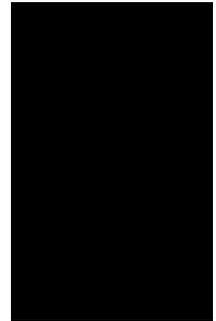




Andrew B. Smith. *African Herders: Emergence of Pastoral Traditions.* Walnut Creek: Altamira Press, 2005. 251 pp. \$36.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-7591-0748-9; \$88.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7591-0747-2.

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The Emergence, Spread, and Development of the Pastoral Tradition in Africa

Andrew Smith has the great merit to bring together archeological and ethnographic information on herding traditions in Africa. This is a great task as archeologists almost more than anthropologists stick to their excavations and their immediate surroundings so that a comprehensive idea on cultural developments does not easily arise from their publications. Smith wants to summarize the current state of the archeology of pastoral traditions in Africa and at the end of his book gives a considered opinion on where research should move in the coming years.

Smith starts with deconstructing stereotypes of African pastoralism. Leaning on an approach developed by Edward Said in his seminal deconstruction of Western notions of the Orient, Smith points out that the image of the African herder has deep roots in Western thought about Africa. African herder societies are conceptualized as male-biased, warlike, and strongly independent. Smith uses this section to prepare for a longer treatise on elements of pastoral traditions that archeologists have to look for. Of course, it is much harder to discover the remains of mobile herders than of sedentary village populations; hence it is useful to apply a system-orientated approach identifying central areas of interest before entering the field, "as you can only find what you already know," as archeologists sometimes say. A good knowledge of pastoral territories and pastoral resource use is of importance here, as are violent and nonviolent intergroup relations. Gender and age in African pastoral communities are currently being recognized by anthro-

pologists as key categories for analysis. In some detail, Smith treats the relation between foragers and herders. Are both lifestyles really antagonistic? Does foraging prepare for a pastoral lifestyle, or does it run against it? From here it is only a short distance to a central question that this small volume not only poses but also answers concisely: what is domestication and where does domestication start?

In chapter 2, Smith attempts to give a summary of pastoral material culture, discussing shelters, containers, grinding equipment, and personal attire in some detail and making use of numerous photographs. Here he also describes how domestication can be traced in the archeological record. It is a great merit of this book that such intricate questions are dealt with in a way digestible not only for interested non-archeologists but also probably for undergraduate students as well. The reader becomes acquainted not only with basic ideas on how animals are genetically transformed under human tutelage, but also gains an understanding of what effects these changes have on pastoral resource management.

The third chapter takes up the thread developed from a methodological perspective and traces the advent of domestication in the Old World. Smith takes the reader to the Levant, the Zagros Mountains, Mesopotamia, and the Sinai. At some length, he deals with precursors to domestication and the advent of village life in the pre-Neolithic period. Changes in climatic conditions are seen as prime causes for changing lifestyles and a turn toward

agricultural production. Only in chapter 4, when Smith traces early domesticated animals in northern Africa, do we reach the first African pastoral people. However, the question of where these domesticates originated is not an easy one to resolve. While it is fairly clear that sheep and goats were introduced into Africa from the Near East, there is a longer debate on whether cattle were domesticated locally or introduced from neighboring areas in the Levant. It is only recent DNA analysis of modern cattle that has shown that domestication in northeastern Africa is very likely. However, independent archeological evidence is still lacking and we know little about the socio-economic processes involved in the domestication process. About 7,800 to 6,400 years ago, we find an early pastoral period well developed in large areas of northern Africa. Smith discusses the economy of these early herders but also deals with their cultural orientation. He gives evidence of cattle cults and draws from Saharan rock art and funerary monuments in the Sahara a great deal of interesting data on early pastoralism.

By the end of this early pastoral period we find the Sahara a fully developed desert, a parallel outmigration from this inhospitable environment, and the emergence of larger villages in the areas adjoining the desert in the south by about 4000 BP and the spread of pastoralism towards the Sahel. Chapter 5 is a highly interesting effort to develop a second perspective on the emergence of pastoral traditions: instead of going back to the origins, Smith tries to trace the prehistory of contemporary Saharan herder populations such as the Tuareg, the Tubu, and the Beja. In a highly interesting way he combines information from ethnography, history, archeology, and genetics. His account is meant to raise new questions: for example, what do the close genetic relations between the Beja and Tuareg indicate, as both speak very different languages (Berber and Cushitic, respectively)? Unfortunately, here the argument jumps somewhat from a comparative account (in search of pre-Islamic traces) of the ritual behavior of Saharan populations to genetic similarities. A more detailed account of the archeology of subsistence technologies of recent Saharan people would have developed closer ties to other chapters. However, a strong point of this section is the description of Saharan trade networks. The importance of prehistoric exchange networks has apparently been grossly underrated in the past, whilst prehistoric populations of the Sahara may be best conceptualized as “traveling cultures.”

Only in chapter 6 do we get to the expansion of pastoralism to eastern and southern Africa. The passage on East Africa is short indeed but it gives a concise ac-

count of the advent of pastoralism in that region: domesticated stock arrived there around 4000 years ago and by 3300 years ago there was already significant cultural diversity in pastoral East Africa. In the remainder of this chapter, Smith follows the traces of pastoralism to southern Africa. While pastoral societies clearly emerged in East Africa, in southern Africa the history of herding is more ambivalent and there are a number of conflicting theories on the emergence of pastoralism in that region. Again, the relation between herders and foragers is crucial: did herding populations introduce livestock to southern Africa, or was livestock herding adopted by foragers and disseminated into southern Africa through pasto-foragers? In a fine interdisciplinary treatise, Smith juxtaposes archeological, linguistic, and ethnographic arguments and devotes an entire section to the interpretation of rock art.

The short seventh chapter attempts to highlight the role of cattle in ritual in a comparative manner, combining material from the eastern Mediterranean, East Africa, and South Africa. This chapter adds to our understanding of a prehistoric pastoral past that perhaps too often is only seen from the perspective of subsistence herding. The final eighth chapter is devoted to an outline of the future of African herder societies and sketches perspectives for future archeological research on African pastoral populations. The future of African herders is described in a highly pessimistic manner citing the loss of lands, violence, and the cultural hegemony of sedentary populations. In stark contrast, the future for archeologists is much brighter: interdisciplinary efforts, especially the great potential that DNA analysis offers archeologists for new insights into the pastoral past. The northern African region requires a closer consideration of links between the Nile Valley and the Saharan hinterlands and a reevaluation of central Saharan rock art. For East Africa, an extension of archeological work into Uganda, southern Ethiopia, and southern Sudan is a major challenge as much of evidence on the pastoral past today rests on data obtained from excavations in Kenya. Interregional relations may become a new focus for research both for East Africa, where Arabian-East African relations may shed new light on the expansion of pastoral traditions, and for southern Africa, where links between southern African pastoralism and East African pastoralism have yet to be explored.

Smith’s small volume is a highly readable introduction to the prehistoric past of Africa’s herder tradition. It successfully synthesizes new information on the pastoral past that was not considered in Smith’s previous book,

Pastoralism in Africa: Origins and Ecological Development (1992). Smith condenses a great amount of information and summarizes very recent research results. The book successfully tries to portray a pastoral past in a holistic fashion, as not only past subsistence patterns but also a pastoral culture are reconstructed. The book is especially recommended for course work and as an introduction to prehistoric herding lifestyles for non-archeologists.

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