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ABSTRACT

The Lower Nubian ›C-Group Culture‹

A Brief Synopsis and Critical Review of the Current State of Research

Marie-Kristin Schröder

The so-called C-Group culture is a distinct archaeological culture attested in Lower Nubia from ca. 2300–1800 B.C.E. Known since the beginning of the 20th century from investigations in Lower Nubia in the frame of the first Archaeological Survey of Nubia, this culture has been the focus of comprehensive research for more than a century. Material culture attributed to the C-Group, in particular the characteristic decorated ceramics, funerary customs, and settlement patterns, were thoroughly published in the main monograph by Manfred Bietak (1968). However, the state of research has since evolved considerably, and thus a revision of the C-Group became imperative. The aim of this paper is to present the current state of the art of the archaeological record of this culture, most notably the striking shift of its chronological phases. The C-Group features a shorter period of time and is, according to the dating of Egyptian-style ceramics, only attested until the advanced 12th Dynasty of pharaonic Egypt.

KEYWORDS

C-Group, Kerma, Pan-Grave, Middle Nubian cultures, Lower Nubia

The Lower Nubian ›C-Group Culture‹

A Brief Synopsis and Critical Review of the Current State of Research

Introductory Remarks

¹ As a consequence of the construction and successive raising of the Low Dam south of Aswan at the beginning of the 20th century, the Lower Nubian Nile Valley was gradually flooded, resulting in the loss of both modern and ancient landscapes¹. In the course of the Archaeological Survey of Nubia, the first attempt to survey the endangered areas and collect archaeological data was made². This survey activity was widely extended in the 1960s by the UNESCO International Campaign to Save the Monuments of Nubia³ in preparation for the construction of the High Dam. One result of the first survey, in particular, was the discovery of distinguishable cemeteries that were determined to be ›Nubian‹ in character (i. e., ›non-Egyptian‹). In this study, the terms ›Nubia/Nubian‹ are being used exclusively in the geographic sense for the attestations of the archaeological remains⁴. Neither are ethnic identities nor any equation to modern Nubian populations implied⁵.

² Based on the archaeological record from cemetery 7 in Shellal, located south of modern Aswan, George A. Reisner distinguished and labelled the different phenomena alphabetically (namely the so-called A-, B-, C-, and X-Groups)⁶. It is important to highlight

¹ The Low Dam was completed in 1902 and raised in 1907/1908, 1912, and 1935 (Raue 2018, 6).

² Reisner 1910; Firth 1912; Firth 1915; Firth 1927.

³ This campaign was a collaboration of a large number of countries who participated in surveying and partly excavating endangered sites in the Lower Nubian Nile Valley. As a result, Lower Nubia was thoroughly investigated, and a large number of important sites were published. Most prominent are, e. g., The Scandinavian Joint Expedition to Sudanese Nubia and the Oriental Institute Nubian Expedition by The University of Chicago with their comprehensive publications.

⁴ Geographically, Nubia is defined as the region upstream from the First Cataract in the area of Aswan to the south into modern Sudan and includes not only the Nile Valley but also the adjacent deserts; see for a detailed description Adams 1977, 20–33 and recently Auenmüller 2019.

⁵ Linguistically, modern Nubia extends from Kom Ombo in Upper Egypt to Debba between the Third and Fourth Cataracts; see, e. g., Shinnie 1996, 1; Török 1997, 1.

⁶ Reisner 1910, 17–74, 313–348. The A-Group is a Neolithic culture that mainly settled in Lower Nubia; see Nordström 1972 with further references; Gatto 2000; Gatto 2006a; Gatto 2006b. Note that the existence of the B-Group was already neglected in the 1960s (Smith 1966). The X-Group is nowadays commonly referred to as ›Meroitic‹ or ›Ballana culture‹; see Adams 1977, 390–403.

the colonial background of these alphabetic designations, i. e., that the remains considered to be Egyptian were labelled as such according to the pre-existing chronological divisions, while the ›Nubian‹ remains were merely assigned letters⁷. However, since no indigenous textual sources from Lower Nubia of that time are attested, the term ›C-Group‹ is mostly neutral in its connotation since no ethnic identities are implied. However, the term ›C-Group‹ remains problematic since the equation of material cultures with cultural groups is an outdated concept and does not necessarily mirror past realities (e. g., that no self-identification of the people is known). The label was intended to describe a distinctive material culture, burial customs, as well as settlement patterns, which occur in the Nile Valley from Upper Egypt to the Third Cataract and are clearly distinguishable from the other ›Middle Nubian cultures‹, the so-called Pan-Grave and Kerma cultures⁸. In this study, the term ›C-Group‹ denotes similar characteristics both in the material culture and the archaeological record as were previously distinguished⁹, whereas no ethnic identities are implied as were imposed by the early researchers on the material culture. It is furthermore important to define ›C-Group‹ properly and to reflect the resulting implications¹⁰. When the term ›C-Group‹ is used, it refers primarily to the archaeological record, but behind every material culture and architecture are people with various identities (i. e., age, gender, social status, etc.), who (inter)acted in the framework of complex social practices. The identities of the past individuals who, e. g., buried their relatives in what we call C-Group customs today can be traced by their social practices, e. g., by the manufacture and choice of funerary objects and the execution of the tombs' architecture. These individual identities do not reflect a collective ethnic identity but speak nevertheless clearly for a sense of community acting in similar patterns. In this context, the theoretical approach of ›communities of practice‹ by Étienne Wenger is of significance. In his opinion, ›communities of practice‹ are »groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly«¹¹. When applied to past communities, this concept would reflect shared burial customs, technologies, as well as material culture in the sense of common ideas¹². The archaeological record of habitation and burial sites along the Lower Nubian Nile Valley clearly displays similar features that we associate with the C-Group today; these were used by communities that, in turn, e. g., did not choose to manufacture pottery in the Kerma tradition or bury their individuals in round tomb pits, as is attested for the Pan-Grave culture. This shows that the approach of ›communities of practice‹ is worthwhile to adapt for the ›Middle Nubian cultures‹. At present, Nubian archaeology lacks a revised terminology for these cultures, but despite its valuable criticism, Nubian archaeologists need to be able to enter a scientific discourse, and for that purpose, the term ›C-Group‹ is used in this study.

3 However, the overall occurrence of similar features in the material culture and burial customs as well as settlement patterns from the Upper Egyptian Nile Valley in the area of Hierakonpolis to the Second Cataract displays, in my opinion, one cultural horizon of ›Nubian‹ communities with a similar mindset, which is also reflected in the choice and execution of decorative elements throughout the aforementioned part of

7 The same applies to the naming of the different sites. While the ›Egyptian‹ sites were treated in their historical dimension, the ›Nubian‹ sites were named using merely a numeric system; see Raue 2018, 7.

8 See Säve-Söderbergh 1989 for an overview of the ›Middle Nubian cultures‹.

9 See Bietak 1968 for a comprehensive overview of material culture, burial customs, and settlement patterns assigned to the C-Group, although some aspects of this study are now outdated.

10 See Schröder in press for a comprehensive study of ›Nubian‹ material culture and ceramic assemblages from settlement as well as funerary contexts from Upper Egypt to Upper Nubia.

11 Wenger 1998; see also <<https://www.wenger-trayner.com/introduction-to-communities-of-practice/>> (03.04.2023).

12 See also Näser 2017, who applied the ›communities of practice‹ concept on cemetery S/SA at Aniba.

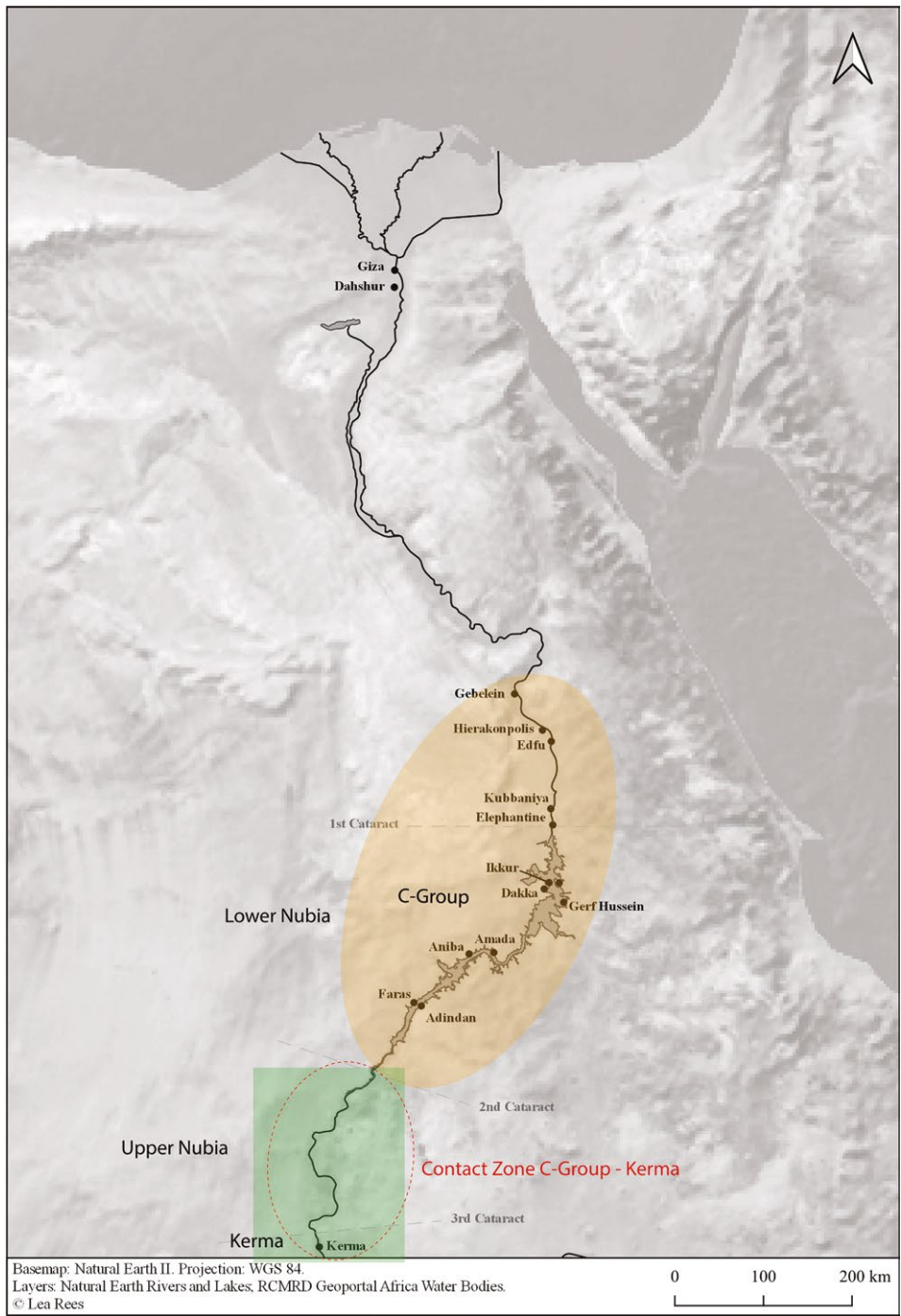


Fig. 1: Map of the main sites mentioned in the text and the extent of the C-Group and Kerma cultures with the contact zone south of the Second Cataract (scale 1 : 8,000,000)

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the Nile valley and stands in stark contrast to other contemporaneous communities in Nubia, e. g., those associated with the Kerma culture.

4 The distinct C-Group is mostly defined by its funerary customs, while settlements are less often attested¹³. Settlements that have been attributed to the C-Group occur exclusively in Lower Nubia, but burial grounds in Upper Egypt are known as well, such as the cemeteries HK27C at Hierakonpolis and Kubbbaniya-North at Wadi Kubbbaniya (Fig. 1). Along with the Kerma and Pan-Grave cultures, the C-Group is considered to be one of the ›Middle Nubian cultures‹.

13 Bietak 1968. For further studies on the C-Group, see, e. g., Adams 1977, 142–162; Williams 1983; Zibelius-Chen 1988; Säve-Söderbergh 1989; Meurer 1996; Hafsaas 2005; Török 2009; Raue 2018; Hafsaas 2020.

5 However, based on recent studies on the C-Group, the narrative of the commonly accepted state of research must be revised. Often repeated statements declare that this culture existed in the shadows of both pharaonic Egypt and the Upper Nubian Kerma culture throughout its existence and that these cultures wielded a strong influence on the development of the C-Group¹⁴. Furthermore, it is believed that Egypt occupied Lower Nubia during the entire Middle Kingdom and thus dominated the C-Group¹⁵. The few written sources, however, especially from the early Middle Kingdom, do not support this view¹⁶. Another perception is the interpretation of the C-Group as a rather small entity with an egalitarian society that only flourished after Egypt's withdrawal from Lower Nubia during the Second Intermediate Period¹⁷. But the recently revised chronology of the C-Group does not stand in favour of this view¹⁸. On the contrary, according to the archaeological record of the cemeteries, the C-Group developed a stratified society already in the early Middle Kingdom (ca. 2000–1840 B.C.E.). Furthermore, as for the concept of the contemporaneous ›Middle Nubian cultures‹¹⁹, the C-Group and Pan-Grave cultures are, according to the archaeological record, not attested contemporaneously, since the Pan-Grave culture is a later phenomenon²⁰. Regarding subsistence strategies, it is believed that a pastoral or semi-pastoral way of life marks the foundation of the C-Group with a focus on cattle herding²¹. Henriette Hafsaas, e. g., states that »young men« from C-Group communities »roamed along the Nile« while also »raiding the neighbours«²². These ›fictional‹ interpretations of the archaeological record and unfounded assumptions should be avoided.

Re-Evaluation of the C-Group Chronology

6 The chronology of the C-Group was first established by Bietak in his comprehensive study in 1968²³. The relative chronology is based on the development of burial customs and characteristic motifs on ceramic vessels, while Egyptian-style objects (e. g., seals) in tombs attributed to the C-Group were used for synchronisation with the Egyptian chronology. However, the numerous Egyptian-style ceramics were not included due to their supposedly long attested time span and their Nubian imitations²⁴.

7 Bietak distinguishes five phases of the C-Group, namely phases Ia, Ib, IIa, IIb, and III, dating contemporaneously to the late 6th Dynasty until the beginning of the New Kingdom in pharaonic Egypt, and this chronology was until recently widely accepted and applied in the archaeology of Nubia²⁵. However, the exclusion of ceramics in Egyptian tradition required a reconsideration in view of current research. Ceramic classifications

14 See, e. g., Zibelius-Chen 1988, 56; Näser 2012, 349; Hafsaas 2020, 162.

15 See, e. g., Adams 1977, 145; Hafsaas 2020, 157. The same was believed to be the case for the late Old Kingdom influence on Lower Nubia based on only a few written sources. However, a military domination over Lower Nubia at that time is no longer the current research opinion; see Vogel 2004, 38; Raue 2018, 120.

16 For an overview of the written sources, see Vogel 2004.

17 See, e. g., Näser 2013, 114.

18 The revision of the C-Group chronology was part of my dissertation project »Nachbarschaft im Wandel. Untersuchungen zu keramischen Inventaren aus Siedlungs- und Nekropolenbefunden in Oberägypten und Unternubien (2300–1700 v. u. Z.)« at the Universität Leipzig; see Schröder in press.

19 See for this view, e. g., Bietak 1968; Hafsaas 2020, 157. See also the discussion in de Souza 2019a, 13 f.

20 Kopp 2018, 279; Schröder in press.

21 Hafsaas 2005; Näser 2012, 350. But see already Seidlmayer 2002, 92–94, who challenges that narrative and presumes a sedentary lifestyle according to the archaeological record, however, with a mobile aspect.

22 Hafsaas 2020, 160.

23 Bietak 1968. Georg Steindorff already defined four different C-Group phases (NM1–NM4) based on his excavations at the largest-known C-Group cemetery, cemetery N at Aniba; see Steindorff 1935, 8–10.

24 Bietak 1968, 132.

25 Bietak 1968. See, e. g., Hafsaas 2020, 157. 159; Then-Obłuska 2022, xxxi tab. 1.

and chronologies were largely enhanced with the shift of focus in Egyptian archaeology towards settlement archaeology in the 1960s²⁶. Therefore, ceramic development and relative chronology of the various forms are largely well-established, in particular for the Middle Kingdom²⁷. Recently, Bietak's chronology was challenged by several researchers based on certain Egyptian-style vessel forms from Lower Nubian cemeteries and different chronological estimations were proposed²⁸. Hence, a re-evaluation of complete assemblages with a special focus on the aforementioned ceramics in Egyptian tradition became inevitable²⁹.

8 Based on ceramic assemblages from recent excavations at Hierakonpolis (HK27C)³⁰ and Kerma³¹ and complemented by published material from selected cemeteries in Lower Nubia, ceramic tomb inventories, both Nubian and Egyptian in style, were reconstructed and analysed³². The criteria for the selected cemeteries were, first, a long occupation that covers most of the C-Group; second, the nature of the publication; and third, the state of tomb preservation.

9 After applying these criteria, the following cemeteries were included in the study: cemetery N at Aniba³³, cemetery 101 at Dakka³⁴, and cemetery T at Adindan³⁵. Additionally, the Upper Egyptian cemetery Kubbania-North was included due to its similarities to HK27C³⁶. For these cemeteries, a complete inventory of the known finds was compiled, including pottery in both Nubian and Egyptian traditions, resulting in the development of a comprehensive classification. Furthermore, settlement ceramics from recent excavations at Elephantine were included for synchronising the Egyptian and Nubian material from a chronological view, as well as to compare Nubian-style ceramics from settlement and burial contexts³⁷. This synchronisation is fundamental because the dating of ceramics in Egyptian tradition from Nubian cemeteries derives from pharaonic Egypt itself and, therefore, provides not only a close link but also allows a more precise dating for these cemeteries.

10 The result of the re-evaluation of ceramic assemblages and burial customs from the aforementioned cemeteries revealed a shift of the C-Group chronology (Fig. 2). It is now evident that the C-Group became archaeologically visible already during the mid-6th Dynasty and thus slightly earlier than Bietak proposed. More important, however, is that the ceramic evidence does not allow dating the C-Group beyond the advanced 12th Dynasty, contemporary to the reigns of Senwosret III and Amenemhat III. A dating of C-Group phases IIb and III to the Second Intermediate Period or even the beginning of the New Kingdom is, therefore, no longer applicable³⁸. This shift has wide implications for the C-Group: the large tumuli, formerly dated to the Second Intermediate Period, were already built during the first half of the 12th Dynasty and thus reflect

26 Moeller 2016, 31–38 with further references.

27 Schiestl – Seiler 2012; Kopp 2019; Kopp 2020.

28 See Bader 2006, 100 f.; Rzeuska 2010, 413–416; Raue 2019, 302, 306. According to these studies, a shift of C-Group phases towards an older date has to be considered. Furthermore, Martin Odler proved that the metal finds from cemetery N at Aniba do not allow a dating into the Second Intermediate Period; see Odler – Kmošek 2020, 152. A recent study of jewellery from cemetery N also challenges the Second Intermediate Period date of certain seals; see Dubiel 2022.

29 See fn. 18.

30 Friedman 2007; Millet 2012; Schröder 2018.

31 Schröder 2017; Honegger 2018; Honegger 2019.

32 Schröder in press.

33 Steindorff 1935.

34 Firth 1915.

35 Williams 1983.

36 Junker 1920.

37 These ceramics originate from the north-western town, excavated from 2014–2020 in the course of the »Realities of Life« project under the direction of Johanna Sigl; see Sigl 2014/2015. The publication of this pottery assemblage is forthcoming; see Schröder in press.

38 Schröder in press.

Egyptian chronology (Hornung et al. 2006)	C-Group (Bietak 1968)	C-Group revised (Schröder in press)	Kerma (Honegger 2019)	Pan-Grave (de Souza 2019a)
Old Kingdom (ca. 2600–2120 B.C.E.)		Ia		
	Ia		<i>Kerma Ancien</i>	
First Intermediate Period (ca. 2120–1980 B.C.E.)	Ia/Ib	Ib		
		IIa		
Middle Kingdom (ca. 1980–1760 B.C.E.)	IIa	IIb		
			<i>Kerma Moyen</i>	
Second Intermediate Period (ca. 1760–1550 B.C.E.)	IIb/III			
			<i>Kerma Classique</i>	Pan-Grave
New Kingdom (ca. 1550–1070 B.C.E.)				

Fig. 2: Simplified chronological table of pharaonic Egypt and the ›Middle Nubian cultures‹ with the revised chronology after Hornung et al. 2006, 490–492 (Table 1)

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a largely stratified society at a time in which pharaonic Egypt supposedly dominated and controlled Lower Nubia. Furthermore, Lower Nubia was more densely populated since the cemeteries had a shorter occupation according to the new chronology.

11 Nevertheless, apart from the chronological shift, the differentiation of the phases in regard to burial customs and the development of the incised bowls established by Bietak did not change substantially. However, the existence of Bietak's so-called phase III has already been challenged by Aaron M. de Souza³⁹. The recently conducted studies in the frame of my dissertation can now confirm that Bietak's phase III can no longer be applied to the C-Group as its defining material culture is largely characterised by features better attributed to the Pan-Grave and Kerma cultures during the Second Intermediate Period. Furthermore, a clear division between phases IIa and IIb is not easily distinguishable, and it can be suggested that these phases rather display different social identities (i. e., age, gender, occupation, social status) than a chronological separation.

12 Furthermore, the ceramic evidence from Elephantine suggests that shortly after C-Group-style pottery ceases in the archaeological record, pottery in the Pan-Grave tradition appears⁴⁰. This was also observed in the Lower Nubian cemeteries, where tombs in Pan-Grave tradition are a later addition to C-Group cemeteries as, e. g., at cemetery N at Aniba or cemetery T at Adindan⁴¹.

Settlement Patterns and Subsistence Revisited

13 The C-Group, according to the revised chronology, was formed by a larger population than formerly known, which also has implications for the settlement patterns. Four main C-Group centres are attested in Lower Nubia, which are located at fertile plains on the west bank at Dakka, Aniba, Faras, and Gerf Hussein⁴². These locations were interpreted as centres based on accumulations of important C-Group

39 De Souza 2018.

40 Kopp 2018; Kopp 2019.

41 De Souza 2019a, 74, 76; Schröder in press.

42 Raue 2018, 164.

Settlement	Location	Architectural features	Reference
Sayala	West bank	Semi-subterranean round structures with standing stone slab wall foundation, enclosing stone fence	Bietak 1966
Wadi el-Sebua	East bank	Complex enclosed semi-subterranean round structures with standing stone slab wall foundation	Gratien 1983; Gratien 1985
Wadi el-Arab	West bank	Rectangular structure with standing stone slabs with interior structures	Emery – Kirwan 1935
Areika	West bank	›Egyptian‹ settlement, later occupied by C-Group community; stone and mud brick structures	Randall-MacIver – Woolley 1909; Wegner 1995
Amada	West bank	Complex oval stone structure with interior structures	Stock 1963a; Stock 1963b; Raue 2007
Aniba I	West bank	Postholes	Langsdorff 1935
Aniba II	West bank	Semi-subterranean round structures with standing stone slab wall foundation	Langsdorff 1935
Aniba III	West bank	Mud brick structures	Langsdorff 1935
Aniba IV	West bank	Stone fences with no further structures	Langsdorff 1935
Ashkeit Site 345	East bank	No structures recorded, but activity zone through pottery and other objects on surface	Säve-Söderbergh 1989
Ashkeit Site 347	East bank	Semi-circular stone structure	Säve-Söderbergh 1989
Faras Site 18C	East bank	Semi-subterranean round structures with standing stone slab wall foundation with exterior silo	Säve-Söderbergh 1989
Faras Site 194	East bank	Mud brick structures	Säve-Söderbergh 1989
Serra East	East bank	Semi-subterranean round structures with standing stone slab wall foundation	Williams 1993
Debeira Site 350A	East bank	›Camp site‹	Säve-Söderbergh 1989

Fig. 3: List of excavated C-Group settlement sites in Lower Nubia from north to south (Table 2)

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sites. Although settlements are less often attested than cemeteries⁴³, possibly caused by the focus on the monumental architecture of the cemeteries, they give insights into the lifestyle of the past communities and complement the funerary evidence.

¹⁴ The known habitations attributed to the C-Group show quite similar patterns (Fig. 3). Early sites, such as Aniba phase I, were built as rather light circular structures, attested through the preserved postholes (Fig. 4)⁴⁴.

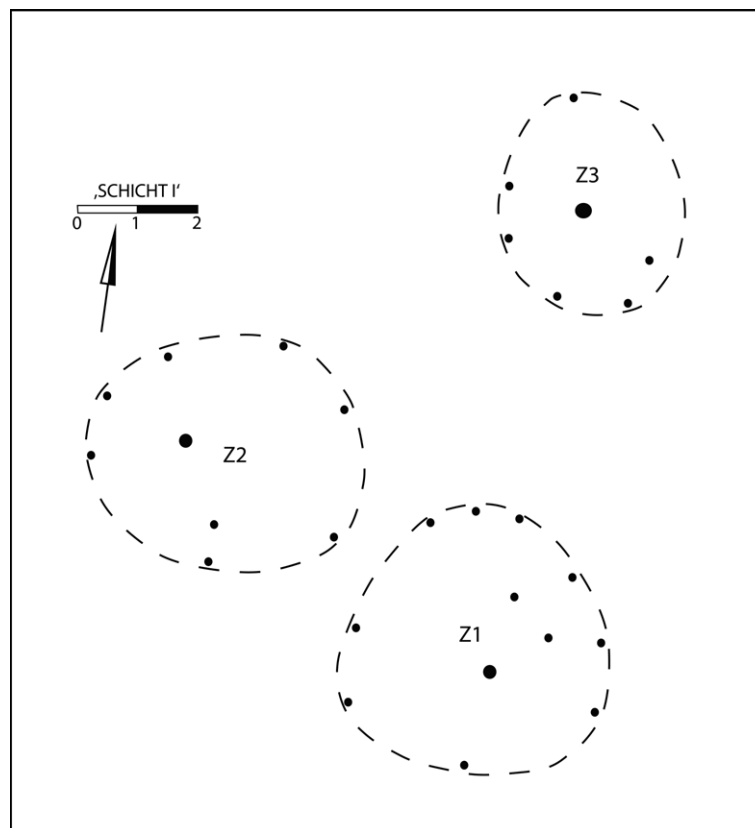
¹⁵ This is also reflected in the mostly egalitarian tombs of the early C-Group⁴⁵. At Aniba, the development from simple post structures to supposedly more permanently built stone architecture can be reconstructed. Here, single semi-subterranean, round habitations were encircled with standing stone slabs as wall foundations⁴⁶. This type of architecture can be found at various other sites, as shown in Table 2 (Fig. 3), and seems to represent the standard habitation of C-Group communities. Wadi el-Sebua is

⁴³ Note that although various habitations were observed during the numerous surveys in the 20th century, these were often not excavated or documented. Therefore, the available data, both published and unpublished, becomes even more relevant.

⁴⁴ Langsdorff 1935, 204–206.

⁴⁵ For a detailed overview of C-Group burial customs, see Bietak 1968. These are not repeated in the current paper, since Bietak's phase definition is still applicable, apart from the chronological shifts.

⁴⁶ Langsdorff 1935, 206–215.



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Fig. 4: Earliest stage of the settlement at Aniba, phase I, with the reconstructed tent constructions (scale 1 : 125)

considered to be the prime example of a so-called fortified settlement of the C-Group⁴⁷. Excavated by Serge Sauneron in 1964/1965, a complex settlement was uncovered, built on a rock cliff and surrounded by a stone wall with 32 wall openings interpreted as loopholes and three gates⁴⁸. The area of the site measures 45 × 38 m in total and is surrounded by standing stone slabs, while the interior is characterised by roughly 100 structures⁴⁹. According to the ceramics in Nubian tradition, the habitation dates to C-Group phases IIa/IIb⁵⁰. Keeping the revised dating in mind, this means that Wadi el-Sebua is contemporary to the first half of the 12th Dynasty and does not date to the Second Intermediate Period as previously suggested. Although Wadi el-Sebua stands out from the other known sites regarding its supposedly defensive features such as loopholes and the large wall, it seems this kind of habitation is more common than formerly known. New research on C-Group habitations at Amada proves that large and bordered structures with a complex interior are not as rare⁵¹. The size of one of the habitations at Amada with dimensions of 34 × 28 m is only slightly smaller than at

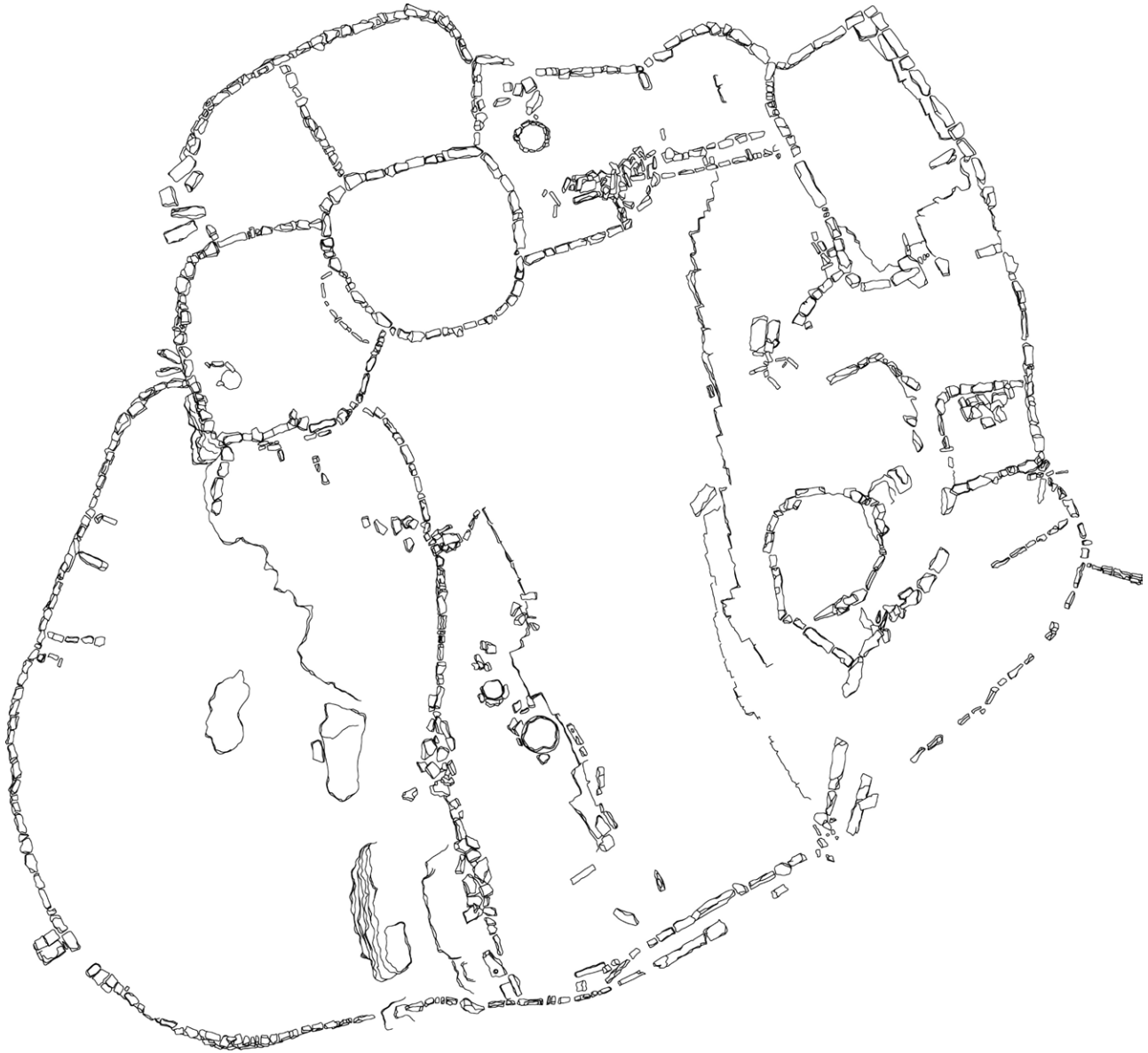
47 Sauneron 1965; Sauneron – Jacquet 2005. See also Hafsaas 2005, 52.

48 Sauneron – Jacquet 2005, 326–330. For the architectural element of the supposed loopholes in connection with archery, see also Liszka 2017, 13, who demonstrates that these openings can also be interpreted as windows.

49 Sauneron – Jacquet 2005, 323.

50 Gratien 1985, 56. However, in light of new studies on domestic ceramics in C-Group style (Raue 2018; Schröder in press), a re-evaluation of this material might offer a different dating.

51 This research was carried out in the frame of a funded research fellowship at the Deutsches Archäologisches Institut Kairo (»Reconstruction of Nubian Settlement Patterns of the C-Group Culture – the Case Study of Amada«). My sincere thanks go to Clara Jeuthe for allocating the excavation archive. Furthermore, I want to thank Cédric Larcher for the successful institutional cooperation with the Institut français d'archéologie orientale (IFAO). The archaeological documentation by the excavator of the C-Group remains at Amada, Fernand Debono, was transferred after his passing to the IFAO archive. For an obituary of Debono, see Tristant 2007.



5

Wadi el-Sebua and displays many similarities (Fig. 5). These more complex structures are again reflected in the later cemetery phases, where large tumuli were built on the fringes of the cemeteries.

16 The finds from C-Group settlements are numerous and diverse. Unfortunately, they were not documented as well as the ›richer‹ finds from the cemeteries, in the sense of their completeness and advanced handicraft. At Wadi el-Sebua, e. g., pottery, both Egyptian and Nubian in style, stone tools, silex tools, figurines, and personal adornments form part of the inventory⁵². Of these, only very few objects were selected for publication, as is also the case for the other settlements⁵³. Funerary assemblages were, on the other hand, more valuable in the older excavations in the sense of possible museum objects. For the C-Group sites at Amada, the original documentation by Hanns Stock and Debono has been located and is part of the above-mentioned

Fig. 5: Map of the main C-Group settlement at Amada

52 Sauneron – Jacquet 2005, 338–345.

53 To revisit the original excavation documentation and the finds in museum magazines would be of high importance for a study of settlement inventories.

research project⁵⁴. Although, to date, the excavated finds have not been located, a detailed analysis from the archaeological documentation can be attempted. Sketches, photographs, and descriptions allow a reconstruction of at least part of the past assemblage, including over 100 detailed drawings of ceramics, but also a large number of other domestic objects. The large variety of this unknown material allows further insights into C-Group habitations.

17 Summing up, according to the more permanently built structures, the thick occupation layers, and the large variety of finds, it can be assumed that the formerly proposed high mobility and (semi-)nomadic lifestyle of communities assigned to the C-Group do not necessarily mirror past realities. Although permanent settlements cannot be definitely proven archaeologically, the overall archaeological record hints towards these⁵⁵. As discussed above, the known habitations are more complex than often referred to in the literature. However, stone structures naturally survive better in the archaeological record and are, hence, more frequently attested than lighter structures, which are known mainly in the early C-Group⁵⁶. With this in mind, it is possible that the C-Group communities were divided into more mobile and more sedentary parties, maybe even to be distinguished chronologically. With the flooding of the Lower Nubian Nile Valley, however, modern in-depth research at these sites became impossible, and only revisiting excavation archives and the original finds can shed more light on the C-Group.

18 Another research opinion is that the C-Group reflects a community of cattle pastoralists⁵⁷. This assumption is mainly based on the depictions of cattle on funerary stelae and ceramic vessels, in particular coarse jars⁵⁸. Furthermore, cattle figurines are known from both funerary and settlement contexts⁵⁹. However, those depictions of cattle are not as frequent and prominent as has been suggested and, therefore, have to be revised.

19 Stelae with incised cattle are not largely common in C-Group funerary contexts. At the largest cemetery of this culture, cemetery N at Aniba, e. g., 30 stelae were found, and not a single stela showed ornamentation⁶⁰. However, the representation of cattle on stelae might be a regional phenomenon since at Adindan cemetery T, located in the southern settlement area north of the Second Cataract, almost all stelae were incised with cattle⁶¹. Fom Dakka, north of Aniba, one stela with incised cattle is published, although the tomb catalogue does not mention this object⁶². As Bietak suggested, the stelae, mostly undecorated, are markers of the early cemetery occupations, which

54 See fn. 51.

55 Also, for the Sheikh Muftah culture at Balat, it was recently argued that settlements were more permanently used and that the mobility term in that context should be questioned; see Jeuthe – Linseele 2019, 185. However, the extent of archaeological investigations at Sheikh Muftah sites is still limited and further studies will shed new light on mobility and pastoralism on a larger scale.

56 Langsdorff 1935, 204–206.

57 Bietak 1968, 16. In her monograph on the C-Group entitled »Cattle Pastoralists in a Multicultural Setting. The C-Group People in Lower Nubia, 2500–1500 BCE«, Hafsaas already implied a subsistence based on cattle pastoralism (Hafsaas 2005, 23); see also Hafsaas 2020. But see Bietak 1987, 118, for an argument against cattle herding as the main subsistence since the faunal remains do not support the dominance of cattle. See also Adams 1977, 154, who questions the importance of cattle depictions in the daily life of the C-Group. Seidlmayer 2002, 91–94, argues for a sedentary lifestyle of the Nubian communities and reckons the pastoral-mobile component as being largely overestimated.

58 For an example of incised cattle on funerary stelae, see Williams 1983, pls. 95–101. Cattle depictions on ceramic coarse wares are, e. g., found at cemetery N at Aniba; see Steindorff 1935, pl. 65.

59 See, e. g., Steindorff 1935, pl. 73.

60 Steindorff 1935, 38 f.

61 Williams 1983, 99–104; pls. 95–101.

62 Firth 1915, 119; pls. 16 b; 35 a.

could be confirmed⁶³. The limited time span of these objects furthermore challenges their reputation of high importance in the overall subsistence throughout the C-Group.

20 Cattle depictions on ceramic vessels are overestimated as well. Cattle and further figural motifs were depicted mainly in the early C-Group phases Ia and Ib and do not form the majority of animal representations⁶⁴. One example was found at Hierakonpolis cemetery HK27C in the context of tomb 5 (Fig. 6)⁶⁵. Common are also other faunal depictions, such as ostriches and gazelles, to name but a few. Cattle depictions on fine ware are rare; only two incised bowls from Adindan cemetery T are attested: the so-called Chicago cattle bowl and the Cairo cattle bowl⁶⁶. Both display a large number of cattle and are unique in the overall corpus⁶⁷.

21 The last find group discussed here are zoomorphic cattle figurines from both funerary and settlement contexts⁶⁸. The mere presence of cattle figurines, however, should not be the basis for deducing a certain subsistence strategy. Also, in Egyptian settlement contexts, cattle figurines represent a high number of the figurines and are likewise common in the so-called Sheikh Muftah culture in the region of Dakhla Oasis in the 4th and 3rd millennium B.C.E.⁶⁹. The overestimation of cattle herding in the context of the C-Group has recently also been stated for the Sheikh Muftah culture⁷⁰. Zooarchaeological investigations of the faunal remains from Balat North, the area north of the enclosures of ʿAyn Asil, contradicted previous statements of the main subsistence strategy relying on cattle herding. On the contrary, cattle bones form the minority of the faunal material, and the authors propose that the term ›cattle pastoralists‹ does not refer to the archaeological evidence and is misleading⁷¹. A study by Pernille Bangsgaard also questions the dominance of cattle in C-Group contexts⁷². Her analysis of faunal remains from nine cemeteries excavated by The Scandinavian Joint Expedition to Sudanese Nubia revealed that sheep/goat dominated the material by far, complemented by gazelle bones, while actual cattle bones form the minority of the material⁷³. Based on this analysis, Bangsgaard dismisses the ›pastoral ideal‹ of the C-Group and proposes that both sheep/goat and cattle possibly play an important role in funerary beliefs⁷⁴ but probably not in the subsistence since the evidence from the cemeteries does not support a primary consumption of cattle in the C-Group diet⁷⁵.

Relations with Pharaonic Egypt

22 The new chronology of the C-Group changes our understanding of Egyptian-Nubian relations during the Old and Middle Kingdoms substantially. The common argument since Bietak's study was that the C-Group, for most of its existence, stood in

63 Bietak 1968, 94; Schröder in press.

64 A first study of the coarse jars from the three largest C-Group cemeteries revealed that geometric patterns are more common and that figural motifs are an older phenomenon; see Schröder in press.

65 Schröder 2018, 246; pl. 4 b. c.

66 Williams 1983, 105 f.; pls. 19. 20.

67 Incised bowls are mostly restricted to geometric designs. Only one incised bowl, excavated at Tumas, shows dancing women (Lal 1967, pl. 37).

68 See, e. g., Firth 1915, pl. 37 d; Steindorff 1935, pl. 73.

69 Jeuthe – Linseele 2019, 184 f. See Jeuthe 2021 for an overview of the Sheikh Muftah culture and further references.

70 Jeuthe – Linseele 2019, 184 f.

71 Jeuthe – Linseele 2019, 184 f.

72 Bangsgaard 2014.

73 Bangsgaard 2014, 347.

74 Bangsgaard 2014, 354.

75 Bangsgaard 2014, 354. Note that faunal evidence from settlement sites is rare but might offer a different perspective than the cemeteries.

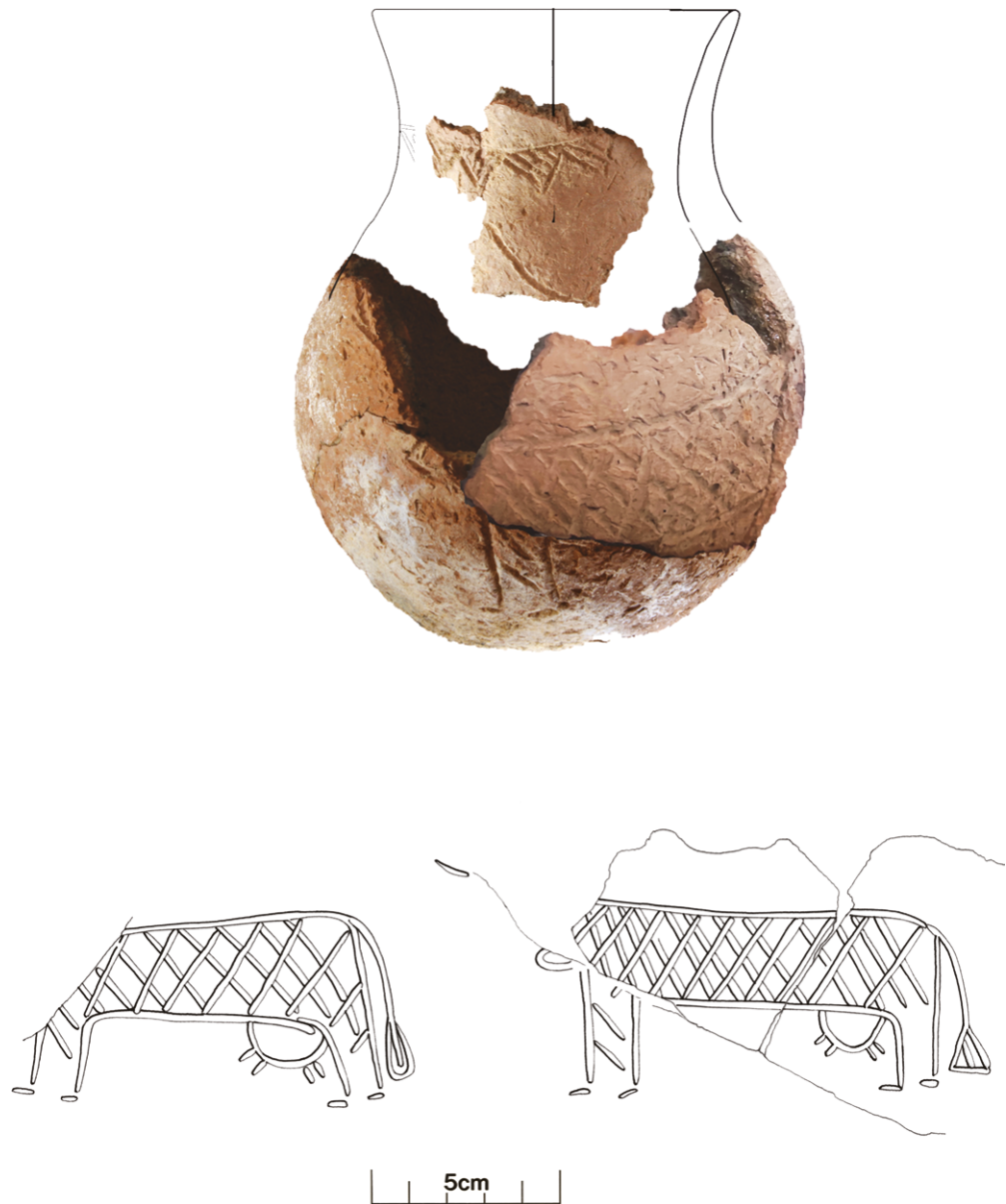


Fig. 6: Incised jar with cattle and calf from cemetery HK27C at Hierakonpolis (scale 1 : 2)

6

the shadows of both the Egyptian and the southern Kerma cultures. This dominance was supposedly established through the implementation of a massive line of fortresses in Lower Nubia, mainly during the reigns of Senwosret I and Senwosret III in the early and mid-12th Dynasty⁷⁶. Only after the retreat of the Egyptian state from Lower Nubia in the Second Intermediate Period was the C-Group thought of as being able to step out of Egypt's shadow, flourish and establish a highly differentiated social stratification. This stratification was thought to have peaked with the construction of monumental tumuli with diameters of up to 16 m in the Lower Nubian cemeteries during the late Middle Kingdom and Second Intermediate Period⁷⁷. On top of that, other researchers stated that the C-Group was highly influenced by the Kerma and Pan-Grave cultures during the Second Intermediate Period and did not develop a stratified society⁷⁸. The lack of any archaeological evidence of the C-Group during the Second Intermediate Period, however, does not support that view.

76 See Vogel 2004, 67. See also more recently Knoblauch 2019 for a summary of the Middle Kingdom fortresses in Lower Nubia.

77 See Bietak 1968, 16 f.; Näser 2013, 114.

78 See, e. g., Meurer 1996, 94 f.

Military Dominance over Lower Nubia during the 12th Dynasty?

23 According to Carola Vogel, most of the Lower Nubian fortresses were only founded during the reign of Senwosret III and not before⁷⁹. Especially for the fortresses at Aniba, Quban, and Ikkur, the dating relies solely on architectural features⁸⁰, while only for Buhen a foundation during the reign of Senwosret I is verified by a stela dating to year 5 of his reign⁸¹. It becomes clear that, therefore, the archaeological evidence does not necessarily support a date of some of the fortresses during the early Middle Kingdom. The fortress belt at the Second Cataract and Batn el-Haggar was exclusively built under Senwosret III, except for the fortress at Buhen. This coincides with the newly proposed date of a cessation in the archaeological evidence of the C-Group during the reigns of Senwosret III and Amenemhat III. Furthermore, written sources of military actions against Lower Nubia tend to be overemphasised⁸². In fact, only a few raids and military campaigns are known from the texts, while those of (trade) expeditions dominate the textual evidence. During the reign of Senwosret I, e. g., only one military campaign is attested on the stela of the military general Mentuhotep erected at Buhen in the king's regnal year 18⁸³, which includes references to the pillaging and destruction of the Nubian crops. However, this campaign was directed against Upper Nubia and not Lower Nubia and, therefore, explains the location of this stela at the Second Cataract⁸⁴. Still, the few early Middle Kingdom military raids were interpreted as a successful Egyptian dominance over Lower Nubia⁸⁵. Yet, the opposite might just be the case, and the lack of evidence for military actions could also reflect the peaceful and neighbourly relations between Egypt and Lower Nubia at that time⁸⁶. This interpretation has not been offered in the relevant literature, mainly because Bietak's chronology, i. e., that the period of prosperity occurred after Egypt's withdrawal from Nubia, ruled this out. The new chronology, therefore, forces us to rethink these relations.

24 A new narrative for the C-Group is, therefore, suggested. The chronological shift of the C-Group phases results in an earlier cessation of C-Group evidence in Upper Egypt and Lower Nubia by around 200 years. Hence, the C-Group settled in Lower Nubia (and Upper Egypt) in a shorter period of time and consequently in higher population numbers than formerly known. The larger tumulus tombs dating to C-Group phases IIa and IIb (formerly mid to late 12th Dynasty and Second Intermediate Period, ca. 1800–1550 B.C.E.) are considerably older and already date to the late 11th/early 12th Dynasty and first half of the 12th Dynasty. The largest known cemetery at Aniba, cemetery N, with its approximately 960 tombs, is more densely occupied, covering fewer generations. The monumental tombs with chapels on the fringe of cemetery N strongly indicate a highly differentiated social stratification already in the first half of the 12th Dynasty⁸⁷. This sheds new light on Nubian-Egyptian relations during that time. The

79 Vogel 2004, 66 f. 206–271 (list of all fortresses with the relevant literature).

80 Vogel 2004, 67.

81 Vogel 2004, 67.

82 This was already corrected for the Old Kingdom (see Vogel 2004, 38), but is still the common belief for the 12th Dynasty.

83 Stela Museo Egizio, Florence, 2450; see, e. g., Zibelius-Chen 1988, 183; Raue 2018, 177. Interestingly, this stela is the first known evidence for the toponym ›Kush‹, which since then is part of many autobiographic inscriptions; see Raue 2018, 177.

84 Vogel 2004, 67.

85 Vogel 2004, 67.

86 However, the execration texts from the Old Kingdom Memphite area list exclusively Nubians (Seidlmayer 2002, 98), which shows a certain negativity towards Nubia from an Egypto-centric perspective. These name lists, including military titles, were directed against the Nubians supposedly living in the area, known from the record of the Dahshur decree of Pepy I (Abu Bakr – Osing 1973, 116; Seidlmayer 2002, 98). The ethnonym ›Nubian‹, from the Egyptian perspective, can therefore be considered negatively, but that certainly did not apply to all individuals. It rather seems that the execration texts offer a general enemy stereotype caused by a general angst; see also Borrmann 2014, 112.

87 It remains a question if C-Group phases IIa and IIb are rather one phase and the tombs differ only in social

fact that attestations of C-Group cultural activity and complex social practices reached their peak at a time when 12th Dynasty pharaonic Egypt also underwent a renaissance is of high importance. Evidently, as neighbours, both the C-Group and pharaonic Egypt profited considerably from mutual participation in cultural networks, exchange, and trade. Military dominance from the Egyptian side can be excluded, especially since only a few military raids are attested from that time. Rather than being populated by small, dominated communities, Lower Nubia seems to have been an important region in the trade networks into Africa, with the Kerma culture at the southern end. The existence of a fortress or administrative building at Aniba before Senwosret III seems probable but might rather have functioned as an administrative centre in the role of an African trading post and not primarily as a military outpost⁸⁸.

25 Moreover, another narrative is that the ›violent‹ C-Group aimed to infiltrate Egypt⁸⁹. The wording is highly problematic and displays a colonial Egypto-centric view, in which Nubians were inevitably drawn to the supposedly dominant Egyptian state. However, it is well-known that C-Group people lived in Upper Egypt for a considerable amount of time and in different places, as is clearly attested through the two Upper Egyptian cemeteries HK27C at Hierakonpolis⁹⁰ and Kubbbaniya-North at Wadi Kubbbaniya⁹¹. These cemeteries are the burial ground of C-Group communities on the west bank of the Nile in Upper Egypt and were occupied over the course of several hundred years. It can also be deduced that these cemeteries served resident communities who lived in or close to the cemetery sites.

The Upper Egyptian Cemeteries Kubbbaniya-North at Wadi Kubbbaniya and HK27C at Hierakonpolis

26 Cemetery Kubbbaniya-North with approximately 260 tombs was excavated by Hermann Junker at the beginning of the 20th century and is divided into three main clusters (Fig. 7)⁹². The cemetery dates to C-Group phases Ib–IIb, approximately from the mid-11th to the first half of the 12th Dynasty⁹³. The two oldest clusters display Nubian burial customs known from Lower Nubian C-Group cemeteries⁹⁴, including Egyptian-style elements such as the use of mud bricks, whereas the tombs in the latest cluster, however, show exclusively Egyptian-style burial practices. Opposing Junker, who suggested that this cemetery was at first a burial ground of Nubians and later Egyptians, Stephan J. Seidlmayer interprets it as a Nubian cemetery that, with passing time, adapted Egyptian burial customs⁹⁵. This adaptation of tomb architecture, the position of the deceased individuals, and the lack of any Nubian-style artefacts resulted at last in an ›Egyptianised‹ cemetery by individuals with Nubian origin⁹⁶. After the occupation of Kubbbaniya-North had ceased, a second cemetery was founded at Kubbbaniya-South, which exclusively displays Egyptian customs⁹⁷. According to the ceramics in Egyptian

rank. The Egyptian vessels in the exterior tombs do not vary markedly, and the possibility that IIa and IIb are contemporary needs to be considered.

88 See also Sählhof – Schröder 2022.

89 See, e. g., Vogel 2004, 67.

90 Friedman 2007; Schröder 2018; Schröder in press.

91 Junker 1920; Seidlmayer 2002; Schröder in press.

92 Junker 1920.

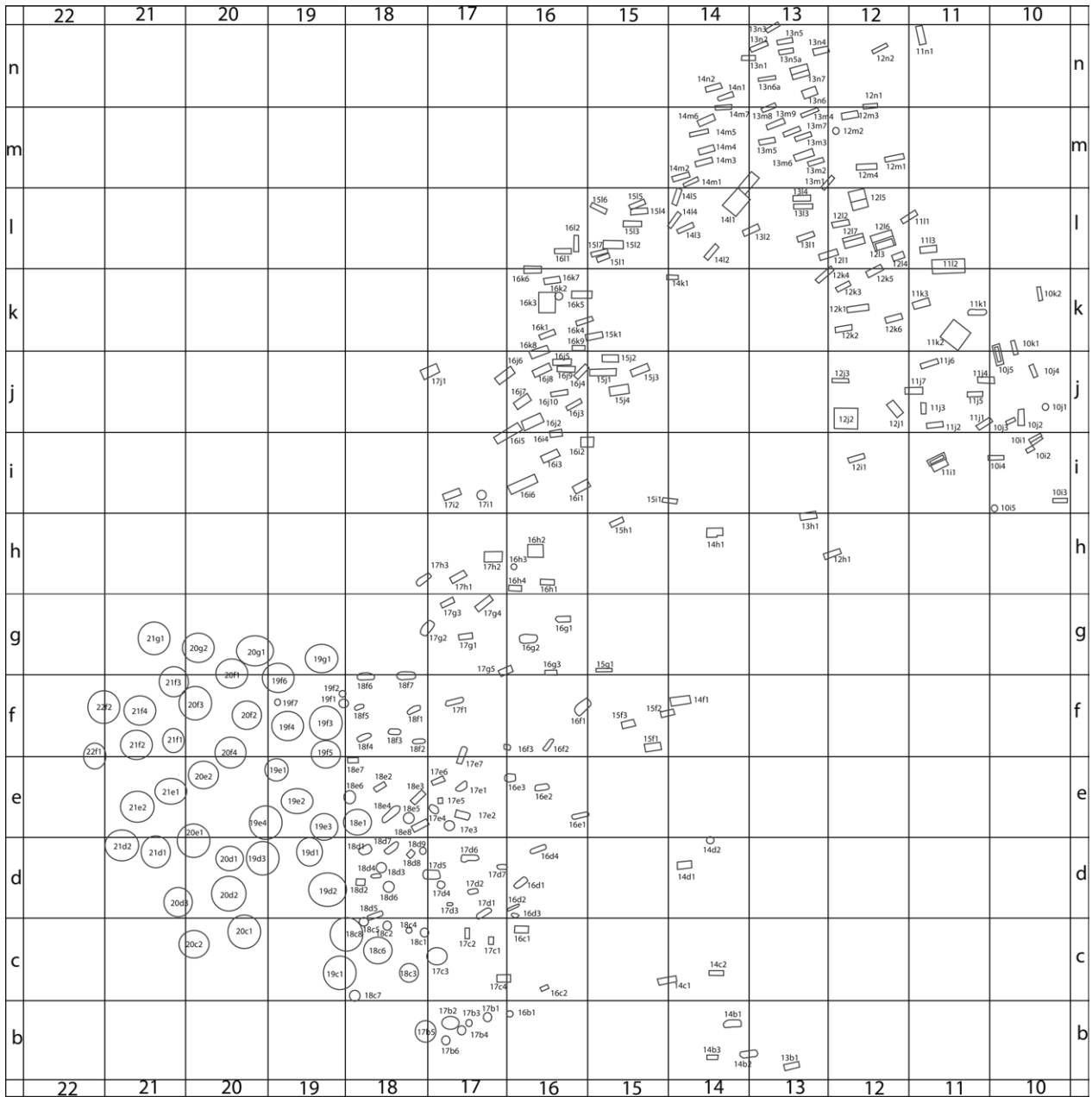
93 Schröder in press.

94 See for an overview Bietak 1968.

95 Junker 1920, 129; Seidlmayer 2002, 105.

96 Schröder in press. The term ›Egyptianised‹ used here is not meant in the sense of an acculturation to a ›superior‹ culture but in the sense of a gradual adaptation of Egyptian cultural burial customs over a long period of time, which probably was also noticeable in the domestic sphere.

97 Junker 1919.



7

tradition, this cemetery can be dated from the late 12th Dynasty to the Second Intermediate Period and is, therefore, younger than the northern cemetery⁹⁸. Hence, two communities were buried at Wadi Kubbaniya: at first, a community with close ties to burial customs in Nubian tradition during the first half of the 12th Dynasty at Kubbaniya-North, followed by a community displaying exclusively Egyptian burial traditions throughout the cemetery occupation. However, these two cemeteries might also simply reflect next generations of the original burial ground at Kubbaniya-North.

27 With cemetery HK27C at Hierakonpolis, the northernmost known cemetery of the C-Group is attested⁹⁹. This cemetery, which is the last known C-Group cemetery still accessible and comprises 64 tombs that display Nubian burial customs, was excavated using modern excavation methods, thus broadening our knowledge of C-Group burial

Fig. 7: Map of cemetery Kubbaniya-North

98 Schröder in press.

99 See Friedman 2007 for an overview of the site.

customs¹⁰⁰. Both HK27C and Kubbaniya-North, however, display not only Nubian but also Egyptian features, such as the aforementioned use of mud brick architecture, wooden coffins, and also multiple burials in one tomb¹⁰¹. Furthermore, the Egyptian-style ceramic assemblages at both cemeteries differ highly from the Lower Nubian cemeteries through a much higher percentage of open forms¹⁰². The assemblages of the Lower Nubian cemeteries know primarily closed forms, which were presumably traded and transported rather for their content than for the vessels themselves, while open forms are only rarely attested. At Kubbaniya-North, however, open vessels form with 105 attested pieces roughly the same quantity as closed forms with 101 examples¹⁰³. At HK27C, open vessels are also often attested, while the majority of the material is formed by closed vessels¹⁰⁴. The presence of these various open forms in Egyptian style at the two cemeteries in Upper Egypt is an interesting feature and can be explained by the availability of these ceramics in Egypt itself, in contrast to the Lower Nubian cemeteries and, therefore, with the integration of the Nubian into the Egyptian communities. The existence of those cemeteries in Upper Egypt alone and the slow adaptation of Egyptian features by C-Group communities undoubtedly show their close interactions and social relations with local Egyptian communities and their neighbourly affiliations. However, the clear display of traditional Nubian burial customs also attests to the self-confidence of communities that established cemeteries at Hierakonpolis and Wadi Kubbaniya and, furthermore, to the social realities, which stand in stark contrast to the official pharaonic rhetoric against ›foreigners‹ in general. The lack of any distinctively ›Nubian‹ settlements in close proximity to these cemeteries might suggest that those people lived within the Egyptian communities, in the case of Kubbaniya-North maybe even at the site of Elephantine¹⁰⁵. Here, Nubian material culture, primarily in the form of pottery, is attested throughout the settlement's occupation¹⁰⁶.

The Evidence from the Settlement at Elephantine

28 Elephantine is a key site for tracking Egyptian-Nubian relations due to its location in the border region to Nubia at the First Cataract. No ›Nubian‹ quarter *per se* can be located in the settlement, but Nubian-style pottery is attested throughout the site¹⁰⁷. The majority of the material is formed by coarse wares for domestic use, e. g., large hemispherical bowls with a rim zone decorated with triangles (Fig. 8 a), horizontal hatchings (Fig. 8 b), and a pattern of lozenges (Fig. 8 c). Only a minority of the assemblage is formed by fine wares, such as black-topped bowls (Fig. 8 d) or a few fragments of incised bowls, which are mainly known from funerary contexts (Fig. 8 e)¹⁰⁸. A comprehensive quantitative and qualitative analysis of the complete assemblage from a settlement area in the north-western town leads to the assumption that pottery in Nubian tradition supplements but never replaces the Egyptian-style assemblages.

29 A definite proof of Nubians living at Elephantine is difficult to determine, but it is likely due to its location in this border region. The various interactions attested through the small but constant percentage of pottery in Nubian tradition speak clearly for continuous contacts, and it is not likely that only pottery was exchanged. However,

100 Schröder in press; Friedman in preparation.

101 Junker 1920; Seidlmayer 2002; Friedman 2007; Schröder in press.

102 Schröder in press.

103 Schröder in press.

104 Schröder in press.

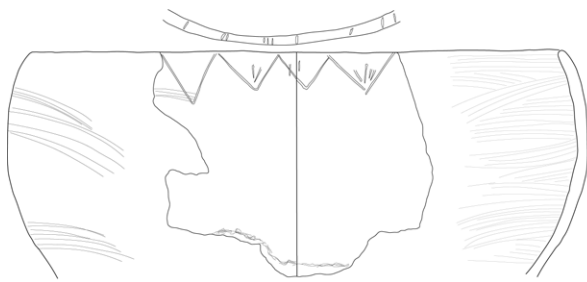
105 However, it cannot be excluded that the settlements are simply not traceable anymore due to their poor preservation in contrast to the cemeteries.

106 Raue 2018; Schröder in press.

107 Raue 2018, 32.

108 See also Raue 2018; Schröder in press.

Elephantine, north-western town: examples of coarse wares



a: 44501M/q-1-1 Z5113



b: 43501L/n-1-1 Z5081



c: 44501I/b-1-3 Z5044

Elephantine, north-western town: examples of fine wares



d: 44501N/v-1-1 Z5051



e: 44501R/m-1-1 Z5114



8

in the necropolis of the First Intermediate Period excavated by Seidlmayer, a few tombs show rather Nubian-style than Egyptian-style funerary practices¹⁰⁹. The material culture found in the settlement consists primarily of Egyptian-style objects, but some figurine fragments and jewellery (such as ostrich eggshell beads) are more likely attributed to a Nubian than Egyptian material tradition, while no statement can be made towards who used these objects in daily life.

³⁰ The close networks of exchange between Egyptian and Nubian communities, as well as the related social practices, are also attested at the site of Gebelein. Here, several First Intermediate Period funerary stelae¹¹⁰ in Egyptian style feature supposedly Nubian elements like, e. g., the famous stela of Nenu¹¹¹. These elements are certain attributes, such as bows and sashes, darker skin pigmentation, and the selection of clothing, which have previously been assumed to be associated with a Nubian identity. The tombs of the stela owners have not been located, but the depiction of characteristic Nubian elements clearly allows the assumption that Nubians lived and were buried at Gebelein¹¹². Further evidence for the presence of Nubians at this site includes a couple of incised bowls of fine ware currently kept at the Museo Egizio, Turin, S. 14073 and S. 14074¹¹³. These display well-known geometric patterns in C-Group style and can be dated to the early and advanced C-Group¹¹⁴.

Fig. 8: Examples of coarse and fine wares from the north-western town in Elephantine (scale 1 : 2)

¹⁰⁹ For an overview of the necropolis, see Kaiser et al. 1982, 271–345. The Nubian element in the form of the positioning of the body and distinct small finds is further expanded on in Seidlmayer 2002, 106 f.

¹¹⁰ See Fischer 1961 for an overview and detailed analysis of these stelae.

¹¹¹ This stela is currently kept in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, MFA 03.1848.

¹¹² However, it is important to remember that it is not certain who commissioned these stelae, the tomb owner or his relatives, and how the artist executed those wishes. See also Seidlmayer 2002, 100–103.

¹¹³ These were found by Ernesto Schiaparelli; see Curto 1966, 135 fig. 21; Ejsmond 2019, 29 fig. 3.

¹¹⁴ Schröder in press.

31 The narrative of an infiltration of C-Group individuals into Egypt is therefore questionable. Rather, it can be suggested that C-Group communities had lived in Upper Egypt for an extended period of time, as is attested through the finds at Gebelein, the Upper Egyptian C-Group cemeteries, and probably also through frequent pottery remains, e. g., at Elephantine and Edfu¹¹⁵. The character of the Egyptian-Lower Nubian relationships during the early Middle Kingdom is thus more bilateral than formerly thought. Egypt's need for southern trade into Africa for the acquisition of valuable goods, such as incense and gold, necessitated expeditions to Lower Nubia. But instead of controlling that region during the early Middle Kingdom, it apparently led to a mutual gain for both parties. Egypt traded with Lower and Upper Nubia, and the C-Group actively participated in that network, which is also visible in the presence of Egyptian-style objects in C-Group tombs, such as ceramics, metal objects, and seals¹¹⁶. Furthermore, the highly stratified C-Group society, as is evident through monumental tumuli, might have been boosted by that trade. The few fortresses seem to be more administrative than military in character and were probably intended to secure the trade routes.

32 Only during the reigns of Senwosret III and Amenemhat III did the relations change drastically¹¹⁷. It is possible that the Egyptian administration felt threatened by the rising power of both the C-Group and the Kerma culture and, thus, established a chain of fortresses towards Kerma, especially in the area of the Second Cataract and Batn el-Haggar¹¹⁸. It was, according to the revised chronology, during this time that the archaeological record of the C-Group suddenly ceased. The Semna stela from year 16 of Senwosret III and the so-called Semna despatches clearly display and underline the intended destruction of Lower Nubian infrastructure and the extension of the Egyptian pharaonic state towards the Second Cataract¹¹⁹.

Relations with the Pan-Grave and Kerma Cultures

33 The C-Group has until recently been viewed as being part of the ›Middle Nubian‹ cultures together with Kerma and Pan-Grave. With the new chronology, however, this view is now evidently superseded. The C-Group is only contemporary with the Kerma culture, while the Pan-Grave culture is a later phenomenon. Judging from the archaeological record alone, no interaction between C-Group and Pan-Grave material culture took place. However, it is unlikely that C-Group communities were no longer living in Lower Nubia during the Second Intermediate Period. Yet, the sudden cessation of the archaeological evidence coincides with the installation of the chain of fortresses at the Second Cataract during the reign of Senwosret III, and although this is an interesting aspect, we lack definite evidence about the connections between both events.

34 At Elephantine, e. g., C-Group and Pan-Grave sherds do not occur in the same archaeological layers, as has been recently shown for the north-western town in the continuous stratigraphy from the 6th to the early 18th Dynasty¹²⁰. Furthermore, Pan-Grave tombs in C-Group cemeteries are exclusively later additions, such as at cemetery N at Aniba, cemetery 101 at Dakka, or cemetery T at Adindan¹²¹. Apparently,

115 See de Souza 2019b.

116 See for metal objects Odler – Kmošek 2020.

117 See also Raue 2018, 180–182 with further references.

118 However, William Y. Adams proposes trade, storage, and monitoring rather than military aims as primary function of the fortress belt at the Second Cataract; see Adams 1977, 183–188.

119 For the Semna stela, see in detail Vogel 2011, 326–335; Raue 2018, 180. For a recent overview of the Semna despatches, see Kraemer – Liszka 2016.

120 Kopp 2019, 279–281; Schröder in press. Except for older material in younger foundation trenches; see Kopp 2019, 279.

121 Schröder in press.

Pan-Grave communities were drawn to older C-Group cemeteries but also founded their own burial grounds¹²². The aforementioned and non-existing C-Group phase III is, therefore, not a result of Kerma and Pan-Grave influences on the C-Group but rather a separate development in Lower Nubia after Egypt's withdrawal during the Second Intermediate Period. As de Souza clearly showed, C-Group characteristics are not part of so-called phase III sites¹²³. In light of the new chronology, this can be verified and draws a different picture of the Middle Nubian-Egyptian interactions during the Late Middle Kingdom and Second Intermediate Period.

35 Turning south to Upper Nubia, characteristic features generally assigned to the C-Group are widely attested at *Kerma Ancien* sites in Upper Nubia, such as close similarities regarding decorations on ceramic fine wares¹²⁴ as well as burial customs, such as the occurrence of sandstone stelae and the exterior deposition of vessels in the context of the burials¹²⁵. These observations at early Kerma cemeteries indicate close connections of the C-Group and Kerma archaeological cultures. As was already pointed out by Brigitte Gratien and Béatrice Privati, decorated fine wares of the C-Group are common in the oldest sectors of Kerma cemeteries¹²⁶. Systematic excavations conducted since 2008 in the oldest sectors of the eastern cemetery by Matthieu Honegger further sharpened our knowledge¹²⁷. In the oldest sector of the eastern cemetery, characteristics associated with the C-Group dominate the burial customs, as is evident by sandstone stelae erected adjacent to the tumuli, the custom of placing burial offerings next to the tomb structure at the surface, and the frequent occurrence of incised fine wares in C-Group style¹²⁸. A comparative study of C-Group and Egyptian-style ceramics from Kerma, Lower Nubian cemeteries, and Egyptian contexts further underlines the parallel development of these cultures¹²⁹.

36 The Egyptian and Nubian-style ceramic assemblages at Kerma find close parallels in the Lower Nubian and Upper Egyptian C-Group cemeteries, and especially the motifs on the characteristic incised bowls are closely related (Fig. 9). However, the shapes of the C-Group-style pottery from Kerma differ slightly from the northern examples. In Lower Nubia, the early incised bowls are mostly flat with open orifices and inflected contour (Fig. 9 a)¹³⁰, while at Kerma, these are often restricted and more hemispherical, though the geometric patterns closely resemble the Lower Nubian motifs (Fig. 9 c–e). The designs of the C-Group-style pottery at Kerma are diverse and can be dated to C-Group phases Ia–IIa with an emphasis on phase Ib with its characteristic design of basketry imitation (Fig. 9 e)¹³¹. Also, Egyptian-style pottery is frequently attested in the context of cemeteries in Upper Egypt, Lower Nubia, and Kerma throughout the occurrence of the C-Group and has been studied in detail¹³². Therefore, it cannot be presented extensively in this paper. However, a few examples of Egyptian-style ceramics shall be discussed. Firstly, large ovoid jars with horizontal incisions on the shoulder are attested in Lower Nubian cemetery contexts (Fig. 9 b)¹³³. This type was already identified as part of the

122 See for an overview de Souza 2019a.

123 De Souza 2018.

124 See Schröder 2018 for examples from the recent excavations under the direction of Honegger at Kerma.

125 See for an overview Gratien 1986; Honegger 2018.

126 Gratien 1978; Privati 1982; Gratien 1986; Privati 1999.

127 Honegger 2018; Honegger 2019; Bonnet – Honegger 2020.

128 For an overview of C-Group burial customs, see Bietak 1968. A preliminary report of the incised bowls in C-Group style is published in Schröder 2018, and the comprehensive publication is in process.

129 The C-Group and Egyptian-style ceramics from the excavations directed by Honegger at the eastern cemetery at Kerma were recently studied; see Schröder 2017. This study supersedes earlier research due to the larger data set (cf. Bourriau 2004). For an overview of the recent excavations, see Honegger 2018; Honegger 2019.

130 This black-topped bowl is currently on display in the Egyptian Museum Cairo (SR_4_10908); Schröder in press.

131 Schröder in press.

132 Schröder in press.

133 See, e. g., Steindorff 1935, pl. 63, 1–6; Raue 2019, 299 fig. 3, Ia13 (for cemetery N at Aniba).

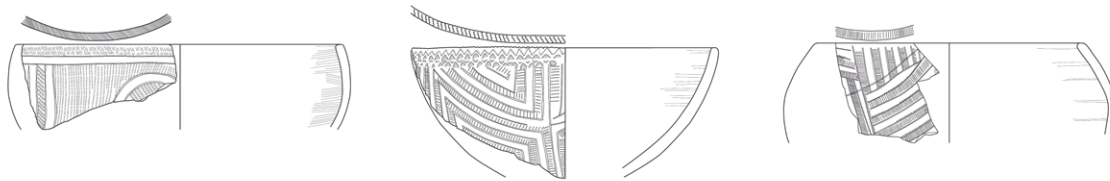
Aniba, cemetery N: examples of C-Group and Egyptian pottery



a: Aniba Nx (surface)

b: Aniba N925

Kerma, eastern cemetery: examples of pottery in C-Group style

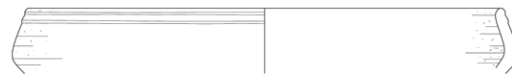


c: CE27_T385-1

d: CE27_T396-7

e: CE23_T520-1

Kerma, eastern cemetery: examples of pottery in Egyptian tradition



f: CE28_T349-1



9

Fig. 9: Examples of Nubian pottery from cemetery N at Aniba and the eastern cemetery at Kerma (a) scale 1 : 2; b–f) scale 1 : 4)

Lower Nubian C-Group cemetery inventory by Bietak¹³⁴ and distributed from Egypt to Kerma during the late Old Kingdom and First Intermediate Period¹³⁵. Furthermore, one bowl has a close parallel to late Old Kingdom material from Elephantine dating to the mid to late 6th Dynasty (Fig. 9 f)¹³⁶.

³⁷ However, the radiocarbon dates from the *Kerma Ancien* at the eastern cemetery are older than the Egyptian dates. For the *Kerma Ancien*, the C14 analysis suggests a date between 2550–2050 B.C.E.¹³⁷, while the 6th Dynasty is commonly dated around 200 years later, between 2305–2118 B.C.E.¹³⁸. Recently, it has been argued that the C14 dates from Kerma are correct and that the Egyptian chronology of the Old Kingdom actually has to be shifted further back¹³⁹. If this is the case, the discrepancy between the early evidence at Kerma and in Lower Nubia would be resolved. Future C14 studies on material culture from Egypt would also offer opportunities to find the missing link.

¹³⁴ Bietak 1968, 96; pl. 2, Ia13.

¹³⁵ See Rzeuska 2006, 144 f. 192–195, for Saqqara; Seidlmayer 1990, 195 fig. 81, K-B10.08, for Qau-Matmar. At Kerma, only body sherds of this type are attested, but the horizontal grooves on the shoulder are a strong indicator for their identification as this distinctive jar.

¹³⁶ Kopp 2019, 298; Raue 2020, 77 f.

¹³⁷ Honegger 2019, 228 fig. 5.

¹³⁸ Dates for the Egyptian chronology after Hornung et al. 2006. See also Raue 2018, 170–172, for a detailed discussion of this contradiction with further references.

¹³⁹ I want to thank Maria C. Gatto and Aaron M. de Souza for several stimulating discussions on that subject.

38 The first holistic and transregional study of ceramics in Egyptian tradition from different cultural contexts conducted in the course of my dissertation thesis clearly resulted in the observation of one chronological horizon, stretching from Upper Nubia to Lower Nubia and Egypt, where the ceramic development and choice of depositing similar ceramic vessels are attested. However, where and when exactly features assigned to the C-Group are attested for the first time can presently not be determined. Nevertheless, the dominance of C-Group material culture in the form of pottery in the earliest occupation of Kerma cemeteries, including Kerma itself, Sai Island, and site H29 in the northern Dongola Reach¹⁴⁰, points to an initial occupation of these cemeteries by a community that we call C-Group today for the lack of better alternatives. Of high importance in this discussion is the introduction of a new phase (*Kerma Ancien 0*), predating *Kerma Ancien I*¹⁴¹, which shares similar ceramic traditions with the earliest C-Group, particularly in the form of horizontal and vertical comb impressions¹⁴². Horizontal comb impressions seem to pre-date the vertical executions since at Elephantine and Edfu, those date within the period of the later 5th and 6th Dynasties¹⁴³ and are not yet to be found in tombs associated with the early C-Group, where exclusively vertical comb impressions are attested¹⁴⁴. At Elephantine, vertically executed comb impressions are attested only during the later 6th Dynasty¹⁴⁵. These ceramics might be an indicator to presume one cultural horizon (*Kerma Ancien 0*)¹⁴⁶ from Edfu to Kerma around 2500 B.C.E, which later can be traced as two traditions, the C-Group and Kerma archaeological cultures. However, the Egyptian and C-Group-style pottery found in the eastern cemetery suggests that C-Group-style incised pottery was part of the ceramic assemblage until C-Group phase IIa, which equates with the late *Kerma Ancien* and early *Kerma Moyen* and is therefore not limited to the first occupation phase as previously proposed¹⁴⁷. But already in the later *Kerma Ancien*, characteristics associated with the C-Group become less frequent, and, henceforth, burial customs in the tradition of the Kerma culture dominate the eastern cemetery.

39 Bearing this in mind, the often repeated narrative of the C-Group being not only in the shadow of the supposedly ›dominant‹ pharaonic Egyptian state but also in the shadow of the Kerma culture is not reflected in the archaeological record of the early occupation of the eastern cemetery. The proposed influence of Kerma on the C-Group in terms of monumental tomb architecture and the introduction of tomb chapels now has to be reviewed¹⁴⁸. According to the chronological shift, these innovations were contemporary and not successive, and therefore, the C-Group acted more independently than formerly proposed, and no intense Kerma influence on the C-Group can be observed. Furthermore, the close connections of ›Nubian‹ communities might also reflect closer relations than formerly assumed, as is clearly visible, e. g., in the ›Nubian‹ ceramic technocomplexes and tomb architecture as mentioned above.

140 For Sai Island, see Gratien 1986. For the recently excavated *Kerma Ancien* cemetery H29, see Welsby 2018.

141 Honegger 2018, 22–24.

142 For comb impressions in the funerary context of the eastern cemetery at Kerma, see Honegger 2018, 25 figs. 5. 6. During *Kerma Ancien 0*, these vessels form 47 % of the material, while this number drops significantly during *Kerma Ancien 1* (Honegger 2018, 25). According to Honegger, this type of decoration is only rarely known from pre-Kerma contexts and seems to be restricted to horizontal executions (Honegger 2004, 44 f. figs. 6, 7; 7.).

143 See Raue 2018, pls. 55. 56. 59, 35, 1. 2, for Elephantine, and for Edfu de Souza 2019b, 26 fig. on the lower right, lower row, second sherd to the right. Horizontal comb impressions are furthermore a characteristic feature of the late pre-Kerma culture and early *Kerma Ancien*; see Honegger 2019, 223 fig. 3.

144 For vertical row impressions in the context of assigned C-Group tombs, see Steindorff 1935, pl. 51, 5–7; Bietak 1968, pl. 2, Ia12.

145 Raue 2018, pls. 86, 47; 87, 48 a; Schröder in press.

146 See also Raue 2018, 168.

147 See Schröder in press.

148 See, e. g., Bietak 1968, 105 f.

Short Summary

40 The discussion outlined above offers different views on the C-Group culture. In particular, the chronological shift of the C-Group phases has wide implications and allows different insights into the past. Firstly, the C-Group already ceased during the course contemporary with the 12th Dynasty instead of the early New Kingdom and had its peak during the first half of the 12th Dynasty and not during the Second Intermediate Period, which changes our perception of the C-Group itself, but also of its relations to pharaonic Egypt and the southern Kerma culture.

41 Secondly, the concept of the so-called Middle Nubian cultures as one chronological horizon does not apply to the archaeological record since the Pan-Grave culture is a later phenomenon than the C-Group and only contemporary with the Kerma culture in Upper Nubia. Furthermore, the Kerma culture did not necessarily have a high impact on the C-Group since the development of burial customs and especially tomb architecture and the introduction of tomb chapels was a simultaneous ›Nubian‹ trend. Social practices can be traced with the analysis of cemeteries, e. g., in the selection of burial objects and tomb architecture. These allow insights into the identities of the tomb owners, such as gender and age, from the anthropological record and their social status from the execution of the burial place, which need further research. Beyond that, a community identity of the C-Group can be reconstructed based on similar burial customs from Upper Egypt to Lower Nubia, and partly the Kerma basin and even the known habitations.

42 Regarding settlement patterns and subsistence strategies, it appears that the C-Group was not a community of cattle pastoralists *per se* since cattle depictions and actual remains of cattle are not as dominant as formerly stated, as has been shown above. Cattle are rarely depicted on stelae, while coarse jars with cattle images are mostly attested in the earlier C-Group phases Ia and Ib, and even then, they do not form the majority of animal representations. Furthermore, C-Group habitations were mostly constructed using stone as a building material, which leads to the assumption that they were more permanently built, although not necessarily permanently inhabited. But in particular, the archaeological record from the habitations at Amada, with its complex architecture, thick settlement layers, and rich variety of domestic finds, sheds new light on settlement patterns.

43 For the Nubian-Egyptian relations, it is imperative to analyse the known written sources in light of the new chronology, not influenced by the established narrative of Egyptian dominance over Lower Nubia but in favour of the archaeological and written evidence.

44 With this paper, some aspects of the formerly set-in-stone and often repeated (and sometimes unreflected) state of research of the C-Group culture were briefly addressed and revised. As has been shown, past fixed narratives have to be challenged in light of modern research with an unbiased approach to advance in the field of Nubian and Egyptian archaeology. In the case of the C-Group, this distinct culture has to be assessed and independently valued, but not mainly through the eyes of its northern and southern neighbours.

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The Lower Nubian >C-Group Culture<

A Brief Synopsis and Critical Review of the Current State of Research

Marie-Kristin Schröder

تُعَدُّ حضارة المجموعة-ج (أو المجموعة الثالثة) حضارة أثرية مميزة في النوبة السفلى يعود تاريخها إلى حوالي 1800–2300 قبل الميلاد، وهي معروفة منذ بداية القرن العشرين من خلال الدراسات التي أجريت في النوبة السفلى في إطار أول مسح أثري للنوبة، وكانت هذه الحضارة محور البحوث الشاملة لأكثر من قرن من الزمان. نُشرت الآثار المنسوبة إلى المجموعة-ج، لا سيما الفخار المزخرف المميز والعادات الجنائزية وأنماط المواقع السكنية، بشكل شامل في الدراسة الرئيسية التي أجراها مانفريد بيتاك (1968). ومع ذلك، فقد تطور وضع البحث بشكل كبير منذ ذلك الحين، وبالتالي أصبح تعديل مجموعة-ج ضروريًا. يهدف هذا المقال إلى عرض الحالة الراهنة للدراسات الأثرية التي تتناول هذه الحضارة، وأبرزها التحول الملحوظ في مراحلها التاريخية. تتميز حضارة المجموعة-ج بفترة زمنية قصيرة، وهي وفقًا لتأريخ الفخار المصري لم تكن حاضرة إلا حتى أواخر الأسرة الثانية عشرة من عصر الأسرات المصرية القديمة.

الكلمات المفتاحية

المجموعة-ج، كرمة، البان قريف، حضارات النوبة الوسطى، النوبة السفلى

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