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Steven E. Sidebotham, Jennifer Gates-Foster, Jean-Louis Rivard, *The archaeological survey of the desert roads between Berenike and the Nile Valley expeditions by the University of Michigan and the University of Delaware to the Eastern Desert of Egypt, 1987-2015. Archeological reports, number 26*. Boston: American Schools of Oriental Research, 2018. Pp. xxi, 480. ISBN 9780897571098.

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[Authors and titles are listed at the end of the review.]

In the fourth century CE, St Athanasius famously wrote that ‘the desert was made a city’. Although the quote concerns the migration of Christian ascetics, it could just as well have described the economic and military activities that transformed Egypt’s Eastern Desert landscape in the Ptolemaic and early Roman periods. Egypt’s Eastern Desert is characterised by a harsh landscape with limited water resources, but it is also rich in minerals, gems and building stone, and it contains the routes that facilitated the lucrative trading networks that connected the Mediterranean world with the Indian Ocean, south Arabia, and sub-Saharan Africa. This book constitutes the final publication of two independent archaeological survey projects of the busy roads between Berenike and the Nile Valley (Apollinopolis Magna (Edfu) in the south, and Koptos in the north). The two survey projects, which were run by University of Michigan and University of Delaware, took place intermittently from 1987 to 2015 and included collaborations with, among others, UCLA, University of Assiut, University of Leiden, and the Polish Centre for Mediterranean Archaeology/University of Warsaw. The book contains six chapters and an appendix and is equipped with an extensive bibliography. It is richly illustrated with photos, maps, and plans that were produced by the projects.

Chapter 1 (Sidebotham and Gates-Forster) introduces the survey projects and their

methodologies followed by a general overview of the landscape, history, and usage of the Eastern Desert. The road between Berenike and the Nile runs c. 380 km from Berenike to Koptos with the Berenike to Edfu road being slightly shorter. The roads' main purpose was to connect the Red Sea harbour at Berenike with the emporia on the Nile, but they also gave access to some of the many mines and quarries that exploited the local geology. Of particular importance for the following chapters is the section on methodology, which lists the recording techniques applied by the two projects, but also the inconsistencies that inevitably occur over the course of nearly 30 years of survey. This point is also addressed by Gates-Foster in her discussion of the ceramic assemblages (p. 290-292).

The survey resulted in the recording of 70 discrete archaeological sites that date mainly from the late dynastic (fifth-fourth century BCE) to the late Roman period (sixth-seventh century CE). Several sites showed signs of long-term multi-period usage prior to the late dynastic and well into the Islamic period. Common for the sites was the key challenge of securing sufficient drinking water (pp. 13-18). The control of water seems to have been managed on the governmental level and maintained by the military, as is evident from ostraca found, for example, at Berenike and from inscriptions found along the roads. Wells were dug into the wadi floors and protected by praesidia—27 are listed in table 1.4, but not all are associated with a water source. Other topics addressed in this chapter include Red Sea navigation; road construction; the forts and their populations; military activity; and major periods of construction. The chapter is well-referenced and rich in comparanda allowing the reader to further pursue topics of special interest.

Harrell (Chapter 2) presents an overview of the geology along the Berenike-Nile Valley roads. Egypt's Eastern Desert was rich in metal, gemstones, ornamental stones, building stone, and utilitarian stone. Its southern sector—the focus of this book—was particularly rich with emeralds and gold. Of the sites discussed in this chapter, 27 were associated with gold mining and six with emerald mining. The five quarries identified in the survey were mainly for building stone that was used in local constructions along the roads. The chapter is followed by a useful table, which lists all mines identified in the survey area (table 2.1).

The bulk of the book (Chapter 3, Sidebotham, Wright, Gates-Foster, Tomber, and Rivard) is a gazetteer with detailed overviews of the 70 sites. The sites are presented as an itinerary starting at Berenike and moving towards the Nile with each branch of the roads presented separately. Some sites have seen some excavation and when relevant, the key results of these excavations are summarised. The 70 entries vary considerably in length and detail, but they follow a standard formula, which includes: ancient toponym; location; visited (when and by which project); chronological summary; pottery summary; other moveable artifacts, followed by a description of the site, its usage, chronology, and other site-specific points. The sites and their main attributes are

also summarised in table 1.4.

At the outset of the roads at the praesidium in Sikêt (site 1), we get a flavour of the state's involvement in securing the water supply. Here, an inscription (76/77 CE) mentions the prefect of Egypt and the prefect of the desert of Berenike, who ordered a well and cistern to be built. The site of Sikêt may, along with nearby Wadi Kalalat, have provided drinking water to Berenike.

Along the roads, we are presented with more praesidia, military outposts, cemeteries, mining settlements, animal enclosures and tethering lines. The sites vary considerably in size and organisation from individual structures (or no structures) to massive complexes supporting long-term occupation by (semi-)permanent residents. These larger settlements are mainly associated with the extraction of gold and green beryl/emeralds such as the gold mining settlement at Wadi Gimal (site 17), which comprised some 80 structures spread over 10 hectares, and the green beryl/emerald mining settlement at Sikait (site 22), which comprised 100-200 well preserved buildings, some preserved to full height. Some further discussion of the provision of water to these larger settlements would have been welcome as it is not always clear whether they were equipped with wells or relied on imports from external sources. This is made more explicit for the gold mining site at Samut (site 44) which received its water from a well that was located c. 4.3 km from the site.

Chapters 4 and 5 discuss the ceramic assemblages that were collected and studied either during or after the completion of the surveys. Gates-Foster (Chapter 4) provides an overview of the ceramics from all sites, focusing on dating and connectivity, while also offering glimpses into the range of artifacts that were used by the people who were travelling through or living in the desert. The first half of the chapter provides a general overview, the second half comprises a catalogue of diagnostic sherds. Some important observations include a generally low percentage of cooking vessels on most sites. Some sites, such as Samut (site 44), had no cooking vessels at all. Similarly, vessels used for the baking of bread were absent. Amphorae, on the other hand, constituted 43.1% of the total desert assemblage and at Umm Qaria/ Umm Ushra (Site 32) they constituted 60.9% of the collected ceramics. In the first and second centuries, imports of mainly transport vessels (and their contents) became more common with vessels from, for example, Italy, north Africa, and the Aegean.

This imported material is the focus of Chapter 5 (Tomber), which discusses the Roman pottery from Kab Marfu'a. Here, the large proportion of imported amphorae (especially Dressel 30) stands out. Tomber suggests that we might be looking at a single consignment that reached Kab Marfu'a from north Africa (modern Tunisia) at a time when wine from this region became increasingly more commercialised.

Barnard (Chapter 6) examines the desert's past and present native dwellers. Our lack of

knowledge of these groups, Barnard writes, stems in part from modern political borders; in part from the challenging logistics of working in the Eastern Desert; and in part from scholarly interests, which have focused mainly on the influence of states and empires. Barnard encourages us to look instead at the people who for thousands of years have made the desert their home. The most evident type of archaeological evidence includes graves and grave goods and the locally produced Eastern Desert ware, which is commonly found at sites from the fourth to the sixth century CE. Today, the southern part of Egypt's Eastern Desert is inhabited by groups of semi-nomadic herders, settled agriculturalists, and labourers that are collectively known as the Beja.

The final publication of survey projects that have been ongoing for nearly 30 years is not an easy task. In addition to the sheer longevity and the changing team members (and the ensuing loss of institutional memory), the main issues, as noted by the authors, derive from the different methodologies applied in the site recording and the lack of an overall strategy for collecting the ceramic assemblages. Despite these issues, the authors have done an excellent job of selecting and summarising what they consider to be the region's key material evidence. There is, however, a chronological imbalance as later material evidence has received comparatively less attention than material of Ptolemaic and Roman date. This is evident, for example, in the summaries of four sites described as Christian *laura* (sites 23, 28, 29, and 60). Site 28, known as Nuqrus west, is described as containing 70-80 structures scattered across several smaller wadis, but receives only a brief description within a couple of paragraphs. Similarly, Islamic period ceramics were retrieved from 11 sites, but are mentioned only in passing. A brief synthesis, based on the material recorded and collected by the survey projects, of the survey area's usage after Berenike's abandonment in/after the sixth century would have been a welcome addition to the book.

A minor point concerns the usage of maps. While the book is brilliantly illustrated throughout and contains detailed plans and maps of all surveyed areas, some interpretative maps showing, e.g. the location of wells, the different types of sites and their chronology would have been desirable. This would help the reader better understand the interdependence and connectedness of settlements, the distribution of resources for travellers along the roads, and the use of the Eastern Desert in different periods. These issues aside, the authors have made a very good job of summarising and publishing this vast corpus of data. The book is an important addition to our knowledge of the Red Sea-Nile roads and their environs, and it will be useful to both historians and archaeologists studying the long history of life in Egypt's Eastern Desert.

Authors and Titles

Chapter 1: Introduction (Steven Sidebotham, with contributions by Jennifer Gates-

Foster)

Chapter 2: Geology (James Harrell)

Chapter 3: Gazetteer of Sites (Steven Sidebotham and Henry Wright, with contributions by Jennifer Gates-Foster, Roberta Tomber, Jean-Louis Rivard)

Chapter 4: Pottery from the Surveys (Jennifer Gates-Foster)

Chapter 5: The Roman Pottery from Kab Marfu'a (Roberta Tomber)

Chapter 6: The Eastern Desert Dwellers (Hans Barnard)

Appendix: Summary of Pottery Analysis and Field Dating

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