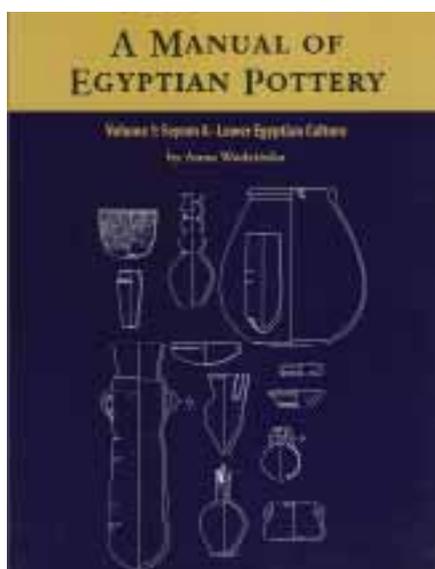




BOOK REVIEWS

Wodzińska, A. 2009. A Manual of Egyptian Pottery. Volume 1: Fayum A-Lower Egyptian Culture. - Boston, Ancient Egypt Research Associates

Augusto Gayubas



Dr. Anna Wodzińska, who works at the Institute of Archaeology of the University of Warsaw (Poland), is the head of the Ceramics Team of AERA (Ancient Egypt Research Associates) Field School. The main aim of the AERA Field School is to teach and train archaeological techniques for both, students and experienced archaeologists alike. Wodzińska developed for AERA four pottery manuals to teach about ancient Egyptian pottery.

Now, the manuals are made available for everyone, the present volume of which is the first that has been published. It deals with seven different 'periods' of Predynastic Egypt: Fayum A, Merimde, Omari, Badari, Naqada I, Naqada II, and Buto-Maadi.

The volume consists of nine sections and a preface. In the preface, the author introduces the objective of the manual and explains how to use it, stressing the importance of ceramic analysis: "Ceramics are usually the most abundant artifacts present at Egyptian archaeological sites", and it "can offer a great deal of useful information" (p. vii).

In section 1, the author provides a brief, but clear introduction to pottery production in Egypt, which she divides into four stages: material (two kinds of clay are identified for Egypt: Nile alluvium and marl) and its preparation, the shaping methods, the surface treatment, and the decoration.

In section 2, Wodzińska explains the system she developed for pottery processing in the field: the classification of pottery fragments (diagnostic – “those from which the original form of the whole vessel can be deduced”, p. 2 – and non-diagnostic), the classification of pots according to shape (restricted and unrestricted vessels) and the way how to draw and photograph pottery (both topics includes a bibliography). Examples of AERA Pottery Forms and drawings describing and visualizing pottery shapes, parts, and typologies are included.

After summarizing the work that should be done after the excavation (“database entry, analysis of the data, and a study of the results”, including publishing; section 3, p. 10), the author presents a useful ceramic glossary in section 4.

Section 5 is a five-page bibliography, which is, remarkably, meant for all four volumes because it refers to the methodological part of the manuals. In section 6 Wodzińska offers a description of the clays mentioned in this volume, mainly following the so-called ‘Vienna System’ of clay classification.

Section 7 contains the list of Egyptian pottery, organized chronologically. Each period has an introduction to the pottery in its general trends (site, material, manufacture, surface, types, and related bibliography), and the catalogue of the main ceramic types, organized by shape. This catalogue consists of drawings and a short description for each type, including provenance, data, shape, material, manufacturing techniques, surface, dating, and bibliographical references. In total, the author summarizes 22 ceramic types for Fayum A (5300–4200 B.C.), 75 for Merimde Beni Salame (5000–4400 B.C.), 31 for Omari (4700–4400 B.C.), 53 for Badari (4100–3700 B.C.), 33 for Naqada I (3900–3500 B.C.), 72 for Naqada II (3500–3200 B.C.), 124 for Buto-Maadi (3800–3200 B.C.), and 5 imports from Palestine found in the context of Buto-Maadi culture.

As Wodzińska points out in the preface, it is “essentially an illustrated list of ceramic types from different periods, meant to show only the most general trends in Egyptian ceramics” (p. viii), and not a complete corpus of the ceramic evidence for each period. In this respect, the manual is actually a very efficient guide to those who work in the field and in the labs, because it provides a very practical classification system that facilitates pottery analysis. The edition of an alternative spiral bound version is a proof of this pragmatic usefulness.

This volume concludes with a list of the bibliography related to the catalogue of ceramic types (section 8) and a final section of eight pages with colour plates, including images of the most characteristic ceramic types of each period. The images are of great help because it complements the drawings: they offer a better idea of colour, texture, thickness, and style of the ceramics.

In conclusion, I think this manual is very useful to those who work in the field as well as in the lab. It is particularly important to students, since it provides a clear and concise approach to study pottery and how to analyse the data. The manual provides an efficient list of ceramic types with rigorous descriptions that may facilitate the study of Egyptian Predynastic pottery.

Wodzińska, A. 2009. *A Manual of Egyptian Pottery. Volume 1: Fayum A-Lower Egyptian Culture.* – Boston, Ancient Egypt Research Associates. 225 pp. ISBN 0 9779370 2 X. Price: £24.00 (paperback). ISBN 0 9779370 4 6. Price: £28.00 (spiralbound).

Second version published: 29 October 2010

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