

CHAPTER 9

THE C-GROUP PEOPLE IN LOWER NUBIA

Cattle Pastoralists on the Frontier between Egypt and Kush

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DURING the time span from ca. 2500 to 1500 BCE, cattle-herders termed the C-Group people inhabited Lower Nubia—the stretch of the Nile between the First and the Second Cataracts (Fig. 9.1). At this time, the Nile was a fertile artery through the Sahara and thus a meeting place for ethnic groups with different forms of political organization and different modes of food production. The C-Group people lived on the southern frontier of the Egyptian state, and the Egyptians invaded and thereafter occupied Lower Nubia from ca. 1938 to 1725 BCE. The proximity to the Egyptian state was of fundamental importance throughout the history of the C-Group people, and the relationship with Egypt will be the overarching perspective in this review. However, the C-Group people also interacted with other ethnic groups in Nubia (i.e., the Kerma people in Upper Nubia and the Pan-Grave people of the Eastern Desert).

HISTORY OF RESEARCH

Archaeologists have mainly uncovered the remains of the C-Group people during salvage campaigns in connection with the building and heightening of the dams at Aswan. C-Group pottery was first recorded during preliminary surveys of Lower Nubia in 1905–1906. During subsequent excavations of the northern parts of Lower Nubia, George A. Reisner applied the term C-Group for the cultural remains that corresponded in time from the 7th to 16th Dynasties in Egypt. There is now consensus that

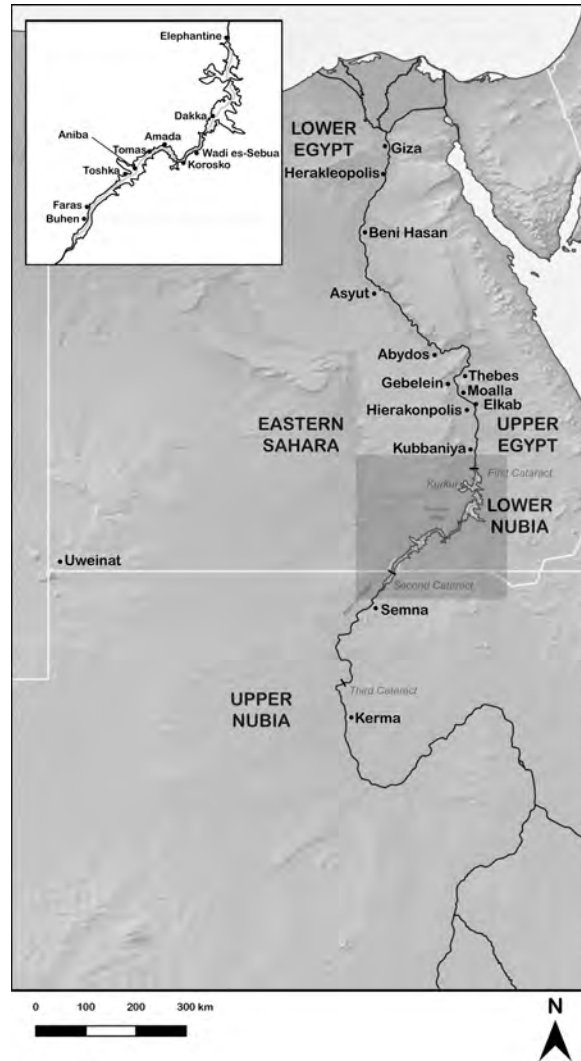


FIGURE 9.1 Map of sites of the C-Group in Nubia and related sites in Egypt. Map: Samuel Burns.

the majority of the sites of this period in Lower Nubia were the remains of a people with a distinct group identity, and the term C-Group has been retained in the archaeological literature.

After the conclusion of the first salvage campaign in Lower Nubia, Georg Steindorff (1935) started excavations of the largest C-Group burial ground—Cemetery N at Aniba. He made the first detailed chronological study of the C-Group graves on the basis of the material from Aniba (Steindorff 1935:8–9). Archaeologists excavated more C-Group sites in the middle and southern part of Lower Nubia during salvage campaigns during the 1930s and again during the 1960s.

The chronological development of the C-Group was the subject of the PhD-theses of Manfred Bietak (1968) and David O'Connor (1969). They started from the work of Steindorff, but also expanded the empirical data by incorporating other cemeteries. Bietak and O'Connor used the method of horizontal stratigraphy, which postulates that cemeteries grow in size in one or more directions (Parker Pearson 1999:12); and they both proposed a concentric development of Cemetery N. Following this interpretation, the founder burials became the center of the cemetery and the dead were buried on the outskirts of a cemetery growing around this central part. Independent of each other, Bietak and O'Connor also organized other features of the burial customs and material culture of the C-Group into four assemblages, which correspond to four succeeding phases. Bietak's terminology of the I/a-, I/b-, II/a-, and II/b-phases (Bietak 1968, table 1) are generally used today (Edwards 2004, table 4.1; Hafsaas 2006:25). Since the late 1960s, Bruce Williams (1983), Torgny Säve-Söderbergh (1989), Wendy Anderson (1996), and myself (Hafsaas 2006) have reviewed and refined but mainly confirmed the C-Group chronology.

ORIGINS

The people who established the material culture recognized as the C-Group had multiple origins. Small groups of mobile pastoralists descending from the A-Group people probably continued to live in Lower Nubia after Egypt's violent state expansion during the 1st Dynasty. The A-Group descendants lived without permanent settlements and left scanty remains for the salvage archaeologists to notice in a region with a monumental past (Hafsaas-Tsakos 2015:394). During the same time span, the desiccation of the last habitable niches in the Green Sahara resulted in an influx of climate refugees to the Nile valley (Kuper and Kröpelin 2006:806). Furthermore, there are strong similarities between the material culture, especially the pottery, of the C-Group people and some Kerma Ancien sites in Upper Nubia dating to the second half of the 3rd millennium BCE (Gratien 2014:96). The people living in Lower Nubia from around 2500 BCE were probably an amalgamation of descendants of the A-Group people and immigrants from both the Sahara and Upper Nubia.

A PASTORAL WAY OF LIFE

The C-Group people appear to have been cattle pastoralists (Williams 2013a:3), although it may also be that they were sedentary agriculturalists with mere ambitions of becoming cattle owners (Adams 1977:154). On the one hand, the absence of specialized artifacts for plant exploitation at C-Group sites suggests that agriculture was a marginal subsistence activity. Cattle, on the other hand, were important economically and culturally.

The C-Group people relied on their herds' renewable resources—milk and blood—for food, while meat was probably reserved for special occasions. The C-Group people incised representations of cattle on pots, funerary stelae, and rock outcrops (Fig. 9.2). It is likely that they supplemented the diet with wild foodstuffs, fish, and grains obtained through both cultivation and trade—like other pastoralists (see Salzman 2004:9). Most of their habitation sites were of an ephemeral nature and their material culture was portable. The C-Group people thus appear to have practiced some mobility with semi-permanent settlements within confined stretches of the river, while the young men roamed along the river and into the nearby *wadis* with the flocks in search for pasture (Hafsaas 2006:64–71).

Pastoralists need to have strategies for protecting their herds from reductions through theft and warfare, as well as to increase their herds through raids for animals. Like East African pastoralists in the ethnographic literature (Oba 2017), the young men of the C-Group people were probably warriors guarding their community and its cattle as well as raiding their neighbors. This mobile lifestyle as cattle herders was a habitual part of C-Group identity, and this contrasted with their agricultural neighbors based in villages in both Egypt and Upper Nubia.

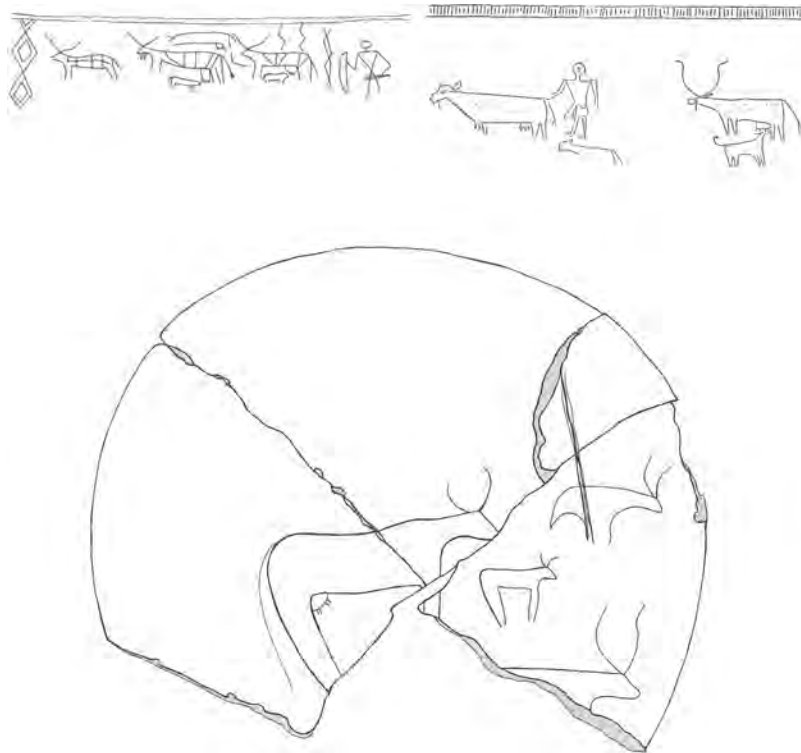


FIGURE 9.2 Representations of cattle. Not to scale. Above left: Jar from grave 94 at Cemetery 115 at Qurta (Firth 1927:137). Above right: Jar from Cemetery N at Aniba (Steindorff 1935, pl. 57). Below: Funerary stela with cattle (Williams 1983: pl. 95b).

FORGING AN ETHNIC IDENTITY

Ethnicity must be grounded in everyday life in order to be relevant. Ethnic identities typically emerge in situations where contact is established between two or more groups, since ethnicity is an aspect of relationships between groups—not a group characteristic (Eriksen 2001:46). Ethnic identity formation can be prompted by a shared interest in protecting access to scarce essential resources and limiting this access to members of the group (Schortman 1989:55). For the C-Group people, it was important to have access to pastures for their herds and increasingly also to monitor the trade corridor to the south, and both meant controlling the river valley. Egyptians in search for mineral resources were competing with the C-Group people for the control of Lower Nubia. The descendants of the A-Group people and the newcomers from the eastern Sahara and Upper Nubia probably forged a distinct group identity from around 2500 BCE in response to contact with the Egyptians, and these people became the ethnic group that we recognize as the C-Group. Also elsewhere have ethnic groups emerged through alliances between peoples with diverse origins and histories (Salzman 2004:86).

People often use visible material signifiers to express ethnic identities, and these signifiers must convey the same message in several media simultaneously in order to be recognized unambiguously (Emberling 1997:318). The most conspicuous remains of the C-Group people are their cemeteries, their pots, and their decorated bodies.

The Cemeteries

Most C-Group cemeteries seem to have been located on higher ground on the fringe of the desert, and the C-Group people marked the graves with a dry-laid stone ring. In the earliest cemeteries, the C-Group people also erected sandstone stelae (Fig. 9.3). The stelae were located in clusters and probably unrelated to specific graves. As a pastoral society without permanent settlements, it is likely that the C-Group people raised the stelae (up to 2 m in height) as territorial markers before the cemeteries reached a size by which they became markers in the landscape themselves (Hafsaas 2006:138). By marking the territory in this way, each sub-group of the C-Group people probably claimed grazing-rights in the surrounding area. Smaller sandstone slabs were also used at Kerma Ancien cemeteries in Upper Nubia, but the Kerma people used the slabs as elements in the construction of the tomb monuments (Honegger 2010:7; Welsby 2012:26).

The C-Group people buried their dead in a contracted position in circular or oval burial pits. Only items of personal decoration were laid in the grave, and the mourners placed pots outside the stone ring in accordance with the orientation of the head (Hafsaas 2006:31). The burial practices and pottery offerings have been interpreted as manifestations of a belief in ancestors rather than in an afterlife (Steffensen 2007:147), and this seems to differ from the beliefs of both the Egyptians and the Kerma people.



FIGURE 9.3 Stelae and stone rings in Cemetery N at Aniba (Steindorff 1935, pl. 8b).

During the II/b-phase, the elite of the C-Group people used mudbrick to build burial chambers, and a few graves had chapels attached to the superstructure. Both features were probably inspired by the burial practices of the Kerma people or the Egyptians (Hafsaas 2006:33–34), and this may be a sign of changing beliefs in what happened to a person after death, from becoming an ancestor to having an afterlife.

The distribution of similar cemeteries between the First and the Second Cataracts indicates that the C-Group people recognized their common interests and formed a common ethnic identity. This becomes clearer when looking at their pottery.

The Pottery

The C-Group people made distinctive pots by hand from silty clay found on the banks of the Nile (Hafsaas 2007:165). The pots were part of the female activities of food gathering, storing, preparing, and serving (cf. Haaland 1997:379); and mothers probably passed on the craft of pottery making to their daughters (cf. Herbert 1993:203). All C-Group pots had round bases that were adapted to a mobile lifestyle without furniture and where the pots stood directly in the sand (Hafsaas 2007:165). Red pots with black tops of the Nubian tradition were the commonest type. The C-Group people placed these pots outside almost every grave, often several at a time, and sherds from these pots were uncovered in large quantities at the habitation sites too. This suggests that the red pots with black tops were the regular eating and drinking bowls among the C-Group people (Hafsaas 2007:166). In the pottery repertoire were also small globular jars with incised patterns as well as cooking pots.

The most characteristic C-Group pots were the so-called black incised bowls with incised geometric designs in elaborate patterns (Fig. 9.4). The surface was black burnished, and the incisions usually filled with white paste to contrast with the dark surface. On the early pots dating to the I/a- and I/b-phases, the decoration of the body and the base of the black incised bowls was integrated into a whole (Fig. 9.4a). The strict layout of these designs may indicate a worldview where symmetry and order were important organizing factors, for instance in the unity of the group and in the relations between the genders. On the later pots dating to the II/a- and II/b-phases, the designs were structured in concentric panels with a central base motif, which suggests a more hierarchical worldview with a focal point (Fig. 9.4b). The pottery decoration thus seems to reflect the development of a more centralized political organization in the C-Group society (see below). The C-Group people usually deposited the black incised bowls singly outside selected graves, but the occurrence of sherds at most habitation sites suggests that these pots were not made exclusively for funerary rituals (Hafsaas 2007:166).

Among pastoralists, a chief can construct and maintain authority and leadership through hospitality (Salzman 2004:87), since the wealthy herd owner can build up personal power by sharing food and drink. Participation in shared meals is a way to incorporate individuals into society simultaneously as the place of each individual within the society is defined (Falk 1994:20). The meticulousness undertaken when making the black incised bowls emphasized the cultural significance of the bowls and their contents,



FIGURE 9.4 Black incised bowls from Cemetery N at Aniba. Not to scale. Above: Integrated designs (Steindorff 1935, pl. 33,7). Below: Designs in concentric panels (Steindorff 1935, pl. 47,3).

as well as the contexts in which the C-Group people used these pots. Moreover, the shape and size of these bowls indicate that they used them for serving drinks or special foods that circulated among the partakers in a single bowl. The inclusion and exclusion of certain people during the meal could distinguish between insiders and outsiders, while the order in which the people were served could differentiate between their ranks. The black incised bowls were thus used to establish and cement social relationships and alliances in the competition for power. The find distribution of the black incised bowls suggests that some C-Group families neither had the necessary wealth to share food nor to possess a black incised bowl. Inequality in wealth of animals and people would have excluded some individuals from the competition for power and authority (Hafsaas 2007:169–70).

Acts of hospitality probably included guests from other ethnic groups, and the serving bowls would thus have a high degree of visibility. As meaningfully constituted material culture, the black incised bowls were used for expressing identity, both inside the C-Group society and towards other ethnic groups (Hafsaas 2007:171).

Personal Decoration

Ethnic identity is often expressed through the visual representation of the body, and this was probably the case for the C-Group people. The most common form of bodily decoration among the C-Group people was to band the body with necklaces, bracelets, anklets, finger-rings, and hair-rings. Numerous beads of various shapes and materials were found in the C-Group graves without distinctions between gender and ages. Some beads are evidence for exchange with Egypt, such as blue-green, blue, and black disc beads of faience, metal beads of gold and silver, as well as various types of pendants. Ostrich eggshell beads as well as beads of carnelian and other stones were probably made locally, and they attest to the skills of the C-Group people. The practice of embroidering beads in lozenge patterns onto girdles or skirts of leather seems to have been characteristic for the C-Group people (Hafsaas 2006:95–98).

The C-Group people made rings and bangles from a variety of materials: marine snail shells, bone, ivory, and stone. Both rings and bangles were uncovered from graves of men, women, and children. However, only C-Group men wore a white stone bangle on the upper left arm. Some rings and bangles were also made of gold, silver, and copper; and the C-Group people probably received these from Egypt (Hafsaas 2006:99–100).

The items of bodily decoration uncovered from the C-Group cemeteries probably represent the traces of a lost language of identity display communicating both social positions within the society and ethnic unity towards other groups. The C-Group people were living in a multicultural setting where they interacted with Egyptians, Kerma people, and Pan-Grave people (see Hafsaas 2006). The interactions with these other ethnic groups had wide implications for the C-Group people as they continuously had to define their own identity while under constant influence from the other ethnic groups, as we will see in the historical outline that follows.

ENCOUNTERS WITH EGYPT

During the I/a-phase, the C-Group people established cemeteries at the most fertile plains of Lower Nubia. The population had become sufficiently numerous to disturb Egyptian activities by ca. 2500 BCE. Snefru, the first king of the 4th Dynasty, claimed to have hacked up the Land of Nehes. From the 5th Dynasty onwards, the Egyptians used this toponym to construct the ethnonym *Nehesy* meaning the people of Nubia (Jiménez-Serrano 2006:140–41), so the Land of Nehes was probably Nubia. Snefru recorded a booty of 7,000 captives and 200,000 heads of livestock (Strudwick 2005:66). The proportion of animals to people, about 29 to 1, support the suggestion that these people were pastoralists (Adams 1977:139). The incentive of the campaign was probably to pacify the local population in order to access the mineral resources in the region.

Khufu, Snefru's successor, sent an expedition to the quarries at Gebel el-Asr in the desert to the west of Lower Nubia. Inscriptions by representatives of the kings of the 4th and 5th Dynasties suggest that they sporadically sent royal expeditions to these quarries until the reign of Djedkara (Storemyr et al. 2002:25). A walled Egyptian settlement was established at Buhen below the Second Cataract and used between the reigns of Khafra and Nyussera, and a key activity appears to have been the processing of gold and copper ore as well as wood resources (O'Connor 2014:336–38).

Descendants of slaves taken in Egyptian raids to Nubia have left traces in Egypt. Three individuals described by the ethnic epithet *Nehesy* were depicted in 5th Dynasty burial chapels at Giza, and their modest titles indicate that they were employed in the household of the deceased (Fischer 1961:75). Statues of bound and humiliated foreign captives, among them *Nehesy*, have been found in the pyramid complexes of several kings of the 5th and 6th Dynasties (Shaw 2000:316). The need to depict their southern neighbors as subdued probably reflected an ambition to control the *Nehesy* rather than the actual reality on the ground. The earliest of the so-called execrations texts, written to magically cause destruction or harm to their enemies, date to the 6th Dynasty. The Egyptians mentioned *Nehesy* in such texts from the beginning (Shaw and Hirt, 2012).

More information about Nubia is found in the autobiography of Weni the Elder, who served under the consecutive kings Teti, Pepy I, and Merenra of the 6th Dynasty. Weni first mentioned *Nehesy* during a military campaign in present-day Palestine during the reign of Pepy I. He had recruited the *Nehesy* as mercenaries, and they came from Irtjet, Medja, Yam, Wawat, and Kaau (Strudwick 2005:354). These places were toponyms in Nubia (see below). Unfortunately, the text gives no information on how Weni recruited the *Nehesy* mercenaries. In Bronze Age Europe, warriors appear to have travelled to distant chiefs in order to earn fame and foreign prestige goods (Earle and Kristiansen 2010:239). This was possibly also the case for the *Nehesy* mentioned in Weni's autobiography. Copper mirrors and gold beads found in contemporary cemeteries in Nubia may thus have been military rewards to mercenaries rather than trade objects (Williams 1999:437). An important effect of the participation in large-scale military actions for

Egypt was that the Nehesy mercenaries acquired fighting experience in state-run warfare as well as knowledge about Egyptian culture and society.

In the autobiography's last reference to Nubia, Merenra sent Weni to Wawat to procure acacia wood for shipbuilding. The rulers from Irtjet, Wawat, Yam, and Medja were responsible for cutting the timber, and Weni used the boats to transport granite blocks for the king's pyramid (Strudwick 2005:356–57).

Weni's journey to the south under Merenra is the last recorded royal expedition for resource extraction during the Old Kingdom. Thereafter, the Egyptians ventured on trading missions to Nubia. Pepy I, Merenra, and Pepy II had their names and titles carved on the rocks of the First Cataract in order to mark the southern border of Egypt and probably also to intimidate the C-Group people so that safe passage for trading expeditions to Upper Nubia could be established.

Egyptian Caravans

The resumption of long-distance trade, which had thrived in A-Group times, is first evident through numerous graffiti by caravan leaders in service of Pepy I. The graffiti were carved near Tomâs—a central position in Lower Nubia since several desert routes entered the Nile valley there.

The southernmost town in Egypt was located on Elephantine Island in the First Cataract. The highest officials in this town were caravan leaders on the trading ventures to the south during the reigns of Pepy I and his sons Merenra and Pepy II. The final destination for these expeditions was Yam. The location of Yam is disputed (Cooper 2012:1). Researchers have placed Yam along the Nile in Upper Nubia (e.g., Edwards 2004:78), in Central Sudan (e.g., O'Connor 1986), and deep into the Western Desert (e.g., Goedicke 1981:18). These suggestions have been based on estimations of the time taken to travel there according to the written sources, the trade goods obtained from Yam and textual comparisons. A recent find of an inscription mentioning Yam at Jebel Uweinat in the Western Desert has given some credibility to the suggestion that it was located to the west of the Nile (Cooper 2012:21; Williams 2013a:3). However, the dating of that inscription to the beginning of the 11th Dynasty, some three hundred years after the majority of references to Yam, weakens the suggestion. So I still find the evidence for associating Yam with Kerma in Upper Nubia more probable, as it is from that place we have material traces for a village-based society in contact with Egypt during the 6th Dynasty. At least twenty-five alabaster jars inscribed with the cartouches of Pepy I have been found at Kerma. These stone vessels and their contents were probably gifts sent to the chieftain of Yam in order to establish good relations between the sovereigns and thus facilitate the flow of trade (Morkot 2000:62; Hafsaas-Tsakos 2009:60). It is also from this time that the first Egyptian imports appear in C-Group graves (Hafsaas-Tsakos 2010:390), and sherds from C-Group pots found at Kerma sites in Upper Nubia suggest contact between Upper and Lower Nubia as well (Honegger 2010:9).

The burial places for the elite of Elephantine were in the sandstone cliffs of Qubbat el-Hawa on the west bank opposite the town. Inscriptions in these tombs provide information both on the political developments in Nubia and on the relationships between Nubians and Egyptians. The caravan leader Harkhuf made a detailed description of four trading expeditions to Yam within the time span of a decade—three during the reign of Merenra and the last when Pepy II was still a child.

On the first journey, Harkhuf travelled together with his father, Iri, in order to learn the itinerary and to be introduced to the trading partners in the south. The name Iri is actually recorded in the aforementioned graffiti at Tomâs (Goedicke 1981:2). For the second mission, Harkhuf followed the Nile on his way south and passed through the territory of the ruler of Satju and Irtjet, which suggests that a single C-Group chieftain ruled these two territories. On his third mission, Harkhuf took the route via the oases in the Western Desert. It is probable that a unification of the pastoral groups in Lower Nubia convinced Harkhuf to travel through the desert rather than along the Nile. Harkhuf returned along the river “with three hundred donkeys loaded with incense, ebony, ‘heknu’ oil, aromatics, panther skins, elephant tusks, and all sorts of wonderful products,” as well as a troop of soldiers from Yam (Strudwick 2005:331). The caravan encountered the ruler of the united lands of Irtjet, Satju, and Wawat, and Harkhuf narrates that the ruler offered him oxen and goats when he saw the strength of the troop from Yam as well as Harkhuf’s own expedition (Strudwick 2005:331). Furthermore, the ruler personally guided the caravan over the heights of Irtjet, probably the Korosko Hills, so that the long way around the bend of the river could be avoided (Goedicke 1981:16–17). Harkhuf conducted the fourth expedition on behalf of Pepy II, and he brought back a dancing pygmy who delighted the young king (Strudwick 2005:332–33).

POLITICAL UNIFICATION IN LOWER NUBIA

As we have seen, Egyptian written sources from the early 6th Dynasty refer to rulers of different territories in the south, including Wawat, Irtjet, and Satju. A reconstruction of the locations of these territories is feasible from the information given in the written sources. Wawat seems to have bordered on Egypt and stretched as far south as Korosko. Tomâs appears to have been located within the territory of Irtjet, since an inscription found there records that an official had been sent there to “open up” Irtjet for Pepy I (Strudwick 2005:150). Irtjet seems to have bordered on Satju in the south. The fertile region stretching from Amada to Toshka probably constituted the political entity Irtjet, while the territory of Satju stretched southwards from Toshka to the Second Cataract (Hafsaas 2006:71).

The reconstructed territories of Wawat, Irtjet, and Satju correspond to the three most fertile districts in Lower Nubia around the plains of Dakka, Aniba, and Faras. The three largest C-Group cemeteries were located on these plains. The three chieftains of the written sources probably controlled separate territories and different segments of the

C-Group population. According to the earliest recordings of these toponyms, these political units existed before 2300 BCE. The large cemeteries at Dakka, Aniba, and Faras were also among the earliest C-Group sites, and some of the graves were contemporary with the 6th Dynasty. Unequal access to objects imported from Egypt indicates incipient social stratification in the early graves of these cemeteries. The available sources suggest Dakka, Aniba, and Faras as the seats for the chieftains of the territories Wawat, Irtjet, and Satju respectively.

According to Harkhuf's narration, Irtjet and Satju were united under a single ruler at the time of his second mission, and all three territories had become unified at the time of his third mission around 2280 BCE. The toponyms of Irtjet and Satju were rarely used after the reign of Pepy II, and Wawat was used for the whole region between the First and Second Cataracts.

An inscription relating to hostilities between an Egyptian caravan and the C-Group people is found in the elite tomb of Sabni and his father Mekhu from Elephantine, dating to the latter part of the reign of Pepy II. It records that the caravan-leader Mekhu died in Wawat. Sabni travelled to fetch his dead father with an army and "100 donkeys loaded with...all requirements for making gifts as requested by the Nehesy" (Strudwick 2005:336). Sabni's narration suggests that his father was killed and that he paid a ransom for retrieving the corpse. Several written sources imply that the Egyptian caravans needed both armed guards and to give gifts to the local authorities in order to travel safely, as the C-Group people would attack weakly protected caravans and kill caravan-leaders unwilling to pay tribute.

A description of a military expedition to the south can be found in the tomb of Pepynakht I, also a noble of Elephantine. On the orders of King Pepy II, Pepynakht I went to destroy Wawat and Irtjet, and he killed many people and brought back numerous prisoners. Pepynakht I was sent on a second mission in order to subdue the foreign lands and to force the Nehesy chieftains to pay tax in form of livestock to the Egyptian king (Strudwick 2005:334–35).

The autobiographies of Sabni and Pepynakht I suggest a more violent relationship between the C-Group people and the Egyptians during the latter part of the reign of Pepy II. This was probably related to the threat that the centralization of power among the C-Group people posed and the obstructions that they put on the passage through their territory (Hafsaas 2006:139).

CLIMATE CHANGE AND POLITICAL UPHEAVALS

Environmental studies show that the Nile had a reduced flow from ca. 2200 BCE resulting in food shortages in both Egypt and Lower Nubia (Hassan 1997). This coincided with a collapse of centralized government in Egypt, whereby nomarchs seized power in the south. The northern part of Egypt was ruled by a succession of kings originating

from Herakleopolis (Seidlmayer 2000:118). In southern Egypt, some nomarchs took control over more than one nome, and there was frequently armed conflict between neighboring regions (Morkot 2000:50). Every nomarch seems to have controlled their own armies, and this provided opportunities for mercenaries. Written and archaeological sources demonstrate that Nehesy were employed as soldiers in Upper Egypt. Some Nehesy eventually settled in Egypt, while others returned to Nubia after service.

Mercenaries in Egypt

The lower floods decreased the flood plain available as pasture in Lower Nubia, and this must have affected the size of the herds. Lack of grassland forced some C-Group herders to search for pasture on the wider flood plains in Egypt, but the refugees were not welcomed. The nomarch Tjemerery of the 8th Nome recorded that he was “repelling foreigners who came down from the southern mountain-lands,” which implies that they arrived via the oasis route connecting the Abydos bend with Lower Nubia (Moreno García 2010:26). Upper Egypt thus seems to have become a place of both military opportunity and climate refuge for the C-Group people (Darnell 2004:33).

Anthropological research on Darfur in Sudan shows that young men leave their villages in order to compensate for the lack of food at times of famine. During crises, young men have few possibilities of becoming head of a household and thus “a man” in socio-cultural terms. Among young men without a future, weapons are an easy and immediate satisfaction in the quest for survival, respect, and self-identity. The high number of marginalized men on all sides of the Darfur conflict contributed to its escalation, and the Janjaweed militia seems to have had diverse ethnic backgrounds (Willemse 2007:485–87). This situation seems comparable to the Nehesy mercenaries in Egypt.

Nehesy men appear to have migrated northwards to Egypt where the internal wars created a demand for foreign mercenaries. The most important weapon among the C-Group people appears to have been the bow and arrows. The C-Group men must have been attractive as mercenaries because they were experienced in archery from their daily life as herders and hunters, as depicted in their art (see Fig. 9.2 above left).

The first indication of Nehesy mercenaries being employed in internal conflicts in Egypt is probably from the tomb of Setka, nomarch of the 1st Nome. The mercenaries occur in a painted scene, which shows five black-skinned archers engaged in battle (Bestock 2017:230). It is unknown whom they attacked as the plaster in front of the scene has disappeared, but it may have been a combat against Ankhtifi—the nomarch of the two neighboring nomes to the north. Since Elephantine was on the southern border of Egypt, it is natural that this was the first place Nehesy men found a warlord to serve.

At Kubbaniya, ca. 13 km north of Elephantine, three groups of graves have been found belonging to three different ethnic groups: C-Group people, Egyptianized Pan-Grave people, and Egyptians (Cohen 1993). The archaeological evidence from Kubbaniya attests to the presence of C-Group people in Egypt contemporary with the references to Nehesy mercenaries in Egyptian iconographic and written sources. Both C-Group and Pan-Grave cemeteries were also established at Hierakonpolis in the 3rd Nome

(Friedman 2001). The finds from Kubbaniya and Hierakonpolis demonstrate that some immigrants from Nubia gradually changed their cultural repertoire. In time, they probably assimilated into the mainstream of the Egyptian society (Hafsaas 2006:140).

Moalla was the hometown of the nomarch Ankhtifi, who ruled the 2nd and 3rd nomes. A troop of forty-six archers, two depicted as Nehesy with black skin and the rest as Egyptians, was included in the painted decoration of Ankhtifi's tomb (Vandier 1950:98–99). In another painting, a Nehesy archer is shown with an arrow piercing his stomach (Vandier 1950:128). Ankhtifi was fighting against the neighboring nomarchs to the south and the north. He probably conquered the 1st Nome, but has no known successors as ruler of the three southernmost nomes (Seidlmayer 2000:128). It seems that the contemporary ruler of the 4th Nome and founder of the 11th Dynasty, Intef I, seized the three southernmost nomes upon Ankhtifi's death. In his autobiography, Ankhtifi boasted that he had not only fed his own people, but also sent barley upstream to the starving people in Wawat (Vandier 1950:220). This indicates that Wawat was the origin of the Nehesy archers in his troop. Four Nehesy archers herding cattle and goats were also depicted in Ankhtifi's tomb (Vandier 1950, pl. 26). This suggests that some Nehesy continued their pastoral life in Egypt—possibly as herdsmen in service of Egyptians.

Further evidence for Nehesy mercenaries comes from Gebelein—a village on the border between the 3rd and 4th nomes. The grave stela of Kedes mentions Nehesy soldiers, and five other stelae confirm the presence of Nehesy mercenaries since the deceased depicted themselves as archers and referred to themselves with the epithet “Nehesy” (Fischer 1961). These Nehesy followed Egyptian burial traditions, and this is a further testimony of the processes of Egyptianization among Nehesy in Egypt. The Nehesy mercenaries of Gebelein were probably employed by the regional rulers of the early 11th Dynasty based at Thebes in the 4th Nome. With the incorporation of the territory of Ankhtifi, Intef I came to rule the five southernmost nomes, and he styled himself as king of the south (Seidlmayer 2000:133–35).

In the tomb of another Intef, the overseer of troops under Mentuhotep II, one of the paintings depicts a siege. Red-brown Egyptians allied with dark-brown Nehesy archers constitute an integrated force attacking a fortress defended by orange-brown Asiatics (Bestock 2017:239).

A model of forty archers from the 11th Dynasty tomb of the nomarch Mesehti of the 13th Nome at Asyut shows Nehesy mercenaries as disciplined soldiers marching in ranks. Their loincloths seem to be identical to the remains of loincloths embroidered with beads in lozenge-patterns that have been found in C-Group graves (Hafsaas 2006:95). One of the archers in the model also wears a white bangle on his upper arm, which was characteristic for C-Group men (see above).

Nehesy mercenaries in the tomb paintings at Beni Hasan in the 16th Nome suggests that the Egyptians recruited Nehesy mercenaries well into the 12th Dynasty (see Bestock 2017:241–51).

The Nehesy mercenaries in Egypt may have derived from several ethnic groups in the south, as the present-day Janjaweed in Sudan (see above). The mercenaries thus

conformed to a cross-cultural warrior identity, and C-Group men were certainly part of this warrior class in Egypt.

Trade and Prosperity

The written records are silent on trade relations between Egypt and Nubia after centralized government collapsed in Egypt, but the archaeological record demonstrates that exchanges of goods increased during the I/b-phase (Hafsaas-Tsakos 2010:391–92, figs. 1–5). With some of the population migrating, the C-Group people who remained in Lower Nubia seem to have flourished. Egyptian imports reached a peak in the graves of the C-Group people. Foodstuffs were an important part of the imports from this time onwards, as there is a marked increase in Egyptian pottery jars deposited in the C-Group cemeteries (Hafsaas-Tsakos 2010:392), and some of them still contained grains that the C-Group people may have acquired to prevent starvation, as recorded by Ankhtifi. Egyptian jewelry was also deposited in some C-Group graves. C-Group mercenaries returning from Egypt possibly brought with them some very fine gold and silver bead necklaces given as rewards for their military services and which ultimately ended up in graves in Lower Nubia (Williams 1999:437). The C-Group people also seem to have become inspired by the institution of kingship in Egypt.

The Obscure Kings of Lower Nubia

Mentuhotep II of the 11th Dynasty reunited Egypt around 2055 BCE. There are indications that his wife Kemsit was Nehesy in origin. The importance of Nehesy mercenaries in Upper Egypt at this time may have led to marriage alliances with ascending ruling families in the south (Morkot 2000:51–53). It was probably at this time of close cooperation that ritual dances of the C-Group women were incorporated into Egyptian rites performed for the cow goddess Hathor, as argued by Solange Ashby (2018).

An inscription tentatively dated to Mentuhotep II's reign describes an Egyptian campaign to Wawat and an oasis—probably Kurkur (Darnell 2004:24, 29). Tjehemau, a Nehesy mercenary recruited by Mentuhotep II and still in service under Amenemhat I, left another inscription in a *wadi* connecting Lower Nubia with Kurkur (Darnell 2004, fig. 1). The text mentions both travels through the Western Desert and the recruitment of Nehesy warriors (Darnell 2004). This suggests that it was difficult to access Lower Nubia along the river, and the reason was probably increased centralization among the C-Group people.

Several rock inscriptions with the names of three otherwise unattested kings have been found in Lower Nubia (see Williams 2013b for references). The names and titles of Kakara In(tef) were recorded in fifteen inscriptions at different locations throughout Lower Nubia. Rock inscriptions of Iy-ib-khent-ra have been found at two locations in northern Lower Nubia, and his Horus name, Gereg-tawyef, had been added to one of

Kakara's inscriptions, which indicates that Iy-ib-khent-ra was Kakara's successor. Wadjkara Segersenti also left two inscriptions in the far north of Lower Nubia (Morkot 2000:54–55).

The similarities in the structure and meaning of the names of the Egyptian king Mentuhotep III of the late 11th Dynasty and Kakara In(tef) is too close to be irrelevant (Williams 2013b:6). It is more likely that a C-Group chief aspiring to rule as an Egyptian king copied the name of Mentuhotep III than the other way around. Kakara In(tef) probably ruled at some point after Mentuhotep III ascended the throne around 2004 BCE and before the 12th Dynasty king Amenemhat I initiated the conquest of Wawat in his 29th regnal year around 1956 BCE. There are indications that also Amenemhat I had genealogical links to Nubia (Morkot 2000:53), and it is possible that the C-Group kings initially ruled with his consent (Morkot 2000:55).

OCCUPIED BY EGYPT

Several inscriptions attributed to the first kings of the 12th Dynasty describe a military conquest of Lower Nubia. This was probably a war between the expanding Egyptian state and the C-Group people, who had been organized in a single chiefdom called Wawat since 2280 BCE and who had rulers copying the royal titulary of Egypt since 2000 BCE. There was a repeating process on the southern frontier of Egypt, whereby local big men rose to the position of paramount chieftains due to influence of political institutions from Egypt, imported luxury goods, and strategic positions in trading networks. The regions with leaders cooperating with Egypt then appear to have been incorporated into the Egyptian state, as the Egyptians waged war on them when their powers became too strong (Hafsaas-Tsakos 2015:397). The Egyptian objectives for conquering Lower Nubia were both to curb the development of increasing centralization of the political power in the hands of the C-Group chieftain and to re-establish control over the trade in African exotics, the extraction of mineral resources, and the acquisition of slaves and mercenaries (Hafsaas-Tsakos 2010:393). The C-Group people fought a war of resistance, and it took several military expeditions before the Egyptians could establish their new southern border at Buhen below the Second Cataract around 1938 BCE. Wawat was thereafter a province of Egypt (Hafsaas 2006:116).

The Egyptians constructed a series of monumental fortresses in the conquered land (Bestock, this volume). The functions of the fortresses seem to have been to hold the territory through a military presence, to administer the riverine traffic, to monitor the local populations, as well as to patrol and explore the deserts. The major fortresses in Lower Nubia were placed in the most populous regions, which suggests that control and surveillance of the indigenous population were important tasks for the soldiers stationed in the fortresses (Hafsaas 2006:117–21).

The Egyptians were not competing with the C-Group people for the fertile land in Lower Nubia, as they received their food rations from Egypt. The continued existence of

the C-Group people after the Egyptian conquest was probably due to a strategy of cooperation with the Egyptians rather than fighting or fleeing. The latter option was rather impossible as there was no empty land in which they could seek refuge, while the option of continued resistance was too costly both in terms of people killed and in loss of means for food production (Hafsaas-Tsakos 2015:400). The occupiers took control of both the lucrative trade in raw materials from Upper Nubia and the mineral resources in the hinterlands of Lower Nubia, while the C-Group people continued their pastoral lifestyle without competition for pastureland. The reconciliation stimulated and facilitated exchange between the Egyptians and the C-Group people. Nevertheless, the C-Group people were to some degree forced to work for the Egyptians—both in fortress construction and in mining and quarrying (Harrell and Mittelstaedt 2015:37–38); and the Egyptian presence in Lower Nubia reduced the C-Group people to a subject population who was denied a share in the profits from both trade and resource extraction (Hafsaas 2006:142). There appear to have been little interest in Egyptian beliefs and practices among the C-Group people during this period of close co-existence. The reason is probably that it was important to communicate ethnic identity as ethnicity structured the rules for both intergroup contact and exchange (Hafsaas-Tsakos 2010:392).

Written testimonies record that Sensusret III annexed the Second Cataract region and the Batn el-Hajar between 1862 and 1854 BCE, and he established the new southern border of Egypt at Semna—the narrowest gorge of the Nile. The Egyptians fortified the frontier zone heavily in order to defend their economic interests in the south from interferences from Kush—an emerging kingdom centered on Kerma in Upper Nubia (Bonnet, this volume).

BETWEEN EGYPT AND KUSH

The Egyptians retreated from their fortified border in Batn el-Hajar to their traditional border in the First Cataract around 1725 BCE, after centralized authority withered towards the end of the 13th Dynasty. This left Lower Nubia again in the hands of the C-Group people, while the Pan-Grave people—probably coming from the Eastern Desert—also appear to have inhabited the region from this time onwards (Hafsaas 2006:143). The ruler of Kush seized control of the Egyptian fortresses and the gold mines in the Second Cataract region (Hafsaas-Tsakos 2010:393). Egyptians still garrisoned some of these fortresses, but they appear to have served the ruler of Kush (Edwards 2004:97). Kush flourished due to the transfer of control over the trade from the Egyptians to the Kerma people (Hafsaas-Tsakos 2013:82). Initially, the relations between the C-Group people and the kingdom of Kush seem to have been peaceful and characterized by cooperation. However, the Kushites were not only peaceful traders. Warriors must have played an important role in the aggressive policy of the rulers of Kush (Hafsaas-Tsakos 2013). A tomb inscription from Elkab in Upper Egypt narrates how war parties from Kush raided for booty in the region during the 17th Dynasty

(Davies 2003:52). The Egyptian rulers of Thebes in the 4th Nome probably went to counterattacks. The C-Group people were suddenly situated between two opponents fighting for the control of territory and trade—the Theban king and the Kushite king (Hafsaas-Tsakos 2010:394). The C-Group people's obvious concern for security appear in the fortifications of the hilltop settlement at Wadi es-Sebua (Sauneron 1965). The defensive walls with loopholes were inspired by the Egyptian fortresses, and the fortifications probably provided shelter from attacks. The C-Group people also seem to have found protection in abandoned Egyptian fortresses in Lower Nubia. Especially the relationship with Kush seems to have deteriorated, as the Kushites probably forced the C-Group people to provide them with supplies and recruits (Hafsaas-Tsakos 2010:394). Some scattered Kerma graves dating to this period have been found in C-Group cemeteries, and this is probably the material manifestations of Kushite excursions to the north (Hafsaas 2006:136).

The C-Group people's solution to the threat from the kingdom of Kush seems to have been an alliance with the 17th Dynasty king Kamose, to whom the C-Group chieftains swore allegiance (Hafsaas 2006:145). The alliance with the C-Group people made it possible for Kamose and his army to expel the Kerma people from Buhen—the northernmost fortress in the Second Cataract. This was the first step in the process whereby the ruling family of Thebes took control over Lower Nubia, reunited Egypt, and conquered Upper Nubia.

Egyptian bronze daggers suddenly appear in graves of C-Group men during the II/b-phase, and this suggests a stronger focus on warfare among the C-Group people (Hafsaas 2006:109–10). The Egyptians had not exported this specialized weapon to the C-Group people during the occupation. Furthermore, one of these bronze daggers was similar to an extraordinary dagger found in the tomb of Queen Ahhotep of the 17th Dynasty. This is thus a material manifestation of the close relationship between the C-Group people and the 17th Dynasty at this time (Hafsaas 2006:145–46).

ACCULTURATION

Mortuary evidence shows that the C-Group people acculturated after Lower Nubia became part of Egypt again (Säve-Söderbergh 1989:10). The large cemetery N at Aniba and many of the other well-established C-Group burial grounds were abandoned after the II/b-phase, and the black incised bowl, which was the hallmark of the C-Group material culture, disappeared from the pottery repertoire (Hafsaas 2006:47). Especially the C-Group elites seem to have become Egyptianized. Following the annexation, local chieftains at Aniba held high offices in Lower Nubia under the Egyptian viceroy (King's Son of Kush), and they were probably in charge of their former chiefdom (Edwards 2004:108). The acculturation of the majority of the population seems to have been limited to the material culture, and they resisted Egyptian ideas, such as the belief in the afterlife. Even though

the material culture of the C-Group people disappeared from the archaeological record after 1550 BCE, their descendants continued to live in Lower Nubia as Egyptian subjects.

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