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**Review of “Socioeconomic Factors Influencing Household Functioning in Third Intermediate Period (1070–664 BC) Egypt: A Case Study of Tell el-Retaba”  
Thesis presented for PhD (University of Warsaw) by Agnieszka Ryś-Jarmużek**

Dear Sir, Madam,

The submitted thesis uses a detailed assessment of evidence from Tell er-Retabah, acquired during excavations over the last 20 years (in which the author participated), to explore three aspects of ancient urban life and experience: the function of tools, what these imply for activities in houses and ancillary spaces, and in turn the strategies deployed to manage assets, waste and labour.

The thesis is logically structured, introducing the methodology, key research questions and theoretical frameworks that underpin the research. The candidate is to be commended for drawing upon frameworks from outside the archaeology of the Nile Valley, including theory on site formation, behavioural chains and case studies from the Levant and Mesoamerica. These are clearly well understood and have then been configured before application to the datasets, to fit the context of the Nile Valley.

The originality, and significant contribution of the thesis is, to my mind, particularly strong in three areas:

- 1) Providing a case study – based on modern excavation – of urban experience and socioeconomic strategies within a pharaonic settlement that lies outside the Nile Delta or Valley (e.g. Amarna, Elephantine, Amara West) but rather sits in a *wadi* with distinctive ecological setting, particularly as regards water supply. The introduction and conclusion could state this more emphatically.
- 2) Assessing the evidence from the perspective of the intention of the ancient individual or group, and their resulting design decisions, rather than in terms of architecture and installations, or objects studied by modern typological category. In many ways this draws upon the landmark study by Barry Kemp and Anna Stevens at Amarna (*Busy Lives*), but in a more challenging environment in terms of site preservation, and within a very different historical context. The author makes a strong case for craft production being integral, to varying degrees, to life in these modest houses.
- 3) Moving beyond the assessment of household activity and function relying on architectural typologies and assumptions projected from other, more recent, societies. It is refreshing to see designations such as “kitchen”, “living/reception room” avoided. Whilst the research could not avail of the opportunities for micromorphological analysis possible at sites outside Egypt, the approach nonetheless provides high resolution insights into activity-scapes, which remains missing from much urban archaeology in Egypt.

I would have favoured, in the introduction, more information on the taphonomy and conditions of the site itself, and how this might have affected preservation of some artefact types, for example wood,

**University of Cambridge**

basketry, textiles. Were parts of the site water-logged, affected by *sebakhin* pitting [an unexplained term cited only in detailed building descriptions) or other major factors? In flagging this upfront, the reader would be appraised of possible dataset biases, rather than encountering occasional references to such absences' (e.g. the absence of preserved leather, p. 155). Are there proxies in the absence of preservation, e.g. can the use of basketry containers be posited through impressions on the sedimentary floors?

The use of La Motta and Schiffer's habitation > abandonment > post-abandonment model does not consider "construction", which can lead to a lot of deposition, changes to earlier deposits and meanwhile occupation (see *Busy Lives*) before a building is used. Is it worth considering this for the deposits studied to see if other patterns emerge?

The only significant absence was around the consideration of pottery. Despite an extensive excursus on the types of spaces and material needed to prepare clay, shape pots, fire them and surface finish them, there was very limited discussion of the containers themselves and how they were used, other than buried pots. An illustration of main types would also be helpful. Much of this might be germane to the candidate's conclusions. For example, were spinning bowls found in the excavations, which might increase or confirm inferences about textiles and weaving. What shapes of storage vessels were buried in the floor, and were any inscribed (e.g. indicating wine or meat stored within)?

The thesis is well illustrated, with a clarity to drawings and good photographs of a representative selection of each tool type. It is unfortunate that no photographs illustrating the form of key installations – ovens, bins, silos, grinding emplacements, were included, given these are key indicators of the reliability of interpretation. The building and area plans are schematic but ultimately effective; those in the concluding chapter VIII (summarising the subsistence and craft activities attested or posited) efficiently convey a mass of complex information, including the interpreted reliability of the evidence base.

I therefore recommend the thesis is approved by the University of Warsaw, given it conforms to the University's regulations in conveying the candidate's mastering of theoretical frameworks, independent framing of research questions and data analysis, and the weaving together of evidenced conclusions. The thesis represents an original contribution to Egyptology and Egyptian archaeology, and a valuable addition to the study of ancient households, societies and economies.

I am happy to clarify any of the above points, I also attach an appendix of specific comments and suggestions to consider, whether for the final submitted thesis or any subsequent publication based upon it.

Yours sincerely,



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## SPECIFIC COMMENTS

on thesis "Socioeconomic Factors Influencing Household Functioning in Third Intermediate Period (1070–664 BC) Egypt: A Case Study of Tell el-Retaba" presented for the degree of PhD (University of Warsaw) by Agnieszka Ryś-Jarmużek

- Some of terminology requires explicit definitions. In particular what you mean by "household" (hinted at on page 18) rather than "house".
- There is no reference to the hard stone quern type generally assumed to be used for gold processing, with two types (striations on concave surface, and closely spaced hemispherical indents) well attested at other sites. If these do not appear, perhaps mention specifically, perhaps part of a section setting out what evidence is missing. See extensive discussion in Klemm, Rosemarie, and Klemm, Dietrich D. *Stones and Quarries in Ancient Egypt*. London: British Museum Press, 2008; and for archaeological context Edwards, Mills, Miellé and Vivian Davies, *The Archaeological Survey of Sudanese Nubia, 1963-69: The Pharaonic Sites*, 2020.
- The use of "Islamic" (e.g. p.33) to define periods is now outdated, and I would recommend using centuries CE or appropriate political designation (e.g. Fatimid, Ottoman etc).
- The distinction between "planned" settlements of the New Kingdom and "organic" layouts of the Third Intermediate Period towns is somewhat over-stated. Note the prevalence of organic development of urban layouts at Amarna and Amara West, for example, often within a short time of foundation.
- I realise that parallels are not cited exhaustively, but some of the evidence from Amara West seems germane to the thesis:
  - Use of shared facilities between houses, such as the oven courtyard (E13.13) servicing two houses. See N. Spencer, Amara West: Considerations on urban life in colonial Kush, in: J. Anderson and D. Welsby (eds.), *The Fourth Cataract and Beyond, Proceedings of the 12th International Conference for Nubian Studies. 1–6 August 2012*, BMPES 1, London, Leuven. 457–485.
  - Use of 'back rooms' to store rubbish and other objects (discussed in above-cited chapter).
  - Big basins in houses at AW, e.g. the limestone 'trough' in villa E12.10. See Spencer, N. 2009. 'Cemeteries and a late Ramesside suburb at Amara. West', *Sudan & Nubia* 13, 47–61.
- In concluding the site does not provide evidence for significant military presence (p. 42) the author could allow for other forms of transitory presence: mobile traders and craftspeople for example.
- p.49 on Nile navigation, for a more nuanced understanding of how difficult navigation was in pre-modern time, see Cooper, John, *The Medieval Nile: Route, Navigation, and Landscape in Islamic Egypt* (Cairo, 2015; <https://doi.org/10.5743/cairo/9789774166143.001.0001>)
- Fig VI.8 inconsistency: labels long tools as "hammers", main text uses "hammers or pestles".
- p. 118 care needed with language. "Examination of the tools identified three main activities for which they were used: piercing, sewing, and making netting" – but surely conclusion not just based on examination and visual characteristics – why must spiral lines mean spin-forging and winding thus netmaking? Also a wrong reference – "One of the tools has spiral lines on the tip (fig. VI. 16, D)," but should be C?
- p. 139 why such a long excursus on agriculture and cereal processing, but not matched by (e.g.) animal husbandry, butchery etc?
- p. 141 "seine and cast nets found at Retebah" (rather attested or implied by finds?).

- p. 144 craft table. Why does pottery making not refer to kilns and wasters? Presumably as none found, so caption needs to make clear criteria for what is included. Similarly “red ochre”, why not other colours (yellow is mentioned on p154) or palettes? Metal production – what about hammering and polishing et? Faience, moulds? Perhaps better is these tables including in bold evidence present at Retebah, and in another colour or grey what other types of evidence might be produced for such activity?
- p151 “Roux” citation missing date?
- p153 “However, places that leave clear signs in the archaeological record, meaning larger establishment with a sizable production, would have been located outside the habitation area because of smoke”. Not true – see kilns and industrial production in heart of Amara West walled town [Spencer, Building on New ground: The Foundation of a Colonial Town at Amara West, in: N. Spencer, A. Stevens and M. Binder (eds.), *Nubia in the New Kingdom. Lived experience, pharaonic control and indigenous traditions*, BMPES 3, 323–355. Leuven, Paris, Bristol).
- p. 248 “other indicators of activities include a complete needle (S3010) in room 1, making a case for sewing” yet there are so many other processes by which such material got here. 245 table VII.31 has this needle as “secondary refuse”, in room 1 habitation – in deposit/floor 2100. Better a nuanced statement to say it may indicate activity here or nearby?
- Table III.1 (p. 38) good to have absolute dates included for reader orientation.

It is also recommended the manuscript, should publication be planned, is copy-edited by a native English speaker, to correct minor errors of syntax, spelling and phraseology.

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