

# Fifty Shades of Orange: Pottery Coatings at Sais

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## Introduction

Excavations at Sais found a layer of smashed pottery, which has been excavated and reconstructed. The material formed part of the foundations of a large wall of the late New Kingdom, built upon late Ramesside Storage structures.



Fig. 1  
Pottery layer  
In main Storeroom..



Fig. 2



Fig. 3



Fig. 6

## Purpose

Usually, coatings may have been used to 'seal' the pottery fabric and make it less likely to lose liquid contents by transpiration. Paler, cream-olive tinged coatings may have been in imitation of marls, which are very rare in Late New Kingdom Saite contexts. In this case jars could have been 'upgraded'. In the case of the Canaanite amphorae (Fig. 6) the coating is fired on, possibly in saline conditions to create a hard bonded-on coat, varying in colour depending on date, region of the Levant and the coating 'recipe'. The smeared orange coatings, however, may not have 'sealed' the fabric effectively, as there are some gaps in the coating, unless the smoothing was enough of a surface treatment.

## Pottery

The assemblage consisted of Egyptian storage jars of different kinds, many bowls and Canaanite amphorae. The Egyptian vessels had coatings ranging in colour from red to orange to yellow/cream. Some coatings were in solid colour (like the elegant drop-amphora, Fig. 2), or red, like an unusual three-handled amphora, but many jars had orange-yellow coatings that were smeared over the outside of the amphora. Handprints or finger marks showed that the coating had been applied by hand (Fig. 3). In addition, there were bowls with smeared coating inside and outside (Fig. 4) as well as finger drawn patterns and Marks (fig. 5).



Fig. 4

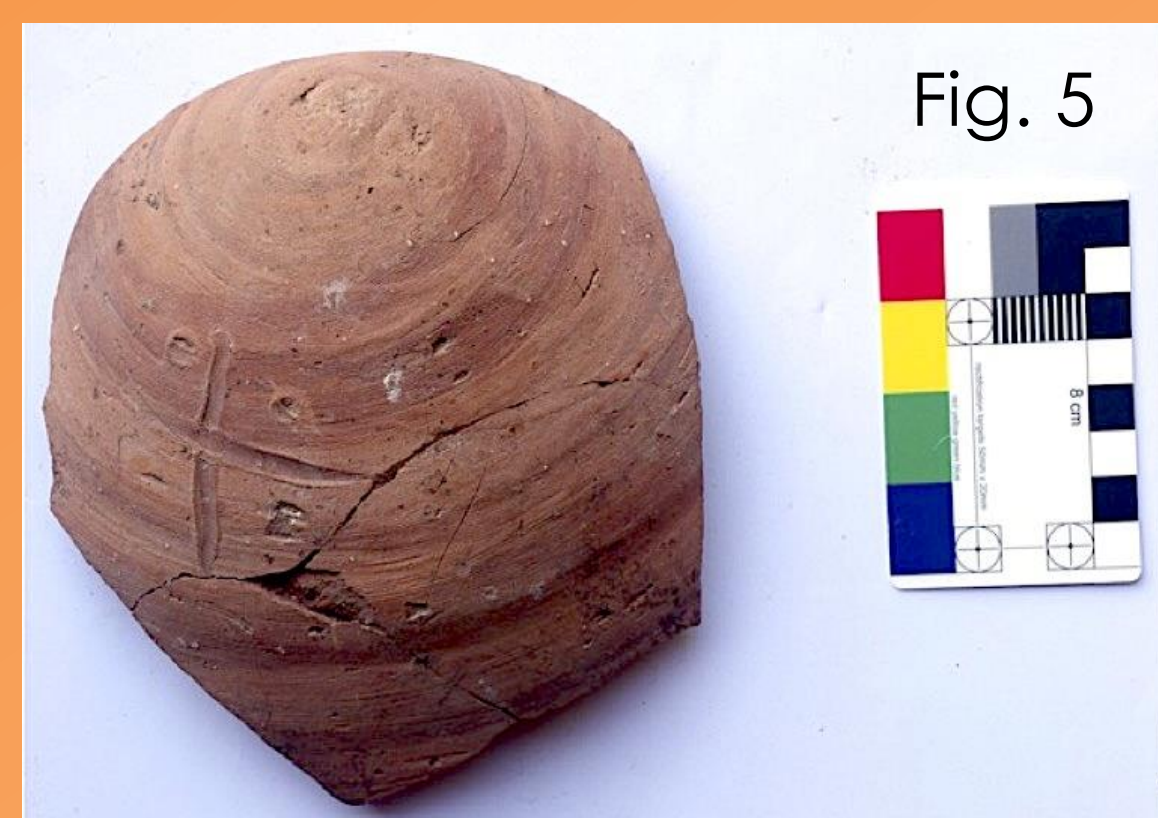


Fig. 5



Fig. 7

Thanks to Sais Teams 2012-2024, conservators at Sa el Hagar and Director Mimi Ibrahim, Tanta

## Branding & Aesthetics

The colour and smearing may have been a locally significant pattern, either to designate potters or the contents of the jars. As the jars with smeared 'patterns' are different types including a large four-handled 'pithos', it is more likely to be connected to a pottery aesthetic. The abstract design could have been a cultural indicator for jars made at Sais at the end of the New Kingdom. Further research, comparing other assemblages in Delta cities will show whether this is a cultural and dating marker at Sais only, and the Late New Kingdom/Third Intermediate Period date is significant for the introduction of a new aesthetic at this time of political change.