

WASTE, OFFERINGS OR CULTIC DEPOSITIONS? AN INSIGHT INTO THE VARIETIES OF DEPOSITIONAL PRACTICES IN ANCIENT EGYPT

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Abstract: *The article discusses different kinds of depositions in their specific contexts, such as in temples, cemeteries and settlements. In the focus of this paper are depositions consisting mainly of pottery vessels which are much more common than precious objects but which are often more difficult to differentiate from mere waste. Depositions in connection to tombs are especially diverse and reflect rituals in addition to those otherwise known from texts and wall paintings. A case study is dedicated to depositions encountered to the south of the tomb of Djer at Abydos that most probably was arranged during the funeral and which was respected as a sacred place during the whole pharaonic history.*

Keywords: *Abydos/Umm el-Qaab, cemetery deposition, cultic cache, deposition, embalming deposit, pottery, storage pit, temple deposit, waste*

Introduction

The offering of meals and drinks is one of the basic constituents of religious and social interactions with the divine realm – incorporating gods and deceased – as well as with dangerous numina.¹ These offerings are often accompanied by recitation, chanting, dancing, libation or incense fuming and can be extended by the presentation of votive offerings. All these actions can be reconstructed from texts and pictorial sources, and only a part of them leave traces in the archaeological record. We lack, however, information on what happened with the objects after their use in rituals. That objects specifically created for rituals were treated in a distinct manner, is easily conceivable. But what

happened to dishes and other devices for the presentation of offerings? Could they be reused or were they deposited after their first use? In case they were reused, how often could this be repeated – until they broke into pieces? Or were they taken by the priesthood for private use in the course of the offerings' circulation? Were they deposited as mere trash like usual garbage or were they kept in special places due to their function in a sacred context? Of course, not all these questions can be answered by archaeological means. And inscriptions only rarely give any hints to the establishment and (partial) meaning of a cache.² On the other hand, it is interesting to ponder the spectrum of possible interpretations for deposits of objects appearing on first glance as mere trash.

Depositions of waste are still only exceptional in the focus of research in Egypt.³ In general, accumulations of objects, sometimes mixed with animal bones, are only of interest when they seem to be associated with cultic procedures,⁴ such as foundation deposits,⁵ caches of temple objects,⁶ offering pits or embalming deposits.⁷ In contrast to pits filled with refuse, in offering pits pottery vessels are accumulated in the lower part and are in their majority restorable.⁸ In addition, their inventory is almost restricted to table wares and encompasses only small amounts of storage jars supplemented with animal bones and botanical materials.⁹ Furthermore, a distinct group of offering pits consists of miniature vessels.

A special case are storage pits: they share several features with offering pits in consisting in their majority of complete or restorable vessels, but usually the types of vessels are restricted to

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¹ ASSMANN 1984; ASSMANN 1990.

² VERNUS 2016.

³ A rare exception ARNOLD, DO. 2012; ARNOLD, F. 2015.

⁴ MÜLLER 2008.

⁵ WEINSTEIN 1973.

⁶ COULON (ed.) 2016.

⁷ BUDKA 2006; EATON-KRAUSS 2008; DZIOBEK *et al.* 2009; SMOLÁRIKOVÁ 2009; BUDKA 2010, 433–470; ASTON 2011; IKRAM and LÓPEZ-GRANDE 2011; KNOBLAUCH 2016.

⁸ MÜLLER 2008: 23–24; BADER *et al.* 2008.

⁹ For the evaluation of botanical remains found in offering pits see BADER *et al.* 2008.

storage jars.¹⁰ But not only the content defines the character of a pit, most important is its context, as could convincingly be shown by C. Knoblauch in respect to pits found in cemeteries of the Middle Kingdom, which neither correspond to offering or foundation pits, nor the embalming pits from the New Kingdom onwards.¹¹ A main component of these pits are storage jars combined with table ware and miniature vessels as well as some other items, such as chaff, natron, sawdust and incidental flint knives, mud bricks, etc. They seem to represent a distinctive tradition of the deposition of materials used during the embalming process and Knoblauch thus proposes their designation as “Middle Kingdom mummification deposit or Middle Kingdom Embalmer’s Deposit”.¹²

In consequence, the question arises under which circumstances a deposit can be identified as mere garbage, a storage pit or in which cases they can be defined as cultic with certainty.¹³ And even in cases in which a deposit is considered in a cultic context, it is not easy to differentiate between a primary, secondary or a tertiary refuse disposal.¹⁴ In the following, a random selection of depositions in clear cultic contexts is presented which is meant to exemplify the range of possibilities in interpreting different depositions and the difficulties involved with these interpretations. The focus is here mainly laid on depositions with ceramics because these are the most ambiguous contexts to understand.

The paper is divided up into two main sections: the first part is dedicated to an overview of depositions in general, addressing questions on 1) waste deposition in settlements, 2) deposits in temples

and 3) depositions in cemeteries. In a second part, a case study is presented of 4) depositional activities in the royal cemetery at Umm el-Qaab/Abydos.

1. Waste deposition in settlements

Like today, in Ancient Egypt waste was most often delivered in proximity to the living areas, either it was dumped immediately into the floors and courts of house complexes¹⁵ or into the streets separating building complexes, where it intermingled with the unbaked mud of the surrounding area and air-borne dust.¹⁶ The distribution of waste in the floors of houses and courts allows for the reconstruction of the diverse activities performed and thus a reconstruction of use and function in the house complexes as well as social practices, including the deposition of waste.¹⁷ The filling of the streets typically leads to a much faster accumulation of materials in comparison to the land plots around the houses.¹⁸ But also areas inside the houses are cleaned to different degrees, dependent on the way the rooms were used and probably depending on the era they belonged to.¹⁹ Larger amounts of refuse must have been deposited outside of used premises – either in abandoned land plots or in areas beyond the living quarters – because accumulations of household debris are only exceptionally found inside the house complexes.²⁰

As recently pointed out in respect to animal bones deriving from settlement areas, the state of preservation of the bones and the composition of the diversity of animals depends strongly on the function of their place of deposition.²¹ Thus, depo-

¹⁰ The most elaborate storage ‘pits’ were found at Deir el-Medina, BRUYÈRE 1939. Accessible via a staircase, they resemble more our modern cellars than mere storage pits.

¹¹ KNOBLAUCH 2016.

¹² KNOBLAUCH 2016, 350–353.

¹³ SCHIFFER 1985; SCHIFFER 1987, 47–98. In a storage pit from the Old Kingdom at Elephantine one storage jar was used for the deposition of parts of different figurines, see KOPP 2013, 219–220. KOPP interprets this deposition as refuse that should nevertheless be preserved though for no obvious reason; a ritual aspect seems not to be attractive to the excavator.

¹⁴ SCHIFFER 1987, 25–46; PFÄLZNER 2015, 19. For difficulties in identifying the theoretical and experimental procedures of depositions made by SCHIFFER, see VON PILGRIM 1996, 21.

¹⁵ BIETAK 1976, 473–474; VON PILGRIM 1996, 18–22.

¹⁶ See for instance the find places of different small finds in Tell el-Dab’a that are most often found in courts and

streets, PRELL 2015. ARNOLD, F. 2015 points out that streets are usually too narrow for the accumulation of large amounts of waste but were mainly filled with wind-borne dust. Also VON PILGRIM 1996, 219 excludes the deposition of waste in the streets of Elephantine and relates the small sherds and little pieces of charcoal to other depositional activities.

¹⁷ ARNOLD, F. 2015; OTTO 2015; PFÄLZNER 2015; RAINVILLE 2015; SPENCE 2015 and several articles in MÜLLER, M. (ed.) 2015.

¹⁸ VON PILGRIM 1996, 219; FORSTNER-MÜLLER and MICHEL 2015, 26–27.

¹⁹ ARNOLD, Do. 2012; ARNOLD, F. 2015; VON PILGRIM 2016.

²⁰ SCHIFFER 1985; VON PILGRIM 1996, 18–22, 220–221; ARNOLD, Do. 2012; KOPP 2013; ARNOLD, F. 2015, 165; RAUE in press (I thank Dietrich Raue very much for sending me his yet unpublished manuscript).

²¹ KUNST and SALLIARI 2015.

sition in streets and areas with a wide extent of movements contain only a limited amount of animal bones that are usually very small.²² Pits and fillings lead to a much better condition of preservation of animal bones and other items, especially pottery vessels. In this context, the effect of scavenging animals and other decaying processes must be taken into account. Furthermore, each settlement underwent continuous processes of construction activities with the building of foundation trenches, cellars, levelling of the areas, decaying processes, repairs and changes in the architectural layouts that resulted in complex life histories of objects deposited in the layers of earth.²³

Accumulations of complete or reconstructable objects, therefore, ask for an explanation, especially since pre-modern societies tended to reuse materials as extensively as possible.²⁴ While precious materials, such as metals, could easily be remelted, or stone could be redressed to smaller items, the reuse of pottery is much more restricted. Thus, tall jars can be cut back to cups, larger plates to smaller ones, body sherds can be reduced to spindle whorls and loom weights, tokens or gaming pieces, small sherds are found as temper in mud bricks and sherds crushed to grog as temper in pottery vessels. While the breakage and reuse of ceramics allow for many interpretations,²⁵ the findings of complete pottery vessels point either to an event with a ‘Pompeii’-effect²⁶ or have to be attributed with a more symbolic meaning, the more so when they are found in pits not connected directly with house activities. But not each accumulation of objects in pits has automatically to be considered in the context of a cultic procedure, as could be for instance argued by Arnold for such a pit found at Elephantine²⁷ or in the case of storage pits.

2. Depositions in temples

Generally, depositions found in the context of temples are either identified with 1) cultic caches or 2)

hoards and treasure troves respectively. Usually only precious objects are associated with these two groups. While the intention of hiding is most obvious for the second group, this is not as clear for the first group. As demonstrated below, the situation becomes more complex when next to distinct cultic objects (statues, figurines, stelae, etc.) ceramics are considered as well. Only a small part of pottery vessels found in temples are of a distinct cultic function, the majority is also known from daily life. In these cases, only the context refers to the use of these vessels. On the other hand, their daily-life-character only allows for those vessels found in a clear context within the temple compound a direct association with cultic activities. Thus, we are confronted with an arbitrary number and variety of objects that were left in the cultic precincts at any point at which the structures of the sanctuaries were changed or the sanctuaries were abandoned altogether. Then again, ceramics – especially when of daily character – are of much less interest for reuse or theft than more precious materials. The archaeological material will thus allow for some, albeit selective and arbitrary, insights into depositional practices in the contexts of temples not gleaned from texts or depictions.

2.1. Cultic caches

Most prominent are cultic caches consisting of assemblages of statues, statuettes, stelae and furniture, depicting gods, kings and officials, buried beneath the floors of temples, such as those found at Hierakonpolis, Karnak, Luxor and other places in Egypt and Nubia.²⁸ The largest deposits have been found in the open courts of the temples at Karnak and Luxor, additional material was deposited at different places inside the temples, such as along the walls and inside the pylons or beneath the basis for statues.²⁹ Interestingly, only a part of the statues were complete, many others were deliberately decapitated or even smashed to small pieces.

²² KUNST and SALIARI 2015, 92.

²³ BIETAK 1976; SCHIFFER 1985; VON PILGRIM 1996; RAUE in press.

²⁴ For the vast range of use and re-use, see SCHIFFER 1987.

²⁵ See, for instance, the spectrum of interpretations in ARNOLD, DO. 2012.

²⁶ In reality, no situation in archaeology completely preserves an original or systemic inventory, see SCHIFFER 1985; SCHIFFER 1987, 99–120; PFÄLZNER 2015, 42–43; but

see two lucky instances of two well-preserved situations in PFÄLZNER 2015, 37 with p. 43 with points of reservation.

²⁷ ARNOLD, F. 2015, 154–155, n. 7.

²⁸ EL-SAGHIR 1992; GOYON and CARDIN (eds.) 2004; COULON (ed.) 2016; COULON and JAMBON 2016; JAMBON 2016; VALBELLE 2016.

²⁹ For an overview, see VALBELLE 2016 who enumerates further temple deposits in Nubia.

The reason for the depositions is still largely unclear. There is no doubt that temple inventories will continuously have augmented, as each new king, new priest and new official will have dedicated new statues, stelae and further objects to the already existing inventory.³⁰ Thus, measures would have been taken to prevent an overcrowding of installations and the stock list inside the temple complexes. At the same time, a custodial care would have to be guaranteed for the older dedications – especially in a temple complex with such a long history as Karnak. While it is easily conceivable that the recycling of statues, statuettes and stelae was obviated, we have no information on the fate of the furniture, votive objects, dishes and ritual objects that fell out of use in the course of time, either because they were damaged or because they were considered old-fashioned. A considerable part of the former seems to have been deposited in the temple floors, the latter group was either deposited in different ways or had a completely different fate, especially if the objects were produced with materials that could easily be reused, like metals. A good insight into the mass and variety of votive objects deposited can be gleaned from G. Pinch's study on the votive offerings to Hathor that also elucidates the marginal interest excavators of the 19th and the early 20th Dynasty addressed to pottery sherds.³¹ Thus, our main source for reconstructions of rituals performed in temples remain largely restricted to texts and wall depictions.

Interestingly, unique and precious ritual objects from the late 4th and the earlier part of the 3rd millennium BC are attested in provincial temple precincts, such as the sanctuaries at Tell el-Farkha, Tell Ibrahim Awad, Abydos, Hierakonpolis or Elephantine.³² In addition, ceramics of all kinds were recorded in these temple precincts reflecting more

the changed paradigm of research in respect to these objects than a difference in depositional behaviour. Most telling is the pottery deposition excavated at Tell Ibrahim Awad and Elephantine.³³ In Tell Ibrahim Awad pottery vessels were found together with votive objects in several pits belonging to the different phases of the temple that was in use from the late Predynastic period until the Middle Kingdom.³⁴ Most of the ceramics deposited consist of so-called ritual vessels (miniatures, tall pot stands, Hes-vases, etc.).³⁵

More complex is the situation of the sanctuary of Satet at Elephantine. Due to the close incorporation of this sanctuary into the settlement context, which during the Early Dynastic Period and the Old Kingdom was not separated by an enclosing wall, it is rather difficult to separate the normal settlement ceramics from those vessels used during cultic activities in the sanctuary.³⁶ At least in the 3rd millennium BC specific ceramics with ritual functions (libation vessels,³⁷ tall pot stands,³⁸ decorated vessels³⁹) can be discerned, while from the First Intermediate Period onwards differences between vessels used in the households and the temple disappeared.⁴⁰ The different find contexts permit the conclusion that food offerings were directly prepared in the sanctuary's court⁴¹ and in adjacent production centres.⁴² Pottery vessels were found lying on the floor in different areas of the sanctuary's interior, in pits inside and outside the sanctuary, in a pit interpreted as a garbage pit as well as in unbounded depositions of several layers in the floor of the sanctuary and its court.⁴³ Especially the latter contained the mass of votive objects consisting mainly of figurines and beads which are interpreted as secondary refuse disposals to prevent their reuse in a profane context.⁴⁴ It is not cognizable for which reason a part of the ceramics were deposited in pits, while the majority

³⁰ VALBELLE 2016.

³¹ PINCH 1993.

³² BUSSMANN 2010; BUSSMANN 2011. For Tell el-Farkha, see CIAŁOWICZ 2007; CIAŁOWICZ 2011a; CIAŁOWICZ 2011b, CIAŁOWICZ 2012a; CIAŁOWICZ 2012b; for Tell Ibrahim Awad, see VAN HAARLEM 2009; for a compilation of the deposits of Abydos, Hierakonpolis and Elephantine, see DREYER 1986. For an alternative interpretation on the context and meaning of the 'main deposit' at Hierakonpolis, see McNAMARA 2008.

³³ VAN HAARLEM 2009; RAUE 2015.

³⁴ VAN HAARLEM 2009.

³⁵ EIGNER 2000.

³⁶ RAUE 2015, 155.

³⁷ RAUE 2015, 170–173, detects an intentional reference and orientation at the Predynastic cultic sphere for the red libation vessels with black upper parts during the 2nd and 3rd Dynasties.

³⁸ According to a proposition of S.J. SEIDLMEYER referred to in BUSSMANN 2010, 144, the tall pot stands seem to substitute altars. For their use and meaning in the temple cult, see RAUE 2015, 164–167.

³⁹ For their ritual interpretation, see RAUE 2015, 170–174.

⁴⁰ RAUE in press.

⁴¹ DREYER 1986, 12, 16, n. 4; RAUE 2015, 155, n. 9.

⁴² RAUE in press.

⁴³ DREYER 1986; BUSSMANN 2010; RAUE 2015.

⁴⁴ DREYER 1986, 59–60.

was just dumped on the floors inside and outside of the sanctuary. The state of preservation of some votive offerings reveal that parts of them must have been deposited outside of the sanctuary and from the site's history it is obvious that some objects were collected from time to time and deposited in pits – sometimes even several times as time passed.⁴⁵

Interestingly, these dumps of ceramic objects used for temple cults were used as large foundation fillings for the building of the settlement's enclosing wall and for the levelling of the area to the settlement levels that had grown much faster than the sanctuary at Elephantine.⁴⁶ That the filling material most probably originates from supplies used in the sanctuary can be concluded from the high percentage of ritual vessels enclosed in these packages.⁴⁷ Their reuse points to a conception of these dumps as mere garbage – at least for the builders of the enclosure at the end of the Old Kingdom. It can only be speculated if this conception was already valid after their primary use, as especially bread moulds and beer jars would regularly have to be substituted due to their fragility. The tall pot stands and libation vessels also usually have only a limited life-span if used frequently,⁴⁸ while objects donated as votive offerings might have been displayed for some time until they had to be disposed of due to place restrictions. The fact that the ceramics were not dumped in great distance to its use might hint at a certain inherent sacredness due to their use in the sanctuary. It is, however, also conceivable that we are confronted with a rather intensive offering cult in the course of which the majority of broken vessels was indeed dumped in greater distance and that only a few left-overs have continuously piled up over the centuries.

As demonstrated above, an interesting issue is the combination of objects deposited: one part can definitely be identified as cultic (like statues, stelae, ritual objects, ritual vessels or votive offerings), another part is, however, used in daily life as well, such as the majority of pottery vessels (beer jars, bread moulds, bowls and storage jars) or beads. Only objects deposited in pits or sealed by

new floors would be considered as caches, although they do not differ from items found loosely spread on the floors or outside of the sanctuary in dumps. Was there a difference in conception of items deposited in pits, loose depositions on floors or objects dumped outside of the sanctuary? Does the type of deposition allow a reconstruction of the sacred value attributed to the items? And is a dump always a dump or are there differences in the concept of waste deriving from ritual activities or daily use?

2.2. *Treasure troves*

The deposition of precious items in non-specific places are usually considered as treasure troves or hoards, in the sense of true hiding places. Hoards consisting of coins are mainly known from the Ptolemaic period,⁴⁹ while a limited number of treasure troves with a diversity of precious objects were found in the pre-Ptolemaic period. One of the earliest is the treasure trove discovered in the settlement on the Eastern Kom at Tell el-Farkha, in all probability dating to the late Predynastic period (Naqada IIIB).⁵⁰ It consisted of two golden figurines, 382 beads covering the larger figurine, and two bifacial flint knives that laid along the northern wall close to the north-eastern corner of a small room which opened towards the south. The excavators conclude that “the poor archaeological context suggests that the objects were to be hidden there only temporarily, and it was not their place of destination.”⁵¹ It is surmised that the treasure was originally positioned in one of the cultic shrines erected on the Western Kom and moved to its find spot in a period of unrest most probably for safety reasons.⁵² The find spot is reminiscent of some of the depositions discovered in the Karnak⁵³ complex, except that the building at Tell el-Farkha seems to be of a non-sacred nature.

Another famous treasure trove was found intentionally buried in the foundation sand beneath the floor in the temple of Sesostris I at Tod, consisting of four boxes made of copper filled with 153 folded vessels made of silver, a few gold items, ingots, chains and fragments of lapis lazuli

⁴⁵ KOPP 2013, 314.

⁴⁶ DREYER 1986, 11–23; KOPP 2013.

⁴⁷ RAUE in press; KOPP 2013.

⁴⁸ Especially the latter show in their majority strong use-wear, see RAUE 2015, 162.

⁴⁹ FAUCHER *et al.* 2017.

⁵⁰ CHŁODNICKI and CIAŁOWICZ 2007; CHŁODNICKI 2012, 23–24; CIAŁOWICZ 2012a.

⁵¹ CHŁODNICKI 2012, 24; CIAŁOWICZ 2012a, 201–206.

⁵² CIAŁOWICZ 2012a, 205–206.

⁵³ VALBELLE 2016, 23–24.

and silver.⁵⁴ The boxes were inscribed with the name of Amenemhet II, Sesostri's I son. The vessel shapes are reminiscent of ceramics found from the late 3rd and early 2nd millennium BC in Minoan Crete, Southern Anatolia and Lebanon, but their craftsmanship is poor and the vessels' walls are very thin so that their practical use can be excluded. Parallels for the items of lapis lazuli (cylinder seals, beads and amulets) are found in the same period in a range from Southern Anatolia to Iran and Mesopotamia. There is no question about the foreign origin of these items, but until now it was not possible to reconstruct their histories of life. It is speculated that they were taxes or diplomatic exchange gifts, either received as tributes of the respective countries or assembled from different parts in Egypt as presents for the temple.⁵⁵ It is interesting to note that their value seems to lie more in their material than in the objects themselves, as their thinness prevents their serious use. The vessels' shapes are immediately recognisable as foreign – as is the material silver – which might have fulfilled its purpose even if they were not usable in a common sense. More obvious is a value based purely on its material with the foreign cylinder seals, fragments of lapis lazuli and silver and the ingots.

While there is no doubt that these treasures were deposited to be hidden, the context in which this happened is not so clear. An identification as a foundation deposit can be excluded because the deposit's content does not correspond to a foundation deposit. The basic constituents of foundation deposits are model vessels, mudbricks, a bull's head and haunch as well as a grinding stone that can be supplemented by labels and model tools.⁵⁶ In addition, the inscription of the boxes holding the treasure names the son of the founder of this temple. Foundation deposits are an important part of the foundation rituals performed in the process of the primary erection of a building and are thus by definition arranged at the beginning of a build-

ing – and not a generation later.⁵⁷ The find position of these boxes beneath the floor can, therefore, not be interpreted in the sense of founding ceremonies of this sanctuary but instead suggests a hidden trove. On the reason for the hiding of these objects can only be speculated. In burying the boxes under the temple floor, a use of the items was definitely prevented. A dedication to the temple god would thus be given in its most complete sense. In this case, the hiding place would be expected in the main sanctuary. Perhaps a plundering of this treasure should be prevented? Or a thief had hidden this treasure and did not find the opportunity to retrieve it?

3. Ceramic Deposits in cemeteries

Similar to the cult in temples, the presentation of meals and drinks embedded in recitations and diverse ritual actions builds the main constituent of the offering cults at tombs.⁵⁸ A great diversity of rituals were performed during the funeral,⁵⁹ only a few of which left archaeological signs at the tombs while most of them can only be gleaned from texts and depictions.⁶⁰ In recent years a diversity of ritual activities at tombs could be reconstructed that partly reflect rituals known from texts and/or wall paintings. Others had not been known until their archaeological discoveries, such as rituals performed during the closing of more complex tombs.

3.1. Depositions during the funeral

It seems that next to personal items, protection amulets, items for the purification of the body and natural provisions designated for eternity some objects have been used for offering rituals performed inside the subterranean tomb during the funeral, corresponding to the offering rituals depicted on the tomb walls above ground.⁶¹ This impression is substantiated by finds such as in the undisturbed tomb chamber of shaft tomb S 309/316 in the western cemetery of Giza dating

⁵⁴ BISSON DE LA ROQUE 1953; MENU 1994; PIERRAT 1994; CASANOVA *et al.* 2015.

⁵⁵ MENU 1994; PIERRAT 1994; CASANOVA *et al.* 2015.

⁵⁶ WEINSTEIN 1973, LXIX.

⁵⁷ WEINSTEIN 1973, 1–16.

⁵⁸ ASSMANN 1984.

⁵⁹ SETTGAST 1963; ALTENMÜLLER 1972; ASSMANN 2001.

⁶⁰ For a comprehensive compilation of the diverse stages of ritual activities and the finds that can be attributed to the funeral in the Old Kingdom, see RZEUSKA 2006, 428–515.

For other periods, see ALEXANIAN 1998; ALEXANIAN 1999, 168–169; ALEXANIAN 2003; SEILER 2005; MÜLLER 2008, 352–366; BUDKA 2010. That only parts of the rituals performed during the funeral have been transferred to tomb walls can be gathered from papyrus Ramesseum E of the Middle Kingdom, which was unfortunately much damaged, GARDINER 1955; HELCK 1981.

⁶¹ JUNKER 1944, 56; RZEUSKA 2006, 434–443; ALEXANIAN 2013a, 145–146.

to the 6th Dynasty.⁶² In front of the eastern side of the wooden sarcophagus lay an arrangement of different objects referring to rituals enumerated in the offering list, such as model vessels made of calcite-alabaster in the northern part of the deposition, symbolising the seven oils. These are followed to the south by a set of ewer and basin for the purification ritual that marks the beginning of the presentation of food and drinks, together with an offering table on which models of bread had been positioned. This group was followed by a set of animal bones of beef, goose, ducks and doves which were surrounded by a large group of miniature vessels made of calcite-alabaster, symbolising the foods and drinks mentioned in the offering list.

3.2. *Depositions at the closing of the tomb*

At the same time, some rituals are only attested in archaeological remains and were not depicted on tomb walls or referred to in texts.⁶³ To these belong, for instance, rituals performed at the stage of the closing of the burial chamber in large mastabas, at which diverse objects (bones of sacrificial animals, miniature bowls, a few other pottery types, many of which containing white mortar, censers, flint tools and shells) were deposited at the bottoms of tomb shafts, hinting at closing and purification rituals including the painting of the blocked entrance with white colour.⁶⁴

An interesting observation could be made in one of the early 18th Dynasty tombs at Dra Abu el-Naga/Theban North: at the bottom of shaft tomb K 91.7, next to the entrance, two storage vessels contained the fragments of six bowls that obviously had been destructed by a stone that together with burnt organic materials was deposited inside the jars.⁶⁵ Here ‘trash’ created during a ritual “breaking of vessels” was carefully collected and stored in vessels which themselves were buried inside the tomb. This ritual was most probably also performed in the course of the tomb’s closing and is thus reminiscent of rituals observed in Old Kingdom mastabas.

3.3. *Depositions in burial shafts*

Additional rituals were performed during the filling of the burial shafts.⁶⁶ These contexts are more difficult to identify because in most cases the tombs had been looted and materials from the subterranean tomb chambers were mixed with those in the shafts and even around the shafts’ mouths.⁶⁷ Only rarely tomb shafts were found undisturbed, but in cases of large shafts tomb robbers made a second, much smaller hole just large enough for reaching the burial chamber. Deposits inside the shaft are usually encountered in its lower part, consisting of a variety of pottery vessels, mainly bread moulds, beer jars and trays, extended by bowls, cooking pots and luxury ware. Especially bread and beer are the basic offerings mentioned in the offering lists.⁶⁸ Included in these ceremonies were the burning of parts of the offerings, mainly fruits and grain, which together with the ash were deposited in some of the beer jars, while many others were filled with mud.⁶⁹ But also animal bones – mainly bull –, palettes or bundles of reed and mats have been detected in these deposits. A specialty of burial shaft deposits consists of niches cut into the shaft, most probably especially for the deposition of offerings – this custom was, however, restricted to the 4th and 5th Dynasties and disappeared with the 6th Dynasty.⁷⁰ Since T. Rzeuska’s propositions, burial shaft deposits have also been identified in the Old Kingdom cemetery at Abusir.⁷¹

3.4. *Depositions in “false” shafts*

Further deposits were found in so-called “false” shafts, i.e. shafts that did not end in a burial chamber but were only 1–2 m deep.⁷² Like the burial shafts, they were cut from the top of the superstructures and were usually situated to the south or south-west of the burial shafts. These shafts, and particularly their content, have for the longest time been ignored or misinterpreted and only recently received attention by T. Rzeuska. The deposits in

⁶² JUNKER 1944, 45–61, Abb. 16–25, pls. XI–XII; ALEXANIAN 2013a, 144–145;

⁶³ ALEXANIAN 2013a, 142.

⁶⁴ ALEXANIAN and SEIDLMAYER 2002, 14–15; RZEUSKA 2006, 444–452; ALEXANIAN 2013a; 1998, 11–16.

⁶⁵ POLZ 1992, 237; SEILER 1995, 196–197.

⁶⁶ SEILER 1995, 186; RZEUSKA 2006, 453–492; ALEXANIAN 2013a, 146–150.

⁶⁷ RZEUSKA 2006, 429, 454.

⁶⁸ BARTA 1963; LAPP 1986; RZEUSKA 2006, 468, 485; MÜLLER 2008, 352.

⁶⁹ RZEUSKA 2006, 468–480.

⁷⁰ RZEUSKA 2006, 485.

⁷¹ ARIAS KYTNAROVÁ 2014.

⁷² RZEUSKA 2006, 492–512; ALEXANIAN 2013a; 148–149.

these shafts also consist mainly of pottery vessels. In contrast to the burial shaft deposits, the assemblages in the “false” shafts consist in their majority of red bowls and plates of high quality (“table ware”) combined with other items, such as textiles, wooden boxes, miniature beer jars made of mud, shells, flint tools, animal bones as well as occasionally charcoal and organic remains. All the ceramics seem to have been intentionally broken, hinting at the ritual of “breaking of the red vessels” as the final act of the ritual of offerings.⁷³ Other materials might have been used during the funeral ceremonies and the mummification.⁷⁴

3.5. *Depositions in or at the tomb’s superstructure*

In the Old Kingdom depositions of model bowls, tall pot stands, beer jars, bowls and bread moulds could in many cases be observed on the east side of tombs or – if available – in front of the niche with the false door.⁷⁵ An interesting differentiation of these pottery types was proposed by T. Rzeuska, who concludes from the large numbers and the vessels’ quality that roughly made beer jars and bread moulds most probably were only used once and discarded immediately in the tomb’s vicinity.⁷⁶ Therefore, she designates this group as “offering pottery” in contrast to “cult pottery” which was much more thoroughly made and was mostly red polished. While offering pottery was produced in large amounts, cult pottery is limited in numbers but encompasses a larger diversity of shapes, such as pot stands, bowls, dishes and ewers or miniature vessels. Time and again pieces of this latter group were found in cult chapels of elite tombs or in front of cult niches and seem to have only been replaced in the case of damage after a longer period of use.⁷⁷

Depositions comparable to those found at Saqqara were also found in the following periods in front of cultic niches and in the tombs’ surroundings.⁷⁸ An interesting case is the lower

necropolis at Dra Abu el-Naga/Theban North, dating to the early 18th Dynasty.⁷⁹ The superstructure of these tombs consists of a vaulted chapel in the west, a trapezoidal court and a pylon on the eastern side made of unbaked mudbricks; in the middle of the court a burial shaft leads to usually two subterranean chambers – an architectural layout otherwise only attested at Abydos in the Middle Kingdom and the Second Intermediate Period.⁸⁰ In some of the generally only poorly preserved tombs complete ceramic vessel could be found close to the shaft mouth⁸¹ and discarded depositions of pottery vessels have been found outside of the walls close to the chapel.⁸² Similar circumstances could be detected in some other Theban tombs and, for instance, in Fadrus in Nubia.⁸³ Dumps of discarded pottery vessels were also encountered in the vicinity of pyramid temples, either as a result of cults performed for the deceased king⁸⁴ or of the provisioning of priests involved in these cults.⁸⁵

An interesting feature in this respect is the fact that pottery vessels used in the worship of deceased people seem to have been discarded in their majority, either in the tomb’s immediate vicinity or beyond enclosure walls.⁸⁶ From a certain point onwards, these vessels were obviously considered as trash. But the fact that still large numbers could be found in the excavations document that this kind of trash was not considered as disturbing. On the contrary, the depositions might have been considered as an integral part of the offering procedures. Parts of these depositions seem to have been only discarded when space for more material was needed. Was discarded pottery considered as symbol of a living cult and thus not immediately removed from the spot? At the same time, other assemblages of pottery were collected and deposited in pits or shafts.

In Upper Egypt, a further group of depositions could be observed: framing the entrance of rock-cut tombs of the late Old Kingdom at Qubbet el-Hawa in Aswan as well as in the royal necropolis

⁷³ RZEUSKA 2006, 509; cf. MÜLLER 2008, 360–362.

⁷⁴ RZEUSKA 2006, 509; ALEXANIAN 2013a, 149; KNOBLAUCH 2016.

⁷⁵ See a compilation in RAUE 1993; MÜLLER 2008, 355–356;

⁷⁶ RZEUSKA 2006, 512–513.

⁷⁷ RZEUSKA 2006, 513.

⁷⁸ MÜLLER 2008, 356–357; BUDKA 2010.

⁷⁹ POLZ 1992.

⁸⁰ POLZ 1992, 122–123.

⁸¹ SEILER 1995, 195–196.

⁸² POLZ 1992, 123; SEILER in POLZ 1992, 127; POLZ 1993, 235–236; SEILER 1995, 193–195.

⁸³ See the parallels cited in SEILER 1995, 194–196.

⁸⁴ WEGNER 2007, 253–285; ALLEN 2014, 88 (I would like to thank Bettina Bader for this reference).

⁸⁵ ARNOLD, Do. 2012.

⁸⁶ As for instance at mastabas of the early Old Kingdom at El Kab (QUIBELL 1898; SAYCE and CLARKE 1905) or at tombs of the First Intermediate Period at el-Ashmunein/Hermopolis (SPENCER 1992).

of the 11th Dynasty at el-Tarif in Thebes substantial staples of pottery vessels were encountered.⁸⁷ The vessel shapes seem to encompass all varieties separated by Rzeuska in two groups, all kinds of open and closed vessels, including beer jars as well as incense bowls. Interestingly, at both places one open vessel was filled with mud and was obviously used as Osiris-bed, thus reflecting a ritual developed only at the end of the Old Kingdom. At least for the preserved group of vessels the keeping of complete vessels in the tombs' immediate vicinity seems to have been at stake. It is well possible that these specific vessels symbolised rituals different from those relating to the offering cult encountered at Saqqara and other places, which seem more likely to represent relics of the daily cult or of necropolis festivals.

4. Case study: cultic activities in the royal cemetery at Umm el-Qaab/Abydos

4.1. Depositions during the reign of Djer outside his tomb

A further special case of depositions was encountered in the royal necropolis of the Early Dynastic Period at Umm el-Qaab/Abydos in the course of the recent excavation of the German Archaeological Institute Cairo.⁸⁸ The open area (Fig. 1) between the tombs of the kings Djer, Wadj and Den – all dating to the first half of the 1st Dynasty – was covered with accurately arranged pottery vessels and selected other items. One deposition (Fig. 1: T-O-K/T-OO-K) was uncovered at a distance of only 3 m to the stairway of Den's tomb that leads from the east to the burial chamber (Fig. 2). The deposition extended c. 26 m in a local west-east direction and from c. 3 m up to 14 m in a north-south direction. The area to the north and to the west of this deposition was unfortunately severely destroyed by the excavations of E. Naville in 1908–1910 who was looking for further royal tombs.⁸⁹ An extension to the north is, however, fairly likely, especially since all objects of this deposition date to the reign of Djer (see below). A

second deposition (Fig. 1: T-SO-K) was encountered at a distance of c. 12–15 m to the south of the first one in an area covering c. 23 m in west-east and c. 6 m in north-south direction (Fig. 3). And a third one (Fig. 1: T-SOO-K) was found c. 7 m to the east of the latter in an extension of 8 m in west-east and 1–2 m in north-south direction (Fig. 4).⁹⁰ The first one is separated from the two latter by a bent depression that served as approach to the tomb of Den (Fig. 1) and is situated 40 cm to 1.80 m below the area with the depositions. This approach certainly developed during the transport of the large granite slabs that covered the floor of Den's burial chamber. It was not yet possible to clarify if the approach had destroyed some of the depositions or if the depositions in the southern part are later than those in the north.⁹¹ It is, however, striking that the bend of this approach is reflected in the architectural layout of the stairway's southern wing, which might regard the southern depositions.

Further depositions have been encountered by Naville's excavations at different locations in the area to the east of the depositions T-O-K/T-OO-K and to the north of T-SOO-K that were described as "pockets of coarse pottery having an archaic appearance".⁹² H.R. Hall dated the pottery into the Old Kingdom,⁹³ the published line drawings – sketchy as they are – and photographs reveal, however, their manufacture in the early part of the 1st Dynasty, which is in accordance with the depositions discovered by the recent excavations of the German Archaeological Institute.⁹⁴

Due to a relatively hard cover of windblown sand with small stones, the northern deposition is better preserved than its southern counterparts. In the deposition T-O-K/T-OO-K nearly all pottery vessels were found complete, only a few had been broken on the spot but could be reconstructed entirely (Fig. 5). In contrast, the depositions in the south were mostly smashed, with fragments being spread over larger areas. Especially interesting is the northern deposition in respect to the arrangements of pottery vessels and small finds. In the

⁸⁷ EDEL 1973; ARNOLD, DO. and HOPF 1981.

⁸⁸ MÜLLER 2000; MÜLLER 2003; MÜLLER 2006a; MÜLLER 2006b; MÜLLER 2011. A final publication is in preparation.

⁸⁹ NAVILLE 1914, 35–39.

⁹⁰ The other shaded areas in Fig. 1 designate further depositions dating to the 1st millennium BCE, for these see MÜLLER 2004; MÜLLER 2006c; MÜLLER 2009.

⁹¹ In contrast to the northern deposition, the two southern ones contained no seal impressions with royal names, but the shapes of the deposited pottery vessels are very similar to those of the northern deposition.

⁹² NAVILLE 1914, 36, pl. XIX.

⁹³ H.R. HALL in NAVILLE 1914, 38.

⁹⁴ NAVILLE 1914, pls. XI (lower part), XII (except no. 7), XV (2), XVI (1–7).

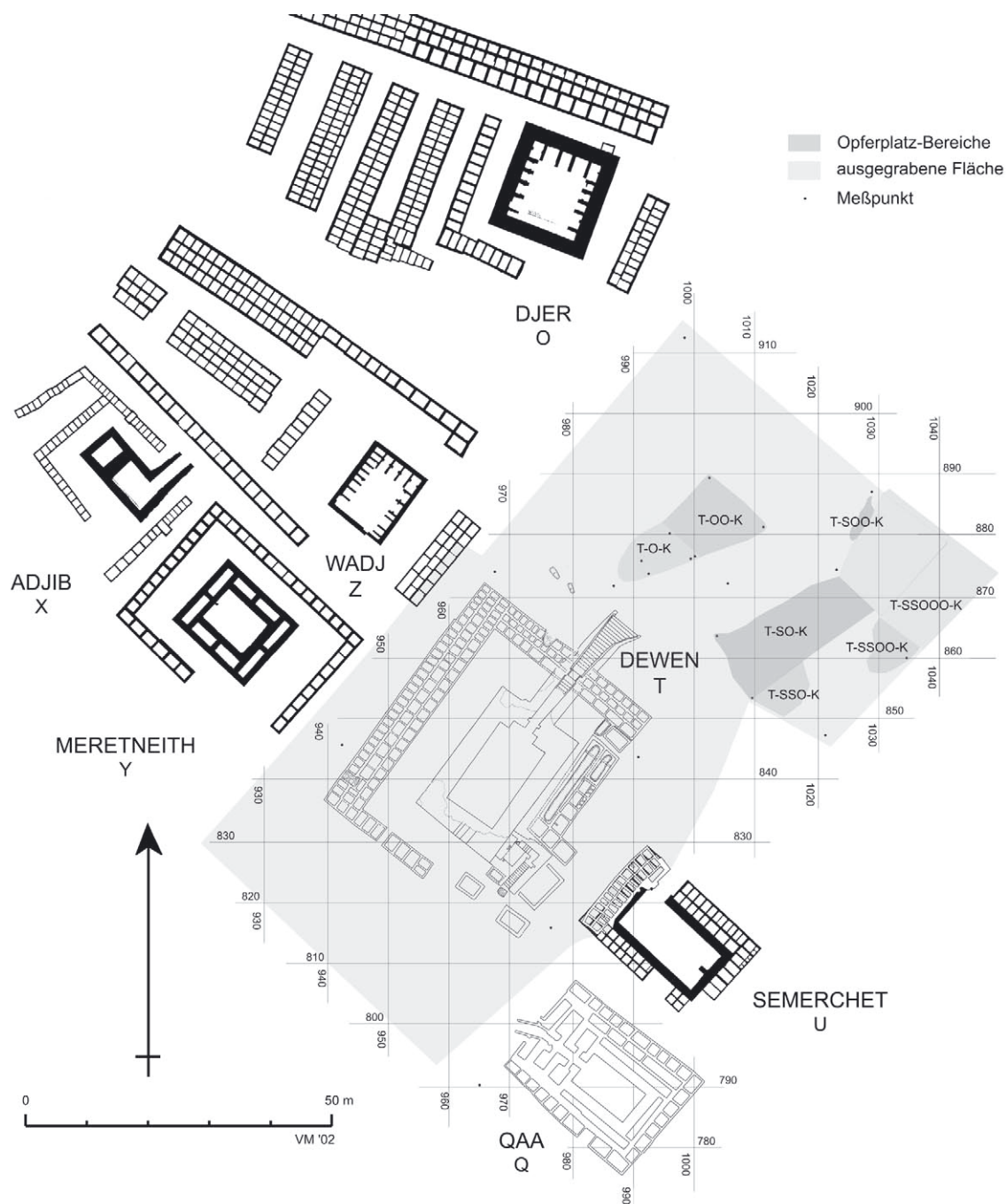


Fig. 1 Part of the royal cemetery of the 1st Dynasty at Umm el-Qaab/Abydos with depositions
(© DAI Cairo, drawing adapted by the author)

western part pottery vessels were closely grouped, in the middle were peculiar arrangements of small finds and in the east groups of pottery vessels were again laid out, although less tightly placed than in the west. While only a small number of small finds was encountered in deposition T-SO-K, together with a great density of ceramics, deposition T-SOO-K was restricted to very tightly stacked ceramic vessels consisting mainly of bowls.

Interestingly, all closed vessels were deposited in an upright position and seem only to have fallen partly aside due to the wind or a slight pressure from the wind-blown sand cover, while nearly all bowls were laid upside-down. All pottery vessels in T-O-K/T-OO-K and T-SO-K were covered with a thin layer of mud. While a mud layer was regularly used for waterproofing beer jars,⁹⁵ this procedure is surprising for other closed vessel types and

⁹⁵ FALTINGS 1998, 204–206.

especially the bowls. This could hint at a use of all vessels for keeping and presenting beer or might have a completely different ritual meaning. The mud covers are very thin and regular and only one cylinder jar was completely filled with mud.

Close to the group of vessels a deposit of small jar sealings and unsealed mud lumps belonging to jar stoppers were found. The jar sealings belong to a type that was attached to the knot of thin strings that had been wound around a jar's



Fig. 2 Deposition T-O-K/T-OO-K found between the tombs of kings Djer, Wadj and Den, view from the north-east towards the tomb of Den (© DAI Cairo)



Fig. 3 Deposition T-SO-K found to the south-east of the staircase of Den's tomb, view from the east (© DAI Cairo)



Fig. 4 Deposition T-SOO-K found to the east of T-SO-K, view from the west (© DAI Cairo)

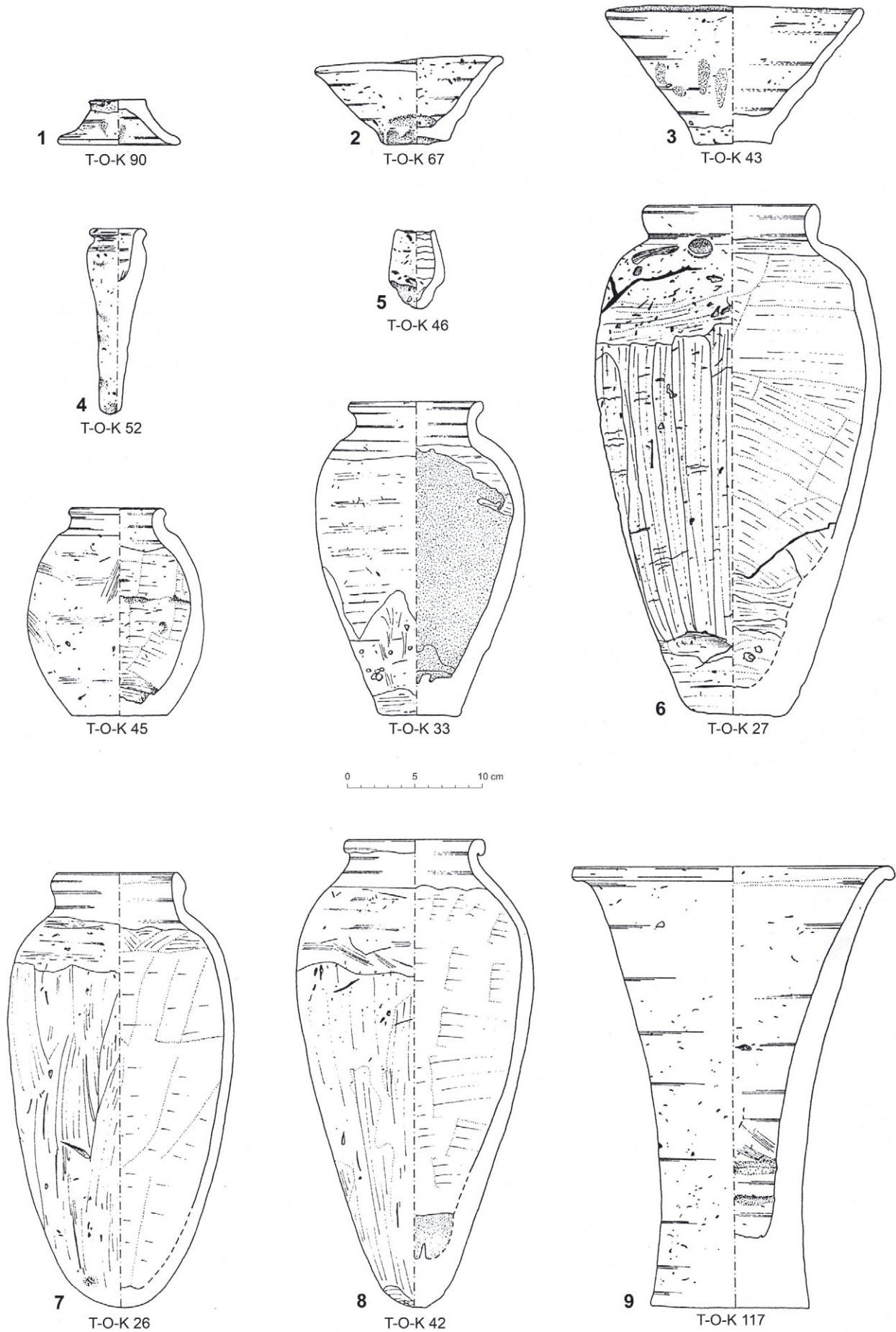


Fig. 5 Selection of pottery types from the deposition T-O-K/T-OO-K, dating to the reign of Djer
(© DAI Cairo, drawings by the author)

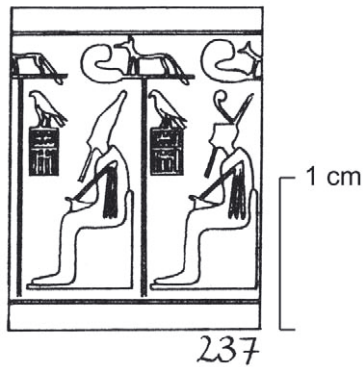


Fig. 6 Sealing of Djer (after KAPLONY 1963/III fig. 237)

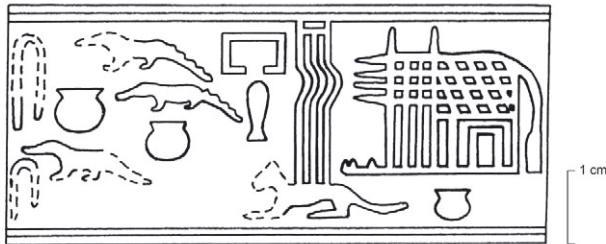


Fig. 7 Sealing of an official from the Upper Egyptian shrine (after KAPLONY 1963/III fig. 157 with additions by the author © DAI Cairo)

neck.⁹⁶ The concentration of the sealings in one place suggests an opening of the vessels at the site, although the finding of two vessels with mud stoppers⁹⁷ in place suggest the deposition of closed vessels at the same time. Many sealings (Fig. 6) were impressed with seal 237 according to Kaplony's labelling, in which king Djer (whose name is mentioned in front of his head) is represented twice, sitting in a cloak on a throne, once wearing the red and once wearing the white crown accompanied by the Upwaut-standard.⁹⁸ The seal belongs to the group of festival seals and is attributed to the Sed-festival.⁹⁹ A second seal (Fig. 7) completes

Kaplony's no. 157 and could almost be entirely reconstructed; it is again only known from the tomb complex of Djer.¹⁰⁰ It belongs to a group of seals designated by Kaplony as "seals of the official belonging to the lion and tent" that has to be considered as a specific administrative unit mentioned in seals from the time of king Narmer until the reign of Den.¹⁰¹ The seal can be transcribed as "*snw-msh.w(?) hm-pr.w ... pr.w-wr*" and translated as "[the official] *snw-msh.w(?)*, temple servant of the Upper Egyptian sanctuary of the lion with the knee timber".¹⁰² The personal name can be translated as "the one who is dividing/adoring the two crocodiles".¹⁰³ The title *hm-pr.w* is attested here for the first time¹⁰⁴ and is next known from a seal found by Petrie in an Early Dynastic tomb at Naqada, dating to the second half of the Early Dynastic period,¹⁰⁵ as well as from ink inscriptions found on four stone vessels from the galleries of Djoser's pyramid.¹⁰⁶ The Upper Egyptian sanctuary, *pr.w-wr*, was first mentioned on labels found in tomb U-j at Abydos, dating to Naqada IIIA1, and was combined there with a standing elephant or a crouching elephant or Seth-animal.¹⁰⁷ The meaning or identification of the 'lion with the knee timber' could not yet be identified.¹⁰⁸

It is striking that the bulk of the seals used in this context is restricted to these two specific seals: 1) the sed-festival seal of Djer and 2) an official's seal of the Upper Egyptian sanctuary. This limitation to two seals connected with a specific ritual and a sanctuary is also reflected in the choice of vessel types: the majority consists of beer jars, high-necked jars with flat bases, bowls in different sizes as well as miniature *hs*-jars. Only a few other pottery vessels were deposited, such as small ellipsoid jars with flat bases, ellipsoid jars, ovoid jars, cylinder jars, jars with elongated tapering bottom¹⁰⁹ or a conical vessel.¹¹⁰

⁹⁶ Type G6N, see ENGEL and MÜLLER 2000, 38, Abb. 2.

⁹⁷ These mud stoppers were of the type G4N, see ENGEL and MÜLLER 2000, 38, fig. 2.

⁹⁸ KAPLONY 1963/I, 76–78; KAPLONY 1963/II, 1124; KAPLONY 1963/III, fig. 237.

⁹⁹ KAPLONY 1963/I, 78; MÜLLER 2013.

¹⁰⁰ KAPLONY 1963/II, 1113, KAPLONY 1963/III, fig. 157; MÜLLER 2000, 118, Abb. 23.

¹⁰¹ KAPLONY 1963/I, 14–15.

¹⁰² For the identification of the latter part, see KAPLONY 1963/I, 14; KAPLONY 1963/II, 686, n. 43.

¹⁰³ I would like to thank Frank Kammerzell for several discussions and the proposal of this translation already several years ago.

¹⁰⁴ MÜLLER 2000, 118, fig. 23; KAHL 2004, 304.

¹⁰⁵ PETRIE and QUIBELL 1896, 66, pl. LXXX/1–2; KAPLONY 1963/I, 173; KAPLONY 1963/II, 880, n. 1120.

¹⁰⁶ KAPLONY 1963/I, 570; LACAU and LAUER 1965, 19–20, no. 26, fig. 29, 21, no. 31, fig. 32c.

¹⁰⁷ DREYER 1998, 120–122 Abb. 61–69, 141; KAHL 2002, 152. For a different reading of the lying animal, see KAHL 2001.

¹⁰⁸ KAHL 1994, 483 [e4**]. The context excludes a reading of the otherwise used *mdh.w* "carpenter" or "master of the numen of writers" as proposed for this word in a sequence of titles by HELCK 1987, 259–260.

¹⁰⁹ MÜLLER 2011.

¹¹⁰ MÜLLER 2000, pl. 11b.

¹¹¹ MÜLLER 2006a, 41.



Fig. 8 Flint blade with three beads made of faience, from deposition T-OO-K (© DAI Cairo)

Amidst this concentration of seals lay a sewing-needle, small flint blades and some beads made of faience and carnelian. To the east of this pottery and sealing group some peculiar arrangements were found: next to a small trapezoid flint blade three cylindrical beads lay next to each other (Fig. 8).¹¹¹ To the north of this group was a disk made of green siltstone, again with three beads lying neatly next to it. A little further north, at the bottom side of a cylindrical jar fallen on its side, were four arrowheads lying parallel to each other and pointing to the south-east, alternating with two bone inlays and a flint blade.¹¹² Not far away four arrowheads of bone were neatly laid down: two of them lying next to each other pointing to the north and two others positioned in a vertical row pointing to the south.¹¹³ The distance between them leaves space for arrow shafts with a length of about 30–35 cm each. This corresponds quite well to the complete arrows known from the contemporaneous tombs at Saqqara, in which arrow shafts made of reed with a length of c. 35 cm have been preserved.¹¹⁴ Close by lay a copper blade of a spatula(?) and a thin rod with indentations at its two ends together with 11 arrowheads of bone all oriented to the south-west (Fig. 9).¹¹⁵ In the vicinity three further arrowheads of bone were found lying neatly next to each other in combination with a short tube made of limestone that exhibits a cross section like a papyrus stem and shows traces of burning (Fig. 9 upper part).¹¹⁶ Adjacent to these were three flint blades and a bifacial flint knife,

which was surrounded by a row of beads made of faience, malachite, carnelian and amethyst, probably once adorning a sheath that has meanwhile decayed (Fig. 10).¹¹⁷ Finally, in a distance of about 2 m to the south-east, a group of five objects were found in a row that consisted of an uninscribed label, a bracer (?) inscribed with the name of Djer, two small case legs of a gaming board in the shape of bull's legs and another label (Fig. 11).¹¹⁸ The two labels were made of bone, the other three objects of ivory. The surface of the first label mentioned reveals that an original inscription had been scraped off, the surface of the other label is intact and might have had an ink inscription that has faded away.

There is no doubt that these objects were carefully positioned on the ground. Especially the small objects, such as the meticulous arrangement of three beads in combination with a flint blade or the disk, reveal the ritual character of the placement of diverse tiny items. No action was left to mere chance. The carefulness cannot only be observed in the precise order of the different elements but also in the arrangement of objects that do not share any visible common function, such as labels together with a bracer and legs of a gaming piece or arrowheads alternating with furniture inlays. In fact, it seems that object categories were deliberately disrupted by the intrusion of extraneous elements. It is also conspicuous that parts of objects were taken out of their context and combined in peculiar ways with other objects.

In earlier papers, the author saw the date of the deposition in the context of the installation of the Osiris cult at the tomb of Djer that was identified with the tomb of Osiris from the end of the Old Kingdom onwards.¹¹⁹ It was surmised that in the course of the preparation of Djer's burial chamber for the Osiris cult, the remaining original grave goods were taken out and carefully deposited to the south of the tomb because they were considered as sacred. Conspicuously, all the material deposited belonged to the reign of Djer without any exception. In a recent study on the landscape of Umm el-Qaab it turned out to be more plausible that the deposition was installed during the funeral of Djer.¹²⁰ A major reason for the new perception

¹¹² MÜLLER 2000, 117, pl. 11b; MÜLLER 2006a, 41.

¹¹³ MÜLLER 2003, 117; MÜLLER 2006a, 41.

¹¹⁴ EMERY 1938, 45–47.

¹¹⁵ MÜLLER 2003, 98, pl. 19b; MÜLLER 2006a, 42.

¹¹⁶ MÜLLER 2003, 98, pl. 19b; MÜLLER 2006a, 42

¹¹⁷ MÜLLER 2003, 98, fig. 15; pl. 19b; MÜLLER 2006a, 42.

¹¹⁸ MÜLLER 2003, 98, pl. 19d–e; MÜLLER 2006a, 42.

¹¹⁹ MÜLLER 2000; MÜLLER 2003; MÜLLER 2004; MÜLLER 2006a; MÜLLER 2006b.

¹²⁰ MÜLLER in press.



Fig. 9 Rows with arrowheads made of bone and other items, from deposition T-OO-K (© DAI Cairo)



Fig. 10 Flint knife surrounded by a row of beads, from deposition T-OO-K (© DAI Cairo)

lies in the way the tombs of Djer, Wadj and Den are positioned in the landscape as well as towards each other, suggesting that the area between these three tombs was considered as so exclusive that it was kept empty from any (recognisable) architectural structures. It is quite possible that installations made of perishable materials had once been erected that did not leave any traces. This exclusiveness was respected through all millennia. The only feature found here was the deposition described above. It thus seems most obvious that

this area was considered as a sacred place which was also considered in the orientation of Den's staircase.

The large amount of beer jars and bowls reminds of cultic activities in the course of rituals performed at the funeral presented above. It has to be accounted for a more complex course of action in a royal burial than purported by the offering list. The Pyramid Texts deliver a vivid insight into the range and complexity of the diverse rituals performed for a royal burial, parts of which definitely



Fig. 11 Arrangement of two labels, a bracer(?) and two furniture legs, from deposition T-OO-K (© DAI Cairo)

refer to the Early Dynastic period.¹²¹ The arrangement of ‘pockets of pottery’ at secluded places could be interpreted as the spots at which different groups of participants took their places during the funeral to perform the required rituals. The practice of depositing bowls upside down was also encountered in other parts of the cemetery, such as at an offering place in cemetery U, dating to the beginning of the 1st Dynasty¹²² as well as at the funerary enclosures close to the cultivation edge.¹²³

It should be mentioned that the southern depositions would not have been recognised without the findings in the northern parts. The smashed pottery would have been interpreted as mere dumps, just like those covering the depositions created during five millennia of activities at this

site (early tomb robbing, conflagration of the royal chambers, restoration of the tombs probably in the early Middle Kingdom, cultic activities in the course of the Osiris cult, subsequent tomb robberies, several excavations since the 19th century AD). Only the existence of complete vessels and the peculiar layout of the small finds suggested a different interpretation than the accumulation of trash. In addition, the avoidance of this area for building projects advocates for the sacredness of this specific place. This would also mean that the objects deposited here might have been considered as sacred.

4.2. Deposition during the reign of Den outside his tomb

A further type of deposition was encountered in the eastern part of T-SO-K that partly coincides with the material of the deposition from the reign of Djer described above.¹²⁴ It consists of broken mudbricks mixed with pot sherds and a few sealings. The layer covered three pits that contained intentionally broken vessels and the vastly decayed remains of baskets and yokes. To the south-east of the broken mudbricks 20 large lumps of mud had been dumped onto the surface. Many of these lumps exhibited impressions of baskets on their surface, a few others revealed the imprints of footsteps. The pottery shapes correspond with those of the tomb of Den and thus differ slightly from the above-mentioned depositions; together with the sealings they can be dated to the reign of Den. Next to ovoid vessels a huge vat could also be reconstructed from the sherds found in the pits. It is thus quite obvious that this deposition consists of material in the context of building procedures during the reign of Den. The footprints in some of the mud lumps, the dumping of the mud lumps on the floor and the smashing of pottery vessels, baskets and yokes into pits defines a procedure marking the end of a process. The baskets in the pits most probably held the mud lumps, which were supposed to be used as mortar and were carried by the yokes, while the vat and the jars most probably held water. It is quite reasonable that these building activities were directed at the closing of the tomb, which in the case of Den consisted of the construction of walls covering the doors at the two

¹²¹ ALTENMÜLLER 1972.

¹²² PUMPENMEIER 1993.

¹²³ KNOBLAUCH 2014. I would like to thank Christian Knoblauch for sharing his ideas with me on this topic.

¹²⁴ MÜLLER 2003, 99–100, pl. 20.

staircases, one leading to the burial chamber, the other to the annex in the south-west corner of the tomb. In the light of the recent reconstructions of closing rituals in the mastabas of the Old Kingdom, it seems quite plausible that such rituals were already performed in the Early Dynastic period. The similarity in the evidence of broken vessels and the use of vats and mortar is striking.

4.3. Further depositions found in the royal cemetery at Umm el-Qaab/Abydos

Further depositions, partly of a different character, could be encountered at other tombs of this cemetery.

Thus, depositions of miniature jars were found by Petrie on the staircase just outside of the door leading into the burial chamber of Adjib. He interpreted these finds as: “These must have contained offerings made after the completion of the burial.¹²⁵” He unfortunately did not give a distinct number, but mentions “dozens of small pots” whose shapes correspond with the main shapes found in larger sizes in the depositions associated with the tomb of Djer.

A different situation awaited Petrie at the ramp leading into the burial chamber of Semerchet: here the sand was saturated with ointment “hundred-weights of it must have been poured out here, and the scent was so strong when cutting away this sand that it could be smelt over the whole tomb.¹²⁶” E.-M. Engel had found several depositions of the Early Dynastic period next to those definitely dating to the Osiris cult around the tomb of Qa’a.¹²⁷ Large depositions of the Late Period were encountered on the north-eastern, western and south-western side of the tomb. A most interesting deposition consisting of a vat and several ovoid jars dating to the 1st Dynasty had been deposited to the north-west of the staircase of the tomb that partly covered parts of the deposition. The staircase had been enlarged during a restoration phase that in all probability can be dated to the Middle Kingdom, thereby covering the pottery.¹²⁸ Due to missing comparative data at the time of writing her dissertation, the evidence could not be unequivocally interpreted yet. The similarity of deposited vessels, such as a vat, beer jars and ovoid jars directly

at the staircase,¹²⁹ suggests, however, that rituals were performed during the closing of the tomb. In the vicinity of the tomb also broken mudbricks were found which were partly covered by the depositions of the Late Period.¹³⁰ At the north-western part of the tombs small pits were detected, probably for holding vessels as well as three copper bowls inscribed with the name of Qaa. Finally, a large deposition was installed in a distance of c. 14m to the south-west of the tomb. One of two limestone blocks was covered with a white substance surrounded by ovoid jars, one bowl and one bread mould of the Early Dynastic period that had been covered by small bowls from the Late Period. Engel was indecisive in dating the material to the 1st or 2nd Dynasty.¹³¹ In light of the other depositions at Umm el-Qaab, it seems, however, possible that this deposition might also originate from rituals during the funeral – its position in the south-west is reminiscent of the large deposition of Djer. The variety of depositions around the tomb of Qaa advocates either for a variety of rituals performed during the funeral or for several spots at which rituals were performed from different people at the same occasion.

4.4. Summary of the evidence at Umm el-Qaab/Abydos

Taking all the evidence into consideration, it seems that we have to account for a variety of ritual activities encountered in the royal cemetery at Umm el-Qaab, most of which might hint to rituals performed during the funeral. It has, however, to be kept in mind that the evidence suggests only glimpses into the range and varieties of different rituals performed at the tombs. Not only are the archaeological leftovers incomplete and in most cases scanty, it also has to be considered that the performers of these rituals might have left only a part of those objects used for the rituals at the site which they considered as refuse, as recently pointed out by Knoiblauch.¹³²

A ritual character is most obvious for the deposition of miniature vessels, such as those found at the tomb entrance of Adjib, which can quite certainly be connected with the closing of the tomb. By definition, miniature vessels symbolise their

¹²⁵ PETRIE 1900, 12, pls. XLII–XLIII.

¹²⁶ PETRIE 1900, 14.

¹²⁷ ENGEL 1997, 98–101.

¹²⁸ ENGEL 1997, 98, 101.

¹²⁹ ENGEL 1996, pl. 13a; ENGEL 1997, 98.

¹³⁰ ENGEL 1997, 99.

¹³¹ ENGEL 1997, 101.

¹³² KNOIBLAUCH 2014, 152.

larger variants or the vessels' content that would be offered respectively. The similarity in type of these miniatures with those found in larger size at the tomb of Djer suggest that the deposition of these miniature vessels was supposed to symbolise the act of offerings at this spot in the context of the closing of the tomb. Also, the anointing of the area in front of the burial chamber with precious oils encountered at the tomb entrance of Semerchet's burial chamber can certainly be attributed to ritual activities in the course of the funeral. Should the use of oil be seen in context of the seven oils mentioned in the offering lists or oils named in the Pyramid Texts? Was it a purification ritual or had it got further meanings? Interestingly, in this case the vessels seem not to have been left behind as refuse¹³³ – at least we have no report by the first excavators, Amélineau and Petrie.

More difficult is the interpretation of materials actively used for closing the entrance of the tomb, such as bricks, mortar, baskets and vessels used for the preparation of mortar. Were these materials also related to ritual leftovers or were they considered as mere refuse in our modern sense? Were they attributed with a certain sacredness because they were used in a sacred context or was it just not important to keep the area clean?

In which way do we have to consider the deposition to the south-west of Djer's tomb? The peculiarities in the arrangement of the small finds hints to a ritualistic background. But was just the act of arranging considered as sacred or was it important to leave the objects exactly in this position? And does the same ritualistic background adhere to the pottery vessels as well? They seem to have been deposited much more deliberately. In addition to the ubiquitous cover with mud on the vessels' inside, only two components are conspicuous: 1) the majority of the closed vessels was deposited upright and 2) the bowls were laid upside down. Both positions are astounding. Only few vessel types of the Early Dynastic Period have a flat base, to these belong – next to bowls – beer jars from the reign of Djer, high-shouldered jars as well as squat jars. From the more ubiquitous round-bottomed vessel types only a few specimens were found in the deposition. The vessels were not stuck into the ground but were only placed on the soil. It

thus seems that types of closed vessels with a flat base might have deliberately been chosen for this ritual. In contrast to these, the bowls were not deposited as expected in an upright position but upside down – thus preventing any use.

Depositions of bowls have not only been encountered in the royal cemetery and cemetery U at Umm el-Qaab but also in the enclosures at the desert fringe.¹³⁴ Knoblauch pointed out the daily character of these vessels – that can also be extended to the other vessel types used in the depositions –, which clearly contrasts with typical cultic pottery shapes encountered in sanctuaries.¹³⁵ The poor quality of these vessels was suggested by Rzeuska in the context of the elite tombs at Saqqara in the Old Kingdom, thus labelling them as offering vessels for single use (see above). The dearth of cultic vessels is definitely conspicuous and might hint to the singular character of the performed ritual at the funeral. There was obviously no intention to symbolise a permanent ritual such as is the case for the installation of offering plates, offering lists, tomb decorations and cult chapels with furniture. At the same time, it is interesting to note that the depositions of bowls were encountered in different contexts: next to different places in the cemetery, also several places at the enclosures were encountered with such depositions, such as inside of the cult building, near the entrance and near the northern enclosure wall of the enclosures of Aha II and III.¹³⁶ Knoblauch proposed a range of interpretative models and elucidates the limited informative value of the archaeological evidence in respect to the variety of possibilities of ritual performances.

Conclusion

The paper tried to address a variety of depositional practices that can be gleaned from the archaeological evidence. The depositions reveal only the material side of those objects that were deposited and that have survived to this day. Thereby the evidence is naturally limited. That archaeological data can supplement aspects of ritual activities not mentioned in texts or depicted in wall paintings or reliefs was formidably demonstrated by Rzeuska for burial practices at Old Kingdom mastabas.¹³⁷

¹³³ This interesting question was raised by C. Knoblauch who also reminded me on the Pyramid Texts. I would also like to thank him for the interesting discussions concerning these issues.

¹³⁴ KNOBLAUCH 2014, 148–156.

¹³⁵ KNOBLAUCH 2014, 153.

¹³⁶ KNOBLAUCH 2014, 148–156.

¹³⁷ RZEUSKA 2006.

One of the main aims in this paper was to address questions concerning the handling of materials after their use in ritual activities as far as this can be answered on the basis of archaeological data.

A lot of questions remain open and a connection to specific rituals can only occasionally be presented, especially if textual and pictorial data can be correlated with the archaeological evidence. In recent years diverse ritual practices could be attested in materials found in and around tombs which were addressed during the funeral, such as rites de passage, the provisions for the buried, protection rites for the dead, tomb closing ceremonies or offering rituals. It is important to note that an object itself only exceptionally reveals a specific purpose. Most important is the context in which an object is found. A beer jar remains a beer jar – no matter if it was found in a house, in a tomb or a temple. But it makes a difference if a beer jar was used for drinking beer in the private sphere, for the presentation of an offering in the temple cult or at a tomb. This difference in use

context is also reflected in the places of its refuse. We have to suppose that the jar received a different meaning if it was dumped outside of a house compound, in the vicinity of a tomb or in an offering pit. At least in the latter case, a reuse was prohibited. But which criteria had an object to fulfil to be considered as worthwhile to be kept? Why were some materials deposited in pits and others dumped outside of the building? Why were pits or shafts dug so much deeper than the number of objects would have required? Why were some objects deposited but not others? Why were certain objects deposited in a complete state and others were broken? This question relates to statues as well as to pottery vessels. While certain vessel types can be related to the ritual of “breaking the red pots”, the deliberate destruction of statues must have had another background.

Several of these questions might never be answered, but new evaluations of the available archaeological, textual and pictorial sources might shed new light on some of the old practices.

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