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Tell El-Retaba 2009 : The Pottery

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TELL EL-RETABA 2009: THE POTTERY

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Abstract: Pottery from excavations by the Polish–Slovak Archaeological Mission in 2009 can be dated to the New Kingdom (early Eighteenth, late Eighteenth and Nineteenth Dynasties), the Third Intermediate and Late Periods. Ceramic vessels from the early Eighteenth Dynasty, rims and bases of wine amphorae, so-called “meat jars”, red slipped bowls, came from area 3. Large amphorae made of marl clay, dated to the late Eighteenth and Nineteenth Dynasties, served as child coffins. The richest ceramic material came from strata of the Third Intermediate Period houses. Some pots were found in uppermost excavated layers — Late Period domestic contexts. The pottery from the Late Period was locally produced with some exceptions — vessels transported from Greek Islands and Cyprus and Syro-Palestine.

Keywords: Tell el-Retaba, pottery, New Kingdom, early and late Eighteenth Dynasty, Nineteenth Dynasty, Third Intermediate Period, Late Period, wine amphorae, “meat jars”, Cyprus, Chios

Pottery found during the third season of the Polish–Slovak Archaeological Mission (see Rzepka *et alii* 2012, in this volume) can be dated to the New Kingdom and the Third

Intermediate Period with some vessels representing the Late Period. The mission explored three areas: 3, 4 and 5, recording altogether 3998 diagnostic fragments.

NEW KINGDOM: EARLY–MID EIGHTEENTH DYNASTY

Pottery of early New Kingdom date was discovered in and near mud-brick structures in the lowermost excavated strata of area 3 and in area 4 near the northern face of the southern enclosure wall.

Approximately 10% of the ceramics from area 3 was made of marl fabrics, especially Marl D. Cream-slipped bases and handles of large wine amphorae represented Marl D [*Fig. 1*].

The shape of the handle and body of the vessel is reminiscent of amphorae from the mid Eighteenth Dynasty, probably the time of Hatshepsut–Tuthmosis III (Hope 1989: Fig. 1, category 1a). Parallels with material published by D. Aston shows that the Tell el-Retaba amphora can be dated to the early(?) years of Tuthmosis III (Aston 2004: 188, Fig. 6c) through Amenophis II (Aston 2004: 189, Fig. 7a).

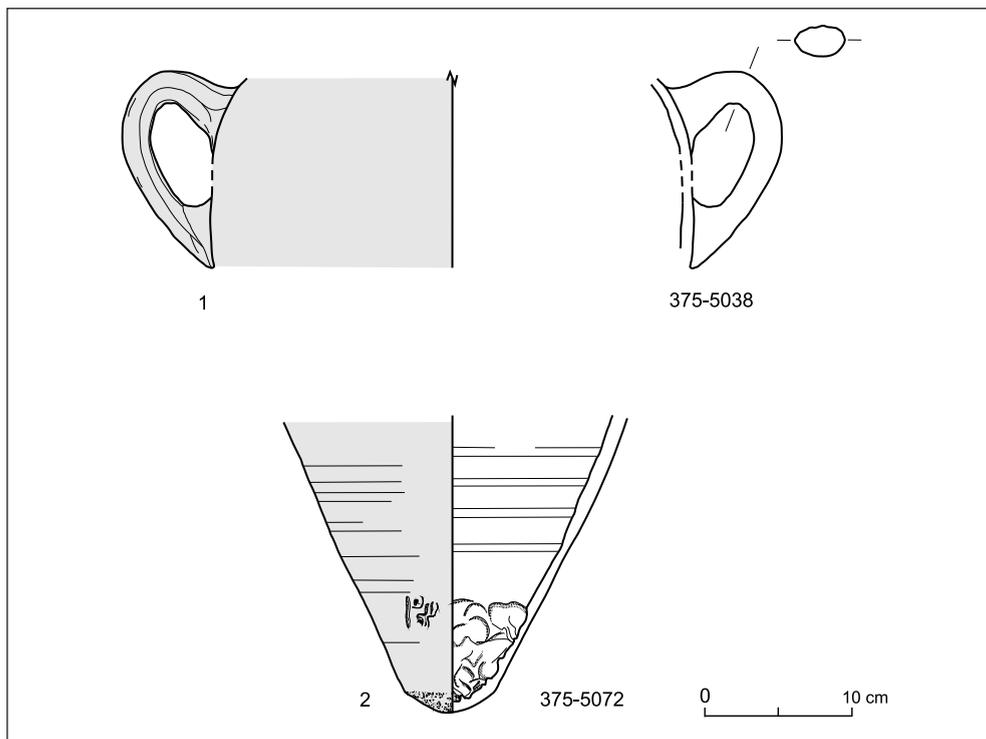


Fig. 1. Fragments of wine amphorae made of Marl D, early Eighteenth Dynasty ¹

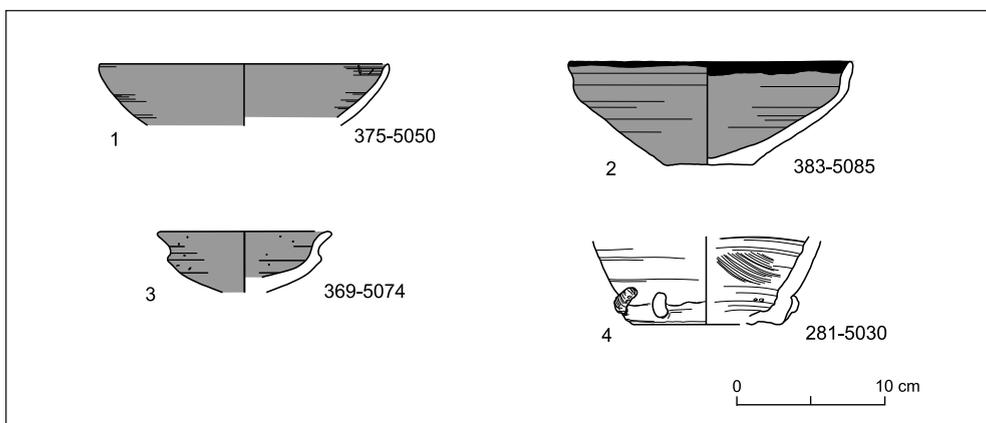


Fig. 2. Red-slipped bowls and base of beer jar, early Eighteenth Dynasty

¹ Pottery drawings in the field K. Braulińska, J. Ciesielska, S. Gromadzka, M. Korzeniowska and A. Wodzińska; digitizing E. Klimaszewska-Drabot (Figs 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 9, 10), M. Korzeniowska and A. Wodzińska (Figs 1, 5, 8).

Rims of large storage vessels, so-called “meat jars” known from many New Kingdom settlements, were also found (Rose 2007: 129–130, 274–276, type MF.1.1–4, Nos 594–602) [Fig. 3]. Like the wine amphorae, they were made of Marl D and coated with cream slip.

Bowls made of Nile silt were also represented abundantly. The most characteristic ones seem to be red-slipped and smoothed bowls [Fig. 2:1–3]. Some of them have black painted rims [Fig. 2:2]. A red-slipped carinated bowl from Qantir with black painted rim was dated by D. Aston to the late Second Intermediate Period/early Eighteenth Dynasty (Aston 1998: 86, No. 1), most probably the reign of Tuthmosis III (Aston 2007a: 207–248). Only a few beer jar sherds have been identified. One of them is a base [Fig. 2:4] of a carelessly made jar (Rose 2007: 99–101, type SH.8, see especially page 243, type SH.8.3, No. 410). Ceramic material found in New Kingdom occupation contexts from area 4 can also be dated to the early Eighteenth Dynasty. This assemblage, similar to the material from area 3, consists mostly of bowls made of a sandy Nile silt fabric. They are commonly red slipped and smoothed, with black painted rims similar to the bowl in [Fig. 2:2].

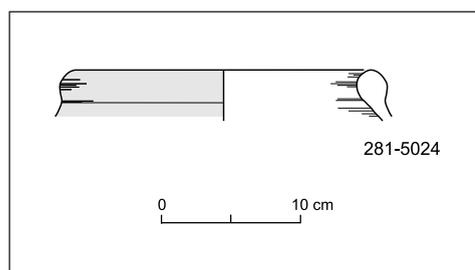


Fig. 3. “Meat jar”, early Eighteenth Dynasty

Two fragments of Cypriot juglets were found: a body sherd from area 3 [Fig. 4:1] and a cylindrical neck in area 4 [Fig. 4:2]. Both pieces are coated with brown slip and polished; their surfaces bear, additionally, simple white painted stripes, and are undoubtedly examples of ‘Base Ring II ware’. The sherds from Tell el-Retaba can probably be dated to the time of Tuthmosis III–Amenhotep II (Merrillees 1968: 175–186).

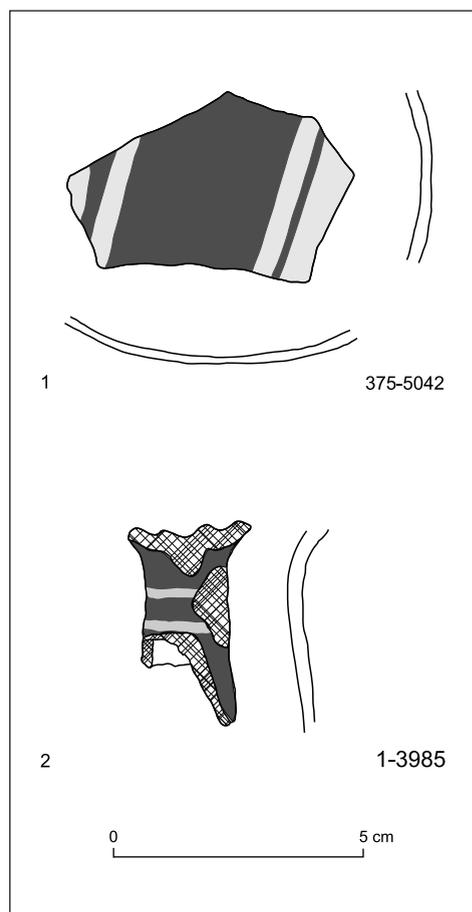


Fig. 4. Fragments of Cypriot juglets, early Eighteenth Dynasty

NEW KINGDOM: LATE EIGHTEENTH– NINETEENTH DYNASTIES

Pottery from the late Eighteenth and early Nineteenth Dynasties was found in area 4 (in addition to the assemblage from area 1 from the previous season, see Rzepka *et alii* 2009).

Large amphorae [*Fig. 5*] were used as coffins for infant burials (Górka, Rzepka 2011), four of which were discovered during the clearing of a defense wall in area 4. In order to fit the bodies inside the pots the bases had to be broken off first; all but one are also missing the rim. The cream-slipped and burnished vessels were made of Marl D [*Fig. 5:2–3*], while the

one uncoated vessel [*Fig. 5:1*] was made probably of Marl F. The vessels are very similar in shape: ovoid elongated bodies, long, almost cylindrical necks, two small vertical handles on the shoulder. Slender amphorae made of Marl D seem to be characteristic of the later Eighteenth and early Nineteenth Dynasties up to the time of Ramesses II (Aston 2004: 189, *Fig. 7e*; Bavay *et alii* 2000: 83, 88, *Fig. 4*; Hope 1989: *Fig. 2.4–7*; Snape 2000: 20). The amphora of Marl F fits well into post-Merenptah times according to Aston (2004: 196, *Fig. 11c*).

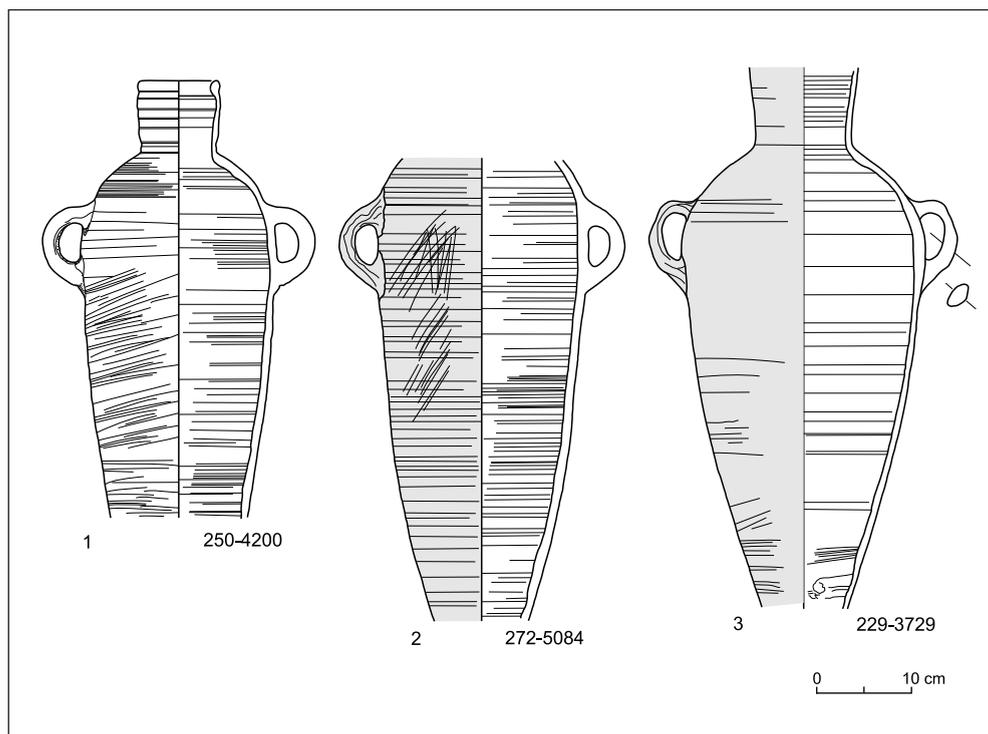


Fig. 5. Wine amphorae, late Eighteenth–Nineteenth Dynasties

THIRD INTERMEDIATE PERIOD

The most abundant pottery material, found in area 5, dated from the Third Intermediate Period, in particular the Twenty-first and Twenty-second Dynasties. The ceramic assemblage comprises forms similar to those distinguished in the material found in the 2008 season.

Many open forms were present, including the ubiquitous small cups with more or less straight sides and pointed bases, made of sandy Nile B2 fabric [Fig. 6:1]. Cups of this kind were very common in other parts of Egypt: Elephantine (Aston 1999: 166–168, Nos 1548–1556), Memphite region

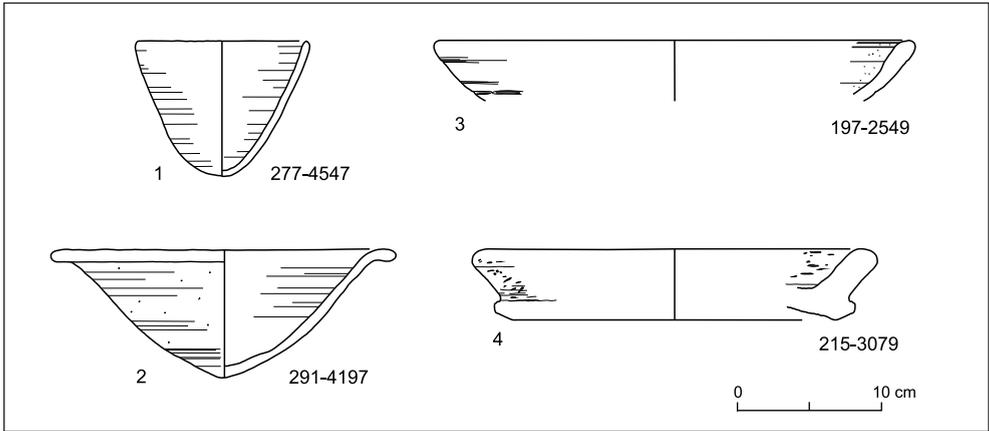


Fig. 6. Bowls, Third Intermediate Period

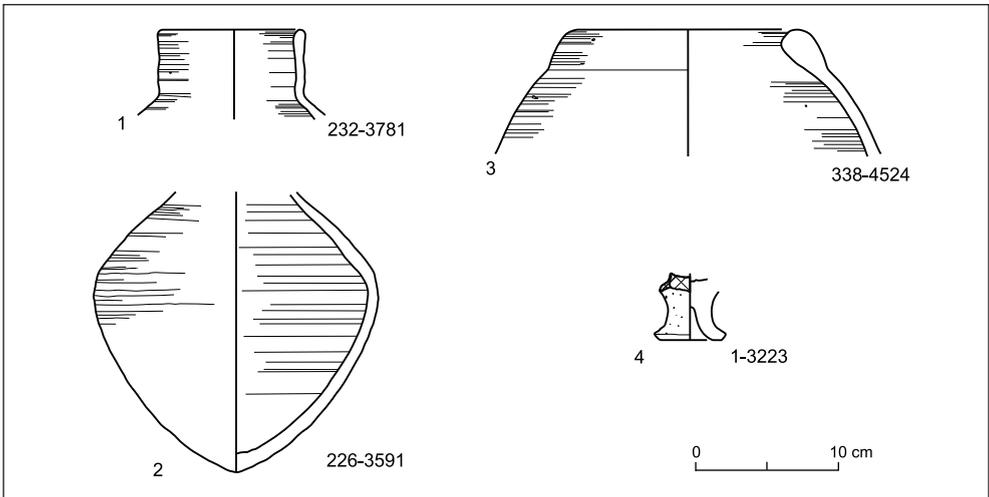


Fig. 7. Closed forms, Third Intermediate Period

(Aston 2007b: Fig. 31, Nos 207–214, and Fig. 42, Nos 446–481), Tanis (Bavay 1998: 319–322, Fig. 32, No. 5, and Fig. 33, No. 20). Uncoated bowls with flaring walls and pointed bases were also very numerous [Fig. 6:2]. Like the small cups, these bowls were made of sandy Nile B2 fabric. Many vessels of this type were found in Memphis (Aston 2007b: Fig. 30, Nos 199–205, also Fig. 41) and Tanis (Bavay 1998: 325, 327, Fig. 36, Nos 61 and 64). Bowls with thickened rims [Fig. 6:3] occurred in great numbers, as well as shallow bread trays [Fig. 6:4] (Rzepka *et alii* 2009: 270, 272, 274, Fig. 30.12–13).

Jars with cylindrical necks and straight rims [Fig. 7:1] were found very frequently in Third Intermediate Period layers. No complete pot of this type was preserved, but it seems that it had a biconical body and pointed base [Fig. 7:2]. These jars, made of sandy Nile B2 fabric, were uncoated. Their external surfaces were often covered with soot. Such vessels were also common in Memphis (Aston 2007b: Figs 45–46), Mendes (Hummel, Shubert 1994: 9, Fig. 3, No. 4) and Tanis (Bavay 1998: 321–322, Fig. 33, No. 18). Jars with incurved thickened rims [Fig. 7:3] constitute another common category of closed vessels. These large hole-

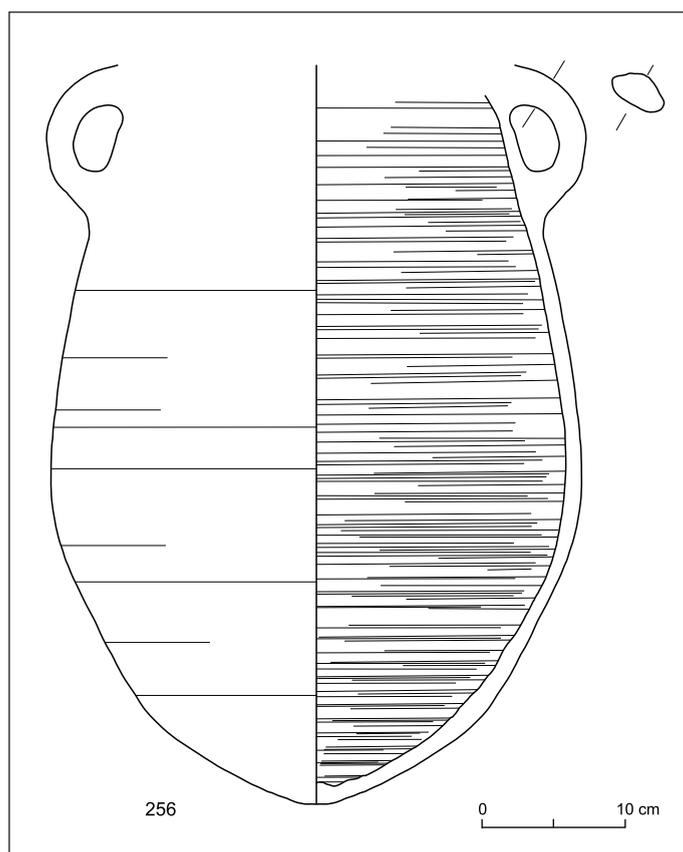


Fig. 8. Storage jar, Third Intermediate Period

mouthered jars are well known from other Third Intermediate Period contexts (Aston 2007b: Fig. 52, Nos 603–610; Bavay 1998: 325–326, Fig. 35, No. 56). Base fragments of unslipped goblets made of Nile B2 fabric were also recovered [Fig. 7:4]. Very good parallels for such goblets can be found

in Memphis in layers dated to the 11th–10th century BC (Aston 2007b: Fig. 44, Nos 514–517).

Two large storage jars were found in their original position. One of them is a bag-shaped closed form with two thick handles placed high on the shoulder [Fig. 8].

END OF THIRD INTERMEDIATE PERIOD– LATE PERIOD

Pottery from the uppermost excavated strata in areas 3 and 4 dated the architectural remains to the Late Period, especially the Twenty-sixth Dynasty. Some pots found on the surface of the kom in area 4 could be dated to the Twenty-seventh Dynasty. The condition of the remains was very poor, suggesting some possible mixing of the ceramic assemblage with material from the Third Intermediate Period located directly below. Some of the forms, however, occurred only in the uppermost layers and,

as such, seem to be associated more with the late Third Intermediate Period–Late Period.

A rich assemblage of pots seems to be connected with domestic activities. Bowls made of very fine Nile B1 fabrics occurred only in the upper layers [Fig. 9:1]. The burnished surface bears traces of a hard tool. Bowls with folded rims and pointed bases, known already in the Third Intermediate Period, were also common later (Brissaud 1987: Pl. VI, No. 18)

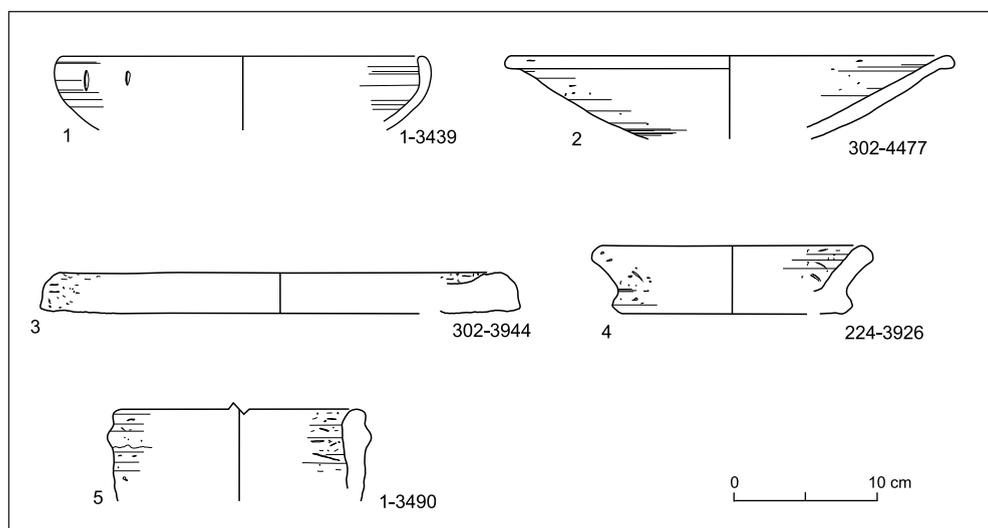


Fig. 9. Pots, end of the Third Intermediate Period–Late Period

[Fig. 9:2]. Handmade trays with flat bases, made of Nile C, were probably used for making bread [Fig. 9:3–4]. A large bowl made of Nile C had a characteristic ledge below the rim [Fig. 9:5]. This type fits well the material coming from the Twenty-sixth Dynasty. Such bowls are also known from Thebes (Defernez 2004: 38, 46, Fig. 18), Saqqara (French, Ghaly 1991: 112, Fig. 55) and Buto (French 2004: 93–94, 96, Pl. 1, Type 7).

Some imports from the Greek islands were also identified; these included a rim fragment of an amphora of Chian production found on the surface in area 4 [Fig. 10]. Uncoated amphorae with 'swollen-necks' and red-painted rim and

handles can be dated to 500–480 BC (Dupont 1998: 150–151, Fig. 23.2d). An example of a similar vessel with a red slipped rim found at Buto has been dated a little earlier, approximately 550–500 BC (Bourriau, French 2007: 120, 130, Fig. 1.7).

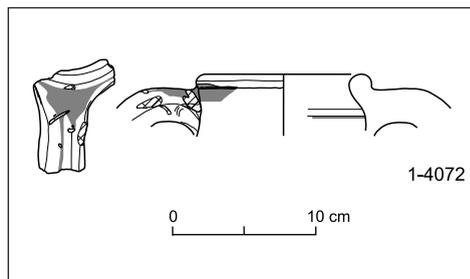


Fig. 10. Chian amphora

CONCLUSIONS

The rich and diverse pottery assemblage from the 2009 season represented occupation layers from the early Eighteenth Dynasty, beginning of the Nineteenth Dynasty, Third Intermediate Period and Late Period.

New Kingdom ceramics, generally dated to the reigns of Hatshepsut–Tuthmosis III, and later from the time of Ramesses II, perhaps even Seti I and later Ramesses III, might have been connected with the presence of the Egyptian army, units, which would have been located in strategic points of the Delta.

The occupation layer of the Third Intermediate Period appears to be thick, covering most of the kom. The ceramic assemblage from the houses represents domestic activities, such as storage, preparation, cooking, and serving of food. There is also pottery evidence for occupation in the Late Period, but the architecture of this phase is not well preserved.

Imported pottery fragments — from Cyprus, probably Syro-Palestine, and later also from the Greek islands — are proof of the international contacts of the inhabitants of Tell el-Retaba.

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