

MtDNA ANALYSIS OF A ROMAN-CHRISTIAN PERIOD CEMETERY AT THE DAKHLEH OASIS, EGYPT

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A compelling story of life at the ancient Roman-Christian town of Kellis (circa AD 300) in the Dakhleh Oasis, Egypt, is developing through mitochondrial analyses of ancient DNA. Through excavations at Kellis 2, the Roman-Christian period necropolis where the ancient inhabitants of Kellis are interred, a fascinating genetic profile of the residents of classical Kellis is beginning to emerge. Interestingly, metric and non-metric trait analyses of 310 burials suggests a local population in residence at Kellis changing slowly over time through antiquity; however, archaeological evidence alludes to frequent trade with the Nile River valley, suggesting population movement into, through, and out of the oasis during this period. Moreover, social and political conditions throughout the Roman Empire, of which Egypt was a possession during this interval, hint at substantial population movements, possibly involving the oasis. Indeed, preliminary sequencing data of HV-1 suggests a genetically diverse population from a maternal perspective. Moreover, specific point mutations, in the small number of individuals analyzed to date ($n=13$), hint at potential maternal associations with sub-Saharan Africa in antiquity.

