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Relief and figure vessels from the Russian excavations in Memphis (Kom Tuman)

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The paper is devoted to investigation of pottery, which was discovered during excavations of the Russian Archaeological Mission to Memphis (Centre for Egyptological Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences), namely Bes vessels and figured vessels in shape of various animals and birds.

Bes vessels that were discovered by the Russian mission had been widespread during the Late Period (664–332 c. BCE). Figure vessel in the shape of a sow/boar could be dated to the 5th — the end of the 3rd c. BCE. Dating of other vessels is debatable. Morphological and technological features, as well as history of domestication of chicken in ancient Egypt, permit to date the vessels in shape of roosters to the Ptolemaic or Roman periods. A spout in the shape of an ox is dated presumably to the Late Period.

Keywords: Bes, rooster, figure vessel, Memphis, Egyptian pottery, Late Period.

The Russian Archaeological Mission of the Centre for Egyptological Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences investigates the northern part of Memphis¹. Administrative buildings, workshops and other structures were discovered during the excavations. The mission found a number of relief and figure clay vessels. These vessels came from various contexts: some of them are surface finds, while the others were discovered in turab or layers (see a catalogue at the end of the paper).

¹ Belova, Ivanov 2016; Belova 2018; Ivanov 2015; Laemmel 2021(1); Laemmel 2021(2); Yarmolovich 2021.

The Bes vessels

Bes vessels are typical for ancient Egyptian pottery corpus. They had appeared in the New Kingdom and were manufactured until the Graeco-Roman period. These vessels could be diverse in terms of shapes and representations of Bes.

On Kom Tuman various types of Bes vessels were found²; they are dated to the New Kingdom and Late Period. Most vessels are preserved in fragments, both diagnostic and non-diagnostic parts. In this paper, some of the new Bes vessels are discussed.

Three vessels are complete, except for their rims. Two miniature Bes jars were found in compact layer under turab in square VII.C13. One of them (18/0005/004) has a flaring rim, pear-shaped body and flat base. Eyes, ears and a nose of the god are fashioned with lumps of clay. The mouth, brow, circle between brows (?) and moustache are painted with red colour. The same colour is on the nose and ears.

Rims of 18/0005/003 and 14/S/0004 are broken. However, other morphological features of these jars are the same as ones of 18/0005/004: they have pear-shaped bodies and flat bases. Representations of Bes is less detailed, either three lumps of clay are used for the eyes and nose (18/0005/003) or two indentations represent the eyes (14/S/0004).

These two vessels were found in the assemblage 18/0005 which is dated to the 5th–4th c. BCE — the early Roman/Roman period³. They as well as 14/S/0004 can be dated to the 5th–4th c. BCE. The technology of depiction was widespread during the Late Period⁴. This date also corresponds with dates of the parallels from other sites in Egypt. D. and B. Aston as well as K. Kaiser date the same vessels to the 5th — early 4th c. BCE⁵. C. Defernez dates one of parallels of the jar from Kom Tuman to the 2nd quarter of the 4th c. BCE⁶.

A miniature Bes vessel 18/0018/013 has an ovoid body and rounded base. Bes is depicted with small lumps of clay (eyes, nose, and ears). There is a post-firing perforation on the lower part of the body. This vessel was discovered in a compact layer under the surface, with pottery of the late Roman period. Technological features as well as dates of the parallels allow dating this vessel to the 5th–4th c. BCE.

Two sherds of Bes vessels were found in the assemblage 18/0001. They do not have diagnostic features. Depiction of Bes is typical for vessels of the end of the 6th — 4th c. BCE⁷, *i. e.* these two fragments are dated to the Late Period.

Roosters

Two vessels in a form of a rooster have been found on Kom Tuman so far. The first one (01/0050) was discovered on the surface in 2001, the second one (18/0005/001) — in a mixed layer in 2018.

The fragment 01/0050 is a spout of a figure vessel in the shape of a rooster. Its preserved height is 19.0 cm. It has a long neck that was attached to the body of the vessel. Lumps of clay were used to fashion the comb, beak, eyes and wattles of the rooster. The beak has an

² Yarmolovich 2015; 2017(1); Laemmel 2021(2): pl. 8 (1–3), 62, 64 (1–2, 5), col. pl. 25 (7–9), 26 (1–8).

³ Laemmel 2018.

⁴ Yarmolovich 2015: 390–391.

⁵ Kaiser 2003: 281–282.

⁶ Defernez 2010: tab. 1 (type L).

⁷ Yarmolovich 2015; 2017(1).

orifice for pouring out liquid. The comb and wattle are covered with red paint. In the lower part of the neck, there are two red bands. The surface is uncoated and smoothed.

The fragment 18/0005/001 is also a spout and neck of a figure vessel in the shape of a rooster. It is smaller than the previous object, the height is 7.1 cm. Water was pouring from the beak of the rooster. It is less well-detailed than 01/0050. The neck was made on the wheel, and other parts (a comb, beak, and wattle) are applied. The outer surface of the vessel is smoothed and covered with white slip. Traces of red paint are on the comb, beak and head.

Research on birds in the Dynastic period of Egyptian history has shown a noticeable lack of roosters and chickens. They are rarely mentioned in texts and depicted in Egyptian temples, tombs, etc.⁸. Known representations of these birds include a graffito from the temple of Senwosret III (Middle Kingdom, 1872–1853/52)⁹, an ostrakon from the Valley of the Kings¹⁰, a silver bowl from Tell-Basta¹¹, a terracotta plaque from Memphis¹², several depictions in tombs and on papyri of the New Kingdom and Late Period¹³. There is also a disputable passage in *The Annals of Thutmose III*¹⁴. The aforementioned depictions and texts date from the Middle Kingdom to the end of the Late Period. However, scholars assumed that the graffito from the temple of Senwosret III could be dated to a much later period than when the temple had been built¹⁵. Translation of the fragment in *The Annals of Thutmose III* is also debatable because hieroglyphs are partly destroyed¹⁶. Conspicuous increase of representations in number started in the Graeco-Roman period. There is a lot of terracotta figurines¹⁷ and moulds for their production¹⁸, vessels (Ptolemaic Black Ware)¹⁹, figured vessels made of clay²⁰, lamps²¹, vessel-stamp (or bread-stamp)²², hairpins²³, gems²⁴. The roosters and chickens are often depicted on pottery.

⁸ Yarmolovich 2017(2): 35–44.

⁹ Yarmolovich 2017(2): 35, 39 (fig. 2); Cotteville-Giraudet 1931: 42, 74. R. Cotteville-Giraudet dated the graffito to the Middle Kingdom (1785–1660 c. BCE). However, P. Houlihan suggested a late date for this graffito. See Houlihan 1988: 80.

¹⁰ The ostrakon was found by H. Carter in 1920–1921 in the Valley of the Kings. See Carter 1923. Now this object is kept in the British Museum (No. EA68539).

¹¹ Simpson 1959: 29–30; Lilyquist 2012: 28–29, 38; Yarmolovich 2017(1): 36, 39 (fig. 4).

¹² Yarmolovich 2017(2): 40, 41 (fig. 7).

¹³ Yarmolovich 2017(2): 36, 40, 39 (fig. 5), 41 (fig. 6, 8).

¹⁴ PM I: 207; Urk. IV: 700; Carter 1923: 4; Houlihan 1995: 201–202.

¹⁵ Houlihan 1988: 80.

¹⁶ Yarmolovich 2017(2): 36–40.

¹⁷ A terracotta figurine from Naukratis (British Museum, No. 1886,0401.1464). Date: 3rd–2nd c. BCE. URL: https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G_1886-0401-1464 (accessed on 20.11.2021). A terracotta figurine from Deir el-Bahri Cache (Metropolitan Museum, No. 32.3.351). Date: Ptolemaic period. URL: <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/564893> (accessed on 20.11.2021).

¹⁸ Bailey 2008: 187, pl. 140 (No. 3773).

¹⁹ A flask (British Museum, No. EA18338). Date: 1st c. BCE. URL: https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/Y_EA18338 (accessed on 20.11.2021).

²⁰ A spout of a flagon (British Museum, No. EA49535). Date: 2nd–3rd c. CE. URL: https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/Y_EA49535 (accessed on 20.11.2021).

²¹ Boutantin 2012: 119; the British Museum, No. 1886,0401.1377, URL: https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G_1886-0401-1377 (accessed on 20.11.2021), No. 1987.380, URL: https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/X_1987-380 (accessed on 20.11.2021).

²² The British Museum, No. 1886,0401.1768, 1888,0601.157 and 1926,0330.1, URL: https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G_1886-0401-1768 (accessed on 20.11.2021), https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G_1888-0601-157 (accessed on 20.11.2021), https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G_1926-0330-1 (accessed on 20.11.2021).

²³ The Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology, No. UC7880iv, URL: <https://collections.ucl.ac.uk/search/simple> (accessed on 20.11.2021).

²⁴ Müller 2011: 198.

The oldest chicken remains from Egypt are dated to the Saite period so far²⁵. R. W. Redding has determined that the bulk of chicken remains found on Egyptian sites is dated to the first half of the Ptolemaic dynasty to the 6th c. CE²⁶.

The majority of pottery from the Russian excavations on Kom Tuman dates to the Late Period²⁷. However, the material of the Ptolemaic time is also present, and it is often found in the same stratigraphic units as sherds of the Late Period²⁸. As to pottery of Roman times, sherds of this period were also discovered, but in much less quantity than pottery of the Late and Ptolemaic epoches²⁹. S. Laemmel points out that ‘pottery dated to the Roman Imperial and late Imperial periods is very uncommon... They either come from near surface levels or are surface finds’³⁰.

Thus, morphological and technological features allow me dating these vessels to Late — Graeco-Roman periods. The increase of the number of objects with depictions of roosters and chicken remains in the Graeco-Roman period leans toward to date these vessels to this epoch. However, the Late Period as the date cannot be excluded as well.

Animals

Several figure vessels were found by the Russian Archaeological Mission in course of excavations on Kom Tuman. One of them is a zoomorphic vessel in the shape of a sow or boar (07/0088). The rim and the spout are broken at their tips. The body of the animal, the rim and the part with the spout were thrown on the wheel. Then these parts were attached to each other. The ears, eyes, legs and mane were made of lumps of clay. The pupils are made with a hollow instrument.

Unlike vessels in the shape of roosters, ones in the shape of the sow or boar are known in Egypt and neighbouring countries. Parallels in Egypt (see the catalogue at the end of the article) have broad dating from the Late (7th c. BCE) to Byzantine period. Dating of many vessels is questionable. However, one of them³¹ was discovered in a primary context, which is dated to c. 610/600–570/560 c. BCE (26th Dynasty).

Technological features of the vessel from Kom Tuman are typical for vessels of the Late Period, *i. e.* for aforementioned Bes vessels. Potters used a combined technique for production of both types of vessels — a combination of wheel-made parts and handmade lumps of clay. The pupils of Bes and the sow are made with the same type of hollow implement. These facts permit me to make supposition that the vessel from Kom Tuman could be dated to the 5th — the end 4th c. BCE.

The fragment 07/0093 is a spout of a vessel in the shape of an animal’s (perhaps, ox) head. It has eyes, a long nose, a mouth, two horns (broken). The head consists of two parts. It is fixed to a stem with a hole. The eyes and ears are applications. The eyes have indentations. This fragment was discovered with the pottery dated from the Persian to Ptolemaic period³².

²⁵ Redding 2015: 335–336.

²⁶ Redding 2015: 335–336.

²⁷ Laemmel 2021(1): 2.

²⁸ Laemmel 2021(1): 229.

²⁹ Laemmel 2021(1): 229, 270.

³⁰ Laemmel 2021(1): 270.

³¹ The British Museum, BM1888,0601.661, URL: https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G_1888-0601-661 (accessed on 20.11.2021).

³² Dated by S. Laemmel.

The state of preservation complicates its reconstruction. The head of an ox could be a part of a zoomorphic vessel³³, a kernos³⁴ or a rhyton³⁵.

The majority of the vessels are dated to the Late Period. However, some of them could be dated to the Ptolemaic and Roman periods. These periods of ancient Egyptian history are marked by intensive contacts of Egypt and neighbouring countries. Egypt was conquered by Persians in 525 BCE and by Alexander the Great in 331 BCE. Moreover, Egyptians also developed intensive trade with neighbouring countries. These processes led to increasing of cross-cultural interactions that could be traced in various historical sources³⁶. Vessels from Kom Tuman discussed in this paper are evidence of processes in ancient Egyptian society.

The catalogue

Bes vessels

Inv. No. 14/S/0004 (fig. 1)

Context. Square VII. Surface find.

Dimensions. Height — 5.5 cm, diameter of a neck — 1.8 cm.

Technology. Wheel made.

Fabric description. Marl clay fabric (Egyptian)³⁷. It is fine, dense and contains scarce fine mica, red and black mineral particles. The break is homogeneous dark beige (10YR 6/6³⁸).

Surface treatment. Light coloured surface (2.5Y 8/3; outer surface).

Parallels. Kaiser 2003: 452 (cat. 296–297).

Date. 5th — early 4th c. BCE.

Inv. No. 18/0001/004 (fig. 2)

Context. Square VII. Surface find.

Dimensions. Inner diameter — 10.0 cm.

Technology. Wheel made (the vessel), handmade (the nose and mouth).

Fabric description. Egyptian marl fabric. It is fine and dense; contains scarce fine black mineral particles. The break is homogeneous dark pinkish beige (2.5YR 7/6). Corresponds to MI.2a.

Surface treatment. The outer surface is uncoated, smoothed and probably has a light coloured surface. The outer surface is uncoated.

Date. The end of the 6th — 4th c. BCE.

³³ The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, A20637, URL: <https://oi-idb.uchicago.edu/id/fab-f4f1-866b-4e56-81a2-26b4bbc3741c> (accessed on 20.11.2021); A20478, URL: <https://oi-idb.uchicago.edu/id/e4d1e8da-8c04-44d9-b834-7aaf869e712e> (accessed on 20.11.2021).

³⁴ The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, A18835, URL: <https://oi-idb.uchicago.edu/id/06e-ac9cd-503b-4831-9056-e641952319dc> (accessed on 20.11.2021).

³⁵ The British Museum, BM 108663, URL: https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/W_1913-1108-7 (accessed on 20.11.2021).

³⁶ For instance, Yarmolovich, Chepel 2019.

³⁷ Fabric descriptions are based on visual analysis of the fresh break with usage of ×10 magnifying glass.

³⁸ The *Munsell Soil Colour Chart. Year 2018* was used for description of colours of breaks.

Inv. No. 18/0001/005 (fig. 3)

Context. Square VII. Surface find.

Technology. Wheel made (the vessel), handmade (the hand).

Fabric description. Fine dense Egyptian marl fabric. It contains scarce fine black mineral particles. The break is homogeneous beige (10YR 8/3). MI.2a.

Surface treatment. The outer surface is smoothed, light coloured; the inner surface is uncoated.

Date. The end of the 6th — 4th c. BCE.

Inv. No. 18/0005/004 (fig. 4–5)

Context. Square VII.C13. Compact layer under turab.

Date of assemblage. 5th–4th c. BCE and the early Roman/Roman period³⁹.

Dimensions. Diameter of the rim — 3.6 cm, height — 8.1 cm, diameter of the base — 2.6 cm.

Technology. Wheel made (the vessel), handmade (the hand). The base was cut from the wheel with an implement.

Fabric description. Egyptian marl fabric.

Surface treatment. The outer surface is smoothed.

Parallels. Defernez 2010: tab. 1 (type L); Kaiser 2003: 452 (cat. 296, 297).

Date. 5th–4th c. BCE.

Inv. No. 18/0018/013 (fig. 6)

Context. Square VI.E13. Compact layer under the surface layer.

Date of assemblage. From the Persian to Roman period⁴⁰.

Dimensions. Diameter of the neck — 1.9 cm, preserved height — 5.7 cm, maximum diameter of the body — 4.7 cm.

Technology. Wheel made (the vessel), handmade (the hand).

Fabric description. Nile silt fabric.

Surface treatment. Uncoated.

Parallels. Kaiser 2003: 411 (cat. 131), 412 (cat. 134–136), Anthes 1965: pl. 60 (434, 436).

Date. 5th–4th c. BCE.

Roosters

Inv. No. 01/0050 (fig. 7–8)

Context. Square VIII. Surface find.

Dimensions. Height — 19.0 cm.

Technology. Wheel-made (neck), hand-made (comb, beak, eyes, and wattle).

Fabric description. Middle coarse, middle dense Nile silt fabric that contains abundant fine, medium-sized and coarse vegetable temper, scarce fine black mineral particles and sand quartz, medium quantity of fine and medium-sized white mineral particles. The break is brown with a red core.

Surface treatment. Uncoated, smoothed.

Parallels. UC19491⁴¹ (the Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology).

Date. Presumably the Ptolemaic or Roman period.

³⁹ Laemmel 2018.

⁴⁰ Laemmel 2018.

Inv. No. 18/0005/001 (fig. 9)

Context. Square VII.C13. Compact layer under turab.

Dimensions. Height — 7.1 cm, wall thickness — 1.1 cm, inner diameter of a neck — 2.0 cm.

Technology. Wheel-made (the neck), hand-made (the comb, beak, wattle).

Fabric description. Medium fine medium dense Nile silt fabric that contains scarce particles of fine mica, scarce medium-sized vegetable temper, common fine to medium coarse sand quartz (angular to round), scarce fine black mineral particles. The break is homogeneous light brown (SYR 6/6).

Surface treatment. Smoothed and covered white slip. Traces of red paint are on the comb, beak and head.

Date. Presumably the Ptolemaic or Roman period.

Animals

A sow/boar**Inv. No. 07/0088** (fig. 10–11)

Context. Square VI.Q11. Mixed layer over the wall 23.

Dimensions. Height — 9.8 cm, length — 14.1 cm, width — 7.9 cm.

Technology. Wheel made and handmade.

Fabric description. Egyptian marl fabric.

Surface treatment. The outer surface is smoothed.

Parallels. The British Museum: BM1888,0601.661⁴², BM1886,0401.1375⁴³; the Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology: LDUCE-UC48325⁴⁴, LDUCE-UC65094⁴⁵; the Museum of Fine Arts⁴⁶; Boutantin 2012: 98; the Museum of Egyptian Antiquities (inv. No. is unknown; provenance: Mit Rahina); Perdrizet 1921(1): 149; Perdrizet 1921(2): pl. CXX (lower row).

Dating of the vessel. 5th — the end of the 3rd c. BCE.

Ox (?)**Inv. No. 07/0093** (fig. 12–13)

Context. Square VI.Q11. Filling of the foundation pit for W. 10.

Technology. Handmade.

Fabric description. J2 (Nile silt fabric; the Saqqara system)⁴⁷. The break is homogeneous reddish brown.

Surface treatment. The outer surface is covered with red slip. The inner surface is uncoated.

Date. Presumably the Late Period.

⁴¹ The Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology, URL: <https://collections.ucl.ac.uk/search/simple> (accessed on 20.11.2021).

⁴² The British Museum, URL: https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G_1888-0601-661 (accessed on 20.11.2021).

⁴³ The British Museum, URL: https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G_1886-0401-1375 (accessed on 20.11.2021).

⁴⁴ The Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology, URL: <https://collections.ucl.ac.uk/Details/collect/34331> (accessed on 20.11.2021).

⁴⁵ The Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology, URL: <https://collections.ucl.ac.uk/Details/petrie/15113> (accessed on 20.11.2021).

⁴⁶ The British Museum, URL: https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/X_4278 (20.11.2021).

⁴⁷ S. Laemmel's description.

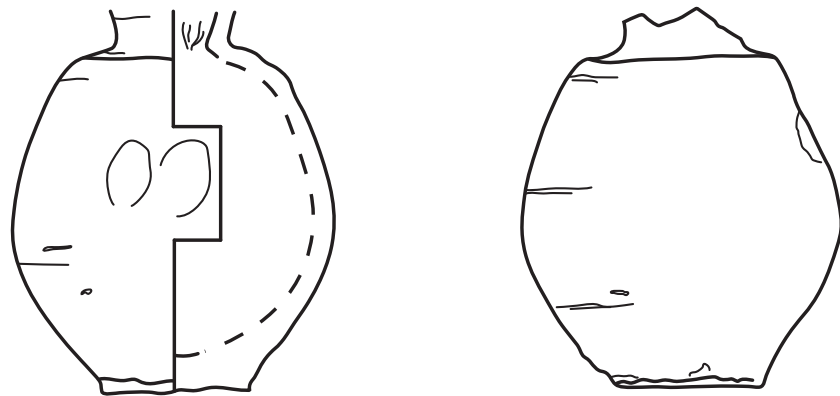


Fig. 1 (upper). 14/S/0004 *

Fig. 2 (lower left). 18/0001/004

Fig. 3 (lower right). 18/0001/005



* The vessels are drawn by R. A. Orekhov, O. V. Windholz, D. A. Karelin, M. Yu. Lavrentieva, V. I. Yarmolovich. The photos are made by B. Boismoreau and S. V. Ivanov.

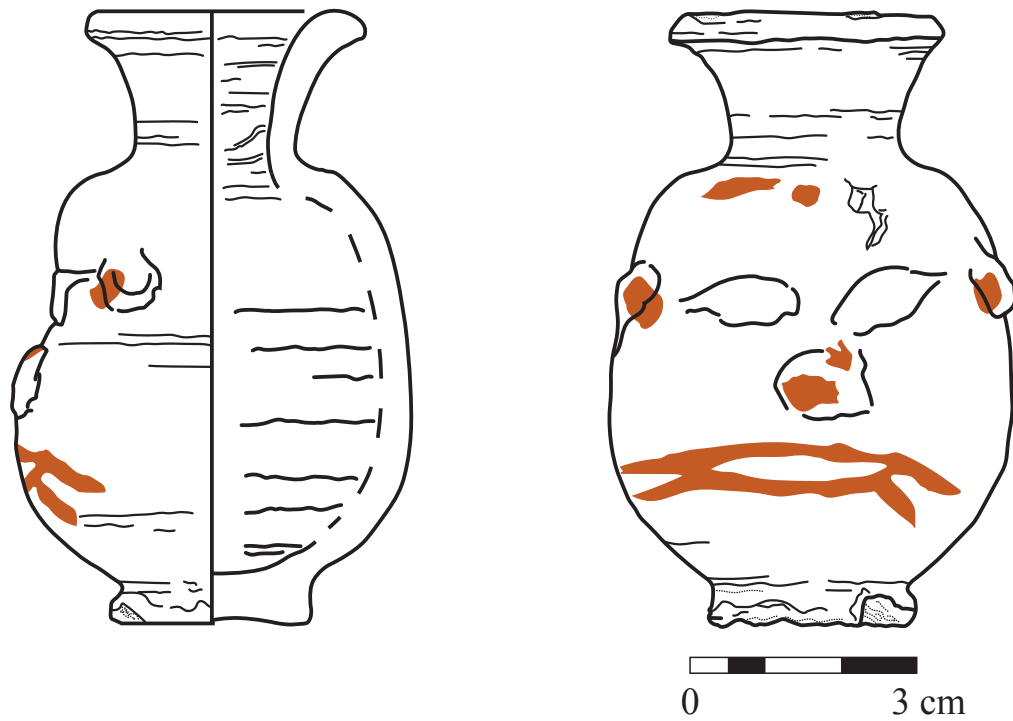


Fig. 4. 18/0005/004 (drawing)



Fig. 5. 18/0005/004 (photo)

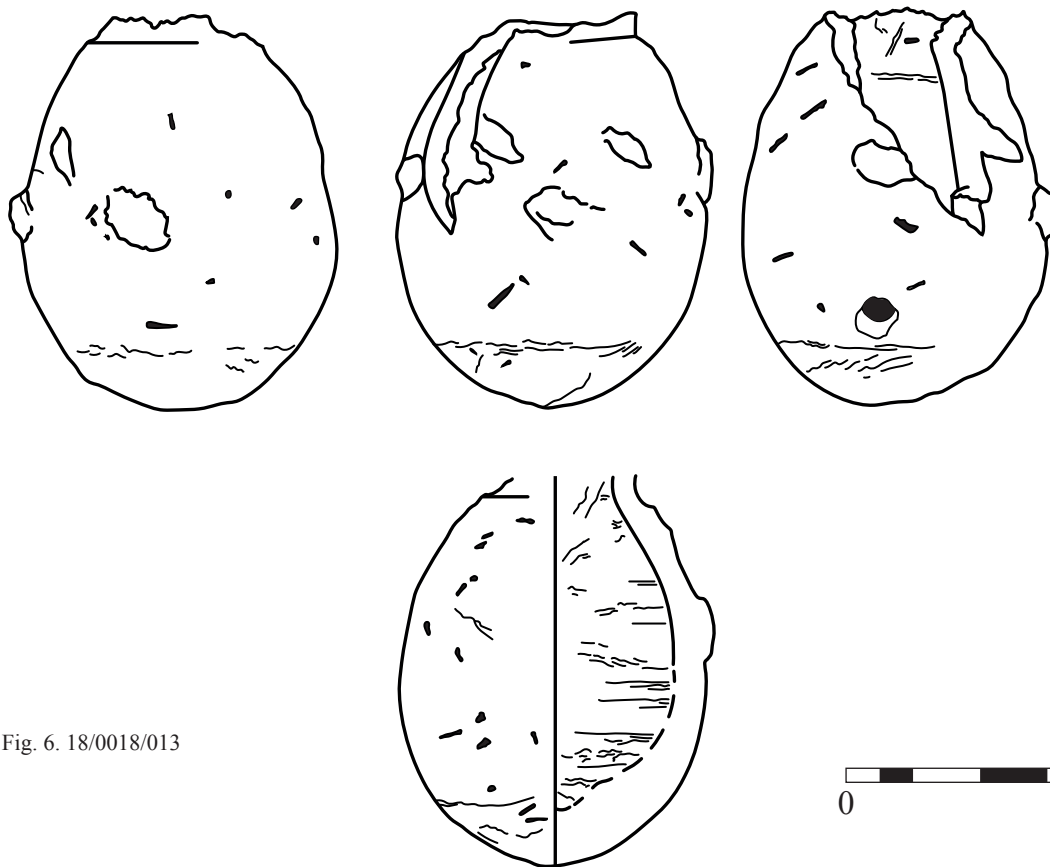


Fig. 6. 18/0018/013

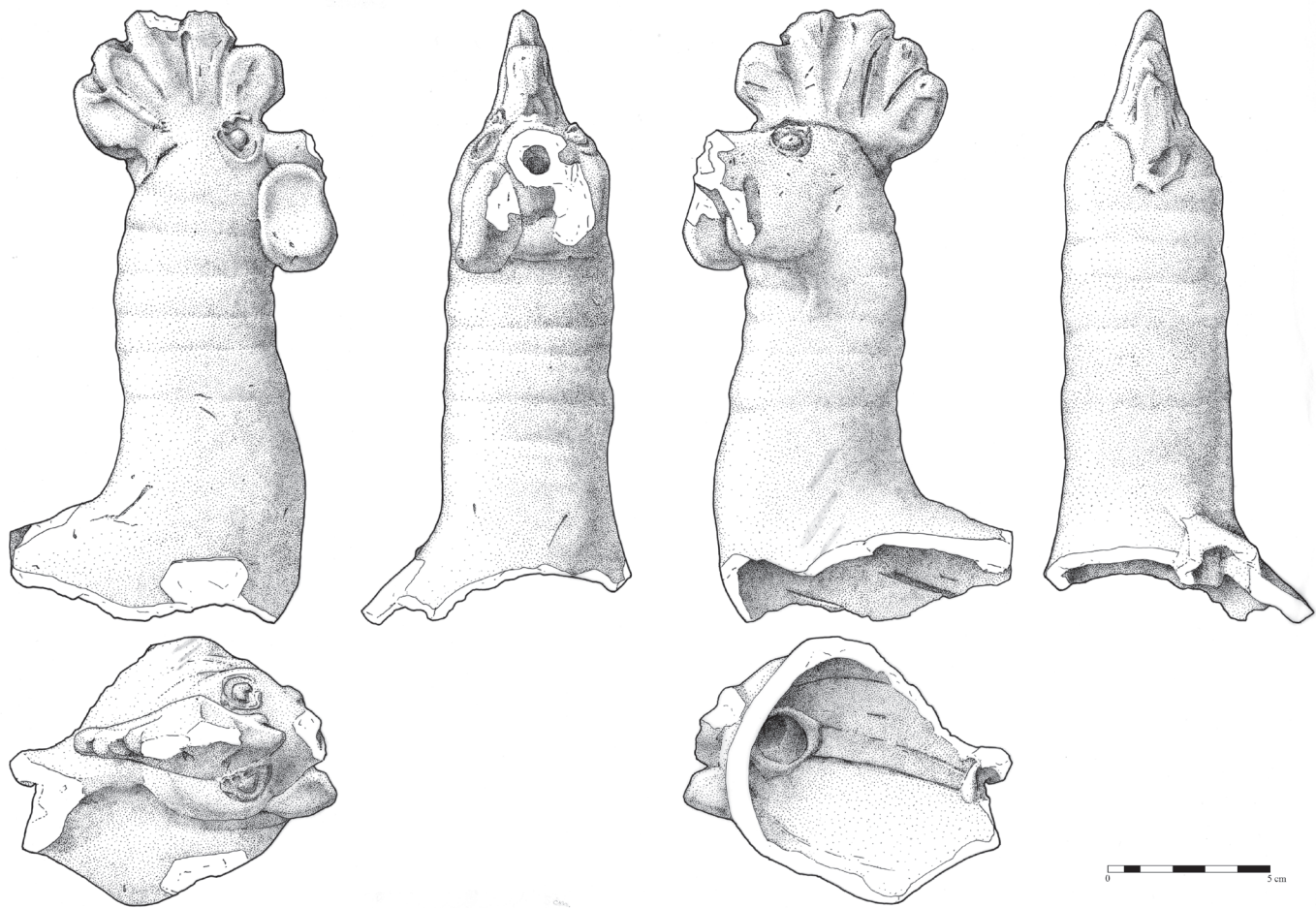


Fig. 7. 01/0050 (drawing)

Fig. 8. 01/0050 (photo)



0 5 cm



Fig. 9. 18/0005/001

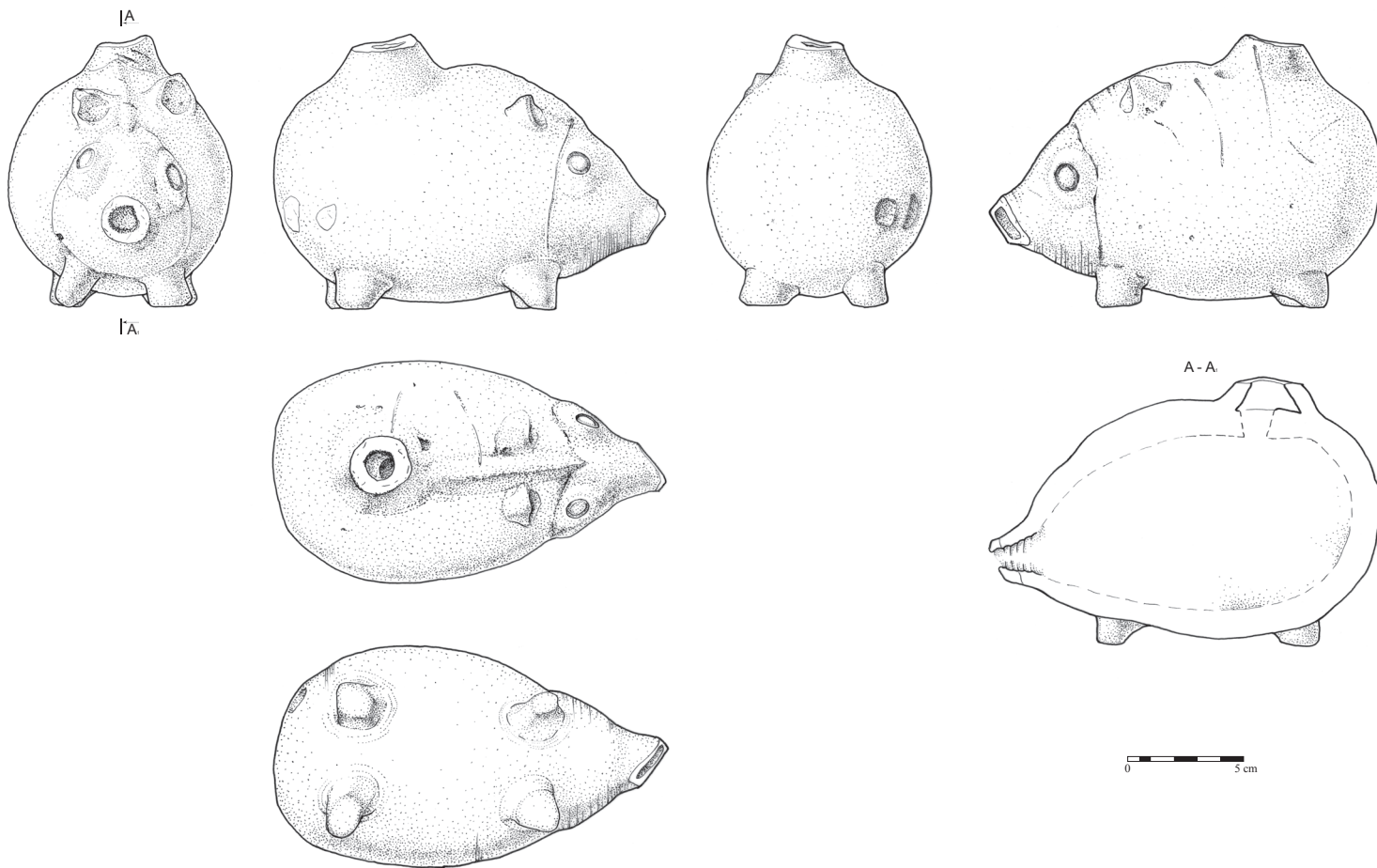


Fig. 10. 07/0088 (drawing)



Fig. 11. 07/0088 (photo)

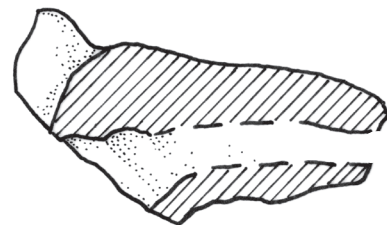
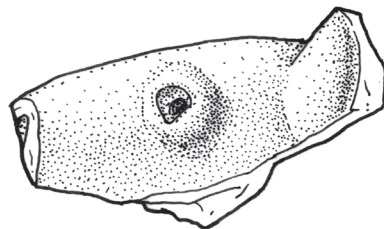
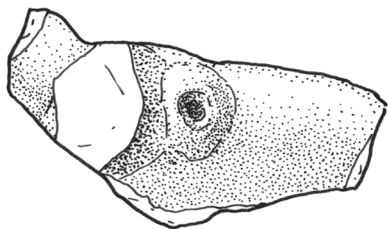
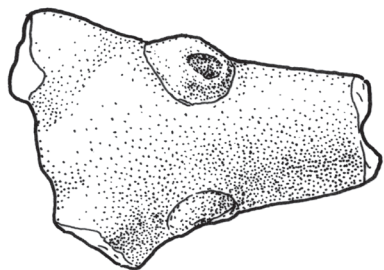


Fig. 12. 07/0093 (drawing)





Fig. 13. 07/0093 (photo)



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Рельефные и фигурные сосуды из российских раскопок в Мемфисе (Ком-Туман)

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В статье представлено исследование керамики, найденной во время археологических раскопок Российской археологической экспедиции в Мемфисе (Центр египтологических исследований Российской академии наук). В частности, рассматриваются рельефные сосуды с изображением древнеегипетского бога-карлика Бэса и фигурные сосуды в виде животных и птиц. Кувшины с изображением бога Бэса, которые происходят из раскопок ЦЕИ РАН в Мемфисе, были распространены в эпоху Позднего периода (664–332 гг. до н. э.). Фигурный сосуд, изображающий свинью, относится к V — концу III в. до н. э. Датировка остальных сосудов дискуссионная. Морфологические и технологические признаки этих изделий, а также история появления петухов на территории Египта позволили предположить, что находки датируются птолемеевским или римским периодами. Носик сосуда в форме головы быка предположительно был выполнен в Поздний период.

Ключевые слова: Бэс, петух, фигурные сосуды, Мемфис, египетская керамика, Поздний период.

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