

The early New Kingdom at Sai Island: preliminary results based on the pottery analysis (4th Season 2010)

Julia Budka

Introduction

Sai Island is a prominent site located approximately halfway between the Second and Third Cataracts in Upper Nubia (Vercoutter 1986; Geus 2004; Doyen 2009). The large island (12 x 5.5km) provided good conditions for settlement and cultivation and is located in a position of strategic value at the southern end of the Batn el-Hagar. Its history of occupation extends from Prehistory to Ottoman and modern times, including the period of the Egyptian New Kingdom (Geus 2004).

The Pharaonic town, located on the eastern bank of the island, is a fortified settlement with an orthogonal layout, approximately 238 x 140m in size (Azim 1975). It was previously investigated by J. Vercoutter and M. Azim in the 1950s to 1970s (Vercoutter 1958; 1973; Azim 1975). Six levels of occupation from the Pharaonic to Islamic periods were identified at that time. Foundation deposits as well as epigraphic evidence such as a text by Viceroy Nehi proved that the small sandstone temple, Temple A, had been founded by Thutmose III replacing an older mud-brick building (Vercoutter 1956, 74-75; 1986, 13-14; Geus 2004, 115; Minault-Gout 2007, 276; for a recent assessment of Temple A see Azim and Carloti forth.).

Since 2008, excavations have been resumed within the Pharaonic town. New fieldwork along the northern enclosure wall in a site called SAV1N is being carried out by the Sai Island Archaeological Mission (SIAM) of University Charles-de-Gaulle – Lille 3, directed by D. Devauchelle and headed in the field by F. Doyen (Devauchelle and Doyen 2009; Doyen 2009; forth.). In 2011, the author joined the SIAM team¹ and took over responsibility for the study of the New Kingdom ceramics. The purpose of this preliminary report is both to present first impressions on the early history of the site as drawn from the pottery analysis and to illustrate the rich potential not only of the ceramics from SAV1N, but of the site in general. The Pharaonic town on Sai Island might potentially provide links between archaeological processes, settlement patterns and historical events in Upper Nubia during the late Second Intermediate Period and the early New Kingdom.

The foundation of the Pharaonic town on Sai Island in its historical setting

In recent years, much has been written about the so-called “reconquest of Nubia” during the early New Kingdom (e.g. Smith 1995; Lacovara 1997; Smith 2003; Valbelle 2004; Davies 2005; Spalinger 2005, 46; Spalinger 2006; Valbelle 2006; Török 2009, 157-169). Sai Island played an important role in this period of Egyptian campaigns against the south, the details of which have still not been firmly established. According to the present state of knowledge, Wawat (Lower Nubia) was largely pacified by the reign of Kamose; in particular there is evidence for building activities by this Theban ruler at Buhen (Smith 1976, 8-9 and 206; Peden 2001, 56; Valbelle 2004, 94; Morris 2005, 68-69; Spalinger 2005, 46; 2006, 345; Barbotin 2008, 84). The situation in Kush (Upper Nubia) was very different. The Kerma kingdom of Kush is known as a significant opponent of the Theban 17th Dynasty (cf. Bonnet and Valbelle 2010, 361). Recent discoveries at Elkab testify that the Kerma kingdom struck as far north as this Upper Egyptian site during the late Second Intermediate Period (Davies 2003; 2010). Besides Kerma itself, Sai Island is the only other major settlement site of the Kerma culture known.² A large community of Kerma Nubians was settled at Sai Island during the period that is contemporary with the 17th Dynasty, as is attested by extensive cemeteries of the Kerma Classique period (Gratien 1985; 1986; Morris 2005, 81; Doyen 2009, 17). The settlement has not yet been identified, but, as at Kerma, fortifications are to be expected (see below).³ It can be assumed that this stronghold of the Kerma kingdom may have prevented the unchecked Egyptian expansion towards the south. Several Nubian campaigns are attested by King Ahmose (Morris 2005, 70-71) and although the precise location of his battles are not known, it is likely that he was concerned with this northernmost outpost of the rival Kingdom of Kush on Sai Island. Ahmose’s possible aim was to secure the region south of the Second Cataract. In founding a fortified town on Sai he might have intended to create a “bridgehead into Kush proper and a secure launching pad for further campaigns” (Davies 2005, 51; see also Török 2009, 183). Afterwards, Thutmose I succeeded in striking further south and in conquering the town at Kerma (Valbelle 2004, 94-95; Davies 2005, 51; Spalinger 2006, 349; Török 2009, 160).

Several textual sources from Sai Island refer to Ahmose (Minault-Gout 2007; Gabolde forth.). The most prominent object from Sai is a sandstone statue of the king (Khartoum SNM 3828 and 63/4/4, Davies 2004, 103, fig. 79; Minault-Gout 2007, 280-281, fig. 1b). This monument has been used

² O’Connor 1997, 63 refers to Sai Island as “a subcapital of the Kushites.”

³ Cf. SAV2 as a possible northern encampment of Pre-New Kingdom date, see Hesse 1981. For potential *Kerma Classique* remains within the fortified town see Azim and Carloti forth.; for a likely fortification of the Kushite site on Sai Island see also O’Connor 1997, 63.

¹ The Fourth season of the Sai Island Archaeological Mission (SIAM) of University Charles-de-Gaulle – Lille 3 was carried out from 5th January to 1st March 2011.



as key evidence for the assumption that Ahmose founded the town at the site (Davies 2004, 103; Valbelle 2004, 94; Török 2009, 159). However, the iconography and style of the seated statue in a heb-sed cloak have stimulated the alternative interpretation of its posthumous dedication by Amenhotep I in honor of his father (Lindblad 1984, 21; Gabolde forth.). Amenhotep I is known to have continued the major projects of his predecessor, for example his pyramid complex at South Abydos (Harvey 1998, 150, 228-229, fig. 74), and he dedicated a similar seated statue of his own on Sai Island (Khartoum 63/4/5; Lindblad 1984, 27-28, pl. 12d; Davies 2004, 102-103; Minault-Gout 2007, 282, fig. 1c). Apart from the discussed dating of the Ahmose statue, in general statues, stelae and relief blocks can be associated with sacred buildings, but do not necessarily attest to the establishment of a fortified settlement on the island (see Gabolde forth.).

Due to the uncertainties deriving from the present state of knowledge and the range of possible interpretations of the epigraphical sources, the founding of the town on Sai Island by Ahmose is not generally accepted. Consequently, one of the research questions of the resumed fieldwork by the Sai Island Archaeological Mission is directed toward establishing a firm date for the foundation of the town (Doyen 2009; forth.). SIAM intends to investigate whether there is any archaeological confirmation for the textual evidence of the various kings of the 18th Dynasty, in particular of the early rulers Ahmose, Amenhotep I and Thutmose I, but also of Thutmose III, Amenhotep II and Amenhotep III (see Minault-Gout 2007).

The Sai Island Archaeological Mission in SAV1N

The four seasons of work in SAV1N (2008-2011) have yielded several domestic structures within the town enclosure in the northern part of the Pharaonic settlement (Doyen forth.). In some of these structures storage facilities, ovens and grinding implements were found. Several building phases were documented, and a stratigraphy of walls and superimposed layers could be observed. At present, five levels have been identified which include several occupation phases within the 18th Dynasty (Doyen forth.). However, only a few ceramic deposits from SAV1N relate to building phases. There is plenty of evidence for the secondary re-use of the structures and for a lot of demolition, in particular in the northern part of the site.

During the fourth season, a magnetometric survey was conducted by Nicholas Crabb (The British School at Rome) and Sophie Hay (Archaeological Prospection Services of Southampton University) and highlighted a number of features in the town (Doyen forth.). Further excavation and clearing of several structures in SAV1N resulted in the discovery of both new buildings and adjoining walls and sections of previously investigated structures. This was particularly the case within levels 3 and 4, both datable to the 18th Dynasty. The earliest remains to date in SAV1N were sealed by level 4 and designated level 5. As will be shown below, the

material derived from this context probably dates already to the 18th Dynasty.

Simultaneous with the excavation in the Pharaonic settlement in 2011, the recording of the pottery was carried out by the author. This study confirmed occupation of the site throughout the New Kingdom – most prominently during the 18th Dynasty until at least Amenhotep III, but evidence for Ramesside activities (19th and 20th Dynasties) is attested as well, although in smaller quantities. As yet, these Ramesseid ceramics cannot be firmly associated with any structures.

The ceramic analysis of SAV1N

Considerable amounts of ceramic material were unearthed daily which attested not only to the use of the structures in SAV1N during the New Kingdom, but also to the later history of the site, especially in Meroitic, Post-Meroitic and Christian times.

The sherds arrived from the field at the house in large baskets, arranged according to their archaeological context (square, level and location). The contents of each basket were separated into the categories of diagnostic and undiagnostic sherds. Rim and base sherds, handles and decorated/painted sherds are regarded as diagnostics. The first step is to separate Pharaonic and post-Pharaonic material. The New Kingdom material is documented according to wares and vessel type. The typology established for the SAV1N ceramic material is organized along the lines of the pottery corpus from Amarna as published by P. Rose (Rose 2007): broad shape groups such as dishes, necked jars and pot stands constitute the main categories of vessels that are designated by a second letter, e.g. DP for dishes/plates. Within these shape groups, form classes are labelled by a numeral, e.g. DP 1 for a simple dish. The individual types are designated with a further number separated from the form class by a point, e.g. DP 1.1. If possible, the diagnostics of each basket are recorded according to their form classes or at least within their shape groups. In contrast, all body sherds are counted according to their broad shape group and ware only.

Coming from 187 different findspots, a total of 145,686 sherds were examined, sorted and recorded. Among these sherds, 20,493 were diagnostics from the New Kingdom and 88,300 non-diagnostics from the same period (75%). The remainder (36,8893 sherds, 25%) comprised post-Pharaonic material with Christian sherds in the clear majority, followed by X-Group and Post-Meroitic material as well as a few Meroitic and Napatan pieces.

Selected sherds of the New Kingdom were drawn to enlarge the site-specific corpus (a total of 2,888 sherds = 14% of the diagnostics). Of these, 380 were processed in a detailed way in 2011, and drawings of 57 pieces were completed. Pottery sherds and vessels that were selected for this detailed analysis were labelled as “N/C” = “Number/Ceramic” and numbered continuously (in 2011: starting from N/C 605; for material studied in earlier seasons, see Miellé forth. a and b). In the case of fragments and less important pieces, they

were labelled as find assemblages (e.g. N/C 663.01-17 coming from level 1 in square 190/2260, from the mud-brick debris A). Complete profiles, complete vessels or decorated and otherwise important pieces were recorded with an individual N/C-number (e.g. the body sherd of a *zir* with a hieratic docket as N/C 740, or a complete beaker as N/C 661).

A site-specific fabric corpus was also established, showing very close analogies to the Egyptian material from the New Kingdom town of Elephantine, but including local fabrics for Egyptian vessels as well as for Nubian wares (see Miellé forth. b).

The ceramic analysis of SAV1N faces several difficulties – first of all, there are still few closed deposits, the majority representing mixed material ranging in date from early to late New Kingdom including post-Pharaonic material. This holds especially true for the upper levels 1 and 2. Within levels 3 and 4, post-New Kingdom material was found more randomly. In all levels, material from the 18th Dynasty predominates, even in the uppermost layer. This situation clearly reflects the peak of activity at the site, but renders finer dating more difficult. As easy as it is to attest a certain period within the New Kingdom material, it is much more complex to connect the ceramic material with specific structures and to give an absolute date to the various phases and levels. Figure 1 for example illustrates sherds derived from mixed fills of level 2, but datable to the early-mid 18th Dynasty. Fortunately, in 2011 a deposit of almost complete vessels was uncovered in square 180/2270 that can be clearly attributed to level 4 and proved to be very significant for the early history of the site.⁴

Findings in square 180/2270

Square 180/2270 is located south of the northern town enclosure wall and features several sections of structures, namely walls of levels 2 and 3. The deposit of ceramic vessels came to light south of wall 18N which belongs to a partly preserved structure of level 2 (Plate 1). In an area of 1.2 x 1.4m, 17 vessels were recovered in nearly complete condition (Plate 2). They had been discarded early in level 4 and were consequently filled with wind-blown sand, some pebbles, and ash. The architectural context of this rubbish deposit of vessels is still unclear since the architectural remains of level 4 are very fragmentary (see Doyen forth., fig. 2). Most likely, the vessels were dumped within a room or courtyard; the northern boundary of such a structure must lie between wall 18N and the town enclosure wall, N4.

Some vessels were discarded while they were still more or less intact, and were found stacked one inside the other (e.g. N/C 658 and 661, Plate 3). Fragments of the upper part of the large Nubian storage jar N/C 650 were scattered across the cluster and were thus separated from the lower part. N/C 643 and N/C 644 illustrate that isolated fragments in broken condition were also part of the assemblage. All in all, the deposit of these 17 vessels represents a typical household

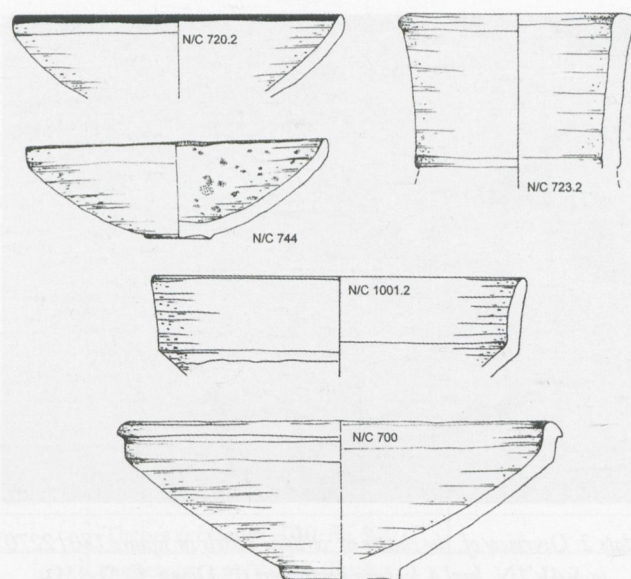


Figure 1. Selected vessels types from SAV1N, level 2, datable to the early-mid 18th Dynasty (scale 1:4).

assemblage (Table 1, Figure 2): vessels that would have been used for storing, drinking, serving and the consumption of food. They were manufactured in several Nile clay variants only and, apart from a Nubian vessel, all are wheel-made except for the large storage jars, the bodies of which were formed in a coiling technique.

A minimum of three vessels (N/C 647, N/C 650 and N/C 652) were manufactured in a Second Intermediate Period tradition; the others showing features for which a production in the early 18th Dynasty can be assumed. The lower part of a simple dish, N/C 647 (Figure 2), with a string-cut base with asymmetrical marks was produced on a slow wheel. Its manufacture corresponds to the Second Intermediate Period style, and does not yet reflect the technological innovations of the New Kingdom.

N/C 660 is the rim sherd of a typical Egyptian cooking



Plate 1. View of square 180/2270 in SAV1N with walls of levels 2 and 3 and the cluster of ceramic vessels in level 4, looking north east (F. Doyen, © SLAM).

⁴ The top of the largest vessel, N/C 642, within this deposit was already visible in 2009, see Doyen 2009, colour pl. X.



Plate 2. Overview of the cluster of ceramic vessels in square 180/2270 in SAV1N, level 4 looking north west (F. Doyen, © SLAM).

pot (Figure 2). This type becomes common throughout Egypt during the 18th Dynasty, but is first attested at the very beginning of the New Kingdom at Elephantine (Seiler 1999, 221, fig. 53). Interestingly, the fabric of N/C 660 corresponds exactly to the sandy Elephantine cooking pot ware.

Three examples of the so-called drop pots or beaker jars have been found. Two of them, N/C 645 and N/C 661 (Figure 2), have trimmed flat bases and show traces of a red wash. They have the typical slender shape for which many parallels can be cited, for example vessels from the early 18th



Plate 3. Detail of vessels as found within the cluster (to the right: N/C 652 below a fragment of N/C 650 and within bowl N/C 646; to the left: N/C 658 below N/C 657) (F. Doyen, © SLAM).

Dynasty found at South Abydos (Budka 2006, figs 19.9 and 20.1) and Umm el-Qaab (Pumpenmeier 1998, fig. 23; Budka in press). N/C 652 was left uncoated and has a rounded base (Figure 2). This drop pot N/C 652 is of special interest, since according to its peculiar shape it seems to pre-date the 18th Dynasty. It has an angular outline and is rather broad with a high centre of gravity. Unfortunately, its base was heavily eroded, so the finishing technique which might provide a

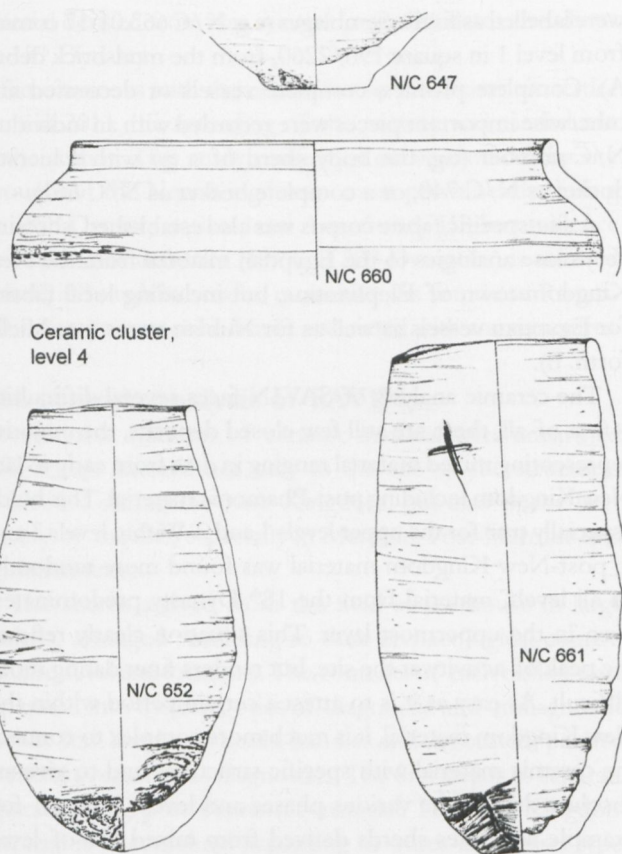


Figure 2. Selected vessels from ceramic cluster in 180/2270, level 4 (scale 1:4).

hint for dating the vessel remains a bit unclear. Especially in respect to its broad shape, it fits best within a morphological line before the slender, round-bottomed drop pots of the early 18th Dynasty (cf. Seiler 2005, folded pls 6.6-12). N/C 652 still shows some affinity to similar vessels from Thebes which are datable to the 17th Dynasty (cf. Seiler 2005, Folded pl. 6.4; Seiler 2010, fig. 9.2).

A total of four white-washed Nile clay storage vessels or *zirs* were found in a fragmentary condition. The largest fragment of this type is represented by the upper part labelled N/C 642 (Plate 4). It can be interpreted as an imitation of marl clay vessels, produced in a coarse Nile clay variant with abundant chaff and a white-washed surface. This type of *zir* is short necked with a ledge at the junction of the neck and the shoulder. Since it is a quite common vessel type in the New Kingdom town of Sai, a vessel sequence based on its morphological development (especially the height of the neck, but also the general shape whether globular or more slender) will be established in the future. Close parallels in both ware and shape have been recently found in contexts of the early New Kingdom at Sesebi (P. Rose, pers. comm.) and at Elephantine (J. Budka and A. Seiler, pers. comm.). Similar *zirs* in another fabric, a dense Nile clay with limestone, are known from contexts of the late 17th Dynasty and early 18th Dynasty at Elephantine (Seiler 1999, fig. 51.2, level 11) and Thebes (Seiler 2003, fig. 11.7). Distant variants of the shape of N/C 642 with no clear identification of the ware were

Table 1. Details of the ceramic vessels found as a cluster in level 4 in square 180/2270 in SAV1N.

N/C	Type/label	Ware*	Date	Parallels	Remark
641	Bowl/large plate	C2UCRW	early 18 th Dynasty	Elephantine (Seiler 1999, fig. 48.3 and unpublished)	
646. 1	Carinated bowl	B2UCRW	early 18 th Dynasty	Elephantine (Seiler 1999, fig. 48.3 and unpublished)	large fragment
646. 2	Carinated bowl	C2UCRW	early 18 th Dynasty	Elephantine (Seiler 1999, fig. 48.3 and unpublished)	small fragment
647	Simple dish/plate	C2UC	17 th Dynasty	Elephantine	SIP manufacture
648	Simple dish	B2RW all RBin	early 18 th Dynasty	Elephantine	Level 10 at Elephantine
651	Dish (lower part)	C1RW all, RBin			
658	Dish/plate	B2 red rim	early 18 th Dynasty	Elephantine	complete
645	Beaker/Drop pot	B2UC	early 18 th Dynasty	numerous; e.g. Abydos (Budka 2006, figs 19.9 and 20.1)	traces of RW
652	Beaker/Drop pot	C2UC	17 th Dynasty	Thebes (cf. Seiler 2010, fig. 9.2)	
661	Beaker/Drop pot	B2UC	early 18 th Dynasty	numerous; e.g. Abydos (Budka 2006, figs 19.9 and 20.1)	traces of RW
660	Cooking pot	B2 sandy UC/smoked	early 18 th Dynasty	Elephantine (Seiler 1999, fig. 53.2)	
642	<i>Zir</i> , almost complete	C2 chaffy WW	early 18 th Dynasty	Elephantine (unpublished and cf. Budka 2005, fig. 29.7); Sesebi (pers. comm. P. Rose)	
643	<i>Zir</i> /storage jar, lower part	C2 chaffy UC			vertically trimmed lower part
644	<i>Zir</i>	C2WW			like N/C 649
657	Storage jar/ <i>zir</i>	C2UC			
649	Storage vessel	C2WW			like N/C 644
650	<i>Kerma Classique</i> storage vessel	Nubian coarse fabric, B	17 th Dynasty	<i>Kerma Classique</i> necropolis Sai (Gratien 1986, fig. 324c)	repairing holes

* The abbreviations of the ware include the label of the fabric (according to the Vienna System) as well as the surface treatment (UC = uncoated; UCRW = uncoated exterior, red washed interior; RW = red washed; RW all RBin = red washed inside and out, burnished inside; WW = white wash; B = burnished).



Plate 4. Upper part of *zir* N/C 642 from cluster of ceramic vessels, level 4 (J. Budka, © SLAM).

found at Fadrus (Holthoer 1977, pl. 16, ST 1, 185/227:2).

Among the Egyptian vessels of the ceramic deposit in square 180/2270, a large Nubian storage jar (N/C 650) was found. It is of *Kerma Classique* tradition and falls into B. Gratien's type C IX (Gratien 1985, pl. 5c; 1986, 434-435, fig. 324c). This is a common type in both the *Kerma Classique* necropolis of Sai Island and in the settlement SAV1N with its prominent rim with impressed decoration. Four post-firing repair holes are preserved on the upper part of N/C 650 (Plate 5). These perforations might indicate a long use-life of the large-sized vessel and this could explain why a *Kerma Classique* storage jar was found in a context of the early New Kingdom. However, *Kerma Classique* ware occurs on other sites of the 18th Dynasty (e.g. at Deir el-Ballas, see Bourriau 1990; 1995 and also at Elephantine).

Analysis of ceramics from square 180/2270, level 4

Aside from the refuse deposit, all of the ceramic material excavated in square 180/2270 and attributed to level 4 has been analysed. Out of 3,032 fragments, 2,821 New Kingdom sherds were identified, leaving a total of only 7% of post-New Kingdom material, a statistic which confirms the almost closed character of this level in square 180/2270. Out of the New Kingdom sherds, a total of 679 vessels were



Plate 5. Kerma Classique storage vessel N/C 650 from cluster of ceramic vessels, level 4 (J. Budka, © SIAM).

reconstructed based on the total amounts of diagnostics and undiagnostic sherds. Table 2 illustrates the distribution of the general vessel types.

As is common within a settlement context, a high percentage (53%) of vessel types were open forms, especially carinated and simple dishes (cf. Figure 1). 17.5% can be assigned to beer jars, flower pots and drop pots.

A total of 8.6% of the material can be classified as functional vessels, comprising bread plates and moulds, spinning bowls, stands and cooking pots. Cooking pots of an indigenous tradition with mat impressions and sometimes incised decoration are present in small, but regular numbers (see Miellé forth. b). The Nubian ware makes up a total of 3% in level 4 in square 180/2270 and includes also some fragments of *Kerma Classique* beakers. A similar appearance of coarse and fine Nubian ware in levels of the early 18th Dynasty is known from sites in Upper Egypt (e.g. Deir el-Ballas and Elephantine, see Bourriau 1995). The amount of marl clay vessels (4%) is small, but quite consistent with the general character and dating of the material. The most common marl clay vessels are jars produced in Marl B of a type illustrated by N/C 723.2 (Figure 1, cf. Budka 2005, 96, fig. 29.4; Bourriau 2010, figs 3.5-6). Marl A3 is attested in considerable numbers as well, mostly deriving from storage jars. Some Marl A2 and A4 clay squat jars, both decorated and undecorated, are also

Table 2. Distribution of vessel types within the ceramic material from square 180/2270, level 4.

Vessel type	Total	%
Dish/plate	361	53
Beer jar	74	11
Drop pot	38	5.5
Flower pot	5	1
Jar/Storage jar, Nile clay	49	7.2
Jar/Storage jar, Marl clay	14	2
zir, Nile clay	23	3.4
zir, Marl clay	5	1
Amphora, imported	16	2.3
Carinated vessel, Marl clay (painted)	6	1
Jug, imported	2	0.3
Bread plate	9	1.3
Egyptian cooking pot	7	1
Nubian ware	22	3
Stands	32	4.7
Footed bowl	9	1.3
Others	7	1
	679	100

present, but their quantity is very small (for parallels from the early 18th Dynasty see Seiler 2003, figs 11.5-6). Although a few, very worn Marl C clay sherds were recorded in 2011, none was found in square 180/2270. This fabric, typical for the Middle Kingdom and Second Intermediate Period (Bader 2001), is also attested in the Kerma cemeteries on the island and it remains to be investigated whether the sherds found at SAV1N are residual or contemporary in their contexts. A few imported wares can be cited from square 180/2270; sherds of Canaanite amphorae and of Syro-Palestinian jugs are present, as well as two small fragments of amphorae in Oasis ware.

Towards an absolute dating of the ceramic cluster (– and level 4?)

In combining the data from both the ceramic deposit and the complete material from level 4 in square 180/2270, almost 700 vessels can be regarded as dating evidence. The general character of the wares, which still show a close affinity to Second Intermediate Period traditions (e.g. a predominance of coarse Nile C variants and of Marl B), as well as the absence of significant wares like black rim ware, red splash ware and the scarcity of Marl A decorated wares, point towards a Pre-Hatshepsut/Thutmose III date. In addition, common types like carinated and simple dishes with ring bases frequently occur in a design that identifies them as early variants: the bottom of the ring base is left uncoated outside – this is still a Second Intermediate Period style of applying a wash to vessels (Seiler 2010, 49). The vessels found in the ceramic cluster provide further interesting clues. Three vessels are most likely of 17th Dynasty date considering the shape, manufacture and ware. The others find close parallels at sites of the early 18th

Dynasty, in particular in material which will be published by the author in the near future coming from the early phase of level 10 in the New Kingdom town of Elephantine (dated as pre-Hatshepsut) and from the Ahmose complex at South Abydos. The site of Deir el-Ballas, estimated as of the 17th/18th Dynasties, can also be named.

Since our possibilities for precisely dating ceramics from the early 18th Dynasty are still limited, assumptions as derived from the context of level 4 at SAV1N have to be treated with caution. However, it seems safe to assume a date range beginning late in the reign of Ahmose (or Amenhotep I), and ending with Thutmose I as the latest date for the disposal of the vessels in square 180/2270, since no material datable to the period of Thutmose II-Hatshepsut/Thutmose III has been recorded.

General remarks on the New Kingdom ceramics from SAV1N

Based on the analysis of the material studied in 2011, some general observations are possible (Table 3). At present, a minimum of seven pottery phases within the New Kingdom ranging in date from the late 17th/early 18th Dynasty to the 20th Dynasty can be distinguished. As mentioned above, the relationship of the ceramic material to the corresponding structures is not always clear, especially regarding level 2. Since the majority of the material comes from mixed upper levels 1 and 2, the ceramic assemblages frequently include material from the very beginning of the New Kingdom up to Ramesside times. With these difficulties in mind, the majority of the material can be assigned to the reign of Thutmose III, showing a very high variability and featuring many decorated wares. Substantial amounts of the ceramics can be dated furthermore to the reigns of Amenhotep II-Thutmose IV and to the period of Amenhotep III. A small amount of sherds attests to the activity in the 19th Dynasty (possibly under Ramesses II?) and some late Ramesside pieces which find close parallels in the material from the cemetery (Thill 2007, fig. 2) are present as well.

The study of the fabrics and wares will be conducted in

more detail in the next season, but for now it is interesting to observe that Nile clay vessels were both imported and locally produced. Particularly utilitarian shapes like bread trays, pot stands and spinning bowls appear both as imported pieces and locally produced variants. The imported Nile clay variants can be equated with the material used during this time period at Elephantine (Budka 2005, 91-95), thus suggesting a corresponding provenience.

Selected vessel types from SAV1N

Small and medium-sized dishes, various plates, pot stands, storage vessels, cooking pots, beer jars, beakers and bread plates dominate the corpus of ceramic types from SAV1N. Bread moulds, bread trays and spinning bowls as well as carinated marl clay vessels and amphorae are also present. Marl D amphorae first appear in level 3, and Ramesside amphorae in mixed clays are attested in small numbers from level 2 onwards. Dishes and plates occur in by far the greatest number, followed by storage vessels and other closed forms, including cooking pots and tall beakers. The high number of pot stands of various sizes can be readily explained by the preference for round bottoms for all kind of storage and drinking vessels in the New Kingdom. A considerable number of decorated pot stands can be noted within the material – very common is a black linear design on a red polished surface as well as incised wavy lines for footed bowls (cf. Brunton 1930, pls XXVI. 39-40).

A common and very specific type of carinated dish shows incised wavy lines and a finger pinched or cut rim. It appears both within levels 3 and 4 at SAV1N (e.g. Figure 3 and Plate 6). These dishes (DP 8.1) are regularly redwashed, sometimes with additional white as decoration, and they often show vertical applications on the upper part of the vessel. This type, also known from SAV2 (Hesse 1981, 29, class 93, fig. 18), is commonly associated with the Second Intermediate Period pottery tradition in Egypt. Early variants are already attested from the late Middle Kingdom in Egypt (Seiler in press, type I.F.18), but these dishes are more numerous during the Second Intermediate Period in Lower Egypt (e.g. Avaris/Tell el-Daba, 15th Dynasty, Aston 2004, no. 18; Aston and

Table 3. Outline of the main characteristics of the ceramic material in SAV1N according to levels.

Level	Dating	Remarks/characteristics
1	post-New Kingdom	mixed material from uppermost layers (approx. 30-40% post-Pharaonic, mostly Christian); majority still 18 th Dynasty, Thutmoside: typical settlement material with various functional aspects; predominately Nile clay wares and open forms
2	late 18 th Dynasty – Ramesside (?)	19 th Dynasty present in small quantities; very few late New Kingdom (20 th Dynasty or later?) pieces: in general more mixed than level 3; predominately Nile clay wares and open forms
3	Thutmose III – late 18 th Dynasty	clearly covering second half of reign of Thutmose III and those of later kings (Amenhotep II-Thutmose IV well attested; as yet nothing later than Amenhotep III): high variability, many decorated wares, some imports, Marl D amphorae
4	early 18 th Dynasty: pre-Thutmose II	nothing later than early Thutmoside (latest possible date: Thutmose I?), most likely Ahmose-Amenhotep I: typical household ceramics, cf. Elephantine, many dishes and bowls, storage jars; Nubian cooking ware
5	earliest 18 th Dynasty	earlier than Thutmose I/Amenhotep I?; first assessment: more Second Intermediate Period/Middle Kingdom in style than level 4; large amount of coarse Nile C2; no decorated marl clays

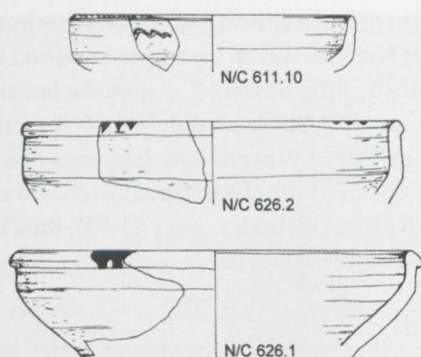


Figure 3. Selected carinated dishes from SAV1N, early 18th Dynasty (scale 1:4).

Bader 2009, fig. 4.32; Qau, Bourriau 2010, fig. 9), as well as in Upper Egypt (e.g. Abydos, Wegner 2007, figs 123.78 and 128.149; Thebes, Seiler 2010, figs 8.2-3, 17th Dynasty and in Marl variants at Deir el-Ballas, Bourriau 1990, fig. 4.3[20]), and also in Lower Nubia (Askut, dated as 13th Dynasty, Smith 1995, fig. 3.8; 2002, fig. 3.3, but probably later, see Knoblauch 2007). Finds at Elephantine (pers. observation) and at Sedment (Petrie and Brunton 1924, pl. 64)⁵ illustrate that this vessel type occurs in 18th Dynasty contexts as well,



Plate 6. Carinated dish N/C 622, type DP 8.1 (J. Budka, © SLAM).

until the reign of Thutmose III. This corresponds to the distribution of the type DP 8.1 at Sai Island, where such dishes frequently appear together with material dating to Thutmose III/Amenhotep II. Given in particular the close parallels from Elephantine, these do not seem to be always residual pieces, although they evoke the style of the Second Intermediate Period. Rather, this particular type might serve as a good illustration of the way in which pottery of the Second Intermediate Period and the early New Kingdom

followed regionally divergent developments within the regional areas of both Egypt and Nubia (cf. Knoblauch 2007 and recently Seiler 2010; Bourriau 2010). A detailed study of the distribution of DP 8.1 according to ware and patterns of decoration might eventually illustrate the region in which the production of these vessels continued into the 18th Dynasty, maybe as late as the reign of Thutmose III.

Decorated wares

Although the number of painted wares in SAV1N is already quite high in the early 18th Dynasty (level 4, cf. Figure 3), it increases further within level 3 (most likely datable to late in the reign of Thutmose III and subsequent kings). Types well known from Egypt (Elephantine, South Abydos, Thebes) as well as locally attested variations in Nubia (e.g. Askut, see Smith 2002, fig. 3.7) are present, including monochrome, bichrome and blue-painted decoration on various surface treatments and in diverse fabrics. Carinated bowls of the common red-burnished types also occur with white-burnished surfaces and monochrome decoration (Figure 3). This surface treatment was recorded at Askut (Smith 1995, fig. 6.4.I), as well as at Elephantine (pers. observation) and Thebes (Seiler, pers. comm.). Thutmoside red splash decoration on dishes (Aston 2006) is frequently found in SAV1N with its first appearance in level 3 (Figure 1).

A large group of bichrome-decorated necked jars that show linear and floral as well as figurative designs is of special interest (Plate 7). The best parallels were recently unearthed in Kerma/Dokki Gel where they have been dated to the reign of Hatshepsut and possibly Thutmose III (Ruffieux 2009, 124-126, figs 3-5). A similar dating seems appropriate for the SAV1N pieces, since they first appear



Plate 7. Fragment of a necked jar, bichrome decorated, N/C 608 (J. Budka, © SLAM).

⁵ I would like to thank H. Franzmeier for providing me with additional information about Tomb 1204 and a colour picture of the carinated bowl (today in Brussels, Musées Royaux d'Art et d'Histoire, E. 5806.4).

within level 3 (e.g. N/C 723.01 with the joining pieces N/C 265, 305, 311). A substantial amount of sherds of the same type of chaffy Nile clay and bichrome decoration was excavated in recent years on Elephantine island (Budka 2009 and pers. observation).

The identical, very specific ware, shape and patterns of decoration of these examples from Sai, Dokki Gel and Elephantine, all coming from contexts datable between Hatshepsut and Thutmose IV, make a common provenience or even a single workshop for the vessels very likely. The obvious preference for Nile clay imitations of typical Theban marl clay vessels (see Hope 1987) in the area from the First to the Third Cataract raises interesting questions regarding the role played by Elephantine in trade from Upper Egypt to Upper Nubia.

Egyptianized material culture

The character of the ceramic material from SAV1 N attests strongly to its identification as an Egyptian town. It finds ready parallels not only in other Egyptian foundations in Lower and Upper Nubia, but also at various sites in Egypt, especially at Elephantine, Abydos and Deir el-Ballas. A high number of vessels, particularly storage jars and decorated closed forms, but interestingly also cooking pots, spinning bowls and dishes were imported from Egypt. Meanwhile, other vessels modelled on Egyptian types were locally produced, but sometimes with a “Nubian” influence as far as the surface treatment or decoration is concerned. Nubian wares are also present, mostly as cooking pots of various sizes with basketry impression and sometimes with incised decoration, as well as large storage vessels like N/C 650 and fine ware (*Kerma Classique* beakers). An increase in the variability in shapes and wares can be noted from the time of Thutmose III onwards (level 3). Imported amphorae and pilgrim flasks from Canaan as well as a Mycenaean stirrup jar (N/C 616) attest to the full integration of the town on Sai Island within Egyptian international trade routes of the second half of the 18th Dynasty.

Conclusions and future prospects

To conclude, according to the ceramic analysis it seems reasonable to assume that an Egyptian base was established at Sai Island very early in the 18th Dynasty. Level 4 and possibly also level 5 can already be attributed to the early 18th Dynasty and the assemblages of these layers include a substantial amount of 17th Dynasty material. Rather than being associated with the nearby *Kerma Classique* cemetery, these sherds are completely Egyptian in character and appear within SAV1N in significant numbers among the undiagnostic sherds; they are thus likely to indicate an early occupation. Interestingly, structures found during the excavation in 1974 in the area around Temple A in the southern part of the town are now interpreted as *Kerma Classique* settlement remains (Azim and Carloti forth.).⁶

The new results in SAV1N support the theory of the founding of the town of Sai Island under Ahmose. Level 5 which will potentially provide further proof still awaits a more exhaustive exploration in the coming seasons. At present, only 432 sherds of this level have been processed, and these show characteristics of Second Intermediate Period pottery style, but also types like carinated bowls and carinated jars of early 18th Dynasty character.

There is no archaeological evidence in SAV1N for the period under Thutmose II/Hatshepsut and this is consistent with the epigraphic analysis (Gabolde forth.). A major remodelling of the site took place during the reign of Thutmose III and comprises part of level 3. Compared to earlier levels of common household character, the high variability of the ceramic material and the large quantities of decorated wares are striking. This might be interpreted as reflecting increasing occupation of the site, as well as new construction of temples and adjoining structures.

As promising as these first results are, more closely datable contexts (like the rubbish disposal of pots in 180/2270) are needed in order to reconstruct a satisfactory archaeological history of the town site of Sai Island. Further work is necessary before a full assessment of the early history of the Pharaonic town on Sai Island can be made, providing firm conclusions regarding the date of its foundation. Future fieldwork on the site will address also the question of a possible pre-New Kingdom occupation in the area of the fortified town.

Further, the character of the Egyptian town will have to be analysed in detail – the material culture and especially the ceramics are very Egyptian in appearance and can be closely paralleled with the New Kingdom town on Elephantine. However, indigenous elements and a Nubian component are also present, and the quantities of Nubian ceramics as well as of locally produced vessels in Egyptian style will have to be carefully assessed. A comparison of the ceramic corpus in a broader regional context, taking into account further sites in Upper Nubia (especially ones that are currently under excavation such as Sesebi and Dokki Gel), as well as a consideration of Elephantine as the southernmost Pharaonic base in Egyptian territory, might add substantially to the current discussion of the nature of Kush, which was previously assumed to have been un-Egyptianized, as compared to Wawat (see Török 2009, 282–283 with references).

The recent results of the Sai Island Archaeological Mission raise some hope that, thanks to current archaeological fieldwork at Upper Nubian sites, a historical interpretation of isolated finds like the cartouche of Ahmose in the area of the Third Cataract (Edwards 2006, 58–59, pl. 4; Török 2009, 158–159) might soon be possible. Only a contextual analysis of all available data (ceramics, archaeological evidence and textual sources) will potentially illuminate the as-yet still

theory raises interesting thoughts about a fortified Kerma settlement at Sai Island and it is notable that the area in question is within the later New Kingdom town enclosure.

⁶ I owe the knowledge of this new interpretation to F. Doyen. This



murky phase of the late Second Intermediate Period and the early New Kingdom in Kush.

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