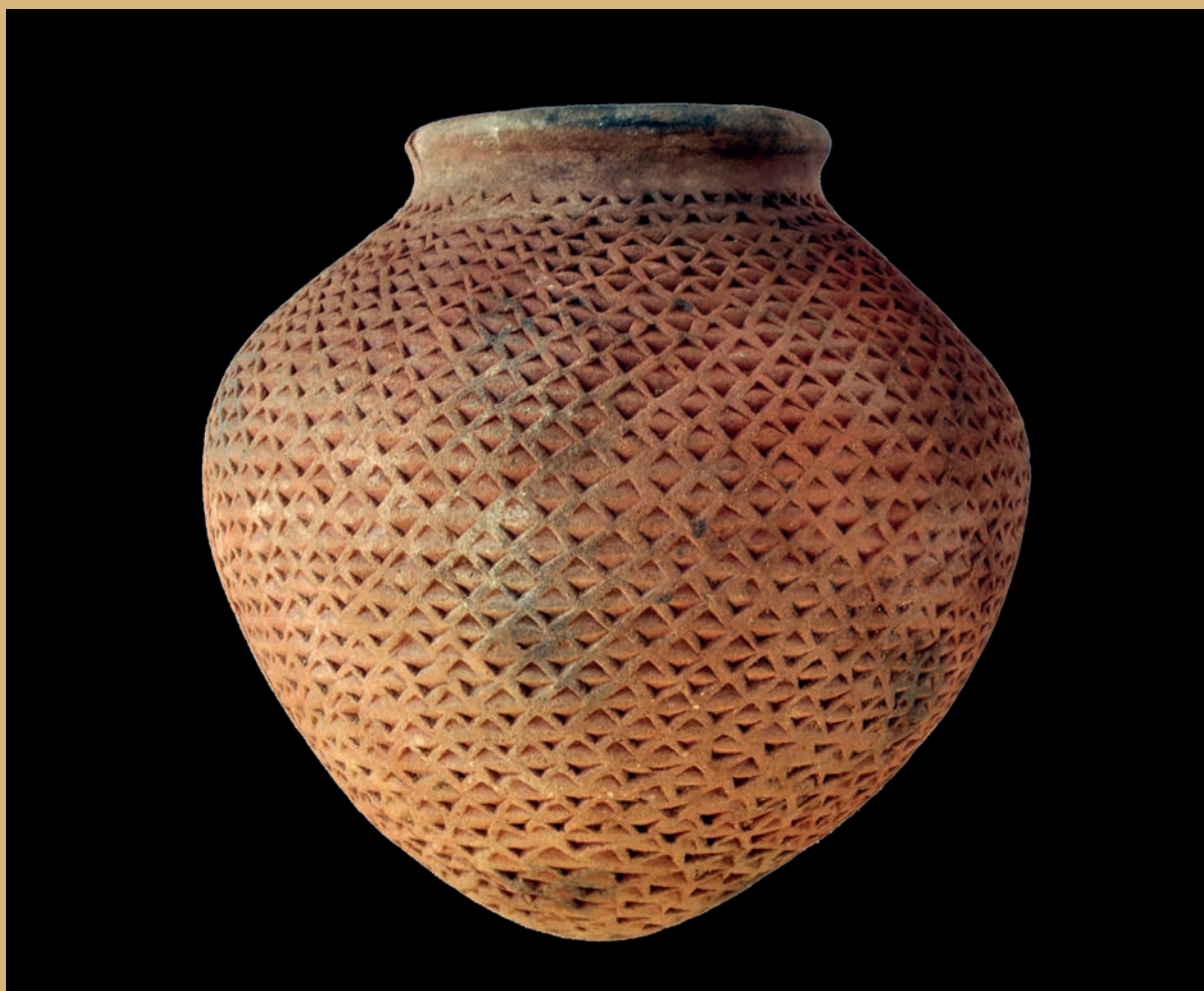


K E R M A

2015-2016 and 2016-2017

SOUDAN

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Cover figure: Early Kerma pottery found in the tomb T672, Sector CE29 (ca. 2100 BC).
Photo: Matthieu Honegger

Our aim during our study of the initial phase of the development of the Eastern Necropolis (Early Kerma, 2500-2050 BC), has been to excavate given sectors systematically, with the objective of having a global vision of the relationships between tombs attributed to each period, and be able to apply both a quantitative and qualitative analysis of the evolutionary tendencies. To achieve this, the strategy has been to re-examine areas already excavated by Charles Bonnet, who had only selected those tombs for excavation, which he supposed to have been less robbed than others. We then proceeded to excavate all those tombs which had not been previously examined. In some instances, the sectors previously excavated were enlarged, and the excavations furnished additional data regarding the evolutionary stages of the cemetery (figure 2). If we consider the 1915-1916 excavations undertaken by George Reiner in Sector N, covering the end of Early Kerma, those tombs excavated by Charles Bonnet between 1979-1999, and those excavated by our team since 2008, we dispose of an ensemble of 702 known tombs from the earliest phase of the cemetery (figure 3). The quality of the documentation is of course variable, and the most detailed analysis is only possible for those tombs excavated since 2008, when certain types of observation have been made in a more systematic manner. However, the tombs excavated prior to our programme do supply important complementary data. Thus, Sector N, excavated by Reisner, furnishes interesting information regarding the appearance of the earliest large tumuli at the end of Kerma Period, subject to our being able to locate these precisely, since this was not done at the time; the graves studied by Bonnet supply essential information regarding the typological evolution, given that the numerous sectors excavated in different parts of the necropolis informs us on the period in which they were in use.

Prior to 2014, our efforts were focussed on the ancient Sectors CE27 and CE23, supposedly corresponding to the first two phases of Kerma, as had been defined by Béatrice Privati (Privati 1999), as *Kerma Ancien* I and II. Surface observations led us to open a new area, called CE28, which harboured stage earlier than those previously recognised (Honegger 2013a). If we had previously considered this stage as belonging to Pre-Kerma, we now believe it should be considered as a stage involving the earliest use of the cemetery, and as such should be denominated *Kerma Ancien* 0. This appellation allows us to be relatively unspecific about the cultural attribution of this early ensemble, which yielded pottery without the most typical elements associated with Early Kerma, which is to say red vases with black top, finely decorated with impressions or incisions below the rim. We did however identify the presence of C-Group Ia sherds, accompanied by numerous vases, most often decorated with horizontal combed impressions, which evoke in some respects the terminal Pre-Kerma, but which are also present in phase Ia of the C-Group, as defined by Bietak (1968). If we consider the numerous remains

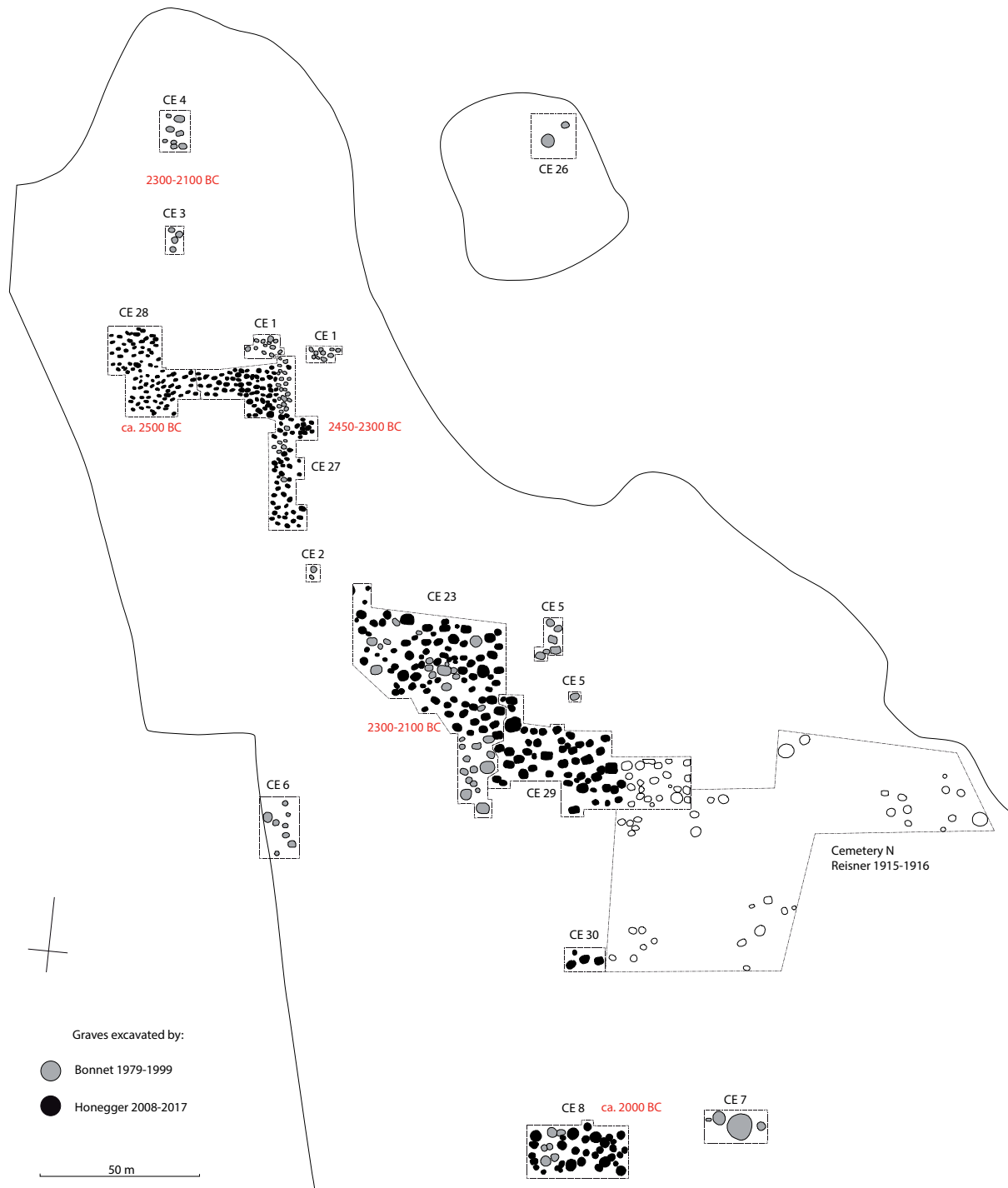


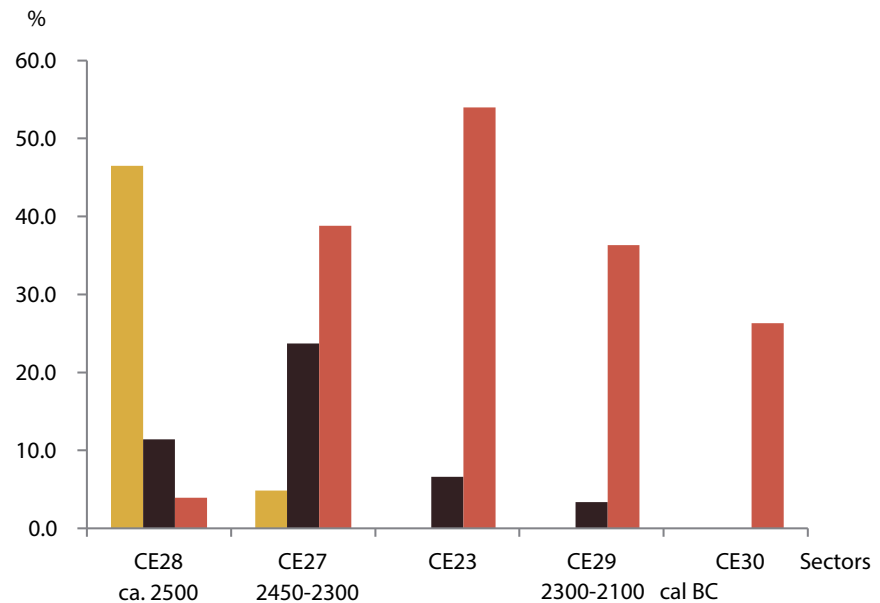
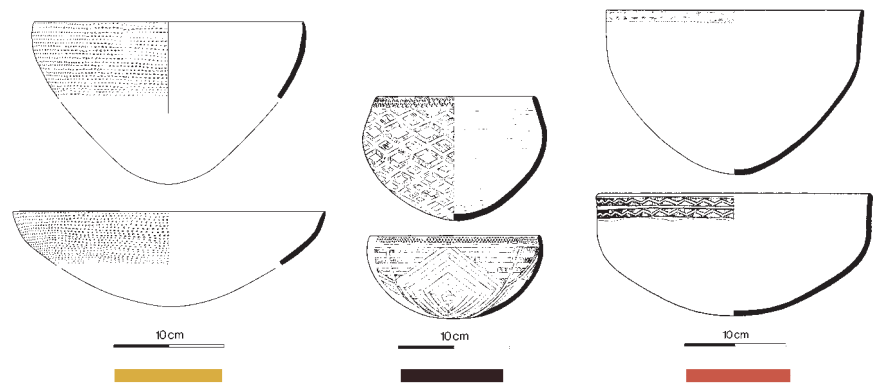
Figure 2. Map of the early phase of the Eastern Cemetery with suggested dates for each sector.

Figure 3/ Eastern Cemetery. Inventory of Early Kerma excavated tombs since the early 20th century.

Excavation	Sector	Number of graves
Northern Sector excavated by Reisner in 1915-1916	N	197
	CE1	22
	CE2	2
	CE3	4
	CE4	8
	CE5	7
Graves excavated by Bonnet between 1979 and 1999 total=124 graves	CE6	8
	CE7	4
	CE8	6
	CE9	6
	CE23	30
	CE27	27
Graves excavated since 2008 by Honegger total=381 graves	CE8	30
	CE23	84
	CE27	118
	CE28	94
	CE29	51
	CE30	4
Total	15 secteurs	702

of steles found in the sector, and that the grave pits are most often rectangular, we have to recognise that the cemetery was initially established by the C-Group. It was only in the subsequent period, represented by Sector CE27, that the red vases with black top, finely decorated with impressions or incisions below the rim, typical of Early Kerma, make their appearance. The tombs are generally circular and the Kerma tumuli decorated with black and white stones are well-represented. But this *Kerma Ancien* I is intermingled with pre-existing C-Group traditions. Steles continue to be numerous in Sector CE27, with a continuing important proportion of C-Group pottery. This imbrication of the two traditions becomes more tenuous in the later Sector CE23 (figure 4), with a more discreet presence of C-Group pottery and the absence of steles and rectangular pits. Sector CE23, already known from 30 tombs excavated by Charles Bonnet in 1996-1997 (Bonnet 1997), was totally excavated by our team and is the subject of initial analyses (Honegger 2013a, Honegger and Fallet 2015). Let us note that this sector is in marked contrast to the previous periods, which yielded rather small tombs, without much differentiation and with limited grave-goods, if we consider how few had been visited by grave-robbers. In Sector 23, the tombs show greater inequalities, already discernible by the differences in their diameters. On average they are larger, yielded more pottery and are better furnished with grave-goods, particularly those made of metal, as evidenced by their almost systematic plundering. The deposits of animals make

Figure 4/ Evolution of three categories of pottery during the Early Kerma: pottery with horizontal comb impression, C Group pottery and red vases with black top finely decorated with impressions or incisions below the rim.



their appearance, with dogs and sheep placed in the tombs, or the first deposits of bucrania. The accompanying dead become more frequent and Egyptian imports more abundant. Furthermore, the differential treatment between men and women appears in the funerary rites, with the men almost systematically associated with the attributes of archers (bow, arrows, quiver), whilst the women hold a stick in their hand.

At present we have 14 C14 dates for Sectors 28, 27 and 23, which allows us to establish the chronology with relative accuracy, even if some questions subsist. On the basis of three dates, Sector 28 was in use ca. 2500 BC. The pottery typology, and especially the presence of combed horizontal decorations, clearly places this sector at a date prior to Sector CE27. The date is however only partially confirmed by the C14 dates. Two dates obtained from tombs in Sector CE27 are in fact contemporaneous with Sector CE28, whilst four other dates are clearly more recent. These dates allow us to place Sector CE27 in the *Kerma Ancien I* ca. 2450-2300 BC. Thanks to five C14 dates, Sector CE23 is on the other hand reasonably clearly

dated between 2300 and 2100 BC.

The first three phases of the cemetery thus show important cultural contrasts, as well as differences in the funerary practices. The temptation is there to interpret this situation in historical terms, and to consider the C-Group and Kerma as two distinct entities, which could correspond to tribes, since their differences are not only based on differences in pottery typology, but also in their distinctive traditional funerary rites. The C-Group, which is usually associated with Lower Nubia, between the First and Second Cataracts, was also present in Upper Nubia during its formative period. It is only later that the Kerma Culture appears, initially interwoven with the C-Group. As from 2300 BC, the situation changes with the C-Group influence disappearing whilst they settled in Lower Nubia, although long-distance contacts may have been entertained, as demonstrated by the presence of their pottery in the Gash Delta (Manzo 2016:33-54). It is at that period that the Kerma society became organised in a more stratified manner, with the systematic expression of certain values, such as domesticated animals, arms and luxury goods, whether imported from Egypt (the contents of jars, bronze and alabaster objects, and pieces of cloth), or objects whose provenance is to be sought in Nubia or beyond (gold, ivory and incense). We believe that these changes have to be seen against the backdrop of the expeditions related in the tomb of Herkouf, a dignitary from Aswan, who initiated a new period of more systematic interactions and exchanges between the Egyptian Empire and Kerma (Török 2009: 60 ff). It is possible that Nubian tribes competed for the control of this commerce, which could explain the warlike values expressed in Sector CE25, with the demise of the C-Group to the benefit of Kerma.

Sector CE8

During the two excavation seasons undertaken between 2015 and 2017, we sought to understand how this situation, which continued until the beginning of Middle Kerma, evolved. We wanted to clarify how the social hierarchy was reinforced up to the point in time when large tumuli, of more than 10 metres in diameter, made their appearance, and to clearly understand the changes which led to the transition to Middle Kerma. It needs to be borne in mind that the division of the Kerma Civilisation into three phases was proposed by Brigitte Gratien, on the basis of the grave-goods from the necropolis on the Island of Sai (Gratien 1978, 1986). Based on the Egyptian imports, she proposed that Middle Kerma starts ca. 2050 BC, at the beginning of the Middle Empire.

It is for these reasons that the 2015-2016 season focussed on the re-excavation of Sector CE8, which had been initially undertaken by Charles Bonnet, who had analysed six tombs (Bonnet 1984). Based on the study of the pottery, this sector had been dated to the end of *Kerma Ancien IV* and the transition to Middle Kerma. This sector is located somewhat on the periphery, if we admit that the central axis becomes clear after Middle Kerma, with the concentration of large tumuli. It is therefore possible that at this time, when social distinctions became more

pronounced, specific sectors came into use, some of which grouped the tombs of those at the top of the hierarchy, whilst others contained the tombs which were possibly less prestigious.

Thirty tombs were excavated over a surface of 550 m², which have been studied in detail (cf. figure 20). Most of these had been seriously pillaged, which is common for this period. The largest ones were most probably the most richly endowed, and were surrounded by smaller tombs, which might have been subsidiary ones. The average diameter of the graves is larger than during previous periods. When looking at the plans, they cover a larger surface, given that they average 4.83 m², as against 3.57 m² in Sector CE23, 1.31 m² in Sector CE27 and 0.82 m² in Sector CE28. With a view to determine a precise chronology, we obtained two C14 dates, which gave dates ranging around 2000 BC.

Overall, the surface of this sector was eroded, and we only discovered a single instance of 25 bucrania to the south of a tomb (T584). The infill of other tombs informs us that there must have been other similar alignments around the edges of the tumuli covering the funerary pits. Several areas were charred, proving that there had been fireplaces, and a few postholes were identified, although these probably date from previous periods in the Pre-Kerma or the Neolithic, given the surface erosion. Most of the tombs contained the remains of a single individual. In three instances, two individuals were buried together at the same time. The deceased were laid out according to a well-established ritual, on ox-hides and lying in a decubitus lateral position on the left side, with flexed lower limbs. By way of grave-goods, we discovered numerous pots, sacrificed animals, boxes and diverse tools. Adornments were relatively rare in terms of quantity as well as diversity.

Pottery disposed on the surface next to the tombs was not common, and comprised essentially small red undecorated bowls with black top, which was a custom which became current during Middle Kerma. The vases, finely decorated below the rim, became rare, and C-Group pottery was absent. In fact, most of the pottery was deposited in the sepulchral pit, and placed to the north and east of the deceased, near his head (figure 5). This marked a notable change from the surface deposits found in the Early Kerma sectors. Small depressions dug into the silt of a few sepulchral chambers at the bottom of the pits were probably destined to hold round-based pots (T598). Other than red vases with black edges, whose decoration was more summarily executed, the most common type was taller examples, with more or less marked necks. A large number of these are Egyptian imports, particularly the 'false Kena', wheel-turned and polished, made of a pink clay and covered with a white wash (Gratien 1986, type EII).

Sector CE8 differed from CE23 as regards the number of sacrificed animals. These were placed to the south of the sepulchral chamber, at the feet of the deceased, and could attain as many as 15 in the largest tombs (figure 6). Dogs become rarer, since the excavations only brought 7 to light, as against some 50 sheep (cf. Chaix,

Figure 5/ Excavations in progress of the tomb T601 from Sector CE8 dating from Early Middle Kerma (ca. 2000 BC)



this volume). This had already been noticed during the 1983 excavations, when a number of instances were found of sheep decorated with discs made of ostrich feathers and beads (figure 7). It was often a large sheep, sometimes of two colours, and in some cases with a lead around its neck.

Small perforated faience or ostrich-shell spherical beads are the type of body ornament most often found in the graves. A few tombs yielded perforated pearly shells of large bivalves (oyster-shells, *Avicula margaritacea*), elongated stone pendants with a perforation at one end and a cutting edge at the other, as well as ivory bracelets and rings. The excavation of the largest tombs brought to light three goat-skin sewn boxes, held together in the past by wooden pins. Similar ones had already been found in the context of tomb T186, dating from Middle Kerma (Bonnet 1990). Compared to Sector CE23, we found little evidence for the presence of archers (Honegger and Fallet 2015). A single tomb produced arrowheads and the remains of string (T610). A stick found in a second tomb might have been a bow (T592). In an instance similar to tomb T81, where a dagger was found, a fragment

Figure 6/ Sheep placed in tomb T607 of Sector 8.



Figure 7/ Tomb T586: Details of the decorations of a sheep (disc of ostrich feathers and pendants with beads).



Figure 8/ Tomb T599: Detail of potter's tools.



of the bronze hilt of a dagger was discovered in the disturbed levels of tomb T586. The remains of potter's tools were found in the tombs of two women (T604 and T599), one of which contained a small assemblage made up of a polisher, combs, a lump of hematite, a palette, a polished axe-head, a polished pebble and spherical ostrich-egg beads; the whole placed on the eastern side of the tomb, close to the head of the deceased (figure 8).

Compared to the Early Kerma sectors located further to the north, Sector CE8 presents numerous differences, whether they be at the level of the fineness of the pottery decorations, the quality of the Egyptian imports, the scarcity of surface-deposited vases, or the abundance of animals placed in the tombs. All these elements, as well as the C14 dates place this sector at the beginning of Middle Kerma, at a time when Lower Nubia came under Egyptian control, and when direct exchanges with Upper Nubia are disproportionate when compared to previous periods.

Sectors CE29 and CE30

Having achieved in Sector CE8 the chronological objective of the present study, the excavations was focussed during 2016-2017 towards older sectors, and more precisely, the prolongation of Sector 23, in the direction of Sector N, excavated by George Reisner a century ago. The objective was to trace the evolution discerned in Sector CE23, namely the emergence of the social stratification and follow its evolutionary stages until the construction of the large tumuli over 10 metres in diameter. These tumuli marked an important milestone in the concentration of power. We therefore opened a new sector covering more than 1000 m² (Sector CE29), which allowed us to excavate 51 tombs (figure 22). This sector was extended eastward to ensure its junction with Reisner's N Cemetery, in the hope

Figure 9/ Sector CE29, tomb T659. Intact grave of a child aged 1.5, with a bow, a cushion made of vegetable matter and a pot.



of being able to locate the large tombs excavated a century ago during the forthcoming 2017-2018 campaign. It needs to be borne in mind that at the time, 197 tombs were excavated in the N Cemetery, the majority of which he did not witness. If the first 37 were precisely located, we have no information regarding the location of the 160 other ones. As it happens, the first tumuli over 10 metres in diameter are amongst the 160 unlocated tombs, of which there were two of particular interest: the first with a pit almost 10 metres wide, and the other almost 7 metres. The idea is to better exploit the information collected at the time, even though their publication highlights the fact that numerous details were not noted, such as the detailed contents of the filling of the pits, which, whilst listing the pottery discovered, is often silent as regards the number of human and animal skeletons, as well as the other material contents (Dunham 1982).

Figure 10/ Sector CE29, tomb T631. Triple burial of three females aged over 50. The principal deceased, in the centre, who would very likely have been accompanied by ornaments and metal objects, pillaged in antiquity, holds a stick, whose traces can be seen. The accompanying deceased have no grave goods, unless it be the stick to their right.



So as to have more precise chronological markers, a further sector, limited to 75 m² (Sector CE30), was opened up, allowing four tombs to be excavated. Unfortunately, the four tombs in this sector, located 40 metres to the south of Sector CE29, on the western edge of the N Cemetery, were in a very poor state of conservation, with limited grave goods and only 14 items of pottery. Nevertheless, the typology confirmed that they dated from Early Kerma at a date close to that of Sector CE29 and quite different to that of Sector CE8.

The 51 tombs excavated in Sector CE29 can be dated in the continuity of what had been observed in Sector CE23. The graves are relatively richly furnished, although almost systematically pillaged, with men and even boys endowed with a bow (figure 9), whilst the women hold a stick in their hand. The deceased are always laid out in the same manner, and are accompanied by their personal effects, pottery and sacrificed animals (dogs and sheep). Most of the pottery found was on the surface, upside down and on the edge of the tumulus. Notwithstanding the similarities, the average size of the tumuli was slightly larger than in Sector CE23 (surface area of 4.97 m², as against 4.22 m²), and some were substantially larger than the rest. This differentiation is particularly marked in two instances, which are the only two

to be accompanied by an alignment of bucrania placed on the southern side of the tumulus (T616 with 50 bucrania and T656 with 15). The occupants were doubtless individuals who had been endowed with political, religious or military power. In both instances, the individuals were adult males, one aged between 20 and 50, whilst the other was over 60. The number of vases associated with the tombs was also larger than normal, having respectively 38 and 18 pots. The intensity with which the tombs were pillaged does not allow more details to be discerned regarding these two assemblages, although the remains of the handle of a dagger was found in tomb T616, which was a first for these early sectors. As for tomb T656, a curious stick, buried with the over 60 years-old individual, had a mass of baked clay fitted at its top end, which was impregnated with incense. It is tempting to see an attribute associated with rites or a religious function.

Of the 51 tombs excavated, 45 are individual, four are double, two are triple (figure 10) and one quadruple. This phenomenon of accompanying deceased (Honegger 2017) is the expression of servile relations within a society. According to Alain Testart (2004), it is an indication of a hierarchical society heading towards statehood. It is therefore not surprising that the number of tombs with accompanying deceased be in constant increase since its first manifestations in Sector CE27 (figure 11).

In a similar manner to tombs T227, T234, T569 and T572 in Sector CE23, motifs painted in red ochre were observed on the upper surface of the ox hide in tomb T617 (figure 12). The painting of these hides was an integral part of the funerary rites. The paintings from tomb T617 are the best-preserved of those known to date. Rows of cells with rectangular bases can be discerned, with an apsidal shape at the top. These elements are connected to each other by means of lines connecting the bases of the apsidal shapes. Charles Bonnet interpreted them as representing steles,

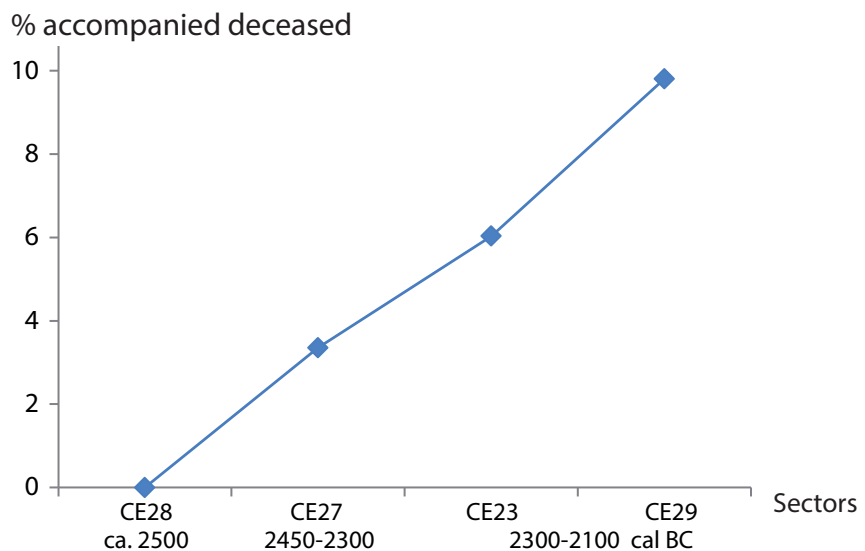
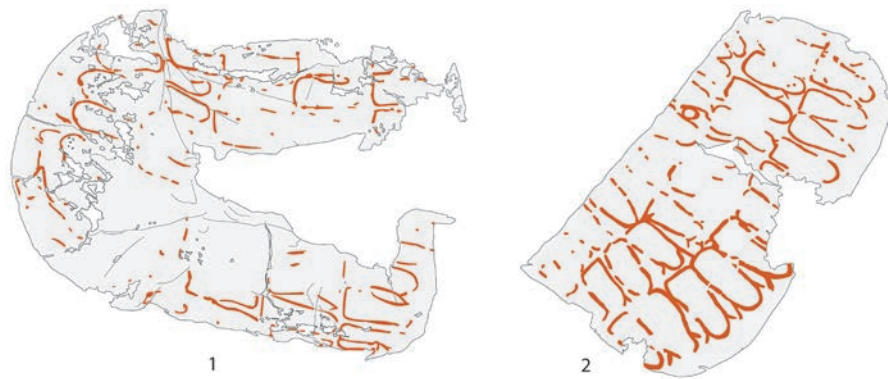


Figure 11/ Proportion of tombs with accompanying deceased in the various sectors of Early Kerma.

Figure 12. Ox hide decorated with painted red motifs. 1. Sector CE23 tomb T569; 2. Sector CE29 tomb T617.

referring to those used in the C-Group tradition and found in the earliest sectors of the necropolis (Sectors CE28 and CE27). It would appear that this hypothesis needs to be abandoned, since steles were no longer attested in the later Sectors CE23 and CE29. Furthermore, comparisons with the rock engravings at the Third Cataract indicate that there as well, small lateral lines were unambiguously representations of sandals with their attachments. It is known that in Egypt, the wearing of sandals was a sign of a certain rank.



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