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## DODEKASCHOINOS IN LATE ANTIQUITY ETHNIC BLEMMYES VS. POLITICAL BLEMMYES AND THE ARRIVAL OF NOBADES

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The present paper is a voice in the ongoing discussion on ethnic and population relations in Late Antique Nubia. The approach presented here argues that ethnonym “the Blemmyes” was also used to designate the population living in the Nile Valley in the 5<sup>th</sup> century CE which ethnically was not Blemmyan. The opinion of the present author is that some elements of the archaeological culture detected in the *Dodekaschoinos* have been misattributed to the Blemmyes, while they should rather be considered as manifestations of the autochthonous population inhabiting the valley before the desert tribes took over.

The region of the *Dodekaschoinos* stretches along the Nile from Elephantine to Hieria Sykaminos (Muharraqa). The name derives from the Greek and means twelve *schoinos*, that is, about 120 km, which is the distance between the two topographical points mentioned above. In antiquity it was a contested area between Egypt (first Ptolemaic and then Roman) and Meroe, a region where the influences of Mediterranean and African cultures merged. From Ptolemaic times it was the domain of Isis temple at Philae.<sup>1</sup> The Roman Empire lost the area ultimately in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE; Diocletian’s new border at Syene (Aswan) established in 298 merely sanctioned an existing *status quo*.

The commonly accepted interpretation based on written sources assumes that in the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> or at the beginning of the 5<sup>th</sup> century the Blemmyes settled in the Nile Valley, adopted local customs, and rejected their traditional nomadic social organization in favor of Egyptian models.<sup>2</sup> In the early 5<sup>th</sup> century CE the *Dodekaschoinos* was inhabited and administered by the Blemmyes. This interpretation, based largely on the report of Olympiodorus, is applied consistently to the analysis of other sources.

Archaeological sources have questioned the credibility of this interpretation. The opinion of the present author is that some elements of the culture and social organization detected in the *Dodekaschoinos* have been misattributed to the Blemmyes, while they should rather be considered as manifestations of the autochthonous population inhabiting the valley before the Blemmyes held the political sway over this region. Neither is there evidence for a sudden and rather absolute acculturation – rejection of own traditions and adoption of models from Egypt – of all of the Blemmyan tribes at once satisfactory.

Blemmyan presence in the Nile Valley grew gradually from the middle of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE, as reported by more or less credible sources like the Latin panegyric for Constantius I, John Zonaras’ writings in *Epitome historiarum*, the fragment of *Historia Augusta* concerning the liberation of Koptos and Ptolemais from Blemmyan hands by Probus and the opposing text of Zosimus in *Historia Nova* presenting the Blemmyes as allies of the rebelling Egyptian towns. These sources have been collected and commented extensively in *Fontes Historiae Nubiorum*.<sup>3</sup> In these sources the Blemmyes appear as nomadic peoples in search of easy and rich loot, spreading terror on the southern and eastern fringes of Egypt. They frequently raided the Nile Valley and were themselves the object of military expeditions, Diocletian’s among others.<sup>4</sup> The peak of growing activity of tribes from the Eastern Desert was noted in the last years of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, especially between

1 Török 1980: 76

2 See comment by László Török to a Greek inscription of a religious association from Kalabsha: Eide 1994, vol.3: 313, 1135-1136

3 For Latin panegyric see: Eide 1994, vol.3: 280, 1057.; for Ioannes Zonaras, see: Zonaras, et al. 1868; Eide 1994, vol.3: 281, 1059. ; for *Historia Augusta* see Eide 1994, vol.3: 284, 1064.; for Zosimus English translation see: Zosimus and Ridley 1982; Eide 1994, vol.3: 323, 1175. The last two refer to the same event, but presenting it in different light. According to the first text, Probus was supposed to free Koptos and Ptolemais from Blemmyan occupation. Zosimus on the other hand believed that the Blemmyes supported the rebellion of Ptolemais against Probus. See also Török 1987: 187

4 Zonaras, et al. 1868: 12.31B-C., Eide 1994, vol.3: 281, 1059.



296 and 298. Their impact on the state of mind of the inhabitants of the Nile Valley was so overwhelming that they are stereotyped in the common consciousness in the Thebaid and to the south of it as the aggressive barbarians from the desert.<sup>5</sup>

The existence of a *topos* of Blemmyes as pillagers is verified by the use of the ethnonym with regard to nomadic tribes from the Western Desert. The Blemmyes were said to have raided Kharga Oasis at the time when Nestorius, exiled by Theodosius II, was there, liberating the ex-patriarch of Constantinople. This event was reported in three sources: Evagrius' *Historia Ecclesiastica*,<sup>6</sup> Letter to Cosmas<sup>7</sup> and Barhadbeshabba `Arbaya's *History of the Church*.<sup>8</sup> In the first of the three sources, the liberators of Nestorius are indeed called Blemmyes, but Evagrius' credibility had been long questioned. In the second and the third source, which are preserved in Syriac, they are referred to: once as barbarians and once as brigands, not by the ethnonym. Is then Evagrius text a sufficient proof that it were in fact Blemmyes who liberated Nestorius or is it just a *topos*?

Another source indicating the possibility of Blemmyan attacks on Kharga is a demotic inscription from the temple on Philae.<sup>9</sup> The toponym indicated there as the objective of Blemmyan raids is supposed to be Khibis in Kharga Oasis, but the interpretation is unsure, although commonly accepted, among others, by the editors of *Fontes Historiae Nubiorum*, rejected however by Didier Devauchelle.<sup>10</sup> Taking into consideration other written sources placing the Blemmyes in the Eastern Desert already a few hundred years earlier, it seems that the interpretation suggesting the presence of Blemmyes in the Western Desert can be a *topos* and thus is at least questionable if not false.

Sources referring to the 4<sup>th</sup> century presented a slightly changed image of the Blemmyes. They appear to have allied themselves with the Meroites and were trying to reach an agreement with the Empire, this attitude expressed by their joint embassy with the Meroites to Constantine in 336;<sup>11</sup> archives of Flavius Abbinus.<sup>12</sup> Bruce Williams even suggested that a part of the Blemmyes could have

settled on the fringes of the Nile Valley already before 346.<sup>13</sup> Between 371 and 373 a barge with the statue of Isis could not make its journey to Abaton Island because of pillaging by the Blemmyes.<sup>14</sup> Interestingly enough, just 50 years later the Blemmyes were already described as worshippers of Isis and guardians of the continuity of the goddess' cult on Philae and according to the sources, Isis temple at Philae was the longest functioning pagan temple in the Empire thanks exclusively to the Blemmyes (see among others, Priscus<sup>15</sup> and *Fontes Historiae Nubiorum*).<sup>16</sup>

The written sources highlight the strengthening of the Blemmyes position to the south and east of Egypt in the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century, especially in the *Dodekaschoinos*. In a report concerning the year 394 Epiphanius of Salamis described the Blemmyes as having taken Talmis (Kalabsha) and its neighborhood, along with the emerald mines in the Eastern Desert (Epiphanius of Salamis, *De XII gemmis*, 19–21, FHN III, 305, 1118).<sup>17</sup> In 395 the Blemmyes raided Syene.<sup>18</sup>

Olympiodorus' report of his visit to the Blemmyes in 423 is a key written source for the history of the *Dodekaschoinos* in the 5<sup>th</sup> century (Olympiodorus, frag. 1.37 FHN III, 309, 1126 ff.). According to the author, the power of the Blemmyan king extended from the Phoinikon (el-Laqaitea), through Khiris (still not identified), Taphis (Taifa), Talmis (Kalabsha) to Prima (Qasr Ibrim).<sup>19</sup> Inscriptions in the temple of Mandulis in Kalabsha constitute another important source on the history of the *Dodekaschoinos*. They were left by rulers: Blemmyan Tamal,<sup>20</sup> Isemne,<sup>21</sup>

13 Williams 2002: 489

14 Eide 1994, vol.3: 302, 1110.

15 Dindorf 1870

16 Eide 1994, vol.3: 318, 1153

17 I do not follow here Török's suggestion that the Blemmyes took over Talmis recently, since it relies on the source which is not very reliable for the southern border of Egypt e.g. Epiphanius erroneously calls Mons Smaragdus an island. The time of Blemmyes taking over Kalabsha relies on interpretation of the meaning of word "nunc", see commentary in FHN III 305, 1120.

18 see Reitzenstein 1916, and FHN III, 307, 1123

19 The relatively risky interpretation of the toponym of Prima suggested by László Török in his comment to the source in FHN, III, 1128, is not followed by the present author thus Prima is Roman Primis (Qasr Ibrim).

20 Preisigke, et al. 1915, vol. I, 1521, 1522, 1523, FHN III, 310, 1128

21 Preisigke, et al. 1915, vol.1: 1524, Eide 1994, vol.3: 311, 1131. Isemne has been identified with Yismeniye, Kharamandoye's opponent, appearing in the latter's inscription, following Millet and Priese see Eide 1994: 1132. In this case Isemne's inscription is probably later

5 Life of St Pachomius, Eide 1994, vol.3: 296, 1087.

6 *Ewagriusz and Kazikowski* 1990: 1.07

7 *Patrologia Orientalis* 1907: 14.7, 270 ff.

8 *Barhadbeshabba and Nau* 1932: 30, *Patrologia Orientalis* 1907: 584-5

9 Griffith 1935, Ph. 371; Eide 1994, vol.3: 302, 1110

10 Wagner 1987: 397

11 Eusebius of Caesarea, *Vita Constantini*: 4.7, Eide 1994, vol.3: 293, 1079

12 Abinnaeus, et al. 1962: P.Abinn.1, CPL 265.; Eide 1994, vol.3: 295, 1083



and Kharamandoye,<sup>22</sup> the Nobadian Silko,<sup>23</sup> as well as by religious associations.<sup>24</sup> Royal inscriptions in the temple of Mandulis attest to the importance of the worship of this deity for the population of the *Dodekaschoinos* in the Late Antiquity. If the cult of Mandulis was still important, then the priesthood must have retained a strong position in society. The location of the inscription of Silko is also of interest. It is found in the northwestern corner of the pronaos on the east facade of the hypostyle hall. The east facade of the hypostyle hall was naturally the best visible vertical wall upon entering the pronaos and this could have decided about placing the inscription.

The first Egyptian text mentioning the Nobades in the Nile Valley in the immediate vicinity of the Egyptian border appeared shortly after Olympiodorus' visit with the Blemmyes. It is a petition of the bishop Appion to the emperors Theodosius II and Valentinian III, dated between 425 and 450.<sup>25</sup> The Nobades put an end to Blemmyan control of the *Dodekaschoinos* gradually, over a span of 20-30 years, ending the process presumably sometime in the reigns of Silko and Aburni. There are no more either written historical reports on Lower Nubia or epigraphic sources after the peace signed by Maximinus in 452. Assuming the current dating of the documents and inscriptions from Qasr Ibrim and Kalabsha, there is a gap of seventy years without any information until the period between 523 and 525 when the Emperor Justin threatened the Himyarites with military intervention by an army composed of Nubians and Blemmyes.<sup>26</sup> This could possibly be explained by normalized relations between Nobadia and the Empire based on the principle of *foedus* and both sides keeping up to the conditions of the treaty. With nothing of interest occurring in this part of the limes, it comes as no wonder that historians did not find anything to report on from the southern borders of Egypt.

The view of *Dodekaschoinos* history presented here contains a number of elements which with the help of additional sources can be interpreted differently than hitherto. The results of archaeological

excavations in Lower Nubia lead to the following conclusions:

- Significant changes of the settlement network (new foundations) occurred in the 6<sup>th</sup> century when the Nobades solidified their power.
- Religious centers (Tafis, Dendur) functioned for long after the collapse of the Meroitic state. The temple of Mandulis in Kalabsha continued to be the main center and the temple of Isis on Philae played an important role at the frontier.
- Anthropological research has produced data on evolutionary changes, not a sudden replacing of the population living in the *Dodekaschoinos*.
- Decline of Meroitic authority corresponded with the fall of royal monopolies, including pottery distribution. A rather sudden change of ceramic inventories occurred at the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century: Meroitic forms and decoration were replaced with a new and different material imported from Egypt, followed by local production continuously modeled on the production of the northern neighbor.
- Only four of a few hundred cemeteries in the *Dodekaschoinos* (Kalabsha South, Wadi Qitna,<sup>27</sup> Bet el-Wali,<sup>28</sup> and Sayala<sup>29</sup>) contained archeological material different than in the other parts of the Nile valley. Bruce Williams rightly criticized László Török's view about the Meroites settling the Noba in the *Dodekaschoinos*. The archeological material from sites indicated by Török (Wadi Qitna, Kalabsha and Sayala) is completely not Meroitic in character. The tombs are also unlike what was discovered elsewhere, except el-Kab in Egypt and in the territory of Atbai in southeastern Sudan. Thus material culture distinguished for the first time by Herbert Ricke,<sup>30</sup> found at four sites (Kalabsha, Wadi Qitna, Sayala and Wadi el-Arab), should be associated with the Blemmyes as suggested by Bruce Williams.<sup>31</sup>

Therefore, there is a dissonance between the archaeological sources and the interpretation, based on the written sources, of changes occurring in Lower Nubia after the fall of Meroe. The commonly accepted view, prompted by Olympiodorus' report, holds that the Blemmyes settled in the Nile Valley and adopted social and cultural models current there, social structure and religion in particular. It derives

then Kharamandoye's due to the Greek not Meroitic language used in the case of the latter.

22 Leclant, et al. 2000, 0094; Eide 1994, vol.3: 311, 1131.

23 Preisigke, et al. 1915, vol.5: 8536; Eide 1994, vol.3: 317, 1147 ff.

24 Preisigke, et al. 1915, vol.1: 13, 14; Eide 1994, vol.3: 315, 1141; the associations: 313, 1135 ff.

25 Preisigke, et al. 1915, vol.20: 14606; Eide 1994, vol.3: 314, 1138 ff.

26 Boissonade 1829, vol.5: 41-43; Eide 1994, vol.3: 327, 1185 ff.

27 Strouhal 1984

28 Ricke 1967

29 Bedawi 1976; correct interpretation in Török 1988: 178-182

30 Ricke 1967: 37-42

31 Williams 1991: 17, Edwards 2004: 209



from the fact that Olympiodorus referred to all of the population of the *Dodekaschoinos* as Blemmyes and this traditional version was continued in successive written sources from the territory of the Empire. In reality, the Blemmyes ruled the *Dodekaschoinos*, but the population resident in the valley was not ethnically Blemmyan. It was different from the Blemmyes, foremost in terms of social structure. The existence of religious associations attested by inscriptions, is proof that social organizations (associations) characteristic of Egyptian society at this time and used as tax-levying instruments were present in the *Dodekaschoinos*. It does not mean that the Blemmyes, having settled in the valley, adopted these social institutions for organization of their chiefdom. The nomadic Blemmyes understood as an ethnic community, were interested in political and economic control of this region.

If there was any intensive settlement by the Blemmyes in the *Dodekaschoinos*, one that could be connected with a radical change of lifestyle from nomadic pastoralism to sedentary farming, it occurred in the area around Kalabsha, the main urban center in the *Dodekaschoinos* and on its southern border in Sayala. But the absence of settlements with archaeological material found in the above-mentioned cemeteries suggests that the Nile Valley was important to the Blemmyes primarily as a burial site. Such a tradition of location of cemeteries close to water sources or communication routes is common among pastoral communities all over the world. It does not necessarily indicate changes of lifestyle.<sup>32</sup> Derek Welsby has suggested that the observed scarcity of evidence for the presence of Blemmyes in the valley is due to the fact that the nomads with their minimal equipment appeared in a community rich in artifacts. For this reason they did not make any huge impact on the material culture in the valley.<sup>33</sup> This view seems to be too much of a simplification. If we take into consideration for instance the grave inventories, artifacts of a different nature, especially if sporadic, would be easy to identify in the more or less homogeneous and well investigated material culture of the Nile Valley. Let's consider for a while the rationale behind and benefits of settling in the valley – more stable means of subsistence. In this case Egypt offered much better conditions than the *Dodekaschoinos* and it was here where the Blemmyes settled. A lack of universal and intensive interest on the part of the Blemmyes in settling in the *Dodekaschoinos* can be found also is a

letter of their king Phonen to the king of the Nobades Aburni.<sup>34</sup> How else after all should one explain the Blemmyan king's greater care expressed about herds and grazing land rather than lost cities?

Upon analysis of the potential scenarios considered by the Blemmyes, it is clear which solution was optimal for the nomads. Political control of the *Dodekaschoinos*, combined with seizing the Eastern Desert with its natural resources was advantageous from an economic, political and cultural point of view. It ensured access to water and grazing land for the herds. This solution was beneficial also to the autochthonous population. The elites associated with traditional cults were interested in maintaining a religious status quo. In the face of effective expansion of Christianity in Egypt and the consequences of this fact for earlier cults, the Blemmyes also guaranteed social position by entrusting authority on behalf of the king from the desert, something already suggested indirectly by László Török in his commentary to the inscription of King Tamal.<sup>35</sup> Thus, we would have in the *Dodekaschoinos* a society made up of at least two ethnic and cultural groups: people settled in the Valley and nomads living on its fringes and in the Eastern Desert. Reiterating, there is no reason not to think that a part of the Blemmyes actually settled in the Nile Valley and were subjected to acculturation. But the political center of the chiefdom remained in the desert, which continued to be the place of first choice.

Cooperation between the population settled in the valley and the Blemmyes appears to be in place in the *Dodekaschoinos* at that time, confirming Bruce Williams' suggestion of the early loss of political control over this area by the Meroitic kings.<sup>36</sup> The joint embassy of the Meroites and Blemmyes to Constantine in 336 is traditionally assumed to be proof of cooperation between the two communities. Taking into consideration the dating of coins found in Kalabsha (issued between 330 and 346) and the later report by Ammianus Marcellinus about the Blemmyes south of Egypt,<sup>37</sup> their strong presence

34 Skeat 1977; Eide 1994, vol.3: 319, 1158ff.

35 FHN III, 310, 1128

36 Williams 2002: 497.

37 Ammianus Marcellinus 22.15.2; 21; 24 – Eide 1994: vol.3: 303, 1112; 304, 1115. Ammianus Marcellinus reported that the hippopotami were allegedly moving from Egypt to the lands of the Blemmyes. Obviously they could not have moved to the desert. Assuming the report is credible, it would indicate that the Blemmyes were in control of the *Dodekaschoinos* (at least its northern end) by not later than between 371 and 378, when Ammianus Marcellinus made his two journeys to Egypt. It is only then that the report makes sense.

32 Description of the habits of pastoral nomads in Africa see: Then-Obluska 2008

33 Welsby 2002: 20



early (first half of the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD) in the *Dodekaschoinos* as well as a possible alliance with the Meroites living there could be suggested, explaining also the fact of intensified raids by the Blemmyes on Egypt, once they had settled their relations with the inhabitants of the *Dodekaschoinos*. Thus, it could be said that there was an alliance started in the third decade of the 4<sup>th</sup> century at the latest, between the Blemmyes and the Meroites in the *Dodekaschoinos* with the latter group being the dominant one initially, until about sixth or seventh decade of the century when the nomads took full initiative in this part of the Nile Valley.

The other peoples present in *Dodekaschoinos* in Late Antiquity mentioned in the textual sources were the Nobades. The first known Egyptian textual non-literary source mentioning the presence of the Nobades in the Nile Valley in the immediate neighborhood of the border is the petition of Bishop Appion to the emperor Theodosius II and Valentinian III dated between 425 and 450. The new term “Nobades”, which appeared in place of “Ethiopians”, means the appearance of a new, politically significant element on the social map of the Nile Valley in the immediate neighborhood of Egypt.<sup>38</sup>

Appion’s petition, Silko’s inscription and the archaeological material support the idea that in the 430s and 440s the Nobades gradually pressed down the Nile from territories to the north of the second cataract. At the beginning of the 5<sup>th</sup> century they subordinated the region of Lower Nubia between the second cataract and the *Dodekaschoinos*. About the middle of the 5<sup>th</sup> century, Silko and Aburni ultimately sealed their authority over the *Dodekaschoinos*. The process was observed by Priscus, who summed up the situation on the borders of the Empire in 447, describing the “Ethiopians” being united (presumably under the aegis of the Nobades and not necessarily peacefully).<sup>39</sup> Maximinus put an end to the territorial expansion of the Nobades in 452. Apart from an incident of freeing hostages shortly after its signing, the peace accord was never broken. Pressure exerted by the Nobades in the valley caused some of the Blemmyes to withdraw to the desert. Therefore, Silko’s inscription could date to before the middle of the 5<sup>th</sup> century. In view of the dating of the documents, the following sequence seems plausible: 447 Priscus reports unification pro-

cesses among the Ethiopians; around the same time but not later than 450 Appion sends his petition to the emperors Theodosius II and Valentinian III; according to another excerpt from the work of Priscus, Maximinus effectively counteracted the threat from the south thanks to his victorious expedition and the treaty signed in 452/3. This suggests that Appion’s petition could date to the 5<sup>th</sup> decade of the 5<sup>th</sup> century and was one of the factors which triggered decision to move Maximinus army south shortly thereafter.

Excavations in Qasr Ibrim produced a few texts concerning political, social and economic relations in the 5<sup>th</sup> century in Lower Nubia and southern Egypt.<sup>40</sup> One of the texts is a letter of king of the Blemmyes Phonen to king of the Nobades Aburni. The find spot indicates that the Nobades had made the city a major, if not the main administration center. Silko’s victory is mentioned in the text; therefore, the letter postdates Silko’s inscription from Kalabsha, meaning that it refers to a time when the Blemmyes were pushed out from the Nile Valley. This is indicated also in the content of the letter, because Phonen is requesting the return of herds and pastures in the *Dodekaschoinos*.

To recapitulate, the political domination of the Blemmyes in the *Dodekaschoinos* ended in the middle of the 5<sup>th</sup> century, when they were replaced there, having similar role, by the Nobades. The latter controlled the territory between the first and second cataracts and placed their capital in the centrally located city of Qasr Ibrim. There was no population change in the *Dodekaschoinos* since the Meroitic period. The Blemmyes confined themselves to exploiting the Nile Valley as a water source and as a convenient pasture ground for their herds, as well as taking advantage of the trade network functioning there to profit from selling the product of the mines they controlled in the Eastern Desert. There is no extensive Blemmyan settlement in the ethnic sense, while organization into religious associations characteristic of Egypt concerned communities living in the valley already in the Meroitic period. Control was exercised partly by still functioning priestly elites, which retained their importance also after the *Dodekaschoinos* entered into the Nobadian sphere of influence. Their important position was also a reason for the long survival of the traditional cults of Mandulis and Isis, and for the functioning

38 Collection of different terms referring to the ethnonym Nuba in Dijkstra 2008: 45, note 123.

39 On the uniting of the Ethiopians see: Priscus frag. 6, after: Letsios 1993; Priscus frag. 21, Eide 1994, vol.3: 1153 ff. (regarding military action by Maximinus).

40 Greek letter of King Phonen: Eide 1994, vol.3: 319, 1158.; Coptic letter of Yahatek to Tantani: Eide 1994, vol.3: 321, 1171 ff.; letter in Coptic of Vientius to Tantani: Eide 1994, vol.3: 320, 1165ff.; Coptic letter of Moses to Tantani: Eide 1994, vol.3: 322, 1172ff.



of the temple of Isis on Philae being a condition of the peace negotiated with Maximinus in 452. The political domination of the Blemmyes in the Nile Valley in the first half of the 5<sup>th</sup> century AD resulted in the ethnonym being applied rather freely to the autochthonous population of the *Dodekaschoinos*. One cannot exclude cultural models from the Valley being adopted by the Blemmyes, but there is no evidence to show that this was a widespread process among them. It was rather a case of families or clans changing from a nomadic to a sedentary lifestyle.

The Blemmyes initially attempted to recover control of this part of the *Dodekaschoinos*. Later they regrouped in the desert in order to continue controlling the mines there. The ethnic composition of the population of the *Dodekaschoinos* did not change radically, as assumed in previous interpretations of written sources. In view of the lack of settlements with “Blemmyan” pottery, concentrations of population groups of Blemmyan ethnicity are marked in the archaeological record only by cemeteries: Wadi Qitna, Kalabsha, Sayala and Wadi el-Arab. The continued functioning of the temple of Isis on Philae, a condition of the peace with Maximinus contrary to official regulations, also speaks in favour of the change in the *Dodekaschoinos* being political, not ethnic. The temple was not of importance to the Blemmyes and later Nobades as much as it was to the part of the population living in the *Dodekaschoinos*. This population retained considerable importance and influence regardless of the political changes, whether concerning the Blemmyes or Nobades. Two factors were decisive in this respect. The population of the *Dodekaschoinos* and of the rest of Lower Nubia retained a stock of knowledge and skills useful in state formation process, something that both the Blemmyes and the Nobades appreciated. Creation of a new political entity in Lower Nubia progressed rapidly thanks to this retained information on state structures and lasting social relations in the urban centers. Radical changes took place in the second half of the 5<sup>th</sup> and the first half of the 6<sup>th</sup> century when the Nobades decided on a change of religion following a gradual weakening of existing elites and rising aspirations of their own. Their decision was prompted by the increasingly complete Christianization of southern Egypt and the development and especially stabilization of Nobadian authority in Lower Nubia. The Nobades took control of the Nile Valley from the Blemmyes in the middle of the 5<sup>th</sup> century. Thus one should not put too much weight by what Procopius had to say about Justinian throwing the Blemmyes out of the Valley and leaving only the Nobades there. All that Procopius did was

to sum up the political situation in the 530s, crediting it to his benefactor.<sup>41</sup>

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41 Christides 1990



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#### ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

In diesem Artikel wird die laufende Diskussion um die Bevölkerung des spätantiken Unternubien aufgegriffen. Es wird argumentiert, dass das Ethnonym „Blemmyer“ auch die Bevölkerung Unternubiens im 5. Jh. bezeichnete, die ethnisch gesehen keine Blemmyer waren. Dafür werden die schriftlichen wie auch die archäologischen Quellen zusammengestellt. Einige Elemente der archäologischen Kultur des *Dodekaschoinos* sind als blemmysch fehlgedeutet worden. Diese können jedoch als Manifestationen der autochtonen Bevölkerung, die bereits vor dem Eindringen der Wüstenstämme im Niltal beheimatet war, angesehen werden. Die Veränderungen im *Dodekaschoinos* sind vor allem als politische und weniger als ethnische Veränderungen anzusehen.