Feminist Archaeology: A Review of George A. Reisner's Funerary Excavations in Meroe.

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Title: **Feminist Archaeology: A Review of George A. Reisner's Funerary Excavations in Meroe**

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To my parents, who had always supported me in pursuing my dreams,
even when those dreams have been fulfilled away from them. Thank you for setting me free.

A mis padres, quienes siempre me han animado a seguir mis sueños,
aunque esos sueños me hayan llevado lejos de ellos. Gracias por hacerme tan libre.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

> 'A feminine text (…) is volcanic; as it is written, it brings about an upheaval of the old property crust, carrier of masculine investments; there is no other way … it is in order to shatter the framework of institutions, to blow up the law, to break up *the truth*. with laughter?' (Cixous, 2001, p.1532).

In this thesis, I investigate the impact of gender and feminist approaches in archaeology, focusing on the specific application in Ancient Nubian archaeology. The case study is based on a re-evaluation of Reisner's excavations in the South and West Cemeteries of Meroe. It provides a comprehensive analysis of his findings and the associated challenges and issues that feminist methodology encounters when applying it. The main focus is on the burial analysis, objects recorded in the graves, and his potential misinterpretations. Additionally, the case study explores the impact of Reisner's excavations on the interpretation of ancient Kush and how a better gender-inclusive archaeological approach can influence our understanding of this historical context.

The topic's scope includes a general examination of the historical context and theoretical framework of gender and feminist approaches in archaeology, with a focus on challenging biased assumptions and striving for a more inclusive and diverse interpretation of the Nubian society.

The literature used in this thesis includes many articles and books that investigate the development and impact of feminist and gender archaeological theories, as well as articles that focus on the limitations implied in traditional theories due to the patriarchal dominance within the field. The main book used is *Royal Cemeteries of Kush* (1957) by Dows Dunham, published after Reisner had passed away. This book is a comprehensive compilation of archaeological records of the materials found during the campaign of the Western and Southern Cemeteries directed by Reisner. The materials and comments in the excavation records have been studied in depth to resolve errors in his excavations and potential burials that need to be reassessed. Additionally, other books and articles about Reisner have been extensively used to gain a more profound understanding of him and his excavations. Original content from Reisner or other contemporary authors has also been consulted to understand their perspectives and potential biases.

The research aims/objectives include exploring the impact of gender and feminist approaches on the interpretation of archaeological findings, particularly in the context of George Andrew

Reisner's excavations in the Southern and Western Cemeteries of Meroe. Archaeologists such as Reisner, whose studies were biased by colonialist and racist ideas, have heavily influenced the field of Nubian archaeology. Although modern archaeological theories are beginning to dominate Nubian research, there is still much reevaluation to be done.

A more inclusive methodology is now being used in Nubian archaeology, and this thesis aims to contribute to this movement towards inclusivity and a fairer understanding of the past. It stresses the importance of questioning biased assumptions and advocating for a more diverse and fair understanding of history. It also acknowledges the possible problems caused by misinterpretations in past archaeological discoveries and, ultimately, underscores the essential need for research on excavations conducted in the 19th century with a modern perspective and methodology.

The content and methodology presented in the thesis can be used as a model or reference point in various archaeological settings. It serves as an example of the need to reevaluate and research previous excavations to arrive at new and improved conclusions. The thesis demonstrates the importance of researching again our understanding of historical contexts, particularly in relation to gender, families, and societal relationships, always through a more gender-inclusive archaeological approach.

Thus, the aims and goals of this thesis are summarised in the main research questions: How have gender and feminist approaches revolutionised the field of archaeology, particularly in the study of Nubia, and challenged the long-held assumptions and biases evident in George A. Reisner's excavations?

Additionally, the other subquestions are:

- What misinterpretations or errors occurred during George A. Reisner's excavations and subsequent analysis?
- What are the challenges and issues encountered when applying gender archaeology, particularly in the study of material culture and funerary spaces in Nubia?

First, I give a general overview of feminist archaeology, including the historiography and theoretical frameworks of the feminist perspective, with an explanation of materials culture and funerary spaces through a gender lens. In Chapter 3, I explain the historical context of the Kingdom of Kush, mainly the Napatan and the Meroitic phase, to be able to introduce the gender perspective in the case of Nubian archaeology. Then, in Chapter 4, I finally delve into the study of the excavations of George Andrew Reisner. First, I give a brief but complete

bibliography that gives the context necessary to understand his point of view and errors. Second, I explain his excavations in both South and West cemeteries, and finally, I analyse the different problems and mistakes that I could find in these records. In this part, I study the burials he excavated, individually and collectively, focusing on objects and sex identifications. In addition, I focus on other miscellaneous funerary interpretations and his racist and colonial thoughts.

The methodology used includes a comprehensive analysis of Reisner's findings, an examination of burial analysis, objects recorded in the graves and how they were misinterpreted, and an exploration of the impact of gender-inclusive archaeological approaches on the understanding of historical contexts, mainly focusing on the Nubian context during the Meroitic phase.

Chapter 2: Gender in Archaeology and Feminist Approaches

‘Man is defined as a human being and woman as a female –
whenever she behaves as a human being, she is said
to imitate the male’ (Beauvoir, 1952, p. 47).

Archaeology and its various approaches evolve over time to align with archaeologists' changing perceptions and new priorities. These theories emerge in response to new research needs and have evolved over time to try to encompass all individuals, aspects, and contexts in the archaeologist's narrative. The emergence of feminism and gender studies in archaeology began as a critique of male-dominated assumptions in the discipline and as a need for women in archaeology to be heard and to uncover histories that had been ignored.

Women have been negatively affected in the practical and job sphere as archaeologists and in how archaeological knowledge is projected in academia (Brami et al.,2023). This has led to a gender bias in archaeology. Women are almost non-existent in this field, and men are often depicted as unrealistic, strong, and family providers. This perpetuates contemporary stereotypes in the science of archaeology (Conkey & Spector, 1983, pp. 12-18). It was in this context that a gender perspective began to emerge in archaeology, aiming to challenge traditional concepts and reevaluate the assumed roles of men and women in every society.

So, this new archaeological theory began to emerge as part of women's need to tell the other side of the story that had been neglected and to reconstruct a fairer and more inclusive archaeology. Over time, this theory has evolved, and the focus of women researchers has changed, although there is still a long way to go. In this chapter, I will explain the beginning and its evolution, as well as some basic concepts to understand the importance of this perspective and, of course, the chapters that follow.

Gender and Sex

Pamela Geller (2017: p.4) identifies the sex and gender system as an arrangement that involves the biological characteristics of humans and their societal context: ‘[The latter] invokes a connection between bodies and sex/gender systems that may be cross-cultural but acquires nuance—bizarreness when viewed by an outsider—in a given social location and historical moment’ (Geller, 2017, p.4).

Biologically, females typically have two X chromosomes (XX), and males have one X and one Y chromosome (XY), determining their sex. However, it is important to understand that there are variations within these categories. These differences may involve variances in sex

chromosomes, hormones, or physical characteristics that do not neatly fit into male or female categories. These alterations can be small, but they are crucial when examining ancient remains, as they can vary and may be easily misinterpreted. (Matic, 2024, p.344).

Regarding gender, the term was first introduced in the late 1950s by John Money, a psychiatrist at Johns Hopkins University. He used the terms gender and gender role to describe the social and cultural aspects of the sexes. According to Money, gender is an identity shaped by external factors such as society, individual perception, and group perception. He emphasised that behaviour plays a crucial role in constructing an individual's gender and that gender identity is learned rather than innate. Even though some of his ideas have been controversial, others have significantly impacted his field and beyond (Diaz-Andreu García, 2014, p.25). With time and through discussions, the definition of gender has been present in Academia for many years, and feminists have been trying since 1970 to determine its meaning and delimit it. Today, there is a consensus about it, and it is understood as a human aspect acquired through socialisation (Geller, 2017, p.4).

Gender is a complex and multifaceted concept that is closely tied to societal norms and expectations. Although society exerts a significant influence on gender, it does not always align with its criteria, and it can evolve with time and within cultures or societies. Gender, when it does not conform to the accepted social framework, can cause confusion to others in our society; there are people whose gender identity does not match their biological sex. Cisgender refers to those whose biological sex corresponds with their gender identity, while transgender refers to those whose biological sex does not align with their gender identity.

Gender is a complex concept that archaeologists and researchers must interpret within its social implications, as it varies greatly over time and between places. Indeed, this is one of the most vital points about this theoretical framework: ‘It is in this very area of cultural diversity and changes through time that archaeology might make a most important contribution to the study of gender, and vice versa’ (Conkey & Spector, 1984, p. 16). Feminist archaeologists try to understand these social implications, and feminist and queer analysis are used to uncover those who were outside the standard (Geller, 2017, p.5)

General Historiography of Gender Archaeology

Marie Louise Stig Sørensen (2013, p. 398) describes the evolution of feminist and gender studies in archaeology in three main waves. The earliest feminist approaches in the field can be traced back to the 1960s, during the Second Wave.

During the First Wave of Anglo-Saxon feminism in the 1920s, the focus was on legal barriers to equality such as women's suffrage and property rights. This and this significant historical moment marked the beginning of the feminist movement and the first approaches in archaeology. After the First Wave, subsequent waves of feminism emerged. The Second Wave, which occurred around the 1970s, marked a period of increased activism and political engagement, the focus shifted to unofficial inequality, including issues related to sexuality, family, work, and abortion rights. These years, around the late 1970s and 1980s, mark the beginning of what can be categorised as Gender Archaeology (Stig Sørensen, 2013, p. 398).

The Second Wave of feminism in archaeology can be first seen in Scandinavian countries, particularly Norway. In 1979, female archaeologists in Norway organised a conference titled 'Were they all men' (Matic, 2024, p. 343), but the papers presented were not published until 1987. A few years later, in 1985, the first feminist archaeology journal was created.: 'KAN: kvinner i arkeologi i Norge' ('KAN : Women in Archaeology in Norway').

Although feminist archaeology existed in Norway in the late 1970s, the introduction of feminism in archaeology varied from country to country. It was initially concentrated in Anglo-American, Scandinavian and Australian universities but has, over time, gained ground in Europe, Latin America and other regions (Engelstad, 2015, p. 764). In this aspect, it has to be mentioned that even if gender archaeology started to be part of the academic theoretical framework, it does not mean it was present in all its areas. That is to say, there are some disciplines in which it did not develop equally. For example, in the Scandinavian region, gender archaeology has had much more presence in the Iron Age than in any other era.

The focal point of this theory has evolved greatly since it started. During the First and Second Waves, gender archaeology focused on critiquing biological determinism, androcentrism, and the absence of women in both the field and studies. Around the 1990s, other aspects started to be part of the focus of feminist approaches in the archaeological field: men and masculinity, as well as queer theories. Men and their role in past societies were taken for granted; they hunted, fought, and kept their families safe. This image was combined with masculinity, and it was a static tale in history. So, in this way, a critique of the male stereotypes started to emerge in the context of feminist and gender archaeology, and feminists wanted to go further and explore how these assumptions had conditioned archaeological evidence (Engelstad, 2015, p. 766). Lastly, as the discipline changed and the research expanded, new theories emerged, shifting the focus to aspects such as sexuality in ancient societies and others that had never been explored before.Nowadays, this discipline encompasses a great variety of approaches and

theories. Androcentrism, gender roles, the absence of women and non-binary people, as well as the body, sex, and sexuality, are still present (Matic, 2024, p. 343).

According to Fries and Gutsmiedl-Schümann (2020, p.1), the integration of feminist theories in archaeology has been comparatively slower than in other disciplines such as history or anthropology. This observation highlights a long-standing concern that archaeology, despite its crucial role in studying the human past, has not received enough attention on issues relating to gender and sexuality. It is unfortunate that even today, many scholars refuse to agree on its importance, which makes it difficult to address all gendered aspects of the archaeological record.

Gender Archaeology vs Feminist Archaeology

Gender and feminist (or gendered in some authors' articles) archaeology aims to understand better the roles of men, women, and other genders within their societies, as well as their relationships with each other. Both feminism and gender archaeology try to uncover different aspects of social life, which have been considered the domain of men throughout history and analyse both the power and social dynamics to explain which gender roles emerge. The basic understanding of both theories is that gender is a social construct that varies and changes depending on the context. Notwithstanding, the similarities shared by feminist and gender archaeology have led to the wrong belief that they are interchangeable concepts. However, they are two very different subfields within archaeology.

Gender is one of the many spheres that must be analysed when interpreting objects and contexts (Spencer-Wood, 1997, p. 29); thus, gender archaeology arose. However, its aim is not to focus its research only on women but to study the interactions and evolution of both genders (Spencer-Wood, 2007, p. 29). Despite originating during the feminist movement, not all gender archaeology aligns with feminist concepts, theories, methods, or frameworks (Gilchrist, 1999, p. 15). In contrast, feminist archaeology is closely tied to gender theory and political thought, unlike gender archaeology, which tries to escape from it.

It is essential to point out that there is not only one feminism, but we speak of feminism in plural since there are many different types and perspectives. Since feminism is a mixture of many movements, it inevitably affects many fields. Feminist archaeology is a multidisciplinary branch, making it challenging to define concretely, according to Jana Esther Fries and Doris Gutsmiedl-Schümann (2020, p. 1). It depends on the country, the person, the period being studied, and the moment it is being investigated... There are many variables in its study.

> ‘(…) For many archaeologists, the connection with feminist perspectives has frayed in recent years. Their studies of gender articulate dated ideas about women and epistemological frames that highlight duality and universality. Examinations of labour divisions typify shortcomings. To advance gender study and archaeology, practitioners must consider several concerns about identity and differences emerging from third-wave feminism. Gender is envisioned as an intersection (…) To this end, resistance to feminism must fade.’ (Geller, 2009, p.65).

Archaeology is a highly gendered practice, and feminist archaeology's focus varies widely. Feminist archaeologists not only spend our time and research on analysing findings and fieldwork, but their research areas also go beyond that: heritage management, museums, community engagement, and how archaeology is presented to the public. The feminist perspective is necessary and can be applied in many different ways.

Simply put, gender archaeology, as described by Maria Cruz Berrocal (2009, p. 26), aims to remain impartial towards the political implications, which feminist archaeology actively seeks to promote. However, both approaches share the same fundamental goal: to uncover perspectives that have been overlooked in patriarchal and androcentric narratives.

Theoretical Frameworks and Possibilities of Gender in Archaeology

The field of gendered archaeology is a constantly evolving and dynamic area of study that adapts to various theoretical frameworks and brings new insights, theories, and changes that expand the direction of archaeology. However, gendered archaeology faces issues and problems when applying its theoretical frameworks. Before applying these, it is essential to examine the fundamental concepts and challenges they employ to understand how they are used. This includes analysing the complexities of gender as a socially constructed identity, the difficulties of interpreting gender in archaeological materials, and the need for reflexivity and critical engagement with the theoretical frameworks themselves.

Challenges and Issues when Applying Feminist Archaeology

When applying gender theory frameworks in archaeology, it is essential to acknowledge and confront the substantial challenges encountered when examining an archaeological site and comprehending its gender-specific elements.

First, one of the main challenges when applying a gender perspective to an archaeological study is recognising that there are more than just two genders. It is essential to acknowledge that non-binary genders or trans people may also appear in an archaeological context (Turek, 2016,

p.353). Identifying and acknowledging a diverse range of genders can present challenges, and it is particularly crucial to be mindful of this when conducting research in order to deviate from heteronormative and patriarchal patterns.

Second, gender is a very adaptable term, and it is tightly linked to specific societies and times. It can vary greatly, being difficult to understand from one society to another. Gender is connected to culture, age, and class, among others, making it increasingly complex, as it is not a homogenous concept shared by all societies. For example, gender evolves and takes on different meanings in individuals through life, as it is something intrinsically connected to someone's identity, which, ultimately, can change both within their lifetime and throughout time. (Dempsey, 2022, p.1). For instance, the roles and activities associated with what defines a teenage boy may differ greatly from those defining an older man. In addition to this complication, gender suffers from bias in its societal context, as it is projected in a certain way in each society. Related to this, there is a significant bias created by the current Western perspective, with a constant reproduction of Western society's gender role models as if they were applicable to other societies (Díaz-Andreu, 2005b, p.15). Each culture and society has its own expectations for expressing and understanding gender. It is important to recognise that Western ideas about gender may not apply universally.

In my opinion, this can all be summarised in one main challenge that affects every discipline and aspect of society, not only archaeology: the androcentric biases. This bias is still one of the main issues that feminists try to overcome, and it has remained so since the 1960s when the first women archaeologists were able to identify them in the discipline. The androcentric views around the discipline have created a hierarchical inequity between both genders, reflected in how archaeology is interpreted. The use of androcentric paradigms in archaeology has created a distorted history, influenced by the gender roles within the patriarchal society (Díaz-Andreu, 2005ab, p. 20). The main consequence of these biases is that men are often seen as the main figures in history, while women are relegated to secondary roles, leading to their contributions being undervalued and overlooked. This, inevitably, has affected most of the studies in Academia, giving a skewed and biased historical view that does not allow us to explore the complete picture (Lozano Rubio, 2011, p. 20).

Thus, with the gender perspective in archaeology being linked to the belief that gender is a social and cultural construct and not a biological determinant, an inclusive approach was created. It applies fundamental concepts in theory and practice that can help to overcome biases and societal norms that restrict the behaviour of individuals based on their gender and outside

that heteronormative narrative. This approach enables a more comprehensive understanding of men's and women's roles in interpreting archaeological findings.

Material Culture

Marie Louise Stig Sørensen (2009, p. 257) expresses how gender in archaeology is 'deeply involved in social life', and applying this theory to material culture can be helpful to comprehend the gendered lives, which are embodied in the broad understanding of material culture: it is not just things, but traditions, social norms, dynamic process in a specific society that define behaviours of people and communities (Stig Sørensen, 2007, p. 75):

> 'Material culture plays an essential role in structuring gender ideology. It represents the material context in which gendered individuals interact, relate to each other and negotiate their social position. Objects provide meanings inserted into a net of identities linked together by codes. Yet, human actions entail decisions on how to use the rules and how the messages they carry are understood (…). The capability of material culture, not only to serve as a symbol but also to have its meaning transformed, seems worth exploring. This may reveal how gender relations function in a social group and how gender roles can be challenged and potentially changed' (Díaz Andreu, 2005b: p. 22).

In this framework, more work is needed to study the objects we have considered to be women's property (such as those related to textiles). Moreover, to understand the role of material culture in social transformation, it is necessary to study the object's production and use, not only their significance (Stig Sørensen, 2009, p. 259). Indeed, material culture is the way of comprehending social identities: 'How a person dresses, adorns themselves, how they move through space, how and what they sing, all indicate to others in what gender category(ies) they belong'. (Díaz-Andreu, 2005a, p.29).

The concept of gender is not fixed and can vary based on context, individuals, and time. This means that material culture can embody gender (Stig Sørensen, 2007, p. 82). Different genders interact with material culture in distinct ways, reflecting gender norms and roles within a broader societal context. Scholars such as Margarita Díaz-Andreu (2005b, p.22) and Marie Louise Stig Sørensen (2000, p.78) have pointed out that in material culture, objects are integral to understanding gender construction and roles in society. Furthermore, studying material culture with a feminist approach gives us the opportunity to understand how people view themselves and create a more personal approach when studying ancient people through archaeology.

Funerary Spaces

Funerary remains in archaeology are of particular interest. Although everyday life can be seen in private spaces or other spheres of archaeological research, studying the burial sites of any ancient culture can provide valuable information about their values and beliefs. When examining these burials from a feminist perspective, we can gain a better understanding of how gender roles and distinctions were perceived. For instance, inconsistencies in the data from different burials can provide insights into individuals who did not conform to the ideal of the two patriarchal genders (Arnold, 2006, p.137). In addition, it must be noted that people do not bury themselves, so these mortuary spaces are intentionally created with care and detail. This characteristic intention provides us with a particularly focused reflection on gender; in these contexts, gender was both part of the discursive construction of the deceased and part of the renegotiation of social relationships that took place during these events (Sofaer & Stig Sørensen, 2013, p.528).

Identifying gender in funerary spaces is challenging. Burial goods are often used for this purpose, but this approach can be problematic as it relies on assumptions about gender roles, potentially leading to inaccurate identification. This can be especially true when the deceased had a non-traditional gender or a gender not clearly defined within their culture or society. (Matic, 2024, p. 347):

> ‘For example, our modern heteronormative society expects men not to wear makeup because it is associated with women, femininity, or those men who do not comply with gender norms. However, in ancient Egypt, wearing makeup was not gendered. Both men and women used makeup (…). Therefore, finding cosmetic containers in ancient Egyptian burials does not necessarily indicate if the buried individual was a man or a woman’ (Matic, 2024, p. 347).

Additionally, relying on burial goods can create issues when there are not enough of such goods in the grave to determine gender accurately. Furthermore, the opposite problem can also arise from too many goods from different people in the same burial space (Arnold, 2006, p. 143). Overall, the assimilation between gender and grave goods can easily mislead archaeologists into an error (Prados Torreira, 2012, p. 237). In this context, we have to remember that material goods are not the only track to identify someone’s gender; the location or how a body is positioned is also essential (Arnold, 2006, p. 138):

I strongly believe that comparing the results of the analyses of the burials and the associated goods is crucial. This comparison can help archaeologists identify patterns and determine if

certain activities or objects were linked to a specific gender. By investigating those connections between the bodily features of individuals and the objects found in their graves, archaeologists can understand how gender was constructed in the past. Therefore, gender studies not only involve studying the gender of each individual but also how gender is understood and what it implies in society. Analysing patterns in burial sites can provide valuable insights into estimating the social status and gender differences of individuals from different age groups. This can also help archaeologists better understand how gender categories evolved during a specific period in a culture or society (Sofaer & Stig Sørensen, 2013, p.528).

The concept of gender and its perception in different societies is extremely complex. Although burial sites are one of the best sources of knowledge within gender understanding, the processes necessary for a fruitful analysis are very complicated. For one, burials are understood as a social ritual involving particular objects with which the deceased may not have identified within their lifetime (Matic, 2024, p.349). In burial spaces, the gender perspective within archaeology implies the assumption that goods that are found do not always belong to the buried person while they are alive. We must not just understand the meaning of goods, but we must go further, see each case individually, and ask questions. Every study of burial spaces must be done with an individual perspective, trying to get away from all the previous modern preconceptions we intrinsically have. In addition, we must consider applying feminist theory to the past gender approaches to burials (Sofaer & Stig Sørensen, 2013, p.532).

As for transgender or non-binary people, they can also be identified in the funerary context. They are usually those graves that, even though they have the same physical characteristics as others in the environment, do not have the same objects, or there is something that does not comply with what is understood to be the gender roles of that society (Matic, 2024, p. 350). It is important to note that in certain types of burials, identifying the sex of the deceased is still crucial.

It is important to bear in mind that sometimes non-binary people are not treated differently at their death: the attributes given to them in the funeral rite can also be relatively standard and do not denote any aspect that may differ from other burials in the same context. Furthermore, a focus on gender should not overshadow the many different characteristics that influence the representation of an individual in the funerary rite. Funerary rites can also be linked to other aspects such as age, mobility, role and/or social status, and all of these characteristics may be similar with different biological sexes. (Pape & Ialongo, 2024, p.58).

Gender theory can be applied to various aspects of archaeology, such as engendered landscapes, bioarchaeology, and public spaces. Undoubtedly, feminist theory is an innovative field that allows for more nuanced analysis and brings the archaeologist closer to the individual. In addition, this helps to identify women in a unique and new position of importance compared to the one they were given in androcentric views studies. Feminist archaeology stops using men as the model and example of the ancient world and begins to open the gaze for all genders (Matic, 2024, p.349).

Archaeology, from a feminist and gender perspective, allows the study of new fields that had not been given so much importance before, leading to further research on the family, sexuality, the body, childhood, and identities. We can create a fairer archaeological perspective of women closer to the ancient world through material culture, funerary and architectural remains, or other archaeological traces. It opens the door to all that has been invisible within the academic study throughout the history of the discipline, and it brings the possibility to study genders (used in plural because its significance extends beyond just men and women). Feminist archaeology fights against the invisibility of women, as well as all the other groups that the patriarchy has systematically ignored. Moreover, men in this study must also be reviewed so their figures can be seen outside the androcentric biases, which also affect them.

Feminist archaeology is needed in the whole archaeological discipline. It brings us closer to the identities of the people of the ancient world, offering a fairer vision of the identities and lives of all the men and women who lived in antiquity.

Chapter 3: The Kingdom of Kush

‘Nubian proverb (87): Garbaan mashakka miirmun.
A sieve does not block the sun’ (Habbob, 2022, p.44)

Historical Context

This thesis's case study focuses on Nubia, the geographical site in the Nile valley between the First and Fourth Cataracts of the Nile, as shown in **Figure 1**. Nubia's domination extended for about 1,000 kilometres from Lower Nubia to Sennar (Edwards, 1998, p.175). No modern-day nation corresponds precisely to the geographical location of the Kingdom of Kush, as it is the region between the current territories of Sudan and Egypt (Ashby, 2021, p.23).

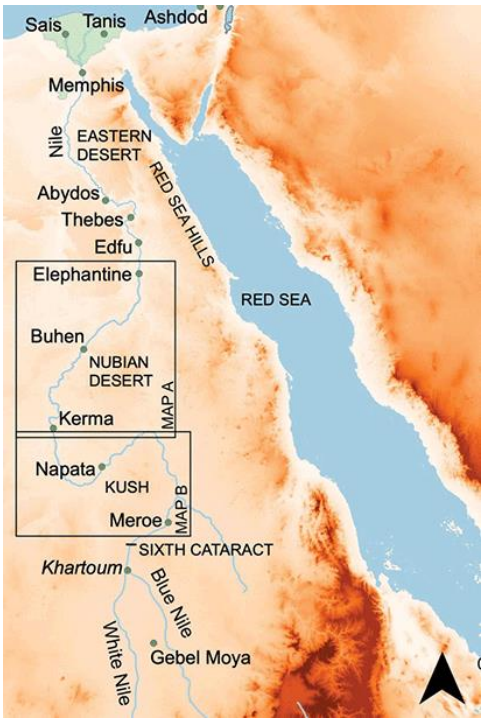

Figure 1: Map of Egypt and Sudan. The key cities of the Kingdom of Kush along the Nile River are clearly visible in this map, with the names of archaeological sites in regular type and modern places in italics. (Emberling, 2023, p.85)

This region holds great significance in prehistoric and ancient archaeology. Archaeological research has uncovered evidence of sedentary tribes that lived between the 9th and 6th millennia BC, attesting its antiquity and archaeological importance. The region, rich in natural resources, continued to be inhabited over the centuries and eventually became home to powerful states such as the Kingdom of Kush. (Caneva, 2005, p. 521-526).

The Kingdom of Kush was one of the region's earliest and most complex kingdoms to develop, and it experienced several distinct phases throughout its history. These phases are commonly categorised as the Kerma, Napata, and Meroe periods, each characterised by unique cultural, social, political, and economic developments.

Kerma Period (2500 to 1500 BC)

The Kerma period is the earliest phase of the Kingdom of Kush and is named after its capital, Kerma. This period is further divided into three subphases: Early Kerma (c. 2500–2050 BC), Middle Kerma (c. 2050–1750 BC) and Classic Kerma (c. 1750–1500 BC) (Bonnet & Gates, 2019, p. 197).

The Middle and Classic Kerma period is characterised by the emergence of Kerma as a political and economic centre with extensive trade networks with other nearby regions. It was a powerful and wealthy kingdom that often interacted with the Egyptians (Lupo, 2004, pp. 89-90). However, Kerma's downfall around 1500 BC resulted from the Egyptian conquest and its subsequent absorption into the Egyptian administration under Thutmose I's campaigns, signifying the end of its independence as a kingdom. (Bonnet, 2021, pp. 68-70).

This marked the beginning of the Napata phase, which was characterised by a resurgence in cultural and economic activity and the establishment of a new capital city at Napata. From this time onwards, in chronological terms, two phases of the Kush kingdom must be distinguished according to the most important city at the time: Napata and Meroe.

Napata period (c. 800-270 BC)

After the Egyptians abandoned Kerma for unexplained reasons, Nubia went through a period from 1069 to 800 BC that researchers have not fully understood. The political, economic, and social structure during this time is still unclear due to the absence of records. Archaeological excavations have provided some evidence, but there is still limited information available, and further analysis is needed. (Emberling, 2023, p. 99).

During the Middle Napatan phase (800-650 BC), the Kushites conquered Egypt and established what is known as the Ethiopian Dynasty or the Kushite Dynasty (Adams, 1995, p.34). Under the Napatan rulers, Kush experienced a period of great prosperity and expansion, with the kingdom's influence and dominance spreading across the Nile Valley and beyond. This era was marked by significant advances in art, architecture, and religion, as well as the flourishing of trade and commerce (Emberling, 2023, p. 98).

As far as the rulers who reigned in Napata, several monarchs ruled. Alara was the first ruler known, but there are no contemporary inscriptions about him. Alara was succeeded by his brother Kashta (755–743 BC), and he was the first to assume full titles and see himself as pharaoh and legitimate heir to the throne of Egypt. He was succeeded by his son Piankhy (743–713 BC), who became one of the most powerful pharaohs in Kush's history by taking over Memphis and, subsequently, Egypt. His successors were Shabaqo, Shabataqo (both ruled around 715 to 690 BC), Taharqo (c. 690-664) and his nephew, Tanutamani. (AlSayyad, 2022, pp.99-100).

After Piankhy conquered Memphis, the kingdom of Kush gained control over Egypt and ruled the land for several generations. However, the Assyrian empire started to gain power and

eventually dominated the territories near Egypt. The Assyrians became a dangerous force to the Kushitan rule in Pharaonic lands. Taharqo lost power in Thebes when the Assyrians, along with Libyan troops, invaded the city in 666 BC. Between 664 and 653 BC, Tanutamani attempted to regain control of Egypt for the Nubian dynasty after the Assyrians had briefly taken it over. He spearheaded military campaigns against the Assyrians, but his efforts were unsuccessful. This led to the decline of the Nubian Dynasty and the eventual conquest of Egypt by the Assyrians (Trigger, 1976, pp. 145–148).

Meroe Period (270 BC – 350 CE)

Meroe was the capital of the Kingdom of Kush from the 3rd century BC until the beginning of the 3rd century CE, and it was the final phase of the Kingdom of Kush. Geographically, Meroe is located around 470 km from the city of Napata, at the merge of the Nile and the Atbarah rivers.

The beginning of the Meroitic period is characterised by the fact that the royal cemetery of Napata was moved to Meroe: first to the Southern Royal Cemetery, Begarawiyah South ('Beg S'), and after a few decades, to the Northern Royal Cemetery, Begarawiyah North ('Beg N') (Kuckertz, 2021, p. 4). During this period, Meroe emerged as a significant centre for iron production, culture, architecture, and trade. Additionally, the Meroitic writing language was developed to replace the predominant use of Egyptian hieroglyphs from previous periods (Ashby, 2021, p.28).

The transition from the Napata period to the Meroe period did not result in any significant changes in the cultural, political, or societal landscape. During the Meroitic period, Napata remained an important city of the kingdom, even though the royal family and the courts were no longer living there and were buried in the Meroitic cemeteries. Scholars have not reached a defined conclusion to explain this transition, but there is a common belief that it was a progressive transfer of power between two different families (Bonnet & Gates, 2019, p. 177). However, there is one key difference between the two periods, which was the presence of female rulers known as the Nubian Queens or Kandakes.

During the Napatan phase, queens held significant political and religious influence and were considered important relatives of the kings. Their importance was such that some kings traced their family line back to a queen, indicating a matrilineal system, as we will further explore in this thesis. By contrast, in the Meroe phase, there were documented female queens who took the reins on multiple occasions, ruling effectively and powerfully. These female rulers were

significant in the kingdom of Kush; in fact, the period of Meroe when there was a succession of ruling queens (mid-first century BCE to mid-first century CE) is considered the Golden Age of the Kingdom of Meroe (Ashby, 2021, p.23).

Feminist Archaeology: The Case of Nubia

Similarly, just like in other areas of archaeology, the gender perspective in Ancient Nubia initially emerged from the exploration and excavation of prehistoric and protohistoric sites, as feminist archaeology has always been predominant in prehistory. In recent years, there has been a growing awareness of the importance of incorporating a gender perspective in studies related to Nubian culture and history and, of course, archaeology. In fact, the use of gender in Nubian archaeology has brought new studies and perspectives, which enriches its research and opens new doors to ancient Nubian society. A perfect example is the article *Gender as Frame of War in Ancient Nubia* written by Uroš Matić (2023), which shows how diverse and helpful gender is in interpreting every aspect of archaeology. Feminism archaeology impacts more than jm ust daily lives or power structures; it can also bring a new perspective within war, for example.

Nonetheless, a significant gap still needs to be filled despite this progress. While many scholarly articles have explored the lives of Nubian women in high society (such as queens and other royal women), there is a noticeable lack of information on other women and people from lower social classes. Furthermore, there has been limited research on subjects like sexuality and masculinity, which are important elements of gender studies. Additionally, much of the current research focuses on specific periods of Nubian history, emphasising the necessity for more comprehensive studies that encompass other time periods.

Looking at Nubian history through the eyes of gender equality is important for two reasons. First, it helps us understand the complex ways men and women interacted in Nubian society, giving us a complete picture of how Nubia achieved economic and technological success. Second, It challenges the notion propagated by George A. Reisner and other archaeologists that certain cultures are superior based on their technology or location. A gendered approach can really impact archaeological interpretations to be able to overcome these outdated and colonists ideas:

> ‘The earliest population discovered was identical to the one discovered in Egypt — the so-called predynastic Egyptian. The people themselves were shown by their skeletons to be of the same proto-Egyptian race as the predynastic Egyptians; their pottery, their flint

> and stone implements, their store of ores and metal objects, their stone vessels, their tanned skins, their cloth and matting, their ornaments and amulets of stone, ivory, and faience, were identical in material, form, and technique with objects of the same period found in Egypt (…) However, the local culture, which has produced none of these things and is incapable of producing or even fully utilising them, remains practically late neolithic in its conditions of life. I take it that a race which cannot produce or even fully utilise the products of a higher culture must, from a historical point of view, still be counted in its former state. The evidence of the fortuitous possession of the products of a higher culture only deepens the impression of cultural incompetence' (Reisner, 1923a, pp. 5 - 7).

Feminist archaeology can further influence Meroe's study by incorporating Sudanese archaeologists' knowledge. The gender approach also aims to empower the local workforce and allow them to participate in their heritage and history. This is a crucial aspect of the approach, as it promotes the inclusion of local communities directly connected to the sites being studied. Engaging community members in the archaeological process, including site protection, conservation efforts, and interpretation of findings, fosters a greater sense of ownership and responsibility towards safeguarding archaeological sites and artefacts for future generations. Furthermore, it also has the potential to lead to more accurate and nuanced interpretations of findings. Also, this approach recognises the importance of diversity and representation in archaeology, promoting the inclusion of women in Nubian archaeology. This has a significant impact as it advocates for a more egalitarian approach to the subject of study and the workforce.

Women, Men and The Matriarchal System in Ancient Nubia

Many studies of Ancient Nubia have been focused on Kandake as a woman with actual ruling power. Royal Nubian women are well-attested in ancient textual sources, with their presence being most noticeable in the Napatan and Meroitic periods (Ashby, 2021), when they were more powerful and their authoritarian status was more visible. Concerning young women and their representations in art, Lohwasser & Phillips (2021, p.1017) identify Nubian women by their appearance, clothes and titles or names. In Nubian art, men are usually represented by an Egyptianisation of their appearance, clothes, and symbols. On the other hand, women lack Egyptian elements in their representation. They typically have elements related to their Nubian culture, except for the double-feathered crown and the vulture headdress of the Egyptian queen (Lohwasser, 2001, p. 62). Other elements which can be identified in their depictions have been listed by Lohwasser (2001):

’A large shawl was wrapped around the body below the armpits or around the hips. A second shawl, which could be fringed or decorated with woven stripes, was worn over the first. Sometimes, women draped a sash over the shoulder (…). Kushite women did not wear wigs. Depictions of their natural bobbed hair are sometimes detailed to show small tight curls’ (pp. 62-63).

Figure 3: Statue of Nubian Kandake and Prince. The Kandake is also wearing in this representation the double-feather crown. (Yellin, 2015, p.13)

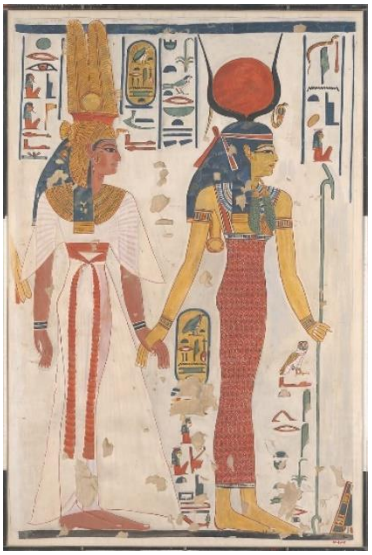

Figure 2: Queen Nefertari Being Led by Isis. In this representation, we can clearly see Nefertari wearing the double-feather crown. (The MET Museum, museum number: 30.4.142, https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/557811)

Regarding Nubian women in power, some researchers attest to the matrilineal succession within the royal family; these studies are also very interesting and worth mentioning as they are one of the main aspects of research within Nubia. However, it is essential to note that I have not found any relevant bibliography discussing its attestation in archaeology. It would be interesting to conduct a study of the matrilineal system from an archaeological perspective. Perhaps this could help resolve some of the unresolved or lesser-known aspects of this succession.

The main hypothesis is that although the kingdom's authority was masculine, its lineage is traced down through the descendants of the mother figure (Saito, 2015, p.234). This was suggested because women in Kush had kingship titles, and investigating the trace of these titles led to confusion, as the succession system they followed was not as expected.

In a society with a matrilineal system, political power still bears on the male members. Still, the transfer of authority typically occurs from an older brother to a younger brother, a maternal

parallel cousin and, if necessary, to a sister's son. This arrangement implies that the political power within matrilineal societies eventually passes from a maternal uncle to one of his nephews. After the succession of eligible brothers and cousins of the current king, the kingship passes on to the son of the king's sisters, following a nephew-centric order. Hence, the sisters of the reigning king become potential candidates for the maternal lineage of the next monarch. This pattern illustrates that the maternal lineage is integral to the transmission of kingship, as the maternal connection is passed down from mother to daughter (Fluehr-Lobban, 1998, p.3 & Ashby, 2021, p.31). In the context of gender studies, the fact that this is a possibility necessitates a reevaluation of the commonly assumed fraternal lineage succession in historical contexts:

> ‘Without the female component, renewal is impossible. Her task lies in continually reiterating that the king exists and endures. Therefore, queenship as a part of rulership guarantees the king's kingship and, thus, the kingdom's continued existence. Without the female aspect, rulership would not function. The concept of queenship in Kush allowed royal women to become active participants.’ (Lohwasser & Phillips, 2021, p.1023).

The matriarchal system is a characteristic of Nubian society. It has attracted attention from scholars, as women's power in the family was closely linked to the kingship of Nubia, leading to the development of several hypotheses. The attention gained by the shift from patriarchal to matriarchal at some point in Nubia completely disrupted the understanding of gender. Feminist archaeology seeks to identify gradual transformations in long-term patterns to comprehend continuity rather than categorising historical time into distinct groups. In addition to this, it is essential to ‘look for diversity of power structures, with and without *gender*, which is a much more balanced approach to(pre)historical realities.’ (Koch, 2021, p.26).

Furthermore, feminist archaeology emphasises the importance of examining power structures beyond the binary selection of patriarchy versus matriarchy. Instead of viewing power as a zero-sum game between men and women, feminist archaeology looks to study the diversity of power structures within society, recognising that power was often distributed unevenly among individuals regardless of gender. This approach allows for a more nuanced understanding of how power operated at various levels of Nubian society, from the ruling elite to the ordinary people.

In the preceding paragraphs, I have summarised a few main aspects surrounding the studies of royal women. However, as explained in Chapter 1, One important aspect of feminist involvement in archaeology is the examination of power structures, in this case, in Nubian

society. In general, previous research has been heavily focused on the ruling classes and the role of women in positions of power. So, what about the rest of the women living in ancient Nubia? Is it possible to understand their gender role?

Non-royal women are a far more complicated study; their remains and possessions are scarce, and there has been significantly less emphasis on studying ordinary women, as evident in these particular sections of the thesis, where I encountered challenges in locating an adequate bibliography to include in this section. One significant factor is the limited availability of data on non-royal women, and they are typically not referenced in texts, unlike Kandake, where they can be compared to written records in addition to archaeological evidence. As a result, archaeology plays a crucial role in ancient Nubian ordinary women's study and investigation, as they can only be reviewed based on funerary remains and other elements in the material culture.

Although the situation is not ideal, the recovered data still allow for some insight and is, therefore, essential to the study of the large majority of women in Nubia. Lohwasser & Phillips (2021, p.1025) summarise the information that these data can provide us with: 'Although mostly derived from statistical osteological data, overall windows into their lives have emerged especially concerning their physical appearance, life expectancy and lifestyles, physical trauma, diseases and other health issues, and, through associated graves and grave goods, interpretation of their beliefs, occupations, interaction, and status'.

The remains of the bodies provide us with valuable information about their way of life up until the age of 70 (Adams, 2022, p. 135), including details on how they adorned their bodies with tattoos and other decorations. Interestingly, the fact that individuals with physical disabilities or health problems were buried alongside others in the community suggests that they were still well-cared for and accepted (Lohwasser & Phillips, 2021, pp. 1025-1027). Regarding non-royal women's occupations, the archaeological evidence indicates that they were focused on household duties. First, their bodies had fewer inflicted injuries than the men, meaning their activities were less dangerous. Additionally, some remains were buried with objects from domestic contexts (Phillips, 2016, p. 286)

In closing, the application of the gender perspective in Nubian archaeology is an ongoing process, with many studies still needed. However, it enriches the field, offers a fresh point of view, and expands knowledge. For example, it has brought to light new dimensions of daily life, power structures, and even aspects of war. The matrilineal system, a distinctive aspect of

Nubian culture, has attracted scholarly attention for its role in tracing royal lineage through the maternal line, thus highlighting the influential roles of women in succession and governance.

While feminist archaeology has progressed in highlighting women's roles, especially those in high society, there is still a gap in our understanding of non-royal women and those from lower social classes.. Nevertheless, it is essential to advance and explore ancient Nubians with a gender perspective in order to gain a better understanding of their individual lives and their society as a whole.

Chapter 4: Case Study - George Andrew Reisner.

Bibliography of George A. Reisner

'(...) The future is a closed book, but the past is open.
Whatever light we can get from the present
and the future must come from the proper
consideration of the past.' (Reisner 1911).

George Andrew Reisner was one of the leading archaeologists in the 20th century. He was in charge of excavations in Sudan, specifically in Kerma, Napata and Meroe, as well as others in Giza and Palestine. Reisner was introduced to Egyptian archaeology because he was, in a way, in the right place at the right time. Nonetheless, his contributions to the archaeological world evoked a paradigm shift within the field, as his work led to new ways of thinking and approaching archaeological research and challenging established methods within the field. Studies conducted today, which restudy his excavations, reveal inadequacies in his methods compared to the ones currently used. To comprehend the potential impact of gendered archaeology on his findings and hypotheses, I will begin by examining his personal history and excavations. Then, I will delve into two of his excavations in Sudan and analyse how a gender perspective would have enhanced his work.

I have gathered information from various sources to create a comprehensive bibliography of Reisner's work. While I have consulted texts written by Reisner's friends and colleagues, I have placed particular emphasis on those published after his death. These texts provide valuable insight into Reisner's life and work, thus offering a unique perspective on his contributions to archaeology.

The most exhaustive study of Reisner's life and work that I have come across is Der Manuelian's book, published in 2023. This work offers a detailed and modern account of Reisner's achievements and is, therefore, an invaluable resource for anyone seeking to understand his legacy. I have heavily relied on this book while compiling the bibliography and found it to be an excellent source of information on Reisner's life, professional accomplishments, and his impact on his field.

Reisner's family roots can be traced back to the city of Worms, Germany. They arrived in the United States, specifically Virginia, during the 18th century. They moved within the US throughout the years until George Andrew Reisner (father) and Mary Elisabeth Mason settled in Indianapolis. They had their first son in 1867, George Andrew Reisner. He had a relatively normal childhood. However, his mother began to show signs of mental illness when Reisner

was a teenager, which ended with her taking her own life in 1883 (Der Manuelian, 2023: pp.14-18).

In their town, Reisner and Mary Bronson, his future wife, lived just a few streets apart and eventually met during his childhood. Throughout my research, the fact that they never left each other's side until Reisner's last years of life piqued my interest: she followed him everywhere and appeared in many pictures during fieldwork. However, little is known about her and her role in the archaeological campaigns and his role when they took place.

When Reisner turned eighteen, he left his home to pursue higher education at Harvard University in Boston. During his sophomore year, he enrolled in a course on Assyriology and the cultures of the ancient Near East, which became his first step towards a successful career in investigation (Der Manuelian, 2023: p.14-18). He received his AB in 1891 and the Ph.D. in Semitic languages two years later, in 1893 (Bull & Albright, 1942: p.8). Whilst still doing his studies, he returned a couple of times to his hometown, one of them to marry Mary Bronson in 1892 (Der Manuelian, 2023: p. 37).

Figure 4:. George Reisner in 1924. (Der Manuelian, 2022).

After finishing his Ph.D., he received a Harvard fellowship to study cuneiform writing under Adolf Ermans in Berlin. Reisner and Mary lived in Germany for several years, where he had the opportunity to meet many leading academics in their field. This led to a term in his career which allowed him to come into contact with Egyptologists as well, introducing him to Egyptian archaeology. Reisner even published several articles in German and worked as an assistant to the Egypt department of the Berlin Museum, a great privilege that was not typically available to foreigners (Bull & Albright, 1942, p.9). In this way, Reisner eventually entered the world of Egyptology.

In 1896, he returned to The United States to work as a teacher at Harvard University, where his life would take a swift turn. When Reisner was 30 years old, he was elected to work with another archaeologist, Borchardt, to create a catalogue for the Museum of Cairo. So, he moved

with his wife to Cairo, a city from which he would barely move except for specific occasions (Crowfoot, 1943, p. 122).

Moving to Cairo to work at the museum would not be a turning point for him, but it would be a catalyst for meeting a very important person in his life: Phoebe Apperson Hearst, the widow of Governor George Hearst. This woman was highly aware of the destruction that Egyptian heritage was suffering. She, therefore, offered Reisner the financial backup to lead the archaeological mission in the context of ancient Egyptians (Crowfoot, 1943, p. 122.). In 1899, Mrs. Phoebe A. Hearst promised George A. Reisner five years of funding for an Egyptian expedition (Vanthuyne, 2023, p. 539). Although he had never worked in archaeology or specialised in ancient Egypt, Reisner abandoned Assyriology to pursue a new academic journey. This decision earned him accolades as one of the 20th century's greatest archaeologists:

> 'For the rest of his life (more than thirty- five years), he directed this expedition [the one in Giza], and he will be remembered chiefly for the work he did in this capacity in Sudan and, above all, for the continuation of his work in the royal and private cemeteries about the pyramids at Gizeh. Reisner established himself at the pyramids, and for many years, he left the site only for short periods in summer and often remained in Egypt throughout the year, taking no respite from his work' (Bull & Albright, 1942, p.9)

Between 1899 and 1901, Reisner and his team excavated in various locations, including Coptos, Shurafa, Deir el-Ballas, Ballas, and el-Ahaiwah. However, in 1901, Reisner received the news that the site of Nag'ed-Deir was being looted, so he shifted his focus to this new site (Vanthuyne, 2023, p. 539).

During these years, he established the chronological basis of Nag'ed-Deir to register all the artefacts from the site (Der Manuelian, 2023, p. 135). Furthermore, he developed many research and scientific methods that revolutionised Egyptian archaeology. He was the first archaeologist to systematically investigate a large area (Der Manuelian, 2023, p. 85). He arranged 20 men in a line in the desert, instructing them to dig a hole until they could see clearly the stratigraphy. Then, he made them move further ahead and repeat the process. Additionally, concerning archaeological methodologies, it is also worth mentioning the stratigraphic approach he used in his excavation in El Dallas, where he focused on reconstructing the chronology of the site, paying particular attention to deposit layers and their associated artefacts. His excavation techniques were so groundbreaking that he wrote about them in a manual on archaeological fieldwork in 1924. He emphasised the importance of understanding

the stratigraphic process before devising excavation methods, as this approach would help reveal unseen evidence without compromising it (Der Manuelian, 2023, p. 90).

From 1907 until 1909, his attention was redirected to Sudan, specifically south of the First Cataract. During his initial season in Sudan, his main objectives were twofold: first, to identify the material buried in the soil in order to determine its historical significance and scope, and second, to make it available for the study of Nubia's history and its relationship with Egypt. In his research in Nubia, he employed the same methodology as in Egypt in 1899, involving the discovery, excavation, and recording of sites (Der Manuelian, 2023, p. 135). He was convinced that his work in Nubia was both fundamental and revolutionary. He believed it would rewrite the earliest chapters of Egy ptian history and cast the whole of history in a new light.

This last conviction of Reisner's research question and his focus on excavation will be further explored in the following chapter. Nevertheless, it is essential to mention here that his research, which focused mainly on Egypt during the first season, and his limited knowledge of the Nubian situation inform his Egyptian-centric approach. Furthermore, replicating excavation methods from Egypt instead of adapting them to the Nubian context is another issue that requires more consideration, which, again, will be further explored in the following chapters.

After teaching archaeology at Harvard for a while, Reisner eventually returned to Giza. In 1913, he decided to focus on the Sudan, specifically the city of Kerma. From that point until 1925, he was actively involved in academic research in Sudan, allowing him to be stationary for some years. His interpretations and hypotheses were based on the idea that Kerman was part of the Egyptian culture and not from the Nubians, showcased by his interpretation of the mortuary sculptures as Egyptian (Bull & Albright, 1942, p.9 & Crowfoot, 1943, p.123).

The start of the First World War in Europe had a significant impact on the excavations in Egypt. Despite the challenging circumstances, Reisner was able to continue his excavation work in Kerma. However, out of the fifteen expeditions that were taking place at the time, his was only one of the few that was able to continue under these circumstances. Der Manuelian (2023, p. 359) highlights that Reisner's focus on archaeological methodology shifted due to inflation and the resulting looting caused by people seeking treasures to cope with the crisis. It became more important for him to conduct excavations than to fulfil publishing duties during wartime.

Reisner was concerned about the war, and his publications against German actions and policies did not bring him a good reputation among German archaeologists who felt personally attacked by his views. In many ways, however, this period of Reisner's professional career benefited

from the government's financial difficulties from the war, mainly due to the fact that the archaeologists at Gebel Barkal, at the Fourth Cataract, had their permits revoked, opening a new door for Reisner. Hence, Reisner began excavations south of the fourth cataract in 1916, a new campaign in Sudan (Der Manuelian, 2023, p. 372).

Between 1916 and 1924, he conducted research in various locations in Nubia. His archaeological excavations covered Gebel Barkal, el Kurru, and Nuri. Later, he also studied the cemeteries of Meroe, which will be discussed in the next chapter. Additionally, he explored the forts near the Fourth Cataract. However, even after all the work he did in Nubia, Reisner could not overcome his modern conceptions of Sudan: 'I take my picture of the time largely from Lower Nubia as it is today, living its isolated, primitive agricultural life in political security, relying for its few luxuries on the sale of dates, goats, and basket-work, and on its income from servitors in the employment of Europeans. The population is now, I imagine, much the same in numbers and much the same in culture as it was then. The largest centres of the population had then, as now, a few Egyptian officials, bullying the local inhabitants and cursing their place of exile' (Reisner, 1923a, p. 7).

Figure 5: Reisner Taking Survey Measurements on March 2, 1920, at Gebel Barkal in Nubia. (Wray, 2021, p.28).

His excavations in Sudan were fruitful and helped lay the foundations for later developments. However, as those who knew him said (Steindorff, 1942, p.93), since Reisner spent many years excavating in Giza, his heart always remained in Giza and its pyramids. So, the Reisners and their team returned to Giza around 1925 after a trip back to Boston (Der Manuelian, 2023, p. 521), and it was there that he would continue to excavate for the rest of his life.

In 1933, however, Reisner began to have problems with his eyesight. In all his years in Egypt, his wife and daughter had several moments when their health was very delicate, which impeded him from directing the excavations. In contrast, this time, his health was in danger. That time,

he did not have to stay away from Giza for long (around four months); however, this irreversible illness persisted over the years and would only deteriorate (Crowfoot, 1943, p. 128).

World War II was just around the corner, and the Nazi ideology was beginning to permeate into academia. In both archaeology and Egyptology, racist and white supremacist theories were propagated, as German archaeologists were very important in the field. In addition to this, in Germany, Jewish archaeologists started to be dismissed. Thus, the tension broke on the 1st of September 1939, when France and Britain declared war on Germany. In this context, the archaeological excavations stopped, and very little field work had the financial backing to continue (Der Manuelian, 2023, p. 600).

In May, the season in Giza ended. This, along with the conflicts caused by the war, led Reisner to decide that it was not safe for his family to remain in Giza, and he determined they had to return to the United States. Both his wife and daughter had little say in the matter, and in June of 1940, they left Cairo and started the journey. The Reisner family would never see him again, as he refused to leave his beloved camp at Giza, and they could not return (Der Manuelian, 2023, p. 632).

Reisner's health at this point was in very bad condition, and in the next two years, he would not be able to recover completely. On the 6th of June, he passed away at the age of seventy-three due to a cerebral haemorrhage while he was in Cairo (Crowfoot, 1943, p. 128). His untimely demise saddened everyone who knew him, for he was not just an exceptional professional but also a figure of admiration to many. Reisner had many good friends who valued his work, dedication, and passion for archaeology. His wife and daughter adored him and were always by his side on his expeditions, sharing his love for history and discovery. He was also loved and respected by his crew of workers and colleagues, who had worked closely with him and admired his leadership and guidance.

Reisner’s Excavations in Meroe’s Cemeteries

The main characteristic of the ancient city of Meore is its three cemeteries, which lie not very far away: the Southern, the Nothern, and the Western Royal Cemeteries. These necropolises had tombs from the beginning of the Napatan period (9th century BCE) until Meroe’s last day as the capital of the kingdom of Kush (mid-4th century CE). Geroge A. Reisner excavated all of these cemeteries with Harvard University and the Boston Museum of Fine Arts Expeditions (Yellin, 2021, p.562).

For Reisner, discovering the chronological order of civilisation was the main objective of an excavation (Reisner, 2020, p.80). In the case of Kush, the excavation of these cemeteries allowed him to establish the first chronology of the kingdom of Nubia. The cemeteries ranged from the 9th century to the 4th century AD: 'On the basis of this research, Reisner worked out a chronology of Sudan for about 14 centuries and established a cultural sequence divided on the basis of archaeological evidence into Napatan and Meroitic Period' (Boozer, 2017, p. 231). This research of the cemeteries made Reisner date the fall of Meroe to AD 350 and attribute its fall to the presence of the rise of Askum.The chronology of the kingdom of Kush that Reisner created was based on the design differences, regarding their features, between the burials within the Southern and Northern cemeteries. According to Reisner, the most desirable sites, such as hilltops, were probably chosen first for burials. Therefore, the tombs in these locations were likely older than those in less desirable locations. The burial sequence followed a west-to-east pattern. Although this approach has some problems, the author's chronological order of the royal pyramids and the attribution of ownership to specific rulers are still the basis for constructing Meroitic history (Yellin, 2021, p.565).

His fieldwork covers approximately 8000 graves, which comprise all of the known graves in the three cemeteries today (Wolf & Riedel, 2019, p.190), and he created a system to be able to identify them using the nearby town Begrawiya. He named the cemeteries following the town's name and their position, so the labelling would go as follows: Begrawiya South (Beg. S), Begrawiya North (Beg. N), and Begrawiya West (Beg. W), and then he would add a number sequentially following the tombs were excavating (Yellin, 2021, p.563).

The Southern and Northern cemeteries can be identified as the royal ones, where the members of the Kushite royal family were buried. On the other hand, there was the Western Royal Cemetery, where the non-royal members of the court, along with other family members and officials, were buried. (Yellin, 2021, p.567). The Napatan burials were present in both Southern and Western cemeteries and used by different family groups. The first burials identified in the Napatan cemeteries were not from the elite. They were simple tombs without any identifiable superstructure. These burials sharply contrasted with the rest of the monumental pyramids in the cemetery, which were easily distinguishable as of elite origin owing to their shape and size (Boozer, 2017, p. 231). Furthermore, there were select pyramids and other monuments consisting of a rock chamber with several generations buried in pit graves (Yellin, 2021, p.567). During his initial excavations, Reisner and his team encountered several issues with the entrance to the burial chamber of the Nubian pyramids. The entrances to these pyramids were

very different from the ones they had been used to, and it took them considerable time to discover that it was located in the southeast part of the pyramid. It consisted of a stairway that descended: 'This was afterwards found to be typical of all Kushite pyramids after the time of the first great king, Piaknhy, conqueror of Egypt' (Reisner, 2020, p.84)

Eventually, the Meroitic family abandoned the South Cemetery and began using a new royal necropolis, the Northern Royal Cemetery, built to the north across the Wadi Tarabil (Yellin, 2021, p.567). The use of these three different cemeteries is far from being completely understood, as the reasons for the changes are not clear enough to be able to create a concrete hypothesis. However, Reisner thought he had identified the transition from the Southern cemetery to the Western one based on the chronology of the sites: 'When, after the lapse of three hundred and fifty years (about 300 B. C.), the Southern Cemetery was full, the minor members of both branches of the royal family were buried in the eastern part of the Western Cemetery, and the old quarrel was pacified if not entirely forgotten' (Reisner, 1925a, p. 53).

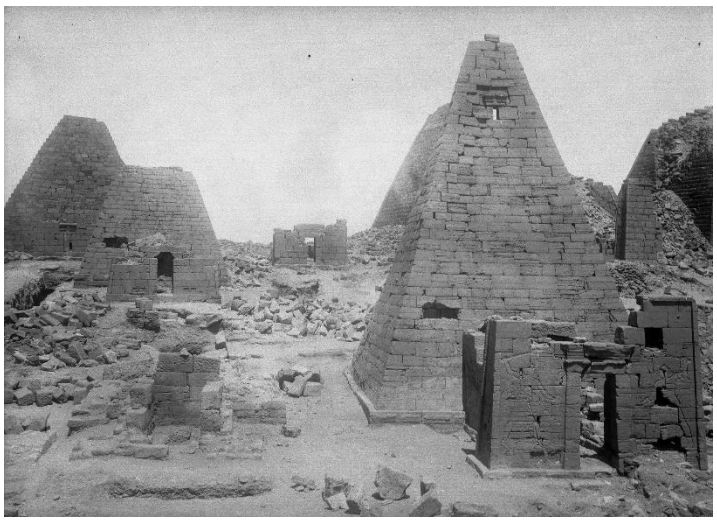

Figure 6: Begrawiya: North Cemetery at Meroe, Pyramids N 32 and N 19 on April 12, 1921 (Shenoy, 2019).

There are more than 800 graves in the Northern Cemetery. Approximately 80 of these are pyramid-shaped superstructures built for the members of royal families in Meroe. During his excavations, Reisner dated the construction of the pyramids between the 2nd century BCE and the 4th century CE. Reisner's seriation technique was used to determine the age of the burials. It was found that they had been in use for approximately 600 years, from 250 BCE to CE 350 (Boozer, 2017, p. 231).

The Southern Cemetery is located 4 kilometres southeast of the city of Meroe and contains around 220 tombs. Ninety of these tombs contained superstructures, and 24 were definitely pyramids (Yellin, 2021, p.567). This total also includes the pyramids of the first two kings buried at Meroë, which date back to the first half of the 3rd century BC (Boozer, 2017, p. 231).

The non-royal members of Meroe used the Western Cemetery, whose main characteristic is the remaining pyramids. This cemetery, in Reisner's words, 'provided a surprise. As we worked westward, the ground was seen to be rising to a low knoll, and the tombs were found to be earlier and earlier in date' (Reisner, 1925a, p. 53).

The earliest tombs in the cemetery were on top of the hill, and they are contemporary to the first burials in the Southern Cemetery itself. It contains burials that are several generations earlier than the ones in the Southern Cemetery. Furthermore, it is the largest of the three cemeteries; it contains over 800 burials dating from the 9th century onwards, and 171 of those had a monumental superstructure (normally dating between the 2nd century BCE and the 4th century CE) (Reisner, 1925a, p. 53). In addition, Reisner found this cemetery in better condition than the rest, which led to a more holistic procurement of objects:

> '(…) very rich treasure, consisting of gold ornaments, necklaces, bracelets, and earrings, was recovered to illustrate the craftsmanship of the goldsmiths at Meroe. The number of scarabs was prodigious- between five hundred and six hundred- and many of them were older scarabs which had been looted from tombs at Kerma and in Lower Nubia (…) A gold seal-ring of Tirhaqa was found, and seals with the names of Kashta and his daughter, Amenirdis, high-priestess of Amon in the eighth century' (Reisner, 1925a, p. 53).

Reisner identified a small chapel on the east side of all the pyramids he worked on. This chapel is a one-room temple with a pylon, sometimes including a small portico or prostyle (Boozer, 2017, p. 231). The inside walls were decorated using a relief technique with scenes of funerary rituals. This chapel was where the performance of the funerary rituals took place.

The findings are incomplete and not precise because of looting, which is common at these sites. Looting has disturbed the integrity of the site and taken valuable historical artefacts, making it difficult for archaeologists to understand the history of the cemetery fully. Furthermore, the excavations by Reisner and others have led to a hole in the documentation. However, these cemeteries remain one of the most important sources for the study of Kush. Moreover, the different objects and goods that have been found in this cemetery have been useful in distinct and unique ways. They have been helpful in understanding chronology or, for example, other social and economic traditions, thanks to the paintings in the tombs, which offer insights into the Nubian religious beliefs (Yellin, 2021, p.563). These cemeteries are undoubtedly a very important source of information about the Ancient Nubian world. Furthermore, understanding that their writing is not fully understood is another very important factor when studying their society.

In a nutshell, the ancient city of Meroe is distinguished by its three cemeteries—Southern, Northern, and Western— that were extensively excavated by George A. Reisner. During his research, he created a chronological framework for the Kingdom of Kush based on the design and placement of burials and tombs. Despite challenges such as looting and incomplete documentation, Reisner's work remains central in understanding many of the social, economic, and religious aspects of Nubian society. His methodical approach while categorising and dating burials has offered invaluable insights until nowadays, making the Meroitic cemeteries crucial archaeological evidence for the study of Kushite civilisation.

Problematics in his studies and conclusions

George A. Reisner's excavations and methodology[1] are considered a turning point in the history of archaeology in Egypt and Nubia. Before his work, excavations were carried out in a nonscientific manner, and many of the finds were sent to other countries without being recorded with any specific method. Reisner's approach, at the time, was revolutionary, as he meticulously documented and recorded every detail of his findings in his diary, including photographs that showed fieldwork.

For Reisner, the main process during archaeological fieldwork was to excavate. However, this step was completed by the recording of archaeological material and the observation and experience of the archaeologists. In *Archaeological Fieldwork in Egypt: A Method of Historical Research* (2020), Reisner stated that 'the power of observation, the faculty of interpreting observed facts, can hardly be taught in a book' (p.80). Reisner was aware that, in order to be a good archaeologist, you had to have practical experience. In addition, he was not only aware of the importance of experience, but he also knew that excavating meant destroying historical material. This, as we know today, is essential knowledge for any archaeologist, as it gives you the awareness of being cautious as you know that everything you are doing now can not be recovered (Reisner, 2020, p.80).

Reisner (2020, pp. 88-89) explained the different steps to follow depending on whether he was excavating a cemetery or a village. When it came to cemeteries, he considered several important points in order to decide where to start:

1. The conditions in which the site was left by previous excavators, whether illegal or not.

[1] In the course of researching Reisner's methodology, I encountered significant challenges related to the availability of relevant sources, either online or physical, in the Netherlands. Consequently, this section of my thesis relies on the few available sources and primary data. However, even if the bibliography is not extensive, it is important to give an overview of Reisner's methodology and the way he conducted archaeology.

2. The mechanical problems involved in disposing of the excavated debris.
3. The conclusions that experienced or inexperienced archaeologists could draw from previous excavations and surface indicators.

For cemeteries, Reisner used a 'tomb card' (see **Figure 7**) to record each unit of excavation with plans, sections, and lists of objects (Reisner, 2020, pp. 88-89). He also relied on photography to document the expeditions, which has been very useful in observing his archaeological methods (Der Manuelian, 1992, p. 2). In addition to photographs, he found drawings, maps, and notes in a diary to be very important for recording every stage of the excavation process (Reisner, 1908, p. 8).

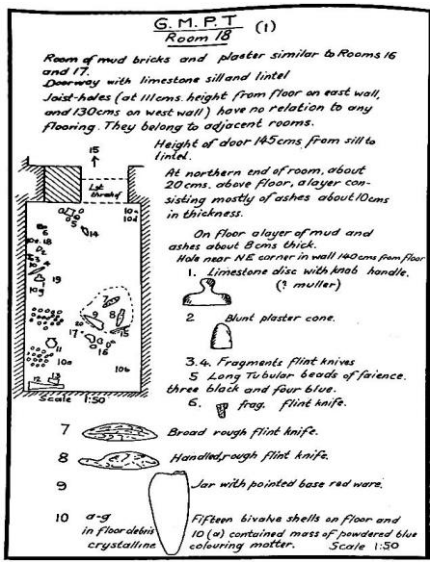

Figure 7*:* Example of Reisner's Room Cards in the Pyramid Temple at Gizeh. (Reisner, 2020, p.92).

To put it briefly, Reisner was a comprehensive and detail-oriented man who recognised the importance of a complete understanding of the site. He was also patient and was aware that that every stage of the excavation needed to be recorded to be able to compile the historical records. He was, ultimately, an archaeologist who defended the scientific methods overall (Reisner, 1925b, p. 320). As a result, Reisner earned a well-deserved reputation as one of the most influential archaeologists of his time for his contributions to the field. He worked assiduously to gather all available information, leaving no stone unturned in his search for knowledge. He once wrote what being an archaeologist meant:

> 'The archaeologist leading an expedition must be as sensitive to increased overhead charges as any factory manager. It was not enough to play the scholar/ historian role; the archaeologist had to be an organiser and administrator with a certain amount of practical business sense. Moreover, knowledge of ancient Greek and Latin languages is desirable, and Egyptian knowledge is indispensable. German, French, Geology, Botany, Biology, Mathematics, History, Fine Arts, and even Music and Astronomy, I imagine, would be helpful. No one could master all these diverse areas, of course, but a scholar must recognise the character of the questions that arise and select the proper research men to be consulted regarding them.' (Der Manuelian, 2023, p. 106).

George A. Reisner undoubtedly exhibited a solid foundation in archaeological methodology. However, it is essential to acknowledge that this does not necessarily mean his work was without biases, as it has revealed some problems with time.

Boozer (2017) points out that the recent excavations in the cemeteries have noticed the damage Reisner provoked in the structures, and, after all, damage in archaeology is irreparable. Once done, the data is generally irretrievably lost: ‘For example, Hinkel and Yellin have noted the unrecorded destruction of many offering chapels and the displacement of pyramid and chapel blocks throughout the cemeteries. This practice caused an irreparable loss of information about the reliefs and architecture. These subjects were discussed little in the published reports and were obviously of little interest to that expedition. Hinkel estimates the clearing of the site during 1903 and 1921–22 amounts to an extraordinary, estimated volume of debris and stones at 10,000 m3’ (Boozer, 2017, pp. 232 – 233).

Furthermore, his failure was not limited to infrastructure damage: contemporary racist notions of white superiority in the form of intellectual and physical dominance permeate the whole of his research and the conclusions he reported. Egypt was considered one of the founders of the current 20th-century civilisations, putting ancient Egyptians above the rest of the societies who lived at the time. In addition, it was a century when imperialism was still at its full potential. This fits, then, in the twentieth-century vision, as the world was still dealing with the Western empires in other countries considered inferior races and capacities. Reisner had all these ideas deep within him because he was, after all, a white man from the Western world, educated in very Western universities in the United States and Germany.

It is essential to know the context beforehand to better understand Reisner's mentality when excavating in Sudan. He was convinced that ancient Sudan was nothing more than a copy of the ancient Egyptian world and that they were just black inferior people. Reisner admired the Nubian civilisation in some ways but could never see it beyond the Egyptian lens; indeed, he never saw ancient Nubian society at its total capacity.

Based on this, which has already been considered in other studies (see, for example, Minor, 2018), I would like to address the weaknesses of one of his publications and some loose ends that can be made meaningful with a feminist theory. It should be noted that during Reisner's excavations, there was clearly no expectation that a gender perspective methodology would be applied, nor was there any awareness of gender roles or the concept of gender itself. It was not a method used in archaeology then, and no established theory existed. He can be criticised for

allowing his prejudices and ideas to colour his excavations. However, no archaeologist is expected to be completely objective in their research.

Royal Cemeteries of Kush, Vol. IV.

The main findings of Reisner's excavations in Sudan were published in Kerma's final report, and the rest of them were published by his assistant, Dows Dunham, after his death (Boozer, 2017, p. 231). There are several books in which Reisner documented the findings of the cemeteries of Meroe, for example, *El Kurru* (1950), the oldest of all the Kushite royal cemeteries, *The Decorated Chapels of the Meroitic Pyramids at Meroe and Barkal (1954), Nuri* (1955)and *Royal Tombs at Meroe and Barka* (1957). In the book *The Royal Cemeteries of Kush, Vol. V. The West and South Cemeteries of Meroe* (1957), which is more than 400 pages long, Reisner gathers the findings he discovered during his excavations from 1916 until 1923.

The book begins with an introduction, which explains some of the findings mentioned throughout its chapters and provides dating evidence. It also clarifies the reason for the significant delay between the end of the excavation and the publication of the results, which is surprising as Reisner was known for advocating prompt publication of his studies as an archaeologist. In the introduction, there is a brief summary of the history of the Kushite kingdom. In it, two groups are mentioned, namely the Napatan and the Meroitic groups, which existed in the area. It wrongly explains that although the Meroitic group was initially subordinate to the Napatan one, they cohabitated. Furthermore, it specifies the different ways in which the mummies were found and identifies them as Egyptians or as Indigenous Kushitan depending on their features: Egyptian if they were mummified within a coffin, and as Indigenous Kushitan if they were not mummified and in a natural sleeping position.

The reports in this book include a lot of practical information and details on the tombs they excavated and the objects they recovered. Indeed, the list of objects is the main focus of the publication, and in general, apart from the chronological and depositional interpretations, Reisner and Dunham did not provide interpretations of the tombs they so meticulously recorded. They divide the article into three parts corresponding to each cemetery. Then, a precise description of the object they felt was essential to be registered and brief information about the structure itself were provided. Most accompanying explanations feature hand-drawn depictions that illustrate the objects' profiles. Although some photographs are included, they are of minimal quality and do not provide as much detail as the drawings.

Analysis

The first flaw in the application of feminist theory to these excavation records is the complete absence of any attempt to approach the ancient Nubians as individuals, rather than as mere goods and materials. Feminist theory understands objects as a way of approaching the everyday lives of the people studied, their family structures, gender or relationships. Objects are used as means but not as ends. This particular aspect of the situation seems to have been overlooked or forgotten by Reisner.

Furthermore, feminist archaeological analysis is undertaken with the primary belief that we are not simply trying to catalogue different gender roles, nor the gender of individual burials. We aim to uncover and understand gender within the political structures of Nubian society. Hence, we need to recognise that gender is not just an attribute of individuals, but it is also a critical component of societal systems and power dynamics. The political dynamics present in the Nubian society would perpetuate or challenge these norms, which would also have implications for society in general. Gender can be shaped by political decisions, hierarchies, and conflicts, thereby affecting governance, policy, and social outcomes. Indeed, gender was not perceived as the same in the elite as in the lower classes. Hence, uncovering the gender of the individuals buried in these cemeteries can give us the foundations to start comprehending the difference that existed between the social classes in Nubia and, consequently, the gender disparities in the political scene.

Regarding the chronological sequence that Reisner created, it must be mentioned that even though it is still the basis for ancient Nubian chronology, this publication has some errors. New expeditions and publications have brought attention to mistakes in Reisner's chronology, prompting further research. For example, burial W503 has been identified by Wolf & Riedel (2019) to be a century earlier than what Reisner believed: 'In combination with the results of J. Yellin's and J. Hallof's studies as well as with several architectural features, we assume that the tomb dates to the turn from the 5th to the 4th century BC – more than a century earlier than originally proposed by G.A. Reisner. It, therefore, belongs to the late Napatan and not to the Meroitic period of the Kushite kingdom and must have been one of the first royal pyramids at Meroe' (Wolf & Riedel, 2019, p. 193). Whether archaeological research involves gender perspectives or not, a solid chronological foundation is essential in any study. These mistakes can significantly impact archaeological research, so our approach must always consider this massive gap in his studies.

Another issue displayed in the book is the confusion or lack of information surrounding previously excavated tombs or those left partially excavated. There are a few examples that evidence some burials which were excavated prior to Reisner's arrival. However, there is no prior information by whom or any records: '[W466] Plundered. This tomb was previously excavated, perhaps by Garstang?', '[W346] CHAMBER completely collapsed. Badly broken and weathered, previously excavated' or '[W255] Note: Reisner noted this tomb had been previously excavated by Garstang?'. Similarly, a few of them are recorded as partially excavated and with an incomplete record: '[W252] NO SUPER., ENCL., CHAPEL. Small stairway tomb only partially excavated. Record incomplete'. It is noteworthy that some of the tombs have not undergone complete excavation. The lack of additional information available is a significant problem. This is because previous discoveries were made by others without leaving records, which means that the missing information cannot be retrieved.

Additionally, when excavating, it is important to proceed with care and to take steps to preserve the site for future generations. If an excavation in a certain area cannot be finished before the end of the season, it is crucial to take the proper steps to safeguard the site. This ensures that the archaeological significance of the site is not lost, which is something that Reisner failed to do.

All these errors that Reisner committed can be explained and partially excused by the significant amount of information he collected. He studied many sites and excavated many burials, and during all those years, he uncovered many goods. Perhaps he did not give enough importance to accurately measuring all the details or required more time to handle the vast quantity of information. Regardless, in feminist archaeology and other modern methodologies, excavations are carried out with great care to prevent loss of data rather than focusing solely on large-scale excavations.

Reisner's gender identifications

An excellent approach to identifying the sex and, in relation, the gender afterwards is using a multivariate approach that implies different techniques and methodologies to obtain the most accurate result of the excavations. First, it is essential to look further into the field, as the archaeological sites are often complex and multifaceted. Thus, focusing on just one location can lead to archaeologists missing out on some of the results. Moreover, it is crucial to perform additional testing beyond the excavation area to compare outcomes and identify any anomalies

that may emerge. While Reisner dedicated much of his time to excavating various sites, he did not venture beyond the confines of the cemeteries. It is understandable that he could not manage to focus on more than one objective, given the amount of time required for a comprehensive excavation, which can often take years. He prioritised excavating a lot rather than focusing on specific places.

Secondly, it is obvious but important to mention that some modern techniques need to be used to reveal the sex of these burials, which Reisner failed to investigate. Examples of this technique are the craniometric or dental analysis. From a gender perspective analysis, it is also essential to highlight the amelogenin peptide analysis[2], as it is the best option to understand the inequalities of the Nubian society while conducting archaeology. Using this method, excavations with a gender perspective (Cintas-Peña et al., 2023) have been able to uncover gender changes in the assumed role of women in ancient societies. The research conducted in 2023 by Cintas-Peña et al. was carried out in a society where writing resources were missing. The archaeological technique used gave them crucial information regarding the gender of the burials. With the context being similar to the one in the Nubian cemeteries, a similar analysis could be beneficial for the study of gender in Nubian archaeology. The key to a proper analysis is considering more than one feature and having sufficient results to reach a well-founded conclusion.

Even if there is no way Reisner's analysis could have been as accurate as one conducted today, there are still some methodological mistakes based on his biased mentality. For example, in these records, there are examples of gendered identification based on skeletal size, perpetuating the harmful stereotype of women being weaker and smaller. An example can be found in S139, where he specifies, 'Fragmentary skull and bones of small adult female'. This statement identifies women with the patriarchal image of weak and small. It would not be commendable if there were no more statements of this kind: 'S144 BURIAL: intact small female, extended on back, head N., in bead net showing traces of mummification but no coffin' or in burial S117: 'Legs of extended burial, head SW. Perhaps female by the lightness of bones'.

[2] This method is based on the proteins that can endure in the durable tissue of teeth (enamel) over long periods, sometimes tens of thousands of years. Through liquid chromatography-mass spectrometry, researchers can identify two sexually distinct forms of the protein amelogenin within tooth enamel: the Y isoform, exclusive to males, and the X isoform, found in both sexes. This technique, known as amelogenin peptide analysis, holds significant value for archaeological, anthropological, and forensic inquiries. Its importance lies in its ability to provide insights into ancient populations' genetics, health, and dietary habits with minimal sample destruction and small sample size requirements (Mikšík, 2023).

As it has been said, the remains would have to be reanalysed to identify the biological sex of those buried. It is important to note that when determining the sex ratio of a cemetery, one must consider that there may be a higher number of male burials in a royal burial site than in non-royal cemeteries. This is because royal cemeteries were often reserved only for male members of the royal family, as there were more male rulers than female ones.

Another hypothesis is the possibility of a war period and military actions; military personnel could have died on the battlefield, resulting in more female burials. This could be the case of, for example, the empty burials identified by Reisner, where some have missing bodies. For example, W140, where Reisner identified no body but many goods (beads neckless, different types of rings, gold pendants…) or W1, which has fewer burial goods but still misses the body itself.

Reisner's Burial Analysis

According to Reisner's notes, the burial's identification is mostly limited to categorising the buried individuals into broad age groups, such as children or adults. He does not delve deeper into a classification of gender or sex. In this way, Reisner does not identify the sex (nor the gender, obviously) of more than half of the burials he excavated, in addition. There is a complete lack of information or specification about the method used to sex the burials, which makes us think that the approach he used is undefined and imprecise. This leaves many gaps that could have led to a better understanding of the demographic and social structures of the Nubian population.

Nonetheless, in their book, Reisner and Durham distinguish between genders in various burials. They identify a balance of around 10 male burials and 10 female burials. This clearly shows that there are too few identifications for the number of tombs he excavated.

In order to further display Reisner's shortcomings and biased conclusions, I have compiled the information from his excavations and conclusions about each burial from both cemeteries in Meroe. First, I organised the burial goods into a categorisation system, as shown in **Table 1**. These goods are divided into four categories: Beadwork and Jewelry, Vessels, Personal and Domestic Items, and Funerary and Ritual Items. Second, using **Table 1** as a reference, **Table 2** indicates the absence or presence of each category of goods in every burial identified, by Reisner, as female or male. The burials are further identified by their contents and the sex of the individuals, allowing for an analysis of potential correlations between grave goods and the postulated sex of the buried individuals.

Table 1: Categories of burial goods from the various excavated burials in the South and Western cemeteries of Meroe by Reisner.

Category	Objects
Beadwork and jewellery	Amulets, Anklets, Bead nets, Beads, Bracelets, Diamond Mesh, Ear-studs, Pendants, Plaques, Ring, Seals, Scarabs, Udjat
Vessels	Bowl, Cup, Jar, Vase
Personal and domestic items	Animal figurine, Kohl tube and lid, Shawl, Toy mouse
Funerary and Ritual Items	Offering tray, Girdle of stone barrel Scarab, Gold axe-shaped pendant, Stela

Table 2: Presence or Absence of Burial Goods in each of The Burials from the Western and South Cemeteries Excavated By Reisner in Meroe

Burial	Description	Beadwork and Jewelry	Vessels	Personal and Domestic Items	Funerary and Ritual Items
W620 (2 Burials) Lower	Adult negroid skeleton	Absent	Absent	Absent	Absent
W620 (2 Burials) Upper	Small adult female	Present	Absent	Absent	Absent
W671	Adult male	Present	Present	Absent	Present
W793	Adult male	Present	Present	Absent	Absent
W859	Adult male	Present	Present	Absent	Present
W308	Male child (8-10y)	Present	Present	Present	Present
W467	Adult male	Absent	Absent	Absent	Absent
W492	Adult male	Present	Absent	Absent	Absent
W836	Adult male	Present	Absent	Absent	Present
S101	Adult male	Present	Present	Absent	Present
S15	Adult male skull	Absent	Absent	Absent	Present
S8	Fragments adult male human skull	Present	Absent	Absent	Absent
S63	Traces of a skull and bones of an adult male	Absent	Absent	Absent	Absent
W585	Young adult female	Present	Absent	Absent	Absent
W591	Adult female	Present	Present	Absent	Absent
W609	Loosely contracted adult female(?)	Absent	Present	Present	Present
W621	Head W. in remains of bead net but without coffin	Present	Absent	Absent	Absent
S25	Adult female	Present	Present	Absent	Absent

S117	Perhaps female by lightness of bones	Absent	Present	Present	Absent
S135	Adult female	Present	Absent	Absent	Absent
S137	Adult female	Present	Absent	Absent	Absent
S139	Adult female	Absent	Absent	Absent	Absent
S144	Small female	Present	Absent	Absent	Absent
S147	Adult female of negroid type	Present	Absent	Absent	Absent

There are several conclusions that can be drawn from these tables:

First, for this analysis, it is important to note that only three burials, specifically W620 (Lower burials and upper), W467, and S63, have been documented as lacking any associated goods.

The presence of jewellery and bead nets is quite normal in burials identified as both male (W671, W793, W859, S101, S8, W308) or female (W620, S135, S137, W621, S25) by Reisner, which suggests that those adornments and personal expressions were very valuable for every person in society and that they were a significant cultural element. The presence of beadwork and jewellery across genders can imply that these items were not solely symbols of femininity, but likely held broader cultural or social significance. In patriarchal interpretations, jewellery is often seen as a marker of female adornment. Still, their prevalence in male burials (not taking into account the burials that have no objects associated with the tomb; only burial S15 has no beadwork but has other objects) indicates they may have symbolised status, identity, or spiritual beliefs applicable to all individuals. Indeed, it would not have been useful enough to determine if a burial was from a male or a female.

Similarly, vessels are also found in both male (W671, W793, W859, W308, W492, W836, S101) and female burials (W609, W591, S25, S117), indicating that both genders could have been involved in activities requiring such items. These items were probably linked to ritual or daily life rather than gendered roles.

Personal and domestic items are notably absent in most burials, just present in two female ones (W609 and S117) and one male child burial (W308). This leads to the possible conclusion that they are only present in female burial goods. Still, the number of burials with such items is insufficient to draw any clear conclusions. Nonetheless, the absence of these goods could suggest that they were deemed important for burial practices or that their presence does not correlate strongly with gendered activities. This could indicate that personal belongings were less significant in burial contexts or that their absence might reflect broader cultural practices rather than gender-specific roles.

Lastly, the category of funerary or ritualistic objects is more present in male burials (W671, W859, W308, W836, S101, S15) than in female ones. Only one feminine burial (W609) contains this category of objects in its burial goods. Hence, there is a need for further research on the presence and absence of ritual and funerary items, as it is very odd that only one female burial has such goods. This could mean that there are more female burials with this type of item in their burial goods, but they have not been recorded accordingly, so we would need to research the rest of the burials. Alternatively, the remains could be from a male instead of a female. Reisner indicated uncertainty by placing an interrogation mark next to his identification, showing that he had doubts. Additionally, the presence of personal and domestic items in the burial may have led Reisner to initially assume the buried person was a woman, allowing his prejudice to affect scientific sex identification. It could also be that the rest belong to a transgender or non-binary person, so their sex and, therefore, their burial goods do not match the heteronormative and patriarchal standard. When we compare this example to the other burials identified as adult males, we can observe that he does not doubt that they always contain the most prosperous goods (i.e. W793), contrary to many of the female ones that are the poorest.

In conclusion, while female and male burials differ in burial positions, coffin types, and burial goods, they also share commonalities in terms of positioning, coffin presence, artefact offerings, and cultural symbolism. It is indeed true that, in general, the richest burials or those containing the greatest variety of items, as specified in **Table 1**, belong to men (W308, S101, W671). However, overall, there is no substantial difference. It may be that, when looked at individually and in detail, there may have been some misinterpretations. This leads to the assertion that Reisner did not follow a pattern in identifying the remaining skeletal remains or objects after this analysis. This leads to the question: Given that he did not adhere to a guideline and that the scientific methods for sex identification were inadequate or non-existent at the time, how did he determine the sex of these individuals? We can thus conclude that these burials require further reconsideration using modern techniques in order to further our understanding of both gender and sex in the Meroitic period.

In addition, even if Reisner's sex identification does not correspond with the results achieved from modern techniques, these tables show that all of the burials have different and overlapping goods. This suggests that in Meroe, social and gender roles may have been more fluid and dynamic, as well as complex. In addition to this, there are very rich burials from both genders; both men and women were buried with items of adornment, utility, and ritual significance. This

clearly challenges the patriarchal notion of burial richness in just male burials and indicates that women held important societal and religious roles in Meroe's society.

The objects recorded in the graves

In terms of a general overview of the goods, Reisner may have missed important details due to methodological flaws and not measuring enough materials. Therefore, this has created a significant information gap, of which many things may not be recoverable: '[W705] 427 B Few fragments of an ivory bracelet. Not measured', '[W742] 563 K Fragments of an alabaster vase with separately made neck. Not measured', '[W753] I blue faience multiple beads, not measured', '[W806] B A few common faience cylinder and ring beads only. Not measured', '[S19] 21- 3-352 K Potsherds: fragment of a large CRW. Tray and of an R. Washed CRW. Jar. Not measured, not illustrated' or '[S41] Entrance slope. Rect. Pit Grave EW., not measured'. Not only does he not measure the objects, but there is a clear bias, as the objects that are not measured tend to be made of materials such as ivory or typical ceramics. These burial goods could be considered less impressive as they were local and less prestigious. From a feminist archaeological point of view, this is wrong since we are trying to have a holistic view of ancient Nubian society. We must evaluate and subject all objects to the same scientific and methodological process, whether they are made of gold, silver, metal, ivory or copper.

Academic research in feminist archaeology emphasises the need to consider all aspects of the archaeological record, including visually appealing and less attractive artefacts. This approach ensures that all voices and perspectives are considered, particularly those of less privileged social spheres.

Jewellery

Jewellery is often present in the findings, with gold being found, remarkably, in many non-royal burials. In the Western Cemetery, the non-royal one, many tombs have many rich and outstanding findings, such as amulets (W493, W630, W861), figures made with gold (W816, W71, W253), rings (W786, W832, W179, W453), neckless (W179, W5) or earrings (W786, W5). Although wealth is traditionally connected to the Nubian royal family, there are non-royal burials with valuable goods that could potentially be regarded as being just as prestigious and significant as royal burials. This challenges the traditional association of wealth with the royal family, broadening the understanding of the significance of non-royal burials in Nubian culture. There are several theories that can help explain the social classes and illuminate the social structure and roles of each class. Feminist archaeology is an essential part of this. Reisner

frequently mentions that the tombs had suffered thefts and robberies, which may be one reason why less wealth was found in the royal tombs, as these were larger and more likely to attract looters. However, Reisner also documents looting and plunder in the tombs of the Western Cemetery. So, although perhaps not to the same extent, they were still targeted. In this context, the discovery of a wealthy burial in a non-royal situation can be explained in a variety of ways:

- Wealth Distribution and Social Structures: Wealth is not exclusive to the royal family in a complex society. A society where wealth can be acquired individually is one with an economic system that allows for the generation of wealth. Prosperous merchants, skilled artisans, and other individuals could amass significant wealth, allowing them to afford luxurious items like jewellery for themselves and their families.
- Changes Over Time: The frequency and distribution of jewellery in burials can vary significantly within the same culture, reflecting changes in wealth distribution, trade connections, societal values, and burial practices. Depending on these shifting dynamics, what might be expected in one era could be rare in another. Maybe the Western Cemetery was used when the wealth distribution during the Napatan period differed from the Meroitic period.
- Artisanal and Economic Development: The jewellery in the non-royal tombs could indicate a society's high level of artisanal skill and economic development. As jewellery-making became more widespread and materials became more accessible, more people could own such items, increasing the number of burials that included jewellery.

Another example of this misinterpretation within jewellery findings could be in W5. In this one burial, there are a lot of rich goods, such as jewellery or decorated ceramics. The burial consists of different bodies, but A and B are the most important ones. Here, Reisner assumes that B is the central burial and that A is just a maid, even if this body is the one that contains goods. The drawing is unclear, and there is no justification for this conclusion. Still, he stated the following: ‘Note: The preceding six objects were found in a compact mass lying on the chest of body A (see Figure 88, b.) as if they had been enclosed in a cloth bag (completely disintegrated). Lower down on the same body, lying under the disc mirror (#10), were the further items of jewellery #7, 8 and 9. The suggestion is that these jewellery items belonged to the main burial (B) and had been placed in the keeping of body A, who was perhaps a personal maid’. A re-evaluation of this statement could lead to a discussion of the remains initially thought to belong to a maid. This could open up the possibility that the individual was not a servant at all but that even if

she was not the wealthiest member of the family, she was still affluent enough to be buried with the jewellery.

It is necessary to clarify that Reisner did not explain why burial A's remains were identified as female. Therefore, it is essential to re-examine the sex and gender of the remains, as the assumption may have been based on a belief that individuals from lower social classes are more likely to be female. This is explained because traditionally, men are seen as the ones holding positions of power and wealth, so he could have assumed that if this body were not the wealthiest of the burial, then it would be directly identified as female because they were seen to have less power and richness.

A significant highlight can be made here following Andrea Manzo's (2020) affirmation: 'Interestingly, the richness of some tombs of females in certain cemeteries suggests a central role for women in the path of A-Group hierarchical development (…) This specific aspect may be one of a pool of elements shared with other highly structured social organisations arising in the Middle Nile, such as the well-known later Napatan and Meroitic Kushite kingdom, where women played crucial roles in the royal family and probably in society in general' (Manzo, 2020, p.110). This statement suggests that in societies where women were buried with jewellery, it was because they had the power and means to acquire them. Therefore, it is crucial to reexamine Reisner's conclusion and consider the possibility that the jewellery found in these burials may have belonged to the women themselves, as other evidence supports this theory.

In summary, the presence of jewellery in non-royal burials opens a window into past societies' complex social, economic, and cultural landscapes, revealing that wealth, status, and burial practices can vary widely across different contexts. This differs significantly from the primary narrative that the Nubians were just an adjacent civilisation of Egypt and demonstrates their complexities, something Reisner missed.

Ceramics

There are many ceramics in the burial sites, but Reisner mainly focuses on some with astonishing features that, for a museum, are very useful and would attract plenty of people. However, in feminist archaeology, we must also focus on the materials used in local and everyday life. In these tombs, numerous ceramic artefacts provide valuable insights and information about food, material storage, and other daily activities. Therefore, it is essential to appreciate every ceramic artefact found, regardless of its form or decoration: in S160, 'Fragment of pottery cup, handmade (…) a very crude local ware'.

Turning to another aspect of how ceramics are described in this book, some notes undervalue the significance of certain ceramics and the original culture of others in burial S97: 'The example [a vessel] from S97 would appear to be of an earlier date. The type, which is rare at Meroe, may have been local ware, seldom placed in tombs here but of prolonged use in less sophisticated areas.' This statement implied a judgment in the value of specific areas and perpetuated stereotypes and misconceptions of some societies over others. In another context, coming across such an adjective might lead one to consider other options. Still, we know that Reisner considered many parts of Africa to be inferior due to his racist conceptions and that, although he admired Meroe, for him, it never lived up to Egypt's standards.

Reisner documented several examples of handmade pottery, specifically in W564, W431, S160… and others. This type of pottery can provide valuable insights into the activities of local artisans and their identities. Although no sex or gender is identified in the tombs where these examples were found, it would be interesting to locate them to draw new conclusions about the dynamics of these creations and gender roles.

While reading the book, I discovered that certain burial goods were not produced locally by the Meroitic people but were identified by Reisner as being made in other cultures. This led me to believe that it could be interesting to investigate this trade or cultural exchange between the Meroitic people and others. I found some interesting examples:

- W127: 'Gold finger ring with Greek inscription.':
- W162: 'Neck and handles of an amphora, showing illegible seal impression in Greek or Latin'. Amphorae were commonly used in the ancient Mediterranean to transport goods such as wine, oil, or grain. The seal impression in Greek or Latin suggests that this amphora may have originated from a Greek or Roman trading vessel, indicating long-distance trade connections.
- W455: 'Fragments of a Pol. BkW. jar (…), with incised Greek inscription below the neck': The presence of a Polychrome, Black-figured Ware jar with a Greek inscription suggests the importation of luxury ceramics from ancient Greece.
- S24: 'A Greek plastic Rhyton'

However, this was easily identified as it had inscriptions or other apparent elements. Still, it was necessary to continue investigating other objects that could be from different areas but that had yet to have such apparent markers of foreign origin. These other artefacts, such as

utilitarian ceramics or everyday tools, also bear witness to these exchanges but more subtly in a standard daily life environment.

Furthermore, feminist archaeology seeks a holistic approach to studying material culture, considering the objects themselves, their contexts, and the broader social, economic and political environments in which they were both produced and used. Tracing these exchange objects allows a more nuanced understanding of ancient trade networks and cultural interactions that recognise individuals' diverse roles and experiences across gender, class and ethnicity. In addition to this, it is worthwhile to examine the Egyptian connections from a fresh perspective. While there is evidence of Egyptian influence, it can be viewed not as proof of their rule but rather as an indication of two strong and equal societies that traded and influenced each other.

Miscellaneous Funerary Interpretations by Reisner

Reisner overlooked some important details that, within the analysis from a feminist perspective, are very important. I noticed various examples. For example, in tomb S15, the skull is identified as male, with little regard for goods: alabaster vessels, fragments of ivory, and gold foil. There is nothing that can be used to determine gender. However, one of the notes here says, 'Lower part of a yellow sandstone stela. Scene: lower part of the lady Pasalta ← before Osiris enthroned with Isis(?) standing behind him → Below two lines of Egyptian hieroglyphic inscription (…) Note: This stela may have been round-topped and could easily have fitted into the niche in the chapel, but since the skull found in the chamber is recorded as male, this stela may perhaps be intrusive here.' In addition to this, at the end of this list of burial S15, the following is written: 'Not Registered. Adult male skull. (ON COFFIN BENCH.)'. The information provided is provoking. First and foremost, it raises questions about the accuracy of the search, which failed to keep track of the skull. Furthermore, although one of the objects in the tomb undoubtedly suggests that it belongs to a woman, it does not even raise the possibility that the skull would have to be re-analysed. However, this cannot be done since the skull is not registered, and this valuable information has been lost. This is a perfect example of a failure to consider the full range of evidence. In feminist archaeology, it is essential to leave the questions open and always remember that what we see at first might be wrong and that our assumptions are always biased. Although not possible because the skull is missing, in a future investigation, there should be another analysis of the burial to determine the skull's sex and the stela's intention and purpose.

Furthermore, Reisner had strong racist ideas that impregnated his excavations. There are comments in the book that clearly show the typical ideas of an American white man from the early 20th century who was very biased in his studies. Like many scholars at the time, he approached his studies with preconceived notions and stereotypes about the people he was investigating. He lived and worked when racial biases were prevalent in Western societies. It is important to point this out, as feminist archaeology is also anti-racist and emphasises inclusivity, diversity, and a critical examination of power dynamics, including race and gender. By acknowledging Reisner's racist ideas and their influence on his excavations, we can see how these biases intersect with gendered power dynamics within the field of archaeology. In this way, several notes in the book prove the racist vision:

- In W505: 'Heavy-set adult skeleton (negro?).' 'Note: This appears to be a late poor man's burial of abnormal type superimposed.'
- In W620: 'BURIALS: Lower, and earlier: adult negroid skeleton extended on back, head W. in traces of wooden box coffin: no objects'.
- In S147: 'BURIAL: intact adult female of negroid type, extended on back, head N. in remains of bead net. No trace of coffin', 'Skull and bones of negroid female.'

While reading these notes, I found Reisner's criteria for identifying a skeleton belonging to a black individual peculiar: What specific characteristics or features did he consider indicative of blackness? And what exactly was the difference between these burials and the rest to point out that they were black?

It is indeed a fascinating aspect to consider how George Andrew Reisner's perceptions of race and social status influenced his archaeological interpretations, particularly in contexts where the majority of the population was of African descent. Reisner's identification of individuals as black or negro, especially in burial contexts devoid of material wealth, raises important questions about the intersectionality of race and class in his analyses.

What is more, it is not difficult to notice that the negro identification is always made within burials that are identified as poorer. Reisner not only categorised someone as negro without any scientific method, but he linked black people to the burial of lower socioeconomic status. Reisner's linking of blackness with poverty perpetuates harmful stereotypes and marginalised populations, and it highlights the importance of reanalyse critically the methodologies of archaeologists as Reisner.

Some of the evidence that Reisner excavated could give us insight into gender roles and new perspectives that could motivate a better understanding of how society understood families, family structures, and caregiving practice. However, Reisner overlooked it. An example is burial W528, described as ‘Leg bones of an adult, head SW. Under this: sub. The contracted skeleton of a small child, head NE. on the left side (…). Apparently, the burial of a child under the legs of its mother. ’ There is a physical closeness between the child and the mother in the burial, which could reflect maternal care and physical attachment. It can also give insights into their connections, relationships, and beliefs that they should be maintained in the afterlife. Moreover, there is a prominent role of caregiving and protection, so it could help to understand the picture of family structures and women's and men's roles in caring for children and their families.

It may be interesting to study those goods that were buried along with children to get closer to societal perceptions of childhood and childcare practices. This could also provide information on whether such burials were limited to lower social classes, as Reisner's documentation offers only one example. Moreover, the goods might also reflect personal relationships and picture the grieving process. During burial rites, personal items of the deceased child or objects that represent the relationship between the adult and the child may be included, indicating the practice of remembering and acknowledging personal loss. This evidence could also be obtained through information about other burials specific to children. W531, W734, W537, W550, W610, W728 or W308. This last one is one of the best-preserved ones, with many goods documented by Reisner. Many of them are more generic ones, such as beads, pendants or offering trays, but there is a wooden toy mouse. This last object is very personal, and examples like this bring us closer to the importance of childhood and play in Nubian society. Another possibility could materialise emotional connections between children and families, or they could also be connected to other religious beliefs or rituals, such as being a totem or spirits. Another curious example of these infant tombs is in tomb W212, where the same ‘gold leaf and flower ornament’ is found in tomb W199. This suggests that the two tombs are somehow related, perhaps two people from the same family or that they share a close social or cultural bond.

Most of the graves of children found at the site are either empty or Reisner did not document many goods. This could have different interpretations. The most apparent one is socio-economic, meaning that families with fewer resources could not afford to bury their loved ones with many possessions. The second interpretation is that these children may have been buried

with fewer possessions because they were not as cherished as they were during a later lifetime, as many of them might have died at birth or within a few months. Indeed, this explains the high number of children's graves at the site.

Conclusions

‘The consistent demonstration and
explanation of the invisibility of women is
a good result in itself’ (Cruz, 2009, p.34).

In conclusion, this thesis demonstrates that gender approaches can help to restudy past excavations, explore new perspectives, and uncover narratives that have been overlooked in archaeology. This has been showcased through an analysis of George A. Reisner's interpretations of funerary and material culture during his excavations in the South and West Cemeteries of Meroe. By applying a gender perspective, this study reconstructs Kush society and gender roles, moving away from patriarchal ideas.

Gender and feminist approaches have revolutionised the field of Nubian archaeology, demonstrating that patriarchal biases have significantly affected archaeology and the historical narrative of ancient societies. Using feminist archaeology in Nubian studies tries to understand and delve deeper into concepts and individuals that have never been the main characters in historical narratives. A feminist archaeology approach contributes to rescuing Kush from historical marginalisation, reinterpreting excavations with greater accuracy by challenging traditional narratives that have excluded certain groups from Kush's history. By considering gender as a critical factor in archaeological interpretations, a more comprehensive and accurate understanding of history can be achieved, allowing for all individuals within the Nubian society to be acknowledged and integrated into historical narratives.

As demonstrated in this thesis, there are several challenges and issues encountered when applying gender archaeology, particularly in the study of material culture and funerary spaces. Gender and sex are very different concepts, and even if we can analyse the remains in a funerary context and determine the sex, understanding their gender and its implications is still far from being achievable. Gender is highly tied to society and its norms, with some individuals having a different gender than what is expected from their biological sex. This is difficult to discern within funerary spaces and material culture, as one must look at the objects to see if there is something that deviates from the norm. Moreover, interpreting gender roles and identities based on material remains is challenging, and there is potential for biases in the interpretation of funerary practices. These challenges highlight the importance of approaching archaeological evidence with a critical and inclusive perspective while also acknowledging the limitations of interpretation.

George A. Reisner's excavations in the cemeteries of Kush during the early 20th century fail to reflect gender identifications and interpretations in several ways. Through the analysis of the burial goods and grave structures, Reisner and his team made assumptions about the gender of the individuals buried in these cemeteries. However, some misinterpretations and errors occurred during the excavation process and subsequent analysis. Furthermore, Reisner's work reflected the prevalent racism and colonialist biases of the time, which influenced the interpretations of gender and the categorisation of individuals based on their perceived ethnic or cultural backgrounds.

In his report from the West and South Cemeteries of Meroe, several examples highlight the importance of gender in Nubian studies, especially regarding the misinterpretations within burials, where assumptions of gender roles based on grave goods emphasise the need for gender analysis to uncover the complexities of Nubian society. After the analysis of the burials that Reisner categorised by sex, it has been concluded that he had no scientific method to do so and that after examining the object in the burials and possible connections with gender, this was not done accurately. Therefore, a scientific re-study of these sites should be carried out in order to sex those people scientifically and, at the same time, to investigate gender in-depth and all that it entails: family relations, dynamics of society, gender roles and intersectionality of gender with other social factors.

In summary, while George A. Reisner's excavations have been demonstrated to include misinterpretations and errors during the excavation process and subsequent analysis, they nonetheless provided valuable insights into the Mereotic period. This highlights the importance of continually reassessing and refining our understanding of the past, considering the impact of biases and societal perspectives on interpretations of historical findings.

For future feminist archaeology research in Nubia, comparative studies across different regions and time periods are essential. This will allow us to explore the diversity of gender roles and identity in different contexts. First, it is crucial to examine how gender intersects with other social categories in Nubia, such as race, class, and ethnicity. Second, further research into domestic spaces is needed, in order to examine gender roles and relationships in the private sphere. Third, prioritising the investigation of non-binary and transgender individuals in archaeological research and interpretations is similarly important. Finally, future publications should promote and disseminate gender-sensitive research findings to contribute to broader discussions in the field.

In conclusion, this thesis demonstrates that applying gender and feminist approaches to Nubian archaeology reveals overlooked perspectives and challenges patriarchal biases, leading to a more inclusive understanding of ancient Kush society. Furthermore, re-evaluating Reisner's excavations through a feminist archaeology framework helps to recognise and address the mistakes and inaccurate narratives that have been perpetuated. This contributes to a more accurate understanding of the past and paves the way for future research that prioritises inclusivity, diversity, and ethical engagement with archaeological fields, materials, and communities.

Abstract

This thesis investigates the impact of feminist approaches in archaeology, with a specific application to Ancient Nubia through a re-evaluation of George Andrew Reisner's excavations in the Southern and Western Cemeteries of Meroe. The analysis focuses on the burial practices of two cemeteries, the items found in the graves, and the potential misinterpretations made by Reisner. It also looks at how Reisner's racist and colonial biases influenced his investigations.

The gendered perspective in Nubia began in studies and excavations of prehistoric or protohistoric sites. However, recently, there has been a growing awareness of the importance of incorporating feminist archaeology in all aspects and periods of Nubian archaeology. This thesis shows how gender and feminist approaches can transform Nubian archaeology, revealing that patriarchal biases have influenced archaeological stories. Using a feminist archaeology approach in Nubian studies helps us better understand concepts and individuals who have been historically overlooked in traditional narratives. By challenging these biases, the research reinterprets excavations more accurately and acknowledges the contributions of all individuals in Nubian society.

The primary literature used includes Dows Dunham's publication of Reisner's archaeological records during the campaign of the Meroitic cemeteries: *Royal Cemeteries of Kush* (1957), along with various books and articles that critique traditional androcentric theories and highlight the development and impact of feminist archaeological theories in nubia and archaeology in general.

Reisner's early 20th-century excavations in Kush widely impacted Kushite archaeology and the view of ancient Nubia culture that was projected into the world. However, this study aims to look again through the funerary spaces and material culture to reexamine those assumptions about gender in Nubia based on grave goods. It also analyses the different aspects of the burials that could give us an insight into family connections, gender dynamics and roles or inter-gender relations. It is further claimed that after re-studying the few burials that were sexed by Reisner, there was no kinetic study or step-by-step dynamics relevant enough to say that this is right. It is concluded, therefore, that a scientific re-study of these sites should be carried out in order to sex the people and, in turn, to investigate the genre in depth.

In conclusion, this thesis demonstrates that feminist approaches to Nubian archaeology uncover overlooked perspectives and challenge patriarchal biases, leading to a more inclusive

understanding of ancient Kush society. The re-evaluation of Reisner's excavations through a feminist framework is used to demonstrate the great inaccuracies that those 20th-century excavations have introduced, and the necessity of re-assessing its aspects to aim for a more accurate historical narrative. It also sets the stage for future research that prioritises inclusivity, diversity, and ethical engagement.

Key Words: Reisner, Feminist Archaeology, Gender, Sex, Burials, Meroe

Resumen

Esta tesis investiga el impacto de los enfoques feministas en la arqueología, con una aplicación específica a la Nubia Antigua a través de una reevaluación de las excavaciones de George Andrew Reisner en los Cementerios del Sur y del Oeste de Meroe. El análisis en esta tesis se centra en las prácticas funerarias de dos cementerios, los objetos encontrados en las tumbas y las posibles interpretaciones erróneas realizadas por Reisner. También examina cómo los prejuicios racistas y coloniales de Reisner influyeron en sus investigaciones.

La perspectiva de género en Nubia comenzó sobre todo en excavaciones prehistóricas o protohistóricas, pero en los últimos años ha habido un crecimiento considerable de las investigaciones con perspectiva feminista en vatios aspectos y períodos de la arqueología Nubia. En esta tesis se muestra cómo los enfoques de género y feministas pueden transformar la arqueología de Kush, revelando que los sesgos patriarcales han influido en su narrativa histórica y arqueológica. Utilizar un enfoque de arqueología feminista en los estudios nubios nos ayuda a comprender mejor conceptos e individuos que históricamente han sido pasados por alto en narrativas tradicionales al mismo tiempo al enfrentarse a estos segos, se pueden reinterpretar las excavaciones de manera más precisa y reconocer las contribuciones de todos los individuos en la sociedad nubia.

La bibiliografía principal utilizada incluye la publicación de los registros arqueológicos de Reisner durante la campaña de los cementerios meroíticos: *Cementerios Reales de Kush* (1957) de Dows Dunham, junto con varios libros y artículos que critican teorías androcéntricas tradicionales y destacan el desarrollo e impacto de las teorías arqueológicas feministas en Nubia y en la arqueología en general.

Las excavaciones de Reisner a principios del siglo XX en Kush impactaron ampliamente la arqueología kushita y en la visión que tenía el resto del mundo sobre ella. Sin embargo, este estudio tiene como objetivo volver a investigar los espacios funerarios y la cultura material

para reexaminar esas suposiciones sobre el género en Nubia basadas en bienes funerarios. También analiza los diferentes aspectos de los entierros que podrían brindarnos una visión de las conexiones familiares, dinámicas y roles de género o relaciones intergénero. Se afirma además que después de reestudiar los pocos entierros que fueron sexuados por Reisner, no hubo un estudio cinético o dinámicas paso a paso lo suficientemente relevantes como para afirmar que esto es correcto. Se concluye, por lo tanto, que se debe realizar un reestudio científico de estos sitios para determinar el sexo de las personas y, a su vez, investigar el género en profundidad.

En conclusión, esta tesis demuestra que los enfoques feministas en la arqueología Nubia pueden descubrir detalles pasados por alto anteriormente y, a la vez, desafían los sesgos patriarcales, lo que lleva a una comprensión más inclusiva de la sociedad antigua de Kush. La reevaluación de las excavaciones de Reisner a través de un marco feminista se utiliza para demostrar la gran inexactitud con la que se realizaron las excavaciones en el siglo XX, y la gran necesidad de reevaluar sus aspectos y aspirar a una narrativa histórica más precisa, estableciendo así el escenario para futuras investigaciones que prioricen la inclusión, la diversidad y el compromiso ético.

Palabras Clave: Reisner, Arqueología Feminista, Género, Sexo, Enterramientos, Meroe

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