

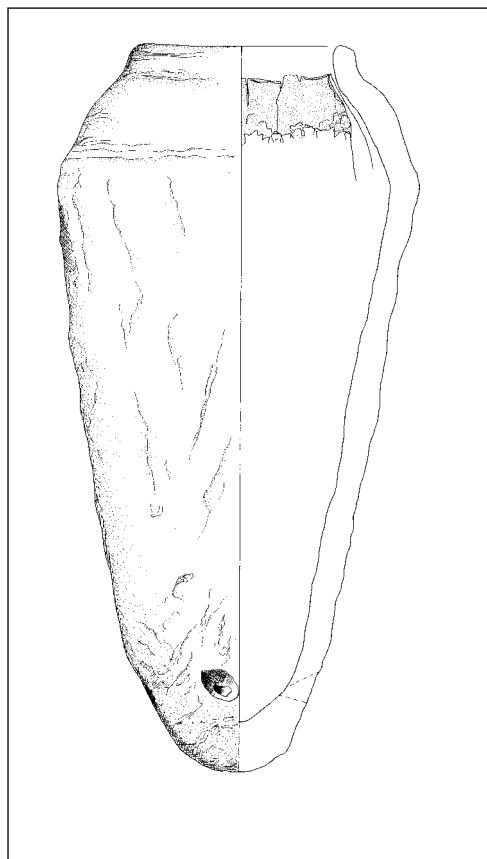
“BEER JARS” WITH ASHES FROM SAQQARA PRELIMINARY REPORT

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“Beer jars” filled with ashes constitute one of the most interesting categories of ceramic finds from the Old Kingdom necropolis at Saqqara.¹⁾ Judging by the archaeological context – these vessels were found in burial shafts or *tafl* deposits around such shafts – there is every reason to believe that they formed part of the offering deposits thrown into the shafts during burial. To date, during five seasons of work from 1998 to 2002, about 30 vessels filled with ashes have been found, all coming from the Sixth Dynasty burial ground.

Jar SQ 98-606 (*Fig. 1*) can be considered as an example of this category. It was found together with other beer jars (deposit 7/98) in the *tafl* fill by wall M to the north of the funerary complex of Merefnebef, between shafts 52 and 53.²⁾ Some of the vessels contained a false filling of Nile silt, others had ashes inside. All of them were closed with mud-stoppers tightly filling the tops of the vessels, so that the ashes could not be spilled. On the outer surface of these vessels, between the shoulders and the rim, there was evidence of an outside stopper. Fragments of such external stoppers were also found in the pottery deposit.

Parts of burned stems of plants, seeds, corn seeds, as well as charcoal, small pieces



*Fig. 1. “Beer” jar SQ 98-606 from the Saqqara necropolis (not to scale)
(Drawing T.I. Rzeuska)*

1) This is an excellent example of how names suggesting the vessels' potential function, assigned as a matter of common practice, not always correspond to reality. In this case, the “beer” jars did not contain beer at all!

2) For the location of the findspot, see K. Myśliwiec, *PAM X, Reports 1998* (1999), fig. 2 on page 84.

of burned bone and sherds of red-slipped open forms, probably bowls, accompanied the ashes in these jars.

A paleobotanical analysis of the ashes, indicated that various plants had been burned together. The ashes were fractioned on a column of sieves with meshes 0.5-3 mm. A comparative analysis was carried out for selected plant material. The following plants were identified among the remains of plants inside jar SQ 98-606: *Apium graveolens* (Celery), *Balanites aegyptiaca* (Balanos), *Carthamus trinatorius* (Safflower), *Celosia sp.* (Cockscomb), *Cyperus esculentus* (Tigernut), *Ficus carica* (Fig), *Hordeum distichon* (Pearl barley), *Lupinus sp.* (Lupine), *Matricaria chamomile* (Chamomile), *Nigella sativa* (Black cumin),

Ochradenus baccatus, *Reseda odorata* (sweet mignonette), *Scorpiurus muricatus* (Caterpillar-plant/Scorpiontail), *Triticum dicoccum* (Emmer wheat), *Triticum monococcum* (Einkorn wheat), *Vitis vinifera* (Vine), *Ziziphus spina-christi* (Christ-thorn).

The presence of celery and safflower, among others, should be pointed out. So far, it had been thought that these two plants were known in Egypt not earlier than the New Kingdom, meanwhile they were obviously in use already in the Old Kingdom, at least since the beginning of the Sixth Dynasty.

The ashes from the other vessels contained similar plant remnants, although some differences in the make-up of the contents are to be observed.³⁾

3) An article presenting the entire assemblage is now under preparation by the authors, to be published elsewhere.