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Saqqara 2010 : The Pottery

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SAQQARA 2010: THE POTTERY

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Abstract: In 2010, archeological explorations, concentrated in the area of the early Old Kingdom quarries, yielded a pottery assemblage dating from the period of the functioning of the quarries as well as the Early Dynastic age. With regard to the Lower Necropolis of the late Old Kingdom, the assemblage included a noteworthy offering deposit from burial shaft 50, one of the largest ever to be found in the area of Polish excavations. It counted at least 120 vessels and was mainly composed of bread molds.

Keywords: Saqqara, necropolis, quarries, Old Kingdom, Early Dynastic, pottery, offering deposit

The pottery discovered in the course of the 2010 season by the Polish mission at Saqqara was less numerous than in preceding years. Most of the finds belonged to the Lower Necropolis of late Old Kingdom date, whereas a smaller but still distinctly numerous group was

constituted by material from the stone quarries dating from the early Old Kingdom (Welc 2011). There was no pottery that could be associated with the Upper Necropolis, known to have existed on the site from the Late Period through Roman times.

POTTERY FROM THE EARLY DYNASTIC TO EARLY OLD KINGDOM PERIODS

The assemblage of pottery representing the period preceding that of the Lower Necropolis was the most abundant of all seasons. A huge majority came from the area of the quarries and has been published separately (Rzeuska 2014a). It should be noted that the most numerous category among the finds were handmade collar beer jars from the Third to early Fourth Dynasty (SQ 2077,

K.09-21) [*Fig. 1*]. Vessels of analogous form have already been noted from the site (Rzeuska 2002), but the present assemblage of these jars was the most plentiful and well preserved one. The shapes repertoire included moreover ledged bowls, bread molds with rounded bottom and trays. Ceramic “shovels” were also recorded in abundance, made from sherds representing characteristically hard

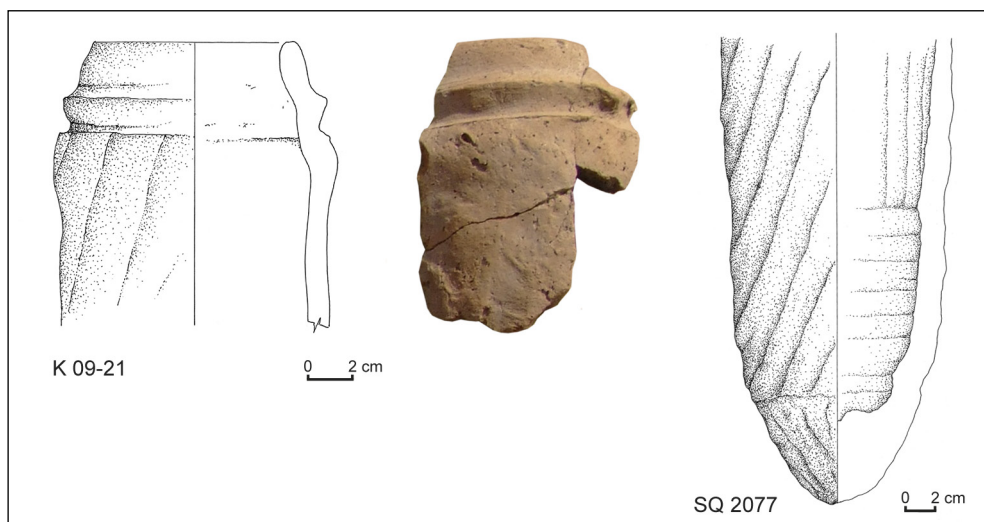


Fig. 1. Collar beer jars from the early Old Kingdom coming from the area of the early Old Kingdom quarries

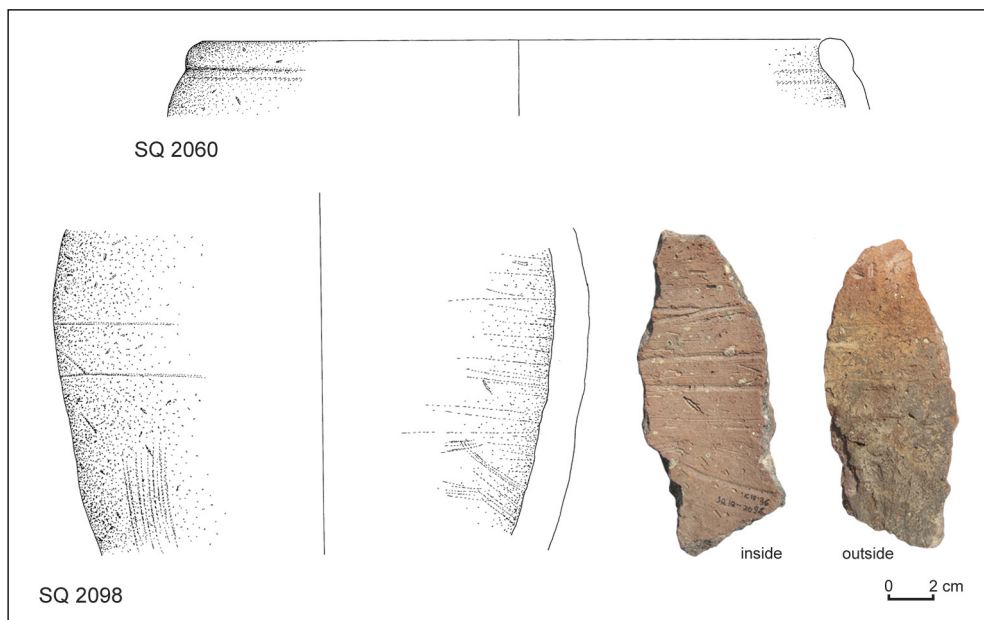


Fig. 2. Burnished bowl and handmade jar from the Early Dynastic period from the area of the early Old Kingdom quarries

All photos and drawings T.I. Rzeuska; inking M. Orzechowska

marl fabric designated as P.38, P.80, P.81 and P.82 in the local site clay typology (Rzeuska 2010: 216). A group of Early Dynastic pots was also recorded from the quarries, including primarily open forms representing Half-Polished (P2) Ware, bread molds and jars of diverse kind.

Vessels from early periods were noted also in other areas excavated this season. Among these was a large bowl,

approximately 30 cm in diameter, thick-walled with a rolled rim, the fabric being Nile silt heavily tempered with sand and limestone particles, burnished on both surfaces, inside and outside (SQ 2060) [Fig. 2, top]. Parallel bowls, sometimes with a spout (opening) just under the rim, have been recorded from layer VI at Buto (Köhler 1998: Pls 20 No. 5, 23 No. 1, 24 No. 5) and from pottery phases B2 and B3 on Elephantine

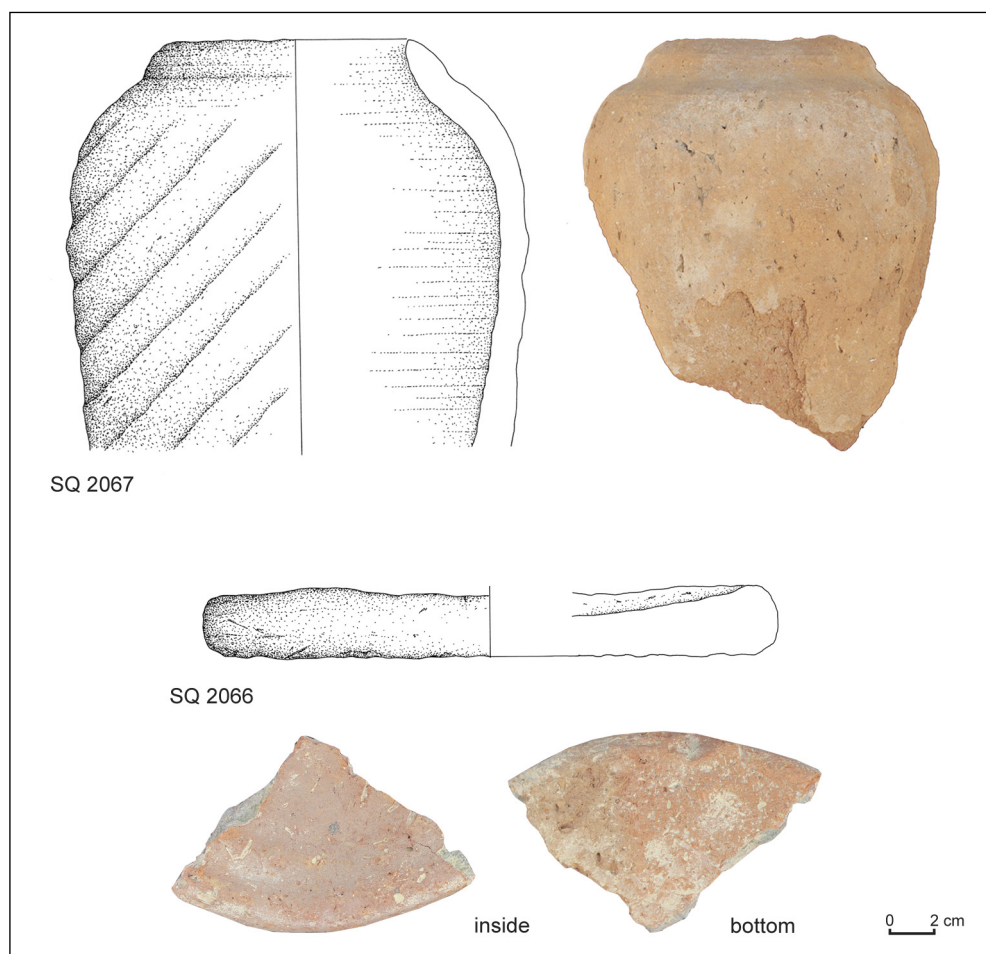


Fig. 3. Beer jar (top) and flat tray from the early Old Kingdom

(Kopp 2006: Pl. 21 Nos 329–331). Next is a sherd identified as a handmade red-slipped jar of large size (SQ 2098) [Fig. 2, bottom]. The preserved body section suggests a tall jar with rounded shoulders and body tapering toward the bottom, the maximal diameter being 22 cm. The vessel was handmade of Nile silt tempered with organic and limestone particles. Horizontal and oblique scratches can be seen on the inside, testifying to the process of joining the coils that the vessel was made of. Scratches, this time vertical, can also be observed on the lower part of the outer surface; they apparently reflect the actual shaping of the lower body and bottom. Although the preserved fragment is sufficiently big to determine the approximate shape of the body, the missing rim prevents a more specific identification of type.

The early Old Kingdom period is represented among others by a beer jar (SQ 2067) and flat tray (SQ 2066) [Fig. 3]. The first, handmade of Nile silt B2, has an untreated surface. It is characterized by a triangular pointed rim and broad rounded shoulders. The body bears oblique traces of the forming processes.

Analogous vessels from the tombs in Bet Khalaf (Garstang 1903: Pl. XXI, No. 29) and Qau (Brunton 1927: Pl. XIV, No. 68F3) place the jar in the Third Dynasty. The flat tray has a rounded edge and was also hand-made of Nile silt C. No direct parallel exists, trays usually having an angular edge and rounded bottom.

The analyzed pottery confirms beyond any doubt activity of some kind before the establishment of the Lower Necropolis in the explored area. To determine the character of this activity one needs to take into account the provenance of the sherds. The early Old Kingdom pottery, both the larger assemblages from the area of the quarry and scattered single finds from other parts of the explored sector, can be associated with two zones of activity: the funerary enclosure of Netjerykhet and the said quarries. As far as pottery from the Early Dynastic period is concerned, it is still too early to draw conclusions as to whether the ceramics were associated with the quarry or necropolis. A larger section of the quarry will have to be explored in order to be able to resolve this issue.

LATE OLD KINGDOM

The pottery from the Lower Necropolis consisted for the most part of vessels representing well known, recorded and published forms. One should mention an almost complete bent-sided bowl Form 166 (SQ 2074) and another bowl, the upper part of which was preserved, representing a variant of the form (SQ 2055), although of much better quality than all other recorded

examples of the type: thin-walled and thoroughly polished [Fig. 4]. Noteworthy as well was a fragment of the body of a carinated Meidum bowl, bearing on the outer surface a fragmentarily preserved pot mark made up of two incisions intersecting at a quasi-right angle [Fig. 5]. Pot marks of the post-firing kind, as this one, believed to be marks of ownership, are very seldom encountered in this

necropolis. Most pot marks were made pre-firing on beer jars (Rzeuska forthcoming). A new form was also recorded, Form 252, which was a handmade (pounded) tray of Nile C (SQ 2068) [Fig. 6].

Meriting special attention was an offering deposit from burial shaft 50 constituting part of the Anonymous Tomb XLI (Kuraszkiewicz 2013: 194–201), explored in 2009–2010. It is one of the largest ceramic deposits found to date in this necropolis and it was apparently much bigger originally, when first deposited.

The shaft had evidently been plundered, depleting the number of vessels that were originally in this collection [Fig. 7]. The upper section of the shaft had been filled with rubble containing innumerable sherds of early Old Kingdom vessels and fragments of all kinds of beer jars. This was a premonition of the deposit proper, which filled the shaft down to the bottom from a depth of approximately 6 m below ground surface and formed one with the pottery in the burial chamber, as indicated by joining sherds of vessels coming from

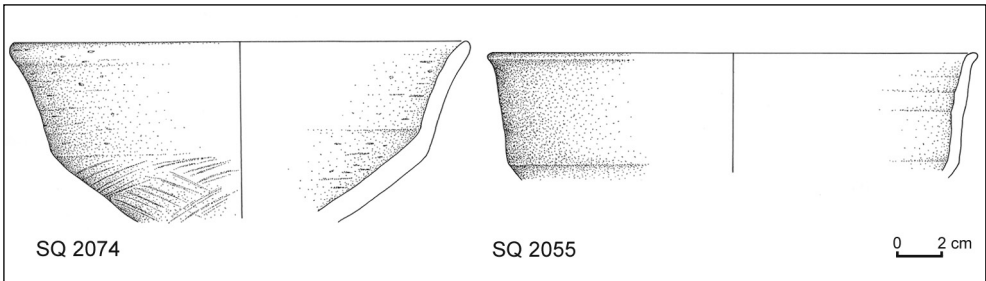


Fig. 4. Bowls of the late Old Kingdom representing Form 166

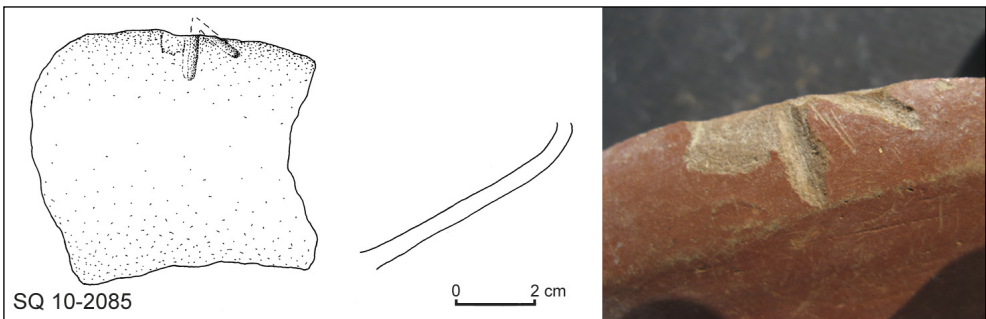


Fig. 5. Fragmentarily preserved carinated bowl with a pot mark

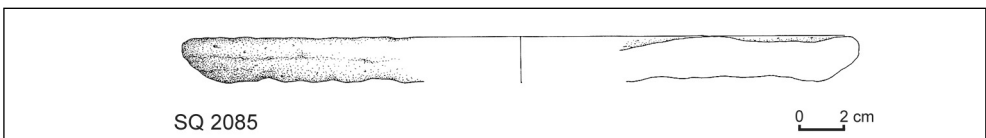


Fig. 6. New type of tray of the late Old Kingdom (Form 252)

the two locations, the shaft and the chamber. It cannot be ascertained which vessels belonged to the offering deposit from the shaft and which to the deposit from the burial chamber, hence the collection will be treated summarily. There is a likelihood that the few red-slipped bowls were part of the deposit in the burial chamber; one bowl (SQ 2097) was found in the chamber and the others at the bottom of the shaft, while none were apparent in the upper parts of the deposit.

Bread forms and beer jars were predominant in the assemblage with other forms constituting a minor share [Fig. 8]. There were at least 63 bread forms representing five main types:

Form 209 (SQ 2030), 210 (SQ 2043), 211 (SQ 2036), 213 (SQ 2025) and a new middle-sized type with hollowed bottom Form 266 (SQ 2027) [Fig. 13].¹ Forms 213 and 211 were the most numerous, the remaining ones distinctly less prolific [Fig. 9]. Compared to bread forms, beer jars were less numerous. There were at least 49 vessels representing mainly Form 7 (SQ 2034) [Fig. 11] and a little less of Form 8, while the remaining types were noted in trace quantities [Fig. 10].

The other innumerable ceramic types included small platters Form 62 and a stand, Form 219. Fine open forms were represented by a plate Form 92, a bowl



Fig. 7. Some of the vessels from the offering deposit found in Shaft 50

¹ Prior to completing a reconstruction of all the vessel fragments, it was thought that the deposit contained at least 39 bread forms representing Forms 204, 209, 212 and 266 (Rzeuska 2013: 517).

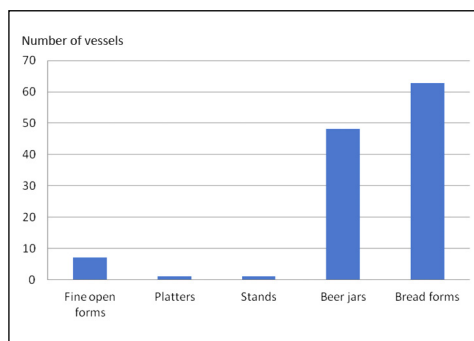


Fig. 8. Statistics of vessels from the offering deposit in Shaft 50

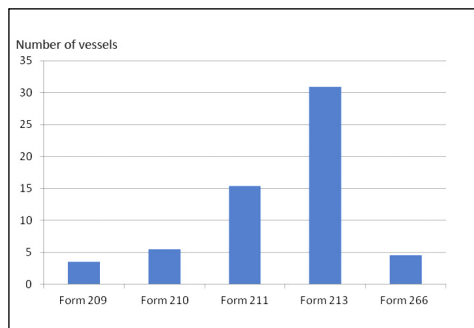


Fig. 9. Statistics of bread forms from the offering deposit in Shaft 50

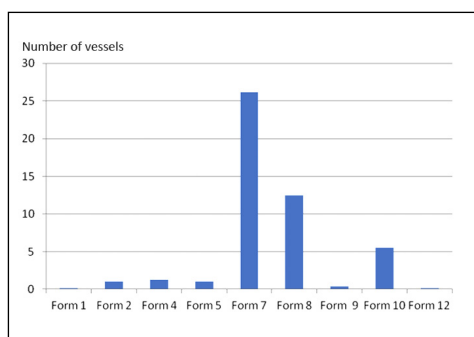


Fig. 10. Statistics of beer jars from the offering deposit in Shaft 50

Form 166D (SQ 2097) [Fig. 12] and a carinated bowl of the *Meidum* type (Form 182). All were made of Nile B1 clay and red-slipped. A new type of bent-sided bowl was also recorded, made of Mixed Clay P.60 (Rzeuska 2012: 182–184). The deposit included also numerous Nile silt fillings, a few reworked sherds in the form of scrapers, and a few fragments of vessels dated to the Third–Fourth Dynasties.

The most common bread molds Forms 211 and 213, as well as beer jars of Forms 7 and 8, making up the deposit, are typical of pottery Phase IV, thus dating the assemblage to the second part of the reign of Pepy II in the terminal Old Kingdom (Rzeuska 2013: Figs 173–174). The new bread mold with hollowed bottom, Form 266, refers to such vessels but of much slenderer proportions that are assigned to the First Intermediate Period and the Middle Kingdom. Our form appears to be a transitional “hybrid” between the traditions of the Old Kingdom and the First Intermediate Period. Since the Anonymous Tomb XLI complex was used twice, the second time in stratigraphic phase Fe (Kuraszkiewicz 2013: 23, 195–201), which corresponds to ceramic Phase IV, then the whole pottery deposit should be interpreted as originating from the second phase of use of the tomb.

The few remains of vessels from ceramic Phase I (Teti–Weserkare), for example, beer jars of Forms 1 and 2, could possibly constitute the remains of the first burial.

Ceramics from this period once again proved a valuable source for understanding the mortuary practices of middle class inhabitants of ancient Memphis, as well as an important marker for precise dating.

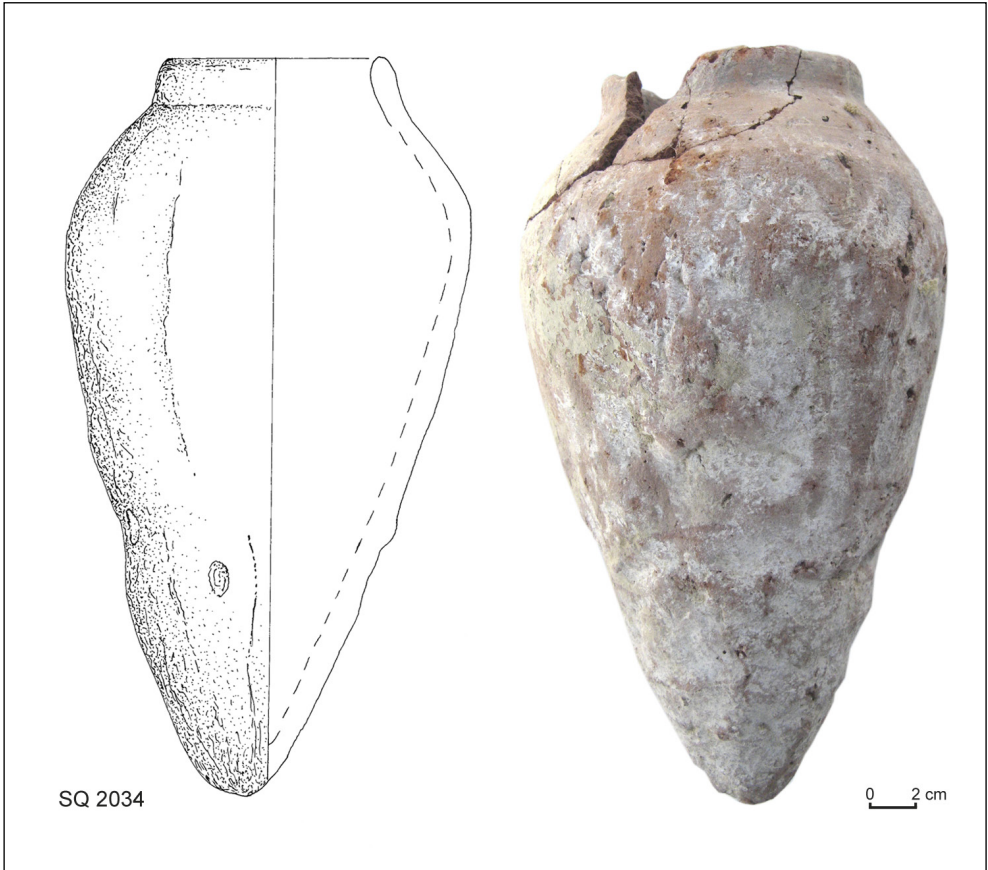


Fig. 11. Beer jar representing Form 7 from the offering deposit in Shaft 50

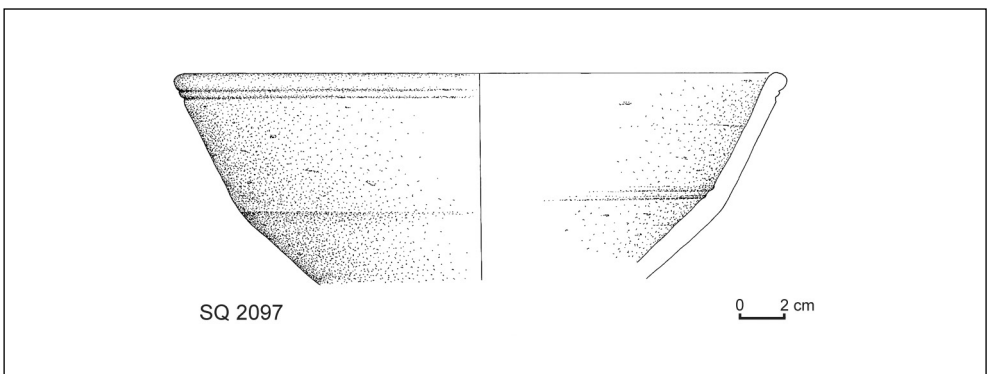


Fig. 12. Red-slipped bowl of Form 166D from the offering deposit in Shaft 50

SUMMARY

Summing up, the pottery from the 2010 season has contributed new data on the investigated necropolis. Of particular importance was the ceramic assemblage from the periods preceding the emergence of the Old Kingdom cemetery. Most of the finds came from an open quarry that existed in the area at least in the

early Old Kingdom. The provenance of Early Dynastic ceramics remains unresolved. As for the pottery from the late Old Kingdom associated with the so-called Lower Necropolis, the majority represented a repertoire that has already been studied and published, enriched by a few new forms.

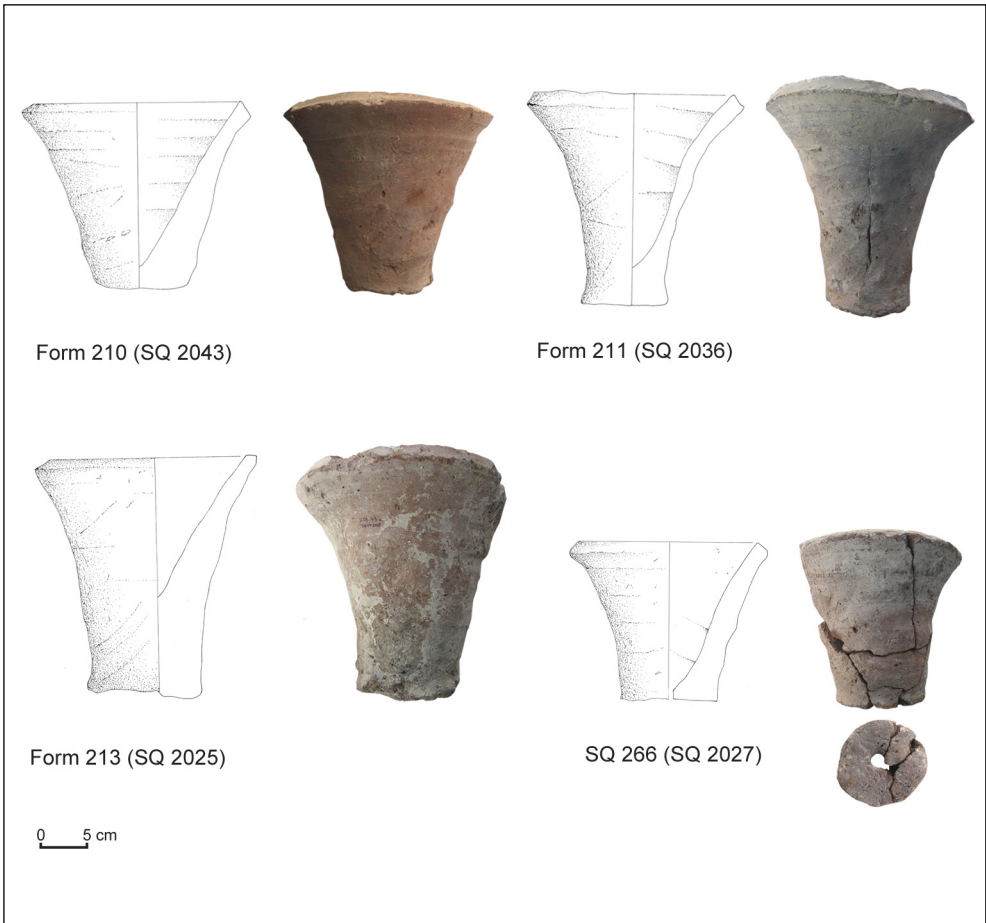


Fig. 13. Bread forms from the offering deposit in Shaft 50

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