἐκ γειτόνων) at a place called Syene' in his years of exile there.<sup>128</sup>

The so-called 'Wandering Poet' Olympiodorus of Thebes provides another testimony to the presence of Blemmyan tribes in fifth-century Dodekaschoinos, and an even wider area. According to Olympiodorus, the 'barbarians' occupied Primis (Qasr Ibrim), Phoinikon (Lageita), Khiris (?), Thapis (that is, Taphis, modern Tafa) and Talmis (Kalabsha).<sup>129</sup> In 421, he visited 'the barbarians around Talmis, that is, the Blemmyes', allegedly invited because of his reputation, and encountered their 'tribal chiefs and prophets'.<sup>130</sup> The term 'tribal chief' (Greek φύλαρχος) is used in Roman administration from the fifth century onwards as a technical term for tribal chiefs who entered into a formal treaty or arrangement (*foedus*) with the Roman Empire.<sup>131</sup> In practice, this would mean that the Romans paid money or goods to the allied tribes (*foederati*).<sup>132</sup> Examples from the Eastern Roman Empire show that phylarchs represented *foederati* at this time, and it is not unthinkable that the Blemmyan tribal chiefs had the same status. Relations with Rome could also explain the visit of the Roman diplomat Olympiodorus to the Blemmyes.<sup>133</sup>

The presence of Blemmyes in the Dodekaschoinos is characterised by two kinds of activities. Firstly, Blemmyan tribes were apparently attracted to religious centres in the Nile valley, such as Philae. The Blemmyes also worshipped the Nubian god Mandulis in his main temple in Talmis. In addition to the evidence of Blemmyan prophets testified by Olympiodorus, there were several cult societies in Talmis in this period, as appears from a fifth-century inscription from the temple.<sup>134</sup> Furthermore, inscriptions of, presumably, Blemmyan 'kings' from Kalabsha, three inscriptions from Tamal and one from Isemne, show the importance of the temple of Mandulis for them

<sup>126</sup> Epiphan. 21 = *FHN* III 305. Versions survive in Latin (cited), Coptic and Georgian. By and large, the Coptic version agrees with the Latin version, whereas the Georgian version is suspect and only mentions that the Blemmyes 'rule many other places as well'.

<sup>127</sup> Claud. *carmin. min.* 28.19 = *FHN* III 308.

<sup>128</sup> Pall. v. *Chrys.* 20.41-2 (tr. A.-M. Malingrey, P. Leclercq, *Palladius. Dialogue sur la vie de Jean Chrysostome. Tome I* (= *SC* 341; Paris, 1988) 397, on the date see 19-21).

<sup>129</sup> Cf. *FHN* III, p. 1128, in which Prima is identified with Qurta.

<sup>130</sup> Olymp. *Hist.* F 35.2 Blockley (= *FHN* III 309). On Olympiodorus as a Wandering Poet, see Al. Cameron, *Literature and Society in the Early Byzantine World* (London, 1985) Ch. I at 493-4 ('Wandering Poets: A Literary Movement in Byzantine Egypt', 1965<sup>1</sup>). See further E.A. Thompson, 'Olympiodorus of Thebes', *CQ* 38 (1944) 43-52; J.F. Matthews, 'Olympiodorus of Thebes and the History of the West (A.D. 407-425)', *JRS* 60 (1970) 79-97; Baldwin, *Studies* 217-36 ('Olympiodorus of Thebes', 1980<sup>1</sup>); Blockley, *Classicising Historians* 1, 27-47; Rohrbacher, *Historians of Late Antiquity*, 73-81; J.H.W.G. Liebeschuetz, 'Pagan Historiography and the Decline of the Empire', in Marasco, *Greek & Roman Historiography*, 177-218 at 201-6.

<sup>131</sup> M. Sartre, *Trois études sur l'Arabie romaine et byzantine* (Brussels, 1982); Isaac, *Limits of Empire*, 238, 243-9; M.C.A. MacDonald, 'Nomads and the Hawran in the Late Hellenistic and Roman Periods', *Syria* 70 (1993) 303-413 at 368-77; M. Sartre, 'Deux phylarques arabes dans l'Arabie byzantine', *Museon* 106 (1993) 145-53; Mayerson, *Monks*, 271-83 ('The Saracens and the *Limes*', 1986<sup>1</sup>) 279-80, and 342-6 ('The Use of the Word *Phylarchos* in the Roman-Byzantine East', 1991<sup>1</sup>); A.G. Grouchevov, 'Trois "Niveaux" de phylarques. Étude terminologique sur les relations de Rome et de Byzance avec les Arabes avant l'Islam', *Syria* 72 (1995) 105-31.

<sup>132</sup> See Heather, 'Foedera', 66-71.

<sup>133</sup> Kirwan, *Studies*, Ch. XV at 197. About the relation of Rome with desert tribes see Graf, *Arabian Frontier*, Ch. IX ('The Saracens and the Defense of the Arabian Frontier', 1978<sup>1</sup>). For a general overview of the relations of Rome with Nubia, see Kirwan, *Studies*, Ch. III ('Rome Beyond the Southern Egyptian Frontier', 1977<sup>1</sup>).

<sup>134</sup> *SB* V 8697 = *FHN* III 313.

in the fifth century.<sup>135</sup> These texts all figure in a religious context and attest the appearance of a Blemmyan-centred cult in fifth-century Talmis. Other evidence for Blemmyan participation in Ancient Egyptian cults in the Dodekaschoinos may be found in the northern temple of Tafa, which now stands in the entrance hall of the Museum of Antiquities in Leiden. On the inner temple wall is a puzzling inscription about a cult society commemorating the building of a hall (*stoa*), which is dated on palaeographical grounds to the late fourth century.<sup>136</sup> It is unclear to which cult this society belonged, as the inscription is the only late testimony to Ancient Egyptian cults on these temple walls to have survived the rising waters of the Nile.<sup>137</sup>

Apart from religious activities in the area around Talmis and, possibly, Taphis, economic activities are also attested to.<sup>138</sup> A few texts, which have already passed the review, indicate that the Blemmyes exploited emerald mines in the area 'around Talmis' in this period and that they must have traded this precious stone in the Red Sea area. The *Historia Augusta* contains the story of the rich merchant Firmus of Seleucia, who, reportedly, had Blemmyes as his friends in the last quarter of the third century.<sup>139</sup> Another passage in the same work reports the Blemmyan conquest of the towns of Ptolemais (el-Mansha) and Koptos.<sup>140</sup> According to Zosimus, Ptolemais revolted with the Blemmyes against Koptos.<sup>141</sup> Koptos was the starting point for the desert route to the Red Sea harbour of Berenike and this nodal position may explain the involvement of the Blemmyan tribes.<sup>142</sup>

In the passage by Epiphanius of Salamis already referred to, he mentions mines that were in use around Talmis:

There are also other mines established in the mountains in the barbarian district of the Blemmyes, near Talmis (Talmis), where the natives now dig to extract emeralds.<sup>143</sup>

Olympiodorus adds to the evidence of emerald mines that the Blemmyes exploited:

He (Olympiodorus) says he learned that in these regions there were also emerald mines from which the kings of Egypt used to obtain emeralds in abundance.<sup>144</sup>

The last remark, that the kings of Egypt exploited emerald mines 'in these regions', is an indication that the Blemmyes were exploiting the ancient mining site of Mons Smaragdus, situated in the Eastern Desert not far from the main track between Koptos and Berenike.<sup>145</sup> Therefore, we should not take Epiphanius' location of the mines 'near

<sup>135</sup> *SB* I 1521-4 = *FHN* III 310-1. Isemne may be the same person as the Yismeniye mentioned in a Meroitic inscription (*REM* 0094 = *FHN* III 300) of the probably Noubadian chieftain Kharamandoye at Kalabsha, but the inscription is still not fully understood. See, most recently, N.B. Millet, 'The Kharamandoye Inscription (MI 94) revisited', *MNI* 30 (2003) 57-72.

<sup>136</sup> *SB* I 5099 = *FHN* III 312. Add M.J. Raven, 'The Temple of Taffeh: A Study of Details', *OMRO* 76 (1996) 41-62 at 47-8.

<sup>137</sup> The temple must have contained several painted graffiti (*dipinti*). The Christian paintings on the interior wall of the temple have equally disappeared, M.J. Raven, 'The Temple of Taffeh, II: The Graffiti', *OMRO* 79 (1999) 81-102 at 83.

<sup>138</sup> Cf. for trading Saracens, Mayerson, *Monks* 315-6.

<sup>139</sup> *Hist. Aug. trig tyr.* 3.1-3 = *FHN* III 283.

<sup>140</sup> *Hist. Aug. Prob.* 17.2-3, 6 Paschoud (= *FHN* III 284).

<sup>141</sup> *Zos.* 1.71.1 Paschoud (= *FHN* III 323).

<sup>142</sup> S.E. Sidebotham, 'From Berenike to Koptos: Recent Results of the Desert Route Survey', in Boussac, *Autour de Coptos* 415-38. On Late Antique Koptos, see J.-L. Fournet, 'Coptos dans l'Antiquité tardive (fin III<sup>e</sup>-VII<sup>e</sup> siècle après J.-C.)', in P. Ballet *et al.* (eds), *Coptos. L'Égypte antique aux portes du désert* (Lyon and Paris, 2000) 196-215.

<sup>143</sup> Epiphan. 21 = *FHN* III 305.

<sup>144</sup> *Olymp. Hist.* F 35.2 Blockley (= *FHN* III 309).

<sup>145</sup> D. Meredith, 'The Roman Remains in the Eastern Desert of Egypt (Continued)', *JEA* 39 (1953) 95-106 at 103-5; J.R. Harris, *Lexicographical Studies in Ancient Egyptian Minerals* (Berlin, 1961) 104; A. Lucas, J.R. Harris, *Ancient Egyptian Materials and Industries* (London, 1962<sup>4</sup>) 389-90; S.E. Sidebotham, W.Z. Wendrich (eds), *Berenike '94. Preliminary Report of the Excavations of Berenike (Egyptian Red Sea*

Talmis' literally, for the distance from Mons Smaragdus to Talmis was over 200 km! In addition to Talmis and Taphis, Olympiodorus locates other Blemmyan activity at Laqeita (Phoinikon), an important desert station on the road to Berenike, and Khiris, which may be another desert station.<sup>146</sup> In the sixth century, Cosmas Indicopleustes states that the Blemmyes provided the 'Ethiopians' with emeralds for the trade with India, and this commercial activity continued into Arab times.<sup>147</sup>

These sources suggest that from the fifth century onwards, the Blemmyes played an important role in the Red Sea trade centred in the harbour of Berenike. They are reported at different places along the trade route from Koptos to Berenike and exploited emeralds in the mines of Mons Smaragdus. Excavations at Berenike have brought to light archaeological evidence indicating that from the fourth until sixth centuries the harbour was partly inhabited by nomadic tribes who lived of sheep and goats. This nomadic-pastoralist population may have consisted of Blemmyan tribes who had settled in Berenike for economic reasons.<sup>148</sup> The same may have happened at Talmis, which is mentioned twice in connection with the emerald mines. Perhaps the Blemmyes revived the old trading link with the south and concentrated on Talmis as their central place, having recourse to the desert road from Koptos to Berenike or, even more likely, to direct tracks into their homeland, the Eastern Desert.<sup>149</sup>

In addition to these activities, there are several sources about the continuity of Blemmyan raids into Egypt after around 394. In the Appion petition, the bishop asks for the troops stationed there to protect his see against raids by the Blemmyes and Noubades:

Since I find myself with my churches in the midst of those merciless barbarians, between the Blemmyes and Annoubades (Noubades), we suffer many attacks from them, coming upon us as if from nowhere, with no soldier to protect our places.<sup>150</sup>

The account by Priscus of the treaty that Maximinus concluded with these peoples is another testimony to the problems that the Romans had with fifth-century Blemmyan and Noubadian raids.<sup>151</sup> Finally, in his *Romana* (c. 551) the historian Jordanes refers to another raid. He mentions among events in the reign of Marcian (450-457) the expulsion of the Noubades and Blemmyes (*Novades Blemmesque*), 'who made incursions from Ethiopia'.<sup>152</sup> The Roman military commander behind this campaign was Florus, *procurator* of the city of Alexandria.<sup>153</sup> It may be that Jordanes used Priscus as his source, but this is by no means certain.<sup>154</sup>

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*Coast) and the Survey of the Eastern Desert* (Leiden, 1995) 8; I. Shaw, J. Banbury, R. Jameson, 'Emerald Mining in Roman and Byzantine Egypt', *JRA* 12 (1999) 203-15; S.E. Sidebotham, W.Z. Wendrich (eds), *Berenike '98. Preliminary Report of the Excavations of Berenike (Egyptian Red Sea Coast) and the Survey of the Eastern Desert* (Leiden, 2000) 356-7; H. Cuvigny, 'Le fonctionnement du réseau', in H. Cuvigny (ed.), *La route de Myos Hormos. Praesidia du désert de Bérénice*, 2 vols (Cairo, 2003) 2.295-359 at 347-8.

<sup>146</sup> Kirwan, *Studies*, Ch. XVIII at 123 ('Prelude to Nubian Christianity', 1966').

<sup>147</sup> Cosm. Ind. 11.21 (*SC* 197, p. 353). For the Arabic sources, see Kirwan, *Studies*, Ch. XXV at 78.

<sup>148</sup> Sidebotham and Wendrich, *Berenike '94*, 8-10, *Berenike '95. Preliminary Report of the Excavations of Berenike (Egyptian Red Sea Coast) and the Survey of the Eastern Desert* (Leiden, 1996) 51, 353. Cf. *Berenike '96. Preliminary Report of the Excavations of Berenike (Egyptian Red Sea Coast) and the Survey of the Eastern Desert* (1998) 181, *Berenike '97. Preliminary Report of the Excavations of Berenike (Egyptian Red Sea Coast) and the Survey of the Eastern Desert* (Leiden, 1999) 452-3, and *Berenike '98* 419.

<sup>149</sup> 'Although no actual evidence survives of an ancient 'road' between the Dodekaschoinos and Berenike there is no reason to discount the possibility that the Bedouin could have travelled more directly between the Dodekaschoinos and Berenike than the route between Koptos and Berenike could have provided' (personal communication from S.E. Sidebotham).

<sup>150</sup> *P.Leid.* Z 5-7 = *FHN* III 314.

<sup>151</sup> Prisc. F 27 Blockley (= *FHN* III 318).

<sup>152</sup> Iord. *Rom.* 333 = *FHN* III 329.

<sup>153</sup> *PLRE* II s.v. 'Florus' 2. See also Carrié, 'Séparation ou cumul?', 111.

<sup>154</sup> Cf. *FHN* III, pp. 1156-7.

Significantly, the threat of raids is also reflected in other literary sources mentioning the Blemmyes. From their earliest appearance in Theocritus in the third century BC, the Blemmyes were portrayed as mythical 'barbarians'.<sup>155</sup> This myth-making sometimes even pervaded historiography, as we have seen in the accounts by Priscus and Procopius. What was new in fifth-century literature was the motif of Blemmyan tribes raiding into Egypt. Closest to the historical accounts comes an elaborate epic in the style of the *Iliad*, the *Blemymachia*, which was probably written by one of the 'Wandering Poets'.<sup>156</sup> On the papyrus fragments that have been found in a tomb and in the monastery of Phoebammon at Thebes we can read how a Roman general, Germanus,<sup>157</sup> defeated the Blemmyes and destroyed their 'huts'.<sup>158</sup>

Besides appearing in this classicising poem, Blemmyan raids are a motif in fifth and sixth-century Christian literature. In two lives of Pachomius (c. 292-346), a monk is taken prisoner and forced to make libations to idols. In the first life, which was written after 346, this is done by 'barbarians', but in the second life, which is dated to the fifth century, by Blemmyes returning from a raid.<sup>159</sup> The sixth-century church historian Evagrius says that Nestorius was captured and released by raiding Blemmyes in the Kharga oasis during his exile in 435-436. Although it is within the realm of possibility that Nestorius was indeed captured by some desert tribe, it is doubtful whether they were Blemmyes, since other versions of the story are clearly of a legendary character.<sup>160</sup> One miraculous story is that related in the Coptic *Life of Shenoute* by Besa (written after 465).<sup>161</sup> According to this story, the Blemmyes (ΒΛΛΗΜΜΩΟΥΙ) raided the countryside and entered deep into Egypt.<sup>162</sup> On their return, they took captives and cattle with them. The archimandrite went after the Blemmyes and confronted them in Ptolemais (el-Mansha). When the tribesmen wanted to spear him, they froze. Impressed by this miraculous act, their chief set the captives free. Finally, a passage from the Coptic *Life of Moses*, in which the devil

<sup>155</sup> Theoc. 7.114 = *FHN* II 116. And the myth-making continues: in his novel *Baudolino* (Milan, 2000), the well-known Italian novelist and medievalist Umberto Eco describes a Blemmy as follows: 'La creatura, con spalle amplissime e dunque molto tarchiata, ma di vita sottile, aveva due gambe corte e pelose e non aveva testa, né peraltro collo. Sul petto, dove gli uomini hanno i capezzoli, si aprivano due occhi a mandorla, vivacissimi e, sotto un leggero rigonfiamento con due narici, una sorta di foro circolare, ma molto duttile, così che quando si mise a parlare gli faceva assumere varie forme, a seconda dei suoni che emetteva' (p. 373). This description draws on Mela 1.48 and Plin. *nat.* 5.46, and was adopted by Late Antique writers such as Sol. 31.5, Mart. Cap. 6.674, and Isid. 11.3.17, and even by early Buddhist literature, see J.D.M. Derrett, 'A Blemmya in India', *Numen* 49 (2002) 460-74.

<sup>156</sup> *P.Berol.* 5003 = *FHN* III 326, based on E. Livrea, *Anonymi fortasse Olympiodori Thebani Blemymachia. P.Berol. 5003* (Meisenheim, 1978). New fragments of the work have been published by L.S.B. MacCoull, 'Fragments from the Monastery of Phoebammon', in *Pap. Congr.* XVI (Chicago, 1981) 491-8, and M. Steinrück, 'Neues zur Blemymachie', *ZPE* 126 (1999) 99-114. On the author of the poem, see E. Livrea, *Studia Hellenistica*, 2 vols (Florence, 1991) 2.357-79 ('Chi è l'autore della Blemymachia?', 1976').

<sup>157</sup> This Germanus has been identified with a Roman general whom the Emperor Theodosius II sent on campaign against the Vandals in 441. Cf. *PLRE* II s.v. 'Germanus' 3; Kirwan, *Studies* Ch. XXV at 80-1. In *Hist. Mon.* 1.2 Festugière = *FHN* III 307, written c. 400, the monk John of Lykopolis predicts the victory of a Roman general over the 'Ethiopians' attacking Syene.

<sup>158</sup> F 13.3 Steinrück (Β]λεμύων κλισίας). Note that in F 4 a 'statue of Isis' is mentioned (Β]ρέτας Ἴσιδος) and in F 20.3 possibly Osiris (Ἰσιριδ]).

<sup>159</sup> Pach., *Vita Prima Graeca* 85, *Paralipomena* 9 = *FHN* III 296. For the dating see P. Rousseau, *Pachomius. The Making of a Community in Fourth-Century Egypt* (Berkeley, 1999<sup>2</sup>) 39, 53-4.

<sup>160</sup> Evagr. *h.e.* 1.13. Cf. *Barhadbeshabba* 30 (*PO* 5, pp. 584-5), and *Letter to Cosmas* 13 (*PO* 13, pp. 273-4), in which versions the raiders are called 'Ethiopians'.

<sup>161</sup> *Life of Shenoute* 89-90 Leipoldt = *FHN* III 301.

<sup>162</sup> For several other stories of raiding 'Ethiopians' in the Shenoutian corpus, see J. Leipoldt, 'Berichte Schenutes über Einfälle der Nubier in Ägypten', *ZÄS* 40 (1902-3) 126-40, and 'Ein Kloster lindert Kriegsnot. Schenutes Bericht über die Tätigkeit des Weißen Klosters bei Sohag während eines Einfalls der Kuschiten', in U. Meckert, G. Ott, B. Satlow (eds), *"Und fragten nach Jesus". Beiträge aus Theologie, Kirche und Geschichte* (= Fs. Barnikol; Berlin, 1964) 52-6. Cf. W.E. Crum, 'A Nubian Prince in an Egyptian Monastery', in *Studies Presented to F.L. Griffith* (London, 1932) 137-48.

carried spears 'like the people of the Blemmyes' (ἄθε ἠπιρεθνοσ νενβλζμογ), can also be seen in this light.<sup>163</sup> Though literary in character, these sources probably also reflected the sentiments of this period: when raids loomed large.<sup>164</sup>

Against this background of Latin, Greek and Coptic sources, we also have some fifth-century documents and inscriptions from the Blemmyes and Noubades themselves. They are few in number and written in obscure Greek or Coptic so that their interpretation, or even translation, is often difficult.<sup>165</sup> Nevertheless, they give us an 'inside' view of the society of these peoples, and a counterbalance to the 'outside' sources discussed thus far. The latter sources have not only attested a Blemmyan presence in the Dodekaschoinos and suggested that these Blemmyes were allies of Rome, but also created a picture of frequent raids carried out by 'the Blemmyes and Noubades', which the Romans had to keep in check. The 'inside' sources modify this image somewhat. Although they confirm the presence of Blemmyan tribes and the ties with Rome, they do not speak of raids in which Blemmyes and Noubades co-operated, but rather that conflicts existed between them.

The first of these sources is the well-known inscription of the Noubadian chieftain Silko on the western wall of the forecourt of the temple of Mandulis at Kalabsha.<sup>166</sup> Initially, the inscription was dated to the second half of the sixth century (that is, after the official conversion of Nubia to Christianity) due to the expression 'God gave me the victory'.<sup>167</sup> This dating has been particularly persistent, despite arguments for dating the inscription to no later than the fifth century, especially on palaeographical grounds.<sup>168</sup> However, the discovery of a papyrus at Qasr Ibrim in the 1970s is a powerful argument in favour of the fifth-century dating for it mentions a Silko and dates to that century.<sup>169</sup> In the first five lines of the Kalabsha inscription, Silko sets out his case:

I, Silko, kinglet (βασιλίσκος) of the Noubades and all the Ethiopians, came to Talmis and Taphis (Tafa). On two occasions I fought with the Blemmyes and God gave me the victory. On the third occasion I was again victorious and took control of their cities. I occupied (them) with my troops.<sup>170</sup>

After his first victory, Silko concluded a treaty with the Blemmyan tribes:

...and they sued me for terms. I made peace with them, and they swore to me by their images (εἰδώλα), and I trusted on their oath that they were honest people.<sup>171</sup>

However, the Blemmyes broke the oath and renewed hostilities, for according to Silko two more campaigns were necessary. In the remainder of the inscription he tells us of

<sup>163</sup> *Life of Moses*, p. 50 Till (tr. Till, *Koptische Heiligen- und Märtyrerlegenden* 2, 69). Cf. M. Ullmann, 'Zum Ende des altägyptischen Kultus am Beispiel der Tempel von Abydos', *Biblische Notizen* 102 (2000) 133-40 at 136-7. On the Coptic names of the Blemmyes, see Crum, *Dict.* s.v.

<sup>164</sup> For stories of raiding Saracens, see Mayerson, *Monks* 271-83, and 313-21.

<sup>165</sup> T. Hägg, 'Some Remarks on the Use of Greek in Nubia', in J.M. Plumley (ed.), *Nubian Studies* (Cambridge, 1978) 103-7, 'Nubicograeca I-III. Bemerkungen zu griechischen Texten aus Nubien', *ZPE* 54 (1984) 101-12, and 'Blemmyan Greek and the Letter of Phonen', in M. Krause (ed.), *Nubische Studien* (Mainz, 1986) 281-6.

<sup>166</sup> See T. Hägg, 'Silko's Language: A Retrospect', in Bącz, *Fs. Gaál, Luft, Török*, 289-300, for an overview of the extensive list of publications on the inscription since its first edition by Niebuhr in 1820.

<sup>167</sup> A.-J. Letronne, *Oeuvres choisies*, 6 vols (1881-5) 1.3-54 ('L'inscription grecque déposée dans le temple de Talmis en Nubie par le roi nubien Silko', 1825<sup>1</sup>); J. Kraus, *Die Anfänge des Christentums in Nubien* (Diss. Münster; Mödling bei Wien, 1930) 100-9; Monneret de Villard, *Storia*, 56-8; Papadopoulos, *Africanobyzantina*, 14-7; Demicheli, *Rapporti*, 189-91; G. Vantini, *Christianity in the Sudan* (Bologna, 1981) 30-1; *IProse* II, p. 173.

<sup>168</sup> Krall, *Beiträge*, 12, 25; Wilcken, 'Heidnisches und Christliches', 419, 436.

<sup>169</sup> *FHN* III, p. 1148.

<sup>170</sup> *SBV* 8536.1-6 = *FHN* III 317 (slightly adapted).

<sup>171</sup> *SBV* 8536.7-9.

his other campaigns against the Blemmyes, and uses strong language to discourage his foes from contending again with him.

Silko calls himself 'kinglet' (βασιλίσκος), and expresses the competitiveness of his position as follows:

When I had become kinglet (βασιλίσκος), I did not by any means proceed behind the other kings (βασιλεῖς), but well ahead of them.<sup>172</sup>

Apparently, Silko was the most prominent 'king' among the other Noubadian 'kings', and his title 'kinglet' does not diminish this position. On the contrary, it has been suggested that this title be regarded as only second to the king *par excellence*, the Roman emperor. If this interpretation is true, the title may be taken as an indication of a federate relationship with the Romans.<sup>173</sup>

Be this as it may, it seems that at some time in the fifth century a federation of Noubadian tribes attacked Blemmyan tribes around Talmis and Taphis, and even further:

I fought with the Blemmyes from Primis (Qasr Ibrim) to Talmis (?);<sup>174</sup> on one occasion I ravaged the country of the others too, above the Noubades, because they contended with me.<sup>175</sup>

Apparently, the conflicts with Blemmyan tribes extended from Primis (Qasr Ibrim) to Talmis. They seem to have taken place on such a large scale that Noubadian tribes had to unite under one chief to restore the peace.

On the wall with the triumphal inscription of Silko two pictures have been incised that may belong to the inscription. The first shows a warrior spearing his enemy. He is dressed in a Roman military outfit and is being crowned by the goddess Victory with the crown of the god of Talmis, Mandulis.<sup>176</sup> In the other picture is a warrior dressed with a royal double crown on his head, the hieroglyphic ankh sign in one hand and a sceptre in the other.<sup>177</sup> Taken together, text and images may represent Silko as a powerful and victorious Noubadian 'king'. In one picture he is dressed according to Roman iconography, which confirms the suggestion that Silko was engaged in a federate relationship with Rome.<sup>178</sup> The crown suggests divine leadership, sanctioned by Mandulis, who bestowed on Silko two victories over the Blemmyes and one over other tribes. Therefore, the God mentioned in line 3 is probably Mandulis, as would be expected in an inscription in his temple.<sup>179</sup>

The other, Ancient Egyptian, attributes are reminiscent of the traditionalism in the 'royal' tombs of Ballana and Qustul. As at those cemeteries, characteristics of Meroitic iconography also seem to be present. Indeed, it is tempting to hypothesise that 'kings' such as Silko were buried in these tombs. The way Silko presents himself, as a powerful 'king of the Noubades and all Ethiopians',<sup>180</sup> is the only testimony from

<sup>172</sup> *SBV* 8536.10-12.

<sup>173</sup> T. Hägg, 'Titles and Honorific Epithets in Nubian Greek Texts', *SO* 65 (1990) 147-77 at 148-56; *FHN* III, p. 1153.

<sup>174</sup> I follow the reading Τέλλ(μ)εως of *SBV* 8536, rather than that of *FHN* III, pp. 1149, 1151, where it is suggested that the place name is not Talmis, because that town is spelled correctly in line 2 of the same text, but Shellal (on the riverbank opposite Philae).

<sup>175</sup> *SBV* 8536.16-8. By 'above', upstream is probably meant as in lines 9-10, so that the other people may be the Noba, who lived further to the south. Cf. *FHN* III, pp. 1150-1 (n. 781 and 784).

<sup>176</sup> See L. Castiglione, 'Diocletianus und die Blemmyes', *ZÄS* 96 (1969) 90-103. On the crown of Mandulis see L.V. Zabkar, *Apedemak, Lion God of Meroe. A Study in Egyptian-Meroitic Syncretism* (Warminster, 1975) 102-5.

<sup>177</sup> *FHN* III, pp. 1151-2.

<sup>178</sup> Kirwan, *Studies* Ch. XV at 199, and Ch. XVIII at 123-4.

<sup>179</sup> *FHN* III, p. 1150 (n. 77-8).

<sup>180</sup> Cf. the inscriptions of King Ezana of Axum, *SEG* XXXII 1601 and XXVI 1813 = *FHN* 298-9.



the fourth to sixth centuries that can compare with the wealth of the tombs of Ballana and Qustul.<sup>181</sup> It may well be significant that the sixth-century Kingdom of Noubadia had as its capital Faras, situated not far from Ballana and Qustul.

Silko is also mentioned in another document, a letter on papyrus from the Blemmyan chieftain Phonen to the Noubadian chieftain Abourni, Silko's probable successor.<sup>182</sup> A certain Phonoin, who is attested in a fifth-century inscription about a cult association at Kalabsha with the function of 'tribal chief' (φύλαρχος), is probably the same person.<sup>183</sup> The papyrus was found at Qasr Ibrim in 1976, and on account of its archaeological context dated 'sometime around the second half of the fifth century'.<sup>184</sup> In his letter, the chieftain (βασιλεύς) of the Blemmyes demands that the Noubades withdraw from his people's lands: 'For indeed, you are not fighting for your lands; you are fighting for our lands'.<sup>185</sup> Apparently, the Blemmyes considered Talmis and its surroundings as 'our lands'.

After a formal address, Phonen continues by stating that he is of noble family: '(It is) a great (thing) for a man who is great [in his clan, τῷ γένει (?)]'.<sup>186</sup> He then vaguely alludes to an incident in which his brother Yeny was killed, but nevertheless expresses his wish to come to terms with the following proposal of the Noubades:

I want us to have concord between one another (and that) we have my cattle with your cattle, pasturing one with another and the sheep.<sup>187</sup>

Phonen also relates some events that had happened previously:

For indeed, first Silko won and took Talmis. Today you won and took Talmis. First Silko seized our lands and kept us off them. Today you won and took Talmis. First Silko said that 'Give me sheep and cattle and camels enough' so that our lands be given (back). And I gave them all, and you were insolent, and he kept (them) from us. And I wrote to Yeny for the peace and sent my ambassadors under a flag of truce; and you were insolent and killed (a) tribal chief (φύλαρχος) and (a) sub-despot (ὑποτύραννος), and took the priests (προφῆται) in the place Phontauou.<sup>188</sup>

Several comments can be made on this passage. Firstly, reference is made to the chieftain Silko who can hardly be other than the one in the inscription from Kalabsha, as he is also said to have taken Talmis there. The 'and you were insolent' phrases probably refer to Silko in both cases. 'You' may then be referring to Abourni, who has taken over Silko's responsibilities after succeeding him.<sup>189</sup>

Secondly, Phonen complains about the killing of two high tribesmen and the taking of priests as hostages. One of these tribesmen may have been Yeny, Phonen's

<sup>181</sup> Already Kirwan, 'Ballaña Civilization', *Studies* Ch. IV at 29, Ch. XI ('Comments on the Origins and History of the Nobatae of Procopius', 1958<sup>1</sup>), and Ch. XV at 202, argues that the tombs of Ballana and Qustul are Noubadian.

<sup>182</sup> *SB* XIV 11957.23 = *FHN* III 319. For the first edition see T.C. Skeat, 'A Letter from the King of the Blemmyes to the King of the Noubades', *JEA* 63 (1977) 159-70, revised by J. Rea, 'The Letter of Phonen to Aburni', *ZPE* 34 (1979) 147-62.

<sup>183</sup> *SB* V 8697 = *FHN* III 313. Cf. *L.Philae* II 199, which is also an inscription about a cult association and starts similarly. This text is dated to 456/7. The different spellings of the name of the Noubadian chieftain (Φωνην/Φονοιν) can be explained on the basis of the interchange of η and οι, see F.T. Gignac, *A Grammar of the Greek Papyri of the Roman and Byzantine Periods*, 2 vols (Milan, 1976-81) 1.265-7.

<sup>184</sup> J.M. Plumley, W.Y. Adams, E. Crowfoot, 'Qasr Ibrim, 1976', *JEA* 63 (1977) 29-47 at 34, 44-5. Cf. Rea, 'Letter', 147; J.M. Plumley, 'Preliminary Remarks on Four 5th Century Mss. from Qasr Ibrim', in Millet and Kelley, *Meroitic Studies*, 218-21 at 218-9.

<sup>185</sup> *SB* XIV 11957.23.

<sup>186</sup> *SB* XIV 11957.4-5.

<sup>187</sup> *SB* XIV 11957.10-1.

<sup>188</sup> *SB* XIV 11957.11-5. Phontauou has not been identified.

<sup>189</sup> Cf. *FHN* III, p. 1162 (n. 796).

brother, whose death is referred to earlier in the letter.<sup>190</sup> This passage probably gives the Blemmyan side of the capture of Talmis as reported in the Kalabsha inscription. According to Silko, the Blemmyes broke a truce. In Phonen's opinion, the Noubades acted even worse, for they not only broke a truce, they even killed men and took hostages:

Well, it is possible to become warlike, but it is not permissible that you should insult our men and kill the men (who were) under a flag of truce.<sup>191</sup>

Thirdly, the passage tells us about the highest ranks in a tribe: the tribal chief (φύλαρχος) and sub-despot (ὑποτύραννος).<sup>192</sup> As in the account by Olympiodorus, these titles may have been used from a Roman perspective.<sup>193</sup> The inscription from Kalabsha in which Phonoin (Phonen) bears the title of tribal chief also suggests relations between the Blemmyes and Rome. Though a problematic text, it seems to be a donation of a *comes*, probably the *comes limitis*, to a Blemmyan cult association at Talmis.<sup>194</sup>

Finally, the sheep, cattle and camels that the Blemmyes had to give to the Noubades indicate that these animals belonged to their basic stock.<sup>195</sup> From the third century onwards, camels became the most common means of transport for the Blemmyes in the desert areas.<sup>196</sup> As regards the sheep and cattle, nomads normally settle first on the fringe of the agricultural land of the indigenous population and maintain themselves with animal husbandry and agriculture.<sup>197</sup> We should therefore not be surprised to find these animals mentioned in the letter as gifts to the Noubades.

After this passage, Phonen asks Abourni to forget 'the fate (of) Yeny and Silko' and to make peace.<sup>198</sup> Apparently, Silko was also killed or died not long after the diplomatic mission of Yeny. This may explain why Silko is mentioned in connection with the present chieftain, Abourni, who may have been his direct successor. Phonen's demands are clear:

Withdraw from our land and send the gods (τοὺς θεούς) to the temple so that I and you (can) make (a) good time with you.<sup>199</sup>

The temple must be that of Mandulis, and the Noubades had apparently taken away its statues.<sup>200</sup> Phonen threatens his fellow chieftain that if he does not return both land and gods, he will take action.

A fifth-century Coptic letter from Qasr Ibrim, which was found wrapped up together with the Phonen letter, is additional proof of diplomatic relations between the Noubades and the Roman Empire. In the letter from the *tribunus* Viventius to Tantani, tribal chief (φύλαρχος) of the Anouba (Noubades), the liaison officer concludes a peace treaty with them.<sup>201</sup> It seems that a *comes domesticus*, who was in

<sup>190</sup> *SB* XIV 11957.7.

<sup>191</sup> *SB* XIV 11957.16.

<sup>192</sup> The text is subscribed by the tribal chief (φύλαρχος) Breytek, *SB* XIV 11957.29. It appears from two, as yet unpublished, ostraka from the Eastern Desert, dating to the end of the second or beginning of the third century, that the title ὑποτύραννος was already in use before the fifth century, *O.Did.* inv. 1.5-6 and inv. 716.1. I am indebted to H. Cuvigny for showing me the transcript of the ostraka before publication.

<sup>193</sup> Hägg, 'Titles', 156-8. Cf. Papadopoulos, *Africanobyzantina*, 20-1.

<sup>194</sup> *SB* V 8697 = *FHN* III 313.

<sup>195</sup> Sheep and cattle are also mentioned in *SB* XIV 11957.10-1, 20, camels in *SB* XIV 11957.20, 32.

<sup>196</sup> Updegraff, 'Blemmyes', 89-90.

<sup>197</sup> Finkelstein, *Living on the Fringe*, 38.

<sup>198</sup> *SB* XIV 11957.18-9.

<sup>199</sup> *SB* XIV 11957.19-20.

<sup>200</sup> Cf. *SB* XIV 11957.29.

<sup>201</sup> Cairo, Coptic Museum inv. 76/50A = *FHN* III 320 (*ed.princ.*).

charge of all soldiers in Egypt, had come to the First Cataract area and had delegated the task of signing the peace with the Noubadian chief to the *tribunus* who was a commander of a military unit at the frontier, but 'whom they have placed over all soldiers on the frontier of Egypt'.<sup>202</sup>

This text confirms the literary sources in which the Romans signed peace treaties with the southern peoples, albeit in this case not with 'the Noubades and Blemmyes' but only with the Noubades. It is also the first text which connects a tribal chief to a formal treaty with Rome. Since examples are known from the East in which these tribal chiefs, 'phylarchs', indicate a federate status of their tribes with the Roman Empire, both the Blemmyes and Noubades may well have been Roman federates.

Other, less formal, encounters on the southern frontier appear from a letter from the monk Apa Mouses of Philae to Tantani. Mouses wanted to send purple dye to Tantani and receive pepper from him in return. The monk also mentions captives in possession of Tantani.<sup>203</sup> The last of these three so-called 'Tantani letters' is from a certain Yahatek to Tantani. We hear of some contact with Talmis, but the identity of Yahatek remains obscure.<sup>204</sup> Thus there is a fair amount of evidence that both the Blemmyes around Talmis and the Noubades around Primis were federates (*foederati*) of the Roman Empire in the fifth century. Archaeology, too, suggests that there may have been a diplomatic relationship between Noubadian chieftains and the Roman Empire in this period, for in the tombs at Ballana several fifth-century, imported objects have been found that can be interpreted as diplomatic gifts. The best example is a folding chair, of which more have been found in tombs belonging to allied kings in other parts of the empire.<sup>205</sup> Closer analysis of the grave furniture of the tombs at Ballana and Qustul shows that Noubadian chiefs were buried there from the late fourth century onwards until the late fifth century, first at Qustul and later at Ballana.<sup>206</sup> The fifth-century diplomatic gifts belong to the time in which chiefs were buried at Ballana, the time of chiefs such as Silko.

Again, we may compare the society of the Dodekaschoinos after 394 with that of a modern Sudanese people, the Nuba.<sup>207</sup> Characteristic of the Nuba are loose political boundaries and frequent raids over both small and long distances.<sup>208</sup> For these reasons, the tribes are far from united.<sup>209</sup> Many tribes do have chiefs (*Mek*) and 'sub-chiefs' (*Sheikh*), but political control is diffuse and rudimentary.<sup>210</sup> Migrations in these areas are common because of raids by other people, or the need for land or food.<sup>211</sup>

These characteristics have much in common with the fifth-century society in the Dodekaschoinos, in other words, it seems to have developed into a more coherent society, that of chiefdoms.<sup>212</sup> Not only the tribal structure with its chiefs and sub-chiefs reminds us of the tribal chief and sub-despot of the Blemmyes and Noubades, but also the larger raids apparently involving several tribes and a large territory, and the way

<sup>202</sup> Cairo, Coptic Museum inv. 76/50A.2. On the title *tribunus* see Mitthof, *Annona militaris* 1, 151-2. Cf. the discussion of the titles in *FHN* III, pp. 1168-71.

<sup>203</sup> Cairo, Coptic Museum inv. 76/50B [bis] = *FHN* III 322 (*ed. princ.*).

<sup>204</sup> Cairo, Coptic Museum inv. 76/50B = *FHN* III 321 (*ed. princ.*). Cf. *FHN* III, p. 1172, in which Yahatek is identified with the Blemmyan Yeni of *SB* XIV 11957.5, 7, 8, 14, 17-8, 27-8 = *FHN* III 319, but the names differ too much.

<sup>205</sup> See *FHN* III, p. 1153, for an overview.

<sup>206</sup> L. Török, 'The Chronology of the Qustul and Ballana Cemeteries', in Krause, *Nubische Studien*, 191-7, and *Late Antique Nubia*, 75-178.

<sup>207</sup> S.F. Nadel, *The Nuba. An Anthropological Study of the Hill Tribes in Kordofan* (London, 1947). Cf. Seligman and Seligman, *Pagan Tribes*, 366-412.

<sup>208</sup> Nadel, *Nuba*, 301-2.

<sup>209</sup> Nadel, *Nuba*, 5.

<sup>210</sup> Nadel, *Nuba*, 447-58.

<sup>211</sup> Nadel, *Nuba*, 5. J.-C. Muller, 'Ideology and Dynamics in Dii Chiefdoms (Cameroon)', in H.J.M. Claessen, J.G. Oosten (eds), *Ideology and the Formation of Early States* (Leiden, 1996) 99-115 at 101.

<sup>212</sup> On chiefdom societies, see T. Earle (ed.), *Chiefdoms: Power, Economy, and Ideology* (Cambridge, 1991); Stein and Rothman, *Chiefdoms*; S.K. McIntosh (ed.), *Beyond Chiefdoms. Pathways to Complexity in Africa* (Cambridge, 1999); Renfrew and Bahn, *Archaeology*, 176.

conflicts over land are described. Moreover, in modern tribal communities, breaking intertribal treaties is considered as bad as breaking the unwritten rules within a tribe, the so-called 'Tribal Code'. Such deeds, as well as murder and taking hostages, will certainly provoke counteraction.<sup>213</sup> These are exactly the reasons for the conflicts between Blemmyan and Noubadian tribes in the documents of Silko and Phonen.

A chiefdom society would also explain why Silko represents himself as a powerful and victorious Roman warrior, for chieftains tend to identify themselves with outside powers to reinforce their own position.<sup>214</sup> Such chieftains are chosen because of their status, which is based on wealth and sometimes on kinship or age, whereas their main task is to keep the peace among their tribe or tribes.<sup>215</sup> Although Silko calls himself a 'kinglet', it is therefore better to speak of his territory as a Noubadian chiefdom rather than a Noubadian kingdom, since the fifth-century society of the Dodekaschoinos lacks the characteristics of complexity usually associated with kingdoms: a capital, a fiscal system, clear boundaries.<sup>216</sup> But with his large-scale actions against Blemmyan and other tribes, and his assumed 'royal' burial at Ballana, Silko could well have embodied the growing self-consciousness of the Noubades.<sup>217</sup> Silko and his successors laid the foundations for the Kingdom of Noubadia, and the growing Noubadian power forced the Blemmyes into the margins again. In the sixth century, nothing is heard any more of Blemmyan settlement in the Dodekaschoinos.

### Conclusion: From Kingship to Kinship

We can now tentatively reconstruct the settlement patterns of the Dodekaschoinos in the fourth and fifth centuries. With the regression of the Roman Empire in 298 and the decline of Meroe in the first half of the fourth century, the original, Nubian population came to live in a segmentary society. Due to economic, political and social trends, society was open for nomadic pastoralists, the Blemmyan tribes from the Eastern Desert, to settle on the fringe. Roughly a century later, these tribes had integrated completely in society and were concentrated in places like Talmis and Taphis.

The further we descend on the scale of organisation of societies, the fewer sources we find. It should therefore come as no surprise that the fourth-century sources are so scanty in comparison with those of the fifth. Apparently, fifth-century society was more complex than that of the fourth century.<sup>218</sup> It now consisted of chiefdoms with powerful leaders who engaged each other in conflicts over land.

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<sup>213</sup> Nadel, *Nuba*, 148-59.

<sup>214</sup> K. Kristiansen, 'Chiefdoms, States, and Systems of Social Evolution', in Earle, *Chiefdoms* 16-43 at 39.

<sup>215</sup> Nadel, *Nuba*, 162-71.

<sup>216</sup> Claessen, *Verdwenen koninkrijken*, 41-2, 103-9. Cf. the word *Mek* for Nuba chiefs, probably a derivative of the Arabic *malek*, see Nadel, *Nuba*, 161 (n. 1), with the evidence for Arab chiefs called *malek* in Late Antiquity, see B. Isaac, 'The Eastern Frontier', *CAH* XIII (1998) 437-60 at 444. Although Kirwan, *Studies*, Ch. IX at 60, already calls Silko a *Mek*, he still insists on seeing Silko's chiefdom as a 'state on the Byzantine model'. Cf. Török, *Late Antique Nubia*, 221-6; *FHN* III, pp. 1132, 1156, and 'End of Meroe', 153-4;

<sup>217</sup> Cf. L. Török, 'Post-Meroitic History and Archaeology', in C. Bonnet (ed.), *Études nubiennes* 3 vols (Geneva, 1992) 1.141-3, and 'End of Meroe', 153-4; Kirwan, *Studies*, Ch. I at 2 ('Introduction: Post-Meroitic Nubia – A Reappraisal', 2002<sup>1</sup>).

<sup>218</sup> For a similar development after a period of decline in several other ancient societies, see C. Renfrew, 'Post-Collapse Resurgence: Culture Process in the Dark Ages', in C. Renfrew, S. Shennan (eds), *Ranking Resource and Exchange. Aspects of the Archaeology of Early European Society* (Cambridge, 1982) 113-6.

Period	Third century	Fourth century	Fifth century
Type of society	'early state'	segmentary society	chiefdom
Social organisation	kingship class-based hierarchy armies war	lineage-based kinship without developed leadership loose federations raids of small bands	kinship-based ranking under tribal chief  loose federations large raids inter-tribal conflicts
Economic organisation	centralised bureaucracy fiscal system laws	settled farmers pastoral herders trade 'Tribal Code'	some craft specialisation trade 'Tribal Code'
Settlement pattern	city	villages	fortified centres religious centres cities of the dead
Religious organisation	temples priestly class	temples	temples
Architecture	monumental public buildings	burial mounds	monumental graves
Modern parallels	non-existent	Nuer and Dinka	Nuba

Reconstruction of the development of society in the Dodekaschoinos in the third to fifth centuries<sup>219</sup>

The increasing organisation of the Blemmyes and Noubades on the southern frontier in the fifth century forced the Romans to conclude treaties with them to prevent these peoples from raiding into Roman territory. The information provided by the 'inside' sources probably gives us a more reliable picture of how the Romans did this than the Roman historians. Sources like Priscus and Procopius speak of 'the Blemmyes and Noubades' raiding into Egypt, as if they consisted of a coalition of peoples invading Egypt. This picture contrasts with one of the Tantani letters, which mentions a Roman officer who signs a peace treaty with a local Noubadian chieftain.

The evidence suggests that the Romans did their best to keep the peace by giving these tribes, presumably the ones nearest to the frontier or the most powerful ones, a federate status. In this respect, Procopius is likely to be right in stating that the tribes received an amount of money every year. This was common practice among other Roman federates in the East. The Romans also wanted to maintain friendly relationships with these tribes by allowing them to continue worshipping Isis at Philae. Since the tribes received money, it is not unreasonable to suppose that they financed the cult with it. In this way, they would have continued the practice of the temples of the Dodekaschoinos of making donations to the temple of Isis at Philae. Having now discussed the relations between the southern peoples and Philae, it is time to turn to the island itself.

<sup>219</sup> After the model of E.R. Service, see Renfrew and Bahn, *Archaeology*, 174-7. Cf. Török, 'End of Meroe', 150-2.