

9: A cup for any occasion? The materiality of drinking experiences at Kerma

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Introduction

Theories of New Materialities provide engaging avenues to conceptualize the interactions between material culture and the body and how scholars might go about examining these interactions in the archaeological record. Such approaches highlight the agency of materials in the design, making and use of objects, moving away from purely object-focused analysis (Knappett 2005; Ingold 2007; 2012; Knappett and Malafouris 2008; Drazin 2015a; 2015b). They can, however, be somewhat lacking in considering how the body itself is also a shifting collection of materials (flesh, liquids, hair, bones etc.) that affects the experiential and sensory aspect of body/material interactions. Though some key work has been done touching on this aspect (Robb and Harris 2013, 17; Harris et al. 2013, 196–212), anthropological and archaeological theories of embodiment and phenomenology provide complementary theoretical perspectives that allow us to place the agency and materiality of objects into the context of the lived experience of the body (Hamilakis 2002, 2013; Csordas 1994; Malafouris 2008a).

Such an approach is particularly useful and relevant when examining societies whose textual and iconographic records are limited and instead require a material culture-based theoretical framework. This limitation can be due to a number of factors, such as preservation patterns of written and artistic sources, the materials used for writing and art and the degrees of

importance of writing and art in the communicative practices of societies. This chapter focuses on one such society, the Middle Bronze Age (MBA, 2000–1550 BCE) Kerma state in Nubia (modern Sudan), whose sphere of influence has currently been demonstrated to have reached, at a minimum, from the second to fourth Nile cataracts (Emberling et al. 2014). The interesting absence of written records and very limited figural iconographic evidence indicate that other communicative modalities such as orality and material culture may have had a higher degree of importance. In examining Kerma society scholars must rely almost entirely on material culture and architecture as the key sources and windows into how this society was organized and operated. As such, a material and embodied approach presents some interesting opportunities to engage with Kerma material in non-traditional ways that have proven to be quite exciting and illuminating. In this chapter I examine how such a material and embodied approach can provide new insights and observations in interpreting the role of drinking and pouring forms of Black Topped Red Polished ware (BTRPW) ceramics in Kerma society. I argue that these vessels have certain material qualities which facilitate different types of drinking experiences in the upper tiers of Kerma society and which were key in expressing social hierarchy and identity.

Materiality and the body

The approach I take in examining the Kerma BTRPW ceramics combines aspects of New Materialities theory, relating specifically to the consideration of the material of objects with anthropological and archaeological theories of embodiment and phenomenology, which deal with the human body. In the author's opinion, the material aspects of objects and bodies are a key component in the way in which humans experience body/material interactions in the

phenomenological-driven experience of the body in the world (Csordas 1994, 6). This experiential element of materials in bodily and social practices is in itself an essential aspect in designing object typologies as well as how they are used in societies. Due to these two properties, they play important roles in social and cultural identity.

I will start from the question: how can objects become part of the cognitive system of the body, blurring distinctions between boundaries of the body and material culture (Malafouris (2008b)? This idea of incorporating objects into the *body schema* (Malafouris 2008b), the cognitive perception and experience of the body, enables objects to become intimately tied to a person's conception of the bodily self and identity. Malafouris' particular example looked at the emergence of swords in the Mycenaean shaft graves as part of an emerging incorporation of these objects into elite warrior identities. The swords were not simply 'prestige' items, but had an agency in being integrated into the human body and cognition, in essence becoming part of the matter of the body. As such, the swords facilitated new body/material interactions and relationships that formed core aspects of these new emerging identities. Malafouris' concept of *body schema* fits into this chapter's approach by recognizing that the body is an amalgamation of materials, which can incorporate a variety of other materials such as ceramic, metal and stone. The resulting melding of materials facilitates the body and object gaining new forms, qualities and functions. This confluence of materials is directly tied in the human cognitive system, which recognizes these other materials as 'part' of the body and of the 'self'.

This porosity between the body and material culture can be built on further by considering how specific forms of bodily action have interdependent relationships with materials and objects. Drinking from a vessel, eating with cutlery, sitting with furniture, or walking with footwear are all examples of bodily actions or gesture that are intimately intertwined with body/material/object interactions. These gestures form part of the habitus of different social and cultural groups, building the basic body techniques of everyday life (Mauss 1934; Bourdieu 1977). The material and physical qualities of objects such as vessels or cutlery are designed and manufactured in order to interact with the human form, constructing and facilitating the performance of specific forms of gesture. These gestural vocabularies are in turn part of a wider spatial and sensory environment, incorporating architecture and the physical environment (Ingold 2012) in which they are defined, constructed and performed. In this regard, the incorporation of materials and objects into the *body schema* also involves the actions of the body and objects through gesture.

These specific attributes, qualities and relationships between materials, objects and bodies – the wider social and physical context which they are a part of – resonate particularly with the concept of affordances put forward by James Gibson (1979, 119–36). His conception of ‘affordances’ refers to the potential relationships formed between objects and people, based largely on the physical properties of objects and what they afford humans by interacting with them. These qualities of objects include texture, colour, size, shape, mass and elasticity amongst others, but they all facilitate potential forms of interaction with humans (Gibson 1979, 125). This outlook allows objects to have myriad affordances and interactions depending on how humans perceive them. I particularly envision this concept contributing to

my approach by focusing on how the material qualities of the object facilitate different ways for the body to interact with it, facilitating different gestural forms.

To summarize my approach, I intend to examine the affordances of the BTRPW Kerma vessels, observing how the material qualities of the vessels facilitate different forms of gesture and experience that can be used to construct different drinking practices. Further, it is suggested that these affordances, as well as the embodied and experiential aspects of the vessels, may have been an integral aspect of the *body schema* of new elite identities within the Kerma state during the MBA in Nubia.

Rethinking Kerma ceramics through materiality

Black Topped Red Polished ware is a very distinctive corpus of Kerman ceramics that is identified through its distinctive colouration and surface treatment (Gratien 1978, 226–7). The vessels feature a bright red/orange on the body, black rims and shoulders and often a distinctive white/grey band between the black and red portions (Fig. 9.1). In addition to this vibrant colouration they are often highly burnished, giving them a noticeable sheen (Gratien 1978, 35). The ware is entirely handmade and as such there is a great deal of variation in the exact shapes and sizes of the vessels (Nordström 2004, 251). This ware finds particular prominence and technical refinement in the mid to later part of the MBA in Nubia, in the phase termed Classic Kerma (1700–1500 BCE; Gratien 1978, 35; Nordström 2004, 251). During this period there is a notable increase in fine BTRPW shapes and forms of bowls, beakers and pouring vessels, which are found at Kerma cemeteries and settlement sites

(Gratien 1978, 230). While the ware is often admired for its high quality and craftsmanship, there has been little detailed technical study of the ceramics outside of Reisner's original excavation report and Gratien's prominent classificatory study of Kerma material culture (Reisner 1923; Gratien 1978). At this time, little is known regarding the role and function of these vessels in Kerma society.

[Fig. 9.1 about here]

These ceramics were classified as finewares and assumed to be 'elite' (Reisner 1923, 325–6). Little consideration was given *how* exactly they are classified as being elite, which the author suspects as being largely based on modern perceptions of aesthetics. Nearly any publication on Kerma material culture will include some discussion of BTRPW vessels, particularly the distinctive 'tulip bell beakers', noting their vivid colours and elegant shapes (Figs. 9.1–2; Kendall 1997, 83; Knoblauch and Lacovara 2012, 204). They certainly do appear in large quantities in royal, courtly and elite contexts, particularly in the royal cemetery at Kerma, indicating that they are indeed important to the upper tiers of society. However, the idea put forward by Reisner that they are exclusively elite, alongside the fixation on the visual rather than the tactile, overlooks that they are found across all social levels in Kerma sites and can be quite variable in quality (Gratien 1978, 226). These BTRPW vessels appear to have been important cultural and social markers of Kerman identity across society (Knoblauch and Lacovara 2012, 204). To understand why these vessels were particularly important to the royal court and elite, an examination needs to move beyond a simple visual analysis and modern sense of aesthetics and instead provide a focused discussion of their materials, affordances and functions.

The idea that pottery played important and primary roles in royal, courtly, or elite identity construction is something not widely recognized in many aspects of elite scholarship.

Scholars usually associate metal and stone vessels with the conspicuous consumption of the top tiers of society (Sherratt and Sherratt 1991, 358–62; Bevan 2007, 136–7), not ceramics, which are usually associated with the utilitarian and domestic. These material assumptions have been examined by Knappett, who noted ‘everyday’ objects, particularly unpainted pottery, have often been overlooked in Bronze Age object studies as being purely functional and with real little meaning or value, particularly to the elite (Knappett 2005, 135–9).

However, in his examination of Minoan conical cups, he found that boundaries between meaningful and functional are often vague, with movements and shifts in these values. Even mass-produced, unpainted or treated ceramic vessels can be very meaningful and valuable when used in specific contexts, such as ceremonial feasting and banquets. MBA Cretan carinated cups also exhibit a huge variety in quality, with some being crudely constructed whilst others are very finely made, with a variety of intermediate forms (Knappett 2005, 143).

This is also true of the Kerma BTRPW, making it often difficult to place them in specific categories and directly correlate them to specific social groups in society. These considerations raise interesting questions on how ceramics are viewed as objects of meaning and value in past societies and if there is a need to reassess their roles. In the case of the Kerma, the widespread use of this type of ware – particularly its proliferation and expansion

of forms in royal, courtly and elite contexts during the Kerma Classic period – could be seen as a similar situation to the emergence of conical and carinated cups in Early and Middle Minoan Crete. It is important that scholars move beyond modern assumptions of the value, and therefore social contexts, of objects made of specific materials, and instead think of how these materials and the objects can have value and meaning across social levels. In the case of this chapter, it is significant that the material and physical properties of ceramics are being examined in regards to how they were valued and have important functions in royal, courtly and elite practices.

Building on Ingold's comments about how materiality studies can be quite removed from examining actual materials (Ingold 2007, 2–3; Knappett 2007, 20–3), it is important to actually physically interact with the ceramics, to try to understand how their materials and affordances could be important in elite contexts. Potentially, could physically handling the vessels and directly experiencing their affordances might result in a better understanding of the possible functions of the vessels and the experiential aspects of Kerman elite drinking practices? Additionally, could direct handling illuminate how the vessel's physical attributes might facilitate different ways of holding, pouring and drinking? To this end, a selected sample of BTRPW vessels from the Egypt and Sudan Department at the British Museum were examined and handled over a period of three days. The vessel types focused on relate specifically to drinking forms, or forms that would likely be for drinking. These consisted of two beakers (Fig. 9.1a–b; Museum No. EA554423, EA55415; Reisner 1923, 330–52), a rilled beaker (Fig. 9.1 c; Museum No. EA65579; Reisner 1923, 374–8) and a spouted vessel often referred to as a 'teapot' (Fig. 9.2; Museum No. EA65577; Reisner 1923, 364; Gratien 1978, 213). All vessels came from the royal eastern cemetery at Kerma, with the teapot and two

beakers presumed from the main burial of a disturbed small tumulus KIV, but found in a nearby chapel, (Reisner 1923, 477–9) and the rilled beaker from the main burial of a disturbed small tumulus KB21 (Reisner 1923, 512–13).

[Fig. 9.2 about here]

The selection of these vessels and these forms was subjective on my part, influenced by personal and scholarly opinions on which forms were likely to be used for drinking practices (Reisner 1923, 326). This does not exclude the possibility that other BTRPW vessels, particularly bowls and flasks, might also be used for drinking. It is highly likely that BTRPW vessels had multiple roles according to context, such as anointing, libations or eating. Other Kerma ceramic wares and forms such as red polish ware spouted zoomorphic jugs or black polish ware rilled beakers may have also been used in drinking practices (Reisner 1923, 376–8, 406). Minor has recently also convincingly argued that large ceramic beer jars and giraffe hair straws were used for elite communal drinking practices (Minor 2018). However, given these BTRPW vessel's physical properties – such as being an open form, capable of containing variable volumes of liquids and, in the case of the teapot, spouted for the pouring of liquids – it is perfectly reasonable that drinking would be one of the primary functions of the vessels.

On examining the vessels, I focused on how the physical affordances of the vessels influenced how I handled and experienced them. Naturally, some experiential elements were difficult to fully immerse myself in, as I could not actually fill the vessels with liquid or have

direct skin to material interaction. For future research, I would be quite interested in working with a ceramicist in making replicas of the vessels, which could then be experimented with to get a better idea of these sensory and material aspects. Nevertheless, the result of this study was a lot of notes and thoughts on the handling experience which I have organized under different affordance types: material and surface treatment, size, mass, decoration, shapes and handling techniques. Within each of these sections I discuss and compare the four vessels, building a discussion on how I think they could have been used.

Materials and surface treatment

All of the vessels are made from a dark Nile clay (Gratien 1978, 210), but exhibit variation in material processing time and effort. The two beakers and teapot are made from a fine clay and were likely worked free of any coarse material beforehand. This has allowed the shaping of very thin vessel walls with a high degree of uniformity, indicating the potter was very careful and skilled in shaping the vessels. In contrast, the rilled beaker has a rougher form, with thin, uneven walls and crudely modelled rills on the side (Fig. 9.1c). The material clearly was not as extensively worked beforehand and was roughly shaped by the potter. This difference in processing and material selection suggests that there was a high degree of planning of the desired material properties and shaping process of the vessels beforehand.

The fine clay of the beakers and the teapot, along with the clay components of the slip, allowed the beakers and teapot to be highly polished. This was probably achieved through burnishing, rubbing a stone against the finished surface (Reisner 1923, 329). This treatment

provides the surface of the vessel with a reflective and almost metallic appearance, which distinctively catches the light. The burnishing also makes the surface of the vessel extremely smooth and pleasing to the touch, even through a glove. This highly tactile element to the surface highlighted how touching and holding the vessel were highly sensual experiences. Also of interest was the high degree of variability between vessels in this surface treatment, with beaker EA554423 and the teapot having the smoothest texture. The other beaker EA55415 was still smooth, but not to the same degree, particularly in the interior. The rilled beaker has no burnishing whatsoever, providing a much different sensation when holding, with the coarser surface being slightly discomforting in comparison. These differences in surface treatment and texture would also be felt by the mouth when drinking. These affordances provided by the surface treatment indicate that beakers had distinct tactile differences from one another, providing quite different experiences depending on the fineness of the clay and the level of surface's burnishing.

The material and surface treatment also provided an auditory aspect to the vessels. Knappett (2007, 2) has noted how tactile and auditory aspects of ceramics can be important and how the choice of material and its shaping influence aspects of texture and sound. Accordingly, I experimented with lightly tapping the vessels to see what sound they made, resulting in a light ringing sound that could be felt through the material when holding. This would have been accentuated with having liquid contents and raises questions on the sensory aspect of toasting gestures, where beakers might have been struck against each other and produced sounds that would have been heard and felt by participants.

A final observation is that the highly thin walls and metallic surface might indicate these vessels are skeuomorphs imitating the physical properties of metals and metal vessels. There are a few examples of metal vessels from the royal tumuli at Kerma, notably the copper beakers found in grave K 334 at Kerma (Reisner 1923, 203–04) along with a copper bowl with a gold band on the rim in K. 5611:1. I was able to recently handle one of the copper beakers, which is now held in the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. The copper beaker had thinner walls, which was achieved through hammering (signs of this could be seen on the base of the vessel), and was highly polished, with a vibrant brass colour. It did appear to be related to the BTRPW in design, with similar haptic experiences in the finishing of the material. However, the ceramic beakers were also very different, notably in their weight, thicker walls, auditory qualities, colouration, and decoration. As such, it is more appropriate to consider the ceramic material affordances, rather than as these being purely ‘imitations’ of metal vessel affordances.

Sizes and volume capacity

The beaker forms had some variation in height, with EA55415 being 14.3cm tall, beaker EA55423 being 11.7cm high and the rilled beaker being 16.7cm tall. This might not initially sound like much, but the result was noticeably different. This height ranges are even more noticeable turning to Reisner’s examination of the BTRPW vessels, where a variety of sizes are noted from roughly 6cm to 20cm in height (Reisner 1923, 331–42). The decision to produce these vessels in a variety of sizes suggests that there was not a set prescribed way of

handling and using the beaker forms; instead sizes could dictate different functions and relationships to the body. Different sizes certainly indicate different holding, pouring and drinking techniques between vessels, which is an interesting area to pursue in handling a wider selection of vessel sizes.

Sizes also dictate the volume and possible contents of beaker forms and teapots, with the variations in shape also leading to variations in volume capacity (Gratien 1978, 226). I was particularly struck by the fact the teapot has an obviously smaller volume capacity than the large beakers, making it unlikely it was intended to be used in conjunction with these large vessels. The smaller beakers or even bowls might have been more appropriate, further suggested by the teapot's thin and delicate spouts (diameter of 1cm), which would only allow a small amount of liquid to be poured. This could indicate that a valuable and/or heated liquid was poured from the teapots, perhaps some kind of refined oil or alcohol. Meanwhile, the larger beakers might have been used in conjunction with a larger pouring form, perhaps animal-headed red polished jugs or even rilled beakers, whose larger volume capacity and possibly handling techniques could facilitate pouring. The larger volume of these vessels might indicate that water or beer was drunk from these vessels, or some kind of beverage which was produced in large quantities. In any case, the variation in size and volume capacity certainly indicate that these vessels facilitate quite complex sets of drinking practices in which participants could have very different experiences.

Decoration

The vivid coloration of the BTRPW vessels makes them very visually distinctive and was clearly intended to be conspicuous. The bright red/orange, black and white colourations however are in no way restricted to ceramics (Reisner 1923, 290–4). Similar colour schemes appear in surviving wall paintings in the funerary chapels in the royal cemetery at Kerma and are reflected in colours of Kerman body cosmetics found in burials (Geus 2004, 274–7). This use of colour seems to be part of a wider colour vocabulary in Kerma society and culture that was used in other mediums such as architecture, body painting and leatherwork/textiles. Red ochre in particular was a prominent colour pigment used, with the distinctive red colour appearing in all aspects of material culture. The decoration of these vessels therefore ties into wider bodies of communicative knowledge and cultural identity. I would suggest that far from being purely aesthetic, the colour palette of these vessels incorporate them into wider cognitive and cultural communicative systems. Holding, pouring and drinking with these distinctively coloured vessels would incorporate the colours into the human body as a type of affordance. This could be further enforced through the use of similar colour vocabularies in personal adornment and dress, which could also be used to express status and identity. In this manner, the vessel colourings were affordances that facilitated the embodied inclusion of participants into certain social, cultural and cognitive identities and landscapes within Kerma society. This materiality of colour in Kerma society is the focus of future research.

Also of note was how each of the BTRPW vessels has its own unique white band patterning. This plays into the variation in affordances of material, surface treatment and size, which recalled the conception of how vessels might have personal ownership and relationships with individuals/groups. This could facilitate concepts of personal or communal vessels that have can only be used by specific individuals or groups. While difficult to prove, it raises some

interesting questions on how the properties of the decoration might have more meaning than currently realized.

A final observation was that in the case of two beakers and the teapot, there seemed to be an incised band around the rim that created a distinct border and termination. This reminded me of a metal rim fixture. A comparable example of metal fixtures along vessel rims can be seen in a bronze bowl with a gold-plated rim which was found in one of the burials in the Royal Cemetery at Kerma (Resiner 1923, 284). However, the copper beaker examined in the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston did not have any metal fixtures, being hammered from a single piece of metal. It is therefore possible that these bands might be mimicking metal fixtures in some form, however, it seems more likely that these are distinct decorations for BTRPW ceramics. In this case, these incised rim decorations might be a particular decorative and sensorial aspects of the BTRPW vessels, especially on the beakers, were the band would have been felt on the lips when drinking.

Shapes and holding techniques

The striking aspect of this seemingly coherent group of pottery vessels are the potential variety of ways they could be held. The teapot, with its spherical shape and flat base was well suited to being held in one or two hands and could also be easily placed on a flat surface (Fig. 9.2). It was not difficult to use as a pouring vessel, being able to comfortably sit in one or two hands and be put through a pouring motion. The unusually thin and elongated spout was intriguing, being highly elaborate for simply pouring the contents of the vessel. The shape of

the spout seems to place particular emphasis and exaggeration into the pouring motion, fully drawing the movement of the user into the pouring action. This suggested that they were meant to be experiential and display orientated, placing a ritualized and ceremonial gesture around the act of pouring. The gesture of pouring would therefore become a performance, providing the actor with the embodied experience that could express and communicate their inclusion and status to participants in drinking events.

The beakers and the rilled beaker in comparison were very unstable due to their shapes, even with flat bases and would have been even more so when filled with liquids. This indicates that their primary function involved being held with the hands rather than being placed on surfaces. Similar observations have been made regarding polished round bottomed ceramic vessels in neighbouring Mediterranean regions such as Cyprus (Steel 2016, 80). Stands for beakers are not common and it seems likely that when stored the vessels were placed upside-down on the rim. In this regard the vessels were clearly designed for being held by the hands.

In experimenting with ways of holding the two beakers, I was struck by how the smooth surface made it actually quite tricky to get a firm grip. With a full beaker this would certainly have provided some additional difficulties in holding the vessel, making it not entirely straightforward to handle. The experience of holding the beakers demonstrated many different ways in which the vessel could be held using one or two hands. Using one hand felt for the most part unstable and difficult. The circumference of the beakers is quite large, which makes it difficult to comfortably hold the vessel from the side. The best method was

holding the base of the vessel in the palm, which allowed greater control, though this made it difficult to transfer into a drinking motion to the mouth. Using the two-handed technique made it easier to maintain a comfortable grip on the vessels and greatly increased the stability (Fig. 9.3), either through two hands on either side of the vessel or one hand at its top and the other hand resting it on the palm.

[Fig. 9.3 about here]

In handling the rilled beaker, I wanted to critically consider the common assumptions or allusions that these vessels were largely non-functional. Rilled beakers have often been suggested to be specifically funerary items made to mimic stacked beakers, with the rills being the ‘rims’. These ideas imply that rilled beakers were purely display objects for conspicuous consumption in funerary contexts (Reisner 1923, 376; Gratien 1978, 214). Therefore, to challenge these assumptions, I explored how they could actually be used as novel and engaging drinking vessels.

The rilled beaker was heavier and taller than the beakers, making it more suited to being held with two hands. The rills along the side of the vessel make for an interesting hold, providing space for a finger in between each. The result was a much more stable grip and holding technique than with the beakers, even though they were quite crude and thick. In finer examples of rilled beakers these are usually less pronounced and would afford a slightly less stable grip, but probably still more stable than those of the beakers. The height of these vessels, being taller than even the largest beaker, would logically make the rilling a means of

acquiring a firmer grip on the vessel. The greater volume capacity and firmer grip might also indicate that these vessels could have been used for pouring, or for communal drinking, in which the vessel was passed around between participants or perhaps involving straws for simultaneous drinking (Stockhammer 2012, 22–6). Again, the aforementioned study by Minor on communal drinking and uses of straws might indicate this, though the current straw remains are rather large to be used with beakers (Minor 2018). In any case, it provided for an interesting and divergent way of holding and interacting with the vessel, as well as quite different drinking or pouring technique to the teapot or beakers. In this manner, the rilling is not only mimicking stacked vessels, but also providing a different experience for drinking. This function as an unusual drinking or pouring form might also suggest why the vessel forms appear in other ceramic wares, such as black polished ware (Reisner 1923, 376–8).

Analysis Summary

The analysis of the different affordances of the vessels has highlighted that the materiality of the BTRPW had important implications on the way these objects interacted with the body and how they were experienced. The material, size and volume, decoration, and body techniques of these vessels were affordances specific to these ceramic vessels. These also facilitated distinct sensorial experiences through the interacting materials of ceramic and the body. This is a particularly vital aspect in considering ceramic as a valued material through its material properties. In the case of the BTRPW vessels this is essential in considering relationships to metal vessels and issues of skeuomorphism. While the copper beaker and the BTRPW beakers had some overlap in affordances, particularly regarding the visual and haptic aspects of surface finishing, they were also distinctly different. The ceramics had vivid

colouration, unique decoration, and a wider variety of sizes, weights, and volumes. As such, it is limiting to consider the ceramic BTRPW vessels as skeuomorphs, as this inherently places ceramics at a lower value and social role. Considering the ceramic vessel affordances and body interactions provides a different perspective on the social lives of these vessels and how they were valued for their sensory experiences. This facilitates a better understanding of the affordances of both ceramic and metal vessels, and their different and overlapping roles in Kerma society.

Constructing drinking experiences and elite identity at Kerma

The variety of affordances of these ceramic BTRPW vessels highlights that they are not simply passive objects made of inert materials with purely functional roles of allowing the body to ingest liquids. Instead, the materials, colours, sizes, decorations and shapes of the vessels facilitate a multitude of body/material interactions and different gestural performances involving holding, passing, pouring and drinking. The incorporation of these different body/material interactions and gestural forms in drinking practices would allow participants to have very different sensual experiences in drinking activities and events.

These variations in experiencing drinking practices would have provided opportunities for expressing social status and identity at drinking events. These could involve decisions to include and exclude individuals/groups from these events and to further delineate status and identity through the allocation of vessels with different affordances and gestural techniques. For example, the allocation of vessels with different materials, sizes, shapes, burnishing or

decoration would have directly impacted on what participants drank, how they held vessels, how they passed and shared them and how they could pour from and into vessels. In the case of the BTRPW vessels, the variety of affordances strongly indicates a complex array of drinking experiences that would have been tightly controlled and manipulated.

These decisions to construct and manage experiences could also be highly formalized through the construction of forms of etiquette, ritualized and codified forms of behaviour within certain social contexts (Walsh 2013). These would facilitate access to and management of these material/body interactions, gestural performances and lived experiences. These forms of etiquette are particularly important ways of expressing status and courtly identities in Bronze Age court societies (Walsh 2013). Courtly drinking practices using these BTRPW vessels likely would have utilized forms of etiquette in order to express social hierarchy and identity amongst the upper tiers of Kerma society.

Returning to Malafouris' concept of *body schema*, there are a number of factors to consider how these BTRPW vessels could be incorporated into embodied courtly and elite identities. Malafouris' examination of the emergence of Mycenaean swords and their incorporation into the *body schema* and elite identities in the Shaft Grave period in Greece particularly resonates with the proliferation of the elaborate BTRPW drinking vessel forms in the Classic Kerma period in Nubia. During the Classic Kerma period there is a development of new local elite object typologies and adoption of Egyptian courtly objects and architecture, which strongly indicates the construction of new types of identity, behaviour and practices amongst the royal court and elite based at Kerma (Minor 2012; Walsh 2016). In this light, the diversification

and refinement of BTRPW vessels with their affordances and potential etiquettes indicates that this is intimately tied to the construction of new forms of identity, in which the vessels played a very important part. As objects with long cultural histories in Nubia, they bring elements of traditional practices, but elaborate them further in innovative ways in order to create a new set of practices to be used in identity construction. As mobile objects with intimate relationships to body, they certainly have the potential to be incorporated into the human cognitive system and concept of bodily ‘self’.

The contexts for these vessels also support the idea of their incorporation into the *body schema* by the Kerman royal court and elite. BTRPW vessels are found in large quantities in royal and elite burials, where they are placed around the body, alongside many other of these new or adapted elite grave good typologies such as cosmetic vessels, furniture and weapons (Reisner 1923; Gratien 1978; O’Connor 1993, 52; Kendall 1997, 55–62; Hafsaas-Tsakos 2013; Minor 2018). The quantities and physical proximity to the deceased suggests direct personal relationships between materials, objects and the body. Together they can be viewed as intimate parts of the deceased themselves, bringing together the notion of the body as a collection of different materials as well as bodily actions. In the case of the BTRPW vessels, they directly intertwine the gestures and practices of drinking with the body and identity of the deceased. This direct bodily association is further suggested by the fact that the act of drinking also involved the interaction, flow, transformation, and incorporation of materials between the vessel and the body (Hamilakis 2017, 177–80). This further demonstrates the permeability and entangled nature of these vessels with the human body and identity, which is clearly expressed in their spatial positioning to the body in Kerman burials.

This particular view helps us to potentially understand the changing forms and emphasis of elite objects in Kerman burial practice during the Classic Kerma period, which seems to be tied with issues of expressing identity and social status. It should also be noted that at this time the practice of interring possible human sacrifices alongside the deceased expands enormously, with hundreds of individuals buried together in Kerma royal tumuli (Reisner 1923, 65–73; Haynes 1992 42; O'Connor 1993, 54–5; Kendall 1997, 60–6; Buzon and Judd 2008; Minor 2018). This change in practice might also be tied to new forms of royal, courtly and elite identity and are related to the new elite object typologies.

This incorporation of the BTRPW vessels into the *body schema* of the Kerman court and elite is also indicated by the fact they were likely used in funerary rituals and commensality events. During the preceding Middle Kerma phase, it is common to find the southern perimeter of elite tumuli surrounded by cattle bucrania and upturned vessels (Geus 2004, 279), including earlier forms of BTRPW vessels (Gratien 1978, 236). The remains of cattle and drinking/eating vessels has led to the suggestion that ceremonial feasting and banqueting events were important aspects of Kerman burial practice, particularly in elite and royal contexts (Manzo 2017, 126–7; Minor 2018). Although this practice becomes less common in the Classic Kerma tumuli (Geus 2004, 279), the proliferation of the BTRPW drinking forms in the royal tumuli and subsidiary burials does seem to suggest that feasting and banqueting activities were important aspects in the internment of the deceased and completion of the funerary rituals.

A key question is the role of these BTRPW vessels in daily life. To be part of the *body schema*, it would be expected that they must play integral and important roles in the daily life of the court and elite, even within specific or limited contexts. Lacovara has noted that the vessels in the royal tumuli seem to have limited signs of wear, particularly when compared to a deposit of BTRPW beakers with signs of wear and repair found in the monumental *deffufa* religious building at Kerma (Lacovara 2003). This deposit at least demonstrates that these vessels have important functions in some ceremonial drinking or ritual activities in the royal and court monumental buildings at Kerma itself. Again, Minor's study of the provisioning and placement of elaborate drinking equipment in Kerma burials suggests that ceremonial feasting and drinking was an integral part of court life and the expression of power at Kerma (Minor 2018). As outlined above, the affordances of the vessels indicate that they could be used in a variety of ways to express and experience status and identity. This analysis presents some considerations on how these vessels could have been used and how they could have formed important aspects of drinking events and activities in the homes and palatial buildings at Kerma itself (Bonnet 2014).

I believe that the widespread occurrence of BTRPW vessels across social levels and regions in the Kerma state indicates a shared conception and tradition of drinking practices, which worked to create a sense of commonality in Kerman cultural identity. However, there also seems to be internal social stratifications in terms of access to drinking experiences, structured around the affordances of BTRPW vessels. These internal social stratifications to

drinking experiences suggests an incorporation of these vessels and their materials into the *body schema* of new emergent courtly and elite identities in the Classic Kerma period.

Conclusions: Moving towards a materials and body-centred approach

The approach I have taken in analysing and discussing these vessels has highlighted that theoretical models of materiality, embodiment and phenomenology have a great deal to offer scholars in approaching the relationships and roles of material culture and the human body. By focusing on these body/material relationships, there is a wider scope in reassessing traditional assumptions on the role and value of materials and material culture in past societies. I believe this is particularly relevant in moving beyond mere modern concepts of aesthetics and material value in characterizing and identifying ‘elite’ object typologies, which often overlook complex and intricate relationships between the body, materials and objects. In particular, ceramics often seem to fall into a conception of being of low value and utilitarian. The examination of the BTRPW at Kerma seems to suggest that this assumption and stereotype needs to be reassessed. Considering how the physical properties of ceramic vessels can have sensual and experiential aspects allows us to understand alternative trajectories of value and significance in royal and elite practices.

This study has also highlighted how such approaches can be particularly useful in examining the role of material culture in societies that may not use texts and art in traditional ways. In addition, it can provide a different approach in illuminating what material culture can tell us about social and bodily practices without the direction of texts and art, which have limitations

in what they can tell us of actual lived experience. Regarding my particular example of the role of these BTRPW ceramics, I believe this study will validate and encourage new ways of approaching Kerman ceramics and hopefully lead to some further experimental and technical studies of this widely recognized but little studied body of material.

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