

SUDAN ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH SOCIETY
PUBLICATION NUMBER 39

ARCHAEOLOGY BY THE FOURTH NILE CATARACT

Survey and Excavations on the left bank of the river
and on the islands between Amri and Kirbekan

Volume IV

Finds

Part 2. The pottery

by

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and

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SARS
LONDON
2026



ARCHAEOPRESS PUBLISHING LTD

13-14 Market Square

Bicester

Oxfordshire OX26 6AD

www.archaeopress.com

Sudan Archaeological Research Society

Publication Number 39

General Editor: W. V. Davies

Editor of this volume: I. Welsby Sjöström

ISBN 978-1-80583-420-5

ISBN 978-1-80583-421-2 (e-Pdf)

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Front cover: A selection of pottery forms from the SARS Concession.

Back cover: The authors in their open-air lab at the end of the final season in February 2007, preparing to pack the finds for the journey to the Sudan National Museum in Khartoum (photo: J. Newman).



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Part 2. The pottery

Dedication

to my friends, colleagues and co-authors

Ross Iain Thomas 1978-2022

and

Sandro Salvatori 1948-2020

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Acknowledgements

Isabella Welsby Sjöström

Special thanks are due to Elisabeth O’Connell, for supplying the most recent versions of Ross Thomas’s text and figures; to Pam Rose, for labelling and sending in copies of her unpublished annotated drawings from Qasr Ibrim that RIT had previously consulted and referenced – an arduous task that spanned three continents; to Bruce Williams and Lisa Heidorn, who very kindly allowed me to reference their two volumes on the al-Widay cemetery ahead of publication; to Valerie Maxwell, for sending scans of Roberta Tomber’s 2001 and 2006 publications; to Krzysztof Pluskota, for copies of two of his articles; and to Derek Welsby, for the use of his extensive library on Sudanese archaeology and for digitising some of the drawings found at the eleventh hour.

Sandro Salvatori generously donated his time to examine a sample collection of prehistoric pottery sherds and to write a detailed report, later reviewed by Donatella Usai. The result of his work is published in Section 3.3. A heartfelt thanks is also due to Adam Łajtar, for looking at graffiti 1223g, 1277g, 3013g, 4000g (5.2.) and the ostrakon (5.3) and sharing his observations.

Thanks are also due to the many people (besides IWS and RIT) who assisted with recording the pottery in the field: Annett Ditttrich, Aléna Efremova, Anna Mabrey, Eric McCann, Krzysztof Pluskota and Paola Pugsley.

At the British Museum, several volunteers in the Department of Egypt and Sudan helped digitise part of the data and drawings.

Jean Greenhalgh has painstakingly copy-edited the manuscript with great thoroughness. Any remaining errors are entirely my responsibility.

Finally, thanks are due to the National Corporation for Antiquities and Museums of Sudan for facilitating the work in the field, and to the Sudan Archaeological Research Society for grants supporting the desk work required to bring this report to completion.

I would also like to pay homage (and I am sure Ross would have done so too) to the various people we had the pleasure of meeting in the Fourth Cataract, particularly in the hamlets of et-Tereif, ed-Doma and Hadiab. Especially our landlord at ed-Doma, Hasaballah Ali al-Kinaibli, who was a unique man.



Hasaballah Ali al-Kinaibli

1. Introduction

Isabella Welsby Sjöström

Preparing the material for publication has been a complicated task. Not only because of the size of the area surveyed, the number of sites (*c.* 2,800), dating to the full gamut of periods from the Mesolithic to the Post Medieval, but also because of the number of people inevitably involved in recording the vast array of pottery. A study season at the end of the fieldwork in 2007 to check the type series would have resolved more easily some issues that later arose at the time of compiling the present volume, but time and logistics did not allow for this. The end result is nevertheless as detailed and comprehensive as possible overview of the ceramics used in the area between Amri and Kirbekan, along the east bank of the Nile and some of the islands (Figure 1.1).

Following the style of the publications of the Northern Dongola Reach Survey and the excavations at Kawa (Welsby Sjöström 2001; 2023), it had long ago been decided to arrange the material typologically, for both the forms and the decoration. Unlike the earlier publications, the material was, however, divided between two chronological blocks, with IWS dealing with all pottery up to and including the Napatan period, and RIT with everything from the Meroitic onwards. A simpler way in which to proceed would almost certainly have been publishing the ceramics from each site individually, rather than attempting to arrange the material according to both date and form, as well as mostly separating wheel-made from handmade wares. However, both Ross and I agreed on this way of laying out the material, the intention being to produce a type series that could be consulted as a ‘manual’, where it would be easy to find a particular form for someone searching for parallels.

By 2012 Ross had prepared a draft of his report, but I was involved with other work at the time and unfortunately it was only after his sudden death in 2022 that I began to work in earnest on the material. While I had his report with many detailed references to parallels in both

Sudan and Egypt, his preliminary layout in the latest version that could be found did not conform to the order of the text. An amount of editing of both text and layout has, therefore, been necessary, with some additions by IWS. All the tables in the volume have been prepared by IWS. While RIT’s text was fulsome for the forms, he had as yet done little work on the decoration of the later periods. The final layout of Chapter 4 retains the core arrangement made by RIT.

In 2013 Sandro Salvatori examined a sample collection of some 100 Mesolithic and Neolithic sherds from the survey. The intention was for him to give his opinion on the forms, fabrics, decoration and especially the dating. Not content to simply dictate a few notes, Sandro very kindly wrote a complete report on the material, which is included here in Section 3.3, with only minimal editing.

Methodology in the field

In general all the pottery visible on the surface at a site was gathered, and all the material collected was recorded: the characteristics of the pottery (whether plain body sherds or diagnostic sherds, i.e. rims, bases, handles and decorated sherds) were recorded, taking into account the form, type of vessel, fabric, surface treatment and decoration, diameter and surviving rim diameter percentage, method of manufacture, and (ideally; see below) the number and weight of the sherds. The intention was that the recording should be complete and uniform enough that any subsequent dating or re-interpretation of the data should be possible. In the field forms were numbered in a simple numerical sequence with an ‘x’ suffix, with the first form being 1x and the next (different) form 2x, etc; the same was done for decoration, but with the suffix ‘y’, and in the rare cases of graffiti, the suffix ‘g’. Fabrics were

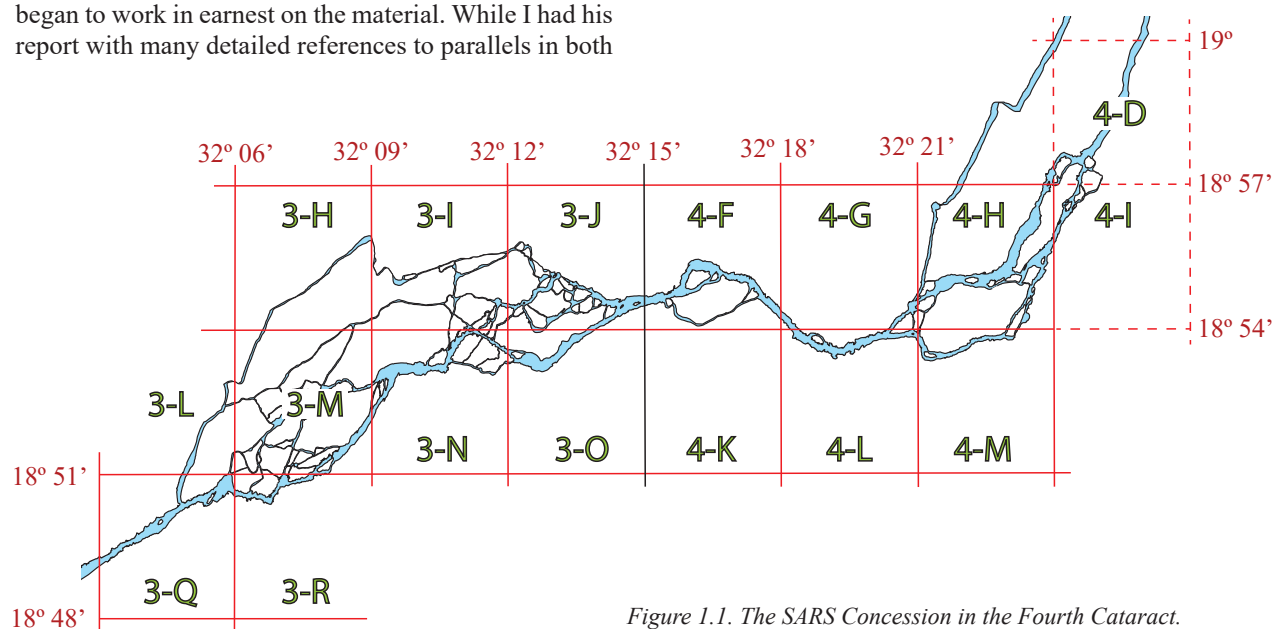


Figure 1.1. The SARS Concession in the Fourth Cataract.

also numbered sequentially, as and when new ones were recognised. As three teams were working simultaneously in the field, each team was given their own run of number sequences (1x-999x and 5000x- for AKSE, 1000x-1999x for AKSW, 2000x-2999x for AKSC, in part later re-recorded as 3000x- and new finds from the 2006-07 season as 4000x-). In between seasons the drawings were digitised, placed in a temporary layout and then circulated to each team ahead of the next season; when logistically possible, fabric samples were also exchanged between the teams. The AKSE fabrics begin at 201, AKSW at 300 and AKSC at 3001 and 4000.

Criteria for creating the current type series

The tables in Chapters 3 and 4 list all instances where a form was found, the fabrics it was made from, the surface treatment and decoration that occur with any given form, as well as the rim diameter range, and whether the vessel was handmade or wheel-made.

The data collected on the rim diameter percentage, weight and number of sherds was ultimately deemed too inconsistent to include, so the tables do not reflect the quantity of examples of a particular type, only indicating at what site(s) they were present. In any case, the surface collections (and to some degree the material from the excavations) do not necessarily correspond to the complete corpus of pottery originally present at the site. Despite initial good intentions, the inconsistency in the records does not allow us to calculate percentages of presence/frequency, whether of a particular type of vessel or pottery fabric across the concession.

For the periods pre-dating the Meroitic a smaller volume of pottery was recovered than in the later periods, though this is largely due to the long excavation at 3-J-5 and 3-J-18 and does not imply that more pottery was used in the Meroitic and later periods. Chapter 3 is divided into three sections: 3.1 includes jars, flagons, amphorae and storage vessels and 3.2 includes bowls (predominantly open forms), as well as miscellaneous handles, bases, lids and unusual forms. The division between handmade and wheel-made has not been strictly adhered to for the layout in these two sections. Section 3.3 contains the report by S. Salvatori on some of the Mesolithic and Neolithic ceramic finds.

The pottery from the later periods, presented in Chapter 4, is a larger corpus and has been divided into five sections, based on shape and function rather than primarily on date. This division is based on various criteria, including method of manufacture: beer jars in section 4.1 and other handmade jars (larger, closed vessels, generally for transport, storage and/or for liquids) in section 4.2; handmade bowls (smaller, predominantly open forms, for cooking and serving food) in section 4.3. The same general subdivision has been applied to wheel-made wares in 4.4 (jars, flagons, amphorae and storage vessels) and 4.5 (bowls, cups, beakers and dishes). Where possible, chronologically earlier forms are placed first, depending on how specific a form is to a period. In the earlier periods (Chapter 3) the majority of the pottery corpus is handmade, and thus form variation cannot entirely be attributed to a development over time rather

than to accidents of manufacture. It is still notable how in some cases contemporary forms of a particular 'ware' (defined as having the common denominators of fabric, surface treatment and, on occasion, decoration and general shape) show only subtle variations over a considerable period of time. However, as the majority of the recovered forms come from surface survey or excavated graves as opposed to stratigraphic excavation in settlements or at least non-funerary contexts (with the notable exceptions of 3-J-5 and the churches at 3-J-18 and 3-Q-62) it is difficult to trace the progressive chronological development of a form.

A problem with identifying pottery from survey collection is that there is no guarantee that the assemblage will belong to a single period, problematic when the pottery in a region is not well known. Hence the finds from the excavations at 3-J-5 and in the church at 3-J-18 on Mis Island in particular are of importance, and this is why RIT focussed on the pottery from these sites. However, every effort has been made to include the pottery from the many other contemporary sites within the survey area in the discussion.

Bowls are illustrated beginning with closed forms (inverted rim) and progressing to open forms, and ending with dishes. In some cases, such as with the decorated Pan-Grave bowls, an exception has been made and all forms with the same decoration type are shown together, outside the linear form divisions. Certain categories, such as *Kerma Classique* beakers or the rilled Napatan amphora rims, naturally fall into classes of their own, while in other instances differences in form are less period-specific. Although surface finish, fabric and method of manufacture will help to date an individual sherd, the same form may occur in disparate periods.

Tables 3.1, 3.2 and 4.1-4.5 list all instances of a particular form, and what decoration was applied to it. It should be noted, when consulting the drawings and the tables, that the forms illustrated are shown with the decoration (if any) that was present on the first example of such a form; not all examples of a form have the same decoration (or any). For the reader who wishes to research (for example) the sites at which a particular type of decoration and form occur, it is best to start from the chapter on decoration, as some forms can be identical but without a particular type of decoration, which may be chronologically diagnostic.

Thanks to the excavations conducted within the concession, especially of cemeteries, which are our best source of complete or at least full profiles, a significant number of these were recovered; inevitably there are none from the Mesolithic due to the condition of the sites, some from the Neolithic and only a few from the Medieval and later periods, as pottery was only rarely deposited in the graves.

Note on the dating terminology

Sites and pottery dating to the period between 2500-1500 BC are generally referred to as *Kerma Ancien*, *Moyen* and *Classique*. The 'Old Kush I, II and III' terminology was introduced by Mahmoud el-Tayeb¹ and has become

¹ See Paner and Borowski 2005, footnote 1, describing the spread of the Kerma culture as far afield as the Fourth Cataract.

established in the literature, notwithstanding that scholar's later comments:

"Study and analysis of Old Kush period burial customs and grave goods from the GAME concession on the right bank of the Nile near the Fourth Cataract has provided strong evidence for a single culture which spread over a vast territory extending from Lower Nubia through Kerma and the whole of the Seleim Basin in the Northern Dongola Reach, the Letti Basin and Abkor in the Southern Dongola Reach, as far upstream as the Fourth Cataract region. Similar burials have been found at Kerma's Eastern Cemetery and in the Northern Dongola Reach, as well as at several locations around the Fourth Cataract. Although the grave superstructures noted at Kerma consisted of sandy mounds covered with stones rather than being exclusively made of stone, this was probably dictated by the natural surroundings, where access to stone was much more restricted Artefacts recovered from the graves, both pottery and various types of dress accessory, also indicate that the people who produced them shared the same cultural identity."

(Kolosowska and Mahmoud el-Tayeb 2007, 217).

Variations in many aspects of the Kerma culture are observable throughout the areas where it is present. The range of variation is clearly seen, for example, in the Eastern Cemetery at Kerma itself.

It should not be understood that all the pottery within the report to which a Kerma date has been assigned was made in Kerma; occasionally some forms do appear to have that provenance, notably many of the *Kerma Classique* beakers, but elsewhere, unless the origin of the vessel is commented on, the fabrics listed in the relevant table will show that production was more local.

Decoration and Graffiti

Chapter 5 deals with the decoration, graffiti and potter's marks. All decoration was recorded, whether it occurred on complete vessels, diagnostic sherds or random body sherds. The various motifs and types of decoration are presented in Section 5.1. The same system of recording the vessel forms was followed for the decoration, each different type of decoration was drawn and a new decoration number allocated. The corpus here presented has been organised according to the method by which the decoration was made (incised, stamped, painted) rather than by chronological order. However, certain types of decoration are time specific; for example, painted decoration generally only occurs in the New Kingdom and Meroitic through Medieval periods, rocker-stamped or impressed patterns largely belong in the Mesolithic and Neolithic. Incised motifs are universal, though the patterns or motifs vary; mat-impressed pottery is common in the

prehistoric periods as well as in the Post Meroitic, with occurrences in all periods.

Rim decoration is presented first, followed by the different body decorations, subdivided by pattern. A differentiation has been made between plain incised lines and dotted lines, although the motifs are similar and appear to be contemporary, particularly on Post-Meroitic jars.

Graffiti and pot marks were recorded according to the same system as the decoration and are presented in Section 5.2. A single ostrakon was found at site 3-J-18, and is published in section 5.3.

Arrangement of the figures, plates and tables

The original x, y and g numbers have been retained throughout. The figure in which each item features is also listed in the text and tables; when a form or decoration is also illustrated by a plate this is indicated by '+' in the table. The plates are arranged by figure number.

At the end of the volume there are indices of the forms (1), decoration (2) and graffiti (3). There is also an index of the sites at which pottery was found (4).

Note on the sites and their contexts listed in the tables

The site code either stands alone or, in the case of there being different features/graves on a site, or if it has been excavated, is followed by the feature/context/grave number, the grave number in red italics.

Photographs

All photographs were taken by various members of the team in the field, with the exception of the thin-section photos in Section 2.2, where they are duly accredited, and the photos in Section 3.3, which were taken by Sandro Salvatori.

Ubi eam?

At the end of the last season of fieldwork in 2007 the finds were brought to the National Museum in Khartoum. Through the generosity of NCAM, a 'Type Series' of the forms, decoration and fabrics was donated to the Sudan Archaeological Research Society, and passed on for permanent curation in the collections of the Department of Egypt and Sudan at the British Museum where it is accessible to scholars. Although not complete, it is extensive.

List of abbreviations and codes used

Abbreviations

ARS = African Red Slip
EDW = Eastern Desert Ware

Pot codes

800e/i red-burnished exterior/interior.
802 red-burnished both interior and exterior.
805e/i light brown burnish, vessel surface colour.

Using the 'Old Kush' terminology is more apposite when discussing burials and settlements far from the Kerma heartland, despite the similarity in form and decoration of the pottery.

806e	grey line on body, usually found on <i>Kerma Classique</i> beakers.
808e	yellow line on body of Kerma type vessel.
810e/i	black-burnished exterior/interior.
812	black-burnished both interior and exterior.
816	black top, i.e. like 804e, but not burnished.
820	slipped e/i, R = red, B = black, Gr = grey. Note that when only one side is slipped (usually the exterior), the slip comes over the inside of the rim. The same is the case with a wash.
822	slipped on both sides.
825e/i	wash.
830	painted.
831e	one painted band;
832e	two painted bands, etc.
850	repair hole.
851	suspension hole. Sometimes similar holes (e.g. 871 below) on closed vessels are unlikely to have been used for suspending the vessel. While some vessels were indeed suspended by the means of passing string through holes made before or after firing, suspension nets were also used (see Wolf and Nowotnick forth., description of graves at 3-Q-33, a Post-Meroitic cemetery).
870	reused sherd – usually by grave robbers as a digging tool – a so-called ‘spade sherd’.
871	air hole, often made pre-firing, average diameter 15mm. Some of these holes were narrower and may have been used to allow air to circulate into the vessel to avoid the build-up of pressure from fermentation, or to fasten a lid (e.g. 3308x and 3310x, 4.4.1).
898	sherds definitely from the same pot, but no physical join.
931e	one incised groove under rim.
932e	two incised grooves under rim, etc.
941e	incised oblique line(s).
948e	horizontal line of impressed dots.
960i	criss-crossed internal smoothing (typical of Kerma or C-Group semi-coarsewares).
961i	parallel lines, internal smoothing.
962e	brush or reed-smoothed surface (usually exterior rather than interior).
999	conjoining sherds (used to indicate joining sherds recovered from different contexts).

Form abbreviations

BC	bread cone
BJ	beer jar
BKR	beaker
CBKR	caliciform beaker
KB	Kerma beaker
CP	cooking pot
IB	incense burner
PB	pilgrim bottle
B	base
B hole	base hole
BS	body sherd
H	handle
HS	handle scar

R	rim
SH	shoulder
N	neck

Manufacture

HM	handmade
WM	wheel-made
SW	slow wheel
CB	coil built
Impr	impressed
Inc	incised
Ptd	painted
H	horizontally applied burnish or slip
V	vertically applied burnish or slip
Var	minor variant of the type specimen

Colours

BL	black
BG	beige
BR	brown
CR	cream
GN	green
GR	grey
O	orange
P	pink
PUR	purple
R	red
Y	yellow
W	white

Abbreviations in general used in the tables, especially in Comments

D	Diameter. When a number or sequence of numbers is given in parentheses it is because the diameter varies significantly from the norm.
Fab	Fabric.
ND	No Drawing. Unless specifically stated, all forms, decoration types and graffiti are illustrated by a drawing. When there is no drawing, the type is nonetheless assigned to the section/figure page where the most similar forms or decorations are illustrated. Occasionally, such as in the case of 806e, 808e and some types of decoration, there is a photograph instead of a drawing; there, the same principle of assigning the code to a particular section for the description/discussion is used.
+	Signifies that the form is also illustrated by a photo (see Plates of relevant section).
#	Signifies that the decoration is also illustrated by a photo in Plates 3.3.
Bold	Signifies that the majority of the pottery has a given characteristic (WM, Fabric, Context).

Periods

Meso	Mesolithic
Neo	Neolithic
PK	Pre Kerma
KA	<i>Kerma Ancien</i>

<i>KM</i>	<i>Kerma Moyen</i>
<i>KC</i>	<i>Kerma Classique</i>
NK	New Kingdom
Nap	Napatan
Mer	Meroitic
Post Mer	Post Meroitic
Xan	Christian
Med	Medieval*
Post Med	Post Medieval/Islamic

*Medieval and Christian are used interchangeably