
The Nomadic Livestock Economies in the Egyptian Desert: preliminary investigations of pastoral nomadism in Northeast Africa

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Résumé

In Egyptology, artistic, textual, and archaeological evidence have long been used to reconstruct the faunal and palaeoecological record of the ancient Nile Valley. This technique is of great value in reconstructing the ecological context of the Ancient Egyptians, and also in delineating the livestock and subsistence economies of the ancient Egyptians. Thus far, few studies have assessed Egyptian texts and representations for they may communicate about the fauna of neighbouring desert cultures. The exact subsistence and pastoral situation of Egypt's nomadic neighbours has not been explicated beyond labeling the subsistence strategies of Libyans, Medjay, and Asiatics as 'nomads'. Egyptian textual sources are replete with information regarding the pastoral situation of Egypt's neighbours. For instance, texts describing campaigns in the Eastern Desert demonstrate that the local inhabitants practiced cattle nomadism, a type of husbandry no longer ecologically possible in this region. One of the basic principles for establishing the livestock subsistence of Egypt's neighbours should be the identification of the different animals that nomadic groups maintained and their relative numbers in given communities and regions. By combining archaeological and ethnographic data it might be possible to reconstruct the seasonal movements and economies of desert nomads. The research will stress two key themes relating to livestock nomadism, namely: **1)** that the differing ecological situations of distinct nomadic groups led to different livestock economies and "foodways" and **2)** how the influx of new domesticates in the desert in the First Millennium BCE, particularly the horse and the camel, may have transformed the local nomadic cultures.

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