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“Nubian” archers in Avaris: A study of culture historical reasoning in archaeology of Egypt

Abstract: The archaeology of Egypt is in world archaeological circles widely regarded as non-theoretical in a negative sense. The consequence of such a state of the discipline are often uncritical uses of concepts and models which were under heavy critique in archaeology since the 1960s. This paper examines the culture-historical reasoning in archaeology of Egypt by analysing the arguments provided for the presence of “Nubian” archers in Avaris (Tell el-Dab^a). Their presence in Tell el-Dab^a is often argued with the presence of Nubian pottery, arrowheads and skeletal remains. This paper analyses the way these finds of different date and contexts, are brought together in a coherent archaeological narrative. It is argued that the finds were identified as Nubian and mutually related because of the cultural-historical reasoning taken as an unquestionable interpretative model, a hidden theory.

Keywords: archaeology of Egypt, culture-historical archaeology, archaeological culture, race, “Nubian” archers, Avaris (Tell el Dab^a)

Introduction

The culture-historical or “traditional” archaeology is usually described as one of the early ways of archaeological reasoning. However, it should not be understood as a phase of the discipline as it is still widely established even after the paradigm shifts in the 1960s (“new” or processual archaeology) and the 1980s (“interpretative” or postprocessual archaeology). These paradigm shifts certainly did not occur in all archaeological communities, neither in the same time or way, nor in the same context. Some archaeological communities were, and some

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are still largely not aware of them. Nevertheless, the state of different archaeologies has to be studied contextually (Sommer and Gramsch 2011, 16–17). Archaeology of Egypt mostly stayed outside of these discussions, and Egyptology, as a covering field, only recently started to question its own theoretical settings (Meltzer 2013, 2, Wendrich 2010, 1). Since the establishment of Egyptology, archaeology plays a minor role in approaches to the Egyptian past which are largely text and image oriented (Andrén 1998, 41–43, Forstner-Müller and Müller 2011). This is why paradigm shifts had little impact on Egyptology, as their entry point, archaeology of Egypt, was already considered to be of secondary importance (Wendrich 2010, 1). Therefore some analytical concepts are still used uncritically.

The aim of this paper is to assess the cultural-historical reasoning in archaeology of Egypt by examining the arguments provided for the presence of “Nubian” archers in Avaris, the capital of the Hyksos kingdom during the Second Intermediate Period. The objects of “Nubian” provenance, coming from different contexts in Avaris (Tell el-Dab^a), are brought together in a coherent narrative because of the culture-historical reasoning and despite the fact that they come from different contexts. Therefore, material culture and human body remains were never divided from theory or an explanatory model, but always already set and observed through an analytical method taken to be so well known, established and correct that it does not require explicit referencing (*cf.* Johnson 2010, 6, Stockwoski 2008, Wendrich 2010, 2). This is what Ulrike Sommer and Alexander Gramsch termed *hidden theory* which shows itself through only in interpretations (2011, 25).

Exactly this is the danger of culture-historical reasoning; the reluctance to admit that its basic analytical methods are very much historically contested, problematic and subjected to criticism. More often than not historiographical documents are taken as proofs in this process. Thus, archaeology of Egypt sometimes turned out to be nothing more than the handmaiden of historiography of Egypt (Wendrich 2010, 1). This issue is also addressed in this paper as the supposed “Nubian” archers were related to specific Egyptian texts.

However, before the discussion on the presence of “Nubian” archers in Avaris, it is crucial to show how the ideas of race and archaeological culture merged in archaeology of Egypt and Sudan and how this fusion established itself in archaeological discourse as a *hidden theory*.

From Race to Culture

The British Museum Dictionary of Ancient Egypt contains an entry “race” usually not expected in academic publications in the second half of the 20th century, at least not without criticism:

“Examination of human remains from the Predynastic period shows a mixture of racial types, including negroid, Mediterranean and European, and by the time that Pharaonic civilization had fully emerged it was no longer meaningful to look for a particular Egyptian racial type, since they were clearly already, to some extent at least, a mixed population... Clearly, despite the highly developed iconography of foreigners, it was nevertheless possible for many different racial types to consider themselves Egyptian” (Shaw and Nicholson 1995, 239–240).

The problem with the entry “race” is that even though the authors allow that individuals of different “race” could have identified themselves as Egyptian they accept “race” as a legit concept. It comes down to a view that everyone could have identified as Egyptian, but at the end of the day it is nevertheless clear who is who (a “negro”, a person from Mediterranean or a European).

Such concept of “race” was formed in the second half of the 19th and the first half of the 20th century. Namely, the long genealogy of racial ideas developing since the Enlightenment era culminated in the second half of the 19th century when biological differences among people were defined as clear, definite, primordial and unchangeable (Díaz-Andreu 2007, 347, Jones 1997, 41). These, often non-precise and ambiguously defined, physical types understood as “races” were explanation for some being “more developed” (Gosden 2006, 2). Colonial discourse at the same time constructed the colonized as degenerate racial types in order to justify conquest (Bhabha 1994, 70).

Archaeologies of Egypt and Sudan were also developing in colonial contexts (*cf.* Wengrow 2003, 121–123) with modern racism and colonialism mutually creating and sustaining each other (*cf.* Gosden 2004, 137, Jones 1997, 44). Early archaeologists in Egypt and Sudan understood race as directly connected to culture and that some races and their cultures are inferior. William Mathew Flinders Petrie, Grafton Elliot Smith, Douglas E. Derry and James Henry Breasted argued that the civilization was brought to Egypt by a superior dynastic race from the east, or more precisely Mesopotamia, which encountered an inferior predynastic race in the Nile Valley. The superior race supposedly had larger skeletal structure and cranial capacity and was without “negroid” elements. They were dominant, although smaller in numbers, but more intelligent, and it is them who brought the knowledge of building in stone, of sculpture and relief, and writing to the Nile Valley. The basic method used for such arguments was craniometry (Ambridge 2013, 22–25, Gosden 1999, 74, Champion 2003, 130–131, Derry 1956, 81–85, Wendrich 2010, 2). James Henry Breasted even went so far to argue that, although dark skinned, people in north Africa still physically belonged to what he termed the “great white race” (Ambridge 2013, 22–25).

Georg Andrew Reisner (1867–1942) one of the pioneers of Nubian archaeology, established methods which cleared out entire cemeteries in Lower Nubia (10,000 graves in eight field seasons). He retained the skulls for craniometrical

measurements and left the rest of the skeleton at the site after making general observations including age, sex and long bone measurements (Baker 1997, 106). According to Reisner the earliest populations of Egypt and Sudan were “racially” and “culturally” identical (Reisner 1910, 319). He argued that there is a lag in development south of the first cataract after the first dynasty and a “retardation” in culture in Lower Nubia in comparison to the Old Kingdom in Egypt. This he explained with an increased change in the racial character and more marked “negroid” element (Reisner 1910, 335, Reisner 1923, 5–6). He also wrote that the population of Lower Nubia was the same in numbers and culture in Middle Kingdom and in his days, having then as in his time Egyptian officials to bully them (Reisner 1923, 7). The fixity of the colonial discourse (Bhabha 1994, 66) is especially evident in Reisner’s comparison of the imported objects in Lower Nubia in the past with the imported objects in Lower Nubia in his time. Namely, he argued that they were incapable of producing these objects as they were still on late Neolithic level. Because they supposedly could not produce or use these products, then and in his time, allowed him to understand the Lower Nubians of his time as in their “former state” (Reisner 1923, 7).

Reisner saw Lower Nubia in all periods as a non-progressive land and its “race” as not showing any power of initiative, so when unaffected by Egypt, it shows little advance even in his days (Reisner 1910, 332). Finally that the racial ideas played, an explicitly stated, political role and were used as a justification for domination is clear in a parallel he draw between British and Pharaonic domination of Sudan in stating that they administrated the same “races” (*cf.* Wengrow 2003, 121–122). Indeed, Breasted similarly wrote that ancient Egyptian canals connecting the Red sea to the Nile were as crucial for Egyptian commercial success as the Panama Canal for Americans or the Suez Canal for the English (Ambridge 2013, 28). This served to prove that the domination of superior “races” was just as natural then as in their times.

From culture to people

Parallel to the scientific consolidation of races, a succeeding paradigm to evolutionism in archaeology was also being formed, namely the culture-historical archaeology. The material remains of the past were not only attributed to races or peoples which were then hierarchically ordered according to their progress, but a new systematic framework for classification of material remains into cultures was defined (Jones 1997, 42–43; 2000, 446).

The succeeding paradigm reconfigured the fusion race-archaeological culture into archaeological culture-people, however, as it was shown, the old evolutionist hierarchy of low and high cultures remained in archaeology of Egypt and

Nubia. Roots of the new framework can be found in anthropogeographical school of *Kulturkreise* (culture circles) which argued that diffusion created relatively homogenous, organically integrated cultural complexes. Culture circles were used as an analytical concept in pursue of historical sequences based on contemporary geographical distribution of culture complexes. This method was known as *kulturhistorische Methode* (culture-historical method) and characterized the “Vienna School” of 1900s (Jones 1997, 46, Rebay-Salisbury 2011, 42–44).

Two authors are usually referred to as exponents of culture-historical archaeology in the making, Gustaf Kossina and Vere Gordon Childe. Kossina, a German linguist and prehistorian in his book *Die Herkunft der Germanen* (1920) used his “settlement archaeology” method (*Siedlungsarchäologie Methode*) to show the descent of a “Nordic-Aryan-German” race from “Indo-Germans” and to demonstrate the spread of influences from this core area. He used archaeological material to argue that parts of Poland had been German since the Iron Age. This method and its political potential was welcomed by the *Deutsches Ahnenerbe* (German Forefather’s Heritage) in the search for Germanic material traces in occupied countries (Hodder 1987, 1–2, Sommer and Gramsch 2011, 13). Childe, an Australian archaeologist, distanced himself from racial connotations of archaeological cultures (Lucy 2005, 88). Instead, he defined archaeological culture as a set of vessels, tools, ornaments, graves and houses regularly appearing together and interpreted it as a material expression of “a people” (Childe 1929, V–VI). He viewed prehistoric Europe as a mosaic of different cultures (Gosden 1999, 52–53) and similar mosaics still continue to be printed out as maps of the prehistoric world.

The racial division of Egyptian and Nubian population done by Petrie, Smith, Derry, Reisner, Breasted and others went parallel to the establishment of culture-historical archaeology and its classification methods. Thus, Reisner’s classification of Lower Nubian material into different archaeological groups (A-group, B-group, C-group and X-group) was done according to the patterns of assemblage that he found in the cemeteries (Reisner 1910, 314). It is important to note that Reisner, like Kossina, contrary to Childe, never separated racial concept from his archaeological groups.

The culture-historical paradigm understands culture normatively, meaning that cultural practices tend to conform to prescribed norms of behaviour. This is governed by an assumption that cultures are made up of a set of shared ideas maintained by regular intergroup interaction and transmitted to incoming generations through socialization (Jones 1997, 24; 2000, 446). Truth be said not many culture-historical archaeologists have such a complex understanding of social behaviour and the mentioned norms usually turn out to be pottery decoration musters, burial forms, stone working techniques, etc. which are taken to be *differentia specifica* of an archaeological culture. Material remains are initially

identified and placed in a certain archaeological culture, after which the spread of this culture and its relations with other cultures are discussed (*cf.* Johnson 2010, 18–19).

What is usually missing in culture-historical archaeology is the explicit statement on why are certain correlations made in order to define an archaeological culture and not others. The non-formal method of grouping of certain traits (e.g. pottery decoration) also questions the very objectivity of such grouping (Porčić 2013, 638). One really has to stress that archaeological cultures were not simply there to be found by archaeologists. They were found because they were looked for, and they were looked for by using a particular historically contingent classification method (Jones 2000, 447, Shennan 1989, 6, *cf.* Thomas 2004, 113). This method is in fact embedded in a distinctively modernist assumptions about social organization, the rise of the nation states, the idea of boundedness, homogeneity, continuity, shared language, customs, religion etc. Thus the modern nation's state palimpsest of ethnic identity, political borders and cultural expression was imposed on the past (Thomas 2004, 112). Based however on the results of ethnoarchaeological research, there is neither a formal nor empirical base on which established patterns like archaeological cultures can be equated with social, language, politic or biological group, even if they result from a formal method for the search of patterns in the archaeological record (Porčić 2013, 639). Simply put some typological groupings correlate with linguistic or ethnic groups but others do not (Lucy 2005, 91–92).

The following chapter will analyse the culture-historical reasoning behind the argument for the presence of “Nubian” archers in Tell el-Dab^a. This narrative will be presented as encountered in published works, and then deconstructed through re-contextualisation of the finds and through explicating the culture-historical background which brought these finds together.

Pots, arrowheads and “negroid” bodies in Avaris

Avaris, the capital of the Hyksos kingdom of the Second Intermediate Period (c. 1650–1550 B.C.) has long been identified with the archaeological site of Tell el-Dab^a in the eastern Delta in Egypt. The archaeological research of the site is conducted since the 1960s by the Cairo branch of the Austrian archaeological institute. Of relevance for this paper is the area ^oEzbet Helmi on the banks of the former Pelusiac branch of the Nile. During the Second Intermediate Period a citadel with a massive enclosure wall with buttresses, garden, a monumental building on a low level platform, and a water supply system existed in ^oEzbet Helmi, however this citadel was largely destroyed by later New Kingdom palaces (Bietak 1996, 63–64; 2007, 14–21, Bietak, Dorner and Jánosi 2001, 60–64).

The two intermediary strata, after the use of the citadel and before the construction of New Kingdom palaces, are described in various publications but their interpretation can be best summarized as follows:

“At the beginning of the Eighteenth Dynasty, most probably immediately after the fall of Avaris the citadel was occupied by Upper Egyptian troops. Numerous postholes in the eastern part of the citadel give the impression that tents had been set up here. The presence of domestic pottery of the Kerma culture as well as fine Kerma beakers, renders it likely that Nubian archers, brought by Ahmose from a Nubian campaign against the kingdom of Kush, had been stationed there. In addition, arrowheads of flint and whole bundles of bone arrow tips were found as well as numerous slingshot projectiles. Remains of huge grain silos in area H/III also appear to have been intended for the temporary storage of provisions. Taken together, the evidence suggests that the former citadel of the Hyksos was used as a stronghold in the time of the early Eighteenth dynasty, most probably intended for the concentration of troops needed for Ahmose’s campaigns in southern Palestine” (Bietak 1997, 115–116, underlined by U. M.).

Indeed the interpretation is accepted by several scholars so far and has entered encyclopaedia and textbooks (Bard 1999, 781, Genz 2013, 96, Schneider 2010, 153). Nevertheless, a closer examination on the contrary shows that there are several objections which can be raised from the start. It is nowhere stated if these objects at all come from the same archaeological context and what is the quantity of the pottery and arrowheads referred to in building up an argumentation for “the concentration of troops”. Therefore, in order to deconstruct this interpretation it is necessary to separate the offered arguments for “Nubian” archers and examine them contextually. Only then can we understand the culture-historical reasoning behind it and why and how these arguments are brought together in a coherent narrative.

Pottery of Nubian provenance found in Tell el-Dab^a comes from areas °Ezbet Helmi (H/I-H/VI), F/II and R/III and dates from the beginning of the 15th dynasty (phase E/1, settlement context in R/III; 15th dynasty contexts from H/VI, phase D/2) to the New Kingdom (Forstner-Müller and Rose 2012, 181, Fuscaldo 2008, 110). The basic elements of the narrative of “Nubian” archers in Avaris are already present in the early publications of Nubian pottery from °Ezbet Helmi. Irmgard Hein published 19 Nubian sherds coming from areas H/I+H/IV, H/II and H/V. Out of 11 sherds from H/I+H/IV, 6 belong to the fine beakers of Classic Kerma; 3 of which come from disturbed contexts (late Second Intermediate Period-late 18th dynasty or Ramesside period) and 1 from a dark-humose destruction layer with some fragments of “Minoan” frescoes. The other sherds from H/I+H/IV come from settlement layers of early to middle 18th dynasty abutting the platform of the Second Intermediate Period citadel. One of these from the lowest level is found together with pottery of Upper Egyptian fabric not known in Tell el-Dab^a in the Second Intermediate Period. One fragment is

dated at latest to the time of Hatshepsut/Thutmose III according to other pottery from the same context. Two sherds of rough ware (one belonging to a cooking pot) come from area H/V south of the platform and are dated to the early 18th dynasty. Six sherds come from area H/II, 3 (2 of which belong to Kerma beakers and 1 to a cooking pot) from a fill of a shallow canal containing pottery of early 18th dynasty, and 1 beaker fragment comes from a pit fill with early 18th dynasty pottery, while 2 are found in late 18th dynasty wall structure (Hein 2001, 203–207). Drawing on interpretations of Kerma cooking pots at Deir el-Balas as evidence for the presence of Nubian servants and cooks (Bourriau 1991, 131), Hein suggested this can be only partly applied to Tell el-Dab^a. Instead, she refers to the burials from H/I and H/III, dated into an intermediary phase between late Second Intermediate Period and early 18th dynasty, which according to the anthropological observations belong to Nubian population and to finds of flint arrowheads from H/I also with Nubian parallels. She concludes that this is the evidence for the presence of Nubian soldiers which came with the Theban army in taking over of Avaris (Hein 2001, 209).

Perla Fuscaldo published c. 90 sherds coming from areas H/III and H/VI (Fuscaldo 2002, 167; 2004, 111; 2008, 107). Most of the sherds come from the area H/VI: the large palace (G) and its annex building (J), workshop W₂ and the workshop area, deposits of pottery, the mud filling of a pit, a rubbish deposit, deposition of mud-brick debris, all located south of the palace (Fuscaldo 2002, 167). The pottery found in the Second Intermediate Period/15th dynasty contexts consists of 1 fragment of cooking pot with incised and 1 with combed decoration from H/III and 2 black-topped red polished beaker fragments and 1 fragment of cooking pot with incised decoration found in H/VI (Fuscaldo 2004, 117–118; 2008, 110). The rest of the Nubian pottery comes from New Kingdom contexts. The first two series of Nubian pottery from New Kingdom contexts were not divided into chronological phases as Fuscaldo did in her last publication of Nubian pottery. From area H/III come 5 fragments found in broadly dated New Kingdom contexts: 1 fragment each, of a beaker, a cooking pot with impressed decoration and a black-topped ware cooking pot and 2 fragments of a cooking pot with incised decoration. From area H/VI come 44 fragments found in broadly dated New Kingdom contexts: 16 beaker fragments, 15 black topped bowl fragments, 1 blacked topped ware cooking pot fragment, 8 fragments of cooking pot with incised decoration, 1 fragment of each, a black topped cooking pot, a cooking pot with incised decoration and an undecorated cooking pot, but also 1 fragment of Egyptian imitation of a Kerma cooking pot (Fuscaldo 2002, 172–181; 2004, 113–118). The latest publication of Nubian pottery analysed by Fuscaldo divided the material chronologically into phases. Thus, from early 18th dynasty contexts in area H/III additionally comes 1 beaker fragment and in area H/VI 2 beaker fragments and 1 bowl fragment. From early to middle

18th dynasty contexts come in area H/III 1 blacked-topped bowl fragment and 2 fragments of a cooking pot with incised decoration, and in area H/VI 1 beaker fragment, 1 cooking pot fragment, 2 black-topped bowl fragments, 1 fragment of a bowl with incised decoration, 2 fragments of a cooking pot with impressed decoration (Fuscaldo 2008, 110–118).

The number of c. 90 Nubian sherds may seem statistically significant, but it has to be taken into account that the number of sherds does not stand for the number of pots. Additionally, the sherds do not come from the same contexts and can be chronologically divided, which lowers the number of potential vessels found in ‘Ezbet Helmi in each phase.

Five, already mentioned, flint arrowheads from area H/I were identified as “Nubian” on the basis of an analogy with the flint arrowheads from the New Kingdom cemetery at Soleb II in Sudan (Tillmann 1994, 108). However, the ones from Soleb, which are published with photos (Giorgini 1971, 94), come from the tomb 17 which has the reign of Thutmose III as *terminus post quem*, as 3 scarabs were found in the tomb inscribed with the prenomens of the king. This indicates that the scarabs were used either during or after his reign, dating the tomb either to his time or later into the New Kingdom (Giorgini 1971, 199). This fact alone excludes a chronological relation with the early 18th dynasty and the campaign of Ahmose. Also, closer examination of the published arrowheads from Soleb II does not show typological similarity to the supposed Nubian arrowheads from Tell el-Dab^a. They are of clearly different type (*cf.* Hikade 2001, 122–124). Bifacial arrowheads are known from Soleb II but they are, unlike Delta arrowheads, without tang (only 1 exception out of 11 known from the cemetery). Indeed, the flint arrowheads from H/I are identical to the ones from Qantir dated to New Kingdom and studied by Andreas Tillmann. He postulated that the arrowheads from Qantir could have belonged to Nubian soldiers stationed there, because Chalcedon, as raw material¹ of which the arrowheads are made, is not found in the delta (Tillmann 1992, 87–91; *cf.* Tillmann 1994, 108). These are identified by Thomas Hikade as “el-Kurru” arrowheads because of the analogy from the royal necropolis at el-Kurru (850–650 B.C). Hikade stressed that, although Tillmann’s connection of the finds from Qantir to Nubian soldiers is well based on the typological analogy and the raw material, the problem is with the lack of contemporary analogies (Hikade 2001, 123). Therefore, the idea that the arrowheads from H/I belonged to “Nubian” archers is based on the same interpretation of typologically same arrowheads from Qantir. The typological identification was thus immediately taken as a hint for the same scenario. An additional problem is that 5 flint arrowheads clearly do not stand

¹ Chalcedon is in the form of raw material present at least in Qantir (personal communication with Silvia Prell) and thus the arrowheads could have been produced locally. The presence of the raw material does not however exclude that it was imported.

for a “Nubian” contingent of an army. It was later published that the arrowheads were found in a higher stratum dated to the Thutmose period (Bietak 2010, 165). Therefore, they cannot be related to the coming of king Ahmose to Avaris even from the stratigraphic point of view,

The mentioned pottery and arrowheads, being interpreted as Nubian, needed further arguments which were provided by interpreting burials of several adult males, inside and outside of the Second Intermediate Period enclosure wall (areas H/I, H/III, and H/VI-North), as Nubian. It was argued that the skeletal remains found in some of these graves “show negroid physical features and are most likely to be identifiable as southern Nubians” (Bietak 2007, 19). Which features exactly is nowhere clearly explained nor written. The anthropological study of Karl Großschmidt and Josef Tangl, on which this racial and ethnical attribution of skeletal material is based,² is until now not published and therefore not subjected to review of scholars. Nevertheless, this information is further used in the construction of the “Nubian” archers narrative:

“Such a conclusion can be corroborated by finds of Kerma beakers and cooking pots, as well as missiles of Kerma type within the next stratum (ph. C/3=str. d) of the first half of the 18th dynasty, following ph. D 1/1, showing that Kerma people were engaged as archers in the Egyptian army.” (Bietak 2007, 19, *cf.* Fuscaldo 2010, 11)

The problem is, as it was already mentioned, that the finds (pottery and arrowheads) are not contextually related. They do not come from the same stratum and are not found in the burials (*cf.* Forstner-Müller and Rose 2012, 200). It is also not clear to what does the term “Kerma” type refers to as no analogies from Kerma were ever offered. Being that all except one burial had no grave offerings it is not clear, even by taking culture-historical reasoning into account, how were these individuals identified as soldiers. The only argument used by the authors to collaborate this interpretation are traces of trauma detected on some of the individuals (Bietak, Dorner and Jánosi 2001, 69).

It all comes down to anthropological argumentation which seem to be in line of tradition of 19th century racial anthropology fused with nascent culture-historical paradigm. Clearly this paradigm functioned as a *hidden theory*. One wonders if the Nubian pottery and arrowheads actually served to *a priori*, racially and ethnically, identify the burials even though they do not come from them. One further problem with the “Nubian” archers interpretation is that the burials are not contemporary, resulting from several consecutive changes of the function of the burial area to a sort of a workshop. Pits with burned remains of soil and charcoal cut the graves and *vice versa* (Bietak, Dorner and Jánosi 2001, 69, *cf.* Fuscaldo 2010, 11). Additionally, some of the burials clearly have chil-

² See the introduction of Manfred Bietak clarifying the stratigraphic position of the burials (Fuscaldo 2010, 11).

dren buried together with the adults (Bietak, Dorner and Jánosi 2001, 70) which does not fit well into the supposed “Nubian” archers interpretation, unless it is argued that children came together with the soldiers to Avaris.

The idea of “Nubian” archers in Avaris indeed culminates with references to the king Ahmose’s campaign in Nubia used as a historical proof for the offered interpretation (Bietak 1997, 115–116, Bietak, Dorner and Jánosi 2001, 71). The problem is that although the Biography of Ahmose, son of Ebana, general of king Ahmose mentions king Ahmose’s campaign in Nubia it does not explicitly refer to a contingent of Nubian soldiers taken to Avaris. An additional problem is that the text also states that the campaign in Nubia occurred *xr m-xt smA n Hm=f Mntyw-sTt* “after His Majesty had slain the Asiatics (Hyksos)” (Sethe 1906, 5). That archaeology was used as an illustrating element is evident in the fact that the changing date of some of the contexts in which Nubian pottery was found did not affect the narrative. Indeed, it was only broadened to other later Egyptian texts referring to military campaigns in Nubia, such as the ones of Thutmose III (Fuscaldo 2008, 110) or Amenhotep I (Bietak 2010, 165). The conundrum of this narrative culminates in the interpretation of some of the buried individuals as fallen soldiers, some as victims of decease, and some as victims of execration ritual done by Ahmose after he took Avaris because “Egyptians were particularly angry” at their enemies (Fuscaldo 2010, 29). This would strangely imply that some of the very mercenaries the king supposedly brought from Nubia died by his own hand as his enemies (?).

Conclusion

Re-contextualisation of finds usually associated with the presence of “Nubian” archers in Avaris on the contrary shows that they cannot be used as argument for such interpretation. The pottery of Nubian provenance mostly comes from insecure or disturbed contexts and is widely dated from early 18th Dynasty to Amarna period. The flint arrowheads, argued to belong to “Nubian” archers, also come from Thutmoside layers. They have parallels in material from Nubia and analogies in the arrowheads of same type from el-Kurru (850–650 B.C.) The proposed analogy with the arrowheads from the New Kingdom cemetery at Soleb turned out to be incorrect as the published flint arrowheads from Soleb are of different type. Additionally, there is no clear contextual association in Tell el-Dab^a between these arrowheads and Nubian pottery dated to the Thutmoside period. Even if the culture-historical approach is applied, the finds cannot be used to ethnically identify the burials from areas H/I, H/III, and H/VI-North because they were not found in them. The skeletal remains in these graves are identified as “negroid” and “south Nubian”, however the anthropological report

explicitly stating the method used to detect “negroid” features and south Nubian origin of these individuals was never published.

These individuals were interpreted as “Nubian” archers through circular argumentation; as their bodies were argued to be “negroid”, the finds of Nubian provenance were associated to them, and as the finds showed Nubian provenance their presence was explained with the individuals buried in these graves. An additional problem is the fact that the burials are not contemporary and that the site repeatedly changed its function from burial ground to a sort of workshop. Some of these burials also have children buried with adult individuals which we would not expect in a contingent of soldiers.

Therefore, the finds were brought together in a coherent narrative because they were from the beginning seen as material remains of a people in an ethnic sense. The pots stood for people, although they were spatially and chronologically dispersed. The culture-historical reasoning is clearly the theoretical framework behind this narrative. It was further strengthened with references to textual sources, such as the Biography of Ahmose, son of Ebana. However, as the Nubian campaign of Ahmose, based on the text at least, happened after the conquest of Avaris it cannot be used as a historical argument.

Indeed, if archaeology of Egypt intends to become a mature discipline it needs not only to show how it can fruitfully contribute to our knowledge of Egyptian past, but also to show that it is capable of critically rethinking its theoretical and methodological concepts. There are other ways of approaching material culture beyond ordering it into archaeological cultures and interpreting it in ethnic terms. For these approaches to be acknowledged a paradigm shift in archaeology of Egypt is much needed.

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„Nubijski” strelci u Avarisu:
Studija kulturno-istorijskog mišljenja u arheologiji Egipta

Arheologija Egipta je u svetskim arheološkim krugovima naširoko poznata kao ateorijska u negativnom smislu. Posledica ovakvog stanja discipline je česta upotreba koncepata i modela koji su predmet ozbiljne kritike u arheologiji još od 1960-ih. Ovaj rad preispituje kulturno-istorijsko mišljenje u arheologiji Egipta kroz analizu argumenata ponuđenih za prisustvo nubijskih strelaca u Avarisu (Tel el-Daba). Njihovo prisustvo u Avarisu često se argumentuje kroz prisustvo nubijske keramike, kremenih projektila i skeletnih ostataka. Ovaj rad analizira način na koji su nalazi različitih datovanja i konteksta dovedeni u vezu u jednom koherentnom arheološkom narativu. Pokazano je da su nalazi prepoznati kao nubijski i međusobno povezani kroz kulturno-istorijsko mišljenje koje je shvaćeno kao neupiti interpretativni model, skrivena teorija.

Ključne reči: arheologija Egipta, kulturno-istorijska arheologija, arheološka kultura, rasa, nubijski strelci, Avaris (Tell el-Daba)

Archers «nubiens» à Avaris:
Étude de la pensée historico-culturelle dans l'archéologie de l'Égypte

L'archéologie de l'Égypte est largement connue dans les cercles archéologiques du monde comme athéorique dans le sens négatif. La conséquence de cet état de la discipline est l'utilisation fréquente des concepts et des modèles qui font l'objet d'une critique sérieuse dans l'archéologie depuis les années 1960. Cette étude réexamine la pensée historico-culturelle dans l'archéologie de l'Égypte à travers l'analyse des arguments proposés pour justifier la présence des archers nubiens à Avaris (Tel el-Daba). Leur présence à Avaris est souvent argumentée par la présence de la céramique nubienne, des projectiles de silex et des restes squelettiques. Cet article analyse la manière dont les vestiges de datations et de contextes différents sont mis en relation dans un récit archéologique cohérent. Il a été démontré que les vestiges sont reconnus comme nubiens et reliés entre eux dans la pensée historico-culturelle, comprise comme un modèle interprétatif indiscutable, une théorie cachée.

Mots clés: archéologie de l'Égypte, archéologie historico-culturelle, culture archéologique, race, archers nubiens, Avaris (Tell el Dab^a)

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