



THE NUBIAN MERCENARIES OF GEBELEIN DURING THE FIRST INTERMEDIATE PERIOD IN LIGHT OF RECENT FIELD RESEARCH

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ABSTRACT

The Gebelein Archaeological Project and study of archaeological sites in its vicinity in recent years has resulted in the acquisition of new data concerning the topography of the region. This report presents a review of the Nubian presence in the region during the First Intermediate Period and proposes an explanation to their origin as well their role in the area in light of new research. It seems that Ankhtifi, ruler of the three southernmost nomes at that time, was responsible for the settlement of Nubian mercenaries in the region in order to utilize their military skills.

INTRODUCTION

Since Henry Fischer recognized the specific style of Nubian mercenaries' stelae from the Gebelein/er-Rizeiqat region dated to the First Intermediate Period in his paper *The Nubian Mercenaries of Gebelein during the First Intermediate Period*,¹ the topic has received some attention, and the stelae from the region became the subject of several studies.² However, the area is poorly documented, and the assemblage of its artifacts lack any form of context. As a result of the recently initiated Gebelein Archaeological Project, new data concerning settlement pattern in the region has been acquired. The aim of this report is to review the area for its Nubian presence in light of the recent research and to present some reflection concerning their appearance and role in the region.

GEBELEIN/ER-RIZEIQAT REGION IN THE FIRST INTERMEDIATE PERIOD

The region encompasses several archaeological sites dated to the First Intermediate Period (Fig. 1). The northernmost is er-Rizeiqat, a cemetery located c. 10 km west of Armant. Er-Rizeiqat probably was related to the towns of Sumenu and Iumiteru during the First Intermediate Period.³ Many stelae of

Nubian mercenaries have been acquired from or are attributed to the site.⁴ During the First Intermediate Period, the cemetery started to contain more opulent burials. It is even likely that an army commander named Iti of Iumiteru was buried in one of them.⁵

Ten kilometers south of er-Rizeiqat there is group of archaeological sites at Gebelein. The area presents the urban and funerary landscape of a regional center that had attained particular importance in the First Intermediate Period.⁶

The landscape of Gebelein is dominated by two rocky hills. A cemetery located in the northern part of the western mount is known from the discovery of Old Kingdom papyri. They indicate the likelihood that Nubians could have served in military roles in the area as early as the 4th Dynasty.⁷ The burial of a local official, an army commander, Iti, and his wife, Neferu, dated to the First Intermediate Period, was also discovered at this necropolis.⁸ The stelae discovered in this tomb were executed in the Gebelein/er-Rizeiqat style.⁹

It served as the necropolis of local elite from the town of Sumenu. The settlement was located between this necropolis and er-Rizeiqat. Study of the available sources suggests that during the First Intermediate Period Sumenu moved northward

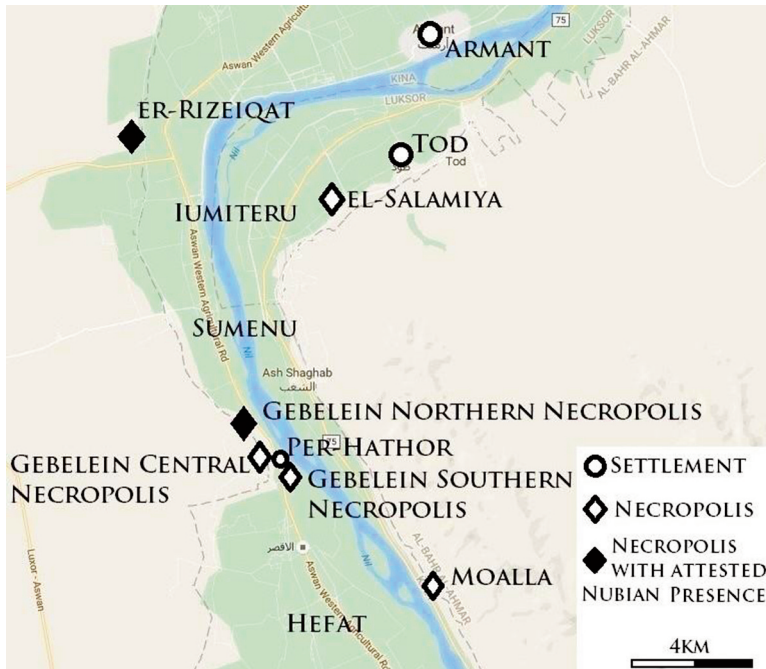


FIGURE 1: Cemeteries and settlements in the Gebelein/er-Rizeiqat region and its vicinity. Names without attached signs are settlements whose exact locations are unknown (base map by Google Earth).

the Egyptian fortresses of Bukhen and Semna in Nubia, and this god was perhaps worshipped by relocated descendants of mercenaries from Sumenu(?).¹⁶ This and the presence of the stelae at the two cemeteries between which the town was located may suggest that the mercenaries were originally located in Sumenu.

Ankhtifi was the overseer of the army and the desert-countries and mentioned several times that he had a battalion stationed close to Hefat.¹⁷ Ankhtifi would have had access to Nubians due to his close relations with Elephantine and the deserts, material resources, and the motive to recruit them. The Gebelein region was *de facto* controlled by Ankhtifi.¹⁸ Therefore, he could be the person responsible for the flourishing or maybe even establishment of the Nubian garrison by employing them in the war with the Theban and Coptite nomes.

from Gebelein, and er-Rizeiqat became its necropolis.¹⁰ There are at least two other cemeteries at Gebelein, but so far no evidence of Nubian presence has been found there.¹¹

The necropolis of the town of Hefat was located on the east bank, identified as the site of Mo'alla. Ankhtifi, who exercised the power in the south of the Upper Egypt, was buried there.¹² We know from his biography that he was fighting with the Theban and Coptite nomes, and he employed mercenaries who were stationed in the vicinity of his home town of Hefat.¹³ The precise location of this settlement is unknown but most probably was near Mo'alla.¹⁴

There are several sites in the Gebelein/er-Rizeiqat region. Stelae of Nubian mercenaries are attested from er-Rizeiqat and the northern necropolis at Gebelein. Therefore, Nubian presence is concentrated north from Hefat, around Sumenu and Iumiteru. Of course, this can be the result of accidental preservation of the sites and lack of systematic research in the whole region. Nevertheless, suggestions can be made.

CONCLUSION

Sumenu was the cult place of the god Sobek.¹⁵ The cult of Sobek lord of Sumenu was later brought to

¹ Henry G. Fischer, "The Nubian Mercenaries of Gebelein During the First Intermediate Period," *Kush* 9 (1961): 44-80.

² E.g. Sabine Kubisch, "Die Stelen der 1. Zwischenzeit aus Gebelein," *Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts Abteilung Kairo* 56 (2000): 239-265; Gloria Rosati, "A Group of Middle Kingdom Stelae from El Rizeiqat/El Gebelein," *Studien zur Altägyptischen Kultur* 32 (2004): 333-349;

³ Wojciech Ejsmond, forthcoming, "The Necropolis of er-Rizeiqat," submitted to *Ägypten und Levante* 17.

⁴ See: Rosati 2004; S. Kubisch 2000; Fisher 1961.

⁵ Location of his tomb is not certain. According to the *Journal d'entrée* of the Cairo Museum his stela was found at er-Rizeiqat, but according to Hans Lange and Heinrich Schäfer (*Grab- und Denkstein des Mittleren Reiches im Museum von Kairo*, vol. I: *Text zu No. 20001-20399, Catalogue général des antiquités égyptiennes du Musée du Caire* 5 [Berlin: Reichsdruckerei, 1902], 1), it came from

- Gebelein; Miriam Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, vol I (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), 90.
- ⁶ Wojciech Ejsmond, *Gebelein: An Overview* (Warsaw: Antiquity of Southeastern Europe Research Centre University of Warsaw and the Scientific Association for Ancient Egypt 'KeMeT' University of Warsaw, 2016), 15–19.
- ⁷ Stephan Seidlmayer, "Nubier im ägyptischen Kontext im Alten und Mittleren Reich," in Stefan Leder and Bernhard Streck (eds.), *Mitteilungen des SFB ›Differenz und Integration‹ 2: Akkulturation und Selbstbehauptung* (Halle: der Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg 2002), 100.
- ⁸ Anna Maria Donadoni Roveri, "Gebelein," in Gay Robins (ed.), *Beyond the Pyramids: Egyptian Regional Art from the Museo Egizio* (Atlanta: Emory University Museum of Art and Archaeology: 1990), 23–29.
- ⁹ Donadoni Roveri 1990, 25–27.
- ¹⁰ Ejsmond, forthcoming.
- ¹¹ One cannot exclude that it is due to their poor state of preservation, decades of looting and unpublished results of previous excavations.
- ¹² Jacques Vandier, *Mo'alla, La tombe d'Ankhtifi et la tombe de Sébekhotep*, *Bibliothèque de Étude* 18, (Caire: Institut français d'archéologie orientale, 1950).
- ¹³ Katrina Edwards, "I Was a Man of Whom There Was No Other!" *A Linguistic Review of the "Autobiographical" Onscriptions of Ankhtify with an Excursus on His Contemporary, Hetepy*, MA thesis, University of Auckland, 2016.
- ¹⁴ Colleen Manassa, "El-Moalla to El-Deir," in Jacco Dieleman and Willeke Wendrich (eds.), *UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology* (Los Angeles: eScholarship, 2008), <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/4pc0w4hg>, 3, accessed 26 August 2016.
- ¹⁵ Charles Kuenz, "Quelques monuments du culte de Sobk" *Bulletin de l'Institut français d'archéologie orientale* 29 (1929): 113–172.
- ¹⁶ Fischer 1961: 78–79.
- ¹⁷ E.g., Edwards 2016, 9 (VII.1/1) and 28 (II.β.2/43).
- ¹⁸ Ejsmond, forthcoming.