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TELL EL-RETABA 2011: THE POTTERY

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Abstract: Most of the pottery collected during the 2011 season in Tell el-Retaba was found in assorted rubbish heaps and it is difficult to associate it with any particular structures or activities. The assemblage, however, is interesting, as it adds new forms not previously recorded at the site to the already known and studied ceramic material from the early Eighteenth and Nineteenth Dynasties and the Third Intermediate Period. Pots from tombs dated to the Hyksos Period correspond presumably to the middle and final stages of the Fifteenth Dynasty. Another interesting group can be associated with the Twentieth Dynasty, its later stage in particular.

Keywords: pottery, Hyksos, early Eighteenth/Nineteenth, Twentieth Dynasty, Black Lustrous Wheel-made Ware, Bichrome Ware imitation, Third Intermediate Period

The pottery assemblage from excavations carried out by a Polish–Slovak archaeological mission at Tell el-Retaba in the 2011 season consisted of 3500 diagnostic pieces of pottery, representing chiefly domestic wares from the early Eighteenth,

Nineteenth and Twentieth Dynasties and the Third Intermediate Period. A small group of pots came from tombs of the Hyksos era, which appears to be, so far, the first occupation that the site in Tell el-Retaba can be associated with.

FIFTEENTH DYNASTY

Tombs dated to the Hyksos age were discovered by Mustafa Nur el-Din conducting the Egyptian rescue excavations in the vicinity of the modern road cutting the site into two (Rzepka *et alii* 2014). The pottery from the graves assigns the burials precisely to the middle and final stages of the Fifteenth Dynasty. A Hyksos grave [810] was also found

by the Polish team (see above, Fig. 6 on page 96). Among the objects in this tomb there was also pottery: a juglet with one handle and a vase with wide recurved rim [*Fig. 1*]. Both of them were made of Nile B1 fabric, also both were black painted, the patterns being almost the same, that is, narrow horizontal bands around the body and the base decorated with a painted

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cross. The only difference is the ornament on the rim: short strokes on the juglet and a solid band on the inner rim of the vase. Vessels similar to the juglet were found at Kom el-Koa and Tell Om-Bordi, two sites excavated by Egyptian archaeologists

(El Hangoury 2003). Such pots were perhaps produced locally in Wadi Tumilat, maybe even in the same workshop as they evince very similar quality, and can be dated to the end of the Fifteenth Dynasty (K. Kopetzky, personal communication).

EARLY EIGHTEENTH DYNASTY

A very rich collection of domestic pottery came from early Eighteenth Dynasty contexts identified in areas 3 and 4. Two houses were found near the Ramesside gate. The site stratigraphy and ceramic repertoire both suggest a date for the assemblage in the Hatshepsut–Thutmosis III horizon.

An ovoid-shaped jar with recurved rim made of marl A3 [Fig. 2] was found in area 4. Another find was a juglet with

one handle made of a fabric similar to Nile B2, covered with black slip and burnished on the outside [Fig. 3:4]. Black juglets of similar shape, dated to the early Eighteenth Dynasty, were found in Tell el-Yehudiya (Petrie, Duncan 1906: Pl. 8B, Nos 103, 105–108). The so-called Black Lustrous Wheel-made Ware (BLW-m) vessels were imported to Egypt from Cyprus (Hörburger 2007).

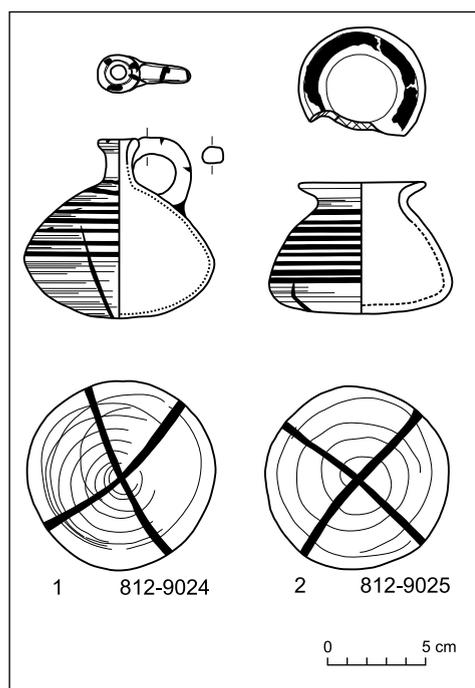


Fig. 1. Vessels found in a Hyksos grave

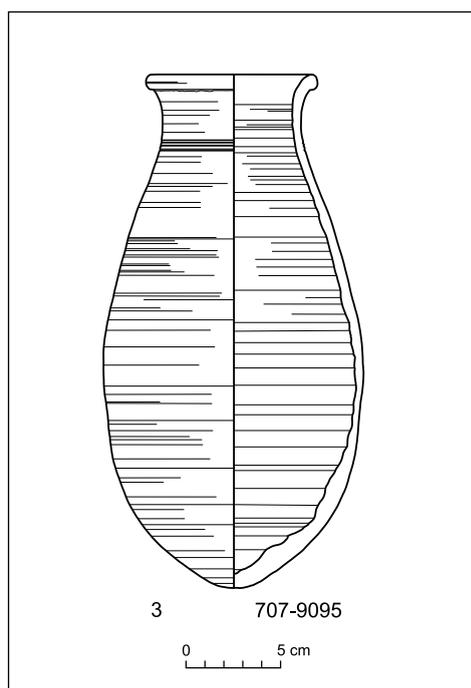


Fig. 2. Jar from the early Eighteenth Dynasty

An abundance of red slipped bowls with black painted rims was part of this assemblage [Fig. 3:5–6]. These bowls, either with incurved rim or carinated body, were made of Nile fabric B2. They are known to have been produced during the

early Eighteenth Dynasty until the time of Thutmosis III (Aston 2007: 218–219; see also Wodzińska 2011: 1017–1018, Fig. 4, No. 2). Many Bichrome Ware imitations were also found this season (see for example Bourriau, Eriksson 1997: Pl. 2) [Fig. 3:7].

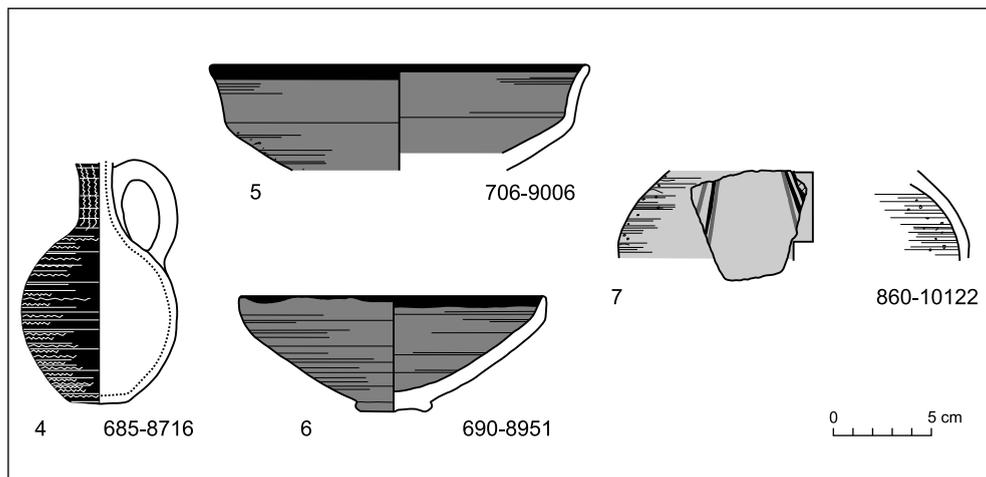


Fig. 3. Selection of pottery vessels from early Eighteenth Dynasty contexts

EARLY NINETEENTH DYNASTY

The early Nineteenth Dynasty ceramic repertoire was represented by only a few pots this season. All of them were found loose in layers without any specific architectural context. A few fragments

of “meat” jars, wine amphorae made of marl D [Fig. 4:8], and a few bowls covered with red slip [Fig. 4:9] were recorded (see also Rzepka, Wodzińska *et alii* 2009: 267–268; Wodzińska 2011: 1020–2021).

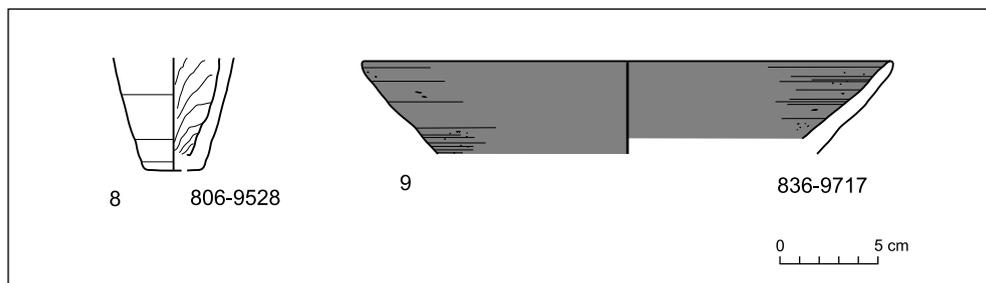


Fig. 4. Wine amphora and red-slip bowl from the early Nineteenth Dynasty

TWENTIETH DYNASTY

The number of painted pots found this season was much larger compared to the previous ones. These are bowls with round bases and recurved rims, often with orange/red slip and black painted decoration inside. Painted patterns are very simple, usually parallel horizontal bands [Fig. 5:10], sometimes stylized floral designs [Fig. 5:11] (Aston 1996: 27; Petrie, Duncan 1906: Pl. 36, No. 2). These vessels were found in a rubbish heap, associated with other pots dated securely to the Twentieth Dynasty.

A pottery caché (see above, Fig. 9 on page 99) was found in a simple pit in the ground. It included 14 pots, 13 nearly complete large storage jars and one large shallow plate [Fig. 6:12]. The jars represented three main types made of marl fabric D (identification of fabrics according to the Vienna System):

- pot with conical body, cylindrical neck, straight rim and round base [Fig. 6:13];

- large jar with ovoid body, round base and two small handles [Fig. 6:14];
- large jar with ovoid body, round base and three handles [Fig. 6:15].

All jars were covered with a cream slip on the external surface and well smoothed with traces of burnishing, especially on shoulder. Four of the jars carried potmarks executed after firing (two are shown in Fig. 6:14–15).

The ceramic vessels from the caché can be dated to the Twentieth Dynasty, particularly its later phase. Jars with cylindrical necks were found in Tell el-Retaba already by W.M.F. Petrie (Petrie, Duncan 1906: Pl. 36B, No. 44). A tall amphora made of marl A2 fabric and cream-slipped, found in Qantir, is dated by D.A. Aston to a similar period (Aston 1998: 608–609, No. 2487).

Large storage jars with three handles are known from other parts of Egypt. The type from Tell el-Retaba is very similar to

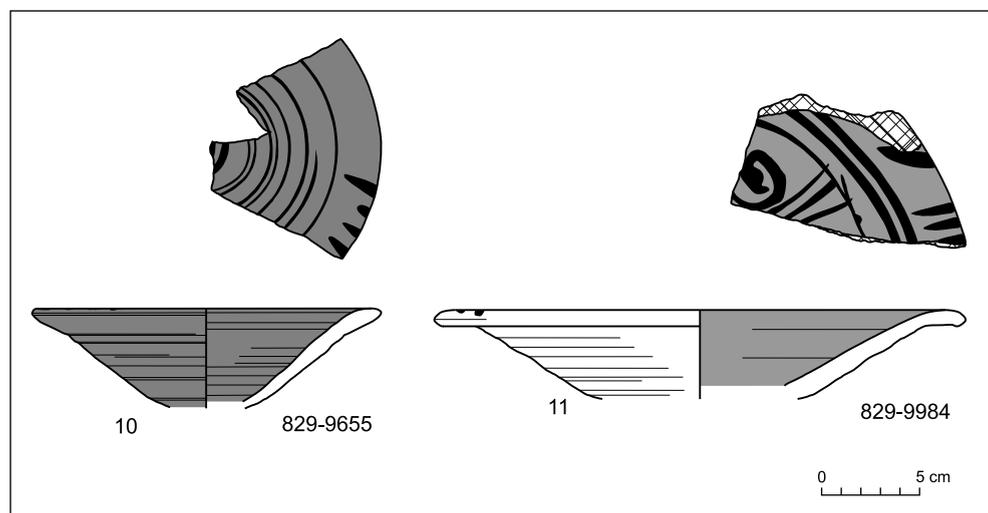


Fig. 5. Painted bowls from the late Twentieth Dynasty

a jar from Tanis, probably dated to the early Third Intermediate Period, as well as a pot from Medinet Habu from the Twenty-second Dynasty (Myśliwiec 1989:

244, 246, Pl. 27). It seems that this type of vessels was used at the very end of the Twentieth and in the beginning of the Twenty-first Dynasty.

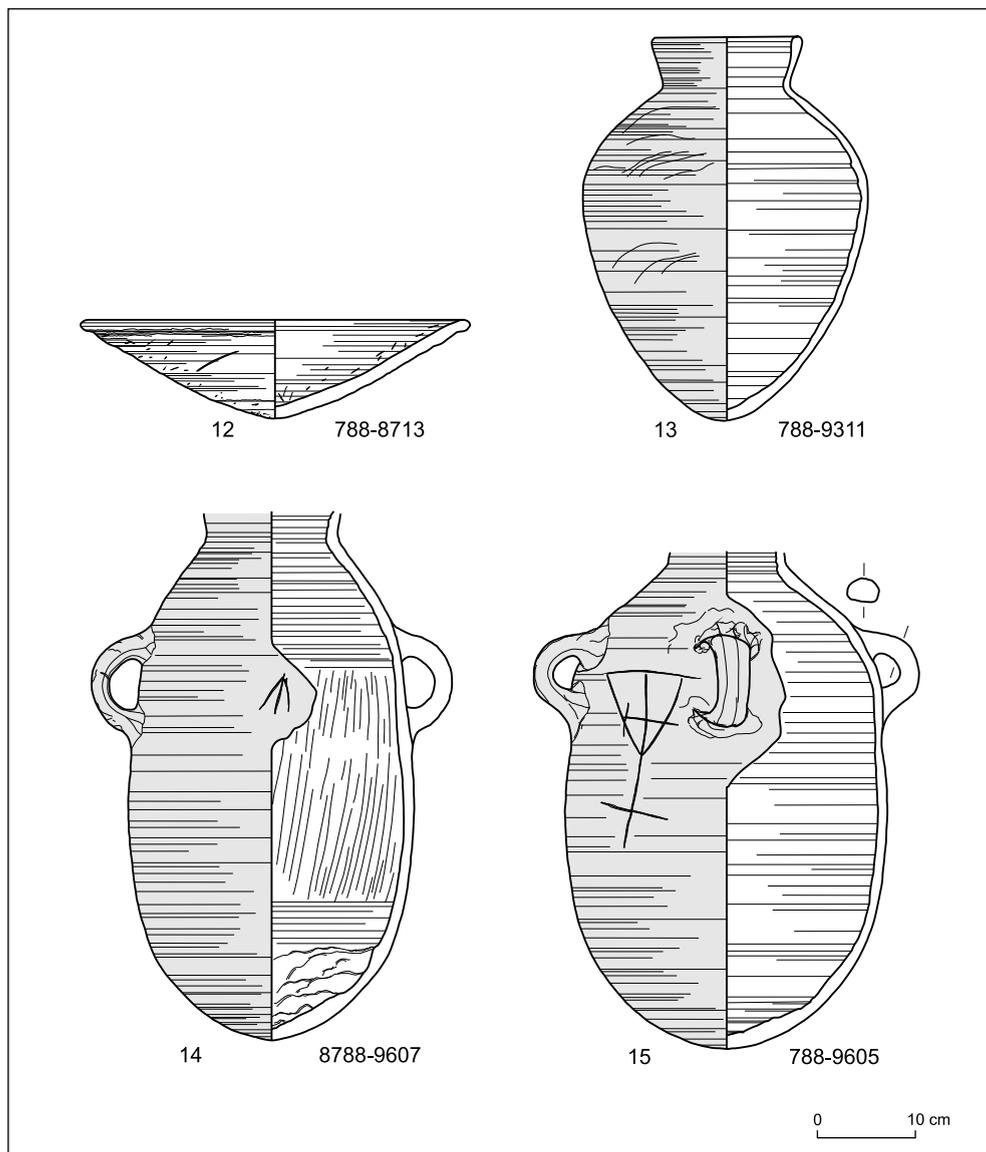


Fig. 6. Selection of vessels found in a caché of late Twentieth Dynasty date; note potmarks executed post-firing on the two jars

THIRD INTERMEDIATE PERIOD ASSEMBLAGE

No evident structures dated to the Third Intermediate Period were uncovered at the site during the 2011 season. Instead, several excavated stratigraphic units could be identified as rubbish heaps and these produced many different pottery vessels. These included a group of closed-form

vessels comprising hole-mouthed jars [Fig. 7:16], as well as bowls with recurved rims, small cups with straight walls [Fig. 7:17], discovered in previous seasons in huge quantities (Wodzińska 2011: 1021–1022, 1034–1035, Figs 9–11), and bread trays [Fig. 7:18].

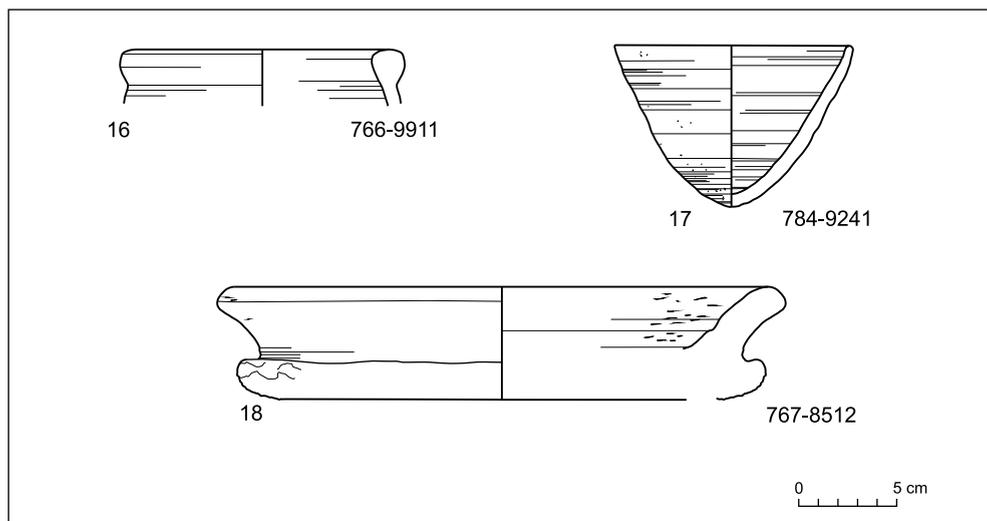


Fig. 7. Hole-mouthed jar, bowl and bread tray from the Third Intermediate Period

CONCLUSIONS

Pottery retrieved in the 2011 season has extended the time range of the assemblage already known from the site. New discoveries have shown that the first occupation of the site came in the Hyksos age and while it is still not clear how long the Hyksos stayed, pottery from the excavated tombs may be dated to the end of the Fifteenth Dynasty, shortly before the pharaohs of the early New Kingdom reclaimed the land. The abundance of early

Eighteenth Dynasty pottery from domestic contexts could be an indication that the Hyksos did not necessarily leave the site before it was reoccupied by the Egyptians and that the two nations may have lived side by side, at least for a short while.

The site's ceramic horizon was also extended this year to include examples of Twentieth Dynasty pottery, which had not been well represented in the material excavated in previous campaigns.

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