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## The Pottery from Naqlun, 1993

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## THE POTTERY FROM NAQLUN, 1993

**Tomasz Górecki**

Most of the pottery recorded at Naqlun in 1993 came from the debris filling rooms in the II.DB complex (rooms D.18-D.22) as well as from the area of the courtyard D.15 and the fill above I.DB.<sup>1</sup> Except for a group of damaged but relatively well preserved vessels from D.21 and another group of smashed pots in the fill above I.DB, the remaining pottery finds were scattered over the entire area of D.18, D.19 and D.22.

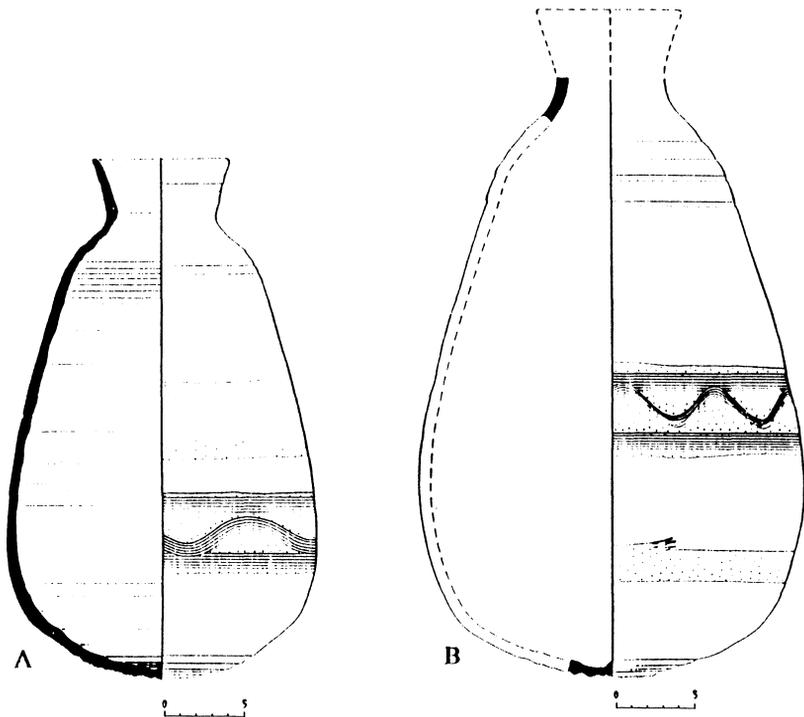
Of the greatest importance for the chronology of the assemblage is a group of vessels discovered lying in the lowermost layers of the debris filling D.21. It is also of the highest value from the ceramologic point of view. The position in which the pots were found indicate that they had all been thrown into the room before the space was filled with debris. The group is made up of six wine containers, two *qawwadis*, two water bottles and the lower part of a lamp or lantern stand.

The wine containers (Fig. 1) are bag-shaped vessels made of Nile silt and decorated with one or two horizontal white-painted bands.<sup>2</sup> On four of the bottles there is a combed decoration on the white band: a wavy line in between two horizontal lines.

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<sup>1</sup> For a report on the pottery finds from Kom D in 1992, see T. Górecki, *Deir el-Naqlun 1992: The pottery, PAM IV, 1992 (1993)*, pp. 53-64.

<sup>2</sup> Bottles of a similar shape were also found during archaeological excavations at Fustat according to Prof. W. Kubiak who is preparing a publication of the pottery from this site. The bottles from Fustat are dated to the 10th-early 11th century.



*Fig. 1. Wine or water bottles. All drawings by the author.*

The bottles had no handles and, judging by the one surviving neck, were equipped with outward-flaring funnel-shaped mouths. All of the vessels were waterproofed inside, indicating their function as wine containers. Just as in the common Egyptian brown amphorae, the necks of these containers are

broken; they were presumably opened by breaking off the neck together with the clay-stopper. These amphorae ranged in volume from 4.7 (Fig. 1a) to 9.25 (Fig. 1b) liters.

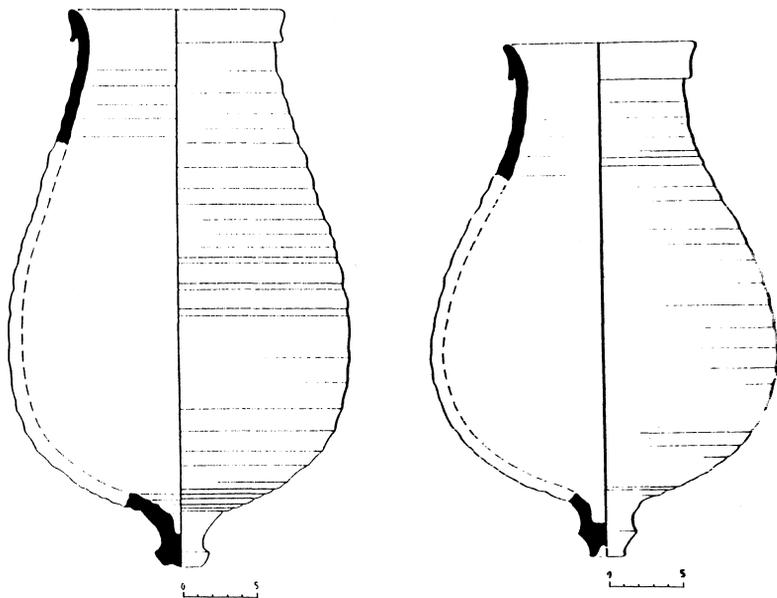


Fig. 2. *Qawwadis*

The two *qawwadis* (Fig. 2) were made of almost identical Nile silt covered with light slip. They are of different size but both end in a typical knob and their maximum diameter comes

below mid-height.<sup>3</sup> The water bottles (*gulla*) (Fig. 3a - volume 0.75 l; 3b - 3.35 l) differ considerably in size. In form they recall a bottle (Fig. 4, volume 2.8 l) discovered in 1988 in room D.3. In all cases the upper part, which includes the neck and body, is covered with a beige-white slip. The smaller bottle is without handles.

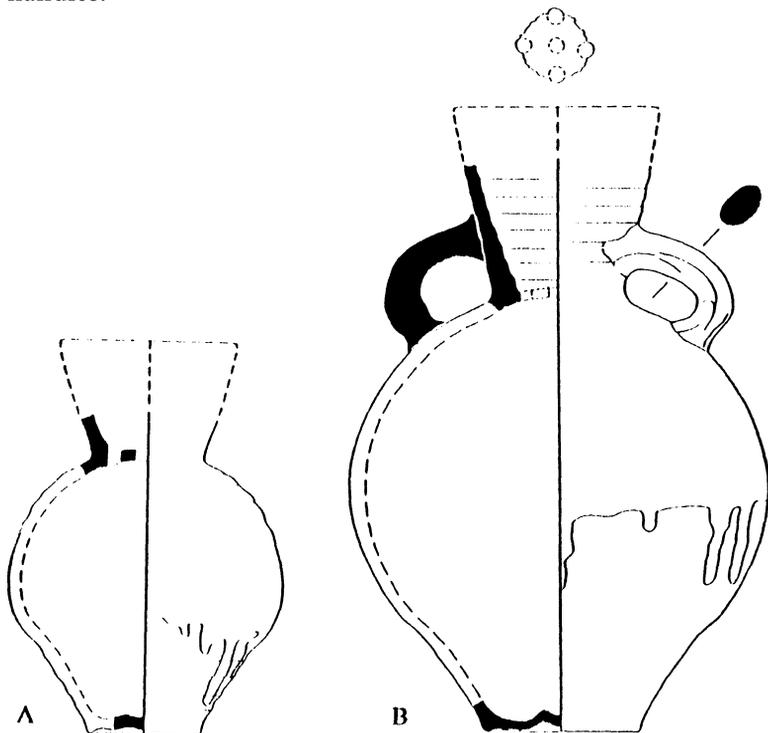
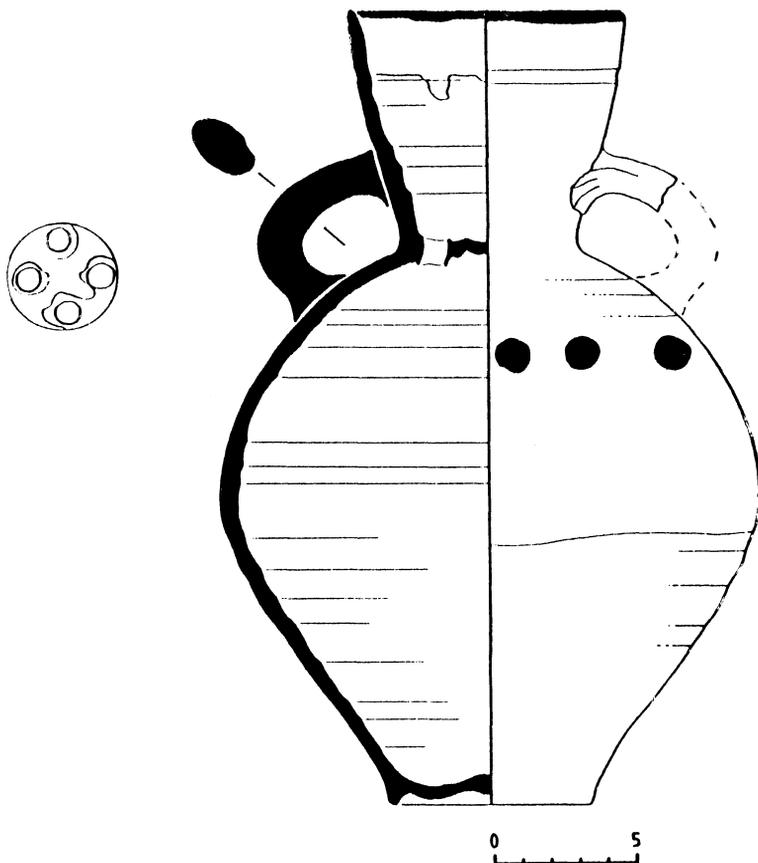


Fig. 3. Water bottles

<sup>3</sup> Similar objects from Fustat are dated there to the 10th-11th century (W. Kubiak, pers. comm.).



*Fig. 4. Bottle found in unit D.3 in 1988.*

Of some interest is a fragmentarily preserved conical object made of baked Nile silt (Fig. 5), which can almost beyond doubt be identified as the bottom part of a lamp or lantern

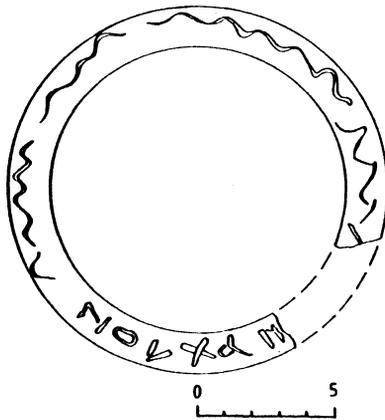
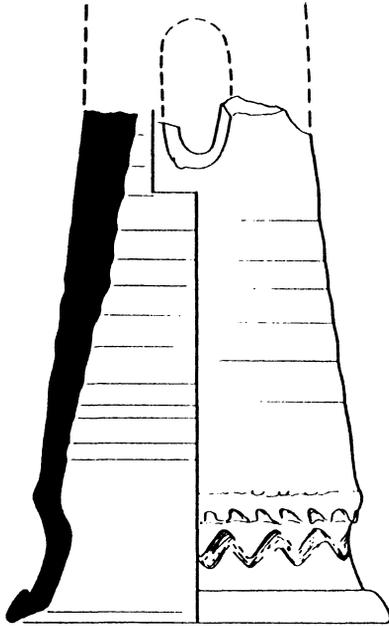


Fig. 5. Bottom part of a lantern stand (?).

stand.<sup>4</sup> The preserved fragment is decorated near the bottom with a wavy incision and a simple finger-shaped relief decoration. On the bottom there is a round wavy groove interrupted only by the inscription: NOY XANOY[...], engraved before firing.

A large pithos (Fig. 6), which was reconstructed from fragments found in the same layer as the other vessels, but also in the ashes and debris overlying them, could be considered contemporary with this deposit, but is more probably later. In form, material and decoration it recalls a storage vessel without handles discovered in D.3 in 1988 (Fig. 7), but it is larger and has four handles.

The deposit was surely not part of the equipment found in room D.21 in the last stage of its use. The evidence would suggest that soon after the room was abandoned, it started being used as a place to discard rubbish, broken vessels included.

In the upper parts of the fill in courtyard D.15, and at least in part above the structure designated as I.DB, a considerable number of sherds from bag-shaped containers (minimum 8 pieces: Fig. 8; volume 16.5 to 7.95 l) were found scattered over a relatively small area. It is to be assumed that they served the same role as the examples from D.21, considering that they are of the same form and have the same black waterproofing inside. They are, however, much wider, with different body proportions and irregular ribbing on the surface. Also the neck is narrower and has a tiny spout for pouring the contents. The vessels were fired in a reduced atmosphere and the clay is quite hard. Even though

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<sup>4</sup> A similar object from the 9th century decorated with an engraved ornament was found at Susa: M. Rosen-Ayalon, *Ville royale de Suse IV. La poterie islamique*, Paris 1974, fig. 306, pl. XXVIIIh.

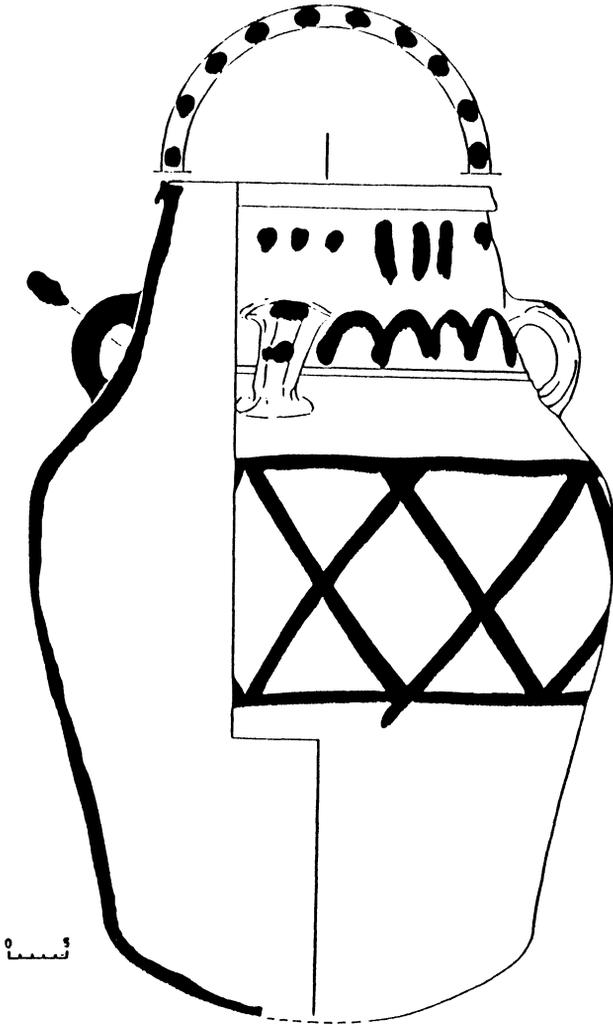
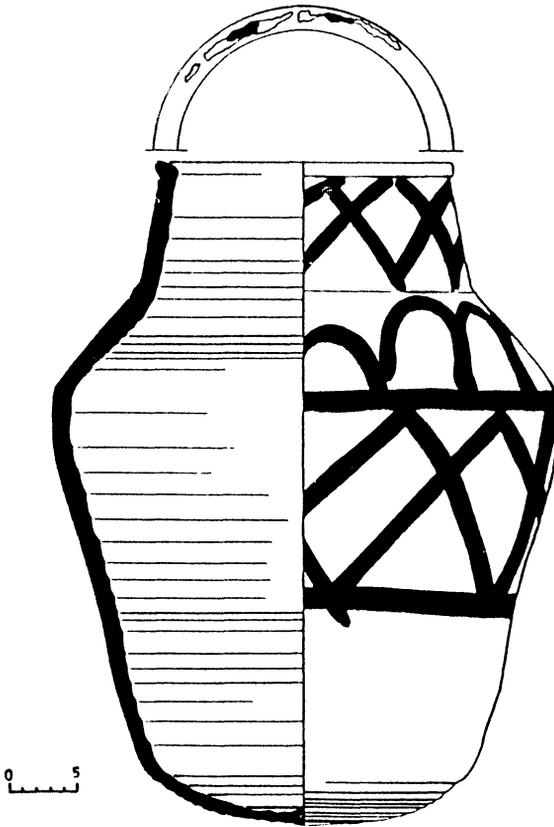
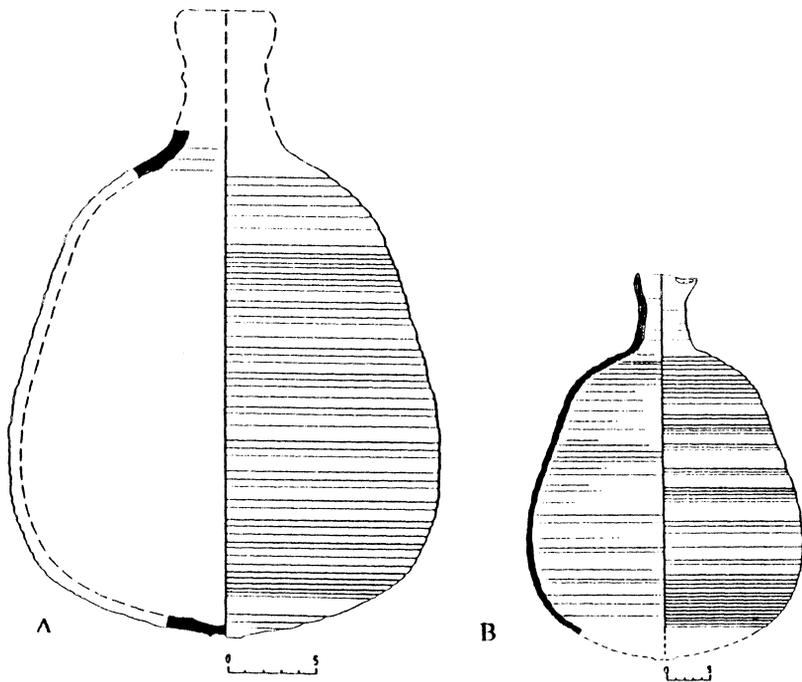


Fig. 6. Pithos with painted decoration in red-on-white-slip.



*Fig. 7. Pithos discovered in unit D3 in 1988.*

the structure and the firing suggest similarities with certain Palestinian products (e.g. amphorae from Keisan), it cannot be excluded that these particular objects were produced in Egypt. Accompanying this find were sherds of thick-walled storage vessels of Nile silt. Almost wholly reconstructible, the vessels turned out to be in one case a strongly elongated oval form with

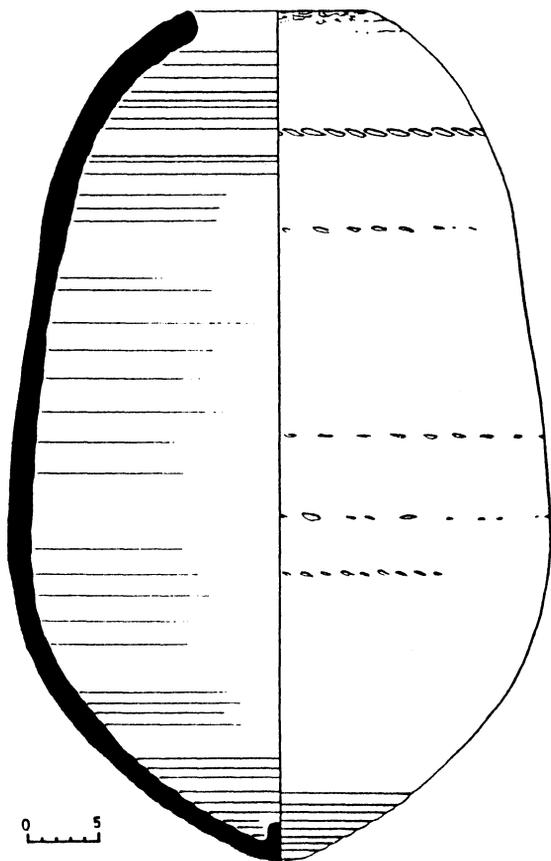


*Fig. 8. Water or wine bottles*

a simple undistinguished incurving rim (Fig. 9) and in another case, a widely flaring bowl of funnel shape and a thick and uneven, outwardly flaring rim (Fig. 10).<sup>5</sup> Both vessels bear impres-

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<sup>5</sup> Corresponding vessels of 10th-11th century date were discovered at Fustat (W. Kubiak, pers. comm.).



*Fig. 9. Storage vessel.*

sions of ropes used to hold together large and heavy vessels while they dried before firing. Pottery with figural decoration is represented almost exclusively by fragments of one type of storage

vessel.<sup>6</sup> The pieces discovered this year included two fragments with representations of a lion painted in red upon a white slip which covered the whole surface of the vessel (Fig. 11).

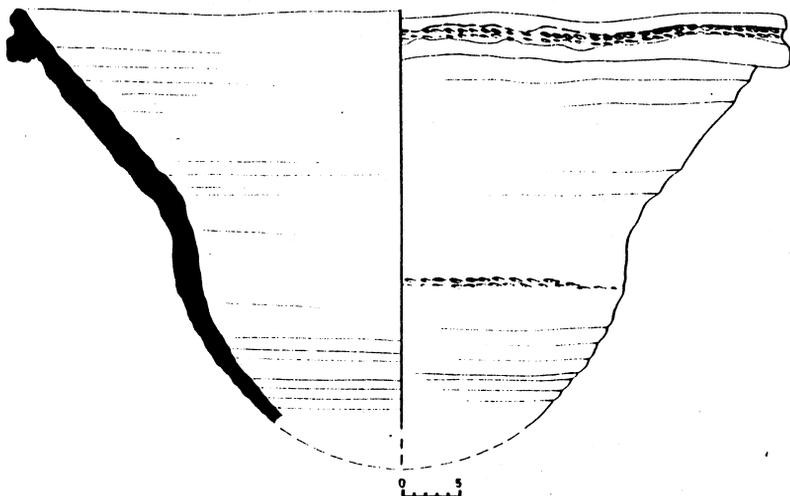


Fig. 10. Large bowl.

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<sup>6</sup> Two complete pithoi of this type are on display in the Coptic Museum in Cairo. Their form is presented in T. Górecki, Coptic painted amphorae from Tell Atrib [in:] W. Godlewski, ed., *Coptic and Nubian Pottery. Part I. International Workshop, Nieborów, August 29-31, 1988, Occasional Paper, National Museum in Warsaw 1*, Warsaw 1990, Fig. 2 i,j.

The assemblage included new fragments of plates with bowl-like depressions, made of Nile silt.<sup>7</sup> Most of the new finds come from D.18 and only a few from D.19, and they were recorded in different layers of the debris filling these rooms. The group is differentiated not just in terms of form and clay structure. There were also different techniques of producing the small bowls, which were subsequently attached to the bottom of the plate in places where round holes had been pierced.

Two almost complete plates of this type were discovered in the bottom layers of the debris filling D.22. One of these is covered with red slip and is devoid of painted decoration; at the bottom of each small bowl there are darker traces of some kind of oily substance. The other example (Fig. 13) is totally covered with a white matt slip serving as ground for dots and lines painted on it in red-brown.

It is still difficult to establish an exact chronology for the deposits and formal categories discussed here. The majority of the tableware and storage pottery found in the fill of rooms of I.DB and II.DB should be dated to the 9th-11th centuries, taking also into consideration the comparative material from Fustat. This dating is confirmed by fragments of three glazed bowls representing different kinds of Fayumi Ware and a lamp (Fig. 13) wholly covered with a uniform green glaze,<sup>8</sup> all of which should be dated to the period between the second half of the

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<sup>7</sup> Mentioned earlier in T. Górecki, *PAM IV*, fig.7.

<sup>8</sup> W. Kubiak, Medieval ceramic oil lamps from Fustat, *Ars Orientalis VIII*, 1970, Type V (10-11 c.), p. 6f.



*Fig. 11. Fragments of storage vessels with figural decoration.*

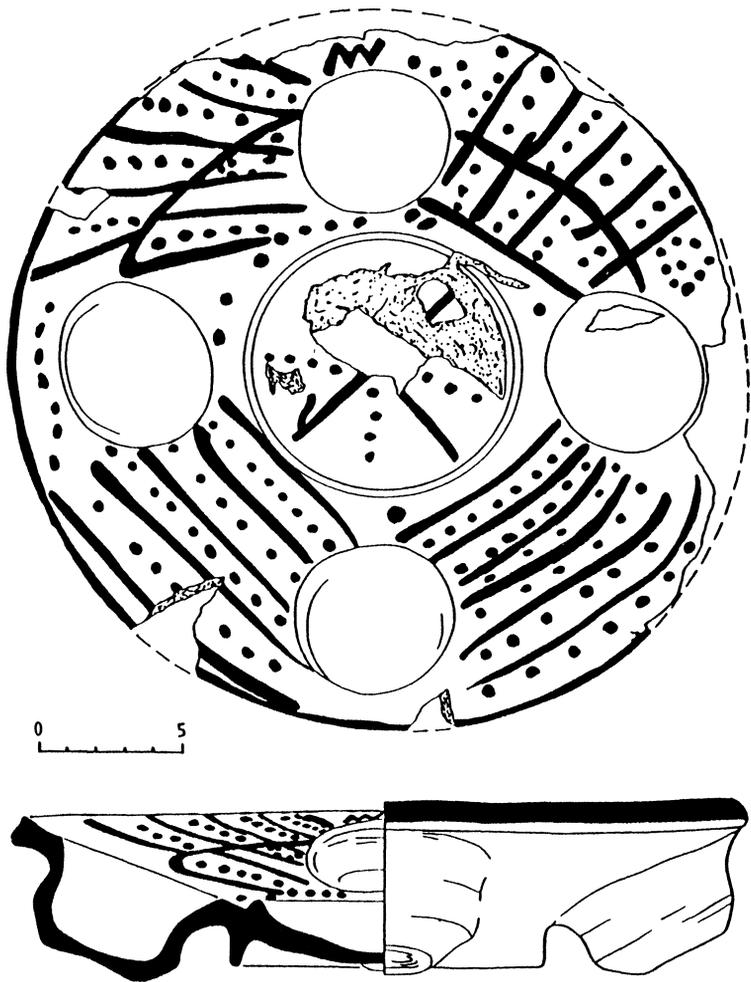


Fig. 12. Compartmented dish with painted decoration.

9th and the middle of the 11th century.<sup>9</sup> A similar date is provided by two fragments of Upper Egyptian products (Adams class C22) with a simple painted brown-and-red-on-white-slip decoration.<sup>10</sup>

The ceramic deposit from room D.21 should be assigned to the initial phase of this period or even to the mid 9th century.

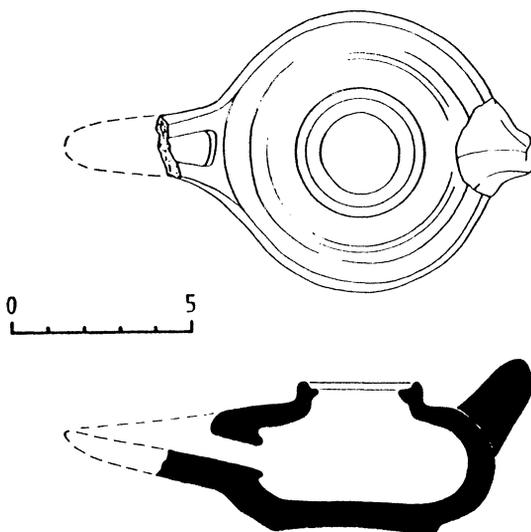


Fig. 13. Green-glazed lamp.

<sup>9</sup> There is a certain discrepancy in the dating of this type of pottery. The earliest dating to the 8th century has been put forward by J. Engemann, *Das Ende der Wallfahrten nach Abu Mina und die Datierung friiher islamischer glasierter Keramik in Agypten*, *JbAC* 32, 1989, p. 166. A much later dating in the 10th-early 11th century has been adopted by H. Philon, *Early Islamic Ceramics. Ninth to Late Twelfth Centuries*, Athens 1979, fig. 73, 96, 97 and pl. IIIA, p. 36.

<sup>10</sup> W.Y. Adams, *Ceramic Industries of Medieval Nubia*, Lexington 1986, p. 117, fig. 27.