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## THE POTTERY FROM FOUR TUMULI GRAVES IN EL-ZUMA (2009)

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**Abstract:** Four tumuli were explored by the Polish team at el-Zuma in 2009 in an effort to verify the typology of the mounds. All were located in the northern part of the cemetery and represented already established types II and III. The pottery was examined individually and as burial sets in the individual chambers, as well as in each of the graves and the shafts leading to the burials. The wheel-made bowls and cups from tomb T.13 represented a typical early Makurian assemblage known from other graves in el-Zuma. Generally, the pottery from the other graves was more diverse. One small jar from T.17 bore unique incised decoration in the form of a palm tree on one side and a monumental staff on a pedestal with lunate top, introduced over an earlier image of a giraffe.

**Keywords:** el-Zuma, early Makuria, wheel-made pottery, handmade pottery, incised decoration

During the third season of excavations at the el-Zuma cemetery situated on the right bank of the Nile, 25 km downstream from Karima, a PCMA mission headed by Mahmoud El-Tayeb (see above, 23–24; for earlier research, see El-Tayeb 2005; 2010) excavated four tumuli graves, T.11, T.13, T.17 and T.27, the purpose being to verify a grave classification developed after the first season (Obluski 2005: 400–403). Tumuli T.11 and T.13 elaborated on the kind of tomb distinguished as Type II, while the other two tumuli belonged to Type III. The excavations brought new information concerning the layout and architecture of the graves. They also yielded a sizable assemblage of pottery with 58 vessels being found in the burial chambers or at the bottom of shafts and interpreted as grave goods. As a rule, the biggest graves contained the most ceramic

goods. Numerous potsherds were also found in the fill of the shafts and inside the superstructures. The typological diversity of the ceramic finds warrants separate presentation of assemblages from each of the graves. In each case a short description of the burial and the grave goods has been included, followed by a catalogue of the pottery found in each of the graves (for an extensive report on the excavations and commentary on grave construction, see El-Tayeb, Czyżewska 2011 and Juszczyk 2011). The order of presentation runs from the modestly furnished to the richest in terms of pottery burial equipment.

### TUMULI T.17 AND T.27

The two tumuli representing the smallest burials designated as Type III, T.17 and T.27, were located at the far eastern edge of the currently identified limits of the

cemetery. Tumulus 17 had a trapezoid shaft, reaching down 2.31 m, leading to a western burial chamber, which was 2.40 m long, 0.80 m wide and 0.52 m high. The grave was covered by a low mound of sand and gravel with a stone ring of about 3.60 m in diameter which demarked the original extent of the superstructure (now it measures about 10 m in diameter). The chamber had been plundered, leaving the skeleton much disturbed. The grave goods consisted of an iron ring, nine severely eroded iron arrowheads and 88 beads of diverse materials. The pottery finds comprised two complete handmade beer jars [Fig. 2, top left], the brown-ware one at the northern end, the black-ware one

at the southern end of the chamber. Pottery scrapers used by the robbers were found in the fill of both the chamber and the shaft.

#### T.17 – CATALOGUE

- ‘beer jar’ Z17/1, large with globular body, low shoulders, neck of medium length and diameter, slightly everted rim. Similar to jar Z27/2 in that it has a single boss attached to a low shoulder; surface red slipped and burnished. There is a hole in the lower body, cut after firing [Fig. 1, right];
- bottle Z17/2, small-sized, globular body, narrow neck of medium length and slightly everted rim. Black to dark brown surface burnished. Body and

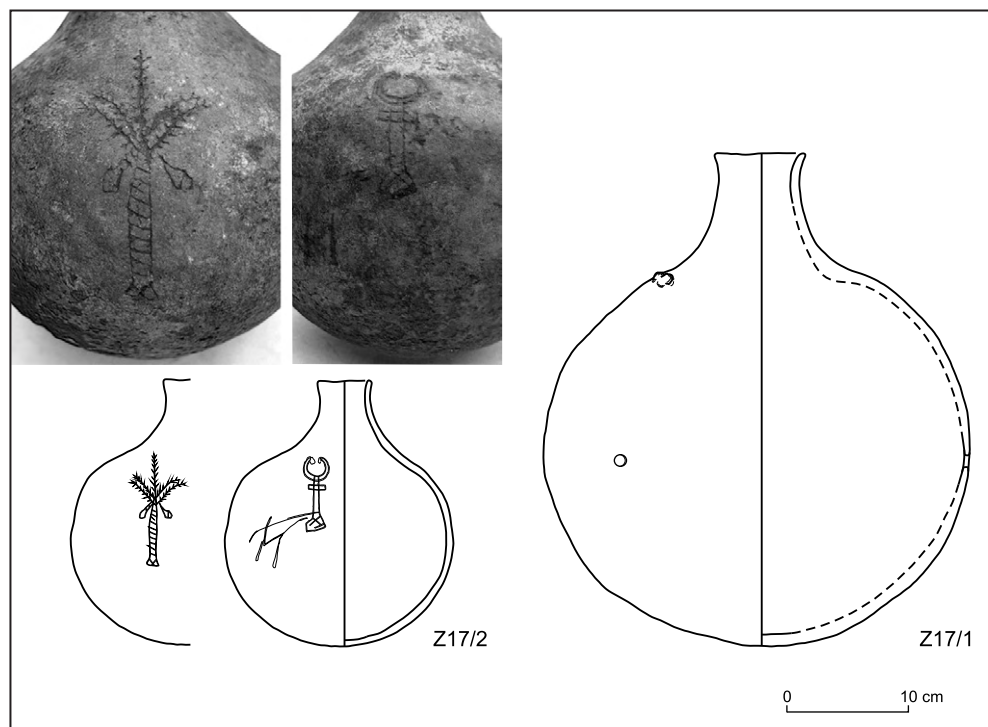


Fig. 1. Vessels from tumulus T.17; insets, close-ups of the incised decoration on jar Z17/2 (All drawings E. Klimaszewska-Drabot; photos O. Białostocka)



*Fig. 2. Pottery burial sets from the four tumuli: top, T.17 (left) and T.27; center, T.11, bottom, T.13 (All photos O. Białostocka)*

shoulders bear decoration incised after firing. A very shallow incised motif of a giraffe was made initially. The animal's head was destroyed by a monumental staff on a pedestal with a cross-bar and crowned with lunate horns. Incised on the other side of the jar there is a palm tree with leaves and fruits. The two motifs were incised later than the giraffe and in a different technique, much deeper and more distinct [Fig. 1, left].

Tumulus 27 consisted of a small trapezoid shaft with lateral niche on the west, topped by a small substructure of about 10.50 m in diameter and preserved height reaching 0.67 m. The bottom of the substructure was at 0.90 m. The chamber was 1.90 m long, 0.75 m wide and 0.44 m high, blocked by chunks of sandstone, which had been disturbed when the tomb was plundered in antiquity. A single skeleton was found

inside the chamber, much disturbed, accompanied by eroded iron arrowheads and some fragments of unidentified iron objects, a stone archer's ring, 101 beads made of diverse materials and a faience scarab. There were also two pottery vessels in the chamber, a beer jar by the north wall and a cup at the southern end [Fig. 2, top right]. Some sherds were mixed in with the fill of the shaft.

#### T.27 – CATALOGUE

- cup Z27/3, rounded base, nearly straight walls which are slightly everted; exterior and interior surfaces red slipped and burnished [Fig. 3, left];
- 'beer jar' Z27/2, medium-sized, globular body, narrow neck of medium length and everted rim; shoulders pronounced and decorated on one side with a single boss; surface red slipped and burnished [Fig. 3, right].

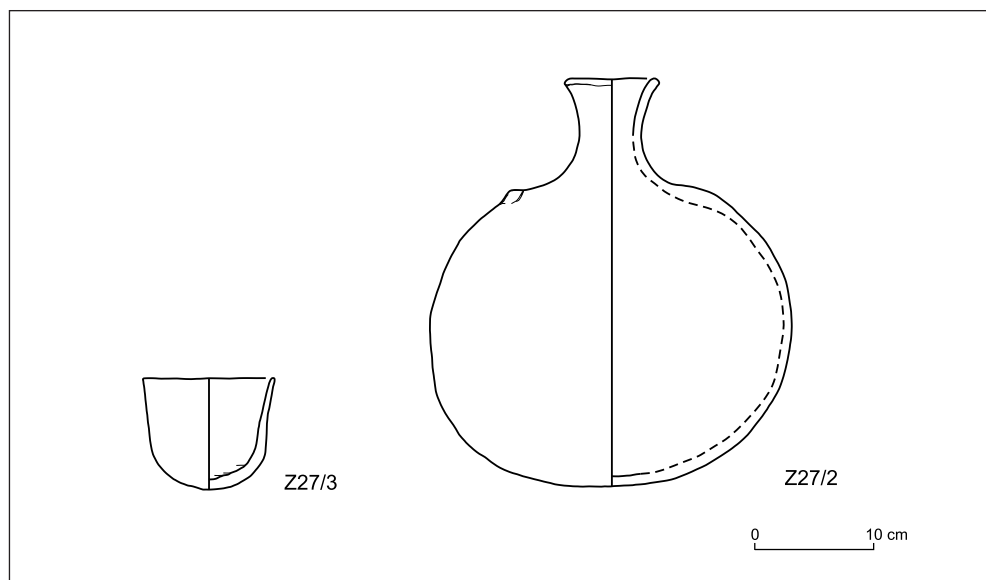


Fig. 3. Pottery from tumulus T.27



## TUMULUS T.13

The round mound of tumulus 13 lies in the northeastern part of the cemetery. It was about 27.70 m in diameter and ranged in height from 1.60 to 5 m. The superstructure covered a roughly squared U-shaped shaft, reaching 3.80 to 4 m down into the soft white sandstone, which constituted bedrock here. Rock-cut steps in different parts of the shaft led down to five interconnected rock-cut chambers, opening off three sides of the shaft and blocked with red bricks or chunks of stone: the main burial chamber 1 in the south wall, the only one to have suffered at the hands of the robbers and one which was not fully explored due to roof collapse, and successive chambers 2, 3, 4 and 5 off the west and north sides.

The chambers contained practically only pottery, with some faint traces of brown organic material (wooden beam?) and a skin holdall in poor state of preservation, possibly decorated with beads, which were found scattered nearby. The seven vessels in chamber 2 were found in the center and northwestern part of the unit, the three bowls in chamber 4 stood in the center next to an unidentified object which seems to have been a kind of container, and the two bowls in chamber 5 appeared in the center of the unit, next to some animal bones.

There were altogether 22 vessels [*Fig. 2*, bottom]: jars and wheel made bowls and cups, in the five chambers: two bowls, two cups and three jars in chamber 2, six bowls in chamber 3, six bowls in chamber 4 and three bowls in chamber 5. Some pottery, including a bowl and two jars, were found in the fill of the shaft.

Among the wheel-made vessels, all the cups and almost all the bowls represented

types recorded already in the assemblages excavated previously from U-shaped rock tombs in El-Zuma (T.2. T.23 and T.25) (Klimaszewska-Drabot 2010, 480-481).

## T.13 – CATALOGUE

- two cups Z13/23 and Z13/20 [*Fig. 4*], medium-sized, flattened, sometimes slightly deformed base, flared sides, thin rim, slightly inturned; exterior and interior surfaces red-slipped and burnished horizontally. Rim diameter ranging from 9.2 to 10.5 cm, height from 8.3 to 9.4 cm.
- 12 hemispherical bowls: Z13/7,10,11, 12,13,14,17,18,24,25,26,35 small- and medium-sized, flattened, sometimes deformed base, flared sides, rounded to flattened rims; exterior and interior surfaces red-slipped and burnished horizontally. Rim diameter ranging from 11.5 to 13.5 cm, height from 6.9 to 8.2 cm.
- two bowls decorated with incised horizontal lines below the rim. In general, this type, represented here by one bowl Z13/28 [*Fig. 5*], is also common in the grave assemblages from some of the U-shaped tombs in el-Zuma. This medium-sized bowl has a rounded, slightly deformed base, flared sides and inturned rim; exterior and interior surfaces red-slipped and burnished horizontally. The other bowl, Z13/27 [*Fig. 5*], has the same type of decoration, but represents a different workshop and is generally an extraordinary vessel. It is medium-sized with slightly concave base, flared sides, applied and inturned rim; exterior and interior surfaces red-slipped, polished on the exterior, smoothed on the interior. The fabric is completely

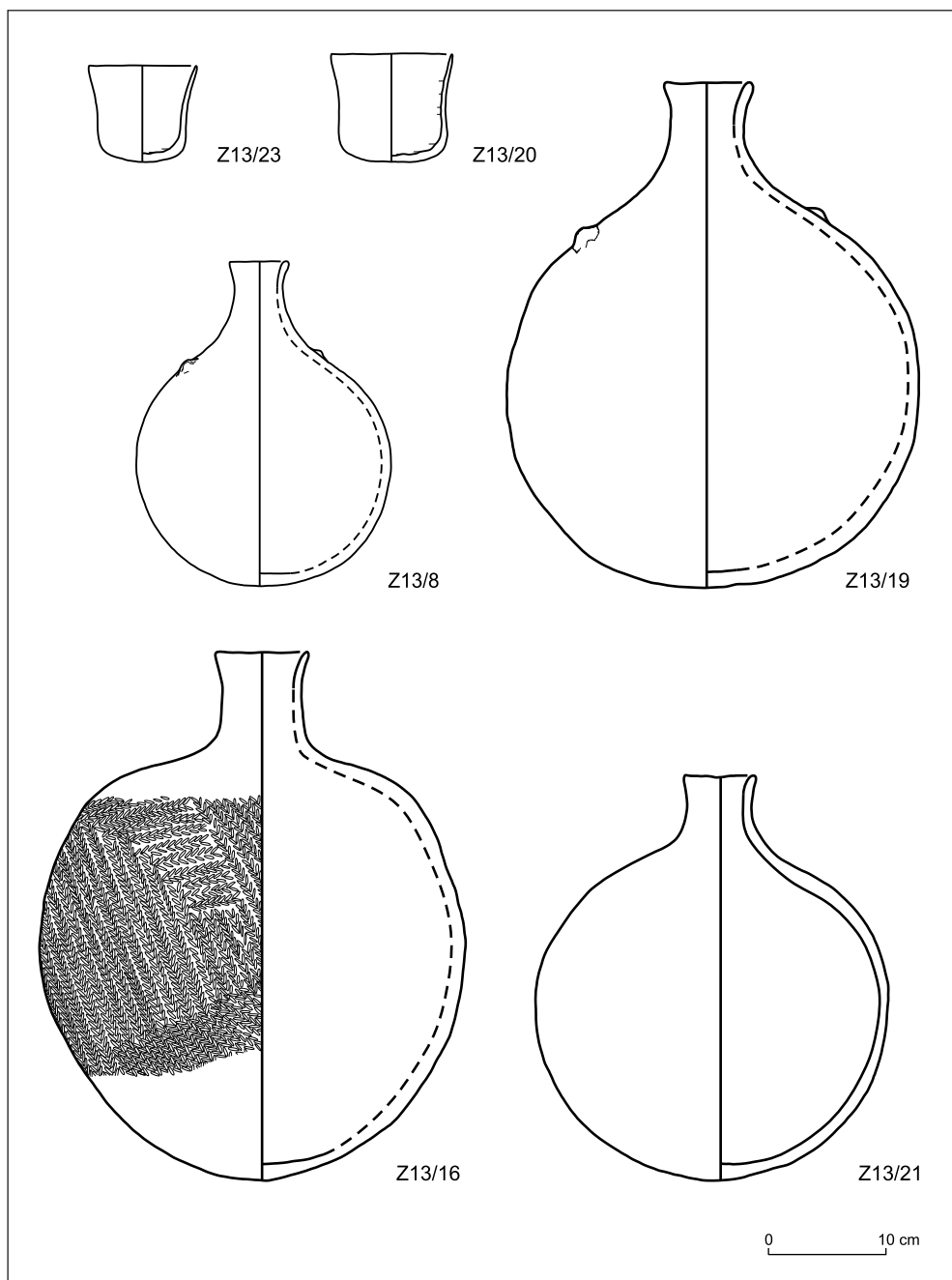


Fig. 4. Wheel-made and handmade pottery types from tumulus T13

- different from that of other wheel-made vessels, very dense and hard, with some very fine mineral inclusion but without any straw temper.
- three handmade jars, representing types already recorded from el-Zuma, characterized by low shoulders decorated with bosses, two big ones (Z13/9, 19) and one middle-sized (Z13/8). All have globular bodies, necks of medium length, rounded flared rims [Fig. 4].
  - two other handmade jars with different typological features. Z13/16 [Figs 4, 5] is a large jar with globular body, prominent shoulders and neck of medium length and diameter, rim rounded and slightly flared. The middle and upper parts of the body on the outside bear mat-impressed decoration. Jar Z13/21 is medium-sized, globular, furnished with a short narrow neck, rounded and slightly flared rim. The damage to the rim was not sustained

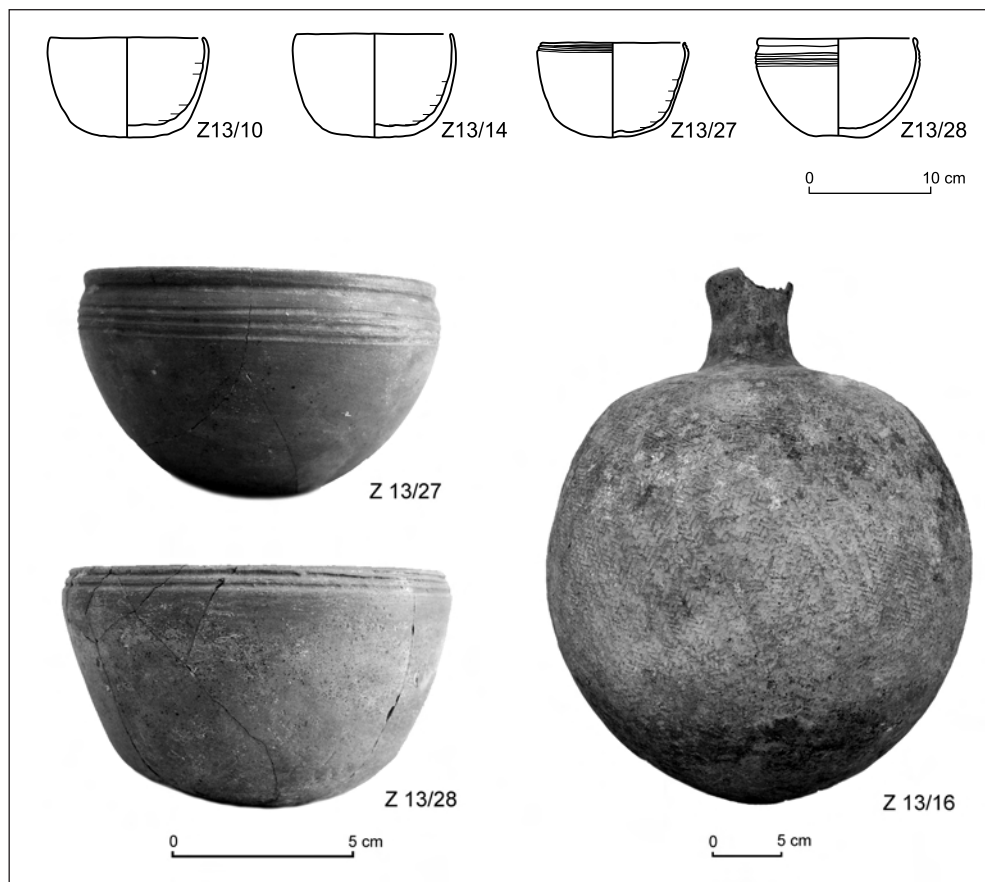


Fig. 5. Bowls and handmade jar with mat-impressed decoration from tumulus T.13



during excavation, suggesting that the jar was in use for some time before burial.

One should note the presence of a “drinking set” in Chamber 2: a jar and a cup placed upside down. A similar arrangement was recorded in grave T.18 from el-Zuma, but the cup was placed upside down over the jar neck. The animal bones in and around the bowls in chamber 5 constituted further proof of the character of local mortuary practices and the rules governing the arrangement of pottery offerings inside the grave.

#### TUMULUS T.11

Tumulus 11, which is located in the central part of the cemetery, was probably the most interesting because of its construction, as well as the pottery vessels. The sand and gravel mound measured about 27 m in diameter, rising from 1.50 to 2.00 m in height. The shaft was of a rare type, a reversed L, recorded so far only at Firka in Northern Nubia and Abkur in the Dongola Reach (Kirwan 1939: 4, Pl. V; Żurawski 2003: 222–224): the longer side was aligned east–west and the shorter one north–south; the maximum depth was approximately 4.95 m. There were two interconnected burial chambers, the main one off the south wall of the longer side, the offering chamber off the west wall of the shorter side. The skeleton in the main chamber was disarticulated due to later plundering, but the repertoire of grave goods was substantial [*Fig. 2, center*]: four bowls and five cups, all of wheel-made red ware, and one large handmade bowl, apart from a concentration of animal bones on the west side of the chamber and some blue faience beads and an eroded iron fragment,

probably from a blade of a knife, found beside the human bones. The western chamber contained only pottery vessels, altogether 17: ten bowls and four cups, all of wheel-made ware, and three handmade vessels, that is, one black beer jar, one cooking pot and one very large basin containing animal bones. Animal bones of both large and small species, probably cattle and sheep/goat, were found arranged in four groups located from south to north. A wheel-made bowl and cup, and three handmade bowls with extra clay added on the underside were found at the bottom of the shaft near the grave chamber, bringing the total number of vessels from this grave up to 32.

#### T.11 – CATALOGUE

The wheel-made material comprised cups and bowls of various shapes [*Fig. 6, top*], the cups divided by type into five groups (last three represented by single examples), the bowls also forming a diversified assemblage.

- two vessels, Z11/6,10, represent a type with slightly concave base, rounded sides, thin rounded rim, tapered and applied; these two vessels were slightly deformed. Exterior and interior surfaces red-slipped and polished, exterior surface of lower body characteristically smoothed. Some black irregular spots on the exterior surface. Rim diameters and heights are identical in size;
- five vessels: Z11/5,11,12,14,18, representing a medium-sized type (between 9.7 and 10.3 cm in height and between 10.1 to 11 cm in rim diameter) with rounded (in one case almost flat), sometimes more or less deformed, heavy base, thin walls, flared sides and tapered rim. Exterior and interior surfaces red-slipped and burnished;

- small cup Z11/19, elaborate tulip-shaped with rounded, heavy base, thin and widely flared walls, tapered rim. Exterior and interior surfaces red-slipped and smoothed;
- cup Z11/24, medium-sized, very deep with rounded base, thin walls, flared rounded rim; exterior and interior surfaces red-slipped and burnished;
- cup Z11/28, medium-sized, heavy rounded base, slightly deformed, thin walls almost straight, rim simple and tapered; exterior and interior surfaces red-slipped and burnished.
- three bowls: Z11/22,29-not illustrated,35, of different depth but with the same characteristic rim, flat and slightly outturned, slightly conical base; exterior and interior surfaces red-slipped and burnished;
- smaller bowl, Z11/17, almost flat, deformed base, rounded sides and beveled rim; exterior and interior surfaces red-slipped, probably polished(?), traces of smoothing on the outer lower body;
- bowl Z11/21, medium-sized with flat, heavy base, rounded but deformed sides, inturned rim; exterior and interior surfaces red-slipped and burnished;
- two bowls: Z11/30, 34 [Figs 6, 7], of different size and shape, both characteristically white in color inside. The smaller one has a rounded base, slightly deformed, and an extremely flared rim. The big one, has a slightly conical base and slightly flared rim. Both were red-slipped and smoothed on the outside and on the inner side of the rim, the rest of the inside being white-slipped and bearing traces of burning (incense?).
- eight bowls: Z11/4,7,8,9,13, 20,25-the

only one illustrated,27 [Fig. 6], of very similar size (7.6 to 8.6 cm in height and 12.1 to 14 cm in rim diameter), bases rounded to flattened, always slightly deformed, sides rounded, rim slightly inturned and squared (only Z11/20 is flat); exterior and interior surfaces red-slipped and polished, and all but one (Z11/20) bear traces of smoothing on the outer lower body.

The handmade material [Fig. 6, bottom] is represented by bowls with clay added at the base, a fairly common type in the graves from el-Zuma.

- two shallow (Z11/1,2) [Figs 6, 7] and two deep (Z11/3, 23- not illustrated) globular bowls, made different by the organic seed temper added to the clay (the seeds, which resemble sesame seeds, were preserved complete due to poor firing conditions).
- large deep bowl, Z11/15, also with clay added at the base, but with the surface decorated with a very shallow impressed pattern [Figs 6, 7].
- basin, Z11/16, very large and heavy hemispherical vessel [Figs 6, 7] with flattened and thick base, squared rim decorated with an impressed pattern in the shape of a row of shallow oval depressions just below the rim; exterior and interior surfaces smoothed. This basin was repaired in two places. Ancient cracks were reinforced with string threaded through four sets of paired holes running from the rim to the lower body and on the other through a pair of holes below the rim. Pots of this kind may have been used to serve food like *asida* (made of *durra* flour), as suggested by Mahmoud El-Tayeb, although this one contained

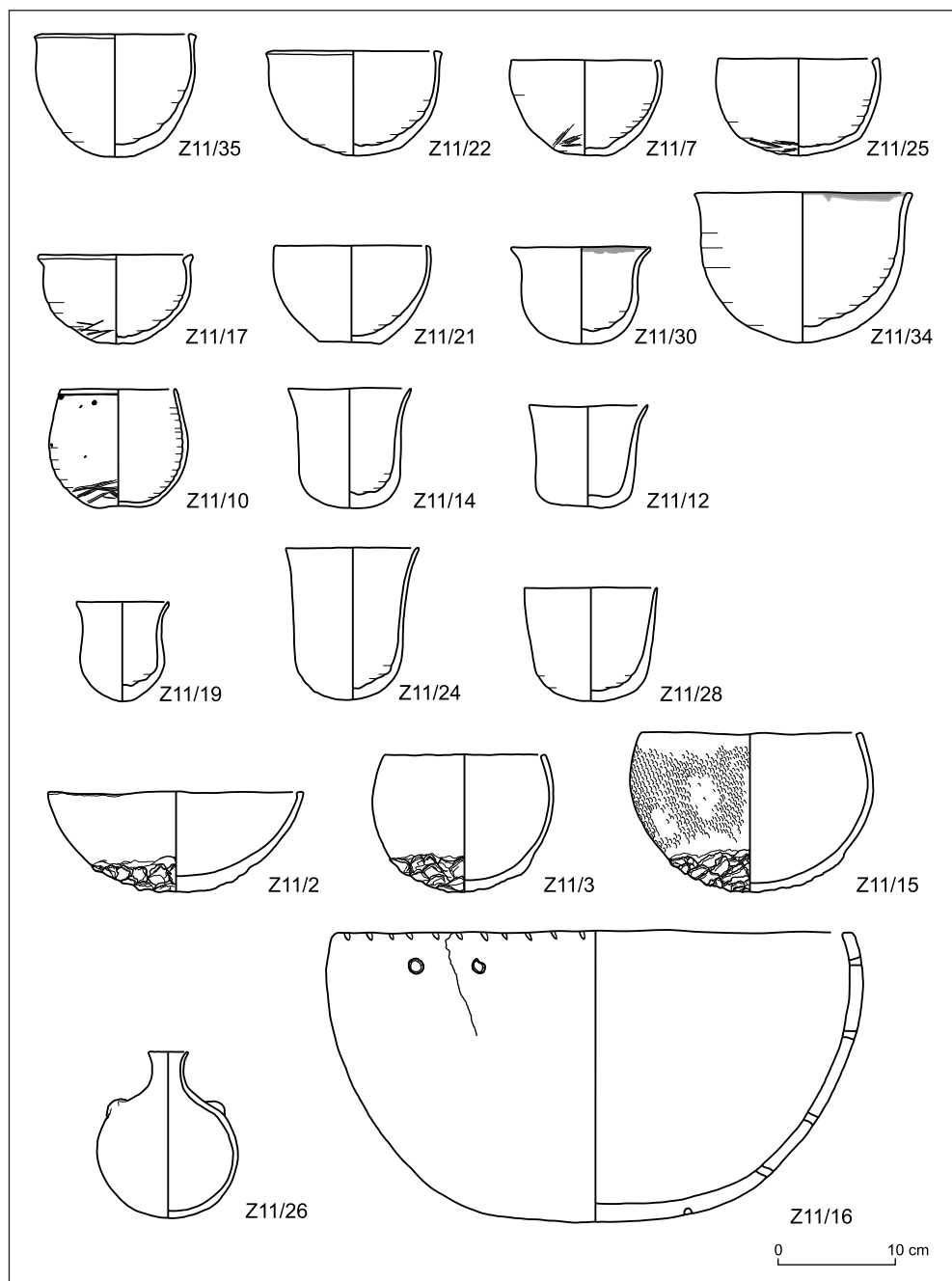
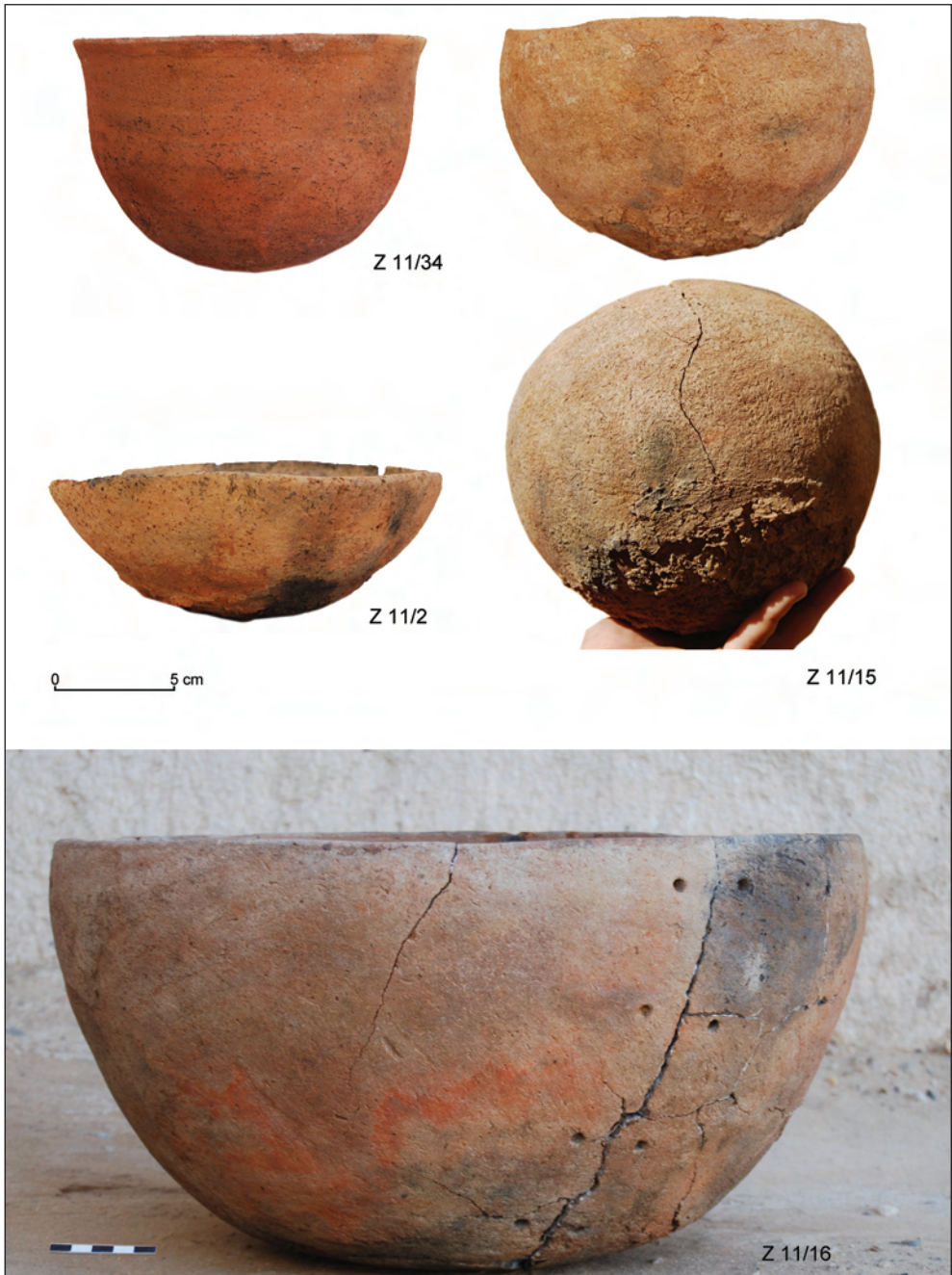


Fig. 6. Wheel-made and handmade pottery types from tumulus T.11



*Fig. 7. Assemblage of pottery from the fill of the robbery shaft in pottery types from T11*

a few big animal bones. Other animal bones were found scattered around it.

- handmade small bottle, Z11/26, with globular body and narrow neck of medium length, rounded and everted rim, low shoulders decorated with two bosses on opposite sides; exterior surface burnished [Fig. 6].

The pottery assemblage from the robbery shaft through which T.13 was robbed was also quite extensive, more so than in other tombs from the el-Zuma cemetery. Distinguishing and counting individual vessels was difficult owing to the large quantity of fragmented sherds; in the end, it can be said that no less than 12 vessels were found in the shaft. Some of them look like they had been broken intentionally in search of the expensive goods, whatever they were, stored inside them. On the other hand, some of the vessels may have been used by the robbers. Some of the vessels appeared to be of later than early Makurian date, belonging already to the Christian age, probably the Transitional period (it is also probable that the production of these vessels began in the late phase of the early Makurian period, M. El-Tayeb, personal communication).

- vessels Z11/48 (not illustrated), Z11/45 and Z11/46, similar to jars, with globular bodies decorated with impressed pattern, a collar at the neck, wide mouth and flared rim were found in a fortress in the Abkur region and in a settlement in the Argi region (Phillips 2003: Pl. 38 B,C) [Fig. 8];
- globular cooking pot Z11/44 with clay added at the base and impressed decoration on the body, four lug handles below the rim; evident traces of

fire on the surface. Comparable vessel found in a fortress in the Bakhit region (Phillips 2003: Pl. 38A) [Fig. 8];

- middle-sized jar Z11/42 with an impressed pattern on the body, three or four round bosses with cross-like depressions in the middle attached to the shoulders; exterior surface of the flared rim and neck as well as the interior just below the rim red-slipped and burnished. Identical bosses were noted on a jar from a fortress in the Bakhit region (Phillips 2003: Pl. 38 B) [Fig. 8];
- *qadus* fragments (Z11/47, Z11/43 two non-joining fragments, possibly from a single vessel) [Fig. 8], found in the fill close to the bottom of the shaft near the grave chamber, some bearing characteristic worked edges indicating that they had been used as shovels;
- six partly reconstructed jars: Z11/41, Z11/40, Z11/39 (not illustrated), Z11/38, Z11/37), apparently of early Makurian date [Fig. 8]; one (Z11/41) decorated on the shoulder with an impressed rope ornament, the rest undecorated. Many body fragments show that at least some of the jars may have had an impressed mat pattern. In general, the jars were large vessels with red-slipped parts of the rim and neck immediately below the rim on the inside and outside. In most cases the rim is especially flared. It is not possible to determine the origin of these jars precisely, but the type was certainly not recorded previously in the grave assemblages from el-Zuma. These jars appear similar to some early Makurian vessels found on Saffi island during the rescue excavations of tumulus 2 (Żurawski 2005: Fig. 24).

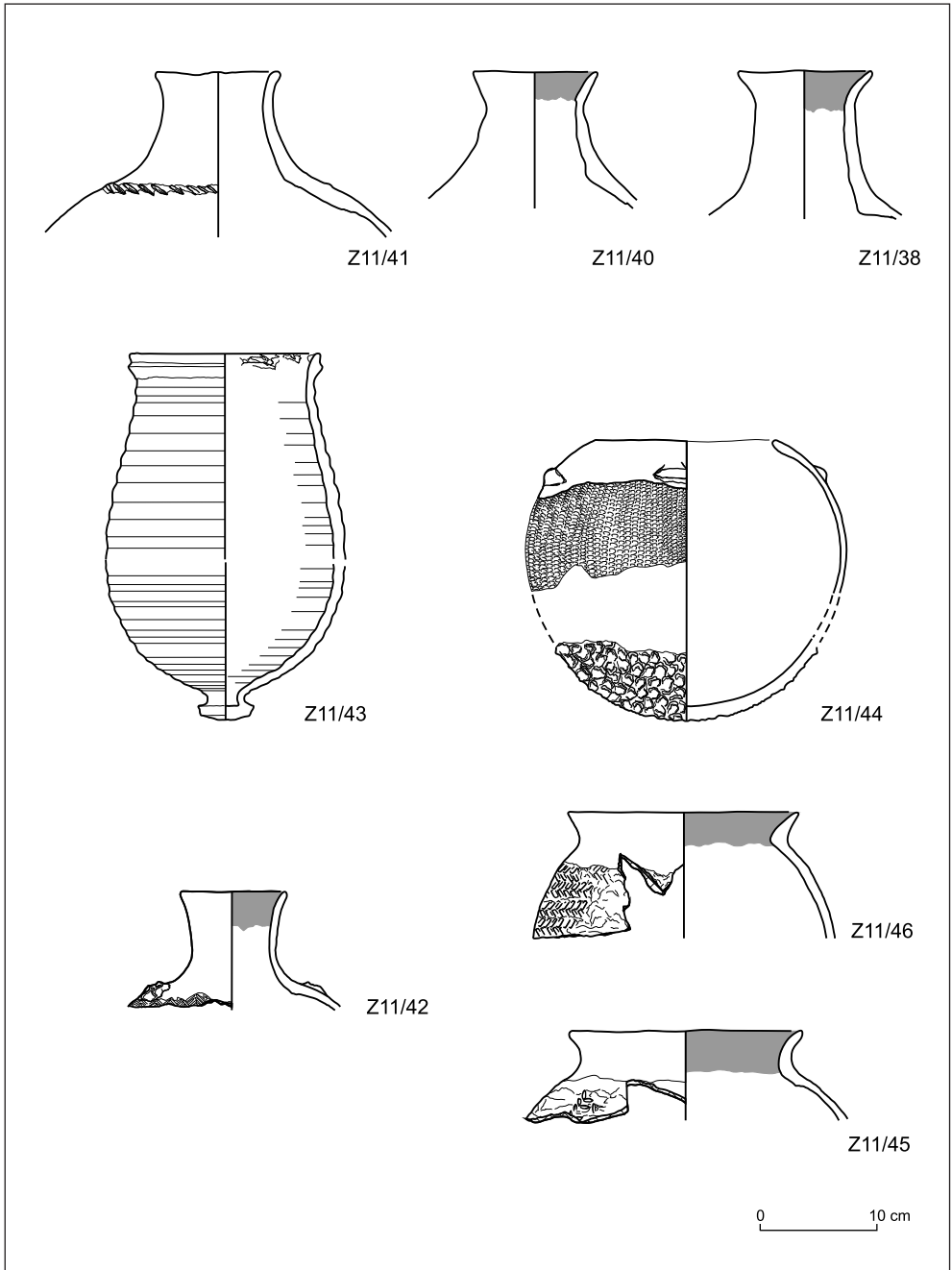


Fig. 8. Assemblage of pottery from the fill of the robbery shaft in tumulus T.11



## RECAPITULATION

The wheel-made collection of bowls and cups from T.13 (with the sole exception of Z13/28 which is unique) represent a known assemblage typical of a late phase of the early Makurian period (AD 450–560). Vessels of this kind have been found in three other U-shaped graves in el-Zuma, as well as in Hammur (Phillips, El-Tayeb 2003: for example Pls 1, 2, 4), and they are known from other types of graves excavated in Kassinger Bahri (Kolosowska, El-Tayeb 2007: Fig. 1). Moreover, the distinctive jars of mainly red ware and low shoulders decorated with bosses, which occur with wheel-made types like those found in T13 (for example, T25 in Zuma), appear to be contemporary and therefore dateable to the late phase of the early Makurian period.

The pottery from the three other graves was more diverse. Jars from T.17 appear to

belong to a later phase of Early Makurian. The shapes are closer to the red-ware jars from T.13. However, the small jar with exceptional incised decoration recalls late Meroitic “black jars” described by Patrice Lenoble (1995). The burial in this chamber had been disturbed, but since the jar was found in the northern part of the grave, opposite the few human phalanges presumed to be in place in the southern part, it is possible that it had been placed by the head of the deceased.

The characteristics of the pottery from T.27 indicate an earlier date for the jar and cup than the vessels from T.17 and T.13. The nearly straight walls of the cup suggest a continuation of Meroitic forms, which may have gradually evolved into the flared sides. The red-ware jar had prominent shoulders, which also appears to be an earlier trend.

The pottery offerings from T.11 proved to be more complicated than the other collections to date. The grave was earlier than T.10, which cut partly into the superstructure of T.11. The interval need not have been long, however, considering that some of the vessels from both graves were of the same types, especially the five cups with everted rim (though smaller), the cup with straight walls, eight bowls with squared, inturned rims and bowls with flat and outturned rim. Handmade bowls with extra clay added on the underside were present also in Tumulus 10. Bowls of this kind are known from T.18 in el-Zuma and T.87 in Tanqasi (for Tanqasi, see Klimaszewska-Drabot 2006: 483–491). Interestingly, some of the wheel-made vessels from a U-shaped grave in Tanqasi resembled the collection from T.11. These were the bowls with flat flared rim, bowls with squared, inturned rim and cups with



Fig. 9. Fragments of a qaddus Z11/47 and Z11/43

tapered and applied rim. Also the small cups with everted rim found in Tanqasi look similar to the small cup Z11/19, although they lacked such a regular and elaborate base. Three very large bowls were found in the tomb in Tanqasi, in one of the secondary chambers, but they were not like the bowl Z11/16; vessels of this size have not been found in any of the graves from the Dongola Reach. Curiously, the pottery assemblage from T.87 in Tanqasi is more evidently similar to the content

of T.11 rather than the U-shaped graves in el-Zuma. Finally, there is cup Z11/24 which resembles Meroitic deep cups (Rose 1998: Fig. 6.16 <3806>). Cups with nearly straight walls Z11/28 and Z27/3 also seem to be connected with late Meroitic vessels (Rose 1988: Fig. 6.17 <755/1>, <12703>). Similarities to Meroitic types can be put forward also in the case of bowl Z11/17. Its characteristic rim shape is comparable to vessels from the Gabati cemetery (Rose 1998: Fig. 6.13 <12203>, 6.14 <12204>).

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