

Stone Vessels in Early Dynastic Egypt*

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As early as the Badarian and Naqada I cultures of Middle and Upper Egypt (and the one of Merimde in Lower Egypt), stone vessels started to be deposited in certain tombs, constituting one of the most valuable elements of the funerary equipment¹.

They were clearly meant to contain costly substances (as perfumes, unguents, oils, beverages, food)² but there are few doubts that they had an outstanding value of their own³ as ornamental and luxury objects and perhaps also beyond that.

The process of extraction⁴, transportation and workmanship⁵ of hard stones did require a fair amount of hours of labour which only the wealthiest individuals could repay.

* This introduction was originally conceived as an appendix to the preceding article (F. Raffaele, 'An unpublished Early Dynastic stone vessel fragment with incised inscription naming the goddess Bastet', which is henceforth abbreviated 'Bastet').

¹ J. Vandier, *Manuel d'archéologie égyptienne*, I, 134f., 164, 216f., 306ff., 365-372, 442f., 455f., 484f., 782-788, 946f.; W.M.F. Petrie, *Prehistoric Egypt*, 1920, 34-36, pl. 37-42; E. Baumgartel, *The Cultures of Prehistoric Egypt I*, 1955, 102ff.; A. El-Khouli, *Egyptian Stone Vessels*, 2 vols., 1978; Lucas – Harris, *Ancient Egyptian Material and Industries*, 1962, 421f., A. Lucas, *JEA* 16, 1930, 200-212; B. Janoš-Deckert, *Steingefäße*, in: *LÄ V*, 1283-1287; Do. Arnold, *Gefäße, Gefäßformen, Gefäßdekor*, in: *LÄ III*, 483-501.

² Cf. W.B. Emery, *A funerary repast*, 1962 (S3477, Second Dynasty).

³ As attested by not infrequent cases of mending of stone vases broken parts, which were recomposed by drilling holes through the wall of contiguous sherds and binding them with a string; cf. H.G. Fischer, *Artibus Asiae* 21, 1958, 77, n. 21; H. Bakry, *MDAIK* 24, 1969, 43-50.

⁴ J. Harrel, M. Brown, M.S. Masoud, *JEA* 86, 2000, 33-42; the most frequently used materials are alabaster (calcite), limestone, schist (slate/greywacke), basalt, diorite, porphyry, marble, volcanic ash, then crystal, breccia, serpentine, syenite, dolomite, granite, quartz and further rarer ones (cf. El-Khouli, *op. cit.*, 793-796; 844ff.).

Since 'Dynasty 0' workmanship of stone vessels must have become a royal monopoly, and these objects are found in huge number only in burials of the uppermost classes of that period; they were important markers of elevated status, hence made object of display, gift and trade⁶.

Tombs in the Early Dynastic royal necropolis of Abydos at Umm el-Qaab⁷ and in the Memphite cemeteries⁸ have yielded large

⁵ W.B. Emery, *Archaic Egypt*, 1961, 214f.; El-Khouli, *op. cit.*, 1978, 789-801; A. Stocks, in: K. Bard (ed.), *Encyclopedia...*, 1999, 749-751; B.G. Aston, J.A. Harrell, I. Shaw, in: I. Shaw, P.T. Nicholson (eds.), *Ancient Egyptian Materials and Technologies*, 2000, 5-77. For possible titles of carvers of stone vessels cf. R. Weill, *Recherches sur la Ire dynastie*, 1961, 109ff., contra W. Helck, *Untersuchungen zur Thinitenzeit*, 1987, 258; cf. the title "leader of the sculptors of stone vases" exhibited in the titularies of Njrwab (owner of the very large IIInd Dynasty mastaba S2302, Kaplony, *IAF I*, 519-524) and Imhotep (*ibid.*, 401-405).

⁶ For example in Lower Nubia: H. Nordström, *Neolithic and A-group sites*, 1972, 119; B. Williams, *The A-Group Royal Cemetery at Qustul: Cemetery L*, 1986, 123ff., fig. 49-53, pl. 70-75; S.R. Rampersad, *The Origins and Relationships of the Nubian A-Group*, (Ph.D. Thesis, 1999), 2000, 238ff.; A. Jimenez Serrano, *BAEDE 9*, 1999, 7-17.

⁷ Abydos: E. Amelineau, *Les Nouvelles Fouilles d'Abydos*, pt. I, 1899, pl. 22ff.; *id.*, pt. II, 1902, pl. 1ff., 21ff.; *id.*, pt. III, 1904, pl. 19f.; *id.*, pt. IV, 1905, pl. 48ff.; W.M.F. Petrie, *Royal Tombs I*, 1901, 18, 37ff., pl. 4-10; *id.*, pt. II, 1902, 41-45, (pl. 2ff.), pl. 46-53g; Hendrickx, Bielen, De Paepé, *MDAIK 57*, 2001, 73ff.; for other relevant Upper Egyptian cemeteries cf. A. El-Khouli, *op. cit.*, xiv-xviii.

Naga ed-Deir: G.A. Reisner, *The Early Dynastic Cemeteries at Naqa-ed-Der*, 1908, 187ff.

⁸ North Saqqara: J.E. Quibell, *Archaic Mastabas*, 1923, pl. 7, 10, 12-14, 17, 19-21, 23; W.B. Emery, *The tomb of Hemaka*, 1938, 55ff., pl. 19c (423), pl. 28-37; *id.*, Hor-Aha, 1939, 34-62 (corpus, with fig. 38-45), pl. 12-15a; *id.*, *Great Tombs... I*, 1949, esp. p. 130-147 (corpus, with fig. 69-79), pl. 12, 13, 19b, 20, 40a-b, 46, 47; *id.*, *Great Tombs II*, 1954, 81-101, 164-168; *id.*, *Great Tombs, III*, 1958, 31-32, 60-61, 94-95, 108-110, pl. 28a-b, 34-36, 38, 83, 105a, 107, 124; a corpus of stone vessels from Predynastic period to the Old Kingdom was compiled by G.A. Reisner, in: *Mycerinus*, 1931, 130ff., along with a description of the developments of the shapes through the same time span.

Helwan: Z.Y. Saad, *Royal Excavations...*, *SASAE 3*, 1947, pl. 10, 11a, 84-85, 91-92; *id.*, *SASAE 14*, 1951, pl. 10-11, 23, 26-27, 29, 31-33, 38,

amounts of stone vassels fragments and, in some lucky circumstances, splendid examples of completely preserved or completely restorable specimen worked out in the most awesome and skill-challenging shapes⁹.

Late in the First Dynasty and particularly since the middle of the Second Dynasty, stone vessels making started a rapid decline, undoubtedly both for the increasing importance of other forms of *artistic* expression (first of all the royal and private statuary)¹⁰

52, 64a. Abu Rawash: A. Klasens, OMRO, 39, 1958, 25f., 41f.; OMRO 40f., 1959, 50; OMRO 41f., 1960, 79, fig. 18-19; OMRO 42, 1961, 115f., fig. 5-6, pl. 23-24; Tarkhan: W.M.F. Petrie et al., Tarkhan I and Memphis V, 1913, 21ff., 28, pl. 32-44 (corpus); W.M.F. Petrie, Tarkhan II, pl. 25-27 (most Tarkhan cemeteries date Naqada IIIB-C1).

Many more cemeteries have yielded important amounts of stone vessels, as Turah, Abusir el-Meleq and, in Upper Egypt, Naqada and Hierakonpolis (Horus temple in the precinct of the protodynastic site of Nekhen; cf. n. 19), but they mostly span earlier chronological phases.

For stone vases from Djoser's Step Pyramid Complex cf. n. 12.

⁹ Cf. El-Khouli, op. cit., 718ff., 788, pl. 130-142, 158-161; true masterpieces can be considered the "Ankh-ka" schist vase in Metropolitan Museum (19.2.16; for this vase and a bibliography of further ones cf. H.G. Fischer, MMJ 5, 1972, 5ff., fig. 1-5, n. 2), Sabu vase, (from S3111, W.B. Emery, Great Tombs... I, 101, fig. 58, pl. 40 a-b) only to quote a few of the most representative ones.

They illustrate the apex of this industry during the First Dynasty. Yet already in Naqada II and early Naqada III (c. 3500-3200) the theriomorphic stone vessels (worked out in the shape of mammals, birds and fishes, in a somewhat similar way as the zoomorphic slate palettes) and those with relief representations (J. E. Quibell, Hierakonpolis, pt. I, 1900, pl. 17 above, 18 nr. 21; J.E. Quibell - F. W. Green, Hierakonpolis, pt. II, 1902, 48, pl. 59, nr. 47; J. Capart, Les déuts de l'art en Égypte, 1904, 97-102) all testify the advanced degree of specialization achieved by the Egyptian artisan in Predynastic period.

¹⁰ Cf. M. Baud, Djéser et la IIIe dynastie, 2002, 238-239.

Although ancient Egyptian artisans were capable to transform hard rock into vessels of extravagant shapes as well as statues of majestic beauty, it is partly incorrect to define it *art*, as the primary purposes were not those which we associate to the definition of modern art (cf. H. Schäfer, Principles of Egyptian Art, 1974, 36ff., 335ff.; more specifically J. Baines, in: CAJ 4/1, 1994, 67-94).

and perhaps owing to political and economic reasons as well¹¹. Only in the IVth –Vth Dynasties this manufacture knew a certain reprise which continued in later periods of the Egyptian history, although never enjoying the same levels of importance it had had in the Protodynastic age.

Netjerykhet/Djoser, first king of the Third Dynasty, heaped up a huge number of stone vases in some of the galleries dug underneath his Saqqara Step pyramid (especially in eastern pits' galleries VI-VII): perhaps more than 40.000! Scores of inscriptions incised on them report the names of First and Second Dynasty kings (see below), while nearly a thousand bear ink inscriptions in the oldest form of hieratic (cursive hieroglyphs)¹². Despite the quantity of vessels gathered in his funerary complex, Djoser's own serekh appears on one unprovenanced bowl only¹³.

Inscriptions on stone vessels¹⁴ were incised or written in ink. The former ones, meant to be permanent¹⁵, consist of royal names¹⁶, gods', princes' or officials' names, palaces, temples and

¹¹ But cf. D. Gould, *A Study of the Relationship between the Different Dynastic Factions of the Early Dynastic Period...*, in: S. Bickel, A. Loprieno (eds.), *Basel Egyptology Prize 1*, *Aeg. Helv.* 17, 2003, 29-53.

¹² C.M. Firth - J.E. Quibell, *Step Pyramid*, pl. 88-91, 96-102; J.P. Lauer, *La Pyramide à Degrés*, III, 1939; P. Lacau, J.P. Lauer, *La Pyramide à Degrés*, IV-V (abbr. PD), 1959-1965; W. Helck, in: *ZAS* 106, 1979; J.P. Lauer, *Histoire Monumentale*, 1962, 91ff.; *PM* III, 2, 1978, 402f.

¹³ Held in a private collection, published by P. Kaplony (*Steingefässe*, 1968, 52, 74, pl. 6.21, 24.21). Only a small part of the inscribed (with incised hieroglyphs) stone vessels from the Step Pyramid Complex are datable to the reign of Djoser: cf. Helck, *op. cit.*, 1979.

¹⁴ Cf. n. 12 and P. Kaplony, *IAF* I, 379ff.; *id.*, *MDAIK* 20, 1965, 1ff.; W. Helck, *op. cit.*, 1979; S.H. Aufrère, *BIFAO* 103, 2003, 1-15; I. Regulski, in: S. Hendrickx et al., *Egypt at its Origins*, in press (2005).

¹⁵ Even in the case of inscriptions, the reuse of vases is revealed whenever new royal names are added or superimposed to earlier ones: cf. Kaplony, *Steingefässe*, 1968, 20ff., 36; J. Kahl, in preparation, 2005.

¹⁶ Narmer to Khasekhem, with the exception of those of Hor-Aha and Peribsen; noteworthy some of these inscriptions are the only source of knowledge for certain royal names which were previously unattested (cf. the author's website related kings pages and corpus at <http://xoomer.virgilio.it/francescoraf/>, and F. Raffaele, in preparation).

other buildings, provisions for some of the latter establishments, feasts and ceremonies during which the vessels and their contents were gifted.

These inscriptions, often fairly visible on the exterior of the vases, amount to few hundreds, mostly on vessels' fragments from the Abydos royal tombs and the Step Pyramid complex of Horus Netjerykhet ('Djoser') at Saqqara.

The ink inscriptions on the other hand, were no more than a temporary notation (generally added in the interior of the vessels) which indicated name and main titles of the donor¹⁷ of the vase and especially the occasion (e.g. the Heb Sed); not seldom different data as vessel size, provenance of its material (e.g. Hatnub's calcite), workshops, producers and temples were indicated too. Royal names are never found written in these ink inscriptions¹⁸.

Early in the 3^d millennium BC, the Egyptian kings were finally acquiring the status of quasi-divinities.

It was very convenient to live *in the shade* of royal palace. Being part of the system, either serving the king or receiving gifts and rewards from him, had to be considered, at least in the circle of the élite, a way to favour and to be favoured by *Ma'at*. In this sense, to receive a vessel with the king's Horus name inscribed

For inscriptions with royal names and titles incised on stone vessels cf. n. 14 (esp. P. Kaplony, op. cit., 1965).

¹⁷ In the case of Menka, the first certain occurrence of the vizir-title (*TAity zAb TAty*): PD V, 1-3, pl. 1 (but also cf. W. B. Emery, GT II, fig. 200, from Sekhemka-Sedj's North Saqqara tomb S3504, reign of Horus Djet!).

¹⁸ A particular which hinders a surer datation of the corpus. Moreover the ink inscriptions, at least in some instances, might have been drawn on *older* vessels (instead of being a sketch for inscriptions to be engraved in a second time): cf. Kaplony, Steingefasse, 1968, 38, n.73.

For a possible exception to the absence of royal names in these ink inscriptions, cf. PD V, pl. 6-7 (the *Hwt-KA* of Horus *ZA?* - Full data in my website s.v. Wneg); also cf. J. Van Wetering, Vereniging van de Beide Landen en de vroeg Egyptische Staat, 76f., 90; id., The Royal Cemetery of the Early Dynastic period at Saqqara and the Second Dynasty Royal tombs, in: Hendrickx et al. (eds.), Egypt at its Origins, in press (2005).

on it, must have had quite the same importance and implications as (in later periods) the permission to mention the king's name in the tomb walls' "biography" ('narrating' the events in which the tomb owner had humbly and cleverly served his king during his life, eventually obtaining rewards by him).

By the same way there must have been profound implications in the act of performing offerings to divinities and the fact that stone vessels were inscribed with gods' or king's name did mean that a person, be it the donor or the receptor of the gift, was somehow entering the beneficent aura of that divinity.

Furthermore the inscription did clarify and fix purpose, origin, destination or context of the offering, enhancing the effect of the gift and probably of the contents themselves (owing to the belief that magic rituals would make *real* what was illustrated by words or figurative representations).

Thus the container was by no means less important than what was contained and, perhaps even more importantly, writing on vases could have a similar value or function as that on statues.

Since its remote origin, hieroglyphic writing (as well as its first image-based prototypes) did serve to a varied range of uses, which can be grouped within two main categories: the holy (gods', places, temples and chiefs' names) and the secular (administrative devices, sealing, tags, levies indications on jars, personal names).

On Early Dynastic inscribed stone vessels we find both these categories exemplified, although the first one is prevalent, especially on vases which bear *incised* inscriptions.

Another character of Egyptian writing is that it is regularly complemented by images (or vice versa).

Yet, even when the written sentences seem to exhaust the message, there can be a limited part of the meaning left which is coded in a way other than pure writing.

The interaction of script and image, which was pursued on palettes, knife handles and labels, seems to be nearly absent on stone vases: indeed, although less manifest, it is still present.

Facing hieroglyphic columns¹⁹ in the inscriptions with a royal name and ‘divine provisions’ and in those with serekhs and goddess are, in my opinion, by no means accidental.

They must indicate a precise *action*, indeed an interaction, of the subject(s) in one of the columns towards/with the object(s) in the other one.

In our case, as Kaplony already recognized it²⁰, the serekh facing the standing or sitting goddess, must indicate a visit of the respectively named rulers to the goddess’ temple²¹.

¹⁹ Incised and ink inscriptions on stone vessels were generally written/read from right to left, with only a few exceptions (as cat. B3). However since Qa’a’s reign (PD IV, nr. 46; Kaplony, Steingefasse, 1968, 46, n. 95) and especially in the period spanning the reigns from Hotepsekhemwy up to Wng, some inscriptions with facing columns start to appear (also cf. –although a totally different kind of inscriptions- Khasekhem’s “year-vessels” commemorating the victory over the Northerners: PD IV, nr. 18; J. Quibell, Hierakonpolis, pt. I, pl. 38; Kaplony, MDAIK 20, 1965, 24, nr. 53-54).

²⁰ Cf. ‘Bastet’, n. 27.

²¹ Apart from the vases catalogued here see:

Hotepsekhemwy: visit to the White crown temple (PD IV, nr. 55) and to the Per-Nw (PD IV, nr. 54); PD IV, nr. 84 records a visit of the same king, but named by his Nswt Bity Hotep-Nebty, to the magazine of the temple of the Two Ladies’ (crowns) shrine (Kaplony, ZAS 88, 1962).

Njnetjer: Horus Njnetjer at the White crown temple (PD IV, nr. 78); Horus Ninetjer at the Neith (temple?) in the *P-@r-Msn* enclosure of Neb-Ra (PD IV, nr. 77); Nswt Bity Njnetjer-Nebty: facing *DfAw-Ntrw(y)* provisions, *phyles* of the slaughterhouse (*nmt*, cf. Kaplony, KBIAF, 1966, 46) and of the cellars (*xnt*, *ibid.*, 42) respectively (PD IV, 68-69); facing *anx swt* (provisions), *phyle* indication and *&pj-mr* (a place-name?) (PD IV,2, p. 36f., nr. 75-76); facing the (*Pr-nswt*) *iz-Dfa* (magazine of provisions, Kaplony, IAF III, fig. 862; *id.*, IAFS, 1965, fig. 1072 bis).

Wng: *Nswt Bity Wng-Nbty ZA-WADtjw* facing the column of the *DfAw-Ntrw* provisions; two examples with *Nswt Bity Wng-Nbty* and the magazine of the Nebty (crowns) temple (*iz aH-nTr Nbty*); all from from tomb Saqqara 3014 (PD IV,2, p. 53, fig. 5 a-c respectively); also cf. Kaplony, ZAS 88, nr. 6, a W.S. Smith’s sketch which presents noticeable differences (for which cf. my website page of Wng) when compared with the drawings published in PD IV,2, p. 53, fig. 5 b, c: this means that there could have been a fourth inscribed green schist vessel from Firth’s S3014 or that one of the drawings is imprecise.

Similar ritual events were much differently recorded on early Naqada III knife handles, on first Dynasty labels and on other Egyptian and Lower Nubian media and artefacts²².

How should the inscription with *DfAw* provisions (see ‘Bastet’, table 1 and fig. 4) be interpreted? As most of the engraved ‘royal inscriptions’ on stone vases, it is the commemoration of a ritual event to be displayed.

Generally the word *DfAw*²³ does not apply to *ritual* offerings (*Htp*), and in fact no temple or equivalent structure is cited as a recipient of *DfAw-BAstt*.

However we know that events of economic, administrative, political or juridical relevancy might be transferred into the ritual sphere and associated with solemn celebrations²⁴.

²² For early Naqada III (Dynasty 0) representations of royal processions cf. F. Raffaele, Dynasty 0, in: S. Bickel, A. Loprieno (eds.), *Basel Egyptology Prize 1*, *Aegyptiaca Helvetica* 17, 2003, 99-141.

Labels: Hor-Aha, in: W.M.F. Petrie, *Royal Tombs II*, pl. 10.2, pl. 3A.5 (= J. Kahl, *Das System*, 1994, Quellen 284a-b), royal serekh facing the (*mst*, fashioning of) *jmy-wt* and the Neith temple); Djer, in: E. Amlineau, *Nouvelles Fouilles III* pl. 15.19 = J. Quibell, *Archaic mastabas*, 1923, pl. 11.2-3 = Kahl, op. cit., Quelle 833 (sojourn at Pe); Djet, sojourn at the “Kronenschrein” of the Two Ladies (Helck, *Thinittenzeit*, 155f. = Kahl, *Das System*, Quellen 986, 1081); Den at the *ah-Wr(w)*: Dreyer et al., *MDAIK* 49, 1993, 61, pl. 13b + *MDAIK* 59, 2003, 94, pl. 18g (= *@D-Wrw?* Cf. Petrie, op. cit., I, pl. 17.26 – Semerkhet - and perhaps also Den’s small label in Michailidis collection: V. Vikentiev, *BIE* 32, 225, n. 5, 227, fig. 25).

For the interpretation of the six stelae of Netjerykhet in the Step Pyramid Complex substructures cf. C.M. Firth, J.E. Quibell, *The Step Pyramid*, 1935, pl. 15-17, 40-42; G. Jequier, *CdE* 27, 1939, 29-35; F.D. Friedman, *JARCE* 32, 1995, 1-42.

²³ “+*fA*” is a common indication of levies from Upper Egypt on First Dynasty sealings, jars and labels (P. Kaplony, *IAF I*, 292ff., II, n. 1583-1606; W. Helck, *Thinittenzeit*, 1987, 172-203; J. Kahl, *Das System*, 1994, 99ff.; id., *Zur Problematik der sogenannten Steuervermerke...*, *FS Krause*, 1995, 168-176).

The magazine gathering this income, *iz-DfA(w)* (for which cf. ‘Bastet’, n. 14) is attested since the reign of Njnetjer (also cf. P. Kaplony, *Steingefasse*, 1968, 39, nr. 17) on stone vessels and seal impressions.

²⁴ Such as are the “Following of Horus” (*^msw-@r*; cf. ‘Bastet’, n. 25), the *iz-DfAw* of 2nd Dynasty stone vessels, and the manifestly celebrative

Therefore the inscriptions of ‘divine-provisions’ should represent more than the cold, bureaucratic record of state incomes.

It is also to be expected that, even valuable products as wines and oils, were only ultimately (i.e. once made object of offerings or part of grave goods) supplied in costly and heavy stone vessels, which were not the containers usually apt to transport them.

The mention of ‘divine provisions’ (n. 21 and table 1) has been accepted either as a direct reference to incomes of a particular god’s temple (Kaplony) or as qualifying the provisions being forwarded from royal domains or local shrines and then ending up, through the *Pr-Nswt* or the *Pr-HD*, into royal (and élite) tombs of the capital cemeteries (Wilkinson; cf. ‘Bastet’, n. 14).

In my opinion, both these definitions are inaccurate.

The recurring mention of a *phyle*²⁵, is significant for our discussion: such “crews” of workmen existed both in palatial and in ritual-funerary contexts, for royal and non royal funerary cult, but they are not known to have ever been specifically related to the tributary system²⁶.

event represented on the second register of Hor-Aha’s reign “Naqada label”, thereinto glossed with the hieroglyphs *DfA(w)-^maw, inw-MHw*: ‘(Receiving) Upper Egyptian provisions and Lower Egyptian income’; see my website for a corpus of labels with full bibliography.

²⁵ On *Phyles* cf. A.M. Roth, *Egyptian Phyles in the Old Kingdom. The Evolution of a System of Social Organization*, 1991; W. Helck, *LÄ I*, 371-374 (esp. n. 16); id., *LÄ IV*, 1044; J. Kahl, *Das System*, 1994, 769; J. Baines, *DE 26*, 1993, 91-96 (review of Roth’s book).

The most attested one in this period is the *ZA-wr* (J. Kahl, *FW*, I, 2002, 122f.); for the five Early Dynastic *Phyles* cf. J. Kahl, *Das System*, 1994, 527, n. 780 (*Wr*), 561, n. 1030 (*WADtw*), 703, n. 2077 (*anx*), 695, n. 2017 (*&A-Wrj*), 690, n. 1980 (*Nfrt*), 529, n. 793 (*NDs*). See also table 2.

It seems that the phyle name known as *&A-Wr(j)* must be read *&A-sI*, as proposed by A.M. Roth (op. cit.) and agreed with by P. Posener-Kriéger (in a review of Roth’s book on *CdE* 71, 1996, 74); it is instead more dubitative the alternative reading *^rj* proposed for the *NDs* phyle name.

For a *\$n(w)* phyle cf. Roth, op. cit., 209 (P. Kaplony, *IAF III*, fig. 299).

²⁶ For which cf. W. Helck, *Abgaben und Steuern*, in: *LÄ I*, 3-12; id., *Palastverwaltung*, *LÄ IV*, 647-652; id., *Thinitenzeit*, *LÄ VI*, 486-93; T.A.H. Wilkinson, *Early Dynastic Egypt*, 1999, 109-149.

Seal impressions which involve any *phyle* inscription are very rare before the Third Dynasty (cf. Kaplony, *IAF III*, fig. 244, 736?), and this

Table 1 shows that, as far as stone vessels inscriptions are concerned, *phyles* occur mostly in combination with: royal name (Horus name or Nswt-bity), royal domain (or department thereof, since late in the First Dynasty), ‘divine provisions’.

It seems that, since the reign of Njnetjer, *phyles* are much involved in duties connected with cellars and slaughterhouses, and these latter ones can be in turn related to ‘divine provisions’. Now stone vessels have been found mainly in the Thinite cemeteries of Abydos and, especially, at Saqqara. As I have stated above, writings on stone vessels did generally emphasize commemorative and ritual aspects²⁷.

Resuming all considerations and data I have provided above, it can be reasonably argued that the inscriptions I have considered here were ultimately related with royal offerings²⁸: similarly to the offering bearers of IVth Dynasty and later periods representations, there must have been some sort of ceremonial event in which tributes and goods were symbolically offered to the sovereign.

Place:

Inscribed stone vases were largely available to the royal person (and to high status dignitaries). They were almost exclusively stored in their tombs and most of the impressive lot heaped up in Djoser’s complex galleries had to be originally part of the funerary equipment of Early Second Dynasty tombs in the nearby royal cemetery (see n. 2, 4 and ‘Bastet’, n. 24).

As shown by some temple deposits²⁹, stone vases were also votive offerings for divinities, but the percentage of examples

is also a striking clue when comparing this scanty evidence with the abundant references to tributes (both from Egyptian and from foreign territories). Two further points to be noticed are the nearly absolute lack of phyle associations in the titles of high dignitaries and the apparent need for purity of even non-funerary service phyle members.

²⁷ Tax indications can be found ink inscribed on tall (pottery) jars since Naqada IIIB (-C1; cf. n. 23) especially in the reigns from Ka to Djer.

²⁸ Cf. W. Helck, *Opferstiftung*, LÄ IV, 590-594.

²⁹ This is the case for the “Main Deposit” found in the Horus temple at Hierakonpolis (J.E. Quibell, *Hierakonpolis*, pt. I, 1900, pl. 17, 18.21, 19.1, 20.1, 31, 33, 34, 36-38; J.E. Quibell, F.W. Green, *Hierakonpolis*,

from these contexts is very low, though partly owing to external reasons (unbalanced chances and interest in funerary as against non-funerary archaeological investigations in the Nile valley). Keeping these caveats in mind, it seems that the great mass of stone vessels was actually conceived to end up in royal funerary complexes (including the ‘Talbezirke’) and high status tombs. All the important administrative and palatial institutions mentioned in the inscriptions (cf. table 1, with the possible exception of Ninetjer’s *Ankh Swt* and the royal domains in the Delta), tightly related to the central administration, were sited and did operate in the capital. It is in the capital cemeteries that most of the stone vases were found.

Direction:

Stone vessels were built for rich tombs, manufactured within the circuit of the most important administrative subsystems, mostly by capable artisans (cf. n. 5), and filled up (by phyle groups) with expensive luxury goods.

The find-spot leaves no doubt about their material, physical destination and on the fact that the inscriptions related to the *origin* of the goods and eventually to the *occasion* associated with their offering (in this case a “destination”). These data are, significantly, just the same ones which were usually recorded on First Dynasty year labels³⁰.

Purpose, occasion:

Comparison with other inscribed vessels clarifies the status of the “origin” information: not a bureaucratic note (as is more the case with labels) but a dedicatory one, pointing out the solemn “occasion” in which the vase and its contents were gifted.

pt. II, 1902, pl. 30, 48a, 59; B. Adams, *Ancient Hierakonpolis*, 1974; id., *Ancient Hierakonpolis. Supplement*, 1974) which, apart from those of Khasekhemwy, are dateable to Naqada III(A-)B (“Dynasty 0”).

³⁰ Products contained in stone vessels and those accompanied by labels generally came from mortuary foundations as well as from productive domains and estates of the king (thus ultimately conveyed to the *Pr-Nswt*): luxury items required a superior bureaucratic control than common goods, and the impressions of cylinder seals rolled up on jars stoppers’ wet clay was the main and oldest means to control goods (the earliest known seal impressions predate the first attestations of writing).

Diagnostic in this concern appear to be the “annual offering” (*Htp rnpt*) in some of Qa’a’s vessels inscriptions, a possible mention of a *Pr-xrw* and the ‘divine provisions’.

It is evident that the vases contents were ultimately destined to the *Ka* of tomb owners and the duty of filling up the precious containers was performed by the phyles groups. This accounts for the mentions of phyles on the inscriptions: they were the medium through which offerings were finally confected for the tombs, a task which they carried out in the magazines of the central administration in behalf of the sovereign and his high officials. Phyles could have never been the appointee of neither the inscriptions nor the vessels, as the cited institutions nor could. Stone made sure that the offered substances, whether of alimentary or of cosmetic use, had the best protection against deterioration and were safer from losses due to breaking of the containers: therefore the *ka* of the offerings themselves was to last as long as possible (also see below, n. 31).

Bastet or other gods’ *provisions* recurring in the inscription are not indicative of incomes or outcomes of their temples (cf. ‘Bastet’, n. 14).

They attest, instead, the sacred character of the aim they had to fulfil, transferring the revenue of royal incomes into the domain of what is sacred. This means that they are expression of the moment in which a separation did occur between the revenues destined to the *daily* consumption by the court and those for the properly funerary use, an *eternal* one which needed divine bonds. These goods originated in the royal foundations and domains, hence, as also the serekhs demonstrate, they were personal property of the king (i.e. they seems to be coming from the structures deputed to revenue the royal household, not from those concerned with state provisioning, the *iz-DfA* of the central treasury, *Pr-Hd*, *Pr-dSr*).

Beside furnishing royal tombs, stone vases with their precious contents could be gifted by the king to his dignitaries, and I’ve already hinted above at the importance of the gift mechanism, and the deep significance of any

object bearing the royal serekh inscribed on it (see ‘Bastet’, n. 25).

Although private names are generally missing in the inscriptions on early stone vases, this kind of gift should have had, for private persons, a similar value and function as later biographies, which developed around the concept of faithful service for the king (cf. above) or as the gold dish presented to the general Djehuty by Thutmosis III; maybe they could be regarded as a kind of *Htp-di-nswt* formula *ante litteram* as well.

For both the private individuals and the king himself, the value of these objects resided in the *elitary* character of the vases themselves (rarity of their materials, difficulty in working and transporting them) and of the goods which they were filled up with.

As for the so called “powerfacts”, ownership of costly artefacts enhanced the status and the *rights* of the leading classes, and this was pursued in the afterlife whether these objects were made available to the dead in his house of eternity, the tomb.

According to an anthropological interpretation, the massive amounts of vases the ruler required for their tombs may be regarded as an index of “conspicuous consumption”, a concept which would also be expressed and exemplified by monumentality³¹.

³¹ Cf. B. Trigger, *Early Civilizations. Ancient Egypt in context*, 1993; id., in: *World Archaeology* 22/2, 1990, 119ff.

A parallel could be traced between the use of stone to contain and preserve products (formerly kept in earthen jars) and its use to preserve the body of the dead (king) within the eternal masonry of pyramid complexes (at least since the Third Dynasty, as opposed to the mudbrick mastabas of earlier kings). The same could be said about the development and materials used for coffins: from pottery and wooden biers to stone sarcophagi.

As it often occurs with ancient Egyptian beliefs, it is always possible that several aspects, significances and purposes were condensed in one object (or symbol): stone vases, and all that was within, onto and around them, are another clear proof of the truth of this statement.

Table 1: Early Dynastic *Phyles* from the reign of Qa'a to Wng.

Reign	<i>Phyle</i> (ZA)	Associated inscription	Reference
Qa-a (5)	<i>Wr</i>	<i>ZA-HA-nb / Pr-nswt / xntj / Htp rnpt</i>	PD IV.1, pl. en. IV, 8-11 (= Petrie, RT I, pl. 9, nr. 1-2, 4-5); IAF III, 877
Qa-a	<i>Wr</i>	<i>P-@r-msnw / aA-xntj</i>	PD IV, nr. 40
Qa-a	<i>WADtjw</i>	<i>xntj</i>	Petrie, RT I, pl. 8.8
Qa-a ?	<i>WADtjw</i>	<i>Pr-nswt / xntj [ZA]-HA-nb</i>	Kaplony, MDAIK 20, 1965, 19, nr. 39
“Bird”	<i>Wr</i>	<i>ZA-HA-nb / Pr-nswt / xntj / @tp rnpt</i>	PD IV, nr. 108 (pl. en. IV.7)
Hotep(sekhemwy)	<i>Wr</i>	<i>xntj</i>	PD IV, nr. 82
Hotepsekhemwy	<i>Wr</i>	<i>aA-xntj</i>	Kaplony, MDAIK 20, 1965, 23, nr. 48
Njnetjer	<i>Wr</i>	<i>anx-swt / @A-tp-mr</i>	PD IV, nr. 75
Njnetjer	<i>Wr</i>	<i>anx-swt / HA-tp-mr/ Pr-xrw aSA</i>	PD IV, nr. 76
Njnetjer	<i>Wr</i>	<i>DfAw-Bastt</i>	PD IV, nr. 63
(Njnetjer)	<i>Wr</i>	<i>DfAw-Bastt / pr-nmt</i>	PD IV.1, pl. en. VII.3 (ink, <u>same vessel as nr. 63</u>)
Njnetjer (3)	<i>Wr</i>	<i>DfAw-Bastt</i>	PD IV, nr. 64-66
Njnetjer	<i>Wr</i>	<i>DfA(w)-Bastt / xntj</i>	PD IV, nr. 67
Njnetjer	<i>Wr</i>	<i>DfAw-nlrw / nmt</i>	PD IV, nr. 68
(Njnetjer)	<i>Wr</i>	<i>DfAw-nlrw / pr-nmt</i>	PD IV.1, pl. en. VII.4 (ink, <u>same vessel as nr. 68</u>)
(Njnetjer)? (2)	<i>Wr &A-wrj WAD(tjw)</i>	(these bowls were used as large ostraca for textiles inventory)	PD V, nr. 34 (fig. 34-35, pl. 17.1-2) (ink)

	<i>NDS(t)</i> <i>Nfrt</i>	or bookkeeping notes)	
(Njnetjer)?	<i>&A-wrj</i>	<i>aHA-Xrtj</i>	PD V, nr. 100 (ink)
(Njnetjer)?	<i>Wr</i>	-	PD V, nr. 101 (ink)
(Njnetjer)? (2+)	<i>&A-wrj</i>	<i>(sma) ij.n-\$nmw / Hb-sd</i>	PD V, nr. 2 (fig. 5, 9) (ink)
(Njnetjer)?	<i>Wr</i>	<i>Hsbt: [zp]-4 Hb-Zkr (?) MA / ? / ...</i>	PD V, nr. 273 (ink on Heb-Sed vessel, Cairo JdE 64872)
(Njnetjer)?	<i>WADtjw</i>	<i>NTrw / ? / inw-sIt / Hsbt: Smsw-Hr / zp 15 Inwt</i>	PD V, nr. 274 (ink)
Njnetjer	<i>WADtjw</i>	<i>DfAw-nTrwj / xntj</i>	PD IV, nr. 69
Njnetjer	<i>WADtjw</i>	-	PD IV, nr. 71
Njnetjer	<i>anx</i>	<i>abw ra nb</i>	PD IV, nr. 73
(Njnetjer)? (2)	<i>anx</i>	-	PD V, nr. 65 (ink)
?	<i>anx</i>	<i>Hwt-sSd (?)</i>	PD IV, pl. en. VI.1
?	<i>anx</i>	<i>Hwt-mnt-anx</i>	PD IV, pl. en. VI.2
Wng	<i>WADtjw</i>	<i>DfAw-nTrwj</i>	PD IV.2, 53, fig. 5a
?	<i>Wr</i>	<i>sm Hm-Nt</i>	PD IV, nr. 116