

POTTERY FROM THE LATE PERIOD TO THE  
EARLY ROMAN PERIOD  
FROM DAKHLEH OASIS, EGYPT

VOLUME I

SHIRLEY FAY PATTEN

BA Macquarie University

Macquarie University  
Division of Humanities  
Department of Ancient History

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis analyses a body of largely unpublished ceramic material from Dakhleh Oasis in the Western Desert of Egypt. The material is primarily from the survey of Dakhleh Oasis and the testing of sites by members of the Dakhleh Oasis Project and, except for some Phase 4 material recovered from excavations at Ismant el-Kharab, is unstratified. It covers a thousand years of Egyptian pottery-making from the eighth century BC to the late second century AD.

A comprehensive survey of published and unpublished material from other sites in Egypt and adjacent regions has been undertaken to acquire comparative material for the pottery from Dakhleh Oasis. In addition, a study of the technical characteristics of the vessels that have remained accessible has been undertaken to describe and explain ancient pottery practices and to build up a framework for comparative purposes.

With this body of information, a vessel typology divided into two series, each of which are further divided into two phases, has been devised and the chronology of the vessels determined. This ceramic typology has been used to compare surveyed sites of different utilisation – cemetery, settlement and temple sites – and to establish a dating system for these sites. The resulting chronology will be a guide to the determination of future excavations in the oasis and will assist in the on-going study of the socio-economic development of the oasis. The typology also provides a corpus of pottery for the processing of material from future excavations in Dakhleh Oasis and information for other ceramicists working in Egypt and elsewhere.

The comparative survey of ceramic material from other sites demonstrates that Dakhleh Oasis, although a remote region in the Western Desert of Egypt, maintained contact with the Nile Valley and more distant areas. It also shows that, while this interaction

influenced local pottery styles, the oasis retained and developed its own pottery traditions.

In addition, a preliminary analysis has been made of fabrics and clays for descriptive purposes and to increase knowledge of the ancient ceramics from the oasis.

A database has also been built to store and manipulate the information on this extensive body of ceramic material from Dakhleh Oasis. The pottery drawings have been produced in a format readily accessible for electronic transfer to researchers in the field of Egyptian ceramics.

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## CERTIFICATE

I, S F Patten, hereby certify that this dissertation has not submitted for a higher degree to any other University or institution.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "S F Patten".

S F Patten

## PREFACE

The data assembled for this thesis has been stored in a database to make retrieval and manipulation of information easier. The design of the database structure was based upon the record cards used in the field to record the finds. Essentially each section of the record card filled in by the fieldworker is represented by a 'database field'. Other fields have been added to improve the retrieval of information, including a 'graphic field' which stores an illustration of the vessel or sherd for easy recognition of each entry. A relational database (4D First) was chosen so that information from differing sources could be combined. For example, vessels can be listed with referenced information from a list of sites, or sherds from a list of wares. The database thus forms an electronic record of the ceramic material from Dakhleh Oasis in this thesis. It can be used and manipulated in any number of ways and the entries, fields and related files can be extended and revised if required. At present, the information for over fourteen hundred vessels and sherds is maintained in the database.

The reproduction of the pottery drawings for the Vessel Typology and the Site Catalogue, which form the basis of this study, presented a number of problems. The only funding for the project has been an overseas travel grant made available by Macquarie University. In addition, the original drawings of the pottery are held in Melbourne and access to them has necessarily been restricted. Therefore, it has been necessary to work with photocopies, which do not have the required quality for professional reproduction.

To overcome these problems, a low cost method was needed to reproduce the pottery illustrations. The computer graphics program (Macromedia FreeHand 7.0) was chosen for the purpose and photocopies of vessels and sherds scanned into the computer and redrawn with this application. Creating the illustrations in this way has been very time consuming. However, as the method generates encapsulated PostScript files (EPS), it

has a number of advantages. First, the files can be stored easily as they take up less hard disk space than other types of files; second, the graphic images can be imported into programs with a different format, such as a 'page layout' program; third, they can be altered, scaled and re-sized accurately if necessary. In addition, the page layout file can be converted to Portable Document Format (PDF) making distribution and sharing easier.

The text and graphics for the thesis have been composed for printing with a 'page layout' application (Adobe PageMaker v. 6.5) and printed out with an Apple Personal Laser Writer. However, the format is capable of being sent directly to a highend output device such as an 'imagesetter' and could be printed commercially at reasonable cost.

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