Fischer’s article “The Nubian Mercenaries of Gebelein during the First Intermediate Period” intrigued me at the outset by its provocative name. Who were these mercenaries? What was their role in Egyptian society? What evidence do we have of the military relationship between Egypt and Nubia during this time period? Unfortunately, the article answered little to none of these questions. It might have been more aptly named “Representations of Nubians during the First Intermediate Period.”

One of the central themes to this weeks reading was identity. What was the cultural identity of Kush at Kerma and of the C-Group in Lower Nubia and how did they interact and affect each other? This article also treated this theme by looking at representations of Nubians within Egyptian contexts. Fischer uses five stelae from Gebelein to examine “mercenaries.” By biggest problem with the article is that Fischer never elucidates on the evidence that these individuals are mercenaries. Is it just because they are shown with weaponry or that no other Nubian professions could have provided them with the access of wealth/power to represent them in this way? Instead, he relegates such evidence to his footnotes and leaves the reader assuming that this is a generally accepted fact; I’m not sure I agree.

Fischer presents all five stelae, examining the text, modes of representation and context. One piece of evidence he clings heavily to is skin color. He uses the skin color of these Nubians to present a picture of how these figures might have viewed themselves in an Egyptian context. In the Boston Stela he notes the dark red color of the Nubian men but the typical Egyptian yellow color of the Nubian woman. However, then in the University of California Stela Fischer states that red was used in the hieroglyphs to make the woman darker than usual to indicate that she was Nubian (62).

Fischer then examines the clothing of the “*Nhsy*”, or Nubians. Similar to the skin color evidence, the representations of various clothing styles are numerous and I was left with the sentiment that these representations show that Egyptians and Nubians wear some same things but not others. I feel like Fischer is trying to quantify the Nubians as distinctly ‘other’. Can you quantify some modes of representation as purely Egyptian or Nubian when there are significant realms of overlap between the two?

I think what Fischer does do a great job of doing is compiling evidence and presenting it to the reader. However, I would have liked to see color plates and even a table, which would have made it easier to compare the evidence to each other. I also think that the difficulties in elucidating the differences between the ‘Egyptian’ and ‘Nubian’ modes of representation might say something about the relationship between these two places and people. If Nubians are blurring the lines between ‘traditional Egyptian,’ it seems reasonable that they would easily be able to take on this guise. Morkot even says that recent skeletal work has determined that Nubians are ethnically the same as Upper Egyptians (44).

Within the final paragraphs, Fischer seems to just now tell the reader that he is framing all of his precious evidence in the context of ‘the existence of a colony of Nubians in Egypt” (76). Where is this coming from? He presents no evidence other than these representations to prove such a colony existed. If Nubians were able to present themselves as Egyptians wouldn’t they be able to also live among them and not be relegated to having their own colony?

In conclusion, I think that when looking at these stelae we need to consider the complexity of the relationship between Nubia and Egypt and also consider the limits of representation. Do you represent yourself as you are or as you would like to be seen? What control does one have over being able to control how they were portrayed in concert with their identity? Finally, I think that we need to reconsider some of the colonialist assumptions that Fischer clings to in this paper and deconstruct the viewing of Nubians and Egyptians as categorically distinct from each other.