

Sixth Dynasty shaft deposit from tomb AS 84b

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to discuss a single context from a small mud brick tomb, AS 84b, built immediately south of large wooden boat (AS 80) at Abusir South. This context is exceptional due to the fact that the relatively small Shaft 2 contained a very large number of fully preserved vessels found *in situ* at diverse depths of the shaft, as well as hundreds of additional fragments in the general fill. The vast majority of the pottery belonged to a single type, namely beer jars with a tall slender body with a sharp pointed base (Abusir J-1c). Among them, at least half of the examples exhibited an intentional hole made in the base of the jar. This paper also offers a short typological and morphometric study of these beer jars and an interpretation of the deposit as a whole within our current knowledge of diverse funerary contexts.

KEYWORDS

Abusir – tomb – shaft – pottery – beer jars – deposit – morphometric analysis

وديعة بئر المقبرة AS 84b من الأسرة السادسة

كاترينا أرياس

ملخص

إن الهدف من هذه الورقة هو مناقشة سياق واحد عثر عليه بمقبرة صغيرة (AS 84b) شيدت من الطوب اللبن، تقع إلى الجنوب مباشرة من المركب الخشبي الكبير (AS 80) والذي عثر عليه بجنوب أبو صير. يعتبر هذا السياق استثنائياً نظراً لحقيقة أن البئر رقم 2، الصغيرة نوعاً ما، ضمت عدداً كبيراً من الأواني الفخارية الكاملة والتي عثر عليها محفوظة بالكامل بأعماق مختلفة من البئر، بالإضافة إلى مئات الكسرات الإضافية بالرديم المستخرج من البئر. تعود الغالبية العظمى من الفخار المكتشف إلى نوع واحد من الأواني الفخارية، وهي أواني الجعة ذات البدن الطويل والرفيع، وتتميز بقاعدة مدببة حادة (تصنيف: Abusir J-1c). ويوجد بعدد كبير من الأواني، بلغت على أقل تقدير نصف الأمثلة، ثقب متعمد مصنوع في قاعدة الإناء. تقدم الورقة أيضاً دراسة تصنيفية وشكلية لأواني الجعة المكتشفة، وتفسيراً للوديعة ككل ضمن معرفتنا الحالية بالسياقات الجنائزية المختلفة.

الكلمات الدالة

أبو صير – مقبرة – بئر – فخار – أواني الجعة – ودائع – تحليل شكلي

INTRODUCTION

Small structures AS 84 and AS 84b were discovered in 2015 during the exploration of the area south of the Third Dynasty tomb AS 54. One of the most outstanding features is a 20 m long wooden boat (AS 80; see Bárta 2019) that is associated with this tomb, based on the ceramic sequence from both structures (Arias 2019 and *forthcoming*). Tomb AS 54 can be tentatively dated more precisely to the reign of King Huny, appertaining to an inscribed stone vessel with his name, found in the burial chamber (Bárta 2011; Jirášková 2011). The whole area underwent

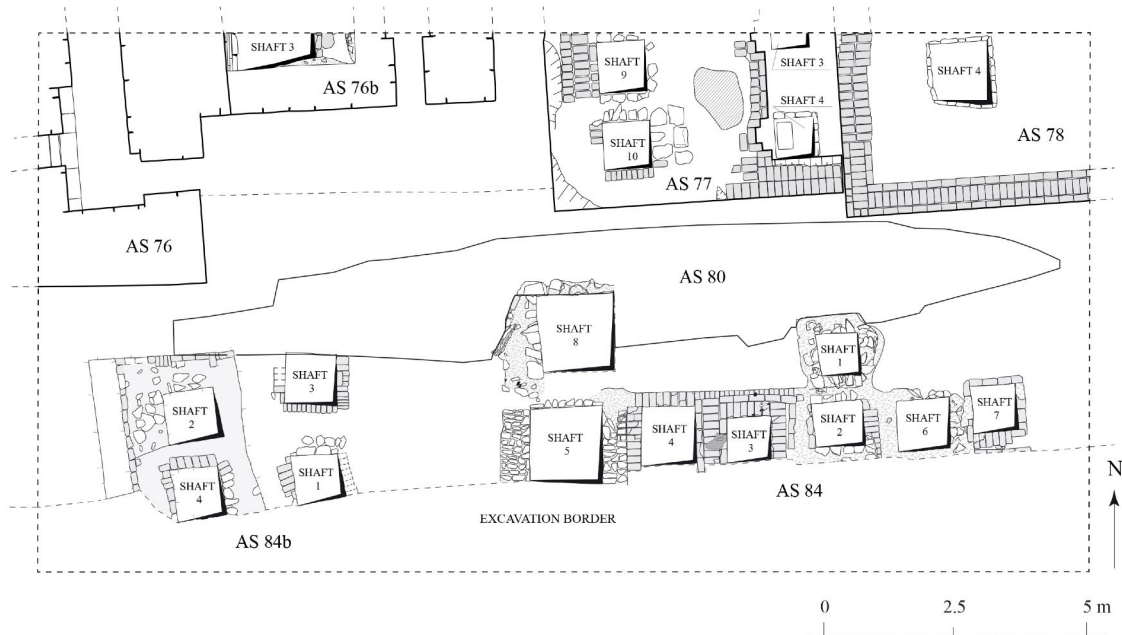


Fig. 1 Plan of the area of the Third Dynasty boat (AS 80) with neighbouring structures, including small anonymous tombs AS 84 and AS 84b (drawing V. Dulíková, L. Jirásková, M. Peterková Hlouchová, L. Vařeková)



Fig. 2 Partially uncovered mud brick tomb AS 84b with four visible shafts (photo V. Dulíková)

significant development during the later Old Kingdom – between AS 54 and AS 80, three mastabas were built during the course of the late Fifth Dynasty (AS 76, AS 77 and AS 78, see Dulíková *et al.* 2017); however, all three of them (and their enlargements AS 76b and AS 78b) respected the layouts of both mastaba AS 54 and the boat (fig. 1).

On the other hand, the boat was partially disturbed by the two small tombs AS 84 and AS 84b, which were built south of it in a later period. Besides pottery, no significant finds were found in these two tombs, and we do not know the names or titles of the owners and the deceased. Both structures were very small and likely irregular, built with mud bricks. Tomb AS 84 was composed of a continuous but irregular line of six shafts south of the boat and two more shafts that were built partially into the boat and which had disturbed it.

Tomb AS 84b is situated at the west edge of boat AS 80. So far, only four shafts have been uncovered, all with rather small diameters and lined only with mud brick (fig. 2). The superstructure is preserved only minimally and includes a northwest corner and a ritual niche exhibiting traces of white-washing and plastering in several layers. It is possible that the tomb continues towards the south, therefore the layout and dimensions of the whole tomb remain unknown at this point.

The ceramic finds from both tombs clearly point to a Sixth Dynasty date – many vessels of identical type were found *in situ* in diverse shafts (see below). This paper concentrates on the interpretation and analysis of one of the larger contexts, namely Shaft 2, which held a homogenous assemblage of pottery and thus belongs among the more interesting examples of a Sixth Dynasty shaft deposit.

SHAFT 2 IN AS 84B

There was a very large amount of pottery (context 9.AS84b.2015), especially given the relatively small size of the shaft. It had a mouth of 0.60 × 0.60 m and reached a depth of 3.80 m (fig. 3). From diverse depths of the shaft, 20 vessels were collected in a few clusters, mostly in complete or almost complete shape and often with a preserved false filling of Nile mud inside (tab. 1). In addition, the shaft brought to light 17 baskets of ceramic fragments of various sizes, from large to relatively small, all with clean breaks without traces of erosion. A total of 69 vessels and an additional 32 rims were drawn from this context.

During the excavation, *in situ* vessels and clusters were assigned letters for easier identification (A to J). During subsequent documentation, all the ceramics from the context were numbered according to the Abusir ceramic system¹ as they were being reconstructed from sherds or available for full analysis. It must be stressed that as such, the vessel numbers do not correspond to the order of their uncovering but to the order of their documentation.

At a depth of 1.30 m from the preserved crown of the shaft, a complete beer jar (vessel A) was discovered lying in a horizontal position roughly in the north-west corner (*ca.* 20 cm from the north wall and 10 cm from the west wall; see fig. 4a). It exhibited an intentional hole made before firing, situated just above its base.

¹ Ceramic numbers from Abusir customarily have the following form: *e.g.* 9-1.AS84b.2015, namely “context number-vessel number.tomb number/year of excavation”.

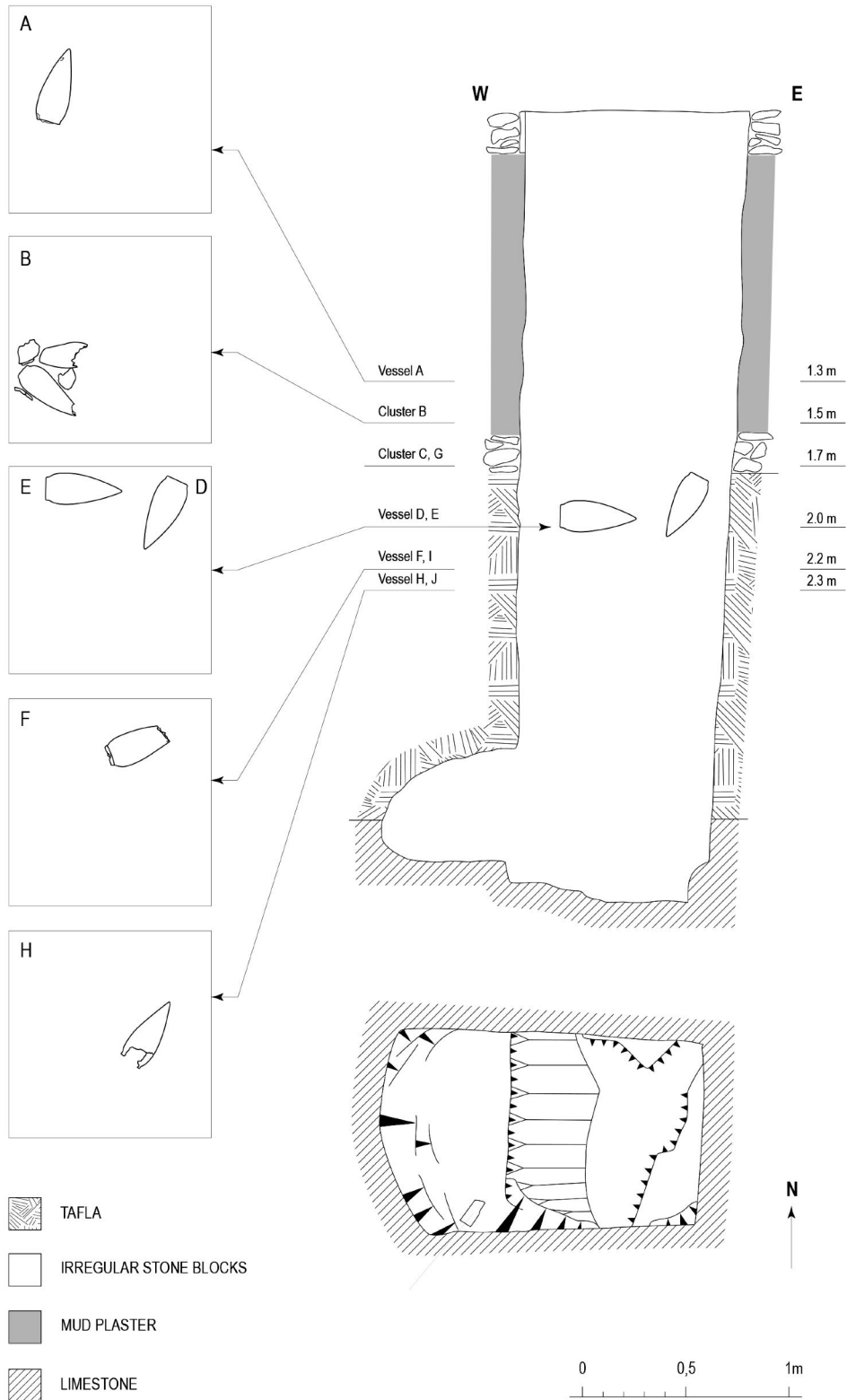


Fig. 3 Profile of Shaft 2 with specifications of the individual ceramic clusters (drawing M. Peterková Hlouchová, L. Vařeková)

Depth	Vessel/Cluster	Ceramic number (Abusir type)
1.30 m	Vessel A	9-6.AS84b.2015 (J-1c)
1.50 m	Cluster B	9-11.AS84b.2015 (J-1c), 9-13.AS84b.2015 (J-1c), 9-21.AS84b.2015 (J-1c)
1.70 m	Cluster C	9-5.AS84b.2015 (J-1c), 9-8.AS84b.2015 (J-1c), 9-23.AS84b.2015 (J-1c), 9-29.AS84b.2015 (J-1c)
1.70–1.80 m	Cluster G	9-1.AS84b.2015 (B-6), 9-12.AS84b.2015 (J-1c), 9-14.AS84b.2015 (J-1c), 9-16.AS84b.2015 (J-1c), 9-19.AS84b.2015 (J-1c)
2.00 m	Vessel D	9-10.AS84b.2015 (J-1c)
2.00 m	Vessel E	9-3.AS84b.2015 (J-1c)
2.20 m	Vessel F	9-17.AS84b.2015 (J-1c)
2.20 m	Vessel I	9-22.AS84b.2015 (J-1c)
2.30 m	Vessel H	9-7.AS84b.2015 (J-1c)
2.30 m	Cluster J	9-4.AS84b.2015 (J-1c), 9-9.AS84b.2015 (J-1c)

Tab. 1 Identification of individual vessels found *in situ* at various depths of Shaft 2 in tomb AS 84b

A small cluster of two complete beer jars and another fragmented one (cluster B, see tab. 1), was uncovered slightly deeper, 1.50 m under the crown of the shaft, in the south-west corner (fig. 4b). All three vessels bore an intentional hole in the lower base and considerable remains of Nile mud filling inside. Additionally, two baskets of ceramic fragments were collected from the level immediately underneath these vessels.

Another concentration was identified at a depth of 1.70 m, with four almost complete beer jars lying horizontally in the shaft (cluster C, see tab. 1). Where enough of the base was preserved, an intentional hole was observed and vessels had remains of mud filling.

Between the depths of 1.70–1.80 m, a further four beer jars were found, mostly in large fragments, in addition to sherds of finer ware preserved in full profile (cluster G, tab. 1). Interestingly, one of the jars (9-19.AS84b.2015) was filled with Nile mud in its lower part and contained a small amount of charcoal and possibly other burned organic matter in its upper part. The finer vessel (9-1.AS84b.2015) was a shallow bowl of type B-6, made of Nile silt B₁, partially covered with a red slip inside and on the outer rim, and additionally, scraped with a relatively hard tool on the outer base.

At a depth of 2 m, two separate beer jars were found – one was standing in an upright position and leaning against the wall of the shaft in the southwest corner (vessel D), while the other (vessel E) was lying horizontally at the northern wall. Both were preserved fully, with a well-articulated false filling of Nile mud, but only the first jar had an intentional hole.

An almost complete beer jar came from a depth of 2.20 m in the shaft, lying horizontally in the north-east corner (vessel F). Slightly lower, a large beer jar base came from a depth of



Fig. 4 Vessel A and cluster B of the ceramic context 9.AS84b.2015 in Shaft 2 of tomb AS 84b, containing *in situ* beer jars (photos V. Dulíková)

2.30 m in the south-east corner (vessel H). The last cluster (J, see tab. 1) consisted of two beer jars from a depth of 2.30 m, both almost complete and the second with an intentional hole and a well-articulated filling of Nile mud.

TYPOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

The pottery from this shaft is surprisingly homogenous from the viewpoint of its typological sequence. By far the most common ceramic group was that of beer jars (Abusir J-1). Despite their large number (almost 100 individual vessels), over 80 were bases or fully reconstructed vessels that belonged to a single type, namely J-1c (see also Arias 2017: fig. 5.2). Its most prominent feature is a very slender body, often with a maximum diameter of only about 12.5–14 cm, and a sharply pointed base (fig. 5). A further 100 diagnostic pieces of rims and larger rim plus shoulder fragments were identical in shape, quality and size to those fully preserved vessels of J-1c type; therefore, they can also be seen as representative of this group.

Altogether 16 beer jars were preserved in full shape or at least in complete profile, enabling a detailed morphometric study. When looking at the height of these vessels, they usually reached between 34 and 36.5 cm, with one outlier each of 33 and 37 cm. The width was even more uniform – the chart clearly shows that most examples had maximum diameters of 13.5–14 cm, with only two examples being slightly wider (chart 1). In one such case, vessel 9-7.AS84b.2015 was highly deformed during drying or firing, thus resulting in an oval rim and body with a maximum diameter of 15 × 12 cm. Its regular width would probably also be around 13.5–14 cm.

By contrast, late Fifth Dynasty ovoid beer jars of type J-1b from diverse contexts (such as the ones from the complex of Princess Sheretnebtu [AS 68], shown in chart 1) often reach 16–18 cm in diameter. The morphometric comparison of J-1c beer jars to other types shows that while they have similar heights to *e.g.*, beer jars of type J-1b (namely 33–36 cm), they always have much slenderer bodies with maximum diameters of most commonly only 13–14 cm. The chart also showcases low tubular beer jars of the Sixth Dynasty (Abusir type J-1g) to emphasise the morphometric differences between these three types.

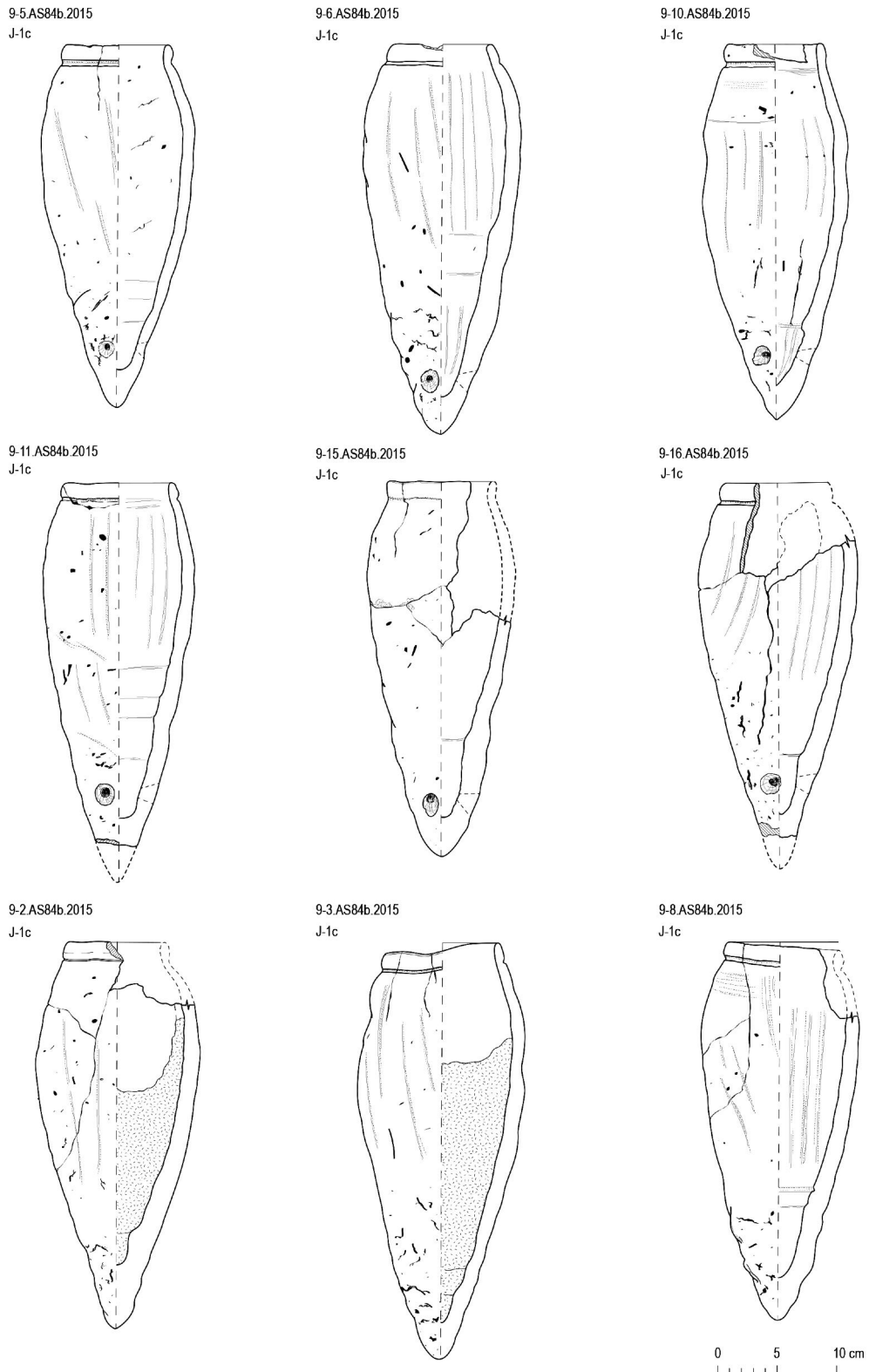


Fig. 5 Selection of beer jars of type J-1c with slender body and pointed base from the deposit in Shaft 2 of AS 84b (drawing K. Arias, L. Vařeková)

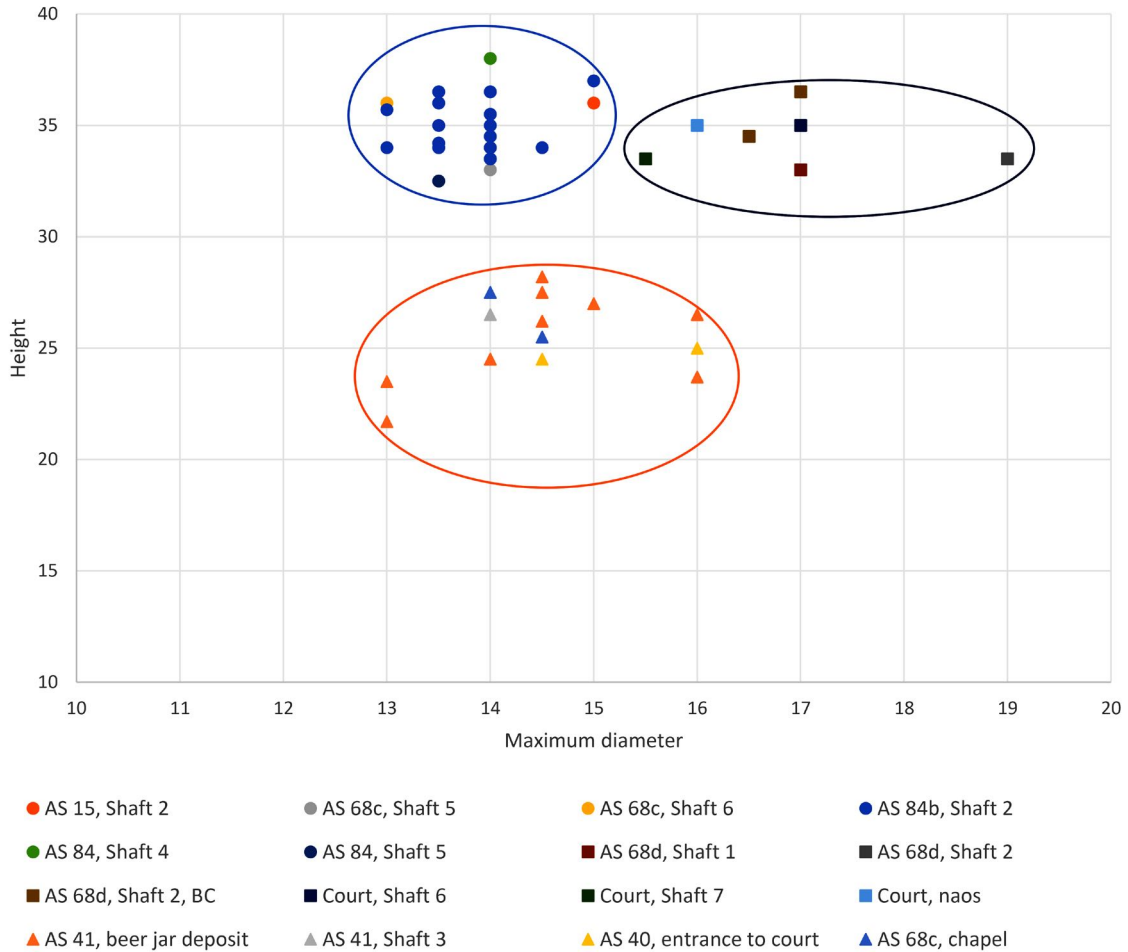


Chart 1 A morphometric comparison between three diverse types of beer jars from Abusir South: Fifth Dynasty ovoid beer jars with a low neck (J-1b: squares), Sixth Dynasty tall slender beer jars (J-1c: dots), and Sixth Dynasty low tubular beer jars (J-1g: triangles). The clear morphometric differentiation between these three types is highlighted in circles

Among vessels of type J-1c, two main forms were identified, based on the shape of the rim, namely vessels with a simple neck (see fig. 5, 9-15.AS84b.2015) and those with a thickened rim, usually underlined with a slight groove (e.g., fig. 5, 9-6.AS84b.2015). Both forms were represented almost equally in this context, and thus it seems that such differentiation is not chronologically significant for the cemetery at Abusir South.

The beer jars of this type were made by hand, in three different parts. The base was usually formed by hollowing and pinching a piece of clay. Subsequently, the body of the jar was built up in individual coils that were later smoothed from the outside, leaving characteristic diagonal or (especially in the case of type J-1c) vertical traces. With many vessels, the joint between the body and base is clearly visible. The rim was added separately, and in some cases may have been turned on a slow wheel (compare also Rzeuska 2006a: 48, pl. 6). As far as the inner surface of the jars is concerned, the most common traces of the shaping techniques consist of horizontal smoothing on the base and vertical smoothing on the middle and upper

body. None of these beer jars had any remnants of additional surface treatment, unlike other types of Sixth Dynasty beer jars.² Most vessels were only roughly wet-smoothed and the very base was left untreated.

With regard to the typological representation, it must be noted that type J-1c is not very frequent in the cemetery of Abusir South, especially when compared with the high occurrences of Fifth Dynasty beer jar types (such as J-1a and J-1b). Still, almost 90 examples have been unearthed in diverse tombs and contexts.

From the complex of Princess Sheretnebtj (AS 68), we uncovered two fully preserved vessels, with a few other fragmented examples. A beer jar from the fill of Shaft 6 in AS 68c (64-1.AS68c.2013, Arias 2017: figs. 3.206–3.207) had a modelled rim and a characteristic tall slender body, with a height of 36 cm. It exhibited the already mentioned intentionally made hole in its lower body and at the same time contained broken remains of the original filling of Nile mud. The second vessel was found broken to pieces in Shaft 5 of tomb AS 68c but was reconstructed to full profile (63-3.AS68c.2013, Arias 2017: fig. 3.201). It was slightly shorter, with a height of 33 cm, and was slightly deformed from being compressed during drying or firing. Besides the two named shafts in AS 68c, sharply pointed bases of this type were also uncovered in the fill of the burial chamber of Shaft 6 in AS 68c and in the chapel of the same tomb. Other contexts include the upper fill in Shaft 3 of the courtyard and the fill of the chapel in the tomb of Shepesuptah (AS 68b).

Type J-1c also appears in almost 20 individual examples in the fill of Shaft 3 in the tomb of Ptahwer (AS 76b, Dulíková *et al.* 2017: fig. 17, third row), in some cases preserved to more than $\frac{3}{4}$ of the profile. All of them had tall bodies with a maximum preserved height of 33 cm and an estimated full height of around 38 cm and very slim maximum body diameters of only around 14 cm. Additional fragmented examples were uncovered in the disturbed area above both Shafts 3 and 4 in the tomb of Ptahwer, as well as in diverse contexts in the tomb of Kaisebi (AS 76, see Dulíková *et al.* 2017: 19–21).

Further documented cases include the unpublished ceramic material from the cemetery at the Lake of Abusir (see also Kytarová 2009: 145–149). There, such tall and slender beer jars were found *e.g.*, in Shaft 2 of tomb AS 15, in the secondary Shaft 2 in tomb AS 11 and at its western wall, close to the secondary shafts. They also bore intentional holes in their bases (Arias 2017: fig. 3.207).

As far as other sites are concerned, this type of beer jar is not very frequent. From the cemetery of Giza, the preserved examples were found in shafts 4082 and 4269 (Junker 1950: 15). At Dahshur, the excavation from the mixed layers at the valley temple of Snofru brought to light at least one such beer jar (Simpson 1961: 110, nos. 2–3). Some other cases may include beer jars that were preserved only partially, judging by the tall and slender shape, *e.g.*, from the late levels of the temple of Menkaure (Reisner 1931: fig. 64, no. 1).

The most significant parallels come from the tombs of Pehenptah and Seshemnefer at Saqqara West (Rzeuska 2006a: pls. 29–30). The majority of these examples came either from ceramic deposits in the superstructure (such as deposit 4/1999) or burial shafts, and a few

2 Some Sixth Dynasty beer jars are red-slipped on the outer walls, especially the low jars with a tubular body and rounded base (type J-1g) and some tall tubular beer jars with a rounded base (type J-1f; Arias 2017: 233–234). Compare similar cases from the Saqqara West cemetery, especially forms 3 and 6 (Rzeuska 2006a: pls. 13–14 and 19–20).

vessels were even part of the funerary equipment in the burial chambers (e.g., the white-washed example in the chamber of Shaft 31 in the tomb of Pehenptah, Rzeuska 2006a: pls. 29, 82). Thanks to the well stratified and epigraphically supported finds from the cemetery, it is possible to delimitate the chronological occurrence of these particular jars to the reign of Pepy II, with a predominance in the first half of his reign (Rzeuska 2006a: pls. 29–30, table 1, form 10), thus providing us with a date for the discussed shafts of tombs AS 84 and AS 84b.

One of the most consistent features of the beer jars from Shaft 2 is the presence of an intentional hole cut into the lower body or base of the beer jar (fig. 6). Such intentional holes are not limited to only this particular type of beer jar. At Abusir, similar holes made before firing were also found in type J-1e with an articulated shoulder (Dulíková *et al.* 2016: obr. 11), also dated to the Sixth Dynasty. At the cemetery of Saqqara West, several beer jar forms could bear intentional holes, but the ones most consistently exhibiting holes were three, namely forms 2, 9 and 10 (Rzeuska 2006a: pls. 11–12, 27–31).

The reason for puncturing the beer jars is still unclear. In all our cases, the holes were made intentionally, perforating the upper base with a small stick from the outside, resulting in a small, raised ring of clay inside, indicating this technique. As a rule, the hole is situated just above the compact base, running through the wall of the vessel (e.g., it was not simply symbolic) – even in cases where the mass of the base is slightly taller, the position of the hole is located higher on the base (see fig. 5). A number of these vessels were subsequently filled with mud, marking their cultic use. The apparent technical contradiction of piercing a vessel and subsequently filling it with a liquid was solved simply by stuffing small pieces of eroded pottery into the hole and around the base before pouring in the mud. However, the primary reason behind this custom still eludes us. At Abusir, while beer jars are the most common vessels that exhibit intentional holes made before firing, they are by no means the only ones.



Fig. 6 Selection of beer jars of type J-1c from Shaft 2 in AS 84b. Note the intentionally made holes in two of these jars (photos K. Arias)



Fig. 7 Detail of the intentional holes made before firing in the lower part of beer jars: vessel 9-9.AS84b.2015 (left) and 9-21.AS84b.2015 (right) (photos K. Arias)

Other, much rarer examples, include bread forms or even finer jars. There is no additional marker that could differentiate these vessels from others – as far as contexts are concerned, most cases come from burial shafts and are often combined with unpierced beer jars. As an example, two beer jars with a hole were found in a small deposit in the superstructure of the anonymous tomb AS 77 (Dulíková *et al.* 2016: obr. 11). Their contents are no different from other offering jars, namely pure Nile mud.

At Saqqara West, some beer jars with intentional holes were found to contain ashes, charcoal and even bones; however, regular beer jars were used for a similar purpose as well. Such vessels were interpreted as containers for the plants and offerings burned in the funerary pyre, based on the paleobotanical analysis of their organic contents (Rzeuska 2006a: 468–480; Rzeuska 2006b). So far, a vast majority of pierced beer jars from Abusir South were filled only with pure Nile mud. It must be stressed that while one of the beer jars from Shaft 2 contained a small number of charcoals inside (9-19.AS84b.2015), these have not been analysed yet. In regard to the presence of the intentional hole, it is possible that such piercing simply served as a ritual killing of the vessels and thus disabled their reuse in everyday life; or it possibly symbolized the destruction of evil forces, represented by the red colour of the jar.³

Another interesting feature was an intact false filling of Nile mud, found in ten of the well-preserved beer jars, and pieces of mud filling were also collected from the surroundings of other fragmented vessels. In some, the filling was well articulated and drawn up almost to the shoulder inside (see fig. 5). In other cases, large broken pieces of well-formed mud bearing the inner shape of the vessel were found inside. The mud used for such a filling was usually sifted and cleaned and can be distinguished from random dirt. Additionally, Abusir shafts were commonly filled with sand and pieces of tafla or limestone (rather than Nile mud), thus

³ The topic of intentional holes made before firing is quite complex and shall be explored in a separate paper.

excluding of the possibility that random shaft debris pervaded into these vessels. Such false filling undoubtedly points to the use of these jars as offering vessels, most likely during the funerary rituals, where it represented beer on a symbolic level. False fillings are very common at Abusir, and we found hundreds of examples from various contexts, including vessels uncovered *in situ* in undisturbed burial chambers from the Fifth Dynasty (*e.g.*, the tomb of priest Neferinpu; Arias Kytarová 2014: figs. 7.10 and 7.17), as well as shafts from the Sixth Dynasty (*e.g.*, Shaft 6 in tomb AS 68c, Arias 2017: figs. 3.206–3.207, 5.2).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The deposit from Shaft 2 in AS 84b can be without any doubt classified as an intentional shaft deposit, given its large number of fully preserved and morphologically homogenous vessels, and extensive number of further fragments of the same type.

Shaft deposits have only relatively recently gained attention as one of the most important archaeological contexts. Although researchers in the past have often noted a large presence of vessels or their fragments in the shafts (especially in Giza, see *e.g.*, Reisner – Smith 1955: 70–71), they considered them accidental debris, thus of minimal scientific value, and only mentioned them in passing. It was only during the very late twentieth century that scholars started to notice certain patterns occurring in the ceramic material coming from the shafts. As an example, the excavations at Balat provided us with very well-documented examples of stratified burial shaft deposits in tombs 2 and 4 in the mastaba of Medunefet (Valloggia 1986: 60 and 157) and in shafts 3000, 5000 and 6000 in the mastaba of Khentika (Castel – Pantalacci – Cherpion 2001: 194–195, 265–266) from the late Sixth Dynasty. One of the ground-breaking works in this respect was the analysis undertaken by Teodozja Rzeuska of the material from the Saqqara West necropolis, including also other previously published structures from neighbouring sites (Rzeuska 2006a: 453–465).

From Abusir, a cemetery that encompasses tombs of almost the whole span of the Old Kingdom, not only social but also diachronic differences in burial shaft deposits have been observed (see Arias 2017: 181–188). As an example, there are a few differences between shaft deposits of the Fifth versus the Sixth Dynasty.

During the Fifth Dynasty, burial shaft deposits are noticeably richer both in the amount of pottery as well as its typological richness and variety. As a rule, high officials and their immediate family members often had dozens up to hundreds of vessels in their shafts, and these usually fall into several main classes. Besides beer jars, which always constitute a large part of the assemblages, there is a high percentage of stands, platters and bowls. In some cases, stands and platters even surpass other ceramic classes by far.⁴ The stands often come in three or four different types, each represented by several examples of almost identical dimensions and general character, supporting the idea they were part of a single make (see *e.g.*, stands from the shafts of Nefer, Neferhathor, Duaptah and Nefermin, discussed below). Given the function of stands, such variability is logical, as diverse stands served as supports for different vessels. Tall biconical stands (Abusir type S-1) were mostly designated for plat-

4 See *e.g.*, Shaft 1 in the anonymous tomb AS 47, with at least 138 individual stands and over 50 platters (Arias Kytarová 2011: 121–123, figs. 19–22 and 25).

ters, forming an offering table (Arias – Smoláriková 2020: fig. 4). In contrast, shorter stands (Abusir types S-5 and S-6) are usually depicted in combination with beer jars or other tall jars (see *e.g.*, Faltings 1998). Platters also usually belong to three or four types, although Abusir P-3 with an inner groove seems to be the most common one. In many cases, although these assemblages were intentionally broken to pieces, several vessels were reconstructed to full shape from the fragments.

Similar rich burial shaft deposits have been found in several tombs of the Fifth Dynasty at Abusir. Among the published ones, the most notable are the assemblages from the shaft of Nefer and the neighbouring one of his wife Neferhathor in AS 68d (Arias Kytarová 2015), each numbering hundreds of vessels. Other examples include the deposit from the shafts of Duaptah and Nefermin in tomb AS 68a (Arias Kytarová 2016) as well as the disturbed and fragmentary assemblage from the shaft of the presumed husband of Princess Sheretnebtu in AS 68c (Arias Kytarová 2018) and only partially published context of Shaft 2 in the tomb of Nefershepes/Wesernefer (AS 67, Arias Kytarová – Havelková – Jirásková *et al.* 2013). The shaft of priest Neferinpu held mostly beer jars, although stands and even bread forms were also present in diverse depths of the shaft (Arias Kytarová 2014). The cemetery in the pyramid field of Abusir provided us with further cases, such as the shaft of Princess Hedjetnebu in AC 19 (Verner – Callender 2002: 89, pl. XXI: Kf2, pl. XXIV: Kf9), Princess Khekeretnebtu in AC 15 (Verner – Callender 2002: 18, pl. II, Bf3) and the yet unpublished examples from the tomb of Queen Khentkaus III.

During the course of the Sixth Dynasty, a prevalence of quantitatively relatively rich but typologically much more limited deposits appears. In several tombs of Abusir South, there were shafts filled almost exclusively with beer jars, such as the discussed Shaft 2 in the anonymous tomb AS 84b. The shaft of judge Inti in AS 22 contained a variety of objects at diverse depths, including beer jars and bread forms, all of them carefully placed rather than simply thrown into the shaft (Bárta 2003: 21–22, fig. 2).

The shafts of the Sixth Dynasty in the cemetery of Saqqara West exhibit similar general features, especially the presence of large amounts of pottery and some animal bones. However, there are also striking differences, as by far the most common ceramic group attested in these shafts is that of beer jars – in a few tombs, the numbers per single shaft can exceed 50 individual vessels. Additionally, some of these beer jars were filled with ashes (Rzeuska 2006a: 468–80), a custom recorded only very rarely at our necropolis thus far (see also above). Following the beer jars, bread baking forms are the most common class from their burial shafts, and in contrast, the classes of stands and platters are present only in very small numbers in the shafts of Saqqara West. These differences could be the result of several factors, one of them being either the diverse social statuses of the owners or the different dates of the structures that they come from (the Fifth versus Sixth Dynasty) and, therefore, the possibility of a slight development in funerary customs.

The function of these shaft deposits was very likely linked to the funerary rituals undertaken on the day of the burial. Besides vessels or their fragments, one of the most common features is also the presence of animal bones in almost all the above-mentioned shafts. Sometimes both animal bones and vessels bear traces of exposure to fire. These deposits were deliberate and consisted of vessels that were used during the burial as temporary offering tables (especially stands and platters) or for presenting various offerings (stands and beer jars

or bowls). It can be theorized that after the burial, these vessels were intentionally destroyed by being thrown into the shaft, thus disabling them both on a practical as well as ritual level.

In conclusion, although tombs AS 84 and AS 84b belonged without any doubt to people of lower social status and the structures did not bring forth traditionally aesthetically pleasing finds, both are nevertheless very important from the point of Egyptian archaeology and our knowledge of non-elite architecture. The exceptionally well-preserved ceramic assemblage from Shaft 2 in AS 84b can be seen as an example of a shaft deposit of the late Sixth Dynasty and adds to our knowledge of not only the material culture, but also the funerary customs of this period.

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