



Bishareen Family Portrait

Date

ca. 1860-1889 (printed 1992)

Primary Maker

Adelphoi Zangaki

Medium

gelatin silver print

Description

Though many early travellers encountered the Bishareen in Nubia, none wrote a detailed account of them. The Bishareen appear once to have had a fair idea of their own history, and there are reports that before the time of the Mahdi in the 1880s, they possessed some written accounts of their traditions. They lived in an area stretching from Aswan southward to Berber on the Nile

River and Kassala on the Atbara River. Perhaps descendents of the earlier nomadic Bedja and Blemmyes, their legendary birthplace was Gebel Elba, near Aidhab; their name is traced to an eponymous ancestor "Bishar." Armed with broad swords, large round hide shields, at times caparisoned in chain mail passed down from the Middle Ages, their camel-mounted warriors were visions of the Prophet's own men. During the Mahdist wars in the Sudan, they were of somewhat divided loyalties: some followed the Mahdist chief Osman Digna, others annihilated Mahdist raiding parties, and some served as native irregulars with the British. Following the defeat of the Khalifa by the British at Omdurman, the Bishareen declined. Although this group portrait bears no signature, the two women reappear as models in at least one other photograph signed "Zangaki."

Dimensions

Sight: 12 x 9 1/2 in. (30.5 x 24.1 cm) Mat: 20 x 16 in. (50.8 x 40.6 cm)