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Early African Pastoralism: View from Dakhleh Oasis (South Central Egypt)

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Abstract

The late prehistoric archaeological sequence from Dakhleh Oasis, South Central Egypt, is examined for evidence on the origins and development of pastoralism in northeastern Africa, under the dry but fluctuating environmental conditions of the early to mid-Holocene. Around 8800 B.P., relatively sedentary groups of the *Masara* cultural unit have a broad-based subsistence system but no sign of food production. Herding appears ca. 7000 B.P., at a time of increased and possibly less seasonal rainfall, on large late *Bashendi* sites with stone-built structures and a still-diversified food economy. With the drying trend after 6500 B.P., mobile *Bashendi* cattle and goat herders continue to aggregate in the oasis for a millennium, still utilizing a variety of resources. More settled *Sheikh Muftah* groups occupy the oasis lowlands until Old Kingdom times. Throughout the sequence, the early pastoralism of Dakhleh seems more African than



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