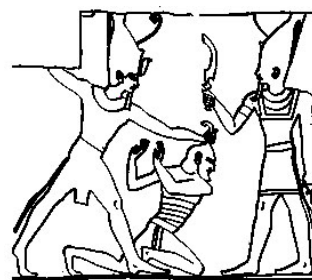


Delta and Sinai Current research



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Dining, Drinking and Connectivity in the Delta: Sais and its Kitchens

Archaeological excavation at Sais in the western Nile Delta over the last 12 years has resulted, unsurprisingly, in the discovery of large amounts of pottery. As the study and analysis of this material and the excavations continue, some preliminary themes for discussion will be presented in this paper. The themes aim to go beyond the creation of typologies and fabrics and looks at the social implications of the vessels, especially when considered as complete assemblages.

Through four sets of dining equipment from different periods this paper will present a study of what people were eating and drinking at Sais in the Neolithic, Ramesside, Saite and Roman periods. The material culture and analysis will be used to develop a discussion about the social implications for each period (dining table etiquette) and the kinds of personal, family, local, regional and international connections that may be deduced from the pottery excavated at the site. The first assemblage shows how the Neolithic period emphasis on local Delta fish resources seems to have created a large scale processing industry, with jars marked with a fish-bone motif. The vessels and their contents may have been prepared for 'export' elsewhere, showing an unexpected level of organisation and connection around 4000 BC. By contrast around 1150 BC, the Ramesside party, that unexpectedly came to an end had assemblage of pottery vessels for community or family eating. During these mealtimes everyone shared the food, perhaps creating an eating hierarchy, but they supplemented the local produce with imported wine. In the Saite period, large scale wine and oil imports from the Aegean show an elevated consumption of outside produce and, perhaps, interaction between different ethnic groups at Sais in the 7th-6th century BC. In the Roman period, a large assemblage of tableware dating between the 1st and 3rd century AD suggests that individual dining and table etiquette were as important as the connections with the past and with material culture from the Hellenistic period as much as with local traditions and regional cooking.

Through such analyses, this paper will show how Sais presents an overview of social change in Egypt, more intimate and personal than a broad historical narrative, yet with implications for understanding how the people of Sais felt connected to the world around them both geographically and temporally. These senses of connection through consumption (in its many meanings) and resource exploitation are explored throughout this paper.