Bestock Week 7

Sadr with a side dish of Liszka

Reading Sadr and Liszka together is informative and helpful because they both, in very different ways, problematize the relationship of the Medjay/Pan-Grave with place. Particularly given the assumed pastoral nomadism of these people(s) as well as their complicated relations with Egyptians and other Nubians, this problematization is necessary. The articles, however, cover almost entirely different ground. This is in part because Sadr starts from the position of assuming that the Medjay and Pan-Grave are the same people at least at some point, whereas Liszka makes no such assumption. As such, Sadr is dealing with archaeological evidence related to the Pan-Grave, while Liszka is dealing with linguistic evidence related to the Medjay. I wish we had all of Liszka’s dissertation to see if and why she is comfortable with equating the Medjay and the Pan-Grave at any point (and/or either one of them with the Bedja, though she does seem at least a little OK with that). I feel she may have a productive critique of the assumption of that equation. However I doubt that even exploding such an equation would fundamentally harm the import of Sadr’s article, which represents a very different argument; all we really need to do in reading him is to substitute “Pan-Grave” for “Medjay” (he’s mostly good about this anyway and does acknowledge the issue). Here I will spend more time on Sadr, though I think we should discuss Liszka in class too (if people read her).

Sadr begins by noting that the Pan-Grave culture can not be exclusively linked with one area in the Nile Valley, though burials of this culture are found scattered widely. He then notes that Bietak understood a connection between the Pan-Grave and ceramics as far away as Khartoum and Kassala. An examination of Bietak’s term *Aktionsradius* for the area in which Pan-Grave related ceramics have been recovered forms the structure of Sadr’s article. Sadr notes from the start that this term is not defined well by Bietak – could not be defined well by him because the recovered far-flung ceramic parallels were from survey rather than excavation and there was insufficient information about their relative chronology and other aspects of the societies that made/used them. Sadr thus begins with several models of what *Aktionsradius* might mean in Bietak’s usage. He goes on to present evidence from work in eastern Sudan and its comparisons with Pan-Grave ceramics, and then returns to a critique of the models he has sketched.

It is somewhat difficult to evaluate Sadr’s discussion of the ceramics at hand, in particular because descriptions are mostly typological and include very little discussion of fabric. Furthermore most of the eastern Sudanese examples are sherds, and a fair level of assumption (mostly justified?) was made about whole vessel type. (As an aside, I LOVE the names given to Mokram ceramic types.) One worries slightly that the level of publication of the Pan-Grave ceramics themselves was insufficient to really support the types of comparisons that Sadr is making. So while I am willing, in this context, to accept his basic statements about similarities and differences, I do think that any future work on this would require reexamining in person the whole corpus from each place, as much as possible. In this study, comparison of the corpuses yielded both serious similarities and serious differences. For instance while several notable types show a very large degree of overlap, the Pan-Grave corpus is less diverse and its vessels usually smaller.

On the basis of the very fact of both similarity and difference, Sadr returns to the models for *Aktionsradius*. He rejects immediately the idea of a sphere of influence – too much similarity. He also rejects the notion that the Pan-Graves and east Sudan are two termini of annual migrations of one group – too much difference (and much too far). He also rejects the notion of a single economic area with a centrifugal seasonal migration. He notes that the economic strategies of these areas appear different, with the Pan-Grave apparently fully nomadic pastoralist while the Mokram group were semi-sedentary. Finally he rejects the notion that we are looking here at a large and diffuse ‘culture area’ including many different economic zones. While this would seem to best fit the evidence so far presented, he here introduces the fact that the Pan-Grave and Mokram assemblages do not appear to be contemporary. (I really hate it when a major argument is introduced so late. Given this, why did we even look at the above possible models?) Mokram appears later. Granted the dating is far, far from secure, there is not in fact any reason to assume they are contemporary. After a brief (and annoyingly tenuous) aside about possible relations between east Sudan and Punt, Sadr turns to building a model for the relation of Pan-Grave and Mokram cultures that incorporates the lack of synchrony.

His basic conclusion is that the Pan-Grave people moved over time. He does not see this as a linear move from the area on either side of the 1st cataract to the eastern Sudanese hills, but rather a sort of core area in the hills from which various groups at various times set out on asymmetrical expansions. He sees both the Pan-Grave and the Mokram as basically episodes of such expansion, though he does caution that more work in the hills themselves is necessary before such a hypothesis can be very strongly supported. In his conclusion he returns to the connection to the Medjay, noting that it is problematic to assume a 1:1 correspondence between Medjay and Pan-Grave; he locates the nature of the ambiguity in the now presumed shift in territorial location of the Pan-Grave culture and its descendants. Liszka’s demonstration that the term Medjay was used in different ways by the Egyptians at different periods, and that it possibly only latterly should be thought of as an ethnic identifier that had intrinsic meaning to the people so identified, likewise demonstrates the difficulty of pinning down eastern desert nomads of the 2nd millennium. Both scholars take nuanced approaches that have much to recommend them. Ultimately, the inability to pin down the Medjay and/or Pan-Grave seems likely to accurately represent aspects of the nature of their culture(s), and the places and times they inhabited.