

SAQQARA 2007: THE POTTERY

Teodozja I. Rzeuska

Less pottery was recorded in 2007 than in previous seasons, but in spite of this and the fact that no sealed offering or ritual deposits

were found, the fieldwork has contributed to the existing vessel typology, especially with regard to Old Kingdom pottery.

ARCHAIC–EARLY OLD KINGDOM
(THIRD–FOURTH DYNASTIES)

Examples of Archaic and early Old Kingdom pottery have never been numerous, especially compared to the late Old Kingdom ceramic assemblage, and this season was no exception. The finds, mostly small sherds (no intact vessel has been found so far), were limited to the eastern sectors in the vicinity of the enclosure wall of the funerary complex of the pharaoh Netjerykhet. The repertoire did not depart from that identified in previous fieldwork.

With regard to the Archaic period, a limited several dozen fragments have been recorded so far — mainly large, spindle-shaped jars which were probably beer jars, handmade of Nile C clay. The outer bottom part was tool-trimmed, using a brush or piece of wood to judge by the telltale scratching on the surface, and then red-slipped. The end effect is that the bottom of the jar is angular instead of being round. On one fragment representing this jar type, a vessel bottom

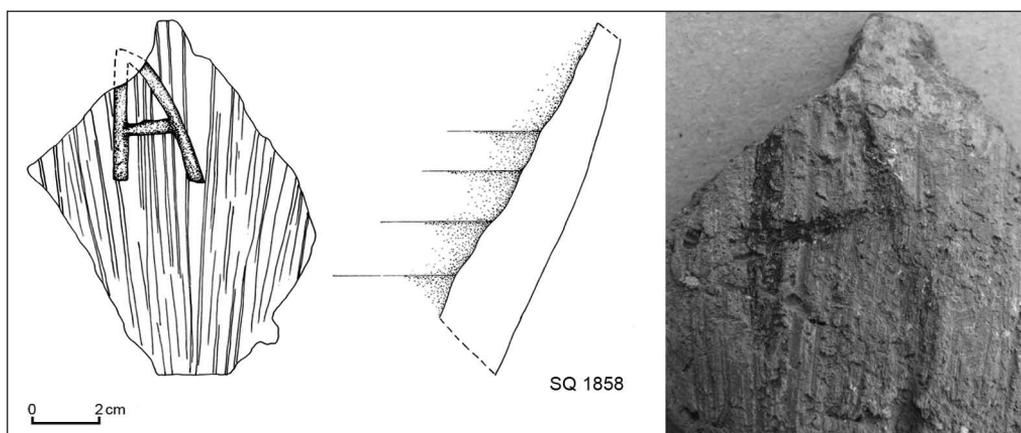


Fig. 1. Bottom part of jar with the hieroglyphic sign *mr* in black ink
(All drawings and photos T.I. Rzeuska; inking M. Orzechowska)

(SQ 07-1858), the hieroglyphic sign *mr* (U6 in Gardiner's sign list, 1969: 516) was inscribed vertically in black ink [Fig. 1].

The early Old Kingdom pottery assemblage, which is more numerous than the Archaic one found so far, consists of mostly large ovoid storage containers with rounded or slightly pointed bottoms, made of Marl or Mixed clay. The bodies were handmade by coiling, the rim thrown on a tournette and subsequently attached to the body, the seam being evident on the inside of the neck. To date, all of these jars were found to be made of clay designated as P.38 in the local site clay typology; following this season, clays P.80, P.81 and P.82 have also been

recorded. All three clay varieties form the same family and resemble P.38, differing only in the quantity and nature of non-organic temper. Analogous jars were found in the Netjerykhet funerary complex, specifically in the stores of the Southern Tomb (Firth and Quibell 1935: Pls 25, 102, nos 18,2; seen by the author in 2006).

Originating from the same period are fragments of *Meidum* bowls with shoulders sharply carinated in keeping with the type and maximum body diameter at shoulder level, as well as beer-jar sherds with a characteristic collar. Examples of the latter form have been found also in previous campaigns (Rzeuska 2001: 151–153, Fig. 1).

LATE OLD KINGDOM POTTERY

Tombs of the late Old Kingdom in the part of the necropolis excavated by the team appear to have been plundered shortly after the funeral, given that the robbers seem to have had excellent knowledge of individual tomb layout and content. Sometimes, instead of laboriously removing all of the soil, they tunneled vertically through the shaft fill straight to the chamber entrance. Fortunately for the ceramologist, this left large parts of the shaft fill and the pottery deposited in it undisturbed (Rzeuska 2006: 453–458).

However, some funerary shafts were plundered completely and this was the case with regard to the shafts explored this season. The result is a mixed and secondary ceramic assemblage. Even so, original partly undisturbed ceramic deposits were discovered in a few of the shafts.

SHAFT 73

Shaft 73 is exemplary in this respect. The fill of the upper part (archaeological context K.07-1) contained late Old Kingdom pottery mixed with sherds from the Late

Period, among others, storage containers, imported presumably Levantine amphorae and fragments of Third Dynasty bowls. Meriting attention in the late Old Kingdom assemblage is a bowl, which was blackened inside, and reused fragments of a vessel with smoothed edges showing evidence of use as a tool (for digging?). The upper part of the shaft had been emptied by robbers and was gradually filled again with chance material from the surface. The process appears to have lasted at least through the Late Period, as suggested by pottery of the period recorded here.

Below this secondary fill, the original fill starts at a depth of 2.20 m from the top of the shaft. The full depth of the feature is 6.60 m (archaeological context K.07-4). This fill consisted of a massed layer of limestone chips mixed with pottery solely from the Old Kingdom. The robbers' tunnel, dug vertically in the southwestern corner of the shaft straight to the burial chamber entrance, was subsequently filled with pure, most likely drifted sand containing absolutely no pottery

(archaeological context K.07-5). The plunder must have significantly preceded the Late Period, considering that the robbers' passage was sealed by the mixed secondary deposit described above.

The pottery from the original fill was part of the offering deposit made at the time of the funeral. In similarity to other deposits of this kind, it consisted of beer-jar fragments (mainly Form 4, slightly less of Form 9) and bread molds, in this case footed and with white-painted rim (Form 209). Other vessels found typically in such offering deposits include bread trays with straight walls and flat or rounded rims and small fragments of trays with profiled inside walls. The usual set of finds characterizing offering deposits was also recorded: false beer jar fillings, limestone drillings, animal bones, some burned, charcoal and some very fragmented red-slipped pottery (plates, deep bowls and *Meidum* bowls). Among the fine pottery, one should note two small *Meidum* bowls, SQ 07-1826, rim diameter 13 cm, and SQ 07-

1807, rim diameter just 10 cm, both made of Nile B1 with red slipped surface [Fig. 2]. These vessels, which are very rare on our site, are believed to be typical of the terminal phases of the Old Kingdom.

Of greatest interest in this offering deposit is a new type of beer jar, SQ 07-1863, which has a simple high rim, gently sloping shoulders, spindle-shaped body and pointed base [Fig. 3]. The maximum rim diameter is 7.5 cm compared to 15 cm for the maximum body diameter; the height stands at approx. 30–35 cm. Handmade of Nile C clay (designation according to the *Vienna System*), it is red-slipped on the surface (2.5 YR 5/3 reddish brown). This is the first time that an almost complete vessel has been found, the type being evidenced previously in this part of the necropolis in very fragmented form. No parallels are known from the Memphite necropolis, but an identical vessel was discovered in tomb no. 102c at Qubbet el-Hawa (Aswan) (Edel 2008: 1486–1488, 1498, Pl. 19, jar 102c/74 was found in the burial chamber of shaft II). Dated to the terminal Old Kingdom, this jar is red-slipped, 28.7 cm high and with a rim measuring 7.3 cm in diameter. The vessel comes from an undisturbed burial deposit where it was found together with vessels already typical of the First Intermediate Period. The same dating can be assumed for the presently discovered jar from Saqqara.

In summary, the deposit left in burial shaft 73 at Saqqara reflects a time most probably at the end of Phase IV, that is, the Seventh Dynasty.¹

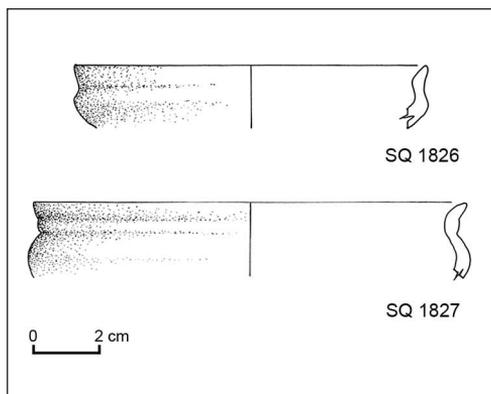


Fig. 2. *Meidum* bowls from Shaft 73

1 No tombs of the First Intermediate Period have been found so far on the Saqqara necropolis in the part excavated by the Polish team, hence there is no reason to distinguish a new chronological phase in its functioning. Nonetheless, pottery from this period from the necropolis, although found seldom indeed, would stand in confirmation of some funerary activity continuing in the area at this time.

OTHER SHAFTS

Among the pottery of the late Old Kingdom from the other shafts explored this season, a few pieces rare in our assemblage deserve note. Of interest is bread mold SQ 1861 [Fig. 4, bottom] found in burial shaft 71. It represents a type (Form 215, Late Old Kingdom vessel typology after Rzeuska

2006: *passim*) displaying characteristic outer surface treatment in the form of scratching with a brush or bundle of straw. To date, vessels of this kind have occurred solely in archaeological contexts from Phase III (first half of Pepi II's rule), but the surface treatment and especially the hole pierced in the bottom already foreshadow traits typical

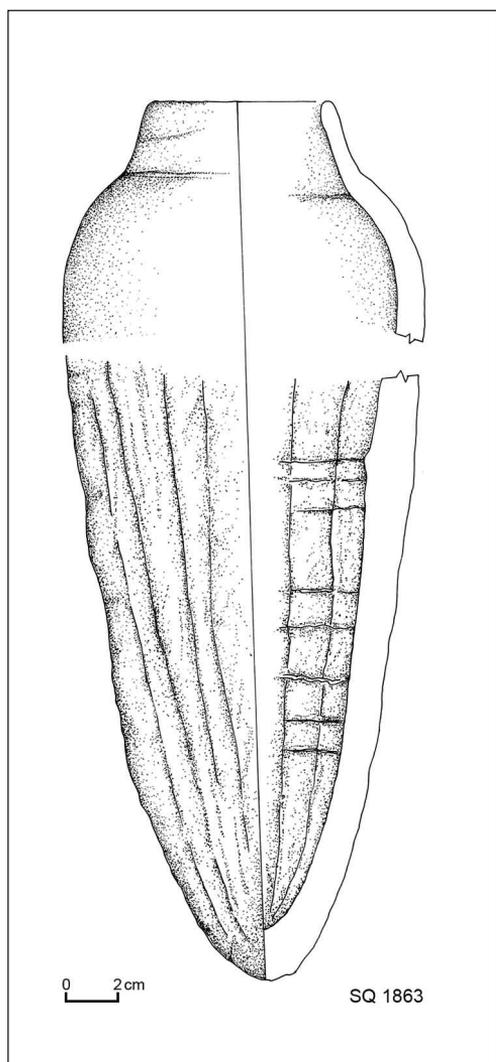


Fig. 3. Beer jar from Shaft 73

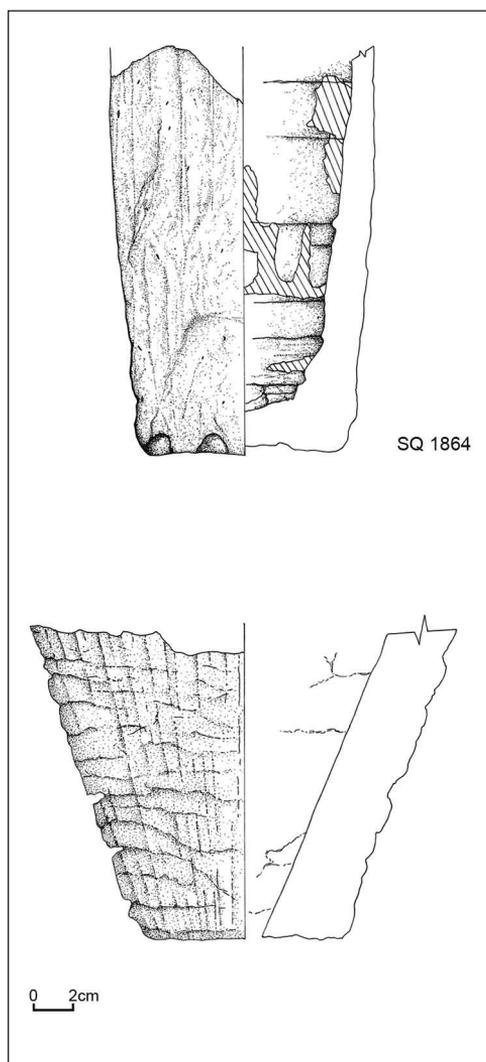


Fig. 4. Potstand (top) and bread mold from Shaft 71

of pottery from the First Intermediate Period.² These vessels are seldom encountered in our assemblages, hence it is possible that they should be dated to phases III–IV, but more data is needed to verify this idea.

The same burial shaft, no. 71, yielded another rare find — a thick-walled cylindrical pot stand (SQ 1864; Form 201) [Fig. 4, top]. It is handcrafted by coiling and red-slipped on the outer surface; the clay is Nile C. Deep finger marks on the outer surface near the bottom leave no doubt that the pot stand, still soft, was carefully lifted from the spot where it had been shaped and moved elsewhere. Joining fragments were found in the burial shaft, but also inside the burial chamber. The find is unusual because to date only bottoms have been found (Rzeuska 2006: Pl. 157, nos 802–804, 807). Judging by the traces on the inside walls, ours seems to have been reused as a container for white paint.

Also from the same burial shaft comes a small deposit of miniature vessels [Fig. 6], consisting of one little jar and five identical tiny bowls (Deposit 1/2007). It was found at the bottom of the shaft, just in front of the

entrance to the burial chamber. This kind of deposit, usually numbering about 40 miniature vessels of different shape, used to be placed in burial chambers, right next to the sarcophagus. In all likelihood, they served as a sort of three-dimensional offerings list (Junker 1929: 105). The present deposit may have come from the burial chamber and could have been more extensive, considering that a few other miniature vessels were discovered in both the chamber and the shaft.

Burial shaft 81 yielded a large jar (SQ 1874) made of Marl C1 clay [Fig. 5]. Its bottom bears traces of shaping in the form of deep grooves inside; the outside surface is smooth. The vessel was fired in an oxidizing atmosphere giving an overall olive color to the scum coating on the surface (1 for gray 8/3 greenish gray). A pot mark in the form of a horizontal line and three short perpendicular dashes starting from it, incised pre-firing, can be seen on the lower bottom. The presence of Marl C pots, however rare in assemblages from the late Old Kingdom, confirms the conviction that their appearance predates the Middle Kingdom.

Two small *Meidum* bowls (SQ 1878 and SQ 1879) [Fig. 8] were recorded in the fill of Shaft 98; they are made of Nile B1, red-slipped, with rim diameters respectively 10 cm and 11 cm. The type is fairly rare at the site with only a few fragments being found so far.

Among the closed forms an almost intact jar SQ 1866 should be mentioned [Fig. 7, bottom]. Fragments were found at different levels in the fill of Shaft 78. The other notable fragment is a small piece of a rim (SQ 1840; Fig. 7, top), most likely biconical,

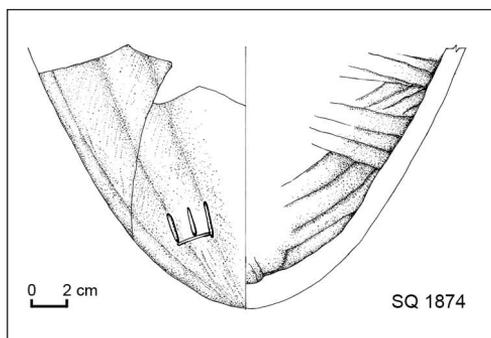


Fig. 5. Bottom of large jar from Shaft 81

2 This is the earliest example of a *bedja* bread mold with hole in the bottom, which became common in the First Intermediate Period and in the Middle Kingdom.

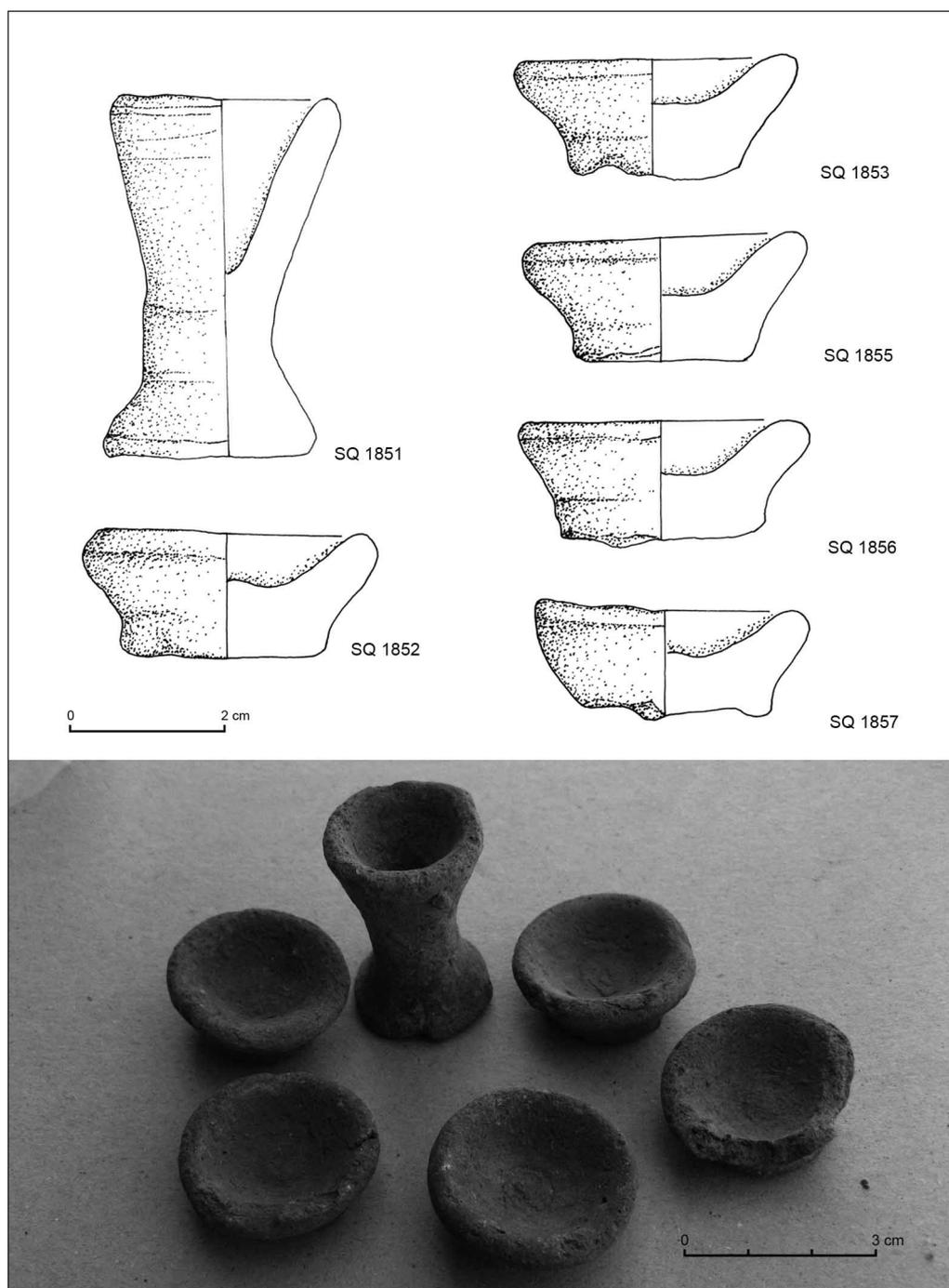


Fig. 6. Deposit of miniature vessels from Shaft 71 (1/2007)

found in the surface *dakka* layer. Both were red slipped, turned on the wheel using Nile B1 clay, and are rare in this part of the Saqqara necropolis.

Equally rare are small bowls with profiled edges and the bowl on three feet, SQ 1886, from Shaft 92 [Fig. 9, bottom], is the first

example of its type, made of Nile B1 clay, turned on the wheel, and red-slipped. There are traces of burning on the inside surface. Similar traces can be seen inside a tray SQ 1843 found in the surface *dakka* layer; it is handmade of Nile B2 (punted bottom, rim coiled) with surface left untreated [Fig. 9,

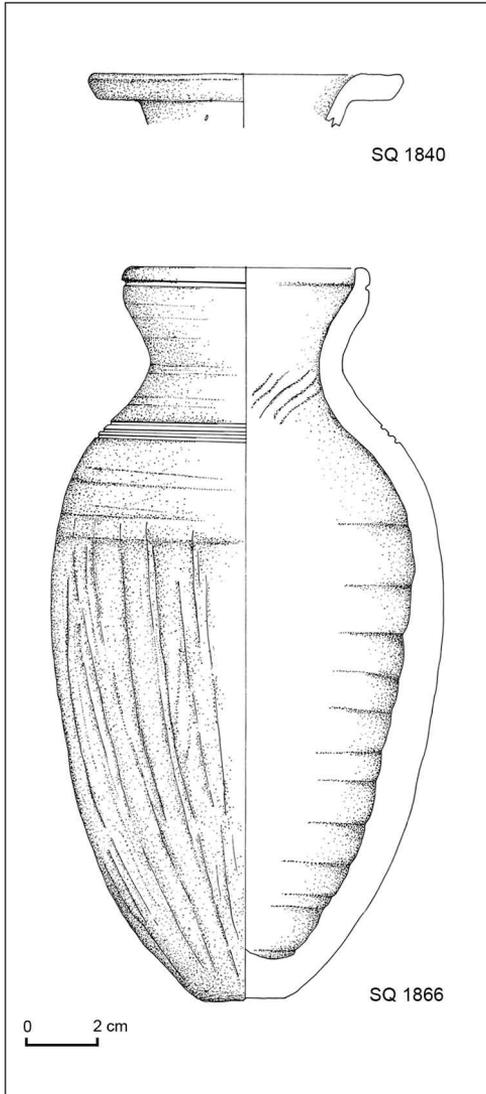


Fig. 7. Fragment of rim (top) and jar from Shaft 98

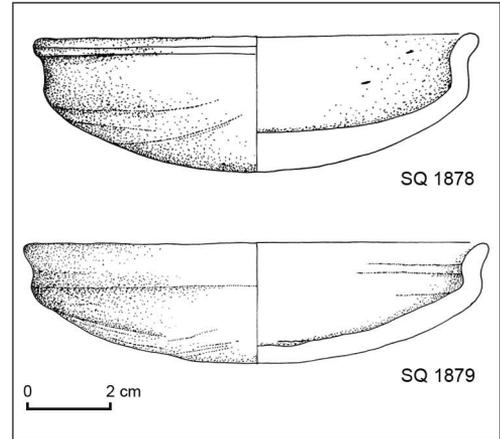


Fig. 8. Meidum bowls from Shaft 98

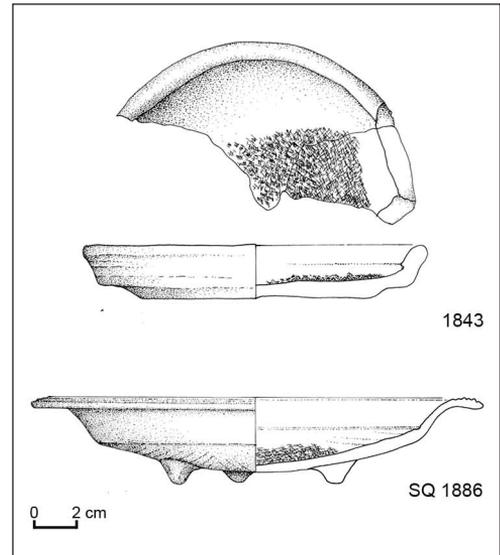


Fig. 9. Tray (top) and bowl on three feet from Shaft 92

top]. Vessels of this kind were used as movable heaters/ovens for cooking and warming food in pots or for roasting meat as shown in wall paintings from Old Kingdom funerary chapels (Faltings 1998: 238, Dok.

14, 240, Dok. 18). It cannot be proved that these vessels served a similar function in the necropolis, but it is quite probable considering that offerings were burned as part of the mortuary cult.

NEW KINGDOM, LATE AND GRAECO-ROMAN PERIODS

Pottery of the New Kingdom, which is seldom recorded at the site, is presumed to be connected with the brick platform adjoining the enclosure wall of the complex of Netjerykhet. It is there that a pottery offering deposit of the terminal Eighteenth and incipient Nineteenth Dynasties was discovered in 2001 (Rzeuska 2001: 155–157, Figs 3–4). Further sherds of a beer jar from this period were discovered this season during clearing of the platform surface. Most of these sherds, however, are non-diagnostic fragments made of a sandy variant of Nile B1 clay.

Vessels attributed to the Late and Graeco-Roman periods are connected with the Upper Necropolis. This assemblage, originating mostly from the surface layers or superimposed directly on the *dakka*, is modest, fragmented, coated with salty encrustation. One of the sherds belongs to a large jar of the kind used for storing remains of the mummification process. A joining sherd found ten years earlier in the general area of Merefnebef's complex proves the degree of fragmentation of this material, while giving hope that missing fragments of already excavated pots can still be found in the future.

REFERENCES

- Arnold, Do., Bourriau, J.
1993 *An introduction to Ancient Egyptian pottery* [=SDAIK 17], Mainz am Rhein
- Edel, E.
2008 *Die Felsgräbernekropole der Qubbet el-Hawa bei Assuan. I. Abteilung (Band 1–3). Die Architektur, Darstellungen, Texte, archäologischer Befund und Funde der Gräber QH 24–QH 209*, Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh
- Faltings, D.
1998 *Die Keramik der Lebensmittelproduktion im Alten Reich. Ikonographie und Archäologie eines Gebrauchsartikels* [=SAGA 14], Heidelberg
- Gardiner, A.
1969 *Egyptian Grammar*, London: Oxford University Press
- Junker, H.
1929 *Untersuchungen im Westfriedhof bei der Cheopspyramide von Gise, I. Die Mastabas der IV Dynastie auf dem Westfriedhof* [=DAWW/DÖAW 69], Vienna–Leipzig
- Firth, C.M., Quibell, J.E.
1935 *Excavations at Saqqara. The Step Pyramid, I*, Cairo: IFAO

Rzeuska, T.I.

2001 West Saqqara 2000. The Pottery, *PAM XII [=Reports 2000]*, 138–147

2002 West Saqqara 2001. The Pottery, *PAM XIII [=Reports 2001]*, 151–158

2006 *Pottery of the Late Old Kingdom. Funerary Pottery and Burial Customs, Saqqara II*,
Warsaw: ZAS PAN and Neriton