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## Pottery from Banganarti : Season 2006

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Polish Archaeology in the Mediterranean 18, 410-425

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2008

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# POTTERY FROM BANGANARTI SEASON 2006

Dobiesława Bagińska

Pottery from the Christian period (from the 6th/7th to the 14th century) was abundantly represented in the material from the 2006 excavations at Banganarti (see above, report by B. Żurawski in this volume). A few thousand sherds were recorded,<sup>1</sup> of which more than 570 vessel fragments were identified as important for the chronology of the Banganarti site and for further ceramic studies. Together with the material collected from archaeological seasons in 2002-2005, this group is the object of a typological study by the author, which will contribute important data on Nubian and imported pottery in the Dongola region.

Vessels from the Early Christian period were discovered in three trial pits dug down to the foundation layer of the Lower Church: in the northern aisle (no. 1), the apse (no. 2) and the area behind the apse (no. 3) (for location of trial pits, see *Fig. 4* on p. 388). This material dated the origins of the Banganarti church to the 6th/7th century.

The ceramics from the Western Building proved equally important, for they represent the post-Classic period (11th-12th century). The same can be said of the pottery from the northeastern corner tower of the curtain wall and a bread oven uncovered in a test pit dug outside the wall,

which can be attributed to the post-Classic period (11th-12th century). Testing along the northern stretch of the enclosure wall brought abundant evidence of vessels from the late Christian period (mid-12th to 14th century AD). Material from the post-Classic and Late Christian periods, whether shapes or decoration, is seldom presented in reports, hence the importance of this group for further studies.

The repertoire of vessel forms, both wheel-made and handmade, was extensive and both red and white tableware wares were featured. Moreover, the pottery from Banganarti appears to have been manufactured in Old Dongola, a fact confirmed by studies of the Dongola ceramic kiln sites (Pluskota 2001). In the Early Christian period Dongola workshops produced imitations of vessels from Aswan derived from the Late Roman *terra sigillata* tradition. With time Nubian potters developed their own traditions, exemplified by the rich ornamentation and extensive repertoire of new local forms of both cooking and tableware. A few handmade forms (bottles, cooking pots, bowls) were survivals from post-Meroitic times; their continued manufacture in the Early Christian period is proof of the influence traditional Nubian models exerted on ceramic production in Nubia.

1 Descriptions Dobiesława Bagińska, drawings Agata Rak, Anna Błaszczuk, Mariusz Drzewiecki, Marta Momot, Dobiesława Bagińska, and photographic documentation Adrianna Oleś-Niedzielska.

## LOWER CHURCH – TRIAL PIT 1

The foundation level of the Lower Church contained an abundant set of tableware forms from the Early Christian period (6th/7th century) and a layer 0.50 m thick, composed of nothing but intentionally broken amphorae, originally used for transporting and storing wine. The body sherds of the containers featured yellow-painted monograms, suggesting that their content may have been of liturgical significance. Typologically, these storage vessels resemble a type known from Old Dongola, found in the monastery on Kom H and the palace complex on Kom A, as well as in the kilns on Site R1 (type A), where these vessels were dated securely in the 6th through 7th century AD (Pluskota 2001: 362-363, Fig. 9; Bagińska 2005: 476-480, type 107). Amphorae of this kind held about 12 liters of local wine. The Banganarti assemblage [Figs 4:a-d; 3:c, f] is evidently representative of Dongolan products (as indicated by the clay, form and characteristic handle and neck shape), which imitated amphorae imported from Aswan, Gempeler form K 722, dated there to the second half of the 5th century through the turn of the 6th/7th century AD (Gempeler 1992: 192, Pl. 124/2).

The Early Christian wheel-made wares included a small white-ware bowl with appliqué decoration [Figs 1:a; 3:b], imitating Late Roman *terra sigillata* models.

A plate with ledge rim (red ware) featured an ornament of black (double arches painted on a white strip [Fig. 1:e], the type being a Dongolan copy of Gempeler form T 353b from Aswan (1992: 104, Pl. 46/5,

7, 9) and Hayes' *terra sigillata* form 95 (1972: 149, Fig. 27/3). Plates with painted decoration have been recorded at Old Dongola (R1 kiln site, cf. Pluskota 2001: 357-365, Figs 6-7) and at the monastery in Ghazali (Shinnie, Chittick 1961: 36, 53, Figs 6/A1-A7, 22B/14, 19).

White-ware plate with ledge rim [Fig. 1:f] with stamped decoration on the rim corresponds again to Late Roman *terra sigillata* types.

Relief-decorated vases (both white and red wares) are typical of the Early Christian period [Fig. 1:g, j]. A thin-walled vase (red ware) with black circumferential lines painted on a white background [Fig. 1:d] is a form known from northern Nubia: Adams' style N III (1986: 481-482, Figs 45/28, 163).

Wheel-made bottle (red ware) with profiled rim [Figs 1:c; 2:a] is a north Nubian tradition typical of style N III (Adams 1986: 481-482, Fig. 82/33).

Among the handmade vessels, bottles commonly referred to by archaeologists as "beer jars" [Fig. 1:b] are abundant in the Lower Church foundation deposit. The form is a survival from post-Meroitic into Early Christian times. It occurs on all sites from the corresponding period: the monastery church on Kom H in Old Dongola (Bagińska forthcoming a), fort in Dar el-Arab (Bagińska forthcoming b), settlement on Boni Island in the Fourth Cataract region (B. Petrick, pers. comm.). W.Y. Adams points out the close correspondence with Alwa Ware (H2) bottle types (1986: 423-424, Fig. 250/36w).

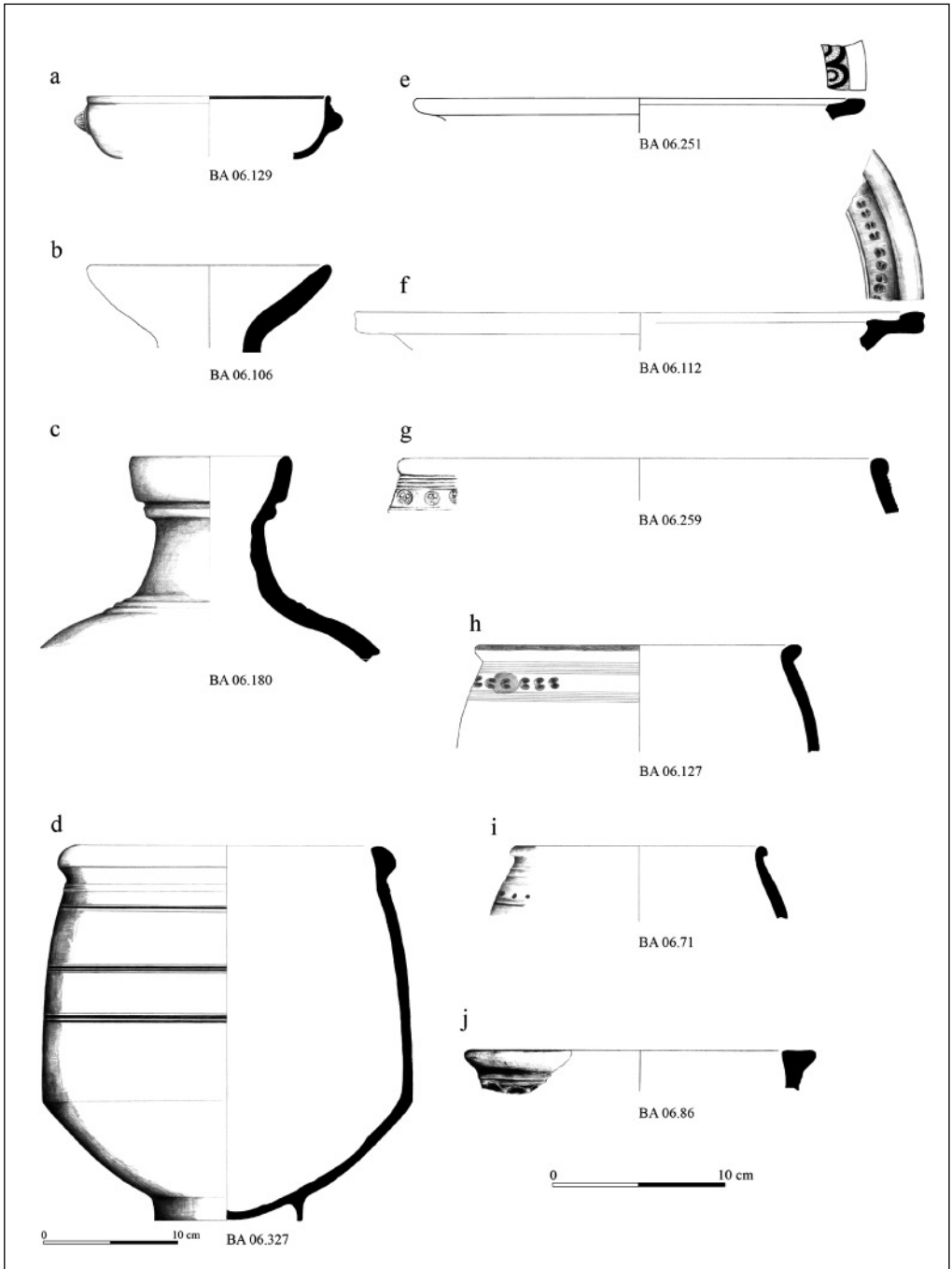


Fig. 1. Pottery from the Lower Church at Banganarti (Trial pit 1)  
 (Drawing A. Rak, M. Momot, D. Bagińska)

## LOWER CHURCH – TRIAL PIT 2

Among the numerous examples of Early Christian wheel-made pottery from the 6th/7th century AD excavated in this trial pit there was one example of what is popularly referred to with regard to Nubia as “Samian Ware” – a red ware plate with characteristically modeled rim [Fig. 6:b]. It constitutes an imitation of Late Roman *terra sigillata*: Hayes form 104 B (1972:

163, Fig. 30/B15) and Gempeler form T 226a in Aswan (1992: 72, Pl. 16/11), and is diagnostic for the period in question. It is well known from archaeological assemblages in Old Dongola, particularly the fills of the pottery kilns on Site R1 (Pluskota 2001: 357-365, Fig. 8) and the foundation levels of the monastery church on Kom H (see above, Old Dongola

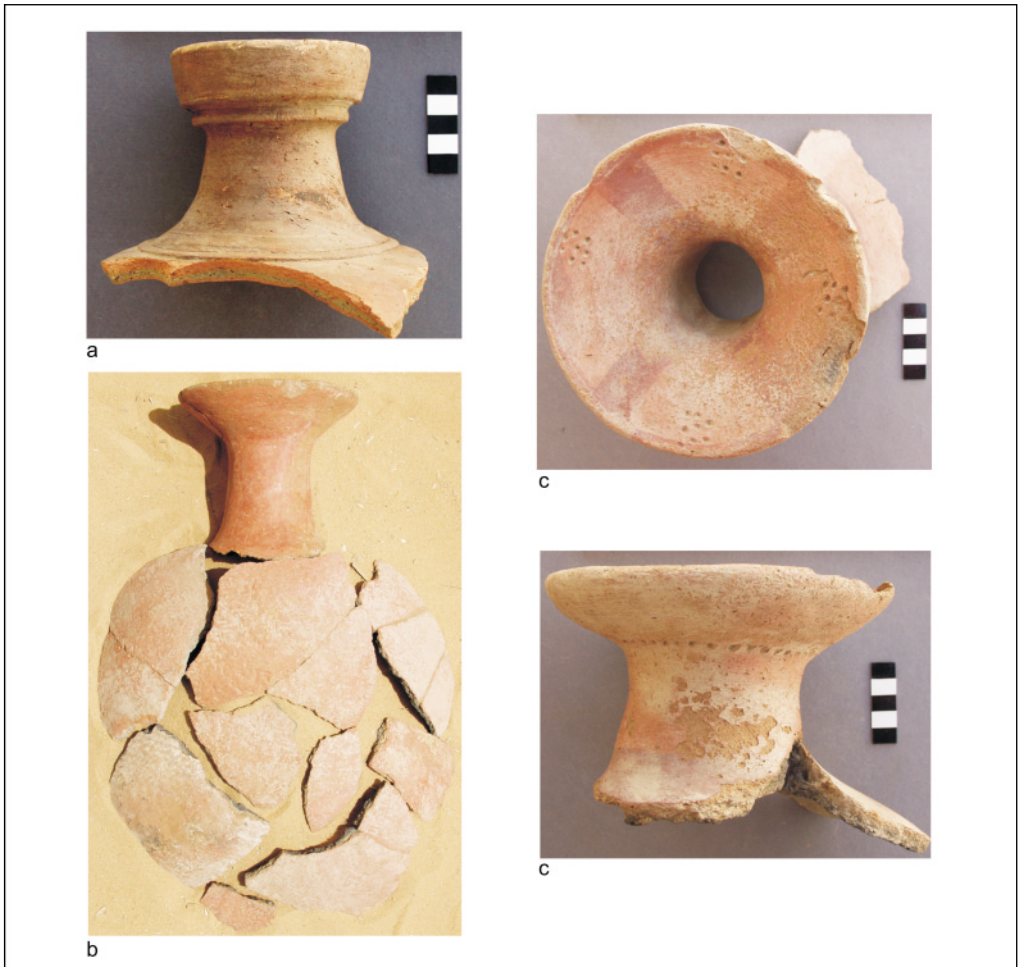


Fig. 2. Selected bottles from the 2006 season of excavations in Banganarti (Photo A. Oleś-Niedzielska)

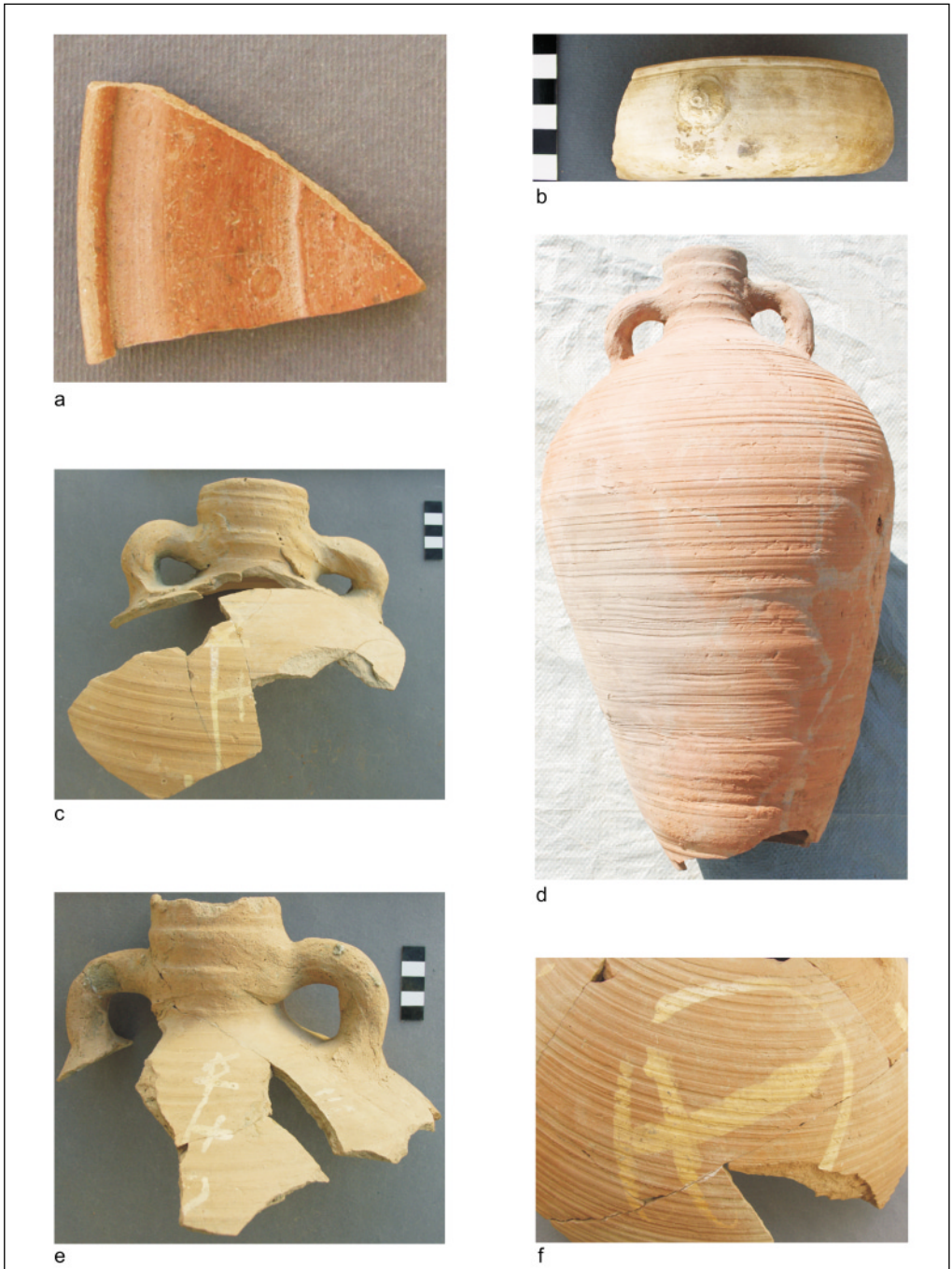


Fig. 3. Selected amphorae and tableware from the 2006 season of excavations in Banganarti (Photo A. Oleś-Niedzielska)

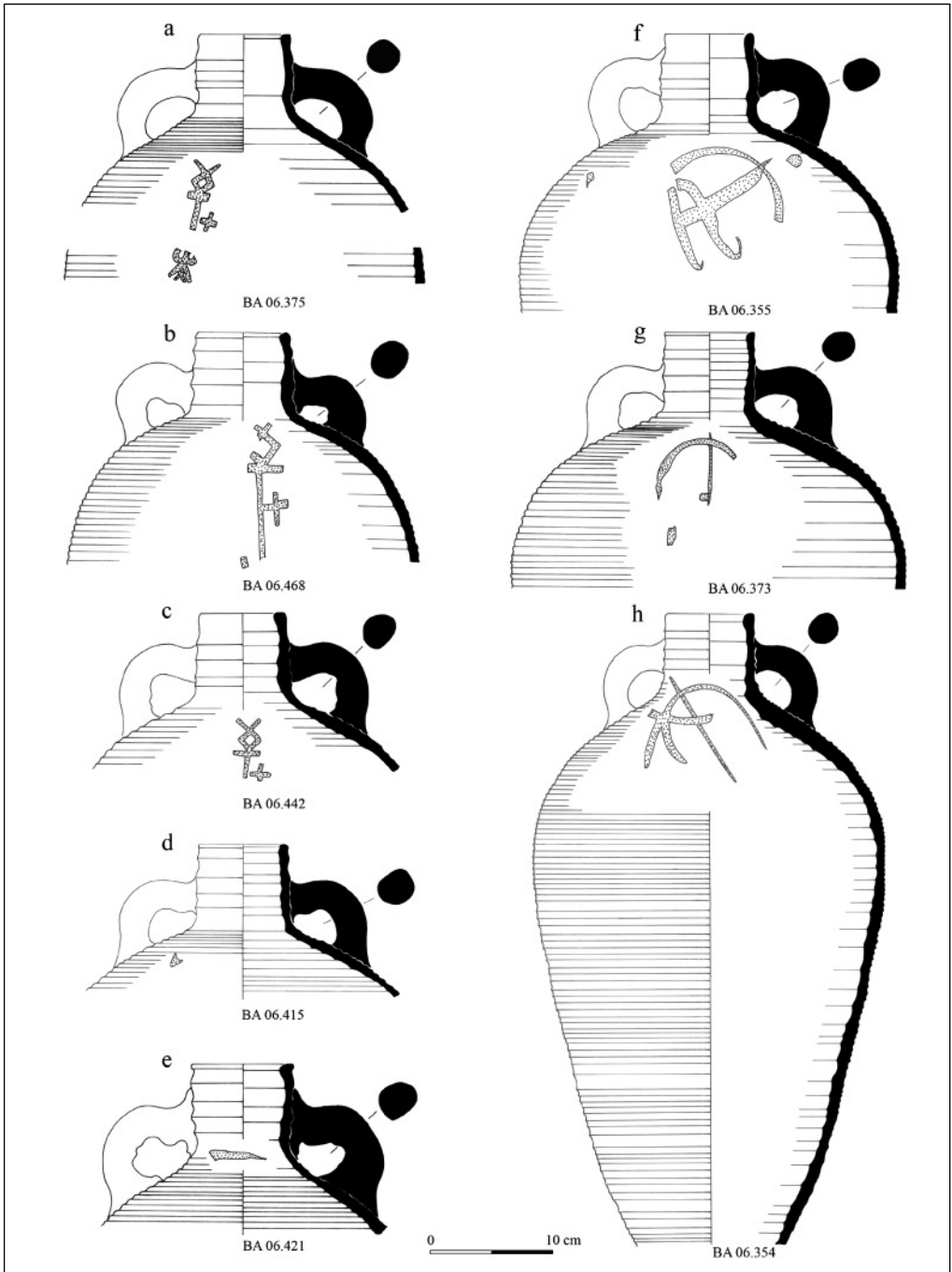


Fig. 4. Amphorae from the foundation level of the Lower Church at Banganarti – a-d: Trial pit 1; e-g: Trial pit 2; h: Trial pit 3 (Drawing D. Bagińska)

pottery report by the author in this volume). They have also been recorded at Dar el-Arab (Bagińska forthcoming b) and the monastery at Ghazali (Shinnie, Chittick 1961: 41, Fig. 11/E2).

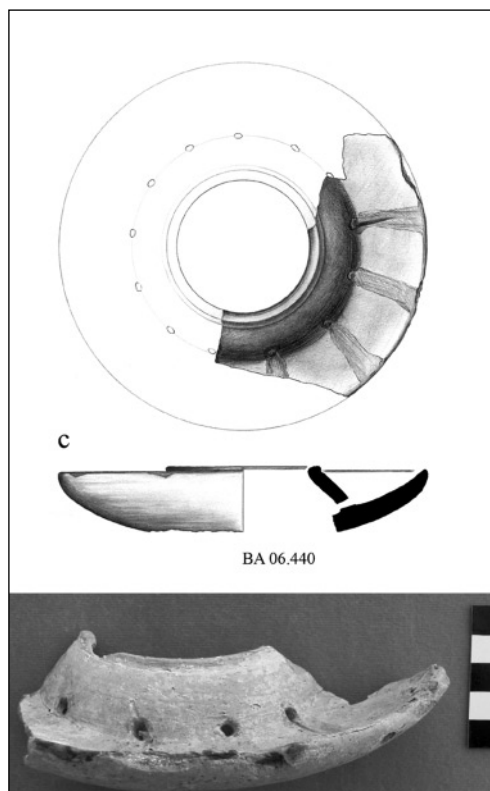


Fig. 5. Lamp (white ware), Early Christian (Drawing M. Momot; photo A. Oleś-Niedzielska)

Footed bowl (white ware) with stamped decoration in the form of rhombuses containing an inscribed cross with a red dot emphasizing the center [Fig. 6:a]. The ornament is characteristic of the Early Christian period (style N III) (Adams 1986: 483-485, Figs. 159, 276/24).

Lamp (white ware) decorated with a red painted radial pattern [Fig. 5]. Early Christian form, most likely with a small looped handle (Adams 1986: 483-485, Fig. 277/18).

The same thick layer of intentionally broken amphorae was noted in Trial pit 2 as well. All the containers were of local, Nubian production, the form and clay pointing to the Old Dongola workshops [Figs 4:e-g; 3:e]; this type was recorded on the kiln site R1 in Dongola (Pluskota 2001: 363, Fig. 9).

There was a similar abundance in this, as in the previously discussed trial pit, of bottles commonly referred to as “beer jars” [Figs 6:d-b; 2:b]. It is characteristic of the Early Christian period in the 6th/7th century and refers to Alwa ware vessels (ware H2) (Adams 1986: 423-424, Fig. 250).

Bottles with painted black, red and yellow decoration on the outer walls and a purple red slip on the neck and rim, featuring mat impressions on the body, are diagnostic of the transition from post-Meroitic to Early Christian.

### LOWER CHURCH - TRIAL PIT 3

The material from the trial pit behind the apse does not differ from the assemblages already discussed from the first two trenches dug to test the Lower Church levels. Among the quality wheel-made wares, a fragment of so-called Samian-ware plate (red ware) with characteristically

modeled rim is of chronological significance [Figs 7:a; 3:a] (see above, plate fragment from Trial pit 2).

The red-ware vessel with everted modeled rim, decorated on the inside with stamped decoration [Fig. 7:b], is known from the R1 kilns (Pluskota 2001: 361-



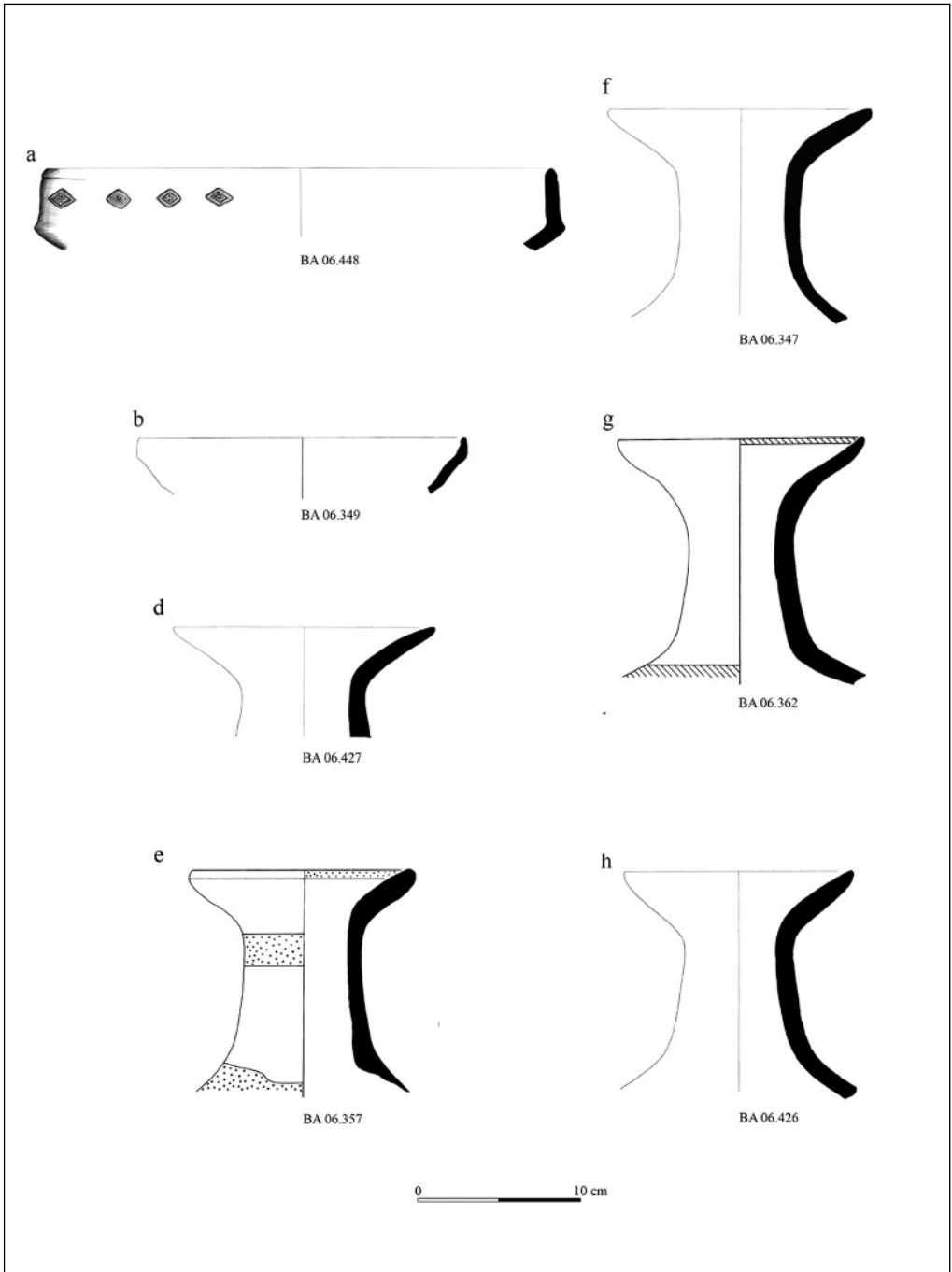


Fig. 6. Pottery from the Lower Church at Banganarti (Trial pit 2)  
 (Drawing A. Rak, D. Bagińska)

363, Fig. 7) and Kom A in Old Dongola (palace latrine depository, B.I.15).<sup>2</sup>

A short-necked bottle (red ware) [Fig. 7:d] is of a style (N III) known from northern Nubia (Adams 1986: 481-482, Fig. 82/33).

Storage jar (white ware) has grooves emphasized with red painted lines on the shoulders [Fig. 7:c]; it is known from northern Nubia (style N III) (Adams 1986: 483-484, Fig. 277/4).

The layer of broken amphorae was again found in Trial pit 3. The containers were all of the same type as already described and one was even preserved almost complete [Figs 4:b; 3:d]. It is a Dongolan product of the 6th through 7th

century AD (see above, amphorae from Trial pit 1).

The handmade vessels from the trench included, as in the other trial pits dug this year, bottles commonly referred to as beer jars [Fig. 7:e-f] of which one [Figs 7:f; 2:c] had a richly decorated rim (four painted radiating bands of red color and between them impressed dots forming a triangular pattern). A band of impressed dots accentuated the top of the neck on the outside, while the shoulders had a purple red band around them. Similarly to the bottles from the first two trial trenches discussed here, these bottles date the foundation level of the Lower Church in the 6th/7th century (see above, bottle from Trial pit 1).

## WESTERN BUILDING

The ceramic assemblage from the chambers of the Western Building lying west of the Raphaelion (Upper Church) is generally attributed to the 11th through the end of the 12th century AD. The forms and decoration are analogous to pottery discovered at Old Dongola (the SW-E annex in the monastery complex on Kom H, studied by the author in 2006, see report in this volume) and in northern Nubia (style N V, cf. Adams 1986: 497-500).

Among the wheel-made vessels, meriting mention are two bowls with a black painted ornament typical of the post-Classic period [Figs 8:a,f; 10:a]. One bowl (from Room 19) had a cross engraved on the outside surface.

Room 19 also yielded an import from Egypt – a fragment of glazed plate with rich black and cobalt blue decoration [Figs 8:b; 10:b]. The production of such plates at Fustat is dated to AD 1075-1175 (Mason 2004: 258-259), helping to pinpoint the

dating of the remaining pottery discovered in this room, and thus contributing significantly to typological and chronological studies on post-Classic Nubian ceramics.

The red and black decoration of other vases (from Rooms 13 and 17) is also typical of the Christian post-Classic period [Fig. 8:c,e].

The type of wine amphora with small loop handles on the neck rising above rim level [Fig. 8:g] places the occupation of the Western Building in the 12th century AD (Bagińska 2005: 451-455, amphora type 100).

Numerous bases of *qadus* pots used in *saqiyah* installations for watering fields were found in the Western Building. Some were intentionally decorated with dots or crosses impressed prior to firing [Fig. 8:i]. Their presence is indirect evidence for the intensive agricultural development of Makuria in the post-Classic period.

<sup>2</sup> Studied by the author in 2003-2005 with the permission of W. Godlewski, head of the excavations on Kom A.

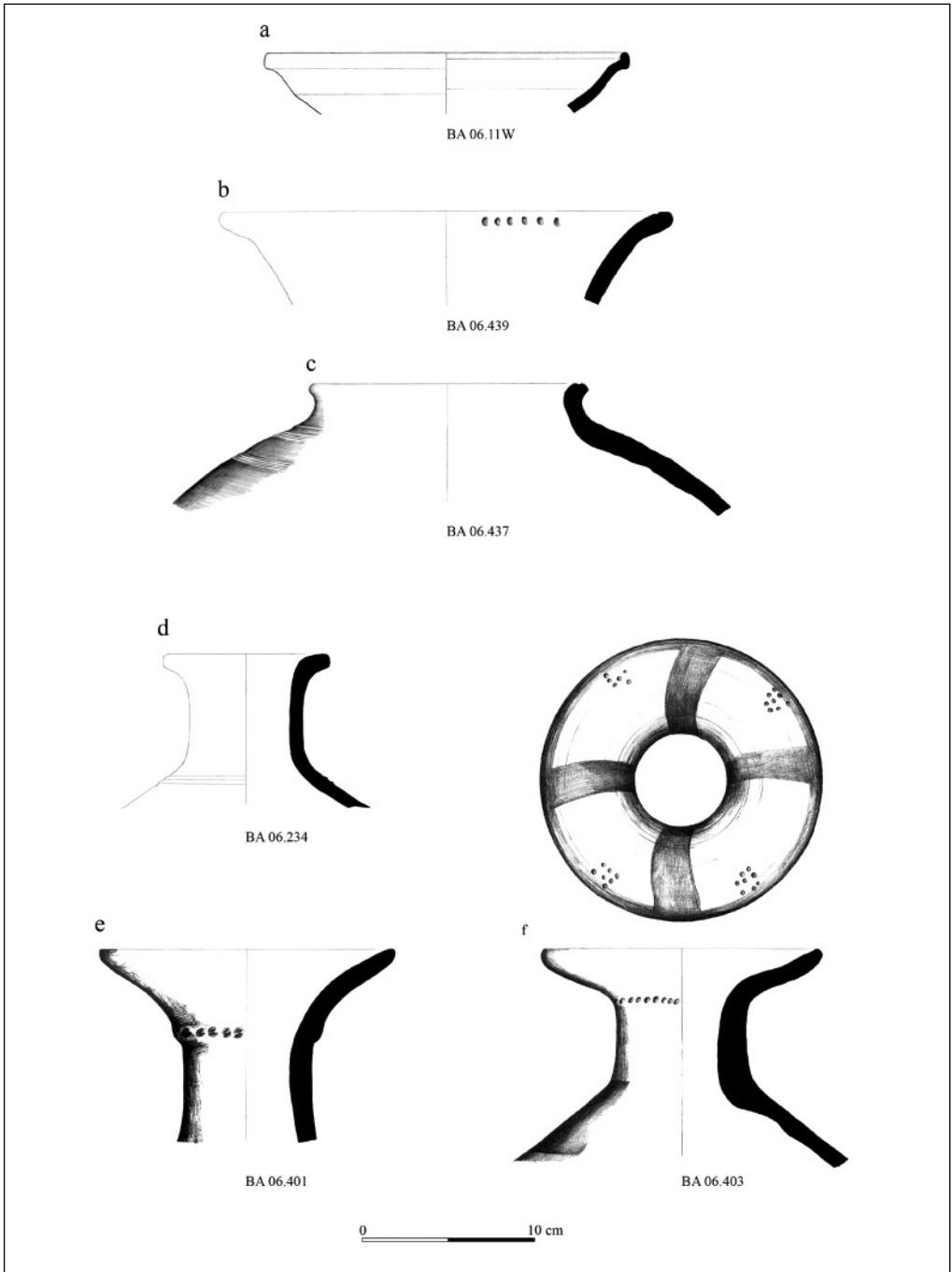


Fig. 7. Pottery from the Lower Church at Banganarti (Trial pit 3)  
 (Drawing A. Rak, D. Bagińska)

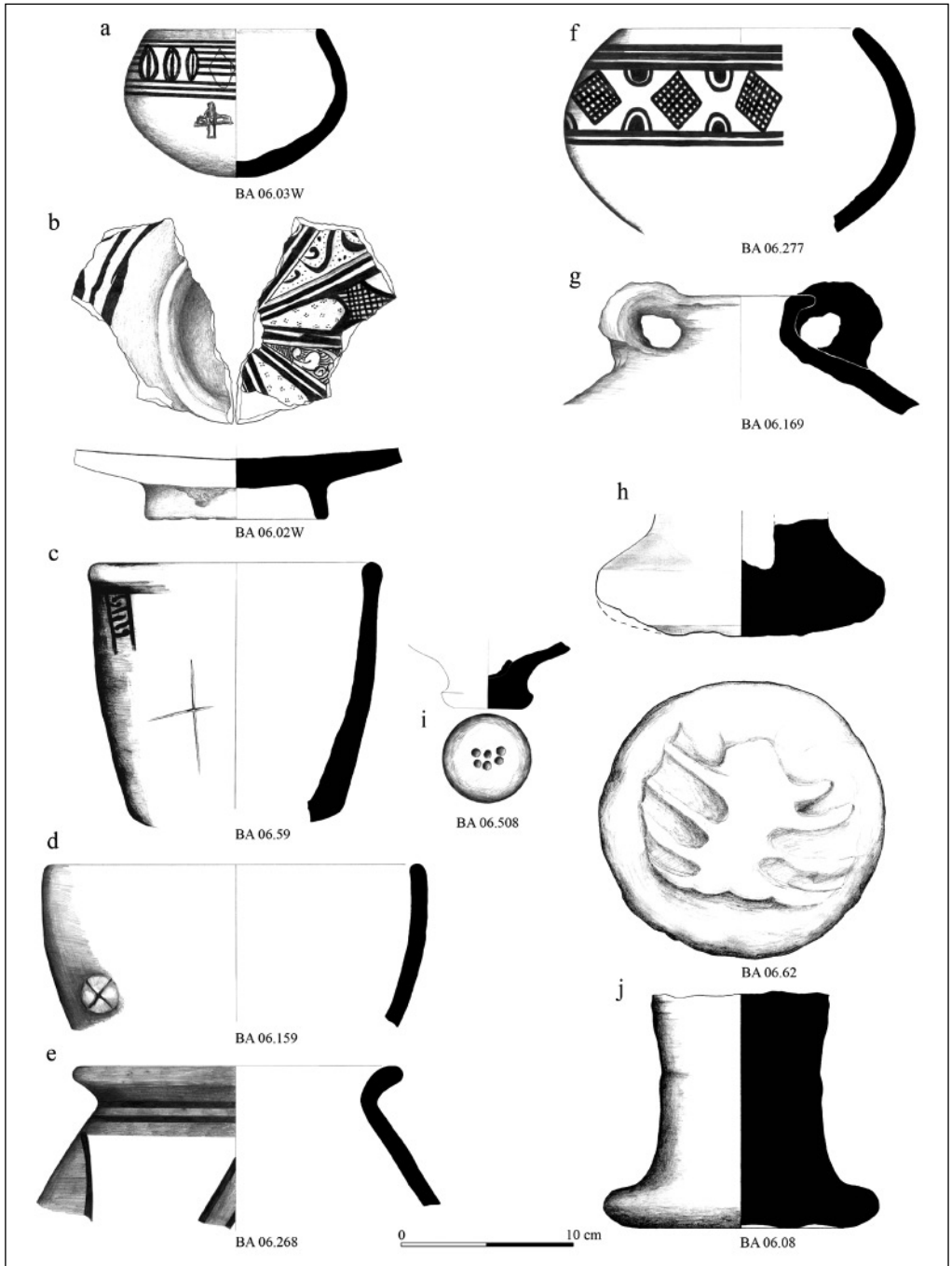


Fig. 8. Pottery from the Western Building in Banganarti  
(Drawing A. Rak, A. Błaszczuk)

Note should be taken, among the handmade products, of a bowl (found in Room 16) featuring a round relief knob applied on the body [Fig. 8:d].

Handmade pot-stands, commonly called “fire-dogs”, were also found in quantity

[Fig. 8:j]. On the flat surface of one of these stands an unusual impression of potter's fingers can be discerned [Fig. 8:b]. Food was heated in pots placed on such fire-dogs in the fire, in much the same way as it is done today in the Banganarti village.

## BREAD OVEN IN TRIAL PIT BY THE NORTHEASTERN TOWER

A bread oven discovered in the fill outside the northeastern tower in the curtain wall yielded a large number of vessels dated to AD 1000-1200. The pottery from the four layers of fill above the oven is all stylistically the same, representing the post-Classic style N V (Adams 1986: 334,

497-500, Fig. 186). Wheel-made vessels, especially bowls [Fig. 9:g] and vases [Fig. 9:f], predominated. The handmade products from the trial pit included large bowls, cooking pots and *doka*, the latter used to produce *kisra* breads out of sorghum flour.

## NORTHERN CURTAIN WALL

Numerous fragments of cooking and table wares, as well as storage containers from the mid-12th through the 14th century AD were recovered from the testing of the northern and northwestern parts of the curtain wall. The tableware was richly ornamented in black, representing the N VI post-Classic style of decoration (Adams 1986: 501-506). Wheel-made forms include predominantly thick-walled beakers [Fig. 9:a], plates on solid bases [Fig. 9:b; 10:c] and vases [Fig. 9:c-e].

Wine amphorae with short necks and small loop handles, fragmentarily preser-

ved, are characteristic of the late period [Fig. 9:b-i]. They were used strictly for storage as their size (c. 20 l capacity), bulging globular bodies and small handles did not make them the best container for transport purposes (Bagińska 2005: 433-435, type 94, 442-446, type 97).

Handmade vessels were well represented. They were thick-walled and bore pre-firing engraved criss-cross decoration below the rim on the outside or inside. There were also cooking pots [Fig. 9:j] and storage vessels of large-size with a ledge for fitting a lid [Fig. 9:k].

## NORTHWESTERN CORNER TOWER

Excavation of the remains of the northeastern corner tower of the curtain wall yielded a considerable quantity of fragmentary wheel-made and handmade vessels. Predominating among the former were large thick-walled plates [Figs 11:b-c,e-f; 10:e] and vases [Fig. 11:d], bearing painted

decoration of red and black color, typical of the post-Classic period (style N V), dated on the grounds of parallels from northern Nubia to AD 1000-1200 (Adams 1986: 497-500, Figs 183-185).

Of particular interest was a small bowl decorated on both sides with what is

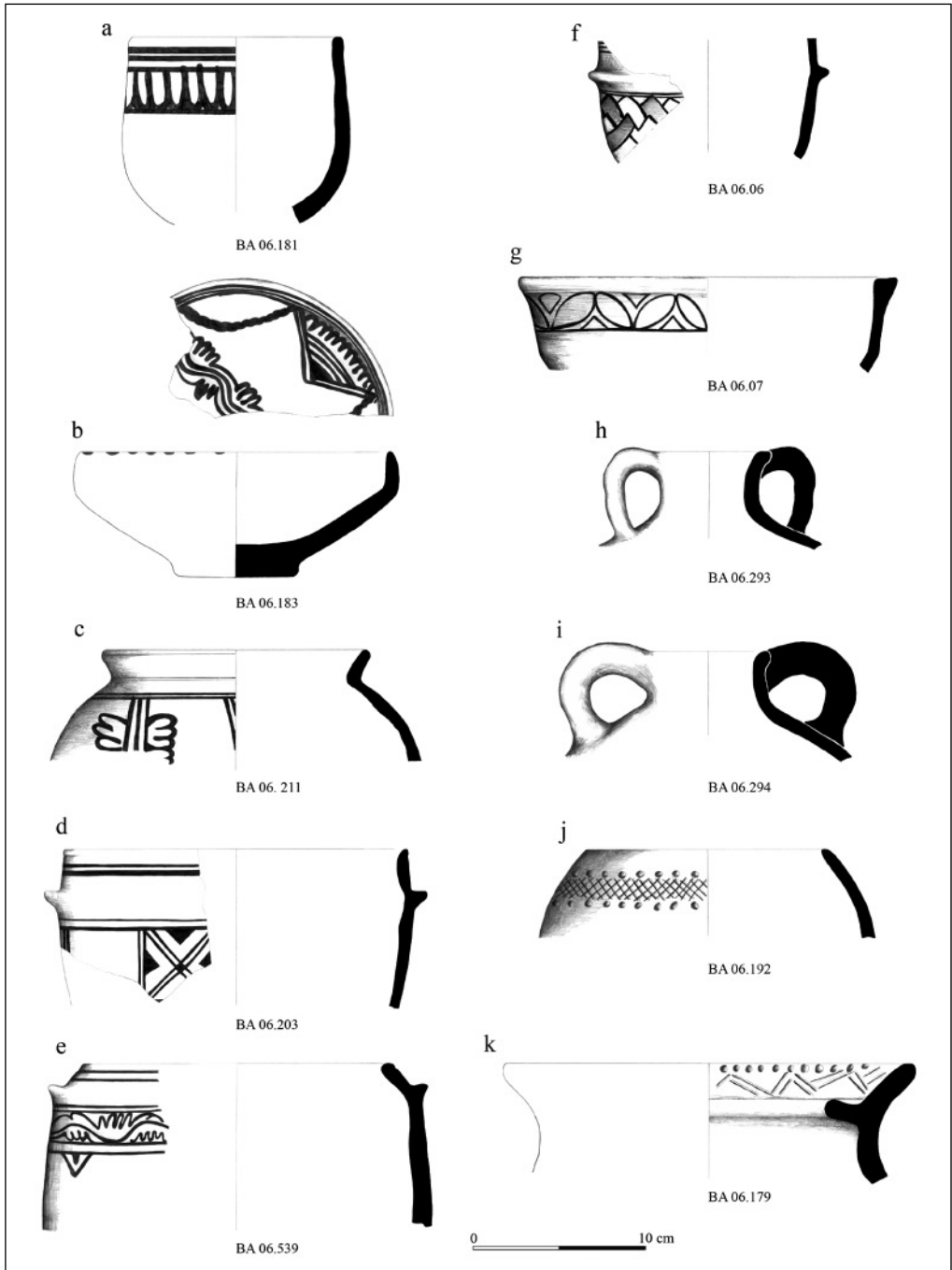


Fig. 9. Pottery from the northern stretch of the curtain wall (a-e, h-k) and from the fill of a kiln to the east of the wall (f-g) (Drawing A. Rak, M. Momot)

presumed to be a magical inscription, painted in brown [Figs 11:a; 10:d].<sup>3</sup> The bowl itself is a typical example of post-Classic style N V and may be dated to AD 1000-1200 (Adams 1986: 500, Fig. 282/c22).

Of the wheel-made storage wares, one should mention the qadus water pots, preserved mostly as knob-shaped bases, sometimes with an intentional pre-firing mark, to which the ropes tying the pot to the *saqiyah* wheel were attached [Fig. 11:b].

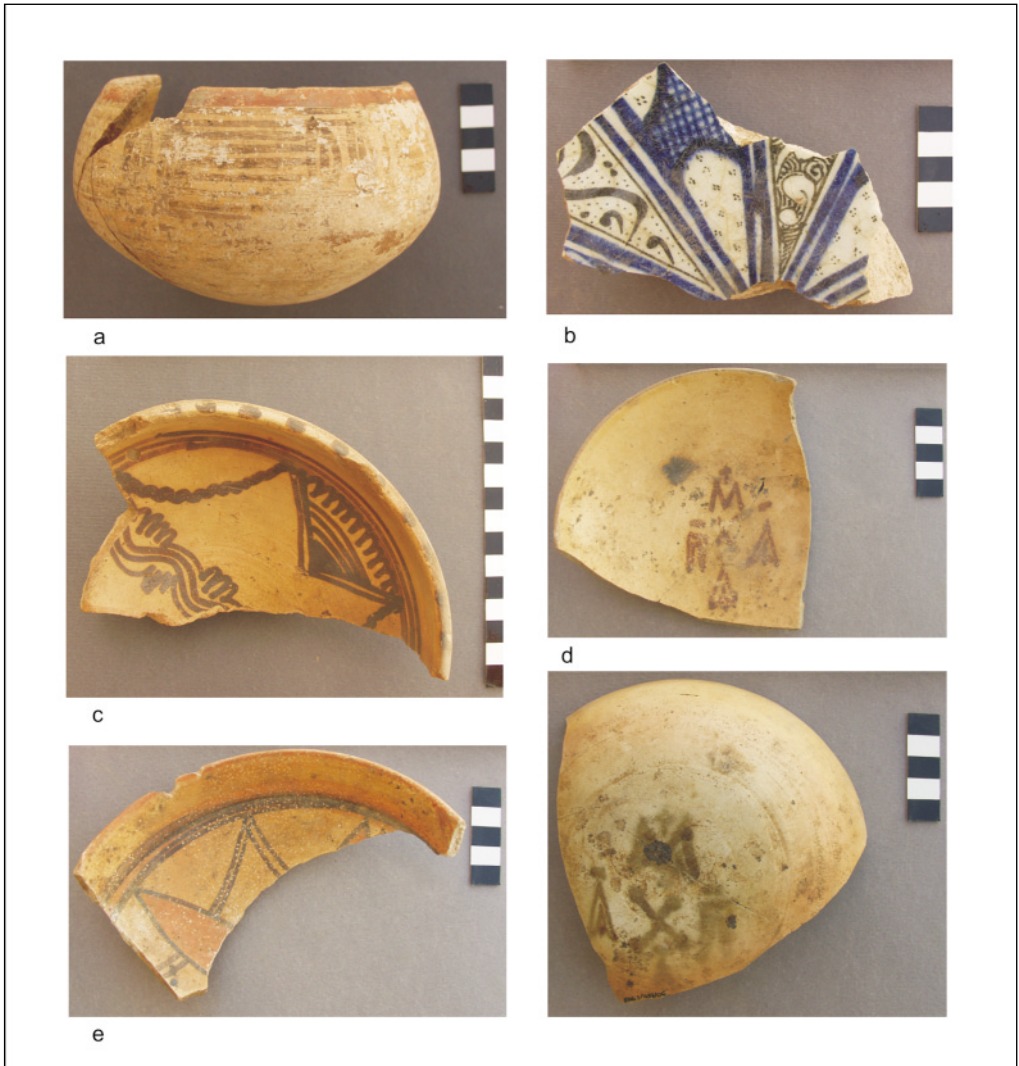


Fig. 10. Selected tableware from the 2006 season of excavations in Banganarti (Photo A. Oleś-Niedzielska)

3 The text is being studied by A. Łajtar of the University of Warsaw Department of Papyrology.

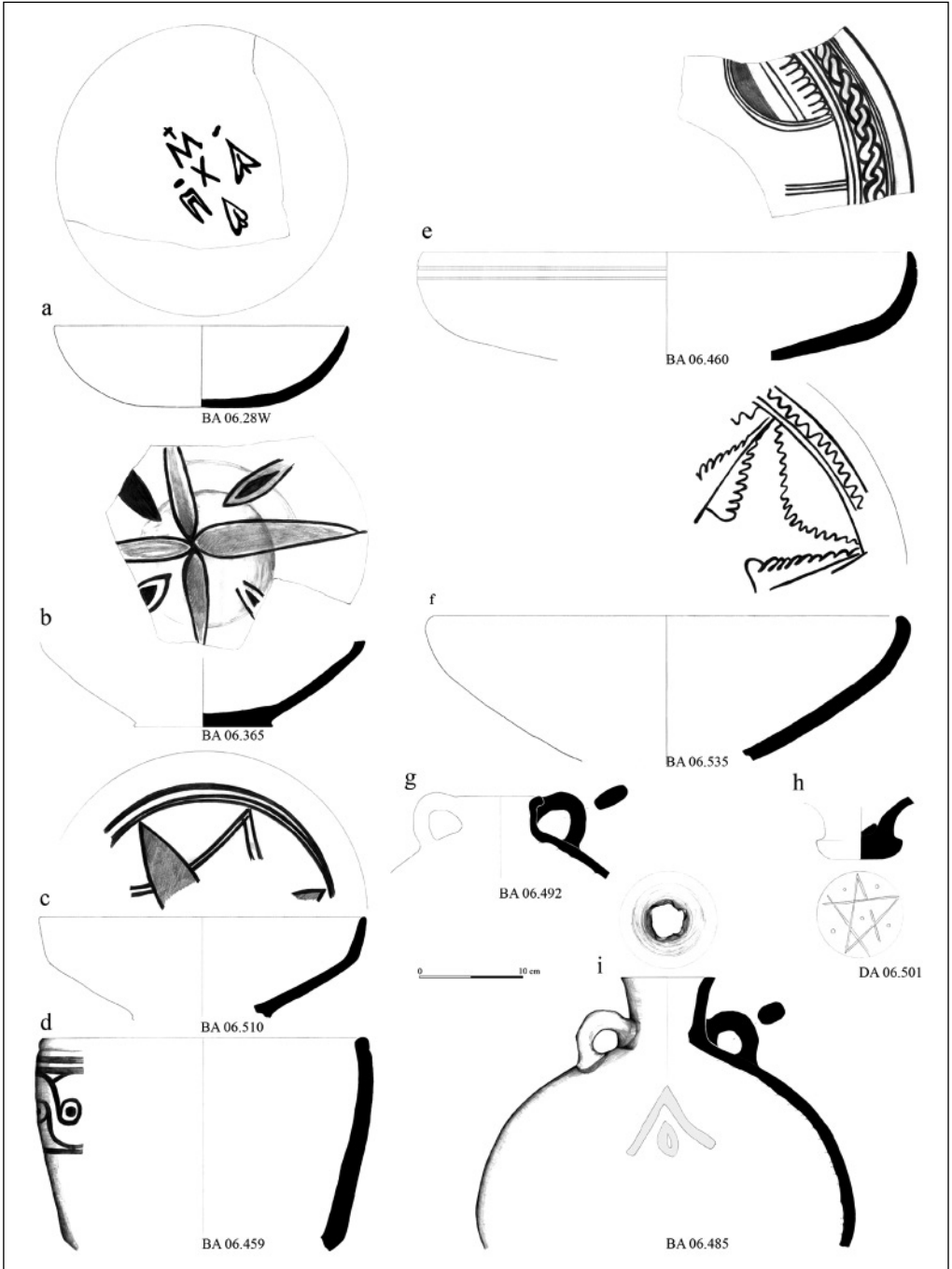


Fig. 11. Pottery from the northwestern corner tower in Banganarti  
(Drawing A. Rak)



A *qulla* with ornamental neck filter was intended for transporting water [Fig. 11:i]. Numerous sherds of late amphorae [Fig. 11:g] confirm the latest occupation of the tower in the 12th century AD, possibly later, but not later than the first half of the 13th century, corresponding to the chronological range of the post-Classic period (Bagińska 2005: 451-455 – type 100).

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