

# Teodozja I. Rzeuska

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# SAQQARA 2008–2009: THE POTTERY

Teodozja I. Rzeuska

Institute of Mediterranean and Oriental Cultures, Polish Academy of Sciences

**Abstract:** The pottery from seasons 2008–2009 came from the two phases of use of the burial ground west of the pyramid of Netjerykhet: the late Old Kingdom (Lower Necropolis) and the Late Period through Ptolemaic and Roman times (Upper Necropolis). Nonetheless, an examination of the material has demonstrated, much more clearly than in previous seasons, the presence of ceramic material from other periods, that is, Predynastic/Early Dynastic and early Old Kingdom.

**Keywords:** Saqqara, Memphite necropolis, funerary pottery, embalming cachet, Early Dynastic Period, Old Kingdom, Late Period

Pottery was again the most prolific category of finds from archaeological excavations in the necropolis. There was only one ceramic deposit among the finds, an offering deposit found in 2009 inside burial shaft 50 and comprising a few dozen well preserved vessels, mainly beer jars and bread moulds. However, since the exploration of the burial complex to which this deposit belonged was not completed until the following season, the pottery from it will

be presented in the next issue of PAM.

The assemblage included ceramics from other periods than what is considered standard for the site, that is, the late Fifth/Sixth Dynasty and terminal Old Kingdom (Lower Necropolis), and the Late Period through the Ptolemaic–Roman age (Upper Necropolis). They merit attention in view of the fact that they appeared in slightly larger sets than the single pieces recorded previously.

## ARCHAIC PERIOD–EARLY OLD KINGDOM

Pottery from phases preceding the establishing of the Lower Necropolis proliferated in the area explored in the 2008–2009 seasons compared to previous campaigns. Of particular importance for the Archaic Period are vessels representing “Half-polished” –“P2” Ware (Needler 1984: 230) [*Fig. 1*]. The sherds belong to middle-sized bowls and plates with straight

rims, mostly made of Nile silt (thick-walled examples), more seldom of marl clay (thin-walled pieces, only SQ 08-1953, *Fig. 1*). The surface of these ceramics is burnished (German *Streifenpolitur*) in a characteristic manner with a hard tool (pebble?) prior to firing, but after the vessels had dried to the so-called “leather hard” state. On the outside of a pot, the burnish appears solely

in the upper part (hence the designation “half polished”) or not at all, as in the case of plate SQ 09-2005 [Fig. 1]. The inside surfaces were treated whole. Burnish patterns differed considerably with most bowls being treated horizontally on the

inside (SQ 1953 and SQ 2002, Fig. 1). In a few cases the horizontal burnish is restricted to the upper part of the inner surface, directly below the rim, while the rest is burnished radially (SQ 09-2002, Fig. 1) or in irregular fashion resembling

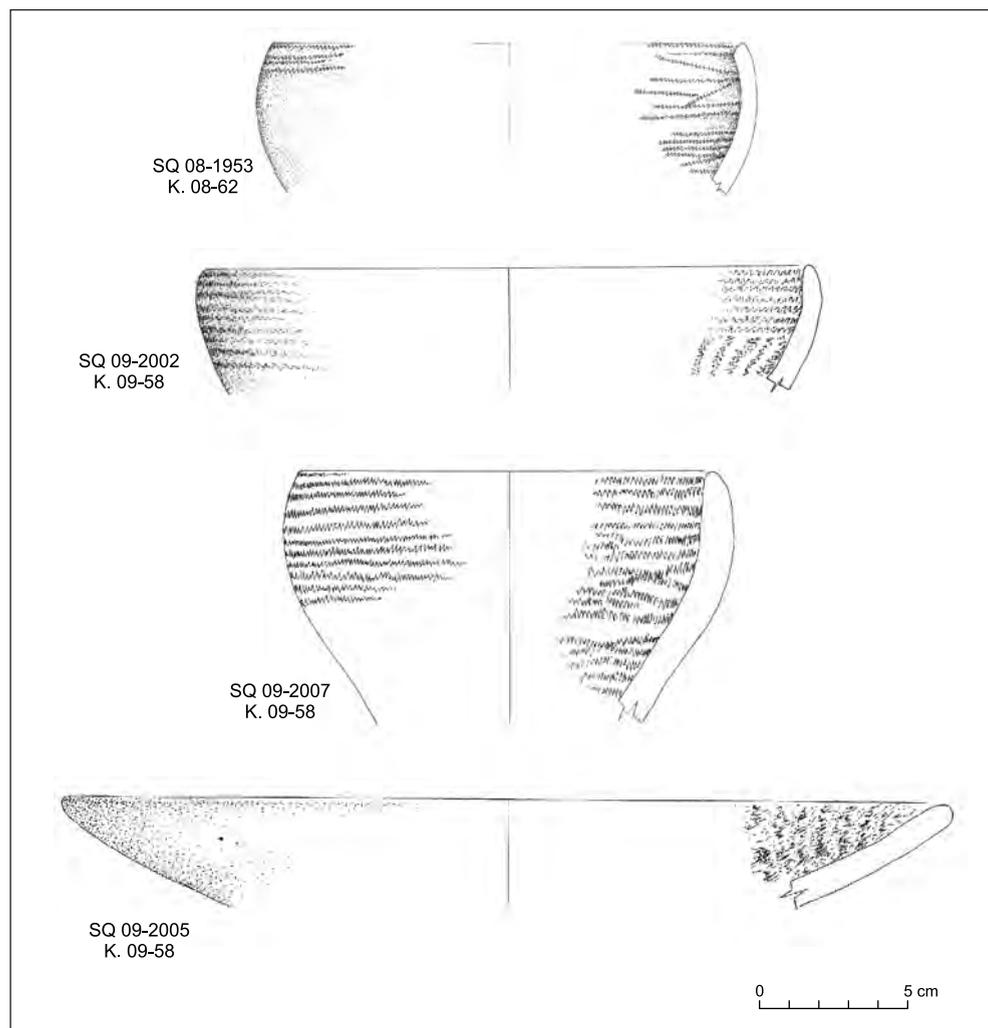


Fig. 1. Examples of pottery with characteristic burnished surface from the Nagada III period and First–Second Dynasty. Bowl SQ 08-1953 made of sandy marl clay, the rest of Nile silt (All drawings T.I. Rzeuska; inking M. Orzechowska)

hatching with slightly oblique lines cross with horizontal ones (SQ 09-2005, Fig. 1).

Pottery with this kind of decoration has been found throughout Egypt. Parallels to bowls SQ 08-1953 and SQ 09-2002 come from Elephantine (Kopp 2006: 129, Cat. 354, Pl. 23, ceramic phase B3 from Dynasty 0) and Buto (Köhler 1998: 22–23, Pl. 28, No. 7, deposit 21421). Plate SQ 09-2005 (rim diameter 29 cm) finds analogy in a vessel from Buto (Köhler 1998: Pl. 26 Nos 2, 5–6), layers IV–V dated to the First–Second Dynasty, as well as in examples from Elephantine, from late Second Dynasty layers (Raue 1999: 178–179, Fig. 36.3, different burnish pattern, horizontal below the rim, vertical below that). Bowl SQ 09-2007 appears unparalleled for the time being.

The vessels from Saqqara feature a rounded rim and relatively thick walls of the same thickness except for bowl

SQ 08-1953, which has thin walls. These characteristics, coupled with analogies from well-dated archaeological contexts give a date in the First–Second Dynasty. A slightly earlier date in Dynasty 0 can be taken into consideration with regard to bowls SQ 08-1953 and SQ 09-2002. While the marl clay vessel appears to originate from Upper Egypt, the Nile silt bowls could very well be local products.

The bottom of a large container (SQ 08-1954, Fig. 2), coiled from sandy Nile silt, can also be referred to the Archaic Period. Its outer surface features characteristic vertical scraping as if with a brush (German *Besenstrichaufrauhung*), subsequently coated with red slip. A few dozen sherds of jar(s) of this kind have already been recorded from the excavation, including one sherd with an inscription in black ink (Rzeuska 2010: 215–216, Fig. 1). The illustrated fragment, which is one of a few diagnostic

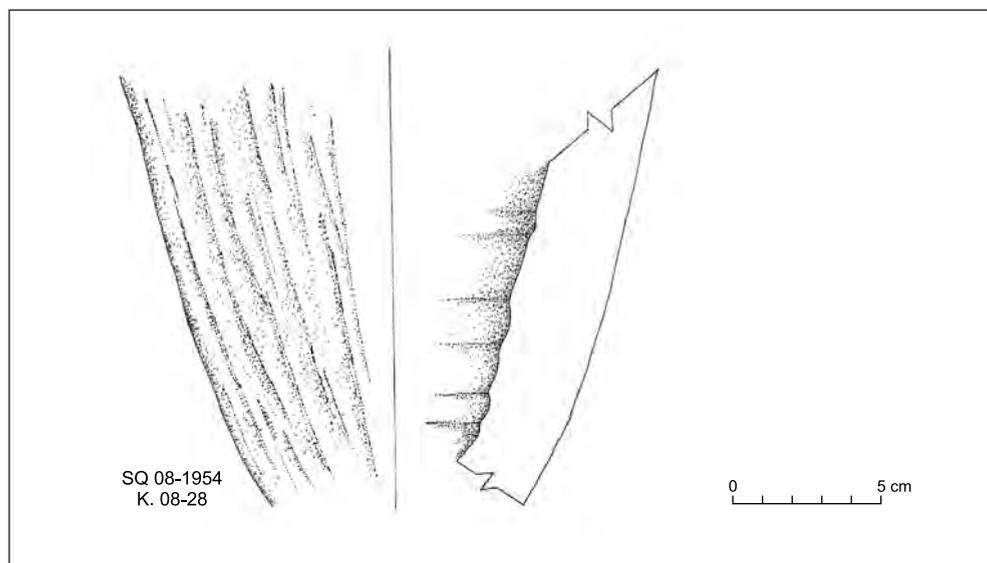
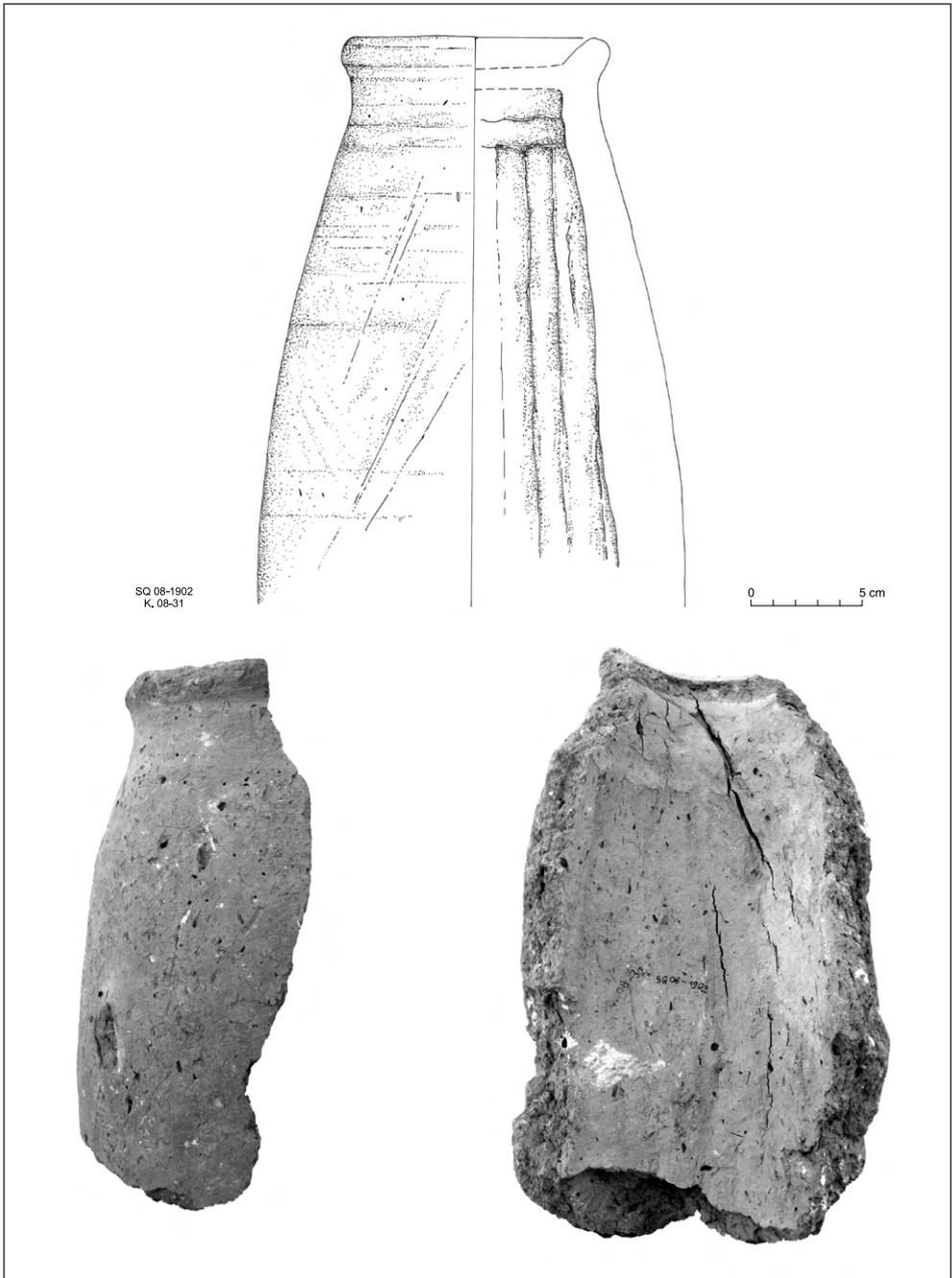


Fig. 2. Jar bottom (SQ 08-1954) with characteristic red-slipped scratched surface (possibly an early form of hes ritual jar )



*Fig. 3. Fragment of a strainer jar (SQ 08-1902) of Early Dynastic date, most probably Second Dynasty*

pieces, leads to the assumption that jars of this type had elongated bodied and a presumably rounded bottom. Vessels with identical surface treatment but without the slip are common in Buto in layers IV/V from the First Dynasty (Köhler 1998: 16–17, Pl. 5 No. 5, 6 No. 2). Our sherd, which represents a variant of the jar with thin bottom, seems to be of Second Dynasty date. It is possible that the jar in question is an early form of the *hes* jar.

A rare example of strainer jar, a kind of ancient *qulla*, can also be referred to the Archaic Period (SQ 1902, Fig. 3). This thick-walled (up to 3 cm in places) jar with short straight rim and body widening toward the bottom was handmade by coiling. The clay was Nile silt extensively tempered with organic elements and sand (similar to Nile C in the Vienna System) and well fired. The surface was left untreated. A similar strainer jar was found on Elephantine in layers dated to the late Second Dynasty (Raue 1999: 178–179, Fig. 36.8), although the body is more ovoid and the walls considerably thinner

than that of the Saqqara vessel. The rim of this kind of jar from Buto, layer VI from the Third/Fourth Dynasty, is very similar, but little can be said of the overall shape (Köhler 1998: 28, Pl. 49 No. 8).

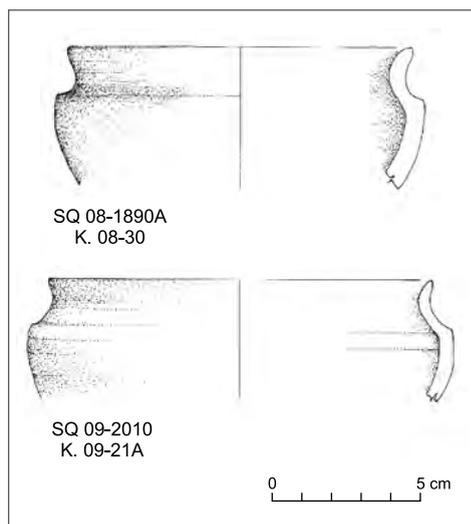


Fig. 4. Examples of Meidum (carinated) bowls from Third–Fourth Dynasty, made of Nile silt (top) and marl clay (bottom)

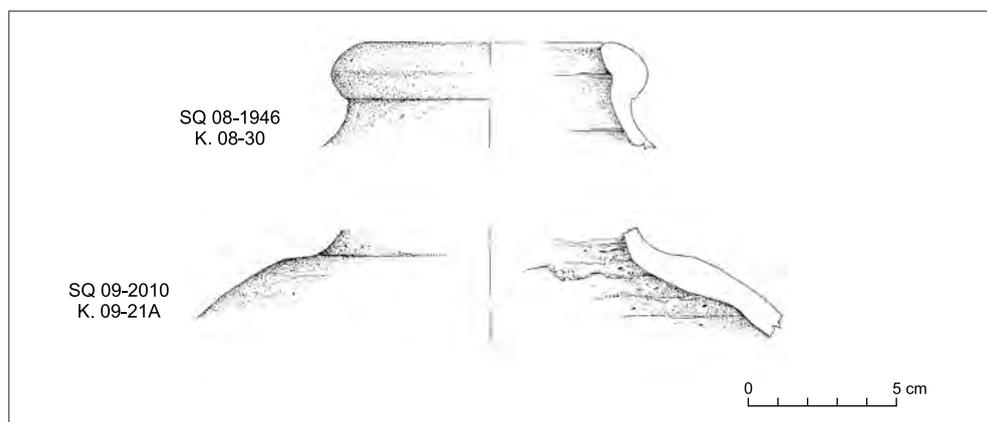


Fig. 5. Rim of a Third–Fourth Dynasty jar (top), shoulders of a presumed EBIII Combed Ware import from Canaan

Early Old Kingdom (Third–Fourth Dynasty) pottery was recorded in abundance in the two seasons and especially in the 2009 season. Beer jars with a characteristic groove below the rim were very numerous. The biggest concentration of this form came from the area of the quarry identified in the eastern part of the necropolis (Welc 2011). Early Meidum bowls should also be mentioned, as well as sherds of storage jars made of various marl clays. The former are small bowls with a rim diameter in the range 12–15 cm and maximum body diameter at the carination, the rim being slightly peaked. The outer profile is still obviously carinated, the inner profile gently S-shaped. These bowls for the most part were made of Nile silt (SQ 1890 A, *Fig. 4*); marl clay bowls with much thinner walls than the Nile-silt examples (SQ 09-2010, *Fig. 4*) were definitely not as numerous. The Nile-silt bowls were red-slipped and polished, those of marl clay had a natural self-slip (scum) and were also polished. The nearest parallels originate from Buto, layer VI, dated to the Third–Fourth Dynasty (Köhler 1998: 24, Pl. 31

Nos 4, 6). The vessels described here fit in the chronological sequence of the eastern town (Oststadt) on Elephantine (level VIII.1, so-called stone vessel workshop) from the late Third–early Fourth Dynasty (Raue 1999: 184–185, Fig. 39 Nos. 2, 10, 12). Jars are represented by a rim fragment with characteristic inside groove (SQ 08-1946, *Fig. 5*).

It is too early to draw conclusions concerning the presence of early pottery, especially from the Archaic Period. The material is still innumerable and found in secondary archaeological contexts, without any observable regularity. It should be noted, however, that at least some of the sherds, like jar SQ 08-1902 [see *Fig. 3*], were found in layers of the Lower Necropolis from the times of the Sixth Dynasty, sealed by a layer of thickly accumulated sand containing burials of Late Period–Graeco-Roman date. It means that these vessels had been lying around long before the Lower Necropolis was established. As for the Early Old Kingdom pottery, sherds of these ceramics were recorded mainly in the area of the stone quarry (Rzeuska forthcoming b).

## SIXTH DYNASTY–TERMINAL OLD KINGDOM

The pottery assemblage associated with the Lower Necropolis dated to the Sixth Dynasty and terminal Old Kingdom Period was the most prolific. Most of the finds from both seasons represented vessels that are well known and have been recorded and published repeatedly (Rzeuska 2006: passim; annually in *PAM*). Even so, there was as always a number of new and less well

known types that will be illustrated here. One should mention foremost another fragment of a large handmade storage jar SQ 08-1896B [*Fig. 6*], which judging by extremely characteristic clay should be identified as EBIII Combed Ware, that is, an import from the Levant or its Egyptian imitation.<sup>1</sup> Another vessel meriting note is a middle-sized ovoid jar SQ 08-1891

<sup>1</sup> Petrographic examination is planned to resolve the question of the identification.

with white-slipped outer surface, found in burial shaft 97 [Fig. 6]. The vessel represents a new form, that is, Form 240. It was produced of Nile silt B2 mixing techniques: the top and middle (about two-thirds of the whole) being formed on the wheel, the bottom handmade by hollowing and pinching, the interface place of joint? meticulously smoothed. This kind of mixed technique was very popular in the Old Kingdom and later,<sup>2</sup> but it was used mainly for large big and very large big jars,

especially those made of Marl C and Mixed P.60 fabrics (Rzeuska 2006: e.g. 122–125, Form 18 and Form 19). In these cases, however, the use of a mixed technique was justified by the insufficient plasticity of the clay as well as large vessel size, too big still to be accomplished entirely on the potter's wheel. The vessel in question is remarkable not only because it is the first of its kind to be found in the part of the Saqqara necropolis excavated by the Polish-Egyptian mission, but primarily

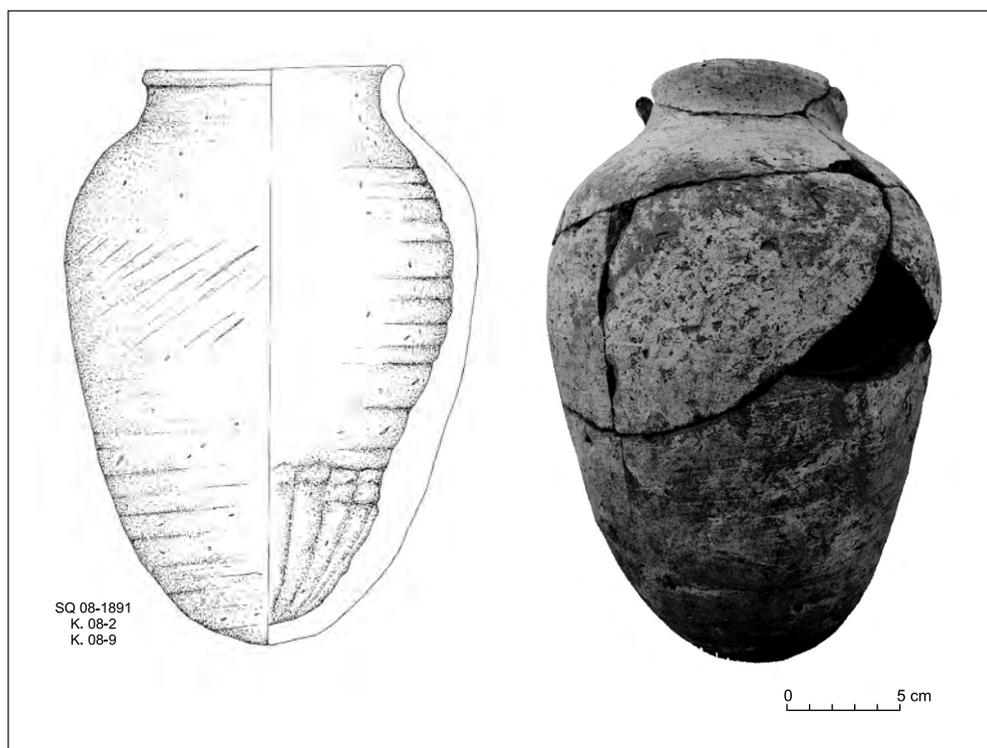


Fig. 6. Middle-sized jar from the terminal Old Kingdom/Early I Intermediate Period, produced in the mixed technique, that is, bottom handmade, upper part wheel-turned

<sup>2</sup> Large storage jars of Marl A3 were produced in this technique combining handmade bottoms with wheel-turned bodies in the terminal First Intermediate Period and early Middle Kingdom. In the late Middle Kingdom the technique was abandoned in favor of making whole jars on the wheel, see Rzeuska 2011.

because the mixed technique was applied here to a middle-sized jar of Nile silt.

The ceramic assemblage from burial shaft 97, where this jar was found, has been dated to pottery phase III–IV of the Lower Necropolis, that is, the rule of Pepi II (Rzeuska forthcoming a). Analogous vessels from the cemetery in the neighborhood of Qau-Matmar are dated from the middle of the Sixth Dynasty (Phase IA) through the beginning of the Eleventh Dynasty (Phase IIIA), their popularity peaking in the reign of Pepi II and immediately afterwards (Phase IIA) (Seidlmayer 1990: 154–155, Fig. 61, type K.B10.10). The difference between the vessel from Saqqara and the latter vessels lies in the way the bottom was formed and the outside surface treated. The Saqqara jar

has a handmade bottom with smoothed outside surface, while those from Qau-Matmar were entirely wheel-turned and had scraped bottoms. The old-fashioned manner of production of the Saqqara jar, undoubtedly more laborious than the technique used in the Qau-Matmar region, indicates imperfect potting skills still unable to cope with turning a complete middle-sized jar on the wheel. It is quite possible that the Saqqara jar represents an evolutionary earlier form of types which had already started being produced on a large scale on the wheel in Middle Egypt during the terminal Old Kingdom and First Intermediate Period.

With regard to open forms, the following vessels merit note. Firstly, a shallow bent-sided bowl with wavy rim

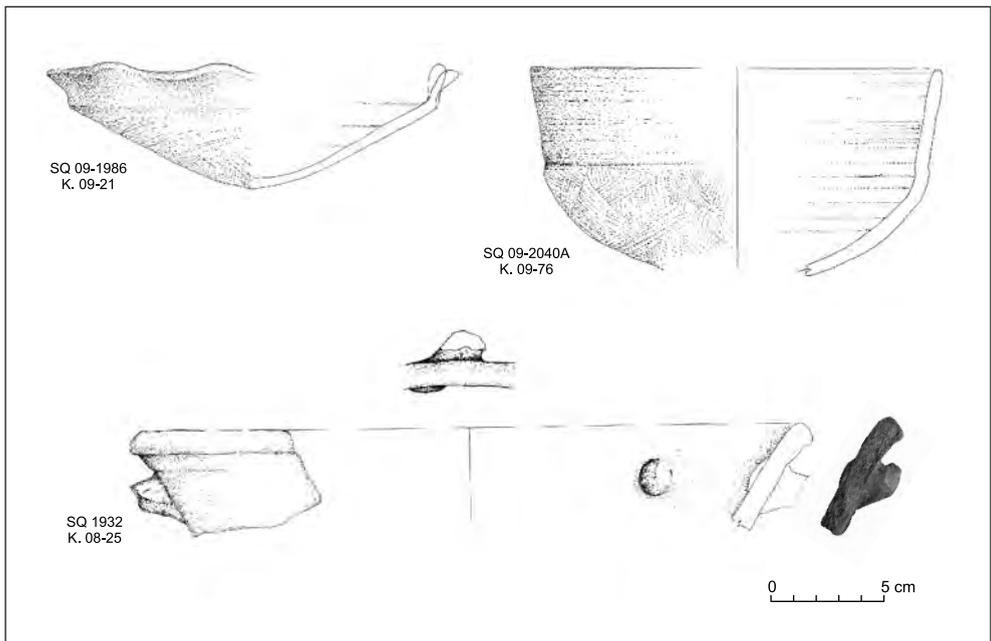
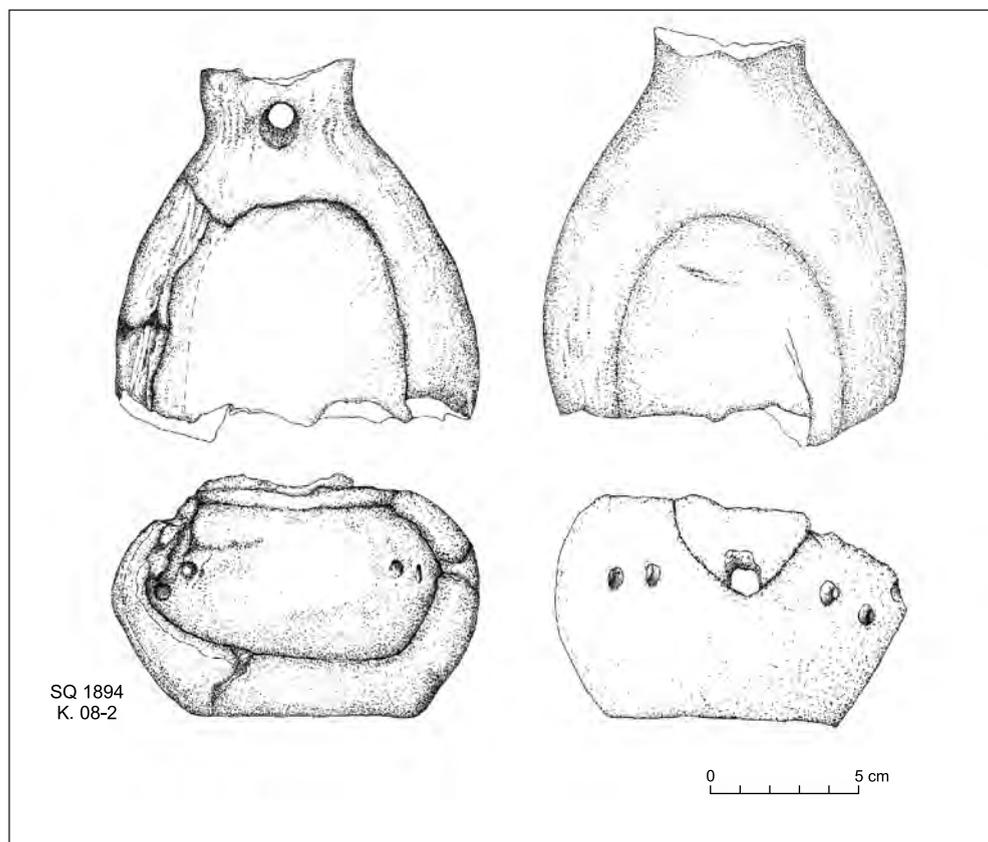


Fig. 7. Open forms from the terminal Old Kingdom. Note the fragment of rim with handle “riveted” to the body (bottom)

and extremely thin walls — Form 254, which is new on the site (SQ 1986, *Fig. 7*). This Nile B1 fabric bowl was wheel-made, the bottom burnished and the surfaces both inside and outside red-slipped. The type, which is very rare in Old Kingdom material, lasted through the end of the First Intermediate Period as attested by finds from Middle and Upper Egypt. The nearest stylistic parallel originates from Asyut, from a deposit found in 2011 in the rock-cut chapel of Tomb V (M11.1) belonging to the nomarch Khety I (Rzeuska 2012:

forthcoming) from the times of the Tenth Dynasty. Another parallel was noted at Qau (Brunton 1928: Pl. LXXXII, type 7o; Seidlmayer 1990: 149–151 Fig. 59, type K-A05-2, phases IIA (without B) through III B) and on sites further to the south: Hawawish (Hope 2006: 37, Fig. 1, Pl. 1a, Type BIIIb.1. First Intermediate Period–early 12th Dynasty. Nile B2 clay with both surfaces slipped) and Thebes (El-Tarif), although these last vessels appear to be slightly different (Arnold 1968: 49–50, Fig. 6, 42–43, fine Nile silt, one unslipped,



*Fig. 8. Incense burner from the Old Kingdom (most probably Sixth Dynasty) with evidence of burning on the inside*

the other slipped inside and edge on the outside). The bowls from Saqqara, Asyut and Qau all have round bottoms and thin walls, unlike those from the southern regions of Egypt which are flat-bottomed and have definitely thicker walls. In the case of the pots from Asyut and Qau it cannot be excluded that we are dealing with a continuation of an Old Kingdom Memphite potting tradition and that the differences are simply a factor of a different potmaking tradition in Upper Egypt.

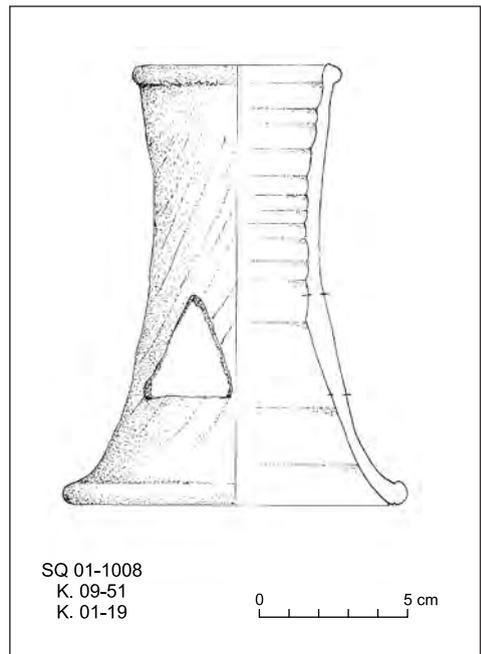
A bent-sided bowl made of a sandy version of Mixed clay P.60 (SQ 09-2040A, *Fig. 7*) is another new form, Form 262. It was wheel-made with a scraped bottom. The groove at the angling of the profile leaves no doubt that the pot was made of two parts. This is the first example of the type from our necropolis and it is generally rare also on other sites. The nearest parallels come from the solar temple of Userkaf in Abusir (Kaiser 1969: 58–59, No 106, type XVI).

Last but not least, there is an open form represented by the rim of a large bowl or a vat — new Form 261 (SQ 08-1932, *Fig. 7*). Wheel-made of Nile B, red-slipped inside and outside, the bowl is distinguished by a handle which was “riveted” to the body, an element which is extremely rare in Old Kingdom material. A small hole was made in the body wall, the end of the handle was pushed through the hole and hammered flat on the inside. So far it has proved impossible to find a parallel for this vessel.

An incense burner (SQ 08-1894, *Fig. 8*) representing Form 227 is another seldom recorded type, only the second example to be found in the Polish–Egyptian excavation. Partly wheel-turned and partly handmade, it was produced of Nile silt B2 and red-slipped. The holes in the sides were

pierced before firing. Inside, the bottom bears evidence of burning, leaving no doubt as to the function of the object.

A small stand of Mixed clay P.60 with triangles cut out before firing in the lower part (SQ 01-809+987=1008, *Fig. 9*) turned out to be a new type. Sherds from this object, found in 2001, were published as the rim of a spindle-shaped jar Form 15 and the middle part of a stand Form 222 (Rzeuska 2006: 116–117, Pl. 37 No. 116, 358–359, Pl. 158 No. 809). A third fragment found in 2009, which joined the pieces together, it enabled a reconstruction of the form (new Form 268). Since the sherds all came from different contexts, neither a provenance

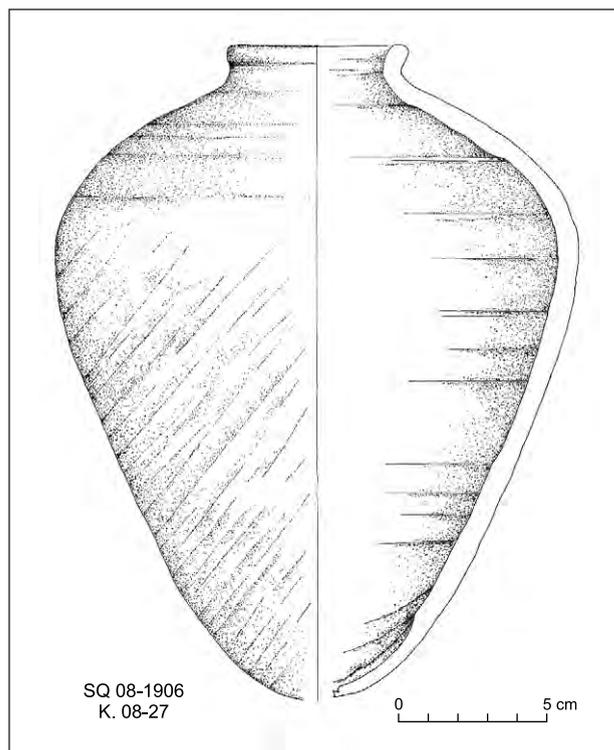


*Fig. 9. Small stand made of a sandy variant of Mixed P.60 fabric, featuring cut-out decoration in the form of triangles in the lower part*

nor a precise dating could be established for this particular stand.

The last pot of the Sixth Dynasty repertoire to be presented in this report is a middle-sized jar with heart-shaped body and wide shoulders, made of Mixed Clay P.60 (SQ 08-1906, *Fig. 10*), featuring grayish-white scum on the outside surface (new Form 239). This is the first example of this type of jar to be found in the excavation and it came from the fill of burial shaft 110. It was produced in mixed technique, the bottom by hollowing and pinching, the body and shoulders with rim on a potter's wheel. The joining of the different parts can be observed as unevenness in the break, while the outer surface below the shoulders is

scraped obliquely. Identical vessels were found, among others, in Giza (Reisner 1955: Fig. 83, G 2381 X, 12-12-188, Pl. 50 2/4, type A-IIc, Sixth Dynasty), Dahshur (Simpson 1961: 108, Fig. 7, Cat. 1-3, classified as RW with white wash [WSR], corresponding to the description of Mixed clay P.60), Asyut and Gebelein (D'Amicone, Pozzi Battaglia 2009: 338, Fig. 11.5.a, No. a2). The latter were filled with mud and sealed with a stopper. The pot from Saqqara was found in pieces, but the inside surface was coated thinly with grayish clay. A more precise dating than generally in the Sixth Dynasty could not be established, because shaft 110 had been reused and the pottery inside it represented a number of different phases.



*Fig. 10. Middle-sized heart-shaped jar of Mixed Clay P.60 from the Sixth Dynasty*

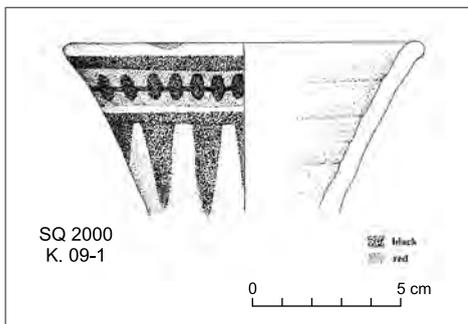
## NEW KINGDOM, LATE PERIOD– GRAECO-ROMAN PERIOD

Material from these chronological phases is fragmented and salt-encrusted owing to long deposition on or near the surface of the necropolis in this area. Nonetheless, a few of the better preserved vessels deserve mention, especially when representing forms previously not recorded in this part of the Saqqara necropolis.

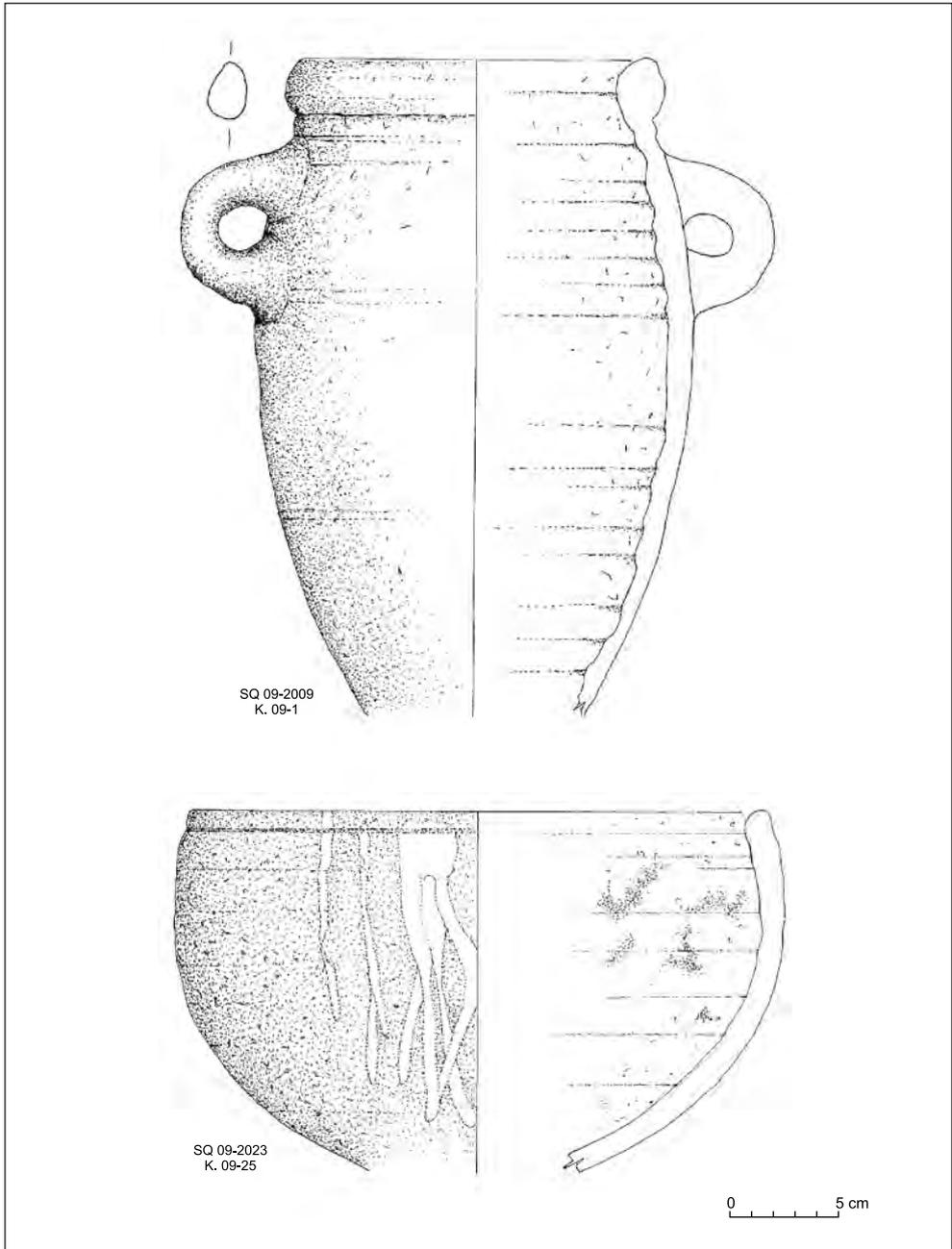
Sherds of middle New Kingdom date were noted for the first time, previous finds being restricted rather to the end of the Eighteenth and beginning of the Nineteenth Dynasties (Rzeuska 2002: 155–158). One should mention a rim fragment from a jar made of Marl A4 (SQ 09-2000 *Fig. 11*), dated thanks to a characteristic ornamental motif to the middle of the Eighteenth Dynasty, approximately about the reign of Hatshepsut and Tuthmosis III (Bourriau 1981: 72, phase II; Bourriau *et alii* 2005: 120, Fig. 28). The rim and neck of the jar bears painted decoration following the red and black color scheme typical of the age: two black horizontal lines separated

by a red band with a black line bordered by round black dots running down the middle, and vertical black triangles below it. A close parallel dates from the reign of Tuthmosis III (tomb Y177 in Hu), now in the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge (E 202.1899) (Petrie, Brunton 1924: Pl. XXIV, 23y; Bourriau 1981 : 147, Cat. 145). The size is different and so is the shape and decoration to some extent. Our example is smaller, has a funnel-shaped neck compared to the cylindrical neck of the jar from Hu, and it also lacks the motif of black dots on a red background. The shape seems to be closer to JO 1 ordinary jars in R. Holthoer's typology (Holthoer 1977: Pl. 36, first row, third and fourth jar from the left, i.e., 185/322:6 and 185/561:4). The Saqqara jar cannot be associated with any specific activity known to have taken place in this part of the necropolis.

The Late Period and Graeco-Roman pottery assemblage is diverse, including sherds of Samian amphorae, small jars of the Late Period with holes under the rim considered typical of the region, made of Nile silt as much as of Mixed clay, fragment of a local imitation of a Phoenician amphora and a small fragment of a small jar with a plastic representation of Bes. The vessels are typical of embalmers' caches of the Late Period found in the Memphite necropolis (Aston 2011: *passim*. For a list of identified post-mummification deposits and their interpretation, see Budka 2006; Smoláriková 2009; Ikram, López-Grande 2011: 205, note 2, 219–224), hence the attention paid here to a few of the better preserved pieces. Firstly, there is a large thick-walled amphora (SQ 09-2009,



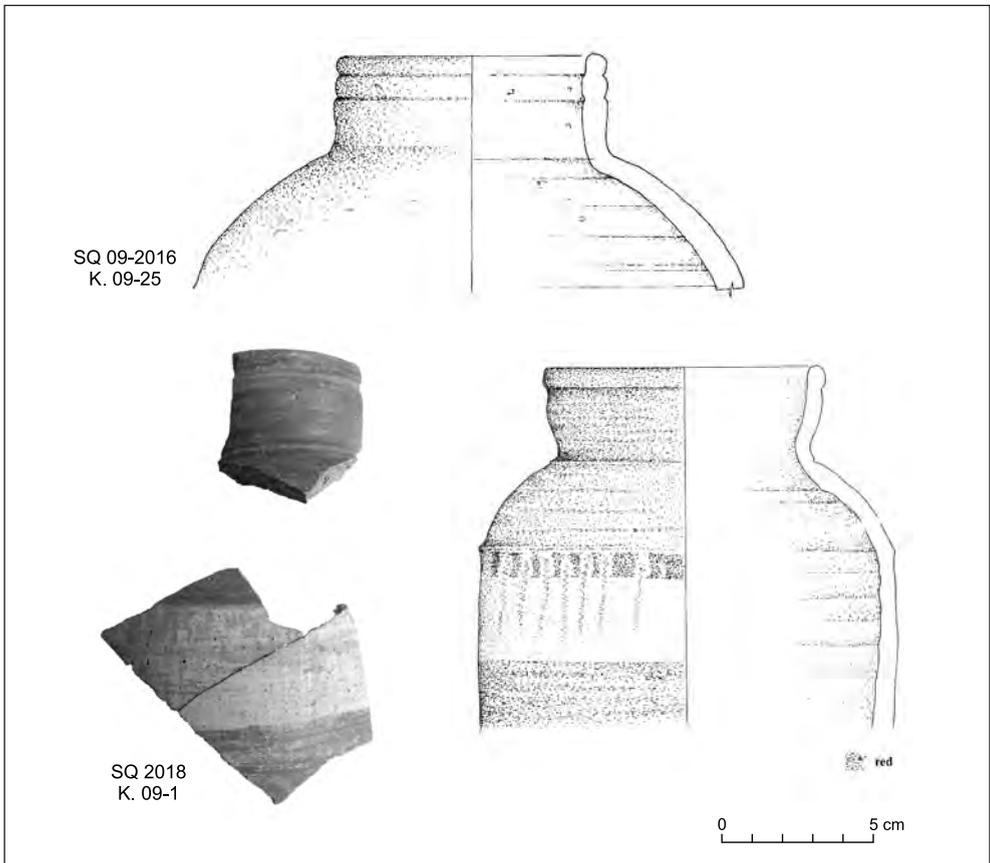
*Fig. 11. Fragment of a funnel-shaped jar from the early Eighteenth Dynasty with characteristic "Swallows on a wire" decoration*



*Fig. 12. Typical vessels from embalmers' caches of the terminal Late Period: Nile silt amphora (top) and "goldfish" bowl (bottom)*

*Fig. 12*) with rolled rim, elongated and slightly rounded body, furnished with two vertical handles in the upper part. The vessel was wheel-made of Nile silt B2; the surface of this vessel was left untreated. Secondly, there is a bowl with rounded rim, also wheel-made of Nile silt B2 (SQ 09-2023, *Fig. 12*), sometimes referred to as a “goldfish bowl” (Dietze 1992: 7–8) or “cooking pot” (Smoláriková 2011: 100, *Fig. 57*). The bowl was red-slipped on the surface, without the burnish treatment observed on vessels of this type from other sites (Aston 2011:

50ff.); inside there was evidence of a black resinous substance, which also appeared as dripping traces on the outside. The other two sherds of interest were bottle rims with a characteristic cylindrical ribbed neck (SQ 09-2016, SQ 09-2018, *Fig. 13*). The rims appear similar, but the fabric and surface treatment are entirely different. The first is a large storage jar or bigger bottle, made of Nile silt B2, red-slipped on the outside and without burnish. The second is part of middle-sized cylindrical bottle, made of marl clay (similar to A4) and



*Fig. 13. Bottles from the Late Period, made of Nile silt (top) and of marl clay (bottom)*

slipped on the outside with two kinds of slip, red and pink, a pink band separating the red parts; the pot was burnished in a vertical direction.

The amphora and bowl are typical of caches of the B3 type (Aston 2011: 79, Fig. 5, Nos 1, 2, and 5), the bottles of caches of the B2 type (Aston 2011: 77, Fig. 3, Nos 10, 12, slightly higher neck compared to ours). Caches B2 and B3 respectively are “deliberately built structures (...) made by cutting pits into previously existing architecture or by erecting purpose built rooms” and “buried in separate shafts or chambers specifically made for this reason” (Aston 2011: 64–65). So far nothing like an architectural cache has been found in the Upper Necropolis strata excavated by the Polish–Egyptian team in West Saqqara. Since this pottery was found in loose

sand, it can be dated solely on the grounds of parallels. The numerous deposits from the Memphite necropolis are helpful in this respect (Aston 2011: 50–64), and especially the undisturbed embalmers’ cache from the tomb of Menekhibnekau in Abusir. Based on these analogies the Saqqara finds, that is, the amphora and bowl, can be dated to the end of the 6th–beginning of the 5th century BC (Smolárikova 2011: e.g., 118, Fig. 118, amphora No. LX, 134, Fig. 160, amphora No. CLIX, 121, Fig. 123, cooking pot Excav. No. 679/S/07), while the bottles are somewhat younger, most likely 5th–beginning of the 4th century BC (Aston 2011: 68–69). Slightly later material of Ptolemaic date cannot be excluded as similar vessels were found in Ptolemaic layers at Tell Atrib (K. Myśliwiec, personal communication).<sup>3</sup>

## RECAPITULATION

To recapitulate, the field seasons in 2008 and 2009 produced new ceramic material from both the Lower and the Upper Necropolises, contributing to the existing register of pottery shapes. The group of Early Dynastic ceramics appears to be of particular importance for reconstructing the history of the site, confirming that the

area to the west of the Netjerykhet complex had been used long before the establishment of an Old Kingdom burial ground in the end of the Fifth Dynasty and for purposes other than just stone quarrying (Welc 2009). In turn, pottery found within the Upper Necropolis strata (may) indicate(s) the presence of embalming cache.

Dr. Teodozja I. Rzeuska  
Institute of Mediterranean and Oriental Cultures  
Polish Academy of Sciences  
00-330 Warsaw, Poland  
ul. Nowy Świat 72  
trzeuska@zaspan.waw.pl

<sup>3</sup> Prof. Karol Myśliwiec headed the Polish excavation at Tell Atrib through the 1995 season.

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