

II. THE EXECRATION PITS

1. EXECRATION PIT LOCUS 1055

Pit 13, execration pit L1055 (Plate Ia), is located in square H/III-s/16, which was cut under wall M1019, 1.75 m east of execration pit L1016 (Plate Ib). It belonged to the transitional phase D/1.2 as does foundation deposit L1057.

It was an oval pit, measuring 40 by 50 cm in section and 15 to 20 cm in depth, containing three skulls, nine fingers, and some pottery sherds (Fig. 6). According to a preliminary report on the human remains presented by the anthropologist of the mission, Karl Großschmidt, skulls No. 1 and No. 3 belonged to two early mature males, and No. 2 to a mature adult. Skull No. 1 lay on its left side looking south-east, while No. 2 was found on its back and No. 3 on its face. One of the skulls has a hole on its right side above the ear, probably resulting from a blow which also appears to have damaged the right temple. Only the fingers belonging to three right hands were found, and no traces of cuts were observed on the fingers. Five fingers were found beside skull No. 1, two beside No. 2 and two beside No. 3.

Some sherds found with these human remains probably served as filling material. These included the body fragment of a drop jar and a sherd of another. Both vessels had a maximum diameter of 17 cm and were made from uncoated Nile B₂ fabric. There was also found the body fragment from a cooking pot in Nile E₂ which belongs to the Middle Bronze Age II B–C tradition.³¹

2. EXECRATION PIT LOCUS 1016

In my opinion, Pit 1, L1016, was an execration pit as well. It lay in square H/III-s/16 (Fig. 4) and had been dug into a layer of ash and humus earth (L1013),

namely, the courtyard surface (ph. D/1.1), southwest of the building from the late Hyksos period citadel (ph. D/2). In the process, the pit cut into the mud-brick pavement M1029. It was oval in shape and had a maximum diameter of 2.20 m north-south by 1.90 m east-west. The pit was 0.45 m deep at the edges and 1.10 m in the middle (Plate Ib). The level of this courtyard was higher than the interior rooms of the palace of the 18th Dynasty.

At the bottom of the pit (Fig. 8 and Plate IIa) were two male skeletons.³² Both had been laid on their stomachs and were found looking south. Skeleton No. 1 on the west side of the pit was an early adult ca. 1.68 m tall. The right arm and hand were raised, but the head and the left arm were missing. Skeleton No. 2, lying parallel to the first one, was complete with the arms extended along the body the face looking east. It belonged to a mature male, 1.70 m tall. No injuries inflicted by an axe, a knife, sword, or spear were observed on either skeleton.

A large quantity of broken pottery (ca. 380 vessels), the small fragment of a limestone relief, part of a limestone *senet* game board, a silex blade,³³ large amounts of limestone fragments (25 dm²), sandstone chips (3 dm²), two fragments of quartzite, a silex fragment, some river pebbles, a bright dark-brown hard stone, the fragment of a mud-brick, and some animal bones were thrown on top of the two bodies (Fig. 7 and Plate IIb).

3. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF EXECRATION PITS LOCUS 1055 AND 1016

By all appearances, both pits preserved complete and partial skeletons of defeated enemies which had been sacrificed and buried in connection with the con-

³¹ From K6637.

³² According to an unpublished report by Karl Großschmidt.

³³ A medial fragment (43.3 × 11.2 × 3.7 mm, weighing 2 gr) lacking any traces of retouch and made from a silex nodule

probably taken from Wadi el-Sheikh; according to an unpublished report by ANDREAS TILLMANN it probably dates to the early 18th Dynasty.

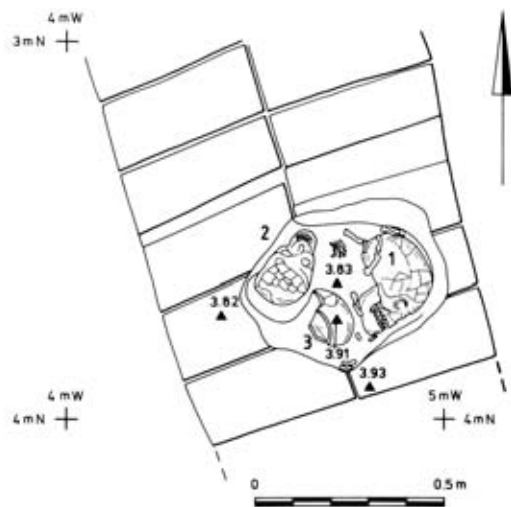


Fig. 6 Execration pit L1055

of official magic meant to serve the state. Being performed within the temples it was used to maintain the established order and consecrate the defeat of the traditional enemies of the solar creator. (...) The heavenly adversaries fighting against the sun god in his barque or the bellicose tribes that threatened Egypt on its borders were thus related in a certain way regarding character and intention. ...³⁵ In the execration rites the figurines and the jars with the names of the enemies written on them were broken. Reliefs from the temples show that wax figurines were used in the performance of the execration rites. The bodies were skewered,³⁶ or pierced by spears and knives, and thrown into the fire.³⁷

In royal hunting scenes, the enemies were also depicted inside a net with birds and fish, represent-

³⁴ The figurines and pots with execration texts from the 6th Dynasty, which were found at Giza and mostly related to Nubians, were published by A.M. ABU BAKR & J. OSING, *Ächtungstexte aus dem Alten Reich*, *MDAIK* 29, 2 (1973), 97–133 and pls. XXXI–LVI; H. JUNKER, *Giza VIII*, Vienna 1947, 30–38 and pls. VIb and VII and J. OSING, *Ächtungstexte aus dem Alten Reich (II)*, *MDAIK* 32 (1976), 133–185 and pls. 40–51. Those from the First Intermediate Period in the Cairo Museum were published by G. POSENER, *Nouvelles listes de prescriptions (Ächtungstexte) datant du Moyen Empire*, *CdE* 14 (1939), 39–41. The individual figurines of the latter group seem to have corresponded to particular Egyptian families, each bearing the names of people that were apparently all related. From the 12th Dynasty we have pottery with texts mentioning princes and peoples of Nubia and Asia, dead Egyptians with rebellion formulae from the Berlin Museum (K. SETHE, *Die Ächtung feindlicher Fürsten, Völker und Dinge auf altägyptischen Tongefäßscherben des Mittleren Reiches*, APAW 1926), and figurines mentioning Nubian princes and countries, Libyans and Egyptians with the rebellion formulae from the Cairo Museum (G. POSENER, *Nouveaux textes hiératiques de proscription*, 313–317, in: *Mélanges syriens offerts à Monsieur René Dussaud*, vol. I, Paris 1939, and *id.*, *fo* et , *ZÄS* 83 [1958], 39); pottery and three figurines from Mirgissa, with texts similar to the Berlin jars (J. VERCOUTTER, *Mirgissa I*, Paris 1970, 12 and fig. 4). From the end of the 12th and beginning of the 13th Dynasties we have figurines from Saqqarah in the Cairo and Brussels Museums (G. POSENER, *Princes et pays d'Asie et de Nubie: textes hiératiques sur des figurines d'envoûtement du Moyen Empire*, Brussels 1940). From the Second Intermediate Period we have figurines from Lisht – now in the Metropolitan Museum of New York and in Cairo – with the names of dead Egyptians (A. LANSING & W.C. HAYES, *The Egyptian Expedition: The Excavations at Lisht*, *BMMA* 28 [1933], 23–24 and 25, fig. 32). Figurines and plaques

from Giza with the representation of prisoners are preserved in the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston (G. POSENER, *Les empreintes magiques de Gizeh et les morts dangereux*, *MDAIK* 16 [1958], 252–270). For the material from the Late Period see the seal-imprints with the image of the dead in POSENER, *op cit.*, *MDAIK* 16 (1958), 252–270 and pls. XXVI–XXVII.

³⁵ “(...) l’envoûtement en Égypte est surtout une technique de la magie officielle, celle qui sert l’État et, dans les temples, est utilisée pour maintenir l’ordre établi et consacrer la défaite des adversaires traditionnels du demiurge solaire. (...) les adversaires célestes qui combattent le soleil en sa barque, ou les tribus belliqueuses qui, aux frontières, peuvent constituer une menace pour l’Égypte, ont donc quelque parenté de nature et d’intention; ...” S. SAUNERON, *Le monde du magicien égyptien*, 46, in: *Le monde du sorcier*, Sources Orientales 7, Paris 1966.

³⁶ This scene is preserved in the temple of Edfu. E. CHASSINAT, *Le temple d’Edfou*. XIII, Cairo 1934, pl. CCCCCLXXX.

³⁷ The formulae for the magical protection of the sun god from the attacks of the storm demon ‘Apep while he is crossing the sky in *The Book of Overthrowing ‘Apep*, preserved in the *Bremner-Rhind Papyrus* (26, 2–4), says: “... To be recited by a man who is pure and clear. Thou shall depict (?) every foe of Re and every foe of Pharaoh, whether dead or alive, and every accused one whom he has in mind, (also) the names of their fathers, their mothers and their children, everyone of them (?), they having been drawn in green ink on a new sheet of papyrus, their names written on their breasts, (these) having been made of wax, and also found with bonds (?) of black thread; they are to be spit upon and (they are) to be trampled with the left foot, felled with the spear and knife and cast on the fire in the melting-furnace of the coppersmiths ...” (R.O. FAULKNER, *The Bremner-Rhind Papyrus*, III, *JEA* 23 [1937], 171; hieratic text in *Urk.* VI).

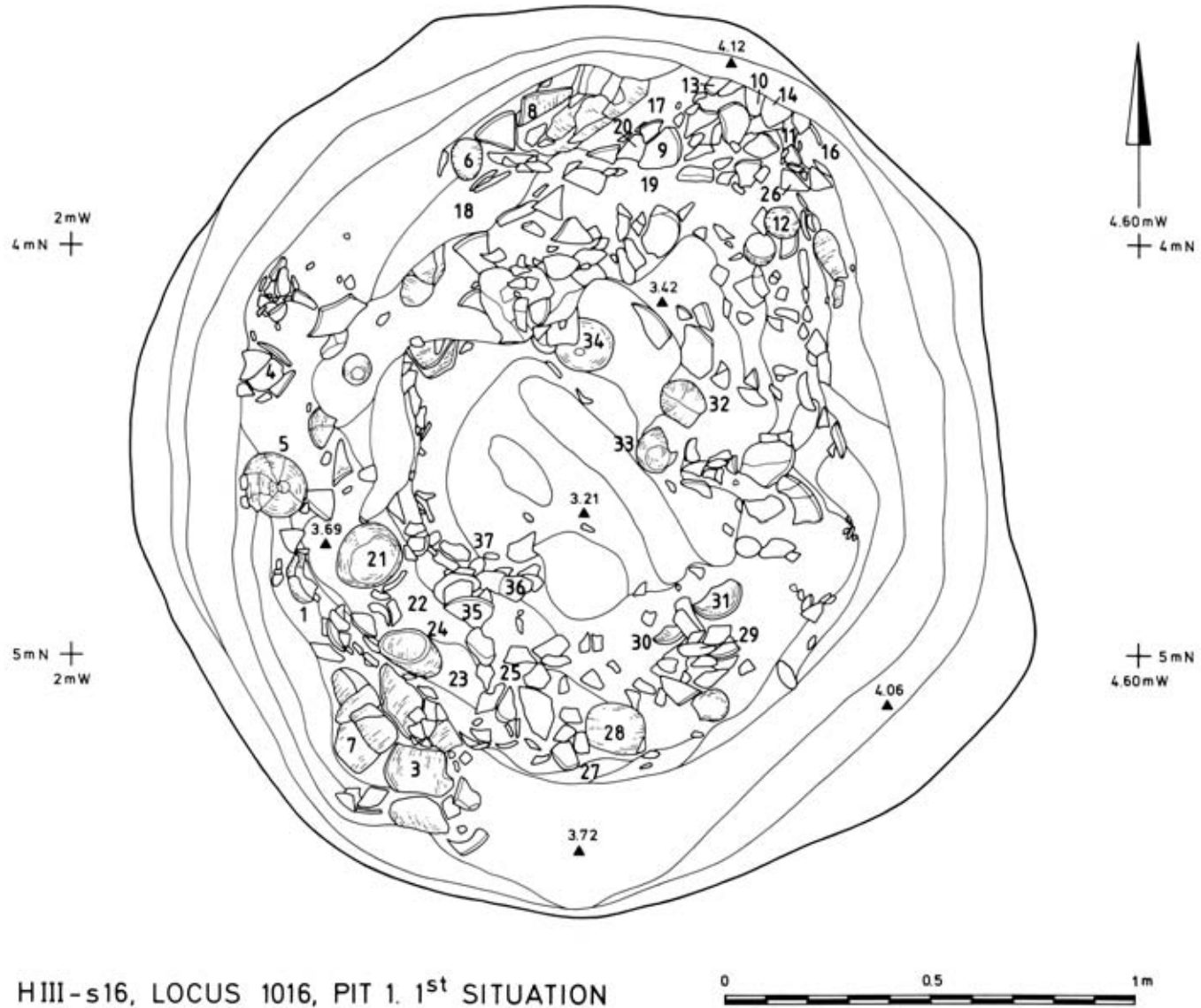


Fig. 7 Execration pit L1016

ing eternal captivity.³⁸ *Papyrus Jumilhac* (XVIII, 9–11) points out with regard to the execration ritual: “... If one does not behead the enemy in front of oneself (which is modelled) in wax, (drawn) on a new papyrus, or (carved) in acacia wood or in *hm3*-wood, according to all ritual prescriptions, then the inhabitants of the desert will rise against Egypt, and

throughout the country war and rebellion will break out. Nobody will obey the king in his palace and the country will be stripped of its defenders; ...”³⁹

There were two types of execration: the destruction of the name and the destruction of the image of the enemy. The destruction of the name written on the jars and on the figurines meant the destruction of

³⁸ M. ALLIOT, *Les rites de la chasse du filet, aux temples de Karnak, d’Edfou et d’Esneh, RdE 5* (1946), 57–118.

³⁹ “... Si on ne décapite pas l’ennemi qu’on a devant soi, (qu’il soit modelé) en cire, (dessiné) sur un papyrus vierge, ou (sculpté) en bois d’acacia ou / en bois de *hm3*, suivant

toutes les prescriptions du rituel, les habitants du désert se révolteront contre l’Égypte, et il se produira la guerre et la rébellion dans le pays tout entier; on n’obéira plus au roi dans son palais, et le pays sera privé de défenseurs. ...” J. VANDIER, *La papyrus Jumilhac*, Paris [1961], 130.

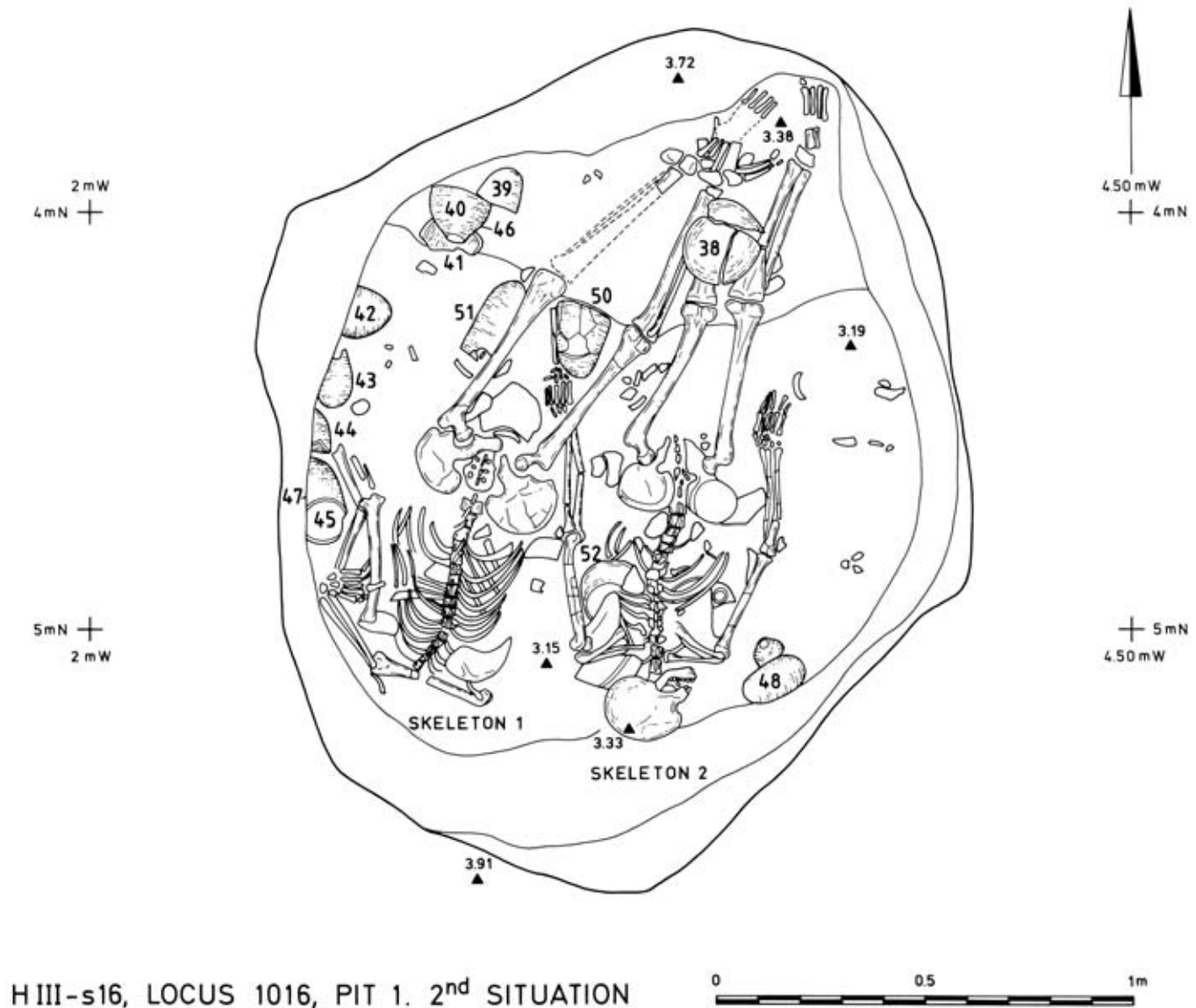


Fig. 8 Execration pit L1016 with the two skeletons

the person who bore that name, which was part of the personality.⁴⁰

Most of the execration texts on figurines and jars are from the Middle Kingdom. The texts from Mirgissa at the Second Cataract belong to this same

period, but are particularly important because most of them were found *in situ* inside two sealed pits in the surrounding desert 800 m north of the Middle Kingdom fortress.⁴¹ The texts⁴² were written on the bodies of three stone statuettes of prisoners, and on

⁴⁰ In the *Juridical Turin Papyrus* and the *Papyri Lee and Rollin* on the harem conspiracy against Ramesses III, the names of the criminals were changed: five of them are common names but deformed, and one has the root of “punish to death”. G. POSENER, *Les criminels débaptisés et les morts sans noms*, *RdE* 5 (1946), 51–56. See also C.J. BLEEKER, *Egyptian Festivals. Enactments of Religious Renewal*. *Studies in the History of Religions* 13, Leiden 1967, *passim*.

⁴¹ J. VERCOUTTER, *Fouilles à Mirgissa (Octobre – Novembre 1962)*, *RdE* 15 (1963), 69–75 and pl. IIA; A. VILA, *Un dépôt de textes d’envoûtement au Moyen Empire*, *Journal des Savants* 153 (1963), 135–160 and figs. 3 and 4. Vila supposes that execration pits similar to those found at Mirgissa might have existed in proximity of other Egyptian fortresses in Nubia.

⁴² G. POSENER, *Les textes d’envoûtement de Mirgissa*, *Syria* 43 (1966), 277–287.

broken pieces of pottery. The statuettes were found buried in the sand, while the pottery had been placed in two pits. One pit lay 11 m south-east of the statuettes. A large amount of broken pottery, around 3,600 fragments from 175 different vessels, had been thrown inside the oval pit, measuring 2.10 m by 1.80 m, and ca. 0.70 m deep.⁴³ Another pit, 4.75 m west-south-west of the first, contained a human skull with no sign of injury, an inscribed broken jar and a fragment of silex.⁴⁴ At Mirgissa, not only human figurines and broken pottery, but figurines of animals and other objects, a flint knife, and human remains – the human skull mentioned above – were buried. This means that an actual human sacrifice could have taken place in the execration ritual.

The two execration pits at Tell el-Dab^ca recall those from Mirgissa. Execration pit L1055 with the three human skulls and fingers of the defeated enemies is similar to the pit with the human skull, possibly of a Nubian, at Mirgissa. Execration pit L1016 with the two human skeletons and broken pottery is equivalent to the three limestone figurines embedded in the sand, and to the pit with the inscribed broken pottery at Mirgissa.

The special feature of execration pit L1016 at Tell el-Dab^ca, in contrast to Mirgissa, is that the stone figurines bearing the names of the defeated enemies were substituted with the actual remains of the defeated enemies, two males, and the uninscribed pottery, which had been broken to destroy the evil forces. This rite must have been part of the ceremonies celebrating the conquest of the city, as well as those commemorating the construction of new buildings. Two actual human sacrifices, one in each ritual pit, that of L1055, then that of L1016, usually substituted by the symbolic destruction of figurines and vessels bearing

the names of the enemies, were here part of the execration ceremony as a destruction ritual.

The *breaking of dšrt-vessels* (*sd dšrwt*) is a ritual of the destruction of pottery.⁴⁵ According to J. van Dijk,⁴⁶ the archaeological evidence on the one hand, and the texts and representations of this ritual on the other, are of different nature. And even though they seem to refer to different rituals, both are related. The archaeological evidence is represented by the figurines of the enemies and fragments of deliberately broken pottery, both of them with execration texts, which are found from the Old Kingdom to the 18th Dynasty.

As noted above, at Tell el-Dab^ca, the stone or clay figurines of the enemies were substituted with actual executed prisoners, a treatment intended for rebels. In the description of an execution in the *Coffin Texts*, Spell 23, it is mentioned that there was a place where the defeated enemies were killed: “... *you shall not be put in the place of execution in which rebels are put, and no sand shall be put on your face*”. ...⁴⁷ The reference to “no sand shall be put on your face” is connected to the fact that some figurines, such as those found at Mirgissa, were embedded in sand.⁴⁸

The rituals of the Late Period mention that the figurines of the enemies were “... fettered, spat on four times, trampled with the left foot, pierced with a spear, cut with a knife, thrown into the fire, spat upon several more times while being in the fire ...” to be completely destroyed,⁴⁹ but no references are made to the *breaking of pottery*. In the human sacrifice of execration pit L1016 at Tell el-Dab^ca, the bodies were neither fettered nor burnt; nor pierced with a spear or cut with a knife. It seems that the pottery was broken on them, and a variety of materials, such as fragments of different kinds of stone and part of a game, were also thrown on the bodies to kill them.

⁴³ VILA, *op. cit.*, 143, fig. 5.

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*, 145, fig. 6.

⁴⁵ There are different forms of breaking the pottery in this ritual: crushing it with a pestle (PT, 249b [M], in: K. SETHE, *Die altägyptische Pyramidentexten*, vol. I, Leipzig 1908, 137, Utterance 244, and R.O. FAULKNER, *The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts*, Oxford 1969, 58; K. SETHE, *Die Ächtung feindlicher Fürsten, Völker und Dinge auf ägyptischen Tongefäßen des Mittleren Reiches*, APAW 1926, 20; *id.*, Zu der Zeremonie des Zerbrechens der roten Töpfe, ZÄS 63 [1928], 101–102; S. SCHOTT, Die Zeremonie des „Zerbrechens der roten Töpfe“, ZÄS 63 [1928], 101), smashing one against the other (H. BRUNNER, *Die südlichen Räume des Tempels von Luxor*, AV 18, Mainz 1977, pl. 16, scene 34/1, in Room

XVII, east wall) or throwing them on the ground, as seen in tomb reliefs (L. BORCHARDT, Bilder des „Zerbrechens der Krüge“, ZÄS 64 [1929], 12–16).

⁴⁶ J.V. DIJK, in: LÄ VI, 1389–1396, s. v. “Zerbrechen der roten Töpfe”.

⁴⁷ A. DE BUCK, *The Egyptian Coffin Texts. I. Texts of Spells 1–75*, OIP 34, Chicago 1935, 71 and R.O. FAULKNER, *The Ancient Egyptian Coffin Texts. Volume I. Spells 1–354*, Warmister 1973, 14.

⁴⁸ J. VERCOUTTER, Fouilles à Mirgissa (Octobre – Novembre 1962), RdE 15 (1963), 69–75.

⁴⁹ S. SCHOTT, *Urkunden mythologischen Inhalts I. Bücher und Sprüche gegen dem Gott Seth*, Leipzig 1921 (= *Urk.* VI), 4 and 5, l. 12–19 (pLouvre 3129 and pBritish Museum 10252).

The texts and reliefs related to the *breaking of dšrt-vessels* are connected with offering rituals. Therefore the scenes are found in tombs from the Old to the New Kingdom, and the *breaking of dšrt-vessels* is mentioned at the end of the funerary offering-list. In his Ka-temple at Luxor, Amenophis III is shown breaking two *dšrt-vessels* in front of the god Amun. The *breaking of dšrt-vessels* could be interpreted as the destruction of the enemies of the deceased. According to J. van Dijk, the destruction of the figurines and the *breaking of dšrt-vessel* at the end of the offering rituals are “variants of one and the same ritual aimed at the destruction of the evil forces lurking beyond the borders of the cosmos”.⁵⁰

We do not know why the Egyptians sacrificed actual enemies at Avaris instead of the usual substitute figurines. The only possibility one could think of is that the Egyptians were particularly angry at them and wanted to express their strong displeasure in this graphic manner. Despite its uniqueness in the history of Egyptian archaeology to date, the ritual of the destruction of pottery, together with the genuine execution of prisoners, could have been part of an execration ritual, tied to ceremonies that celebrated the conquest of the city by Ahmose and the construction of new buildings over the previous Hyksos citadel.

⁵⁰ J.v. DIJK, *op. cit.*, 1393.

