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## ZIGZAG, TRIANGLE AND FISH FIN. ON THE RELATIONS OF EGYPT AND C-GROUP DURING THE MIDDLE KINGDOM

### INTRODUCTION

The region south of the First Nile Cataract entered Egypt's sphere of interest once again after the Theban kings of the Eleventh Dynasty consolidated their power. During this time Kerma Culture flourished in Upper Nubia, while the C-Group developed in Lower Nubia. The latter found itself practically under Egyptian rule between 2000 and 1750 BC. The relations between Egypt and Nubia during the Middle Kingdom have been the object of multiple studies resulting in numerous publications (Säve-Söderbergh 1941; Vercoutter 1957; Adams 1984: 36-71; O'Connor 1978: *passim*; 1984: 65-108; Gratien 2007: *passim*; Bourriau 1991: 129-144; Smith 1991: 77-102; Meurer 1996), analyzing these relations on different levels: political, military, economic (that is, commercial) and cultural. A reflection of political relations and military conflicts can be seen in many private inscriptions, as well as royal edicts and reports of military and trading expeditions in search of gold and stone in Nubia, not to mention ordinary rock graffiti.

Undeniable proof of the coexistence of the two ancient civilizations is the presence of Egyptians in Nubia and Nubians in Egypt. The most tangible evidence of the former is the series of forts — in Buhen, Mirgissa, Uronarti Semna and Kumma, among others — which reinforced and guarded Egypt's supremacy in that region, and the accompanying burial grounds (PM VII: 129-155, 142-146; Gardiner 1916: 184-192; Trigger 1976: 77; Leclant 1978: 64-66; Shinnie 1996: 72-77; Bietak 1987: 120; Mostafa 1998: 169-173). Proof of the latter can be found in numerous Nubian cemeteries scattered around Egypt and names of Nubians recorded in written Egyptian sources (Bourriau 1981: 25-41; 1991: 129-144; Shinnie 1996: 66, Map 5 showing Pan-grave sites in Nubia and Egypt; and recently Giuliani 2006: 223-227;

Friedman 2001: *passim*). Less spectacular, but important nonetheless is the testimony of Egyptian products: amulets, figurines, swords, stone vessels, bronze objects and scarabs found in Nubia, as well as Egyptian pottery discovered in large quantities in Nubia and no less numerous Nubian ceramics in Egypt (Bietak 1987: 119-120). Indeed, the latter group of objects is an extremely important source, for it is not only evidence of trade relations, but also a significant chronological marker helping to put absolute dates on Nubian cultures based on Egyptian chronology. Unfortunately, it is often an underestimated source and hardly ever taken advantage of in full (O'Connor 1993: 29; Bietak 1979: 107-108; Edwards 2004: 80).

Political, commercial and military relations are easy to trace because of the tangible evidence mentioned above, but when it comes to mutual cultural influences, comparative studies are essential of both Egyptian and Nubian material. Lively and unbroken ties with Egyptian civilization must have influenced Nubian cultures, but the extent, intensity and duration of these relations depended on the region of Nubia and the period (Shinnie 1996: 63; O'Connor 1978: 55-56; Cohen 1992). Egyptian artifacts found in C-Group territory are believed to be relatively numerous in phase I, but occur only sporadically in the later phase II when the region was after all under Egyptian control (Bietak 1987: 120).<sup>1</sup> This is sometimes considered as proof of cultural autonomy on the part of the C-Group population which developed independently of Egypt despite the territorial proximity (Trigger 1976: 80-81; Hafsaas 2007: 170-171). Egyptian products appear again in phase III, at which time the C-Group underwent progressive Egyptianization (O'Connor 1993: 29). In Kerman territory, Egyptian artifacts were always much more frequent compared to the north (Leclant 1978: 66).

<sup>1</sup> This view, which has influenced the picture of Egyptian-Nubian relations during the Middle Kingdom, seems to be slightly exaggerated. Excavation reports published already after Bietak's monograph of C-Group chronology, such as the report from the Adindan necropolis, have demonstrated pointedly that Egyptian imports in phase II were much more numerous than thought earlier, cf. Williams 1983: 51-54.

Archaeologists considering issues of mutual relations between the two cultures have a tendency — possibly subconscious — to concentrate on what Egypt contributed to the technologically less advanced Nubia and how it “civilized”, read “Egyptianized”, the land. They tend to forget that relations of this kind are almost always mutual (Arnold 1985: 1). Just as “civilized” Egypt affected “barbarian” Nubia, so Nubia interacted with Egypt. Thus, one should expect Egyptian influence in many spheres and pottery is definitely a category where foreign influence would leave a mark. It is found in large quantities on virtually every site, in Egypt as well as in Sudan, potentially providing a huge dataset for research. Nonetheless, looking at Nubian ceramics, whether from C-Group or from Kerma, we will be hard put to observe any trace of Egyptian tradition.<sup>2</sup> In spite of extensive Egyptian imports, Nubian potters relinquished neither the repertoire of shapes cherished for generations nor the methods of execution and techniques of surface treatment and decoration. No “Egyptianizing” forms nor “Egyptianizing” decoration, if one can speak of such at all, made an appearance, not was there any instance of “Egyptianizing” surface treatment. Even the potter’s wheel, successfully used in Egyptian workshops of the Old Kingdom, was not adopted, although it would have surely improved the efficiency of Nubian potters and the quality of their work.<sup>3</sup> The common conviction is that local, Nubian pottery was handmade, while pots from Egypt were always wheel-turned. This is not entirely true as many Egyptian vessels of the Middle Kingdom were handmade either whole or in part.<sup>4</sup>

Coming back to the question of cultural interactions, the matter appears to be quite the

contrary: it is Nubian pottery, of C-Group as well as Kerma culture, that affected substantially the development of Middle Kingdom ceramics, especially in Upper Egypt.<sup>5</sup>

#### ELEPHANTINE — KEY TO NUBIA

Elephantine is an island on the Nile in the region of the first cataract (modern Aswan) — the southernmost “beachhead” of Egypt. The town, which sprung up there was an important political and administrative center, the capital of the first Upper Egyptian nome bearing the highly suggestive appellation *ta seti*, that is, Nubian Land; it was also an army garrison in different historical periods, guarding Egypt’s southern frontiers, and a trade center distributing products and goods imported from Nubia to Egypt and exported the other way. The name of the nome reflects the proximity of Nubia which begins just beyond the first cataract, but it must have surely expressed the impression ancient inhabitants had of the region’s strong “Nubianization”.<sup>6</sup> The island acted as a gate on Egypt’s southern border and everyone heading south and, more importantly, everyone coming from the south could not pass Elephantine unnoticed. Most importantly for our discussion, the island was an arena where the two civilizations interacted, an ideal site for the study of cultural interrelations between Egypt and Nubia.

Regular excavations by the German Institute of Archaeology and Swiss Institute for Architectural Research and Archaeology started in 1969 and are still being continued. A considerable part of the mound in the southern end of the island has been explored (c. 200 x 100 m, H. 12 m), uncovering the town, cemeteries and temples existing uninterruptedly from the Nagada II period through Arab times.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Otherwise Bietak 1968: 132, who is of the opinion that Egyptian pottery from the First Intermediate Period through the Eleventh Dynasty was copied in Nubia until the Second Intermediate Period.

<sup>3</sup> It could be proof of the C Group population manifesting its cultural and ethnic distinctness through its pottery, cf. Hafsaas 2007: 170.

<sup>4</sup> Shinnie 1996: 60. Despite the common use of the potter’s wheel in Egypt, certain types of vessels were always handmade, the technique being imposed by the kind of clay, the shape of the pot or its size. Most of the pottery made of Marl C was handmade, cf. Bader 2001: 19ff. As a matter of fact, pots made of this clay are frequently found in Nubia, cf. Williams 1983: 30, Table 9, where the clay is described as “Egyptian: hard pink” IVA-B; Nordström, Bourriau 1993: 179-180; see also below, discussion of vessels of the Stufe IIa 26 type. Large pots of Marl A3, often designated as “Qena-Ballas” type, were also partly handmade, cf. Williams 1983: 31, Table 9, where the clay is described as “Egyptian: gray-greenish” VA-B, e.g. 147, 161, Fig. 19, no. 3, 191-192, Fig. 32, Pls 79A, 84A; Nordström, Bourriau 1993: 177. The lower part of the body of this type of *zir* was handmade and the upper part turned on a wheel.

<sup>5</sup> The present article covers merely one aspect, namely, the impact of Nubian pottery with incised decoration on the development of decorated pottery in Egypt. But the impact of Nubian ceramics on Egyptian products was much more extensive, e.g. cooking pots, the so-called gilded surface treatment and the so-called “Black Elephantine” pottery. The issue will be discussed in detail in a monograph on Middle Kingdom pottery from Elephantine, cf. Rzeuska forthcoming.

<sup>6</sup> The presence of Nubians on Elephantine is evidenced by Nubian ceramics occurring on the island already in layers corresponding to the founding of the settlement. Its quantity and spatial distribution is different in various periods, cf. Raue 2002: passim; Seidlmayer 1991: 337-350; and in the vicinity, cf. Junker 1920.

<sup>7</sup> PM V: 222-250, excavation reports in *MDAIK* and monographs in the *Elephantine* series published by the German Institute of Archaeology (DAI).

One of the most important discoveries is the town of the Middle Kingdom and the Second Intermediate Period, the biggest settlement from this period ever explored in Upper Egypt (von Pilgrim 1996: *passim*). The excavations have contributed substantially to an understanding of the functioning of the urban organism, its temples and everyday life of the inhabitants. They have also yielded huge quantities of finds, pottery included.<sup>8</sup>

#### POTTERY WITH INCISED DECORATION

This paper is devoted to vessels with incised decoration which form a distinctive group in the huge mass of Middle Kingdom ceramic material from the site. But before these vessels are discussed, it should be said that most of the pottery from the Middle Kingdom period (layers XVI–XIII in an area designated as H.G.S., and layers 15–13 in other areas; von Pilgrim 1996: 15ff.) represents local Upper Egyptian products. Pots made of Marl C from the Fayum area constitute a much smaller group and imported vessels from both Nubia and the Levant are the least numerous set.<sup>9</sup> Five broad chronological phases of the pottery from this period were distinguished based on a well-studied stratigraphy of particular areas of the site:

1. Eleventh and beginning of Twelfth Dynasty
2. reign of Senwosret I
3. until the middle of the Twelfth Dynasty
4. second half of the Twelfth Dynasty
5. Thirteenth Dynasty

The pottery itself was also helpful in establishing this chronology, especially the typology of specific forms considered as chronological markers, such as hemispherical and carinated bowls, beer jars, and cooking pots. Also of significance were certain vessel types with a tendency to appear and disappear, as these phenomena provided precise dating, and the appearance and evolution of certain marl clays typical of Upper Egypt.

The group discussed below is characterized by marl clay A3 used in the manufacturing of these pots [Fig. 1]. This is a fine clay, colored light green, occasionally yellowish or pinkish, of the same color in the break, featuring distinct oblong air voids. It contains no organic temper and only spot occurrences of round sand grains (presumably quartz) and light amorphous particles of unmixed

marl or lime. Firing in temperatures above 1000°C makes these vessels very hard; the edges of broken sherds can be dangerously sharp. The surface, despite being untreated — wet-smoothed, if anything — is smooth, occasionally slightly coarse or dry to the touch.

Marl clay A3 is first encountered in material from the second half of the Eleventh Dynasty, that is, at the very beginning of the Middle Kingdom, when Thebes became the capital of a reunited land, and it remained in use through the end of the Middle Kingdom. Sources of the clay are located in the Theban region, somewhere around Qena, hence the different designations used in publications, such as “Qena clay”, “Ballas clay” and even “Qena–Ballas clay” (Nordström, Bourriau 1993: 177; Arnold 1981: 169–171; Bourriau *et alii* 2000: 131; Holthoer 1977: 61 and 67, Table 2, classified as ware group W 5).

Vessels in this group were wheel-turned (but the bottoms of large storage jars were handmade, cf. Rzeuska forthcoming b). The forms are closed, medium- or large-sized, globular or ovoid in shape. Jars are furnished with a cylindrical neck or have none, and feature a rounded bottom cut with a spatula (possibly a knife), sometimes additionally hand-smoothed. The outer surface of the shoulders and upper body, occasionally also the rim, bears an ornament incised with a very sharp tool. The motifs are geometric: vertical and

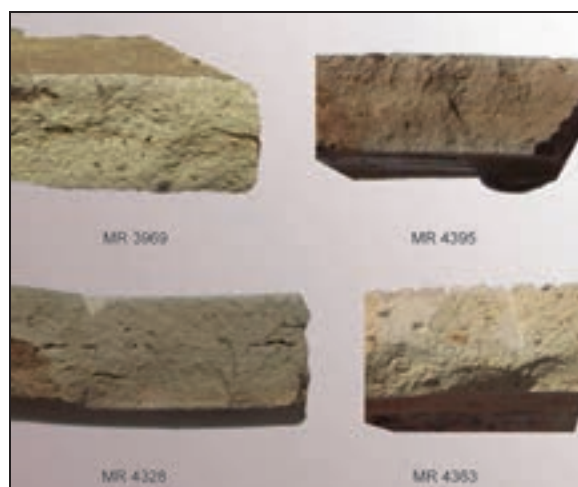


Fig. 1. Samples of Marl A3 fabrics from Elephantine (Photo T.I. Rzeuska)

<sup>8</sup> The present author, who has been working on the Middle Kingdom pottery from Elephantine since 1998 (to be published as a monograph in the Elephantine series), thanks Prof. W. Kaiser, the director of the expedition at the time, and Dr. C. von Pilgrim (director of the Swiss Institute for Architectural Research and Archaeology), who was field director of the excavations in the town of the Middle Kingdom, for entrusting her with the study of this extensive and important set of finds. She is indebted to the German Institute of Archaeology, especially the current head of excavations on Elephantine, Dr. D. Raue, for assistance at every step of the way over the many long years that this joint project of the German Institute of Archaeology and the Research Centre for Mediterranean Archaeology of the Polish Academy of Sciences has been running.

<sup>9</sup> Nubian pottery, including material from the Middle Kingdom period, is being studied and will be published by Dr. D. Raue, cf. Raue 2002: *passim*.

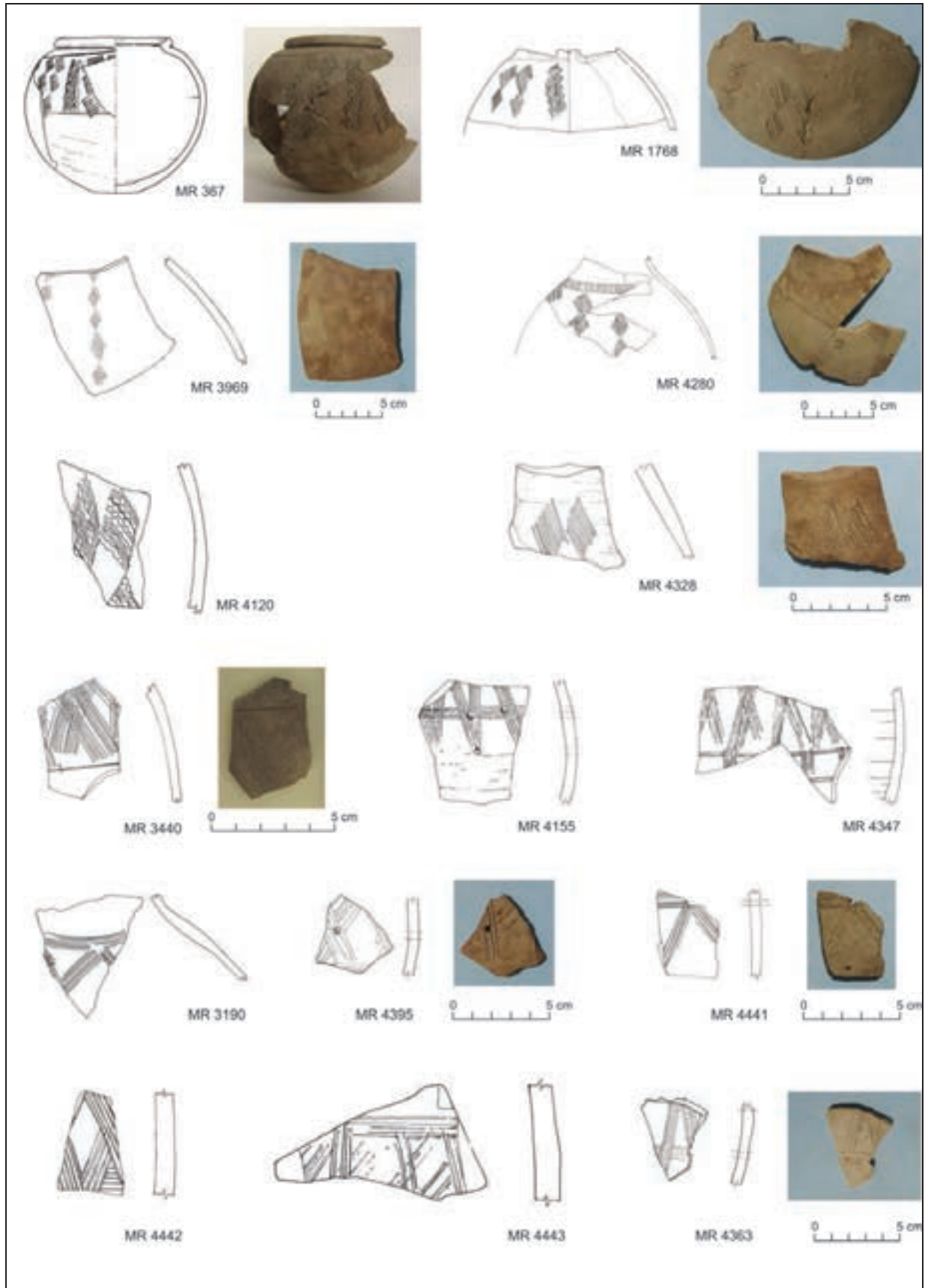


Fig. 2. Selection of pottery with incised decoration from Elephantine (Photos T.I. Rzeuska; inking M. Orzechowska)

horizontal lines, either straight or wavy, zigzags and rhombuses. Ornaments comprise bands of a few to a dozen plus thin and parallel lines, incised very shallowly always prior to the firing. The tool appears to have been akin to a comb with densely spaced teeth, c. 1 mm apart on occasion. It was held against the wall of the pot at a very sharp angle, so that not always all the teeth touched the surface, resulting in the outside lines being occasionally broken. The fin of a fish of the *Synodontis* sp., even now a common species in the Nile, is perfectly suited for the purpose.<sup>10</sup>

The following is a selection of fifteen pots and body sherds exemplifying this group of pottery with incised decoration [Fig. 2].

### Small globular jar with modeled rim (MR 367)

*Archaeological context:* 18504 Y/d, 18504 D/c-2, 18504 U, 18504 Y/e (Level 14-15)

*Technique:* Thrown on the wheel

*Base technique:* Trimmed with a tool

*Clay:* Marl A3

*Surface treatment:* Uncoated (natural)

*Hardness:* Very hard

*Firing:* Oxy

*Dimensions:* Rim dia. 7 cm, max. body dia. 13.4 cm; pres. height 11 cm

*State of preservation:* Complete profile, 120° of the rim

*Decoration:* On upper part of body, incised alternating columns of vertical wavy lines and two columns of lozenges filled with diagonal or cross hatching

*Bibliography:* von Pilgrim 1996: 358-359, Pl. 60d.

### Small, globular jar (MR 1768)

*Archaeological context:* 18502 L/a (Level 13-14)

*Technique:* Thrown on the wheel

*Clay:* Marl A3

*Surface treatment:* Uncoated (natural)

*Hardness:* Very hard

*Firing:* Oxy

*Dimensions:* Max. body dia. 15 cm; pres. height 6.5 cm

*State of preservation:* Upper part (body sherd)

*Decoration:* Incised alternating vertical wavy lines and two columns of lozenges formed by diagonal lines

### Body sherd (MR 3969)

*Archaeological context:* 16113 Q

*Technique:* Thrown on the wheel

*Clay:* Marl A3

*Surface treatment:* Uncoated (natural)

*Hardness:* Very hard

*Firing:* Oxy

*Dimensions:* Pres. height c. 5.5 cm

*Decoration:* Incised columns of lozenges formed by diagonal lines

### Globular jar (MR 4280)

*Archaeological context:* 23601 X/a

*Technique:* Thrown on the wheel

*Clay:* Marl A3

*Surface treatment:* Uncoated (natural)

*Hardness:* Very hard

*Firing:* Oxy

*Dimensions:* Pres. height c. 9 cm

*State of preservation:* Upper part (body sherd)

*Decoration:* Band of vertical cross hatching on the neck and columns of lozenges formed by diagonal lines on the shoulder

### Body sherd (MR 4120)

*Archaeological context:* 31201 R/b

*Technique:* Thrown on the wheel

*Clay:* Marl A3 3

*Surface treatment:* Uncoated (natural)

*Hardness:* Very hard

*Firing:* Oxy

*Dimensions:* Pres. height 6.7 cm

*Decoration:* Incised columns of lozenges formed by wavy diagonal lines

### Body sherd (MR 4328)

*Archaeological context:* 21010 n

*Technique:* Thrown on the wheel

*Clay:* Marl A3

*Surface treatment:* Uncoated (natural)

*Hardness:* Very hard

*Firing:* Oxy

*Dimensions:* Pres. height c. 11 cm

*Decoration:* Incised columns of rhombuses performed before firing with a tool reminiscent of a comb

### Body sherd (MR 3440)

*Archaeological context:* 19101 L/e

*Technique:* Thrown on the wheel

*Clay:* Marl A3

*Surface treatment:* Uncoated (natural)

*Hardness:* Very hard

*Firing:* Oxy

*Dimensions:* Pres. height c. 5 cm

*Decoration:* Incised cross hatching

### Body sherd (MR 4155)

*Archaeological context:* 20013 e

<sup>10</sup> For this suggestion I am indebted to Prof. J. Peters (Universität München, Institut für Paläoanatomie und Geschichte der Tiermedizin), who is working on the archeozoological material from Elephantine.

*Technique:* Thrown on the wheel  
*Clay:* Marl A3  
*Surface treatment:* Uncoated (natural)  
*Hardness:* Very hard  
*Firing:* Oxy  
*Dimensions:* Pres. height c. 8 cm  
*Decoration:* Incised horizontal lines and cross hatching  
*Remarks:* Holes pierced before firing

**Body sherd (MR 4347) (not illustrated)**

*Archaeological context:* 23603 K/c  
*Technique:* Thrown on the wheel  
*Clay:* Marl A3  
*Surface treatment:* Uncoated (natural)  
*Hardness:* Very hard  
*Firing:* Oxy  
*Dimensions:* Pres. height c. 9.5 cm  
*State of preservation:* Body sherd  
*Decoration:* Incised horizontal lines and cross hatching

**Body sherd (MR 3190)**

*Archaeological context:* 36108 U/a  
*Technique:* Thrown on the wheel  
*Clay:* Marl A3

*Surface treatment:* Uncoated (natural)  
*Hardness:* Very hard  
*Firing:* Oxy  
*Dimensions:* Pres. height c. 5 cm  
*State of preservation:* Shoulders (body sherd)  
*Decoration:* Incised horizontal lines and cross-hatching on the shoulders

**Body sherd (MR 4395)**

*Archaeological context:* 25101 E/b  
*Technique:* Thrown on the wheel  
*Clay:* Marl A3  
*Surface treatment:* Uncoated (natural)  
*Hardness:* Very hard  
*Firing:* Oxy  
*Dimensions:* Pres. height: c. 5 cm  
*Decoration:* Incised horizontal and criss-crossing lines  
*Remarks:* Hole pierced after firing, probable mending of broken vessel

**Body sherd (MR 4441)**

*Archaeological context:* 26102 B/c  
*Technique:* Thrown on the wheel  
*Clay:* Marl A3

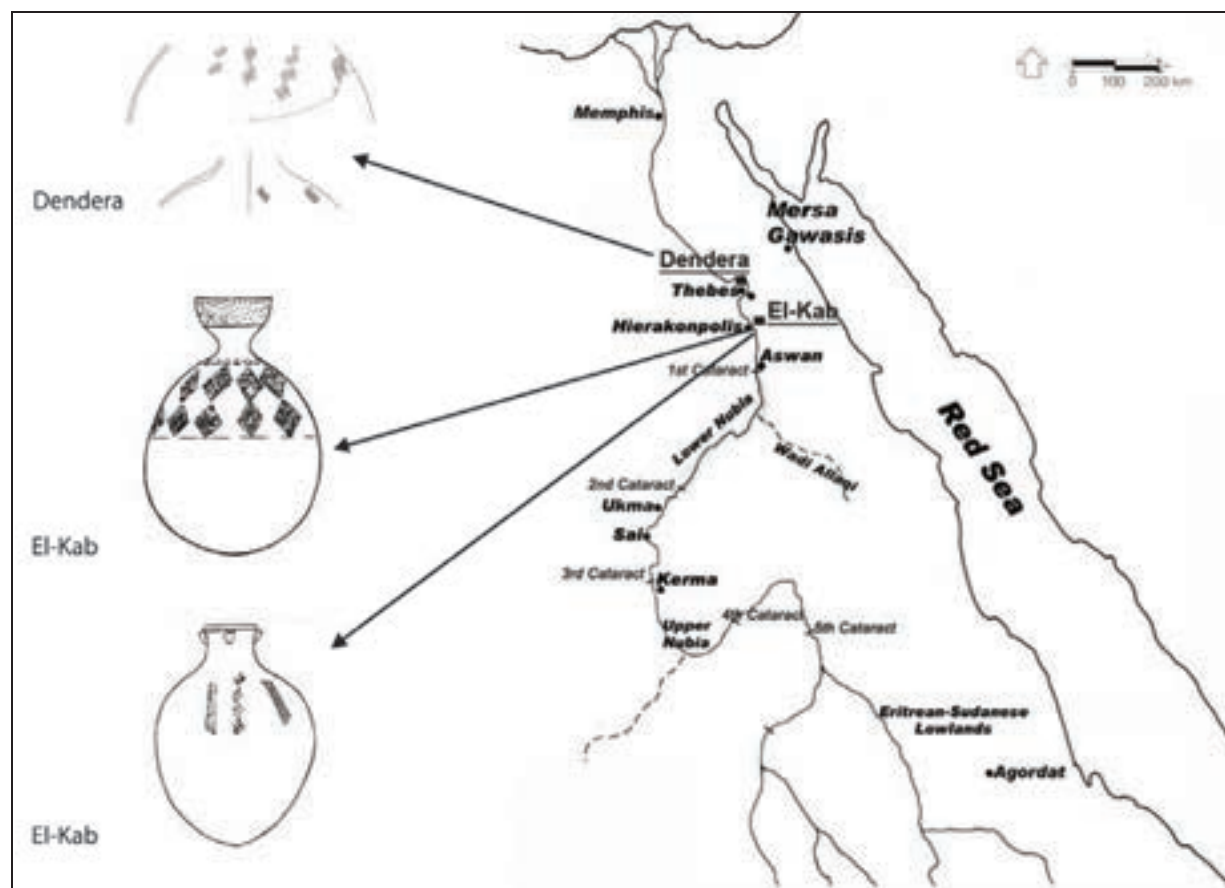


Fig. 3. Distribution of Upper Egyptian sites where pottery of Marl A3 with incised "Nubian" decoration has been recorded

*Surface treatment:* Uncoated (natural)  
*Hardness:* Very hard  
*Firing:* Oxy  
*Dimensions:* Pres. height c. 5 cm  
*Decoration:* Incised horizontal and criss-crossing lines  
*Remarks:* Hole pierced after firing, probable mending of broken vessel

#### **Body sherd (MR 4442)**

*Archaeological context:* 26102 H/b  
*Technique:* Thrown on the wheel  
*Clay:* Marl A3  
*Surface treatment:* Uncoated (natural)  
*Hardness:* Very hard  
*Firing:* Oxy  
*Dimensions:* Pres. height c. 3.5 cm  
*Decoration:* Incised horizontal lines and cross hatching

#### **Body sherd (MR 4443)**

*Archaeological context:* 25102 H/e  
*Technique:* Thrown on the wheel  
*Clay:* Marl A3  
*Surface treatment:* Uncoated (natural)  
*Hardness:* Very hard  
*Firing:* Oxy  
*Dimensions:* Pres. height c. 5 cm  
*Decoration:* Incised horizontal lines and cross hatching

#### **Body sherd (MR 4363)**

*Archaeological context:* 21006 y  
*Technique:* Thrown on the wheel  
*Clay:* Marl A3  
*Surface treatment:* Uncoated (natural)  
*Hardness:* Very hard  
*Firing:* Oxy  
*Dimensions:* Pres. height c. 4.7 cm  
*Decoration:* Incised horizontal lines and cross hatching

Pots with this kind of decoration appeared already in layer 15 on Elephantine dated to the late Tenth – early Twelfth Dynasties (Pilgrim 1996: 359). The small globular jar with modeled rim (MR 367) from the early Twelfth Dynasty is one of the better preserved examples. The decoration, very popular otherwise in Elephantine, lasted through the end of the Middle Kingdom, still occurring in material from layer 13.

Pottery with the same kind of decoration has been found at other sites in Upper Egypt (El Kab, Dendera and Karnak North), but it is generally rare [Fig. 3]. Like the vessels from Elephantine, these pots are of medium- or large-size, and are made of Marl A3.

#### **Dendera**

Globular jar  
*Clay:* Marl A3 (*pâte 9* in local classification)  
*Surface treatment:* Uncoated (natural)  
*Technique:* Thrown on the wheel  
*Decoration:* Incised before firing, lozenges filled with diagonal lines, and vertical wavy lines  
*Dimensions:* Max body diam. c. 34.5 cm; pres. height c. 12 cm  
*Provenience:* Settlement east of temple

*Dating:* Occupation phase 4, i.e., end of Eleventh – beginning of Twelfth Dynasty  
*Bibliography:* Marchand 2004: 222-223, Fig. 108

Globular jar  
*Clay:* Marl A3 (*pâte 9* in local classification)  
*Surface treatment:* Uncoated (natural)  
*Technique:* Thrown on the wheel  
*Decoration:* Incised before firing, vertical wavy lines  
*Dimensions:* Pres. height c. 8 cm  
*Provenience:* Settlement east of temple  
*Dating:* Occupation phase 4, i.e., end of Eleventh – beginning of Twelfth Dynasty  
*Bibliography:* Marchand 2004: 222-223, Fig. 109

#### **Karnak North**

Vessel  
 Decoration consisting of lozenges with incised cross-hatching, no further details available (Jaquet-Gordon 1979: 30).

#### **El Kab**

Globular, funnel-necked jar [Fig. 4]  
*Clay:* Marl A3 colour of section 5 Y 7/2 light grey  
*Surface treatment:* Uncoated (natural), 5 Y 7/3 pale yellow  
*Technique:* Thrown on the wheel with base trimmed with knife and smoothed by hand  
*Decoration:* Incised before firing, rows of nicks on neck, band of vertical cross-hatching on shoulder, two rows of lozenges with cross-hatching  
*Dimensions:* Max. body diam. 23.2 cm; height 34.9 cm  
*Provenience:* Unpublished tomb 263, kept in London, Petrie Museum, U.C. 18365  
*Dating:* Reign of Senwosret II  
*Bibliography:* Bourriau 1981: 57, nos 99; Quibell 1898: 59, Pls XVI and XXIV (cf. <http://www.digitalegypt.ucl.ac.uk/elkab/archive/uc18365.jpg>)

Ovoidal jar with rounded rim, and short neck  
 No precise information on surface treatment, technique, dimensions, and provenience given in publications.  
*Clay:* “Hard, drab ware”, possibly identical with Marl A3

*Decoration:* Incised before firing, alternating columns of wavy lines and lozenges filled with diagonal lines, below rim applied knobs

*Dating:* Reign of Senwosret II

*Bibliography:* Quibell 1898: 59, Pls XIV, 4

Since the sources of the clay they were made of continue to be exploited even today in the neighborhood of Luxor, one can assume cautiously that the pots were made in one of the local workshops from where they were distributed near and far. The oldest pots with incised decoration are dated to the beginning of the Middle Kingdom (end of the Eleventh and beginning of the Twelfth Dynasty). Incised geometric motifs do not lie in the tradition of Egyptian pottery. Before the Middle Kingdom incised decoration was a rarity. It appeared in the Nagada II period, but even then the polished pots with white-filled incisions and punctures resembled Nubian ceramics more than anything else (Bourriau 1981: 24, nos 23-26) and indeed, imports from Nubia are thought to have inspired Egyptian potters (Bourriau 1981: 24, nos 23). The Old Kingdom and the First Intermediate period have yielded no



Fig. 4. Globular jar from El Kab (UCL8356; courtesy of the Petrie Museum, University College, London)

examples of incised decoration, if preferringly incised pot-marks on the exterior of bread-moulds, bread trays, and beer-jars are excluded (Bourriau 1981: 17-18, no. 2, bread mould with incised sign of a loaf; Peet, Loat 1913: Pl. IV, nos 37-38, 42-45, bread moulds with cross; *anch*-sign, etc.; Rzeuska forthcoming; Aston 1998: 33-34). Incised decoration reappears in material from the terminal years of the First Intermediate period and the beginning of the Middle Kingdom and it is in Upper Egypt that this occurred (Marchand 2004: 213, 220-221, Figs 44-49, 69, Pls 3b-d, 4; Seiler 1999: 380, Figs 15-16). This is hardly a surprise considering that Thebes was the capital of a united kingdom, a political center and the cradle of a strong and belligerent dynasty of the Mentuhoteps. What's more, it was a cultural center that stimulated an artistic awakening, in ceramics as well, after the stiff and awkward style of the First Intermediate Period.

#### INCISED JARS OF NUBIAN C-GROUP

The inspiration for this kind of decoration appears to have come once again from Nubia where this ornamental tradition goes back to the Neolithic (Sudan 1996: 60). It is indeed a trademark, especially of the Nubian C-Group pottery, easily recognizable and very characteristic punctured and incised motifs combining in a variety of ways geometric figures — rhombuses, squares and triangles, straight, wavy and zigzagging lines running horizontally and vertically, and more rarely figural representations. The punctures and incisions were filled occasionally with a color paste: white, seldom yellow or red (Bietak 1968: *passim*; Shinnie 1996: 59-60; Trigger 1976: 77-78; O'Connor 1978: 53; 1993: 29; Reinold 2000: 89-90.). Pottery with this kind of decoration is deeply rooted in the Nubian tradition and particular motifs have remained popular even in modern Nubian handiwork, especially basketry (Bietak 1979: 125-126). It has been called the most beautiful of Nubian ceramics (Sudan 1996: 52; Bietak 1979: 108) and it certainly can be considered as a source of prototypes inspiring Egyptian potters.

Meriting particular attention are jars classified by M. Bietak as type II/a/23 (Bietak 1968: 103-104; Pl. 7, IIa 23, first jar from left) and II/b/17 (Bietak 1968: 111, Pl. 12, IIb 17). These are small globular jars with cylindrical necks and straight simple rims. They were made by hand, out of organically tempered Nile silt, the surface left untreated. Pots of this type appeared already in phase I, but always in settlement contexts and never decorated (in Sayala, after: Bietak 1968: 103; 1979: 124); interestingly, their percentage share in settlement assemblages is con-



siderable.<sup>11</sup> In cemeteries, where they are numerously represented, their appearance coincides with the beginning of the C-Group phase II (Bietak 1979: 124-125, Figs 10-12, classified as “necked jars of rough decorated ware”). At this time they already bore geometric or naturalistic incised designs, initially only on the shoulders, then also on the body. Accompanying them all the time were undecorated pots (Trigger 1976: 77-78; Bietak 1987: 121). This type has been recorded on many C-Group sites, among others, Dakkeh (O’Connor 1993: Pl. 4, first jar from left), Aniba, Toshke, Faras, Areika, and Wadi el-Arab, the latter studied in detail by Bietak (1968: 104 and 111). Recent additions to the list include the cemetery in Adindan and a settlement in Wadi es-Sebua East.

At Adindan, Bruce B. Williams distinguished these jars as “Group III: C-Group jars”, describing the type as a small vessel with globular body, cylindrical neck and simple rim, 10 to 30 cm high, handmade of chaff-tempered Nile silt using coiling and pinching as the most likely techniques. The surfaces of these vessels were left rough (Williams 1983: 49-50, esp. note 34, combining Bietak’s “necked jars of houseware” and “necked jars of rough decorated ware”, cf. Bietak 1979: 124-125).

At Wadi es-Sebua East, B. Gratien placed the jars in her group III B, that is, Nubian C-Group pottery (*la poterie nubienne non tournée*). They were described as very typical jars with globular or ovoid bodies, a simple or slightly rim, measuring from 10 to 18 cm in diameter, a straight or slightly flaring neck, sometimes with characteristic ledge located in its lower part, and rounded bottom. The Nile silt used in their manufacture contained natural temper in the form of grains of quartz, feldspar, and mica, as well as organic temper visible to the naked eye as porous clay structure. The pots were made by hand and an additional coil of clay was added on the shoulders, presumably at the weakest and most easily damaged point where the body and neck were joined (Williams 1983: 47-49). Jars with geometric incised ornament on the shoulders and upper body belong in subgroup NT 2 (*les jarres décorées*) (Gratien 1978: 42-44, Pls 6-7).

Jars of this type are thought to have been used as containers for beverages, milk perhaps, as suggested by images of cows on some of them (Bietak 1979: 120, Fig. 10, first row: first, third, fifth jar from left, second row: first and third jar from left, third row: second and third jar from left; Hafsaas 2007: 168; Friedman 2001: 32,

Fig. 4, Pl. 3). They could have been used very well for water transport as they are very handy and their rough surface must have augmented a cooling effect, making them ideal for the purpose. They may have been used for other beverages like beer, for example, but without examination of the residues found inside the pots this must remain in the sphere of conjecture (Bietak 1979: 125; Hafsaas 2007: 168-169).

#### EGYPTIAN VERSUS NUBIAN POTTERY

Looking for Nubian prototypes of the C-Group jars one turns an eye on examples of types IIa 23 and IIb 17 — four from Toshke, one from Adindan, another of unknown provenance and fragments of at least six others from Wadi el-Sebua East [Figs 5,6].

#### Toshke 1 [Fig. 6, uppermost row]

Globular jar with long, slightly flaring neck and simple rim. Made of Nile silt. Height c. 22 cm, rim dia. c. 10 cm, max. body dia. 22 cm (dimensions based on drawing). Incised lines on the rim, from the neck down to the middle of the body alternating motifs of a double vertical zigzag line and a single and double column of lozenges filled with cross-hatching.

Phase IIa (Junker 1926: 35, Pl. XV, no. 163; Bietak 1968: 183, Pl. 7).

#### Toshke 2 [Fig. 6, second row from top]

Globular jar with slightly flaring neck and simple rim. Made of Nile silt. Height c. 23.5 cm, rim dia. c. 10.5 cm, max. body diam. 19.5 cm (dimensions based on drawing). Incised lines on the rim, two horizontal lines on the neck, from the neck down to the middle of the body alternating motifs of a double vertical zigzag line with four crosses in each open field of the zigzag, a band of vertical wavy lines, column of lozenges filled with cross-hatching and a human(?) figure.

Phase IIb (Junker 1926: 35, Pl. XV, no. 179; Bietak 1968: 184, Pl. 12).

#### Toshke 3 [Fig. 5, top]

Globular jar with long, slightly flaring neck and simple rim. Made of Nile silt. Height c. 15.5 cm, rim dia. 7.5 cm (dimensions based on drawing). Incised decoration on the neck in the form of a double zigzag line sandwiched between horizontal lines. From the neck down to the middle of the body, columns of single or double lozenges filled with cross-hatching. Now in the collection of the Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung in Berlin (no. 1458).

<sup>11</sup> At Wadi es-Sebua the group of vessels made of “*pâte grossière*”, including the jars, constituted c. 46% of all of the pottery, cf. Gratien 1983: 65.

Phase IIa/b (Junker 1926: 35, Pl. XV, no. 161; Sudan 1996: 64-65, no. 63, jar in center).

Phase IIa (Williams 1983: 216, Pl. 66D, found in tomb K59).

**Adindan** [Fig. 6, middle row, left]

Globular jar with flaring neck and simple rim, Made of Nile silt. Height c. 28.5 cm, rim dia. 16 cm, max. body dia. 25 cm. Incised decoration on the shoulders and upper body in the form of vertical, slightly wavy bunches of crossing lines and a zigzag around the neck. The ornament may have been executed, as in Egypt, using a comb-like tool, for example, the fin of a fish.

**Dakka** [Fig. 5, bottom left]

Globular jar with long, slightly flaring neck and somewhat modeled rim. Made of Nile silt. Height c. 17.5 cm, max. body dia. 16 cm. Incised decoration on the neck comprising two horizontal lines, a zigzag line below it and rhombuses, the latter two motifs made with a triple line.

Phase IIa/b (O'Connor 1993: 129, Fig. 12, Pl. 3, first jar from left; found in cemetery 101, grave 360).

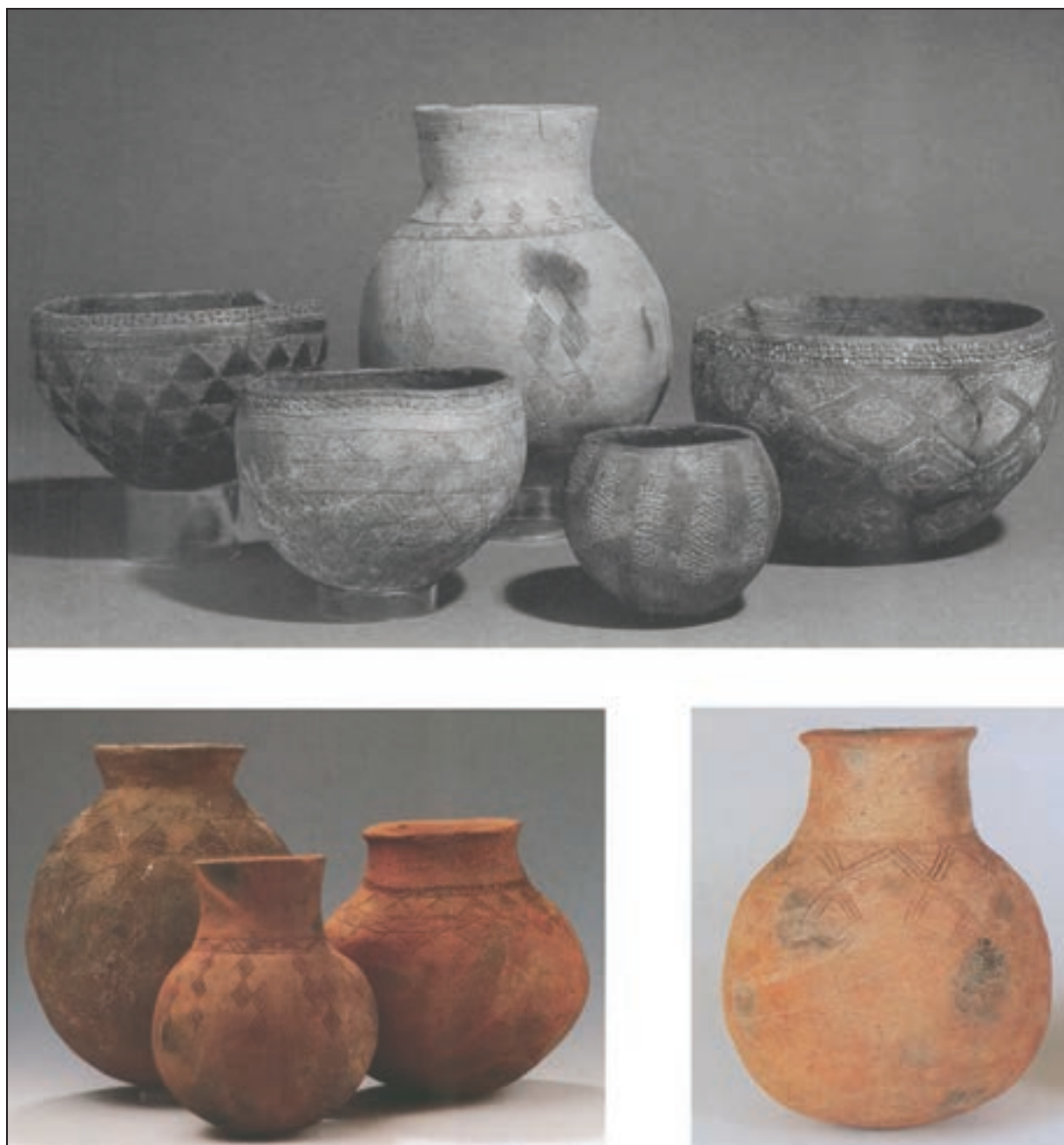


Fig. 5. Nubian prototypes of C-Group jars from Toshke (top), Dakka (bottom left) and without provenance (after Shinnie 1996; O'Connor 1993; Bonnet 1996)

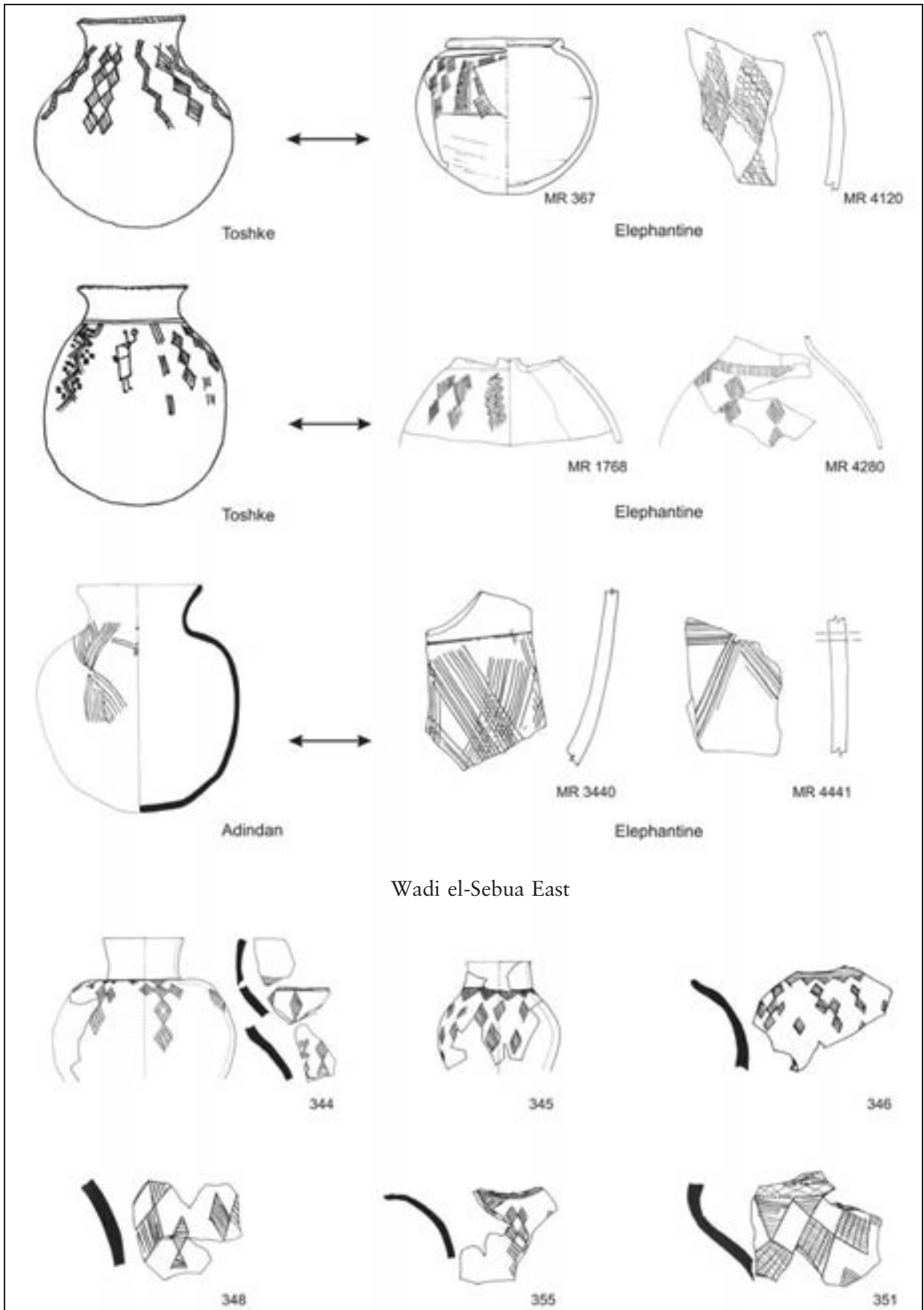


Fig. 6. Nubian prototypes of C-Group jars from Toshke (top two rows), Adindan (middle row), both with parallels in Elephantine material, and Wadi el-Sebua East (bottom two rows) (Drawings after Bietak 1968; Gratien 1983; Williams 1983; inking from Elephantine M. Orzechowska)

**Jar without provenience** [Fig. 5, bottom right]

Globular jar with long, slightly flaring neck. Made of Nile silt. Dimensions unknown. Incised decoration in the form of lozenges filled with diagonal lines on the neck, two vertical lines below that with triangles between them, also filled with diagonal lines; below two columns of double lozenges filled with diagonal lines.

No date given (Shinnie 1996: Pl. 8a, jar in center).

**Fragments from Wadi el-Sebua East** [Fig. 6]

Fragments of globular jars with long, slightly flaring neck. Made of Nile silt. Dimensions unknown. On the shoulders incised triangles, columns of single and double lozenges, all filled with diagonal lines or cross-hatching

Phase II (Gratien 1978: 42-44, for vessels with similar decoration, cf. 48-49, Pl. 6, nos 344, 345, 348, 355, Pl. 7, nos 346, 351).

A comparison of these Nubian C-Group pots with the Egyptian products reveals a striking similarity. Motifs are the same — wavy lines and zigzags,

rhombuses and triangles, the figures filled with diagonal lines or cross-hatching. Considering the different ceramic traditions and the popularity of this kind of decoration in Nubia contrasted with its rareness in Egypt, there can be no doubt that the inspiration came from the south, meaning that Egyptian ceramics imitated Nubian models and not the opposite. The aesthetic qualities of this allegedly “barbarian” ceramics were appreciated in Egypt and subsequently adopted by Egyptian potters and spread throughout Upper Egypt, enriching the rather poor ornamental repertoire of Egyptian pottery and determining its development during the Middle Kingdom.

The oldest pots from the end of the Eleventh and the beginning of the Twelfth Dynasty are proof that Egyptians started out by copying Nubian prototypes very closely. Suffice it to mention a small globular jar from Elephantine (MR 367, cf. Fig. 2), the decoration of which repeats that of a jar from Toshke [Toshke 1, cf. Fig. 6], despite insignificant differences in shape. A jar from Dendera (Dendera 2, cf.

Table 1. Similarities and differences between Nubian and Egyptian groups of vessels with incised decoration

FEATURE	NUBIAN POTTERY Pottery characteristic after: Bietak 1979: 111, 124-125; Nortström 1973: 38 and 52; Williams 1983: 29-36, Table 9; Hafsaas 2007: 165; Gratien 1978: 43	EGYPTIAN POTTERY Author's personal observation based on the Elephantine material and parallels from Egypt mentioned earlier
Shape	Globular with clearly articulated neck, and simple rim	Globular with or without neck, rounded or modeled rim
Clay	Porous and relatively silty Nile Clay with minor inclusions of sub-rounded or rounded quartz and feldspar in the silt fraction, fragments of mica may be present, abundant of finely chopped organic inclusions: straw or grass (i.e. dung rarely chaff) evenly distributed in the groundmass	Very dense and homogenous Marl A3 (according to the <i>Vienna System</i> ) without any temper, occasionally some sub-rounded grains of quartz, mica and unmixed amorphous marl particles, small pores and voids; the clay is coeval with “Egyptian grey-greenish, i.e., VA-B (Williams 1983: 31, Tab. 9)
Technique	Handmade by pinching and hollowing or/and by the “paddle and anvil” technique, the neck probably by coiling	Wheel-made, bottom overcut with a knife, sometimes smoothed with the hand.
Decoration	Incised before firing, loose spacing of particular incisions, grooves varying from rounded to V-shaped	Incised before firing, very dense spacing between incisions, cut at an angle, shallow
Tool	Tool with single sharp edge, e.g. skewer or moderately pointed tool	Sharp multi-edged tool resembling a comb (e.g. <i>Synodontis fin</i> )
Surface	Not smoothed, rough	Untreated, not smoothed
Color	Light reddish brown	Light green, yellowish green
Hardness	Medium hard	Very hard
Fracture	Brown, usually with clear black core in the middle of the fracture	Uniform, the same color as on the surface
Firing temperature	500-700°C	1000°C
Firing	Mixed	Oxidized

Fig. 3) is decorated in a virtually identical manner. In turn, the pot from El Kab [El Kab 2, cf. Fig. 4] copies the decoration of jars from Toshke (Toshke 3) and Wadi el-Sebua. Fragmentary jars from Elephantine shown in Fig. 2, (bottom three rows) were inspired presumably by the decoration of the kind found on the jar from Adindan [cf. Fig. 6].

A closer analysis also reveals certain differences deriving from different pot-making traditions. This is expressed in the material used, because Egyptian potters selected the finest marl clay for this beautifully decorated ceramics. The technique was also different, turning on the wheel being in Egypt the method of choice for the mass production of jars of this shape and size. But the most distinct difference was the way in which the ornament was executed. Nubian potters used a middling-sharp tool with single cutting edge leaving rather deep, single incisions (except for the jar from Adindan perhaps). Their Egyptian counterparts adapted a much more complicated tool in the form of a fish fin.

The similarities and differences between the two groups of vessels are presented in the table below.

With time Egyptian potters introduced bolder and bolder variations of decoration patterns and transferred them from the jars to other shapes — bowls, deep bowls and cups, the shoulders or upper parts of which received one or more wavy lines. Quickly enough they also started decorating vessels made of other clays than the fine Marl A3, namely, the Nile silt clays, like B1 and more



Fig. 7. Nubian prototypes of C-Group jars from Wadi el-Sebua East (after Gratien 1983)

rarely B2 and also Marl A4. Incised wavy lines, both vertical and horizontal, became very fashionable and were so commonly used, at least in Upper Egypt, that one is hard put to recognize in those late examples any of that initial Nubian influence (Marchand 2004: 222; Rzeuska forthcoming a).

The most surprising development, however, was that ceramics with Nubian-inspired decoration subsequently returned to Nubia, presumably as imported luxury goods. We have no way of knowing whether the Nubians actually recognized this interdependence. Fragments of such imports have been found in Areika (O'Connor 1993: 131, Fig. 21), Saï (Gratien 1976: 118, Fig. 8), and the settlement of Wadi el-Sebua Est, where B. Gratien identified it as pottery with typical C-Group decoration (*sic!*), but wheel-made and hence probably from Egypt (Gratien 1978: 42 and 49, clay type III A.2).<sup>12</sup> It would be interesting to

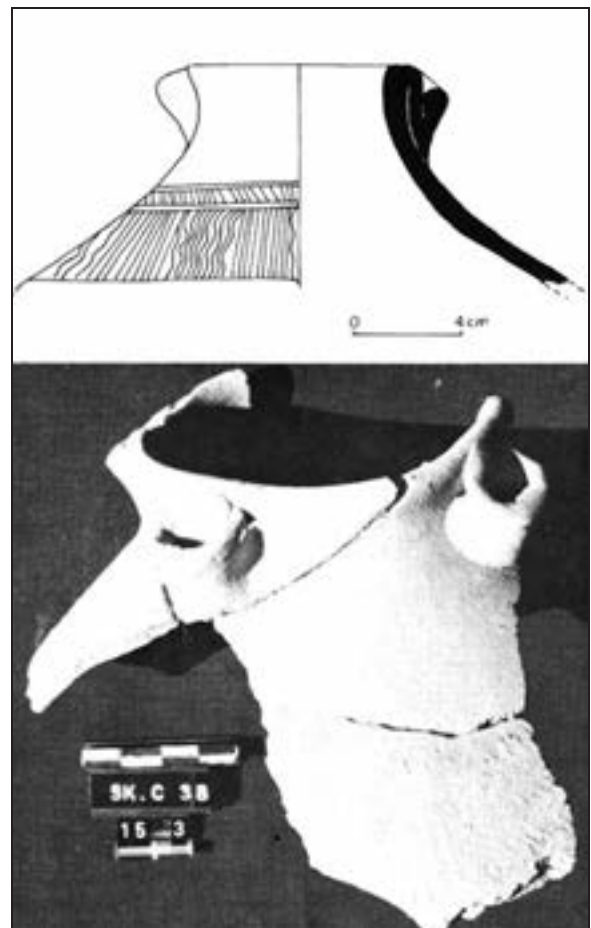


Fig. 8. Egyptian Marl A3 pottery with Nubian-like incised decoration found in Nubia (Drawing and photo after Gratien 1978; O'Connor 1978)

<sup>12</sup> Identifying the clay by the description alone is difficult, but it is most likely Marl A2. Vessels made out of such clay used to be decorated with incised ornaments, which were, however, already Egyptian variations on Nubian-inspired motifs.

know why of all the different Nubian incised ornaments only one kind fired the imagination of Egyptian potters sufficiently to have them adopt it as their own [Figs 7, 8].

### TRANSFERRING THE IDEA

A study of this group of pottery has raised a number of intriguing issues to be discussed. Foremost, it is the question of how Nubian decorative motifs reached Egypt. Two possibilities exist — either through man's instance when a Nubian potter transferred his capabilities to a new working environment, or through the pottery itself, assuming it was imported. The 'human transfer' theory has gained many proponents, even at the 11th Conference of Nubian Studies where this paper was presented, for it is easy to imagine a Nubian or Nubians living in Upper Egypt during the Middle Kingdom and working in Egyptian ceramic workshops where they could have produced vessels bearing a typical Nubian decoration. The weak point of this idea, however, lies in the different organization of pottery manufacture between Egypt and the C-Group population during the Middle Kingdom. In Egypt the workshops were well-organized mass-producing complexes operated mostly by men, if the representations from Egyptian tombs and various figurines are anything to go by. In Nubia, women were responsible for this rather domestic production<sup>13</sup> and the special knowledge of how to make a pot, from preparing the clay to making the pot and firing it, was passed down from mother to daughter. This female approach is explained by the fact that for the C-Group peoples pottery was connected inseparably with food production and storage, both activities belonging in the sphere of women's activities. Women had the knowledge which pots were best for cooking and which for serving or storing reserves (Hafsaas 2007: 164-165). The wheel was simply not essential in such "house workshops" and one can hardly be surprised that it took such a long time for it to appear. Only as many pots as were needed at any given moment, and the specific kinds of pots that were needed were produced — when needed. Adding to this the requirements of the technique — unlike handmaking, wheel-turning requires long training, especially in the case of marl clay as the raw material — one is led to the conclusion that no Nubian woman could have

been employed to make pots in an Egyptian pottery workshop. The ceramic production in Ancient Egypt and Nubia was organized along different systems: that in Nubia encompassed making pottery on the household level for use outside the household, while that in Egypt was a large-scale industry producing on a massive scale and employing large numbers of highly specialized workers (van der Leeuw 1977; Sinopoli 1991: 99)

We are left therefore with the other possibility: that the pottery itself — sometimes even specially imported from Nubia as Egyptian sources report<sup>14</sup> — was specifically the carrier of inspiration for Egyptian potters.

### CHRONOLOGICAL CONFUSION

Having said the above, we could end with the conclusion that pottery of the Middle Kingdom developed under the influence of Nubian C-Group pottery of the second phase. At this point, however, we encounter a much more disturbing question than the transfer of ideas. It is the chronological dissonance that arises from absolute dates. Egyptian pottery in the Nubian style appears already in the beginning of the Middle Kingdom, that is, at the close of the Eleventh and in the beginning of the Twelfth Dynasty, while the earliest Nubian prototypes can be attributed to phase IIa, which is said to correspond to the middle of the Twelfth Dynasty at the earliest. The original would thus be younger than the copy and that does not do at all.

In his fundamental work on the chronology of Group C, M. Bietak (1968) introduced three phases of the culture. In the absence of written sources, pottery became an increasingly important historical source in his argument, providing a chronological framework based on the changes and developments in the corpus of vessels (Bietak 1979: 125-126). Thus, the relative chronology is based on grave and pottery typologies, while the absolute one on the chronology of Egypt, the connection established by Egyptian artifacts, pottery included, found in Nubia (Bietak 1968: 19-22, 135-136; O'Connor 1993: 29). The middle phase, II, has been dated mainly by scarabs and pottery to c. 1850-1600 BC. Sub-phase "a" is believed to be contemporary with the late Twelfth – early Thirteenth Dynasty and subphase "b" with the Second Intermediate Period (Bietak 1968: 135-136, 165, Zeittafel).

<sup>13</sup> Holthoer 1977: 27-31; two ostraca from el-Medina depicting children or Nubians sitting with vessels, cf. Fig. 42, nos 7-8, are hardly proof that Nubians were employed in pottery workshops in Egypt. The identification of the depicted as Nubian is highly doubtful in the first place and even if they were Nubians, the activities depicted on the ostraca cannot be linked easily with pot-making, see also Bourriau *et alii* 2000: 135-136; Bietak 1979: 108-110.

<sup>14</sup> F.Ll. Griffith, *Hieratic Papyri from Kabun and Gourab I*, London 1897, Pls XX: XXII.1-account, cited after Raue 2002: 23. The text mentions one Hori, scribe of frankincense, who purchased vessels from the Medja.

This absolute and relative chronology of C-Group culture in Nubia, established already 40 years ago, would appear to be extremely stable and yet there have been published several other absolute dates for phase II. One variant is 1900-1600 BC, considered as coeval with the end of the Middle Kingdom and the beginning of the Second Intermediate Period (Sudan 1996: 31); other published chronological variants include 2050-1700 BC (O'Connor 1993 : 7, Fig. 1.2) and 2000-1600 BC (O'Connor 1993 : Pl. 3), the latter two notably in the same work; from c. 1840 BC, that is, from after the middle of the Twelfth Dynasty to the end of the Second Intermediate Period (Lacovara 1987: 67); finally, from 1985 to 1550 BC (Hafsaas 2007: 164). It follows that scholars see the beginning of phase II of C-Group sometime between 2050 and 1840 BC, which gives a period of more than 200 years! Taking into consideration that the beginning of the phase is invariably linked in scholarly arguments with the second half of the Twelfth Dynasty, such an absolute dating of the middle of the Twelfth Dynasty to a range between 2050 and 1840 BC is extremely imprecise and unacceptable, at least from the point of view of the history of Egypt. A recent reliable chronology of Ancient Egypt places the Twelfth Dynasty between 1939(+16) BC and 1760 BC, giving altogether 179 years (+16), which is less than the proposed time range for the beginning of phase II of C-Group (Schneider 2006: 168-175, 491-492).

Let us therefore consider the issue of the beginning of phase II in some detail. There have been many new developments in Nubian studies, including the field of Middle Kingdom pottery, since M. Bietak's breakthrough study. Until recently the beginnings of C-Group were placed in the Sixth Dynasty arguing strongly against an earlier dating of the origins of this culture (O'Connor 1978: 51), an argument that has recently been overturned (Glück 2006-2007: *passim*). The same is true of the division into phases, of which there were originally three, but now there is talk of the possibility of there being a fourth as well (Reinold 2000: 89). The confusion grows, fueled on one hand by inconsistent application of absolute chronology and on the other hand by uncritical repetition of once established opinions.

## JARS FROM THE NORTH

Egyptian artifacts, including pottery, have already been mentioned as chronological markers for establishing the absolute chronology of C-Group in Nubia. One type of vessel found in C-Group cemeteries is particularly important, especially for precisising chronological relations with Egypt. It is a slender jar with funnel-like rim and a roll of clay around the neck, globular body and rounded bottom — type 26 from phase IIa in Bietak's typology — dated to the late Twelfth-early Thirteenth Dynasty (Bietak 1968: 104-105, 135, Pl. 8,IIa 26, cf. Fig. 10). It merits attention as it supplies a key to unraveling the chronological confusion described above.<sup>15</sup>

This kind of jar has been found at a number of C-Group sites: at least 14 vessels in Toshke,<sup>16</sup> one at the northern cemetery in Aniba,<sup>17</sup> and a few at Buhen (Emery 1979: 164, Pl. 63, Type 49).

A closer look at the type compared to other forms of C-Group ceramics reveals that neither shape nor clay belong to the C-Group tradition. The clay has been described in more or less detail by a number of the excavators to date. Type 26 was seen as a "Gefäß der harten hellen Ware" (Bietak 1968: 104), made of "Qenaware" (Steindorf 1935: 98),<sup>18</sup> "a smoothed red ware with a cream or white surface" (Emery, Kirwan 1935: 501), or "red ware" (Emery 1979: 164). Junker's description is the most exhaustive one: "...nach einer kleinen Einziehung am Ende des Körpers ein kleiner Wulst, von dem aus ein breiter Rand trichterförmig nach außen strebt, ohne am oberen Rand eine eigene Lippe zu bilden. (...) das Material ist ein gut geschlämmter Ton mit Kieselbeimischung, hart gebacken, und steht zwischen der Kena-Ware und der übrigen roten Ware. Der Bruch ist entweder durchgehend ziegelrot oder zeigt in der Mitte einen schwarzem Kern. Sämtliche gut erhaltenen Beispiele weisen ein hellrotes bzw. hellgraues Farbband auf, gewiß in der Nachahmung der Kena-Ware. Bemerkenswert ist, daß jedes Exemplar, soweit nachweisbar mit einer eingeritzten Ofenmarke versehen ist" (Junker 1926: 52-54). He recognized the vessels as handmade, but erred in considering them a local product [Fig. 9].

The shape and the clay as described above, undoubtedly Marl C, indicate that the jar was a purely Egyptian product, and the present author is not alone in making this determination (cf.

<sup>15</sup> I thank Virpi Perunka from Liverpool University for an informative discussion of the topic.

<sup>16</sup> Seven by H. Junker, cf. 1926: 52-54, Pl. 22, nos 328-334, 337; seven others by Emery and Kirwan in cemetery 209 in Toshke, cf. Emery, Kirwan 1935: Pl. 34, graves nos 194, 217, 227, 243, 244, 251, 252.

<sup>17</sup> Steindorf 1935: 98, 105-106, Pl. 60, no. 6. Grave 181, which yielded the jar, was even dated by M. Bietak to phase IIIb, cf. Bietak 1968: 105, n. 661.

<sup>18</sup> "Qenaware" was a term often used in older publications to refer to marl clay in distinction from Nile silt. Today "Qena" is applied to Marl A3, see above.

Czerny 1999: 97-98; Bader 2001: 125-126). Identical jars have been discovered in northern Egypt where they have been attributed to the period from the end of the Eleventh to the beginning of the Twelfth Dynasty, at Ain Sohna (Defernez 2004: 69, 74-75, 86, Fig. 5, nos S 1 X-VI, S 9 VI, Fig. 9, no. S 15 I; M1B or M2 clay, identical with Marl C1 and Marl C2), Abu Ghâlib (Bagh 2002: 39, Figs 7c, 9c, Marl C2) and Tell el-Da'aba (Czerny 1999: 94-98, 192, Mc 112-117; Type 44 in Bader's classification, dated to the inception of the Twelfth Dynasty, rule of Amenemhet I, cf. Bader 2001: 123-126, 129, nos 199-201, Figs 28j-k, 29a).<sup>19</sup> Vessels of this kind have also been identified in the material from Elephantine and they can be considered as a "missing link", helping to track the commercial routes from Lower Egypt into Nubia, but also providing

a tool to synchronize more precisely the chronologies of the Delta, Upper Egypt and Nubia in the beginnings of the Middle Kingdom.

The following exemplifies the finds of vessels of this type from the island [Figs 10, 11].

#### Rim (MR 4323)

*Archaeological context:* 23603 B/b

*Technique:* Handmade and overthrown

*Clay:* Marl C1

*Surface treatment:* Scum

*Hardness:* Very hard

*Firing:* Oxy

*Dimensions:* Rim dia. 12 cm; pres. height 5.5 cm

*State of preservation:* 45° of rim

#### Rim (MR 2254)

*Archaeological context:* 25602 F

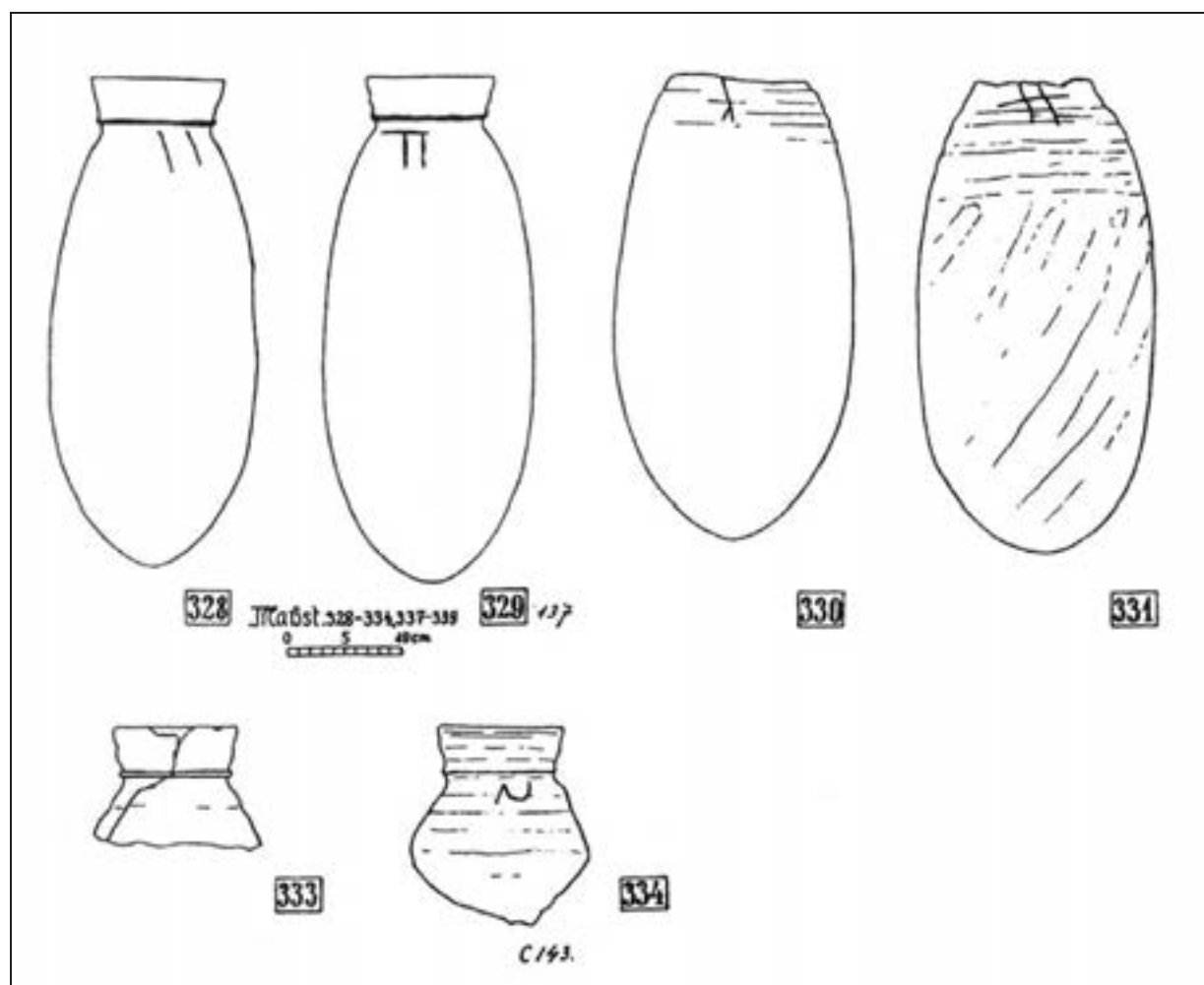


Fig. 9. Marl C slender jars with funnel-like rims; Bietak's type 26 from Phase IIa (after Junker 1920 and Bietak 1968)

<sup>19</sup> The evolution of the jar shape led from a long body with straight or slightly flaring rim and a roll of clay around the neck to a more flaring rim and groove and a rounder body with a maximum diameter below mid-height, which imparts an impression of sagging and heaviness (Bader's types 45 and 46; cf. Bader 2001: 127-145, Figs 29a-l, 30-38, Taf. III d, IV a-b).



*Technique:* Handmade and overthrown  
*Clay:* Marl C1  
*Surface treatment:* Scum  
*Hardness:* Very hard  
*Firing:* Oxy  
*Dimensions:* Rim dia. 9.2 cm; pres. height 5.2 cm  
*State of preservation:* 25° of rim

#### **Rim (MR 3001)**

*Archaeological context:* 18608 F (Level 13)  
*Technique:* Handmade and overthrown  
*Clay:* Marl C1  
*Surface treatment:* Scum  
*Hardness:* Very hard  
*Firing:* Red  
*Dimensions:* Rim dia. 10 cm; pres. height 4.5 cm  
*State of preservation:* 70° of rim

#### **Rim (MR 3188)**

*Archaeological context:* 26108 N/a (Level 14)  
*Technique:* Handmade and overthrown  
*Clay:* Marl C 2  
*Surface treatment:* Scum  
*Hardness:* Very hard  
*Firing:* Oxy  
*Dimensions:* Rim dia. 11 cm; pres. height 5.5 cm  
*State of preservation:* 74° of rim

#### **Rim (MR 3165)**

*Archaeological context:* 16114 G (Level 14)  
*Technique:* Handmade and overthrown  
*Clay:* Marl C1  
*Surface treatment:* Scum  
*Hardness:* Very hard  
*Firing:* Oxy  
*Dimensions:* Rim dia. 11 cm; pres. height 5 cm  
*State of preservation:* 55° of rim

#### **Rim (MR 3067)**

*Archaeological context:* 16108 G  
*Technique:* Handmade and overthrown  
*Clay:* Marl C1  
*Surface treatment:* Scum  
*Hardness:* Very hard  
*Firing:* Mix  
*Dimensions:* Rim dia. 10 cm; pres. height 6 cm  
*State of preservation:* 132° of rim  
*Remarks:* Traces of fire and soot on the surfaces indicate secondary burning

#### **Upper part of jar (MR 3210)**

*Archaeological context:* 26108 B/b  
*Technique:* Rim and neck hand made and probably overthrown, body hand built by coiling  
*Clay:* Marl C2  
*Surface treatment:* Scum  
*Hardness:* Very hard

*Firing:* Oxy  
*Dimensions:* Rim dia. 11.8 cm; pres. height 11 cm  
*State of preservation:* 158° of rim  
*Remarks:* Three vertical strokes scraped before firing on inner surface of neck

#### **Rim (MR 3211)**

*Archaeological context:* 26108 A/a (Level 14)  
*Technique:* Handmade and overthrown  
*Clay:* Marl C1  
*Surface treatment:* Scum  
*Hardness:* Very hard  
*Firing:* Oxy  
*Dimensions:* Rim dia. 11 cm; pres. height 6.2 cm  
*State of preservation:* 24° of rim

#### **Part of neck (MR 4235)**

*Archaeological context:* 21005 j  
*Technique:* Handmade  
*Clay:* Marl C1  
*Surface treatment:* Scum  
*Hardness:* Very hard  
*Firing:* Oxy  
*Dimensions:* Pres. height 6 cm  
*State of preservation:* Body sherd  
*Remarks:* Potmark in the form of a wavy line incised before firing

#### **Body sherds (MR 4224)**

*Archaeological context:* 21005d  
*Technique:* Handmade by coiling  
*Clay:* Marl C1  
*Surface treatment:* Scum  
*Hardness:* Very hard  
*Firing:* Oxy  
*Dimensions:* Max. body dia. 17 cm; pres. height 26.5 cm  
*State of preservation:* Body sherds

#### **Lower part of the jar (MR 4285)**

*Archaeological context:* 21015 a  
*Technique:* Body handmade by coiling, bottom by pinching  
*Clay:* Marl C1  
*Surface treatment:* Scum  
*Hardness:* Very hard  
*Firing:* Oxy  
*Dimensions:* Max. body dia. 19 cm; pres. height 31 cm  
*State of preservation:* Body sherds  
*Remarks:* Partly preserved potmark incised below neck before firing

#### **Discussion**

It may be assumed that vessels of Type 26 were long in use as “luxury” items, thus explaining their presence in phase IIa dated by Bietak to the

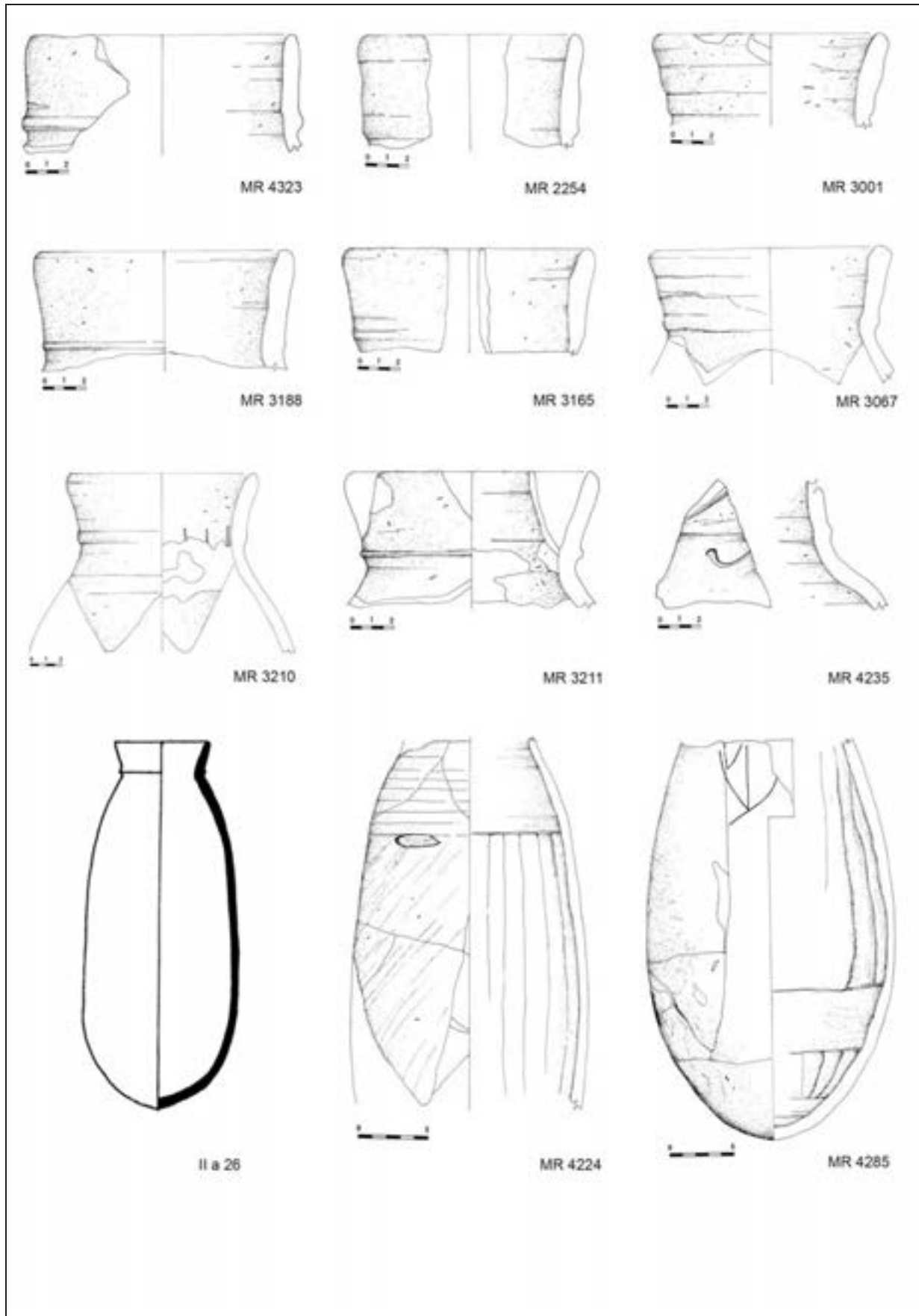


Fig. 10. Early Middle Kingdom Marl C slender jars with funnel-like rims from Elephantine; Bietak's type 26 from Phase IIa (Inking M. Orzechowska; left bottom corner, after Bietak 1968)

late Twelfth Dynasty. The weakness of this argument lies in the following. Firstly, the sheer numbers. A few jars could have imaginably lasted in households for a hundred years or so, after which they were put in a grave with other goods, but the scenario is not likely in the case of at least 14 vessels of Type 26 found in different graves in

Toshke (see above). Secondly, assuming a chronology in which the beginning of phase II of C-Group falls in the middle of the Middle Kingdom, how can we expect to explain the presence of jars with such “Nubianizing” incised decoration already in the beginnings of the Middle Kingdom? There is no way of explaining



Fig. 11. Selection of Early Middle Kingdom Mar C slender jars with funnel-like rims from Elephantine (Photo T.I. Rzeuska and Virpi Perunka)

logically the chronological precedence of Egyptian copies with regard to the Nubian prototypes.

If we assume that Nubian jars of type IIa 23, and possibly also IIb 17, as well as Egyptian jars IIa 26, all originate from phase IIa — as the Bietak's study of C-Group ceramics appears to suggest — then we should also accept the same dating for all of them and “translate” the absolute dating of Egyptian pots into Nubian ceramics. Consequently, the beginnings of phase IIa would fall in the beginning of the Middle Kingdom and not, as is commonly assumed, in the middle and second half of the Twelfth Dynasty. Upon adopting this dating, we will find that Egyptian pottery with incised Nubian decoration from the beginning of the Middle Kingdom now occupies its proper and logical place in the overall chronological framework.

### CONCLUSIONS

Recapitulating the discussion, there can be no doubt that the decoration of Egyptian Middle Kingdom pottery developed under a strong influence of Nubian C-Group ceramics of phase II. A closer look at the material has demonstrated, however, that if the currently accepted absolute chronology of C-Group is considered, the Egyptian products would be earlier than their Nubian originals. This led the author to

a reconsideration of the dating of the beginnings of phase II of Group C. The Nubian-inspired Egyptian pottery from Upper Egypt, especially Elephantine, and primarily Egyptian jars of Marl C found in C-Group context as well as in Egypt, also in Elephantine, do not disturb in any way the relative chronology of Group C, but they suggest an earlier dating of the beginnings of phase II. Instead of the commonly accepted middle to late Twelfth Dynasty, the inception of phase II should be considered as corresponding to the beginning of the Middle Kingdom, that is, the late Eleventh or the early Twelfth Dynasty at the latest. It is notable that premises arguing in favor of an earlier dating of the beginnings of phase II derive from a study of material from both Egypt and Nubia.

This contribution is presented with full awareness that it barely touches upon a much wider problem, which is a reconsideration of the absolute dating of all phases of C-Group culture based on a deeper and more detailed examination of the chronology in the two regions. A new analysis of Egyptian ceramics, which undoubtedly made an appearance in Nubia during the Middle Kingdom, should be a key factor in this study, being possibly a proverbial “Trojan Horse” opening new directions in these chronological considerations.

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