

KERMA HORIZON POTTERY FROM THE
CEMETERIES IN EL-GAMAMIYA

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Survey fieldwork in the Fourth Cataract area in 2007 uncovered, among others, two cemeteries from the Kerma and Pan-Grave cultures (sites El-Gamamiya 19 and El-Gamamiya 55). The survey and excavations in El-Gamamiya were carried out under the supervision of Piotr Osypiński as part of the bigger PCMA salvage project directed for the Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology of the University of Warsaw by Dr. Marek Chłodnicki from the Poznań Archaeological Museum (for the overall survey report, see above, in this volume).

The excavations at site GM55 recorded 12 tumuli from whence came several dozen whole pots and numerous broken pieces left from the pillaging of the tombs already in antiquity (for the excavations of GM55 as well as GM19, see preceding report by P. Osypiński in this volume). Testing of the tumulus cemetery at site GM19, where a number of graves was noted on the surface, yielded a surface collection of pottery as well as three vessels from the furnishings of a child's tomb (T.1), these including a bottle imported from Egypt (see below, appendix by T.I. Rzeuska). The other excavated tomb, which had been plundered already in antiquity, yielded no ceramics.

The pottery from the graves in the two cemeteries can be dated to the *Kerma Moyen* (2100–1750 BC) and *Kerma Classique* (1750–1580 BC) periods (Gratien 1986: 12; Privati 2000), known also as Old Kush II and

Old Kush III (El-Tayeb, Kołosowska 2005: 53), as well as the times of the Pan-Grave Culture (2000–1500 BC) (Trigger 1976: 105).

The assemblage of Kerma Culture pottery from GM55 is of particular importance owing to the extensive repertoire of handmade forms with decoration (especially from tomb T.3) that is encountered also in Kerma and on the island of Sai. This is an important observation as up to now the ceramics from the Fourth Cataract region had been considered as quite provincial in character, exhibiting little of the quality of execution known from the big centers of Kerma culture.

Most of the finds represent locally produced black-topped red- or brown-burnished wares. The pots are on the whole well made, finely pebble-burnished, the exterior registering as red on the Munsell scale (10 R4/8 and 10 R4/6), the interior as black or gray (Munsell 2.5YR N 2.5/0 and 2.5 YR N 3/0). The fabric is a fine, compact and hard clay, tempered with straw chaff, lime, quartz and abundant mica, occasionally hematite. Clay with abundant mica (large flakes from 3 to 4 mm) was characteristic of the Kerma horizon ceramic production.

Vessels are thin-walled, ranging from 2.5 to 4 mm in thickness. Rims are characteristically blackened with a band of orange immediately below, while the rest of the pot exterior is a glossy red. The blackened top is

related to the manner of firing (Gratien 1978: 226–228). The thin-walled assemblage from graves T.1, T.2, T.11, represents quality wares modeled on the production originating from the pottery center at Kerma (as indicated by the specific character of the products, their form and decoration) in the *Kerma Classique* period.

The tulip-shaped vase from grave T.12 [Fig. 2,n] is also an important chronological indicator, dating the tomb and its content to the *Kerma Classique* period (Gratien 1986: 12, 292–293, Fig. 236/b–c).

The author's observations made on the ceramic material coming from the PCMA survey in 2007 of the districts of El-Gamamiya, El-Ar and Keheili leaves no doubt as to the predominance of Kerma-period wares in this part of the Fourth Cataract (next to the Christian and Islamic pottery assemblages collected from the region). This is proof of intensive Kerma Culture settlement of the area, already suggested by the extensive pottery finds from tumuli of Kerma date made by the GAME expedition from Gdańsk at Wad Umm Rahau, El Argub, Abu Haraz (El-Tayeb, Kołosowska 2005: 53–60, Fig. 9/a–b,e). Identical Kerma material was

recorded also by the SARS Anglo-German Survey in the Fourth Cataract area (Pawel Wolf, pers. comm.).

In turn, the highly specific engraved decoration and intentionally blackened top, characteristic of Pan-Grave culture, are known also from Sayala in northern Nubia (Bietak 1966; Sadr 1987: Fig. 4/type: aa, bb) and from sites in the southern desert regions (Erkowit, Khor Arbaat, Agordat, Kassala, Southern Atbai). Pottery of this type is known from the Nile Valley from Asyut through the region of the Second Cataract (Sadr 1987: 265–267, Fig. 1). The presence of this kind of pottery in the graves at El-Gamamiya is proof of contacts with, perhaps even settlement in the Fourth Cataract area of a Pan-Grave population which is identified with the Medjay (Sadr 1987: 265–269; Trigger 1976: 104; Adams 1977: 215; Säve-Söderbergh 1941: 139).

The pottery assemblage from the two cemeteries excavated this season in El-Gamamiya by a Polish team has provided the grounds for dating the burials to 2100–1500 BC. It has also contributed to the overall knowledge of the character of Kerma ceramics in the Fourth Cataract region in the period in question.

CATALOGUE OF POTTERY FINDS

GM55: TOMB T.1

1. Bowl [Fig. 1,a], decorated with a molded relief band under the rim; exterior dark brown, interior black.
2. Bowl [Fig. 1,b], profiled black-topped rim with orange band below; exterior red, interior black (polished surface, glossy).
3. Bowl [Fig. 1,c], undecorated, black-topped rim, grayish-orange discoloration below it on the exterior.
4. Bowl [Fig. 1,d], hemispherical, rounded

rim, black-topped with an orange band underlining it.

5. Large bowl [Fig. 1,e], hemispherical, profiled yellow-topped rim; oblique incisions in a band under the rim and engraved motif centrally on the underside.
6. Bowl [Fig. 1,f], profiled black-topped rim, criss-cross pattern in a band below it.
7. Small bowl [Fig. 1,g], fragment, incurved rim; brown exterior, band of engraved criss-cross pattern under the rim.

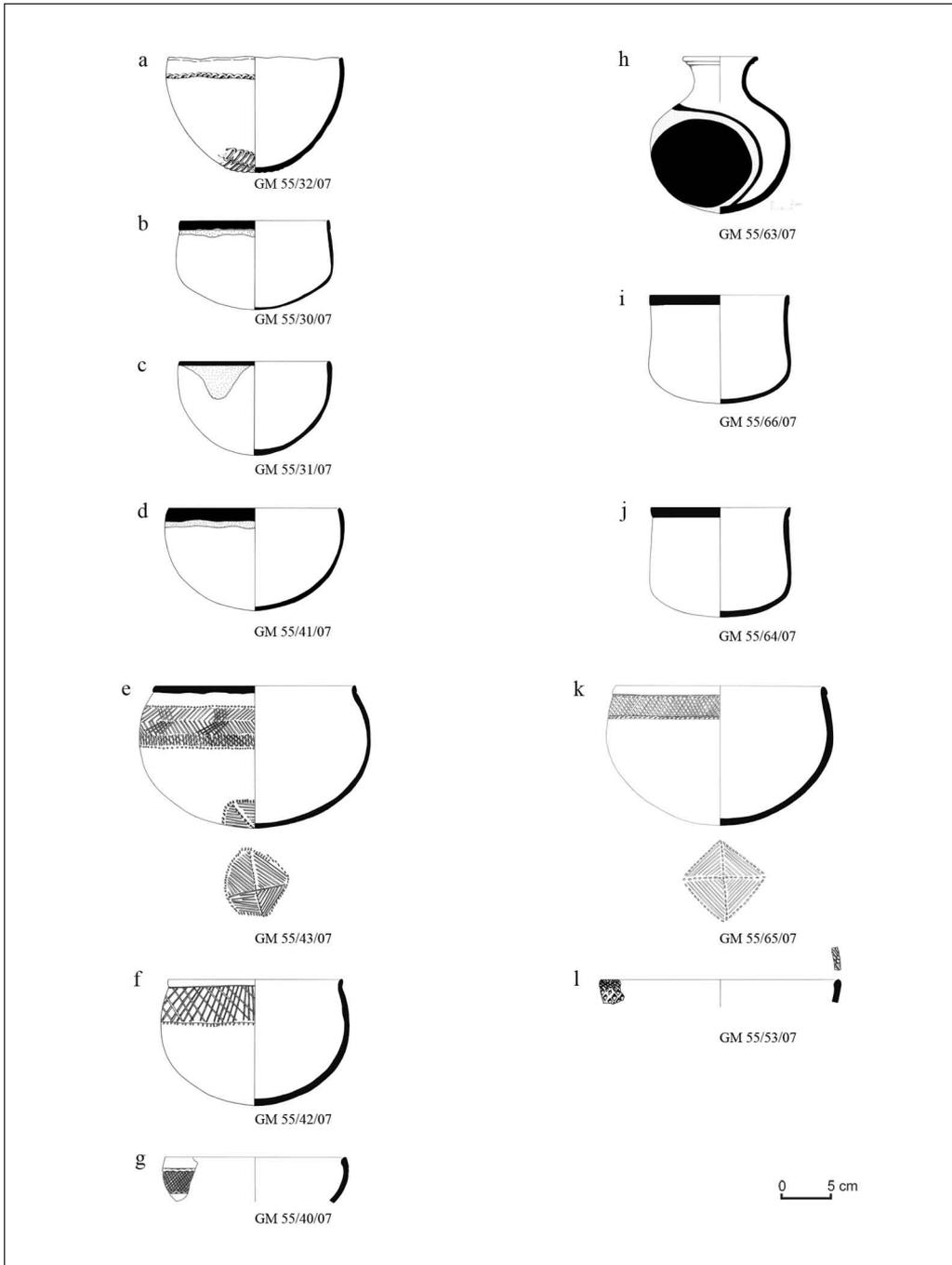


Fig. 1 *El-Gamamiya 55: a-g) pottery from tomb T.1; h-l) pottery from tomb T.2 (Drawings by the author)*

Dating: *Kerma Moyen* (2100–1750 BC) (Gratien 1986: 12, 92–93, Fig. 86/e, 275–276, Fig. 222/f; Kołosowska, El-Tayeb 2003: 118, Fig. 3/I), Pan-Grave Culture (1700–1520 BC) (Wildung 1996: 68, cat. no. 75; Sadr 1987: Fig. 4/type cc).

GM55: TOMB T.2

1. Small bottle [Fig. 1,b], profiled rim, orange and black discoloration on the body exterior characteristic of Kerma Culture production.

2. Cup [Fig. 1,i], thickened rim, black-topped for emphasis, straight walls, rounded bottom.

3. Cup [Fig. 1,j], everted profiled rim, black-topped for emphasis; rounded bottom.

4. Large bowl [Fig. 1,k], hemispherical, profiled rim with engraved band of criss-cross pattern below it; geometric motif engraved centrally on underside.

5. Bowl [Fig. 1,l], fragment, finely molded geometric decoration on rim edge and exterior below the rim. The piece is stylistically different from the rest of the ceramics in the tomb and may have been reused in the context of the grave furnishings, as it can be dated on stylistic grounds to the *Kerma Ancien* period (2500–2000 BC) (Gratien 1986: 12, 411, Fig. 307).

Dating: *Kerma Moyen* (2100–1750 BC) (Gratien 1986: 12, 146, Fig. 136/b, 158–159, Fig. 147/c–d; Privati 2000: 180, Fig. 131/3; Kołosowska, El-Tayeb 2003, 118, Fig. 3/I), Pan-Grave Culture (2000–1500 BC) (Sadr 1987: 267, Fig. 4/type aa, cc).

GM55: TOMB T.3

1. Bottle [Fig. 2,a], straight rim, short distinct neck, band of engraved alternate oblique lines around the shoulder. Quality red ware.

2. Bowl with decoration [Fig. 2,b], quality ware, straight walls, rounded bottom. Relief band painted yellow under the rim, sandwiched between grooved lines.

3. Small bowl [Fig. 2,c], fragment, thickened

gray rim with band of criss-cross pattern below it, sandwiched between lines of punctures.

4. Small bowl [Fig. 2,d], fragment, band of engraved oblique criss-cross pattern below rim, sandwiched between bands of oblique incisions. Quality black-topped ware.

5. Small cup [Fig. 2,e], profiled rim; lines of impressed oblique dashes and dots on rim and exterior.

Dating: *Kerma Moyen* (2100–1750 BC) (Gratien 1986: 12; Privati 2000: Fig. 134/11), Pan-Grave Culture (1700–1520 BC) (Wildung 1996: 69, cat. no. 76; Sadr 1987: Fig. 4/type cc).

GM55: TOMB T.4

1. Large bowl [Fig. 2,f], thickened undercut rim, black-topped; rounded bottom. Quality red ware.

2. Small bowl [Fig. 2,g], profiled rim marked with a white band; biconical body with white band around it emphasizing vessel tectonics; rounded bottom. Quality ware.

3. Cup [Fig. 2,h], straight walls, rounded bottom; black-topped rim with orange band below it, red ware.

Dating: *Kerma Classique* (1750–1580 BC) (Gratien 1986: 12, 296, Fig. 240/c).

GM55: TOMB T.5

1. Miniature bowl [Fig. 2,i], brown ware, very poor quality (short firing process); rounded rim without decoration. The other bowl from this grave was of even worse quality and disintegrated.

Dating: *Kerma Moyen* (2100–1750 BC) (Gratien 1986: 12).

GM55: TOMB T.8

1. Large bowl [Fig. 2,j], fragment; red ware, black-topped, band of engraved oblique lines below the rim.

Dating: Pan-Grave Culture (2000–1500 BC) (Sadr 1987: 267, Fig. 5).

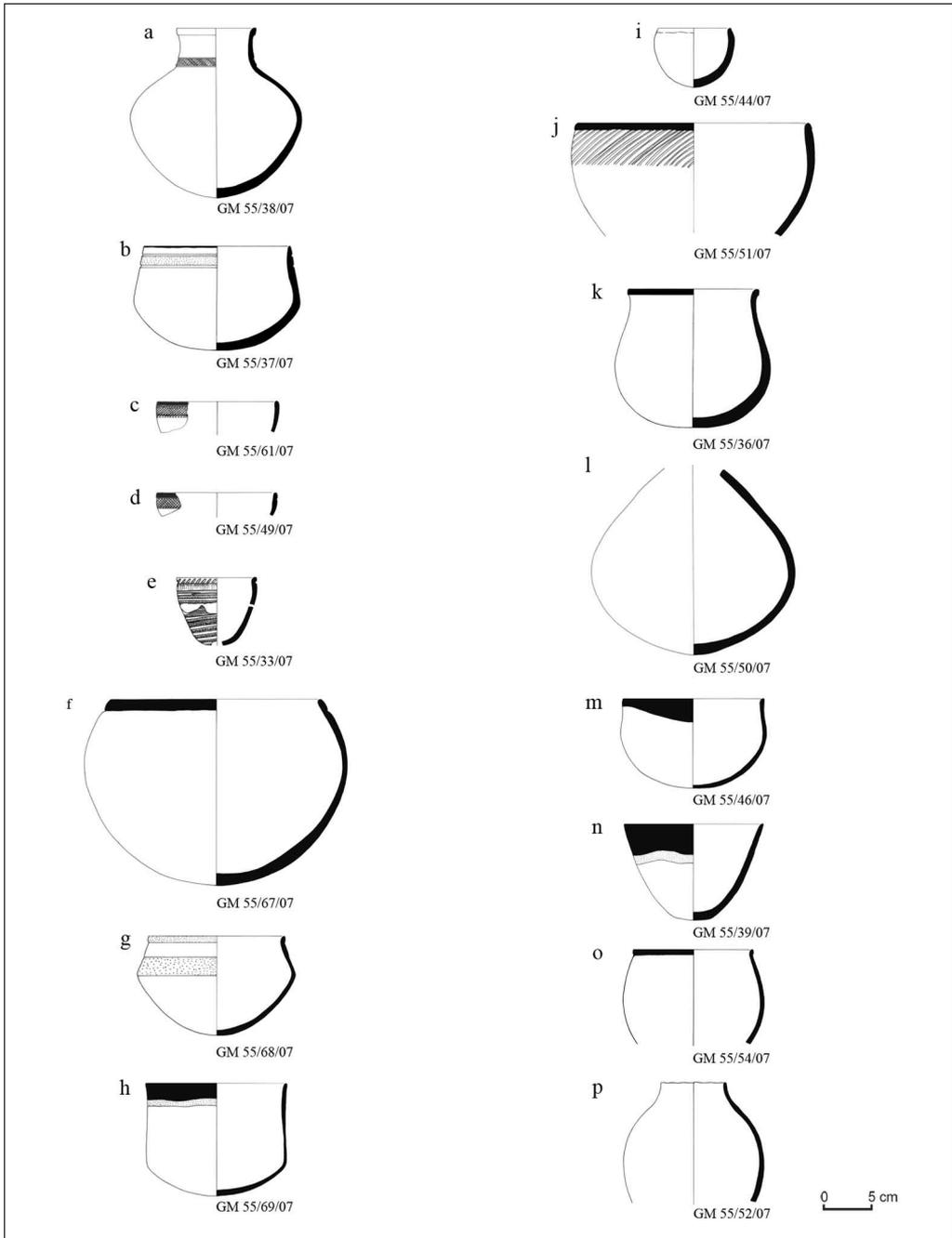


Fig. 2. *El-Gamamiya SS: a-e) pottery from tomb T.3; f-h) pottery from tomb T.4; i) pottery from tomb T.5; j) pottery from tomb T.8; k-m) pottery from tomb T.11; n-p) pottery from tomb T.12 (Drawings by the author)*

GM55: TOMB T.11

1. Cup [Fig. 2,k], red ware, thickened black-topped rim and rounded bottom.
 2. Bottle [Fig. 2,l], body fragment with rounded bottom; pale brown ware, unslipped.
 3. Bowl [Fig. 2,m], everted black-topped rim, rounded bottom; red ware of good quality.
- Dating: *Kerma Moyen* (2100–1750 BC) (Gratien 1986: 12, 177, Fig. 159/f, 228, Fig. 192/d, 133–134, Fig. 127/e).

GM55: TOMB T.12

1. Cup [Fig. 2,n], tulip-shaped type, quality red ware; black-topped rim with orange band below it.
 2. Cup [Fig. 2,o], fragment, profiled black-topped rim, red ware.
 3. Cooking pot [Fig. 2,p], fragment, everted wavy rim, rounded body; short firing process resulted in poor quality ware.
- Dating: *Kerma Classique* (1750–1580 BC) (Gratien 1986: 12, 292–293, Fig. 236/b–c, 307–308, Fig. 249/c; Gratien 1978: 35–36, Fig. 7/a; Privati 2000: Fig. 132/10).

GM55: POTTERY FROM THE
STONE LININGS

1. Small bowl [Fig. 3,a], fragment, red ware, gray-topped profiled rim.
2. Bowl [Fig. 3,b], fragment, thin-walled red ware, black-topped profiled rim.
3. Bowl [Fig. 3,c], fragment, globular body, profiled black-topped rim, traces of burnishing inside.
4. Bowl [Fig. 3,d], fragment, red ware, everted black-topped rim.
5. Small bowl [Fig. 3,e], fragment, thin-walled red ware, pre-firing engraved frieze on the exterior composed of vertical lines above horizontal lines.
6. Small bowl [Fig. 3,f], fragment, thin-walled, straight sides; black-topped rim, below it engraved frieze of alternate criss-cross pattern sandwiched between bands of oblique incisions. Quality red ware.

7. Small bowl [Fig. 3,g], fragment, black-topped profiled rim, below it engraved frieze of alternate engraved criss-cross pattern sandwiched between lines. Very good thin-walled red ware.

8. Bowl [Fig. 3,h], fragment, red ware; thickened black-topped rim, below it on body engraved frieze of oblique criss-cross lines sandwiched between bands of oblique dashes.

9. Bowl [Fig. 3,i], fragment, red ware; thickened rim, below it engraved frieze of alternate oblique lines sandwiched between grooved lines.

10. Large bowl [Fig. 3,j], fragment, black-topped rim, decorated on body with an engraved frieze of alternate oblique lines sandwiched between bands of oblique incisions. Quality thin-walled red ware.

11. Cup [Fig. 3,k], fragment, black-topped red ware.

12. Imported vessel [Fig. 3,l], fragments, yellow ware, very good quality (see below, appendix).

13. Small bowl [Fig. 3,m], fragment, red ware; bottom pressed in; decoration engraved deeply on the bottom and body before firing.

14. Small bowl [Fig. 3,n], fragment, red ware, everted rim, engraved wavy line running around body.

15. Large bowl [Fig. 3,o], fragment, red ware; everted rim, traces of burnishing inside, engraved irregularly spaced lines decorating the body.

16. Large bowl [Fig. 3,p], fragment, red ware; deeply engraved oblique dashes on body, traces of burnishing on the inside.

Dating: *Kerma Moyen* (2100–1750 BC) (Gratien 1986: 12; Privati 2000: 180, Fig. 131/3; Borcowski, Paner 2005: 63, Fig. 7; Kołosowska, El-Tayeb 2003: 118–120, Fig. 3), Pan-Grave Culture (1700–1520 BC) (Wildung 1996: 68–69, cat. no. 74, 76; Sadr 1987: Figs 4/type cc, 5).

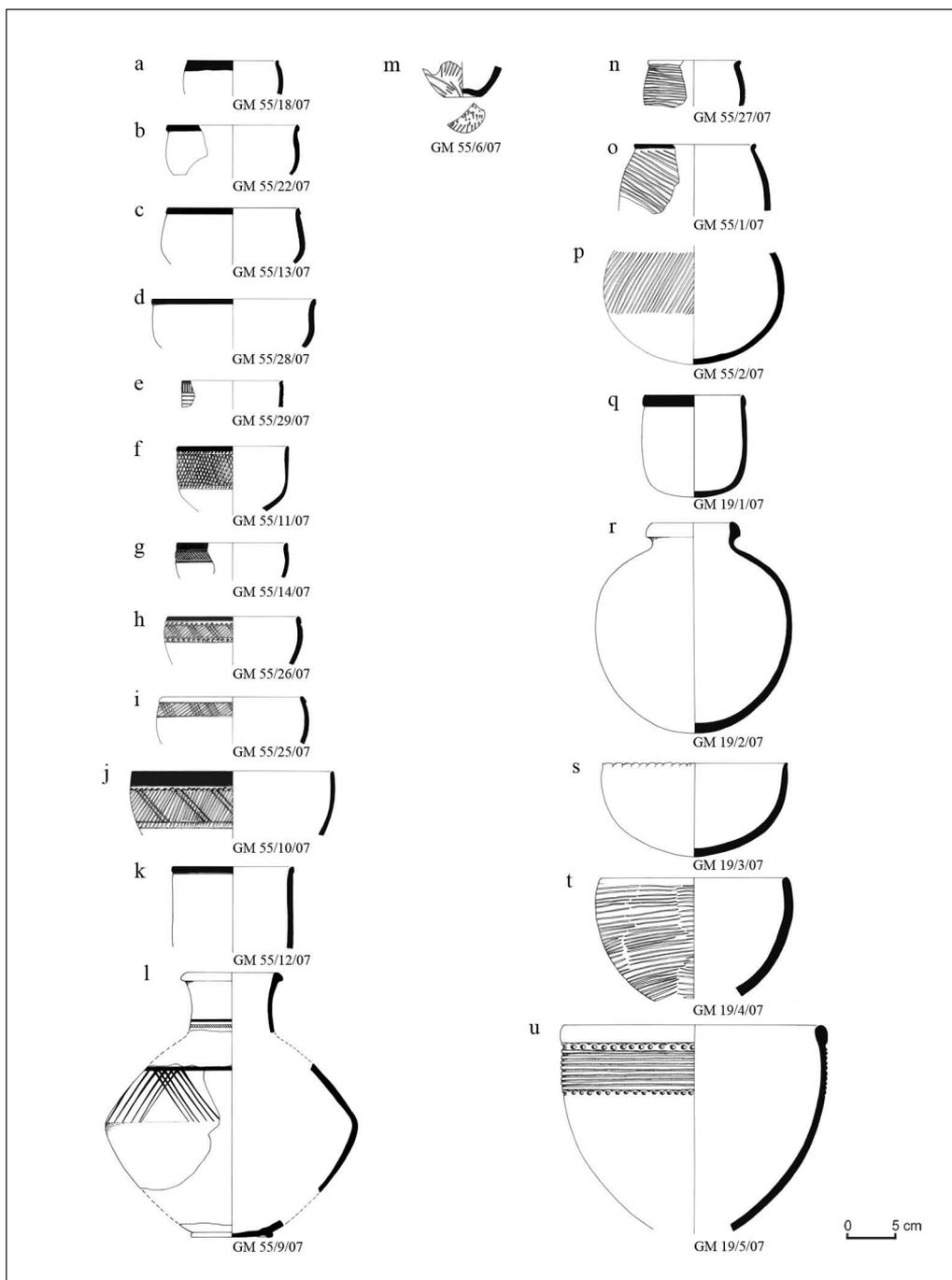


Fig. 3 *El-Gamamiya 55: a-p) pottery from the stone tomb kerbs; El-Gamamiya 19: q-u) pottery from tomb T.1 (Drawings by the author)*

GM19: TOMB T.1

1. Cup [Fig. 3,q], quality red ware; exterior burnished, rim articulated and painted black.
2. Globular pot, imported [Fig. 3,r], yellow-red ware of very good quality (see below, appendix).
3. Bowl [Fig. 3,s], red ware; molded decoration on rim, traces of burnishing inside.
4. Bowl [Fig. 3,t], yellow-red ware, unslipped; traces of burnishing on inside

walls, rim angled to the inside; irregular bands of pre-firing incisions on body exterior.

5. Large bowl [Fig. 3,u], unslipped, thickened rim, below it pre-firing engraved decoration in the form of lines sandwiched between rows of oval depressions.

Dating: *Kerma Moyen* (2100–1750 BC) (Gratien 1986: 12; Borcowski, Paner 2005: 63, Fig. 7).

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