

Teodozja Izabela Rzeuska

Saqqara: The Pottery, 2004

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THE POTTERY, 2004

Teodozja Izabela Rzeuska

Most of the pottery in the 2004 campaign came from the exploration of the late Old Kingdom necropolis and was dated accordingly. Potsherds attributed stratigraphically and chronologically to the so-called Upper Necropolis were few and poorly preserved.

THE PLATFORM

The focus of this season's activities was the area of the so-called platform.¹ The structure is difficult to date, although sherds mixed into the brick clay matrix provide some idea of the *terminus post quem*. The earliest pottery found to date had consisted of tiny fragments of Old Kingdom beer jars and Medum bowls.² Fragments of later age, characteristic Middle Kingdom hemispheric drinking cups made of Nile silt B1, as well as fragments of luxury globular jars made of Marl A2, so-called "Pink Elephantine Ware", were discovered in this structure for the first time this year.³ This identification has permitted the construction of the platform to be dated to a period not earlier than the Middle Kingdom.

The few sherds of pottery found in the sand bedding layer of the platform are of exclusively Old Kingdom attribution. They

are heavily worn indicating long exposure to the elements, which would mean that the layer was long in accumulation. No burials identified as belonging to the so-called Upper Necropolis were discovered under the platform, giving a *terminus ante quem* for the construction. To sum up, it can be said, based on the pottery evidence from the platform and under it, that the structure was constructed sometime in the period between the Middle Kingdom and the Late Period, when the area began to be used as a burial ground for individual graves.

Explorations concerned also the mastaba with two shafts present under the platform. The fill of shaft 38 consisted of limestone chips and huge quantities of pottery, of which the principal part of the deposit was found 1.50-2.00 m down from the top of the shaft. As in all burial shafts in this necropolis, the predominant form here was the beer jar – 65 examples altogether (counting bases alone), including 29 which were whitewashed on the outside. All the vessels represented beer jars of types 7 and 10 in the local typology [*Fig. 1*]. Some of the jars contained what has come to be called a false filling (Nile mud imitating beer) or else

- 1 See report by K. Myśliwiec in this volume; also, id., "West Saqqara, Excavations, 1999", *PAM XI, Reports 1999* (2000), 95-96, Fig. 5.
- 2 Observation of Dr. Anna Wodzińska, who was in charge of pottery identification in 1999, cf. A. Ćwiek, "The Stratigraphy of West Saqqara, Preliminary remarks", *PAM XI*, op. cit., 115, note 14.
- 3 The term "Pink Elephantine Ware" was proposed by the present author in a paper on pottery from Elephantine ("Die Keramik aus der Siedlung von Elephantine") presented at the Internationale Fachtagung zur ägyptischen Keramik des Mittleren Reiches, Freie Universität, Berlin, 25 June 2004. It was used in reference to a group of luxury vessels, chiefly globular and egg-shaped jars and low-footed bowls, made of marl clay A2, with polished or burnished surface.

ashes. Both inner and outer stoppers were in ample evidence, and the jars bore traces of such sealings. Also present in the shaft were numerous fragments of jars made of mixed clay P. 60 [Fig. 2], bowls, plates, bread forms and animal bones mixed with charcoal. The collection was evidently part of an offering deposit placed usually in the burial shafts.⁴ The deposit was partly damaged and disturbed in the robbing of the burial chamber and so it cannot be excluded that it has been mixed with funeral goods originally deposited in the burial chamber. The assemblage is chronologically homogeneous; it comes from the terminal period of the Old Kingdom, the end of Pepi II's reign or even later. The pottery is identical with the ceramic finds from the

mastaba of Peh-en-Ptah (funerary complex no. 3), neighboring with the presently investigated complex on the north.⁵ The absence of any later pottery suggests that the tomb was plundered within a relatively short time of the funeral.

The offering deposit recovered from Shaft 62, another shaft found below the mud-brick platform, consisted of the same pottery types.

In summary, the pottery from the two shafts is homogeneous as regards type and date, hence the shafts should be seen as being from the same period. It is still too early, however, for any discussion of cult practices at the mastaba as neither ritual shaft (containing remnants of the funeral banquet) nor cult chapel(s) have yet been found.

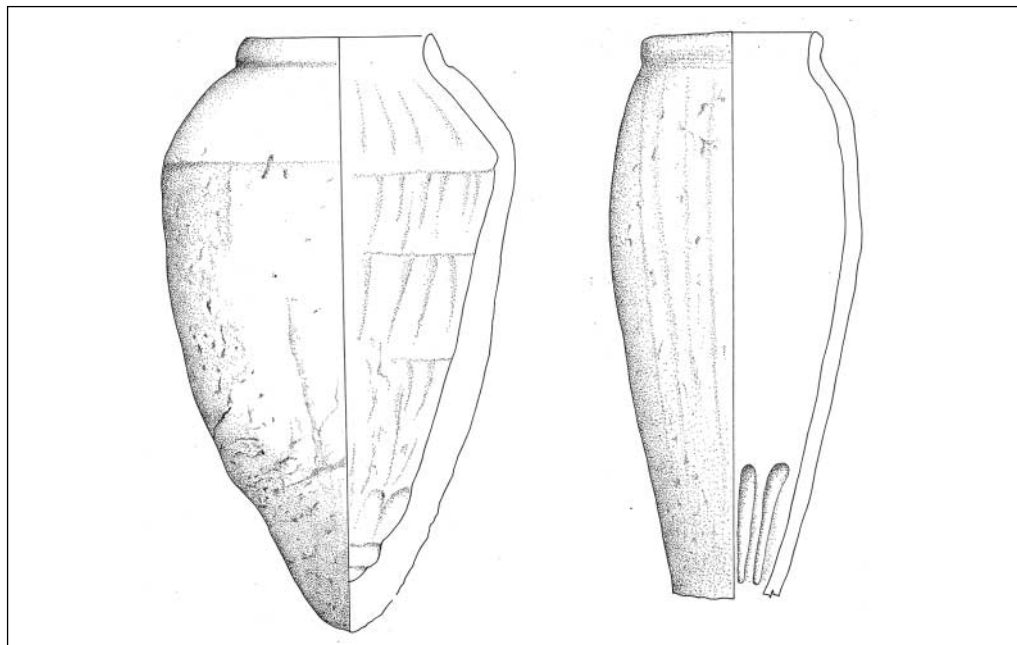


Fig. 1. Beer jars (type 7 and 10) dated to the very end of the Old Kingdom. Not to scale (Drawing T.I. Rzeuska, inking M. Orzechowska)

4 T.I. Rzeuska, Late Old Kingdom Pottery from Saqqara, *Saqqara II* (in press).

5 Myśliwiec, *PAM XI*, op. cit., 92-93.

An interesting globular jar (SQ 04-1331) was found near Shaft 62 [Fig. 3]. It was made of Nile silt B2, red-slipped outside, with horizontal grooving on the shoulders (H. 29.5 cm; max. dia. 25.8 cm; rim dia. 6 cm). Traces of a stopper can be seen under the rim. Dating based on the archaeological context is impossible, as the jar was found near Shaft 62 but in a layer of windblown sand, not in the layer of limestone chips from the original fill of the shaft. Jars of this type appeared in the late Fifth Dynasty, but our example should rather be assigned to the late Sixth, if the fabric is any indication (Nile silt B2 instead of the better Nile silt A or B1 used for the earlier jars, poorly fired (mixed), red slip peeling and of poor quality).

SLOPING PASAGE

The sloping passage in square 2003, only partly excavated, proved to be filled with

limestone chips and pottery with the beer jar being the predominant type again. A regularity of distribution was noted, the jars from the northern part of the passage (south of burial Shaft 35) being different from those found in the southern part (by shaft 68 and south of it). Prevalent in the northern part of the passage were beer-jars of types 4, 9 and 10 (spindle-shaped body and conical foot), some of which were white-washed. The opposite end of the passage contained beer-jar types 1 and 2.⁶ In the middle part of the passage, where the two fills intermixed, all types of jars were present. Also recorded were multiple false fillings, fragments of inner and outer stoppers and the occasional Medum bowl, various types of plates, bread moulds, bread trays with flat edge, platters with grooved rim, charcoal, and animal bones. Beer jars with a filling of ashes, representing remains of burnt offerings, were also noted

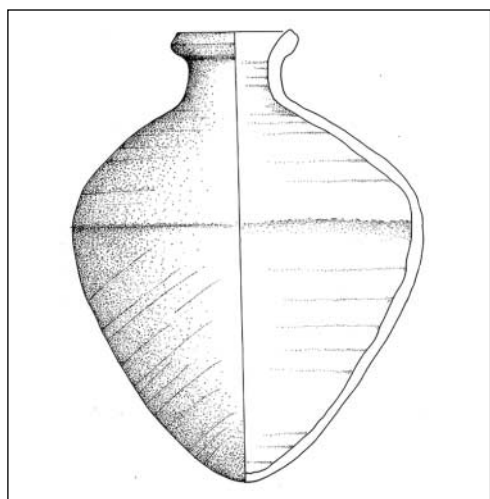


Fig. 2. Medium-size jar made of mixed clay P.60 found in Shaft 38, dated to the late Old Kingdom. Not to scale (Drawing T.I. Rzeuska, inking M. Orzechowska)

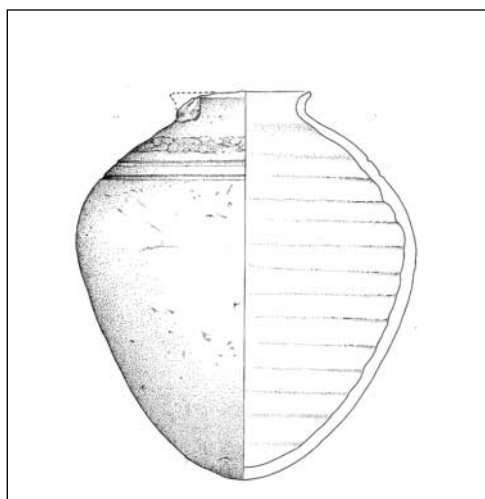


Fig. 3. Late Old Kingdom globular jar found near burial Shaft 62. Not to scale (Drawing T.I. Rzeuska, inking M. Orzechowska)

⁶ Cf. T.I. Rzeuska, "The Pottery", in: K. Myśliwiec et al., *The Tomb of Merefnebef* (Warsaw 2004), 210-212, Pls. XCI-XCII, CXIIg.

(SQ 04-1323) [Fig. 4]. The fill of the passage should be interpreted most likely as offering deposit or deposits thrown out of the burial shafts by tomb robbers. The southern part of the fill could originate from an early Sixth Dynasty context in view of the presence of beer jars characteristic of the first phase in the operation of the necropolis (e.g. tombs of Merefnebef and Ny-anekh-Nefertum). As for the northern part, it must have come from a burial dated to the terminal Sixth Dynasty, based on the beer-jars' identification. Further explorations should indicate a potential source for this material. At this point, however, it is important to note that since the sloping passage was filled with these secondary deposits and not by sand, the structure cover-

ed later with a mud-brick platform must have been still open at this date.

MASTABA OF NY-PEPY

The exploration of the mastaba of Ny-Pepy (burial complex no. 5) was completed this year. Burial shaft 32 from the central part of the mastaba did not contain any offering deposit consisting of pottery. A few sherds of beer jars, chiefly cylindrical forms with characteristic red-slipped exterior, were discovered on the level of the burial chamber and inside it (type 3 in the local typology). Sherds of other types of pottery were few [Fig. 5]. South of Ny-Pepy's funerary complex, in the neighborhood of shafts 20, 24 and 29, a deposit of vessels and animal bones was discovered (Deposit 2/2004). It

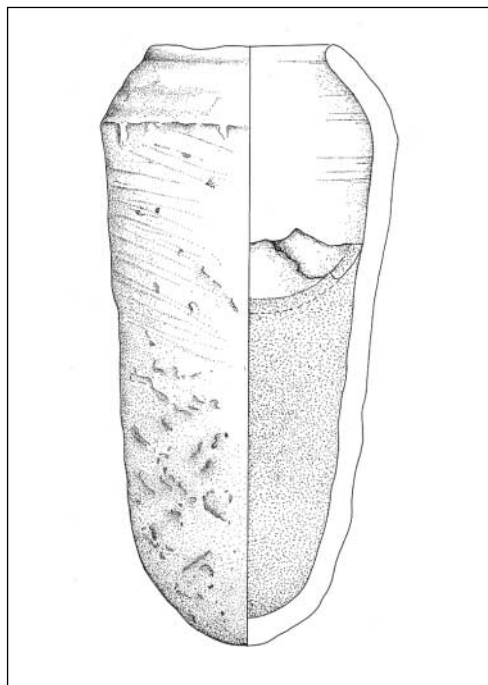


Fig. 4. Late Old Kingdom beer jar (type 4), filled with ash and plugged with inner stopper from the top. Not to scale (Drawing T.I. Rzeuska, inking M. Orzechowska)

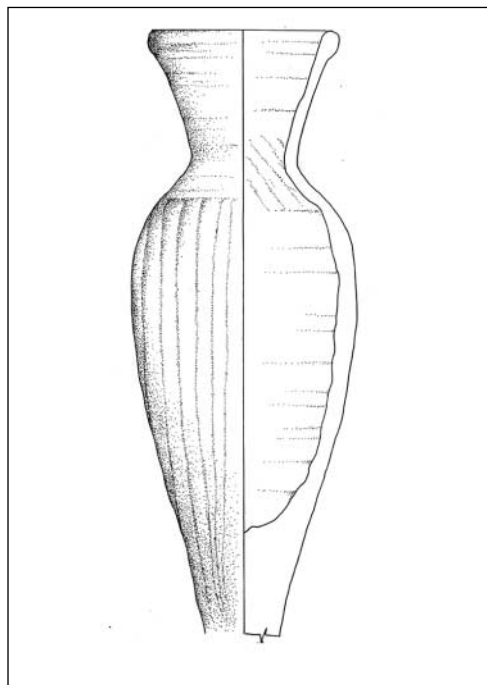


Fig. 5. Slender jar made of mixed clay P.60, dated to the late Old Kingdom. Not to scale (Drawing T.I. Rzeuska, inking M. Orzechowska)

was made up of two types of beer jars: 3 and 6. The former is a cylindrical form with characteristic red-slipped outer surface (SQ 04-1490), made of Nile silt C. The latter demonstrates a similar shape, but slightly smaller dimensions; it is made of Nile silt B2 sandy and also exhibits a red-slipped outer surface (SQ 04-1330) [Fig. 6]. While the former type has been dated to the reigns of Pepy I – Mernere, perhaps the early years of Pepy II (second phase in the operation of the necropolis),⁷ the latter had

not been attributed precisely so far. The presence of both types in a single deposit indicates that the two forms were contemporary. Other pottery was innumerable in the deposit.

RITUAL SHAFT 49

Shaft 49 belonging to the anonymous funerary complex no. 2 was explored completely this season.⁸ At over 2 m depth, it proved quite deep for a ritual shaft. It was filled with limestone chips interspersed

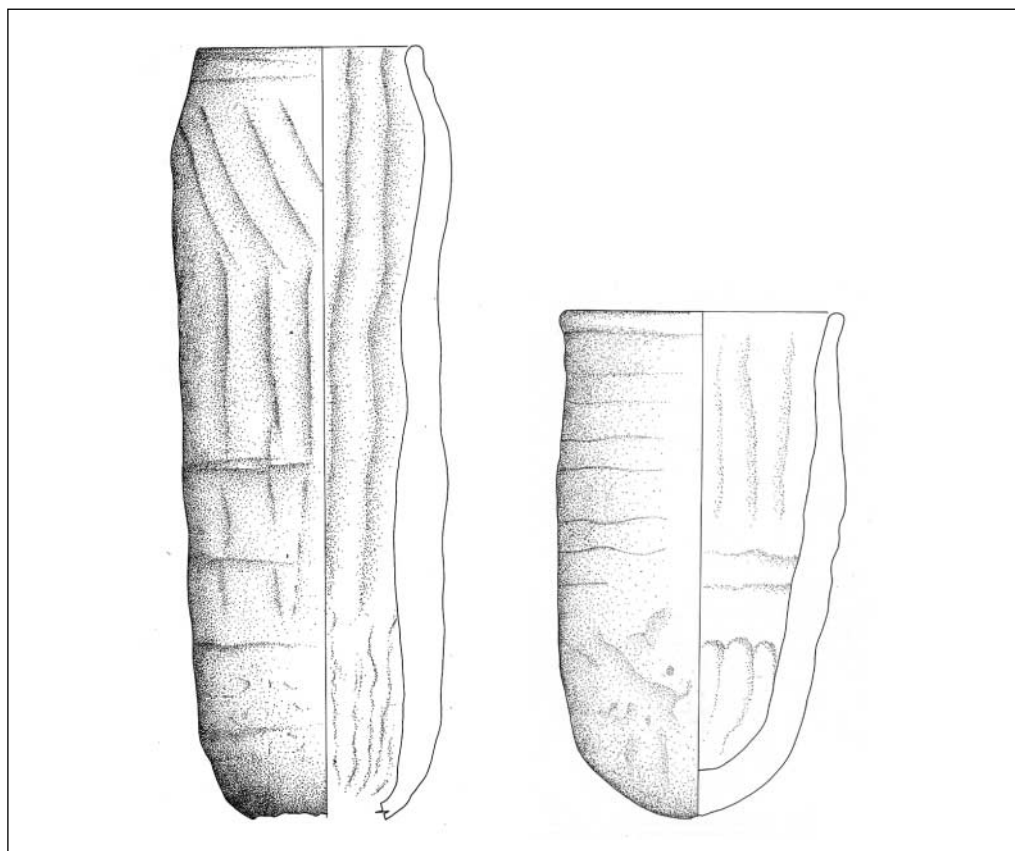


Fig. 6. Red slipped beer jars (types 3 and 6) dated to the middle of the Sixth Dynasty. Deposit 2/2004. Not to scale (Drawing T.I. Rzeuska, inking M. Orzechowska)

7 T. Rzeuska, "The Pottery, 2002", *PAM XIV, Reports 2002* (2003), 146-147, Fig. 4.

8 K. Myśliwiec, "West Saqqara, Excavations, 1998", *PAM X, Reports 1998* (1999), 84-86, Fig. 4-5.

with a few small fragments of beer jars. A ceramic deposit (3/2004), the fifth to come from a so-called 'false shaft' in this necropolis, was found at the bottom.⁹ Altogether, it consisted of 27 vessels representing four types: carinated bowls with spout rim, plates with inner rim, large bowls and Medum bowls. All the vases were shattered, but restorable and all were found to be more or less complete. The fabric was Nile silt B1 or B2, red-slipped. The pottery appears to be very homogeneous with little variety of shape and execution, suggesting that all the vessels originated from the same workshop and may have even been produced all at the same time [Fig. 7]. Other finds from the shaft included numerous frag-

ments of textiles, animal bone(s), charcoal, miniature beer jars (?) and unidentified organic remains. Like other deposits from ritual shafts, this assemblage should be interpreted as the remnants of a banquet held during the funeral. It probably represents the ritual of breaking red vessels.

FUNERARY SHAFT 59

Shaft 59 in front of the entrance to cult chapel 17¹⁰ formed one funerary complex with it. The upper part of the fill was of secondary character – sand mixed with limestone chips and small sherds – but the lower part and burial chamber contained the standard and apparently original limestone chip fill. A base count set the number of



Fig. 7. Pottery deposit (3/2004) found in ritual shaft 49
(Photo M. Jawornicki)

9 T. I. Rzeuska, "The Necropolis at West Saqqara: The Late Old Kingdom shafts with no burial chamber. Were they false, dummy, unfinished or intentional?", *AO 70/3*, 377-402; id., "Pottery 2003", *PAM XV, Reports 2003* (2004), 138, Fig. 6.

10 K. Myśliwiec, "West Saqqara, Archaeological Activities, 2003", *PAM XV*, op. cit., 112-114, Fig. 1

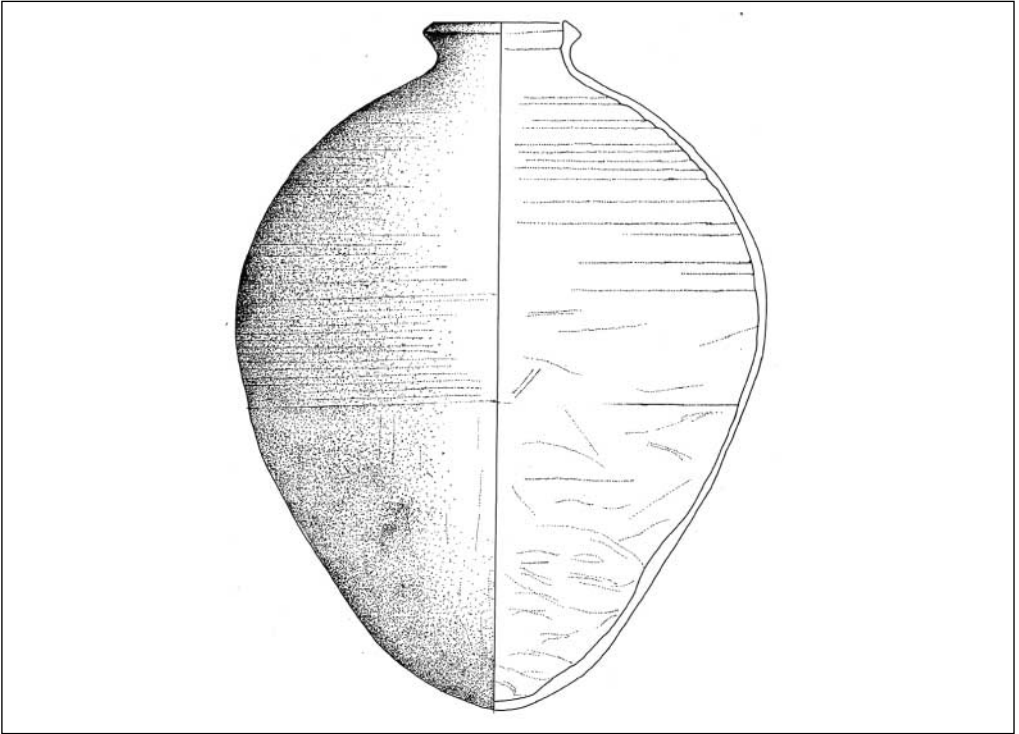


Fig. 8. Large jar of mixed clay P.60, part hand- and part wheel-made, found in burial shaft 59. Not to scale (Drawing T.I. Rzeuska, inking M. Orzechowska)

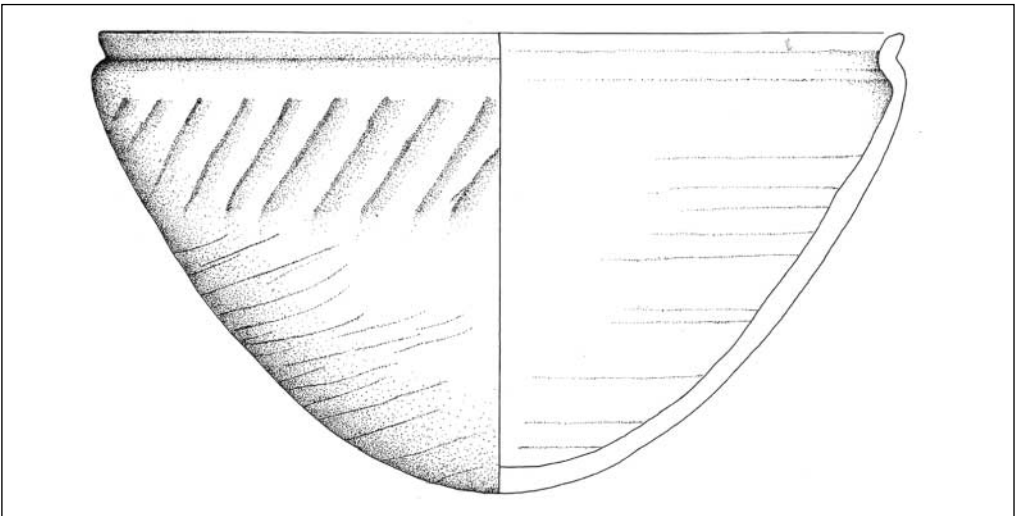


Fig. 9. Large bowl dated to the late Old Kingdom, found between burial shafts 22 and 23. Not to scale (Drawing T.I. Rzeuska, inking M. Orzechowska)

beer jars at 14 with some bearing evidence of being white-washed on the outside. All represented a type with wide shoulders and conical bottom (type 7). Also recorded were fragments of false fillings, inner stoppers, a few fragments of handmade bread trays and some red slipped carinated plates. The pottery, while fragmentary, is evidently homogeneous and can be dated to a terminal Sixth Dynasty (Pepy II and later). The beer jars, which have been found in this necropolis to be the surest chronological indicator, are identical with the vessels from the funerary complex of Pehi (no. 3) and Corridor 2.¹¹ An example of a large-size beer jar was found at the very bottom of the shaft (SQ 04-1494: H. 48.4 cm, max. body dia. 37 cm). The shattered vessel proved largely complete and restorable. It was made of mixed clay P. 60. The lower part was hand made by pinching and coiling, the upper part (arms and rim) was thrown on the wheel [Fig. 8].

A few new types of Old Kingdom date were recorded, as well as some others which had so far been preserved only fragmentarily. One such type is a bowl of large size, SQ 04-1488 [Fig. 9]. (H. 20.6 cm, max. dia. 36.4 cm), made of Nile silt B1 and thrown on the wheel in two parts, the place of joining showing the characteristic oblique traces of the potmaker's palms. The surface was red-slipped. The bowl was

found between burial shafts 23 and 22, in context with the characteristic bDA bread moulds exclusively. The latter are shallow vessels with wide open rim, footed, usually unfired or very poorly fired, with white-painted rim.¹² To date, vessels of this kind were found in burial shaft 2 (deposit of over 100 poorly fired moulds), in the nearest vicinity and in the neighborhood of adjacent shafts 22 and 23. The homogeneous context permits the bowl to be dated with some caution to the terminal Old Kingdom, like the bread moulds.

Another type of interest is a large-size vat made of clay resembling Nile E (high sand content) and red-slipped on the outside. The nearest parallel is a vessel from Giza, where it was found in mastaba G 6030.¹³

In summary, finds from the 2004 season have contributed new types of vessels to be included in the local typology of Late Old Kingdom pottery. The excavated burial shafts yielded evidence of offering deposits composed of, among others, pottery of various types, but mainly beer jars. The large quantities of beer jars found in the necropolis have permitted a seriation of the jars, leading in turn to a relative dating of particular funerary complexes.¹⁴ Further deposits found in the newly excavated false shafts confirmed the existence of a custom to leave the remains of funeral banquets in these shafts.

11 Rzeuska, *PAM* XV, op. cit., 136-137, Fig. 4, nos. SQ 03-1282 and SQ 03-1248.

12 T.I. Rzeuska, "Saqqara West 1998", *BCE* XXII (2001), 20, Fig. 7, no. SQ 98-513.

13 A.M. Roth, *A Cemetery of Palace Attendants, Including G2084-2099, 2230-2231 and 2240, Giza Mastabas 6* (Boston 1995), Fig. 129 (G 6030 B: 25-11-80).

14 T.I. Rzeuska, *Late Old Kingdom Pottery from Saqqara, Saqqara II* (in press).