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Ceramic technology, production and use in an urban settlement on the Middle Nile: the pottery assemblage from Late Meroitic Hamadab, Sudan (2nd to 4th Century A.D.).

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The reviewed volume represents a publication of the PhD thesis defended by the author in 2019 at the Humboldt University of Berlin. It brings together the results of continuous research done by the author, in cooperation with others, on the pottery corpora recovered from the exploration of the sites of Hamadab (headed by Pawel Wolf, Deutsches Archäologisches Institut) and the Royal Baths at Meroe (headed by Simone Wolf, Deutsches Archäologisches Institut). Whilst some of the results appeared in earlier publications,² the present volume is the first major report on the pottery from both abovementioned sites – Hamadab, in particular. It is also another much-desired addition to the still sparse collection of major studies dealing with the ceramics of the Meroitic south.

The volume is structured into nine chapters. The frontmatter is followed by the (1) ‘Introduction’ summarising in a concise yet sufficient way the cultural, geographic, historical, and scholarly setting of the study. The next chapter, (2) ‘Materials and Methods’, defines in general the pottery assemblages of Hamadab and the Royal Baths and details the methodology of the processing of pottery finds at both sites. Without delving into much detail, it also introduces adopted systems of classification of pottery fabrics, form classes, and wares. In (3) ‘The *Chaîne Opératoire* in Kushite Ceramic Manufacture’ the manufacturing phase in the ‘life course’ of Meroitic potteries is introduced utilising the titular approach, by now well-established in Meroitic pottery studies. Both (4) ‘Fabric Classification – Outline of the Scheme’ and (5) ‘Fabric Evaluation – Application of the Scheme’ deal with the methodology and results of comprehensive scientific research establishing a reliable classification of pottery fabrics from the sites and addressing some other related issues. Another stage of the pottery production is in the focus of (6) ‘The Kiln Pottery – Urban Ceramic Production’. This chapter describes a pottery producing compound found at Hamadab, particularly an excavated pottery kiln and associated ceramic finds. The following (7) ‘Domestic Ceramics from a Late Meroitic House’ shifts focus to the functional aspects

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2 *Inter alia* Matthews and Nowotnick 2019; Nowotnick 2018; Wolf et al. 2009; Wolf et al. 2011; Wolf et al. 2015.

of Meroitic ceramics as well as the house itself, examined through a limited sample of finds. The final two chapters present the overall (8) 'Conclusions' in summarised form and extensive (9) 'Appendices' including (A) a sample catalogue and some datasets of the pottery fabrics research and (B) a register listing and describing the selection of pottery finds relevant to the present volume. The whole volume is accompanied by frequent figures in the text and further illustrations comprising seventy-four plates at the end of the volume, which are organised into sections corresponding to the main chapters.

As evident from the preceding summary, the volume does not aspire to bring forth a comprehensive description and evaluation of the pottery assemblages of Hamadab and the Royal Baths and even the description of the general methodological approaches adopted for pottery processing at both sites is rather condensed. This is understandable as the core of the volume is formed by three narrowly focused studies represented by chapters 4 and 5, 6, and 7. All three are of significant merit. Chapters 4 and 5 dealing with the issue of pottery fabrics represent another contribution to the series of complementary studies spearheaded by Małgorzata Daszkiewicz and her collaborators.³ The rare find of the Meroitic pottery kiln described in chapter 6, and especially its meticulous examination, sheds the much-needed further light on the following phase of pottery production and its organisation and identifies Hamadab as another source of Meroitic kaolinitic finewares. Chapter 7 opens several issues related to the utilisation of pottery so far rather marginal in the field of Meroitic pottery studies. Although dealing with fairly diverse topics, the three studies prove to be, to a certain degree, complementary to one another. The author succeeds in emphasising this, using it to draw some general conclusions, and, in general, giving the volume a coherent, although not exactly monographic, character. Most detached is the study of the selected domestic pottery assemblage in chapter 7 which – in contrast to the rest of the volume – departs from the focus on the manufacturing phase of any given ceramic object's 'life course' (accented also by the inclusion of chapter 3 serving as its more general introduction). The stand-alone nature of individual chapters is highlighted mostly by the discussions of the formal typology of pottery vessels repeated on three separate occasions in chapters 2, 6, and 7. Each time the classification is based on (slightly) different criteria (such as manufacturing characteristics or function) and establishes different groups or types with varying designations. Such multi-track treatment of formal typology may be justifiable and, in chapters 6 and 7, the differing approaches were clearly chosen regarding the specific research questions targeted by each of them. On the other hand, more attention could have been given to establishing their mutual complementarity and avoiding some (seeming) inconsistencies between them. There are also other minor issues of a similar kind, such as the appearance of different designations for the same group in the text and in corresponding plates (e.g. 'deep wheel-made pots and basins' vs. 'steep-sided pots and basins'), or a rather unclear definition of the group of 'pots' in chapter 2. However, it must be simultaneously admitted that the formal typology of Meroitic pottery is indeed a challenging discipline and as it was laid out especially in chapter 7 counts amongst the best such classifications published so far. Apart from the issues of typology, there are other sporadic mishaps to be

3 E.g. Daszkiewicz and Malykh 2017; Daszkiewicz et al. 2003; Daszkiewicz et al. 2016.

encountered throughout the volume, including various minor typographic mistakes or, for example, the omission of the local term for small metal bowl 'koriya' from the appended list of mentioned Arabic words.

The first major report highlighting the research done on pottery coming from the town of Hamadab and the Royal Baths site at Meroe is a very welcome sight. Whilst the comprehensive publication and evaluation of the ceramic assemblages coming from the two sites remains to be desired, the present volume puts forward some very important finds and findings and approaches the issues dealt with in the spirit of best standards established in the field. Beyond that, it introduces some perspectives seldom applied in research of Meroitic pottery in the past, at least not in such a rigorous way. As such, the latest volume by Ulrike Nowotnick represents another important step in furthering our knowledge about the ceramics made and used during the Meroitic period.

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