

Teodozja Izabela Rzeuska

West Saqqara: Pottery 2003

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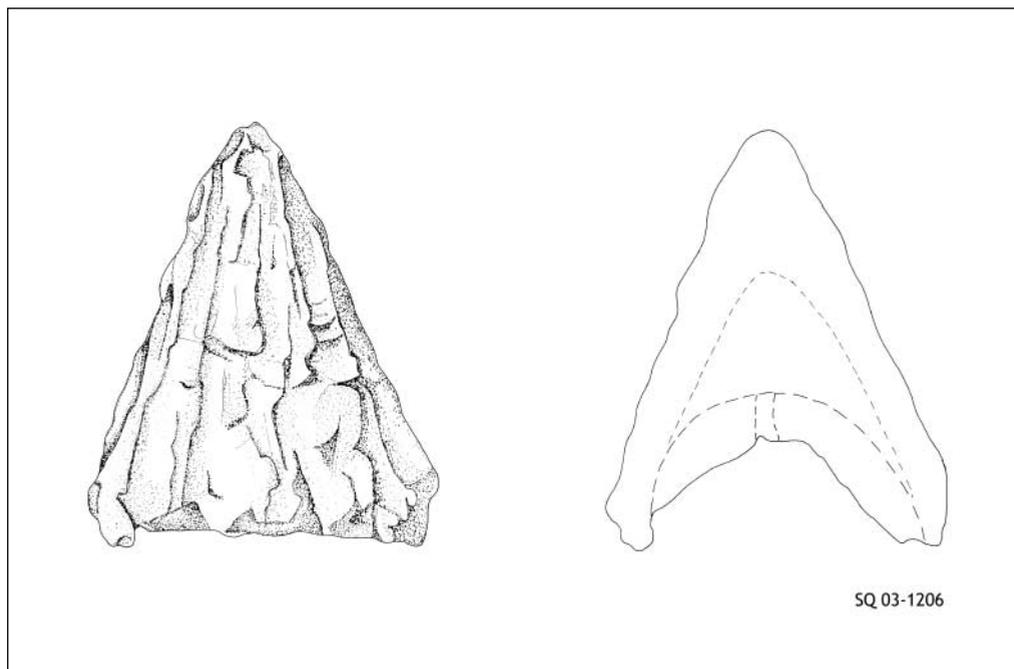
Tekst jest udostępniony do wykorzystania w ramach dozwolonego użytku.

POTTERY 2003

Teodozja Izabela Rzeuska

Most of the pottery reported on here came from the Old Kingdom necropolis, from contexts excavated in 2003.¹⁾ A pottery deposit consisting mostly of beer jars, some of them whitewashed on the outside, was recovered from a meter-thick layer of limestone-chip debris overlying the central part of the court in front of chapels 15, 16

and 17. More than a hundred bases were recorded, demonstrating the presence of two different types of beer jars, one with a pointed base, the other with rounded bottom. The deposit also yielded many fragments of false-content fillings of unfired Nile silt and biconical stoppers (*Fig. 1*). Many jars contained ashes consti-



*Fig. 1. Biconical stopper from the court in front of the chapels
Not to scale*

1) Chapels 15, 16 and 17 and the court onto which they opened, and the shafts inside Corridor 2. Material not reported on here will be presented once the investigations in specific areas are completed. For a report on the 2003 season of excavations, cf. K. Myśliwiec in this volume. All the pencil drawings in this article are the work of T.I. Rzeuska, U. Dąbrowska, M. Muc, and were inked by M.Orzechowska.

tuting the remains of burnt offerings made at the time of the burial.²⁾ Other forms from the deposit included miniature vessels, infrequent sherds of bowls, plates (some with traces of burning on the underside), platters, and bread forms. Animal bones and charcoal were also found.

From the same layer as the deposit, but already from the entrance to chapel 15, as well as from the southwestern part of the chapel with the shaft, came vessels of the same kind. The shaft has yet to be explored, but it seems nonetheless that the fill originated from inside it. An Egyptian imitation of a Canaanite jar was found here (*Fig. 2*).³⁾ The shape of the pot, the technique (external vertical combing in places, the inside scraped to cover up the joining of the coils, whitewashed on the outside) and the clay, which was brown and soft, containing abundant large, angular grayish rock particles, seemed not to fit in the Egyptian pottery tradition, pointing instead to a Syro-Palestine origin from the Early Bronze III-IV. Petrographic examination of this, as well as other suspected 'imported' vessels revealed that they were all made of Nile silt.⁴⁾

The assemblage from the chapel floor contained burned red-slipped bowls found in context with the residue from round fireplaces, 30-35 cm in diameter, concentrating ashes, charcoal, and burnt remains of plants and bones.

Overlying the layer connected with the plundering of chapel 15's shaft was another layer of limestone chips, which had slipped into the court from the higher-lying

eastern part of the necropolis. It contained exclusively Old Kingdom pottery: beer jars of all kinds, bread trays and moulds, plates and bowls. Stoppers were common as well. Charcoal and animal bones were accompanied by false jar fillings and beer-jar bottoms with a residue of ashes inside them. The material, which can be attributed to both the early and the late Sixth Dynasty, appears to have come from the burial shafts belonging to a number of funerary complexes. Of interest is one beer jar (*Fig. 3*: SQ 03-1211) with gently rounded shoulders, a cylindrical coiled body and round pinched bottom. It is hand-made of Nile silt C and uncoated.

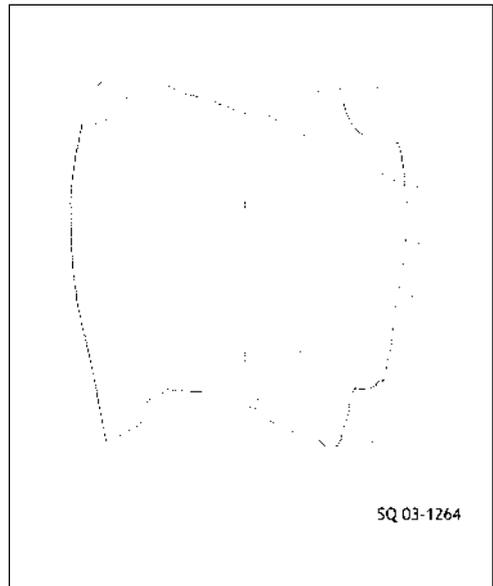


Fig. 2. Egyptian imitation of a Canaanite jar, from the chapel of Ny-ankh-Nefertem. Not to scale

2) T.I. Rzeuska, J. Zieliński, "Beer jars' with ashes from Saqqara, Preliminary report", *PAM XIV, Reports 2002* (2003), 153-154; T.I. Rzeuska, "A case of beer jars with ashes", in: *Festschrift für M. Bietak*, in press.

3) Only the body was uncovered; the rest may yet be found down the shaft once it is explored.

4) Cf. T.I. Rzeuska, "Some remarks on third millennium Levantine pottery found on the necropolis at West Saqqara", *Proceedings of the Third Central European Conference of Young Egyptologists, Warsaw 2004*, in preparation.

Similar vessels were found in corridor 2, where they were dated to the second half of the Sixth Dynasty.⁵⁾ Similarly shaped but red-slipped beer jars were found in the cemetery in contexts dated to the reign of Pepi I - Merenre.⁶⁾ Morphologically, both the red-slipped and uncoated variants of cylindrical beer jars appear to belong to the same line of development, although the red-slipped jars likely precede the uncoated ones. No sherds of the uncoated type have

ever been found in contexts containing red slipped jars, while the latter are present in assemblages containing uncoated jars. Therefore, the uncoated cylindrical beer jars should be dated to the times of Pepi II.⁷⁾

Beer jar SQ 03-1211 merits attention also because of the Nile mud mixed with small sherds that filled it, imitating the beverage inside. The contents had been sealed with a double stopper, the outer one

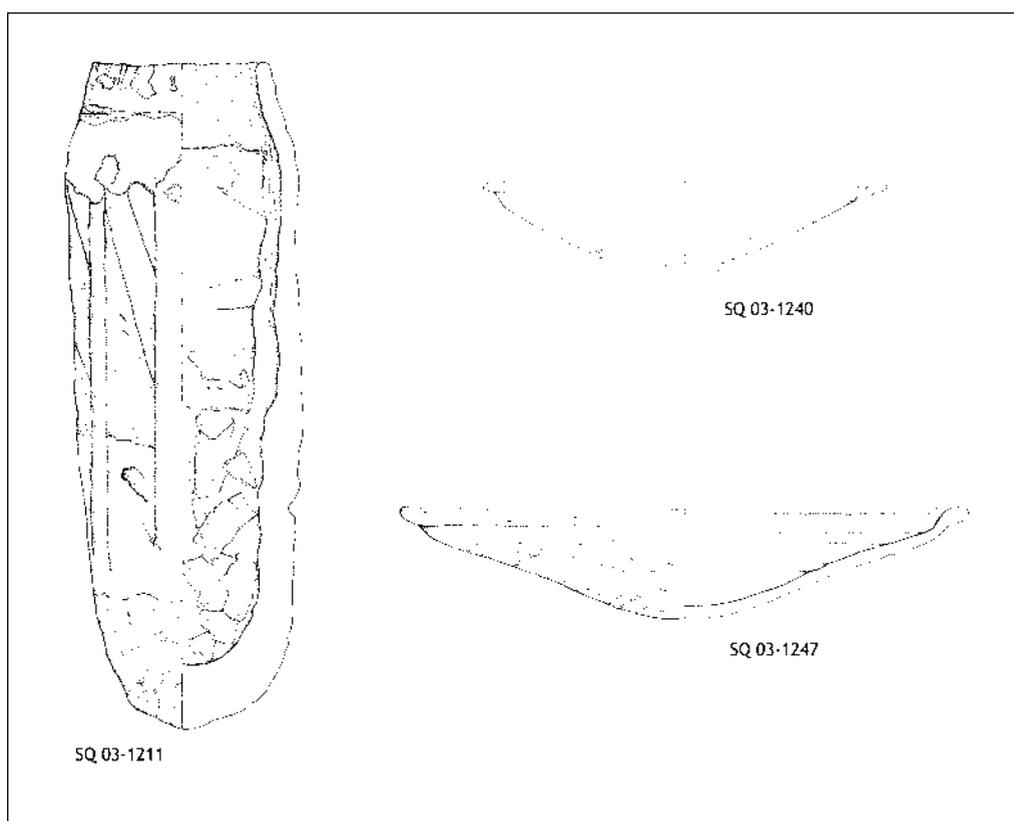


Fig. 3. Pottery from the entrance to chapel 15
Not to scale

5) Id., "West Saqqara. The pottery", *PAM XII, Reports 2000* (2001), 145, Fig. 6.

6) Id., "West Saqqara. The pottery", *PAM XIV*, op. cit., 147, Fig. 4, no. SQ 1115.

7) Similar vessels (but without information as to whether they were red-slipped) were found at Saqqara South in contexts dating from the times of Pepi II, cf. G. Jéquier, *Tombeaux de particuliers contemporains de Pepi II* (Le Caire 1929), 9-11, fig. 7.

seen as traces of clay on the shoulders.⁸⁾ The pottery mark on the surface of the jar consists of two vertical lines executed before firing.⁹⁾

A large plate from the same layer (Fig. 3: SQ 03-1247), maximum diameter 31 cm, has just one parallel coming from the necropolis – a vessel from the burial chamber of the vizier Merefnebef, dated to the end of the reign of Teti or just after that.¹⁰⁾ The present example is of worse quality than the vessel from Merefnebef's tomb. It was made of Nile silt B1, not Nile silt A, and the red slip is of worse quality, the base was scraped and the firing not as good. The plate bears traces of secondary burning. Also of interest is a medium-size plate, maximum diameter 23 cm (Fig. 3: SQ 03-1240), made of Nile silt B2, red slipped inside, but only the rim on the outside, with scraped bottom.

The ceramic material recorded from corridor 2 in the 2003 season confirmed the dating of the burials found in this funerary complex to the second half of the Sixth Dynasty.¹¹⁾ Beer jars characteristic of the early Sixth Dynasty were absent from this assemblage,¹²⁾ and the sherds of cylindrical red slipped beer jars dating from the times of Pepi I – Merenere were few and small in size, indicating their

accidental presence in this deposit. Uncoated cylindrical beer jars, most probably from the times of Pepi II,¹³⁾ and conical jars with broad and distinct shoulders were much more common (Fig. 4: SQ 03-1282, SQ 03-1258). Vessels of the second type were found in, among others, the funerary complex of Pehi, from the terminal Sixth Dynasty,¹⁴⁾ and the similarly dated burial shaft 46.¹⁵⁾ It seems that all three funerary complexes, that is, partly corridor 2, the mastaba of Pehi, and burial shaft 46, belonging most probably to the burial complex of Seshemnefer,¹⁶⁾ were in use at the same time. This is indicated also by the remaining pottery, including small bread forms (Fig. 4: SQ 03-1302) found in shaft 46 and in Pehi's mastaba, and also tall jars of mixed clay (Fig. 4: SQ 03-1265, SQ 03-1293). It thus seems that corridor 2 functioned from the times of Pepi II to the end of the Sixth Dynasty and somewhat later, in a period referred to as the “*ausgehendes Altes Reich*”.¹⁷⁾

Of particular interest is the lid of a censer of very unusual shape resembling a mouse (Fig. 5: SQ 03-1315). It was made of Nile silt B1, the corpus wheel-made, the handle hand-made, red slipped only on the outside. A square opening was cut in the

8) This is yet more proof to show that the custom of filling beer jars with Nile mud was practiced at this necropolis and that the mud occasionally contained sherds, usually of beer jars, cf. T.I. Rzeuska, “The pottery from the funerary complex of Vizier Merefnebef (West Saqqara). The evidence of burial and cult of dead in the Old Kingdom”, Proceedings of the First Central European Conference of Young Egyptologists, Warsaw 7-9 June 1999, ed. J. Popielska-Grzybowska (Warsaw 2001), 157-167.

9) An identical vessel with the same pottery mark was discovered in the 1998 season.

10) T.I. Rzeuska, “The pottery”, in: K. Myśliwiec, K. Kuraskiewicz and others, *Sakkara I: The Tomb of Merefnebef* (Warsaw 2004), 205-206 and 219, No. 81, pls. XCVII, CXI/d (= Rzeuska, Pottery).

11) T.I. Rzeuska, *PAM XII*, op. cit., 144-145.

12) Typical of the Merefnebef complex, cf. Rzeuska, Pottery, 210-211, nos. 14-26.

13) See above.

14) K. Myśliwiec, “Saqqara. Excavations 1999”, *PAM XI, Reports 1999* (2000), 93.

15) Rzeuska, *PAM XII*, 141-143, Fig. 3.

16) K. Myśliwiec, “Saqqara. Excavations 2000”, *PAM XII*, op. cit., 118-119.

17) R. Müller-Wollerman, *Krisenfaktoren in ägyptischen Staat des ausgehenden Alten Reichs* (Tübingen 1986), 3-9.

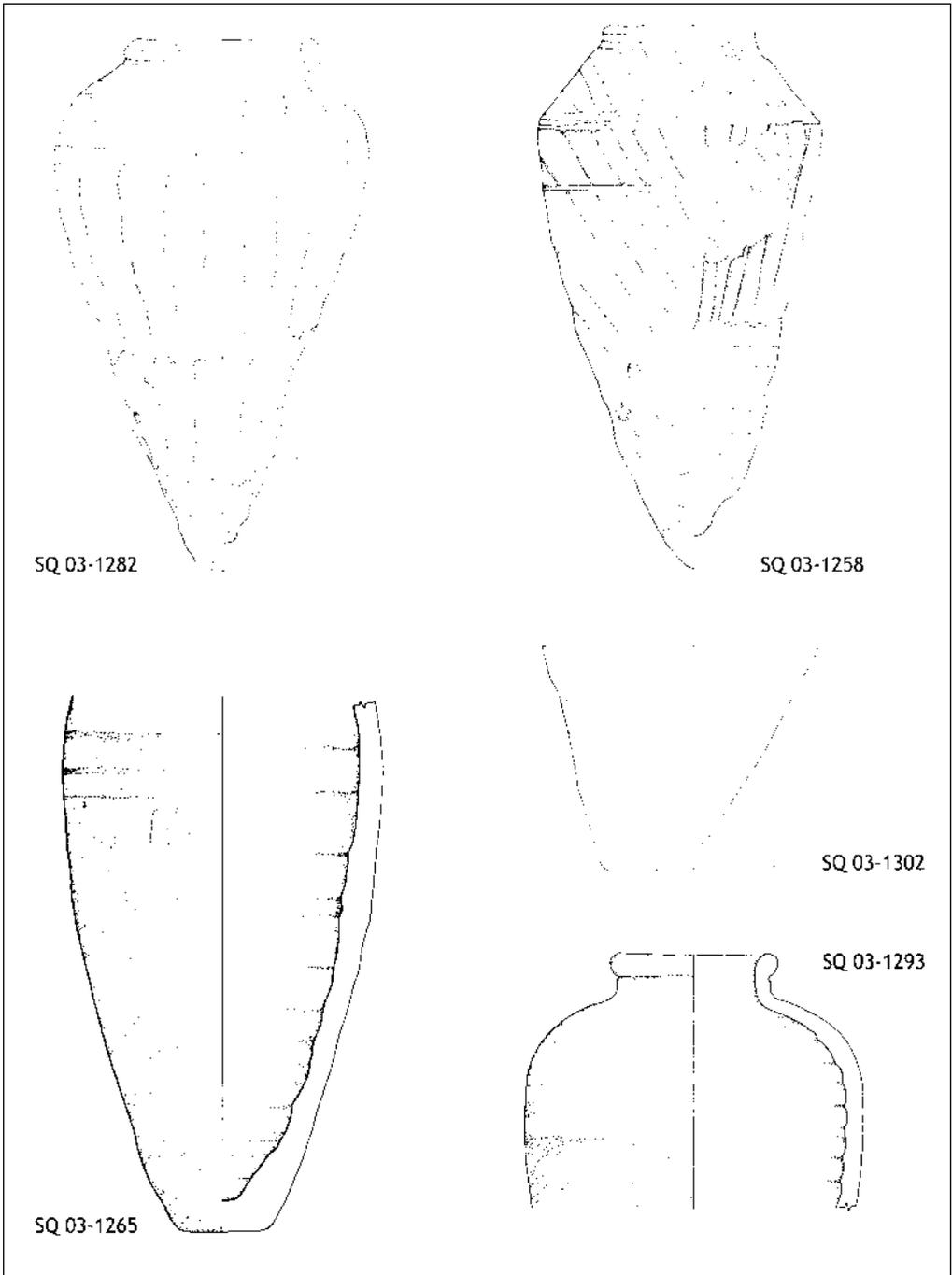


Fig. 4. Pottery from the burial shafts in corridor 2
Not to scale

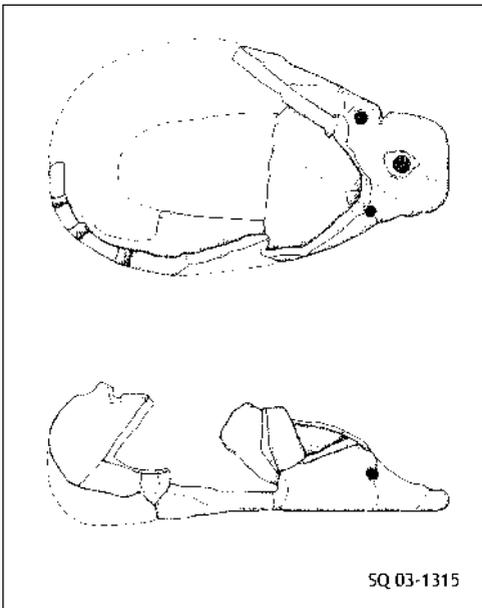
bottom part, the upper part, poorly preserved, was perforated. Blackening on the front part of the vessels indicated that it had been used.

The ritual deposit from the very shallow shaft C2/16, the fourth of its kind found in this part of the necropolis,¹⁸⁾ consisted of 17 red-slipped vessels representing open forms: bent-sided bowls, also with spout rim, Meidum bowls and plates (*Fig. 6*). Also found in the shaft were bandages, some of them wrapped around vessels, animal bones, charcoal and a piece of wooden board painted red on one side.

Inside the burial chamber of shaft C2/10, a wooden box was found to contain four bundles of bandage wrappings and two pottery vessels. The box was most

probably a Canopic chest and the bandages may have contained the internal organs removed during the process of mummification. It is not to be excluded that the bundles constituted waste from the mummification process.

The two vessels, both bent-sided bowls (*Fig. 7*: SQ 03-1274, SQ 03-1276) were found shattered. One has a rim spout (rim dia. 21-22 cm), was wheel-made of Nile silt B1 and red-slipped with scraped base. The other bowl, also red-slipped, was slightly bigger (dia. c. 25 cm). The base looks as if it had been thrown on the wheel, which is not a technique seen in Old Kingdom potmaking;¹⁹⁾ it is more likely that it was hand-finished in a way that made it look wheel-made. Assuming that the chest was



*Fig. 5. Censer lid from corridor 2
Not to scale*



*Fig. 6. Ritual deposit of pottery from shaft
C2/16. Not to scale*

18) On the other deposits and their importance, cf. T.I. Rzeuska, "The necropolis at West Saqqara: The Late Old Kingdom shafts with no burial chamber. Were they false, dummy, unfinished or intentional?", *AO 70/3* (2002), 377-402.

19) Vessel bases started being wheel-made in the end of the Second Intermediate Period, cf. Do. Arnold, J. Bourriau (eds.), *An Introduction to Ancient Egyptian Pottery* (Mainz 1994), 63.

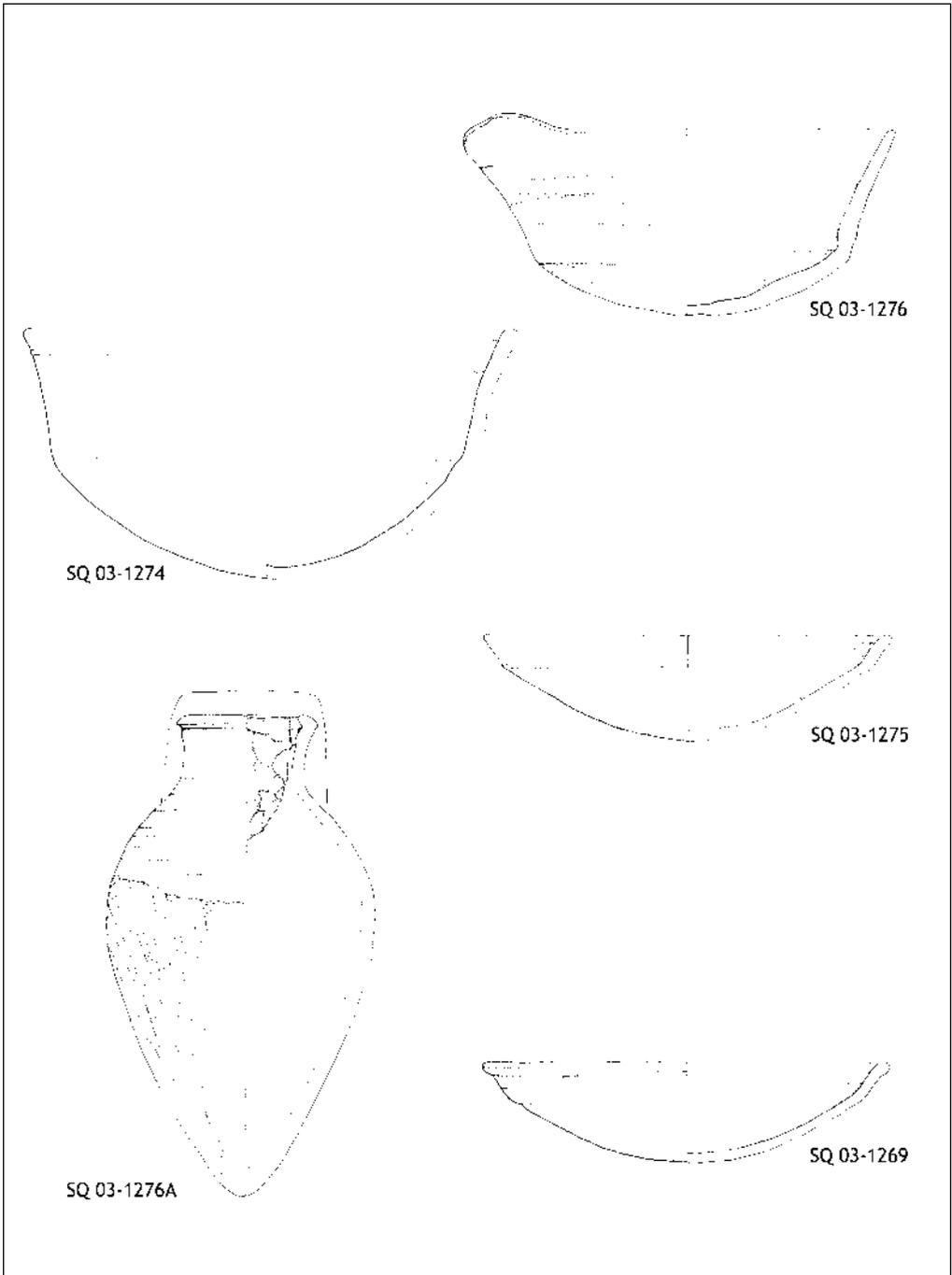


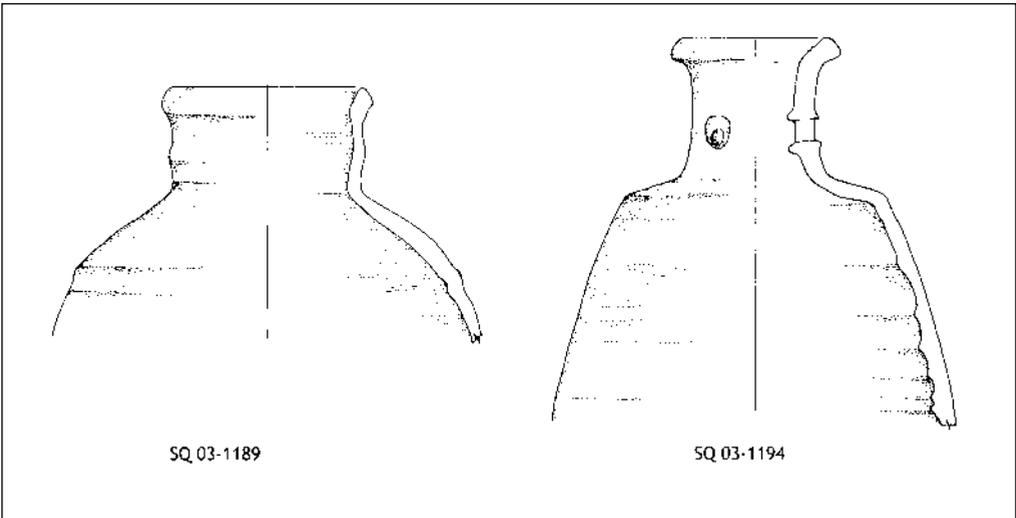
Fig. 7. Pottery from the burial chamber of shaft C2/10. Bowls SQ 03-1274, SQ 03-1276 came from inside a wooden box. Not to scale

indeed a Canopic box, it is difficult to explain the presence of these bowls.

The fill inside the burial chamber of shaft C2/10 also contained a jar (*Fig. 7*: SQ 03-1276A) and two plates (*Fig. 7*: SQ 03-1269, SQ 03-1275). The intact jar stood next to the coffin, resting against the northern wall of the chamber; the first of the plates stood on the coffin, the second next to it. The jar was wheel-made of mixed clay (P.60) and had a self-slip (of light reddish brown color = 2.5 YR 7/4) that is produced automatically in the process of drying that precedes firing. The lower part was scraped. A two-part stopper served to close the jar: the inner stopper was of ovoid shape and filled the neck, the outer one cylindrical, reaching down to the shoulders. Jars closed in similar fashion

were found at Giza.²⁰⁾ The plates were bent-sided, rim diameter in both cases equaling 22 cm. They were wheel-made of Nile silt B2, red-slipped inside and partly outside on the uppermost section of the body, the bases scraped. They were presumably part of the grave equipment deposited during the burial ceremonies. From the technological point of view, they recall the vessels from the wooden box.

The layers connected with the Late Necropolis did not contain much pottery. Prevalent among the Egyptian wares in this area was a type of small jar made of finer or coarser variants of marl clay A4 (*Fig. 8*). The imports were represented by fragments of amphorae: a base recalling Samian ware and a handle identical to Chios and pseudo-Chios examples.²¹⁾



*Fig. 8. Examples of common jars from the Late Necropolis
Not to scale*

20) G. Reisner, GN I, Pl. 68, f.

21) T.I. Rzeuska, "Amphorae from the Late Necropolis at West Saqqara, Preliminary Report", *CCE* 8, in print.