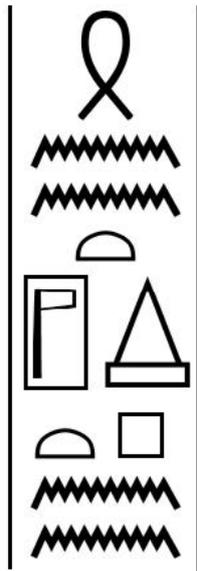


On the Origins of the Cartouche and Encircling Symbolism in Old Kingdom Pyramids

David Ian Lightbody



Access Archaeology





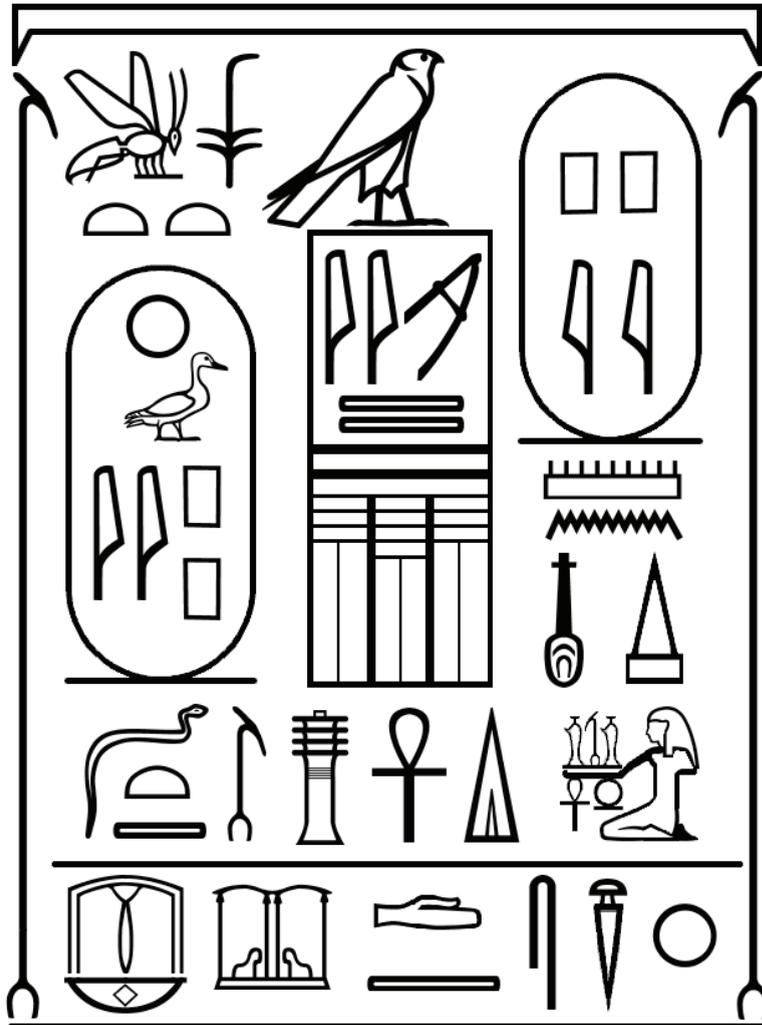
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Frontispiece (above). Representation of a “cosmic frame” panel inscribed on a travertine/ Egyptian alabaster jar dedicated to Pepi I Meryre, on the occasion of his first heb-sed (Egyptian Museum Berlin, ÄM 7715). The text reads, from right column to left and from top to bottom: “The beautiful pyramid of Pepi is enduring, the living Horus, beloved of the two-lands, *nswt-bity*, Pepi, son of Re. An offering of never-ending encircling protection, life, and dominion; given life, stability, and dominion, forever. On the occasion of the first heb-sed”. This panel demonstrates the close relationship between the pharaoh’s names, cults, and architecture. The architectural aspect is manifested by the palace façade serekh and by the name of the pyramid. The symbolism of the piece alludes to the dual eternal and ephemeral nature of the pharaoh, and the vessel would have been used in the pharaoh’s cult at the new pyramid complex. It was found in his mortuary temple in South Saqqara (D. Lightbody).

Cover image. Hieroglyphs within a shen-ring: *šnnt mr hwt-ntr*; stating that “[This] pyramid and temple are encircled”. The text is from Pyramid Text PT 534 §1277, found at the entrance to the pyramid of Pepi I Meryre in South Saqqara (D. Lightbody).

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Conventions

After the introduction, the text and chapters of this book are arranged in chronological order. The illustrations of the relevant artifacts and monuments are distributed through the text and are numbered according to the dynasty in which the piece or building was created, and then by the order in which the item is discussed in the chapter. For example, (Figure 2-1) refers to item 1 in the chapter covering dynasty 2. The depictions, therefore, correspond rigorously to the sections covering the dynasty in which the subject matter was created. Towards the end of the book is an additional section illustrating and discussing related artifacts from the Middle and New Kingdoms. These later examples, which were not created during dynasties 1-6 that are the focus of this study, all have 7 as the first digit in the bipartite figure code. That number does not actually refer to dynasty 7 and is only used to maintain chronological order. The table of figures on the previous two pages sets out the titles of the illustrations, the order in which they appear, and the corresponding figure numbers.

The acronyms B.C. and A.D. are used throughout. This is the author's preference, due to the force of habit, and it is retained on the basis that C.E. and B.C.E. seem to lack some degree of clarity, and take up more space on the pages and in tables.

The terms "pharaoh" and "pharaonic" are used extensively in this work to refer to the rulers of Upper and Lower Egypt and their culture, for the whole dynastic era. The Egyptian roots of the English word pharaoh, *pr-ꜣ3* "great house", were not used to refer to a person until the New Kingdom, and so referring to the ruler as a "pharaoh" or anything as "pharaonic" may not seem appropriate for the Old Kingdom period. The alternative English word "king", however, was never used to refer to any Egyptian ruler during Antiquity. As will be discussed in this current work, the ancient Egyptian system of leadership was intimately tied to the landscape, history, and culture of the lower Nile Valley in a way that did not apply in other regions. The use of a unique term that has its roots in ancient Egypt, and which alludes to the architecture of ancient Egypt as well as the Egyptian ruler, means that the word "pharaoh" is most appropriate for the current context. The word "pharaonic" refers to the unique organizational system in which the "pharaoh" existed.

Abbreviations

AIA	<i>Archaeological Institute of America.</i>
ASAE	<i>Annales du Service des Antiquités de l'Égypte.</i>
AUC	<i>American University in Cairo.</i>
BIFAO	<i>Bulletin de l'Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale.</i>
BiOr	<i>Bibliotheca Orientalis.</i>
BMFA	<i>Bulletin of the Museum of Fine Arts.</i>
BSAE	<i>British School of Archaeology in Egypt.</i>
CAJ	<i>Cambridge Archaeological Journal.</i>
DE	<i>Discussions in Egyptology.</i>
EES	<i>Egypt Exploration Society.</i>
GM	<i>Göttinger Miszellen.</i>
IFAO	<i>l'Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale.</i>
JAEA	<i>Journal of Ancient Egyptian Architecture.</i>
JARCE	<i>Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt.</i>
JEA	<i>Journal of Egyptian Archaeology.</i>
JNES	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies.</i>
JSSEA	<i>Journal of the Society for the Study of Egyptian Antiquities.</i>
MDAIK	<i>Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts, Abteilung Kairo.</i>
MDOG	<i>Mitteilungen der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft, Berlin/Leipzig.</i>
OMRO	<i>Oudheidkundige mededelingen van het Rijksmuseum van Oudheden in Leiden.</i>
PM	<i>Porter, B. and Moss, R., Topographical Bibliography, Oxford, Griffith Institute.</i>
ZÄS	<i>Zeitschrift für ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde.</i>

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This work could not have been completed without the help of many friends and colleagues over the last decade. They have helped me collect and understand information relating to this new study of the ancient world. In particular, I want to thank Amy Wilson, Franck Monnier, Jon Bodsworth, Anke Webber, Angela McDonald, Rozenn Bailleul-LeSuer, the late Glen Dash, the late Edwin C. Brock, Edward Brovanski, Jannik Korte, Krista Moyls, Anne Snyder Payne and Keith Payne, Brian Alm, Kate Gingell, Helen McDonald and the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, and Lawrence Berman and the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. More generally, I thank all those scholars whose diligent research and fieldwork in Egypt produced the foundation of information on which this current research was built. Many of those scholars are listed in the bibliography, but I would particularly like to single out William Matthew Flinders Petrie as a great inspiration for my research and for this current study. Finally, I thank my wife Lindsay for helping me edit the document and find the time and space required to complete it.

It has been the greatest privilege of my intellectual life to work on this fascinating subject. Due to the potential significance of the conclusions drawn, I decided to share the publication as widely as possible by publishing Open Access. I hope that this treatise is an adequate tribute to the ancient monument builders, to the many people who have helped me study them, and to all you readers who have decided to learn more about them. It is my sincere hope that you take the time to carefully evaluate all of the information presented here for yourselves, and that you enjoy the experience as much as I have.

This book is dedicated to Carl and Carlanne Herzog's Christian book group in Vermont, which has been particularly supportive of my ongoing research and publication efforts.

David Ian Lightbody, Ph.D., M.Phil, BEng (Hons), PGCE. Vermont, 2019.

Foreword

The subject of this publication is encircling symbolism in pharaonic monumental tomb architecture. The study focuses on the Early Dynastic Period and the Old Kingdom; from the first dynasty through the sixth dynasty of ancient Egyptian history. During that time, encircling symbolism became most influential and was developed most significantly. The cartouche also became the principal symbol of the pharaoh for the first time. This work demonstrates how the development of the cartouche was closely related to the monumental encircling symbolism incorporated into the architectural designs of the Old Kingdom pyramids.

This publication builds on a long-term research project that I began in 2004, and which in turn built on research and knowledge assembled by other scholars who worked on the subject during the 19th and 20th centuries. Far from being resolved or settled, the subject matter was still poorly understood when I first encountered it in 2004. In 2008, I published a monograph¹ setting out my preliminary thoughts on the issue, which are more fully elucidated here with corrections and additions where necessary.

The first objective of the 2008 report was to compile and publish the basic archaeological evidence that was available at that time, predominantly in the form of linear measurements derived from standing building surveys. The second objective of the publication was to demonstrate how the data set assembled there supports the proposal that the ancient Egyptians utilized special dimensions and proportions² to build their pharaonic monuments. As described below, some of the principal dimensions and proportions of the pharaonic tombs were based on the geometric properties of circles. The third objective of the 2008 study was to investigate the symbolic context of that architectonic tradition, in order to understand what it meant in the ancient Egyptian mind. All three of those objectives were met, but with respect to the third objective, the analysis was superficial, only hinting at what subsequently proved to be a deeply important pharaonic tradition.

As will be discussed below, encircling symbolism was expressed simultaneously through multiple aspects of ancient Egyptian culture. It manifested through the ancient Egyptian language, through their scripts, in the decoration of their jewelry and fine vessels, in their architectural decor, as well as in the principal dimensions of their most significant pharaonic monuments.

It was important to revisit this subject in a new and dedicated publication because it elucidates aspects of the early development of the abstract sciences and applied engineering, including architecture and math, in ancient Egypt.³ Despite its importance, the subject area has remained

1 D. Lightbody, *Egyptian Tomb Architecture. The Archaeological Facts of Pharaonic Circular Symbolism*, vol. S1852 (Oxford: Archaeopress British Archaeological Reports International Series, 2008).

2 Proportion is not synonymous with ratio. A proportion in art or architecture refers to the relative spatial magnitudes of elements of the composition. The related magnitudes can be expressed as a numerical ratio when their lengths, areas, or volumes are calculated or measured as numerical values and compared. The proportional relationship is not fixed to particular magnitudes or dimensions, and can be reproduced at different scales.

3 In order to help develop an open forum where papers focusing on ancient Egyptian architecture could be submitted, peer-reviewed, published, and discussed, I worked with Franck Monnier to establish the *Journal of Ancient Egyptian Architecture* in 2016, and we were able to do this with the help of several professional and amateur colleagues. Paul François designed a bespoke online reading interface to make the peer reviewed studies available world-wide. See: *The Journal of Ancient Egyptian Architecture* online at www.Egyptian-architecture.com. We continue to maintain the website and associated social-media forum and volume 4 will be published in 2020.

confused,⁴ and at times even contentious,⁵ and the technical discussions lacked clarity.⁶ This updated publication presents and elaborates the hypothesis put forward by Petrie and others. It is hoped that by compiling and developing the latest available information into an organized and useful research report that the subject can be more readily appreciated by interested readers.⁷

-
- 4 In the late 19th century, the issue of circular symbolism in the Great Pyramid was taken up by the Astronomer Royal for Scotland, Charles Piazzi Smyth. His theories on the matter were distorted by his religious and nationalist beliefs and it was not until Petrie's survey became available in 1883 that most of Smyth's ideas were effectively debunked. Smyth's publications continued to confuse the matter and discredited the issue to some extent in the public mind. Petrie did provide a clear explanation of the architectural phenomenon as he saw it, and the issue was rehabilitated to some extent by the mid-20th century. I.E.S. Edwards was one of those Egyptologists who broadly accepted Petrie's conclusions on the matter.
 - 5 At the end of the 20th century, the issue of circular symbolism in the architecture of the pyramids became one of the core issues discussed during the debates surrounding the contribution of Africa to the development of the sciences. A series of contentious articles were published as part of the "Black Athena Debate", focussing on the hypothesis published by Martin Bernal, grandson of Egyptologist Alan Gardiner. See M. Bernal, *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization* (London: Free Association Books, 1987). The issue of circular symbolism was drawn into that debate, but the discussions were inconclusive and remained confused as they primarily referenced philological works rather than the architectural evidence from the monuments themselves.
 - 6 One of the most widely read and well developed discussions of the issue of circular symbolism in the Great Pyramid's architecture in recent years was the publication by C. Rossi, *Architecture and Mathematics in Ancient Egypt* (Cambridge: University Press, 2003). I addressed the arguments made there in my 2008 publication, and the Addendum of the current publication addresses the mathematical evidence in more detail. The conclusions of my analysis indicate that the written evidence from mathematical papyri and the architectural evidence from field surveys are in fact complementary, rather than contradictory, and do support the conclusions reached by Petrie that the circular symbolism was intentionally incorporated into the designs of the monuments.
 - 7 Over the course of the research project, I published shorter interim presentations of aspects of the research, including D. Lightbody, "The Encircling Motifs of Old Kingdom Avian Themed Pharaonic Vases", *GM* 249 (2016); "Biography of a Great Pyramid Casing Stone", *JAEA* 1 (2016); "The Encircling Protection of Horus", in *Proceedings of the Twelfth Annual Symposium Current Researches in Egyptology, 2011, University of Durham*, eds. H. Abd El Gawad, et al. (Oxford: Oxbow, 2012).

Introduction

This introduction sets out the theoretical basis and background to the study, before the archaeological information is presented in chronological order in the subsequent sections.

To be rigorous, research must take place within an established academic context and a rational intellectual structure. These provide the organizational and theoretical foundations of all advanced study. In order to contextualize this current study for the reader then, the organizational and theoretical background against which it was carried out must be defined and summarized. The first point of note is that the research was inherently interdisciplinary in nature. In order to understand the core issue, every available class of evidence from the Old Kingdom had to be examined. All of the available publications relating to the period and subject in question, including scholarship from several different sub-fields of study, were consulted. The different issues that arose in those sub-fields are described below.

The most basic approach taken towards understanding the Old Kingdom is to address it as history. Traditionally, the study of history began by following the “great man theory”.⁸ In Egyptology, the approach translates into interpreting ancient Egyptian history as a sequence of events shaped by a sequence of influential pharaohs and their dynasties. The current study does follow a relatively traditional diachronic approach, and the role of pharaohs in the ancient Egyptian culture was clearly significant, but like many other historians I have questioned the basis of this approach.⁹ The genesis of influential men or women depends on factors specific to the cultures that produced them, and on the specific context into which the individuals were born. Before “great men” or women could remake society, society had first to make them. Later social historians viewed historical changes with a much longer perspective,¹⁰ and some considered that cultures undergo specific periods of profound change as a result of multiple influences that intersect during specific periods, rather than depending on the transformative actions of any one individual.

The architectural iconography studied here was developed by the pharaonic culture, and while it remains difficult to interpret it with respect to specific individuals,¹¹ it is possible to relate important changes that appear in artworks to specific historical events and cultural changes taking place at the time they were made. In this study of pharaonic Egypt, it appears that the most significant changes were initiated by the Old Kingdom court, by its artisans as well as the members of the administration, and perhaps at times by the pharaoh himself. The start of the third dynasty was a phase of particularly intense cultural change. In the pages that follow, I propose that many novel aspects of the third dynasty’s monumental architecture and iconography were deliberately and meaningfully developed as the result of a newly emerging political reality. We can better understand the political history of the era by understanding the changes visible in the artistic canon, but the analysis must encompass the whole of the pharaonic culture in question, rather than the lives of individual pharaohs or artisans.

8 The great man theory is a 19th century concept according to which history can be largely explained by the impact of great men, heroes, or other highly influential individuals who, due to either their personal charisma, intelligence, wisdom, or political skill, used their power in a way that had a decisive historical impact. The theory was popularized in the 1840s by Scottish writer Thomas Carlyle.

9 One of the first to critique Carlyle’s proposal was English intellectual Herbert Spencer.

10 Fernand Braudel’s *Longue Durée* is the most notable of these approaches.

11 This is made particularly difficult by the fact that ancient Egyptian artisans did not sign their work.

Symbolism in ancient Egyptian architecture is most conventionally considered to fall within the realm of art¹² and art-history. John Baines considered that symbolism in Old Kingdom material culture is most meaningfully interpreted using concepts from the theoretical study of art and architecture. He stated that the funerary monuments in Old Kingdom Egypt were comprehensively planned as works of art,¹³ and that architecture was the core genre of artistic expression for the emerging state.¹⁴ This was particularly the case in the dynasties before writing became the predominant mode of communication.¹⁵ Richard Wilkinson, on the other hand, considers that little of Egyptian artwork can be considered as “art for art’s sake”, and that most artworks were conceived within a matrix of symbolism and magic. For him, ancient Egyptian artworks cannot be fully comprehended without knowledge of the underlying concepts intrinsic in their composition.¹⁶ Research must, therefore, include approaches that can deal with concepts such as symbolism and magic in architecture. Robert Ritner, who studied Egyptian magic and religion in depth, stated that ritual activities were not felt to be supernatural, but to be quintessential parts of nature, and were thought to be used daily by the gods to maintain, not violate, the natural order.¹⁷ He also showed that encircling magic was relatively common in ancient Egypt. It was applied in contexts as simple as casting water purification spells for liquid-filled vessels, or as elaborate as ritual circumambulations performed during major festivals. By understanding these magical and ritual meanings, and by applying this understanding to the architectural and artistic contexts, the meanings being expressed by architectural design motifs can be revealed.

The culture-history approach considers the domain of artistic representation and the struggle over meaning as the most fruitful avenue for achieving historical understanding of a culture. In this respect it shares some common ground with anthropological approaches that consider cultures to consist of structures of meaning. According to Baines, a small number of schematic elements usually characterize a civilization.¹⁸ One such “schema” used in ancient Egypt was the group of inter-related and essential symbols that became central characteristics of the pharaonic culture, including the *ꜥnh* ankh, *w3s* was scepter, *dd* djed column, *srh* serekh, and *hr* pharaonic falcon, which are referred to here as a “symbolic repertoire”.¹⁹ As the premier medium of artistic expression during the Old Kingdom, architectural designs were integral to that cultural schema. Baines also considers that ground plans of monuments such as temples could be representational schemas.²⁰ That concept is adopted here and put forward to help explain the inclusion of such monumental motifs in Old Kingdom pharaonic architecture.

More traditional archaeological approaches also provided hard data sets for the current study in the form of linear measures from standing building surveys. Empirical information was also compiled regarding the materials used in construction and to fabricate smaller artifacts, and radiocarbon dating information was used to construct a chronology of key events.

12 J. Baines, “On the Status and Purposes of Ancient Egyptian Art”, *CAJ* 4:1 (1994), 68.

13 *Ibid.*, 77.

14 *Ibid.*, 72.

15 J. Baines, “Communication and Display: The Integration of Early Egyptian Art and Writing”, *Antiquity* 63 (1989), 480.

16 R.H. Wilkinson, *Symbol and Magic in Egyptian Art* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1999), 7.

17 R.K. Ritner, *The Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magic*, Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilization No. 54 (Chicago: The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 2008), 8.

18 J. Baines, “Temples as Symbols, Guarantors and Participants in Egyptian Civilization”, in *The Temple in Ancient Egypt: New Discoveries and Recent Research*, ed. S. Quirke (London: British Museum Press, 1997), 217.

19 A similar concept, the “cognitive constellation”, has been described by Renfrew. See C. Renfrew, “Symbol before Concept: Material Engagement and the Early Development of Society”, in *Archaeological Theory Today*, ed. I. Hodder (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 137. He described how, in sedentary societies, symbols come to constitute reality in rituals and religions, as much as they reflect them.

20 Baines, “Temples as Symbols, Guarantors and Participants in Egyptian Civilization”, 217.

More progressive archaeological methods also proved useful. Archaeology now tries to contextualize people and their cultures within specific habitats and cultural landscapes. This approach is particularly useful for studying sites predating the fourth dynasty, from the proto-literate era when the performative aspects of culture predominated. Ritual was the principal means of elite communication at that time, and both architecture and artwork reflected the ritual activity underpinning the early pharaonic system.²¹ It can be anticipated that new monuments constructed during that era, such as pharaonic tombs, were designed as new places to establish and maintain traditional cults, and that they were designed with the rituals in mind. The pharaoh's funerary monuments incorporated the symbolism of the mortuary rituals at a profound level. An understanding of the wider ritual context in which the art and architecture were constructed can, therefore, provide a way to access the meanings being expressed in those domains.

The monumental architecture of Old Kingdom Egypt incorporated reliefs and statues. These were carefully placed within temples and carefully designed to be experienced with respect to the surrounding architecture. The monuments as a whole were located with respect to the local cultic topography and with respect to the wider Egyptian landscape and the heavens above. The architecture even reflected aspects of the natural environments that surrounded the temples. As will be seen, even the local zoological and botanical contexts were influential, and structured symbolism relating to these can be identified in the designs of Old Kingdom pharaonic architecture and iconography.

A final research approach used in this study was philology. Towards the end of the Old Kingdom, hieroglyphic writing began to play a more prominent role in conveying ideology previously carried by monumental architecture, iconography, and ritual. The analysis of ancient texts falls within the field of philology, and although philologists tend not to interpret texts with respect to architecture, their studies provided important information about architectural motifs and rituals, as well as about the mathematical procedures²² used by the scribes and architects when designing the monuments.

The main symbol examined in this treatise is the shen-ring, including in its elongated form known as the cartouche. The textual meaning carried by the shen symbol is often reduced to “eternity”, “the whole world encircled”, or “everything encircled by the sun and the king's dominion over it”.²³ Several in-depth philological analyses of the symbol have appeared in recent years,²⁴ and other definitions are available.²⁵ In later dynasties, associated meanings became more varied and

21 Baines, “Communication and Display: The Integration of Early Egyptian Art and Writing”, 479.

22 See Addendum. A mathematical note, at the end of this work, 80.

23 J.P. Allen, *Middle Egyptian, an Introduction to the Language and Culture of Hieroglyphs* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 65; S. Quirke, *The Cult of Ra. Sun Worship in Ancient Egypt from the Pyramids to Cleopatra* (London: Thames & Hudson Ltd., 2001), 123; A. Gardiner, *Egyptian Grammar: Being an Introduction to the Study of Hieroglyphs*, 3rd Rev. (London: Oxford University Press, 1957), 74.

24 W. Barta, “Der Königsring als Symbol zyklischer Wiederkehr”, ZÄS 98 (1970); A.O. Bolshakov, *Man and His Double in Egyptian Ideology of the Old Kingdom, Ägypten Und Altes Testament* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1997); A. Sugi, “The Iconographical Representations of the Sun God in New Kingdom Egypt”, in *Egyptology at the Dawn of the Twenty-First Century. Proceedings of the Eighth International Congress of Egyptologists, Cairo 2000. Vol 2. History, Religion*, eds. Z. Hawass and L.P. Brock (Cairo AUC, 2003); R.H. Wilkinson, *Reading Egyptian Art. A Hieroglyphic Guide to Ancient Egyptian Painting and Sculpture* (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd., 2003), 192-94; C. Spieser, “Cartouche”, in the *UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology* (Electronic Resource), eds. E. Froid and W. Wendrich (Los Angeles: UCLA, 2010); idem, *Les Noms Du Pharaon: Comme Etres Autonomes Au Nouvel Empire* (Fribourg: Editions Universitaires Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht Göttingen, 2000); D.J.O. Klop, *Beneath the Raptor's Wings: The Avian Composition Grasping the Symbol for Eternity in Egypt*. MPhil Thesis (Stellenbosch: University of Stellenbosch, 2008); L. Miatello, “Expressing the Eternity as Seriality: On \overline{n} as a Number of Large Magnitude”, JARCE 52 (2016).

25 M.C. Betro, *Hieroglyphics. The Writings of Ancient Egypt* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1996), 195; I. Shaw and P. Nicholson, *The British Museum Dictionary of Ancient Egypt* (London: British Museum Press, 1995), 267, 300, 301; Allen, *Middle Egyptian, an Introduction to the Language and Culture of Hieroglyphs*, 67; Quirke, *The Cult of Ra. Sun Worship in Ancient Egypt from the Pyramids to Cleopatra*, 123.

the symbol appeared in many different contexts, but it seems that its Old Kingdom sense was originally derived from the word “to encircle”.²⁶ The symbol was closely linked to architectural contexts through the ritual concept of “unending encircling protection”, most often surrounding royal tombs and enclosures. The associated shen word family supports this interpretation,²⁷ as do the architectonic case studies outlined in the chapters that follow.

Anthes discussed meanings associated with the word shen when used as a verb within Old Kingdom texts. They ranged from “enchant”, to “captivate”, “encircle”, “hold”, “embrace”, “capture”, “enclose”, and “spellbind”. For the Pyramid Texts of the Old Kingdom, he assigned a special meaning of “encircle”, “captivate”, “hold”, or “bind”. Importantly, Anthes also concluded that, as a noun, the term referred to a physical enclosure or circle.²⁸

Many written signs in the ancient Egyptian hieroglyphic script represented or resembled real objects,²⁹ while others were abstract shapes that represented the sounds of syllables or groups of syllables. Other glyphs known as determinatives signified words associated with specific groups of ideas. A fourth, intermediate, type of representation existed in iconography where a symbol did not realistically depict any real object, but referenced a specific abstract concept or ritual. These can be referred to as emblems.³⁰ It is within this class of symbol that the shen-ring most realistically belonged when it was used in iconographic arrangements. Rituals themselves are ephemeral, and because of their special status, access to their meanings was often restricted. They were not usually depicted explicitly, but in a way that reflects their symbolic value.³¹ Given its prominence in scenes representing rituals in Old Kingdom pharaonic monuments, the shen-ring appears to have held a special status within those rituals.

The approaches outlined above led to conclusions that do not necessarily conform to traditional understandings of the symbols and the monuments being studied. Nevertheless, the interdisciplinary and contextualized approach taken here has perhaps proved to be more fruitful than the rather dry culture-historical approach,³² or less rigorous art-historical approach, when those paths are taken in isolation. Older studies tended to be overly focused on tracking the use of motifs through time, back to “original” essential meanings that were assumed to be unchanging. They have not, however, provided any explanation for some of the most fundamental questions in Egyptian history, such as

26 R.J. Leprohon, *The Great Name in Ancient Egyptian Royal Titulary*, vol. 22, Writings from the Ancient World (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013), 8.

27 Definitions for *šnw* include perimeter, enclosure wall, enclosure. See A. Erman and H. Grapow, *Wörterbuch Der Ägyptischen Sprache*, Vol. IV (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1971), 488, 489, 491; R.O. Faulkner, *A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian* (Oxford: Griffith Institute, 2002), 267-268. Further research should be carried out to better understand the meanings associated with the word *šn* in Middle Kingdom and New Kingdom sacred texts, i.e. the Coffin Texts and Book of the Dead, respectively, to understand if and how the nuances changed over time. That work lies outside the scope of the current study and beyond the capabilities of the current author, and should be undertaken by specialists in the ancient Egyptian language.

28 R. Anthes, “Das Verbum Sni „Umschließen, Bannen” in Den Pyramidentexten”, *ZÄS* 86 (1961), 89.

29 Bastioned enclosures and palace-façade walls were often represented in early hieroglyphs, including on ceremonial palettes and seals. Some of these were ovoid and so visually resemble the cartouche to some extent. The different encircling symbols representing *dt* estates, forts, towns, and *inbw* walls have been discussed at some length. See J. Monnet-Saleh, “Forteresses, Ou Villes-Protégées Thinites?”, *BIFAO* 67 (1967); Spieser, *Les Noms Du Pharaon: Comme Etres Autonomes Au Nouvel Empire*, 22.

30 Baines, “Communication and Display: The Integration of Early Egyptian Art and Writing”, 474; idem, “Temples as Symbols, Guarantors and Participants in Egyptian Civilization”, 218. Renfrew describes a similar concept associated with the emergence of material symbols in non-literate sedentary societies. He refers to these as “constitutive symbols”, which do not necessarily represent something else, but are themselves active. They allow and facilitate the emergence of institutional facts, such as structured kinship relations or power hierarchies. The emblems that developed in proto-literate pharaonic Egypt seem to fit within this theoretical framework. See Renfrew, 130.

31 Baines, “Communication and Display: The Integration of Early Egyptian Art and Writing”, 476; idem, “Temples as Symbols, Guarantors and Participants in Egyptian Civilization”, 223.

32 B. Trigger, *A History of Archaeological Thought* (12th Printing) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 200.

why the cartouche quite suddenly became the principal symbol of the pharaoh in the third dynasty, or why the serekh was no longer used to contain the pharaoh's name after he had died. Answers to those questions are proposed below.

In conclusion, this study takes an inter-disciplinary, contextualized approach that addresses the encircling symbolism from several different angles. This holistic approach draws out meaning from the symbolic arrangements and it is informed by theory from several different fields of study. Worked together, concepts from art-history, anthropology, archaeology, and philology can complement each other and reveal underlying meanings that existed in the ancient Egyptian mind.

The following chapters present the results of the study, set out in chronological and dynastic order.