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Egyptian Pottery Found in Kerma Ancien, Kerma Moyen and Kerma Classique Graves at Kerma

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The difficulty anyone faces in studying Egyptian pottery from Kerma contexts, whether graves or settlements, is identifying it in existing reports. There are two main reasons: the influence of Reisner and the skill of the Kerma potters. Reisner's typology (Reisner 1923, 320-504) was built upon a hierarchy of attributes in which colour and surface treatment came first, followed by fabric, shape and size. His failure to incorporate the technological differences between Egyptian and Nubian pottery into his classification often resulted in the inclusion of both in a type class. Where the Kerma potters set out to imitate imported Egyptian vessels (Dunham 1982, 249, type C1), it is often impossible to distinguish Egyptian from Nubian vessels from the publication alone. Unfortunately, Reisner's approach became a model for future publications and only now is its grip weakening.

This paper has therefore been based upon a study of the actual pottery from Kerma Ancien and Kerma Moyen graves from the excavations of the University of Geneva under Charles Bonnet. All the sherds and many whole vessels (those in the Museum of Art and History in Geneva) are available and have been studied by the author. I have to thank Charles Bonnet who invited me to study this material, and Béatrice Privati who showed it to me, made the drawings and discussed them with me in the course of three most enjoyable exchanges in Cambridge and Geneva. Béatrice Privati's pencil drawings were inked by Will Schenck. My thanks go too to Jean-Luc Chappas at the Museum of Art and History for his collaboration. Some whole vessels still in the Sudan have been studied from drawings only but the corpus contains so few types that these can be identified with some confidence.

Béatrice Privati, in her paper in this volume, has analysed the Nubian pottery from these graves, and on the basis of this analysis has divided Kerma Ancien into three chronological phases, I-III, with a transitional phase IV between Kerma Ancien and Kerma Moyen. Kerma Moyen has been divided into 8 phases, I-VIII, and the relatively small number of Kerma Classique graves in the cemetery into 2 phases, I-II, which are contemporary respectively with Tumuli XVI, XIX, XX and XXI and with some subsidiary tombs in Tumulus X, excavated by Reisner.

In the present article I examine the Egyptian imported pottery in Béatrice Privati's phases and offer chronological observations. The references to Egyptian fabrics use the Vienna System (Nordström and Bourriau 1993, 168-82) for ease of comparison with pottery from sites like Dahshur, Lisht and el Tarif where pottery from groups dateable by reference to royal monuments is to be found. Marl A2, Marl A3 and Marl B derive from Upper Egyptian marl clays, whereas Marl C derives from Lower Egyptian sources (Arnold 1981, 167-91). This pottery was reaching Kerma indirectly, via intermediaries which from Dynasty XII onwards would have included the Egyptian cataract forts. We must therefore allow a considerable time lag between the dispatch of a pottery vessel from Egypt and its arrival in a grave at Kerma. In addition to being dateable, this pottery, through its fabric, shape and technology, can be assigned to an Upper or Lower Egyptian origin, and this tells us something about the pattern of trade and contact between Egypt and Kerma throughout this whole period.

On the evidence of the Egyptian pottery alone, Kerma Ancien belongs to a period from Dynasty V to the beginning of Dynasty XII, when the transition to Kerma Moyen occurs. Kerma Moyen dates to the XIIth and XIIIth Dynasties. Kerma Classique begins in the early Second Intermediate Period. The graves do not continue to the end of Kerma Classique, and Nubian pottery in graves in Sector 19, the latest in Béatrice Privati's sequence, parallels that in some subsidiary tombs in Tumulus X. The imports are most

plentiful in the last three phases of Kerma Moyen (VI-VIII), and there is a conspicuous increase in ceramics originating in Lower Egypt from the mid-XIIth Dynasty to the early Second Intermediate Period, when this sequence ends.

SEQUENCE

Kerma Ancien I Sectors CE 1, 3. Fig 1: 1

Date suggested by imports: Dynasty V to Dynasty XI. *Source:* Upper and Lower Egypt.

Graves in Sector 1 produced five body sherds and one rim sherd: two body sherds were of Marl A2 and three of Marl A3 fabric, four showing fine rilling lines on the interior indicative of throwing. The rim sherd [Fig. 1: 1] is of Marl C and was hand made, probably by coiling. No Egyptian pottery was found in Sector 3.

The date suggested for this group of imports depends upon four pieces of evidence, none of which is alone sufficient to support the date:

- 1: The use of the wheel, revealed by the fine rilling lines. The lines are not quite proof of the use of a wheel in the manner illustrated by the potter in the tomb of Ti (Arnold 1993, 31-4), since the body sherds are too small to show the interior spiral.
- 2: The use of a Marl C fabric, the earliest occurrence of which, known to the author, is in Dynasty IV (Nordström and Bourriau 1993, 180).
- 3: The use of the very fine Upper Egyptian marl clay, Marl A3. Present knowledge suggests this clay source was first exploited in Dynasty XI (Arnold 1981, 169-171).
- 4: The shape of the jar rim [fig. 1: 1] which suggests a parallel to Rifeh (Petrie 1907, Pl. XIII A, 21 and 36) and Sedment (Petrie and Brunton 1924, pl. XXXII, 62 C). Vessels of this shape can be made in Marl C and have been seen by the author at South Saqqara in the Pyramid complex of Pepi II, in a VIth Dynasty context.

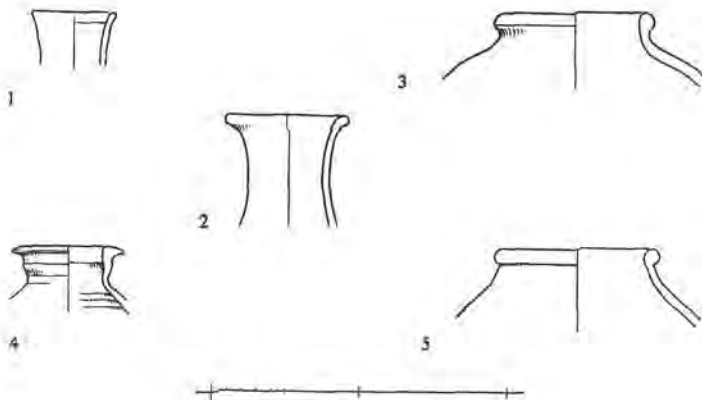


Fig. 1. Kerma Ancien I. 1: CE 1. Marl C.
Kerma Ancien II, 2: CE 5. Marl A3; 3-5: CE 23. Marl A2.

Kerma Ancien II Sectors CE 5, 23. Fig. 1: 2-5.

Date suggested by imports: Dynasty V to beginning of Dynasty XII (?). *Source:* Upper and Lower Egypt.

Apart from four body sherds of Marl C jars from Sector 23, grave 228, all the surviving Egyptian pottery derives from Marl A2 and Marl A3 jars [fig.1:2-5]. The rim and neck [fig. 1: 2] from its shape, fabric and technology may belong to the same general type as the complete vessel [Fig. 2] in the next phase.

Kerma Ancien III Sectors CE 7, 23. Fig. 2.

Date suggested by imports: Beginning of Dynasty XII (?). *Source:* Upper Egypt.

A single vessel from grave 79 has been reported. From the description and drawing the fabric appears to be Marl A3 and the technology indicates a coil built neck luted on to a hand made body, but the vessel, which is in the Sudan, has not been seen by the author. No precise parallel from Egypt has been published but there are similar vessels from El Kab, seemingly of early XIIIth Dynasty date (Quibell 1898, pl. XVI, 70-1). The author has had the opportunity of examining the large collection from the Middle Kingdom tombs at El Kab, now in the Petrie Collection, University College, London, with kind permission of Barbara Adams, the Curator, and can confirm that the two parallels cited are also of Marl A3 fabric.

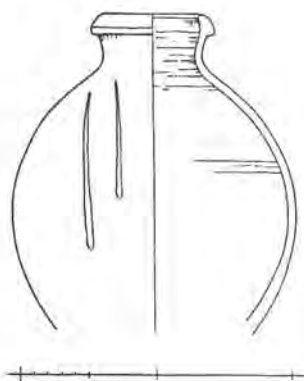


Fig. 2. Kerma Ancien III. CE 7. T79.
Marl A3 unconfirmed.

Kerma Ancien IV Sectors CE 8, 9. Figs. 3, 4.

Date suggested by imports: Beginning of Dynasty XII. *Source:* Upper Egypt.

At this point in the sequence, the transition from Kerma Ancien to Kerma Moyen, the introduction of a new type, the wheel thrown ovoid/globular jar, in Marl A2 fabric, can be seen. There is a long series of such jars, from this phase until Kerma Moyen VI. They have parallels at el-Kab, Beni Hasan and Karnak North (Bourriau 1981a, no.124). They were carefully imitated by Kerma potters (Bonnet 1990, no.183), who reproduced the shape and surface appearance with great skill. However, the smaller size, different manufacturing technique and fabric give the imitations away. Publications which rely upon shape alone to separate one type from another do not enable the reader to make this fundamental distinction between the products of Egyptian and Nubian potters.

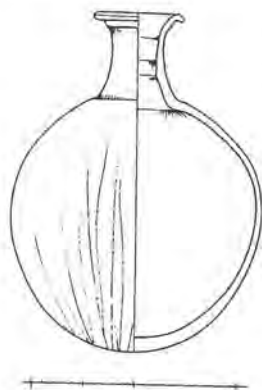


Fig. 3 Kerma Ancien IV. CE 8,
T85. Marl A2.

The starting point for the ovoid/globular jar is not at present absolutely clear from contexts in Upper Egypt; however, a recently excavated settlement of the early XIIIth Dynasty at Tell el Dab'a (Ezbet Rushdi) has revealed one such jar. The settlement has been dated by Bietak to the reign of Amenemhet II (Bietak and

Dorner 1998, 15) and from it came, in addition to the jar, two familiar types from Lower Egypt [fig. 4]. The ovoid jar [fig. 4: 3] is an excellent match for the jar from Sector 8, grave 85, at Kerma [fig. 3]. The fabric is described by Czerny (Czerny 1998, 44-5) as Marl A4. All the Kerma examples examined by the author were unequivocally Marl A2 fabric, and this is important evidence for linking the jars to a series

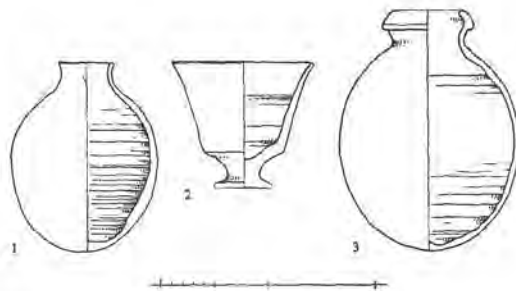


Fig. 4. Pottery from current excavations at Tell el Dab'a, Ezbet Rushdi. Beginning of Dynasty XII. (Courtesy of M. Bietak and E. Czerny).

with a history from the Middle Kingdom to the early New Kingdom, as discussed below. However, among the parallels from El Kab in the Petrie Collection was one jar of Marl A3, indicating that more than one fabric was used for them. The identification of Marl A3 and Marl A2 fabrics as of Upper Egyptian origin is secure, but the source of Marl A4, if it had a single source, is not known. I am most grateful to M. Bietak and E. Czerny for providing the drawings for fig.4 and giving me permission to reproduce them here.

Apart from the jar, the other imports are represented by body sherds of Marl A3 vessels, also from Upper Egypt. In fact, from Kerma Ancien III to Kerma Moyen III inclusive, all the imports are from Upper Egypt, except for one Marl C body sherd in a Kerma Moyen I context.

Kerma Moyen I Sectors CE 11, 25. Fig. 5.

Date suggested by imports: Early Dynasty XII. Source: Upper and Lower Egypt.

As well as the dominance of Upper Egyptian products, the number and range of imports in Kerma Moyen I shows a striking increase. Remains of 11 vessels were found, or 17 if those found on the surface of the graves are included. In contrast, the whole of Kerma Ancien, phases I-IV, produced sherds from only 17 vessels. For the first time, the types extend beyond storage jars [fig. 5: 2] to include tableware: a water jar from grave 115 in Sector 11 [fig. 5: 1]; a pot stand from grave 114 in Sector 11; and an open form: a body-sherd of a large bowl with zigzag incised decoration on the interior, from grave 230 in Sector 25. This last was in Marl B fabric, of Upper Egyptian origin (cf. a slightly later example, Bourriau 1981a, no. 101), showing a further extension of the repertoire. It seems inescapable that the increase in contacts between Egypt (especially Upper Egypt) and Kerma, which this pottery reflects, is associated with the policy seen in the building of the Second Cataract forts to control the river and desert routes between Egypt and Nubia.



Fig. 5. Kerma Moyen I. CE 11, T115. Marl A3; CE 25, T240. Marl A2.

Kerma Moyen II Sector CE 12. Fig. 6.

Date suggested by imports: Early Dynasty XII. *Source:* Upper Egypt.

The imports consist of one water jar [fig. 6: 1] in Marl A3 (cf. Bourriau 1981a, no. 131) and 2 globular jars [fig. 6: 2, 3] in Marl A2. The picture is unchanged from that suggested by the imports in Kerma Moyen I.

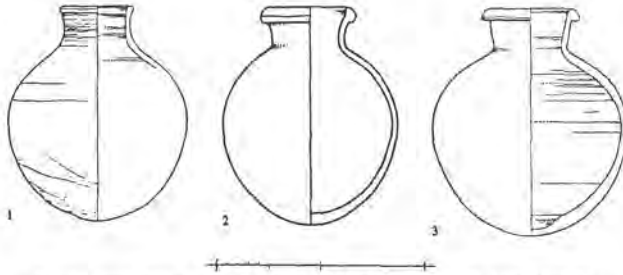


Fig. 6. Kerma Moyen II. 1: CE 12, T132, Marl A3; 2-3: T119, T246 Marl A2.

Kerma Moyen III Sectors CE 10, 13. Fig. 7.

Date suggested by imports: Early to mid-Dynasty XII. *Source:* Upper Egypt.

The imports consist entirely of globular jars of Marl A2 fabric, 5 vessels in all, apart from the body sherd of a Marl A3 jar from grave 126 in Sector 13. The inspiration for the Egyptian jars may have been cosmetic vessels made of calcite (Bonnet 1990, 192, no.184). Careful firing to produce an even white or grey surface combined with burnishing to produce a smooth, glossy surface is characteristic. One may speculate that the imitation of stone vessels arose from a shared function. Contents often survive and although no analyses have been carried out, an aromatic cream or oil, rather than food, may be suggested.

One jar [fig. 7: 3] has a possible parallel among pottery from Dahshur, Sector 6. The starting point for the Dahshur group is the reign of Amenemhet III (Arnold 1982, Fig. 8: 11), and on this basis the imports in Kerma Moyen III may be thought to extend into that reign.

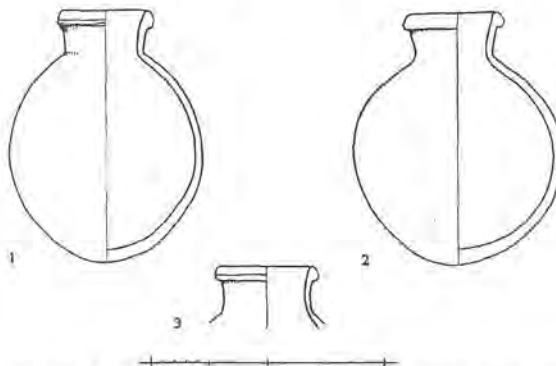


Fig. 7. Kerma Moyen III. CE 10, T107 Marl A2; CE 13, T125 Marl A2; CE 10, T93 Marl A2.

Kerma Moyen IV Sectors CE 20, 21. Fig. 8.

Date suggested by imports: Early to mid Dynasty XII. *Source:* Upper and Lower Egypt.

The ovoid/globular jars in Marl A2 still dominate the imports and are the only types present in Sector 20, but grave 189 in Sector 21 contained the neck of a corrugated-necked jar in Marl C [fig. 8: 5]. This sherd, as well as signalling an import from Lower Egypt, belongs to a class [fig. 9] which can be fairly closely dated. The earliest example is from the burial of Sit-Hathor-Yunet (daughter of Senwosret II) and the latest occurs among the Sector 7 material at Dahshur, dated by the excavators to the Second Intermediate Period (Arnold 1982, Fig. 11: 7). From this time until the end of Béatrice Privati's sequence, imports come from both Upper and Lower Egypt.

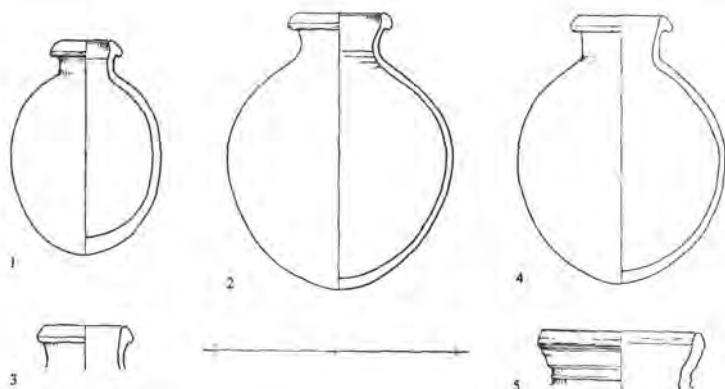


Fig. 8. Kerma Moyen IV: 1-3: CE 20, T188, T187, T183, Marl A2; 4-5, CE 21, T189, Marl A2, Marl C.

Kerma Moyen V Sectors 15, 24 Figs. 9, 10.

Date suggested by imports: Mid-Dynasty XII to early Dynasty XIII.

Source: Upper and Lower Egypt.

The pattern of imports again changes slightly in this phase, types from Lower Egypt now dominating. Marl C vessels, one of which is illustrated [fig. 10: 2], have parallels from Dahshur Sector 6 (Arnold 1982, fig. 19: 1), which ends in the early XIIIth Dynasty (Burial of King Hor). Especially interesting is the neck of a water jar [fig. 10: 1], of Nile B1 fabric, covered with a micaceous slip. This slip has been recorded on Middle Kingdom pottery from Mirgissa, (Maley 1975, 240-1, 280; Bonnet 1990, no. 335; in my view the intact burial from which this vessel comes should be dated to early Dynasty XIII rather than the Second Intermediate Period) and has been nicknamed "Golden Ware". There is no doubt that the shape and manufacturing technique are Egyptian (Bourriau 1981a, no. 96) but the slip is found only on examples from Nubia. The evidence suggests that "Golden Ware" is the product of Egyptian potters working in Nubia, prob-

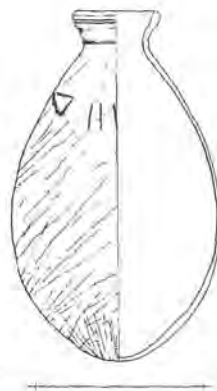


Fig. 9. Kerma Moyen V. CE 24, T222, Marl C.

ably at one of the forts, and using local raw materials. A comparison of unslipped Nile B1 hemispherical cups, visually identical but from both Nubia (Askut) and Egypt, was carried out using chemical analysis (NAA). The results indicated that in this case the bowls were made in Egypt, since the Askut samples grouped with bowls excavated at Dahshur and Memphis (Bourriau 1998, 189-99).

Kerma Moyen VI Sectors CE 14, 22. Fig. 11.

Date suggested by imports: Mid-Dynasty XII to early Dynasty XIII, *Source:* Upper and Lower Egypt.

The character of the imports is unchanged from the previous phase. The Lower Egyptian jar types [fig. 11: 6-10] all have parallels in the Dahshur Sector 6 material (Arnold 1982, Fig. 8: 6, 10; Fig. 19: 1, 2). The Upper Egyptian Marl A2 jars [fig. 11: 1-5] are the most common type, but this is the last phase in which they appear in the Kerma cemeteries. For their later development in Egypt, during the Second Intermediate Period, see Bourriau 1981b, figs.3, 4. They exist, of course, in Reisner's corpus, but no conclusions can be drawn until they can be re-studied to confirm their identity.



Fig. 10. Kerma Moyen V CE 15, T141 Nile B1 with micaceous slip; T137 Marl C.

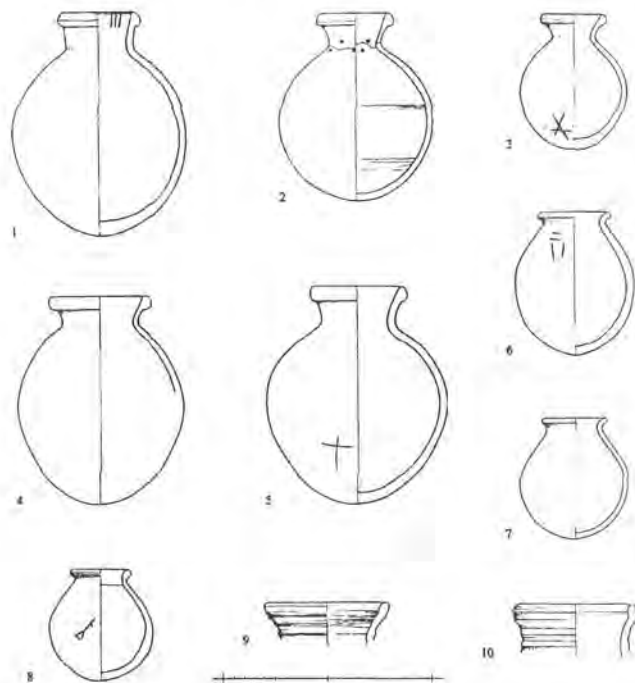


Fig. 11. Kerma Moyen VI. 1-5: CE 14, T4, T22, T21, T1, T29 Marl A2; 6-9: T1, T14, T27, T31 Marl C; 10: CE 22, T195 Marl C.

Kerma Moyen VII Sector CE 16. Fig. 12: 1-4.

Date suggested by imports: Dynasty XII to early Dynasty XIII. *Source:* Upper and Lower Egypt.

There is very little imported pottery from the graves in this sector. Only one piece was found in grave 146, the Marl C jar rim [fig. 12: 4], which again has parallels in Deffufur Sector 6. The rest of the pottery including a complete vessel of the type shown in fig. 9, was found on the surface of the graves. Its chronological significance is reduced since its association with the grave on which it was found is not absolutely certain.

Kerma Moyen VIII Sector CE 17. Fig. 12: 5-7.

Date suggested by imports: Dynasty XII to early Dynasty XIII. *Source:* Upper and Lower Egypt.

The picture presented by the imports is unchanged from that of the previous phase except for the fact that the vessels were found in graves rather than on the surface.

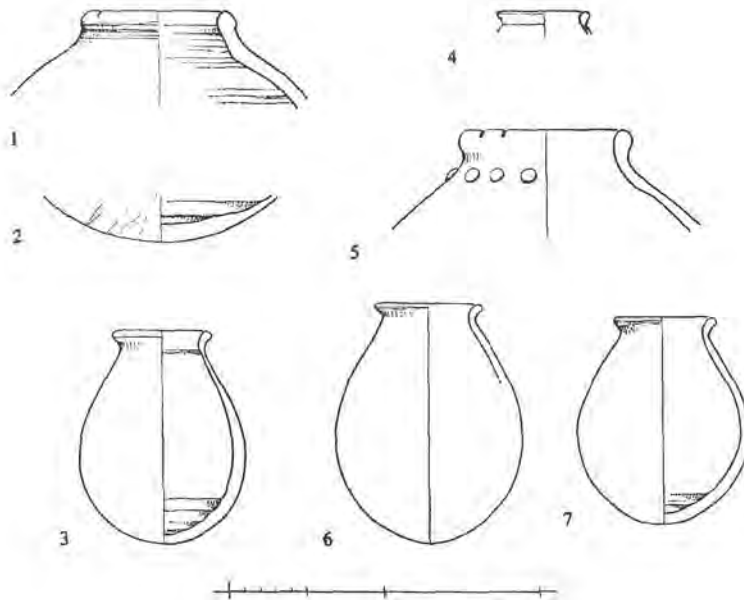


Fig. 12. Kerma Moyen VII: 1-2: CE 16 Surface Marl A3; 3-4: T146, Surface Marl C.
Kerma Moyen VIII: 5: CE 17, T154 Marl A3; 6-7: T151, T152 Marl C.

Kerma Classique I Sector CE 18. Fig. 13:1-4.

Date suggested by imports: Early Second Intermediate Period. Source: Upper and Lower Egypt.

The imports show distinct changes at the beginning of Kerma Classique. For the Upper Egyptian type [fig. 13: 4] there are parallels at Ballas (Bourriau 1990, fig. 4.5:12), and the Lower Egyptian types are paralleled in material from Dahshur Sector 7, not Sector 6 (Arnold 1982, Fig. 19: 7). It is interesting to note that, despite the break-up of Egypt into competing kingdoms, so much pottery was still reaching Kerma (as is obvious also from Keesner's publication) and that it was coming from both Upper and Lower Egypt. The presence of the "beer jar" base [fig. 13: 3] is interesting since the type has nothing to do with the storage and transport of commodities. It is of Nile clay (Nile B2) fabric using Egyptian wheel technology, and if originating in Nubia, it was made by Egyptian potters or Nubians trained in Egyptian craft traditions.

Kerma Classique II Sector CE 19. Fig. 13: 5.

Date suggested by imports: Early Second Intermediate Period. Source: Upper and Lower Egypt.

The imports in this phase show no substantial change from those of the previous phase. There are still imports from Lower Egypt [fig. 13: 5] and some more sherds in Nile B2 fabric made on the wheel in the Egyptian tradition.

Béatrice Privati's sequence stops at this point, but it is possible to add an epilogue based upon the Egyptian pottery from the Beit es Sheitan, a structure in the town at Kerma [fig 14: 1-12]. This, following the Kerma relative chronology, belongs later in the Kerma Classique. The Egyptian corpus now includes bowls, dishes and beakers as well as large and small jars. The parallels in shape, fabric and technology are all from Upper Egypt; in particular, they are closely dateable to the late XVIIth-early XVIIIth Dynasties from parallels at Thebes and Ballas (Bourriau 1990, Fig. 4.1-4.6). The only Marl C piece [fig. 14:12] is part of a potstand, possibly the re-used rim of a broken *zir*.

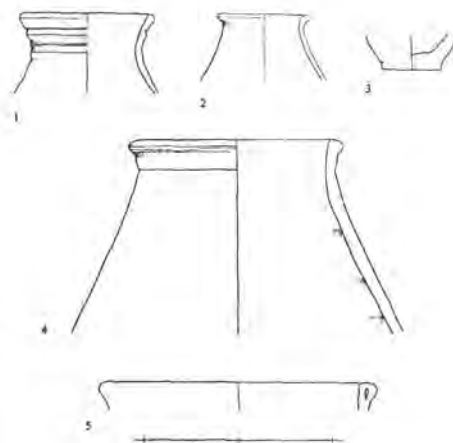


Fig. 13. Kerma Classique I. 1-4; CE 18. T147. Marl C, Nile B2 and Nile D. Kerma Classique II. CE 19. T175 Marl C *zir* rim.

Final Observations

The Egyptian pottery in these Nubian graves does not parallel that found in graves at the cataract forts. The assemblage contains a limited range of storage jars with only occasional examples of table ware, such as Marl A3 water jars, all of Upper Egyptian origin. The tableware does appear in Egyptian graves at the forts but the storage jars, for the most part, do not (or rather they do not appear in the publications). It is difficult to know how to interpret this observation since our evidence from the forts is so unbalanced. We

have records of many graves but very little from the coeval settlements to set beside them. The case may be different at Askut and I await full publication of the site with the greatest interest.

The Egyptian pottery does not change as rapidly as the Nubian pottery analysed by Béatrice Privati, so that some phases are not reflected by corresponding changes in the imports. The Egyptian assemblage is small and dominated by types which change more slowly, as they are observed in their Egyptian context. Nevertheless there is a noticeable change in the Egyptian pottery in the transition phase Kerma Ancien IV, before Kerma Moyen begins, with the first appearance of the ovoid/globular jars of Marl A2. At the beginning of Kerma Classique, which coincides with a new ceramic phase in both Upper and Lower Egypt, significant changes can again be seen.

Conclusion

I think it is now accepted that during the period under review, the Old Kingdom to the end of the Second Intermediate Period, Upper and Lower Egypt followed different ceramic traditions. This is most clearly visible in the Marl Clay corpora from the two regions. Marl C vessels were made in Lower Egypt (including the Eastern Delta) and, Marl A2, Marl A3 and Marl B in Upper Egypt, Theban region. Since marl clays were preferred for storage vessels, almost all the imports are of these fabrics, and if the fabric can be identified we can postulate where the vessel originated.

Certain generalisations can thus be made:

- there are more imports in Kerma Moyen than in Kerma Ancien
- throughout Kerma Moyen their number steadily increases
- until the end of Kerma Moyen III Upper Egyptian imports are more common than Lower Egyptian ones and the turning point seems to lie in the mid-XIIIth Dynasty
- at the beginning of Kerma Classique there is no slackening of imports from Lower Egypt, but, by the end of the period, evidenced from the material from the Beit es-Sheitan, all imports are from Upper Egypt and comprise the full range of open and closed forms, not simply storage jars.

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