In “Relationships of the Nubian A-Group” Rampersad examines A-Group material, primarily ceramics, to place the group in context of the greater Nile Valley and establish relationships among these various cultures. Beyond ceramics, Rampersad also tackles pastoral and agricultural influences during this period as well.

Rampersad first undertakes looking at A-group ceramics. She notes that “in most cases A-Group designs are exactly comparable to those same patterns found elsewhere, both in terms of appearance of the decoration and, often, the location of the design of the vessel” (127). After collecting data on ceramic variation throughout the entirety of the Nile Valley (See Table 1 and 2), Rampersad comes to some conclusions. She determines that A-Group designs are not closely linked with industries closest to it, and that the strongest correlation exists between Khartoum Neolithic sites in the Central Sudan and were not indigenous to Lower Nubia. This assertion then begs the question “How did A-Group obtain Khartoum Neolithic traits?” Rampersad poses a few theories:

1. Direct acquisition from Khartoum region
2. A-group contact - direct or indict - with Shaqadad in Eastern Sudan (Butana)
3. Source from the Karat Industry (Dongola Reach)

Each of these hypotheses have data that both support and bring into question the claims being made. This biggest disclaimer to keep in mind is the lack, or scant amount, of evidence that these use for grounding.

While reading the piece, I continually felt like Rampersad was asserting a direction of influence on the A-Group from one industry to only feel led astray by the argument a few moments later when she would present another theory of transmission, all the while under the tone of complete causality. My biggest question is to what extent are these relationships mutually exclusive? If the A-Group is in contact with the Khartoum Neolithic does this mean they can’t be with Shaqadad in the Eastern Desert? Unfortunately, lack of evidence will most likely never answer the question. Finally, after the entire article seems to heavily emphasize a strong influence from the south of the A-Group, Rampersad states that “the A-Group was very much a part of this “dispersal process” despite its strong Egyptian connections, and it should be regarded equally as a product of Sudanese as well as Egyptian influence” (138). What was surprising to me about this passage was that only at that point did I realize her article and argument were contingent on debunking, or reframing, the theory that “Egyptian” influence has the most influential on A-Group ceramics, and not on a general overview of hypotheses of relationships. With the argument framed this way it would have been interesting to see her examine the “Egyptian” influence as to compare multiple sources.

Rampersad also treats non-ceramic relationships such as agricultural and pastoral acquisition, which tie in nicely with many of last week’s articles. In the context of this week, Rampersad gave a nice overview of ceramic culture of the A-Group and set up a lens of looking at relations focused in other areas rather than farther north in the Nile. Other authors, primarily Williams, Smith, and Adams, focus on the Naqada culture in Egypt in relation to the A-Group. This article acts as a nice contrast to those arguments and could frame the way we think of influence in Lower Nubia during this time period.