

6. The New Kingdom-Pottery from Elephantine (Pl. III)

The 2008 study season on the New Kingdom pottery from Elephantine (March, 14th to April, 11th) was a continuation of the work conducted in 2000-2003 and 2006. The focus was on material from excavations in 'area II' and 'area III South' from 2004 to 2007. These areas

are situated at the northern edge of the kom and have yielded several domestic buildings of both the Eighteenth Dynasty and the Ramesside period.¹²

The time of the mid-Eighteenth Dynasty marks the beginning of the appearance of decorated pottery wares of the New Kingdom in Elephantine.¹³ Within the category of painted vessels, a group of mono-, bi-, and polychrome decorated marl clay vessels is remarkable. These are bottles with a long neck, made in Marl A2 and A4 clays of the Vienna System and painted either in red and black, in red, black and blue, or in black only. The motifs comprise simple linear designs as well as floral and faunal elements (e.g. flowers, lotus buds, ducks and papyrus, Pl. IIIa-b).¹⁴ The published parallels are dated to the reigns of Amenhotep II to Thutmose IV,¹⁵ which corresponds well with the stratigraphic evidence at Elephantine [Bauschicht 9]. The provenience of most of the complete vessels in museums is unknown, but they are said to come from Thebes. A 'Theban manufacture' as proposed by C. Hope¹⁶ would be consistent with finds by the German Archaeological Institute Cairo in the temple of Seti I at Qurna.¹⁷ In the case of the sherds from Elephantine, a Theban provenience is therefore very likely.

Because of the archaeological contexts and the pictorial evidence from tombs of nobles we know of two central meanings of such decorated vessels. Firstly, as offerings in royal temples, more precisely in Houses of Millions of Years and thus related to the cult of Amun and the king¹⁸ and secondly, as wine jars used in the Beautiful Feast of the Valley during banquets, as memorized by the Theban elite on their tomb walls. Both sources have a cultic connotation in common and are closely connected with festivals. One can assume that the imported nature of such vessels found outside of Thebes, far from decreasing their special character, may have enhanced the sense that they were not intended for everyday use. In the case of the material from Elephantine, the buildings that have yielded the pottery fragments are located in the immediate vicinity of the temple of Khnum. We know of close interconnections between the cults at Elephantine and the ones at Thebes.¹⁹ The highest Theban officials spent on a regular basis some time in the area of the southern border of Egypt. Parallel to the increasing importance of local festivals, there is evidence that the hometown and cult for local gods of one's place of birth were prominent issues during the New Kingdom.²⁰ It seems very likely that Theban officials imported particular votives – as well as objects of both daily use and luxury – when being abroad. This might explain why the majority of decorated wares at Elephantine, including blue painted ware, originated from Thebes during the New Kingdom.

In addition to often poorly provenanced material in museums, the fragments of decorated pottery vessels from stratified contexts of the mid-Eighteenth Dynasty at Elephantine will

¹² See B. und C. von Pilgrim, 'Area II: Domestic Quarters of the New Kingdom', in Raue et al., 'Report on the 36th season of excavation and restoration on the island of Elephantine', *ASAE* 83, 364-365.

¹³ For the blue painted pottery see J. Budka, *Weihgefäße und Festkeramik des Neuen Reiches aus Elephantine*, in Dreyer et al., 'Stadt und Tempel von Elephantine – 33./34./35. Grabungsbericht', *MDAIK* 64 (2008).

¹⁴ One remarkable, bichrome decorated fragment of the same ware group features the representation of a horse (EZN 737), a motif well known from Thebes (cf. A.-M. Loyrette / M. Fekri, 'Un ensemble céramique du nouvel empire – vallée des reines: tombe 18', *CCÉ* 2 (1991), 12-15 with further parallels). The Elephantine vessel will be published by Anne Seiler, whom I would like to thank for permission to mention it here.

¹⁵ C. A. Hope, *Innovation and Decoration of Ceramics in the Mid-18th Dynasty*, in *CCÉ* 1 (1987), 108-109 and 116.

¹⁶ Hope, *Innovation and Decoration*, 116.

¹⁷ Cf. R. Stadelmann / K. Mysliwiec, 'Der Tempel Sethos' I. in Qurna. Vierter Grabungsbericht', *MDAIK* 38 (1982), 99. In addition, see the finds from the valley of the Queens mentioned in note 14.

¹⁸ Cf. the earliest finds at the temple of Amenhotep II; cf. W. M. F. Petrie, *Six temples at Thebes* (London, 1897), pl. V; Hope, *Innovation and Decoration*, 110-111, note 62.

¹⁹ For the close relationship between Thebes and Elephantine cf. W. Spiegelberg, 'Ein Heiligtum des Gottes Chnum von Elephantine in der thebanischen Totenstadt', *ZÄS* 54 (1918), 64-67; I. Nebe, 'Die Stelen des Heiligtums Y', in Kaiser et al., 'Stadt und Tempel von Elephantine – 17./18. Grabungsbericht', *MDAIK* 46 (1990), 231; M. Bommas, 'Ramessidische Graffiti aus Elephantine', *MDAIK* 51 (1995), 3-4; J. Budka, *Der König an der Haustür, Die Rolle des ägyptischen Herrschers an dekorierten Türgewänden von Beamten im Neuen Reich, Beiträge zur Ägyptologie* 19 (Vienna, 2001), 64.

²⁰ See e.g. J. Assmann, *Ägypten. Eine Sinngeschichte*, München & Wien (1996), 262-263.

contribute to a better understanding of the use and function of specific vessels of a very innovative period within the ancient Egyptian pottery industry.

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