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Potmark-Egypt.com

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Since the publication of the monograph *Thinitische Töpfermarken* (Helck 1990) and my own contribution *Corpus and numerical evaluation of the "Thinite" potmarks* (van den Brink 1992), only very few studies dealing specifically with Early Dynastic pottery 'inscriptions' (Adams and Porat 1996; Engel 1997; Kroeper 2000; Gilroy et al. 2001) have appeared until very recently, with the notable exception of a number of studies dealing exclusively with the incised *serekh*-signs (van den Brink 1996, 2001; Dreyer 1999; Gilroy 2001; Köhler and van den Brink 2002; van den Brink and Braun 2002).

It was, therefore, a pleasant surprise to notice a renewed interest in Early Dynastic potmarks during the second international conference on *Predynastic and Early Dynastic Egypt. Origin of the State*, which took place from the 5th – 8th of September 2005 in Toulouse, France. This revival was evidenced by the presence of

various posters on display dealing with provisional corpora of newly uncovered potmarks, deriving from in particular late Predynastic/Early Dynastic Delta sites at Kafr Hassan Dawood (102 potmarks; Hassan *et al.* in press), Tell el-Farkha (51 potmarks exclusively from the cemetery site; Jucha in press), Tell el-Samara and Tell el-Dab'a/Qana'an.

After receiving positive reactions from various participants to the conference (in particular from Alain Anselin, Gaëlle Breand, Mariusz Jucha, Agnieszka Maczynska, Jane Smythe, Geoffrey Tassie and Joris van Wetering) to the *ad hoc* idea of organizing a brainstorming and 'code-cracking' kind of workshop on early potmarks, it was possible to announce at the end of the Toulouse conference, with the formal approval of the Scientific Committee, the establishment of the ***International Potmark Workshop*** in preparation of the third conference on *Predynastic and Early Dynastic Egypt. Origin of the State*, to be held in 2008 in London, England.

An obvious advantage of the more recent, site-specific pottery corpora referred to above - to which we hasten to add those of Minshat Abu Omar (Kroeper 2000), Heluan (Köhler and Smythe 2004) and Adaïma (Breand in press) – over the 1992 countrywide corpus is the possibility to relate each and every newly uncovered potmark to its actual carrier, that is those potmarks can be directly related to specific pottery types, something that was advocated by Eva Engel (1997) and put into practice by Kroeper (2000), Hassan *et al.* (in press) and Jucha (in press).

While initially trying to communicate via e-mail with the *ca.* 20 participants to the workshop to date, it soon became clear to me that for proper, simultaneous communication amongst all workshop's participants as well as for furthering an easy exchange of data between us, a data-base driven website including a Forum would be a *sine qua non*. Hence ***Potmark-Egypt.com***. Needless to say, perhaps, that realizing the need for such an information and communication vehicle was easier than the actual realization of it. Designing and building the website, the scanning and uploading of *i.a.* 3360 potmark-archive cards upon which I based my own 1992 publication are all time consuming, and the website is still a work in progress.

Although the workshop's main focus is on potmarks from the Proto- and Early Dynastic periods (Dynasties 0-2), several workshop participants will bring in their expertise concerning Old Kingdom and Middle Kingdom potmarks (Anna Wodzinska and Carla Gallorini respectively), thus providing hopefully a most welcome diachronic perspective to the subject matter at hand as well as the possibility of a study in contrasts. Peter Damerow kindly accepted an invitation, on suggestion by John Baines, to participate in the workshop. His expertise on deciphering the earliest cuneiform writing and record keeping systems, in combination with his unbiased, that is to say non-Egyptological look at the Early Dynastic potmarks will certainly be beneficial to the workshop's aim to arrive at meaningful interpretation(s) of the potmarks, either on an individual basis or as a system as whole.

Launching of the website is anticipated for January 1st, 2007. A first progress report of the workshop will be presented during the third conference on *Predynastic and Early Dynastic Egypt. Origin of the State* to be held in London, England, in 2008.

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