

Pots & People

Ceramics from Sai Island and Elephantine

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Abstract

One of the main goals of the European Research Council project AcrossBorders is reconstructing life on Sai Island in Nubia during the New Kingdom according to the material evidence. The most numerous finds to be considered for this task on settlement sites like Sai are thousands of potsherds and ceramic vessels attesting to the use, function and aspects of the social strata of the ancient towns. In general, New Kingdom pottery in Nubia is very similar to contemporary material in Egypt. However, a detailed study comparing early to mid-18th Dynasty sites situated in both Nubia and Egypt has not been conducted before and is now for the first time undertaken within the framework of AcrossBorders.

The ceramic data from the New Kingdom town of Sai is currently being analysed and compared to the pottery corpora from the town of Elephantine, situated in Egypt. In this pottery analysis, a particular focus is laid on differences and similarities between local products and imported pieces, including the very significant appearance of hybrid types, vessels which combine Egyptian and Nubian ceramic tradition, e.g. Egyptian wheel-made types with Nubian surface treatment.

The pottery analysis from New Kingdom Sai, in conjunction with the processing of the material from Elephantine, allows for proposing some new tentative thoughts about the occupants of Sai. Despite the big caveat that pots do not equal people, the pottery from the island seems to attest to people who identified themselves primarily as Egyptian officials and occupants of an Egyptian site but may nevertheless have had family ties in Nubia and derive from a local group with a specific cultural identity that was never completely abandoned.

Keywords: *Settlement archaeology, Egypt, Nubia, Elephantine, Sai, pottery, cooking pots, material entanglement, hybridity*

Settlement pottery in Egypt and Nubia

Despite of recent advances, the current knowledge of settlement pottery in Ancient Egypt and Nubia during the era of the New Kingdom is still limited (Budka 2016a). From the following New Kingdom sites located in Egypt ceramics associated with domestic contexts have been published in considerable quantities (from north to south): Qantir (Aston 1998), Ezbet Helmi near Tell el-Daba (Aston 2002), Memphis (Bourriau 2010), Amarna (Rose 2007), Deir el-Ballas (Bourriau 1990), Thebes (especially Malqata and Karnak; Hope 1989; Jacquet-Gordon 2012) and Elephantine (Aston 1999; Seiler 1999; Budka 2005; 2013). According to the main occupation phases of these sites, only selected periods are accessible by means of published material; this is

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especially the Thutmoside era and the Amarna period as well as the Ramesside period (19th and 20th Dynasties). To date, no complete ceramic sequence covering the entire span of the New Kingdom has been presented from settlement sites. Consequently, vessels from well-dated New Kingdom tomb contexts were used as ‘*chronological markers*’ (Aston 2003; 2009), although clear shortcomings from these contexts were also noted (Bourriau 2010, 2). This also applies for New Kingdom sites located in Nubia where, until today, only ceramic assemblages from tomb contexts have been published in considerable number (e.g. Wolf 1937; Holthoer 1977; Williams 1992). Ceramic material from tombs represents, other than settlement pottery, no direct indicator for daily activities (cf. Budka 2016a; 2016c). Furthermore, as vessels from domestic contexts are likely to have shorter life spans than pots used for burials, the sequencing of settlement types in combination with stratigraphic information may prove to be highly valuable for dating evidence and for establishing concise “chronological markers”. At present, the development of New Kingdom pottery is primarily based on material from tombs.

Since the 1980s, Bourriau defined four major ceramic phases characterising the New Kingdom up to late Ramesside times (Bourriau 1981, 72). Today, most scholars favour a new division into five phases (Aston 2003; 2008, 375; see also Bourriau 2010, 2-3). In addition to this new phasing, the ceramic production of selected reigns has been discussed in more detail in recent years. For example, the innovative and distinctive character of pottery under the long reign of Thutmose III was frequently raised in recent studies (e.g. Aston 2006). Similarly, the reign of Hatshepsut is commonly known to mark a new phase of ceramics distinguished by several innovations. One of the most pressing problems today is ascertaining a more specific chronology for Egyptian pottery pre-dating Hatshepsut other than “early 18th Dynasty”, meaning a time span of approximately 70 years from the reign of Ahmose to Thutmose II. At present, labelling pottery phases as “early-mid 18th Dynasty”, comprising more than 150 years from Ahmose to Thutmose III/Amenophis II, is still common (Wodzińska 2011, 1016-1019; see also Budka 2016a, 46). Significant finds from Abydos (Budka 2006) and Memphis (Bourriau 2010) seem to be relevant in this respect. Both sites revealed material datable to Ahmose and Amenhotep I from settlement contexts, comparing nicely to tomb groups (e.g. Aniba, see Helmbold-Doyé and Seiler 2012). Recently, Aston (2013) very convincingly re-dated Theban funerary contexts of the early 18th Dynasty, proposing that there was probably a break within the ceramic tradition after Amenhotep I. According to Aston, the Thutmoside tradition might have started already as early as during

the reign of Thutmose I. Important indirect evidence for this theory comes from the pyramid of queen Tetisheri at South Abydos: votive pottery comprising the reigns of both Ahmose and Amenhotep I is of uniform character and markedly different from the well-known “Thutmoside style” (Budka 2006, 108-112).

All in all, several matters regarding settlement pottery of the New Kingdom are still unsolved: chronological issues, especially for the beginning of the 18th Dynasty, but also the general sequence and life span of significant types (*i.e.* of possible “chronological markers”) as well as the characterisation of the material culture of the New Kingdom in specific regions, raising the issue of regional traditions. The importance of regional studies (e.g. Seiler 2010) and the potential of a close comparison between sites (Aston 2009; Bader 2009) were highlighted in recent years. The most promising sites with much potential to answer the greatest pressing questions are Abydos, Elephantine and Egyptian sites in Upper Nubia like Sai Island, Sesebi and Amara West.

The ceramics from recent German and Swiss excavations in the New Kingdom town of Elephantine, currently under the responsibility of the author, derive from layers datable to the 17th Dynasty/early 18th Dynasty until the Late Ramesside Period (cf. Budka 2005). This corpus of well-stratified material is of major importance and provides the keys to a more detailed understanding of settlement pottery. Most important is so-called House 55, excavated by the Swiss Institute Cairo under the direction of Cornelius von Pilgrim, in cooperation with the AcrossBorders project (von Pilgrim 2015; in press). This exceptional building, possibly a workshop connected with equipping expeditions going to the south, was founded in the 17th Dynasty and yielded strata with diagnostic pottery sherds from the 17th Dynasty to Thutmose III. This sequence of pottery from House 55 has therefore much potential for establishing a corpus of settlement pottery spanning the time from the late Second Intermediate Period to the mid-18th Dynasty, thus of a period with several assumed “breaks” in the pottery tradition (see above).

This paper focuses on the limits and the potential of comparing ceramics excavated from 18th Dynasty contexts on Sai Island with contemporaneous material from Elephantine; the relevance of pottery for tracing people and related problems will be discussed. That New Kingdom pottery in Nubia is very similar to contemporary material in Egypt is already well established (Williams 1992, 23; see also Holthoer 1977, *passim*; Budka 2016a). However, case studies from the Middle Kingdom have shown that a comparative approach without the consideration of regional developments can result in considerable shortcomings concerning the dating and production of ceramics (cf. Knoblauch 2007; 2011). Consequently, the increased understanding for the need of site specific and

regional studies for researching New Kingdom pottery in Nubia is especially relevant for AcrossBorders' comparative method and its case studies of Sai and Elephantine (Budka 2016b; Budka 2016c). Pottery processing is much advanced at these two sites for the 18th Dynasty contexts, but still ongoing. The following is therefore only an outline of the present state of research.

Entanglement of cultures

One of the buzzwords in recent archaeological studies dealing with settlement remains in Northern Sudan is "entanglement" (see also Budka Households in this volume). The background for this is a new discussion of the concept of "Egyptianisation", well established in considerations of Nubian culture, but now subject of criticism on the grounds that it projects a one-dimensional and static view of culture (see, e.g., Cohen 1992; de Souza 2012). In its stead, a model based on the notion of "cultural entanglement" has been suggested (van Pelt 2013, based on Stockhammer 2012b), borrowing from a more advanced discussion in Mediterranean archaeology and also studies about Romanisation (see Stockhammer 2013). Ongoing excavation work on New Kingdom sites in Nubia has since expanded the material basis for the debate and has shown how central the dynamics of cultural entanglement really are (see Smith and Buzon 2014; Spencer 2014; Budka 2015a; Budka 2017; Spencer, Stevens and Binder 2017).

In the present paper, I follow Stockhammer's (2012b, 49-51) categories and propose that pottery can be regarded as evidence of "material entanglement". This seems to apply in particular to so-called hybrid vessels: Egyptian pottery types made of Nubian fabrics or with Nubian surface treatment (Budka 2017c, 440; see Stockhammer 2012a, Pappa 2013 and Stockhammer 2013 on hybridity and hybridisation; cf. also Hahn and Weis 2013 on mobility aspects of the material culture). Established research on Bronze Age networks of interaction was useful for this approach as were studies on the material culture during Romanisation (Woolf 1998; for recent ideas about the situation in Nubia, see van Pelt 2013; Smith 2014; Spencer 2014; Binder 2017). Such hybrid pots may represent products of a temporary or local fashion, but they can also refer to the cultural identity of their users or materialise more complicated processes (cf. Miller 1985; Woolf 1998; Smith 2003b; Budka 2017c, 440). In any case, one has to keep in mind one important paradigm phrased by Kraidy (2005, vi): *'It is therefore imperative to situate every analysis of hybridity in a specific context where the conditions that shape hybridities are addressed.'* Thus, all following comments about hybridity of pottery at Sai and Elephantine need to be seen within the context of the Egyptian towns these ceramics derive from.

Within this specific context it is interesting to note that several archaeological case studies from elsewhere have illustrated that there might be *'close links between ceramic technological production and cultural identity'* (Pierce 2013, 529; cf. also D'Ercole *et al.* 2017). I suggest that also the pottery production at Egyptian sites in Nubia seems promising in this respect. Egyptian imports and Egyptian-style wares appear side by side with indigenous Nubian wares, and this is in general very similar to the situation in the Levant (see, e.g. Martin 2008; Pierce 2013). The situation of cooking wares was already discussed by Smith (Smith 2003a, 113-124; see also Smith and Buzon in this volume), implying a gender-specific factor for the composition of the pottery corpora of Egyptian sites in Nubia (indigenous females responsible for cooking and using Nubian cooking pots) which faces some difficulties in interpretation and still needs to be tested by further examples (Raue 2015, 55; note, e.g., male cooking activities in various cultural contexts, see Goody 1982, 101-102).

Despite a general similarity with contemporary pottery in Egypt, for both the Middle and the New Kingdoms local pottery workshops and traditions are traceable in Nubia. Regional style was mostly expressed by surface treatment and decoration. Case studies like Marl clay vessels with incised decoration and cooking pots illustrate that Nubian decoration patterns and shapes directly influenced the Egyptian pottery tradition (Rzeuska 2010; 2012; see also Arnold 1993, 90; Miellé 2014). At present, it is still difficult to assess the possible impact of Nubian potters. That Egyptian potters were present at the colonial sites cannot be doubted (Williams 1992, 24, fn. 3; Reshetnikova and Williams 2016; see below).

At Elephantine, the cohabitation of Egyptians and Nubians can be traced through millennia (Raue 2015). During the 17th Dynasty, the period immediately preceding the New Kingdom, one can not only observe that Nubian cooking pots dominate the inventories of the Egyptian settlement of Elephantine, but also that hybrid forms of cooking vessels are developed which can be treated as evidence of "material entanglement" in Stockhammer's (2012, 49-51) categories. These wheel-thrown imitations of hand-made Nubian cooking pots (Raue 2017), decorated with fine incisions, seem to be direct precursors of the New Kingdom vessel type (see Budka 2016b).

The pots and people debate

Pots are of course pots, and not people – recent migration studies have challenged the simplistic approach that pots can be regarded as direct traces of people (e.g. Dores Cruz 2011). Both assumptions are embedded in colonial approaches and post-colonial responses (cf. van Pelt 2013; Stockhammer 2013).

The cultural connectivity of the Nile valley as reflected in pottery is quite complex. Very regularly, Nubian vessels found in Egypt from various periods and in varied contexts are treated as foreign objects and associated with the presence of people of Nubian culture or at least of Nubian cooking practices (see, e.g., Bourriau 1991; Smith 2003a, 43-53; Aston and Bietak 2017). In recent years, several scholars have stressed more complex processes connected with non-local pottery at sites with dynamic social structures and a high degree of mobility of its people (e.g., Bader 2012; 2013; de Souza 2012; 2013; Raue 2015). Nubian case studies suggest that individual choices and group dynamics may sometimes be more significant than cultural identities (Spencer 2014, 47; Budka 2017c, 440).

Bearing this in mind, it seems nevertheless worthwhile to examine possible links between the production of pottery and cultural identity at Sai and Elephantine. The following questions can be addressed: Can pots be regarded as products of a temporary or local fashion? Do pots reflect the cultural identity of their users? Or are pots the results of more complicated processes and mirror individual choices? Answers to these questions can be sought by means of archaeological interpretation and ceramic typology, but also by petrographic analyses and provenience studies (e.g. by Instrumental Neutron Activation Analysis, see D'Ercole and Sterba in this volume).

Despite of the preliminary status of this paper, recent work at Sai, Amara West and Tombos has demonstrated: *'Rather than drawing artificial borders between Egyptians, Nubians, and their respective lifestyles, the aim should be to reconstruct social, economic and cultural identities at the local level'* (Budka 2017b, 177). Such identities can change, interact and merge and highlight the complexity of life in Pharaonic towns like Sai in Upper Nubia. Pottery can contribute to support a more balanced view of cultural changes in New Kingdom Nubia which were formerly all merged under the too-simplistic concept of "Egyptianisation". The case studies presented in the following strongly support de Souza's characterisation which is based on an analysis of Pan-Grave pottery and culture (2013, 119): *'Egyptianisation is a complex concept involving processes that differ greatly in different situations and must therefore be evaluated on a case-by-case basis.'*

The case studies Sai and Elephantine

In the following, the significance of a comparison between the New Kingdom corpora from the town of Sai located in Upper Nubia and the town of Elephantine located at the First Cataract, thus at the southern border of Egypt, will be discussed. This will be done by comparing the general groups of ceramic classes which appear at both sites. Five classes are attested at Sai (and also Elephantine): 1) Nubian hand-made pottery, 2) imports from Egypt (in the case of Elephantine: from elsewhere in Egypt),

3) imports from elsewhere (Levant; Cyprus etc.), 4) local wheel-made production in Egyptian style and 5) hybrid forms (incorporating aspects of both ceramic traditions, the Egyptian and Nubian). Because of the "material entanglement" focus discussed above, the emphasis will be on locally produced vessels of both Nubian and Egyptian style and on vessels attesting hybridity, keeping the respective contexts at both Sai and Elephantine in mind.

Sai Island

The ceramic material from Sai not only finds ready parallels at other Egyptian sites in Lower and Upper Nubia (cf. Holthoer 1977; Miellé 2012, 173-187; Budka 2016a), but also at various New Kingdom towns in Egypt (Budka 2011; 2016a), especially Elephantine (Seiler 1999, 204-224; Budka 2005, 90-116; Budka 2010, 350-352), Abydos (Budka 2006) and Deir el-Ballas (Bourriau 1990). However, a local component and site-specific features are present on Sai, a topic studied within the framework of the AcrossBorders project (Budka 2015a; 2016a; cf. also Miellé 2014 for Sai and Ruffieux 2016 for the local style at Dokki Gel). Food serving, food consumption, cooking, baking and storage are the main activities attested by the pottery found in the various sectors of the New Kingdom town of Sai, complemented by less frequently attested actions like spinning or ritual activities (Budka 2011; 2016a; 2016c; 2017c).

Within the New Kingdom temple town of Sai, several excavated sectors yielded pottery discussed in the following:¹ SAV1 North (Budka 2011; Miellé 2012; Miellé 2014, 387-392; Budka 2017b, 119-156), SAV1 East (Budka 2014, 68-69), and SAV1 West. It is beyond the scope of this paper to highlight the individual differences between these corpora despite their strong similarities (Budka 2016a; 2016c). Other aspects which will also not be addressed in detail are the close parallels between these Egyptian ceramics and the material from the local cemeteries, especially pyramid cemetery SAC5 (Minault-Gout and Thill 2012, pls. 132-145; cf. Budka 2015a, 48-50 and Budka Tomb 26 in this volume).

In the earliest levels of the town, the pottery material can be attributed to the very early 18th Dynasty, corresponding to unpublished material from South Abydos, the Ahmose complex and ceramics from the early phases of use in House 55 in Elephantine. Within these layers at Sai, the assemblages include a substantial amount of material which is seemingly 17th Dynasty in character.

1 The individual numbers of the pottery fragments include the name of the excavation sectors and correspond to the following: "N/C + consecutive number" (e.g. N/C 642) refers to material from SAV1 North; SAV1 West and SAV1 East are abbreviated with "P + consecutive number" (e.g. SAV1W P044).

However, rather than being connected with the nearby Kerma cemetery, these sherds are always associated with Egyptian vessel types – like carinated bowls and carinated jars – datable to the early 18th Dynasty. Therefore, the formation of these earliest levels of Egyptian presence probably took place under Ahmose II Nebpehtyra or Amenhotep I (Budka 2015a, 50; 2016b). This dating, however, still poses some problems because only very few contexts derive from the earliest levels. In some respects, so-called Level 5 at SAV1 North bears already some characteristics of “Thutmoseid” style, which point to a slightly later date under Thutmose I (see above and Aston 2013; also Budka 2017b, 128-130).

In terms of fabric classification, the Vienna System (Nordström and Bourriau 1993) works well for New Kingdom site in Nubia, especially if one includes local variations (Budka 2017b, 122-125; cf. Smith 2003b, 40). Nile silt fabrics form the most common group by far, which is very typical for settlement pottery. A considerable number of Nile clay vessels have been modelled on Egyptian types but were locally produced. From a macroscopic point of view it is not always possible to distinguish imported Nile clay products from Egypt (“Real Egyptian”) and locally produced Nile variants (“Egyptian style”, wheel-thrown, but of local fabrics). Chemical and petrographic analyses can help to differentiate between these two sub-families of Nile clays (see Carrano *et al.* 2009, 785-797; Spataro *et al.* 2015, 399-421 and D’Ercole and Sterba in this volume).

Most common pottery types

Native Nubian hand-made pottery vessels are present in all levels within the town (fig. 1). They comprise primarily cooking pots with basketry impression and sometimes incised decoration (cf. Rose 2012) and also fine wares of Kerma style (black-topped cups and beakers). Interestingly, within the latter none of the fine burnished Kerma vessels shows the silvery band characteristic of Kerma Classique productions (Gratien 1978, 210), corresponding to the evidence from early 18th Dynasty levels at Sesebi (Rose 2017, 466).

Nubian storage vessels from the New Kingdom town of Sai generally have a larger capacity than Egyptian vessels and often show traces of repair. This is nicely illustrated by the almost complete vessel N/C 650 with four repair holes (fig. 2) (Budka 2011, 27). Other than in Egypt, where repair holes are only common during Predynastic periods, the repair of pots is well attested through various periods and diverse Nubian cultures (Williams 1993, fig. 4 and *passim*). The repaired Nubian storage vessel N/C 650 from sector SAV1 North was found side by side with an Egyptian *zir* vessel (Budka 2017b, fig. 57), but was tentatively used for a much longer period, suggesting its production already prior to the New Kingdom. This example raises several caveats to use Nubian vessels as chronological

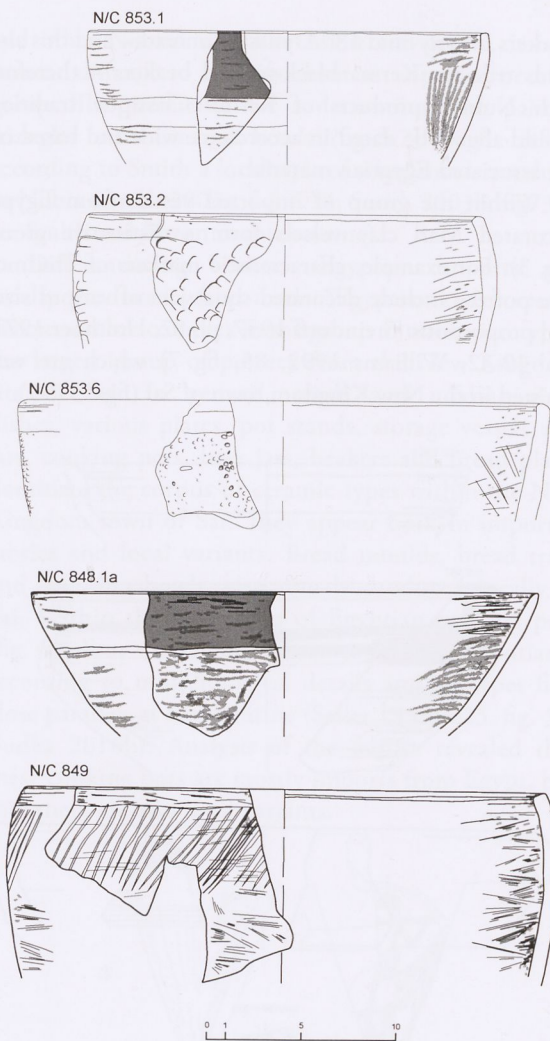


Figure 1. Nubian open forms and cooking pots from the New Kingdom town of Sai.

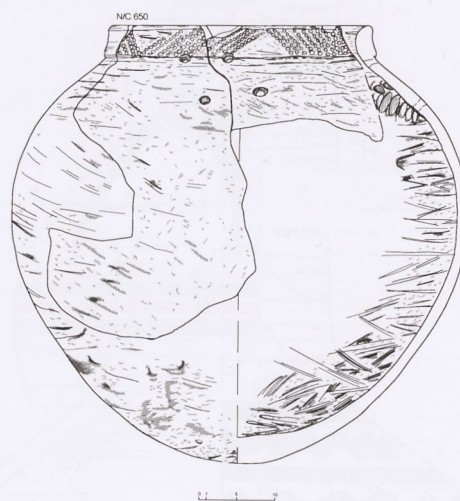


Figure 2. Nubian storage vessel N/C 650 from the New Kingdom town of Sai.

markers in early-mid 18th Dynasty contexts – and this also holds true for Kerma black-topped beakers – therefore such Nubian products of Kerma Classique tradition should always be dated in accordance with and based on the associated Egyptian material.

Within the group of imported vessels from Egypt, decorated Marl clay vessels form a distinctive group (fig. 3). For example, characteristic markers of Thutmose pottery include decorated squat jars of various sizes and proportions (Steindorff 1937, pl. 82; Holthoer 1977, pls. 30-32; Williams 1992, 85, fig. 7) which are well attested in the New Kingdom town of Sai (figs. 3.7-9).

Nile clay vessels are of interest as well, in particular a large group of bichrome-decorated necked jars with linear, floral and figurative designs. Good examples of mid-18th Dynasty date are known from Sai (figs. 4.1-2) and Dokki Gel (Ruffieux 2009, 124-126, figs. 3-5; Ruffieux 2016, 512-513, figs. 7-8), but also from Askut, Buhen and Aniba (Budka 2015b, 334-335 with references). The origin of these specific vessels is still an open question – based on parallels, the area of Elephantine seemed likely (Budka 2015b) until new finds from Dokki Gel suggested a possible local workshop in the Kerma region (personal communication Phillipe Ruffieux, May

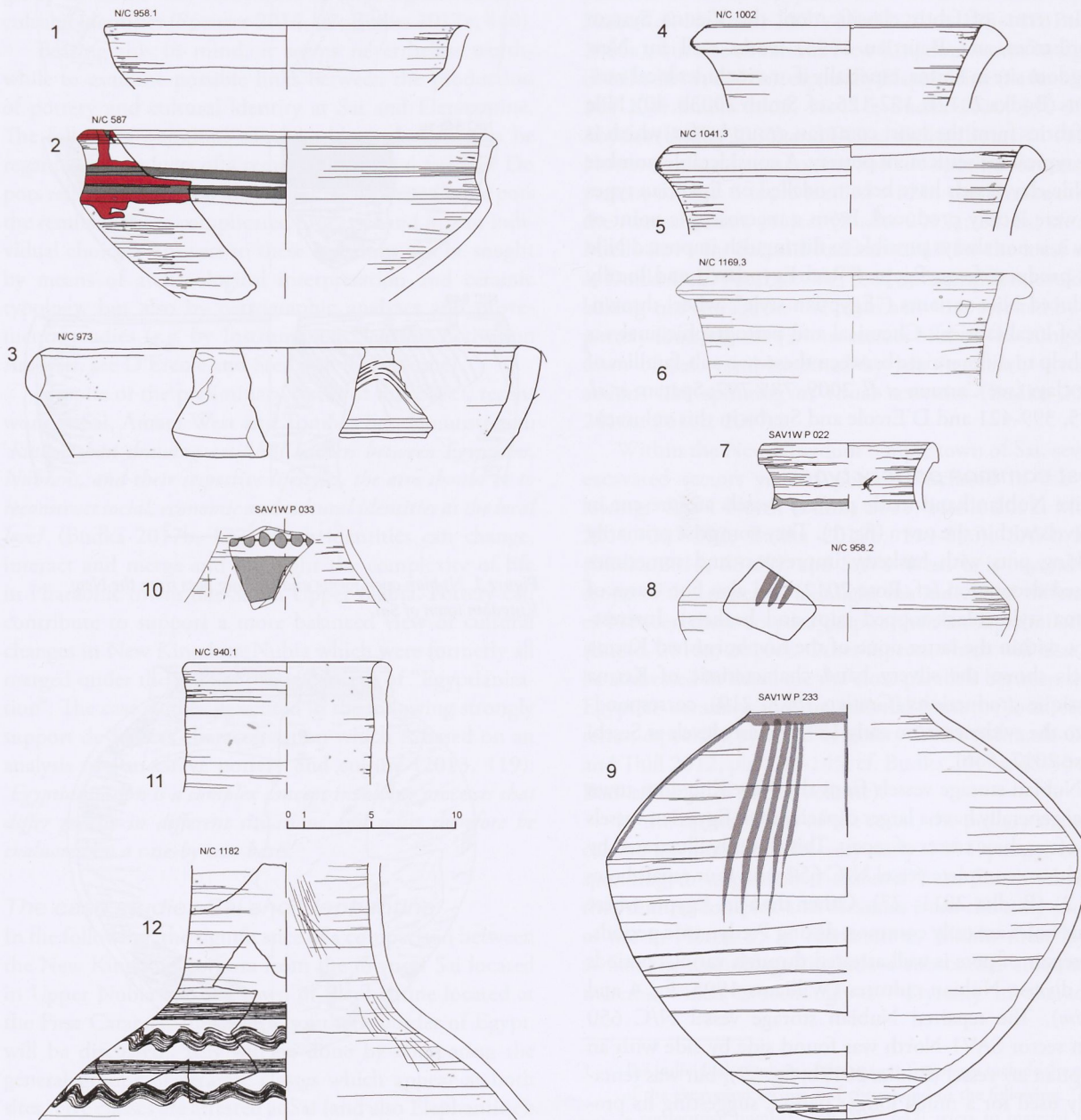


Figure 3. Imported Egyptian Marl clay vessels from the New Kingdom town of Sai.

2016). Thus, these bichrome vessels illustrate problems of differentiating between imported Egyptian Nile clays and locally produced Nile clay vessels (see D'Ercole and Sterba in this volume).

Another category of painted forms which is very likely to be imported from Egypt is blue-painted pottery, only rarely attested in Nubia (for the southernmost attestation Tombos, see Smith and Buzon in this volume). At Sai, some pieces of this type can be dated to the mid- to late 18th Dynasty, others like beakers with linear decoration (fig. 4.5) are already early Ramesside in date (e.g. at Aniba, Sai, Tombos, Dokki Gel and Amara West, cf. Budka 2011, 30; see also Holthoer 1977, pl. 33, FU1). A unique piece is the lower part of a rhyton with floral and faunal decoration, covered in a red slip and burnished (N/C 1205, fig. 4.3, Budka 2016a, 95).

A large variety of decorated open Nile clay forms is of particular interest since they might be products of the larger region of "Nubia". Most common are red-burnished and white-burnished carinated Nile clay dishes and bowls with linear monochrome decoration (figs. 5.1-5). Wavy lines are very popular both for incised and for painted decoration (figs. 5.7-10, Budka 2011, 29-30; cf. Smith 1995, fig. 6.4; also Smith and Buzon in this volume). Although they find parallels in Elephantine (see below)

and other Nubian sites like Askut and Sesebi, it is at present difficult to identify them as imported or local group. The preference for a decoration with painted triangles on carinated bowls (fig. 5.2) might reflect according to Smith a local style of wheel-made products in Nubia (Smith 2003a, fig. 6.14; Smith 2003b, fig. 3.7; see Smith and Buzon in this volume).

Differentiating between Egyptian imports and locally produced wheel-made "Egyptian style" vessels becomes more complex in the group of utilitarian types, the largest group of pottery from the New Kingdom site of Sai. In general, small and medium-sized dishes, various plates, pot stands, storage vessels and jars, cooking pots, beer jars, beakers and bread plates dominate the corpus of ceramic types within the New Kingdom town of Sai. They appear both in imported fabrics and local variants. Bread moulds, bread trays and spinning bowls were mostly produced locally at Sai. Within the form class of Egyptian cooking pots (fig. 6), four individual types can be differentiated according to morphological details and all types find close parallels at Elephantine (Seiler 1999, 223, fig. 53; Budka 2016b). Analysis of the fabrics revealed that these cooking pots are mostly imports from Egypt, but that there are also local variants.

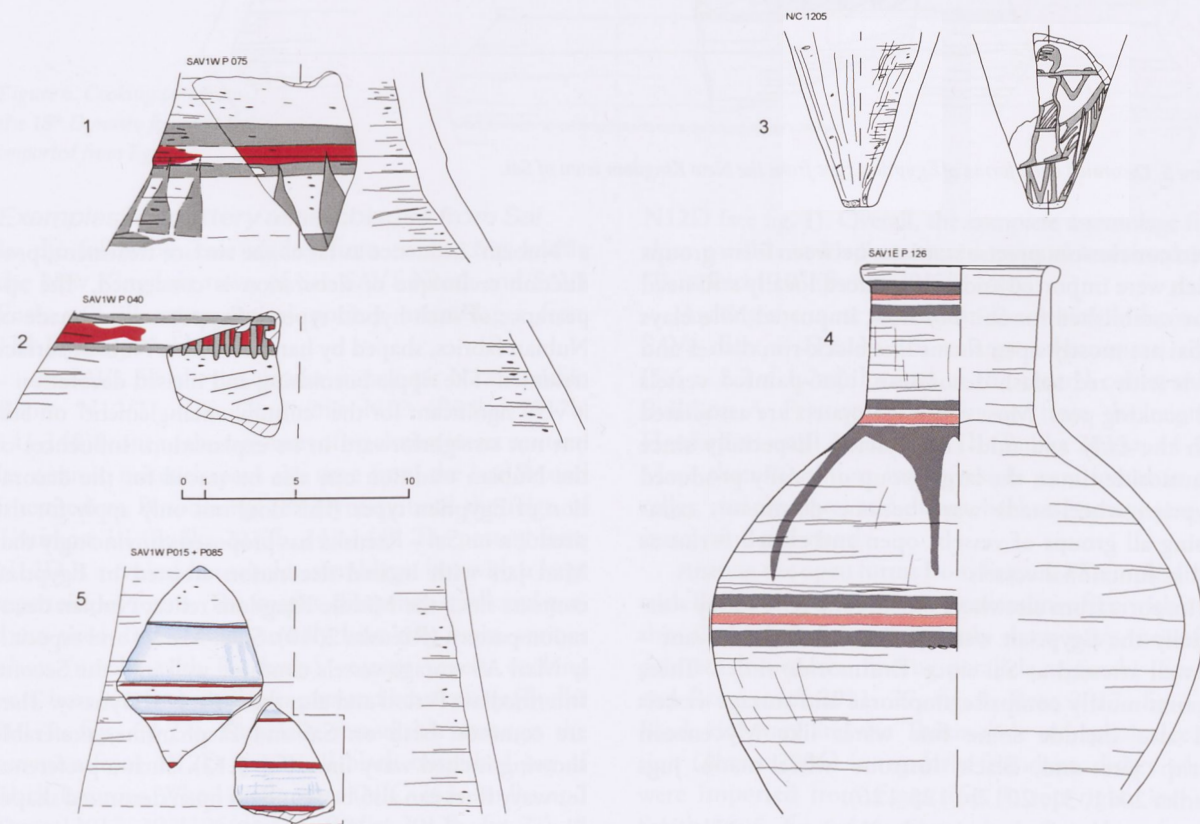


Figure 4. Decorated closed forms of Egyptian pottery from the New Kingdom town of Sai.

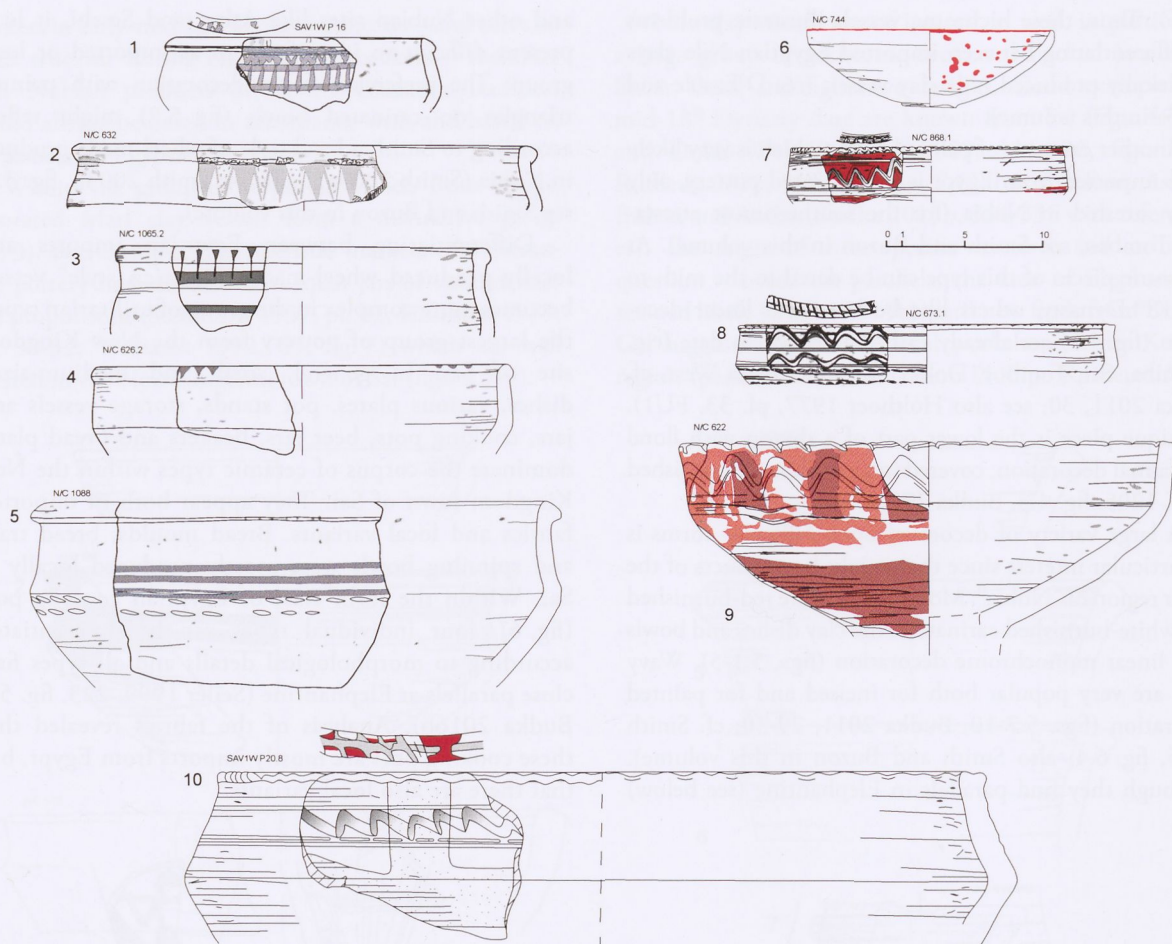


Figure 5. Decorated open forms of Egyptian type from the New Kingdom town of Sai.

In conclusion, precise statistics between form groups which were imported and/or produced locally still need to be established for Sai. For now, imported Nile clays on Sai are mostly open forms like black-rim dishes and bowls with red splash decoration, blue-painted vessels and cooking pots. Most of these imports are associated with the early and mid-18th Dynasty. Especially since Thutmoside times, the large group of locally produced Egyptian wheel-made ware became dominant, comprising all groups of vessels, open and closed forms as well as functional vessels.

Imports from elsewhere outside the Nile valley – especially the Egyptian western Oases and the Levant – are well attested at Sai since Thutmoside times. These imports mostly comprise amphorae and storage vessels and also include some fine wares like Mycenaean stirrup jars and Black lustrous wheel-made jugs (Budka 2011, 31; 2017b, 125-126).

As was briefly mentioned above, some Nile clay pottery vessels from Sai have been modelled on Egyptian types but were locally produced and this sometimes with

a “Nubian” influence as far as the surface treatment, production technique or decoration is concerned. The appearance of such hybrid types – Egyptian types made of Nubian fabrics, shaped by hand or with a Nubian surface treatment like ripple burnishing and incised decoration – is very significant for the “cultural entanglement” on Sai, but not straightforward in its explanation. Influences of the Nubian tradition can also be traced for the decoration of Egyptian types. This does not only apply for the situation on Sai – Rzeuska has proposed convincingly that Marl jars with incised decoration attested in Egyptian contexts since the Middle Kingdom reflect Nubian decoration pattern (Rzeuska 2010). Such Marl B and especially Marl A3 storage vessels continue well into the Second Intermediate Period and also the early 18th Dynasty. They are common both on Sai and Elephantine, preferable showing incised wavy lines (fig. 3.12). Such a preference for wavy lines can also be found on open decorated shapes like carinated bowls (figs. 5.7-10) and is traceable until the late 18th Dynasty (Smith 1995, fig. 6.14; see also Sesebi: Rose 2017, fig. 1.4).

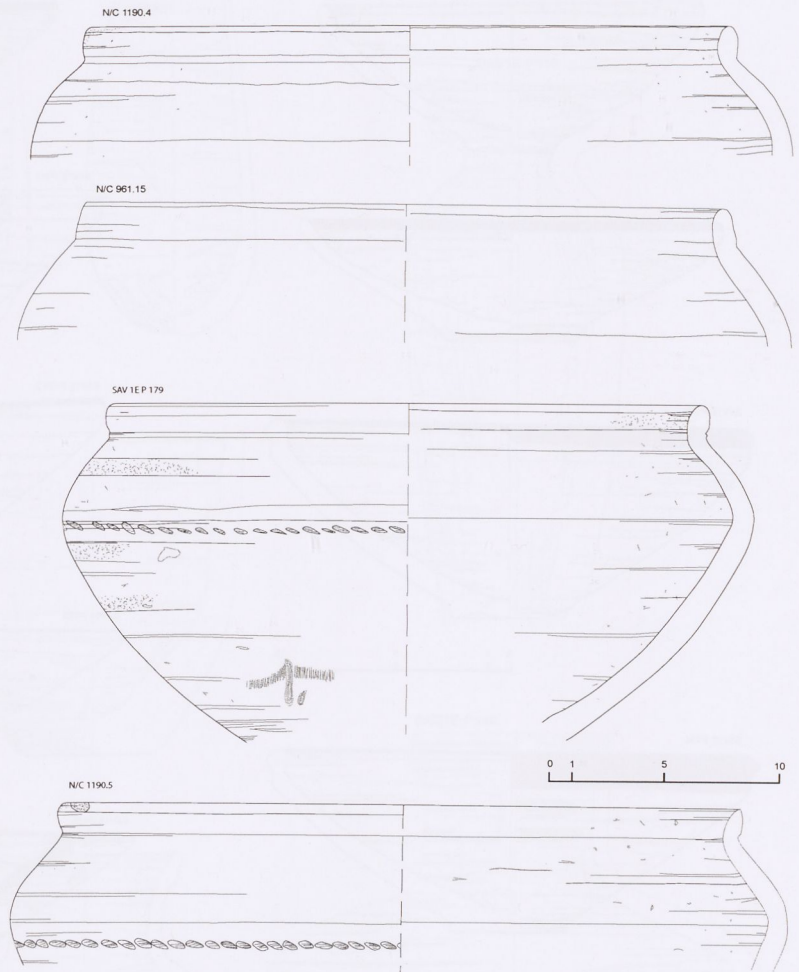


Figure 6. Cooking pots from the 18th Dynasty found at Sai, imported from Egypt.

Examples for pottery assemblages from Sai

In the following, case studies from two sectors within the New Kingdom town of Sai, SAV1 North and SAV1 East, will illustrate typical pottery assemblages from 18th Dynasty Nubia.

At SAV1 North, the circular storage pit N12D within Room N12/2 of building unit N12 (Budka 2017b, 141-148) is one of the rare cases of an almost intact context. Its ceramic material spans the time from the late Second Intermediate Period/early 18th Dynasty until the reign of Thutmose III (Budka 2017b, 141-144). The pottery from N12D is a typical household assemblage, but with a large repertoire of forms. The corpus comprises small and medium-sized dishes which usually have ring bases, various plates (usually with flat bases), storage vessels, cooking pots, beer jars, beakers, flower pots and bread plates (Budka 2017b, figs. 68-77). Especially remarkable amongst the ceramics from N12D is a small black burnished jug of Black Lustrous Wheel-made ware (N/C 763; Budka and Doyen 2013, 193-195, fig. 23; Budka 2017b, fig. 77). A small quantity of Nubian cooking pots and some Kerma black-topped cups complement the pottery from silo

N12D (see fig. 1). Overall, the complete assemblage finds close parallels at Elephantine, in material associated with “Bauschicht 10” (Budka 2017b, 148).

Among the most significant discoveries in the sector SAV1 East is Feature 15, a large subterranean room (5.6 x 2.2 x 1.2m) located in the central courtyard of Building A. Feature 15 was in use from the reign of Hatshepsut until Amenhotep III (Budka 2015a, 44-45). More than 80 almost intact vessels were found in this cellar, mainly plates and dishes, beakers, storage jars, *zir* vessels and pot stands.

Among the open forms from Feature 15 simple dishes with flat or ring bases are very common, often with a red rim. Carinated dishes frequently show wavy incised or painted decoration, finding parallels at Sesebi (Spence and Rose *et al.* 2011, 37, fig. 5; Rose 2017, fig. 1.4). Black rim ware and the Thutmoside red splash decoration (Aston 2006) is regularly found on dishes which were imported from Egypt (fig. 7, top right; see also Smith 1995, fig. 6.4A). Chronological markers for the 18th Dynasty are the so-called flower pots, conical deep bowls with perforated bases (fig. 7, bottom; see Wolf

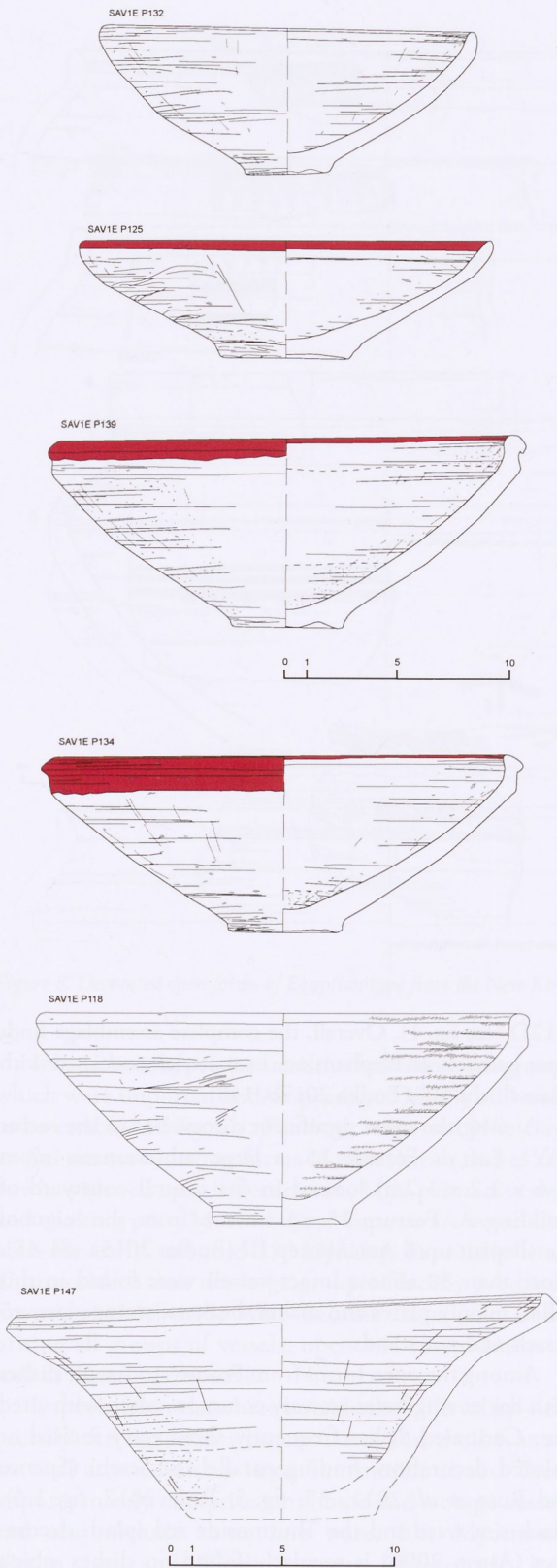


Figure 7. Open forms from Feature 15 in SAV1 East.

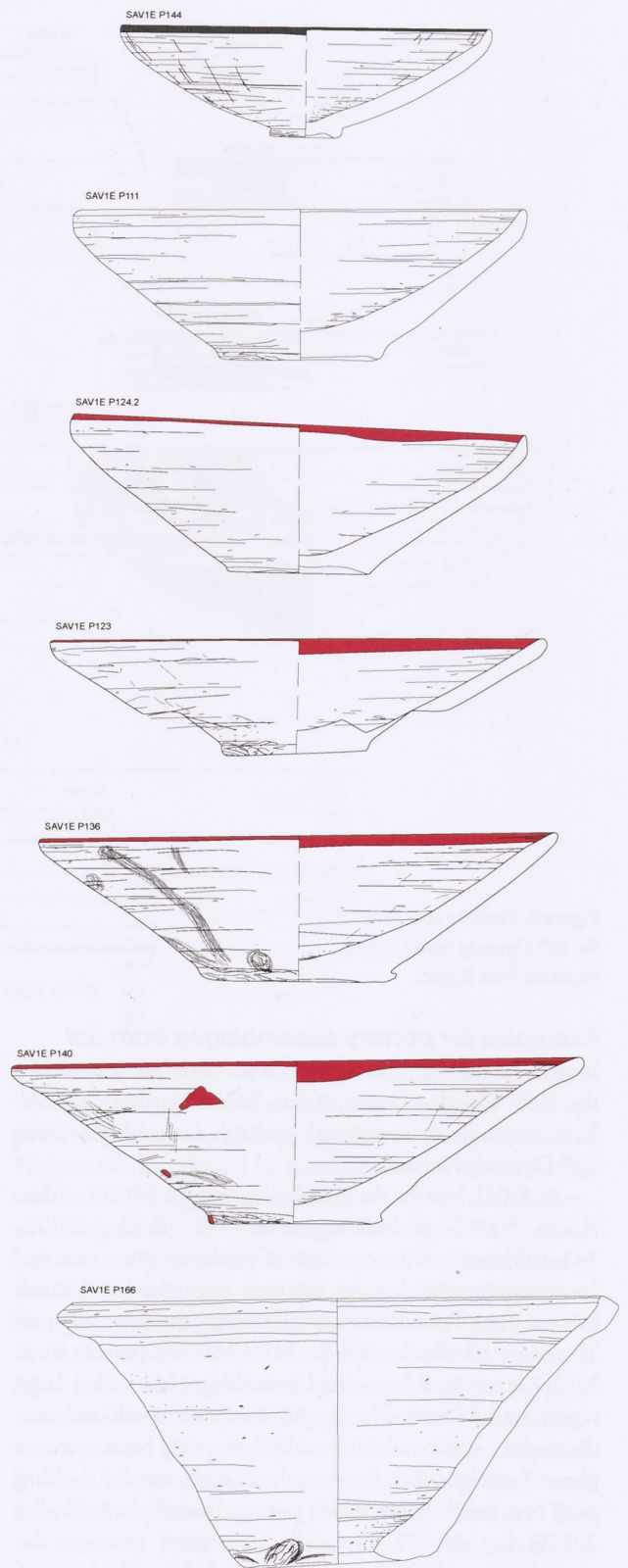


Figure 8 (opposite page). Closed forms and miscellaneous vessels from Feature 15 in SAV1 East.

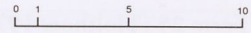
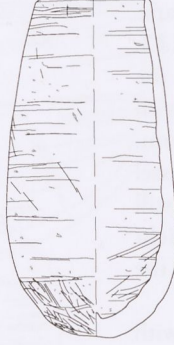
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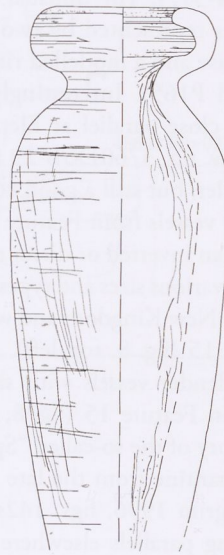
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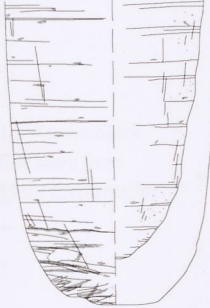
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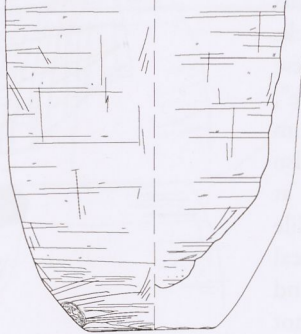
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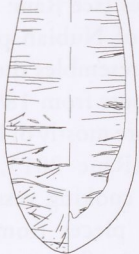
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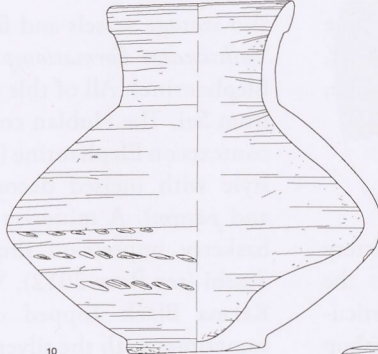
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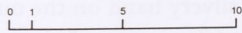
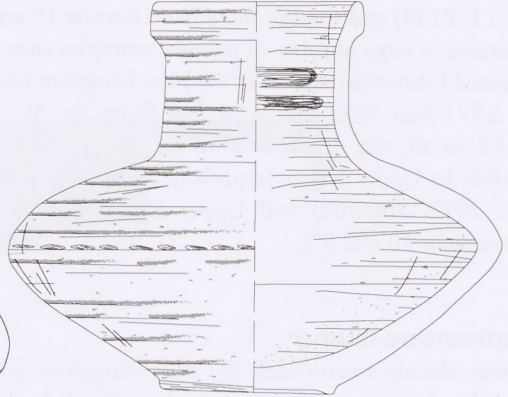
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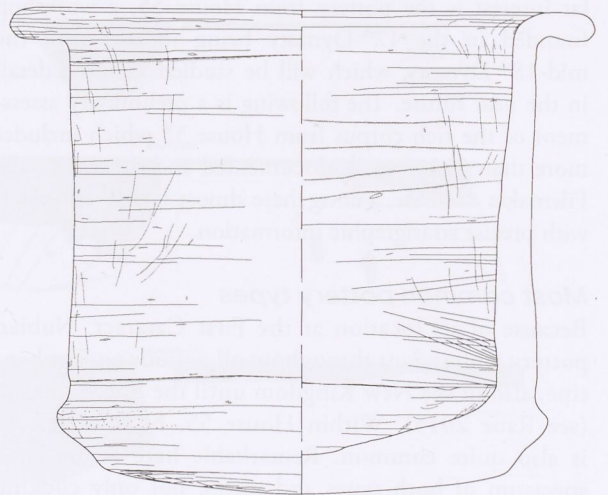
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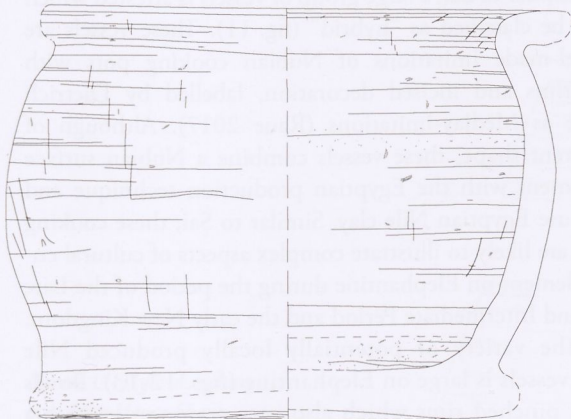
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SAV1E P128



SAV1E P165



1937, pl. 77, ‘Form 25’; Holthoer 1977, pl. 18; Williams 1992, 34-35; Minault-Gout and Thill 2012, pl. 132; Pierce 2013, 514-517). An unusual type within the corpus from Sai is represented by two deep bowls with an irregular flat base and a modelled rim (fig. 8, bottom, SAV1E P128 and P165). Interestingly, this rare vessel type finds a very close parallel at Elephantine: the still unpublished Excav. no. 37601X/b-29 from “Bauschicht 9” is slightly smaller, but still a good comparison for the mid-18th Dynasty vessels from Feature 15.

Beer jars with an inverted or direct rim, together with slender beakers of various sizes and types, are typical settlement forms of the New Kingdom and well attested on Sai and from Feature 15 (fig. 8, top left). Several fragments of heavy-walled slender vessels with short flaring necks were also found in Feature 15 (fig. 8, top right). These fall into the category of the so-called “Spitzbodenflasche”, common at Elephantine from the late Middle Kingdom onwards (von Pilgrim 1996, figs. 142s, 147j-k; see also below) and finding parallels elsewhere in Egypt, e.g. at Amarna (Rose 2007, 92-93, type SG5, see below). Nile clay squat jars that imitate Marl clay vessels are typical of the Thutmoside period (fig. 8, SAV1 E P115 und SAV1 E P149) and though those from Feature 15 are not decorated, a large number of painted examples were documented from other sectors of the New Kingdom town of Sai, SAV1 East, West and North (see above, fig. 3).

All in all, the ceramics from Feature 15 find close parallels in Upper Nubia (especially Sesebi, Phase II/III, Rose 2017, 466-468) and Upper Egypt (Elephantine, “Bauschicht 10 and 9”).

Elephantine Island

As was already mentioned, the New Kingdom pottery from Elephantine provides very close parallels to the corpus excavated at Sai (see Budka 2011). Of particular interest is the pottery from House 55, a workshop founded in the 17th Dynasty being in use until the mid-18th Dynasty, which will be studied in more detail in the near future. The following is a preliminary assessment of the rich corpus from House 55 which includes more than 2100 vessels documented and entered in the Filemaker database, among these almost 100 *in situ* vessels with precise stratigraphic information.

Most common pottery types

Because of its location at the First Cataract, Nubian pottery is abundant throughout all periods on Elephantine, also in the New Kingdom until the Ramesside era (see Raue 2015). Within House 55, Nubian pottery is also quite common. Remarkable here is the large spectrum of both types and wares: not only cooking pots are attested as hand-made Nubian wares, but

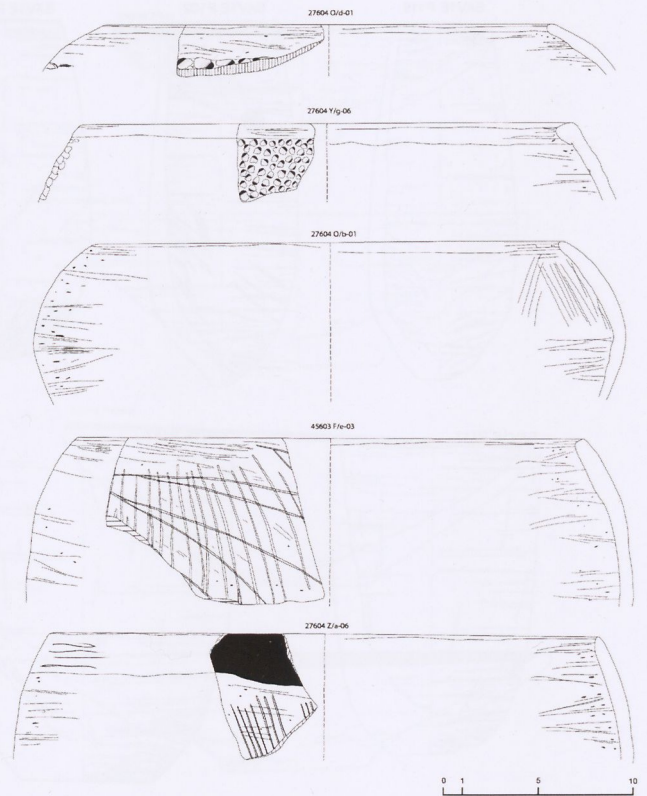


Figure 9. Nubian cooking pots from House 55 on Elephantine.

also storage vessels and fine wares (see Raue 2015, 55: ‘vollständige Formationspräsenz’ of Nubian pottery on Elephantine). All of this closely resembles the evidence from Sai. The Nubian cooking pots from 18th Dynasty contexts on Elephantine (fig. 9) are mostly of Pan-Grave style with incised decoration (Raue 2015, 364-365 and *passim*). A minority of the cooking vessels shows basketry impression similar to pieces from Sai and Sesebi (see Rose 2012). Within the fine ware (fig. 10), Kerma Black Topped cups and beakers dominate, sometimes with the silvery band on the outside characteristic of the Kerma Classique period.

Similar to Sai, a large group of vessels is attested which may be classified as “hybrid” (fig. 11). These vessels are wheel-made imitations of Nubian cooking pots with red rims and incised decoration, labelled by Dietrich Raue as Medjay-imitations (Raue 2017). Although of different shape, these vessels combine a Nubian surface treatment with the Egyptian production technique and also use Egyptian Nile clay. Similar to Sai, these cooking pots are likely to illustrate complex aspects of cultural entanglement on Elephantine during the period of the Late Second Intermediate Period and the early New Kingdom.

The variety of potentially locally produced Nile clay vessels is large on Elephantine (figs. 12-13). Bowls with pinched rims which also very common in Nubia are well attested and nicely preserved (fig. 12.7).

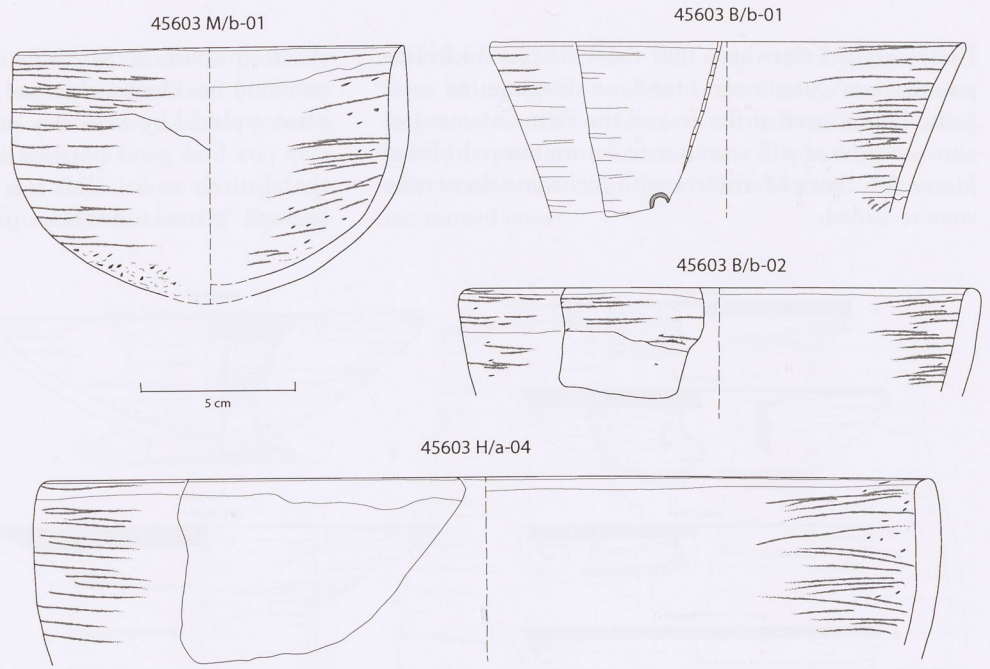


Figure 10. Kerma Black topped fine ware from House 55 on Elephantine.

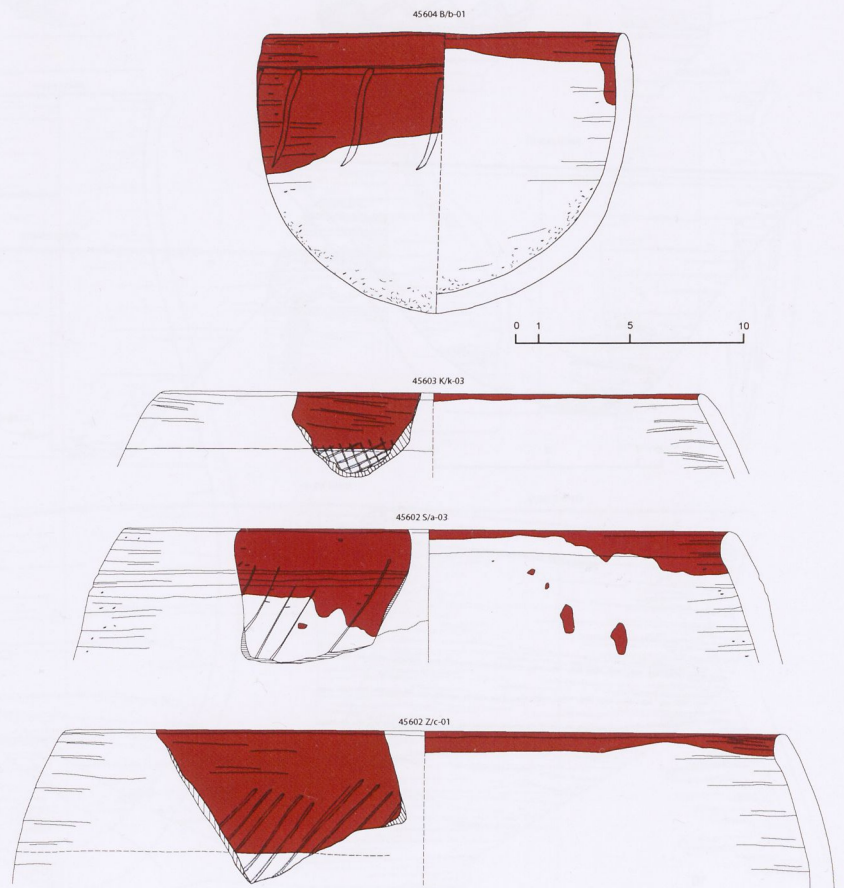


Figure 11. Hybrid cooking pots from House 55 on Elephantine.

I have argued elsewhere that the Nile clay bichrome painted jars commonly found on Elephantine were possibly produced at the area of the First Cataract (see above) which is still a matter of future research. From House 55, more Marl clays with bichrome decoration were recorded.

In contrast to Sai, Nile *zir* vessels are not very common on Elephantine (see fig. 13.8), but are more often replaced by Marl clay variants. Other ovoid Nile clay jars find good parallels at other sites and correspond nicely to Sai. This also holds true for beer jars, beakers, plates and dishes (figs. 12-13). Blue-paint-

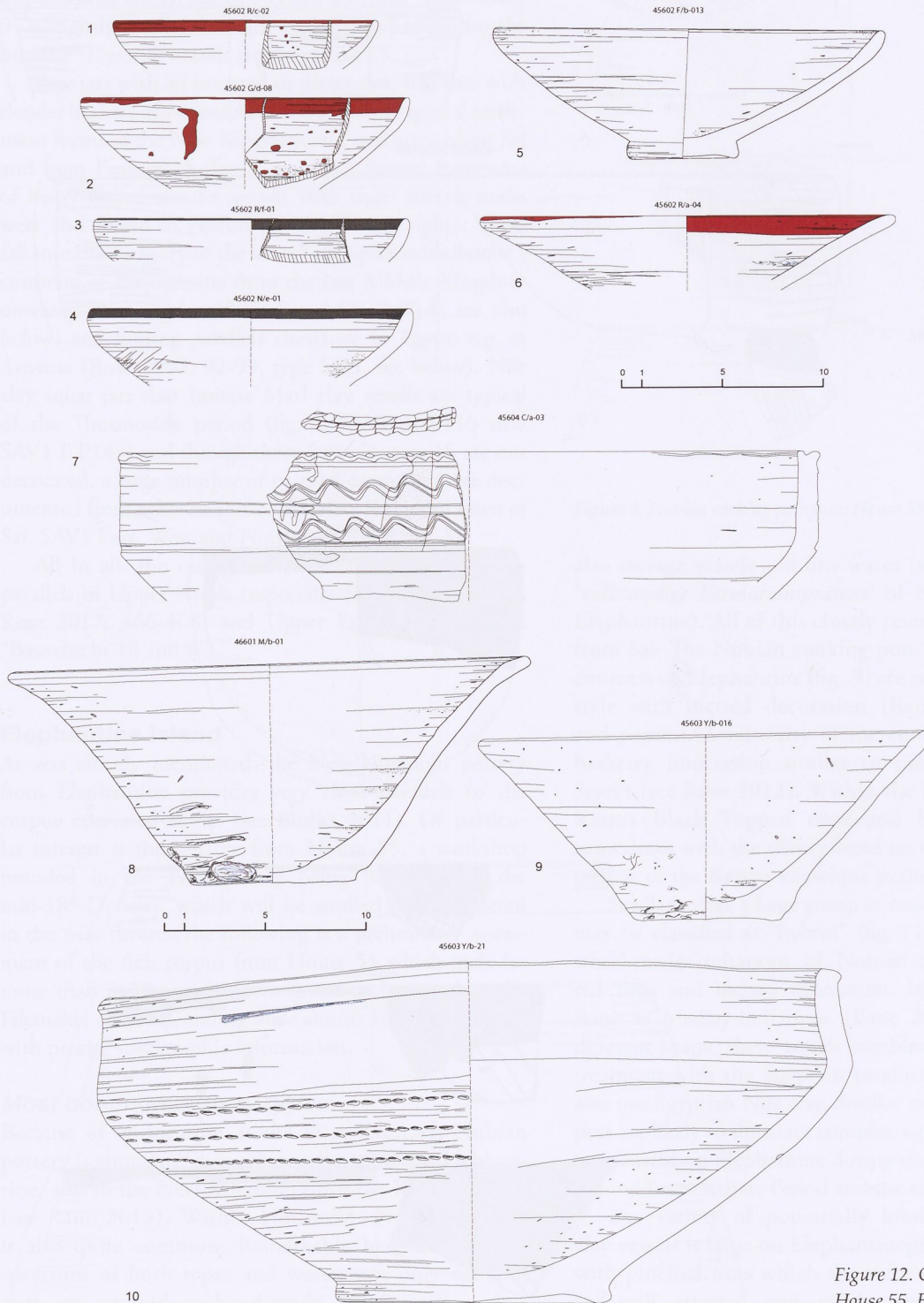


Figure 12. Common open forms House 55, Egyptian types.

ed ware is well represented on Sai and was probably imported to the island (both Marl clays and Nile clay variants, see Budka 2013). However, no blue-painted sherds are associated with House 55.

Imported Levantine and Oases wares are regularly attested on Elephantine, especially from late 18th Dynasty

and Ramesside levels. The early 18th Dynasty levels from House 55 also yielded some Canaanite amphorae fragments, similar to vessels unearthed on Sai. So-called hybrid types are restricted on Elephantine to the wheel-made cooking pots with incised decoration mentioned above.



Figure 13. Common closed forms House 55, Egyptian types.

Functional pottery types – Sai vs. Elephantine

The most common functional vessel types from both Sai Island and Elephantine are pot stands, cooking pots and bread plates. At both sites, bread plates of different sizes are frequent and usually made in Nile C. Conical bread moulds, belonging to Jacquet's Type D (Jacquet-Gordon 1981, 18, fig. 5; also Rose 2007, HC 2, 288), appear only in very small numbers within the domestic contexts of Sai and Elephantine. The only exception is sector SAV1 East where they have been found in considerable quantities and are probably connected with the temple cult of nearby Temple A (Budka 2014; Budka 2015b; Budka 2017c). Pot stands are typically numerous in settlement contexts (both in Egypt and Nubia) and vary at both sites in general from low, transitional to tall (fig. 13.1). The pot stands are made primarily in Nile clays (Nile B2 and Nile C), but also attested in Marl clay (especially Marl B and Marl E) (see Budka 2017b, 137 with references). Marl E was also used for the so-called *Schaelbecken* or fish dishes, attested both at Sai and Elephantine. These large thick-walled trays are ovoid in shape and show incised geometric pattern on the interior. They occur both in Marl and local Nile clay variants – the shapes and decoration patterns are the same in both cases (Budka and Doyen 2013, 191) and are also very similar between Sai and Elephantine.

Amongst functional vessels, cooking pots are of much importance in settlement areas. At Sai, imported, authentic Egyptian wheel-made cooking pots are attested contemporaneous with Nubian-style cooking pots (hand-made with basketry impression or incised decoration) (see above, figs. 1 and 6). In the earliest levels at SAV1 North (Levels 5 and 4), the Egyptian type of cooking pot seems to be the most common, gradually declining in frequency through later phases. This form class of Egyptian cooking pots finds close parallels at Elephantine (Seiler 1999, 223, fig. 53). Further variants regarding the size, carination and details of the rim shape are also attested and are likely to represent local variations.

Specific Egyptian ceramic devices thought to be connected with the preparation of food are the so-called fire dogs (Budka 2017b, 138-139). The functional use of these vessels is not precisely understood, but traces of burning link them to processes involving fire, most likely placing cooking pots above flames (Aston 1989; Giddy 1999, 250-253). The fire dogs from the New Kingdom town of Sai might therefore indicate that some of its inhabitants used a typical Egyptian tradition of food preparation: a set of fire dogs with an Egyptian cooking pot (Budka 2012; 2017b, 139). Until now, Sai is the only site in Upper Nubia where early 18th Dynasty cooking pots imported from Egypt were found; equally unique is the large quantity of Egyptian fire dogs (more than 200 pieces in total). However, this large number – contrasting con-

siderably with findings in settlements in Egypt (Elephantine: from House 55, only five examples were found; from "Bauschicht 10" in total just 12) – and the lack of hearths from 18th Dynasty levels raises also doubts about an Egyptian "cooking kit", suggesting a more complex situation and possible multifunctional use of these fire dogs (Budka 2017b, 139). Comparably large quantities of these objects found at Buhen were tentatively associated with copper production processes (Millard 1979, 123-126, pls. 43, 103; Budka 2017c, 441).

Another category of functional vessels which are still not completely understood regarding their function are so-called crucibles, in German "Spitzbodenflaschen". These are well attested at both Sai (fig. 9.6) and Elephantine (fig. 13.7), finding parallels at Amarna (Rose 2007, 92-93, type SG5) and Mirgissa (Vercoutter 1970, 199-200). Whereas these vessels were frequently found in the contexts of hearths/ovens at Mirgissa and Elephantine, the find contexts on Sai are diverse and the function remains unclear. Common features of all "Spitzbodenflaschen" are that they are produced in coarse Nile C variants and most of them were red burnished.

In general, functional ceramics from 18th Dynasty strata at Elephantine compare very well with the Sai material. Despite of close parallels regarding the general corpus and the vessel types, a distinct difference between Sai and Elephantine seems to apply to the use of Marl or Nile clay for functional vessels. This can be illustrated by spinning bowls, but also fish dishes ('*Schaelbecken*'), pot stands and *zir* vessels.

The class of spinning bowls (fig. 14; dishes with two handles attached to the interior of the base; see Rose 2007, 60-61, SD 6, 202-203) is quite interesting. At Elephantine, 32 pieces from 12451 records in the database represent a total of 0.25%. 21 fragments derive from "Bauschicht 10", and here 14 pieces from House 55 which equals 67%. In total, 15 Marl clay spinning bowls and 17 Nile clay pieces were recorded; in House 55, 8 Marl and 6 Nile clay bowls.

These numbers differ considerably from Sai Island. In sector SAV1 North, 19 of 2287 diagnostic pieces are spinning bowls (0.83%), comprising 18 Nile clay vessels and only a single one made in Marl clay. Five seasons of work at SAV1 East did not yield a single fragment of a spinning bowl; and only three fragments, all in Nile clay, were recorded at sector SAV1 West. All in all, a clear preference for Nile clays, produced onsite in local fabrics is traceable for Sai. This finds parallels at other Egyptian sites in Nubia, for example at Sesebi (Pamela Rose, personal communication, 20 Jan 2012) and Buhen (Emery, Smith and Millard 1979, pl. 68, nos. 143-144 and 148). It is likely to explain this as specialised pottery manufacture to meet the local demand as it was proposed for the workmen's village at Amarna (Rose 2007, 60).

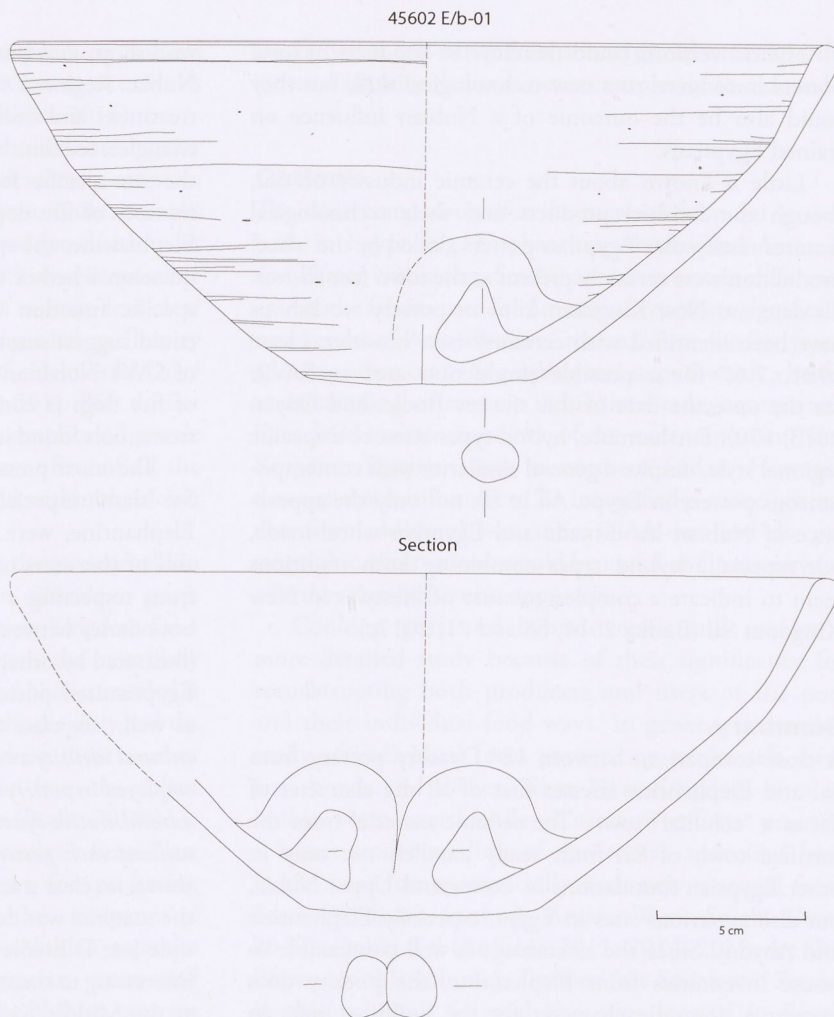


Figure 14. Example of spinning bowl in Marl B from House 55.

All in all, the similar categories of functional ceramic vessels from Sai and Elephantine suggest that very analogous functional needs were present in both settlements. Small differences regarding the functional pottery types were noted for the quantities and especially the material. Functional vessels seem to represent a useful tool to investigate trade and import of vessels versus local demand/local production and should be studied in more detail.

Hybrid pottery production and its cultural implication

As was stressed above, hybridity has to be closely contextualised, in particular if taken into account for reconstructing archaeological “cultures”. The two case studies presented here offer a precise historical and cultural framework allowing assumptions based on the appearance of hybrid vessels. Here, much potential lies in particular in the evidence from Elephantine, in the sealed context from House 55 which still needs to be investigated in more detail in the near future. Of course pots do not equal people – but the striking occur-

rence of hybrid types both on Sai and on Elephantine combining Nubian and Egyptian pottery technology implies that the occupants of these two sites comprised both Egyptians and Nubians and in particular people who were confronted with both cultures.

The general co-existence of Egyptian (wheel-made) and Nubian (hand-made) pottery traditions at both sites is not unusual but has found parallels at Elephantine since millennia (Raue 2015) and in Nubia since the Middle Kingdom (Smith 1995, 53-80). Hand-made Nubian cooking pots and some Kerma fine wares (cups and beakers) are also well attested at other New Kingdom sites in Egypt and Nubia, *e.g.* Tell el-Dab’a (Aston and Bietak 2017) and Sesebi (Rose 2012).

At Elephantine, a large number of wheel-made cooking pots with Nubian-style incised decoration represent ceramic vessels falling into the hybrid pottery category. What Raue called “Medjay-imitations” combines Nubian pottery surface treatment tradition with Egyptian wheel-made technology. Interestingly, Nubian traces of pottery tradition are most often reflected in surface treatment and here in particular in incised decoration (see Rzeuska 2010).

Hybrid versions could therefore be products of local potters introduced to a new technological skill, but they could also be the outcome of a Nubian influence on trained Egyptians.

Little is known about the ceramic industry on Sai, though the finished products and their technological features testify that Egyptian potters skilled in the wheel production were certainly present at the town (see above). To date, no New Kingdom kilns or pottery workshops have been identified with certainty (see, however, Hesse 1981, 7-67 for a possible production area at SAV2; for the unsecure date of this site see Budka and Doyen 2013, 170). Furthermore, hybrid types attest to a specific regional style, despite a general similarity with contemporaneous pottery in Egypt. All in all, not only the appearance of Nubian hand-made and Egyptian wheel-made, but especially hybrid types combining both traditions seem to indicate a complex mixture of lifestyles in New Kingdom Sai (Budka 2014, 68 and 71; 2017c).

Summary

A close comparison between 18th Dynasty pottery from Sai and Elephantine stresses first of all the character of Sai as a “colonial” town. The ceramic material from the fortified town of Sai finds ready parallels not only in other Egyptian foundations in Lower and Upper Nubia, but also at various sites in Egypt, especially Elephantine and Abydos. Since the assemblage is well comparable to house inventories from Elephantine, the pottery does suggest a domestic character for the building units in sectors SAV1 North, SAV1 West and also SAV1 East. Furthermore, the development of the pottery corpus throughout the 18th Dynasty is significant. An increase in the variability in shapes and wares can be noted from the time of Thutmose III onwards and is most probably related to the heyday of Sai as an administrative Egyptian centre (cf. Budka SAV1 in this volume). Imported wares from Canaan, the Levant and the imitation of an Aegean rhyton attest to the full integration of the town on Sai Island within Egyptian international trade routes of the second half of the 18th Dynasty. The role of these imported and partly nicely decorated vessels for the occupants of Sai is difficult to assess – they might have been used for creating a “Pharaonic lifestyle” far away from home, but they could also simply be regarded as pretty *‘knick-knacks with exotic cachet’* (Barrett 2009, 226). Attributing a single meaning to an entire object type seems not reasonable in this case and it still remains to be tested how the entire ceramic corpus of New Kingdom Sai contributes to the reconstruction of lifestyles on the island.

At present, despite a general similarity with contemporary pottery in Egypt, the Egyptian pottery from Sai Island can also be used as a case study that local pottery

workshops and traditions are traceable in New Kingdom Nubia. Regional style was mostly expressed by surface treatment and decoration (e.g. the preference of painted triangles, see Smith and Buzon in this volume). Amongst the site-specific features of the town of Sai, the large number of fire dogs is especially relevant. Compared to Elephantine, the quantity is much higher and raises the question whether the fire dogs are connected with some specific function or possible production process. This could suggest some kind of workshop character for parts of SAV1 North and SAV1 West. The high concentration of fire dogs is comparable to the very large number of stone tools found in these sectors (see Budka 2017c, 438).

The most pressing questions about the pottery from Sai Island, especially with regard to its comparison with Elephantine, were the identity of the producers/potters and of the users of the vessels. The answers must derive from respecting a very dynamic microcosm with fuzzy boundaries between cultural identities at the site, but as illustrated by other examples with both real Egyptian and Egyptianised pottery, the following seems likely for Sai as well: *‘the close and multifaceted links between issues of cultural identity and the production sequence and technology employed in pottery manufacture, as well as the foodways and administrative systems of the individuals who produced and utilized such pottery’* (Pierce 2013, 531). As mentioned above, no clear traces of kilns were found at Sai, but part of the material was definitely a local production in Egyptian style (see D’Ercole and Sterba in this volume). Here, it is interesting to mention the situation of pottery production at the Middle Kingdom Nubian forts. Nadejda Reshetnikova and Bruce Williams have convincingly argued that episodic work of potters as itinerant craftsmen travelling from site to site played an important role (Reshetnikova and Williams 2016, 500-501). New evidence from Askut complements this picture: based on the existence of a ceramic potter’s wheel head, Stuart Tyson Smith demonstrated that the production and distribution of pottery during the Middle Kingdom in Nubia was probably quite complex, including industrial workshops at major sites like Askut, as well as local production for demands on a much smaller scale at other sites (Smith 2014).

For New Kingdom Sai, it would be reasonable to assume an industrial workshop during the heyday of the site. However, since we still know little about the internal structure of the town, it is possible to consider small scale production as well – perhaps the demands of the various sectors within the town (see Budka SAV1 in this volume) were fulfilled on a micro scale. Hybrid versions of New Kingdom and Nubian style vessels illustrate the close interconnections between Egyptians and Nubians. One has to assume that Nubian potters were being trained in wheel-made production by Egyptians, at least in the first generation. For this training, but

also possibly to explain higher quality products in local fabrics, the presence of Egyptian potters at the site is very likely (see Reshetnikova and Williams 2016).

Nubian cooking pots and storage vessels are regular finds both at Sai and Elephantine and seem to attest in both cases to Nubian presence, maybe to Nubian cooks or persons otherwise involved in food production; at present, no clear gender-related conclusion is possible (see above). Nubian fine wares seem a little less clear in this respect – they may also be regarded as “luxury ware”, likewise used by Egyptians (cf. Helmbold-Doyé and Seiler 2012, 36; Raue 2015, 360-361). Pots do not equal people but offer a much more complicated puzzle for archaeologists. As mentioned above, first of all the individual corpora have to be explained within their own small microcosm and contexts.

To conclude, the individuals using the pottery within the New Kingdom town of Sai remain difficult to grasp. Of course they were the occupants of New Kingdom Sai – but here, much is still debatable. At present, the most likely scenario would be that both Egyptians and Nubians settled at the site, with the Egyptians being both the majority and the “upper” social class. As highlighted elsewhere, there is a clear development with changing stratification from the earliest levels to the heyday in Thutmoside times (Budka 2015a).

All in all, the combined pottery analysis from New Kingdom Sai and Elephantine allows for proposing some new tentative thoughts about the occupants of Sai. From the earliest strata onwards, Nubian ceramics appear together with imported Egyptian wares and locally wheel-made products. Since the Nubian pots are the minority, it seems safe to assume that the Egyptian style town was first occupied by Egyptians. However, the production of hybrid types of pottery makes it reasonable to suggest that Egyptians and Nubians lived and worked side by side, combining aspects of both cultures. Although it comes as no surprise that within a colonial Egyptian site like Sai the Egyptian appearance is dominant, a local substratum is traceable as well. The pottery corpus seems to attest to people who identified themselves primarily as Egyptian officials and occupants of an Egyptian site but may nevertheless have had family

ties in Nubia and derive from a local group with a specific cultural identity that was never completely abandoned.

Outlook

The close comparisons for the material from Sai at sites both in Egypt (e.g. Elephantine, Abydos and Amarna) and Upper Nubia (e.g. Sesebi) as well as certain differences (e.g. the fabrics used for functional types) are significant new results of AcrossBorders’ research over the last years, allowing advances in fine dating and steps towards a better understanding of ceramic industries, trade, contact and household inventories at one of the most important New Kingdom Egyptian sites in northern Sudan. However, these analyses still need to be intensified – more general data from additional sites, more iNAA data and also petrographic observations would be useful and necessary for a further comprehensive approach.

Cooking pots and hybrid vessels still require a more detailed study because of their significance for reconstructing both producers and users of the pots and their individual food ways. In general, a detailed study of individual form groups, e.g. *zir* vessels, beer jars, bowls and dishes, from New Kingdom sites in Nubia seem worthwhile. Common efforts promise a better understanding of the topics addressed here in the near future, especially with new material from Serra (Williams *forthc.*), Amara West, Sesebi (Rose 2017), Dokki Gel (Ruffieux 2011; 2014; 2016; see also Bonnet in this volume), Tombos (see Smith and Buzon in this volume), Sai and also sites located in Egypt being published or in preparation for publication. Beyond doubt, the island of Elephantine holds a key role for these ceramic studies comparing Nubian and Egyptian material because of its function as trade port at the First Cataract and especially because of its stratigraphy, allowing the contextualisation of the development in the New Kingdom with the preceding Second Intermediate Period. In conclusion, pottery from New Kingdom Nubian sites seems to be a powerful tool for reconstructing social, economic and cultural identities at the local level with much potential for future studies.

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