NUBIA IN THE NEW KINGDOM

Lived experience, pharaonic control and indigenous traditions

edited by
Neal SPENCER, Anna STEVENS and Michaela BINDER
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### Part 5

**Cultural choices for eternal life**

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Abstract

This chapter presents the results of a first season of survey of pharaonic sites in the desert hinterland beyond Amara West, a project that seeks to better understand local settlement patterns and the place of the Ramesside town therein. Two sites located north of Amara West, and their ceramic assemblages, are discussed in some detail. Both represent early Dynasty 18 occupation, on what seems to be a fairly modest scale. Test excavation at the more substantial of the two sites revealed a sequence of activity layers beginning with possible brick and wooden constructions, a horizon of open fireplaces and the subsequent construction of more substantial stone structures. The chapter concludes by considering the possibility that the sites represent early Dynasty 18 gold prospection on the west bank of the river.

Introduction

The desert hinterland around Amara West is scattered with archaeological sites, both prehistoric and historic, the latter still poorly understood in comparison to the Ramesside settlement. In early 2014 a small-scale survey of these sites was instigated, with the aim of placing Amara West within its broader historical and cultural context in terms of its local setting. We are particularly interested in identifying evidence for an Egyptian presence in the area, whether contemporary with the town or otherwise, to help us understand several outstanding issues concerning the foundation and occupation of Amara West. Where did the people of Amara West come from, and what kind of exposure might they have had to Nubian culture beforehand?

Why was this site chosen as the seat of the Deputy of Kush and not, for example, the existing settlement on Sai Island? A broader temporal study of settlement patterns should also segue into ongoing work on past environmental conditions, recent results of which are showing that Amara West was founded at a time of environmental change that saw the gradual drying up of water channels on the north bank of the river (Woodward et al., this volume). Is this reflected in any way in the distribution and nature of nearby sites, both before and after the occupation of the town?

The starting point for the fieldwork was André Vila’s (Centre national de la recherche scientifique) survey of sites along the Nile Valley south of the Dal Cataract, conducted in the early 1970s on behalf of the Sudan Antiquities Service. Vila (1977) noted several sites in the vicinity of Amara West to which he assigned a New Kingdom date (Fig. 1), usually due to the presence of wheel-made pottery. More recently, Elena Garcea (Università degli Studi di Cassino e del Lazio Meridionale) led a survey in the area, focussing on prehistoric sites, and identified one additional New Kingdom site just under 1km northwest of Amara West (2-R-75).1

Nine of Vila’s ‘New Kingdom’ sites were relocated during fieldwalking: 2-R-17, 18, 55, 57 and 65/65A in the desert to the north of Amara West, and 2-R-70/70A, 2-R-73, 2-S-38 and 2-S-37 along the riverbank to the east. Three of the more substantial sites were then selected for test excavation: 2-R-18, 2-R-65 and 2-S-37. The former two sites proved to be of early New Kingdom date, and are the focus of discussion here, whilst 2-S-37 was found to represent much later Christian Period occupation.

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1 This has yet to be published.
Site 2-S-37

Site 2-S-37 spreads about 2km along the river (see Fig. 1), intermittently covered by sand dunes, as it seems also to have been in Vila’s day. We did not reach its eastern end, where Vila records circular ‘wells’. At around the mid-point of the site, the partial outline of a mud-brick building, which seemed to have been recently robbed out, was visible, and we opened a small 4 × 4m trench nearby. Removal of the surface sand (1036) revealed a horizon of sand with a low concentration of sherds (1037). Below this, the fill was largely clean sand (1038/1039) that probably pre-dated occupation — the collapsing baulks meant that the natural alluvium could not be reached. The trench seems, therefore, to have caught the edge of a diffuse rubbish deposit consisting mainly of sherds that had accumulated across the sandy riverbank. The small amount of pottery recovered from 2-S-37 can be dated to the X-Group and Early Christian Periods. This mixed sand-eroded sherd accumulation is entirely domestic in appearance, comprising bowls, basins, jars and gadus-bases.

Site 2-R-18

Sites 2-R-18 and 2-R-65 lie just under 2km north of Amara West (see Fig. 1). They are reached by following a broad wadi that extends from Cemetery C northwards to a line of trees which marks an ancient palaeo-channel, one of several that cross this part of the desert (Woodward et al., this volume).

Site 2-R-18 is a low oval mound, covering an area of some 63 × 46m, in the mouth of the wadi (Fig. 2). It is covered by a dense scatter of local schist pieces, with potsherds, quartz chips and natural pebbles in lesser concentration, and occasional fragments of grinding stones. There are a few larger schist slabs that are potentially architectural remains, particularly across the northeast part of the mound, but none are obviously in situ. Vila (1977, 46) did not undertake any excavation here during his survey.

We opened a 3 × 3m test trench towards the eastern end of the mound, where it was highest. Effectively, two horizons of fill were encountered. The lowest was a fairly homogeneous deposit of ash and silt (1003) that had accumulated directly over the natural alluvium.

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2 J. Budka, J. R. Anderson and W. Y. Adams (pers. comm.).
horizon of ash and silt (1001) some 20cm deep, moderately rich in sherds, often lying flat, suggesting a gradual period of accumulation. This was in turn covered by a thin horizon of windblown surface sand (1000).

Whilst the trench yielded a large number of potsherds, the quantity of objects was otherwise relatively low, and of a fairly modest nature (Fig. 3). They consisted mainly of sherds worked into rough discs (F1003, F1013–15, F1018–20, F2443, F2468), fragments of grinding stones (F1017, F1025 and possibly F1006–7, F2463) and pieces of stone possibly used expeditiously as tools such as pounders (F1004, F1008). Other finds included a pierced clay bead or sinker (F1009), a single faience ribbed bead with worn blue glaze (F1016) and a possible unpierced bead (F1023). A piece of polished stone (possibly schist) with a finely bored hole (F1005) is an unusual piece and perhaps an item of personal adornment. There was little obvious difference in the kinds of objects present in the three main horizons of fill.

(1006) to a depth of 20–40cm. The deposit (1003) contained very little material culture, apart from occasional small eroded sherds of Egyptian-style wheel-made pottery and Nubian-style hand-made coarse ware, along with a few pieces of animal bone. As it was removed, two pieces of schist (1005) and an adjacent patch of ash (1004) were exposed in the southwest corner of the trench, just possibly the remains of an expedient fireplace (stone was rare in the trench). The schist pieces and ash patch, along with deposit (1003), overlay the natural alluvium (1006), which bore a marked slope to the south.

A concentrated horizon of sherds and ash (1002) then formed over deposit (1003) to a depth of 10–20cm, across the northern and central margins of the square, containing quite frequent clumps of probable degraded mud mortar or brick. Sitting on the deposit was a crushed but largely intact Nubian cooking pot (C1000; see Fig. 16). Above this, and covering the entire trench, there then accumulated a similar but less concentrated horizon of ash and silt (1001) some 20cm deep, moderately rich in sherds, often lying flat, suggesting a gradual period of accumulation. This was in turn covered by a thin horizon of windblown surface sand (1000).
southwest of 2-R-18 (Figs 1, 4–5). Vila (1977, 82–4) observed the remains of eight rectangular houses of varying sizes here, made of stone and mud brick. He cleared the northeast corner of one of these, noting the presence of several open fireplaces and traces of a plaster floor. When we visited the site, far fewer stone lines were visible. Excavation was undertaken in a 4 × 4m trench that encompassed part of one of the lines of stone (1009) through the northwest margin of the trench (see Figs 4–5). This enabled us to clarify the stratigraphy of the site, revealing three main phases of activity (Fig. 6).

Phase I: trampled surface once associated with mudbrick and wooden constructions?

The first phase is represented by a silty surface (1024) and an associated rubble deposit (1027). The surface is perhaps to be associated with Vila’s ‘plaster floor’ although there was little sign that it had been laid deliberately. It sat immediately over the outcropping schist bedrock (1025), which formed an irregular and
Fig. 4: Site 2-R-65 facing southwest, as it is approached from site 2-R-18. Photo: Amara West project (British Museum).

Fig. 5: Kite photograph of site 2-R-65, with the 2014 excavation trench visible. Facing south. Photo: Amara West project (British Museum).

Fig. 6: Final plan of the trench at site 2-R-65, and section through its west baulk. Original plan by A. Stevens and section by T. Fushiya. Amara West project (British Museum).
quite jagged surface of fractured stone and would have been awkward to build upon; there is no indication that it was smoothed down in any way. In places, the bedrock extruded through surface (1024), suggesting the latter was formed simply by trample and never entirely covered the outcropping stone. In part, (1024) was covered by a pale grey-brown crust and where this was broken, slightly reddish brown or ashy horizons were exposed, suggesting that some of the surface comprises debris from fires. A complete profile of an Egyptian-style wheel-made potstand (C1259) sat on the surface.

Surface (1024) was cut by three pits. One was a fairly regular circular pit (1033), with a diameter of c. 8cm and depth c. 10cm, set upright in which was a piece of desiccated wood (1032) measuring about 3 × 3cm, in a silty fill (1034). Caroline Cartwright (British Museum) has identified the wood as highly friable, disintegrating doum palm trunk wood (*Hyphaene thebaica*). Given its lack of any root system, it is likely that the wood is a stake or post that had been set into the pit as part of a structure or emplacement such as a tethering stake. With no trace of the pit in the overlying layers (although these were considerably softer) it may be contemporaneous with the surface.

The other two pits (1028) and (1029) were much larger and less regular, occupying much of the western margin of the trench. Each was around 10–20cm deep, with the outcropping schist exposed in their base. They were filled with distinctive deposits of silt with lesser ash, a relatively high concentration of fine chaffy plant material and some animal pellets: deposit (1030) in (1028) and (1031) in (1029). Deposit (1030) contained a quartzite hammer stone or similar (F1062). They were richer in charcoal, animal bone, sherds and plant remains than the fills that subsequently accumulated over much of the trench, and are probably midden deposits, although unlikely to be contemporary with surface (1024).

Sitting immediately on top of surface (1024) was a low-density scatter of mud-brick rubble (1027), and a few pieces of schist. Most were clearly not *in situ*, but seem to represent collapse from structures that were probably of the same general phase as surface (1024). The bricks were not greatly weathered, suggesting that they may not have lain exposed for very long before being buried. Amongst them was a fragment of a grindstone (F1063). One group of fragmentary brick and schist pieces that formed an approximate circle about 40cm in diameter (1026) was left in place for the possibility that it represents a rough emplacement or remains of a more substantial structure (see Fig. 6), although this was far from certain.

A soft horizon of reddish-brown silt with a little ash (1023) accumulated over surface (1024). This deposit contained a small amount of pottery but was relatively rich in fine chaffy plant material and also contained some small clumps of compact silt, perhaps heavily degraded brick. It was also quite rich in animal pellets, of a kind also found in the pit fills (1030) and (1031). Deposit (1023) seems to be an abandonment layer that accumulated after the Phase I structure/s here was in use; the presence of ashy debris and occasional sherds, however, implies that the deposit need not reflect the abandonment of the site altogether. The interface between (1023) and the midden deposits (1030) and (1031) filling the pits along the west margin of the trench was difficult to identify. It is possible that (1023) extended across the pit fills in a thin layer (see Fig. 6) but notable that immediately above, and isolated to the western margin of the trench, was a further horizon of ‘midden’ material, numbered (1016) in the northwest quadrant and (1019) to its south. This was of very similar composition to deposit (1030/1031), although somewhat richer in artefacts. It contained two rough stone pounders or similar (F1044, F1049; Fig. 7), a sub-spherical bead, probably of white faience (F1051), and a roughly spherical clay ball c. 1.8–2.2cm in diameter, seemingly pierced (F1053; Fig. 7). Deposit (1019) contained a distinctive stone seal carved with the name Amenhotep (F1050; Fig. 8), a fragment of a grindstone (F1057) and possible fragment of a second (F1058), an ostrich eggshell bead (F1059; Fig. 7) and a stone pounder or similar (F1060). Whilst pits (1028) and (1029) and their fills most likely represent the dumping of waste at a time after surface (1024) was in use, there remains uncertainty over when they were cut, with the possibility that deposits (1016) and (1019) are an upward continuation of the fill of each.

An interface layer (1018) was encountered between Phases I and II across most of the square apart from the western margin, consisting of a reddish-brown silt, more reminiscent of (1023) in its colour and presence of fine chaffy material than the asher fills above. From within deposit (1023) itself, a potsherd cut into a disc (F2449), two chips of a calcite object with red paint (F2690) and a possible piece of hand-worked clay (F1055) were recovered. In the southwest corner of the trench, sitting on (1023) but below (1018), was an area of concentrated white ash (1021), adjacent to which lay...
Fig. 7: A selection of objects from site 2-R-65 (clockwise from upper left: F1039, F1030 [flints], F1035 [ear- or hair-ring], F1036 [faience fragment], F1049 [pounder], F1047, F1053, F1046, F1033, F1059 [beads], F1032 [grindstone], F1048 [pounder]).
Photo: Amara West project (British Museum).

Fig. 8: Stone seal inscribed Amenhotep (F1050) from deposit (1019) at site 2-R-65. Photo: Amara West project (British Museum).
Phase II: open fireplaces

Phase II is characterised by the presence of open fireplaces and the accumulation of associated ashy silt. The fireplaces survived as concentrated sub-circular patches of ash: there was a clear example in the centre of the trench (1013), a second in the southeast quadrant (1014) and a further possible example in the immediate southeast corner (1015). These were presumably examples of the open fireplaces Vila (1977, 82–3) encountered. Surrounding and overlying each was a layer of ashy silt (1012) containing distinctive bands of concentrated ash, nebulous in form and undulating in section, which had presumably originated from the fireplaces. The ashy silt deposit (1012) averaged around 20cm in depth and yielded part of a possible grinding stone (F1040), a faience scarab inscribed Menkheperra (F1041; Fig. 10), a small fired-clay ball, not quite spherical (F1045), a bead in ostrich eggshell (F1046; Fig. 7), a small pierced cylinder or ‘barrel bead’ in fired clay (F1047; Fig. 7) and a stone used as a pounder or similar (F1048; Fig. 7).

Fig. 9: Tomomi Fushiya excavating ash deposit (1021) with associated bovine skull at site 2-R-65 (left), and a fragment of mortar (1022) with unusual curved impressions lying nearby (right). Photos: Amara West project (British Museum).

Fig. 10: Faience scarab inscribed Menkheperra (F1041) from deposit (1012) at site 2-R-65. Scale 2:1. Illustration by Alice Salvador. Amara West project (British Museum).
Phase III: construction of stone walls

The final activity phase preserved at the site saw the construction of two lines of stone walling (1009) and (1010) immediately over (1012) along the northern margin of the trench. The intersection of (1009) and (1010) seems to form the corner of a space that extended beyond the western and southern limits of the trench (Fig. 11 and see Fig. 6).

Each wall was formed of angular schist boulders ranging from 20–80cm in length, stood to one to two courses and had a maximum width of around 55cm. There were often large gaps between the stones, and the laying of stones within (1009) in particular is somewhat odd, some sticking upright rather than lying flat. There is also very little stone rubble in the vicinity. Unless the walls were never built very high, we can probably assume that considerable amounts of stone have been removed from the site for re-use; it is worth noting that large quantities of stone were employed for walls and cairns at site 2-R-65A on the adjacent desert.

floor to the west (Vila 1977, 80–4), although we have as yet no dating criteria for these. There is a gap of around 60cm within stone wall (1009) that might represent a doorway, but could simply be an area where the stone has been removed, and it may be that the southern end of wall (1010) has likewise been truncated after abandonment. Between the stones there was a greyish-brown deposit that may be the remains of mortar, and there was also a small span of possible alluvial brick (1035) in the immediate northeast corner of the trench that is perhaps part of a brick construction extending northwards.

There was only one deposit (1008) that appeared to be contemporaneous with the walls: a horizon of well-mixed ash and silt around 5–10cm deep, and reasonably rich in potsherds, that abutted the wall faces. It overlay a crackled crust of mud (1011) adjacent to wall (1009). Deposit (1008) yielded a fragment of a flint blade (F1030; Fig. 7) and a second intact but probably unfinished blade (F1039; Fig. 7), part of a possible schist grindstone (F1032; Fig. 7), a turquoise faience

Fig. 11: The trench at site 2-R-65 at the close of excavation showing the lines of stone walling (1009), in the foreground, and (1010), to the left, and earlier surface (1024) across the bulk of the trench. Facing south. Photo: Amara West project (British Museum).
ring bead (F1033; Fig. 7), a small sub-spherical object in mud (F1034), a fragment of a ring, perhaps an ear- or hair-ring, in steatite (F1035; Fig. 7), a very small fragment of a probable bowl in turquoise faience with a black design (F1036; Fig. 7), and a small piece of smoothed sandstone, perhaps used as a rubber (F1038). It was subsequently covered by a thin layer of wind-blow surface sand (1007), which contained two fragments of grinding stones (F1025, F1027).

Characterising the pottery from 2-R-18 and 2-R-65

Overview

The two sites are fairly homogeneous in terms of pottery wares. Both wheel-made vessels in the Egyptian style and hand-made vessels in the Nubian style are present, the majority of which are well preserved, and it was possible to reconstruct a small number of full vessel profiles. The sites yielded predominantly domestic assemblages characterised by a high percentage of simple small and medium-sized bowls, carinated bowls and basins (Fig. 12). Open and restricted forms including cooking vessels dominate the assemblages and occur in greater numbers than closed forms such as storage jars. Other utilitarian vessel types, including bread plates (dokka) and pot stands, were present in comparatively fewer numbers, and no bread mould sherds were identified at either site. The latter is not surprising, however, given that bread moulds in the New Kingdom are generally associated with bread production for temples (Jacquet-Gordon 1981, 19) or formal oven features, which are yet to be identified in the desert hinterland; bread moulds are also rarely present in the Ramesside pottery from the town at Amara West. A small number of beer jars were present in 2-R-18 — all from the dense rubbish deposit (1001) — but they were completely absent from this initial investigation of 2-R-65.

Though it is not possible at this stage to make any substantive comparisons between the ceramic assemblages from 2-R-18 and 2-R-65 given the limited excavations at either site, it is worth noting that the smaller trench at site 2-R-18 (3 × 3m) produced more sherds in total (2006) than the larger trench (4 × 4m) at 2-R-65 (1636 sherds). With similar depth of deposit at each, this would seem to fit the identification of 2-R-18 as an area of peripheral rubbish dump. The sherds here were also larger in size (1–17.5cm, compared to 0.5–8cm from 2-R-65), which could support the idea that the ground here was not used and trampled upon as intensively as that at 2-R-65. In terms of wares, a variation in the proportions of certain types between the two sites is the only observable differentiating factor, as outlined below.

Fabrics

The vast majority of the pottery from both sites consisted of Egyptian-style wheel-made Nile silt vessels, including several decorated wares. Nile clays included AW fabrics 1–4 (equivalent to Nile B1 and B2 in the Vienna System: Spataro, Millet and Spencer 2014) which are generally very micaceous — on macroscopic observation, more so than the Ramesside Nile fabrics from Amara West itself — and contained infrequent to densely packed quartz inclusions. These Nile fabrics were also generally mixed with sand and organic chaffy

Fig. 12. Graph showing relative percentages of pottery types from 2-R-18 and 2-R-65.

3 Descriptions of fabrics are based on macroscopic observations of fresh breaks in the field with a 20× hand lens. The Amara West (AW) fabric classification was defined and developed by Marie Millet between 2009 and 2012 (Musée du Louvre).
temper, particularly for the Nile B2 variants, and both frequently exhibited rounded and/or angular white opaque particles ranging in size from 0.1 to 1mm.

Both assemblages contained a small number of wheel-made AW fabric 17 sherds (equivalent to Marl A2 in the Vienna System: Spataro, Millet and Spencer 2014) from squat jars of Egyptian type which do not form a notable part of the overall ceramic repertoire. Imported vessels from outside the Nile Valley include a possible Oasis fabric[4] and a small number of cream-slipped sherds of Canaanite fabric. Rose (this volume) suggests that the very small size of the few marl and Canaanite sherds also evident in the early New Kingdom pottery from Sesebi may indicate that these represent personal possessions brought from Egypt rather than large-scale supply. Was this also the case in the desert hinterland of Amara West?

Decorated wares

A small group of decorated sherds were present in both assemblages, which in most cases were relatively well preserved. Simple bowls in Nile B1 and B2 variants commonly displayed a red-painted rim band[5] (e.g. C1029) or were red-slipped on the interior and exterior and burnished on the interior (e.g. C1025). Bowls with modelled rims also occurred in both assemblages, generally displaying either a red-painted rim or red-orange slip and burnishing on the interior (e.g. C1033, C1264). Both sites contained ring-based bowls with red-slipped interior and exterior (e.g. C1149, C1150), disc-based bowls with red-slipped interior and exterior and burnishing on the interior (e.g. C1317) and bulb-based bowls with red-slipped interior and/or exterior and burnished interior (e.g. C1350).

Carinated bowls also in Nile B1 and B2 variants occur in both assemblages (Fig. 13a–c), most commonly of the red/orange-red or cream slipped and burnished type (e.g. C1147 [Fig. 13c], C1198), or with white-burnished surfaces and monochrome (e.g. C1213, C1233) or bichrome decoration (e.g. C1195). The burnishing either covers the whole of both surfaces (e.g. C1251), or more commonly horizontal streaky burnish is present on either or both the interior and exterior surfaces, which in some cases is neatly executed in a decorative manner (e.g. C1078). Carinated bowls with more detailed decoration include black/dark brown and red painted horizontal bands (e.g. C1019, C1220) together with a dark brown painted horizontal wavy line (e.g. C1195, C1213 [Fig. 13a], C1197) or a neat horizontal band of dark brown/black finger prints (e.g. C1233, C1321).

Sherds preserving bichrome decoration (brown or black and red) were present in the 2-R-18 assemblage in contexts (1000) and (1001), notably C1199 (Nile B2; Fig. 14a), which exhibits red and black bichrome decoration on a cream-white background composed of a register of repeating black v-shaped patterns — part of a floral motif — above a series of black and red bands. This sherd was originally part of a necked jar dated to the reign of Hatshepsut and possibly Thutmose III.[7]

A single sherd displaying polychrome decoration was identified from 2-R-18 (C1008, Nile B1; Fig. 14b) with a pale creamy-white slip on the interior and exterior with yellow bands on the interior, and a series of black, yellow and red bands on the exterior. The small size of the sherd prevents any specific identification of vessel form, although it is probably part of a bowl.

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[4] AW fabric 18, identified as either Marl C or an Oasis fabric (Spataro, Millet and Spencer 2014), containing many angular and spherical inclusions including shell, quartz and mica.

[5] As also observed at Sesebi (Rose, this volume, fig. 1).

[6] As is also evident in Level 4 at Sai, and in Egypt at Elephantine and Thebes (Budka 2011, 30).

[7] A type known from the early Dynasty 18 levels at Dokki Gel (Ruffieux 2009, 124–6, figs 3–5), Sai (Budka 2011, 30) and Elephantine (Budka 2009).
Fig. 13: (a) (top) Rim sherd from an Egyptian-style wheel-made carinated bowl (C1213) with cream-slipped and burnished interior and exterior and dark brown-painted monochrome decorative bands on the exterior. (b) (middle) Body sherd from an Egyptian-style wheel-made red-washed carinated bowl (C1257) with incised wavy-line decoration and a finger-pinched rim. (c) (bottom) Complete profile from an Egyptian-style wheel-made overfired, warped carinated bowl (C1147) with orange/red-slipped and burnished interior and exterior. Illustrations by Alice Salvador. Amara West project (British Museum).

Fig. 14: (a) (top) Body sherd from an Egyptian-style wheel-made necked jar (C1199) with red and black floral bichrome decoration. (b) (bottom) Body sherd from an Egyptian-style wheel-made vessel (C1008) with white, yellow and red polychrome decoration. Photo: Amara West project (British Museum).
Nubian-style pottery

A further point of interest is the type and quantity of Nubian-style hand-made pottery and its association with the contemporaneous Egyptian-style wheel-made ceramic repertoire, of which preliminary observations can be offered for both 2-R-18 and 2-R-65.

Sherds from Nubian-style hand-made vessels of Nile silt fabric, equivalent to AW fabric 13, are present in almost every context from both 2-R-18 and 2-R-65. All those excavated to date belong to restricted globular vessels, the most common type observed in both assemblages being coarse ware cooking pots characterised by large rectangular basketry impressions on the exterior, formed by plaited strips of palm leaf, together with pre-firing indents in the rim (Fig. 15e). The best example of this manufacturing technique is C1000 (see Fig. 16), a complete Nubian-style hand-made cooking

Fig. 15: (clockwise from upper left) (a) Body sherd from a Nubian-style hand-made bowl (C1295) with comb-impressed decoration on the exterior. (b) Body sherd from a Nubian-style hand-made bowl (C1356) with comb-impressed decoration on the exterior. (c) Body sherd from a Nubian-style hand-made bowl (C1286) with incised decoration on the exterior. (d) Rim sherd from a Nubian-style hand-made bowl (C1280) with wet-smoothed decoration on the exterior. (e) Rim sherd from a Nubian-style hand-made bowl (C1186) with large rectangular basketry-impressions in the exterior and pre-firing indents on the rim. Illustrations by Alice Salvador. Amara West project (British Museum).

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8 AW fabric 13 is characterised as containing quartz and organic chaffy temper, often also with micaceous inclusions and some sand (Spataro, Millet and Spencer 2014).

9 Also the most common coarse basketry or matting type identified in the early Dynasty 18 levels at Sesebi (Rose 2012, 18).
pot from 2-R-18, which preserves large rectangular basketry impressions on the exterior and regularly spaced shallow incisions along the rim. This vessel also preserves a post-firing layer of unfired mud (*mouna*) on the exterior which would have provided the vessel with an additional protective layer when on the fire (Rose 2012, 19), as well as traces of ash around the rim on the exterior. These pots are all blackened on the exterior, reflecting their use as cooking pots, unlike the fine wares which were evidently not used for cooking.10

Sherds in AW fabric 13 from comb-impressed (C1286, C1295, C1356) and incised (C1357) vessels were also present in 2-R-65 (Figs 15a–b), together with rim sherds from two wet-smoothed restricted globular vessels (C1238, C1280, Fig. 15d), perhaps also used for cooking (Rose 2012, 22). These wet-smoothed sherds are undecorated save for the simple linear designs produced by the smoothing of the exterior vessel surface and upper framing rim bands (see Fig. 15d).

Based on sherd count, Nubian-style hand-made vessels form between 2 and 30% of the total number of sherds in any given context.11 These groups consist of a small amount of burnished fine ware body sherds but the majority of the Nubian-style hand-made pottery is coarse ware, including basketry-impressed, wet-smoothed, incised and impressed wares: the 2-R-18 contexts average 94% coarse ware and 6% fine ware, a ratio directly comparable to that from the 2-R-65 contexts which contained 95% coarse ware and 5% fine ware.12

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10 As is also the case in the early Dynasty 18 levels at Sesebi (Rose 2012, 27).
11 The average percentage for 2-R-18 is 7.8%, and for 2-R-65 7.1%.
12 The presence of both Nubian coarse ware and fine ware in small numbers is also evident in the contemporary early Dynasty 18 levels at Sai (Budka 2011, 28) and Sesebi (Rose 2012, 16) and in Upper Egypt at Elephantine (Seiler 1999) and Deir el-Ballas (Bourriau 1995).
Dating the pottery

The pottery from both sites is consistent with an early Dynasty 18 date, i.e. from the beginning of the dynasty continuing through the reign of Hatshepsut until that of Thutmose III (c. 1550–1479 BC). There is no noticeable difference in the date of the pottery across the different stratigraphic phases. The Egyptian-style wheel-made repertoire can be usefully compared with contemporaneous assemblages in Nubia from Level 4 at SAV1 North at Sai (Budka 2011), Areas 1, 17 and 19 at Sesebi (Rose 2012; this volume) and Sectors 33C and 33E at Dokki Gel (Ruffieux 2009; 2014). In Egypt, comparable assemblages are found in Level 10 at Elephantine (Budka 2005; Seiler 1999) and Level IV at Memphis (Bourriau 2010).

The presence of a bichrome decorated necked jar sherd (C1199; Fig. 14a) offers a marker that dates the 2-R-18 pottery to the reign of Hatshepsut and possibly into that of Thutmose III (Budka 2011, 30; Ruffieux 2009, 124–6, figs 3–4). Two sherds (C1257 [1008] and C1363 [1023]) from red-washed carinated bowls with incised wavy-line decoration and a finger-pinched rim in 2-R-65 also indicate an early Dynasty 18 date for the 2-R-65 phases detailed above and offer further evidence to prove that this type is not residual but rather continued to be used until late Dynasty 18, ‘evoking the style of the Second Intermediate Period’ (Budka 2011, 30; see Fig. 13b).  

Nubian-style hand-made pottery forms from both 2-R-18 and 2-R-65 are consistent with Kerma recent dating criteria including plaited palm-leaf basketry-impressed cooking pots (Fig. 16, and see Fig. 15e) thus corresponding directly with the early New Kingdom dating of the Egyptian-style wheel-made repertoire (Gratien 1978; 1999, 11–12; 2002, 226).  

An important direction of future research will be to compare the proportion of Nubian-style hand-made pottery from the Desert Survey with that from the Ramesside town of Amara West, to investigate potential changes in the indigenous cultural signature over time.

Technology, production and use

Whilst no evidence for pottery production was found in the small trenches opened at sites 2-R-18 and 2-R-65, it is logical to suppose that the majority of Nile silt Egyptian-style wheel-made vessels were locally produced, in a regional sense, since the required materials — clay and temper — were readily available in the immediate surroundings, as at Sesebi (Rose, this volume) and indeed within the Ramesside town at Amara West (Spataro, Millet and Spencer 2014).

The majority of sherds from 2-R-18 and 2-R-65 are eroded by sand to differing degrees and many are also burnt. Sherds are often either underfired, or overfired and warped (see Fig.13c), which is perhaps indicative of less adept kiln technology or indeed less confident potters, as has also been suggested for the contemporary early Dynasty 18 settlement at Sesebi where poorly manufactured carinated bowls also appear (Rose, this volume). The act of repairing broken vessels is apparent in the presence of two Egyptian-style wheel-made bowl sherds from 2-R-65 (C1342 and C1401) which both preserve post-firing repair holes, while several carinated bowl sherds also display heavy use-wear on the interior rim as a result of repeated scouring or grinding (e.g. C1285).

What is clear is that the use-life of the hinterland pottery was actively extended as far as possible, perhaps through necessity. The continuous re-use and

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13 A type generally associated with the Second Intermediate Period in both Lower and Upper Egypt, including for example at Tell el-Dab’a (Aston 2004, note 18) and Thebes (Seiler 2005, 145; 2010, figs 8.2–3). The form is also known from contemporary levels at Sai (Level 4 SAV1N and SAV2; Budka 2011, 29; Hesse 1981, 29), in the pre-Thutmose III Level 10 at Elephantine (Budka 2005, 95–9) and in Dynasty 18 levels at Sesebi (Rose, this volume, fig. 1.4; Spence et al. 2011, 37).  

14 As has also been observed from the contemporary Area 1 at Sesebi (Rose, this volume; 2012, 26).
repair of the same vessels over time may indicate potential problems in obtaining replacement ceramics, as has also been suggested for Sesebi (Rose, this volume), in turn implying that on-site kilns were not present, or at least any kilns in regular use.

Towards an understanding of Dynasty 18 activity in the vicinity of Amara West

The main result of the first season of survey has been to confirm an Egyptian presence in the vicinity of Amara West prior to the foundation of the Ramesside town itself. The ceramic assemblage provides an early Dynasty 18 date for this occupation, a date that accords well with the names Menkheperra and Amenhotep attested on seals from 2-R-65. Given the consistency in date across the pottery assemblages of 2-R-18 and 2-R-65, the two sites were presumably part of one contemporaneous settlement, although whether they were physically contiguous is not clear. The rubbish deposits that spill gradually down the sloping alluvium of 2-R-18 suggest that this low mound was already in existence and has not been created subsequently by erosion. We need not imagine that the deposits in 2-R-18 are necessarily debris from 2-R-65 itself, and the site perhaps took the form of loosely attached pockets of activity and occupation spread across the landscape. Vila (1977) identified several further ‘New Kingdom’ sites nearby (see Fig. 1) and a goal of ongoing fieldwork will be to ascertain how these relate to 2-R-18 and 2-R-65, and to the local landscape.

Although now entirely desert, the area is criss-crossed by ancient Nile channels. Sites 2-R-18 and 2-R-65 lie immediately adjacent to one of these. On the basis of Optically Stimulated Luminescence dates from sand deposits, the channels are likely to have been flowing fairly consistently in early Dynasty 18, dividing the land into a series of islands (Woodward et al., this volume). The natural alluvium today sits under only a very thin cover of surface sand. The channels seem to have been drying up from at least the 1st millennium BC, however, and we might wonder whether, if the flow of water was already affected by the time Amara West was established, this prompted the founding of the town closer to the main river, which remained an area of settlement during the occupation of 2-S-37. The deep sand deposits sealed below the early Christian Period (6th century AD) pottery at site 2-S-37 show the extent to which sand had accumulated close to the riverbank by this time.

At 2-R-18/2-R-65, Egyptian-style wheel-made pottery was encountered right down in the lowest layers of fill, indicating that the site was established within the period of Egyptian re-conquest of Nubia in early Dynasty 18, presumably with Egyptians themselves already present. It underwent considerable change over the course of its occupation, most evident at 2-R-65. The first horizon of activity here saw the presence of structures, perhaps quite simple, of mud brick and/or wooden posts. Nothing can yet be said on what form these might have taken. It is not clear whether the space excavated was an internal or external one, but it had a simple trampled ‘floor’, through which the schist bedrock protruded. After these structures — or those in the vicinity of the study area at least — had fallen out of use and begun to collapse or be dismantled, the ground here was used for fireplaces, presumably for cooking and/or heating. We can assume that it was an outdoor or only semi-enclosed area at this time. Whether this occurred after the site had been abandoned for a time, or parts of it were simply re-purposed, is impossible to tell. There is no obvious ‘abandonment layer’ visible in the stratigraphy (see Fig. 6), although the desert here is not prone to gathering much windblown sand. As far as we can tell, the latest phase, in which stone structures were built, also falls within the New Kingdom; there is, at least, no obviously later pottery associated with the upper horizons of fill, and the one deposit that seems to abut the walls, (1008), is firmly Dynasty 18. The construction of stone buildings conceivably signals

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15 Three samples were taken from sand lenses at a depth of 1.5m below the current desert surface, yielding dates of 922–342 BC, 737–227 BC and 1207–497 BC (Woodward et al., this volume).
a shift to more substantial occupation, especially if additional stone from the buildings has been removed at a later date.

In addition to an Egyptian presence, it is clear that a group or groups of individuals making and/or using Nubian-style hand-made pottery were on site. It is too early to try and pinpoint the nature of relations between the Egyptian and Nubian populations; whether, for instance, the latter functioned as a form of ‘service population of Kerma origin supporting the Egyptian population, perhaps mainly as cooks’, as has been suggested for Sesebi (Rose 2012, 26) and Deir el-Ballas (Bourriau 1990, 17). But the commingling of Egyptian-style wheel-made and local Nubian-style hand-made vessels, especially those used for cooking, both types exhibiting charring through use over a fireplace, could imply the close sharing of space and activities.

A notable absence amongst the desert assemblages are examples of Egyptian-style wheel-made forms replicated by hand and vice versa, dubbed ‘cross-over pieces’ by Rose (this volume). These occur, albeit infrequently, at Amara West itself, generally within the later Ramesside levels in the walled town, the western suburb, and Cemetery D.16 Allowing for the much smaller size of the desert survey assemblage this could indicate that, when not deliberately promoted, but rather allowed to develop naturally, ‘cultural entanglement’ in the context of Egyptian-occupied Nubia probably took many generations to find expression within material culture. There is little in the object record that speaks obviously to Nubian presence, apart perhaps from a couple of ostrich eggshell beads (F1046, F1059) and a piece of drilled ornamental (?) stone (F1005) that is not obviously ‘Egyptian’ (see Figs 3, 7).

What was the context for this early Dynasty 18 occupation, and how can we explain the apparent abandonment of 2-R-65/2-R-18 around the middle of the dynasty? Whilst it is too early to answer these questions with any certainty, it is worth considering the possibility that the settlement was connected with gold mining. In this part of Nubia, from around Wadi Halfa to the Third Cataract, the gold-bearing Precambrian Basement formation is found largely on the east bank of the Nile, and it is here that most of the potential evidence for New Kingdom mining has been identified (Klemm and Klemm 2013, 606–11, fig. 7.4; this volume). The west bank, in contrast, is dominated by non-gold-bearing Nubian Sandstone, yet a thin strip of Precambrian Basement is found between around the Second and Third Cataracts, widening in the vicinity of Sesebi (Klemm and Klemm 2013, fig 7.4; this volume). Klemm and Klemm (2013, 606–11; this volume) propose that gold mining in the New Kingdom often took the form of ‘wadi working’ whereby lumps of quartz washed out along wadis would be collected and pounded to release any gold they contained. This kind of activity may leave little archaeological signature, but is of interest in trying to understand one aspect of the deposits encountered at 2-R-18/2-R-65: the presence of small chips of quartz, and also larger irregular fragments of both quartzite and sandstone. Both occur in quantities that, whilst not vast, are noticeable — more so than at Amara West itself. Quartz chips were most obvious at 2-R-18, where surface deposit (1000) yielded around 100 pieces, although the deposits below contained far fewer. More striking was the quantity of chips of quartzite and sandstone from 2-R-65; for example, surface deposit (1007) contained 173 quartzite fragments and seventeen pieces of coarse sandstone. These again lessened in number with depth, but did not disappear entirely, and thirty-two pieces of quartzite were present in deposit (1023) immediately above the earliest surface (1024). These are chips with no obvious worked surfaces, but pieces of ‘grinding stones’ with surfaces that have been smoothed by abrasion are also quite prominent at 2-R-65. They were one of the features of 2-R-65 that Vila (1977, 82) noted during his initial survey; they are both scattered over the surface of the site and appear throughout the archaeological deposits. ‘Detritus’ of this kind needs to be taken into

16 Note C8014, a hand-made plate with a red-painted rim in the Egyptian style, found in the same grave as wheel-made vessels (G309), dated to the late New Kingdom (Spencer and Millet 2013, 656–7, fig. 13). See also Spataro, Millet and Spencer (2014).
account in assessing the site and may, in the end, be more directly indicative of the activities that defined its role than the architecture and ceramics that supported the occupants themselves. In this case, we might wonder whether the stone chips are hinting at not only the pounding of quartz in the search for gold, but also the shaping of stone tools and surfaces to facilitate such activities.

This idea clearly needs to be tested with more fieldwork, but we need not imagine that 2-R-18/2-R-65 was necessarily a primary processing site: it could perhaps have been an encampment from which miners continued to locales further afield. An island setting was perhaps deemed safer as a ‘base camp’ than the desert, and more convenient in terms of access to water, fish, river trade and communication. This framework could also explain the somewhat ephemeral nature of the site, if it was occupied not continuously but on and off by workers moving over the landscape, periodically re-occupying and re-shaping convenient base camps. And it suits the fairly low-level presence of objects within the excavated deposits, and the largely practical nature of these. The few fragments of ‘luxury’ items, such as a faience bowl fragment, a piece of painted calcite (also from a vessel?) and sherds from Egyptian marl and Canaanite imported pottery vessels, were perhaps brought in as personal items.

Sites 2-R-18 and 2-R-65 recall something of early New Kingdom levels recorded recently at Sesebi, which include simple mud-brick constructions with associated pottery that appear to be an exact chronological match to that from 2-R-18/2-R-65 (Rose 2012; this volume; Spence, this volume). Mid-to-late Dynasty 18 horizons have not yet been identified with any certainty in the stratigraphic record at Sesebi, but these may lie beyond the areas so far investigated, or have been eroded away or deliberately levelled (Rose, this volume; Spence, this volume). Finds of scarabs, and fragments of statues and architecture, dating to the reigns of Amenhotep II, Thutmose III and IV and perhaps Hatshepsut could hint at continued occupation through mid-Dynasty 18 (Spence, this volume). By the reign of Akhenaten the walled town that now dominates the site was built, in part immediately over the remains of the earlier Dynasty 18 settlement (Rose 2012; this volume; Spence, this volume). We might wonder whether these early Dynasty 18 horizons at Sesebi and Amara West represent initial prospecting activities on the west bank and whether, in turn, the richer gold deposits at Sesebi — the subject of extensive mining today — saw it solidify as a settlement in a way that the sites around Amara West did not. Evidence for gold mining at Sesebi itself is quite extensive, although as yet difficult to relate to the poorly preserved pre-Akhenaten levels (Spence this volume). It includes the presence of crushed quartz from deposits within the settlement, stone tools including many grinding stones, here mostly in the local green schist, and dug-out quartz deposits themselves in the desert behind the town (Spence et al. 2009; 2011). Might the landscape at Amara West, in contrast, have effectively become ‘worked over’, and the encampments shifted to another location? Such an interpretation would suggest the control and processing of gold resources may not have been a primary motivation for founding a walled town at Amara West in early Dynasty 19.

A potential launching point for prospecting activities in the vicinity of Amara West was Sai Island, where recent fieldwork is clarifying the evidence for early Dynasty 18 occupation; namely, a horizon of poorly preserved mud-brick houses/workshops, with storage facilities (Budka and Doyen 2012–13, 167–82; Budka, this volume). The ceramic evidence from these buildings again shows parallels with that from 2-R-18/2-R-65 in terms of both date and composition (Budka 2011). The early Dynasty 18 structures at Sai are fairly modest, with walls built to just one half-brick wide, and there is no evidence yet that they were part of a walled town of the kind built later, around the reign of Thutmose III. But they seem to have occupied an area perhaps not dissimilar to the latter, whilst isolated finds of inscribed stonework and sculpture suggest the presence of more formal architecture of early Dynasty 18 date (Budka and Doyen 2012–13, 168–70, 182; Budka, this volume). It seems likely that Sai, early in Dynasty 18, was on its way to becoming the predominant Egyptian settlement along this stretch of the Nile that it would remain for the rest of the dynasty. Budka (this volume) supports the view that, during the reigns of Nebpehtira Ahmose and Thutmose I at least, it could have served as a ‘bridgehead into Kush’ (Davies 2005, 51), and we might wonder whether it also served as a base for the exploration of the mineral-bearing potential of the deserts nearby. Little work has yet been done in the hinterland around Sai (Budka and Doyen 2012–13, 170) to ascertain whether extramural sites similar to those at Amara West might exist here.

Whatever the context of the early New Kingdom occupation revealed by the survey, it is now clear that by the time Amara West was established in early
Dynasty 19, this landscape already had the footprint of Egyptian activity, either as a memory of occupation a few generations earlier or of residual settlement itself, traces of which perhaps remain to be uncovered with further survey.

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