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Polish Archaeology in the Mediterranean 16, 357-368

2005

Artykuł został opracowany do udostępnienia w internecie przez Muzeum Historii Polski w ramach prac podejmowanych na rzecz zapewnienia otwartego, powszechnego i trwałego dostępu do polskiego dorobku naukowego i kulturalnego. Artykuł jest umieszczony w kolekcji cyfrowej bazhum.muzhp.pl, gromadzącej zawartość polskich czasopism humanistycznych i społecznych.

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NEOLITHIC TO NAPATAN POTTERY FROM ULI ISLAND PRELIMINARY REPORT

Edyta Klimaszewska-Drabot

The surface pottery collection from sites on Uli Island assembled a few hundred potsherds, the number further augmented by pottery assemblages excavated at selected sites.¹ The information provided is of significance not only for the chronology of settlement on the island, but foremost for understanding the ceramic industry develop-

ment in the region. Unfortunately, the material is much degraded and fragmented due to unfavorable atmospheric conditions prevalent on much of the rocky island. The present report is a preliminary discussion of the pottery originating from the earliest periods, that is, from the Neolithic through Kerma-Horizon to Napata.

MESOLITHIC/EARLY NEOLITHIC

Only three sites (Uli 60, 9, 10) yielded Mesolithic/Early Neolithic potsherds and in all the cases, this pottery was no more than a tiny component of the collections. No shape reconstruction was possible due to the fragmentariness of the sherds, but even so, the assemblage can be said to be rather homogeneous.

The fabric appears very hard, heavily mineral-tempered, containing quartz and sand particles of different shape and ranging in size from 0.5 to 5 mm, poorly sorted, and often with impressive quantities of mica inclusions [*Fig. 1*]. A fabric with large bits of organic temper, of which small quan-

tities have been observed by the author on neighboring Saffi Island, was not noted and it should be deemed rare in the region. Neither has it appeared in the area investigated by the Anglo-German expedition (SARS) a little farther upstream.²

In the main, interior surfaces appear to be smoothed, while the exterior bears horizontal rows of impressed 'seed & dots', apparently made with a cord or another tool. This type of decoration is characteristic of the Central Sudan and the Fourth Cataract region, and has been recorded on numerous sites.³ Notably, no examples of wavy line or dotted wavy line sherds have been found.

1 For the Uli Island survey and excavation results, cf. report by W. Godlewski et al. in this volume, 339-350.

2 P. Wolf, "The SARS Anglo-German Expedition at the Fourth Cataract of the Nile: the 2003/04 season", *Sudan&Nubia* 8 (2004), 19.

3 E.g. E. Kołosowska, M. El-Tayeb, "Pottery from the Fourth Cataract Region (Sudan)", *GAMAR* 2 (2003), 118; A.J. Arkell, Shaheinab. An account of the excavation of a Neolithic occupation site carried out for the Sudan Antiquities Service in 1949-50 (London 1953), 69-71; I. Caneva, A. Marks, "More on the Shaqadud Pottery: Evidence for Sahari-Nilotic Connections during the 6th-4th millennium B.C.", *Archéologie du Nil Moyen* 4 (1990), 17-19.

LATE NEOLITHIC

The Late Neolithic is also represented on a few sites, separately or associated with sherds of an earlier or later tradition (Uli 6, 9, 10, 15, 20, 33, 34, 36, 49).

The sites are settlements in all likelihood, so the pottery assemblage is rather homogenous. The fabric is better sorted and features a smaller fraction of mineral inclusions than in earlier examples, but it is still a quartz- and mica-rich temper. Fragmentariness is again an issue for shape reconstruction. It seems, nonetheless, that the most popular shape was a fairly large open bowl. Small bowls were extremely rare. Vessels were rather thin walled; good quality examples with walls about 0.5 cm thick are seldom encountered.

The predominant colors of the clay of this pottery were red, brown, gray or black. Surfaces were smoothed inside and out or had simple burnishing outside. Rims were simple, either rounded or plain, very often decorated on top with incised lines: short straight or oblique, cross-hatched, sometimes zigzag [Fig. 2]. The exterior body surface was usually undecorated, rare exceptions including a continuous zigzag pattern [Fig. 2:4] and two instances of impressed parallel dots in bands [Fig. 2:2], which could be the pattern on a typical beaker frequent in the Neolithic grave inventory.⁴ In one case, there was a band of short incised oblique lines below the rim [Fig. 2:1] and in another, a herringbone pattern on the ex-



Fig. 1. Examples of Early Neolithic sherds: 1 - U9.1; 2-5 - U60; 6. U60.5
(Photo A. Obluski)

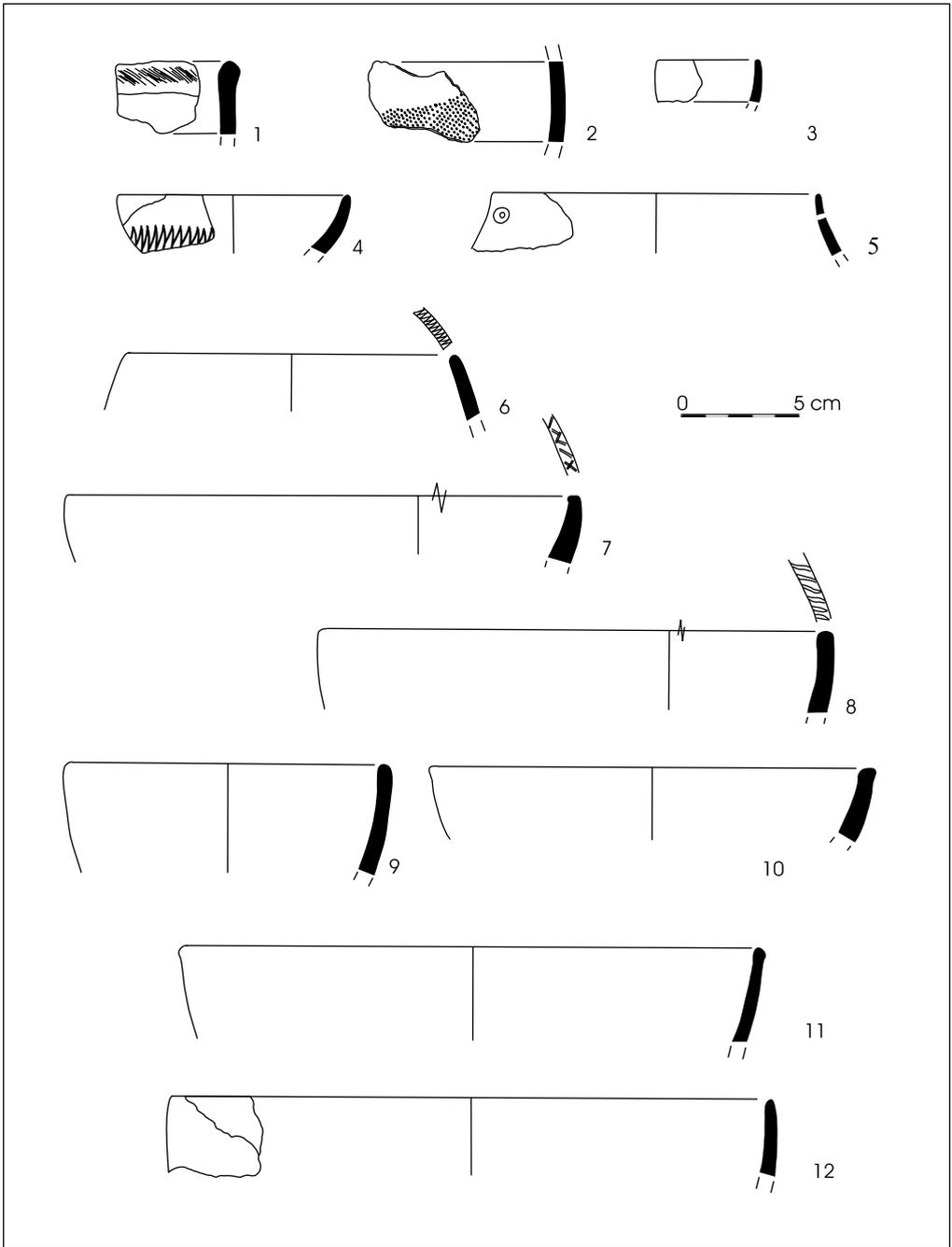


Fig. 2. Neolithic pottery: 1 - U49.1; 2 - U33.7; 3 - U33.2; 4 - U20.9; 5 - U33.4; 6 - U34.7; 7 - U20.7; 8 - U20.4; 9 - U20.12; 10 - U20.10; 11 - U20.11; 12 - U33.5
(Drawing E. Klimaszevska-Drabot)

terior body; a few other vessels featured parallel incised lines.

Only a small percentage of the collection was decorated. Some types, like ripple ware,⁵ which were so characteristic of the period, are absent entirely. The finds from Shaqadud presented a generally similar picture.⁶

While fragmentary and innumerable, the collection clearly corresponds to finds from other regions of Sudan⁷ and the Fourth Cataract region in particular,⁸ at least as far as comparative analysis goes today based on the brief reports that have been published so far.

KERMA PERIOD

Abundant pottery of Kerma Period date appeared on sites: Uli 6, 9, 23, 37, 43, 57, 60, 63, 74, and 80. Chronological attribution to individual phases of Kerma culture is difficult, in view of the provinciality of the Fourth Cataract region as compared to the important centers, like Kerma and Sai in northern Sudan, for which chronological systems have been developed. Local traditions must have impacted local production substantially, while influences from the major centers would have been slow in coming. Since the material is in the main surface collection from settlement sites, its fragmentariness makes any study of it difficult to say the least. Even so, some chronological distinctions based on the standard typology can be made.

Few examples dated to the Ancient Kerma period have been recognized. Indeed, pottery of this date is rare throughout the

Fourth Cataract region.⁹ Sherd U23.8 [Fig. 3:1] and several similar sherds could be dated to this phase on the basis of the all-over punctate decoration on the exterior. These vases have plain upright walls with occasionally a slight backward kick. All represent fine wares with red-slipped exterior and all-over dotted decoration made with a notched rocker stamp, forming horizontal registers of triangles, rectangles and squares.

Another example [Fig. 3:2] is an open bowl or plate fragment decorated with at least three zones of relief zigzag lines on the exterior. Rows of triangular impressions run around the interior. A similar pattern, but accompanied by incised horizontal lines, occurs on a vessel dated by Privati to the end of the Ancient Kerma period.¹⁰ Interestingly, it is also found in Gash Delta¹¹ and Wadi Howar¹².

- 4 S. Salvatori, D. Usai, "Cemetery R12 and a possible periodisation of the Nubian Neolithic", *Sudan & Nubia* 8 (2004), 36; J. Reinold, "Néolithique soudanais: les coutumes funéraires", in: ed. V. Davies, *Egypt and Africa: Nubia from Prehistory to Islam* (London 1991), 16-29; M. Chłodnicki, J. Kabaciński, "The Neolithic of the Dongola Reach (Nubia)", *GAMAR* 2 (2003), 58.
- 5 F. Geus, *Rescuing Sudan Ancient Cultures* (Khartoum 1984), 54-55; Salvatori, Usai, loc. cit.
- 6 Caneva, Marks, op. cit., 19.
- 7 Arkell, loc. cit.; Chłodnicki, Kabaciński, loc. cit.; Caneva, Marks, loc. cit.
- 8 Kołosowska, El-Tayeb, loc. cit.
- 9 Kołosowska, El-Tayeb, op. cit., 118.
- 10 B. Privati, "Le matériel céramique", in: Ch. Bonnet, *Le temple principal de la ville de Kerma et son quartier religieux* (Paris 2004) (=Privati 2004), 172, Fig. 134.12.
- 11 R. Fattovich, "At the periphery of the empire: The Gash Delta (Eastern Sudan)", in: ed. V. Davies, *Egypt and Africa: Nubia from Prehistory to Islam* (London 1991), Fig. 5.2.3.
- 12 B. Keding, "The Yellow Nile: new data on settlement and the environment in the Sudanese Eastern Sahara", *Sudan & Nubia* 2 (1998), Pl. 5.

Later finds are more frequent. The Middle Kerma period is represented mostly by hemispherical bowls, as is the case in the neighboring Gdańsk Archaeological Museum Expedition (GAME) concession.¹³ The exterior of the vessels is red or brown, roughly smoothed or unsmoothed and decorated with various patterns of incised lines, the latter varying from straight or oblique lines to cross-hatching in different combinations. Zones of ornament appear immediately below the rim or cover the entire surface. Vessel rims are simply rounded or tapered with a few examples showing slight outward eversion [Fig. 3:3].

The Pan-grave style of decoration is also frequent. It comes as incised oblique lines and dots or triangles in registers, usually below the rim, as well as incised straight, contiguous triangular motifs or horizontal lines, all dated to the Middle Kerma/Kerma Classic.¹⁴

Other kinds of ornament, albeit very few, include dotted, probably impressed fish-bone patterns [Fig. 2:5], relief dots below the rim [cf. Fig. 4:4] and zigzag made with a plain-edged rocker stamp.

Few of the sherds could be dated to the Middle or Classical Kerma period. Small fragments of black-topped red wares, of rat-

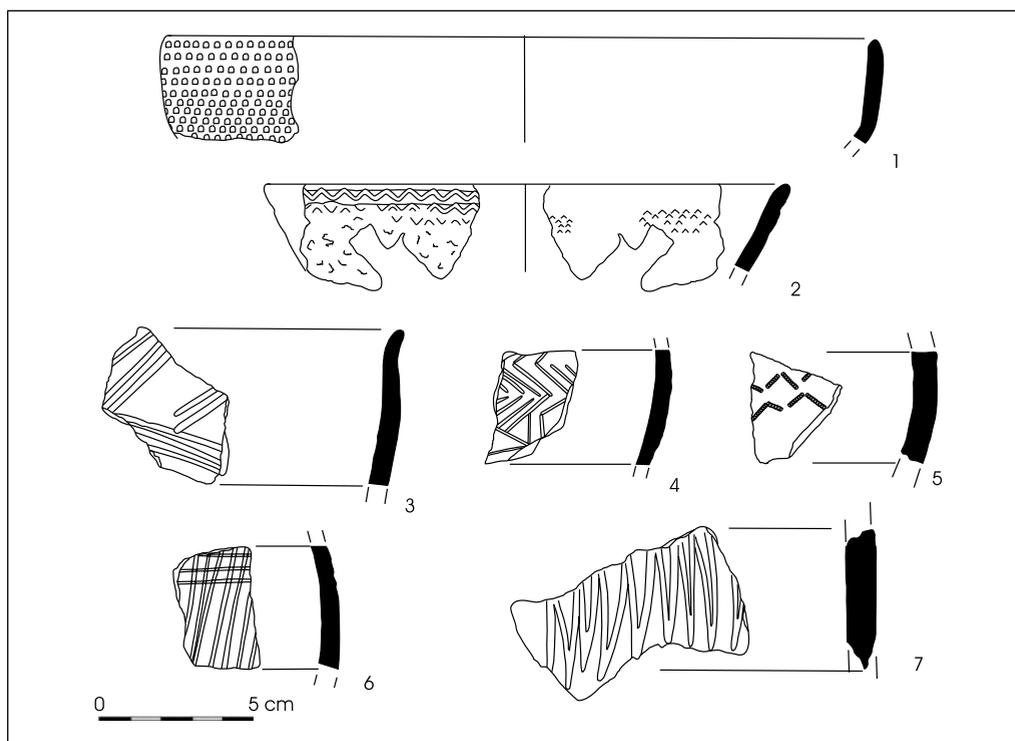


Fig. 3. Kerma-period pottery: 1 - U23.8; 2 - U23.32; 3 - U23.27; 4 - U23.22; 5 - U23.2; 6 - U9.1; 7 - U23.23 (Drawing E. Klimaszevska-Drabot)

¹³ Kołosowska, El-Tayeb, loc. cit.

¹⁴ I. Welsby-Sjöström, "The pottery from the survey", in: D.A. Welsby, *Life on the Desert Edge. Seven Thousand Years of the Settlement in the Northern Dongola Reach, Sudan*, vol. I (London 2001), 246-247: type D43, D58.

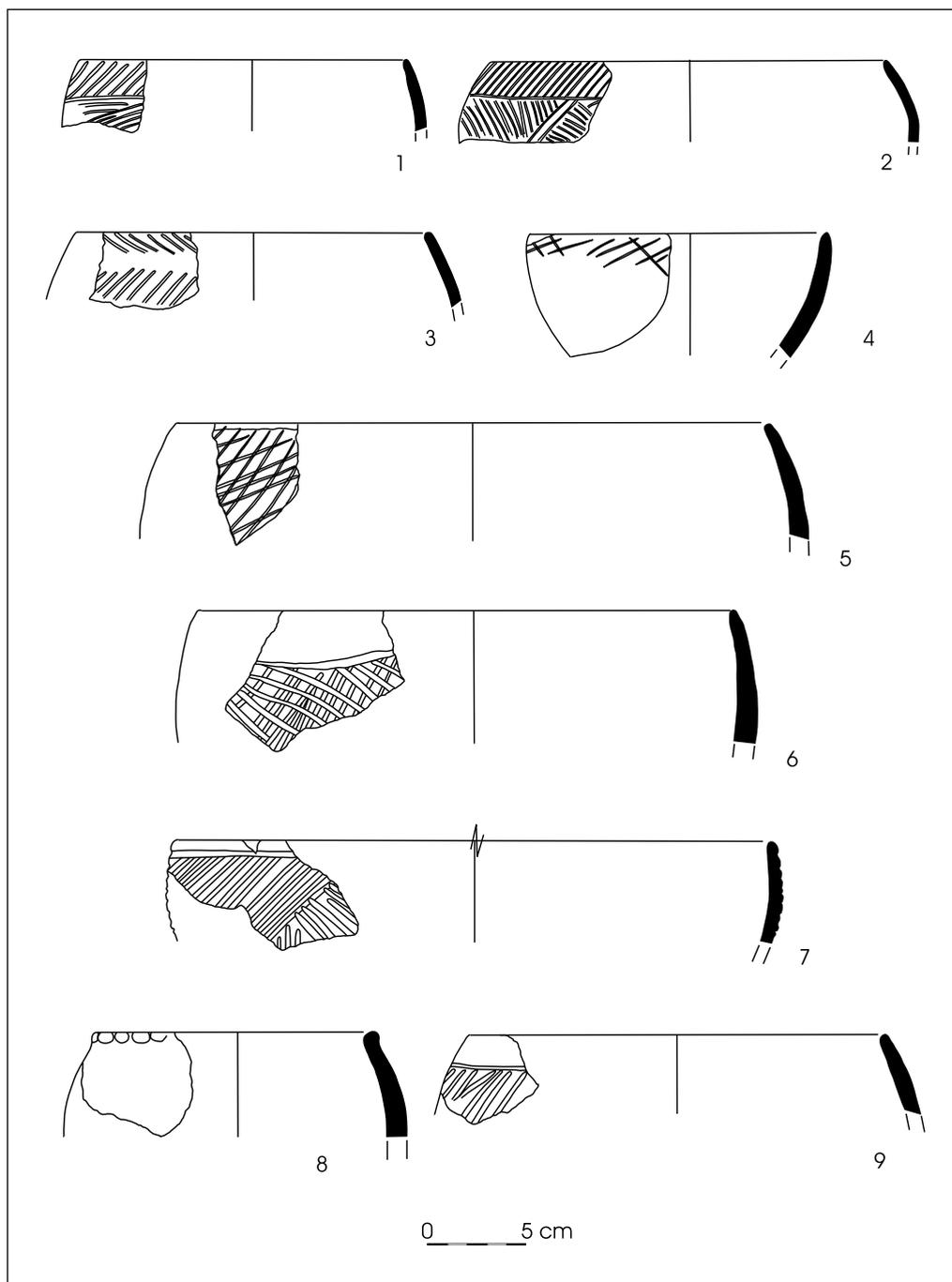


Fig. 4. Kerma-period pottery: 1 – U23.15; 2 – U15.1; 3 – U43.1; 4 – U23.31; 5 – U23.18; 6 – U23.20; 7 – U63.1; 8 – U23.21; 9 – U63.5 (Drawing E. Klimaszevska-Drabot)

her coarse quality, were the standard with only one piece – and it does not look like a local product at all – possibly belonging to the fine, polished ware of the Classical Kerma period [Fig. 5:2]. Among the best preserved fragments was a small, very fine open bowl with tapered rim [Fig. 5:3]. A red slipped open bowl [cf. Fig. 5:1] is more ambiguous in terms of attribution. Vessels of this kind were rare in the Kerma tradition and similar shapes are known to come from the western necropolis in Kerma where Egyptian influence has been noted.¹⁵ The Uli piece could be a local and rather poor imitation.

Unlike the bowls, which are more frequent than other kinds of vessels, few examples of jars have been found. One, in red ware, featuring a globular body and everted rim, bore a repeating dotted pattern on the shoulders and another pattern on the upper body [Fig. 6:2]. Other examples included a black-topped

red-ware jar with slightly everted, rounded rim and short neck [Fig. 6:1] and a wide-mouthed jar with everted rim, decorated with impressions along the rim top and incisions on the shoulders [Fig. 6:3].

Two examples of bigger storage jars come from the surface collection from the cemetery at Uli 60. Their dating, however, is not clear. The red ware jar with short straight neck and slightly everted rim has an impressed pattern running along the rim top and impressed dots horizontally on the neck [Fig. 6:4] (a similar vessel but without decorated rim and with a slightly different pattern on the neck from the cemetery at Kerma belongs to the Classical Kerma period).¹⁶ The other example is a globular storage jar decorated with two rows of slightly oblique marks below the rim and a series of impressed zigzags (like sherd U23.32 [cf. Fig. 3:2]) with incised triangular motifs between two of these ornament lines [Fig. 6:5].

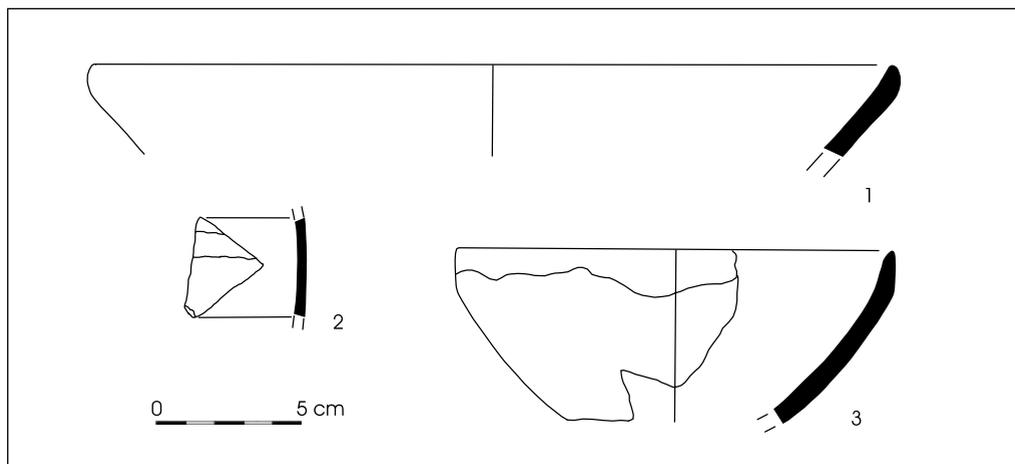


Fig. 5. Kerma-period pottery: 1 - U23.7; 2 - U6.4; 3 - U23.19
(Drawing E. Klimaszewska-Drabot)

15 B. Privati, "Le matériel céramique associé aux édifices funéraires", in: Ch. Bonnet, *Edifices et rites funéraires à Kerma* (Paris 2000) (=Privati 2000), Fig. 137.3.

16 Privati, *op. cit.*, Fig. 131.12.

At the present stage of research, the Kerma-period pottery assemblage from Uli Island does not appear to differ from that generally recognized on the Fourth

Cataract,¹⁷ demonstrating many similarities with finds from further downriver, e.g. Northern Dongola Reach¹⁸ and the city of Kerma.¹⁹

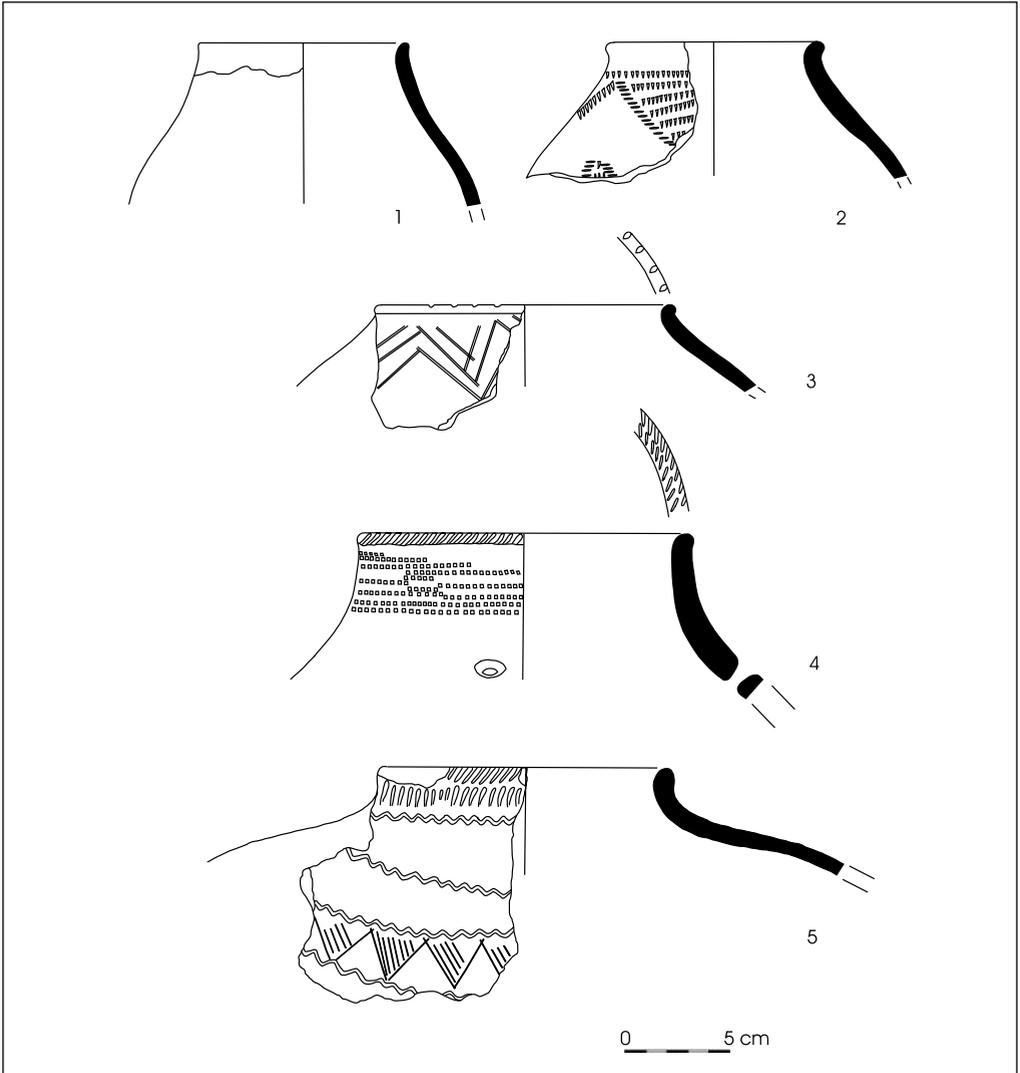


Fig. 6. Kerma-period pottery: 1 – U80.1; 2 – U37.5; 3 – U80.2; 4 – U60.15; 5 – U60.14 (Drawing E. Klimaszewska-Drabot)

17 Kołosowska, El-Tayeb, loc. cit.

18 Welsby-Sjöström, loc. cit.

19 Privati 2000, op. cit., 176-192; id. 2004, op. cit., 162-189.

POST-KERMA HORIZON AND NAPATAN PERIOD

The collection of sherds and complete vessels from the surface and excavations of the cemetery in Uli 23 deserves a separate and detailed discussion. The site extends well beyond the cemetery itself and has yielded mostly standard Kerma-period wares. The collection from the cemetery, however, appears to represent a much more varied time horizon. It should be kept in mind that only intact vessels from the bottom of graves can be regarded as constituting undisturbed grave goods. Since the graves were disturbed and in any case lay very close together, the loose ceramic material may be mixed and there is no certainty that all the sherds found in a grave actually belonged to vessels deposited at the time of burial. Despite this, it seems that the cemetery may have been in uninterrupted use until

the 25th Dynasty. Thus, an in-depth consideration of the pottery assemblage (here presented at a very early stage in the study) could bring more light to bear on the period in Nubian pottery production that followed the fall of Kerma.

WHOLE VESSELS

Two bowls found in grave 4 and one from grave 10 represent an interesting handmade product in a similar, coarse black-topped red ware with yellow band on the body imitating Kerma products [Fig. 7:1-3]. Similar bowls were discovered in Hillat el Arab, in a grave attributed to the late New Kingdom.²⁰ Such bowls were also found in graves by the GAME expedition.²¹ Many sherds with the same features collected from the surface indicate that vessels of this type must have

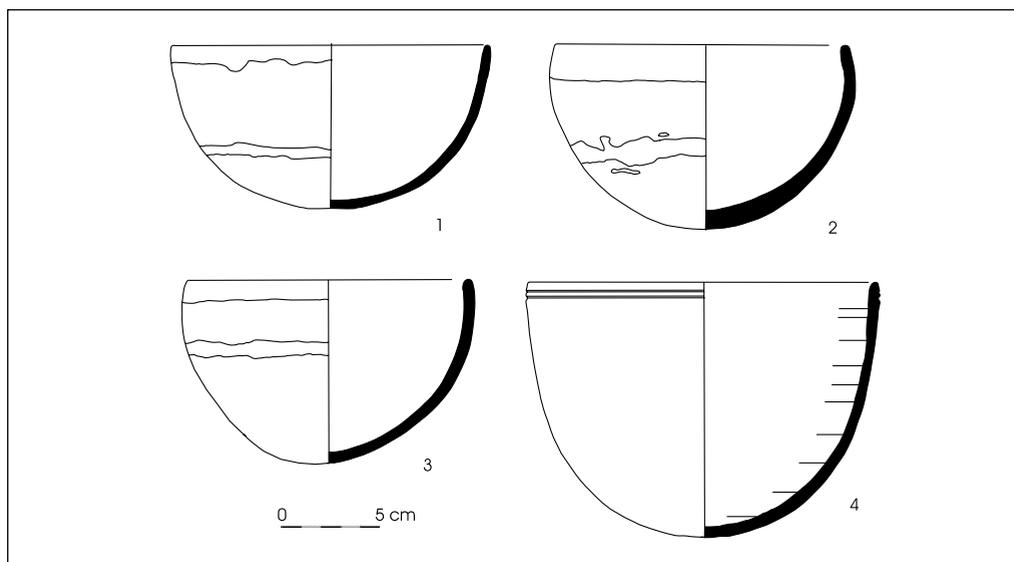


Fig. 7. Pottery from the Uli 23 cemetery: 1 – U23.T4.2; 2 – U23.T4.1; 3 – U.23.T10.3; 4 – U.23.T1.4 (Drawing E. Klimaszevska-Drabot)

20 I. Livererani, "Two Field Seasons in the Napata Region", *KUSH* XVII (1997), 170.

21 M. El-Tayeb, E. Kolosowska, "Burial Traditions on the right bank of the Nile in the Fourth Cataract Region", *GAMAR* 4, Fig. 16.

been quite common among the grave offerings.

Another vessel of interest is a wheel-made hemispherical red-slipped bowl with two grooves below the rim [Fig. 7:4]. It could be of Napatan date, but the dating is not all that clear. The style of decoration is known from the Kerma site, where it appears to have been popular, hemispherical or cylindrical bowls bearing from one to six or more grooves under the rim.²² A similar bowl was found in Soniyat temple, where it was dated to the Napatan period.²³

Coming also from this cemetery is an Egyptian amphora [Fig. 8] of a type that

started being produced locally in Egypt during the New Kingdom, when it became quite common. Earlier vessels of this kind had been imported from the Levant, and then produced only in the Delta.²⁴ The pot from grave 4 was made of Nile silt and given a cream coating. It is 30 cm high and features an elongated neck and vertical handles. It resembles Hope's type 1c, dated to the 18th Dynasty (reign of Amenhotep II) and 19th Dynasty or a little later.²⁵

SHERDS

Incised sherds evidently of Kerma tradition included a big open hemispherical bowl



Fig. 8. *Egyptian amphora U23.T4.3*
(Photo W. Godlewski)



Fig. 9. *Sherds of hemispherical open bowl in the Kerma tradition from Uli 23 cemetery (U23.T10.1)* (Photo W. Godlewski)

22 Salah el-Din M. Ahmed, *L'agglomération napatéenne de Kerma* (Paris 1992), Fig.20, 25, 26.

23 M. Orzechowska, "Preliminary Report on the Pottery from the Soniyat Temple", in: B. Żurawski, *Survey and Excavations between Old Dongola and Ez-Zuma, Southern Dongola Reach Survey 1, Nubia II* (Warsaw 2003), Pl. 4.f.

24 C.A. Hope, *Pottery of the Egyptian New Kingdom: Three Studies*, Victoria College Archaeology Research Unit, *Occasional Paper No. 2* (Victoria 1989), 87.

25 *Ibid.*, 95-96.

decorated with incised lines on the exterior [Fig. 10:1], and another one with short, slightly oblique lines under the rim and horizontal lines on the body [Fig. 9].

Another two handmade black-topped bowls, thin walled and deep, and burnished inside and out [Fig. 10:2-3], find distant parallels in material from Napatan sites.²⁶

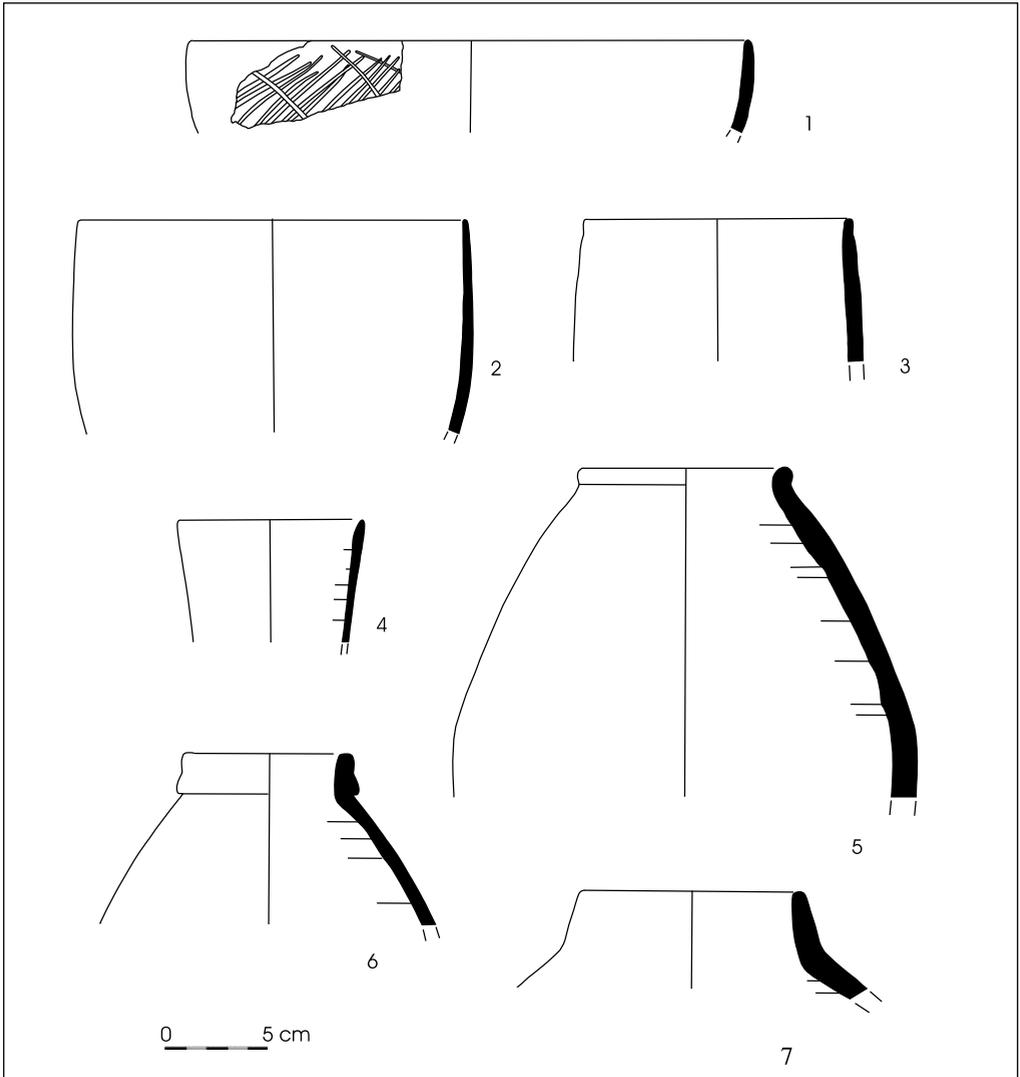


Fig. 10. Pottery from the Uli 23 cemetery: 1 – U23.T4.2; 2 – U23.T4.1; 3 – U23.T10.3; 4 – U23.T1.4; 5 – U23.T4.6; 6 – U23.T1.3; 7 – U23.T4.4 (Drawing E. Klimaszevska-Drabot)

26 B.B. Williams, *Twenty-Fifth Dynasty and Napatan Remains at Qustul: Cemeteries W and V*, The University of Chicago Oriental Institute Nubian Expedition, vol. VII (Chicago 1990), 6; F. L. Griffith, "Oxford Excavations in Nubia, The Cemetery of Sanam", *Liverpool Annals of Archaeology and Anthropology* X (1923), 99.

The Napatan examples, however, look more coarse, and the deep bowls from Uli 23 could actually be earlier products, which emerged when reminiscences of the Kerma tradition appeared.

Wheel-made sherds, which are a more abundant class in the collection, included a red-slipped beaker [Fig. 10:4], burnished inside and out, which can be compared with examples from the pottery workshop in Kerma²⁷ or with finds from the Qustul cemeteries.²⁸

A few sherds of storage containers coated with a thin cream wash [Fig. 9:6,7] are doubtless of Napatan date. Similar pieces were found in the Usli temple.²⁹ Storage jars of Nile silt, difficult to date due to the fragmentariness of the sherds, were also represented [e.g. Fig. 9:5]. Vessels of this kind appeared during the New Kingdom,³⁰ but were also found in 25th Dynasty contexts at El-Kurru³¹ and Amarna South (tombs dated to or around the 25th Dynasty).³²

SUMMARY

While further study of the ceramic assemblage from Uli Island is in order, the present preliminary presentation of selected issues and examples of pottery demonstrates an inherent similarity of the material to what other archaeological expeditions have already collected on the Fourth Cataract. Neither does it depart

significantly from the picture of pottery production that is available for areas upriver and downriver from this region. Further studies of the Uli Island material in confrontation with the growing body of published evidence from other work in the region should provide the grounds for a more detailed analysis.

27 Salah el-Din M. Ahmed, op. cit., Fig. 26.

28 Williams, op. cit., 8, Fig. 2:20.

29 J. Phillips, "An overview of the ceramics", in: Żurawski, Survey Ez-Zuma, op. cit., 399, Pl. 14.a.

30 Hope, op. cit., Fig. 1.i.

31 L.A. Heindorn, "Preliminary analysis of selected vessels from the earliest tombs at El-Kurru (Generations A-F)", Seventh International Conference for Meroitic Studies (Berlin 1992), Fig. 3a.

32 D.A. Aston, "Egyptian pottery of the Late New Kingdom and Third Intermediate Period (twelfth-seventh centuries BC). Tentative footsteps in a forbidding terrain", *Studien zur Archäologie und Geschichte Ägyptens* 13 (Heidelberg 1996), Fig. 119-SJ6 4.3 (L).