

SUDAN & NUBIA

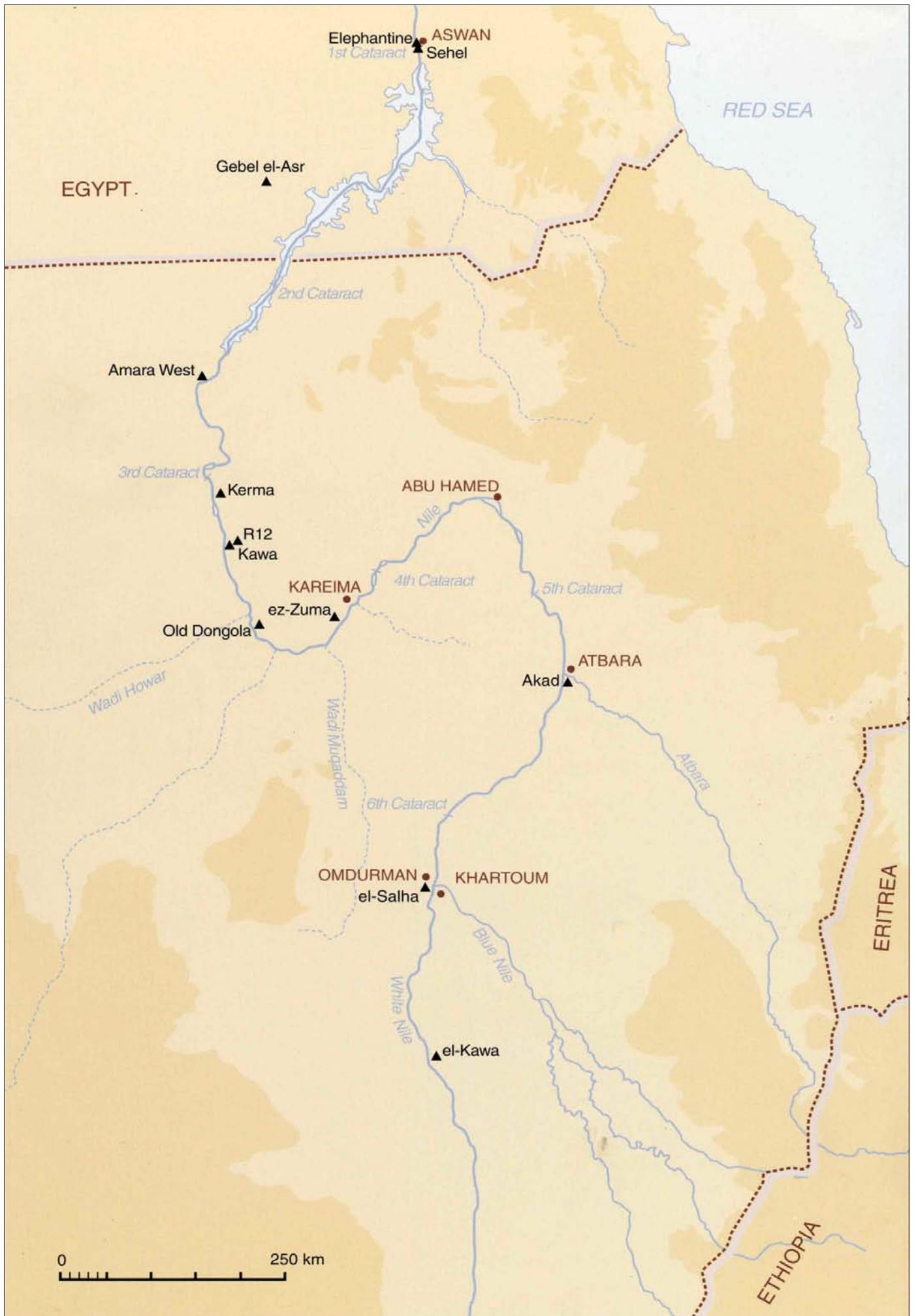
The Sudan Archaeological Research Society



Bulletin No. 6

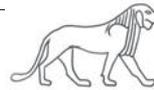
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Front Cover: An apostle from the mural in the chapel at Baganarti containing the king's portrait.

Introduction

Vivian Davies

At the time of writing (mid-September 2002), the 10th International Conference for Nubian Studies has just finished, generously hosted by colleagues in the Università di Roma "La Sapienza". The large number of papers delivered shows how rapidly the subject of Middle Nile studies is growing, with significant advances in knowledge achieved since the last conference held in Boston four years ago, an encouraging state of affairs, to which the content of this present volume bears further witness. There was, however, one hugely important issue which overshadowed the event: the looming crisis of the new dam at the Fourth Cataract.

As reported by the Sudanese delegation, preparatory work for the dam has now begun and actual building will start in two years. It is expected to take a further seven years to complete. In an unwelcome echo of the Aswan High Dam scheme, the reservoir created will flood over 170km of the Nile Valley between the Fourth Cataract and Abu Hamed, enveloping, as we now know from preliminary surveys, thousands of archaeological sites - artefact scatters, settlements, cemeteries and rock-drawings dating from the Palaeolithic to the Islamic Periods. Very little is known about these sites; for the most part only that they exist. Our Sudanese colleagues are urgently appealing for assistance, so that as much as possible of the record may be investigated and documented before the area is lost to knowledge for ever. In response, SARS is this winter launching a campaign of rescue excavation in a region which we recently surveyed (see *Sudan & Nubia* 4 [2000], 51-7), but an extensive international effort will be required if any serious impact is to be made. Our next international colloquium, to be held at the British Museum on 8 May 2003, will focus on the dam emergency. All colleagues with an interest in helping are invited to attend.



Nubians on Elephantine Island

Dietrich Raue

A frequent personal name in the New Kingdom is Panehsi – “the Nubian”. The persons bearing this name appear in all social strata known to us from written sources in the later 2nd and 1st millennium BCE. Many of them belong to the administrative elite of their time. But are they of Nubian origin? And if so, are they to be compared, for example, with families like the Koslowskis or Stanischewskis, having come to Germany more than 100 years ago, while nowadays just their names indicate a Polish origin? Or are they to be compared with families like the Tarnanidis and Yilderims, who have integrated into German society but take care to preserve their national and cultural identity in their circle of families, friends and clubs?

In most cases it will be impossible to reveal the ethnic origin of these Panehsis. But it can be taken for sure that a multi-ethnic component was a part of pharaonic Egypt’s reality: while the pharaoh smote the northern and southern enemy on the pylons reliefs, people like Aper-el lived some hundred metres away, and held office in the palace administration or temple. There is less inscriptional proof for this reality during the 3rd and early 2nd millennium BCE, but pottery finds from cemeteries and settlements provide compelling evidence.

One of the key sites for the understanding of this relationship is the town of Elephantine, where the German Institute of Archaeology and the Swiss Institute for Architectural Research and Archaeology have been working since 1969.¹ It is a comparatively small site, measuring about 200 x 100m in the 3rd millennium BCE, gaining its importance from its proximity to Nubia and the trade at the Egyptian border (Colour plate VIII). Nowadays, Elephantine is the only site where the relationship between Egypt and its southern, western and eastern neighbours can be examined on the basis of continuous stratigraphical evidence and, therefore, chronologically well dated material. On the other hand, it is a comparatively young site. Following the lower levels of the inundation in the later 4th millennium, the first huts were built on the island in the Naqada IIc-Period; the earliest evidence for more elaborate architecture appears during Dynasty 0. Towns like Hierakonpolis, at this time, already had a history spanning several hundred years.

The co-existence of Nubians and Upper Egyptians is attested to from the very beginning of the town’s history. On the Nubian side, mainly undecorated simple wares testify to their marked presence on the island. The fabric of the pottery may be compared to the A-Group inventory, and

¹ Dreyer *et al.* 2002, 157 ff. ; Kaiser *et al.* 1999, 63 ff. ; Seidlmayer 1991, 337 ff.

some impressed decorations also point to this culture. But among the few examples of decorated wares a closer relation to the Terminal A-Group is lacking. Elephantine is probably situated too far to the north for this cultural unit.²

Several decades later, during the late 1st/early 2nd Dynasty, there is evidence for features generally attributed to much later stages of Nubian cultural development (Plate 1). It seems to be typical for the material of Elephantine that

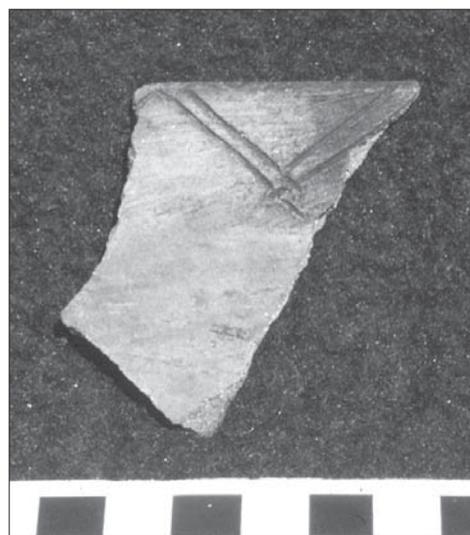


Plate 1. Fragment of a bowl with incised decoration, early 2nd Dynasty, from the area south of the temple of Satet.

several features appear “too early” or “too late” or “just once”. It seems appropriate to apply a model that has two main components: small-scale migration and assimilation. Small entities arrive in the Nile Valley, keeping their strictly defined identity, mirrored in the vessel decoration, for one or two generations (Colour plate IX). It is followed by their assimilation into Egyptian urban culture (at least the material culture), or to a Nubian culture already established in the town and/or its surroundings. The provenance of these small entities is, to date, almost impossible to determine. The possible areas on both sides of the Nile are far too vast and not yet well surveyed. So far, these cultures need obviously an urban context like those at Buhen³, Ain Asyl⁴ or Elephantine that provide a marked accumulation of material to be found in archaeological field-work. It is not surprising, therefore, that several hundred years later, similar patterns reappear and it probably simply means that groups again arrived from the same area.

In the earlier 2nd Dynasty a remarkable percentage of the population in town must still have been of Nubian origin. This is not proved by the architecture, but by their pottery, which constitutes in certain areas up to 20% of the total

² Kaiser *et al.* 1999, 187 f. with Fig. 41.

³ Gratién 1995, 43 ff.

⁴ Soukiassian *et al.* 2002, 493, Fig. 308, Type 1r (especially no. 637/1), 499, Fig. 324, Type 2e.

assemblage (Plate 2). Vessel decoration plays a subsidiary role and appears quite rarely. The explicit meaning of vessel-decoration was obviously neglected.



Plate 2. Cooking pot, middle of 2nd Dynasty, from the area south of the temple of Satet.

The conditions prevailing in the Old Kingdom differ markedly. During the 3rd Dynasty the king established a new type of royal estate on the island, marked by a little stone pyramid, also known from Hierakonpolis/El-Kola and other sites. Royal administrative seal impressions of the 3rd and 4th Dynasties are found in the town itself. The percentage of Nubian pottery decreases dramatically in this period, but among the few testimonies to Nubian pottery in town are the decorated and fine wares which dominate in the 4th Dynasty. Friezes of triangles with different patterns are the most common decoration (Plate 3). The centralised state of the early Old Kingdom leads to more explicit means of



Plate 3. Fragment of a cooking pot with incised decoration, earlier 4th Dynasty, from the area south of the temple of Satet.

differentiating the Nubian group within the town of Elephantine. Only the pottery is available to bear witness to this development, but it is not hazardous to suggest that there existed other indicators, such as clothing, dances, taboos and wedding and funerary rites.

Once again, the strata of the 4th and 5th Dynasties contained proof of developments that should have passed centuries before,⁵ and others that have been considered hitherto of a much younger date, as is the case with vessels entirely covered by parallel hatchings (Plate 4) typical of the First Intermediate Period and the early Middle Kingdom.



Plate 4. Fragment of a vessel with hatched decoration, late 4th / earlier 5th Dynasty, from the area south of the temple of Satet.

The town and temple of Elephantine are the focus of explicit royal interest in the later Old Kingdom. New large-scale administrative units in the town, an enlarged new temple for the goddess Satet, and the first royal rock-inscription of Unas testify to this.⁶ Coinciding with this, perhaps to be related to a major step in the desertification of the Western Sahara, a number of patterns appear in the corpus of Nubian pottery that have no parallels as yet in the earlier phases and cannot be paralleled in the later developments. Among this rather heterogeneous material appear the first heralds of a major migration, which was to take place some decades later: characteristic techniques of the early C-Group, first appearing in closely related products in the late 4th / early 5th Dynasty, become more common in the later 5th Dynasty (Plate 5).

This major migration of the later 3rd millennium BCE met a considerably changed Egyptian society. Elaborately decorated tombs of the nomarchs and their officials reflected their position in the Upper Egyptian nomes.

⁵ E.g. a typical late Neolithic and A-Group zigzag-pattern (compare, for example, Salvatori and Usai 2001, 17, Fig. 11.13; Nordström 1972, Pl. 36, Type A1a.15) in a 4th Dynasty context and fabric.

⁶ Dreyer *et al.* 2002, 162 ff.; Petrie 1888, Pl. XII no. 312.

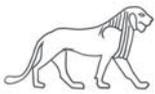


Plate 5. Fragment of a vessel with angular stamp pattern, later 5th Dynasty, from the area south of the temple of Satet.



Plate 6. Fragment of a cooking pot, First Intermediate Period, from the palace bakery.

The inscribed cylinder seals were replaced by stamp seals with ornamental and figural motives, probably indicating the increased role of illiterate personnel in administrative procedures. The autobiographies of the later 6th Dynasty leave no doubt that the neighbouring cultures mainly functioned as partners in the trade with Nubia. The routes of this trade may well have turned into corridors for this migration. In contrast to earlier phenomena, the movements of the advanced 6th Dynasty, bringing definitely new shapes and techniques (Colour plate X), arrived successively at many points up to more than 100km south of Aswan.

When the centralised state of the 6th Dynasty imploded, local authorities obtained the power and society opened up. The tomb stelae from Gebelein in particular demonstrate how Nubians exhibited their ethnic origin even in the classic Egyptian funerary culture⁷ and as a mirror of this almost every large pottery assemblage on Elephantine contains decorated Nubian sherds. Even if it is far from reaching the percentages seen in the 1st Dynasty, black-topped vessels and elaborately decorated cooking pots are omnipresent in the town of the First Intermediate Period (Plate 6), together with the typical inventory of fine decorated C-Group wares, well known from sites in Lower Nubia.⁸

Elephantine flourished in the First Intermediate Period as probably did many other centres in the south. Even the conquest of the area by Intef II does not seem to have changed the lot of the Nubian community. In one of his inscriptions he states that he “opened the mountains” (i.e., made prospections for new or forgotten trade routes). It is

most remarkable that the development of the Nubian community on Elephantine followed the general development of the C-Group in Lower Nubia. It seems plausible to suggest that again the trade corridors were basically the connection for the Nubian communities, resulting in parallel developments, as for example, among the fine wares (Colour plate XI).¹⁰

The immense activity of the kings of the 12th Dynasty in erecting the chain of fortresses had no effect on the presence of Nubian pottery in the contemporary strata of Elephantine. It is rather negative evidence that reflects this programme: so far, Kerma pottery is absent, i.e., the pottery of the culture against whom the fortresses were probably built. Cooking pots with parallel hatchings and rim zones with friezes of triangles still dominate - for the last time.

The most drastic change in the development occurred towards the end of the 12th Dynasty. In Stratum 13 of the settlement's stratigraphy the complete spectrum of the pottery production of the Pan-Grave culture is present.¹¹ On the other hand, only isolated examples of typical later C-Group pottery were recovered. More or less exactly at the time when the system of fortresses was established and began to function, all large pottery assemblages on Elephantine bear evidence for these latest arrivals. The role of auxiliary troops, settled by the state of the late Middle Kingdom, may well provide the background for this sudden appearance. The recent excavations at Hierakonpolis illustrate in a very illuminating way, even in their physical appearance, the differences that must have been felt by these two groups towards each other: the C-Group with Egyptian burial customs and the other group with the traditional tumulus

⁷ Meurer 1996, 94 f.

⁸ Compare for example: Weigall 1907, Pl. LXXXI with an almost identical ensemble of pottery at Ed-Dakka.

⁹ Kaiser *et al.* 1975, 46, Pl. 20b

¹⁰ See for example “Stufe Ib”, Bietak 1968, Pl. 3-4.

¹¹ von Pilgrim 1996; see for example 340 f., Fig. 151d (fine ware) and 342 f., Fig. 152a (cooking pot).

burials indicating that the process of acculturation had not yet proceeded very far.¹²

The fall of the “mud-brick curtain”¹³ took place some decades later in the advanced 13th Dynasty. It is reflected in Elephantine by two developments. Firstly, the proportion of Nubian pottery increased as did its diversity. Still the Pan-Grave culture dominated among the non-Egyptian pottery (Plate 7), but isolated examples of later C-Group pottery appeared. Secondly, during the 13th Dynasty the first examples of Kerma pottery production reached Elephantine. The presence of the latter culture seems to increase slightly towards the advanced 17th Dynasty when also simple domestic wares of the Kerma culture can be observed on Elephantine.



Plate 7. Fragment of a cooking pot of the Pan-Grave-Culture, 13th Dynasty, from habitations south of the temple of Khnum.

The peak in the quantity of non-Egyptian ceramics is located in stratum 10 of Elephantine, i.e., the late 17th Dynasty /early 18th Dynasty. The subsequent strata of the 18th and 19th Dynasties still contained ceramics of the Pan-Grave culture and the latest phase of the C-Group development, but they occurred in far smaller quantities. It is no surprise that after the wars of the early Thutmossides against the Chiefdom of Kerma there is no further evidence for this culture on Elephantine. But this does not yet explain the marked decrease of the Pan-Grave component in the material. Current excavations should shed light on the next phase of the development.

What is the background for the presence of Nubian pottery in the town of Elephantine in the 3rd and 2nd millennia at Elephantine? Did Nubians live in the mud-brick houses inside the town enclosure? Does the presence of these vessels point to Nubian personnel or perhaps rather to their being fashionable accessories in Egyptian households? It has to be

kept in mind that there is, for example, evidence from the late Second Intermediate Period / early 18th Dynasty of a certain Hori, scribe of frankincense, buying vessels of the Medja-People.¹⁴

After the 2nd Dynasty it becomes difficult to answer these questions. There is no concentration of non-Egyptian ceramics that would allow us to argue in favour of a Nubian quarter in the town. The pottery seems to be regularly distributed. The excavation has revealed Egyptian house types (Plate 8), and sites like the sanctuary of Heqaib present an Egyptian prosopography or, at least it gives this impression. Given this contradiction it would not be wise to infer the existence of Nubian households from the presence of Nubian pottery, even if it cannot be excluded that assimilated non-Egyptians were using mainly ceramics of Egyptian fabric.



Plate 8. Elephantine, North town, House 70, late 12th Dynasty.

Answers may be given just for single periods so far. The excavation of the cemetery of the later 3rd millennium BCE on the island revealed typical Nubian burial customs, such as the leather kilt of the deceased, as well as anthropological evidence for non-Egyptian burials.¹⁵ In addition some clay figurines from the settlement seem to point towards a Nubian presence in the town in the late Old Kingdom.¹⁶

In the later Middle Kingdom and the Second Intermediate Period, on the other hand, it seems to be impossible to assume that the regularly distributed Pan-Grave pottery points in every case to the houses' inhabitants. While this may well be the case for the more restricted number of C-Group sherds, this is impossible to assume with regard to the Pan-Grave culture. On this argument Elephantine would have been a town entirely inhabited by these people. One should probably think rather of a Nubian settlement in close

¹⁴ Griffith 1897, 52, Pl. XX: XXII.1-account. I am grateful to Felix Arnold for this reference.

¹⁵ The information on these results from the island cemetery are owed to personal communications from Stephan Seidlmayer.

¹⁶ An extraordinary example was found in the palace of the late 6th Dynasty in Spring 2002. This material will be studied by P. Kopp (Hamburg).

¹² Friedman 2001, 29 ff.; Giuliani 2001, 40 ff.

¹³ Williams 1999, 449.



proximity, perhaps in the area of modern Aswan, from where people (police, household personnel, entertainers)¹⁷ may have come to the island, and where vessels may have been produced to be sold to the households on the island.

The south of the country is nowadays said to be as special as it was in pharaonic times. During the 12th Dynasty, Sinuhe expressed his confusion by the idea of a “delta-man finding himself in Elephantine”.¹⁸ This feeling may have been enhanced or even caused by the reality of the continuous migration to the First Cataract of people from the east, west and south and subsequently the marked presence of non-Egyptians in the town and its vicinity. One may also think of people probably explicitly conservative in their late Neolithic attitude to their pottery production. It may also reflect, in general, the highly regarded reliability and expertise (in hunting, etc.) of the Nubians that led the Egyptian authorities to allow considerable numbers of them into the vicinity of urban centres, these being observable in the archaeological record from their strictly segregated cemeteries as at Hierakonpolis. If this was the first step towards integration, the next may have consisted of an official presence in the police, state administration and other institutions. In this situation, just a few persons would still have used Nubian cooking pots, but some of them may have been named Panehsi.

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¹⁷ For Medja-dancers and -singers at the festivals in a temple of Senusret II in Illahun, as well as other references to Nubians employed in Egyptian society, see Meurer 1996, 122 ff.

¹⁸ Sinuhe B 225-226, Lichtheim 1973, 231.



Plate VIII. Elephantine.
Settlement of the later
3rd Dynasty.

Plate IX. Elephantine.
Fragment of a lid-vessel, middle
of 2nd Dynasty, from the area
north of the temple of Satet.

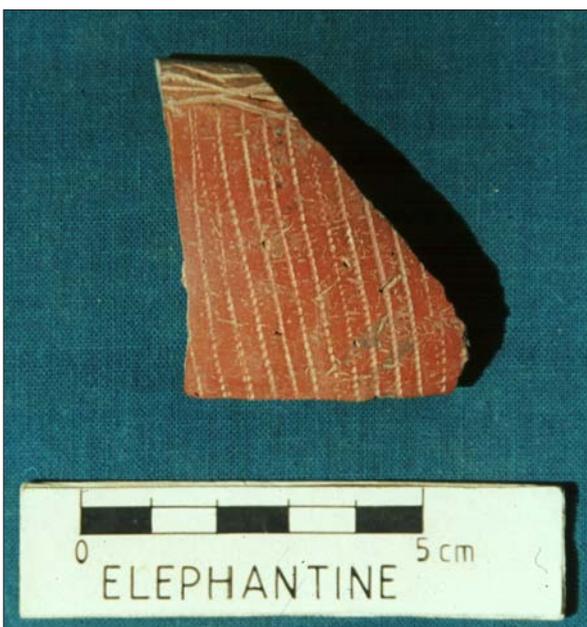


Plate X. Elephantine. Fragment of a vessel with fine row-
incisions, late 6th Dynasty, from the area of the southern harbour.

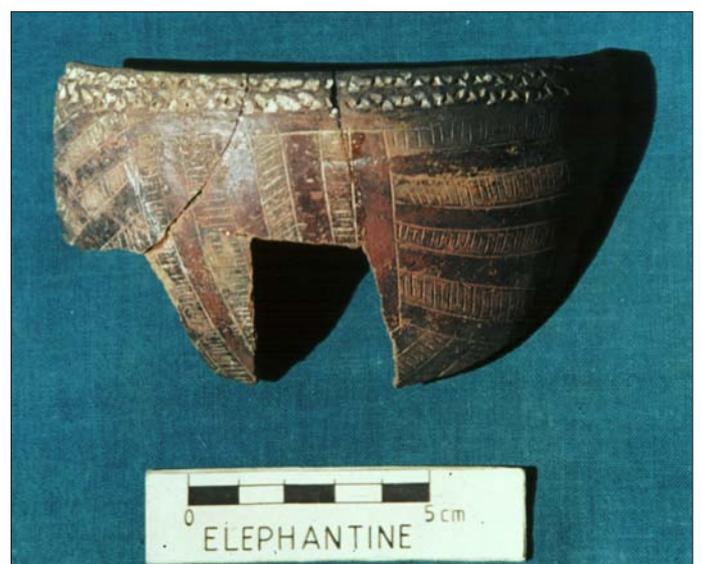


Plate XI. Elephantine. Fragment of a fine C-Group bowl, 11th
Dynasty, from the palace bakery.