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West Saqqara: The Pottery, 2001

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WEST SAQQARA THE POTTERY, 2001

Teodozja Izabela Rzeuska

Completing the study and documentation of pottery finds from previous campaigns was the chief objective of the season. Concurrent excavation work provided some

interesting material – either new types from periods that are already well attested or pottery from periods we have not yet recorded in the West Saqqara necropolis to date.

POTTERY OF THE 3RD-4TH DYNASTY

Finds from the area near the enclosure wall of the mortuary complex of Netjerikhet¹⁾ included, beside the well-known types (e.g. beer jars, bread moulds, plates) of the Sixth Dynasty, also some sherds of vessels dating to the early Old Kingdom – the first time that a bigger assemblage of ceramics from this period has been found in the necropolis. Unfortunately, the vessels came from mixed archaeological contexts and neither their original provenance nor exact dating is known. Attribution to the Third-Fourth Dynasties is possible based on parallels. It seems that originally the pottery came from the step pyramid complex.²⁾

The identifiable repertoire is limited to three types, i.e., collar beer jar, jar with modeled rim with internal groove and bowl with internal ledge below the rim. The beer jars are handmade of Nile silt B2

or C. The clay is relatively compact and, compared to the Sixth Dynasty beer jars, contains fewer inclusions, such as straw, lime, mica and sand. Organic inclusions are also more finely chopped. The surface is left untreated. The jars are usually fired in an oxygen atmosphere, so the color is brown or reddish brown, the hardness is 2-3 on the Mohs scale. The vessels from West Saqqara represent various types depending on the shape of the collar, which can be either shallow or deep with more or less sharp edges. Nothing can be said about the bottom as no complete jars have been found.

Collar beer jars are well attested at the Memphite necropolis, sometimes in well dated contexts, e.g. at Saqqara (funerary complex of Netjerikhet;³⁾ mastabas of the Fourth Dynasty near the causeway of the

1) For the 2001 excavations, see report by K. Myśliwiec in this volume.

2) Objects, possibly deriving from the Netjerikhet complex, have been found in the West Saqqara necropolis in the past, cf. Et. Drioton, J.-Ph. Lauer, "Un groupe de tombes à Saqqarah: Icheti, Nefer-Khouou-Ptah, Sèbek-em-Khet et Ankhi", *ASAE* 55 (1957), 220-222.

3) C. M. Firth, J. E. Quibell, *The Step Pyramid* (Le Caire 1935), pls. 25, 102, nos. 18, 20.

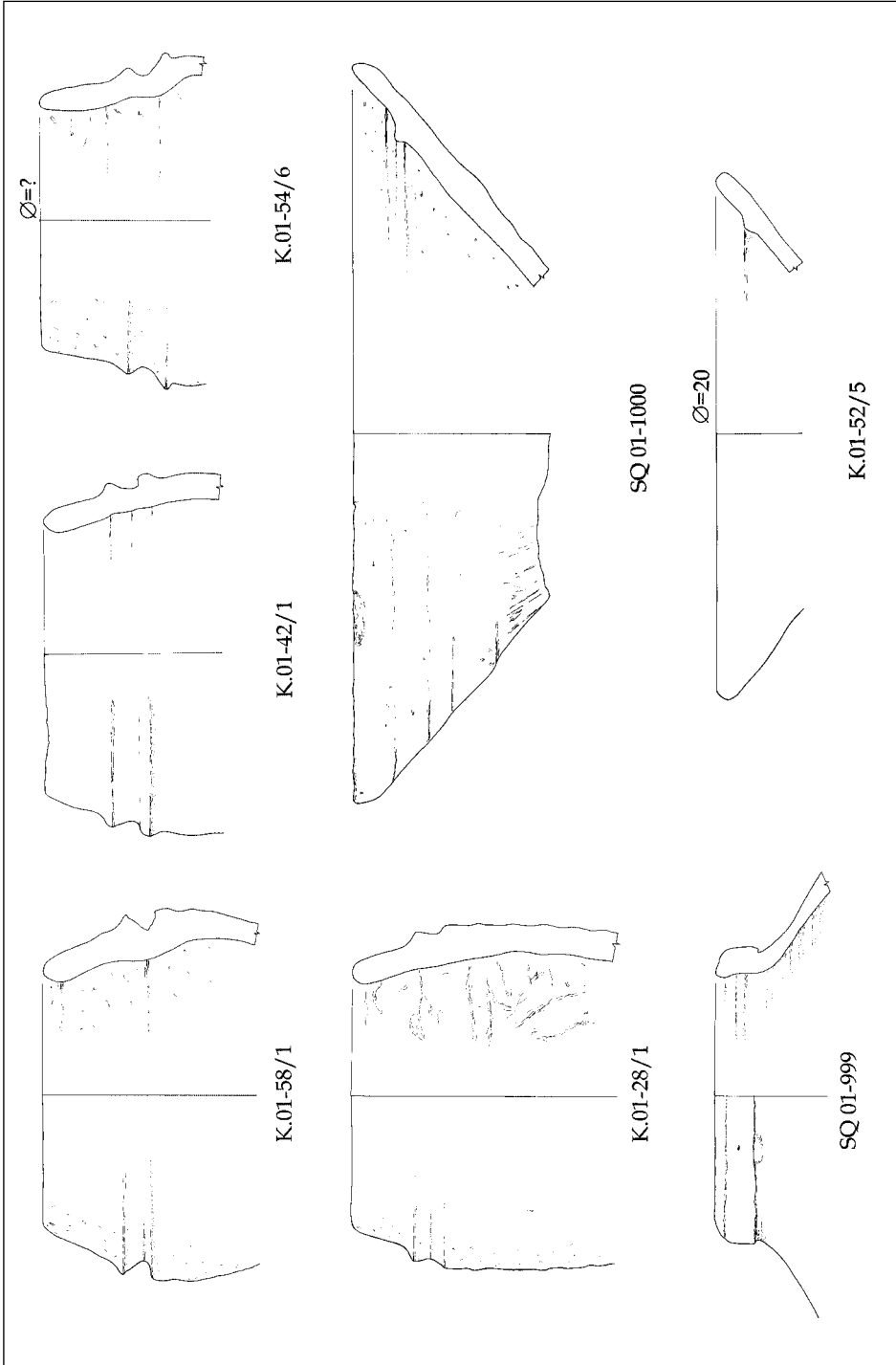


Fig. 1. Pottery of the Third-Fourth Dynasty, assorted fragments (not to scale)
(Drawing T. Rzeuska)

Unas pyramid),⁴⁾ Dashur (tomb of Netjer-aperef),⁵⁾ and Giza (early mastabas).⁶⁾

The jar with modeled rim and internal groove is rarer. The only rim found in this campaign (SQ 01-999, *Fig. 1*) was made of Marl C1 clay. The rim was thrown, while the rest was handmade. Jars of Marl C clay, but dating from the Sixth Dynasty, were shaped in the same way.⁷⁾ Rims of a similar shape, but made of Marl A or Nile B, were found in the previous seasons. Parallels come from Dashur.⁸⁾

Bowls with internal ledge below the rim constitute the third recognized type.

They are made of Nile silt B1, B2 or C, probably on a turntable. The surface is uncoated and the base scraped. One example (SQ 01-1000) is preserved sufficiently to reconstruct practically the entire shape. There are two main varieties: small with a diameter of c. 20 cm, and big with a diameter of c. 30-32 cm. They are usually fired in a reduced atmosphere, resulting in a gray or reddish-gray color. Bowls of this type are well known from the Memphite necropolis: Saqqara (tomb of Hesi-Ra)⁹⁾ Dashur (North Pyramid of Snofru,¹⁰⁾ tomb of Netjer-aperef,¹¹⁾ Giza.¹²⁾

SHAFT 51

Shaft 51 contained a secondary filling composed of mud brick – probably from the mastaba superstructure – and several sherds.¹³⁾ Their original provenance is not known. All of the pots are dated to the early Sixth Dynasty. The beer jars are like those from the complex of Meref-nebef.

A broken vessel (SQ 01-1035) (*Fig. 2*) was found in the burial chamber, east of the sarcophagus. It seems to have been part of the original tomb equipment. It is

a globular jar with flat base, a collar on the shoulders, probably narrow neck and vestigial loop handle. It was handmade of at least four parts, joined at the shoulder and the lower part of the body. The base is shaped with a tool (knife?) and the outside surface is red-slipped and burnished. There are five vertical marks on the lower body, made with a rope impressed into the leather-hard clay before firing. The clay is hard, dense and contains a quantity of

4) H. Ghaly, "Ein Friedhof von Ziegelmastabas des Alten Reiches am Unasweg in Saqqara", *MDAIK* 50 (1994), 66-69, Abb. 5.

5) N. Alexanian, "Das Grab des Prinzen Netjer-aperef. Die Mastaba II/1 in Dahschur. Dahschur II", *AV* 56 (1999), 132-134, Abb. 54, M 28-39.

6) Type A LVI, cf.: G. A. Reisner, *A History of the Giza Necropolis*, vol. I (Cambridge Massachusetts 1942), figs. 279, 285, 289, 287; vol. II, completed and revised by W. S. Smith (Cambridge Massachusetts 1955), 72, fig. 88.

7) This method was still in use during the Middle Kingdom, as revealed in the present author's study of Middle Kingdom material from Elephantine, Qubett el-Hawa.

8) Alexanian, Dahschur II, op. cit., 138, Abb. M 68-69, made of Nile D; R. Stadelmann, N. Alexanian, "Die Friedhöfe des Alten und Mittleren Reiches in Dahschur", *MDAIK* 54 (1998), Abb. 6.9.; D. Faltings, "Die Keramik aus den Grabungen an der nördlichen Pyramiden des Snofru in Dahschur. Arbeitsbericht über die Kampagnen 1983-1986", *MDAIK* 45 (1989), Abb. 12, no. A 54.

9) J. E. Quibell, *The Tomb of Hesi* (Le Caire 1913), pl. 27.

10) Faltings, op. cit., 146-147, Abb. 12 a, no. A 28.

11) Alexanian, Dahschur II, op. cit., 144-147, Abb. 59, Tf. 19, M. 110.

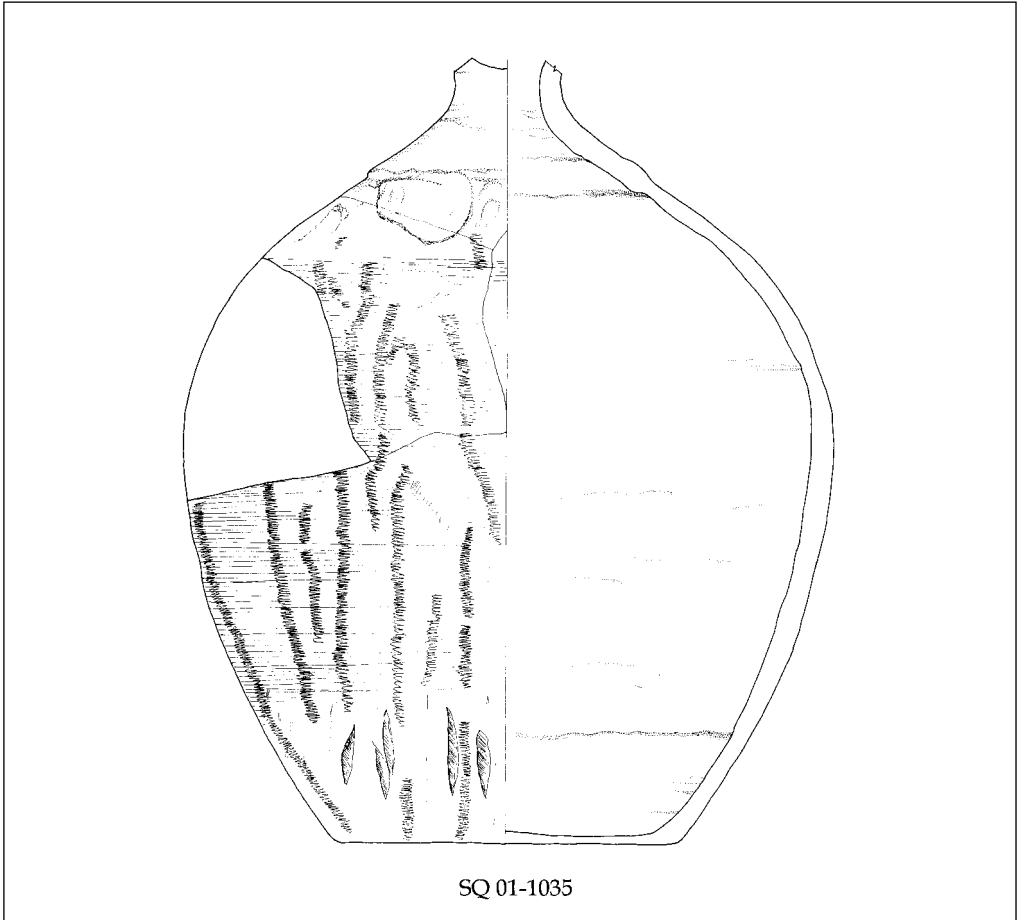
12) The tomb of Hetep-heres, cf. Reisner, *Giza II*, op. cit., fig. 75; mastaba at Nezlet Batran, cf. K. Kromer, *Nezlet Batran. Eine Mastaba aus dem Alten Reich bei Giseh (Ägypten)*. Österreichische Ausgrabungen 1981-1983 (Wien 1991), Taf. 24.2.

13) For details, see contribution of K. O. Kuraszkievicz in this volume.

white and gray particles, visible in the section and on the plain inner surface. The vessel is an example of Palestinian Red Burnished of the Early Bronze Age III.¹⁴⁾

Morphologically, Palestinian Red Burnished (Early Bronze III) seems to be

a late form of the Abydos Ware (Early Bronze II). Vessels imported to Egypt during the Predynastic Period were found in the royal complexes at Umm el-Qaab in Abydos¹⁵⁾ and in Nagada.¹⁶⁾ The vessel shape evolved toward a lower, squatter



*Fig. 2. Jar from the burial chamber of Shaft 51
(Drawing T. Rzeuska)*

14) Mineralogical and chemical analyses suggest that this type originates not so much from Palestine, as from Lebanon, cf.: Alexanian, Dahshur II, op. cit., 108-110.

15) W.M.F. Petrie, Abydos, vol. I (London 1902), 6, pl. VIII, 5; Id., Royal Tombs, vol. II (London 1901), 8, pl. LIV; R. Amiran, Ancient Pottery (Jerusalem 1969), 62-66, pl. 17,5.

16) E.-M. Engel, in: J. Kahl et al., "Die Funde aus dem 'Menesgrab' in Naqada: ein Zwischenbericht", *MDAIK* 57 (2001), 176, pl. 28 a (SACOS Liverpool E 2799b).

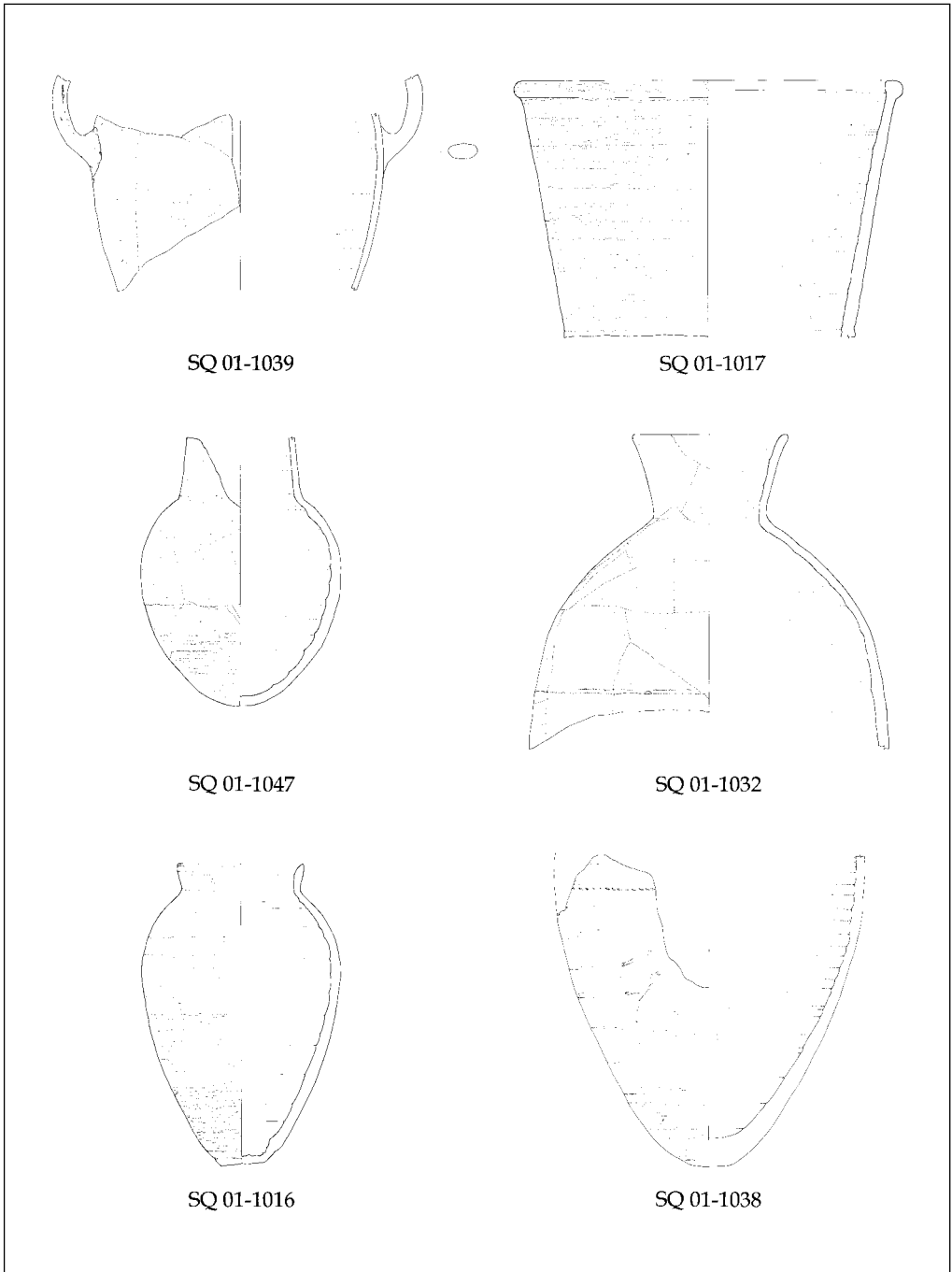


Fig. 3. Assorted examples of pottery from the New Kingdom assemblage (not to scale)
(Drawing T. Rzeuska)

version, the body becoming more ovoid than globular, the bottom wider. The piece from the West Saqqara necropolis, recorded there for the first time, falls in the very end of the sequence – it is definitely the youngest such vessel known from Egypt to date. R. Amiran has suggested

that they served as containers for oil imported from Palestine.¹⁷⁾

Parallels include the following: Palestine – Jericho, jug from tomb A (light red, red burnished slip);¹⁸⁾ Egypt – Giza (seven jars),¹⁹⁾ Dashur (tomb of Netjeraperef).²⁰⁾

NEW KINGDOM

Single New Kingdom sherds have been found in previous seasons, but never in a closed context. The assemblage appeared in

the area north of the brick platform excavated in 1999.²¹⁾ Connections have been found between the material discov-

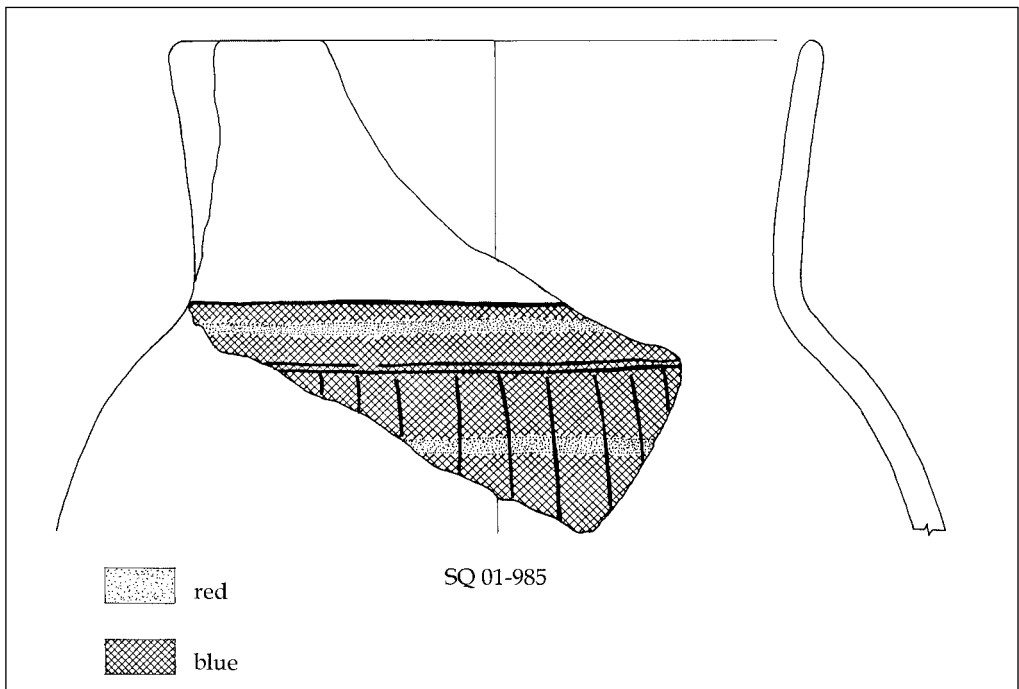


Fig. 4. Painted beer jar of New Kingdom date
(Drawing T. Rzeuska)

17) Amiran, *op. cit.*, 66.

18) Amiran, *op. cit.*, 75-77, pl. 20, no. 15.

19) Reisner's B-LII a: One-handled pitcher, no. 32-12-13, from mastaba G 2170 A, burnished red wash: Reisner, *Giza I*, *op. cit.*, fig. 274; Reisner, *Giza II*, *op. cit.*, 74, fig. 95, pl. 53f.

20) Alexanian, *Dahshur II*, *op. cit.*, 108-110, no. S. 45, Abb. 46, Tf. 20.

21) K. Myśliwiec, *PAM XI, Reports 1999* (2000), 93-95, fig. 5.

ered in 1999 and 2000, and the group discovered this year, proving beyond doubt that we are dealing with a single deposit. The prevailing forms are of the closed kind: chiefly jars of various size with round base and high neck with rolled rim, (red-slipped, Nile silt B1 or B2); amphorae: two-handled (SQ 01-1039, slipped Marl clay D) and with rolled rim (SQ 01-1017, uncoated, Nile silt B2); beer jars with direct rim (uncoated, Nile silt B2) (*Fig. 3*). Good parallels come from Malkata.²²⁾

One fragment of a beer jar (SQ 01-985) is particularly extraordinary for its decoration (*Fig. 4*). The cream-slipped surface is painted in blue, red and black. The ornament consists of a frieze of overlapping petals below a composite band. Similar jars from Malkata²³⁾ and Amarna²⁴⁾ seem to confirm a dating in the late Eighteenth Dynasty.

A rare find is a bell-shaped vessel (SQ 01-989, uncoated Nile silt B2) with a handle (?) at the top and at least two holes

pierced before firing (*Fig. 5*). Malkata again provides a parallel.²⁵⁾

Also belonging to the deposit are two Canaanite amphorae (SQ 01-1040, SQ 01-1051, cf. *Fig. 5*). They are made of two different types of clay (respectively P. 55 and P. 56), dense and hard, containing an abundance of large- and medium-size gray and gray-white mineral inclusions.²⁶⁾ On the grounds of the characteristic carination on the shoulder, the amphorae may be dated to the late Eighteenth Dynasty.²⁷⁾ Open forms are restricted to three small bowls with flat base (uncoated, made of Nile silt B1, cut base, cf. *Fig. 5*).

The pottery seems to be chronologically homogeneous (late Eighteenth Dynasty). Yet it was found apparently not in its original location, but in a layer of wind-blown sand instead. No New Kingdom tombs have been discovered in the West Saqqara necropolis to date, although there is nothing to preclude the possibility of such graves being located there.

SUMMARY

The pottery presented above reflects types hitherto unknown or little known from the West Saqqara necropolis. Sherds of the Third-Fourth Dynasties likely originated from the funerary complex of Netjerikhet. A jar found *in situ* in the burial chamber of

Shaft 51 represents a rare import from the Lebanese coast, confirming trade contacts with this region in the Late Old Kingdom. An unresolved issue is the New Kingdom pottery, which surely came from some as yet unknown structure.

22) C. A. Hope, *Pottery of the Egyptian New Kingdom. Three Studies* (Burwood 1989), fig. 3 a (beer jars), e (red-slipped jars), fig. 4 a-b (amphorae), pl. 7c (marl-clay amphorae).

23) Hope, *op. cit.*, fig. 10, b.

24) *Egypt's Golden Age: The Art of Living in the New Kingdom 1558-1085 BC. Catalogue of the Exhibition, Museum of Fine Arts, February 3-May 2, 1982* (Boston 1982), 93, no. 73.

25) Hope, *op. cit.*, fig. 4 f.

26) Petrographical and mineralogical analyses are planned.

27) Hope, *op. cit.*, part III, *Amphorae of the New Kingdom*, fig. 4 no. 1; M. Serpico, "New Kingdom Canaanite Amphorae fragments from Buhen", in: *Studies on Ancient Egypt in Honour of H. S. Smith*, eds. A. Leahy, J. Tait (London 1999), 267-272.

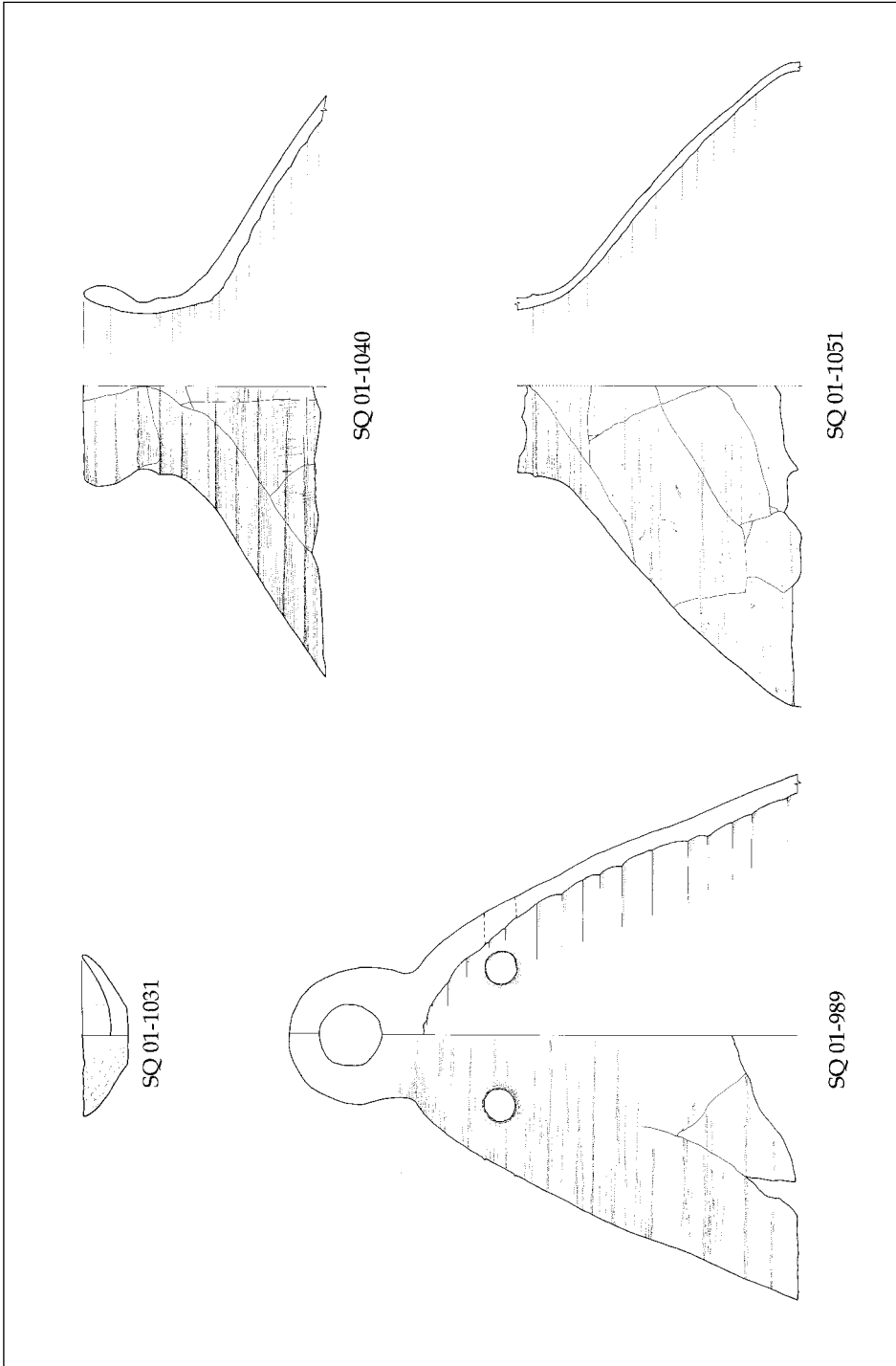


Fig. 5. Assorted pottery of New Kingdom date (not to scale)
(Drawing T. Rzeuska)