



**Tell el-Retaba 2008: the pottery**

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# TELL EL-RETABA 2008: THE POTTERY

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**Abstract:** The season yielded 30,386 ceramic sherds which were sorted and classified according to a typology prepared based on the surface finds from the first season. The typology was revised and enlarged to include new evidence. Two main phases of site occupation were represented in the assemblage: late New Kingdom and beginning of the Third Intermediate Period. Despite parallels between the two assemblages, the pottery repertoire in one and the other was completely different.

**Keywords:** Tell el-Retaba, late New Kingdom, Third Intermediate Period, Twenty-first Dynasty, pottery

The second season of work of the Polish–Slovak Archaeological Mission revealed a settlement generally dated to the end of the New Kingdom and beginning of the Third Intermediate Period. 30,386 ceramic sherds were collected during the season. All of them were first sorted into Nile and marl fabrics and secondly into non-diagnostic and diagnostic pieces. Each of the diagnostic sherds (3,783 in total) received a unique number.

The typology of the pottery found in the two excavated areas (Area 1 and 2) was based on the surface finds from the 2007

survey season (Wodzińska forthcoming). This typology was further enlarged and corrected according to new evidence. The ceramics were made mostly of Nile alluvium with only approximately 3% of the material recognized as marl.

The pottery from the 2008 season comes generally from the Twentieth and Twenty-first Dynasty and maybe even the Twenty-second Dynasty. Some of the excavated stratigraphic units appear to be earlier, that is, from the late New Kingdom–beginning of the Twentieth Dynasty.

## LATE NEW KINGDOM

Ceramics of this period came from a few stratigraphic units in Area 1. All the late New Kingdom units contained plates with red coated external and internal [*Fig. 1:1*], or only internal surfaces. The vessels have flaring walls and recurved rims. Similar to other pots from Tell el-Retaba, they were made of a Nile B2 sandy variant. They vary

in size, but 20–24 cm in diameter seems to be the most common. Similar bowls dated to the late New Kingdom were also found in Memphis (Aston 2007: 30, *Fig. 20:8*, 11, 16–17).

Small cups of the early Twentieth Dynasty often have red painted rims (similar to *Fig. 2:7*). They are made of

a Nile B2 variant with significant amounts of fine sand. These hemispherical cups range in diameter from 10–13 cm to 16 cm. Similar pots were found at Elephantine (Aston 1999: 34–35, Pl. 6, Fig. 131, late New Kingdom) and Memphis (Aston 2007: 31, Fig. 21:33, 41, 45, 49).

Jars with rounded narrow rims were covered with red slip on the outside and smoothed [Fig. 1:2]. They were made of

Nile B2 sandy clay. Such jars can be dated to the beginning of the Twentieth Dynasty (Aston 1996: 17, 110, Fig. 8b). Some however occur later, during the reign of Ramesses XI (Aston 1999: 33–43, Pl. 9, Fig. 198). The complete vessels have an elongated body measuring approximately 52 cm in height.

A marl jar with a cylindrical neck and rounded rim [Fig. 1:3] came from unit 45.

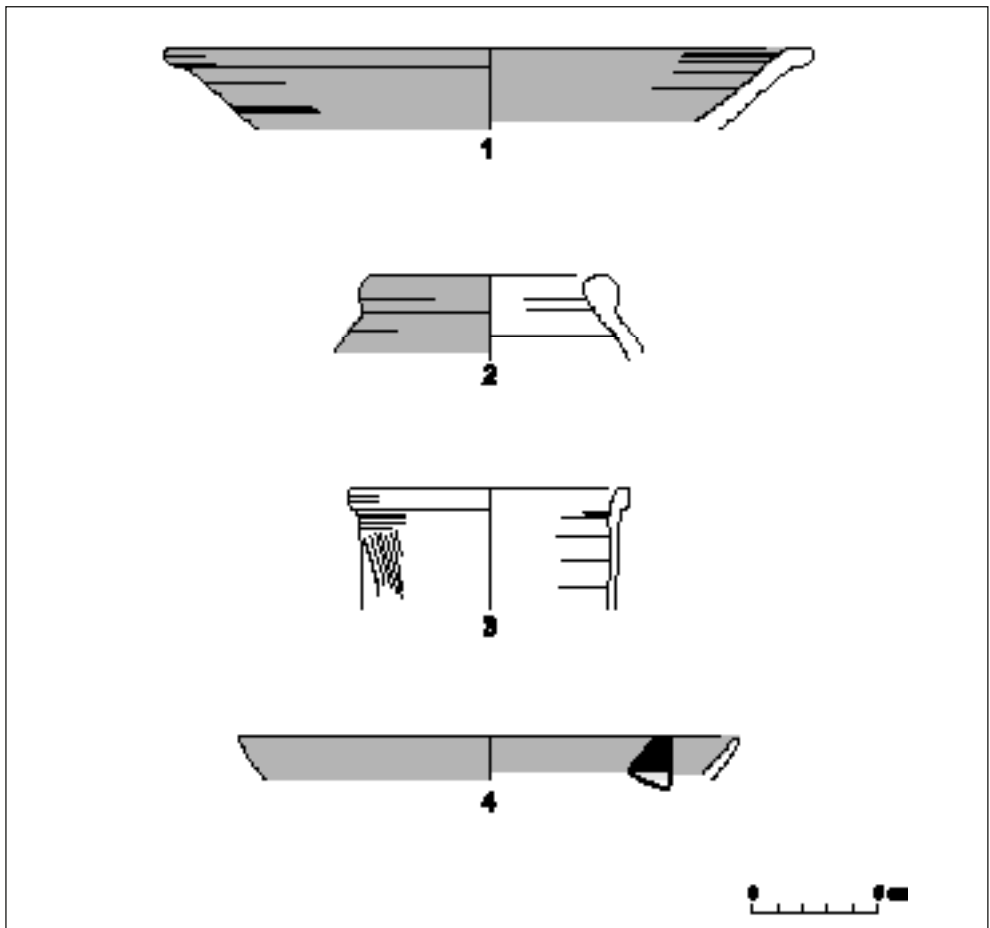


Fig. 1. Pottery from the late New Kingdom  
(All drawings K. Górka, S. Gromadzka, A. Wodzińska)

The external surface of the pot was clearly burnished, with shiny vertical stripes. Rims of similar jars made of marl F fabric found at Qantir have been dated to the Ramesside period (Aston 1998: 504–509, Figs 1991–2027).

The date of the late New Kingdom units has been confirmed by the occurrence

of a small fragment of a blue-painted bowl [Fig. 1:4]. According to Aston (1996: 79) the blue-painted decoration does not occur later than the time of Ramesses IV. The bowl is made of Nile B1 clay, covered with red slip and subsequently painted cream and blue inside. The vessel is characterized by its very good manufacturing quality.

## THIRD INTERMEDIATE PERIOD

The material from this period [Figs 2–4] is characterized predominantly by the presence of four ceramic vessel types: bowl with flaring walls, small hemispherical cup, flat bread tray, and jar with cylindrical neck and more or less upright rim.

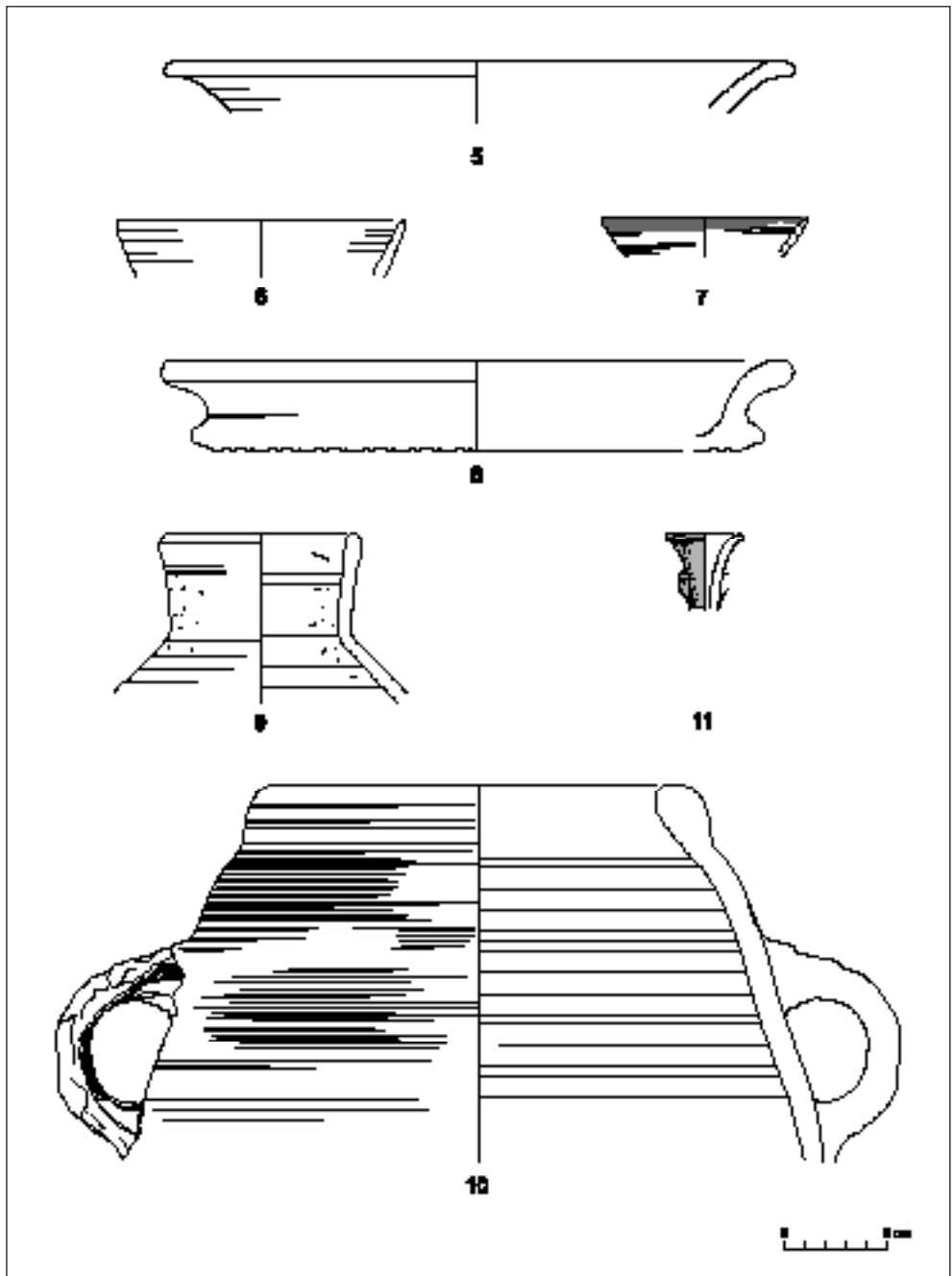
The ceramics that are found most frequently are bowls with flaring walls and recurved rims made of Nile B2 sandy clay [Fig. 2:5]. They represent 23% of all of the diagnostic fragments. They were wheel-thrown and probably made of local material. Their surface was well smoothed without any coat. The vessels vary in size, but the most common are those with 23–26 cm diameter. The bowls (see also Redmount 1989: 363, Fig. 54:27–35) dated to the Third Intermediate Period were also very popular in different regions of Egypt, for instance Elephantine (Aston 1999: e.g. 50–51, Pl. 11, Fig. 257, Twentieth–Twenty-first Dynasty, also 65, 69, Pl. 15, Fig. 494, Twenty-second Dynasty), Memphis (Aston 2007: 34, Fig. 29:153–157) Qantir (Aston 1998: 545, Figs 2220–2222), and Tanis (Bavay 1998: 323–324, Fig. 34:38–39).

The other most common vessel is a small bowl with straight sides also made of Nile B2 sandy clay [Fig. 2:6] (see also Redmount 1989: 361, Fig. 54:1–6). It usually has very

thin walls and its production seems to have been very fast and not very careful. Their size, 10–14 cm in diameter, and clay properties suggest that they were used probably as drinking cups (see also Aston 2007: 33, Fig. 28:137–145). This type of bowl seems to be very well known already in the late New Kingdom when its rim was usually red slipped (see above). Later the decoration gradually disappeared (for uncoated bowls of this type dated to the beginning of the Third Intermediate Period, see e.g. Aston 2007: 33, Fig. 28:142–143, 145), although it is still sporadically visible [Fig. 2:7]. Uncoated bowls were also common in Tanis (Bavay 1998: 321–322, Fig. 33:19–20).

Another frequent find from the site is a flat bread mould [Fig. 2:8] (see also Redmount 1989: 391, Fig. 54:251–255). It is made of Nile C or Nile E clay. Rim diameter varies between 26 and 31 cm. These vessels were very popular across Egypt from the Third Intermediate Period to the Late Period (see, for instance, Aston 1998: 570, Figs 2340–2344; 1999: 200, 203, Figs 1835–1836).

Another characteristic form is a jar with long cylindrical neck and slightly thickened rim [Fig. 2:9] (see, for instance, Aston 2007: 35, Fig. 31:237–244) made of



*Fig. 2. Pottery from the Third Intermediate Period*

Nile B2 sandy clay. The external surface of the jars is very often blackened with traces of soot indicating possible use as a cooking vessel.

Jars with incurved walls and elongated rims, and often with a pair of handles [Fig. 2:10], were also very common (see also Redmount 1989: 395, Fig. 54:270–275). The pots are well known from the Third Intermediate Period contexts at Tell el Daba (Aston 1996: 142, Fig. 40:6, pot K3436, Twentieth–Twenty-first Dynasty) and Mendes (Aston 1996: 130, Fig. 28:8, Ramesside and Third Intermediate Periods).

Fragments of pilgrim flasks were also found. A small two-handled pilgrim flask [Fig. 2:11] is made of Nile B2 clay, with a thin layer of red slip applied to its external surface. The piece is well datable with analogies coming from Twenty-first–Twenty-second Dynasty context at Qantir (Aston 1998: 550–551, Fig. 2243).

The ceramics are plain, except for pilgrim flasks made of Nile B1 clay, and

shallow bowls with ledge rims. No complete pilgrim flask with decoration has been preserved. However, several decorated body

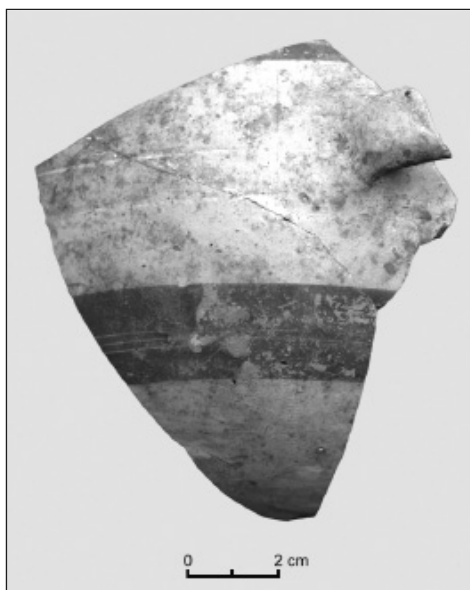


Fig. 3. Painted pilgrim flask from the Third Intermediate Period (Photo A. Wodzińska)

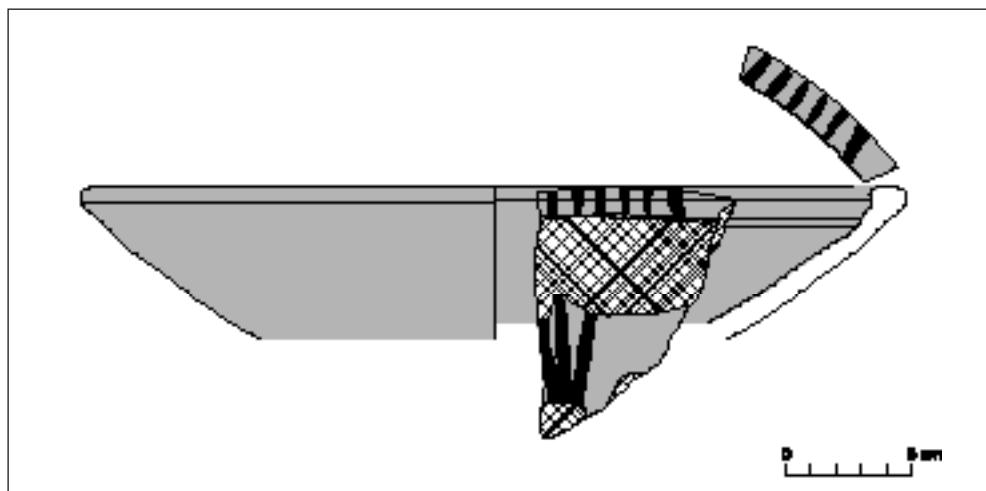


Fig. 4. Painted bowl from the Third Intermediate Period

sherds were discovered. The red-coated pots were painted black on the outside [Fig. 3]. Patterns consisted of simple bands encircling the body. According to Aston based on ceramics from Memphis, such pots can be dated to the 11th–10th century BC (Aston 2007: 53, Fig. 47:557). Similar pots are also known from Tanis (Defernez, Isnard 2000: 170, 211, Pl. XIII, type 17A; Bavay 1998: 321–322, Fig. 33:22).

The bowls were also black-painted [Fig. 4], but the motifs are more elaborate. The interior of the bowl has a stylized floral pattern. Its rim was additionally painted with a pattern of short parallel strokes. Black parallel lines can be found on a bowl from Tanis (Bavay 1998: 319–320, Fig. 32:6). Similar patterns can be seen on pots described by Petrie (Petrie, Duncan 1906: Pl. 36:2).

## CONCLUSIONS

The ceramic material coming from the 2008 excavated areas is well defined. The fieldwork revealed two main phases of site occupation, in the late New Kingdom and in the beginning of the Third Intermediate Period. The late New Kingdom, in comparison to the Third Intermediate Period layers, contained less vessels. Both assemblages demonstrate some parallels, e.g. bowls with flaring walls and small hemispherical cups.

Nonetheless, the two assemblages are clearly different. In the course of a relatively short time the pottery repertoire visibly

changed. Jars with round rims slipped with a red coat and marl jars with a cylindrical neck and rounded rim disappeared. Red paint on the rims of small hemispherical cups gradually vanished. The Third Intermediate Period contained neither red-slipped bowls with flaring walls nor blue-painted pots. The decoration of the vessels is also different. Pots from the Twenty-first and Twenty-second Dynasty have black-painted decoration. The motifs are very simple, usually short parallel lines appearing on rims of unrestricted vessels, also circular bands painted on pilgrim flasks.

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## CONTENTS

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## CONTENTS

<i>PAM RESEARCH</i> — NEW FORMULA: NOTE FROM THE EDITORIAL BOARD...	11
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....	13
OBITUARIES	
<i>Stanisław Medeksza</i> .....	15
<i>Eliza Szpakowska</i> .....	17
<i>Hanna Szymańska</i> .....	19
ABBREVIATIONS AND STANDARD REFERENCES .....	21

## PAM REPORTS

PCMA FIELD MISSIONS AND PROJECTS IN 2008 (WITH MAP) .....	25
---	----

## EGYPT

### ALEXANDRIA

ALEXANDRIA: KOM EL-DIKKA EXCAVATIONS AND PRESERVATION WORK. PRELIMINARY REPORT 2007/2008	
<i>Grzegorz Majcherek</i> .....	35
THE ISLAMIC GRAVEYARD ON KOM EL-DIKKA IN ALEXANDRIA. EXCAVATION SEASON 2007/2008	
<i>Emanuela Kulicka</i> .....	52
GLASS FROM AREA F ON KOM EL-DIKKA (ALEXANDRIA). EXCAVATIONS 2008	
<i>Renata Kucharczyk</i> .....	56
NUMISMATIC FINDS FROM KOM EL-DIKKA (ALEXANDRIA), 2008	
<i>Adam Jegliński</i> .....	70

### MAREA

MAREA: EXCAVATIONS 2008	
<i>Hanna Szymańska</i> , <i>Krzysztof Babraj</i> .....	81
MAREA 2008: POTTERY FROM EXCAVATIONS	
<i>Anna Drzymuchowska</i> .....	97

## CONTENTS

---

### MARINA EL-ALAMEIN

MARINA EL-ALAMEIN. POLISH–EGYPTIAN RESTORATION MISSION:  
CONSERVATION WORK IN 2008

*Stanisław Medeksza, Rafał Czerner* ..... 103

### TELL EL-RETABA

TELL EL-RETABA 2008: EXCAVATIONS AND GEOPHYSICAL SURVEY

*Sławomir Rzepka, Jozef Hudec, Tomasz Herbich* ..... 129

TELL EL-RETABA 2008: THE POTTERY

*Anna Wodzińska* ..... 146

### TELL EL-FARKHA

TELL EL-FARKHA (GHAZALA), 2008

*Marek Chłotnicki, Krzysztof M. Ciałowicz* ..... 153

GOLD FROM TELL EL-FARKHA. CONSERVATION PROJECT AT THE EGYPTIAN  
MUSEUM IN CAIRO

*Anna Longa, Władysław Weker* ..... 171

### TELL EL-MURRA

TELL EL-MURRA (NORTHEASTERN NILE DELTA SURVEY), SEASON 2008

*Mariusz A. Jucha, Artur Buszek* ..... 177

### SAQQARA

SAQQARA 2008: INSCRIBED MATERIAL

*Kamil O. Kuraszkiewicz* ..... 183

### DEIR EL-BAHARI

TEMPLE OF HATSHEPSUT AT DEIR EL-BAHARI, SEASON 2007/2008

*Zbigniew E. Szafrński* ..... 193

BUILDING *DIPINTI* IN THE TEMPLE OF HATSHEPSUT. DOCUMENTATION WORK,  
SEASON 2007/2008

*Dawid F. Wiczorek* ..... 203

TEMPLE OF HATSHEPSUT: POTTERY FROM EXCAVATIONS IN THE ROYAL  
MORTUARY CULT COMPLEX, SEASONS 2004–2008

*Ewa Czyżewska* ..... 212

### SHEIKH ABD EL-GURNA (WEST THEBES)

ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH IN THE HERMITAGE IN TOMB 1152  
IN SHEIKH ABD EL-GURNA (WEST THEBES)

*Tomasz Górecki* ..... 225

### DAKHLEH OASIS

DAKHLEH OASIS PROJECT. PETROGLYPH UNIT, ROCK ART RESEARCH, 2008

*Ewa Kuciewicz, Michał Kobusiewicz* ..... 237

---

## CONTENTS

---

### SUDAN

#### OLD DONGOLA

- THE 12 NUMMLA COIN FROM OLD DONGOLA  
*Barbara Lichocka* ..... 245

#### BANGANARTI

- BANGANARTI AND SELIB: TWO FIELD SEASONS IN 2008  
*Bogdan T. Żurawski* ..... 251
- APPENDIX 1: REVITALIZATION PROJECT AT BANGANARTI  
*Bogdan T. Żurawski* ..... 261
- APPENDIX 2: BANGANARTI CONSERVATION REPORT  
(JANUARY–FEBRUARY AND NOVEMBER–DECEMBER 2008)  
*Dorota Moryto-Naumiuk, Bogdan T. Żurawski* ..... 262
- APPENDIX 3: OVERVIEW OF CERAMIC STUDIES AT BANGANARTI IN 2008  
*Dobiesława Bagińska* ..... 264
- INSCRIPTION WITH LITURGICAL HYMN FROM THE LOWER CHURCH  
IN BANGANARTI  
*Agata Deptuła* ..... 267
- BANGANARTI FORTIFICATIONS IN THE 2008 SEASON  
*Mariusz Drzewiecki* ..... 273

### CYPRUS

#### NEA PAPHOS

- NEA PAPHOS: SEASON 2008  
*Henryk Meyza* ..... 283

### LEBANON

#### ESHMOUN

- ESHMOUN VALLEY: PRELIMINARY REPORT AFTER THE THIRD SEASON  
OF THE POLISH-LEBANESE SURVEY  
*Krzysztof Jakubiak* ..... 295

### SYRIA

#### TELL ARBID

- TELL ARBID: ADAM MICKIEWICZ UNIVERSITY EXCAVATIONS IN SECTOR P,  
SPRING SEASON OF 2008  
*Rafał Koliński* ..... 303

---

## CONTENTS

---

### TELL QARAMEL

TELL QARAMEL: EXCAVATIONS 2008

*Ryszard F. Mazurowski* ..... 321

## PAM STUDIES

INTRODUCTION ..... 345

ENTRE LA II<sup>E</sup> ET III<sup>E</sup> CATARACTE: SEDEINGA, UNE ÉTAPE SUR LA RIVE  
OCCIDENTALE DU NIL

*Catherine Berger-el Naggar* ..... 349

FOOD AND FUNERALS. SUSTAINING THE DEAD FOR ETERNITY

*Salima Ikram* ..... 361

SYMBOLIC FAUNAL REMAINS FROM GRAVES IN TELL EL-FARKHA (EGYPT)

*Renata Abłamowicz* ..... 373

THE NECROPOLIS AT TELL EDFU: AN OVERVIEW

*Joanna Aksamit* ..... 379

THIRD INTERMEDIATE PERIOD CEMETERY IN THE HATSHEPSUT TEMPLE  
AT DEIR EL-BAHARI. RECENT RESEARCH

*Miroslaw Barwik* ..... 387

ENIGMATIC BUILDING FROM TELL EL-FARKHA. PRELIMINARY STUDY

*Krzysztof M. Ciałowicz* ..... 399

FUNERARY TEXTILES FROM THE MEDIEVAL CEMETERY OF NAQLUN

*Barbara Czaja-Szewczak* ..... 413

GRAECO-ROMAN TOWN AND NECROPOLIS IN MARINA EL-ALAMEIN

*Wiktor Andrzej Daszewski* ..... 421

POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATION AS REFLECTED BY BURIAL  
RITES OBSERVED IN THE PROTODYNASTIC PART OF THE CEMETERY  
IN TELL EL-FARKHA

*Joanna Dębowska-Ludwin* ..... 457

IN THE SHADE OF THE NEKLONI MONASTERY (DEIR MALAK GUBRAIL, FAYUM)

*Włodzimierz Godlewski* ..... 467

REMARKS ON THE TYPOLOGY OF ISLAMIC GRAVES FROM THE CEMETERIES  
ON KOM EL-DIKKA IN ALEXANDRIA

*Emanuela Kulicka* ..... 483

BEADS AND WARRIORS. THE CEMETERY AT HAGAR EL-BEIDA 2 (SUDAN)

*Anna Longa* ..... 499

## CONTENTS

---

MATS AND BASKETS FROM CEMETERY A AT NAQLUN IN FAYUM OASIS <i>Anetta Łyżwa-Piber</i> .....	509
TOMB BUILDING TRADITION IN LOWER NUBIA FROM THE MEROITIC AGE TO AFTER CHRISTIANIZATION <i>Artur Obłuski</i> .....	525
ANIMAL REMAINS IN POST-MEROITIC BURIALS IN SUDAN <i>Marta Osypińska</i> .....	541
CEMETERY A IN NAQLUN: ANTHROPOLOGICAL STRUCTURE OF THE BURIALS <i>Karol Piasecki</i> .....	549
ORNAMENTS ON FUNERARY STELAE OF THE 9TH–12TH CENTURIES FROM EGYPT — JOSEF STRYGOWSKI’S PUBLICATION ANEW <i>Małgorzata Redlak</i> .....	561
NON OMNIS MORIAR. REFLECTION ON “RITE DE PASSAGE” IN THE OLD KINGDOM <i>Teodozja I. Rzeuska</i> .....	575
BURIALS IN THE COMPLEX OF THE GREAT AMIR QURQUMAS (No. 162) IN CAIRO’S “NORTHERN NECROPOLIS” <i>Maciej G. Witkowski</i> .....	587
BURIAL CUSTOMS AT TELL ARBID (SYRIA) IN THE MIDDLE BRONZE AGE. CULTURAL INTERRELATIONS WITH THE NILE DELTA AND THE LEVANT <i>Zuzanna Wygnańska</i> .....	605
GIFTS FOR THE AFTERLIFE: EVIDENCE OF MORTUARY PRACTICES FROM THE NECROPOLIS IN MARINA EL-ALAMEIN <i>Iwona Zych</i> .....	619
INDEX OF SITES .....	633