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Gender as a Frame of War in Ancient Nubia

Abstract:

Gender archaeology of ancient Nubia is still a nascent field. Studies of gender are especially lacking in investigations concerning war and violence, usually written from an androcentric perspective, and focusing solely on army, weaponry, battle representations, and images of enemies. The experiences of non-combatants, such as women, children, and non-combating men, are rarely considered. The same tendency is observable with the gender background of war. This paper deals with gender structure in the lists of spoils of war, women and children as prisoners of war in representations of the aftermath of battle, feminization of enemies in royal texts, participation of royal women in war, and depictions of royal women smiting enemies. The sources for the study come from the Napatan and Meroitic periods (eighth century BCE to fourth century CE). In terms of gender as a frame of war, Kushite kings were represented as masculine, and their enemies as feminine. This binary opposition has also been observed in ancient Egyptian and Neo-Assyrian sources, and was clearly a shared vocabulary of the great powers of the second and first millennia BCE. Such a frame of war was based on a gender disposition, of men as active and strong, and women as passive and weak. It "naturalized" Kushite domination over their enemies, just as it "naturalized" male domination in ancient Sudanese society. However, the participation of Meroitic queens in conflicts and their depictions smiting enemies show how the visual vocabulary of violence can be utilized even by some women, in their own expression of power.

Bio:

Uroš Matić is a research fellow of the Austrian Archaeological Institute, Austrian Academy of Sciences, Vienna, Austria. He received his PhD from the Institute for Egyptology and Coptic Studies of the University of Münster, Germany, in 2017. For this work, he received the Philippika prize of Harrassowitz in 2018 and the Best Publication Award of the Austrian Academy of Sciences in 2020. Since 2012, he has been a team member of several archaeological missions in Egypt (Tell el-Dab^{ca}, Aswan, and Kom Ombo). He was co-chair of the Archaeology and Gender in Europe (AGE) community of the European Association of Archaeologists from 2016 to 2019. He is currently finishing a project on Old Kingdom pottery from Kom Ombo and studying ancient Egyptian lists of spoils of war. His most recent publications are *Violence and Gender in Ancient Egypt* (2021) and *Beautiful Bodies. Gender and Corporeal Aesthetics in the Past* (2022).