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Lectures

Objectual violence: some remarks on deliberate pottery fragmentation from Predynastic Egypt

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While the violence exerted on human bodies is a normal focus of attention in archaeology, less consideration has been paid to the violence inflicted upon objects. Thus, I will explore new anthropological perspectives defining violence not as "human physical harm" but as "vehemence". Here, violence obliges us to reconsider the relationships and boundaries between humans and non-humans. I qualitatively analyse some emerging cases from the Predynastic funerary record that demonstrate the deliberate violent destruction of pottery in mortuary rituals and its later redistribution. Although the complexity and variability of the phenomenon are emphasised, I propose the significance of this practice as a "technology of emotion" prompting grief within the participants and as a mnemonic device connecting social spaces, temporalities and people.

Alors que la violence exercée sur les corps humains fait partie des thèmes les plus étudiés en archéologie, la violence infligée aux objets a reçu beaucoup moins de considération. J'explore ici de nouvelles perspectives anthropologiques qui définissent la violence non pas sous l'aspect du « dommage physique humain » mais de celui de la « véhémence ». La violence nous oblige en effet à reconsidérer les relations et les limites entre humains et non-humains. J'analyse de manière qualitative des exemples provenant du registre de l'archéologie funéraire qui témoignent de la destruction violente et délibérée d'objets céramiques dans des rituels mortuaires puis leur éparpillement. Bien que la diversité et la complexité du phénomène soient bien mises en évidence, je suggère que cette pratique est importante en tant que « technologie des émotions » provocant le deuil au sein des

1. I would like to thank David Wengrow and Alice Stevenson for their stimulating comments on the ideas here exposed. I am grateful to Stan Hendrickx as well for his observations and his permission to use images from the Belgian excavations at Elkab. I must also thank Yann Tristant and Béatrix Midant-Reynes for giving me the opportunity to collaborate in this volume, and the three anonymous reviewers for their constructive comments. The project that gave rise to these results received the support of a fellowship from "la Caixa" Foundation (ID 100010434). The fellowship code is LCF/BQ/EU20/11810009. It has also received the support of the UCL, Bloomsbury and East London Doctoral Training Partnership (UBEL DTP), ESRC Grant Reference ES/P000592/1.

participants et comme un dispositif mnémonique associant les populations, les temporalités et les espaces sociaux.

Introduction: what is violence?

When one hears the word "violence", one tends to think naturally of wars, sacrifices, abuse, pain... It is thus difficult for an archaeologist to imagine violence as non-human or non-material given that, in our society, violence is usually understood as a "physical harm experienced by humans". However, I want to explore other dimensions of violence here that might enrich archaeological interpretations, through a re-thinking of its basic definition and working with recent anthropological discussions on the subject. This article will explore what I have termed *objectual violence*, or the violent destruction inflicted upon material culture. Through non-anthropocentric definitions, I will discuss some cases of objectual violence in the Predynastic funerary record to reconsider the ontological connections between humans and things in Predynastic and Early Dynastic Egypt. A challenging discussion on violence will force us to revaluate classic definitions of this phenomenon, to explore the constructive aspects of destruction, and to rethink the boundaries of our bodies and selves.

What is violence then? As an alternative to the abovementioned definition, I draw notions from the work of the anthropologist Neil Whitehead. He resorts to the etymology of the term in order to understand violence as "vehemence" or excessive intensity exerted in a certain relationship or behaviour.[2] Thus, violence alludes not to a physical reality, but to an emotive intensity of actions in a relationship that does not have to be human-to-human.[3] This novel perspective has allowed anthropologists to widen their focus to include some other violent actions that, because they do not imply direct "evident" physical harm on human bodies, are not considered as violent practices.[4] Here, the intensity of violence will allow us to rethink the relationship between humans and things and the boundaries between both. Interestingly, these concepts resonate across parallel disciplines with Sara Ahmed's understanding of pain not as an effect of bodily damage, but as an unmaking of figures and surfaces in a process of *intensification*.[5]

Violence and pain, as transgressions of borders between inside and outside, urge us to reconsider the limits of our bodily surfaces. In this regard, some scholars have put much effort into deconstructing the definitions of violence as a natural functional phenomenon (as seen in biological evolutionary perspectives), to understand it instead as a contextual cultural practice.[6] If one considers how violence in any social system is mediated by bodily and emotive cultural-specific experiences,[7] we are left to question the common imposition of Cartesian dualisms in archaeological and anthropological research on violence in the past. What was the limit of the Predynastic bodies, how did they define themselves, and how did those concepts affect their culturally embedded experiences of violence? For instance, terms such as "pain", "harm" and "suffering" sustain Western definitions of violence and are usually taken for granted as such. As we have learnt from ethnomedicine and the anthropology of health, such concepts rely

2. Whitehead 2004: 61.

3. Musical passages, bodily movements, atmospheric conditions, words and discourses… may all be termed "violent". Whitehead (2004: 57) clarifies that "(t)his broad though not merely metaphorical use of the notion of violence is connected to the logical and semantic properties of the concept".

4. See for instance some interesting publications on dark shamanism, witchcraft and sorcery (Stewart & Strathern 1999; Whitehead 2002; Whitehead & Wright 2004).

5. Ahmed 2002.

6. Accomazzo 2012: 545-50; Lee 2005: 287-89; Ralph 2012: 287-89; Whitehead 2004; 2007: 41.

7. Whitehead 2007: 40-41.

heavily on cultural semantics and are inextricably tied to culturally specific concepts of the relationships between self, community, personhood and embodiment.[8] Think, for example, how the Western mind-body dualism has found its way into the organisation of the modern healthcare system, divided into physicians (specialised on *corporeal* health) and psychologists (working with immaterial emotions and *thoughts*).[9] When we define pain, and thus violence, strictly as a non-referential corporeal hurt, we are identifying it as physical, bodily, primeval, natural damage. We are thus continuing with a deceitful body/pain against mind/language dualism already settled in Aristotle's work.[10] Through an unreflecting use of these terms, we might be imposing Western ideas that naturalise a certain violence, the "obvious" violence, and rejecting to analyse the intricated meshwork that lays underneath Western essentialisms.

Before dealing with the archaeological record, there is one last aspect of contemporary discussions of violence that I would like to highlight. Violence cannot be resumed as mere annihilation, obliteration, destruction. It is, conversely, a creative action constitutive of social relations and identities of those practicing it. As a cultural performance in a determinate social context, rather than an extra-cultural essentialist behaviour, we have to pay close attention to the *poetics of violence*.[11] As we will see, the breakage of pots in Predynastic Egypt can be partially understood as a violent action erasing yet creating bodies, people and emotions.[12]

A brief historiography and methodology

While the study of human violence has had a prominent role in archaeology, objectual violence has not been common in archaeological research – although it has not been absent either. The deliberate destruction of material culture has received special attention in relation to upheavals and sociopolitical crises, such as the archaeology of Christian destruction of images during Late Antiquity or the killing of ensouled monuments of kings during the Classic Maya collapse.[13] The breakage of objects in funerary contexts has also been the focus of recent analysis. As a prominent case, the cremation and inhumation burials from the Roman Gaul have shed light on the dynamic gestures of participants in the funerary ceremonies from the Early Empire to the Late Antiquity. Here, the deliberate shattering, perforation, mutilation, and incomplete introduction of vessels in tombs might relate to a symbolic necessity to separate the living from the dead.[14]

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8. Pollock 1996; Whitehead 2004.

9. Pollock 1996: 321-22.

10. Lee (2005) argues that Western philosophy is caught up in an oversimplifying and misleading dualism regarding the communicativeness of violence and pain: while language is usually defined as the *cultural* expression of the human mind, pain is understood as a non-referential *natural* or primitive experiential system.

11. Whitehead 2004.

12. The definition of violence here exposed is not without critiques. Dentan (2008:50) reminds us that, if violence is to be understood simply as vehemence, this definition could *dangerously* allow "rudeness or breaking windows by otherwise nonviolent protestors (to) qualify as 'violence' or even as 'terrorism', justifying state (counter) terrorist measures". This reasonable warning highlights, however, the sociocultural and hermeneutical praxis in which the usage of (the term) violence exists. "Violence as vehemence" has allowed, among other things, for criticism towards invisibilized and institutionalized violence, including the one performed by liberal democracies which are usually justified and normalised (Whitehead 2007:43-44, see Hall 2016). Additionally, it acknowledges the existence of a variety of forms of violence that are not purely material, such as sorcery or verbal aggression (Whitehead 2004: 57). Bearing this in mind, we must acknowledge that this novel definition, even if it does not lead "immediately to solutions", still prompts "new approaches, questions and strategies" to understand violence anthropologically (Whitehead 2004: 76).

13. Harrison-Buck 2016; Pollini 2012.

14. Blaizot et al. 2007; Bonnet in press. a & b. The intentional breakage of objects, especially pottery, has been studied in other cultural contexts, such as Sub-Saharan Africa (Barley 1994). Worth mentioning is Chapman & Gaydarska's (2007) work, who have dealt exhaustively with the topic of fragmentation and circulation of material culture during prehistory, although in this article the emphasis is placed on the deliberate act of violent destruction.

Especial cultic depositions of objects are well known in temple, settlement and grave contexts from Dynastic Egypt, including the breakage of wares as part of wider mortuary rituals.[15] For instance, the Pyramid Texts from Pepi I and Unis mention the intriguing ceremony "breaking of the red pots" as part of the funerary ritual associated with the pharaoh's death, while the archaeological record provides other examples of "ritual killing" of pottery in mortuary contexts from places as distant as Umm el-Qa'ab, Thebes or el-Kurru.[16] As the present article will explore, this violent destruction of objects was already practiced during Predynastic Egypt. Interestingly, some striking patterns of breakage of grave goods already draw the attention of early archaeologist during the first half of the 20th century, as we can see in old excavation reports of Predynastic and Early Dynastic cemeteries. Arthur Mace analysed the breakage pattern of some stone vessels from the Early Dynastic cemeteries of Naga-ed-Dêr. For tomb 5103, he defended the possibility of an intentional breakage and scattering of stone vessels. He proposed that, even if this rite may have had some symbolical meaning, it was probably better explained as a mechanism to prevent plundering.[17] As another example, Brunton cited one polished black vase with a hole made in one side from the cemetery of Matmar as an instance of "killing pots", a practice he considered "otherwise unknown in Predynastic times as far as pottery is concerned".[18]

Despite these early citations of the deliberate fracture of grave goods in Predynastic tombs, the phenomenon has not sparked much interest or debate among scholars. An exception would be Grinsell's cross-cultural overview of the breaking of objects in funerary rites, which noted that the custom of breaking grave goods in Egypt could be traced back to prehistory.[19] However, new data from recent excavations is prompting a renewed interest in the matter and urges us to reanalyse the unacknowledged evidence available from old reports.[20] This article adds to this emerging research, fostering discussion on the deliberate fragmentation of grave goods and borrowing concepts from the anthropology of violence.

Cases of objectual violence abound in the well-preserved funerary record of the Predynastic and Early Dynastic Nile Valley: anthropomorphic figurines, palettes, stone vessels, flint knives, offering tables… all have been intentionally fragmented in Predynastic and Early Dynastic times.[21] The variability of materials subjected to deliberate fragmentation in the archaeological record perhaps cautions us about establishing univocal explanations to what seems to be an incredibly complex phenomenon. Thus, here I will focus mainly on pottery, particularly on the smashing of pots in funerary rituals and the subsequent stages of their fragmentation process. However, by focusing on this particular type of damage of ware I will leave out other ritual actions concerning pottery that could also be interpreted as purposeful "killing and breakage", such as reversed bowls or holes pierced in ceramics.[22]

Before dealing with the archaeological examples and interpretations I must first highlight some methodological concerns. In

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15. Müller 2017.

16. Allen 2005; Budka 2014; López Grande & De Gregorio 2015; Müller 2017. See Budka (2014: 644-48) for an overview on textual, pictorial and archaeological sources on ritual breakage of pottery in Ancient Egypt.

17. Mace 1909: 36-37.

18. Brunton 1948: 17.

19. Grinsell 1961; 1973.

20. Hendrickx 2020; Junge 2019; Kuch 2018.

21. Cases of breakage of figurines can be found in Anderson (2006: 218), palettes in Ayrton and Loat (1911: 14, 17) and Petrie et al. (1913:10), stone vessels in Kuch (2018), flint knives in Mond & Myers (1937: 37), and offering tables in Vanthuyne (2016: 442), among many other examples.

22. Steffensen 2007.

his seminal work, Grinsell already noted the difficulties archaeologists face to distinguish between objects intentionally fragmented during rituals and those broken down due to post-depositional processes,[23] including pressure exerted by the filling of the grave, disturbance by secondary burials or reinternments, and looting. The latter cause is one of the main dilemmas for archaeologists working with the funerary record from Egypt. Thus, to increase the confidence on the present data, the cases discussed here all come from undisturbed graves where objects were found *in situ*. Although information on violent breakage patterns can also be obtained from partially disturbed graves through meticulous analysis, I have excluded them from this article for the sake of simplicity and reliability. I should also acknowledge that this is not an exhaustive dataset of objectual violence on Predynastic pottery. Only some relevant cases will be presently explored in order to highlight and foster debate on this unacknowledged phenomenon. Finally, this article hopes to promote serious reflection on the nature of archaeological reports and the archaeological process. Since the first archaeological excavations in the Nile Valley, the emphasis has been placed on complete pottery, as shown in any archaeological report or museum collection holding Egyptian materials. Complete artefacts have an invaluable role in developing chronological seriations and analysis of functionality. However, the overemphasis on intact exemplars dismisses the importance of utilisation, (un)intentional breakage of ware and redistribution of sherds; these are all relevant dimensions of the biography of the object which should be considered in any interpretation of mortuary rituals and grave goods. I urge readers to reflect on how the ways we understand the ceramic record and the ways we display the data in reports and collections can hamper the study of pottery fragmentation.

Thus, this article will trace the origins of objectual violence on pottery at least back to the 4th millennium in the Nile Valley. The cases will be organised roughly following a *chaîne opératoire* of the smashing and distribution of sherds. Firstly, I will present some illustrative evidence for the smashing of pottery in funerary rituals from Predynastic graves. Secondly, some examples of the introduction of sherds in tombs will be presented. Emerging from discussions on the anthropology and archaeology of violence, memory and emotions, some possible interpretations will be then discussed in relation to the highlighted cases. As a closure, some future perspectives on the study of deliberate object fragmentation in Egypt will be discussed.

Breaking ware during funerary rituals

Although the deposition of intact pottery in graves seems to be dominant in Predynastic times, the archaeological record presents some clear cases of the deliberate smashing of pots in relation to funerary rituals. The practice is already present at least in Badarian times, as shown by grave 5719 in Badari (**Fig. 1**).[24] An untouched child wrapped in matting was found with a small pot of fine black ware reduced to a mass of flakes and covered with a basket near to the head. In addition, near the face was a long rectangular bowl, found in two pieces. Although without further information it is difficult to elucidate whether the latter bowl was broken accidentally, the state of the former (described as "scraps" in the index and covered by a basket) indicates a deliberately

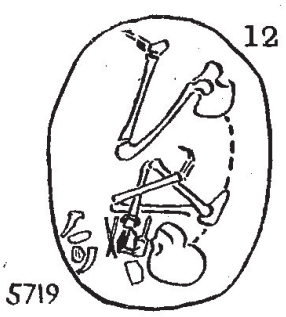

Fig. 1
Tomb 5179 from Badari, including the remains of a young child with head towards south, with a shattered black ware near to the head and fragmented bowl close to the face
© Petrie Museum, UCL.

23. Grinsell 1961: 478.
24. Brunton & Caton-Thompson 1928: 15

shattering.[25] This hypothesis is strengthened if we consider that the deceased was also accompanied by a bone tool, a hippopotamus tusk, two rods of wood, and an ivory bracelet, all in outstanding state of preservation despite the fragility of the materials.

At Naga-ed-Dêr, we find similar examples of objectual violence. Tomb 7474, dating to the Naqada IC-IIB, was the burial of two adolescents interred simultaneously over a piece of matting.[26] The tomb was well provisioned, with a total of 6 well-preserved pots, two bead bracelets, and a necklace on the right defunct. However, there was a dark red polished jar between both bodies that had been found "badly broken" despite the exceptional conditions of the tomb. Interestingly, the reconstruction of the pot was possible despite some missing sherds.[27] Similarly, the nearby tomb 7476, holding the remains of an adult male, included a "badly broken" black-topped vessel and a black-topped vessel with broken rim, both in close contact to the front to deceased.[28] Again, the contrast in preservation of grave goods supports an intentional breakage. This same pattern is repeated in el-Amrah grave b215, where a pot next to the head was found in fragments, while the rest of grave goods were well-preserved, and found arranged in a row in front of the deceased, including two slate palettes, an ivory comb, a large shell and four pots.[29]

Data from more recent and meticulous excavations has also provided possible evidence for intentional shattering of wares in funerary rites. A particularly interesting example is tomb 85 from Elkab.[30] Apart from being the richest tomb in the cemetery by far, including 48 complete pottery containers, 8 stone vessels, 2 palettes, 6 ivory hair pins, an ivory vessel, and beads; it also contained a spouted vessel (M284), unique in Elkab, that had been broken and later deliberately placed in the centre of the tomb as an isolated group of sherds (**Fig. 2 & 3**). Hendrickx rightly highlighted a direct link between the

Fig. 2
Vessel M284 from Elkab in situ upon excavation: it was deposited in Elkab grave 85 (originally numbered 76) as a confused group of broken sherds during burial

Fig. 3
Reconstructed spouted vessel M284, from Elkab tomb 85. Notice its fragmentary state, with broken spout and missing sherds

Fig. 2

Fig. 3

25. Brunton & Caton-Thompson 1928: pl. VII.
26. Lythgoe 1965: 296, 299, figs. 133b-g.
27. See item UCLMA 6-3805 in the catalogue of the Phoebe Hearst Museum of Anthropology, Berkeley.
28. Lythgoe 1965: 299-300, figs. 134c-d.
29. Randall-MacIver & Mace 1902: 20, pl. V7.
30. Hendrickx 1994: 194-96, pl. LXIII-LXV.

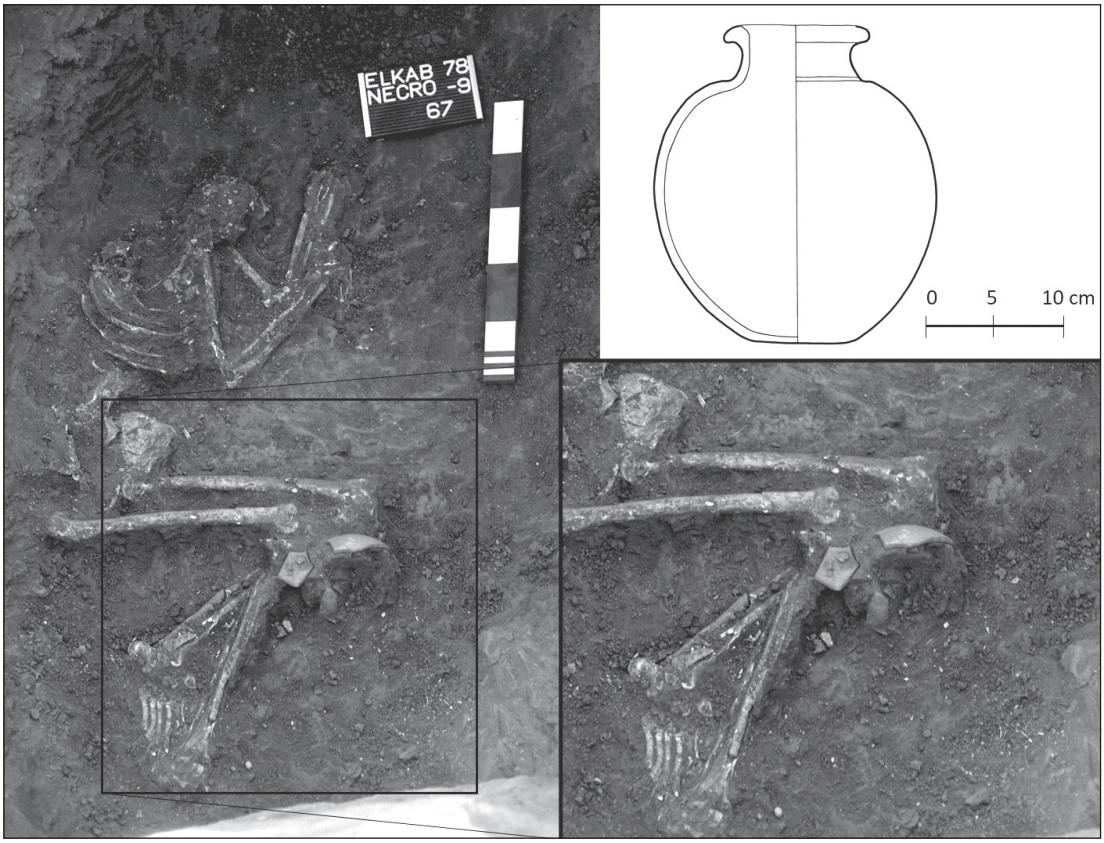

Fig. 4
Lower burial in tomb 77, Elkab (originally numbered 67) (left). Hypothetical reconstruction of vessel M252.1 (upper right). Detail of the incomplete wares in situ by the knees of the deceased, with broken and incomplete vessel M252.1 accompanied by the sherds of M252.2 and M252.3 (lower right)
© Belgian Archaeological Mission to Elkab.

pot and the deceased's social persona, as it is an exceptional pot for an exceptional individual.[31] Furthermore, tomb 77 contained the remains of two adults buried, one on top of the other, accompanied by a total of seven vessels and a pierced shell.[32] Both individuals were buried at the same time. The upper skeleton was accompanied by an intensely used vessel that was missing fragments of the rim, as if a sherd had been chipped off,[33] as well as three other jars. On the other hand, the lower burial presented fragments of an intentionally broken marl ware bottle and sherds of two other vessels (M252.1-3) next to the knees (**Fig. 4**). None of these wares was found complete. More interestingly, the smashing of pottery was paralleled with the fragmentary skull of the body that they accompanied, the upper part of which had been intentionally removed upon burial. This burial partially resonates with Badarian tomb 3107 from Matmar, where an adult with a right broken and healed shorter humerus was again given a pot "crushed to pieces" over the head and a well-preserved bone needle.[34] As a final example, grave 1435 at Armant, a double burial of a very young child and an adult, contained only a well-preserved black-topped pot next to a cluster of sherds (**Fig. 5**).[35] Considering the previous

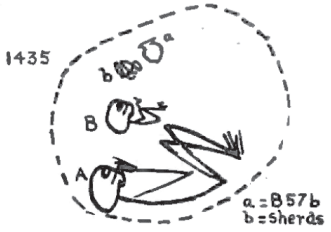

Fig. 5
Tomb 1435 from Armant, holding the remains of an adult and a child with head towards south west, accompanied by a black-topped vessel and a cluster of sherds. Courtesy of the Egypt Exploration Society.

31. Hendrickx 2020: 175-76. However, for Stan Hendrickx (pers. comm.), the evidence for the deliberate breakage of this pot is not conclusive: the vessel was badly used, and the spout might have disappeared before breakage. Had it been intentionally smashed, that "must have happened before the sherds were deposited in the tomb.
32. Hendrickx 1994:191, 2020.
33. See Hendrickx (2020: fig. 6).
34. Brunton 1948: 9.
35. Mond & Myers 1937: 27.

examples and the disposition of grave goods, one is to think a possible mimesis between the pots and the buried individuals.

Circulation and deposition of sherds

While the intentional breakage of wares in tombs seems to be only occasionally present in the funerary record, the introduction of fragments of pottery is a more common feature in Predynastic tombs. Burial 87 from el-Gerzeh had half of a Canaanite imported vessel as a unique offering.[36] Similarly, grave 7019 from Naga-ed-Dêr only included a complete B-ware jar accompanied by half R-ware dish as grave goods.[37] From Umm el-Qa'ab, grave U-129 contained the remains of an adult with a black-topped pot in front of the deceased, while a sherd of a similar vessel was placed at his back.[38] As some scholars have noted, the funerary deposition of sherds appears occasionally in graves with no or very few grave goods, which has lead archaeologists to believe that these tombs belong to people of low status.[39] This is perhaps also the case of Elkab tomb 39, where an adult male was buried only with a rough atypical sherd.[40] The fact that the corpse does not follow the typical SE orientation points perhaps to a marginal social position. However, the two bodies buried in the nearby tomb 18 were provided with seven vessels (two of them heavily used and missing the rim), as well as a sherd of a L31a storage vessel.[41] Moreover, in the cemetery of Kafr Hassan Dawood potsherds were found with most burials, regardless of the type of grave, and they were usually placed near the pelvis or at the face.[42] Consequently, the fact that sherds also appear in better-provided undisturbed tombs perhaps suggests that there is much more to these phenomena than economic position. It is typically argued that the burial of sherds allowed a funeral with "as little costs as possible".[43] However, there is no economic difference between offering a whole pot into a grave or just a potsherd, at least if the sherd had been created through deliberate ware destruction: both actions imply the complete disablement of the vessel.[44] Thus, economic rationalities cannot totally account for the introduction of sherds in a funerary context. There is an unacknowledged qualitative difference between burying a whole pot and just a sherd of the same.

The careful ritual deposition and perhaps magic significance in some cases is a good place to start. Among the six wares from Elkab burial 9, one was a piece of a broken flat-based bowl found under one hand.[45] Similarly, in Helwan Operation 4, tombs 142, 151 and 200 included small rim sherds of bread moulds laying under the right hand, very close to the deceased's mouth, perhaps as a *pars pro toto* for a whole food offering.[46] The double burial from grave 11 in Adaïma contained, among other grave goods, 4 complete vases.[47] At the top of one,

36. Stevenson 2009: 189.

37. Lythgoe 1965: 11-13, figs. 5d-g.

38. Hartmann 2016b: 12.

39. Friedman 2002; Junge 2019, cf. Stevenson 2009: 190-91.

40. Hendrickx 1994: 170.

41. Hendrickx 1994: 163.

42. Interestingly, the number of sherds buried per grave varies in Kafr Hassan Dawood: tomb 1035 had four potsherds; meanwhile, tomb 958 contained only a coarse-ware potsherd interred as sole grave good (Hassan et al. 2003:42-43).

43. Junge 2019: 110.

44. We must recognise, however, the likelihood that some sherds were not created at the moment of the funeral or during mortuary rituals through intentional objectual violence but were recycled materials from previous contexts and activities (see **Fig. 6**). For some possible cases of extraction of sherds during the funeral, see above tombs 77 and 85 in Elkab, and below Helwan tomb Op4/148.

45. Hendrickx 1994: 159, pl. XXXIII.

46. Junge 2019: 110.

47. Crubézy et al. 2002, 143-49.

which was completely filled with sand, a carefully positioned sherd was found next to a piece of coal, pointing again to a (perhaps magic) ritual whose significance is not known. The deposition of sherds during the filling of the grave might suggest similar purposes. In Elkab, tomb 42 presented atypical sherds scattered in the filling while grave 93 included some pierced shells and sherds within the filling.[48] In Adaïma, graves 216, 68 and 73 presented akin deposits in the filling including three sherds, three sherds and a flint, and a sherd with a shell, respectively.[49] In some of these cases, the sherds could have been used by the diggers of the tomb or by plunderers during looting,[50] while in other instances the fragments might have entered the filling by post-depositional processes related with the later occupation and use of cemeteries.[51] Nevertheless, it is difficult to deny a more special significance in some of these examples. This might be the case of Matmar 102.[52] Its filling contained multiple fragments of pottery that interestingly paralleled 8 stone vessels from the grave floor which "had been first broken and then thrown in". Regarding the similarities between the breakage of pottery and stone vessels in the tomb, Brunton argued that "perhaps the pottery had also been intentionally broken and thrown in when the grave was filled".[53] Thus, while it cannot be argued that all isolated sherds that were introduced in Predynastic graves emerged from the intentional destruction of pots, we should acknowledge the possibility that some of them did.

I want to finish this section with the interesting case of Adaïma grave 31, an adolescent that received no grave goods aside from a sherd, used as a headrest for the skull of the deceased.[54] What makes this tomb exceptional is that this sherd fits back with another fragment found between graves 14 and 15, more than 20m apart from grave 31. As a tentative reconstruction of the events, a pot was perhaps broken during funerary rites (or elsewhere), and one sherd was offered to tomb 31 upon burial. The fate of the other is more difficult to understand; it might have been buried simultaneously in another tomb that was later plundered or perhaps it was kept by a mourner and deposited later as an offering to an ancestor or another deceased individual.[55] Whatever the intention, we are observing how different integer entities that were probably distributed, circulated and later deposited emerged from the violence inflicted on pots. Tomb Op4/148 from Helwan included 13 beer jars holding ashes, bones, plant remains and small burnt sherds, potentially the remains of a funerary meal;[56] however, no whole vessel could be reconstructed with the available sherds. Some of the cases mentioned above, such as the shattered ware in Naga-ed-Dêr 7474 or the broken pots by the knees of the lower skeleton in Elkab 77, were also incomplete, perhaps implying that some sherds had been taken, and circulated and deposited elsewhere. This might also be the case for grave 2727 from Matmar, which held a "rough *worn* sherd lying under the head".[57]

48. Hendrickx 1994: 172-73, 200-201.
49. Crubézy et al. 2002: 161-64, 173-74, 313-15.
50. Buchez 1998: 86; Junge 2019: 107.
51. A good example would be Umm el-Qa'ab (Hartmann 2016a: 52-53)
52. Brunton 1948:23-24.
53. Brunton 1948: 24. He also notes, however, that 6 of the sherds had been used as scrappers. Nevertheless, this does not account for the rest of the fragments of pots and vessels found in the grave.
54. Crubézy et al. 2002, 91-92.
55. The position of this second sherd could be affected, however, by the strolling of mourners in funerary processions and other cultic rituals, as noted in Umm el-Qa'ab (Hartmann 2016a: 52-53).
56. Junge 2019:116-17. He also mentions a similar example coming from Old Kingdom tombs in West Saqqara.
57. Brunton 1948: 14, emphasis added.

Discussing objectual violence

Above I have briefly sketched the possible biographical pathways of Predynastic pots after their violent destruction: from their shattering to their deposition. **Fig. 6** summarises these possible routes in a simplified form through mortuary and domestic spaces, although this article has focused primarily on the destruction, circulation and deposition as encountered in the funerary record.[58] We can now discuss these archaeological cases from a perspective of objectual violence: vehement emotive acts of simultaneous destruction and creation of integer entities, questioning the boundaries of the prehistoric self.

Although some aspects of the violent killing of material culture in Egypt might be related with magic rituals transforming objects and people in rites of passage between life and death, here I would like to focus on the mnemonic, emotional and personal aspects of these actions. I will understand the breakage and distribution of pots and sherds as devices for connecting contexts, as emotional prompters and as mnemonic reminders of social relationships in mortuary rites.[59] The idea that funerary rituals might not be exclusively related with depicting statuses and identities of the deceased,[60] but with practices of mourners to cope with the farewell of a member of the community and renegotiate social relationships is gaining attention in recent publications.[61]

The violent destruction of pottery was not the annihilation of entities. Rather, it was the creation of new powerful objects embedded with memories and emotions.[62] Through

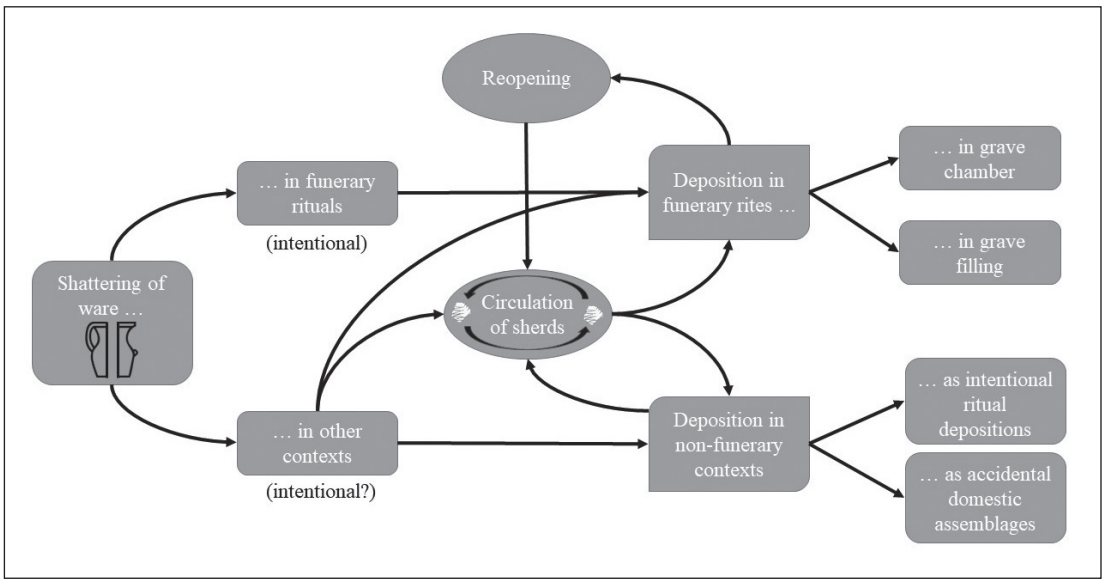

Fig. 6 Simplified diagram of the possible routes of fragments of pottery after its (un)intentional breakage, including its circulation and later deposition, as seen in Predynastic cases.

58. For the sake of simplicity, I have depicted objectual violence as a somehow ordered unilineal process. However, we must understand that the pathways of fragmentation and circulation of pottery might have been more enmeshed than here acknowledged. For instance, as many tombs were reopened and plundered in antiquity, we must ask whether objects and fragments of grave goods were re-introduced into social circulation, as was the case in Dynastic Egypt (Näser 2013). See also Blanco-González (2016: 63).

59. Stevenson 2009: 189-90; Chapman & Gaydarska 2007.

60. For a brief review and criticism of quantitative models that tend to focus on socio-economic "unidimensional" status through funerary data, see Stevenson (2009:178-182) and Barba (2020:1-2).

61. For examples from Predynastic and Early Dynastic Egypt and Prehistoric Near East see, among many, Barba (2020); Croucher (2018); Kuch (2018); Stevenson (2009); Wengrow & Baines (2004).

62. The concept of destruction as creation or transformation is well attested for Early Dynastic Egypt. As we see in the labels of king Hor-Aha, the sacrifice of victims was connected with the fashioning of objects, a powerful rite necessary to activate them (Morris 2014: 65-68).

the exertion of violence on vessels, sherds were created to be circulated or deposited in tombs. Olivier Allard's ethnography on the Warao, from the Orinoco Delta, may provide us with some clues regarding objectual violence in the Predynastic period.[63] Allard warns us that the Western understanding of grief as an externally imposed emotion to be overcome through "five stages" might not be applicable cross-culturally. The Warao, for instance, pursue sorrow intentionally through evocations mediated by material culture: different objects such as photographs of the corpse of the deceased are kept, well-cared and actively used to generate intense grief, evoke sorrow and avoid a breakage with the dead. This remembering is, in addition, a technology of emotions that endorsed an ethic of conviviality and care between people, the materialisation and remembering of a social relationship.

In a similar fashion to the Warao, I argue that the funerary rituals from Predynastic Egypt, in this case the objectual violence upon ware, were not actions to cut ties with the deceased, but to foster emotions and memories of them that will be present during daily life. As I propose below, the shattering of vessels in ritual mortuary contexts was a powerful and intense action creating new entities, sherds, that embodied memories, social relationships, and traits of the deceased. Like Warao pictures, Predynastic sherds might have functioned as embodied relics of the deceased.

On the one hand, we mentioned above how some of the broken vessels in funerary rituals were not complete, perhaps implying that some fragments were kept by the mourners; or how some graves included only one sherd, prompting the question of where the rest of the ware lies. Working with Allard's ethnography, this interpretation questions the common assumption that funerary objects must be "defused", either by destroying and/or burying them, to break ties with the deceased and avoid "death pollution". Conversely, these missing fragments could have been used as *memorabilia*: they were circulated, deposited and used daily to cite the deceased, ancestors, foster grief and sorrow, and to recall social relationships in various contexts.[64] Although the data available is scant due to the little attention paid to ware fragments, the already mentioned sherd from tomb 2727 at Matmar was, for instance, badly worn, suggesting intensive post-breakage circulation. The intentional shattering of pots acted as vehement emotional acts inscribing memories, social identities and relations into the newly created fragments. Unfortunately, it is not always clear how and where the pots had been broken.[65] They could have been shattered in the same grave, in special areas of the cemetery, during the procession towards the necropolis or in domestic contexts, giving the sherds a spatial dimension.[66] Thus, sherds emerging from objectual violence could connect people, spaces, and temporalities. The breakage, circulation and deposition of sherds could map memories, identities, and social links in a dynamic Predynastic landscape.

On the other hand, we have seen above that some broken pots had clear characteristics that linked them with the deceased. The identification of pottery and humans

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63. Allard 2018.

64. The idea that objects from the deceased or involved in funerary rituals are socially rejected and have to be destroyed or buried because their "pollutant" character is widespread in archaeology and ethnography (Grinsell 1961; Politis 1894). Although that could be the case in some societies, this interpretation runs the risk of projecting and naturalising Western aversions to death to prehistory. See for instance Blanco-Gonzalez (2016: 63) on the recirculation of bones and ceramics from funerary contexts in Prehistoric Iberia.

65. Pots could have been broken elsewhere, and only deposited and rearranged in the grave. For instance, tomb 85 in Elkab might indicate a ritual breakage in funerary rites outside the grave, with a later deposition of the fragmented vessel in the tomb during burial. See also Kuch (2018).

66. See Politis (1894) for a Greek example. Although this article focuses on intentional breakage, we must consider the possibility of sherds being created through non-deliberate ware fragmentation (i.e., recycling fragments from other contexts and activities). See **Fig. 6**.

is hardly a novelty in Predynastic research. The cases of Adaïma S15 and S35, are well-known examples: two tombs housing the remains of two adults with hunchback deformities, specifically Pott's disease, that were accompanied by a deformed vessel that was modified before firing.[67] Similarly, in tomb 213-219 from HK43, a pot could have embodied the identities of the child and adult buried there through the differential depiction of ostriches.[68] The Predynastic record provides thus reliable cases of identification between humans and pots, although this mimesis between both entities is undertaken at different levels and through different mechanisms. In the case of Elkab tomb 77, Hendrickx rightly highlighted that the destruction of the vessel and the removal of the skull relates to an image of the deceased during the *funerary* ritual, rather than the *living* images of the deceased expressed in the Adaïma cases.[69] Nevertheless, we should not understand these examples as mere symbolic identifications, but as an ontological relation between humans and pots: through material affordances, they embody and construct the relations and identities which these materials carry.[70] Thus, as might be hinted by the incomplete broken pots of Helwan tomb Op4/148 or Elkab grave 77, the sherds possibly kept by the mourners after the ritual shattering could have embodied the identity of the deceased, facilitating the remembrance of social identities and relations explained above. One problem for the archaeologist is, however, that the identification between material culture and humans might be obvious for an *emic* participant, but not necessarily to the *etic* observer.[71] Unfortunately, the cases that archaeologists can securely recognise might be only those self-evident ones based on material mimesis, such as the deformed pottery from Adaïma, while other more complex ontological identifications will remain unnoticed (see Armant 1435: fig. 5).

Thus, objectual violence has led us to question our assumptions and projections of Western essentialisms into prehistoric societies. The Predynastic body might have been less individualistic, and more divisible and relational than previously acknowledged, with pots being material extensions of the human body and its surfaces.[72] In some cases, these mimetic pots were buried with the deceased, with no other ritual required. However, some other instances required the breakage of these ontological vessels and later redistribution of their sherds in complex and dynamic poetics of sorrow and material remembrance.

Future perspectives on Predynastic objectual violence

In this article, I have explored a non-anthropocentric definition of violence, and analysed accordingly some cases of deliberate breakage of pottery from the funerary record of Predynastic Egypt. Through the concept of objectual violence, or vehement rituals of poetic destruction and creation of

67. Crubézy et al. 2002: 54-55, 99-103.

68. Hendrickx 2002.

69. Hendrickx 2020: 176.

70. See González-Ruibal et al. (2011). Crubézy (2001) considers the identification of humans and pots in Adaïma as an evolutionary cognitive development, a more abstract symbolic capacity prior to the emergence of writing. However, this approach forgets the material affordances of clay and pottery. Ethnographic research in West Africa show how the metaphor of pots as humans is an "old intuition", furthermore being potting a common model to understand human development (Barley 1994: 85-100). Rather than a cognitive symbolic imposition of a human psyche, I argue that this identification relies on the material and bodily qualities of pottery and of its production. See also Warnier (2006) on the body as a "human container".

71. Barley (1994) provides a wide variety of parallelisms between humans and pottery from the African context: while some are self-evident for both the group and the foreign observer, others could be unappreciable for the archaeologist. See as well the ontological identification between arrows and humans in the Awá group (González-Ruibal et al. 2011).

72. Warnier 2006.

material culture that foster discussions on the limits of the human body, I understood the breakage, circulation and deposition of sherds as mnemonic and emotional devices to recall identities and foster sorrow.

However, the intention of this text was not to argue that the whole phenomenon of objectual violence can be reduced to the fostering of grief and memories. As briefly sketched at the beginning and throughout the article, the destruction of objects is a highly complex and varied topic that might have embodied different meanings and purposes. There will be other, sometimes overlapping, plausible explanations for the intentional breakage of material culture in Egypt that should be further studied. For instance, Grinsell proposed a series of cross-cultural utilitarian and symbolic-religious reasons for the deliberate destruction of material culture in funerals.[73] Among the former he included reducing the risk of tomb robbing of valuable objects, preventing quarrels regarding inheritance, and allowing objects to fit in the grave. Meanwhile, objects could be destroyed as well to release the spirit of an object, to avoid the polluting nature of funerary ritual objects, to discard certain personal possessions closely tied to the deceased, or to symbolise the destruction of the deceased's enemies. Certain causes of death might have required specific funerary rites, such as breakage of objects, while funerals could have also been prominent scenes for the practice of magic, sorcery, or apotropaic rituals to scare the dead through objectual violence. Furthermore, some social identities and personae might have been deemed more adequate than others to receive these fragmenting rituals. Perhaps an intensive quantitative analysis will find specific patterns associated with sex and age categories or social status (such as poverty and marginality). Time and space are also fundamental dimensions in Predynastic cemeteries.[74] We have neither explored the chronological development and the absolute and relative frequency of these practices, nor their spatial distribution within the necropolis.

Finally, some innovative methodologies could create exciting new data on the fragmentation, circulation, and deposition of pottery. There is a great need for experimental archaeology on ware breakage to better understand the patterns of pottery destruction present in the archaeological record. Especially if we consider that pots killed in different ways might have held different meanings as their material results of these practices differed. Similarly, recent research in the Roman Gaul has developed a pertinent methodology for the excavation and study of intentional breakage of pottery during funerary rites that could prove relevant in other archaeological contexts.[75] On the other hand, tomb 31 from Adaïma has opened the exciting possibility of tracing back the biographical histories of sherds being fashioned, circulated and later deposited in graves, thus connecting people, times and spaces. The refitting of pottery vessels has revolved around sherds that could be physically matched and adjoined. However, cutting-edge studies on petrographic analysis of thin sections of sherds that do not fit together physically have proved strong in recognising distant fragments emerging from a same ware.[76] These results reveal promising ways to understand the predepositional lives, circulation, and circumstances of the deposition of sherds after the breakage of the original pottery.

73. Grinsell 1961: 476-78.
74. Barba 2020: 9; Stevenson 2009:182-185.
75. Bonnet in press a & b.
76. Blanco-González et al. 2014; Blanco-González 2016.

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