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West Saqqara: The Pottery

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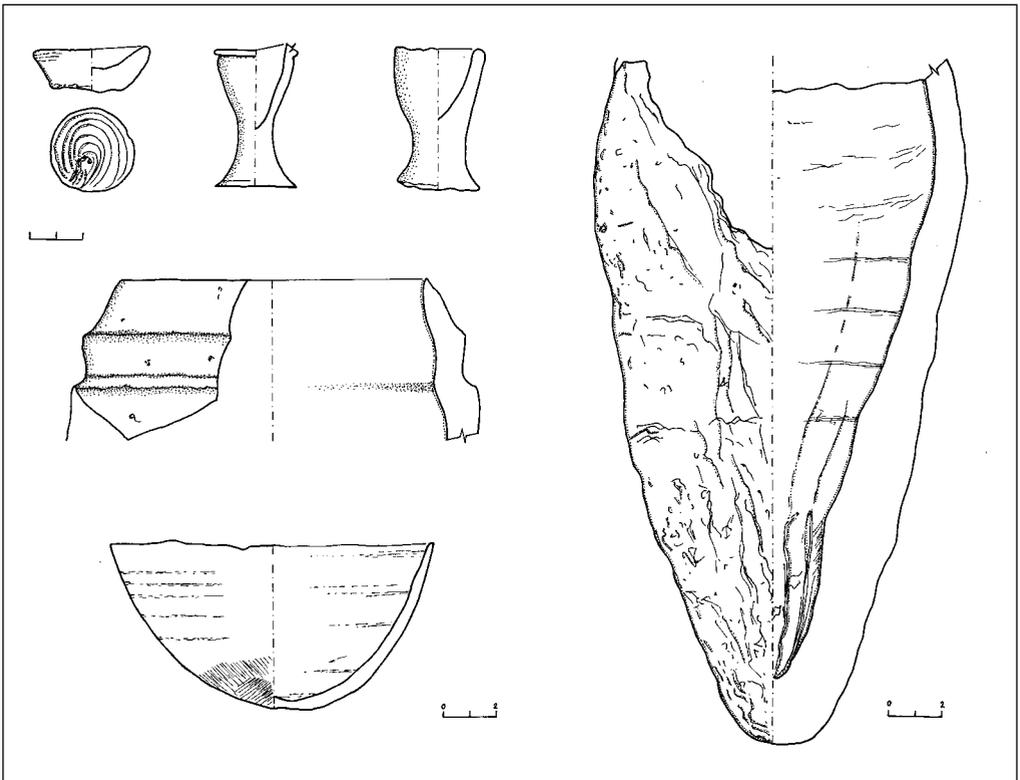
THE POTTERY

Teodozja Izabela Rzeuska

CORRIDOR 1 (*Figs. 1, 2*)

Not much pottery was found in Corridor 1. Next to the entrance there was a rim fragment of a Third-Fourth Dynasty beer jar SQ 00-822 (Nile silt C, handmade, uncoated). The pottery was concentrated

chiefly in the area between the entrance to the corridor and a spot 13 m further east where Shaft 37, discovered in 1999, is located.¹⁾ The corridor and the shaft seem to have been connected at a later date and



*Fig. 1. Pottery from Corridor 1
(Drawing T. Rzeuska)*

1) K. Myśliwiec, *PAM XI, Reports 1999* (2000), 98, Fig. 9. See also Fig. 1 on p. 108 in the present volume).

some of the objects initially in the shaft found their way into the fill of the corridor. Consequently, this pottery should be connected with Shaft 37 rather than with Corridor 1. Most of these sherds belong to beer jars, some white-washed on the exterior, and to bread moulds. The assemblage also included three miniature offering vessels: SQ 00-821 (Nile silt B 2,

string-cut from the wheel, uncoated) SQ 00-823 and SQ 00-824 (Nile silt B 1/2, cut from the wheel, uncoated). In the absence of dating criteria for miniature offering vessels,²⁾ they should be dated by the context. Considering that they were part of an assemblage from the mid-Sixth Dynasty, it should be assumed that they come from this period.

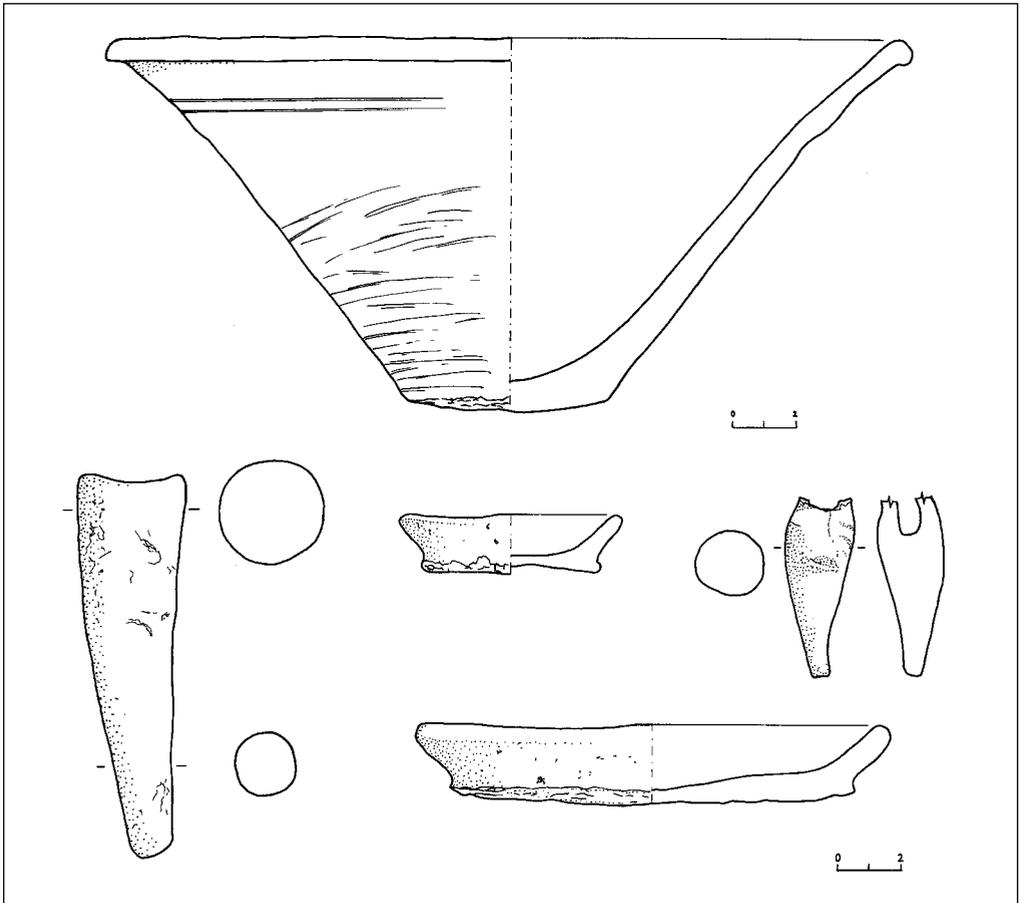


Fig. 2. Ceramic deposit found under the harpoon in Corridor 1
(Drawing T. Rzeuska)

2) Compare alternative conceptions presented by M. Bárta, Pottery Inventory and the Beginning of the IVth Dynasty, *GM* 149 (1995); S. Marchand et M. Baud, La céramique miniature d'Abou Rawash, *BIFAO* 96 (1996), 255-288, with a list of miniature vessels.

It seems very probable that some penetration of Corridor 1 occurred about the middle or in the second half of the Twelfth Dynasty. Testifying to this is the pottery: a complete “drinking” cup SQ 00-816 (very fine Nile silt B1,³⁾ wheel-made, wet-smoothed), found c. 7.13 m from the entrance, on the surface of the sand fill. It is well dated by the surface treatment, i.e., absence of red slip, and by the vessel index⁴⁾ equaling 160.⁵⁾ In its vicinity there was a sherd of coarse Nile silt E, probably a cooking pot, as indicated by the blackened outer surface.⁶⁾

Directly in front of the entrance to the chamber at the end of the corridor, on top of the fill, there was the lower part of a beer jar SQ 00-853 (Nile silt C, handmade, uncoated) dated to the second half of the Sixth Dynasty. The vessel lay at an angle and it was coated inside with a thin layer of fine silt.⁷⁾ It was on the same level as the deposit of animal bones in the chamber,⁸⁾ yet it cannot be determined whether it had been put there intentionally.

An extremely interesting deposit, consisting in part of pottery, was found inside the chamber.⁹⁾ Stratigraphically, the pottery lay between the harpoon deposited alongside the southern wall of the chamber and the chamber floor.¹⁰⁾ The deposit consisted of a bowl SQ 00-866 (Nile silt B 2, slow wheel-made, base scraped, red-slipped inside and outside until mid-height), plate SQ 00-867 (Nile silt B 2, slow wheel-made, uncoated), two identical miniature plates SQ 00-868 and SQ 00-869, miniature beer jar (?) SQ 00-874 (Nile silt B 2, handmade, red-slipped on the exterior) and four “nails” SQ 00-870-873 (Nile silt B 2, handmade, uncoated). The fabric in all these vessels is the same: Nile silt, fairly strongly tempered with organic substances. Surface treatment is very similar, suggesting same workshop origins for the lot. Similar “nails”, dated to the period between the reigns of Pepi I and Pepi II have been found at Balat. Yet in contrast to the objects from Saqqara, these had not been baked.¹¹⁾ The deposit comes most probably from the second half of the Sixth Dynasty.

3) The clay characteristic (quality and quantity of inclusions) resembles NB1a from Elephantine, cf. T. Rzeuska, *Zur Keramik des Mittleren Reiches*, in: W. Kaiser et al., *Stadt und Tempel von Elephantine 25/26/27. Grabungsbericht, MDAIK 55* (1999), 195. An evident macroscopic difference between the two types of clay is the definitely lower mica content in the fabric of the Saqqara vessel.

4) Vessel index (VI) – maximum body diameter divided by height of body and multiplied by 100.

5) Do. Arnold, *The Pottery*, in: Di. Arnold, *The Pyramid of Senwosret I. The Metropolitan Museum of Art Egyptian Expedition, Vol. XXII* (New York 1988), 140-141.

6) This type of Nile silt came into use in late Twelfth/early Thirteenth dynasty. H.-A. Norström, J. Bouriau, in: Do. Arnold, J. Bouriau, *An Introduction to Ancient Egyptian Pottery* (Mainz 1993), 175.

7) In order to seal the porous inside surface of beer jars, the inside walls were covered with a coating of fine mud, cf. D. Faltings, *Die Keramik der Lebensmittelproduktion im Alten Reich. Iconographie und Archäologie eines Gebrauchsartikels*, SAGA 14 (Heidelberg 1988), 204-205. It cannot be excluded that the mud inside SQ 00-853 was a coating of this kind.

8) Cf. contribution by S. Ikram in this volume.

9) Cf. contributions by K. Myśliwiec, S. Ikram and K. Kuraskiewicz in this volume.

10) *Ibid.*, and also contribution by Z. Godziejewski in this volume.

11) M. Valloggia, *Le monument funéraire d'Ima' Pépy/Ima'-Merye, Balat IV, FIFAO 38* (Le Caire 1998), 42-43. A similar find comes from Dahschur, funerary shaft of the mastaba of Netjer-aperf (Fourth Dynasty), interpreted as a miniature model of a white bread loaf, cf. N. Alexanian, *Das Grab des Prinzen Netjer-aperf. Die Mastaba II/1 in Dahschur, AV 56* (Mainz 1999), 106, Abb. 45 (S33), Taf. 20. Other finds from the mastabas in Giza have been listed there.

SHAFT 46 (Figs. 3, 4)

Of all the shafts in front of the western cliff ledge explored this year, Shaft 46 contained the most interesting and at the same time the biggest pottery deposit.¹²⁾ For about 2 m from the top, the shaft was filled with a secondary sand-and-*tafl* deposit, which included some scarce potsherds, bones, bandages and a fragment of limestone red-painted torus. From 2.00 to 4.20 m the pottery content increased rapidly. It consisted of chiefly pieces of beer jars, some whitewashed on the exterior, and of red-slipped plates. SQ 00-876 was found at this depth – a bowl (?) bottom with blackened outer surface (Nile silt B 2, slow wheel-made, red-slipped). Below this the shaft was again filled with sand and *tafl*. It should be emphasized that the ceramic scatter inside the shaft is by no means homogeneous from top to bottom. In the upper part of the shaft potsherds were concentrated in the southwestern corner, but below the 6 m mark they were to be found in the entire southern part. This suggested – and was later corroborated – that the funerary chamber had been plundered. The uneven scatter of pottery finds inside the shaft demonstrated that the tomb robbers had been unable apparently, in the brief time at their disposal, to remove from the shaft all the pottery found there.

The repertory of vessel types filling the shaft from a depth of 4.20 m to the bottom is limited to two kinds of beer jars: the smaller one, such as SQ 00-882

(Nile silt C, handmade, uncoated), and a bigger one, like SQ 00-902A and SQ 00-892 (Nile silt, handmade, uncoated). These two kinds differed in form, a slightly different execution technique and firing. Some of the smaller types of beer jars were whitewashed on the exterior. Many bore traces of unfired mudstoppers on the rim and shoulders.¹³⁾

Apart from beer jars, the fill of the shaft yielded a few fragments of bread moulds *bd3* and *'prt*, and some red-slipped bowls of Nile silt B 1. Two examples of bread moulds deserve special attention. SQ 00-878 (Nile silt C, slow wheel-made, uncoated) is distinguished not so much by form, as by size, being smaller practically by half from the average bread mould. The other bread mould, SQ 00-879 (Nile silt C, slow wheel-made, whitewashed rim), has a potter's mark made before firing inside it.¹⁴⁾

Unfired mudstopper fragments are very numerous. Their presence, when combined with evidence that many beer jars had been sealed, could be taken to mean that the vessels were dropped into the shaft with some kind of contents. Indeed, many of them could have contained Nile silt "imitating" beer; this substance has survived in the form of impressions of the inside of the jars.¹⁵⁾ A few beer jars (of the bigger type), e.g. SQ 00-902 A, were found in the stratum between 7.20 and 8.00 m. They contained a red powder (ocher?) and some potsherds, SQ 00-902 A/1 (Nile silt B 1, slow wheel-made ?, red-

12) Cf. report by K. Mysliwiec in this volume.

13) Seen in the drawings as blackened surfaces around the rim and on the shoulders.

14) Cf. A. Minoult-Gout, P. Deleuze, *Le mastaba d'Ima-Pépy, Balat II*, (Le Caire 1992), 172-173, pl. 48.

15) On false filling found inside vessels of the Old Kingdom, cf. T. Rzeuska, "The Pottery from the Funerary Complex of Vizier Meref-nebef (West Saqqara). Evidence of burial and cult of the dead in the Old Kingdom", in: *Proceedings of the First Central European Conference of Young Egyptologists*, ed. J. Popielska-Grzybowska (Warsaw 2001), 157-167.

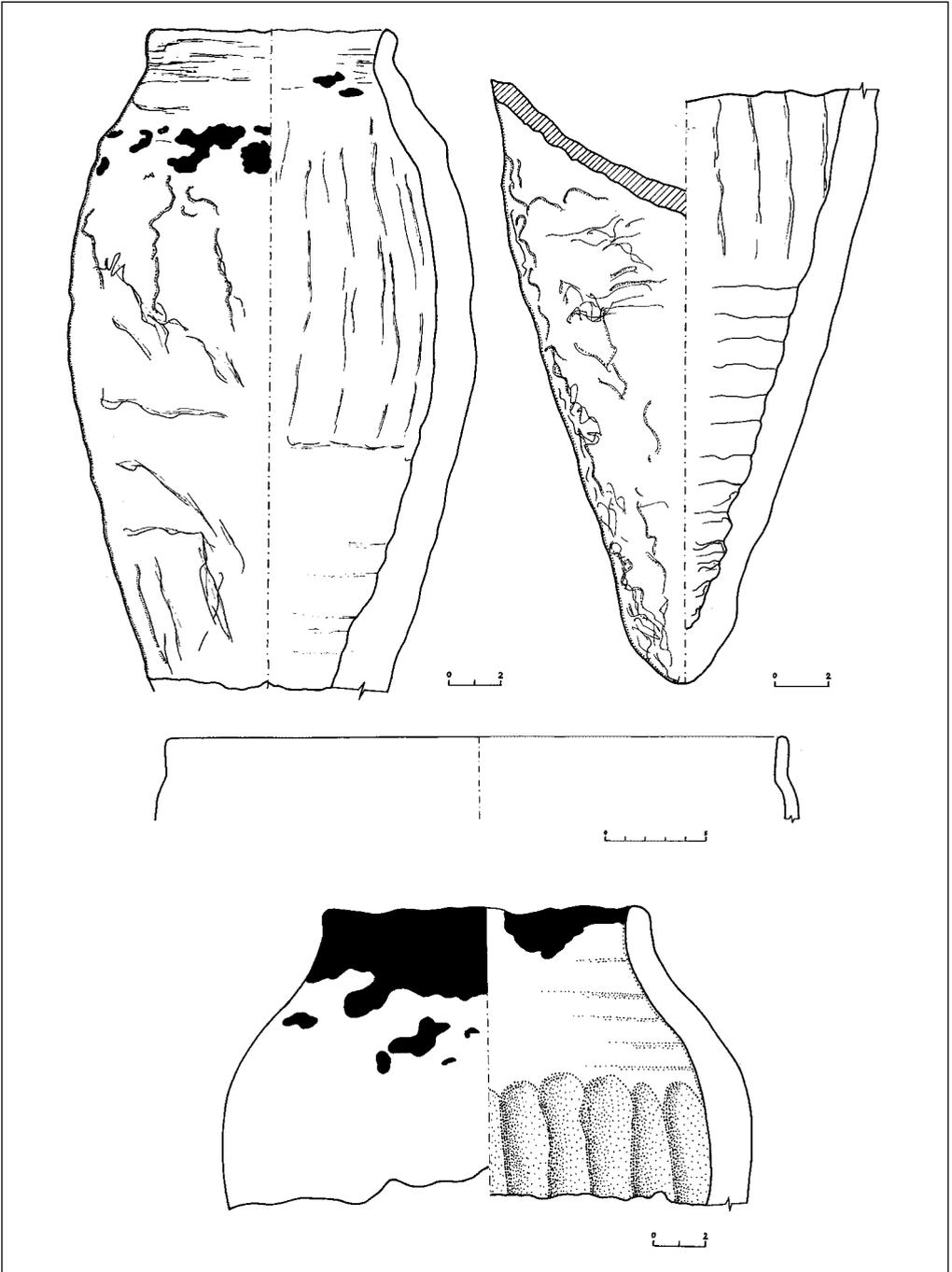


Fig. 3. Pottery from Shaft 46
(Drawing T. Rzeuska)

slipped). A similar find comes from Giza, where a beer jar filled with mud and a red-colored substance was found next to the mastaba G 6050.¹⁶⁾

The pottery excavated from the shaft filling is sufficient to reveal that the vessels did not find their way into the shaft by chance. There is a certain pattern that can be discerned. Between 4.20 and 6.00 m, the predominant fragments belong to the so-called smaller type of beer jar, while between 6.00 and 7.30 m the percentage of beer jars of the bigger type increases; finally from 7.30 m down to the bottom, this second type prevails in the ceramic

assemblage. It is also accompanied by an increasing number of “fillings”. At the very bottom of the shaft, some 8.00 m below the top, there was a bowl fragment, SQ 00-896 A (Nile silt B 2, slow wheel-made, red slipped inside).

The finds from Shaft 46 demonstrate that, contrary to widespread belief, the pottery inside funerary shafts was not always mere “rubbish” used to fill them up.¹⁷⁾ It seems quite evident that when they were thrown into the shaft – and this must have occurred most probably during the funeral ceremony – the beer jars were filled with mud and sealed with a mudstopper.

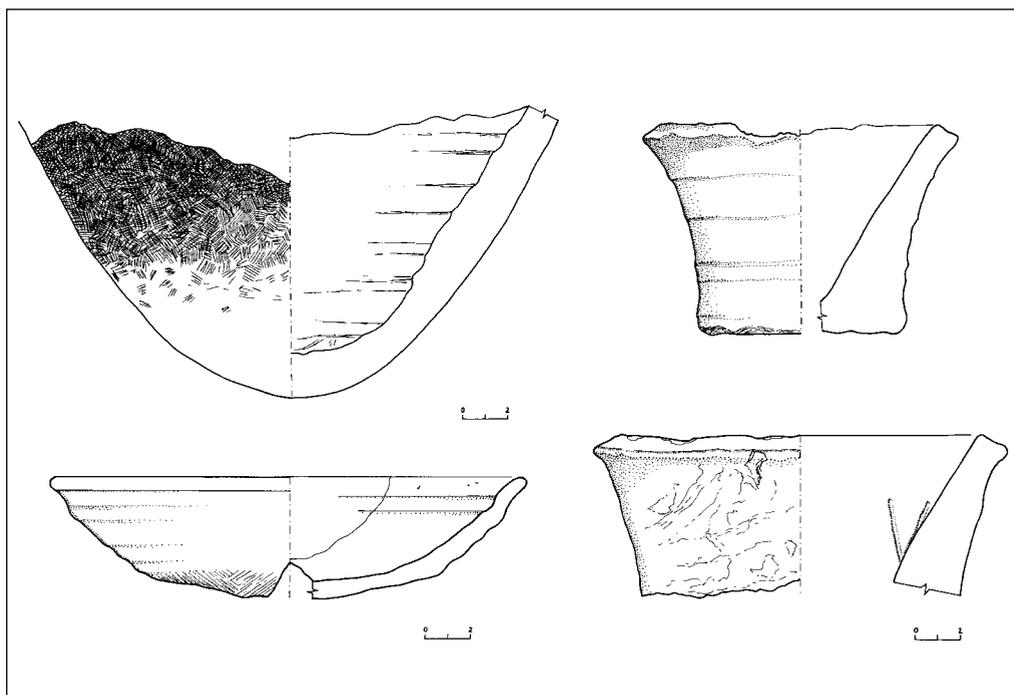


Fig. 4. Pottery from Shaft 46
(Drawing T. Rzeuska)

16) K.R. Weeks, *Mastabas of Cemetery G 6000* (Boston 1994), 96, No. 25-11-138.

17) K. Kromer, *Nezlet Batran, Eine Mastaba aus dem Alten Reich bei Giseh (Ägypten)*. *Österreichische Ausgrabungen 1981-1983* (Wien 1991), 32; Faltings, *op. cit.*, 223 and note 652.

CORRIDOR 2 (Figs. 5, 6)

The windblown sand filling the corridor and chapels yielded absolutely no finds. Pottery appeared only in the *tafl* layer and comprised two groups: pottery connected with the cult of the dead and pottery that was probably deposited in the funerary

chambers or shafts during the funeral ceremonies.

The first group is not very numerous. It includes a bowl, SQ 00-884, found above shaft C2/6 just above the entrance to Chapel E (Nile silt B 1, slow wheel, red-

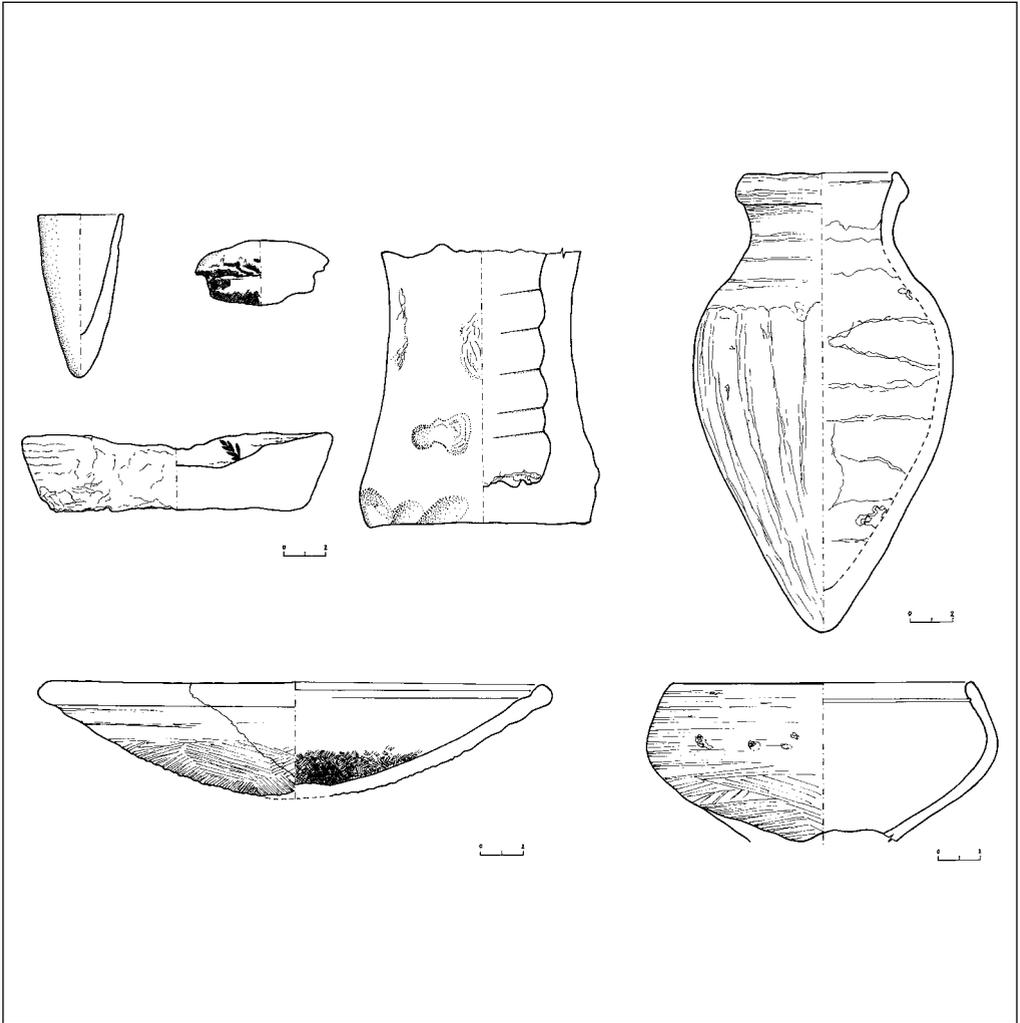


Fig. 5. Pottery from Corridor 2
(Drawing T. Rzeuska)

slipped). The inside walls bear evidence of burning (burnt offering), while the remains of the burnt substance were found to adhere strongly to the inside surface. The vessel is dated to the second half of the Sixth Dynasty. Another example is the bottom part of a stand (?) SQ 00-898 (Nile silt B 2, slow wheel, uncoated), datable to the end of the Sixth Dynasty or early First Intermediate Period. It was found in chapel A, on a stone in front of the southern smaller false door.

The second group of pottery was much bigger. Stoppers of unfired Nile silt were many and varied, in terms of both size and shape, e.g. SQ 00-880. Like all the various kinds of jars and bowls, they must have come from the plundered shafts and burial chambers: jug SQ 00-877 (marl clay A 4, handmade, uncoated), miniature SQ 00-886 (marl clay C 1, handmade, uncoated), bowl SQ 00-896 (Nile silt B 2, slow wheel-made, red-slipped), plate SQ 00-895 (Nile silt C, slow wheel-made, uncoated) with barley impression. An almost complete beer jar, SQ 00-887 (Nile silt C, hand made, uncoated), lay on top of shaft C2/14. Its execution, especially the characteristic traces of fingers visible in the upper part, date it to the end of the Sixth Dynasty.¹⁸⁾

The pottery from Corridor 2 originates practically exclusively from the second half of the Sixth Dynasty. The latest find is a pot-stand, SQ 00-898. Everything in the assemblage appears to be witness of the actual moment of pillaging: bodies pulled out of the burial chambers, mats that had probably covered them strewn around,¹⁹⁾ scattered and broken ceramic vessels. The absence of later ceramics suggests that

Corridor 2 was abandoned shortly after the plundering and everything was covered with windblown sand.

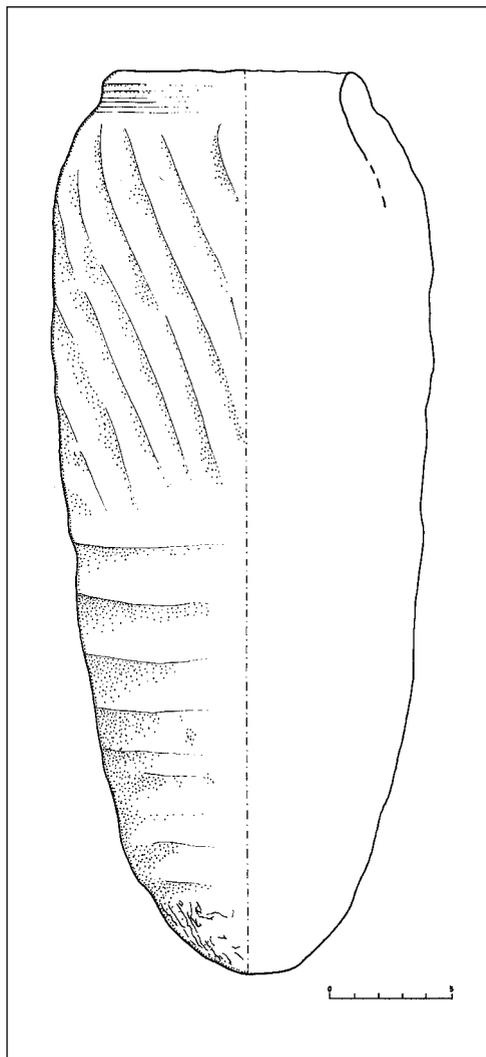


Fig. 6. Beer jar from the late Sixth Dynasty. Corridor 2 (Drawing T. Rzeuska)

18) G. Jéquier, *Tombeaux de particuliers contemporains de Pepi II* (Le Caire 1929), 30, Fig. 30.

19) Compare unplundered burial, Kromer, *op. cit.*, 31, Taf. 14.

LATE NECROPOLIS (*Fig. 7*)

The oldest pottery in the assemblage coming from the so-called Late Necropolis originates from the 5th cent. BC. An example in point is the jug SQ 00-840

(marl silt A, wheel-made, uncoated) with holes pierced before firing. This type seems to have been common in the Memphis necropolis.²⁰ A similar case is represented

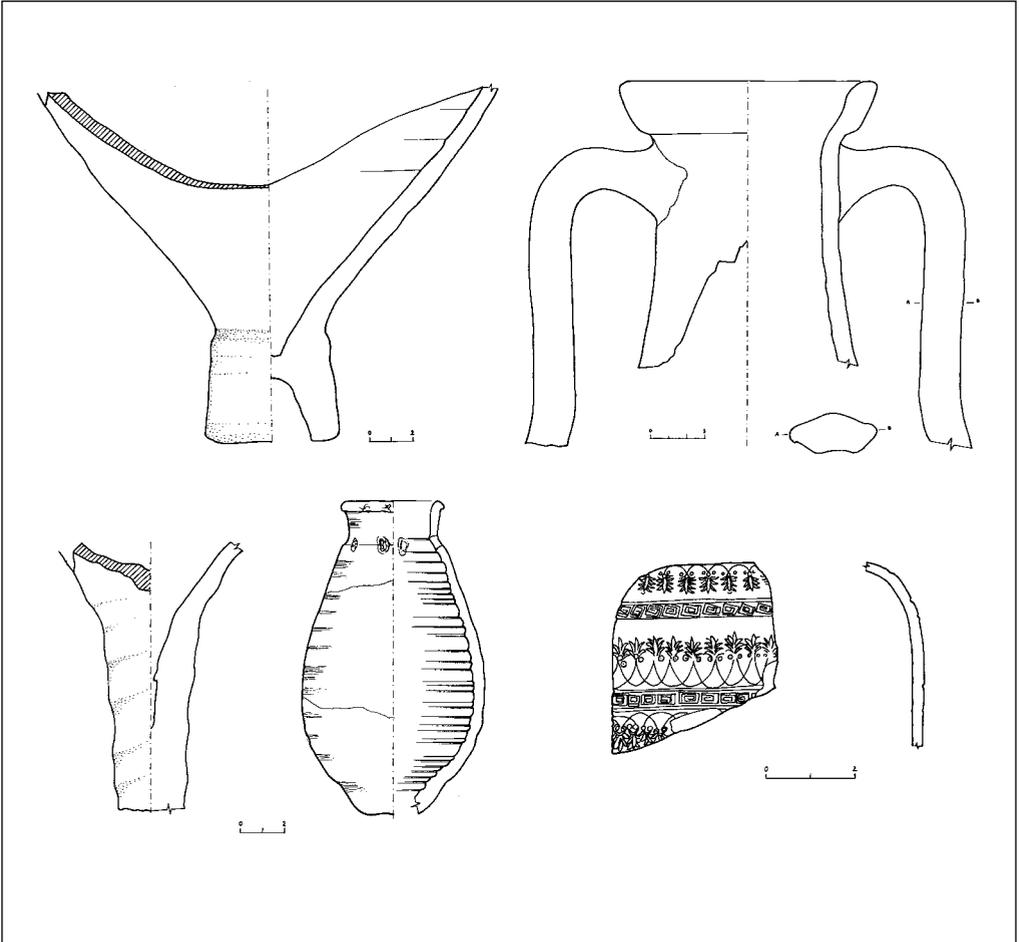


Fig. 7. Pottery from the Late Necropolis (5th cent. BC-1st cent. AD)
(Drawing T. Rzeuska)

20) At Saqqara: J. Bourriau, D. Aston, *The Tomb-Chapel of Paser and Ra-ia at Saqqara* (London 1985), 85, no. 8; P. French, H. Ghaly, *Pottery Chiefly of the Late Dynastic Period from Excavations by the Egyptian Antiquities Organisation at Saqqara 1987*, *CCE 2* (Le Caire 1991), 109, no. 43. At Dahshur, S. J. Allen, *Dahshur 1990-1995*, *BCE XXI* (2000), 44, Fig. 3.6; G. Lecuyot, *La céramique du Mastaba d'Akhetetep a Saqqara*, *CCE 6* (2000), 240, Fig. 2.1. BE.14.

by another vessel from the same period, SQ 00-814 (P.4,²¹ wheel-made, uncoated?²²).

Numerous fragments represent amphorae of the "Mediterranean type", i.e., SQ 00-858 (P.21, wheel-made, uncoated)

and SQ 00-859 (P.7 wheel made, uncoated). There is also a piece, which has been identified as a black-glazed Attic lekythos (?) with stamped decoration, SQ 00-850.²³

SUMMARY

The pottery discovered during the 2000 season has confirmed activity in this part of the necropolis in the second half of the Sixth Dynasty and in the period from the

5th cent. BC. The ceramic deposit from Corridor 1 is extremely interesting and will undoubtedly require more discerning study.

21) Clays that cannot be classified in the so-called "Vienna System" are referred to with the letter P and a consecutive Arabic numeral. The identification of particular clays, which is planned, will require petrographic analyses.

22) Cf. Bourriau, Aston, op. cit., 53, 118-119, pl. 37; French, Ghaly, op. cit., 123-124; Lecuyot, op. cit., 238, Fig. 2, BE. 7.

23) B.A. Sparkes, L. Talcott, *Black and Plain Pottery of the 6th, 5th and 4th Centuries BC. The Athenian Agora*, vol. XII (Princeton 1970), 150-155, Pl. 48, nos. 1142-1146, 5th cent. BC, and B. Gratien, *Tell el-Herr (Nord-Sinai). Étude stratigraphique de la céramique*, *CRIPEL* 18 (1996), 59-60, Fig. 4 (l-n), last quarter of the 5th cent. BC.

I am indebted to Prof. E. Papucci-Władzyka and H. Meyza for their assistance in identifying this find.