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West Saqqara: The Pottery, 2002

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THE POTTERY, 2002

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OLD KINGDOM NECROPOLIS

The ceramic assemblage*¹⁾ from the three complexes explored this season, i.e., shaft 54¹⁾ and the rock-cut funerary chapels 13 and 14, was mixed, the structures having been robbed at least once. The last time this happened was in medieval times as indicated by a lamp SQ 02-1111, Fustat type I²⁾ (Fig. 1), which was discovered on the surface of the fill just next to the passage joining the two chapels. It is an Egyptian-made long-nozzle lamp with one nibbed handle and characteristic concave foot with incised ring inside, the surface glazed with thin turquoise glaze with dark green “dripping” on the lower part. The lamp had been used: There were traces of burning on it and inside it some burnt remains and knot. This type of lamp was in use from the second half of the 12th century and was produced through the 14th and even 15th century.³⁾ The robbers must have operated sometime during this period, throwing out the content of shaft 54 and quarrying through the rock to chapel 13; consequently, they obliterated all traces of earlier robbing. The fill in the shafts of both chapels was disturbed and the contents mixed, so that parts of one and the

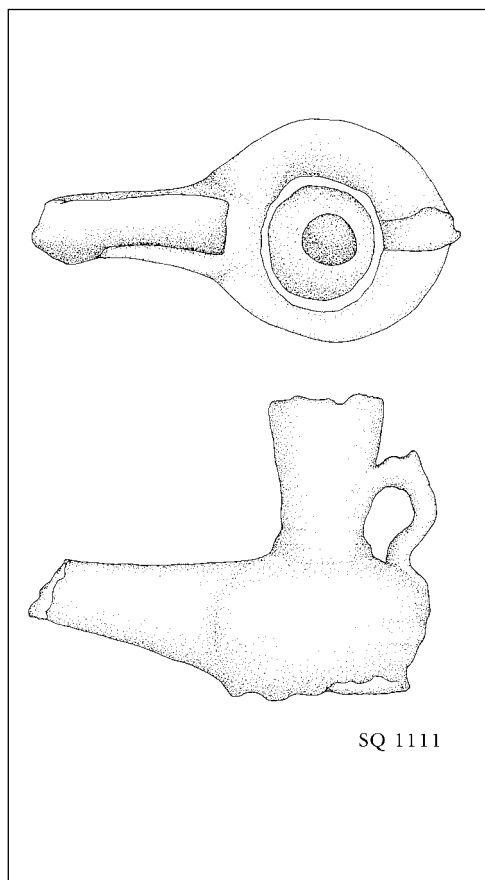


Fig. 1. Medieval glazed lamp SQ 02-1111

*) Mr. Henk Jan Top's assistance in documenting the pottery assemblage is gratefully acknowledged. All the drawings are by the author and Mr. H.J. Top, the inkings are by K. Orzechowska. The drawings are not to scale.

1) Cf. contribution by K. Myśliwiec in this volume. Shaft 54 had been explored in 1986 and the pottery from it studied in 2001. Cf. K. Myśliwiec, T. Herbich, with contribution by A. Niwiński, *EtTrav XVII* (1995), 177-203.

2) W. Kubiak, "Medieval Ceramic Oil Lamps from Fustat", in: *Ars Orientalis. The Arts of Islam and the East*, vol. 8, Freer Gallery of Art (Michigan 1970), 13-15, figs. 10-11, Text figs. 12-13. I am grateful to Dr. Małgorzata Redlak of the National Museum in Warsaw for this information.

3) Loc. cit.

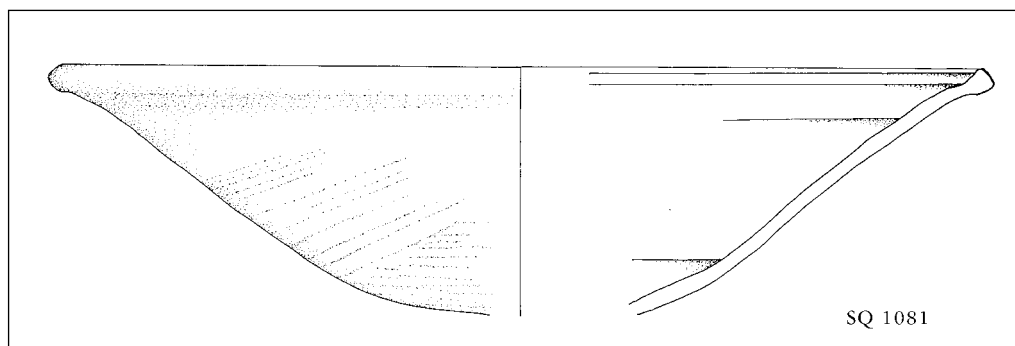


Fig. 2. Old Kingdom bowl SQ 02-108

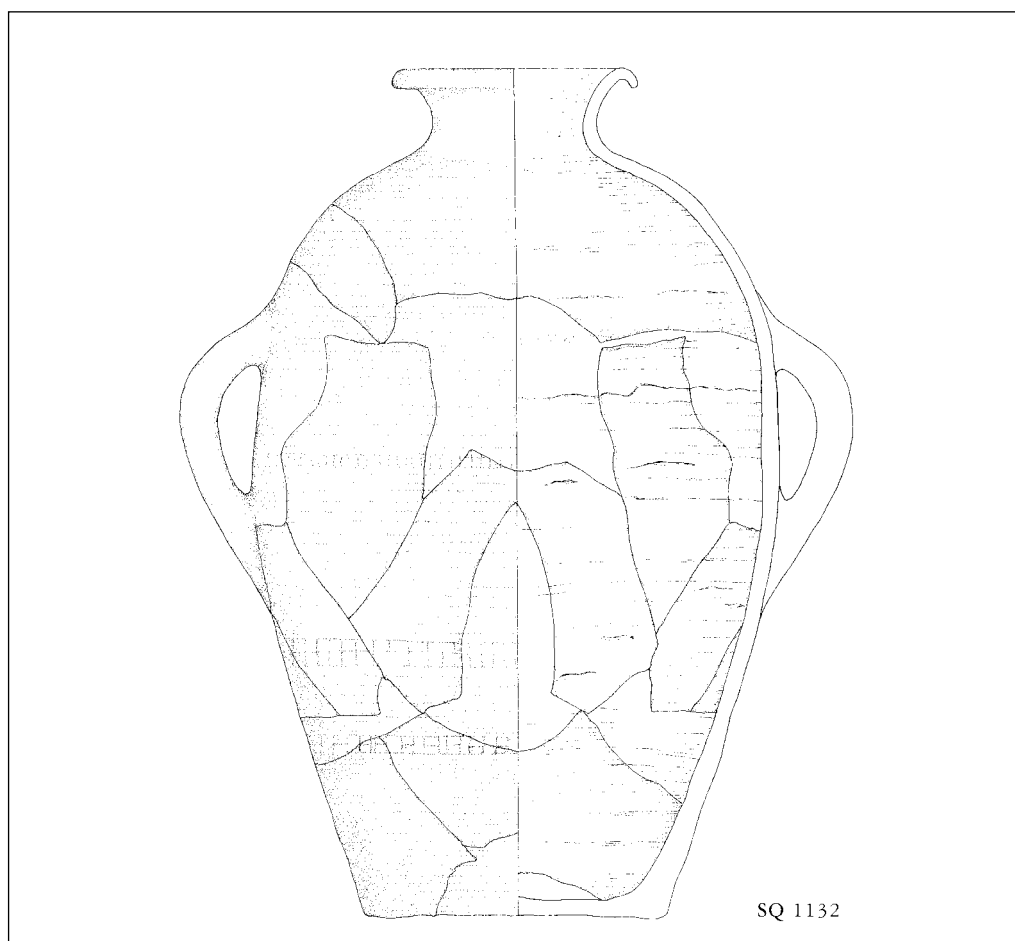


Fig. 3. Levantine import from the Early Bronze III, SQ 02-1132. The handles have been reconstructed theoretically

same vessel could have been scattered quite extensively. For example, sherds of bowl SQ 02-1081, Nile silt B2, red slipped (*Fig. 2*), were found inside chapel 13, but also 10 m east of shaft 54, on top of a thick layer of drifted sand covering both the shaft opening and Late Period burials. Matching pieces of vessel SQ 02-1132 (*Fig. 3*) came from chapel 14 and shaft 54. This vessel was handmade of soft coarse clay containing abundant gray and white grits (P.70 in our classification). The surface is combed horizontally and in the lower part also vertically. On the outside it was covered with white wash, on the inside with resin. In all likelihood the vessel, representing Combed ware, came from the northern Levant, the white wash suggesting the region of Byblos;⁴ it is dated to the Early Bronze III.⁵ Its presence confirms Egyptian-Levantine contacts at the end of the Old Kingdom. Sherds of another identical vessel were discovered in chapel 14 and shaft 14/1,⁶ making it viable to think that both vessels had been deposited in the burial chamber at the bottom of this shaft, forming part of the grave goods for Meri.

Another vessel found scattered between chapel 14 and shaft 54, SQ 02-1115 (*Fig. 4*), is an entirely new type of beer-jar.⁷ These vessels, handmade of Nile silt C, are c. 40 cm high with a rim diameter of about

10 cm, straight mouth, cylindrical body and rounded bottom. The surface bears evidence to the modeling: the bottom by pinching and the body by coiling, probably in two parts joined together in the middle of the pot. One or two horizontal depressions can be seen just under the rim. The most distinctive characteristic of this type of jar is the red-slipped surface, which is quite exceptional considering the disposable character of these pots and their overall hurried and careless manufacturing, giving little thought to the surface treatment. Accompanying these sherds were cylindrical lumps of unfired clay that fit perfectly the inside of the vessels; occasionally, they were even found inside surviving fragments of pots. It seems that the Nile silt was intended as a replacement for the beer offerings to the dead.⁸ No stoppers used with these jars have been found as yet. This type of beer-jar was found in shaft 54 and chapel 14 almost to the complete exclusion of all other types, making the two structures putatively contemporaneous. Jars of this type were also used in the construction of the brick mastaba superstructure by shaft 54 (deposit 2/2002).

Also coming from chapel 14 is a red-slipped bowl of Nile silt B1, SQ 02-1166 (*cf. Fig. 4*) made of Nile silt B1, having

4) D. L. Esse, *Subsistence, Trade, and Social Change in Early Bronze Age Palestine* (Chicago 1991), 111-114.

5) N. Porat, R. Greenberg, "A Third Millennium Levantine Pottery Production Center: Typology, Petrography, and Provenance of the Metallic Ware of Northern Israel and Adjacent Regions", *BASOR* 301 (1996), 12. R. Amiran, *Ancient Pottery of the Holy Land* (Jerusalem 1969), 67ff. J.B. Hennessy, *The Foreign Relations of Palestine during the Early Bronze Age* (London 1967), 31-32, 72-73; Esse, *op. cit.*, 109, 114.

6) Shaft 14/1 has yet to be fully explored; hence, there is a chance that more fragments of this second vessel will come to light, facilitating a fuller reconstruction of the form.

7) Sherds of beer-jars of this type were found during earlier seasons of explorations, mainly to the south of the funerary complex of Meref-nebef; they were not numerous, however.

8) On false contents, in beer-jars among others, imitating funerary offerings, see T. I. Rzeuska, "The pottery from the funerary complex of vizier Meref-nebef (West Saqqara). The evidence of a burial and cult of the dead in the Old Kingdom", in: *Proceedings of the First Central European Conference of Young Egyptologists. Egypt 1999: Perspectives of Research*, Warsaw 7-9 June 1999, ed. J. Popielska-Grzybowska (Warsaw 2001), 157-167.

a characteristic “soapy” surface. It represents a rare type of bowl featuring a double carination. The nearest parallel comes from Abusir.⁹⁾

Epigraphical data from the false doors of Meri called Ikhi in chapel 14 sets the date of the two structures almost certainly in the reigns of Pepi I and Merenre.¹⁰⁾

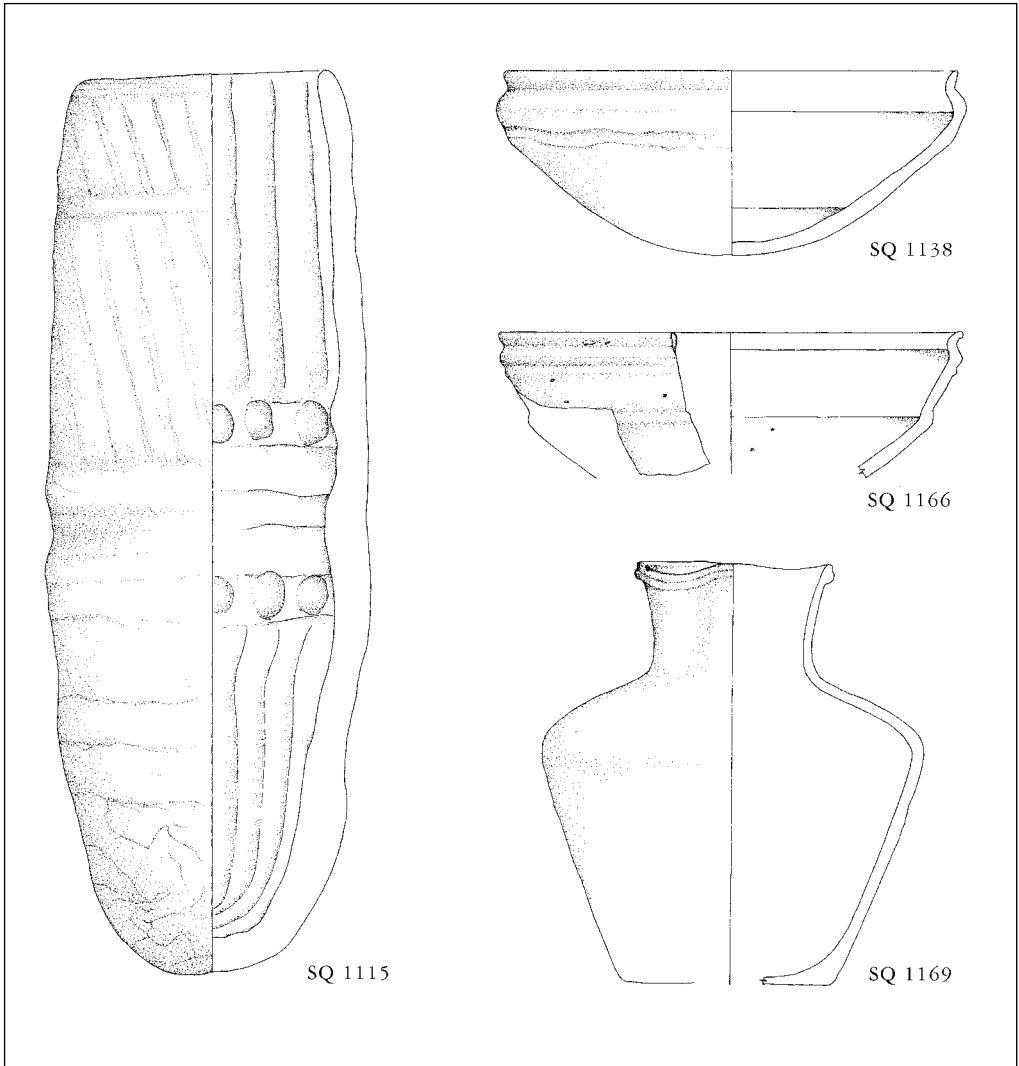


Fig. 4. Pottery from the reigns of Pepi I and Merenre, found in the chapel 13 and 14 complexes

9) W. Kaiser, "Die Tongefäße", in: H. Ricke, Das Sonnenheiligtum des Königs Userkaf. II. Die Funde, *BÄBA* 11 (Cairo 1969), 64, type XXVII, nos. 155-158.

10) See contribution by K. O. Kuraszkievicz in this volume.

The ceramic assemblage from chapel 13 is not as straightforward apparently. Red slipped beer-jars are present, so it is likely that the two structures, 13 and 14, functioned contemporaneously for some time. However, to judge by its irregular plan, chapel 13 was later than 14, cut in the rock already when chapel 14 was functioning.¹¹⁾ The number of shafts inside chapel 13 (eight in total) suggests long usage, a deduction confirmed by the ceramic assemblage, which includes, beside the same kind of pottery as in chapel 14, also later pieces that do not appear there. Two other types of beer-jars are just as frequent as the red slipped variety. One is a spindle-shaped jar with gently rounded shoulders narrowing toward the rim; these pots were made of Nile silt C and their characteristic feature is a white-washed external surface. Jars of this type have already been found in the Saqqara West necropolis – in the funerary enclosure of Pehi, dated to the late Sixth Dynasty.¹²⁾ The other type is also spindle-shaped, but without white wash; it is confirmed in burial shaft no 46 of the Seshem-nefer complex,¹³⁾ attributed to the late Sixth Dynasty as well.¹⁴⁾ This type of beer-jar was accompanied by well preserved mud stoppers with a “button” at the top (*Fig. 5*).¹⁵⁾

Maidum bowl SQ 02-1138 was found in shaft 13/7 of chapel 13 (cf. *Fig. 4*). On the grounds of the form and characteristic

carination, which is considered as a dating criterion,¹⁶⁾ the proposed date for this vessel is the end of the Fifth – early Sixth Dynasty. But while the form resembles earlier vessels, such as those from the complex of Meref-nebef,¹⁷⁾ the material is different: not Marl clay, but Nile silt B1, and slip that is not brick-red, but dark red, the surface being not slippery, but “soapy”.



Fig. 5. Mud stopper from chapel 13, Old Kingdom period. SQ 02-1173

11) Cf. contribution by K. Myśliwiec in this volume.

12) K. Myśliwiec, *PAM XI, Reports 1999* (2000), 93-96.

13) T.I. Rzeuska, “West Saqqara 2000. The Pottery”, *PAM XII, Reports 2000* (2001), 141-143, fig. 3.

14) K. Myśliwiec, *PAM XII*, op. cit., 118-119.

15) Identical stoppers were discovered in burial shaft 31 belonging to Pehi, cf. Myśliwiec, *PAM XI*, op. cit., 93-96, thus providing further confirmation of the dating.

16) P. Ballet, “Essai de classification des coupes type Maidum-bowl du sondage nord de 'Ayn-Asil (Oasis de Dakhla). Typologie et Evolution”, *CCE I* (1987), 1-16; recently, L. Op de Beeck, “Restrictions for the use of Maidum-bowls as chronological indicators”, *CdE LXXV* (2000), Fasc. 149, 5-14.

17) T.I. Rzeuska, *The Pottery from the Funerary Complex of Vizier Merefnebef*, op. cit., pl. 26, no. SQ 98-490.

This case suggests that, if Maidum bowls are to be considered as a dating criterion, then not only the shape, that is, the characteristic angle of the carination to the body and the ratio of the rim-to-body diameter, but also the material of the vessel, its color and the character of the slip should be taken into account. The Maidum bowl was found in the same context with red-slipped beer-jars, suggesting that the vessel dates to the reigns of Pepi I and Merenre. Furthermore, the vessel displays a technological resemblance to the bowl with double carination (SQ 02-1166, cf. *Fig. 4*); so much, in fact, that the two seem to be the product of the same potter. Another luxury pot, an ewer with rim spout SQ 02-1169 (cf. *Fig. 4*), also appears

to come from the same “workshop”; it is made of Nile B1 clay, red-slipped and “soapy” to the touch.

Jar SQ 02-1161 and stand SQ 02-1155 (*Fig. 6*), both from the fill of chapel 13, represent an entirely different workshop. The clay is the coarser Nile silt B2, but the outer surface is red-slipped. The bottom part has been scraped, leaving on the surface characteristic traces that were common rather in the second half and in the end of the Sixth Dynasty. These deep cuts, like the ones on jar SQ 02-1152 (*Fig. 6*), may have been considered as a decorative motif.

Summing up the evidence of the pottery, it can be said that chapel 13 functioned from the times of Pepi I – Merenre until the end of the Sixth Dynasty.

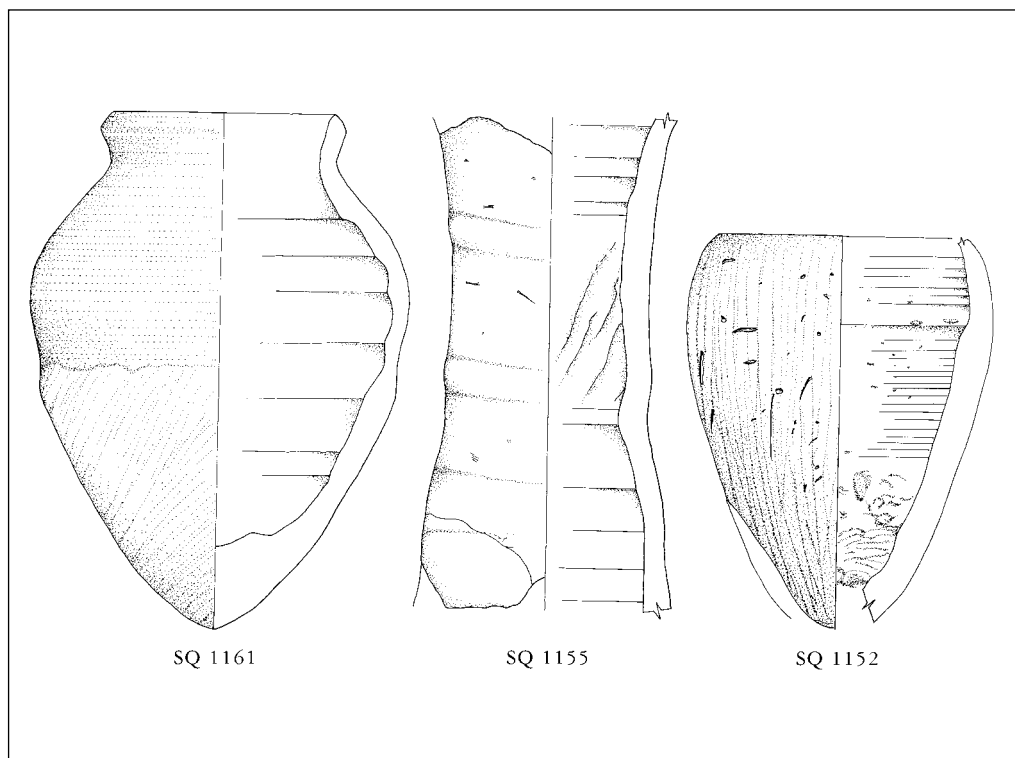


Fig. 6. Pottery from the chapel 13 complex

So far, practically no cultic vessels, such as stands and bell-shaped bowls, have come to light in the pottery assemblage from chapels 13 and 14.

NEW KINGDOM POTTERY

The level of the Late Necropolis again yielded some sherds of New Kingdom date, but of unknown provenance.¹⁸⁾ They mostly belong to jars made of Nile silt B, decorated under the rim with three horizontal black bands painted prior to firing (Fig. 7); these jars date back to the early Eighteenth Dynasty. There are also sherds of Marl clay B and Marl clay D.

LATE NECROPOLIS FINDS

A substantial part of the new material discovered this season consisted of small wheel-made juglets made of Marl clay A4 with wet-treated surface. An ensemble of six pots in two varieties (Fig. 8) was found in a layer of very hard and compact *dakka*, approximately 50 cm below the surface. The original provenience of the pots is not known, but it seems probable that they had belonged to one of the burials in the Late Necropolis. Five of the vessels represent a bulging vase with small mouth and distinctly marked neck, where there are two holes pierced before firing; a rope had been passed through these holes to suspend the juglet.¹⁹⁾ The sole representative of the other type is a slender juglet with slightly open mouth. Finding the two types together confirms the presumption about their similar date.

Vessel SQ 02-1090 (Fig. 9) was found with burial no. 304, and sherds of other vessels of the kind have been noted in the ceramic assemblage from the Late

Necropolis layer. Their presence in the necropolis is hardly surprising in view of their being putatively used in the mummification process. This would be suggested by the presence of resin inside the vessels and on the outer walls, as well as the aperture made at two-thirds height prior to firing. They must have been used either to pour a bituminous mass on the body or inside the various orifices. Many burials mummified in this fashion have been found at the necropolis and it was the custom that anything that came into contact with the deceased's body during the process of mummification had to be

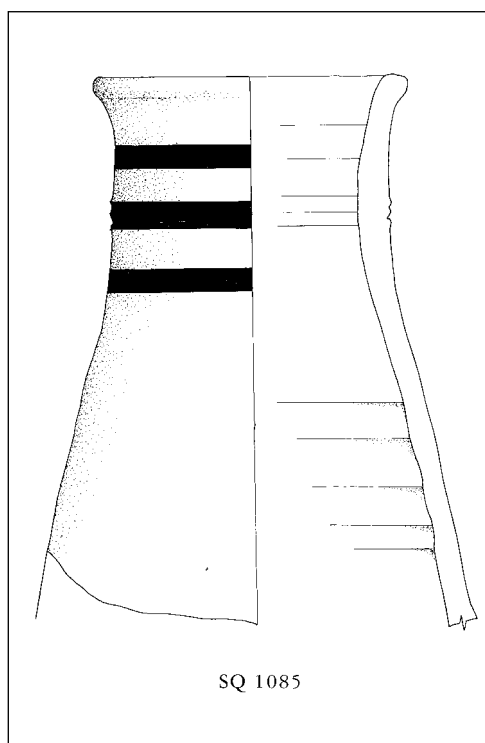


Fig. 7. New Kingdom jar

18) Cf. T. Rzeuska, "West Saqqara. The Pottery, 2001", *PAM* XIII, pp. 156-7, Figs. 3-4.

19) A neck with string still tied around it had been found during the previous season.

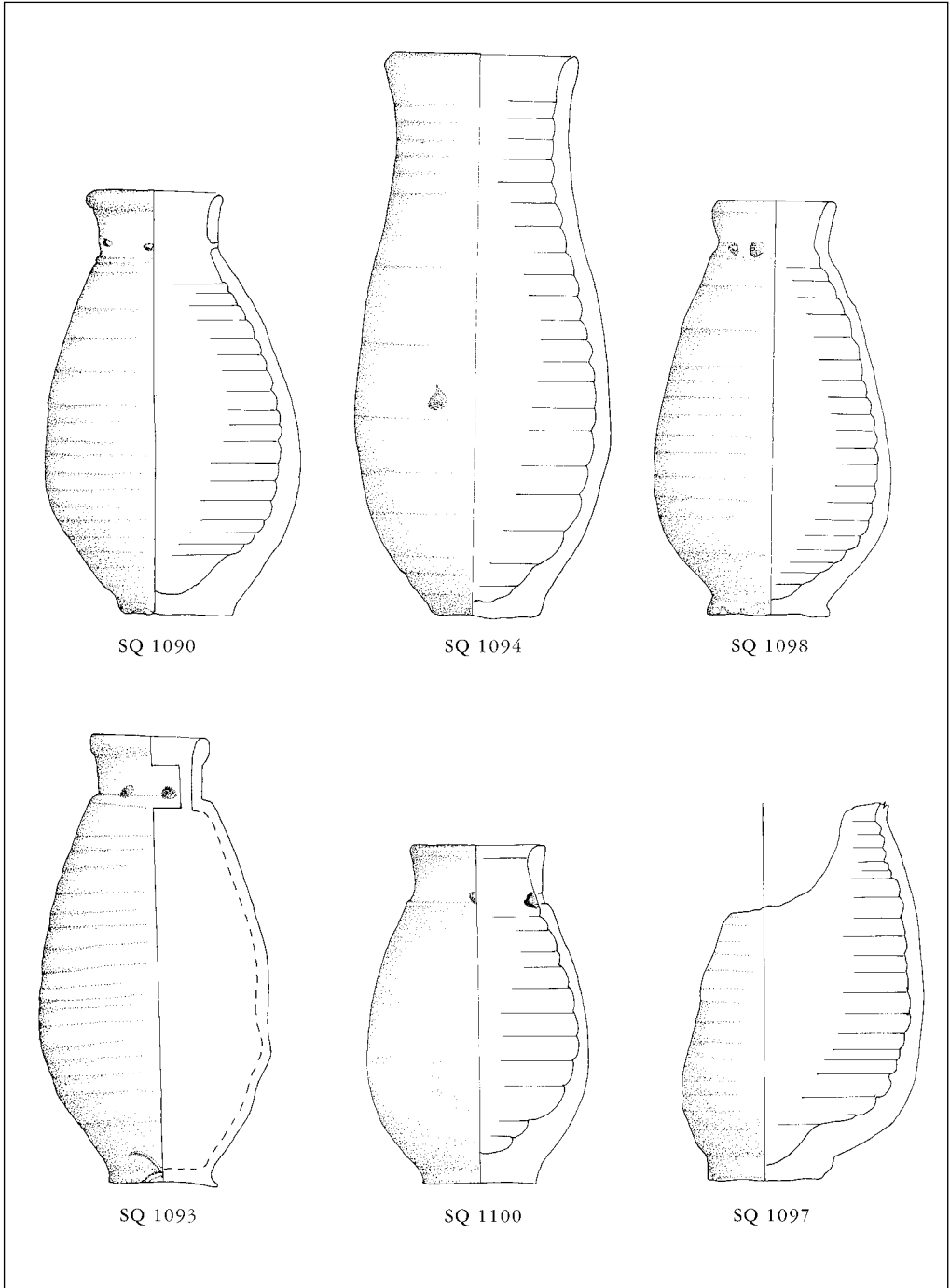


Fig. 8. Deposit 1/2002 from the layer of dakka underlying the Late Necropolis

buried somewhere close-by. Bowls like SQ 02-1067 (*Fig. 9*) were quite frequent; they were made on the wheel of Nile silt B2 or C, with a red slip on the exterior surface.

The level of the Late Necropolis also yielded some diagnostic sherds belonging to the so-called torpedo amphorae. These are vessels with a short vertical rim, broad flat shoulders forming a sharp angle to the body and two twisted handles. They represent six types according to Sagona's classification,²⁰ and are dated to the Persian period in Egypt. The two amphorae from

West Saqqara were manufactured of two different types of clay. The first group is represented by amphora SQ 02-1078 (*Fig. 10*), made of a very soft, powdery clay (P. 11) that is believed to be typical of Sagona's type 6,²¹ the other by vessel SQ 02-1116 (*Fig. 10*), manufactured of a harder and more sandy clay (P. 65). The chronological connection between this pottery and the immediate context of the burials is difficult to explain, but despite everything it shows that there were some activities in Saqqara during the Persian period.

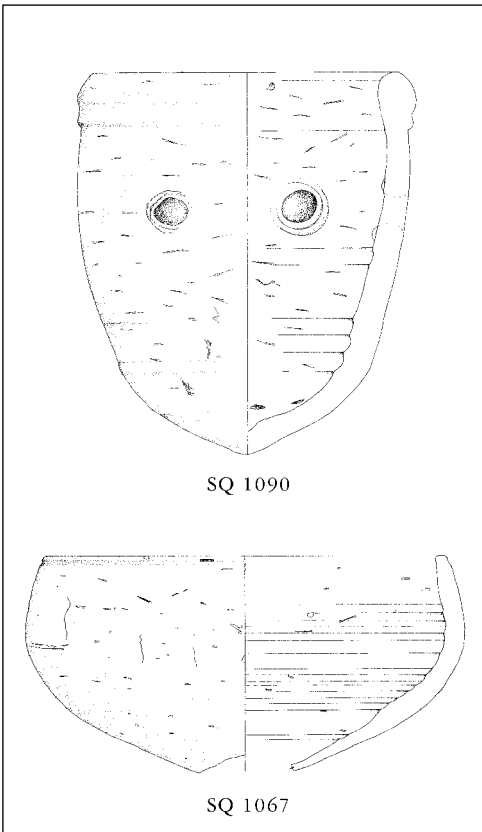


Fig. 9. Pottery from the Late Necropolis

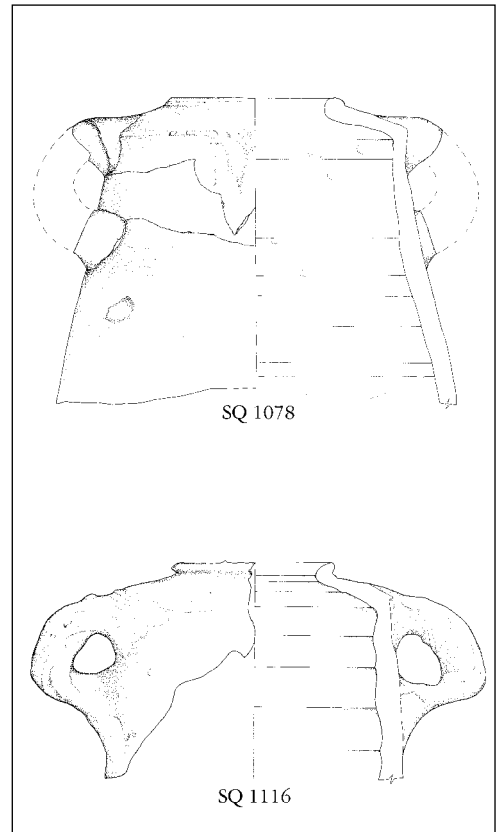


Fig. 10. Torpedo amphorae from the Late Necropolis

20) A.G. Sagona, "Levantine storage jars of the 13th to 4th Century B.C.", *OpAth* XIV:7 (1982), 80-82, fig. 2, nos. 1-4.

21) *Op. cit.*, 80.