

5. FUTURE PROSPECTS

The most important step towards a better understanding of the ‘phenomena of cultural encounter’ manifest in material culture is an appropriate description by means of words and illustrative material of the outcome of such phenomena in order to be able to assess them and relate them to other case studies. The terminology used is perhaps less important⁶³⁸ than actual examples and their number and the abolition of purely binary categories, which do not leave other options and are therefore too rigid to be useful. It is extremely frustrating to read about, for example, the ‘imitation of something’ because usually neither the ‘imitation’ nor that ‘something’ is illustrated and described sufficiently, so that it remains impossible to form one’s own opinion in retracing the comparison suggested in case studies.

The point of this study is not to doubt or deny the existence of contact or the presence of individuals of non-Egyptian origin at Tell el-Dab’a overall or to try and find out whence they had come but to study the material culture at a liminal site in a borderland between Egypt and Syria-Palestine and to determine the way in which the creative powers of the otherwise voiceless inhabitants of Tell el-Dab’a were inspired and how they used their immediate socio-cultural environment to produce the things they handled every day and how this situation differs at other sites. It would be extremely interesting to compare effects and stages of development of material culture from other liminal areas, e.g. at Aswan where the Egyptian and Nubian cultural traditions were in close geographical and physical contact as well as to carry out further research in the regionalism of material culture and what causes it in presumed ‘inner Egyptian’ contexts without influences that are *a priori* connected to non-Egyptians. Thus, this is another result of this study: it seems increasingly unlikely that any two sites would provide an exactly parallel development of material culture but while this is a valid suggestion it also has to be tested.

The material culture can be compared to multiple strands of reeds of different derivation which are then interwoven into a mat with unique patterns that may be similar to each other but never exactly the same. This is due to the fact that various items and traditions that are used develop according to “the way of doing things” with input from various social groups and in different ways as well as due to local circumstances and elements. Thus, such strands of the mat may have a very local derivation as well as more distant features.

An important task for future research is to study material culture in more detail to tease out the spaces between types in typologies, into which modern researchers force ‘things’ sometimes and make them reveal their inherent information on ancient practices. In addition, the case study may serve as an example to show that over-generalisation robs us of the possibility of recognising diversity. At the same time, the study of ‘things’ is not the end in itself, but a means to obtain an additional perspective. This can only be gained, if one knows the “stuff”.

Historical narratives based on human-thing relations in the widest sense are but one aspect of historical events and the multitude of such relations does not necessarily exclude some of them. The language component, for example, cannot be treated at all in this case study. At the same time, it must be borne in mind that these theoretical considerations are just that and that they – inevitably – are in flux as new data are collected, new theoretical models are developed and thinking about things changes. These

⁶³⁸ Of course, this is an oversimplification, but when Yasur-Landau (2010, 19) writes “innovation may then be expressed in finding new uses for ‘foreign’ pottery types by connecting them to existing behavioural patterns,” it describes an actual process and rings very similar to what is described by Stockhammer 2012, 49–50, and called relational entanglement.

reconstructions, however, can never be detached from the sum of philosophical thought of modern researchers and, thus, remain *etic* in nature and cannot demand to be the exclusive truth.

At the end of this study an appeal to scholars does not seem out of place, due to the all-enveloping presence of the themes of mobility, migration and identities and the relevance of such research to modern themes and pressing problems. Any simplified presentation of complex results of research into ancient migration runs the risk of being used in the modern discourse in ways not anticipated or intended by the researchers.⁶³⁹ Undertheorised results of aDNA analyses especially might lead to unwanted attention by modern politics for hidden agendas, if the scientific community is not extremely circumspect. On the other hand, knowledge obtained and used wisely may enhance a global understanding of mobility as a natural part of being human and humankind in general.

⁶³⁹ Insoll 2007, 7.