

human remains from the cemetery, Chapter 8 by Svenja Partheil, should be singled out as the first comprehensive reconstruction of the demography and palaeopathology of an ancient community in northern Ethiopia.

The Mifsas Bahri Archaeological Project is the first to conduct fieldwork intended to investigate the progressive shift of the ancient Ethiopian state from the northern to the central Horn of Africa during the most obscure period of Ethiopian history, in the late first millennium and early second millennium AD. This is therefore an important book and the editors must be praised for making their results accessible to scholars so soon after the conclusion of the fieldwork. A short delay in publication, however, might have allowed for better language editing and for a more coherent structure; in particular, Chapters 4, 11 and 12 should have been presented as appendices insofar as they do not provide any significant contribution to the archaeological investigation.

The absence of a precise description of the stratigraphic sequence at Mifsas Bahri is a significant problem and may jeopardise the interpretation of the excavations as a whole. In fact, the authors of Chapter 10, on the stratigraphy and chronology (Hilbrig and Yule), honestly admit that no precise correlation between the soil layers, architectural remains and artefacts could be defined during the fieldwork. Therefore, the reader can only understand that there was a sequence of finds (mainly potsherds) based on the absolute depth of the materials, a sequence of walls more or less in a stratigraphic order and a small number of radiocarbon dates, which cannot be directly associated with the walls. Such problems notwithstanding, the excavations at Mifsas Bahri indicate that a building, with apparently two or three phases of use, was erected in the seventh to eighth centuries AD. In the earliest phase, the building had an indented plan similar to those of the elite residences and churches of the Aksumite polity (c. 400 BC–AD 800) in central Tigray and Eritrea. This building may have been a church on account of the presence of several quadrangular columns decorated with crosses; as, however, the date at which these crosses were carved is unknown, it remains uncertain whether the building really was a church. The pottery consisted mainly of reddish-brown and grey/black wares, reminiscent of the ceramics used in the northern regions of the Aksumite polity during the period of decline in the seventh to eighth centuries AD, although the shapes and decorations

are often different. Subsequently, in the early second millennium AD, the site was used as a cemetery.

Individually, the editors of the volume suggest two contrasting interpretations of their results. According to Michela Gaudiello, Mifsas Bahri was “an important southernmost outpost of the Aksumite kingdom during the Late Aksumite Period” (p. 149). According to Paul Yule, however, “Mifsas Bahri lies well outside the main sphere of Aksum and has a strong local cultural flavour of its own” (p. 272). This contradiction could probably have been avoided with closer editing of the text and better communication between the editors in order to arrive at a joint interpretation. On the basis of the data published here, this reviewer agrees with Yule’s opinion. The evidence presented by the authors does not support Aksumite dominion over the region and indicates that Christianity penetrated from Aksum to the south only in the late first millennium AD. The absence of crosses as decoration on vessels suggests that the local community was not fully converted at this time. Conversion was probably only completed in the early second millennium AD, as inferred from the absence of grave goods associated with burials, in conformity with Christian funerary rituals.

The presence of pottery comparable in style to the ceramics of the Aksum region of the first millennium BC at sites around Mifsas Bahri is a significant result of the project. This discovery may indicate that communities with ceramics linked to the tradition of central Tigray also occupied the territory of Lake Hashenge, and they may have connected the northern communities with those of the African hinterland. Further fieldwork will be necessary to confirm the evidence and its significance.

In conclusion, this volume is a crucial contribution to the archaeology of the Horn of Africa, providing new information about a region that hitherto has not been investigated by archaeologists. It should be read by any scholar interested in the archaeology and history of this region.

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BJARNE GRØNNOW. *The frozen Saqqaq sites of Disko Bay, West Greenland. Qeqertasussuk and Qajaa (2400–900 BC)*. 2017. 490 pages, 106 colour and 210 b&w

illustrations, 30 tables. Copenhagen & Chicago (IL): Museum Tusulanum Press & University of Chicago Press; 978-87-635-4561-7 hardback \$70.



Although the North American Arctic is blessed with high levels of site visibility and often excellent organic preservation, many aspects of its archaeology remain poorly understood.

This is particularly true for the Early Paleo-Inuit (or Palaeoeskimo/Arctic Small Tool tradition) period, consisting of archaeological entities labelled Denbigh Flint Complex (Alaska), Pre-Dorset (most of Arctic Canada), Independence I (High Arctic) and Saqqaq (West and East Greenland). These were the earliest pioneering societies who migrated from Alaska to the Eastern Arctic around 3000 cal BC, subsequently peopling most of this vast region. In this book, Bjarne Grønnow single-handedly revolutionises our understanding of the range of material culture in this period, and in the process provides a wealth of insight into the broader picture of Early Paleo-Inuit lifeways.

The study is centred on the analysis of artefacts and architectural data from the Saqqaq sites of Qajaa and Qeqertasussuk in Disko Bay on Greenland's west coast. Qajaa is a very large, deep site that probably served as a regional aggregation location; Qeqertasussuk is a smaller, multi-seasonal settlement. The total occupation span for these two sites is about 2400–900 cal BC, although most of the book is based on artefacts recovered from the intensively occupied early components from Qeqertasussuk that date to around 2350–1750 cal BC. Due to the rapid accumulation of sediments, combined with the preservation afforded by permafrost, these two sites contain an amazingly diverse array of organic and lithic artefacts that represents almost the entire Saqqaq material culture inventory. Qeqertasussuk also contained a well-preserved and rapidly buried dwelling, as well as other features. It must be emphasised, however, that the importance of this study does not derive simply from the quantity of artefacts; rather, its value results mainly from the high quality of the careful and extensive fieldwork, combined with intensive and insightful analysis and interpretation.

While the technological inventory is far too diverse to summarise here, it is worth pointing out that

there are few unique artefacts; rather, there are multiple examples of almost every type or functional class, allowing Grønnow to discuss variability and, in some cases, to propose sub-categories within each class. For example, Qeqertasussuk yielded no fewer than 57 complete or partial harpoon heads, allowing the definition of four types based on tang or socket form, presence and location of barbs, and other features. Manufacturing waste of all categories is also discussed, allowing detailed description of technological processes. Artefacts are discussed in terms of functional groupings derived mainly from analogy with the Inuit ethnographic record. These include some classes never before confirmed for Early Paleo-Inuit; most remarkably, several ribs from a kayak-like vessel, as well as paddle fragments, confirm the existence of watercraft. While the use of this form of analogy comes with some risks due to the lack of a close genetic or cultural relationship between Paleo-Inuit and Inuit, most Arctic archaeologists will be comfortable with the usage here as the source (Inuit ethnography) and subject (Saqqaq) artefacts are so similar in form, and as Grønnow is careful to cast the net wide, basing his comparisons on the full North American Arctic from Alaska to Greenland. Some aspects, such as the interpretation of spatial patterning within the Saqqaq dwelling, owe less to analogy and more to high-resolution pattern recognition and interpretation.

The monograph is also noteworthy for its synthesis of where Saqqaq fits within the rest of the Early Paleo-Inuit world, with three important themes emerging. First, it confirms that Saqqaq is part of a cultural continuum with its Pre-Dorset and Independence I neighbours; most of the much more fragmentary and scattered material culture from elsewhere in the Arctic at this time shows close similarities to the Saqqaq artefact inventory. Second, Saqqaq, and by extension its neighbouring traditions, are quite conservative, with low levels of variability over time and space; differences that do exist probably result mainly from the different resource distributions in each region. Third, Grønnow makes the case that Early Paleo-Inuit technology is extremely complex, finely made and functionally specific—in many ways comparable to later Inuit technologies. This is perhaps the most important point, as it has clear implications for our understanding of the prerequisites for successful human colonisation of the North.

Alas, similar sites that could enable detailed interregional comparisons may not exist elsewhere

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during the Early Paleo-Inuit period. For example, in areas of the Canadian Arctic with similarly rich resource bases, rapid isostatic rebound in the middle Holocene ensured that few sites were occupied for long enough to develop the deep middens that are required for the consistent preservation of organic materials. In other areas, including large parts of Alaska and Labrador, soil chemistry and other factors led to conditions that rarely allowed organic preservation. Thus, it is conceivable that Qeqertasussuk and Qajaa will never be matched elsewhere.

To sum up, publication of this monograph is an important event in the archaeology of the North American Arctic. It provides by far the most detailed description of Early Paleo-Inuit technology ever produced, and the high quality of the research and writing are matched by generally excellent photographs, graphics and production quality. Its importance is further expanded when it is paired with Morten Meldgaard's (2004) similarly detailed

study interpreting the extensive faunal samples from Qeqertasussuk. It rewrites the story not just for Saqqaq, but for other Early Paleo-Inuit societies as well, all of which must have had a technological base very similar to the one described here. Perhaps its most important lesson is one that should have been obvious all along: people cannot live in the Arctic without a complex and specialised technological repertoire.

References

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