

POTS AND STATS! MOMENTS IN A DAY OF A POST-DOCTORAL RESEARCHER

July 31, 2015 Grazia Di Pietro Archives, Egypt, Explore Posts, Finds, Prehistory archives, Artefacts, British Museum, Ceramics, Finds, Marie Curie, Petrie Museum, post graduate research

This is my first blog post for the 'Day of Archaeology'.

I am going to write about some aspects of the research project which I have been working on for most of the last two years, at the [UCL Institute of Archaeology, London, UK](#).

The focus of my research is the later Egyptian Prehistory, also known as the 'Predynastic', a period which covers approximately a millennium (the IV millennium BC) and during which the most fundamental features that characterise the ancient Egyptian civilisation developed: sophisticated funerary rituals, monumental architecture, craft specialisation, the first forms of administrative practices and economic centralisation.

Some areas which I have been trying to investigate through my ongoing research are:

chronological and functional variability of settlements;

how the process of state formation influenced the life of the inhabitants of the Nile Valley (*i.e.* how it is reflected in the material culture of settlements, rather than how this process affected the mortuary realm);

dynamics of interaction between different cultural spheres extant in Egypt at this early stage.

The archaeological data which I have been using in my research especially concerns pottery and has been collected by me over the course of several study seasons I spent in Egypt in the past and in recent years.



Hk, Egypt / 2013 season: sorting pottery...

Some pottery collections held at the [Petrie Museum](#) and the [British Museum](#) in London, as well as unpublished archival records and published reports, pertaining to pottery which is not available for visual inspection and analysis, have provided further valuable data.



Potsherd analysis forms archive

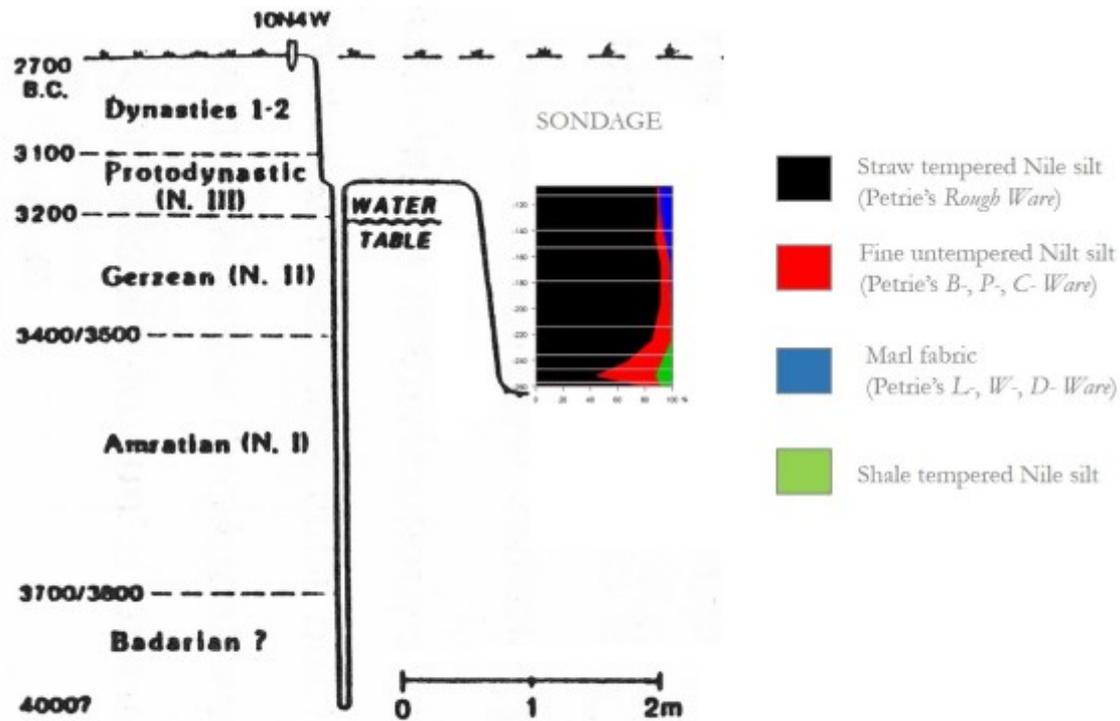
Re-use of data produced by other researchers and the integration with data collected by myself, though necessary for having a base of data as large as possible, has been quite challenging at many points, because of the different terminological conventions and multiplicity of systems employed for the classification and recording of the Predynastic ceramic material. Thus, initially part of my work has consisted in tracking correspondences (or lack thereof) amongst terms and codes used in different systems for indicating ceramic wares or shapes. Here one of my first attempts towards 'translating' (also visually) the code of a specific ceramic category from one classification system to another one.

Ceramic categories	
Ceramic category code	AM1.2c-3aL3
Classification system	Adaima system
Description	Pâtes alluviales, sableuse fine / Enfumage du bord / Fermée sans col, sans levre, paroi peu + très rentrante
Figure	
Bibliography	Buchez 2002: 16-18, fig. 1.3 (3a1), 170-173, 199-200
Notes	No distinction is made of upper contour type

Hierakonpolis system correspondence	2-2a 4/1
Description	Fabric/temper class 2, "Untempered Plum Red" Nile silt* / Hole mouth jars, direct rims / Red and black polished exterior
Figure	
Bibliography	Friedman 1994: 823, fig. 9.46

Database setting: ceramic codes correspondence form

This integrated corpus of data has been the basis for conducting a series of quantitative and statistical analyses, aiming at identifying potentially significant patterns. In the ceramic assemblage of certain sites, several technological and morphological developments can be traced, for example appearance of new fabrics and the decline of others (see picture below); adoption of new ceramic shapes, *etc.* These developments seem to have a chronological meaning and, in some cases, reflect wider changes taking place within the society and economy in the course of the Late Predynastic, the period of state formation, in Egypt.



Sketch of a stratigraphic sondage (Nekhen, Hk, Egypt).
Adapted from: Hoffman *et al.* *Geoarchaeology* 1987

Ceramic fabric variation across a stratigraphic sondage (Nekhen, Egypt)

I learnt the analytical methods I have applied and how to use the software to perform such analyses as part of a specific training program I followed. The research project has been supported by a funding scheme ([Marie Curie Actions](#)) which specifically fosters advanced training and career development of researchers.

I feel so privileged for this exciting experience of research and training! Equally, I am grateful for the support I have received from my teachers, mentors and colleagues in the past and in more recent years!

Many happy returns ... for this Day of Archaeology!

GRAZIA

You can find out more about the project on this [webpage](#).