

Préhistoires de l'écriture *Prehistories of Writing*

Gwenola Graff & Alejandro Jimenez Serrano (dir.)

Iconographie, pratiques graphiques et émergence de l'écrit dans l'Égypte prédynastique
Iconography, graphic practices and emergence of writing in Predynastic Egypt





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Intact wine jars with pre-firing potmarks from the Early Dynastic cemetery at Helwan, Egypt

Jarres à vin intactes avec marques incisées avant cuisson de la nécropole thinite d'Hélouan, Égypte

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Abstract - The current paper presents and discusses a group of 148 intact, marked wine jars excavated in Helwan, against the backdrop of related data culled from four selected, partly contemporary cemeteries, viz. those of Minshat Abu Omar, Kafr Hassan Dawood, Abu Roash and Tarkhan. Their study contributes not only to the theme of early dynastic potmarks *per se*, but also to contextual and social analyses and perhaps script development more in general. The various groupings of both legible and intelligible potmarks are slowly but certainly expanding, and the application of the term preformal hieroglyphs to several of these seems fitting.

Keywords - Helwan, potmarks, Thinite period, circulation of prestige goods

Résumé - Cet article présente et étudie un groupe de 148 jarres à vin, intactes, avec des potmarks, en provenance des fouilles de la nécropole d'Hélouan et mis en parallèle avec des objets similaires en provenance de quatre autres nécropoles, partiellement contemporaines, celles de Minshat Abu Omar, Kafr Hassan Dawood, Abou Roash et Tarkhan. Leur étude contribue non seulement au thème des premiers potmarks dynastiques en soi, mais aussi de manière plus générale aux analyses contextuelles et sociales et peut-être au développement de l'écriture. Les divers regroupements de potmarks tant lisibles qu'intelligibles se développent lentement mais sûrement, et l'application du terme hiéroglyphes préformels à plusieurs d'entre ceux-ci semble juste.

Mots clés - Hélouan, potmarks, période thinite, circulation des biens de prestige

The round table discussions organized by Gwenola Graff and her colleagues within the framework of *Prehistories of writing: Iconography, graphic practices and emergence of writing in predynastic Egypt* provided a suitable environment in which to recommence the topic of pre-firing applied potmarks and their containers found in proto- and early dynastic, viz., Naqada IIIB-D contexts in Egypt, mainly – though not exclusively – deriving from the mortuary realm.

The relevance of foresaid potmarks as a non-verbal signification system, developing in tandem with the process of the emergence of writing in early Egypt, has been discussed most recently by van den Brink (van den Brink 2010: 334). This process, evolving from pictographic, through ideographic to eventually phonetic representation, is recorded in different media, e.g. in rock art, in the painted decoration on certain types of pottery vessels, on stamp and cylinder seals and sealings, bone, ivory and wooden labels, ink inscriptions etc. To date this process finds its first condensed, tangible expression in the *Schriftzeugnisse* from Tomb U/j and neighboring tombs at Umm el-Qa'ab, Abydos, dated to the Naqada IIIA1/2 (Dreyer 1998, Hartung 2001).

The current paper presents and discusses potmarks applied to one particular class of ceramic vessels only, namely that of 'wine jars' (Petrie's types 75-76 (Petrie 1953); van den Brink's types III and IV (van den Brink 1996) deriving from the excavations carried out in the past by Z.Y. Saad, resumed in 1997 by E.C. Köhler and her team in the cemetery of Helwan. A group of 148 intact, marked wine jars is discussed here for the first time, against the backdrop of related data culled from four selected, partly contemporary cemeteries, viz. those of Minshat Abu Omar, Kafr Hassan Dawood, Abu Roash and Tarkhan, in the hope of shedding further light on the largely still enigmatic meaning of the potmarks.

The Helwan excavations

In the early 1950s Z. Saad unearthed two adjacent subterranean tombs within an area of the early dynastic cemetery at Helwan as part of an extensive excavation carried out over numerous seasons, which to date remain largely unpublished. These two tombs were subsequently used by the excavator as repositories for large amounts of intact pottery and stone vessels as well as selected human remains, deriving mainly from his 9th and 11th seasons of excavation in the cemetery.

During renewed excavations in the Helwan cemetery under the auspices of Macquarie University, Sydney

in 1997/1998 and 2002/2003, Köhler located and re-opened those tombs in an area designated Operation 3 (Köhler 2005). Together they held an estimated 1735 pottery vessels of different types (Smythe 2004: 317, 2008: 151), including 106 mostly intact, wine jars with potmarks¹ which form the bulk of the collection under discussion.

The Helwan wine jars bearing potmarks

This study considers these vessels and an additional 14 (Appendix 1²: tables 1-2), which were also excavated under the supervision of Saad, but which were selected by him for display in the former on-site museum at Helwan/Ezbet el-Walda. Out of safety concerns, this museum's entire collection was transported in 1967 in 158 wooden crates to the basement of Egyptian Museum in Cairo, where they lay forgotten until their recent re-discovery by Köhler (Köhler 2002, Köhler 2004b).

Of these 120 vessels deriving from Saad's work in the Helwan cemetery, 86 still have tomb allocation numbers (nos. 1-86 in Appendix 1: table 1) that link them with 62 different graves. The remaining 34 either lack any identifying numbers or these have become illegible over time (nos. 87-120 in Appendix 1: table 2). Therefore, the vessels cannot be allocated to any specific grave. Together with 28 wine jars bearing potmarks (nos. 121-148 in Appendix 1: table 3) from eight graves excavated more recently by Köhler (Köhler 2004a) in an area designated Operation 4, both groups of vessels are discussed below as a corpus of 148 wine jars and their potmarks deriving from this cemetery. Of this collection, 32 jars with potmarks and six that did not bear potmarks have already been published elsewhere, some only cursorily and others in more detail (cf. Appendix 1: tables 1-3; Saad 1947: figs. 11-12, 1951: Pl. 71.3-4, Köhler & van den Brink 2002: fig. 1, 1-4, Köhler 2004a: figs. 3, 4, 7b, Köhler 2004b: fig. 6, Smythe 2004: figs. 11-12, 2008: figs. 1-2, 4, 15-16, 18, 28, 32, 37-38, van den Brink 2010: figs. 1-2).

¹ Only two wine jars were found to be incomplete (Appendix 1: table 1: nos. 32 and 47). On a different note, it is worth mentioning that six of the wine jars had been modified post-firing by drilling holes at varying heights through the vessels' walls, in one case four holes around a larger perforation (Appendix 1: table 1: nos. 2, 42, 51, 54, 79 and 92), indicating an apparent re-use of these containers before final deposition in the graves. For a recent discussion of primary vs. secondary use of wine jars found in early dynastic mortuary contexts, see Mawdsley 2011

² For this Appendix, see <http://pm.revues.org/>

Wine Jars from Operations 3/1 and 3/3

A. Wine jars with original tomb allocation numbers still preserved on them

Ninety-nine intact wine jars, including 86 with potmarks and 13 others, unmarked, were retrieved from “storage tombs” Operation 3/1 and 3/3 (Appendix 1: table 1). Based on the preserved original excavation tomb number on each of these jars, they must have come from 62 distinct graves.

The distribution of wine jars with potmarks by grave, based on the corpus under discussion³ is as follows:

- 53 graves each contained a single jar
- 3 graves contained 2 jars
- 3 graves contained 3 jars
- 3 graves contained respectively 4, 6 and 8 jars

B. Wine jars without proveniences

Thirty-four unprovenanced wine jars with potmarks derive from an unknown, but maximum, number of 34 graves (Appendix 1: table 2). The number of graves for this quantity of wine jars might be lower, however, as it is likely some of the jars were found in groups of two or more.

Operation 4

With work in this area still ongoing, to date 28 wine jars with potmarks and two similar, unmarked jars, that were analyzed for this study, derive from eight graves (Appendix 1: table 3). In contrast to the 120 jars with potmarks noted above, the full archaeological context of each of the jars from this Operation is known.

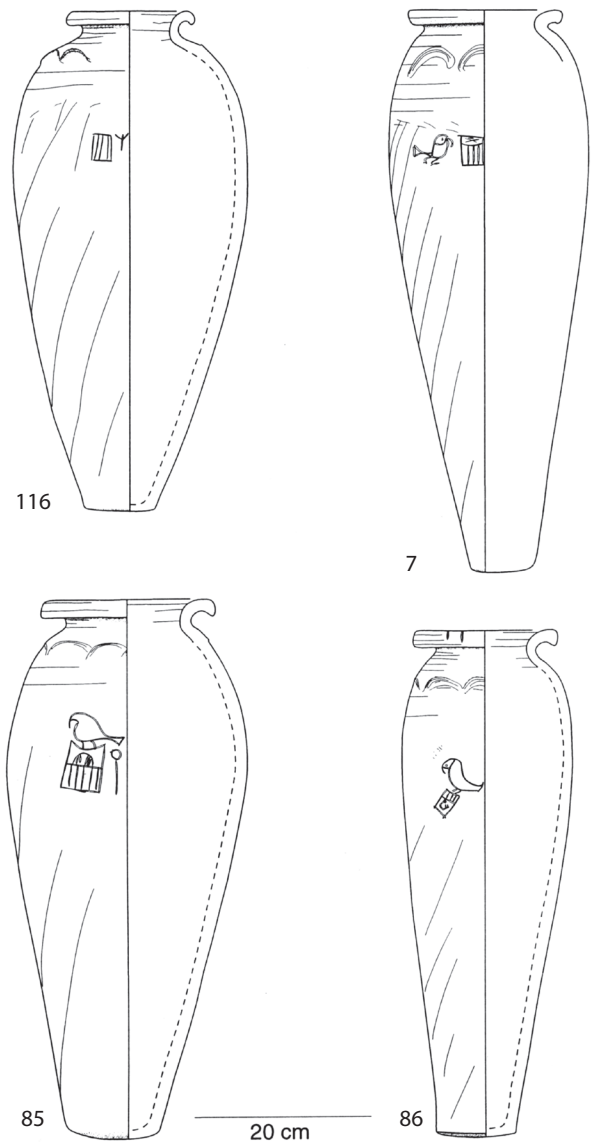
The distribution of wine jars with potmarks by grave is as follows:

- 3 graves contained a single jar
- 1 grave contained 2 jars
- 2 graves contained 3 jars
- 1 grave contained 6 jars
- 1 grave contained 11 jars

Wine jar types represented in the Helwan assemblage

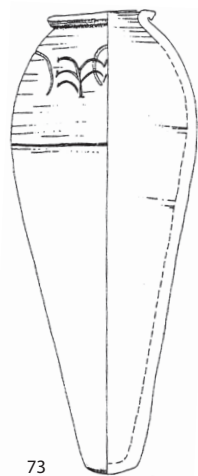
The earliest wine jar types in the present corpus, characterized by either pushed-up, vestigial, indented

³ It should be taken into account that Saad only retained complete or intact vessels (Smythe 2004: 317, Köhler & Smythe 2004: 126). The total amount of jars per grave mentioned in this section, therefore, should be considered as the minimum number of jars known from any one tomb assemblage

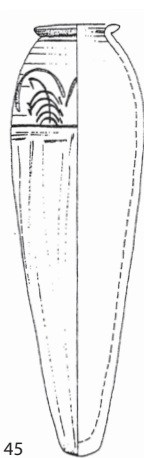


1. Types II and III winejars with incised *serekh* sign. NB: the 1, 2 or 3 digit-numbers appearing in conjunction with each individual jar at its lower left side as represented in figs. 1-5 correspond with the numbering/order in which the Helwan jars have been presented in Appendix 1: tables 1-3 / *Jarres à vin de types II et III, incisées de serekhs*. NB : pour les figs 1 à 5, les nombres placés en bas à gauche de chaque jarre correspondent à l'ordre dans lequel les jarres d'Héliouan ont été présentées dans l'annexe 1: tables 1-3

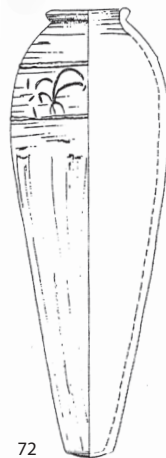
ledge handles (n=1) or by impressed, crescentic decoration on the shoulder (n=8) are few in number (Appendix 1: tables 1-2, nos. 7, 9, 45, 61, 73, 85, 86, 116, 117). They are ascribed to van den Brink's jar Types II and III respectively, and date from Late Dynasty 0 to the very beginning of Dynasty 1 (van den Brink 1996: 144-147). Four of these jars are incised with a *serekh*.



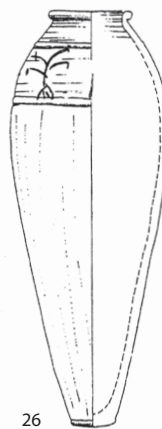
73



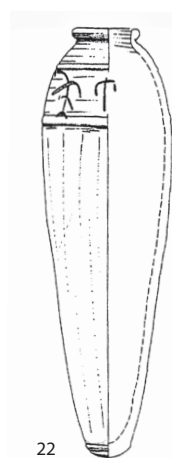
45



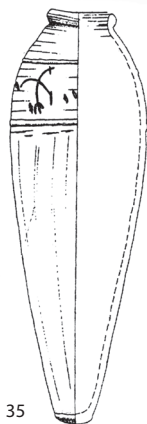
72



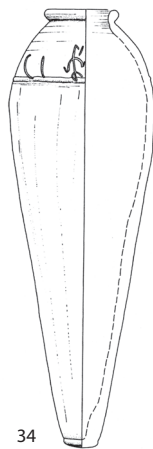
26



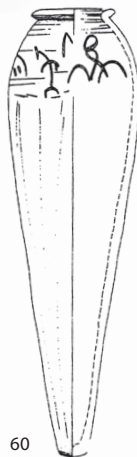
22



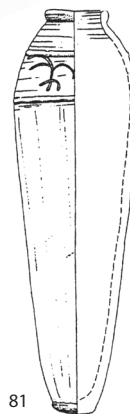
35



34



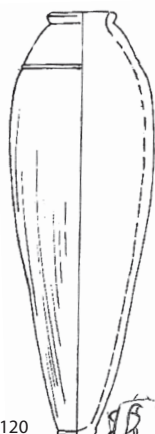
60



81



104



120



20



93

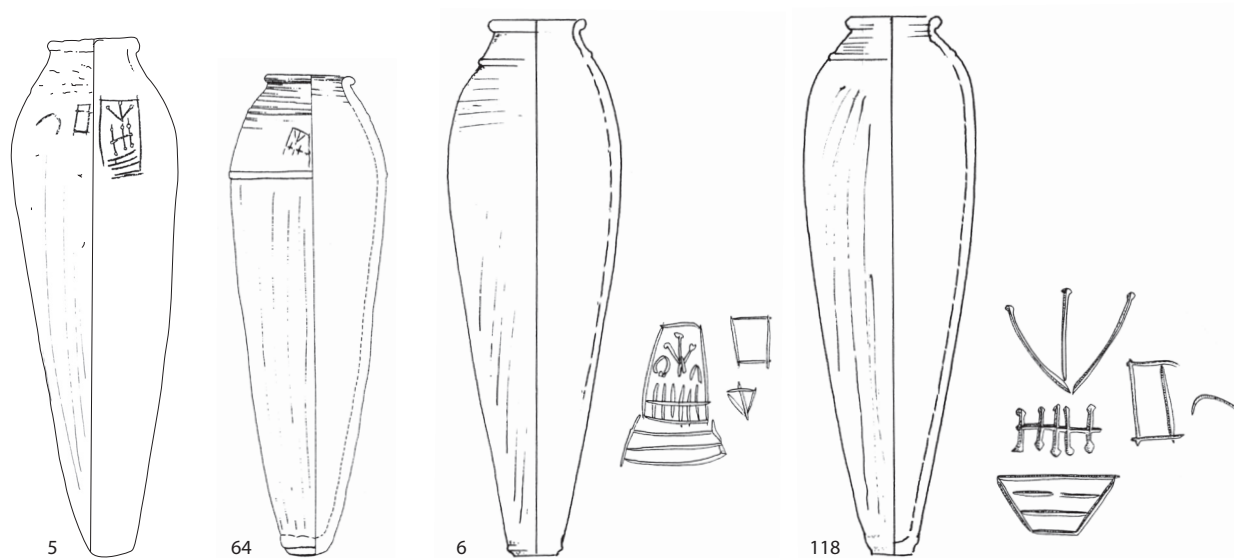


96



70

2. Type IV winejars with ['g.tj] Sm'j' sign / Jarres à vin de type IV avec le signe ['g.tj] Sm'j'



3. Type IV wine jars *ḥw.t s3-ḥ3* Adjib estate / *Jarres à vin de type IV ḥw.t s3-ḥ3 de l'état d'Adjib*

The vast majority of intact wine jars found at Helwan, however, date from the second half of the First Dynasty to sometime during the Second Dynasty (Smythe 2004: 323). They consist of tall exemplars with three (n=16), two (n=38), one (n=66) or without any (n=19) continuous plain bands applied to their tapering bodies, types classified by van den Brink as IVb-d (van den Brink 1996:148). Most jars are made from alluvial Nile silt, with a significantly smaller percentage made of marl clay (*cf.* Appendix 1: tables 1-2; Smythe *op. cit.*)⁴. Not a single specimen of the bulkier, Type IVa jar, datable to the end of Dynasty 0 and very beginning of Dynasty 1, has been identified amongst the group at issue. Based on the information deriving from Operations 3 and 4 *only*, there appears to be a gap in the use of the Helwan cemetery covering the first half of the First Dynasty, although this may well be due to the lack of published materials from other areas of the cemetery.

Composition of the Helwan potmarks

The Helwan corpus includes 27 potmarks on wine jars that are legible (*cf.* below, table 3). These comprise the four jars incised with a *serekh* already noted above (fig. 1; Appendix 1.1-2: 7, 84, 85, 116) and 15 jars bearing the floral mark [*gt*] *Šmꜥ* (U.E. barley) (fig. 2; Appendix 1:

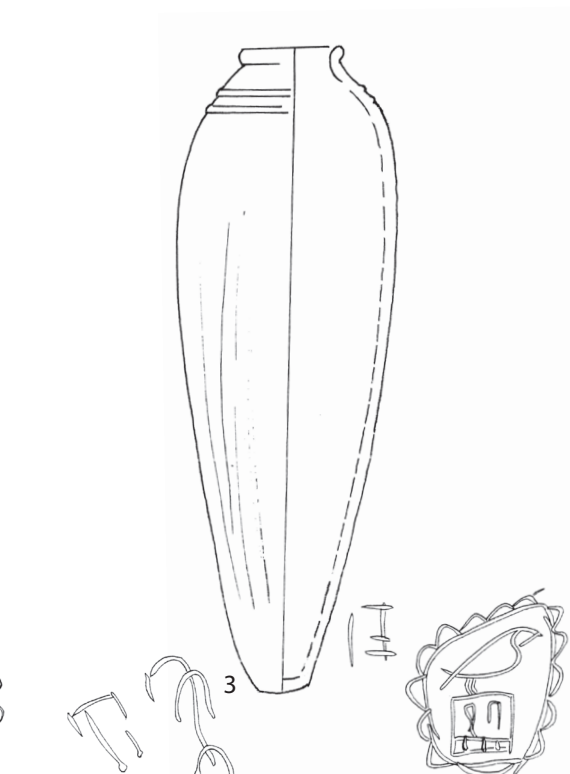
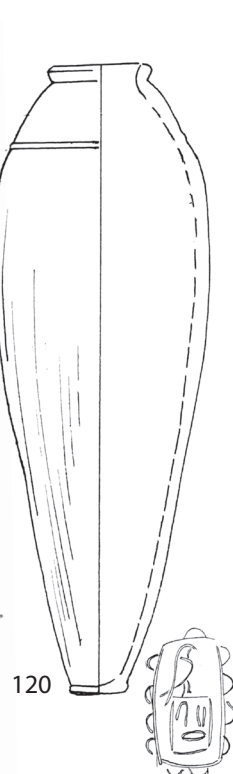
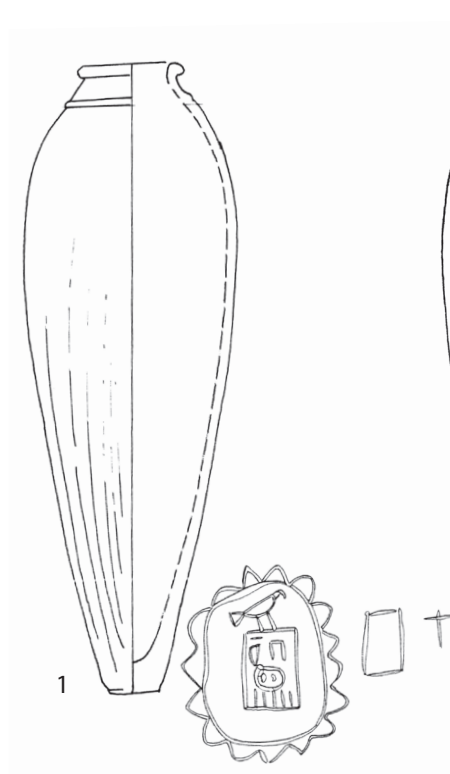
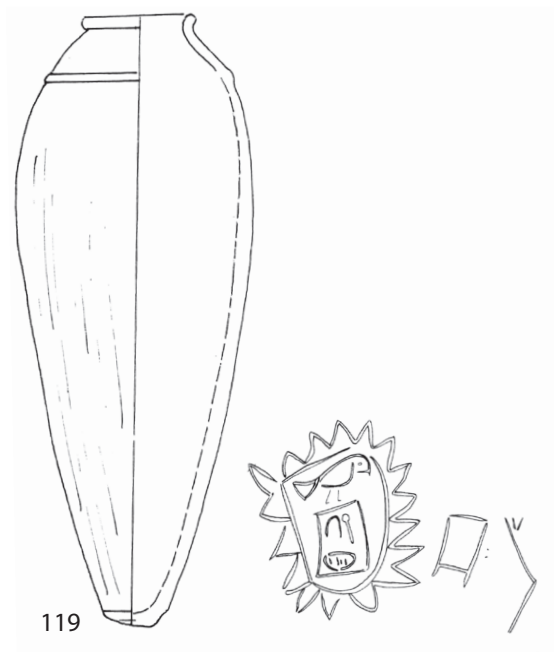
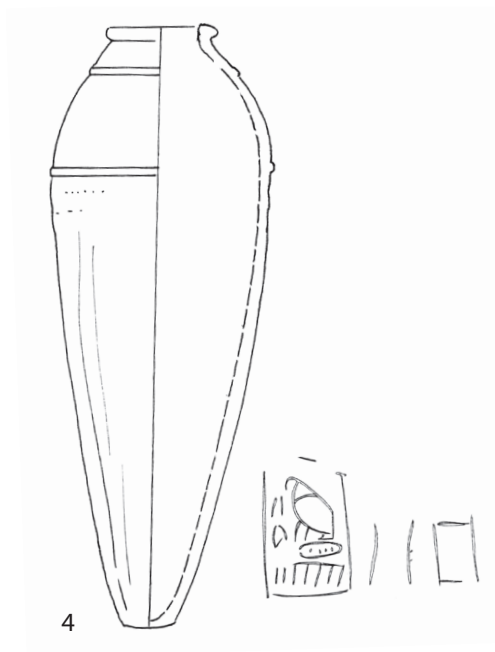
tables 1-2: 20, 22, 26, 34, 35, 45, 60, 70, 72, 73, 81, 93, 96, 104, 120). These have been discussed elsewhere at length (Köhler & van den Brink 2002, van den Brink 2010). Four additional jars are inscribed with the *ḥw.t s3-ḥ3* estate-sign of A[ne]djib, all of which have accompanying marks, two of which (nos. 5 and 118) are identical (fig. 3; Appendix 1: tables 1-2: nos. 5, 6, 64, 118). Five jars bear the domain-sign of Semerkhet (fig. 4; Appendix 1: tables 1-2: nos. 1, 3, 4, 119, 120)⁵, one (no. 4) without the usual crenellated oval frame, and another (no. 120) notably associated with the *Šmꜥ*-sign.

Excluding these 27 legible inscriptions, the remaining 121 potmarks (figs. 5-6) in the corpus under discussion can be subdivided into marks consisting of a single sign (n=31), or different combinations and quantities of signs including two (n=63), three (n=22), four (n=4), and, in one case, eight distinct, usually horizontally aligned signs, thus forming composite or compound potmarks. Of these, seventy-three simple and compound potmarks⁶

⁴ Although not all wine jars with potmarks that are listed in Appendix 1: tables 1-3 have been examined according to fabric, yet from those that have been studied, 92 are made of alluvial Nile silt and only 26 of marl clay

⁵ In contrast to domain names of Semerkhet's predecessors usually found on cylinder seal impressions but not incised on the actual pottery vessels themselves, Semerkhet's domain name is incised into pottery, and does not occur on cylinder seal impressions. This indicates a change in the handling of wine jars bearing this particular type of inscription during the reign of Semerkhet. Notably see also Appendix 1: table 7: 61

⁶ A simple potmark consists of one distinct, basic sign (n=77) as listed in van den Brink 1992: 282-284, table 2. A compound potmark consists of a combination of two or more distinct signs as listed in *op.cit.*: 285-296, figs. 6-17



4. Type IV winejars with Semerkhet domain / *Jarres à vin de type IV avec la marque de Semerkhet*

Table 1. Compilation of total numbers of graves and pottery vessels retrieved from selected early dynastic cemeteries in Lower Egypt - 1. Total number of graves excavated in each distinct cemetery; 2. Total number of graves that contained marked vessels regardless of vessel type; 3. Total number of graves that specifically contained wine jars with potmarks; 4. Total amount of ceramic vessels excavated in each of the selected cemeteries; 5. Total amount of marked vessels regardless of vessel type; 6. Total amount of wine jars bearing potmarks; 7. Total amount of wine jars without potmarks / *Synthèse du nombre total de tombes et de vaisselles céramiques provenant des cimetières sélectionnés de la première dynastie de Basse Égypte* - 1. Nombre total de tombes fouillées dans chaque cimetière distinct; 2. Nombre total de tombes qui contenaient des vaisselles avec marques indépendamment du type de vaisselles; 3. Nombre total de tombes qui contenaient spécifiquement des jarres à vin avec marques incisées; 4. Quantité totale de vaisselles céramiques découvertes dans chacun des cimetières sélectionnés; 5. Quantité totale de vaisselles avec marques indépendamment du type de vaisselles; 6. Quantité totale de jarres à vin portant des potmarks; 7. Quantité totale de jarres à vin sans marques incisées

Site	1. # graves	2. # graves yielding potmarks	3. # graves yielding marked wine jars	4. # ceramic vessels	5. # marked ceramic vessels	6. # marked wine jars	7. # unmarked wine jars
Minshat Abu Omar	420 ¹	100 (23.8%)	30 (30%)	2360	332	164 ²	35
Kafr Hassan Dawood	752	96 ³ (12.8%)	34 (incl. 1 type III jar) (35.4%)	1775	227 (excl. 4 on stone vessels) ⁴	90 (incl. 11 on type III jars)	150 (incl. 188 type III)
Helwan	± 10.000	?	69 ⁵	ca. 1735 ⁶	?	148	15
Tarkhan	2167	87 (4.1%)	26 (29%)	ca. 2917 ⁷	356	67	29 ⁸
Abu Roash	400 ⁹	88 (22%)	37 (42%)	1670	209	105	60

¹ This number concerns both late predynastic and early dynastic graves (grave groups I-IV), but excludes a further 2639 Graeco-Roman burials uncovered at the same site; ² This number includes 108 marked jars of van den Brink's (1996) Type IV (Kroeper's [2000] wine-types 1-4), and 56 marked jars of his Type III (Kroeper's op.cit. serekh-types); ³ This number may include some graves excavated between 1989 and 1995 by S. el-Hangouri (Tassie, pers. comm. 2011); ⁴ A total of 262 potmarks, divided amongst 227 different vessels are recorded for the 1989-1999 excavations (Tassie et al. in prep.); however, after the planned study of the vessels in the Zagazig Magazine and further excavations at Kafr Hassan Dawood, this figure may well change (Tassie pers. com. 2011); ⁵ This number is based on Operations 3/1, 3/3 and 4 as presented in this paper only; ⁶ This number only accounts for the ceramic vessels retrieved from "storage tombs" Operations 3/1 (ca. 1000 complete vessels) and 3/3 (ca. 735 intact vessels); ⁷ Pottery total is based upon number of vessels from the published registers. According to Lisa Mawdsley (pers. comm. 2011), basing herself on Petrie's actual tomb cards, there actually are over 4500 vessels; ⁸ This figure is based on the published registers in Petrie's two excavation reports. However, according to unpublished data most kindly provided by Lisa Mawdsley deriving from Petrie's tomb cards, there are actually 239 unmarked wine jars of Petrie's Types 75-76, bringing the grand total of marked and unmarked wine jars for the Tarkhan cemeteries to 306; ⁹ In addition to the 381 graves excavated by A. Klasens in Abu Roash, this number also include the 19 graves previously excavated there by Montet (1946) in Cemetery M

Table 2. Distribution of jars with potmarks over grave totals from selected early dynastic cemeteries in Lower Egypt - 1. Total number of graves that contain wine jars with potmarks; 2. Total number of graves containing a single wine jar with a potmark; 3. Total number of graves containing two wine jars with potmarks; 4. Total number of graves containing three wine jars with potmarks; 5. Total number of graves containing four wine jars with potmarks; 6. Graves containing between 5 to maximum 23 wine jars with potmarks / *Distribution des jarres avec marques incisées parmi la totalité des tombes provenant des cimetières sélectionnés de la première dynastie de Basse Égypte* - 1. Nombre total de tombes qui contenaient des jarres à vin avec marques incisées; 2. Nombre total de tombes qui contenaient une seule jarre à vin avec marque incisée; 3. Nombre total de tombes qui contenaient deux jarres à vin avec marques incisées; 4. Nombre total de tombes qui contenaient trois jarres à vin avec marques incisées; 5. Nombre total de tombes qui contenaient quatre jarres à vin avec marques incisées; 6. Tombes qui contenaient entre cinq et un maximum de 23 jarres à vin avec marques incisées

Site	1. # graves with marked wine jars	2. # graves with 1 marked wine jars	3. # graves with 2 marked wine jars	4. # graves with 3 marked wine jars	5. # graves with 4 marked wine jars	6. # graves with 5 or more marked wine jars ¹
Minshat Abu Omar	30	13 (44.8%)	2 (6.8%)	6 (20.7%)	3 (10.3%)	1/5 (3.4%); 1/6 (3.4%); 2/9 (6.8%); 1/10 (3.4%); 1/22 (3.4%)
Kafr Hassan Dawood	34	16 (47%)	9 (26%)	3 (8.7%)	1 (2.9%)	2/5 (6.7%); 1/6 (2.9%); 1/9 (2.9%); 1/18 (2.9%)
Helwan Op.3/EMO and Op.4	70 ²	56 (80.0%)	4 (5.7%)	5 (7.1%)	1 (1.4%)	2/6 (2.8%); 1/8 (1.4%); 1/11 (1.4%)
Tarkhan	26 ³	15 (57.7%)	8 (30.8%)	1 (3.8%)	1 (3.8%)	1/8 (3.8%)
Abu Roash	32 (exl. Montet's)	21 (65.6%)	4 (12.5%)	2 (6.2%)	2 (6.2%)	1/5 (3.1%); 1/14 (3.1%); 1/23 (3.1%)

¹ 1/5; 1/6; 2/9 (etc.) stands for 1 grave with 5 marked wine jars; 1 grave with 6 marked wine jars; two graves with 9 marked wine jars each (etc.); ² Note that 34 marked wine jars from Helwan are unprovenanced and that their number does not show up in this table; ³ Note that 21 marked wine jars from Tarkhan cannot be attributed to a particular grave and are therefore not included in this table (data kindly provided by L. Mawdsley)

are already attested elsewhere as documented in van den Brink's 1992 corpus, and annotated in Appendix 1: tables 1-3. In the absence of a paleography, 32 additional simple and compound potmarks could not be attributed with 100 % confidence to either a specific known potmark consisting of a single, basic sign or a combination of two or more basic signs as categorized in the 1992 potmark corpus, because they can be interpreted as minor paleographic variations of attested signs or their combinations, or else must be considered to be new, previously unrecorded signs and their combinations. Amongst these are several compound potmarks that are known on basic sign level, but not on compound sign-group level; several others consist of one recorded and one previously unrecorded sign; nearly a dozen are new (that is, previously unattested), compound potmarks, each comprised of two signs, both of which are known as distinct, basic signs but thus far had not been recorded in combination with one another; several others are completely new signs, one in combination with $\dot{S}m\dot{j}$, a sign consciously excluded from the 1992 potmark corpus, but incorporated in the 2007 data base of the www.potmark-egypt.com as basic sign group CI (see van den Brink 2010: 331). More definitive assessment of these observations is not possible without the aid of a paleography of all published early dynastic potmarks, a resource not yet realized (see also van den Brink 2011: 1010).

The remaining 16 potmarks in the Helwan corpus are clearly new additions to the 1992 corpus, and include simple potmarks consisting of a single, not previously recorded, new sign, or compound potmarks consisting of hitherto unattested combinations of previously documented single or multiple signs (Appendix 1: tables 1-3: nos. 18, 22-23, 44, 47, 55, 66-68, 79, 89, 103, 111, 115, 123 and 130).

Several simple and compound potmarks occur more than once in the Helwan corpus: there are three compound potmarks each consisting of two distinct signs (van den Brink 1992 Groups I.9, I.30-.33 and VII.11), each attested twice or thrice (Appendix 1: tables 1-2: nos. 78, 94; 24,30, 54; 58, 76 respectively); one triple combination (Group I.58) is attested twice (Appendix 1: tables 1-2: nos. 5 and 118)⁷; two single signs (Appendix 1: tables 1-2: nos. 31, 50, 82 and 91, 136) are attested three and two times, respectively. Most frequently appearing

basic signs are $\dot{S}m\dot{j}$ (n=15; Group CI), a square (n=15; Group I), a fish (n=7; Group XXVI), a pair of arms (n=6; Group III), a tree-like sign (n=4; Group IV), a moon or star (n=3; Group XIX), a pair of snakes (n=2; Group XXV) and the city sign (?) *nwt* (n=2; Group XXXI).

It has been noted in the past (van den Brink 1992: 271) that in 35.2% (or 25 records) of all (n=71) attested compound potmarks that consist of a combination of three distinct signs (*ABC) within the 1992 corpus, at least one of three possible double combinations (*AB [or *BA], *BC [or *CB] and *AC [or *CA]) is observed, in 31 % (22 instances) of the cases two out of three possible double combinations is observed, and only in 14.1 % (10 instances) of the cases all three possible double combinations contained in any individual triple combination are known, while in 19.7 % (14 records) only the triple combinations are recorded, while none of the three possible double combinations within each triple combination are attested. Helwan wine jars nos. 18 and 23 supplement the 1992 record in this respect: in the already previously recorded triple-compound potmark Group IV.41 (*ABC), only two of the three theoretically possible double combinations (IV.2 [*AB] and IV.28 [*AC]) had been attested prior to the rediscovery of Helwan material. Helwan wine jar potmark no. 18 constitutes the unattested third and possible combination of *BC within this triple compounded potmark. Helwan wine jar potmark no. 23 presents the reverse side of the same coin: it presents the otherwise unattested triple combination (*ABC), that consists of three previously attested double combinations (*AB, *AC, *BC, in this case sign Groups IV.2, IV.49 and VI.16).

The illustrations accompanying this paper begin with the wine jars and their potmarks from Operations 3/1 and 3/3, starting with the 27 legible marks distributed across four groups (figs. 1-4), listed in the order of appearance in table 3. They are followed by the remaining jars of the aforementioned Operations, organized in the order of their appearance in Appendix 1: tables 1-2, (figs. 5.1-5.6). These are then followed by the 28 jars of Operation 4 (listed in Appendix 1: table 3; figs. 5.6-5.7), which chronologically are also the latest exemplars, for the most part, of wine jars attested in the corpus. Finally, all 148 potmark drawings of these are presented together in fig. 6, in order of their appearance in Appendix 1: tables 1-3.

⁷ The 3-sign combination Group I.58 is recorded on 45 jars deriving from various cemeteries in Egypt (cf. www.potmark-egypt.com), in one instance juxtaposed to the estate sign of An[ed]jib, cf. Petrie 1900: Pl. 46, 137-X 51

Site	Serekh	[<i>g.t</i>] Šm'j	hw.t s3-ħ3 A[ne]djib estate	Semerkhet domain	References
Minshat Abu Omar	6	6	3*	1	Kroeper 2000
Kafr Hassan Dawood	2	4	-	-	Tassie <i>et al.</i> 2008; in prep.
Helwan	4	15	4	5	van den Brink 2010: Table 1
Tarkhan	3	4	-	1	Mawdsley 2006
Abu Roash	1	7	-	-	Klasens 1958 - 1961

* MAO 2275/114, 2900/31 and 3009/1, all three "wine-type 1" jars

Table 3. Different types of wine jars with legible classes of signs / *Différents types de jarres à vin avec des classes lisibles de signes*

Site	1. # marked wine jars, excluding those listed in Table 3	2. # wine jars marked with 1 sign	3. # wine jars marked with 2 signs	4. # wine jars marked with 3 signs	5. # wine jars marked with 4 signs	6. # wine jars marked with 5 or more signs
Minshat Abu Omar	148	56 (38%)	72 (49%)	17 (11%)	3 (2%)	-
Kafr Hassan Dawood	90 ¹	40 (44.4%)	35 (38.8%)	11 (12.4%)	1 (1.1%)	2/5 (2.2%) - 1/6 (1.1%)
Helwan	120	31 (26%)	62 (52%)	22 (18%)	4 (3%)	1/8 ² (0.8%)
Tarkhan	59	31 (52.5%)	26 (44.1%)	2 (3.4%)	-	-
Abu Roash	97	47 (49%)	41 (42%)	9 (9%)	-	-

¹ Six marked potsherds are too fragmentary to enable determination of the original number of co-occurring signs; ² 1/8 stand stands for one potmark consisting of eight signs

Table 4. Numerical distribution of single and multiple (*i.e.* compound) potmarks on wine jars from selected cemeteries - 1. Total number of wine jars with potmarks per cemetery; 2. Jars with one sign; 3. Jars with two signs; 4. Jars with three signs; 5. Jars with four signs; 6. Jars with five or more signs / *Distribution numérique des marques incisées isolées ou multiples (i.e. composés) sur les jarres à vins des cimetières sélectionnés* - 1. Nombre total par cimetière de jarres à vin avec marques incisées; 2. Jarres à signe unique; 3. Jarres à deux signes; 4. Jarres à trois signes; 5. Jarres à quatre signes; 6. Jarres à cinq signes ou plus

Comparison of the distribution of jars with potmarks by grave between the cemetery at Helwan and selected contemporary cemeteries in Lower Egypt

Although crucial, contextual information concerning actual tomb locations and possible additional funerary gifts associated with the wine jars excavated by Saad are mostly lacking, we suggest that a comparison of available data on the numeric distribution of wine jars with potmarks per grave in Helwan with that of other cemeteries may, nevertheless, be informative. Comparison may aid the discernment of quantitative patterns in the deposition of wine jars in graves that, in turn, could perhaps shed light on the personal wealth or social status or persona of the deceased, if not members of the living associated with the deceased. Accordingly, tables 1-2 present pertinent, comparative data from the cemeteries of Minshat Abu Omar (based on Kroeper 2000; *cf.* Appendix 1: table 6), Kafr Hassan Dawood (based on Tassie *et al.* 2008; in prep.; *cf.* Appendix 1: table 7), Abu Roash (based on van den Brink 1992: 267-269, fig. 3), and Tarkhan (based on Mawdsley 2006, 2009; *cf.* Appendix 1: tables 4-5). The cemetery sample thus includes provincial cemeteries somewhat

distant from Memphis, considered to be the core area where a unified Egyptian polity was developing, and cemeteries closer to that center. Although the cemeteries were all in use during the height of production and use of wine jars bearing potmarks (Naqada IIIB-C), some were established earlier as well as continued in use later than others.

Table 1 indicates that graves containing marked pottery vessels form but a small percentage (3.7% – 23.8%) of the total number of graves within the selected cemeteries and that within this small group, graves containing wine jars with and without potmarks are a smaller percentage still (ranging from 30% – 42% of all graves containing marked pottery vessels) of the total number of graves⁸.

The information from table 2 shows that the majority of the early dynastic graves (44.8 % – 80 %) that include wine jars with potmarks, contain only one such jar. The data further suggest that a significantly lower percentage of graves (38.4 % – 14.2 %) contain 2-4 such jars, while only a small percentage (3.9% – 17.4%) contain between 5 and a maximum of 23. It is tempting to interpret such

⁸ Since a specific group of graves, namely those yielding marked wine jars that cannot be dated to a specific time range (*i.e.* Naqada IIIB-C), is compared with the overall numbers of graves that undoubtedly include instances extending beyond the above mentioned time range, this picture is unavoidably distorted

differences in groups of grave goods as evidence of social distinctions between the interred. In many instances there is a correlation between tomb size and number of funerary gifts included; *e.g.*, the two graves at Minshat Abu Omar that yielded the largest number of wine jars, Graves 1590 and 2275 (with respectively 25 and 16 wine jars), are relatively large, mudbrick structures, referred to by their excavators as elite-tombs (Kroeper 1992: table 2). A similar case also occurs at Kafr Hassan Dawood, where the two largest mud-lined graves 913 and 970 produced the greatest number of wine jars, and in this case also the largest number of potmarks. This would suggest that the greater the number of marked jars, the higher the social standing of the owner of the tomb. This interpretation seems logical given that the greatest number of relatively small graves, representing the mass of the population of the cemetery contained only one or no wine jars accompanying the deceased to the after-life (*cf.* table 1).

Continuing the cross-cemetery comparison, table 3 lists the totals of wine jars with legible inscriptions similar to those found at Helwan (n=27; see above), deriving from four additional cemeteries in Lower Egypt. The distribution of wine jars in Egypt with either A[ne]djib's estate sign or Semerkhet's domain sign is very restricted, with the majority of both former (55) and latter (116) deriving from their respective tombs situated in the royal necropolis in Umm el-Qa'ab, Abydos⁹. Inscriptions with the estate name of A[ne]djib and the Semerkhet domain are unattested at the cemeteries at Kafr Hassan Dawood and Abu Roash. The A[ne]djib estate sign is also absent from the Tarkhan cemeteries. In almost all cases legible signs are accompanied by additional single or compound potmarks that are less intelligible.

Excluding the 27 inscriptions listed in table 3, the remaining 121 potmarks in the corpus under discussion can be subdivided, as already mentioned above, into potmark groups consisting of one, or combinations of 2 or more distinct signs (up to a maximum of 8). The way in which this distribution compares to those recorded for the additional selected cemeteries is shown in table 4.

Table 4 indicates that the vast majority of potmarks are those that either consist of a single sign or a composite of two distinct signs. Compound potmarks consisting of two signs are slightly more numerous than those

consisting of a single sign within the group of selected cemeteries, although some cemeteries have more vessels bearing single signs than others. At Minshat Abu Omar and Helwan, for instance, compound potmarks consisting of two signs are more numerous than those consisting of a single sign. The importance of this patterning, however, does not concern so much a specific cemetery or groups of cemeteries; it rather reflects something about the internal organization and composition of potmarks and perhaps possible associations with administrative institutions.

Compound marks of three individual signs make up a minor, though still significant portion of all recorded potmarks in the cemeteries surveyed above, while compounds of four and up to eight distinct signs are rare.

Additional Recently proposed legible potmark signs

Readings or interpretations have recently been suggested for several other incised potmark groups based on their apparent similarity to some of the slightly later hieroglyphs (Anselin 2007, 2008, 2010a-b, 2011a-b, Bréand 2008, Kroeper 2000, Mawdsley 2006, 2009, Tassie *et al.* 2008: 215-217), to the extent that they have been called "preformal hieroglyphs" by some (Tassie *et al.*, *op.cit.*: 217-218). Several of these also occur in the Helwan corpus. They include the square or rectangle (n=33; van den Brink's [1992] Group sign I.1), suggested reading *hwt* [*cf.* Kroeper 2000:216] or *pr* [Mawdsley 2006; see also Anselin 2011b). In the Helwan assemblage this sign either appears alone (n=2) or in combination with one or two additional signs (n=31), *e.g.*, in combination with a fish (n=6), a frequent combination (van den Brink's [1992] Sign sub-groups I.30-I.32 (n=87) which Kroeper – in analogy to certain Old Kingdom onomastica – suggests represent an estate name in the Delta (*ibid.*; Anselin 2011a); another frequently occurring mark concerns the generic, non-perpendicular, crois simple (n=12) interpreted as a mnemonic device in the production of pottery vessels by Bréand (Bréand 2008).

Other signs appearing in the Helwan corpus that perhaps can be read or are similar to the slightly later hieroglyphs, include van den Brink's (1992) Sign groups III.1 (n=6; *k3* or *shn*), IV.1 (n=5), X (n=2; *3bd* "lunar festival"; see Anselin 2010b), XXXI.1 (*njw.t*), appearing twice in the Helwan corpus in combination with another sign and XXXVII (n=1) in combination with a *serekh*. Notably absent from the Helwan corpus are

⁹ In contrast, wine jars with the Šm'j sign have a more even distribution within the Lower Nile Valley and Delta; 15 derive from Abydos, 52 from Saqqara, while an additional 32 are distributed among the five cemeteries appearing in table 3

the frequently recorded signs for e.g. *ntr* (Group XI) and *mr* (Group XVII), and the *hs*-vase like sign Group X and Group XXI.

Conclusions

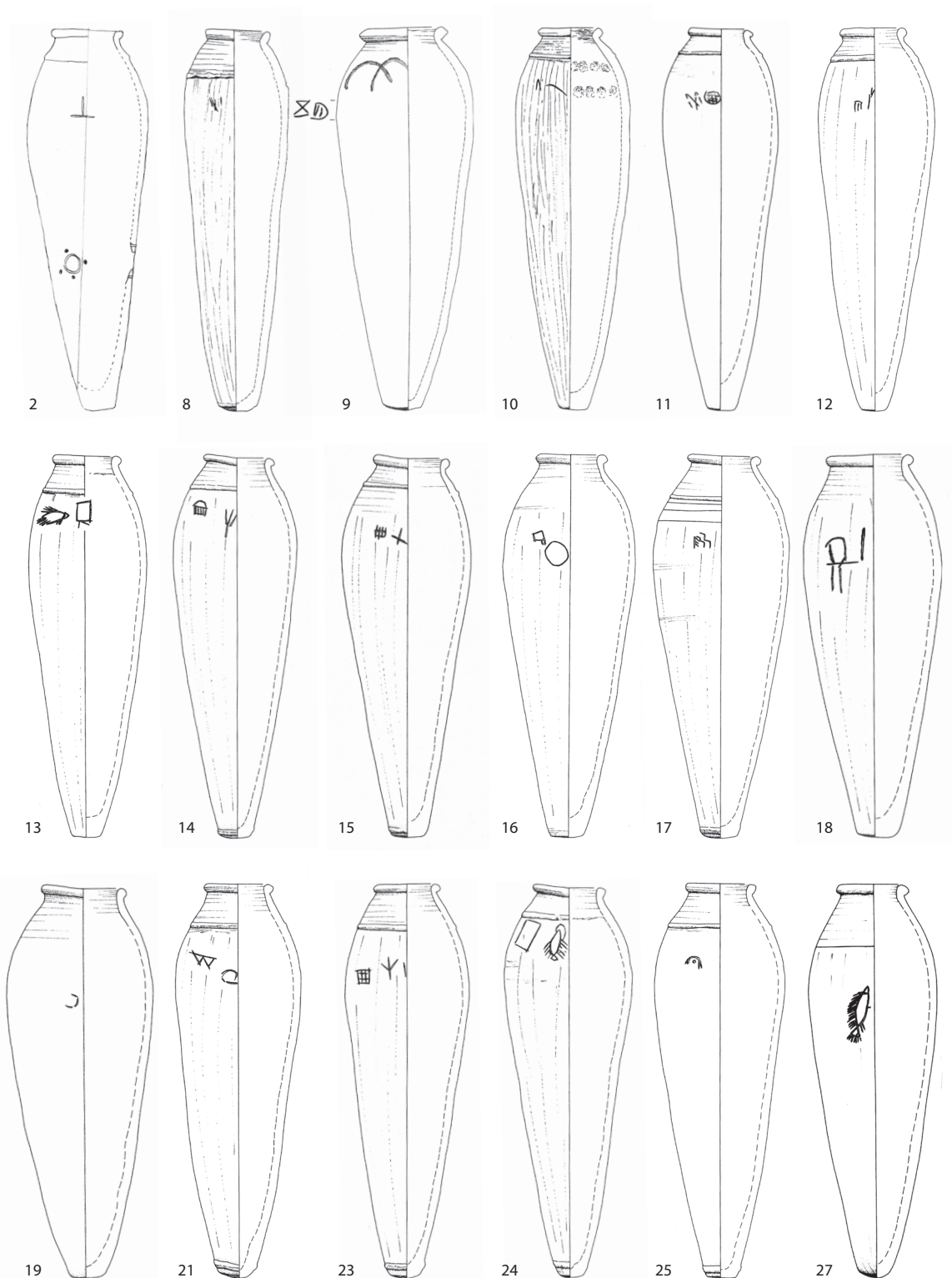
It is difficult, perhaps too early to comment at this stage on the possible wider ramifications of the analyses and resultant trends emerging from this small and incompletely preserved aspect of early dynastic mortuary behavior. The bulk of data used for examining the wine jars and their potmarks, and information concerning their distribution among graves in the Helwan cemetery as presented here derive from Z.Y. Saad's excavations. In the absence of relevant field records or publications, these data are hopelessly inadequate to work with. These circumstances preclude a deeper investigation into how, for example, wine jars bearing potmarks and their distribution over parts of the Helwan cemetery relate to e.g., other vessel types and their distribution, to other tomb contents, tomb size, location within the cemetery, skeletal remains if preserved, sex, gender, age, etc. Thus, attempts to cast additional light on the social status of the owners of those tombs or others affiliated with them (cf. e.g., Parker-Pearson 1999) are severely hindered. Kroeper's (Kroeper 2000: 215) observation that "the highest amounts of marks was not found in the grave

with the highest amount of offerings" stands as a caveat to guard against assuming simple correlations between quantities, size and social status. Past cultural frameworks of significance might be more complex than one might initially expect.

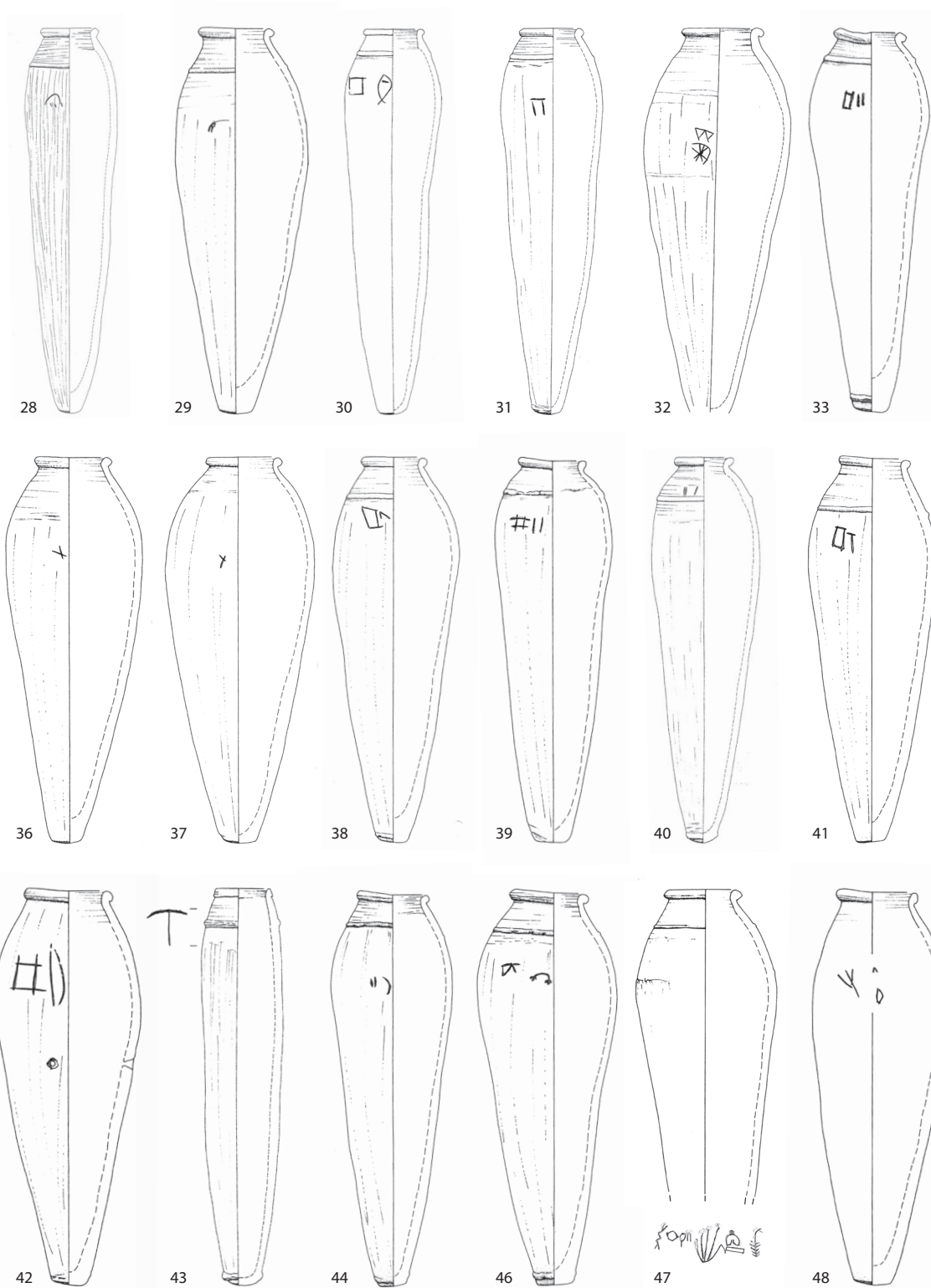
Although the contextual analysis of a class of grave goods, even within a single cemetery—in this case of wine jars bearing potmarks—goes well beyond the scope of the present paper, we could begin to overcome the problem of incomplete archaeological records for Helwan by investigating comparable data from the four selected contemporary cemeteries for which field records and published excavation reports *do* exist. It is therefore hoped that the selected data presented here might encourage others to continue to pursue potmark research in new ways and build on the groundwork laid by this study.

As discussed above, the various groupings of both legible and intelligible potmarks are slowly, but gradually expanding, and the application of the term preformal hieroglyphs to several of these seems fitting. With the renewed excavations at the Helwan cemetery still ongoing, the present assemblage of wine jars with potmarks will undoubtedly continue to expand and contribute not only to the theme of early dynastic potmarks per se, but also to contextual and social analyses as well as script development more generally.

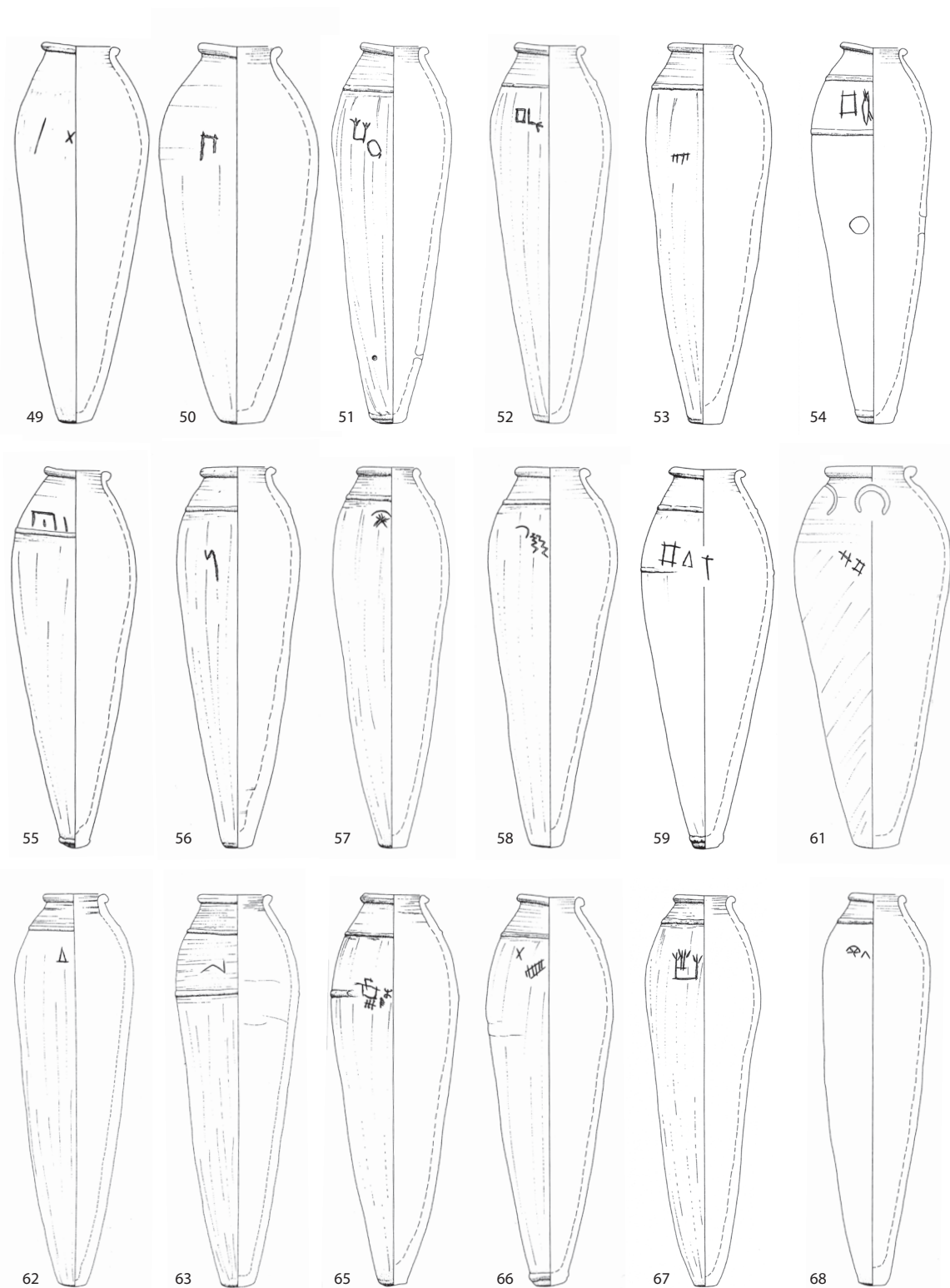
Acknowledgements - We like to thank Geoffrey J. Tassie and Lisa Mawdsley for their kind assistance in tabulating and checking out relevant cemetery data, some of which is still unpublished, of Kafr Hassan Dawood and Tarkhan respectively. Kathryn E. Piquette and Eliot Braun both read and commented upon earlier drafts, significantly improving the internal cohesion of this paper.



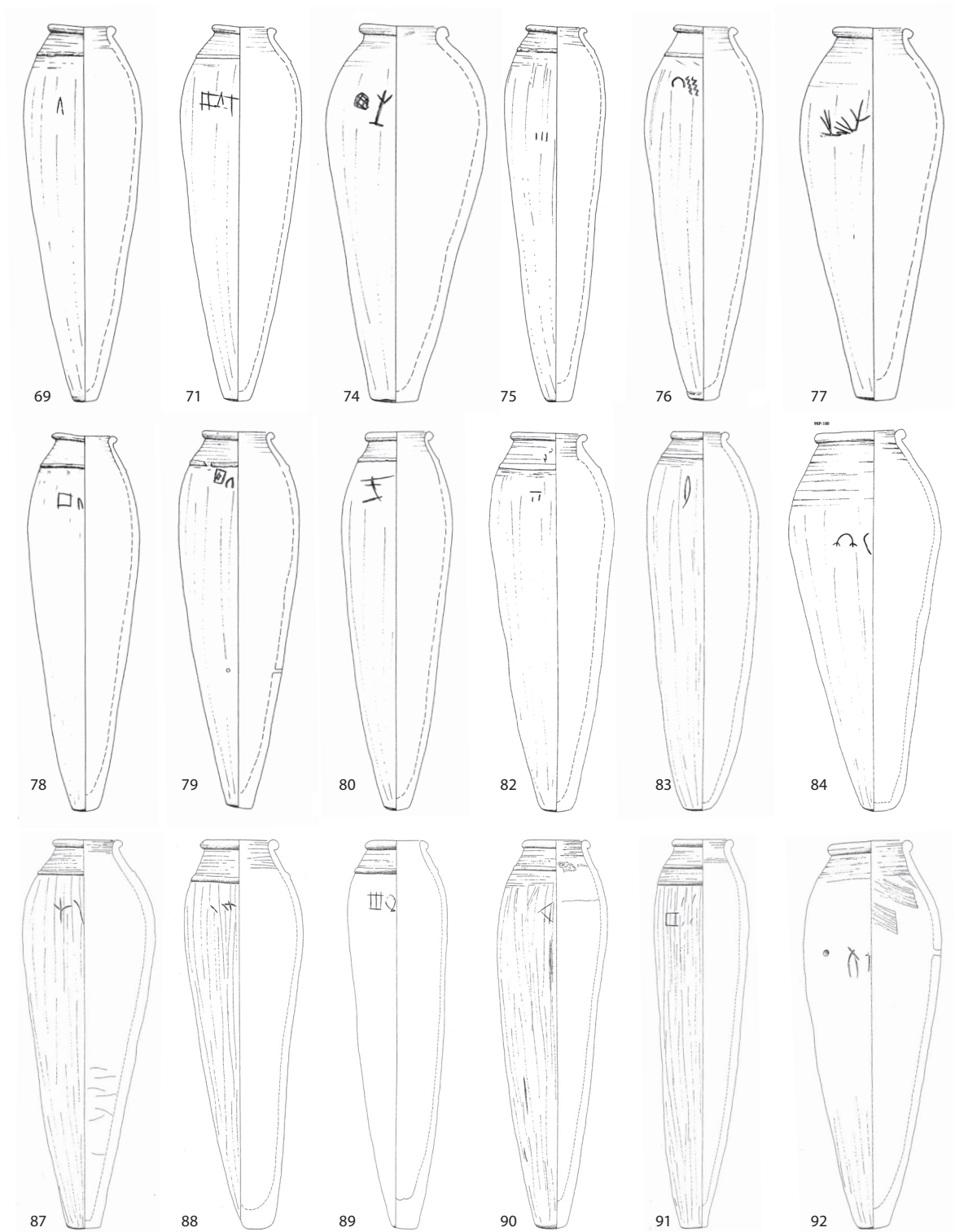
5-1. Winejars in the order of appearance as in Appendix 1: tables 1-3. For missing jars nos.1, 3-7, 20, 22, and 26, see figs. 1-4 / *Jarres à vin dans l'ordre d'apparition de l'Annexe 1 : tableaux 1-3. Pour les jarres manquantes nos.1, 3-7, 20, 22, and 26, voir figs. 1-4*



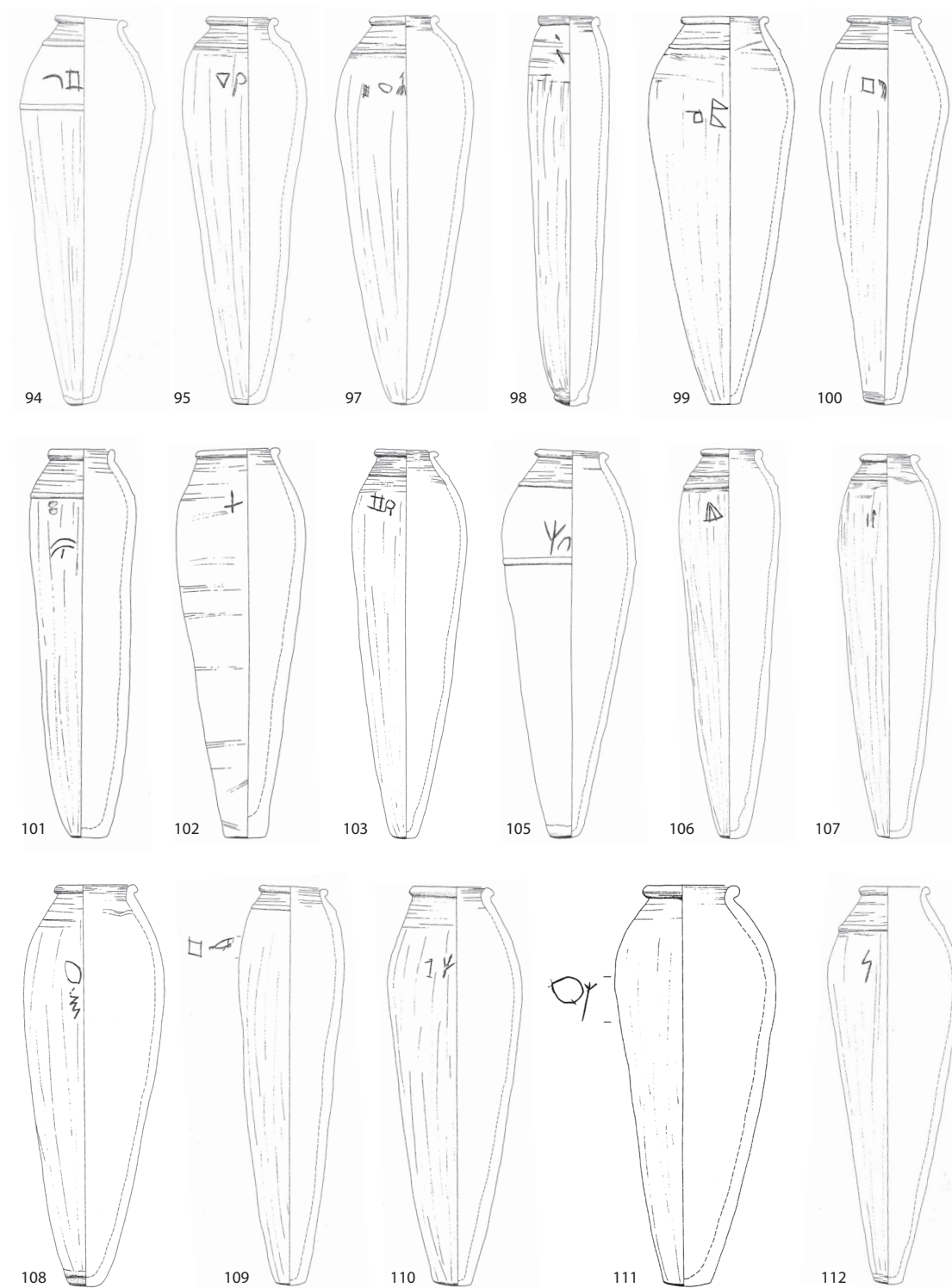
5-2. Winejars in the order of appearance as in Appendix 1: tables 1-3. For missing jar nos. 34-35, see fig. 2 / *Jarres à vin dans l'ordre d'apparition de l'Annexe 1 : tableaux 1-3. Pour les jarres manquantes n° 34-35, voir fig. 2*



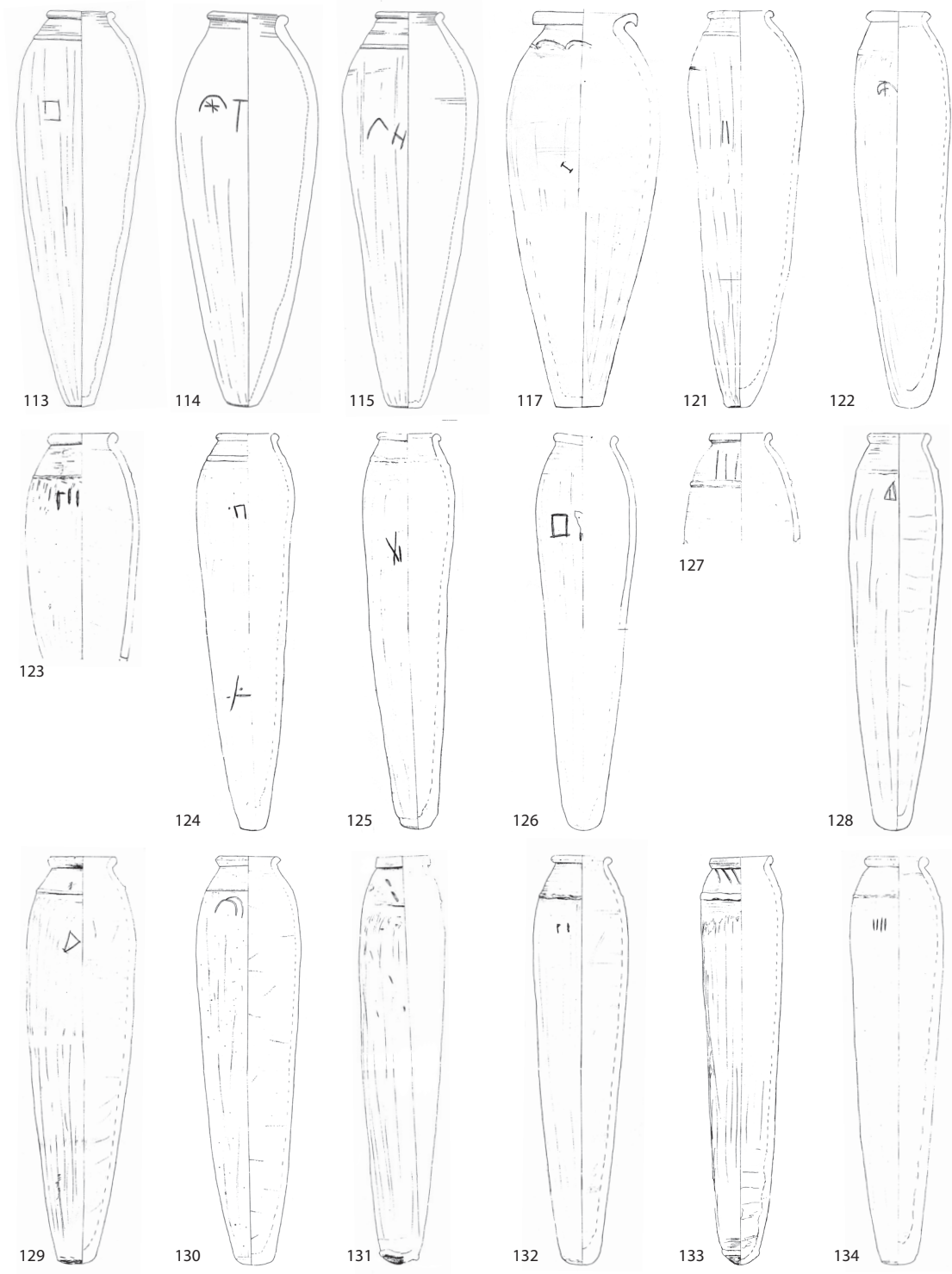
5-3. Winejars in the order of appearance as in Appendix 1: tables 1-3. For missing jar nos. 60, 64, see fig. 2 and 3 / *Jarres à vin dans l'ordre d'apparition de l'Annexe 1 : tableaux 1-3. Pour les jarres manquantes n° 60, 64, voir figs. 2 et 3*



5-4. Winejars in the order of appearance as in Appendix 1: tables 1-3. For missing jar nos. 70-73, 81, see fig. 2; for nos. 85-86, see fig. 1 / *Jarres à vin dans l'ordre d'apparition de l'Annexe 1 : tableaux 1-3. Pour les jarres manquantes n° 70-73, 81, voir fig. 2 ; pour les n° 85-86, voir fig. 1*



5-5. Winejars in the order of appearance as in Appendix 1: tables 1-3. For missing jar nos. 93, 96 and 104 see fig. 2 / *Jarres à vin dans l'ordre d'apparition de l'Annexe 1 : tableaux 1-3. Pour les jarres manquantes n° 93, 96 et 104, voir fig. 2*



5-6. Winejars in the order of appearance as in Appendix 1: tables 1-3. For missing jar no. 116, see fig. 1; for no.118, see fig. 3; for no. 119, see fig. 4; for no. 120, see figs. 2 and 4 / *Jarres à vin dans l'ordre d'apparition de l'Annexe 1 : tableaux 1-3. Pour les jarres manquantes n° 116, voir fig. 1 ; pour le n° 118, voir fig. 3 ; pour le n° 119, voir fig. 4 ; pour le n° 120, voir figs. 2 et 4*



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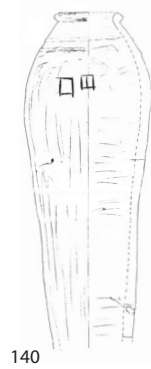
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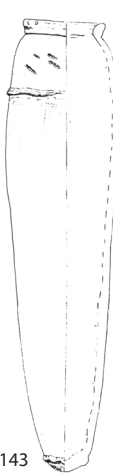
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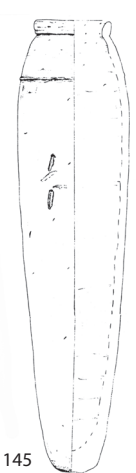
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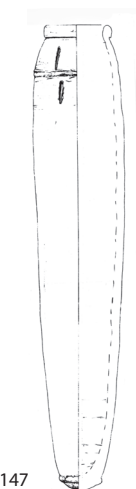
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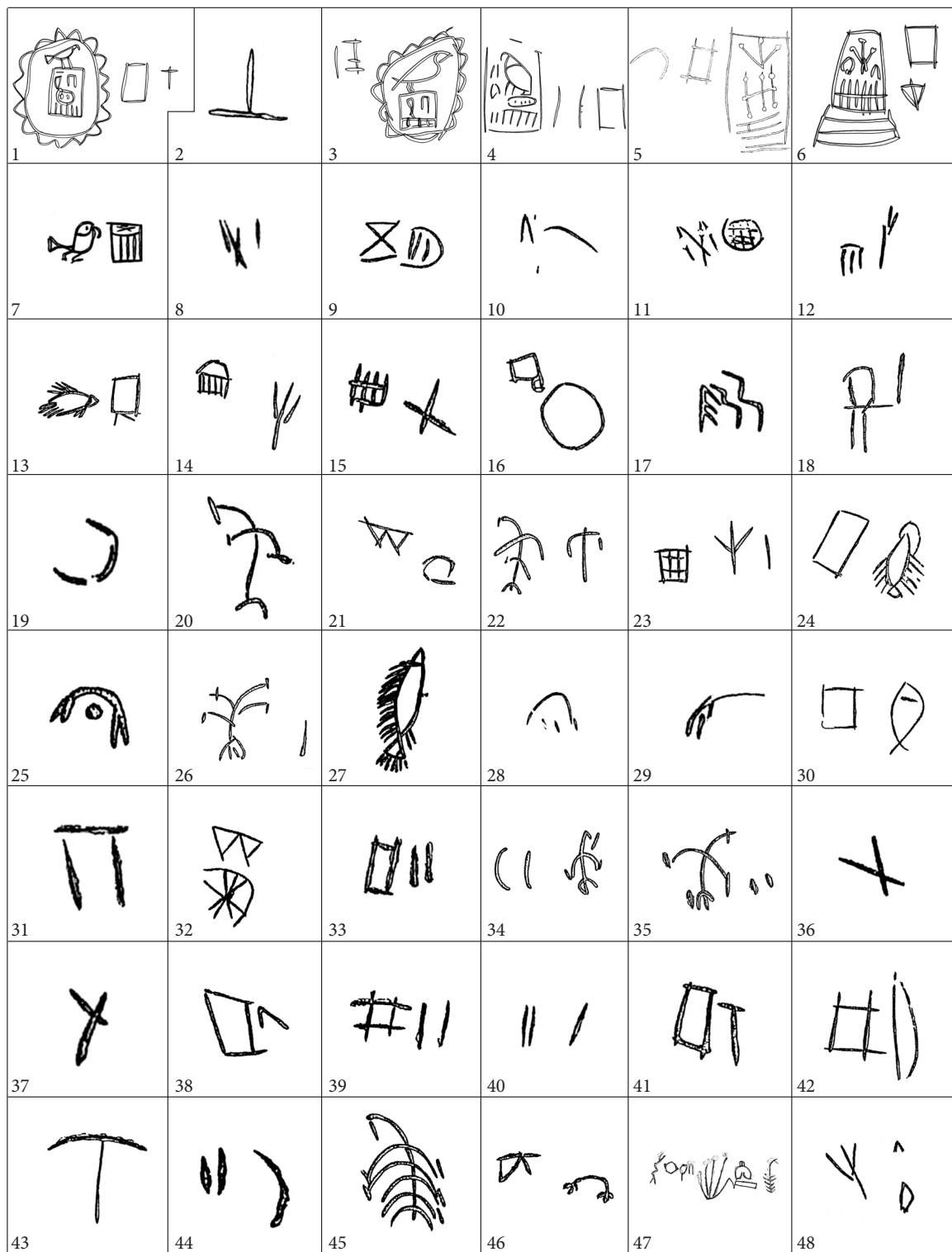
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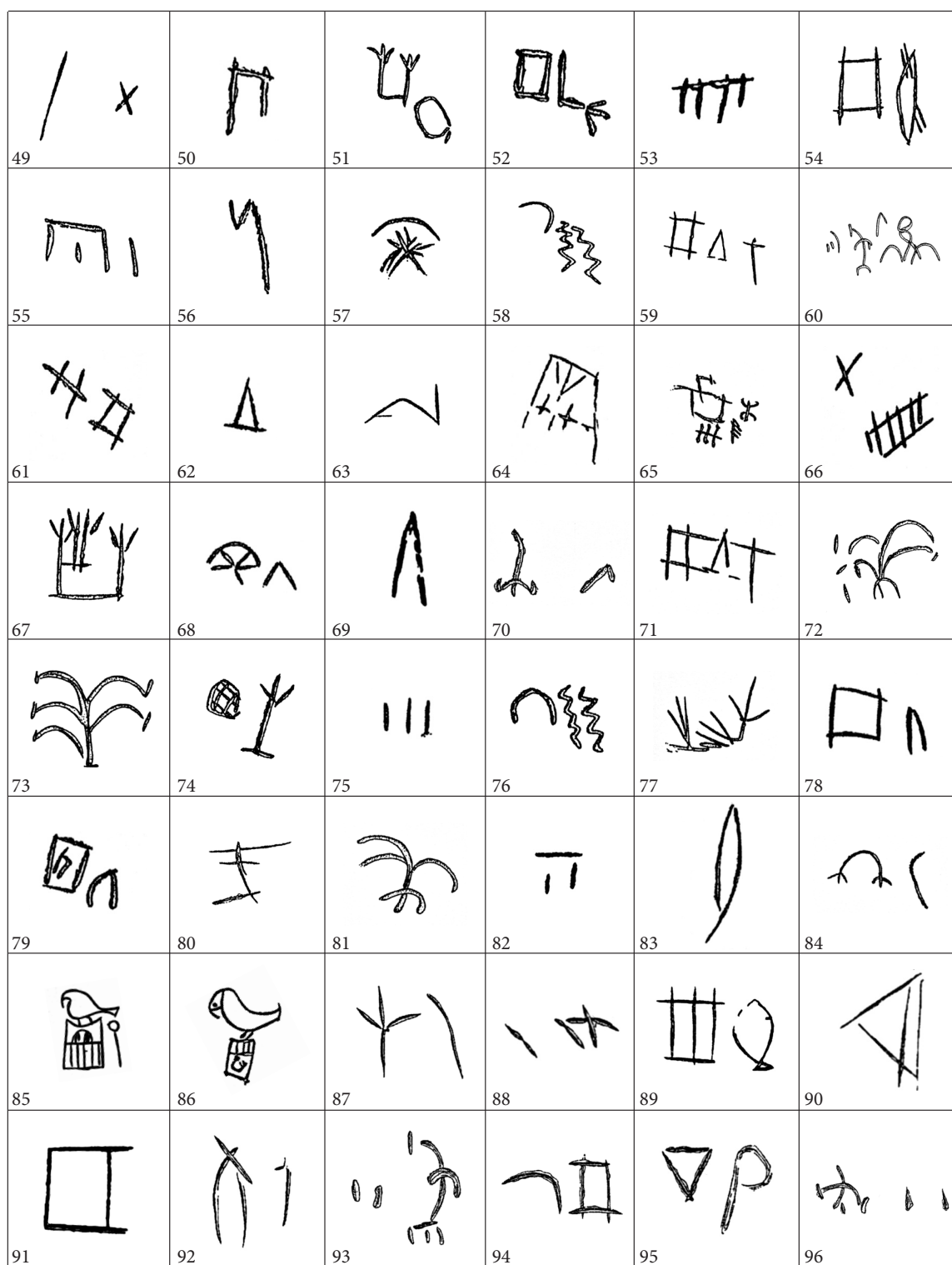


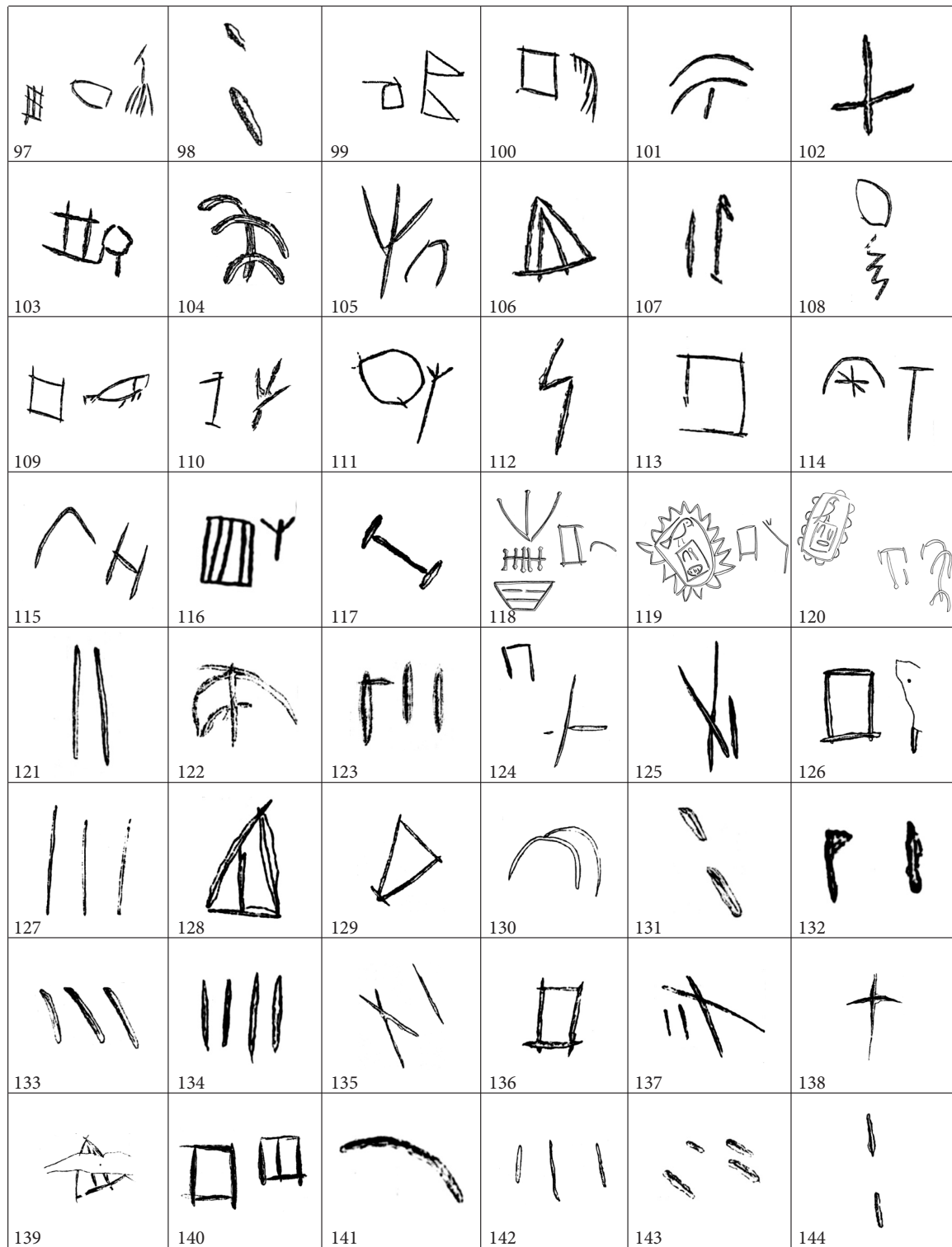
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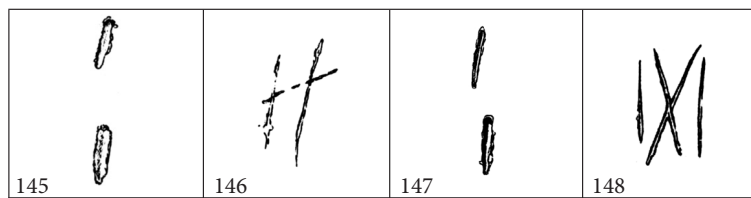


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6-1. Corpus of Helwan potmarks / *Corpus des marques incisées d'Hélouan*

6-2. Corpus of Helwan potmarks / *Corpus des marques incisées d'Hélouan*

6-3. Corpus of Helwan potmarks / *Corpus des marques de potiers d'Hélouan*

6-4. Corpus of Helwan potmarks / *Corpus des marques de potiers d'Hérouan*

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PRÉHISTOIRES DE L'ÉCRITURE

ICONOGRAPHIE, PRATIQUES GRAPHIQUES ET ÉMERGENCE DE L'ÉCRIT DANS L'ÉGYPTE PRÉDYNASTIQUE

PREHISTORIES OF WRITING

ICONOGRAPHY, GRAPHIC PRACTICES AND EMERGENCE OF WRITING IN PREDYNASTIC EGYPT

PRÉHISTOIRES DE LA MEDITERRANEE

rassemble des monographies archéologiques de Préhistoire portant sur l'étude de l'homme et de son environnement dans les espaces méditerranéens et reflétant la multiplicité des pratiques de la discipline.

collects prehistoric archaeological monograph on the study of man and his environment in the Mediterranean areas, reflecting the multiplicity of practices of discipline

En couverture :

Hieroglyphes provenant des inscriptions de la tombe d'Herkouf (VIème dynastie, Qubbet el-Hawa, Assouan, mission espagnole. Direction : A. Jimenez Serrano).
Figurine masculine (en arrière plan) est une gravure rupestre du wadi Abu Subeira (région d'Assouan - Mission franco-égyptienne . Direction : G. Graff).

Hieroglyphs from tomb's inscriptions of Her-Kuf (VI dynasty, Qubbet el-Hawa, Aswan, Spanish mission directed by A. Jimenez Serrano).
Male figure (back ground), rock engraving from wadi Abu Subeira (Aswan region, French-Egyptian mission directed by G. Graff).

La genèse des premières écritures suscite beaucoup d'intérêt. Toutefois, jusqu'à ces dernières années, les travaux sur ce problème portaient tous d'une approche «phylogénétique», c'est-à-dire d'un stade constitué et reconnu de l'écriture vers ses origines, comme on recherche les étapes de l'évolution entre le singe et l'Homme, squelette par squelette. Les recherches les plus récentes ont permis l'apparition d'un nouveau point de vue, qui conduit à prendre en compte des modes de communication visuels antérieurs ou contemporains de l'écrit mais qui n'en sont pas (para-ou proto-écriture).

Ce colloque a eu pour ambition de faire se rencontrer des spécialistes qui travaillent sur différents systèmes graphiques attestés au IVème millénaire en Egypte. Ont été ainsi pris en compte différents supports matériels comme les sceaux, les potmarks (des signes incisés sur la surface des vases), des objets de prestige (palettes à fard, têtes de massue et manches de couteau), les gravures rupestres du Désert oriental et les décors peints des vases de Nagada II.

Les auteurs s'interrogent aussi sur le lien entre l'écrit et l'image, le contexte socio-culturel dans lequel cette transformation s'est produite et le statut du signe. Il semble en effet que la relation entre le signe et le support puisse être une clef de compréhension : moins le support et l'agencement sur celui-ci est prégnant, plus le signe lui-même le devient, comme un tout et non comme une partie d'un ensemble. Hors de son contexte, un élément n'est plus lisible. Le passage d'une représentation synthétique plus ou moins rigide à des variations analytiques à combinatoire illimitée s'est produit. Des pistes très prometteuses sont ouvertes par la prise en compte des techniques de mémorisation de performances orales liées à la pratique rituelle.

The genesis of early writing has generated a great deal of interest. However, until recent years, most of the studies shared a common basis, a « phylogenetic » approach, which means a retrospective analysis from a given constituted and known form of writing backward to its origins, as palaeoanthropologists usually do between early hominids and modern man, skeleton by skeleton. More recent works gave birth to a new perspective, taking into account visual modes of communication, prior to or contemporary of the earliest writings, but which are not writing (para or proto-writing). The goal of this scientific meeting held in Aix-en-Provence was to gather scholars working on different graphical systems attested during the fourth millenium BCE in Egypt. Material supports such as seals, potmarks (incised signs on the surface of ceramic vases), prestige items (palettes, maceheads, decorated knife handles), rock engravings from the Eastern Desert and painted scenes on ceramic ware from the Nagada II period have been taken into account. The authors also investigate the link between image and writing, the social and cultural contexts within which this transformation occurred and the status of the sign in Early Egypt. Indeed, it seems that the relation between the sign and the material support might be a key of understanding : The less the agency of the sign on the material support is determining the material support itself, the more the sign becomes an entity in itself (a whole) and no more the part of a whole. Out of context, any written item is then no more readable. The shift from a synthetic representation more or less rigidly expressed to an unlimited combination of analytic variations took place. Several promising avenues have been pinpointed while taking into account of the memorization techniques of oral performance in ritual practice.

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