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Plain and Painted Pottery

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Plain and Painted Pottery

*The rise of Late Neolithic ceramic styles on the Syrian
and northern Mesopotamian plains*

Plain and Painted Pottery

The Rise of Late Neolithic Ceramic Styles on the Syrian and Northern Mesopotamian Plains

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*To Bob Nieuwenhuyse,
who so much appreciated the archaeologist's
concern for a scientific approach to the past,
and to Anne-Céline.
They simply should have been here.*

Acknowledgements

My first experience with prehistoric pottery from the Near East was way back, in Amsterdam. Prof. Dr. Maurits N. Van Loon still had his office in the worn-out, almost prehistoric *Instituut voor Prae- and Protohistorie*, the Archaeology Department of Amsterdam University. Van Loon kept himself surrounded with a bunch of elder, mean-looking students: Marc Verhoeven, Hans Curvers and Peter Akkermans all kept a desk in Van Loon's over-crowded library. Incidentally these people also gave lectures, and one day Peter Akkermans began teaching a course on prehistoric pottery from Syria. Little did we youngsters realise that many of us would spend much of our future lives on the Syrian steppes. We were struck by the magnificent pottery Akkermans gave us to study, and by the still poorly known Halaf culture that produced such beauties. Peter Akkermans has remained a loyal guide to my subsequent itineraries and this project is as much his as it is mine.

My first 'live' encounter with the Halaf culture came in 1990, when I joined Hans Curvers and Glenn Schwartz at Early Bronze Age Tell al-Raqq'a. Curvers turned out to be another persuasive inspirator. His contagious enthusiasm for the prehistoric archaeology of Syria was a most stimulating force. At Tell al-Raqq'a, Miriam Teeuwisse showed us the Halaf pottery from Tell Sabi Abyad and Khirbet esh-Shenef, which she was preparing for publication. Circumstances prevented her from completing her project, but Teeuwisse's work would form the immediate basis of my own subsequent studies on the ceramics from Tell Sabi Abyad. The following summer, living through my first season of fieldwork at the 'Mound of the White Boy', we dug ourselves into the crumbly orange debris that eventually became the 'Burnt Village'. After the fieldwork, Peter Akkermans suggested I that study the Early Halaf and part of the Transitional pottery in a joint effort with Dr. Marie LeMière. The present book owes a considerable debt to LeMière and could simply not have been written without her work.

Following my MA at the University of Amsterdam, Peter Akkermans suggested the topic of this book for a Ph.D. dissertation. Thus began an inspiring stage in my life. I am grateful to the National Museum of Antiquities Leiden for assuring a loyal home base for our research throughout these years and for helping whenever and in whatever way possible. Various persons in the museum have at times provided crucial assistance, in particular Peter-Jan Bomhof, photographer, Henk Nort, computer manager, Steph Scholten, head of the Collections Department, and Renée Magendans, at the time the director of the museum. Scholten and Magendans were among the first museum officials that actually visited our excavations. Perhaps not always acknowledged publicly, by supporting and making possible archaeological fieldwork in Syria the National Museum of Antiquities has assumed a vital role within the present-day scientific establishment.

It should be apparent that this book represents the results from a series of fruitful joint projects with a large number of people and institutions. Foremost I wish to thank Bram van As and Loe Jacobs of the Department of Pottery Technology of Leiden University for their personal engagement, their skilful contributions to the project and their patient teaching of pre-modern ceramic technology. Their worldwide research truly fits a globalized economy. I owe warm memories to the pleasant, highly professional, collaboration initiated by the excavator of Tell Boueid II, Dr. Antoine Suleiman of the DGAM Damascus. More specialised aspects of the ceramic technology have been investigated by Dr. Gerwulf Schneider and Dr. Malgorzata Daszkiewicz of the Free University of Berlin, Dr. Jaques Connan of the University of Strassbourg, Benjamin Diebold of Yale University, Beatrice Roberts of the University of Bordeaux, Tom Broekmans at Antwerp University, and Agnes Vokaer at the Geological Department of Oxford University.

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The fieldwork in Syria was evidently not carried out alone. Throughout these years we have always profited from the whole-hearted, so often crucial, assistance provided by our colleagues from the Directorate General of Antiquities and Museums: Nauras Mohammad and Murhaf al-Khalaf from the Archaeological Museum of Raqqa, and in particular Dr. Michel Maqdissi from the headquarters in Damascus. Our guard, Salem al-Mughlif has proved his weight in gold. As the organization of international archaeological projects is becoming increasingly complex, it is essential to have good 'ground support'; in this respect the Netherlands Institute for Academic Studies Damascus, represented over the past years by Kim Duistermaat, has been - and still is - a successful intermediary. In the field many Syrian and European students of archaeology have helped with the ceramic possessing. Marc Lebeau, Halil Tekin and Mehmet Özdoğan all have been helpful at one stage or another. One summer, Diederik Meijer generously offered me his own dig house at Tell Hammam et-Turkman as a place to stay and work on the ceramics from Sabi Abyad - no small offer considering the crowded conditions while his excavations were in full swing!

After the fieldwork, invaluable assistance in preparing pottery figures was offered by Els van den Berg and, in particular, Lex van Soest and Erica Dooijes. Erica Dooijes then offered to prepare the lay out of this thesis, and it is she who made sure that this presentation was professionally completed in time. The corrections of the English language were made by Ans Bulles and, often in conjunction with the best Italian red wine available in Leiden, by Maria Trentin. Various people have read long, tedious pieces of text, and commented upon it. In this respect I wish to thank Richard Spoor, Renske Dooijes, Marc Verhoeven, Loe Jacobs,

Maria Trentin, Joan Oates, Stuart Campbell, John Bintliff, Leendert Louwe Kooijmans, Bram van As, Diederik Meijer and Peter Akkermans for their trouble, and for their comments and suggestions. They certainly do not agree with all that is written here, for which the responsibility is entirely my own.

This has been a self-funded thesis. As with any archaeological project, it would not have materialized without a sound financial basis. The National Museum of Antiquities Leiden faithfully offered unrestricted access to its facilities, covered various costs related to the project, and invited me to gain experience with the museum field by working as an assistance-curator. The HOVO foundation at the Free University of Amsterdam, directed by Anneke de Lange and Astrid Mantel, showed itself to be a constructive partner whenever the demands of fieldwork in Syria conflicted with university teaching schedules. The Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO) has consistently responded favourably to our appeals for financial support. It has enabled the fieldwork itself (dossier R28-452), visits to important reference collections (dossier R28-436, dossier R28-458 and dossier R28-511), and, crucially, it provided the means to finish this study and to prepare its publication (Vervangingssubsidie 365.62.002). De Stichting Nederlands Museum voor Anthropologie en Praehistorie, which shares a long, fruitful history with Dutch archaeological explorations in Syria, has been a loyal companion by generously covering various travelling expenses.

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Olivier Nieuwenhuysse
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