Planting Empire, Cultivating Subjects: British Malaya, 1786-1941
Lynn Hollen Lees
Cambridge University Press, 2017; eBook; 374 pages; RRP USD$96; ISBN 9781108547963

The initial inspiration for Lees’ book stems from the most surprising of places: a trove of British Malayan documents tucked away in a Philadelphia archive, some 9000 miles away from their original source. In discovering these materials and realising their potential to recount the story of British Malaya's colonial history through a complex network of perspectives, Lees’ efforts to uncover these different voices have resulted in a fascinating, eminently readable social history of the region. At its heart, Planting Empire interrogates how different communities in Malayan towns and plantations experienced British rule, from 1786 to 1941. Empire, Lees argues, was moulded by communities and structures both social and political, all brought together in a transnational web of interactions. The book therefore attempts to interrogate the many threads that form this web by revealing the perspectives of indentured labourers, townspeople, administrators, merchants, planters and so on. By demonstrating the permeability of colonial spaces and how different actors moved between, or inside them, the book makes for a compelling investigation into how the colonial experience was never a wholly homogenous one.

Given the tendency for social histories of British Malaya to study ethnic experiences in relative isolation, Lees’ contribution to the current corpus is welcome indeed. European, Chinese, Indian, and Malay communities under British rule have been examined in great detail by a number of scholars, but thus far, there has no real attempt to gather these different experiences into a coherent narrative. The inclusion of both town and plantation settings also intervenes into present historiographies which have trended towards strictly urban or rural histories, while interrogations into civil establishments alongside social ones and personal experience offers yet another synthesis of areas. In drawing its material from a variety of different places and perspectives, Planting Empire sits comfortably within a number of intellectual crossroads.

To achieve this, Lees has utilised an extensive range of primary sources which include archival materials, newspapers, photographs, and material objects, the combination of which allows for a richer, more immersive text. Encountering these reconstructed landscapes, readers gain a richer sense of these places and their peoples: the cacophony of a town centre, for instance, or the cheerful conversations held within social clubs. The inclusion of oral interviews in the second half of the book, in particular, is a valuable addition to current works on British Malaya, as actual voices are given the opportunity to speak into their own histories.
Chapters have been divided into two broad temporal sections. *Part 1: The Nineteenth Century* is on the formation of the plantation industry and the birth of urban centres, while *Part 2: The Twentieth Century* investigates the maturing of these spaces and the communities within them, with a larger focus being placed on towns.

The first two chapters deal specifically with plantations. Here, we begin to uncover the interconnected layers of British administration, Asian mediators, European planters, and immigrant workers who helped create a thriving agrarian economy. However, these layers often had elements of tension between them. Possession and control are the two main themes which Lees explores in physical, legislative, spatial, and cultural terms. Of note is the inclusion of women and families into discussions of plantation labour – a space predominantly seen as masculine.

The third and fourth chapters examine the spread of urban development across Western Malaya, with a focus on how physical and institutional establishments affected social interactions. Whilst it has long been known that British administration overlaid pre-existing structures of political control, Lees’ investigations into the socioeconomic elements of the latter and how they affected different communities makes for a fresh approach. Another useful contribution can also found in discussions on colonial subjecthood as a learnt identity, an area of study in which British Malaya has yet to be properly integrated.

The second half of the book opens with an examination of how the rubber industry affected different swathes of society, the racial inequalities of plantation labour being starkly juxtaposed with the issues of urban cosmopolitanism in the proceeding chapter. In Chapter Six, readers gain an in-depth look into the social life of multicultural towns from the 1920s to the 1930s, this being explored through discussions on the role of literacy and language, clubs and associations, and conceptions of ‘modernity’.

Lees uses the final two chapters to unpack the symbiotic relationships that existed between the surface layers of colonial management and the underlayers of indirect control perpetuated by clans, communities, and societies. Different populations moved fluidly between each as they managed multiple allegiances under colonial rule. This in turn provides a smooth transition into discussions surrounding colonial subjecthood, and how colonial identities were set within broader, transnational contexts. To close, the spread of anti-colonial sentiments during the 1930s are also appraised alongside their influences, this leading up to the 1942 Japanese Occupation.

*Planting Empire* achieves its goal of telling the stories of different peoples living under Empire with much grace, meticulous research, and few unnecessary frills. Lees’ writing and treatment of her subjects indicate that she cares deeply about not only having these stories
told, but told well, resulting in an accessible tome written in clear, lively language that will easily find appeal outside academic circles. In attempting to have all these voices speak at once the book does however run into the issue of certain sections feeling oversaturated, as the narrative flits from one perspective to the next in quick succession. Readers barely have time to get acquainted with the subject before another is introduced, leaving us to feel that there is still much more to be explored. This is a great pity given the wealth of material that Lees has at her disposal, but in the face of corralling so many aspects of society all at once, it is inevitable that some detail has to be given up in favour of a book under a thousand pages long.

Similarly, in attempting to cover so many different aspects of a colonial space, some areas such as the role of clubs and societies are returned to multiple times across separate chapters, and this repetition leads to the narrative being more scattered than it should be. Of course, within a project of this scope it can be difficult to balance thematic and temporal groupings. Slightly tighter internal section structures might have helped alleviate this, but overall, this detracts little from the content and reading experience. At times, the constant movement between areas even manages to structurally capture the overarching theme of permeability between colonial spaces. Ultimately, these are small critiques in the face of what is an ambitious and much-needed update to present social histories of the region. *Planting Empire* creates more space for human voices to be heard, these coming from all manners of places which have previously not been examined alongside each other. In marrying plantation stories with urban ones and questioning what it meant to be a colonial subject, Lees has managed to capture the messy multiculturalism that made British Malaya.

*Joanna W.C. Lee*

*Monash University*

Colin A. Hope, assisted by Bruce E. Parr.


This volume presents the corpus of blue-painted pottery from Kom Rabia, as part of the archaeological survey of the Memphite region, in Egypt. The volume is especially unique as the corpus from this site spans the duration of the manufacturing period of blue-painted pottery, from mid-Dynasty Eighteen until the middle of Dynasty Twenty. This makes the publication an excellent collection and volume for collaborative discussion and future analysis with other material of a similar nature. At the outset this highlights the importance of such publications, of which the EES Excavation Memoir series provides many examples for archaeologists, ceramists, historians, and more.

Associate Professor Hope was the Director of the Centre for Ancient Cultures at Monash University where he taught Egyptology until his recent retirement. Throughout his distinguished career he has been an authority on Egyptian ceramics, especially those of the New Kingdom, and more specifically blue-painted pottery. It is fitting that his previous experience with this type of material culture is drawn upon in this volume, stemming from his deep knowledge and experiences since 1973 when he began his study of blue-painted pottery at Malkata, and the early collections from sites such as Karnak North and Amarna. This enables the present volume a distinct flow and credence with its discussion of the evidence from Kom Rabia. This is also combined with recent research undertaken on the source of blue paint from Dakhleh and Kharga Oases for pigments, and the application post firing based on studies the author has been involved with through his role as a Principal Investigator of the Dakhleh Oasis Project.

The main aim of the volume is the documentation of the evolution of blue-painted pottery based on the analysis of decoration and forms for this ceramic type. Hope notes that the material from Kom Rabia, drawn from a controlled excavation area, provides material from both closed and disturbed contexts, to indicate the sequence of evolution, based on the decorative program used. The documentation of this material here is given a wider context through the comparison of material from other sites indicated above.

The introduction sets out the aim, the fabrics, and surface treatment categories applicable to the discussion in subsequent chapters and the appendix. This has been written in conjunction with Bourriau’s recent publication of New Kingdom pottery from Kom Rabia (2010), also part of the same series.
Chapter Two begins by setting out aspects of methodology applied to the analysis and interpretation of the decoration motifs of blue-painted pottery, which has is based on previous research and developed (Hope 1980) and evolved through the authors career. This approach has been applied to the material from Kom Rabia, which seems to confirm the original analysis of blue-painted pottery from Malkata and Amarna.

The analysis of decoration is separated into several parts including elements which comprise to form a motif. Motifs are then grouped into families (floral, faunal (with sub-family groupings), human and deities, hieroglyphic, and abstract). Further categorisation occurs with structure classes falls into three categories: simple, composite, and complex, which are used with motif groups to produce motif classes. The structure of motifs is discussed, with all of the analysis providing comprehensive details. The motifs are organised into panels with make-up the overall design on a vessel, with different design classes. This arrangement made by Hope provides an in-depth detailed analysis, unique at times for its easily accessible outlay, but easily applied elsewhere and adapted with future research. This is because Hope has established a reference system here for design classes to the technique of decoration for blue-painted pottery.

All of the fragments of blue-painted pottery analysed by Hope are presented within their find contexts, which is organised by a well-structured catalogue in Chapter Three. This material is arranged in a chronological framework for the duration of the production of this type of pottery. Importantly, Hope notes that any aesthetic appreciation of decoration is subjective, and as such, only basic observations are given in this volume. The author does rightly note that any distinct relationship between the vessel and shape and decoration may stem from the desire to emphasis and stimulate the structure representation of the motif of vessel shape.

Chapter Three also sets out the sequence of blue-painted pottery chronologically at Kom Rabia via Levels V upwards in the archaeological sequence to modern levels. Due to the fragmentary nature of the material, the corpus forms are not provided, and parallels are not frequently provided, as it was a difficult task to complete with the state of perseverance of the corpus. This is the largest chapter, setting-out the bulk of the data on blue-painted pottery from the site, and it is here that the comparative nature of the volume shines for possible future research.

The fourth chapter characterises the decoration by motifs and frequency of classes and sub-classes. This allows any determination of frequency use throughout the archaeological levels and sub-phases. It also allows Hope to compare the use of design classes and sub-classes found at the site with others listed above, and then to determine if
the Kom Rabia corpus attests to a Memphite tradition for the manufacture of blue-painted pottery and to briefly discuss the functional value of the material.

Notably, this volume presents a comprehensive listing of decorative motifs from a wide range of sites, again helping, and hopefully prompting further analysis and discussion of ceramic research on Egyptian blue-painted pottery. Hope highlights that the volume and nature of comparative material is not uniform, nor are the social contexts of different sites, so results can be tentative. Hope also points out that due to the fragmented nature of the corpus from Kom Rabia makes any discussion of the morphological evolution of ceramic forms, and associated decoration very difficult to engage with. However, this type of publication means that future analysis and discussion can be undertaken, perhaps in conjunction with other corpora from different sites for a wider and holistic approach to the topic. Fortunately, the author has outlined similarities of the decorative motifs from other sites such as Amarna, Karnak North, Malkata, and Qantir.

This volume discusses ceramic theory, and importantly applies it well, providing a useful application for other corpora. Given the short discussion of the material, the volume is suitable for those setting out in Egyptological studies, with an interest in archaeology from Egypt or the ancient world, and specifically those focussing on ceramics. The layout of EEF volumes is such that they provide a well laid-out and accessible series, with a good flow and structure to any level of reader. The catalogue/appendix is easily accessible and well explained, providing further emphasis on why this volume will be useful to future comparative research.

*Caleb R. Hamilton*

*Monash University*
Prehistoric Pottery from Dakhleh Oasis, Egypt.

Ashten R. Warfe.

Oxbow, Dakhleh Oasis Project Monograph 18, 2017, 144 pages.


This volume presents the prehistoric ceramic corpus from Dakhleh Oasis, and is well aligned with a plethora of material currently being published from this region. Covering the period from the early and mid-Holocene, this volume uniquely provides and discusses one of the earliest bodies of material to be surveyed and excavated in this part of the Egyptian Western Desert. It is the result of the authors PhD research, completed through Monash University (2008), and is highly anticipated due to the important contribution it makes to understanding this period of occupation of the Western Desert, and specifically the Dakhleh Oasis by the Sheikh Muftah cultural unit, amongst other cultures. It is important to note that this volume is a shortened version of the authors PhD research, forming three chapters from the authors previous work, though now matched with new content to provide a description, classification, and also quantification of the early pottery from Dakhleh.

Warfe focuses on the fact that pottery is an essential part of the material culture that remains from the late prehistory in this part of Egypt, and Africa. Rightly so, Warfe uses this category to examine the long-term human development and occupation of the Dakhleh region. The material comes from 101 sites in this region, though a small amount of these were not registered with the Dakhleh Oasis survey. An important aspect of the ceramics analysed is the fact that they derive from settlement contexts, rather than burials, with the latter traditionally a strong source of analysed objects from Egypt. The author has associated the ceramics with hut circles, hearths, and lithic scatters, amongst other site types, which allows the data and conclusions from this volume to be used in future research to construct a more complete understanding of the Masara, Bashendi A and Bashendi B, as well as the various phases of Sheikh Muftah cultural development. Overall, this helps to present a more holistic understanding of these cultures during the Holocene towards the establishment of the Egyptian State in the Nile Valley, and its subsequent expansion towards the Dakhleh Oasis and the interaction between the later Egyptians and the Sheikh Muftah. This understanding of the different local cultural units, through the innovation in ceramic traditions, is also compared to other traditions in the desert region. Through this, the work of Mary McDonald and others more recently helps to situate the study by Warfe with other researchers and artefact categories.
A corpus of over 10,000 sherds was analysed by the author (as outlined in Chapters Two to Four), showing the depth of the examination and the importance of the conclusions that form Chapter Seven. The discussion allows for the establishment of a detailed cultural sequence, and Warfe has therefore been able to indicate stylistic variations between investigated sites and through the time period framing the study. The appendix provides a useful list of the 96 registered sites and five unregistered site collections from Dakhleh Oasis. Notably, the author has used this artefact category to provide useful comments on the social relations and economic capabilities of the inhabitants of the region across time. The short, though well-structured conclusion (Chapter Seven), provides thought-provoking comments on the study of ceramics from this region of Egypt, and helps to promote a better understanding of the early and mid-Holocene cultural units.

One of the more significant aspects of the discussion within this volume is the provenance of the ceramics, which helps to provide a better context of this corpus within archaeological research in northeast Africa. As the author notes, this allows future research a useful comparative and contrasting reference of ceramic material from the Western Desert. The technical detail of the volume makes it suitable for ceramicists, archaeologists focussing on northeast Africa, more specifically the Egyptian Western Desert, though early Egyptological studies as well. It is more appropriate for those well-trained and versed in these fields, and some students may find it accessible, for advanced studies. As part of the Dakhleh Oasis Project Monograph series, there are other useful volumes that may match the research in this present monograph, though an abundance of more recent articles also supports the research presented here.

Caleb R. Hamilton

Monash University
**Amheida II: A Late Romano-Egyptian House in the Dakhla Oasis**

Anna Lucille Boozer et al.,
New York University Press, 2015; 460 pages; 160 figures; 19 tables; RRP USD$55; ISBN 9781479880348

The study of life in Roman Egypt (30 BCE – AD 350) has long suffered from a dearth of reliable archaeological evidence, but this situation is beginning to change as the results of well-funded and large scale excavations are seeing publication. The volume under review is the second in a series of report/discussion monographs to come out of the Amheida Project mission, an ongoing multidisciplinary research project designed to understand the archaeological history of the settlement today called Amheida in Dakhleh Oasis in Egypt’s Western Desert.

The town of Amheida, in ancient times called Trimithis, is one of the chief sites of archaeological investigation in the Oasis. The focus of the present volume, House B2, was excavated between 2005 and 2007. The volume proposes to “…contribute[s] to the growing corpus of data on Romano-Egyptian daily life…” (Boozer et al. 2015, 17) by showcasing the results of the excavations through a series of chapters organised by reference to various elements of material culture, among them ceramics (Chapter 8), unfired clay objects (Chapter 9), figurines (Chapter 10), features of adornment (Chapter 11) and glass vessels (Chapter 12). These are preceded by an extensive description of the excavation history of the house (Chapter 4), the building techniques employed by the original inhabitants, insofar as that can be determined (Chapter 5). Other chapters present theoretical material and discussion relating to research methodologies (Chapter 3) and materiality (chapter 7).

While the core of the volume lies with those chapters concerned with either the excavation of the house itself or the various categories of material evidence which were extracted and noted, Boozer attempts to situate these data within an integrative framework which also draws on a range of abstract theoretical positions. For example, her discussion on architecture (Chapter 6) brings methods originally applied in the context of Pompeii to bear on the spatial analysis of room layout in the B2 house. This analysis serves as a jumping off point from which comparisons to other houses and domestic structures in Roman Egypt (and further afield) are made. Boozer draws useful contrasts with better known house types discovered in the Roman Fayum at Karanis, emphasising the ‘verticality’ of the spatial arrangement in these structures as opposed to the apparent ‘horizontal’ layout of House B2 (174-181). Boozer further speculates that such arrangements might provide additional evidence for the presence of vast spatio-temporal ‘architectural regions’ within the Roman empire, an idea originally supplied by Simon Ellis. Such comparative work is useful,
although it is always valuable to ask about the extent to which limited amounts of material evidence (from one structure, no less) are sufficient for the examination of themes like this.

In the same discussion Boozer (175) writes, “The layout of House B2 is typical of what appears to be a local Dakhlan domestic architectural tradition…” The “domestic architectural tradition” such as it is, is known mostly from the excavations of the town of Kellis, situated some miles to the south-east of Amheida. Boozer’s analysis of this tradition from the Kellis excavations is subtle and is suggestive of a greater synthesis, but again it drives toward a broader conclusion, even when the evidence presented in the remainder of the volume is partial and incomplete. In the case of Amheida the settlement remains largely unexcavated, and only House B1 and B2 have been excavated and recorded in depth. The town of Kellis is more thoroughly exposed, but its excavators have been limited and cautious about the extent to which the archaeological picture of the town should be put in the service of grand synthesising narratives or theories. Boozer, too, is cognizant of this when she writes that “In an area of nascent study, such as Romano-Egyptian houses, we ought to remain mindful of the many comparative examples that have been lost to us…” (174)

The volume helpfully presents a wide series of fascinating results, and certainly succeeds in its ambition to further our archaeological knowledge of Roman Egypt. The ceramic, architectural, and numismatic data are presented and handled clearly, but the book suffers in its discussion sections from an overemphasis on theoretical considerations which the evidence is not yet comprehensive enough to come into contact with.

Benjamin Bassett
Monash University

---

2 Ellis, S.P. 2002, Roman Housing, Bristol Classical Press, Bristol.