



From the sea to the deserts and back: New research in Eastern Sudan

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Editorial

This issue of *BMSAES* contains the proceedings of the Annual International Egyptological Colloquium, entitled *Mariners and traders: Connections between the Red Sea littoral, Arabia and beyond*, and Rudolfo Fattovich's Raymond and Beverley Sackler Foundation Distinguished Lecture in Egyptology, 'Egypt's trade with Punt: Recent discoveries on the Red Sea coast,' both held at The British Museum on 2 August 2011.

Professor Fattovich's contribution neatly summarizes a decade of extraordinary finds at Middle Kingdom Mersa Gawasis/Wadi Gawasis on Egypt's Red Sea coast. The colloquium papers present other important, new fieldwork elucidating ancient maritime and over-land routes connecting Egypt to the Levant, East Africa, Arabia, Central Asia and India and dating from as early as the Old Kingdom through the Byzantine period.

Julie Anderson, who organised the colloquium, guest-edited the volume. Editorial assistance was provided by Tiffany Chezum, Ruiha Smalley, Alice Springuel, Michaela Binder, Elisabeth R. O'Connell and especially Topy Fiske.

Elisabeth R. O'Connell

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From the sea to the deserts and back: New research in Eastern Sudan

Andrea Manzo

Introduction: From Mersa/Wadi Gawasis

This contribution will focus on Eastern Sudan, by which I mean the Eritrean-Sudanese lowlands and the Eastern Desert of Sudan, and will outline how these regions were involved in broad exchange networks extending to both sides of the Red Sea (Fig. 1). The discovery of some sherds among the imported ceramic materials at Mersa/Wadi Gawasis, the Middle Kingdom port for Punt, has revealed evidence of the involvement of the Eritrean-Sudanese lowlands in the Red Sea exchange networks. A clear example among the finds is a fragment of basket ware, typical of the 2nd millennium BC phases of the Gash Group, a culture of the Eritrean-Sudanese lowlands (Manzo 2010, 443–45, fig. 5c) (Fig. 2).

Our work at Mersa Gawasis also uncovered sherds related to the Kerma culture and, in some cases, more specifically to its variant of the Fourth Cataract area. One such fragment from a black-topped vessel, found in a late Old Kingdom/First Intermediate Period assemblage (Manzo 2010, 443, fig. 2f) (Fig. 3), was reused as a scraper and had a rim band etched with incised crossing lines. The inspection of an assemblage dating from late Dynasty 12 to early Dynasty 13 revealed several fragments of grey ware flasks with highly polished external surfaces that could be ascribed to Middle and Classic Kerma types (Manzo 2012, 50, fig. 6:2e) (Fig. 4). Finally, a late Middle Kingdom assemblage produced a body sherd decorated with a thick, wavy pattern formed by triangular impressions delimiting a sector filled with crossing incised lines (Manzo 2010, 443, fig. 2h) (Fig. 5).

The discovery of Upper Nubian materials at Mersa/Wadi Gawasis is significant, as they may have reached the port via the Eastern Sudanese Desert (Manzo 2010, 448; 2012, 55), the second focus of this paper, and, of course, via the Red Sea coast. This latter interpretation is supported by findings such as sea shells, collected in Upper Nubian sites of the Kerma culture in the Nile valley, which were used to produce personal ornaments, mainly in Early and Middle Kerma times (Bonnet ed. 1990, 176, n. 118, 184, n. 150, 197, n. 204; Dunham 1982, 88–89, 138, 143, pl. 18a, pl. 33, pl. 41c; Reisner 1923, 318; Welsby ed. 2001, 365, n. 287). That sea shells were found in Kerma assemblages recently investigated in the Fourth Cataract area (see El-Tayeb and Kołosowska 2005, 57, fig. 7; Paner et al. 2010, 63–65, fig. 5, HP 233/1, fig. 6, HP 735/1, HP 738/4, HP 233/1) is not unexpected because this region represents the easternmost fringe, i.e., the area closest to the Red Sea, of the region where the Kerma culture occurs. Unsurprisingly, the contacts between Upper Nubia and the Red Sea could only have taken place via the Eastern Desert, a region which likely supplied the Upper Nubian state of Kerma/Kush with gold (Castiglioni et al. 2010; Bonnet and Reinold 1993, 20).

to the Eritrean Sudanese lowlands and...

Other evidence of the Eritrean-Sudanese lowland's involvement in the Red Sea trade network has already been documented. In 1980, the University of Naples 'L'Orientale,' under the direction of Rodolfo Fattovich (Fattovich 1989; 1990; 1993; Fattovich et al. 1988; Fattovich et al. 1994), began systematic investigations in the Eritrean-Sudanese lowlands.¹

Fattovich noted that this region was crucial not only because it was crossed by a network of tracks connecting the Nile valley to the Ethiopian-Eritrean highlands, but also because it was rich in natural resources (ebony, aromates, ivory, gold). The occurrence of several raw materials that were imported from Punt by the Egyptians, as well as the archaeological elements to be described shortly, suggests that this region may have been part of the fabulous land of Punt (Fattovich 1991a; 1996).

Excavations conducted at Mahal Teglinos (K1), close to the town of Kassala, produced finds that may confirm frequent contact with the coast. Among the recovered objects were marine shells, like the cowries originally fixed on leather bands and used as personal ornaments in Gash Group tombs (early 2nd millennium BC) (Fattovich et al. 1994, 17) (Fig. 6). Further evidence of interaction is provided by the discovery in Gash Group assemblages of potsherds from Bronze Age Yemeni cultures, like the ones of the Khawlan culture dating to the second half of the 3rd millennium BC from Mahal Teglinos (K1) (Fig. 7), and which obviously arrived via the Red Sea (Fattovich 1991b, 45, fig. 4, 1, 5; Manzo 1997, 79, pl. 4B).

Additionally, Egyptian ceramic materials were discovered at Mahal Teglinos (K1) in Gash Group assemblages dating from the late 3rd to the early 2nd millennium BC (Manzo 1993; 1997, 79, pl. 3 A) (Fig. 8). Moreover, faience beads used in personal ornaments were found in Gash Group tombs dating to the early 2nd millennium BC (Fig. 9). In the case of the Egyptian vessels, it is debatable whether they reached Eastern Sudan via the Red Sea and the Sudanese coast or from the Nile valley via Upper Nubia, where Egyptian ceramics widely occur in Kerma assemblages (see e.g., Bourriau 2004). The faience beads also may have been produced in Upper Nubia, where workshops manufacturing faience objects were active at Kerma (Lacovara 1998).

The Gash Group culture of Eastern Sudan (mid 3rd–early 2nd millennium BC) was characterised by the occurrence of several Kerma and Kerma-like ceramic materials, which show intense contact between the Eritrean-Sudanese lowlands and Upper Nubia (Fattovich 1991b, 45, fig. 5, 2–3; Manzo 1997, 79, pl. 3B). Interestingly but not unexpectedly, many of the Nubian ceramic types recorded in Eastern Sudan can now be compared with materials from Kerma sites in the Fourth Cataract area, the south-easternmost region of Upper Nubia and the part of Nubia closest to the Eritrean-Sudanese lowlands. This similarity of materials from the Fourth Cataract area is evident in the case of sherds from bowls and cups decorated with horizontal parallel lines on the body and sometimes with small, impressed notches on the top of the rim that had been recorded in Gash Group and Jebel Mokram Group assemblages (Fig. 10, sherd b) (Manzo 1997, pl. 4C; Sadr 1990, fig. 5v; comparisons in Kołosowska and El-Tayeb 2007, 212, fig. 8b, fig. 9b; see also Braddock 2003, 53, fig. 3.4, 29

¹ At that time, Istituto Universitario Orientale.

and possibly Emberling and Williams 2010, fig. 26d). As stressed previously when discussing a sherd from a similar vessel from Mersa/Wadi Gawasis, those decorated with a complex incised or impressed pattern delimited by bands of triangular impressions and collected in Gash Group and Jebel Mokram Group assemblages (Fig. 11, see also Arkell 1954, pl. VI 6, VII 4, VIII 5) are close to types found in Kerma assemblages of the Fourth Cataract region (Kołosowska et al. 2003, pl. 6; Kołosowska and El-Tayeb 2007, 212, fig. 8c; Wolf 2004, pl. 4; see also Emberling and Williams 2010, fig. 26j, fig. 28e–f; Sidebotham et al. 2010, 95, figs 21, 17).

Not only ceramic materials but also some types of lithics from the Eritrean-Sudanese lowlands can be compared with finds from Upper Nubia. In some cases, the distinctive stone axes from Agordat (Fig. 12; Arkell 1954, 42–43), already considered stone imitations of Egyptian bronze prototypes (Arkell 1954, 36, 51), may now be compared to a well known class of Kerma artefacts (Bonnet ed. 1990, 164, n. 70; Caneva 1990, 139, fig. 119). The site of Agordat, located on the Eritrean side of the present border between Eritrea and Sudan, is culturally related to the Gash and Jebel Mokram groups and is likely dated to the 2nd–mid 1st millennium BC (see also Brandt et al. 2008).

As remarked by Fattovich (1991c), the Gash Group was also characterised by possible administrative devices, which, when combined with study of the settlement pattern (Sadr 1991, 65), suggests that a hierarchical society arose in the region. The typical Gash Group seals are mushroom-shaped stamp seals bearing geometric impressed or incised patterns on the side to be impressed in the clay (Fattovich 1991c, 66–69, fig. 1, pl. I, pl. IIa–d; see also Manzo 2007, 52, pl. 5.1a, b) (Fig. 13). From the perspective of the ties of Eastern Sudan with Nubia, it should be noticed that similar stamp seals were found at Kerma in Upper Nubia (Bonnet 1986, 11, fig. 13; 1997, 98–99, fig. 3; ed. 1990, 152, no. 22, 172, nos 104, 174, no. 109; Gratien 1985a, 379) and in Lower Nubian C-Group assemblages (Säve-Söderbergh 1967–1968, pl. XLI; 1989, 109, fig. 30, pl. 45 no. 401/56/1).

These are not the only C-Group elements found in the Eritrean-Sudanese lowlands. Ceramic materials of C-Group type were collected at Mahal Teglinos (K1) in Gash Group assemblages (Fig. 14) (see Fattovich 1991b, 35; Manzo 1997, 79, pl. 4A). Interactions with Lower Nubia may have taken place via Upper Nubia, the Eastern Desert or both, as may be suggested by finds of types related to the Pan-grave culture, traditionally related to the inhabitants of the Eastern Desert (see Bietak 1966, 70–71; Sadr 1987, 1990) from the latest phases of the Gash Group (Fattovich 1991b, 45; Manzo 1997, 79, pl. 4A, C), and became increasingly abundant in Jebel Mokram Group assemblages (Sadr 1987; 1990).

To sum up, all of these elements may point to intense contact between the Eritrean-Sudanese lowlands and Upper Nubia and suggest that, as expected, the south-easternmost region of the Kerma cultural area, i.e., the Fourth Cataract region, played an important part in this interaction. These remarks also suggest that the Eritrean-Sudanese lowlands had contact with the Red Sea coast and the Eastern Desert and may have had direct contact with Lower Nubia via the Eastern Desert, Arabia and perhaps Egypt via the Red Sea.

It should be stressed that the processes of interaction between Nubia and Eastern Sudan led not only to the exchange of goods but also to the local production in Eastern Sudan of objects in a Nubian style. Most likely, this was the case in several of the Nubian ceramic types

recorded in Gash Group and Jebel Mokram Group assemblages, described above. These types are usually bowls, whose open shape with direct rim makes them difficult to stop and seal, therefore unsuitable as storage pots and, thus, for trade (Manzo 1997, 81). The only exotic ceramic shapes that may have been used as containers for potted goods and may be more directly related to trade are the Egyptian ones, usually Marl A3, Marl C and Nile C flasks (see also Manzo 1993; 1997, 80 pl. 3A), and some Kerma jars or flasks (Manzo 1997, 80, pl. 3B) (Fig. 15). Most of the ceramics of Nubian type from the Eritrean-Sudanese lowlands are usually interpreted as domestic if not cooking ware (Manzo 1997, 81; see also Gratien 1985a, 54–55, Gratien 2007, 152, 154, 158–59). Only a few of them can be regarded as serving vessels, like some black-topped bowls and beakers or the bowls and dishes of C-Group type with alternated incised geometric patterns and black-burnished surfaces (Manzo 1997, pl. 3B, pl. 4A; see also Gratien 2006, 121; Hasfaas 2007, 169–70; Smith 2003, 113–16, fig. 5.19).

Many of these materials can be related to types of interaction different from the simple exchange of goods but not alternative to it, involving the exchange of ideas and styles, and possibly the movements of small groups of people. Perhaps they were traders or herders, or both, since a pastoral nomadic component can be envisaged among the inhabitants of the Eritrean-Sudanese lowlands and, perhaps, of the Eastern Desert at least as early as the 2nd millennium BC (Sadr 1991, 52–71, 99–101). The exchange of women, traditionally the pot-makers in many African societies (Hasfaas 2007, 164–65), has been proposed as a way to explain the spread of exotic ceramic traits in 2nd millennium BC ceramic production of the Eritrean-Sudanese lowlands (Manzo 1997, 81) and may fit well into this general model of interaction.

The similarities in the typology of some administrative devices between the Eritrean-Sudanese lowlands and Nubia can be more safely related to the movement of traders/administrators and goods. This may point to a more specialised interaction based on the exchange of goods and involving the sharing of practices related to the administration of goods, perhaps related to the administrative structures of the fledgling Nubian states (Manzo 2007, 54) like Kush, whose capital was Kerma, and of their still only partially known correspondent(s) in the Eastern Sudan (see e.g., Fattovich 1995). It may be worth noting that the only seal typologically similar to the ones from the Eritrean-Sudanese lowlands with a figurative decoration was found in Kerma and bears the representation of the façade of a palace (Bonnet 1997, 98–99, fig. 3), perhaps a symbol of the kings of Kush (Manzo 2011a, 217, fig. 4a).

The Eastern Desert and...

The Eastern Desert has been frequently mentioned in the previous sections. This is a clear indication of the importance of this region in the cultural and economic dynamics affecting the whole of northeastern Africa, not only because it occupies a strategic position between the Nubian Nile valley and the Red Sea and is crossed by the most direct tracks linking Eastern Sudan and the lower Nile valley, but also for its richness in terms of mineral resources, notably gold (Klemm et al. 2002, 217–18, fig. 4; Manzo 1999, 8–9, 11–12, 14).

Unfortunately, the Sudanese Eastern Desert is still largely unexplored, even though some surveys, often unsystematic, were undertaken by the Centro Ricerche sul Deserto Orientale (CeRDO), a private Italian institution,² mainly focusing on the gold-bearing areas and on the possible routes leading to them (Sadr et al. 1987; 2004; Castiglioni et al. 2010). In the field seasons from 2004 to 2008, the CeRDO expedition was investigating the gold-bearing regions south and southeast of the Wadi Allaqi/Wadi Gabagaba areas and the north-south and east-west tracks leading to these regions from the Nile valley as well as following the Korosko route and other related routes (Castiglioni and Castiglioni 2007; Castiglioni et al. 2010). In the materials collected by CeRDO in these sectors of the Eastern Desert, we observed the occurrence of several sites with 2nd millennium BC assemblages, some characterised by Pan-grave types. This was true of the sherds of grey to brown ware with grooved parallel lines carved into the top half of the vessel and an undecorated rim band marked by a groove or with a thickened and triangular section rim (Figs 16a; 17f; 19a). These correspond to a well known type of Pan-grave site in Lower Nubia and Egypt (see Bietak 1966, 55, type dd corresponding to type P9 in Bietak 1968, 120, Taf. 16). It appears that these highly fragmented sherds from the Eastern Desert do not have the opposed set of carved fields that characterise this type in Lower Nubia and Egypt and are more similar to the variant found in the Pan-grave component of the Jebel Mokram Group of the Eritrean-Sudanese lowlands, the latter of which has a set of grooves in a single direction (see Sadr 1987, 273). These sherds are often associated with fragments of brown to grey ware bowls with opposed carved fields (Figs 16b; 17b), a type recorded in Pan-grave and C-Group assemblages (Bietak 1968, 120–21, Taf. 16, type P 10; see also Sadr 1987, 270, fig. 4), in the Pan-grave component of the Jebel Mokram Group (Sadr 1987, 273, fig. 5) and in the Gash Group assemblages (Manzo 1997, 79, pl. 4c). In the same assemblages sherds of rarer brown to grey ware types decorated with rows of parallel, oblique, incised lines are always typical of the Pan-grave culture (Fig. 17a) (see Bietak 1968, 121, Taf. 16, type P 11) as are fragments of the more common red to grey ware bowls with incised, oblique lines that cover the upper part of the vessel and often cross to form a net pattern (Fig. 17c–e). Sometimes these have an undecorated rim band marked by a groove or a thickened rim triangular in shape (Fig. 17c) recalling Pan-grave (Bietak 1966, 54–55, type cc; 1968, 120, Taf. 16, type P 8) and Jebel Mokram Group types (Sadr 1987, 273, fig. 5). Bowls with this decorative pattern are also common in domestic assemblages of the Kerma culture (see e.g., Gratien 2007, 155–56, fig. 2g–h), but the ones from the Eastern Desert, like the ones of the Jebel Mokram Group in the Eritrean-Sudanese lowlands, seem to be close to the Pan-grave culture mainly because of the shape of the rim—thickened, triangular, with flat top and slightly everted, often also separated from the wall by a marked groove. As has been said, these features should be regarded as a no less distinctive marker than the decoration for identifying Pan-grave ceramics (Bietak 1966, 53–55, Taf. 25–33; 1968, 118–21, Taf. 16; Emberling and Williams 2010, 33–34; see also Wainwright 1920, 36, 47; Sadr 1987, 270–72; Säve-Söderbergh 1989, 17).

² I would like to thank the directors of the Centro Studi sul Deserto Orientale (CeRDO), Angelo and Alfredo Castiglioni, for allowing me to study the ceramic materials, dating back to protohistoric and historic times, which they collected in their fieldwork. For the publication of the Mesolithic and Neolithic materials, see Lanna and Gatto 2010.

All of these remarks seem to suggest the occurrence of Pan-grave assemblages in these sectors of the Eastern Desert, an outstanding conclusion because the apparent absence of Pan-grave materials in the Wadi Gabgaba and Wadi Allaqi regions led Sadr, Castiglioni and Castiglioni to write of the Pan-grave: 'This second millennium BC archaeological culture ... is in need of serious reassessment if its absence in the desert turns out to be real ...' (Sadr et al., 1987, 226). On the contrary, the more recent CeRDO finds, together with the typical Pan-grave elements identified in Kerma assemblages in the Fourth Cataract area by the expedition of the Oriental Institute of Chicago (Emberling and Williams 2010, 33–35, figs 31–32), appear to fill the gap between the northernmost Pan-grave assemblages, in Egypt and Lower Nubia, and the southernmost culture with a strong Pan-grave component, i.e., the Jebel Mokram Group in the Eastern Sudan (see Bietak 1966, 64–71, fig. 5; Sadr 1987, 287–89, fig. 13) (Fig. 18). Therefore, these recent finds seem to support the traditional view relating the Pan-grave culture to the groups inhabiting the Eastern Desert or at least some parts of it, perhaps to be equated with the *Md3yw* of the Egyptian texts (Bietak 1966, 73–78; 1968, 149–50; Sadr 1987, 286). It is worth noting, after these finds, that the distribution of the Pan-grave assemblages almost completely overlaps with that of the 1st millennium AD Eastern Desert Ware also related to the inhabitants of the Eastern Desert, possibly the Blemmyes/Beja of the Roman and Late Antique sources (see e.g., Barnard 2005; 2008, 1–18, 113–15; Lassányi 2010a, 267–69; 2010b, 271–72; Manzo 2004, 79–80).

Other interesting assemblages from the Eastern Desert are characterised by Kerma elements. These are sherds of vessels with the external surface delineated by sectors filled with oblique incised or impressed lines and delimited on two sides by impressed bands consisting of a thick, wavy pattern formed by triangular or more rounded impressions (Fig. 19c, d). These call to mind the ones previously described among the Kerma elements from Mersa/Wadi Gawasis and the Eritrean-Sudanese lowlands, and are reminiscent of common ceramic types from the Kerma sites in the Fourth Cataract region dating to the first half of the 2nd millennium BC (Emberling and Williams 2010, fig. 28f; Kołosowska et al. 2003, pl. 6; Kołosowska and El-Tayeb 2007, 212, fig. 8c; Wolf 2004, pl. 4). A fragment of the irregularly indented bottom of a cooking pot (Fig. 20b) recalls Kerma domestic pottery (Emberling and Williams 2010, 33, fig. 30f, g; Gratien 2006, 121; Gratien and Olive 1981, pl. IVc) and is associated with a sherd with crossing incised lines (Fig. 20a), cited before as occurring in Pan-grave and Jebel Mokram Group assemblages and widely distributed in Kerma domestic assemblages (see e.g., Gratien 2007, 155–56, fig. 2g, h). Often these finds are associated with other elements more directly related to the Pan-grave culture, like a sherd of a vessel with grooved parallel lines of the type previously described (Fig. 19).

Although frequently associated with Pan-grave types, these finds related to the Kerma culture represent a further important achievement of the exploration conducted by the CeRDO, as the first evidence of Kerma elements in the Eastern Nubian Desert (see also Gratien 2011, 227).

Also interesting is the discovery in some assemblages from the Eastern Desert of elements related to the cultures of Eastern Sudan, like rim sherds of rim-banded bowls (Fig. 21) typical of the Gash Group assemblages (see Fattovich 1989, 104, fig. 3; 1991b, 41, figs 2, 3). Some sherds with typical impressed decoration perhaps imitating basketwork (Fig. 22)

can be ascribed to a class typical of sites related to the Gash and Jebel Mokram groups close to Agordat in the lowlands of present Eritrea (Arkell 1954, 54, pl. VI.5). Other fragments from Eastern Desert assemblages are decorated with fingernail impressions (Fig. 23a), a kind of decoration very typical of the site of Shaqadud in the Butana (Robertson 1991, 160–61, fig. 7–13a–d, f), and also occurring in the Gash Group (see Fattovich 1989, 108; 1991b, 45).

The work of classifying ceramic materials from the Eastern Sudanese Desert is still in progress, but if all the data collected for the 2nd millennium BC are plotted on a map showing the distribution of the sites as well as the main gold-bearing areas (based on Castiglioni et al. 2010, and Klemm et al. 2002), some observations can be made, in addition to the presence of Pan-grave assemblages in the area (Fig. 24). First, the elements from Eastern Sudan seem to cluster close to the tracks of the Korosko-Kurgus route. This suggests that these tracks were not just used by the Egyptian armies at the beginning of the New Kingdom to bypass the core of the Kerma/Kush Kingdom (Castiglioni et al. 2010, 268; Valbelle 2004, 95). The occurrence of sherds related to the Gash Group culture and dating to the first half of the 2nd millennium BC suggests that these routes were used also by the southern groups to get to Lower Nubia, bypassing the Upper Nubian Nile valley. The idea that there may have been a direct link between Lower Nubia and the Eritrean Sudanese lowlands via the Eastern Desert, as previously suggested when dealing with C-Group elements from Gash Group and Jebel Mokram Group assemblages, may in some way be confirmed by the results of these preliminary investigations.

The occurrence of Kerma elements in some assemblages from the Eastern Desert may give the first direct archaeological evidence from that region of a Kerma/Kush interest in entering into the Eastern Desert, following the Korosko route as well as the routes going to the east and southeast, to get raw materials for internal consumption and to export to Egypt. These goods and the routes to obtain them may have been important to the Kingdom of Kush and may have led to the establishment of ties with many groups inhabiting the regions east and southeast of Upper Nubia. The control of gold and access to prized raw materials may have been crucial for the kings of Kush no less than for the pharaohs (Castiglioni et al. 2010, 268–70). Confirmation of these ties between Kush and, among others, the people of Eastern Desert, the *Md3yw* and the people of regions to the southeast of Upper Nubia, the inhabitants of *Pwnt*, may come from an inscription in the tomb of Sebeknakht at El Kab that mentions an alliance among all the groups ravaging Upper Egypt in the Second Intermediate Period (Davies 2003a; 2003b).

To return to the distribution of Kerma elements in the Eastern Desert, Castiglioni, Castiglioni and Bonnet (2010) may have been right in suggesting that the Onib and Oshib gold-bearing areas may have been exploited by Kerma/Kush, as the Kerma elements appear to cluster close to their western fringes (Fig. 24). This suggests that the regions of Onib and Oshib were crucial for the supply of gold for the Upper Nubian state, while the gold sources of the Wadi Gabgaba and Wadi Allaqi were more directly related to Lower Nubia, thus more affected by Egyptian political influence (Castiglioni et al. 2010, 267–68). Significantly, Onib and Oshib are also the gold-bearing areas of the Eastern Desert closest to the Red Sea.

Back to the Sea!

These remarks on the gold-bearing regions of the Eastern Desert may add fresh evidence to the dossier of the location of a region reached via the Red Sea and frequently mentioned in the texts from Mersa/Wadi Gawasis, the Middle Kingdom pharaonic port on the Egyptian Red Sea coast: *Bi3(w) Pwnt* or *Bi3 n Pwnt* (Pirelli 2007, 95, note 42; see also Bard and Fattovich 2010, 29). The name means ‘the Mine of Punt’ and was likely a mine or mining region of prized metal, perhaps gold, which is often listed among the imports from *Pwnt* (Manzo 1999, 8–9). In general, it is clear from the inscriptions from Mersa/Wadi Gawasis that *Bi3 Pwnt* was perceived by the Egyptians as a district distinct from *Pwnt* proper. This distinction seems particularly clear to the officers who left inscriptions at Mersa/Wadi Gawasis, i.e., the ones leading the expeditions, obviously having specific skills and know-how about the geography and environmental features of the regions of the southern Red Sea as well as about the routes to get there. This is evident in the stela of the two brothers, Amenhotep and Nebstu, who, under the reign of Amenemhat III, led two different expeditions to *Pwnt* and *Bi3 Pwnt* (Pirelli 2007, 95–98).

I have already noted (Manzo 2012) that *Bi3 Pwnt* may correspond to the gold-bearing area of Oshib between the Fourth Cataract and the Red Sea, but in the light of the 2nd millennium BC materials collected in the Eastern Desert sites by the CeRDO and discussed in the previous section, *Bi3 Pwnt* may have extended to the more northern Onib. Actually, given their proximity to the Red Sea, both of these gold-bearing areas may have been accessed by the Egyptians from the coast, possibly in competition with the Kerma/Kush people who were exploiting the same resources from inland, as suggested by the distribution of Kerma archaeological elements from the Eastern Desert. Obviously, this may also easily explain the occurrence of Upper Nubian Kerma elements at the site of the Mersa/Wadi Gawasis, discussed in the first section of this paper.

The possibility that a more southern mining region was meant by the term *Bi3 Pwnt* should be considered as well. Ancient remains culturally related to the Gash and Jebel Mokram groups of the Eritrean-Sudanese lowlands were recorded close to Bisha in Eritrea, near the border with Sudan (Yemane et al. 2008). This is a gold-bearing region which, given the abundant occurrence of grinding stones in the ancient sites associated with the mines and a possible smelting structure investigated by Eritrean colleagues (Yemane et al. 2008, 95, 97–99), may also have been exploited in ancient times. It should be recalled that several archaeological elements discussed in the above second section demonstrate the involvement of the Eritrean-Sudanese lowlands in the Red Sea trade network and, for this reason, its identification with *Pwnt* or a part of it was suggested. Therefore, this region as well may also correspond to *Bi3 Pwnt* (Fig. 25).

As previously stressed, the fact that separate expeditions under different officers apparently reached *Pwnt* and *Bi3 Pwnt* via the Red Sea may suggest that the two regions were seen as clearly distinct, and *Bi3 Pwnt* may not have been a part of *Pwnt* proper but perhaps a distinct region on the way to *Pwnt*. This view may also fit better with the hypothesis of a different seasonality of the expeditions to *Pwnt*, which apparently left in September, and those to *Bi3 Pwnt*, apparently leaving in May as proposed by L. Bradbury (1988, 138–41) on the basis of

the very few inscriptions and texts commemorating expeditions bearing a date with indication of the month. According to Bradbury, the different time suitable for expeditions to *Pwnt* and *Bi3 Pwnt* was mainly related to the different seasonality of the rainy season in the two regions, taking place in summer in the first one, the more southerly, and in winter in the second, the more northerly (Fig. 26).

Moreover, the Middle Kingdom term *Bi3 Pwnt* may be related or perhaps even equated to the land of *'mm* mentioned in the New Kingdom texts as a region closely related to *Pwnt* and from where gold and electrum were imported (Posener 1990, 338–40). The location of this region is also debated, but it may well correspond to the gold-bearing areas of Onib and Oshib, as an inscription of a scribe of the gold of *'mm* was recorded close to the Third Cataract, where the routes leading to these regions of the Eastern Desert (along which some of the sites surveyed by the CeRDO are located), reach the Nile valley (Vercoutter 1956, 70–71).

Thus, all this seems to support more the hypothesis of a location of *Bi3 Pwnt* in the south-easternmost, gold-bearing areas of the Sudanese Eastern Desert than the one of a location in the Eritrean-Sudanese lowlands, which may have been, as suggested by Fattovich (1991a; 1996), part of *Pwnt* proper, but the problem is far from solved.

Final remarks

The only way to answer the question of the location of *Bi3 Pwnt*, as well as other questions that remain unanswered, is to continue exploring the fascinating Eastern Sudan and the Eastern Sudanese Desert, which already have proven to be crucial for a better understanding of the history of the whole of northeastern Africa.

The subjects dealt with in this paper also will be included in the research project on Eastern Sudan which the University of Naples 'L'Orientale' launched in 2009 under the direction of the present author. This project involves resuming fieldwork in the region, which began in 2010 after a fifteen-year gap (Manzo 2011b)³. Among our goals is a closer investigation of the complex process of interactions between Upper Nubia and Eastern Sudan that led not only to the exchange of goods but also to the local production in Eastern Sudan of objects in an Upper Nubian style. Our commitment at this point is to investigate the distribution of these objects at a regional as well as an intra-site level. Among our tasks are also to enlarge our investigation to the north and east and follow the routes linking the Eritrean-Sudanese lowlands with the Eastern Desert and Upper Nubia as well as with the Red Sea coast (Manzo 2011b, 1–2).

Several sites dating to the 3rd and 2nd millennia BC were discovered in 2010 between Gash and Atbara by the National Corporation for Antiquities and Museums, Sudan. These sites in the region west of Kassala will be endangered over the next few years by the construction of new dams on the Atbara and Setit and by the related irrigation schemes. Collaboration with

³In the 2010 and 2011 field seasons, the expedition was supported by the University of Naples 'L'Orientale,' the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Polias Marine & General, Centro Ricerche sul Deserto Orientale and the Michela Schiff Giorgini Foundation.

the National Corporation for Antiquities and Museums (NCAM) to safeguard the endangered heritage and the related investigation of some of these sites, selected on the basis of location and dating, is an additional challenge for the expedition (Manzo 2011b, 2–16).

The first season devoted to the investigation of some of the endangered sites took place in 2011. Site UA 53, investigated in the 2011 field season, was characterised by four phases of occupation. One of these phases, characterised by settlement areas (Fig. 27), a badly disturbed cemetery with tumulus, and ceramic materials recalling the Pan-grave cultural tradition (Fig. 28), can be ascribed to the 2nd millennium BC local culture of the Jebel Mokram Group. In association with these remains, fragments of C-Group (Fig. 29) and Egyptian pottery (Fig. 30) were discovered. Although the study of these finds is still in progress, all of this suggests how fruitful the investigation of these sites may be for the study of the topics dealt with in this paper.

Frontispiece: View of the southern Sudanese Eastern Desert in the region of Derudeb, photograph taken during the survey conducted by the expedition of 'L'Orientale,' November 2010.

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Fig. 1: General map of the region showing the places mentioned in the text.



Fig. 2: Sherd of basket ware from the Eritrean-Sudanese lowlands from a Middle Kingdom assemblage at Mersa/Wadi Gawasis.



Fig. 3: Rim sherd of a rim banded, black-topped vessel reused as a scraper from a late Old Kingdom/First Intermediate Period assemblage at Mersa/Wadi Gawasis.



Fig. 4: Sherd of a grey ware flask with highly polished external surface from a late Dynasty 12/early Dynasty 13 assemblage at Mersa/Wadi Gawasis.



Fig. 5: Sherd decorated with a thick, wavy pattern delimiting a sector filled by crossing incised lines from a late Middle Kingdom assemblage at Mersa/Wadi Gawasis.



Fig. 6: Cowrie shells originally fixed on leather bands and used as personal ornaments in Gash Group tombs dating to the early 2nd millennium BC at Mahal Teglinos (K1).



Fig. 7: Potsherds of the 3rd–early 2nd millennium BC Bronze Age Khawlan culture of Yemen from Gash Group assemblages at Mahal Teglinos (K1).

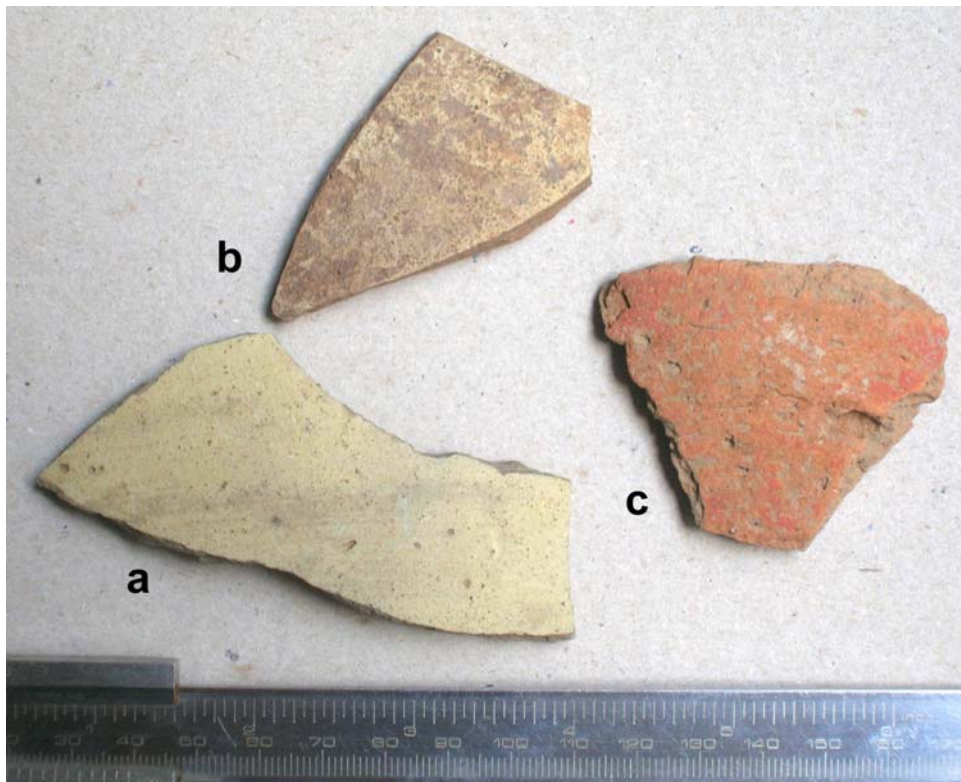


Fig. 8: Egyptian sherds from Gash Group assemblages dating to the early 2nd millennium BC; Fabrics: a: Marl A3, b: Marl C, c: Nile C.



Fig. 9: Faience beads in a necklace found in a Gash Group tomb dating to the early 2nd millennium BC at Mahal Teglinos (K1).



Fig. 10: Assemblage from site SEG 13 in the Eritrean-Sudanese lowlands, early to mid-2nd millennium BC.



Fig. 11: Sherds from vessels decorated with an incised or impressed pattern delimited by bands of triangular impressions from site SEG 14 in the Eritrean-Sudanese lowlands, early to mid-2nd millennium BC.

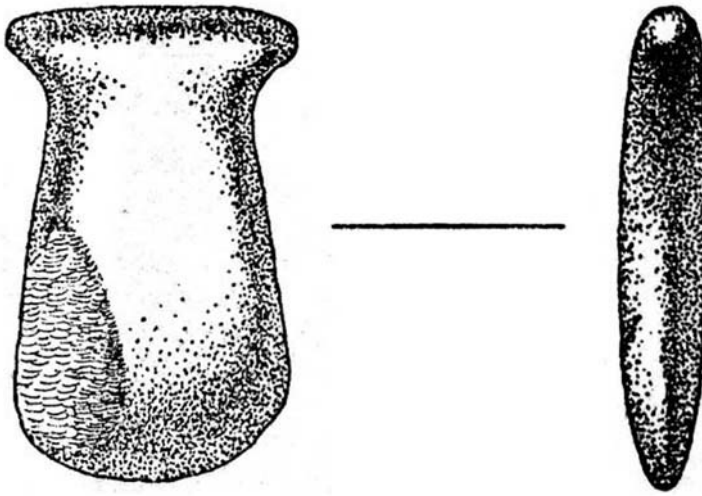


Fig. 12: Stone ax from Agordat, a site culturally related to the Gash and Jebel Mokram groups on the Eritrean side of the present border between Sudan and Eritrea (modified from Arkell 1954).



Fig. 13: Gash Group clay stamp seals from Mahal Teglinos (K1), early 2nd millennium BC.



Fig. 14: Sherds of vessels of C-Group type from Mahal Teglinos (K1), late 3rd–early 2nd millennium BC.



Fig. 15: Reconstructed neck and rim of a black-polished Kerma flask from Mahal Teglinos (K1), first half of the 2nd millennium BC.



Fig. 16: Assemblage with Pan-grave elements from site AL in the Sudanese Eastern Desert (courtesy CeRDO).



Fig. 17: Assemblage with Pan-grave elements from site ED 16 in the Sudanese Eastern Desert (courtesy CeRDO).

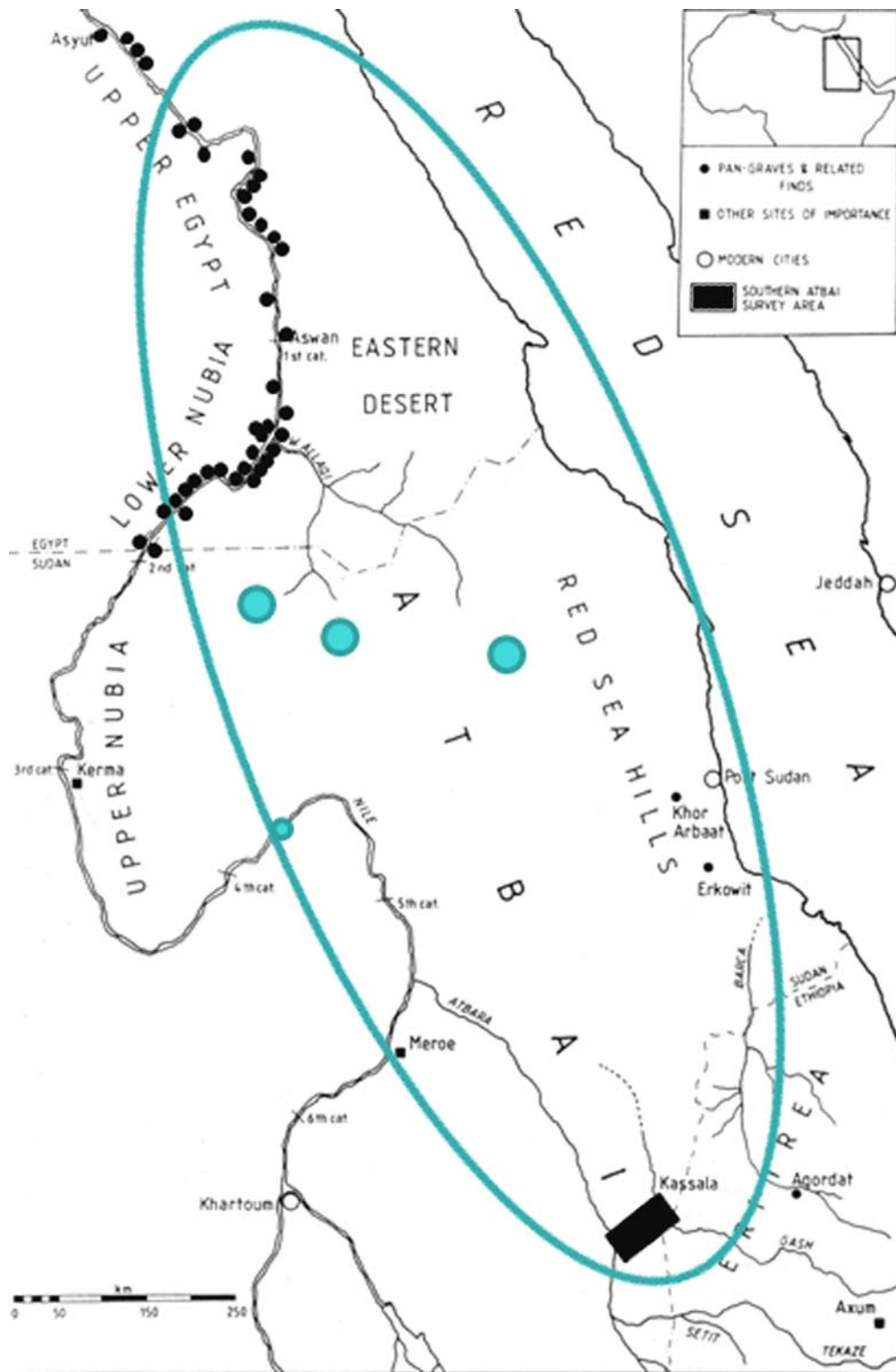


Fig. 18: Map showing the distribution of the Pan-grave materials (modified from Sadr 1987). The blue dots show the areas with Pan-grave assemblages in the CeRDO concession and the site with Pan-grave elements in Kerma assemblages in the Fourth Cataract area.

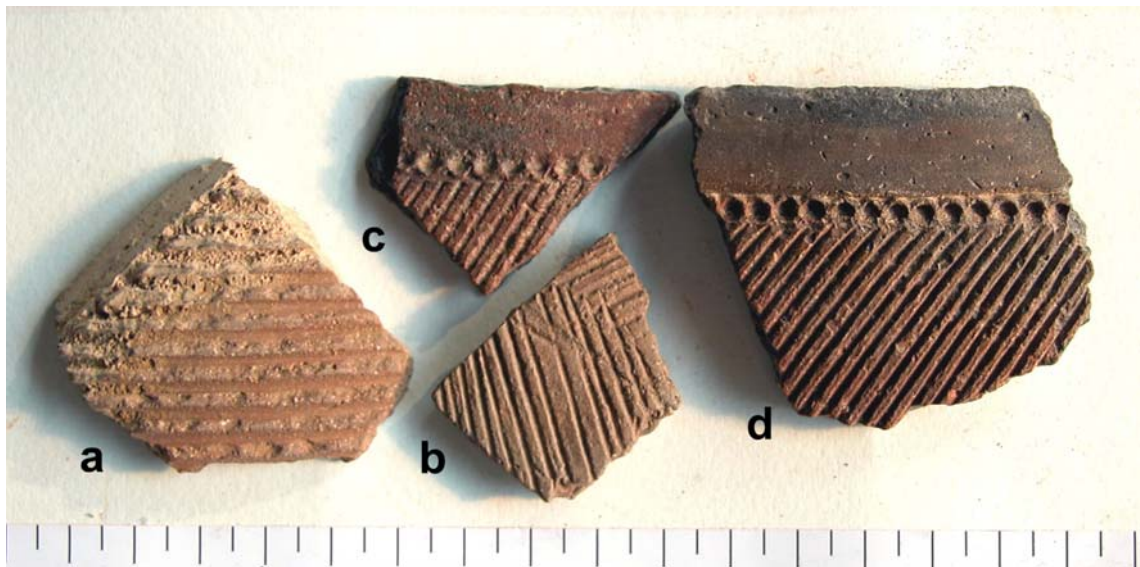


Fig. 19: Sherds of vessels of Pan-grave and Kerma type from site R 49 in the Sudanese Eastern Desert (courtesy CeRDO).



Fig. 20: Sherds of vessels of Kerma type from site 21°14'47.5"N, 32°30'56.7"E in the Sudanese Eastern Desert (courtesy CeRDO).



Fig. 21: Rim sherd of rim banded bowl of Gash Group type from site RD 7 in the Sudanese Eastern Desert (courtesy CeRDO).



Fig. 22: Sherd with typical impressed decoration occurring in Gash Group and Jebel Mokram Group assemblages from site V in the Sudanese Eastern Desert (courtesy CeRDO).

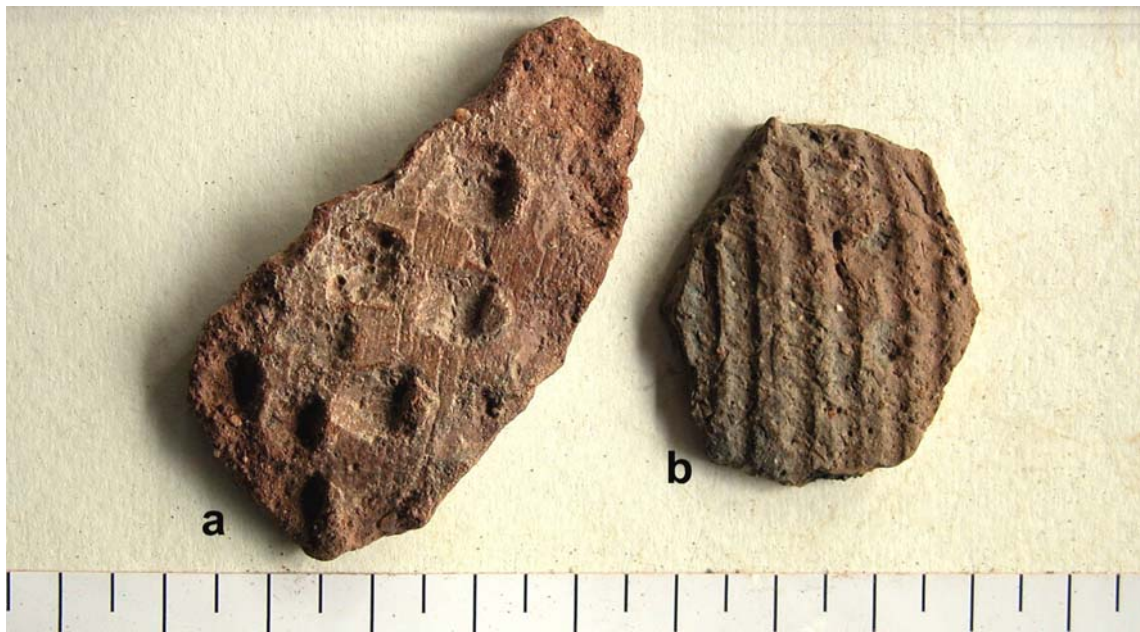


Fig. 23: Assemblage from site RD 15 in the Sudanese Eastern Desert (courtesy CeRDO).

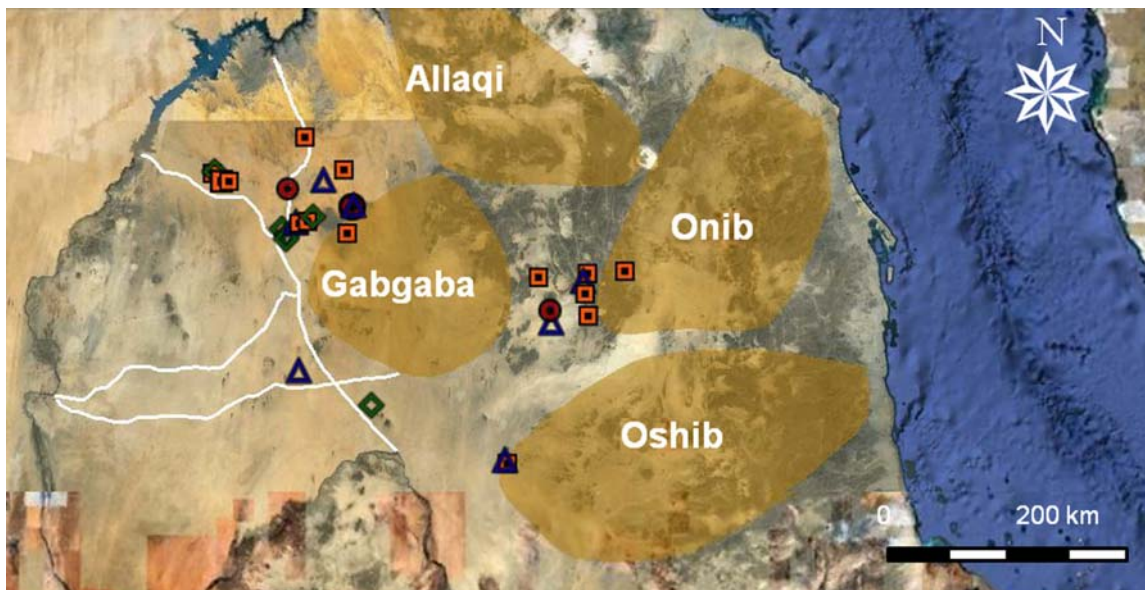


Fig. 24: Map showing the distribution of the sites as well as the main gold-bearing areas in the Sudanese Eastern Desert. Square and rounded symbols mark the sites with Middle Nubian and Pan-grave assemblages, the triangles mark the Kerma elements and the green lozenges mark the sites where elements from Eastern Sudan were collected. Shadowed areas show the main gold-bearing regions.



Fig. 25: Map showing the two possible locations of *Bi3 n Pwnt*.



Fig. 26: Map showing the possible locations of *Pwnt* and *Bi3 n Pwnt*, according to the hypothesis of a different seasonality of the rainy season in the two regions.



Fig. 27: A sector of the Jebel Mokram Group settlement site at UA 53.



Fig. 28: Ceramic materials of Pan-grave type from site UA 53.



Fig. 29: Sherds of a vessel of C-Group II b type from site UA 53 in the region between Gash and Atbara, early 2nd millennium BC.



Fig. 30: Egyptian Marl A4 ceramic fragment from site UA 53; a: external surface, b: internal surface.