the foreign mariners anchored near by at any given time, would have engaged in trade with semi-nomads who were living in the adjacent coastal area for the summer months. While imported pottery may have been part of these commercial relations with the Libyans, the foreigners had another valuable product to offer—knowledge of an advanced technology. We must presume that bronze objects, produced by methods unknown to the Libyans, were an important part of the trade between the Libyans and the people who used the island.

Exactly who the metal workers on Bates’ Island were is an interesting question. On the basis of his finds at Cape Gelnolyna, Bass has shown that Rinerian bronze workers traveled aboard Late Bronze Age merchant ships, equipped to supply their products on demand in each port of call. Thus bronze working may have been performed either by a Bates’ Island resident, or by a craftsman from a passing ship.

The Libyans living near the revistailing station on the islet could have traded various items in return for the pottery and bronze objects. At such an isolated outpost, and given the needs of passing merchant ships, local resources must have been the primary trade goods, including water (of which there was none on Bates’ Island itself), meat, and various other foodstuffs and wild animal products—including ostrich eggs. Perhaps consumed at the site, these eggs also could have been carried off by the visiting merchants to be traded as novelties in other ports, eventually to be transformed into rhyta, dedicated in foreign sanctuaries, or offered in tombs in distant lands (see box on ostrich eggs).

Conclusion

Though in the past it has been suggested that people from the Aegean settled on the northeast African coast during the Bronze Age, no convincing tangible evidence has yet been furnished which would prove this hypothesis. Excavations by The University Museum Museum on Bates’ Island have begun to provide material evidence which will help us to understand African-Aegean relationships in the Late Bronze Age. Most important of the foreign remains during the late second millennium B.C. is the site of yielding tangible evidence of interaction between Libyans and the foreigners during the late second millennium B.C.

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Bibliography


An Interpretation

For Classical authors such as Herodotus (ca. 450 B.C.), all the various independent people inhabiting the huge land mass extending west from Egypt to the Atlantic Ocean were called “Libyans.” For convenience, we can also employ this general term for the Bronze Age inhabitants of the area. The Egyptians of the New Kingdom (1506-1050 B.C.), however, referred to their western neighbors as the “Tjehenu” and “Tehenu.” Their texts also mention specific subgroups called the “Meswesh” and the “Libu” or “Libyi” — from which our modern word Libyan is derived. Other rare names seem to refer to smaller tribal groups.

The Meswesh and the Libu probably lived in Cyrenaica, where climate and environment made a nomadic semi-nomadic way of life based on herding the most efficient one to follow. They were described by the Egyptians as much, a word translated literally as “family”; however, as applied uniquely to these groups and to the nomadic Shasu of Palestine, much clearly relates to a larger social group. By using this term the Egyptians were apparently emphasizing the primary of kinship within the social and political organization of the Meswesh and Libu, a characteristic shared with modern nomadic tribal societies such as the Bedouin.

Other Libyans known simply as the Tjeheadi lived in Marmara, the coastal region lying between Cyrenaica and Egypt. Further south, the oases of the western desert were inhabited by non-Libyans; throughout the New Kingdom, all of these isolated agricultural settlements (with the exception of remote Siwa) were controlled by the Egyptians. They were metaphorically called “mountains,” reflecting their role as outposts on the frontier, protecting the Nile Valley from the “enemy of the
The Libyans portrayed in these reliefs may well have been only those of Marmarica, and the implied Egyptian domination might have been quite light. Libyan soldiers may have been recruited, rather than impressed; independent as well as venal rulers sent representatives to the Egyptian court; and in the tribute scene, the Libyans are grouped not with the inhabitants of conquered Nubia and Palestine, but with Egypt’s independent trading partners of Punt (Red Sea coast) and North Syria/Anatolia.

This Egyptian interest in Marmarica is part of a generally heightened interest in western contacts during the 18th dynasty. Under Akhenaten’s father, Amenophis III, Egyptian ships were already visiting Crete and mainland Greece, and would naturally return to Egypt via the Libyan coast, as did traders from other lands involved in the eastern Mediterranean trade described by Conwell. Expanding Egyptian foreign contacts are further signalled during Akhenaten’s reign by the first substantial appearance of Greek (Mycenean) pottery in Egyptian sites such as Amarna.

Late 18th dynasty Egypt may well have been in (indirect?) contact with Cyrenaica itself. Meshwesh cattle (but not tribesmen) were imported into Egypt under Amenophis III. But specific references to Cyrenaica do not occur until after the 19th and 20th dynasties (1295-1089 B.C.), and these are almost invariably hostile. Libu, Meshwesh and others are spoken of with withering contempt; they clashed with Egyptian forces (sometimes at or within the Egyptian frontier) under pharaoh Seti I, Ramesses II, Merenptah, and Ramesses III. Within this context, the Egyptian fortification of Marmarica during the 13th century looks like an attempt to stop Cyrenaican movement towards Egypt. The attempted overlordship of Cyrenaica might well have been an effort to halt Cyrenaican pressure at its source.

Why did this marked change in Egyptian-Libyan relations occur? We can only speculate, but aggressive expansion by Egypt may be part of the answer. It is clear that the Cyrenaicans, who were undergoing internal organizational changes, were also aggressors. In the 13th and 12th centuries B.C. the Libu and Meshwesh had centralized political leadership, military coordination, and a relatively wealthy ruling elite. Among nomads, this kind of complex political system would immediately precede the founding of a “nomadic state.” A typical mechanism of state formation is for the nomads to conquer and permanently occupy regions occupied by sedentary agriculturists, and then either become sedentary themselves, or exploit the conquered folk through tribute, taxation, and other means. Such a state provides a self-protective territorial base for periodic raiding and plundering of other nearby, independent sedentary groups. This developmental pattern would explain the Cyrenaican’s repeated attempts (often partially successful) to invade and occupy Egypt’s western and even central Delta (18th and 19th centuries B.C.).

According to Egyptian sources, the Libyan invasions failed; but in the long run they may have succeeded. Only a century after the close of the New Kingdom a new dynasty controlled most of Egypt. This 22nd dynasty had a strongly Libyan character, proclaiming its descent from generations of Meshwesh who were originally prisoners of war, and settled by the Egyptians as military colonists in the eastern Delta. As Leeshy suggests, this dynasty may have brought a Libyan dimension into Egyptian culture by governing in a mode derived from the practices of a nomadic society. Even more intriguing is the emergence along the western edge of the Delta of a kingdom or confederation ruled by successive “Great Chiefs of the Libu”; this obscure entity may prove to be (after further study) a genuine nomadic state.