

Collecting groups: the archaeological context of the late Middle Kingdom Cemetery A at Harageh *

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(PLATES II–V)

The importance to individuate block categories of objects to define separate chronological periods within the history of Ancient Egypt has often clashed against the necessity to keep find-context at the centre of study as the only possible way to encounter and explore past societies and cultures. Collecting types and arranging objects in categories could have been one of the easiest way to explore unknown cultures as Egypt was at the beginning of nineteenth century, while accurate records of find-groups would have generated slow process of data acquisition and would have moved the discipline towards fragmentation. The resolution of difficulties in constructing visual diachronic typologies and in reassembling find-groups as a source of knowledge is still today one of the tasks to be accomplished. The aim of this paper is that to show new possible directions for the future of the research, receding its focus from types to groups. The late Middle Kingdom Cemetery A in the necropolis of Harageh has been selected as case study, in order to show the potentiality to reassemble the original find-groups.

Theoretical model: types vs groups

Types in archaeology involve a particular atomization of groups of objects as found together, separating each single item from its original context.¹ However, classification in types has long represented an irresistible process, because it offers one of the most efficient and swift ways to index the ancient material culture and produce discourses on it. Types have the effect of creating big pictures, chronological sequences, evolutionary lines, easy reading and interpretation of

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1. S. QUIRKE, *Collecting Types: Rosellini, Petrie, Montelius. The before and the after*, in M. BETRÒ - G. MINIACI (eds), *Talking along the Nile. Ippolito Rosellini, travellers and scholars of the 19th century in Egypt. Proceedings of the International Conference held on the occasion of the presentation of Progetto Rosellini. Pisa, June 14-16, 2012*, Pisa 2013, pp. 197-210.