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**A market of polyphonies: the social mobility of prestige goods in ancient Egypt
(1900-1650)**

The paper builds on a group of fourteen faience figurines which all entered the collection of the British Museum in 1891: although these figurines come from purchases, they form a homogenous group and they can all be typologically and stylistically dated to the late Middle Kingdom (1800-1650 BC). Close analogies in manufacture, shape, decoration, raw materials and the technology employed led to suggest a possible common place of provenance (or – eventually– production); Lahun has been tentatively proposed here on the ground of the date of purchase and on a comparative approach.

The second part of the article aims to tackle more theoretical and methodological issues, in order to acknowledge the degree of centralisation and/or dispersion in the production of faience figurines in the Middle Kingdom. Four key variables have been identified and analysed here: the value and the provenance of the raw material; the size of the work-force; the technical skills required; the destination of the finished products. The dissonance offered by these four variables, which conflict between them and do not draw a unidirectional line, has shown that faience is an ‘ambiguous’ media, which cannot be fully controlled in all the steps of its production. Therefore, faience production straddles between ordinary and prestige goods. The only the control that can be exercised relates to the craftsmanship of the artisans: since faience figurines of the late Middle Kingdom are not produced with moulds –therefore they are not mechanically reproducible–, only skilled makers, escorted by those who had control over the intellectual sources, can have generated such a type of artefacts. Therefore late Middle Kingdom faience figurines can be classified under the prestige goods, although the ubiquity of the raw materials (sand, flint or crushed pebbles, water, lime, alkali, and copper scraps) allows also for local variation, as in the case of Serabit el-Khadim (Hathor sanctuary).