Pottery in the Funerary Context, Chronology and State of Archaeological Research—An Overview

1 Pottery in the Funerary Context

The Nubians believed in the afterlife, and that death was a journey to a new life in another world, and that it was necessary to equip the deceased for this journey (Mahmoud El-Tayeb 2012, 80). Mortuary practices had two main aspects: a social dimension, relating to earthly/human activities (reflected in grave structures and burial goods) and a spiritual one (concerning faith, customs, and religion) [Fig. 2.1].

In the social dimension, the tomb is the last ‘house’ for the physical body of the deceased, and a symbol of the end of earthly life. Grave goods, drinks, and food were provided for the deceased to use on their last journey to eternity. They also served as manifestations of the social status of the deceased during their earthly life. In the religious dimension, the grave could be understood as a symbol of home in the new life, but in the new life the deceased still needed food. When analysing the burial contexts, we should also remember about funeral ceremonies and religion. Analysing the pottery as containers for grave goods, we should take into account the symbolic function of vessels used in rituals and burial ceremonies as well their function in domestic life, which is difficult to establish because of the lack of settlement sites in the study area (see Chapter 2.2). If we look at the grave goods deposits from El-Zuma, we notice that pottery was the major component of these assemblages, but we should also remember that it was only one of many elements in the whole burial context.

Analysis is sometimes hindered by robber activity. In most cases, personal adornment rather than pottery was the main object of the looter’s interest (Mahmoud El-Tayeb 2012, 81), but damage caused during the robberies (such as the destruction of the shaft, the ceiling of the burial chamber, or the body itself) disturbed the entire burial context (see also Volume 1, Chapters 3 and 5). We should bear in mind that looting at archaeological sites creates a secondary context which influences our analysis and interpretation of what we find.

An important aspect is the religious meaning of pottery, such as liturgical vessels, which probably served ritual functions during some kind of purification ceremony (Mahmoud El-Tayeb 2012, 101–102; Bonnet and Mah-

moud El-Tayeb 1991, 32). Pottery is one of the materials that defines a culture, and it is especially significant in the earlier periods of habitation in the Nile Valley (David and Salvatori 2019, 1). Many years of archaeological work in the territories of Lower and Upper Nubia have revealed cultural diversity in different regions of Ancient Nubia.

The deposition of grave goods was a custom noted among Nubian communities from the Mesolithic period onwards [Fig. 2.2, Fig. 1 at the end of this volume]. The first Mesolithic site in Upper Nubia, in the Sixth Cataract region, was recognized by Arkell, working within the grounds of Khartoum Hospital (Arkell 1949). Later, radiocarbon analysis in other regions around Khartoum established that pottery users (hunters, gatherers, fishermen) had been present in the Nile Valley in the seventh millennium BC (Edwards 2004, 24–25). The earliest phases of the Mesolithic (*c.* 9000 BC) have been recognized at Nabta in Lower Nubia, in the Kerma area in the Northern Dongola Reach, at Al-Khiday, in the Atbara area, north of Khartoum, and at Sarourab in Central Sudan (see map, Fig. 1 at the end of this volume) (Usai 2016, 12). In the Dongola Reach, Mesolithic sites such as Kadruka, El-Barga, and Wadi El-Arab, have been recorded in the Kerma region (Honegger 2014, 19). In Lower Nubia, archaeological work in Nabta Playa played an important role in our understanding of Mesolithic burials (David and Salvatori 2019, 1, Fig. 3). Grave goods were not abundant in tombs of the Mesolithic period. Most of the burials at El-Barga did not contain any funerary offerings, apart from two graves in which shells were found (Honegger 2014, 23–24). Graves in Upper Nubia, for example in the Atbara region (below the Fifth Cataract, see Fig. 1, map at the end of this volume), sometimes contain shells that were deposited as offerings (or were maybe items of personal adornment), but this practice was not frequent at the time (Haaland and Magid 1995, 137–145). Mesolithic handmade pottery (jars and bowls) is characterized by decoration executed using rocker stamp, comb, and cord-wrapped techniques to produce motifs made up of dots, leaves, and dotted wavy lines. These vessels were made using the coiling technique (David and Salvatori 2019, 4–6).

Neolithic sites were discovered in Upper Nubia in the Khartoum region (e.g. Kadero, El Geili) and the Dongola

FIGURE 2.1 Social and religious aspects of burial customs
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Reach (e.g. Kerma Basin, Kadruka, El-Barga, Wadi El-Arab, Wadi al-Khowi, Wadi Howar) [Fig. 2.2, Fig. 1 at the end of this volume] (David and Salvatori 2019, 8–9, Fig. 4, 5; Edwards 2004, 44–47, 50; Honegger 2014, 24–28).

In the Neolithic [see Fig. 2.2], we have evidence of the introduction of domestic animals. The earliest traces of domestic animals in Sudan come from Neolithic graves at El-Barga, where domestic cattle skulls (bucrania) were recorded among other burial offerings (Honegger 2014, 24). Many graves in the cemeteries at Kadruka contained cattle skulls located close to the body (Reinold 2006). The Neolithic graves of El-Barga in the Northern Dongola Reach contained numerous tools, weapons, and ornaments, including ivory and semiprecious stone jewellery (Honegger 2014, 24). A limited amount of pottery appeared in graves of this period (Usai 2016, 13). The Neolithic ceramic repertoire featured an increased variety of vessel forms: bowls, globular and ovoid jars, caliciform beakers, smaller vessels and closed vessels probably for serving liquids (David and Salvatori 2019, 8–9, Figs. 4, 5; Edwards 2004, 44–47, 50). The rocker stamp dotted pattern was still used, and herringbone patterns, zigzags, bands, dotted zigzag lines, and incised bands with dotted lines appeared. Pots were made using the coiling technique, and possibly also the paddle and anvil technique, and the surface of vessels was sometimes polished or burnished (David and Salvatori 2019, 8–9, Figs. 4, 5; Edwards 2004, 44–47, 50).

In Late Neolithic Upper Nubia pre-Kerma culture (3100–2600 BC, see Fig. 2.2) appeared in the Kerma region within the Dongola Reach (Edwards 2004, 44–47, 66–67). Pre-Kerma culture (contemporary with the A-Group in Lower Nubia), is known only from a few sites located between Kerma and the Second Cataract, among them Sai and Kerma (Chaix and Honegger 2015, 206–207). The most important pre-Kerma settlement was Kerma (dated to 3000 BC) [Fig. 2.2, Fig. 1 at the end of this volume], and

it was based on an agro-pastoral economy but, unfortunately, this period is poorly known (Honegger 2014, 28). In the funerary tradition, bucrania played a more significant role and were placed in or near the graves. The most spectacular example is the deposit of 5,600 skulls close to a Middle Kerma grave dated to c. 1900 BC (Chaix and Honegger 2015, 206–207).

The A-Group (3400–2700 BC) [Fig. 2.2, Fig. 1 at the end of this volume] appeared in Lower Nubia in about 3400 BC around the First Cataract area in Egypt, and settlements have been discovered between the First and Second Cataracts, in Dakka, Gerf Hussein, Qustul, Faras, Serra, and Gemmai (David and Salvatori 2019, 10; Edwards 2004, 44–47, 68–70). A-Group evidence was not always found in an A-Group context; in the First Cataract area A-Group material culture was present within Naqadian sites above the First Cataract (Gatto 2006, 62). Mortuary practices depended on regional, chronological, and socio-cultural differences. Graves did not usually have superstructures, and the shaft was sealed by large stone slabs (Gatto 2006, 69). The bodies from the Second Cataract cemeteries were commonly wrapped in animal leather and laid on animal skins, while those from the First Cataract were wrapped in mats or linen and laid on a mat or a wooden box (Gatto 2006, 68–69). Remains of wooden beds dated to this period were recorded only at Qustul (Williams 1986). Objects placed in the grave as offerings included local and Egyptian imported pottery, stone vessels, grindstones, palettes, Nile pebbles, mace heads, copper and bone tools, ornamental objects made of different materials, ornaments for clothing, hand axes, incised ostrich eggshells, incense burners, lithic tools, clay figurines, lapis lazuli, seals, and seal impressions (Gatto 2006, 69). Animals also were buried in human graves or independently within the human cemeteries (Gatto 2006, 70). The A-Group specialized in black-topped and rippled pottery decorated with incised geometrical patterns, thin egg-

shell wares with painted decoration, and red polished wares (David and Salvatori 2019, 10; Edwards 2004, 44–47, 68–70).

In the second half of the third millennium BC, the area of Lower Nubia was occupied by the C-Group (2700–1500 BC, see Fig. 2.2), while in the Northern Dongola Reach the main centre of habitation was focused around the Kerma region and Kingdom of Kush (2700–1500 BC, see Fig. 2.2) (Edwards 2004, 44–47, 76–77). The C-Group was probably related to the A-Group, which is reflected in their pottery. C-Group people led a pastoral life, and cattle seem to have been an important economic and cultural issue. A large amount of cattle leather was recorded in C-Group graves (probably having been used as material for clothing) (Hafsaas-Tsakos 2010, 389–390). The pottery assemblage features black-topped wares, vessels with incised and impressed patterns, as well as evidence of Egyptian influences and pottery imported from Egypt (David and Salvatori 2019, 13). The incised decoration which appeared in this period includes half-moon and quadrate patterns on black bowls, wavy lines on rims, zigzag, herringbone, figurative motifs, and chessboard patterns (David and Salvatori 2019, 13). Egyptian commodities imported into Lower Nubia were recorded as burial goods in C-Group graves. The C-Group cemetery at Aniba appears to have been used from around 2500 to 1500 BC; Egyptian imports make their earliest appearance at this cemetery in graves dating from the beginning of the Sixth Dynasty, around 2345 BC (Hafsaas-Tsakos 2010, 390). The distribution in time of Egyptian pottery in the C-Group cemetery at Aniba shows that there was a dramatic increase in trade. Different kinds of jewellery were the most numerous Egyptian imports among the burial goods in C-Group graves; others included bronze objects such as mirrors, daggers, and various tools (Hafsaas-Tsakos 2010, 391). Mortuary evidence shows that after Lower Nubia was again incorporated into Egypt, the C-Group population acculturated and Egyptianized (Hafsaas-Tsakos 2010, 395).

The Kingdom of Kerma (Old Kush, see Fig. 2.2) in Upper Nubia retained a pastoral way of life, in which cattle played an important economic role and also served a social function. Representations of cattle were discovered at Kerma in the form of small figurines and images painted in murals decorating the large funerary chapels of the Eastern Cemetery (Chaix et al. 2012, 189). Bucrania, which were recorded in pre-Kerma funerary contexts (see above), took on a more significant role during the Kerma period, when thousands of bucrania were placed in front of graves (Chaix et al. 2012, 189, 192). In the Ancient Kerma period (2500–2050 BC, see Fig. 2.2) meals probably took place during funeral ceremonies, during which large numbers

of bowls were turned upside down on the ground close to the grave (traces of liquid were visible on the hardened mud). Human sacrifices sometimes also featured in this period, whilst grave goods were restricted to a few personal adornments (Bonnet 1992, 621–622). In the Middle Kerma period (2050–1750 BC, see Fig. 2.2) graves became larger and contained more food supplies; human sacrifices increased, and libation rituals were still present (broken pottery was recorded in front of grave entrances) (Bonnet 1992, 622). During the Classic Kerma period (1750–1500 BC, see Fig. 2.2) human sacrifices increased further still, and grave goods became more lavish, with pottery, jewellery, toilet objects, chests, beds of wood inlaid with ivory, as well as Egyptian imported pottery, statues, and stelae appearing in burials (Bonnet 1992, 622–623). Kerma period pottery represents a wide range of fine and coarse wares, incised black wares, and fine polished black-topped red wares (David and Salvatori 2019, 13–14). Some wares copied Egyptian pottery. Black-topped bowls decorated with incised triangles below the rim, and black-topped tulip beakers appeared in this period (Edwards 2004, 85, 96; David and Salvatori 2019, 13–14). The thickness of vessel walls did not exceed 3 mm, and the pot surface was highly polished to a metallic sheen. These vessels were inspired by metal prototypes (Edwards 2004, 85, 96; David and Salvatori 2019, 13–14).

During the Egyptian occupation (1500–1100 BC, see Fig. 2.2), Egypt extended south of the Third Cataract, and an Egyptian presence was established at Jebel Barkal in the Dongola Reach (Edwards 2004, 103). Many cultural changes in religion and burial customs took place in Egypt at that time. During the Amarna period (1353–1336 BC), Amenhotep IV decided to build a new city, Akhenaten, devoted to the cult of Aten (the sun god) and his children. Amenhotep IV changed his name to Akhenaten and became the manifestation of Aten's will (Van Dijk 2000, 269). Tombs of this period were decorated with representations of Aten temples and of the king and his wife. It was believed that the dead lived on earth among the living, and their tombs served as nightly resting places. Mummification was practised, and funerary offerings and tomb equipment were commonplace (Van Dijk 2000, 277). After the Amarna episode in Egyptian history, religious beliefs returned to the tradition and cult of Amon Ra and Osiris, but with some changes. Rock tombs and free-standing tombs were built, and the tomb became a private mortuary temple for the owner, with wall paintings focused on the owner adoring the gods (Van Dijk 2000, 280). The Egyptians' attitudes to life and death were influenced by their belief that eternal life could be ensured by a wide range of strategies, including piety to the gods, the preservation

of the body through mummification, and the provision of funerary equipment. Temples complete with priests and a steady flow of offerings would also help grave owners to express their adoration of the gods (Shaw 2004, 120–121).

The Egyptian occupation of the Dongola Reach gradually put an end to many local traditions, and subsequent changes in religious beliefs were followed by major changes in burial traditions (Mahmoud El-Tayeb 2012, 47). Burials began to be furnished with greater numbers of utensils and practical items (Mahmoud El-Tayeb 2012, 80). The first evidence of changes in burial customs dating from the period of the New Kingdom occupation was noted in the Fourth Cataract region in the form of tombs referred to as dome graves and semi-dome graves, in which there was no burial pit (Paner and Borcowski 2005, 209–212). The ceramic traditions of the C-Group and Kerma period survived and met with Egyptian influences and the introduction of the potter's wheel. Wheel-made dishes, carinated bowls, and *zirs* appeared in this period (David and Salvatori 2019, 15).

During the 10–9th century BC, political changes in the Dongola Reach led to the establishment in the 8th century BC of the new Kushite Kingdom, centred on the Napata Region in the Upper Dongola Reach (Edwards 2004, 112–113, 122–123, 128). The rulers of this kingdom conquered Egypt in the 7th century BC (founding the Twenty-fifth Dynasty), and Kushite sites have also been discovered in Lower Nubia, among them Mirgissa, Faras, Buhen, Qustul and Qasr Ibrim. The history of the Kushite Kingdom is divided into two main periods: Napatan (1100–300 BC, see Fig. 2.2) and Meroitic (300 BC–AD 350, see Fig. 2.2) (Edwards 2004, 112–113, 122–123, 128).

Kushite occupation in the Napatan period continued up to 300 BC, and was concentrated in the Napata region, with important centres and royal cemeteries at El-Kurru, Nuri, and Jebel Barkal (Edwards 2004, 112–113, 122–123, 128). After the Egyptian withdrawal, Kushite culture was Egyptianized (Török 2004, 132). The innovation in burial customs which occurred in northern Nubia as a result of Egyptian influence was confined to the shift from a flexed position to the traditional Egyptian supine attitude. Burials in foot-shaped graves probably appeared in Napatan times, several graves of this type having been discovered at Kerma (Mahmoud El-Tayeb 2012, 47–48, Bonnet 1999, 1–7, fig. 3, t 123). In the Napatan period, Nubian pottery, such as handmade black-topped red bowls, black-topped goblets, red burnished bowls, and globular jars, co-existed with Egyptian wares, represented by large numbers of wheel-made bowls with red-painted rims and amphorae. Besides the large quantity of imports from Egypt, local pottery

started to imitate Egyptian models (Edwards 2004, 137; David and Salvatori 2019, 15–16).

In the Meroitic period (300 BC–AD 350, see Fig. 2.2) the main centre of power was moved to the Shendi Reach, between the Sixth and Fifth Cataracts, and remained there till the 4th century AD. The northern frontier of the kingdom probably extended to the Second Cataract (Edwards 2004, 141–143).

The mortuary custom of burying bodies in extended position was adhered to during the Early Meroitic period. Foot-shaped graves have been recorded at cemeteries in Lower Nubia at Abu Simbel, and in the northern part of Upper Nubia at Sai Island and Soleb. Burials of this type have even been noted upstream of the Fourth Nile Cataract (Mahmoud El-Tayeb 2012, 47–48). Mahmoud El-Tayeb believes this practice was known only in northern Nubia during the Napatan and Early Meroitic periods (Mahmoud El-Tayeb 2012, 47–48). Classic Meroitic burials in northern Nubia consisted of a rectangular pit, which seems to have been covered by a brick vault and marked on the surface by a *mastaba* or sometimes even by a small pyramid (Woolley and Randall-MacIver 1910, 32–45; Bonnet and Mahmoud El-Tayeb 1991, 29–34). In Upper Nubia, graves took the form of a perpendicular chamber that would have been entered via a sloping ramp, and the burial was usually covered by a circular mound (Mahmoud El-Tayeb 2012, 48–49). In the Late Meroitic period, graves began to have more distinctive superstructures, consisting of a low, rounded, flat-topped mound surrounded by a skirt of small, rough, black stones (Mahmoud El-Tayeb 2012, 49, 51). These changes may have originated from the waning of Egyptian influence on Meroitic society. Stronger contacts with the Meroitic heartland allowed for the revival of certain older traditions and the influx of ideas stemming from southern burial practices (Mahmoud El-Tayeb 2012, 49, 51). In the 3rd century AD, changes in grave construction were followed by changes in inhumation attitude, the Egyptian extended position (which had remained unaltered as the sole practice since the New Kingdom period) was replaced by the old tradition of contracted burials (Mahmoud El-Tayeb 2012, 76).

There is no evidence of human sacrifice during the Napatan and Meroitic periods. The inhumation practice of reopening a grave to accommodate a secondary burial probably appeared during the Early Meroitic period and was maintained throughout the Classic and Christian periods (Mahmoud El-Tayeb 2012, 77). In the Classic and Late Meroitic, burials were furnished with various grave goods, sometimes including *ba* statues and offertory tables, depending on the social and material status of the deceased (Bonnet and Mahmoud El-

Tayeb 1991, Mahmoud El-Tayeb 2012, 77). The pottery does not show continuity of Napatan traditions but modifications to the local handmade repertoire. The potter's wheel was still in use (David and Salvatori 2019, 17). Ceramic wares in the earliest phases of the Meroitic period include black handmade pottery that was, however, different to that seen in the Napatan period. Black vessels with impressed decoration are more reminiscent of the Kerma and C-Group traditions mentioned above (David and Salvatori 2019, 16). Painted designs such as wavy lines and floral motifs known from Egypt were copied on Meroitic pottery (David and Salvatori 2019, 16). During the first centuries AD, when Egypt was under Roman rule (Bowman 2008), fine wares made with kaolinitic clay were introduced to the Meroitic repertoire. Roman influences also led to the appearance of new vessel shapes, stamped decoration, and light-coloured ceramic surfaces (David and Salvatori 2019, 16–18; McNally and Schrunck 2000).

At the end of the Meroitic period, around the 3rd century AD, burial goods became quite modest; in some graves they were limited to a single pottery vessel and no food offerings were left for the buried individual. The body was usually wrapped in a perishable material and placed directly on the ground, where no remains of a bed, bier, bench, or even an animal hide have ever been noted (Mahmoud El-Tayeb 2012, 78).

In the early 4th century, the hegemony of Meroe seems to have begun to disappear. The time between the 3rd and 7th centuries AD was a period of political and cultural transitions during which a number of regional traditions appeared and three Kingdoms arose: Nobadia in the north, Makuria in the middle and Alwa in the south of Ancient Nubia (Edwards 2004, 182–185). El-Zuma is situated in the Dongola Reach, between the Third and Fourth Cataracts, within the bounds of the Makurian Kingdom [see Fig. 1, end of this volume] (Mahmoud El-Tayeb 2012, 15). The period between the 4th and the 6th century is known as the post-Meroitic, and this term was widely applied to the period succeeding the end of central authority in Meroe. The post-Meroitic period was first recognized in the cemeteries of Lower Nubia, where burials of this date were identified by Reisner, who attributed them to a culture he referred to as the 'X-Group,' which filled the gap between the Meroitic and medieval Christian periods (Reisner 1910). Royal burials of new tradition were discovered at the cemeteries of Ballana and Qustul (Edwards 2004, 185–187).

In Upper Nubia, the research conducted by Shinnie at Tanqasi (Shinnie 1954) in the Dongola Reach led to the emergence of the term 'Tanqasi Culture,' coined by Trig-

ger, which became a southern equivalent of the northern 'X-Group' of Lower Nubia (Trigger 1965). The excavation of cemeteries at Firka (Kirwan 1939), Gemai (Bates and Dunham 1927), El-Hobagi (Lenoble 2004), El-Zuma (Mahmoud El-Tayeb 2012), and Hagar El-Beida (Longa 2007; Lemiesz 2007) increased the number of similar tumulus sites, but the term 'Tanqasi Culture' has now become largely obsolete (Edwards 2004, 192–195). Cemetery evidence of this period is scarce in the northern Dongola Reach. Further upstream, sites of this date (almost entirely tumulus cemeteries) appear to be much more common. A significant post-Meroitic presence can be identified in the Letti Basin and in the Fourth Cataract region, especially in the area of Old Dongola, where Meroitic cemeteries were recorded around El-Ghaddar (Mahmoud El-Tayeb 1994), Hammur (Mahmoud El-Tayeb 2003), and El-Zuma. The abundance and scale of the post-Meroitic cemeteries upstream of Old Dongola, rather than in the Letti Basin, suggests that settlement during this period may have been focused on the basins of the southern Dongola Reach (Edwards 2004, 188, 192–195).

The processes of political change and cultural transformation in Meroitic Lower Nubia probably began with the reorganization of the Egyptian frontier of the Roman Empire in the 3rd-century AD, and these changes transformed a province of the Meroitic kingdom into the independent kingdom of Nobadia (Edwards 2004, 195). Significant centres of this period probably focused around the Second Cataract, as far south as Murshid, Gemai and Meinarti, and extending north as far as Abu Simbel (Edwards 2004, 200). The post-Meroitic settlements (see below, Chapter 2.2) seem to have been small, and the majority of cemeteries continued to be used into the medieval period, tumulus burials gradually being abandoned (Edwards 2004, 200). The survey in the Third Cataract region suggests that the appearance of post-Meroitic settlement seems to be a relatively late phenomenon, and the Third Cataract may have marked a significant political frontier of Nobadian culture (Edwards 2004, 201).

It was during this period that the El-Zuma necropolis came into being (see Fig. 2.2, box marked in grey). Mahmoud El-Tayeb suggests that this period should be divided (based on burial architecture and traditions—see Volume I, Chapters 3 and 4) into two main phases: Early Makuria phase I (AD 350–450), and phase II (AD 450–550) (see Fig. 2.2). Phase I was dominated by graves with two variants of superstructure: a conical mound of earth, or a flat-topped mound clad with stones. Beneath the mound was a substructure consisting of a rectangular vertical shaft provided with a side niche. At the turn of the 4th century, this type of construction appeared to

be widespread throughout the Dongola Reach, at least from the Letti Basin upstream to the Fourth Nile Cataract region (Mahmoud El-Tayeb 2012, 57). In Early Makuria phase II, grave construction changed through the addition of one or more secondary chambers for the deposition of burial goods inside the tomb (Mahmoud El-Tayeb 2012, 68, 70). The tradition of digging a separate pit to accommodate offerings most probably started during the transition between the Late Meroitic and Early Makurian periods, or even a little earlier, yet this practice was maintained in the late phase of the Early Makurian period (Mahmoud El-Tayeb 2012, 61). The large mound burials at El-Zuma (see Volume 1, Chapter 3), Tanqasi (Shinnie 1954), and Hammur-Abbassiya (Mahmoud El-Tayeb 2003) were regarded as elite tombs because of their size and construction (Mahmoud El-Tayeb 2003, 130–134, Figs 8, 13). An interesting feature recorded in burials with double or multiple chambers is the existence of a connecting system between the burial chambers, created by making holes in the partition walls. The function of these holes and passages remains obscure, though based on Lower Nubian traditions it appears that they may have been intended to provide the soul of the deceased with easy access to the offerings deposited in the other chambers (see Volume 1, Chapters 3 and 4; Mahmoud El-Tayeb 2012, 68, 70).

During the Early Makurian period, inhumation adhered to the same tradition that had reappeared in the Late Meroitic period, with the body being buried in contracted position (Mahmoud El-Tayeb 2012, 76). In most cases, the body appeared to be wrapped in a linen cloth, or in other instances simply dressed in a leather kilt or woven animal hair shroud (Mahmoud El-Tayeb 2012, 79). The best-preserved example of burial garments was found in grave HP45/1 at El-Kassinger, where the body was wrapped in three woollen shrouds (Fischer 2007, 125–128).

Burials with grave furnishings deposited in multiple chambers, and bodies interred on a bed, a bier, an animal hide, an earthen bench, or even on a layer of pure sand, became quite popular and followed a specific pattern. The main burial chamber contained the body accompanied by adornments, personal effects, and some valuable grave goods (Mahmoud El-Tayeb 2012, 79). Pottery, which provided containers for grave goods and was the major component of burial assemblages, included tableware (such as cups, bowls, and goblets) and utility wares (such as beer/storage jars and cooking pots) (Mahmoud El-Tayeb 2012, 81). Food, consisting mainly of meat such as lamb or goat, was placed inside the burial chamber (Mahmoud El-Tayeb 2012, 82). Offerings of cattle meat were not common in Nubia, though examples have been recorded at El-Hobagi (Lenoble et al. 1994) and more recently at

El-Kassinger Bahry (Paner 1998, 129). Animal sacrifice was also practised in this region, though on a very limited scale (see Volume 1, Chapter 8; Mahmoud El-Tayeb 2012, 82). It appears that the animal was first slaughtered, then intentionally placed near the edge of the shaft, and finally buried beneath the earthen mound (Mahmoud El-Tayeb 2012, 82). A sacrificed animal or animals were either placed directly in the grave in the Kerma period (see above), or buried in the grave shaft, outside the burial chambers, as was recorded in the X-Group tumuli at Ballana and Qustul (Emery and Kirwan 1938). Another interesting issue is the presence of hearths associated with burials. Attention was first drawn to this by Lenoble during the excavation of the tumulus field at El-Kadada, where hearths were observed on the ground surface at the edge of the descending ramp, just in front of the entrance to the burial chamber (Lenoble 1987, 92). Traces of fire have been recorded at some burial grounds in the Dongola Reach, for example at the cemeteries in El-Ghaddar (Mahmoud El-Tayeb 1994) and El-Zuma (see Volume 1, Chapters 3 and 4), and in the Fourth Cataract region at El-Kassinger. Lenoble assumes that meat had been cooked and consumed during the inhumation process, and before the burial was finally sealed, as part of an organized ceremony which he referred to as a “Funerary Banquet” (Lenoble 1994, 95–96). At El-Zuma, pieces of charcoal were found on the top surface of the pier in T.25, and at the bottom of the external shaft of the tunnel in T.5 (Mahmoud El-Tayeb 2010, 209).

After the post-Meroitic transition (c. AD 600), as mentioned above, three Kingdoms—Nobadia in the north, Makuria in the middle and Alwa (Alodia) in the south—took shape in Ancient Nubia, heralding the arrival of the Christian period, which lasted till around AD 1400 (Edwards 2004, 195). In the pottery of this period, painted decoration and religious themes appeared, and new types of pottery began to be produced (Edwards 2004, 234). Several pottery-producing centres have been discovered in Lower Nubia and the Makurian area. The revival of wheel-made pottery manufacture signals further innovation. Faras wares were also produced at Old Dongola and perhaps Ghazali in the Dongola Reach (Edwards 2004, 234, 235–236). In the 11th century, a range of new wares appeared. Some vessels may have been made at Old Dongola, which may have become the main producer of later decorated wares (Edwards 2004, 236).

In the southern part of Upper Nubia, Alodian pottery seems to have developed out of post-Meroitic traditions, and handmade manufacture still existed. Black burnished pottery was common in this region. The new and most distinctive pottery is known as Soba Ware (named after the capital of the Alodian kingdom), and consists of bowls and

basins, with decoration painted over a black or brown slip (Edwards 2004, 224).

After the dissolution of the Medieval Nubian kingdoms, the 16th century saw the establishment of the Funj Sultanate of Sinnar and the Sultanate of Darfur, and the introduction of Islam (Edwards 2004, 256; Adams 1987; Crawford 1951). Pottery of this period tends to be identified simply as 'Islamic' or 'Funj.' The Funj pottery types consist mainly of large flat-bottomed handmade dishes elaborately decorated with incised geometric designs, braziers, incense burners, and tobacco pipes (Edwards 2004, 270).

The short historical overview presented above outlines the changes and/or continuation of burial customs and traditions throughout the long history of Ancient Nubia. The El-Zuma cemetery bears witness to the beginnings of the Kingdom of Makuria, which flourished in the territory of Ancient Nubia between the Third and Fifth Cataracts during the 4th–6th centuries AD (Mahmoud El-Tayeb 2006; 2012). The excavations have uncovered burial architecture and artefacts of material culture attributable to early Makurian times. Pottery makes up the largest group of finds recovered from this site. Many vessels were found *in situ*, inside the burial chambers, or broken and scattered in the shafts. Little is known about the settlements of this period [see Table 2.1], and there is no evidence of any pottery workshops, which begs the question: Where was this pottery produced?

Ethnographical observations of pottery making in the El-Zuma and Karima regions (Czyżewska-Zalewska and Kowarska 2020) revealed similarities between modern and ancient pottery, suggesting that this is a tradition that has not changed, or changed only a little over the centuries. This could perhaps be indicative of the fact that cultural changes in general did not occur rapidly, and we should bear this in mind when examining materials from El-Zuma.

2 State of Archaeological Research into the Post-Meroitic Period

As mentioned above, the post-Meroitic period is the most relevant to the analysis of the El-Zuma burials, and it is essential to summarize the state of archaeological research into this period. Archaeological sites connected with the post-Meroitic period are presented below in the form of a table [Table 2.1]. Sites are itemized in geographical order from north (Lower Nubia) to south (Upper Nubia). The table lists different types of sites, such as settlements, cemeteries, and fortresses, and includes data from surveys as well as excavations.

As we can see in the table, the post-Meroitic period is well represented, mainly by cemeteries which were discovered in Lower and Upper Nubia. Tumulus cemeteries include burials of the elite, rulers and other important members of Nubian society (Drzewiecki 2016, 14–15). Tumulus fields dated to the post-Meroitic period were very widespread across much of Central Sudan (Edwards 2004, 188–189).

Fortifications are not widely represented in the post-Meroitic period. Fortresses were located south of the Fifth Cataract, but during the post-Meroitic to medieval period no significant political centre formed in this region (Drzewiecki and Stępnik 2014).

Settlements are less well-represented in the archaeological record of this period. Some burials of post-Meroitic date were recorded close to the Meroitic settlement sites of Musawwarat es-Sufra and Naqa. These two sites seem to have been largely abandoned, although a small Christian community may have been established at the latter during the early medieval period (Edwards 2004, 187). Post-Meroitic activity was observed in the earlier layers at Sonyiat (Orzechowska 2003, 443, 446–447, 452–453) and Selib (Cedro 2017). Soba, capital of medieval Alodia, was probably established during this period, and distinctive post-Meroitic pottery has been found in early levels there (Edwards 2004, 187).

FIGURE 2.2 General chronological table based on chronology of Mesolithic and Neolithic Sudan (David and Salvatori 2019, Fig. 2), and timeline of Kush, Nubia, and Christian Nubia (Emberling and Davies eds. 2019, x–xi; Obluski 2014, 9); * periodization according to burial traditions after Mahmoud El-Tayeb 2012

TABLE 2.1 State of archaeological research into the post-Meroitic–Early Makuria period

Archaeological site	Discovery context	Additional information	Date	References
Lower Nubia				
El Hesa	graves	cemetery 2	5th–6th century AD	Reisner 1910, 9–15
El-Biga	graves	cemetery 59	5th–6th century AD	Reisner 1910, 9–16
Bab Kalabsha	graves	cemetery 59	X-Group	Firth 1912
Dandur	graves	cemetery 63	X-Group	Firth 1912
Gerf Husein	graves	cemeteries 27 and 74	X-Group	Firth 1912
Aman Daud	graves	cemetery 92	X-Group	Firth 1912
Shalub Batha	graves	cemetery 75	X-Group	Firth 1912
Qasr Ibrim	graves	cemetery 192	post-Meroitic	Alexander 1999; Mills 1982
Gebel Adda	graves	cemeteries 3 and 4	X-Group	Millet 1963; Huber and Edwards 2012
Ballana	graves		X-Group, 4th–6th century AD	Emery and Kirwan 1938
Qustul	graves		X-Group, 4th–6th century AD	Emery and Kirwan 1938
Faras area	habitation	south of Faras	X-Group and Christian times	Nordström 1962; Verwers 1962; Williams 1993
Serra East and West	graves		Meroitic, X-Group	Nordström 1962; Verwers 1962; Williams 1993
Argin	graves, habitation		X-Group and Christian times	Nordström 1962; Verwers 1962; Williams 1993
Gezira Dabarosa	graves, habitation		X-Group and Christian times	Nordström 1962; Verwers 1962; Williams 1993
Gudhi	graves		X-Group	Reisner 1910
Upper Nubia				
Gemmai	graves	cemetery	post-Meroitic	Sakamoto 2016a
Kulubnarti	graves	cemetery, Site 21-S-46	Ballana Culture (X-Group)	Adams et al. 1999, 7
Sesebi	graves, habitation		AD 350–550	Edwards 1994; Osman and Edwards 2012, 128–133
El-Ga'ab	graves	cemetery	post-Meroitic	Tahir 2012
El-Ghaddar	graves		4th–6th century AD	Godlewski and Kocianowska-Bożek 2010; Mahmoud El-Tayeb 1994
Hambukol	graves		4th–5th century AD	Grzymski 1991
Old Dongola	graves, fortifications		Late Meroitic—post-Meroitic	Drzewiecki 2013; Drzewiecki and Stepnik 2014; Rees, Lahitte, and Näser 2015
Hammur-Abbasiya	graves	cemetery	post-Meroitic	Mahmoud El-Tayeb 2003; Phillips and Mahmoud El-Tayeb 2003
Dam Debba-Nuri	graves, survey	cemeteries	post-Meroitic	Bashir 2014
Argi	graves, survey	Argi 48, 65	post-Meroitic/Early Dongola	Żurawski 2003, 176–206
Abkur	graves	Abkur 39, 55, 69	post-Meroitic	Żurawski 2003, 89–90, 207–223
Soniyat	habitation, survey		post-Meroitic	Orzechowska 2003
Selib	habitation	Selib 3, refuse dump	6th–7th century AD	Cedro 2017
Tergis	survey	Tergis 47, 54	post-Meroitic	Żurawski 2003, 234–261
Affad	survey	Affad 18, 19, 28, 37, 60, 64	post-Meroitic	Żurawski 2003, 262–290
Ed-Diffar	survey	Ed-Diffar 18	post-Meroitic	Żurawski 2003, 291–304
Mansourkuti	graves	cemetery	Late Meroitic—post-Meroitic	Bashir 2014
Wadi Muqaddam	graves	cemetery	post-Meroitic	Mallinson et al. 2018
Usli	graves	cemetery	Meroitic and post-Meroitic	Żurawski 2001
El-Zuma	graves	cemetery	Early Makuria AD 450–550	
El-Detti	graves	cemetery	Early Makuria AD 450–550	Mahmoud El-Tayeb et al. 2016
Tanqasi	graves	cemetery	post-Meroitic	Godlewski 2008; Shinnie 1954; Wyżgoł and Mahmoud El-Tayeb 2018
Merowe Sheriq	graves, fortifications		post-Meroitic	Drzewiecki 2013; Drzewiecki and Stepnik 2014; Rees, Lahitte, and Näser 2015; Klimaszewska-Drabot 2010a

TABLE 2.1 State of archaeological research into the post-Meroitic–Early Makuria period (*cont.*)

Archaeological site	Discovery context	Additional information	Date	References
Wadi Abu Dom	graves		post-Meroitic	Gabriel and Lohwasser 2010; Lohwasser and Karberg 2012; Gabriel 2014; Lohwasser, Eger, and Karberg, 2015
Nuri	graves		post-Meroitic	Sidebotham, Thomas, and Harrell 2010
Umm Ruweim 1	graves, fortifications		Late Meroitic—post-Meroitic	Drzewiecki 2013; Drzewiecki and Stępnik, 2014; Rees, Lahitte, and Näser 2015; Klimaszewska-Drabot 2010a; El-Nur and Bandi 1994
Khor Al-Greyn	graves		post-Meroitic	El-Nur and Bandi 1994
Umm Kuweib	fortifications		Late Meroitic—post-Meroitic	Drzewiecki 2013; Drzewiecki and Stępnik 2014; Rees, Lahitte, and Näser 2015
Umm Muri	habitation	settlement	Late Meroitic–Early Christian	Thomas 2008
El-Kassinger Bahry	graves	HP 47, HP 47 tumuli	post-Meroitic	Mahmoud El-Tayeb 1998; Mahmoud El-Tayeb and Kołosowska 2007a, 2007b
Saffi Island	graves		post-Meroitic	Phillips and Mahmoud El-Tayeb 2005; Żurawski 2005, 2007b
Jebel Kulgeili	graves		post-Meroitic	Ali Mohammed and Hussein 1999
El-Kassinger Bahry area	graves	HP112, 129, 135, 142, 537	Meroitic and post-Meroitic	Paner and Borcowski 2005, 213–216
Fourth Cataract	graves		post-Meroitic	Ahmed 2003
Fourth Cataract	graves	cemetery 3-Q20	post-Meroitic	Wolf 2004
Fourth Cataract	graves	cemeteries 3-Q-33, 3-Q-102	post-Meroitic	Wolf and Nowotnick 2005
Fourth Cataract	habitation	settlement 3-Q-14	post-Meroitic	Wolf and Nowotnick 2005
Fourth Cataract	graves	cemetery 3-R-69	post-Meroitic	Wolf and Nowotnick 2006
Fourth Cataract	graves	settlement 3-R-103	post-Meroitic	Wolf and Nowotnick 2006
Fourth Cataract	graves	cemetery 3-N-160	post-Meroitic	Wolf and Nowotnick 2007
Ed-Doma	graves		post-Meroitic	Welsby 2005
Fourth Cataract	graves, habitation	71 cemeteries, 17 settlements	post-Meroitic	Paner and Pudło 2010a
Suegi	fortifications	fortifications	Late Meroitic or post-Meroitic	Drzewiecki 2013; Drzewiecki and Stępnik 2014; Rees, Lahitte, and Näser 2015
El Tereif	grave	cow grave	post-Meroitic	Welsby and Welsby Sjöström 2011
El-Haraz	graves		post-Meroitic	Ali Mohammed and Hussein 1999
Amri and Kirbekan area	graves		post-Meroitic	Welsby 2003, 2010
Bayuda Desert	graves	cemetery BP86	post-Meroitic	Paner and Pudło 2010b
Umm Melykta	graves		post-Meroitic	Edwards and Fuller 2005
Dar al-Manasir	graves		post-Meroitic	Budka 2005
Us, Sur, Sherari	graves		post-Meroitic	Näser 2007, 125–126
between El-Gerif and Abu Hamed		HP543, HP544, HP545, HP546, HP547, HP548, HP550, HP551, HP554, HP557, HP558	post-Meroitic	Paner and Borcowski 2005, 221–226
El-Sada	graves		post-Meroitic	Osypiński 2007; Chłodnicki and Żurawski 2005
Hagar El-Beida	graves	Hagar El-Beida 1, 2	Late Meroitic—post-Meroitic	Longa 2007; Chłodnicki and Stępnik 2013; Lemiesz 2007; Chłodnicki and Żurawski 2005
El-Ar	fortifications		Late Meroitic or post-Meroitic, 6th century AD	Drzewiecki 2013; Drzewiecki and Stępnik 2014; Rees, Lahitte, and Näser 2015
	graves	cemetery	post-Meroitic	Chłodnicki, Longa, and Osypiński 2010; Żurawski 2010b
Umm Saffaya	graves	cemetery	post-Meroitic	Chłodnicki and Żurawski 2005; Chłodnicki, Longa, and Osypiński 2010
Keheili	graves		post-Meroitic	Chłodnicki, Longa, and Osypiński 2010

TABLE 2.1 State of archaeological research into the post-Meroitic–Early Makuria period (*cont.*)

Archaeological site	Discovery context	Additional information	Date	References
Gamamiya	graves		post-Meroitic	Chłodnicki and Żurawski 2005; Chłodnicki, Longa, and Osypiński 2010
Shemkhiya	graves		post-Meroitic	Chłodnicki and Żurawski 2005; Żurawski 2007a
Mikeisir	fortifications		Late Meroitic or post-Meroitic, 6th century AD	Drzewiecki 2013; Drzewiecki and Stępnik 2014; Rees, Lahitte, and Näser 2015
Morgat Island	fortifications		Late Meroitic or post-Meroitic, 6th century AD	Drzewiecki 2013; Drzewiecki and Stępnik 2014; Rees, Lahitte, and Näser 2015
Kurgus	graves		post-Meroitic	Welsby Sjöström 2001
Gandeisi	fortifications		Late Meroitic or post-Meroitic, 6th century AD	Drzewiecki 2013; Drzewiecki and Stępnik 2014; Rees, Lahitte, and Näser 2015
Dangeil	graves		post-Meroitic	Anderson, Bashir, and elRasheed 2015
El-Gol	graves		post-Meroitic, 4th–6th century AD	Jesse, Fiedler, and Gabriel 2013
Jebel Nakhara	fortifications		Late Meroitic or post-Meroitic	Drzewiecki 2013; Drzewiecki and Stępnik 2014; Rees, Lahitte, and Näser 2015
Akad	graves		post-Meroitic	Ali 2002; Faroug, Saeed, and Tsakos 2007; Faroug and Tsakos 2005
Gabati	graves		post-Meroitic	Edwards 1998
El-Hobagi	graves	cemetery Hobagi III, IV	4th century AD	Lenoble 2004, 2018
El-Kadada	graves		4th–5th century AD	Geus 1983; Caneva 1994
El-Hatra	graves		post-Meroitic	Geus 1984
Hosh el-Kafir	fortifications		Late Meroitic or post-Meroitic	Drzewiecki 2013; Drzewiecki and Stępnik 2014; Rees, Lahitte, and Näser 2015
Abu Rtela (Abu Erteila)	graves		4th–7th century AD	Fantusati et al. 2010
Musawwarat es-Sufra	graves		post-Meroitic	Daszkiewicz et al. 2016; Daszkiewicz and Schneider 2001; Joachim 2014
Sabaloka	graves		post-Meroitic	Varadzinová Suková et al. 2015
Wadi Mukhtar	fortifications		Late Meroitic or post-Meroitic	Drzewiecki 2013; Drzewiecki and Stępnik 2014; Rees, Lahitte, and Näser 2015
Hosh el-Kab	fortifications		Late Meroitic or post-Meroitic	Drzewiecki 2013; Drzewiecki and Stępnik 2014; Rees, Lahitte, and Näser 2015
Umm Marrahi	fortifications		Late Meroitic or post-Meroitic	Drzewiecki 2013; Drzewiecki and Stępnik 2014; Rees, Lahitte, and Näser 2015
Kabbashi	graves		post-Meroitic	Caneva 1994
Al-Khiday	graves		post-Meroitic	Salvatori et al. 2014
El-Gereif	graves		post-Meroitic	Geus 1984, 12–13
El-Sabeil	graves		4th–5th century AD	Mahmoud El-Tayeb 1999
Gheresli	graves		post-Meroitic	Abd el-Rahman 2016
Amara el-Nasri	graves		post-Meroitic	Mohamed 2003
Jebel Ofreik	graves		4th–5th century AD	Manzo 2004

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