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Saqqara: The Pottery, 2005

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THE POTTERY, 2005

Teodozja Izabela Rzeuska

The pottery studied in the season of 2005 came from squares 1903-1904-1905, where burials of the Upper Necropolis were discovered in the upper layers, superimposed on the late Old Kingdom

necropolis¹ and the sloping passage, i.e., Corridor 3 (squares 2002-2102) combined with the area of the mud-brick platform (squares 2001-2101), both investigated in 2004.²

UPPER NECROPOLIS

The surface layer in squares 1903-1904-1905 consisted of sand mixed with limestone chips in considerable quantities. The layer was evidently disturbed, as indicated by the chronological spread of the sherds found in it, from severely damaged Late Old Kingdom beer jars to vessels from the Late Period.

The directly underlying layers were connected with the functioning of the Upper Necropolis as well. The most numerous and typical of the finds are tall slender wheel-made juglets made of Marl clay A4 or Mixed clay with wet-smoothed surface,³ and fragments of a slender torch, often with a burnt substance inside. Meriting special attention is a fragment of small globular juglet with one handle, made of Marl A4 (SQ 1683), as well as a bowl (SQ 1505) [*Fig. 1*] found south of the Upper Necropolis burial 422, both vessels dating to the Late Period. The former has a parallel found in context with Late Period burials in Saqqara.⁴ The latter is wheel-made of Nile

B2 with uncoated surface, only the rim being secondarily covered with a black, resinous substance. Vessels of this type were used as lids for large piriform jars of the Late Period, which served as containers for whatever remained from the mummification process. The resinous traces on the rim would suggest just such use as a lid for the present vessel. No jars of piriform shape have been found so far, but this lid could mean that such finds should be anticipated. A large number of amphorae sherds was recorded, unfortunately mostly not diagnostic. Meriting note is fragment SQ 1703 [*cf. Fig. 1*], which is a fragmentary rim with one handle preserved, coming probably from a Samian amphora. One of the most remarkable pieces is a body sherd from a big vessel with an Aramaic inscription written in black ink. The vessel was made of hard, dense clay with a considerable amount of dark and red sandy inclusions. The outer surface is brown, while the inside is coated with a resinous substance. Despite numer-

1 For the mission's present work at Saqqara, see report by K. Myśliwiec in this volume.

2 See contribution by F. Welc in this volume.

3 T.I. Rzeuska, "The pottery", *PAM XIV, Reports 2002* (2003), 150-151, Fig. 8.

4 J. Bourriau, D. Aston, "The pottery", in: G.T. Martin, *The Tomb-Chapel of Paser and Ra'ia at Saqqara* (London 1985), Pl. 37, no. 127, p. 54.

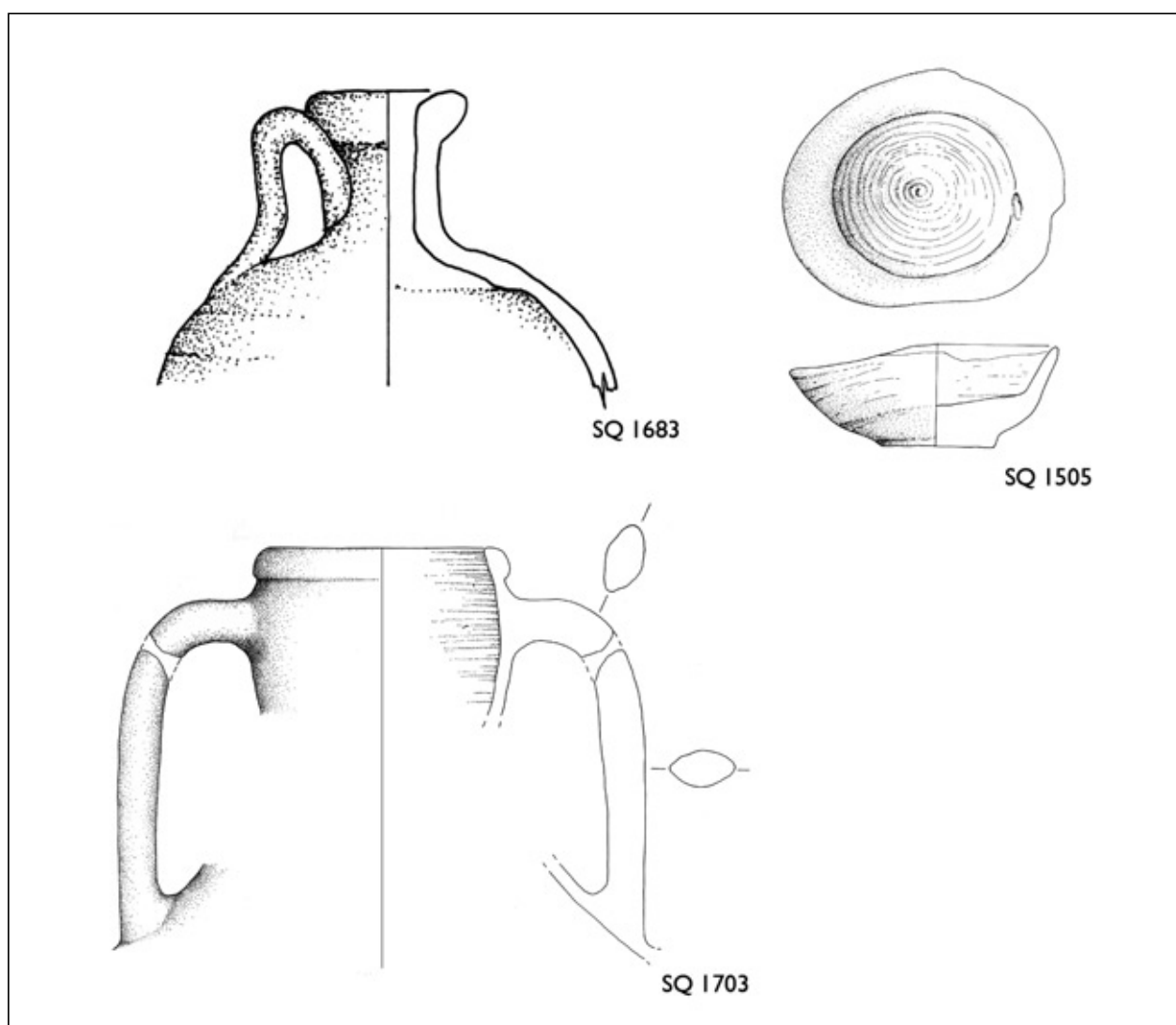
ous finds of sherds on the necropolis in West Saqqara belonging to a pot (or pots), the shape has not been identified so far. The

vessel(s) cannot be associated with any specific burials as the sherds were scattered over a large area.

LATE OLD KINGDOM NECROPOLIS

The pottery material from most of the shafts explored this season was not numerous, but homogeneous, all of the ceramics being of Old Kingdom date. None of the shafts

without burial chambers at the bottom – the so-called ritual or false shafts⁵ – contained any ritual deposits of red-slipped broken bowls and plates. As far as burial shafts are



*Fig. 1. Late Period pottery from the Upper Necropolis layers
(Drawing E. Klimaszevska-Drabot, inking M. Orzechowska)*

5 T. I. Rzeuska, "The Necropolis at West Saqqara: The Late Old Kingdom shafts with no burial chamber. Were they false, dummy, unfinished or intentional?", *ArOr* 70/3, 377-402.

concerned, some contained no pottery deposit whatsoever, but accumulations found around their mouths often included deposits of pottery mixed with limestone chippings, which could have come from such shafts. One example is deposit 1/2005 discovered in the vicinity of burial shaft 71 (square 1903), located to the north of the mastaba of Pehenptah (funerary complex 3). The pottery was discovered in concentrations to the south and west of the shaft. Most of the sherds belonged to beer jars, mainly forms 4, 11 and 12 of the local typology, dated to the fourth phase in the

functioning of the necropolis,⁶ but we have also recorded small fragments of beer jars from earlier phases. Some of the vessels were white-painted on the outside and some contained ashes. A few non-diagnostic pieces of bread moulds and platters were also included, as were animal bones. The pottery found near Shaft 71 was typical of Old Kingdom offering deposits and it cannot be excluded that it formed part of the offering deposit from the burial in this shaft. Since most of the vessels belonged to phase IV of the functioning of the necropolis, such a date for the deposit is more than likely.

BURIAL SHAFT 77

As far as pottery found *in situ* in burial shafts is concerned, the offering deposit from burial shaft 77 merits attention. The sand-and-*tafl* fill in the uppermost part of the shaft was mixed from the mouth down to a depth of 2 m. Finds included a piece of offering table and single sherds of beer jars. The actual pottery deposit mixed with limestone chips appeared below this. The principal part of the deposit (Dep. 2/2005) reached from 2.50 m to 5 m below the top of the shaft, mainly by the west wall. Apart from pottery, the deposit included limestone fragments with drilling holes, animal bones, jars filled with ashes, a fragment of ceramic vessel with polished edges (tool or cosmetic palette?), fragments of outer jar sealings, inner mud stoppers, and pieces of wood. Beer jars, at least 24 to judge by the



Fig. 2. Jar SQ 1524 (form 35) from the burial chamber of Shaft 77 (Photo J. Dąbrowski)

6 Based on beer-jar typology, it was possible to distinguish four phases in the functioning of the Old Kingdom necropolis: phase I covering the reign of Teti-Weserkaf; phase II corresponding to the rule of Pepy I-Merenre; phase III from the first half of the reign of Pepy II; and phase IV correlated with the second half of his reign through the 7th and 8th Dynasties, cf. T.I. Rzeuska, Late Old Kingdom Pottery from Saqqara, *Saqqara II* (Warsaw 2007), 381-383.

count of bottoms, represented forms 4, 7, 8, 9, and 10. Bread moulds were also identified, including a type on a high foot with white-washed rim (form 209 in the local typology).⁷ Also included were cylindrical stands made of Nile B1, like SQ 1510 (form 220) found in the sloping passage and discussed below, bent-sided plates (form 93), as well as plates with ledged rim underlined with inner groove (form 108). The little pottery originating from the fill below the deposit included mostly beer-jar fragments, of forms 9 and 10 as a rule, some pieces that are white-washed, false filings, a bread mould, a ceramic palette, and animal bones. These finds seem still to be part of the offering deposit. Green-painted stones (flint concretions, chunks of quartz and sandstone) constituted an intriguing element of the deposit.⁸ At the very bottom of the burial shaft there was a single beer jar filled with mud, animal bones,

and bricks with one side white-washed. Perhaps they testify to a sealing of the chamber entrance with a brick wall, which was ritually white-washed on the outside. The burial chamber itself was filled with pottery as well: beer jar and bread mould fragments, bent-sided plates (form 93), plates with ledged, rounded rim (form 104), Meidum bowls (form 179 and 183), and pieces of charcoal.

A small squat jar, SQ 1524 (form 35), 8.7 cm high and with a maximum diameter of 7.7 cm, was found in the burial chamber [*Fig. 2*]. It is wheel-made of Nile B2, in two parts joined at the shoulders, the outer surface being red-slipped. It is the first jar of its kind found in the necropolis.

The pottery from this offering deposit can be attributed to phases III-IV, thus dating burial shaft 77. The shaft itself has yet to be assigned to a specific funerary complex.

MUD-BRICK PLATFORM

The ceramic material found between the bricks of the platform and from the bricks themselves included numerous small pieces of Old Kingdom wares, less numerous Middle Kingdom pots and for the first time a fragmentary New Kingdom vessel – a blue painted closed form – but unfortunately not diagnostic and too damaged to permit a reconstruction of either shape or decoration. Fragments of other New Kingdom pots

also found here were beer jars and jars with rounded body and straight, high neck, both paralleling closely finds from a pottery deposit in the northern part of the platform discovered in 2001.⁹ Thus, the pottery found in and among the bricks (providing a *terminus post quem*) and the pottery found directly on the platform have dated the construction of the platform to the turn of the 18th and early 19th Dynasty.

7 Rzeuska, *Saqqara II*, op. cit., Figs 128-129. All the pottery forms and types are cited according to this publication.

8 On the symbolism and significance of green-painted stones, see forthcoming article by the author in *EtTrav XXII*.

9 T.I. Rzeuska, "Saqqara. The pottery, 2001", *PAM XIII, Reports 2001* (2002), 155-158.

SLOPING PASSAGE

The explorations of the sloping passage, completed this season, yielded huge quantities of pottery, mostly beer jars, mixed with limestone chips. Two archaeological contexts were identified in this passage running under the mastabas of the late Old Kingdom. The northern part of the passage and the lower part of the fill in the southern part contained pottery of the late 6th Dynasty originating from phase III of the functioning of the necropolis, while the upper part in the southern end of the passage was filled with beer jars typical of phase I.¹⁰

Among the finds from phase I, which comprised mainly beer jars of forms 1 and 2, there was a rim that fitted a jar of Levantine Combed Ware (SQ 1035) found in the burial chamber of Shaft 51 already in 2001, located a few meters east of the sloping passage.¹¹ Hence, it may be assumed that the pottery, possibly at least a part of the ceramics found in a context dated to phase I originating from the passage, may have originally come from this burial shaft.¹²

As for the phase III fill, it consists mainly of beer jars of forms 7 and 8. Some of them, such as SQ 1624, were filled with ashes from offerings burnt during the funeral. SQ 1624 is a beer jar of form 7 with wide, distinct shoulders, spindle-shaped body and pointed bottom [Fig. 3]. Its shoulders bear traces of an outer sealing. The fill yielded upper parts of outer

sealings: conical (SQ 1530) and conical with rounded knob at the top, as well as very numerous pieces of no longer determinable shape. Other beer jars were found to contain mud, which is supposed to imitate the beer in these jars, as well as numerous loose fragments of such false fillings well fitted to the inside of actual vessels.

A few other jars from the phase III deposit merit attention. One is a medium large, slender jar with spindle body and flat base (SQ 1650, form 15), wheel-made of Mixed clay P.60. Another is a large, tall jar, also of Mixed clay P.60 (SQ 1691, form 19, cf. Fig. 3); the upper part was wheel-turned, while the lower part handmade – the bottom by pinching, the walls by coiling. The neck and rim are missing, but parallels from the necropolis¹³ leave little doubt that the mouth was narrow (Dia. c. 9 cm) and the rim modelled on the outside, sharp-angled and triangular in section. Finally, the third jar (SQ 1659, form 22, cf. Fig. 3) is wheel-turned, made of Mixed clay P.60. It is a medium-sized tall jar with rounded rim, medium-high neck, ovoid body and rounded bottom.

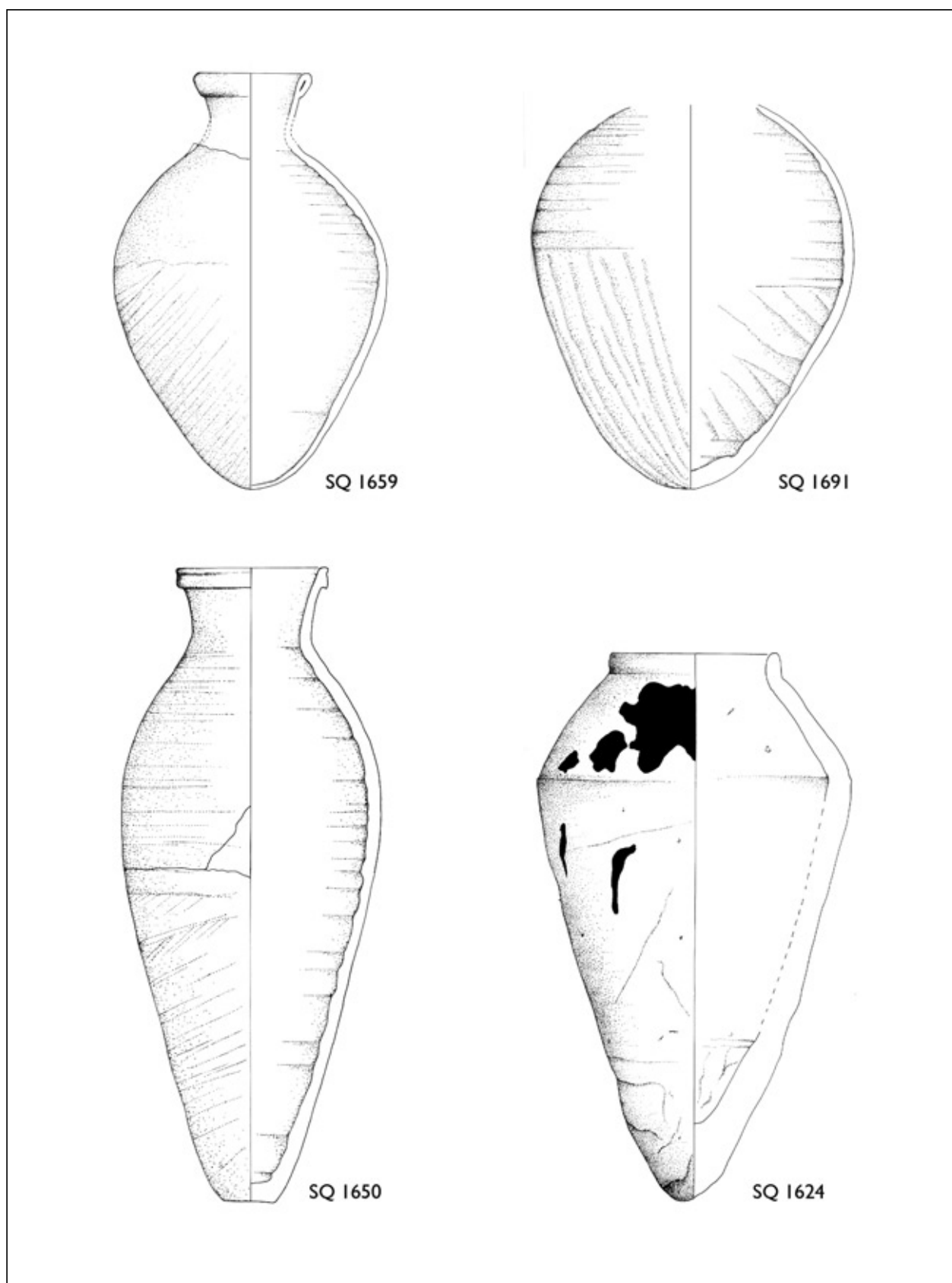
These jars from the sloping passage correspond to a general characteristic of phase III pottery, one feature being that an increasingly larger number of vessels, compared to earlier phases, was made of Mixed clay P.60. The shape repertoire of

10 T.I. Rzeuska, "Saqqara. The pottery, 2004", *PAM XVI, Reports 2004* (2005), 174-175. On the phases of the functioning of the necropolis to the west of Netjerykhet complex in Saqqara, see the contribution by K.O. Kuraszkiewicz in this volume.

11 Originally, this jar was identified as an import, cf. T.I. Rzeuska, "West Saqqara. The pottery, 2001", *PAM XIII*, op. cit., 153-155, Fig. 2. Petrographic analyses later revealed that it was made of Nile silt, cf. id., "Some remarks on third millennium Levantine pottery found in Saqqara", in: *Acts of the Third Central European Conference of Young Egyptologists, Egypt 2004: Perspectives of Research, Warsaw 12-14 May 2004*, in press.

12 The pottery from the offering deposit in Shaft 51 seems to have been thrown outside by robbers. It slipped west because of the sloping lie of the land in this area and fell into the sloping passage. The ceramics found in 2001 in Shaft 51 confirm this hypothesis; they consisted mainly of Phase I beer jars of type 1; cf. Rzeuska, *PAM XIII*, op. cit., 153-155.

13 Rzeuska, *Saqqara II*, op. cit., Fig. 33, nos. 131-138.



*Fig. 3. Selected jars from phase III fill in the sloping passage
(Drawing E. Klimaszewska-Drabot, inking M. Orzechowska)*

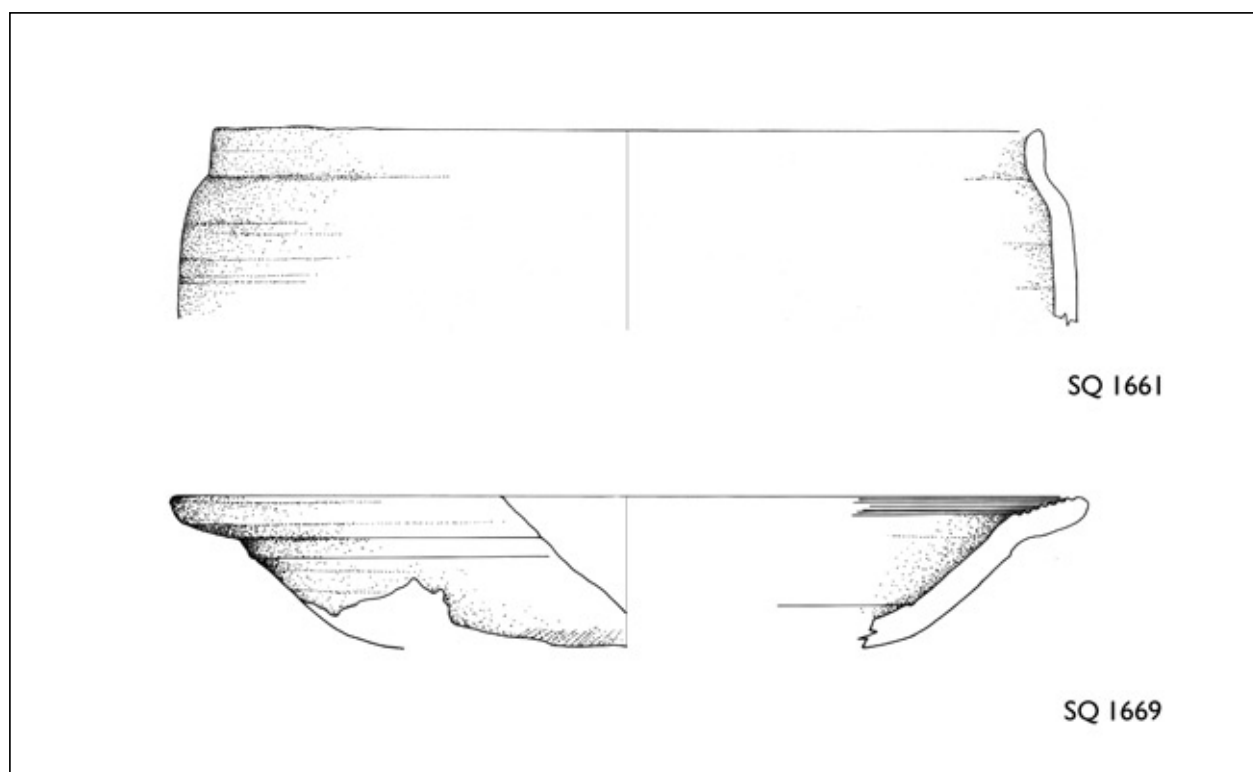


Fig. 4. Exceptional forms from phase III fill in the sloping passage
(Drawing E. Klimaszewska-Drabot, inking M. Orzechowska)

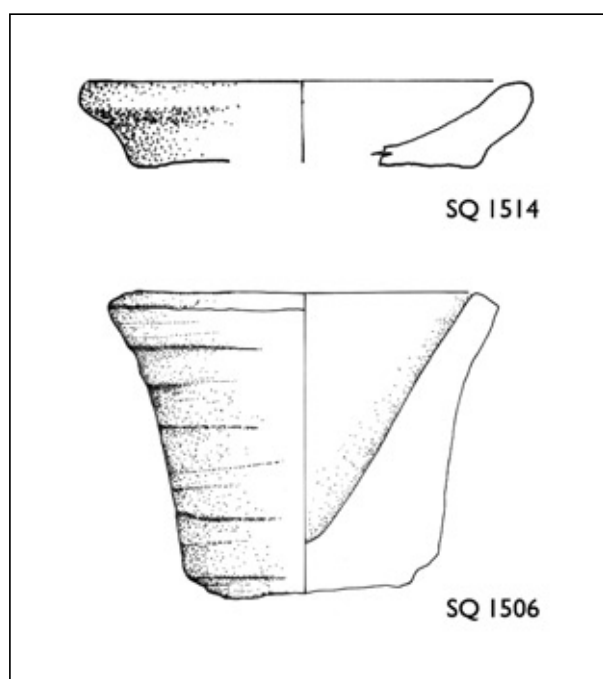


Fig. 5. Exceptional forms from the phase III fill of the sloping passage
(Drawing E. Klimaszewska-Drabot, inking M. Orzechowska)

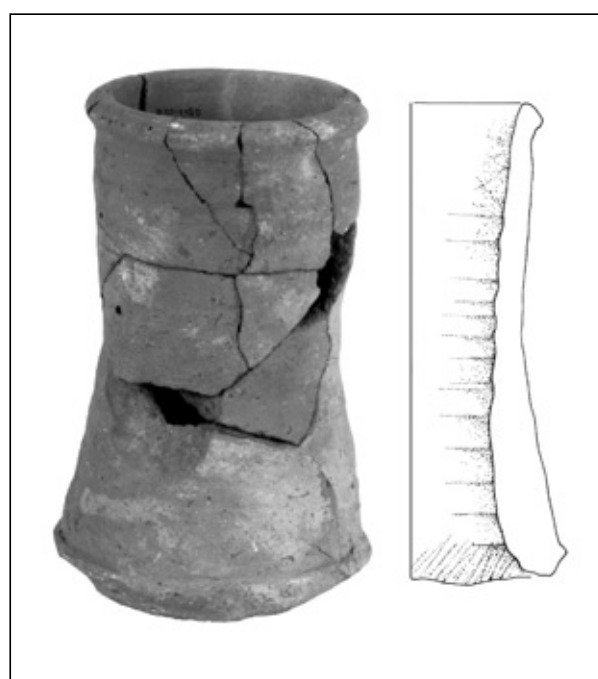


Fig. 6. Potstand of Nile B1 with characteristically scraped lower rim
(Photo J. Dąbrowski; drawing E. Klimaszewska-Drabot, inking M. Orzechowska)

vessel made of this clay identified in the necropolis so far was restricted to closed forms (jars), stands and miniature vessels. One of the presently found fragments made of Mixed clay represents the first known open form, i.e., Meidum bowl (SQ 1679, form 184).

Other vessels worth mentioning include the rim of a rare item – a large bowl (SQ 1661, form 155), wheel-made of Nile B1, with both surfaces red-slipped [Fig. 4]. Only one other fragment like this has been recorded so far.¹⁴ Another fairly uncommon form is a small, bent-sided bowl with grooved inner rim (SQ 1669, form 177, cf. Fig. 4). Also seldom encountered is the small bread mould (SQ 1506, 202, cf. Fig. 5) of Nile B2, quite unusual because wheel-turned (or overthrown) with cut base. It is the first of its kind to be found in the necropolis. The fill also included low

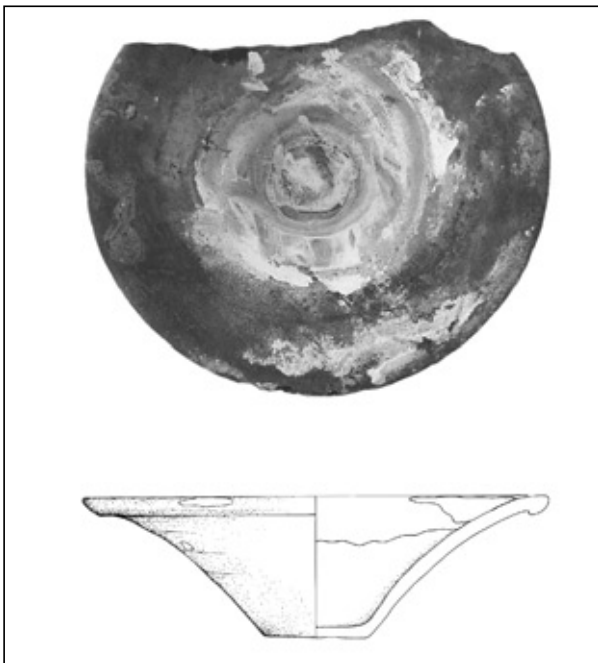


Fig. 7. Bell-shaped bowl from the bottom of the fill in the sloping passage
(Drawing E. Klimaszewska-Drabot,
inking M. Orzechowska)

cylindrical stands of Nile B1 with uncoated surface (SQ 1510, form 220) and a lower rim that is characteristically scraped [Fig. 6]. Moreover, the fill contained a few miniature vessels, including pots made of Mixed clay P.60, and for the first time, a miniature plate with inside surface red-slipped (SQ 1514, form 232, cf. Fig. 5). Large platters with grooved rim were very numerous, as were bowls and plates, all typical of phase III.

The pottery from the fill, especially beer jars with ashes or filled with mud, as well as stoppers, are typical of offering deposits found in burial shafts.

At the very bottom of the fill a bell-shaped bowl (SQ 1595, form 141) was found; it was wheel-thrown of Nile B1, red slipped with inner surface secondarily white-coated [Fig. 7]. Vessels of this type were intended for cult practices, hence they are usually found inside chapels or in their nearest vicinity. The ceramics from the very bottom of the fill must have come from some cult chapel(s), while those from the upper parts came from burial shafts where offering deposits were placed ritually.

The fill of phase III is very homogeneous and has parallels among pottery coming from funerary complexes dating to this phase. So far it has proved hard to identify the complex or complexes from which this pottery could have come.

In conclusion, the pottery discovered in 2005 has added to the local typology of vessels from both the Late Period and late Old Kingdom necropoleis. The first group, not very numerous, contained Egyptian pottery typical of Saqqara in the Late Period and numerous fragments of as yet unidentified imported amphorae. As for the late Old Kingdom pottery, it represented mostly phases III and IV, contributing to our knowledge of typical forms in these phases.

14 T. I. Rzeuska, "West Saqqara 2000. The pottery", *PAM XII, Reports 2000* (2001), 141-142, Fig. 3; T.I. Rzeuska, *Saqqara II*, cat. 503.