

SUDAN & NUBIA

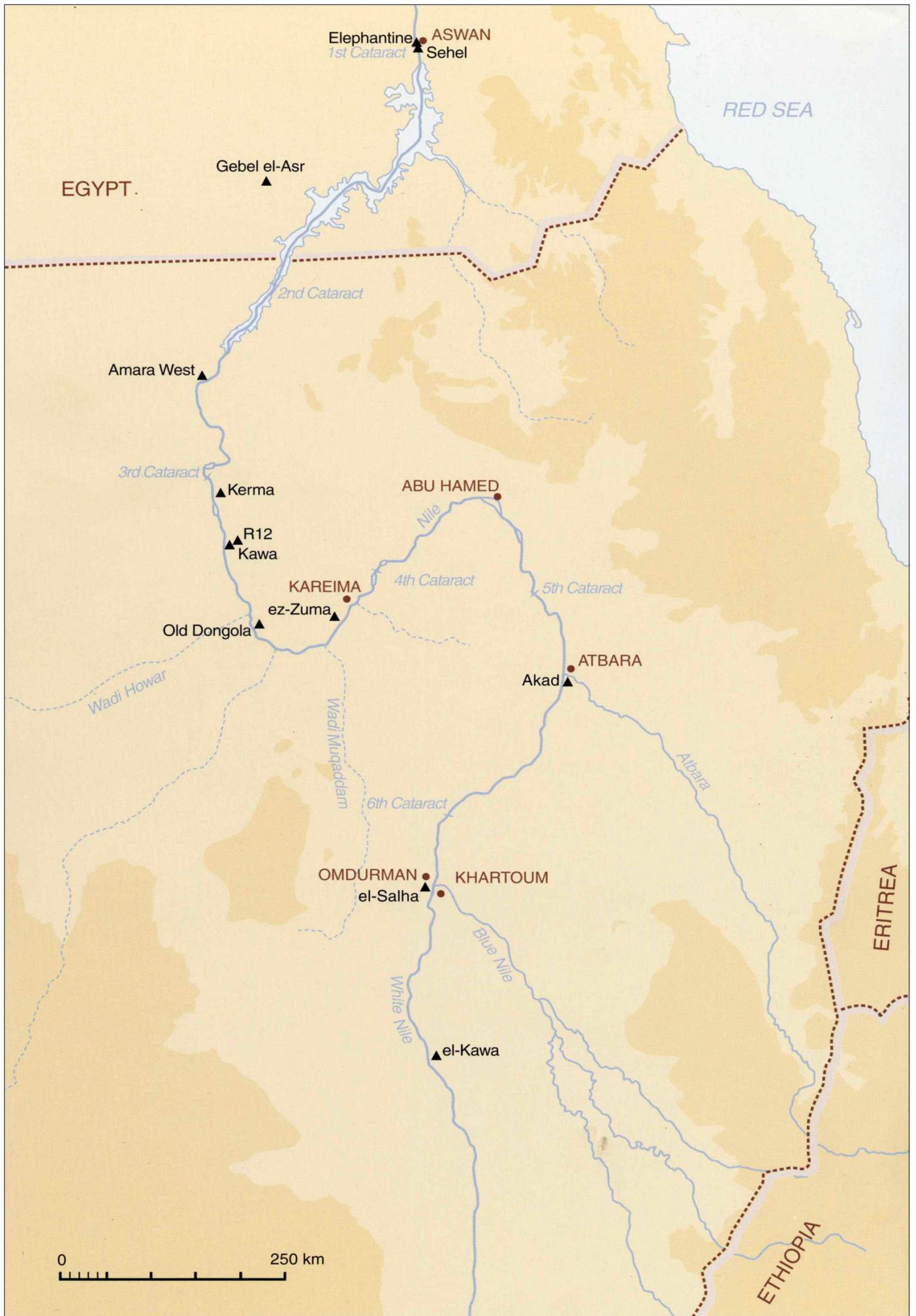
The Sudan Archaeological Research Society



Bulletin No. 6

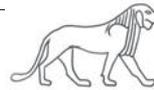
2002





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Front Cover: An apostle from the mural in the chapel at Baganarti containing the king's portrait.

Introduction

Vivian Davies

At the time of writing (mid-September 2002), the 10th International Conference for Nubian Studies has just finished, generously hosted by colleagues in the Università di Roma "La Sapienza". The large number of papers delivered shows how rapidly the subject of Middle Nile studies is growing, with significant advances in knowledge achieved since the last conference held in Boston four years ago, an encouraging state of affairs, to which the content of this present volume bears further witness. There was, however, one hugely important issue which overshadowed the event: the looming crisis of the new dam at the Fourth Cataract.

As reported by the Sudanese delegation, preparatory work for the dam has now begun and actual building will start in two years. It is expected to take a further seven years to complete. In an unwelcome echo of the Aswan High Dam scheme, the reservoir created will flood over 170km of the Nile Valley between the Fourth Cataract and Abu Hamed, enveloping, as we now know from preliminary surveys, thousands of archaeological sites - artefact scatters, settlements, cemeteries and rock-drawings dating from the Palaeolithic to the Islamic Periods. Very little is known about these sites; for the most part only that they exist. Our Sudanese colleagues are urgently appealing for assistance, so that as much as possible of the record may be investigated and documented before the area is lost to knowledge for ever. In response, SARS is this winter launching a campaign of rescue excavation in a region which we recently surveyed (see *Sudan & Nubia* 4 [2000], 51-7), but an extensive international effort will be required if any serious impact is to be made. Our next international colloquium, to be held at the British Museum on 8 May 2003, will focus on the dam emergency. All colleagues with an interest in helping are invited to attend.

Eastern Desert Ware, a first introduction

Hans Barnard

Eastern Desert Ware (EDW) refers to a recently identified corpus of small, hand-made vessels with a remarkable surface treatment, dating from the 4th-5th centuries AD.¹ Sherds of this type have been found in the Eastern Desert, between the Nile and the Red Sea, in southern Egypt and northern Sudan (Figure 1). It is assumed that these vessels were produced and used by the indigenous inhabitants of the desert at the time. In order to test this hypothesis and to learn more about these desert dwellers, a research project was started in January 2002 to extract as much information from this pottery as possible.² An outline of this project will be presented here, followed by a request for the co-operation of colleagues working in the area.

Background of the project

Since December 1994 excavations have taken place in Berenike, the most important harbour on the Egyptian Red Sea coast in Graeco-Roman times (Sidebotham 1995, 5-8; Figure 1).³ Layers from the 4th-5th centuries AD in this settlement, inhabited from about 275 BC until the 6th century AD, show a significant rise in ovicaprid bones combined with a drop in fish remains and commodities from the Nile Valley. The most likely explanation for this is that during this period another, more desert-oriented group had joined the multi-ethnic population of Berenike (Sidebotham and Wendrich 1999, 452-453). This explanation is supported by contemporary historical sources, like Procopius and Olympiodorus

¹ I would like to thank Steve A. Rosen, Roberta S. Tomber and Willeke Z. Wendrich for their comments on earlier, much longer versions of this article.

² This research group consists of W. Z. Wendrich (University of California in Los Angeles, USA), R. S. Tomber (University of Southampton, UK), Dr. P. J. Rose (University of Cambridge, UK), Anwar Osman and R. H. Pierce (both University of Bergen, Norway), E. Strouhal (Charles University, Czech Republic), J. van der Vliet (Leiden University, the Netherlands) and myself. Additional scientific support is provided by S. E. Sidebotham (University of Delaware, USA), J. Bintliff and J. F. Borghouts (both Leiden University, the Netherlands), S. T. Smith (University of California Santa Barbara, USA), S. A. Rosen (Ben-Gurion University, Israel) and K. A. Willemsse (University of Rotterdam, the Netherlands).

³ The Berenike Project, co-directed by Sidebotham and Wendrich (first Leiden University, the Netherlands, now University of California in Los Angeles, USA), did research in the area between 1994 and 2002. The excavation reports are published by the Research School CNWS in Leiden. More popular information is available at <http://www.archbase.com/berenike/>. It is the Berenike Project, especially its pottery specialist R. S. Tomber and co-director W. Z. Wendrich, that has made most of the material presented here accessible to me and has stimulated me to undertake this research.

(Sidebotham 1995, 8-10; Updegraff 1988; Eide *et al.* 1998). Even though this group has been tentatively linked with a corpus of pottery its identity has so far escaped definition (Sidebotham and Wendrich 1996, 17; 2001, 256-267, Abb. 14).

Next to three large, more or less distinct groups of pottery (from the Nile Valley, the Mediterranean and India) Berenike has yielded a heterogeneous group of sherds, mostly of hand-made vessels, of unknown origin. A portion of these sherds shows striking similarities (in vessel forms, decorative motifs and technological features) to some of the sherds from other sites in the Eastern Desert and Lower Nubia (Rose 1995, 41-43). The most comprehensive description of the type derives from the excavation of the 4th-5th century AD cemeteries in Wadi Qitna and Kalabsha South (Strouhal 1984, 157-177, 195-200; Tables 31-34; Plates 66-70). Comparable sherds, always among much larger quantities of wheel-thrown Egyptian or post-Meroitic sherds, have also been found in Kalabsha North (Ricke 1967, 46-70, Tafel 23-28), Sayala (Badawi 1976, 29-31, Abb. 12, Fig. 2; Kromer 1967, 19, 34, 96-99, Tafel 2, 32-2, 34-3, 37-5), Wadi al-Arab (Emery and Kirwan 1935, 108-122), Qasr Ibrim (P. J. Rose, pers. comm.) and, much further south in the Nile Valley, at Kurgus (R. F. Friedman and G. Pyke, pers. comm.). Places in the Eastern Desert where similar sherds have been found include a number of tombs scattered in the Wadi Alaqi area, most notably in Wadi Elei and Wadi al-Ku (Sadr *et al.* 1995, 210-22, Figs 10-11 and 25); several sites with an unknown function in the vicinity of Berenike: Hitan Rayan (Sidebotham, in preparation), Shenshef (Tomber 1998, 170; 1999, 152, Figure 5-15/75) and Qaria Mustafa 'Amr (Sidebotham, Barnard and Pyke (forth.)); sites associated with the beryl mines in the Mons Smaragdus area: Sikait (S.E. Sidebotham, pers. comm.), Gebel Zabara (I. M. E. Shaw, pers. comm.) and Kab Marfu'a (Sidebotham, Barnard and Pintozzi (forth.)); and, again much farther to the south, Tabot (Magid *et al.* 1995, 165-170, Plate V).⁴ Based upon the study of the sherds associated with them, and in some cases on C¹⁴ analysis of associated finds (Sadr *et al.* 1995, 227), their production seems limited to the 4th-5th centuries AD, with possible precursors as early as the 2nd century AD.

Given the distribution of this ware and its similar physical characteristics, usually with a very sandy fabric without much organic temper (see below), it has been labelled Eastern Desert Ware (EDW). Because of the current lack of archaeological data and the confusing labelling in the historical sources the people that must have produced and used EDW are prudently labelled Eastern Desert Dwellers. They are supposed to have lived a nomadic life, much like their present-

⁴ Some of the sherds from Bir Abraq may also belong to this corpus. They have been tentatively identified as representing the Pan-Grave culture (Sadr 1994, 9) but their appearance, as judged from drawings, and especially their occurrence in association with Graeco-Roman remains renders an interpretation as EDW also possible.

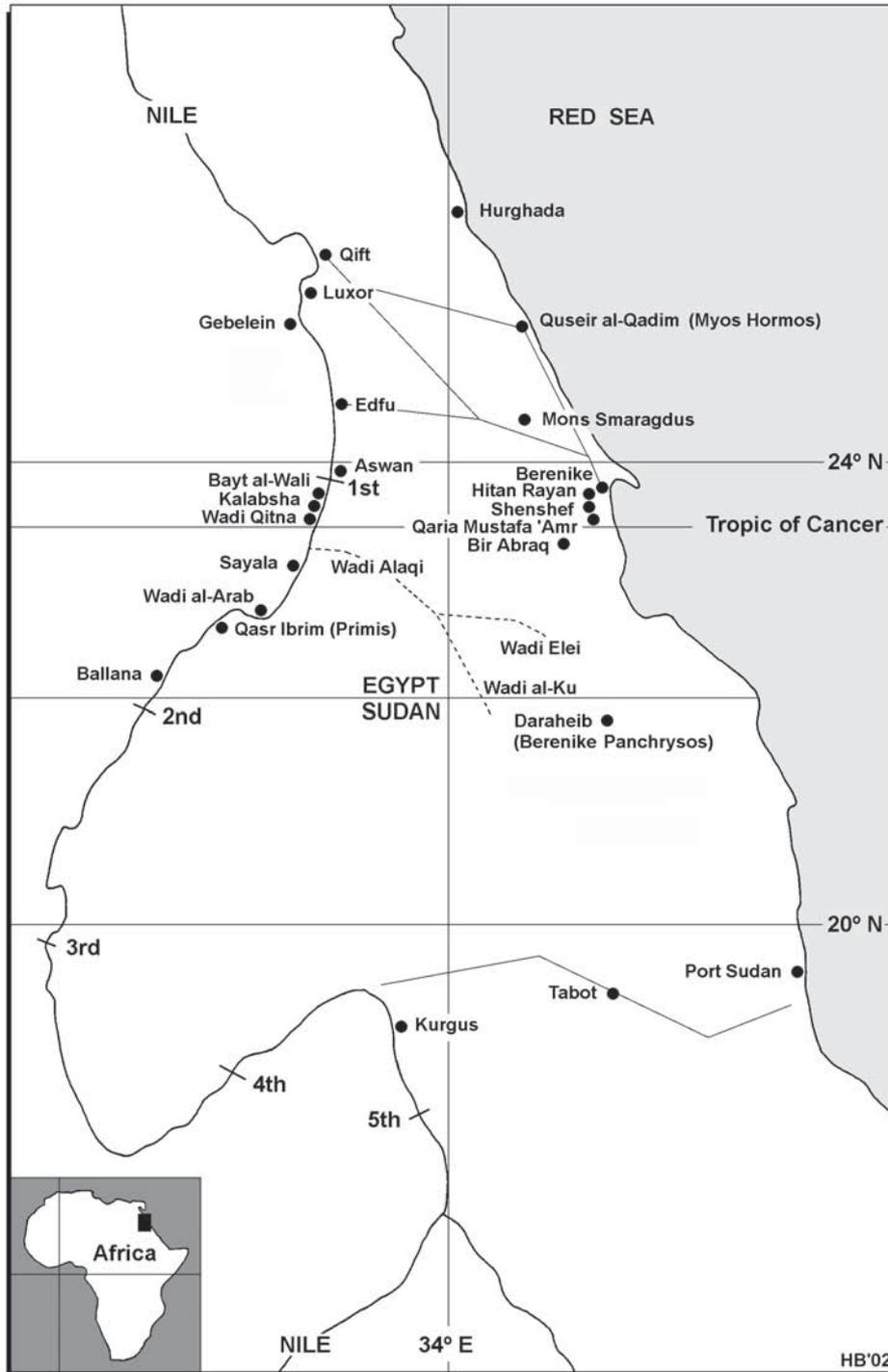
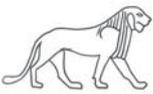


Figure 1. Map of the Eastern Desert, between the Nile and the Red Sea, showing the locations where EDW has been described.

day counterparts,⁵ roaming the region that is outlined by the sites in which EDW has been found. In places where outsiders provided an infrastructure allowing them to settle, probably assisting the newcomers in some way, sherds could accumulate and are now found in small quantities among pottery produced elsewhere. Other places of accumulation

⁵ Most of the supposed region of the ancient Eastern Desert Dwellers is now inhabited by the Ababda, who are part of the larger nomadic group of the Beja (Murray 1935; Hobbs 1989; Barnard 2000).

are graves and several of these, both in the Nile Valley and in the desert, have yielded EDW (Ricke 1967; Badawi 1976; Strouhal 1984; Sadr *et al.* 1995). The cemeteries in Sayala were close to several desert settlements, which were considered to have been temporary villages of nomads helping with the harvest in the Nile Valley (Ricke 1967, 33-35). Now that more, very similar settlements have been found far from the Nile Valley this interpretation seems less certain (Sidebotham, Barnard and Pyke [forth.]).

In Berenike the suitability of the site for the production

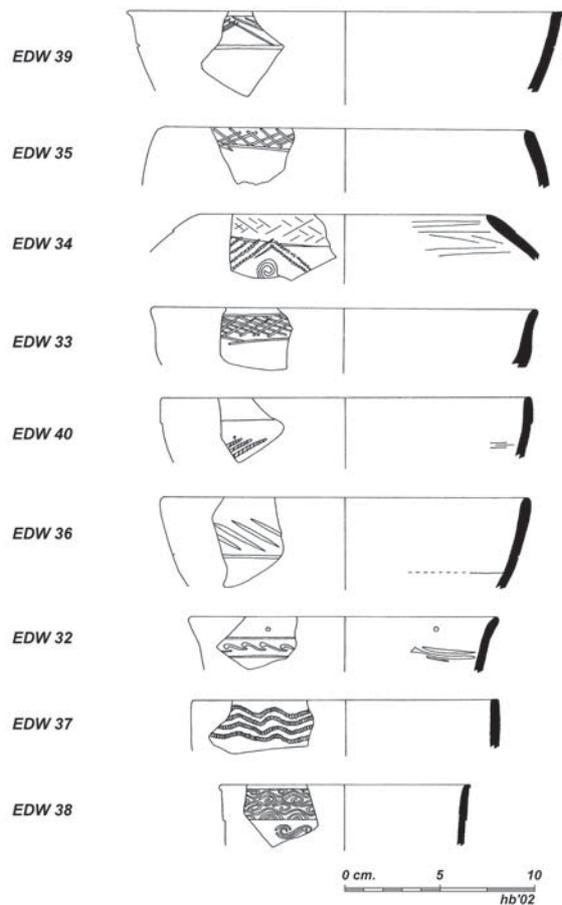


Figure 2. A selection of nine EDW sherds found on the surface in Kab Marfu'a (in the Mons Smaragdus area, Figure 1; see Table 1 for an abbreviated classification of each sherd and Plate XXX for a photograph of EDW 38).

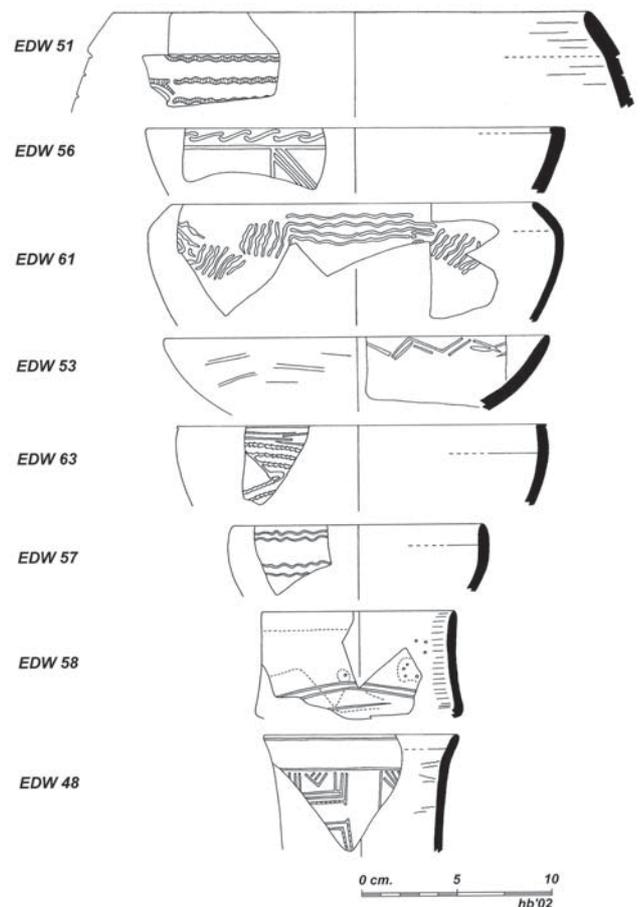


Figure 3. A selection of eight EDW sherds excavated in Berenike (see Figure 1 for the location, Table 1 for an abbreviated classification of each sherd and Plate XXXI for a photograph of EDW 48).

of pottery was demonstrated by the thin aeolian clay deposits on the surface (As and Jacobs 1995, 45). This does not prove, however, that production actually took place there. Most likely EDW found in Berenike, and elsewhere, was produced somewhere in the Eastern Desert proper, either in a few specialized areas as a trade object or anywhere whenever the need occurred. The pottery was almost certainly used throughout the area but it is not clear if its use was limited to a certain group nor if any group limited itself to EDW exclusively. The occurrence of EDW in the Mons Smaragdus area is noteworthy as Olympiodorus states that in his day, the 5th century AD, one needed permission of the king of the Blemmyes (who seemed to have used the title βασιλισκος 'little king') to visit the beryl mines in the desert.

Preliminary results and future research

Questions to be addressed by our research project are, among others, the sources of EDW and its use. As a first step a pilot group of 66 sherds from Berenike and Kab Marfu'a was recorded and classified. A slightly adapted version of the system put forward by Strouhal on the basis of his finds in Wadi Qitna and Kalabsha South was used (Strouhal 1984,

162, 165-168), the most significant difference being the change of form H 3 from 'footed bowl' into 'jar / pot', a category which was absent in the original system as almost all of the sherds are from relatively small cups and bowls.⁶

Low magnification study of the fabrics resulted in the identification of three and possibly four fabrics. Two of these, labelled EDW 1 and EDW 2, are relatively hard with no (EDW 1) or very few (EDW 2) organic inclusions and instead an abundance of poorly sorted, coarse white-transparent and blue-black quartz particles (sand). Other very similar fabrics could not readily be assigned to either EDW 1 or EDW 2, but are likely to belong to the same ware type. A few sherds had small shiny flakes of golden-yellow mica, best visible on the surfaces (EDW 3 ?), while others were made of silt, probably from the Nile Valley. A summary of the records of nine sherds from Kab Marfu'a and eight sherds from Berenike are presented here as an example (Figures 2-3, Table 1, Colour plates XXX-XXXI).

⁶ Together with the 'suspending bowl' (which has holes just below the rim presumably to be suspended or carried) footed bowls are now classified as H 2d.



Table 1. Summary of the characteristics of a selection of Eastern Desert Ware from Kab Marfu'a (in the Mons Smaragdus area) and Berenike.

Number	Form	Decoration	Fabric	Parallels
Kab Marfu'a				
EDW 39	H 2c	D 2	EDW 1	EDW 36
EDW 35	H 2a	D 2	EDW 1	EDW 33
EDW 34	H 3	D 7	EDW 1	EDW 49
EDW 33	H 2b	D 2	EDW 1	EDW 35
EDW 40	H 2b	D 0	unclassified	
EDW 36	H 2c	D 2	unclassified	EDW 39
EDW 32	H 2d	D 2	EDW 2	
EDW 37	H 1b	D 2	EDW 2	Hayes 1996, Fig. 6-19/5
EDW 38	H 1c	D 3	EDW 2	
Berenike				
EDW 51	H 3	D 0	unclassified	
EDW 56	H 2b	D 6	unclassified	Kromer 1967, Abb. 30-1
EDW 61	H 2a	D 8	unclassified	Strouhal 1984, Fig. 128 (P 1303a)
EDW 53	H 9	D 2	EDW 3 ?	Kromer 1967, Abb. 31-6
EDW 63	H 2b	D 8	EDW 1	Kromer 1967, Abb. 30-5
EDW 57	H 2b	D 3	unclassified	Kromer 1967, Abb. 31-2 Badawi 1976, Abb. 12-2
EDW 58	H 1b	D 3	unclassified	
EDW 48	H 1c	D 6	EDW 2	EDW 20, Hayes 1996, Fig. 6-15/2

The next step will include the following destructive research techniques: petrologic thin-sectioning, which will more firmly establish the different fabrics;⁷ gas chromatography coupled with mass spectrometry (GC-MS), to analyse fatty acid residues in the sherds;⁸ and inductively coupled plasma mass spectrometry (ICP-MS), which will produce trace metal fingerprints of the different fabrics. The results can be combined with earlier comparable research (Strouhal 1984, 195-200) and all information will be entered into a relational database (using FileMaker Pro 5.5) which will become available on the project's website.⁹ Analysis of this data should reveal some of the culture of the people who produced and used EDW and who are now tentatively identified as the Eastern Desert Dwellers. This may well turn out not to be a homogenous group, as is suggested by the tentative, macroscopic examination of their pottery, nor to coincide with any of the groups mentioned in the historical sources. Additional information and material have already been made

⁷ With the help of Mr. Ram Alkaly (UCLA) thin-sections have been prepared of all sherds in the pilot. These are currently being studied by the author.

⁸ With the help of Dr. Stuart Tyson Smith the fatty-acid residue has been recorded in all sherds of the pilot. The results are currently being analysed by the author.

⁹ A number of test-pages can already be viewed at <http://www.barnard.nl/EDWdata/> which is linked to <http://www.archbase.com/index.html>

available by several projects active in the region,¹⁰ and more would be very welcome.¹¹

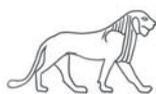
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¹⁰ Among these are the Berenike Project, the University of Delaware Survey of the Eastern Desert and Excavation of Sikait (Mons Smaragdus), the Egypt Exploration Society's Qasr Ibrim Expedition and the Norwegian Environmental Survey of the Red Sea Mountains in Sudan.

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EDW 38 (Kab Marfu'a)

*Plate XXX. Eastern Desert Ware. A
sherd of EDW 38.*



EDW 48 (Berenike)

Plate XXXI. Eastern Desert Ware. A sherd of EDW 48.