

# TELL EL-RETABA 2012: THE POTTERY

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**Abstract:** Archaeological remains excavated by the Polish–Slovak Archaeological Mission in Tell el-Retaba can be well dated to the New Kingdom till the Late Period. During the 2012 season domestic layers from the Hyksos period were found, indicating that the site was occupied for the first time around the end of the Thirteenth and beginning of the Fifteenth Dynasties. Next to the houses three Hyksos graves were found. Archaeological work also revealed houses from the early Eighteenth Dynasty located just above the Hyksos structures in Area 7. Very interesting material came from the late Twentieth Dynasty and Third Intermediate Period houses excavated in Area 9. Rich pottery assemblages mostly of domestic character have been recovered from all of the structures.

**Keywords:** Tell el-Retaba, late Thirteenth Dynasty, Hyksos, early Eighteenth Dynasty, late Twentieth Dynasty, Third Intermediate Period, Late Period, house, grave, Tell el-Yahudiya juglet, Black Lustrous Ware

During the 2012 season of work at Tell el-Retaba 3000 diagnostic fragments of pottery have been recorded, 845 of them were drawn.

Material from several periods was recovered: late Thirteenth–Fifteenth Dynasty, early Eighteenth Dynasty, Nineteenth Dynasty, possibly end of Twentieth–beginning of Twenty-first Dynasties, Third Intermediate Period and Late Period.

The ceramic material came from three areas: 3, 7 and 9. Areas 3 and partly 5 were already excavated in previous seasons. Only a small trial trench was dug there during the 2012 season. According to the pottery, the material can be dated to the early

Eighteenth Dynasty, possibly Hatshepsut/Tuthmosis III reigns (see also Rzepka et al. 2014: 274–281). Most of the found pottery came from the Third Intermediate Period units of Area 3 [Fig. 1].

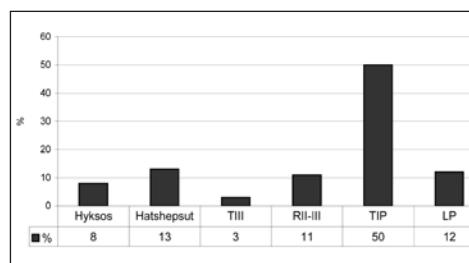


Fig. 1. Diagram showing general occurrence of pottery found in Tell el-Retaba during 2012, divided by period

Field drawings S. Gromadzka, A. Pawlikowska, A. Poniewierska, A. Ryś; digital drawings A. Wodzińska

## AREA 7

The pottery from Area 7 can be divided into several assemblages. From the top layers excavated eroded material was found, not associated with any structures. It can be well dated to the Late Period. Among others, several deep bowls with a ledge below the rim on their external surface were found [Fig. 2:1]. Such bowls are well known in Tell el-Retaba and other Egyptian sites (Wodzińska 2011: 1023, Fig. 12.5). As well as the Egyptian pottery, some imported vessels were also found. For instance, fragments of Greek amphorae, one example being a red painted handle of a Chian amphora [Fig. 2:2] (Dupont 1998: 148–151, Fig. 23.2).

Immediately below the Late Period surface, layers dated to the early Eighteenth Dynasty (squares Y95–X125, Y95–X120 and Y100–X120), and late Thirteenth–Fifteenth Dynasties (squares Y100–X110, Y110–X115, and Y115–X115) were excavated.

The early Eighteenth Dynasty pottery can be dated more precisely, probably to the reign of Hatshepsut/Tuthmosis III. Fig. 3 shows a selection of early Eighteenth

Dynasty ceramic vessels. Wine amphorae made of marl D fabric and covered with cream burnished slip were not found complete, but their fragments, especially handles [Fig. 3:1] and bases, occurred in many instances. There were many simple open forms, especially two kinds. Bowls with hemispherical body, flat base and undulating walls and red painted rims, often additionally decorated with simple splashes of red paint [Fig. 3:2]. This kind of decoration appears in many sites dated to Hatshepsut/Tuthmosis III–Amenophis II (Aston 2006; see also Bourriau 2010: 81, 91, Fig. 21, type 3.2.3), however the Tell el-Retaba pots can be placed in the Hatshepsut–Tuthmosis III time frame. The second most common open form is represented by red slipped hemispherical bowls with black painted rims [Fig. 3:3] (see Hein and János 2004: 106–107, Fig. 80B, nos 31–34; Bourriau 2010: 56, 62, Fig. 12, type 4.2.1). A number of closed cooking pots were also found. The example in Fig. 3:4 shows a vessel with sharp carination and triangular, slightly recurved rim. Its entire

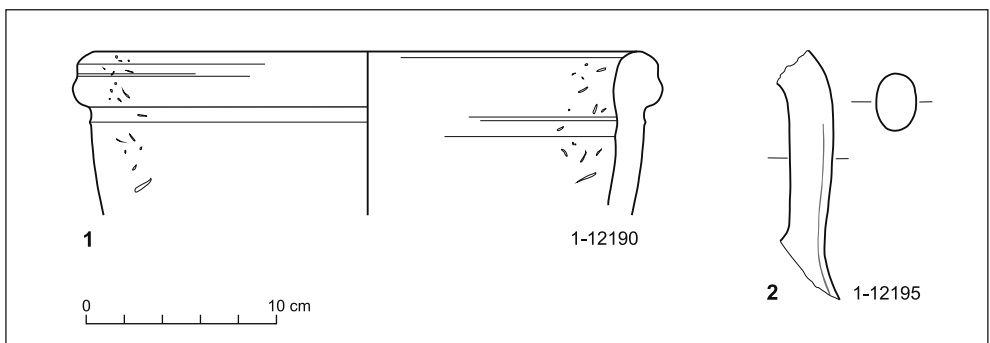


Fig. 2. Deep bowl with a ledge below rim on the external surface and Chian amphora handle, Late Period

body was covered with a thin layer of red slip. Some imitation Cypriot Biochrome ware pots were relatively common in the early Eighteenth Dynasty units, however only body sherds were preserved [Fig. 3:5] (see also Rzepka et al. 2014: 275–277). Three fragments of

Cypriot Black Lustrous Ware were found, of which one base is shown in Fig. 3:6. The Cypriot imports are not new to Tell el-Retaba. Some fragments of Black but also Red Lustrous Ware were found during the 2011 season (Rzepka et al. 2014: 279–282).

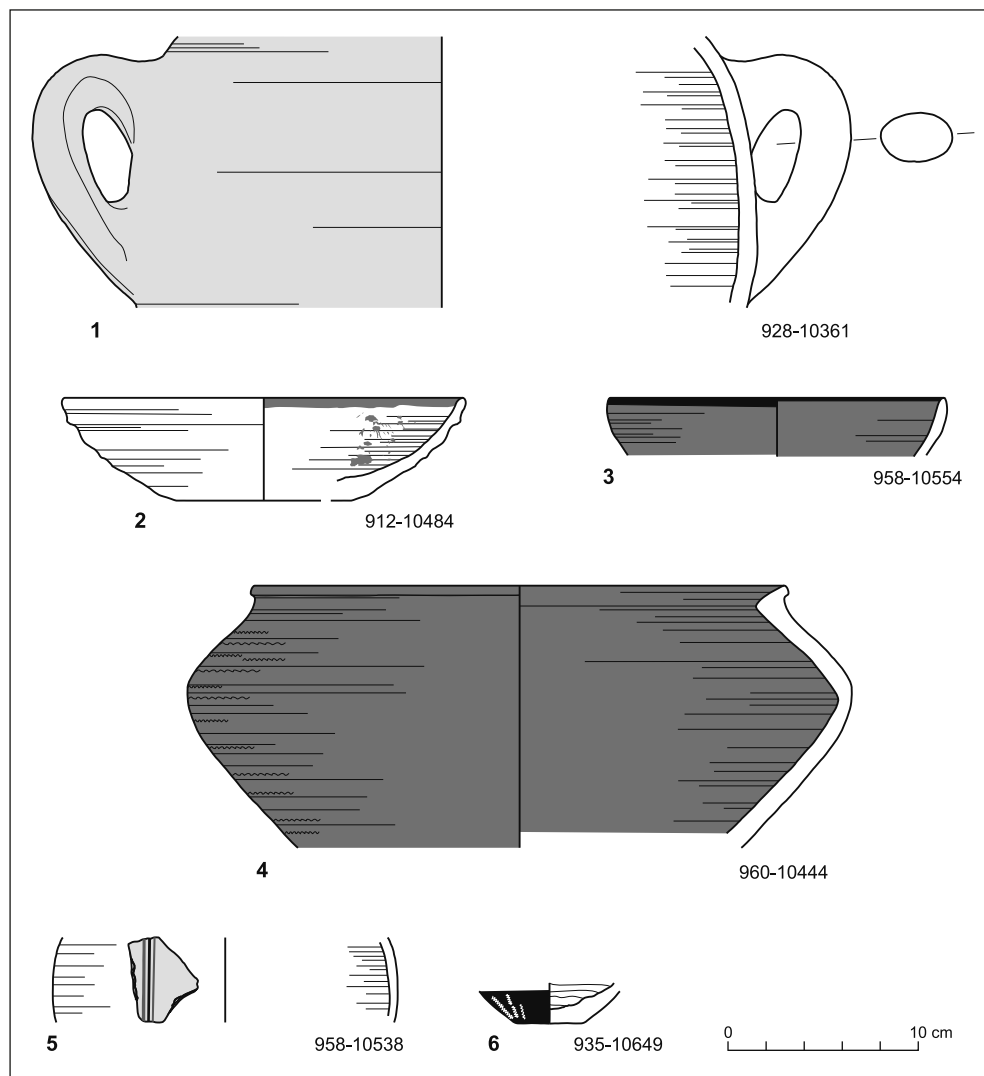


Fig. 3. Selection of pottery from the early Eighteenth Dynasty

The late Thirteenth–Fifteenth Dynasties pottery came from two contexts: domestic and funerary. These two assemblages of pots are thus different.

The funerary vessels found in graves were almost intact. A few types can be easily recognized. A juglet with biconical undecorated body [Fig. 4:1] was covered with black slip and well burnished. It had a very characteristic handle made of two coils of clay attached to its rim and shoulder. Such undecorated juglets are known also in Tell el Dab'a where they can be associated with strata E3 and E2 dated to the late Thirteenth–beginning of the Fifteenth Dynasties (Bietak 1991: for instance 86–87, 124–125, 150, Fig. 46 No. 1883, 80 No. 1639, see also Fig. 112 No. 2070; Forstner-Müller 2008: 76). A small juglet with one handle, the so-called Tell el-Yahudiya ware [Fig. 4:2],

was covered with thin black slip and burnished. Its surface was then decorated with impressed patterns. Its handle was also made of two jointed coils. The vessel can be classified in the Aston and Bietak typology as type group I.3.2c and can be placed among pots from the late Thirteenth Dynasty (Aston and Bietak 2012: 169, 555).

Small cups with slightly incurved walls, simple rims and round bases made of Nile B1 fabric were also found in domestic units, however the funerary pots are complete [Fig. 4:3]. These were standard grave goods of the late Thirteenth–beginning of the Fifteenth Dynasties (Bietak 1991: 144, Abb. 103, stratum E2). Shallow bowls with ledge rims and flat bases covered with red slip were also common [Fig. 4:4] (see Bietak 1991: 85, 87, Fig. 46 No. 1878; Forstner-Müller 2008:

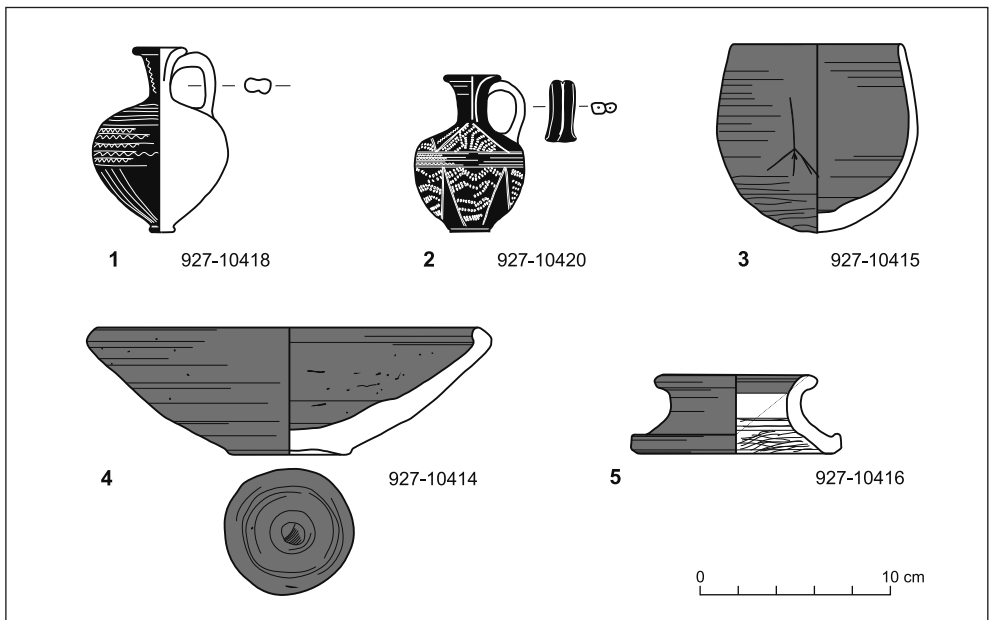


Fig. 4. Selection of pots found in one of the Hyksos tombs

209–210 No. 8844B). The graves also contained low pot stands with external surfaces covered with red slip [Fig. 4:5]. Such forms are also known in domestic contexts (see Kopetzky 2010: 155, stratum E3).

Hyksos domestic ceramics were associated with a house. The material is very fragmented, however it was possible to recognize very diverse types, including many bowls, storage jars, and also cooking pots. See Fig. 5 for a selection of domestic pottery fragments from the Hyksos period. Two types of cooking pots were found. The first is a handmade vessel

made of strawy Nile fabric with decorative depressions made with finger just below a slightly recurved rim [Fig. 5:1]. Such pots are usually associated with early Hyksos occupation (early Fifteenth Dynasty) (Redmount 1989: 825–827, Fig. 137; 1995: 186). A second type of cooking pot is a vessel with thickened incurved rim made of sandy Nile E fabric with smoothed surface [Fig. 5:3] (Redmount 1989: 828, 830, Fig. 138). Another common domestic vessel was a red slipped and well burnished cup made of finer version of Nile B2 fabric [Fig. 5:2] (Redmount 1989: 816, 818–820, Fig. 135).

## AREA 9

The excavations were continued in Area 9, where four phases of occupation can be distinguished: Nineteenth Dynasty; small units associated with the enclosure wall built by Ramesses II; structures dated to the early and late Twentieth Dynasty; and houses from the Third Intermediate Period.

A very large group of vessels [Fig. 6] was found in the early Twentieth Dynasty

house. Some of the vessels were relatively well preserved, probably found *in situ*. The date of the material is confirmed by the presence of large wine amphorae made of marl D fabric and covered with thin cream slip [Fig. 6:1]. Their elongated body and narrow flat bases are reminiscent features of amphorae from Thebes West but also Qantir (Aston 1998: 518–519, no. 2080; 2004: 195–196, Fig. 11). Large

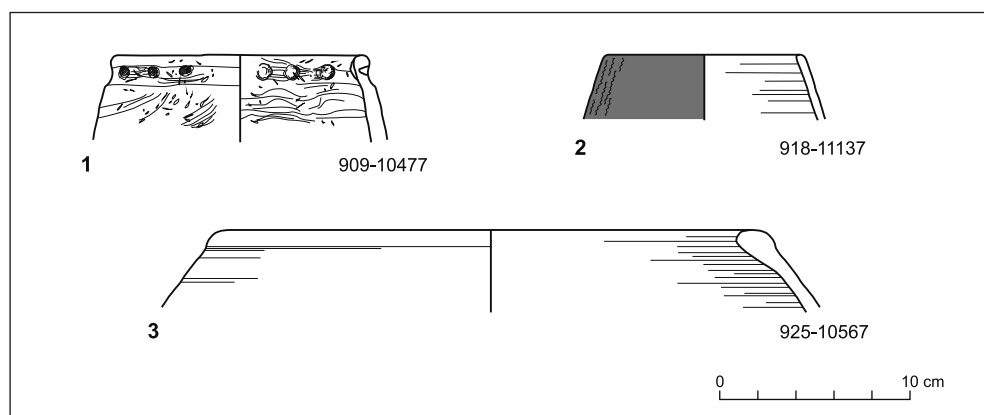


Fig. 5. Selection of Hyksos domestic pottery

pilgrim flasks also made of marl D fabric came from the same phase. One was covered with cream slip and well smoothed. Its rim, neck and handles were red painted [Fig. 6:2]. The second pilgrim flask was almost complete, showing a thickened flaring rim, round body made of two plates

and two handles attached to the vessel between upper part of its neck and upper part of the shoulder [Fig. 6:3].

The assemblage also contained hemispherical cups made of Nile B2 fabric with red painted rims [Fig. 6:4] (Aston 2007: 31, Fig. 21, Nos 41–42).

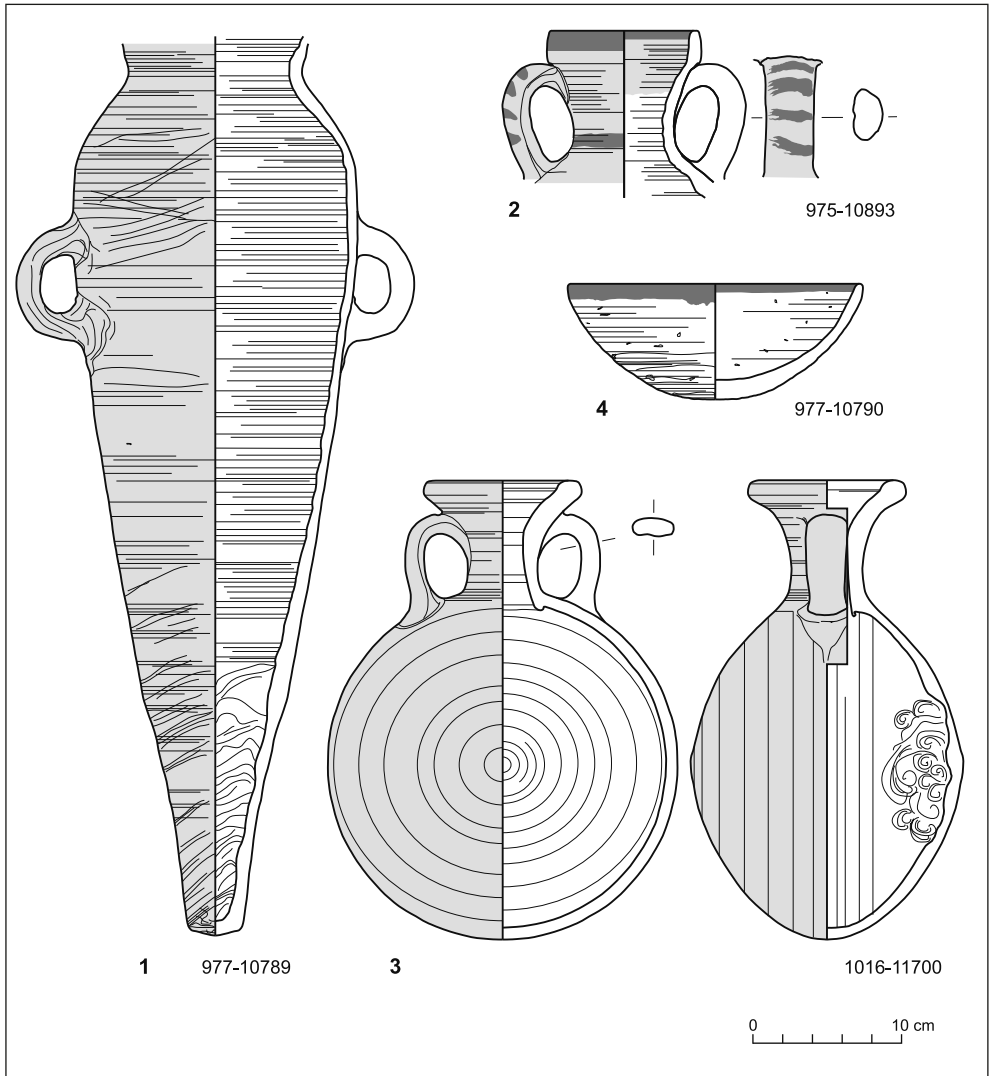


Fig. 6. Selection of Ramesside pottery

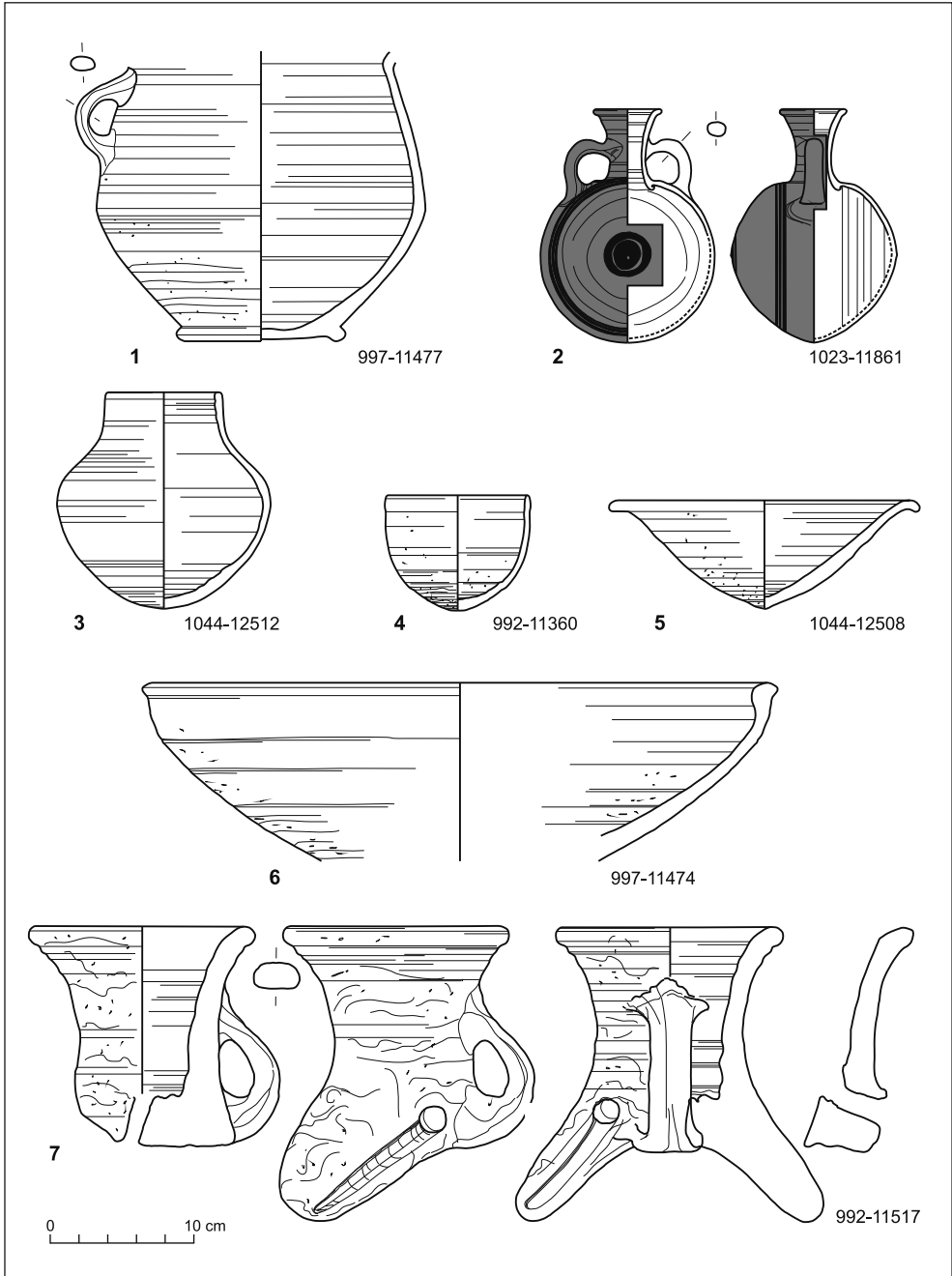


Fig. 7. Selection of pottery from the Third Intermediate Period

The richest ceramic group was recovered from Third Intermediate Period houses. A variety of vessels are typical Twenty-first Dynasty material. The vessels indicate clear domestic use of the structures. Several large fragments of so-called chamber pots [Fig. 7:1] made of Nile B2 fabric were found. Such pots have a broad carinated body, ring base and one small handle attached to their shoulder (see Aston 1998: 550–551, No. 2241). An interesting yellow residue was observed inside the pot. Its character is unfortunately unknown.

Jars with long slightly flaring necks and simple rims made of sandy Nile B2 fabric [see for example Fig. 7:3] were commonly used as cooking pots (Wodzińska 2011: 1034, Fig. 10.1–3; see also Aston 2007: 52, Fig. 45, Nos 520–529). A large percent of the material consisted of cups and bowls. The most common were cups made of sandy Nile B2, with hemispherical body and pointed bases [Fig. 7:4] (Wodzińska 2011: 134, Fig. 9.1–3, see also Aston 2007: Fig. 43, Nos 446–481). Bowls with

flaring walls, recurved rims and pointed bases made of the common sandy Nile B2 fabric [Fig. 7:5] were also very numerous (Wodzińska 2011: 1034, Fig. 9.4–5; see also Aston 2007, Fig. 41). The Third Intermediate Period layers also contained a number of large basins made of coarser NB2 fabric. These have thickened, slightly recurved rims, deep hemispherical bodies [see Fig. 7:6] and ring bases (Wodzińska 2011: 1034, Fig. 9.7). Many fragments of fire dogs, including one almost complete example [Fig. 7:7] (see Wodzińska 2010: 156, Fig. 4; also Aston 1998: 580–581, No. 2384) came from the Third Intermediate Period houses. The Third Intermediate Period material is usually undecorated, however exceptions occur: primarily pilgrim flasks made of very fine Nile B1 fabric. The flasks were covered with red/brownish slip and were well smoothed. Their bodies were commonly black painted with circular patterns, three to five bands [see Fig. 7:2] (see Aston 2007: 55, Fig. 51, Nos 589–590; Rzepka et al. 2009: 273, Pl.1).

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