A recurrent problem in the study of Egyptian ceramics is the distinction between the everyday types of vessels used by the living and the pots chosen as grave goods. Since most of our standard typologies are composed of examples from tomb groups, utilitarian wares are often not represented (Bourriau 1986/87). This distinction is even greater for the cultures of Nubia where we have far fewer corpora, particularly from habitation sites.

One such juncture that presents a series of problems is the Bronze Age cultures of Lower Nubia. Only now are we beginning to clarify the different developmental stages of the “Pan-Grave,” C-Group, and Kerma cultures (Lacovara 1987; Wegner 1995). A particular concern is the distinction between domestic and luxury/funerary ceramics. Our sample for Nubia is even more heavily skewed towards the material recovered from cemeteries than pottery corpora from Egypt.

An important exception is a group of sherds from Reisner’s excavations in the town at Kerma (Reisner 1923a, 30-32). During his excavations of the dependencies on the western side of the great mudbrick chapel known as the Western or Lower Deffufa (K I) at Kerma, Reisner came upon a large deposit of broken Egyptian stone vase fragments along with other raw materials and ceramics (Lacovara 1991).

The complex building phases of the western “annex” to K I make interpreting the chronology and building history of the findspot very difficult. The excavation records indicate, however, that the vessel deposits found by Reisner must have been made at a fairly late stage in the building’s construction. The stone vase fragments and ceramics were found beneath a layer of collapsed wall debris and above several superimposed floor levels.
The main deposits of stone vessels found in the annex came from rooms H (north and south), X1-3, and Y1-3, all clustered around the entrance to KI. The stone vase fragments found in these areas were also associated with other materials, including fragments of decorated faience bowls, Tell el-Yahudiyah ware, a sherd from an imported Aegean vessel, mud seal impressions of Second Intermediate period date, as well as seals and pottery of local design.

The ceramics form a unique group to contrast with the corpora from the Kerma culture cemeteries published by Reisner and Dunham (Reisner 1923a, 1923b; Dunham 1982). An overall distinction that one can observe between the two is condition. The vessels from the cemetery show little or no evidence of use-wear, suggesting many were manufactured exclusively for burial. The ceramics recovered from the KI annex, in contrast, show signs of burning, repair, and abrasion from use. The types of vessels and decorative motifs are also distinct. Incised wares appear to be far more common in the domestic context than in the cemetery context, while the burnished/polished wares are more evident as grave goods.

Some forms, such as the beaker shape (fig. 4.1a) occur in both contexts; however, the domestic beakers are less carefully finished and show traces of use and repair. The overall form, though, does correspond to beakers from contemporary tombs (fig. 4.1b). This is important to note, since many of the associated incised wares (fig. 4.2a-c) bear an overall similarity to vessels of the earlier phases of the Kerma civilization (fig. 4.3a-c). I would suggest that this is an example of the survival of older traditions in domestic contexts.

![Figure 4.1a](image-url) Blacktopped beaker from Kerma settlement. SU 29. Scale 1:1. Drawing by Yvonne Markowitz.
Also of significance is the distinction between the incised domestic ceramic complex of the Kerma culture as opposed to that of the C-Group and Pan-Grave cultures. While there is a similarity among these ceramics, just as in the case of the luxury wares, they can be separated out. The incised bowls of the Pan-Grave culture in general tend to be larger and less carefully made than those at Kerma. Also distinctive are the Kerma "cooking pots" with their applied lumps of clay on the bottom, perhaps to distribute heat more efficiently (fig. 4.4). These appear distinctive to the Kerma culture, and their occurrence in Egypt points to a resident population of this culture during the Second Intermediate period (Bourriau 1990). Indeed, Egyptologists should be careful not to automatically assume that all Nubian handmade wares found in Egypt belong to the Pan-Grave culture.\(^1\)

Lastly, the Kerma cooking bowls are also of importance as being an example of the survival of traditional forms in rough domestic wares. Both the beaker shape and rough cooking bowls with applied clay bottoms are found in rough wares associated with some of the early Napatan period tombs at el-Kurru (fig. 4.5a-b), suggesting a cultural link between the two great Nubian empires.

While the study of these ceramics is still in an embryonic state, the lines of research we have noted should help to refine much of our understanding of Bronze Age Nubia.

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Figure 4.2 a) Incised bowl, wet smoothed exterior. SU 45. b) Incised rough bowl, brown surface. SU 13-14. c) Large, deep bowl with incised rim. SU 1. Scale 4:1. Drawings by Yvonne Markowitz.
Figure 4.3  a) Incised bowl from KM 15. BMFA 15-2-320. b) Incised rough bowl from KM 48. BMFA 15-3-437. c) Large, deep bowl with incised rim from KN 164. BMFA 16-4-1489. All from Dunham 1991. Scale 4:1. Drawings by Yvonne Markowitz.
**Figure 4.4** Kerma “cooking pot.” BMFA 21.3079 (14-1-561). Handmade, low-fired Nile silt with mat-impressed surface and applied clay on bottom. Traces of smoke stains on interior and exterior. Scale 1:1. Drawing by Yvonne Markowitz.

**Figure 4.5** a) Red polished beaker from Kurru Tomb 702. BMFA 19-4-19. Wheelmade, fine Nile silt with burnished red surface. Fire cloud at bottom. b) “Cooking Pot” from Kurru Tomb 702, BMFA 19-4-17. Handmade, low-fired Nile silt with mat-impressed surface applied clay on bottom. Traces of smoke stains on interior and exterior. Scale 1:1. Drawings by Yvonne Markowitz.
NOTES

1 Bourriau has suggested that Egyptian sources conflate the Pan-Grave peoples residing in Egypt in the late Middle Kingdom with individuals from the Kerma culture.

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