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Christian Pottery from Old Dongola (Kom H)

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CHRISTIAN POTTERY FROM OLD DONGOLA (KOM H)

Dobiesława Bagińska

Ongoing excavation of the monastery complex (including the church) on Kom H in Old Dongola has yielded a pottery assemblage ranging in time from the 6th/7th to the 14th century (specifically the Early and Classic Christian periods in the case of the church). The pottery from the 2006 season¹ was documented on a current basis with additional studies being made of the material from the monastery church (HC), which had been excavated in the 2003-2005 season. It included a rich repertoire of wheel-made and handmade forms. Both red and white wares were noted. Of special interest was a set of Early Christian thin-walled vessels coming from the foundation layers of the monastery church. The fabric and specific forms and decoration of these vessels leaves no doubt that they were produced in the ceramic workshops on Site R1 in Old Dongola.

The 6th/7th century material from the monastery church proved to be of particular importance, for it provided a date for the establishment of the building. It was further corroborated by pottery with decoration and vessel shape characteristic of the 7th-century ceramic production in Dongola present in the fill of the shaft of

a grave (G.3) inside the church. The grave has been tentatively attributed by a funerary stela found nearby to Bishop Joseph, who died in AD 668. Analogous ceramic material was recorded in the kilns on Site R1 (especially kiln R1 B, cf. Pluskota 2001: 357-365) and in the palace toilet depository (B.I.15) on Kom A in Old Dongola.² A similar Early Christian assemblage has been recovered from the level of the foundations of the Lower Church in Banganarti (studied by the author, see relevant report in this volume).

Material from the excavations continued in 2006 in the Southwestern Annex (SW-E) of the monastery on Kom H, especially the finds from units 13, 14 and 16, represented mostly painted Late Christian wares (12th-14th century), including some rare forms and unique decoration. This material has contributed significantly to the study of Late and Terminal Nubian pottery production.

Typological studies are in progress of this extensive assemblage, which is of particular importance for understanding the full repertoire of vessel shapes and decoration styles of the pottery produced in the Makurian capital in medieval times.

1 For the fieldwork in 2006 on Kom H in general, see above, report by S. Jakobiński and M. Martens-Czarnecka in this volume; for the exploration of the monastery church (HC) in November and December of 2006, see above, report by D. Gazda in this volume as well. The pottery was documented in writing (D. Bagińska), drawing (A. Błaszczuk, H. Kosińska-Sowa, D. Bagińska) and photography (J. Świącicki).

2 Studied by the author in 2003-2005 with permission from W. Godlewski, who heads the excavations on Kom A.

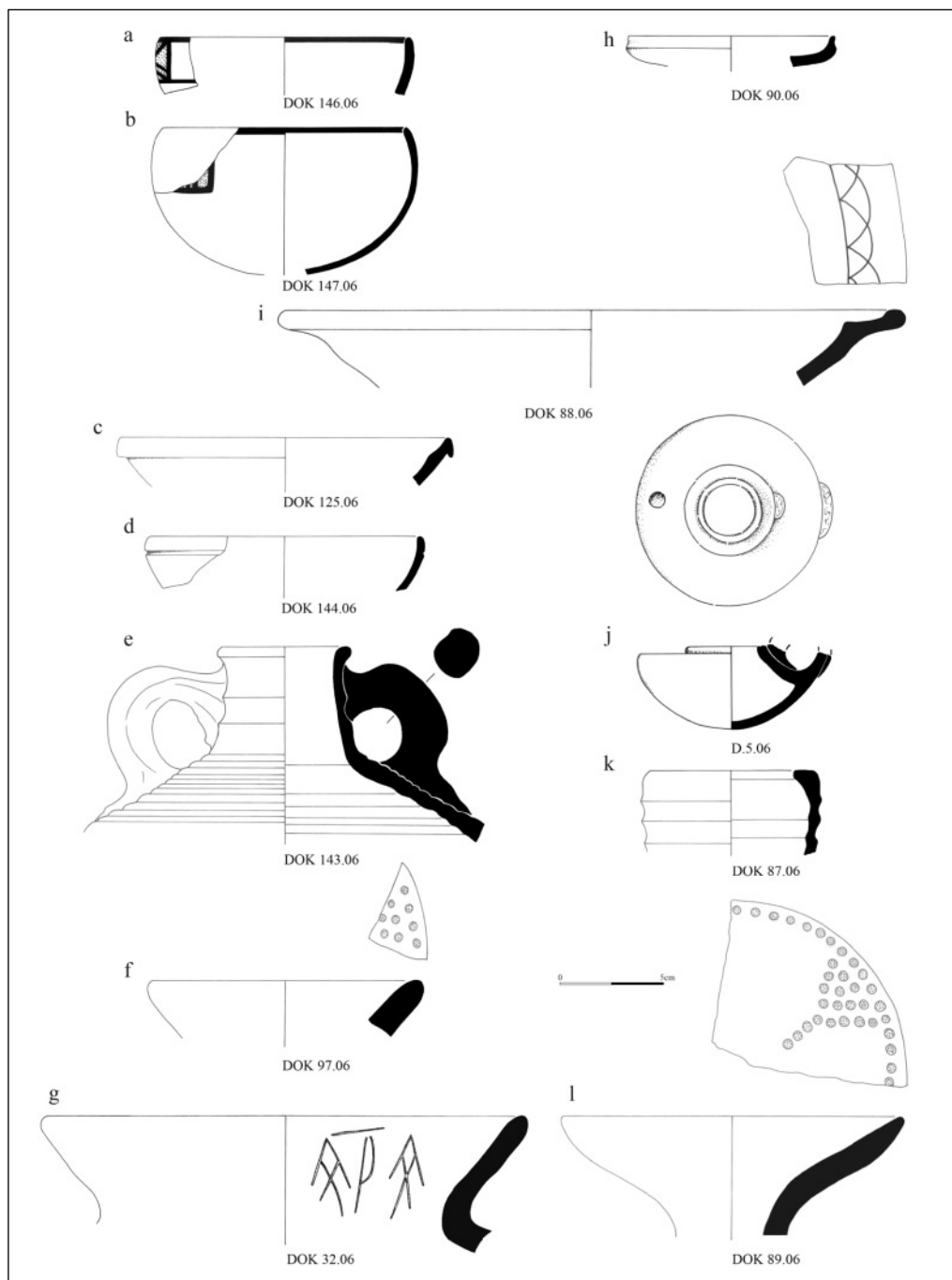


Fig. 1. Pottery from the monastery church on Kom H – Areas 15: a-c; 16: d-e; 16A: f-g; 17: h-l
(Drawing D. Bagińska)

CATALOGUE OF SELECTED POTTERY

MONASTERY CHURCH – AREA 15

(east wall of the church)

Small bowls [*Fig. 1:a-b*] with globular body (red ware), painted metope decoration (black cross on white background). Bowls of this type were uncovered in the Dongolan kilns (kiln R1 B) and dated to the 6th/7th century (Pluskota 2001: 361-362, Fig. 6).

Plate (red ware) with modeled rim [*Fig. 1:c*]. Imitation of Late Roman terra sigillata, Hayes form 104 B (1972: 163, Fig. 30/B15), also found in Aswan, Gempeler form T 226a (1992: 72, Abb. 16/11). Type of plate typical of the Early Christian period (6th/7th century AD), known from various archaeological sites in Old Dongola, especially the pottery kilns on site R1 (Pluskota 2001: 357-365, Fig. 8); the Lower Church (Trial pit 2) in Banganarti;³ Dar el-Arab fort (Bagińska forthcoming) and the monastery at Ghazali (Shinnie, Chittick 1961: 41, Fig. 11/E2).

MONASTERY CHURCH – AREA 16

(fill of north wall, foundation trench level)

Small bowl (red ware) with groove under the rim on the outside, typical of the 7th century AD [*Fig. 1:d*].

Amphora (red ware), fragmentarily preserved, handles with oval transverse section [*Fig. 1:e*], representing local Early Christian production in Dongola (kiln R1 E, cf. Pluskota 2001: 362-363, Fig. 9/C), 6th-7th century AD (Bagińska 2005: 352-354, amphora type 70).

MONASTERY CHURCH – AREA 16A

(test pit under stone floor

behind east wall of the church)

Fragmentary sherds reinforcing the under-floor bedding, including many body fragments from Early Christian amphorae. Upon preliminary analysis of the ware and the clay used in its manufacture, the sherds can be attributed to the local 6th/7th century Dongolan production.

Handmade bottle (beer jar type) with deep red slip on neck and typical ornament composed of yellow dots forming a triangle on the rim [*Fig. 1:f*]. The bottle derives from a post-Meroitic tradition continuing into the Early Christian period. The form is known from all the Early Christian sites: Banganarti (foundations of the Lower Church), Old Dongola (Kom A, palace toilet depository B.I.15 (studied by the author in 2003-2005), Dar el-Arab fort (Bagińska forthcoming), settlement on Boni island in the Fourth Cataract region (B. Petrick, pers. comm.). W.Y. Adams notes a connection with Alwa jars (Ware H2; 1986: 423-424, Fig. 250/36w). At Old Dongola and Banganarti bottles of the type were found together with red plates and small bowls of Dongolan production, imitating the Late Roman terra sigillata vessels known from Egypt.

Handmade cooking pot [*Fig. 1:g*] with mat red slip, mat impressions on the body, post-firing graffito on the rim.⁴ Typical pot of the transition from the Post-Meroitic to the Early Christian. An identical set of

3 For all citations of this material in this paper, see below, the pottery report from Banganarti by the author, in this volume.

4 Vessel graffiti from Old Dongola are being studied by S. Jakobielski.

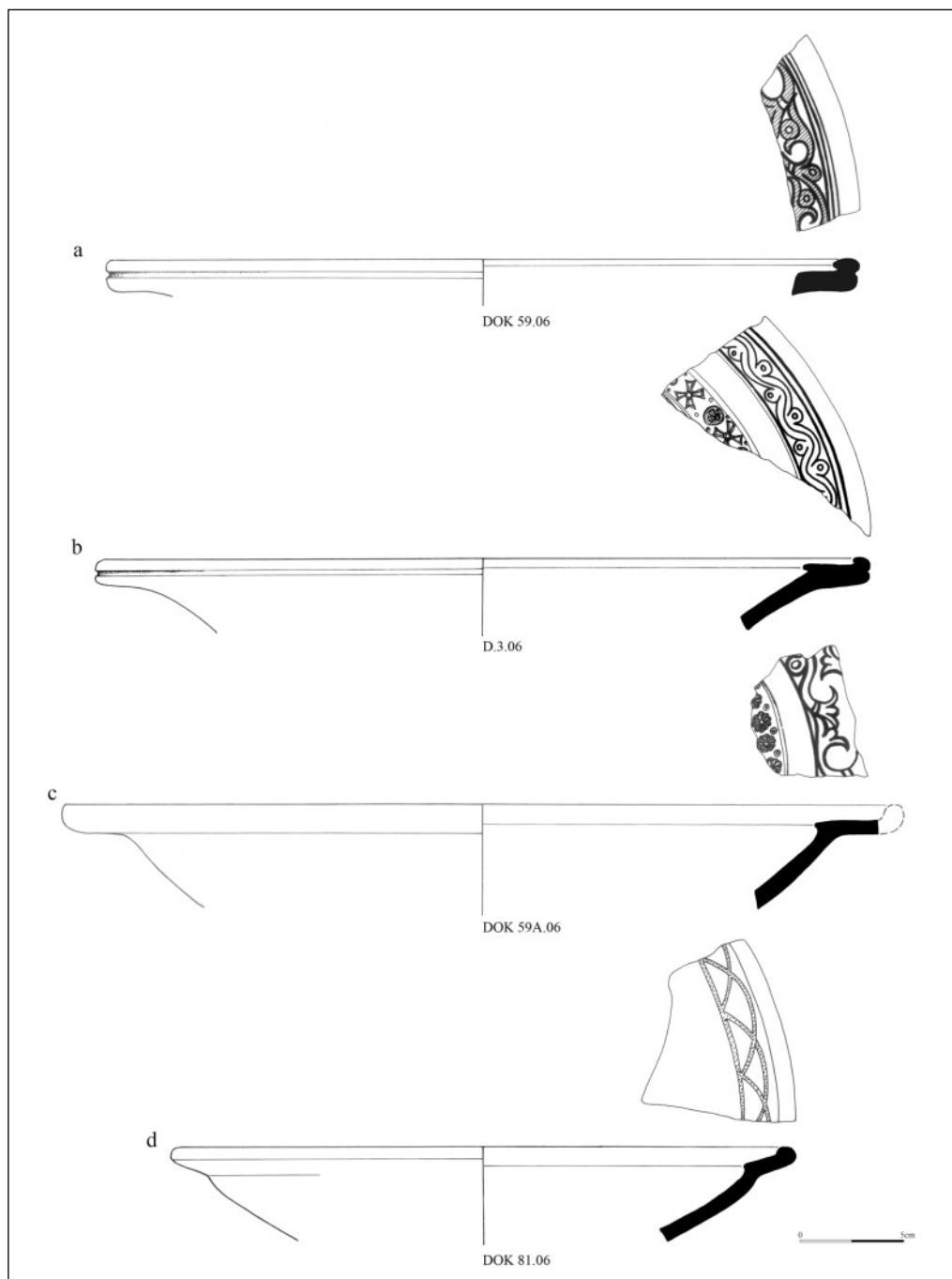


Fig. 2. Pottery from the monastery church on Kom H – Area 19
(Drawing D. Bagińska)

different forms occurring together in the Early Christian period was uncovered in the Dar el-Arab fort on the Fourth Cataract (Bagińska forthcoming).

MONASTERY CHURCH – AREA 17

(fill behind south wall of church)

Miniature plate (red ware) of very good quality [*Fig. 1:b*], 6th/7th century AD. Recorded in the palace toilet depository (B.I.15) on Kom A in Old Dongola, where it is dated to the 7th century.

Plate (grey ware) with ledge rim decorated with overlapping red-colored arches, 7th century AD [*Fig. 1:i*].

Oil lamp (red ware) with loop handle (lost) and air hole [*Fig. 1:j*]. Very good quality lamp from the Early Christian period, style N III (Ware R5) (Adams 1986: 481-482, Fig. 273/P). An identical lamp was discovered in the palace toilet depository (B.I.15) on Kom A in Old Dongola, where it is dated to the 7th century.

Amphora [*Fig. 1:k*], preserved rim fragment (red ware) with incurved edge typical of amphorae produced in Old Dongola (kiln R1 B), 6th-7th century AD (Pluskota 2001: 362-364, Fig. 9/A). Imitation of Aswan production, Gempeler form K 722, from the 5th to the 7th century (1992: 192, Abb. 124.2; see also Bagińska 2005: 476-480, amphora type 107, 6th-7th century AD).

Bottle (beer jar type) with deep red slip and an ornament of yellow dots forming triangles on the rim [*Fig. 1:l*]. 6th/7th century, connections with Alwa jars (Ware H2) (Adams 1986: 423-424, Fig. 250/36w).

MONASTERY CHURCH – AREA 19

(debris layer above graves G5 and G6)

Exploration of the area to the southeast of the main body of the church building

yielded numerous examples of Early Christian wheel-made pottery from the 6th-7th century and sherds from the Classic period (mid 9th-12th century).

Cup [*Fig. 3:c*], fragmentarily preserved (gray ware), decorated with two grooved lines on the lower body. Quality piece from the Early Christian period.

Small bowls [*Fig. 3:b*], fragment with two concentric brown stripes on the bottom (gray ware), Early Christian period (7th century) (Adams 1986: 306, Fig. 158/26).

Large plate [*Fig. 2:a*], fragmentarily preserved, ledge rim decorated in red and black vine wreath frieze, Classic Christian period, style N IV (Adams 1986: 313, Fig. 165/9).

Plate [*Fig. 2:b*] with ledge rim (red ware), fragment, decorated with a brown vine wreath frieze and stamped ornaments (crosses, circles), Classic Christian period, style N IV (Adams 1986: 320-321, Figs 172-173).

Plate [*Fig. 2:c*] with ledge rim (red ware) decorated with a black vine wreath frieze ornament and stamped motifs (10-petalled rosettes), Classic Christian period, style N IV (Adams 1986: 313, Fig. 165).

Plate [*Fig. 2:d*], ledge rim (red ware), fragment decorated with white overlapping arches on the rim, 7th century AD.

Plate [*Fig. 3:a*], fragment (grey ware), decorated with central stamped ornaments composed of circles and rhombuses with inscribed crosses, Early Christian period (7th century), style N III.

Vase [*Fig. 3:d*], modeled rim (red ware) featuring stamped decoration in the form of circles and rhombuses with inscribed crosses. Form and decoration typical of the Early Classic period in the 7th century AD, style N III (Adams 1986: 307, Fig. 159).

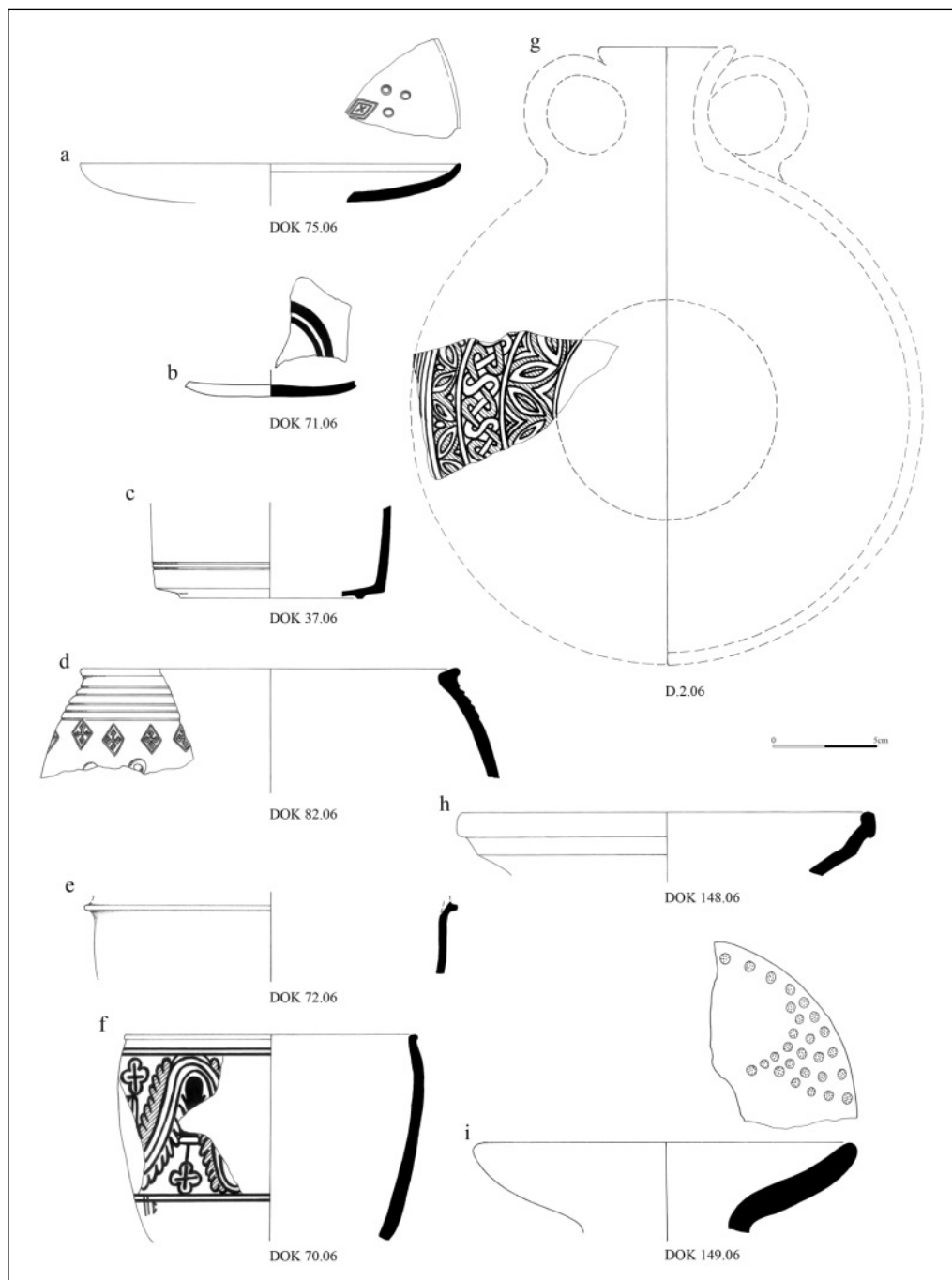


Fig. 3. Pottery from the monastery church on Kom H – Areas 19: a-g; 20: b-i
 (Drawing A. Błaszczyk, H. Kosińska-Sowa, D. Bagińska)

Vase (black ware) with relief ring on body [*Fig. 3:e*]. The nature of the vessel, execution and clay evince connections with an earlier ceramic tradition.⁵

Vase [*Fig. 3:f*], fragment (white ware) with circumferential frieze including stylized crosses, painted in brown and red, and below it, a post-firing engraved graffito. Classic Christian period, style N IV (Ware W5) (Adams 1986: 492-493, Fig. 278/F).

Pilgrim's bottle [*Fig. 3:g*], body fragment (yellow ware), ornament brown and red, three concentric friezes composed of plant motifs (leaves) and guilloche. Ware W10, Classic Christian period, style N IV (AD 850-1100) (Adams 1986: 494, Figs 165-166).

MONASTERY CHURCH – AREA 20

(building behind east wall

of the church, foundation level)

Plate [*Fig. 3:b*] wheel-made (red ware) with modeled rim, representing so-called Samian Ware characteristic of the 6th/7th century AD. Imitation of Late Roman terra sigillata, Hayes form 104 B (1972: 163, Fig. 30/B15), Aswan Gempeler form T 226a (1992: 72, Abb. 16/11). Diagnostic piece for the Early Christian period, 6th-7th century, known from archaeological sites in Old Dongola, especially the pottery kilns on site R1 (kiln R1 B; Pluskota 2001: 357-365, Fig. 8). Recorded at the Dar el-Arab fort (Bagińska forthcoming), the monastery at Ghazali (Shinnie, Chittick 1961: 41, Fig. 11/E2) and in the foundation level of the Lower Church at Banganarti.

Bottle (beer jar) with mat deep-red slip [*Fig. 3:i*], ornament of yellow dots forming

triangles on the rim, Early Christian period, 6th-7th century. The form has connections with Alwa Ware bottles (Ware H2) (Adams 1986: 423-424, Fig. 250/36w).

MONASTERY CHURCH – AREA 22

(south of the southern church aisle)

Predominant pottery from the Early Christian period.

Vase (red ware), two registers of stamped circumferential ornaments, alternately rhombuses and circles [*Fig. 4:a*], Early Christian period, 6th/7th century AD, style N III (Adams 1986: 307, Fig. 159).

MONASTERY CHURCH – GRAVE G.1

Small bowl (red ware) with mat red slip, plain, Transitional/extremely early Christian period [*Fig. 4:b*].⁶

MONASTERY CHURCH – GRAVE G.3

Small bowl (red ware), metope decoration in black on a white background [*Fig. 5:a*], known from the pottery kilns of Old Dongola (kiln R1 B), 6th/7th century (Pluskota 2001: 359-362, Fig. 6).

Small bowl (red ware), two grooves running circumferentially under the rim [*Fig. 5:b*], Early Christian period, style N III (Ware R5) (Adams 1986: 481-482).

Small bowl with globular body (red ware), black and white decoration, circumferential frieze on the outside (wavy line and criss-cross with dots), inside white-colored arches suspended from the rim edge [*Fig. 5:c*]. 6th/7th century, evident Dongolan ware (kiln R1 B, where this kind of decoration was recorded, K. Pluskota, pers. comm.; see also Pluskota 2001: 359-362, Fig. 6).

5 Similarly made vessels are known from Late Meroitic sites (2nd-3rd century AD.); the pottery from Hamadab and Meroe are known to the author from her own studies of the material from the sites.

6 Small bowl resembling Ware R1, from the Classic period of group X (dated to AD 450-650), see Adams 1986: 469-470, Fig. 265/C48).

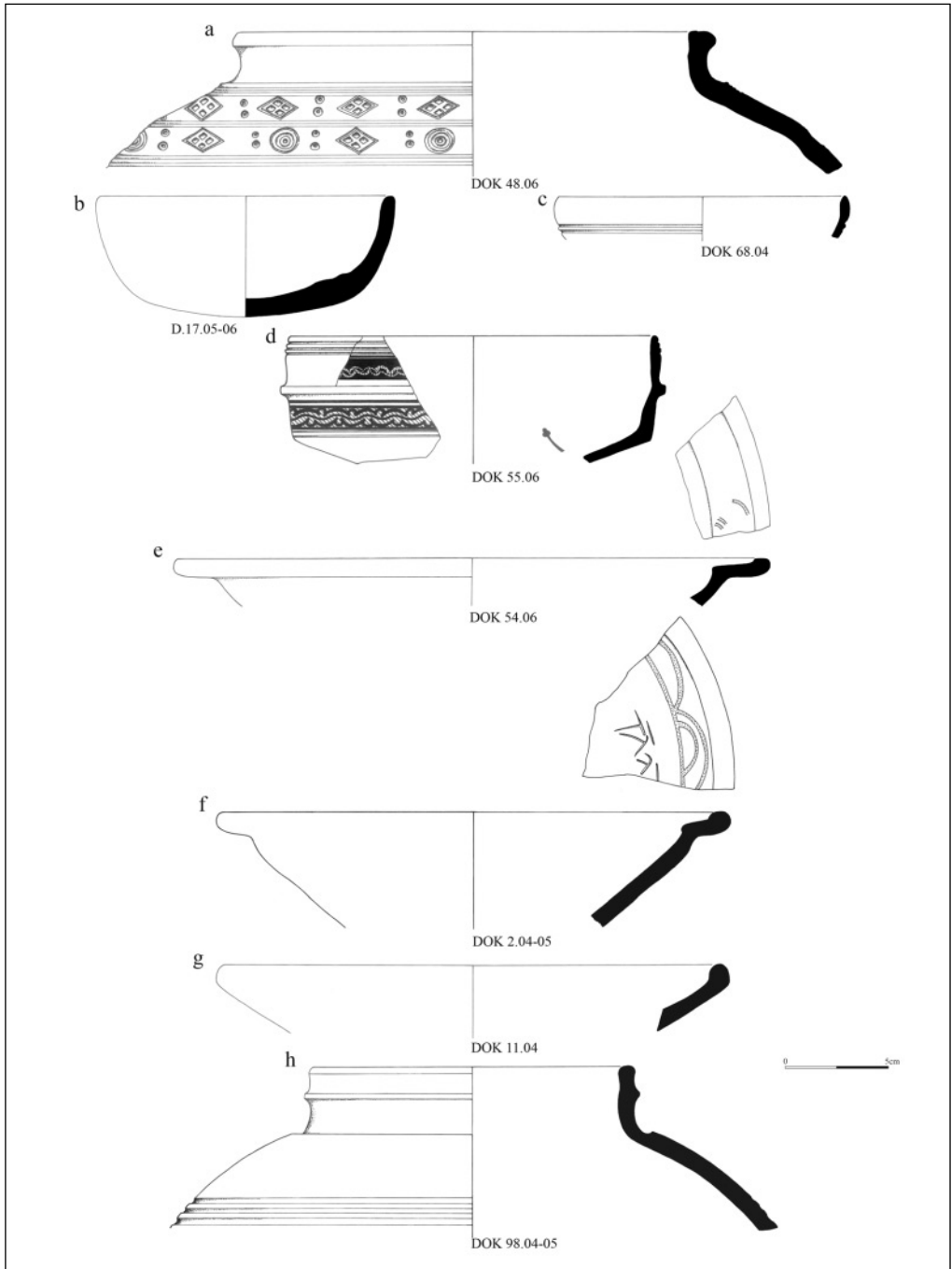


Fig. 4. Pottery from the monastery church on Kom H – Area 22: a; graves G.1: b; G.4:c; G.5: d-e; fill above grave G.5: f-h (Drawing H. Kozińska-Sowa, D. Bagińska)

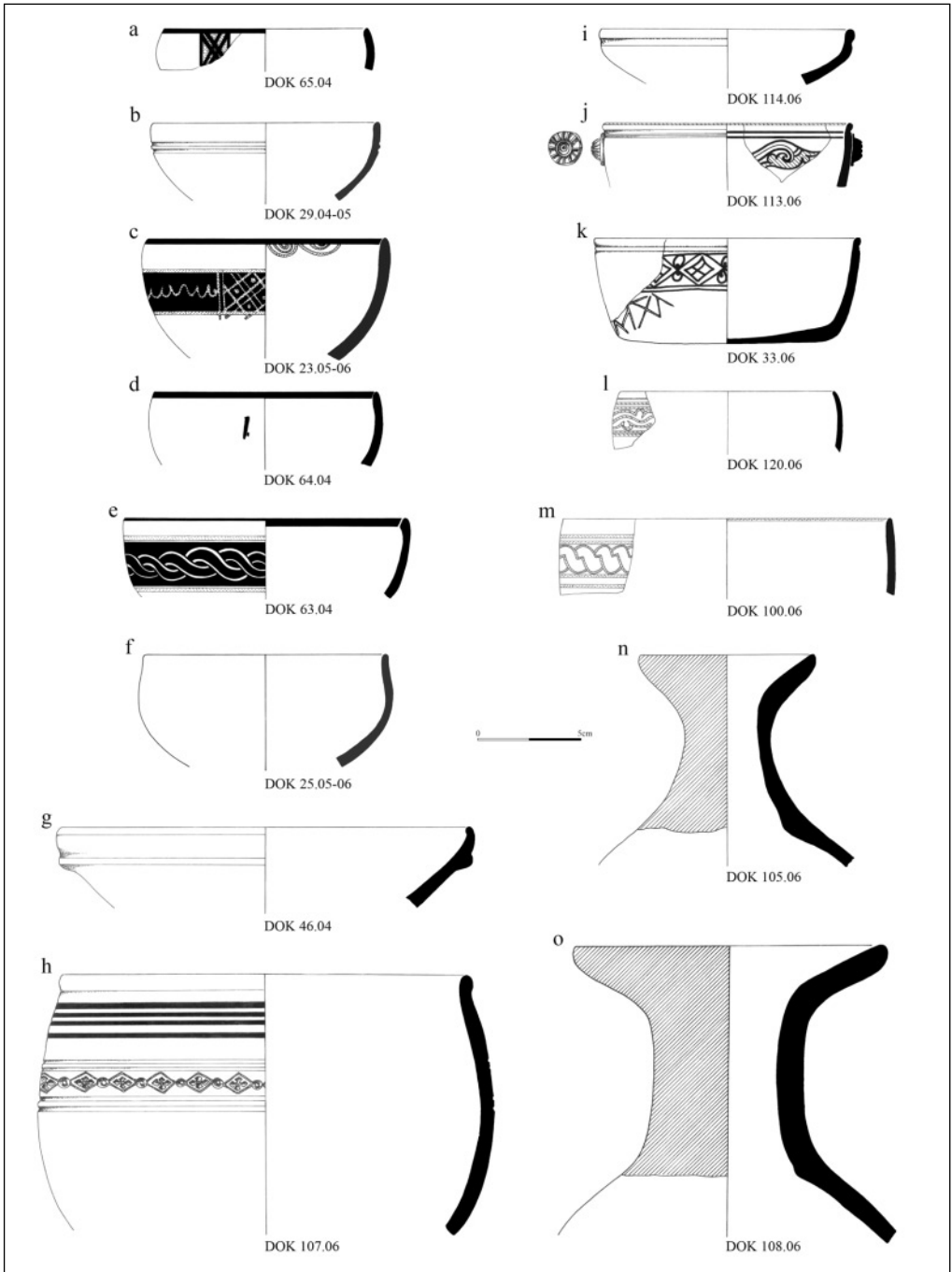


Fig. 5. Pottery from the monastery church on Kom H – graves G.3: a-g; G.6: b-o
(Drawing H. Kozinińska-Sowa, D. Bagińska)

Small bowl (red ware), black band around rim [*Fig. 5:d*], 7th century (Early Christian period, style N III (Ware R5) (Adams 1986: 481-482, Fig. 272/C23).

Small bowl (red ware), circumferential guilloche frieze in white and black, Early Christian period, 6th/7th century [*Fig. 5:e*]. Form and decoration recorded at the pottery kilns of Old Dongola (kiln R1 B) (decoration known from kiln R1 B, pers. comm. K. Pluskota; see also Pluskota 2001: Fig. 6).

Small globular bowl (red ware), high quality, thin-walled [*Fig. 5:f*], known from 6th/7th century kilns in Old Dongola (this form known from kiln R1 B, K. Pluskota, pers. comm.).

Plate (red ware) with modeled rim and flange at maximum body width, typical of the 7th century AD [*Fig. 5:g*].

MONASTERY CHURCH – GRAVE G.4

Plate (red ware), double circumferential groove under rim on the outside [*Fig. 4:c*], Early Christian period, style N III (Ware R5) (Adams 1986: 481-482).

MONASTERY CHURCH – GRAVE G.5

Deep bowl (white ware) with profiled ledge rim, painted black, yellow and red ornament [*Fig. 4:d*], two registers – guilloche at top and stylized vine wreath frieze below. Radial decoration with floral motif on the bottom. Classic Christian period, style N IV (Adams 1986: 321, Fig. 173/9).

Plate (red ware), ledge rim decorated in yellow, presumed guilloche pattern [*Fig. 4:e*], Early Christian production of the 7th century.

MONASTERY CHURCH

FILL ABOVE GRAVE G.5

Plate (red ware), ledge rim with white decoration in the form of overlapping arches [*Fig. 4:f*], on the sides post-firing engraved

graffito. Early Christian period, style N III (Adams 1986: 303, Fig. 155/11).

Plate with modeled rim [*Fig. 4:g*], very good quality (red ware), Early Christian production of the 7th century. The same form was recorded in the palace toilet depository (B.I.15) on Kom A in Old Dongola.

Jar (red ware) with profiled rim decorated with a band of four grooves on the body, [*Fig. 4:b*], Early Christian style N III (Ware R5) (Adams 1986: 481-482). Examples from the Old Dongola pottery kilns have been dated to the 6th/7th century AD (K. Pluskota, pers. comm.). Noted in the palace toilet depository (B.I.15) on Kom A in Old Dongola.

MONASTERY CHURCH – GRAVE G.6

Small bowl (white ware), painted frieze of rhombuses joined by plant motifs, post-firing graffito engraved on body [*Fig. 5:k*], Classic Christian period, style N IV (Adams 1986: 312, Fig. 164/6).

Small bowl (white ware), sophisticated appliqué rosettes on the outside [*Fig. 5:j*], painted vine wreath frieze in red and brown on the inside. Transition from Early to Classic Christian – the external decoration points to the earlier period, while the inside ornament suggests a later date (for the style, see Adams 1986: Fig. 160/Z (N III), Fig. 165/9 (N IV)).

Small bowl (black ware), very good quality with glossy slip, frieze of red painted vine wreath frieze [*Fig. 5:l*], pointing to the Classic Christian period, although the form and execution suggest the period of transition from Early to Classic Christian.

Small bowl (red ware) [*Fig. 5:m*], decorated with white guilloche frieze, Classic Christian period (Adams 1986: 312, Fig. 164/7).

Small plate (red ware) with matt slip, groove under rim in the outside [*Fig. 5:i*],

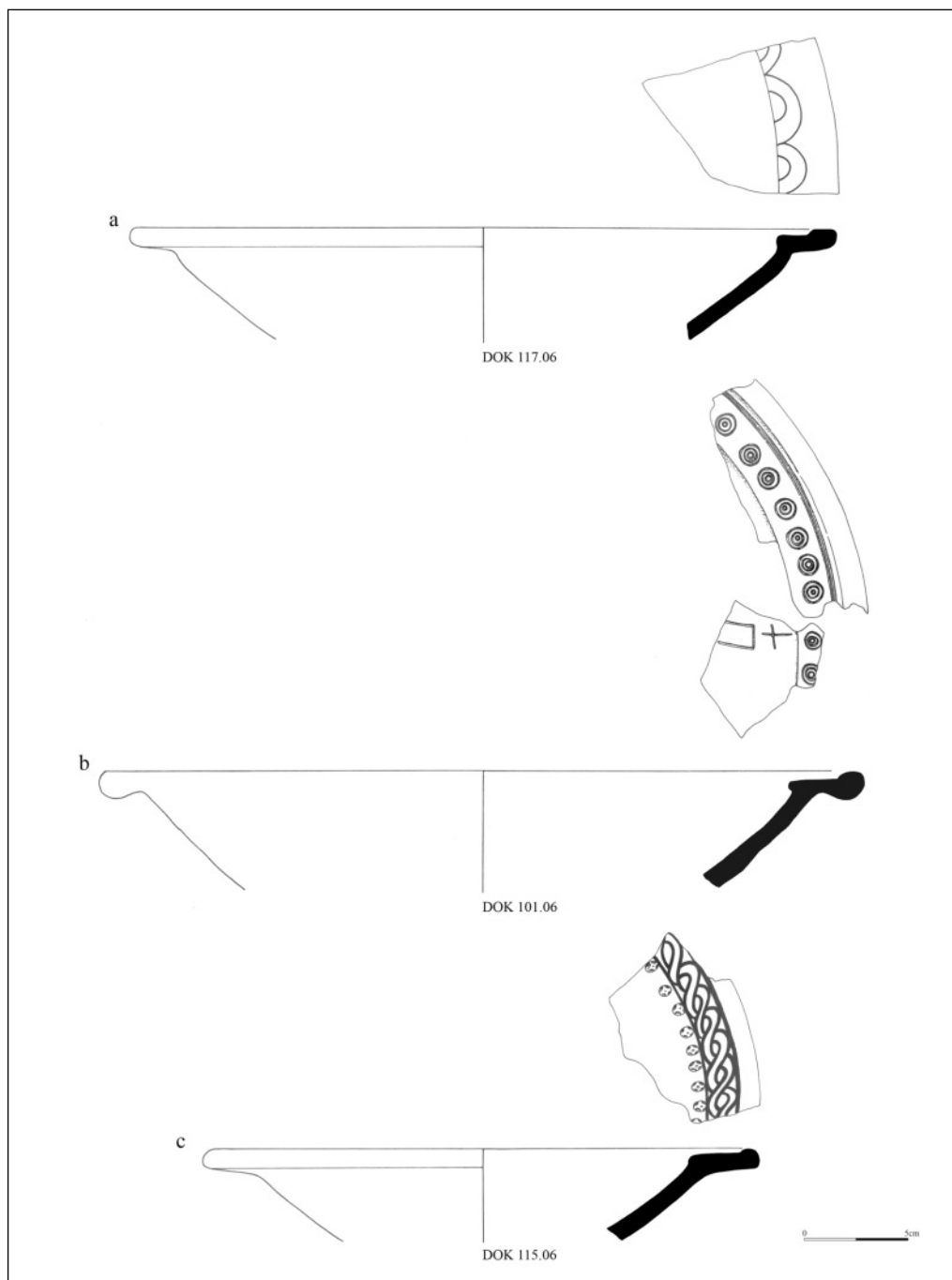


Fig. 6. Pottery from the monastery church on Kom H – grave G.6
(Drawing H. Kozłńska-Sowa, D. Bagińska)

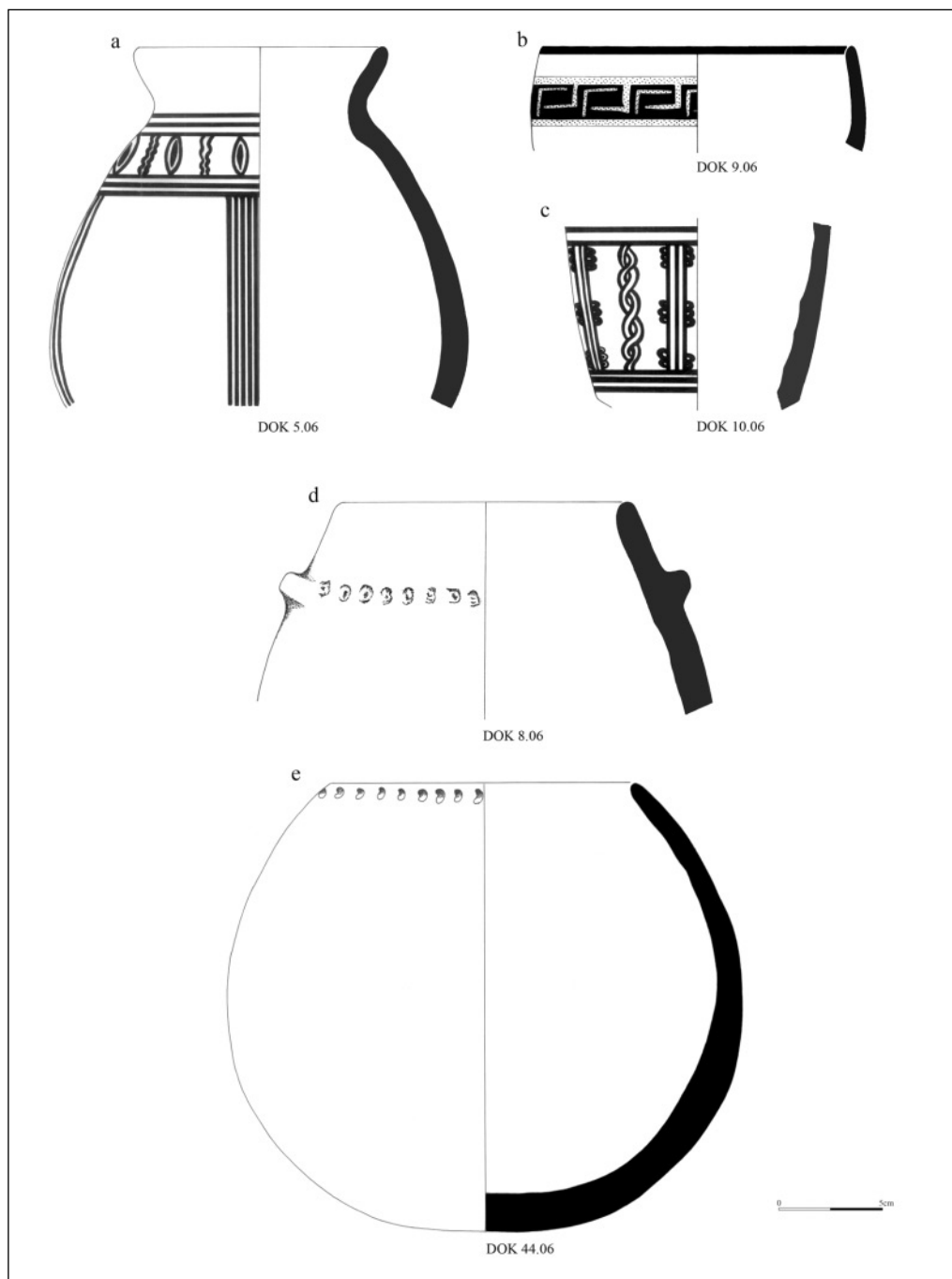


Fig. 7. Pottery from the SW-E area – Rooms 13: a; 13A: b-d; 14: e
(Drawing H. Kozłowska-Sowa, D. Bagińska)

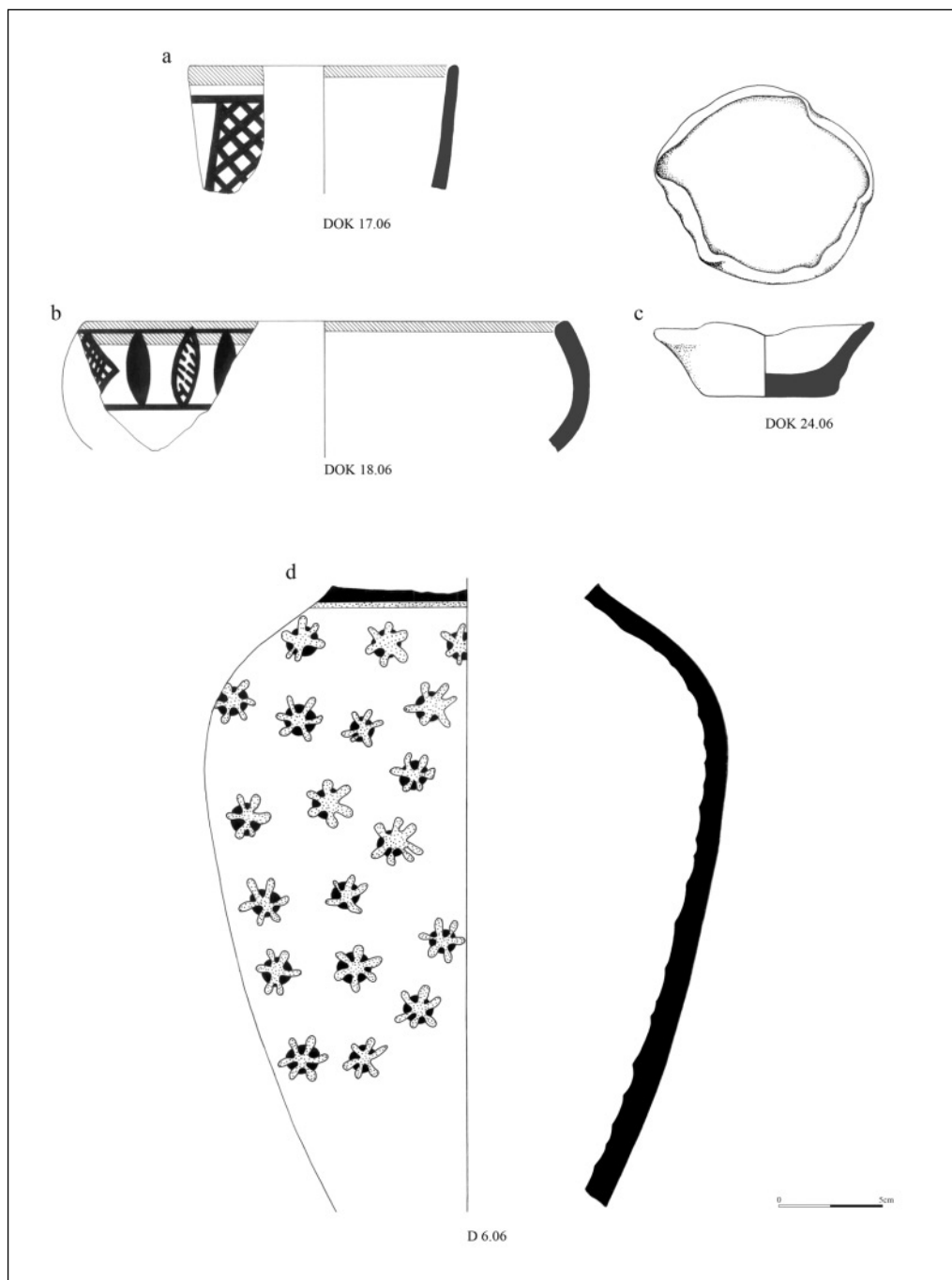


Fig. 8. Pottery from the SW-E area – Rooms 16A: a; 16B: b; 16D: c-d
(Drawing H. Kozińska-Sowa, D. Bagińska)

Early Christian period, 6th/7th century AD. Similar plate known from the palace toilet depository (B.I.15) on Kom A in Old Dongola.

Plate (white ware), rim decorated with a frieze of red, double arches [*Fig. 6:a*], 7th century AD (Adams 1986: 303, Fig. 155).

Plate (white ware), ledge rim, stamped decoration consisting of concentric circles, emphasized with a painted red band (now obliterated), post-firing graffiti inside [*Fig. 6:b*]. 7th century AD (Adams 1986: 307, Fig. 159/25).

Plate (white ware), black and red guilloche frieze on the rim, below stamped motifs of crosses inscribed in circles [*Fig. 6:c*]. The decoration indicates a dating in the transition from the Early to Classic Christian periods.

Vase (red ware), stamped frieze of rhombuses with inscribed crosses and joining circles on the body, four brown bands painted below the rim [*Fig. 5:b*]. Early Christian period (Adams 1986: 307, Fig. 159/11).

Two bottles of the beer jar type with wide flaring mouths, deep red slip on neck and rim [*Figs 5:n-o*], 6th/7th century AD (Adams 1986: 423-424, Fig. 250/36w).

SW-E – ROOM 13

Vase (orange ware), black painted decoration on body – horizontal frieze of double vertical wavy lines alternating with elongated oculi, between bands of three painted lines, and vertical bands of five lines each suspended from the horizontal frieze at intervals [*Fig. 7:a*]. Late Christian period, style N VI (AD 1150-1500) (Adams 1986: 503, Fig. 284/F).

SW-E – ROOM 13A

Small bowl (orange ware), yellow and black painted horizontal meander frieze [*Fig. 7:b*].

Late Christian period, style N VI (AD 1150-1500) (Adams 1986: 337, Fig. 189/7).

Cup (orange ware), black-painted frieze on body comprising a vertical guilloche alternating with a motif of three lines with triple ovules attached to the outside ones [*Fig. 7:c*], Late Christian period, style N VI (AD 1150-1500) (Adams 1986: 343-344, Figs 195/21, 196/13).

Handmade cooking pot (red ware) with two knob handles, horizontal frieze of stick-impressed dots on the body [*Fig. 7:d*]. Late Christian period from the 14th century, style D III (Ware H6) (Adams 1986: 431, Fig. 252/U).

SW-E – YARD 14

Storage vessels turned on the wheel were in preponderance, mostly amphora body sherds and basins.

Handmade cooking pot (red ware), horizontal frieze of stick-impressed dots just below the rim, thick-walled with rounded bottom [*Fig. 7:e*], Late Christian period from the 14th century, style D III (Ware H6) (Adams 1986: 431).

SW-E – ROOM 16A [*Fig. 8a*]

Typical dump fill containing elements of pottery hydraulic installations (toilet seats, pipes, see above, p. 333 and Figs 7-8), remnants of wooden construction or *angareb* bed legs, animal bones, stone grinder, as well as sherds of handmade and wheel-made vessels.

Cup (orange ware), red band around rim and a frieze of oblique crisscross pattern [*Fig. 8:a*]. Terminal Christian period, style N VII (Adams 1986: 352, Fig. 204).

SW-E – ROOM 16B

Bowl (orange ware), red and black decoration on rim and body, consisting of a horizontal frieze of oculi alternating with

hatched rhombuses, red band around rim [Fig. 8:b]. Terminal Christian period, style N VII (Adams 1986: 351, Fig. 203/6)

SW-E – ROOM 16D

Oil lamp [Fig. 8:c], rim modeled to a roughly rectangular outline, flaring outward, dated to the Late Christian period.

Jar (red ware), on the body ornament of yellow stars set against a background of brown dots, yellow and brown bands on the shoulder [Fig. 8:d]. Late Christian period (AD 1150-1500), style N VI (Ware R19) (Adams 1986: 505-506, for the ware; the decoration finds no parallels in published medieval Nubian pottery).

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