

# POTS, GOLD, AND VICEROYS: SHIFTING DYNAMICS OF EGYPTIAN-NUBIAN RELATIONS AT THE TRANSITION TO THE NEW KINGDOM, FROM THE VIEWPOINT OF MIDDLE NUBIAN POTTERY AT TELL EDFU

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*Abstract: This paper attempts to marry together the archaeological and historical records for the transition into the New Kingdom, from the viewpoint of the Nubian ceramic sequence at Tell Edfu. The evidence in question dates to a period spanning the late Middle Kingdom through to the early 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty and is notable for a distinct change in the character of the assemblage that seems to correspond to marked changes in the social and political relationship between Egypt and Nubia. These changes include an increased Egyptian vigour in goldmining activities and the establishment of the viceregal administration. More broadly, the paper suggests that Tell Edfu and its surrounding region (Hierakonpolis and Elkab) were enmeshed in broad social and political shifts that occurred at that time. It is also suggested that the southern half of Upper Egypt as far as Hierakonpolis should be perceived as a transitional zone in which the Egyptian and Nubians spheres overlapped, both administratively and culturally.*

*Keywords: Tell Edfu, Middle Nubian pottery, Viceroy of Kush, gold mining, Pan-Grave, Kerma.*

The site of Tell Edfu has yielded one of the most extensive sequences of Nubian pottery from a settlement context in Egypt, second only to that from Elephantine. Spanning over a millennium, the Edfu sequence can be broken up into two main groups, one comprising material from the late Old Kingdom (late 5<sup>th</sup>–6<sup>th</sup> Dynasty) excavated in Zone 2 of the site, and the other covering a period from the late Middle Kingdom up to the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty, excavated from Zone 1. The latter group is the focus of this analysis, which builds on the preliminary study published by Ayers and Moeller<sup>2</sup> by presenting an overview of

the Nubian ceramic sequence and identifying the chronological phases within it. The Nubian ceramic sequence from Edfu is then integrated into its broader historical context by drawing on textual and archaeological evidence from other sites in the region. Central to the discussion is a region-wide perspective on the Nubian evidence from the neighbouring sites of Elkab, Hierakonpolis, and Genemiyeh, as well as a comparison with the sequence from Elephantine. By taking into account the range of mortuary, settlement and epigraphic data from these sites, the intense and complex encounters between Egyptians and Nubians over many generations become clearly visible. The most remarkable feature of the Edfu sequence is a distinct and sudden break in the character of the material, which abruptly shifts from small quantities of Pan-Grave style wares to considerable amounts of Kerma-style pottery. It is argued that this change in character of the ceramic assemblage may be linked to corresponding shifts in Egyptian policies toward Nubia during the late Second Intermediate Period, and in particular to a renewed vigour in gold-mining activity and the establishment of the office of the Viceroy of Kush.

## The archaeological context

The Nubian pottery from Tell Edfu that is under investigation here was excavated from a continuous, stratified sequence of contexts associated with an administrative quarter designated as Zone 1 (fig. 1).<sup>3</sup> The abundance of Egyptian pottery and other associated finds provide the chronological framework that spans a period from the late Middle Kingdom up to the early 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty, around

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<sup>2</sup> AYERS and MOELLER 2012.

<sup>3</sup> For further details on the stratigraphy and archaeological contexts, see: AYERS and MOELLER 2012, 104; MOELLER and MAROUARD 2018a, 173–180.

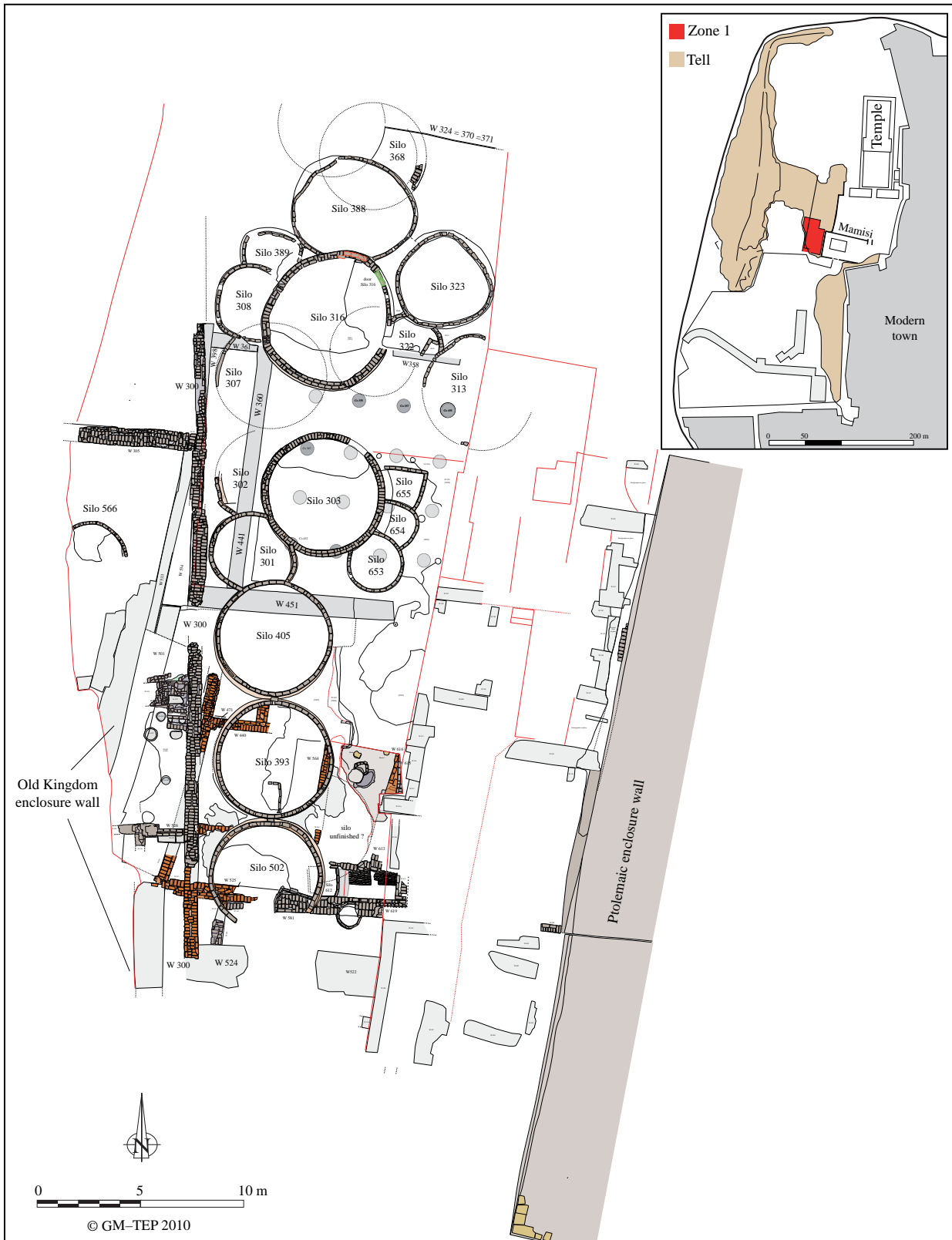


Fig. 1 Map of Tell Edfu Zone 1. © GM-Tell Edfu Project 2010.

the reigns of Hatshepsut and Tuthmosis III.<sup>4</sup> The function of this part of the site changed over the course of its lifespan, beginning as a large columned hall that was part of an administrative complex during the late Middle Kingdom (US 2280 and US 2078). Over a thousand sealings were found in the layer covering the final phase of floor renovation (US 2079=US 2280),<sup>5</sup> indicating intensive administrative activities before the building fell out of use by the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> Dynasty, i.e. the early Second Intermediate Period (US 2654).<sup>6</sup> Above this, a series of floor levels with evidence of domestic activity (e.g. food preparation) suggest that the area to the south of the columned hall was used as a temporary dwelling place, perhaps by squatters, for a short period after the columned hall was abandoned and dismantled (US 2548 and US 2543).<sup>7</sup> The domestic activity came to an end with the construction of a large silo complex during the 17<sup>th</sup> Dynasty, and areas between the silos were in active use during their functioning (US 2659).<sup>8</sup> The next contexts in the sequence to contain Nubian pottery come from trash deposits that filled the silos after they had fallen out of use around the end of the Second Intermediate Period–early 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty (US 2547, 2562, 2570, 2571),<sup>9</sup> and the final contexts in the sequence constitute substantial fill layers that covered the entire silo complex (US 2458). The clear stratigraphy in this part of the site facilitates the observation of a clear sequence characterised by distinct changes in the Nubian ceramic assemblage.

### The Middle Nubian pottery sequence

The earliest contexts in Zone 1 to contain Nubian pottery date to the late 12<sup>th</sup> and early 13<sup>th</sup> Dynasty, coinciding with the abandonment of the southern part of the columned hall complex (US 2078, 2079, and 2280).<sup>10</sup> Although low in quantity, the

sherds show clear affinities with the Pan-Grave tradition based on a number of morphological markers. Most distinctive are rim sherds of two undecorated black-top red ware bowls of slightly restricted form with burnished exteriors, black interior surfaces, and irregular black zones at the rim (2280.N1 & 2079.N2, **fig. 2a-b**). Both display the streaky burnish that is typical of the Pan-Grave tradition, as is the slightly modelled band rim delineated by an incised line parallel to the rim edge (**fig. 2b**). Of the decorated pottery (**fig. 2c-d**), the most distinctive is 2079.N1 which has a line of impressed dots delineating the rim band, below which is a band of incised filled zig-zag motif (**fig. 2c**).<sup>11</sup> This motif is uncommon among the Pan-Grave tradition generally, but the attribution is supported by parallels at the Pan-Grave cemeteries SJE Site 47,<sup>12</sup> Nag el-Qarmila WK11,<sup>13</sup> and Armant 1900,<sup>14</sup> the latter two being among the earliest Pan-Grave sites in the Nile Valley.<sup>15</sup> A base sherd from US 2280 is decorated with the web-like motif (**fig. 2e**) that is also common on Pan-Grave vessels both from cemetery contexts at Wadi Kubhaniya WK11,<sup>16</sup> Hierakonpolis HK47,<sup>17</sup> and also from settlements, e.g. Elephantine,<sup>18</sup> and Qasr es Sagha.<sup>19</sup>

The next context in the sequence, US 2654, marks the final abandonment of the columned hall and dates to the late 13<sup>th</sup> Dynasty (i.e. the early Second Intermediate Period). Egyptian pottery forms of the Middle Kingdom are still present in the assemblage but some new types appear for the first time.<sup>20</sup> The bulk of the Nubian pottery from US 2654 is typical of the coarse, thick-walled, chaff-tempered, uncoated black-top wares found in settlement contexts, and their consistently soot-covered exteriors indicate secondary burning, presumably from cooking. The majority of the sherds are decorated with variants of incised cross-hatched motifs and most have band rims delineat-

<sup>4</sup> AYERS and MOELLER 2012, 102–105; MOELLER 2016, 317–321; AYERS 2018. Natasha Ayers' PhD dissertation is an in-depth analysis of the Egyptian pottery from the late Middle Kingdom until the Second Intermediate Period (AYERS 2017).

<sup>5</sup> AYERS and MOELLER 2012, 103.

<sup>6</sup> AYERS 2018, 66–72.

<sup>7</sup> AYERS 2018, 72–74.

<sup>8</sup> AYERS and MOELLER 2012, 103–105; AYERS 2017, 236–237; AYERS 2018, 74–77.

<sup>9</sup> AYERS and MOELLER 2012, 105.

<sup>10</sup> AYERS and MOELLER 2012: 101, 105.

<sup>11</sup> DE SOUZA 2019, 49–50.

<sup>12</sup> DE SOUZA 2019, fig. 50b.

<sup>13</sup> GATTO, GALLORINI and ROMA 2012, fig. 9.6.

<sup>14</sup> MYER, unpublished mss. The author consulted the unpublished manuscript and associated documents at the Lucy Gura Archive, Egypt Exploration Society.

<sup>15</sup> DE SOUZA 2019, 68–69.

<sup>16</sup> GATTO, GALLORINI and ROMA 2012, fig. 7a.

<sup>17</sup> DE SOUZA 2019, fig. 55a.

<sup>18</sup> RAUE 2018a, Taf. 182 (102.2), 203 (121.1).

<sup>19</sup> SLIWA 1992, fig. 12.3.

<sup>20</sup> AYERS 2018, 66.

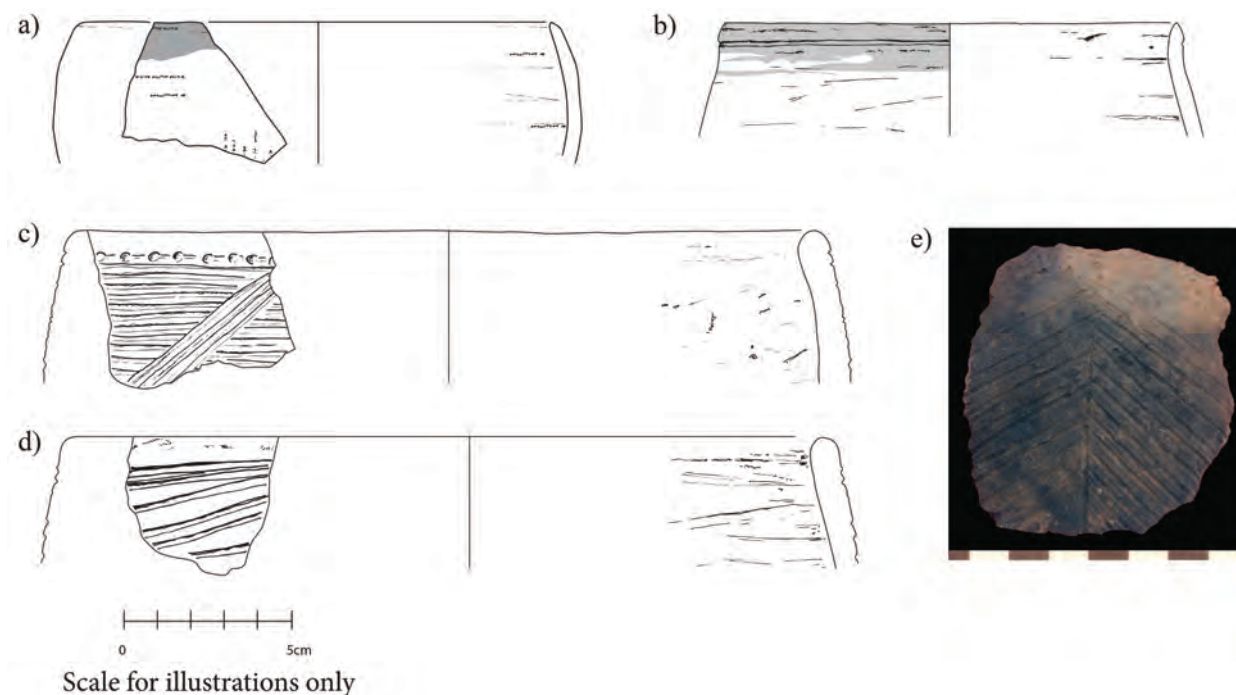


Fig. 2 Pottery from US 2079 and US 2280

(a) ED2280.N1 (b) ED2079.N2 (c) ED2079.N1 (d) ED2079.N3 (e) base sherd from 2280. © AdS-Tell Edfu Project.

ed by an incised line parallel to the rim, which is consistent with the Pan-Grave tradition (fig. 3).<sup>21</sup>

Also from US 2654 is a group of sherds from three vessels that stand out for their combination of Nubian and Egyptian styles and technology (fig. 4). Preserved only as rim sherds, all three vessels are of a slightly restricted form that is typical for Nubian cooking wares, but the modelled rim profiles find better parallels in the Egyptian tradition. The incised cross-hatched decoration and band rims defined by an incised line would otherwise be typical for the Pan-Grave tradition, but the way in which the incised marks were executed is distinctly ‘un-Nubian’, and in one case the incised marks appear to have been made with a multi-toothed tool, which is atypical for the Pan-Grave tradition in which single-pointed tools are the norm (fig. 4c). The sherds are also materially distinct in that they were made in a medium-fine fabric that displays many of the characteristics of a coarse variant of Egyptian Nile B2 in the Vienna System,<sup>22</sup> but with features more common among Nubian fabrics, e.g. large rounded quartz particles (fig. 5a-b). Clearly defined zoning in the cross-section, with reddish-brown zones toward the exterior

and interior surfaces and narrow violet and black zones at the core indicate that the firing technology is also atypical for Nubian pottery, which ordinarily has a predominately black section with a narrow and poorly defined oxidised zone toward the exterior surface (fig. 5c-d). This shows that the vessels were fired under more controlled and consistent conditions than is usual for Nubian pottery, and that a process more akin to Egyptian firing technology was employed. Perhaps the most significant difference of all is in the forming technology. Where most ‘normal’ Nubian pottery is hand-built using the coiling or paddle-and-anvil method, these examples from Edfu were made on a wheel or other turning device, as proven by the regular and distinct turning marks that run parallel to the rim on their interior surfaces, which are rendered clearly visible by Reflectance Transformation Imaging (RTI) (fig. 6).<sup>23</sup>

Comparable sherds have been recorded at Elephantine where they have been termed ‘Late Middle Nubian Imitation ware’ (LaMNI),<sup>24</sup> and also at Umm Mawagir in the Kharga Oasis, where they have been tentatively described as ‘hybrid’.<sup>25</sup> While the term ‘hybrid’ is not without its detrac-

<sup>21</sup> DE SOUZA 2019, 28.<sup>22</sup> NORDSTRÖM and BOURRIAU 1993, 171–173.<sup>23</sup> DE SOUZA and TROGNITZ, forthcoming.<sup>24</sup> RAUE 2012, 55; RAUE 2018a, Taf. 279–284.<sup>25</sup> MANASSA 2012, 141–2, fig. 8.

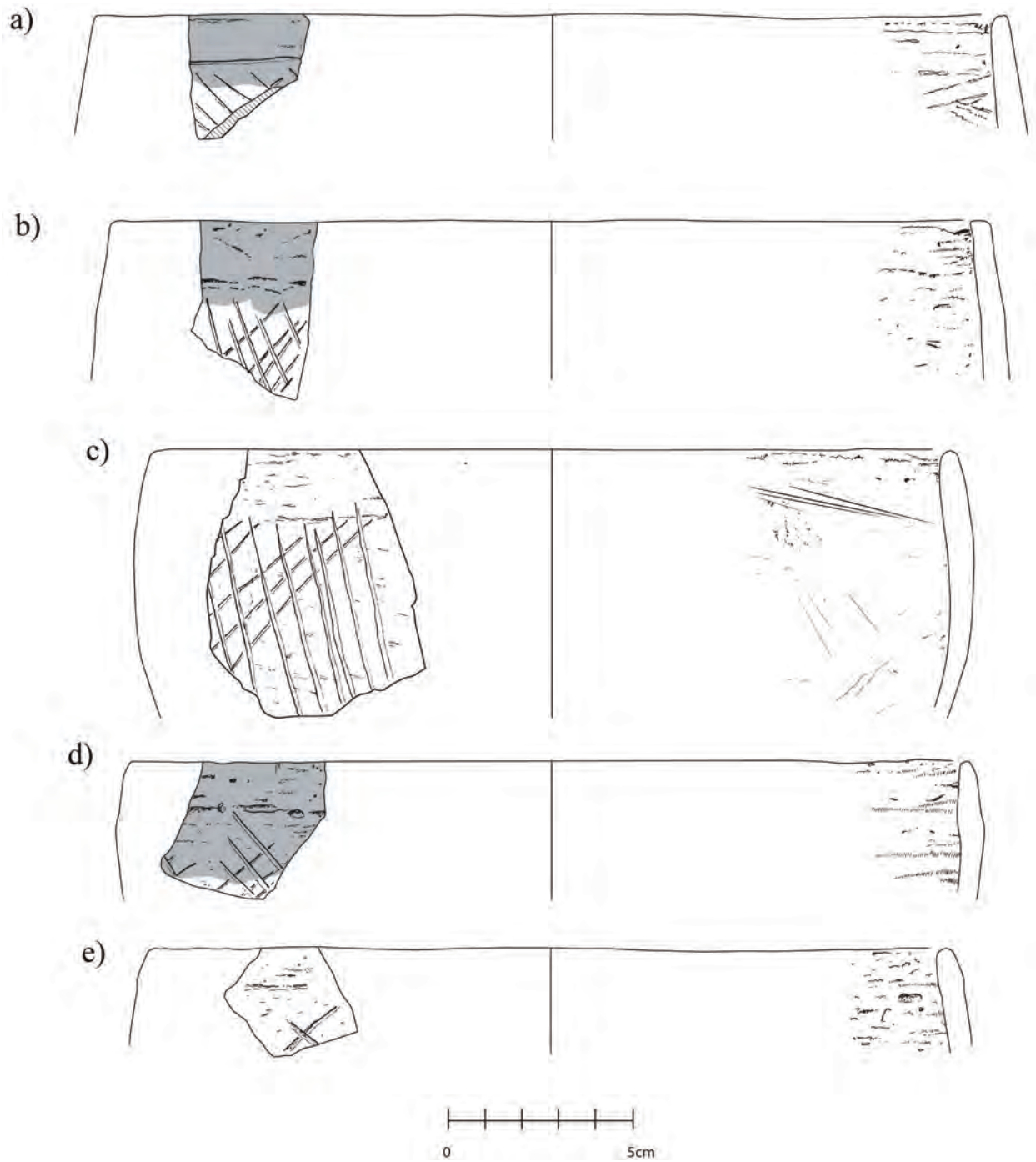


Fig. 3 Pottery from US 2654  
 (a) ED2654.N4 (b) ED2654.N5 (c) ED2654.N6 (d) ED2654.N7 (e) ED2654.N8.

tors,<sup>26</sup> it remains, in this author's opinion, a more appropriate term than 'imitation'. Besides not adequately defining who is imitating whom, how, and in what capacity (i.e. Nubians imitating Egyptians? or vice-versa?), imitation as a concept is

inherently biased in its implication that the thing being imitated is somehow more desirable or better than that which is doing the imitating.<sup>27</sup> Therefore, in the case of pottery from Tell Edfu, the term 'hybrid' is the better fit for these cooking

<sup>26</sup> STOCKHAMMER 2013, 12–14; BADER 2013, 261; RIVERO 2016, 43–72. Criticisms of hybridity in an archaeological context are based in the perceived biological overtones and

assumptions of 'purity' vs. 'impurity'. Contra see DE SOUZA, 2020, 14–17.

<sup>27</sup> BADER in press.

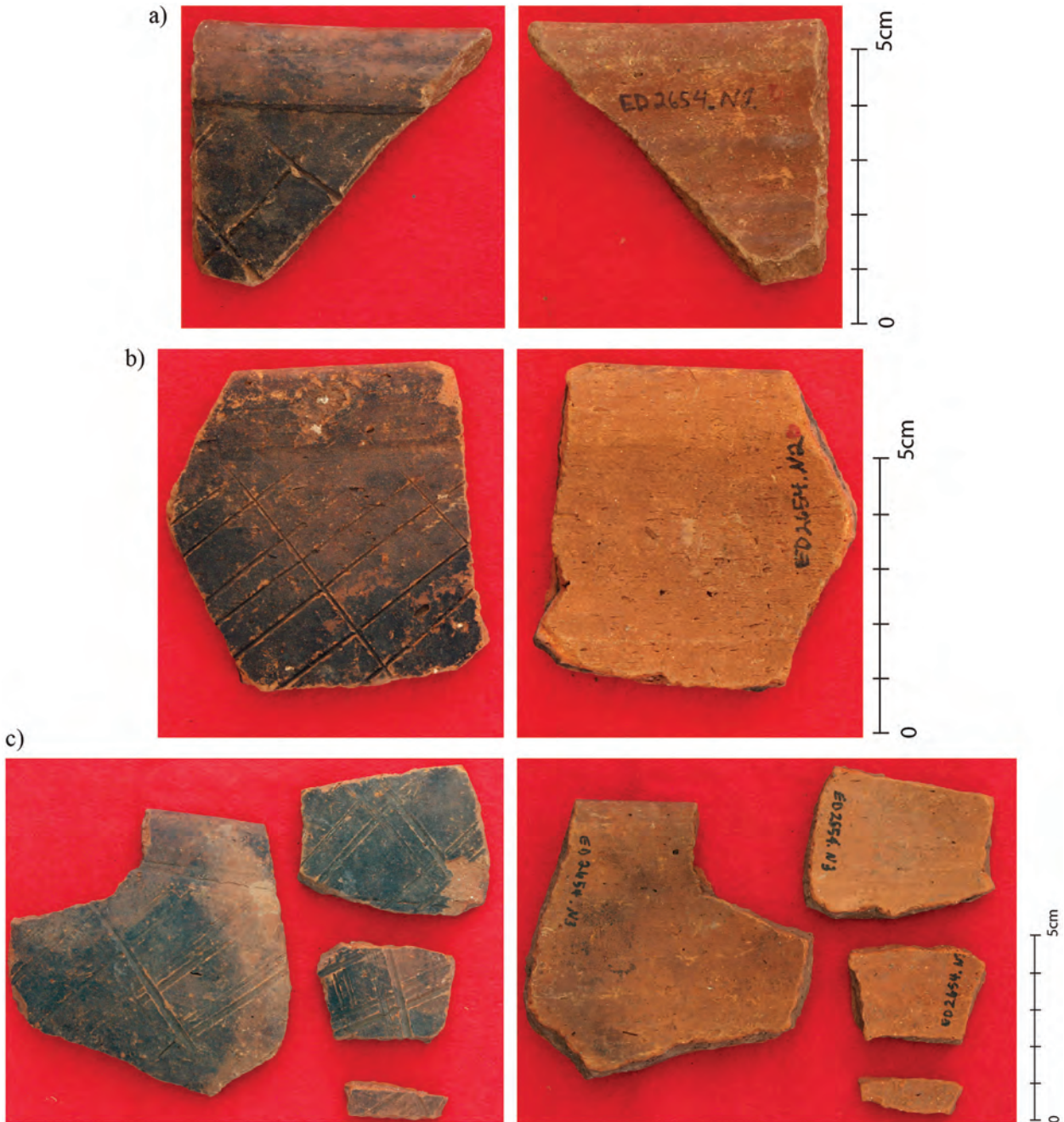


Fig. 4 Sherds from 'hybrid' cooking pots, US 2654. (a) ED2654.N1 (b) ED2654.N2 (c) ED2654.N3. © AdS-Tell Edfu Project.

pots based on what appears to be the deliberate and conscious combination of stylistic and technological elements from the Egyptian and Nubian pottery traditions. These hybrid pots are equally technologically Egyptian and aesthetically Nubian, but neither tradition dominates the other, and the characteristics that were drawn from each tradition remain recognisable even in their hybridised form. As a final comment, it is worth clarifying that no assumptions can or should be made regard-

ing whether these vessels were produced by Egyptian or Nubian potters, nor can we make any inferences about their intended purpose.

Returning to the sequence, contexts US 2543 and US 2548 are roughly contemporary with one another and both correspond to the period shortly after the abandonment of the columned hall but before the construction of the silo complex. Both contexts were in use for a very limited period of time during the transition to the late Second Inter-

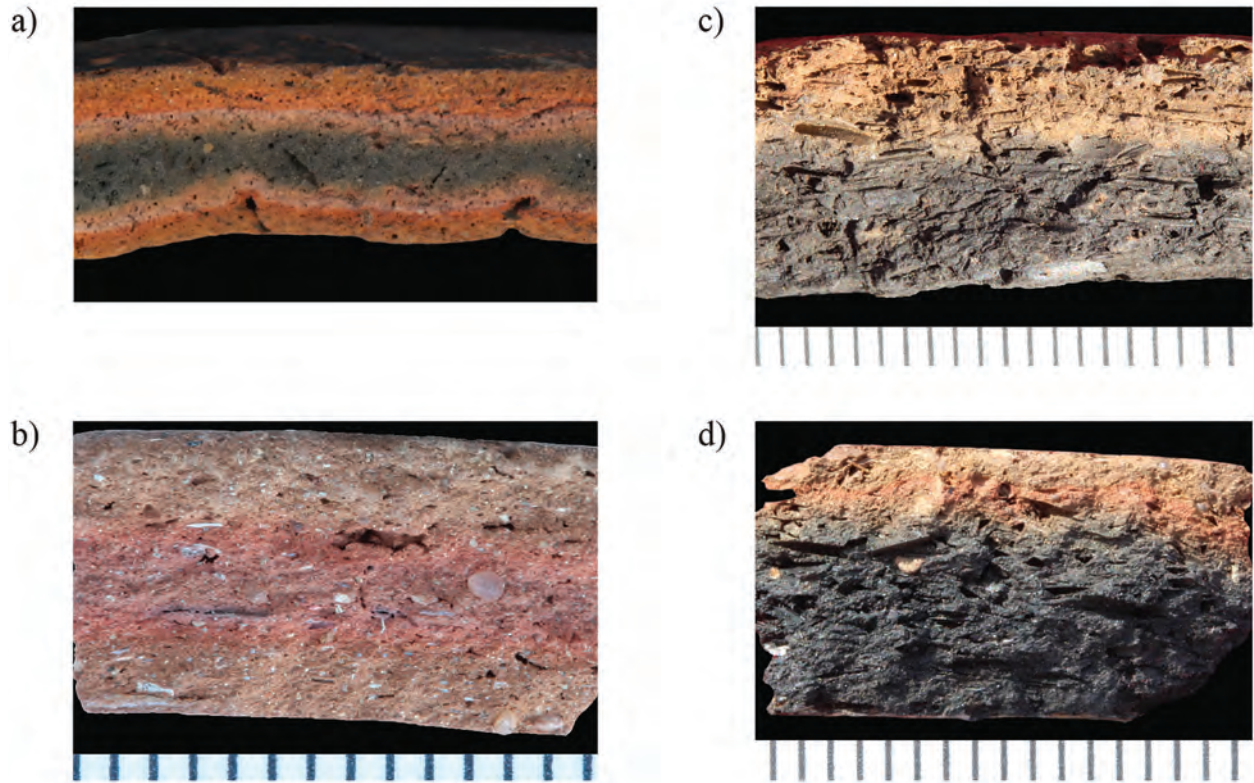


Fig. 5 Comparative view of fabrics from 'hybrid' (a-b) and typical Nubian (c-d) sherds. (a) hybrid, ED2654.N3 (scale not given); (b) hybrid, from context US 2603; (c) straw tempered Nubian, from US 2562; (d) chaff tempered Nubian, from US 2652. © AdS-Tell Edfu Project.

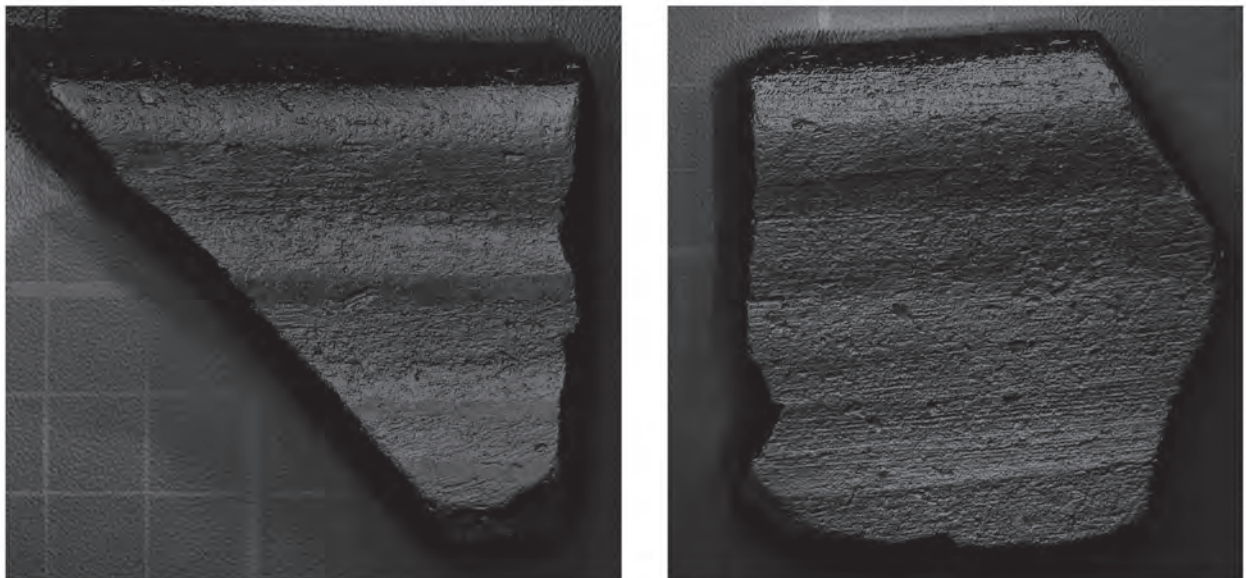


Fig. 6 RTI images of interior surface of hybrid vessels ED2654.N1 (left) and ED2654.N2 (right) clearly showing horizontal turning marks. © AdS-Tell Edfu Project.

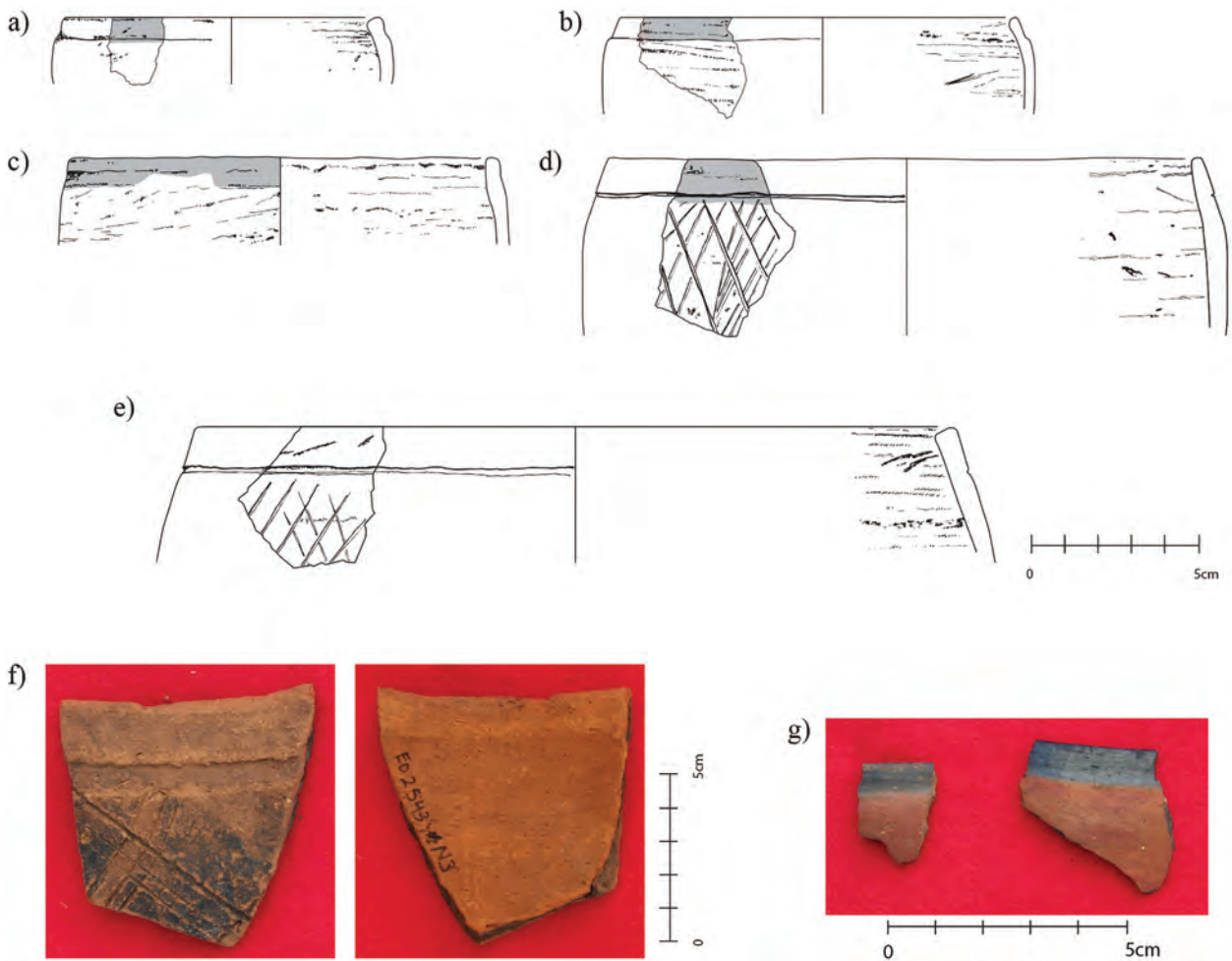


Fig. 7 Pottery from US 2543 and US 2548

(a) ED2543.N1 (b) ED2543.N2 (c) ED2548.N1 (d) ED2548.N2 (e) ED2543.N4 (f) Hybrid sherd ED2543.N3 (g) rim sherds of ED2543.N1 and ED2543.N2 showing defined black-tops. © AdS-Tell Edfu Project.

mediate Period,<sup>28</sup> and the successive mud floors and hearths suggest that these are temporary, short-lived occupation phases or domestic “squatter” activity that took place when this area and especially the area to the south of the southern columned hall had fallen out of regular use. The Nubian-style pottery from these two contexts is very low in quantity, especially in comparison to the Egyptian pottery from the same context,<sup>29</sup> but the character of the Nubian-style pottery is quite distinct from that in the contexts that precede it. Especially noteworthy is a group of fine ware sherds from four vessels which are unmistakably of the Pan-Grave tradition (fig. 7a-c, g) based on

very close parallels from Pan-Grave mortuary contexts. All are thin-walled with slipped and burnished exteriors and well-defined black tops, and two examples have recessed rims with sharply defined black zones that are diagnostic for the Pan-Grave tradition. This group of sherds is distinct in the Tell Edfu sequence and displays strong affinities with Pan-Grave pottery from cemetery sites. Besides this small group of fine ware sherds, there are a few examples of the coarse cooking pots (fig. 7d-e) as well as one sherd of ‘hybrid’ ware (fig. 7f). The mixed nature of the assemblage from these contexts could thus be interpreted as evidence for a living community that simultane-

<sup>28</sup> AYERS 2018, 72.

<sup>29</sup> At the time of writing the proportion of Nubian pottery as compared to Egyptian pottery had not yet been calculated,

but the Nubian pottery would almost certainly make up less than 1% of the total ceramic assemblage from these contexts. See AYERS 2018: 72–74.





Fig. 8 Pan-Grave style pottery from US 2659. (a) ED2659.N1 (b) ED2659.N3 (c) ED2659.N5. © AdS-Tell Edfu Project.

ously used coarse and fine wares for the preparation, presentation, and consumption and food and drink.

Moving forward in time, the Egyptian pottery from US 2659 dates to a period *after* the break

from Middle Kingdom traditions – that is, the late Second Intermediate Period.<sup>30</sup> The Nubian evidence consists of only a few sherds from coarse cooking pots with soot-covered exterior surfaces, all of which can be associated with the Pan-Grave

<sup>30</sup> BOURRIAU 2010, 35; AYERS 2018, 74–75. With regard to chronology, the Egyptian pottery from Edfu US 2659 displays many similarities with the earliest introduction of the

new Upper Egyptian style of pottery of the early 17<sup>th</sup> Dynasty at Thebes (SEILER 2010, 44–49; AYERS 2017, 252–253, 261–262).

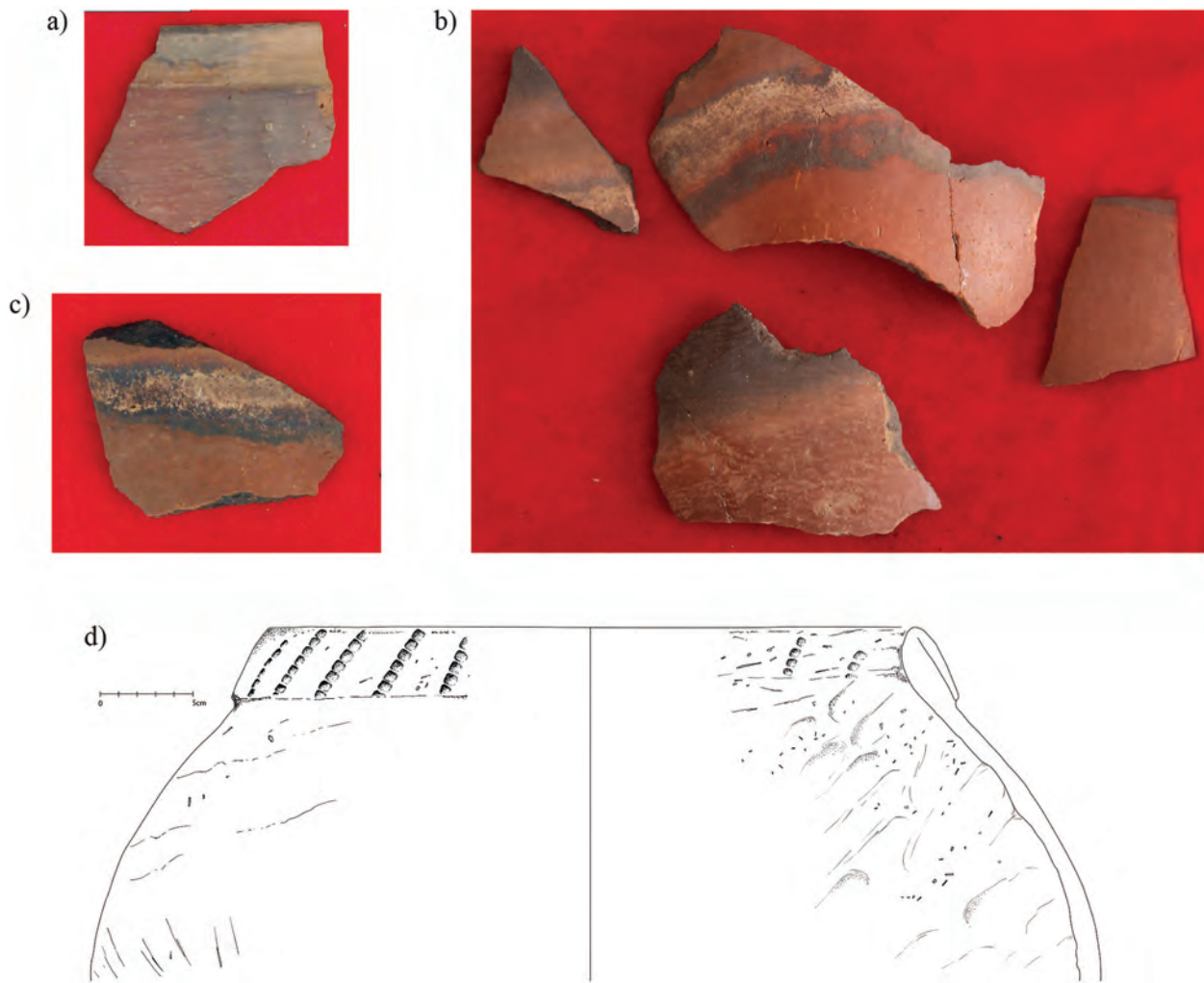


Fig. 9 Pottery of Phase I.IIIA

(a) Residual Pan-Grave, ED2547.N4 (b) Sherds of Classic Kerma beaker from context US 2562 (c) sherd from Classic Kerma beaker from context US 2570 (d) ED2547.N3. © AdS-Tell Edfu Project.

tradition based on their style and morphology. A near-complete example (2659.N.1, **fig. 8a**) has a recessed rim and is decorated with an incised lattice motif on the upper body and closely spaced but irregular cross-hatching covering the base, all of which are characteristic for the Pan-Grave tradition. Another sherd from a large pot also has a distinctive recessed rim, below which is a band of deeply incised oblique hatching (**fig. 8b**). Direct parallels for this type are known from Pan-Grave cemeteries at Shellal<sup>31</sup> and Debeira East,<sup>32</sup> supporting their attribution to that tradition. Overall the context shows the continued presence of Pan-Grave coarse wares, but the fine black-topped red

Table 1 Minimum number of individuals of Nubian-style pottery per context.

Phase	US	MNI
1.IA	2078	4
	2079	6
	2280	3
1.IB	2654	7
1.IIA	2543	5
	2548	3
1.IIB	2659	5
1.IIIA	2547	44
	2562	33
	2570/1	26
1.IIIB	2458	24

<sup>31</sup> REISNER 1910, fig. 37.10.

<sup>32</sup> DE SOUZA 2019, fig. 38b.

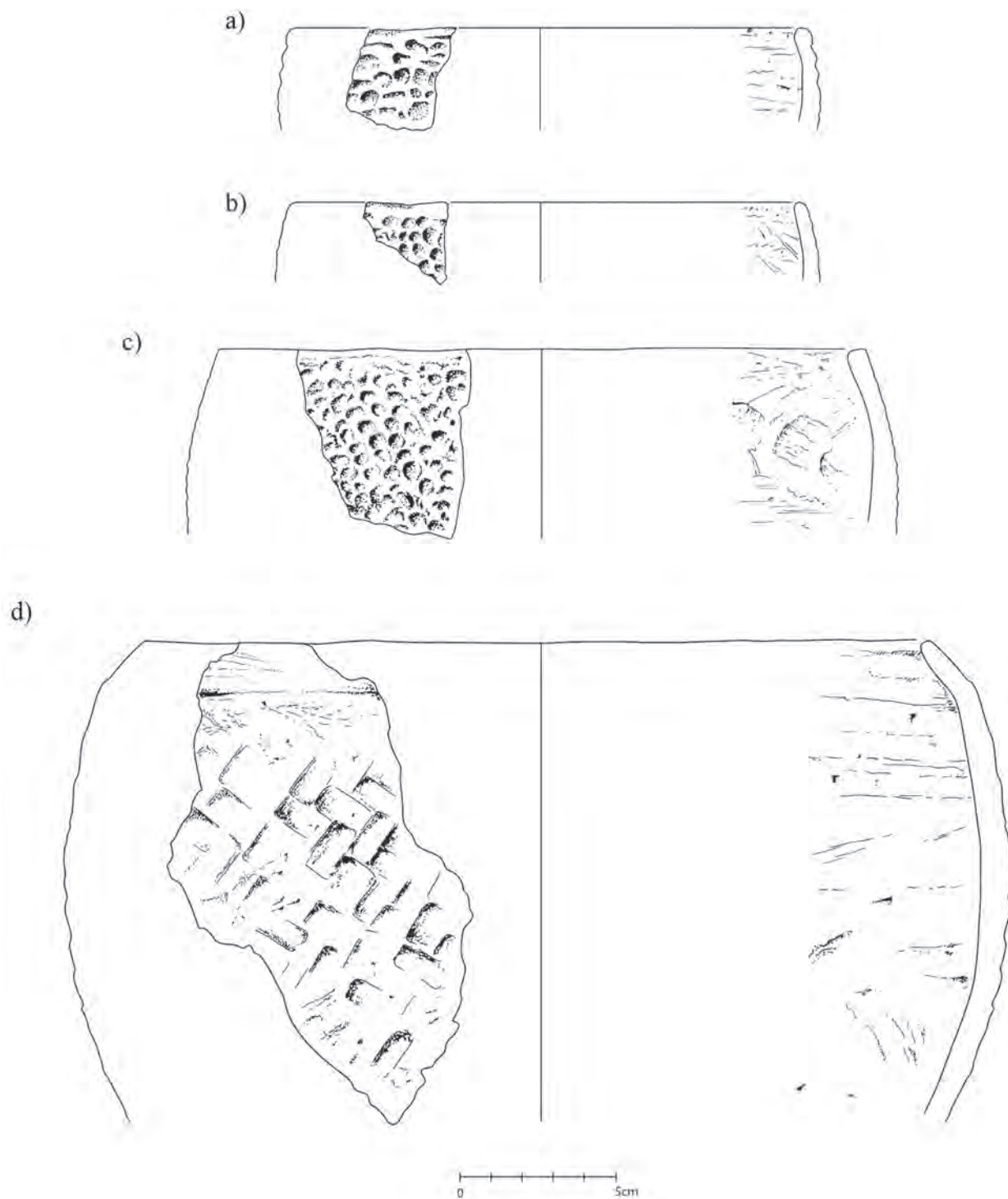


Fig. 10 Mat-impressed wares: (a) ED2562.N2 (b) ED2562.N13 (c) ED2562.N2 (d) ED2547.N11.

burnished wares seen in the ‘squatters’ contexts are now entirely absent.

The next contexts in the sequence (US 2547, 2562, 2570, 2571) date to the late Second Interme-

diat Period (i.e. the 17<sup>th</sup> – early 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty), by which time the silos had fallen out of use and were filled by a large trash deposit.<sup>33</sup> The Egyptian pottery from these contexts is quite homogeneous and

<sup>33</sup> AYERS and MOELLER 2012, 105.

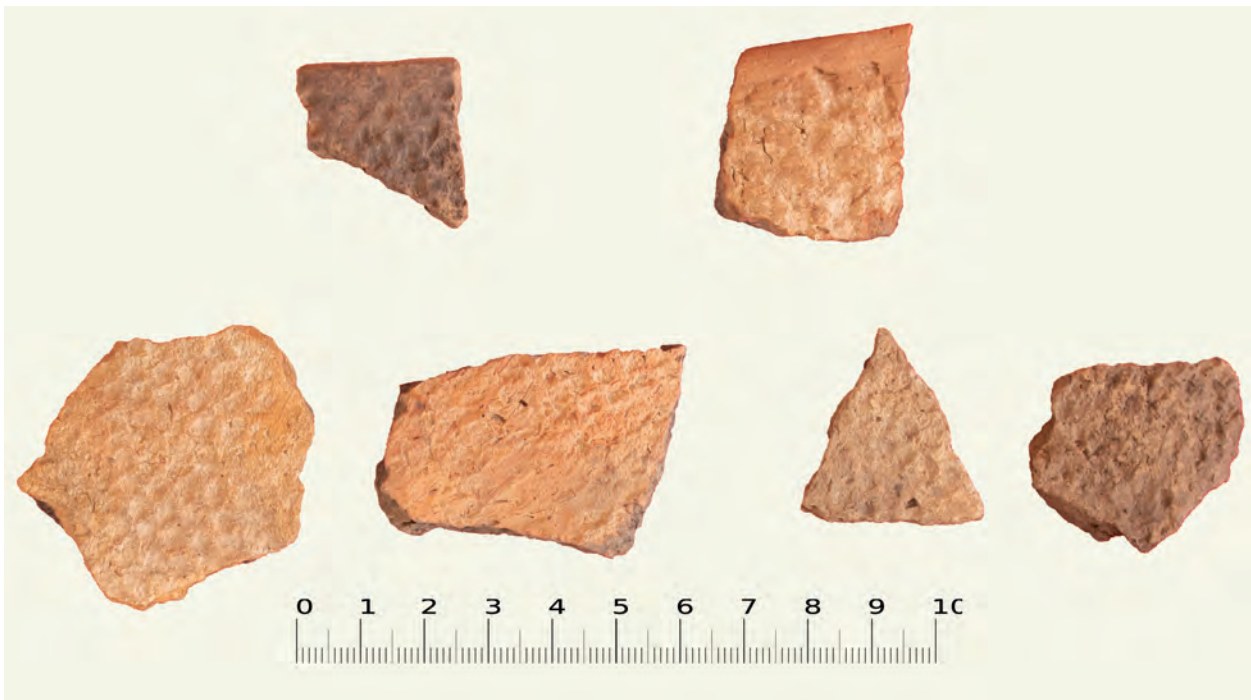


Fig. 11 Sample of mat-impressed wares from US 2652. © AdS-Tell Edfu Project.

joining sherds from across these layers indicate a short period of deposition.<sup>34</sup> There is a distinct change in the composition and character of the Nubian ceramic assemblage in these contexts, and the frequency of Nubian pottery increases dramatically, in some cases by almost 700% from earlier contexts based on the minimum number of individuals (**Table 1**).<sup>35</sup> Despite the short timeframe for deposition, the Nubian pottery from these contexts is highly varied in terms of quality, surface treatment and shape. The most noticeable change from earlier contexts is that pottery attributable to the Pan-Grave tradition almost entirely disappears and is represented only by at least one residual sherd (**fig. 9a**). Sherds from at least two unmistakable Classic Kerma beakers (**fig. 9b-c**),

fine burnished Kerma-style bowls, and the associated Egyptian pottery all point firmly to a date in the late 17<sup>th</sup> to early 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty.<sup>36</sup>

Mat-impressed wares occur frequently in these contexts in varying qualities and thicknesses, and the impressions on the vessel surfaces show the range of matting types that were used in the production process, including tightly woven with a nodular texture (**fig. 10a-c**, **fig. 11**) and more loosely woven examples with flat fibres in a herringbone weave pattern (**fig. 10d**). All of these examples find clear parallels at sites connected with the Kerma tradition such as Sai<sup>37</sup> and at Kerma itself,<sup>38</sup> at Upper Nubian sites connected with Egyptian activities such as Dukki Gel,<sup>39</sup> and at the New Kingdom Egyptian settlement at Sesebi.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>34</sup> AYERS and MOELLER 2012, 111. Joins were found among both the Egyptian and Nubian pottery from these contexts.

<sup>35</sup> At the time of writing, quantification of the Egyptian pottery from these contexts is in progress and it is therefore not possible to calculate the Nubian pottery as a percentage total in each context. It is therefore possible that the increase in quantity may simply be due these contexts being larger in terms of volume of material. The author has elected to calculate the minimum number of individuals (MNI) rather than using EVE approach. This was done in order to account for the varied and fragmentary nature of

the Nubian ceramic assemblage in which an individual vessel may be represented only by a single rim or body sherd. The irregularity of the handmade forms often prohibits the accurate calculation of a vessel's diameter, further limiting the usefulness and relevance of the EVE approach.

<sup>36</sup> LACOVARA 1997, 78–80; PRIVATI 1999, 49–50, pl. 19–20; AYERS and MOELLER 2012, 111.

<sup>37</sup> GRATIEN 1986, figs. 229b, 234c; BUDKA 2017, fig. 67.

<sup>38</sup> LACOVARA 2003, fig. 4.4.

<sup>39</sup> RUFFIEUX 2012, fig. 28.

<sup>40</sup> ROSE 2012, 18–21, figs. 4–5.

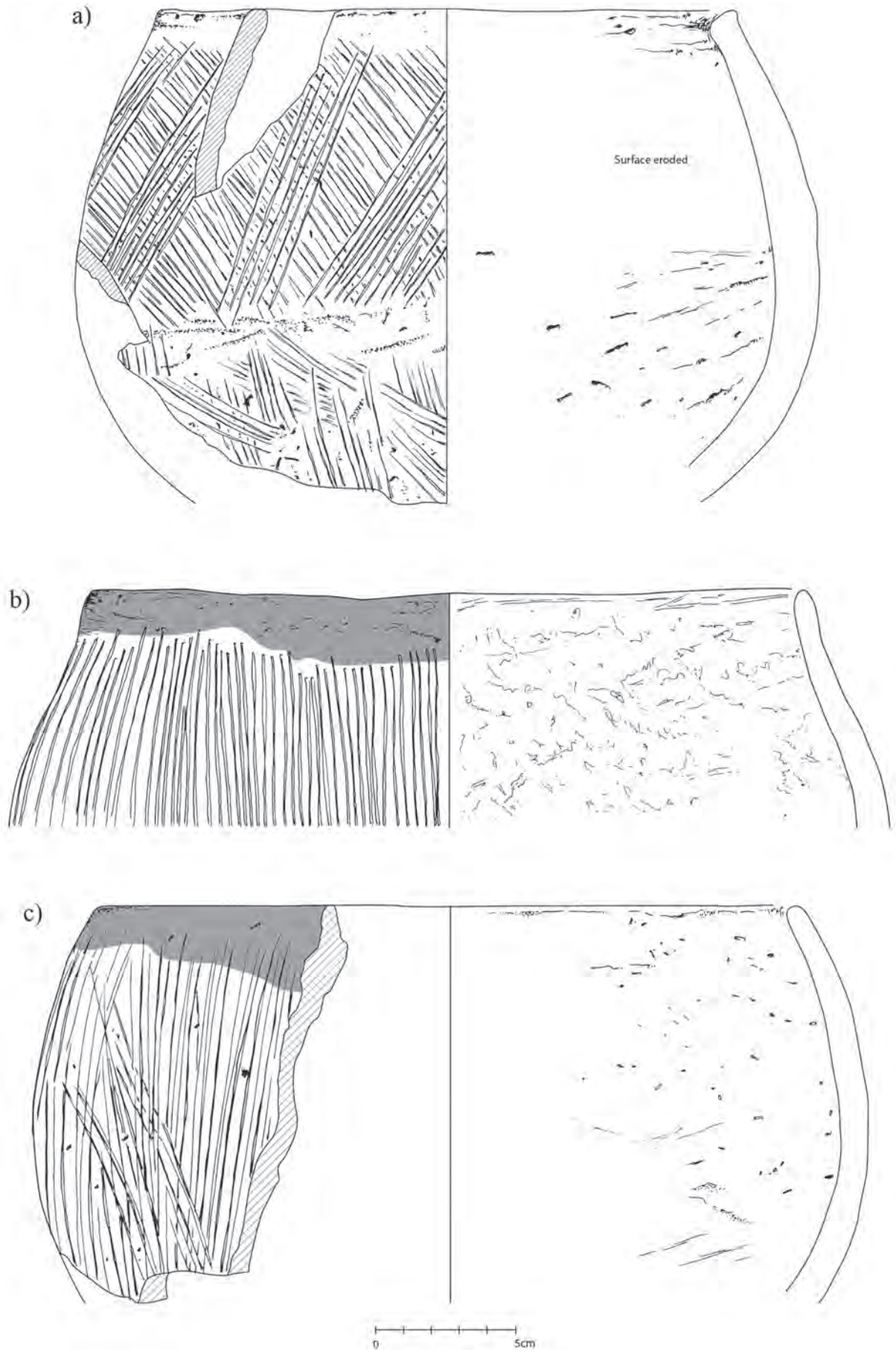


Fig. 12 Comb-scraped wares: (a) 2562.N18 (b) 2571.N2 (c) 2562.N2.



Fig. 13 Comb-scrapped bowl ED2562.N18. © AdS-Tell Edfu Project.

Comb-impressed decoration occurs on the rims of large globular jars with thick folded rims (2547.N.3, **fig. 9d**) known from Egyptian settlement contexts in Upper Nubia, for example at Sai,<sup>41</sup> Dukki Gel,<sup>42</sup> and Sesebi.<sup>43</sup> The same type of vessel was used for an infant burial from Cemetery 110 at Kubban in which the pot was placed

against the side of an Egyptian mudbrick superstructure.<sup>44</sup>

Comb-scrapped wares are by far the dominant type in this phase, easily recognised as coarse, black-topped vessels with a distinctive surface treatment made by scraping the exterior using a small comb or other form of multi-toothed imple-

<sup>41</sup> GRATIEN 1986, fig. 277d; BUDKA 2017, fig. 57.

<sup>42</sup> RUFFIEUX 2012, fig. 27.8, 27.10, 30.

<sup>43</sup> ROSE 2012, fig. 7.44.

<sup>44</sup> FIRTH 1927, 23, pl. 25f.

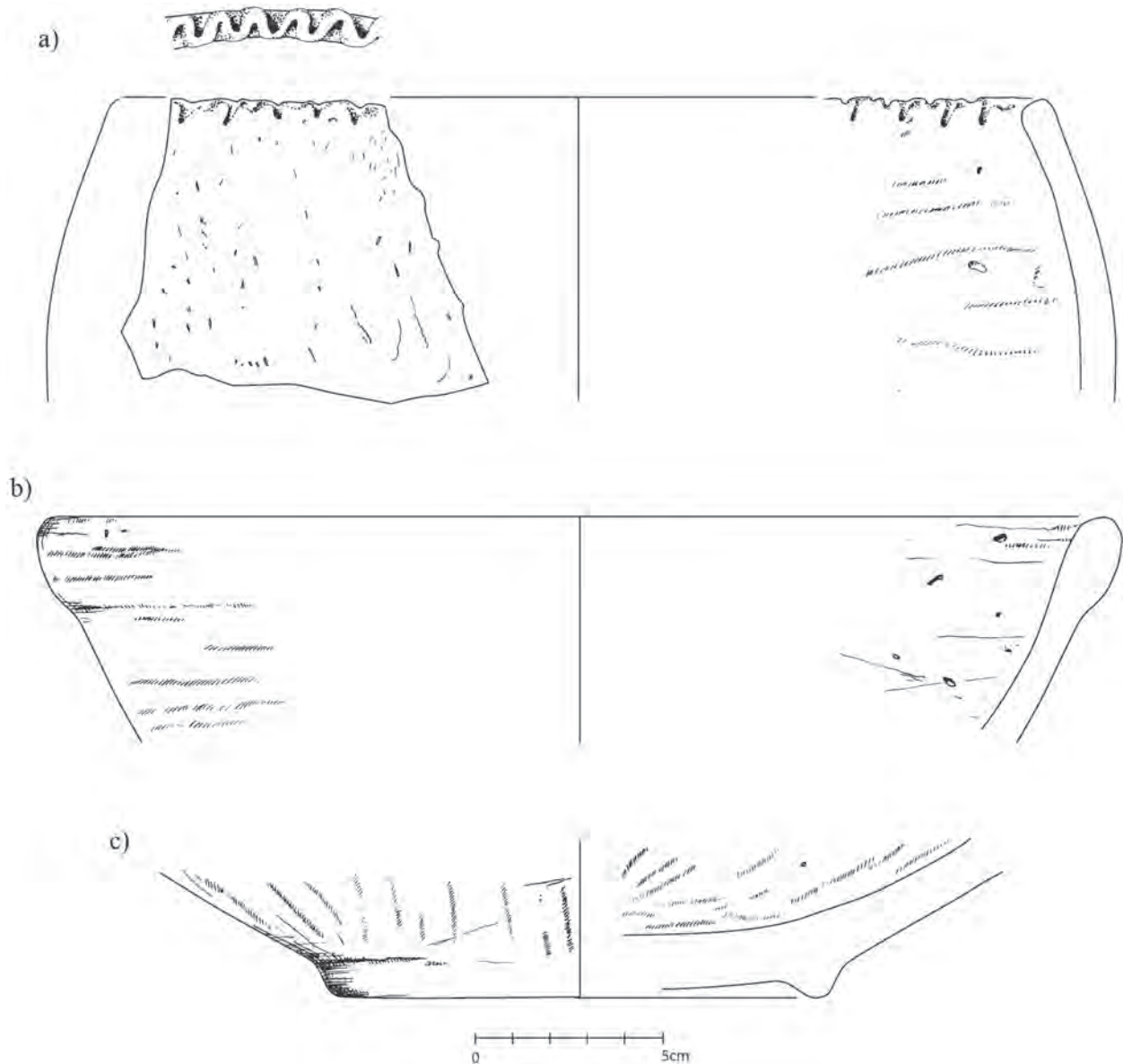


Fig. 14 “Hybrid” pottery from Phase I.III: (a) ED2562.N1 (b) ED2562.N14 (c) ED2562.N15.

ment (fig. 12). Comb-scraped wares do not occur in earlier contexts, and all but a few of the examples at Edfu have soot-covered exteriors from secondary burning, indicating that they were used as cooking vessels. The combs used to give these pots their distinctive surfaces vary in width but most have between 3–6 teeth, and the ‘motifs’ range from combed bands at regular intervals and sometimes crossing (fig. 12a, 13), to closely spaced combing in a single direction (fig. 12b), to random and overlapping scraping in multiple directions with no clear arrangement (fig. 12c). While the surface treatment may be interpreted as a form of decoration, the comb-scraping may also

have served the functional purpose of making the large vessels easier to grip. With regard to form, the comb-scraped vessels vary from bag-shaped with inward-sloping walls and flattened bases, to rounded and over-hemispherical, to open bowls with upright walls and flat bases. The quality of production ranges from very rough with highly irregular and thick walls up to and exceeding 15mm in thickness made in a coarse chaff or straw tempered fabric, to much finer examples with thinner walls (5–6mm) in a more dense fabric. In spite of their abundance at Tell Edfu, comb-scraped wares have not been widely published making it difficult to attribute the type to any par-

ticular tradition. The best published parallel is a bag-shaped example from Elephantine,<sup>45</sup> where it is said that comb-scraped wares dominate the assemblage of the ELE7C formation.<sup>46</sup> Based on the overall chronology, associated Egyptian pottery, Classic Kerma beakers at both Edfu and Elephantine, and the mat-impressed wares, it is here proposed that comb-scraped wares are a part of the Kerma tradition.

Examples of cultural and stylistic exchange between Egyptian and Nubian traditions come from these contexts. A handmade red-slipped bowl with a ‘crinkled’ rim edge created by alternating impressions along the exterior and interior edges of the rim (**fig. 14a**) finds close parallels at Sesebi,<sup>47</sup> but it should be noted that notched and incised rim edges are also a feature of Nubian pottery traditions generally, for example on Pan-Grave horned bowls.<sup>48</sup> Comparisons may also be made with pinched or wavy rims known in Egyptian pottery from the late Middle Kingdom<sup>49</sup> through to early 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty.<sup>50</sup> Perhaps most striking of all is a sherd of a large black-topped bowl with a wide modelled rim (**fig. 14b**) and a base sherd with an applied ring base (**fig. 14c**). Both are made in a typically Nubian fabric and ware (i.e. red burnished exterior, highly polished black interior, dense silty fabric with black section), but their form, especially that of the applied ring base, is decidedly Egyptian in character and unparalleled among Nubian pottery in terms of its size. Much smaller examples of such ‘hybrid’ ring-based forms that combine Nubian technologies with Egyptian-style forms also occur at Hu Cemetery Y in Egypt,<sup>51</sup> and at SJE Site 170 at Debeira East.<sup>52</sup>

The Middle Nubian sequence at Edfu comes to an apparent end with context US 2458, which is a large trash deposit that covered the silo courtyard, from which the Egyptian pottery dates to the early 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty, probably no later than the reigns of Hatshepsut and Tuthmosis III.<sup>53</sup> The Nubian pottery from these contexts is comparable to that from US 2562 and 2547 in that it is dominated by coarse comb-scraped wares, coarse undecorated and uncoated wares, large pots with comb-

impressed rims, mat-impressed wares and only one body sherd of a Classic Kerma beaker.

### Phases in the Nubian sequence at Tell Edfu

Based on the sequence as outlined above, the Middle Nubian pottery from Zone 1 at Tell Edfu can be divided into three phases, each of which can be further divided into two sub-phases (**Table 2**). The Arabic numeral ‘1’ in the phasing system denotes that these divisions are specific to Zone 1, thereby allowing for the development and integration of sequences for other excavated zones at the site.

In summary: Phase 1.I is distinguished by the presence of wares that are best attributed to the Pan-Grave tradition and its two sub-phases are differentiated by the presence of hybrid pottery, which occurs only in subphase 1.IB. Phase 1.II also consists predominately of Pan-Grave style wares. Subphase 1.IIA is defined by the presence of Pan-Grave fine wares that do not occur in earlier phases, and subphase 1.IIB consists only of large, coarse cooking vessels that display Pan-Grave characteristics. The final phase, Phase 1.III, marks a clear change in the character of the assemblage that represents a break rather than a gradual transition. The volume of Nubian pottery increases dramatically and is now almost entirely attributable to the Kerma tradition apart from only one residual Pan-Grave style sherd. Overall this phase is dominated by coarse comb-scraped wares, but sherds of Classic Kerma beakers and other fine wares clearly mark the shift from one tradition to another. The division between the sub-phases is based on the presence of Kerma fine wares in the earlier subphase 1.IIIA, and their almost total absence from subphase 1.IIIB.

It is clear from the phases as outlined above that there is a clear and sudden change in the Tell Edfu sequence, and with that change comes a marked shift in pottery styles and technologies, which in this case may be interpreted as a diachronic progression from one pottery tradition to another – in this case from Pan-Grave to Kerma. This is not necessarily to say that there was a

<sup>45</sup> RAUE 2018, Taf. 247–8.

<sup>46</sup> RAUE 2018, 245.

<sup>47</sup> ROSE 2012, fig. 6.33.

<sup>48</sup> DE SOUZA 2019, fig. 15.

<sup>49</sup> SCHIESTL and SEILER 2012, 289–291.

<sup>50</sup> SEILER 2005, 144–5.

<sup>51</sup> DE SOUZA 2018, 81, fig. 1.6. The object is in the collection of the Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology, UCL, object no. UC19021.

<sup>52</sup> SÄVE-SÖDERBERGH 1989, pl. 19; DE SOUZA 2018, fig. 1.7.

<sup>53</sup> Natasha Ayers, personal communication.



Table 2 Phases in the sequence of Nubian-style pottery from Tell Edfu Zone 1.

Phase 1.IA	US 2078, 2079, 2280	Abandonment of the southern columned hall	Late Middle Kingdom (late 12 <sup>th</sup> – early 13 <sup>th</sup> Dyn.)	Pan-Grave
Phase 1.IB	US 2654	Final abandonment of the southern columned hall	Late 13 <sup>th</sup> Dyn. – early SIP	Pan-Grave; Hybrid wares
Phase 1.IIA	US 2543, 2548	Temporary occupation, “squatter” activity	Early SIP	‘Late’ Pan-Grave; Hybrid wares
Phase 1.IIB	US 2659	“Trash deposit” related to first phase of silo court	Mid-Late SIP	Pan-Grave coarse wares
Phase 1.IIIA	US 2547, 2562, 2570, 2571	Trash layers inside Silo Si. 388.	Late 17 <sup>th</sup> – early 18 <sup>th</sup> Dyn.	Classic Kerma; Comb-scraped ware; residual Pan-Grave
Phase 1.IIIB	US 2458	Trash deposits above and surrounding silo courtyard	early 18 <sup>th</sup> Dyn.	Kerma coarse ware; Comb-scraped ware.

change in population or in modes of contact between Egypt and Nubia. Such conclusions would invoke the “pots-equal-people” line of reasoning that should generally be avoided until it cannot be ruled out. Apart from the pottery itself, there is no other archaeological evidence that ethnically or culturally Nubian people were present at Edfu. In order to understand and interpret the reasons that may have driven the change in the assemblage, and to understand Edfu as part of its socio-cultural landscape, one must take a region-wide perspective that incorporates archaeological *and* historical evidence. The question then becomes: to what extent are the archaeological phases at Tell Edfu a product of the social and cultural process taking place across the region at that time?

### Edfu in its regional setting

There is extensive evidence for Nubian mortuary activity in the region around Edfu during the late Middle Kingdom and early Second Intermediate Period, corresponding to Edfu phases 1.IA–1.IIB. The C-Group cemetery HK27C at Hierakonpolis is the northernmost known C-Group site, and although it predates the Nubian ceramics from Tell Edfu Zone 1, it is a clear indicator of a Nubian

presence in region during the Middle Kingdom.<sup>54</sup> Pan-Grave evidence is more widespread with two cemeteries at Hierakonpolis,<sup>55</sup> and another now-lost cemetery was reported on the northern side of the Third Dynasty pyramid at Genemiyeh, only 5 km south of Tell Edfu.<sup>56</sup> The two cemetery sites at Hierakonpolis, HK47 and HK21A, are roughly contemporary, both apparently having been established during the late 12<sup>th</sup> Dynasty, no earlier than the reign of Amenemhat III.<sup>57</sup> The Egyptian pottery from both cemeteries displays a continuation of Middle Kingdom styles, but there is no evidence of the new Upper Egyptian ceramic styles of the Second Intermediate Period, indicating that activity here most likely ceased at some point during the late 13<sup>th</sup> Dynasty.<sup>58</sup> This corresponds well with the Edfu sequence, where pottery attributable to the Pan-Grave tradition is confined to contexts in which the new Upper Egyptian pottery forms are entirely absent. The last context in which Pan-Grave style pottery is dominant at Edfu is US 2659, which is the same context in which the break from Middle Kingdom Egyptian traditions can first be observed.

Pan-Grave mortuary evidence declines in intensity by the early Second Intermediate Period (i.e. late 13<sup>th</sup> Dynasty) in southern Upper Egypt between Thebes and Aswan, and there is virtually

<sup>54</sup> FRIEDMAN 2001, 29–33; FRIEDMAN 2004; FRIEDMAN 2007.

<sup>55</sup> FRIEDMAN 2001, 33–38; DE SOUZA 2019, 66–68.

<sup>56</sup> WEIGALL 1907, pl. lxxvii–lxxviii; WEIGALL 1910, p. 348. Weigall’s description of the site is brief, but sherds of Pan-Grave horned bowls strongly indicate a mortuary context, as this type has only been recorded at Pan-Grave cemeter-

ies (WEIGALL 1907, pl. lxxviii.41, 45–46; DE SOUZA 2019, 68). For an overview of recent excavations at the Genemiyeh Pyramid, see MAROUARD and PAPAZIAN 2012.

<sup>57</sup> DE SOUZA 2019, 66–67.

<sup>58</sup> GIULIANI 2001, 42–43; DE SOUZA 2019, 66–8, fig. 63–64.

no evidence of activity at any Pan-Grave cemetery in that region following the break from Middle Kingdom Egyptian ceramic traditions in Upper Egypt. There is no single date for when this break occurs,<sup>59</sup> but the new Upper Egyptian material culture styles have taken hold by the time of what is recognised politically as the 17<sup>th</sup> Dynasty. We can therefore see a three-part correspondence between events taking place in the region around Edfu and in Upper Egypt generally: (1) Pan-Grave mortuary activity in Upper Egypt goes into decline before the new styles of Egyptian pottery appear, (2) Pan-Grave pottery all but disappears from the Tell Edfu sequence by the end of Phase 1.II, and (3) the new Upper Egyptian material culture styles take hold at Edfu in the same phase. These events are roughly contemporaneous, and so it is proposed that they are outcomes of corresponding shifts in socio-cultural processes across the region.

The decline in evidence for Pan-Grave activity across the region is immediately followed by the sudden and dramatic appearance of comb-scraped wares and Kerma-style pottery that marks the beginning of Phase 1.III at Edfu. In spite of the relatively large quantities of Kerma-style pottery at Tell Edfu during this phase, there is virtually no evidence that there was an actual Kerma presence in the region for any extended period of time. There are no known Kerma cemeteries in the region surrounding Edfu (which is not to say that none exists), and any other evidence is scant and unreliable.<sup>60</sup> Two Kerma sherds were found among the surface debris of the Pan-Grave cemeteries HK47 and HK21A at Hierakonpolis, one sherd at each site, but based on their forms both may be dated to the Middle Kerma tradition, which is somewhat earlier than Edfu Phase 1.III.<sup>61</sup> Other archaeological evidence for a Kerma presence in

the area, even only temporarily, is scant. Cooking pots displaying similarities with examples from Edfu Phase 1.III were recorded at Hierakonpolis locality HK64, which was a possible Nubian campsite.<sup>62</sup> Associated Egyptian pottery from the site dates to the late 17<sup>th</sup> and early 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty,<sup>63</sup> making it roughly contemporary with the Tell Edfu sequence. Weigall also published a sample of sherds collected from the surface inside the enclosure at Elkab, virtually all of which are of the comb-scraped variety found in abundance at Tell Edfu.<sup>64</sup> Recent excavations by the Belgian Mission to Elkab have uncovered more Nubian-style sherds that are close comparisons with the range of types and wares found at Edfu.<sup>65</sup> Although from surface contexts following disturbance by *sebbakhin* digging, the sherds are a clear indication that the same types of Nubian pottery were present in at least two Egyptian settlement contexts in the region.

We know from the biographical inscription of Sobeknakht II, a governor of Elkab, that Kushites conducted raids on Elkab during the late Second Intermediate Period and probably earlier.<sup>66</sup> Sobeknakht recounts that the combined Kushite-led force was an alliance of Nubians from Wawat, Khentennefer, Medja-land, and Punt, and that although the attacks were “unprecedented since the time of the god”, Sobeknakht managed to “repel the looters”.<sup>67</sup> While Sobeknakht’s account of this single “unprecedented” attack was likely selected by him in an effort to memorialise his role in protecting his city, it does not by itself support a sustained Kushite presence in the region. Instead, the text refers to what were more likely periodic raids, during which the Kushite forces were only in the area long enough to loot and to carry their booty south to Kerma, where it was

<sup>59</sup> For general discussions of the difficulties in synchronising the archaeological sequences during the Second Intermediate Period, especially in Upper Egypt, see BOURRIAU 2010; POLZ 2010; SEILER 2010; MÜLLER 2018.

<sup>60</sup> BOURRIAU (1981, 31–34) lists known Kerma burials in Egypt, but none of her cited examples occur south of Thebes. Raue posits that no Kerma cemetery is likely to ever be found in Egypt (RAUE 2019, 578).

<sup>61</sup> DE SOUZA 2019, 14.

<sup>62</sup> FRIEDMAN 1992, 100–101, 105, fig. 2; FRIEDMAN et al. 1999, 18–23.

<sup>63</sup> The Egyptian vessels from HK64 most characteristic of the early 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty date are carinated bowls with applied ring and protruding button bases (e.g. WILLIAMS 1992, fig. 2.e and g; LILYQUIST 2003, fig. 1c).

<sup>64</sup> WEIGALL 1907, pl. lxxvi.

<sup>65</sup> Wouter Claes, personal communication.

<sup>66</sup> DAVIES 2003; DAVIES 2005, 50; DAVIES 2010, 229–237. See also RAUE 2019, 577; TÖRÖK 2009, 109–110; EDWARDS 2004, 79. Davies dates the tomb and the text to the Sixteenth Dynasty. It should be noted that the chronology of the Sixteenth Dynasty generally is a subject of debate, see: RYHOLT 1997, 151–162, 259–264; BENNETT 2006, 233–234. Schneider presents a detailed overview of the confusion surrounding the chronology of the Second Intermediate Period in general (SCHNEIDER 2006, 168–170, 181–196).

<sup>67</sup> DAVIES (2003) emphasises the use of the word “looters” to indicate short and sporadic attacks. See also TÖRÖK 2009, 109–110.

eventually deposited in the large royal tumuli.<sup>68</sup> While there is no explicit reference to a Kushite attack on Edfu, it is likely that such attacks must have occurred considering the proximity to Elkab, which was subject to raids. A stele from Edfu dedicated to the priest Iuf, who served during the reign of Tuthmosis I, recounts his efforts in restoring the tomb of a Queen Sobekemsaef, who is likely to have been a wife of the 17<sup>th</sup> Dynasty ruler Nubkheperre. Polz suggests, albeit speculatively, that this tomb is likely to have been located at Edfu, and that the damage restored by Iuf might have been inflicted by the Kushite raids of the late 17<sup>th</sup> Dynasty.<sup>69</sup> Neither the texts nor the archaeology supports a long-term Kerma / Kushite presence in the region surrounding Edfu, nor does it seem that the Kushite looters had any intention of staying in Egypt for any length of time.

In addition to the changes in material traditions, the Nubian sequence at Tell Edfu shifts between agreeing and disagreeing with the evidence from elsewhere in the region during each of the phases. We know that Pan-Grave Nubians were burying their dead in the region (i.e. at Hierakonpolis and Genemiyeh) during Edfu Phases 1.I and 1.II. There is also evidence for intensive contact and cultural exchanges between Egyptians and the C-Group Nubians buried at Hierakonpolis HK 27C.<sup>70</sup> Likewise, the Egyptian objects deposited in the Pan-Grave burials at Hierakonpolis speak of some form of encounter between those two cultural spheres.<sup>71</sup> Furthermore, the appearance and eventual decline in Pan-Grave style pottery at Tell Edfu corresponds with the decline in evidence for Pan-Grave mortuary activity across southern Upper Egypt, as has already been outlined above. It is therefore quite probable that the Nubian pottery found in Phases 1.I and 1.II of the Tell Edfu sequence found its way into the town as a result of direct contact and exchange between Egyptian and Nubian populations in the area, and that the lack of non-ceramic Nubian evidence from

the settlement is made up for by the proliferation of Nubian mortuary activity in the area during those phases.

The same cannot be said about Phase 1.III of the Tell Edfu sequence, defined as it is by Kerma-style pottery and coarse utilitarian wares. The relative quantity of Nubian-style pottery increases dramatically, rising to over forty individuals in some stratigraphic units (**Table 2**),<sup>72</sup> which is in stark contrast to the dearth of archaeological evidence for Kerma-related activity in the region surrounding Edfu. In Phase 1.III, it appears that “pots *do not* equal people”, and that the presence of Nubian-style pottery does not necessarily indicate the actual presence of Nubian people at the site, nor does it correspond with contemporary textual evidence recounting military aggression committed by Kushite Nubians against Egyptian settlements. Once again, it must be stressed that Kerma sites may exist in the region but have been lost over time or simply have not yet been discovered. Weigall notes that “*Pan-Graves were observed at some twenty places along the western desert*” between Farshût and Aswan,<sup>73</sup> but at the time of his publication there was no distinction between the Middle Nubian groups, and everything Nubian was classified as Pan-Grave, or simply ‘Pan’.<sup>74</sup> It is thus very possible that some of Weigall’s “pan-grave” cemeteries could in fact be Kerma cemeteries, but the locations of these sites is lamentably unknown and hence their character can never be verified.

The presence of Nubian pottery in Egyptian towns has variously been explained via trade in goods or employment of Nubians,<sup>75</sup> as evidence for the presence of Nubian garrisons,<sup>76</sup> or as diplomatic gifts.<sup>77</sup> The latter may certainly be the case at Tell el Dab’a, where the fine Kerma beakers may be evidence of the supposed alliance between the Hyksos and Kerma rulers.<sup>78</sup> Trade is certainly a possibility, but the idea that pottery reflects the presence of Nubian soldiers would seem to perpet-

<sup>68</sup> DAVIES 2005, 50; TÖRÖK 2009, 110; EDWARDS 2004, 79.

<sup>69</sup> POLZ 2018, 229–231, notes 52, 65–66.

<sup>70</sup> FRIEDMAN 2004, 52.

<sup>71</sup> FRIEDMAN 2001, 37–38.

<sup>72</sup> Quantification of the Egyptian assemblages from these contexts is ongoing, therefore the exact percentage of the Nubian pottery in each context is yet to be determined.

<sup>73</sup> WEIGALL 1907, 26.

<sup>74</sup> Confusion between Kerma and Pan-Grave material culture can be traced back to the first Nubian grave to be system-

atically recorded, Abadiyeh E2, which Petrie identified as Pan-Grave, though we now know that the contents are entirely of the Kerma tradition (PETRIE 1901, 45, pl. xxxviii). Similarly, many Kerma beakers were described as “Pan” or “Late C-Group” in the Archaeological Survey of Nubia (e.g. FIRTH 1927, 52, fig. 1).

<sup>75</sup> BOURRIAU 1990, 16–7; RAUE 2002, 23.

<sup>76</sup> TÖRÖK 2009, 110.

<sup>77</sup> ASTON 2013, 380–381.

<sup>78</sup> SMITH and SMITH 1976, 61; FUSCALDO 2012, 170–171.

uate traditional perspectives with all of their colonialist undertones. Alternative explanations need to be sought.

### Edfu and Elephantine: Nubian encounters in the regions and at the frontier

Spanning over two millennia, the Nubian ceramic sequence from Elephantine is the longest continuous sequence from an Egyptian settlement context<sup>79</sup> and thus presents a point of interregional comparison for the sequence from Tell Edfu. Phase ELE-7 at Elephantine covers the period from the late Middle Kingdom up to the beginning of the New Kingdom,<sup>80</sup> and is thus contemporary with all of the Tell Edfu sequence. Despite their contemporaneity and the overall similarities in the material itself, the *sequences* at Edfu and Elephantine differ in subtle but important ways that can only be seen by direct comparison (**Table 3**).

Table 3 Comparative table showing relationships between Nubian evidence at Edfu, Hierakonpolis and Elephantine.

Egypt	Edfu	Hierakonpolis	Elephantine
Early 12th Dyn		HK27C	ELE-6B
Late 12th Dyn	Phase 1.IA	HK47 / HK21A	
13th Dyn	Phase 1.IB		ELE-7A
	Phase 1.IIA		
	Phase 1.IIB		
17th Dyn	Phase 1.IIIA		ELE-7B
	Phase 1.IIIB	HK64	
Early 18th D			ELE-7C
Mid 18th–19th Dyn			ELE-7D

The ELE-7 formation is divided into four sub-phases. The earliest, ELE-7A, displays Middle Nubian characteristics,<sup>81</sup> although precursors to what is later called the Pan-Grave tradition first appear in the preceding phase ELE-6B.<sup>82</sup> The Pan-

Grave style characteristics continue into phase ELE-7B, where they are accompanied by the first appearance of Classic Kerma beakers.<sup>83</sup> Raue describes this phase as neither ‘late Pan-Grave’ nor ‘Domestic Kerma’, but rather as the result of the intercultural interactions that were taking place at the First Cataract.<sup>84</sup> The following phase ELE-7C shows an increase in ware types and styles that fit with the Kerma tradition (e.g. mat-impressed wares) and a corresponding decrease in pottery displaying Pan-Grave characteristics. The final phase in the formation, ELE-7D dates to the second half of the 18th Dynasty (a time well beyond the span of the Tell Edfu sequence),<sup>85</sup> and the assemblage comprises a continuation of ELE-7C but with types from preceding phases back to ELE-7A.<sup>86</sup> Additionally, Raue’s ‘Late Middle Nubian Imitation wares’ occur in all of the ELE-7 phases, which is a comparable situation to the presence of hybrid wares in almost all phases of the Edfu sequence.<sup>87</sup>

While there are clear changes in the Elephantine sequence, there is a greater sense of continuity that at Tell Edfu. Types from the earliest phases continue to occur through to the end of the ELE-7 formation, albeit in gradually decreasing quantities and in association with new types and wares.<sup>88</sup> This sense of continuity is likely a reflection of the intense and long-standing social and intercultural interactions that took place at the First Cataract, which had long been the political and ideological frontier between Egypt and Nubia.<sup>89</sup> Elephantine could therefore be seen as a cultural ‘melting pot’ with distinct local material traditions resulting from continuous intercultural encounters and exchanges taking place at Egypt’s geographical and ideological southern frontier. In a sense, Elephantine could represent a southern ‘*Mischkultur*’ of Egyptian and Nubian traditions that may be compared to that seen in the Eastern Nile Delta, where material and cultural traditions from Egypt and the Levant merged in complex ways during the Second Intermediate Period.<sup>90</sup>

<sup>79</sup> RAUE 2018a.

<sup>80</sup> RAUE 2012; RAUE 2018a, pp. 208–282.

<sup>81</sup> RAUE 2018b, 526–528.

<sup>82</sup> RAUE 2018a, 200–201.

<sup>83</sup> RAUE 2018a, Taf. 220–221. Raue describes this as “Silbergebänderte SR-Fabrikate” (Silver-banded black and red ware).

<sup>84</sup> RAUE 2012, 54; RAUE 2018b, 527–528.

<sup>85</sup> RAUE 2018a, 275–279.

<sup>86</sup> RAUE 2012, 54–5; RAUE 2018a, 273–279.

<sup>87</sup> RAUE 2012, 55; RAUE 2018, Taf. 279–84

<sup>88</sup> RAUE 2019, 579.

<sup>89</sup> RAUE 2018a, 262.

<sup>90</sup> MORENO-GARCIA 2018, 3–7. Junker also spoke of a “*Mischkultur*” in Nubian cemeteries at Kubbaniyeh, characterised by a complex mixing of C-Group, Egyptian, and possibly even Pan-Grave elements (JUNKER 1920, 108–128).

By contrast, Edfu was a major regional centre and therefore presents an opportunity to consider how intercultural encounters did or did not differ from what took place at frontier zones like Elephantine or in the Eastern Delta. That Nubians were present in the area surrounding Edfu is expressly clear from the numerous cemeteries, which is also the case for Elephantine,<sup>91</sup> but unlike at Elephantine, the sequence of Nubian pottery at Edfu shows a distinct diachronic succession from one tradition to another. Phases 1.I and 1.II display predominately Pan-Grave type characteristics, while Phase 1.III is of an entirely different character that displays many affinities with the Kerma tradition. There is also a dramatic increase in the quantity of Nubian pottery during Phase 1.III, which, as noted earlier, was more than 700% in some contexts. Unlike at Elephantine, there is virtually no instance in which the two ceramic traditions occur simultaneously and in the same contexts at Edfu, the only exception being the single residual Pan-Grave-style sherd in Phase 1.IIIA (ED2547.N4).

A similar diachronic progression occurs elsewhere in the region surrounding Edfu. At Hierakonpolis, the C-Group cemetery HK27C falls out of use around the reign of Senwosret III and the two Pan-Grave cemeteries HK47 and HK21A show no signs of activity demonstrably earlier than the reign of the succeeding pharaoh, Amenemhat III.<sup>92</sup> None of these sites shows any signs of activity following the break from Middle Kingdom material traditions. The Egyptian pottery from the possible Nubian campsite HK64 at Hierakonpolis consists entirely of the new Upper Egyptian styles, which are absent from the two Pan-Grave cemeteries at the same site. Overall, the Nubian activity at Hierakonpolis also displays a diachronic succession in which activity attributable to one tradition ceases and is seemingly replaced by that of another tradition. This apparent contrast between the Nubian sequences at (and near) Edfu and Elephantine raises a fundamental question: how is it that the sequence at Edfu is diachronic while the sequence at Elephantine is somewhat more mixed?

One important point must be stressed, namely that the Kerma and Pan-Grave traditions were

broadly contemporary with one another, which makes the diachronic succession at Edfu all the more perplexing. The Pan-Grave tradition is first attested in the Nile Valley from the late 12<sup>th</sup> Dynasty, reaches its peak during the 17<sup>th</sup> Dynasty, and eventually ‘disappears’ archaeologically by the beginning of 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty. Over that same time period, the Kerma tradition developed into its Classic phase, during which time it assumed control of Lower Nubia as far as Aswan, from where it staged periodic raids on Upper Egypt such as that recounted in the Sobeknakht texts. The disparity between the Edfu and Elephantine sequences must therefore be interpreted situationally, as products of the socio-cultural conditions under which they were formed. It has already been surmised that Elephantine’s mixed sequence is the result of intensive multi-cultural encounters at a frontier zone, and that Edfu as a regional centre did not follow the same trajectory. A closer analysis of the social and political framework at Edfu and its immediate surrounding region offers some new possibilities that allow for a clearer reconciliation between the historical and archaeological records.

### **Gold, Viceroys, and the shifting dynamics of Egyptian-Nubian relations**

It has already been demonstrated that the Pan-Grave character of the first two phases of the Edfu sequence can be quite easily connected to other Nubian activity from the surrounding region, namely the Pan-Grave cemeteries at Hierakonpolis and Genemiyeh. The problem only comes with the sudden change that marks the beginning of Phase 1.III.

The virtual disappearance of Pan-Grave pottery at Tell Edfu from Phase 1.III onward can be linked to changes in the relationship between Egyptians and Nubians in the local area. The traditional view maintains that Pan-Grave material culture can be equated with the historical *Medjay* of Egyptian texts,<sup>93</sup> who, we are told, served numerous functions in Egyptian society including temple attendants, traders, and mercenary soldiers.<sup>94</sup> These connections are problematic, but there is evidence to suggest that at least some of

<sup>91</sup> Several Nubian cemeteries have recently been recorded along the west bank near Aswan. See GATTO, GALLORINI and ROMA 2012; GATTO 2014.

<sup>92</sup> DE SOUZA 2019, 66–68.

<sup>93</sup> BIETAK 1966, 61–78; SÄVE-SÖDERBERGH 1989, 15; LISZKA 2015; DE SOUZA 2019, 8–13.

<sup>94</sup> LISZKA 2012, 247–387; LISZKA 2015.

the Pan-Grave archaeological record can be related to communities serving a mercenary function but without those people necessarily being *Medjay* in a cultural or ethnic sense.<sup>95</sup> A recent analysis conducted by this author has shown that all of the known Pan-Grave cemeteries in Upper Egypt between Thebes and Elephantine seem to fall out of use by the late Second Intermediate Period, before the new styles of Upper Egyptian material culture appear,<sup>96</sup> a pattern that mirrors the sequence seen at Tell Edfu. From that point on, Pan-Grave material culture becomes more frequent in Middle Egypt as far north as Deir Rifeh, and in many cases, the Pan-Grave cemeteries in that region show virtually no activity *before* the late Second Intermediate Period. Egyptian-made weapons such as axes and daggers together with what appears to be strategic locations near Egyptian urban centres has been cited in support of a military role,<sup>97</sup> but this only seems to apply to the Pan-Grave sites north of Thebes. The archaeological record can therefore be interpreted as Pan-Grave communities moving (or being moved) north at some time around the 17<sup>th</sup> Dynasty. If the historical evidence is taken into account, this may be explained as ‘Pan-Grave (i.e. *Medjay*) mercenaries’ following their Egyptian employers northward as they advanced against Hyksos-controlled Lower Egypt.<sup>98</sup> This model is of course tentative, but what is clear is that the disappearance of Pan-Grave style pottery from the Tell Edfu sequence corresponds to the overall decline in Pan-Grave related activity in southern Upper Egypt and to a decrease or cessation of contact between Egyptian and Pan-Grave communities in the region.

The proliferation of Kerma-style pottery during Phase 1.III at Tell Edfu is more problematic. Elsewhere, for example at Elephantine,<sup>99</sup> Askut,<sup>100</sup> and Mirgissa,<sup>101</sup> the increase in Kerma-related activity can be linked to political developments, namely that Kerma had taken control of Upper and Lower Nubia as far north as Aswan during the Second Intermediate Period.<sup>102</sup> The problem at Edfu is that the dearth of Kerma sites and burials in Upper Egypt and reports of Kushite attacks on the region immediately surrounding Edfu is incongruous

with the dramatic increase in Kerma-style pottery found within the settlement. Interpreting this distinct and dramatic shift in the archaeological sequence requires a more detailed consideration of the social and political landscape of Edfu and its surrounds towards the end of the Second Intermediate Period.

It is almost certain that Egyptians were accustomed to having Nubians in their midst as itinerant groups or as permanently settled residents for what, by the beginning of the New Kingdom, would have been many centuries. Nubian pottery from late Old Kingdom contexts at Tell Edfu,<sup>103</sup> the Twelfth Dynasty C-Group cemetery at Hierakonpolis, and the Pan-Grave cemeteries at Hierakonpolis and Genemiyeh are testament to the long-standing encounters between Egyptians and Nubians in this region. Although it can only be speculation, one would not be wrong to think that Nubians who settled in the area could have come to self-identify as Egyptian with Nubian heritage after such a long time, and likewise their Egyptian neighbours may also have perceived them as being Egyptians. The very fact that the Pan-Grave and C-Group burials at Hierakonpolis are so recognisably ‘Nubian’ indicates that these people were able to express their non-Egyptian identities in death, in spite of the incorporation of Egyptian objects and customs in their graves.<sup>104</sup> The archaeological record therefore projects an image in which Nubians and ‘Nubian-ness’ were a familiar and apparently welcome part of the Egyptian social landscape, and had been for many generations.

It is only in the official narrative that we encounter the ideologised image of ‘wretched’ Nubians. In this light, the Kushite-led looters in the Sobeknakht texts may have been viewed as ‘other’ Nubians who came from somewhere else and were therefore somehow different to the Nubians who had been living amongst Egyptians in the region since the early Middle Kingdom. In fact, we are told by Sobeknakht that the Kushite coalition included *Medjay* Nubians, but this is at the very same time that *Medjay* were working in support of the Theban rulers. This is strong evidence

<sup>95</sup> LISZKA and DE SOUZA, forthcoming.

<sup>96</sup> DE SOUZA 2019, 140–53.

<sup>97</sup> RYHOLT 1997, 178–9.

<sup>98</sup> DE SOUZA 2019, 146–8.

<sup>99</sup> RAUE 2012.

<sup>100</sup> SMITH 1995, 81–136.

<sup>101</sup> VERCOUTTER 1970, 181–7.

<sup>102</sup> DAVIES 2005.

<sup>103</sup> The author studied Nubian sherds from late Fifth Dynasty contexts at Tell Edfu during the 2017 and 2018 seasons. Publication is in preparation.

<sup>104</sup> FRIEDMAN 2004, 52; DE SOUZA 2013, 116–118.

that the *Medjay* were not a single unified group,<sup>105</sup> and that even the Egyptians recognised that different portions of what was ostensibly the same group could simultaneously be friends and enemies.<sup>106</sup> One need only consider modern politics around the world, where a given ethnic, cultural, or religious group may be simultaneously welcomed and vilified according to the social context and who is telling the story.

As a possible interpretation, I propose that the discrepancy between the archaeological and historical records may be directly connected to changes in Egyptian policies toward Nubia, and specifically toward Kush (i.e. Kerma). The idea relates to the establishment of the office of the Viceroy of Kush, also known as the “King’s Son of Kush”,<sup>107</sup> and stems from a possibility first raised by Weigall in 1907, which he himself promptly dismissed in favour of what was then the more traditional assumption that Nubians buried in Upper Egypt served as mercenaries under Egyptian employ.<sup>108</sup> Weigall recorded what he called “Pan-grave” pottery in the town of Elkab, equated it with the presence of “Pan-grave tribes”, and offered the following interpretation:

*“El Kab being the seat of the Viceroy of the South, there might here have been a large number of southern merchants, servants, slaves, &C., and this variety of pottery might have been made by them.”*<sup>109</sup>

Weigall clearly names Elkab as the seat of the Viceroy of Kush, but then promptly reverts to the colonialist perspectives of the time, namely that Nubians were subservient to Egyptians. Besides this, there are some key problems with Weigall’s suggestion that should be addressed.

The first problem is that the bulk of the pottery published by Weigall shows no affinity with the Pan-Grave pottery tradition, and the roughly comb-scraped sherds are far more likely to be of the Kerma tradition based on their general style.<sup>110</sup> The second issue is his conclusion that ‘Pan-grave tribes’ were living at the site, which is not impossible but is difficult to confirm based on what is only a surface collection of pottery sherds. It should be noted, however, that the sherds recently recorded by the Belgian mission to Elkab do include examples attributable to the Pan-Grave tradition.<sup>111</sup> The third issue is that there is no evidence that Elkab was ever the seat of the Viceroy of Kush, and it is otherwise assumed that the Viceroy’s main residence was at Thebes based on evidence from later in the 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty.<sup>112</sup> It is also not exactly clear as to when the office of the viceroy was established. The earliest known possibility is a “king’s son” (*sA nsw.t*) named Teti, who appears in a rock inscription at Arminna West along with the name of the ruler Kamose,<sup>113</sup> but it is generally accepted that he was not a “king’s son” in the viceregal sense but was more likely to have been an actual son of the king.<sup>114</sup> The first confirmed viceroy is Ahmose Turoy, whose tenure in the office began in year 8 of the reign of Amenhotep I.<sup>115</sup>

While the sudden increase in the quantity of Kerma-style pottery at Edfu may not be directly connected with the establishment of the viceregal office, the change in the archaeological sequence occurs at a time of dramatic changes in Egyptian–Nubian relations. The Arminna West inscription makes it clear that the Theban rulers were hitting back against Kushite rule in Lower Nubia at least during the reign of Kamose and probably earlier. We also know, albeit from later sources, that the

<sup>105</sup> LISZKA 2011; LISZKA/DE SOUZA, forthcoming. Liszka’s dissertation on the *Medjay* as an ethnic group is the most extensive analysis on this topic currently available (LISZKA 2012).

<sup>106</sup> One could also cite the concept of ‘pacified Nubians’ or ‘subdued Nubians’, well known e.g. from a Royal Decree of Pepy II from Dashur (Berlin 17500). For a recent translation see STRUDWICK 2005, 103–105.

<sup>107</sup> For detailed discussions of Viceroy of Kush see: HABACHI 1980, 630–640; TÖRÖK 2009, 171–182; PIERRE 2020. See also EDWARDS 2004, 86.

<sup>108</sup> WEIGALL 1907, 26. As noted, Weigall described the pottery as “pan-grave”.

<sup>109</sup> WEIGALL 1907, 26. Emphasis added.

<sup>110</sup> WEIGALL 1907, pl. lxxvi. From the published selection, only five sherds (8, 14, 18, 22, and 46) might be attributable to the Pan-Grave tradition.

<sup>111</sup> Wouter Claes, personal communication. The author is grateful to Wouter Claes for sharing images of these sherds.

<sup>112</sup> TÖRÖK 2009, 178. Török bases this on the fact that most of the Viceroys of Kush were buried at Thebes.

<sup>113</sup> HABACHI 1980, 630.

<sup>114</sup> HABACHI 1980, 630; PIERRE 2020, 30. Spalinger identifies Teti as a ‘protoviceroy’ (SPALINGER 2006, 346), and Török does not include him in his list of viceroys at all (TÖRÖK 2009, 171). Bács does not make a definitive judgement either way owing the lack of evidence (BÁCS 2014, 412).

<sup>115</sup> TÖRÖK 2009, 171; PIERRE 2020, 30.

northern limit of viceregal authority was at Nekhen (Hierakonpolis), which is less than 20km north of Edfu.<sup>116</sup> In an administrative sense, the southern part of Upper Egypt as far as Hierakonpolis seems to have been governed as if it were part of Lower Nubia. From that perspective, one might draw a connection between the high proportion of Kerma-style cooking pottery in late Second Intermediate Period contexts, renewed Egyptian resistance against Kushite control of Lower Nubia, the beginnings of the viceregal administration, and shifting perceptions of the boundary between Egypt and the lands to the south. If Elephantine and the First Cataract are perceived as the ideological boundary between Egypt and Nubia, then the region of Edfu, Elkab, and Hierakonpolis may be seen as the administrative boundary. The intervening region of southern Upper Egypt from the First Cataract to Elkab may then be perceived as a transitional frontier zone in which the Egyptian and Nubian spheres overlapped.

Other historical evidence lends further support to links between Edfu and Nubia during the late Second Intermediate Period and early 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty. A stela of the ‘hereditary noble and favoured count’ Emhab called Tamereru, found at Tell Edfu and dated to the late Seventeenth Dynasty, briefly describes the owner’s participation in military campaigns during the reign of either Kamose or Seqenenre Tao.<sup>117</sup> Emhab tells us that he accompanied his master (i.e. the king) to *Miu*, and later to Avaris, in other words to the southern and northern limits of Egyptian penetration at that time.<sup>118</sup> The location of *Miu* is in the region Kurgus in the Abu Hamed Reach near the Fifth Cataract,<sup>119</sup> indicating that an official from Edfu participated in

military activities that penetrated deep into Upper Nubia in the last years before the New Kingdom. Another man named Haankhef of Edfu, a contemporary of Emhab, appears to have travelled between Egypt and Upper Nubia during a time when other Egyptians were not able to freely do so, and perhaps also as part of a military campaign.<sup>120</sup> Additionally, Uljas has previously argued that the Buhen family of Sobekemhab may find its origins in Edfu based on palaeographic evidence.<sup>121</sup> These latter sources are admittedly indirect, but they nevertheless point toward some form of connection between Edfu, Nubia, and Nubians. Besides Edfu, strong links between Nekhen and Nubia are recorded in the numerous Nubian rock inscriptions dated to the early 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty in which the authors identify Nekhen as their hometown.<sup>122</sup> It is therefore clear that people from the Edfu–Elkab–Hierakonpolis region were making regular visits to Nubia during the transitional period between the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasties, which occurs at around the same time as the drastic changes in the Nubian ceramic sequence at Tell Edfu.

That same change is also synchronous with an increase in gold mining activities in the deserts to the east of Edfu. Technological advances in gold extraction processes at the beginning of the New Kingdom led to a dramatic increase in the number of gold mines along routes leading east from Elkab to Marsa Alam on the Red Sea Coast (**Fig. 15**).<sup>123</sup> Securing the control over access to gold-producing regions was one of the viceroy’s principal roles,<sup>124</sup> which was clearly communicated in the viceregal title “Overseer of the Deserts of Gold of Amun”. This title was not initially bestowed upon viceroys

<sup>116</sup> The full geographic extent of viceregal jurisdiction is most likely that recorded in the tomb of the viceroy Amenhotep Huy (reign of Tutankhamun), where it is stated that he controlled the regions from Nekhen to Nesut-Tawy (riverine Nubia up to Gebel Barkal) and Nekhen to Karoy (the desert regions as far as Kurgus). See MORKOT 2013, 916–917. Also HABACHI 1980, 630; TÖRÖK 2009, 178; BROWN 2017, 176.

<sup>117</sup> In the most recent analysis of the Emhab stela, KLOTZ (2010, 241) supports a date during the reign of Kamose, as did ČERNÝ (1969, 87–92). See also STÖRK 2013, 215–6. BAINES (1986) suggests it may be slightly earlier in the reign of Seqenenre Tao. See also SPALINGER 2006, 346.

<sup>118</sup> A text from the reign of Tuthmosis III explicitly states that *Miu* is the “boundary of the south” (DAVIES 2017, 72).

<sup>119</sup> DAVIES 2017, 72; DAVIES 2001, 52. For other general discussions regarding the various opinions on the location of

*Miu*, see O’CONNOR 1987, 122–124; BAINES 1986, 43–44; COOPER 2015, 321–322. SPALINGER (2006, 346) suggests that Kamose’s activity at *Miu* was intended to attack Kerma from the south, after having regained control of Lower Nubia.

<sup>120</sup> Störk believes that Haankhef and Emhab may have been part of the same military campaign (STÖRK 2013, 215). See also COOPER 2018, 146.

<sup>121</sup> ULJAS 2010, 381. See also COOPER 2018, 154.

<sup>122</sup> DAVIES 2019, 37–39, esp. note 40, in which Davies provides a list of examples of inscriptions citing Nekhen as the author’s hometown.

<sup>123</sup> KLEMM and KLEMM 2013, 606–609, and in particular compare their maps fig. 7.2 and fig. 7.3 for an illustration of the increase in gold mining activity between the Old Kingdom and New Kingdom.

<sup>124</sup> TÖRÖK 2009, 178–179; KLEMM and KLEMM 2013, 609.



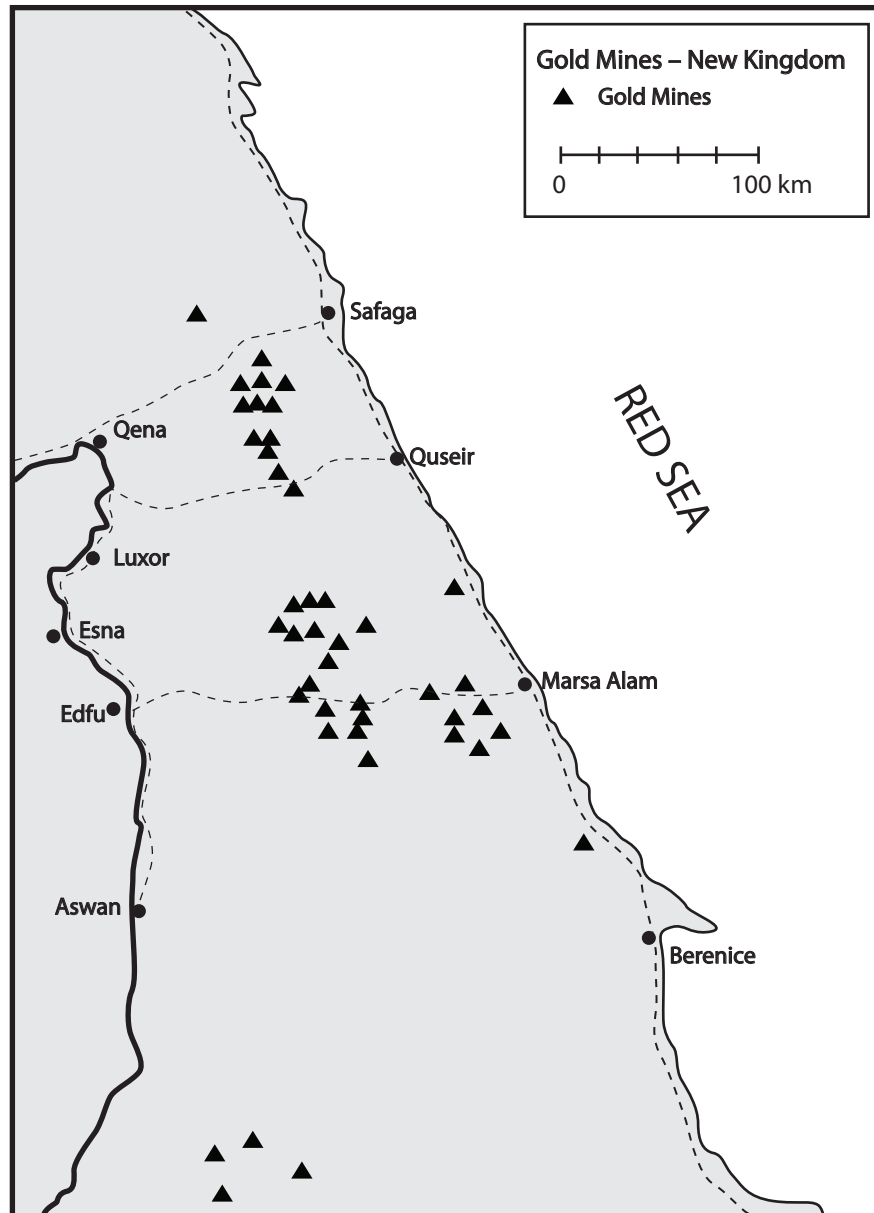


Fig. 15 Map showing locations of gold mines in the Egyptian Eastern Desert at the beginning of the New Kingdom  
(© A. de Souza, after KLEMM and KLEMM 2013, fig. 7.3).

but is first attested with Egyptian officials who were responsible for gold mining in the desert regions of southeastern Egypt, including the regions east of Elkab and Edfu.<sup>125</sup> It can therefore be argued that the deserts east of Edfu and Elkab were most likely a part of the “Deserts of Gold of

Amun” that would eventually feature in viceregal titulary. Gold was not the only valuable resource mined from the deserts east of Edfu. Evidence for copper mining in the region reaches back to the Old Kingdom,<sup>126</sup> and a stela naming the viceroy Usersatet (reign of Amenhotep II) from an ame-

<sup>125</sup> BROWN 2017, 176–178. The first viceroy to hold the title “Overseer of the Deserts of Gold of Amun” is Merimose, who served under Amenhotep III.

<sup>126</sup> KLEMM and KLEMM 2013, 601–621. For Edfu specifically, royal seals from the reign of Djedkare-Isesi mentioning “Overseer of the Sementiyu” (i.e. prospectors), Red Sea

shells, and Nubian pottery may be related to mining activity in the Eastern Desert regions, in particular for malachite and copper ores. Publication is in development, but for a preliminary overview see MOELLER and MAROUARD 2018b, 168–169; MOELLER and MAROUARD 2019, 140–143.

thyst mine at Wadi el Hudi suggests that gold was not the only resource under the jurisdiction of the King's Sons of Kush.<sup>127</sup>

It is also worth noting that there appears to be an increase in gold mining activity in Upper Nubia by the early New Kingdom,<sup>128</sup> and Egyptian settlements such as Sesebi may have been established as a direct result of gold mining activities at the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty.<sup>129</sup> It also seems that the Egyptians may have capitalised on and eventually usurped the Kushite Nubians' existing control of gold-mining activities in Upper Nubia during earlier periods, for which there is mounting archaeological and epigraphic evidence. A large concentration of grinding stones found at the site of Hosh el-Guruf near the Fourth Cataract have been interpreted as evidence for the processing of gold ore, and Nubian pottery found at the site is comparable with the Nubian-style wares that occur in Edfu Phases 1.IIA to 1.IIIA.<sup>130</sup> The grinding stones themselves have been tentatively dated by the excavators to the New Kingdom.<sup>131</sup> As part of the Korosko Road Project, Davies recorded a number of Egyptian rock inscriptions naming officials involved in gold mining activities, some of which can be dated to the early 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty.<sup>132</sup> Only one inscription (KRP14) predates this, and is remarkable in that it includes an indigenous Nubian name (*'Tr-r-h'*) likely to be a Kushite ruler, which may indicate that this gold-bearing region was previously under Kushite control.<sup>133</sup> Davies also mentions the occurrence of Kerma-style pottery in association with at least one of these inscriptions (KRP8).<sup>134</sup> Manzo has also identified what appears to be a correspondence between distributions of Nubian-style pottery and gold mining zones through the Sudanese Eastern Desert, and he also argues that Kushite (i.e. Kerma) rulers may have been as interested as Egyptians in controlling access to gold rich areas.<sup>135</sup> The evidence is admittedly sparse, but it is tempting to suggest that the apparent shift from Kushite to Egyptian control over gold-bearing regions in Upper Nubia at the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty may be a conse-

quence of increased gold mining activity in the deserts east of Edfu. Given the evidence for the Kushites' existing experience with gold extraction, one could also surmise that Egyptians either co-opted or cooperated with Nubian miners both in Upper Nubia and east of Edfu. This could be an explanation for the dramatic increase in Nubian-style pottery at Tell Edfu during the late Second Intermediate Period as well as the occurrence of Nubian-style pottery at gold mining regions in Upper Nubia.

Whilst it is still not possible to draw an indisputable link between the viceregal administration and the changes in the archaeological record at Tell Edfu, the synchronicity of the social and political changes at the time and in that region is perhaps no coincidence. The change from Pan-Grave to Kerma-style pottery and the dramatic increase in quantity corresponds chronologically with changes in Egyptian policies toward Nubia, and in particular the renewed efforts to reinstate Egyptian authority across Lower and Upper Nubia towards the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> Dynasty. The change also comes at a time when mining activity increases in the desert regions east of Edfu and Elkab, which is likely related to the annexation of gold-mining regions in Upper Nubia at the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty. The Egyptians' determination to secure access to gold and other mineral resources is in turn very likely to have been a driving factor behind the establishment of the viceregal administration, the roots of which may be traced back to the social and political changes during the transition into the 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty. An inevitable consequence of these factors would have been increased contact, exchange, and perhaps even cooperation with Nubia and Nubians. A by-product this changing relationship may have been a greater influx of Nubian goods into Egyptian communities, and this may be the reason for the sudden increase in Nubian utilitarian pottery at Tell Edfu. The question of where the seat of the early viceroys was located must remain open for now, and will hopefully be addressed through ongoing fieldwork in the settle-

<sup>127</sup> LISZKA 2017, 38–39. Liszka acknowledges that the find is anomalous in that it is the only find of New Kingdom date at the site.

<sup>128</sup> KLEMM and KLEMM 2013, 608–611; KLEMM and KLEMM 2017, 259–261.

<sup>129</sup> SPENCE ET AL. 2009, 42, pl. 5; McLEAN 2017, 82–83.

<sup>130</sup> EMBERLING and WILLIAMS 2010, 20–23, fig. 25–26.

<sup>131</sup> EMBERLING and WILLIAMS 2010, 23.

<sup>132</sup> DAVIES 2014.

<sup>133</sup> DAVIES 2014, 35–36; COOPER 2018, 144, 148–149.

<sup>134</sup> DAVIES 2014, note 20.

<sup>135</sup> MANZO 2012, 82.

ment remains at Tell Edfu and Elkab. At the very least, the collective archaeological and historical evidence suggests that southern Upper Egypt was a broad and culturally mixed transitional zone between the Egyptian and Nubian spheres, and that the region was enmeshed in the political and societal changes that marked the beginning of the New Kingdom and a renewed vigour in Egyptian colonial activities in Nubia.

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