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SAQQARA 2006: THE POTTERY

Teodozja Izabela Rzeuska

Excavations in 2006 were focused on the eastern part of the explored site, in the sector of the necropolis directly adjoining the enclosure wall of the Netjerykhet funerary complex (see above, report by

K. Myśliwiec in this volume). Most of the pottery assemblage represented the late Old Kingdom with the rest forming small groups dated to the Archaic, early Old Kingdom, New Kingdom and later periods.

ARCHAIC – EARLY OLD KINGDOM (THIRD–FOURTH DYNASTIES)

Seldom represented in the material from the West Saqqara burial ground, Archaic Period sherds have been limited so far mainly to fragments of bowls with orange- or light red-slipped and burnished or “half-burnished” surface(s) (Rzeuska 2004: 202-205, Pl. LXXXIX). This year for the first time other vessel types have been recorded. One such type is a tall jar(s) with rolled rim, tapering body and rounded base with or without rope bands around shoulder, waist, and bottom (often referred to as a “wine jar”), handmade of Marl A1(?) with red-slipped and burnished outer surface. The nearest parallels were discovered in the Archaic necropolis at Saqqara, giving a date for these sherds in the First-Second Dynasties (Emery 1954: *Fig. 97*; 1958: Pls LXXII, XXX). Other types include a small cylindrical jar with flat base, handmade of Marl A2. In both cases, however, nothing but body sherds have been collected, making precise typological identification impossible. The fragments were found in context with late Old

Kingdom pottery in the sector directly adjacent to the step pyramid's enclosure wall. So far it has not proved possible to determine the original place of these vessels.

Pottery from the early Old Kingdom is much more prolific, which is hardly surprising in view of the appreciably big group recovered earlier from the site (Rzeuska 2002: 151-153). To date, two types of jars and one type of bowl have been recorded (Rzeuska 2002: 151-153), and they were present in the material from this season as well. The most numerous were beer jars handmade of Nile B2 or C with untreated surfaces. Rims with the characteristic groove a few centimeters below the edge, represented by fragment SQ 06-1808 (Dia.rim 8-9 cm), are the most common, while bases, such as SQ 06-1707 and SQ 06-1780 [*Fig. 1*],¹ apparently shapeless and not distinctive, are actually easily recognizable. They are massive, very thick and narrow, especially in comparison with the bases of late Old Kingdom beer jars; on the outside there is often a little

1 All drawings by the author, inking by M. Orzechowska.

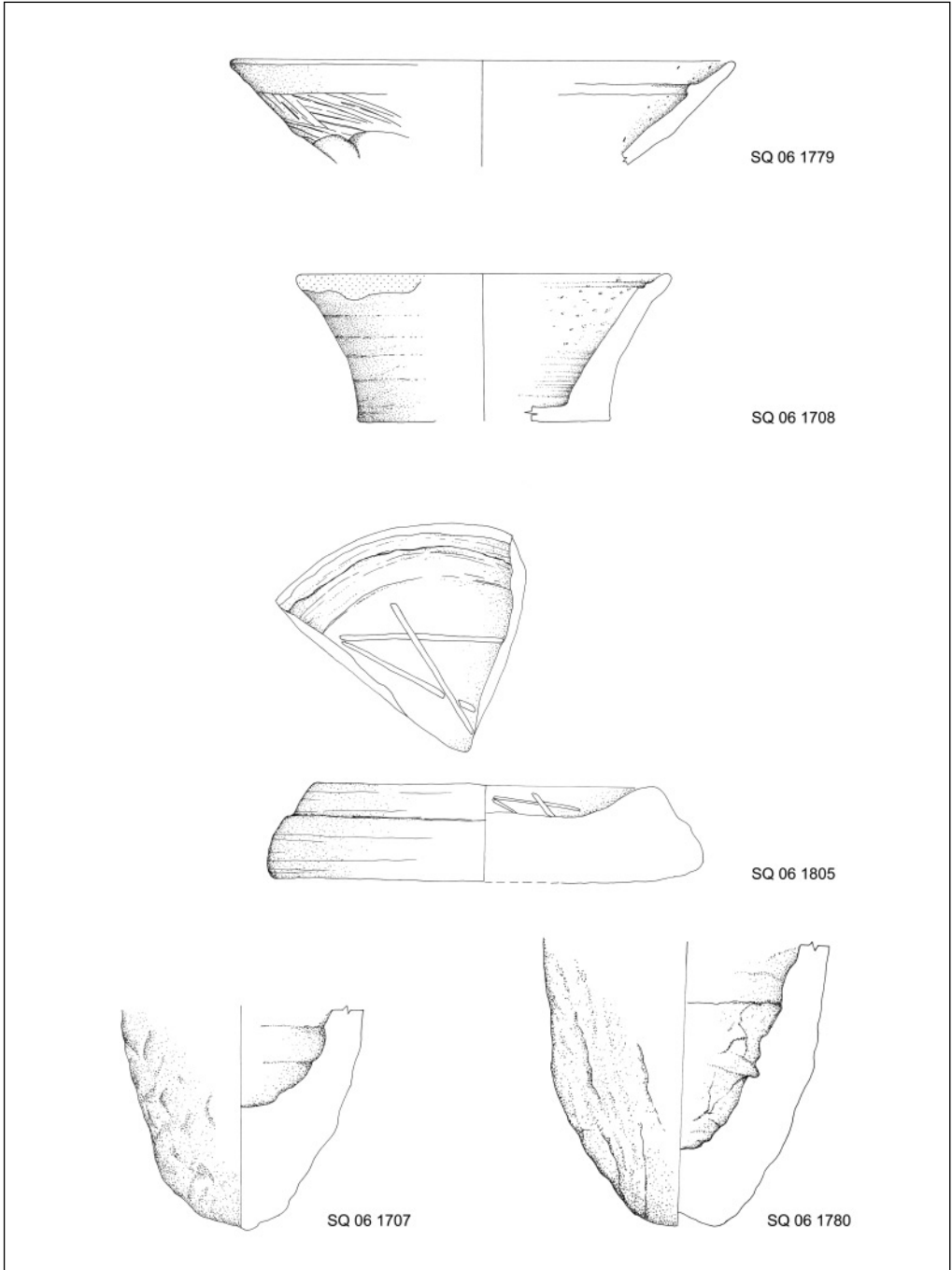


Fig. 1. Early Old Kingdom pottery from the West Saqqara necropolis

depression and on the inside deep horizontal grooves, both evidence for the technique of pinching and hollowing.

Large ovoid jars with trefoil rim were equally common as beer jars. They featured a little indent in the rim on the inside, short neck, wide shoulders and rounded bottom. Judging from the preserved fragments, these jars could be at least 80-100 cm high, with a maximum body diameter of c. 60 cm. They were handmade of marl or mixed² clay by coiling, only the rim being more regularly shaped, perhaps even turned on a tournette. The joining of the rim to the rest of the body is very distinct, the wall here uneven in thickness and marked on the inside with a hollowing and vertical smearing to conceal the joining.

A few dozen fragments of wheel-made bowls (or lids?) with an inner ledge were found. These vessels of Nile B2 clay with untreated surfaces and a characteristic scraped base are represented by fragment SQ 06-1708 (Dia.rim 19.5 cm) [*Fig. 1*].

A few previously not recorded types were now recognized in the early Old Kingdom assemblage. One is a small, low tray with rounded rim. Made of Nile C clay, this vessel (SQ 06-1805; Dia.rim 14 cm,

Dia.base 18 cm, H. 4; *Fig. 1*) had the base made by pounding and the walls probably by pinching. The surfaces were natural (uncoated) and inside there was a prefiring potmaker's (?) mark resembling the hieroglyph *mr* (Gardiner's U7). Another previously unnoted type is a simple-rimmed bowl with characteristic partly grooved inner surface, bell-shaped body, and flat base, e.g. SQ 06-1779 (Dia.rim 20 cm, Dia.base 24 cm, H. 6 cm; *Fig. 1*)³. Handmade of Nile C, it has the bottom pounded and the walls coiled. Its inner surface is entirely red-slipped, while the outer surface is partly red-slipped (on the rim) and partly natural (untreated).

Early Old Kingdom vessels appear to have been concentrated especially within the area of Shafts 94-97, which neighbor directly with the Netjerykhet complex. They were found in mixed archaeological contexts, always in association with late Old Kingdom pottery, which means that they were in secondary position. Their original provenance cannot be established, but the proximity of the step pyramid compound makes it highly probable that the vessels came from there.⁴ It is at present impossible to date this assemblage more precisely than to the Third-Fourth Dynasty.

LATE OLD KINGDOM

Most of the pottery from the late Old Kingdom discovered during the 2006 season represented vessel types already identified and published regularly in previous years (annually in PAM and most recently Rzeuska 2006). Beer jars were as

usual in dominance, but unlike earlier seasons bread molds were much rarer. Meriting attention are some types which have so far gone under-represented, as well as pottery deposits from two burial shafts (nos. 84 and 100).

2 P.38 in the local clay typology. This clay resembles closely the mixed clay P.60 from the late Old Kingdom and it may belong to the same family, but this will be confirmed only after petrographic chemical analyses are completed. Rims of similar shape but made of Marl C1 have already been recorded, e.g. SQ 01-999; it is not clear, however, whether they represented the same type of jar as nothing but the rims have been preserved, cf. Rzeuska 2002: 151-153, *Fig. 1*.

3 Hawass, Senussi 2008: 166 no. A 81, 288 HW3.

4 In areas west of the compound enclosure wall, Early Old Kingdom material is found in much smaller quantities.

The group of vessels made of Mixed clay P.60 was richly represented this year. The material includes typical, already well studied medium- and big-sized tall and slender jars: forms nos 15 (Rzeuska 2006: 116-117 and 389-391; 2007: 186-187, Fig. 3), 18-19 (Rzeuska 2006: 122-125 and 391-392, Pl. IX,1 and 4), and 22 (Rzeuska 2006: 132-133 and 393-394, Pl. VIII,4; 2007: 186-187, Fig. 3) in the local typology. Closed forms were once again in preponderance; open vessels were quite rare (Rzeuska 2006: 42-44, Pl. 3), bowls meriting particular attention. This is the second fragment of an open form made of P.60 clay from the West Saqqara necropolis⁵ and it represents a medium-sized bowl, form 136 (Rzeuska 2006: 234-235, 411), with a modeled rim (SQ 06-1734; Dia.rim 20 cm, Dia.max. 24 cm; Fig. 2). The outer surface has a thin pinkish-white (7.5 YR 8/2) self-slip, while the inside is natural red (10 R 5/6). The difference in the coloring is due most probably to restricted access of sufficient oxygen to the inside of the bowl during firing. The vessel was found in Burial Shaft 18, in a deposit of beer jars from the fourth phase of the West Saqqara cemetery, that is, the second half of the reign of Pepy II and later. It is dated therefore to this period.

Rare in this material are the sherds of another jar, namely SQ 06-1747 (Dia.rim 9 cm, Dia.max. 13 cm; Fig. 2). This wheel-made vessel of Nile B2 has a white-slipped outer surface (5 YR 8/2 pinkish white, inner surface 2.5 YR 5/4 reddish brown), which puts it in a little known group of white-slipped wares, represented so far by only a few sherds (Rzeuska 2006: 148-149 and 397). Precise dating is impossible due to the disturbed context in which it was found.

The small open forms not found before in material from the necropolis also merit attention. The small bowl SQ 06-1750 (Dia.rim 11.5 cm, Dia.max. 12 cm, H. 2.9 cm) has an inner modeled rim, carinated contour and rounded base. The vessel is made of Nile B1, thrown on the wheel, the base scraped. Both surfaces are red-slipped (10 R 5/8 red). It was found in an Old Kingdom period context, the pottery including particularly beer jars from phases III-IV, but unfortunately disturbed. However, it can be dated to this period because of such features as the gentle angle of the carination and the fact that the maximum diameter is at mouth level. The second example is small bowl SQ 06-1724 (Dia.rim 8.8 cm, Dia.base 5.2 cm, H. 3.8 cm) with simple rim, straight wall and flat base. It was wheel-made, too, and the bottom, largely unpreserved, was most likely smoothed. The clay is Nile B1 and both surfaces are red-slipped (outside 10 R 6/4 pale, inside 10 R 5/6 red). A dating more precise than to the late Old Kingdom is not possible for this vessel as it was discovered in a disturbed context with Old Kingdom pottery in the burial shafts 83 and 88.

The most interesting find was made in the burial chamber of Shaft 83. It is a small, red-slipped carinated jar (SQ 06-1822; Fig. 2), c. 15 cm high, which was found *in situ*, between the eastern side of the sarcophagus and the east wall of the chamber, even with the head of the deceased. It was wrapped in a textile and placed inside a plaited bag with long handles. The gray coating on the inside surface of the vessel presumably came from the substance that had once filled it. While more studies are needed, it can already be said that placing the vessel near the face of

5 The first was a sherd from a Meidum bowl (SQ 1679, form 184), cf. Rzeuska 2007: 189.

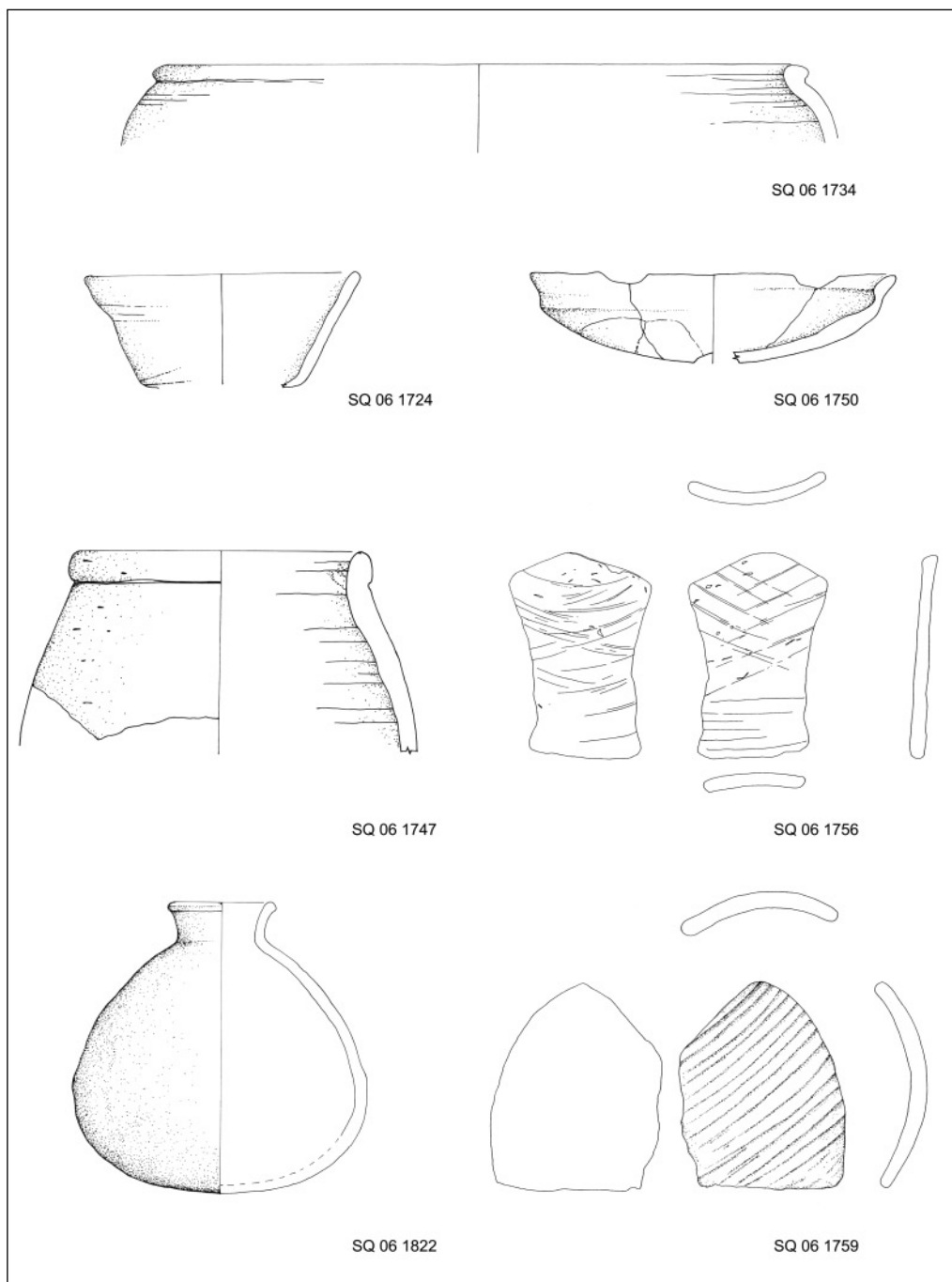


Fig. 2. Late Old Kingdom pottery from the West Saqqara necropolis

the deceased on the eastern side of the sarcophagus seems to be typical of late Old Kingdom burials in this necropolis (Rzeuska 2006: 438 and 443). An analogous find, albeit from a later period, of a jar in a plaited bag but without the wrapping textile was made at the cemetery in Kafr Ammar (Petrie, Mackay 1915: no. 23, Pl. XXVII; but no data on vessel dimensions, clay, surface treatment or provenience).

“Spades” were relatively richly represented in this season’s assemblage. This fairly common object was made from beer-jar or other big jar body sherds chosen for their relatively flat or slightly rounded profile. In shape they resemble a triangle, like SQ 06-1759 [Fig. 2], rhombus or polygon, like SQ 06-1756 [Fig. 2]. The edges are well polished and on the inside there is parallel ribbing, evidently coiling marks in the case of handmade vessels and wheel marks in vessels turned on the wheel, arranged at an angle with regard to the vertical axis of the “spade”.

The season was poor in deposits. No ritual shaft with remains of the funeral feast and the “Breaking of Red Vessels” rite was discovered and the remains from burial shafts, where vessels from the offering rituals were deposited, were few (Rzeuska 2006: 453-517). Even so, the assemblages from burial shafts 84 and 100 merit a discussion.

Shaft 84 was filled to a depth of 2.40 m with secondary material, including animal bones, potsherds, mainly beer jars, but also quite a few red-slipped bowls and plates, platters, some fragments of stands, inner stoppers, pieces of wood, limestone chunks with traces of drilling, charcoal (from palm

wood).⁶ At least two sherds of New Kingdom pottery confirm the secondary character of this fill.⁷ The underlying offering deposit, containing a preponderance of beer jars of type 4, 7-9, should be dated to phases III and IV in the functioning of the necropolis, that is, the reign of Pepy II (Rzeuska 2007: 382-388). The fill of the shaft yielded a few vessels, which were under-represented in the material discovered so far. First, there is a large platter with edged rim SQ 06-1773 (Dia.rim 27 cm, Dia.max. and base 19 cm, H. 3.5 cm; Fig. 3), handmade of Nile C, base by pounding, wall by pinching, probably overthrown. The inner surface and partly the outer one are red-slipped, while the base is over-scraped. It constitutes the first full profile of form 65 (Rzeuska 2006: 178-179 and 389-400). Another platter, representing form 75, is equally rare. It is a small vessel with short-ledged base SQ 06-1774 (Dia.rim 16 cm, Dia.max. and base 19 cm, H. 3.8 cm; Fig. 3). It is hand made of Nile C by pounding, with untreated surfaces (uncoated). Traces of burning can be seen on the edge. Both platters are dated to phase III. Also found in the shaft was a bent-sided plate with short-ledged rim SQ 06-1793 representing form 95 [Fig. 3] (Rzeuska 2006: 200-201, 402-404). The vessel is wheel-made of Nile B2 with scraped base and red-slipped both surfaces. Plates of this type are dated to phases III-IV, but the red-slipped surfaces on both sides point to phase III.⁸ In turn, the small plate SQ 06-1737 (Dia.rim 14.5 cm, Dia.max. 15 cm, Dia.base 8 cm, H. 1.7 cm; Fig. 3) is of a type not yet recorded in this necropolis. It is simple and flat-based,

6 I am indebted for the identification to Dr. Jarosław Zieliński of the Pomeranian Academy of Agriculture in Szczecin.

7 Among others, the fragment of funnel-necked jar SQ 06-1731 presented in this report.

8 Form 95 from phase IV has a red-slipped inner surface and only the rim outside, cf. Rzeuska 2006: 402.

made of Nile B2, thrown on the wheel with scraped base, both surfaces red-slipped (10 R 6/6 light red). Also of interest is a *Medium* bowl SQ 06-1727 (Dia.rim 18.8 cm, Dia.max. 20.6 cm; *Fig. 3*) made of Nile B1 with red-slipped and polished surfaces. It is the second example of form 181 from the necropolis, featuring a short, everted rim, dated probably also to phase III (Rzeuska 2006: 296-297, 416).⁹ Con-

sidering the dating of the beer jars and remaining pottery, it seems that the deposit from this burial shaft (no. 84) should be dated to phases III and IV of the necropolis, that is the reign of Pepy II or even slightly later.

The deposit from the other burial shaft (no. 100) was not disturbed. Already about a meter below the preserved top of the shaft it was found to be filled with

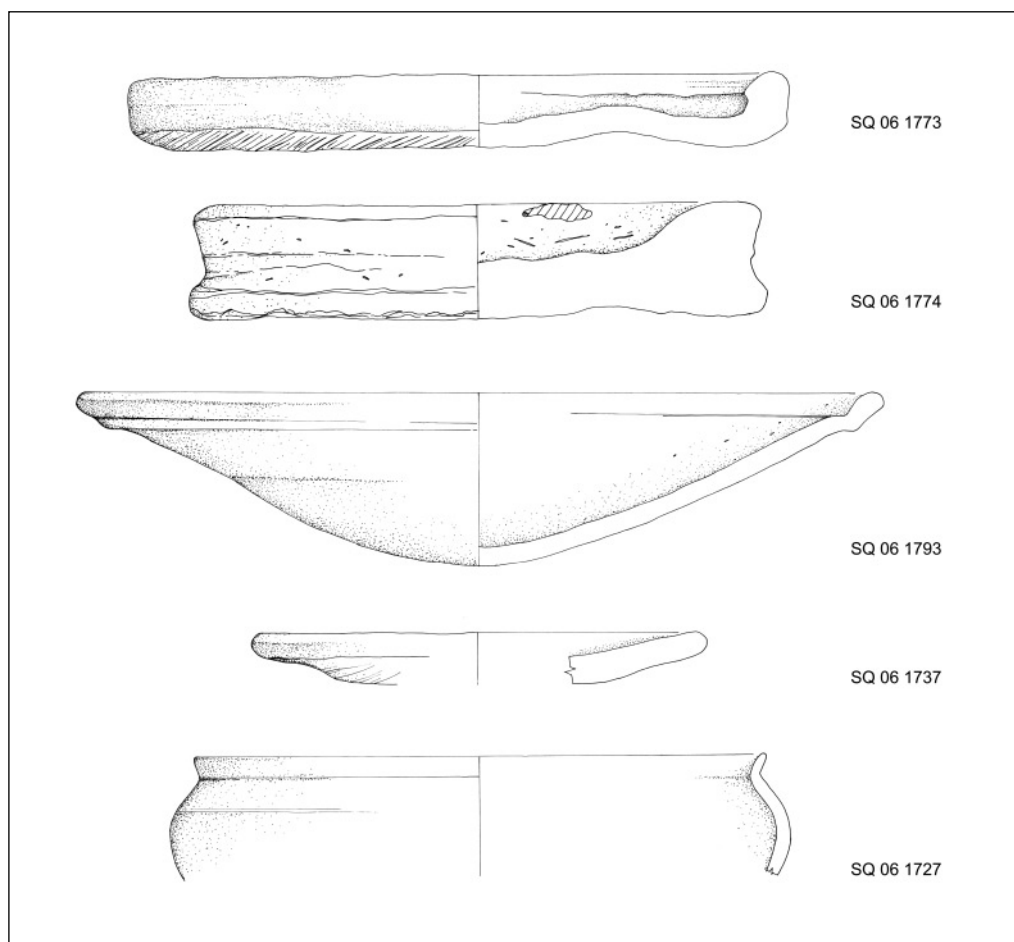


Fig. 3. Late Old Kingdom pottery from Shaft 84 in the West Saqqara necropolis

⁹ The Memphite necropolis has yet to produce a parallel for this form.

considerable amounts of potsherds, including mainly beer jars (forms 4, 9, and 11), a medium-large platter with red-slipped inner surface (probably form 53)¹⁰ and plates with rounded or ledged rim underlined with inner groove (forms 105 and 106=108) (Rzeuska 2006: 210-215, 402-406). Two intact bread moulds (form 210) with white painted rim merit a note as well. All these vessels occur in phase IV of the necropolis.

The deposit also contained two *Meidum* bowls with full outline preserved. The first, SQ 06-1792 (Dia. rim 25 cm, Dia.max. 25.6 cm, H. 9.2 cm; *Fig. 4*), represents form 182 (Rzeuska 2006: 296-299, 408-409, 417) with flaring, rounded rim and maximum diameter on the body; it was thrown on the wheel of a very fine variant of Nile B1, red-slipped (10 R 5/8 red) and polished. The second, SQ 06-1814 (Dia.rim. 26.6 cm, Dia.max 27 cm, H. 8.7 cm), is form 187, a shallow bowl with flaring rim and maximum diameter at the rim (Rzeuska 2006: 306-307, 408-

409, 417). It was made of Nile A, thrown on the wheel in two parts, the rim separately and the body separately, then joined at the shoulders, the joining smeared unsuccessfully. The bowl is red-slipped and polished (2.5 YR 5/8 red). Form 182 occurs in the necropolis in contexts dated to phases I-IV, the second solely in deposits from phases III-IV. The

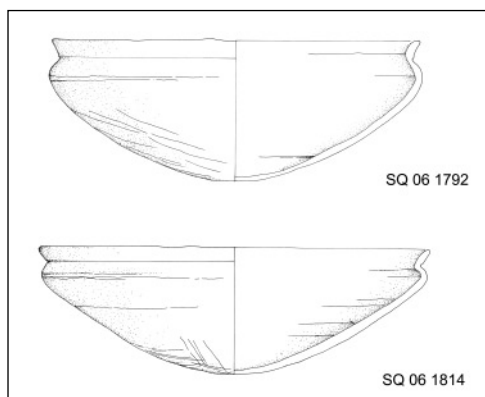


Fig. 4. Meidum bowls from Shaft 100 in the West Saqqara necropolis

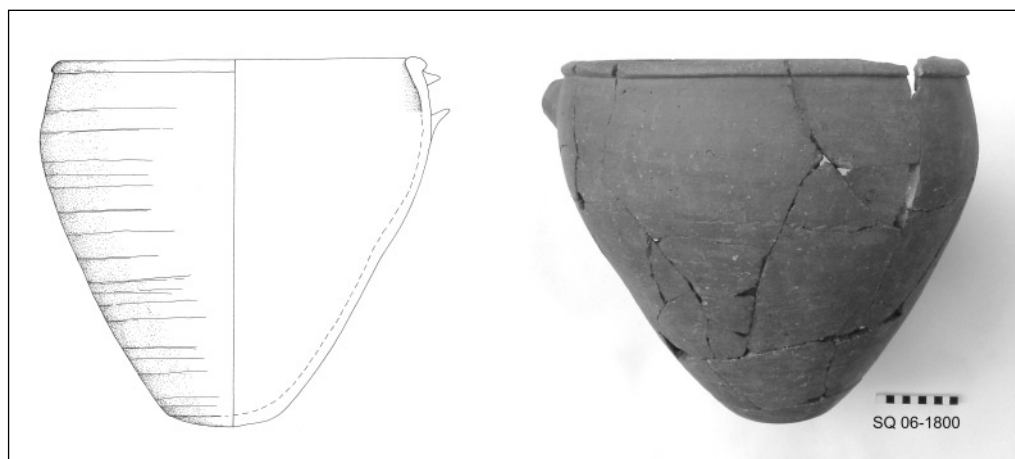


Fig. 5. Vat

¹⁰ This type is rare, but the fragment is too small unfortunately for a sure identification, cf. Rzeuska 2006: 170-171, 398-399.

presence of two typologically different vessels in one deposit is more proof that luxury vessels, which these bowls are definitely an example of, had a long circulation and dating a context exclusively on their basis can be misleading.

Another extremely interesting find is a vat with outside modeled rim and spout, slightly narrowing walls and flat base, SQ 06-1800 (Dia.rim 36 cm, max. 40.8 cm, base 12 cm, H. 37.8 cm; *Fig. 5*). Of Nile B2, it was made partly by coiling (middle part) and pinching/pounding (base), and partly on the wheel (upper part and rim), and the complete product was probably overturned on the wheel. The outer surface was red-slipped and polished (10 R 5/8 red), the slip inside is so worn that it can be observed only in places. Tomb represen-

tations and models from the Old Kingdom period indicate that vats of this kind were used for brewing beer (Faltings 1998: 199-203); scratch marks on the interior surface could be evidence for such usage. The vessel was found broken, but it proved possible to recompose, providing the first almost complete example of form 199 (Rzeuska 2006: 322-222, 418-149). Vats of this kind discovered so far originated from phase III of the necropolis; this one is the first to be dated to phase IV. Analogous vessels of practically the same size, dated to the Sixth Dynasty, were found in Giza (Type D-XXXV b, from mastaba G 5020 (Annex): Reisner, GN I: *Fig. 283*, GN II: *Fig. 117*, Pl. 55d). The deposit from Shaft 100 is chronologically homogeneous, originating from phase IV

NEW KINGDOM – ROMAN PERIOD

Later periods are represented by single, mostly small sherds from disturbed or surface archaeological contexts. Their condition – worn, salt encrusted surfaces and rounded edges – suggests frequent disturbance and/or exposure to atmospheric conditions. Determining their original provenience is impossible at present.

From the New Kingdom there is SQ 06-1741, which is a funnel necked jar [*Fig. 6*] made of Nile B2, with red-slipped outer surface (10 R 5/6 red), and uncoated inner one. The nearest parallels from Saqqara date this fragment to the early Ramesside period (Bourriau, Aston 1985: 44, Pls 66, 61, 65). From the Late Period through Roman times comes a small group of pottery, mainly non-diagnostic amphora sherds and a piece of jar with small handle, SQ 06-1745 (rim c. 19 cm) from Nile B2 with red-slipped outer surface [*Fig. 6*].

In summary, the pottery from the 2006 season is an important group for under-

standing the development of this part of the Saqqara necropolis. Not only has it contributed types previously not recorded in the richly represented pottery of the late Old Kingdom, but also added to our knowledge of pottery from ages previously poorly represented in this area.

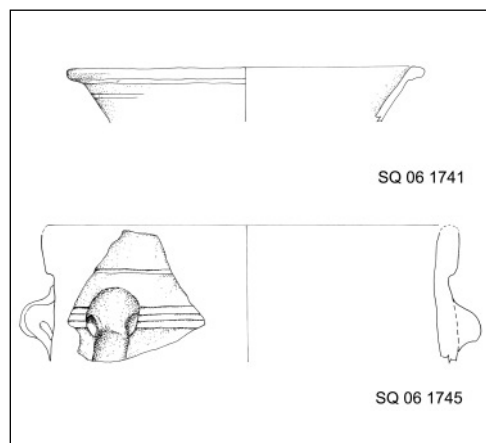


Fig. 6. Late Period - Roman sherds

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