



# DOCUMENTING MATERIAL CULTURE

**ABSTRACTS  
STUDY DAY**



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### **Documenting Pottery, A Lifetime's Evolution of Recording Methods**

**David A. Aston** (Tell el-Dab<sup>a</sup> Publications)

This presentation reflects part of the history of recording methods of Egyptian pottery, from a personal view point of 40 years of experience on excavations in Egypt, which began at Saqqara in the late 1970s. It includes reminiscences of recording methods from pre 'Vienna system' days and collaboration in large projects such as those of Elephantine, Qantir and Tell el-Dab<sup>a</sup>. By detailing the adoption, adaptation, development and change of my own recording methods as well as the influence of those set up and practiced by others I will retrace the steps of an ignorant student to a specialist with his own questions for ceramic material of various periods. The presentation also discusses adjustments necessary (either additional procedures or the omission of others) due the variety of types of sites, excavation procedures, periods of study and other influential factors.

### **Adapting Method to Material: A Decade of Recording Ceramics at Tell Edfu**

**Natasha Ayers** (Material Culture of Egypt and Nubia)

Although it is widely known that methodologies for recording ceramics can vary between archaeological sites and regions, intrasite variation and development in the recording of ceramics is less often discussed. Methods employed for working with ceramics in the field can (and should) develop alongside the larger research questions, chronological phases, and types of context being excavated at a site. In this talk I will discuss how the methods for recording ceramics at Tell Edfu (Egypt) have developed since I joined the mission in 2007: from the first forays into one small area of late Middle Kingdom occupation to three large areas encompassing late Old Kingdom through early New Kingdom occupation. Specific methodological challenges, both resolved and unresolved, will be highlighted.

### **Documenting Material Culture, To touch or not to touch – A Close Look at the Object**

**Bettina Bader** (Material Culture of Egypt and Nubia)

The intention of this study day is to reflect our own methods in documenting material culture, which structure and influence the outcomes of our research in a major way. While

most researchers start as students either in universities or on excavations to learn how to record objects, draw, describe and photograph them, they adopt methodology already in place. Such methodologies vary between object types, geographical areas (Egypt, Greece, European Prehistory) and even within sites and due to research traditions. Changes might occur due to new technologies or differential personal interests culminating in the adoption of new procedures and the abandonment of old ones. In a sense to learn documentation work is related to craft learning, with certain standards and demands to the result. The process of collecting data and the nature of the data collected influence each other and are interdependent. Thus, the motives in doing certain things in a certain way should therefore be made clearer in order to be conscious of subjectivity in recording objects. Moreover, the look over the fence to related disciplines may open new avenues of research and breathe fresh air into it. Finally, thoughts are given to the way recording methodologies are influencing the final publication of objects.

### **Wretched Nubians: Trials and tribulations in (re-) documenting ancient Nubian pottery** **Aaron de Souza** (Material Culture of Egypt and Nubia)

Handmade, asymmetrical, and just plain wonky. Nubian pottery is invariably irregular, and recording the peculiarities of this unique ceramic production is an exercise in compromise, flexibility, and patience. Over many years of studying this material, I have had to develop approaches to documenting wobbly rim-lines, lumpy profiles, and infuriatingly complicated incised decoration, and have recently employed new imaging processes to identify technological traces that are otherwise invisible to the naked eye. I will also highlight the importance of re-visiting old material from new perspectives in an effort to tease out previously unnoticed traits and characteristics among the complex and distinctive Nubian ceramic traditions.

### **Documentation Strategies in Biblical Archaeology and at the Austrian-Israeli Excavations at Lachish**

**Felix Höflmayer** (Levantine and Egyptian Histories)

Documentation and publication of archaeological finds and features are key in order to make them accessible to other researchers and the interested public. Over the past century, very different recording and publication traditions have emerged in different fields. Also probably due to political reasons the academic fragmentation of different archaeological fields proliferated and increased differences of academic traditions in the wider field of ancient Near Eastern archaeology. E.g. recording and publication of pottery in the Bronze Age of the southern Levant (c. 3500-1200 BC) was quintessential from the beginning due to (compared with Syria/Mesopotamia or Egypt) scant architectural remains and the almost lack of written sources, in order to reconstruct a chronological framework. At the same time, the intensive archaeological work done in modern Israel generated a specific form of excavation report, where different types of data are treated differently and usually no holistic picture of a specific context, building, phase, etc. is given. This paper aims to outline current standards in documentation and publication of material culture in Biblical Archaeology and specifically the approach of the Austrian-Israeli Expedition to Lachish.

## Looking at Things from a Different Angle

Lucia Hulková (Material Culture of Egypt and Nubia)

Objects of daily life usually do not follow a rigid set of standards regulating their shape, size or even material. However, not only are objects of daily use highly variable, especially tools are often multi-functional. This, together with ancient recycling makes development of archaeological typologies problematic. Thus their documentation is a balance between capturing this variability on one hand and assuring for comparability, both within and outside of the site on the other. In Tell el-Retaba we deal with this problem by drawing and photographing every object from at least three sides. Together with shape and sizes, traces of use are another vital factor in documenting objects of daily use. We decided to include them in the drawing documentation, because traces of use on objects of daily use are often the only sources of information about activities of the inhabitants of Tell el-Retaba, ranging from food preparation to industrial activities connected with the copper processing.

## On the razor's edge – Detecting use patterns on metal findst

Uroš Matic (University of Münster)

Knife-shaped razors reminding of modern scalpels were known in ancient Egypt as *dg3*. They were found both in settlement and cemetery contexts in Egypt, Nubia and the Levant, although the majority of them comes from tombs. The fact that various authors use 15 different terms for this one class of razors indicates that material culture-oriented Egyptologists neglected discussions by those focused more on philology and iconography. The latter, on the other hand, sometimes entirely neglected the archaeological context of these finds. More object focused studies of *dg3* razors are still lacking. Although there were some attempts to propose typologies and seriations at the beginning of the last century, a study based on all so far known pieces is missing. This paper deals with around 100 known *dg3*-razors from Egypt, Nubia and the Levant from Middle to New Kingdom (c. 1980-1077 BC). It combines philological, iconographical and archaeological evidence to first propose typology, chronology and distribution of this class of razors. Secondly, the paper will provide context-based suggestions for the original purpose of the *dg3*-razors. These will then be used to pinpoint the places on the finds where we should look for potential traces of use. Last but not the least, problems in documenting use patterns on *dg3*-razors and other ancient Egyptian cosmetic utensils in museum collections will be discussed together with some preliminary results of this ongoing work.

### **The dog is in the detail – technological necessities versus aesthetical gimmicks**

**Vera Müller** (Material Culture of Egypt and Nubia)

The documentation of archaeological objects is delimited in a framework of efficiency, necessities, research questions and the abilities of the draughtsperson. While on the one hand the representation of the diversity of details concerning the production techniques, the material, the structure of the surface, damages, signs of wear and secondary coatings might be desirable, too many particularities might obscure typological or other features necessary for comparative studies and other inquiries. Especially since photographs became omnipresent and new digital methods have been developed, the question arises if there still is a need for drawings at all. In this presentation a variety of objects will be illustrated which highlight the problems and possible solutions for the problems characterized.

### **You spin me round – creating 3D models of objects**

**Irene Petschko** (DIGital Documentation Lab)

**Mario Börner** (DIGital Documentation Lab)

While first digital documentation efforts in archaeology were already made in the 70s, the last decades brought on developments that now allow us to create 3D models of objects through structure from motion, structured light scans or laser scans. Due to the low cost in equipment the structure from motion approach became more and more popular in archaeology since the start of the current decade. In this paper we present the comparison of structure from motion with structured light scanning, and look at applications of 3D models in material culture research.

### **A view to recording Middle Bronze Age pottery from Greece**

**Michaela Zavadil** (The Mycenaean Aegean)

The material culture of the major part of the Middle Helladic (MH) period is considered rather simple and pottery constitutes the bulk of the excavated objects. Its strong regional character has until now made it difficult to develop a standardised terminology concerning shapes, wares and fabrics. Moreover, many questions related to pottery production and pottery exchange networks on a regional and inter-regional perspective are still open. Carol Zerner's statement "If those of us who will be publishing MH pottery could agree upon a system that would allow us and future students of the period to compare pots and sherds from different sites, we would be able to evaluate pottery production and distribution and, in general, the interrelationships of regions on the Mainland in the MBA" is still valid (Zerner et al. 1986, 58). Based on the ongoing study of the Middle Bronze Age pottery from Pheneos (Peloponnese), I will show my approach to the recording of pottery from this epoch. In addition, I would like to present what I would change (or keep) in my approach if I started recording the material now.



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