The Old Kingdom beer jar corpus as a whole shows a lack of volumetric standardization across both time and space with exceptions only in small closed contexts. As a result, we can say that beer jars, so abundant in the archaeological record, were not centrally controlled and were not part of a centralized economic system. Yet wage payments were not made exclusively in beer. While it is clear that Old Kingdom wages could be paid in various commodities (or combinations of various commodities), a system conceivably could have been in place to make bread the dominant government wage. Bread could have functioned as an independent value unit. Government regulation of bread, if it existed, might be the antecedent of the Middle Kingdom base-wage, measured exclusively in bread.1

If this were the case in the Old Kingdom, central or regional authorities could have controlled bread payments while payments in beer operated within a different system, reliant more upon individual agency or at least responsive to multiple, extra-administrative pressures. The below investigations of volume for bread mould corpora yield different figures than the study of beer jar corpora; however, their values are just as problematic for any economic model where the state is the defining economic power.

If bread moulds, too, show large variation in capacity, no standardized wage payment would have existed across the country. No additional ceramic form provides a strong window into Old Kingdom economy and the role of the state or regional authorities. The reason for this is twofold: firstly, other ceramic types form a relatively small part of ceramic corpora, providing little utility for cross-site, cross-class governmental control or intra-site regional control, and secondly it is often unclear what different forms held or if a specific form was dedicated to one specific commodity. Ovoid jars provide one example. Ovoid jars were more finely made than beer jars and bread moulds, often out of a marl clay, which features make it a good container for a luxury commodity such as wine. G. A. Reisner

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suggested that ovoid jars were used to hold wine. Distribution of wine would be largely related to the elite classes. Accordingly, they make up a small amount of any ceramic corpus. Most ceramic types, including the ubiquitous Meidum bowl, were likely versatile and could hold many types of commodities. If pottery was not valued outside of its contents, the economic value of these other ceramic forms must remain difficult to elucidate.

Bread moulds have been coupled with beer jars in the assumption that they were built with standard volumetric measures in order to allow the government to control wage distribution. The Old Kingdom bread mould was a large, heavy vessel, with examples as large as 46.6 cm in height and 33 cm in rim diameter, some weighing up to 6.5 kg. Their bulk suggests that Egyptians did not actually exchange bread moulds during any given wage transaction, as transporting multiple full moulds would have been unwieldy. Unlike beer, bread may be easily removed from its ceramic container; it would have been simple for a baker to simply distribute finished loaves without the mould. It seems likely that bread would have moved as a whole loaf from baker to the individual responsible for dispersing wages, rather than as slices or fragments.

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4 S. Hendrickx et al., “Milk, Beer and Beer Technology during the Early Dynastic Period,” *MDAIK* 58 (2002): 277–304; J. Bourriau, *Umm el-Ga’ab: Pottery from the Nile Valley before the Arab Conquest* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 52. Hendrickx et al. suggests Meidum bowls were used in milk production, while Bourriau suggests they were used for holding lotus blossoms.


6 Particularly true of Heit el-Ghurob type F2C. This measurement belongs to Heit el-Ghurob Pot F2Caw27165—unpublished material shared by A. Wodzińska.