

VESSELS OF LIFE: NEW EVIDENCE FOR CREATIVE ASPECTS IN MATERIAL REMAINS FROM DOMESTIC SITES

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Introduction

Figurative vessels from Ancient Egypt have been studied since the early 20th century, but it was Janine Bourriau who first discussed these vases not as works of art but as an integral part of the huge corpus of Pharaonic ceramic vessels.¹ The excavated examples of such figure vases were predominately found in tombs, as can be illustrated by one of the sub-groups from the 18th Dynasty, so called representations of wet nurses, deriving in particular from cemeteries at Sedment and Abydos.² The funerary context is also predominant for the group of contemporaneous figure vases which is the main focus of the present paper: feminoform vessels with modelled breasts and often plastic arms are well attested in a variety of forms³ and derive primarily from tombs⁴ dateable to the New Kingdom (Fig. 1).⁵ They have often been labelled as “milk vessels” and were associated by various authors with the cult of Hathor.⁶ Such vessels are also known as metallic variants⁷ or as imitations in glass.⁸

The purpose of this paper is to present feminoform vases from domestic contexts that potentially contribute to our understanding of the possible use and function of this type of vessel as the present state of knowledge is mainly derived from funerary records.

Feminoform vessels of the New Kingdom

The prime feature which characterises the wheel thrown pottery vessels as feminoform vases are nipples or breasts applied to the upper part of the body of the jar.⁹ They are attested both as pierced ones, potentially functioning as small spouts (Fig. 1.b),¹⁰ or as unpierced examples with a greater emphasis on anatomical details of the female breast (Fig. 1.a).¹¹

¹ BOURRIAU 1987. For references on early studies by Margaret Murray, Christine Decroches-Noblecourt and others see BOURRIAU 1987: 82.

² Cf. BRUNNER-TRAUT 1969–1970; BRUNNER-TRAUT 1971; BOURRIAU 1987; ROBINS 1995: 76.

³ Cf. PINCH 1993: 150. See especially SEILER 2006 for the distinction between “Hathor” and “Isis” vases – the latter is defined as a ritual vessel embedded in the funerary context, representing a mourning woman.

⁴ Cf. LOPEZ GRANDE and DE GREGORIO 2009; LOPEZ GRANDE in this volume. For the range of contexts of Hathor vessels cf. STEVENS 2006: 172.

⁵ Although more common in the New Kingdom, pottery vessels with applied breasts and feminine faces are already known from the Middle Kingdom onwards, see STEVENS 2006: 171 with literature. See also BOURRIAU 1982a: 78.

⁶ See e.g. BOURRIAU 1982a: 78; HOPE 1982: 87; SMITH 2003: 47.

⁷ BOURRIAU 1982a: 78: “a stylized bronze version of the domestic milk vase,” now in Strasbourg. Cf. also STEVENS 2006: 172.

⁸ E.g. British Museum EA 4739, see NOLTE 1968: pl. XXX.8.

⁹ Cf. SEILER 2006: 319–320.

¹⁰ Cf., e.g., BRUNTON 1930: pl. 27.101–102.

¹¹ Cf., e.g., BRUNTON 1930: pl. 27.100 and WODZIŃSKA 2010: 59, New Kingdom 2 with references.

Feminine faces at the neck, moulded and applied to the vessel, may complement these breast applications, but are sometimes missing. Applied arms including hands are present in some cases (Fig. 1.b); sometimes they are executed in paint only.¹² In contrast to the figurative Isis vessels recently discussed by Anne Seiler,¹³ the feminoform vases presented here, fashioned both in Nile and in Marl clay, are thus mainly characterised by a “vessel appearance”. Rudimentary elements representing anthropomorphic features have been added to a simple ovoid jar body.

Such vessels, predominantly found in funerary contexts, are commonly referred to as Hathor vases,¹⁴ although the face is not always present and even if so, it cannot clearly be identified as the goddess (Fig. 1.a).¹⁵ The general assumption is that vessels with female breasts are the predecessors of decorated, mostly blue painted, Hathor jars, where the interpretation is more straightforward since the modelled faces of these vessels show the common features of the goddess like cow’s ears.¹⁶ Blue painted Hathor vessels are attested in both tomb and settlement contexts in addition to temple settings.¹⁷ The symbolic value of such vessels with modelled applications covers a wide range of functional aspects, concentrating on themes like fertility, sexuality and festivity.¹⁸ How do the earlier feminoform vessels of the 18th Dynasty correspond to this picture?

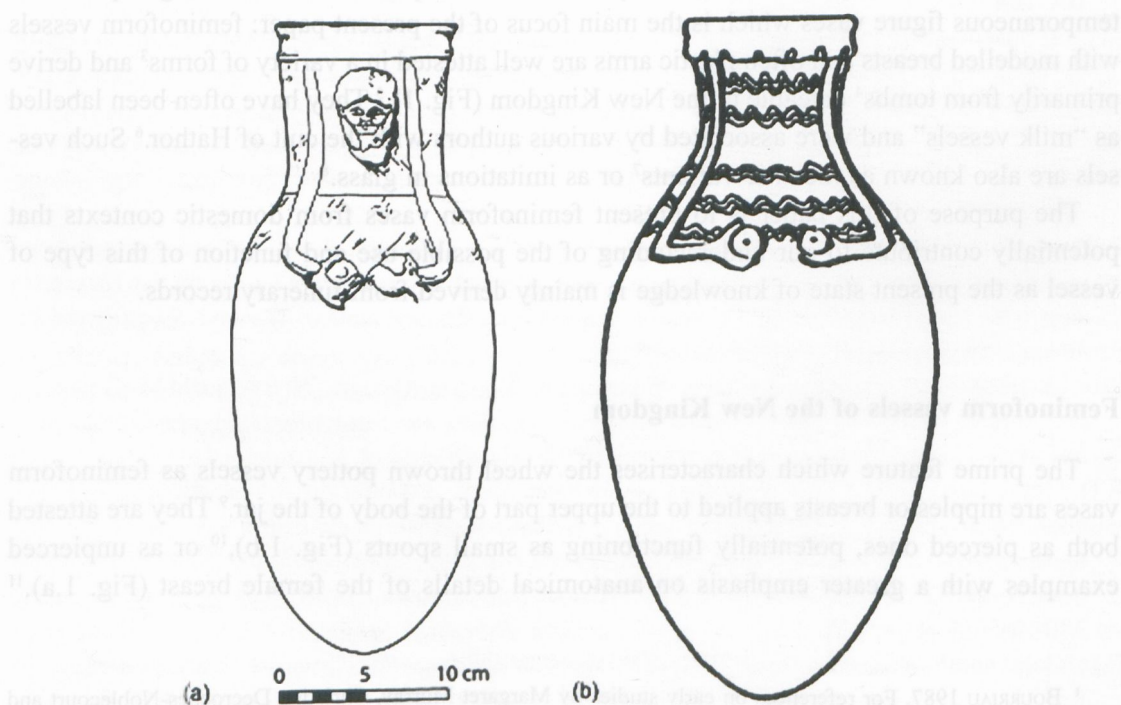


Fig. 1. Examples for feminoform vessels of the 18th Dynasty: (a) Nile clay with applied decoration including feminine face and unpierced breasts, after WODZIŃSKA 2010: 59, New Kingdom 2; (b) Marl clay with incised and applied decoration including breast-spouts, after SEILER 2006: fig. 1. Not to scale.

¹² Cf. SEILER 2006: 318–319, fig. 2 and table 1.

¹³ SEILER 2006: 319, table 1 and passim.

¹⁴ See GUIDOTTI 1978; PINCH 1993: 148–150; SEILER 2006: 317, figs. 1–3.

¹⁵ SEILER 2006: 317.

¹⁶ BOURRIAU 1982a: 78; HOPE 1982: 86–87; SEILER 2006: 317 with note 8; STEVENS 2006: 171–172.

¹⁷ Cf. HOPE 1991; ROSE 2007: 29; BUDKA 2008: 107 and 117 with literature; HUBIN 2008: 32–34 and passim.

¹⁸ Cf. STEVENS 2006: 168–169; BUDKA 2013: 206–207.

Creative aspects of New Kingdom material culture

To provide a background for contextualising feminoform vessels of the New Kingdom, it is important to stress general aspects of the material culture of this period. It is especially the data-rich period of the New Kingdom which can be used to illustrate the complexity of life in Ancient Egypt.¹⁹ The complete set of material culture, coming both from settlement sites and from tombs, offers rich insights into life-style and working processes, but also into cultic activities and religious practice. Like other types of artefacts, pottery vessels can contribute to this picture. As highlighted in recent years by Anna Stevens and others, pottery from towns attests not only to common household activities and storing, but also to the presence of religious, cultic and festive activities in domestic settings.²⁰

Especially creative aspects are known as important issues in Ancient Egypt, well traceable in textual and pictorial data.²¹ “Creative aspects” comprise here regeneration, rebirth, fecundity, fertility and sexuality. All of these aspects are present in tombs, temples as well as in settlements of Pharaonic Egypt. It is predominately the goddess Hathor who is, among other deities like Taweret, associated with this sphere which is of great importance for both domestic and funerary settings.²² Hathor as the protector of maternity is closely associated with women, health-related issues, childbirth and fertility, but she is also the mistress of festivity and drunkenness including aspects of sexuality. As Hathor and her range of responsibilities clearly illustrate, this set of aspects cannot be separated from each other and falls into the same sphere, labelled here as “creative aspects”.

The famous fishing and fowling scenes from Egyptian tombs can be named as a prominent example for this general theme. The elaborate semantic meaning of these scenes, illustrating regularly Theban rock tombs of the 18th Dynasty, has been widely discussed. Recently, scholars like Lise Manniche,²³ Melinda Hartwig²⁴ and Valérie Angenot²⁵ have stressed the complexity of such icons combining various aspects within the sphere of rebirth and fertility. The term “creative aspects” used here implies exactly this combination and elaborate meaning.

The archaeological evidence for finds relating to creative aspects is particularly rich in the period of the New Kingdom. Faience vessels like the well-known Nun bowls²⁶ and different kinds of artefacts, for example the so called cosmetic spoons,²⁷ have been taken into account for tracing the importance of regeneration in the world of the living. Female figurines, comprising both nude figures on beds and rudimentary female clay sticks, are common finds from temple sites, thus probably used as votive offerings.²⁸ Examples from domestic contexts are also known, where they are frequently associated with Nun bowls (see below). A wide-ranging setting for the use of such “objects of life”²⁹ which are generally known from domestic but also funerary and temple contexts can be established. The famous fancy shapes of the

¹⁹ See BROVARIKI, DOLL and FREED 1982: passim. Cf. also BUDKA 2013: 185–207; BUDKA 2014.

²⁰ Cf. STEVENS 2006: 167–194, 297–321; BUDKA 2013; BUDKA 2014 with further literature.

²¹ Cf. HARTWIG 2004: 98–100 with further literature; see also PINCH 1993.

²² See PINCH 1993; STEVENS 2006: 35–36, 40 and passim.

²³ MANNICHE 2003.

²⁴ HARTWIG 2004.

²⁵ ANGENOT 2005.

²⁶ Cf. STRAUSS 1974. For the domestic context of these bowls cf. GIDDY 1999: 267; STEVENS 2006: 178–180.

²⁷ See most recently WOODS 2009; cf. also BULTÉ 2008.

²⁸ See STEVENS 2006: 85–89; WARAOKA 2009: passim.

²⁹ WOODS 2009.

blue painted ware, favouring a variety of floral and faunal motifs³⁰ and including Bes and Hathor jars with applied decoration,³¹ fall into the same category.

Feminoform vessels from New Kingdom settlement sites

The key aspects of this paper are unpublished ceramics from three domestic sites occupied during the 18th Dynasty: the town and temple site of Nebpehtyre Ahmose at South Abydos³², the settlement of Elephantine Island³³ and the Egyptian fortified town on Sai Island in Upper Nubia.³⁴ These sites have yielded some feminoform vessels among the domestic New Kingdom ceramics and I will address the ceramic context and associated finds in order to discuss their functional use.

South Abydos

At South Abydos, the Ahmose Tetisheri Project directed by Stephen Harvey has been working on monuments around the pyramid of king Nebpehtyre Ahmose. Several small temple buildings and production areas were unearthed and cultic use at the site is attested until the 20th Dynasty.³⁵

In 2010, trenching was conducted as part of the building of the Supreme Council of Antiquities' protection wall at the site. In one area, labelled trench 13, a large assemblage of votive pottery came to light. This assemblage is located to the southwest of a building associated with Ahmose Nefertary, Temple A.³⁶ Due to time pressure and the adjacent Muslim cemetery, we were not able to open the intriguing area much further. In total, trench 13 yielded 29 baskets of sherds and about 3,000 diagnostic sherds. The material is mainly typical offering pottery also known from other contexts of the site³⁷, comprising incense burners, white washed pot stands, dishes and offering jars with red splash decoration, beer jars and drop pots. Most of the material is clearly early 18th Dynasty in date, but some vessels have been produced as late as during the reign of Thutmosis III.³⁸ In general, the material resembles the pottery found at the terrace temple of Ahmose³⁹ and also that within the huge offering-deposit in front of the pyramid of Queen Tetisheri.⁴⁰ Among these votive ceramics, feminoform vessels, otherwise rare at non-funerary contexts at Abydos, are also present.

One of the most interesting pieces from trench 13 was a Nile B2 feminoform vessel with red and black paint (linear decoration around the neck and a faded black band around the maximum diameter). ATP 14283 has two modelled, unpierced breasts (Fig. 2). A very similar, feminoform jar with applied breasts was drawn by 'Umm Sety/Dorothy Eady as coming from the New Kingdom town during the course of the Egyptian Antiquities Organisation excava-

³⁰ For the rich symbolism of floral motifs in general see e.g. SCHOSKE, KREISSL and GERMER 1992.

³¹ Cf. HOPE 1991; ROSE 2007: 29; BUDKA 2008: 107 with literature; HUBIN 2008: 32–34 and *passim*.

³² Cf. HARVEY 1998, 2004.

³³ Cf. VON PILGRIM 2010a, 2012.

³⁴ DOYEN 2009, 2014.

³⁵ See HARVEY 1998, 2004; BUDKA 2006.

³⁶ For ceramics from Temple A see BUDKA 2006: 88–108.

³⁷ Cf. BUDKA 2006: 88–90, fig. 2, 108–112; see also the large number of votive pottery from Umm el-Qaab (BUDKA 2010b: 46–48, fig. 28).

³⁸ All of this is still preliminary since I was unfortunately not able to conduct the study season planned for 2011.

³⁹ E.g. AYRTON, CURRELLY and WEIGALL 1904: pl. XLVII.

⁴⁰ BUDKA 2006: 108–112, figs. 19–20.



Fig. 2. Feminoform vessel with applied breasts and linear decoration from wall trench 13 in South Abydos (ATP 14283).

tions in 1966.⁴¹ Both jars are unfortunately broken at the junction of the neck, thus the upper part is lost in each case. Of interest for a possible reconstruction of the top part are rim sherds with a feminine face at the neck, found in trench 13. Several of these rim sherds in Nile B2, covered in red wash (ATP 14608, Fig. 3) attest to the presence of at least one vessel. According to a slight variance in the rim diameter, there might have been even several jars of this particular type within the material from trench 13, but only one feminine face has survived. A similar piece was found nearby: ATP 6089.3 comes from Temple A (operation 24, locus 4) and is the rim sherd of a red washed Nile B2 bottle with tall neck and folded rim.⁴² At its neck, remains of an applied decoration might have once been a feminine face as it is the case for ATP 14608.

In addition, during recent excavation of the small hut used by Charles T. Currelly during his work early in the 20th century at South Abydos, a shoulder fragment of a Marl A3 fem-

⁴¹ Notes provided kindly by Peter Lacovara to Stephen Harvey.

⁴² A complete vessel of a similar type, with feminine face and female breasts, was found in a comparable temple-related context, in the treasury of Thutmose I at Karnak; see JACQUET-GORDON 2012: vol. 1, 101, vol. 2, Fig. 45.d (P.953).

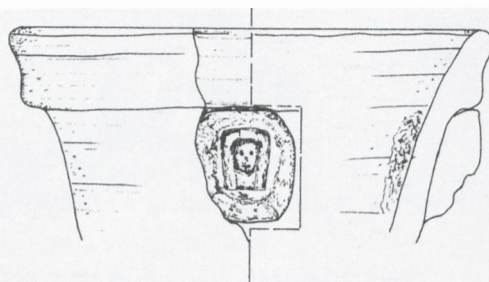


Fig. 3. Rim sherd of feminoform vessel with applied feminine face, from wall trench 13 in South Abydos (ATP 14608, scale 1:2).

inoform vase was found.⁴³ Two pierced female breasts are preserved as well as modelled arms with hands cupping the breasts. Typical incised decoration of groups of horizontal lines and finger impressions are visible on the sherd. The piece most probably dates to the early 18th Dynasty and finds a close parallel in a sherd of the same ware from Sai (Fig. 6, see below).⁴⁴

Prior to this new evidence from temple and domestic contexts, feminoform vessels have been known at Abydos from burials as part of tomb groups. Mace's Cemetery D yielded a complete example in tomb D 56.⁴⁵ Now kept as Inv. no. 1901:606 at the National Museum of Ireland, Dublin, it is a painted jar with two breast-spouts.⁴⁶ Its flaring rim was decorated with cord impressions and the body shows white banded painted decoration.⁴⁷ In form and decoration, this vessel example finds parallels at Umm el-Qaab.⁴⁸ Two examples of a type labelled as FA 99 were found in the course of German excavations at the hill of Heqareshu; a third fragment was recovered in recent years from the tomb of Djer. These vessels are associated with the votive cult during the 18th Dynasty for Osiris.⁴⁹ The best preserved vessel FA 99 from the hill of Heqareshu is similar in size and shape to Dublin Inv. no. 1901:606, but no breast applications have survived. Interestingly, there is a piece missing at the front side of the jar, covering exactly the area of the shoulder where breast-spouts might have been once applied. The bands of its decoration are executed in red colour, not in white as in the case of the Dublin vessel. These bands are intriguing features and seem to provide information on the symbolic function of the jars: for the white bands, associations with linen bandages used to wrap divine bodies are possible.⁵⁰ The vessels could therefore be closely linked to the mummified Osiris or to the protective deities responsible for his resurrection, especially the mourning sisters Isis and Nephthys. This might explain why such feminoform vessels are archaeologically associated with tombs and funerary rituals.⁵¹ The red bands of FA 99 pos-

⁴³ See YAMAMOTO 2006: 12; information about the sherd provided kindly by Kei Yamamoto.

⁴⁴ Currelly excavated both in the Middle Kingdom and New Kingdom areas of South Abydos (see AYRTON, CURRELLEY and WEIGALL 1904: passim); the fragment might have been found in the Ahmose area.

⁴⁵ RANDALL-MACIVER and MACE 1902: pl. 54.

⁴⁶ See The Global Egyptian Museum (<http://www.globalegyptianmuseum.org/detail.aspx?id=1882>).

⁴⁷ This painted decoration is paralleled by an example from another tomb group at Abydos, see SNAPE 1986: 180, no. 71. For white banded decoration as a feature of "Isis vases" see SEILER 2006: 319, table 1, note d.

⁴⁸ Another red washed parallel with white linear decoration and breast-spouts can be named from a tomb at Qau: BRUNTON 1930: pl. 27.101.

⁴⁹ To be published by the author within the framework of the project "Cult of Osiris at Abydos/Umm el-Qaab", German Archaeological Institute Cairo. For some finds from the hill of Heqareshu dated to the New Kingdom see already PUMPENMEIER 1998.

⁵⁰ For the colour symbolism of white bands as clothing see RAVEN 1978–1979: 282 and 285.

⁵¹ See SEILER 2006: 319 for Isis jars with painted decoration.

sibly refer to similar aspects (bandages of gods, mummification) or also to apotropaic rituals or festive elements at the occasion of the ritual burial of Osiris (cf. below).⁵²

In general, the Nile silt feminoform vessels from settlement and temple contexts at South Abydos find ready parallels at Thebes, especially from tomb contexts in Dra Abu el-Naga and within the material recently published by Anne Seiler.⁵³ A good example for an applied face, arms and breasts is the complete jar Brooklyn Museum 14.642, excavated in the Upper Egyptian site Sawama, in tomb 91.⁵⁴ Similar to ATP 14283, this vessel has a linear decoration with black lines across the shoulder.⁵⁵

To contextualise the assemblage from trench 13 within the Ahmose complex, other finds and vessels have to be mentioned. Interestingly, some of them are also connected with creative aspects as discussed above – especially with Hathor, fertility and rebirth. Several ornamental and figural vessels from South Abydos fall into this category.⁵⁶ A good example is an ibex-appliqué, ATP 6564.1, coming from the area north of the entrance of Temple A (Op. 27, 9, 11).⁵⁷ Temple A is most probably dedicated to Ahmose Nefertary who is closely associated with Hathor. Faience bowls with floral design and references to the goddess were found in the general area.⁵⁸ So called Hathoric ceramic bowls can also be named in this context. Four carinated bowls with rough applications in the shape of the head of Hathor were recognized during recent excavations at South Abydos (town surface 1993, ATP 569.9, 6043.7 and 6560.1). In addition, a rim sherd of a bowl with a Hathor head appliqué was recorded by ‘Umm Sety/Dorothy Eady as coming from the New Kingdom town.⁵⁹ These bowls with applied Hathor faces occur in Egypt as of the 18th Dynasty and are especially well known at Deir el Medina,⁶⁰ but also attested at Malqata,⁶¹ Amarna⁶² and Elephantine.⁶³ The finds from South Abydos, together with the pieces from Elephantine, might provide additional information on the function of these vessels that are usually connected with Thebes and the goddess Hathor in her role as Lady of the Western Valley.⁶⁴ Associations with the local cult of Ahmose Nefertary and a connection with the mentioned Nun bowls seem possible.⁶⁵ This might also explain the evidence of feminoform vessels from a context adjacent to the queen’s Temple A.

Elephantine

The ceramic material from recent excavations by the joint German-Swiss mission in the New Kingdom town of Elephantine, currently under the responsibility of the author, derives

⁵² Cf. STEVENS 2006: 299–300.

⁵³ SEILER 2006: 318–320, figs. 2–3. For new material from Spanish excavations at Dra Abu el Naga see LOPEZ GRANDE in this volume.

⁵⁴ SMITH 2003: 47, fig. 3.7 on p. 49. The vessel is also labelled as “milk jar” in the online catalogue, see http://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/objects/3115/Milk_Vase.

⁵⁵ See also a similar jar from Qau with black linear decoration and breast-spouts: BRUNTON 1930: pl. 27.102.

⁵⁶ See BUDKA 2013: 198.

⁵⁷ BUDKA 2006: 107–108, fig. 17. For vases in the form of a reclining ibex see BOURRIAU 1982c: 105.

⁵⁸ Nun bowls were found at the terrace temple and throughout the Ahmose complex and town, cf. AYRTON, CURRELLY and WEIGALL 1904: pl. XLVIII, no. 15; HARVEY 1998: 464, fig. 11. For similar bowls used as votive offerings to Hathor see PINCH 1993: passim and pl. 32 (faience bowls).

⁵⁹ Notes provided kindly by Peter Lacovara to Stephen Harvey. See BUDKA 2006: 93, note 6 and 113, note 169.

⁶⁰ Cf. GUIDOTTI 1978: 108, fig. 5; see also PINCH 1993: 150.

⁶¹ HOPE 1989: fig. 13.s and fig. 14.a.

⁶² HOPE 1991: 26, fig. 1.d (blue painted); STEVENS 2006: 169.

⁶³ BUDKA 2008: 127–128, fig. 19.3.

⁶⁴ Cf. GUIDOTTI 1978: 105.

⁶⁵ See BUDKA 2006: 113.

from layers dateable from the early 18th Dynasty until the Late Ramesside Period.⁶⁶ The new fieldwork yielded among others also feminoform vessels (Fig. 4). At present, 15 pieces were documented from domestic contexts of the New Kingdom at Elephantine. Four sherds are associated with the earliest stratum, level (*Bauschicht*) 10; these are red washed vessels with applied breasts, sometimes with black linear decoration like ATP 14283 (see above). A single piece was made in Marl clay and painted (39802O/k-03).⁶⁷ These feminoform vessels are associated with the typical settlement pottery from Elephantine – mostly open shapes like dishes and bowls, cooking pots, beer jars, various types of jars and pot stands.⁶⁸ Some fragments of feminoform vessels from Elephantine derive from the Ramesside levels 8 and 7, comprising again mainly open shapes and storage vessels.⁶⁹ In addition to the forms already discussed, blue painted vessels with modelled faces of the god Bes, the goddess Hathor and Hathoric bowls (see above, South Abydos) are also present at Elephantine.⁷⁰

It is in particular recent excavation work by Cornelius von Pilgrim in the southern part of the town, so called area 14, which yielded material of high interest for the present paper.⁷¹ Five fragments of feminoform jars were documented in a rather small assemblage of 1,500 diagnostic sherds; in general this material from area 14 is extremely rich in painted and imported sherds.⁷² The relevant pieces are mainly pierced and unpierced appliqué breasts, made in Nile B2 and red washed (the breast-spout 39802O/f-031 and the unpierced nipples 39802V/c-014 and 39802V/c-022, Fig. 4). 39802O/f-030 (Fig. 4 top left) is a more elaborate piece: a sun disk with modelled cow horns decorates its neck, probably a Hathoric headdress as attested in funerary contexts.⁷³

Within area 14, the associated ceramic material comprises, apart from common wares and functional types as bread plates and cooking pots, also figurative applications including a duck bowl and painted wares with floral and faunal motifs as well as an extraordinary blue painted lotus vessel imitating a metal bowl (39801M/a-020) and fragments of Mycenaean stirrup jars.⁷⁴ Furthermore, a large number of female figurines and idols were found. Twenty nine nude figures on beds, two female votive sticks and two pieces of possible Nun bowls are archaeologically associated with the feminoform vessels from area 14.⁷⁵

Sai Island

The third case study is material unearthed on Sai Island within the framework of the Sai Island Archaeological Mission of Charles de Gaulle – Lille 3 University. At a site in the northern part of the New Kingdom town on the island, labelled as SAVIN, excavated under the direction of Didier Devauchelle and headed in the field by Florence Doyen,⁷⁶ two frag-

⁶⁶ Cf. BUDKA 2005, 2010a.

⁶⁷ A fragment of a female nipple with traces of black paint, comparable to the famous Princeton vessel, inv. no. 1952-87 (see below).

⁶⁸ For an overview of the typical vessel types of the 18th Dynasty from Elephantine see: BUDKA 2005: 95–108, figs. 29–37. For *Bauschicht* 10 see also SEILER 1999: 206–223.

⁶⁹ For an overview of the typical vessel types of the Ramesside period from Elephantine see: BUDKA 2005: 108–111, figs. 39–40.

⁷⁰ BUDKA 2008: 127; BUDKA 2015.

⁷¹ Cf. VON PILGRIM 2010b, 2011: 202–205.

⁷² For a first characterisation of the ceramics from area 14 see BUDKA 2010a.

⁷³ See LOPEZ GRANDE in this volume.

⁷⁴ For preliminary remarks on this material see BUDKA 2010a, 2013a, 2013b. For Mycenaean stirrup jars in the context of New Kingdom Egypt cf. VERMEULE 1982: 153.

⁷⁵ Data kindly provided by the excavator Cornelius von Pilgrim. For the typical shape of such female stick figures at Elephantine see KOPP 2005: fig. 28.5.

⁷⁶ See DOYEN 2009, 2014.

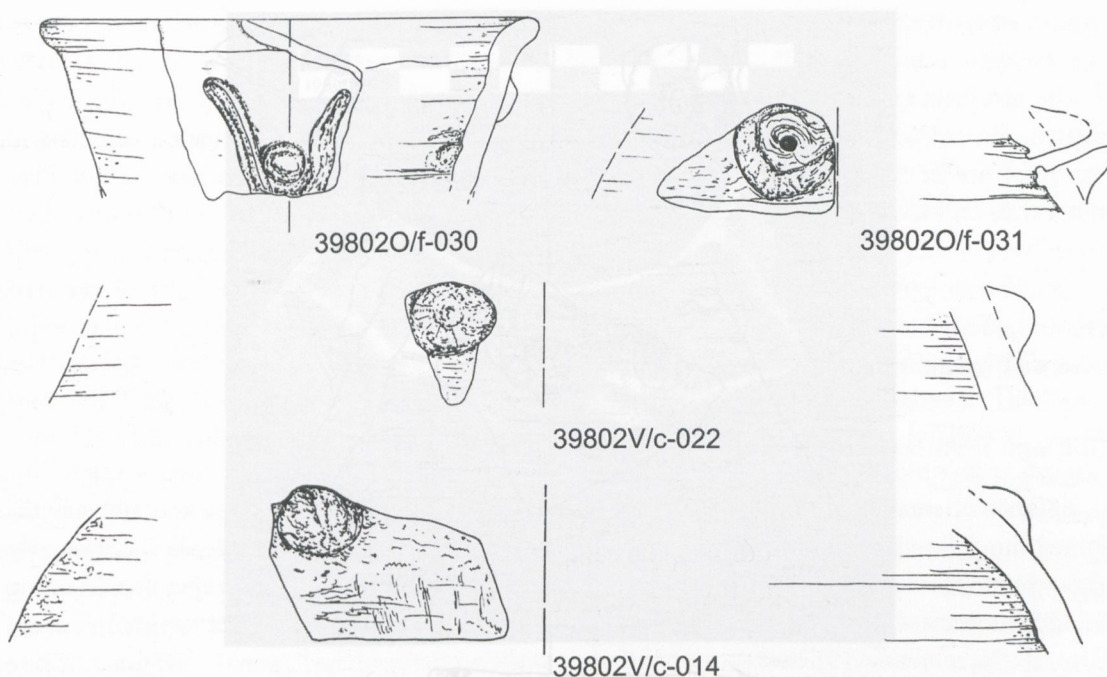


Fig. 4. Fragments of feminoform vessels from the settlement of Elephantine (scale 1:2).

ments of feminoform vases were found. A surface find completes this small assemblage of three figure vases of the New Kingdom (Fig. 5). Although the pieces do not come from stratified contexts, but from fillings (and in some cases from surface contexts), they can be well dated to the early 18th Dynasty according to parallels.

The first piece from SAVIN is a red washed shoulder fragment of a Nile clay jar with pierced breasts and applied arms with hands cupping the breasts (SAVIN N/C 685, Fig. 5 centre). Traces of incised decoration as wavy lines are clearly visible at the shoulder. The vessel finds good parallels in Egypt, for example a Marl clay jar from Qau can be named.⁷⁷ Like the comparable vessels from Egypt, N/C 685 ranges in date from the early 18th Dynasty up to the reign of Thutmosis III.⁷⁸

Another fragment from SAVIN is not as straightforward in its interpretation – SAVIN N/C 621.4 (Fig. 5 top) might be a pierced and quite large, a bit angular shaped breast or maybe also a spout. Spouted vessels are rare, but they are attested in New Kingdom Nubia.⁷⁹ They also show a red wash like N/C 621.4 and other feminoform vessels.⁸⁰

The third piece from Sai is a heavily worn shoulder fragment of a Marl A3 vessel (Fig. 5 bottom, Fig. 6). Similar to the Nile clay example, modelled arms and hands are cupping the female breasts which are not pierced. There are no traces of wavy lines or incised comb patterns, as attested for a close parallel from a tomb at Qustul.⁸¹ This jar is made of the same

⁷⁷ BRUNTON 1930: pl. 27.100; SEILER 2006: fig. 1. For wavy line patterns of feminoform vessels cf. LOPEZ GRANDE in this volume (but note also RZEUSKA 2010).

⁷⁸ Cf. SEILER 2006: 317–327; WODZIŃSKA 2010: 59, New Kingdom 2 with references. Another example of feminoform vessels at Egyptian sites in Upper Nubia was found at Sesebi – this fragment, a jar with a Hathor-head, is probably dating to the later 18th Dynasty, see PETERSON 1967: 12, fig. 28 and STEVENS 2006: 172.

⁷⁹ HOLTHOER 1977: 79–80, pl. 16, SV 1, ordinary spouted vessel.

⁸⁰ An interpretation as an udder of a cow vessel (see ROSE and PYKE 2011: 816–820, figs. 6–7) as proposed by P. Rose during the conference is unlikely since the fragment is clearly of New Kingdom date according to the ware (fabric and surface treatment).

⁸¹ BOURRIAU 1982a: 78, no. 50, Chicago 21044 from Qustul, tomb R. 29, early 18th Dynasty. See also the sherd mentioned above from Currelly's hut at South Abydos (note 43).

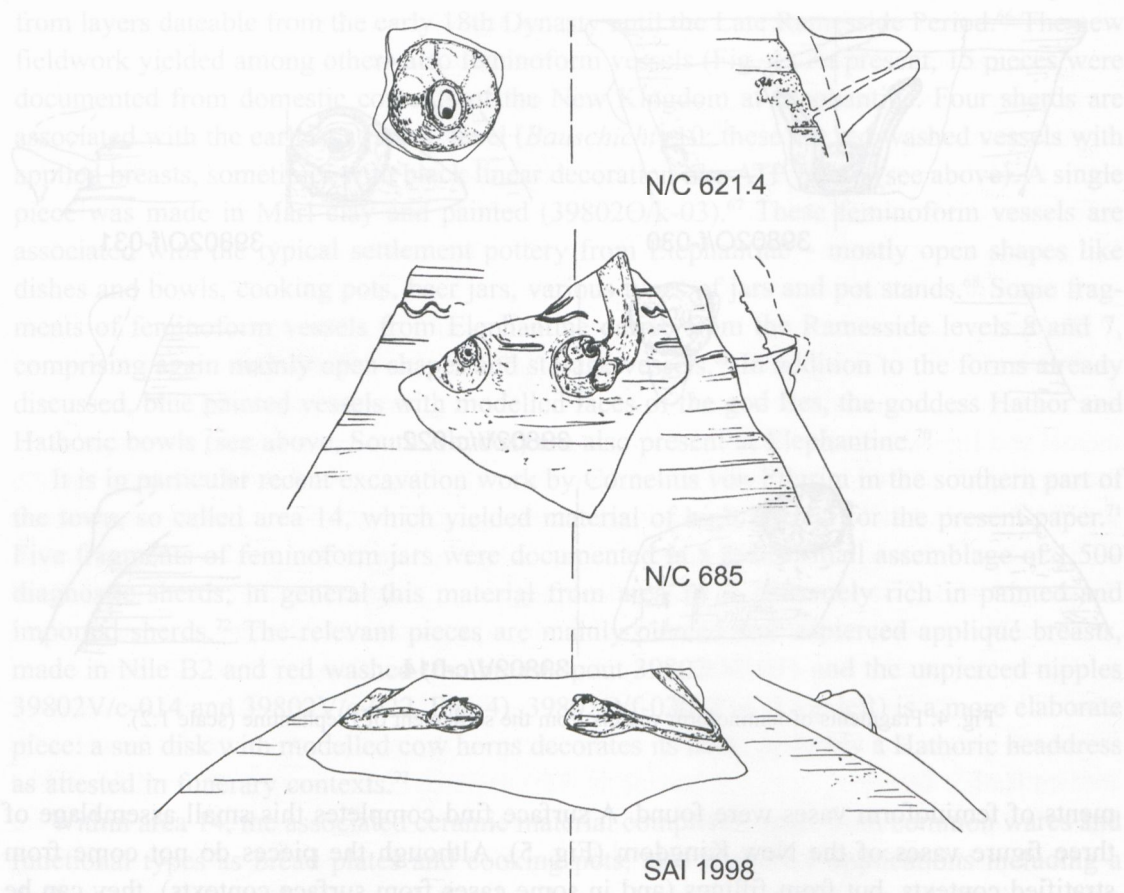


Fig. 5. Fragments of feminoform vessels from the New Kingdom town on Sai Island (scale 1:2).

material and completely preserved. The style of the unpierced breasts, the thin, elongated arms and the hands are very similar to the Sai fragment. The latter was collected by Francis Geus in 1998 from the surface and cannot be dated by context. Comparable vessels are already known in the Middle Kingdom and the Second Intermediate Period, made in Marl A3 and decorated with incised patterns like the Qustul jar.⁸² Both the close comparison from Qustul and the archaeological context from Sai itself suggest a dating of the Marl A3 feminoform vessel to the early 18th Dynasty.

In general, the 18th Dynasty pottery assemblage from SAVIN resembles material excavated in domestic quarters at other Pharaonic sites, both in Upper and Lower Nubia (e.g. Kumma, Semna, Askut and Sesebi)⁸³ and in Egypt (e.g. for the early levels Elephantine, Deir el-Ballas and the Ahmose town at South Abydos as well as Elephantine, Amarna and Malqata for the later levels).⁸⁴ In addition to typical household pottery like cooking pots, spinning bowls and fire dogs,⁸⁵ several vessel types occur that may have served a variety of functions, e.g. as votive pottery (e.g. so called beer jars and flower pots, incense bowls and white washed pot stands) or as luxury ware (e.g. blue painted ware, imported vessels and an Egyp-

⁸² See RZEUSKA 2011: 485, 521, fig. 14E, family III jars (from Shellal); SMITH 2012: 390, fig. 10.m (from Askut). Cf. also RZEUSKA 2010 who convincingly argues for a Nubian influence of the zigzag and wavy line-style decoration of Middle Kingdom Marl clay vessels.

⁸³ Cf. also HOLTHOER 1977.

⁸⁴ Cf. BUDKA 2011a, 2011b, 2012.

⁸⁵ BUDKA 2012.



Fig.6. Fragment of Marl A3 feminoform vessel from Sai Island (SAI 1998).

tian imitation of a Late Minoan IA rhyton). Comparable to Elephantine and Abydos, SAVIN yielded good examples for the bichrome painted style with floral and faunal motifs.⁸⁶

A so far unique piece with floral and faunal decoration is a lower part of a decorated rhyton, covered in a red slip and burnished, made in a very fine Nile B (SAVIN N/C 1205). The area around the perforated bottom of this vessel is painted in black with floral elements. Just above these lotus flowers a register with figural painting is still partly visible. According to the remains it seems to be a scene in the marshes: a striding male figure is carrying two fishes hanging from a pole set on his shoulder.⁸⁷ This motif finds a close parallel in the small-scale decorative panel of a silver jug dated to the 19th Dynasty.⁸⁸ This silver vessel is part of the famous Bubastis hoard, discovered in 1906 and characterised by a mixture of Near Eastern and Egyptian styles and motifs.⁸⁹ Interestingly, the silver and gold jugs from this hoard comprise also vessels with depictions of the goddess Hathor, embedded in a rich spectrum of floral and faunal motifs.⁹⁰ Similar as these precious metal vessels from Bubastis, rhyta like N/C 1205 had the character of luxury items.⁹¹ The vessel shape of N/C 1205 is characteristically Aegean; as known from other sites, it is an Egyptian imitation of a Late Minoan IA rhyton.⁹² The Egyptian “fish” motif as part of a little marsh scene might be interpreted as a symbol of renewal.⁹³ SAVIN N/C 1205 therefore belongs to the general sphere of creation and festivals evoked in some of the settlement pottery from SAVIN. As a complement, a

⁸⁶ See BUDKA 2011a: 30–31, pl. 7; for general aspects of this bichrome style see HOPE 1987.

⁸⁷ For rhyta in general cf. HEIN 2015.

⁸⁸ SEIPEL 1977: 379, fig. 72, pl. lii; SARHAGE 1998: 114, fig. 53 and pl. 16; BAKR and BRANDL 2010: 48–49, fig. 4. See also PATCH 2000.

⁸⁹ See BAKR and BRANDL 2010; PATCH 2000.

⁹⁰ Cf. HAYES 1959: 358–359, figs. 224–226; STEVENS 2006: 172.

⁹¹ See in detail HEIN 2015.

⁹² See HEIN 2015: fig. 6 (a number of pottery rhyta from Ezbet Helmi). Cf. also VERMEULE 1982 (especially for Egyptian faience versions of Aegean rhyta).

⁹³ Cf. MINAULT-GOUT 2004: 120; STEVENS 2006: 55–56, 180.

small pottery figure vase in the form of a fish, a *tilapia nilotica*, was discovered in one of the 18th Dynasty tombs at Sai.⁹⁴

The artefacts from SAVIN find close parallels both at Elephantine and at Abydos. Especially noteworthy is the presence of Nun bowls, nude female figures and female clay sticks.⁹⁵ The latter are of the same type as at Elephantine and elsewhere: simple hand-modelled clay sticks with an incised or dotted area representing the pubic region and sometimes with dotted circles resembling breasts.⁹⁶ They can clearly be dated to the early-mid 18th Dynasty, both by the archaeological context of SAVIN and by numerous parallels.⁹⁷ Several fragments of Nun or marsh bowls were found at SAVIN⁹⁸ and complement the theme of regeneration generated by the small marsh scene on the rhyton base N/C 1205.⁹⁹

Common features: creative aspects of material culture

This short survey of feminoform vessels and their associated ceramics and finds highlighted the following common features at all three domestic sites: (1) red wash is commonly applied to these vessels, as is (2) painted linear decoration and incised wavy patterns. Among the archaeologically associated finds, several groups appear frequently, of which three are particularly relevant: (3) bichrome painted vessels with floral and faunal designs, coming from levels of mid-18th Dynasty date.¹⁰⁰ (4) Nun bowls of the 18th Dynasty were found at all sites as were (5) simple clay female figurines of stick shape at Elephantine and Sai and clay “dolls” with attached hair at Abydos.¹⁰¹ Female figurines are archaeologically associated with Nun bowls also at other domestic contexts of the 18th Dynasty, e.g. at Memphis and Amarna.¹⁰²

The common aspect of the five categories listed here might be based on a mutual primary functional use. The features belong to the same context, although the precise relationships between the objects are not always accessible. They cover a set of nuances of day-to-day activities and underscore that creative aspects are important issues in daily life.¹⁰³ That they are closely linked to each other can be illustrated by the bichrome painted vessels with floral and faunal decorative patterns, well attested at Abydos, Elephantine and Sai. These are clearly associated with regeneration and festivals.¹⁰⁴ It has to be stressed that there are even examples where this type of vessel takes the shape of a feminoform vase. The famous vessel now in the Princeton Art Museum (inv. no. 1952-87) has a feminine face below the rim, applied breasts, paint to indicate the pubic zone, and a large register with painted motifs, including the Hathor cow and floral elements.¹⁰⁵ This jar therefore exemplifies the connection between the human faces, the nipples and the goddess Hathor. Especially at Sai and Elephantine,

⁹⁴ MINAULT-GOUT 2004: 120; MINAULT-GOUT and THILL 2012: 66, tomb 8, no. 87, 359, pls. 141 and 160. Another figure vessel of this type found in Upper Nubia comes from Soleb, see BOURRIAU 1982b: 103–104, no. 86.

⁹⁵ BUDKA and DOYEN 2102/2013; DOYEN forthcoming.

⁹⁶ Cf. BUDKA and DOYEN 2013. See, e.g., close parallels from Buhen: EMERY, SMITH and MILLARD 1979: pl. 53.

⁹⁷ See KOPP 2005: 89, note 291 with further parallels from domestic contexts. Comparable pieces from Amarna have been dated to the late 18th Dynasty (STEVENS 2006: 89–91, figs. II.3.10–11).

⁹⁸ Cf. BUDKA and DOYEN 2012/2013: 187, figs. 16–17.

⁹⁹ For Nun bowls found in New Kingdom tombs in Nubia see e.g. WILLIAMS 1992: 131.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. BUDKA 2010a, 2011a: 30–31.

¹⁰¹ From the early excavations at the town of Ahmose, see AYRTON, CURRELLY and WEIGALL 1904: 38.

¹⁰² See GIDDY 1999: 28–31, 267, pls. 8–12; STEVENS 2006: 178–179.

¹⁰³ Cf. STEVENS 2006: 323–329.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. BUDKA 2013a: 203–207.

¹⁰⁵ HOPE 1982: 86–87, no. 69.

sherds are attested that could very well derive from such an elaborate type of feminoform vessel with a wide ranging symbolic meaning.¹⁰⁶

Discussion: feminoform vessels as embedded in New Kingdom daily life

In conclusion, the types of feminoform vessels discussed above seem to be firmly embedded in domestic life of the New Kingdom and are integral parts of its material culture. I would propose to understand this special type of pottery vessels as icons for themes that might be best labelled as “human health or well-being” and as “life”, respectively, in general. Several possible semantic meanings are connected with these feminoform vases – based on the red wash, one may think of apotropaic aspects and rituals¹⁰⁷ as well as of festivals,¹⁰⁸ but the female breasts and Hathor motifs refer in particular to sexuality, childbirth, fecundity, regeneration and rebirth. These elements are merging with each other and there is no clear separation line.¹⁰⁹ As argued above, to describe this complex set of meaning the general term “creative aspects” might be used.

In order to address the symbolic meaning of the vessels below their general iconic aspects, more context-related data are necessary – for example, within the distinct contexts of Theban tombs, Anne Seiler could propose a specific ritual function of similar vessels as Isis jars.¹¹⁰ As another case study, female figurines from the Mut precinct at Karnak were reasonably associated with health-related ritual use by Elizabeth Waraksa.¹¹¹ The discussed feminoform jars from settlements might have functioned as symbols for health, childbirth, Hathor – both as protector of maternity, but also as mistress of festivity and drunkenness – and possibly also for sexuality.¹¹² The vessels were at least partly involved in respective rituals like libations, but this strongly depended on the specific context and its users.¹¹³ It makes a clear difference for the potential ritual use of a vessel whether it is equipped with fully functional breast-spouts or not. Nevertheless, I think that both types – pierced and unpierced breasts – were used in a common sphere of action. It seems unreasonable to isolate one specific function for these jars – such vessels were neither solely connected with Hathor, nor with milk or childbirth. This holds true also for the nude female figurines commonly attested at domestic sites and not only connected with sexuality or childbearing, but with a complex set of meanings which is somehow hard to grasp.¹¹⁴

Finally I would like to stress that the discussed feminoform vessels are not exclusively associated with funerary contexts and regeneration in the afterlife. As it is often the case in Ancient Egypt, finds from tombs are more commonly known and better preserved, but a clear preference for the funerary sphere might very well be an illusion. Feminoform vessels have a firm “Sitz im Leben” and played an important role in daily life of New Kingdom Egypt, as is attested by their appearance in settlement contexts and by a range of associated finds.¹¹⁵ The latter comprises both household items such as functional ceramic types as pot stands, cooking pots and bread plates or moulds, but also objects more readily associated with tomb

¹⁰⁶ For Elephantine see BUDKA 2010a (cf. above, 398020/k-03).

¹⁰⁷ For some critical comments about the potential danger of “over-interpretation” of the symbolism of the colour red in domestic contexts see STEVENS 2006: 299–300.

¹⁰⁸ For the ominous notions of red see RAVEN 1978–1979: 282.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. MESKELL 2000: 260 “It seems that sexuality was inextricably linked to domesticity and ritual.”

¹¹⁰ SEILER 2006.

¹¹¹ WARAKSA 2009.

¹¹² Cf. already HOPE 1982: 87.

¹¹³ As of yet, there were no residues found in the feminoform jars from Abydos, Elephantine or Sai.

¹¹⁴ Cf. WARAKSA 2009; DOYEN forthcoming.

¹¹⁵ For the general embeddedness of “private religion” into daily life see STEVENS 2006: 328 and passim.

contexts as Nun bowls and female clay figurines. However, it is especially the complete set of ceramics associated with the feminoform vessels discussed here that firmly illustrates the embeddedness of these vessels into daily life – other than comparable finds from tombs, we can rely here on a domestic corpus of ceramics of which the feminoform vessels are not exclusive and separate pieces, but quite on the contrary, integral parts showing the wide range of meaning in archaeological contexts from settlements.

Since excavations at the sites discussed here will continue in the near future, one can expect further evidence for contextualising the feminoform vessels of the New Kingdom. At present, some comments on the general character of the jars have been presented and will hopefully contribute to the discussion of the functional analysis of domestic ceramics. The particular type of vessel known as Hathor jar or feminoform vessel held a meaning for both life on earth and the hereafter – emphasising as such that these were not separate or mutually exclusive spheres within the Ancient Egyptian perception.

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