Mobility Patterns of Pastoral Peoples from the Eastern and Western Deserts (Egypt, Sudan) Between the Sixth and Second Millennia BC An Ethno-archaeological Examination of Burial Practices
‘…there is much to be gained from a careful analysis of the behavior of modern pastoral nomadic groups...’

The spread of domesticated animals was the crucial civilization process for the Northeast African economy since the seventh millennium BC. The knowledge of breeding cattle spread from the area of the present day Western Desert or Kerma while domesticated goat and sheep were introduced through the Eastern Desert from the Near East. Since this time, hunting-gathering, fishing, and pastoral groups inhabiting the territories adjacent to the Nile Valley were facing variable environmental conditions. Between the sixth and second millennia BC the areas of gradually disappearing savannah of North Africa still enabled their inhabitants to practise pastoral economy. Egyptian deserts underwent change due to deteriorating environmental conditions, which gradually restricted the specialised herdsmen’s presence to the area of Wadi Howar (Sudan) – the southern border of the present day Sahara.

Pastoral economy, in general based on moving the herds from one field to another, is well-illustrated in a wealth of rock art thought to be made by many pastoral groups of the Eastern and Western Deserts in Egypt and partially in Sudan. Pastoral economy was also identified from skeletal remains of domesticated cattle, sheep and goat retrieved from the occupation, settlement, ritual, and burial sites.

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3 M. Honegger, Aux origines de Kerma, Genava n.s. 55, 2007, pp. 201–212; M. Honegger, Kerma et le débuts du néolithique africain, Genava n.s. 53, 2005, pp. 239–249.
For centuries, burial sites have been observed along desert routes in the Grassy Valley\(^9\) and Wadi Hammamat,\(^{10}\) close to the Mediterranean coast in Marsa Matrouh,\(^{11}\) and the Red Sea coast in Ras Samadai\(^{12}\) and Er Arib,\(^{13}\) as early as the first half of the Twentieth century (Fig. 1). During the last several years archaeological research has been carried out in the Eastern Desert by the following institutions and projects: the British Museum in Wadi

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\(^{11}\) O. BATES, Excavations at Marsa Matruh, *Varia Africana* IV, 1927 [=Excavations], pp. 137–140.


Atulla, UNESCO and the Britsh Museum in Shaab Negema, Centre Ricerce sul Deserto Orientale (CeRDO) in Wadi Elei, and Institut Français d’Archéologie Orientale (IFAO), Institut de Recherche pour le Développement (IRD), and by South Valley University (Aswan branch) in Wadi Gabgaba and Wadi Seiga. In the Western Desert burial sites have been examined by: the Combined Prehistoric Expedition (CPE) in Gebel Ramlah and in Nabta Playa, The Theban Desert Road Survey (TDRS) in Wadi el-Hol, The Dakhleh Oasis Project (DOP) in Sheikh Muftah, Besiedlungsgeschichte der Ost-Sahara (BOS) and Arid Climate Adaptation and Cultural Innovation in Africa (ACACIA) in Eastpans, the Laqiya region, and in Wadi Howar.

24 F. JESSE, B. KIEDING, Death in the Desert – Burials in the Wadi Howar Region (Eastern Sahara) [=Death in
Although a number of burial sites have been excavated to date and many works concerning desert lands and the economy of their inhabitants,\textsuperscript{25} as well as their cultural affiliation with the Nile Valley,\textsuperscript{26} have been published so far, an overview study on burial customs of pastoral people and their mobility from the Neolithic period onwards is still surprisingly lacking.

THE DEAD AND MOBILITY PATTERNS?

Each community reacts in a specific way to the death of its member; this reaction is one of the basic sources of archaeological information, all the more so since funerary structures and finds are very often preserved in conditions far better than those coming from settlements.\textsuperscript{27} Moreover, funerary customs should not be treated as a separate phenomenon but as a focal point that can inform us about different aspects of particular cultures, such as their economy or character, including their mobility.

In the introduction to their book The Archaeology of Mobility, Willeke Wendrich and Hans Barnard, basing on ethno-archaeological studies, indicated location of burials and other ways of treating the dead among many factors of mobility ‘that should be addressed when studying mobile societies.’\textsuperscript{28} They also collected many definitions describing the
mobility of people, including pastoral people: ‘Pastoral-nomadism is the general form for mobility centered around maintenance and welfare of flocks or herds, while semi-nomadic pastoralism denotes a situation where part of the group is settled, or the entire group is settled for part of the year.’

Territories of that groups often overlap with those of semi-settled pastoralists. One should note, however, that pastoralism with breeding and grazing animals as its sole activities is most often just a dominant strategy accompanied by a wide variety of subsidiary activities such as hunting, gathering, farming, barter, trade, and hired work; this is called multi-resource nomadism. ‘The term herders-gatherers, introduced by Steven Rosen, finds increasingly widespread use and highlights the frequent occurrence of pastoralists who also embark on hunting and gathering.’

Additional terms, used for seasonal migration with flocks and herds, are vertical and horizontal transhumance/nomadism. In the vertical one, connected with mountains, pastoralists graze their herds higher in the mountains during summer, and descend into the plains for winter; in horizontal one, pertaining to plains on the other hand, they move with winter rainfalls to come back to their water wells for summer.

On the basis of archaeological evidence from burial sites, coming mainly from southern regions of the Eastern and Western Deserts, the whole period has been divided in the present article into four subperiods: turn of the sixth to fifth millennium BC, the second half of the fifth millennium BC, the fourth and third millennium BC, and the second millennium BC. The material of particular subperiods and regions will be compared with ethnographic information about contemporary northeast African pastoral tribes’ sepulchral practices, according to the pattern of their mobility (Fig. 2).

Applying an ethnographic approach to archaeological studies can sometimes be controversial. By directly identifying modern peoples with ancient communities of the same area, one deprives the latter of the right to their own culture as well as restricts its interpretation. If applied properly, however, ethnographic analogies can provide a useful tool for interpretation of many, often very specific, elements of material and social culture.

Thanks to ethnographic comparison, it will be possible to indicate the relation between the mobility pattern of pastoral community and its burial customs. This, in turn, should

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29 Ibid., pp. 6-8.
33 Wendrich, Barnard, Archaeology of Mobility, p. 6.
34 Ibid., p.8.
help identify the patterns of mobility the inhabitants of both deserts practiced between the sixth and second millennia BC

THE FUNERARY EVIDENCE AND CHRONOLOGICAL APPROACH OF SITES FROM THE EASTERN AND WESTERN DESERTS BETWEEN THE SIXTH AND SECOND MILLENNIA BC

Statistical, topographical, and geographical analyses of Eastern and Western Desert sites confirm a large diversity of funerary customs among pastoral people between the sixth and second millennia BC. To these belong both animal burials within ritual centres and human burials on burial sites, within settlements, and occasionally also within ritual centres.  


The majority of those sites were located in close proximity of water or communication routes (wadi); in several cases the closeness of an occupation site was also an important factor.\(^{41}\) According to the number of human burials, the sites can be divided to single-\(^{42}\) and double-burial sites,\(^{43}\) small clusters of burials,\(^{44}\) and cemeteries.\(^{45}\) The dead (or his bones) could be rested on surface,\(^{46}\) in a pit,\(^{47}\) or in a pit with niches;\(^{48}\) there is also one case of a burial in a cave.\(^{49}\) Burial pits could be provided with superstructures in form of a stone mound,\(^{50}\) single or double stone ring,\(^{51}\) or stela.\(^{52}\)

Single,\(^{53}\) double,\(^{54}\) and collective human burials\(^{55}\) have been recorded; they could be of primary or secondary character. Bodies were usually rested on side in flexed position; in several cases, however, the deceased rested on back in extended position. The deceased were accompanied by bones or skin of domesticated animals (cattle, sheep/goat).

Cenotaphs have also been recorded in the Western Desert.\(^{56}\) In the Eastern Desert, offering pits have been discovered placed under tumuli and containing animal bones and pottery, as well as personal adornments.\(^{57}\) In one case a hearth has been observed within stone circle located near the burial.\(^{58}\)

The analysis of grave inventories reveals changes in burial customs of the peoples under discussion. The presence of human settlers in the deserts became significantly limited to ecological niches and the Nile Valley due to the drought proceeding from the north to the south, a process which started in the end of the sixth millennium BC.
Burials dated to the turn of the sixth to the fifth millennium B.C., known from Eastpans and Nabta Playa, were located within settlements or ritual centres comprising animal offerings or burials. Usually, both superstructure and grave goods were lacking;\(^{59}\) in a few Nabta Playa cases, however, the presence of tumulus and grave goods has been observed. A few burials were surrounded or covered by stone slabs\(^{60}\) and a few contained pieces of red ochre and mica, ostrich eggshell and carnelian beads, or exceptional pottery pendant in shape of a tulip beaker.\(^ {61}\)

Beside the burials within settlement sites, in the Nabta Playa ritual centre, tumuli have been discovered accompanying the astronomical calendar and a number of stelae. Their stone superstructures contained human and faunal skeletal remains.\(^ {62}\)

From the mid of the fifth millennium BC, the world of the living and the dead became separate and most of the dead, accompanied by a wealth of grave inventories and jewellery, were buried within the burial sites outside the settlements. Collective graves found in Gebel Ramlah and Wadi Atulla, belonging probably to particular families, dated to the fifth millennium BC, contained primary and secondary burials. As a rule, the deceased were placed in simple pits,\(^ {63}\) with the exception of a pit with niches in one case\(^ {64}\) and a cave in another one.\(^ {65}\) The burials were richly equipped with, among others, tulip-shaped beakers, animal skins, adornments made of various materials either of local origin or coming from Middle Africa, Sinai, Red Sea coast, or Red Sea Mountains. Remains of ochre and other pigments have also been recorded; they are frequently found together with cosmetic containers and pebble stone grinders.

In the fourth millennium BC, the herders moved southwards and strictly limited their territory to the oases, the Lajyia region and Wadi el-Allaqi.\(^ {66}\) Their burials, usually single, and occasionally also double,\(^ {67}\) in most cases were covered by stone superstructure. The famous Nabta Playa Prince’s Tumulus, marking the burial of a three-year-old boy, has been dated to the mid-fourth millennium BC and is commonly considered a proof of the hierarchisation of the community.\(^ {68}\) It is possible, however, that this was just one of many tumuli of the Eastern and Western Deserts, so popular in this period. Grave goods and adornments were not so abundant than a millennium earlier, but they were still present in the burials. It is worth noticing that in Wadi Shaw the removing of incisors has been recorded.\(^ {69}\)

\(^{59}\) Gehlen et al., Holocene Occupation, pp. 85–116; Applegate, Gautier, Duncan, North tumuli, pp. 468–488.

\(^{60}\) Wendt, Prehistory, pp. 158–160, Fig. 3.102; Applegate, Gautier, Duncan, North tumuli, pp. 468–488.

\(^{61}\) Wendt, Schöld, Prehistory, pp. 158–160, Fig. 3.109.


\(^{63}\) Kobusiewicz et al., Discovery, pp. 566–578.


\(^{65}\) Darnell, Gravel, pp. 156–157.


\(^{67}\) Gatto, Guliati, CRIPEL 26, pp. 121–130.

\(^{68}\) A. Krzemińska, Stele w pyle, Polityka 16 (2601), 21 kwietnia 2007, pp. 80–82.

Additionally, from the fifth millennium onwards a stela and/or traces of fire appeared within or near tumuli of the Eastern Desert; these were occasionally accompanied by animal bones, beads, or pottery, forming a so-called offering place.70

A usual burial practice in Wadi Howar between the fourth and second millennia BC were intra-settlement graves without superstructure.71 One can also observe the presence of a local ritual centre, existing for almost a millennium at Djabarona, where thousands of pits have been discovered filled with animal bones, pottery, and stone axes.72

Interestingly, no human burial from the third millennium BC has been recorded so far in the Eastern Desert.73 On the other hand, a large ritual centre existed at Er Arib, where many tumuli with animal bones have been found.74

Very few human burials of the second millennium BC have been preserved, and in only two of them, in Wadi Elei75 and Wadi Shaw,76 personal adornments were present. Also for this period, a ritual centre with tumuli containing animal bones was located in the oasis of El Bahrein, in the Western Desert.77

BURIAL CUSTOMS AND MOBILITY OF THE PASTORAL PEOPLES OF NORTHEAST AFRICA – AN ETHNOGRAPHICAL APPROACH

An ethnographic foray into northeastern Africa reveals a great diversity of burial practices among the pastoral peoples. These customs are represented by, for example, primary and secondary burials and cenotaphs indicative of significance of tribal cemeteries, burying the dead within settlements, leaving the bodies unburied, or animal and pastoral elite burials situated in a ritual centre. Additionally, the graves themselves could have different functions.

Among the cattle specialised herders from tribes of Sahel such as semi-nomadic Turkana78 and the semi-sedentary Dinka79, examples of intra-settlement burials can be observed.80 Among Turkana proper burials are given only to those people who entered into

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72 KEADING, Djabarona, p. 11.
73 SADR, CASTIGLIONI, and CASTIGLIONI, Archaeological Sequence, p. 194.
74 MURRAY, JEA 12, pp. 248–249.
75 SADR, CASTIGLIONI, and CASTIGLIONI, Archaeological Sequence, p. 194.
76 SCHUCK, Steinzeitliche Graber, pp. 242–243.
78 YOKELL, Modeling, p. 38.
79 Ibid., p. 39.
marriage – the husband is buried in anok, the goat stall, while the wife and mother in her akai, the night hut, which is subsequently destroyed.81

Burying the deceased by placing a body in the ground is not always the case. As happens quite often during the migration, a dead nomad is left in the steppe or bush, or simply in the place where his/her life ended.82 “Among Anuak (southern Sudan), a large and sacred Tamarind tree was known as “Aboori” after a woman who was “buried” (wrapped in mats and thornwood) in its branches.”83 Among the Turkana, in the case of death occurring far from home and family, the deceased is left to rest in the bush. Bodies of children, adolescents, and unmarried persons are left in the bush west of the camp, as west symbolizes the wilderness.84

One of the most recognisable elements of the semi-nomadic pastoral peoples’ sepulchral tradition are cemeteries with graves without bodies and burials containing disarticulated skeletal remains. The Khababish tribes (northwestern Sudan) go to great distances to bury their dead in tribal cemeteries and sometimes transport the body 100 km to its final resting place.85 In this case, one can observe the importance of burying the dead in small tribal cemeteries. These are usually located within the vicinity of settlements, scattered around annually dug water wells and concentrated around the gebel that served as the territory marker in the grazing area used in summer.

According to Carol Yokell,86 in the case of pastoral nomadism, herders are found in environment of the present day Sahara (Tuareg), the Red Sea Mountains of the Eastern Desert (Ababda, Kushman-Ma’aza, etc.) and territories of semi-desert and savannah, where climate precludes farming (Samburru). In these more arid environmental conditions, it is necessary to raise territorial markers in order to mark a travel route as well as signal the right to limited natural resources such as pastures or water sources. A stone superstructure, for example, a tumulus, serves such a function.87 In this way nomadic herders of the present day Sahara (Tuareg) and the Red Sea Mountains (Ababda) mark their territories by simultaneously creating places of the ancestor worship cult.88

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82 SMITH, Cultural contacts, pp. 29–35.
83 E.E. EVANS-Pritchard, The Nuer. A Description of the Modes of Livelihood and Political Institutions of a Nilotic People, Oxford 1940, p. 73.
84 BROCH-DUE, Fertility, pp. 175–176.
85 R.J. BRADLEY, Nomads in the Archaeological Record: case studies in the northern provinces of the Sudan, Meroitica 13, Berlin 1992, p. 70.
86 YOKELL, Modeling, p. 37.
The tradition of the offering place accompanying the burial can still be observed nowadays among inhabitants of the Eastern Desert. An Ababda burial (raised 30–40 years ago) situated 15 km south of Berenike comprised large stones in oval arrangement around a burial pit dug in the ground. A jar and a tea vessel were placed between the stone at the feet and three stones at the head. Additionally, there are three structures associated with the grave raised for an important individual: a small mihrab (an empty niche pointing towards qible, direction of Mecca), a mound on the opposite side of a footpath pointing towards the grave, and a small mound of unknown purpose built of rubble, possibly to contain another burial.\textsuperscript{89}

In the Eastern Desert the Khushman graveyards are usually situated close to stable water sources, thus creating a strong bond between the dead and the living. When no water source is present, the grave is equipped with a vessel or a special stone storage room is erected within the cemetery with vessels containing water or tea, mortars and pestles for grinding coffee grains, flour sieve, and a salt stone. Moreover, 40 days after the burial took place, a sheep or goat is butchered and part of the food together with some water are left on the grave. “The gesture is symbolic; unlike the ancient Egyptians, the nomads do not bury the dead with earthly possessions or leave food in the belief that souls will actually use them. The dead are always spoken of reverently with the epithets Hayy (“He Who Still Lives”) and al-Marhuum (“the Deceased”). The expression “I walked with so-and-so” (i.e., “I knew the deceased”) is uttered with great pride.”\textsuperscript{90}

Both of the below described cases show that in the Eastern and Western Deserts the nomadic herders migrate according to the rules of horizontal transhumance moving southwards to the areas with easy access to water and pastures in rainless season. During the rainless periods in the northern territories, the present day Ababda groups (the Eastern Desert) come with their herds of sheep and goats from the north to the Gebel Eleba region (south of Gebel Gerf) in the vicinity of the Egyptian–Sudanese border.\textsuperscript{91} Up till recent times, the small oases around Siwa (the Western Desert) were occupied only in the summertime by the Awlad Ali tribes coming from the north.\textsuperscript{92} Although their tribal cemeteries are placed at the Mediterranean coast, they use to bury their dead deep in the desert.

Gatherings, where small scattered groups join together during common celebrations, rituals, trade, and courts, they all are a wide-known activities not only amongst nomadic e.g., Kel Tamasheq (Tuareg, Sahelian West Africa),\textsuperscript{93} but also semi-nomadic and semi-sedentary herders. Often during such ceremonies, a major part of the herd is butchered, as seen among Dodoth cattle-herders (southern Sudan).\textsuperscript{94} Ritual centres of the Dinka and

\textsuperscript{89}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 398.
\textsuperscript{90}\textsc{HOBS}, Bedouin Life, p. 66.
\textsuperscript{91}W.Z. \textsc{wendrich}, From Objects to Agents: The Ababda Nomads and the Interpretation of the Past, in: \textsc{WENDRICH, Barnard} (eds.), Archaeology of Mobility, pp. 509–542.
\textsuperscript{92}A. \textsc{roe}, Naming the Waters. New Insights into the Nomadic Use of Oases in the Libyan Desert of Egypt, in: \textsc{WENDRICH, Barnard} (eds.), Archaeology of Mobility, pp. 487–508.
\textsuperscript{93}M.M. \textsc{mcdonald}, New Evidence from the Early To Mid-Holocene in Dakhleh Oasis, South-Central Egypt, Bearing on the Evolution of Cattle Pastoralism, \textit{Nyame Akuma} 33, 1990, p. 5.
Nuer herding tribes (southern Sudan), where as recently as the 1980s offerings were commonly made by the rainmakers, served as both elite necropoleis and places that legitimised elite’s power.95

**BURIAL CUSTOMS AND TYPES OF MOBILITY AMONG THE PASTORAL PEOPLES – RESULTS OF AN ETHNO-ARCHAEOLOGICAL APPROACH.**

The analysis of the grave inventories and ethnographic examples allows for interpretation of the numerous ancient sepulchral customs of pastoral societies of diverse mobility patterns in the Eastern and Western Deserts between the sixth and second millennia BC.

Human burials in graves mostly without superstructures within the occupation sites96 can be traced back to the earliest examples of sepulchral activity of peoples in Nabta Playa, Eastpans, and Laqiya (from the 6th millennium BC onwards), as well as areas situated along Wadi Howar and its inflows (from the 4th millennium BC onwards). Geographic and climatic placement of mentioned sites assured an optimal access to water and pastures used by these semi-nomadic specialised cattle herders.97 In the period between the fourth and second millennia BC in the area along the Nile Valley, mixed economy developed, and specialised cattle herders gradually moved to the savannah southern peripheries of the Western Desert, Wadi Howar.98

What is more, examples from Wadi Howar often lack the burial pit which could indicate placing the bodies on or above the ground surface and/or under roof made of organic materials99. Similarly, the aforementioned practice could possibly give an explanation to both a small number of preserved burials of the pastoral peoples and the occurrence of single skeletons without archaeological context in the desert areas of the present day.

Ethnographic examples, including cenotaphs and secondary burials,100 have been identified in the fifth millennium BC cemeteries of semi-nomadic pastoral peoples of Gebel Ramlah.101 In this case, based on contemporary customs,102 one can observe the importance of burying the dead close to settlements in small tribal cemeteries.103

In harsh climatic conditions, built up grave constructions signify the right to precious pastures or water sources as stone tumulus does.104 Burial sites, comprising either one tumulus or a small assemblage of tumuli, dispersed along the wadi in the Eastern Desert105

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96 See above, notes 80, 81.
97 KUPER, After 5000, p. 413.
98 *Ibid., loc.cit.*
99 See above, notes 82–84.
100 See above, n. 85.
101 KOBUSIEWICZ et al., Discovery, pp. 566–578.
102 See above, n. 85.
104 MacDONALD, Before the Empire, pp. 71–103; see above, notes 87, 88.
and in the Laqiya region, might have played a similar role among nomadic herders between the fifth and second millennia BC.

What is more in the Eastern Desert a cult of ancestors could have been practiced at some burial sites where the traces of offerings in form of ashes or animal bones and fragments of pottery were discerned. Examples of such customs can be observed among contemporary nomadic Ababda and Khushman tribes. In ancient Wadi Atulla, a hearth surrounded by stones was found in the vicinity of a grave, while in Wadi Gabgaba and Wadi Seiga the offering places were situated within a stone circle. Occasionally, the stone circle was accompanied by a niche built up on its side. In Wadi Elei, the offering place was located in the centre of a stone tumulus. Additionally, in some cases, stelae could be situated next to tumuli.

The below-described cases show that ancient inhabitants of today Deserts could migrate according to the rules of horizontal or vertical nomadism in search of pastures and water for their herds as well as other commodities.

The analysis of spatial distribution of desert sites in the Western Desert from the sixth to second millennium BC confirms the gradual shift of the specialised cattle herders’ territories towards both the south and the Egyptian Nile Valley, brought about by drying Sahara. The latter direction is attested to by early dates obtained from the desert sites thought to be associated with Tasa culture, which up to quite recently was considered merely an Egyptian Valley phenomenon. The Wadi Atulla tomb containing tulip beakers with incised and imprinted decoration indicates the presence of the ‘Tasian cultural complex’ (ash deposits in the vicinity of graves, 4765–4455 BC) in the Eastern Desert as early as the fifth millennium BC. It also appears that ‘Tulip Beaker’ peoples could enter the Nile Valley possibly through the Western Desert via the Qena Bend region from Wadi el-Hol or Gebel Ramlah (4360±60 BC). In the later period, vast ritual centre with tumuli containing skeletal remains of cattle has been discovered in Er Arib, at the foot of the mountain in a wadi leading to Shurafa Pass over the Gebel Gerf range in the Bisharin country (dating based on ceramics representative of the C-Group, ca. 2500–1550 BC). It is possible that nomadic herders visited this area during the rainless periods in the northern territories, just as pastoralists of

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106 Shaw, JEA 22, pp. 47–48, Pl. IV-1,2; Schuck, Steinzeitliche Graber, pp. 242–243; Lange, Wadi-Shaw, p. 510.

107 See above, notes 89, 90.


110 Ibid., p. 194.

111 Sadri, Castiglioni, and Castiglioni, Archaeological Sequence, pp. 195, 197.

112 Ibid., p. 197.

113 Kuper, After 5000, pp. 409–414.

114 Kobusiewicz, Schild, Prehistoric Herdsmen, pp. 20–24.


116 Darnell, Gravel, pp. 156–175.

117 Kobusiewicz, Schild, Prehistoric Herdsmen, pp. 20–24.

118 Murray, JEA 12, pp. 248–249.
today use to do.\textsuperscript{119} Another ritual centre with tumuli containing faunal skeletal remains, dated to the beginning of the second millennium BC, has been identified in El Bahrain Oasis in the Western Desert.\textsuperscript{120} This is the most recent and outstanding evidence of such a concentrated presence of the pastoral peoples in the middle of the desert. It is thought that following the winter rainfalls the herders were moving towards the Mediterranean. In the summertime, they would return to the areas with water sources such as small oases east of the Siwa Oasis, one of them being El Bahrain\textsuperscript{121}, where the annual celebrations and offerings took place in antiquity.

The above- and below-described cases show that in the Eastern and Western Deserts the herders independently of the pattern of their mobility could gather for common ritual purpose. Between the seventh and second millennia BC, a few archaeological sites of the Eastern and Western Deserts comprising hundreds of tumuli or pits with animal bones appear to represent \textit{ritual centres} where celebrations followed by the burial of the butch-ered animal remains took place.\textsuperscript{122}

Ritual centres of the Dinka and Nuer herding tribes\textsuperscript{123} can resemble ancient customs. The ritual centre with diverse installations and tombs in Nabta Playa could also serve as an elite necropolis. The tumuli concealing faunal skeletal remains on the Sacred Mountain and Valley and later the herding elite burials (e.g., the so-called Prince’s Tumulus) constituted an integral part of this ritual centre,\textsuperscript{124} functioning throughout several thousand years and used, concentrating communities collective memory, by both the herding community of Gebel Ramlah, whose cemeteries and settlements were located farther to the north, and the inhabitants of Nabta Playa, who were buried within the Nabta settlement.\textsuperscript{125}

In Wadi Howar, in Djabarona 84/13, one of such places, comprises over a thousand pits representing a chronological sequence of at least eight hundred years. Archaeological and ethnographic analogies indicate that these features can be interpreted as offering pits or cattle burials.\textsuperscript{126} The entire site appears to have been the herders’ ritual centre, which can be associated with the people of the Leiterband horizon, occupying middle Wadi Howar in the fourth and third millennium BC.

Regardless of the enigmatic nature and poor preservation of the burial sites of the pastoral peoples of the Eastern and Western Deserts, the diversity of their sepulchral customs allows tracing various patterns of their mobility attested in the ethnographic research.

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\textsuperscript{119} See above, n. 94.
\textsuperscript{120} See above, n. 77.
\textsuperscript{121} See above, n. 95.
\textsuperscript{122} See above, notes 62, 72, 74, 77.
\textsuperscript{123} See above, n. 93.
\textsuperscript{124} \textsc{Kobusiewicz, Schild}, Prehistoric Herdsmen, pp. 20–24.
\textsuperscript{125} \textsc{Wendorf, Schild}, Prehistory, p. 153.
\textsuperscript{126} \textsc{Keding}, Djabarona, p. 224; \textsc{Jesse, Keding}, Death in the Desert, p. 290.