

H25 2019 – the ceramics

Loretta Kilroe

Ceramic material from the final season of the QSAP mission at H25 was consistent with evidence from the previous excavations, demonstrating occupation of the site from the *Kerma Moyen* to the early Kushite phases, with stratified deposits dating to the early–mid 18th dynasty. Pottery accounted for the vast majority of finds from the 2019 season, with a total of 15,747 sherds processed, weighing 310,612g. This added to the 58,044 sherds from the first season, and 17,245 from the second season. A mix of Egyptian-style, wheelmade and indigenous, hand-made forms was visible across the site, with indigenous material making up over 50% of the ceramic repertoire.

Nile silt fabrics overwhelmingly predominated across all areas of the site (Figure 1). Egyptian-style vessels were fired homogenous beige, often with red zoning, containing straw, sand, and some stone temper. Nubian-style pots were fired to a lower temperature displaying a black core, with high levels of dung, straw, stone and mica. It is difficult to identify whether Egyptian-style Nile silt vessels were manufactured locally or imported from Egypt. However, high levels of mica temper in certain Nile silt fabrics suggest local production, with silt in Lower Nubia and particularly the Second Cataract area observed to contain noticeable quantities of this mineral (Knoblauch 2011; 2017). Marl clay was uncommon and examples were most often in an orange pink fabric, likely marl A2. The green-cream marl A4 variant 1/marl A5 was rare and typically highly eroded. The top of a marl A2 carinated, necked amphora with a red slip on the upper rim has parallels in deposits outside the tomb of Ramesses IV (Aston *et al.* 1998, pl. 32 no. 264), demonstrating that trade with Egypt continued in the later New Kingdom. Ten foreign fabric types occurred in small quantities and likely have a Levantine origin, although no forms could be distinguished.

Fragments of storage jars were identified in large numbers across the site. Excavation of several rooms in Building 18 revealed Egyptian-style material pointing to an early–mid 18th dynasty use, in common with Building 4 excavated during the first season at the site. Handled and handleless storage jars in both Nile silt and marl clay were found (e.g. Rose 2007, 724–276; Ruffieux 2014), some still laid with their stone lids *in situ* in room floors, particularly in Room H – here, several storage jars were periodically deposited over time, indicating continuous activity patterns in the space (Plate 1). Several of these jars had a cream-orange or red slip and vertical burnishing, a feature also observed on 18th dynasty examples at Dokki Gel (Ruffieux 2010, fig. 24) and bowls at Sesebi (Spence and Rose 2014, 411). Other wheel-made vessels included broad jars, shallow and deep bowls, and more rarely, beer jars.

The site contained a notable quantity of pilgrim flasks, with 15 examples across the three seasons of excavation. This

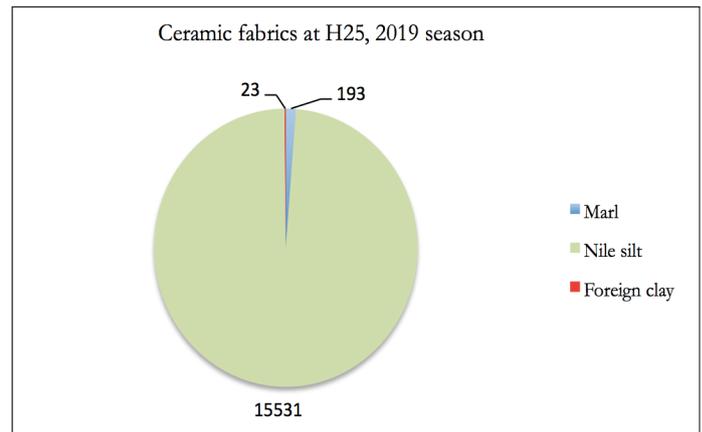


Figure 1. Graph showing relative quantities of Nile silt, marl clay and imported fabrics from the 2019 season at H25.

year, five pilgrim flask fragments were identified, including a particularly large surface example measuring 120mm at rim diameter with a thick red slip and handles stemming from the middle of the neck, dateable to the Ramesside period. Pilgrim flasks were containers for luxurious liquid contents, likely perfumed oils (Kilroe 2019). The prevalence of numerous storage jars and pilgrim flasks supports the hypothesis that the site acted as a trading nexus for imports from the north and likely distributed these to the wider area (Thomas 2014, 67), similar to Sanam in the early Napatan period (Vincentelli 2018).

Two pits in square G10 contained a mixed-date deposit, with many joining sherds dateable to the later New Kingdom, including straight-rimmed, funnel-necked jars (e.g. Aston 1998, 195, pl. 29 nos 243–244; 210, pl. 44 no. 378; 190 pl. 24 no. 222; Thomas 2014, 66), simple and deep wheelmade bowls, and domestic cooking bowls. Two bowl fragments (see Plate 2) were decorated with red slip and a white painted rim, with parallels from the Ramesside period (e.g. B. Aston 2011, 209 no. 49; Aston *et al.* 1998 pl. 15 nos 145, 150). Much



Plate 1. Vessel 7520x: from Building 4, a large storage jar showing vertical burnishing with a stone lid.



of this material was heavily burnt and these pits were likely reused as rubbish pits in this phase.

Decoration on Egyptian-style vessels was limited. Jars and bowls were frequently slipped in orange or cream, with bowls and occasionally jars sometimes given red painted rims. Further decoration was restricted to tableware: a small broad handled jar with a black painted cross-hatched decoration has two parallels from previous seasons (Plate 3; Thomas 2014, fig. 11), and the style occurs in other early–mid 18th dynasty sites in Nubia (e.g. Holthoer 1977; Miellé 2014, fig. 3). This indicates an interest in Egyptian modes of display, and a link with a particular workshop or tradition in Egypt, a feature also supported by the presence of fine wheelmade bowls at the site. As in previous seasons, little evidence of graffiti was found. One jar sherd bore an incised line; whilst a worn jar handle had several lines on the interior surface and may perhaps have been reused as a counter.

Indigenous ceramics continued to comprise over 50% of the material. Cooking pots, often heavily burnt and with mud applied to a rounded base, were frequent. Hole-mouth jars also appeared, as did finer tableware items, particularly deep burnished bowls. Several examples showed evidence of repair indicating value within the community. Nubian-style vessels displayed a broader range of decorative styles (Plate 4). Classic burnished ware occurred relatively frequently, including red, black, black-topped red ware and occasionally red-topped black ware. Other styles included rouletting, incised and cross-hatched lines, impressed squares, circles, and fingernail marks (e.g. Gratien 2000). Many decorations show clear continuity with Kerma traditions (see Gratien 1978) and continue into the post New Kingdom phase, making them difficult to accurately date, but have parallels across contemporary Nubia, demonstrating cultural affinity across the region and the continuation of Nubian production. Basket-impressed vessels were common as at other contemporary sites (e.g. Ruffieux 2014, 422). The presence of rectangular patterning indicates much of this material was contemporary with the New Kingdom occupation of the site (Gratien 2002, 227–228; Welsby-Sjöström 2001, 251; Rose 2012; Miellé 2014, 390). Larger weaves resemble woven and mud impressed roofing impressions seen at Amara West (Vandenbusch 2017, fig. 11). Hybrid imitations of Egyptian bowls in a Nubian fabric and fired to a lower temperature, in common with traditional Nubian vessels as referenced above, were painted to mimic contemporary Egyptian bowls, with a beige slip and red painted rim. Similar experimentation can be observed at several New Kingdom sites (e.g. Binder, Spencer and Millet 2010, pl. 14; Spataro *et al.* 2015, 418; Budka 2017, 440). This demonstrates even at this early phase in the New Kingdom that communities were experimenting with hybrid Egyptian-Nubian practices.

The discovery of a remarkably well-preserved ladle (Plate 5) in square F6 has some similarities to pinched rim examples found at Aniba in Middle Kingdom/Second Intermediate Period deposits (Steindorff 1935, tafel 95.S36) and in



Plate 2. A sherd with a red slip and white painted rim, 7181y.



Plate 3. Vessel 7369x, an example of black painted geometric motifs from the 2014 season.



Plate 4. Types of indigenous decoration found in the 2019 season.

Egypt (e.g. Hayes 1953, 247), although this vessel has a true handle. Multiple ladle fragments have been found at the site in previous seasons, all in a coarse Nile silt with traces of burning and matting impressions, and their ubiquity points to a key role in daily activity, likely for drinking water from *zir*.

The ceramic material supports the evidence from previous seasons pointing to intensive use of the site during the New Kingdom, with significant buildings demonstrating activity in early-mid Dynasty 18. Kerma and 20th dynasty material from the first season (Thomas 2014, 65) and surface Napatan and medieval material from the first and second season (Thomas 2014, 65; pers. ob.) indicate that the site was in use for a long timespan.

High concentrations of indigenous material suggest that this site remained outside of Egyptian control and retained local practices, but the frequent Egyptian storage jars and,



Plate 5. Vessel 7521x, a ladle with faint matt impressions on the base.

less commonly, bowls, beer jars, fanciform jars, and Levantine fragments indicate that H25 may have acted as a key trading node with Egypt for the surrounding area, demonstrating that such activity was not restricted to colonial towns. Future excavation below these Phase I levels would likely be of significant interest for understanding the later Kerma periods in the region.

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