**Response**: Charles Bonnet. 1992. “Excavations at the Nubian royal town of Kerma” *Antiquity* 66

To begin, I was disappointed by this article. While I have not read Bonnet’s 2006 *The Nubian Pharaohs: Black Kings of the Nile,* it received rave reviews – both from Spalinger (University of Auckland) and Grzymski (Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto). Furthermore, knowing Bonnet is the former president of the International Society of Nubian Studies and was director for almost 30 years (1977-2002 I think) for the Swiss Mission of Kerma, I had high expectations going into this reading.

The organization and tone of the article is what first struck me as wanting. With regards to organization – the article’s firs few headings are: The Discovery of Kerma, Recent Research in Kerma and its region, The pre-Kerma period, The western *deffufa*…, the southwestern hut, etc. Noticeably, the headings jump between topical and temporal organizational sections. It took me a while to realize this. After I read the section labeled ‘the pre-Kerma period’ I was expecting to see a ‘Early Kerma’ heading – especially since this chronological distinction was introduced explicitly and presented in a table on the first page. However, these labels never appeared. So I when I first began to read the following section ‘the western *deffufa’* I was expecting to still be in the pre-Kerma period and was a bit lost temporally. But okay, I got over it.

The tone was also a little strange to me. I don’t know if this is at all a translation issue, English not being Bonnet’s native language I assume (being Swiss and all – I guess French?), but some phrasing just wasn’t what I was quite expecting, especially in the opening paragraphs: “It was not until 1913-16 that archaeological work by G.A. Reisner satisfied some of the curiosity of men of science. According to this famous American Egyptologist…” (611). ‘men of science,’ ‘famous Egyptologist’ I don’t know – they just struck me as a bit colloquial I guess? But again, not a big deal, but didn’t set me up to really love the article.

So then, Bonnet delves into a number of topical discussions: recent research in Kerma and its region, the pre-Kerma period, the western *deffufa*, southwestern hut, the town, religious buildings, fortifications, the standing of Kerma, structures by the Nile, and the cemetery. In this first section on recent research, I was again confused by the first table in the article. Bonnet comments that we have to thank French archaeologist B. Gratien for distinguishing four phases of Kerma civilization development, based on funerary remains at the Kerma necropolis of Sai. These ‘*four* chronological periods’ are listed in Table 1 as these *five* phases: Pre-Kerma, Early Kerma, Middle Kerma, Classic Kerma, Final Kerma. I presume that pre-Kerma is not being counted here as a ‘Kerma’ phase, but it is not made very clear and just seems a bit sloppy to me.

In general, I understand why he grouped his discussion this way, but it makes it very hard to understand the site as whole during any given period. Each section jumps back and forth across phases. In fact the only section that is explicitly chronological is the ‘cemetery’ section at the end which I found to be the best part of the article (unfortunately truncated in this scan. Oh well). Bonnet also makes some rather interesting and provocative statements without citations or an explanation of evidence. And this is what I find to be the most frustrating aspect of the article! Here are a few examples:

On page 613: “It is probable that the ancient town developed gradually around an early sanctuary located beneath the western *deffufa*.”

why is this probable? what is the evidence?

Page 614: “Comparative study of the different funerary buildings rapidly convinced us of the religious function of the *western* deffufa.”

comparative study with what funerary buildings? Other Kerma buildings? of what period?

Page 616: “it is clear that domestic altars were set up in certain rooms, but places specifically reserved for worship have also been found, notably in house no. 100 in the northwestern quarter.”

confusing wording – what was found in house 100: a domestic altar? or a specifically reserved place for worship? Also what do these altars look like? How is it clear that they are altars? Why is this more notable in house 100? do we have any artifacts found in conjunction with these altars? If I wanted to find out more about house 100 and its domestic altars where should I look? what publication? why is there no citation here?

Speaking of a lack of citations, on page 617 he writes without citation: “ocher for religious or magic purposes is well attested in Kerma” and “red ochre…in Egypt…is used to combat demons”

well attested in Kerma!? Interesting – at what sites? for what time periods? in what contexts?

And finally, on page 617-618, Bonnet writes that there is a palace inside the town walls, but also likely outside the town walls.

Do these date to the same period? How do you know they are palaces? Do they exhibit a unique architectural style that is arguably palatial? Or are they simply bigger? The outer one seems to have numerous seal impressions, is this the case for the inner palace as well? Can we date these?

A last final note of complaint – the abstract at the beginning describes Kerma as an ancient city in Nubia. It then says that “its position, at the southern limit of Egyptian control, sets it strategically on the routes to the African interior. Its environment in the arid desert results in remarkable preservation of organic remains.” (611). This is potentially really interesting, but it is not really addressed in the article. bummer.

In conclusion, I was happy to see some pictures and maps of the site of Kerma, but was seriously disappointed by the lack of discussion and description of the site! And, okay, fine, if you don’t want to go into it, at least provide citations so I can go and look up the field reports.