

## EGYPTIAN IMPACT ON POT-BREAKING CEREMONIES AT EL-KURRU? A RE-EXAMINATION

JULIA BUDKA

### INTRODUCTION

The smashing of pots as part of the funeral ritual during the early history of the royal cemetery at el-Kurru was much discussed in the last decades.<sup>1</sup> The discussion, raised by ideas originally proposed by Kendall in 1982, mainly focused on the acceptance or the rejection of a possible Egyptian influence on this ritual activity and is as such imbedded in the controversy about the origins of the Napatan state.<sup>2</sup> After initial thoughts about a strong impact from Egypt and a direct influence via Theban priests, more recent studies have highlighted what was termed an 'African' character of the ritual, corresponding to the nowadays widely accepted doctrine of an indigenous origin of the Napatan Kingdom.<sup>3</sup> New discoveries that attest to contemporaneous pot-breaking ceremonies during the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC in Egypt suggest that a re-examination of the evidence at el-Kurru and of possible interactions with Egypt, especially with Thebes<sup>4</sup> and Abydos,<sup>5</sup> would be worthwhile. This paper will highlight some of these aspects, raising again the question of possible relics of Egyptian culture (cf. Trigger 1976, 145-146; Morkot 2003, 161) in early Kushite funerary customs as well as the issue of interconnections between Egypt under the Libyan rulers and the Nubian ancestors of the 25<sup>th</sup> Dynasty.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Kendall 1982, 22-23; Morkot 1993, 159-161; Török 1995a, 209-211; Török 1995b, 35; Yellin 1995, 246-248; Kendall 1999a, 20-21; Török 1999, 155; Morkot 2003, 166; Török 2009, 306-307.

<sup>2</sup> See especially Kendall 1999a and Török 1999.

<sup>3</sup> For the general discussion of the descent of the Kushite rulers (Libyan origin, descent from Theban priests versus indigenous origin) see the summary by Morkot (2003, 161-167 for a review of the recent reassessment initiated by Kendall 1982).

<sup>4</sup> Early connections to Thebes are already known since they are attested by imported Marl clay vessels and other ceramics, cf. Heidorn 1994, 131; Török 1995a, 211. Matrimonial connections between the Theban and Napatan priesthood were established in the 25<sup>th</sup> Dynasty, see e.g. Török 1997, 168 and Jansen-Winkeln 2006, 239.

<sup>5</sup> The connections to Abydos are manifold, cf. Leahy 1994; Budka 2012. For close connections between Thebes and Abydos see Leahy 1977; Effland 2012.

<sup>6</sup> My research was undertaken in the framework of the Research Cluster 4 of the German Archaeological Institute. I am grateful

### 1. THE EVIDENCE IN EL-KURRU

#### 1.1 Remains of pot-breaking ceremonies at el-Kurru

The royal cemetery at el-Kurru and finds recovered during its first examination by Reisner present the starting points for this discussion. Some of the early tombs at the site, especially Ku. 19 and Ku. Tum 6, assigned to Generation B (Kendall 1999a, 18-25), yielded a special type of pottery.<sup>7</sup> Reisner discovered hundreds of sherds of large painted vessels and of footed offering bowls with "crude Egyptianizing decoration"<sup>8</sup> (Figure 1). These vessels were most probably deliberately broken at the tombs after having been used during the funerary banquet (Kendall 1982, 23; Welsby 1996, 87). Since an offering chapel was built at Ku. Tum. 6, it is convincing that the pottery was specially produced for the funerary ceremony and destroyed after the funerary meal.<sup>9</sup>

Most of the broken pottery was red slipped and polished ware with white or black painted decoration (Figure 1).<sup>10</sup> The painted vessels fall into two main categories – large handled jars and footed bowls. At el-Kurru Tum. 6 a minimum of four handled, red-slipped jars with white line decoration were discovered (Dunham 1950, 21, figs 5b-c). Several amphorae of the same type and at least four footed bowls with painted decoration were found around Ku. 19 (Dunham 1950, 72-75).

to Ute Effland as the director of the project "The cult of Osiris at Umm el-Qaab" (see Effland and Effland 2006; Effland *et al.*, 2010) and to the excavation director at Umm el-Qaab, Günter Dreyer. For valuable suggestions, a lot of fruitful discussion and very generous information on painted and inscribed sherds from Abydos, I would like to thank Andreas Effland.

<sup>7</sup> Dunham 1950, 72, 74, fig. 24d, pl. 42B; Kendall 1982, 22-23, fig. 17, cat. 2; Török 1995a, 209-211; Kendall 1999a, figs 10-11.

<sup>8</sup> Kendall 1982, 22; cf. also Heidorn 1994, 120; Török 1995b, 35; Welsby 1996, 87.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Kendall 1982, 23; Kendall 1999a, 21; Welsby 1996, 87-88. See also Török 1995b, 35 who pointed out that it is rather unlikely to be accidental that the first grave at el-Kurru with a cult chapel is also the first one with the remains of the pot-breaking ceremony (Ku. Tum. 6).

<sup>10</sup> Dunham 1950, figs 5b-c, 18c, 24b; Kendall 1982, fig. 17; Kendall 1999a, figs 10-11.



Figure 1. Examples of the painted and broken pottery from el-Kurru (after Dunham 1950, figs 5 and 24b; Kendall 1999a, fig. 11).

The best preserved piece of the footed bowls depicts two wailing, kneeling women, opposite each other and in front of an offering stand (Figure 1) (Dunham 1950, 73, fig. 24b). Such bowls are well known from other Napatan cemeteries, as well as in Egypt, as far as the shape is concerned, but no parallels regarding the dec-

oration are yet known. This also holds true for the two-handled, painted jars – although the vessel form is common, no parallels with this particular style of decoration can be found.<sup>11</sup> The decoration which mainly

<sup>11</sup> Kendall 1999a, 22. For similar vessel types in Egypt see Heidorn 1994, 122.

features mummified gods and mourners seems to be “Egyptian” in style or at least inspired by Egyptian forms. It may be stressed that despite the mummified figures on the pottery vessels, there is no evidence for the practice of mummification in this early stage of use at el-Kurru.<sup>12</sup>

It remains unclear whether decorated sherds found at grave Ku. 13 (Dunham 1950, 51-53, figs 18a-d) are intrusive and originally belonged to Ku. 19,<sup>13</sup> or if they also attest to the breaking ritual at Ku. 13 and thus are within Generation C.<sup>14</sup> Another small sherd with a partly preserved human figure in white lines was recovered from Ku. 17, the tomb of King Piye (Dunham 1950, 65-66, fig. 22b (19-4-169)).

An interesting detail, which contributes to the ritual function of the painted ceramic vessels discovered at Ku. Tum 6 and Ku. 19, is that the red-slipped jars commonly had perforated bottoms.<sup>15</sup>

Ku. Tum. 6 yielded another very interesting find, a small faience label with Egyptian hieroglyphs (Dunham 1950, fig. 5d). These hieroglyphs clearly give a personal name, possibly the name of the tomb owner.<sup>16</sup> Interestingly, an indigenous meaning can be proposed for these hieroglyphs, as the non-Egyptian name includes the Meroitic adjective *mlo*, “good”.<sup>17</sup> This label, found associated with the smashed painted pottery at Ku. Tum. 6, might indicate the presence of Egyptian scribes<sup>18</sup> or at least of persons who were capable of writing Meroitic names in Egyptian hieroglyphs.<sup>19</sup>

Hieroglyphs appear also as incised marks on pottery vessels from Ku. 13 – e.g. common Egyptian hiero-

glyphs like  $\epsilon nh \ dd \ w3s$  are attested (Dunham 1950, 53, fig. 18c (19-3-902); Kendall 1999a, 28). Of special importance are two small sherds with partially preserved, incised hieroglyphic inscriptions (Figure 2), also recovered from Ku. 13 (Dunham 1950, 53, fig. 18c (19-3-903)). Both sherds seem to give the same inscrip-

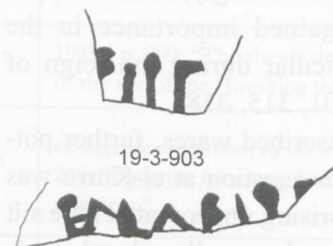


Figure 2. Two pottery sherds from el-Kurru with incised inscriptions naming a “High Priest of Shu” (after Dunham – 1950, fig. 18c).

tion which is better preserved on the larger fragment. Although a reading of the first two hieroglyphs as proposed by Kendall “*ntr 3*” ( $\text{𓏏} \text{𓏏}$ ) would be possible (Kendall 1999a, 28), an alternative reconstruction of the beginning of the inscription as  $\text{𓏏} \text{𓏏} \text{𓏏}$  is proposed here. It can thus be understood as a dedication giving the name and title of the donor (*jrj n NN...*), while only the priestly title *hm-ntr-tpj (n) šw*, *High Priest of Shu*,<sup>20</sup> is preserved. The personal name that originally followed this title is unfortunately partly broken off and not legible in the present state of documentation.<sup>21</sup> Such incised dedications are well known from Egypt, but, to my knowledge, are restricted to the 19<sup>th</sup> Dynasty and to the region of Abydos, embedded within the cultic sphere of rituals for Osiris.<sup>22</sup> What is striking about the sherds from el-Kurru, is that they are also referring to the Osirian priesthood at Abydos. Shu was very closely connected with Onuris, residing in Thinis, and thus part of the circle of gods at Abydos (see Spiegel 1973, 102-103; Leahy 1979) – a High Priest of Shu was

<sup>12</sup> See Kendall 1982, 23; Morkot 1993, 160; Yellin 1995, 245 with note 11; Kendall 1999a, 22 with note 28.

<sup>13</sup> Dunham 1950, 52; see also Heidorn 1994, 120 with n. 27 (a sherd with black painted decoration).

<sup>14</sup> Yellin 1995, 246 also refers to Ku. 14 as the find spot for these broken vessels; I was unable to find a confirmation for this in Dunham 1950.

<sup>15</sup> Kendall 1982, 22-23; Török 1995b, 35; Yellin 1995, 246, note 14; Kendall 1999a, 21. See also Dunham 1950, fig. 5d: the bottom of the amphora is indicated as broken off (here fig. 1, bottom right).

<sup>16</sup> Kendall 1999a, 22-23, 110, fig. 13. See also Morkot 1993, 158 and Török 1995a, 209 with references to Kendall.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Török 2009, 307 with a review of possible readings; most recently Zibelius-Chen 2011, 235 with an alternative interpretation.

<sup>18</sup> As proposed e.g. by Welsby 1996, 87.

<sup>19</sup> Kendall 1999a, 23; Török 2009, 307. Cf. also the example of the inscription of Queen Katimala at Semna with an apparent Meroitic name, see Darnell 2006, 61 and passim (note, however, that according to Zibelius-Chen 2011, 247-248 the Meroitic origin of Katimala is not proven).

<sup>20</sup> For the reading of the group  $\text{𓏏} \text{𓏏} \text{𓏏}$  as *hm-ntr šw* instead of *hm-ntr M3.t* see Effland and Effland 2004, 11, note 49.

<sup>21</sup> It has to be a short or abbreviated personal name, since the personal determinative ( $\text{𓏏}$ ) is preserved after two groups of signs only. The first sign might be read as  $\text{𓏏}$ , *ju* (for personal names beginning with *ju*, most common in the Middle Kingdom, see Ranke 1935, 15.14-25 and 16.1-4). The hieroglyph that follows as illustrated by Dunham (Dunham 1950, fig. 18c) has an angular top – possibly something like  $\text{𓏏}$  (*spd*), or  $\text{𓏏}$  (*thn*). However, since the accuracy of this illustration is not known, the reading must stay unclear for the moment. Examples for High Priests from the Ramesside Period who are attested at Abydos apart from Minmose (see below) are the High Priest of Osiris Yuyu ( $\text{𓏏} \text{𓏏} \text{𓏏}$ ; Kitchen 1982, 139,10-141,10) as well as the High Priest of Onuris Anhurmosé ( $\text{𓏏} \text{𓏏}$ ; Kitchen 1982, 141.13-147,6).

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Effland and Effland 2004; Effland 2010). I would like to thank Andreas Effland for the confirmation of this restricted distribution of such vessels.

likely to be in close contact with colleagues at the neighbouring cult centre of Osiris. Most importantly, Minmose, High Priest of Onuris under Ramesses II, who dedicated several votive vessels with incised inscriptions at Umm el-Qaab which represent the closest parallels for the sherds from el-Kurru,<sup>23</sup> is for example also *hm-ntr-tpj n Šw*.<sup>24</sup> Interestingly, Shu and especially Onuris-Shu again gained importance in the Kushite Kingdom, in particular during the reign of Taharqo (cf. Lohwasser 2001, 315, 318).

Besides decorated and inscribed wares, further pottery from the early tombs in question at el-Kurru was documented: a corpus comprising undecorated Nile silt and marl clay wares, imported as well as local products, open and closed forms. Unfortunately, a detailed description and a full statistical analysis of the material are still lacking, although L. Heidorn has published several previously unknown vessels in the Museum of Fine Art, Boston.<sup>25</sup> These vessels clearly illustrate early connections to Thebes, since some of them are Egyptian imports. The ceramics, including Phoenician storage vessels, were interpreted as supporting the short chronology at el-Kurru (see e.g. Kendall 1999b, 168), but this might be an illusion based on the still fragmented state of documentation – for example, no complete profiles of the round-bottomed and perforated jars have so far been published. According to their description, these vessels seem to find close parallels among the ceramic material from the Third Intermediate Period at Umm el-Qaab (late 10<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries BC, see below, 3.1).

<sup>23</sup> Note, however, that according to Kendall 1999a, 28, note 35: “both [sherds] derive probably from a single amphora and were incised directly beneath the handles”, whereas the fragments known from Abydos all come from bases of vessels (cf. Effland and Effland 2004). In general, the questions of the vessel shape and also of the fabric of the el-Kurru pieces remain unclear at the moment.

<sup>24</sup> Effland and Effland 2004, 5 and passim. The text on one of his votive vessels (UC 39678) can for example be reconstructed as follows: [*jr n hm-ntr Šw Mnw-]ms sn=f s3=f jmj-r3 njwt Btj [n šm<sup>c</sup>w mh<sup>w</sup> P3-R<sup>c</sup>-h<sup>tp</sup>]; “Dedicated by the Priest of Shu, Minmose, and his brother and son (in law), the Overseer of the Town, *Veziar of Upper and Lower Egypt, Parahotep*” (Effland and Effland 2004, 9, doc. III.6; recently with new joints Effland 2011, 23, fig. 35).*

<sup>25</sup> Heidorn 1994, figs 2-4. Timothy Kendall kindly told me after my ISNS 2010 lecture in London (which is related in this paper), that more ceramic material is still awaiting a detailed study in the magazines of the Boston Museum.

## 1.2 Possible implications of pot-breaking ceremonies at el-Kurru

The red colour, the breaking and especially the decoration with Egyptianizing funerary scenes were interpreted by some scholars as clear indications of an Egyptian influence on the early funerary practices at el-Kurru (Kendall 1982, 22-23; Török 1995a, 209; 1995b, 35). This was mainly explained by the possible presence of Egyptians among the Amun priests of Jebel Barkal (Kendall 1982, 23; Török 1995a, 211)<sup>26</sup> and thus affected the discussion of the Egyptian impact on the rise of the Kushite Kingdom, respectively the origins of the Napatan rulers and the still ongoing problems of chronology.

Table 1 summarizes the most significant interpretations of the pot-breaking ritual at el-Kurru. Especially the fact that parallels from contemporary Egypt seemed to be missing stimulated a lively discussion of the indigenous versus Egyptianized character of this particular ritual at the Kushite site.<sup>27</sup> Several scholars have proposed that the explanation of the material remains at Ku. Tum. 6 is the Egyptian ritual *sd dšr.wt*, but it was also labeled as indigenous tradition. Frequently the possibility of influence from, and a partial adoption of, Egyptian funerary practices was named (cf. Trigger 1976, 145; Török 1999, 155), recently described by Török as part of a “mixed Kushite-Egyptian character of the mortuary cult” (2009, 308).

However, a closer look at the available data testifies that an association with the Egyptian “Breaking of the Red Pots” is not obvious at all. The vessel types and the painted decoration definitely do not correspond to anything known in connection with this particular ritual in Egypt (see 2.1) (cf. Yellin 1995, 247-248). As will be discussed below however (3.), there are other contemporaneous pot-breaking rituals in Egypt that provide close parallels for el-Kurru.

## 2. POT-BREAKING CEREMONIES IN A BROADER PERSPECTIVE

To illustrate that the vessel types and the painted decoration at el-Kurru are different from what is

<sup>26</sup> For a summary of the theory on the priestly origin of the Napatan kings, including Breasted’s émigré-priest assumption, see Morkot 2003.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Yellin 1995, 246-248; Welsby 1996, 87; Török 1999, 156.

Table 1. Overview of the most relevant interpretations of the pot-breaking ceremonies at el-Kurru.

Author	Year	Interpretation	Comments
Tim Kendall	1982, 1992	<i>sd dšr.wt</i> ; <b>Egyptian</b> funerary custom; presence/influence of Amun priests	1982, 23: "The el-Kurru red pots, with their Egyptian-style painted figures, have no parallel either in Egypt or the Sudan."
Robert Morkot	1993	painted pottery by <b>Kushite artisan</b> , "trained in an Egyptian centre" (p. 165); no direct influence via priests	continuation of close relationship between Thebes and Napata after the NK
László Török	1995, 1999	<i>sd dšr.wt</i> ; <b>adoption</b> of elements of Egyptian religion; influence via priests	1995a, p. 209: "The sherds doubtless attest the performance of the rite of the "breaking the red pots" at the burials."
Janice Yellin	1995	<b>indigenous</b> tradition – parallels to <i>sd dšr.wt</i> as "coincidental"	cf. Meroitic tradition; <i>sd dšr.wt</i> not survived after NK; p. 248: "Egyptian forms are being used to express indigenous practices."
Derek Welsby	1996	<b>indigenous</b> tradition	cf. Yellin and other Nubian pot-breaking rituals (Kerma etc.)
Tim Kendall	1999	"Nubian" custom of "killing" pots <b>transformed</b> to Egyptian <i>sd dšr.wt</i> ; advice by Egyptians	p. 22, note 28: "an emergent cult of Osiris"
László Török	2009	Egyptian influence; p. 308 " <b>mixed Kushite-Egyptian</b> character of the mortuary cult"	Kushite tradition, with awareness of Egyptian rites ( <i>sd dšr.wt</i> having survived after NK)
Julia Budka	present study	pot-breaking not as <i>sd dšr.wt</i> , but as specific ritual in connection with ancestor/funerary cult: <b>innovative adaption</b> to Kushite funerary practice with possible Egyptian influence	close parallels for el-Kurru at Abydos from 9 <sup>th</sup> century BC; possible interactions between priesthood (cf. High Priest of Shu on sherd at el-Kurru)

attested in connection with the Egyptian *sd dšr.wt*, (cf. Yellin 1995, 247-248) a brief description of the Egyptian ritual follows.

## 2. 1 The Egyptian ritual "Breaking of the Red Pots" (*sd dšr.wt*)

The Egyptian ritual "Breaking of the Red Pots" is attested since the Old Kingdom in the Pyramid Texts (Spell 244, resp. Pyr. 249).<sup>28</sup> In total, the textual (cf. van Dijk 1993, 177-178), pictorial<sup>29</sup> and archaeological (van Dijk 1993, 174-177) evidence ranges from the Old Kingdom to Ptolemaic times.<sup>30</sup> Despite these attestations, there is still a discrepancy between the information provided by textual sources on the one hand and the archaeological remains on the other hand (cf. van Dijk 1986; 1993, 177). For example, the broken red

pots found at several tombs in the Theban necropolis differ in shape from vessels that are depicted on later tomb reliefs.<sup>31</sup> Contemporaneous textual or pictorial references for the *sd dšr.wt* are lacking, and thus these finds from tombs of the late 17<sup>th</sup>/early 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasties at Thebes are generally regarded as the clearest archaeological evidence for the ritual (cf. Seiler 2005, 180; Budka 2010a, 391-393). Indeed, the pots are a very specific kind of red-slipped vessels which commonly show "killing holes" in addition to their smashed state.<sup>32</sup> Associated with these red pots, incense burners were found in the Theban tombs and suggest the confirmation of the textual references that libation, burning and offerings are closely connected with the pot-breaking ritual (cf. Budka 2010a, 92 and 398-399, fig. 162).

A very good correspondence between the pictorial evidence and material proof of smashed pottery can be seen with finds in the New Kingdom elite tombs at

<sup>28</sup> Cf. van Dijk 1986; van Dijk 1993, 173-188; Ritner 1993, 144-147; Assmann 1994; el-Shohoumi 2004, 216-225; Seiler 2005, 170-184; Müller 2008, 341-343 and 360-362; Budka 2010a, 390-393.

<sup>29</sup> For possible pictorial evidence of this ritual cf. van Dijk 1993, 178-184; Barthelmeß 1992, 84; Feucht 2006, color pl. VI; for the deliberate smashing of pottery vessels in funerary context cf. Seiler 1995.

<sup>30</sup> Ritner 1993, 146 (Ptolemaic attestation); Seiler 2005, 170-184; Müller 2008, 361; Budka 2010a, 390.

<sup>31</sup> For the actual pots of the early 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty see Seiler 2005, 93, 177-184; Graefe 2005, 413-419; Graefe 2007, 53-54; Budka 2010a, 392, fig. 160; for funnel-necked jars as depicted on Ramesside tomb reliefs at Thebes cf. Feucht 2006, colour pl. VI.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Graefe 2005 who tries to argue that the "killing of vessels", the intentional perforation, is the older ritual than the smashing of vessels; his argument is based on variants of writing in the Pyramid Texts, but not totally convincing; cf. Budka 2010a, 392, fig. 160 for the same types of vessels like in Graefe 2005, but without "killing holes."

Saqqara, namely the ones of Paser and Horemhab.<sup>33</sup> Since a large quantity of red-slipped broken vessels were found in caches associated with these tombs, of the types that are depicted on the corresponding reliefs showing pot-breaking rituals as part of the funerary ritual, it seems very likely that actual remains of the *sd dšr.wt* have been found in these cases.<sup>34</sup>

The majority of the archaeological remains which are interpreted as evidence of the “Breaking of the Red Pots” can be dated to the New Kingdom, but recent excavation in TT 8 (Dra Abu el-Naga) recovered very similar deposits datable to the Libyan Period.<sup>35</sup>

Several problems concerning the precise character of the ritual still exist because the scattered archaeological evidence differs from the widespread information related according to the Egyptian texts. The written sources frequently associate it with execration texts and figures, but also with the funerary ceremony, the funerary meal and the like.<sup>36</sup> The most significant texts to illustrate this range of evidence for the ritual are PT 244 and CT 926. The spell from the pyramid text can be translated as follows: “This is the [firm] eye of [Horus]: it has been set for you that you may become powerful and he may become afraid of you. SMASHING THE REDWARE” (Allen 2005, 29). CT 926 refers directly to the deceased and gives him orders: “Wash yourself, sit down at the meal, put your hands on it; divert the god’s offerings, break the red pots, give cold water, purify the offering-tables ... Fire and incense are for NN...” (Ritner 1993, 145).

Thus, it can be demonstrated that the Egyptian ritual is associated with enemies, offerings and gods.<sup>37</sup> Apart from a singular evidence within the temple cult,<sup>38</sup> it belonged to the funerary practice of various times and settings, and was transferred from the royal to the pri-

vate sphere.<sup>39</sup> The colour red for the pots used in the ritual is not incidental, but supports its apotropaic aspects. There are strong negative connotations of the colour red, particularly because of its association with Seth, the enemy of Osiris and Horus, but also because of its resemblance to blood (cf. Ritner 1993, 147-148; Müller 2008, 361). All in all, the breaking ceremony within the Egyptian context holds a clear apotropaic character and the pots become substitutes for enemies.<sup>40</sup>

In sum, it seems very likely that there were various semantic layers and diverse levels of action associated with the “Breaking of the Red Pots.”<sup>41</sup> Its main functional aspect was clearly embedded within a rite of passage and is closely linked to the funerary rite (cf. in more detail Seiler 2005, 184).

## 2.2 Pot-breaking ceremonies in First Millennium Egypt: The “killing” and “breaking” of pots

It is sometimes overlooked that the *sd dšr.wt* is not the only pot-breaking ritual that is attested in Pharaonic Egypt, but is the most prominent because of textual references that actually name the ritual. Seiler has recently pointed out an Egyptological tendency to associate every ritual that involved the smashing of pottery vessels with the “Breaking of the Red Pots” (Seiler 2005, 178). However, the evidence itself is rather diverse and comprises deposits of smashed vessels of various types<sup>42</sup> as well as vessels with “killing holes”.<sup>43</sup> Since the breaking of pottery, and of objects in general, is a widespread funerary practice attested in various cultures throughout the world (see 2.3) (cf. van Dijk 1986, 1392; Yellin 1995, 247), it seems unlikely that the evidence in Egypt is restricted to a single phenomenon and can be summarised as one particular ritual throughout the ages (cf. Budka 2010a, 407). In support of this, a closer analysis reveals that for example, the context of “killed” pottery vessels is diverse and ranges from embalming caches, burial chambers, shafts and tomb superstructures to settlement deposits. Datable

<sup>33</sup> Bourriau and Aston 1985, 47-48; van Dijk 1993, 184-185; Bourriau *et al.* 2005, 9; Jambon 2009, 11; Arnold 2010, 2-13; Budka 2010a, 393.

<sup>34</sup> I would like to thank Christian Greco (Leiden, personal communication) for some additional information on latest finds at these tombs in Saqqara which support this interpretation. See also Aston 2011, 238-246 (deposit between tombs of Iniua and Horemheb).

<sup>35</sup> López Grande and Torrado de Gregorio 2008 (dated there erroneously to the 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty, see Budka 2010b, 55).

<sup>36</sup> See recently Jambon 2009; cf. as a summary Budka 2010a, 391-393.

<sup>37</sup> For the close link between offerings and the destruction of enemies see Quack 2006.

<sup>38</sup> For this “Breaking of the Red Pots” within the temple context (Amenhotep III, Luxor temple), see van Dijk 1993, 177-178; el-Shohoumi 2004, 221; Waitkus 2008, part I: 95, 98, 113, 168 and part II: 135.

<sup>39</sup> For the theory that the ritual was conducted during the New Kingdom after pharaoh’s burial as well see Arnold 2010, 12 and *passim*.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Assmann 1994; el-Shohoumi 2004, 224; Quack 2006; Budka 2010a, 393.

<sup>41</sup> See lately Seiler 2005, 180-184; Budka 2010a, 393. Cf. also Arnold 2010, 72.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. e.g. Polz 1996, 237, pl. 44b; Brissaud and Zivie-Coche 2000, 105.

<sup>43</sup> See Budka 2010a, 407 with references to Graefe 2007, 51-52 who tries to interpret such “killing holes” as the early variant of the ritual “Breaking of the Red Pots” (cf. note 32 above).

examples span from the Old Kingdom to Ptolemaic times and originate from Lower and Upper Egypt as far upstream as the Fourth Cataract (cf. Budka 2010a, 407-409). The vessel types are multiple and include open as well as closed forms, decorated wares and imported vessels as well as common domestic and funerary shapes. The only feature that these pots have in common is the “killing hole” which might have had the shared function to render the vessel “useless” (Budka 2010a, 412).

As was recently pointed out by Seiler it is also important to distinguish between the breaking as a ritual act or as a post-ritual breaking (Seiler 2005, 178; Budka 2010a, 408). For both, disablement appears to be the primary intention; within the archaeological record, however, it is almost impossible to make this distinction (cf. Budka 2010a, 408-409 with some examples). The broken sherds found at el-Kurru are generally thought to attest a post-ritual breaking (see above), whereas the *sd dšr.wt* seems to be a ritual act itself according to the textual sources.

Interestingly, many examples of “killed” pottery vessels can be dated to the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC, both in Egypt and Sudan, and are thus close in date to the evidence at el-Kurru. The following, more or less contemporaneous examples can be cited from royal and elite contexts in Egypt and illustrate the wide range of evidence apart from smashed red ware. In Heracleopolis, “a magical ritual of the breaking of jars” (Pérez Die 2009, 319; cf. Budka 2010b, 54) is attested associated with the tombs of the Third Intermediate Period. In a corridor between two structures, a large number of smashed beer jars was found.<sup>44</sup> The vessel types indicate a typical offering deposit which has many parallels, especially in temple and funerary contexts in the New Kingdom (cf. Budka 2006, 109-112), but also at the presumed tomb of Osiris at Umm el-Qaab (Budka 2010b, 54). Although these broken vessels at Heracleopolis obviously played a role in the funeral rites, they do not precisely recall the “Breaking of the Red Pots”.

At Medinet Habu, ceramic vessels were smashed in connection with the burial of the God’s wife of Amun, Shepenupet I.<sup>45</sup> The range of vessel types is wide and includes plates and bowls as well as large jars. Since the funeral was probably conducted during the tenure of Amenirdis I, one might even speculate about a possible Kushite influence for this ritual (Yellin 1995,

247). This deposit at Medinet Habu is definitely closely comparable to the discoveries at el-Kurru, but cannot be identified with a known ritual, also not as the *sd dšr.wt*.

Among the Late Period elite tombs at Saqqara, the burial place of Wahibramen was recently interpreted as evidence for a revival of the ritual “Breaking of the Red Pots” in the 26<sup>th</sup> Dynasty (Stammers 2009, 86). This may again serve as a typical example that within Egyptology every smashing of pottery is readily identified as the *sd dšr.wt*. In the case of Wahibramen, a package of pot sherds and resin was found between the inner wooden coffin and the outer stone sarcophagus (Stammers 2009, 106) – an assemblage without clear parallels which cannot be equated with textual descriptions of the ritual.

To conclude, there is no universal interpretation of the archaeological evidence for pot-breaking ceremonies in 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC Egypt. Most of them are connected with funerary practice, a funerary banquet or offering for the deceased. The precise identification of a specific ritual is most often dependent on written sources, but one should be careful about applying such a method *vice versa* and to interpret an archaeological record because of texts that are not specifically linked to this record (cf. Seiler 2005, 52 and 169-184). In general, a variable kind of actions must be considered for the ritual breaking of objects – apotropaic aspects which can be safely assumed for the *sd dšr.wt* were for sure common, but are not universal and the only possible explanation.

### 2.3 Selected pot-breaking ceremonies elsewhere

Breaking objects and especially pottery vessels is a well attested custom throughout the ages and in various parts of the ancient and modern world.<sup>46</sup> Numerous examples illustrate that the ritual breaking or “killing” is neither limited to ancient times nor to a single explanation.<sup>47</sup> Especially within the funerary context, there are various possible motivations, comprising anger, grief and fear but also including specific rituals as for example potlatch ceremonies.<sup>48</sup> In general, funerary banquets are common features in various cultures and

<sup>44</sup> See López Grande, Quesada Sanz and Molinero Polo 1995, 75-76 and fig. 30.

<sup>45</sup> Heidorn 1994, 122, note 30; Yellin 1995, 247; Török 1999, 306.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Grinsell 1975, 60-67; van Dijk 1993, 185; Yellin 1995, 247; Budka 2010a, 407.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. Grinsell 1975, 60-67; Meyer-Orlac 1982, 54-56, 317-318; el-Shohoumi 2004, 216-226.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. Meyer-Orlac 1982, 54-56, 317-318; Wotzka 1993, 269 and Budka 2010a, 407-408 with further references.

such banquets frequently resulted in assemblages of broken vessels within the archaeological record. For example, pot-breaking rituals associated with feasting in the Phoenician funerary cult were recently re-examined by P. C. Schmitz.<sup>49</sup> Interestingly, he also discusses a possible Egyptian influence in the Phoenician practice of smashing tableware at the funeral.

Irrespective of the evidence at el-Kurru, an indigenous tradition of breaking ceramics at the funeral can be found in Nubia, especially at graves of the Kerma culture and in later times at Meroitic funerary places (Yellin 1995, 248; Welsby 1996, 87). In addition, the “killing of pots” is well attested at Nubian and Napatan sites (Budka 2010a, 409 with refs). At Sanam, a high percentage of pottery vessels found in the Napatan cemetery was intentionally perforated in their lower parts.<sup>50</sup>

Various pot-breaking ceremonies are also attested in modern Egypt (el-Shohoumi 2004, 82-85). El-Shohoumi has compared these rituals which are attested within the framework of funerals, weddings and fertility cults but also as an act of personal hatred, with the evidence in Pharaonic Egypt. She has named the “Breaking of the Red Pots” at the funeral as a striking parallel for apotropaic rituals in both ancient and modern times (el-Shohoumi 2004, 224-225). As in Egypt, breaking ceremonies are also well known in modern Sudan. Interestingly, sometimes these rituals which are mostly connected with fertility cults, take place at ancient monuments like tumulus graves and other holy places (Budka 2010c, 128).

### 3. NEW EVIDENCE FOR POT-BREAKING RITUALS FROM ABYDOS, UMM EL-QAAB

In order to try to put the evidence from el-Kurru back into its context, I will now refer to new discoveries at Abydos, from the royal cemetery of Umm el-Qaab. Abydos was an important necropolis during much of Egyptian history and also during the Libyan and Kushite periods: members of the royal families were buried there as well as high, including Theban,

officials.<sup>51</sup> Due to its important role as cult centre of Osiris, the site was also attractive for non-locals. Several types of tombs are attested following the period of the New Kingdom. Notable are pyramid tombs which refer to a much older tradition and show both associations with local types as well as with contemporary cemeteries in Nubia.<sup>52</sup>

#### 3.1 Ceramic evidence for rituals at the tomb of Osiris, Umm el-Qaab

The tomb of Djer as the presumed tomb of Osiris is currently being re-excavated by the German Archaeological Institute, Cairo and yields important ceramic evidence (Effland and Effland 2006; Effland *et al.* 2010). Although the amounts of pottery deposited at Umm el-Qaab around the Early Dynastic royal tombs are innumerable, a detailed study of the material which has been in progress since 2008 has revealed certain prime periods of use (Budka 2010b; 2010d).

The major types of the pottery offered to Osiris at Umm el-Qaab are beer jars, so-called *qaabs* and several types of jars (Budka 2010b; 2010d). From the 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty, “killed” red-polished bottles and beakers were recovered that find close parallels in contemporary Theban tombs where they have been associated with the *sd dšr.wt* (see above, 2.1). This evidence raises interesting questions for the ritual since at Abydos it was not part of a real burial and funerary ceremony, but must have taken place during the celebration of the ‘mysteries’ for Osiris (see Budka 2010d). This may serve as an example to illustrate that our understanding of this famous ritual in Egypt is far from complete. “Killing holes” as in the red pots are common features at Umm el-Qaab. Such perforations are attested there for various types of vessels dating from the Second Intermediate Period until the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC. In addition and sometimes associated with “killing holes”, many New Kingdom and Late Period examples show splatters of red paint which might have an apotropaic meaning as well (Budka 2010d).

At the tomb of Osiris at Umm el-Qaab, there was a first peak of activity during the Ramesside period and an increase and revival in cultic activity took place at the site especially during the 25<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> Dynasty. The remains that were produced during the so-called Third Intermediate Period are substantial as well (cf. Effland

<sup>49</sup> Schmitz (in press). I would like to thank P. C. Schmitz for bringing these feasting rituals to my attention, for a fruitful discussion about pot-breaking ceremonies in the Ancient World and especially for sending me a pre-print version of his publication.

<sup>50</sup> Lohwasser 2010, 84: 10% of the vessels was “deliberately damaged by drilling a hole.”

<sup>51</sup> Leahy 1977; 1994; Aston 2009, 141-152; O’Connor 2009, 126; Budka 2010a; 2012.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. Aston 2009, 410; Budka 2012.



2010). Within the ceramic repertoire of the Libyan Period, the most common type is a large ovoid, round-bottomed jar (Budka 2010b, 52-55, fig. 14). Most of these bottles show a pierced bottom, created during the production of the vessels, and a thin layer of mud on the interior (Figure 3). Whether actual libations at the

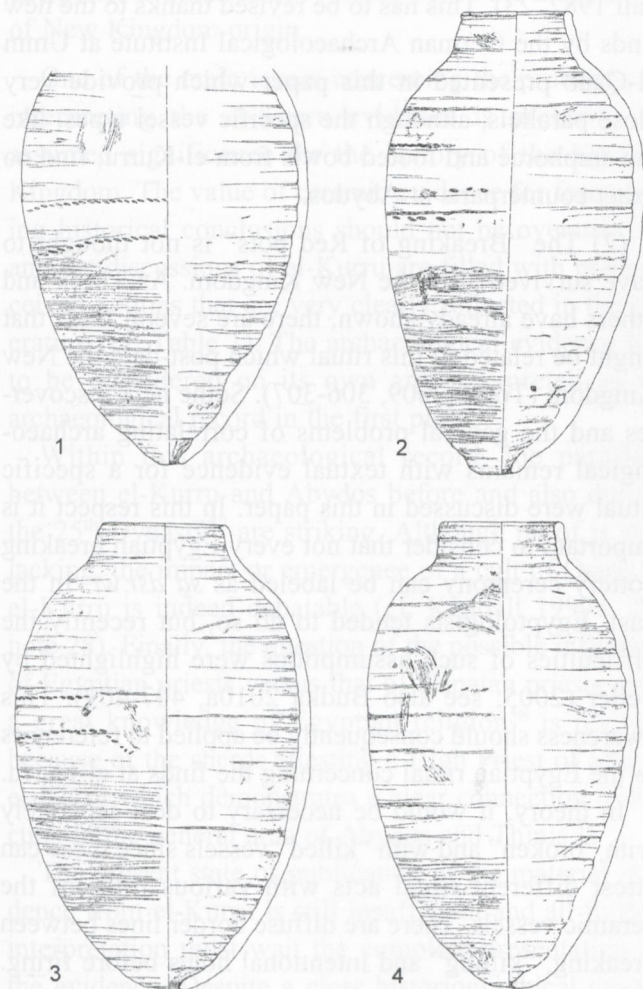


Figure 3. Typical red washed offering jars from Umm el-Qaab, Libyan Period, with perforated bottoms.

tomb of Osiris or the ritual aspect of these acts and a symbolic value of an otherwise non-functional vessel were in the foreground remains an open question for the moment (Budka 2010b, 53-54). This can be compared to the evidence at el-Kurru, where a large group of vessels is said to have had a hole pierced in their bases prior to firing (cf. Kendall 1982, 22-23 and above). Yellin has already suggested that the perforations in the bottoms of these vessels at el-Kurru might be explained in connection with libation and offering, rather than as “killing holes” (Yellin 1995, 246). The evidence at Abydos might support this suggestion. In this respect it is striking that these common Libyan beer bottles from Umm el-Qaab which follow a New

Kingdom tradition of jars, find close parallels in red-slipped pottery jars from Napatan tombs at Hillat el-Arab (e.g. Vincetelli 2006, fig. 2.96 and passim). Since none of the perforated vessels from el-Kurru have so far been published, a likeness similar to these must remain hypothetical for the moment.

Although the functional use of the vessels at the Tomb of Osiris is likely to have been complex, some aspects can be highlighted for the Libyan Period. The largest quantity of votive vessels deposited at Umm el-Qaab falls into the category of red-slipped vessels with a hole in the bottom, possibly used for ritual libation. In addition, special vessels with painted decoration are known from Umm el-Qaab (Plates 1 and 2). As succes-



Plate 1. Fragment of painted jar from the tomb of Osiris (T-NNO; with mummified figures of Osiris and Horus without texts, © German Archaeological Institute Cairo).



Plate 2. Fragment of painted jar from the tomb of Osiris (O-HN-BO and O-O; with mummified figures of Osiris, Har-nedj-itef (Horus the Avenger) and Isis, with accompanying texts, © German Archaeological Institute Cairo).

sors to similar pieces from the New Kingdom with incised decoration showing priests in adoration of Osiris and other gods, these jars picture mummified figures/gods and they bear cartouches and short texts.<sup>53</sup> The inscribed pieces either give royal names or the names of Theban High Priests of Amun. They can thus be safely dated to the Libyan Period, in particular to the late 21<sup>st</sup> Dynasty up to the middle of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Dynasty (c. 960-800 BC) (Effland 2010). All of these jars were red-slipped and none were found complete. There are good reasons to assume that these vessels have been deliberately broken at the site. Thus, within the context of the cult for Osiris, an apotropaic ritual can be proposed for which we still lack the precise name.<sup>54</sup>

Several variants of offering scenes occur on the pottery vessels from the Tomb of Osiris (Plates 1 and 2) (Effland 2010). All of the examples datable to the Third Intermediate Period are painted and none are incised. They are painted in black with white outlines and show mummified gods and human figures, thus they closely parallel the el-Kurru pieces.<sup>55</sup>

Plenty of evidence for hieroglyphic incised inscriptions on pottery vessels comes from Ramesside activities at Umm el-Qaab, especially from the time of Ramesses II (Effland and Effland 2004; Effland 2010; 2011). Thanks to these texts the persons who dedicated the vessels are known by name and title – several High Priests of Osiris and Shu are connected with this very special kind of ritual vessel. Minmose is one of the most prominent donors.<sup>56</sup> The two small fragments from Ku. Tum. 6 (Figure 2) are very similar and actually form the only known parallels for the votive vessels from Abydos which were used as ritual vessels for Osiris.

<sup>53</sup> On some of the New Kingdom vessels, shaped like the hieroglyph *jb* (𓂏, F34, heart), long ritual texts have been incised, see Effland 2010; Effland (forth.).

<sup>54</sup> This is similar to finds from the New Kingdom where both archaeological and textual evidence for “Rituals of Awakening Osiris” and the “Breaking of the Red Pots” are attested at Umm el-Qaab; cf. Budka 2010d; Effland 2010; Effland (forth.).

<sup>55</sup> Small fragments of sherds with painted decoration were also found at the tomb of Paser (Martin 1985, 20-22, 47-48, pl. 33, see also Heidorn 1994, 122, note 30). Since the date of these pieces is still unclear and they are more likely to be similar to *ostraca*, thus painted after the original vessel had been broken, I am hesitant to include this find as an additional parallel (as proposed by Török 2009, 307).

<sup>56</sup> See above and Effland and Effland 2004.

#### 4. CONCLUDING REMARKS

To conclude, I would like to re-examine some common presumptions for interpreting the el-Kurru pottery.

(1) It was stated that the broken red ware at el-Kurru finds “no parallel either in Egypt or the Sudan” (Kendall 1982, 23). This has to be revised thanks to the new finds by the German Archaeological Institute at Umm el-Qaab presented in this paper which provide very close parallels, although the specific vessel types, like the amphorae and footed bowls from el-Kurru, find no exact counterparts at Abydos.

(2) The “Breaking of Red pots” is not thought to have survived after the New Kingdom. As Török and others have already shown, there are several finds that might be related to this ritual which post-date the New Kingdom (Török 2009, 306-307). Some new discoveries and the general problems of correlating archaeological remains with textual evidence for a specific ritual were discussed in this paper. In this respect it is important to consider that not every Egyptian breaking pottery ceremony can be labeled as *sd dšr.wt*. In the past, Egyptologists tended to do so, but recently the difficulties of such assumptions were highlighted by Seiler (2005; see also Budka 2010a, 407-409). This awareness should consequently be applied to references to the Egyptian ritual concerning the finds at el-Kurru.

In theory, it would be necessary to deal separately with “broken” and with “killed” vessels since these can attest different ritual acts with various roles of the ceramic vessels. There are diffuse border lines between breaking, “killing” and intentional holes before firing. Abundant evidence for all of these rites in both Egypt and Sudan exists during various time periods. We must not summarize all of these acts under the label “Breaking of the Red Pots” or as a possible adaptation of this ritual (cf. Török 2009, 307). Not every breaking of pottery has to bear apotropaic meaning like the well attested *sd dšr.wt*. Considering the archaeological setting and the ceramic types in the first place, the el-Kurru practice cannot be identified as *sd-dšr.wt*: there are too many differences and textual information for a possible identification is missing.

(3) The pot-breaking rite at el-Kurru must be indigenous because of its date and missing parallels (cf. Table 1). Because of the new data from Egypt during the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC, this assumption has to be revised. The sherds from Abydos are safely dated to the

Libyan Period, in particular to the late 10<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries (c. 950-800 BC) (Effland *et al.* 2010). Thus, the parallels from Abydos could also support a date of the el-Kurru pieces within Török's 'long' chronology of the cemetery. In addition, the fragments of jars with an incised dedication by a High Priest of Shu fall into the categories of finds from el-Kurru which are likely to be of New Kingdom origin.

One of the main issues concerning the problems of interpreting the el-Kurru evidence is probably its assumed significance for the history of the Kushite Kingdom. The value of ceramic evidence for formulating historical conclusions should not be overstressed and the discussions of el-Kurru are filled with preconceived notions that are very clearly reflected in the literature (cf. Table 1). The archaeological evidence has to be considered on its own and interpreted as an archaeological record in the first place.

Within this archaeological record, the parallels between el-Kurru and Abydos before and also during the 25<sup>th</sup> Dynasty<sup>57</sup> are striking. Although proof is still lacking, the impact or emergence of a cult of Osiris at el-Kurru is indeed debatable (cf. Kendall 1999a, 22, note 28). Finally, the question of the possible influence of Egyptian priests versus that of Napatan priests with a great knowledge of Egyptian religion<sup>58</sup> is revived because of the sherds attesting a High Priest of Shu at el-Kurru which demonstrates a clear connection to the cults in the general area of Abydos and Thinis.<sup>59</sup>

The present state of publication of the material evidence from el-Kurru is still insufficient and all further interpretation must wait the complete presentation of the evidence. Despite a clear historiographical caveat in interpreting Kushite history once again from an Egypt-centered perspective, the present archaeological evidence at el-Kurru and Abydos suggest a close connection between Third Intermediate Egypt and the early Kushite state, in particular between Egyptian priests and people buried at el-Kurru before the 25<sup>th</sup> Dynasty.<sup>60</sup>

The site at Abydos has not failed to astonish by means of unexpected finds regarding various periods of Pharaonic history in the recent past.<sup>61</sup> Thus, it would come as no surprise if additional textual and archaeological evidence for the cult of Osiris during the Third Intermediate Period might be recovered in the coming seasons of the German Archaeological Institute, potentially confirming the ritual connections between Abydos, Thebes and el-Kurru already suggested by means of the as yet incomplete ceramic evidence.

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- <sup>57</sup> Cf. also references to Thebes and Abydos at Nuri (tomb of Taharqa) and Jebel Barkal, see e.g. Kendall 2002; Kendall 2008 and his homepage, <http://www.jebelbarkal.org/> (especially III. Religious/Political Significance).
- <sup>58</sup> Cf. Török 1995b; Niwinski 1995, 348; Welsby 1996, 14; Morkot 2003; Darnell 2006, 57; Török 2009, 307.
- <sup>59</sup> Connections between the Kushite and Theban priesthood during the 25<sup>th</sup> Dynasty are well known; cf. note 4 above and Niwinski 1995, 348; Darnell 2006, 57 and 61-62; Budka 2012.
- <sup>60</sup> Cf. Darnell 2006, 62 for "the overwhelming legitimizing importance of the cult of Amun for the independent rulers of 1<sup>st</sup> millennium Nubia."
- <sup>61</sup> Cf. recently O'Connor 2009, *passim*.

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