

Current Research in Egyptology 2024

Proceedings of the Twenty-Fourth Annual Symposium, Jointly Organised by the University of Liverpool, Swansea University, University of Birmingham, University of Oxford, and University of Wales Trinity Saint David, 2–6 September 2024

Edited by

J. Rogers, C. Bishop-Allen, H. Bohun,
R.G. Hutchinson-Wong, and M. Sartori



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Introduction

In CRE's twenty-fifth year and the twenty-fourth iteration of the conference, it was a joy to welcome the Egyptological world back to the UK. In a departure from the usual organisation of CRE by a single host institution, postgraduate students and postdoctoral researchers from five departments in England and Wales (University of Liverpool, Swansea University, University of Birmingham, University of Oxford, and University of Wales Trinity Saint David) came together to host this year's meeting, which took place on the University of Liverpool campus.

The twenty-fourth Current Research in Egyptology was held between 2–6 September 2024, and featured 115 papers in 36 panels, alongside 17 posters, with presenters and attendees from every continent (save Antarctica!) participating in a spirit of warm collegiality and scientific rigour.

Our primary intention with CRE 2024 was, as has been the case since the first CRE in Oxford in 2000, to bring together early career researchers in Egyptology from across the globe to share research and develop networks. Our secondary aim, alongside this, was to challenge our own heritage. This challenge was met through a multi-institution and multi-nation organisation and by incorporating activities and conversations less frequently encountered at academic conferences to give rise to the fruitful and creative discussion that truly drives scholarship in innovative directions. We maintained the new 10-minute flash talks introduced at Basel in 2023 aimed at newly-begun works, while the proceedings process has continued to build on the developments of the last several volumes, to feature an increased drive for style and formatting standardisation to aid user searchability and accessibility. Each of these endeavours have been undertaken with the understanding that, as a significant stage for emerging researchers, it is imperative that CRE remains flexible in form and adaptability to the rapidly-shifting contexts in which we do and will work.

Where possible, objects in museums are referenced by CITY, MUSEUM NAME CODENUMBER (for example, London, British Museum EA1). Where such a lengthy reference would be cumbersome, for example within a longer sentence or a table, shortened or modified forms have been used – most often by abbreviating the museum name. Additionally, the reader should note when searching for a term that no spaces are used between, for example, TT and tomb number; the exception to this rule is references to *Book of the Dead* / *Book of the Dead* / *Coffin Text* / *Pyramid Text* Chapters/Spells, which do contain a space (thus BD 1). Of course, this aspiration will not have been executed perfectly, and it goes without saying that Titivillus will have been at work across the volume.

The list of people to thank is almost as long as the list of things we should thank each of them for. Firstly, the conference would not have been possible without the support of many persons and institutions, including the Egypt Exploration Society, the Robert Anderson Charitable Trust, the MIDAS Fund, Manchester Ancient Egypt Society, The Society for the Study of Ancient Egypt, and several anonymous individual patrons; we owe them each a great debt of gratitude. Our supporters, Ancient Egypt Magazine, the Garstang Museum of Archaeology, the Egypt Centre, and the Department of Archaeology, Classics, and Egyptology at the University of Liverpool also contributed to making the conference happen.

The meeting was enriched by five exceptional keynotes delivered by Marina Escolano-Poveda, Margaret Maitland, Silvia Zago, Ahmed Altaher, and Campbell Price, which set the tone for the meeting and to whom we owe thanks. We are grateful also to Campbell for opening the stores of Manchester Museum for conference participants. We are indebted to the artists and practitioners whose works created opportunities for new conversations beyond the traditional realms of CRE:

Hedayat Taymour, Nada Mobarak, and Katharina Zinn and artists within her project, 'The Museum of Lies'. An image of Nada Mobarak's piece, 'Huddle', graces the front cover of this volume.

The logistics of the meeting – both the in-person and online portions – would have been impossible without a veritable army of volunteers, both in Liverpool and elsewhere. Our thanks particularly go to Millie Eley, Lily Isaac, Yao Li, Chang Lu, Michelle Middlemann, Tom South, and Katherine Warburton – thank you, truly. Similarly, thank you to those who agreed to chair sessions, as well as to our scientific committee and anonymous reviewers of papers submitted to the conference and to the volume; review in particular is often silent and thankless work, but we mark here our profound gratitude for their committed support, messages of encouragement, and belief in the purpose and need for CRE.

Our thanks also go to the Estates team and the Teaching Hub building team at Liverpool. We are grateful to Archaeopress, especially Mike Schurer, Ben Heaney, and Erin McGowan, for their aid and patience amidst a barrage of queries. The people and organisations to whom we are grateful are many; if we have forgotten momentarily to include their names here, we trust they shall forgive us. Similarly, we wish to apologise to any copyright holders to whom thanks accidentally have been omitted from these pages.

Finally, I (JR), wish to thank my co-editors for their patience, determination, friendship, and for their tireless efforts, often alone at their desks, to see this volume to completion. I thank them for allowing me to take the rudder this short while. It truly has been an honour to hear, discuss, and read the work of so many amazing friends and colleagues both at the conference and during the editing process – thank you. I am forever grateful to ER, DR, and JH for their continual support and humour, to JB for aid at a crucial hour, and to JSR, who encouraged me to submit a first paper to CRE several years ago, allowing me to meet and become part of this wonderful community. *Diolch o'r galon*.

A personal thanks (from CBA) should be noted to George, for providing your last-minute photography skills and year-round support. To the FSE, for helping me to find community and humour in academic Egyptology. And finally, to the CRE24 Organisers/Editors, I am proud to be included in a team with such skill, compassion, and encouragement – a heartfelt thanks goes to each of you.

I (RHW) want to thank my co-organisers (now co-editors) for giving me the privilege and opportunity to work with them on CRE 2024; it has been a wild ride. I have thoroughly enjoyed their tenacity and ability to just get things done, making both the conference and proceedings a fun process to be a part of. My thanks also extend to my whānau back in Aotearoa New Zealand and Malaysia, especially my parents for their unwavering support and providing me the bedrock from which to jump headfirst into something like co-organising CRE.

I (HB) would like to thank everyone who made the commitment to participate in CRE 2024. Including, and especially, all the attendees and presenters. I'm sure I can speak for all of us in saying that we are truly thankful for the dedication of your time and the efforts made in the presentation of your research. The electric sense of camaraderie felt at CRE through meeting new friends and colleagues, and catching up with old ones, was joyful. Reflecting on the days in Liverpool already brings a smile to my face. I am, of course, very grateful to have had the opportunity to work beside such fun and wonderful co-organisers. Your work-ethic and skills have been both inspiring and motivational.

I (MS) thank with all my heart the co-organisers for their indefatigable efforts, extreme professionalism and absolute dedication in turning CRE into a such a memorable experience. I will cherish this cooperation and the friendships that it allowed to grow. A big thanks also to all the volunteers for their incredible work and for all the positive energy they filled the event with.

As we each write our portions of this introduction, our task now almost at a close and with eagerness to witness in what directions the next Organising Committee takes the conference, we take this opportunity to send our best wishes to the 2025 Committee as they take on the baton for a historic meeting; we wish all participants an enriching and important congress!



Finally, as work on these proceedings was progressing, we heard the devastating news of the passing of a dear colleague and friend, Marco de Pietri. An individual who was such a large part of CRE, we dedicate this volume to his memory, confident in the knowledge that he would be pleased to see the health and vitality of the discipline he loved shown within these pages.

The Editors

John Rogers, 00.46, 24 June – lightly raining

Reuben G. Hutchinson-Wong, 21.06, 15 July – brisk chill in the air

Catherine Bishop-Allen, 10.57, 16 July – pleasantly warm with light breeze

Henry Bohun, 18.33, 18 July – ‘Feels like Summer’

Marina Sartori, 08.58, 9 August – summer strikes back

Abbreviations

Throughout this volume, the use of abbreviations has been kept to a minimum to facilitate ease of reference. However, a few of the more common reference works have been abbreviated throughout:

PM = B. Porter and R. Moss 1927–1951. *Topographical Bibliography of Ancient Egyptian Hieroglyphic Texts, Reliefs and Paintings*. 7 vols. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Wb = A. Erman and W. Grapow (eds) 1926–1931. *Wörterbuch der ägyptische Sprache*. 7 vols. Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs.

Urk. = K. Sethe, H.W. Helck, H. Schäfer, H. Grapow, and O. Firchow 1903–1957. *Urkunden des ägyptischen Altertums*. 8 vols. Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs/ Berlin: Akademie-Verlag.

Other abbreviations used by authors are given in footnotes or at the close of the respective papers.

Readers should also note the following standard conventions:

fig./figs = figure/figures

no./nos = number/numbers

pl./pls = plate/plates

tab./tabs = table/tables

n./nn. = (foot)note/(foot)notes

l./ll. = line/lines

Finally, reference to elements of a page as part of a wider string of cited pages within the same publication are set off via the use of square brackets as so: Smith (2008: 4 [fig. 1], 18–20).

Organising Committee

John Rogers, doctoral candidate in the Department of History, Heritage, and Classics at Prifysgol Abertawe – Swansea University.

Catherine Bishop-Allen, doctoral candidate in the Department of Archaeology, Classics and Egyptology at the University of Liverpool.

Henry Bohun, doctoral candidate in the Institute of Education and Humanities at the Prifysgol Cymru, Llanbedr Pont Steffan–University of Wales Trinity Saint David–Lampeter.

Reuben G. Hutchinson-Wong, doctoral candidate in the Department of Classics, Ancient History and Archaeology at the University of Birmingham

Marina Sartori, postdoctoral fellow at the Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Oxford

Conference Volunteers

Millie Eley, University of Liverpool

Lily Isaac, University of Liverpool

Yao Li, Northeast Normal University, Changchun

Chang Lu, University of Liverpool

Michelle Middleman, University of Liverpool

Thomas South, University of Liverpool

Katherine Warburton, University of Liverpool

List of Keynote Lecturers

Marina Escolano-Poveda, University of Liverpool
The Astral Sciences in Egypt: New Sources and Interpretations

Margaret Maitland, National Museums Scotland
Speaking the Wretch's Name: Revealing Untold Stories and Colonial Legacies in Egyptology

Ahmed Altaher, Franco-Egyptian Center for the Study of Karnak Temples/Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities
Karnak and Luxor: Temples Divine Images Graffiti Project

Silvia Zago, University of Liverpool
Investigating the Early Ramesside Iconographic Tradition at Deir el-Medina: The Case of Theban Tomb 265 (Amenemipet)

Campbell Price, Manchester Museum
Senemut's Strategy: Symbolism, Strategy and Sensational Museum Discoveries!

Nada Mobarak, artist, @nadamobarak; Hedayat Taymour, artist, @sculpturebyhedayat Katharina Zinn, Prifysgol Cymru, Llanbedr Pont Steffan–University of Wales Trinity Saint David–Lampeter
Art and Academia in Conversation

List of Paper Presentations

Amany Abd el Hameed, Hisham Elleithy, and Robert Vigar
Echoes of Abydos: Rediscovering the Stolen Secrets

Marwa Abdel Razek and Mounira Raslan
Journey Beyond: Unveiling Ancient Egyptian Black Coffins in the Cairo Museum

Ahmed Samar Abu-Dahab
The Excavation at Tanis Street Cemetery: Funerary Practices at the Eastern Cemetery of Alexandria

Yaser Abouzid
Unravelling Elite Status and Architectural Significance: A Comparative Analysis of Early Dynastic Tombs in Abydos and Naga ed-Deir

Sally Adel
The Journey of Coptic Antiquities between Egyptian Museums

Nourhan Adel Ahmed
Contextualising the Cult of the Nile Crocodile in Ancient Egyptian Quarries

Amal Ahmed, Naser Mohamed, and Rasha Shaheen
Empowering Unseen Voices: Exploring Childhood and Disability in Ancient Pharaonic Society

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A New Provenance Criterion for Third Intermediate Period Northern Coffins

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Abu El-Draj "Lost Roman Station" Recent Discoveries on the Eastern Desert

Ahmed Amr Ahmed
From Data to Discovery: Exploring Human Habits and Environmental Factors in Archaeological Site Prediction using Machine Learning Ensembles and Geospatial Data

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Unveiling Economic Dynamics of the Hyksos: A New Institutional Economics Analysis

Abdelhaleem Awadallah
Who is on the Solar Bark? The Crew of the Sun God in the Late and Ptolemaic Stelae

Nour M. Badr, Moamen Othman, Mohamed Abdel-Rahman, Eid Mertah, Ahmed Tarek, and Mohamed Ragab
Advancing Imaging Techniques for Documentation, Assessment and Sustainability of Egyptian Coffins at Egyptian Museum, Cairo

Gehad Mohamed Ibrahim Bakr

My Offspring Favoured Me Over All: Gender Preference and Distinction in Non-Royal Women Stelae during the New Kingdom Period

Louise Berginc

Sleeping in Ancient Egypt, from the Last Dynasties to the Roman Empire: Materiality, Spaces, and Representations

Amalee Bowen

A Brief Co-Regency Between Amenemhat III and Amenemhat IV

Lauren Bruce

“It’s the creepiest, most uncanny thing I ever heard of!”: The Misuse and Consumption of Mummy Brown Paint

David Brügger

Between Religious Proselytism and Artistic Homage: A Case Study of Non-Royal Statuary Recontextualisation in Deir el-Medina

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Interpersonal Relationships Between Producer and Recipient in the Text of the Rhind Mathematical Papyrus: An Analysis of their Means of Expression

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Model Cities and City Models: Urban Conception in Egypt and the Ancient Near East

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Reconstructing the Scenes from the Temple of Sobek (Gebel el-Silsila) from an Iconographic Perspective, and Exploring the Reasons for the Demise of the Crocodile Cult at the Ancient Quarry

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Lawrence Webb

The Call of Nighted Khem: Tracing Ancient Egypt through Weird Fiction

Yannick Weichmann

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Ritual or Taphonomy? The Ritual Breaking of Predynastic Flint Knives

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Abstract

This research investigates the earliest material evidence of the ritual breaking of objects as a distinctive element of mortuary practices in ancient Egypt. Unlike the well-documented ritual breaking of objects in dynastic periods – evidenced through iconography, texts, and physical remains – this practice during the Predynastic Period is discernible only through the material evidence of grave goods. The study sheds light on the diverse early forms of ritual ‘killing’ or breaking of objects, revealing that luxury Predynastic flint knives were among the first items intentionally broken for ritual purposes. Furthermore, findings suggest that the ritual destruction of objects was primarily associated with elite burials during the Pre- and Early Dynastic periods. By analysing the preservation conditions of funerary knives in relation to the overall state of the burial and their spatial placement, the research demonstrates that these patterns were a result of deliberate mortuary practices rather than taphonomic processes.

Keywords

Predynastic Egypt; Flint Knives; Mortuary Practices; Ritual Breaking; Funerary Taphonomy

Introduction

The inclusion of funerary goods inside burials started as early as the Neolithic Period in Egypt (Debono and Mortensen 1990; Irish 2010) and became more prominent during the Predynastic Period, when funerary goods were assigned both ritual and social roles (Brunton 1948; Lythgoe 1965; Petrie and Quibell 1896). The creation of such goods involved considerable effort, utilising diverse materials and exhibiting high-quality craftsmanship, all serving to convey intricate beliefs about the afterlife and the status of both the producers and the intended recipients. A wide array of items were crafted and interred alongside the deceased, driven by various motives such as personal belongings or the expression of social standing. However, the importance of this funerary tradition transcended mere object placement, as evidenced by the deliberate arrangements of items and, at times, the deliberate breakage of funerary artefacts.

The state of preservation of funerary goods and the possibility of their breakage likely stems from a combination of factors. Hence, distinguishing between intentional object breakage and damage caused by various taphonomic processes is essential for understanding the difference between ritual practices and unforeseen events. Analysing the condition of funerary objects within burials can offer insights into the dynamics influencing their preservation. This analysis can involve comparing the preservation status of objects with other factors, such as the preservation of the burials, the arrangement of objects within the burial and recurring observations regarding specific fractures of certain types of tools. This underscores the significance of recognising ‘Funerary Taphonomy’ as a sub-discipline dedicated to reconstructing the events that shaped the final condition of funerary contexts, including their contents of goods and skeletal materials (Knüsel and Robb 2016: 655; Lopez and Chamel 2013: 41–43).

However, successful utilisation of funerary taphonomy is challenging because it requires precise observation and accurate recording of artefacts' placement and preservation during burial excavations, a practice that was mostly absent when excavating sites during the late 19th and early 20th century. Another challenge is the prior disturbance of burials, whether natural or human-induced, which often resulted in the destruction or disappearance of burial contents from the archaeological record. Quibell and Green (1902) discussed the difficulties they encountered at Hierakonpolis, exacerbated by the high Nile River levels before the construction of the Aswan High Dam, which led to the loss of numerous archaeological remains. Human activities also played a significant role, as noted by their statement that 'Hundreds of archaic graves lay open. Theban dealers had been more extensive than was expected, and little of the cemetery had been left' (Quibell and Green 1902: 1). Similar challenges were documented at other sites in Upper and Lower Egypt, such as Naqada, Matmar, and Badari (Brunton 1937: 4; Petrie and Quibell 1896: vii-ix). On the other hand, most of the prehistoric cemeteries witnessed several episodes of plundering in modern times due to urban expansion and encroachments.

Despite the challenges involved, it is possible to understand the concept of ritualistic object breakage by synthesising evidence from multiple sources. These include: documented cases of ritual breakage in prehistoric contexts outside Egypt; material and textual evidence from Dynastic Egypt; ethnoarchaeological studies of contemporary societies that maintain traditional lifestyles around the world; and, most importantly, detailed analysis of published data on grave goods from Predynastic cemeteries in Egypt.

The advancements associated with the development of processual and post-processual archaeology have led to the widespread implementation of Ian Hodder's (2014) 'Things Theory' and highlighted the value of reconstructing human-object interactions in both past and present contexts. These developments have increased the visibility and credibility of ethnoarchaeological investigations as a means to better interpret Prehistoric evidence. This is particularly relevant because traditional societies often adopt lifeways that bear similarities to those of prehistoric hunters, gatherers, and farmers.

Breaking objects before or during the burial of the deceased is recorded as a common practice among diverse traditional contemporary cultures worldwide. Ethnoarchaeological studies have served as a valuable tool for comprehending the presence of fragmented objects within archaeological contexts. Analogous customs have been observed in regions such as Japan, the island of New Guinea, India, and parts of North Africa. Ceramics, stone jars, grave digging tools, stone and metal objects are among the objects frequently associated with ritual breaking or smashing among those societies. This normally refers to piercing ceramics, breaking their functional parts i.e. spouts and handles, and breaking tools into two halves (Grinsell 1961: 476-480).

Hence, the thorough investigation of the ritual practices of such traditional societies can be valuable for gaining insights into the motivations behind the selection of certain classes of objects to be broken, the timing of their destruction or 'killing' and the context of such practices. Although this data may not be entirely comparable to evidence from prehistoric pastoralists and farmers, it can still offer beneficial perspectives for developing possible interpretations of the archaeological record.

The act of ritual breaking is mentioned as an explanation by the site's excavators concerning funerary goods from non-Egyptian Prehistoric contexts, for example, ceramics, clay figurines, ochred-pebble tools, faunal remains, stone tools (Alexandridou 2013: 273; Dubreuil *et al.* 2019: 1-3; Gravel-Miguel 2016: 331; Grinsell 1961: 477; Morison and Park 2008: 207). One of the earliest

documented examples of this ritual practice dates back to the end of the Paleolithic Period in the Levant, exemplified by the Natufian burial of the female at Hilazon Tachtit Cave in the Southern Levant, dating to around 12,000 BCE. In this burial, a broken funerary basalt bowl exhibited signs of intentional flaking, with multiple flakes removed before its placement within the burial. Other grave goods deposited emphasised the high social status of the deceased female (Dubreuil *et al.* 2019: 3–4). However, earlier instances are known from sites such as the cave of Dolni Vestonice, where ritual killing or destruction was associated with clay figurines in a burial dating to 26,000 BCE, which are suggested to have been affected by intentionally exposing them to a thermal shock (Vandiver *et al.* 1989: 1006–1007).

Patterns of ritual killing/breaking during the Predynastic Period

The evidence of ritual breaking in Prehistoric Egypt is not well-documented, nor is it widely discussed, unlike the evidence from non-Egyptian Prehistoric contexts. However, as Grinsell (1961) suggests, ritual killing/breaking might be evident in various forms that go beyond the breakages of tools and objects. Grinsell (1961: 475) argues that the sacrifice of animals – including pets, wild animals, or even human sacrifices i.e. servants of elites – constituted another form of ritual killing. The practice of sacrificing animals to accompany their owners dates back to the Predynastic Period, e.g. the remains of around 20 dogs were found buried inside one pit in Naqada Cemetery T, while a dog's skull was also found in burial no. 286 of the same locality (Petrie and Quibell 1896: 26). On the other hand, the bioarchaeological evidence suggests the occurrence of human sacrifice during the Protodynastic and state formation periods, notably at sites like Abydos and Saqqara (Campbell 2019: 16, 2024: 113–118).

Additionally, the disarticulation or selective removal of skeletal elements, such as skulls, was observed during the Predynastic Period at sites such as Naqada, Al Amrah, and Gebel Ramlah (Irish *et al.* 2003: 282; Petrie and Quibell 1896: 31). Dismembered bodies might represent another early form of ritual breaking and can be particularly inferred when the dismembered parts are found in specific arrangements within intact burials, indicating that the body parts were dismembered before the burial of the deceased or that secondary burials were conducted.

This displacement of skulls is also recorded from Naqada. Examples of this include burial no. 124 where the skull was placed at the south end of the burial, and burial no. B62 of a child whose skull was removed together with the relocation of wrists and hands. Petrie and Quibell describe burial no. 315 as being 'certainly untouched', although he further adds 'skulls and lower arms lying at S.W corner'. Additionally, the skulls of the occupants in burial nos 227, 548, 712, 845, 1388, 1437, 1480, 1909 were totally removed (Petrie and Quibell 1896: 25–31). Those examples refer to the intentional removal and disarticulation of skeletal elements for possible ritual purposes rather than plundering or other taphonomic factors, especially when considering that most of these cases are of intact burials. On the other hand, in some of the mentioned instances, special care was paid to place the skull on piles of flints, botanical remains, or a brick. It is also worth mentioning that flint knives are recorded from most of the burials with disarticulated or displaced skeletal elements, mostly found as 'whole'. Petrie and Quibell also mentioned that intact pottery jars sometimes may have replaced the position of the skull and the arms as noted from some burials (Petrie and Quibell 1896: 31).

In his comments on the 'notable graves' in Naqada Petrie states 'it is probable that the skull was separately placed in the grave, perhaps some time subsequent to the burial' (Petrie and Quibell 1895: 31). This assumption might be plausible, especially when correlated with the funerary practices of several Prehistoric Mediterranean and Near eastern societies e.g. the Neolithic communities of

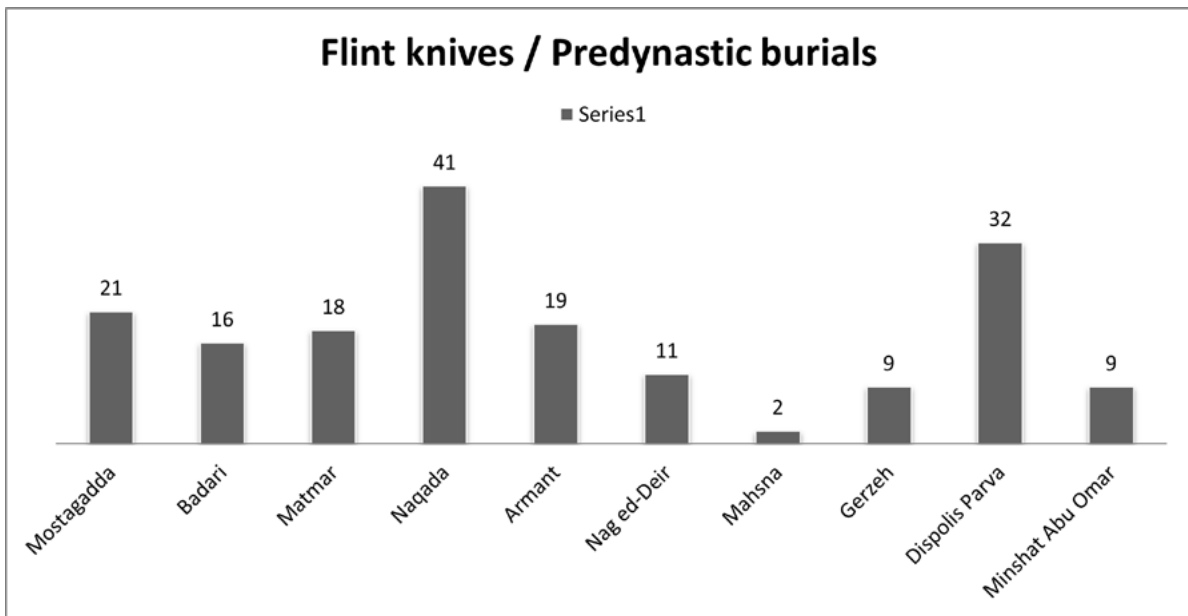


Figure 1. The flint knives recorded from the Predynastic burials including intact and broken knives. The data comes from the following sites/sources: Badari (Brunton and Caton-Thompson 1928), Matmar (Brunton 1948), Mostagadda (Brunton 1937), Naqada (Petrie and Quibell 1896), Hierakonpolis, Amrah, Armant, Mahsna (Ayrton and Loat 1911), Nag ed-Deir (Lythgoe 1965), Dispolis Parva (Petrie 1901), and Gerzeh (Petrie et al. 1912; Stevenson 2006).

Çatalhöyük, proved through both archaeological and ethnoarchaeological reasoning (Talalay 2004: 139–140).

Similar instances are recorded from Gebel Ramlah Neolithic cemetery where intentional teeth replacement and rearrangement of skeletal remains were also observed (Irish *et al.* 2002: 284–285, 2010: 119–221; Sereno *et al.* 2008). However, the mortuary practices associated with the dismembering of body parts might be better defined as a form of ritual smashing, rather than ritual killing, as it does not involve breaking bones of functional aspects similar to the case with objects. Drilled holes inside the bodies of the Predynastic vessels were also recorded, but rather rarely. Examples are known from the domestic and ritual contexts from the Predynastic site of Mahsna and from ‘Operation 8’ area in Abydos. The latter represented a repaired vessel (Skarzynski 2017: 80). Broken pots were recorded more frequently within the Predynastic burials, but their state of preservation cannot be explained as being a result of ritual breaking in almost all cases.

On the other hand, Barba (2021) explores the concept of ‘objectual violence’ to explain the ritual fragmentation or breaking of pottery, drawing on ideas from the anthropology of violence. Barba argues that this practice dates back as early as the Neolithic Period, citing an example from a child burial in Badari. Additionally, Barba provides occasional evidence from Predynastic burials in Nag ed-Deir, Amrah, Matmar, Armant, and Elkab, as well as few examples from an Early Dynastic context at Umm El-Qaab and Helwan, suggesting the intentional breakage of pottery in these contexts. This hypothesis is supported by the contrast between the deliberately broken pots and the well-preserved condition of other accompanying grave goods (Barba 2021: 17–19). An important example is known from undisturbed burial no. 2666 at Matmar, where Brunton in describing its pottery, grave goods, stated ‘Four of the pots were in fragments for a reason which was not obvious’ (Brunton 1948: 13).

Based on this evidence, it is clear that ritual killing could take various forms, including the potential sacrifice of objects, animals, or even humans. However, human sacrifices probably represented a

short-lived tradition whose use was limited to the 1st dynasty as evident from the subsidiary burials attached to royal tombs at Abydos especially that of King Djer (Bard 2015: 121).

Unlike the fragmented evidence characteristic of the Prehistoric Period, breaking objects for funerary purposes is well-documented in Egypt during the Dynastic Period and is especially linked to ceramics. The so called '*sd deshrwt*' or the ritual breaking of two red pots during the burial of a person is recorded through the scenes on the walls of the Old Kingdom and New Kingdom tombs in the Memphite and Theban Necropolis (Budka 2014: 641–644; Elsharnouby 2018: 41–44). These red pots are also associated to the set of tools used in the 'Opening of the Mouth' ritual performed during the Dynastic Period, in which the *Pesech Keef* knife (later form of fishtails), was also used. However, the earliest evidence of performing such ritual comes from the 2nd dynasty female burial in Saqqara, where red pots were found to be intentionally broken (Ananey 2013: 2).

Over time, the concept of ritual killing extended to other objects, such as pottery and stone vases during the Old Kingdom, and arrows and bows during the Middle Kingdom. Pottery and stone vases were sometimes ritually killed by adding holes to their bodies or bases, or by smashing them entirely (Grinsell 1961: 482). This indicates that the ritual killing or destruction of objects, could take different and evolving forms, including breaking, drilling, and burning (Dubreuil *et al.* 2019: 2). However, detecting and explaining all these forms is not always straightforward, as it requires a well-preserved context and sufficient expertise.

Other instances of breaking are discernible within the spells of the *Pyramid Texts*, particularly those associated with 'entering the *Akhet*' in the afterlife. Among the broken items are writing tools such as pens, palettes, and ink-shells, along with the breaking of eggs, likely symbolising themes of resurrection and rebirth. Two examples are documented within the texts found in the burials of King Pepi I: 'Scribe, scribe! Destroy your palette, break your two pens, and rip up your scrolls. Sun, remove him from his place, put Pepi in his place, for this Pepi is clear (of guilt) and carrying a forked staff. Sun, it is Pepi,' and King Pepi II's '*Spells for entering the Akhet*,' 'You have your magic: let Pepi Neferkare have his magic, let Pepi Neferkare break your pen and smash your ink-shell' (Allen 2005: 278). Through these spells, it can be inferred that the rationale behind such breaking and smashing is to empower the deceased, purify them, and facilitate their rebirth in the afterlife. Textual and physical evidence from the Dynastic Period suggests the evolution of this ritual, likely serving various purposes and associated with different types of actual and symbolic possessions. These traditions are deeply rooted in the ideology of Egypt's earliest inhabitants. This raises a critical question: apart from ceramics and the possible practices of smashing and killing associated with humans and animals, what were the earliest items used in this significant ritual, and what motivations drove their use?

The ritual breaking of flints in Predynastic Egypt

To answer the aforementioned question, this research further investigates the possible evidence of ritual breaking associated with stone tools, whose functions evolved from profane to sacred over the course of the Prehistoric/Predynastic Period (Ahmed 2024b: 50–56). Although the ritual breaking of flint tools might have been connected to varied classes of lithic tools, detecting such action with tools like flakes, blades, and smaller tools is normally hampered by their ability to easily break by any kind of pressure, the difficulty of distinguishing between the intended shapes and sizes of these tools, and the state in which they are recorded from funerary contexts. This contrasts with flint knives, whose intended shapes have been known since the Neolithic. From the Naqada I Period onward, new types of funerary knives emerged exclusively for funerary purposes. These included rhomboidal knives, fishtails, and ripple-flaked knives, along with a variety of bifacially-flaked flake

and blade knives, most of which were produced from fine, homogeneous flint. Hence, it is possible to identify instances in which this ritual was practiced through careful analysis of documented data on flint knives from funerary contexts

To trace the origins of the ritual breaking of flint knives during the Predynastic Period, it was essential to begin by gathering data from scattered sources, including burial descriptions, burial registers, flint knife descriptions, and photographs of published examples. Flint knives were used as funerary goods in eleven of the investigated sites, the details of which are presented in Figure 1.

The selection of investigated sites was based on the availability of data, with particular emphasis on those that included documented burials. This process was preceded by a comprehensive review of all published data on Predynastic Period burials. The recorded evidence of flint knives was initially assessed on the level of the investigated sites and the data collected included: types, frequency (number per burial), their preservation, and their placement inside the burials. This was followed by an assessment of instances where such knives were broken, with documentation of the breakage areas for each type and an investigation into potential recurring placement patterns within the burials (Table 1).

Flint knives are the most common class of stone tools to be used as funerary goods during the Predynastic Period followed by flakes, blades, varied classes of chipped stones, and few ground tools (Ahmed 2024b: 55). A total of 178 knives are recorded from the burials of the discussed sites. However, it is strongly believed that a larger number of flint knives were originally present in such burials, but mostly lost due to diverse natural and artificial taphonomic factors, i.e. the ancient and modern looting of the burials, the great interest of antiquities' dealers in those finely-made tools, the selective criteria of the early excavators, and the partial publishing of the excavated burials. However, the data about the published examples were exploited, with special focus given to the data on types of knives, and their placement and preservation.

The data analysis identifies 36 burials that originally contained a total of 56 flint knives, of which 46 exhibit various patterns of breakage (Table 1). Most examples were associated with male occupants, wherever sex could be determined, though a few cases involved female occupants. Fishtail and ripple-flaked knives were the most frequently broken types, regardless of the reason of the breakage, followed by curved varieties, rhomboidal knives, and double-edged knives. Confirmed cases are discussed in greater detail, focusing on broken knives found within intact burials. Additional commentary highlights the different patterns of placement of broken knives within these burials, offering insights into their possible ritual significance. Additional information about other grave goods is presented to explore the potential association between the presence of broken knives and the social status of the deceased.

Knife placement

Through the brief comments and/or sketches of burials provided by the excavators, it became obvious that flint knives were either placed in association to the body of the deceased, the grave itself, or associated with other objects (Figures 2–3). However, the evidence indicates that in the former case, preserved knives were most often found around the pelvic area—either over or under the pelvis, behind the back, or near the knees of the deceased (Ahmed 2024b: 57). Petrie and Quibell also observed that the placement of the daggers in Naqada whether of flint or copper as well as the flint lance/fishtails was always located on the hip or at the back of the deceased (Petrie and Quibell 1896: 30).

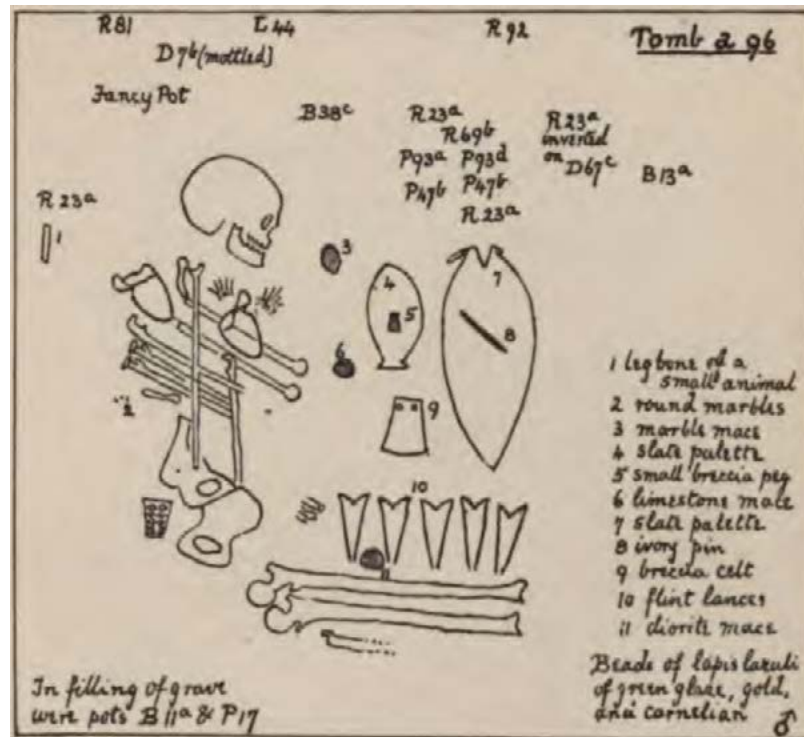


Figure 2. The arrangement of flint knives inside burial no. A.95 – Al Amrah
(Randall-MacIver and Mace 1902: pl. V; Courtesy of the Egypt Exploration Society).

Several examples support the favouring of the pelvic zone for the placement of flint knives. For instance, the rhomboidal knives found behind the pelvis in burials no. 1676 and no. 1437 in Naqada, the uncommon curved knife found in the same position in burial no. 1485, and the double-edged-knife found on the hip of the deceased in burial no. 1410. The same applies for fishtails mainly from Naqada i.e. the fishtails in burials nos 7120, 7016, 223, and T22, placed on the leg, behind the pelvis, before the knee, behind the pelvis, while the fishtails in the two burials no. 1676 and no. 1773 were placed behind the pelvis respectively (Petrie and Quibell 1896: 25–29). The knife in burial no. N7016 in Nag ed-Deir was also placed on the leg of the male deceased, while the fishtail in burial no. N7120 was found near the left knee of the deceased (Lythgoe 1965: 9). A flint knife was also placed behind the back of the deceased in burial no. 2015 in Badari, while the knives accorded to the fourteen-years-child in burial no. 429 and the immature female in burial no. 469 in Mostagadda were also placed at their feet (Brunton 1937: 5 and 35).

In a minority of cases, knives were discovered in proximity to the upper part of the body, such as the torso or hands. One notable example is burial no. N7491 in cemetery no. N7000 at Nag ed-Deir, where a knife was found grasped in the right hand of the deceased (Lythgoe 1965: 301). Additionally, in burial no. N7583, a flint knife was located near the face of the deceased, accompanied by a goat skull placed before them.

At Minshat Abu Omer, two burials further illustrate this tradition: burial no. 761 and burial no. 137. In these instances, curved knives were positioned above the head and before the face of the deceased. Moreover, at Naqada, specifically in burials nos 1821 and 1909, fishtails were discovered near the torso. In burial no. 1821, they were placed before the chest, while in burial no. 1909, one was positioned between the arms of the deceased. Similarly, in Naqada burials no. 1802 and no. 1909, flint fishtails were found in front of the chest and wrapped in leather before the face, respectively.

The placement of flint knives at the sides of the burials were also noticed. For example, burial no. 414 in Naqada contained three preserved knives of different types, curved, symmetrical, and fishtail positioned at three sides of the burial. Additionally, a double-edged knife was found at the southeastern side of burial no. 331 in Naqada. Furthermore, three ripple-flaked knives were discovered: one at the east side, another on a shell at the north side, and the third at the north side of burials nos 1233, 187, and 162, respectively. Similar examples are documented in burials nos 187, 430, 1233, and 1416, where fishtail knives were respectively placed at the east side, mid-south end,

TABLE 1. THE RECORDED EXAMPLES OF BROKEN FLINT KNIVES AMONG THE INVESTIGATED PREDYNASTIC BURIALS

no.	Site	Burial	Occupants	SD Date	Knives count	Broken knives	Knife type	Placement	Preservation condition	Broken area	Burial preservation	Other goods
1	Dispolis Parva	B.236	4 Adults (Males)	SD.43-48	3	2	U-shaped Fishtail	Behind one of the occupants	Broken	One fork missing	ND	Stone vases
	Dispolis Parva			SD.43-48			U-shaped Fishtail			One fork missing		
	Dispolis Parva			SD.43-48			U-shaped Fishtail			One complete		
2	Dispolis Parva	B.86	3 Adults	SD.35-40	9	2	U-shaped Fishtail	Not mentioned	Broken	One fork missing	ND	Mace heads with ivory and horn handles with two fragments
	Dispolis Parva						U-shaped Fishtail			One fork missing		
3	Dispolis Parva	U.400			a	1	Rhmboidal		Broken	Breakage of the blade		Arrowhead, 2 fishtail, 2 bracelets
4	Dispolis Parva	B.168			3	3	Curved with integral handle		Two halves	Mesial section	?	Other knives
	Dispolis Parva						Curved - bifacial?		One half	One half is missing		
	Dispolis Parva						Curved		One half	One half is missing		
5	Dispolis Parva	B.217		SD 66	1	1	Ripple-flaked	In the filling	Pieces	Not defined	D	40 Small pottery pots, large grave
6	Dispolis Parva	B. 408			2	1	Ripple-flaked		One half	One half is missing		Fishtail
7	Dispolis Parva	U.74		SD.78	1	1	Not defined?	In the filling	One half			
8	Dispolis Parva	B.79				1	Ripple-flaked		One half			Indetified from photos
9	Armant	1413			3	1	Double-edged?		Broken			
10	Naqada	1437			2	2	Rhomboidal	Behind the pelvis	Broken	Two halves		Head removed, fragmenrs of white lined jars
11	Mostagadda	1839			1	1	Rhomboidal		Broken		Q	Ceramics, needle

RITUAL OR TAPHONOMY? THE RITUAL BREAKING OF PRE-DYNASTIC FLINT KNIVES

no.	Site	Burial	Occupants	SD Date	Knives count	Broken knives	Knife type	Placement	Preservation condition	Broken area	Burial preservation	Other goods
12	Mostagadda	1847	Adult Male		1	1	Rhomboidal	Placed at right angles to each other	Broken		ND	Resin
13	Mostagadda	1854			1	1	Rhomboidal	Near the knee and the head	Broken		ND	Syenite mace-head, bone pin and point
14	Mostagadda	1860			1	1	Fishtail		Half	Probably from adjoining grave		
15	Mostagadda	11724			1	1	Fishtail	One half over the arm, the other over the leg	Broken	Two halves		
16	Nag ed-Deir	N7014	1 Adult 18 y, male		1	1	Fishtail	Butt inside a WCL ceramic	Two halves	Mesial section		WCL saucer, BT pottery, alabaster pot, two ivory tusks
17	Nag ed-Deir	N7016	2 Adult males, 1 Adult female		1	1	Fishtail		Broken	Two halves, mesial section, and missing forks		Animal figurine, WCL bowl and beaker
18	Nag ed-Deir	N7120			1	1	Fishtail	Near the left knee	Broken	One fork is missing	HP	Black topped broken containing charcoal and sand
19	Nag ed-Deir	N7235	5 Adults (4 Females)		1	1	Fishtail	Not mentioned				Rough and smooth wares, beads
20	Nag ed-Deir	N7151	1 Adult		1	1	Ripple-flaked		Broken	Mesial section	P	Two decorated jars, 1 wavy handled jar, saucer, rough brown jar filled with vegetable matter

no.	Site	Burial	Occupants	SD Date	Knives count	Broken knives	Knife type	Placement	Preservation condition	Broken area	Burial preservation	Other goods
21	Nag ed-Deir	N7271	1 Adults		1	1	V-shaped Fishtail	Two halves, mesial section	Two halves with missing pieces	One part found under the bowl	HP	Two wavy handled jars, 3 red ware smooth bowls, base of black topped beaker, 6 red ware jars with pot marks, tall black T beaker, 2 rough brown jars, stone jar containing malachite
22	Nag ed-Deir	N7491	Female		2	1	Double-edged	In the hand	Broken	Two halves	ND	Two red polished ware, 1 black topped jar, rough brown dish
23	Nag ed-Deir	N7583	Adult Male		1	1	Double-edged	Near face	Broken	Two halves, mesial section	P	Light brown jar with red polished bowl inside it, skull of a goat
24	Armant	1572			1	1	Not defined?		Fragment	Fragment of a knife	Q	Resin, gum, ivory game, 2 stone balls, beads
25	Armant	1573		SD57-58	1	1	Ripple-flaked			Two halves	Q	
26	Armant	1523			1	1	V-Shaped Fishtail			One half missing		
27	Matmar	2606	Adult Male		1	1	Fishtail	In the filling	Parts		P	Ceramics
28	Matmar	2657			1	1	Fishtail	In the filling	Broken		Q	Ceramics
29	Matmar	3122			1	1	Fishtail	In the filling	Half	One half is missing	Q	Ceramics
30	Matmar	5103			1	1	Ripple-flaked		Two halves			
31	Badari	102				1	Ripple-flaked		Broken	Several pieces		
32	Badari	102			2	1	V-shaped Fishtail		Broken	Mesial section		
	Badari	1647			1	1	Ripple-flaked			Not quite complete?		
33	Gerzeh				1	1	Ripple-flaked					
34	Amrah	B.27	Young?	Before SD.46	1	1	Curved?		Two halves		P	Malachite, carnelian and stone beads, ceramics
35	Amrah	B.35			3	1	Ripple-flaked		One half		P	5 discs of backed clay, resin, malachite, many ceramics
						1	Ripple-flaked		One half			
						1	Ripple-flaked		One half			

no.	Site	Burial	Occupants	SD Date	Knives count	Broken knives	Knife type	Placement	Preservation condition	Broken area	Burial preservation	Other goods
36	Gerzeh	ND			3	3	Ripple-flaked		Two halves			
					56	46						

east side, and mid-east side of the burial. Notably, there appears to be a preference for placing knives, especially fishtails, on the east side in Naqada. This distinctive placement underscores Naqada as a unique case where knives were deliberately positioned in association with both the burial and its occupant, regardless of the type of knife.

In other instances, knives were discovered in unique associations with various objects. For example, in burial no. 2666 at Matmar, a fishtail knife was placed beneath the skull of a gazelle, while in burial no. 1457 at Armant, another fishtail knife was found atop a sandstone rock. Another noteworthy example of unusual placement is seen in male burial no. B99 at Naqada, where a curved knife and a ripple-flaked knife were positioned parallel to each other and alongside other grave goods. These included fish-shaped slate, copper and ivory harpoons, a stone jar, Decorated Ware (D-Ware) jar, and a wavy handled (WH) jar. This arrangement suggests a lavish burial, where individuals witnessing the interment carefully arranged and placed the knives and other items, likely after wrapping the deceased in mats. Such practices may reflect the social status of the deceased as perceived by those participating in the burial ritual. Similarly, in burial no. 39 at Naqada, a curved knife was found next to sheep bones, while the remaining grave goods, including white cross-lined pots and a copper adze, were arranged in a row within the same burial site.



Figure 3. Burial no. N7014 – Nag ed-Deir (Lythgoe 1965: 8).

Unconventional placement of knives within burials may indicate either a specific burial sequence followed when placing knives alongside other grave goods, or it could reflect an early phase in the use of knives as grave goods. Evidence from Mostagadda suggests that earlier types of knives, particularly cortical ones made from flakes, were placed in seemingly random positions. For instance, in burials nos 429, 3204, and 472.a at Mostagadda, single-edged cortical, symmetrical, and single-edged cortical knives were respectively positioned at the feet, behind the shoulder, and at the shin of the deceased. These examples from Mostagadda likely represent an early stage in the incorporation of knives as grave goods.

Another factor contributing to the variation in knife placement could be the historical plundering of burials, both in ancient times and more recently. As noted by Petrie and Quibell, plundering often resulted in shifted objects being found in the earth fill, which workers would remove if they appeared disconnected from their original context (Petrie and Quibell 1896: 4). This plundering

has significantly complicated efforts to accurately determine the original positions of flint knives within burials. Additionally, the variability in knife placement patterns could also be influenced by the types of knives themselves and the specific cultural practices associated with their use and placement in burial contexts. However, the common theme reflected in the discussed example is the significant attention given to the deliberate placement of flint knives. This underscores the importance of this particular funerary good and highlights the care taken by those witnessing the burial to ensure such details served the benefit of the deceased, and raises the question whether the knives' placement followed a different pattern when broken?

Knife breakages: Deliberate or accidental?

The data obtained through the study of flint knives among the discussed sites shows that some of the deposited knives were found broken into two or three pieces, placed in different zones within the burial. These pieces were often associated with various body parts or arranged beside each other. The functional parts of the knives were typically broken at the blade, especially around the mesial part of the cutting edge. Analysing the preservation condition of knives from several Predynastic sites reveals that this practice, although infrequent, occurred with various types of knives. Examples of this can be found at sites such as Dispolis Parva, Mostagadda, Naqada, Gerzeh, Armant, Al Amrah, Minshat Abu Omer, and Nag ed-Deir (Table 1).

Breakages or fragmentation was found to be associated with various types of knives including fishtails, rhomboidal, symmetrical, and ripple-flaked knives, along with rare examples of flint knives with integral handles. In their description of the ripple-flaked knives from Badari, Brunton, and Caton-Thompson (1928: 61) state that 'These beautiful implements are much sought after by the modern native, and we found none perfect'. However, only three specific cases were mentioned in their publication, including fishtail and ripple-flaked knives. The same publication notes the discovery of 30 fishtail knives from Badari, but only a few examples are described in detail. Brunton (1937: 91) also observed breakages related to funerary knives at Mostagadda, noting, 'The thin fine knives, so easily broken, were only for the burials'.

Brunton's statement was likely inspired by the obvious breakages of rhomboidal knives in Mostagadda. However, the distribution and arrangement of these pieces are not mentioned in most cases. The rhomboidal knives from burials nos 1854, 1847, 1803, and 1854 in Mostagadda were found broken into five, two, three, and four pieces, respectively (Brunton 1937: pl. XL, 10-12). These knives are thin and delicate, with rounded butts and tips.

The four Amartian burials with rhomboidal knives in Mostagadda were those of male occupants, except for one, which was for a child. In burial no. 1847, the broken pieces of the knife were arranged at right angles to each other. This burial was described as 'quite undisturbed' within the main text and as 'not disturbed' in tomb registers (Brunton 1937: 91, pl. XXX). The rhomboidal knife in burial no. 1854 (Figure 4b) from Mostagadda was found broken into several pieces and placed together with a broken mace head before the arms of the male occupant, who was equipped also with a chaff pillow, faience cylinder bead, and intact matting. Brunton inferred the possible breakage of the knife prior to burial because the missing part was not found inside the intact burial (Brunton 1937: 82-91, pl. XXX). This suggests that the breakage occurred before deposition. The same applies to the rhomboidal knife in the intact male burial no. 1803, where the broken knife was present with missing broken pieces. In this case, the three parts of the knife were placed under the body of the deceased. Further, the double-edged knife from the plundered burial no. 1839 in Mostagadda, was also found in two pieces (Brunton 1937: pl. XL, 9), though their exact locations were not specified (Brunton 1937: 88).

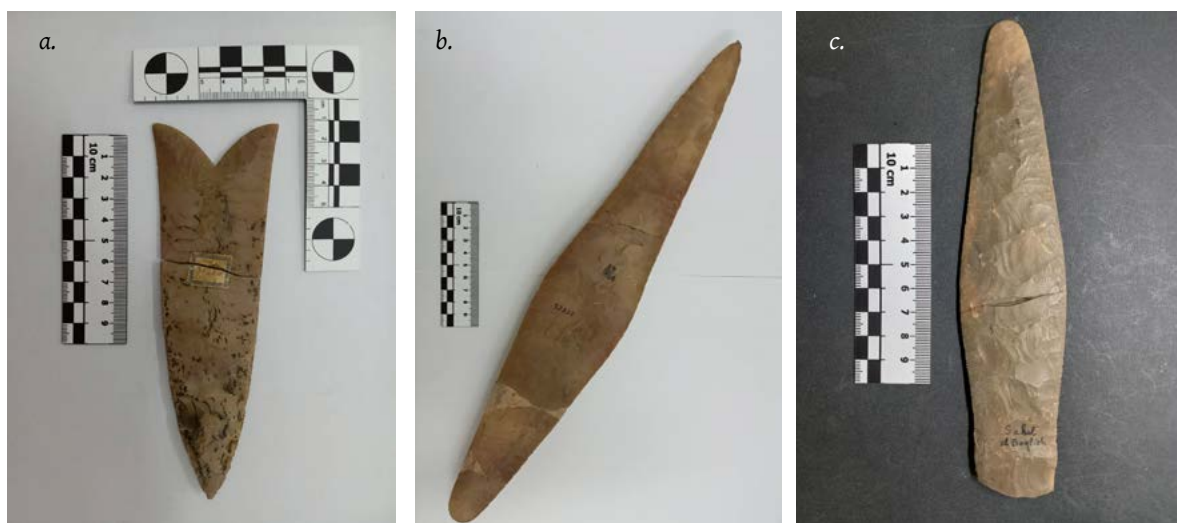


Figure 4. Broken flint knives at Egyptian Museum Cairo: a. Fishtail CG64864 from Gebel el Tarif, b. Rhomboidal knife from Mostagedda JE52852/ EXC.1854, c. Rhomboidal knife CG64842 from Gebel el Tarif.

The deliberate breakage and arrangement of broken pieces observed at Mostagedda are particularly noteworthy, especially given the presence of those knives in intact burials and their specific placement within these contexts. Rare examples associated with rhomboidal knives from other sites may indicate the continuation of this tradition, particularly among Upper Egyptian sites. In Naqada's burial no. 1437, the two halves of the two broken rhomboidal knives were placed behind the pelvis of the occupant. It is worth mentioning that the same burial comprised sherds of red and white-crossed lined ware which might have been broken for ritual purpose too. The absence of the deceased's head from the grave further supports the possibility of ritual activity, although this remains uncertain, as the burial was described as 'plundered' (Petrie and Quibell 1896: 28).

Two rhomboidal knives were also described as part of a group of finds excavated by Garstang in 1904 at Naqada. These knives are currently housed in the Egyptian collection of the Royal Museum of Art and History in Brussels. The tomb is attributed to a 1st dynasty prince. The two rhomboidal knives were found alongside animal-shaped flint figurines and points. The knives are bifacially-worked, with serration along the edges. Both show signs of hafting at one end and were made of grey homogenous flint, characteristic of Upper Egypt. The 38.8cm long knife (E.6185b) was broken into seven pieces but has been restored in modern times. Given the early date of this knife type (Naqada I to early Naqada II), these knives are interpreted as heirlooms in this context. Therefore, these objects were valued for their ritual or symbolic meaning and carefully kept for use in a new context (Huyge *et al.* 2021: 430–431). However, it is difficult to determine whether the breaking occurred in the original Predynastic context or the Early Dynastic burial.

The breakage of other symmetrical knives, such as double-edged knives, is less common. However, a unique example is the broken double-edged knife from the intact burial no. N7491 at Nag ed-Deir. This knife was found in two parts: one was held in the hand of the female occupant, while the other was embedded in a mass of cloth and hair. The excavator noted that the rolled hair within the mass did not belong to the deceased but rather to a person of an earlier age, suggesting it was preserved and placed with the deceased during burial (Lythgoe 1965: 310). It is possible that one part of the broken knife was included in this mass for ritual purposes. Another noteworthy case is burial no. N7583. Although the excavator described it as plundered, the disturbance was confined to the neck area of the male deceased, whose body was fully wrapped in goat skin. The rest of the burial contents remained undisturbed, including the two halves of a double-edged knife (Lythgoe 1965: 310). This

may further support the hypothesis of intentional breakage for ritual purposes. Additionally, one of the four flint knives in Armant burial no. 1413 is described as broken prior to the burial of the deceased (Mond and Myers 1937: 37).

The absence of broken pieces in some intact burials might be related to what Hertel (2023: 19–21, 49) discussed regarding the ritual breakage of Dynastic pottery. Hertel argues that this practice may reflect a tendency to share parts of the same objects between the deceased and the living members of society. This interpretation is supported by the presence of worn, broken pottery pieces in certain burials, suggesting their post-breaking circulation. Such evidence challenges the assumption that burials containing sherds necessarily represent impoverished contexts. Similar debates about the indicators of wealth and poverty in burials have recently been addressed by other scholars (Bentley *et al.* 2012, 2022).

Out of the 32 knives recorded from the burials of Dispolis Parva, ten were found broken. These include five fishtail knives, one symmetrical/rhomboidal knife, and four curved knives of different types. These broken knives were recorded from burials nos B86, B235, B408, U400, and B168 (Petrie 1901). In only five cases did the excavator provide information about the burial and other types of non-lithic goods. The fishtail knives from Dispolis Parva were almost all of the U-shaped type, except for one, and are dated to Sequence Date (SD) 35–48. One fork represented the missing part of the aforementioned examples.

The broken fishtail knives were found inside two undisturbed multiple burials, each accompanied by a mace head. One remarkable example is burial no. B86 (SD 35–40) with nine fishtails, two of them with broken forks, described by Petrie as ‘one of the finest graves’. The grave contained three bodies, two of them seemed to be intentionally incomplete, while the rest of the grave goods reflect their high rank i.e. three mace-heads with preserved handles of ivory and horn for two of them. The four adults in burial no. B236 were buried with three fishtails, two of them with one fork missing of each (Petrie 1901: 33–34).

Other patterns of breakages are observed with fishtails including breaking the knives into two halves. Examples of breaking a fishtail into two pieces and placing each part in different positions are frequently recorded with fishtail knives. In some cases, both parts were distributed over the body of the deceased. For instance, in burial no. 11724 from Mostagadda (SD 55–57), one part of a V-shaped fishtail knife was placed over the arm of the occupant, while the other part was placed over their leg (Brunton 1937: 74).

In burial no. N7016 at Nag ed-Deir, the blade of the fishtail knife was placed over the leg of the deceased, while the fork was missing. In other examples, parts of fishtail knives were found in association with various objects, including animal remains, bowls, shells, and sandstones. Another notable example from Nag ed-Deir is burial no. N7271, where half of a fishtail knife was found under a brown ware basin near the head and chest area, though the location of the other half was not mentioned (Lythgoe 1965: 156). In burial no. N7014 of young male in Nag ed-Deir, one half of a fishtail knife was found inside a white-cross-lined (WCL) bowl, while the other half was outside the bowl, although its precise location within the burial was not specified but was detectable through the burial’s photo. Here, the occupant was also equipped with two ivory tusks, alabaster pot, and ceramics (Figure 3).

Similar breakages were observed among other fishtail knives whose photos were provided with descriptions in Brunton’s publication about Mostagadda. However, their actual context is not fully known as they are given the number 1800, which refers to burials within the earlier domestic context

at the site. Many objects from this section were unregistered, making it difficult to obtain complete data about these examples. Nevertheless, the shapes and breakages of these knives suggest their possible ritual use and earlier date, indicated by their U-shaped forks. Other uncertain cases come from Matmar, with few examples described with few details i.e. burial no. 2606 as containing pieces of fishtail in the filling, while Brunton mentioned that similar cases existed from other burials too, i.e. nos 2657, 3074, 3122, and states 'All the graves containing knives, whether 'fish-tail' or otherwise, were of males where the sex could be determined' (Brunton 1948: 21).

The breakages observed on curved knives, including ripple-flaked and bifacially-worked knives, are relatively less frequent compared to fishtail and rhomboidal knives. The breakages on curved knives were usually minor in size and impact. In some cases, the broken part was at the mesial section of the cutting edge and was only partially invasive, so it did not cause the knife to divide into two parts. Three out of the five ripple-flaked knives from the Gerzeh cemetery were broken in the middle and placed at the centre of the burial (Stevenson 2006: 45). The preservation condition of the ripple-flaked knives from the other sites was not clearly stated by the excavators, but photos indicate they were also sometimes broken. Three halves of ripple-flaked knives were recorded from burial no. B35 in Amrah, along with five discs of backed clay, resin, malachite, and many ceramics. One ripple-flaked knife was found broken at the mesial section inside burial no. N7151, while one half is recorded from burial B408 in Dispolis Parva. From this site, other curved knives were also found: one with an integral handle; one bifacially-flaked, and an unspecified curved knife, all discovered as halves in burial no. B168. From burial no. B217 pieces of large ripple-flaked knife was also mentioned as part of the filling in this plundered yet large burial (Petrie 1901: 33).

Some cases were identifiable only through photographs of grave goods associated with specific sites, as described in sources such as Dispolis Parva. For example, burial no. B78 included a half ripple-flaked knife, while burial no. B186 contained three knives: two halves and one broken knife with an integral handle. Similarly, a broken rhomboidal knife was documented from burial no. U400, accompanied by two fishtail knives, a single arrowhead, and two bracelets (Petrie 1901: pl. VII). Other briefly described examples are recorded from Badari (Brunton and Caton-Thompson 1928: 61). However, due to the lack of detailed descriptions or clear contextual information for these examples, they are not discussed further in this analysis but are included in the data table for reference (Table 1).

Due to the lack of complete data about the preservation condition of the remaining knives from the discussed sites, reconstructing the full evidence of the ritual breaking of knives and its frequency is not entirely feasible. However, it is evident that this phenomenon existed, as demonstrated by the confirmed examples mentioned above, particularly when knives are found broken inside intact burials with missing pieces. Such cases strongly suggest the intentional breaking of knives either prior to or during the burial.

The practice of ritual breaking of flint knives appears to have originated as an Upper Egyptian tradition, similar to the initial use of knives as grave goods, which began in Upper Egypt and later extended to some Lower Egyptian sites. The low number of examples may be attributed to the selective criteria employed by early excavators, who prioritised the collection of complete and luxurious pieces. This is also supported by Brunton's statement 'None of the implements was broken, an unusual state of affairs' (1948: 13), describing four flint knives from burial no. 2666 in Matmar, in which he provided brief data about broken knives, which refers to the possible fact that the actual number of broken objects outnumbered the described examples, a case that was probably common among the consulted publications. Alternatively, this scarcity might reflect the nature of the ritual itself, as suggested by ethnoarchaeological and archaeological data from non-Egyptian

prehistoric contexts. In such cases, evidence of similar rituals tends to be limited when compared to the total number of burials at a given site.

Valued vs. unpreserved

Further examples are detected among museum collections such as the stored and displayed flint knives at Cairo, Egyptian Museum. Investigating how ritually-broken objects are displayed in museums is particularly challenging with Predynastic flint knives, given their distribution among numerous international museums. The dispersal of these objects is well-documented in early excavation publications that included ‘distribution lists’ of flint knives and other varied objects. Cairo, Egyptian Museum received several flint knives excavated during the late 19th and early 20th centuries or donated by kings or unspecified persons. Certain examples were directly located among the stored and displayed collection, while others are mentioned within the *Catalogue general des antiquités Egyptiennes du Musée du Caire* by Quibell (1905), in which he described ‘archaic objects’ that actually refer to Predynastic materials.¹

However, most displayed examples are whole pieces with one exception: the large rhomboidal knife from Mostagadda (JE52852 – EXC.1857), which was originally broken into five pieces and placed on a supporting plinth by conservators. Its modern restoration makes the original breakages discernible only from a close distance and through photography (Figure 4b), which refers to losing its original identity and neglecting the ritual values imparted when breaking it by the Predynastic societies.

This situation raises the critical question of whether broken objects should be regarded as unpreserved or, instead, as valued. The answer depends on whether the breakage resulted from ritual practices or taphonomic processes. In this context, Hertel (2023: 23) offers valuable insights into the significance of broken objects, arguing that broken items are not necessarily non-functional or useless, just as whole objects are not always functional. This perspective is particularly relevant

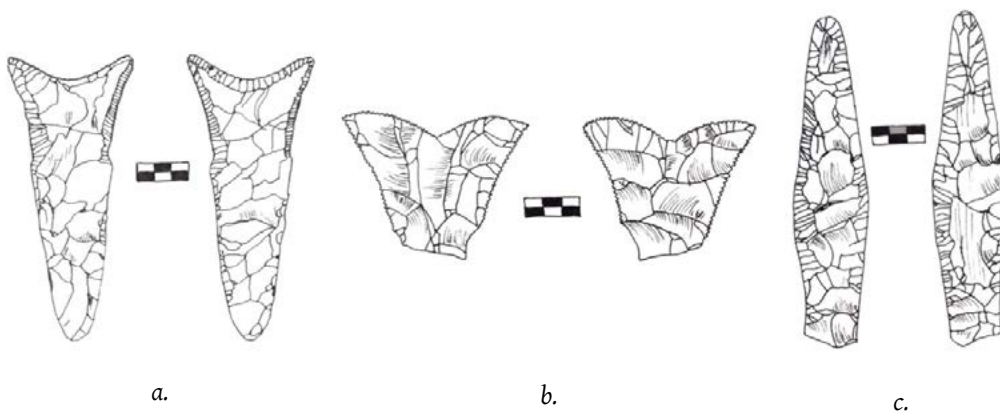


Figure 5. Varied Breakage patterns detected on three flint knives housed in Cairo, Egyptian Museum: a. Fishtail intentionally-broken, JE47611 from Qau el Kebir (b). Obsidian fishtail probably intentionally broken CG67933 (Given) (c). A rhomboidal knife broken at the mesial and distal ends, the latter probably for hafting CG64842 (Gebel el Tarif).

¹ The direct investigation of the flint knives housed at the Egyptian Museum, Cairo was made possible after obtaining the necessary permissions and was conducted within the framework of the author's research project, *Reopening the Permanent Gallery P.55*. This project seeks to promote prehistoric archaeology within the museum context, while also reinterpreting and showcasing a significant collection of prehistoric artefacts, with a particular focus on lithic objects. The results of this research are currently showcased within the same gallery.

when broken objects are found in non-discard contexts, such as graves. To consider broken objects as unpreserved or useless imposes modern assumptions about the nature of objects onto ancient artefacts. Such a perspective is unlikely to yield accurate archaeological interpretations, emphasising the need for a more nuanced understanding of the cultural and ritual meanings associated with these items.

Other broken examples are kept in storerooms (Figure 5) such as rhomboidal knives CG64845/14310 from El-Tarif and CG64843/14310 from Hamra Dom, broken into two halves, and CG64845, representing only one half. The single-edged knives JE54846 and CG64844 are also broken, with one part remaining from the first, and the two halves from the second, while diverse broken double-edged knives were also detected i.e. CG14305, CG14308, and CG14311. More breakage instances are observed in the collection of fishtails housed in the Cairo, Egyptian Museum, exhibiting more variability. Some were broken into two pieces (CG64864, CG64847, JE47611, and JE52832) and restored by museum staff to appear whole. Others were broken from one or two of the forks (CG64863, CG64854, CG64848, and CG64859), while in other cases, one part remained (CG64867 and JE67933).

Due to the lack of clear contextual data for most of the knives housed in the collection of the Cairo Egyptian Museum, interpreting these artefacts presents significant challenges. Provenance information is often missing, primarily due to the varied acquisition methods, which include confiscation, donations, purchases by excavators, or excavation without proper documentation. Furthermore, linking these objects to earlier publications is often difficult. As a result, meaningful interpretation is generally limited to cases where relevant data can be identified in existing published literature. However, some examples refer to the presence of breakage instances in Gebel el Tarif, Qau el Kbir, Mostagadda, and Naqada.

Further, it is important to distinguish between breakages caused by ancient ceremonies and those occurring inside museums due to storage conditions, referred to here as ‘museum taphonomy’. The fragility of these knives makes them more prone to breakages, especially within insufficient storage facilities. Distinguishing between ancient and modern breakages is possible only with objects of known provenance and context, which is often not the case with finely-made knives, even within Egyptian museums. This necessitates reconstructing objects’ biographies, conducting in-depth scientific research on their contexts, functions, and evolving values, and ultimately deciding on the best ways to convey these complex events and meanings to audiences and researchers through museums as platforms of knowledge.

Conclusions

The analysis of ceremonial object breaking in ancient Egypt reveals a complex practice deeply rooted in funerary traditions, particularly during the Predynastic Period. By integrating funerary evidence with taphonomic and ethnographic methods, alongside comparative textual and iconographic analyses from later periods, this study uncovers the intentional and symbolic nature of these rituals. Ritual breaking, whether of flint knives, skeletal remains, or other grave goods, appears to have been a practice reserved for individuals of high social status, emphasising its role in reinforcing social hierarchies and afterlife beliefs.

Flint knives, especially fishtail and rhomboidal types, were among the earliest objects ritually broken, with evidence of intentional breakage patterns traceable to as early as Naqada I. These patterns, often targeting functional or non-functional parts of the knives, suggest a deliberate ceremonial act rather than accidental damage. The association of broken knives with prestigious grave goods such as mace heads, metal artefacts, and ivory objects further underscores their role in elite burials,

reflecting their dual function as practical tools and symbols of wealth and power. The deliberate placement of intact and broken knives within burials – often near the pelvic region or distributed alongside other grave goods – highlights their integral role in burial rituals and the deceased's journey to the afterlife. While early interpretations attributed knife breakages to plundering, the presence of broken knives in undisturbed burials contradicts this notion, reinforcing the view of intentional ritual practices.

The motivations behind ritual object destruction remain open to interpretation. Proposed explanations include the symbolic release of the object's spirit, the prevention of reuse by the living, the neutralisation of the object's ritual role, and the representation of the deceased's dominance over enemies. These interpretations, while rooted in comparative studies of other cultures, align with evidence from Egyptian contexts, albeit with variations reflecting regional and temporal dynamics. However, ritual breaking cannot have a universal interpretation, as it is linked to various societies, spans across diverse temporal periods, and involves objects whose meanings undoubtedly varied among the early inhabitants of different regions. These interpretations may also differ significantly from the perceptions of modern traditional societies, and the same certainly applies to the Predynastic flint knives.

The selection of flint knives as some of the earliest items to undergo ritual breakage is undoubtedly linked to the symbolic values and meanings associated with this specific tool type. A thorough analysis is necessary to understand the patterns of breakage and to compare them with the shapes of these knives, as well as the cultural and symbolic significance embodied in their forms—particularly the fishtail, ripple-flaked, and rhomboidal varieties. The ritual breaking of knives appears to have originated as an Upper Egyptian tradition, closely associated with the broader practice of using knives in funerary contexts. This tradition mirrors similar acts of ritual destruction, including the deliberate killing, fragmentation, or smashing of skeletal materials, human and animal sacrifices, and other objects, particularly pottery.

The evidence suggests that ritual breaking during the Predynastic Period was either an emerging tradition or a practice reserved for select societal members, as indicated by the limited yet significant cases recorded. This tradition persisted and evolved through the Dynastic Period, where it became more codified, as seen in textual and iconographic representations, and increasingly associated with the elite. The ritual killing of objects and skeletal remains in Predynastic Egypt served as a profound expression of social status, funerary ideology, and the metaphysical concerns of the afterlife. The practice's evolving forms and functions highlight its enduring significance as an integral aspect of ancient Egyptian cultural and ceremonial life.

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Vignettes of the *Book of the Dead* on Third Intermediate Period Coffins from Thebes

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Abstract

During the Third Intermediate Period (21st dynasty to 25th dynasty), coffins replaced tomb walls as the primary location for funerary scenes. This change led to an increase in interest in their decorations and the scenes depicted on them. Coffins also adopted the scenes depicted on tombs. Vignettes from the *Book of the Dead* are among the scenes depicted and repeated frequently in the decorative programmes of coffins. Scenes from the *Book of the Dead* are found on all types of coffins of this period without exception. The style of depiction is characterised by the extreme abbreviation of the scene and the absence of the title and text of the spell in most cases. The iconography is also characterised by ambiguity, innovation, and the difference in the scene of the spells from one dynasty to another within the period. This paper presents the most important features of the *Book of the Dead* on the non-royal coffins during the Third Intermediate Period from Thebes and lists the spells of the *Book of the Dead* that appeared on those coffins, the places where vignettes of the *Book of the Dead* appeared, and the relationship of their placement to their purpose. This paper additionally seeks to show how the arrangement of visual depictions of these *Book of the Dead* spells is dependent upon their physical contexts on the coffins.

Keywords

Book of the Dead; Vignettes; Non-royal coffins; Third Intermediate Period; Thebes

Introduction

The political events that occurred at the end of the New Kingdom played a prominent role in changing funerary customs of the Third Intermediate Period. The spread of chaos in this period resulted in increased grave robbery. Reuse of tombs and *burial assemblages* became widespread social phenomena (Aston 2009: 19–33), and burials in temple courtyards are also frequently attested (Montet 1951: 21). These significant changes in funerary practice led priests during the Third Intermediate Period to stop constructing large ornate tombs (Taylor 2010a: 229–230). Instead, interest in mummifying the body increased, as well as interest in coffins and their decoration. The decorative programmes found on the coffins replaced those which had formerly been on tomb walls.

By the end of the 20th dynasty, there were already significant changes in the styles of coffins. Yellow coffins began to appear during the New Kingdom, but it is during 21st dynasty that new types appeared. The 21st dynasty yellow coffins constitute a thematic development from New Kingdom precedents. It is the type of coffins known as ‘multi-style coffins’ that was the longest-lived among Third Intermediate Period Egyptian coffins (Sousa 2018: 37–43), as this type lived for about one hundred and fifty years, from the 21st dynasty until the beginning of the 22nd dynasty, during the reign of King Osorkon I (Taylor 1989: 39, 2003: 103). They are then replaced by a completely different style in terms of shape, composition, and decoration. The new style, known as ‘cartonnage’ was widely spread due to its ease of manufacture and low cost (Taylor 1992: 166). Wooden coffins reappear again during the 25th dynasty, in addition to another type of coffin known as the *qrs*w coffins (Taylor 1989: 53).

The styles of coffins varied during the Third Intermediate Period, as the repertoire of scenes depicted on them included many potential scenes (Taylor 1985). Instead of continuing to reproduce just the traditional scenes of Thoth, Anubis, and the sons of Horus that were common during the New Kingdom, there seems to have been increased freedom, beginning in the 21st dynasty, in choosing the scenes. Coffins, which functionally replaced the tomb, then became a safe means of showing social status through their decoration and the choice of scenes depicted on them, particularly in the first half of the 21st dynasty (Cooney 2011: 3–44; Sousa 2019: 167). Large numbers of coffins were manufactured in different workshops, and these coffins were decorated with various scenes and texts, which differed only in the name of the buyer. The coffin artisan typically left a blank space in place of the name so that the buyer could record whatever names and titles he wished. This step of the coffin decoration is clear from examples like the mummy cover of the Oslo (UKM) coffin C47714c (Anders 2004: 55), preserved in the University Museum of Cultural Heritage in Oslo, where the artisan clearly left blank space for the name of the deceased (Bettum 2014: 182, fig. 7). However, the blank spaces may indicate the practice of reusing coffins (Sousa 2019: 167). In some cases of coffin reuse during this period, there are indications that the blank spaces were left and never used, having been covered over with layers of varnish associated with later reuse actions (Cooney 2018: 307). Reuse of coffins was a common phenomenon that spread during this period (Cooney 2024), and there are many cases of this phenomenon found on the 21st dynasty coffins (Cooney 2018).

Religious scenes depicted in the tombs were transferred to the coffins, particularly the scenes related to the *Book of the Dead*, which appeared in abundance on the coffins of the Third Intermediate Period. (Niwiński 2006: 245). Although some of *Book of the Dead* vignettes appeared on New Kingdom coffins, such as BD 59 (Billing 2002: 401, fig. E.1) and BD 161 (Lapis 1956: 157–160), it is only during the Third Intermediate Period that *Book of the Dead* vignettes became one of the most distinctive and basic features of non-royal coffins from Thebes.

Many spells of the *Book of the Dead* appear on non-royal Theban coffins of the Third Intermediate Period. Often, more than one spell was depicted on the one coffin. The spells shown on the coffins appear to have been chosen according to the characteristic practices and decorative features of each workshop and not necessarily according to the wishes of the deceased, as is evident from the repetition of the scenes in the same forms and order on many coffins. This applies to the coffins of all dynasties of the period (Alazraq 2023: 558).

The selection of *Book of the Dead* spells depicted on the non-royal coffins of the Third Intermediate Period focuses on eight main themes: providing food and drink for the deceased, protecting him from danger and preserving his body from decay, participating with the god Ra on his journey, the judgement, transformations of the deceased, entering the Fields of Iaru, and passing through its gates.

Below are three tables, showing which *Book of the Dead* vignettes are depicted on 21st dynasty, 22nd dynasty and 25th dynasty non-royal coffins and the location of these vignettes on the coffin, although the data is not exhaustive.

TABLE 1. BOOK OF THE DEAD VIGNETTES AND THEIR PLACEMENT ON 21ST DYNASTY NON-ROYAL COFFINS FROM THEBES (COLLATED BY AUTHOR)

Spell	Placement of <i>Book of the Dead</i> (BD) vignettes on 21st dynasty non-royal coffins			
	Under/near mummified remains' head	Exterior sides of coffin box	Floor of coffin box	Lid
BD 1	×	London, BM EA6664 Vatican, MGE 25021	×	×
BD 9	×	×	×	Cairo, EM CG6191 Cairo, EM CG61027 Oslo, (UKM) C47714 a New York, MMA 25.3.183a
BD 16	New York, MMA 25.3.183a Cairo, EM JE29565 Cairo, EM JE29641 Cairo, EM JE29656 Cairo, EM JE29635 Cairo, EM JE29598 Cairo, EM JE29637 Cairo, EM JE29711 Cairo, EM JE29716 Cairo, EM JE29730 Cairo, EM JE1238 Cairo, EM JE26198	London, BM EA24907 Vatican, MGE 25021 Alexandria, 32 (On the head area) Cairo, EM JE26198 CGT 10101b= CAT 2236 (On the foot area)	×	×
BD 17	London, BM EA29591 London, BM EA24794 London, BM EA15659 London, BM EA24789 Paris, Louvre E.13037 Paris, Louvre 2609-11 F93/10.1a F93/10.1b Vienna, ÄS 6261-6262 Cairo, EM JE1238 Cairo, EM JE29612 Cairo, EM JE29628 Cairo, EM JE29735	Stockholm, NME 894 Uppsala, VM 228 Cairo, EM CG6008 Cairo, EM JE29661 Cairo, EM JE29655 Cairo, EM JE29718 Cairo, EM JE29692 Alexandria, 32 (On the head area) Vatican, MGE 25021 (Repeated on the Middle side of the coffin)	Cairo, EM JE29733 Odesa, 71695 (On the Middle of the floor of the coffin)	×
BD 33	×	×	London, BM EA29591 Cairo, EM CG6029	×
BD 59	×	This spell appeared on many coffins on the foot end of the coffin box sides, e.g. Odesa, 71695 Cambridge, FM E.1.1822 London, BM EA29591 CGT 10106	×	×
BD 81	×	Cairo, EM JE29668 Cairo, EM JE29660 Cairo, EM JE29659 Vienna, ÄS 6261-6262 Paris, Louvre N3661	×	×

Spell	Placement of <i>Book of the Dead</i> (BD) vignettes on 21st dynasty non-royal coffins			
	Under/near mummified remains' head	Exterior sides of coffin box	Floor of coffin box	Lid
BD 86	Cairo, EM JE29641 Cairo, EM JE29713	x	x	x
BD 87	x	Cairo, EM JE29668 Cairo, EM JE29660 Cairo, EM JE29659	x	x
BD 125	x	This spell appeared on many coffins of this dynasty, e.g. Odesa, 71695 London, BM EA6664 Cambridge, FM E.1.1822 CGT 10106	x	x
BD 126	x	London, BM EA29591 Cairo, EM JE29660 Cairo, EM JE29662 Cairo, EM JE29706 Cairo, EM JE29565	x	x
BD 138	x	Cairo, EM JE29668 Odesa, 52976 Cairo, EM JE29655	x	x
BD 148	x	Cairo, EM CG6029 Cairo, EM JE29668 Cairo, EM JE29662 Cairo, EM JE29706 Cairo, EM JE29736 Cairo, EM JE29702 Cairo, EM JE29678 Cairo, EM JE29670 Odesa, 52976	x	x
BD 151	x	Cairo, EM JE29619 London, BM EA29591 (On the inner side of the coffin box)	x	x
BD 161	x	Oslo, UKM C47714 a London, BM EA29591 CGT 10106 CGT 10101.b CGT 10104.b	x	x
BD 186	x	This spell appeared on many coffins on the foot end of the coffin box sides, e.g. Cambridge, E.1.1822 Odesa, 71695 Oslo, UKM C47714 a Paris, Louvre E.13037 CGT 10106 CGT 10104.b Cairo, EM JE29619	x	x

TABLE 2. BOOK OF THE DEAD VIGNETTES AND THEIR PLACEMENT ON 22ND DYNASTY NON-ROYAL COFFINS FROM THEBES

Spell	Placement of <i>Book of the Dead</i> (BD) vignettes on 22nd dynasty non-royal coffins		
	Under/near mummified remains' head	Exterior sides of coffin box	Lid
BD 1	×	London, EA36211 Leiden, RMO AMM18-h	×
BD 16	Cleveland, CMA 14.714 Leiden, AMM18-h London, EA36211 London, EA6666	×	London, BM EA22939 Cairo, EM TN21.11.16.5 (On the leg)
BD 17	Vatican, MGE 25008.2.1 Paris, Louvre E. 3864 Leiden, RMO AMM18-h London, BM EA36211	×	×
BD 42	×	×	Brooklyn, 35.1265 (On the Belly)
BD 59	×	Cairo, EM CG61034 Cleveland, CMA 14.714 Leiden, RMO AMM18-h London, BM EA6659 Cairo, EM CG61034	San Francisco, Global Museum, 107.1 L.XII.3-c Brooklyn, 35.1265 (On the leg)
BD 74	×	×	San Francisco, Global Museum, 107.1 L.XII.3-c Paris, Louvre N3948 Brooklyn, 34.1223 (On the leg)
BD 125	×	×	This spell appeared on many coffins on the chest, e.g. Brooklyn, 34.1223 Toledo, MA 1906.4 Cambridge, FM E.8.1896 Chicago, AI 1910.238 London, BM EA6659
BD 126	×	×	London, BM EA6664
BD 138	×	×	L.XII.3-c London, BM EA22939 London, BM EA9577 London, BM EA6666 Chicago, AI 1910.238 Cambridge, FM E.64.1896 Cairo, EM TN21.11.16.5 Brooklyn, 34.1223 (Between the belly and the leg)
BD 151	×	×	London, BM EA29577 Harvard, MANE 1901.9.1 Cairo, EM CG41035 (On the belly)
BD 182	×	London, BM EA6666 London, BM EA30721	×

Spell	Placement of <i>Book of the Dead</i> (BD) vignettes on 22nd dynasty non-royal coffins		
	Under/near mummified remains' head	Exterior sides of coffin box	Lid
BD 186	×	Cairo, EM CG61034 Cleveland, CMA 14.714 London, BM EA6666	London, BM EA29577 Paris, Louvre N3804 (On the leg)

TABLE 3. BOOK OF THE DEAD VIGNETTES AND THEIR PLACEMENT ON 25TH DYNASTY NON-ROYAL COFFINS FROM THEBES

Spell	Placement of <i>Book of the Dead</i> (BD) vignettes on 25th dynasty non-royal coffins			
	Under mummified remains' head	Exterior sides of coffin box	Floor of coffin box	Lid
BD 1	×	×	×	Cairo, EM CG41038
BD 16	Cairo, EM TN21.11.16.5 London, BM EA25256 Stockholm, NME 816 Liverpool, WM 15.2.07.5c Paris, Louvre E.13032 Copenhagen, AEIN 1522	×	×	Cairo, EM CG41034 Cairo, EM CG41014 RO.III-a (On the head area)
BD 17	×	Tübingen, 150a	×	Stockholm, NME 816 Copenhagen, AEIN 1522 Hamm, 5500 (On the belly)
BD 31	×	×	Cairo, EM CG41004 Cairo, EM CG41009	×
BD 33	×	×	Cairo, EM CG41004	×
BD 36	×	×	Cairo, EM CG41004 Cairo, EM CG41009	×
BD 40	×	×	Cairo, EM CG41004 Cairo, EM CG41009	×
BD 41	×	×	Cairo, EM CG41004	×
BD 59	Cambridge, FM E.2.1869	×	Vatican, MGE 38073.2.2 Tübingen, 150a	×
BD 71	Cairo, EM CG41060	×	×	×
BD 82	×	×	×	Cairo, EM CG41026
BD 89	×	×	×	L.XII.2-b AE 1 Stockholm, NME 816 Vatican, MGE 38073.2.2 Edinburgh, NMS A.1869.33 Cairo, EM CG41060 (On the chest and the belly)

Spell	Placement of <i>Book of the Dead</i> (BD) vignettes on 25th dynasty non-royal coffins			
	Under mummified remains' head	Exterior sides of coffin box	Floor of coffin box	Lid
BD 100	×	×	×	Cairo, EM CG41021 Cairo, EM CG41022 Cairo, EM CG41023 Cairo, EM CG41026
BD 125	×	×	×	This spell appeared on many coffins of this dynasty on the chest, e.g. Liverpool, WM M14003c Liverpool, WM 1953.72 L.XII.2-b M.40 London, BM EA24906
BD 138	×	×	×	Cairo, EM CG41020 Cairo, EM CG41026 Turin, ME 2223/01 London, BM EA25256 AE 1 Stockholm, NME 816 Copenhagen, AEIN 1522 Cairo, EM CG41026 Vatican, MGE 38073.2.2 (On the leg)
BD 145	×	Liverpool, WM 1953.72 Cairo, EM CG41020 Cairo, EM CG41026	×	×
BD 147	×	Cairo, EM CG41025	×	×
BD 148	×	Cairo, EM CG41025	×	×
BD 149	×	Cairo, EM CG41025	×	×
BD 151	×	×	×	Sur-Mer Museum, 123 Leiden, RMO AMM 19a Tübingen, 150a. Paris, Louvre E.2.1869 Hamm 5500 Cairo, EM CG41020 Cairo, EM CG41026 (On the belly)
BD 154	×	×	×	Liverpool, WM M14003c Turin, ME S.2223/01 Copenhagen, AEIN 1522 London, BM EA15654 London, BM EA6691 London, BM EA22940 Turin, ME S.5241 Turin, ME S.5246 Turin, ME S.2218/01 (On the belly)

Spell	Placement of <i>Book of the Dead</i> (BD) vignettes on 25th dynasty non-royal coffins			
	Under mummified remains' head	Exterior sides of coffin box	Floor of coffin box	Lid
BD 182	×	Rome, MVO n.1000 Cairo, EM CG41001bis	×	×

The features of the *Book of the Dead* on Third Intermediate Period non-royal coffins

Book of the Dead vignettes on Third Intermediate Period non-royal coffins are characterised by the severe reduction of the vignettes and the absence of spell texts that would normally accompany the vignettes, in the papyri from the same period. This is in contrast to the vignette design and caption practices seen in papyri of the period (Lenzo 2007, 2019; Tarasenko 2012a). Although some spells are clear, many of them are ambiguous and difficult to recognise or interpret (Niwiński 2006: 245) because the title and the text of the spells is omitted, in the vast majority of cases. This may be because of the size of the coffin, which could not accommodate huge amounts of text in addition to scenes in their complete form. The author utilised a comparative analysis of the scenes illustrated on the coffins with those represented on papyri (Lenzo 2007, 2019; Tarasenko 2012a) and tombs (Saleh 1984) from the same and earlier periods to identify which spells are attested.



Figure 1. *rwty*-scene from BD 17 on coffin Uppsala VM 228, 21st dynasty. Drawing by author, after Tarasenko 2007: 19.

For example, BD 17 of the *Book of the Dead*, which is one of the longest spells in terms of text and vignettes, consists of about 22 scenes in the papyri of the same period (Mosher 1990: 158–195; Tarasenko 2011: 84). The vignettes of the spell underwent many changes during the different periods, especially during the Third Intermediate Period and the Late Period, where vignettes were added that did not exist in the previous periods and scenes known from the previous periods were deleted or modified (Tarasenko 2012b: 379–381). This spell is one of the most repeated spells on Third Intermediate Period coffins, as it continued to appear on coffins throughout that period, starting from the 21st dynasty until the end of the 25th dynasty. The vignettes of BD 17 on coffins were characterised by the extreme brevity of the vignette and the absence of the spell text, as the artists of this period typically depicted only one vignette selected from the full corpus of spell vignettes. The choice of this vignette differed from one artist to another and from one dynasty to another, perhaps due to the artist's view of the importance of the vignette they chose. More than one scene of the spell appears on Third

Intermediate Period coffins, including: the *rwty*-Scene (Figure 1), *snt*-game scene (Gasse 1996: pl. XXVIII.II), the scenes of the morning boat of the sun god (Valdemar 1919: 130–131, figs 674, 676, 678), as well as the night boat, and a scene of a cat cutting the neck of the snake (Niwiński 1996: 105, fig. 82, 2004: fig. 12.2). The morning sun boat scene (Niwiński 1988: 153, nos 152, 264, and 267) and *rwty*-scene are among the more repeated on 21st dynasty coffins (Tarasenko 2007). The morning sun boat scene is more common on 22nd dynasty coffins (Chneider and Raven 1981: fig. 120; Niwiński 1988: 146, no. 225), and the night sun boat scene is more common on 25th dynasty coffins (Graefe 2001: pls V–XIII).

Book of the Dead scenes on the Theban coffins of the Third Intermediate Period can be distinguished by appearance of more than one version of a scene for each spell, with some temporal variation from one dynasty to another. BD 138 exemplifies this, as it appeared with different versions during the 22nd and 25th dynasties. This spell is known to be one of the main vignettes on the 22nd dynasty cartonnages (Taylor 1985: 50–51). The text of BD 138 talks about entering Abydos, and being in the following of Osiris (Lapp 1997: pl. 54; Quirke 2013: 313). An earlier vignette of BD 138 in the Papyrus of Ptahmes, Italy, Milan, Archaeological Museum (coll. Busca), of 19th dynasty date (Franco 2008) depicts the Abydos fetish in the middle of the scene decorated with a *uraeus* topped with two feathers. The fetish is flanked on the right by the goddess Isis and on the left by the god Osiris, who are holding the fetish in place. Other elements present in the scene include *ankh*-signs with human arms and hands holding fans; falcons standing on standard-poles, likely symbolising Horus; rams with long feathers on their heads also standing on standard-poles; jackals standing on standard-poles, symbolising either Anubis or Wepwawet. To the right and left of the symbol, we find three standing deities, souls of Pe and souls of Nekhen and Anubis, sitting on his shrine (Quirke 2013: 313). This depiction constitutes a possible precedent for Third Intermediate Period coffin vignettes of the same spell.

The vignettes of BD 138 appear differently on coffins of the Third Intermediate Period. Notably, the vignette has no associated text or title. The vignette changes when transferred to the surfaces of cartonnages during the 22nd dynasty (Figure 2). These changes specifically are in the appearance of the god Horus as a main element in the scene. He is most commonly depicted in the form of a large falcon with spread wings and the sun disc on his head. Usually, a small caption is written next to his head, identifying him specifically as *bḥdty*, instead of depicting him in the form of a small falcon standing on a standard-pole, as was common in previous periods (Raven 1993: pls LIII–LIV). He also appears in the form of a man with a falcon head worshipping the Abydos fetish (Eladany 2011: 167, fig. 5.3). Perhaps Horus is depicted in the scene because according to the text of the spell, the deceased takes on the person of Horus and speaks as Horus, announcing his passing of the judgement, protecting his father, and eliminating his enemies (Quirke 2013: 313). There is also a depiction of Isis and Nephthys sitting or standing around the fetish, and finally a depiction of Thoth accompanied by Horus around the Abydos fetish, as it appears on the coffin London,



Figure 2. BD 138 on coffin Leiden, L.XII.3 – c. 22nd dynasty coffins © National Museum of Antiquities, Leiden.

British Museum EA6666 (Fletcher and Hill 2014: 47, pls 2–3, 8, 112). The scene of Thoth accompanied by Horus in this spell is taken from an early version of BD 138 found in 21st dynasty papyri, such as the Cleveland Papyrus 1921.1032 (Berman 1999: 370–372).

The scene changes again when transferred to the surface of bivalve coffins of 25th dynasty date. The vignette of BD 138 on the coffins of the 25th dynasty is more similar to those on the coffins of the 22nd dynasty, because it centres on the fetish itself, which is the focus of the scene, though there are some differences. These differences are in the depiction of the fetish, which can be surrounded by the gods Horus and Thoth (Taylor 2003: pls LXV–LXVI), and then by another group of gods which may include Isis, Nephthys, Neith, Serget, Osiris, and Khnum (shown with a ram's head and a human body), Atum, Geb, Ptah, and finally the four sons of Horus (Sheikholeslami 2019: 210, fig. 131). These gods may represent the gods that receives the deceased and cheers and welcomes him in Abydos in the presence of Osiris, as the text of the spell includes this episode: *j ntrw jmyw ʾbdw d:d:t dmd. tj mj qd.s* 'O those gods who are in Abydos! The tribunal united in its entirety!' (Lapp, 1997: pl. 54; Quirke 2013: 313), and most of the gods depicted in the scene are members of the Ennead, such as Atum, Geb, Osiris, Isis, and Nephthys. With the development of the *qrsw* coffins at the end of the 25th dynasty, a different version of BD 138 appeared, depicting the god Anubis in the form of a jackal sitting on his shrine, with the Abydos fetish emerging from the back of the shrine, while the deceased is depicted kneeling or standing before the god Anubis, raising both hands in worship of him (Moret 1913: pls XXVIII–XXX). This version later became widespread in the papyri of the Late Period (Mosher 2020: 331–334)

During the Third Intermediate Period, not only did each spell appear in more than one form, but also some spells appeared in new forms that did not exist in previous periods. This is particularly clear from depictions of BD 16. BD 16 is an illustration of BD 15 and depicts the sun god's cycle during his ascent from the afterlife, his passage through heaven, and his return to the world of the dead (Allen 1949: 349–355). One version of this spell, as it appears in tombs and papyri, depicts a *djed*-pillar topped with an *ankh*-sign from which human hands emerge, raising the sun disc upwards, with the two goddesses Isis and Nephthys surrounding the *djed*-pillar and worshipping it. In addition to the monkeys cheering the sun god's rise from the horizon (Schäfer 1935: fig. 14). Another version of this spell depicts a god, most likely the god Nun, raising the sun disc upwards (Schäfer 1935: fig. 1). A later addition to these scenes is the scene of the hands of the goddess of the West, like Hathor or Nut, reaching down from the top to the bottom to receive the sun disc (Saleh 1984: 8, Schäfer 1935: figs. 13, 22–23).

These versions of the spell continued to appear on coffins during the Third Intermediate Period; however, they underwent some modifications as they became more abbreviated (Alazraq 2023: 261–262, pls 387–391). Additionally, during this period, some new versions emerged that had not appeared before. In one attested case,



Figure 3. BD 16 on the box of the outer coffin of Butehamon CGT. 10101.B © Museo Egizio di Torino.

as far as I know, during the 21st dynasty, the coffin artisan replaced the figures of Isis and Nephthys who were surrounding the *djed*-pillar and worshipping it, as it appears in the papyrus of Ani London, British Museum EA10470 (Dondelinger 1978) and the coffin Amsterdam, Allard Pierson Museum, APM 8103 (Lunsingh Scheurleer 1992: fig. 8; van Haarlem 1997: 12–24), with two *tit*-signs with human hands, worshipping the *djed*-pillar topped by the sun disc (Figure 3) (Niwiński 2004: pls II–III). The coffin artisan may have used the *tit*-sign because of its association with the goddesses Isis and Nephthys (Birch 1967: 13–14). In this case, the *djed* pillar does not raise the sun disk upwards, like the version of BD 16 in the Papyrus London, British Museum EA9901, from the 19th dynasty, where the artist depicted the god Ra at the top of the *djed*-pillar as a falcon with the sun disk on his head (Schäfer 1935: fig. 21). Perhaps the coffin artisan of the coffin CGT 1010b (Figure 3) replaced the falcon with the sun disk, as both are symbols of Ra. This motif is also found on the coffin in the Museo Civico Archeologico of Padua, 84889, and the coffin in Denmark, Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek Museum, AEIN 1522. In some other cases such as coffin Krakow UJ 10628 and coffin Linden RMO M3/AMM18, the *djed*-pillar itself is replaced by a *tit*-knot raising the sun disc or sun disc coming forth from it (Hellinckx 2001: 73–74, figs 10–11). I believe that all these scenes represent a new version of BD 16.

In the 25th dynasty, the *djed*-pillar was frequently depicted on the floor of the coffin box and sometimes on the back of the coffin. Often, it appeared alone, without other elements of the traditional scene, in a large size, with human hands emerging from its top, raising the sun disc upwards (Taylor 2003, 115, pls 65–66, 68). In some instances, the *djed*-pillar was topped with an *ankh*-sign, from which human hands also emerged, raising the sun disc (Dodson 2015: 37). In certain cases, the *djed*-pillar was replaced by the goddess Nut, who was similarly depicted in a large size on the floor of the coffin box, portrayed as a woman raising the sun disc (Dodson 2015: 36). Depicting Nut as a goddess raising the sun disc is unusual, as traditionally, male deities such as the god Nun were shown raising the sun disc, while female deities like Nut and Hathor were typically depicted receiving it (Hornung 1995: 105). I believe that Nut here in these cases, is receiving the sun's disc, not raising upwards. Her hands are depicted bending downwards in a receptive pose for the solar disc, rather than upwards in an raising pose. The shape of her palms can be compared to that of other hands that raise the solar disc upwards (Dodson 2015: 37; Schäfer 1935: figs 1, 14–15, 22–23)

One of the other features of the *Book of the Dead* on the coffins of the Third Intermediate Period is the union of Osiris with Ra in form and roles. This is seen in the scenes of BD 125 from the second half of the 21st dynasty, where the god Osiris was depicted in the form of the god Ra, placing the sun disc on his head (Niwiński 2004: fig. 7.2). The god Ra also gained great importance in Thebes during that period, where he appeared as the main judge of the judgement, though he was replaced by Osiris in many cases during the 22nd dynasty (Raven 1993: 40, pls LIII–LIV). Interestingly, during the 25th dynasty, he was typically depicted alongside Osiris (Alazraq 2003: 410, Dautant *et al.* 2014: pl. 1b).

The placement of Book of the Dead vignettes on the coffin

The inner and outer coffins, the *qrsw*, and the cartonnage all featured scenes from the *Book of the Dead*. Inclusion of scenes from the *Book of the Dead* seems not to have been limited to one type of coffin, but the choice of spells of the *Book of the Dead* does seem associated with specific chosen locations on the coffin. There is a close relationship between the meaning and the purpose of the spell of the *Book of the Dead* and the place where the spell is depicted on the coffin. Tables 1–3 (above) present the locations of each of the spells of the *Book of the Dead* commonly attested on Third Intermediate Period coffins. The selection of these locations was not by chance, and seems to represent a deliberate choice on the part of the artisans and a functional role related to the efficacy of the funerary text and vignette in the rebirth process.



Figure 4. BD 59 and 186 on coffin of Khonsumes CGT 10106 © Museo Egizio di Torino.

During the 22nd and 25th dynasties, the spells which discuss the protection of the body and organs of the deceased from damage (BD 42, BD 151, and BD 154) are typically depicted on the lids of the coffins on the belly area,¹ where the soft organs are most vulnerable to damage. The spells pertaining to the presentation of offerings and food to the deceased (BD 59, BD 148, and BD 186) are depicted at the end of the sides coffin box (Table 1) near the foot (Figure 4), typically where the West is in the location of the tomb, and thus toward the direction of the afterlife. It is this place where offerings are offered to the deceased. Particularly, BD 186 appears to have been linked to BD 59 on the coffins of the 21st dynasty, and the two spells were always depicted next to each other. BD 186 represented the deceased's arrival to the West in peace (Refai 2007: 160) and meeting the gods of the West, and the presenting of offerings to gain divine approval (Warkentin 2018: 97). In return, Hathor is shown to accompany him on his journey to the afterlife, to provide him with food and drink, and to welcome him before he entered the afterlife. She would help him participate in the solar cycle as he died every day in the West and would return and rise again at dawn (Abass 2014: 30). At the same time, the divine tree goddess provided him with the water and food necessary to complete his journey in the afterlife.

The spell of the judgement and the determination of the deceased's fate (BD 125) during the 22nd and 25th dynasties were depicted on the coffin lids in the chest area,² where the heart (Tables 2 and 3), which is integral to the weighing of the heart ceremony, is located. During the 21st dynasty and the beginning of the 22nd dynasty, the spells of the *Sun Cycle* and the journey of the sun god (BD 16 and BD 17) are depicted below or near the head of the mummified remains on yellow coffins

¹ For example, coffin Edinburgh A.1869.33 (Taylor 2018: 363, figs 7–8) and coffin Brooklyn 35.1265 (Botwinick and Bianchi 1978: 13) and coffin Cambridge, FM E.2.1869 (Sheikholeslami 2019: 210, fig. 131).

² For example, coffin L.XII.3-c (Raven 1993: 40, pls 53–54) and coffin London, BM EA6664 (Budge 1904: 63) and coffin Edinburgh, National Museum, A.1869.33 (Taylor 2018: 363, figs 7–8).

on the east side.³ Here, the east is the symbol of life and resurrection to ensure that the deceased's soul returns to him during the day with the sun god (Bonomi and Sharpe 1864: 47). Moreover, when they are depicted on the exterior sides of the coffin box, they are also depicted on the head of the mummified remains area (Tables 1 and 2), and, in rare cases, they are depicted away from the head of the mummified remains area (Table 1) (Niwiński 1988, pl. XVI.b). However, with the development of cartonnage in the 22nd dynasty, these spells were depicted on coffin lids, and then in the 25th dynasty, they returned to being depicted on the floor of the anthropoid coffins below the head of the mummified remains or near it (see Tables 2 and 3), and with the development of the *qrsw* at the end of the 25th dynasty, BD 16 was depicted on lids on the head area (Table 3).

The spells on the extermination of reptiles (BD 31, BD 33, BD 36, BD 40, and BD 41) were commonly depicted on the floor of the coffin box below the body of the deceased in the 21st (Taylor 2010b: fig. 11) and 25th dynasties (Haładaj 2019: 213, fig. 2) (Tables 1 and 3), likely because the crocodiles, snakes, or insects mentioned in the texts of these spells are creatures that crawl on the ground. These spells were located on the floors near the person's mummified remains to protect this fragile area of the coffin from hostile creatures that could emerge from the ground (Lucarelli 2008: 108). BD 182 was also depicted on both sides of the royal inner coffin box during the 21st (Montet 1951: pls LXXXIV–LXXXVI) and 22nd dynasties (Taylor 2010b: 202), and on *qrsw*-coffins during 25th dynasty (Sist 2017: 510). They can be found both on the outside and the inside of the coffins. On these sides, a group of seated and standing demons holding knives in their hands, snakes, and lizards were commonly depicted. BD 182 is one of the spells on the protection of the body of the deceased by these demons (Godefroid 2014). The protective attributes of the demons are clear from the reptiles and knives they carry in their hands, which show their fierce, aggressive nature, as well as their protective nature. They used this fierce nature to protect the deceased from dangers on his journey through the afterlife (Lucarelli 2012: 86–87). These demons seem to be depicted on the inner and outer sides of the coffins in order to surround the mummified remains so that they could protect it. These two sides represent the upper and lower registers of the spell scene as it appears in the papyri (Lucarelli 2012: pl. II), while the middle scene, which represents a person's mummified remains lying on a bed, was replaced functionally by the person's real mummified remains lying in the coffin (Alazraq 2023: 508).

The arrangement of the *Book of the Dead* scenes on the Third Intermediate Period coffins is logical. The artist would depict scenes that served a specific idea side by side, so that these scenes would fulfil their intended purpose to the fullest extent. For example, in the 22nd dynasty, there was a close relationship in terms of arrangement between BD 74, BD 125, and BD 138, particularly on the cartonnage. The depiction of Sokar's boat scene (BD 74) consistently occurs between the judgment scene (BD 125) and the scene of entering Abydos and staying with Osiris (BD 138) (Raven 1993: 40, pls 53–54). This arrangement is logical, as it is expected that after the deceased has undergone judgment and been acquitted, entering Abydos and remaining in the presence of Osiris serves as the reward for the acquitted, as described in the text of BD 138 from the *Book of the Dead* (Quirke 2013: 313–315). It is known that the boat of *hnw* carried the deceased to the heavenly paradise where Osiris resided after passing the trial, and it was the means of transportation to Abydos, where the heavenly paradise was located.

The same is true for BD 59, BD 148, and BD 186, the spells pertaining to obtaining food (Heyne 1998), as they are sometimes depicted side by side at the foot end of the coffin box exterior (Anders 2004: fig. 25; Chassinat 1909: 88, pl. XIV). Notably, BD 59 and BD 186 were closely associated with one

³ For example, coffin Leiden, RMO AMM18-h (Schneider and Raven: 1981, 119–120, fig. 120) and coffin London, BM EA36211 (Niwiński 1988: 153–154).

another in terms of arrangement on the yellow coffins from the 21st dynasty (Figure 4), one always depicted on one side and the other on the opposite side (Berlev and Hodjash 1998: pl. II. 9.2–3).

The spells of transformation are always depicted side by side on 21st dynasty coffins, such as BD 81, the spell of transformation into a lotus flower, and BD 87, the spell of transformation into the serpent Sa-ta (Niwiński 1999: fig. 4). BD 16 and BD 17, are the spells of participating in the sun god's cycle and joining his boat. Sometimes the artist would depict these two spells side by side or combine them into one scene, as appears on the Egyptian Museum coffin 1238 and the Alexandria coffin 32 from the 21st dynasty (Tarasenko 2007: 119). BD 147 and BD 149, the spells of passing the deceased from the gates and hills of the underworld, were depicted together during the 25th dynasty (Moret 1913: pls XXVI–XXVII). Finally, BD 31, BD 33, BD 36, BD 40, and BD 41, the spells of killing the snakes and crocodiles, have close relationship between them on 25th dynasty coffins, as they are always depicted side by side, on the floor of the *qrsu* coffins, seen in coffins Cairo, Egyptian Museum CG41004 and CG41009 (Haładaj 2019: figs 1–2).

Conclusion

The significant changes in funerary practice led priests during the Third Intermediate Period to stop constructing large ornate tombs. Instead, interest in mummifying the body increased, as well as interest in coffins and their decoration. The decorative programmes found on the coffins replaced those which had formerly been on tomb walls. The *Book of the Dead* was one of the main features of the decorative programme on the Third Intermediate Period coffins. The spells shown on the coffins appear to have been chosen according to the characteristic practices and decorative features of each workshop and not necessarily according to the wishes of the deceased, as is evident from the repetition of the scenes in the same form and order on many coffins. This applies to the coffins of all dynasties of the period.

The style of depiction is characterised by the extreme abbreviation of the scene and the absence of the title and text of the spell in most cases. The inner and outer coffins, the *qrsu*, and the cartonnage all featured scenes from the *Book of the Dead*. Though not limited to one type of coffin, the depictions of spells of the *Book of the Dead* were clearly associated with specific locations on the coffin.

There is a close relationship between the meaning of the spell and the place where each scene is depicted on the coffin. Many spells of The *Book of the Dead* were depicted on these coffins, and these spells revolve around eight main themes: providing food and drink for the deceased, protecting him from danger and preserving his body from decay, participating with the god Ra in his journey, passing the judgment, transformations of the deceased, entering the Fields of Iaru, and passing through its gates. There is also a relationship between the arrangements of the spells on the coffin. Each spell appeared in more than one form during each dynasty, the forms differed from one dynasty to another, and even some new forms appeared for some spells during the period.

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Abbreviations

BD = Spell of *Book of the Dead*

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Women in the Workforce: A Gendered Division of Labour in Dynastic Egypt?

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Abstract

In tomb art reliefs depicting everyday life during the Dynastic Period, women are underrepresented. Whilst men are seen engaging in a diverse range of tasks and activities, women are often absent, which has contributed to a gap in our understanding of gender divisions in labour organisation in Dynastic Egypt. This ongoing research re-examines the role of women within labour organisation systems between the Old Kingdom and the New Kingdom through examination of activity patterns inferred from the skeleton. Repetitive or excessive activity can leave a mark on human bone which has proved useful in reconstructing activity patterns of past populations. This study uses a biocultural approach to combine skeletal evidence of activity patterns with historical and ethnographic data to analyse activity patterns of women and men during this timeframe. Analysis of skeletal changes associated with muscle activity was undertaken by recording changes at muscle attachment sites (entheseal change), the development of osteoarthritis in the joints, and changes to the shape and structure of the bones in the arms and legs (cross-sectional bone geometry). This paper will explore the dichotomy between men and women within tomb art depicting scenes of physical labour, such as construction work, agriculture, gardening, and food production, to evaluate whether Egypt operated within a gendered division of labour. Preliminary results of data collection on Egyptian remains from Old Kingdom Giza will allow insight into the role of men and women within a workforce community which may not be provided through tomb art analysis alone.

Keywords

Activity Patterns; Women; Tomb Art; Bioarchaeology; Skeletal Remains

Introduction

This paper forms part of my ongoing PhD research into activity patterns and concepts of gendered divisions of labour in Dynastic Egypt. My PhD research uses a biocultural approach to combine iconographic analysis of funerary monuments, primarily tomb art and tomb inscriptions/titles, with bioarchaeological analysis of human skeletal remains. The skeleton can be affected by excessive or repetitive activity which places high strain loads upon the bone. These activity-related changes – entheseal change, osteoarthritis, and cross-sectional bone geometry – can allow insight into the activity patterns performed.

It is often assumed that women in ancient Egypt conformed to what may be described as a ‘gender appropriate’ role; but are modern archaeologists applying their own gender-normative expectations of society onto ancient Egyptian culture? With the increasing interest in gender archaeology since the 1980s, there has come greater recognition of the importance of ‘looking for women’ in archaeology (see Conkey 2003; Conkey and Gero 1997; Engelstad 2007). Such projects emphasise the importance of re-examining where women may have operated within a previously assumed androcentric world. ‘Man the hunter’ concepts have given way to acknowledgment that men alone did not hunt (Matić 2024: 343; Moen 2019: 215). The stark divide created between men in physical labour and women in domesticity has begun to be broken down (Hays-Gilpin 2000: 97–98; Moen 2019: 215). Interpretations

of men and women and appropriate 'gender roles' in ancient Egypt may be likewise influenced by modern gender bias and it is crucial that going forward, we critically question our expectations of gendered divisions of labour in archaeological studies.

By looking at tomb art, we can build a model of patterns of activity-related changes we may expect to see on the skeleton. Based on Egyptian art, it would be expected that if men were engaging in more physically strenuous tasks, they would demonstrate greater activity-related changes than women. Equivalently, by engaging primarily in 'gender appropriate' domestic activities, there should be an absence of the same levels or patterns of activity-related changes in female skeletons. Preliminary results of my bioarchaeological analysis of activity-related changes in skeletons from an Old Kingdom cemetery at Giza will be discussed in this paper to investigate established concepts of a gendered division of labour in ancient Egypt.

The representation of women in tomb art

To question the role of women in ancient Egyptian society, we must consider the primary source material we have at our disposal: monumental architecture, depictions of women in tomb art, and the representation of women in surviving literary sources such as court documents or work records. Understanding and interpretation of primary sources comes with substantial risks of bias, both from the contemporary ancient Egyptian society and more recent archaeological study. The concept of death in ancient Egypt was hugely significant. The design and scale of funerary architecture, the rituals performed, the decoration of tomb walls, tomb goods and furniture, and the depiction of individuals within the tomb all combined to define and ensure immortal life for the deceased in the afterlife (Davis 1982; Hawass 2008; Matić 2016; Swart 2008; Zakrzewski 2017). Throughout the Dynastic Period, women were often depicted in tomb decorations as a devoted wife. They drape their arms across their husband's shoulders, embrace them, sit at the feet, hug their legs, or sit behind them (Hawass 2008: 22; Zakrzewski 2017: 132). Lesko (1991) argued that the interpretation of women as submissive or inferior to their husband based on these depictions is a modern misunderstanding of Egyptian artistic perspective due to ingrained gender bias within the field of archaeology. Instead, Lesko (1991: 4) suggested that when a figure (often female) appears to be sitting or standing behind another figure (often male), it is meant to depict them side by side. Lesko argued that this was a necessity of the Egyptian artistic perspective throughout the Dynastic Period, whereby the entire human form was painted, and therefore figures had to be staggered to ensure both could be seen. Similarly, when a wife is seen grasping or embracing her husband, it may have represented her supporting her husband in her role as a survivor and mourner (Lesko 1991: 4).

Women were sometimes painted smaller than their male counterparts in tomb art, which has contributed to suggestions of their inferior status (see Hawass 2008: 22; Swart 2008: 210; Zakrzewski 2017: 132). There are numerous examples of women portrayed on their own in tomb art, or of equal size, however. For instance, in the Old Kingdom Tomb of Petety and Nesy-Sokar at Giza, the husband and wife are presented side by side and of equal size, perhaps representing equal respect and status (Hawass 2008: 38). Furthermore, it could also be said that as a wealthy man would have paid for the tomb for himself and any family members, his prominence in the mortuary art was simply to reflect and highlight the tomb's owner (Vasiljević 2012: 139). By the Middle and New Kingdoms, husband and wife are more often of equal size which may suggest this was due to a transition in artistic style (Hollis 1987: 500).

Tomb art was commonly commissioned by the husband or the male of the household, even when depicting the wife and her accomplishments (Eyre 2007: 242; Hawass 2008; McDermott 2006: 98; Vasiljević 2012: 139). When modern archaeologists interpret tomb art as evidence of a wife's inferior

or submissive role compared to her husband, are we seeing an ‘accurate’ representation of the wife’s role in society, how the husband viewed his wife within his version of society, or simply the artistic canon of the period? Interpretation of ‘gender-appropriate’ roles based primarily on tomb art can be problematic. Not only was tomb art subject to the desires of the male tomb owner and what he wanted immortalised, but also to our modern interpretation of perceived gender differences and what this may mean for gender roles in ancient Egypt. The limitations of research into gender roles and division of labour has given rise to the concept of ‘looking for women’, which encourages a renewed and thorough (re-)inspection of archaeology where women may have previously been overlooked (Conkey 2003: 869–870; Conkey and Gero 1997: 415; Engelstad 2007: 217–218). Assumptions that in palaeolithic hominin groups the males knapped weapons or tools and hunted whilst the females cared for young are not based on archaeological evidence or fact, but merely preconceptions of ‘appropriate’ gender-roles in modern society being imposed upon archaeological societies (Geller 2009: 67–68; Hays-Gilpin 2000: 97–98; Matić 2024: 343). Although we must apply caution to the accuracy of such sources in how they present the role of women, they remain one of the most illustrative and revealing insights into ancient Egyptian society, and the identity of the women within it.

Many archaeologists have examined tomb art from ancient Egypt and identified a gendered division of labour. Whilst men were assumed to have participated in tasks involving greater physical exertion, women are often believed to have been restricted to more ‘gender-appropriate’ tasks, such as those related to domesticity or food/commodity production (Hawass 2008; Kemp 1989; Lesko 1991; Matić 2016; Miller 1991; Vinson 2013). Tomb art served to depict everyday life in Egypt to ensure the continuity of life and balance in the afterlife. Depictions of individuals engaging in everyday tasks therefore likely represented an accurate (perhaps somewhat idealised) version of real life (Davis 1982: 31–32). Although ancient Egypt was not a gender-equal society, women were not solely restricted to roles within the household such as caregiving, child-raising, and domestic tasks. Tomb art depicts women engaging in many aspects of life, from domestic and agricultural scenes to working within an urban community, such as a town or royal building site (Di Teodoro 2014: 73; Hawass 2008: 40; Üstündağ 2020: 40–41). It is also crucial to remember that as tomb art was commissioned by the male tomb owner, the dominance of men in certain scenes may not necessarily reflect an accurate gendered division of labour. An overview is provided here of the role women played within the home as well as within the wider community, such as working in service jobs, food preparation, product manufacturing, agriculture, and animal husbandry. The work women performed and the positions they could attain were defined by the social construct of female identity in ancient Egyptian society.

The role of women within society

Although the main responsibility of a woman in ancient Egypt was to the house and family, this was not necessarily a negative or inferior position. In many modern societies, the idea of a housewife is often seen as symbolising women’s subordination to their husbands (Conkey and Spector 1984; Dietze 2014). In ancient Egypt, the role of a woman to the continuity of life and in maintaining the balance of society was fundamental, and their participation in domestic and familial duties highly regarded (Hollis 1987). In an instructional text dated to the New Kingdom, a man named Any writes to his son about the importance of women, reminding him to care for and respect his mother, the woman who raised and supported him throughout his childhood (Lichtheim 1976: 143); He also advises:

Do not control your wife in her house, when you know she is efficient; let your eye observe in silence, then you recognise her skill; it is joy when your hand is with her.

This text suggests that within the house, women could maintain a level of control and importance. Swart (2008: 212) has argued that many women used the title 'Lady of the House' in their funerary manuscripts and texts to emphasise their position and status, as maintaining a household required a range of administrative and business abilities. This was not meant to restrict women to an inferior position, but instead to recognise their value within the functioning of society. Stefanović and Satzinger (2015: 334) suggest that the title *nb.t-pr*, translated to 'Mistress of the House' or 'Lady of the Household/Estate', may have indicated the status or social identity of women. The authors question whether this individual had to be married or not, although state she was clearly an independent woman who managed economic affairs of a household or business (Stefanović and Satzinger 2015: 337). On temple cult stelae, Swart (2008: 215) found that many women purposefully chose to use the title 'the wife of X' or 'the daughter of X' to enhance their own prestige through acknowledgement of their connections. Again, this was not diminishing women to being simply the wife of a man, but instead recognising and enhancing their family's status, and by association their own status within society. Although titles were often self-identified, this could suggest that the wider society may have also recognised titles, and therefore the use of titles could help to define the identity of a woman within society.

Within the domestic setting, women performed a variety of tasks to maintain the household. These included child rearing responsibilities, as well as tasks such as food preparation and production, spinning, weaving, doing laundry, and cleaning (Agut-Labordère 2021: 92; Hawass 2008: 46; Wilson 1997: 63). These tasks may have been the responsibility of women within domestic settings for logistical reasons associated with child rearing. Tasks such as spinning, weaving, or grinding are flexible and repetitive. They could be stopped and resumed whenever necessary to accommodate for caring for children, and thus, are best suited to be performed by women within the home (Üstündağ 2020: 40–41). In richer households, women could afford to hire servants or workers to perform many of these tasks, yet they remained in charge of the household affairs (Hawass 1995: 94). Boserup claims that whilst women may have performed certain jobs in domestic settings, such activities became masculinised in industrial settings (see Agut-Labordère 2021: 92). Agut-Labordère (2021) shows this may have been the case for daily laundry in ancient Egypt through analysis of laundry scenes from the Middle Kingdom onwards, which fell predominantly to men.

Although men had greater social standing in some ways, women remained respected in their roles and continued to enjoy many social and legal freedoms throughout the Pharaonic Period (Zakrzewski 2017: 118–119). During the Old Kingdom, the economic power of a household and family was controlled and managed by men, despite the role of women within the house. By the New Kingdom, some women had gained similar financial responsibility (Kemp 1989: 312; Sweeney 2006: 140). In a letter found at Deir el-Medina, LRL no. 37, Henuttawy writes to a man named Nesamenemope (possibly her husband) that delivery men had on two occasions cheated her of grain consignments that she was collecting on behalf of the scribe Nesamenemope, demonstrating her economic agency (Sweeney 1994: 208; Toivari 1997: 157). In a case held in the Ramesseum court described in ostrakon Berlin, Staatliche Museen 14214, a woman was taken to court twice and fined over failure to pay a debt for a chair and a footstool (Toivari 1997: 162). This demonstrates that a woman could not only be responsible for financial matters but could also be held legally responsible for financial issues.

Women from all social spheres held administrative and authoritative titles and positions in religious cults throughout the Dynastic Period (Hollis 1987: 501; Lesko 1991: 5–6). Work documents from the New Kingdom describe women controlling access to temple stores in minor cults, along with other authoritative or supervisory positions (Lesko 1991: 6). Women were also commonly involved in religious worship throughout the Dynastic Period, often listed as cult singers, dancers, musicians, and high priestesses (Matić 2016: 175; Ward 1994: 61). From the end of the Old Kingdom, women



Figure 1. Tomb art from the Tomb of Sennedjem (TT1), Deir el-Medina (Wilkinson 1922; see also Wilkinson and Hill 1983: 60–61, fig. 64).

transitioned into jobs in the service industries outside of the home, working in a range of jobs including as hairdressers, gardeners, and millers (Lesko 1991: 5–6).

The late 4th dynasty Gebelein papyri listed the occupations of all individuals within each household from villages across several localities (Moreno García 2011). The richest households in the area, the local elite, were labelled as ‘Serf of the King’, and included scribes, government workers, and local chiefs. The rest were recorded as ‘Member of a Team of Workers’, which covered activities such as herding, hunting, fishing, animal husbandry, and bee keeping, whilst other occupations included millers and carpenters (Moreno García 2011: 3–4). There are sometimes discrepancies between how poorer and richer households completed these tasks, which could impact the status and role of women. For example, whilst richer people could afford farming equipment such as yokes and ploughs, as well as aid from animals such as from donkeys, poorer individuals often could not and would therefore perform farming tasks themselves by hand (Moreno García 2011: 4). In the more modest social classes, men and women often worked together, performing many of the same tasks (cf. Matić 2017: 59–61). This included tilling soil, ploughing, harvesting, weaving, gardening, watering plants, processing grain and cereal, and making bread and beer (Di Teodoro 2014: 73; Hawass 2008: 46; Wilson 1997). Whilst men and women from poorer households used fishing to provide part of their staple diet, due to the economic demand of animal husbandry, fishing amongst richer individuals was often a sport, and was sometimes restricted to men (Moreno García 2011: 4). In Figure 1, the artisan Sennedjem and his wife Iineferti are depicted farming together in the Fields of Iaru in the afterlife in their tomb in Deir el-Medina, dated to the New Kingdom. They are seen sowing seeds and harvesting grain and flax. Both husband and wife perform the same agricultural tasks together in the afterlife. However, these depictions may have been intended as symbolic of their existence in the afterlife rather than their reality during lifetime.

How was labour organised in ancient Egypt?

Previous work has examined the organisation of Egyptian labour around the natural climate and inundation period, but much of this work focuses on men (Di Teodoro 2014; Kemp 1989; Manning 2018; Moreno García 2011). For much of the common population of ancient Egypt, participation in royal administration as *corvée* labour was obligatory, including performing physical labour at royal building projects, temple estates, and working in urban areas (Miller 1991: 5–6; Moreno García 2011: 5). These workers came from villages and rural areas across Egypt, and each would travel to a royal building site, project, town, temple etc. during the farming low season to perform their obligatory service for a certain amount of time each year (Callender 2000: 172–173). For instance, the Old Kingdom Gebelein papyri list men who could be conscripted from across Upper Egypt to work on royal administrative projects as physical labourers, whilst the similarly dated decrees of Coptos list villagers recruited to the temple of Min as obligatory service (Moreno García 2011: 5).

Lists surviving from the Old Kingdom to the 17th dynasty suggest the continued use of this system to provide low-skilled labour for royal administrative projects and estates (Callender 2000: 172–173). For example, the Reisner and Lahun papyri from the Middle Kingdom describe similar scenarios of forced labour conscription of male villagers to supply workers for royal architectural construction (Moreno García 2011: 5). The Lahun papyri categorises four types of conscripted workers (Di Teodoro 2014). Two groups translate as ‘the counted’ or ‘conscripts’ (*ḥsbw*), and ‘substitutes’ (*jwꜣw*). The remaining two groups (*mnyw* and *ḥꜣw*) may represent temporary labour; however, translations of these terms are more complex (Di Teodoro 2014: 68). Di Teodoro (2014: 77) suggested that whilst one of the temporary labour groups (*ḥꜣw*) were employed during the sowing and harvest seasons, the ‘substitutes’ were conscripted for specific stages of food and textile production. ‘The counted’ and the second temporary labour group (*mnyw*) were conscripted throughout the entire year, but were staggered to ensure a constant flow of labour for royal construction sites. According to the Lahun papyri, in the temple estate of Sekhemsenswosret, the *ḥꜣw* and the *jwꜣw* contributed to the functioning and administration of the temple, whilst the *ḥsbw* and the *mnyw* performed more physically laborious tasks, such as working in the gardens and fields as well as any building tasks on the estate (Di Teodoro 2014: 77).

Unfortunately, Di Teodoro (2014) does not discuss gender other than simply that both men and women were involved in this process. It is generally assumed that these temporary, conscripted workers were likely males working in low-skilled physical labour, contributing to quarrying, building, transporting blocks of stone, chiselling, woodworking, food production, agriculture etc. Laboury (2012: 202) studied ostraca referring to ‘quarrymen’ or ‘those of the necropolis’ (*ḥr.tyw-nṯr*) – individuals such as plasterers working in project construction in low-skilled jobs – and claimed such individuals were sometimes referred to instead as ‘the men’. Tasks considered of higher skill, such as tomb artists, craftsmen, artisans, as well as scribes, administrators, and doctors, were normally performed by a dedicated, permanent workforce of slightly higher social status, often still male (Austin 2014: 102–104; Hawass 2008: 6).

Where women fit into this system is more ambiguous and is often less researched or documented (Austin 2014; Conkey and Spector 1984; Geller 2009; Hays-Gilpin 2000; Matić 2024). Whilst men and women were both conscripted by royal administration for *corvée* labour, it is often assumed that men would work both on the physical construction of royal architecture and in the pyramid town, whereas women were restricted to ‘gender-appropriate’ tasks within the town, such as weaving, producing bread, beer, textiles, making pottery, working as wise women, and possibly even as scorpion charmers (Austin 2014: 97 and 101–102; Austin and Gobeil 2017: 35). This may suggest a gendered division of labour existed for some forms of work.

Can we interpret activity patterns from tomb art?

Tomb art can be revealing of the jobs performed by men and women and may aid understanding of the role of women within labour organisation systems in ancient Egypt. Gender theory concepts such as 'looking for women' encourage archaeologists to question whether what we believe we know about gender roles is accurate. As discussed above, tomb art often had socio-political agendas, undertones, or nuances and therefore may not necessarily represent an accurate picture of society. The use of bioarchaeological examination of human skeletal remains offers further insight into activity patterns and allows archaeologists to ask questions, which may not be answered by tomb art alone, such as whether ancient Egypt operated within a gendered division of labour, or to what extent it existed (Geller 2009; Hill 1998).

As specific movements require a different set of muscles to be activated, repetitive or habitual activities can be inferred from biomechanical markers of skeletal stress. Excessive strain placed on the muscle insertion points, also called entheses, causes changes at the insertion interface. Joint surfaces associated with the relevant limbs can also experience greater wear through joint use and movement (osteoarthritis), and long bone cross-section morphology can remodel to better suit habitual activities (known as cross-sectional bone geometry or CSBG). By looking for patterns in biomechanical changes throughout the skeleton, such as enthesal change in the muscle insertions in the arm combined with osteoarthritic changes in the shoulder, elbow, or wrist, and changes to the shape of the humeral shaft, bioarchaeologists can infer patterns of musculoskeletal movement and interpret activity levels or patterns from skeletal collections. Patterns in specific muscle groups may also help to isolate movements performed, such as increased enthesal change in the muscles associated with abduction of the shoulder or flexion of the elbow.

However, caution must be taken. Firstly, muscles work in groups to perform movements and therefore skeletal changes should be interpreted within the context of the entire skeleton. Secondly, a single muscle can contribute towards the movement required for a multitude of different tasks, and therefore skeletal changes are not proof of a single activity performed. Whilst repetitive use of the common extensor and flexor muscles can be indicative of tasks such as weaving and spinning, it could equally reflect the job of a scribe, preparing food, or a master craftsman such as artists working with delicate tools. Thirdly, inferences should be made within the relevant historical and ethnographic context.

Analysis of tomb art depicting men and women engaging in everyday activities will provide the foundations for how habitual activity patterns may be interpreted from skeletal changes. The activities performed in tomb art can reveal the movements necessary and thus the patterns of biomechanical strain which may be expected from the skeletons of individuals holding such jobs. Where titles of the skeletons studied are also known, hypothesised patterns can be investigated in future research. For example, the skeleton of a scribe may reveal patterns of biomechanical strain expected of an individual habitually seated in a squatting or kneeling position using the common flexor and extensor muscles of the arm to write.

The limitations of tomb art previously discussed such as contemporary idealised undertones by those who commissioned the art, or modern bias in interpretation of the meanings within the art, nevertheless remain. In the following sections of this paper, scenes of construction work, food preparation, supply production, gardening, agriculture, and textile production performed at royal building projects, urban centres, and temple estates will be analysed as examples of the use of material culture as indicative of skeletal markers of activity.



Figure 2. Brickmakers in Tomb of Rekmire, Sheikh Abd el-Qurna, Thebes, New Kingdom (Nina de Garis Davies c. 1928; see also Wilkinson and Hill 1983: 95).

Royal building projects

Physical labour at royal construction sites was performed by a mixture of high-skill workers such as artisans and craftsmen, and low-skill workers such as labourers. The low-skill workers were likely predominantly made up of *corvée* labour, as discussed above (Austin 2014: 237). These male individuals worked as masons, carpenters, toolmakers, etc. and performed tasks such as mining, quarrying and chiselling stone blocks, mixing mortar, making bricks, carrying and transporting materials, building ramps, and digging canals (Lesko 1994: 11–12; Refai 2019: 519; Wilson 1997: 45–46). Such activities would have demanded the use of the entire body, such as muscles in the shoulders, arms, hips, legs, and feet. Men could also act as overseers in towns and royal building projects, however, which may have involved a significantly less amount of physical activity. Figure 2 depicts workers making bricks for the construction of a tomb. One man is seen carrying a bucket of mud on his shoulder, which would activate muscles in the upper long bones and shoulder such as the abductors, stabilisers, and flexors, and place high strain loads on the shoulder and elbow joints. Another is seen moulding the bricks into the correct shape, placing strain on his back as he bends over the moulds, flexing and extending his leg and arm muscles with the repetitive motion.

Carrying heavy loads, either on the head, or over the shoulders or back, was commonly used by workers in ancient Egypt as an efficient method for transporting goods. It placed high strain loads on the cervical vertebrae in the neck or the thoracic vertebrae in the back, creating pronounced skeletal changes such as osteoarthritis of the vertebral facets, greater prevalence of osteophytosis on the vertebral bodies due to excessive curvature of the spine, and pronounced uncinat processes on the cervical (Molleson 2007: 12; Sofaer Derevenski 2000: 349–352). Carrying loads on the back



Figure 3. Sculptors at work in the temple of Amun-Ra at Karnak, depicted in the Tomb of Rekhmire, Sheikh ab del-Qurna, Thebes, New Kingdom (Nina de Garis Davies c. 1927; see also Wilkinson and Hill 1983: 54, fig. 56).

can also cause skeletal changes in the humerus if loads are secured by the arm or held over the shoulder, or in the pelvis such as the sacroiliac joint, due to the greatest force being experienced at the lumbar and sacral spine (Molleson 2007: 12).

Although high-skilled, and therefore higher social status, craftsmen working in royal tombs, pyramids, temple complexes etc. could perform a variety of tasks and movements, many of which could place high strain loads on the skeleton. In Figure 3, five sculptors can be seen working on a statue. Each uses their hand for the delicate work of carving the features and detail into the statue, activating muscles such as the common extensors and common flexors. At the bottom of the relief, a worker is depicted squatting to work on the bottom of the statue, possibly remaining in this position for extended periods of time. This would create hyper-flexion of the hip and knee joints, stabilisation of the joints, as well as placing strain on the back and neck due to the curved posture.

Urban activities: Towns, villages, and settlements

Both men and women contributed to ensure the provisioning and functioning of royal administration towns, such as those attached to the pyramids or royal tombs to house the workers. Male workers, called *smdt* or 'porters', performed jobs such as gardening, animal husbandry, woodcutting, fishing, carrying water, grinding flour, baking, cooking, brewing, processing food and supplies, and producing pottery (Di Teodoro 2014: 77; Lesko 1994: 11–12; Miller 1991: 2–3 and 11). The ostraca Cairo, Egyptian Museum JE25516-25521 from Deir el-Medina records absences from work on a royal construction project where workers were temporarily fulfilling other roles in the project town such as making baskets, producing wooden statues and chests, painting, and feeding oxen (Janssen 1980: 144). Similarly, the ostrakon London, British Museum EA5634, also from Deir el-Medina, records workmen being excused from their usual construction responsibilities because they were 'carrying stones' or 'with the scribe' (Janssen 1980: 143). In the same ostrakon, on 16 occasions across seven different days, workmen were excused from their normal responsibilities to brew beer for upcoming religious services or rituals (Janssen 1980: 147). The ostraca Cairo, Egyptian Museum CG25521, Cairo, Egyptian Museum CG25533, and Cairo, Egyptian Museum CG25779-25783, all from Deir el-Medina, record similar absences for workmen for brewing beer for special feasts and services (Janssen 1980: 147). Higher skill (and thus higher status) male workers also worked in towns, sculpting, decorating, painting, scribing, providing medical care, and working in organisation or political roles (Lesko 1994: 11–12).

Previous work on Egyptian division of labour suggests that women may have engaged in a variety of activities such as grinding grain, making beer, baking, milling, cutting hair, gardening, salting fish, carrying water, weaving and spinning, and producing clothes, textiles, and pottery (Hawass 2008: 37; Kemp 1989: 120–125; Lesko 1991: 506; Sweeney 2006: 140–141). However, women are not commonly depicted in tomb reliefs engaging in physical tasks such as carrying water, hunting and fishing, salting meat and fish, or providing medical care (Hawass 2008: 34; Lesko 1991: 5). When analysing dental wear patterns amongst the working population from Deir el-Medina, Austin (2014: 212) found asymmetrical wear patterns amongst the female population, including sharp angles commonly on the right premolars and molars but not on the corresponding left dentition. Austin (2014: 212) suggested that this wear may have been related to habitual chewing activities, such as holding fibres in the right hand and wetting them through the right side of the mouth for spinning thread. However, Austin (2014: 214) also found asymmetrical occurrences of calculus bilaterally in both males and females, with greater calculus build-up on the left side compared to on the right, possibly related to habitual activity patterns such as the natural flossing action of wetting fibres through the teeth. This could suggest both males and females engaged in similar habitual tasks. Such work could challenge preconceived notions of ‘gender-appropriate’ tasks or gendered division of labour based on modern assumptions of gender-normative activities.



Figure 4. Depiction of a sandal maker from the Tomb of Rekhmire, Sheikh ab del-Qurna, Thebes, New Kingdom (Nina de Garis Davies 1932; see also Wilkinson and Hill 1983: 92).



Figure 5. Weavers depicted in tomb art in the Tomb of Khnumhotep, Beni Hasan, Middle Kingdom (Norman de Garis Davies 1931; see also Wilkinson and Hill 1983: 92).

Figure 4 illustrates a sandal maker sitting on a chair with his legs crossed. He uses his mouth to work the leather sandal, which may have contributed to dental changes such as those discussed above. In both rural and urban areas, women also aided in textile production, performing tasks such as spinning and weaving textile to make clothing and linen. Weaving and spinning are highly repetitive tasks which requires extensive use of the common flexors and extensors of the fingers, as well as the wrist and hand (Üstündağ 2020: 41). Some spinners and basket weavers also use their mouths, for example if the material is tough and requires softening, or as a third hand to secure the material (Molleson 2007: 9). This may produce similar asymmetrical dental wear signs, or a lack of calculus build up. A group of weavers can be seen working in Figure 5. To the right, women ply linen thread which is then woven into cloth on a loom to the left (Davies 1931). Three women are squatting on the ground, placing high strain loads on their lower limbs. The loom would have required the use of the shoulder and elbow flexor and extensor muscles, stabilisers, as well as the abductors and adductors. The joint surfaces most impacted by this movement would be the shoulder, elbow, as well as the lower limb joints of the hip, knee, and ankle due to squatting.

In art reliefs depicting both rural, domestic settings and urban life at royal project towns, women are depicted performing tasks related to food production and preparation, such as grinding grain to make bread or beer, or kneading flour for baking. These tasks may have primarily engaged muscles in the shoulders, arms, wrists, and hands. Figure 6 illustrates two women preparing barley in a granary. The woman on the right uses winnowing sticks to winnow the barley which falls back into the pile whilst the woman on the left holds a pair of winnowing sticks in one hand and a broom in the other, sweeping away the chaff (Junker 1943: 148–150). The man to the right uses a different type of broom to sweep new barley from the store (the conical shape) onto the pile for the women to process. Each of the women are stooped over the pile of barley placing high stress loads on the back as well as the upper long bone and shoulder muscles as repetitive forceful arm and wrist



Figure 6. Women preparing barley, depicted in tomb art from the Tomb of *k3hjjf*, Giza, Old Kingdom (Junker 1943: pl. Xb).

movements are necessary (Üstündağ 2020: 41–42). An activity such as making bread will involve multiple different steps, each requiring different body movements and muscle groups. To prepare grain or barley to make bread, the grain spikelets or barley would need to be sieved, stones and seeds removed through hand sorting, the grain or barley to be pounded, winnowed, and then finally ground into flour (Samuel 1989: 265–270; Sweeney 2006: 147–148).

In rural, agricultural villages and settlements, as well as in royal project towns, women tended fields, performing jobs such as ploughing, sowing, and harvesting (Lesko 1991: 5). Farming and animal husbandry would engage lower body muscles as well as the hips, for example through twisting when ploughing or shovelling, as well as walking the fields. Higher status women likely engaged in fewer physically-demanding activities than lower status women. They may have employed workers to perform such tasks and acted more as an overseer than a worker within homes, urban settlements, etc. Males also would have experienced social class differences. For instance, upper status men could become scribes, doctors, or hold religious positions, whereas lower status men likely relied on physical labour jobs. In agricultural populations, men engaged in a variety of farming activities engaging both the upper body and the lower body. Gardeners would have transported large amounts of water across their shoulders when watering plants. Tomb art of gardening scenes is usually restricted to men, which may suggest gendered division of labour in some environments or tasks (see Cornelius 1989; Davies 2020; Kemp 1989: 11).

The famous image of the gardener in the Tomb of Ipuy using a bucket attached to a long stick, with a counterweight on the other end to draw water from a pool, provides the perfect example of the physical exertion required when gardening in ancient Egypt (Cornelius 1989: 223–225). The individual is seen in Figure 7 hunched over with a bend in his back, demonstrating the physical strain placed on the body when using body weight to hoist the bucket down into the water repeatedly. Similarly, the *Teaching of Khety* also known as the *Satire of Trades* recalls a gardener who ‘carries a yoke, his shoulders are bent as with age; there’s a swelling on his neck and it festers’ to describe the labour the gardener endured (Miller 1991: 11). Gardeners would often have to transfer water from garden pools to vegetable patches or other areas of the garden, carrying the water on their backs or shoulders in jars, or carrying two water jugs attached to a stick across their shoulders from the pool to the vegetable patches, where they lean over to pour the contents out (Davies 2020: 9; Kemp 1989:



Figure 7. A man watering a garden, tomb art from the Tomb of Ipuy, Deir el-Medina, New Kingdom (Norman de Garis Davies 1924; see also Wilkinson and Hill 1983: 146).

11; Wilson 1997). This common technique would place high strain loads on the shoulders and back and require use of the upper arm muscles, hips, and shoulder and hip stabilisers.

Other gardening activities involved included picking fruits, harvesting vegetables, and carrying heavy loads. Figure 8 demonstrates workers performing a variety of agricultural tasks on the estate of Nakht in the New Kingdom. On the left, workers are bent over, using tools to prepare the soil before seeds are scattered. Oxen are also being used. To the right, grain is harvested, and trees are chopped down. The common theme in all these activities is the obvious strain placed on the back and the requirement of the upper arm muscles such as the shoulders for flexion, extension, abduction, and adduction. The use of farming tools would have also placed strain on the upper body. To the right in the lower register, a man is depicted using a hoe. The tool would be lifted and lowered repetitively into the soil, requiring constant flexion and extension of the elbow and abduction and adduction of the shoulder. The hip stabilisers would also be necessary in many farming activities to lend support to the individual during movement of the upper body, such as swinging.

Temple estates

On temple estates, men and women may have performed very similar tasks as they did in towns and urban areas. Some suggest that whilst men worked in agriculture, farming, and gardening, women performed tasks associated with food processing and production of supply (see Kemp 1989; Wilson 1997). Matić (2017: 59–60) has found that foreign women working on temple estates participated in agriculture, weaving, brewing, and possibly baking and construction work, which may imply few gender divisions in labour existed amongst lower social classes. A papyrus from Thebes in the



Figure 8. Agricultural scenes in the Tomb of Nakht, Thebes, dated to the New Kingdom (Nina de Garis Davies, ca. 1908–1910; see also Wilkinson and Hill 1983: 113).

late Middle Kingdom (New York, Brooklyn Museum 35.1446), details the jobs of 95 workers in a household. The men were employed as ‘domestic servant’, ‘field labourer’, ‘brewer’, ‘cook’, ‘tutor’, ‘guardian’, ‘sandal-maker’, whilst the women were ‘clothmakers’, hairdressers and gardeners’ (Kemp 1989: 156). Documents found at the mortuary temple of Senusret II in Kahun dated to the Middle Kingdom describe the male and female staff attached to the temple and their responsibilities, which includes soldiers, scribes, doorkeepers, singers and dancers, though unfortunately further details of the gendered division of labour were not provided (Kemp 1989: 156–157).

Women could be employed as priestesses, cult singers, dancers, or musicians and many held religious titles such as ‘Priestess of Hathor’ or ‘Priestess of Neith’ (Gosline 1996: 25 and 37; Matić 2016: 175). In Figure 9, four women and a young girl are seen with instruments at banquet for the Beautiful Festival of the Valley in the New Kingdom. The four women play a harp, a lute, a double pipe, and a lyre. The lute player and the young girl appear to be dancing, and as their heads are tilted upwards, they may also be singing. There is also evidence that women worked in administrative or organisational roles on estates (Hollis 1987: 501; Lesko 1991: 5–6). Women with the title *mrt* were responsible for the financial running and stability of the temple estate or religious complex (Gosline 1996: 37). Women were also responsible for organising the male workers and overseeing estate administration, such as organising delivery and distribution of supplies across the estate, and organising religious rituals and services (Swart 2008: 208).

Bioarchaeological analysis

Three forms of skeletal markers of activity were used for bioarchaeological analysis of activity patterns in my ongoing PhD research. Entheseal change refers to osseous changes at the origin or insertion points of muscles or ligaments into the bone, including both bone formation and bone lesions (Jurmain *et al.* 2012: 535; Santos *et al.* 2011: 137; Schrader 2019: 73). Osteoarthritis is defined as wear or damage to the surface of the bone in synovial joints in response to repetitive or excessive use (Jurmain and Kilgore 1995: 443; Schrader 2019: 56; Waldron 2008: 27-28). Long bones (bones in the arms and legs) are loaded by bending and torsional forces during movement. For example, locomotion creates forces acting upon the lower long bones. These forces are felt strongest at the centre of the bone and dissipate outwards towards the bone surface. Bone may remodel over time in response to activity, becoming more oval or irregular in shape to resist biomechanical forces, resulting in changes to the cross-section of the bone. This process is referred to as 'bone functional adaptation' (Friedl *et al.* 2016; Holliday and Ruff 2001; Niinimäki 2012; Ruff, 2019; Ruff *et al.* 2006). These three changes are commonly used in bioarchaeological studies of the impact of activity on the skeleton, and can be applied to archaeological populations to assess activity patterns and division of labour (Acosta *et al.* 2017; Carballo-Pérez *et al.* 2025; Havelková *et al.* 2011; Holliday 1997, 2002; Montes and Eulàlia Subirà 2018; Niinimäki and Baiges Sotos 2013; Refai 2019; Ruff and Hayes 1983a, 1983b; Santana-Cabrera *et al.* 2015; Schrader 2015; Stock *et al.* 2011; Üstündağ 2020; Yonemoto 2016). Carballo-Pérez *et al.* (2025) linked evidence of enthesal and osteoarthritic changes in the upper skeleton of Nubian populations with iconographic data which suggested the use of engendered load-carrying techniques.

Osteological data was recorded from two collections holding human skeletal material from the Old Kingdom cemeteries at Giza: The Natural History Museum in Vienna and the Peabody Museum of



Figure 9. Tomb art of female musicians from the Tomb of Djeserkaraseneb, Thebes, New Kingdom (Wilkinson, 1921; see also Wilkinson and Hill 1983: 111).

Archaeology and Ethnology in Boston. Further data will be collected from human skeletal remains from Old Kingdom Saqqara. The cemeteries at Giza were originally constructed for lesser members of the ruling family and very high-status elites working in the royal administration, such as scribes or advisors, or highly skilled craftsmen (Junker 1929: 7). Over time, the occupants of the cemeteries declined in social class, until the royal centre moved to Saqqara and the cemeteries were abandoned. Later burials represent lower status officials still stationed at Giza, such as priests of the funerary cults, and poor individuals from the local landscape.

Preliminary results

Preliminary tests have been run on the enthesal change data from the Vienna collection. Data from the 27 entheses recorded in this study was collected independently for the left and right side of the skeleton, creating a maximum of 54 data points for each skeleton. Where possible, the individuals were recorded as either 'Male' or 'Female' through observation of sexually dimorphic traits in the postcranial skeleton. The individuals were then divided into age categories of 'Young Adult' (20-35 years), 'Middle Adult' (35-50 years), or 'Old Adult' (50+ years) based on age estimation methods appropriate for Egyptian remains, such as dental attrition (Mays *et al.* 2022), pubic symphyseal phasing (Brooks and Suchey 1990, reproduced in Buikstra and Ubelaker 1994), and auricular surface morphology (Buckberry and Chamberlain 2002). Juvenile remains (under 20 years) were excluded from analysis as skeletal development can affect interpretation of skeletal markers such as enthesal change (Hawkey and Merbs 1995: 326). Elderly individuals aged over approximately 60 years based on degenerative processes such as severe dental attrition, erosion of the pubic symphysis and auricular surface, and obliteration of cranial suture lines, were also excluded as natural degenerative processes alter the morphology of entheses (Jurmain *et al.* 2012: 538). Multivariate analysis (Kruskal-Wallis test, $P = 0.05$) showed statistically significant results for five of the 54 entheses studied (see Table 1). Two of these significant results – the left lateral epicondyle and the left medial epicondyle – are interesting to discuss here as interpretation of the data may be influenced by our preconception of gender roles in ancient Egypt.

Multivariate analysis of the left lateral epicondyle on the humerus suggested age was a predominant factor influencing enthesal change. Although most male groups had greater scores than females of the same or younger age, older females were higher than the young and middle males, and equal to older males. The left lateral epicondyle is the common origin for the extensor muscles responsible for extension of the fingers and hand. This suggests an interesting trend where women were using their hands and fingers more than most males, which when interpreted within the context of ancient Egypt could suggest tasks such as harvesting/picking food, grinding grain, or weaving. The left medial epicondyle of the humerus is the common origin of the flexor muscles, responsible for flexion of the fingers and hand. Statistically significant results were found for the older male group compared to younger and middle males. Older males also had higher scores than all female groups but not to a statistically significant degree. Flexion of the hand could be associated with the same activities as the common extensor muscles. Analysis of tomb inscriptions of the individuals within the Vienna collection performed as part of this research has shown that some of the male individuals were scribes and craftsmen. Greater enthesal change at the common flexor insertion may be related to scribal work or jobs such as carpentry or sculpting. The individuals within the Vienna collection are a combination of higher social status individuals working within the royal administration, and intrusive burials from the late Old Kingdom reflecting the local, poorer population. Future analysis of tomb date, size, location, and construction material may allow understanding of social class which will aid interpretation of activity patterns.

TABLE 1. ENTHESES WITH A SIGNIFICANT VALUE WHEN MULTIVARIATE ANALYSIS WITH AN ALPHA LEVEL OF 0.05 IS USED. TABLE AUTHOR'S OWN

Enthesis with a significant result	P-value (where a statistically significant result = <0.05)
Left costal impression - Costoclavicular ligament	0.03983
Right costal impression - Costoclavicular ligament	0.03876
Left lateral epicondyle - Common extensor muscles	0.02336
Left medial epicondyle - Common flexor muscles	0.004624
Right greater trochanter - <i>Gluteus minimus</i>	0.01898

Preliminary multivariate analysis only resulted in statistically significant differences between males and females in five tests. In the other 49, no significant differences in activity-related changes at entheses were found. When the five significant results were adjusted with the Bonferroni correction (further analysis to adjust the significant values to reduce the risk of a false positive result), only two statistically significant results remained, both between the Old Male and Middle Male groups: the left medial epicondyle (Old Male - Middle Male = 0.008490224) and the right greater trochanter (*gluteus minimus* insertion) (Old Male - Middle Male = 0.02422121). For 52 of the 54 tests, no significant difference was found between male and female activity-related changes. Although further tests are required, the bioarchaeological data thus far appears to challenge the assumption that males and females were engaging in different activity patterns or levels of physically strenuous activities in ancient Egypt.

Future work

Although preliminary results demonstrate interesting trends in enthesal change development between different groups from the Old Kingdom cemetery at Giza, further testing is required for clearer understanding of the data. Currently, each muscle has been tested in isolation. Statistical results of the right *gluteus minimus*, a muscle insertion in the femur responsible for abduction of the hip and medial rotation of the thigh, showed no pattern related to age but females had higher scores than most males. This muscle could be related to a range of tasks which require squatting or walking. Data collected from the right *gluteus minimus* alone cannot be used to reliably make claims on the use of the lower limbs without considering enthesal change from other muscles in the leg, as well as osteoarthritic changes to the hip, knee, or ankle, or changes to the cross-sections of the lower long bones.

Whilst it is important to base our interpretations in cultural context, without critical consideration of how gender theory may be applied to ancient Egyptian archaeology we may risk modern gender bias affecting our interpretations. Incorporating known occupation through analysis of mortuary titles during statistical analysis may provide further context for the results. As the collection currently held in the Vienna Natural History Museum and the Peabody Museum come from the same cemeteries, combining the data to increase sample sizes will also aid statistical analysis and the interpretations or conclusions which may be drawn. Further analysis of the mortuary archaeology for each skeleton can also allow future insight into social class. The preliminary results discussed only tested the six mentioned groups against each other, controlling for sex and age but not social class. This may have created bias in the results as lower and higher status individuals may not have been performing the same activities.

Conclusion

This paper has outlined the ways in which tomb art can be indicative of division of labour in Dynastic Egypt. Although there was overlap in activities performed, such as those related to food production, textile production, and agriculture, men appear to have often performed more laborious tasks which may have placed greater strain loads on their skeletons. For example, most tomb art depictions of gardeners or field workers on agricultural estates illustrate male workers, and the builders of the royal architectural projects, such as the pyramids, are commonly believed to have been male (Figures 1–4, 7 and 8) (Ferguson 2012; Laboury 2012). Women performed essential work on these projects, however, and remained a vital part of the royal building project workforce (Sweeney 2004: 84). Together, men and women ensured the continued functioning of project towns as well as private estates, and both held vital roles in religious worship.

What is crucial to remember, however, is that tomb art is subjective and both Dynastic Egyptian mortuary traditions and modern gender bias can affect our interpretation of gender roles. Gender theory emphasises the importance of relooking at what is ‘known’ in archaeology with specific focus on ‘looking for women’ as women have often been overlooked, misinterpreted, or defined by modern standards of what it means to be ‘a woman’ within a society (Conkey 2003; Conkey and Gero 1997; Engelstad 2007). Analysis of tomb art allows greater understanding of the skeletal movements during certain tasks, and strain loads placed on the skeleton during the activities depicted. By examining activity-related change on human skeletal remains, such as enthesal change, osteoarthritis, and changes to the bone morphology, bioarchaeologists can further this understanding and allow greater insight to what extent Egypt operated within a gendered division of labour, as has been assumed for so long.

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The Cult of Sobek at Gebel el-Silsila – A Study of the Relief Scene Fragments of the Recently Rediscovered Temple of Sobek of Kheny within the Context of New Kingdom Crocodile Cults

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Abstract

The ancient quarry of Gebel el-Silsila was the source of sandstone for many royal and cult temples across Egypt. The site is well-known as an industrial landscape, but through the work of the Gebel el-Silsila Archaeological Mission, evidence of a significant local cult to the god Sobek is also emerging.

Three temples operated at the quarry site (known in ancient times as Kheny) during the New Kingdom, the largest of which was the Temple of Sobek on the east bank of the Nile, at least 80m by 40m in size (excavations ongoing), which would have dominated the landscape, visible from the northern and southern approaches of the Nile. Buried foundations, foundation pits, small finds, broken statuary, and thousands of relief fragments contribute to a picture of a substantial royally sponsored cult temple and indicate that the worship of the crocodile god Sobek was a significant activity alongside the industrial activity.

The cult of Sobek at Kheny was active during the 18th, 19th, and 20th dynasties, with attestations for Thutmose III, Amenhotep III, Ramesses II, and Ramesses III amongst the fragmentary temple material. However, the temple was already demolished and/or quarried for building material sometime after the reign of Ramesses III (c. 1155 BCE), but before the transient occupation of the Romans (c. 30 BCE). Many relief fragments show signs of deliberate hacking and destruction and images of Sobek were defaced upon other monuments around the site.

The author is studying 2600+ sandstone and limestone relief fragments of the Temple of Sobek to develop a hypothesis on the potential scenes of the temple, drawing on comparative studies of other New Kingdom cult temples. The relief style can be linked with rulers from three dynasties which can help to establish the sequence of temple construction and decoration. Approximately 250 fragments of limestone raised relief represent the earliest phase of construction, by Hatshepsut/Thutmose III. A transition to sandstone is evident from 383 raised relief fragments attributable to the reign of Amenhotep III. Finally, sandstone sunk relief is Ramesside in style, with attestations for Ramesses II and III amongst the material. One fragmentary cartouche (sunk relief) could indicate Amenhotep II, Thutmose IV, or Horemheb, and evidence for Atenist damage is also present on another fragment. Iconographic representations include Sobek, Horus, Thoth and Hathor, as well as a *Sed*-festival scene, presumably from the reign of Ramesses II based on the relief style. Most fragmentary reliefs relate to offering scenes.

This paper analyses the evidence for the potentially unique cult of Sobek of Kheny, and how it related to its industrial context. Comparisons are made with other Sobek cults, which survived through to the Graeco-Roman Period. Drawing on the case study of the temple fragments, the author considers the factors which could have led to the ultimate demise of the cult.

Keywords

Temple; Cult; Sobek; Quarry

Introduction

The sandstone quarry of Gebel el-Silsila, known in ancient times as Kheny, was both an important industrial site but also a sacred landscape, home to the cult of Sobek of Kheny. The Gebel el-Silsila Archaeological Mission have been working at the site since 2012, and during 2015 located the remains of a cultic temple on the east bank of the Nile, adjacent to the New Kingdom necropolis. A decade of excavation has led to the recovery of 2600+ relief fragments, which provide evidence for the decorative programme and dating of the temple. This paper will consider the cult of Sobek of Kheny, drawing on comparable Sobek temples, and the operation of cults within industrial contexts. Other monuments at Gebel el-Silsila provide context, and consideration is given to the demise of the cult after the 21st dynasty.

Overview of the cult of Sobek at Gebel-el Silsila

The predominant cult at Gebel el-Silsila was the cult of Sobek (Kockelmann 2017: 297; Nilsson and Ward 2018a). Sobek is widely attested at the site and is the earliest documented local deity with the epithet *nb hny* ‘Lord of Kheny’ (Kockelmann 2017: 297). Whilst Kheny was attested as early as the 4th dynasty in the mastaba of Prince Iynefer, son of Sneferu, at Dahshur (Nilsson and Ward 2019: 19), first indications of the existence of a religious dimension derive from three Middle Kingdom sources: the inscriptions of Amenemhat II at Memphis; the faience cylinder of Senusret III from Memphis (Godron 1965: 198); and P. Kahun (Kucharek 1998).

An 11th dynasty inscription, found at Shatt el-Rigal (4km north of Gebel el-Silsila), commemorates ‘Sankh-Ka-Ra beloved of Horus and Sobek Lord of Lake Kharu’ (Nilsson and Ward 2018b: 49; Sayce 1907: 101). Sobek of Kheny was attested in other geographical areas such as Kom Ombo where he is part of the local network of deities and was depicted in the Ptolemaic Temple of Sobek and Horus (Kockelmann 2017: 297). Sobek of Kheny is also part of the group of gods in the temple of Amenhotep III at Elephantine, where the local cataract deities Khnum, Anuket, and Satet as well as Horus are featured. According to Kockelmann (2017: 297), theologically, the communion of Sobek and the cataract deities can be explained by their mutual role as flood deities. This is probably the basis, as suggested above, for the epithet of Sobek as Lord of Elephantine.

The latest mention of Sobek Lord of Kheny at Gebel el-Silsila is from the 20th dynasty, at which point Sobek was syncretised with Sobek-Ra, attested upon the quarrying inscription of Ramesses V on the west bank of Gebel el-Silsila (Peden 1991: 335–338). After this time, it appears that the cult of Sobek fell out of favour, with images of the god defaced.

The pure water ‘mw wab’

The significance of the Nile at Kheny is evident, with dramatically high-water levels inevitable as the river passed through this narrowest part of the Nile Valley in Egypt. The monuments at

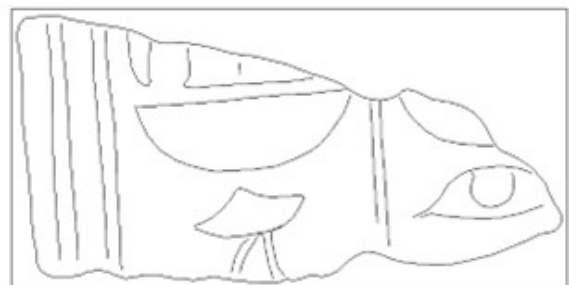


Figure 1a-b. Sandstone fragment with sunk relief representation of Sobek of Kheny (above; M. Nilsson, Gebel el-Silsila Archaeological Mission); Epigraphic drawing of fragment by author (below).

Gebel el-Silsila were heavily affected by the rising waters, and the impact of the inundation would have been dramatic as flood waters channelled through the relatively narrow part of the river, effectively acting as a cataract. In his PhD dissertation, Mahmoud (2019) studied the Nile stelae at the southern part of Gebel el-Silsila, including their spatial positioning and their iconographical and textual programmes. Dedicated to Seti I, Ramesses II, Merneptah, and a smaller shrine for Ramesses III, the monuments celebrated the annual inundation, describing the rituals to ensure prosperity at the first rising of the Nile. Royal offerings were made to Amun-Ra, Ptah, Ra-Horakhty, Hapy and other gods, with reference to the ritual ‘throwing the book of Hapy’ (Mahmoud 2019; Nilsson and Ward 2020b: 16). Gebel el-Silsila was chosen as the sacred place to perform the annual Nile festival in this region (Mahmoud 2019; Ward and Nilsson 2015: 60). The southern part of the site of Gebel el-Silsila where the Nile stelae are located was referred to as The Pure Water in Dynastic times (Mahmoud 2019).

Kucharek (1998: 266) argues that the character of the site and the ferocity of the floods would have been linked to the work of the river gods, principal of whom was the Nile god Sobek. The large number of shrines commemorating high status private individuals indicates the perceived importance of the site in elite circles.

Cultic monuments at Gebel el-Silsila

Religious monuments constructed at Gebel el-Silsila include nine 18th dynasty Naoi shrines; three temples; the Nile stelae (see above); the stela of Amenhotep IV; 32 private shrines; and numerous other commemorative stelae.

Naoi

On the east bank, five monuments were recorded in 1906 by Legrain, which have been re-examined by the Gebel el-Silsila Project, and which have since confirmed nine monuments, all created during the reign of Amenhotep III (Billing *et al.* 2023). The monuments have been subject to Atenist damage (to the images of Amun), and more recent destruction, so the epigraphic recording made by Legrain has been invaluable in reconstructing scenes, particularly as some broken pieces have been found in the vicinity and reunited with their counterparts. Monument labelled ‘Base A’ bears a stela on its west side depicting Amenhotep III offering water to Amun to the north and wine to Sobek to the south (Billing *et al.* 2023: 367). Stelae B and C (one monument) depicts Amenhotep III offering liquid to Amun-Ra and Sobek-Ra (Billing *et al.* 2023).

Many of these monuments attest the cult of Sobek of Kheny, and the cult was linked with other Sobek cults, specifically Sobek of Kom Ombo and Sobek of Sumenu (Gebelein), both attested at Gebel el-Silsila (Kockelmann 2017: 297). The joint gods of Horus and Sobek of Kom Ombo are represented at Gebel el-Silsila where the High Priest of Sobek and Horus is attested (Kockelmann 2017: 297). On one stela Sobek appears together with the Theban royal deities Amun, Mut, and Khonsu, as well as with Mut and Nut in the Naos of Horemheb, and with Ptah, Amun-Ra, and Maat on the Nile stela of Ramesses II (Kockelmann 2017: 297). In addition to the Theban gods, Sobek-Ra of Sumenu is attested in Gebel el-Silsila on a votive relief, that is the Theban form of the crocodile god from the north (Kockelmann 2017: 297). Kockelmann (2017: 297) argues that the cult of Sobek was linked to other Sobek cults in other areas of Egypt, and that Sobek of Kheny was likely to have formed a triad with Tawaret and Nut (all gods of the flood) at the site.

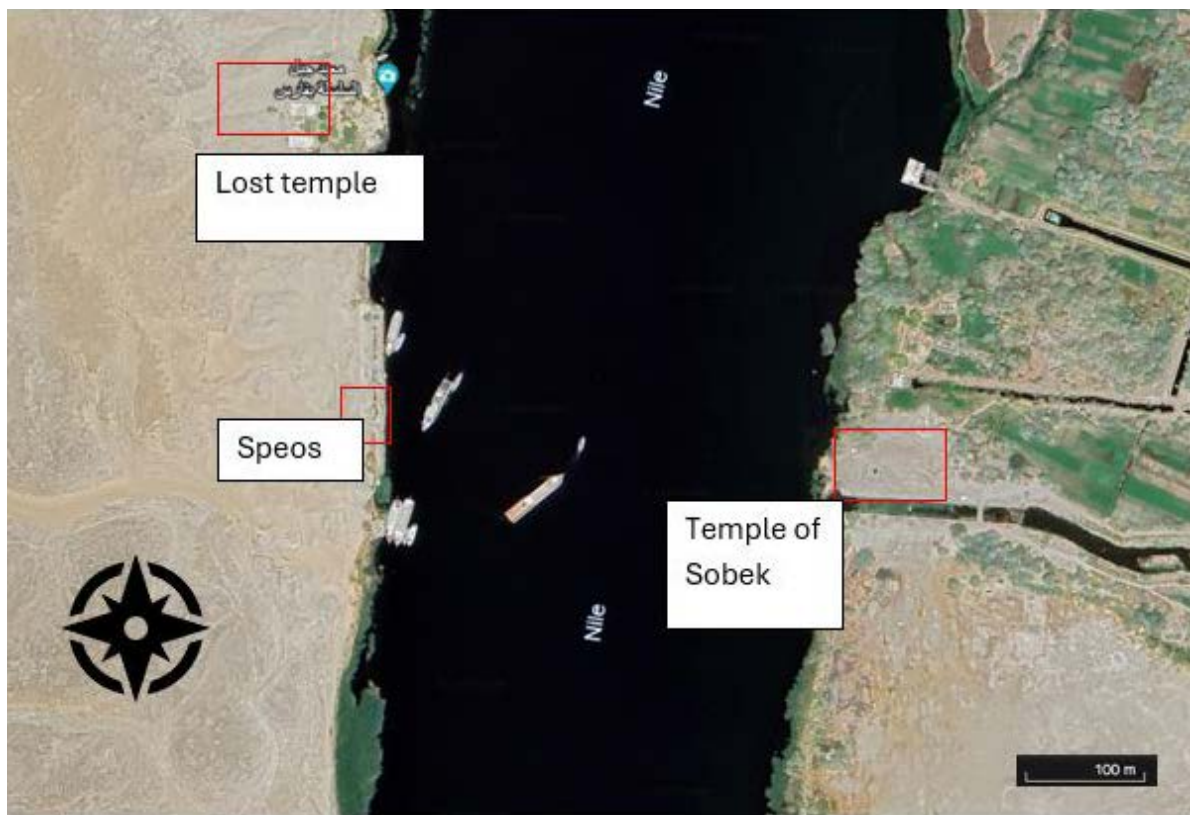


Figure 2. Google Earth image showing location of temple in red areas.

Three temples at Kheny

Kheny was the site of at least three temples (Figure 2), the best-preserved being the Speos on the west bank. Approximately 350m north of the Speos was a second temple, now lost, of which few details are known. The third temple, on the east bank, is the Temple of Sobek, currently under excavation.

The Speos

The Speos (Greek word for a cave/rock-cut shrine), consists of a wide gallery (28m wide) entered through a central doorway, with two other openings either side of the doorway (Figure 3). The gallery leads to a rear sanctuary. On the rear (western) wall of the sanctuary six seated gods and Horemheb were carved as engaged 3D sculptures with Amun-Ra occupying the centre as the principal god, and the king two positions north of Amun-Ra (Thiem 2000: 106). The sanctuary is an interesting mix of original raised relief images, for example above the sculpted figures, as well as later sunk relief images on the northern and southern walls of the sanctuary. 61 deities are depicted in sunk relief on the northern and southern walls of the sanctuary in regimental registers, with 12–14 deities per register. These are above a narrower register (subbasement) of earlier raised relief.

Described as the ‘Speos of Horemheb’ by early travellers, the temple was recorded (but remains unpublished) by Caminos for the Egypt Exploration Society, and Thiem (2000) who focussed on the reliefs of Horemheb. Re-examination of the Speos by Nilsson and Martinez (2017) confirmed an earlier decorative programme, most likely Thutmose III and Hatshepsut. Atenist defacements (visible traces of hacking) were then followed by post-Amarna repairs on the south wall of the sanctuary, where scenes were replastered and decorated (Nilsson and Martinez 2017: 445–449).



Figure 3. View of the Speos from the Nile, photographer facing NW, Co-ordinates: 24°39'01"N 32°55'45"E, courtesy of Gebel el-Silsila Archaeological Mission.

Nilsson and Martinez (2017: 447) also observed inconsistencies in the Horemheb decoration, with cramped cartouches which appear to have been added retrospectively to the overall scheme.

Within the Speos, over 100 Ramesside additions were made in the form of chapels, statues, stelae and inscriptions by both royalty and private individuals, with many by the High Priest of Memphis Khaemweset, commemorating the many jubilees of his father Ramesses II (Thiem 2000: 243). Nilsson and Martinez (2017: 447) note that none of the pharaohs of the Third Intermediate, Late or even Graeco-Roman periods left any 'official' reliefs in the main sanctuary. The absence of attestations for these later periods is mirrored in the fragments of the Temple of Sobek. Post-New Kingdom graffiti includes a series of white Christian crosses, means that interpreting the Speos is challenging as it has been reworked many times.

Throughout the Speos, images of Sobek were defaced (see Figures 11, 12, and 13), and on the north wall of the sanctuary, Horus has suffered partial defacement to the arms and legs which are chiselled out. In other areas (such as the exterior of the Speos), the defacement has been of the entire figure.

To the south of the transversal hall, the scene above the representation of the king trampling Nubians under his chariot wheels has been replaced by a representation of Siptah followed by his vizier Bay in front of Amun. The Gebel el-Silsila epigraphic team examined the series of odd lines which seemed to interfere with the scene and were able to detect the remnants of an image of a large barque carrying an obelisk. This scene is comparable with a similar scene commissioned by Hatshepsut at Deir el-Bahri (southern portico of the first terrace) (Nilsson and Martinez 2017: 447). It is therefore likely, from the recent reanalysis of the decorative programme, that the construction of the Speos was contemporary with the construction of the Temple of Sobek opposite, and, therefore, attributable to the Hatshepsut/Thutmose III period.

Hatshepsut/Thutmose III may have initiated a more extensive programme of cave/rock-cut sanctuaries associated with animal gods, particularly Pakhet at Speos Artemidos (Brand 1998: 62), and of course the crocodile god at Kheny. These temples may have been part of a wider scheme, connected by procession and ritual, and indicating significant cultic practice at Gebel el-Silsila.

The third temple (destroyed)

The remains of what has been described as a Horemheb temple approximately 350m north of the Speos are sparse, with no known drawings or photographs (Caminos 1987: 64; PM V: 208). Sayce (1907: 98) observed the ruins of the temple in 1906, referring to an upper part of a large granite stela and ‘fragments of columns and squared stones or red and grey granite, as well as a portion of the crude brick wall of the enceinte’. Caminos (1987) recorded some details of the temple in his journal, echoing what Sayce had seen, including column bases, inscribed blocks, portions of a mud brick wall and the upper end of a broken granite stela. The temple was destroyed by modern quarrying in the 1970s (Caminos 1987: 97). Twenty-five small fragments from 10–33cm in size were collected, recorded, and stored in the Speos by Caminos, but neither the present location of these recordings, nor the items themselves, is known. The broken granite stela showed Horemheb offering to Osiris and Isis, confirming that Horemheb was active at this temple, and concurs with attestations at the Speos. However, like the Speos, it cannot be assumed that Horemheb founded the missing temple.

New Kingdom Sobek cults in Egypt

Perhaps developing from the early crocodile depictions, the zoomorphic image of crocodile god Sobek developed and became widely attested throughout the dynastic periods, with the development of prominent and varied cults practised in different regions (Kockelmann 2017).

New Kingdom temples were built for Sobek at Shedet, Kom Ombo, Gebelein (Sumenu) and Gebel el-Silsila. At the dual temple of Kom Ombo, Sobek and Horus the Elder were the principal temple gods, and Sobek was presented as the male consort of Hathor and father of Khonsu (Wyatt 2019: 28). It is possible that Horus was also an important god in the main temple of Sobek of Kheny, where a number of statues and votives of the falcon god have been recovered. Sobek was considered a protective deity and votive offerings and amulets in his name are frequently attested. Mummification of sacred crocodiles was practised at Shedet and Kom Ombo (Ikram 2005: 207–227).

The joint temple of Sobek and Horus the Elder at Kom Ombo

The joint temple at Kom Ombo is of Ptolemaic and Roman date, preceded by a New Kingdom temple, with a lintel from this earlier phase retained in the later structure (Forstner-Müller 2019: 59). Porter and Moss (1939: 200–201) list a now destroyed gate of Hatshepsut and Thutmose III and some fragmentary blocks attesting to Amenhotep I, Thutmose III, Ramesses II, and a lintel with a 19th dynasty king before Sobek. In 2018, the Egyptian Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities found a broken sandstone stela (2.3m by 1m wide) with inscriptions in good condition. Seti I is depicted standing in front of Horus and Sobek, with a winged sun disc above and the 26-line hieroglyphic inscription beneath also containing several cartouches of Horemheb. The New Kingdom phase of the temple has been dismantled and rebuilt upon, but the cult of Sobek continued at the site for much longer than at Gebel el-Silsila, actively adopted by the Ptolemies. This temple is closest geographically to the Gebel el-Silsila temple, and the cult sites must have been linked both practically and economically.

Kom Ombo also has an independent chapel to Hathor, as well as a very deep pit on the west side, not dissimilar to the circular pit located on the south-western corner of the Temple of Sobek at Gebel el-Silsila. A small pond on the western side is believed to have housed sacred crocodiles (Wilkinson 2000: 209). Several hundred crocodile mummies have been excavated at the site and are now housed in the Kom Ombo Crocodile Museum.

Sobek at Sumenu

The temple site of Sumenu was rediscovered at the small village of Al-Mahamid Qibly (14km south of Armant and 160km north of Gebel el-Silsila) in the late 1960s, when architectural fragments were found while preliminary work was being conducted to build a new canal (Bakry 1971: 131). Between 1966 and 1969, Hassan Bakry, on behalf of the Department of Antiquities (now the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities), undertook emergency excavations at the site due to it being under threat from the construction of the modern canal and housing. The site was evidently an important centre of Sobek worship in the Middle and New Kingdoms, with archaeological excavations revealing building foundations and many architectural/inscribed blocks and statues.

The earliest attestations of a temple at Sumenu date back to the 11th dynasty sarcophagus of the nomarch Iny of Gebelein (Betrò 2005: 91). Yoyotte (1957: 94) suggests that the flourishing of the Sobek cult in this region was due to the 12th dynasty pharaohs having a Theban base and preferring this area to the Faiyum further north. Betrò (2005: 91, quoting Yoyotte 1957: 94) states that objects relating to 'Sobek of Sumenu' became 'quite common' at this time. The sarcophagus of a nomarch of the First Intermediate Period, named In, bears the title 'Superintendent of the Prophet of the Temple of Sobek, Lord of Sumenu' (Brovarski 1977: 31–41). The attested blocks found by Bakry confirm that the New Kingdom was also an important period of temple building for the cult of Sobek at this site. According to Betrò (2005: 93), the temple was demolished and its materials reused in the nearby city of el-Tod soon after 88 BCE.

The blocks and statuary reliefs at Sumenu are more numerous, more substantial, and in better condition than those of Gebel el-Silsila, and attest the following rulers: Thutmose III, Amenhotep III, and Ramesses II (Bakry 1971: 140), comparable with the attestations at the Temple of Sobek at Gebel el-Silsila. As the foundations extended under what is now the village of Ezbeh, it was not possible to confirm the size of the temple and precinct during excavations (Bakry 1971: 139). Sondages in the streets of the village revealed mud-brick walls extending eastwards, westwards and northwards, indicating the temple precinct was relatively large. Although no tentative temple plan was produced, Bakry was able to identify several features, including foundations for a pylon entrance and a paved floor of a probable courtyard on the east bank, which measured approximately 11.6m from north to south. A subterranean structure was excavated, which contained statues of Sobek, and could have housed a living sacred crocodile (Bakry 1971: 127). Several inscribed sandstone blocks were found lining a drainage channel, as well as several Sobek statues, stelae and votives (Bakry 1971: 135). A large and well-preserved alabaster statue of Sobek and Amenhotep III was found in the underground chamber, bearing Amenhotep III's cartouche, later usurped by Ramesses II. Repairs and modifications to the muzzle and feathers are evident. Significantly, Bakry (1971: 141) observed that the underground chamber had been repaired after the Ramesses II era, as some Ramesses II blocks had been reused to re-line the structure.

One of the most intriguing features of this site is the underground structure, with a brick-lined tunnel leading off it, on the west



Figure 4. Side of statue, currently in Kom Ombo Crocodile Museum. Photograph authors' own.

bank. Within the chamber, a large sandstone basin (130cm long, 125cm wide, and 35cm thick) was found containing a black granite statuary group comprising an individual described as ‘Neb-Nefer Priest’ and ‘Superintendent of the Treasury of Amun’, and two reclining Sobeks (Figure 4). The statue is attributed to Amenhotep III and Sobek Lord of Smen (Sumenu) (Bakry 1971: 139).

The slab was located over another sandstone slab (130cm by 53cm) with two grooves on its upper surface, coated with lead and bronze. The bronze wheels could run through the grooves to move the upper slab forwards to partly open the basin into a chamber (Bakry 1971: 139). Bakry suggests that this chamber would have been able to receive offerings (presumably for a living crocodile or model of the god Sobek). The cavity also had a locking mechanism at the middle of the front edge (Bakry 1971: 139). A brick archway was found to the south of the basin, and on the eastern bank the entrance to the temple was located, along with mud brick and a limestone pavement. The chamber appears to have been located to the north-west of the main temple, and Bakry (1971: 143) suggests that this structure was designed for the breeding of sacred crocodiles. It is difficult to think of alternative uses for the underground structures and gates. The possibility of sacred crocodile breeding at Gebel el-Silsila must be considered, particularly given the presence of the so-called ‘Pit of Sobek’ at the south-western corner of the temple complex, the function of which is still a matter of debate.

Comparison

The Sumenu temple, built entirely of sandstone, does not appear to have been entirely abandoned after the reign of Ramesses II, as there is evidence for repairs within the Chamber of Sobek which was modified using some recycled Ramesside blocks. However, the Ptolemies, who rebuilt many 18th dynasty temples such as Kom Ombo, did not choose to rebuild at this site, and the temple was either demolished or fell into disrepair, harvested for building materials (which can be found in the nearby town of Tod) before being built upon by a modern village settlement and infrastructure such as the canal.

Sobek in the Faiyum

Ubiquitous in the Faiyum, Sobek was the principal god of many towns, where localised versions developed in towns such as 12th dynasty town Soknebtunis (now Tuṭun). Sobek gained the greatest prominence under the 12th dynasty king Amenemhat III, who built many monuments in the Faiyum dedicated to the cult. Sobek was closely associated with Horus, the falcon-headed god of kingship, from the Middle Kingdom through to the New Kingdom, and from the New Kingdom onwards Sobek-Ra gained prominence. Through his association with Horus, Sobek also became son of Osiris and Isis and therefore a member of the Osirian triad (Zecchi 2010: 3). Sobek Shedety was the patron of the Faiyum’s capital Shedet, with extensive temple building for the cult throughout the Graeco-Roman Period.

Temple of Sobek at Shedet

The Great Temple of Sobek at Shedet was probably the central focus of the largest geographical area dedicated to the crocodile cult in Egypt. Amenemhat III built the temple dedicated to Sobek, with later additions by Ramesses II. The temple was already in ruins when it was visited by Petrie in 1888 and has now been entirely lost or buried due to agriculture and modern building. Although none of the structure remains, several fragmentary statues and the remains of a pool where the sacred crocodiles were apparently kept have been preserved. The blocks from the Great Temple were entirely gone by the late 1880s, but red granite column fragments were lying in the fields until the 1980s and are now situated within the enclosure of the University of Medinet el-Faiyum (Davoli and Ahmed 2006: 81). Petrie (1889: 56) stated that he was able to ‘recover some notion of the plan

of the temple, though all the stone is destroyed but the sand beds on which the stone was laid still remain'. Column bases were still present, indicating a surrounding colonnade. Petrie found some Ramesside blocks and a Ramesside statue, used as foundations by Ptolemaic builders (Petrie 1889: 57). Various archaeological expeditions have taken place at the site, but little has been published.

Sobek at Medinet Madi

In the south-western Faiyum region, Medinet Madi is one of the best-preserved Middle Kingdom temple complexes still existing. The site of Medinet Madi was first excavated by archaeologist Achille Vogliano from the University of Milan in the 1930s, and the subject of further archaeological study and preservation starting from 1966–1986, by a team from Pisa University, led by Edda Bresciani.

The Renenutet Temple (Temple A) is the earliest temple in the complex along with two later temples, granaries, and residences. Temple A, built during the reigns of Amenemhat III and Amenemhat IV (c. 1855–1799 BCE), continued to operate during the New Kingdom (Merneptah attested), and was added to during the Graeco-Roman era. Dedicated to the cobra-goddess of the harvest Renenutet, her consort Sobek is heavily featured in the relief programme.

The temple, measuring 10.5m by 9.7m, is entered through a hall with two limestone papyrus bundle columns, one bearing the name of Amenemhat III and the other Amenemhat IV, both accompanying Renenutet. The reliefs include a scene showing a king and the goddess Seshat founding the temple. A further room containing reliefs leads from the columned room, and from this inner room three sanctuaries/chapels can be accessed, each containing statues of gods. The central chapel contained a large statue of Renenutet, with Amenemhat III and Amenemhat IV standing either side of her. The second chapel is dedicated to Renenutet and Sobek jointly, and the third chapel to Renenutet with Sobek standing in front of Amenemhat III (Bresciani 2015).

Zecchi argues that whilst Renenutet is the principal god of the temple, in fact Sobek is the most powerful deity. Renenutet is stood behind the king and Sobek is stood in front of him, transferring power to the king (Zecchi 2010: 76).

A group of texts known as *Hymns to the Diadem*, preserved on Middle Kingdom/Second Intermediate Period P. Golenischeff I are interesting as they contain hymns addressed to various crowns of Sobek of Shedet including the white crown, the double crown, the *atef* crown, the red crown, and the *uraeus* goddess Wadjet (Zecchi 2010: 102). Zecchi observes that since the reign of Amenemhat III, Sobek has been associated with royal headgear, symbols of royal power. The material from the Gebel el-Silsila Temple of Sobek contains several images of crowns.

During the New Kingdom, Sobek of Shedet, Amun-Ra and Thutmose III are attested on a limestone lintel and stone slab found by Petrie (1890: pl. XXII.2) at Gurob. It is evident that the cult of Sobek of Shedet co-existed with the cults of Sobek at Sumenu and Kheny. It is possible that a temple of Sobek existed at Gurob at this time.

The cult of Sobek of Shedet continues with various attestations such as on the boundary stela of Year Two of Seti I erected in the Faiyum, which mentions the 'House of Sobek of Shedet' (Zecchi 2010: 113). Sobek is listed in the temple of Seti I at Abydos in four territories of the Faiyum, and evidence points to a new building phase of a temple of Sobek during the reign of Ramesses II (Petrie 1889: 58). Zecchi (2010: 117) notes that Ramesses III appears to be the last king of the New Kingdom to have used the epithet 'Beloved of Sobek' (Sobek of Shedet) in Medinet Habu, where the king offers two vases of wine to the god. This deity is sitting on a throne holding a *was* sceptre and *ankh* sign, and interestingly has the head of a ram, wearing the *atef* crown. Hathor of Shedet stands behind

Sobek (Zecchi 2010: 117). ‘The House of Sobek of Shedet’ is listed in P. Wilbour (Ramesses V) as a land-owning institution and both Ramesses IV and V are listed as making foundations for the temple of Sobek at Shedet.

After the New Kingdom, Sobek of Shedet and his temple are occasionally mentioned. The 22nd dynasty King Osorkon I left an inscription on a column at Medinet Madi (Vogliano 1937: 19, 25). Osorkon II listed Sobek in his Sed-festival hall at Bubastis, amongst a long list of deities (Naville 1892: 18–19). There are several priestly attestations throughout this period on statues, indicating that the cult at Shedet continued to operate (Zecchi 2010: 141). Sobek of Shedet is attested through the Late Period including on statues and some sarcophagi, and on a relief of Nectanebo II (Zecchi 2010: 145). During the Graeco-Roman Period, Sobek of Shedet morphed into new and different regional versions around the Faiyum.

Quarry/mining cults and their links to gods

Bloxam and Shaw (2020) have published widely on ancient quarry sites, touching on cultic aspects where structures survive. However, relatively few researchers have considered the social and cultic aspects of industrial landscapes. Industrial areas relating to quarrying and mining, termed by Bloxam and Shaw (2020: 165) as ‘procurement landscapes’ have been ‘largely ignored in Egyptological studies’. Bloxam (2015: 791) categorises characteristics shared by all quarries within four broad categories:

1. The resources or stone deposit
2. Production remains such as quarries, tools, spoil and discarded products
3. The social infrastructure, or remains left by the quarry workers such as settlements, inscriptions and ceramics
4. Logistics or infrastructure laid down to remove products from the quarries

This categorisation can be applied to other industrial sites, especially mining. Category (iii) does not specifically identify cultic monuments, and an additional category could be useful, as cultic monuments were created not only by quarry workers but also sponsored by kings and their elite agents. Bloxam (2015: 791) advocates for a more holistic approach to the study of quarries to represent the human transformation of the landscape over time, and this approach concurs with the research developments at Gebel el-Silsila.

It is important to consider sites outside Egypt, which were exploited by Egyptians on expedition, such as Serabit el-Khadim in the Sinai, and sites in Nubia. In many of these industrial sites, extraction has continued into modern times, and archaeological evidence has no doubt been lost because of this.

It is apparent that the fluctuation of quarrying activity reflects the fluctuation of royal economic power (Shaw 1994: 110) and this view concurs with the fluctuating activity at Gebel el-Silsila. The dynamic works both ways, as the ability to procure valuable material must have added further wealth, and therefore power, to rulers. It is evident that the output of mines and quarries were assets that were owned not only by the state/ruler but also by temples, such as the gold mines near Wadi Abbad which were owned by the Seti I temple at Abydos (Shaw 1994: 110; Schott 1961: 143–159).

Shrines and cultic remains can be found in various remote locations within Egypt and beyond its borders where Egyptians were active. The choice of location for places of worship in remote (desert) settings was evidently governed by pragmatic considerations of geology. Shrines were established in both natural and constructed fashion, taking advantage of caves or natural shelves such as the 18th dynasty rock inscription site of Pahu in Qamula (Darnell 2021). The creators of shrines sometimes

built protective dry-stone walls, for example at Serabit el-Khadim, and some sites such as the temple of Seti I at el-Kanais were constructed as rock-cut shrines (*hemi-speos*), possibly connected with desert roads (Darnell 2021).

Pethen (2012) articulates a new approach to interpreting social meaning of landscape settings, and Hornung (1982: 68) describes landscape imbued with divine power (2012, citing Hornung 1982: 68). Pethen (2012: 109) proposes that specific landscape features were strongly associated with a divinity, and the minerals extracted from the landscape to create divine statues etc. were imbued with divine power because they were sourced from a divine site. Minerals were considered to be emanations of the divine, with the remote landscapes of the mines and quarries representing the desert horizon and the junction of natural and supernatural existence.

The deities most prominent in pharaonic desert sites are Hathor and Horus, the latter often present in the form of the deified ruler (Darnell 2021: 44). The Egyptians linked minerals and stones as ‘concretised exudations’ of a celestial goddess, who in *Pyramid Text* Utterance 350 ‘strews greenstone, malachite, turquoise — the stars’, and mining expeditions sought to extract the mineral glory shed by the goddess (Darnell 2021). A stone cutter could be described as ‘one who brings a stone to life’ and turquoise was described as the ‘skin of Hathor’ at Serabit el-Khadim (Darnell 2021). The mineral and stone resources were considered as ‘living’ things, controlled/provided by deities.

Case study – Temple of Sobek of Kheny

The Temple of Sobek preliminary project findings have been published in Egyptology journals by Nilsson and Ward (2018a: 52–62, 2019: 35), and an archaeological report is being prepared for publication.



Figure 5. Temple of Sobek plan, GIS map prepared by Mohamed el Raza, Gebel el-Silsila Archaeological Mission (blue shapes are foundation pits).

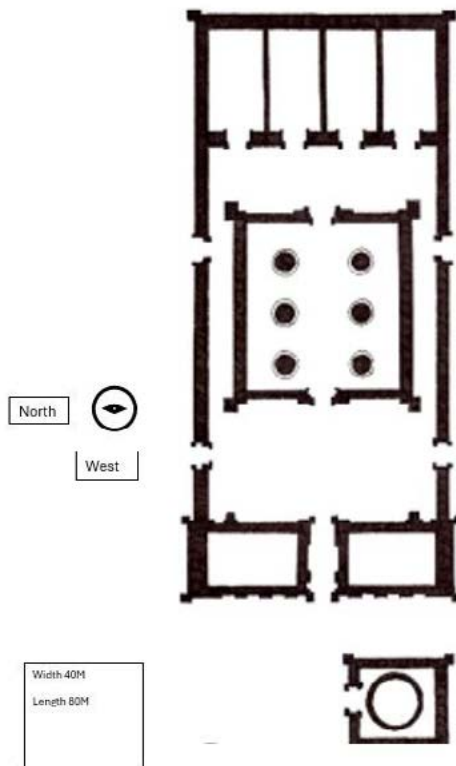
Temple layout

Figure 6: Tentative temple plan, courtesy of John Ward, Gebel el-Silsila Archaeological Mission.

The Temple of Sobek would have been a large and imposing structure, at least 80m by 40m in perimeter and orientated on an east-west alignment, facing west, almost opposite the Speos on the West Bank. The ground rises from west to east as one proceeds into the temple. Located at the front of the temple are large pylon footings and a large pit at the south-western corner which could indicate a place where sacred crocodiles were kept. The rear of the temple contained small rooms, adjoined by a covered or partially covered hall or courtyard, containing at least five (probably six) dressed and raised column bases. Sandstone fragments bearing blue paint and golden painted stars indicate decorated ceilings. A large mud-brick wall bounds the southern side of the temple, standing over 1m high, and at least 12 large foundation or ritual pits cross the temple, in a broadly diagonal pattern. It is likely that during the inundation, the temple would have been completely surrounded by water, situated as it is on a promontory, with a natural wadi (now a canal) to the south side.

There is a good deal of vegetation in this area

in the modern day, which supports the theory that this area was regularly inundated during the flood.

The material

Over 2600+ relief fragments have been recorded to date. The excavation, recording and preservation work is ongoing, and the results and analysis outlined in this paper should be considered as interim. The reliefs have been recorded in a bespoke database and categorised by material, size, carving style, presence of plaster/paint, and condition. The fragments have been categorised as relief, architectural, and statuary, then further categorised as diagnostic/non-diagnostic, to create a subset of fragments which contain useful information such as relief imagery, colour images, or 3D shape. The decision on whether an item can be classed as 'diagnostic' is determined by whether there is enough of an image to be recognisable in some way. The relief fragments are further categorised into relief types: raised sunk worked surface graffiti or indeterminate. Where relevant, fragments are given key words to assist with identifying themes. Statuary and small finds items are part of a separate study.

There is significant margin for error in the categorisation of fragments, as some pieces are too small and fragmentary to be sure whether a carved line is part of a raised or sunk relief scene. In this case, the fragment has been classed as indeterminate. Specifically, there is some carving, but not enough to determine the relief style.

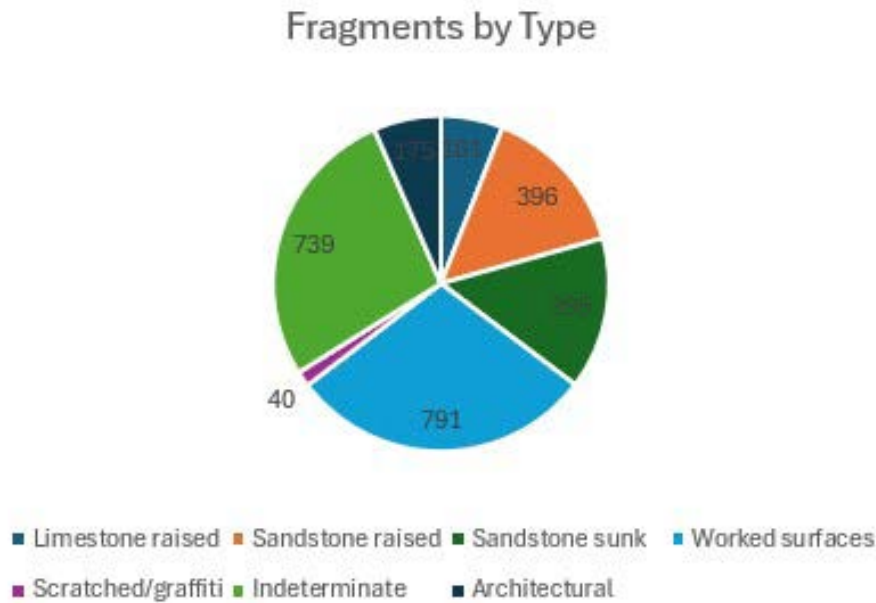


Figure 7. Analysis of fragments by type (material and decoration).

The condition of the fragments is generally poor, particularly the sandstone fragments. The limestone fragments are destroyed and in very small pieces, but the relief is crisp, and some retain traces of paint. Some limestone fragments were used as rubble for later building phases. The paint on some fragments is very bright, particularly the blue and red elements.

Key Statistics: Figure 7 summarises current numbers of fragments by relief style.

Chronology: A number of the diagnostic fragments contain partial cartouches with attestations for the reigns of Thutmose III, Amenhotep III, Ramesses II, and Ramesses III, and one fragmentary cartouche which could be Thutmose IV, Amenhotep II or Horemheb. These fragments are key in dating the construction and decorative phases of the temple (see Table 1).

TABLE 1. ANALYSIS OF RELIEFS BY CARVING STYLE AND PERIOD

Type of Relief	Ruler
Limestone raised relief	Thutmose II, Hatshepsut/Thutmose III
Sandstone raised relief	Amenhotep III
Sandstone sunk relief	Ramesses II, Ramesses III

Limestone Reliefs: The iconographic programme of the limestone reliefs indicates an early Thutmoside date (Nilsson and Ward 2018a: 61). The limestone fragments are very finely carved in raised relief, with some retaining traces of paint. There is no weathering or wear on these fragments, and it is possible that the reliefs were created on internal walls. Fragments of particular note show the royal kilt, a royal head, and a number of partial hieroglyphic fragments. The size of some of the fragments indicates wall scenes with principal figures at least 1.5–1.6m in height.



Figure 8a-b: Photograph of fragment 3652, by Anders Andersson, copyright Gebel el-Silsila Archaeological Mission (above); Epigraphic drawing by author of fragment 3652, showing Sobek embracing a king (below).

Sandstone Reliefs: The sandstone fragments are more numerous and have more extensive plaster and paint retention than the limestone fragments. Three fragments contain the cartouches of Amenhotep III, Ramesses II, and Ramessess III respectively. The relief scenes of Amenhotep III are in raised relief, and the cartouches of Ramesses II and III are in sunk relief.

Fragments of note include an architectural sandstone fragment containing the serekh (Horus name) of Ramesses II, and a sandstone fragment (Figure 8) showing Sobek Lord of Kheny embracing a king (Nilsson and Ward 2018b: 62).

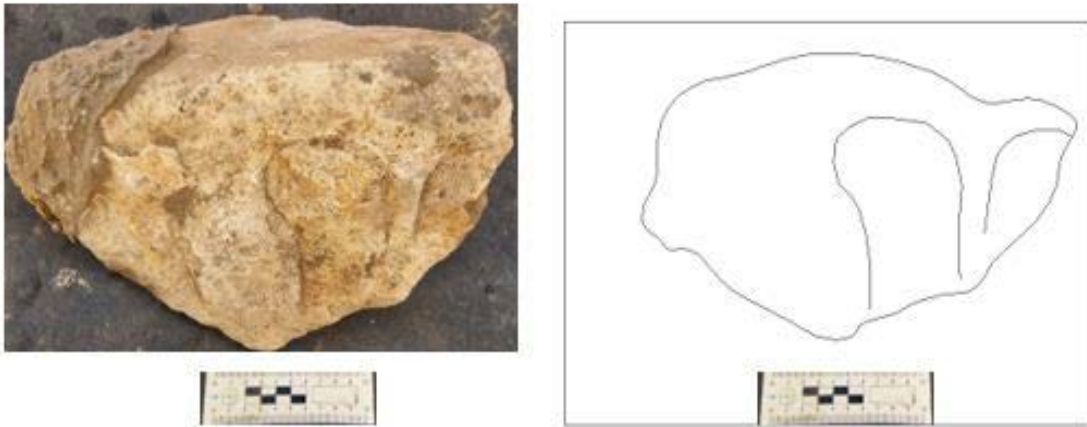


Figure 9a-b. Photograph of fragment 6217 showing atef crown feathers, sandstone sunk relief (left); Epigraphic drawing of fragment 6217 (right); both images by author.

The corpus contains 22 fragmentary reliefs of crowns, mostly the *atef* crown with feathers, the recognised crown of Sobek. By calculating the relative height of the figure with the fragments of feather, the figures must have been approximately 1.6m high (for example Figure 9).

Fragment 3000 (Figure 10) bears partial raised relief cartouches with the content of the left-hand cartouche hacked out, showing that the ‘Amun’ element has been intentionally removed, likely during the Amarna Period, and therefore offering an important clue to the history of the temple. The right-hand cartouche contains a Ra-sign and a *maat*-feather perhaps held by a seated figure of Maat, from the prenomen *neb-maat-ra* or *maat-ka-ra*. As this cartouche is in raised relief, it is most likely to be that of Amenhotep III but could also represent Hatshepsut. Whether Hatshepsut or Amenhotep III, the name would have been a target for Atenists, who defaced other monuments on site. These cartouches appear to be facing each other, which could only have occurred if they were placed centrally, perhaps on a lintel.



Figure 10. Defaced cartouche (photo Anders Andersson, Gebel el-Silsila Archaeological Mission).

Two mud bricks – one *in situ* and one reused and fired in the Roman Period – retain the cartouche of Thutmose III. The debris at the temple also contained many Roman items including votives and ceramic sherds. The earlier limestone and sandstone fragments had been used as fill for Roman Period temporary structures, indicating that the temple had already been demolished by the Roman Period.

Presently, no firm evidence for Tutankhamun or Horemheb has been found at the main temple, although these rulers are attested elsewhere at the site and would have probably left their mark on the temple.

The eradication of Sobek

The cult of Sobek at Gebel el-Silsila fell out of favour, and evidence for this can be found on many site monuments. New Kingdom representations of Sobek in both anthropomorphic and zoomorphic form were consistently eradicated (Figures 11 and 12). In the royal monuments, including the Nile stelae, and in particular the Speos, Sobek's face was hacked out. This eradication most likely extended to the main Temple and the 'Horemheb' temple.

On the East Bank, the dedicatory stela of Ramesses II, toppled by an earthquake, shows damage to the images but not the text, which could be a useful dating criterion (Nilsson 2020a: 34).

It is possible that the eradication of Sobek is linked to the 'proscription of Seth' (Warfe 2023: 115) during the Ramesside Period, as Sobek was considered a Sethian animal. Whilst images of Seth were comprehensively destroyed in the Nile valley, it is evident that the treatment varied at other more marginal places such as Dakhleh Oasis, where the Sethian cult continued into the Roman Period (Hope and Warfe 2017: 274). The theory that Seth's cult should be terminated due to changes in religious belief has been challenged recently by Arp-Neumann (2021: 175), who advocates for the transformation of Seth representing religious vitality and pursuit of order. It is evident that the iconoclasm of Seth varied considerably depending on location and context (Warfe 2023: 115). The possible link with the proscription of Sobek at Gebel el-Silsila requires further investigation.



Figure 11. Broken stela of Ramesses II (East Bank) showing defacement of Sobek; photo M. Nilsson.

Discussion on the cult of Sobek of Kheny including evidence for its creation and operation, and the reasons for the demise

The Temple of Sobek was in many ways conventional, with the 'usual' temple layout and relief programme constituting predominantly offering scenes. The temple was a state sponsored temple, with New Kingdom rulers investing in the building and maintenance of the monument.

Although located in one of the largest quarries of the ancient world, the cult of Sobek of Kheny can be distinguished from other 'industrial cults' which were seeking help and protection from a god in remote and dangerous places. Kheny was the location for the Nile festival and marked the geographical end of the Festival of Opet (Mahmoud 2019), indicating the importance of the site as a sacred place. Temple 'staff' included the Chantress Tapenu of Kheny, whose sistrum is located in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (MMA 68.44).

Despite this apparent independence from the industrial function, it is also evident that the operation of the cult was economically connected to the industrial activity of the state sponsored quarrying



Figure 12. Front of the Speos showing the defacement of Sobek (author's own photo).

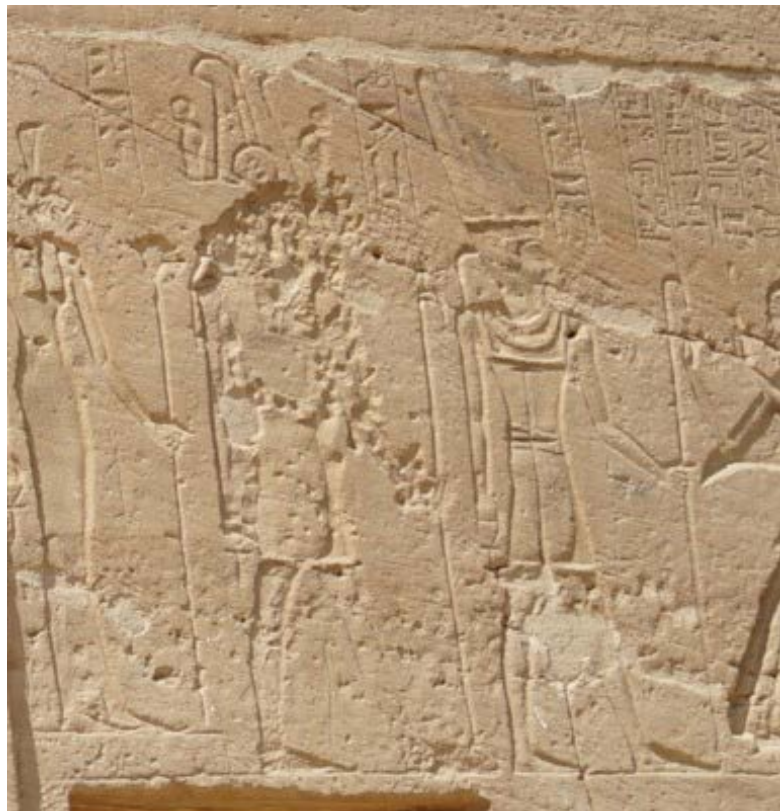


Figure 13. Zoomed in photo – front of Speos (author's own photo).

at the site. Very active throughout the 18th–20th dynasties, the site and the temple were seemingly abandoned sometime during or after the Third Intermediate Period. The demise of the temple mirrors the inactivity of state-sponsored quarrying, and it is possible that the local population left the site for economic reasons. Without work, people would perhaps have relocated to more fertile and hospitable areas where they could grow crops. Once the large-scale quarrying ended, the operation of the temple seemingly ended.

However, it is possible that the cult of Sobek of Kheny, and the principal Temple of Sobek, were independent of the quarrying activity, and would not have been abandoned because the industrial activity stopped. Could there be another reason for the cult to have fallen from favour? No evidence exists in the written record to support this theory, but the temple was clearly abandoned. It is likely that the valuable stone blocks were recycled – whilst 2600+ fragments have been recovered, this represents only a very small proportion of the structure, which must have been removed at some stage. Less than ten large blocks remain (other than undecorated foundation blocks). Temple blocks are known to have been recycled at other sites (for example the Akhenaten blocks found in the infill of the pylons at Karnak) (Redford 1973: 9) or may have been used by the local people for domestic structures. So far, no trace of these blocks has been found.

Although active Sobek cults continued at both Kom Ombo and Sumenu, the cult of Sobek of Kheny ended after the New Kingdom but before the arrival on site of the Romans. Evidence for deliberate destruction of the relief scenes can be found on many fragments, and this evidence is supported by the desecration of Sobek images around the site of Kheny. Even though the quarrying activity was active during this period, the Graeco-Romans did not rebuild the temple as they did at Kom Ombo and many other sites. However, crocodile votives from the Graeco-Roman Period have been recovered from the temple site, indicating the continuation of personal worship to the crocodile god.

That the cult came to an end is clear, but the cause of the demise remains uncertain. From the defacement of images of Sobek, we can deduce that there was a change in attitude to the local god which was not apparent in the parallel sites of Kom Ombo and Sumenu. Some crocodile defacement occurred at Kom Ombo, but as this temple was constructed in the Graeco-Roman Period, any defacement was much later. Likewise, the Sumenu temple was repaired (and therefore maintained) during the Roman Period (Bakry 1971: 141), and its disassembly was likely by the Copts, or even dissembled for building material, with anecdotal evidence for reuse of blocks in the town which now occupies the temple site.

Apparently, only Sobek of Kheny was subject to desecration sometime towards the end or soon after the New Kingdom. As the home of the god, destruction of the temple and the gods' sanctuaries was perhaps necessary to counteract the danger and threat of the disgraced/feared god. Perhaps the structure of the temple was 'tarnished', and the economic attraction of a ready-made structure was not a sufficient motivation to preserve it. It is likely that after the cult and the temple were abandoned, the temple was subsequently demolished for building material, although, so far, repurposed blocks from this temple have not been located. The decline of the cult could have been linked to an abatement in the economic and industrial activity of the quarry, but the fact that iconography was deliberately erased points to more than purely economic motives. Ongoing archaeological investigation at the temple of Sobek and other areas of Gebel el-Silsila may provide answers in the future.

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From Souvenirs to Statements: A Study of ‘Mummy Photography’ at the Turn of the 20th Century

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Abstract

This study aims to analyse a little-known souvenir phenomenon that emerged in Egypt at the end of the 19th century. Known as ‘mummy photography’, this practice allowed tourists to be placed and photographed inside a supposedly authentic ancient Egyptian coffin, leaving only their faces visible. Unattainable within a conventional museum setting, mummy photography is believed to have originated in Egypt, where it was offered by several expatriate photographers in Cairo. This trend rapidly gained popularity and was subsequently adopted by commercial studios in various Western cities, including Paris and New York.

While current research on mummymania has mainly focused on the purchase, collection, and display of mummified bodies as souvenirs, this paper focuses on the coffin itself and questions the tourists’ desire to be placed within this artefact for an imaginative journey to ancient Egypt. Drawing on the results of archival research, the paper will present the history of this phenomenon, questioning its origin and target clientele while assessing its reception in Egypt and abroad.

In line with ongoing decolonial research in the history of Egyptology, this study critically illustrates how, by engaging in trick photography, individuals from the middle and upper classes – including prominent political figures – also engaged in the problematic appropriation of ancient Egyptian material culture and identity. This paper will thus challenge the contemporary advertisement and perception of mummy photography as an elegant and appropriate souvenir. It will, importantly, recontextualise this practice as deeply embedded within the construction of visual narratives, facilitated by the prevailing Western colonial power and authority in Egypt.

Keywords

History of Egyptology; Photography; Tourism; Material Culture

Introduction: Studying mummymania through photography

In recent years, scholars have increasingly stressed the importance of confronting the problematic history of Egyptology and embracing decolonial approaches in both the field and museum collections (Reid 2002; Stevenson 2019). Although still an undefined and understudied field of research (Bednarski 2020: 33), studying the history of Egyptology provides an opportunity to reflect on past practices, which is crucial to ‘re-animate Egyptian heritage within fresh narratives that draw from and make transparent a broader range of histories’ (Stevenson 2019: 256). Now a developing field (Ebeling 2020: 80), material culture, written documents, and oral history are increasingly being examined as key sources to address archaeological and museum practices in Egypt in the 19th and 20th centuries (van der Spek 2011; Quirke 2010).

Simultaneously, there is a growing interest in the history of photography, where photographs are being recognised as a new historical source to analyse colonial power dynamics. Scholars challenge the

prevalent assumption that photographs are merely illustrative, advocating for a closer examination of *how* they were used and *why* (Edwards 2022: 97). The ‘materiality of photographs’ is seen as crucial for deciphering ‘what people wanted photographs to do for them, as photographs are made in certain ways, selected and ordered into, for instance, the desired narratives of event, experience or self’ (Edwards 2022: 110). Importantly, the power of colonial-era photographic *objects* is not fixed – once tools of colonial control, photographs can now be reframed today as tools of resistance. For instance, unidentified or mislabelled photographs of Indigenous peoples can be recontextualised through initiatives such as ‘Project Naming’ (Payne *et al.* 2022). This collaboration with First Nations in Canada enabled communities to reconnect with and preserve their histories. The reframing of colonial-era photographs as research tools is thus well-documented in regions such as the Arctic (Kaalund 2023; Payne 2022). However, despite the wealth of colonial-era photographs, their use to address questions on the reception of ancient Egypt and the history of Egyptology remains relatively limited. Existing scholarship has primarily focused on the interaction between the ‘West’ and the Egyptian landscape (Nicholson 2022), the role of photography in archaeology (Riggs 2019, 2020), and the exotic portraiture of Egyptians through the lens of Orientalism (Behdad 2013). This paper shifts the focus to the often-overlooked category of tourist portrait photography. Rather than examining photographs of archaeological ruins or the people whom the tourists encountered, it focuses on the travellers themselves. In particular, this paper explores a phenomenon known as ‘mummy photography’, in which tourists were photographed in an ancient Egyptian coffin. Emerging at the end of the 19th century and remaining popular at the beginning of the 20th century, mummy photography was likely invented in Cairo during the heyday of the British occupation (1882–1914) (Reid 2002: 16). This unusual style of photography was quickly promoted to American and European audiences, leading commercial studios to introduce mummy photography in major cities, particularly Paris (“From the Big Cities” 1899: 3) and New York (“Mummy Pictures” 1898: 6).

Although briefly mentioned in studies of mummymania (Baber 2016: 84) and Victorian alchemy (Dobson 2022: 54), this phenomenon has only recently begun to receive in-depth scholarly attention as a distinct subject in its own right (Hornstein 2023). In this context, I adopt Edwards’ (2022) approach by engaging with the materiality of mummy photography. This specific type of trick photography becomes an *object* of study to question how tourists engaged with ancient Egypt and how this practice reflects the appropriation of material culture during a period of Western colonial control and authority in Egypt.

Bringing a personalised souvenir home

The 19th century was an era characterised by rapid industrialisation and a revolution in travel, as exemplified by the establishment of the Suez Canal (1859–1869) and the development of steamships and rail networks. Egypt, once the realm of intrepid explorers, emerged as a new touristic destination accessible to the upper and middle classes from the Western world, due to faster, more reliable, and more affordable means of transportation (Reid 2002: 69). This surge in tourism led to the first package tours, pioneered by companies like Thomas Cook, making travel more accessible by planning different aspects of the journey for their elite clientele (Wilkinson 1891: 4). What was once a rare and imaginary landscape, only glimpsed through watercolour paintings and the narratives of early adventurers, thus became accessible to tourists who had both the means and time to venture to Egypt. From the 1860s, European and Ottoman photographers, drawn by the growing number of visitors and potential clientele (Howe 2008: 131), established studios in key locations such as Cairo, Alexandria, and Luxor, targeting their products to a foreign audience eager to bring photographs home as souvenirs (Cazentre 2013: 231). Despite their significant contribution to the tourism industry, however, the role of such photographers has, to this day, not been widely acknowledged (Nicholson 2022: 281).

The earliest written references to mummy photography identified so far date back to American newspapers in 1898. These articles actively promoted the trend, describing the process as follows:

The picture is taken in this way: The subject steps into the case, which is placed on end, and the lid is then closed, leaving an opening just large enough for the face. It is a gruesome idea, but a popular one. The mummy pictures are considered graceful and appropriate souvenirs of a trip to Egypt to present on returning to the friends at home ("Mummy Pictures" 1898: 6).

Reports of this curious trend quickly crossed the Atlantic, with Parisian newspapers highlighting mummy photography – still unknown in France – on their front pages in November 1898 ("Mode nouvelle" 1898: 1; "Momies Nouvelles" 1898: 1). Just a few months later, a photographer is reported to be offering mummy photography in Paris after being inspired by French travellers who had brought this unusual souvenir back from their journeys to Egypt. He reportedly acquired an authentic coffin from Egypt to recreate the experience in his studio ("Notules" 1899: 1). This trend soon attracted renewed attention abroad, especially in British newspapers ("Mummy-Photography" 1899: 5).

A short-lived fad at the end of the 19th century, mummy photography regained popularity two decades later, presented once more as 'the newest thing in freak photography' ("Photographed as Sphinxes and Mummies" 1908: 429). It seems that during this revival, photographers introduced an

innovative approach by selling the photographs as post-cards, providing a convenient means for tourists to send them home. This format, known as a 'real picture postcard', is part of the broader popularity of postcards in the early 20th century, offering a material form for 'individual people to capture personal narratives' (Pyne 2021: 114). This innovation of personal printing was offered by the studio of Lékégian in Cairo, as indicated by a postcard depicting a male tourist, possibly of French origin, posing in the replica of an ancient Egyptian coffin adorned with fake hieroglyphs (Figure 1). Mummy photography thus uniquely contributed to personalising a tourist's souvenir. Functioning as an individualised memento, such a photograph served as a tangible tool to document and record their own experience in Egypt. Diverging from conventional landscape photographs that were 'generally similar in size and composition' (Stapp 2008: 478), mummy photography allowed the tourist to stand out and emphasise the notion of truly 'being there' (Pyne 2021: 116).



Figure 1. Gabriel Lékégian, postmarked 25 November 1906, Cairo, picture postcard. From the Collection of Christopher B. Steiner.

This unconventional form of touristic performance aligns with Nicholson's observation of photographs seeking to portray 'the unfamiliar in the familiar' (Nicholson 2022: 271). According to him, 19th-century portrait

photographs in Egypt often featured well-known elements such as food and water but emphasised how they differed from conventional Western practices; for example, how the water was stored or transported. These popular photographs of ‘food and water, but not as we know them’ captured the strange and exotic aspects of the tourist’s surroundings (Nicholson 2022: 271). Similarly, while mummy photography portrays a highly familiar and captivating artefact at the time, the tourist’s presence within the coffin transcends conventional depictions of antiquities. Rather than depicting a coffin ‘as we know it’, this portrayal of an ancient Egyptian artefact actively participates in documenting the exotic and the unfamiliar. Mummy photography thus allowed the tourist to materially and visually document their experience in Egypt in a unique way. Yet, the significance of such a photograph extends far beyond a static souvenir. As demonstrated below, it is crucial to understand how mummy photography provided an intimate and performative space, facilitating the active engagement of all senses with ancient Egyptian antiquities.

Getting in a coffin: A theatrical and multisensorial journey

One illustration published in the illustrated newspaper, *The Sketch*, provides a valuable insight into what a Cairene studio might have looked like in the early 20th century (“Mummies and Sphinxes—All Alive!” 1908: 21) (Figure 2). An imposing camera is placed in the foreground and the photographer is ready to take a photograph of the tourists, who are patiently posing in coffins and sphinx cardboards. In his studio, the photographer meticulously re-created an ancient Egyptian

setting (Hornstein 2023: 97–99). Small antique statuettes are carefully aligned on the ground, while palm trees and, unsurprisingly, a painting of the Great Pyramids adorned the background. In contrast, what appears to be stereotypical Oriental photographic props such as a fez, a shisha, and Islamic-style furniture are neglected and piled up along the walls. Indicative of the 19th-century wave of Egyptomania, this theatrical setup is carefully selected to transport the tourist back in time. Rather than engaging with props used to evoke a modern Egyptian or broad ‘Oriental’ aesthetic, the sitters use iconic symbols of ancient Egypt, such as sphinx cardboards and decorated coffins, as costumes to initiate an imaginative journey to Egypt.

As seen in one photograph depicting an anonymous tourist, the decor creates a perfect ancient Egyptian *mise-en-scène* (Figure 3). The solitary figure is surrounded by exotic flora. Large boulders, symbolising the archaeological ruins of an imaginative lost ancient Egypt, are placed around the coffin, and the outline of the pyramids emerges in a blurred landscape. This tableau, meticulously staged by the photographer, transforms the traveller into a storyteller. Mummy photography effectively achieves the primary objective of commercial

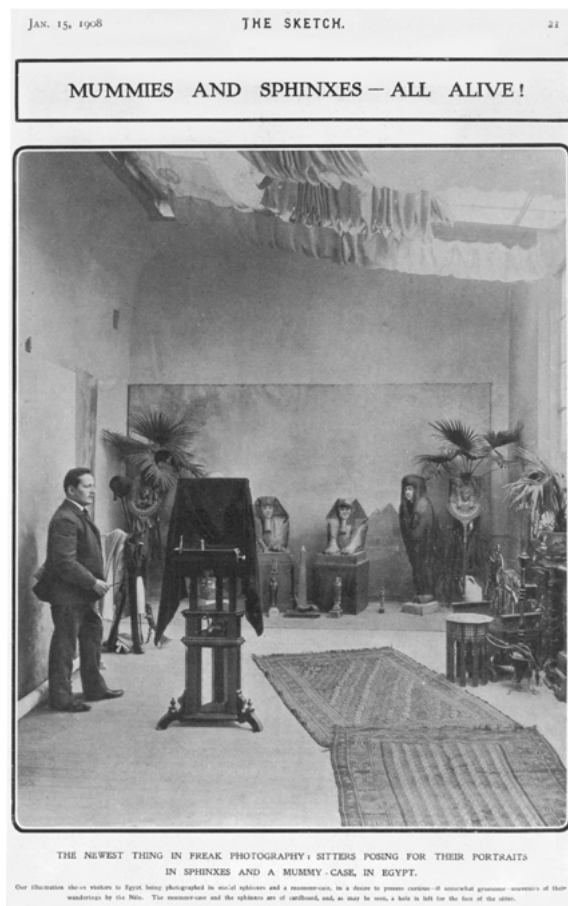


Figure 2. An illustration of mummy photography. “Mummies and Sphinxes – All Alive!” *The Sketch*, 15 January 1908 © Illustrated London News Group.

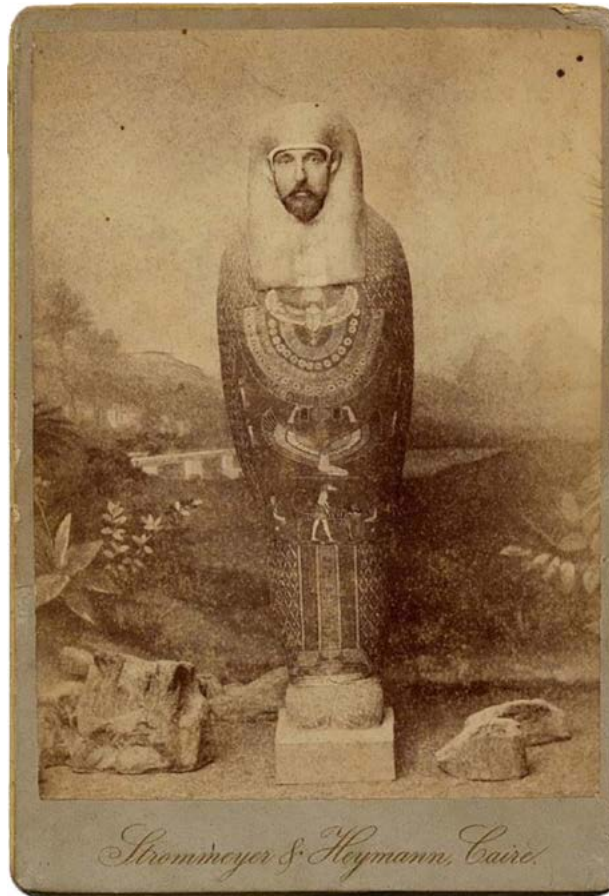


Figure 3. An unknown tourist posing in a coffin. Strommeyer and Heymann, c. 1885, Cairo, cabinet card. From the collection of František Gregor.

photographs, constructing an imaginary world for the tourist, allowing the performance of his desires and fantasies (Urry and Larsen 2011: 175). In the studio, the tourist is thus immersed in a carefully crafted dreamscape, creating his own personal propaganda.

Sensory engagement within a coffin

The significance of the immersive and performative nature of touristic experience is crucial to understanding mummy photography (Urry and Larsen 2011: 215). As emphasised by Degen *et al.* (2008: 1909), 'visuality is always multimodal: that is, visual experiences are almost always accompanied by aural, tactile, and oral experiences'. Building on this perspective, mummy photography extends beyond mere visual performance and becomes more than a motionless record of a staged performance. It invites us to consider the full bodily experience offered by trick photography, particularly the unique 'physical proximity between the gazer and the object of the gaze' (Urry and Larsen 2011: 199). Such a close experience with a coffin, unattainable within a conventional museum setting, involved touch, smell, and the immersive play aspect of photography. This unusual encounter engaged all senses, an experiential consideration that is often overlooked by historians but asserted by performance theorists (Urry and Larsen 2011: 208).

For the poser, mummy photographs served both as souvenirs and records of a holistic encounter with a supposedly authentic ancient Egyptian funerary artefact. For commercial studios, they provided a

way to offer unique images that tourists alone could not capture with their own cameras. The turn of the 20th century indeed marked a period of growing access to amateur photography (Cazentre 2013: 233). The introduction of Kodak No. 1 pocket cameras in the late 1880s ‘reduced the travelers (*sic*) dependence on outside sources of imagery’ (Stapp 2008: 477). By the 1890s, tourists could take their own photographs with the ease of pressing a button, a practice that quickly gained popularity in Egypt (Gregory 2003: 210–211). This development in travel photography had a direct negative impact on commercial studios (Stapp 2008: 477), and commercial photographers were ultimately ‘surviving only as portrait artists’ (Cazentre 2013: 233). As a result, the invention and availability of mummy photography in countries like Egypt, France, and the United States may be viewed as a strategy for commercial studios to respond to the rising number of amateur photographers and prevent their own decline.

While the imaginative journey in the Orient through mummy photography might have been entertaining and memorable, it remains inherently problematic. Indeed, this practice serves as a valuable case study to illustrate the Western re-use and appropriation of Egyptian antiquities within a colonial context.

A visual assertion of Egypt’s heritage?

A self-conscious construction of identity

By the end of the 19th century, portrait photography had become the defining representational medium of its age (Hamilton and Hargreaves 2001: 109). Similar to paintings, portrait photography served the dual purpose of contemporary commemoration and celebration, whilst ensuring the preservation of one’s identity for future generations. In other words, driven by a ‘desire of immortality’ (Hamilton and Hargreaves 2001: 20), portrait photography was favoured as a tool for constructing one’s visual identity in public and private spheres. In Paris, this desire for eternal remembrance through portraiture was achieved with mummy photography. Although unconventional, the method was seemingly widely popular, as ‘no actress’s salon in Paris is now complete without a counterfeit presentment of her own mummy’ (“Mummy-Photography” 1899: 5). By assuming an ancient Egyptian identity, the photographic subject was transported into an antiquated context during their journey to the afterlife (Dobson 2022: 56). Contemporary newspapers claimed that photographers in Paris and New York had imported authentic coffins from Cairo to be reused as props (e.g. “Mode nouvelle” 1898: 1; “Notules” 1899: 1). Whether this was true or simply a strategy to attract customers, the supposedly ancient coffin was used as a costume and became one of many theatrical accessories that, in portrait photography, ‘contributed to the self-conscious construction of identity’ (Cushman 2020). An ancient Egyptian symbol was thereby removed from its original sacred context to provide the Parisian ‘queens of the demi-monde’ with the chance to be portrayed as authentic ancient Egyptian queens (“Mummy-Photography” 1899: 5).

These photographs therefore reflect how Europeans and Americans used elements of Egypt’s past to construct their own visual narratives. This is indeed a well-documented phenomenon in research on the history of the reception of ancient Egypt (Bednarski 2020: 80). By portraying themselves as kings or queens, artists and tourists play a role in crafting an image of Egypt within their specific cultural and historical contexts. The camera, with seemingly objective – yet, in reality, ethnocentric – filters, represents ‘a technology of cultural imperialism’, which reflects and reinforces stereotypical Western imaginings of Egypt, devoid of modernity (Urry and Larsen 2011: 170). In the exhibition *Egyptian dreamworld, Early Photographs by Pascal Sebah and Émile Béchard*, mummy photography is described as a method in which tourists embody and indirectly assert ownership over ancient Egypt (Guyer 2019: 18). Guyer claims that this trick photography represents how ‘the visual appropriation

of the Orient was taken to extremes' (2019: 18), representing a particularly emphatic point of view. Nevertheless, the act of being placed and photographed in a coffin undeniably allowed tourists to select and appropriate an ancient Egyptian cultural symbol, constructing and asserting an identity that satisfied their contemporary desires to align with the perceived prestige of the past (Smith 2006).

Mummy photography: Outdoor compositions

Mummy photography appears to have become a favoured trend among Westerners, achievable not only in photographic studios but also at archaeological sites. A striking example can be found in the photograph collection of Egyptology enthusiast Edmond Gachet, also known by his religious name Brother Julien Michel, who lived in Egypt in the early 20th century. In one photograph, he is seen outdoors, likely at an archaeological site, posing inside a wooden anthropoid coffin (Figure 4). Dressed as though he were mummified, he holds the crook and flail – symbols of kingship – and smiles directly at the camera. Surrounding him are ancient Egyptian symbols, including a seated statue, likely ancient linen fragments, and a skull that may have been associated with the coffin. This photograph demonstrates how human remains, the wooden coffin, and the accompanying burial assemblage were repurposed as props, enabling Europeans to symbolically present themselves as ancient Egyptian royalty. In doing so, the photograph captures the disturbance of the burial's original archaeological context, illustrating how mummy photography deprived the coffin of its culturally intended purpose (Kopytoff 1986).

In another photograph, Brother Julien Michel is depicted in a standing position, pretending to be dead, as if archaeologists were recording their recent discovery (Figure 5). Remarkably, he personalised the coffin by inscribing his name, Michel, in hieroglyphs at the centre of the lid. The ancient Egyptian symbols of life and stability also decorate its base. The skull and linen fragments were repositioned at his feet, further integrating these ancient elements into his staged scene.



Figure 4. Brother Julien Michel posing in an ancient Egyptian coffin, 1925 © Peggy Joy Egyptology Library.



Figure 5. A second scene depicting Brother Julien Michel as an ancient Egyptian king, 1925 © Peggy Joy Egyptology Library.

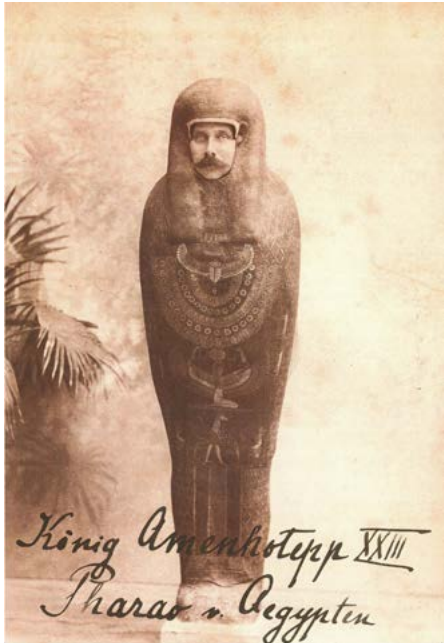


Figure 6. The Archduke Franz Ferdinand as 'König Amenhotep XXIII Pharao von Aegypten'. J. Heyman & Co., c. 1895, Cairo, albumen cabinet card © Schloss Artstetten.

This level of personalisation appears to be unique within the known corpus of mummy photography. By prominently displaying his hieroglyphic name and fully dressing for the occasion, Brother Julien Michel moves beyond the typical pose seen in commercial studios, where sitters hid behind coffin lids in controlled indoor settings. Instead, he stages the scene outdoors, surrounded by what appears to be an authentic burial assemblage. The preparation required – creating the personalised cartouche, arranging props, dressing on-site, and taking multiple photographs from different angles – points to a thoughtfully executed photo session. This unique example of mummy photography certainly captures a personal and sensory experience that goes beyond the staged compositions commonly produced by commercial studios at the time.

Photographic evidence reveals that such performances took place in a variety of settings, including studios, archaeological sites, and museums. The latter is well-known from two photographs depicting Catalan diplomat and Egyptologist Eduardo Toda posing as a mummified body at the Bulaq Museum in Cairo (Biblioteca Museo Victor Balaguer). Although these photographs differ slightly in nature, as the sitters are placed in or around coffins rather than behind their lids, they clearly illustrate how authentic ancient Egyptian coffins were reused as decorative props. These photographs highlight how individuals used elements of Egypt's ancient past to create their own visual narrative. The camera was a tool that reinforced stereotypical Western views of Egypt – views that often ignored the country's modern reality and focused instead on an exotic, ancient past, 'transport[ing] the viewer not only to a different place but also to a different time' (Riggs 2019: 36). Similar to the contemporary enthusiasm for purchasing mummified remains, the participation of foreigners in mummy photography serves as another illustration of their effort to claim a connection to Egypt's heritage. These photographs were not simply about preserving memories; they were a deliberate expression of control and an attempt to align themselves with the prestige of Egypt's heritage.

Occupation and domination

One of the most notable persons who took part in this trick photography was the Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria (1863–1914). This photograph was taken in Cairo during his grand tour at the end of the 19th century

(Figure 6). Once again, the tourist favoured an ancient Egyptian coffin as a symbol to commemorate his travels in modern Egypt. Rather than being represented in an Orientalised way, he chose to be portrayed in an ancient Egyptian mummified style. The caption accompanying the photograph is also intriguing, as the Archduke is presented as King Amenhotep XXIII. Adding another layer of humour, the writer intended to provide a comical yet descriptive legend of the image. The caption states a direct link between the heir of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the ancient Egyptian kings (Dobson 2022: 56).

By participating in this photographic trend, the Archduke elevated his own status by associating himself with the grandeur and historical significance of the ancient Egyptian pharaohs. Although it remains unclear whether the caption was written by Franz Ferdinand's entourage or at a later time, the Archduke's posture simply makes a statement that he is a mummified member of the elite and rightfully placed in a richly decorated coffin, making him the legitimate king of the Amenhotep dynasty.

Such photographs strengthen a perception of Western superiority in which 'visual sense enables people to take possession of objects and environments' (Urry and Larsen 2011: 158). This trick photography was not only popular among tourists seeking unusual mementos from their occasional visits to Egypt, but also among Egyptologists and Egyptology enthusiasts. Russian Egyptologist Vladimir Golenishchev also took part in this trick photography (Vikentiev 1951: pl. IV). Although the photograph was supposedly taken in his private museum in Saint Petersburg (Vikentiev 1951: 9), it seems more likely that Golenishchev was photographed in a commercial studio in Egypt. The composition, which includes the same coffin lid and small statuette props, mirrors those used in other photographs from Egyptian studios, such as the one depicting Italian explorer Luigi Robecchi-Bricchetti (published in Hornstein 2023: 95).

The production of these colonial-era souvenirs was certainly facilitated by foreign influence and authority in Egypt. These photographs thereby serve as valuable sources for highlighting how the American upper class, European explorers, Egyptologists, and even a figure of ruling authority in Europe benefitted from the Western dominance of Egypt, including control over the procurement of archaeological material culture.

Critical perspective

Extent of the trend

Out of the eleven studio photographs and illustrations identified so far, three different coffin lids are used. Two are nearly identical and feature ancient Egyptian deities, floral motifs, and a few columns of hieroglyphic inscriptions. These coffins appear mainly in photographs produced by the firm A. Strommeyer and J. Heymann (or J. Heyman & Co.) and its successor, P. Dittrich. The third coffin lid, used in Lékégian's studio (see Figure 1), is larger and almost entirely covered in hieroglyphic text. In several photographs, the sitter is accompanied by additional props placed around or at the foot of the coffin. The items include a jackal statuette representing the god Anubis, funerary statuettes, sphinx statues, and funerary masks – most of which are likely modern replicas.

Considering the relatively small number of photographs identified so far, one may consider reassessing the popularity of this trend and questioning whether newspaper articles exaggerated its success. Photographic evidence shows that in 1900, two of the four well-known Cairene studios providing portrait services to tourists – Strommeyer and Heymann, as well as G. Lékégian – also offered this form of trick photography (Brodrick 1900: 991). Provided that written sources are

accurate, more examples could also be found from studios based in Paris, London, Vienna, or New York, where mummy photography was reportedly practiced.

The limited circulation of these photographs is certainly a factor that makes the identification of this phenomenon more challenging. Although the exchange and sale of negatives between studios was relatively common at the time (Cazentre 2013: 240), it is probable that these mummy photographs were kept in the private sphere and were not widely reproduced. Published occasionally, additional photographs are likely preserved in museum collections or held by private collectors, while others may still remain in family albums.

Future avenues of research

Further study into the phenomenon of mummy photography would be valuable, as it appears to be a unique form of souvenir photography. While most photographs date from the late 19th to early 20th century, the Lékégian studio in Cairo likely continued to offer mummy photography at least into the 1920s (Hornstein 2023: 105). Notably, a photograph taken in 1924 represents the only known example that includes a caption in Arabic, dating the image using both Gregorian and Islamic calendars (published in Golia 2010: 82). Further research is necessary, as this example

may reflect the participation and possible adaptation of mummy photography by Egyptian sitters. This photograph may be a valuable starting point to explore the early development of photography among Egyptians, particularly considering the country's changing political context in the 1920s.

It is also noteworthy that newspapers consistently mentioned the participation of women in mummy photography, mentioning figures such as young teenagers in the United States, Mrs. James P. Kernochan – a woman from an influential New York upper-class family during her trip to Egypt (“Mummy Pictures” 1898: 6) – and popular actresses in Paris (“Mummy-Photography” 1899: 5). Almost all identified examples, however, feature men. While mummy photography may have represented ‘a fashionable form of desirability’ for women (Hornstein 2023: 105), the discrepancy between photographic evidence and historical sources is intriguing. One notable exception is a photograph of a woman in a coffin published in 1912 (“Mummy’s the Word: The latest in freak portraiture” 1912: 111) (Figure 7). Subtle traces of her attire remain visible, which suggests that the woman’s dress may have proved challenging to conceal. This detail

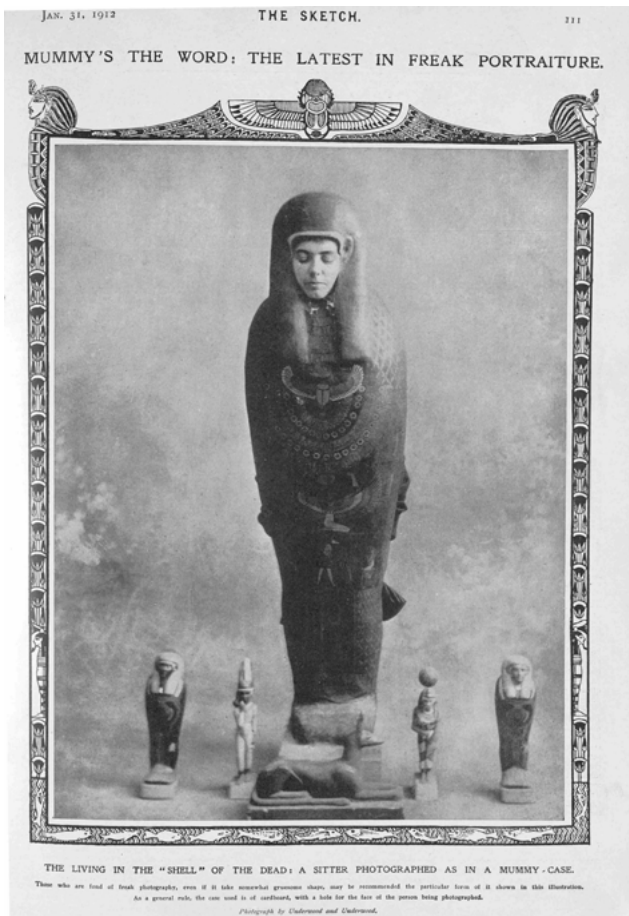


Figure 7. A rare example of female involvement in mummy photography, with part of her dress remaining visible. *The Sketch*, 31 January 1912 © Illustrated London News Group.

is particularly significant as it seems that only a lid was used and not an entire coffin. The presence of the dress serves as a final reminder that in mummy photography,

The sitter's body [...] undergoes an extensive, but incomplete metamorphosis. Crucially, the subject of these transformations never relinquishes their Western identity (Hornstein 2023: 100).

Authenticity of the coffins

It is unclear whether some studios actually owned authentic ancient Egyptian coffins, despite frequent claims in American, British, and French newspapers. The coffin used by Gabriel Lékégian in Cairo was clearly a modern replica, as indicated by the fake hieroglyphs and inaccurate decorative motifs. The authenticity of the one used in the studio of A. Strommeyer and J. Heymann remains unclear. While its shape and broken foot could support its authenticity, the lid was almost certainly painted in the late 19th century to be used as a photographic prop that met the posers' and viewers' expectations of what a well-preserved ancient Egyptian coffin would have looked like. The evidence of such modern restoration is attested in various European and American museum collections, indicating that coffins were repainted with inscriptions and a decorative programme characteristic of the Egyptianising style (Dodson 2009: 57). Whether in Cairo or abroad, newspapers mostly advertised mummy photography as the chance to be photographed in a genuine coffin imported from Cairo ("Mummy Pictures" 1898: 6; "Mummy-Photography" 1899: 5; "A Pretty Face in a Mummy Case" 1908: 1). It is also reasonable to anticipate that the photographer would have asserted the authenticity of this prop to heighten the tourists' interest and curiosity. The reuse of such artefacts in photographic studios would not have been unfamiliar to them, as the purchase, collection, and reuse of mummified remains and funerary artefacts by Western travellers was common practice during this period, commonly referred to as mummymania (Baber 2016).

This paper does not provide a comprehensive assessment of whether photographers were involved in the purchase and reuse of an authentic coffin in their studio. Rather, it argues that they offered the imaginative experience of using a genuine ancient Egyptian artefact. Regardless of whether the coffins were ancient or modern, this method of trick photography allowed photographers to create an illusion of authenticity. This essay stops short of asserting that mummy photography directly promoted empire or legitimised colonial practices. Rather, it offers valuable photographic evidence of popular Western perceptions of ancient Egypt, which reveals a fascination with human remains and ancient Egyptian funerary culture in the context of imperialism and colonial authority. It sheds light on how mummy photography, facilitated by colonial practices, captured the Western ideal of ancient Egypt. While it is impossible to determine whether the photographers and sitters supported colonial power and the acquisition of archaeological material culture, their active participation suggests an engagement with what was considered a perfectly 'appropriate souvenir' during a time of colonial authority, without which mummy photography would likely not have been possible ("Mummy Pictures" 1898: 6).

Concluding thoughts

This unconventional trend, likely originating in Egypt and later embraced by visitors from major Western powers such as Britain, France, and the United States, provides a unique lens through which to explore several themes, such as the history of Egyptology, reception of ancient Egypt, and history of tourism and photography. Despite being mostly forgotten today, mummy photography once attracted a diverse audience who could afford this type of photography. Written sources suggest that participants in the United States and France ranged from flirting youths to Parisian actresses.

In Egypt, photographic evidence demonstrates that explorers, archaeologists, diplomats, as well as religious and prominent political figures took part in this phenomenon in the late 19th to early 20th centuries.

The relationship between photographer and subject becomes apparent in the benefits each derived from mummy photography. For studios facing decline at the turn of the 20th century, this trend offered a novel way to attract customers, providing them with unconventional and amusing images distinct from typical touristic photographs. For the visitor, mummy photography offered a means of personalising a unique Egyptian souvenir that stood in engaging contrast to the ubiquitous landscape photographs of the time. This trick photography facilitated a multi-sensorial experience, where sitters could actively participate in an imaginative journey to ancient Egypt.

However, beneath their whimsical appearance and the seemingly light-hearted engagement with ancient Egypt, these historic photographs illustrate the selection processes employed to construct specific visual narratives. Various ancient Egyptian symbols, such as the coffin, statuettes, archaeological ruins, and the Great Pyramids, deliberately serve to obscure modernity. The studio thereby becomes a performative space in which to control and stage a Western ideal and stereotypical image of Egypt. It offered Western and Central European, American, and Russian visitors a way to create a direct link with the ancient history of the colonised country they visited.

Beyond its role in providing entertainment and souvenirs, the collection of photographs discussed here serves as material evidence of the prevalent mentality of the time. It underlines an overlooked practice of occupation and domination, specifically, the construction of an ancient Egyptian identity through photographic portraiture. As individuals momentarily become the symbolic occupants of an ancient Egyptian coffin, they engage in a problematic appropriation of material culture and identity. This phenomenon, deeply embedded in the construction of visual narratives in a colonial context, was facilitated by the prevailing colonial power and foreign authority in Egypt. While newspapers advertised mummy pictures as tasteful and appropriate souvenirs, it is essential to critically re-evaluate this overlooked material today.

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The One and the Many, and the ONE-TO-MANY: Data Models and Databases in Egyptology

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Abstract

Data modelling and databases have become an integral part of Egyptological research. Starting with analogue data collection from the 19th century onwards, today's landscape offers various digital databases, ranging from text and images to prosopographical information and archaeological records. The needs towards data have evolved over the years and reflect the wealth of material studied in Egyptology. Changes in approaches to data modelling and data storage are observable in both the broad survey of databases presented as well as selected case studies of successful projects.

The goal of this paper is to give an overview of the history of data modelling in Egyptology as well as the concrete practice present today and to offer suggestions based on these findings. Several issues with sustainability were identified in the survey of databases, namely long-term availability, technical debt, funding, historic data backlogs, data complexity, and the disconnected landscape of projects. By taking the case studies and technological advances into account, the author proposes and outlines the following solutions: standardisation, Open Source principles, community involvement, and use of Linked Data.

Keywords

Databases; Digital Egyptology; Data Modelling; History of Egyptology; Methodology

Egyptological data models

Any collection of data is based on a model – either implicit or explicit. Data models in digital databases are by nature explicit, but many earlier data collections can be less formally organised than a digital database would be, i.e. into tables with distinct headers. Such data models may align with ontologies of a broader scope and may be used for multiple database systems. The most prominent model in heritage studies is the CIDOC-CRM which aims to offer a framework for data interoperability (Bekiari *et al.* 2023: 9).¹ As a system agnostic reference model it does not rely on a single technical implementation such as RDF (Champin and Lindström 2025).² Instead of complete database schemas, ontologies model the underlying semantics and may be implemented differently on a case-by-case

¹ The CIDOC-CRM refers to the Conceptual Reference Model as proposed by the CIDOC (International Committee on Documentation or *Comité international pour la documentation*). Its framework offers an object centred approach to object documentation which is based on relationships or between entities. For example, the Great Sphinx may be further characterised with “P53 has former or current location” – Giza. The most recent version can be found on the official website (CIDOC n.d.).

² RDF or the Resource Description Framework offers a formal way to model logical statements in a triple format, e.g. (simplified) “Rosetta Stone” – “is part of collection” – “British museum”. Several technical implementations of RDF exist, most notably TURTLE which is used to write down triples in textual form. The current Working Draft for the RDF schema may be found at Tomaszuk and Haudebourg 2025, the primer at Champin and Lindström 2025. RDF triples can also be used to represent concepts from the CIDOC-CRM.

basis.³ The same holds true for the much broader term Linked Open Data (LOD), which itself is a concept of the Semantic Web (Berners-Lee 2006; Berners-Lee and Hendler 2001).⁴

Modelling in Egyptology, for the purposes of this article, thus starts with analogue data collection. These endeavours often began with filing card systems. For example, the *Berliner Wörterbuch* project first collected texts, which were then processed by a group of 34 researchers and written out on filing cards (Wb 1: vi). In the first ten years of work, an average of 5000 such cards were produced yearly (Grunert and Reineke 1992: 9), now available as digitised records online (Berlin-Brandenburgische Akademie der Wissenschaften n.d.). Similarly, the *Topographical Bibliography of Ancient Egyptian Hieroglyphs, Texts, and Paintings*, compiled by Porter and Moss, collected bibliographical references (PM I: viii–ix). These analogue collections organised data on Egyptian source material, which was the basis for later (digital) systems. Data modelling, whether digital or not, is therefore an integral part of Egyptological research (Bergman 2009).

General developments

In 1970, Edgar F. Codd first proposed the relational model which is used for all Structured Query Language (SQL) databases (Codd 1970). In 1986, the first International Organization for Standardization (ISO) standard for SQL was published (American National Standards Institute, Inc. 1986). Within the same year, Ernest W. Adams and Nigel Strudwick gave the first lecture about the usage of SQL in Egyptology (Adams and Strudwick 2008: 183). This lecture was later published in 1990 and updated in 2008. Relational databases follow a structure of interconnected tables with predefined fields. Altering the basic structure of such a database is not recommended and may lead to inconsistent data (Moniruzzaman and Hossain 2013: 2–3).

This was followed in 1992 with the earliest international efforts for Egyptological data standards (van der Plas 1992). The *Integrated Egyptological Database System* (IEDS) aimed to facilitate data sharing, which necessitated standardisation and the development of a robust thesaurus (van der Plas 1992: 38–39). The project was designed to use a common framework developed by UNESCO. At the same time, web technology as well as noSQL databases saw rapid development in the 1990s (Bergman 2009: 210–211), including early Egyptological web applications and datasets available via the internet (Ruffing 2005). The term noSQL denotes databases that are no longer (only) following a tabular structure, such as document databases, key-value-stores, or graph databases (Moniruzzaman and Hossain 2013: 4). These databases allow for different data structures and even unstructured data, and are often easier to change at a fundamental level (Moniruzzaman and Hossain 2013: 3–4). However, these advantages come at the cost of possible losses in consistency. These aspects might need to be monitored more closely when using noSQL databases.

In 2001, Tim Berners-Lee and James Hendler proposed the Semantic Web (Berners-Lee and Hendler 2001). Linked data offered a better understanding of the semantic links within data collections and the web, later leading to the development of Linked (Open) Data principles (Berners-Lee 2006). Notably, the CIDOC-CRM model can be used with this approach to data modelling (Bekiari *et al.* 2023: 9). Even for earlier database models, the possibility to link data was seen as a major advantage of digital databases compared to analogue data collection (Hafemann 1999: 98).

³ Ontology here, refers to the concept as it is used in computer science. An ontology in this sense provides a set of concepts, properties and relationships which may be used to describe real world phenomena. The CIDOC-CRM is an example of an ontology used to describe heritage data. On the other hand, a database schema is the fixed table (or other format) structure which is used to store data. Database schemas can be based on formal ontologies.

⁴ Linked Open Data (LOD) refers to all data made available via the internet which is both available under an open license and linked semantically to other data points. The Semantic Web as proposed in the articles by Berners-Lee is an extension of the traditional internet, making it machine readable by using semantic links between concepts.

Database survey and case studies

Database survey

The database survey used $n=119$ databases as published in the *Bibliography of Egyptological Databases and Datasets* (Ilin-Tomich and Konrad n.d.), as of September 2024. This dataset was chosen for its comprehensive and up-to-date entries. Information about the databases was collected via the associated websites if available.

With the exception of a few years, the extant database number grew at a relatively linear pace of roughly one to two new databases per year (Figure 1), only counting databases where this information was freely available. This may, however, be explained by a large number of websites having gone offline since their inception (see also below), which consequently could not be added to the bibliography, or skewed by the databases with no date information. The date given for any database was collected from its website. Higher numbers can be seen for 2009 (five new databases), 2018 (four), and 2020 (five). Given the generally low number of new online databases per year, no conclusions can be drawn from this observation.

Of the total number surveyed, 47 databases or datasets included in the *Bibliography* were no longer accessible online (i.e. approximately 39.5%; Figure 2), indicating issues with sustainability. Several of these were available in archive formats with usage restrictions which was determined by accessing the associated websites. As these offered no or only partial information on the respective projects, the databases were not included in further examinations. One example of a database deemed no longer fully available would be the archived version of the *Animal Mummies Database* (Animal Mummies 2017). While most data are still available via the Internet Archive's *Wayback Machine*, the pages as they are archived there were crawled and retrieved at different points in time, making it impossible to gauge whether there could be inconsistencies or missing data from later versions.

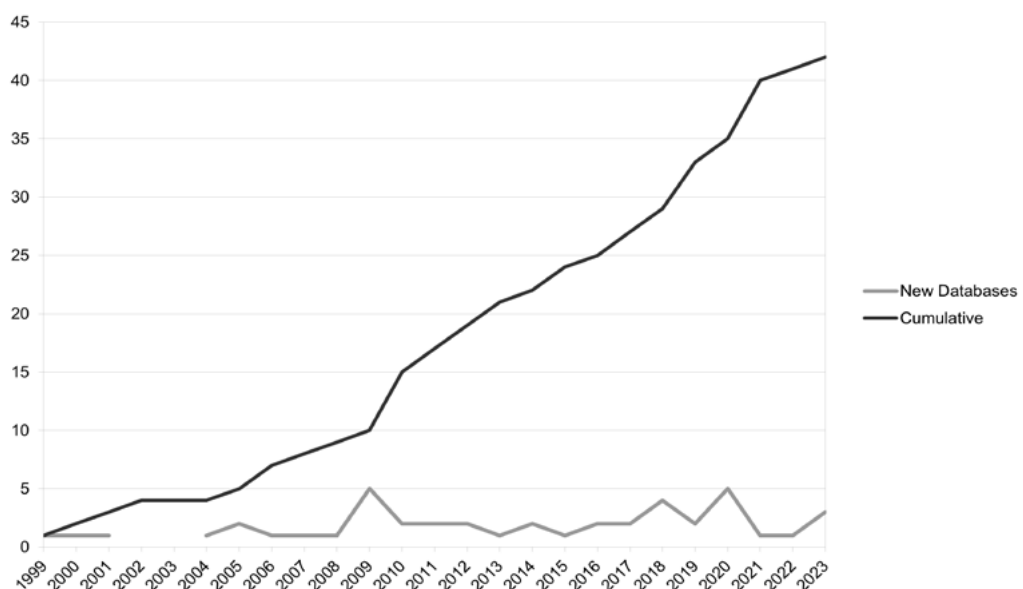


Figure 1. Number of new databases per year and cumulative increase. Figure by the author, using data from Ilin-Tomich and Konrad, n.d.

Out of the $n=72$ remaining databases and datasets, 45 (62.5%) indicated no earlier projects from which they derived while 27 (37.5%) were based on an earlier, often analogue, project (Figure 3). For the latter, reasons given for moving from an earlier project were first, offering online access (twelve), followed by digitisation (nine) and a switch to newer software or technology (eight), and last, to move or merge datasets (two) (Figure 4). The survey only includes cases where such reasons were clearly stated; multiple reasons could be given for a single project.

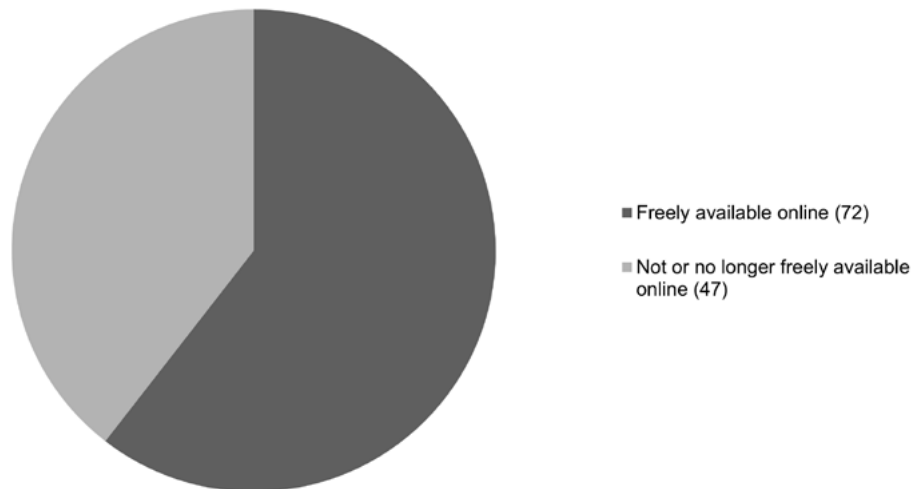


Figure 2. Online availability of databases surveyed. Figure by the author, using data from Ilin-Tomich and Konrad, n.d.

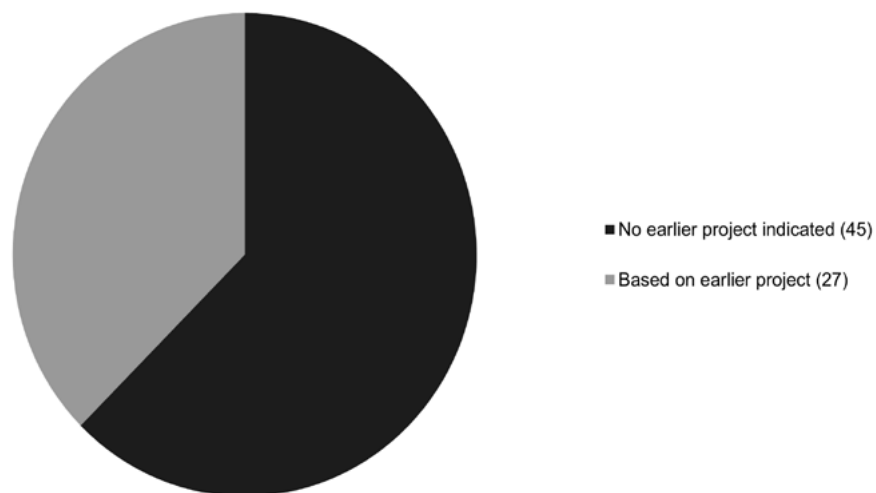


Figure 3. Databases based on earlier projects. Figure by the author, using data from Ilin-Tomich and Konrad, n.d.

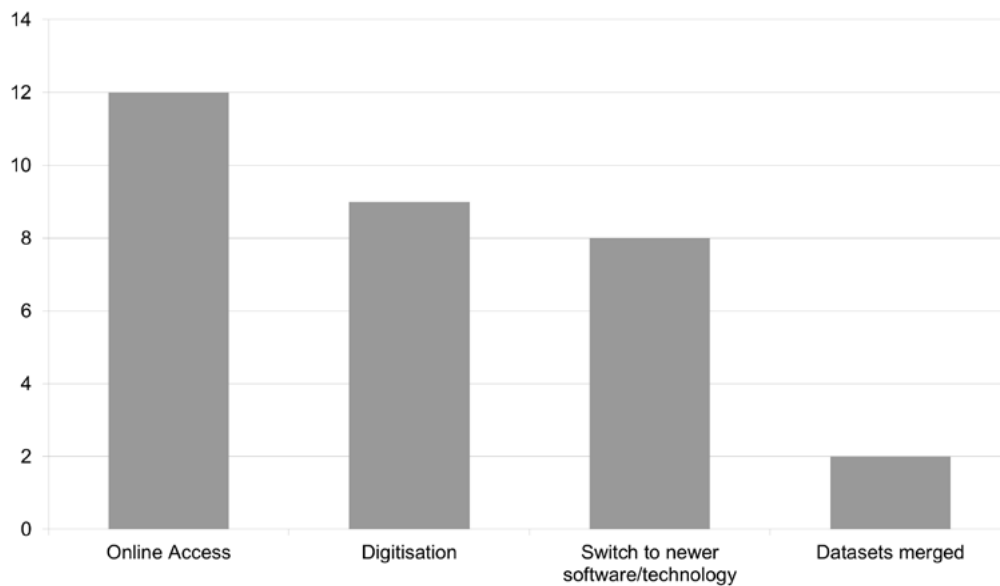


Figure 4. Reasons given for project migrations. Figure by the author, based on data collected in the survey.

Major problems identified in the survey

As stated above, multiple projects were no longer available or only usable in a limited capacity. From the survey, the following major problems for Egyptological data modelling could be identified: first, the projects are more of a patchwork than a cohesive structure. There often is little to no connectivity between datasets, making interoperability difficult to achieve (noted as early as van der Plas 1992 and Hafemann 1999). Secondly, these projects often use and store historic data, and this data then builds up as a backlog that needs to be addressed. These two aspects are further complicated by data complexity in Egyptology, including texts (e.g. Gerhards and Konrad 2022; Seidlmayer 2005), objects (e.g. Nordström 2016; Tomorad 2015), or images (e.g. Beinlich and Hallaf 2007; Mader *et al.* 2013), which all call for their own standards and best practises. Last, given any project, the question of long-term (online and bitstream) availability is often a problem and relies on robust funding as well as solutions for technical debt (Gülden 2023). In summary, Egyptological data is often stored in a way that may not be sustainable long-term.

Case studies

The following case studies were chosen as representative best-practice examples and are briefly presented with the aim of showcasing different approaches to databases and data models; conversely, projects not included are not necessarily any better or worse than the case studies. The case studies were chosen as examples for approaches to standardisation, treatment of different material categories (text, objects, scenes, prosopographic data), solutions to long term availability, and use case examples for recent technological advances. Only projects with clear descriptions of their technology stack, online availability, and associated publications were considered. The projects are listed in chronological order.

As with many projects, the *Thesaurus Linguae Aegyptiae* (TLA) is based on the digitised *Wörterbuch* records (Seidlmayer 2005: 107). Efforts to digitise the *Wörterbuch* were already underway from 1985 onwards (Grunert and Reineke 1992: 12). The project was first available online in 2004; its web interface underwent major updates and is now available as v.2 (Grallert *et al.* 2024). The texts made available

through the project are offered under a free license, and all records are available in standardised JSON and TEI-XML, meaning that reuse is explicitly allowed and can be streamlined technologically.⁵ Entries are generated by a core team and collaboratively by researchers from different institutions in a community effort. Including this larger group of researchers from different institutes made expanding the project to its current corpus size feasible (Seidlmayer 2005: 108). The project is an academy project and, as such, has secured long-term funding (Grallert *et al.* 2024). Following the probable long-term availability of data, TLA entries can be used as fixed reference points.

The *Meketre Scene Repository* (MeKeTRE) project was started in 2009 and used citizen science for data entry (Mader *et al.* 2013: 121–123). The project aimed to collect and analyse scenes from the Middle Kingdom (Kahlbacher and Zelenková 2011: 465–466). Anyone with an interest could add annotations to the scenes in the dataset (Mader *et al.* 2013: 123), making this database an example of citizen science. Involving a broader public can be an engaging way to promote (humanities) research, besides facilitating data collection. As a framework, taxonomical ordering was applied to the scene content, which could help alleviate possible inconsistencies. The project also notably implemented Linked Data standards (Mader *et al.* 2013: 125), being one of the first in Egyptology, and aligned its data to an existing long-term archiving standard based on Fedora Commons (Mader *et al.* 2013: 126). These technical decisions make the project archivable long-term and its data interoperable with other datasets.

Starting from retro-digitisation and integrating previous palaeographic work, the *Altägyptische Kursivschriften* (AKU) project has been operating since 2015 (AKU n.d.). In 2022, its data was made available via an open-access database. Special consideration was given to long-term availability of data (Gülden 2023: 137). The FAIR and CARE principles are explicitly taken into account for research data management purposes, thus adhering to well-established standards of archiving. Consideration of the CARE principles seems to be especially prudent when dealing with data in Egyptology as the discipline had its start as a colonial endeavour (see Global Indigenous Data Alliance n.d.) The data model builds on the already established *Trismegistos* data model and has a defined set of minimal compulsory metadata (Gerhards and Konrad 2022: 187). Using Linked Open Data principles, the project connects its data to other data points. By choosing to work with a widely used data standard, the data can be integrated into other, interdisciplinary projects much more easily.

Starting in the same year, 2015, the *Thot Sign List* is building on Gardiner's and other sign lists (Polis *et al.* 2021: 55–57): its sign codes either align with them or modify them for further distinction between signs. By integrating the older, widely used system, the new sign codes are easily understood by Egyptologists while offering a much more detailed distinction between signs; this approach is particularly useful when building upon older standards widely used by researchers. The database uses a relational one-to-many model (Polis *et al.* 2021: 60), making it an SQL database. This ensures data consistency and easy portability to other SQL-based systems. Additionally, the project collects structured metadata for its sources (Polis *et al.* 2021: 61–62). It relies partly on monitored crowdsourcing to improve its data (Polis *et al.* 2021: 72), controlling data quality as well as offering the possibility of continuous data improvement and enrichment.

⁵ JSON – JavaScript Object Notation – is a lightweight data interchange format (Bray 2017). It is not dependent on a single programming language; for automatic data queries via the internet (i.e. using an application programming interface [API]) it is one of the more commonly used data formats. The other is XML (Extensible Markup Language) which is structurally more similar to HTML and usually follows a predetermined schema (Bray *et al.* 2008). This data format is also used when encoding TEI (Text Encoding Initiative) data (TEI Consortium 2025), the *de-facto* standard for encoding textual data in the humanities. The usage of XML ensures both human and machine readability and enables researchers to tag linguistic or publication properties.

Since 2018, the *Persons and Names of the Middle Kingdom and Early New Kingdom* (PNM) project has collected prosopographic data, first of the Middle Kingdom and later of the New Kingdom (Ilin-Tomich n.d.). The database is set up in MySQL and can be accessed with ontology-based RDF, using the advantages of both SQL and noSQL. Such an ontology ensures that semantic content, not just the file binary, remains understandable. To access the RDF data, there is a designated SPARQL endpoint for queries.⁶ This endpoint could act as an Application Programming Interface (API) to integrate data from this database into other projects, or it could be used to collect specific subsets of data.

Running from 2019 to 2021, the *Nachlass des Ägyptologen Adolf Erman* project comprised the digitisation of the Erman estate as well as making it freely available online (Hermes-Wladarsch 2021: 177). All writings are available as .pdf files and are, wherever possible, put in the public domain (Hermes Wladarsch 2021: 178). The content was made accessible using the Kalliope guidelines, which means that all data is enhanced with structured metadata (Hermes-Wladarsch 2021: 179). Structured metadata and Open Data policies markedly improve the findability and usability of documents.

Since 2023, the *Prosopographica Memphitica* project has been available online in its current form (Herzberg 2023). The project comprises a regional prosopography of the Memphite region for the second millennium BCE. The database was first created from filing cards and later converted to a relational database using PostgreSQL (Herzberg 2021: 233). The author notes that for such large-scale data, relational structures are very different from analogue templates. This transfer to digital records allowed for the creation of unique identifiers within the project. Currently, the data is also available in structured JSON to provide long-term accessibility (Herzberg 2023). This data format can also easily be used in other applications and seamlessly imported into document store databases. The complete dataset underlying the application is available (Herzberg 2019), but the online interface additionally offers a novel data visualisation with graphs (Herzberg 2021). The focus on graph visualisation in the online presentation exemplifies a shift towards new approaches in data presentation, aside from the well-known tabular formats.

Recommendations and conclusion

As seen in the case studies, data modelling has become an integral part of Egyptological practice, which influences research output. The survey as well as the case studies show that successful projects tend to be available long-term; additionally, they are relevant to either one large group or multiple different groups of researchers.

To improve sustainability, the following recommendations can be extracted from the case studies:⁷

Standardisation makes data much more useful for the broader research community. The development of subject-specific standards should address the needs present in Egyptology and be interoperable with standards used in other humanities disciplines. All case studies show that, where possible, established formats and standards for file formats or metadata standards also facilitate long-term availability and interoperability. Particularly where standards used in different disciplines are implemented, interdisciplinary projects can profit from easier data integration.

Open Source principles likewise allow for easier access and sharing of information. In publishing Open Source, reproducibility and reuse are facilitated. Open licenses offer the opportunity for

⁶ SPARQL, the recursive acronym for SPARQL Protocol And RDF Query Language, is the query language for RDF triples and is therefore used when querying RDF based databases (Harris and Seaborne 2013).

⁷ These recommendations also align with the FAIR data principles (Barker *et al.* 2022), although they do not cover all of them.

truly long-term archiving and documentation. When data is available to all, collaborative efforts to find (software) solutions become possible. As seen prominently with the TLA, MeKeTRE, and the Thot Sign List, community involvement can also help with data curation and acquisition. Data sharing within the community once again improves reproducibility.

Last, publishing Linked (Open) Data offers the opportunity to integrate legacy data without compromising the current data scheme, as can be seen in the case study of the AKU project. By linking data, mapping and compatibility of datasets can be improved. With enough links, this could also facilitate a clearer identification of data points. Additionally, a query endpoint, such as the PNM project provides, makes it easier to find links within the dataset and to link other data to it.

These measures can, however, only be a first step toward better data management. As seen in the case studies, none of the principles outlined above are dependent on a single technical solution – rather, they can be used as design principles when conceptualising a new database. Their implementation in all Egyptological data projects would open the door for better (long term) data availability and usability.

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Naked Female Figurines in the Palace Area of Qantir: Sexual Images or Objects of Protection?

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Abstract

This paper focuses on 14 naked female figurines found in excavation area Q VIII at Qantir, in which a palatial complex has been excavated since 2016. After a brief introduction and discussion of the history of research of naked female figurines in Egyptology, the excavation area itself is described. The paper's main part focuses on the material and manufacture, and the archaeological context of the figurines found in Q VIII as well as their interpretation(s). These are further supported by means of comparisons to other sites where figurines are found, which are referred to throughout the discussion.

Keywords

Qantir; Piramesse; Naked Female Figurines; Ramesside Period

Naked female figurines

Female figurines have been found at various archaeological sites throughout Egypt, including the Eastern Desert and Sinai Peninsula. Attested in Egypt from the Predynastic to Roman periods, they often derive from the debris of houses, tombs, and, less frequently, temples, as well as Nubian forts (Arnette 2022: 503; Pinch 1993: 208–209; Teeter 2010: 5; Waraksa 2008: 2).¹ Most of these objects are dated to the Middle Kingdom and later, and it should be noted that figurines dating to the Graeco-Roman Period might also belong to other traditions and may be interpreted differently than those discussed here. Female figurines have also been found in the context of other ancient cultures, neighbouring Egypt, such as in the Mediterranean and the Near East, exhibiting many similar features (Arnette 2022: 504; Kuckertz and Nebe 2022: 32; Waraksa 2008: 1; see also Desroches-Noblecourt 1953).

In general, female figurines as discussed in the following can be defined as representations of women, which were mostly depicted naked, and only sometimes dressed (Arnette 2022: 503; Waraksa 2008: 1). They could be made from different materials, such as fired and unfired clay, stone, and from faience, ivory, or wood (Arnette 2022: 503; Waraksa 2008: 1). These figurines were either carved or modelled by hand or moulded in an open or two-piece mould in which the damp clay was pressed into (Arnette 2022: 503, 524–526; Backhouse 2013: 31; Waraksa 2008: 1). Many were painted and, especially during the 18th–20th dynasties, some more elaborate pieces, and particularly those figurines lying on a bed, received a polychrome decoration (Backhouse 2013: 31; Waraksa 2008: 1). From the late 18th dynasty onwards, some figurines made of pottery or stone depict women lying on beds, or slabs which are probably intended to represent beds. Some figurines were accompanied by a child – either held in the woman's arms and being nursed, or placed beside the female body, and further accessories could be added (Pinch 1983: 406; Pinch 1993: 207–209; Teeter 2010: 34, 41, 48–49; Waraksa 2008: 1).

¹ For some analyses of such figurines also see Arnette (2022); Backhouse (2013); Kuckertz and Nebe (2022); Pinch (1993); Teeter (2010); Waraksa (2009); Weiss (2015).

Various scholars have studied corpora of female figurines found at other sites throughout Egypt, analysing their archaeological context, drawing up typologies, and suggesting interpretations.² Early interpretations were already made by Petrie (1927: 59, nos 390–391), Frankfort and Pendlebury (1933: 99), and Hayes (1953: 221), claiming them to be toys or dolls. Others interpreted them as depictions of dancing girls or servants placed into male burials to provide the deceased with sexual pleasure for their entertainment (Pinch 1993: 211; Winlock 1932: 36),³ and suggested them to be maid-servants in the afterlife when placed into female burials (Hayes 1953: 221). Further scholars have associated naked female figurines with the marital relationship (Hölscher 1954: 11). The so-called ‘concubine’ figurines have been interpreted as erotic bed mates and sexual partner of a deceased man in the afterlife,⁴ and magical representations which should stimulate fertility and project the image of mother and child. They were thus placed in a funerary context, which furthermore indicates that their functions would continue in the afterlife (Hornblower 1929: 40; Janssen and Janssen 1990: 7, 46). The concubine-theory and all other above-mentioned theories have already been criticised and dismissed by many scholars, especially since female figurines were also found in tombs of women – and not only men – as well as in houses and temples. In general, more figurines stem from domestic sites than funerary contexts (Boutantin 2001: 79; Hornblower 1929: 40; Pinch 1983: 410, 1993: 211 and 214; Quirke 1998; Tooley 1991). Additionally, and contradicting their interpretation as toys or dolls, female figurines were also found at sites unlikely to be visited by children, such as Gebel Zeit in a mining region (Quirke 1998: 144).⁵ Some were also found in fortresses such as Buhen and Uronarti, both in a military and domestic context, which seems to indicate a protective function rather than usage as toys (Quirke 1998: 141, 145–146, 149).

Nowadays, another term to describe naked female figurines has been suggested; namely ‘fertility figurines’ (Pinch 1983: 405, 1993: 225). This term was first used by Bruyère and suggests that the figurines were used in fertility rituals for the continuation of the family (Bruyère 1939: 131; Budin 2014: 123). Found in tombs, houses, and temples,⁶ they are said to have served to enhance and protect their owners’ fertility, both during their life and death, belonging to the magical and religious sphere (Hornblower 1929: 40; Pinch 1993: 225; Tooley 1991: 104–105, 107). The figurines were suggested to have also been offered to spirits of the dead or deities that were associated with fertility as ex-votos (Arnette 2022: 507; Pinch 1993: 225). As votive offerings,⁷ Pinch associates them especially with Hathor, in whose temples and shrines several female figurines were found,⁸ and who is most closely linked to fertility (Pinch 1993: 225; Teeter 2010: 26). This suggested term and interpretation is further supported by inscriptions found on two figurines from the Middle Kingdom or First Intermediate Period (Arnette 2022: 507): on figurine Berlin, ÄM14517,⁹ for instance, which is holding a child in its arms, an inscription says, ‘May there be given birth to your daughter Sah.’ (Arnette 2022: 507; Janssen and Janssen 1990: 7). Scholars have, furthermore,

² A first attempt of creating a typology for, and major work on, figurines has been published by Pinch (1993), focusing on figurines found at sites dedicated to Hathor, namely Deir el-Bahari, Faras, Mirgissa, Serabit el-Khadim, and Gebel Zeit. She has also written an article on figurines from Deir el-Medina and Tell el-Amarna (Pinch 1983). Furthermore, see Teeter (2010), for example, publishing the figurines from Medinet Habu, as well as Waraksa (2009) on the figurines from the Mut precinct in Karnak. Arnette (2022), Backhouse (2013), and Weiss (2015) discuss figurines from Deir el-Medina, and Kuckertz and Nebe (2022) analyse figurines from Elephantine.

³ Pinch does indeed note that they might depict *hnr* dancers, though they were not shown as actively dancing (Pinch 1993: 211, 214).

⁴ Janssen and Janssen (1990) and Petrie (1927), both, distinguish them from those female figurines which they interpreted as toys by means of their emphasised genitalia (Janssen and Janssen 1990: 46), and Petrie (1927: 60, obj. 423) further notes that it is not certain whether they arose from the dolls.

⁵ This is, additionally, a votive context (Quirke 1998: 144).

⁶ Boutantin (2001: 80) additionally notes figurines found in the central part of a palace.

⁷ An interpretation also supported by Janssen and Janssen (1990: 46) for some figurines, and by Boutantin (2001: 79–80).

⁸ Pinch (1993: 221) states that 305 of 321 figurines found in temples come from edifices dedicated to Hathor.

⁹ Its provenance is unknown, and thus it could not only have come from a tomb, but also a shrine (Tooley 1991: 106).

suggested that the figurines may also signify the end of the ritualised process of birth. This has been supported by their resembling some iconographic features of New Kingdom ostraca depicting postpartum rites, including – among other things – the depiction of children, mirrors, and kohl pots (Arnette 2022: 506; for these ostraca see Arnette 2015; Backhouse 2012, 2020). Waraksa argues for an interpretation exceeding that of fertility figurines, due to the fact that most of the figurines were found in the refuse of domestic sites and temples. In her opinion, the figurines' breakage should also be taken into account, and she has debated if such breakage was intentional (Waraksa 2009: 18–21) associating it with the figurines' usage in a magical or ritual context (Budin 2014: 26–27). Waraksa points to two magical texts calling to female figurines with formulae to repel snake venom and to cure stomach aches, further suggesting a magico-medical use of the objects (Waraksa 2009: 131–154). This might further be supported by the deposit of figurines in a magician's cache in Ramesseum Tomb 5 dating to the 12th dynasty. The objects found in the tomb include a box in which literary as well as medical and magical papyri were stored, a paddle doll, and three further female figurines (Arnette 2022: 509; Gardiner 1955: 1; Quibell 1898: 3; Tooley 1991: 105).

The diversity of naked female figurines, as well as them being found in different contexts and existing over a long period of time, might suggest that the figurines' usage varied (Arnette 2022:

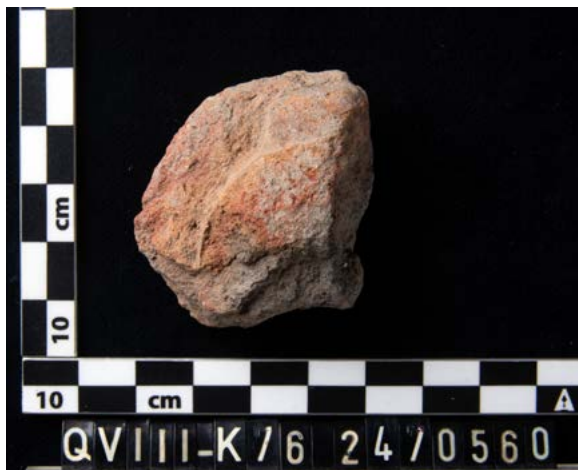


Figure 1. Head fragment FZN 24/0560 (Photo: Robert Stetefeld, © Qantir Piramesse Project).



Figure 2. Foot fragment FZN 17/0304b (Photo: Robert Stetefeld, © Qantir Piramesse Project).



Figure 3. Torso FZN 17/0082 (Photo: Robert Stetefeld, © Qantir Piramesse Project).

510; Backhouse 2013: 36; Pinch 1993: 225–234; Teeter 2010: 26). Yet, Pinch (1993: 211) argues for all different types of naked female figurines to be linked with each other, and so she suggests that an interpretation fitting all figurines would be more accurate than one explaining the meaning of some figurines only.

Naked female figurines in Excavation Area Q VIII

Excavations in area Q VIII of Qantir have been carried out between 2016 and 2024 (Franzmeier, Verbovsek, Shalaby *et al.*, forthcoming [Franzmeier *et al.*a, forthcoming]; Franzmeier, Verbovsek, Kirschner *et al.*, forthcoming [Franzmeier *et al.*b, forthcoming]). Five different strata and several buildings have been distinguished so far, dating from the late 18th/early 19th dynasties to modern times (Figure 4). Stratum relative (rel.) a comprises modern layers. It is followed upon by str. rel. b, dating from the Third Intermediate Period to the early Late Period. Within this stratum, an irrigation ditch was found. Additionally, remains of a lime burning kiln, as well as further traces of lime-burning can be ascribed to stratum rel. b, as well as pits, which can be connected to the demolishing of the palace of stratum rel. c by removing its walls' mudbricks. Stratum rel. c can be split into c/1 and c/2. Stratum rel. c/1 dates to the Ramesside Period, most likely the later reign of Ramesses II to the early 20th dynasty. It comprises the foundations – and thus trenches and column pits – of a palatial building. Stratum rel. c/2 contains annexe buildings, as well as some single contexts, and can probably be identified as the earlier phase of the later palatial building. This stratum was dated to the 19th dynasty, more precisely to the later reign of Ramesses II to the later 19th dynasty. An 'older palace' in the north and a villa in the south of the site can be ascribed to stratum rel. d, which is dated to the 19th dynasty, and the earlier reign of Ramesses II. Stratum rel. e – consisting of several separate strata – can only be attested in a few excavated squares, and dates to the late 18th/early 19th dynasties (Franzmeier *et al.*a forthcoming: tab. 1; Franzmeier *et al.*b forthcoming: tab. 1).

14 naked female figurines were found in area Q VIII, seven in the northern part – excavated in 2016–2017 – and seven in the southern part – excavated in 2022–2024. All figurines are merely preserved as fragments: two head fragments have been found (Figure 1), as well as the torsi of five figurines (Figure 3), four legs, and three feet fragments (Figure 2). The latter have been standing on so-called footboards. All fragments are chipped and worn. Two of the fragments – a head and a torso – are part of one figurine. Due to their state of preservation, no overarching typology can be presented. However, all figurines seem to have been lying on a slab. This would suggest them to be comparable to types 6B or 6C of Pinch (1993: 207–209); it remains unclear if a child might have accompanied (some of) the figurines, either lying in the female's arms or by her side.

Material and manufacture

Only one of the 14 naked female figurines was made of limestone; all others were made of ceramics, fabric I.E.01 to be exact.¹⁰ It dates to the Ramesside Period and is the by far most common ceramic fabric at Qantir. Most likely produced locally (Aston 1998: 62–63; Aston *et al.* 2007: 521), it might hence point to a manufacture of the figurines at Piramesse. All figurines seem to be made in moulds, though no such moulds have been found for the production of this group of objects at Qantir. However, moulds of shabtis were found in Qantir, thus proving the production of shabtis at Qantir (Moje 1999: 59–62). This is further evidence for a local production of naked female figurines.

¹⁰ The fabric referred to belongs to the Qantir fabric terminology developed by David Aston (see Aston 1998: 60–81; Aston *et al.* 2007: 521–522).

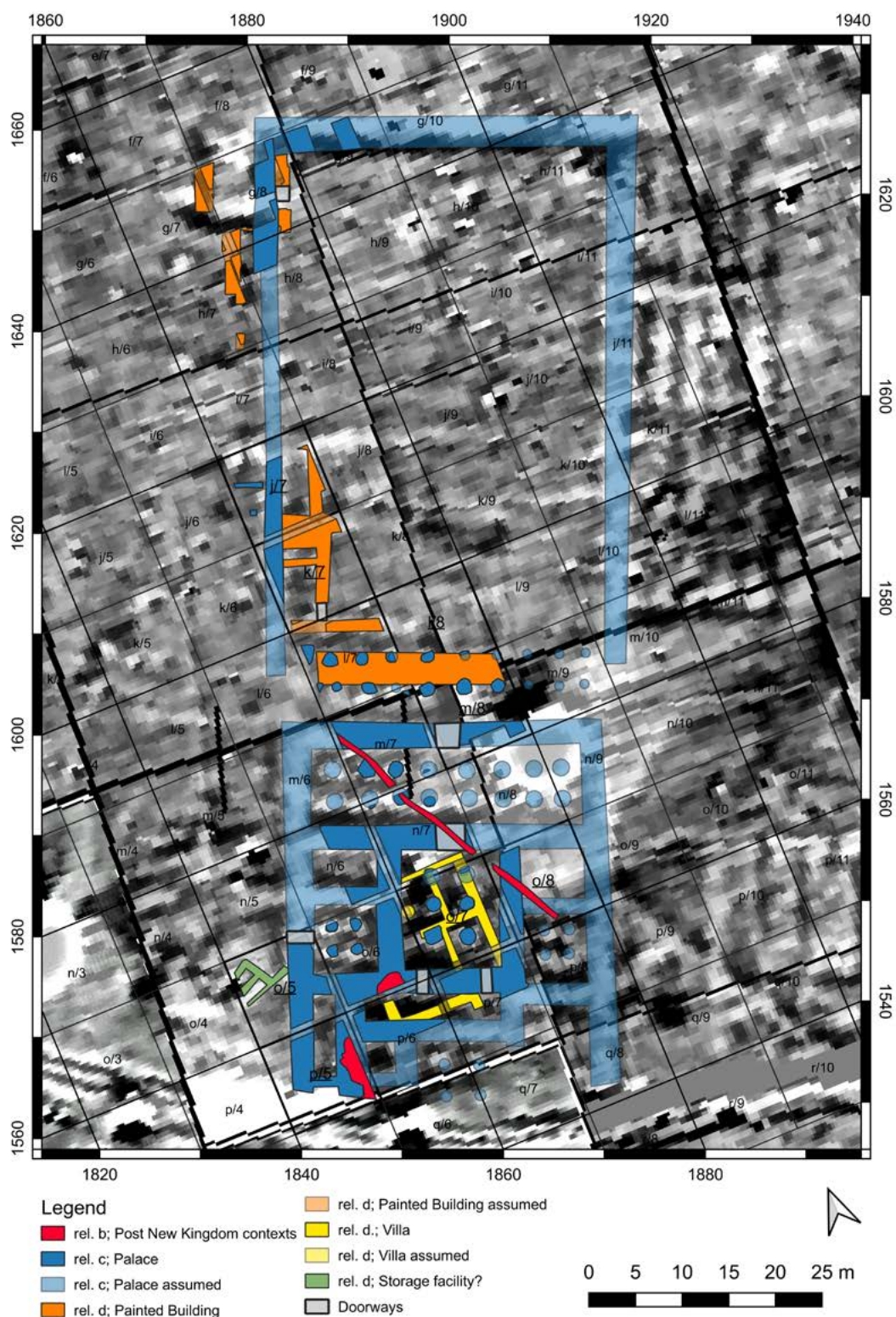


Figure 4. The palace complex in Q VIII (Plan: Frank Stremke © Qantir-Piramesse-Project).



Figure 5. Potmark on figurine FZN 17/0276 (Photo: Robert Stetefeld, © Qantir-Piramesse-Project).



Figure 6. Potmark on figurine FZN 17/0065 (Photo: Robert Stetefeld, © Qantir-Piramesse-Project).



Figure 7. Fingerholes on figurine FZN 17/0422 (Photo: Robert Stetefeld, © Qantir-Piramesse-Project).

Pieces made of limestone have been connected to the creation of moulds later used for the production of clay figurines; however, comparable material looks rather different, as for example a stamp used for both the production of a shabti and a female figurine (Loeben 2014: 64–65 and 67, fig. 22). Whether the limestone fragment found in Q VIII could be used as such a stamp cannot be verified, though it would point to a production of the Qantir figurines on a local level too.

Potmarks are carved into the backs of at least two figurines (Figures 5 and 6),¹¹ deep holes on the back of a third piece (Figure 7) might either be identified as another potmark or as fingerprints stemming from pressing the damp clay into a mould or removing the clay from it for firing. In this case, the latter option seems more probable, especially since this fragment can be added to another fragment (Figure 5) of the same figurine, which is already bearing a potmark. In general, potmarks could be carved into clay objects either before or after firing (Haring 2018: 16 and 42). In the case of the two female figurines from Q VIII, the potmarks were carved into the clay before firing, which is usually considered to point to mass production or institutionalised production (Haring 2018: 44).

¹¹ For general information on potmarks see Haring (2018); and for potmarks in Qantir, see Ditze (2007).

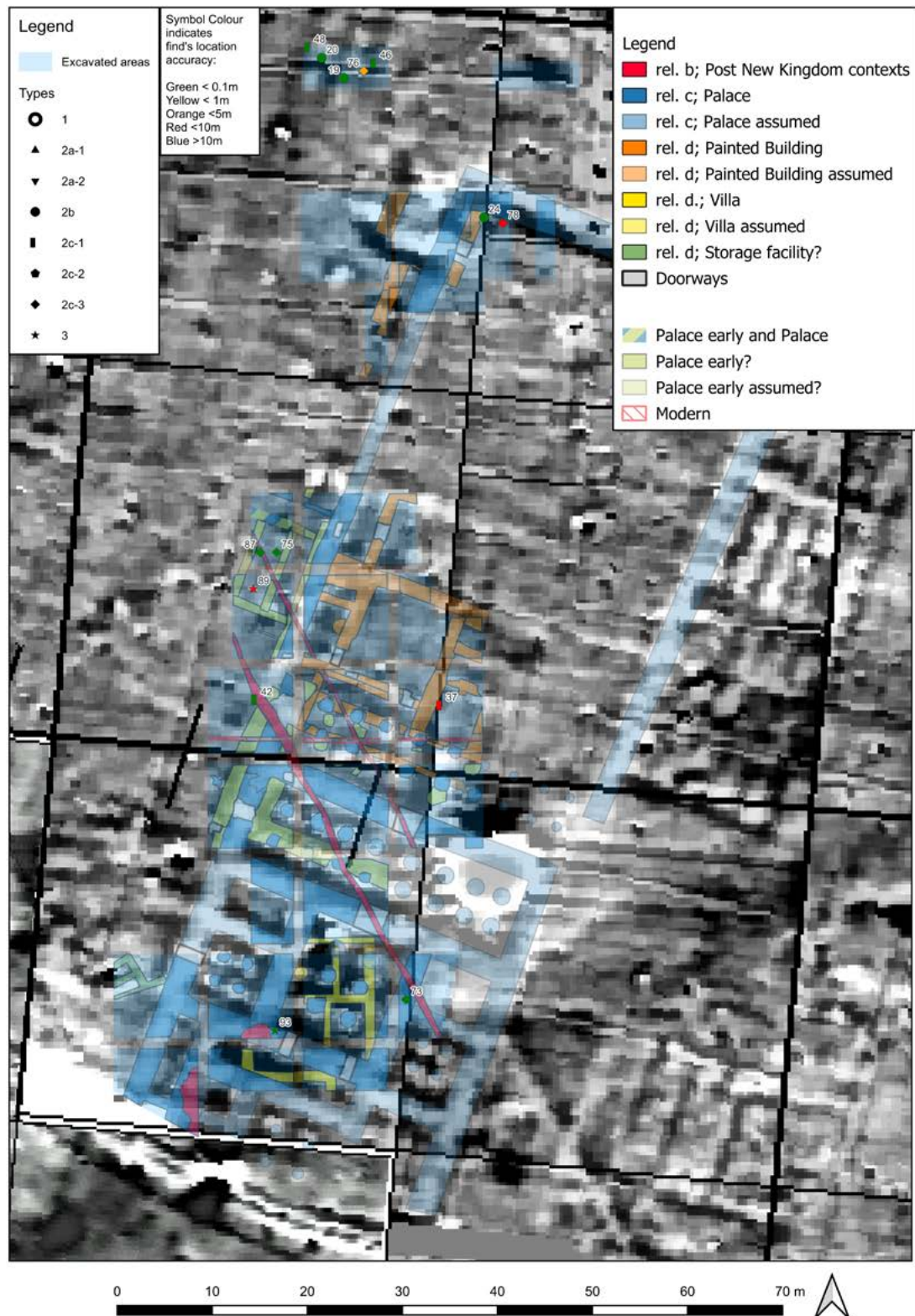


Figure 8. The distribution of naked female figurines in Q VIII (Plan: Frank Stremke; © Qantir-Piramesse-Project).



Figure 9: Figurine FZN 17/0082 (for an object photo cf. fig. 3), lying in the fill of a pit (Photo: Robert Stetefeld, © Qantir-Piramesse-Project).



Figure 10a-c. Figurine of a horse's head (a. above)
Figurine of Baal(?) (b. middle)
Figurine of a horse's head (c. bottom)
(Photo: Robert Stetefeld, © Qantir-Piramesse-Project).

Archaeological context

Seven figurines were found in the northern part of Q VIII (Figure 8).¹² A cluster of five figurines (nos 19, 20, 46, 48, and 76) derive from a sequence of levelling layers and the fill of a refuse pit within the same trench (Figure 9). Apart from these five figurines, huge amounts of pottery (including seven Mycenaean sherds), charcoal, and some limestone fragments, as well as other small finds, were found in the humous-sandy clay. Especially important for my interpretation are some further figurines found within the same context: heads of horses (Figure 10a), and two figurines which were previously suggested to be identified as Baal (Figure 10b; see object database Qantir).¹³ Furthermore, two figurines (nos 24 and 78) stem from the fills of pits in the corner of the later palaces' courtyard; the former was found together with Mycenaean pottery and might be connected to the demolition of the painted building of stratum rel. d.

¹² The figurines' numbers used in the distribution map derive from my MA thesis, in which additional figurines have been taken into account. These will be published by Dr Silvia Prell.

¹³ A connection between the female figurines studied in this paper and these horses' heads, as well as Baal figurines, is presumed due to them stemming from the same find context. Thus, they will be further elaborated on in the discussion of the female figurines' interpretation.

Seven further figurines were found in the southern part of Q VIII. A cluster of three figurines (nos 75, 87, and 89) was found in the direct vicinity of each other: Two figurines were found in the same excavation trench and refuse layer which was sealed underneath a layer of *dakke* in humous material amongst a huge amount of pottery and further figurines (Figure 10c). The context and finding of various other figurines is strongly reminiscent of the cluster of figurines found in the northern part of Q VIII, which has been discussed above. They might have been connected with each other. The third figurine was found in a similar humous layer underneath a layer of *dakke* located in the adjacent excavation trench, and thus only a few metres further south. However, how these three finds are related to the stratigraphy and different buildings has not yet been exhaustively investigated, though they might be connected to the earlier palace of stratum rel. d or the preparation of the ground for the later palace of stratum rel. c. Two more figurines were found in the remains of the mudbrick walls of the throne room of the later palace; one (no. 93) derives from the southern wall and seems to have been deposited in the wall during its construction, while the other (no. 73) presumably stems from the eastern wall of the throne room. Two further fragments (nos 37 and 42) were found in the topsoil – and, thus, no further conclusions can be drawn from this piece – and in a ditch which cannot be dated with any certainty (Henning Franzmeier, personal communication).

Interpretation

It remains to be discussed by whom the figurines were used, what they were used for, and consequently how to interpret them. Therefore, their archaeological context will be discussed in comparison with other sites. Most important for the interpretation are the two abovementioned clusters, as well as the figurine found in the mudbrick remains of the southern wall of the throne room of the later palace, in close proximity to a doorway entering into the throne room.

Figurine within mudbrick remains of the throne room's southern wall

This figurine seems to have been deposited in the wall during its construction, and it shall be proposed that this placement was intentional. Comparisons to other sites suggest it to be identified as a foundation deposit, which ordinarily consist of votive offerings placed in or underneath the foundations of, or in close proximity to, a building before its construction. They were commonly placed under the corners of buildings, but also in other important places such as under entrances, columns, and along the building's central axis, and could be used for both cultic and royal buildings as well as private domestic architecture (Fuscaldo 2003: 186, 2010: 95; Müller 2018: 182–183). In a comparable position to the findspot of the figurine at site Q VIII, foundation deposits not containing female figurines are known from the mortuary temple of Ramesses III at Medinet Habu (Hölscher 1932: 20–22, 1951: 47; Weinstein 1973: 273–275, no. 104). Here, a foundation deposit was found in a building located in the outer temple area interpreted as royal stables by Hölscher. It was placed under the building's front wall in close proximity to a doorway (Hölscher 1951: 18 [fig. 19], 47; Weinstein 1973: 275, no. 104C). Further foundation deposits were found in the latest phase of the mortuary temple. The objects were scattered in the sand underneath the columns of the throne room, as well as in the sand underneath the doorway of the throne rooms' main entrance and adjoining pilasters (Hölscher 1932: 20–22; 1951: 47; Weinstein 1973: 274, no. 104A). More importantly, figurines were also found in foundation deposits at Tell el-Muqdam (Müller 2018: 186; Redmount and Friedman 1997: 63). They were placed in lower courses of walls, thus found with the wall's bricks, and additionally in close proximity to a doorway entering into the throne room (Redmount and Friedman 1997: 63); this find is quite alike to that of the Q VIII figurine, which is thus suggested to be identified as part of a foundation deposit. Additionally, all figurines found in the foundation deposit at Tell el-Muqdam were broken (Redmount and Friedman 1997: 63), as is that of Q VIII. Breakage of figurines has already been analysed by Waraksa, suggesting it to be intentional for ritual purposes (Budin 2014: 26–27;

Waraksa 2009: 18–21). Yet, even though all figurines from Q VIII are indeed fragmentary, it cannot be said with certainty whether they were broken intentionally or not. If they were, it would, however, further support a ritual use during foundation ceremonies. It shall however be noted that no further objects, which could securely be identified as belonging to a foundation deposit, were found nearby the figurine discussed.

Figurines from the North and South Clusters

The figurines which were found in the two clusters in the north and south of the excavated area seem to have been connected. They were found in a levelling layer and a refuse pit underneath a columned portico and a layer of *dakke*, containing large amounts of pottery, including some Mycenaean sherds, as well as further kinds of figurines. The material might have originally come from other areas of Qantir, used to level and reach a higher building ground, and was identified as settlement refuse by Franzmeier. A connection between the various figurines found within these layers might be presumed (Henning Franzmeier, personal communication). However, two figurines, which have previously been interpreted as depictions of the god Baal (see Object Database Q VIII),¹⁴ as well as the figurines of horses' heads found in these layers, seem rather to point to a ritual and cultic context. Horse figurines were found throughout the ancient Near East, and were identified as ritual objects by their findspots in sanctuaries such as at Tell Damiyah in the Central Jordan Valley (Brody 2018: 214; Petit and Kafafi 2016). Yet, they were also discovered in domestic contexts (Aytan and Atakuman 2023: 6, 8, 10), such as at Tel Rehov in northern Israel, where so-called horse-rider figurines were found in courtyards, rooms, and on streets. Most of these figurines date to the 10th and 9th centuries BCE, and apart from two pieces, they are all broken (Kletter and Saarelainen 2022: 156). They were suggested to depict deities or function as toys, however, recently, Kletter and Saarelainen argued that they depicted the ideal warrior. This suggestion is based on the figurines becoming common in the southern Levant during the late Iron Age, a time in which the cavalry became more important, and should transmit power and status. Furthermore, horses' heads were found at the site, belonging to zoomorphic vessels. A few figurines, furthermore, display incised features (Kletter and Saarelainen 2022: 155–157). More importantly, at Tel Rehov and Beth Shean in northern Israel, naked female figurines were also found. They were holding and nursing a child (Hagan 2013: 33–34; Kletter and Saarelainen 2022: 154), as do many other figurines found throughout Egypt. The figurines found at Q VIII do not depict a child; this could, however, be a result of their fragmentary state, and it is possible that some might actually have been accompanied by a child they held and nursed or that was lying by their side. Especially since the depiction of a woman nursing a child was commonly used for figurines from the Mediterranean and ancient Near East, though some scholars emphasise that this was especially popular in Egypt (Hagan 2013: 34; Kletter and Saarelainen 2022: 154). Thus, connections between female figurines from different cultures were previously suggested, and Budin has argued for an Egyptian influence on the female figurines nursing a child, which were found in the Levant (Budin 2014: 149; Hagan 2013: 34; Pusch and Eggebrecht 2006: 249). Female figurines have also been identified with different deities by various scholars, such as Astarte and Isis nursing Horus. Hagan notes that others have identified them as Mary nursing Jesus, though she herself rather interprets the female figurines from Beth Shean as Dionysos' nursemaid Nysa, and thus his cult (Hagan 2013: 34; Pusch and Eggebrecht 2006: 249). Previously, some scholars have argued female figurines to be connected with the aspect of childbirth and suggested them to be used in fertility rites. They compared the iconography of female figurines at other sites with that of ostraca depicting postpartum rites, signifying the end of the ritualised process of birth. Both the ostraca and some figurines depict females sitting or lying on beds and accompanied by children

¹⁴ Baal was attested in Qantir as visible on stelae, and it is presumed that a temple or shrine for the god was present at Qantir (Pusch and Eggebrecht 2006: 260). On Near-Eastern deities in Egypt – including Baal – cf. e.g. Stadelmann (1967); Tazawa (2009); Zivie-Coche (2011).

lying beside the woman or being nursed by her. Additionally, some depict mirrors as well as kohl pots (see Arnette 2015, 2022: 506; Backhouse 2012, 2020). Even though the figurines found at Q VIII do not show traces of children,¹⁵ all preserved fragments indicate the female lying on a slab, which may be identified as a bed (Pinch 1993: 207 and 209). A connection with childbirth, and thus also protection, can be further supported by figures of Bes depicted on some figurines from the collection of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (see Boston, MFA 72.739). Additionally, the fertility aspect may be further supported by a figurine from the Mut precinct at Karnak, which depicts a child lying next to the female with an erect phallus (Waraksa 2009: 28–29).

Final comments on the interpretation of naked female figurines

In general, as already seen for the figurines found in Q VIII in foundation deposits and two clusters with additional horses' heads and two Baal figurines, naked female figurines seem to have been used for protection and as objects with a cultic or ritual use. Furthermore, the suggested connection with childbirth seems to point to them playing an important role in private religion. This interpretation as objects of protection, with ritual value, and especially in private religion can further be supported by the finding of figurines at other sites throughout Egypt. In particular, some figurines have been found in shrines and temples of the goddess Hathor (see Pinch 1993). Five female figurines – four made of faience and one of limestone – have, for example, been found in the sandy debris on the floor of the sanctuary of the Hathor shrine at Mirgissa (Kemp 1995: 27–28; Vercoutter 1970: 315 [fig. 10], 316 [fig. 12], 323, 350). One figurine had broken into two fragments, one of which was found within a pottery vessel in the north-eastern corner of the sanctuary of the Hathor shrine, together with many other objects, whereas the other was found outside of the vessel (Vercoutter 1970: 316 [fig. 12], 323, 350). Two further figurines were found in the pottery vessel, and a further piece was found in the eastern half of the sanctuary (Vercoutter 1970: 316 [fig. 12], 350). Additionally, the figurine made of limestone was found in the sanctuary's northern part, depicting the female lying on a bed (Vercoutter 1970: 315, fig. 10). Furthermore, many of the figurines found at Deir el-Medina stem from the debris of houses (Arnette 2022: 514–515; Backhouse 2013: 22–23; Bruyère 1939: 109, 1953: 35–36). More importantly for this discussion, some were found in the houses' first room, in which a house altar was often located, and, in two cases, an ancestor bust was found in this room as well (Arnette 2022: 514, 514–515, n. 78; Bruyère 1939: 144; Weiss 2009: 197).¹⁶ One of these is house N.O. XXVII dating to the 19th dynasty (Bruyère 1939: 299–300; Weiss 2015: 140, n. 1099). In Elephantine, as well, female figurines dating to the New Kingdom were found in houses and in shrine Y (Kuckertz and Nebe 2022: 35–36 [tab. 5], 39–40, 41–49 [tabs 7–11]). Those figurines found in shrine Y are distributed in the courtyard, as well as the shrine's other rooms and its sanctuary. Whereas part of the shrine's courtyard seems to have changed to a residential usage, all other rooms were still used as cult site, (Krekeler 2023: 67; Kuckertz and Nebe 2022: 39, 43, 43 [tab. 8], 46–47 [tab. 9], 49 [tabs 10–11]), thus again stressing the figurines role as cultic objects.

In conclusion, it is argued that female figurines were indeed most likely used as objects of private religion and in ritual contexts, as supported by figurines appearing in shrines. The suggested use in foundation deposits neatly fits with this hypothesis as well, as they were created to purify the building they were placed in and guarantee its protection (Fuscaldo 2003: 186, 2010: 95). The intentional breakage suggested for some figurines further supports their role within rituals (Budin 2014: 26–27; Waraksa 2009: 18–21).

¹⁵ Though, as pointed out above, this might merely be a matter of preservation.

¹⁶ These house altars were previously studied by Bruyère, who called them '*lit-clos*' (Bruyère 1939: 54–64). Several different suggestions for interpreting these structures have been discussed, and most scholars came to the conclusion that they were used as altars (Weiss 2009: 196–197).

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One Workmen Family from the Serapeum of Memphis Area

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Abstract

In November 1851, the French Egyptologist Auguste Mariette discovered the Serapeum of Memphis, the sacred burial place of the Apis bulls; it consisted of individual tombs dating back to the New Kingdom (c. 14th–11th centuries BCE) and two catacombs, the Lesser Vaults (c. 10th–7th centuries BCE) and the Greater Vaults (c. 7th century BCE–1st century CE), where Mariette (1882: 5–6, 40–45) found a large number of stelae that were written in Hieroglyphic, Hieratic, and Demotic. Heinrich Brugsch (1891: 980–999), a German Egyptologist and Demotist, published a few brief extracts from these texts, paving the way for other scholars to study those inscriptions.¹

Close to the entrance of the catacombs, Mariette discovered a gate, now held in the Louvre Museum, which was covered with around 126 demotic graffiti, two or three poorly legible dipinti, and one hieroglyphic inscription,² probably dating from between the reign of Ptolemy III Euergetes (first attested c. 250 BCE) and the end of the Ptolemaic period.³ The texts engraved on this door provide valuable insights into the people who worked in this sacred area and emphasise some connections between the Serapeum and other catacombs. Among the families that can be reconstituted thanks to these inscriptions, the one of Herefankh son of Pedihornedjitef, chosen for this article, is particularly interesting as they worked in the necropolis for over a century.

Keywords

The Serapeum of Memphis; The Gate of the Serapeum; Apis Osiris; The Mother of Apis; Herefankh Son of Pedihornedjitef; Demotic

The family of Herefankh

The names of the people who served in the Serapeum were listed on the gate of the Serapeum, as well as on several monuments at North Saqqara. Thus, the same names and families can be found on several stelae from the Serapeum, as well as on others from the Mother of Apis catacomb, and on graffiti and stelae from the Baboon and Falcon galleries.

One of these workmen families is the family of Herefankh son of Pedihornedjitef. We know that they served at Saqqara thanks to the inscriptions of their names, titles, and the dates on several monuments: the gate itself (I.P.S. 33; I.P.S. 49; I.P.S. 51; I.P.S. 55; I.P.S. 56 ; I.P.S. 90; I.P.S. 94; I.P.S. 95)

¹ Also, some stelae have been published by Malinine, Posener, and Vercoutter 1968, as well as by Adel Farid and Didier Devauchelle. See, for example, Devauchelle 1994: 109–113, 2001: 41–61, 2024: 173–182; Farid 1994: 44–55, 1997: 23–33, 2000: 182–200. In this paper, I.P.S. refers to 'Inscription de la Porte du Sérapéum', and CDD refers to the Chicago Demotic Dictionary.

² The study of the inscriptions on the Serapeum Gate is currently being undertaken by Amira Hamdy Mortaga for her PhD at the University of Lille (France) under the supervision of Didier Devauchelle (Professor emeritus, University of Lille) and Hélène Guichard (General Curator, Musée du Louvre). The author also works as an Egyptologist for the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities and is a member of the Egyptian-French mission (Musée du Louvre) at Saqqara.

³ If on-site study of the monument and photography has enabled us to date this corpus from year 14 of Ptolemy V Epiphanes (c. 191 BCE) to year 31 of Ptolemy IX Soter II (c. 82 BCE), an inscription previously thought to be a stela (Paris, Louvre IM6089) and prosopographical cross-referencing allow us to extend this chronology to this larger period.

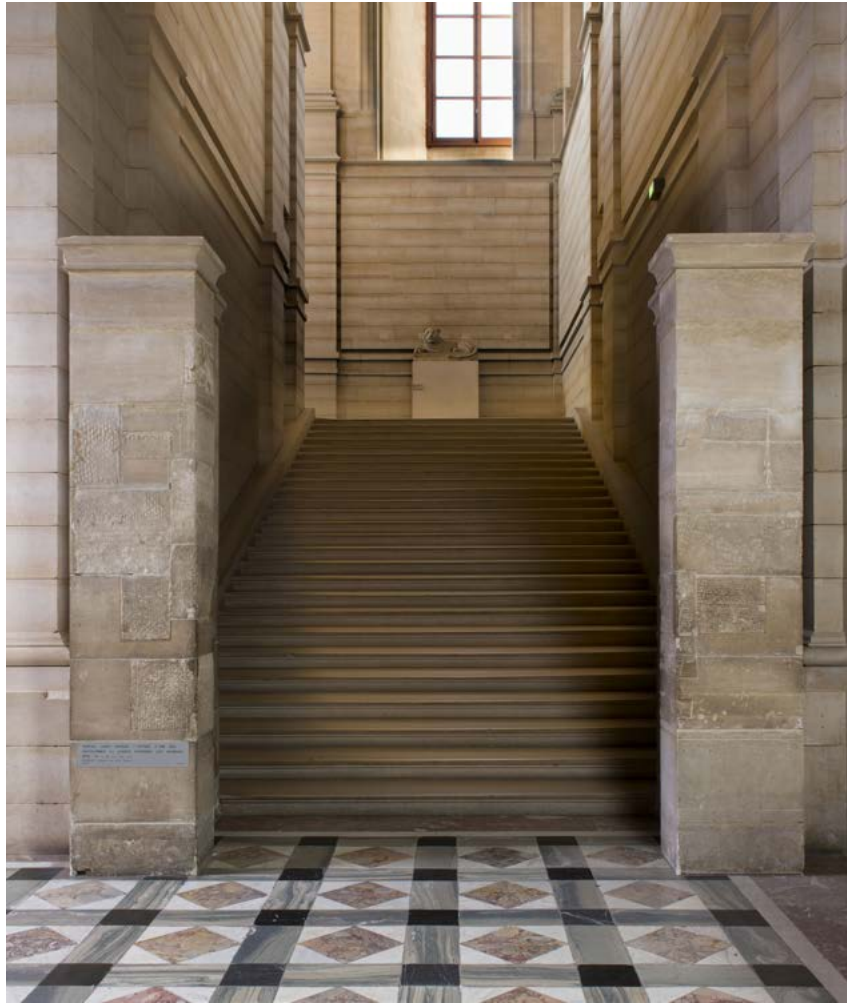


Figure 1. The Gate at the entrance of the Greater vaults of the Serapeum, in Paris, Louvre Museum © Musée du Louvre, dist. RMN Grand Palais / Christian Décamps.

some stelae from the Serapeum (for example: Paris, Louvre IM3741; IM3351; IM3362; IM3367),⁴ stela no. 43, discovered in the Mother of Apis catacomb (cf. Smith, Andrews, and Davies 2011: 125–130), and inscription no. C42 in the Baboon galleries (cf. Devauchelle 2014: 418; Ray 2011: 109).

The history of the Herefankh family

The first mention of Herefankh is written on stela Louvre IM3741, l. 7, which dates to year 22 of Ptolemy III Euergetes I (c. 225 BCE) (cf. Thompson 2012: 266).⁵ He bore two titles: *by* ('the stone man', CDD, B: 26–28) and *stm* ('attendant', cf. CDD, S148). He served the Apis bull born of Gerga, the mother of Apis that lived in the Memphite region, as did many other men who left their mark in this area (for the list of the Apis during the Ptolemaic period, with the names of their mothers and their origin, see Smith, Andrews, and Davies 2011: 273–274; Thompson 2012: 263–283).

Usually, in this type of texts and stelae, the owner mentions all the members of his family, their names, wives, and their children; about Herefankh, we know that he had four sons, 'Padiimhotep, Tjainimu, Hetephor and Pedihornedjitef'.

⁴ For information about these stelae: IM3351: <https://collections.louvre.fr/ark:/53355/cl010052080>; IM3362: <https://collections.louvre.fr/ark:/53355/cl010052422>; IM3367: <https://collections.louvre.fr/ark:/53355/cl010052427>.

⁵ For more information about stela IM3741: <https://collections.louvre.fr/ark:/53355/cl010073946>.



Figure 2. Demotic inscription I.P.S. 49 © Musée du Louvre, dist. RMN Grand Palais / Christian Décamps.



Figure 3. Stela IM3741 © Musée du Louvre 2012.

The information about this family is spread over several monuments, and some members have only been noticed on one stela of the Serapeum; for example, the name of his son, ‘Khonsuiu son of Herefankh’, is only mentioned on stela IM3351, centre 1, dated from year 13 of Ptolemy V Epiphanes (c. 193–192 BCE, cf. Thompson 2012: 266), but is not known from other monuments. Similarly, some other members of the family are quoted on stela no. 43, discovered in the catacomb of the mother of Apis and dated from year 8 of Ptolemy V Epiphanes (c. 197 BCE) (cf. Smith, Andrews, and Davies 2011: 125–127). Furthermore, among Herefankh’s children two sons, named ‘Tjainimu and Hetephor’, were mentioned on the north wall, next to the interior of the entrance of the Baboon galleries (cf. Ray 2011: 109–110). We also know that the first of them, Tjainimu son of Herefankh, had two wives, (Taimhotep and Tasheretkhonsou), whose names were mentioned on two texts from the Louvre gate: I.P.S. 55; I.P.S. 56 (cf. Brugsch 1891: 979, no. 20).

These inscriptions indicate the period in which this family worked at North Saqqara: from year 22 of Ptolemy III Euergetes I (c. 225 BCE) to year 16 of Ptolemy X Alexander I (c. 100–99 BCE). Through the dating of these texts, the deaths of the family members have been identified; for example, from inscription I.P.S. 55 on the gate of the Serapeum, we believe that Herefankh died before year 6 of the joint reign of Ptolemy VI Philometor and Ptolemy VIII Euergetes II (c. 164 BCE). Also, from the texts, it has been noticed that his son, Hetephor, served the Apis bull from around year 8 of Ptolemy VI Philometor until year 27 of Ptolemy VIII Euergetes II (c. 173–143 BCE) and passed away before year 29 of Ptolemy VIII Euergetes II (c. 141 BCE).

The family of Herefankh had a major role in the Sacred Animal Necropolis at North Saqqara, lasting for more than 124 years, and their titles varied between *bꜥk*, ‘servant’, *by*, ‘stone man’, *stm*, ‘attendant’, and *mnḥ*, ‘devotee’. The family members served different bulls of Apis, born to four different mothers of Apis, which came from different places in Egypt.

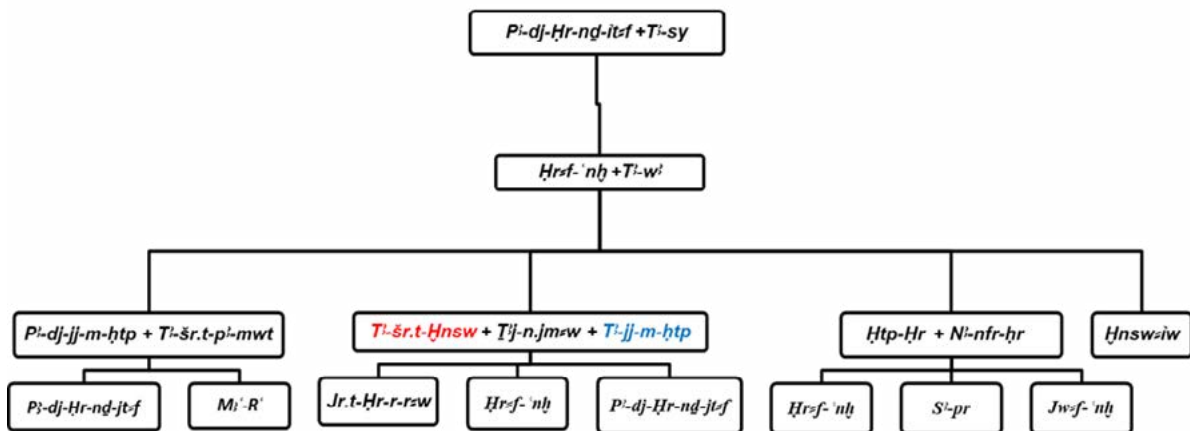


Figure 4. Herefankh’s Genealogical tree.

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Replacing Deities: The Adaptation of Divine Triads by the God's Wives of Amun in Iconographic Reliefs (8th–6th Centuries BCE)

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Abstract

The office of 'God's Wife of Amun' became very important in Thebes from the 16th to the 6th century BCE. It was occupied by royal women, who held in their post a significant institution, with lands, periodic goods and some priests under their command. For the office succession, it was often the pharaoh who chose an heiress already during a god's wife's tenure. It was only after the death of the current Adoratrice (mentioned in the sources as 'Mother') that the heiress would assume the office. These priestesses played a significant role in the political, religious and social spheres, developing a powerful institution connected with kingship and the priesthood of Amun. In this regard, the God's Wives of Amun were prominently depicted in the sources, adapting pharaonic prerogatives and rituals and being close to the gods. Amongst these adaptations certain divine triads can be highlighted, in which the God's Wives of Amun replaced some deities with themselves or their predecessors in the office in different contexts. The aim of this paper is to explore the reasons behind the adaptation of divine triads' composition and the God's Wives of Amun's roles in these groups. I will examine the iconographic reliefs from two monuments in Thebes: the Chapel of Amenirdis (Medinet Habu), which served the funerary cult of this priestess, and the Columned Building of Nitocris (Naga Malgata), a probable residence of the God's Wives of Amun. Considering these consorts' kinship and gender, inextricably linked social markers, as well as the specificity of this office's identity, I will discuss what elements allowed these women to be depicted and interact with divine triads and how the selected iconographic reliefs were instrumentalised by the Divine Adoratrices in order to understand the political, religious, and social implications of this practice.

Keywords

God's Wife of Amun; Divine Triads; Iconographic Reliefs; Gender; Kinship

Introduction

The office of the 'God's Wife of Amun' was created in the beginning of the 18th dynasty (c. 1550–1295 BCE) during the New Kingdom (c. 1550–1069 BCE) and disappeared shortly after the Persian conquest of Egypt (525–404 BCE). It was initially created by the pharaohs to ensure their rule over Thebes, distant from the dynastic capitals in Lower Egypt, especially regarding the influence of the priesthood of Amun in Upper Egypt (Ayad 2009a: 6). In this sense, the women allowed to hold this title, initially the queens, were closely related to the pharaoh. However, from the tenure of the God's Wife Isis during the reign of Ramesses VI (c. 1143–1136 BCE), only princesses occupied the office (Gosselin 2007: 193).

The roles of a God's Wife of Amun (also mentioned in the sources as the 'God's Hand' and/or the 'Divine Adoratrice') were to perform several rituals for the gods and other activities related to her own institution, with lands, periodic goods, and some priests under her command (Ayad 2021: 47; Coulon 2018a: 321). The consorts of Amun were also responsible for the construction of many important monuments in Thebes, such as chapels dedicated to Osiris in Karnak and memorial chapels for the funerary cult of their predecessors in the office in Medinet Habu. Furthermore, this office had its own internal dynamics, which in many times remained almost unchangeable in relation to pharaonic political and dynastic issues throughout its history (Coulon 2018b: 281).

For the office succession, it was often the king who chose an heiress during a God's Wife's tenure. Only after the death of the current Adoratrice would the heiress assume the post. From Amenirdis I (c. 710–678 BCE) onward, these priestesses began to refer to their predecessors in the sources as 'Mother', as well as to establish a funerary cult for them. According to Mariam Ayad (2009a: 16), these women did not have offspring, possibly due to the duties of the office or to a possible restriction on generating an heir who could threaten the pharaoh's throne. Despite the absence of direct biological descendants of the God's Wives in the sources, these consorts created and highlighted their kinship ties of 'Mother' and 'Daughter' in the office, a choice that, as Laurent Coulon (2018b: 279) states, reinforced their high status through a 'fictional genealogy'.

In general, the God's Wives of Amun played a significant role in the political, religious, and social spheres and they were prominently depicted in the sources, adapting pharaonic prerogatives and rituals and being close to the gods (Ayad 2009a, 2021; Coulon 2018b; Koch 2012), especially during the 8th–6th centuries BCE. Amongst these adaptations, such as the offering of the goddess Maat to the gods, the modification of kingship titles, the adoption of a throne name, and being crowned by Amun, for instance, some iconographic representations of divine triads can be highlighted, in which they interacted with a trio of gods or replaced some deities with themselves or their predecessors in different contexts.

Divine triads were a very prominent part of ancient Egyptian religion, often signifying plurality or unity expressed by three deities (Sales 2012: 118), associated with the indefinite plural of the number three in the Egyptian language and culture (te Velde 1971: 80). According to Kákosy (1980: 48), there are two types of triads: one with a modalistic conception and another with a tritheistic structure. The triad with a modalistic conception implies three characteristics of a god, which reflects three aspects of one reality and not three separate deities. The triads of tritheistic structure, however, are composed mostly of a family group, three entities independent of each other, usually a father, a mother, and a son, and they can have different aspects and symbolism, such as fertility, royal legitimacy, and hereditary succession (Sales 2012: 119).

The tritheistic triads exhibit, however, some variations, depending on the context. This is the case when a pharaoh is associated with a divine couple as their 'son', such as the representations of Osiris, Isis, and a king replacing Horus, thus reinforcing his exceptional human and divine aspects (Sales 2012: 121). Therefore, a tritheistic triad model could be rearranged in Egyptian iconography according to one's interests in expressing a concept or symbolism. Nevertheless, this type of triad is not limited to a family structure, and neither is it restricted to a composition of two male deities and a goddess (te Velde 1971: 83–84).

The aim of this paper is to explore the reasons behind the adaptation of divine triads' composition and the God's Wives' roles in these groups. For this purpose, I will present the Chapel of Amenirdis in Medinet Habu and discuss the scenes of the consorts interacting with and forming a divine triad, exploring how social markers such as kinship and gender allow us to understand these representations and their exceptionality more clearly. Lastly, I will present the Columned Building of Nitocris in Naga Malgata and the iconographic reliefs with divine triads that include a consort of Amun, in order to examine how these selected sources were instrumentalised by the God's Wives and to understand the political, religious, and social implications of this practice.

The Chapel of Amenirdis (Medinet Habu)

Located in the precinct of the mortuary temple complex of Ramesses III, in Medinet Habu, are the so-called 'Tomb-chapels' or the 'Memorial Chapels' of the God's Wives of Amun, which served as

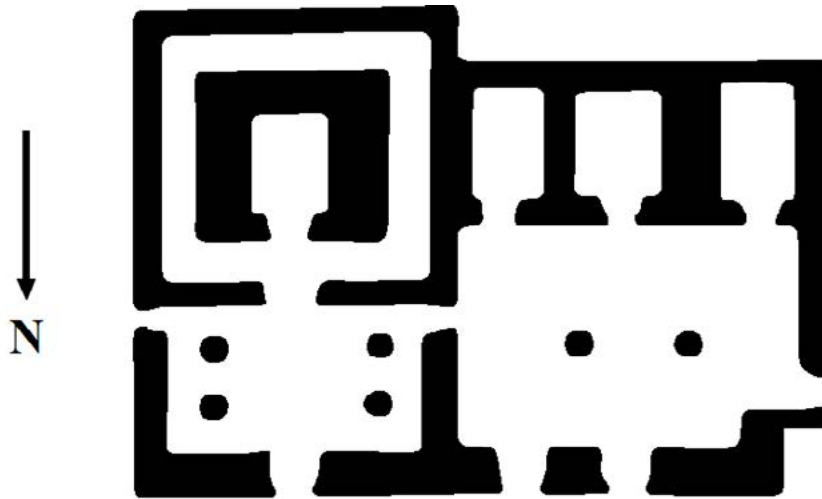


Figure 1. Plan of the Chapel of the God's Wives of Amun in Medinet Habu (adapted from Hölscher 1954: 18).

the place of the funerary cult for their predecessors in the office (Koch 2016: 158–159). The first chapel was initially built around the tenure of the Libyan Divine Adoratrice Shepenupet I (c. 765–710 BCE) during the 23rd dynasty (c. 818–715 BCE). Subsequently, the building was expanded to include three additional structures, forming a row of four chapels (of which only two are preserved today), connected by an inner corridor. Based on the surviving remains, the first structure on the east of the monument corresponds to the chapel of the Nubian God's Wife Amenirdis I. The second on the west is dedicated, in order from left to right, to her successors Nitocris (c. 639–586 BCE) and Shepenupet II (c. 678–639 BCE), and to Mehtenweskhet, the biological mother of Amenirdis and wife of Psamtik I (Figure 1).

The Chapel of Amenirdis, originally built of mud-brick, was replaced by a stone structure by Shepenupet II for eternity for her mother in the office (Ayad 2009a: 19; Koch 2012: 26). It is important to highlight that this new structure can be considered an architectural innovation in the development of Egyptian mortuary monuments of that period, especially for combining ancient elements and creating an inner shrine (*cella*) in the chapel, surrounded by a corridor, whose main aim was to revive Amenirdis in order to allow her to leave her chapel and achieve immortality (Ayad 2016b: 168). While this represents the extent of resources available to Shepenupet II during her tenure (Ayad 2009a: 20–21), it also indicates the ability of these priestesses to mobilise these kinds of resources in order to build exceptional monuments in their predecessors' favour, strengthening their status and kinship ties amongst each other in the office.

Before the conquest of Egypt by the Nubian rulers, which marks the beginning of the 25th dynasty (c. 747–656 BCE), King Kashta of Napata gained control over Lower Nubia and Upper Egypt, the latter not through military means but by diplomacy and negotiation with the priesthood of Amun in Thebes. As a result, Kashta's daughter, Amenirdis I, was accepted as the successor of Shepenupet I as the God's Wife of Amun. This appointment suggests two possibilities: first, that the priesthood of Amun formally recognised Kashta as the new pharaoh of Egypt; second, that it was a strategic move repeated by those who wanted to exert influence in Upper Egypt by placing a princess in the office of the Divine Adoratrice, in order to control the influence of that priesthood (Török 2009: 319–322). The conquest of the rest of Egypt was secured by Kashta's son, Piye, who assumed the Egyptian throne as Piankhy (c. 747–716 BCE) (Rilley 2001), beginning the rule of the Nubian pharaohs.

During Amenirdis' tenure, the God's Wife continued developing her institution by expanding monuments of her predecessor, Shepenupet I, such as the Chapel of Osiris, Ruler of Eternity, in Karnak (Ayad 2016a: 91), as well as the tradition of adapting pharaonic prerogatives and being depicted in an exceptional manner in the sources. The same is valid for Amenirdis' successor, Shepenupet II, daughter of Piankhy, this new priestess being responsible for the construction of many buildings, especially chapels dedicated to Osiris in the east and north of Karnak (Payraudeau 2018b: 42), and for modifying the Chapel of Amenirdis in Medinet Habu, as mentioned above. Other sources of Shepenupet II attest the exceptionality of this consort in terms of her high status as God's Wife. She is represented as a sphinx, for instance, in a statue (Berlin, Neues Museum ÄM7972), something rare for royal women and common for kings (Koch 2012: 42), inscribed her name on scarabs, and referred to herself as 'Horus' in feminine gender, as Hatshepsut did when she became pharaoh (Coulon 2018b: 274–277).

The entire set of sources related to Shepenupet II and how she was portrayed in them allow us to identify a peak in the ritualistic potential of the office of the God's Wife of Amun. This consort made the most extensive adaptations of pharaonic prerogatives, particularly in iconographic reliefs. According to Ayad (2016a: 96–99), this likely reflected the ideological expression of Nubian women's royalty adapted to Egyptian culture, thus reinforcing the power of her institution. However, it can also be seen as a culmination of a historical process in the development of these women's status, rooted in the very creation of the office, regardless of the ethnic background of some of the consorts. After approximately forty years in her role as Divine Adoratrice, Shepenupet II is believed to have adopted a successor, Amenirdis II, daughter of Taharqa (690–664 BCE) and her niece. Little is known about Amenirdis II, due to the scarcity of sources concerning her (Ayad 2009a: 91) and the political dynamics surrounding the God's Wife succession line after the conquest of the Egyptian throne by the Saite king Psamtik I (Koch 2012: 47–50).

After passing through the left entrance of the façade of the Memorial Chapel of the God's Wives, there is a forecourt with the remnants of four columns, with no ceiling. On the north wall (i.e. the back part of the façade upon entering the forecourt) there are fragments of a representation of Shepenupet II before Osiris, Horus, and Amenirdis on the left side of the entrance. On the west wall, there are two scenes on the upper register, although damaged: on the left, Shepenupet II is before Isis, whilst on the right side the same God's Wife is before Anubis, Hathor, and Amenirdis, justified. On the lower registers of the same wall, there are remnants of unidentified scenes (Porter and Moss 1972: 476 [4–8]).

On the left upper part of the south wall (i.e. the façade of the *cella*), there is a scene of Shepenupet II driving four calves before Osiris, Horus, and Amenirdis. Below this scene, there is a representation of Shepenupet II offering hekenu jars to Ra-Horakhty, Isis, and the justified Amenirdis. On the right upper part of the same wall, there is a damaged scene of a god's wife with her arm raised, and one with Shepenupet II performing the ritual of stretching the cord with the goddess Seshat, founding the monument. Below both scenes, there is a relief of that Nubian god's wife before Atum, Anubis, and Amenirdis. Finally, on the east wall of the forecourt, there is a scene of Shepenupet II consecrating *meret* chests to Osiris and Amenirdis (PM II: 476 [9–10]).

The predecessor in the office as the goddess Isis

There are two cases in the scenes mentioned above in which Amenirdis seems to be replacing the role of the goddess Isis in a divine triad. The first scene is on the upper register of the north wall, the relief of Shepenupet II before Osiris, Horus, and Amenirdis (Figure 2). Although it is very damaged, it is possible to recognise on the right side Shepenupet II's double-feathered crown and that of her



Figure 2. Shepenupet II before Osiris, Horus, and Amenirdis (line drawing © Priscila Junglos, after Epigraphic Survey Negative 1611 from ISAC, the University of Chicago. Courtesy of the Institute for the Study of Ancient Cultures of the University of Chicago).

predecessor on the left side, who holds a kingship-related sceptre in her left hand, in front of her chest, and an *ankh* in her right hand. The body and other visual elements of the other characters in the scene are not well preserved. The inscriptions, however, permit us to better understand how the gods and the priestesses were portrayed, as they were recorded by Jansen-Winkel (2009: 269–270).

Shepenwepet II's titles of the 'Mistress of the Two Lands' $\overline{\text{Hnw.t t.wj}}$ (*hnw.t t.wj*, *henut tauy*) and the 'God's Wife' $\overline{\text{hm.t-ntr}}$ (*hm.t-ntr*, *hemet-netjer*) reinforce her connections with kingship and her office. The inscriptions around the deities indicate their names and concessions of 'all life and authority, and all health' $\overline{\text{nh w3 nb snb nb}}$ (*nh w3 nb snb nb*, *ankh was neb seneb neb*) to Shepenupet II. Amenirdis, justified, also blesses her successor. The predecessor is represented with her title of the 'God's Hand' $\overline{\text{dr.t-ntr}}$ (*dr.t-ntr*, *djeret-netjer*) and with the inscription 'may she appear on the throne of Tefnut, like Ra forever' $\overline{\text{h3t [hr] st tfnw.t r mj r dt}}$ (*h3t [hr] st tfnw.t r mj r dt*, *khat her set tefenut mi ra djet*). This last epithet is an adaptation of the phrase 'may he appear on the throne of Horus', typically used by pharaohs. In this case, the god is replaced by Tefnut, Horus' feminine counterpart (his great grandmother or grandmother). According to Laurent Coulon (2018b: 271), this kind of adaptation was also an appropriation of mythological narratives by the God's Wives, reinforcing, therefore, their status connected with kingship and the divine sphere beyond their kinship with Amun as his consorts.

The Divine Adoratrices were daughters or sisters of the pharaohs, wives of Amun and mothers or daughters in their office. They were, thus, exceptionally connected to kingship, to the divine sphere, and to their institution through these kinship ties. In this sense, kinship should not be understood merely as a quality or characteristic of 'being related', i.e. a person connected to another by blood, affinity, or adoption, as it is in the contemporary Western family system. Rather, it should also be

seen as a socially and culturally constructed relationship that is negotiated over time, articulated by the concept of 'relatedness' – that is, kinship as a performative and processual practice (Olabarria 2020: 11). Being related by a kinship tie, therefore, is connected to specific circumstances, contexts, and social practices, rather than to a strict definition as a natural fact.

In ancient Egyptian society, being closely connected to the pharaoh by a kinship tie was an important element of social differentiation and status, a privilege that few people could have (Campagno 2006: 26). Thus, to be represented and to highlight a kinship connection with the king and kingship in the sources, as the God's Wives did, would demonstrate the importance of an individual within Egyptian society. This could be done visually or textually in the iconographic reliefs.

As for kinship ties with deities, the consorts of Amun also highlighted their connections with the divine sphere, especially by their title of 'God's Wife' and 'God's Hand', as well as by visual elements. In iconographic sources, they are frequently depicted wearing the double-feathered crown – a symbol characteristic of their divine husband and also associated with queenship and their authority as consorts of the god (Hallmann 2018: 304) – and shown in close proximity to him. As the wives of Amun, these priestesses could also be represented in situations and contexts with deities to whom only the pharaoh was allowed access. This intimate relationship to kingship and the gods was possibly permitted not only because it was of interest to the pharaohs to have a direct and influential representative of kingship in Thebes, but also because the God's Wives' kinship was intrinsically linked with their female gender.

Gender, in this sense, can be defined not just by the physical, biological, and sexual characteristics of someone, but also as a social and performative practice (Olabarria 2018: 288), similarly to kinship. It exists necessarily in a social relationship and can only be understood if many different factors are considered, such as social position, age, ethnicity, etc. As Deborah Sweeney (2011: 1–2) states, gender is the sum of associations, attitudes, and practices prescribed from social groups that changes constantly, varying in each society over time, affected by the context of representation and the presupposed audience of the sources. Just like kinship, gender cannot be taken as an isolated and natural element, both of them being relational and processual social markers, inseparably linked.

Ancient Egyptians had a binary and rigid gender model, which can be observed in both textual and visual representations in the sources. Beyond the bodily markers that categorise men and women, such as hairstyle, physical body composition, skin colour, and other cultural conventions of representation, the Egyptian grammar itself formed terms through masculine roots with feminine variations, suggesting an androcentrism that prioritised the masculine gender as the predefined state and the feminine as a derivation. Thus, the ancient Egyptian gender system was not only binary but also hierarchical (Robins 1994). However, although rigid, gender categories could be flexible depending on the context, such as the case of the iconographic reliefs of the God's Wives of Amun. Ancient Egyptian art often omitted representational forms for the benefit of an idealised artistic canon that had the goal of achieving ends that prioritised certain individuals, images, and activities to, for instance, please deities (in the case of temples) and achieve the afterlife (in tombs). Therefore, following a certain set of determined rules, gender was not only expressed by the material sources, but also shaped by them (Sweeney 2011: 3).

In this regard, when examining the sources, it is important to consider the monument itself, the context to which it belongs, as well as its decorative programme and narrative. As Edward Scrivens (2019: 24) suggests, gender representations in monuments allow us to discuss the spatial dimension when reflecting about how agency and gender work in certain spaces and their implications. In the ancient Egyptian case, temples, chapels, and tombs constituted potent and generative environments,

which presupposed the interaction of visual and textual elements among each other and with and through the space. Considering gender as a social marker of differences on the iconographic reliefs permits us to reflect about a specific kind of agency, which is represented in the sources and exercised actively through their images, texts (Scrivens 2019: 30), and material supports.

Agency, in this paper, is understood as the ability to act, exert influence and behavior within a relationship of cause and effect, as postulated by Alfred Gell (1998). This concept is relational and contextual, and it can be attributed both to people and objects (Gell 1998: 16). However, it is important to note that there is no strict opposition between these two elements. An object can be considered a 'thing', according to Tim Ingold (2012: 27), permeated by vital flows that enable us to access meanings, effects, and interactions between human beings and their environments. In this sense, there is no separation between subjects and objects (Miller 2013: 92). The human condition, thus, is inseparable from the material world to which it belongs (Cooney 2021: 14). Therefore, this concept of agency allows us to understand what the iconographic reliefs, their elements, their decoration programme, and the monuments in which they are located could do, cause, and influence within a given social relationship, situated within a specific context.

Male deities occupied the highest position in the cosmic hierarchy, which granted them the most prestigious and prominent roles in the decorative programmes of monuments. This reflects an androcentric representational system in ancient Egyptian art. Male figures were central and normative, while feminine elements were never equal to masculine ones, even in depictions of gods and goddesses together. Thereby, the representation of male and female figures in ancient Egyptian sources was not random or oppositional but followed a specific pattern aimed at balancing multiple priorities in decorative programmes while mitigating tensions between genders (Scrivens 2019: 135).

Although usually positioned on the periphery of the Egyptian androcentric canon, female figures had greater flexibility within rigid norms, which enabled them to perform roles inaccessible to their male counterparts. This paradoxical dynamic underscores how gendered agency, even in marginality, could provide specific and exclusive capacities for female subjects in the compositional system of ancient Egypt (Scrivens 2019: 234). In the representations of the God's Wives of Amun, an important fact is that, although female figures, they did not exactly occupy the periphery of the scenes in relation to a male figure in the sources, as demonstrated throughout this paper. The consorts of the Theban god adopted strategies that allowed them not only to occupy the focus of the scene but also to replace deities in divine triads and interact directly with them.

It is important to go beyond the ideas that these women's exceptionality was only connected to periods of political instability for pharaonic rule, or to the hypothesis that they did not have offspring to avoid generating an heir who could threaten the throne succession (Ayad 2016a: 98). Furthermore, the assumption that their high status was solely related to a restricted and symbolically isolated influence in a 'religious sphere' in Thebes (Gosselin 2007: 265) should not be regarded as an explanation for the distinctive representations of the God's Wives of Amun in the sources. As Ayad (2022: 2) claims, women exercising power in ancient Egypt were often seen by scholars, many times without evidence, as a result of a male figure behind them, who actually wielded power or acted for them behind the scenes. Since these consorts held a status and had a considerable influence in many affairs in Upper Egypt, one must take into consideration their gender and kinship as part of the many elements that constituted the God's Wives' agency, inserted in a historical framework.

It is important to note that, in the first scene mentioned above (Figure 2), Amenirdis replaces the role of Isis in the divine triad with Osiris and Horus, Isis' husband and son respectively. The God's Wife, a former princess and also consort of Amun, would be able to replace the goddess mother.

According to te Velde (1971: 85), an Egyptian princess could take over the function of a mother in some contexts in a triad, and, in this sense, the Divine Adoratrices of Amun would fit the role as both daughters and consorts. In this case, there is Shepenupet II before the triad, daughter of Amenirdis in the office, with both of them benefitting from this opportunity due to their kinship and Amenirdis' gender.

The second relief is located on the left upper register of the south wall of the forecourt, with a scene of Shepenupet II wearing a double-feathered crown with a vulture headdress, driving four calves before the mummiform Osiris, Horus, and deified Amenirdis (both of the last two are very damaged) (Figure 3). In the inscriptions related to Shepenupet II, there are some of her titles, such as ‘the Charming Noble, the Great of Praises, the God’s Wife’  (*rp.t.t jmw wr.t ḥsw.t ḥm.t-nṯr*, *hesut hemet-netjer*), as well as an indication that ‘her mother is the God’s Hand, Amenirdis, justified’  (*mwt(-s) ḏrt-ṯ-nṯr jmn-ḏjr-ḏ-sṯ mṯ-ḥrw.t*, *mut-es, djeret-ntjer imenirdset maa-kheru*). Both gods give Shepenupet II ‘all life and authority’  (*nḥ ws nb*). The only preserved title of Amenirdis in the inscriptions is ‘the Divine Adoratrice’  (*ḏwṯ.t-nṯr*, *duat-netjer*).

According to Ayad (2009a: 106), this ritual was supposed to be performed by Horus and its main purpose was the protective concealment of Osiris' tomb. By extension, this ritual was usually represented with the pharaohs performing it (Ayad 2021: 51), granting them legitimacy as the rightful successors on the throne of Egypt. Adapting a pharaonic prerogative and directing the benefits of this ritual to Amenirdis (who seems to replace the goddess Isis again in the depicted divine triad), Shepenupet II would secure her legitimacy as Amenirdis' successor in the office of the God's Wife of Amun, establish her rights over her predecessor's properties (Ayad 2009a: 133), and honour Amenirdis through this rite. Furthermore, as Carola Koch (2016: 156) notes, this ritual was more typically associated with temples rather than with a funerary context, such as the Chapel of Amenirdis. The deceased should be the primary officiant benefitting from the ritual depicted. However, in this case, it is not the justified Amenirdis performing the act for her own benefit,

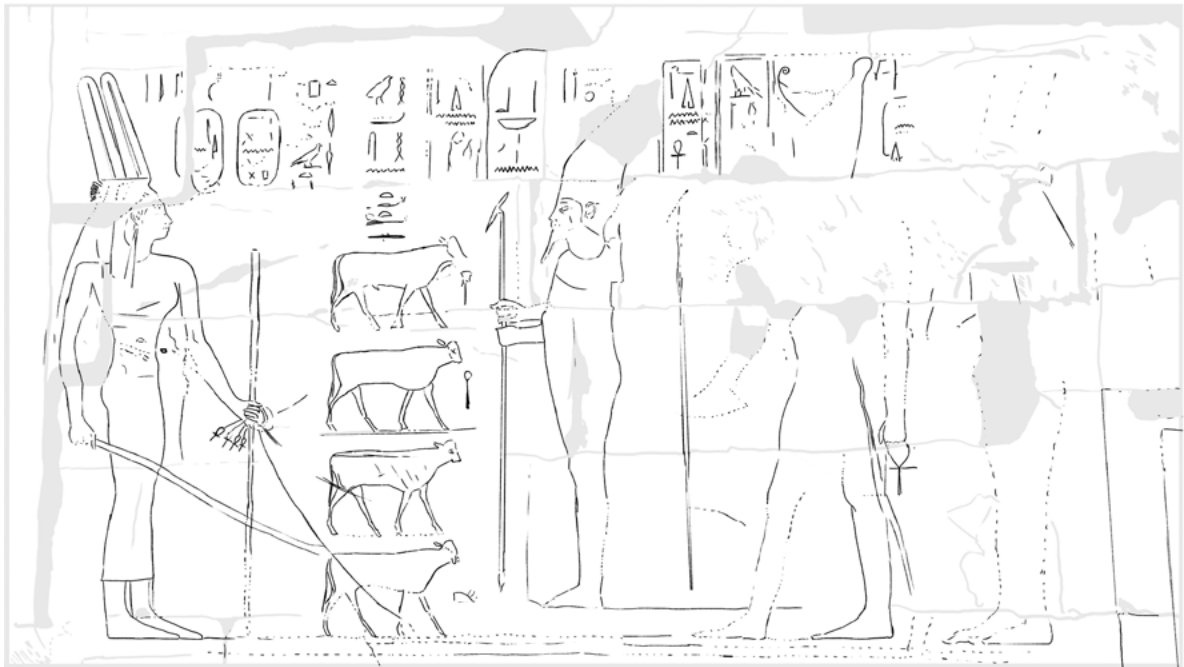


Figure 3. Shepenupet II driving four calves before Osiris, Horus, and Amenirdis (line drawing © Priscila Junglos, after Ayad 2016a: 94, fig. 5).

but Shepenupet II. The specificities of the God's Wives of Amun's identity, thus, permitted these priestesses to adapt certain pharaonic prerogatives, as well as to replace the role of a goddess in order not only to benefit from a specific ritual, but also to highlight, maintain, and propagate the high status of their office in Thebes.

Among two deities: Amenirdis in different divine triads

There are some reliefs in the forecourt of the chapel in which Shepenupet II interacts with different combinations of divine triads. Below the scene of the driving of four calves, there is a representation of Shepenupet II offering jars of *hekenu*, a sacred oil, to Ra-Horakhty, Isis, and the justified Amenirdis (Figure 4). Shepenupet II's titles related to her office and kingship appear again, such as 'the God's Wife, Lady of the Two Lands' $\text{𓆎} \text{𓆏} \text{𓆑} \text{𓆒}$ (*hm.t-nṯr nb<.t> t3.wj, hemet-netjer nebet tauy*) and 'the Daughter of the King' $\text{𓆎} \text{𓆏}$ (*s3.t-nsw.t, sat-nesut*). The gods also bless her, like in the other scenes mentioned, with 'all life and authority and all health' $\text{𓆎} \text{𓆏} \text{𓆑} \text{𓆒}$ (*nh w3 nb snb nb, ankh was neb seneb neb*).

The offering of *hekenu* jars could serve for helping the deceased to unite with the gods and having a cleansing effect (Ayad 2009a: 60). Shepenupet II's offering, thus, benefits Amenirdis and herself, since the sweet aroma of *hekenu* would please the gods and would ensure their goodwill towards her. In this case, although the original composition of a divine triad of Ra-Horakhty, Isis, and another deity is not clear, Amenirdis stands with the two gods, a constant privilege in the decoration of her forecourt chapel.

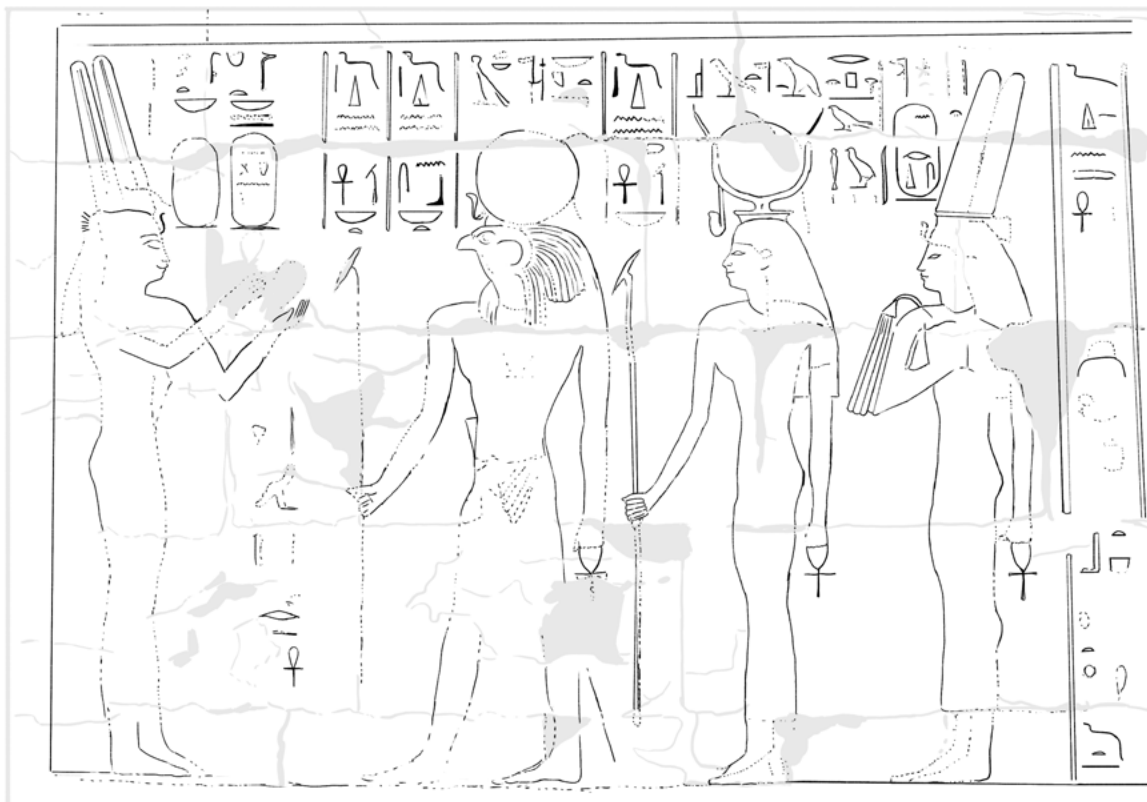


Figure 4. Shepenupet II offering *hekenu* jars to Ra-Horakhty, Isis, and Amenirdis (line drawing © Priscila Junglos, after Ayad 2016a: 95, fig. 6).

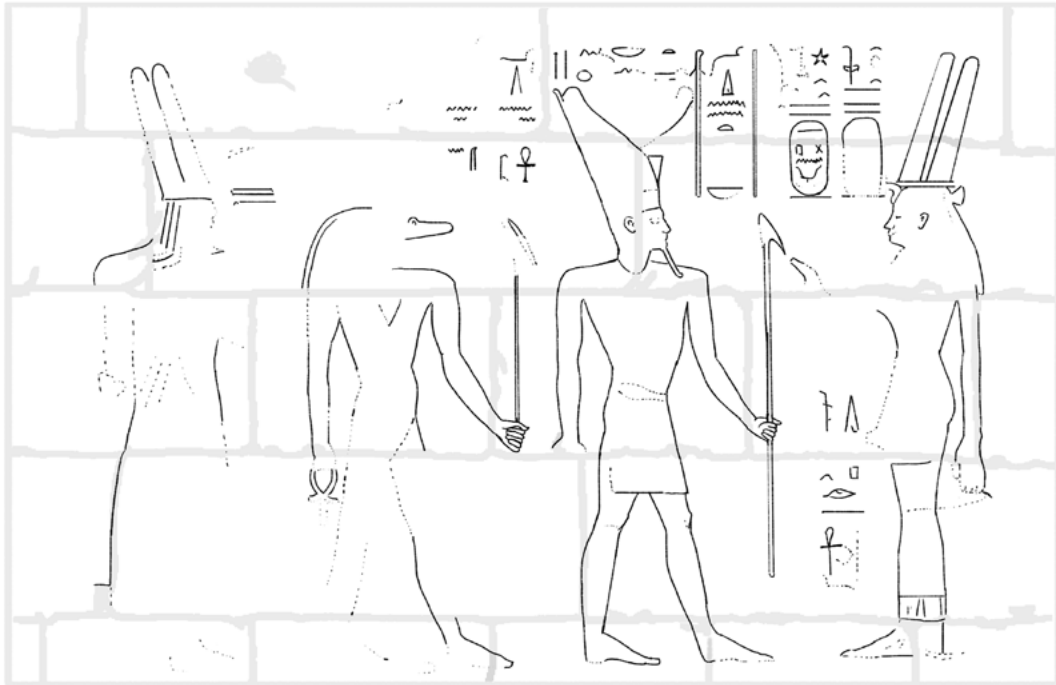


Figure 5. Shepenupet II before Atum, Anubis, and Amenirdis (line drawing © Priscila Junglos, after Epigraphic Survey Negative 1594 from ISAC, the University of Chicago. Courtesy of the Institute for the Study of Ancient Cultures of the University of Chicago).

On the lower register of the right-south wall, there is a scene of Shepenupet II before Atum, Anubis, and Amenirdis (Figure 5). Although very damaged, it is possible to observe some patterns regarding the different titles of the successor with the inscriptions provided by Jansen-Winkel (2009: 273–274), such as ‘the Divine Adoratrice, the Mistress of the Two Lands Shepenupet’ $\text{𓆎} \text{𓆏} \text{𓆑} \text{𓆒}$ (*dw:t-ntr ḥnw.t t.wj špn-wpt*, *duat-netjer henut tauy shepenupet*), and ‘the Daughter of the King, the Lady of the Two Lands’ $\text{𓆎} \text{𓆏} \text{𓆑} \text{𓆒}$ (*s:t-nsu.t nb<.t> t.wj*, *sat-nesut nebet tauy*). The original presupposed composition of this divine triad is also unclear.

Lastly, on the west wall of the forecourt, there is a scene on the upper right part of Shepenupet II before Anubis, Hathor, and Amenirdis (Figure 6), also with similar inscriptions (Jansen-Winkel 2009: 271–272). Shepenupet II is represented as ‘the Daughter of the King’ $\text{𓆎} \text{𓆏} \text{𓆑} \text{𓆒}$ (*s:t-nsu.t*, *sat-nesut*) and ‘the Divine Adoratrice, the Mistress of the Two Lands’ $\text{𓆎} \text{𓆏} \text{𓆑} \text{𓆒}$ (*dw:t-ntr ḥnw.t t.wj*, *duat-netjer henut tauy*), and Amenirdis’ inscriptions indicate her as ‘the God’s Hand’ $\text{𓆎} \text{𓆏} \text{𓆑} \text{𓆒}$ (*ḏr.t -ntr*, *djeret-netjer*) and ‘the Daughter of the King’ $\text{𓆎} \text{𓆏} \text{𓆑} \text{𓆒}$ (*s:t-nsu.t*, *sat-nesut*).

Although the composition of these last three triads is diverse and unclear regarding their original presupposed composition, the deceased Amenirdis is represented justified with two other deities, blessing Shepenupet II, who benefits even more than her from the rituals. Although dedicated to the memory and funerary cult of Amenirdis, Shepenupet II shares the primary position of the narrative of the forecourt reliefs, in which both of them are put in exceptional positions, expected to be occupied by a pharaoh or a deity. Thereby, the decoration programme of the forecourt works in favour of both God’s Wives, expanding and strengthening their agency and status.



Figure 6. Shepenupet II before Anubis, Hathor, and Amenirdis (line drawing © Priscila Junglos, after *Epigraphic Survey Negative 1580* from ISAC, the University of Chicago. Courtesy of the Institute for the Study of Ancient Cultures of the University of Chicago).

The prominence of these figures in this forecourt should not be considered as an exception, a concession made by the Nubian kings only to support their new rules in Egypt and/or due to a cultural context behind the origins of Amenirdis and Shepenupet II. The royal Nubian ideology required a female counterpart to the king for him to succeed in his rule, something that was not necessarily expected in the case of Egyptian kingship, in which the queens did not play the complementary role seen in Kush (Lohwasser 2016: 132). It could be suggested, therefore, that the exceptional prominence of the representations found in the Chapel of Amenirdis resulted from Nubian influence regarding gender roles and royal power, which would allow the Divine Adoratrices to develop their status and agency as a necessary counterpart to the new pharaohs (Ayad 2016a: 96), thus ensuring the unity of Thebes with pharaonic governance.

This idea could lead to the conclusion that the developments and status of these women's office were outcomes of the dynastic transition from Libyan to Nubian kings, as Ayad (2009b: 49) suggests in relation to the Chapel of Osiris, Ruler of Eternity, in Karnak. However, we must approach this kind of interpretation cautiously in the case of the Chapel of Amenirdis in Medinet Habu to avoid losing sight of the historical context of the institution of the God's Wife of Amun. While also a product of this new political and cultural dynamic of the 25th dynasty, the prominence of the Nubian consorts' status and representations in this monument also reflects the internal development of their office over time. As Ayad (2022: 5) states, the God's Wives not only built their legitimacy as such, but also expanded the privileges acquired by their predecessors.

The office of the God's Wife of Amun began adapting pharaonic prerogatives and expanding the agency of the Divine Adoratrices before the 25th dynasty (Ayad 2009a; Coulon 2018b; Kawaminami 2023), not only as a result of the political interests of the Nubian kings in Thebes. Although they somehow supported the legitimisation of the new pharaohs' rules, these priestesses continued to act rather independently, occupying a central position within the interconnected networks of kingship and the priesthood of Amun. During moments when the kings were concerned about their authority in Upper Egypt, the God's Wives also reinforced the power of their institution, strategically employing the symbolic elements of kingship and the divine sphere to their advantage. This agency of the consorts of Amun, which was not merely dependent on pharaonic interests, for instance, can be observed in the selected reliefs discussed above.

According to Lohwasser (2016: 132), the office of the God's Wife of Amun in its internal hierarchy, administration, and influences remained Egyptian and embedded within this emic context, with the monumental representation of the consorts not essentially importing models from Kush. While the balance of power in the 25th dynasty required the kings to have a female counterpart in Thebes, Shepenupet II's focus on the forecourt of the chapel seems to have been more on reinforcing and developing internal kinship ties among the Divine Adoratrices through her mother in the office, Amenirdis, than on exalting pharaonic power in her representations. Therefore, the agency of the God's Wives of Amun in this context is not inverse, direct, or necessarily proportional to pharaonic interests. Instead, there is a historical process of mobilising pharaonic prerogatives, kingship and divine elements, and the kinship ties among each other in the office.

The Columned Building of Nitocris (Naga Malgata)

The second monument in which the selected iconographic reliefs occur is the so-called 'Columned Building' of Nitocris. Its ruins are located in Naga Malgata and it was originally integrated into the domains of the priesthood of Amun and the God's Wife's institution (Coulon and Laisney 2015: 159). The ruins are remnants of a small room flanked by two columns, with the building's main entrance likely located to the west (Charron 2009: 46). Its façade extends to the north and south, with parts deprived of decoration (Figure 7). Inside the room, there are some severely damaged iconographic reliefs. Although we do not know for sure about its original functions, according to Laurent

Coulon (2014: 566–567), the archaeological remains and the information inscribed on an autobiographical statue of Ibi (Cairo, Egyptian Museum JE36158), the Chief Steward of the God's Wife Nitocris (c. 639–586 BCE) about the construction of some buildings dedicated to the mentioned priestess, would indicate that these ruins were possibly a residence built for this adoratrice.

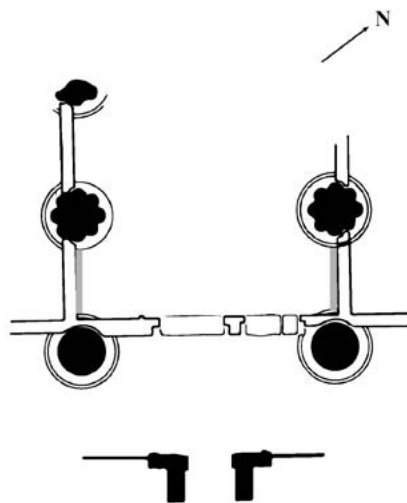


Figure 7. Plan of the ruins of the Columned Building of Nitocris in Naga Malgata (adapted from Coulon and Laisney 2015: 143, fig. 51).

The first Saite God's Wife of Amun, Nitocris, had a very important tenure that allows us to understand not only the importance and the operating mechanisms of these women's institution, but also the strategies of the Saite pharaoh Psamtik I (c. 664–610 BCE) for the legitimization of his rule. According to the narrative of the adoption stela of Nitocris (Cairo, Egyptian Museum JE36327), the new

king, when he took the Egyptian throne, did not end the tenure of the Nubian God's Wife at that time, Shepenupet II, but instead put his daughter Nitocris in the line of succession of the office. This source is one of the documents that provides us with the most detailed information regarding the goods and properties involved in the investiture of an heiress as God's Wife, as well as the clearest record of a kind of codification of the idea of succession in the office through adoption (Ayad 2021: 53). It is when Nitocris becomes an heiress within the institution of the Divine Adoratrice that we can infer a recognition of the Saite royal power by the priesthood of Amun and the nomarchs of Upper Egypt (Blöbaum 2016: 199). Like her predecessors, the Saite priestess maintained the use of titles, representations in rituals characteristic of the pharaohs, as well as an active programme of monument construction in Thebes, erecting her memorial chapel alongside those of the other God's Wives in Medinet Habu (Hölscher 1954: 18; Koch 2016: 161) and dedicating chapels to Osiris in Karnak (Ayad 2009a: 25–26).

As for the iconographic reliefs in the ruins of the Columned Building, in general, there are scenes of Nitocris and the king interacting with some deities in a possibly ritualistic sequence (Coulon and Laisney 2015: 143). All of the subjects have the same proportion, which would indicate the importance of the God's Wife in relation to the gods and the pharaoh. There are scenes of Nitocris offering wine to deities, playing the sistrum to them, and receiving offerings from Ibi, as well as reliefs of Psamtik I making offerings to the gods. There are also some particular scenes that together resemble a ritual related only to the pharaoh, but performed by Nitocris, a sequence divided between the north and the south walls alternatively: the ritual of crowning the king.

Replacing the pharaoh: The adaptation of the ritual of crowning the king

Beginning on the north wall, there is a fragment of a scene consisting of Nitocris being purified by Horus, on her right (Figure 8). Although it is damaged, it is possible to reconstruct the god Thoth on her left, also purifying her (Charron 2009: 49).



Figure 8. Nitocris being purified by Horus (line drawing © Priscila Junglos, after Coulon and Laisney 2015: 147, fig. 59).

The gods are standing on a base, tilting *hes* jars  over Nitocris from which *ankh*  and *was*  (i.e. life and authority) flow. There are only a few traces of inscriptions left. The *hes* jars could also form a visual and phonetic pun with the verb to bless, to consecrate (*hsj*, *hesi*)  . With both hieroglyphs, *ankh* and *was*, the scene forms an iconographic set that is related to the ritual of legitimation of the pharaohs, part of the process of his crowning, in which eternal life and divine authority are granted to him by the gods. Thereby, Nitocris appropriates this ritual and its elements to benefit from them as well as to reinforce her authority as a God's Wife, similarly to the kings.

Moving to the south wall, the sequence continues with Nitocris being introduced by Montu and Atum (Figure 9), representing Upper and Lower Egypt, respectively. On the left of the scene, Montu wears a double-feathered crown with a solar disk and two *uraei*. The god faces the right of the relief, towards Nitocris, and

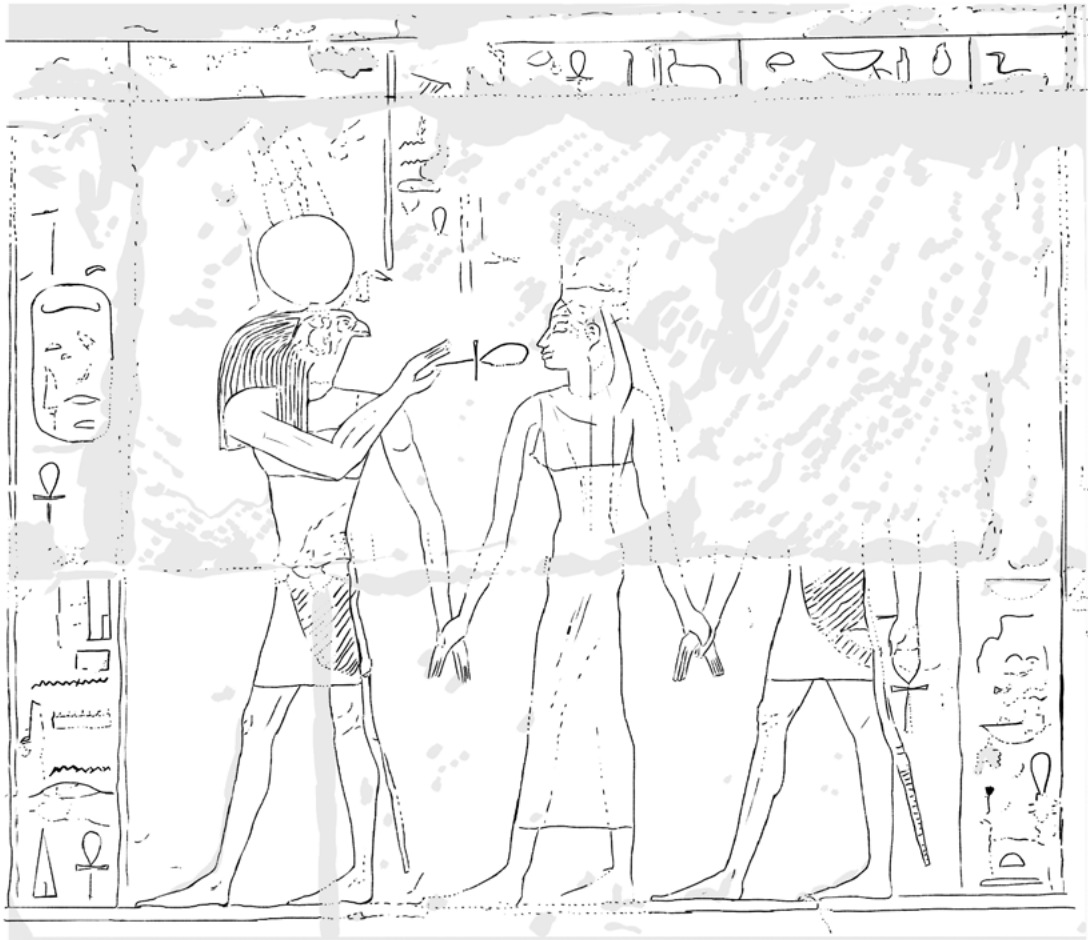


Figure 9. Nitocris being introduced by Montu and Atum (line drawing © Priscila Junglos, after Coulon and Laisney 2015: 148, fig. 61).

with his left hand he holds the God's Wife's right hand. With his other hand, Montu offers her an *ankh* towards her face. Nitocris' representation is fragmented, with an indistinguishable crown. She wears a long tight dress and each of her hands holds that of one of the deities. Atum, on the right side of the scene, holds an *ankh* in his left hand. There is only his lower half preserved on the relief.

Then, on the north wall and beside the purifying scene, Nitocris is finally crowned by Amun (Figure 10). This scene can be reconstructed from its lower part, photographed by J.J. Clère in 1935 with the partial block located at the Louvre Museum (Paris, Louvre E26905). The God's Wife's representation is damaged, although it is possible to see her kneeling, wearing a short wig adorned by a vulture headdress. Behind her, sitting on a throne, Amun lays his right hand slightly above her head. He wears his typical double-feathered crown, an *usekh* necklace and a false curved beard. According to Alain Charron (2009: 48), the style of both figures is characteristic of the transition period from the 25th to the 26th dynasties.

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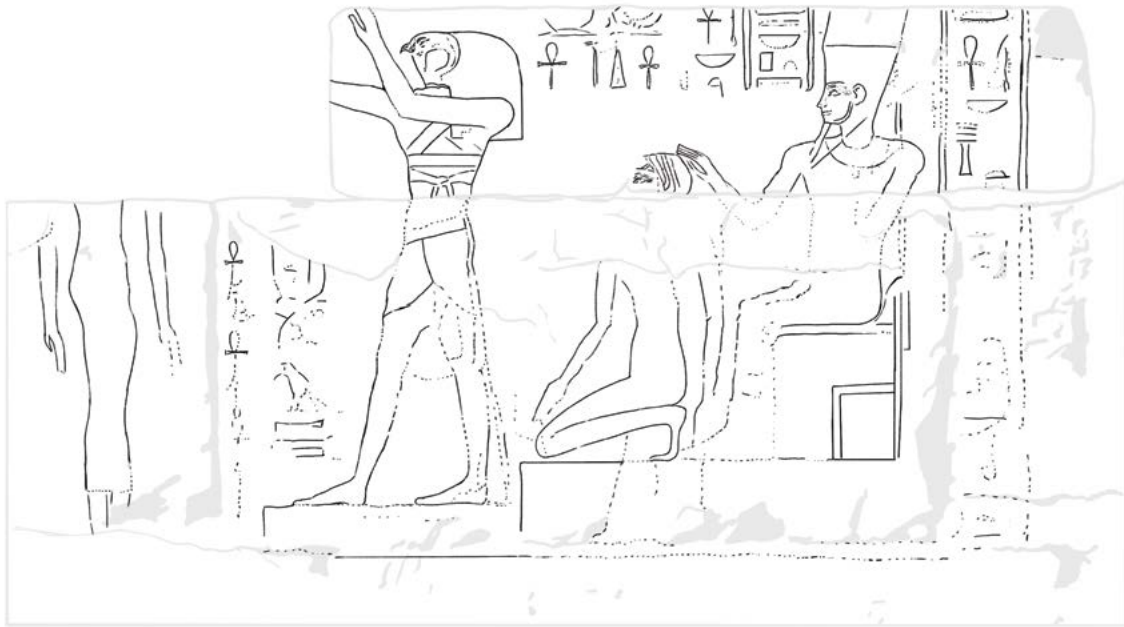


Figure 10. Nitocris being crowned by Amun (line drawing © Priscila Junglos, after Coulon and Laisney 2015: 147, fig. 59).

aut-ib neb mi ra). Above Nitocris' head, she is identified as 'Divine Adoratrice' 𓆎^* (*dwꜣ.t-nṯr*, *duat-netjer*) and 'Daughter of the King Psamtik' $\text{𓆎} \text{𓆏} \text{𓆑} \text{𓆒}$ (*sr.t-nsu.t psmṯk*, *sat-nesu Psamtik*).

Considering that these reliefs adapt a pharaonic ritual, Charron (2009: 50) suggested that such adaptation to the benefit of a God's Wife could have happened due to the exceptional circumstances around Nitocris' adoption to the office, as mentioned before. By allowing his now-priestess daughter to be represented in such a ritual, the Saite pharaoh could reinforce and legitimise his reign with Nitocris as a representative of the new dynasty in Thebes, associating her with the God's Wife of Amun's institution. However, Charron's hypothesis does not consider the number of adaptations of king's rituals and elements related to kingship, mostly exclusive of the pharaohs, by the Divine Adoratrices throughout the existence of their office, nor the possible audience of this relief.

According to Laurent Coulon and Anna Guillou (2022: 50), the depiction of the ritual of crowning a God's Wife of Amun in iconographic reliefs is not an innovation of the Saite Period. Currently, the earliest known evidence of such representations dates from the tenure of Amenirdis I, reconstructed from blocks of the 25th dynasty that were reused in the construction of the chapel of Osiris of Coptos, located in the northeastern sector of the temenos of Amun at Karnak. The reconstructed scenes include Amenirdis being introduced by Horus and Thoth, and her being crowned by Amun in the presence of Iunmufet and the *bau* of Pe and Nekhen – a parallel also found in the crowning ritual scenes of the pharaoh Taharqa on the reliefs of Temple T, at Kawa (Coulon and Guillou 2022: 63–65). Furthermore, representations of crowning a God's Wife disconnected from the sequence of the traditional ritual of crowning the king can also be found in the Chapel of Osiris, Ruler of Eternity, in Karnak, on the lower register of the door jambs of the façade (the Libyan part of the monument), in which the consort Shepenupet I is crowned by Amun (PM II: 205 [11]; *Projet Karnak*, KIU 2244 and 2246). Regarding the possibility of this relief being set in a monument that probably served as a residence for the God's Wives of Amun, or that at least was directly related to these priestesses' institution, the main audience presumably could be the Divine Adoratrices and their servants. Thereby, the access to the sequence of crowning Nitocris was possibly limited to the institution itself,

which would function more to the benefit of legitimising the Saite God's Wife's tenure than purely her father's rule in Thebes. Therefore, it is possible to consider that this adaptation and interaction of Nitocris with other deities, replacing a pharaoh in a male divine triad composition, did not focus on the legitimisation of Psamtik I as king of Egypt, but on the reinforcement of Nitocris as a God's Wife and on the high status of this office. Connected to kingship as daughter of the pharaoh and to the divine realm as the consort of Amun, Nitocris' gender and kinship ties allowed her to benefit from the divine blessings given to her without threatening the king's authority, but representing it in Thebes, as well as to occupy a place in a specific ritual and context that would meet the interest of her own institution.

The selected reliefs from the Columned Building of Nitocris also raise the issue of how divine triads were composed and the proportions they were expected to follow. The ritual of crowning a king would suggest three male subjects, the pharaoh and two deities. Considering the exceptionality of the divine attributes of the Egyptian king, the pattern of a male divine triad in the crowning ritual is more deeply changed than it may look at first. Nitocris inverted the concept of a divine triad in that context to one female power to two male powers, a deviance in ancient Egyptian art to a cosmic level. As discussed before, the God's Wives adopted strategies and leveraged their unique identity and social markers to be represented in contexts and with elements that diverged from the traditional Egyptian artistic canon, while minimising the tensions arising from these deviations. This historical practice of this office can also highlight how these consorts politically instrumentalised their iconographic reliefs in the process.

In this sense, the iconographic reliefs can be considered a mechanism of domination and empowerment, a device for different purposes in which different agents are involved (Sansi 2015: 59). The selected sources, thus, as funerary art, have a performative character. The interaction with and the adaptation of the composition of divine triads in the discussed sources were meticulously arranged by the God's Wives, not only as a reflection of a representational tradition, but also as a mechanism of empowerment. As such, the reliefs in each of their contexts supported the agency of the God's Wives, acting as devices for reinforcing their status and own interests in the material sources. It is the Divine Adoratrice's institution that bestowed them power, a specific agency whose vector is their gender, kinship, and specific relationships.

Conclusions

In the iconographic reliefs presented, the God's Wives of Amun depicted themselves either replacing a pharaoh or a deity within the composition of a divine triad. They also portrayed themselves interacting with these triads, which benefitted both the interacting Adoratrice and the one included in the triad through the rituals performed. From the discussion of the selected sources, it becomes evident that their kinship ties and connections to kingship, the gods, and their predecessors were consistently mobilised. These connections formed a central part of their institution's identity and enabled them to adapt the composition of divine triads to suit their purposes, such as maintaining, reinforcing, and expanding their privileges and high status as God's Wives of Amun.

Kinship and gender, as inseparable social markers, provide a deeper understanding of the role of the consorts of the Theban god in the composition of divine triads in the selected iconographic reliefs. These representations were not merely mechanisms to support a pharaonic rule in Thebes but instruments of power and agency bestowed upon the God's Wives by their institution. This agency, rooted in their unique identity, allowed them to benefit from the close relationship to the gods and the divine status arising from composing a triad with deities. By leveraging their ties and

status, they reinforced their high rank in society and explored their own interests as evidenced in the sources.

The agency exercised by the God's Wives in this context was not inversely or directly proportional to pharaonic interests; rather, it reflected a historical process of strategically mobilising pharaonic, kingship, and divine prerogatives and elements, along with their kinship ties. This practice highlights how these consorts politically instrumentalised their iconographic reliefs, exceptionally navigating through political issues and exploring the traditional boundaries of the Egyptian artistic canon.

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Exploring the Expression of Time and Memory in Decorated Ware Vessel Compositions through Experimental Archaeology

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Abstract

The machinations of prehistoric imagery and ancient conceptions of time and memory encoded therein perpetually elude modern viewers. Drawing on the rich corpus of Predynastic Egyptian Decorated Ware (D-ware) vessels with figural decoration, this article explores these issues using a tailored experimental archaeology methodology. This strategy recreates Predynastic D-ware compositions by testing and applying ancient painting techniques and materials to replica vessels corresponding to strictly excavated pottery. It focuses on the role of the vessel surface and the audience by analysing the painting process and completed replica vessels that more closely capture ancient viewing experiences. The results indicate the imagery was designed for a collective audience participating in a social experience, not an individual viewer reading a narrative driven by linear progression. Thus, the motif arrangement and layout of the compositions on D-ware correlate to the vessels' role in concretising both an image of the deceased in social memory as well as reinforcing collective identities among the living rather than functioning as isolated objects with meaning only for the deceased.

Keywords

Decorated Ware; Prehistoric Compositions; Experimental Archaeology; Painting Practices; Social Memory

Introduction

This article explores what a tailored experimental archaeology methodology can reveal about how two complex elements – time and memory – are encoded in prehistoric imagery. To address visual culture predating texts, Predynastic Egyptian figural compositions painted on pottery, Decorated Ware (D-ware) vessels, are examined. The wealth and variety in the repertoire of motifs, including anthropomorphic figures, as well as the wide range of distribution throughout Egypt offer the most potential for reference to time and memory.

As detailed in recent dissertation work (Kroft 2024), an experimental archaeology strategy was developed to investigate how images and vessel surfaces operate effectively together to communicate meaning to an audience. This materiality-focused method uses first-hand re-creation of the entire object – painted imagery and ceramic vessel – to deconstruct the ancient painting process. Moreover, it more closely approximates the ancient viewing experience and investigates a new possible audience. The constructive process of painting the imagery on ceramic vessels, coupled with the final viewing experience, draws out visual cues and technical aspects that are obscured by considering only the completed vessels, a complication compounded by the absence of textual evidence. Based on observations and findings unique to this research, this article proposes that the composition was read as a single, cohesive tableau rather than a series of episodes or sequential stages. In this interpretation, time is a cyclical component underpinning the imagery and not a linear or sequential force driving the narrative. By functioning in this way, the vessels address a collective audience to initiate and concretise social memory to generate meaning.

Corpus

Prehistoric figurative imagery investigated in this article is drawn from compositions painted on ceramic pottery, D-ware vessels, during Naqada IIc–IId2 (c. 3450–3300 BCE) of the Predynastic Period of ancient Egypt (c. 4400–3100 BCE).¹ These vessels were fashioned out of marl clay collected in specific locations in the desert surrounding the Nile Valley. After the vessels were formed and fired, decoration was added with a hematite-based red-brown paint (Patch 2011: 223). The vessels turned a buff colour at the high temperatures required for firing in special up-draught kilns,² resulting in the characteristic decorative scheme that defines D-ware, a buff-coloured pot with red-brown painted decoration. D-ware comprise two inter-related components – the iconographic element, that is, the painted decoration, and the three-dimensional object, that is, the curvilinear surface of the ceramic vessel. Following Jessica Cox’s research (2020: 104), decorative schemes can be grouped into two main categories, geometric or figural decoration, and vessel morphology did not impact the scheme chosen. Geometric decoration includes only spirals and horizontal wavy lines whereas figural decoration includes anthropomorphic figures, flora, fauna, and boats.

The research presented in this article refers strictly to excavated vessels with figural decoration. There are a total of 47 complete vessels with figural decoration excavated from Predynastic sites (Kroft 2024: 218). Only complete vessels are analysed here because the focus is on the compositions in their entirety and their communication strategy via the vessel surfaces for which sherds cannot offer the whole composition. The work pays particular attention to compositions including anthropomorphic representation, which serve as effective entry points for an audience (Table 1).³

D-ware vessels have been excavated in 39 sites from northern to southern Egypt and into Nubia. The overall consistency in the morphology and decorative schemes points to vessel manufacture in regional workshops. According to Cox’s (2020: 99–100) analysis of the distribution of the vessels at these sites, five centres of D-ware vessel production can be determined: Badari (Middle Egypt), Abydos, Diospolis Parva, Naqada, and Hierakonpolis, though Abydos and Diospolis Parva may have formed part of the same large region of production. Based on her analysis of excavated D-ware vessels, Cox (2020: 97–111) finds that the regional workshops of Abydos and Naqada dominated vessel production with figural decoration. Vessels used in this research were found in all workshop production centres – Badari in Middle Egypt; el-Amra, Naga ed-Deir, Abydos, and Abadiya in the Abydos/Diospolis Parva region; Naqada and Ballas in the Naqada region; and el-Hosh and Adaima from the Hierakonpolis region, as well as one vessel from northern Egypt, Harageh, which was likely imported from a southern workshop (Kroft 2024: 20).

Limitations of previous studies

Although prehistoric imagery is especially challenging to decipher, it offers an arena in which to pose new questions and test innovative approaches. To do this, the strategy used in this research steps away from iconographic identifications, which are hindered by subjective visual similarities. Across all prehistoric cultures, representational art interprets what is seen or experienced and is not an exact portrayal (Bahrani 2001: 29–31). Due to the absence of texts, motifs are mediated by ancient societies in ways unknown to the modern viewer, and it is not possible to determine how these mediations impacted the extant representations by visual comparison alone. For Predynastic Egyptian art, this results in prolonged debates among scholars in the identification of motifs,

¹ The chronology in this article follows Patch (2011: 212–215).

² Wengrow notes the use of specialised up-draught kilns to achieve the high firing temperatures of the D-ware vessels (Wengrow 2006: 93).

³ Twelve of the total number of complete excavated vessels have anthropomorphic figures (Kroft 2024: 215–216, 231).

such as specific vegetation, birds, and quadrupeds (Kroft 2024: 91). When symbolic attributes are incorporated into reading motifs, they are often drawn from the Dynastic Period, and these links remain tenuous suggestions rather than evidence for definitive identifications.

The method presented here also changes how compositions are analysed, namely by not extracting the motifs from the surface upon which they are painted and not as flat, rolled-out printed reproductions. These reproductions do not correspond to the ancient viewing experience, where a single viewer could not see the entire composition from one vantage point. Removal of the curvilinear surface in the interpretation of the iconography excludes one of the two components that together form the D-ware vessel as a complete object, and thus printed reproductions only address half of the total viewing experience.

Moreover, by showing the entire composition in one plane, the printed versions distort and change the imagery. These rolled-out versions introduce another level of subjectivity and variation by the modern reader – where the composition should be broken. The curvilinear nature of the vessel surfaces means that the compositions do not have identifiable beginnings or ends. When the compositions are thus reproduced in a flat printed version, the modern viewer introduces an assumed break in the composition – a beginning and an end to the imagery. These breaks are not only different among scholars who reproduce the compositions, but by demarcating such breaks in the imagery, the scholars are already inserting several layers of interpretation into the imagery.

To re-evaluate Neolithic figurines, Bailey (2005: 16) explores materiality and agency, explaining that figurines are interpretations of reality *through* a specific medium and focusing on the role of the viewer. Similarly, the recreation of replica vessels illuminates aspects of the painting process and produces objects that can be analysed in ways more accurate to prehistoric engagement. Using the multifaceted painted pottery, the questions posed here directly target the interplay between imagery and surface. How does the imagery operate on a three-dimensional surface? It is not asked what the motifs are, but instead what the painting process can reveal about how the craftsmen and viewers perceived time and memory in the objects.

Experimental archaeology methodology

Seven excavated D-ware vessels with figural decoration including anthropomorphic figures (Table 1) will be analysed in this paper with the experimental archaeology strategy developed in Kroft (2024).⁴ For this method, modern ceramic techniques are used to recreate replica vessels out of an Appalachian mudstone that turns a buff colour after firing, basing their sizes and shapes on excavated ancient vessels (Figure 1a–g).⁵

For the painting process, materials were restricted to those available to Predynastic Egyptians to emulate the painting process as closely as possible. For the paint, a ground red ochre was mixed with a binder, gum Arabic, and water. Gum Arabic was available to ancient painters via tapping Acacia trees to collect the water-soluble substance (Newman and Halpine 2001: 22). The author mixed various paint consistencies, which were tested on the vessel surfaces, ranging from those closer to watercolours to thick paints. Based on the observations of ancient paint strokes and the tests, an approximate consistency of the paint was determined. Ancient paint strokes are neither translucent

⁴ Seven excavated D-ware vessels with anthropomorphic representation were selected for creation of replica vessels: Oxford, Ashmolean Museum 1895.606; Oxford, Ashmolean Museum E.2823; Berkeley, Hearst Museum of Anthropology 6-4000; New York, Brooklyn Museum 09.889.400; Philadelphia, Penn Museum E1399; London, Petrie Museum UC36233; London, British Museum EA35502.

⁵ The full details of the experimental archaeology strategy can be found in Kroft (2024), as well as the remaining excavated vessels with figural decoration.

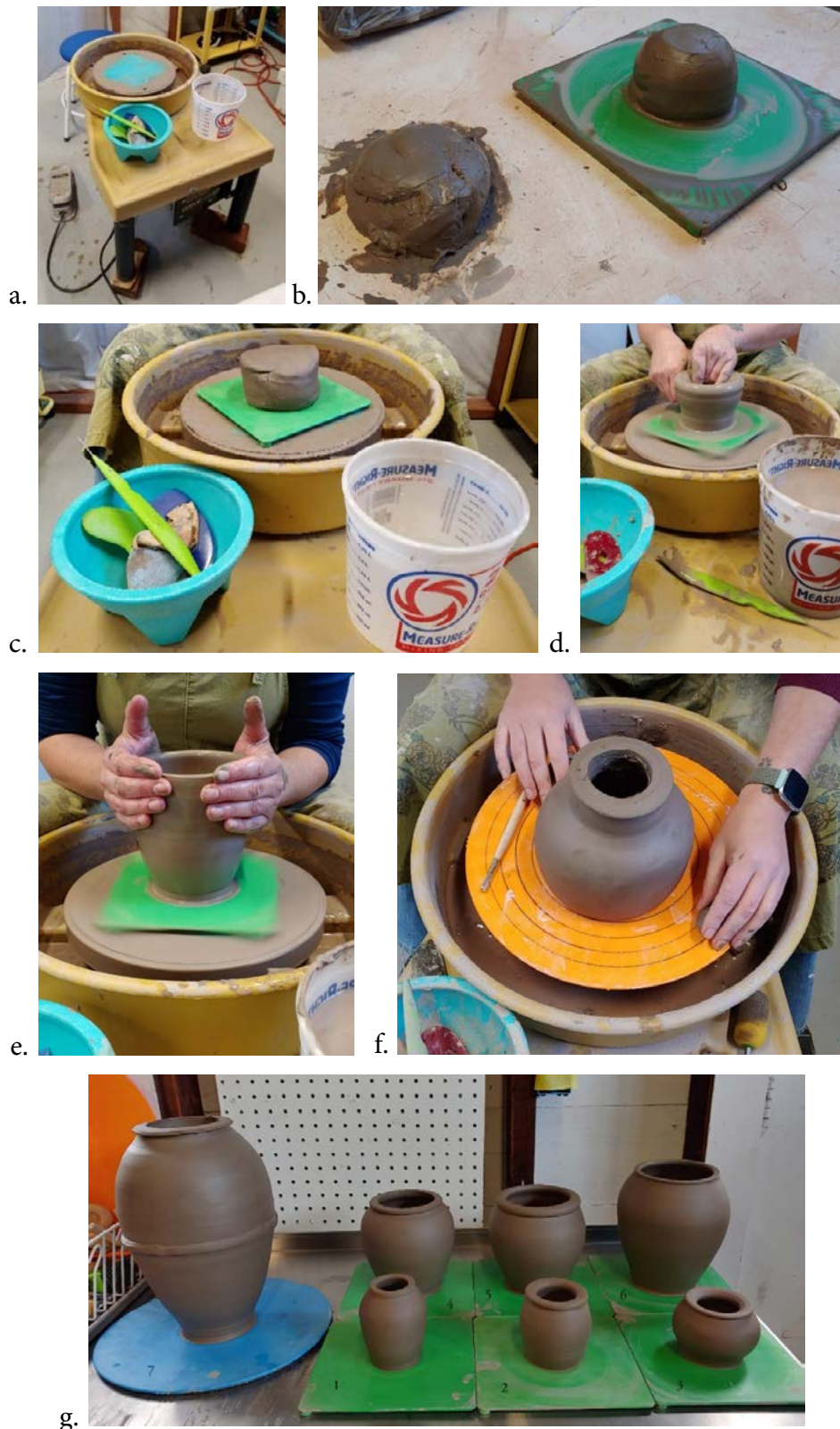


Figure 1a-g. Images recording the process of creating replica vessels using modern techniques based on the sizes and shapes of the seven ancient excavated Decorated Ware vessels examined and measured firsthand by the author. The replica vessels were fabricated at the Albion Experimental Archaeology Studio, Danbury (CT), with ancient ceramic specialist and founder Mara T. Horowitz. Photographs: Sophia E. Kroft.

like watercolours nor thick and textured, as observed over the corpus of excavated vessels. The way the paint flowed from the painting implement (Figure 2) during the experimental testing was also incorporated into the final assessment of the paint consistency; namely, it was clear that paint, beyond a certain viscosity, did not release from the carved tip of the implement even with the use of water. The reed implement was dipped in water to facilitate and extend the flow of paint and not via re-dipping it into the paint itself. This was effective up to a point, after which the integrity of the reed was no longer maintained (Kroft 2024: 130–133).⁶ Moreover, if this dipping was too frequent, the consistency of the paint became transparent, like watercolours, a saturation not matched by the ancient paint strokes.

Several possible painting implements were tested, such as a brush, a reed pen, a porcupine quill, and a bird feather. The author determined using a reed pen matched the thickness of the ancient painted lines and the sizes of the motifs most accurately. The end of the reed was sculpted using a sharp implement to create a pointed tip and a well where a small amount of paint could be stored and released during the painting (Figure 2). The reed pen also allowed for the control of the paint flow and the accuracy of lines over the other tools tested. A range of reed pen sizes were fashioned using reeds of various thicknesses, available by collecting a group of reeds from the water's edge.⁷ This allowed the author to achieve details that were often only millimetres long as well as figures reaching several centimetres in height.

After the replica vessels were fired, experiments were conducted to simulate a range of possible painting techniques and methods. Various sequences of painting were tested by adding different motifs on the vessels before others, based on observations from the ancient vessels. Experiments were also conducted to paint different combinations of motifs on the vessel surfaces, such as if motifs

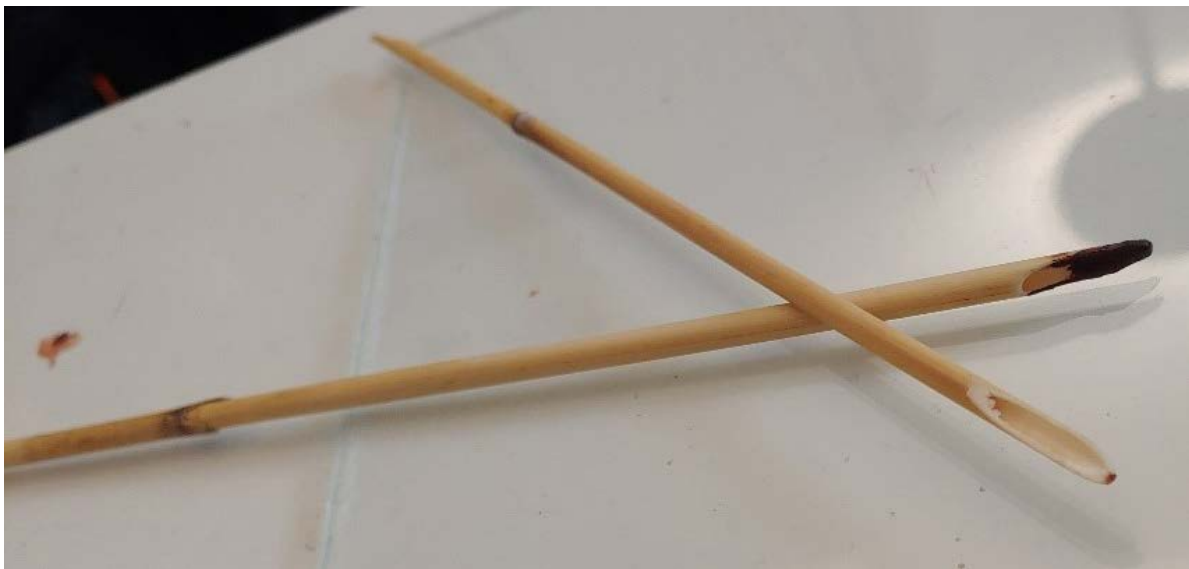


Figure 2. Image of the paint implements, reed pens, fashioned and used in the recreation of the painted compositions. Such materials as reeds would have been available to ancient craftspeople. Photograph: Sophia E. Kroft.

⁶ The availability of reeds along the Nile riverbank and the ease of manufacture of the reed implement into a painting tool allowed the author to create new painting pens as needed.

⁷ The reeds could easily be cut to create implements of different lengths. However, the author did not find that this variable influenced the painting practice in the experiments as much as the paint consistency, proper use of water, and the reed pen implement itself. The ochre paint and painting implements can be replicated for subsequent experiments by referencing the appendices in Kroft (2024).

occupying different regions of the vessel surfaces were painted in groups or in combination with other motifs. Finally, two different painting approaches were executed: painting each vessel side as a complete vignette before rotating the vessel to paint a subsequent side (Figure 3a–d) and painting the entire vessel surface at once, turning the vessel continuously during the painting process (Figure 4a–f). The paint dried rapidly so all the iterations of the painting experiments were achieved without smudging from images already on the vessel surface. Thus, this factor did not affect the author's painting practices involved in realising the compositions in the different iterations tested.



Figure 3a–d. Series of photographs documenting the painting process where the ancient composition was painted on a replica vessel, after the composition from London, Petrie Museum UC36233. In this example, each side of the vessel was completed in its entirety as a discrete scene prior to turning the vessel and beginning the next scene. Photographs: Sophia E. Kroft.



Figure 4a-f. Series of photographs documenting painting ancient compositions on a replica vessel, after the composition on Oxford, Ashmolean 1895.606. The motifs are painted onto the vessel surface by addressing the entire decorative field at once, rotating the vessel continuously to add the motifs. In this series of photographs, the anthropomorphic and faunal motifs are painted onto the vessel before boat motifs are added in a subsequent stage. Photographs: Sophia E. Kroft.

TABLE 1. LIST OF EXCAVATED DECORATED WARE VESSELS USED IN THE EXPERIMENTAL ARCHAEOLOGY METHODOLOGY, INCLUDING THE DATE, LOCATION, SCENE TYPE (BOAT OR DESERT SCENES), AND TOTAL NUMBER OF ANTHROPOMORPHIC FIGURES IN THE COMPOSITIONS. THE CALCULATED DATES FOR THE NAQADA IIC-IID2 PERIOD ARE C. 3450-3300 BCE (PATCH 2011)

Vessel accession number	Site	Date	Size (Height)	Scene type	Anthropomorphic figures
Oxford, Ashmolean 1895.606	Naqada	Naqada IId2	8.9cm	Boat	4
Oxford, Ashmolean E.2823	Abadiya	Naqada IId1	10.2cm	Boat	3
Berkeley, PHMA 6-4000	Naga ed-Deir	Naqada IIC-IId1	11.6cm	Boat	3
New York, Brooklyn 09.889.400	Adaima	Naqada IId1	17.5cm	Boat	7
Philadelphia, Penn Museum E1399	el-Ballas	Naqada IIC-IId	11.9cm	Boat	2

Vessel accession number	Site	Date	Size (Height)	Scene type	Anthropomorphic figures
London, Petrie Museum UC36233	Harageh	Naqada IId1	12.6cm	Boat	6
London, British Museum EA35502	el-Amra	Naqada IIc – IId	29.5cm	Boat	6

Observations and findings

The following paragraphs review the findings gleaned from formal analyses and experimental archaeology upon which the subsequent interpretations are based (Kroft 2024).⁸

Compositional design elements

Several compositional design elements were documented across the corpus via formal analysis, and their frequency and prominence were underscored during replica vessel recreation. First, continuous bands of geometric designs – parallel wavy lines, cross-hatched banding, and rows of triangles – appear in the compositions (Figures 5–6).



Figure 5. Decorated Ware vessel (New York, Brooklyn Museum 09.889.400) illustrating a geometric banding element, parallel wavy lines, spanning the circumference of the vessel at the top. Photograph: Sophia E. Kroft.

⁸ The research and analysis hitherto conducted, for this article and the dissertation, concentrate on close observation, surface inspection, and formal analysis. In future research, the experimental archaeology strategy developed by the author can be replicated in order to conduct further experiments and incorporate scientific techniques to generate scientific evidence.

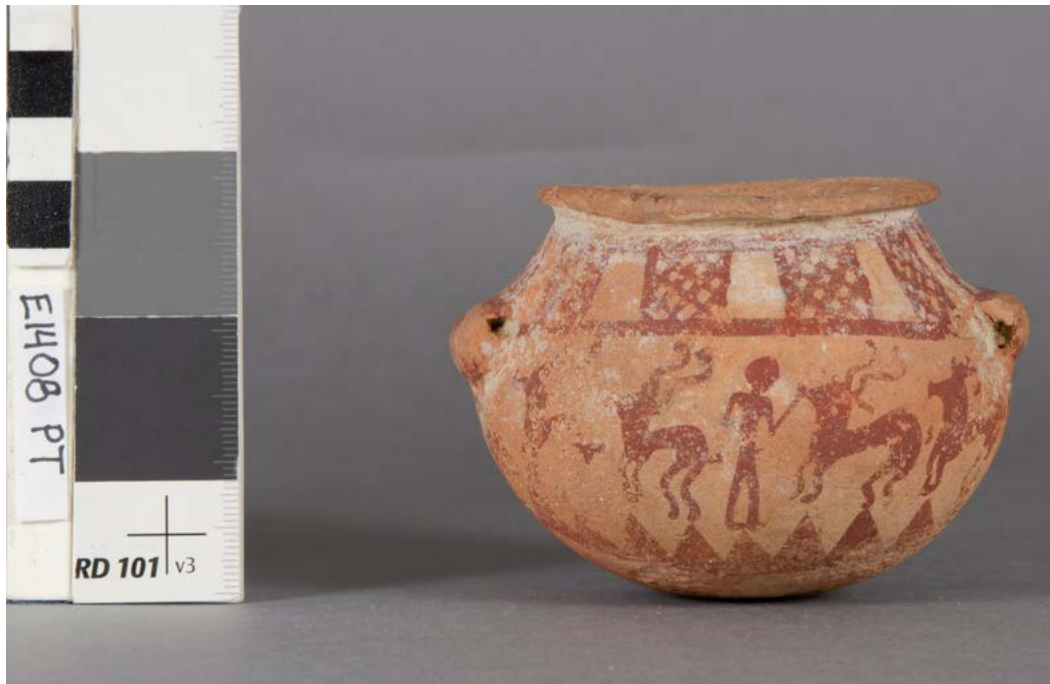


Figure 6. Decorated Ware vessel (Philadelphia, Penn Museum E1408) showing two different geometric bands, cross-hatched rectangles and continuous row of triangles, painted across the circumference of the vessel at the shoulder and below the maximum diameter of the vessel. Quadruped motifs are repeated throughout the centre. Photograph: Courtesy of the Penn Museum.

As detailed in Table 2, these bands bound the compositions at the top and shoulder, at the bottom near the base, and run through the middle, often appearing in more than one position (Kroft 2024: 144). The geometric designs are entirely connected such that the band is one continuous element. It is a prevalent design element, with roughly half the excavated vessels displaying at least one geometric banding element in the composition (Kroft 2024: 215).

TABLE 2. LIST OF EXCAVATED DECORATED WARE VESSELS WITH GEOMETRIC BANDS AROUND THE CIRCUMFERENCE OF THE VESSELS INCLUDING THE TYPE OF GEOMETRIC BAND DESIGN AND ITS LOCATION ON THE DECORATIVE FIELD. THE DATES OF THE NAQADA IIC–IID2 PERIOD RANGE FROM C. 3450–3300 BC (PATCH 2011)

Vessel accession number	Date	Site	Geometric band design	Location on vessel surface
New York, Brooklyn 09.889.400	Naqada IId1	Adaima	Wavy lines	Shoulder
London, British Museum EA35502	Naqada IIC – IId	el-Amra	Cross-hatched band	Shoulder
Oxford, Ashmolean E.2832	Naqada IId2	Abydos	Cross-hatched band	Below centre
Philadelphia, Penn Museum E1408	Naqada IId	el-Ballas	Triangles	Lower portion
			Cross-hatched band	Shoulder
			Cross-hatched band	Bottom

Vessel accession number	Date	Site	Geometric band design	Location on vessel surface
Brussels, MRAH E.03189	Naqada IId2	Abydos	Cross-hatched band	Shoulder
			Triangles	Lower portion
Philadelphia, Penn Museum E1399	Naqada IIc	el-Ballas	Rectangle with oblique lines	Lower portion
London, Petrie Museum UC36233	Naqada IId1	Harageh	Triangles	Shoulder
Oxford, Ashmolean 1895.584	Naqada IIc	Naqada	Triangles	Shoulder
el-Hosh vessel	Naqada IIc	el-Hosh	Wavy lines	Shoulder
New York, MMA 36.1121	Naqada IIc – IId	Hierakonpolis	Wavy lines	Shoulder
Philadelphia, Penn Museum E4997	Naqada IIc – IId	Hu	Triangles	Shoulder
Philadelphia, Penn Museum E1393	Naqada IIc – IId	el-Ballas	Triangles	Lower portion
			Cross-hatched band	Shoulder
Chicago, Oriental Institute E.5189	Naqada IIc – IId	Abadiya	Wavy lines, Triangles	Shoulder
Bristol, H614	Naqada IIc – IId	el-Amra	Wavy lines, Triangles	Shoulder
Bristol, H601	Naqada IId	DP/Hu	Wavy lines	Shoulder
Bristol, H600	Naqada IIc	el-Amra	Wavy lines	Shoulder
London, British Museum EA30920	Naqada IIc – IId	Abadiya/Hu	Wavy lines	Shoulder
Berkeley, PHMA 6-15508	Naqada IIc – IId	Naga ed-Deir	Triangles	Lower portion
Berkeley, PHMA 6-4015	Naqada IId	Naga ed-Deir	Wavy lines	Shoulder
Oxford, Ashmolean 1895.577	Naqada IIc	Naqada	Wavy lines	Shoulder

Another notable feature is repeated motifs distributed throughout the decorative field (Figures 3, 4, 6, and 7). All the motifs – boats, birds, quadrupeds, S-motifs, animal skins, and anthropomorphic figures – follow this pattern. For example, when figural compositions include boats or anthropomorphic figures,⁹ they are always repeated on each side (Table 3). Fauna, such as birds and quadrupeds, S-motifs, and animal skins likewise appear on all sides of the vessels.

There is also a noticeable emphasis on multiplicity over differentiation and change, detectable via the absence of variation between motifs on each side. When motifs are repeated several times in the same composition, they are depicted with the same overall design and details, such as in boats, anthropomorphic figures, fauna, animal skins, flamingos, and S-motifs. As seen in Figure 7, the same group of anthropomorphic figures can be repeated on multiple vessel sides.

⁹ There are no instances where several groups of anthropomorphic figures are concentrated on one side of the vessel surface (Kroft 2024: 226). There is only one instance of an excavated D-ware vessel with only one boat in the composition (Kroft 2024: 101).

TABLE 3. LIST OF EXCAVATED DECORATED WARE VESSELS DETAILING THE DISTRIBUTION OF THE ANTHROPOMORPHIC FIGURES ACROSS THE ENTIRE CIRCUMFERENCE OF THE VESSEL SURFACE WITH REFERENCE TO THE HORIZONTAL DISTRIBUTION. THE NAQADA IIC–IID2 PERIOD RANGES FROM C. 3450–3300 BCE (PATCH 2011)

Vessel accession number	Date	Site	Anthropomorphic figure location	Scene type
Oxford, Ashmolean 1895.606	Naqada IId2	Naqada	All sides	Boat scene
London, British Museum EA35502	Naqada IIC–IID	el-Amra	All sides	Boat scene
Oxford, Ashmolean E.2823	Naqada IId1	Abadiya	All sides	Boat scene
Berkeley, PHMA 6-4000	Naqada IIC–IID	Naga ed-Deir	All sides	Boat scene
Brussels, MRAH E.03189	Naqada IId2	Abydos	Only one figure	Desert scene
New York, Brooklyn 09.889.400	Naqada IId1	Adaima	All sides	Boat scene
Cairo, EM CG2083	Naqada IId2	Abydos	All sides	Boat scene
Philadelphia, Penn Museum E1399	Naqada IIC	Ballas	All sides	Boat scene
Philadelphia, Penn Museum E1408	Naqada IID	Ballas	All sides	Desert scene
Penn Museum E1404	Naqada IIC	Ballas	Only one figure	Boat scene
Philadelphia, Petrie Museum UC36233	Naqada IId1	Harageh	All sides	Boat scene
el-Hosh vessel	Naqada IIC	el-Hosh	All sides	Boat scene
Oxford, Ashmolean 1895.584	Naqada IIC	Naqada	All sides	Boat scene
Oxford, Ashmolean 1895.609	Naqada IId1	Naqada	All sides	Boat scene
Oxford, Ashmolean E.2832	Naqada IId2	Abydos	Only one figure	Desert scene

Though boat standards can be different between boats on different sides, this is not a consistent occurrence, and boats often carry the same standards.¹⁰ Repetition is also substantiated by the fact that compositions are not composed of a combination of boat and desert scenes where different vessel sides display different scene types.

Moreover, motif design itself comprises multiples of the same image. For example, the flamingo motif is comprised of several identical long-legged birds in a row (Figure 8). Thus, the overall lack of variation or change between the motifs and the emphasis on repetition within and among the motifs suggests that multiplicity and repetition underpin the imagery.

¹⁰ For example, Berkeley, Hearst Museum of Anthropology 6-4000 and Oxford, Ashmolean 1895.606.



Figure 7a-c. Decorated Ware vessel (New York, Brooklyn Museum 09.889.400) illustrating the repetition of motifs such as boats, anthropomorphic figures, S-motifs, flora, and fauna on all sides across the curvilinear vessel surface. This vessel also demonstrates the repetition of the same group of anthropomorphic figures on various sides of the vessel. The design of the boat motifs is also repeated for each of the three boats. The execution of lines – fluid, unbroken paint strokes used to depict the long, curved boat hulls across the curvilinear vessel surface – can also be noted on this vessel. Photographs: Sophia E. Kroft.

Painting techniques

There were three main techniques illuminated during the experimental archaeology process – sequence of motifs, fluid execution of continuous lines, and painting motifs as groups. The first is the sequence in which the motifs were applied to the vessel surface, determined by close examination

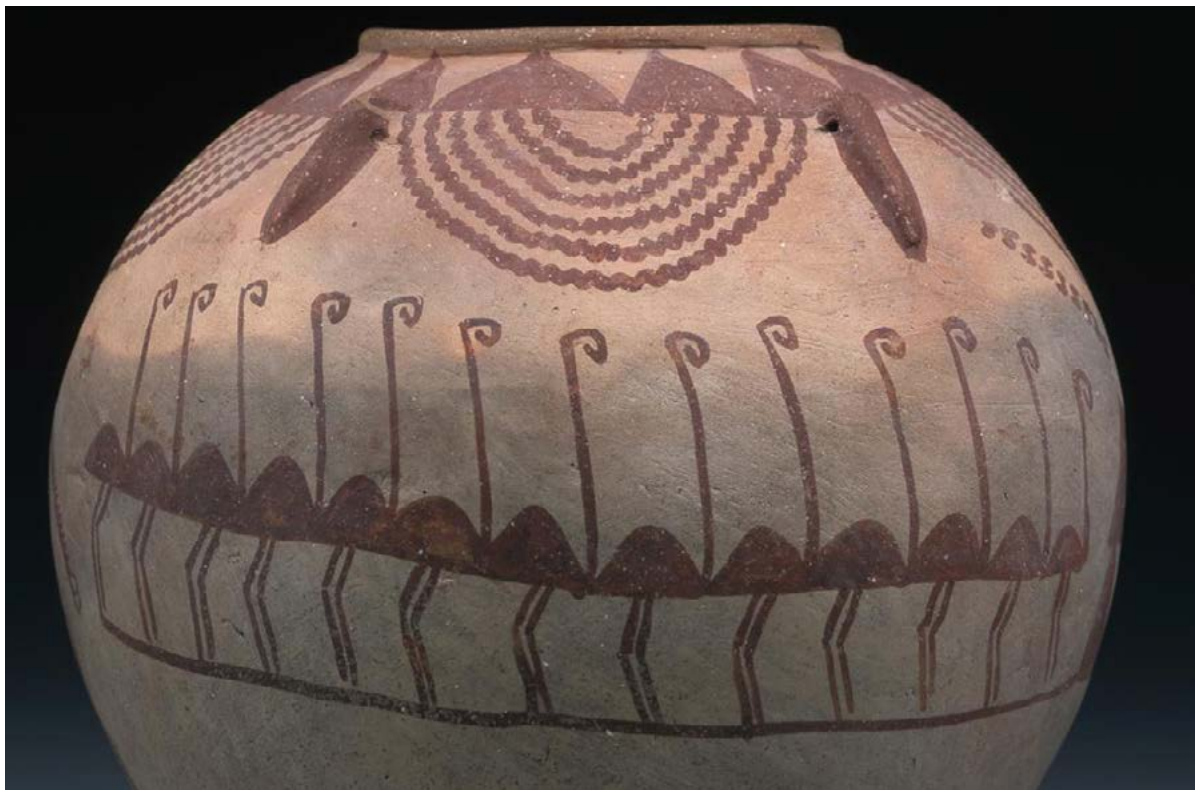


Figure 8. An example of a Decorated Ware vessel (Philadelphia, Penn Museum E4997) with the flamingo motif comprising the repetition of numerous identically designed birds in a row. The flamingo motifs were likely painted via a 'component-by-component' painting method whereby the craftsmen painted the component shapes and lines – semicircular bodies, vertical neck lines, curved lines at top, and the two leg segments – at one time for the group rather than completing each individual bird. Photograph: Courtesy of the Penn Museum.

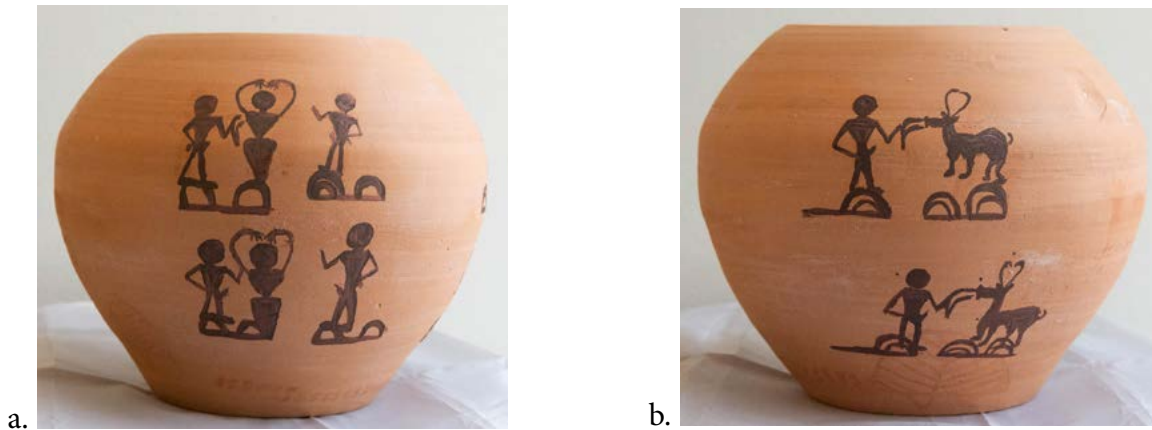


Figure 9a–b. Two photographs recording the painting of motifs on the vessel surface in different sequences, after the motifs on Petrie Museum UC36233. In the top registers on each vessel, the anthropomorphic and faunal motifs were painted onto the vessel surface before the loops of the boat cabin structures. The anthropomorphic and faunal motifs on the bottom registers were painted after the loops of the boat cabin structures. Upon close inspection, one can see the layers of the paint strokes which betray the sequence in which the motifs were painted. These tests and the observations corroborate that anthropomorphic figure groups were painted onto the vessel surface before the boats and their related components. Photographs: Sophia E. Kroft.

and magnification of where two motifs overlapped (Figure 9a–b; Kroft 2025: 157). Visual evidence shows certain motifs were consistently painted before others; most notably, anthropomorphic figures were painted on vessel surfaces first, before boats or geometric bands such as a row of triangles. Interestingly, animal skins also follow this sequence, painted on the surface first before boats. These patterns suggest painters were choosing certain motifs with which to begin the compositions and the painting process, and they recur on vessels produced in different workshops and at different times (Kroft 2025: 156–165).

It was also notable how the long, continuous, curved paint strokes were executed consistently as single, fluid, unbroken lines, such as in the boat hulls (Figure 10). Observations of the width and saturation of paint strokes reveal the painter was not stopping or re-dipping the reed pen to complete these lines, often on expansive and curved vessel sides (Kroft 2024: 149). In rare instances, ancient vessels do show lines completed in multiple stages with several lines used to complete the curved line or changes in stroke width within the same line.¹¹ These observations informed how experiments were conducted with painting techniques in the reproduction of the compositions. When executing the boat hull lines on replica vessels, holding the vessels in an upside-down position allowed for similarly long, continuous lines to be achieved. The combination of the convex shape of the line and the curved vessel surface allowed for the paint to flow from the reed pen fluidly without having to readjust the vessel position or re-dip the pen, suggesting that the position and shape of the line were complementary in this upside-down position (Kroft 2024: 602–608). Continuous geometric bands also do not show evidence of being executed in sections with visible breaks or line segments. Continuity in the lines indicates the painter rotated the vessel to complete the entire line.

Lastly, a method by which the painters executed the motifs themselves was determined, referred to in this research as the ‘component-by-component’ method. It is most clearly observed in the flamingos (Figure 11a–c; Kroft 2024: 609–614). The discrete shapes, lines, and layers of the paint

¹¹ See the raised curved arm of the anthropomorphic figure on Berkeley, Hearst Museum of Anthropology 6-4000 for an example of a brush stroke that changes width and is completed in two separate segments rather than one continuous stroke. The boat hull on Philadelphia, Penn Museum E1399 is an example where the painter has added an additional line to the curve and demonstrates that individual strokes are visible in surface inspection.



Figure 10. An example of long, continuous, curved boat hull lines painted with fluid and unbroken paint strokes in a boat scene. The image shows the Decorated Ware vessel (New York, Brooklyn Museum 09.889.400) in the upside-down position.
Photograph: Sophia E. Kroft.

strokes in the formation of the flamingos – semicircular bodies, long vertical neck lines, two leg segments toward the front of the bird, and a curved line at the top as the head and beak – were discerned via the surface examination. It was deduced that the semicircular bodies were painted at once, then the long vertical lines of the neck were added between the semicircular bodies, and finally, the curved heads and two legs were added to finish the motifs (Figures 8 and 11). With the aim of painting the motifs on the replica vessels for the experiments presented in this article, the author concentrates on examining the method of painting motifs, which was central to achieving accuracy in reproducing the images.¹²

The interpretation, based on the experimental painting scenarios, suggests that each individual bird was not painted one at a time to completion, but instead each component (semicircle, vertical lines, and curved lines) was completed for the group before moving to the next component. This mechanical process of painting components matched the ancient flamingos more closely than when each bird was painted individually. Moreover, there are examples of the flamingo motif that show individual birds that are either incomplete or executed with extra components that do not correspond to individual birds. One of the clearest examples is on Oxford, Ashmolean 1895.606, where the flamingo in the leftmost position only has paint strokes denoting a head, neck, and legs. There is no semicircular body painted for this flamingo, which suggests that the painter was painting a row of semicircular bodies and adding the details during the secondary and tertiary stages. Because of this mechanical or component-based process, the painter inadvertently added

¹² Close examination of the ancient motifs did reveal details that could speak to identifying several hands in the realisation of the compositions, and such questions were considered when painting replica motifs. Further analysis of these observations could be incorporated into this research as it relates to the question of painting the vessels in their entirety or in segments. In future study, one could conduct a systematic comparison of the most common motifs, such as the flamingos. However, there are limitations to drawing conclusions via this method, such as assumptions that overreach what the painting process reveals. For example, discerning individual hands assumes the painter did not simply choose to paint the motif in two different forms on the same vessel. Such a practice was shown to be the case in dynastic letter writing, where Janssen tracks the use of three forms of the same sign by the same scribe in the same letter (Janssen 1987: 161–163). For this reason, this avenue was not incorporated into the scope of the present study.

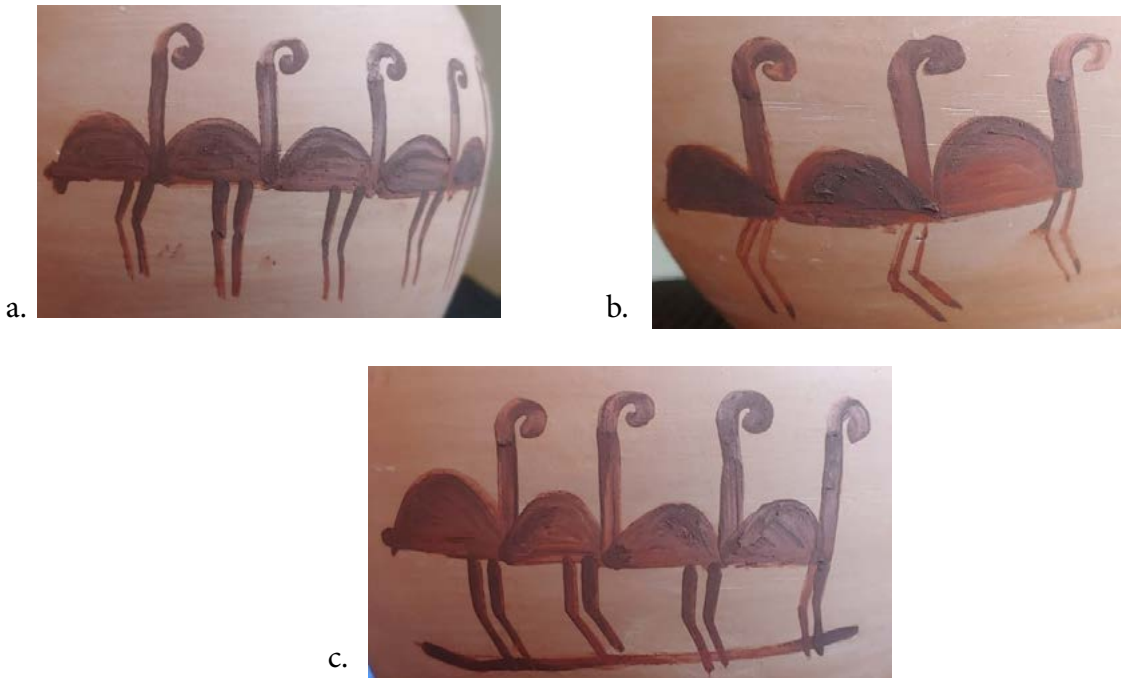


Figure 11a-c. Details showing the painting of replica flamingos using three different sequences of components to complete the motifs. The birds are comprised of four components — a semicircle, a vertical line, a curved line, and a pair of two parallel lines bent at an angle. These components are visible via the paint strokes, as well as the sequences that the paint strokes were applied to the vessel surface.

- a) In the first scenario (Figure 11a), the semicircular bodies of the flamingos were painted first, followed by the vertical lines of the necks between each semicircle. Then, the curved heads were painted on each neck. Finally, the two vertical leg lines were painted below the necks and semicircles. The paint strokes in this sequence show that the necks are painted over the semicircles and can be seen as an added stroke after the bodies are completed.
- b) In scenario two (Figure 11b), each flamingo bird was painted individually, from left to right. Each flamingo was completed with all four components before the next flamingo was started, maintaining that the motifs are connected. The sequence was as follows: the semicircle was painted, then the vertical line of the neck was added, then the curved head, and finally the legs. Subsequently, the next semicircular body was painted and overlapped with the bird to its left. Then, the neck and head were added and so on for the next bird in the group of birds. Examining the paint strokes following this sequence, one can see that the body of the bird to the right overlaps the adjacent bird.
- c) In scenario three (Figure 11c), the birds were executed as in scenario two, but from the right to left. In this sequence, the vertical line of the neck is obscured by the body of the corresponding bird, when the painter begins with the semicircular body of the bird. The horizontal line connecting the legs was also added, per the form of some flamingo groups, to inspect whether this stroke was added at the end or at the beginning of painting this motif, when present.

Photographs: Sophia E. Kroft.

extra details without realising that there was no corresponding bird. This may not have occurred if the painter was completing each bird individually.

It is proposed that boats were also executed with this component-by-component painting technique (Figure 12a-d). The previous observations speak to painters manipulating the vessels into various positions to execute the lines, such as those of the boat hulls with the vessel upside down. Other components, such as the oars, were likely accomplished with a similar manipulation so as to reach the lower regions of the vessels. If this were the case, the boats could have also been executed with a component-by-component process in which all the boat hulls were executed at once, followed by the strokes of the oars on all the boats. This process speaks to the painter executing the motifs of the boats as a group rather than as an individual boat in an analogous way to the flamingo motif.

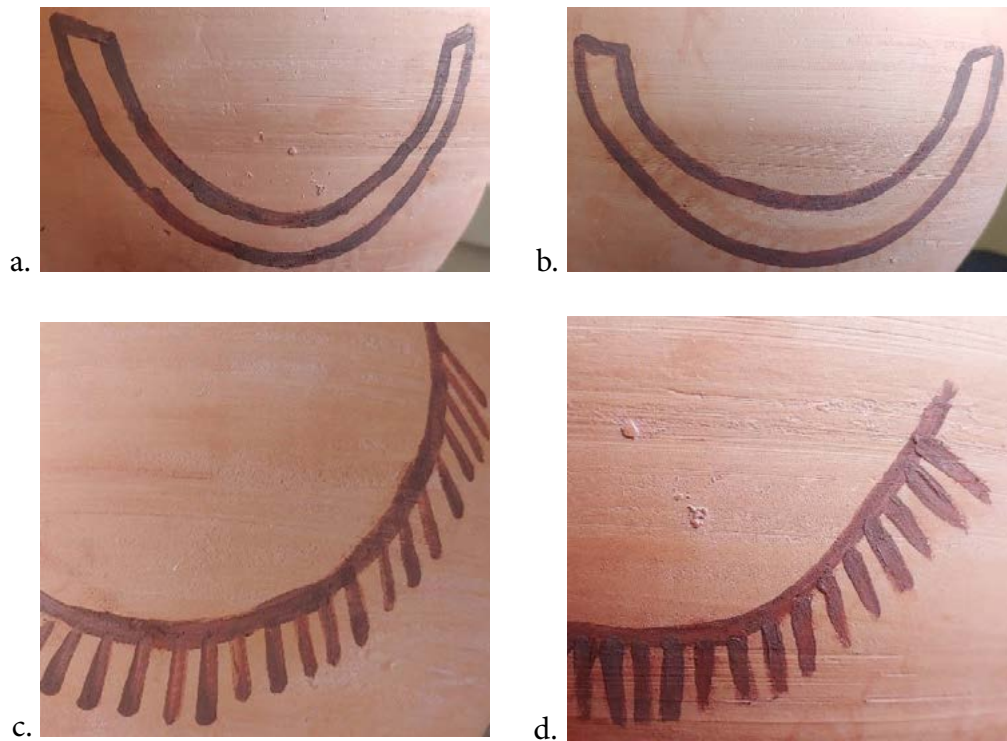


Figure 12a–d. Details showing different methods of painting boat hulls and oars via manipulating the vessel and applying the components of the boats in different sequences. For the oars, one can observe several methods of painting. In one scenario, oars were painted starting at the boat hull line. In other cases, the oars were painted beginning at a distance from the boat hull and painted toward the boat hull until a point of contact was reached. Both examples can be identified in the original excavated vessels themselves.

- (a) To achieve the fluid continuous line of the boat hull, the vessel was positioned upside down and the concave line was painted on the vessel surface. The paint flowed evenly along the contour of the vessel in this position.
- (b) The second iteration of the boat hull was painted with the vessel in the upright position where the convex line was less fluid and required repositioning of the vessel and pauses. This resulted in a line that did not match the continuity observed on the ancient vessels.
- (c) The oars in this scenario were painted with the vessel in the inverted position, and the oars were begun away from the boat line and painted toward the line until contact was made, at which point the reed pen was lifted away from the vessel's surface. This method produced an oar shape that is slightly wider at the base and slightly narrower at the point of contact with the boat outline. The bottom of the oar, seen when the boat is viewed right-side up, is thicker with paint, sometimes producing a pooling dot of paint. The point of contact when the oars are painted in this method does not clearly show the oars overlapping with the boat hull on top because the paint is less thick and often the fading of the paint blends in with the boat hull, giving this ambiguous area of overlap between the oars and the boat hull.
- (d) The oars in this scenario were painted with the vessel in the right-side up position. The oars were painted by beginning at the boat hull line and then downward away from the boat. In this method, the shape of the oars is wider at the point of contact with the boat hull and narrower at the bottom, with the paint less saturated at the bottom. The point of contact between the oars and the boat hull visibly shows that the paint strokes of the oars are painted on top of the boat hull line. Photographs: Sophia E. Kroft.

Thus, the results suggest that these two motifs are examples of painters approaching and executing motifs as groups. This holds true on the smaller-scale instances of the groups of the flamingos but also in the larger case of the boats as a 'motif-group' that extends around the entire vessel surface. Deconstructing this painting process reveals the steps the painter may have used to accomplish the image and its form but also sheds light on how the motifs operated within the totality of the composition – in these instances there is an emphasis on groups and grouping within and around the

vessel surface, which is inconsistent with the individualisation of motifs and of scenes on different sides.

Spatial layout in compositions

There are three major characteristics of spatial layout repeatedly followed across the corpus of vessels, detection of which was significantly facilitated via the author's experimental archaeology strategy and formal analyses.

First, there is a consistent lack of overlap between motifs except for when the painters are communicating a relationship between the motifs, such as between anthropomorphic figures and objects they are likely holding (Kroft 2024: 151–153). This spacing of the motifs shows a favouring of negative space between them in compositional design. When motifs do overlap, it is minimally at the corners or edges, such as the instances used to determine the sequence of motifs discussed above. This is significant because it is not necessary for painters to use negative space in this way. Overlap can be employed as a visual device to communicate a range of meanings, such as associations, depth, or perspectives. Moreover, if motifs are only being used as symbols in a semantic context, painters may use negative space differently for this objective.

Another striking characteristic is the horizontal distribution of the motifs across the decorative field. From data gathered in Kroft (2024), it was found that none of the compositions have motifs concentrated on only one side of the vessel surface, and all the motifs – boats, anthropomorphic figures, Naqada plants, animal skins, flora, and fauna – follow this distinct distribution around the curvilinear surface. Painters repeat the same motifs throughout the compositions, giving particular attention to dispersing them around the entire decorative field. There is enough available space to paint several boats or groups of flora, fauna, or anthropomorphic figures on just one side of the vessel, yet there are no examples of this spatial layout in the corpus. Such motifs as anthropomorphic figures and animal skins are centrally spaced around the vessel in consistent intervals between the lug handles or other visual elements that demarcate the space. Likewise, boats are painted in a linear horizontal distribution around the vessel surface. They are almost always located at the centre of the decorative field but are never clustered on one side of the vessel or above another. In all these examples, there is enough space in the decorative field on each side where the same motifs could be vertically oriented. The use of negative space and horizontal distribution appears to be a visual device related to the way the compositions operate.

The final noteworthy spatial layout characteristic is the concentration of imagery within the vertical space of the decorative field. In a recent survey of D-ware, where relationships between decoration, vessel size, and shape were addressed, Hendrickx *et al.* (2020: 280–300) found a deliberate concentration of imagery of larger vessels with globular and high-shouldered shapes in the top regions of the decorative field.¹³ The imagery is concentrated at the top of the vertical axis even though there is sufficient space below to fill with motifs. The same conclusions were reached separately in Kroft (2024). Practical limitations do not explain this as there are numerous vessels with decoration covering the entire available surface as well as the bottom.¹⁴ These conclusions were confirmed using experimental archaeology, manipulating the vessels to paint all surface regions.

¹³ Larger vessels refer to those above 19cm in height (Hendrickx *et al.* 2020: 280–282).

¹⁴ Examples include Philadelphia, Penn Museum E1399, Penn Museum E1408, Penn Museum E1393, Boston, MFA 13.3923, and Oxford, Ashmolean 1895.595.

This study also reveals that certain motifs are prioritised in these upper regions of the vessel surface, namely anthropomorphic figures, which are often painted above the widest diameter of the vessel (Table 4).

TABLE 4. LIST OF EXCAVATED DECORATED WARE VESSELS WITH FIGURAL DECORATION AND ANTHROPOMORPHIC FIGURES SHOWING THEIR LOCATION ACROSS THE DECORATIVE FIELD WITH REFERENCE TO THE ORIENTATION ALONG THE VERTICAL AXIS. THE CALCULATED DATES FOR THE NAQADA IIC–IID2 PERIOD ARE C. 3450–3300 BC (PATCH 2011)

Vessel accession number	Site	Date	Motif	Region	Relation to other motifs
Philadelphia, Penn Museum E1404	el-Ballas	Naqada IIC	Anthropomorphic figures	Bottom third	Below boat
el-Hosh	el-Hosh	Naqada IIC	Anthropomorphic figures	Bottom third	Below boat
Oxford, Ashmolean 1895.584	Naqada	Naqada IIC	Anthropomorphic figures	Bottom third	Below boat
Oxford, Ashmolean 1924.326	el-Badari	Naqada IIC	Anthropomorphic figures	Top third	-
London, British Museum EA57581	el-Badari	Naqada IIC–IID	Anthropomorphic figures	Top third	Above boat
Philadelphia, Penn Museum E1399	el-Ballas	Naqada IIC	Anthropomorphic figures	Top third	Above boat
New York, Brooklyn 09.889.400	Adaima	Naqada IID	Anthropomorphic figures	Top third	Above boat
London, British Museum EA35502	el-Amra	Naqada IIC–IID	Anthropomorphic figures	Top third	Above boat
Berkeley, PHMA 6-4000	Naga ed-Deir	Naqada IIC–IID	Anthropomorphic figures	Top third	Above boat
Oxford, Ashmolean 1895.595	Naqada	Naqada IID2	Anthropomorphic figure	Top third	Above boat
London, Petrie Museum UC36233	Harageh	Naqada IID	Anthropomorphic figures	Top third	Above boat
Oxford, Ashmolean 1895.819	Naqada	Naqada IID1	Anthropomorphic figures	Top third	Above boat
Oxford, Ashmolean 1895.606	Naqada	Naqada IID2	Anthropomorphic figures	Top third	Above boat
Oxford, Ashmolean E.2823	Abadiya	Naqada IID1	Anthropomorphic figures	Top third	Above boat
Cairo, EM CG2083	Abydos	Naqada IID2	Anthropomorphic figures	Top third	Above boat
Philadelphia, Penn Museum E1408	el-Ballas	Naqada IID	Anthropomorphic figure	Centre	Above triangles
Brussels, MRAH E.03189	Abydos	Naqada IID2	Anthropomorphic figure	Centre	Above triangles
Oxford, Ashmolean E.2832	Abydos	Naqada IID2	Anthropomorphic figure	Centre	Above cross-hatched band

Anthropomorphic figures on Oxford, Ashmolean Museum 1895.606; London, Petrie Museum UC36233; New York, Brooklyn Museum 09.889.400; Oxford, Ashmolean Museum E.2323; and Philadelphia, Penn Museum E1399 are visible in the same vertical regions around the decorative field. Again, there is sufficient negative space above and below them for a variety of arrangements, and their placement is unchanged even when they are not in contact with other motifs, such as boats.¹⁵ For example, anthropomorphic figures in Oxford, Ashmolean Museum 1895.606 and London, Petrie Museum UC36233, are not in contact with the boats, which could explain their placement in the vertical space above them. Thus, their placement along the vertical axis seems to relate to their location within the decorative field rather than as a visual connection to another motif. Moreover, anthropomorphic figures occupy the same locations along the vertical axis around the entire vessel surface, such that they are all visible in these same regions regardless of their association with the boats or other motifs. When boats are not present, such as in compositions comprising geometric bands or quadrupeds with anthropomorphic figures, anthropomorphic figures are located centrally along the vertical axis or above the widest point of the vessel.¹⁶ The consistency in the placement within the vertical space suggests that motifs were arranged in specific locations for the effective communication of the imagery as it functions together with the vessel surface.

Interpretation of observations and experimental archaeology results

Painting process

Based on observations and results from the experimental archaeology reviewed above, a painting process was reconstructed as hitherto described. A similar process may have been followed by the ancient painters, based on the inspection of the surface details and paint strokes. In this method, the painter addresses the entire vessel surface by rotating the pot continuously throughout painting, using a turntable made from woven mats,¹⁷ or rotating the vessel in the hands, executing the composition as one single cohesive tableau. This approach is in contrast with one in which the painter completes the composition in sections, completing one scene per vessel side before rotating and completing the subsequent scene on the next vessel side.

Technical cues

The following technical cues offer a group of evidence for a painter executing a single cohesive tableau, namely continuous geometric bands, the sequence of motifs, execution of unbroken lines, absence of overlap, and motifs comprised of groups.

Continuous bands of geometric designs are connected in their entirety around the vessel surface with no visible breaks or changes. Any breaks in the lines – such as the parallel, wavy lines or long horizontal lines – are detectable, yet it is noteworthy that so few are identified. This suggests that the painter was moving the reed pen continuously around the vessel and not painting in sections, stopping and starting several times. These geometric bands were not painted as borders or components of discrete vignettes on separate vessel sides. Thus, they can be considered a single cohesive design element, and it is proposed that they were executed in their entirety at one time.

To paint the geometric bands to match the ancient paint lines, the painter rotated the vessel to finish each horizontal line across the entire circumference of the vessel until the entire length of the band was complete. This was the case for the row of triangles, the cross-hatched rectangles,

¹⁵ There are only two examples where the anthropomorphic figures are below the boats in the bottom region of the decorative field (Oxford, Ashmolean 1895.584; El-Hosh vessel).

¹⁶ Examples include: Brussels, Musées Royaux d'Art et d'Histoire E.03189 and Philadelphia, Penn Museum E1408.

¹⁷ This method was brought to the attention of the author by one of the anonymous reviewers.

and the parallel wavy lines painted on the shoulders, centre, or bottom of the vessels. Moreover, it is significant that the geometric bands appear in all regions of the vessel surface. This suggests that the method of painting the bands around the circumference was not reserved only for the shoulder of the vessel. Instead, painting continuous banding around the entire vessel applies to the entire decorative field. This focus on the entire surface – not just one side – speaks to the painter developing the imagery over all the available space rather than concentrating on a specific side with a discrete vignette.

Secondly, the overlapping paint strokes betrayed a sequence in which motifs were added to the vessel surface. If motifs were added in thematic groups around the entire vessel, such a sequence was achieved and documented via the visible overlapping paint strokes. The painter addressed the entire vessel surface continuously, populating the decorative field by adding all the motifs of a certain type in specific regions around the pot before moving onto the next motif. This method also allows the painter to access certain regions of the surface, such as the lower regions, at one time around the entire vessel. For example, anthropomorphic figures populating the top regions were painted first, before boats, meaning the painters added all motifs in this thematic group at the top and moved onto the centre motifs afterwards. The observations of the paint strokes are thus not the results of completing separate scenes as individual vignettes. Like the continuous bands, the sequence of motifs observed speaks to a painter painting the compositions as single cohesive tableaux.

To achieve the long, fluid, continuous lines, such as those comprising the boat hulls, one can infer that painters were manipulating vessels to maximise the effectiveness of reed pens or painting implements (Figure 12a–d). It is suggested that painters were painting similar shapes and lines at one time around the entire vessel surface. This painting practice, again, addresses the entire decorative field to paint a single cohesive tableau and does not compartmentalise the sides into discrete scenes. Thus, boat hulls and oars on different sides of the vessel would be painted at once, whereby the painter turns the vessel continuously around to paint the same concave lines, possibly adding oars before or after. Then, the painter could move into the next groups of lines or shapes, perhaps in a different region of the surface.

The infrequency of overlapping between motifs is significant as it indicates the painter actively avoided having two motifs in contact, reserving the visual link to communicate an association between them. Moreover, in one example, Oxford, Ashmolean Museum 1895.584, incised guidelines, likely made with a reed pen in the clay, are visible (Kroft 2024: 151).¹⁸ A concerted effort to populate the vessel surface with well-spaced motifs, supported by evidence of using guidelines, shows that the painter was addressing the entire vessel surface. This method involves constant rotation of the vessel so that the entire decorative field is in view, and the spatial relationships between motifs can be considered and reconsidered throughout the process. This repeated ‘visual check’ allows the painter to achieve such a precise layout in compositions that cannot otherwise be viewed in their entirety from one viewpoint (Kroft 2024: 145).

The final technical cue used in recreating the painter’s painting practice is the component-by-component method of painting motifs and the distinct appearance of motifs in groups discussed above (Figures 8, 11, and 12). In the interpretation presented in this article, the painter approaches and prioritises the group over the individual via this painting process. Again, this speaks to the painter rotating the vessel throughout the painting process to populate the decorative field with

¹⁸ This detail also raises the possibility that the painter is the same individual as the potter. The incised guidelines of the boat hull show attention to pre-planning the compositional layout and decorative scheme and preparation of the vessel for decoration after forming the pot but before firing.

these components. The component-by-component painting method on the individual scale of the motifs relates to the larger technical process of completing the entire composition. Thus, an analogy can be drawn between how the motifs comprised of several repeated identical motifs – flamingos and boats – are painted and how the entire composition was painted because the compositions are comprised of similar groups of repeated motifs. The compositions themselves are painted via these groups around the entire vessel, whereby each repeated motif is part of a larger group of motifs, and each motif is approached via its components.

Reading compositions

Using the painting process hitherto reconstructed and the incorporation of formal analysis and visual cues in compositional design, this research proposes that compositions were also read as one single cohesive tableau on the curvilinear surface.

Visual cues

Continuous geometric bands lead the eye around the vessel surface, and as one single element, there are no visual breaks between the scenes. In fact, what the bands do is visually connect all the sides of the vessel surface and provide a framework within which to read the motifs. As the bands are located at the top, middle, and lower regions of the decorative field, they provide more than merely a border decoration. The geometric bands in these various locations work to reinforce this connectivity, linking the sides together.

The painter uses negative space and the absence of overlap as a visual device to connect the imagery across the curvilinear surface. Motifs, such as boats, are painted adjacent to one another such that they are linked and dispersed throughout the decorative field. On the curvilinear surface, this visual device is particularly important because not all the imagery is visible at once, and the painter inscribes this connection between the sides for the viewer. Concentration of imagery in one area focuses the viewers' attention on dense imagery in order to parse out meaning. But, by way of dispersing the motifs around the vessel with no overlap, the communicative strategy involves the entire vessel surface as a three-dimensional curvilinear object to be considered as one surface rather than sections.

Similarly, there is a distinct horizontal distribution of motifs within the decorative field around the vessel, where, as noted, motifs are not condensed or stacked vertically on one side. This horizontal distribution is a visual cue to read the entire composition as one cohesive tableau because it does not concentrate all the attention on one side. It also does not segregate portions of the decorative field from others, and it gives weight to the entire decorative field as a whole. Again, the curvilinear surface is important to consider in the horizontal distribution, as the horizontal distribution means that motifs are not visible simultaneously. The distribution reinforces the continuity and connectivity between the sides, instead of separating the sides, which is already a result of the three-dimensional nature of the vessel.

Finally, the multiplicity of motifs – often identical groups repeated on all sides – reinforces the cohesiveness of the tableau. This visual cue points viewers to consider the entire composition as one tableau instead of searching for variations among the different sides to read meaning within the changes.

Element of time

The technical and visual cues discussed above illuminate that compositions are single, cohesive, cyclical tableaux rather than narratives with linear progression and sequential episodes. The analysis also demonstrates how the circularity of the object is incorporated into the compositional design, whereby the curvilinear vessel surface is integral to the effective operation of the imagery. Consequently, time is encoded within the object – imagery and surface – as cyclical and recurring.

The passage of time can be detected in changes within motif details and in visual cues that delineate separate episodes. The absence of variation, however, speaks to repetition and continuity across the decorative field. The continuous bands encircling the vessel also convey continuity and connectivity across the sides instead of delineating discrete scenes, which could be accomplished with borders or partitions. The horizontal distribution of these repeated motifs supports the concept that the meaning is derived from the entire tableau rather than being inscribed within a single scene visible in one instance by a viewer on one side. The painter also does not use overlapping between various motifs or dense concentration of images on one side to direct the viewer to read the message in these discrete scenes.

These visual cues support the hypothesis that the composition does not need to be turned by a single viewer to understand the imagery as in a linear narrative composed of episodes. As multiplicity is emphasised over variation, the viewer is not searching for patterns among the sides to read the meaning. This means an individual viewer does not use ‘memory-work’ to trace the clues for the passage of time to comprehend the tableau.¹⁹ Finally, the curvilinear nature of the vessel surface itself is continuous, cyclical, and recurring as there is no beginning or end. Taken together with the other visual cues, it is suggested that the cyclical nature of a circle underpins the entire tableau and is deliberately used by the painter for the operation of the painted imagery. Owing to the circular vessel surface, the imagery does not have a beginning or an end, as is necessary for linear progression. The circular surface physically encodes the cyclical time element in the imagery and is a key component of how the painter lays out the motifs to convey time as recurrent.

Recently, Förster (2022) has argued for ‘cinematographic’ recording in White Cross-lined (C-ware) vessel imagery, where he interprets changes in motif details as conveying a hippopotamus feeding. He explains the pictorial ‘narration’ as sequential representation of a repeated or habitual activity (2022: 42–43). In his interpretation, the C-ware vessel with feeding hippopotamus does not represent ‘a short-term specific movement, but a longer-lasting and recurring activity’, one in which the repeated behavior of feeding is an attribute of the hippopotamus. It is a characteristic of the motif itself, not a single action or movement. Notably, using a different method of analysis, he also concludes that the circularity of the vessel reinforces the reading of a recurring and cyclical activity (Förster 2022: 45).

Collective audience

The spatial layout of the imagery on the vessel surface betrays an awareness of the audience on the part of the painter, which, when re-evaluated, is in fact a group of viewers. Without linear progression driving the imagery, reading the compositions does not rest on the traditionally assumed single viewer rotating the vessel to comprehend the imagery.

The design elements highlighted above establish multiple simultaneous viewpoints to draw in and effectively communicate with a group audience. These viewpoints all function as possible points of

¹⁹ The term ‘memory-work’ is understood here as used by Wengrow (2006: 102).

entry into the composition that make sense to several viewers because it is not a linear sequence that must be read by turning the vessel. The function of the design is to bring in viewers as part of a total shared experience in and around the compositions.

First, the horizontal distribution of the motifs effectively establishes multiple simultaneously valid viewpoints for the imagery. As repeated motifs are dispersed across the vessel circumference, audience members located at various points can view all the motifs that are important to the message. Most significantly, the anthropomorphic motifs' placement around the vessel circumference is an important entry point for a human audience, and the distribution can be explained if considered as communicating to a group. Anthropomorphic figures, in particular, make a strong point of connection with a group of viewers, drawing the audience in from various vantage points.

The repetition of motifs and absence of variation between repeated motifs visually correlate and work with the horizontal distribution in communicating with the group of viewers. The emphasis does not appear to be on inscribing discernable patterns of variation that would communicate the passage of time and the need to read changes between all sides of the vessel for comprehension. Instead, the focus is on multiplicity, which operates by conveying the meaning from several vantage points. The dispersal of repeated motifs throughout the decorative field signals simultaneously valid viewpoints, which makes the most sense if there is a group audience.

Finally, the arrangement of imagery within the vertical space demonstrates the painter's consideration of the audience and elucidates how the imagery operated on the curvilinear surface. On medium and large vessels, imagery is concentrated at the top, in the most visibly accessible regions of the decorative field. As proposed by Hendrickx *et al.* (2020: 279–300), vessels of a large size may have been used in a stationary position with the audience as moving participants. In this scenario, placement of the imagery in the top regions adheres to the vantage points of this audience. This is particularly clear in the placement of anthropomorphic figures, centrally located and at the top of the vertical axis, which can act as an entry point for a human audience. Their placement here suggests the layout aligns with viewership (Kroft 2024: 168–172). The group audience can apply to all vessels due to the consistent arrangement of anthropomorphic figures above the maximum diameter in a range of sizes. While smaller vessels may not serve practically as central gathering points, all the same spatial layout elements are used that address a group audience. The analysis here reveals that the design of the composition and layout on the vessel curvilinear surface is driven by its objective to communicate to a group of viewers for which the social context of the vessels is paramount to the function of the object.

Social dimension of burial practices

D-ware vessels were part of grave assemblages, at least in their final role interred with the deceased, as the majority of excavated vessels come from burials. Within a funerary context, the social network of the deceased involved in the burial practices may constitute the proposed collective audience, as demonstrated by the archaeological evidence.

Sets of anthropomorphic figurines have been found as part of one grave assemblage in the same burial,²⁰ which echo the theme of multiplicity from the motifs in the D-ware compositions. Stevenson (2017: 71; 75) interprets these sets of figurines as mediators for groups of burial participants to build and perpetuate collective identities, noting that repetition communicates 'a common conception of

²⁰ Figurines in New York, Brooklyn Museum from el-Ma'mariya in Burial 186: 07.449.500, .501, .503, .504, .508, .510, .511, .513, .515, .516, .523. Two figurines from el-Ma'mariya in Burial 2: 07.447.502 and 07.447.505. Figurines from Naqada found by Petrie (1896: 21, 45): Oxford, Ashmolean Museum 1895.129 and London, Petrie Museum UC4251–UC4253.

a collective practice and a sense of shared identities'. Body adornments – decorated combs, hairpins, jewelry, and palettes for cosmetic use (Ayrton and Loat 1911: 16; Eyckerman and Hendrickx 2011: 392–425; Petrie and Mace 1901: 33) – also suggest group rituals, including festivals and burials, as argued by Patch (2011: 59–60).

The physical treatment of the body of the deceased speaks to the significance such rituals held for living participants. Across a range of Predynastic burial sites including el-Amra, Abydos, Naqada, el-Gerza, Adaima, Naga ed-Deir, and Hierakonpolis, excavators document evidence of body dismemberment and post-mortem manipulation of the corpses (Dougherty and Friedman 2008: 309–335; Girardi 2017: 291–309; Peet 1914; Petrie and Quibell 1896; Randall-MacIver and Mace 1902; Wengrow 2006: 119). Physical evidence suggests that bodies were intentionally dismembered and partially decomposed bodies rearranged in alternative patterns to natural skeletal configuration prior to interment (Wengrow and Baines 2004: 1096–1099). Segments of bodies, such as skulls, were also buried separately or even removed altogether after the initial burial (Girardi 2017: 307; Wengrow and Baines 2004: 1097–1098). Scholars have also noted instances where the disarticulated body parts were interspersed with grave goods, such as vessels substituted in place for skulls or forearms, to generate unique patterns (Wengrow 2006: 118). Furthermore, scholars such as Girardi (2017: 296–308) suggest that the corpses were subject to multiple interventions over a prolonged period, where corpses were revisited and treated over various stages of decomposition and potentially in different locations before the final interment.

The level of creativity involved in the treatment of the corpses is particularly illuminating. As Wengrow (2006: 117–118) points out, the rearrangements of the body parts do not follow the same patterns as other burials nor are the same grave goods, such as vessels, used in generating the new configurations. This level of creativity and individuality does not correlate to a single protracted set of steps guiding the execution of the ritual and reveals those involved in carrying out the treatment may have been more closely tied to the deceased than persons simply holding a specialised occupation. Such creative and varied expressions of body manipulation point to the involvement of the deceased's social network and to significance for these participants. Wengrow argues that corpse intervention and reconfiguration were used as ways to outwardly express a final image of the deceased reflecting the relationship between those enacting the ritual and the interred (Wengrow 2006: 117–118).

Social memory and the collective audience

Taken together, scholars' analyses of grave assemblages and the author's discussion of D-ware compositional design, the evidence demonstrates D-ware vessels were objects defined by and effective because of their use by a group of participants in a shared experience.

The role of memory becomes clear once the compositional design and its layout on a curvilinear vessel surface is recognised as communicating to a collective audience. These visual devices and multidimensional mechanisms target multiple participants involved in a dynamic social experience. During such an event, memory was activated and reinforced through the use of the vessel. As the participants could glean meaning from the imagery by simultaneously viewing and engaging with the objects, they could connect visual and performative aspects of the burial event and concretise meaning in the objects through the generation and recall of memory. Thus, the role of memory is not defined by an individual using 'memory-work' to read the imagery over the course of turning the vessel, but in the way the object generates and reinforces social memory, establishing a connection between the imagery and the total viewing experience.

With imagery directed at a collective audience, the vessels are also part of a collaborative and dynamic shared social experience. The vessels may be integral parts of the ritual, initiating and facilitating social interaction for the duration of the event. As painted vessels are mobile objects, rather than stationary painted tomb walls, they were carried to the burial site, which opens the possibility for a wider audience than only those permitted in tombs. Decorated tomb walls were often private and secluded from other burial rites and a wider public. Journeys with grave goods, however, involved individuals carrying objects and the body through a familiar landscape to specific burial locations, which became more and more concentrated over time (Patch 2004: 913–914). In this way, the vessels were transported to well-known locations, visited and revisited by the living population. In a scenario where the social network collaborated in multistep burial events, as proposed by scholars, participants formed connections and collective memories between objects and imagery, interpersonal interactions, the landscape, and performances.

This echoes the ideas brought forward by Wengrow and Baines (2004), who argue for the enhanced significance of funerary rituals in the realisation of social memory of the deceased among living participants. The manipulation of the body into unique patterns demonstrates creative outward expressions by the social network involved in the burial event. As generative performances giving form to absence, funerary rituals concretise a ‘positive image of the deceased within social memory’, tangibly manifesting the social component of the deceased’s influence within the group after death (Wengrow 2006: 121; see also Wengrow and Baines 2004: 1101). Each burial event thus offered an area for unique social experiences and collective memories to be formed while engaging with the objects and the deceased.

Likewise, D-ware vessels were crafted within a framework of syntactic components – vessel shapes and a repertoire of imagery – but extant vessels show different iterations of the painted compositions. Most intriguingly, this research found no identical vessel compositions across the excavated corpus, even though they were likely produced in workshops. Such variation shows that each vessel exemplifies creativity and uniqueness as distinct from other vessels. Furthermore, it was a component of a singular experience, garnering its total significance when participants use the object during the burial event. Thus, vessels represent another example where creative expression in social memory of the deceased could be developed and actualised; in this case, connecting the distinct experience with the object, participants, journey through the landscape, and the deceased through the totality of the burial performance.

Conclusions

By foregrounding materiality and viewership, the experimental archaeology strategy proved effective in investigating how time and memory are inscribed in prehistoric imagery. It allowed for new questions to be posed and evaluated, namely focusing on what representations are *for* rather than *of*, within the framework of a more accurate ancient viewing experience. Predynastic Egyptian painted pottery, D-ware, with figural compositions offered a rich corpus of material to reproduce with elaborate and unique scenes developed over the curvilinear vessel surfaces.

The evidence generated from this research demonstrates that the scenes are recurring, and time is cyclical, where imagery operates via the circular arrangement around the vessel, engaging a group of viewers simultaneously. Via formal analysis and experimental archaeology, compositions can be read as one single, cohesive tableau, where the curvilinear surface is an integral part of how the imagery communicates meaning. The painting techniques determined by the author’s observations and experiments demonstrate how painters addressed vessel surfaces by continuously rotating the vessel and adding the motifs to the entire decorative field, in contrast to painting one vessel

side entirely before moving onto the next. This was also substantiated with formal analyses of the compositional layout.

The synergy between painted imagery and curvilinear surface illuminates the collective audience for whom visual devices speak to collaborative viewing of unique compositions to manifest social memory via repeated use of vessels in burial rituals. The spatial layout on the decorative field operates by establishing several viewpoints to read cyclical compositions, rather than for individuals using ‘memory-work’ to trace linear narratives. In this interpretation, D-ware vessels provide support for enhanced significance of burial events within the domain of the living social network. With a collective audience, they occupy a role in initiating and reinforcing social memory through repeated performances and foreground the social context of burial practices, generating meaning beyond only for the deceased.

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A Lexical Study of the Theme of Creation in the Amarna Hymns

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Abstract

This article examines the lexical field of creation in the hymns from the Amarna Period, commonly referred to as the ‘*Short Hymn to (the) Aten*’ and the ‘*Great Hymn to (the) Aten*’, both found in the private tombs of the ancient city of Akhetaten. While the concept of creation has often been associated with solar theology (Assmann 1995; Bickel 1998) and more recently, studied within Egyptian hymnology (Borges Pires 2023a), the context of the Amarna Period remains unique in the history of pharaonic Egypt, as do the inscriptions that come within. Therefore, the vocabulary used in the Hymns to the Aten require an examination which will be presented in this paper. This will put the choice of lexemes used in the spotlight and shed light on the products created by Aten and developing thanks to the sun god, brought to the fore by Amenhotep IV/Akhenaten.

Keywords

Semantics; Hymnology; New Kingdom; *Creatio Prima*; *Creatio Continua*; Lexicology

Introduction

Since the discovery of the Amarna archaeological site, the two Hymns to the Aten have aroused huge interest in the Egyptological field. Considered as some of the richest compositions of Egyptian literature, they are indispensable for understanding the Atenist ideology of the Amarna Period, established by Amenhotep IV/Akhenaten. To this day, nine versions of the *Short Hymn to the Aten* have been attested in five private tombs of the ancient city (Grandet 1995),¹ while one complete and unique attestation of the *Great Hymn to the Aten* has been found in the private tomb of the so-called God’s Father Ay, who succeeded Tutankhamun at the end of the Amarna Period. As its name suggests, the latter hymn is a more extensive version of the short one and its unity, along with its location, makes it the most important text among both Hymns.

Researchers often divide the Hymns to the Aten into two major parts, focusing on one theme. The first part is usually called the ‘Daily Cycle of Aten’ and the second one ‘Revelation’, focusing essentially on the creative and demiurge aspect of the solar deity while explaining the role of Akhenaten as the only mediator between his people and Aten, being his son.

Studies on these unique pieces of Egyptian hymnology have been extensive since their discovery, and widely translated into many languages; this is especially so for the *Great Hymn to the Aten* (some examples in chronological order: Bouriant 1884: 2–7;² Erman 1907: 64–66; Davies 1908;³ Scharff 1922; Erman 1923: 462–464; Moret 1937: 378–379; Gilbert 1943: 34–39; Wilson 1950: 369–371; Gardiner 1961: 225–227; Aldred 1968: 187–189; Simpson 1973: 289–295; Assmann 1975: 213–215 [*Short Hymn*], 215–221 [*Great Hymn*]; Lichtheim 1976: 90–92 [*Short Hymn*], 96–100 [*Great Hymn*];⁴ Hornung 1979: 69–73;

¹ The tombs mentioned belong to the nobles Apy (TA 10), Any (TA 23), Meryre I (TA 04), Mahu (TA 06), Tutu (TA 08). The version found in the first is usually the one used to translate the *Short Hymn to the Aten* and so will be used in this publication.

² Another version would be published in 1903, cf. Bouriant *et al.* 1903: 29 and pls XVI, XVII.

³ Refer to pl. XV for Tutu’s version of the *Short Hymn* and pl. XXVII for Ay’s version of the *Great Hymn*.

⁴ In this research, the 2019 edition of Lichtheim’s translation will be used. Refer to pages 410–412 for the translation of the *Short Hymn to the Aten* and to pages 417–421 for the translation of the *Great Hymn*.

Lalouette 1987: 126–129; Foster 1992: 5–10; Murnane 1995: 112–116 [*Short Hymn*]; 157–159 [*Great Hymn*]; Grandet 1995;⁵ Mathieu 2005: 56–65; Cannuyer 2002; Laboury 2010: 449–451 [*Short Hymn*], 451–454 [*Great Hymn*]; Dessoudeix 2019). If P. Grandet's monograph presents a transcription, transliteration and French translation of these texts, the other studies only propose a translation of their choice. However, none offer a lexicological or lexicographical analysis, which could be explained by the lack of publications about lexicographical studies in Egyptology compared with other topics such as religion, iconography, philology or archaeology. It is important to mention that the topic of the present publication is part of a current dissertation focusing on Amarna vocabulary, which will offer a digital version of all the inscriptions known from Amarna as well as their transliteration for the first time.

Therefore, this work aims not to add another translation to the already long list, but to focus on the wide range of lexemes (verbs, substantives, adjectives, etc.) reattached to the lexical field of creation and analyse them. The most recent publication of M. Lichtheim's translations (2019) will be used as support to examine the translation of the Egyptian terms studied in this research.⁶

What is 'creation' after all?

In many Egyptian cosmogonies, the theme of creation remains crucial to comprehending the vision of the world the Egyptians had and interpreted depending on the era and the area they lived in. The Nun is considered as the primordial ocean, source of all things and Atum, creator of every being. While the notion of Creation does not need any explication as it is common knowledge, it is necessary to explore the various interpretations of the term nowadays, followed by an examination of its significance as it was perceived in ancient Egypt.

Definitions and etymology

In the English and French languages, the word 'creation' derives from the Latin etymology of the verb *creare* meaning 'to produce' and is registered as a noun and a proper noun in most dictionaries. The first definition of the substantive refers to 'the action or process of bringing something into existence from nothing by divine and natural agency' in English and '*l'acte, le fait de créer*' in French. The second definition indicates 'the fact of being created' in English and '*[un] objet; [une] chose créé(e)*' in French. In both cases, the particularity of the lexeme lies in its depiction of the act of producing and the result issued from it.

Yet, creation can be written in two different ways, with a lowercase 'c' as a noun or the capital 'C' as a proper noun. The word written as the latter way is always preceded by the article 'the' and indicates 'the original bringing into existence of the universe by God' (Thesaurus).

Before delving into the research, the reader should understand that the classification of words which will be used in this work is the same one as that acknowledged today: substantives, verbs, adjectives, and so. In the Egyptian language, lexemes considered as substantives are often derived from certain Egyptian vocables today registered as verbs. The closest ones referring to the idea of the substantive 'creation' as it is perceived it today are *hpr.t* or *qmꜥw*, both derived from the verbs identifying as the state of being: *hpr* and *qmꜥ*. If both transcribe the concept of producing, the first

⁵ Since Grandet's monograph is dedicated to these *Hymns*, refer to pages 99–119 for the *Great Hymn*'s transcription and translation and to pages 123–133 for the *Short Hymn*'s. Regarding their respective transliterations, refer to pages 137–152 for the *Great Hymn*'s and to pages 153–159 for the *Short Hymn*'s.

⁶ Transliterations and French translations, unless otherwise stated, are the author's own, contributing to ease the interpretation of these ancient lexemes depending on the living language of the researcher.

one is usually translated as ‘to come into existence, to come into being’,⁷ while the second is usually translated as ‘to create, to beget, to give birth’.⁸ Thus, the derived words from these verbal vocables both could be translated as ‘creation’ related to the term’s second meaning.

Many verbs present in the Egyptian language can be translated as ‘to create’ or relate to it. The *Vocabulaire de l’Égyptien Ancien* (VEgA) project, a digital dictionary from the Université de Montpellier III, gathers 18 lexemes for the verb alone, which, following the alphabetic order of the Egyptian language, are: *jmn*, *jmtj*, *ꜥb*, *pꜥt*, *pꜥh*, *msj*, *nꜥp*, *ntt*, *hꜥr*, *hnm*, *sjꜥj*, *swꜥh*, *smsj*, *šꜥ*, *qmꜥ*, and *qd*. The *Ramses Online* project counts three of these verbs: *hnm*, *shꜥr*, and *qmꜥ*, while six are attested in the most recent edition of the *Faulkner Dictionary*: *jmn*, *jrj*, *pꜥh*, *msj*, *shꜥr*, and *qmꜥ* (Faulkner 2019: 25, 31, 118, 144, 295, 341).

Concepts of *Creatio Prima* and *Creatio Continua*

In his 2006 work on the concept of creation within the Egyptian hymnology of the New Kingdom, Knigge (2006: 67) notes two main themes: the idea of the *creatio prima* which refers to the act itself of creating, and the *creatio continua* which refers specifically to the maintaining of the product created.

Lexicological and semantic analysis

One of the most delicate parts when it comes to realising a lexicographical study, especially when the study topic is written in an ancient language is, not only to know that we will probably never be able to reach that level of comprehension of it but also to do the best to illustrate the nuances one term can contain in the proposed translation.

Verbs of creation in the Amarna Hymns and classification

Verbs associated with *Creatio Prima*

TABLE 1. VERBAL LEXEMES EXPRESSING THE ACT OF CREATING IN THE AMARNA HYMNS

Lexeme transcription	Attestations	Translations
<i>Creatio Prima</i>		
<i>jrj</i>	10	‘to make, to do’
<i>qmꜥ</i>	3	‘to create, to fashion’
<i>qd</i>	1	‘to fashion’
<i>sntj</i>	1	‘to found’
<i>hꜥr</i>	2	‘to come (into existence), to be born, to develop’

jrj: with over ten attestations, *jrj* stands as the most frequently used verb of creation in our hymns. The second attestation of this verb in particular, *ntk mw.t jt n(y) jryꜥk* ‘you are mother and father of all that you made’ (Lichtheim 2019: 411), vividly and singularly illustrates the creator and parental role (Borges Pires 2023b: 47).

⁷ <https://app.vega-lexique.fr/?entries/w11437> (last consulted: 30 May 2025).

⁸ <https://app.vega-lexique.fr/?entries/w13099> (last consulted: 30 May 2025).

When we examine passages that showcase the use of *jrj* (first and second attestations) we discern that the verb is primarily employed to describe fundamental creations of paramount importance such as the creation of the earth: ‘Who made (*jrj*) every land, created what is in it’ (Lichtheim 2019: 411); the sky: ‘You have made (*jrj*) the far sky to shine in it/To observe all that you made’ (Lichtheim 2019: 412) and the sea: ‘You made Hapy in *dat*/You bring him when you will/ To nourish the people/ For you made them yourself.’ (Lichtheim 2019: 419). The act of creation in these three major realms (terrestrial, celestial, and aquatic) is always translated by the verb of creation *jrj* itself.

Moreover, the formula *jrj=k* which can be translated as ‘what you make’ or ‘what you created’ is the closest textual element to the substantive creation.² In my French version of the texts, I translate *jrj=k* as ‘your creations’ while Lichtheim prefers ‘all that you made’. The same applies to the word ‘creator’, which is not explicitly written as a substantive but more as a proposition with (*m*) *pj*: *jrj.w* in the sentence (*m*) *pj*: *jrj.w=sn htp m jh.t=f*: *Lorsque celui qui les a créés se couche dans son horizon*. In comparison, the expression *š(w) nḥ*, which Murnane read as an imperfective participle and translates as ‘who initiates life’ (1995: 113), must be included among those elements replacing the absence of explicit substantive ‘creator’, ‘maker’.

qm: the attestations of the verb *qm* can be counted thrice in the sources. The sole attestation present in the *Short Hymn*, *jr(w) t nb qm(w) nty hr*, is closest to the explicit meaning of ‘creating’ and is translated as such by Lichtheim (2019: 411), despite the use of *jrj* right before being translated as ‘to make’ by the author. Some authors, like Bernard Mathieu, translate the verb as follows: ‘*Toi qui as fait l’univers et créé (qm) ce qui s’y trouve*’ (Mathieu 2008: 59); Dimitry Laboury shared the same way of translating the verb: ‘*Toi qui as fait la terre et créé (qm) tout ce qui s’y trouve*’ (Laboury 2010: 450). Some authors, like Grandet prefer to associate the verb ‘to create’ with *jrj* and use ‘to fashion’ to translate *qm* in this passage: ‘*Ô toi qui a créé la terre en son entier / Et qui a façonné (qm) ce qui dessus repose*’ (Grandet 1995: 125).

The two other passages counting the use of *qm* belong to the *Great Hymn to the Aten*, and more precisely to the so-called ‘Revelation’ part. The first passage, *qm=k t n hr=k jw=k w=stj*, is similar to the example from the *Short Hymn* since it also implies that the creation of the land (of Egypt) was accomplished by the solar god, alone. However, this time *qm* is the only verb used to refer to the creation of this environment. The choices of translation this lexeme in this context varies depending on the author: Grandet, Mathieu and Laboury maintain their previous choices and keep the same verbs: ‘*Solitaire en esprit, tu façannes (to fashion) la terre*’ (Grandet 1995: 111); ‘*Tu as créé (to create) la terre à ton idée alors que tu étais seul*’ (Mathieu 2008: 62) and ‘*étant seul tu as créé (to create) la terre selon ton désir*’ (Laboury 2010: 452) in their respective versions. If Lichtheim translated the Egyptian verb by ‘to create’ in the *Short Hymn* attestation (Lichtheim 2019: 411), her choice differs in this context and the author preferred translating the passage as such: ‘you made the earth as you wished, you alone’ (Lichtheim 2019: 419). The second part of this passage insists on the demiurge aspect of Aten, being the only creator-god (‘you alone’) and by doing this task with the strength of his will (‘as you wished’).

The finale attestation with the verb *qm* is in a second passage from the *Great Hymn*, *qm=k hr=sn r tm=k*, that this author would translate as ‘you fashion their faces until you cease’.⁹ If it is actually omitted by Lichtheim, it is still a clear example of the idea of *creatio continua* which makes this attestation even more interesting. While in the other passage from the ‘Daily Cycle’, *qm* is used as a verb expressing the *creatio prima*, in this part, focusing even more on the constant creating power of Aten, the verb can be reattached to the idea of *creatio continua*. Therefore, ‘until you cease’ can also

⁹ In french : « *tu façannes leurs visages jusqu’à ce que tu cesses* ».

be understood as ‘until you dawn’ and knowing that the solar cycle never stops, so too the action, which is uninterrupted.

qd: if *qd* is similar to *qm* in terms of translation (since they both can be translated as ‘to fashion’ and imply the act of creating), it is important to highlight the nuance between the two of them. Indeed, *qd* is associated with the craft of pottery, and more specifically with the wheel on which Khnum moulded men.

The sole passage attesting the verb *qd* in the *Hymns to the Aten* represents a particular lexicographical case on its own. Present in the beginning of the ‘Daily Cycle’ in the *Short Hymn*, it is used to refer to the creation of Aten himself: *p; ntr špsy qd(w) sw dsf* reinforcing the idea of the creator being a product of its own production (Borges Pires 2023b) accentuated with *sw dsf*. The importance of the choice of this verb will be developed in the part dedicated to Aten’s self-genesis below.

snj: the verb *snj* (AnLex II: 78.3644; Wb 4: 177.10–178.15) has one attestation in the Hymns. Translated as ‘to found’ (Lichtheim 2019: 420) its use refers to the creation of *t*, which has to be understood as the country in this instance, and not the earth as in previous verbs such as *jrj* or *qm*. Its hieroglyphic writing seems to be attested only in this text among the Egyptian hymnological literature (Faulkner 2017: 288).

hpr: this verb appears in the ‘Daily Cycle’ of the *Short Hymn* and the ‘Revelation’ of the *Great Hymn*. Although it has several meanings, such as *jrj* or the derived verb *shpr*, it is important to highlight the nuances of the context in which it is used in order to choose a verb that best suits the text.

In the passage from the *Short Hymn*, the verb is used following a sequence dealing with the consequences of sunset on the land of Egypt: *r hpr wbn-k (m) dw(w) m ḥ.t j;bt(y).t n(y).t p.t*, which Lichtheim translates as ‘until you dawn in sky’s eastern lightland’ (Lichtheim 2019: 411). There is no precise translation of the verb, combined with *wbn-k*, and it is therefore implicit in the author’s ‘until you dawn’.

However, the presence of the verb in the original Egyptian text is a good reason to retranslate it in the diverse translations. Indeed, the appearance of Aten is vital if the creative cycle is to continue, and it is with *hpr* that he resurfaces every day here. The passage could, therefore, be translated as follows: ‘Until your rising comes (*hpr*), in the morning in the eastern horizon of the sky.’ This emphasises Aten’s appearance’s crucial role in the creative cycle’s continuation.

The second passage, present in the ‘Revelation’ of the *Great Hymn to the Aten*, also relates the benefits of the rising of the divine Solar Disk over the land of Egypt: *hpr t; ḥr-k mj jrr-k sn / wbn-n-k ḥḥ-sn ḥtp-k m(w).t-sn*. Here, *hpr* is closer to the meaning of the verb ‘to create’, whereas, in the previous passage, it referred more to the idea of manifestation.

Thus, ‘the earth (*t*) comes into existence (*hpr*) under the supervision of Aten (*ḥr-k*)’, renewing the daily solar cycle but also accentuating the solar god’s generative and creative source during this specific period, given that it only takes place in broad daylight. This phrase highlights Aten’s power and influence during this important moment.

Verbs associated with Creatio Continua

Other verbs, like *mn* (‘to nurse, to nourish’) or *wd* (‘to grow’), hint at the idea of creating life in the long term. Among those verbs which belong to the idea of *creatio continua*, *snḥ* is the most often employed, with seven attestations.

TABLE 2. VERBAL LEXEMES EXPRESSING THE ACT OF CREATING IN THE AMARNA HYMNS

Creatio Continua	Attestations	Translations
<i>s'nh</i>	7	'to make...live; to vivify'
<i>mnr</i>	1	'to nourish'
<i>rdj tꜣw</i>	1	'to give (the) breath (of life)'
<i>wd</i>	1	'to grow'
<i>srd</i>	1	'to strengthen'
<i>wꜣs</i>	1	'to elevate'
<i>shpr</i>	2	'to bring into existence, to bring into being'
<i>pr(j) m</i>	1	'to come out from'
<i>rdj</i>	1	'to give, to offer, to put'
<i>stnj</i>	1	'to distinguish'

The word *shpr*, which occurs twice in the texts, literally means 'to bring into existence' or 'to bring into being'. However, Lichtheim translates it in two different ways: the first time by 'to make' (Lichtheim 2019: 418) to denote the creation (and implied development) of the foetus in the womb, and the second time by 'to foster' (Lichtheim 2019: 420) to illustrate the creation of time through the passing of the seasons.

In both extracts, the verb *shpr* testifies to the creative power of the Aten, but above all, to the long-term development of some of his creations – in this case, the foetus and the seasons – and puts forward the idea of a *creatio continua* (the unborn child; the various seasonal creations) starting from a *creatio prima* (the foetus; the seasons).

The creations of Aten

The religious texts that are the *Hymns to the Aten* are testimonies of the ideology of the Amarna Period. They illustrate, at best, the demiurge role of the sun deity. In terms of philological process, the so-called 'creations of Aten' are presented in the form of successive enumerations. Before starting to study any of them, it is essential to note that no Egyptian word can be explicitly translated as 'creation' or 'to create' in the texts. However, the formula *jry=k*, which can be translated as 'what you made' or 'what you created', is the closest textual element found in the literary evidence to the substantive 'creation'.

The self-genesis

If Egyptian mythology explains well that gods come from somewhere (example: Nun) or another god (like Atum), Aten does not have any divine parent and does not come from a specific sacred place. The formulation *qd(w) sw dsꜣf* explicitly illustrates that the sun god, alone, contributed to his own creation. As stated previously, *qd* is used once in the Amarna hymns and is the only verb used to describe the act of creation of the divinity.

In his recent articles, G. Borges Pires (2023b: 76) compared the hymns of the New Kingdom and realised that the idea of a 'self-emanated deity' can be found in several hymns of this period but that, when it comes to describe the self-creation of the god, the verb used is not *qd*, but mostly *hpr*

in the commonly used expression *hpr ds=f*. Therefore, the *Great Hymn to the Aten* represents a unique case of lexicographical depiction of self-creation with the expression *qd(w) sw ds=f*. What is more, the use of *sw*, added to *ds=f* and compared to *hpr ds=f*, emphasises the idea of self-creation even more.

The divine son

If placing the name of the sun god Aten in cartouches was one of Akhenaten's ways of establishing his divine lineage, diverging from his predecessors, this idea is also explicitly supported in the Hymns to the Aten. The vocables attested which illustrate this idea are *s*, occurring eight times,¹⁰ four times in each hymn, and *ms*, which appears only once. If *s* is a generic term to refer to the male descendant of someone; then *ms* on the other side is derived from the verb *msj* which is also a verb of creation.

The first attestation of *s* is in the sequence *s=k w^b(w) hr jr:t hss(w).t=k*, which the author of this work translates as 'Ton fils, purifié, fait ce pour quoi tu es loué', and Lichtheim as 'Your holy son performs your praises' (Lichtheim 2019: 411). The second ends the first part of the *Short Hymn* in its eighth column with *s=k špsy h^rw*, 'Ton fils auguste exulte', 'Your august son exults' (Lichtheim 2019: 411).

The next three attestations follow each other at the beginning of the second part of the *Hymn*, which emphasises the idea that Akhenaten is the sole one who knows Aten and has the ability to exchange with him and be his divine son. The first of the three could be added to the philological proofs to nuance the translations when two verbs as synonyms occur in the same sentence. Attested at the beginning of the second part of the *Hymn*, both vocables follow each other in (m) *msy s^r špsy w^r-n-r mj-qd=f* 'Son enfant, fils auguste, Ouaenrê, conformément à sa forme'. In Lichtheim's version, this phrase is translated as 'Your offspring, your august son, Sole one of Re'. The lexeme *ms* is here considered as a substantive and translated as such by 'offspring' while 'son' is retained to express the idea behind *s*. Derived from the verb of creation *msj*, *ms* refers here to a product issued from the act of birthing but implies that the product has been obtained after giving birth. Akhenaten is, therefore, to be considered not only as the divine son of the solar deity but more than that: the one who actually came from him.

The next mention of *s* in the *Short Hymn* is particular for two reasons. First, because it is attested in the negative sequence *nn jry:t ;b(j) s^r r^r wts nfr.w=f (nfr-hpr.w-r^r w^r-n-r^r)*. Secondly, because the royal title *s^r r^r* is usually followed by the 'Son of Ra' name of the king, which for Akhenaten is *Neferkheperoure Ouaenre*. However, in this context, the sequence starts with the negative particle *nn* followed by *jry:t ;b(j)*, which, when gathered, means 'not to cease (something)' or 'never stop to'. The title *s^r r^r* is then followed by *wts nfrw*, 'exalt beauty' or 'exalt perfection' depending on the translation the researcher prefers for *nfrw*. The action of Akhenaten's celebration of Aten is expressed once again immediately afterwards, using the same substantive (*s*) and verb (*wts*). The filial bond is explicitly illustrated with *jnk s^r*, 'I am your son' reinforced with the following *h(w) n=k wts rn=k*, which Lichtheim translates as 'who serves you, who exalts your name' (Lichtheim 2019: 411).

In the Great Hymn to the Aten:

*jw=k m r^r jn=k r-r(;)s^rsn,
w^rf=k sn (n) s^r mry=k*

'Being Re, you reach their limits,
You bend them <for> the son whom you love' (Lichtheim 2019: 417).

¹⁰ The royal epithet 'Son of Ra' is not counted in this study. If so, the attestations would have been raised to twelve, since it appears four times.

s^{nh} s_i m h.t n(y).t mw.t^{sf}
sgrh sw m tm.t rmy^{sf}

‘Who feeds the son in his mother’s womb,
Who soothes him to still his tears’ (Lichtheim 2019: 418).

jw^{sk} m jb^{sj}, mn wn^{sky} rh tw
wpw-hr s^{sk} (nfr-hpr.w-r^c w^c-n(y)-r^c)

‘There is no other who knows you,
Only your son, Neferkheprure, Sole-one-of-Re’ (Lichtheim 2019: 420).

wts^{sk} sn n s^{sk}
pr(=w) m h^c.w^{sk}

‘You rouse them for your son
Who came from your body’ (Lichtheim 2019: 420).

Of the 12 attestations of the substantive *s_i* in the Hymns to the Aten, four are followed by the name of the god Ra and refer to the royal title, including three with the epithet ‘*nh-m-m^c.t*’; five are associated with the personal pronoun of the second singular person *sk*; and only one is attested with the personal pronoun of the third singular person *sf*. Both pronouns clearly refer to Aten in each passage they are attested and depict the desire to emphasise the bond between the king and the solar deity. Having said that, the first of the two remaining attestations of the word are quite different from the others. It is attested in the sequence identifying Aten as the god of foreign countries and therefore implies that Akhenaten, being his son, is their sovereign as well; the second is mentioned in a context related to the concept of *creatio continua*.

The sky

Following the act of self-genesis and the act of divine creation of his son, nature could be considered as the third creation of Aten. The first realm about to be studied here is the celestial one because the role of the sky has its own importance in the Hymns. If the term *p.t* (Wb 1: 490.10–492.1) is attested nine times in these compositions, Aten is only recounted as its creator twice, once in each *Hymn*, and the sequences are practically identical:

jw jry~n^{sk} p.t wst r wbn jm^{ss}
r m^{ss} jry^{sk} nb jw^{sk} w^wstj

‘You have made the far sky to shine in it,
To observe all that you made’ (Lichtheim 2019: 412).

jr~n^{sk} p.t w^{stj} r wbn jm^{ss}
r m⁽ⁱ⁾ jry^{sk} nb jw^{sk} w^wstj

‘You made the far sky to shine therein,
To behold all that you made’ (Lichtheim 2019: 420).

Besides the grammatical distinction between one extract and the other, which explains the change of translation, the theme of the creation of the sky remains. These passages present more information than just Aten being at its origins.

In fact, this passage explicitly demonstrates four facts which need to be highlighted: the first is the creation of the sky (*jry pt*) by Aten; the second is its emplacement, mentioned through the verb *wj* (Wb 1: 245.3–246.4) so that he could rise into it, and therefore, refers to the idea of elevation as a demiurge divinity compared to the rest of the world. The third idea reinforces this notion with the deity who ‘contemplates’ his creations seen from the sky with the use of the verb *m^{ss}*, which took on a heavier meaning than that of ‘to see’, taken up by the verb *ptr{f}* at the time; and finally, the fourth fact is linked to the second, since it insists on the fact that these so-called ‘creations’ (*jry*) were made by Aten alone, supported by the *w(w)stj* ‘only you’ or ‘you alone’, emphasising the exclusivity of Aten’s role in creation.

However, Aten is not the only result of the act of creating he produced in this environment. The other living beings attributed to the sky in the Hymns and that this author refers to as ‘celestial creatures’ are the birds, mentioned by the general term of *ꜥd.w*, and their offspring, identified with the use of *tꜥ*. In addition to these lexical elements, the expressions *ꜥꜥꜥ.t(w) hnn.t(w) nb*, ‘all that fly up and alight’ and *nty m ꜥꜥ hr ꜥꜥꜥ.w m dnꜥ.wꜥsn*, ‘all on high that fly on wings’ complete those creations.

Having said that, attention should be brought upon one sole sequence mentioning the creation of the rain and the sea within the sky, results of Aten’s power of creation.

d~nꜥk hꜥpy m p.t hꜥꜥꜥnꜥsn

You made a heavenly Hapy descend for them;

jrrꜥꜥ hnw hr dw.w mj wꜥꜥd-wr

He makes waves on the mountain like the sea (Lichtheim 2019: 419)

This statement shows how what is considered as rain today was perceived as the Nile flood in the sky (*hꜥpy m p.t*).

The sea

While birds are the only creatures – other than Aten himself – considered as ‘heavenly’ creatures in the Amarna hymns, the only mentions of ‘aquatic’ ones are fish, through the term *rmw*. However, this collective term excludes animals such as hippopotamuses and crocodiles (Meeks 2012: 532), which can be found in the compound *jmyw-mw* ‘those who are in the water’ in the Egyptian vocabulary, but not in that of the Hymns. The other creations of Aten associated with the aquatic world are the great bodies of water, of which there are two: the *wꜥꜥd-wr*, whose Egyptian name we prefer to keep, but which is often associated with the Mediterranean Sea, and the Nile, which is mentioned implicitly through the personification of the flood with Hapy, but also through the simple lexeme *jtrw*, the generic word ‘river’. Although it is only mentioned once in the masculine singular, the term is used under its plural form towards the end of the *Great Hymn to the Aten*, in the enumeration of the places in which Aten manifests himself: ‘You made millions of forms from yourself alone / Towns, villages’ fields, the river course’ implying the *creatio continua* maintained by Aten.

The Earth

Toponyms and expressions

Among the different realms created by Aten, the earth statistically may be the one with the most attestations. Besides the adverbial locution *hꜥꜥd-tꜥ* often describing the dawn,¹¹ twenty-six occurrences can be found of the lexeme in the Hymns. Before proceeding to a detailed examination of its use, it is essential to note that *tꜥ* is the only term used to designate a land or a country, besides the attestations of the two toponyms *tꜥ-mrj* and *tꜥ.wy*.

Regarding the latter, seven attestations state *tꜥ.wy*, the toponym referring to the land of Egypt as the combination of Lower Egypt and Upper Egypt. Among the seven attestations, five are included in royal epithets, preceded either by *nb* when it refers to Akhenaten or the feminine version, *nb.t* to designate Akhenaten’s wife, Nefertiti. The other references to *tꜥ.wy* can either be read at the beginning of the *Short Hymn to the Aten*: *mꜥꜥ~nꜥk tꜥ.wy m mrw.tꜥk* ‘Tu as empli le Double-Pays de l’amour que tu inspires’, ‘When you fill the Two Lands with your love’; and the second one at the beginning

¹¹ This attestation has been removed from this study.

of the *Great Hymn*: ‘*tꜣ.wy m ḥb rꜣ [nb ?]*’, translated by ‘*Le Double-Pays est en fête chaque [jour ?]*’, ‘The Two Lands are in festivity’. If the first reference states that Aten is a loving creator, emphasising the idea of the parenthood which is reattached to him in the Hymns, the second one, with the Egyptian preposition of state, ‘*m*’, reflects the state of the creations within the Egyptian country, mirroring the state of Aten. This thought could be strengthened by two other attestations employing *tꜣ* as reference to the earth and all pertaining to the idea of darkness, *kkw*, which will be included in another research paper.

Regarding the other occurrences of the lexeme, used as a substantive, the first one refers to its very creation in the sequence: *jr(w) tꜣ nb qmꜣ(w) nty ḥr*. Since the study of the verbs of creation *jrj* and *qmꜣ* has already been executed previously in this paper, the combination of *tꜣ* followed by the adjective *nb* will be examined in this part. Indeed, since it is reported four times in the Hymns, once in the *Short Hymn* and thrice in the *Great Hymn*, the nuance of *tꜣ nb* requires to be studied in detail regarding the context of its attestations. For instance, the first statement resumes the demiurge aspect of Aten, being the creator of all things. Nonetheless, the sequence could be interpreted in two different ways: the first one as Aten, creator of the whole world and everything upon it; the second as Aten, creator of the whole land of Egypt and everything upon it. It is the scale and the limits of *tꜣ nb* that need to be established to be able to comprehend the concept behind it. The expression is attested twice in the first part of the *Great Hymn*:

jwꜣk wbnꜣtj m ḥ.t jꜣb(y).t
mḥ~nꜣk tꜣ nb m nfr.wꜣk

‘When you have dawned in eastern lightland,
You fill every land with your beauty,

jwꜣk nꜣtj wrꜣtj tḥnꜣtj
qꜣꜣtj ḥr-tp tꜣ nb

‘You are beautiful, great, radiant,
High over every land’ (Lichtheim 2019: 417).

The preposition *m* in the first of the two is used as an instrumental preposition and not as a preposition of state, as seen previously. However, the states of Aten and its terrestrial creation are still intertwined in this sequence; while, in the second one, its superiority is underlined with the use of the verb *qꜣj* reinforced by the preposition *ḥr-tp*. The last attestation of *tꜣ nb* is quite useful to study because the nuance of the use of *nb* is slight but still needs to be expressed. Indeed, in the previous statements, *tꜣ nb* referred specifically to the land of Egypt. Yet, in the sequence *pꜣ nb n(y) tꜣ nb wbn nꜣsn*, translated by Lichtheim as ‘Lord of all lands who shines for them’, *tꜣ nb* does not refer only to Egypt but also all others without limits. If the *tꜣ nb* was to be understood as the whole land, it is to be understood as the whole world here, adding another reason why the nuance must be stressed and highlighted in the translating work. Furthermore, the use of *nb* as a substantive in *pꜣ nb* might have been a word play in writing and pronunciation by the scribe, reinforced with the pronunciation of *wbn* following *tꜣ nb*, but this should perhaps be the topic for another study.

Finally, the term *tꜣ* also appears in the compound phrase *tꜣ r-ḏrꜣf* which is attested twice and only in the *Great Hymn to the Aten*. The substantive is followed by the preposition *r-ḏr*, meaning ‘entire, whole’,¹² and by the masculine suffix pronoun *ꜣf*.

¹² <https://app.vega-lexique.fr/?entries/w3797> (last consulted: 31 May 2025).

shd n st.wt:k t: r-dr:f
jb nb h'w n m:(i):k,
jw:k h'tj m nb:sn

'As your rays light the whole earth,
 Every heart acclaims in your sight,
 When you are risen as their lord.'
 (Lichtheim 2019: 411)

w'b.w h'.w:sn
šsp.w wn:h.w
ˁ.wy:sn m j:w n h'w:k
t: r-dr:f jr:sn k:t:sn

Bodies cleansed clothed,
 Their arms adore your appearance.
 The entire land sets out to work.
 (Lichtheim 2019: 418)

It appears that, when followed by this preposition, it is not the geographical location which is stated, but a group of living creatures. This hypothesis could be justified by the use of the *sn* plural suffix pronoun but also by the actions performed by the Earth in these extracts. In the first one, the sunrise appears to evoke joy in the *jb*-heart, which seems to be the seat of thought and emotion in the Egyptian theology, completed by the *h'ty*-heart referring to the living organ. The second extract specifies the group designated by *t: r-dr:f* by listing human actions such as cleaning the body (*w'b h'.w*), getting clothed (*šsp.w wn:h.w*), raising their arms to accomplish the *j:w*-adoration and finally going to realise their work (*k:t*).

The earthly creatures

Being the most extensive creations mentioned in the Amarna hymns, the earthly beings created by Aten hold significant importance. Among all products issued from Aten, they represent more than 31% compared to other creatures. If the previously statement of *t: nb* referring to the living beings, and more precisely the human ones, the others are illustrated through enumerations several times in the hymns.

Indeed, these creatures are firstly highlighted in the *Short Hymn*: August God who fashioned himself/ Who made every land (*t: nb*), created what is in it (*qm:(w) nty hr*)/ All peoples (*rm:t*), herds (*mnmn.t*) and flocks (*ˁ.w.t*)/ All trees (*šn.w*) that grow from soil/ They live when you dawn for them/' (Lichtheim 2019: 411); and in the *Great Hymn to the Aten*: 'You made the earth as you wished, you alone! All peoples (*rm:t*), herds (*mnmn.t*) and flocks (*ˁ.w.t nb.t*)/ All upon earth (*nty nb hr t:*) that walk on legs (*šmw hr rd.wy*) / All on high that fly on wings (*nty m ˁ hr py.w m dn:h.w:sn*) / The lands of Khor and Kush (*hs.wt hrw, kš*) / The land of Egypt (*t: n(y) kmt*)' (Lichtheim 2019: 419). In both, the living beings of the earth are mentioned first, starting with humankind, followed by animals and vegetal beings; while the *Short Hymn* stops there, the *Great Hymn* extends the creations. Some of the latter creatures remain unnamed, only implied through the expressions illustrating the same schema of composition: *nty* followed by a specificity like walking or flying. Others, ending the list, go beyond the limits of the land of Egypt (see below).

Regarding the creation of humankind, the generic term *rm:t* (Wb 2: 421.9–424.14) is attested three times in the Hymns. While it usually refers to the Egyptian people (Meeks 2012: 519), depending on the context it could also include other peoples. Since the foreign countries and their peoples are mentioned later as creations of Aten, it should be identified here as applying to Egyptian people as is more usual. This clarification helps the reader understand the broader implications of the term *rm:t* in the context of the Hymns.

The terms used to describe the animals in the Hymns are the standard terms *mnmn.t* (Wb 2: 81.17–23) and *ˁ.w.t* (Wb 1: 170.7–171.7) referring, respectively, to herds and flocks that are basically small

cattle. If we usually find the terms in the opposite order in Egyptian texts (Meeks 2012: 523), in both attestations, the cattle are referred as *mmn.t* first, followed by *ˁw.t*. The difference between both of them is found in the condition they are in: *mmn.t* refers to animals that can move freely in the fields while *ˁw.t* refers to animals confined in stables. Another term – similar to *ˁw.t* – is used in the ‘Revelation’ of both Hymns for the animals: *jˁw.t* (Wb 1: 29.15–16), translated by Lichtheim as ‘flocks’ (Lichtheim 2019: 412) or ‘beasts’ (Lichtheim 2019: 418), which refers to cattle generally kept in stables and sacrificed during an event. The presence of one cattle shed in the northern palace at Amarna (Stevens 2020: 139–140, fig. 115; Meeks 2012: 525), supported by the presence of representations of these animals on the stone troughs that have been found, may also be evidence of this Egyptian practice at the time. However, if the first terms are found in a context of creation, *jˁw.t* is used in both attestations in a context of celebration from the animals in honour of Aten.

Some passages vividly depict the *creatio continua*, showcasing how Aten, the sole source of life according to the cosmology presented herein, perpetually breathes life into the Earth. This is exemplified by the flowers (*hrr.t*), for example, which are described as blooming at every sunrise. This unceasing act of creation serves as a profound testament to the perpetual nature of life and the formation of time through Aten’s omnipotent power, as he continually brings life into existence and fosters growth.

The foreign countries

The passage detailing the creation of foreign countries underscores the universalist aspect of Aten’s creative power. The land of Khor (modern-day Syria), the land of Kush (modern-day Sudan), and Egypt are explicitly mentioned in the *Great Hymn to the Aten*: *hˁs.wt hˁrw, kꜣš, tˁ n(y) kmt*. In the hieroglyphic version, the foreign people (*hˁsty.w*) live in the *hˁst.w*, a term that some interpret as ‘foreign countries’ while others prefer the more neutral expression ‘lands of’. In both cases, the universalist idea of Aten’s creative power is shown to be extending beyond the borders of Egypt, reaching all the countries adjacent to it, emphasising the breadth and inclusivity of the Amarna religion.

This idea is accentuated by the rest of the passage, which illustrates the diversity of foreign peoples not only by the difference in the languages spoken, *ns.w wpꜥw m md.wt*, but also by the difference in their skin colours (Esjmond, 2025: 10–20) with the nouns *qd.w* and *jnm.w*. This unique perspective on diversity is further highlighted by the fact that while *qd.w* refers to the inner aspect, such as the character of a person or people, *jnm.w* refers more to the outer aspect, such as the skin of a human or the fur of an animal. The foreign animal species, designated by the sequence *ˁwt hˁs.t nb(.t)*, is also considered a creation of Aten.

Time

Finally, throughout this lexical study, one element remains present in Aten’s creation process: time. Through his rising and setting, the solar deity succeeds into mastering the temporal dimension and the source of life that he represents and attributes to his creations, however diverse they may be. The idea of time is perceived in the hymns with the seasons *jtr.w*, including explicit references such as *pr.t* or *hh*. As for the daily cycle, it is carried out temporally through the millions of manifestations (*hh.w n hpr.w*) of Aten, who renews man’s *ˁh* through his appearances and his life-giving rays.

However, the most significant parallel drawn in the Hymns lies in the difference between diurnal time, representing a living and creative duration, and nocturnal time, incarnating the opposite idea. If the presence of Aten is a symbol of life, its absence takes life away, allowing *kkw* to take its place. The mention of night and the consequences of night-time occur in both Hymns to the Aten and

illustrate the contrast between life and death, order and disorder, joy and despair. Since this topos will be studied in another research piece, this will not be detailed in the present paper.

Conclusion

The Hymns to the Aten, especially the *Great Hymn* found in a remarkably preserved state as a text from the Amarna Period, are of immense significance. They allow us to identify the profound role of the demiurge god Aten in Amarna ideology and religion. The Egyptian lexemes that contemporary researches like ourselves would consider as verbs of creations can be divided in several categories: the ones implying producing (*jrj*, *qmꜥ*, *rdj*, *snṯj*), the ones illustrating the idea of bringing something to life (*shpr*, *pr(j) m*, *rdj tꜣw*, *jrj*), the idea of keeping a creation alive (*jrj*, *sꜣnh*, *mnꜥ*, *wd*) and finally, the ones attesting the idea of growth due to the constant creative source which is Aten (*wd*, *srd*, *wts*). The solar god is the creator of every living being and every space considered as their residence: the sky, the sea and the earth. Aten is their creator and Akhenaten, being his only son, is the only one with the ability to know him and have access to the deity. The creations of Aten also extend beyond the borders of Egypt and reach all countries next to it. By invoking Aten as their creator's mediator through the Hymns, Akhenaten intention to legitimate his place as their lord is explicitly illustrated.

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Early Egyptology: Beyond Nationalism?

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Abstract

Egyptology was born in the 19th century, in the aftermath of the rise of European nationalisms. As a logical consequence of its inception in a context of fierce competition between Western powers in the Middle East, Egyptology is often analysed through the lens of this fractured and quarrelsome background. Such emphasis on external factors does indeed align with the perception of the protagonists of the time themselves; national scopes may, moreover, offer a convenient historiographic framework, with clear criteria of analysis that roughly match the institutional gathering of archival documents.

However, a constant attention to national allegiance as a determining factor in sensibility and behaviour may induce a simplistic perception of the situation that overlooks the complexity of individual agency and interpersonal relations. Fellow countrymen rarely form a monolithic group devoid of internal conflicts, and several scholars of note had trajectories that defy national compartmentalisation. An excessive focus on national ties is especially questionable in the study of scientific development, where individual initiative remains more determining than state policy, even if the latter can create opportunities and means of action. Re-evaluating early Egyptologists' attitudes towards their peers from other countries, and more broadly any foreigners and other nations (including Egypt) could then be of interest, as well as looking for possible divergences between their public and private positions, since their activities were often dependent on state sponsorship and at least acquiescence from the diplomatic corps.

The article aims to assess the relevance of the national lens in the context of Egyptology before the First World War. As a tribute to the Current Research in Egyptology spirit of fellowship and cooperation, we also need to recall how much international scholarly enterprises and friendships contributed to the development of Egyptology in the 19th century.

Keywords

19th Century Egyptology; Diplomacy; Historiography; History of Egyptology

Introduction

Egyptology developed amid rising European nationalisms and intense competition between the Western powers, with the Middle East being the focus of strong geopolitical interests. This dramatic background is often used as a backdrop to analyse the history of Egyptology and to define Egyptian archaeology as a colonial science.

While a national lens is convenient for historiographic studies, it can be observed that individuals often defied expectations based on their country of origin throughout the 19th century. These occurrences may be of interest in the historiographical debate on the balance between individual agency and collective structures (Navratilova 2019: 38 and 40). This paper aims to recall some of them and question the use of nationality (or more precisely of country of allegiance), looking at primary sources that avoid the generalisation and oversimplification that are detrimental to our understanding of early Egyptology. It may help broaden the scope of analysis of Egyptology before

the First World War (1914–1918) as a dynamic and multinational system resulting from state policies and personal agency, impacted but not driven by geopolitics (Gertzen 2019: 211–227).

Nationality and early Egyptology

Relevance of nationality for the history of individuals and scholars

Nationality is commonly used as essential identificatory information for any individual. It appears, for example, as the first word in the entries of *Who was Who in Egyptology* (Bierbrier 2019), as well as in many dictionaries. Nations of origin also form the lens of recent syntheses of the history of Egyptology, such as chapters of collective works such as *Global Egyptology* (Langer 2017: see chapters from Loktionov; Nishimura and Miyagawa; Rocha da Silva; and Tian); *Towards a History of Egyptology* (Navratilova *et al.* 2019: see chapters from Dodson; Gertzen; Haikal and Omar; Loktionov; and Rocha da Silva); or *A History of World Egyptology* (Bednarski *et al.* 2021).¹ Nation of origin is also used as a framework for targeted articles in the *UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology* (Ladynin 2022; Sheppard 2021; Voss and Gertzen 2020).

Admittedly, the national scale offers a practical categorisation and seems quite objective as a discriminating criterion. It is, moreover, usually a coherent scope, since, on an international scene, fellow countrymen often are a close group with more frequent contacts and communications than with foreigners. This scale can be justified when pondering the specificities of a national frame of work (e.g. Dodson 2019: 147–156).

An even more logical reason to choose this characteristic also lies with the fact that archives and documentation are usually collected at regional and national levels. Consequently, most of the sources to investigate an individual's career are held in similar conditions as those for other people belonging to the same state. Nationality is thus a coherent and manageable scope to study Egyptologists from the past in a broader scale than the traditional individual biographic approach.

Nationality is defined by personal status laws. We will see below that state authority involvement, documented or assumed, is often constitutive of what we usually think of as national groups of Egyptologists. Accordingly, it could be more accurate to focus on national allegiance, less limitative than nationality proper, which is above all an administrative device. National allegiance, on the other hand, depends on the contemporaneous geopolitical situation. Both criteria may be subject to change over an individual's life, with the movement of borders and the rise and fall of regimes, which was not a rarity in the 19th century.

However, none of these characteristics can define *a priori* an individual's feeling of belonging, nor determine their trajectory through life and intellectual pursuits. The underlying meaning of the national categorisation of scholars has always been relatively difficult to define more strictly. An illustration of the blurry nature of such denomination is offered by the *Bibliothèque égyptologique* monographs series, an early attempt to preserve the works of the forerunners of our discipline. The complete title of the series is *Bibliothèque égyptologique contenant les œuvres des égyptologues français dispersés dans divers recueils et qui n'ont pas été réunies jusqu'à ce jour*.² This title refers to

¹ Inside the framework of chapters focused on countries, this last book addresses the issue (Bednarski *et al.* 2021: 3) in the least unsatisfactory way, by stating that chapters are neither 'territorial' nor 'ethnic', so that individuals who move between countries are covered for their activities in the respecting corresponding chapters, e.g. Mariette's career is described in both the Egyptian and the French chapters.

² 'Egyptological library containing the works of French Egyptologists scattered in various collections and not gathered to this day.' The series counted 32 volumes, spanned from 1893 to 1918, was edited by Maspero, and briefly by Naville towards the end.

'French Egyptologists', whose delimitation was not defined further. Was it Egyptological works by French people, written in French, or according to the teaching used in French institutions? None of these propositions would really make a clear and sound categorisation from an epistemological perspective.³

Nations in 19th century culture

However, the nation was a central idea in 19th century political thought. While the ancient European cultural and political structures were becoming obsolete, Western societies of the time were experiencing the shattering of ancient monarchies and the social consequences of growing industrialisation. The concept of nation and its practical expressions were emerging in law (Weil and Hansen 1998), as well as in philosophy (Renan 1882; Tönnies 1887). The rise of the nation as a core element of someone's identity had many effects. The most unpleasant among them was of course the fateful rise of nationalism; on the other hand, it also created a nurturing environment for the pursuit of political determination, the crystallisation of folklore, interest for regional languages, and the birth of communities bound by a sense of belonging and the narrative of historical continuity. People of the time, especially in learned circles, and furthermore among scholars interacting in international circles, were certainly self-conscious of their nationality and its meaning in their lives. Nationality did not necessarily determine either their intellectual works or their actions in the field.

Belonging to one state, however, remains an essential element in anyone's practical existence. If we postulate that nationality is not a fundamental trait to define a scholar, we could hardly contest that originating from a country has a deep implication in social and intellectual identity, especially in one's formative years. Growing up and living in a specific place, especially at a time when travel was rarely affordable and information circulated less freely than today, meant to acquire specific cultural references, codes, or the use of a primary language. It may also have helped or impeded in accessing Egyptological knowledge (books, lectures, museums) and sharing one's works.

Patriotism was also becoming a strong element of identity, fuelled by young or transforming regimes, as national characteristics and stereotypes were becoming ever more present in popular culture. For a prospective Egyptologist, state allegiance also had another incentive: their potential career was only possible through patronage of some sort; apart from clergy or uncommon material wealth, scholarly pursuits could for the most part only be followed inside public institutions and nascent administrations such as libraries and museum, later in specialised university chairs.

State involvement and interested patriotism

The involvement of state was central in the very gradual structuration and institutionalisation of Egyptology throughout Europe. Some attention has been given to the uneasy position of Egyptologists under some 20th century authoritarian states (Gertzen 2019: 211–227; Loktionov 2019: 157–171; Navratilova and Macková 2021: 334–335); their predecessors were also often in a constrained position, if not as perilous. Each component of antiquarian scholarship often depended on local authorities. This dependency was the case with gaining the ability to access study materials, either expensive and rare books or actual objects gathered in aristocratic collections. Teaching positions and curatorial responsibilities were also determined by the benevolence of public administration. A scholar who wanted to publish their works and share their ideas had also to face tremendous expenses, which could only be met with the help of subscriptions, in which institutions could weigh heavily, or with official patronage. Such uneasy requirements explain delays and obstacles in Champollion's career, when, after his public enthusiasm for revolutionary ideas, he embraced the

³ See Gertzen (2018: 144–145) for difficulties arising when describing German Egyptology.

Napoleonic regime but later had to recognise and serve the *Restauration* monarchy (Hartleben 1906: I: 281, II: 575). Egyptologists needed to ingratiate themselves with authorities more heavily in order to still obtain the means to travel abroad, a necessity to get acquainted with foreign collections and libraries, and above all to discover Egypt itself.

This necessary state involvement in many aspects of scholarly activity tends to put into perspective displays of patriotism: beyond their personal sensibility toward their homeland, Egyptologists had an obvious incentive to overplay their loyalism to maintain the trust and confidence of their country's officials. This need was even more present in the field, where scholars had to cultivate the benevolence of their consular representatives or of their home governments to build their career in Egypt or ensure necessary funds. It could also be a measure to enhance their own station and safety in situ: such is the aim of the French flag flown by Mariette on top of the Sphinx' head in 1853 ('*Dieu merci, dans des temps bien difficiles, le drapeau tricolore a très-bien su me protéger*').⁴

In such conditions, the public positions of Egyptologists, when exalting national pride, could be a lever to ease their ways towards state-sponsored positions and consular support abroad. Declarations of patriotism, especially in official circumstances, should accordingly not be taken at their face value; they should rather be analysed in context.

International competition seen from outside

Rivalries and conflicts between Egyptologists from different nations were sometimes overemphasised by external voices rather than by the protagonists themselves. They could involuntarily cause a serious and lasting distortion in the perception of the scholarly debate. As an example, the competition between Champollion and Young has been regularly overplayed on both sides of the English Channel. A more telling occurrence is offered by the dispute set fifty years later when Lepsius published (1865), unwisely, on behalf of Dümichen, a stela found in Mariette's excavations, without asking for the latter's permission, nor giving him any credit. Angered, Mariette asked Desjardins, an influential friend of his, to protest publicly in France. The resulting press coverage was disastrous and overheated the debate in antagonistic and chauvinistic terms that polarised Egyptological circles for years and went far beyond Mariette's intent, to his deep dismay (David 1994: 161; Maspero 1904: CLXVI–CXLIX).⁵

Throughout the 19th century, and regularly since, claims have been made to characterise Egyptology and its achievement as a matter of national pride. The idea, for example, that Egyptology might be a specifically French science, while often expressed by contemporaries (Gady 2006: §§ 6–13; Solé 2019: 107–115), rarely comes from Egyptologists – except when petitioning administrations for funding and support; sometimes, such claims seem to be completely unfounded.⁶

There is also, as the author believes, a strong external incentive to view the development of the Egyptological science as a competition between rival groups. It is a common trend to dramatise historical phenomena to ease their narration. In the case of the history of Egyptology, it may be tempting to describe the dry and somewhat abstract collective construction of ideas and methods as a narrative often fashioned like a race or a heroic conquest. That may explain the tendency to put Champollion against Young. Beyond Egyptology proper, this imagery is prevalent, from the very

⁴ Mariette (2020), letter from Mariette to his superiors in the Louvre, dated 25 May 1853. Translated from French: 'Thank God, in most difficult times, the tricolour flag has protected me very well.' He would later be shot at in the desert by an Arnaut warrior (Mariette 2020, letter dated 28 August 1853).

⁵ Maspero was seemingly not aware that Desjardins made his public outcry on Mariette's request.

⁶ An early report of the Boulaq Museum opening (Adriani 1860) reports that it follows a French museum's example – but Mariette himself never made such claims and one wonders what the meaning of this notion could be.

time of the events, and particularly noticeable in other fields, especially when state sponsorship is heavily involved. The polar exploration development or the history of the space race come in mind. In these cases, as in Egyptology, national interest may not have always been the foremost motivation of the protagonists themselves. It would also be quite sensible that the actual participants of the events were more commonly driven by a combination of a dedication to increase knowledge, personal ambition, and their respective other driving ideals. The narrative of science development as a race between nations, however, has become commonplace, although diplomatic stance and one's individual agency are to be distinguished.⁷

Personal agency against national expectations

Networks of help and rivalries among nationals and foreigners

Another inadequacy of national groups as a cohesive subject of study is that they obviously were seldom united. The most immediate rivals for positions and funds were the closest at hand. Among the German Egyptologists of the time, fierce enmity is, for example, well documented between Lepsius and H. Brugsch, and later between Bissing and his colleagues from Berlin, Erman and Borchardt (Lebée 2025); in France, there was little sympathy between Mariette and Rougé, and conflict erupted openly between Maspero and Moret. Beyond the power games and petty conflicts inevitable in human structures, these animosities were caused by multiple factors, such as competition for a limited number of positions, personal histories, and various incidents; in a number of circumstances, they mattered much more than national upbringing.

On the other hand, foreigners were seldom a threat to one's career, and sympathy could develop more easily. Some scholars of note entertained a network of close peers well beyond the borders of their country. Chabas is representative of such a situation; a provincial wine-seller who became one

TABLE 1. THE INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE OF FRANÇOIS CHABAS, FROM HIS PRESERVED LETTERS FROM EGYPTOLOGY FIGURES (INSTITUT DE FRANCE, MS. 2572–2588; SEE LEBÉE 2020); 'EGYPTOLOGISTS' ARE PEOPLE DESCRIBED IN BIERBRIER 2012

Country	Egyptologists
United Kingdom	Birch, B.H. Cooper, W.R. Cooper, Francks, Goodwin, Hincks, Lepage-Renouf, Malan, A.C. Harris, S. Harris
Germany	Abel, H. Brugsch, Dümichen, Ebers, Eisenlohr, Lauth, Lepsius, Schaeffer
Italy	Barucchi, Fabretti, Lumbroso, Rossi, Schiaparelli
Switzerland	Malan, Naville, Zuendel
Netherlands	Leemans, Pleyte
Austria	Reinisch
Belgium	Delgeur
Denmark	Schmidt
Norway	Liebleins
Russia	Golenishchev

⁷ See Dodson (2018) for the lack of British public funding in Egyptology, despite the weight of British civil administration in the Archaeological Committee in Egypt in the early 20th century, which illustrates a clear shift between state policy and scholarly pursue; likewise, see Gertzen (2018: 219, 224–225) for the entanglement of Germanic imperialism and Egyptology as interdependent but distinct poles.

of the leading figures in Egyptian philology in the middle of the century, he remained sidelined by Parisian circles but had correspondents in a number of European nations.

Friendship beyond frontiers: Mariette and Brugsch

Personal sympathy could naturally exist regardless of origins; it developed sometimes in defiance of national prejudices. The well-known friendship between Auguste Mariette and Heinrich Brugsch is a striking example of such affinity.

The two men met in 1853, early in their respective careers. Mariette was then excavating the Serapeum and was visited by the young Brugsch, who stayed in his shack in the desert and helped him with any demotic material he found. They remained close friends afterwards, sharing similar difficulties in their own countries. Both faced few career opportunities, being put aside by more prominent colleagues (Lepsius and Rougé). They also helped each other over the years; Mariette sent money to Brugsch and tried to obtain a position in France for him; later, in Egypt, they planned to write a journal together.

Thanks to their close friendship, their affection was not even threatened by the fact that Brugsch was set by the Prussian diplomacy as a potential successor to Mariette's position, or a competitor if the Frenchman fell out of the favour of the Khedive (Gady 2012: §§ 4, 8). They were not estranged by the Franco-Prussian war of 1870 either; it is probably at this occasion that Mariette wrote to Brugsch the following letter:

Mon cher ami,

Votre lettre de ce matin m'a soulagé. Vous n'êtes pas pour moi un Allemand ; vous êtes Brugsch. Aussi vous n'aviez pas besoin de tant vous expliquer sur les derniers événements [sic]. Ils ont pu affecter mon cœur de Français ; ils n'ont en rien modifié mon cœur d'homme, principalement vis-à-vis de vous. Je vous aime en véritable ami, et vous ai toujours aimé beaucoup par une sympathie naturelle que rien n'a détruit, ni ne détruira. Vous me connaissez assez pour voir que je n'ai pas besoin de vous en dire plus et qu'aujourd'hui comme toujours vous restez en France aussi bien qu'en Allemagne et en Egypte la personne que j'affectionne le plus.

Là dessus je vous serre la main de tout mon cœur.

Tout à vous,

Aug. Mariette⁸

Their close affection is also noticeable in Brugsch's autobiography, in which his stay at the Serapeum excavation and Mariette's death are noteworthy episodes (Brugsch 1894: 165–179, 347–353). It is clear from these texts that the two men viewed each other as dear friends and not as representatives

⁸ This letter is to be added to Mariette (2020); the original is in the Università degli Studi di Milano, Biblioteca e Archivi di Egittologia (Milan) and is also reproduced by a photograph in the Musée Art & Histoire – Museum Kunst & Geschiedenis (Brussels). The text was published by Brugsch (1894: III) with marginal modifications (capitalisation of 2nd person, a change in the accentuation of 'événement' [sic] and a change from 'ils n'ont en rien modifié' to 'ils n'ont pu modifier'). Here follows our translation in English: 'My dear friend, / Your letter this morning was a relief. You are not a German to me; you are Brugsch. So you did not need to explain so much about recent events. They may have affected my heart as a Frenchman, but they have in no way changed my heart as a man, especially with regard to you. I love you as a true friend, and have always loved you very much out of a natural sympathy that nothing has destroyed, nor shall destroy. You know me well enough to see that I do not need to tell you anymore and that today, as always, you remain in France, as well as in Germany and Egypt, the person I like most. / On that note, I shake your hand with all my heart. / Faithfully yours, / Aug. Mariette'.

of another aggressive state. If they tried sometimes to use what advantage their home country could give them, they devoted themselves primarily to science and their immediate needs for a living.

The point is that national policies and individual wills could intersect but also differ to a noticeable degree. A generation later, with more structures supporting the development of Egyptology and offering opportunities for scholars to delve in the discipline, Golenishchev had a trajectory that allowed him to be called retrospectively a ‘privateer’ (Loktionov 2019: 159), being able to take advantage of state patronage when convenient, but also to develop his activities outside of this framework.

Foreigners in a state administration: The Egyptian Antiquities Service

These examples invite a reconsideration of some preconceived ideas about the activity of Europeans who joined the Egyptian administration at this time and the balance of power at the middle of the 19th century in Egypt. For the Egyptian Pasha, hiring foreign advisors was a profitable way to introduce modern methods in some domains of the administration (primarily the army, but also the health system and industry) in its enterprise to be able to challenge the Ottoman dominion over Egypt. In addition, by playing one country against the other, the Pasha kept the upper hand until ill-advised loans led to the 1876 debt crisis, European interference in the Egyptian government (Coşkun Tunçer 2021: 82–83), and, in the end, the military occupation of the country by the United Kingdom from 1882.

In this context, the involvement of foreign Egyptologists in supervising the Egyptian antiquities may be questioned: as Europeans overseeing parts of Egyptian heritage, were they in a situation of conflict between their duties as civil servants, the interests of their home country, and their scholarly projects? In short, were they potentially or inevitably part of a system of influence over Egypt? According to the various examples described above, no generalisation should be made about individual behaviour without documented evidence sufficient to build a strong case. We can fortunately provide some examples from Mariette’s career to shed some light on this aspect of his activity, sometimes in opposition to previous assumptions (*contra* Reid 2015: 6).

Mariette designed the Antiquities Service on the invitation of Sa’id Pasha; he was then nominated to head this new administration. We know from an early draft (David 2010: 209–223; Mariette 2020, letter dated 20 September 1857) how Mariette envisioned the challenges offered by such responsibilities; more critically, the text of this document reveals who Mariette saw as the principal threats to the Antiquities Service missions: the foreign consuls. This detail is revealing of his attitude toward his mission as an Egyptian civil servant, while his independence from France is rarely noticed. According to Maspero’s testimony, Mariette was asked twice by the French imperial court to allow the acquisition of the Boulaq antiquities collection by France (Maspero 1904: CLXII–CLXIII); in each of these instances, Mariette refused, despite falling into disgrace both in France and in Egypt for his obstinacy.

Moreover, it must be noted that Mariette did not favour in any way French institutions during his directorship. He kept a strict monopoly on archaeological works – to the dissatisfaction of many colleagues of any nationality – and did not facilitate acquisitions by foreign museums of ancient artefacts.

It would have been, however, in Mariette’s objective interest to favour France inside the Viceroy’s service, and someone less scrupulous, or with a different understanding of his responsibilities and his allegiance, could have used of his position quite differently. Beyond individual attitude, the way Egyptologists from multiple nations operated in the framework Mariette designed with the

Antiquities Service is also key to explore with regard to the question of nationality and assumed allegiance.

International cooperation, formal and informal

Inside the Antiquities Service

French lobbying assured Mariette's successors were also French, until 1904, when the British occupying Egypt formally agreed that this position would be reserved to French nationals (Gady 2006: § 24). If the French directorship was prized by the diplomats as a symbolic token – and by French Egyptologists as a prestigious career opportunity –, it remains to be seen if it translated into any effective systemic hegemony.

As seen above, Mariette does not seem to have behaved as an active influence agent; the only known requests from Paris were firmly resisted by him. Moreover, he did not foresee nor advocate for the French monopoly on the directorship that was implemented after his death. In his time, the alleged French Service employed French members in its meagre team, although far from exclusively: other nationals occupied senior positions. Most notably, the deputy director under Mariette for twenty years was Vassalli, an Italian. Mariette did not reject the services of Egyptian colleagues either: he hired the little-known Copt Marc Kabis as inspector early on, and later requested the hiring of Ahmad Kamal with explicit reference to his scholarly abilities (Lebée 2023: 224).

TABLE 2. SENIOR POSITION IN THE ANTIQUITIES SERVICE DURING MARIETTE'S DIRECTORSHIP (LEBÉE, FORTHCOMING)

Position	Holder (date of exercise; nationality)
Director	Mariette (1858–1881; French)
Deputy Director	Bonnefoy (1859; French), Vassalli (1860, 1861–1883; Italian)
Assistant curator/ excavations inspector	Gabet (1859–1866; French), Chaillan (1859; French), Kabis (1863–1865; Egyptian), Daninos (c. 1870–1897; French), E. Brugsch (1872–1914; German)

The French monopoly on the Antiquities Service was thus far from exclusive, apart from its directorship: from its inception, this small administration employed Italian, German and Egyptian scholars among its senior members.

In this context, it can be wondered how important or indifferent nationality was when an opportunity of joining the Service opened, or when the prospect of promotions arose, given the frequent political interventions of the British protectorate – despite the lack of governmental involvement in British Egyptological scholarship (Dodson 2019: 147–156) – and the shifting balance of international powers. Regarding the career of Egyptian Egyptologists, it is not the intention herein to deny the effects that Western Egyptologists could have by their mere presence;⁹ it is noteworthy, however, that Maspero advocated in vain for the Egyptian government to fund Egyptological training (Reid 2002: 188). The Service, especially before the First World War, was a place of meeting for Egyptologists of diverse

⁹ The author acknowledges that Brugsch claimed that Mariette put obstacle for Egyptian students to access the Boulaq museum (Brugsch 1894: 282); it is, however, contrary to the explicit museum rules, and seems inconsistent with other documented opinions of Mariette. The author plans to address this question in detail in a later paper focused on the relationship between Brugsch and Mariette.

origins. A generation later, letters sent by Bissing to Maspero (Lebée 2025) show how nominations and promotions were commented on among members of the Service and their colleagues:

Edgar me dit en passant qu'il va quitter bientôt l'Égypte pour toujours. Je ne puis encore bien le croire: si Lacau un jour s'en va, si Edgar s'en est allé, où restera le service et le Catalogue ? [E.] Brugsch ne compte pour rien, Quibell, Weigall, Legrain, Lefèvre [sic, for 'Lefebvre'] sont occupés ailleurs, Carter l'est aussi et puis il ne peut toujours être considéré comme personne scientifique. Tout, dans le musée, restera donc à Daressy, qui bon travailleur qu'il est, ne pourra jamais satisfaire aux besoins scientifiques du musée. Et ni lui, ni encore moins le vieux Ahmed Bey Kamal, ne disposent des connaissances nécessaires en archéologie classique.¹⁰

In his comments, Bissing seems only to care for academic value (from his subjective appreciation); he dismisses his only fellow German member of the Service, Brugsch, while praising highly the British Edgar and the French Lacau. Additionally, his disapproval of Ahmad Kamal for more responsibility inside the service is based on what Bissing deems a lack of skills, at the same level as Daressy.

In such an international system, by simply occupying a position that could be filled by another, even the most distracted scholar is de facto a token in the balance and may represent an advantage, at least a symbolic one, for his nation. They were thus part of systems of alliances and strategies, sometimes actively in support of this 'game'; sometimes indifferent, unaware or even resisting it. But they were also working together inside a unified structure, pursuing higher goals. The Service later also occupied a role as organiser and mediator between the British administration and various excavators inside the Archaeological Committee tasked with assigning excavation permits and improving archaeological legislation. The Service members there had to defend the interests of science over trade and traffic, and do not seem to have favoured unfairly some nations over others. While it is, however, in the field that the more pressing rivalries could be expected to be seen, there too help and cooperation could grow.

In the field

Excavations in Egypt seem to offer a perfect bone of contention between several nations. Throughout the 19th century, any official field operation necessitated the blessing of the Egyptian sovereign and often required foreign state support due to their cost and logistical needs. This entailed diplomatic involvement, a factor prone to put the prospective campaign in a dynamic of competition with other nations. For the various countries able to support and staff archaeological works in Egypt, promising sites to excavate were a limited resource. Once excavated, a site would lose its main incentive, since the symbolic merit of the work went mostly to the first archaeologist to operate there, recognise the main structures, and unearth the most precious artefacts.

With such premises, acquisition and appropriation of identified sites may have motivated fierce competition between nations. It is thus surprising that two kingdoms came to associate themselves to fund a common expedition quite early, in the form of the 1828–1829 Franco-Tuscan Expedition led by Champollion and Rosellini. In this instance, if the cooperation was deep during the travel itself, collected materials were published separately (Champollion 1835–1845; Rosellini 1832–1844) – the death of Champollion might have put an end to a coordinated editorial project.

¹⁰ Institut de France, ms. 4005: p. 512; letter from Bissing to Maspero, dated 2 September 1905. Translation from French: 'Edgar told me in passing that he will soon be leaving Egypt for good. I still can't believe it: if Lacau leaves one day, if Edgar had gone, where will the service and the Catalogue remain? [E.] Brugsch counts for nothing, Quibell, Weigall, Legrain and [Lefebvre] are busy elsewhere; Carter is, too, and he can't still be considered a scholar. So everything in the museum will remain with Daressy, who, as good worker as he is, will never be able to meet the museum scientific needs. And neither he, nor old Ahmad Bey Kamal, had the necessary knowledge in classical archaeology.'

In the following generations, archaeological legislation would progressively establish the control of the Antiquities Service over the archaeological heritage of the country, but, near the end of the century, Maspero realised that his administration did not have the means to operate effectively and launch new campaigns while protecting existing sites. He engaged in a pragmatic policy of partnerships with foreign organisations that allowed the increase of excavations throughout the land under the supervision of the Service. One of the emblematic field actors of these years was the Egypt Exploration Fund (Dodson 2007: 32–44; Drower 1982: 299–317), which operated throughout various sites. Despite its British origin, the Fund also employed foreign excavators, like the Swiss Naville (Virenque 2015). Being himself an example of a cosmopolitan Egyptologist, having studied in Switzerland, the United Kingdom, France, and Germany, he led many campaigns on a variety of sites from Lower and Upper Egypt over more than three decades. Given the lack of large Egyptological organisations in Switzerland at that time, Naville had no choice but to build his career abroad, and enjoyed the ability to do so; his successive projects reflect nonetheless his wide horizons. He had numerous opportunities to excavate alongside other Egyptologists like Hogarth, Somers Clarke, Carter, Hall, and Wainwright; previous to his field career, he had already joined several publishing ventures with peers from various countries: the Germans Borchardt and Sethe (Lepsius and Sethe 1913), the Italian Schiaparelli and the French Lefébure (1886, 1889).

Editorial works

Editorial works were indeed also a place of exchange and collaboration. Publications were always collective enterprises, needing a vast array of skills. Many authors had to cross borders to find the abilities needed to materialise their works. Egyptological publications needed specialised draughtsmen, publishers, and booksellers, with a meagre prospective public, while necessitating figures, plates, and exotic characters. The market for Egyptological books, and more broadly Orientalist edition, was small and international. Mariette, for example, with the means allowed to him by the Viceroy, tried to educate draughtsmen to copy hieroglyphs but finally required the services of Weidenbach, who had previously worked for Lepsius and his famous *Denkmäler*. Being denied the authorisation to use the hieroglyphic types of the French *Imprimerie nationale*, both Chabas and Mariette resorted to experimentation and finally benefitted from German printers' concourse (Mariette 2020: letter dated 30 March 1874; Virey 1899: LXII–LXV).

International cooperation in publishing was not limited to the various actors of the editing process. It is also during this time that specialised journals began to emerge: Egyptology was now becoming a distinct discipline and had enough actors to fuel dedicated reviews. The gathering of papers in the same volumes created a material space of exchange, allowing for the clash of divergent opinions, but also the discussion and reinterpretation of previous works in a single framework. In this situation, the choice of languages is especially meaningful. Some journals did not limit their contributors to one language, but welcomed articles in several idioms, a fact appreciated by foreigners despite the difficulties presented by editorial work in a multilingual environment (Virey 1907: XLVII). It contributed also to the formation of a multinational Egyptology.

Due to its ambitious scale, the preparatory works for the *Wörterbuch der ägyptischen Sprache*, the 'Berlin Dictionary', also benefitted from foreign collaboration, especially British and American (Voss and Gertzen 2020: 2). At the end of the 19th century, the inception of the *Catalogue général des antiquités égyptiennes du musée du Caire* (CGC) gave another illustration of this collective partnership. The publication project was designed by Borchardt (1937) and implemented by Maspero to publish the Cairo Museum collection properly, independent scholars from abroad would be invited to the museum to study their typology of predilection. The multiple volumes published from this point, with a common framework and under the supervision of the director of the Antiquities Service, displayed

the work of Egyptologists from various countries, in several languages (English, French, German, and Italian). Practically, it allowed the Cairo Museum to publish multiple catalogues that exceeded its workforce capacity; it was also a unique opportunity for the authors to work on extraordinary collections of artefacts in line with their research interests. In this enterprise, the Cairo Museum also formally welcomed these numerous contributors from many backgrounds, allowing them to work alongside one another each year. Before the inception of widely recognised tools used by all Egyptologists such as the *Lexikon der Ägyptologie* or the *Annual Egyptological Bibliography* (such works, sometimes multilingual, often involve scholars from various countries: Bednarski 2021: 6), the CGC can be considered as a formalisation of the ordinary gathering of scholars and students at the core of a museum's purpose. It also gave an incarnation to the developing and multinational science of Egyptian antiquity.

Teaching and learning together

Such gatherings of Egyptologists were also becoming more frequent as the 19th century advanced. Whereas the discipline developed relatively late compared with other sciences; it structured itself while archaeology, art history, and many humanities fields were setting foundations that still endure. University and research themselves were taking new shapes that are still fundamentally relevant. This burgeoning system of higher education attracted students and audience in – originally – a handful of institutions, from all over Europe. It also relied on periodic meetings between leading figures of the field. Personal, institutional, and national rivalries and conflicts were assuredly not absent; nonetheless, all participants engaged in a common scene.

Foreign attendance to Egyptological lectures, when documented, is of great interest to grasp the multinational dimension of the discipline. The *École pratique des hautes études's Annuaire* ([EPHE] 1872–1960) gives the details of the students matriculated, and sometimes their nationality. Between 1877 and 1899, students are recorded from Austria-Hungary, Belgium, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, the Ottoman Empire, Poland, Portugal, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America (among which were Gardiner, Krall, Piehl, Schiaparelli, Spiegelberg, and Wiedemann). The audience was probably even more cosmopolitan, since foreign nationality is not always indicated (e.g. there is no mention of Wilbour's nationality).

International conferences, as recurring events of worldwide magnitude, also contributed to fostering a global community around Egyptological scholarship. The International Congress of Orientalists was such a place, with an active and diverse Egyptological section (see Virenque 2021: 807–817 for the 1897 congress) until the first International Congress of Egyptology in 1976. Alongside these regular occasions of meeting, the development of international careers for some scholars of note is of particular significance in this perspective. Egyptologists of the end of the century, mostly during their formative years or throughout their professional life (Golenishchev [Loktionov 2019: 159], Naville, Capart),¹¹ moved across borders and enriched their thought as well as our science.

Conclusion

The weight of national allegiance is certainly not without consequence among Egyptologists; however, it is not always a defining character. Egyptological developments in the field had to rely on diplomatic support that tied them into the play between foreign powers in Egypt, but the rivalry of these powers was not necessarily shared by the archaeologists, whose ultimate stand depended on personal sensibility. Moreover, external discourse and particular contexts may tend to overemphasise the question of national competition. *De facto* rivalries did exist, especially in

¹¹ For a later example, see the discussion of Černý's national allegiance in Navratilova 2019: 57–61.

Egypt, but if historiographical narrative tends to overlay a spirit of competition, assumptions and generalisations are to be avoided. Consequently, statements about individual behaviour should rely heavily on primary sources, analysed in their context, in order to build a strong case (Gertzen 2023: 62–63). In many instances, contemporary evidence tends to draw a more complex picture, where interpersonal relationships and individual character remain prevalent.

The same could be said of any network, be it alumni of the same university, or even members of a given family, congregation, or political affiliation. Individuals from those structures may or may not promote them, and it would be incorrect to overemphasise this reduction in their agency without evidence. In the perspective of the history of a science, such lens is a possibility among many, which should be chosen consciously and openly discussed. Envisioning the history of Egyptology as a global phenomenon, while a challenge, can also help to tie its development to the broader evolution of humanities and scholarship systems.

Indeed, despite parochial frictions, whatever may be their nature, scholarship is also a collective endeavour, nourished by the accumulation and confrontation of ideas. Cooperation was also common, in all fields and despite national prejudices. Informal help, but also institutional cooperation, played a considerable role in the shaping of our discipline and the exchanges of views from across the world. Overall, national competition is an element of context put in the foreground by many biases, but, in the end, it is also a choice of perspective; similar attention can be given to the friendship and cooperation that develop out of need, commodity, sympathy, and sheer kindness among our predecessors.

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Multifaceted Religiosity: Reflections on the Use and Significance of Offering Tables in the 1st Millennium BCE

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Abstract

Little research has been conducted on the development, significance, and ritual use of ancient Egyptian offering tables in the 1st millennium BCE. This study investigates how the evolving design and ritual context of offering tables reflect broader socio-religious transformations. By analysing these objects' roles in bridging personal, communal, and state religiosity, the paper reveals their function as critical tools for expressing continuity, adaptability, and the integration of tradition with innovation in ancient Egyptian religious practices. This study examines the evolving designs and uses of these objects, influenced by socio-economic, cultural, and religious transformations. Notably, the emergence of two distinct trends – centralised production for official purposes and localised, personalised crafting – reflects the interplay between tradition and innovation. By focusing on case studies, this paper explores how offering tables transitioned from functional items for provisioning the deceased to multifaceted magical objects embedded in ritual practices. Through an analysis of their design, symbolic features, and associated practices, the study highlights their role as transformative utensils and enduring symbols of ancient Egyptian religious thought.

Keywords

Offering Tables; Funerary Ritual Practice; Ancient Egyptian Ritual Practice; Graeco-Roman Egyptian Religion; Archaeology of Ritual

Introduction

This paper is based on a PhD thesis titled *Materia Magica Aegyptiae: The Ancient Egyptian Offering Table as Funerary Landscape, Ritual Utensil, and Unifier of Elements* (Lundius 2022). As part of the extensive study of over 400 offering tables and similar material, 82 objects were examined dating from the Third Intermediate Period (c. 1069–664 BCE) to the Graeco-Roman Period (323 BCE–395 CE),¹ housed in various collections and contexts, as outlined in the dissertation. These objects represent a crucial intersection of socio-economic, cultural, and religious transformations, reflecting the dynamics of ancient Egyptian funerary practices. One of the findings of my extensive study on ancient Egyptian offering tables was that the offering table undergoes a profound change in design and significance from the Late Period (c. 664–332 BCE) onwards, reflecting the multifaceted religiosity, revived ancient traditions, and foreign influences of the time, fomenting its role as an all-encompassing religious symbol within ancient Egyptian religious thought.

The sample for this study originates from a broader dataset of 477 objects, including offering tables, basins, models, amulets, trays, and soul-houses, compiled in an extensive Access 2016 database as part of the author's doctoral research. Of these, 387 were physically examined in museum collections across Europe, Egypt, and the United States, and 90 were documented *in situ* at the necropolis of Asyut and in the magazine at Shutb as part of The Asyut Project (TAP). Unlike earlier studies that focused predominantly on Old to New Kingdom material, this research centres on the 1st millennium

¹ Date ranges states throughout are based on the dating standards outlined in Hornung, Krauss, and Warburton (2006).

BCE (82 objects of the 477 sample), a period that remains significantly understudied in relation to offering tables. The intention is not to produce a statistical analysis but to use a representative and heterogeneous sample to reflect on evolving ritual functions, symbolic meanings, and socio-cultural dynamics of these objects during the Late Period and beyond.

Rather than presenting a rigid typological sequence, the aim of this study is to offer a platform for analysing the concept of the ‘offering table’ itself – its iconographic features, original contexts, and magical connotations – within a broader and more fluid interpretive framework. With a clear methodology and various indicators of what defines an offering stemming from an analysis of the object itself, gaps may be identified in how these objects have been interpreted in the past. Previous typological studies, such as those by Petrie (1907), Tooley (1989), and Hölzl (2002), provide essential background, but they often overlook key aspects such as wear patterns, landscape placement, material choices, and the relationship to comparable objects like amulets or libation models. By reassessing the category through these additional parameters, the study brings new insight into the cultic role of offering tables in religious practice. Several thematic threads emerged as especially significant: the integration of offering tables into both funerary and domestic landscapes; their evolution in rural production contexts; and the rising importance of water as a conceptual and magical element from the late New Kingdom onwards marking a shift from functional libation to figurative potency, where water imagery itself came to be a substitute for ritual performance. Collectively, these observations reveal a deeper understanding of the objects’ agency in ritual performance and their place within the broader cosmological and material logic of ancient Egyptian religiosity.

Historical and socio-religious context

Definitions: The offering table

Traditionally, ancient Egyptian offering tables were stone slabs inscribed with reliefs depicting food and beverages, often accompanied by the *hṯp* sign (Hölzl 2002; Lundius 2022a, 2023; Taylor 2001). However, the term ‘offering table’ may be applied to numerous objects, especially when observing use and function within ritual practice (Lundius 2022a). Based on a set of criteria distinguishing features related to their ritual use, numerous utensils can be defined as ‘offering tables’ including pottery trays, offering basins, soul houses, and miniature models/amulets. From the Third Intermediate Period to the Graeco-Roman Period, these objects expanded to include amulets, votive offerings, and pendants. This diversification highlights their role in personal and communal religiosity, blending Osirian mythology, Nile fertility symbolism, and royal cult elements.

Funerary offering tables were placed at the foot of false doors, stelae, statues inside of courtyards, beside tomb shafts or even within the tomb itself. Their size, material, shape and placement not only indicate the social status of the users, but especially their preference and intended ritual function (Lundius 2023). Their use extended beyond temples and tombs into domestic settings, signifying their integration into everyday religious life, as well as their ‘multilocational’ nature (e.g. the offering table *in situ* at El-Lahun during Petrie’s 1890 campaign, in Quirke 2015: 76, fig. 2.20; libation slabs at Amarna evidenced in Harrington 2012: 79; remnants of pottery offering trays found in numerous domestic settings listed in Stevens 2009: 12–19; paraphernalia used in domestic cults outlined in Assmann 2005: 256–258). These objects were essential for facilitating communication between the living and the deceased, serving as conduits for divine blessings and the transfer of offerings. Therefore, when the religious setting in Egypt extended beyond temple walls, and came to be subject to syncretism, local cults, and religious traditions, offering tables changed and evolved accordingly, steadily becoming even more ‘multifaceted’ and powerful symbols of ritual action.

Centralised vs. localised production

From the New Kingdom (c. 1550–1069 BCE) onwards, offering tables reflected two main production trends (Ilin-Tomich 2018: 82; Lundius 2022a, 2022c):

1. **Centralised production:** Mass-produced items from prestigious workshops near key cult centres (e.g. Abydos, Saqqara, Memphis, Thebes). These often followed standardised designs that emphasised state-endorsed religious iconography, ensuring a consistent visual and symbolic language across different regions. This centralisation facilitated the dissemination of uniform religious dogma, reinforcing state ideology and the authority of temple institutions.
2. **Localised production:** Regional workshops tailored to local beliefs and practices, as seen in Dendera and Kom Tuman. This localised craftsmanship often resulted in highly personalised items, imbued with symbolic details reflecting individual and communal needs. The incorporation of unique regional motifs and stylistic variations illustrates the significance of local religious traditions in shaping material culture.

The implications of this dichotomy for the distribution and accessibility of offering tables are profound. Centralised production ensured widespread availability of standardised ritual objects, aligning with broader state religious practices. In contrast, localised production fostered diversity, allowing communities to integrate personal and regional identities into their ritual practices. This dual system highlights the adaptability of religious material culture, enabling offering tables to serve as both tools of state propaganda and deeply personal expressions of piety. Since the offering table may reflect different aspects of ritual behaviour especially within funerary contexts, those which are locally produced may also have functional or iconographic elements which foster particular ritual action such as the use of a sacred lake or the inclusion of rural production landscapes (see Lundius 2022b).

Multifaceted religiosity

The concept of multifaceted religiosity is integral to understanding the evolving significance of offering tables during the 1st millennium BCE. This framework highlights how these objects uniquely bridged personal, communal, and state-sponsored religious practices. Unlike other ritual items, offering tables synthesised diverse symbolic elements – from Osirian rebirth and the life-giving waters of the Nile to celestial motifs representing cosmic order – into a single, cohesive object. This adaptability allowed offering tables to function across varied contexts, from temple sanctuaries to domestic shrines, embodying the dynamic interplay between innovation and tradition in ancient Egyptian religious life.

Any ritual object, especially one with a 3000-year history, has a biography of its own. Offering tables evolved in conformity with changing rituals, ultimately becoming multifaceted items that embodied entire, complex rituals and their various religious notions. Offering tables served as tangible images of intricate rituals, blending elements of the Nile's life-giving waters and Osirian rebirth. Between the Third Intermediate Period and the Graeco-Roman Period, a single cultic object, iconographic element, or site could reflect numerous religious traditions simultaneously. This adaptability underscored their unifying role, merging state, community, and personal religiosity into a cohesive spiritual framework. During the Graeco-Roman Period, offering tables often featured iconography that merged Egyptian and foreign traditions, reflecting the adaptability of these objects to cultural shifts. For instance, Graeco-Roman floral motifs intertwined with traditional Egyptian imagery highlighted their ability to accommodate new influences while maintaining core theological principles.

Offering tables also held immense ritual utility, serving both practical and symbolic purposes. The depiction of water – whether as flowing basins or primordial waves – embodied themes of life, renewal, and divine sustenance. This adaptability underscores their enduring relevance in maintaining continuity across changing socio-religious landscapes. Their presence across temple sanctuaries, necropoleis, and domestic shrines highlights their versatility and integration into diverse ritual landscapes. For example, sacred lakes in temple layouts symbolised the primordial waters of creation, while their counterparts in homes represented the continuity of religious practice as will be highlighted in the case studies below. By acting as conduits between the physical and spiritual realms, offering tables encapsulated ancient Egyptian perspectives on harmony, renewal, and the cyclical nature of existence.

Setting the scene: Tables in temporal-socio-religious context

Offering tables evolved alongside socio-economic and diachronic changes that shaped religious practices in ancient Egypt. These objects began as practical supports for provisioning the deceased but gradually transformed into multifaceted symbols of rejuvenation and spiritual transformation. Central to the funerary cult, they embodied both tradition and innovation. The reuse of ancient tombs and the combination of new and old funerary utensils exemplify this dynamic, as offering tables juxtaposed royal paraphernalia and pharaonic symbols with contemporary, individualised elements, reflecting the evolving identities of their users.

This evolution was particularly evident during the Ptolemaic era (323–30 BCE), marked by significant advancements in water management. In the Fayyum region, formerly centred around Shedat during the Middle Kingdom (c. 2055–1650 BCE), the rise of Arsinoe (Krokodilopolis) in the 4th–3rd century BCE heralded a new era of agricultural development (Haug 2012: 59; Römer 2017: 171). Herodotus (484–425 BCE) described the Fayyum as a waterscape of canals and drains two centuries prior to Egypt's largest pre-modern agricultural expansion (Haug 2012: 58; Herodotus, *Histories* 2.189). Unlike earlier periods, irrigation in the Fayyum no longer relied solely on Nile floods but concentrated on Lake Moeris, whose desiccation and salinification stemmed from restricted Nile water flow (Haug 2012: 70–74).

The state-organised annual cleaning of canals, known as *penthemenos*, exemplified the integration of practical and ritual elements in water management. Every male inhabitant was required to participate in this maintenance, ensuring the functionality of larger basins (*perichomata* or *hydrostasia*) that facilitated agricultural productivity (Haug 2012: 58; Römer 2017: 187). In tandem with these practical efforts, Egyptians prepared for the flood through ritual actions. Festivals held during the inundation season incorporated waters for healing and fertility rites, underscoring the sacred status of the Nile's life-giving flow (Bonneau 1964: 130; Prell 2009: 215). Since the early Ptolemaic Period, libation rites using inundation waters played a critical role in rejuvenating the dead, demonstrating their transformative power (Blackman 1921: 52; Prell 2009: 227).

The enduring significance of locality during the Graeco-Roman Period is evidenced by Ptolemaic tombs situated within ancient necropoleis. This placement underscored a desire to connect the dead with both the past and broader societal structures. Offering tables, deeply integrated into funerary landscapes, acted as tangible links in this relationship, fostering both spiritual and social continuity. Their adaptability extended beyond the ritual sphere: in tombs, they symbolised 'longevity and temporal connections between past, present, and future' (Boozer 2019: 378–379), while their presence in domestic settings reflected their interchangeable roles as household and funerary items.

Moreover, offering tables were profoundly personal. Their iconography and placement – whether in a grand temple or a modest home – mirrored the identities of their creators and users, further amplifying their symbolic resonance. This duality highlights their importance as mediators between the living, the divine, and the deceased. Their design and context reveal deeply personal expressions of belief, while their setting enhanced their role in negotiating relationships across temporal and spiritual realms.

The tomb of Petosiris in the Dakhla Oasis exemplifies this cultural synthesis. On one wall, Petosiris is depicted in Greek-style clothing (*himation*), receiving funerary rites from an Egyptian priest over an offering table. Adjacent imagery shows an Egyptian deity (Osiris or Hapi) holding an offering tray with a central spouted *hs*-vase and four round bread loaves, characteristic of Late Period and Graeco-Roman Period offering tables. This iconography underscores how offering tables navigated cultural and religious amalgamations while maintaining their symbolic essence (Figures 1 and 2).

Through their adaptability and symbolic depth, offering tables encapsulated broader cultural, religious, and social trends during the 1st millennium BCE. They served as conduits for reverence, continuity, and cosmic principles, illustrating the interplay between tradition and innovation. By



Figure 1. Painting inside the Tomb of Petosiris at Qaret el-Muzawwapa in the Dakhla Oasis (2nd century CE) showing Petosiris in Greek-style clothing facing two different offering scenes using similar offering tables. Photograph by author.



Figure 2. Offering table of unknown origin, dated to the Graeco-Roman Period (from Schiapparelli 1887: 527, no. 1823, dated as 'periodo assai tardo'. Despite being catalogued as 3–4th century CE the style indicates an earlier date, presumably between the 2nd cent. BCE–3rd cent. CE) (Florence, Museo Egizio 6412). Photograph by author.

embedding cosmic principles into daily and spiritual practices, these objects offer a compelling lens through which to explore the material and spiritual dimensions of ancient Egyptian life.

New trends in offering table design

Building upon the socio-economic transformations outlined in the previous section, offering tables underwent significant changes during the 1st millennium BCE. As funerary culture adapted to these shifts, offering tables evolved to meet the diverse spiritual and practical needs of their users. These new trends highlight the interplay between tradition and innovation, encapsulating the changing spiritual landscape of ancient Egypt.

The ancient Egyptian worldview, as noted by Bonhême (1995: 137), envisioned the world emerging from a liquid universe, symbolising a symbiosis between nature and culture. Animation ceremonies, integral to both the cult of the dead and that of the living, embodied this connection. The life-giving flow of water, echoing the primordial waters, was believed to guarantee the germination of vegetation. Offering tables reflected this process, symbolising the connection between humanity and the cosmos through their design and iconography. This symbolic resonance extended to references of nilometers, sacred lakes, large-scale state-sponsored irrigation projects in the Fayyum, and Osirian links to the flood and Nile festivals.

Iconographic innovations further distinguished offering tables of this era. Complex imagery, including depictions of Nile inundations, sacred animals, and cosmological themes, became increasingly prevalent. These designs reinforced the ritual significance of offering tables while reflecting the growing influence of Osirian and Graeco-Roman religious thought. Aquatic motifs and fertility symbols, such as lotus flowers and fish, underscored their connection to themes of renewal and sustenance, reinforcing their symbolic importance in ritual contexts.

Design elements also evolved, with offering tables incorporating features resembling sacred lakes. Deeper basins and staircases, often found in temple complexes, emphasised the rejuvenative powers of water. These basins, integral to purification and libation rituals, mirrored the water management systems of the time, such as nilometers and irrigation canals. Offering tables with deep basins and canals symbolised the flow and storage of sacred waters, reflecting the broader socio-religious emphasis on water as a life-sustaining and sacred element.

A shift towards water-centric designs began during the late Middle Kingdom, gaining prominence by the late Ramesside Period (c. 1295–1069 BCE). Water features, such as deeper basins and aquatic iconography, became focal points, with trends continuing into the Graeco-Roman Period. By this time, the decline of canal depth paralleled the rising depth of basins, underscoring a shift towards water retention overflow. Hölzl (2002: 41) observes that sunken areas and basins became deeper, with ‘gussets’ added near the spout to provide additional space for inscriptions. Basins in the shape of cartouches – symbolising royal dominance over natural and cosmic elements – further reinforced this connection, highlighting the creative potential of the primordial waters of Nun.

Another notable trend was the interchangeable use of offering tables in both domestic and funerary contexts. Objects originally crafted for household use were frequently repurposed for burial, illustrating their dual functionality. This fluidity emphasised the interconnectedness of daily and spiritual life in ancient Egypt, as well as the adaptability of ritual objects to serve multiple roles.

These new trends in offering table design underscore their evolving role as both practical and symbolic objects. By bridging the realms of the living and the divine, they maintained their relevance in a shifting religious and cultural landscape. Offering tables thus emerged as enduring symbols of rejuvenation, transformation, and the intricate interplay between tradition and innovation in ancient Egyptian religiosity.

Case studies

Sacred lake designs and the Dendera Group

A significant innovation in offering tables during later periods was the incorporation of basins with staircases, closely mirroring the design of sacred lakes in temple complexes. These basins were deeply symbolic, evoking the primordial waters of Nun and playing a key role in purification rituals and libation ceremonies. The tradition of incorporating sacred lakes into temple architecture began during the reign of Thutmose III (c. 1479–1425 BCE) at Karnak, and expanded to other sites such as Tod, Medamud, Dendera, and Tanis, intended for the purification of priests as well as providing a constant source of water for libation rituals to be performed in the daily cult (Sauneron 2000: 77–78; Geßler-Löhr 1983: 144–145).

Sacred lakes, often equipped with lateral staircases, were artificially constructed to accommodate water levels that fluctuated with the Nile flood (Bonhême 1995: 130–131). These lakes were essential to rituals such as the mysteries of Osiris during the 24th day of the month of Khoiak at Karnak, where effigies of the god were ceremonially floated by the pharaoh in his role as Horus (Bonhême



Figure 3. Offering table (B2) from Tell el-Retaba dating to the Ptolemaic Period (Manchester Museum 3395).
Photograph by author.

1995: 131; *Book of the Dead* Chapter 125, ‘coffin on the edge of the *bassin-maat* [sic] (Herakleopolis) at the time of the evening meal’). Furthermore, these lakes were used for priestly purification rites, as referenced in *The Golden Ass* by Apuleius, where Lucius is purified before being initiated into the mystery cult of Isis (9.231–236). In addition to lakes, related structures such as nilometers, wells, and cisterns were crucial for sourcing sacred waters for temple rituals. During the Nile floods, underground, chthonian waters seethed up through foundation cracks filling lakes, wells and pits where effigies and other votive objects were thrown containing divine, sacred energies (Bonhême 1995: 138). Pseudo-nilometers, lacking measurement scales, were particularly associated with Graeco-Roman temples and provided water for ritual use (Bonhême 1995: 132; Kurth 2021).

Lundius 2022a identified three types of offering tables with sacred lake motifs in the sample:

1. **Single basin with a descending staircase:** These tables resemble T-shaped pools in temple complexes. Examples from Tell el-Retaba suggest they were used in votive rituals tied to local cults. The limestone construction and portable design indicate frequent ritual use (Figure 3).
2. **Basins with two to four interlinking staircases:** The most common design in the sample, examples such as London, British Museum EA1778 and Copenhagen, Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek AEIN1682, from Armant feature inscriptions dedicated to Ta-ast, the Great Cow, linking the tables to fertility and the Buchis bull cult. These basins emphasised rejuvenation through sacred waters.
3. **Larger basins with two to six staircases:** These intricate designs incorporated deeper basins and elaborate water channels, underscoring their ceremonial importance.

The Dendera Group

Offering tables from Dendera, especially from the Graeco-Roman Period, showcase the integration of sacred lake motifs into local religious practices. The Hathor temple at Dendera featured a sacred lake with four interlinking staircases, and offering tables from the region reflected this design. Surrounding the temple are also several Osiris chapels involved in the celebration of the Khoiak festival during which the mysteries of Osiris were performed, most likely using sacred water from the artificial lake at the temple. The offering tables from Dendera have a similar design to the actual lake, including a small square basin with four interlinking staircases, recalling the staircases incorporated in the sacred lake (Figures 4–6). Both tables in the sample have two spouted *hs*-vases



Figure 4. Sandstone offering table (B2) from Dendera dated to the Ptolemaic Period (Petrie 1898: pl. XXVa) (Chicago, ISAC OIM5007). CAT ID304. Photograph by author.



Figure 5. Sandstone offering table (B2) from Dendera dated to the Ptolemaic Period (Petrie 1898: pl. XXVa) (New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art 98.4.64). Photograph by author.



Figure 6. Detail of an image of the western part of the Hathor temenos showing the sacred lake structure and its four staircases © P. Zignani (Zigani 2020: 114, Image 3).



Figure 7. Limestone offering table from Dendera dating to the Ptolemaic Period (Petrie 1898) (Chicago, ISAC OIM4943). Photograph by author.

with streams of liquid connected to the square basin and with four round breads at the centre. Liquid pours from the vases onto the central offerings, all connected to the sacred lake at the top of the table. On either side of the vases are lotus flowers, considered to be symbols of rejuvenation. At the very centre is a piece of flesh and the sacred waters in the lake. The entire table emphasises the libation process and activation by the waters from the basin (lake).

One of the two studied offering tables at the Institute for the Study of Ancient Cultures in Chicago (ISAC), OIM007 (Figure 4), seems to be an imitation of an offering table (98.4.64) at the Metropolitan Museum of Art (Met) in New York (Figure 5). This may be deduced from the execution of the design, since the images seem to be scratched crudely into the sandstone and the design does not include all the iconographic elements present in the Metropolitan example. This indicates that it might not have been made in the same workshop; perhaps it was commissioned by someone of another social status, who nevertheless wanted to include all of the iconographic elements pertaining to the Dendera cult. However, the palm decoration on OIM5007 may have been executed at a later date, since it indicates a later Roman Isis cult. Nevertheless, both tables may testify to a localised religious tradition. A similar design is featured in offering table OIM4943, also at the ISAC of Chicago, which was initially from an unknown provenance, but, after closer inspection, it appears to belong to Petrie's finds at Dendera, precariously dated to the Ptolemaic Period (Petrie 1898: pl. XXVa).

A particularly detailed example is the water process depicted on these tables. Water poured from the vases into the central basin, flowing over offerings such as round bread and a central piece of flesh representing Osiris. Instead of the water flowing into a basin, as in earlier tables, the water flow of these tables is directed towards an external spout and thus the water stream was directed towards the receiver of the offerings, instead of being stored in a basin reminiscent of a 'sacred lake'. The water canals of these specific tables have the shape of lotus stems, a plant that is a symbol of rejuvenation as well as the primordial waters, as evidenced in Nun bowls of the Ramesside Period. In simpler terms, the water from the sacred lake flows along the spout when the table is inclined, causing the lotus stems to function as channels.

It appears as though the sacred lake basins emphasise already 'charged' waters, rather than a previous need for 'activating' waters. They nevertheless still represent sacred landscapes, as well as 'processing sites' since sacred lakes were constantly used by priests for purification purposes, as well as providing water for the execution of temple rituals. Incorporating them on funerary offering tables provides a direct link not only to the sacred landscape but they also indicate a flow of rejuvenation waters. This is evidenced in offering basins with an external spout structure with palm designs, a constant source of regenerative and nurturing powers.

Offering tables from Dendera, particularly those dated to the Graeco-Roman Period, reflect distinct local religious practices while aligning with broader Egyptian traditions. These tables feature elaborate basins designed to emulate sacred lakes, a motif central to purification rituals associated with Osirian myth. The regional iconography, such as floral patterns and representations of aquatic life, underscores the temple's unique veneration of Hathor as the goddess of fertility and motherhood (e.g. Chicago, ISAC OIM4943, Figure 7). These objects served as conduits for divine rejuvenation and ensured the deceased's connection to the sacred cycles of life and death. By reflecting localised interpretations of sacred landscapes, these offering tables demonstrate the dynamic interplay between tradition, innovation, and cultural identity in ancient Egyptian religiosity.



Figure 8. Limestone offering table, without provenance, dated to the Ptolemaic-Roman Period (New York, Brooklyn Museum 70.135). CAT ID298. Photograph by author.

The Mendes tables and Nile cults

A unique group of offering tables from Mendes, dating to the 2nd–3rd century CE, featured intricate labyrinth designs and depictions of aquatic animals and vegetation. These tables are strongly associated with the Nile cults and the god Hapi, symbolising the fertilising power of the Nile flood. Mendes tables provide remarkable insights into the interplay between nature, religion, and ritual practices during this period.

Mendes tables are distinctive for their complex designs, which include central basins, lion-shaped spouts, and labyrinthine patterns. These features symbolise the cyclical and life-giving properties of the Nile. For instance, a limestone offering table (New York, Brooklyn 70.135; Figure 8) features a labyrinth canal design forming seven sunken areas, each containing representations of offerings, aquatic animals, and vegetation in raised relief (Hibbs 1985: 42). Protruding structures with drainage holes are positioned at one end of the table, facilitating the controlled flow of water.

Vivian Hibbs' (1985) study identifies these labyrinth designs as rectilinear ornamental bands, resembling meandering river patterns. Such designs have historical precedents in the Aegean region as early as 6000 BCE (Hibbs 1985: 42). Mendes tables often incorporate bases decorated with ram-horned lion spouts, flanked by figures of Bes. The central basin frequently includes a staircase descending to a crocodile motif, a reference to the personification of the Nile and its inundation (Hibbs 1985: 59). The inclusion of bread-like offerings, vegetation such as lotus flowers and rosettes, and aquatic animals like crocodiles, frogs, and fish, further underscores their connection to fertility and rejuvenation (see Cairo, Egyptian Museum CG23214 [unknown provenance] and CG23216 [from Temai el-Amid] in Kamal 1909: pl. LIV).

The Mendes tables are intricately linked to the worship of Hapi and local deities like Banebdjed ('Lord of the Ba of Djedet'), a deity associated with the nearby Osiris cult centre at Djedu (Plutarch, *Moralia* 5.55). Banebdjed is depicted as a ram-headed lion, emphasising his role as a reproducer and seeder of life. This is evidenced by the ram-headed lions present on most of the spouts. The Mendes Stela preserved in the Louvre equals with Ptolemy II Philadelphos and represents the god as 'the RAM, who is the Lord of the city of Mendes, the Great God, the Life of RA, the Generator, the Prince of young women, the Only God, the Original male power of gods and men' (Brugsch 1875: 95). Furthermore, the Mendes stela identifies with Khnum who seeded gods and men (Brugsch 1875: 95).² Contemporary with the appearance of these tables is the emergence of a cult revolving around Khnum as the Lord of the first cataract, making him fully in control of the stream of the Nile compared to any other deity.

Vegetation motifs, including rosettes, reflect offerings thrown into the Nile during Hapi festivals (Petrie 1911: 1–11). Flowers, especially lotus blooms, held great significance in the Hapi cult, as evidenced by inscriptions from the Temple of Amenhotep III at Wadi-Sebua: 'I bring thee flowers that Hapi causes to grow, Amun' (Leibovitch 1953: 109). Rosettes are depicted in reference to the 137 bouquets of flowers which were also thrown into the Nile (Leibovitch 1953: 109), and are closely related to the fertility goddess Sehat and Hathor (Hibbs 1985: 70). Such offerings symbolised agricultural abundance and divine nourishment.

Crocodiles, frogs, and fish feature prominently in the iconography of Mendes tables. These creatures, integral to Nile-based cults, symbolise life force, protection, and fertility. The goddess Hatmehit, whose name translates as 'Foremost of the Flood', was venerated in Mendes and associated with the Nile's inundation. Fish motifs on Mendes tables may reflect Hatmehit's connection to Hathor, also called Mehet-Weret ('The Great Flood') (Wilkinson 2003: 228–229). Plutarch mentions that Osiris has a clear association with fish cults: 'Of the parts of Osiris' body the only one which Isis did not find was the male member for the reason that it had once been tossed into the river and the pike [*lepidotus*] had fed upon it' (Plutarch, *Moralia* 5.47, translated by F.C. Babbitt 1936). This association with the member of Osiris is also an association with the rejuvenative qualities of fish and fertility, also evidenced on the 29 stelae recovered at Mendes illustrating the fan and fish as fertility symbols (Redford 2004: 32).

The inclusion of crocodiles, often positioned near staircases resembling nilometers, alludes to Sobek, the crocodile god associated with fertility, resurrection, and knowledge of the Nile's inundation levels. As Pliny the Elder notes, crocodiles could predict flood levels by strategically laying their eggs beyond the expected waterline (*Natural History* 2004: 118).

The labyrinthine designs of Mendes tables evoke the meandering flow of rivers and symbolise the divine force spreading throughout the landscape. The water process on these tables follows an inverse pattern, with liquids poured into the central basin, flowing across the surface, and exiting through ram-headed lion spouts. This controlled release of water mirrors the Nile's cyclical inundation and its vital role in sustaining life (Hibbs 1985: 59). Central basins often resemble nilometers, reinforcing their ritual significance. The presence of crocodiles within these basins emphasises the connection between divine energy and the inundation. The integration of aquatic and vegetative motifs into the water process symbolises the regenerative power of the Nile, aligning with broader cosmological themes of life, death, and renewal.

² Khnum was widely worshipped on the island of Elephantine, where the priesthood was said to control Hapi's appearance from the so-called Two Caverns, i.e. the location where the god Hapi is rejuvenated. This particular location is of great importance for the Nile cult since offerings were made in order to invigorate the Nile stream. As a consequence of the Nile flood, the cubits would rise to 28 in the first cataract and 7 in the Nile Delta at Diospolis (Hibbs 1985: 176–177).

Mendes tables embody the fusion of local and centralised religious traditions. While rooted in universal Nile-based themes, their designs incorporate elements unique to Mendes, reflecting regional adaptations of religious practices. The tables served as practical tools for libation ceremonies, where water was poured as offerings to deities or the deceased. The lion-shaped spouts added a performative dimension to these rituals, visually reinforcing the sacred connection between the Nile's waters and divine nourishment.

By blending symbolic richness with functional utility, Mendes tables encapsulate the interplay between nature, religion, and ritual. Their labyrinthine designs, aquatic imagery, and connection to fertility deities underscore their importance in Egyptian religious thought. As objects bridging the tangible and intangible realms, Mendes tables highlight the Nile's centrality in sustaining life and maintaining cosmic balance. These tables remain enduring symbols of the dynamic interplay between environment, spirituality, and cultural identity in ancient Egypt.

'Stirrup-shaped' pottery trays

Four pottery offering trays in the sample have been described as 'stirrup-trays' due to their resemblance to the shape of stirrups on a horse-saddle (Figures 9–12). Although Petrie initially categorised them as 'horseshoe' types, their covered external spout structure makes 'stirrup' a more accurate description. These trays function like funnels, with small drainage holes at each end of the spout. Despite their unique shape, their overall form closely resembles pottery offering trays from the First Intermediate Period and Middle Kingdom. However, the iconographic elements and ritual functions of these trays set them apart, showing elements of past traditions, local beliefs, and changing concepts of religious landscapes in the 1st millennium BCE.

Steven Quirke dated the trays to the Ptolemaic Period, although their exact provenance remains uncertain (Ivanov 2015: 122). Recent excavations by the Russian Archaeological Mission at Memphis unearthed fragments of at least three similar trays. While these fragments were found in disturbed layers – likely grave robbers' pits – they still provide valuable insights into Memphite popular religious practices between the Late Period and Ptolemaic Period (Ivanov 2015: 116–117). These findings align with the dating suggested by the Petrie Museum and offer avenues for further analysis.

At Kom Tuman, a late-Ptolemaic Period administrative and military site in Memphis, excavations revealed household utensils and objects associated with rural or domestic ritual practices. Among these were fertility figurines depicting naked women or 'megalophallic youths' (Ivanov 2015: 116). These items, defined by Ivanov as 'connected to domestic workshops, votive offerings, or popular charms for fertility, prosperity, safety, and well-being,' suggest that the trays served as domestic ritual utensils rather than funerary objects.

The four offering trays from the Petrie Museum are all stirrup-shaped, featuring a funnel, external spout structure, and a sunken, open-ended tray area adorned with depictions of aquatic animals in raised relief. Made with finer coarseware compared to earlier trays, they exhibit surface coatings of red and/or white paint – a characteristic treatment of Late Period and Graeco-Roman Period terracotta figurines (Ivanov 2015: 121). The iconography includes:

1. **Aquatic motifs:** Fish and crocodiles line the edges of the tray, facing the open end, symbolising the life-giving properties of the Nile.
2. **Human figures:** A squatting individual, possibly female, is depicted at the centre or on the external spout structure. The positioning and details, such as a hole between the legs creating the funnel, suggest a birthing squat, a posture still common in rural childbirth practices.

3. **Lotus buds and reproductive symbolism:** Encircling some figures are lotus buds connected by stems in a semi-circular arrangement, evoking the shape of the female reproductive system and emphasising themes of fertility and renewal. The figures often hold fish or frogs, animals linked to fertility and rejuvenation.

The trays' ritual function shifted over time, particularly in the way liquids were poured and flowed. Ivanov (2015) noted that in earlier First Intermediate Period and Middle Kingdom trays, offerings were oriented toward a central throne or figure. The main difference between the two sets of



Figure 9. Pottery offering tray of unknown origin dated to the Ptolemaic Period (London, Petrie Museum UC74854).
Photograph by author.



Figure 10. Pottery offering tray of unknown origin dated to the Ptolemaic Period (London, Petrie Museum UC74855).
Photograph by author.



Figure 11. Pottery offering tray of unknown origin dated to the Ptolemaic Period (London, Petrie Museum UC74856).
Photograph by author.



Figure 12. Pottery offering tray of unknown origin dated to the Ptolemaic Period (London, Petrie Museum UC74853).
Photograph by author.

objects is that the water must have been directed towards the opposite end of the tray and through the external spout structure. The offerings are, therefore, always oriented opposite the spout end. Accordingly, the water must have been poured over the tray in such a way that it would flow from the spout end, covering the entire tray surface. If this process is linked to the iconographic elements present, it may mimic the process of childbirth, or creation, since in the three trays containing squatting figures, the hole is made between the individual's legs. It is as though the waters containing fish, lotus flowers, and crocodiles flow from the womb outwards rather than in the opposite direction. The entire tray may therefore function as the female reproductive system and mimic the moment of birth, while simultaneously simulating the flood.

Recent excavations at Kom Tuman suggest these trays were primarily used in domestic contexts, indicating their dual role as practical items and objects of ritual significance. Other than the birthing stance, offering tray London, Petrie Museum UC74853 (Figure 12) shows an individual in a prostrate position resembling the goddess Nut, who lies prone over the world in numerous Pharaonic depictions of the Cosmos. The legs of the individual are encircled by lotus buds linked by a stem in a semi-circular position. This may recall the shape of the female reproductive system, with the buds representing ovaries. The individual is holding a fish as well as a frog, both animals associated with fertility and rejuvenation. Holding these animals may also be a reference to *cippi*, which are magical stelae from the Late Dynastic to the Roman periods featuring Harpocrates, or Horus the Child, holding snakes, scorpions, and lions while standing on two crocodiles. The insertion of crocodiles on protective amulets, *cippi*, as well as healing statues, are symbols of defeated evil, or are at least important for protection, as well as healing. These notions, together with the representation of women in birthing squats may indicate a local, rural and most importantly female-centred cult. In potential funerary settings, stirrup-shaped trays served as potent symbols of rebirth and the cycle of life, aligning with Osirian themes of death and resurrection. Their presence ensured that the deceased remained connected to cosmic forces of fertility and renewal, embodying beliefs in life's continuation through death and rebirth.

Stirrup-shaped pottery trays encapsulate the interplay between practicality and symbolism in Egyptian ritual objects. Their inverted water flow design mimics childbirth, while their aquatic and floral motifs underscore their association with the Nile's life-giving properties. These trays demonstrate the fluidity of ancient Egyptian religious practices, blending state-endorsed and domestic rituals. By serving as channels between the mundane and the divine, they embody the broader themes of continuity and transformation that defined the 1st millennium BCE religious landscape.

Bronze offering table pendants

The prominence of bronze pendants underscores their role as a bridge between personal piety and state religious traditions. Their design and functionality highlight the adaptability of offering table iconography, ensuring these objects remained relevant across diverse contexts in the 1st millennium BCE. This dual role emphasises their significance as tools for maintaining continuity in religious practice, reflecting the dynamic interplay between personal devotion and institutionalised worship. These pendants exemplify the overarching themes of continuity and transformation in ancient Egyptian religious practices, emphasising their vital role in connecting the living, the dead, and the divine.

Most bronze pendants feature two suspension loops at the end of the table opposite an external spout structure, often adorned with the depiction of a frog. These loops occasionally retain remnants of bronze chains (Figures 13 and 14). The simplest design comprises a square offering table with a



Figure 13. Bronze offering table pendant with chain from an unknown origin, dating to the Late Period (Chicago, ISAC OIM11393). Photograph by author.



Figure 14. Bronze offering table pendant depicting a figure balancing a tray of round bread upon its head, facing a ḥtp-sign and two ducks. Unknown origin, dating to the Late Period (664–332 BCE) (Berlin, ÄMP ÄM2749). Photograph by author.

kneeling figure positioned between the loops, facing the offerings and the spout. Offerings typically include round cakes and one or two *hs* vases. These pendants, generally ranging from 1.6cm to 8.5cm in width, were lightweight and likely designed for personal wear or for adorning sacred spaces.

The frequent depiction of priests and deities, alongside religious paraphernalia, suggests that these pendants primarily served as votive offerings at temple cult sites, rather than as funerary amulets. Teeter defines these objects as votive offering tables deposited by devotees to demonstrate piety, paralleling the ritual use of bronze *situlae* (Teeter 1994: 262–264). Found predominantly in votive zones, such as the animal necropolis at North Saqqara, Abydos, and Medinet Habu (Green 1987: 116–120; Teeter 1994: 259), their iconographic elements echo the themes seen in other votive objects, including bronze *situlae*. These *situlae* often depict libation rituals and processional animals like baboons and jackals, symbolic of solar and cosmic cycles (Teeter 1994: 261).

The inscriptions on two pendants further support their votive nature. One, housed in London (British Museum EA64027), invokes Isis to ‘give life’ to the dedicator, underscoring the goddess’ nurturing qualities. Another pendant (London, British Museum EA66672) bears a similar dedication, associating the object with ritual acts of offering and libation (Andrews 1994: 94; Leclère 2014: 64).



‘Isis who gives life to *bs-spd* (?) daughter (?) of Pawenhatef, born of *Nb-hwy*’ (London, British Museum EA64027; Leclère & Spencer 2014: 64).



‘Isis who gives life to (?) *pth* [Ptah] son of *pꜣ* [apparently referring to a so-far unknown lineage, or association]’ (London, British Museum EA66672; transcribed by Andrews 1994: 94, translation by author).

The association of these pendants with Isis highlights their symbolic significance in Egyptian religious thought. Isis, often depicted as a nurturing and protective deity, was closely tied to libation and milk-related rituals, as evidenced by the frequent depiction of *situlae* (milk vessels) alongside these offering tables. Teeter (1994: 262) argues that the dual symbolism of *hṯp* (offerings) and *hṯp* (satisfaction) inherent in the table design extended to these pendants, further reinforcing their ritual importance.

The bronze pendants’ design elements – including aquatic motifs, kneeling priests, and depictions of frogs – emphasise themes of purity, fertility, and cosmic balance. Frogs, symbolising the Ogdoad and Kek, frequently appear on the spout structures, while baboons, jackals, and falcons represent solar and cosmic entities tied to the Ennead. The contrasting entities (baboons for greeting the dawn and jackals for greeting the dusk), together with the occurrence of falcons which represent the sun disk, are all intended to illustrate cosmic entities, rather than the funerary journey of the deceased. This is also in accordance with depictions of devotees in front of offering tables facing the Ennead. The alignment of these figures toward the spout reflects their participation in the symbolic journey of the libation, connecting the physical and metaphysical realms.

Martin Bommas (2005) proposes that bronze *situlae* and similar objects may have served as insignia for specific priestly titles during the Late Period, particularly for priests involved in water rituals. This aligns with the Greek term *choachytes*, or ‘water-pourers’, which described priests responsible

for libation rituals and tomb maintenance (Vandorpe and Clarysse 2019: 416–417). The material and portability of the pendants suggest they may have functioned as identifiers for this specialised priesthood, further linking these objects to the institutionalised temple cult.

The prominence of bronze pendants highlights their role in blending personal piety with state religious traditions. By combining wearability with profound symbolic significance, these objects allowed devotees to carry sacred symbols beyond temple precincts, integrating religious identity into daily life. Their portability and intricate iconography demonstrate their adaptability to various social and religious contexts, reflecting broader themes of continuity and transformation in ancient Egyptian religiosity.

Conclusions

This study underscores the versatility and enduring significance of offering tables in the 1st millennium BCE. From practical utensils to symbolic objects, they were adapted to socio-economic and religious shifts, embodying the spiritual and material needs of their users. The case studies demonstrate the complex interplay of innovation and tradition in offering table design and use, reflecting broader cultural transformations. In particular, they reveal how these objects moved across ritual, funerary, and domestic contexts, acting as tangible links between local religious practices and broader theological concepts.

These multifaceted items became profound expressions of ancient Egyptian religiosity, connecting the mundane with the divine and showcasing the dynamic nature of religious practice in a changing world. The examination of offering tables provides valuable insights into the ways material culture reflects and shapes religious thought. The diachronic analysis of water features, for example, reveals broader shifts in religious thought. What began as practical libation gradually evolved into a more symbolic and imagistic function, where carved or painted water motifs came to replace the ritual action. This transformation underscores a broader shift in ritual logic – from performance to presence – where the power of ritual was embedded in form and iconography.

By adopting a qualitative and context-focused approach to a representative and underexplored sample of later-period offering tables, this study moves beyond typological categorisation to reassess what defines an offering table. These objects, in their diverse forms and contexts, serve as a testament to the richness and adaptability of ancient Egyptian spiritual traditions, and invite further study into how material culture functioned not only within ritual, but as ritual.

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Shell Forehead Ornaments in Predynastic Egypt and the Southern Levant

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Abstract

The Egypt and Sudan collection at the Manchester Museum contains two large pierced oval shell artefacts that are stated to have been found in burials 399 and 723 at Predynastic Naqada, Egypt. Similar artefacts are recorded from other Predynastic burials in Upper and Lower Egypt and are predominantly crafted from mollusc shell, and occasionally from other materials such as limestone and copper. In some cases, these pendants are reported to have been found either on the forehead or near the head of the deceased, which led William Matthew Flinders Petrie to categorise these artefacts as ‘forehead ornaments’. Petrie conjectured that the hook on the lower end of some of these pendants held a face veil, while the shell pendant itself, which according to Petrie was believed to hold apotropaic qualities in ancient Egypt, absorbed and diverted negative powers from the ever-watchful ‘evil-eye’. Comparable artefacts have been found at various Chalcolithic sites in the southern Levant and, as these are also predominantly crafted from mollusc shell, could be a further expression of contact between this region and Egypt. Many of the Levantine examples have been identified by archaeomalacologists as being made from either the Nilotic mollusc shell *Chambardia rubens* (a freshwater bivalve previously known as *Aspatharia rubens*) or, in fewer cases, from a Red Sea bivalve shell known as *Pinctada margaritifera*. The function of these Egyptian and Levantine ornaments, together with Petrie’s interpretation of those from the Nile Valley, have not been investigated. This paper aims to introduce these distinctive artefacts and begin an exploration of their possible function and amuletic value in Predynastic Egypt and the southern Levant, developing and correcting Petrie’s original conclusions.

Keywords

Manchester Museum; Archaeomalacology; Predynastic Egypt; Southern Levant; Amulets

Introduction

This paper presents two previously unpublished mollusc shell artefacts (Figure 1) from Predynastic Naqada, registered as 1018a (5.2cm by 3cm) and 1018b (6.1cm by 3.4cm), that are on display in the Manchester Museum, and aims to investigate their possible function and meaning in ancient Egypt. The Manchester examples belong to a broader group of objects that William Matthew Flinders Petrie and James Quibell (1896: 47) classified as ‘forehead ornaments’. These are predominantly made from mollusc shell, and occasionally from other materials such as limestone, copper, and ivory. Petrie and Quibell (1896: 47) explained that these objects were pierced for hanging and were mostly found near the head of the deceased, and in one case close to the forehead. Many of the ‘forehead ornaments’ are concave on their inner side, prompting Petrie and Quibell (1896: 47) to test the fixture of the object upon the forehead, which they report to fit ‘very closely’. Some of the ornaments have a turned-up hook at the lower end that, according to Petrie and Quibell (1896: 47), ‘falls in the bridge of the nose easily when worn’. This feature, together with the location of the ornaments near the head of the deceased in burials, reaffirmed to Petrie (1920: 41) that the placement of the object on the forehead was ‘certain’. These factors explain the reasoning behind the suggestion that the turned-up hook supported another ‘ornament on the face; or if a face veil was worn it would be exactly the thing to carry that’ (Petrie and Quibell 1896: 47). Petrie and Quibell (1896: 47) likened the turned-up

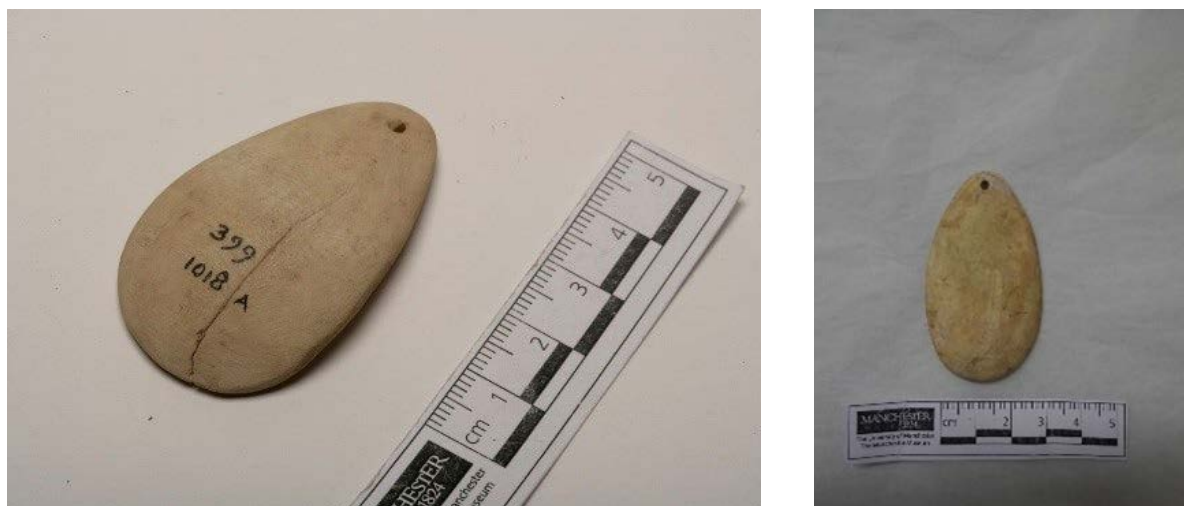


Figure 1. 1018a and 1018b on display at the Manchester Museum. © Manchester Museum, The University of Manchester
Photographer: Paul Cliff.

hook to modern gilt tubes that hold a face veil; this supposed parallel led Petrie (1901: 22, 1920: 41) to suggest that the origins of the ancient Egyptian ‘forehead ornament’ should be assigned to an Eastern influence.

The identification of this group of artefacts, to which the Manchester Museum examples belong, as ‘forehead ornaments’ is problematic, and Petrie’s interpretation of their use has not been reinvestigated. The fundamental issue lies with a lack of supporting evidence for both the proposed placement of the ornament on the forehead, and the function of the turned-up hook as a face veil holder. The latter idea is further weakened by the small overall number of extant ornaments that have a turned-up hook and does not explain the function of those that do not. Should the ornaments with a turned-up hook indeed have supported a face veil, they should be classed as an entirely different group of artefacts based on their physical appearance.

In any case, there is currently no existing evidence in Predynastic burials suggesting that ancient Egyptians wore face veils, nor is there any pictorial or written evidence from later periods indicating that the ‘forehead ornament’ was indeed worn on the forehead. While reassessing the validity of Petrie’s interpretation, this paper does not wholly reject his ideas as the function of the ornament remains obscure. Rather, this analysis aims to highlight the mollusc shell ‘forehead ornament’ and question whether shell, as a raw material, bore any influence on the perceived material quality and symbolic meaning of these objects. This methodology is driven by the relatively new discipline known as archaeomalacology which studies the presence of mollusc shells at archaeological sites (Bar-Yosef Mayer 2005: 1).¹ This approach has not yet been thoroughly applied to the Predynastic Period and it has potential to unveil new insights on a range of socio-economic aspects during the period such as human interaction with aquatic resources, perceived prophylactic and apotropaic properties of miniature objects, commercial trade and cultural exchange along the Nile Valley and between Egypt, the Sinai Peninsula, and the Levant.

The Manchester Museum curatorial records state that 1018a and 1018b (Figure 1) were excavated at Predynastic Naqada from burials 399 and 723, respectively. In relation to 1018b, the Museum refers

¹ Mollusc shells have often been overlooked in the archaeological record, particularly by early excavators working at ancient Egyptian sites. Studying ancient Egypt through an archaeomalacological lens, in thorough detail, has not yet been done and shells have generally received little interest from Egyptologists.

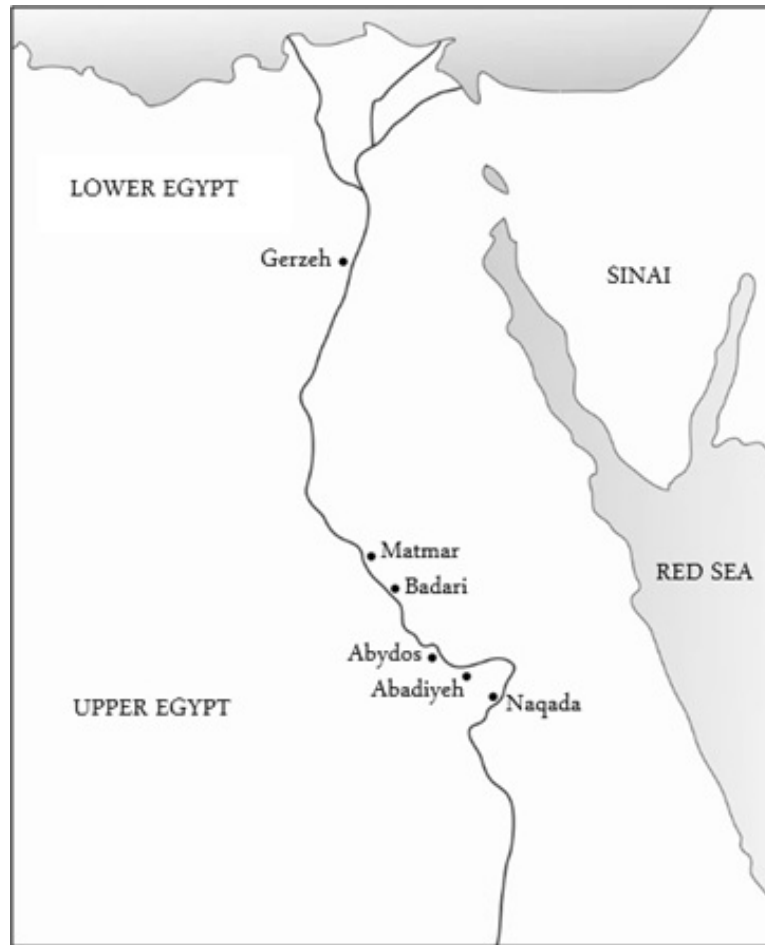


Figure 2. A map showing the Egyptian sites mentioned in the text where 'forehead ornaments' have been found (created by the author).

to a specific artefact that was excavated by Petrie and Quibell (1896: pl. LXII, no. 22); however, this object is stated to have been found by the excavators in burial 272, and not 723. Petrie and Quibell (1896: 23) did report that two shell ornaments were found at Naqada in Burial B99: one with a turned-up hook that is pictured by the excavators (Petrie and Quibell 1896: pl. LXII, no. 21), and one without a hook that is not illustrated in the excavation report. Neither of the Manchester examples have a turned-up hook and it is possible that the latter artefact, the object without a hook, is either 1018a or has a comparable appearance. The exact findspot for 1018b is also problematic since Petrie and Quibell (1896) did not detail every individual burial, and their contents, found in the Naqada region. Despite these ambiguities, it can be deduced that both artefacts were unearthed from a funerary context at Naqada and that they served as burial goods, found near the head of the deceased.

Data Presentation

Predynastic 'forehead ornaments' are a relatively rare group of objects (Table 1), although they do appear at various funerary sites along the Nile Valley in Upper and Lower Egypt (Figure 2). At present, a preliminary survey has collected a total of 44 documented ornaments, a selection based purely on their classification as 'forehead ornaments' by the excavators. Regardless of material, provenance or body placement (if known), all 44 ornaments are defined by their uniform appearance (teardrop or oval, with single perforation). Among these 44 ornaments, 33 (75%) are stated to have been crafted from mollusc shell. Most of these ancient Egyptian ornaments are teardrop or oval-

TABLE 1. STATISTICAL DATA SHOWING THE RARITY OF THE ‘FOREHEAD ORNAMENT’ AND WHERE THOSE MADE FROM MOLLUSC SHELL HAVE BEEN FOUND IN PREDYNASTIC EGYPT (STATISTICS COMPILED BY THE AUTHOR)

Location	Total number of burials	Total number of ‘forehead ornaments’	Number of mollusc shell ‘forehead ornaments’
Upper Egypt			
Naqada	2,589	14	10
Abadiyeh	570	2	2
Abydos	-	2	1
Badari	262	1	1
Matmar	240	1	1
		Total: 20	Total: 15
Lower Egypt			
Gerzeh	277	9	9
		Total: 9	Total: 9
Unknown	-	15	9
		Grand Total: 44	Grand Total: 33

shaped except for two triangular, flat-based examples that were found at Abadiyeh (Petrie and Mace 1901: pl. VIII, B350 and B323; Petrie 1914: pl. XVI, no. 130j). All the ornaments exhibit a single perforation at the top of the object except for two unprovenanced examples at the Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology. The first ornament (UC52185) is the only example exhibiting a perforation at the lower end of the object, and the second ornament (UC52187) features a double perforation vertically aligned at the top of the object. Petrie (1914: 29, pl. XVI, nos 130t and 130u, 1920: 41) assigned two mollusc shell ornaments, in the shape of female figures, to his ‘forehead ornament’ category, yet these are visually entirely different to the rest of the corpus. Petrie (1920: 41) did not state his reasoning for including these artefacts within this group but simply noted that they ‘are probably a late form of the forehead pendant’. Given that both figures are unprovenanced, it is unclear if they are from a late Predynastic context or if they should be placed during the Pharaonic Period, although Petrie’s (1914: 29) grouping of them with other Predynastic ornaments seems to suggest the former.

Most shell ornaments have a smooth, polished finish apart from three exceptions. The first was discovered in Burial 33 at Gerzeh in Lower Egypt (Petrie *et al.* 1912: 24, pl. VIII, no. 26) and is either a parallel artefact to, or the same as UC26317 (Figure 12, no. 130s; Petrie 1914: 29, pl. XVI, no. 130s). The Gerzeh ornament has herringbone style etchings on the obverse side of the object as well as a turned-up hook on the lower end and is quite unique in style when compared to the other examples. Petrie (1920: 41) described this ornament as representing a ‘bundle tied together’ and he compared it to the Old Kingdom ‘bundle amulet’ (Figure 3) depicted on the neck of a female figure, that he refers to as Ant (Petrie 1917: 49, fig. 1). Importantly, Petrie (1917: 49) suggested that the ‘bundle amulet’ was predominantly worn by males during the Old Kingdom, an idea that might be worth bearing in mind with regards to the Predynastic ornaments. The second ornament (UC52186) is unprovenanced and features 17 drilled holes (Figure 12, no. 130l) on the obverse side that do not fully pierce the object (Petrie 1914: pl. XVI, no. 130l, 1920: 41). It is somewhat comparable to the third example (UC52187) yet unpublished and exhibiting eight drilled holes also on the obverse side. The main difference between the latter two ornaments, besides the number of drilled holes,



Figure 3. Old Kingdom depiction of a woman (Ant) wearing a 'bundle amulet' at the neck (Petrie 1917: 49, fig. 1).

is the placement of the holes on UC52187 which appear to be more systematically patterned than those on UC52186.

In Upper Egypt, the largest corpus of shell 'forehead ornaments' comes from Naqada, and the excavators provided a findspot for each artefact at this site. In Naqada and Ballas, Petrie and Quibell (1896: 23, pl. LXII, nos 21–22) record two ornaments in Burial B99, one of which has a turned-up hook (Figure 4, no. 21), and one nacreous ornament in Burial 272 (Figure 4, no. 22). A further five ornaments from Naqada were later published in *Amulets* (Petrie 1914: 29, pl. XVI) and catalogued as 130b, 130d, 130e, 130g, and 130h in the publication (Figure 5). These are kept in the Petrie Museum and are listed here, with their corresponding burial, respectively: UC4357, Tomb T16; UC4488, Burial 1848; UC5661, Burial 1007; UC4489, Burial 1848; and UC5663, Burial 1384. The Petrie Museum also holds two still unpublished ornaments from Naqada, UC4639, Tomb T144;

and UC5663, Burial 1384. The production of these nine examples was dated to the Naqada II Period (Gerzean) c. 3500–3200 BCE (Petrie 1920: 41) on the basis of their uniform appearance. Three ornaments (Petrie 1896: pl. LXII, no. 22, 1914: pl. XVI, nos 130d and 130e), that are rounder in shape, rather than teardrop, were assigned by Petrie (1920: 41) to an earlier phase of the Naqada II Period.

To the north-west of Naqada, Petrie and Mace (1901: 34, pl. VII) recorded two 'forehead ornaments' at Abadiyeh (Figure 6), found in Burials B323 and B350, each featuring a single perforation at the upper end. The artefact from B323 is currently held in the Petrie Museum (UC10814) but the current location of the ornament from B350 is unknown. The shape of the Abadiyeh examples is more triangular than those found at Naqada, although they were also dated to the Naqada II Period by Petrie (1901: 34, 1920: 41). At Abydos, Petrie (1902: 23, pl. LI, nos 8–9) reported the finding of two late Predynastic 'forehead pendants', one of which is made from shell, and was found in the town near to



Figure 4. Examples of two shell ornaments found at Naqada in Burials B99 and 272 (adapted by author from Petrie and Quibell 1896: pl. LXII, nos 21–22, left to right).



Figure 5. Five shell ornaments held in the Petrie Museum: 130b (UC4357), 130d (UC4488), 130e (UC5661), 130g (UC4489), and 130h (UC5663) found at Naqada and published in *Amulets* (Petrie 1914: 29, pl. XVI).

the Temenos of Osiris. The latter ornaments are the only examples from the corpus that were found in a settlement context, presumably in site debris, rather than in individual burials from where they may have nonetheless originated. The Abydos mollusc shell example has a single perforation (Figure 7; Petrie 1902: pl. LI, no. 9) and is comparable in shape to those found at Naqada, although its top has a more pointed finish above the perforation. Petrie (1902: 23) did not clarify whether the Abydos ornament is crafted from ostrich or mollusc shell.

The last sites in Upper Egypt, chronologically speaking, where the ‘forehead ornament’ has been documented are located in the Badari region, on the eastern bank of the Nile. At Badari, Brunton and Caton-Thompson (1928: 59, pl. LIV, no. 3) reported finding one ornament in Burial 3705 (Figure 8), that they dated to the late Naqada II Period; this artefact is currently held in the Bolton Museum (1924.31.6). Although Brunton and Caton-Thompson (1928: 59) referred to this ornament as a ‘forehead pendant’ they stated that ‘it is not curved to fit the head’, indirectly contesting Petrie’s proposed body placement for this object. The Badari example has a single perforation at the upper end and a familiar teardrop shape like those found at Naqada. Still in the Badari region, at Matmar, Brunton (1948: 19, pl. XVI, no. 38) recorded one shell ‘forehead pendant’ found in Burial 3039 (Figure 9), which he stated was in a plundered state. This example shows a single, upper-end perforation and is comparable to the rounder examples from Naqada, particularly UC4488, found in Burial 1848 (Figure 12, no. 130d; Petrie 1914: 29, pl. XVI, no. 130d).



Figure 6. Two shell ornaments found in Burials B323 (UC10814) and B30 at Abadiyeh (Petrie and Mace 1901: pl. VII).

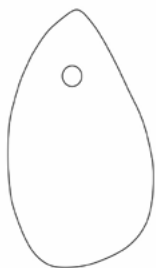


Figure 7. A shell ornament found in site debris at Abydos (adapted by author from Petrie 1902: pl. LI, no. 9).

In Lower Egypt, nine Predynastic ‘forehead ornaments’ were recorded by Petrie *et al.* (Figures 10 and 11; 1912: 23, pl. VI, no. 11; pl. VIII, nos 26–29) that come from individual burials at Gerzeh, though only five of these are pictured in the excavation report. These selected five ornaments were described by Petrie *et al.* (1912: 23) as exhibiting ‘new shapes’, as evident from the artefact found in Burial 33 (Figure 10, no. 26; Petrie *et al.* 1912: pl. VIII, no. 26). The ornaments found in Burials 30 and 110 at Gerzeh (Petrie *et al.* 1912: pl. VIII, nos 28–29) show more of a square shape than those from Upper Egypt, while the example from Burial 70 (Petrie *et al.* 1912: pl. VIII, no. 27) is notably wider at the upper end. Petrie *et al.* (1912: 24, pl. VIII, no. 28) suggested that the ornament from Burial 30 is ‘a

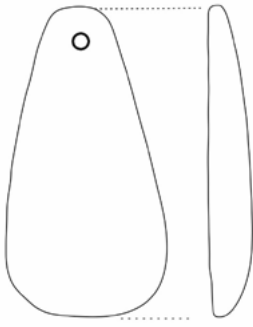


Figure 8. A shell ornament (BOLMG:1924.31.6) from Burial 3705 at Badari (adapted by author from Brunton and Caton-Thompson 1928: pl. LIV, no. 3)

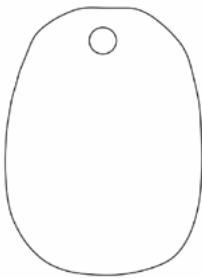


Figure 9. A shell ornament from Burial 3039 at Matmar (adapted by author from Brunton 1948: pl. XVI, no. 38).

broken one touched up for the use of the dead' and that it either did not have a perforation, or that the perforation was on the missing fragment. In Burial 81, Petrie *et al.* (1912: 23, pl. VI, no. 11) recorded that a shell pendant was found with a child who was positioned near the owner's head (Figure 11); notably, this ornament is similar to those found at Naqada. Petrie *et al.* (1912: 24) reported that all nine of the Gerzeh ornaments were 'never far from the head', although they admitted that 'there was no clue given as to their use'. The remaining four, unpictured ornaments were found in Burial 30 behind the head, in Burial 55 near the face, in Burial 72 behind the head, and in Burial 82 in front of the chin (Petrie *et al.* 1912: 24).

In addition to the ornaments recorded in excavation reports, the Petrie Museum holds four other unpublished 'forehead ornaments': UC4639, UC5663, UC52185, and UC52187. The former two were found at Naqada and documented as coming from Tomb T144, and Burial 1384, respectively. Petrie (1914: 29, pl. XVI, nos 130a, 130f, 130k, 130l and 130s) also published a further five artefacts (Figure 12), all unprovenanced and currently kept in the Petrie Museum: UC52182, UC52183, UC52184, UC52186, and UC26317. Objects UC52182, UC52183, and UC52184 (Figure 12, nos 130a, 130f and 130k) are typical in shape to those found across Predynastic sites in Egypt; however, objects UC52186 and UC26317 (Figure 12, nos 130l and 130s) are quite unique in their appearance. UC52186 (Figure 12, no. 130l)

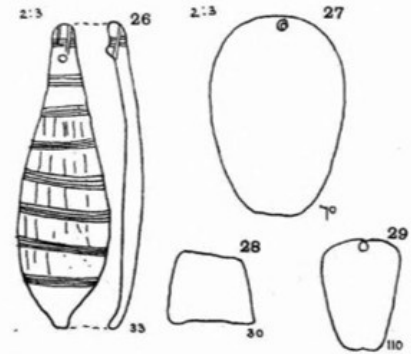


Figure 10. Four 'forehead ornaments' found at Gerzeh (Petrie *et al.* 1912: pl. VIII, nos 26–29).

features 17 drilled holes that could be either decorative, or extraction sites where circular pieces of shell were retrieved for use on other products, e.g. ornamental eye inlays. UC26317 (Figure 12, no. 130s) contains diagonal carvings, set in blocked columns, that Petrie (1914: 29) referred to as a 'basket pattern' and the ornament also has a turned-up hook at the lower end. The 'basket-style' diagonal carving on the Predynastic ornament (Figure 12, no. 130s) is comparable to the decoration on some of the southern Levantine examples; comparing with Levantine examples may shed more light on these artefacts, and on the possibility of cultural exchange between the two regions.

Comparisons with the southern Levant

In the southern Levant, several mollusc shell ornaments have been retrieved from various Chalcolithic sites, c. 4500–3500 BCE (Table 2; Figure 13), a time roughly corresponding to the Badarian, Naqada I and early Naqada II periods in Upper Egypt, and the Buto–Maadi culture in Lower Egypt.



Figure 11. A shell ornament found in Burial 81 at Gerzeh (Petrie *et al.* 1912: pl. VI, no. 11).

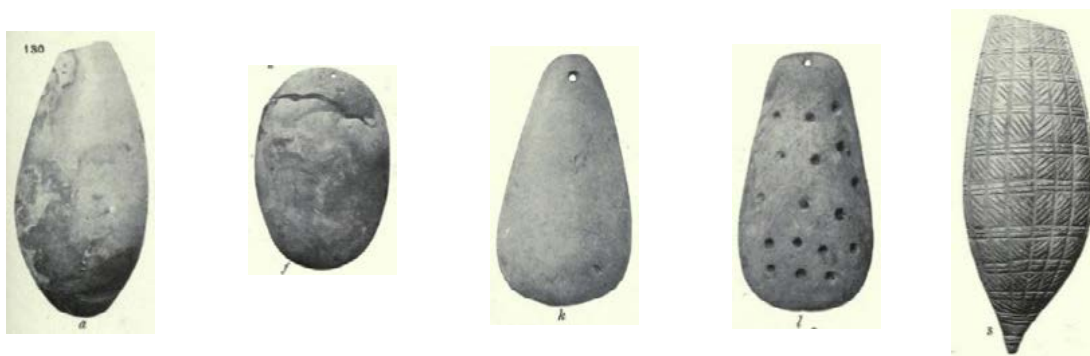


Figure 12. Five unprovenanced shell ornaments held in the Petrie Museum: 130a (UC52182), 130f (UC52183), 130k (UC52184), 130l (UC52186), and 130s (UC26317), and published in *Amulets* (Petrie 1914: 29, pl. XVI).

TABLE 2. STATISTICAL DATA SHOWING THE SITES FROM WHERE THE CHALCOLITHIC SHELL PENDANT HAS BEEN RETRIEVED IN THE SOUTHERN LEVANT (STATISTICS COMPILED BY THE AUTHOR)

Location	Total number of trapezoidal, and rectangular shaped ornaments	Number of trapezoidal, and rectangular shaped mollusc shell ornaments
Kissufim Road	15	15
Shiqmim	10	7
Tell Abu Matar	8	3
Ḥorvat Beter	3(?)	3
Naḥal Mishmar	3	3
Naḥal Shafan	6(?)	2
Teleilāt Ghassul	3	3
Gerar	7	0
	Grand Total: 55	Grand Total: 36

Nacreous shell ornaments have also been found as far north as Byblos in the Levant (Bar-Yosef Mayer 2002a: 129), although the main concentration of these objects comes from the Negev Desert. Southern Levantine examples are mostly rectangular or trapezoidal in shape (Figure 14; Bar-Yosef Mayer 2002a: 129). Given the difference in shape between the Egyptian and Levantine ornaments, comparative analyses have remained unexplored.

A preliminary study of 55 ornaments found in the southern Levant shows that 36 (65%) are made from mollusc shell. Among these 36 shell examples, 18 were probably crafted from either the Nilotic bivalve *Chambardia rubens* (previously known as *Aspatharia rubens*), or the Red Sea bivalve *Pinctada margaritifera*. Most of the 36 Levantine shell ornaments have a double perforation at the upper end of the object, except for two from Teleilāt Ghassul, showing a single perforation. A third ornament from Teleilāt Ghassul has no perforation at all, although perhaps it was not completed. One example from Kissufim Road in the northern Negev is stated to have three perforations, two at the upper end and one at the lower end, and it is possible that other Levantine ornaments may have had more than two perforations, particularly those that are fragmented. Around 15 of the Levantine ornaments

have either herringbone or diagonal style etchings, although a typological significance, if any, is yet to be determined (Bar-Yosef Mayer 2002b: 51).

A paper by archaeomalacologist Daniella Bar-Yosef Mayer (2002b) discusses 15 mother-of-pearl shell ornaments from Kissufim Road, all exhibiting a double, horizontally-aligned perforation at the upper end of the object. These examples represent the largest concentration of this type of artefact in the southern Levant. Their average length is around 3.6cm (Bar-Yosef Mayer 2002b: 51), some 3–5cm shorter than most Egyptian ornaments. Of the 15 Kissufim pendants, ten have either herringbone or diagonal style incisions that cover the entire object (Bar-Yosef Mayer 2002b: 49–51, fig. 7.1). As noted, these patterns are somewhat comparable to the etchings on the ‘bundle amulet’ discussed by Petrie (1914: 29, pl. XVI, no. 130s). Bar-Yosef Mayer (2002b: 51) suspects that most of the Kissufim shell pendants belong to the Nilotic species *Chambardia rubens* based on the common occurrence of this bivalve shell at other Chalcolithic sites. Four of the Kissufim examples are, however, identified by Bar-Yosef Mayer (2002b: 51) as crafted from the Red Sea pearl bivalve, *Pinctada margaritifera*. The Kissufim pendants come from bulldozed dumps at the site; however, given



Figure 13. A map of the southern Levant showing all the sites mentioned in the text (created by the author).

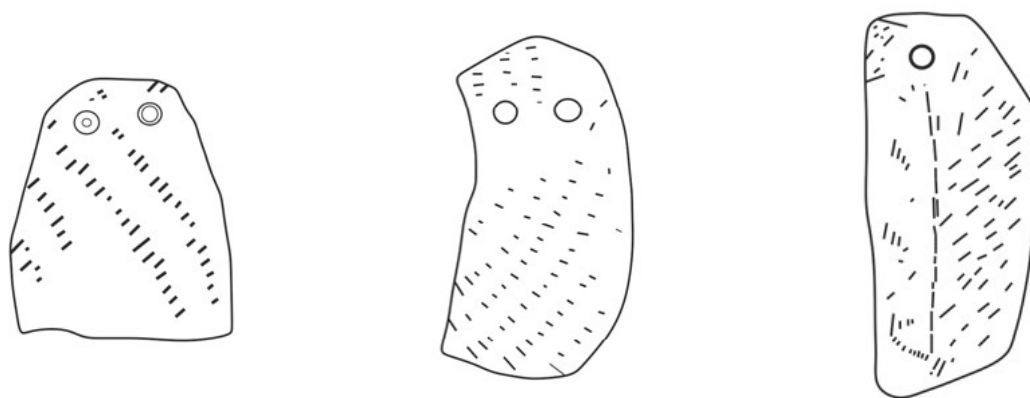


Figure 14. Three double perforated ornaments, with diagonal incised patterns, from Tell Abu Matar (adapted by author from Perrot 1955: fig. 20, nos 1, 6 and 7 left to right).

that skeletal remains and ossuaries were found in the same context, Bar-Yosef Mayer (2002b: 52) suggests that the ornaments were originally from burials.

At Shiqmim, in the northern Negev desert, Levy *et al.* (1987: 514–515, 668–669) record the finding of seven mother-of-pearl ornaments, two from the village and five from the cemetery. The shell ornaments from the village (Levy *et al.* 1987: 514–515, fig. 6.12, nos 1–2) are both trapezoidal, have a double perforation at the upper end, and do not bear any incised patterns. The five ornaments from the cemetery at Shiqmim are all trapezoidal except for two, which feature four perforations—two on the upper and lower ends—almost in a violin shape (Levy *et al.* 1987: 668–669, fig. 13.14, nos 3–4; Levy and Alon 1985: 80, fig. 4, no. 3). Another two ornaments have herringbone etchings (Levy *et al.* 1987: 668–669, fig. 13.14, no. 2; Levy and Alon 1985: 80, fig. 4, no. 2), while the remaining ornament from the cemetery is quite large compared to the others, and more rectangular in shape (Levy *et al.* 1987: 669, fig. 13.14, no. 11). The latter three ornaments each have a double perforation at the upper end of the object. Further north, at Tell Abu Matar, the shape and material of eight pendants found here is more variable than those found at Shiqmim (Perrot 1955: 171–172, fig. 20, nos 1–7, 10). Three of them are reportedly made from nacreous shell, and each have a double perforation and diagonal incisions (Figure 14; Perrot 1955: 171–172, fig. 20, nos 1, 6 and 7); of these, one is trapezoidal (Figure 14, no. 1), whilst the other two have a more elongated shape (Figure 14, nos 6–7). It is unclear as to whether the Tell Abu Matar shell ornaments were found in a domestic or funerary context.

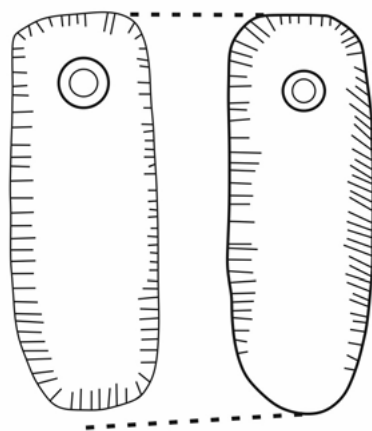


Figure 15. An ornament of unknown material, from Ḥorvat Beter (adapted by author from Dothan 1959: fig. 19, no. 29).

The data from Ḥorvat Beter near Beersheva in the northern Negev desert is difficult to assess although it seems that a total of three shell pendants were retrieved from this site (Bar-Yosef Mayer 2002b: 51). The first pendant is violin-shaped (Dothan 1959: pl. VII, no. 6) and is comparable to the violin-shaped artefact from Shiqmim (Levy *et al.* 1987: 668–669, fig. 13.14, nos 3–4; Levy and Alon 1985: 80, fig. 4, no. 3). Bar-Yosef Mayer (2002b: 51) states that a nacreous ornament, with a single perforation, was also present at Ḥorvat Beter; this may correspond to an object (Figure 15) published by Mosche Dothan (1959: 40, fig. 19, no. 29). The final ornament from Ḥorvat Beter (Figure 16) is rectangular rather than trapezoidal, has a smooth finish with no

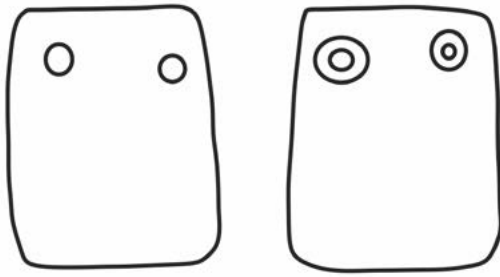


Figure 16. A rectangular Levantine ornament, from Ḥorvat Beter (adapted by author from Dothan 1959: fig. 11, no. 23).

incised patterns, and a double perforation at the upper end (Dothan 1959: 20, fig. 11, no. 23).

To the east of Beersheva at Naḥal Mishmar, the Cave of Treasure in the Judean Desert yielded three shell ornaments that are similar in shape to those found at Kissufim Road (Bar-Yosef Mayer 2002b: 51; Bar-Yosef Mayer *et al.* 2014: 270–271, fig. 4, nos 61–1129, 61–1130, 61–1134). As seen at Kissufim Road, Bar-Yosef Mayer *et al.* (2014: 270) observe that the Naḥal Mishmar ornaments were made either from the Nilotic *Chambardia rubens* or the Red Sea *Pinctada*

margaritifera. In contrast, they are somewhat smaller (Bar-Yosef Mayer 2002b: 51; Bar-Yosef Mayer *et al.* 2014: 271) than those found at Kissufim Road, and each one is polished smooth with no incised patterns. Nonetheless, they feature a double perforation at the upper end that is diagonally aligned. Another cave in the Judean Desert at Naḥal Shafan, known as Cave 49, produced a group of six, doubly perforated ornaments (Aharoni 1961: 14, pl. 8, C) comparable to the Kissufim Road examples (Bar-Yosef Mayer *et al.* 2014: 271). The excavator, Yohanan Aharoni (1961: 14), did not specify how many of the Naḥal Shafan examples were made of mollusc shell, although Bar-Yosef Mayer *et al.* (2014: 271) point out that two ornaments from this group have diagonal incisions like some of the examples at Kissufim Road.

At Teleilāt Ghassul, several nacreous shell ornaments were recorded by Mallon *et al.* (1934: 80–82, figs 32–33) yet these do not resemble the trapezoidal, or rectangular, examples from Kissufim Road (Bar-Yosef Mayer 2002b: 52). Most of the Teleilāt Ghassul shell examples were described by the authors as pectoral adornments, rather than ornaments (Mallon *et al.* 1934: 80–82, , fig. 32 [nos 10, 13, 17, 20, and 25], fig. 33 [nos 2–4, 7, 16, 19–20] and these artefacts appear to belong to an entirely different object category. Three other shell artefacts from Teleilāt Ghassul (Mallon *et al.* 1934: 80, fig. 32, nos 3, 26 and 30) appear to better fit in the Levantine shell ornament group although, interestingly, two of these resemble more closely the ancient Egyptian ‘forehead ornaments’ than the Levantine examples (Figure 17, nos 26 and 30). Particularly one of these examples (Figure 17, no. 30) has an oval shape, a single perforation at the upper end (Mallon *et al.* 1934: 80, fig. 32, no. 30) and the shape typical for most examples found at Naqada, Abydos, Badari, Matmar, and Gerzeh in Egypt. The other Teleilāt Ghassul shell ornament (Figure 17, no. 26) is larger and does not have a perforation (Mallon *et al.* 1934: 80, fig. 32, no. 26); this artefact has a close resemblance to the ornament from Burial 1007 at Naqada (Figure 5, no. 130e) now held in the Petrie Museum (UC4489; Petrie 1914: 29, pl.

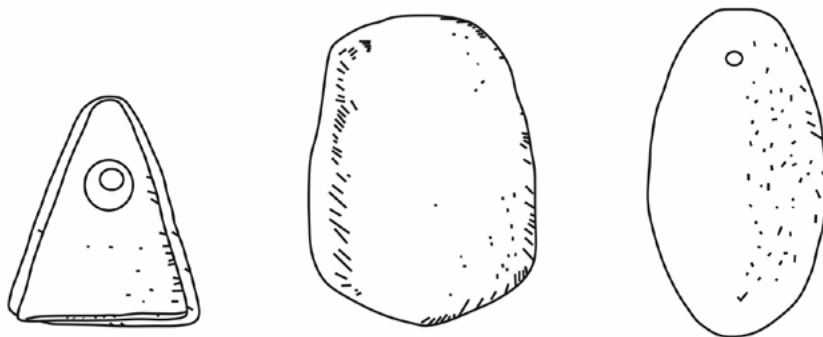


Figure 17. Three shell ornaments from Teleilāt Ghassul (adapted by author from Mallon *et al.* 1934: fig. 32, nos 3, 26 and 30 left to right).

XVI, no. 130e). Three further ornaments, from Teleilāt Ghassul, but made from hematite, nephrite, and limestone (Mallon *et al.* 1934: 82, fig. 33, nos 6, 15 and 17) also display a single perforation and a teardrop shape comparable to Egyptian examples.

Discussion

In Predynastic Egypt, all shell ‘forehead ornaments’ come from non-elite, individual burials except for one (Figure 7) found amongst site debris in a settlement near the Temenos of Osiris at Abydos (Petrie 1902: pl. LI, no. 9). As such, these ornaments likely served as funerary goods that were either positioned on the deceased or placed alongside them in the burial. Whether these ornaments were used in the living world and then later interred for use in the afterlife is more difficult to ascertain; however, given the practical nature of most other Predynastic funerary goods, i.e. pottery, fishhooks, hair combs, cosmetic palettes, flint implements etc., it is reasonable to suppose that the ‘forehead ornament’ was used as a personal object in everyday life before serving as burial equipment. It is also challenging to confirm whether the ‘forehead ornament’ was predominantly used by males, females, children or the elderly. Burial 81 at Gerzeh, which contains an adult and a child, is the only instance where Petrie *et al.* (1912: 23) give an indication of the age of the deceased. However, the Gerzeh ornament (Figure 11) was allegedly found alongside a child ‘who was positioned near the owner’s head’ (Petrie *et al.* 1912: 23), which makes it unclear as to whether the ornament was intended to be a provision for the child, the adult, or both occupants.

The interpretation of these objects as ‘forehead ornaments’ (Petrie 1901: 22, 1914: 2, 1920: 41; Petrie and Quibell 1896: 47) is also problematic due to a lack of supporting evidence. Given that these artefacts were found mostly near the head of the deceased and have an inner curvature that appears to fit the bridge of the nose, it is easy to see the reasoning behind this explanation. However, it seems that these unique artefacts were overlooked and classifying them as ‘forehead ornaments’ provided a convenient and relatively plausible interpretation for a seemingly otherwise unexplainable object. Petrie *et al.* (1912: 24) admitted that ‘there was no clue given as to their use’, yet this admission did not interfere with the continued description of these objects as forehead ornamentation. However, had these artefacts indeed been worn upon the forehead, they would have required further headgear from which to be suspended, no evidence of which is recorded in Predynastic burials. Furthermore, those ornaments with a turned-up hook which supposedly held a face veil, would have needed a counterweight of some form to prevent the ornament and veil from sliding down the face, similarly unattested. The recurrence of the ‘forehead ornament’ near the head of the deceased does point towards an association with the upper body, and the perforation on each artefact indicates that they were intended to be strung in one way or another. However, whether these ornaments were suspended on a thread in the form of a pendant, or sewn onto garments, remains to be seen, just like whether the ornament was threaded alone or grouped with other perforated objects.

The symbolic value of mollusc shells in ancient Egypt requires further research, although one species in particular has the potential to reveal a facet of the perceived magical quality of shell as a raw material. The common *Cypraea* shell, or cowry, was used by the ancient Egyptians throughout the Pharaonic Period and the amuletic value of this species is a popular topic amongst scholars of various academic disciplines. The resemblance of the cowry aperture, or even its simple shape, to a ‘half-open, half-closed human eye’ has been observed by many ancient and modern cultures. Similarly, its perceived prophylactic ability to ward off the ‘evil-eye’ is attested by various amulets and ornaments in ancient Egypt and beyond, e.g. the Jericho modelled skulls with cowry inlays (Kovács 2008: 24–35). The association between cowry shells and the ‘evil-eye’ was well-known in the early 20th century (i.e. Jackson 1917: 140) and is possibly the reason why Petrie assigned (1914: 2) an amuletic value to ‘forehead ornaments’. However, while this correlation should not be wholly

discredited, it is problematic as the shell species used to craft the Predynastic ‘forehead ornament’ has not yet been identified, and the body placement and function of these objects remains obscure.

In fact, ‘forehead ornaments’ were most certainly not crafted from cowry shells; their shape, size, and nacreous quality suggests that they were made from large bivalve shells that were either sourced from the Nile or the Red Sea. The amuletic value, if any, of bivalve shells in Predynastic Egypt requires further research although their practical use is evident from burials, where they frequently appear, unworked, in the form of cosmetic palettes, fish (?) scrapers, and food provisions for the afterlife. The presence of unworked bivalves in Predynastic burials suggests that the ‘forehead ornament’ was most likely manufactured in Egypt; the availability of Nilotic shells probably removed a necessity to import the raw material. However, given their exotic nature, Red Sea sourced bivalves would have been particularly appreciated in Predynastic Egypt and their amuletic value may have been different to those sourced from the Nile. The predominance of mollusc shell as the seemingly preferred material for the ‘forehead ornament’ could either be related to a perceived magical quality or simply reflect resource availability along the Nile Valley. Most Predynastic ornaments were probably crafted from locally sourced shells, with a few made from more distantly sourced shells.

The trapezoidal and rectangular shell ornaments found in the southern Levant have been identified as predominantly made from the Nilotic *Chambardia rubens* and, in fewer cases, the Red Sea *Pinctada margaritifera*. Bar-Yosef Mayer (2002a: 52) points out that during the Predynastic Period, the Pelusian branch of the Nile extended across the northern Sinai, allowing faunal migration between the Nile and Levantine rivers (see Tchernov 1988). As such, *Chambardia rubens* is likely to have been native in the Levant, making it relatively easy to access from the northern quarters of the Negev Desert. On the other hand, *Pinctada margaritifera* would have been more difficult to obtain and this Red Sea bivalve could be a marker of long-distant trade through the Sinai Peninsula. Fragments or complete bivalves of *Chambardia rubens* have been found at various Chalcolithic sites in the Levant including Tell Abu Matar (Perrot 1955: 84), Horvat Beter (Dothan 1959: 31), Teleilat Ghassul (Lee 1973: 307), and Gerar (Bar-Yosef Mayer 1995: 454). At Teleilat Ghassul, fragments of both *Chambardia rubens* and *Pinctada margaritifera* are present, prompting Lee (1973: 314) to suggest that nacreous pendants were produced at the site. Fragments of both shells were also found at Gerar (Bar-Yosef Mayer 1995: 454), although complete trapezoidal shells pendants were not evident here; however, seven trapezoidal pendants, made from other materials, were found (Table 2). As such, Bar-Yosef Mayer (2002b: 52) suggests that trapezoidal pendants were produced at specific locations in the southern Levant, such as Gerar, and sent to other sites on demand.

Trapezoidal, rectangular ornaments are the most common style of mother-of-pearl artefacts in the southern Levant prompting Bar-Yosef Mayer (2002: 129) to define them as one of the ‘hallmarks of Chalcolithic material culture in Israel’. However, it is unclear if they carried amuletic significance. Unlike for Egypt, scholars have not proposed explanations of the function of Levantine ornaments, although their perforations indicate that they were intended to be either strung as an adornment or sewn on to garments. Similarly, it is unclear whether the Levantine pendants were threaded alone or alongside other perforated objects, although Aharoni (1961: 14)

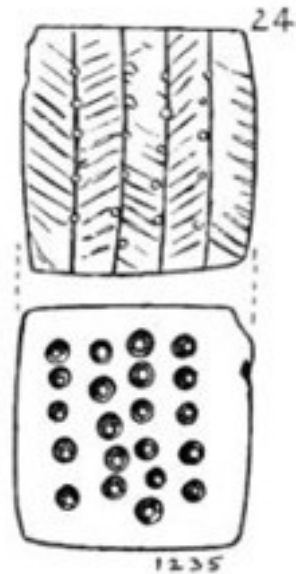


Figure 18. An ivory pendant from burial 1235 at Naqada (Petrie and Quibell 1896: pl. LXII, no. 24).

reported that the ornaments from Cave 49 at Nahal Shafan were found together, indicating that they were strung together on a cord for ornamental purposes.

Bar-Yosef Mayer (2002a: 130) notes that the Levantine style of ornament is not archaeologically attested in Predynastic Egypt. However, an ivory pendant found in Burial 1235 at Naqada (Figure 18) appears to be an interesting amalgamation between the Egyptian ornament with drilled holes (Figure 12, no. 130l), the ornament with a basket pattern (Figure 12, no. 130s), and the incised ornaments from the southern Levant. The ivory pendant is square, exhibits 21 drilled holes that appear to penetrate both the obverse and reverse sides, and contains diagonal carvings that are arranged in vertical columns. In turn, examples of the Egyptian ‘forehead ornament’ are not recorded in the southern Levant except for one, with single perforation at the upper end, found at Teleilat Ghassul (Figure 17, no. 30). Given the wide range of shaped pendants at Teleilat Ghassul, the latter was most likely produced on site and the shape might be unintentionally like those made in Egypt.

Conclusion

The function, and bodily placement, of the Egyptian Predynastic ‘forehead ornament’ remains unknown, yet it is unlikely that those with a turned-up hook held a face veil. This conclusion is reached by the absence of supporting evidence from Predynastic burials, and pictorial and written evidence from later periods. The location of these artefacts near the head of the deceased suggests that they may have been associated, or worn, on the upper body and the perforation shows that they were intended to be threaded. The shell species used to produce these Predynastic ornaments is currently unidentified; however, isotopic analysis and formal conchological identification have potential to reveal the taxonomic identity. The shape, size, and nacreous quality of the ornaments strongly suggests that they were created from bivalve shells predominantly sourced from the Nile, and in fewer cases from the Red Sea. The concaved shape of certain ornaments reflects the natural curvature of the utilised bivalve shell and does not necessarily indicate that the object was worn on the face. Whether the ornaments served solely as funerary goods is difficult to determine although it seems likely, based on the practical nature of other Predynastic grave goods, that the objects were first used in everyday life.

The gendered use of these ornaments is currently unknown and the ages of the people they were interred with remains unclear. The amuletic value of the ‘forehead ornaments’ is also difficult to ascertain, an investigation limited by the absence of species identification. More research is required on the perceived prophylactic qualities of bivalve shells in ancient Egypt; the exotic nature of shells from the Red Sea may have amplified any perceived magical qualities and this was likely to have been heightened by larger specimens.

The shell ornaments from the southern Levant are an entirely different shape to the Predynastic examples in Egypt, and their function and amuletic value are just equally as obscure. Despite this, the manufacture of these objects shows an exploitation of aquatic resources as well as a sophisticated craftsmanship required to create perforations and carvings without fracturing the delicate shell. It is likely that *Chambardia rubens*, which was used to produce most Levantine ornaments, was sourced from local rivers in the southern Levant, while obtaining the Red Sea *Pinctada margaritifera* demanded more effort.

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The Eldest Sons of Re. Reconsidering a Royal Title

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Abstract

The title  has been interpreted as an erroneous spelling of either *z3-njswt* or *z3-rʿw*, or as a title for a designated coregent (*z3-njswt/rʿw*). In this contribution, the known attestations of this title are collected and a new reading as *njswt z3-rʿw* (and  as *njswt z3-rʿw-sms.w*) is proposed. Among the title bearers is the famous king named *nhs.j*, who is differentiated from another title bearer with a similar yet distinctive name *nh.jj*. For this purpose, different spellings of the name *nhs.j* and a comparison with the name *nh.jj* are presented.

Keywords

Second Intermediate Period; 14th Dynasty; Royal Title; *nhs.j*

Introduction

The scarcity of material associated with the 14th dynasty leaves many uncertainties. They were often described as small Hyksos,¹ or a vassal state of the Hyksos (i.e. the 15th dynasty). However, this is not deduced from known sources, but rather assumed due to their absence (Ryholt 1997: 323–325).

In the Manethonian tradition, 76 kings are associated with the 14th dynasty, ruling for a total of 184 years (Waddell 1964: 74–75). These kings may, furthermore, be found in the Royal Canon of Turin (cf. Farina 1938; Gardiner 1959; Ryholt 2022), a Ramesside list of kings which groups the rulers approximately according to the dynastic division found in the Manethonian tradition. Contrary to other king lists of the Ramesside Period, the Royal Canon of Turin also includes the kings and rulers of the Intermediate periods and is therefore considered to be less ideologically shaped compared to other lists. In this papyrus, at least 46 and up to 59 kings are mentioned who are attributable to the 14th dynasty.² Among the named kings in this source, only nine can be identified with individuals who are known from contemporaneous sources. Among the contemporaneous sources are 13 kings who are only attested by scarabs, other seals, or seal impressions (Ryholt 1997: 359–383). Although this image does not necessarily differ from the later 15th dynasty (Ryholt 1997: 359–388), the Hyksos, the latter are considered to be more powerful and a greater opponent to the Theban kingdom(s) compared to the 14th dynasty. This perception appears to be linked with the sources associated with the 14th dynasty. Most of them are scarabs and do not allow for far-reaching conclusions. On the contrary, some rulers of the 15th dynasty are also known from sources of the victorious 17th dynasty

¹ E.g. Stock (1942: 67), von Beckerath (1965: 112). It is noteworthy that the kings identified by them with the 16th dynasty are understood to belong to the 14th dynasty following the argumentation by Ryholt (1997).

² The kings from col. 8 [l. 28] to col. 10 [l. 15] are usually associated with the 14th dynasty; cf. *inter alia* Allen 2010: 8–9. Although most dynasties in this papyrus are preceded by an introduction line and followed by a summation line, Ryholt (2004: 140) only reconstructs a summation line but no introduction line separating the 13th and 14th dynasty. As a long lacuna may be found between the 13th and 14th dynasty (i.e. col. 8 [l. 15–27]), I propose to reconstruct the division of these two dynasties at this position. This would allow for an introduction line for the 14th dynasty, while nothing speaks against such a position of the division. Therefore, the kings in lines 15 to 27 of this column may still be part of the 14th dynasty and not the 13th dynasty (*contra inter alia* Ryholt 1997: 73–74, tab. 18). A further discussion of the 14th dynasty including their section in the Royal Canon of Turin will be published in Posch (submitted a).

and subsequent kings.³ Although scarce, the sources of the kings associated with the 14th dynasty may reveal more about their own perceived power than was hitherto thought.

In the contemporaneous mentions of kings associated with the 14th dynasty, the title  or  occurs, which is otherwise unknown. Whereas most Egyptologists consider this title to be an erroneous spelling combining the titles *z3-rw* and *z3-njswt* (cf. Allen *et al.* 1999: 62; Beckerath 1965: 138; Ben-Tor 2007: 110, 2010: 104; Stock 1942: 67; Tufnell 1984: 170; Ward 1976: 363), K. Ryholt (1997: 59) has suggested to read '*z3-njswt/rw*' and assumes that this title may be a designation of an *heir apparent* as coregent during the 14th dynasty. According to him, the inclusion of *z3-njswt* into the title may point to the 'junior-status' of the young coregent, whereas *z3-rw* points towards his status as a ruling king.

Attestations of the title / on scarabs

Among scarabs usually attributed to the 14th dynasty,⁴ at least 14 (or possibly 15) examples bear this title (Figure 1).

Another scarab from Nubia may also belong to this corpus (cf. Firth 1912: 27, 29, and pl. 42 [44]). According to the excavator, the name *jppj* is readable on this scarab. This cannot be verified with the published photograph as the quality is unfortunately not sufficient for such a reading. Several characteristics suggest that the person mentioned on this scarab was royal: The name is encircled with a cartouche and followed by *ḏj(.w) nḥ*. While cartouches are also known for royal offspring from the Middle Kingdom onwards,⁵ male royal offspring are not attested with a cartouche before the New Kingdom, which would make this attestation the earliest example of such a phenomenon. The epithet *ḏj(.w) nḥ* is an exclusively royal attribute (Murnane 1977: 267–269), which remains so at least until the beginning of the New Kingdom.⁶ Just before the cartouche, the title , *z3-njswt*, is readable and suggests that this person may be nevertheless identified as a king's son. However, it is possible, though not clearly visible, that a sun disk  (N5) may be read above the sign  (G39),⁷ which would allow for the reading of the title  on this object as well.

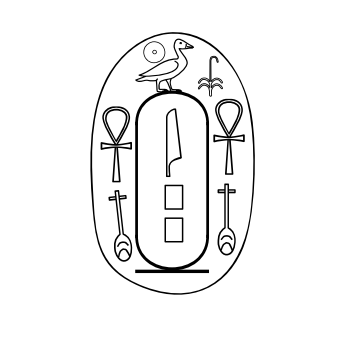
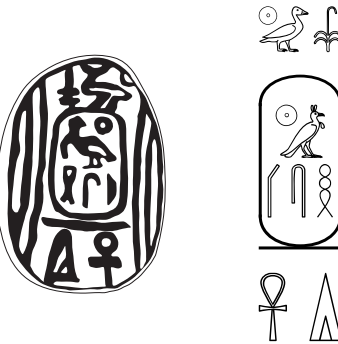
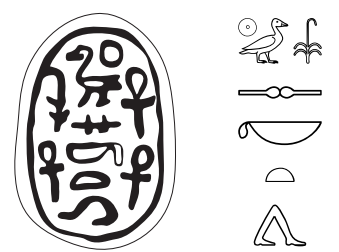
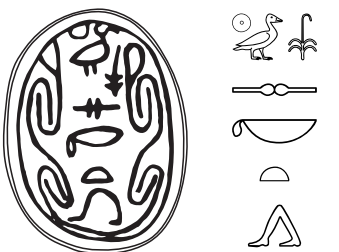
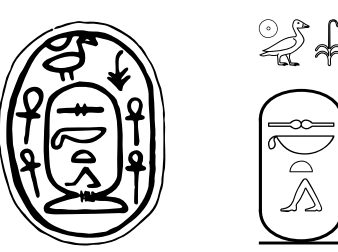
³ For an overview on the gradual vilification of the Hyksos in later times, see Peirce (2024).

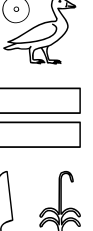
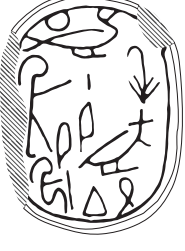
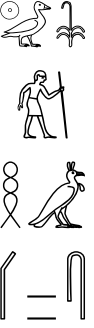
⁴ For the scarabs attributable to the 14th and 15th dynasty, see most recently Ilin-Tomich (2023: 320–374, tab. 48). As the characteristics on the scarabs allow for no clear separation of rulers from these two dynasties, A. Ilin-Tomich opts not to divide them. I suggest that only those rulers with the title *ḥq3-ḥs.wt* and *3-wsr-rw jppj* may be identified as 15th dynasty rulers (see similarly already Ryholt 1997: 123–125), while the rest of them can be associated with the 14th dynasty. The title *ḥq3-ḥs.wt* is transmitted as 'Υκσώς in the Manethonian tradition and mentioned in the Royal Canon of Turin for six rulers each. Contemporaneous sources show exactly five individuals with this title. Although *3-wsr-rw jppj* is not known as a *ḥq3-ḥs.wt*, his mention in the second Kamose stela leaves no doubt about his association with the 15th dynasty. For *ḥ3-mw-dj*, see Posch (submitted b).

⁵ The first royal offspring to receive a cartouche enclosing her name is the king's daughter *nfr.w-ptḥ* dating to the reign of Amenemhat III; cf. Farag and Iskander (1971: *passim*). However, king's sons are not known to receive a cartouche before the New Kingdom; see, with further references, Dietrich (2022: 100, n. 62).

⁶ For an attestation of the early New Kingdom, see Dietrich (2022: 103). For a possible earlier attestation, see n. 8 below.

⁷ One may further wonder if the sign  (N5) was mistakenly not written. A similar scenario may be observed on the scarab Fribourg, Bible + Orient Museum AS1983.127 (<http://www.bible-orient-museum.ch/bodo/details.php?bomid=2498> [last accessed: 06/12/2023]) of king ššj.

 inverted  (M23); i.e. 		
 Oxford, Ashmolean Museum 1933.93 (XIX); drawing after Tufnel 1984: pl. LXII [3471]	 Basel cat. 134; drawing after Hornung & Staehelin 1976: 217 [cat. 134 (XIX)]	
not inverted  (M 23); i.e. 		
 Berlin, Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung ÄM32721 = 325/73; drawing after Kaplony 2016: pl. 29 [no. 552]	 Berlin, Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung ÄM32729; Schematic reproduction	 Berlin, Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung ÄM32298; drawing after Kaplony 2016: pl. 25 [no. 498]
 Berlin, Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung ÄM32687 = 291/73 drawing after Kaplony 2016: pl. 28 [no. 535]	 London, British Museum EA37668; drawing after Ward 1976: 369, fig. 2 [no. 54]	 Drawing after Ward 1976: 369, fig. 2 [no. 55] ^a

  Jerusalem, Israel Museum 76.31.3896; drawing after https://www.imj.org.il/en/collections/598450-0; (last accessed: 30/10/2024)^b	  Fribourg, Bibel + Orient Museum ÄS1983.138 © Foundation BIBLE+ORIENT, Fribourg Switzerland	
		
inverted ⲙ (M23); i.e. ⲙⲓⲛⲓ		
  London, Petrie Museum UC11590; drawing after Tufnell 1984: pl. LXII [3473]	  drawing after Dunham and Janssen 1960: fig. 54	  Berlin Ägyptisches Museum 32683 = 287/73; drawing after Kaplony 2016: pl. 30 [no. 561]
  Cairo, Egyptian Museum JE72857; drawing after Martin 1971: 65 [no. 790] and pl. 42A [28]		

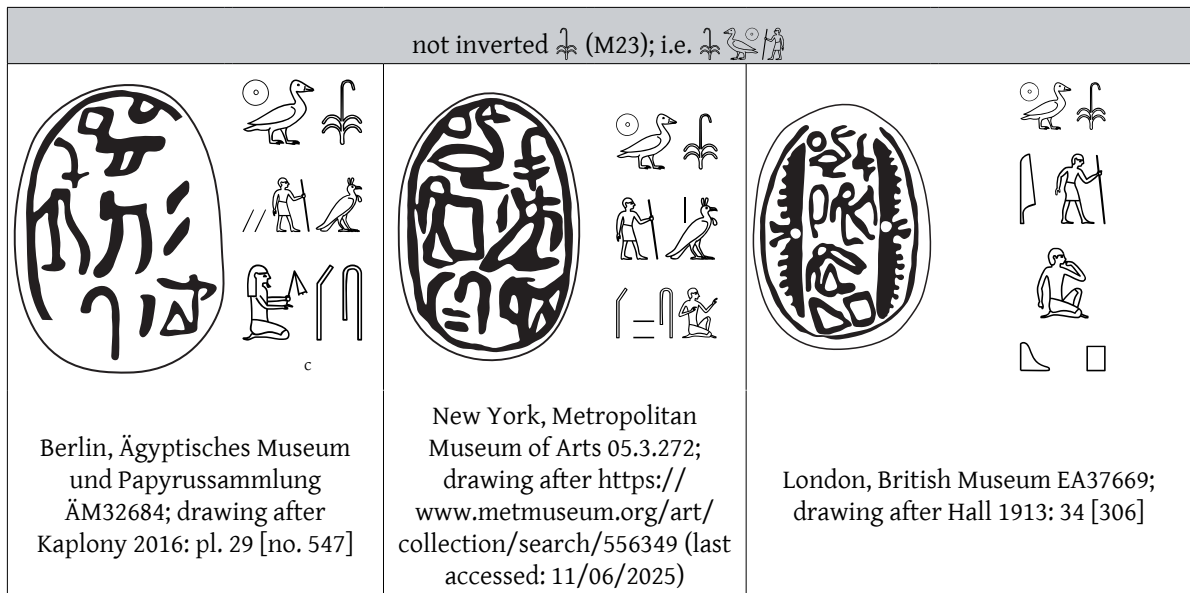


Figure 1. Collection of scarabs with the title ꜥꜥꜥꜥ or ꜥꜥꜥꜥꜥꜥ. The orientation of the signs follows the seal and not the seal impressions.

Comments to Figure 1:

a: Scarab Ward 1976: 369, fig. 2 [no. 55] is perhaps identical with the scarab Jerusalem, Israel Museum 76.31.3896.

b: One may wonder if this scarab is the same as Ward (1976: 369, fig. 2 [no. 55]).

c: In his notes, Kaplony (2016: 164–165) suggested a reading ‘zꜥ-njswt-Rꜥ/Rmqḥ (?) (zꜥ-njswt-Rꜥ als Kgs.titel [Königstitel] verzetteln)’ or ‘zꜥ-njswt-Rꜥ/Rmqḥ (?) Rmqḥ (?) (r)d-nḥ/’. Also Ilin-Tomich (2023: 379, tab. 49) reads the name nḥs.j.

Different observations on this group of inscriptions may be made:

- In both variations of the title, the sign ꜥ (M23) is sometimes oriented towards ꜥꜥꜥꜥ.
- The sun disk ☉ (N5) in ꜥꜥꜥꜥ is often very close to the border of the encircling decoration and thus sometimes only showing half of the sign.
- The title bearers of ꜥꜥꜥꜥ show further royal attributes such as cartouches and the epithet *dj(w) nḥ*.⁸
- Apart from one exception, the attestations with the title ꜥꜥꜥꜥꜥꜥ do not show variations with a cartouche or other royal attributes. An exception to this is London, Petrie Museum UC11590, which has the epithet *dj(w) nḥ* after the mentioned name nḥ.jj.

The omission of royal attributes such as cartouches and epithets may be explained by the space available. The addition of ꜥꜥ (A21A) to the title ꜥꜥꜥꜥ necessitates another (half)square of space, which does not leave much room after the writing of the individual’s name for an epithet. The resulting layout of signs makes it more complicated to encircle the name of the kings with a

⁸ However, one may note that few examples of individuals with the title zꜥ-njswt-smꜥ.w show the epithet *dj(w) nḥ*; e.g. New York, Brooklyn Museum 44.123.91 (<https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/objects/56747> [last accessed: 12/06/2025]).

cartouche. All these problems may have been solved by increasing the size of the scarabs marginally, which leaves the question of whether another explanation may be sought.

In this corpus, four individuals (*jppj*, *nhs.j*, *ššj*, and *z-k-t*) are known to bear the title ⁹ and two individuals (*jpq* and *nhs.j*) bear the other title ¹⁰. Among them, *nhs.j* displays a remarkable variety of spellings,¹¹ which deserve a more detailed discussion.

Excursus: The name of *nhs.j* and other reading options

Besides the name *nhs.j* ('the Nubian', cf. Wb 2: 303.3–7; TLA WCN 86650),¹² a second name, *nh.jj* ('the desired one', cf. Wb 2: 288.11–289.10; TLA WCN 86050; Faulkner 1962: 136; Wilson 1997: 531) is known,¹³ which is written with a similar orthography.¹⁴

TABLE 1: OVERVIEW OF THE DIFFERENT WRITINGS FOR THE NAMES *nh.jj* AND *nhs.j*

<i>nh.jj</i> 'the desired one'		<i>nhs.j</i> 'the Nubian'	
			
			
			
			
			
			
			
			

A differentiation between the two names is only possible as *nhs.j* is either written with the  (S29) or  (T14) sign, or both. Considering both signs are not included in the personal name written on scarabs Oxford, Ashmolean Museum 1933.93 and London, Petrie Museum UC11590, both objects are therefore not attributable to *nhs.j*, but may be associated with one (or two) otherwise unknown king(s) named *nh.jj*,¹⁵ if the division of both names solely based on orthography is possible and correct.

⁹ On the meaning of *z-k-t*, see Schneider 1998: 138–139.

¹⁰ Following the conclusions from the excursus below, this would add up to five individuals for the title  and three individuals with the title . See also Table 2 below.

¹¹ Besides the scarabs clearly spelling the name *nhs.j*, Oxford, Ashmolean Museum 1933.93 and London, Petrie Museum UC 11590 are also usually attributed to this individual; cf. Ryholt 1997: 377 [File 14/6 (7)].

¹² On this name, see also Bietak 1984: 72, n. 42, with further references.

¹³ Contrary to Scheele-Schweitzer (2014: 497, no. 2098), who interprets this name in the Old Kingdom as a hypocorism with *#nh-*. Ranke (1935: 207.10–11, with n. 1) hypothesised that *nh*, 'the pleading one', and *nh.jj*, 'the begged one', may be short names of the sun god; cf. Budde *et al.* 2002: 270–271. I would like to thank Roman Gundacker for this hint.

¹⁴ For the different individuals with the name *nh.jj*, see <https://pnm.uni-mainz.de/5/name/2771> (last accessed 25/10/2024); for *nhs.j*, see <https://pnm.uni-mainz.de/5/name/628> (last accessed 25/10/2024).

¹⁵ A similar name (i.e. *nh.jtt*) has been suggested for a royal wife attested from a scarab found in phase D/3 of Tell el-Dab'a; cf. Bietak 2022: 264, fig. 22. The same individual is also known from another scarab (Berlin, Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung ÄM32715 = 319/73; Kaplony 2016: pl. 31, no. 593; cf. Siesse 2016: 246). It is noteworthy to mention that

finis excursus

A (new) reading of /

The title *njswt* is usually spelled . However, orthographic variants include  / , e.g. in the title *njswt-bjt* (i.e. ), as well as  (cf. Wb 2: 325).¹⁶ The title  may, therefore, simply be read *njswt z3-rw*¹⁷ and be a short writing for a combination of the most common titles of an ancient Egyptian king.¹⁸ Although one may also read *z3-rw njswt*, the subsequent birth name, which is otherwise mainly linked with the title *z3-rw*, suggests that the order of reading is preferably *njswt z3-rw*, positioning *z3-rw* as close as possible to the following birth name.¹⁹

Accordingly, the title  may be read *njswt z3-rw-sms.w*. A title *z3-rw-sms.w*, ‘Eldest Son of Re’ is otherwise unknown, but *sms.w* may be seen as a similar addition to *z3-rw* as *n(j)-t3f*. This may further parallel the use of titles such as *z3-njswt* ‘King’s Son’ (cf. Wb 2: 326; TLA WCN 450223; Hardekopf 2022: 93–94; Jones 2000: 799, no. 2911; Schmitz 1976), which may also be extended by qualifications such as *z3-njswt-n(j)-h.t3f*, ‘King’s Son of his Body’ (cf. Schmitz 1976: 65–79; TLA WCN 852514), or *z3-njswt-sms.w*, ‘Eldest King’s Son’ (cf. Gardiner 1947: 20* [75]; Hardekopf 2022: 97–98 and 101–108).

During a period with several kings claiming the Egyptian monarchical title *z3-rw*, it seems plausible that a title *z3-rw-sms.w* may have been introduced to imply a seniority over other claimants, or at least to distinguish oneself from the others.²⁰ As Heliopolis, the main temple of the god Re, was most likely within the territory of the 14th dynasty,²¹ such a claim may have been based on a special connection to this god via this temple.

The scarabs bearing these titles can be associated with a few individuals (see Table 2) and the question arises whether these kings ruled in close temporal proximity to each other.

the two assumed  (M17) on the scarab from Tell el-Dab’a are written similar to the sign  (Q3), probably missing a vertical stroke on one side of the sign.

¹⁶ This writing is often used if another title includes the word *njswt*; e.g. *hm.t-njswt* or *jm.j-r3-pr-njswt* etc.

¹⁷ Such a reading would further suggest that the title on the scarab from Nubia discussed above may also be interpreted as *njswt z3-rw*, as this would explain the otherwise unknown royal attributes during this period.

¹⁸ For an example of such a combination from the Second Intermediate Period, see the coffin of Kamose (Daressy 1908: 62). One wonders if scarab Berlin, Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung ÄM32730 = 334/73 (Ilin-Tomich 2023: 322, tab. 48) shows a more elaborate version of this abbreviated title writing *njswt-bjt z3-rw* (); according to a photograph of the museum).

¹⁹ If the order would be *z3-rw njswt*, one would rather expect a subsequent throne name.

²⁰ It is furthermore noticeable that other rather uncommon titles and combinations of titles were introduced to scarabs during this time, just to disappear soon afterwards; e.g. *nfr njswt-bjtj* (Newberry 1913: pl. XXX, no. 6), *nfr-njswt* (New York, Metropolitan Museum of Arts 15.171; <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/545722> [last accessed: 12/06/2025]), *nfr-rw* (Berlin, Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung VÄGM1982/015, cf. Ilin-Tomich 2023: 328, tab. 48). The reading of this title on another scarab mentioned by Ilin-Tomich (2023: 328, tab. 48) cannot be verified as the published scarab (Newberry 1914: pl. X [il]) does read  *z3-rw 3-mw dj(.w)-nh*.

²¹ While the 16th dynasty is not attested further north than the Abydene region (cf. Ilin-Tomich 2014: 167), a source of much later date may point towards the 14th dynasty’s territory spanning at least until Heliopolis. A genealogy of Memphite priests from the 22nd dynasty (Berlin, Ägyptisches Museum 23673; see, with further literature, Jurman 2020: 1019, Cat. N-O29) also names kings of the Second Intermediate Period, which are to be identified with 14th dynasty kings (i.e. at least *3bjj* and *3-qn*). A discussion of this inscription concerning the Second Intermediate Period is found in Posch (submitted a). This suggests that Heliopolis, at least for some time in the Second Intermediate Period, belonged to the sphere of influence of the 14th dynasty; cf. Bietak 2022: 236, who argued recently that at least parts of Middle Egypt were under the control of this dynasty. This is further suggested by the plundering of the Memphite necropolis assumed to date during the 14th dynasty (cf. Bietak 2022: 245), which is hardly explainable if they had not extensive access to this territory. *Contra inter alia* Ryholt (1997: 103), who assumes the southern border on the latitude of Athribis in the Western Delta and Bubastis in the Eastern Delta. Other researchers assume that the territory in question was controlled by the 15th dynasty based on the descriptions of the Kamose Stela; e.g. Ilin-Tomich (2014: 166–167) and Wegner and Cahail (2021: 363, fig. 14.12).

TABLE 2: OVERVIEW OF KINGS WITH THE TITLES *njswt z3-r(-sms.w)*

King	Title	Object
<i>nh</i> (= <i>nh.jj</i> ?)	<i>njswt z3-rw</i>	Oxford, Ashmolean Museum 1933.93 (XIX); Basel cat. 134
<i>nh.jj</i>	<i>njswt z3-rw-sms.w</i>	London, Petrie Museum UC11590
<i>nh.sj</i>	<i>njswt z3-rw</i>	Berlin, Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung ÄM32298; Dunham & Janssen fig. 54
	<i>njswt z3-rw-sms.w</i>	Cairo, Egyptian Museum JE72857; Berlin, Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung ÄM32684; Berlin, Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung ÄM32683; New York, Metropolitan Museum of Arts MMA05.3.272
<i>jpq</i>	<i>njswt z3-rw</i>	London, British Museum EA37669
<i>ššja</i>	<i>njswt z3-rw</i>	Fribourg, Bibel + Orient Museum ÄS1983.138
<i>z-k-t</i>	<i>njswt z3-rw</i>	Berlin, Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung ÄM32687; London, British Museum EA37668; Ward 1976 no. 55; Jerusalem, Israel Museum 76.31.3896
<i>jppj</i> ^b	<i>njswt z3-rw</i>	Berlin, Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung ÄM32721; Berlin, Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung ÄM32729

Comments to Table 2:

a: Although the name of this king is often considered to be of semitic origin, Gundacker (2020: 143) has convincingly shown that the name *ššj* can be an abbreviation of the name *nfr-ššm-ptḥ* or similar names, which are already known from the Old Kingdom onwards; cf. Scheele-Schweitzer 2014: 482-483 [1988].

b: Ilin-Tomich (2023: 322, tab. 48) attributes Berlin, Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung ÄM32729 to Apophis (*3-wsr-rw*) and Berlin, Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung ÄM32721 to a king's son *jppj*. However, in his description of both scarabs he does not consider the similar title on both scarabs and reads one as *z3-rw* whereas the other one is read *z3-njswt*. The other characteristic features of these scarabs are known from kings of the 14th as well as the 15th dynasty (for the base type, see Ilin-Tomich 2023: 125, tab. 26 [1ad]), the back type, Ilin-Tomich 2023: 123, tab. 25 [O and II], side types, Ilin-Tomich 2023: 122, tab. 24 [e6b and d14]) and it is therefore not obvious that Berlin, Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung ÄM32729 names the ruler *jppj* from the 15th dynasty as proposed by Ilin-Tomich (2023: 107).

It is noticeable that several of the scarabs with the title *njswt z3-rw* or *njswt z3-rw-sms.w* show strong similarities with the hieroglyphs of scarabs known from individuals with the titles *z3-rw* or *z3-rw-sms.w* and the same name.²² An overlap of the design is observable for the scarabs of *jpq*. Apart from a slightly different arrangement of few hieroglyphs, the signs on London, British Museum EA37669 (see Figure 1) and other scarabs of the *z3-rw-sms.w jpq* are strikingly similar to each other.²³ The biggest differences are visible for the scarabs attributed to *z-k-t*. The scarabs with the titles of a king's son write the determinative  (A1) after the name,²⁴ whereas this is missing for all scarabs

²² I would like to thank one of the anonymous reviewer for pointing this out to me.

²³ E.g. Fribourg, Bibel + Orient Museum ÄS1983.1627 (<https://bodo.unifr.ch/bodo/details.php?bomid=7615> [last accessed: 13/06/2025]), Berlin, Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung ÄM32422 (Kaplony 2016: pl. 11 [201]), and Berlin, Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung ÄM32423 (Kaplony 2016: pl. 2 [21]).

²⁴ E.g. Berlin, Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung ÄM32653 (Kaplony 2016: pl. 28 [532]) and Berlin, Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung ÄM32654 (Kaplony 2016: pl. 28 [531]).

with the title *njswt zꜣ-rꜣw* (see Figure 1). Also, other features from scarabs of the individual *zꜣ-kꜣ-t* are very similar to each other, independent of the titles shown (cf. Ilin-Tomich 2023: 387, tab. 49). Single attestations of base type 1aa (London, British Museum EA37668) and head type B5 (Jerusalem, Israel Museum 76.31.3896) are otherwise generally known during the 14th and 15th dynasty (cf. Ilin-Tomich 2023: 121 [tab. 23], 125 [tab. 26]).

Comparing the different scarabs naming an individual *nḥs.j*, one may observe that most of them also show similar features (cf. Ilin-Tomich 2023: 345 [tab. 48], 125 [tab. 26]). Interestingly, only a scarab with the title *njswt zꜣ-rꜣw* (Berlin, Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung ÄM32298) as well as one with the title *njswt zꜣ-rꜣw-sms.w* (New York, Metropolitan Museum of Arts MMA05.3.272) show the head-type A4a (cf. Ilin-Tomich 2023: 345 [tab. 48], 379–380 [tab. 49]), which is otherwise considered to be a distinctive trait of 12th dynasty scarabs (Ilin-Tomich 2023: 68, tab. 11), but are later also found on scarabs that are attributed to *ꜣ-wsr-rꜣw jppj* (Ilin-Tomich 2023: 107). Similarly, a scarab of the *zꜣ-njswt-sms.w* appears with the head-type B2,²⁵ which is otherwise known from *ꜣ-wsr-rꜣw jppj* as well as a few other rulers of the 14th dynasty (cf. Ilin-Tomich 2023: 121, tab. 23).

The similarity between scarab Basel cat. 134 and Oxford, Ashmolean Museum 1933.93 (XIX) is striking (Figure 1). They are very different from other examples attributed to *nḥs.j* and, as proposed above, it might be the case that this is a different king named *nḥ(.jj)*. However, this is only based on these observations as other features of both scarabs are well known for the other scarabs of *nḥs.j* (cf. Ilin-Tomich 2023: 379–380, tab. 49).

It can therefore be concluded that there is little to almost no difference between scarabs of individuals with the same name, regardless of whether they are shown with a royal or a king's sons title. This makes it very likely that these individuals are indeed the same persons, or that the persons with the same names lived in close temporal proximity.

A possible further attestation of the title

In 1885, W.M.F. Petrie found four fragments of an obelisk naming *nḥs.j* in Tell el-Dab'a (Figure 2) (Helck 1983: 48, no. 67; Petrie 1885: pl. III [19 A–D]). The mentioned *nḥs.j* is usually interpreted as the eldest son of a king (*zꜣ-njswt-sms.w*) (cf. Ryholt 1997: 377 [File 14/6 (7)]), but the fragmentary state of the inscription, as well as the available space, would also allow the reconstruction of the title *njswt zꜣ-rꜣw(-sms.w)* in column 1 on fragment 19.A. Notably, there is no  (M23) written before  (G39) in the leftmost column of fragment 19.A (Figure 2). However, one would expect both signs to be in the same line if the title   *zꜣ-njswt* was meant. While the scribe may have opted to use the remaining space in the column and wanted to fill it, the succeeding signs would have allowed to be organised in a way that would take up the available room easily. If the title *zꜣ-rꜣw-sms.w* is reconstructed in column 1 on 19.A, this would align well with the central position of the sign  (G39) and only the sun disk (; N5) would be missing in the lost part of the group. In the rightmost column of fragment 19.A, the title before *nḥs.j* may either be reconstructed as *njswt zꜣ-rꜣw* or *zꜣ-njswt*. If the title is reconstructed as *zꜣ-njswt*, this would raise the question if the two individuals named *nḥs.j* are to be identified with two distinct persons, rather than the same.

It is not clear whether the columns on fragment 19.A and 19.B belong to the same face of the obelisk or to different ones (Figure 2). If they belong to the same side, the mention of the erection of the obelisk would refer to a *zꜣ-njswt nḥs.j* who could not be identical with the other named *zꜣ[rꜣw]-sms.w*

²⁵ The head-type B2 was identified based only on a photograph from the museum (<https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/objects/56747> [last accessed: 12 July 2025]). Side type: d5; and base: 3a; following the typology used by Ilin-Tomich (2023: 24 [tab. 1] and 26 [tab. 2]).

nḥs.j, a king. In this position of the fragments, the text would mention various *ḥqꜣ.w* ‘rulers’ bowing before the *zꜣ-[rꜣw]-sms.w nḥs.j*, which would be further consistent with the proposed reconstruction of his title as royal and not that of a king’s son. He is furthermore described as one who is loved by Seth, the Lord of *rꜣ-ḥt.wt*. Both statements are unprecedented for a royal son but would suit a king. In the scenario discussed, it seems more likely that this *zꜣ-nḥswt nḥs.j* is the son of the king of the same name. However, if the title is read as *nḥswt zꜣ-[rꜣw]*, then the *nḥs.j* mentioned could be the king both times; erecting the obelisk and having the *ḥqꜣ.w* bowing before him.

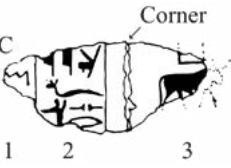
 19.D 19.B 1 2		¹ [...]w.w <i>ḥqꜣ.w prj(.w) m ḥt ḥrꜣf</i> [...] ² [...] <i>ṯḥn n šw ḥft ḥprt m</i> [...] ¹ [...] and] the rulers came on the belly before him (i.e. <i>nḥs.j</i> [...])^a ² [erecting?] the obelisk of light, while [...] became (?)
 19.C 1 2 3		¹ [...]n [...] ² [...] <i>jj nꜣf wsr</i> [...] ³ [...] <i>kꜣ</i> [...]^b
 19.A 3 2 1		¹ [...] <i>nḥswt zꜣ-[rꜣw] nḥs.j</i> ² [...] <i>mnwꜣf n stḥ nb rꜣ-ḥt.wt sspt ḥrꜣf</i> ³ [...] <i>zꜣ-[rꜣw]-sms.w nḥs.j mri.jj stḥ nb rꜣ-ḥt.wt</i> ¹ [...] the king, Son of Re Nehesi ² [...] his monuments for Seth, Lord of <i>rꜣ-ḥt.wt</i>,^d the One who enlivens his face ³ [...] Eldest Son of Re, Loved by Seth, Lord of <i>rꜣ-ḥt.wt</i>

Figure 2: The four fragments as published in Petrie 1885: pl. III [19 A–D] according to the organisation by Helck 1983: 48 [no. 67] and with transcription and translation by the author.

Comments to Figure 2:

a: See also Ryholt 1997: 252.

b: It is not clear if the traces of sign on this face of the obelisk are part of a scene or should be read as an inscription. The reading proposed here follows the assumption that the traces of the bull and a possible $\mathfrak{U}$ (D28) above it may be part of a name or other text.

c: Bietak (2022: 236–238, fig. 3) compares the writing of the sign  (A21A) in the left column to depictions ‘*nahöstlicher Fürsten, Könige und Götter*’. However, the remaining traces may also be interpreted as a king wearing the white Upper Egyptian crown (i.e. ; A300B; see also Daumas 1988: 74 [1303 and 1311], 76 [1347]). If such a reading is accepted, one wonders if this might refer to a claim over Upper Egypt? As the current position of the object is unknown, the reading cannot be verified at present.

d: Currently it is not possible to identify the location of this place. While Bietak (1975: 186–187) suspects the area of Avaris, Leclant and Yoyotte (1957: 53 n. b) propose a broader region east of Tanis. See also Gomaà 1987: 231.

I would therefore suggest that the mentioned *nḥs.j* on this obelisk is a king, rather than a king’s son. However, as long as the current location of this inscription is unknown, making a detailed collation of the text impossible, and no more reliable recording is available, this suggestion must remain hypothetical.

Conclusion

Contrary to the traditional reading, the title  /  may be an abbreviated writing of a combined title, *njswt z3-rw* and *njswt z3-rw-sms.w* respectively. The names so far identified with king’s sons may therefore be kings, which is also suggested by their otherwise exclusively royal attributes such as cartouches and the epithet *dj(.w) nḥ*. The title *z3-rw-sms.w* may have been a pragmatic combination of titles to distinguish the bearer from other claimants to the title *z3-rw*. This new reading of the title thus identifies five names of kings attributable to the 14th dynasty and illustrates the potential of re-evaluating known material.

Acknowledgements

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***djsw*: The Personification of Creation Utterances**

Shaimaa Saber

The Grand Egyptian Museum

Abstract

During the Graeco-Roman Period, the term *djsw* was frequently found on coffins, in the *Book of the Dead*, and on the walls of Ptolemaic temples such as Edfu, Dendera, and Esna. According to the ancient beliefs, the *djsw* were considered the manifestation of the seven utterances that the creator god uttered to bring things into existence, representing the seven stages of the creation of the universe. Their origins can be traced back to the seven utterances of the goddess Mehet-Weret in the *Coffin Texts* (406–408). They were first depicted as seven falcons on the Louvre coffin lid (Paris, Louvre D7), and later they were represented in full human forms, falcon-headed humans, or animal and avian shapes.

Once these powerful personified creation utterances had completed their roles, they were laid to rest in *pr-ntr* north of Esna to prevent any further efficacy from them, as it was believed that uttering these words again would bring the world to an end.

The article aims to address the word *djsw* as a later form or synonym of the earlier word *tsw*. Furthermore, it will investigate why the term ‘Sages’ has been associated with *djsw* in modern references. The name is derived from the verb *djs*, which means ‘to say’ or ‘to speak’, so it might also be rendered as ‘the speakers’. The study discusses the various roles of these divine beings in the creation of the universe, the preservation of the cosmic order, the foundation of the temple, writing, and protection, as well as their role as the arrows of the goddess Sekhmet.

Keywords

djsw; Creation Utterances; Seven Falcons; Children of Tatenen; Thoth Crew

The name of *djsw*

Understanding the meaning of the word *djsw* and its linguistic origin is critical for tracking its evolution over time.¹ Brugsch rendered the *djsw* name as the ‘Masters’ (Brugsch 1868: 1598; Naville 1911–1912: 193); however, the *Wörterbuch* interpreted it as the ‘Sages’, as they were the god Thoth’s assistants who helped him rule the world (Wb 5: 521.8–9). The meaning of the name can be also explained in terms of their roles as writing gods and knowledge masters.

The word in question, *djsw*, was used in texts with two meanings depending on the context:

The first was inscribed with the determinative  (A1) referring to the divine utterances    (Edfou I: 114.3).

¹ This research is based on my master’s thesis entitled ‘The Sacred Beings *djsw* until the end of the Greco-Roman Time (A Comparative Study)’, supervised by Professor Dr Salwa Ahmed Kamel and Lecturer Dr Maissara Abdullah Hussein, and defended in 2021, at Cairo University, Faculty of Archaeology, Department of Egyptology.

The second was written with god determinatives,  (A40A) or ,² to refer to the seven personified utterances,  (Edfou VI: 169.9),  (Edfou VII: 6.2),³  (Edfou IV: 14.8),⁴ while the determinative  (R8) signified divinity for both words:  (Edfou III: 7.2; Edfou VII: 34.12).

The name of the *djsw* was derived from the ancient Egyptian verb  *djjs*, meaning ‘to speak’/‘to say’, dated back to the Graeco-Roman Period (Wb 5: 521.10–20), and the older form of it is , *ts*, which dates back to the Old Kingdom (Wb 5: 403.10–21). Linguistically, it is acknowledged that a word such as *ts* became *djjs* since the phonetic signs  (*t*),  (*d*), and  (*dj*) were easily interchangeable in the Ptolemaic Egyptian writings, as evidenced in an example from the temple at Esna: *djjsw* (Esna III: 330.1), where the word  (*djjsw*) is written by the phonetic sign *ts* rather than *dj*.

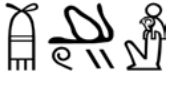
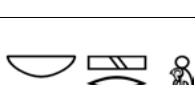
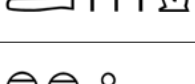
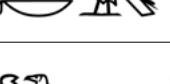
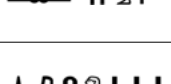
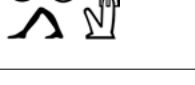
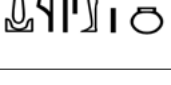
Regarding the two signs,  (G1) and  (M17), that were added to *djjs*, they are frequently absent (Dévaud 1912: 127–129; Naville 1911–1912: 195–196). The subsequent examples (Table 1) demonstrate the close proximity of the two words.

TABLE 1. EXAMPLES OF THE PROXIMITY OF *tsw* AND *djsw*

Example 1	
<i>tsw</i>	<i>djsw</i>
   (Erman and Lange 1925: 14.10)	   (Edfou IV: 13.5),    (Urk. VI: 57.4)
  (Gardiner 1909: 96, recto 1)	  (Edfou I: 41.10)
Example 2	
                   	

Furthermore, the Late Period sarcophagus (Paris, Louvre D7) inscriptions serve as a link between *tsw* and *djsw*.⁵ The sarcophagus' lid, which bears the formula *tsw sfh jpw mht-wrt*, clearly arranges the names of these seven beings in the same order as the inscriptions from the Ptolemaic Period at Edfu Temple (Edfou I: 295.14–15; Pierret 1878: 4; Rochholz 2002: 63; see Table 2).

TABLE 2. PARALLELS IN DEITY NAMES ACROSS THE TWO GROUPS

Edfu Temple	Sarcophagus (Paris, Louvre D7)	Order of beings according to Sarcophagus (Paris, Louvre D7)	Transliteration	Translation
			<i>nfr-hꜣt djꜣs tpj</i>	Nefer-hat, the First Word
			<i>ꜥpr-phꜣwj djꜣs sn.nw</i>	Aper-pehwy, the Second Word
			<i>nb-dšrw djꜣs hmt.nw</i>	Neb-desheru, the Third Word
			<i>kꜣ djꜣs fdw.nw</i>	Ka, the Fourth Word
			<i>bjk djꜣs djw.nw</i>	Bik, the Fifth Word
			<i>ḫḫ djꜣs sjsw.nw</i>	Khakh, the Sixth Word
			<i>sjn djꜣs sfh.nw</i>	Sin, the Seventh Word

The manifestation and iconography of *djsw*

The seven sacred entities, the *djsw*, came into existence in the *primaeva* time, when the goddess Mehet-Weret gave them birth, and they took the form of seven falcons (Reymond 1966: 118).



djsw sfh nw mht-wrt ḥsb tꜣwj ḥnꜣ tꜣn bhꜣw n nbt tp wꜣrt nwn m hynꜣs m nht rsj prꜣsn m mw m dfꜣ n jrt rꜣ r tꜣ dr pꜣwtꜣfjꜣrꜣsn jrꜣwꜣsn n bjkw sfh (cf. Ibrahim 1975: 63; hieroglyphs from Edfou I: 295.16–296.1)

⁵ The Louvre Museum dated it to the 30th dynasty-Ptolemaic Period. (<https://collections.louvre.fr/en/ark:/53355/cl010009971> viewed 22 July 2025).

The seven *djsw* of Mehet-Weret, who count the two lands together with Thoth, whom the *nbt*-cow gave birth upon the region of Nun in her property by the southern sycamore (Memphis). They come forth from the water of the eye of Re to the earth from the time of his earliest beginning. They made their forms of seven falcons (Baum 2007: 273; Ibrahim 1975: 273).



djsw sfh nw mht-wrt m jrwsn n bjkw pwtjw-tpjw (hieroglyphs from Esna III: 197.24)

The seven *djsw* of Mehet-Weret in their forms of falcons, the first *primaeval* ones (Sauneron 1958: 274).

The texts explicitly define the details concerning the origin of the *djsw* of Mehet-Weret, including their number, the location and time of their birth, and their form.

Their number

The sacred number seven, symbol of completeness and effectiveness, was associated with this group of deities, the *djsw* (Wilkinson 1994: 135). This appears quite logical; the number seven was specified over others because the *djsw* embodied the seven creation utterances, which represented the seven stages of creation.

Although the number seven is one of the most recognised characteristics of this group, a few reliefs represented only three of them, as in Edfu, or as four gods, as in Esna.

The place of birth

It is stated that the *djsw* were descended from Mehet-Weret, to whom *nbt* (cow) gave birth in the Waret of the Nun, in her home by the southern sycamore (Reymond 1966: 118). Nun was the primordial water that covered the world at the time of creation. It may be seen as a vast, dark, murky, churning body of water, inert but full of life and force (Wilson 1997: 497). The southern sycamore was located to the south of Memphis (Gauthier 1926: 97).

The time of birth

The *djsw* came into existence at the *primaeval* age, before creation, when the land and waters were not separated and everything was dark and devoid of life (Wilson 1997: 342–343):



djsw 3w nw pwt-tpt (Esna III: 196.2)

djsw the great of the *primaeval* time.



Figure 1. The seven *djsw* following the *ba* bird, depicted as seven falcons with human heads. Coffin lid of Ankhmerweret (Paris, Louvre D7), drawn after © Musée du Louvre, Dist. GrandPalaisRmn/Maurice et Pierre Chuzeville; Pierret 1878: 4.



djjsw šbtjw ḥw nw p:wt-tp̄t (hieroglyphs from Edfou VI: 173.6)

djjsw, Shebtyu, and Akhu of the *primaeval* time.



bjkw [wrw] p:wtjw-tp̄jw (hieroglyphs from Esna II: 58.2)

The elder falcons, the first *primaeval* ones.

Their Iconography

Despite the inscriptions mentioning that the *djjsw* assumed the form of seven falcons, the reliefs depicted them in various other forms. They were represented for the first time on the lid of the sarcophagus (Paris, Louvre D7) of Ankhmerweret, as seven human-headed falcons (Figure 1).

On the other hand, the human form with a falcon head was their common depiction, as seen in various reliefs from the Temple of Edfu (Figures 2–3).

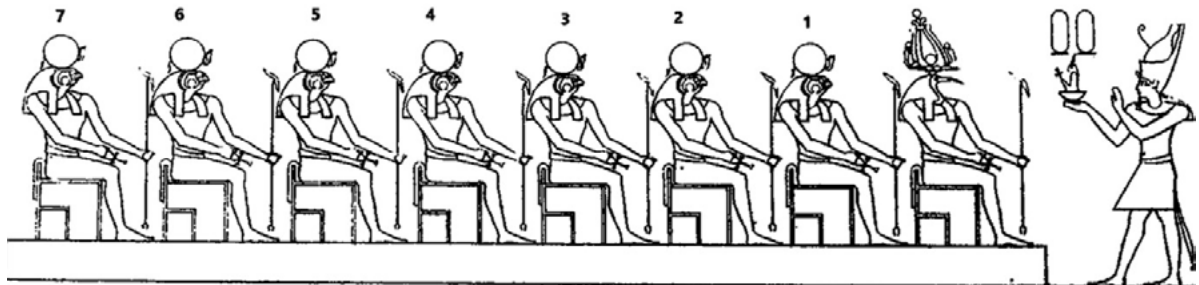


Figure 2. Adapted scene showing Ptolemy IV offering Maat to the gods: Thoth and the seven *djjsw*. The latter are depicted as humans with falcon heads (Edfou IX: pl. XXIX); modified by the author.

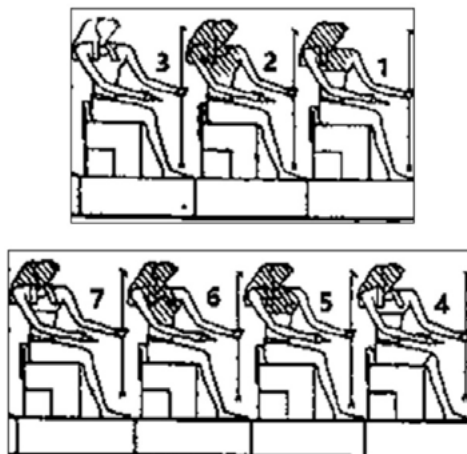


Figure 3. Adapted scene, with detail, showing the ceremony of dedicating the temple to his lord, depicting the seven *djjsw* as humans with falcon heads (Edfou X/2: pl. CLII); modified by the author.

The falcon form was represented once at the Ptolemaic sanctuary in the Temple of Deir el-Bahri (Laskowska-Kusztal 1984: pls III–IV, figs 23 and 28). The *djsw* were also depicted in human forms (Mendel 2003: pl. 9; Esna VI: 481).⁶ They were also represented in different forms, such as birds with the heads of falcons, humans, or bulls (Cauville 1997: pls X 155, X 171).

The *djsw* divine seven

It was believed that the name of the *djsw* was linked with two groups of sacred entities, each consisting of seven different deities:

It is evident from the tables that the first group's names are simple and easy to understand, linked to the sarcophagus of Ankhmerweret (Paris, Louvre D7) from the Late Period. However, the second

TABLE 3. NAMES OF THE FIRST GROUP (AFTER EDFOU I: 295.14–15)

Hieroglyphs	Transliteration	Translation
	<i>nfr-ḥꜥt</i>	The Perfect Beginning
	<i>ꜥpr-phꜣwj</i>	The Equipped End
	<i>nb-dšrw</i>	The Lord of Red
	<i>kꜣ</i>	The Bull
	<i>bjk</i>	The Falcon
	<i>ḥ(ꜣ)ḥ</i>	The Swift
	<i>sjn</i>	The Runner

TABLE 4. NAMES OF THE SECOND GROUP (AFTER EDFOU IV: 390.16–18)

Hieroglyphs	Transliteration	Translation
	<i>ḥy-wr</i>	The Great Child
	<i>ḥy-ḥrd-jb</i>	The Child with a Young Heart
	<i>ḥdb-mwtꜣf</i>	He who Kills his Mother
	<i>qbḥ-snwꜣf</i>	He who Purifies his Brother
	<i>šḥpr-mw-sšd-nwy</i>	He who Causes to Create the Water and Lets the Flood Flow
	<i>bqbq</i>	Meaning unclear
	<i>mn-qb</i>	Meaning unclear

⁶ See also a scene from Esna temple showing the Roman emperor Caracalla offering *nff*-oil and linen bandages to the goddess Neith and the *djsw*, who are depicted as four humans (Esna VI: 481).

group's names are more complex and often unclear, coming from the late Ptolemaic Period (Rochholz 2002: 43).

Roles of the *dꜣjsw*

The *dꜣjsw* deities significantly contributed to the creation of the universe and the preservation of cosmic order by maintaining Maat. Furthermore, they played a role in the foundation rituals of temples. As the masters of knowledge and skilled in their work, they were considered to be the deities of writing and the crew of Thoth. They were also regarded as the divine guardians assigned to safeguard the deities, temples, and the territory of Egypt. Additionally, they were responsible for helping the deceased, who appealed to them to overcome obstacles in the afterlife. Ultimately, they fulfilled the role of Sekhmet's arrows, sent out to dispel the foes and rebels.

The *dꜣjsw* as minor deities of creation

Continuing to the local creation myths of ancient Egypt, the most famous of which were at Heliopolis, Hermopolis, and Memphis, creation theories were further developed during the Graeco-Roman Period in local centres such as Edfu and Esna (Kurth 1991: 189). According to the creation myths at the temples of Edfu and Esna, the seven divine beings, the *dꜣjsw*, were shown as embodiments of the creator's seven creative utterances at the beginning of creation.

Edfu creation myth

The seven deities, the *dꜣjsw*, were regarded as the excellent ones who completed their father Tatenen's work in the creation of the universe. According to the Edfu temple narrative, creation was not the work of the sole creator. Instead, three groups of sacred beings completed the work on his behalf, and it was believed that they were responsible for the actual creation of the terrestrial world. These three groups were mentioned as the divine brethren, *snnw*, and children of Tatenen (*msw-tꜣ-tnn*): *dꜣjsw*, *šbtjw*, and the seven builder gods, *hnmw*. According to the texts, these sacred families initially lived on a mythical island called the 'Island of Trampling', they created the earth, the sacred places for the gods, and the temples, and had a special function in the drama of the creation myth (Reymond 1966: 116; see Figure 4).

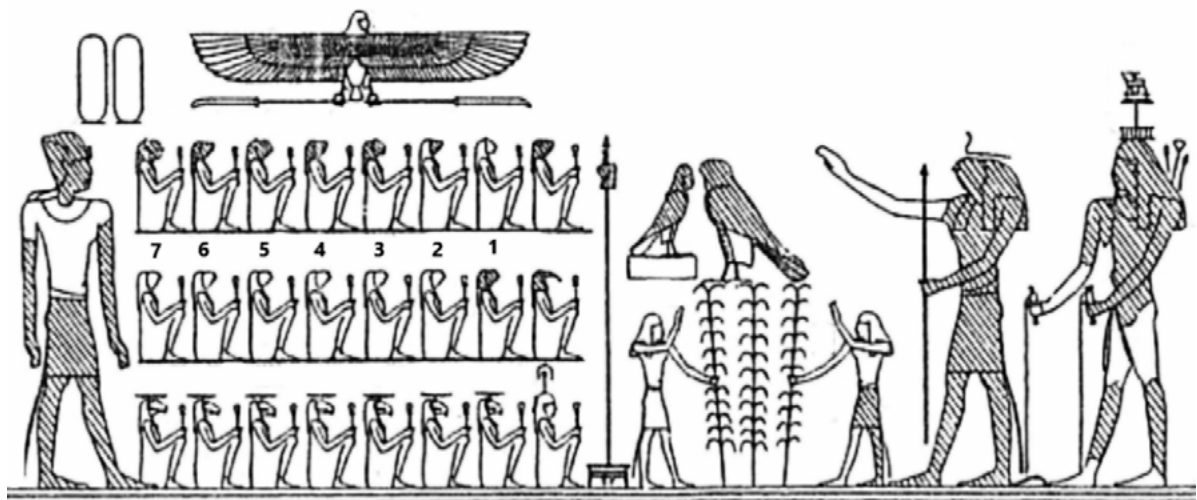


Figure 4. Adapted scene showing the cosmology of Edfu, depicting the seven *dꜣjsw* as humans with falcon heads (Edfou X/2: pl. CLII); modified by the author.

As creative spells, they played a vital role in the creation myth of Edfu since the *Shebtyu* uttered them to cause the earth to emerge from the primeval water, Nun (Reymond 1966: 119).

Esna creation myth

Esna temple cosmology started with the primordial waters, Nun, from where the goddess Neith emerged in the form of the cow goddess Mehet-Weret, meaning 'The Great Flood'. She uttered the seven creative utterances, the *djsw*, to bring the world into existence (El Sayed 1982: 56–58).



js pr djsw sfh m rꜥs hprꜥsn m nꜥrw sfh hpr ddꜥs m rn n djsw m rn n mdw-nꜥr rꜥf m rn n sꜥw hpr djsw sfh nw mꜥht-wrt wnꜥsn m sꜥ n mꜥht-wrt r bw nbw šmꜥs jm (hieroglyphs from Esna III: 206.12–13)

Thus, the seven utterances *djsw* came out from her mouth, and they became seven gods. She said the sacred utterances under the name of *djsw* as the name of the word of god, she uttered them under the name of Sais, and (so) the seven *djsw* of Mehet-Weret came into existence. They existed to protect Mehet-Weret in each place she goes (Sauneron 1962: 268).

Through Neith's verbal emanations, she could create the land of Egypt, the cities of Esna, Pe, Dep, and Sais, as well as the Temple of *Per-Nejter*, and various divine and human beings, including the thirty eternal gods, Apophis, and Thoth (El Sayed 1982: 51–53; Sauneron 1961: 46, 1962: 268).⁷

djsw as the assisting deities of building

The participation of the primeval deities, the *djsw*, in the temple's erection were mentioned in the foundation texts in the temples of Edfu and Dendera. The use of creation deities during construction suggests that the authors of the creation myths did not differentiate between the creation of the world and the creation of the temple. According to ancient Egyptian beliefs, the temple served as a miniature model of the world (Graeff 2011: 207).

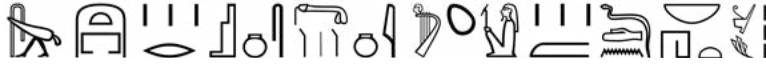


Figure 5. Adapted scene, with detail, showing the rite of stretching the cord, depicting the seven *djsw* as humans with falcon heads (Edfou X/2: pl. CXLVII; Corteggiani 2007: 123); modified by the author.

⁷ The Esna cosmology text should be read alongside the Greek text, *Le Kosmopoia de Lyde*. There is undeniable symmetry of structure between both texts. The Greek text declared that the creator god laughed seven times and, through the laughs, the seven gods who enveloped the world were born (Sauneron 1961: 4).

The seven *dꜣjsw* were assigned to the work of *ḥsb tꜣwj*, meaning those who count the Two Lands. The term *ḥnd* was used for assessing the lands (Edfou I: 295.16; Wilson 1997: 677). Additionally, the *dꜣjsw*, along with Thoth and Seshat, were responsible for *šbšb tꜣ*, that is, division of the land correctly (Edfou IV: 389.17–18; Wilson 1997: 999).

The *dꜣjsw* also took part in the stretching cord rite, and their roles included properly delimitating the shrines (Edfou VII: 6.1–2):



sšm šḥw r stꜣsn mtr jn dꜣjsw m ḏd n nb-ḥdn

The chapels were delimitated in their right place by *dꜣjsw*, according to the saying of the Lord of Heden (Thoth) (Amer and Morardet 1983: 256–257).

In addition, they were responsible for enlarging the architectural layout (Edfou VII: 49.8–9) and purifying the sanctuaries with incense (Edfou IV: 7.5–6). In addition, they were responsible for recording foundation ceremonies (Edfou VI: 174.7, see Figure 5).

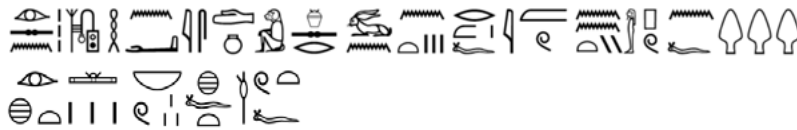
The dꜣjsw as deities of writing

During the Ptolemaic period, Edfu Temple's inscriptions and scenes depicted the group of *dꜣjsw* as the gods of writing (Cauville 1987: 129), alongside Thoth and Seshat. Together, these nine gods formed a crew led by Thoth (Figures 6–7). Following Thoth, we see the seven deities, each with a scribal palette in their left hand and a reed pen for recording in their right. The texts mentioned the *dꜣjsw* as the first to inscribe (Edfou VI: 174.7–8; Edfou VI: 320.12). They were considered the Crew of the god Thoth who led them to create the world and initiate inscribing (Wilson 1997: 1217).



dꜣjsw sfḥ jmy-r sš šꜣ sh

The seven *dꜣjsw*, the overseers of writing, who initiated inscribing (Wilson 1997: 1217; hieroglyphs from Edfou III: 315.1).



jrꜣsn sš ḥnꜣ jsdn šsr-wnnwt r-gs.f jm n ntt snnw pw nꜣf jmy jr ḥtw nbw ḥft wꜣwtꜣf (Ibrahim 1975: 64; hieroglyphs from Edfou I: 296.1–2)⁸

They made writing with Thoth, announcing that beside him there, for they are his likeness, doing all things according to his command (Ibrahim 1975: 47).

The presentation of the writing instruments (Figure 6), comprising the palette (*gsty*) and water pot of a scribe (*ps*) showcased Thoth, the seven *dꜣjsw*, and Seshat as the 'Masters of Writing', and the

⁸ *šsr-wnnwt*: an epithet of Thoth (Wilson 1997: 1031).

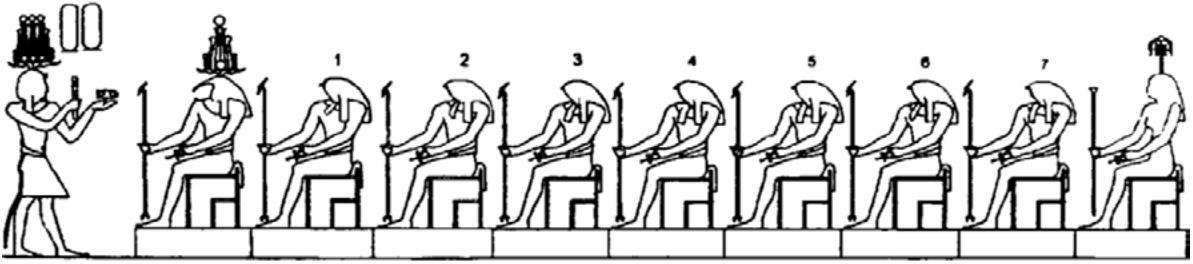


Figure 6. Complement of the previous scene (Figure 5), depicting the seven *djsw* as humans with falcon heads (Edfou X/2: pl. CLII); modified by the author.

first to begin writing so that the earth and heavens might function. The *djsw* were also described as trustees, precise, efficient in their work, and skilled in knowledge (Edfou IV: 290.3–15).

The seven *djsw* were also attested in the *pr-nḥ*, the ‘house of life’:



jw djsw sfḥ m prt ḥr šnbt=f ntrw pw n pr-nḥ

They are the seven *djsw*, who come forth from his throat; these are the gods of the house of life (Mendel 2003: 124, pl. 13).

The *djsw* as divine guardians

The seven *djsw* were considered guardian gods who protected their mother Neith-Mehet-Weret in each place she went (Esna III: 206.13) and protected her limbs (Esna II: 163.18), as well as protecting other gods such as Osiris and Hor-Behdety (Edfou VII: 34.12; Kurth 2004: 60).



bjkw sf[h...] js r-mjtt m tjwt jr w ntt sšm jb=f wn=sn s; n wsjr m st:t=f[...] r-mjtt rs=sn mwt=f

The seven falcons [...] likewise in the forms, which guide his heart. they existed to protect Osiris in his coffin [...] likewise; they protect their mother (Mendel 2003: 143, pl. 16).

Regarding their role with the afterlife, the *djsw* were depicted on the lid of the sarcophagus (Paris, Louvre D7) to ensure the protection of the deceased. This is evident from the two lines of the lid's

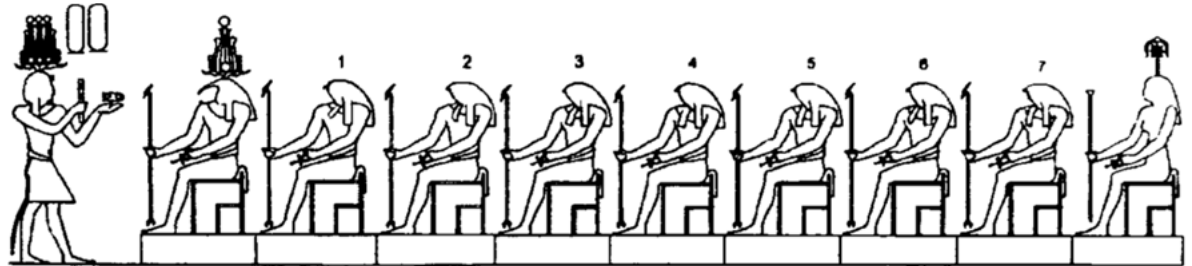


Figure 7. Adapted scene showing Ptolemy IX offering the writing tools to the gods: Thoth, the seven Djaisu, and Seshat. The Djaisu are depicted as humans with falcon heads (Edfou X/1: pl. CVII); modified by the author.

inscription, which included an invocation by the deceased, Ankhmerweret, to the seven falcons of Mehet-Weret, who are in charge of leading and directing his soul so that it could rejoin with his body wherever he is (de Rougé 1849: 78–79; El Sayed 1982: 52). As they are the seven falcons of Mehet-Weret that fly and descend upon the holy coffin every day (Figure 1; Pierret 1878: 4).

Furthermore, the *djsw* were mentioned in the *Book of the Dead* as the shoulders of the balance, on the night of calculating the *wedjat*-eye. They slice off heads, sever necks, seize hearts, and make slaughter on the island of two flames, which was linked to establishing justice, as it was a place to destroy the sun god's enemies (Wilson 1997: 547). The deceased called the seven *djsw* for revival, strength, prosperity, and protection from evil.



dd mdw jn j p; sfh djsw jpw rmnw mh:t grh pw n jpt wd:t psšw tpw jww nhbwt jt看 jbw hnpw h:t看 jrjw š:t m š nsrt rh.n:看 tn rh.n:看 rnw:看 mj rh:看 qm:看 spr:看 r:看 nh:看 m nh:看 jm swd:看 n:看 nh:jmj :看 was:jmj hf:看 nh n tpj-r:看 dj:f rnpt :看 hr rnpt nt nh dj:f n:看 hrw :看 hr hrw nh grhw nt nh (r) wd:看 wbn=f r snn:看 t:看 r fnd:看 jrtj:看 m:看 sn mj nn n jmjw :看 hrw pwj n hsb :看 w: (cf. Quirke 2013: 171; hieroglyphs from Maspero 1914: 171)

O those seven *djsw*, shoulders of the balance, on the night of calculating *wedjat*-eye, who slice off hands, and severe necks, who seize hearts, and snatch fore-hearts, who make slaughter in the isle of the double flame, I know you, I know your names, and your creator. May you reach me so I can live in your life. Assign me to life that is in your hands, to the power that in your grip and life that in your utterances. May it give me many years to my years of life. May it give me many days to my days of life and nights of life, until I go out, and rise at my likeness, with air at my nose, my eyes seeing like those, who are in the horizon, on the night of counting the theft (cf. Quirke 2013: 171).

*The *djsw* as the seven arrows of Sekhmet*

One of the texts of protection in the temple of Edfu records a unique role for the *djsw* deities. The text demonstrates their dual nature; they were not merely peaceful but also fierce and destructive, as they are the arrows of Sekhmet.



nbw wḏw ḥtmw jr tp-nfr⁹ m šsrw ḏjsw jpn nw mḥt-wrt jrj s; nṯrw m nh(t)sn nbw mk(t) mkj nb=sn m nḥt=sn šhrj sbjw r st-wrt ḥtjw wrw phr m njwwt=sn nbnb m-ḥt spwt sm; s'nh ḥft ḏd(t) ḥmt=sn mkj=tn ḥwt-ḥr swd=tn bḥdt šhr=tn ḏw ḥ; jwnt šd=tn ḥnty-jbtt swd=tn jrtj sb; q=tn nsw-bjtj (pr-ḳ) dt ḥw(w)? nn ḥwj ḥty m ṣšm=ṣf šhr ḏw ḥ; nbw nṯrw (hieroglyphs from Edfou VIII: 108.20–109.4).

O Lords, who command inscriptions, who establish Maat (cosmic order) with (their) utterances. These are *ḏjsw* of Mehet-Weret, who protect the gods with their magical book. The Lords of Protection, who safeguard their lord with their power, drive the rebels away from the great seat (Temple of Edfu). The great butchers, who roam the cities, who roam the nomes, slaughtering or letting live according to the command of Her Majesty (Sekhmet). You may protect the house of Horus (the Temple of Edfu), you may make Edfu intact, you may keep evil away from Dendera, you may rescue Khenti-Iabtet, and you may keep the two rows of shrines preserved. May you protect the king of Upper and Lower Egypt (the great palace) forever. These are the protectors, who protect Akhty (Hor-Behdety) in his shrine, who drive evil away by the Lords of the gods (Kurth 1998: 194–195).

The wordplay with *šsrw* utilised in this text to refer to the *ḏjsw* might be translated as utterances (Wb 4: 548.8–13) or arrows (Wb 4: 546.7–17) due to the mention of Sekhmet in the text (Wilson 1997: 1031–1032). Goyon therefore suggested that the *ḏjsw*, the seven personified creation utterances, had double aspects that combined good and bad. Sekhmet's seven arrows represent merciless and destructive forces, whereas the words of the goddess Mehet-Weret provided protection (Goyon 1985: I, 188).

During the five epagomenic days, regarded as the pestilence at the end of the year, Sekhmet's arrows, messengers, and emissaries were activated, causing fear and death. This plague may represent primeval chaos, disease, or epidemics. The beginning of the deluge coincided with the New Year, implying a link between the 'pestilence of the year' (*jḏt rnpt*) and the flood (Györy 2010: 81). Ancient Egyptians were aware of the link between seasonal epidemics and bad water conditions but did not hold water responsible for these calamities. Instead, they directed their anxiety and wrath upon the desert, referring to it as Sekhmet and her messengers. These messengers delivered deadly diseases borne by the winds that ravaged Egypt every year, occurring during the *Khamsin* winds in the spring months before the Nile's rise (Bickel 2005: 199–200; Morris 2019: 62).

The *ḏjsw* were the most well-known team of messengers assigned to the destructive goddess Sekhmet to demonstrate her might and carry out her orders. Typically, they carried knives (Figure 8). They had a strong association with the solar eye's punitive, vengeful aspect, from which they



Figure 8. Adapted scene showing, from right to left: three gods from the *ḏjsw* (*sjn*, *ḥ[ḫ]*, and *bjk*), then the *ḥtyw*-emissaries, and, at the end, the two leaders of the *šbtjw* gods (Edfou XIV: pl. DCLXXIII).

⁹ In the earliest texts, *tp-nfr* retained its literal meaning, 'a good beginning'. However, in Graeco-Roman texts, it became synonymous with 'Maat' (Wb 5: 285.13–286.11; Wilson 1997: 1136).

were thought to have come. They were the seven decans that accompanied the sun, a situation that, for obvious reasons, assured their periodic return; they were the seven arrows that the destructive goddess Sekhmet fired at the cosmic foes. They were by nature ubiquitous. They were so quick and the darts they spat or shot so certain of the mark that no miscreant could escape them (Meeks and Favard-Meeks 1996: 47). Consequently, Sekhmet and her messengers' role in dispelling foes and chaos undoubtedly contributed to the maintenance of the cosmic order.

The *ḏḏjsw*, the deities who rest

Once the *ḏḏjsw*, the powerful personified creation utterances, had accomplished their roles, they were laid to rest (Sauneron 1962: 269) to prevent any further efficacy from them (Hollof 2011: 11), as it was believed that uttering the words of creation again would end the world (Urk. VI: 127.3–5). Like the Ogdoad of Hermopolis, when their work was finished, they received a funerary cult on the human model and were buried in the mound of *ḏḏmt* in Medinet Habu, along with other dead deities of Edfu, Dendera, Esna, and Kom Ombo (Dunand and Zivie-Coche 2004: 50; Sethe 1929: 53). However, death here is not intended in the literal sense; rather, those divine entities transition into a state of total inactivity (Franco 1996: 113).

The Edfu priesthood proclaimed that their temple was the last resting place of Tatenen's children. It was thought that they resided in the temple's original nucleus, the privy chamber. Reymond suggested that these gods' images were kept there and carried to the hall of the Pronaos during the New Year festival (Reymond 1966: 128).



msw tḏ-ṭnn wtṭ-(n)-r nṯrw-ḥ-šps¹⁰ jrjw bḥdt (hieroglyphs from Edfou I: 158.8).

Children of Tatenen, descendants of Re, gods of the noble palace, belonging to Edfou (Reymond 1966: 128).

Their worship was celebrated on the days when the ancestor gods' ritual was performed at Edfu during the night of the New Year. The *primaeva*l deities, who were the creators and protectors of the first temple-entity, were likely adored during this festival, which signified the renewal and revivification of the temple-entity, re-opening it to a new life. Although no evidence is provided, the idea that all *primaeva*l deities were adored on this day seems logical (Reymond 1963: 67–68).

The Edfu Temple inscriptions indicated where the *ḏḏjsw* were believed to rest as gods, but no further information was provided. We know about their deaths from Esna Temple; according to the texts, the goddess Neith's seven personified creation utterances were buried in the Temple of *pr-nṯr*,¹¹ north of Esna (Sauneron 1962: 269). This temple was dedicated to Osiris, Isis and the gods who were rested there: Kematef, Tatenen, and the seven *ḏḏjsw* (Ali 2009: 5; Esna III, 196.2). As well as it was buried with them Shu, Tefnut, and Atum. This sacred tomb was known as the Mansion of *bḏs* because it is the tomb of Osiris since his members were assembled (Esna III: 197. 24; Sauneron 1958: 274). During the third month of inundation, the goddess Isis of Abe (*ḥbḏ*) made offerings every ten days to the great

¹⁰ The palace of a god is the place where the god resides, either in the temple or in the heavenly dwelling (Wb 1: 214.18–20).

¹¹ *pr-nṯr*, situated 5km northwest of Esna in Kom Senon, was one of four temples known as the 'Lost Temples of Esna', three of which appear in the texts of the Great Temple of Esna and were located north of the current Temple of Esna. The fourth temple, located on the western bank, was only mentioned in the writings of the travelers (Ali 2009: 1).

soul of Kematef, and to her father Re, to Shu, Geb and to her brother Osiris, with the *djsw*, the great ones of Mehet-Weret (Sauneron 1958: 278; Esna III: 345.14).



šsp=k qbhw tp r 10 nbw m-wj ıst hnt pr-ntr htpwj hm-ntr=k hr mrw n tı-snt hı rnp htpwj=tw jmjw=tw htpıw m jmht dwı-sštı nt djsw wrw ntrw ht tpj n mht-wrt (Herbin 1994: 273, XXXV.7–10, hieroglyphs from the same reference: 509, G' XXXV. 7–10=P.OIC 25389).

You receive the libation at the beginning of each ten days from the hands of Isis in per-neter. Your Majesty is satisfied in the desert of Ta-Senet (Esna); (your) body becomes rejuvenated, being satisfied among those who rest in the necropolis, the secret tomb of *djsw*, the great gods, the first generation of Mehet-Weret (Herbin 1994: 76).

To sum up briefly, the area extending to the north of Esna included the sacred temples, *pr-ntr* and Khnum of the Field, as the sacred Abaton of Esna resembled the Temple of Bigeh, where Osiris' members were buried. The rituals and rites at both temples were similar. Every ten days, the goddess Isis would depart Philae to make offerings to her brother and husband, Osiris. In comparison, Neith would travel every ten days from the Temple of Esna to the Temples of *pr-ntr* and Khnum of the Field, offering sacrifices to Osiris and the *djsw* (Sauneron 1958: 278–279).

Conclusion

The name of the *djsw* evolved form of the ancient word *ısw* from the Old Kingdom texts. The research indicates that both terms exhibit linguistic equivalence, allowing for their interchangeable usage without altering the meaning. As a result, the words are essentially the same, with *ısw* having undergone phonetic changes over time.

Although scholars often refer to the *djsw* as 'Masters' or 'Sages' due to their association with writing, knowledge, and the Lord of Wisdom, Thoth, their name is derived from the verb *djs*, meaning 'to say' or 'to speak', so their name literally could also be translated as 'the speakers'. The word *djsw* had significant meaning, particularly in the titles of gods, kings, and individuals. It represented verbal strength, perfection, and the power of word choice.

The comprehensive study reveals that the first group's names were still linked to the *djsw* and still used even after the second group's names appeared. Furthermore, the names of deities from the first and second groups could be mixed in later scenes, provided the total number does not exceed seven.

The *djsw* not only appeared as sacred utterances; they were also personified as divine entities. Their names were written using the gods' determinatives and they were referred to as *ntrw* – gods – in the texts. They belonged to the group of deities or conceptual personifications whose names were the same as a religious concept. They may thus acquire a cult, as happened for the three powers that helped the creator to plan and execute his work of creation: Sia (perception), Hu (creative

utterances), and Heka (magic), that bring the world into being out of the creative word, in addition to Iri (sight) and Sedjem (hearing).¹²

The *dꜣjsw* and the god Hu were both regarded as the creator's creative words. While Hu appeared only in human form, the *dꜣjsw* had varied forms. In contrast to Hu, who did not receive any worship, the *dꜣjsw* were worshipped in the temples where they took part in its foundation ceremonies or were associated with its origin myth as part of ancestor worship, and offerings were made to them.

The *dꜣjsw* were dual-natured entities; they embodied both good and evil natures. While Mehet-Weret's seven personified utterances carried protection, the goddess Sekhmet's seven arrows represented evil and caused trouble. These entities were highly skilled and widely trusted; their primary responsibility was maintaining the cosmic order and everything that keeps goodness in the whole earth.

The *dꜣjsw* were associated with various deities, including Mehet-Weret, Neith, Tatenen, Shebtyu, the builder gods (Khnum), Thoth, Seshat, Re, and Ptah.

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Abbreviations

CT V = de Buck, A. 1954. *The Egyptian Coffin Texts. Volume V. Texts of Spells 355–471* (Oriental Institute Publications 73). Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Edfou = Chassinat, É. and M. Rochemonteix 1897–1934. *Le temple d'Édfou. vols I–XIV (Mémoires publiés par les membres de la Mission Archéologique Française au Caire 10–31)*. Cairo: Institut français d'archéologie orientale.

Esna = Sauneron, S. 1963–1975. *Le Temple d'Esna. Vols II–III, VI*. Cairo: Institut français d'archéologie orientale.

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¹² cf. Hornung 1982: 76.

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Enhancing Documentation and Communication for Preserving Cultural Heritage: A Case Study of Mallawi Museum

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Abstract

Cultural heritage is an invaluable asset that portrays human achievements over centuries. The need to preserve and document it is considered extremely important, stated in several documents, such as the Burra Charter. With technological advancements, conservation concepts have evolved, and digital tools have opened new avenues for cultural heritage conservation. This paper examines the crucial role of documentation in preserving cultural heritage, focusing on the Mallawi Museum in Upper Egypt, which suffered significant losses due to vandalism and looting in 2013. The research evaluates the documentation's impact on crisis management, response, and recovery efforts, highlighting the importance of adopting best practices and leveraging digital toolkits. By investigating the challenges and opportunities of documentation, while ensuring its accessibility and appreciation for future generations.

Keywords

Museums; Documentation; Cultural Heritage; Regional Museums; Preservation

Introduction

Museum collections should be documented according to accepted professional standards. Such documentation should include a full identification and description of each object, its associations, provenance, condition, treatment, and present location. Such data should be kept in a secure environment and be supported by retrieval systems providing access to the information by the museum personnel and other legitimate users (International Council of Museums [ICOM] 2006: section 2.20).

The significance of documentation extends beyond merely cataloguing or recording information; it plays a vital role in the preservation, conservation, and interpretation of cultural artefacts. Documentation facilitates collaboration and knowledge-sharing among researchers, conservators, and stakeholders, promoting a comprehensive understanding of cultural heritage. An example is the Mallawi Museum in Upper Egypt, established in 1963, which boasts a significant collection of artefacts from the Graeco-Roman, Pharaonic, and Islamic periods. However, the vandalism, looting, and arson that in the Museum experienced in August 2013 resulted in the destruction or theft of a large portion of its collection and the loss of its documentary archives. This incident highlights the crucial role of documentation in preserving cultural heritage.

Documentation serves as the brain of a museum, playing a vital role in identifying, tracking, and recovering stolen items. It provides proof of ownership and aids law enforcement in tracing and

recovering lost pieces. Documentation can also enhance public understanding and appreciation through meaningful interpretations.

This study places particular emphasis on the documentation tools used before and after the museum's destruction and emphasises the need for museums to adopt best practice in documentation, leverage digital toolkits, and invest in ongoing research and inventory management. Community awareness and engagement are also vital in supporting the museum's efforts. By prioritising documentation, museums can better protect their collections and promote a deeper understanding of cultural heritage.

Objectives

This paper aims to explore how documentation practices, particularly in response to crisis, can support the safeguarding, recovery, and reinterpretation of cultural heritage, by using the Mallawi Museum as a case study.

This topic was chosen because documentation remains a crucial yet often overlooked element in heritage protection, particularly in regions susceptible to conflict or looting. The Mallawi Museum serves as a compelling example of how the absence or loss of documentation can exacerbate the damage caused by a crisis and how rebuilding documentation can facilitate recovery efforts.

Methodology

This study began with a comprehensive literature review and an analysis of relevant documentary sources. These materials were selected to bridge theoretical approaches to museum documentation with the practical realities faced by heritage institutions operating in crisis contexts.

In addition to desk-based research, qualitative data was collected through semi-structured interviews conducted with museum professionals, heritage specialists, and local stakeholders who were directly or indirectly involved with the Mallawi Museum. The interviews focused on understanding the documentation practices before and after the 2013 incident, the challenges faced in restoring the lost records, and the strategies adopted to rebuild institutional memory.

Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure the inclusion of individuals with direct experience or knowledge of the case study. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and thematically analysed to extract key patterns and insights. This qualitative analysis helped to contextualise the theoretical framework within the specific realities of the Mallawi Museum, offering a grounded perspective on the role of documentation in cultural heritage preservation and recovery.

Cultural Heritage

Cultural heritage can be understood as a form of collective memory – a socially constructed process shaped by contemporary political, economic, and social contexts (Smith 2006). This perspective emphasises that heritage is not simply about studying or preserving the past, but about actively selecting, interpreting, and representing heritage resources to address present-day needs and concerns (Simon 2010; Roued-Cunliffe and Copeland 2017). Therefore, working in heritage management or the heritage sector often focuses on how heritage is mediated and presented for current and future generations, rather than solely engaging in historical research. As Graham and Howard (2008: 2) explain, the contents and meanings attributed to heritage are chosen in the present and bequeathed to an imagined future.

The content of cultural heritage is commonly seen as embracing the material or tangible–natural landscapes, settlements, buildings, monuments, and the built environment in general –and the intangible. The latter term is defined in the criteria set out in the United Nations Educational, Social and Cultural Organisation’s (UNESCO) criteria for World Heritage Sites as the ‘expressions, knowledge and skills that communities...recognise as part of their cultural heritage’, a ‘living cultural heritage’ expressed in a number of ways including oral traditions and social practices (UNESCO n.d.).

Intangible heritage, itself a contested concept, is ‘interactive, dynamic and cohesive’ and ‘transmitted from generation to generation’ to provide ‘people with a sense of identity and continuity’ (UNESCO 2005).

The diversity of definitions of cultural heritage is extensive, and the meaning behind it has been constantly changing over time, influenced by different contexts and changing environments. Originally, it only covered tangible heritage, such as buildings, monuments, and sites; but with the passage of time, it extended beyond the tangible forms to all the intangible dimensions as well. Now, the definition of cultural heritage is necessarily broad, and includes the ways of living developed by communities and passed from generation to generation, such as customs, practices, places, objects, artistic expressions and values (Howard 2003; Smith 2006). Moreover, it is also perceived as ‘a group of resources inherited from the past which people identify, independently of ownership, as a reflection and expression of their constantly evolving values, beliefs, knowledge and traditions. It includes all aspects of the environment resulting from the interaction between people and places through time’ (FARO Convention, Council of Europe 2005). However, it is not possible to perceive cultural heritage, and how it is understood, as a static phenomenon, but rather as a dynamic process of constant evolution shaped by the changing contexts and expectations and perceptions of society. Today, many look past standard definitions and perceive cultural heritage as a vital resource for socio-economic and sustainable development, which can significantly contribute to smarter, environmentally friendly, socially aware and more inclusive societies (Angelina and Glivetić 2020: 8).

Cultural heritage is not just a set of cultural objects or traditions from the past. It is the set of physical elements and intangible attributes that represent a people or society, which has been acquired by social inheritance of the ancestors. UNESCO defines cultural heritage broadly as:

The legacy of physical artefacts and intangible attributes of a group or society that are inherited from past generations, maintained in the present and bestowed for the benefit of future generations (UNESCO 2007).

It follows, therefore, that cultural heritage plays a significant role in both economic and social life, even though much of it remains informal, lacking public protection and explicit management. Nevertheless, it serves as a key institution connecting history, territory and society, thereby shaping the cultural context of social life (Barrère 2015: 10).

Cultural heritage documentation

Historical and cultural relics are irreplaceable, as they represent unique and authentic traces of the past. Any modification can compromise their value and authenticity. Therefore, it is necessary to strictly comply with cultural heritage laws and regulations (Hoang 2021: 1–7).

Documentation refers to all records providing information about the nature, origin, and ownership of an object. It is crucial for the protection of works of art and antiquities, as it becomes extremely difficult to trace and return objects to their rightful owners when proper documentation is lacking (ICOM 2006). While cultural objects physically exist, their continuity and proper identification are

supported and safeguarded through accompanying documentation. This documentation helps establish the object's provenance, facilitates its safe identification, and thus enables its recovery in case of theft. In cases of large-scale theft or looting, the absence of documentation can have dramatic consequences, making the recovery of objects almost impossible.

As cultural heritage can be threatened by various factors, such as natural hazards, vandalism, development of cities, and aging, one cannot guarantee their eternality, and each moment poses a risk of irreversible loss. Thus, we should make sure that they are well documented, so that in the case of their loss we could pass the documentation and recording archives to the future generations or if needed use them for reconstruction purposes. By preserving detailed records, heritage documentation supports educational, restoration, and conservation efforts, thus maintaining the cultural narrative of societies (Hassani 2015).

The need to protect cultural heritage against damage, loss, theft, and crimes against humanity, has acted as an incentive for the development of standardised documentation practices. The 1970 UNESCO Convention on the means of prohibiting and preventing the illicit import, export, and transfer of ownership of cultural property recommends that national inventories be established to identify cultural property.¹ Inventorying objects in a standardised way can help prevent loss and support the recovery of lost items. The availability of good documentation also has the potential to ensure that knowledge about objects exists beyond the lifespan of the objects themselves. It provides a foundation for the use of a collection by curators, researchers, and the public (CIDOC 2012: 20). Thus, the documentation should include a full identification and description of each object, its associations, provenance, condition, treatment and present location. This data should be kept in a secure environment and be supported by retrieval systems providing access to the information by the museum personnel and other legitimate users' (ICOM 2006: 14). It will also help authorities to recognise a stolen object and distinguish it from other similar objects, if found (CIDOC 2012).

Cultural heritage documentation involves systematically recording historic sites, objects, and cultural landscapes to preserve their information for future generations, employing methods like photography, 3D scanning, and written records (Hassani 2015). 'Documentation' is the process of recording information for the collections for which a museum or institution is responsible. Specifically, museum documentation is concerned with the development and use of information about the objects within a museum collection and the procedures which support the management of the collection (UNESCO 2007: 2). Documentation is the information gathered, recorded and maintained about a collection. It is fundamental to collections care and, as such, forms part of any museum's basic remit. Documentation proves that a museum is fulfilling the requirements of collections care, contributes to its credibility and public accountability and provides proof of title. With good documentation and good documentation practices, a museum can assure the future of its collection and facilitate current and new uses of the objects. The implementation of policies and procedures depends on good documentation. Information should be recorded objectively and for posterity and should be independent of the knowledge of individual members of staff. (Matassa 2011: 63).

Collections documentation is the documentation of the objects in a museum's collection, on paper or electronically. It records the creation, history, and acquisition by the museum and subsequent history of all objects in a museum collection. Such records include provenance and provenience documents, acquisition documents, conservation reports, cataloguing records, images, and research papers, both created by the holding institution and by previous owners or independent researchers,

¹ <https://www.unesco.org/en/fight-illicit-trafficking/about>.

among others. These records are also used for the process of gathering this information in future research (CIDOC 2012: 24).

The museum must be able to account for all the objects in its care and must keep records of any item entering the premises, the exit of any item and the locations of all objects that it holds. Information contributes to knowledge and enjoyment of the objects. It can help make connections between objects, classifications and entire collections, can aid research and enriches the visitor experience. Published information can enable remote users to search a collection, make comparisons and undertake research. Information can come from any area of the museum or from outside the museum but it has to be gathered, noted and preserved in one place. Ideally, one person should be designated with overall responsibility for documentation policy and procedures and for maintaining the documentation system. (Matassa 2011: 68).

The importance of communication in preserving cultural heritage

Community engagement plays a pivotal role in the success of heritage preservation initiatives, as it taps into the knowledge, passion, and resources of residents. When communities are actively involved in the conservation and management of cultural heritage sites, they become stewards of their heritage, ensuring its long-term sustainability and vitality.

International Council on Monuments and Sites's (ICOMOS) Burra Charter states that 'Conservation of heritage places should include involving members of those places host communities who are associated with them.' The Council of Europe, in their value of cultural heritage convention, assured the necessity of cooperation between government and communities in the management of heritage buildings in order to promote social awareness and prevent conflicts (Afifi *et al.* 2022: 343).

The concept of cultural heritage emerged and developed in the context in 19th-century Europe. The role of cultural heritage in society was to support an exclusive collective identity for each nation, by providing it with a distinctive origin and evolution to the present day (Holtorf 2011: 10–11). Heritage is less about tangible material artefacts or other intangible forms of the past than about the meanings placed upon them and the representations which are created from them. Consequently, it is now largely agreed that most heritage has little intrinsic worth. Rather, values are placed upon artefacts or activities by people who, when they view heritage, do so through a whole series of lenses, the most obvious of which are: nationality; religion; ethnicity; class; wealth; gender; personal history; These meanings are produced, exchanged, and change over time and across cultures. Heritage reflects societal identity, is shaped by social conflicts, and is open to continuous revision and change (Graham and Howard 2008: 2).

Nation-states play leading roles in the construction of heritage as they subscribe to a set of ideas that are consequently embedded through socialization and education. As a result, the state is usually the official arbitrator of public commemoration and, therefore, of national heritage, and as such, it assumes responsibility over planning, maintaining and funding memorial monuments, programmes and events (Graham and Howard 2008: 40). However, financial constraints are a primary barrier, as many communities lack the necessary funding to support extensive preservation efforts. This often leads to reliance on external grants and donations, which can be inconsistent and insufficient. Additionally, the lack of education and awareness about the importance of cultural heritage preservation diminishes community engagement. Many community members are unaware of the cultural and historical significance of local heritage sites, leading to apathy or neglect. Logistical issues, such as remote locations and inadequate infrastructure, further complicated preservation activities by limiting access and resource availability. Finally, a community's internal conflicts and

differing priorities can impede collective action, resulting in fragmented efforts. Addressing these barriers requires targeted interventions, including financial support, educational programmes, and improved infrastructure, as well as fostering a unified community vision for preservation (Usmaedi 2024: 55).

The Mallawi Museum in Egypt serves as a poignant example of the challenges posed by financial constraints in cultural heritage preservation. The museum's recovery efforts following destruction and looting highlight the need for sustainable funding models and community engagement (Hemida 2024). Limited funding can hinder restoration and maintenance efforts, forcing institutions like the Mallawi Museum trying to meet its needs with what the ministry provides, which can be inconsistent and insufficient. Furthermore, community involvement in cultural heritage preservation is crucial, as seen in the potential for local communities to support the museum's recovery and promote its cultural significance. By engaging local communities in preservation efforts, institutions like the Mallawi Museum can foster a sense of ownership and ensure the long-term sustainability of heritage preservation initiatives.

We must further consider that the level of community involvement in cultural heritage preservation varies significantly across different regions. In some areas, communities are highly engaged in preservation activities, actively participating in restoration projects, organising cultural events, and advocating for heritage sites. This involvement often includes volunteer efforts and collaboration with local authorities and conservation organisations. However, in other regions, community participation is minimal, with limited awareness and engagement in heritage preservation (Usmaedi 2024: 54). Although, community involvement has both positive and negative impacts on the effectiveness of cultural heritage preservation. On the positive side, active participation from community members enhances the authenticity and sustainability of preservation efforts, and fosters a sense of pride and ownership, which motivates continuous support for preservation projects (Usmaedi 2024: 54).

Case study: Mallawi Museum

Location

The Mallawi Museum, affiliated with the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, is located in the heart of the Minya Governate's city of Mallawi in Upper Egypt, along the highway connecting Aswan and Cairo. Established in 1961 in order to showcase the local community's heritage, the museum was opened on 23 July 1963, and after substantial vandalism and looting in 2013, was subsequently reopened on 22 September 2016. Spanning 2500m² with a building area of 600m², the Museum's design is inspired by pharaonic architecture, resembling the Karnak Temple (Figure 1).

The Museum features two floors with four halls containing 1,089 artefacts from various periods, including Pharaonic, Greek, Roman, Coptic and Islamic antiquities. Notable exhibits include baboon and ibis statues (Figure 2), finely decorated sarcophagi, canopic jars, Roman coins, and ancient Egyptian tools. The Museum also boasts an outdoor botanical garden with plants and trees over 50 years old, enhancing the overall cultural experience (Nessim 2024).

Significance of the cultural heritage represented by the Mallawi Museum

The Mallawi Museum holds a unique and rich position in Egypt's cultural landscape, showcasing the city's historical significance as a hub for the Pharaonic, Greek, and Roman civilisations. Established to display artefacts excavated from local archaeological sites such as Tuna El-Gebel and Ashmunein and their surroundings, the Museum highlights the region's association with the god Thoth, the



Figure 1. Mallawi Museum building from the outside, Minya, Egypt. The official page of Mallawi Museum (29 September 2016), <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=935620689876085&set=a.552696280235819>.



Figure 2. The old display and traditional showcases that were vandalised at the Mallawi Museum in 2013. Photo taken by the researchers, 2012.

ancient Egyptian god of wisdom, writing, and knowledge. In these sites, many mummified animals; pharaonic monuments and ibis statues linked to the cult of Thoth were discovered (Curators of Mallawi Museum 2024).

The Museum's primary focus on displaying the history and heritage of Mallawi city and highlighting the region's historical importance, offering visitors a chance to explore the past and gain a deeper understanding of the local culture. By preserving and promoting the cultural identity of the local community, the Museum has a significant educational and cultural impact. Additionally, it contributes to the socio-economic development of the region, fostering a sense of pride and appreciation for the region's historical and cultural significance while creating job opportunities for the local population. Furthermore, the Museum plays a vital role in the growth of the tourism industry in the Minya Governorate, attracting both domestic and international visitors to explore the area's historical sites and cultural attractions (Curators of Mallawi Museum 2024).

The Mallawi Museum's cultural heritage preservation is crucial for maintaining Egypt's rich history and identity. By protecting and conserving its artefacts and historical significance, the Museum can continue to educate and inspire future generations, promote cultural understanding, and support national pride. Effective preservation efforts will also contribute to the Museum's role as a valuable cultural and tourism destination. Consequently, the preservation of cultural heritage is a shared responsibility that involves individuals, communities, governments, and international organisations.

Vandalism and looting of the Mallawi Museum in 2013

In the wake of the Arab Spring (2010–2012)² and the repercussions of the January 25 Revolution (2011), Egyptian museums faced numerous instances of looting and vandalism. The Egyptian Museum, for example, was among the first to be targeted and vandalised during the early days of the revolution (Rashed 2015: 30). The Mallawi Museum incident is one of a series of criminal and unlawful acts committed against Egypt's cultural heritage in recent years, aimed at destroying Egyptian civilisation. However, this tragic event has also become a symbol of the efforts made by numerous individuals and organisations to protect Egypt's cultural heritage (Hemida 2024).

Unfortunately, the Mallawi Museum was subjected to deliberate looting and vandalism in August 2013 by terrorists and protesters. The attack turned the museum into a battlefield, with automatic fire echoing from all sides. The incident highlighted the vulnerability of cultural heritage sites during times of conflict (Curators of Mallawi Museum 2024).

The incident began with an announced sit-in in the Museum's garden, which escalated into chaos. The protesters damaged surveillance cameras removed the original iron fence, and breached the museum's wall, which was less than one meter high. They then broke into the Museum and set the building ablaze, which resulted in the destruction and looting of much of its contents. Furthermore, all documents and papers related to the Museum's records, collections, and administrative affairs were completely destroyed and burned (Figures 3 and 4; Hemida 2024).

The attack resulted in the destruction of 1,049 out of the Museum's 1,089 artefacts, leaving behind a trail of devastation. Distorted ancient statues and shattered glass cases, once home to rare treasures, now laid in ruins. The Museum's main display hall was littered with broken glass and debris (Figure 5), with

² The Arab Spring was a wave of anti-government protests, uprisings, and armed rebellions that swept across the Arab world starting in late 2010. Fueled by socio-economic grievances, political repression, and social media, these movements challenged authoritarian regimes, sparking hopes for democracy.



Figure 3. Burning and destruction of Mallawi Museum in 2013. Photo taken by the Museum curators, 2013.



Figure 4. Burning and destruction of Mallawi Museum in 2013. Photo taken by the Museum curators, 2013.



Figure 5. All objects, display showcases and halls were destroyed and looted during the 2013 vandalism. Photo taken by the Museum curators, 2013.



Figure 6. The artefacts that were too heavy were left and vandalised in situ. Photo taken by the Museum curators, 2013.



Figure 7. Re-sorting the remains of broken and scattered artefacts in the Mallawi Museum. Photo taken by the Museum curators, 2014.

similar scenes of destruction visible in adjacent rooms and upstairs. Larger artefacts, too heavy to be carried away, were vandalised and damaged in place (Figure 6). To this day, 400 artefacts remain missing (Hemida 2024).

The Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities worked diligently to recover the missing artefacts. An archaeological committee was formed to inspect the site, document the damage, and compile a list of stolen items. This list was shared with ports, Interpol, and the ICOM website to prevent smuggling. UNESCO also distributed a red list of looted artefacts in Arabic and English. Local residents played a role in returning some artefacts after the Ministry declared an amnesty, promising no criminal charges for their return. Thanks to these efforts, many artefacts were recovered and returned to the Museum (Curators of Mallawi Museum 2024).

Following the recovery of some artefacts, the Museum was cleared of debris, with broken artefacts evacuated from the display halls and transferred to the Ashmonein warehouses for restoration. There, a meticulous process of re-sorting and reassembling pottery fragments, stone and marble monuments, and wooden and plaster artefacts began (Figures 7 and 8). Approximately 50 artefacts were found to be completely destroyed, while the remaining recovered pieces underwent restoration and maintenance (Nessim 2024).

The Museum reopened following a three-year redevelopment project funded by Egypt's Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, Minya Governorate, and the Italian government through an Italy-Egypt debt exchange programme. The Museum's reopening on 22 September 2016, marked a significant milestone for the Egyptian state in its efforts to overcome chaos and terrorism. The two-story museum building has undergone a comprehensive renovation, featuring updated interior design and décor, a new lighting and security system, and replacement of damaged showcases with new ones (Nessim 2024).



Figure 8. Re-sorting of the remains of broken and scattered artefacts in the Mallawi Museum after they were looted. Photo taken by the Museum curators, 2014.

Role of Documentation in Crisis

Museum documentation and inventories are the primary and most critical aspects when dealing with emergency situations, as organised documentation of the collection enables museums to take the initial step in retrieving lost objects (Hekman 2010: 45).

Several policies and procedures are concerned with the safety of museum collections, involving curators, registrars, and conservators. These individuals possess the knowledge and authority to approve and implement protocols for handling museum collections in such situations by consulting collection documents. These documents specify the conditions of artefacts, taking into account the materials they are made of, the extent of damage, and appropriate methods of mobilisation and storage (Dorge and Jones 1999: 139). Consequently, during the evacuation and relocation of these objects and their records, the artefacts are maintained in excellent condition.

On the other hand, individuals with limited knowledge about handling museum objects may also be required to assist in this work. In these cases, documentation will aid these individuals in understanding and handling these items. Especially in disastrous situations, a clear plan is essential, including object documentation, staff responsibilities, and awareness levels for each item, as well as a safe relocation and storage facility for exhibits and museum catalogues (Sant 2017: 42). Museum collections require precise documentation, as it not only assigns value but also enables efficient tracking of lost items. Without thorough records, the recovery of stolen or damaged items becomes nearly impossible and poses a significant challenge. Moreover, sharing documentation information, rather than withholding it, enhances object protection and facilitates restitution claims, ultimately benefitting the institution.

Unfortunately, many museums have incomplete or inadequate documentation of their collections. Consequently, when these museums face a disastrous situation, the safety and security of historical items and heritage sites are compromised. Museum objects that are not properly registered or documented are more susceptible to theft and loss. In an effort to advocate the process of documentation and to avoid museums losing their value due to lack of documentation, museums are focusing more on, and acknowledging the importance that, documentation provides to their collection, especially during emergency situations (Thani 2019).

Mallawi Museum's pre-2013 documentation and communication practices

Before 2013, the Mallawi Museum's documentation and communication systems were inadequate, which exacerbated the challenges of recovering lost items and managing its collection. The Mallawi Museum's experience offers valuable lessons, highlighting the importance of addressing documentation challenges to prevent similar issues in the future. Prior to the 2013 vandalism, the Museum faced significant challenges in its documentation mechanisms and community engagement, which tragically resulted in the destruction of over 1,000 artefacts from various historical eras (Nessim 2024).

As mentioned earlier, the Mallawi Museum's collections were primarily gathered through excavations in Upper Egypt, including Tuna el-Gebel and Ashmunein. The recording process relied heavily on paper records extracted from excavation notes, with limited documentation that only included the object's name, era, and location. There was a lack of digital records, advanced photographs, and additional data to support the object's acquisition, discovery, and display purpose (Nessim 2024).

The museum team inherited a substantial backlog of artefacts with incomplete data, facing a daunting cataloguing challenge. At the time, they were limited to traditional documentation methods, which were hindered by inadequate funding, insufficient time, outdated systems, and a lack of expertise. Furthermore, staff members were overly burdened by multiple responsibilities and had limited opportunities for training, impeding their ability to devise strategic plans for updating artifact documentation. The scarcity of financial resources and small budgets further constrained the development of modern recording and documentation tools, falling short of contemporary standards (Curators of Mallawi Museum 2024).

Regarding communication with the local community, the Mallawi Museum's pre-2013 approach to community engagement was notably ineffective. Despite its critical role in preserving and sharing cultural heritage with the public, the Mallawi Museum struggled to connect with the local community and broader audiences. Key shortcomings included limited public awareness, a lack of educational programmes, and insufficient cultural events that could have fostered a stronger connection with its audience, and responded to their evolving needs and interests. Moreover, the Museum's exhibits were presented in an uninspiring manner, featuring outdated displays, traditional lighting, and unengaging narratives and interpretation methods that ultimately failed to captivate visitors (Curators of Mallawi Museum 2024).

Despite the Museum's limited community engagement, the local community's deep appreciation for the cultural heritage of the museum and its historical significance played a crucial role in countering the vandalism. They actively supported the police in recovering stolen artefacts, with one young man alone returning 80 artefacts. Additional returns from other locals included 25 gold coins (out of 150 gold coins taken), 30 silver and bronze coins, wooden and bronze statues, pottery vessels, faience statues, pottery lamps, and parts of wooden coffins. These recovered artefacts were subsequently stored in the Ashmonein area's storehouse (Curators of Mallawi Museum 2024).

Role of documentation in new displaying and interpretation at the Mallowi Museum

‘Interpretation is the way that we connect visitors or audiences to our historic places and collections; it is how we communicate stories and ideas about our heritage’ (Gándara 2023: 15). Museums utilise collections, built heritage, and intangible heritage to narrate stories and facilitate understanding of the significance behind objects. Effective interpretation requires a deep understanding of the heritage, including museum collections, history, and tangible and intangible aspects. Before interpreting, it is essential to review documentation and information about the collections, potentially producing a statement of significance for specific objects or groups (Hemida 2024).

Documentation enables curators, developers, and designers to gain in-depth knowledge about objects. Even without intimate knowledge, end-users can access object records using keywords, collectors, time periods, or geographical locations. However, the role of documentation precedes this point, laying the groundwork for effective database utilisation.

The Mallowi Museum’s experience highlights the importance of documentation. After the destruction and burning of paper records at the Museum, the Museum relied on a stored backup of the data in the museum sector; this archival data played a pivotal role and proved effective in restoration, identification, and reinterpretation efforts, enabling the identification of objects suitable for re-display and informing their integration into a new narrative with more interactive interpretations (Hemida 2024).

The Mallowi Museum was subsequently reopened (Figure 9), showcasing a remarkable collection of approximately 944 artefacts spanning from prehistoric times to the Islamic era. The collection



Figure 9. The new displays at the Mallowi Museum after its reopening in 2016. Photo taken by researchers, 2024.



Figure 10. Statue of King Akhenaten's daughter, Ankhesenpaaten, from the 18th dynasty in the New Kingdom era in ancient Egypt after restoration and re-display. Photo taken by researchers, 2024.

comprises 425 pieces from its former holdings, supplemented by carefully selected items from the storehouses of Ashmonein and Behnesa in Minya Governorate. The Museum's display layout has been revamped, with the first floor featuring three dimly-lit, stone-blue exhibition halls that guide visitors through a U-shaped tour, starting from the entrance, passing through the first and second halls, and concluding at the third (Nessim 2024).

The first hall showcases daily and family life of the ancient Egyptians through a striking double statue of Ankh-Pepi and his wife, dating back to the Old Kingdom, c. 4500 years ago. The exhibit also features various crafts and tools used for writing, lighting, hunting, baking, and cooking. Informative panels illustrate the development of tools in the region, complemented by an array of artefacts reflecting daily life, religious beliefs, and artistic styles of the ancient Egyptians. Notably, the display includes an impressive collection of jewelry, such as makeup containers, wigs, necklaces, earrings, and bracelets. The hall also boasts rare masterpieces, including a remarkable statue of King Akhenaten's daughter, Ankhesenpaaten, from the 18th dynasty in the New Kingdom (Figure 10; Curators of Mallawi Museum 2024).

The second hall showcases an ancient funerary collection that reflects traditions surrounding the afterlife in ancient times. The exhibit features colourful and plain anthropoid wooden and alabaster coffins, including the notable display of Henu's burial equipment (Figure 11), one of the region's ancient nobles. This collection highlights ancient Egyptian religious rituals and illustrates key concepts such as justice, love, and eternity. Additionally, a collection of mummified animals is on



Figure 11. The display showing Henu's burial equipment, in the second hall of the Mallawi Museum. Photo taken by researchers, 2024.



Figure 12. Display of artefacts from the Islamic era, in the third hall of the Mallawi Museum. Photo taken by researchers, 2024.

display, demonstrating the ancient Egyptians' reverence for and affection towards animals (Curators of Mallawi Museum 2024).

The third hall features Graeco-Roman artefacts, including mummy masks, pottery statues, paintings, and tombstones. The adjacent section showcases artefacts from the Coptic Period (3rd -7th centuries CE), such as manuscripts, icons, and pottery, offering insights into the religious and cultural practices of early Christian communities in Egypt. Additionally, the exhibition includes a selection of Islamic-era artefacts (Figure 12), comprising pottery, manuscripts, coins, and calligraphy, which demonstrate the significant influence of Islamic art and culture on the region. Beyond its

historical collections, the Mallawi Museum also highlights contemporary and modern Egyptian art, showcasing local artistic talents and fostering cultural exchange (Curators of Mallawi Museum 2024).

The second floor of the Museum is home to a scientific research library catering to students, particularly those pursuing archaeology and heritage studies. Additionally, there are rooms dedicated to educational activities for children. A lecture hall hosts various events, including workshops, celebrations, and festivals for national occasions, holidays, and diverse fields, engaging all age groups and enhancing the Museum's community role. Furthermore, the Museum's outdoor botanical garden features a collection of native plants and trees, offering visitors a chance to explore local flora and its cultural significance in Egypt (Curators of Mallawi Museum 2024).

The current documentation in Mallawi Museum

Following the 2013 vandalism, which resulted in the destruction and burning of all paper records and administrative files at the Mallawi Museum, including vital data on holdings and crucial information, the Museum leveraged a backup copy stored at the Information Center in the Museums Sector of the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities. Additionally, an electronic copy in Microsoft Word, supported by photos, was preserved at the Registration and Documentation Department of the Museums Sector. Further documentation sources included notebooks belonging to the Curators of the Mallawi Museum, as well as shared pictures and data from researchers and students.

These efforts yielded significant results: out of the total documented collection of 1086 artefacts, 1046 were reported missing after the looting. Through recovery efforts, 642 artefacts were successfully retrieved. Combined with the 40 artefacts that had not been stolen, this brought the total number of artefacts currently held in the collection back to 682. The preserved records played a crucial role in restoration and maintenance, informing the narrative and design of the new displays, and identifying associated objects. Notably, 40% of the old collections were featured in the new display. Subsequently, the registration and documentation process was enhanced by the implementation of a new paper register, which provides comprehensive documentation of all museum collections. This register is further supported by an electronic Microsoft Word version, accompanied by high-quality photographs taken from multiple angles, ensuring detailed and thorough documentation of the collections (Hemida 2024).

The Museum has also implemented the Fiber System, which features a dedicated Information Systems Room equipped with computers, scanners, printers, and a private internet connection. This system integrates with the Ministry's unified information network, linking all museums and storage, thereby facilitating centralised record-keeping and connectivity managed by the Ministry. Furthermore, the Museum has developed a 'Crisis and Disaster Planning Documentation', which includes detailed plans for crisis management and disaster response, as well as staff training and preparation to ensure effective implementation of these plans (Nessim 2024).

The current communication in Mallawi Museum

While the primary focus of this research is on the role of documentation in preserving cultural heritage, it is equally important to explore how current communication practices at the Mallawi Museum complement these efforts. Effective communication not only raises public awareness about the museum's documented collections, but also fosters community engagement and support, which are essential for sustaining preservation initiatives and safeguarding cultural heritage in the aftermath of crises.



Figure 13. Educational activity for children 'Children's Cinema' at Mallawi Museum. Official Facebook page of Mallawi Museum (4 February 2023), <https://www.facebook.com/share/p/16fF4xtPoi/>.

According to the ICOM Statutes, a museum is defined as a 'non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment.' Following the 2013 vandalism and reopening, the Mallawi Museum has strived to become an accessible, friendly, and inspiring place for local community involvement.

The Museum has launched several programmes to reinforce its role as a public space and lifelong learning institution, offering education, cultural, and social opportunities for all. As a result, the Mallawi Museum has become increasingly popular and attractive. The staff promote the Museum on social media, cooperate with schools and civil society groups to organise visits, and arrange student visits that align their history curriculum when it includes eras or objects exhibited in the Museum. These visits incorporate engaging methods such as storytelling, living history, puppet shows, and children's cinema to convey historical facts in an entertaining way (Figure 13). The Museum also features a museum radio programme that narrates the story of artefacts for local children and family members were able to experience the museum in an unprecedented fashion. Furthermore, the Museum holds meetings in schools to teach museum etiquette and behaviors for visiting museums (Hemida 2024).

Temporary exhibitions highlight specific artefacts, and workshops on heritage crafts like carpets, pottery, and wicker (Figure 14) raise awareness about the importance of cultural heritage among local populations. This encourages them to protect museums and historic sites (Curators of Mallawi Museum 2024).

The Museum actively involves diverse audiences, including people with disabilities and the elderly. Distinctive activities include workshops in Braille and meetings for seniors. These groups often receive free entry to the museum, lectures, and participation in cultural events.



Figure 14. Educational workshop on traditional crafts at the Mallawi Museum. Official Facebook page of Mallawi Museum (22 March 2024), <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=809014827937295&set=pb.100064863541513.-2207520000&type=3>.



Figure 15. The educational activities and guided tours inside the Mallawi Museum. Official Facebook page of Mallawi Museum (1 April 2024), <https://www.facebook.com/share/p/1YD3xATGgU/>.

By providing these benefits, the Museum creates a dialogue with new audiences and empowers them to act as a link between the Museum and other community groups, supporting cultural events and promoting daily museum activities that help preserve cultural heritage (Curators of Mallawi Museum 2024).

Best practices derived from the Mallawi Museum

The Mallawi Museum's experience offers valuable insights into best practices for museums. A key lesson learned is the importance of comprehensive digital cataloguing systems for all artefacts. The 2013 looting highlighted the limitations of traditional paper-based documentation, which was largely destroyed, underscoring the need for secure and easily accessible digital records.

Maintaining off-site digital backups of all records and images in a separate location is also crucial. This was demonstrated by the vital role documentation played in identifying stolen objects. Accurate documentation of damage and loss is vital for recovery efforts, and museums should establish procedures for quickly and accurately documenting such incidents to facilitate recovery and restoration.

Community outreach is a key area of focus, where increasing public understanding of a museum's value can foster community support. To achieve this, museums should develop educational programmes that enhance public appreciation of cultural heritage and engage local communities in preservation efforts. By doing so, museums can build a strong relationship with their community and ensure the long-term preservation of cultural heritage.

Proactive risk assessment and mitigation are also essential in minimizing potential losses. Museums should regularly assess vulnerabilities and implement strategies to address them. Furthermore, collaboration and information sharing among institutions are vital for striving towards comprehensive documentation and benefitting the entire museum community. By adopting these best practices, museums can enhance the protection of their collections and fulfil their role in preserving cultural heritage.

Findings and analysis

The 2013 looting of the Mallawi Museum revealed critical gaps in documentation and underscored the importance of comprehensive records in facilitating recovery and crisis response. The lack of complete inventories and digital backups hindered initial efforts to track and retrieve stolen artefacts. However, subsequent initiatives demonstrated the potential of digital documentation in supporting cultural heritage preservation during emergencies.

One of the key findings is that modernising documentation practices is essential. Regular review and updating of documentation and communication strategies can significantly improve institutional resilience. The study also suggests a global shift towards digital-first documentation strategies, especially in regions vulnerable to conflict or disaster. This requires international support and collaboration to assist museums with limited technical or financial resources.

Community engagement emerged as another important theme. The active involvement of the local community in safeguarding and reporting missing artefacts contributed meaningfully to preservation efforts. This highlights the importance of proactive communication and public education as part of heritage protection strategies.

In addition, the research points to the need for continuous professional development. Training museum staff in registration and documentation is critical, and partnerships between institutions can foster the exchange of knowledge and expertise. Finally, the long-term sustainability of such efforts relies heavily on securing stable and sufficient funding. Without financial investment, even the most advanced documentation systems may fail to deliver on their potential.

Conclusion

The Mallawi Museum case study highlights the importance of digital documentation in preserving cultural heritage. Digital cataloguing systems and secure off-site backups of records and images are crucial for protecting heritage assets. The 2013 looting exposed gaps in traditional paper-based documentation, and a printed copy of documentation stored elsewhere proved instrumental in identifying stolen objects.

The integration of digital technologies, such as virtual reality, augmented reality, and digital archiving, plays a pivotal role in documenting, preserving, and promoting cultural heritage. These technologies capture and store detailed information, making it accessible to a global audience and engaging younger generations. By leveraging digital technologies and fostering community involvement, preservation efforts can extend beyond physical boundaries, ensuring cultural heritage is preserved and appreciated worldwide.

Community engagement has been essential in preserving cultural heritage. Educational programmes have enhanced public appreciation of cultural heritage and involved the local community in preservation efforts. This approach has fostered a sense of ownership, responsibility, and cooperation between institutions, benefitting the entire museum community through shared knowledge and resources.

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Colourant Pigments in Sudan, Nubia and Egypt in the Neolithic Period

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Abstract

Although most previous studies on colourant pigments in northeastern Africa during the Neolithic Period have focused on rock art, this study explores the broader utilisation of colourant pigments beyond rock art during the late Neolithic Period. This is accomplished by compiling a comprehensive list of colourant pigments employed in the period along the Nile in both Sudan and Egypt, supported by a thorough examination of published data. Additionally, the study tries to identify the component of the white pigment used in the so-called 'caliciform beakers', referring to the preliminary pottery analyses conducted by the author using a Raman spectrometer and a microscope. The results of the archaeometric analyses are also considered ethnographically to see why the first colourant pigment used for decorating pottery vessels in northeastern Africa was white. This study sheds light to the meaning of pottery vessels and colourant pigments for the people in northeast Africa during the late Neolithic Period.

Keywords

Colourant Pigments; Malachite; Caliciform Beakers; Regional Differences; Pottery Decoration

Previous studies on colourant pigments in northeastern Africa in the Neolithic

Most previous studies on colourant pigments in northeastern Africa in the Neolithic Period are based on rock art (e.g. Kuper 2013; Riemer 2009; van Noten *et al.* 1978; Winkler 1939). The colourful rock art appeared for the first time in Egypt in Uwaynat and Gilf Kebir, in the Western Desert of Egypt, in or after the second half of the fifth millennium BCE, even though rock art in Egypt had only consisted of petroglyphs before that (Riemer 2009: 42, fig. 2). Three sites in the Wadi Sura, on the western side of the Abu Ras Plateau, are known for colourful rock art: the Cave of Swimmers, the Cave of Archers (both are also known as Wadi Sura I; Rothert 1952), and the Cave of Beasts (Wadi Sura II or Foggini-Mestekawi Cave; Kuper 2013). Researchers have pointed out that colourful rock art is related to pastoralists because of the emergence of thin-walled pottery often decorated with fine impressed or incised decorations, the disappearance of microlithic arrow heads, and the depictions of cattle pastoralism (e.g. Honoré 2019; Riemer 2009). Bluish and greenish-yellow colours were possibly used in rock art, new colours on the prehistoric palette, as identified by a recent study with a Raman spectrometer (Hamdan *et al.* 2021).

The use of colourant pigments in northeastern Africa in the Neolithic besides rock art

Colourant pigments were sprinkled over the deceased, as seen at the burial site R12 in North Dongola (Salvatori and Usai 2008). Ochre is the most frequently observed pigment in Egypt and Sudan, and is thought to have been used for cosmetic purposes (i.e. body and face painting) and dying of fabrics or other objects (Mączyńska 2013: 176). In addition, potters used yellow and red ochre to create slips for

TABLE 1. A LIST OF COLOURANT PIGMENTS FOUND AT NEOLITHIC SITES IN SUDAN AND EGYPT (BY THIS AUTHOR), WHERE P = PRESENT, A = ABSENT, AND X = PRESENT, BUT SEE COMMENT

	White	Yellow (ochre)	Red (ochre)	Black-topped vessel	Green (malachite)	Grinding stone	Cosmetic palette	Caliciform beaker	Slip
Merimde	P	P	P	A	A	P	P	A	In layer I, red. In layer II, a grey slip appeared. After layer III, black slip also joined. Black pigment such as black charcoal could have been used, though these are reported it may be the result of controlled firing process based on advanced knowledge of reducing and oxidising firing techniques.
Sais (phases I and II)	A	P	P	A	A	P	P	A	Red, brown, and black polish have been found. Black pigment such as black charcoal could have been used, though these are reported it may be the result from controlled firing process based on advanced knowledge of reducing and oxidising firing techniques.
The Fayum Neolithic	A	A	P	A	A	P	P	A	Red slip.
Badari/Tasian	P	A	P	P	P	P	P	P	Red wash for polished red ware class. The wash varies from grey, or dark neutral earth-brown, to a dull rather lighter coffee-brown shade. The colour of the slip is a bright red or brown-red.
Kharga Oasis	A	A	?	P	P	A	P	X (no white filling)	Red slip (De Dapper 2012; Dachy et al. 2018). No report about red ochre but red-slipped surface treatment is reported.
Dakhala Oasis (by Bashendi B)	A	A	?	P	A	A	P (Bashendi B)	P (Bashendi B/ no white filling)	Brown or reddish-brown to red (self-slip). No report about red ochre but 'red coat' surface treatment is reported.
Gebel Ramlah	A	P	P	P	P	P	P	X (no white filling)	Only self-slip (No slip).
Nabta Kiseiba (by Late)	A	P	P	P	A	A	P (Late)	A	Red to reddish brown.
2nd Cataract (the Khartoum Variant)	A	X as self-slip	X as self-slip	A	A	P (without pigment)	A	A	No slip.
2nd Cataract (the Abkan)	A	A	P	A	A	P cosmetic palettes or grinding stones		A	Mostly light red or pale grey (self-slip).
Sai Island	A	A	X as self-slip	P	A	P (without pigment)	A	A	No description of slip. Red or Brown (self-slip).
Kerma	A	A	P	P	A	A	P	X (el-Barga II/ no white filling)	No slip.
R12	P	P	P	A	X	P	P	P (yellow)	No slip. Wash is reported. Green Malachite was present not as pigment but as splinters, malachite, and amazonite.

	White	Yellow (ochre)	Red (ochre)	Black-topped vessel	Green (malachite)	Grinding stone	Cosmetic palette	Caliciform beaker	Slip
Kadero	P	P	P	A	X	P	P	P	Red slip. Green Malachite was present not as pigment but as splinters, malachite, and amazonite.
Al Khiday	A	P	P	A	A	P	X	X	Red and yellow (Salvatori says it is slip surface treatment but probably wash as Nordström explained).

malachite in a container is attested at other late Neolithic sites: examples are an ivory cosmetic container in a Badarian grave (Midant-Reynes 2000: 155),³ and containers of cow-horn or shell at burial pits in Gebel Ramlah (Kobusiewicz and Kabaciński 2010). Since malachite is always found with caliciform beakers, which are estimated to originate from Nubia, and a hippo ivory tusk was used to contain malachite, it seems plausible not only that the mineral deposit is on the African continent but also that the origin of caliciform beakers is African.

Caliciform beakers showing inlay decoration have been found only at limited sites (Table 2), and the currently available radiocarbon dating results suggest they might have appeared slightly later in Central Sudan than in Upper Egypt (Table 3).

These beakers represent the first kind of pottery to exhibit decoration with colourant pigments in Sudan, Nubia,⁴ and Egypt, aside from the use of ochre as slip and/or temper (Sanada 2024). The inlay on caliciform beakers was composed of white or yellow pigments (Brunton 1934; Salvatori and Usai 2008).⁵ The report of R12 says that the yellow pigment filling in incised lines on the caliciform beaker was ochre (Salvatori and Usai 2008), though the materials used for the white pigment remain unknown. The reasons for the selection of white or yellow pigments for the inlay have not been discussed. The white pigment seen on white cross-lined ware (C-ware),⁶ which appeared in Upper Egypt during the first half of the fourth millennium BCE, is thought to have been calcite or gypsum,⁷ though it has not been chemically analysed.

TABLE 2. A LIST OF CALICIFORM BEAKERS WITH THE INLAY DECORATION (BY THIS AUTHOR)

Found place	Context	Report	Number	Stored place
Mostagedda	Settlement	Brunton 1937	1	London, British Museum EA62012
El-Badari	Burial pit	Friedman 1999	1	London, British Museum EA59723
Unknown but in Upper Egypt (purchased at Luxor)	Unknown	Brunton 1948	2	Cairo, Egyptian Museum, CG62931, CG62933, CG62935

³ No specific information such as grave number or location is provided in the publication.

⁴ Upper Nubia designates the area between the Second and the Sixth cataracts of the Nile (Adams 1977; Török 2008: XXI). South of Upper Nubia is regarded as Sudan here.

⁵ In tomb/burial/pit R12, a caliciform beaker with yellow inlay decoration was found, though an example with white inlaid decoration was not excavated. From Grave 67, a small ovoid jar with red inlaid and impressed decoration was recorded (Salvatori and Usai 2008: 210), which is a unique pottery showing red inlaid decoration in northeastern Africa in the prehistoric period.

⁶ Petrie 1921.

⁷ The white pigment used for C-ware (white cross-lined ware in W.M.F. Petrie's classification system) has been described variously as 'gypsum' by J.E. Quibell (Petrie and Quibell 1896: 13), 'white slip clay' by W.M.F. Petrie (Petrie and Quibell 1896: 37), and 'pinkish granular material' by E. Finkensstaedt (1981: 9).

Found place	Context	Report	Number	Stored place
Unknown but in Upper Egypt	Unknown	Petrie 1921: pl XXVII; Midant-Reynes 2014	1	London, Petrie Museum UC17869
	Unknown	Petrie Museum online Catalogue	1	London, Petrie Museum: UC17870
Kadruka	Burial pit	Reinold 2001	1	Khartoum Museum, no. unknown
R12	Burial pit	Salvatori and Usai 2008	1	Khartoum Museum, no. unknown
Kadero	Burial pit	Chłodnicki 2010	2	Poznan, Archaeology Museum MAP/DEP1992:1/1 and MAP/DEP1992:5/9
	Burial pit		1	Boston, Museum of Fine Arts 2014.514

TABLE 3. RADIOCARBON DATING RESULTS FROM SOME CALICIFORM BEAKERS WITH INLAY DECORATION (BY THIS AUTHOR)

Site	Contexts	Radiocarbon dating results
Badari/El-Tarif	settlement and cemetery areas	c. 4262–3985 cal. BCE, and c. 4375–4223 cal. BCE (Holmes and Friedman 1994)
Kadruka, Cemetery 1	burial pits	c. 4341–4041 cal. BCE (Reinold 2004: 46)
R12 (Grave 129)	burial pits	c. 4933–4688 cal. BCE, and c. 4498–4336 cal. BCE (Salvatori 2008: 146, tab. 13.1)
Kadada	settlement and cemetery areas	c. 3750–3250 cal. BCE (Reinold 1987)
Kadero	burial pits	c. 4450–3900 cal. BCE (Chłodnicki and Kabaciński 2010: 213)

Previous chemical analysis of the colourant pigment on Neolithic pottery in Northeast Africa

Only one analysis on white pigment has been conducted by the Université de Bordeaux III with cathodoluminescence (CL), x-ray fluorescence (XRF), and x-ray diffraction (XRD) (Piponnier *et al.* 1995). This study using cathodoluminescence microscopy revealed that the mineral of the whitish surface, caused by post-depositional effects, was calcite. The researchers argue that the white pigment for the inlay decoration on the pottery vessels found at el-Kadada could not be measured by a CL microscope but was measured by an XRF microscope, and subsequently identified the pigment as kaolinite. It is not certain if XRF could properly measure the white pigment since the XRF measurement result is largely affected by the surface preparation of the examined object (Speakman *et al.* 2011). One author of this report announced in a later study that the white pigment used for the inlaid decoration on caliciform beakers found at el-Kadruka, a site contemporary with el-Kadada, is ‘gypsum’ (Reinold 2001).

Analysis

Raman Spectrometry analysis of the white pigment on Caliciform beakers from Northeast Africa

Caliciform beakers, also known as ‘Tasian beakers’ (Brunton 1934: 8), are thought to have developed in Upper Nubia, i.e. Kerma (Reinold 1994; Welsby 1997), Kadruka 21 (Reinold 2001; Salvatori and Usai

2007),⁸ and Kawa in the Northern Dongola region (Salvatori and Usai 2006; 2008) around the first half of the fifth millennium BCE (Longa 2011; Sanada 2023). These beakers have convex bases and flared rims, although a few examples with flat bottoms were also registered (Brunton 1934: 95, Cairo, Egyptian Museum JE62933). Their surfaces are usually richly decorated with geometric designs that were either incised or impressed (Longa 2011). Some examples exhibit the incision or impression inlaid by white pigments (Figures 2–3). Caliciform beakers disappeared by the beginning of the fourth millennium BCE, except for some beakers categorised into ‘black incised ware’ in Petrie’s classification system (e.g. Sanada 2024).⁹

Due to the limited number of caliciform beakers with inlaid decoration (Table 2), the aim of this chemical analysis looks to identify the material of the white pigment rather than detect the deposit of material. Based on the following three main reasons, it was assumed that the chemical component or material of the white pigment on caliciform breakers is either kaolinite, as in the previous study (Piponneier *et al.* 1995), or human or animal bones:

- a) The white pigment on white cross-lined ware that appeared in Upper Egypt in the first half of the fourth millennium BCE has been thought to be calcite or gypsum (Petrie and Quibell 1896: 13), though this hypothesis has not been chemically analysed.
- b) Most caliciform beakers with inlaid decoration have been discovered in burial pits, while those without the inlaid decoration have been found in other archaeological contexts outside of burial pits. Several researchers have suggested that caliciform beakers are related to nomadic people roaming desertic areas to take refuge in ecologically favourable areas such as the oases and the Nile Valley (Briois *et al.* 2012; Hendrickx and Vermeersch 2000: 40; Midant-Reynes 2014).
- c) The rock paintings found in the Western Desert of Egypt are the first colourful rock paintings in Sudan, Nubia, and Egypt that also include white pigments (Riemer 2009). They are thought to be associated with nomadic cultures around 4400–3500 cal. BCE, as they depict cattle herding (Riemer 2009; Zboray 2013: 18).

The Yixi Portable 785 Raman Spectrometer, YOA-8401-785-02, was used to conduct this component analysis of white pigment on the following case studies:

Case 1: a caliciform beaker found at Grave 113 at Kadero (in Sudan) and stored at the Poznań Archaeological Museum (MAP/DEP 1992:1/1) (Figure 2). The white pigment on the incised lines is visible, though it could not be measured because of the whitish surface caused by the post-depositional effect.

Case 2: a caliciform beaker found at Grave 114 at Kadero and stored at the Poznań Archaeological Museum (MAP/DEP 1992: 5/9) (Figure 3). One of two caliciform beakers found at Grave 114.¹⁰

Case 3: a caliciform beaker found in Upper Egypt (find location is unknown) and stored at the Petrie Museum (UC17869). This pottery has been published, and Petrie categorised this into ‘black incised ware’ (Midant-Reynes 2014; Petrie 1921: pl. XXVII).

⁸ The four 14C determinations from the site of Kadruka 21 (5910±60 bp = 4850–4710 cal. BCE; 5890±60 bp = 4850–4690 cal. BCE; 5875±110 bp = 4850–4590 cal. BCE; 5850±70 bp = 4800–4610 cal. BCE) point to date into the first half of the fifth millennium BCE (Salvatori and Usai 2008).

⁹ See the following link for the image: <https://collections.ucl.ac.uk/Details/petrie/23542>.

¹⁰ Another is stored by the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (MFA 2014.514).

Case 4: a caliciform beaker found in Upper Egypt (find location is unknown) and stored at the Petrie Museum (UC17870).¹¹ This pottery has not been published and is categorised as ‘black incised ware’ in the Petrie Museum’s online catalogue.

The analyses of Cases 1 and 2 were conducted at the Poznań Archaeological Museum in Poznań, Poland, and the analyses of Cases 3 and 4 were conducted at the Petrie Museum of Egyptian and Sudanese Archaeology in London, United Kingdom. No samples were taken as this analysis was non-destructive.

Analysis of the results from Case 1 and 2

The surface of the two specimens from Kadero in Sudan is covered in a whitish-brown colour. Donatella Usai explains that it resulted from the post-depositional alterations of minerals on the pottery surface (personal comm. January 2024). Notwithstanding that the whitish-brown colour prevented the Raman spectrometer from measuring the Raman spectra of the white pigment on the caliciform beaker from Grave 113 (Figure 2), the measurements could be conducted on the one from Grave 114 (Figure 4).

The Raman spectra of the white pigment show bands of 250–280cm⁻¹, 390cm⁻¹, 500–520cm⁻¹ and a missing band around 1050–1100cm⁻¹ (notice the two middle spectra in Figure 4). From these results, I postulate that calcium carbonate was used as a material for the white pigment used in the inlay decoration seen on some caliciform beakers, at least for the ones found at Kadero.

Several kinds of freshwater mussels and snails inhabited the Nile at that time (Graf *et al.* 2007), the shells of which are made for more than 90 % of calcium carbonate (Chakraborty *et al.* 2020; White



Figure 2. Caliciform beaker from Kadero, Grave 113 (photo by this author/courtesy of the Poznań Archaeology Museum).



Figure 3. Caliciform beaker from Kadero, Grave 114 (photo by this author/courtesy of the Poznań Archaeology Museum).

¹¹ See the following link for the image: <https://collections.ucl.ac.uk/Details/petrie/58863>.

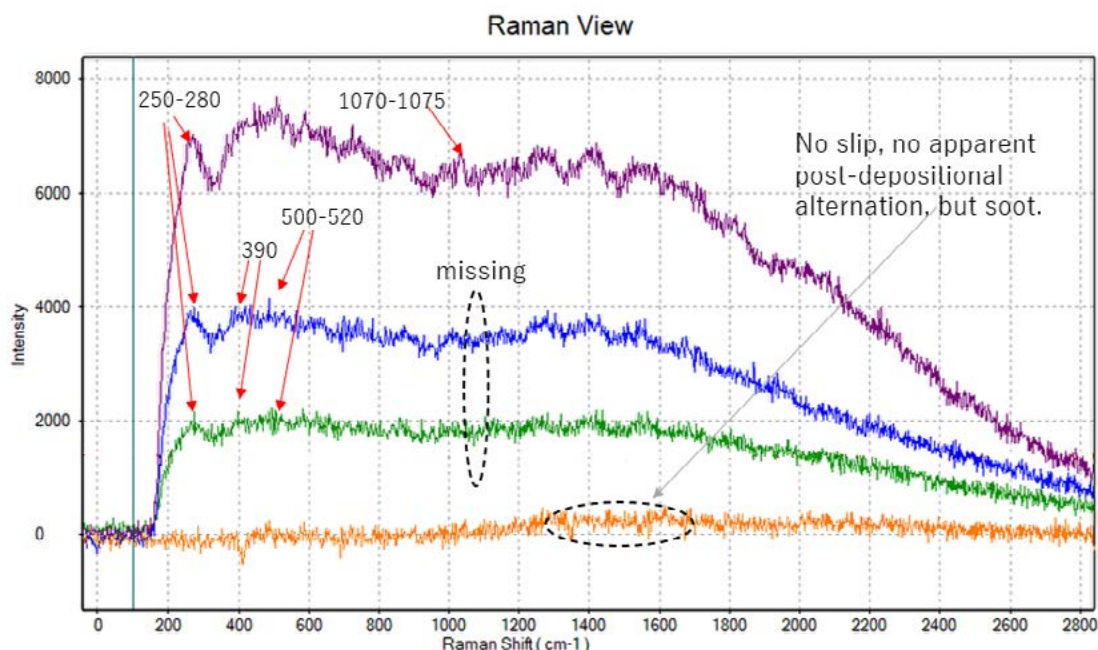


Figure 4. Raman Spectra from caliciform beaker found at Grave 114 (by this author/courtesy of the Poznań Archaeology Museum).

et al. 2007). Even though calcium carbonate is contained in mammal (e.g. bovid) bones, it accounts for 10% of the total bone constituents (Supriadi *et al.* 2021). Calcium carbonate (CaCO_3), as found in shells, freshwater snails, and ostrich eggshells, decomposes on heating to form calcium oxide (CaO) and carbon dioxide from $\sim 650^\circ\text{C}$ to completion at $\sim 765^\circ\text{C}$ (Bilton *et al.* 2012). CaO is sintered under an inert atmosphere in the temperature range between $700\text{--}1400^\circ\text{C}$ (Maya *et al.* 2018). Calcium oxide reacts with water vigorously. When water is added to calcium oxide, an exothermic reaction occurs, producing calcium hydroxide (Ca(OH)_2) and a large amount of heat.

The firing temperature of pottery production in the Neolithic Period is estimated to have been between $600\text{--}900^\circ\text{C}$ (Gosselain 1992). Therefore, if calcium carbonate from shells had been used for the inlay decoration on caliciform beakers, calcium carbonate could have been decomposed to calcium oxide and even sintered during the pottery firing. In the Raman spectrum of calcium carbonate (CaCO_3) (calcite, aragonite, and vaterite), bands appear at $206\text{--}299\text{cm}^{-1}$, $660\text{--}750\text{cm}^{-1}$, and $1070\text{--}1090\text{cm}^{-1}$ (Donnelly *et al.* 2017; Schaible *et al.* 2023; Wehrmeister *et al.* 2007). The Raman spectrum of calcium oxide (CaO) indicates most visible at the peaks at 366cm^{-1} and $653\text{--}700\text{cm}^{-1}$ (Capriotti and Quaini 2012: 114–117; Galván-Ruiz *et al.* 2007). Sintered CaO shows additional peaks at 390cm^{-1} , 464cm^{-1} , and 522cm^{-1} , even though a peak at 1070cm^{-1} disappears (Capriotti and Quaini 2012: 114–118).

It can be estimated that the white pigment was originally carbon carbonate (e.g. ground shell, freshwater snails, and ostrich eggshell). It could have been partially decomposed to calcium oxide and altered to sintered calcium oxide in the firing process of pottery production. The Raman spectra of the white pigment (the two middle spectra out of the four in Figure 4) seem to reflect the transitional phases from carbon carbonate to calcium oxide and sintered calcium oxide.

Analysis of the results from Case 3

The Raman spectra of the white pigment show bands $250\text{--}280\text{cm}^{-1}$, 390cm^{-1} , $500\text{--}520\text{cm}^{-1}$ and a missing band around $1050\text{--}1100\text{cm}^{-1}$ (see the top two spectra of the three in Figure 5), as the

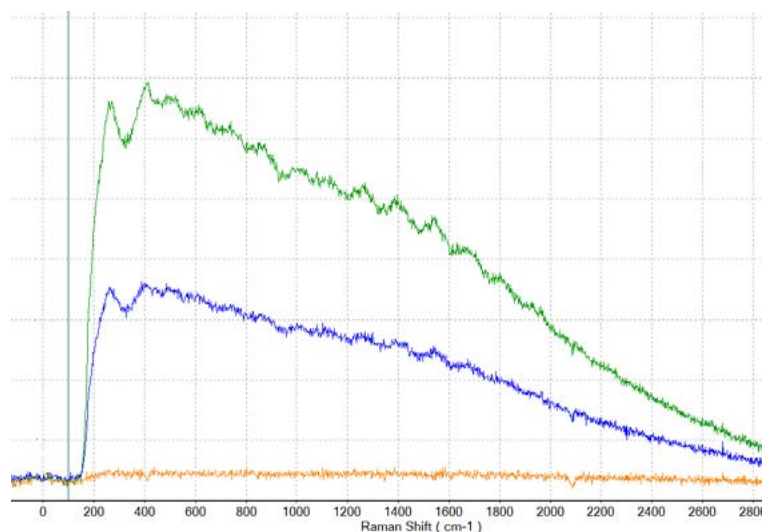


Figure 5. Raman Spectra from caliciform beaker found at an unknown place in Upper Egypt (Petrie Museum: LDUCE-UC17869) (by this author/ courtesy of the Petrie Museum of Archaeology).

caliciform beaker found at Grave 114 at Kadero (Case 2). The main difference is the lack of a whitish surface caused by the post-depositional effect, as visible in the bottom spectrum in Figure 5, which does not exhibit any excitation bands at around 1350 and 1600 cm⁻¹. On the contrary, Case 2 exhibits these bands, which indicates that the black part is soot. As this vessel was grouped into the so-called 'black incised ware' by Petrie (1921), the black part of this vessel was the result not of soot but of reduced firing temperature during pottery production.

Analysis of the results from Case 4

The Raman spectra of the white pigment show bands 250–280 cm⁻¹, 410 cm⁻¹, 500–520 cm⁻¹ and a missing band around 1050–1100 cm⁻¹, a similar result to Cases 2 and 3 except for the band at around 410 cm⁻¹ (see the top spectrum of the two in Figure 6). This vessel was grouped into the so-called 'black incised ware' on the museum's online catalogue.

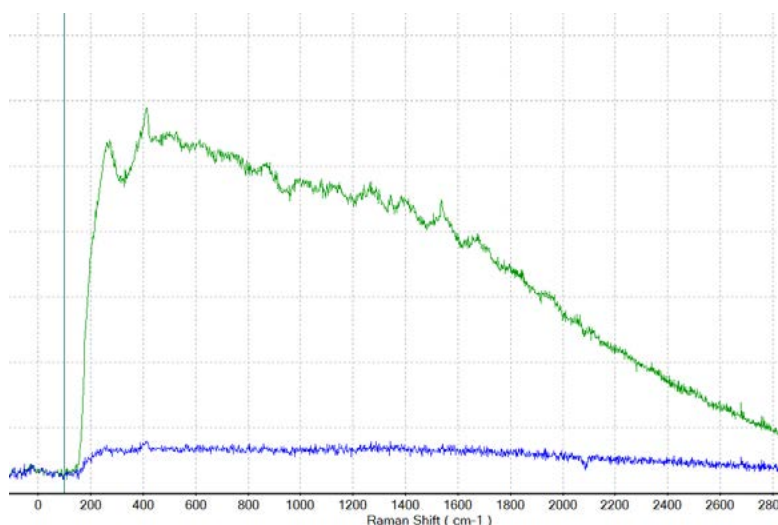


Figure 6. Raman Spectra from caliciform beaker found at an unknown place in Upper Egypt (Petrie Museum: LDUCE-UC17870) (by this author/ courtesy of the Petrie Museum of Archaeology).



Figure 7. Caliciform beaker from grave number 114, Kadero (photo by this author/ courtesy of the Poznań Archaeology Museum).

Other external factors

Binders, soot, and post-depositional alteration can affect the Raman spectrum of the white pigment on caliciform beakers.

Researchers estimate that binders or glue were needed to stick the colourant pigments on the surface, be it rock or pottery. This theory may be applied to the caliciform beakers with inlay decoration, at least for those from Kadero, as the minute dots in each incised line indicate the potters had intentions for an inlay decoration (Figures 7 and 8). If potters at Kadero wanted the pigment remains in the incisions, it is not strange that they used some kind of glue. Available glues in ancient times could have been limited, such as human saliva, plant sap, and animal fat (Castaneda and Koenig n.d.). A study reveals that cow fats contain plenty of beta-carotene shown at Raman shifts of 1006, 1157, and 1520 cm^{-1} , while goat fats reveal the Raman band at 1650 cm^{-1} , representing conjugated linoleic acid (CLA). The Raman bands at 838, 870, and 1060 cm^{-1} depict relatively higher concentrations of vitamin D in buffalo fats than in cow and goat (Saleem *et al.* 2021). Therefore, if bone marrow had been used as an agent to let white pigments adhere in the incised lines, cow fats might be most likely among the three kinds of fats according to the Raman result (Figure 4). The Raman spectrum of bone marrow indicates collagen: consisting of Amide I, which shows the Raman excitation band at 1642–1670 cm^{-1} (C=O stretching mode), and Amide III, which exhibits its peaks at 1200–1280 cm^{-1} (C–N stretching mode). They are also characterised by both bending of methylene groups ($\delta[\text{CH}_2]$) and stretching between carbon and hydrogen atoms ($\nu[\text{C-H}]$), which are vibrational modes common to several peptides and manifest as peaks at 1365–1500 cm^{-1} and 2820–3035 cm^{-1} (France *et al.* 2014; Jurašková *et al.* 2022; Londoño-Restrepo *et al.* 2019).

A part of the pottery surface in Case 2, which does not retain the whitish-brown surface resulting from the post-depositional process, is black without any slip. The bottom spectrum in Figure 4 was measured at such a part of the pottery surface, showing strong bands at 1350 and 1600 cm^{-1} . This result matches with the previous study, revealing that the Raman spectra of various kinds of soot are



Figure 8. Caliciform beaker from grave number 113, Kadero (photo by this author/ courtesy of the Poznań Archaeology Museum).

known as the bands at 1360 and 1580 cm^{-1} (Sadezky *et al.* 2005). This excitation band did not appear in Cases 3 and 4.

Another factor to consider is possible post-depositional alteration. A recent transmission electron microscopy analysis of sand in the Farafra Oasis in the Western Desert of Egypt exhibited abundant fibrous calcite, which typically forms in playa and/or ephemeral (and paleo) lakes in arid regions (Wanas 2012). At least the caliciform beakers found at Gebel Ramlah, the Kharga Oasis, and the Dakhla Oasis could therefore have experienced post-depositional alterations of pottery-surface minerals because of the calcite-rich depositional contexts (Attanda *et al.* 2013; Jones *et al.* 2013: 53), even though unfortunately this author has not had an opportunity to examine the caliciform beakers from the sites directly. The Raman spectrum of the whitish-brown surface (see the top spectrum in Figure 4) seems to indicate both calcium carbonate (CaCO_3) and carbon oxide (CaO). Because of the peak at around 1070–1075 cm^{-1} , it appears closer to calcium carbonate (CaCO_3) when compared with the Raman spectra of the white pigment (see the two middle spectra out of the four in Figure 4). The whitish-brown surface of the caliciform beaker from Grave 113 also reveals a similar Raman spectrum to the Raman spectra in the top spectrum in Figure 4. They exhibit an identical band at 1250–1600 cm^{-1} together, which likely represents the post-depositional alteration on the pottery surface, even though it is hard to determine what caused the alteration only from this initial analysis with Raman spectrometry.

A microscopic analysis: Methods of the inlay decoration on caliciform beakers

A microscope analysis (x20) and observation with the naked eye were conducted on the above-mentioned four caliciform beakers as well as one found at el-Badari, now stored at the British Museum (London, BM EA59723).

Incised lines in triangles filled with white paste are visible on the surfaces of the caliciform beakers from Upper Egypt. Under the randomly remaining white paste, we can see lightly incised lines.¹² Friedman (1999: 4), referring to Brunton's (1934: 94, 1937: 28) report, describes 'these triangles were cross-hatched or lightly scored not as a decorative element but to give a grip for a paste of white pigment, and that the pattern meant to be shown was a solid white one.'

¹² See the following link for the image: https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/Y_EA59723.

This means that the potters at el-Badari in the Neolithic Period had an intention to inlay the white pigment on the triangles, and they incised the random light lines inside the triangles as a prior processing.

In the case of Upper Nubia, the incised lines under the white pigment inlay were accompanied by fine dots, as one can see in Figures 7 and 8. Each dot's size in the incised lines is about or under 1mm. It is still unclear how these incised lines and fine dots were drawn. Although Arkell and Chłodnicki suggest catfish spines as a tool to make wavy lines decoration on the pottery surface (Arkell 1953: 70–72; Chłodnicki 2011: 227–228), they did not mention the tool for incised decoration on caliciform beakers. As in el-Badari, the incised lines with fine dots on the caliciform beakers from Kadero might have helped keeping the white pigment in the lines, perhaps a special preprocessing for the inlay decoration.

El-Badari is dated to c. 4400–4000 cal. BCE and the cemetery at Kadero is estimated to have been used between c. 4450 and 3900 cal. BCE (Chłodnicki and Kabaciński 2015; Hobbs and Friedman 1994). They are simultaneous sites even though el-Badari was located in Middle Egypt, while Kadero is near the Sixth Cataract, in modern-day Sudan. This means that the difference in the inlay technique is not a chronological difference but a regional variation.

The number of caliciform beakers with inlay decoration is limited, but their peculiar design (i.e. vessel forms, incised lines in geometric patterns, inlaid decoration) was spread over the wide region from the Sixth Cataract to Middle Egypt.¹³ However, the inlay technique, or perhaps the tool used for drawing the incised lines, was not known in Upper Egypt. Techniques of incision and impression originated from Saharo-Sudanese pottery traits (Arkell 1953; Friedman 1994: 197–198, 331; Köhler 1996: 217; van den Brink 1989), explaining why the inlay technique seen on caliciform beakers at Kadero seems to be more refined than that at el-Badari.¹⁴

Caliciform beakers were decorated with geometric patterns, which were unknown decoration patterns in northeastern Africa at that time, and an unprecedented decoration technique (i.e. inlaid technique) in northeastern Africa. This may suggest that caliciform beakers themselves and decorating them with white pigments had special meanings to the people in northeast Africa in the late Neolithic Period.

Was the white pigment inlaid technique introduced from Western Asia?

Pottery decorated with white pigment (painted or inlaid) has been observed in present-day southern Romania and Bulgaria, from the beginning of the Neolithic to the end of the Chalcolithic Period (c. 6000–4000 cal. BCE) (Atanassova *et al.* 2024; Pirovska *et al.* 2020). A study indicates that earlier examples, from the Karanovo I Period (after c. 6000 cal. BCE), were ‘painted’.¹⁵ The introduction of an ‘inlay’ technique in pottery production seems to have followed during the Karanovo IV Period (c. 5300–4800 cal. BCE) in the same region (Atanassova *et al.* 2024; Reingruber, Hansen, and Toderas 2010; Reingruber and Thissen 2016). Archaeometric analyses have consistently identified the white pigment as calcite, enriched with diverse fillers like quartz, clays, feldspars, talc, and metal oxides throughout the Period (Atanassova *et al.* 2024). In Balkan archaeology, researchers estimate that white-painted pottery spread across the Balkan Peninsula in the process of Neolithisation,

¹³ About 1259 km in distance, comparable to the distance between the British Museum in London and Madrid in Spain (1250 km).

¹⁴ Pottery-making techniques can be separated into two sections: the explicit sequence of technical steps (what was done: technique) and the degree of technical skills (how it was done: skill), see Miki (2022: 331).

¹⁵ The Neolithic pottery, so-called ‘white-painted pottery’ in archaeology of the Balkans, were red-polished pottery vessels decorated with geometric patterns painted in white.

suggesting relationships with Anatolia and the Aegean, especially the Balkano-Anatolian culture complex (e.g. Grębska-Kulow and Zidarov 2021; Stojanovski 2014).¹⁶

Among the Neolithic pottery assemblages in Upper Mesopotamia (a part of modern Syria, Turkey, and Iraq), pottery vessels inlaid with white pigment, so-called ‘incised-and-plastered Grey-Black Ware’, are attested c. 6100–5900 cal. BCE (Nieuwenhuyse 2017). No earlier white-painted pottery has been documented, despite the presence of some red-slipped vessels,¹⁷ and a few sherds painted with reddish-brown pigment in the archaeological record (Nieuwenhuyse 2017: fig. 10.7).¹⁸ A white slip made from gypsum or calcium carbonate was used for the so-called ‘red on white’ or ‘plastered-and-painted Standard Ware’ by c. 6200 cal. BCE, before the emergence of the ‘incised-and-plastered Grey-Black Ware’ (Nieuwenhuyse 2017; Nilhamn 2017). The white substance used for the inlay is reported to be gypsum or lime (Nieuwenhuyse 2007), though it seems it has not been analysed chemically. Based on the examination of pottery vessels at Tell Sabi Abyad, Nieuwenhuyse (2017: 125) explains that painted pottery was developed to enhance the colour contrast between the painted decoration and the surface background for facilitating the visual transmission of stylistic information of increasing scope in commensality events. He (2017: 122) describes ‘incised-and-plastered Grey-Black Ware’ as follows:

some of these dark-coloured vessels were given incised-impressed decoration, and occasionally the voids were filled in with a white substance. This resulted in a stunning white-on-black effect. In effect, these vessels reached the maximum motif-background contrast that was technically possible.

On the other hand, among southern Levantine Neolithic pottery assemblages, no inlaid example has been recorded, at least for the Neolithic and Chalcolithic (e.g. Garfinkel 1999; Streit 2020). The application of whitish pigment in prehistoric pottery vessels in the southern Levant is exclusively observable on whitish-slipped vessels identified during the Wadi Rabah culture and the Ghassulian periods (Garfinkel 1999; Streit 2020).

Reasons for the initial use of white pigment in pottery in northeastern Africa

This discussion explores five different aspects that may explain why certain white pigment materials were used in prehistoric pottery, particularly in the Nile Valley during the late Neolithic Period.

The first hypothesis concerns accessibility. Recent studies have identified a variety of white minerals—such as kaolinite, gypsum, barite, illite, and calcite—at outcrops near the colourful rock art in Gilf Kebir, Western Desert of Egypt (Hamdan *et al.* 2021). Given this broad availability, it seems unlikely that potters in Sudan, Nubia, and Egypt chose specific materials purely due to limited access, and this hypothesis may not sufficiently account for their selection of white pigments.

The second hypothesis focuses on the ease of processing these materials. Compared to calcite, gypsum requires much lower temperatures (80–150 °C vs. 750–900 °C) and shorter preparation times (Nilhamn 2017), making it easier and safer to process. Additionally, mineral hardness may have influenced pigment choices. The Mohs scale attributes a hardness value of 3.0 for calcite, 2.0–2.5 for kaolinite, and 1.5–2.0 for gypsum (American Federation of Mineralogical Societies n.d.). The caliciform beakers from Kadero, for example, display finely incised lines arranged in geometric

¹⁶ A few scholars argue for the Eastern origins of European civilisation. Among them, M. Garašanin, with her ‘Balkano-Anatolian cultural complex’ (Garašanin 1981; 1997; 2000), and Theodoridis (1973), insist on Anatolia as the source of the Aegean Neolithic.

¹⁷ Dated to c. 6395–5900 cal. BCE (levels A3–4) (Nieuwenhuyse 2018: 22, 96–98).

¹⁸ Dated to c. 6675–6620 cal. BCE (levels A10–A9) (Nieuwenhuyse 2018: 22, 109–110).

patterns, wherein ultra-fine dots are discernible (Figures 7 and 8). Such incisions have not been observed on other vessels. Given that incised lines on caliciform beakers with fine dots may retain white pigment more effectively than those without, it is plausible that potters had the intention to inlay colourant pigments in the incised lines. To keep white pigments in the incised lines, the potters needed to grind out the white material finely.

The third hypothesis considers the symbolic significance of the materials themselves. While direct archaeological evidence is limited, it is possible that particular white pigment materials such as bones and gypsum held a special significance for the people of northeastern Africa during the late Neolithic Period. Funerary offerings made from white stones or shells (e.g. beads, pendants, and bangles) have been recorded, yet no bodies embedded in or covered by white powders have been found in the burial pits at R12 and Gebel Ramlah (Kobusiewicz et al. 2010; Salvatori and Usai 2008). This may argue against a connection between white pigments and burial customs in northeastern Africa. For instance, pottery sherds from Early Chalcolithic Romania were decorated either with pure calcite-white or with a mixture of calcite and hydroxyapatite, while other vessels used exotic silica-rich pigments. These variations are interpreted as reflecting social or technological distinctions (Opriş et al. 2022). However, in the case of Nubian and Egyptian pottery, such interpretations remain speculative due to the absence of comprehensive chemical analyses.

The fourth hypothesis shifts focus from the material to the meaning of the colour white itself. Cultural interpretations of colour are often complex, and it is plausible that white held particular symbolic associations. The Tasian/Badarian cultures, centred on both agriculture and husbandry, for instance, are believed to represent a continuous cultural tradition, with pottery – including white-inlaid caliciform beakers – associated with nomadic lifestyles (Hendrickx and Vermeersch 2000: 40–42). Additionally, in the rock art of Gilf el-Kebir and Jebel el-‘Uweinat, cattle are depicted using white and red pigments. These artworks are linked to mobile pastoral communities dating from 4400–3500 BCE (Honore 2019: 270; Riemer 2009: 270; Zboray 2013: 18–19), hinting at a possible cultural or symbolic link between the colour white and cattle pastoralism in the region.

The fifth and final hypothesis relates to the visual impact or conspicuousness of white pigments. While their use in caliciform beakers, C-ware, and N-ware was eventually abandoned – likely due to the adoption of more efficient decoration methods, such as those seen in D-ware (Sanada 2023) – the striking contrast between white pigment and reddish pottery surfaces may have originally served an aesthetic or communicative function. This approach to high-contrast decoration aligns with ceramic traditions in Upper Mesopotamia during 6200–5900 cal. BCE, where dark-painted motifs on light backgrounds were employed to maximise visibility and attract attention (Nieuwenhuyse 2009). Similarly, the use of white inlays in Egyptian pottery may have been driven in part by the desire for visual prominence, especially in ceremonial or socially significant contexts.

Together, these five perspectives – ranging from material availability and practicality to symbolic and aesthetic considerations – offer a multifaceted understanding of why white pigments were chosen and applied in specific ways during the fifth millennium BCE.

Concluding remarks

An analysis of the available literature reveals that malachite consistently appears in conjunction with caliciform beakers in northeastern Africa during the late Neolithic Period. Some of them were found in special containers made from hippo tusks, cow horns, or shells. This evidence implies that the origins of both malachite and caliciform beakers are fundamentally linked to the African continent. The rarity of malachite and the depiction of caliciform beakers in rock art (Longa 2011)

may indicate that both were precious for the people of that time, although it is uncertain whether the white pigment material or the white colour was utilised in burial customs.

No systematic chemical analyses of the white pigments used for caliciform beakers, N-ware, and C-ware have been conducted (Newell 2013). This study reveals the possibility that the Neolithic potters in northeast Africa used calcite, a much harder material than gypsum. This means potters chose this material for the inlay decoration regardless of the processing difficulties, instead influenced by colour or availability. Potters might have, however, chosen shells or eggshells in a rather soft state.¹⁹ Both colourful rock art in the Western Desert, depicting white cattle, and caliciform beakers from Sudan, Nubia, and Egypt suggest that white may have had a significant relationship with pastoralism in northeastern Africa at that time.

The differences in inlay techniques between Sudan and Middle Egypt, which were brought to light in this study, though the question how a particular production technique was distributed by late Neolithic people in northeastern Africa leaves for future studies. Potters at el-Badari may have known about the presence of vessels decorated with inlay techniques but they may not have known how to do this decoration - the kind of pottery decoration possibly widely known through word of mouth by people seeing and hearing about the technique in northeast Africa in the Late Neolithic Period. It was necessary to see directly how the potter drew lines and inlaid white pigments for producing the inlay decoration in the same manner. Techniques of incision and impression originated from Saharo-Sudanese pottery traits, explaining why the inlay technique at Kadero seems more refined than that at el-Badari. Decorating pottery with white could have been important for certain groups, despite the unrefined inlay technique seen on examples from Upper Egypt. Production likely remained at a 'household industry' level (Köhler 1997), undertaken by non-specialists with other tasks besides producing pottery and limited time to transmit techniques to other groups.

Although several researchers have suggested that caliciform beakers are related to nomadic people roaming desertic areas, the role of the beakers remains unclear. This study, however, indicates that caliciform beakers must have had a special meaning for the people at that time, considering they were decorated by geometric patterns and inlay technique, both of which were new at that time in northeastern Africa (Sanada 2023) and the inlay needed an extra labour for the decoration, and also thinking about the limited number of excavated caliciform beakers at each site. As such, for late-Neolithic inhabitants of northeastern Africa, some pottery vessels might have held significance beyond utilitarian purposes and were regarded as valuable artefacts.

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¹⁹ Young snail shells are softer because they are constantly growing, and new shell growth is soft.

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An Era of Perfection: The Vignettes of Book of the Dead Spell 17 in the Papyri of Ramesside Period

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Abstract

The paper examines the tradition of illustrations to Spell 17 of the *Book of the Dead* during the Ramesside era. In this period of development of the iconographic tradition of the *Book of the Dead* the composition of the pictorial frieze of Spell 17 was formed. This spell, which is one of the longest and most significant in the collection and goes back to Spell 335 of the *Coffin Texts*, contains a theological and mythological text, structured as an exegetical essay. During the 18th dynasty, Spell 17 was illustrated only sporadically. However, a ‘revolution’ occurred in the post-Amarna period, from which the papyrus of Nakht (P. London BM EA10473) is the earliest to have a pictorial frieze of Spell 17 vignettes. According to the *Bonn Totenbuchprojekt* database, 84 sources with the texts of Spell 17 have survived from the Ramesside Period, of which 53 have vignettes. Despite their superficial similarity, the frieze of vignettes of Spell 17 varies significantly in its iconographic details, as Egyptologists have noted in their studies. The paper aims to examine the vignettes of Spell 17 of the *Book of the Dead* after the papyrus of Ani (P. London BM EA10470), dating to the 19th dynasty. The interconnection of vignettes with the text of the spell is also considered.

Keywords

Book of the Dead; Spell 17; Vignettes; Papyri, Iconography; Ramesside Period

Introduction

In this paper I aim to examine the illustrative tradition of Spell 17 of the *Book of the Dead* in the papyri of the Ramesside Period (19th–20th dynasties), which was when the well-known pictorial frieze of this spell was formed. Spell 17 is one of the longest and most significant in the whole collection (Rößler-Köhler 1979). It goes back to Spell 335 of the *Coffin Texts* and contains a theological and mythological text, structured according to the initiatory ‘question-answer’ principle as an exegetical essay (cf. Serova 2024: 385). There is a voluminous introductory rubric: (1) *hꜛt-ꜛm ztꜛw zhꜛw prt hꜛyt m hꜛt-nꜛr ꜛht* [sic.] *m jmnt nfrt p* (2) *rt m hrw m hꜛrw nb mryꜛf hꜛb r znt hꜛmsy(t) m shꜛ pr* (3) *t m bꜛ ꜛnhꜛ dd-mdw jn wsjr ꜛny* (4) *m-hꜛt mnjꜛfjw ꜛht* [sic.] *n jrr z<t> tp tꜛ* (after P. London BM EA10470; Lapp 2006: 3–9)¹ – ‘(1) The beginning of prayers and transfigurations; going out and descending to the Necropolis (lit. ‘god’s land’); being transfigured in the Beautiful West; going (2) out by day in any form he desires to take; playing the *znt*-game; sitting in the pavilion, going (3) out as a living *bꜛ*-soul, proclamation by the Osiris Ani (4) revered after he moors (i.e. after his death).² This is effective for the one who does it on earth (i.e. during lifetime)’.

During the 18th dynasty, Spell 17 was illustrated only sporadically. Of the 48 known sources, only 6 papyri of the pre-Amarna period feature the corresponding vignettes. In each of them, the vignette exhibits a different iconography, without any stable tradition (Munro 1988: 67–68; Tarasenko 2014: 241–256). The illustrative tradition of Spell 17 was formed by the end of the 18th dynasty, when

¹ Hereinafter the translation is based on Günther Lapp’s (2006) hieroglyphic transcription of Spell 17 of the *Book of the Dead*.

² See Tarasenko 2022: 107–119.

we find the first example in the papyrus of Nakht (*nḥt*), P. London BM EA10471 (Tarasenko 2020: 131–146). Only after the Amarna Period does this spell acquire its pictorial collection of individual vignettes, forming a separate distinct sequence of motifs that both illustrates the written text and complements it. According to the *Bonn Totenbuchprojekt* database,³ 66 sources with the texts of Spell 17 have survived from the 19th dynasty, and 50 of them have illustrations. For the 20th dynasty, 18 sources with Spell 17 have been identified, of which only three certainly have illustrations. In total, from the Ramesside Period the illustrations of Spell 17 are known on 21 papyri and papyrus fragments and in the decoration of 27 tombs (see Saleh 1984: 14–19), one royal cenotaph, one door, and three coffins. The complete frieze of Spell 17 vignettes is preserved on only eight out of 53 documents. The rest of the examples consist of small fragments or separate scenes (Table 1).

TABLE 1. SPELL 17 OF THE BOOK OF THE DEAD WITH ILLUSTRATIONS IN THEBAN TOMBS (TT), QUEENS' VALLEY (QV), PAPYRI (P.), AND OTHER SOURCES

No.	Source	Vignettes (characteristic)
19th dynasty		
1	<i>nfrt-jrj</i> , Tomb QV66	4 scenes
2	Osireion of Seti I at Abydos	8 scenes (fragments)
3	<i>sn-nḏm</i> , TT1, Deir el-Medina	4 scenes
4	<i>ḥr-bḥnt</i> , door of TT1, Deir el-Medina	2 scenes
5	<i>ḥr-bḥnt</i> , TT2b, Deir el-Medina	1 scene
6	<i>nfr-bt</i> , TT5, Deir el-Medina	2 scenes
7	<i>nfr-ḥtp</i> , TT6, Deir el-Medina	2 scenes
8	<i>k3-s3/pnbwy</i> , TT10, Deir el-Medina	1 scene (1b)
9	Unknown, usurped by <i>ḥnsw-ms</i> , TT30, Sheikh Abd el-Qurna	1 scene (1b)
10	<i>ḏḥwty-ms</i> , TT32, El-Khokha	12 scenes
11	<i>jmn-ḥtp</i> and <i>jmn-m-jnt</i> , TT58, Sheikh Abd el-Qurna (19th–20th Dyn.)	12 scenes
12	<i>jmy-sb3</i> , TT65, Sheikh Abd el-Qurna	1 scene
13	<i>b3k-n-jmn</i> , TT135, Sheikh Abd el-Qurna	1 scene
14	<i>knr</i> called <i>nfr-rnpt</i> , TT178, el-Khokha	1 scene (1b)
15	<i>p3-nb</i> , TT211, Deir el-Medina	2 scenes
16	<i>nfr-ḥtp</i> , TT216b, Deir el-Medina	4 scenes
17	<i>nb-n-m3't</i> , TT219b, Deir el-Medina	1 scene (1b)
18	<i>pyj3y</i> , TT263, Sheikh Abd el-Qurna	1 scene (1b)
19	<i>jmn-m-jpt</i> , TT265, Deir el-Medina	full
20	<i>p3-ḥm-nṯr</i> , TT284, Dra Abu el-Naga	1 scene

³ Accessible under <https://totenbuch.awk.nrw.de/>.

No.	Source	Vignettes (characteristic)
21	<i>pꜣ-šdw</i> , TT292, Deir el-Medina	1 scene
22	<i>nfr-šhrw</i> , TT296, El-Khokha	1 scene (1b)
23	<i>nḥt-jmn</i> , TT335, Deir el-Medina	2 scenes
24	<i>nfr-rnpt</i> , TT336, Deir el-Medina	1 scene
25	<i>qḥꜣ</i> , TT360, Deir el-Medina	5 scenes
26	<i>ḏḥwty-ḥtp</i> , tomb A.16, Dra Abu el-Naga	1 scene
27	Tomb C.9, Sheikh Abd el-Qurna	1 scene (1b)
28	<i>nḥt-jmn</i> , P. Berlin P.3002a-z (= Ba)	full
29	<i>nfr-rnpt</i> , P. Brussels MRAH E5043	fragments
30	<i>rꜣ-ms</i> , P. Cambridge E.2a.1922	fragments
31	P. Dublin MS 1661 (= Da)	full
32	P. Glasgow D.1925.43	fragment (?)
33	<i>tꜣ-nt-?</i> , P. Heidelberg von Portheim Stiftung 3b and 8	fragments
34	P. Cairo EM JE95720 (16) (19th–20th dynasty)	fragments
35	<i>nfrt-jrj</i> , P. Paris Louvre SN2	fragments
36	<i>nmꜣ</i> , P. Leiden T2 (= La)	full
37	<i>qꜣny</i> , P. London BM EA10470	full
38	<i>ḥwj</i> , P. London BM EA70896 (19th – 20th Dyn.)	fragments
39	<i>hw-nfr</i> , P. London BM EA9901 (= Ag)	full
40	<i>njꜣ/ꜣ</i> , P. London BM EA9926b-d, 9934b-d (19th–20th Dyn.)	fragments
41	<i>ḥꜣry</i> , P. London BM EA9949 (= Ap)	full
42	P. London UC71002B	fragments
43	<i>wsr-ḥꜣt</i> , P. Moscow I,1b,13+14+15+133+160	fragments
44	<i>ḥnsw</i> , P. Naples 2322	fragment
45	<i>sj</i> , P. New York Amherst 33, sh.1+2+3	fragments
46	<i>nfr-rnpt</i> , P. New York Brooklyn 35.1448 + 35.1464 (19th–20th dynasty)	fragment
47	<i>rꜣjj</i> , P. Glenn Janes (private collection), ex Gloucester Public Library	fragment (?)
48	Coffin of <i>pꜣ-šdw</i> (TT 3, Deir el-Medina)	1 scene
49	Coffin of <i>sn-ndm</i> (from TT 1, Deir el-Medina), Cairo, EM JE27301	2 scenes
50	Coffin of <i>ḥnsw</i> (from TT 1, Deir el-Medina), Cairo, EM JE27302	2 scenes
20th dynasty		
51	<i>tꜣ-nfr</i> , TT158, Dra Abu el-Naga	1 scene (1b)

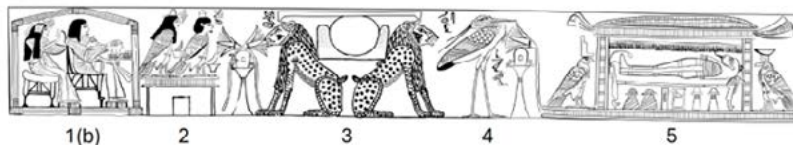
No.	Source	Vignettes (characteristic)
52	<i>jnj-ḥr-ḥw</i> , TT359, Deir el-Medina	2 scenes
53	<i>pꜣ-qrr</i> , P. Leiden T4 (= Le)	full

Edouard Naville (1886: I, pls XXVII–XXX) was the first Egyptologist who attempted to present the drawings of many of these sources in his well-known synoptic edition of the *Book of the Dead*. Despite the superficial similarity of the sources, the frieze of vignettes of Spell 17 has noticeable differences in iconographic details, and these are reflected in Egyptologists' 'iconographic typologies' (Table 2).

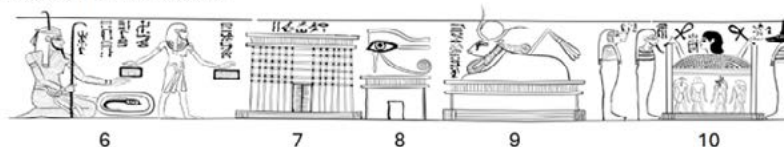
TABLE 2. NUMBER OF SCENES OF SPELL 17 OF THE *BOOK OF THE DEAD*, AFTER DIFFERENT SCHOLARS

Egyptologist	Number of scenes
Ernest Alfred Wallis Budge (1898: 47–48)	23
Hermann Grapow (1917: 13–94)	14
T. George Allen (1974: 26–27, n. 47)	19
Erik Hornung (1979: 423–424)	21
Mohamed Saleh (1988: 14)	22
Henk Milde (1991: 31–42)	24
Zoltán Bartos (1993: 13)	17
Malcolm Mosher, Jr. (1990: 158–195, 641–657 [Appendix D])	54 (for all periods of attestation)

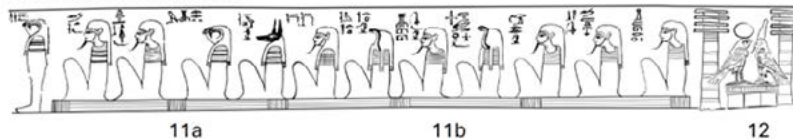
P. London BM EA 10470.7



P. London BM EA 10470.8



P. London BM EA 10470.9



P. London BM EA 10470.10

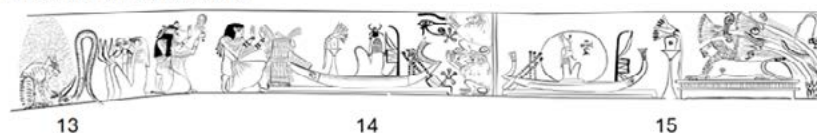


Figure 1. The vignettes of Spell 17 of the *Book of the Dead* in the papyrus of Ani (drawings by Dinara Hereikhanova).

The goal of my research is to explore the iconography of vignettes of Spell 17 in the *Book of the Dead* papyri of Ramesside Period, identifying which scenes were stable and which could vary. In this context, I also consider the interconnection of the vignettes with the text of the spell. The vignettes of Spell 17 form a long pictorial frieze of pictures along the top of the papyrus sheet (or wall in case of tomb decoration). A unique feature is that they constitute an undivided series of diverse mythological scenes that complement the text. The extensive sequence of undivided scenes, wherein images are arranged sequentially to illustrate a plot line, is a distinctive feature of Spell 17. Such a configuration is otherwise uncommon in the *Book of the Dead*. An additional example of such a frieze is Spell 1, which depicts a funeral procession (Tawfik 2008). My description of Spell 17 scenes uses the vignettes in the papyrus of Ani (ꜥny) (19th dynasty, P. London BM EA10470) as a primary source (Figure 1). In art-historical terms, this papyrus is one of the most colourful (see Einaudi 2024).

First scene

The first scene in the papyrus of Ani shows the deceased and his wife sitting in a ‘pavilion’ in front of the table for playing the *znt*-game (Einaudi 2024: 122) (Figure 2). The image of the game in this vignette and reference to it in the title rubric of the spell (*ḥꜣꜣ r znt* ‘playing the *znt*-game’) is unique in the *Book of the Dead* corpus. The scene is reputed as a kind of marker, indicating the beginning of the deceased’s journey through the Afterlife, which is gradually revealed in the subsequent illustrations and text of the spell. It is very significant that there is no player opposite Ani and his wife, perhaps showing that their game is with some invisible forces of the Netherworld (see Goedicke 1998: 39; Milde 1988: 89–95). The *znt*-game itself here symbolises the passage of the soul along the paths of the *Duat* (Kendall 1979: 28–33; Piccione 1990: 290–311).⁴ This scene sometimes occurs as a separate image in the tomb decoration of non-royal persons as well as of members of the royal family. A well-known example is the picture in the tomb of Nefertari (QV66),⁵ wife of Ramesses II (Nasr and Tosi 2005: 7; Thausing and Goedicke 1971: fig. 21). Two Ramesside papyri with Spell 17 have another introductory vignette (scene 1a) showing the ‘Mountain of the West, supplied with bread and beer’ (Milde 1991: 31–32). In the anonymous P. Dublin MS 1661, the West is marked only with the hieroglyph for the



Figure 2. First scene (b) of Spell 17 vignettes in the papyrus of Ani (P. London BM EA10470, Sheet 7) (after Budge 1894: pl. 7).

⁴ For the connection of the *znt*-game to astronomical practices, calculating time and medicine, see Arnette (2021: 23–63).

⁵ For the images of female *znt* players during the New Kingdom see Arnette and Chave (2022: 127–142).



Figure 3. First (introductory) scene (a) of Spell 17 vignettes in the papyri of a – Hunefer (P. London BM EA9901); b – P. Dublin MS 1661; c – Mutemuia (P. Berlin 3157, 21st dynasty) (after Naville 1886: I, pl. XXVII).

West jmnt (GSL 13) (Figure 3a).⁶ In the papyrus of Hunefer (*hw-nfr*) (P. London BM EA9901), the figures of the deceased with a staff are shown on both sides of the Mountain of West (Figure 3b). This scene is repeated later in the 21st dynasty papyrus of Mutemuia (*mwt-m-wj*) (P. Berlin 3157), where the two images of mountains (West and East) and the figure of *bj*-soul are represented (Figure 3c; Tarasenko 2012: 381, fig. 1). These scenes are also connected with the title rubric of spell ('going out and descending to the Necropolis; being transfigured in the Beautiful West; going out by day in any form he desires to take').

Second scene

The second scene shows the *bj*-souls of the deceased couple (in the form of birds with human heads) on the roof of a tomb or shrine, painted white (Einaudi 2024: 122) (Figure 4). Two censers (bowls for incense) are drawn beside the *bj*-souls. The image of a censer D (GSL R7) is often used to write *bj*. This scene is also connected with the title rubric ('going out as a living *bj*-soul'). In front of them is a libation vessel on a stand, with a pair of lotus-flowers draped over it. The same image of a *bj*-soul on the roof occurs in the tomb of Nefertari (Nasr and Tosi 2005: 7; Thausing and Goedicke 1971: fig. 21). A separate scene of the *bj*-soul is present in vignettes of Spell 85 (*r n jrt hprw m bj nh*, 'Spell for taking the form of a living *bj*-soul') (Quirke 2013: 199–200).



Figure 4. Second scene of Spell 17 vignettes in the papyrus of Ani (P. London BM EA10470, Sheet 7) (after Budge 1894: pl. 7).

⁶ Hereinafter GSL = Gardiner's Signs List (Gardiner 1957: 442–548).

Third scene

The third scene in the papyrus of Ani shows two lions sitting back-to-back and the signs of the horizon (*ḥt*; GSL N27) and sky (*pt*; GSL N1) nesting between them (Einaudi 2024: 122) (Figure 5). The interpretation of this composition is disputed; it is sometimes called the ‘horizon lions’ scene or ‘Ruti-scene’. In the papyrus of Any and the tomb of Djehutimes (TT32, el-Khokha, 19th dynasty: Kákosy *et al.* 2004: 196), captions next to the lions read *dwꜣw* ‘tomorrow’ and *sf* ‘yesterday’. On this basis, the scene could be associated with a passage in Section 5 of spell: (14) *jnk sf (jwꜣj)* (15) *rh.kwj dwꜣw ptr rꜣf sw jr sf wsjr* (16) *pw jr dwꜣw rꜣ pw* (Lapp 2006: 31–33) – ‘(14) I am Yesterday (and I) (15) know Tomorrow. Who is that? Yesterday is Osiris, (16) (and) Tomorrow is Re’. The pictures with two lions are known as a separate scene in many other sources, including tomb and coffin decoration of the Ramesside and Third Intermediate periods (Tarasenko 2007: 77–122).



Figure 5. Third scene of Spell 17 vignettes in the papyrus of Ani (P. London BM EA10470, Sheet 7) (after Budge 1894: pl. 7).



Figure 6. Fourth scene of Spell 17 vignettes in the papyrus of Ani (P. London BM EA10470, Sheet 7) (after Budge 1894: pl. 7).

Fourth scene

In the fourth scene, the *bnw*-bird (sacred heron or phoenix) is represented in front of an offering table with a lotus-flower (Einaudi 2024: 122) (Figure 6). This image relates to the text passage in Section 8 of the spell: (25) *jnk bnw* (26) *pwꜣ nty m jwnw jnk jry zjꜣty nty wnn* (Lapp 2006: 49) – ‘(25) I am the *bnw*-bird, (26) which is in Heliopolis; I am in charge of the inventory of that which exists’. The image of the *bnw*-bird is also known in Spell 83 vignettes (*rꜣ n jrt ḥprw m bnw* ‘Spell for taking the form of a *bnw*-bird’) (Quirke 2013: 196).

Fifth scene

The fifth scene shows the mummy of Osiris (or the deceased as Osiris) lying on the funeral bed in a tent. Canopic jars, a casket (?) and a writing palette are placed under the bed (Einaudi 2024: 122) (Figure 7). Isis and Nephthys in the form of falcons stand at the head and feet of the mummy. This scene corresponds to the passage of Section 9 of the spell: (32) *jr šw(33)t.wyꜣf m tpꜣf šmt ꜣst ḥnꜣ nbt-ḥ.t rdj.nꜣsn sw ḥ(34) rt tpꜣf wnnꜣzn m drtwy* (Lapp 2006: 63) – ‘(32) As for the two (33) feathers on his head – Isis and Nephthys came (and) placed themselves (34) on his head when they were (two) Djerty-birds’.



Figure 7. Fifth scene of Spell 17 vignettes in the papyrus of Ani (P. London BM EA10470, Sheet 7) (after Budge 1894: pl. 7).

Sixth scene

The sixth scene shows the seated figure of god Heh, personification of eternity; he holds the palm-branch 𓏏 – the logogram for *mnpt* ‘year’ (GSL M4) – in his right hand, with his left hand extended over the Eye of Horus in an oval (see Einaudi 2024: 128; Díaz-Iglesias Llanos 2005: 31–106, 2017: 117–182; Ibrahim and Tarasenko 2023: 277–278) (Figure 8). Heh has a green wig and pectoral. His skin is blue and decorated with water waves. The next god in the scene is Wadj-wer (lit. ‘Great Green’, personification of the sea); his hands are extended over two 𓏏 hieroglyphs turned into images of pools – the sacred lakes of Heracleopolis. The pool-symbol on the left is located above the hand of Heh and below the hand of Wadj-wer. Near the image of Heh is an inscription reading ‘Heh’. Further, to the right of the Wadj-wer figure there is an inscription: wꜥd-wr mnꜥf ‘Wadj-wer is his name’. Between the figures of the gods is š(ꜥ) n ḥsmn ‘Lake of Natron’. Above the lake symbol on the right is the inscription: š(ꜥ) n mꜣꜥt ‘Lake of the Righteous’. The earliest example of this vignette is in the papyrus of Nakht (Tarasenko 2020: 137). It can be related to the fragment of Section 13 of the spell: (42) $\text{wꜥb pw m hrw n mstwꜥf}$ (43) $\text{wꜥbwꜥj m ššwꜥj ꜥt wrt nty m nn-nswt (m)}$ (44) $\text{hrw pwꜥ n ꜥbt rḥyt n nꜥr pwꜥ ꜥ nty}$ (45) $\text{jmꜥz pty rꜥf sw ḥḥ rn n wꜥ wꜥd-wr}$ (46) $\text{rn n ky š(ꜥ) pw n ḥsmn ḥnꜥ š(ꜥ) pw n mꜣꜥt}$ (47) $\text{t ky ḏd ššm ḥḥw rn n wꜥ wꜥd-wr}$ (48) rn n ky (Lapp 2006: 63, 65), ‘(42) This is purification on the day of his day of birth. (43) I become pure in two great large Lakes that are in Heracleopolis (on) (44) the day of offering by the



Figure 8. Sixth scene of Spell 17 vignettes in the papyrus of Ani (P. London BM EA10470, Sheet 8) (after Budge 1894: pl. 8).

rekhyt-people to this Great God, who (45) is there. What is that? Heh is the name of one, Wadj-wer (46) is the name of the other. This is the “Lake of Natron” together with the “Lake of the Righteous (Maat)” (47) Another version: “Guide of millions (Hehu)” is the name of one, “Wadj-wer” is the (48) name of the other’.

Seventh scene

In the next, seventh scene, we see a pylon with its gate closed which is identified as a gate of the horizon (Einaudi 2024: 128) (Figure 9). Some papyri from the Ramesside Period show this gate with the door open, while others show it with the door closed (Milde 1991: 34–35 [VIII]; Quirke 2013: 65). In the papyrus of Ani there is a caption above the building: ‘Rosetjau’.⁷ This scene matches Section

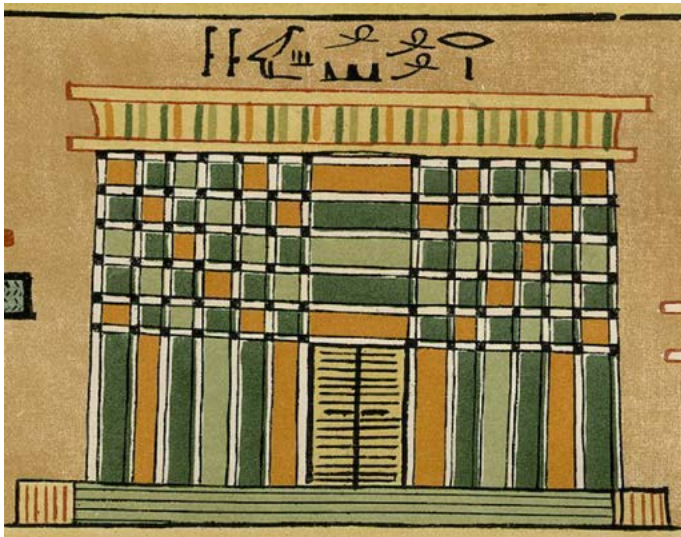


Figure 9. Seventh scene of Spell 17 vignettes in the papyrus of Ani (P. London BM EA10470, Sheet 8) (after Budge 1894: pl. 8).

13 of the spell: (50) *šm.nꜥj ḥr wꜣt rḥt.nꜥj tp m š(·) (n) mꜣtyw* (51) *pw pty rꜣf sw jr r-ꜣꜣw pw sbꜣ pw* (52) *rsy (m) nꜣrf sbꜣ mḥty n jꜣt <wsjr> jr grt š(·)* (53) *(n) mꜣtyw ꜣbdw pw* (Lapp 2006: 89–93) – ‘(50) I follow on the way known to me to this “Lake of the Righteous”: (51) What is that? This is Rosetjau (52) which is the southern gate of Nairef⁸ (and) the northern gate of the mound <of Osiris>. As for the ‘Lake (53) of the Righteous’ – it is Abydos’. It is possible to associate this scene with the next Section 14, where the deceased is ‘going out from the Sacred Gate’ (*prꜣj m sbꜣ ḏsrt*). This ‘Sacred Gate’ is identified in the gloss as the ‘Gate of the Netherworld (*Duat*)’ (*sbꜣ pw n dwꜣt*) and the ‘double gate/doorway’ (*ꜣwy*) of the ‘Eastern Horizon of Heaven’ (*ḥt jꜣbtt n pt*).

Eighth scene

The eighth scene shows the *Wedjat*-Eye (i.e. Eye of Re) on a decorated pylon or plinth (Einaudi 2024: 128) (Figure 10). On the picture we see the left eye of Re, that is the Lunar Eye. This scene corresponds to the fragment of Section 17 of the spell: (69) *tz(70)w.nꜥj šnw <m wꜣt> m trꜣs n nšny* (Lapp 2006: 119) – ‘(69) I have removed (70) the hair <from the *Wedjat*-Eye> during its anger’. The mythological plot of this section relates to the role of Thoth as the god who restores the damaged Eye of Re and makes it healthy again (Milde 1991: 34–35 [VIII]; Quirke 2013: 65).

Ninth scene

In the ninth scene, the cow-goddess Mehet-Weret (the Celestial Cow) is shown (Einaudi 2024: 128) (Figure 11). The cow is lying on a white pedestal on a green mat. She faces left, with a sun-disk between her horns, a *menat*-necklace, and a flagellum. In front of her in the papyrus of Ani there is a caption reading *mḥt-wrt jrt rꜣ* ‘Mehet-Weret, the Eye of Re’. This scene is related to the text of Section 18: (75) *jw mꜣꜣj.nꜥj rꜣ ms m sꜣr* (76) *ḥpdw mḥt-wrt* (Lapp 2006: 127) – ‘(75) I saw this Re born yesterday

⁷ *r-ꜣꜣw* is originally the name of the Memphite necropolis (Zivie-Coche 1984: 303–309).

⁸ Lit. ‘The Place where Nothing Grows’, name of the Abusir el-Melek necropolis.

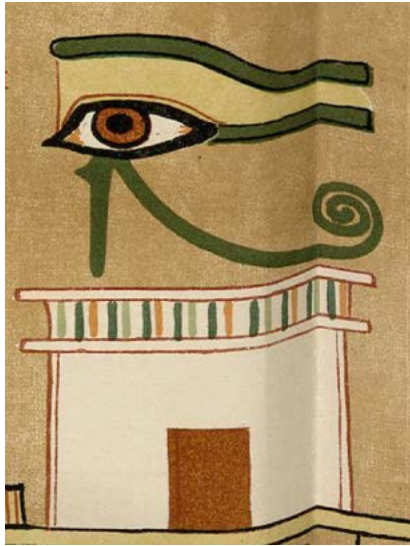


Figure 10. Eighth scene of Spell 17 vignettes in the papyrus of Ani (P. London BM EA10470, Sheet 8) (after Budge 1894: pl. 8).

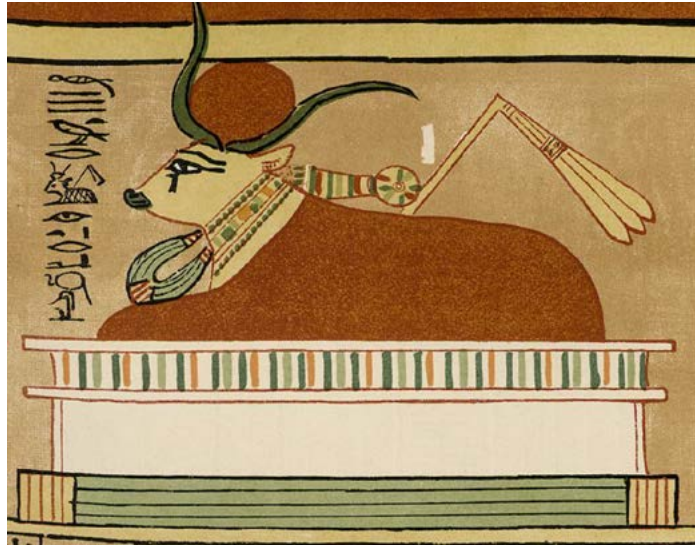


Figure 11. Ninth scene of Spell 17 vignettes in the papyrus of Ani (P. London BM EA10470, Sheet 8) (after Budge 1894: pl. 8).

(76) at the buttocks of Mehet-Weret'. At the end of this section, connected with the everyday rebirth of the sun-god into the sky, is a gloss corresponding to the caption next to the image of the cow: (78) *jr (grt)* (79) *mḥt-wrt wdꜥt pw n r* (Lapp 2006: 133) – '(78) As to (79) Mehet-Weret – this is the *Wedjat*-eye of Re'. This scene can be understood as a continuation of the previous one based on the image of the *Wedjat*-eye. This conclusion is supported by a scene in the papyrus of Hunefer (P. London BM EA9901), where Thoth is showed making an offering of the Eye to Mehet-Weret (cf. Milde 1991: 35 [XI]; Quirke 2013: 66).

Tenth scene

The tenth scene presents a canopic chest surrounded by four mummiform Children of Horus standing two by two:⁹ on the left, Hapy with a head of baboon and Imsety with a human head, and on the right, Duamutef with a jackal head and Qebehsenuef with a falcon head (Figure 12). The

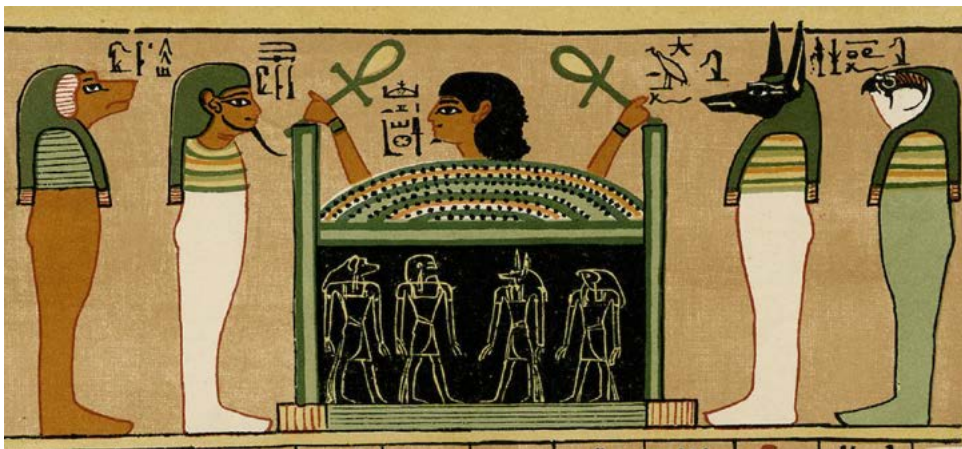


Figure 12. Tenth scene of Spell 17 vignettes in the papyrus of Ani (P. London BM EA10470, Sheet 8) (after Budge 1894: pl. 8).

⁹ Milde (1991: 36 [XII]) associates the canopic chest with a tumulus.

framing of the canopic chest is green, while its central rectangular part is painted black. A very close parallel for the Ani version of this scene can be found in the papyrus of Hunefer (P. London BM EA9001) (Naville 1886: I, pl. XXIX). The images of the same deities (two pairs face to face), but in human form, are drawn here. From the curved lid of the chest appears the head of deceased, looking left, with two hands holding green *ḥh*-signs. Regine Schulz (1992: 748, fig. 88) associates this image with the type of so-called cuboid statues of the New Kingdom. Near all the deities, the legends with their names are written: *jmstj*, *ḥpy*, *dwꜣ-mwtꜣf*, *qbḥ-snwꜣf* – ‘Imsety’, ‘Hapy’, ‘Duamutef’, and ‘Qebehsenuef’ (he is shown on the next sheet). In front of the man’s head is a caption: *jtꜣf ;bdw* ‘his mound, Abydos’, which associates the deceased with Osiris and his famous cult place. This scene corresponds to Section 19 of Spell 17: (79) *ḥr-nty jr wsjr* (80) *sš ny mꜣ-ḥrw wꜣ wr m nw ntrw jmyw* (81) *-ḥt ḥr mdw ḥry-tpꜣf mryw nbꜣf ptr* (82) *rꜣf sw jmstj ḥpy dwꜣ-mwtꜣf qbḥ-snwꜣf* (Lapp 2006: 135–139) – ‘(79) ... Osiris, (80) the Scribe Ani, justified, is the first among the gods in the suite (81) of Horus, uttering (spells) on behalf of one who loves his Lord. What (82) is that? It is Imsety, Hapy, Duamutef, and Qebehsenuef’. The same four deities are also mentioned in the next Section 20, which can also be related to this scene (Lapp 2006: 153 [cols 90–91], 165 [col. 99]).

Eleventh scene

The eleventh scene in the papyrus of Ani shows eleven sitting deities who face left. They are seated on a green mat (Einaudi 2024: 134) (Figure 13). There are captions next to the gods’ faces (left to right):

1. *mꜣ(n)-jtꜣf* ‘He who looks toward his father’ – deity with a human head and body painted white.
2. *ḥry-bꜣqꜣf* ‘He who is under his moringa-tree’ – deity with a human head and body painted brown.
3. *ḥr-mḥnty-jrty* ‘Horus without eyes (on his head)’ – deity with a falcon head and body painted light brown with a hint of orange.
4. *jnpw* ‘Anubis’ – deity with a jackal head and body painted white.
5. *ndḥ-ndḥ* ‘Nedjeh-nedjeh’ – deity with a human head and body painted green.
6. *ꜣd-ꜣd* ‘Aqed-qed’ – deity with a snake head and body painted brown.
7. *ḥnty-hwtꜣf* ‘Foremost of his flame’ – deity with a human head and body painted white.
8. *jmy-wnwtꜣf* ‘He who is in hour’ – deity with a snake head and body painted brown with a hint of orange.
9. *dšr-jrty* ‘He who with red eyes’ – deity with a human head and body painted green.
10. *bs-mꜣ-m-grḥ* ‘Flame seeing at night’ – deity with a human head and body painted white.
11. *jnn-m-ḥrw* ‘Fetching by day’ – deity with a human head and body painted light brown.

These deities can be divided into two groups:

Scene 11a: Together with the four Children of Horus, the first three gods in this scene are the ‘seven *ḥw*-spirits’, who are mentioned in Section 20 of Spell 17. Behind them is the god Anubis, who placed



Figure 13. Eleventh scene of Spell 17 vignettes in the papyrus of Ani (P. London BM EA10470, Sheet 9) (after Budge 1894: pl. 9).

these seven *ḥw* ‘as a protection of the burial of Osiris’: (98) *jr grt ḥw sḥ jp(99)wy jmsty ḥpy dw-mwtḥ qbḥ-snwḥ* (100) *mꜥ(n)-jtḥ ḥry-bꜥqḥ ḥr-mḥnty-jrty* (101) *rdjt zn jn jnpw m sꜥ qrz nt wsjr* (Lapp 2006: 163–169) – ‘(98) As for these seven spirits (99), they are Imsety, Hapy, Duamutef, Qebehsenuef, (100) Maa(-n)-it-ef (“He who looks toward his father”), Kher-baq-ef (“He who is under his moringa-tree”), Horus-mekhenet-irti (“Horus without eyes (on his face)”), (101) and they were placed by Anubis as a protection of the burial of Osiris’.

Scene 11b: The next seven deities in the scene are the same ‘seven *ḥw*-spirits’, but according to another (local?) mythical version in Section 20: (102) *ky ḏḏ jr ḥw sḥ jpwyw* (103) *ndḥ-ndḥ ḥqḏ-qḏ n-rdj-nḥ-ḥnty-hwt(104)ḥ ḥr-jmy-wnwtḥ ḏsr-jrty-jmy(105)-ḥt-jnsy bs-ḥr-pr-m-ḥtḥt m(106)ꜥ-m-grḥ-jnnḥ-m-hrw* (Lapp 2006: 169–177) – ‘(102) Another version: these seven spirits are (103) Nedjeh-nedjeh, Aqed-qed, Ne-redi-en-ef-henty-hut(104)-ef (“He who cannot be given to fire, Foremost of his flame”), Akh-er-imi-unut-ef (“Enterer of sight who is in his hour”), Desher-irti-imi-(105)het-inesi (“He who with red eyes in the Temple of Red Cloth”), Bes-her-per-em-khet-khet (“Flame faced coming out backwards”), M(106)aa-em-gereh-inen-ef-em-heru (“Seeing by night fetching by day”).’ The captions in the vignette and the names in the text also differ. In the text the names of the deities are sometimes more complex (Table 3).

Iconographic details in this scene (or scenes) vary considerably in the Ramesside papyri. Examples are the vignettes in the anonymous P. Dublin MS 1661, or in P. London BM EA9901 (papyrus of Hunefer) (Milde 1991: 36–38 [XIII–XIV]; Naville 1886: I, pls XXIX–XXX).

Twelfth scene

The twelfth scene shows the bird forms of the *bꜥ*-souls of Re to the left (with a disk on his head), and Osiris to the right (crowned with an Upper Egyptian white crown) (Einaudi 2024: 134) (Figure 14). They face each other and stand on a pylon or shrine between two *ḏḏ*-pillars. This scene occurs only in the papyrus of Ani as an illustration for Spell 17. It corresponds with the first part of Section 21 of the text: (109) *jnk bꜥwyḥ(y) ḥry-jb tꜥwyḥ(y)* (110) *ptr rf sw wsjr pw m ḥqḥr ḏḏw* (111) *gm nḥbꜥ jm n r ḥꜥ n ḥpt.n ky jm ḥꜥ* (112) *n ḥpr m bꜥwyḥ(y)* (Lapp 2006: 183–189) – ‘(109) I am this double *bꜥ*-soul amid his two children. (110) What is that? It is Osiris when he enters Djedu (Busiris), (111) he found the *bꜥ*-soul of Re there. Then they embraced one another. Then this (112) double *bꜥ*-soul come into being’. The two *ḏḏ*-pillars in the scene can be interpreted as linking to the spelling *ḏḏw* ‘Busiris’ in the text. The same



Figure 14. Twelfth scene of Spell 17 vignettes in the papyrus of Ani (P. London BM EA10470, Sheet 9) (after Budge 1894: pl. 9).

TABLE 3. THE NAMES OF THE DEITIES IN SECTION 20 OF SPELL 17 AND IN THE VIGNETTE LEGEND OF THE PAPYRUS OF ANI (P. LONDON BM EA10470)

No.	Caption in the vignette	Form in the text
1.	<i>mꜣ(n)-jtꜣf</i>	<i>mꜣ(n)-jtꜣf</i>
2.	<i>ḥry-bꜣqꜣf</i>	<i>ḥry-bꜣqꜣf</i>
3.	<i>ḥr-mḥnty-jrty</i>	<i>ḥr-mḥnty-jrty</i>
4.	<i>jnpw</i>	<i>jnpw</i>
5.	<i>ndḥ-ndḥ</i>	<i>ndḥ-ndḥ</i>
6.	<i>ꜣqd-qd</i>	<i>ꜣqd-qd</i>
7.	<i>ḥnty-hwtꜣf</i>	<i>n-rdj-nꜣf-ḥnty-hwtꜣf</i>
8.	<i>jmy-wnwtꜣf</i>	<i>ꜣq-ḥr-jmy-wnwtꜣf</i>
9.	<i>dšr-jrty</i>	<i>dšr-jrty-jmy-ḥt-jnsy</i>
10.	<i>bs-mꜣ-m-grḥ</i>	<i>bs-ḥr-pr-m-ḥtḥt</i>
11.	<i>jnn-m-hrw</i>	<i>mꜣ-m-grḥ-jnnꜣf-m-hrw</i>

‘rebus method’ (Angenot 2018: 85–103) with two *dd* hieroglyphs is found on the vignette of Spell 100 in the papyrus of Nakht-Amun (*nḥt-jmn*) (P. Berlin 3002, 19th dynasty). On this partly destroyed vignette, a boat with a figure of Osiris is shown, together with two hieroglyphs of *dd*-pillars. Above them, the phonetic sign *⊃* *r* (i.e. preposition ‘to [where?]’) is visible (Munro 1997: 30, photo-pl. 14). This scene ‘encrypts’ the first sentence of the spell: *dꜣ.nꜣj bnw r jꜣbtt wsjr r ddw*, which translates as ‘I ferried the Benu-heron to the East and Osiris to Djedu (Busiris)’, or more specifically, ‘Osiris to Djedu’, since the spelling ‘Busiris’ contains two *dd* signs (Milde 2011: 47–48, fig. 11; Tarasenko 2024: 23–24).

The image of the ‘double *bꜣ*-soul’ (*bꜣwyꜣfy*) here represents the figure of the united *bꜣ*-soul of Re-Osiris—a universal syncretistic cosmic god of the New Kingdom who also occurs in some other Spells of the *Book of the Dead* (64, 74, 130 etc.) (Spiegel 1975: 129–181; DuQuesne 2006: 23–33). An image of this deity occurs in the tombs of Nefertari (QV66), Nakhtamun (TT335) and as well as in other Queens’ Valley and Deir el-Medina tombs (McCarthy 2022: 681–692). In the tomb of Nefertari, it is supported by a legend: *wsjr ḥtp m r* ‘It is Osiris who sets as Re’ (on the left) and *r pw ḥtp m wsjr* ‘It is Re who sets as Osiris’ (on the right) (Thausing and Goedicke 1971: fig. 41; cf. Billing 2003: 378, fig. C.32 [TT335]). This image and inscription are repeated in several other sources, such as Spell 180 of the *Book of the Dead* (McCarthy 2022: 681–692; Quirke 2013: 458–460).

Thirteenth scene

In the thirteenth scene, a cat cuts off the snake’s head under the sacred tree. The snake’s body (on the right) has one coil. There are three seated deities with knives in their hands behind the snake (they seem to be assistants of the cat) (Einaudi 2024: 138) (Figure 15). This scene relates to Section 22 (Milde 1991: 38 [XV]; Quirke 2013: 67; Tarasenko 2016) of Spell 17:¹⁰

¹⁰ In this instance, the translation is provided following the papyrus of Nebseni (P. London BM EA9900, 18th dynasty, Memphis) (Lapp 2006: 192–204). On the tenth sheet of the papyrus of Ani, the final forty columns of the text of Spell 17 are inscribed, spanning from column 106 to column 145. As illustrated in Leach and Parkinson (2010: 41), the text of the spell omits around 100 columns. Section 21 has been halted in its midpoint within the designated col. 112. The text commences from the midpoint of Section 31 in col. 113 (Lapp 2006: 175–189) and concludes at the conclusion of Section 33 in col. 145

(54) [...] jnk mjw pwy (ꜣ) (ntj) pšny jšd (55) r-gsꜣf m jwnw grḥ pwy [n ꜥꜣꜣ n jrjt sꜣwt sbyw hrw pw n]¹¹ ḥtm ḥftyw njw nb-r-dr jmꜣf [ptr rꜣf] sw mjw pwy [ꜣ] rꜣ pw (56) dzꜣf dd.(n.)tw nꜣf mjw m dd sjꜣ rꜣf mjw sw m nn (n) jrj.nꜣf ḥpr rnꜣf pw n mjw ky dd wnn (57) šw pw ḥr jrjt jmyt-pr n gb n wsjr jr grt pšn jšd r gsꜣf m jwnw wnn msw bdšt pw ḥr mꜣꜣ (58) ḥrjrj(t) nꜣsn jr grt grḥ pf n ꜥꜣꜣ ꜣꜣzn pw m jꜣbty pt ꜥꜣꜣ n ꜥꜣꜣꜣ (ḥpr) m pt m tꜣ r drꜣf

(54) [...] I am that (Great) Cat, beside whom the jšd-tree (55) was split in Heliopolis on that Night [of the Combat and repelling of the rebels; on that day] when the Enemies of the Lord of the Universe were executed. [What is] that? As for the ‘(Great) Cat’, it is Re himself. (56) He was called ‘Cat’ (mjw) because the (god) Sia said about him: ‘He is similar (mjw) to those made by him’. Thus, came into existence his name of ‘Cat’ (mjw).¹² Another version: it was (57) Shu, who gave the Will to Geb and Osiris. As for ‘the jšd-tree was split in Heliopolis’, that is the Children of bdšt, punished (58) for what they had done. As for this ‘Night of the Combat’ – it happened when they invaded the East in the entire Land.

Based on this text, the vignette depicts the cat, identified as mjw ꜣ ‘the Great Cat’, the jšd-tree, and the snake, which is not named explicitly in the text and hence is the most difficult character to identify. The caption in the scene reads ‘Great Cat’; according to the gloss this is the image of Re cutting off a serpent’s head with the knife under the shadow of the sacred jšd-tree. This scene, along with the ‘double lion’ scene (Scene three) and the introductory vignette (Scene one), was the most popular among the series of vignettes to Spell 17, and it was often found in the decoration of 19th dynasty tombs and on the coffins of the 21st dynasty (Tarasenko 2016: 1–21). This scene is attested in seven New Kingdom *Book of the Dead* papyri. Their iconographic structure usually includes all three characters, but in some sources, there is no image of the tree (P. London BM EA10471; P. Berlin P. 3002; P. Leiden T2; P. Leiden T4; TT335) (Tarasenko 2016: 1 [fig. 1], 2 [figs 2, 2a], 3 [figs 3, 3a], 6, [fig. 7], 15–16 [fig. 22]). Another unstable element in the scenes – the knife (knives) – could be represented by one or several units, shown either at the paws of the cat or embedded in the snake’s coils (Tarasenko 2016: 1–6). The number of coils in the snake’s body can vary, from one (as in papyrus of Ani) to three and more in later sources (two in P. London BM EA10471; P. Berlin P. 3002; P. London BM EA9900; TT1; TT292; TT359; three in P. Leiden T2; P. Leiden T4; TT10; TT32; TT216; TT335; four in P. Cairo S.R. VII. 11496) (Tarasenko 2016: 1–17). If the snake’s body has two coils, it can resemble the hieroglyph  of two hills (GSL N26, phonetic ḏw), clearly signifying the term  ḏw-‘evil’ (Tarasenko 2016: 3). The snake is the most mysterious character in the vignette. The text of the spell mentions only ‘enemies’ and msw bdšt ‘Children of Weakness’ in connection with this mytheme. Perhaps the scene depicts metaphorically the cosmogonic combat of cat-Re with ḥftyw and msw bdšt, who are shown in the form of



Figure 15. Thirteenth scene of Spell 17 vignettes in the papyrus of Ani (P. London BM EA10470, Sheet 10) (after Budge 1894: pl. 10)

(Lapp 2006: 279–339), and the subsequent sheet continues with the text of Spell 146. Therefore, nine sections of Spell 17’s text are absent from the papyrus of Ani.

¹¹ Restored after Lapp 2006: 194–195.

¹² See Otto 1956: 65–66; Tarasenko 2016: 24.

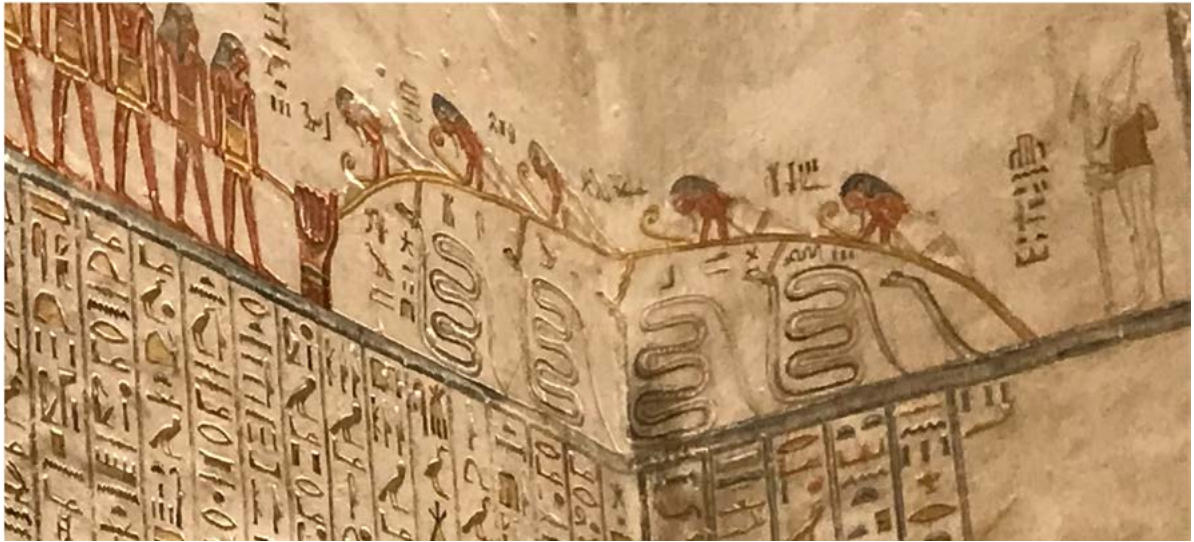


Figure 16. Image of the *msw bdšt* as snakes in the Book of Gates in the Tomb of Ramesses V/VI, western Thebes, KV 9, 20th dynasty (photo by author).

a snake (Tarasenko 2016) in a few sources. An example is a scene of the 11th Hour of the *Book of Gates* (upper register, scene 69) (Figure 16). In P. 47.218.48/.85 (so-called ‘Ophiological Treaty’, Late Period), *msw bdšt* are described as ‘vipers’ (Sauneron 1989: 163).

Fourteenth scene

In the fourteenth scene, the deceased and his wife are shown kneeling and worshipping Khepri (Einaudi 2024: 138) (Figure 17). Khepri, the god of the morning sun, is represented in human form in white clothes with a scarab as his head. He sits in a solar morning bark (*mꜥndt*). Behind Khepri there is a sign  (GSL T18, phonetic *šms* ‘to follow’ [Gardiner 1957: 513]). On the front left of the bark is an offering stand with a lotus-flower (Figure 18). This scene relates to Section 32 of the text: (116) *j hꜥrj hꜥry-jb wjꜥꜥf* [...] (122) *pty rꜥꜥf* (123) *sw (jr) hꜥrj hꜥry-jb wjꜥꜥfꜥꜥ pw dꜥꜥꜥf* (Lapp 2006: 283, 295–297) – ‘(116) Oh, Khepri! Oh, one who is in his bark [...] (122) What is (123) that? (As for) Khepri who is in his bark, it is Re himself’. Behind the bark of Khepri (to the right) are the *Wedjat*-eye (left, i.e. moon eye), two stars and two baboons worshipping the rising sun. The star symbols here represent the abbreviation of the word *dwꜥ* ‘worship’; the *Wedjat*-eye could be a symbol of offering (Milde 1991: 40–41 [XXI]). The two baboons are well-known worshippers of the rising sun in Egyptian art, but in this case, they could be personified as goddess Isis and Nephthys, according to the text fragment of the same



Figure 17. Fourteenth scene of Spell 17 vignettes in the papyrus of Ani (P. London BM EA10470, Sheet 10) (after Budge 1894: pl. 10).



Figure 18. Fifteenth scene of Spell 17 vignettes in the papyrus of Ani (P. London BM EA10470, Sheet 10) (after Budge 1894: pl. 10).

Section 32: (123) *jr nw n jryw* (124) *sjpw bntwy pw ʔst pw nbt-ḥwt pw* (Lapp 2006: 297–299) – ‘(123) As for these (124) ‘Judges’ – they are two baboons, this is Isis and this is Nephthys’.

Fifteenth Scene

In fifteenth scene, the last one in the papyrus of Ani, the god Atum, personifying the evening sun, is shown wearing white clothes and a Double Crown, seated within the sun disk on the Bark of the setting, evening sun (*msktt*). In front of him (to the right) is an offering stand with a lotus flower. Next to the offering stand is a lion-god on a white pedestal or shrine under papyrus and floral stems, one intertwined with a cobra (Einaudi 2024: 138) (Figure 18). It is uncertain how this connects with the text,¹³ which does not mention the bark of Atum; but at the beginning of spell, we have a relevant statement in Section 4: (13) *jtm pwy jmy jtn=f* (Lapp 2006: 29) – ‘(13) It is Atum in his disk’. This scene could also be related to a passage in Section 33, the last in the spell: (132) [...] (*jnk*) *tm jw=f m njwt=k* (133) *ḥʔk rw ḥd r pdz tp ḥm n pḥty=f* (Lapp 2006: 311–313) – ‘(132) [...] (I am) Atum, who is in your town. (133) Go back! Lion with white mouth and flat head, retreat at his might’. The cobra above the lion is a snake-goddess Wadjet entwined around a papyrus stem. Behind this group composition is a hieroglyphic for ‘fire’ 𐎗 (GSL Q7, in *ḥt* ‘fire’, *sd̥t* ‘fire, flame’, *wnm* ‘flame’ etc.) (Gardiner 1957: 500). These images too can be related to the text of Section 33: (140) *ntk m šms n wḏyt nbt jm wnmw* [...] (145) *jr wḏyt nbt jm wnmw jrt r pw* (Lapp 2006: 329) – ‘(140) You are in following of Wadjet, Lady of the Flame [...] (154) As for “Wadjet, Lady of the Flame” – she is the Eye of Re’.

The final table (Table 4) shows the interconnection between the vignettes of Spell 17 and sections of its text.

TABLE 4. INTERCONNECTION BETWEEN THE VIGNETTES OF SPELL 17 OF THE BOOK OF THE DEAD AND SECTIONS OF ITS TEXT

Scene	Section of the text
1a/1b	Title rubric
2	Title rubric
3	5
4	8
5	9
6	13

¹³ See Milde (1991: 41–42 [XXII–XXIV]); Quirke (2013: 67–68). For later development, see Ibrahim (2020: 87–104).

Scene	Section of the text
7	13/14
8	17
9	18
10	19
11a/11b	20
12	21
13	22
14	32
15	4/33

Conclusions

In most known sources (papyri, tombs and coffins decoration), Spell 17 of the *Book of the Dead* has illustrations. They are represented in 54 out of 84 sources known to me (in 50 cases these are objects of the 19th dynasty). At the same time, unfortunately, many documents are fragmented. The complete frieze of vignettes of Spell 17 has been preserved only in eight sources. This frieze of undivided vignettes appears in Spell 17 only in the post-Amarna period. It has not yet been possible to trace the primary sources of the vignettes of Spell 17 and to offer an explanation for the appearance of their frieze form. In my opinion, their creation may be linked to the public reaction that followed Akhenaten's death. Akhenaten's religious reform may have played an unexpectedly positive role in shaping the illustrative design of Spell 17. The post-Amarna 'restoration' of traditional cults and the growing ideas of 'personal piety' allowed the Theban artists of the late 18th and early 19th dynasties to develop an original series of vignettes for Spell 17, one of the key texts of the *Book of the Dead* (Tarasenko 2020: 143).

Based on the illustrations in the papyrus of Ani (P. London BME A10470), I have identified 15 individual scenes that illustrate the title rubric and 14 of the 33 sections (*Abschnitt*) of the text of the Spell. In total, 17 such scenes can be identified for the Ramesside documents (cf. scenes 1a and 1b, 11a and 11b). For unknown reasons, more than half of the sections of the text of the spell never received their illustrations. Despite the obvious basic similarities, each document has its own iconographic differences, confirming that vignettes of Spell 17 were not standardised in this period. It looks like the artists who designed the vignettes of Spell 17 had a certain freedom in expressing the details of the scenes, which allowed them to create individual funerary objects for their customers. In some cases, unique scenes are known, such as the twelfth scene in the papyrus of Ani, showing the *bꜥ*-souls of Re and Osiris between the *ḏd*-pylons. The seventh, tenth and eleventh scenes show considerable iconographic variation in Ramesside manuscripts.

It should also be noted that the complete set of illustrations of the *Book of the Dead* Spell 17 is extremely rare in tomb decoration (I know of only three comparatively complete sets in tombs TT32, TT58, and TT265.) Four scenes from the Spell 17 vignettes were particularly popular: The first scene (the deceased in front of a *znt*-table in a pavilion); the third scene (the 'Double Lion' or *Rwty*-scene); the fifth scene (the mummy of Osiris on the funeral bed, surrounded by Isis and Nephthys in bird form); and the thirteenth scene (the cat cutting off the serpent's head under the *jšd*-tree). The same scenes were also chosen for the decoration of coffins. It can be assumed that these four scenes had the most important status for the Egyptians out of all the illustrations in Spell 17 for some reason. At the same time, only two of these scenes (the third and thirteenth) continued to exist as

individual motifs in funerary art during the Third Intermediate Period. More precise comparisons of iconography in different sources could reveal the reasons for this phenomenon, which will be the focus of my next research and discussion.

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Banqueting with Tutankhamun: A Case Study in Determining the Function and Meaning of an Unprovenanced Artefact (ECM 1887)

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Abstract

This paper investigates an unprovenanced faience broad collar terminal from the Myers Collection, Eton College (ECM 1887) depicting Tutankhamun drinking from a white lotus chalice and wearing a *khepresh*-crown, providing insight into the sophistication of the vitreous materials industry, the symbolism embedded in the iconography, and its function as part of a broad collar. The comprehensive physical analysis of the terminal, involving stereomicroscopic inspection and ultraviolet, infrared, and x-ray fluorescence analysis, helped to elucidate the manufacturing process, likely involving the use of an open-back mould, manual touch-ups, the incising of the hieroglyphs and terminal holes, and a combination of efflorescence and application glazing. The intimate iconography of the image, particularly the *khepresh*-crown, white lotus chalice, and act of drinking, identify this object as a potent fertility symbol of royal regeneration with a connection to public feasts and festivals. This interpretation is based on the symbolism associated with the lotus flower, allusions to the Heliopolitan creation account, an implicit connection with banqueting, and parallels to similar imagery. Stemming from this evaluation, the broad collar that incorporated ECM 1887 was most likely distributed to a retainer at a feast to cement their loyalty to the Egyptian state and create a bucolic atmosphere, while also bestowing prestige upon the recipient due to its connection to Tutankhamun. In addition, broad collars can assume a cultic function, as alluded to in iconographic depictions, with the choice of faience reinforcing its symbolism. Finally, the textual appearance of broad collars indicates their purpose in ennobling, rejuvenating, and sometimes deifying the wearer. Although unprovenanced, ECM 1887 not only stands as an example of faience production techniques consistent with known methods from the 18th dynasty, but the symbolic meaning gained from its unique iconography and composition offers valuable insight into the role of broad collars in festival contexts.

Keywords

Amarna Art; Broad Collar; Tutankhamun; Feasting; Faience

Introduction

A detailed analysis of an unprovenanced faience broad collar terminal with an image of Tutankhamun from the Myers Collection, Eton College (ECM 1887), this paper explores the intricacies of its elemental composition and iconography. The results of the research conducted reveal the sophistication of the vitreous materials industry at the time it was produced, while the symbolism embedded in the iconography and its use as part of a broad collar contribute to the understanding of feasts/festivals in ancient Egypt. However, despite being a cornerstone piece of the collection due to its connection to Tutankhamun and having been displayed in special exhibitions around the world, it has never been the focus of any scholarly research before this time beyond its brief mention in several publications (Reeves 1990: 29, 1998: 91, 192; Reeves and Quirke 1999: 40; Tait 1963: 97, fig. 1).

Description of ECM 1887

The small terminal designated as ECM 1887 measures 38.2mm long by 23.8mm wide, narrowing to 11.2mm, with a maximum thickness of approximately 3.9mm. It depicts Tutankhamun in the Amarna style drinking from a white lotus chalice and wearing a *khepresh*-crown with a *uraeus* and crimped streamer, a broad collar, wristlets, armlets, and an elaborate pleated kilt with sporran (Figures 1 and 2).

The cartouche contains the king's praenomen 'Nebkheperure,' definitively identifying the figure as Tutankhamun (Eaton-Krauss 1987: 117–118, 122, fig. 4), with the entire hieroglyphic inscription



Figure 1. ECM 1887, with possible locations of additional holes in original piece indicated in red (photos courtesy of the Johns Hopkins Archaeological Museum).



Figure 2. Facsimile of ECM 1887 (drawing by Michael R. Tritsch).

reading, *ḥqꜣ¹-nfr nb-tꜣ.wj nb-ḥpr.w-r...*,² ‘the Perfect Ruler, Lord of the Two Lands Nebkheperure...’ (Figure 3).³

In terms of its current condition, the upper right corner of the terminal is broken off, as is the lower right half and the entire bottom section. In the lower left section, below the figure’s elbow, a crack runs completely through the piece, which has been repaired with adhesive. Holes on the left and right sides of ECM 1887 terminate in corresponding holes on its back, indicating a 90-degree bend in the path of each opening; they do not extend through to the other side of the terminal. On the left side, the edge of the uppermost hole is 12.4mm from the top of the object with the edge of the lower hole being 15.0mm from the bottom. The two holes are 7.6mm apart, edge-to-edge. The corresponding holes on the back are the same distance from the top and bottom of the terminal, but they are only 7.2mm apart edge-to-edge, attributed to their slightly larger diameter. The edge of the hole on the right side of the object is 8.2mm from the top, which matches the location of its mate on the back side; however, the hole on the back is, again, a slightly larger diameter. There would have also likely been one additional set of holes on each side of the original, intact piece, as indicated in Figure 1. The arrangement of holes, with the holes on the left side accommodating the strings for the beads and the holes on the right side used for the strings required to secure the collar around the neck of the wearer, combined with the overall size and shape (Jéquier 1921: 8; de Keyser 1947: 85) of ECM 1887, confirm its identification as a broad collar terminal that incorporated two rows of beads.⁴



Figure 3. Inscription on ECM 1887.

¹ This has also been read as *nṯr* (R8) by Reeves (1998: 192) and Reeves and Quirke (1999: 40). However, the appearance looks more reminiscent of the shape of the *ḥqꜣ*-sign (S38), dating this object earlier in the reign of Tutankhamun (Eaton-Krauss 2016: 8, 23).

² Because the end of the cartouche is missing, the inscription may have continued, possibly reading *dj nḥ d.t.*, ‘given life forever’, or something similar.

³ All translations in this article are by the author.

⁴ Based on a thorough review of broad collar terminals, the closest parallel is the terminal on New York, MMA 40.2.5, an 18th dynasty broad collar displaying imagery of natural elements (Lansing 1940: 67–68, fig. 2; <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/549199>). No parallel has been identified that exhibits the complexity of the iconography of ECM 1887. Most terminals that bear any type of intricate design are in the shapes of falcon heads and lotus flowers and are only occasionally inscribed with the name of the owner (Andrews 1990: 119–123, figs 100–103, 105).

Historical background

Unprovenanced, ECM 1887 was purchased on the antiquities market during the late 1800s by Major William Joseph Myers, a graduate of Eton College. During his service in the British army, he became an avid collector of *Aegyptiaca* while stationed in Egypt, which became a lifelong passion. Unfortunately, he did not document from whom he bought the objects, where they were found in Egypt, or the conditions under which the objects were uncovered. In his will, he bequeathed his entire collection to Eton College to form a teaching collection, resulting in the creation of the Myers Museum, part of the Natural History Museum (Georganteli 2010: 20; Reeves 1999a: 4–6; Spurr 1999: 1–3). A portion of his collection, including ECM 1887, was on loan to the Johns Hopkins University Archaeological Museum at the time of ECM 1887's study in 2015–2016.

Faience production

To interpret the results of the physical evaluation of ECM 1887, a brief review of the composition and manufacturing techniques associated with faience during the 18th dynasty proves beneficial.

Faience material composition

A glazed material, the main ingredient in faience is finely crushed silica, originating from sand, flint, or crushed quartz pebbles and accounting for over 90% of its composition (Friedman 1998: 15, 17; Krygier 2005: 47; Nicholson 1998: 50–51, 2000: 177, 186–187, 2009: 2; Vandiver and Kingery 1987a: 20, 1987b: 79). Faience also contains notable amounts of an alkali (0.3–5.0%) and lime (1–5%) which contribute to its physical strength and act as a flux, increasing the reaction times and lowering the required firing temperature. Soda (Na_2O), obtained from plant ash or natron, serves as the primary alkali used, and the lime, known as calcium oxide (CaO), comes from limestone or chalk (Krygier 2005: 47–48; Nicholson 1998: 50–51, 2000: 186–191, 2009: 2; Vandiver and Kingery 1987a: 19–20, 1987b: 80–81). Finally, different elemental compounds are included as colourants in very small amounts, with copper being the primary additive used, giving faience its characteristic blue-green colour (Kaczmarczyk and Vandiver 2008: 59; Nicholson 2000: 182; Vandiver and Kingery 1987b: 80–81). The presence of other substances that may appear in faience is most likely unintentional.

Faience manufacturing techniques

Following the acquisition of raw materials, the production of faience objects often took place in royal workshops alongside glass and pottery production in order to economise on the allocation of fuel, labour, and materials (Bianchi 1998: 23; Krygier 2005: 54; Friedman 1998: 17). An artisan mixed the ingredients in the proper proportions and amalgamated them with water to create a pliable paste. Thixotropic in nature, the paste was difficult to shape and prone to losing detail, requiring the craftsman to roughly shape the object quickly, either by hand or in a mould. Once dried, the artisan used precision tools to trim and add detail if needed (Friedman 1998: 18, fig. 4; Krygier 2005: 36; Nicholson 2000: 187–189, 2009: 3; Vandiver and Kingery 1987a: 27, 1987b: 81). The use of open backed moulds increased the production volume, significantly expanding the availability of faience, frequently selected for the creation of jewelry elements, despite the manual touch-up required due to the loss of detail after removal from the mould (Friedman 1998: 18, fig. 4; Krygier 2005: 45, 158–59; Nicholson 1998: 51, 2000: 182–189, 2009: 3–4, fig. 2).

Faience glazing techniques

The luminous glaze on the top surface of the faience body is a vitreous substance that originates from alkaline salts, creating a layer that, when heated, produces a hard, glassy finish (Friedman 1998:

18, fig. 4; Riccardelli *et al.* 2001: II10.7.1). When a faience object is fired, three layers form, which are observable during scanning electron microscopy (SEM) — the body (appearing coarse with large grains), a thin interaction layer, and the top layer of glaze (exhibiting much smaller, less coarse, particles) (Nicholson 1998: 50 [fig. 26], 54 [figs 28–30], 2000: 189–191, figs 7.6–7.8, 2009: 3, fig. 1; Tite *et al.* 2007: 1571; Vandiver and Kingery 1987a: 23–24, fig. 3), with ‘faience shimmer[ing] due to the interaction layer between the core and the glaze which reflects and scatters light in all directions’ (Krygier 2005: 47). Following this chemistry, three different glazing techniques exist: efflorescence, application, and cementation (Krygier 2005: 49; Nicholson 1998: 52, 2000: 189, 2009: 4–7; Stocks 1997: 180; Vandiver and Kingery 1987a: 27–28, fig. 5, 1987b: 81–82, fig. 2).⁵ While each method is singularly sufficient, they were often used in combination on a single object in order to achieve the desired appearance (Krygier 2005: 46; Nicholson 2000: 189).

Efflorescence, the most common type of glazing, occurs when additional soluble salts are added to the silica mixture, although it does take place to some extent even with the basic formulation. As the water within the faience body evaporates, the salts migrate to the surface to form a precipitate composed mainly of sodium, as well as trace amounts of potassium carbonates, sulfates, and chlorides. Upon heating the object, the layer of salts fuses together to create a glaze, with the thickness dependent on the extent of efflorescence that transpires during drying (Friedman 1998: 18, fig. 4; Krygier 2005: 47 and 49; Markowitz and Lacovara 1999: 137; Nicholson 1998: 52–53, fig. 27, 2000: 189–191, fig. 7.5, 2009: 5–6; Vandiver and Kingery 1987a: 24, 1987b: 81–82, fig. 2). In analysing the cross section of an efflorescence glazed faience object, it ‘generally shows a narrow, well-defined interface between the glaze and the underlying body’ with a great deal of interparticle glass in the body (Nicholson 1998: 52–54, fig. 28, 2000: 189–190, fig. 7.6).

Application glazing involves physically applying a glaze on the formed object just prior to firing, consisting of the same raw materials used for the faience body but in different proportions. An artisan finely grinds all of the components and mixes them with water to create a slurry to be brushed directly on the object or into which the object can be dipped. After the glaze dries, the object is fired to fuse the glaze to the body. Faience items glazed with this approach can often be identified due to drip and flow lines as well as brush strokes and the occasional finger mark. In evaluating a cross section, the area between the main body and the glaze remains relatively well-defined with only a slight blurring at the interface where a small amount of glaze absorbs into the body (Krygier 2005: 50–51; Nicholson 1998: 53–54, figs 27 and 30, 2000: 189 [fig. 7.5], 191 [fig. 7.8], 2009: 5; Vandiver and Kingery 1987b: 81–82, fig. 2).

Firing

Firing, the final step in faience production, is ultimately responsible for the characteristic properties to materialise, with a temperature range of 800–1000 degrees Celsius required for the vitrification of the salts to take place (Krygier 2005: 51; Nicholson 1998: 55, 2000: 191–192, 2009: 7–8).

Material analysis

To gain an understanding of the manufacturing process and glazing technique(s) used in the fabrication of ECM 1887 along with its chemical composition, the object underwent four separate types of physical analysis. Stereomicroscopy inspection provided insight into the production steps, including the glazing method; the original colour; and the repair performed. Ultraviolet (UV)

⁵ Because cementation glazing is not attested in the 18th dynasty, it is not discussed herein. For further information, see Krygier (2005: 50); Nicholson (1998: 53–54, figs 27 and 29, 2000: 189–190, figs 7.5 and 7.7, 2009: 6–7); Riccardelli *et al.* (2001: II10.7.1); and Vandiver and Kingery (1987b: 81–82, fig. 2).

radiation exposure offered further data regarding the glazing and repair. Infrared (IR) radiation exposure imparted information concerning the presence of carbon and surface pigments. X-ray fluorescence (XRF) analysis identified the elements present in ECM 1887, confirming the constituent materials and object's original colour.

Stereomicroscopy

When inspecting ECM 1887 under the stereomicroscope at a magnification of 30X to 100X, the main image and the edges of the terminal appear smooth and crisp, which is consistent with the touch-up process after removal from a mould. However, when examining the cartouche, the edges of the hieroglyphs look rough, indicative of them being incised by hand after drying as it would not have been possible to transfer this level of fine detail from a mould. Additionally, the edges of the holes are fairly smooth with a slight variation in diameter between the different holes, which agrees with the conjecture of this being a manual operation due to the 90-degree bend in their path.

The glaze presents with a greenish-blue colouration on the *khepresh*, fading to a pale green on the rest of the object, attributed to weathering and the subsequent leaching out of colourant as no identifiable pattern to the missing glaze exists. When examining the cracked side of the terminal, the use of efflorescence glazing becomes apparent. The cross-sectional view reveals a homogenous body throughout, displaying a tan, sandy appearance with smaller particles prominent near the surface. At the surface, a well-defined layer appears in which individual particles are no longer detectable at this level of magnification, having been fused together during the firing process. This is consistent with efflorescence glazing in which the smaller grains of soluble salts in the mixture migrate upward as the faience dries prior to firing, with larger grains forming the core of the terminal. The high concentration of these salts at the surface then facilitates vitrification and creates a smooth, glassy finish. Therefore, while the observed microstructure of ECM 1887 does reflect efflorescence glazing, it cannot confirm or discount the likely possibility that application glazing was also utilised.

Finally, when inspecting the glue line under the stereomicroscope, it appears shiny and clear, with small air bubbles visible, indicative of a modern acrylic resin.

Ultraviolet (UV) radiation analysis

When an object is exposed to UV radiation, some components of the object will glow while others will remain dark, yielding information regarding its physical makeup and restoration. When this was done with ECM 1887, the majority of the terminal remained dark while the cracked edge and the glue line glowed, along with the labels (Figure 4). This observation reveals that the material on the surface is different from the material in the core of the object. Because UV radiation is absorbed and reflected differently by different materials, this supports the use of efflorescence glazing. During the firing process, the high concentration of alkaline salts on the surface results in the complete fusion of the silica particles forming the glaze, which is quite different from the rest of the piece. The unique microstructures of the glaze and the body elicit the different reactions to the UV light exposure. Further, the glowing of the glue line is consistent with modern acrylic resins.

Infrared (IR) radiation analysis

The use of IR radiation determines if an object contains any carbon-based substances, which will cause it to glow. The object will also glow if any red or black pigments have been applied to it. When ECM 1887 was exposed to IR radiation, it remained dark. This confirms that no carbon is present, as expected for a faience object with efflorescence glazing. In addition, it verifies that no paints were applied to the piece.



Figure 4. ECM 1887 exposed to UV radiation (photos courtesy of the Johns Hopkins Archaeological Museum).

X-Ray fluorescence (XRF) analysis

XRF analysis is a nondestructive evaluation that identifies the metals and metalloids in an object based on the unique chemical properties of each element. The analysis generates a spectrum with major, minor, and trace peaks. However, this technique is qualitative and not quantitative in nature so the height of each peak does not directly correlate to the specific amount of that element present in the object (Krygier 2005: 70–72; Nicholson 2000: 192). Two flat areas on ECM 1887 were tested, Tutankhamun's face and the flat section on the upper right edge, using a Brukers SD-III handheld portable x-ray fluorescence instrument with a filter, set to 13.40 μ A (current), 40.00 kV (wave length), and 90 seconds (time).

The results obtained from the two locations were comparable, with the major elements identified being copper, iron, silicon, and calcium. The copper is the colourant added to produce the blue-green colour, noted during stereomicroscopy inspection, with the iron most likely being an impurity of the copper. The silicon and the calcium are from the silica, the main base material in the object. In addition, calcium could come from the lime added to the faience mixture. The elements classified as minor in the object are potassium and nickel. Potassium is from the alkali used to bind the silica. The nickel is likely from the silica, but it may have also been used as a colourant. The elements identified as trace are lead, strontium, and tin. The lead may be an impurity in the silica. While lead is introduced in faience to create a yellow colouration when mixed with antimony, this was ruled out since no antimony was detected. Not common in faience objects, the strontium most likely originated from the soil on which the unfired terminal may have rested. The tin may be from the silica, although it, too, is relatively unusual to find in faience. No other explanation for it can be ascertained. Overall, the XRF analysis yielded results matching what would be expected of a blue-green faience article fabricated during the 18th dynasty using the efflorescence glazing process, helping to strengthen the results of the stereomicroscopy inspection, as well as the UV and IR radiation analyses, in deducing the manufacturing techniques and elemental composition of ECM 1887.

Chaîne opératoire

Consistent with faience production methods employed during the 18th dynasty and supported by the results of the physical evaluation of ECM 1887, the following *chaîne opératoire* can be proposed. Following the acquisition and mixing of the raw materials with water, ECM 1887 was formed in an open back mould, yielding its basic shape and the impression of the image. After a carefully controlled drying period, the object would have been removed from the mould for touch-up and addition of further detail with some sort of pin-like tool, a necessary step due to the thixotropic property of the faience paste. In particular, the hieroglyphs would have been incised at this point with a fine pointed tool. The holes on the sides and the back would also have been manually created at this time with a similar instrument to create the hook-like routing from the side of the terminal to the exit point on its back. All of these steps would have been done during the critical period when the paste is wet enough to work with but not too wet that it is runny and unable to hold the features being added.

Upon completion of all detail work, application glazing was probably undertaken. While efflorescence was the main glazing technique employed, because the effloresced salts on the surface would have been disturbed by the manual operations performed, additional glazing would be needed to ensure complete coverage. After adding a supplemental layer of glazing, the terminal would have then been fired.

Iconographic analysis

With an understanding of the manufacturing techniques and elemental composition of ECM 1887, research into the different iconographic components of the terminal, combined with the use of faience in its fabrication, reveal its symbolic significance relating to fertility, rebirth, and festival participation. This analysis is broken down into the various images that appear on the piece and their associated meaning, including the blue crown, the white lotus chalice, and the act of drinking.

Blue crown

Identifiable by its distinctive shape, the headdress in the image on ECM 1887 is the blue crown (*hprš*). Collier (1996: 110) describes the blue crown as ‘a tall cap, bulbous in front, with an angle at the back that rises from a ridge along the sides of the crown.’ It is either smooth or adorned with circlets, and it consistently appears blue in colour depictions. A *uraeus* adorns the front of the blue crown, centred on the forehead (Green 2000: 62). During the Amarna Period, crimped streamers became common, flowing from the base of the crown, utilised to fasten the crown to the head (Eaton-Krauss 2008: 49; Robins 2010: 213).

The symbolism associated with the blue crown centres on rebirth and fertility, the prevailing themes on ECM 1887. This is attributed to kings often being portrayed suckling deities while wearing this crown, as seen in the pendant of Werethekau from the small golden shrine of Tutankhamun (Cairo, Egyptian Museum JE61952; Carter no. 108c) and in a scene from the Hathor Chapel at Deir el-Bahari (Figure 5).

In another context, a majority of the scenes depicted on the exterior of the small golden shrine (Cairo, Egyptian Museum JE61481; Carter no. 108) show Tutankhamun wearing the blue crown, significant as the shrine is argued to have strong erotic symbolism that aids in rebirth (Collier 1996: 119–122; Eaton-Krauss and Graefe 1985; Kessler 1986: 42–43; Robins 2010: 209, 213–222). Moreover, the crown was commonly worn during rebirth rituals, as seen in the Opening of the Mouth ritual

illustrated in Tutankhamun's tomb (Figure 6).⁶ Therefore, the blue crown contributes to the overall meaning of ECM 1887, as does the white lotus chalice.



Figure 5. Scene from the Hathor Chapel at Deir el-Bahari depicting the king suckling Hathor in bovine form while wearing a blue crown (photo by Michael R. Tritsch).



Figure 6. Ay performing the Opening of the Mouth ritual on Tutankhamun, who wears the blue crown; from Tutankhamun's tomb (KV62) (photo by Michael R. Tritsch).

⁶ In addition, the blue crown is associated with the king's legitimacy, identifying him as the 'new heir of Amun-Re', often worn during battle scenes, creating order over chaos (Bryan 2007: 156–158; Davies 1982: 75–76).

Lotus chalice

The symbolic meaning of the white lotus chalice rendered on ECM 1887 comes from its connection to the lotus flower, with the latter's strong ties to procreation and new life. The chalice itself is a fluted vessel exhibiting either painted or incised veins of the lotus flower, with the bud terminating in the stem of the chalice. The rounded shape identifies it as the white lotus chalice rather than the more slender blue lotus version. Supporting its use by Tutankhamun, these vessels first appeared for stately drinking during the Amarna Period as part of official functions (Brovarski 1982: 146–147). However, outside the court in everyday life, the white lotus chalice played an important role in cultic offerings to Hathor, other deities, and ancestors due to the rebirth symbolism of lotuses (Bomann 1991: 63; Gallorini and Reeves 1998: 225). The lotus also relates to the intimate relationship between a man and a woman as well as to feminine beauty, frequently mentioned in love poems involving sexual situations and used to describe the appearance of the beloved (Maniche 1994: 30; Robins 1988: 62–63). Therefore, by virtue of its shape, the symbolism of the chalice correlates with the creative potential and procreative desires of Tutankhamun and Ankhesenamun, a theme furthered by the act of drinking.

Act of drinking

The strongest symbolism on ECM 1887 comes from the act of drinking, particularly when set within the larger context of banqueting, formal occasions replete with symbolic meaning. A notable aspect that suggests the banquet's sexual significance arises from guests often holding lotuses while half-naked females pour the drinks, a task with sexual connotations because 'to pour' and 'to impregnate' are both *stj/stj* in ancient Egyptian (Maniche 1997: 42; Robins 1988: 63, 2010: 217–218; Wb 4: 328.3–329.16).⁷ This sexual reference relates to the image on ECM 1887 since a beverage would have been poured into the cup from which Tutankhamun is drinking, presumably by Ankhesenamun in her supportive role as his wife and queen. Thus, the act of drinking alludes to Tutankhamun having relations with his wife and impregnating her with a child, fulfilling one of his royal duties. Symbolising their creative potential and procreative desires within the context of a banquet, the meaning associated with this activity becomes apparent, but it can be tied to the creation story as well.

This procreative symbolism is also connected to the Heliopolitan creation story, wherein the creator god Atum masturbated, drank his semen, and produced Shu and Tefnut, who came forth from his mouth, and, through their physical union, they created all of the other gods and eventually humanity (Allen 1988: 13, 30 and 36; Green 2002: 55; Hornung 1982: 171 and 222; Leclant 1977: 813; Robins 1988: 61 and 65, 2010: 212 and 217). The role of woman in creation is inferred through the ancient Egyptian language which designates the word *dr.t*, 'hand,' as feminine.⁸ In this way, the union of male and female forces creates life when the feminine hand and the male mouth (*r*) procreate (Robins 2010: 210 and 218). By holding the chalice with his hand and raising it to his lips, Tutankhamun's actions on ECM 1887 parallel those of Atum when he created the first two beings, accounting for this action to be symbolic of new life and creative potential.

⁷ For orgiastic activities at banquets/festivals, in many cases supplemented with hallucinogenic substances, see Bryan (2014: 112, 118–119) and Darnell (2022: 237).

⁸ For the significance of this constellation of beliefs, see the common epithet of Hathor and the God's Wives of Amun, *dr.t-ntr*, 'Hand of the God' (Green 2002: 55; Leclant 1977: 813; Robins 1988: 65).

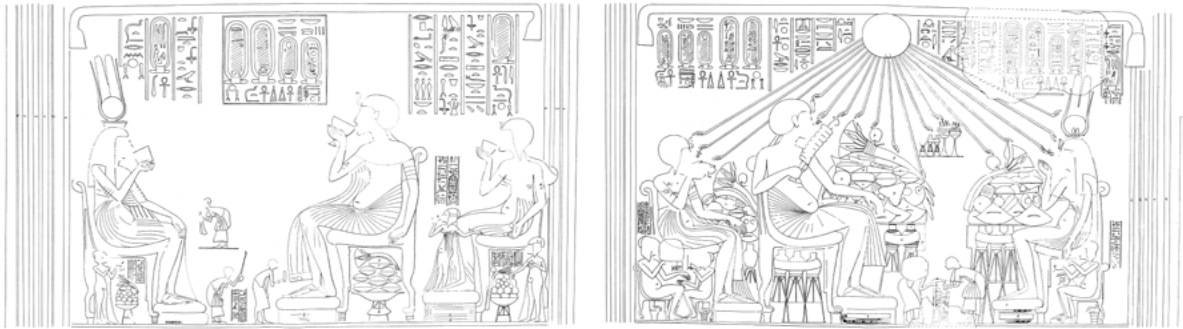


Figure 7. Scenes from the south wall of the tomb of Huya at Amarna (Tomb 1) (from Davies 1905: pls 4 and 6; courtesy of The Egypt Exploration Society).

Iconographic parallels

In looking for iconographic parallels, a number of scenes from the Amarna Period and its immediate aftermath emerge. The tomb of Huya at Amarna (Tomb 1) portrays a drinking scene on its south wall, west side, the only definitively known attestation of the physical act of drinking,⁹ which is followed by a feasting scene on the east side (Davies 1905b: pls 4 and 6) (Figure 7). Akhenaten, Nefertiti, and Tiye, wearing Hathoric headgear, and their daughters appear in both, combining multigenerational male and female creative components. The first scene probably represents the royal family asking for abundance through the act of drinking, symbolic of fertility and of offering, an idea furthered by the intimate nature of the setting. The feasting scene which follows most likely reveals the answer to their supplications as they celebrate a bountiful harvest under the life-giving rays of the Aten.

Another possible drinking scene does seem to exist on a poorly preserved trial piece or house altar from Amarna which depicts a seated Akhenaten drinking from a white lotus chalice (Manchester Museum 9356) (Figure 8), but this interpretation is not unequivocal.¹⁰

With analogous imagery and clear symbolic meaning related to fertility, a scene from the south wall, west side, of the tomb of Meryre II at Amarna (Tomb 2) (Davies 1905a: pl. 32) (Figure 9) and an unfinished house shrine stela from House O 49.12 at Amarna (Berlin, Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung ÄM20716) (Weber 2012: 412–413) (Figure 10) both portray Nefertiti pouring liquid into the cup of Akhenaten, with the former taking place during a banquet with their daughters and the latter using a white lotus chalice.

Similarly, scene CR 2 on the small golden shrine of Tutankhamun shows Ankhesenamun pouring liquid into Tutankhamun's elaborate chalice while holding a lotus (Eaton-Krauss and Graefe 1985: pl. 16; O'Connor 2008: 507; Robins 2010: 218). This iconography may also be present in an ivory plaque rendered in the Amarna style, potentially originating as an element of a coffin (Paris, Louvre E11203) (Koura 1994: 193–195, fig. 1),¹¹ and in a fragmentary house altar from House N 50.22 at Amarna (Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum 8038).¹² Scene CR 3 conveys a comparable meaning except in this case it is Tutankhamun pouring into Ankhesenamun's cupped hand which is raised to

⁹ Outside of Egypt, similar contemporary (Late Bronze Age) imagery occurs on ivory furniture inlays (nos 2 [Jerusalem, PAM 38.780] and 160 [Chicago, OIM A22270]), originating in a royal context at Megiddo (Loud 1939: 13 and 17, pls 4 and 32) and having clear inspiration from Egyptian iconography.

¹⁰ I would like to thank Campbell Price for pointing out this scene to me and showing me the object during a tour of the museum.

¹¹ Post-dating the Amarna Period, this iconography also appears on two silver bracelets depicting Queen Tausret pouring a drink for Seti II (Davis 1908: 39–40; Green 2010: 223–224).

¹² For this object, see <https://www.khm.at/en/object/322491>.



Figure 8. Photo and preliminary facsimile of a fragmentary trial piece or house altar from Amarna (Manchester Museum 9356) (photo and drawing by Michael R. Tritsch, courtesy of Manchester Museum, The University of Manchester).

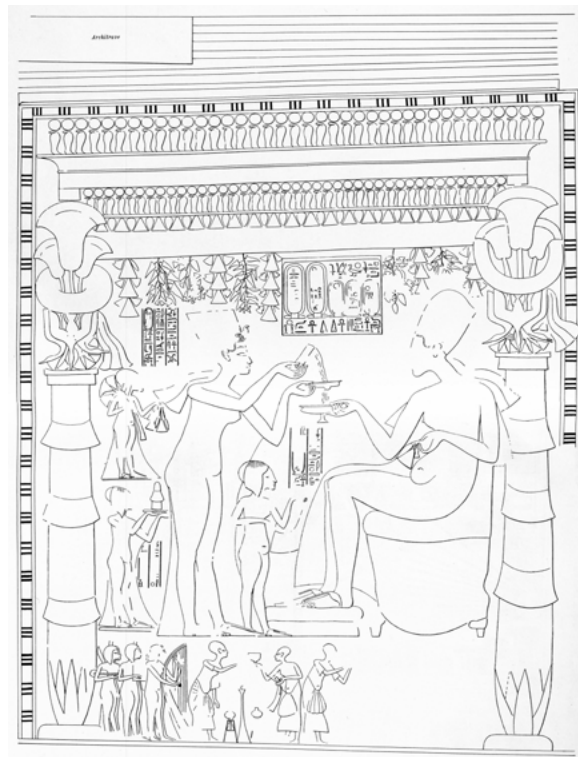


Figure 9. Scene from the south wall, west side, of the Tomb of Meryre II at Amarna (Tomb 2) (from Davies 1905: pl. 32; courtesy of The Egypt Exploration Society).



Figure 10. Unfinished house shrine stela from House O 49.12 at Amarna (Berlin, Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung ÄM20716) (Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung; photo by Sandra Steiß <https://recherche.smb.museum/detail/607028/unfertiges-relief-mit-darstellung-zweier-k%C3%B6niglicher-personen?language=de&question=20716&limit=15&sort=relevance&controls=exhibit&collectionKey=AMP*&objIdx=0>).

her mouth, reversing gender roles (Eaton-Krauss and Graefe 1985: 34, pl. 17; Green 2003: 63 and 67, 2004: 215–216; O’Connor 2008: 507; Robins 2010: 218) (Figure 11). Overall, this symbolism pertains to the creative potentiality and fecundity of the royal couple with their actions paralleling those of the creator god, broken down into the male and female elements.

Finally, the backrest of Tutankhamun’s throne (Cairo, Egyptian Museum JE62028; Carter no. 91) depicts an image of Ankhesenamun presumably applying an ointment to Tutankhamun’s shoulder and broad collar from a lotus shaped vessel (Reeves 1990: 184) (Figure 12). Ankhesenamun wears a broad collar as well, and an additional large broad collar with a lotus counterpoise is located to her left. Because anointing is also *stj/stj* in Egyptian (Wb 4: 349.5–20), it likely takes on a similar nuance to pouring. A related scene (DR 1) appears on the small golden shrine with the queen anointing Tutankhamun’s armlet (Eaton-Krauss and Graefe 1985: pl. 18; Green 2010: 219–220; O’Connor 2008: 507).¹³ Like the pouring scenes,¹⁴ these images allude to the creative potential of the royal couple while further suggesting the importance of the broad collar in these scenarios.

Based on the analysis of the imagery, ECM 1887, as part of a broad collar, celebrated the fertility and creative potential of Tutankhamun and the royal couple as a whole. Moreover, the intimate nature of the terminal’s scene clearly reflects the Amarna style art (Arnold 1996: 85–119; Freed 1999: 117–121), displayed in both tombs and houses, which demonstrates the religious overlap of these different spheres (Tritsch, forthcoming). In addition, its association with banqueting provides a clue as to the possible function of the collar in antiquity, probably one of many bestowed to high-

¹³ In addition, this may be present on an openwork plaque from Tutankhamun’s tomb (Carter no. 585s) (Robins 2010: 223).

¹⁴ Koura (1994: 193–196, fig. 2) argues that Paris, Louvre E11203 actually bears a scene more akin to that on the throne’s backrest, but the fragmentary nature of this object makes its original appearance less clear.



Figure 11. Pouring scene on the small golden shrine of Tutankhamun (CR 3; Cairo, Egyptian Museum JE61481) (Burton photograph p0314a, reproduced with permission of the Griffith Institute, University of Oxford).



Figure 12. Image from backrest on the throne of Tutankhamun (Cairo, Egyptian Museum JE62028) (photo by Michael R. Tritsch).

ranking officials and other members of the social elite by Tutankhamun as an outward sign of his greatness during festival-like activities that celebrated abundance, fecundity, and rebirth, alluding to the action of the creator god in the Heliopolitan tradition.

Distribution of broad collars in feasting/festival contexts

At some feasts, it was a common practice to hand out gifts, including broad collars such as the one incorporating ECM 1887.¹⁵ At these banquets, classified as ‘diacritical feasts’,¹⁶ the underlying goal was to arrange and strengthen social relationships. This was accomplished by promoting segregation of elite groups and carefully curating the allocation of food, drink, and other special luxury items, which created an institutionalisation of inequality. This action would have emphasised the status quo because it helped the officials realise their place in the larger context of the kingdom, keeping them humble but not complacent since becoming more industrious could lead to an increase of rank. At the same time, through the acceptance of food, drink, and gifts, the officials indicated their recognition of the giver’s dominant status and signalled an expression of fealty (Dietler 1998: 98–99; Green 2003: 68, 2004: 205–208, 211 and 213; Hayden 1998: 129–130).

While food and drink made up important elements of the feast, the bestowing of gifts encompassed special significance. As Green (2004: 210) points out, because:

food and drink are the only forms of ‘symbolic capital’ which literally became part of the recipient, [gifts] would be an even more potent symbol of connection with the overlord.

While the symbolic meaning attached to the food and drink, as well as an individual’s specific placement at the banquet, was transient, a tangible gift constituted an outward physical sign of the pharaoh’s approval for all to see (Green 2003: 68, 2004: 209–210, 218–219; see also Dietler 1998: 90–92; Hayden 1998: 130, 132, 139–140; Kemp 2012: 41–43 [figs I.13–14], 208–209; Michalowski 1994: 35–37). Specifically, wearing the broad collar with ECM 1887 would have transmitted vassalage and favour, giving the owner prestige due to its association with Tutankhamun, who also wore a similar piece in the terminal’s image. Further, the use of an open back mould in the fabrication of ECM 1887 would have facilitated its efficient manufacture to assure the availability of sufficient quantities for the production of broad collars to be dispersed in a feasting context.

Art historically, the distribution of beaded collars as gifts and rewards is attested in numerous tomb wall paintings at Amarna (Binder 2008: 81–82, figs 8.7–8.19; Kemp 2012: 41–43, figs I.13–14), such as on the south wall, east side, of the tomb of Meryre II (Tomb 2) which portrays Akhenaten and Nefertiti presenting collars to the Egyptian people from the window of appearance (Davies 1905a: pl. 33) (Figure 13). Additionally, *wšḫ.w m ʿt nb.t dmd.t*, ‘broad collars from all hard stones of value’, are attested as offerings to the king during the Opening of the Year festival, as seen on the west wall, south side, of the tomb of Kenamun (TT93), who then likely redistributed them to his high officials as a reward for their service (Aldred 1969: 79; Davies 1930: 24–25, pl. 13).

¹⁵ While it has been suggested that the collar containing ECM 1887 may have been presented as a gift to a loyal subject at Tutankhamun’s coronation (Reeves and Quirke 1999: 40), there is no evidence that this occurred.

¹⁶ This is different from a ‘celebratory feast’ which honoured an individual as he/she moved from one stage of life to another or commemorated a notable accomplishment. Though elaborate, these feasts were relatively informal, were not hierarchical in nature, and their goal was not an attempt to cement political relationships and show dominance (Green 2004: 207).

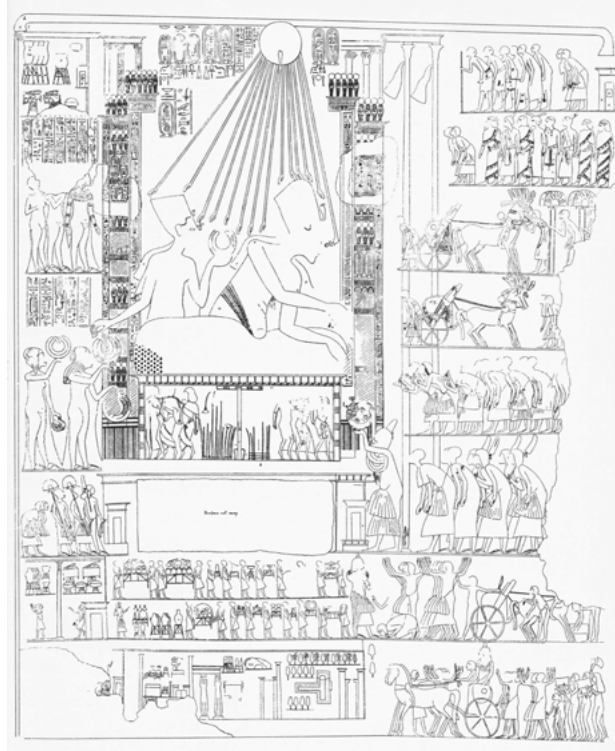


Figure 13. Scene from the south wall, east side, of the Tomb of Meryre II at Amarna (Tomb 2) (from Davies 1905: pl. 33; courtesy of The Egypt Exploration Society).



Figure 14. House shrine stela from Amarna (Berlin, Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung ÄM14511) (bpk Bildagentur / Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung / Sandra Steiß / Art Resource, NY).

Ritual usage of broad collars

In addition to being used as a gift, collars take on a cultic function (Handoussa 1981: 145–148),¹⁷ alluded to in a royal family house altar shrine (Berlin, Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung ÄM14511) depicting Nefertiti tying a collar on Akhenaten's neck under the anthropomorphic hands of the Aten in association with lotus flowers (Figure 14). Similarly, the scene of the backrest of Satamun's throne from the tomb of Yuya and Thuya (KV46) (Cairo, Egyptian Museum JE5342) depicts the princess being offered a broad collar by a female servant, scene CR 4 on Tutankhamun's small golden shrine portrays Ankhesenamun securing Tutankhamun's neck adornment,¹⁸ and a limestone relief fragment shows an unidentified Amarna royal woman, likely Tiye, carrying a broad collar in her left hand (New York, Brooklyn Museum 73.67.2).¹⁹ Furthermore, the Aten himself can wear broad collars, as illustrated on the south wall, east side, of the tomb of Meryre I (Tomb 4) (Figure 15) (Darnell 2016: 35; Darnell and Darnell 2022: 212–223; Davies 1903: pl. 22; Eaton-Krauss and Graefe 1985: pl. 17; O'Connor 2008: 507; Robins 2010: 218–219; Seyfried 2012: 194, fig. 3). Moreover, during the reign of Amenhotep III, both male and female royals begin to wear variations of broad collars, further hinting at their divinity as these collars are associated with both Osiris and Re (Johnson 1999: 227, 230–232). Given the cultic undertones thereby connected to broad collars, the choice of faience for ECM 1887 adds to this symbolism.

Symbolism of faience

A relatively inexpensive and common material to produce, the true worth of faience is linked to its inherent symbolism connecting it with life, fertility, youth, rebirth, and immortality. Faience and other similar materials were sacred to Hathor, a multifaceted goddess, who held the designation



Figure 15. Scene from the south wall, east side, of the tomb of Meryre I at Amarna (Tomb 4) (from Davies 1903: pl. 22; courtesy of The Egypt Exploration Society).

¹⁷ For their use in the Graeco-Roman Period, see Beaud (1990) and Châtelet (2015a; 2015b).

¹⁸ This activity is also reflected in private 18th dynasty tombs with scenes of women tying floral broad collars on each other (Maniche 1997: 41, fig. 29).

¹⁹ For this object, see <https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/objects/3821>.

of *nb.t-ṭhn.t*, ‘Mistress of Faience’. The goddess of fertility and semiprecious stones, and a daughter of the sun god, her association with faience reinforces its solar creative properties as she is one of the solar eye goddesses. Because of this connection, the majority of the gifts left at Hathor shrines consisted of faience objects (Aufrère 1991: 524–525, 531; Friedman 1998: 15; Krygier 2005: 34–35; Pinch 1993: 326–332). Hathor is also made of minerals and acts as an intermediary by bestowing semiprecious stones, including faience, to people.

Furthermore, faience’s original blue-green colour (*wṯd*) and interaction with sunlight probably gave faience its name in Egyptian, *ṭhn.t* (Wb 5: 390.11–391.15), coming from the verbal root *ṭhn*, meaning ‘to dazzle or scintillate’ (Aufrère 1991: 522; Wb 5: 393.11–22), being a designation of the sun god (Wb 5: 393.26) and of Hathor (Wb 5: 394.1–2). This likely caused faience to be used frequently in the 18th dynasty due to the increased solarisation of religion. Moreover, this colour is associated with:

the color of the sky and light itself...[which] connected faience with the resurrection of the sun from the Netherworld and the bright light that followed (Maravelia 2002: 82; see also Aufrère 1991: 121, 524–525).

This draws a clear link to rebirth as the Egyptians believed the sun was reborn every day, an idea enhanced by the shimmering qualities of faience that mimic the properties of the sun. The term *wṯd*, used substantively, adjectively, and verbally, also indicates freshness, youth, life, and good health (Wb 1: 264.12–266.9) causing the green hues to be affiliated with ‘the regeneration of nature’, with distinct ties to the god Osiris, linking it to fertility, rebirth, and eternal life and thus explaining its popularity (Maravelia 2002: 82; see also Aufrère 1991: 523–524; Friedman 1998: 15; Krygier 2005: 34, 84–85). This may have been augmented by faience’s expanding colour palette in the 18th dynasty, very possibly interpreted as it having vast power, contributing to the potency of its mystical effectiveness and making it a very valuable commodity (Krygier 2005: 36). The outward traits of faience objects gave it profound symbolic meaning, further reinforced by its raw materials that on a deeper level relate to the core of Egyptian theology.

The process of obtaining the raw materials for faience production was entrenched in ceremony and ritual. The Egyptians believed the desert areas rich in the natural resources needed for the creation of faience objects to be the dwelling places of the forces of chaos, associated with the god Seth, and hostile to cosmic harmony, which it was the king’s duty to preserve. Excursions to ex-Nihlo, mineral-rich regions to acquire raw materials required religious endorsement and evoked a ceremonial meaning (Aufrère 1991: 36–38; Bianchi 1998: 23; Darnell 2021: 1, 40–41), which involved overcoming chaos with order wherein the microcosm of the desert was symbolic of the macrocosm of the cosmos.

At a component level, faience was selected because the magical qualities of its raw materials were connected with the eye of Horus (*udjat* eye), providing the ability to heal due to the regenerative power of all the plants and minerals contained within it. Additionally, the concept of luminosity was associated with Osiris who possessed the power of regeneration because he contained every mineral through his mummification (Aufrère 1991: 199–306; Krygier 2005: 34). As a result, faience was often used for jewelry, objects of daily life, and grave goods to increase their effectiveness. The cultic qualities linked to the raw materials, therefore, contributed to the overall symbolism of faience objects.

Textual evidence about broad collars

By using faience for ECM 1887, as well as the beads comprising the broad collar, the Egyptians were likely invoking the properties of minerals embedded within this composite material. While

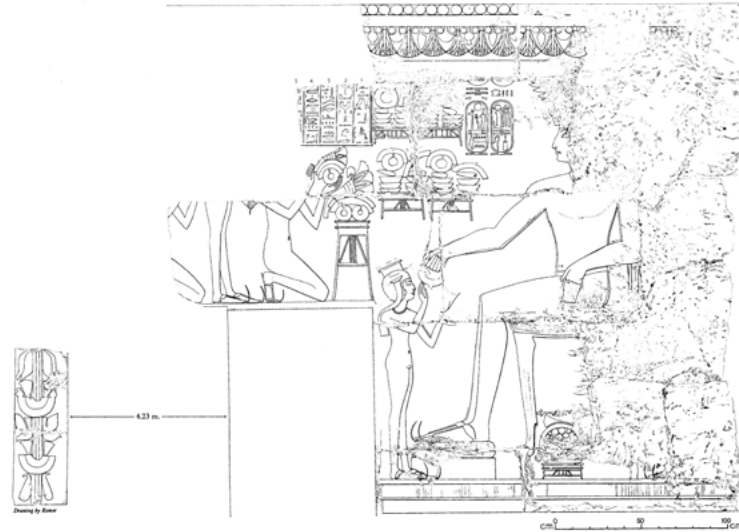


Figure 16. Scene from the south wall of the third-floor room north of the central part of the stone structure on the Eastern High Gate at Medinet Habu (from *Epigraphic Survey* 1970: pl. 648; courtesy of the Institute for the Study of Ancient Cultures of the University of Chicago).

alluded to in the above-mentioned royal family stela scene (Berlin, Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung ÄM14511) (Darnell 2016: 35; Darnell and Darnell 2020: 213), this idea is also supported by the collar ritual scene from the Eastern High Gate at Medinet Habu wherein Ramesses III intimately interacts with his daughters (Figure 16).

In the corresponding text, the royal children exclaim to their father (*Epigraphic Survey* 1970: pl. 648):

[d]d.t.n n; ms.w-nswt n [nswt-bj.tj] nb-tj.wj wsr-mꜥ.t-rꜥ mr-jmn [zꜣ-rꜥ] nb-ḥꜥ.w rꜥ-mss ḥqꜣ-jwnw
 [šz]p wsh.w
 šnꜥk [ḥs]bd
 jnh.wjꜥk qꜥ
 jr.tjꜥk š[zm].t
 rꜥk ḥnmt...

What the children of the king said to the [Dual King], the Lord of the Two Lands, User-Maat-Re, Beloved of Amun, [the Son of Re], Lord of Appearances, Ramesses, Ruler of Heliopolis:²⁰

Take²¹ the broad collars;
 your hair is lapis lazuli,
 your eyebrows are of green stone²² / black hematite,²³
 your eyes are of malachite,²⁴
 your mouth is of red jasper²⁵...

These collars have a similar description to those depicted in the tomb of Kenamun, incorporating semi-precious stones. Their presentation to Ramesses III by his Hathoric daughters, acting as

²⁰ *Contra* *Epigraphic Survey* (1970: 14) and following Darnell (2016: 31) and Darnell and Darnell (2020: 211), the object of the preposition *n* is not omitted but is the king (his titles and names) whom the princesses face.

²¹ This is the main verb used to describe the acquisition of this object in texts in private tombs (Gregersen 2015: 68).

²² Harris 1961: 132–133.

²³ Aufrère 1991: 262.

²⁴ Aufrère 1991: 244, 541–543; Harris 1961: 132.

²⁵ Aufrère 1991: 553–554; Harris 1961: 123–124.

intermediaries, helps to deify the king as a *primaeval* creator god in an intimate, festive environment. He thus becomes rejuvenated and ennobled through the likening of his body to the minerals in the collars (Darnell 2016: 30; Darnell and Darnell 2022: 210–211)²⁶ as Atum is often associated with such adornments (Handoussa 1981: 148), likely alluding to creation and paralleling analogous beliefs attested at mining/expedition sites regarding semiprecious minerals (Morenz 2014: 48–53, 201–203; Tritsch, forthcoming; Valbelle and Bonnet 1996: 119–124).

This idea further appears in a text on the right half of side B from the portable chest of Tutankhamun (Cairo, Egyptian Museum JE61445; Carter no. 32), an excerpt from a speech describing protection in the hereafter by Ptahsokarosiris, which proclaims (Asaad and Kolos 1979: 41–42; Beinlich and Saleh 1989: 13):

šzp=k wꜥḥ n mꜥ-ḥrw wn r ḥḥ n wnn-nfr
 rnpj ḥꜥ.w=k
 wsr jb=k
 jp.tw=k ḥnꜥ psd.t

May you take the wꜥḥ-collar of justification which exists at the neck of Wenennefer,
 so that your limbs may be young (again),
 and your heart may be strong (again),
 when you are assessed by the Ennead.²⁷

A variant of *Book of the Dead* Spell 19 (Allen 1974: 34; Derchain 1955: 225) and paralleling a speech by Isis to the king in the temple of Seti I at Abydos (Châtelet 2015a: 11), this excerpt likewise indicates that the wearing of a broad collar, the same type worn during the Beautiful Festival of the Valley, allows Tutankhamun to be associated with Osiris and thus become rejuvenated when he is judged before the ennead, enabling him to enter the hereafter (Bell 1987: 57; Johnson 1999: 230; Kozloff 1998: 114), paralleling the use of collars in the previous text.

This concept is also attested in texts involving private people, as seen in the love poem found on an ostrakon (O. Gardiner 304, recto). The composition seems to describe the bedecking of a woman during a reward ceremony in a bucolic setting wherein she becomes ennobled and possibly even rejuvenated, followed by a man publicly proclaiming his love for her (Darnell 2010: 130–131, 2016: 25–27). The text reads (Černý and Gardiner 1957: pl. 38.2; Mathieu 1996: pl. 26):

mrw snt m...ḥꜥ.wt
 jw nꜥyꜥst šby.w n ḥrr.w
 nꜥ[yꜥst krm.t/kmr?] n jsy.w
 jw pꜥyꜥst ḥtmw šrj [ḥr ḏbꜥ.tꜥst]
 jw pꜥyꜥst zšnj m dr.tꜥst
 jwꜥj (r) znnj[ꜥs] m-bꜥḥ wn bw nb
 ꜣꜣw pꜥyꜥj mrwt.tj
 yꜥ mnts jtꜥ jbꜥj
 jr m-ḏr nwꜥs rꜥj
 qbw(.kw)

²⁶ For an interesting parallel, see the description of the young sycamore tree in P. Turin 1966 (recto 2, lines 3–5), a love poem, in which the various components of this tree are linked to minerals (Donnat 2021: 60; Mathieu 1996: 85, pl. 16).

²⁷ Asaad and Kolos (1979: 42) read these three clauses as initial subjunctive *sdmꜥfs*, but they are more likely two result clauses and a circumstantial clause.

The love of the sister in...limbs;
 her šby-collars²⁸ of flowers,
 her [bracelets?] of reeds,
 her little seal [upon her finger,]
 her lotus in her hand.
 I will kiss [her] in the presence of everyone,
 so that they shall come to know my love.
 Indeed, she is one who steals my heart.
 When she looks at me,
 (I) am refreshed.

Her receipt of a collar and other accoutrements seems to take on a similar transformative purpose (Darnell 2010: 131)²⁹ as seen in the previous royal rituals, highlighting the possible additional cultic function of the broad collar containing ECM 1887, serving not only as an expression of royal but also divine favour and demonstrating a permeability between official and private practices where this object would have been utilised.

Probable appearance

In regard to the terminal's probable appearance in antiquity, Tutankhamun's lower torso and legs would have been rendered on the missing portion of the terminal. He would have been positioned in a standing pose based on the flair of his kilt, presumably with sandals covering his feet (Figure 17). While this represents a relatively unusual posture, it is not unattested in other analogous situations and may simply have been one of convenience to fit the shape of the terminal. The cartouche on the lower left side of the object is complete and may have had a short inscription following it, as discussed in footnote 2 above.

There also would have been a second terminal, and while its appearance is purely conjecture, it very conceivably depicted Ankhesenamun in a comparable stance wearing a cap crown,³⁰ emphasising



Figure 17. Reconstruction of ECM 1887 and possible appearance of its mating terminal (drawing by Michael R. Tritsch).

²⁸ For this item, see Binder (2008) and Brand (2006: 18–20).

²⁹ For a visual scene of this, see the tomb of Neferhotep (TT49) (Darnell 2010: 131, 2016: 26–27; Davies 1933: pl. 1).

³⁰ The cap crown is the female equivalent to the blue crown during the 18th dynasty (Collier 1996: 108).

her supportive and procreative role as Tutankhamun's spouse, paralleling the role and mimicking the duties of royal women in the other scenes discussed, especially those on the small golden shrine (Eaton-Krauss and Graefe 1985: 30), ultimately alluding to creation.

Finally, based on the arrangement of holes, the collar would have two rows of beads, as previously discussed. The top row probably consisted of small round beads, possibly in the shape of sliced mandrake fruits, with larger beads comprising the bottom row, most likely in the shape of lotus petals, mimicking a real floral necklace (compare to Boston, MFA 1965.1723).³¹ Two additional pieces of string would have been looped through the holes on the opposite side of each terminal before being bundled together to accommodate being tied to a counterpoise. Overall, this would be a typical example of 18th dynasty broad collars (Andrews 1990: 122–123; Kozloff 1998: 113; Markowitz and Shear 1998: 122 and 221).

Conclusion

ECM 1887 is an unprovenanced, faience, broad collar terminal produced during the reign of Tutankhamun, obtained on the antiquities market and eventually becoming part of the Myers Collection of Egyptian artefacts at Eton College. A comprehensive physical analysis verified its faience composition and elucidated the process used in its fabrication, confirming methods consistent with 18th dynasty practices. Formed in an open-back mould, the main features were touched-up by hand, with the hieroglyphs and holes manually incised. Its original blue-green finish, with the characteristic lustre emblematic of faience, was likely achieved through a combination of efflorescence and application glazing techniques.

The unique iconography of ECM 1887, depicting Tutankhamun wearing a *khepresh*-crown and drinking from a white lotus chalice, connects it with fertility and rebirth through both the symbolism associated with the elements contained in the image and the implied linkage to the creation story, as identified by iconographic and textual parallels with other contemporary sources. The interpretative analysis further supports the proposal that ECM 1887 was part of a beaded broad collar given out at a banquet, presumably a diacritical feast, to celebrate the procreative desire and creative potential between Tutankhamun and his wife, Ankhesenamun. The presentation of the collar to a loyal official would have served to cement fealty and reinforce the established social hierarchy, while, at the same time, providing an incentive to lower ranking officials and supporters to work hard to improve their standing. Wearing the broad collar incorporating ECM 1887 would have indicated vassalage and favour, bestowing prestige upon the owner due to its connection to Tutankhamun. Moreover, the collar not only demonstrates royal recognition, but also divine favour. The use of faience for the terminal, as well as for the other components of the broad collar, contributes to its meaning as a potent fertility symbol through its association with the goddess Hathor and adds to its cultic significance, with imagery and texts attesting to its connection with divine intervention.

While this singular object may not initially present as an important piece of Egyptian history, an intensive study of its physical makeup and imagery reveals further insight into the procedures of the vitreous material industry and the role of beaded broad collars distributed during feasts. Though the current condition of the terminal may not convey the grandeur of the newly fabricated piece, the original collar with this terminal would surely have been a spectacular accessory representative of the ancient Egyptian culture of the 18th dynasty during the reign of Tutankhamun.

³¹ For this object, see <http://collections.mfa.org/objects/164006/broad-collar>.

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The Call of Nighted Khem: Tracing Ancient Egypt through Weird Fiction

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Abstract

Ancient Egypt and its diverse manifestations have permeated Western culture to an uncanny extent. This is reflected in a growing body of literature on the reception of ancient Egypt. Ancient Egypt was, during the golden age of weird fiction (1880–1940), the focus of significant public attention as artefacts flowed into museums, and the press sensationalised archaeological finds. This, along with the pre-existing notions of Egypt as mysterious, made it an ideal place to set weird fiction.

The representation of Egypt in weird fiction will be explored by examining Egypt's connotative power, drawing on Roland Barthes' work on signification. Ultimately, this article argues that the ancient Egypt represented in weird fiction is a type of hyperreality. Weird fiction authors used shared techniques to evoke this hyperreality, some of which are explored here, along with their influences as revealed in epistolary evidence.

In this context, ancient Egypt became a microcosm, an immutable and stationary culture, isolated from later eras and perceived as a distinct ontological entity. While ancient Egypt has drawn scholarly and popular attention, medieval and modern Egypt has been comparatively neglected, and a paradox exists between the unchanging Egypt that is evoked and differing representations of ancient and contemporary Egypt in weird fiction.

This study shows how the Weird Circle drew on accounts by archaeological, museological and literary figures for different ends, but which nonetheless reinforced views which remain problematic in relation to Egyptian identity and Western perceptions of both ancient and modern Egypt. I demonstrate that modern authors of weird fiction often subvert the prejudices perpetuated by the Weird Circle concerning ancient Egypt and are generally more considerate of issues relating to race, gender, and sexuality.

Keywords

Egyptomania; Speculative Fiction; Reception Studies

Introduction

The impact of weird fiction should not be underestimated. Not only have classics such as H.P. Lovecraft's *The Call of Cthulhu* (1928) influenced other writers, but their influence has also grown in media including film, music, and games. I consider the representations of ancient Egypt in weird fiction and how these have been informed by pre-existing western 'knowledge', revealing some 'under-investigated generically problematizing implications' (Miéville 2009: 510).

What is weird fiction?

While there is no consensus on weird fiction's theoretical boundaries or whether it even constitutes a genre (Weinstock 2016: 183), there is agreement on its exemplars, including Algernon Blackwood's *The Willows* (1907), Arthur Machen's *The Great God Pan* (1894) and H.P. Lovecraft's *The Call of Cthulhu*.

The following criteria are not necessary and jointly sufficient conditions for weird fiction, but are important in general.

That an underlying atmosphere of unease is absolutely vital is broadly acknowledged (Barron 2014: 14; Lovecraft 1973: 16; SLL. V. 756, 893; SLS. 219).¹ This is usually achieved through an unknown or unknowable presence or phenomenon, or transgression of the laws of nature. This focus demotes plot and characters to peripheral concerns (SLS. 219; SLL. V. 756), making these stories' conclusions often ambiguous.

The implications of weird fiction raise existential questions about the universe and human knowledge. This is linked to the original use of 'weird' (*wyrd*), a noun signifying someone's destiny (Weinstock 2016: 177). Clark Ashton Smith used it thus in *The Weird of Avoosl Wuthoqqan* (1932) (Joshi 2019: 101). The horror produced by the atmosphere is philosophical, differing from extant horror tropes. It represents a lack of recognition; things existing beyond our conception (Miéville 2009: 512), which may encourage introspection (Alder 2025: 67). A recurring theme is the indifference of the universe to humankind. This coincides with rising atheism when many classic weird authors were writing. For them there was no traditional god to create meaning; humankind appeared startlingly insignificant.

Weird fiction's utilisation of elements of fantasy, science fiction and horror (Miéville 2009: 510; Weinstock 2016: 182–183), without belonging to any of them (Kelly 2014: 7), makes it difficult to classify. M.R. James, for example, scholar of medieval England and director of Cambridge's Fitzwilliam Museum, used the past as a source of horror, foregoing the possibilities offered by science fiction. This difficulty in categorisation is diagnostic of weird fiction and its liminality means that categorisation best lies with the reader.

The 'Golden Age' of weird fiction (1880–1940) saw key figures writing their most renowned work (Joshi 2003: 338), including Arthur Machen, Algernon Blackwood, H.P. Lovecraft and Robert E. Howard. The pulp magazine *Weird Tales* became important in this movement in the USA from 1923. I focus on writers who were published in *Weird Tales* (the Weird Circle) whose work included Egyptian motifs, as well as their exchanged letters, books, art and news clippings.²

Why Egypt?

Egypt had long been a subject of fascination in the West. From Greek collecting (Lloyd 2010: 1071), through the Medieval Period, Egypt remained in the European consciousness. There was increased interest in travel to Egypt from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (Bednarski 2010: 1087), and the eighteenth century saw the adoption of Egyptian architectural motifs in British cemeteries, landscapes and interior contexts (Zigarovich 2020: 110). Napoleon's expedition into Egypt, resulting in the monumental *Description de l'Égypte* (1809–1829) however, is a pivotal moment in the blossoming of Egyptomania: the West's fascination with Egypt. Shortly after the initial volumes, in 1822, Jean-François Champollion succeeded in deciphering the hieroglyphic script. While this breakthrough was not necessarily immediately accepted (Gange 2013: 102), it promised to reveal the secrets assumed to lie within the Egyptians' writing. Meanwhile, Egyptomania continued throughout the nineteenth century as excavation brought new archaeological material to light, and the Suez Canal bolstered the possibility of travel and trade with Egypt, and Africa more generally, from 1869. In

¹ 'SLS' and 'SLL' refer to *Selected Letters of Clark Ashton Smith* and *Selected Letters of H.P. Lovecraft* respectively. Roman numerals refer to volume number, and numbers refer to letter number. See bibliography for full references.

² Henceforth 'Egyptianising weird fiction' (following Fleischack 2015: 20); 'Egyptianising fiction' refers to 'fiction which features aspects of ancient Egypt, which describes it and makes use of it.'

1922, the tomb of Tutankhamun was discovered, beginning the next significant peak in public interest in Egypt, predating the first issue of *Weird Tales* by just a few months. The press coverage was immense (Bednarski 2010: 1107), with the public eager to keep abreast of the excavation, bolstered by archaeological studies and Egyptianising literature (Gange 2013: 325).

Around this time, museums also contributed to increased public interest in ancient Egypt (Fleischack 2015: 33). The Museum of Fine Arts in Boston and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York were both founded in 1870. Both housed Egyptian collections and funded excavations in Egypt (Riggs 2010: 1141), offering direct experience of Egyptian material culture to citizens of the USA.

Also important was the commercial potential of Egyptianising fiction. While the Weird Circle pursued writing ostensibly for aesthetic reasons (SLL. III. 410), many members received little remuneration. Therefore, commerciality might have influenced their selection of topics (and those preferred by editors). The commercial appeal of ancient Egypt was not a new phenomenon; at the request of her editor, Louisa May Alcott wrote *Lost in a Pyramid* (1869) (McGeough 2015: 201). Similarly, H. Rider Haggard's fascination with Egypt, along with Egypt's commercial potential (Woodward 2020: 91) resulted in *She* (1886) and *Cleopatra* (1889), while Sax Rohmer's *Brood of the Witch-Queen* (1918) was republished as *It Came Out of Egypt* (1923) following the discovery of Tutankhamun's tomb (Parkinson 2020: 210).

Within the Weird Circle, Frank Belknap Long regarded his *The Desert Lich* (1924) as 'commercial', and Lovecraft viewed his collaborative tale with Harry Houdini, *Imprisoned with the Pharaohs* (1924), similarly (SLL. I. 166).³ The commerciality of Egyptianising fiction is due to its continued popularity with the public (Bednarski 2015: 81; Moreno-García 2015: 50). The Weird Circle capitalised on existing

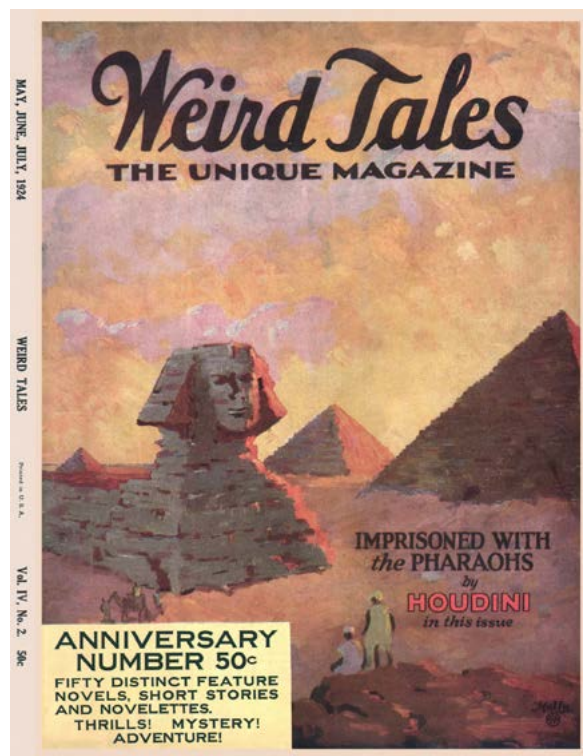


Figure 1. Cover of *Weird Tales*, May 1924 (credit: R.M. Mally, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons).

³ Named *Under the Pyramids* when in its draft period, but published as *Imprisoned with the Pharaohs*. I follow the published name convention in this paper to avoid confusion.

demand, especially in the 1920s and 1930s (Dobson 2022: 238), and Egyptianising art was often used on the cover (and interior) of *Weird Tales* (e.g. Figure 1).

Despite this, Clark Ashton Smith wrote in 1938: 'Egypt has been overworked' (SLS. 222), in the same year Robert Bloch's *The Eyes of the Mummy* (1938) and *Beetles* (1938) appeared in *Weird Tales*. Where Egypt did not constitute a significant theme in an author's work, they will be considered in less depth. Thus, some important figures in weird fiction are omitted such as Robert E. Howard (one of the 'Three Musketeers of *Weird Tales*' [De Camp 1976: 318]), not because of his lack of importance but rather his peripheral relevance to this discussion.

How is ancient Egypt represented?

Before examining the various ancient Egypts portrayed, the methods of conveying representations should be examined, using Roland Barthes' work on signification and mythology, before considering the use of verisimilitude.

A theory of meaning

When considering writing, *inter alia*, Barthes separates the '*signifiant*' and the '*signifié*'. By the *signifié*, Barthes means the idea which is evoked by something (Barthes 1957: 185). The *signifiant* is the thing itself. For example, a flag is a physical object (*signifiant*) that has certain connotations (*signifié*). This group constitutes a '*signe*' (Barthes 1957: 186).⁴

Barthes, however, was interested in myths, conceiving mythology as a second-order semiological system, where the *signe* of the original term becomes the *signifiant* in the second-order term (Barthes 1993: 116–7). Returning to the example of the flag, a Union Jack might cause us to think of the United Kingdom; this is a *signe*. However, on the second-order mythical level, this might conjure ideas of Britishness.

Such myths lack objective grounding (Barthes 1993: 110) and constitute a mode of signification, whereby the referent is distorted; neither erased nor revealed (Barthes 1993: 121). It is alienated from history and made to serve the mythological system (Barthes 1993: 122). This is because the mythological representation is self-perpetuating and takes as its starting point a sign instead of reality (Barthes 1993: 120). In the case of Orientalism, the myth takes the constructed Orient, not the external world, as the starting point from which ideas are derived.

Myth homogenises; it smooths over inconsistencies and counterexamples (Barthes 1993: 143). There are similarities to Foucault's 'discourses', whereby statements are true according to the prevailing epistemological outlook ('episteme') (Foucault 1980: xxii). Indeed, Barthes argues that myths naturalise themselves, masquerading as facts (Barthes 1993: 143). Hence:

Ce que le monde fournit au mythe c'est un réel historique, défini, si loin qu'il faille remonter, par la façon dont les hommes l'ont produit ou utilisé; et ce que le mythe restitue, c'est une image naturelle de ce réel (Barthes 1957: 216).⁵

⁴ The terms *signifiant*, *signifié* and *signe* are to be found in the work of Ferdinand de Saussure's *Cours de linguistique Générale* (1916) and are usually translated in English as 'signifier', 'signified' and 'sign' respectively, (e.g. Barthes: 1993: 112–113).

⁵ 'What the world supplies to myth is an historical reality, defined, even if this goes back quite a while, by the way in which men have produced or used it; and what myth gives in return is a natural image of this reality' (Barthes 1993: 142).

In the case of Orientalism, the ‘Orient’ has been defined according to how it has been viewed by the West (Said 1995: 1), and Orientalism presents this state as natural (i.e. representing reality). This serves to depoliticise its content, making it appear innocent (Barthes 1993: 61).

Due to the preservation of its material culture, many things can signify ancient Egypt. These become mythologised and naturalised as appearing a certain way. Looking at Egyptianising weird fiction, we can see how effective such evocations can be. Even a single word ‘*pourra servir de signifiant à un concept gonflé d’une très riche histoire*’ (Barthes 1957: 193).⁶ As the Weird Circle mainly wrote short fiction and poetry, we can see why ancient Egypt was appealing. It has huge connotative power, and an established Western mnemohistory dating back to at least the time of Homer (Lloyd 2010: 1069).⁷ Therefore, when Thebes or Memphis are mentioned, most readers think not of the places, but of ancient Egypt in general.

Verisimilitude

Verisimilitude was sought by the Weird Circle, using seemingly accurate details to lend authenticity to their stories. This technique already proliferated across Egyptianising media, used by artists such as Lawrence Alma-Tadema (Moser 2017: 53), and writers including H. Rider Haggard (Dobson 2020: 1) and Bram Stoker (Ramirez 2020: 189–190).

These historical details allowed writers to demonstrate to their research to editors (Norris 2016: 27). Lovecraft noted that J.C. Henneberger (co-founder of *Weird Tales*) insisted on ‘literal verisimilitude’ in the stories that he printed (SLL. I. 166). H.P. Lovecraft prided himself on such research (SLL. II. 346).

While real objects have been used in Egyptianising fiction (Dobson 2020: 63), the Weird Circle often used historical concepts to ground their stories. For example, H.P. Lovecraft and Robert Bloch mention the re-use of monuments, and that *damnatio memoriae* (erasure of records of someone’s existence) took place, in *Imprisoned by the Pharaohs* (2014e: 293) and *The Shadow from the Steeple* (1950) (2009e: 201), respectively. Bloch also appears to have known that the ancient Egyptians took statues to be inhabited by gods, as used in *The Opener of the Way* (1936) (2009c: 51).

The Weird Circle used plausible-sounding pseudo-historical grounding for their narratives. Lovecraft created histories for his creations including *The Necronomicon* (SLL. II. 307; SLL. V. 717), and constructed convincing locales such as *Innsmouth*, *Dunwich* and *Arkham* (SLL. III. 508). These creations appear in other Weird Circle authors’ work explicitly to create a pseudo-historical tradition (SLL. V. 717). Using plausibly historical context allowed writers to manipulate settings to fit the desired atmosphere, without requiring exact historical accuracy.

One important aspect of verisimilitude is naming. Names can be invested with significant connotative power. Consider ‘Astophet’ from Edgar Allan Poe’s *Ligeia* (1838) (1969: 149–150); while no such deity existed in Egypt, associations with the name may include the Egyptian deity Astoreth, and Tophet, a place associated with child sacrifice and the Canaanite deity Moloch (Huckvale 2012: 143).

The Weird Circle used literary and historical examples of names in their work. For example, Clark Ashton Smith appropriated names from Herodotus, Gustav Flaubert and John Mandeville (SLS. 259), while Samuel Henley’s notes accompanying his translation of William Beckford’s *Vathek* (1786) (LL.

⁶ ‘...can serve as signifier to a concept filled with a very rich history’ (Barthes 1993: 120).

⁷ A term coined by Jan Assmann (1997: 8–9), he defines it thus: ‘Unlike history proper, mnemohistory is concerned not with the past as such, but only with the past as it is remembered.’

83) are the source for the Arabic name (*Al-Azif*) of *The Necronomicon* (SLL. V. 927).⁸ Furthermore, Frank Belknap Long's eponymous character from *In the Tomb of Semenses* (1921) may be based on Semerkhet, a king of the 1st dynasty (Long 2022a: 32). Possibly, the name is from Manetho, who calls him 'Semempsês' (Manetho, *Aegyptiaca*: frag. 6). The constructed authorship of the *Necronomicon* by an Arabic author with a Greek title is a reversal of the Greek authorship of the 2nd-century CE *Almagest* (an Arabic name) (SLL. V. 927). The painstaking efforts toward verisimilitude in naming are clear from Lovecraft's letters. While names can be designed to suggest real names with 'sinister associations' (SLL. IV. 688), others are of unknown beings, with totally alien names. However, these names were given an 'outwardly Arabic aspect to account for the transmitting influence of the mad Arab Abdul Alhazred' (SLL. IV. 688). Similarly, Lovecraft advised Robert Bloch to translate the title of *The Mysteries of the Worm*, into Latin to make it more historically accurate (and confer a feeling of erudition [Price 2009: viii]). He offered the translation 'DE VERMIS MYSTERIIS (Concerning/of the worm/the mysteries)' (SLL. V. 748). However, Lovecraft warned Robert E. Howard against using existing names such as Thoth-Amon and Asgard as their associations were set, limiting their potential to stimulate the imagination (De Camp 1976: 320). The Weird Circle produced settings that appeared convincing without sacrificing artistic freedom.

Verisimilitude has implications for distinguishing reality from simulation.⁹ While readers would not mistake Lovecraft's *Cthulhu* or Smith's *Tsathoggua* for real beings, details and settings could deceive the reader (McGeough 2015: 249). Reality and systems of signification are easily conflated. This is not novel in Egyptianising fiction; for example, Jean Terrasson's 1731 work *Sethos* (1731) was taken by many as factual (McGeough 2015: 189). The potential for weird fiction to blur the lines of fact and fiction can be seen where H.P. Lovecraft and Frank Belknap Long debated which elements of Arthur Machen's work were real (SLL. III. 421).¹⁰

Particularly confusing is the intentional mixing of real and imaginary elements. For example, Lovecraft included his *Necronomicon* alongside real works including Remigius' *Dæmonolatriæ libri tres* and Margaret A. Murray's *The Witch-Cult in Western Europe* (Joshi 2014: 589). When reality and simulations are conflated iteratively, the result is an ancient Egypt which is increasingly based on non-existent referents, becoming 'hyperreal' (Baudrillard 1994: 47).¹¹ Due to the impossibility of direct experience of the past, the constructed past takes primacy over the actual past (Said 1995: 93). This has implications; important here are the potential for 'retro-racism' (Day 2006: 11) and the entrenchment of pseudo-facts.

Content of conceptions of ancient Egypt

We can trace a persistent Western tradition of Egyptian mysteriousness (Dobson 2020: 2–3), which encompasses sources as varied as Herodotus, Helena Blavatsky and Gustav Doré. We should not therefore be surprised to find Egypt being represented as mysterious in weird fiction where mystery and incomprehensibility are singularly important.

The Great Sphinx of Giza has come to represent the mystery of ancient Egypt. A symbol charged with latent meaning, it has often come to represent Egypt itself. While the Sphinx is used in the work of the Weird Circle, the Colossi of Memnon (two statues at the Theban necropolis which would originally have stood in front of the mortuary temple of Amenhotep III, the main temple having been destroyed in antiquity) are also used to signify mystery. Since antiquity, these statues have

⁸'LL.83' refers to the catalogue of H.P. Lovecraft's library, number 83. See bibliography for full reference.

⁹ A term borrowed from Baudrillard (1994: 6).

¹⁰ Including *Aklo Letters*, *Voorish Domes*, *Dols*, and *Green and Scarlet Ceremonies*.

¹¹ Hyperreality replaces reality with simulation according to Baudrillard (1994).

been reported to make whistling sounds. They appear in Algernon Blackwood's *The Spell of Egypt* (1924) (2020: 158), Lovecraft's *The Nameless City* (1921) (2014d: 166), and in Clark Ashton Smith's poem *The Memnons of Night* (1917):

[...] only at eve, when the east grows infinite and vague, and the shadows of the waste are one with the increasing shadow of night – then, and then only, from their sullen throats of stone, a music rings to the bronze horizon – a strong, a sombre music, strange and sonorous, like the singing of black stars, or a litany of gods that invoke oblivion; a music that thrills the desert to its heart of adamant, and trembles in the granite of forgotten tombs, till the last echoes of its jubilation, terrible as the trumpets of doom, are one with the black silence of infinity (Smith 1971: 195–196).

When the Colossi are mentioned in subsequent fiction, then, their connotations are already fixed to convey a sense of mystery.

The idea of ancient Egyptians being obsessed with death persists in the Weird Circle. It is adopted to use Egypt as a plausible setting for mystery. This is implied in Lovecraft's *Imprisoned with the Pharaohs* (Lovecraft 2014e: 303) and Bloch's *Fane of the Black Pharaoh* (1937) (Bloch 2009a: 128). The supposedly liminal divide between life and death is taken to be almost plausible. The Weird Circle promote such an understanding, following a culturally constructed mythology.

Ancient Egypt is often used as a byword for antiquity. As Krämer points out, historical specificity is secondary to producing a 'feeling of antiquity' (Krämer 2017: 115). This is evident where Egyptian sites are mentioned. In *The Nameless City*, the titular city existed 'before the first stones of Memphis were laid' (Lovecraft 2014d: 165) and is 'too old for Egypt and Meroë to remember' (Lovecraft 2014d: 166). These places have nothing to do with the 'Nameless City' itself but function to signify antiquity. Also interesting is the Weird Circle's naming of Egypt. While 'Egypt' is sometimes used, 'antique and shadowy Khem' (Lovecraft 2014c: 1094)¹² and 'antique Aegyptus' (Lovecraft 2014a: 90) are also found. It is plausible that Lovecraft used the Roman name 'Aegyptus' because he claimed to view ancient history through Roman eyes (specifically of the Republican Period) (Norris 2016: 7; SLL. II. 303; SLL. IV. 674).¹³

The conception of Egypt as antiquity manifest was used to connect antiquity and unwholesomeness. Lovecraft does so in *Imprisoned with the Pharaohs*, where Houdini says 'I saw the horror and unwholesome antiquity of Egypt' (2014e: 300). No logic is presented to arrive at this connection leading to the supposition that it was assumed as universally perceptible to the Western reader.

Linked to its antiquity, ancient Egypt is portrayed as sinister. Partly, this was determined by the requirements of weird fiction; his beloved New England is portrayed thus in Lovecraft's work, as is urban England in much of Ramsey Campbell's weird fiction. However, the reasons why Egypt is described as sinister are traceable to their antecedents.

One theme is the revenge by the ancient Egyptian on the Westerner. This exists in preceding Egyptianising fiction, such as Arthur Conan Doyle's *Lot No. 249* (1892) and Richard Marsh's *The Beetle* (1897). Ancient Egypt is made threatening and is 'othered'. This is perhaps linked to the idea that ancient Egyptians were intellectually superior but morally underdeveloped, endorsed by

¹² 'Khem' is also used by H. Rider Haggard in *Cleopatra* (1889: 13); perhaps Lovecraft had read the novel, although it is hard to say. Certainly, he was familiar with Rider Haggard's work and owned a copy of *She* (LL. 411). It is equally plausible that he had heard Egypt referred to as Kemet (the ancient Egyptian name meaning 'black land').

¹³ The Latin name *Aegyptus* itself derives from the Greek *Aegyptos*, possibly from the Egyptian *ḥwt-Ptḥ* (Temple of Ptah) (Plumley 1993: 182). It is unclear whether Lovecraft was aware of this etymology.

phrenologist George Combe. Combe's ideas were used by Edward Bulwer-Lytton in *The Last Days of Pompeii* (1834) and have had lasting sway in western literature (Gange 2013: 67). This is linked to the work of craniologists who sought to use skulls to determine intellectual and moral racial characteristics (see Challis 2015: 88). The West could thus self-congratulate its moral righteousness, hence Abercrombie Smith in *Lot No. 249* proclaims to Bellingham 'You'll find that your filthy Egyptian tricks won't answer in England' (Doyle 2016: 159).

Ancient Egyptians' moral contemptibility is recurrent. The constructed ontology in weird fiction sometimes includes real Egyptian gods and their worship, debased by violent sacrifice which the West often assigns to ancient Eastern cultures. This alternative history of Egypt is found in the work of Robert Bloch and Frank Belknap Long. In the former, we find parallels drawn between devil worship and the worship of Nyarlathotep (2009c: 52). This constructed ancient Egyptian religion is further examined in *Fane of the Black Pharaoh*, *The Brood of Bubastis* (1937) and *The Secret of Sebek* (1937). From the latter:

Egyptian gods and religions were based on secret realities. Strange hybrids walked the earth when it was young; gigantic, lumbering creatures – half-beast, half-man. Human imagination alone did not create the gigantic serpent Set, carnivorous Bubastis, and great Osiris (Bloch 2009d: 120).

Frank Belknap Long uses a similar motif. In *The Dog-Eared God* (1926), Professor Dewey opines:

It is absurd to believe that the Egyptians created their monstrous bestial gods from mere observation of living animals. There is something so immense, so psychically terrible about the Egyptian gods that it is difficult to believe them simply the product of normal human imagination (Long 2022b: 101).

These works show the perceived gap between the West and the Egyptian 'other', temporally, spatially, morally and intellectually.

Given its supposed sinister nature, when ancient Egypt is given agency, it creates disquiet. This personification is a consistent stylistic choice. Drawing on the likes of Thomas De Quincey's *Confessions of an Opium Eater* (LL. 247), Lovecraft uses this motif in *Imprisoned with the Pharaohs* where Houdini says 'I saw the black soul of Egypt singling me out and calling me in inaudible whispers' (Lovecraft 2014e: 300). Perhaps it is a reflection on the western fascination with ancient Egypt (as in Algernon Blackwood's *Sand* [1912] [Blackwood 2008: 274]), but the sinister tone of the description in Lovecraft's story is unmistakable.

Despite these sinister depictions of ancient Egypt, the idea that ancient Egypt was technologically and spiritually advanced is also expressed. For example, in Clark Ashton Smith's *The Third Episode of Vathek* (1937):

Soon Abou Taher Achmed came to be convinced that if he could recover the arts and sciences of the ancient Egyptians, his power would be unbounded (Smith 1972: 178).

On other occasions, both advanced spirituality and scientific knowledge are highlighted. In Robert Bloch's *Beetles*, Arthur Hartley says that the ancient Egyptians

had scientific secrets we haven't yet fathomed, and of course we cannot even begin to approach their concepts in mysticism (Bloch 1974: 23).

Ancient and modern Egypt

Comparing conceptions of Dynastic (and Predynastic) Egypt with Egypt's later historical phases (specifically post-Ottoman), a divergent picture emerges. This is particularly true concerning what I shall call 'modern Egypt'; contemporary Egypt at the time of the Weird Circle.

One major trope is modern Egypt's decline into decadence and stagnation (Said 1995: 56), like the rest of the East (SLL. II. 345). Weird Circle Representations of modern Egyptians usually fall into two reductive types: superstitious or deceitful. This is hardly surprising, given the representations of Egypt since the Pharaonic Period in existing western literature. These representations are culturally remembered from previous representations; they draw from a hyperreality which masquerades as a robust foundation for cumulative knowledge. This corpus of interpretations however, is full of contradictions, half remembered sources and entrenched notions from hundreds, sometimes thousands, of years ago, that have been assigned primacy because of their relative temporal proximity to Egypt. This corpus of Western interpretations is also replete with problematic assumptions (e.g. that the classics give "the" Western view of Egypt) and gaps where the Western world created interpretations in political and religious contexts for expediency from what were seen as existing precedents. For example, Christian ecclesiastical writers transposed the motif of Christians fighting pagan oppressors onto Muslims, who were represented as worshipping (multiple) pagan gods (Toner 2013: 51).

Both Clark Ashton Smith and H.P. Lovecraft read Sir John Mandeville's *Travels* (LL. 637; Lovecraft 2004: 186; SLS. 107), while Frank Belknap Long wrote a poem about him. In Mandeville's work we find references to deceitful Eastern peoples:

...the Saracens perform such tricky adulterations in order to deceive Christians, as I have often found out from experience (Mandeville 2012: 28).

This eastern deceiver is an archetypal character in Egyptianising fiction (Fleischack 2015: 137), and permeates the work of the Weird Circle. We might look to Sax Rohmer as an important influence. Lovecraft owned a copy of *Brood of the Witch-Queen* (LL. 135), in which Dr Cairn says, 'Not daring to trust the natives, we removed it [a mummy] secretly at night to our own tent' (Rohmer 2022: 136). Similarly, Houdini accuses the Cairo authorities of having knowledge of the monstrosities lurking beneath the Pyramids in *Imprisoned with the Pharaohs* (Lovecraft 2014e: 289), while Robert Bloch depicts an Egyptian priest stabbing an explorer in the back in *Fane of the Black Pharaoh* (Bloch 2009a: 138).

Brood of the Witch-Queen may also be a precursor for the archetypal superstitious Arab character found in the Weird Circle's work. In the story, Sime says of Egypt 'The most weird ideas prevail here to this day – ideas which properly belong in the Middle Ages' (Rohmer 2022: 56). Robert Bloch's *The Faceless God* (1936) contains similar examples; native people are called 'ignorant' and 'frantic' (Bloch 2009b: 27 and 31). When a statue is unearthed, the natives are described as 'openly frightened' and begin to 'jabber hysterically' (Bloch 2009b: 29). They are represented as highly irrational, one of the reasons they are represented as inferior to the ancient Egyptians.

The Weird Circle's characters see ancient Egypt as the 'real' Egypt. Perhaps influenced by ideas about the fall of empires into decadence found in the likes of Edward Gibbon (LL. 374), they conceived of modern Egypt as the result of cultural decline. This finds expression in the fiction of early weird authors. In Algernon Blackwood's *A Descent into Egypt* (1914), it is stated that 'The real Egypt lies underground in darkness' (Blackwood 2006: 827), while in Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Ring of Thoth* (1890), the ancient Egyptian Sosra denounces modern Egyptians as a 'down-trodden race of slaves'

(Doyle 2008: 69). The Weird Circle used similar ideas of a regressive Egypt. In Clark Ashton Smith's *The Third Episode of Vathek*, it is said 'Never before his time had any Mussulman puzzled his brains over hieroglyphics' (Smith 1972: 178).¹⁴ In Lovecraft's *Imprisoned with the Pharaohs*, Bedouins around the pyramids are described as seeming to 'defy every rule of taste' and as being 'offensive' (Lovecraft 2014e: 295 and 292).

When modern Egyptians do speak in these stories, their voice is of Orientalist mythological construction (Said 1995: 34). The modern Egyptians described in Bloch's *The Faceless God* above have as their foundational referent a constructed 'Oriental' perspective.

Paradoxes

If we contrast representations of ancient and modern Egypt with eternal Egypt, we arrive at a paradox; an Egypt which is unchanging but changed. Both conceptions belong to Orientalist traditions whose propositions are inconsistent (Said 1995: 96, 121). Another paradox is the contrast between sinister ancient Egypt and its advanced spirituality. While ancient Egypt could function as a locus for both the sinister and the spiritual, the shared source (namely the treatment of the dead) raises issues of consistency.

Due to the primacy of verisimilitude, we can see how these paradoxes seem less confronting. Partly, this is due to the mythology of Orientalism, true within its self-referential epistemological framework (almost tautologically so) (Said 1995: 148), where these contradictory notions sit beside each other without conflict. We should remember mythology's ability to naturalise interpretations. In the wake of post-colonial theory, the Orientalism informing these conceptions is apparent, but in a contemporary context this epistemological framework was less conspicuous (Said 1995: 32).

Mythologies homogenise, while contradictions are accommodated by the epistemology and ontology of Orientalism. However, mythologies of 'the West' are equally homogenising. When Orientalism ascribes excessive superstition to the East and rationalism to the West (e.g. Said 1995: 38), it smooths over western counterexamples including the notoriously superstitious Spartans or instances of human sacrifice purportedly committed by the Romans. This homogenisation of history has been revealed by New Historicism (e.g. Gallagher and Greenblatt 2000: 57).

We are left with an Orientalist-tinted Egypt which reflects a constructed hyperreality that does not deal with faithful representations. Its veracity is impoverished. In Baudrillard's words, 'it has no relation to any reality whatsoever' (Baudrillard 1994: 6), but *appears* to. Barthes reflects that partial veracity equates to complete falsity (Barthes 2020: 78).

Influences

The Weird Circle constantly corresponded. H.P. Lovecraft wrote approximately 80,000 letters, one eighth of which are extant (Joshi 2014: 27), giving insight into the lives and influences of the Weird Circle. So does Lovecraft's library: Lovecraft did not merely collect books but bought them for their 'easy and repeated access and permanent usefulness' (Lovecraft 2004: 202). While this resource is limited to Lovecraft's possible influences, books circulated among the Weird Circle (SLL. V. 749). There are relevant influences which cannot be addressed here, such as the art of Gustav Doré and John Martin. Equally, there are forms of media such as film which exerted contemporary cultural influence (e.g. Lant 1992: 100), but which seem to have had a less significant impact on contemporary

¹⁴ The notion of Egyptian disinterest has since been revealed as imperialist justification for continued interference in Egypt (e.g. Reid 2002: 180–181).

weird fiction; Lovecraft in particular was damning of film (Joshi 2014: 49). I have therefore selected influences most directly relevant to the Weird Circle's depictions of Egypt, though indirect influence cannot be ruled out.

Classical Literature

H.P. Lovecraft was knowledgeable about the Graeco-Roman world and regarded its literature as 'ours by intellectual descent; our bridge to all antiquity' (Lovecraft 2004: 23). This is evidenced by his first poem, *The Poem of Ulysses* (written in 1897), being a retelling of Homer's *Odyssey* (Joshi 2014: 149), as well as his lost article on Roman architecture (De Camp 1976: 411). Lovecraft identified with ancient Rome:

The idea of the republic of the consuls and empire of the Caesars being other than my country is simply impossible for me to entertain. I recognise Rome's defects, but always have to excuse them as I would England's and America's. I cannot envisage antiquity except as a Roman (SLL. IV. 674).

This love of Graeco-Roman history exerted influence on the Weird Circle's writing. For example, Lovecraft's *The Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath* (1943) adapts Homer's *Odyssey* (LL. 464), Virgil's *Aeneid* (LL. 999–1002) and Lucian's *Verae Historiae* (LL. 599) (Krämer 2017: 99–101). Caution should be exercised in assigning influence to classical texts, as influences which appear to be classical may derive indirectly from elsewhere.

One example is traceable to a specific text: Diodorus Siculus' *Universal History*, which Lovecraft read (SLL. V. 855). *The Cats of Ulthar* (1920) is a retelling of an account recorded by Diodorus. The law that it is intolerable for a person to kill a cat is found in both (Norris 2016: 8). In Diodorus Siculus' account, a Roman who accidentally kills a cat in Egypt is killed by angry citizens (Diodorus Siculus *Universal History*: 1.83.6–9). Similarly, in *The Cats of Ulthar*, an old couple kill Menes' cat and are in turn killed (by the cats of Ulthar) (Lovecraft 2014a: 92). The sacred status of cats is, according to Diodorus Siculus, one of the peculiarities of Egyptian culture. Here, Lovecraft does not dispel the notion of Egypt as strange and mysterious but utilises it. His other work exhibits many such examples, including in *The Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath*, *The Outsider* (1926), and *Imprisoned with the Pharaohs*.

Modern literature

There are many more modern literary works which influenced the Weird Circle. H.P. Lovecraft and Clark Ashton Smith cite William Beckford's *Vathek* (SLL. I. 104; SLS. 186), Thomas De Quincey's *Confessions of an Opium Eater* (SLL. V. 795; SLS. 30) and Edward Fitzgerald's translation of *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam* (Lovecraft 2004: 186; SLS. 256). Lovecraft's library also included H. Rider Haggard's *She* (LL.411), Richard Marsh's *The Beetle* (LL.642), Sax Rohmer's *Brood of the Witch-Queen* (LL.811), and the poetical works of Percy Bysshe Shelley (LL.865). *The Arabian Nights*, however, particularly coloured the Weird Circle's conception of 'Orient'. Al-Dabbagh (2010: 5) has argued that nearly every great western 19th-century novelist was influenced by it.

In his early-teens, Clark Ashton Smith wrote narratives based on the *Arabian Nights* (SLS. 186). This lasting influence is clear, especially in his Zothique stories. H.P. Lovecraft had a radical reaction to the *Arabian Nights* (LL. 49). At five, he adopted the pseudonym 'Abdul Alhazred' due to being

‘crazy about the Arabian Nights’ (SLL. I. 70).¹⁵ He also assembled a collection of ‘Oriental pottery and objects d’art’ (SLL. I. 160), including Oriental ‘hangings and incense-vessels’ (SLL. II. 262). Such influences may have inspired him to write a book of Egyptian myths in his youth (now lost) (Norris 2016: 3). As he grew acquainted with the classical world, he dropped ‘Abdul Alhazred’ in favour of a Roman pseudonym, ‘L. Valerius Messala’ when he was seven (Krämer 2017: 95), and began to adopt a Roman-sympathising perspective on history.

Nonetheless, Lovecraft’s interest in the Orient was not forgotten; in preparing a reading list, both the *Arabian Nights* and *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam* feature (2004: 186). He noted:

As it is, I still retain just enough half-placement to feel a certain homelikeness in Saracenic art and ways, whereas other Oriental ways seem wholly alien. In the Crusades, I find myself often siding with the Saracens instead of with my own blood ancestors. – for were not the Saracens the kin of my old friends Haroun al Raschid, Ali Baba, Nouredin, and so on? (SLL. IV. 521)

Both the Oriental and classical Occidental world were important to him (Krämer 2017: 95–6).

Archaeology and museums

Archaeology and museums informed the Weird Circle’s approaches to ancient Egypt. As already mentioned, the Boston Museum of Fine Art and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York both funded excavations, and collected Egyptian objects around the beginning of weird fiction’s Golden Age. The Weird Circle jointly haunted these very museums:

We all agree that if any sudden holocaust were to engulf Manhattan Island, and if the gods were to allow only one object or institution on it to be saved, the Metropolitan Museum is what we would choose for preservation (SLL. V. 750).

H.P. Lovecraft recounted trips (e.g. SLL. IV. 591, 674; SLL. V. 743, 815) and mentioned looking at ‘Egyptian tomb paintings’ (SLL. IV. 694) and ‘tombs of Aegyptus’ (SLL. I. 99). Robert Bloch cited The Chicago Art Institute and the Field Museum as inspiring his interest in Egyptian mythology (Bloch 2024). We have a general connection between museums and Egyptianising weird fiction, but an example makes these influences more explicit.

In 1924, H.P. Lovecraft was commissioned to ghostwrite *Imprisoned with the Pharaohs*. During his research he consulted *The Tomb of Perneb* (LL. 709) published by the Metropolitan Museum of Art. He had visited the exhibition on the Tomb of Perneb at the museum two years prior (Norris 2016: 28). He also visited the Egyptian mummified remains multiple times (Card 2019: 24). This shows how museums directly inspired the Weird Circle, and how museum publications could shape the ideas about Egypt used.

Museums could do little to influence the Weird Circle without their defining feature: authentic objects. As such, we can assign some influence to specific Egyptian objects. For example, Lovecraft mentioned the Dream Stela of Thutmose IV in *Imprisoned with the Pharaohs*, giving it a sinister interpretation (Lovecraft 2014e: 294). Equally, his description of carvings on the volcano Ngranek in *The Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath* (Lovecraft 2014b: 516–517) recall Amarna Period iconography

¹⁵ The origin of the pseudonym is unclear. He inconsistently claimed that he invented it (SLL. IV. 521) and that it was given to him by an unspecified adult (SLL. V. 927). L. Sprague De Camp notes that ‘Alhazred’ likely derives from ‘Hazard’; a Rhode Island family with whom Lovecraft was connected (De Camp 1976: 18).

(Norris 2016: 6), while the heretical fictional pharaoh Nephren-Ka may allude to the reign of Akhenaten (Card 2019: 29).

Lovecraft was intimately impressed with a selection of ancient objects that he owned, which included a Greek lamp, an African flint knife, a wooden Balinese monkey, 'Mayan images', a ushabti and Roman coins (De Camp 1976: 244, 367, 385; SLL. IV. 674) Concerning the latter he says:

I cannot begin to suggest the feeling of awe and anomalous familiarity which those coins—the actual products of Roman engravers and mints, and actually passed from Roman hand to Roman hand twenty centuries ago—awaked in me (SLL. IV. 674).

Archaeological objects elicited an intense connection with the past. In addition, Lovecraft placed non-archaeological objects alongside them, such as Clark Ashton Smith's sculpture (the *Nameless Entity*), perhaps suggestive of links between cosmic horror and antiquity which find expression in his work. This is hinted at in a letter from Smith to Lovecraft:

Many lost secrets must be exchanged in the night by your Mayan image and ushabti ... and those uttered by the Nameless Entity are, it is to be hoped, forever lost in the black oubliettes of bygone cycles (SLS. 187).

Egyptological figures also inspired the Weird Circle; Lovecraft recommended Grafton Elliot Smith in connection with race archaeology as well as mentioning him in *The Whisperer in Darkness* (1931) (Joshi and Schultz 2017: 146; Lovecraft 2004: 197). Similarly, he judged J.G. Frazer's *The Golden Bough* and Margaret A. Murray's *The Witch-Cult in Western Europe* as meritorious (Lovecraft 2004: 193). One figure appears to have exerted particular influence on the Weird Circle: Sir E.A. Wallis Budge.¹⁶

Lovecraft owned Budge's translation of the *Book of the Dead* (LL. 121), which may be the influence behind his use of the re-carving monuments motif in *Imprisoned with the Pharaohs* (Card 2019: 28; Norris 2016: 27):

There are unpleasant tales of the Sphinx before Khephren – but whatever its elder features were, the monarch replaced them with his own that men might look at the colossus without fear (Lovecraft 2014e: 293).

Robert Bloch mentioned Budge in *The Secret of Sebek*. Although it is unclear which of Budge's works he referred to, Bloch seems aware of some of Budge's sometimes outré interpretations of texts and material culture:

Egyptologists have never fully traced the history of the god [Sebek], though some unorthodox surmises and wild linkages have been made or hinted at by Wallis-Budge (Bloch 2009d: 120).

It is not difficult to imagine why Budge proved popular with the Weird Circle; as a translator of magical and religious texts, and with his sometimes-unusual interpretations, his works must have appeared allied to a sense of the mysterious.

¹⁶ Budge is considered a controversial character; he removed objects from Egypt under morally and legally questionable circumstances and was (probably erroneously) linked to the Golden Dawn.

Journalism

The press drew the Weird Circle's attention to certain Egyptian stories and excavations, who shared newspaper clippings (SLS. 183). Lovecraft remarks:

And speaking of Egypt—the literal news of the day furnishes one item as good as any weird fictional Plot yet written. Have you seen the item of the suicide of Lord Westbury last Friday? He was the father of one of the explorers of Tutankhamen's tomb, & his rooms in London were full of strange Egyptian objects. On Friday he leapt from a 7th floor window, leaving a note in which he said "I really cannot stand any more horrors." This is no product of imagination, but a literal bit of fact from the day's news! (SLL. III. 402)

Even scholarly works were sensationalised, such as Howard Carter's *The Tomb of Tut-Ankh-Amen* being made more dramatic by novelist Percy White (Dobson 2020: 5). Howard Carter's response to Lord Carnarvon, 'Yes, it is wonderful' was later changed to the well-known 'Yes, wonderful things' (Dobson 2020: 23). This phrase was then adapted in Sax Rohmer's proto-weird *Brood of the Witch-Queen* ('Things – yes! Unholy things!' (Rohmer 2022: 4)), as well in Robert Bloch's *Beetles* (Bloch 1974: 24), the original becoming increasingly distorted by adaptation. It has also been plausibly suggested that the concepts and events of *The Call of Cthulhu* and *The Haunter of the Dark* (1936) are strikingly similar to details of the discovery of Tutankhamun's tomb and subsequent curse reporting (Card 2019: 29–30).

Departure from influences

It is tempting to view the Weird Circle through their influences to explain their approaches to Egypt. Undoubtedly, they drew on those outlined in this paper but also introduced different ideas to meet their needs (Bicker 2023: 71; Houellebecq 2008: 47). They moved beyond horror tropes; weird fiction should be 'more than secret murder, bloody bones, or a sheeted form clanking chains' (Lovecraft 1973: 15). Thus, they imagined new horrors; instead of vampires and werewolves, chimeras of organisms such as cephalopods and crustaceans were used (Miéville 2009: 512), which originated in ineffable cosmic realms.

Within the Weird Circle, representations of Egypt were heterogeneous. While Robert Bloch's early stories emulated Lovecraft, his storytelling evolved. For example, he adopted the Egyptian pantheon, moving away from Lovecraft's mythos (Joshi 2014: 556). Therefore, many ancient Egypts were represented by the Weird Circle. In most cases, ancient Egyptians communed with, or had knowledge of, cosmic beings. Perhaps the link was natural; as mentioned, the Weird Circle's influences may have predisposed them to consider Egypt mysterious and technologically advanced.

In doing so, they othered ancient Egypt, putting it outside the Western sphere. While authors such as Algernon Blackwood presented Westerners aligning with the Other (Fleischack 2015: 120), the Weird Circle aligned ancient Egypt with the unknown, making their protagonists fear it, or become mad when exposed to it. This constructed reality is a common one in weird fiction: cosmicism. Roughly, this equates to the realisation of humanity's insignificance and is sometimes aligned with absurdist or nihilistic philosophy, stressing a lack of objective value. Lovecraft's invented deity Azathoth is emblematic of this: an ineffable manifestation of primordial chaos.

A plausible source of the cosmicism of the Weird Circle may be, as S.T. Joshi has suggested, a decline in religious belief because of scientific advances at the time. While Lovecraft argued that supernatural fiction is linked to religion, Joshi has suggested that weird fiction may be an aesthetic

outlet for the contemporary decline in faith (Joshi 2003: 338). Such an interpretation is bolstered by Lovecraft's Nietzschean leanings, although it is unknown whether Lovecraft read Nietzsche's *The Gay Science* wherein 'God is Dead!' is infamously proclaimed (Nietzsche 2012: 150). The existentialism embodied in God's obsolescence may have prompted Lovecraft's cosmicism; he was 'practically and provisionally' an atheist (SLL. IV. 561). However, while H.P. Lovecraft sneered at the occult, Theosophy and spiritualism (SLL. V. 866), during the late nineteenth century these were popular as a means to answer questions raised by scientific advances, which traditional theology appeared ill-equipped to answer (De Cicco 2012: 5). Furthermore, condemnation of these belief systems does not entail that the Weird Circle ignored them entirely; Theosophical notions of astral projection and cosmic libraries of arcane knowledge are very similar to ideas used in Lovecraft's work (McGeough 2015: 376). This is particularly apparent in *The Shadow Out of Time* (1936).

Representing ancient Egypt since the Weird Circle

The Weird Circle held ideas which are now unacceptable and outdated. Each writer held prejudices (Miéville 2009: 513), such as Lovecraft's xenophobia finding ample expression in *The Shadow Over Innsmouth* (1936).¹⁷ Given weird fiction's afterlife, we should consider whether the Weird Circle's views of ancient Egypt persist.

Modern works often pay homage to, and draw influence from, the Weird Circle. For example, Brian Lumley uses Nyarlathotep in *Khai of Khem* (Lumley 1990), and the Egypt of Lovecraft's conception is found in Lin Carter's *The Necronomicon: The Dee Translation* (Carter 1996). Similarly, some of the same influences are perceptible, like Sir E. A. Wallis Budge's work, which appears in Lin Carter's *Curse of the Black Pharaoh* (Carter 2006: 132) and Ron Weighall's *Child of the Dawn* (Weighall 2024: 55).

However, in many cases, the views of the Weird Circle are questioned. For example, Matt Ruff's *Lovecraft Country* (Ruff 2019) uses H.P. Lovecraft's racism as a source of horror. Victor LaValle's *The Ballad of Black Tom* (LaValle 2016) uses Lovecraft's setting in *The Horror at Red Hook* (1927) but gives voice to Lovecraft's 'Other': a black protagonist. Similarly, Caitlin R. Kiernan challenges the predominance of the straight white male protagonist, often using female (and lesbian) characters, examples of which abound in *Houses Under the Sea* (Kiernan 2018).

P. Djeli Clark's *A Master of Djinn* (Clark 2021) (fantasy with weird themes) is set in 1912 Cairo, where Fatma el-Sha'arawi is tasked with solving the murder of a member of The Hermetic Brotherhood of Al-Jahiz by someone claiming to be Al-Jahiz (a Sudanese mystic). In *A Master of Djinn*, neither modern, nor medieval, nor ancient Egypt is given primacy; they are blended together in a way that signals an attempt to redress the problematic neglect by the West of anything after the Roman Period (i.e. when 'ancient Egypt' ends). This starkly contrasts with the Weird Circle, where modern Egypt is denigrated while ancient Egypt is the locus of great knowledge. Whereas the Weird Circle portrayed modern Egyptians as superstitious or deceptive, these traits are projected back onto the coloniser in Clark's story as the antagonist is revealed to be the British Abigail Worthington, who plays on the sexist assumption of women as weak to mask her ambitions, thereby questioning the western assumption that the British were morally righteous.

Another important aspect of modern weird fiction is the examination of outdated conceptions through the voices of characters who are dislikable, serving to lampoon those ideas. These characters are used in, for example, P. J. and G. A. Rahman's *The Temple of Nephren-Ka* (Rahman and Rahman 2006:

¹⁷ The extent of Lovecraft's racism and xenophobia has been much discussed. See for instance, Houellebecq (2008: 108) and Dobson (2022: 233). It seems that his xenophobia was fuelled by his time living in multicultural New York but appears to have lessened with age; see Joshi (2014: 147).

210) and Dan Franklin's *The Eater of Gods* (Franklin 2023: 36–37). By creating a dislikable character, these authors encourage an *ad hominem* critique of their ideas; their ideas concerning Egypt reflect their unpleasant character. It should be noted that such a character was employed in Robert Bloch's *The Faceless God* (Doctor Stugatche), but this technique was rarely employed elsewhere in the Weird Circle.

In China Miéville's *Perdido Street Station* and *Kraken*, we see novel uses of ancient Egypt. In the former, one of the races are called Khepri (Miéville 2024: 12). Not only is their name that of the Egyptian deity, but their physiognomy reflects his: a human body with a scarab beetle for a head. This race appears to be used to add interest to the universe and uses ancient Egyptian symbolism without politicising it. It does not comment on the status of ancient Egypt but does demonstrate an interest in it. In the case of *Kraken*, the Egyptian connection is more interesting. One character, Wati, is the spirit of an Egyptian shabti, created by one of the striking workmen from Deir el-Medina in the reign of Ramesses III, who rebels and organises a strike among other inanimate objects (2010: 145). This shows not only knowledge of Egyptian material culture and history, but a creative approach to the objects and their uses. Miéville's novel use of shabtis here suggests themes of object agency, and questions assumptions regarding interpretations of the past. The use of ancient Egypt in both cases is more subtle; there are no mummies, pyramids or sphinxes, but aspects of ancient Egyptian culture which are less common in Western literature.

The original uses of Egypt mentioned here suggest a desire by modern writers of weird fiction to move beyond, as well as addressing the conceptions of, the forerunners of the genre. These new avenues also show a receptivity to the potentially political nature of fiction writing which allows ethical and philosophical commentary.

Conclusion

In the Weird Circle, we see disparate, and even contradictory conceptions of ancient Egypt which are rooted in Orientalist mythologies. These notions of ancient Egypt represent a hyperreality that impacts how readers perceive the past. Egyptianising weird fiction, however, has become less reliant on Orientalist hyperrealities, and even opposed to them. Instead of the Orientalising framework which shaped the portrayal of ancient Egypt in the Weird Circle, authors of Egyptianising weird fiction are now exploring other avenues in Egypt's representation, both ancient and modern. Their approaches can significantly differ, especially where their personal beliefs have diverged a great deal from the conservatism of the Weird Circle. This has allowed for a widening of the scope of weird fiction, resulting in the so-called 'New Weird' movement, within which some of the authors mentioned are classifiable. Works categorised as such often actively work against conventions of weird fiction found in the writings of the Weird Circle.

The significance and representation of ancient and modern Egypt is not as static as Oriental discourse may lead us to believe. Not only is it possible to change perceptions of ancient Egypt, but such work is actively taking place, at least in the arena of weird fiction. However, authors of weird fiction, and literature more generally, remain able to represent Egypt however they wish. We should be aware of how these impact reader perceptions, what proportion of readers take these to accurately represent reality, and how these affect the public perception of Egypt more generally. What is clear is that not only is Egypt represented in Egyptianising weird fiction, but in so doing, authors hold a mirror up to their own beliefs and influences. Looking back on such works, we can trace the development of an entrenched Westernised picture of Egypt, but one that writers are beginning to alter through different and sometimes reactionary perspectives.

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Regent or Ruler? Military Policy of Queen Ankhesenpepy II During the Early Years of Pepy II's Reign

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Abstract

This paper is dedicated to the study of the problem of historical assessment of female regencies in ancient Egypt, focusing on the example of the co-regency of Pepy II with his mother Queen Ankhesenpepy II, centring on her military policy. Despite evidence of Ankhesenpepy II's political influence, the queen's deeds during the early years of Pepy II's reign are still attributed to her young son. As a result, she has not been presented as an individual political figure in modern historiography. A regency was an official opportunity for ancient Egyptian queens to rule the country on their own, acting on behalf of their male relatives, who were unable to rule for various reasons. However, the achievements and political decisions of queen-regents were consistently attributed to their male dependents, even if these heirs were infants at the time of their accession to the throne. This study focuses primarily on the military policy during the early years of Pepy II's reign, specifically the expeditions to Nubia and the Syria-Palestinian region. It examines archaeological evidence from the pyramid complex of Queen Ankhesenpepy II in the necropolis of Pepy I, the Sinai inscription, the autobiographies of Harkhuf and Weni, and a biographical fragment of Iny. These sources are used to reconstruct the main directions and purposes of Pepy II's early military expeditions and to assess the potential involvement of Queen Ankhesenpepy II in the process of their organisation and control.

Keywords

Old Kingdom; Regency; Military Policy; Pepy II; Ankhesenpepy II

Introduction

The reign of the 6th dynasty King Pepy II and his mother, Queen Ankhesenpepy II, provides a good example of a female regency in ancient Egypt and clearly illustrates the problem with the study of regencies in modern historiography. A regency is a system of governance in which a country is ruled, usually temporarily, by a regent and not by the crowned king. In ancient Egypt, in cases where the male heir was too young to take the throne, the chief queen, usually the king's mother, acted as his regent.

The political purpose of a regency was to protect and maintain kingship, while avoiding the potential risk of conflict between male representatives of the royal family. In patriarchal societies, the system of female regency was supported by other male members of the royal dynasty. Since women were not eligible to ascend the throne, female regency was considered as a temporary solution to preserve dynastic continuity and prevent struggles for the throne (Duindam 2016: 95). Manetho notes that during the 2nd dynasty, it was decreed that women might also hold royal office in ancient Egypt (Manetho, *History of Egypt* 1.10). However, as there is no evidence of independently ruling queens in the Old Kingdom, it was apparently a matter of regency.

The importance of motherhood, combined with the exclusion of women from direct succession, gave royal mothers a significant advantage over other members of the royal family to rule as regents (Cosandey 2005: 69–72). The royal mother was seen as a vital link from one king to another

through procreation: therefore, ensuring the transition of power to a new king through regency and guaranteeing a peaceful succession of power within a dynasty. In ancient Egypt, periods of female regency maintained the ideological concept of kingship with a male king on the throne, while female regents acted on behalf of their male co-rulers and usually remained in the background in many official sources.

In cases of female regency, the queen-regent presented herself as the instrument of the king's will. However, this system of relationship, rooted in the dynamic of the reconstituted royal couple, eventually established a relationship of inverse subordination, where the queen, as the principal educator and protector, had command over the source of the king's authority (Cosandey 2005: 85). In practice, queen-regents ruled on behalf of their young male co-rulers, who, due to their age, were often unable to influence the decisions of their regents fully. During such periods, queen-regents assumed royal responsibilities along with a set of male iconic symbols and duties, including military power. In fact, female regents temporarily ruled as kings.

The active role of female regents has been generally overlooked in modern Egyptological historiography. However, this issue has been discussed more widely in the context of the ancient Near East. The examples of Queens Šammuramat and Zakutu, whose glory and military victories were officially attributed to their young sons, show that concealing the political and military role of female regents in official records was often a deliberate strategy (Clancier 2014: 21–23). This bias against powerful and warrior queens in ancient sources has contributed to the lack of scholarly attention to these women in modern historiography (Bernbeck 2008: 351–369). Although these examples are chronologically later and culturally distinct, they demonstrate a common tendency to disregard the rule of queen-regents.

A similar situation is observed during the reign of Pepy II, who, according to official records, appeared to be an active ruler in his youth. However, substantial evidence suggests that Queen Ankhesenpepy II, as regent, was the driving force behind Pepy II's active political and military policies during the early period of his reign. The activities surrounding the military expeditions and her involvement in governance reveal the Queen Ankhesenpepy's significant influence.

The regency of Queen Ankhesenpepy II: Evidence of her exclusive political status

Ankhesenpepy II and her sister Ankhesenpepy I were both wives of the 6th dynasty King Pepy I (Borchardt 1937: 111; Fischer 1977: 56, fig. 58; Urk. I: 118). After Pepy I's death, the throne passed to Ankhesenpepy I's son, Merenre. However, Merenre's reign was short, his last documented regnal year is year 5, according to Hatnub Inscription IV (Baud 2006: 151–152; Spalinger 1994: 306–307). It has been suggested that Ankhesenpepy II was also the wife of King Merenre, since her name and the title 'King's Wife' are inscribed on a block from her pyramid complex alongside the names of Pepy I and Merenre (Labrousse 2000: 486, fig. 1; Leclant and Labrousse 2001: 376), providing the only evidence of an aunt–nephew marriage alliance in the Old Kingdom (Sabbahy 2021a: 14). Following the death of King Merenre, Ankhesenpepy II's son Pepy II ascended the throne. The transition of power between Merenre and Pepy II seemed to go smoothly, with Merenre leaving no direct heirs and Pepy II apparently being the son of Pepy I (Callender 2017: 48–49; Dobrev 2000: 392).

There is an extensive body of evidence confirming that Ankhesenpepy II ruled as regent on behalf of her son, at least during the early years of his reign. The evidence includes statues depicting the king as a child, a paired statue of the king with his mother, as well as texts and images of the queen herself that exceed the conventional depictions of royal women in ancient Egypt at the time.

Manetho claimed that Pepy II was 6 years old at the time of his accession to the throne (Manetho, *History of Egypt* 1.20). Although it is impossible to determine the king's exact age at enthronement, archaeological evidence confirms that Pepy II came to the throne relatively young and that his mother, Queen Ankhesenpepy II, acted as his regent. For example, an alabaster figurine, Cairo, Egyptian Museum JE50616, from the pyramid of Pepy II at Saqqara depicts the king as a child (Hall 1977: pl. 25.2); he is shown naked, wearing a cap crown with the *uraeus*, and seated with his knees drawn up. The missing hand of his figurine must have originally touched his mouth (Hall 1977: 56), a common symbol of childhood in ancient Egypt. From the Brooklyn Museum, a comparable representation can be found in the 5th dynasty group statue of the Nikara family, New York, Brooklyn 49.215, where Nikara's son, Ankhmara, is depicted naked with his right hand raised to his mouth (Arnold 1999: 370–371).

Another crucial piece of evidence is the famous alabaster statuette Brooklyn Museum 39.119 of Ankhesenpepy II and Pepy II (Arnold 1999: 437–439), which shows the queen seated on a throne and holding her young son on her lap. This paired statuette is unique in that it portrays the king, wearing full royal regalia, in a subordinate position to a non-divine person, his mother (Arnold 1999: 439). This composition evokes the traditional image of Isis and her son Horus. The child's feet rest on a second throne, which bears the inscription: 'King of Upper and Lower Egypt, Neferkara, beloved of Khnum, given all life like Ra forever' (Arnold 1999: 437). The queen's head was originally adorned with a traditional metal version of the Vulture Crown, indicating her high royal status as the mother of the king. Pepy II is shown wearing the royal *nms*-headdress and *šndw.t*-kilt, indicating that the statue was made after his accession to the throne. Queen Ankhesenpepy II is called Ankhenesmerya, and the inscription at her feet reads: 'Mother of the King of Upper and Lower Egypt, the Daughter of the God, the Revered One, beloved of Khnum, Ankhenesmerya' (Arnold 1999: 437).

The rare title 'Daughter of the God' was commonly used in the Old Kingdom by queens whose royal sons were not the sons of previous kings (Callender 1991: 102–105). Therefore, Ankhesenpepy II used it to reinforce the legitimacy of the young Pepy II, preserving dynastic continuity (Callender 1991: 102–105). In the Cairo, Egyptian Museum CG1431 inscription (Borchardt 1937: 111–112) from the tomb of Ankhesenpepy II's brother Djau, where both Ankhesenpepy I and II are shown together, only Ankhesenpepy II bears this title (Troy 1986: 155). Furthermore, on a block from Ankhesenpepy II's mortuary complex, the queen is given the title *mwt ntr* 'Mother of the God', which is attested only twice in the Old Kingdom (Callender 2011: 161).

Further evidence of Queen Ankhesenpepy II's elevated political status is found in her funerary pyramid complex, which demonstrates her appropriation and subsequent successful incorporation of strictly masculine attributes and royal symbols of power to her images. Although Ankhesenpepy II was buried in the necropolis of her husband, King Pepy I (Labrousse 2005: 205), the construction and decoration of the burial chambers were started during the reign of her son Pepy II, as the queen is referred to with the title 'King's Mother' (Dobrev *et al.* 2000: 289 fig. 10). The pyramid of Ankhesenpepy II was not only the largest within Pepy I's pyramid complex (Collombert 2018: 67 [fig. 2], 69 [fig. 8]), but the queen-regent appeared to have been the first royal woman to use the *Pyramid Texts* in her pyramid (Mathieu, Bène and Spahr 2005: 129–138, 2008: 281–291; Sabbahy 2021a: 15–16). The presence of the *Pyramid Texts* in the burial chamber of the queen-regent is remarkable, as the later pyramid of Pepy II's wife, Queen Ankhesenpepy III, contains only her title and invocation of offerings, without the *Pyramid Texts* (Labrousse 2005: 207).

The entire funerary complex of Ankhesenpepy II is exceptional and resembles a king's tomb (Dobrev *et al.* 2000: 279), imitating the main sections of a king's mortuary complex, including a large, pillared court and an additional antechamber, which has only been found in the king's pyramids (Labrousse

2010: 301). The dimensions of both Ankhesenpepy II's funerary temple and pyramid exceeds all the funerary complexes of other wives of Pepy I, for example, Queen Inenek (Fraisie and Abeid 2002: 235). The temple consisted of a large courtyard with sixteen pillars and a huge granite lintel of the front door, and the design of the queen's sarcophagus closely follows that of a king's (Fraisie and Abeid 2002: 235; Labrousse 2010: 301). Moreover, the pavement in the Hall of Offerings was made of thin, shiny slabs of calcite, a material symbolising purity, rather than the typical limestone used in other burial complexes of queens during that period. Before Ankhesenpepy II, this kind of pavement had been common only for kings (Collombert 2018: 74). In 2017, two fragments of Ankhesenpepy II's granite obelisk were discovered, and according to measurements of one of the fragments, its original height is estimated to have reached 5 metres (Collombert 2018: 72). Indeed, the mortuary complex of Ankhesenpepy II differs radically from the tombs of other queens, indicating her unusual status and inequality among contemporary queens, whose pyramids were less elaborate (Legros 2018: 299). The unique architectural and symbolic features of the mortuary complex of Queen Ankhesenpepy II, compared to other royal women, and its similarity to the king's funerary complex clearly indicate that she possessed kingly prerogatives (Fraisie and Abeid 2002: 235).

The name of Ankhesenpepy II appeared along with the name of her son Pepy II on the gateway lintel from her mortuary complex (Callender 2011: 259 fig. 99), and the position of the queen-regent's name in relation to that of her co-ruler in this inscription is situated as if both persons shared the throne (Callender 2017: 44). On a limestone fragment, possibly related to a doorjamb, a line of text reads: 'His Majesty did (that) [for] her while she was in the Residence' (Collombert 2018: 74). Since the decorative programme of Ankhesenpepy II's funerary complex started during the reign of her son, it has been suggested that this text fragment refers to her political activities as regent on behalf of her son Pepy II and that its author wanted to emphasise the queen's key role in governance (Collombert 2018: 75). On the lid of the sarcophagus from the burial chamber of Ankhesenpepy II, which is also the size and shape of a typical king's coffin, her title is 'Mother of the King of Upper and Lower Egypt, the Daughter of Geb, Ankhesenpepy, the Mother of the King of Upper and Lower Egypt, the Daughter of Nut, Ankhesenpepy, to whom Nut gave her beautiful place in heaven' (Dobrev *et al.* 2000: 279). Previously in the *Pyramid Texts*, only the king was referred to as the 'Son of Geb' (*Pyramid Text* 669), so the title of 'Daughter of Geb' grants Ankhesenpepy II the privileges of a king in the afterlife (Callender 2017: 46) and undoubtedly emphasises her political position.

In addition, the images of Queen Ankhesenpepy II were also transformed with the addition of some masculine features in accordance with her new political status. In her mortuary temple, Ankhesenpepy II appeared in the *sšš-wꜥd* scene associated with the ritual of the goddess Hathor and with rebirth in the afterlife (Leclant and Minault-Gout 2000: pl. 17). The queen stands on a papyrus boat pulling a papyrus stem, in a rite of passage dedicated to the goddess Hathor (Woods 2011: 315). The small female figures on a boat next to the huge figure of the queen may have been her daughters (Callender 2017: 45). A throne decorated with lion heads and paws is shown behind the queen. Ankhesenpepy II is represented wearing the Vulture Crown, a tight dress, a necklace, and anklets. However, the most unusual feature is that the queen is depicted in a typical male *striding* posture, with her leg stepping forward (Callender 2017: 45; Sabbahy 2021a: 15). A comparison of other *sšš-wꜥd* scenes with principal male and female figures in Old Kingdom tombs reveals that only men were represented in a striding posture, while women were depicted in tight clothing with their legs placed together (Sabbahy 2021a: 15; Woods 2011: 317).

Another example of the inclusion of strictly masculine features in the image of a royal woman can be seen in the black diorite figurine from Abydos, Cairo, Egyptian Museum CG255 (Borchardt 1911: *Blatt* 55), which represents a royal mother, presumably Ankhesenpepy II, wearing the Vulture Crown and is stylistically related to the reigns of the 6th dynasty kings, Pepy I, Merenre, and Pepy II (Fay 1999:

102–103). The sculptor added a moustache to the queen's upper lip, emphasising the masculinity of the figure. This element was evidently added deliberately, as was the king's beard (Fay 1999: 102).

The incorporation of masculine features into the images of the queen went beyond the gender role assigned to women in the Old Kingdom (Callender 2017: 45) and clearly indicated that the queen fulfilled a role, and obligations, typically reserved for a king (Sabbahy 2021a: 15).

Moreover, the rise of Ankhesenpepy II and the support of her regency among other members of the royal dynasty may have been due to the threat of accession troubles, which occurred at the beginning of the 6th dynasty (Kanawati 2003: 169–171). Pepy I's reign was also turbulent due to conspiracies by high officials and royal family members against the king. The erased names and figures of the viziers Seshemnefer and Rawer indicate their probable involvement in a conspiracy against Pepy I, and were subsequently punished (Uchida 1993: 79). According to Weni's biography, he presided over the secret trial of a queen, who was also involved in the plot against Pepy I (Lichtheim 1973: 19). During the 5th dynasty, the office of vizier was increasingly held by persons of non-royal descent (Bárta 2013: 166). However, Pepy I appears to have decided to grant the necessary political positions exclusively to members of the royal family. Members of the ruling dynasty naturally sought to protect the institution of kingship and the birthright of the royal family by supporting the interests of the king (Duindam 2016: 87). Therefore, the appointment of Nebet, the mother of Ankhesenpepy II and Ankhesenpepy I, by Pepy I to the vizierate was politically motivated (Kanawati 2010: 116). Weni's closeness to the king may also have been based on his connection to the royal dynasty through his father Iuu, who was the queen's brother or half-brother (Kanawati 2010: 116).

Hence, Ankhesenpepy II's political power and authority appear to stem from Pepy I's earlier decision to secure major political offices for members of his family, which had the effect of creating strong support for Ankhesenpepy II's position as regent. During the early years of Pepy II's reign, Ankhesenpepy II's brother Djau occupied the position of vizier (Goedicke 1967: 81–89), while her younger brother Khui (Kanawati 1980: 62–64) served as 'Overseer of Upper Egypt' (Goedicke 1967: 81–89; Kanawati 1980: 75–76). In fact, Djau gained the position of vizier because his mother, Nebet, was vizier, which fits into a general trend of hereditary transmission of power that happened at the time. Nebet essentially becomes a paradigm for female authority, setting a precedent for how elite women can operate in government. With the support of the royal family, Queen Ankhesenpepy II consolidated her position as regent.

Military expeditions during the regency of Ankhesenpepy II

The situation with regards to the military conquest of foreign lands had changed radically during the reign of Pepy I. Before Pepy I, the main goal of the interregional policy of the Old Kingdom kings was the control of trade and strategic routes in Nubia and Palestine (Moreno García 2010: 7). During the reigns of the kings of the 6th dynasty, the area of Egyptian military campaigns expanded. For example, the autobiography of the 'Governor of Upper Egypt' Weni of Abydos, who served at the courts of Teti, Pepy I and Merenre, mentions military expeditions against the 'Asiatic Sand-dwellers', and Weni emphasises that he was sent to lead the king's army (Lichtheim 1973: 19–20).

Weni claimed to have been sent several times to suppress revolts against Egyptian dominion (Goedicke 1963: 192; Lichtheim 1973: 19–20). Evidence from the tomb of Inti of the first step towards Egyptian domination over Semitic lands comes from the reign of Pepy I (Petrie 1898: pl. 4), which possibly refers to the military campaign of Weni (Kanawati 1980: 77). Statues of kneeling captives as a symbol of domination over foreign lands found in Pepy II's pyramid complex suggest the continuation of this military programme (Arnold 1999: 440–441). Pepy II and his regent, Queen

Ankhesenpepy II, were likely expected to continue the same pattern of interregional policy in order to maintain Egypt's dominant position in the region.

There are three documented campaigns dating from the early years of Pepy II's reign that were organised by his regent Queen Ankhesenpepy II. Further detailed examination of these expeditions aims to show that all of them involved the use of military force. The planning and execution of expeditions involved the coordination of logistic, human resources, administrative control, and direct management by the central government. All stages of preparation, from deciding where to send an expedition to managing its organisation and successful completion, were under the direct control of the king, in this case under the control of his regent, Queen Ankhesenpepy II. An examination of these aspects of Queen Ankhesenpepy II's foreign policy can demonstrate the extent of the power that she wielded in controlling military power as a regent.

The Sinai inscription

The Sinai inscription of the military expedition, in which Queen Ankhesenpepy II is the only person depicted there, provides clear evidence of her direct involvement in military affairs. The queen's role in organising the campaign demonstrates both her authority and active participation in the governance of the state.

The Sinai inscription, dated to the second regnal year of Pepy II (Gardiner and Peet 1917: pl. 9.17), refers to an expedition called the 'Royal mission which was sent with the god's treasurer Hepy to the terraces-of-the-turquoise' (Černý 1955: 64). There is no representation of the king, only a representation of his regent. Ankhesenpepy II is shown wearing the cap crown with the *uraeus*, holding the *nh*-sign (Callender 2017: 43). It is important to stress that the cap crown with the *uraeus* is rare as a royal female headdress, given the crown is usually worn by kings only (Collier 1996: 127). The only queens known to have worn the cap crown were Hatshepsut (Roehrig, Dreyfus, and Keller 2005: 280, fig. 102), Nefertiti (Davies 1905: pl. 5) and Ankhesenamun (Eaton-Krauss and Graefe 1985: pl. 8) in the 18th dynasty. The Sinai inscription mentions Pepy II along with his mother, whose titulary is 'Mother of the King of Upper and Lower Egypt of the pyramid of Menankh-Neferkara; the King's Wife, beloved of him, of the pyramid of Mennefer-Meryra, Ankhesenmeryra, beloved of all the gods'. The epithet 'beloved of all the gods' was usually reserved only for kings (Callender 2011: 264). The text below refers to the expedition and its members:

Year of the second time of numbering all the cattle, great and small, of Lower and Upper Egypt, Horus the Divine Neferkara, living forever. King of Upper and Lower Egypt, Horus of Gold 'Powerful, Neferkara, living forever like Ra. The mother of the king of Upper and Lower Egypt of the pyramid (-town) of Menankh-Neferkara, the king's wife, beloved of him, of the pyramid of Menankh-Meryra, Ankhesenmeryra, beloved of all the gods. Royal mission which was sent with the god's treasurer Hepy to the terraces-of-the-turquoise. There served for him: Pilot, Commander of [...] Bekenptah, [...] Udjoi, Overseer of scribes Snodjem, Pilot, Overseer of interpreters Meryra-ankh, [...] Neka-ankh, Pilot, Overseer of officials Ikri, [...] Ankhef, [...] Hemu, Judge and scribe Djaty, [...] ...khet, Sea captain Hemi, [...] Snodjem, Second-on-charge of interpreters Ikhwof (Urk. I: 92; Černý 1955: 64).

The nature of this expedition is unknown, but it can be assumed that a military force took part in it, since leaders of recruits, commanders and a sea captain are mentioned. Moreover, the inscription is located next to a group of inscriptions belonging to Sneferu and Sahure (Černý 1955: 64), both of which include motifs of domination over foreigners (Gardiner and Peet 1917: pls 2.5 and 5.8).

According to the date of the inscription, which is given as the ‘year of the second time of numbering all the cattle’ of Pepy II’s reign, the king was too young to organise this expedition. Therefore, it must be organised by his mother, Ankhesenpepy II, who is depicted as the royal regent. This evidence clearly demonstrates that Queen Ankhesenpepy II was not merely serving as a placeholder for a young male ruler, but was directly and actively involved in military affairs, acting in the role of ruler with full authority over state matters, including the organisation of expeditions.

Harkhuf’s expedition to Yam

In another expedition, dated to the period of Ankhesenpepy II’s regency, the queen again took the lead, organising and directing efforts to secure important trading routes in Nubia, further emphasising her administrative and military capacity. The expedition to Nubia, mandated by the noble Harkhuf from Elephantine, is described on his tomb’s façade at Qubbet el-Hawa. This was the fourth campaign of Harkhuf to the land of Yam (Clayton, de Trafford, and Borda 2008: 129–134; Cooper 2012: 1–22; Goedicke 1981: 1–20; Sall 1995: 57–71). Based on evidence from the inscription, it can be suggested that the first expedition to Yam was led by Harkhuf’s father, the ‘Sole Companion and Lector-Priest’ Iri (Kadish 1966: 23–24), during the reign of King Merenre. Subsequent expeditions to Yam were led by Harkhuf himself, and his fourth and final journey took place in regnal year 2 of Pepy II (Lichtheim 1973: 26).

The nature of this expedition is unclear, but textual evidence, along with the aggressive foreign policy of the kings of previous dynasties towards the Nubian region, suggests that Harkhuf’s campaign had a military purpose. The royal annals of the 6th dynasty, dated to the reign of Pepy II, refer to a previous campaign to Nubia, during which subjugated Nubians were delivered to Egypt (Baud and Dobrev 1997: 38). What is known is that, at least on his third expedition to Yam under Merenre, Harkhuf had military troops with him, and he mentioned that the other rulers were frightened by the large number of troops sent with him (Lichtheim 1973: 25–26). The main aim of the Egyptian expeditions to foreign lands during the 6th dynasty was not the annexation of territory, but the securing of important routes to Egypt (Spalinger 2013: 464).

The military context of Harkhuf’s expeditions to Yam is evident from his text. Correctly interpreting the phrases and words used to describe events can shed light on the nature of the campaign. Thus, Harkhuf stated that upon his arrival in Nubia, the ruler of Yam had gone to battle with the Libyans. Harkhuf followed the ruler of Yam and ‘*sh̥tp*-ed him, so that he praised all the gods for the sovereign’ (Urk. I: 126.3; Lichtheim 1973: 25). A closer analysis of the phrasing and the context shows that Harkhuf’s statement *sh̥tp nꜥj sw* was used as a military term, referring to the pacification of the ruler of Yam by force (Kadish 1966: 29–33). This interpretation comes from the similar meaning of the verb *sh̥tp* in other instances, such as in the text of Sabni, an official of the 6th dynasty also buried at Qubbet el-Hawa, who *sh̥tp*-ed foreign states (Urk. I: 136.13; Kadish 1966: 29–33). This term has also been interpreted as ‘to appease’ (Goedicke 1981: 12). Another phrase in Harkhuf’s description of his campaign to Yam, where he states that he ‘*wbꜥ*-ed’ the land, has been translated as ‘to inspect’ or ‘make the rounds’ rather than ‘to explore’ (Kadish 1966: 28). Since the main goal of Harkhuf’s expedition was to transport goods from Nubia and ensure open and safe trading routes, he used the troops that were sent with him because control over the trade routes could be achieved through military force (Kadish 1966: 28). The Egyptians used their army in this expedition to *pacify* the local rulers. Thus, Harkhuf arrived at Yam with troops and *pacified* the ruler of Yam with military force in order to reduce the threat to Egypt and its trade routes from Nubia (Kadish 1966: 32). Therefore, the Egyptian king wanted to control the trade routes and sent Harkhuf with troops to achieve this political and economic goal.

The text in Harkhuf's tomb contains limited information concerning the fourth expedition to Yam, which took place in regnal year 2 of Pepy II, during the regency of Ankhesenpepy II. The expedition may have been prompted by unrest in the Nubian region, which affected the safety of important trade routes. Apparently, the nature of this campaign was no different from the previous one, as Harkhuf noted that the army was sent with him:

The King's own seal: Year 2, third month of the first season, day 15. The King's decree to the Sole companion, Lector-priest, Chief of Scouts, Harkhuf. Notice has been taken of this dispatch of yours which you made for the King at the Palace, to let one know that you have come down in safety from Yam with the army that was with you (Lichtheim 1975: 26).

According to this text, Harkhuf was sent to Yam with an army in the early years of Pepy II's reign. Although the text does not explicitly name Queen Ankhesenpepy II, the context strongly suggests her involvement. Pepy II was still a child at the time, being too young to independently oversee the planning and control of expedition. It is evident that the initiative fell under the authority of his mother who have acted as regent during his minority. Again, while indirect, the available evidence points to Ankhesenpepy II's active engagement in the process of organising of campaigns on behalf of her son.

Expedition of Iny

The next documented expedition to foreign lands in the northern regions during the reign of Pepy II is mentioned in a fragment of the biographical text of Iny, the Lector Priest and 'Seal Bearer of the god on the two big ships' from the Tokyo Collection of Egyptian Antiquities (Reg. No. 11581) (Marcolin 2006: 299–304). Iny states that Pepy II sent him to bring back 'one *kbnt*-ship and *jmw*-ships' with silver and Asiatic men and women as captives (Marcolin 2006: 300).

It has been suggested that the text refers to either a peaceful expedition or a punitive campaign into the Syria-Palestinian region undertaken by the Egyptians using two naval units of *kbnt*-ships and *jmw*-ships (Marcolin 2006: 301). The ships were also used in battles against the 'Asiatics', according to the text of Weni, who attacked foreign territory from both land and water (Lichtheim 1973: 20). The text also mentions the *ꜥmw ꜥmwt* people from Syria-Palestine, speaking Semitic language, aboard Egyptian ships. This passage can be interpreted as the transport of captives 'in Egypt upon execution of some military actions', considering the hostile relationship between Egypt and its northern neighbours (Marcolin 2006: 303).

The date of the expedition is not indicated in the fragment of Iny's stela, but other fragments of his biographical inscriptions provide the names of kings Pepy I and Merenre (Marcolin 2006: 293). According to his biography, Iny carried out four expeditions during the reign of Pepy I, the mission to Syria-Palestine under Merenre and the forementioned punitive campaign during the reign of Pepy II, under whom he 'almost certainly concluded his life' (Marcolin 2006: 306). Thus, Iny served under three kings of the 6th dynasty, and it can be assumed that the expedition to the Syria-Palestinian region, mentioned in the *minor* biographical fragment of Iny, took place during the first part of the reign of Pepy II, under the regency of Ankhesenpepy II, and toward the end of Iny's long career.

Ankhesenpepy II and her role in military policy

All three expeditions organised during the regency of Ankhesenpepy II required comprehensive administrative planning and control. As head of state, the queen-regent had to oversee logistical preparation, resource allocation, and coordination of troops. The Sinai inscription with the image

of the queen herself clearly demonstrates that Ankhesenpepy II took full responsibility not only for directing the military forces, but for organising the entire campaign.

During the Old Kingdom, expeditions were organised and controlled by the king and his government (Lichtheim 1973: 19; Moreno García 2010: 7–18). In the case of a child king on the throne, this responsibility would have fallen to his regent. In such instances, the regent would have been the key figure organising and authorising these campaigns. Evidence suggests that Old Kingdom Egypt did not have a branched structure of military officials or generals who controlled expeditions. Instead, during the 6th dynasty, forces were composite in nature, gathered from different regions of Egypt and Nubia (Spalinger 2013: 465). A professional army only emerged during the Middle Kingdom (Grajetzki 2013: 224). Thus, the navy was used for both civilian purposes and military campaigns (Moreno García 2010: 16). While kings and their sons did not lead armies in person (Spalinger 2013: 466), all military mobilisation depended on royal command (Lichtheim 1973: 20), which in the early years of Pepy II's reign would have meant Ankhesenpepy II herself. Therefore, as regent, Queen Ankhesenpepy II not only authorised expeditions but also actively managed their organisation, acting in full capacity as ruler during the period of her regency.

The queen-regent was also responsible for organising supplies for the expedition. The temples and agricultural centres, *hwt*, that provided the supplies were part of a network of economic and productive centres under the control of the king, as well as the 'houses of weapons', which were a special department in the Egyptian administration controlled by the vizier (Moreno García 2010: 15–16). During the Old Kingdom, the *hwt* acted as agricultural centres, being provided with cattle, fields, and workers. From their warehouses, supplies and products were delivered to royal agents on missions. The *hwt*, along with temples, the king's domains, and processing installations, constituted a large network of centres, which provided a source of labour and organised the tax collection system (Moreno García 2013: 129). In his biographical inscription, Weni describes the logistics of the composite army and the many officials responsible for provisioning the various categories of people participating in this great military expedition (Lichtheim 1973: 20). Therefore, many local officials were involved in organising this campaign, controlled by the king. In his decree, Pepy II mentioned the supply system for Harkhuf's campaign to the land of Yam:

Orders have been brought to the chief of the new towns and the companion, overseer of priests to command those supplies be furnished from what is under the charge of each from every storage depot and every temple that has not been exempted (Lichtheim 1973: 27).

The absence of a regular army and the king's dependence on nomarchs who could provide their own military force to suppress rebellion led to the weakening of the central government toward the end of the Old Kingdom (Moreno García 2010: 23). For example, the Hatnub inscription mentions 1600 men sent on an expedition to the quarries during the reign of Pepy II (Anthes and Möller 1928: pl. 11; Moreno García 2010: 21). Moreover, Harkhuf also recruited Nubian mercenaries for the expedition (Kadish 1966: 32; Lichtheim 1973: 27).

Therefore, organising such a great military campaign was a complex event, and it could only be achieved by the king and his government. From the 4th dynasty onward, the kings pursued a policy of 'centralising in specific localities' the logistics that were important for foreign expeditions (Moreno García 2013: 102). In their biographical texts, Weni and Harkhuf clearly indicated that it was the king who sent them with troops gathered from different parts of Egypt, controlled the supply, and organised these campaigns (Lichtheim 1973: 19–20). On the tomb façade of Harkhuf, it was highlighted that the officials always did what the king ordered them to do:

Truly you know how to do what your lord loves and praises. Truly you spend day and night planning to do what your lord loves, praises, and commands (Lichtheim 1975: 26).

Moreover, direct control over the expedition was also exercised by the king and his central government. When Harkhuf went with his troops to Tjemeh-land to assist the ruler of Yam, he dispatched a messenger to the king to inform him of amendments in his mission:

I dispatched the courtier with a man from Yam to the retinue of Horus, to let the Majesty of Merenre, my lord, know that I had gone to Tjemeh-land after the ruler of Yam (Lichtheim 1975: 25).

Thus, the same control over Harkhuf's fourth expedition to Yam must have been exercised directly by Ankhesenpepy II. This evidence supports the argument that Queen Ankhesenpepy II was the central force behind Egypt's strategic decisions, not just executing them, but shaping their purposes and scope. It further demonstrates the queen's position as the acting ruler, wielding full administrative and strategic control.

Conclusion

Queen Ankhesenpepy II gained significant authority and political power during her regency on behalf of her young son Pepy II. The incorporation of masculine symbols of power and masculine features in the queen-regent's official representation clearly signifies the transition of Ankhesenpepy II from queenship to kingship, with strictly royal obligations and duties. Although officially considered a temporary regent, Ankhesenpepy II acted as a ruler with full powers. The early years of Pepy II's reign were marked by high military activity and cannot be attributed to his independent policy. Acting in conjunction with her young son, Ankhesenpepy II's level of power could only be limited by Pepy II, who, due to his young age, was under the influence of his mother. Ankhesenpepy II occupied a leading position in the state, overseeing military policy. During the reign of the child king, the government and military forces had to be managed, and most importantly, remained under the theoretical supervision of the crowned male king in order to maintain political stability. Thus, Ankhesenpepy II gained access to kingly duties and governance, and at least the first ten years of Pepy II's reign essentially demonstrate the consequences of the political and military decisions of the queen-regent.

Ankhesenpepy II was involved in all stages of organising military expeditions during the early years of Pepy II's reign, being well informed about the progress of each military campaign, which remained under direct royal control during the Old Kingdom. Due to the limited sources related to the organisation of expeditions in the Old Kingdom Egypt, it can be suggested that many other officials, as well as viziers, were involved in its preparation, but all of them acted exclusively under the direct supervision of the king, and in this case, his mother Ankhesenpepy II. Therefore, all expeditions dating from the early period of Pepy II's reign should be attributed to Ankhesenpepy II's foreign policy.

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Postface

‘Art and Academia in Conversation’: Pushing the Boundaries of Interdisciplinarity in the Conference Space at Current Research in Egyptology 2024

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Introduction

‘Art and Academia in Conversation’ was the title of a new and experimental session at the Current Research in Egyptology (CRE) conference, which took place at the University of Liverpool, 2–6 September 2024. There were three major contributors to this session: Two Egyptian contemporary artists who presented their work - Hedayat Taymour (also known as Hedayat Islam) and Nada Mobarak - and a presentation of The Museum of Lies (MOL) project, led and explained by Katharina Zinn. The conference’s academic poster presentations and second keynote lecture also formed part of the wider session. In addition, a question-and-answer (Q&A) panel-style conversation took place within the session, centred on the contemporary artists and MOL project.¹ This paper will focus on explaining the processes and motivations behind this event, with a focused look at the art displayed and the artists involved.

Bringing Egyptian artists, who take inspiration from ancient Egypt in their art practice, as well as an academic who leads an artistic, creative, and interpretative project, together in discussion, was a novel approach for CRE.² Specifically bringing Egyptian artists into the conference space intentionally integrated non-academic processes and contemporary Egyptian voices into the wider event. The purpose of doing so helped generate a dialogue between artists and academics, as well as between ancient and modern Egypt. I (the coordinator) had some previous experience with event management but had not yet organised this type of layered academic-artistic presentation and discussion. The following represents a first foray into curating this type of event, positioning it within an academic context. As this article touches upon many well-discussed topics (e.g. the relationship between art and Egyptology/academia, decolonisation of Egyptology, the relationship between ancient Egypt and modern Egyptian identities and politics, the reception of ancient Egypt, narrative studies, etc.) from different disciplines (like museum studies and Egyptology), it naturally represents a work-in-progress (both for those involved and for those who may wish to emulate this kind of event at future CRE/postgraduate conferences) and does not seek to discuss the varying frameworks within which this event sits comprehensively.³ However, the CRE 24 Organising Committee, upon the advice of supporting colleagues, deemed it important that this event be documented for the above

¹ Contemporary art here is defined as art produced by living artists after Desai *et al.* (2009: 22–36) and Stevenson (2025: 6–7).

² The use of the terms ‘artists’ and ‘academics’ throughout generally refers to professional artists or academics who are either established in their career or pursuing one in their respective fields. These terms are not mutually exclusive, as individuals can be both. A discussion of the converging roles played, and methods used, by artists and academics is found at near the end of this article.

³ An overview of the important discussions, disciplines, and relevant works are given below.

stated reasons. It is also hoped that, in general, the collaborative methods outlined in this paper will give some impetus in generating new ways in which CRE can incorporate a broader range of diverse research and researchers, alongside working towards building a community that supports all its members.

The following article does not follow the traditional style usually seen in conference proceedings or edited journals. It is partly a report detailing the processes and motivations behind the session and a case study for future and similar projects. At the same time, it also offers a general overview of some academic frameworks and discussions in which this session sits. This overview will give a brief literature review, with some discussion of the differences between the conference and the museum as spaces for the display of art, as museums were an important influence for the formation of this session. Part of this overview also contextualises the event within its local setting of northwest England and Liverpool, briefly discussing and highlighting three heritage projects which were a direct inspiration for me in bringing this session about with the support of my co-organisers.

Bringing contemporary artists into the conference space builds upon similar aims already explored within various projects and studies. For instance, the AHRC-funded project 'Egypt's Dispersed Heritage: views from Egypt' (UKRI Gateway) and the partnering work with National Museums Scotland under the direction of Margaret Maitland (Head of the Mediterranean, Africa, Americas and Oceania Section, National Museums Scotland), Heba Abd el-Gawd and Alice Stevenson (2021a), and Alice Stevenson (2025), presented similar aims of bringing together ancient and contemporary Egypt.⁴ With the inclusion of artistic presentation from two Egyptian artists alongside the academic posters, it became clear that a number of other benefits could be realised through this collaborative session. In general, these were: engagement outside academia; encouragement of inter/transdisciplinary discussion; engagement with contemporary Egypt in reference to its past; enriching the qualitative experience of conference attendees; and providing new networking opportunities.

While this article mainly discusses CRE as a conference (event and physical space), and how this type of event can be used for wider interdisciplinary collaboration and decolonisation of academia, CRE in this context is also understood as a community. This community is predominantly made up of postgraduate students and early career Egyptologists but also includes researchers from other academic disciplines. Some non-academic attendees also participate. Initially this community and event was based in the United Kingdom (UK) and hosted by different UK universities, but is now shaped by the roaming nature of the conference which is held by a different institution from any country. 2025 will be the first year CRE takes place outside of Europe, being hosted by Misr University for Science and Technology (MUST) in 6th of October City, a city in the Giza Governate, Egypt, near Cairo. As such, the CRE community is one that is to some extent fluid and transient, as its members usually grow out of the early stages of their academic careers. But what does the CRE community look like? Who is welcome in it? How is the community engaging with the rest of society? How might this community shape the practices of future academics and heritage professionals? These are important questions it should be asking itself. These questions, and some of the points of discussion in this article, were already raised during the roundtable conversations of previous conferences. In particular, CRE III, hosted at University College London in 2003, discussed the relationships between academics, non-academics, and the general public, calling for greater integration between academic disciplines, post-colonial frameworks in Egyptian archaeology, and the funding requirements needed to support Egyptian delegates (Piquette and Love 2004: vii–viii). Although that conversation happened over 20 years ago, many of the questions raised then remain pertinent to CRE.

⁴ See 'Influences and underlying frameworks' section of this article for a more expansive overview of the surrounding literature.

Aims, planning, and influences

Planning the session

CRE 2024, the 24th iteration of the conference and the 25th year since its inception,⁵ was a collaborative effort between students from five UK institutions (University of Liverpool, University of Wales Trinity Saint David, Swansea University, University of Birmingham, and University of Oxford), with the University of Liverpool chosen as the conference's host venue. It was this unique shared teamwork method which, in part, inspired the committee to explore how collaboration could become a central guiding principle for the conference. The committee also wanted to actively focus on thinking of ways in which the conference could move towards working within a postcolonial framework.⁶ Other beneficial outcomes were realised through this process, with the background processes and the underlying influences behind the various aims being discussed below.

Many conversations took place in trying to find meaningful ways to achieve these primary goals. The idea for this session appeared at a very early stage of the planning process in October/November 2023. It quickly became necessary to delegate its organisation to one of the committee members, and it was agreed that I would coordinate the session.

As a committee, we agreed that the primary way in which the conference could facilitate broader, and inter/transdisciplinary, collaboration would be through incorporating non-academic professionals within the conference space. A preference for some form of creative art, ideally visual or performance, was acknowledged. This allowed easy inclusion within the standard conference structure and was also a familiar concept to the organisers through their experiences in museum spaces (discussed in *Influences and underlying frameworks* section below). Visual or performance art, from a logistical point of view, would be easy to transport/display and could be placed alongside the more formal aspects of the conference (e.g. poster session, opening, and keynotes), and the informal ones (e.g. welcome reception and conference dinner). Being a conference focussed on Egyptology, the study of Egypt, it was important that the art had a connection to ancient and/or contemporary Egypt. It was agreed that this influence could come in the form of art that was directly inspired by ancient Egyptian culture and/or art made by an artist with Egyptian or Sudanese heritage. Part of the intention behind this approach was to establish a shared connection between both the academics and artists, grounded in either their interaction with the material culture of ancient Egypt and Sudan and/or experience of modern Egypt and Sudan, and their varied social, built, and natural landscapes. In doing so, it was hoped that fruitful discussions about processes, approaches, identities, and narratives could be brought up to explore new questions, understandings, and methodologies for academics and creative practitioners alike.

Visual presentations and academic knowledge already intersect in the conference space – in the form of the poster presentation session. Because the creation of academic posters always includes a deliberate design choice, the committee thought that this way of presenting and communicating knowledge would nicely complement the proposed artistic displays. As a result, we decided during the conference planning that the posters would be displayed alongside the art. This would help integrate art and academia in the same physical space in a fluid and natural way. It would also be another potential connecting practice that linked both the artists and the academics who attended. From the perspective of academic attendees and the academic poster presenters, this joint art-

⁵ There was no CRE in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

⁶ The term 'postcolonial framework' here is understood as the underlying structure of the event, focussed on providing or working towards creating a decolonised space, based around inclusion and equity. For an explanation of terms surrounding decolonisation, postcolonial, etc. and their application in Egyptology specifically, see Langer and Matic (2023: 1–27).

poster session had the potential to generate a more stimulating space for networking, discussion, knowledge exchange, and creative thinking. These were the prominent supplementary benefits of the session. Invigorating the poster session in this way was hoped to also put special emphasis on the poster session as an important, yet often neglected and poorly attended, aspect of conferences. As personal experience highlights, poster sessions are often held in the corridors or corners of conferences and never reach all attendees. Poster presentations are often, informally, viewed as secondary to the lecture format. Yet, they offer great opportunities for in-depth, informal, and relaxed conversation and knowledge exchange, which may not always be offered by the more formal, large, public lecture format (Reba 1979).

All organisers agreed that one of the primary aims of the conference would be to inspire participating postgraduate and early career researchers to continue the work towards deconstructing colonial legacies within academia. Inviting contemporary Egyptian and Sudanese artists to present and discuss their work was one of three ways in which we sought to do this. It was vital that artists had Egyptian or Sudanese heritage to prioritise the expertise, perspectives, and voice of contemporary Egyptians and Sudanese, and Egypt and Sudan, from outside the traditionally academic Egyptological (and its associated disciplines) sphere. The specific inclusion here of Sudanese artists was not intended to group Egyptian and Sudanese individuals together, and understand them as one group. Our aim in looking to include Sudanese artists (and scholars) specifically, was intended to prioritise their unique voice within the conversations surrounding identity, and relationships to, and interpretation of, the ancient past in the Nile Valley. We were very conscious of a number of complex disciplinary discussions and social issues surrounding the study of ancient Sudan (Dann 2006; Lemos 2022; Lemos and Tipper 2021). We wanted to avoid subsuming the study of ancient Sudan and Nubia into 'Egyptology', recognising both the distinctness to, and the close relationship of, Egyptology to Nubiology/Sudanese Archaeology (Langer and Matić 2023: 4–6). This follows the academic push to recognise and centre distinctive ancient and modern peoples and areas (Cooper 2025; Fushiya 2021), having both a unique history as well as modern challenges (Adam and Taha 2022). Of course, the creation of separate disciplines focused on Nubia and Sudan comes with the potential issues that these disciplines, when centred in Western knowledge systems, can reproduce the colonial patterns apparent in Egyptology (Lemos 2022; Trigger 1994). It was important that we specify there was space specifically for the voices of Sudanese individuals in this session. This is especially due to historic eliding of Sudanese and Nubian voices, not just apparent in the form of Western colonialism, but also through forms of Egyptian imperialism. For instance, in more modern times this might be seen in the building of the Aswan Low Dam (Vigar 2023). We were of course, also fully conscious that the inclusion of a few contemporary Egyptian or Sudanese artists by no means fully represented these contemporary regions and peoples as a whole, or that their experiences and ideas are reflective of whole groups. Our engagement with contemporary Egypt and Sudan, though collaboration with individual artists, did not seek to portray these peoples as homogenous units. These artists could also, more broadly, have had Egyptian or Sudanese heritage, as opposed to being exclusively Sudanese or Egyptian citizens.⁷ This might have involved individuals who are part of diaspora communities or have a mixed heritage background.⁸

This approach resulted in two Egyptian artists, Hedayat Taymour and Nada Mobarak discussing and presenting their art at CRE (Table 1). I was introduced to Taymour through the Egypt Exploration Society (EES) after asking them if they knew of any Egyptian artists who were inspired by ancient Egypt in their work, and who might like to participate in the event. After a meeting with Taymour

⁷ We were not able to confirm any Sudanese artists to present their work at the conference. This means that further reference to the artists in respect to our aims will be as Egyptian artists.

⁸ For a more detailed discussion on the how decolonisation within Egyptology was integrated into the conference, see Influences and underlying frameworks section below.

she put me in touch with Mobarak, and both artists agreed to participate after these first meetings. The incorporation of contemporary art into the session, and a focus on cotemporary non-academic Egyptian perspectives as a part of decolonisation effort, still existed as two sperate goals of the organising committee. Both were realised though the incorporation of Egyptian artists, but on their own could be also be realised though other methods and practitioners. As we realised the incorporation of contemporary art had other potential benefits to the session, including another artistic project which was influenced by ancient Egypt had the potential to diversify and expand the conversation. Having already been aware of the Museum of Lies project through discussion with its coordinator, Katharina Zinn, it was decided that we would invite the project to present at the session too. It was felt this this project, which had already successfully engaged artists, and used art creation in both a museum and education setting, would be able to provide additional perspectives and understandings. As it was driven from the academic side, it would be able to complement the works of the contemporary artists by demonstrating how the application of art in other academic settings could be used.

The other two actions we took in achieving the decolonisation aims were to offer a keynote talk which discussed and unpicked colonial legacies, and using as much of the funding as possible to support Egyptian and Sudanese nationals to join CRE 24 in person to enable them to participate fully within the conference. Margaret Maitland, from National Museums Scotland, delivered the keynote lecture ‘Speaking the Wretch’s Name: Revealing Untold Stories and Colonial Legacies in Egyptology’, grounding the decolonisation of academia in the UK and in Egyptology within the general discussion by highlighting previous colonial practices (Table 1). Three funding streams were secured for supporting Egyptian and Sudanese nationals, and these were given for either the general purpose of supporting their attendance, spent at the discretion of the organising committee, or for specific costs which were outlined though a grant application process. These funds were allocated to support costs associated with visa fees (funded by the Egypt Exploration Society), accommodation (funded by anonymous donations), and travel costs for three participants (funded by The Robert Anderson Trust).

TABLE 1. SUMMARY AND DETAILS OF THE MAIN MOTIVATIONS AND DECISIONS BEHIND THE CURATION OF THE FINAL SESSION

Session element	Details
Keynote speaker: Margaret Maitland	Maitland’s keynote was chosen for this session for two main reasons: 1) as a heritage professional working in museums, this talk was able to bring a museums studies approach. Representation from a Scottish institution was also important as we tried to have as many areas/ institutions from across the UK present as possible, and 2) her talk would address colonial legacies and non-royal narratives, which were essential to our aims of constructing a discussion around a post-colonial framework.

Session element	Details
Incorporation of art displays in the poster presentation session.	Merging these elements was chosen for two major reasons: 1) the creation of a poster requires some form of creative thinking and design skill in the visual display of research. A poster presentation session provides common ground for artists and academics to talk to each other and discuss their processes, methods and experiences exploring ancient Egypt. As the academic poster utilises art and design within the process of knowledge sharing and creating an academic narrative, this session also highlights how art and academia can engage with each other, as well as others in society, and 2), the session was focussed on enriching the experience for attendees and presenters. Interspersing the art between the different poster presentations would allow attendees to mentally and intellectually engage with the visual media of both art and posters in different ways. The session as a whole provided opportunities for different types of conversations, as the poster session at academic conferences can involve lots of different interactions between strangers and new colleagues, as well as waiting for opportunities to talk with specific presenters.
Invited Egyptian artists: Hedayat Taymour; Nada Mobarak	Artists with Egyptian heritage presented their work as a core element of this session. The socio-emotional and multifaceted manifestation of ancient Egypt relating to modern Egyptians and Egypt is an element not often seen at academic conferences. It was felt important that academics were confronted with this reality. Beyond this, we wanted to invite academics to engage with non-western viewpoints, Egyptian insights, and the processes and methods of art, knowledge creation, and research.
MOL Project Katharina Zinn	This project already explored the use of contemporary art as a method in the interpretation of ancient Egyptian material culture. This fitted into our initial criteria that the art displayed be inspired by ancient Egypt or be from an Egyptian artist. As a UK-based project coming from Wales, led by a German academic and being centred in the heritage sector, the project's incorporation was fitting for the interdisciplinary and collaborative goals of the session. Through the project's documented outcomes, it would offer attendees a framework to think about how personal connections and narratives could be made with, or explored, through objects/material culture.

Session element	Details
Q&A Session with the artists and MOL Project	The intention behind having a Q&A-style panel discussion was to create a setting which was more conversation orientated, but still placed the focus on the art, artists, and artistic project. This session functioned like a keynote lecture by centring and platforming the discussion of the art by the artists/project lead themselves, using a different, exploratory format. The artists and the art facilitator could also ask each other questions. This different form of 'keynote' sought to bring attention to the artists in a way which is non-standard for an academic conference, usually taking the format of a lecture with audience questions afterwards. This was partly influenced by the conversational style of the poster presentation session, but also aimed to provide a format of presenting that is more common for professionals who operate outside of academia. This style would also not be completely unfamiliar to the academic participants either, as Q&A segments to lectures and roundtable discussions are often an aspect of conference activities.

What the session looked like

It is important that the reader visualise the session to better understand the discussion of the decisions made during the process of its creation.

The session took the following format:

Keynote lecture: Margaret Maitland. This took place in a lecture theatre and lasted one hour.

Title: Speaking the Wretch's Name: Revealing Untold Stories and Colonial Legacies in Egyptology.

Abstract: Egyptology has often adopted the dominant perspective of the 'master', both from antiquity and from the colonial era. This has privileged the study and display of elite culture and promoted the perception of ancient Egypt as a superior 'civilization'. Non-elite perspectives have been understudied and contemporary Egyptians and Sudanese have often been excluded. This talk will discuss my various approaches to research and museum display in which I have sought to address some of these issues. This includes research into representations of the non-elite in ancient Egypt and the construction of social inequality through visual and written elite culture; how historic racial biases have distorted our understanding of interconnections between ancient Egypt and Sudan; and how reading against the archival grain can reveal unrecognised Egyptian agency and contributions to Egyptology. In our displays and public programming at National Museums Scotland, we have sought to challenge the objectification of ancient Egyptian human remains, and the exclusion of contemporary Egyptians through partnership in community collaboration, the inclusion of Egyptian voices in displays, and contemporary collecting.

Art and Poster Session: In this session, 20 academic posters were presented alongside larger artistic presentations from two artists and one art facilitator. The organisers specifically chose a large rectangular room close to break and rest areas for this session to take place. These artistic displays combined visual art (prints), sculptures, drawings, digital art, written poetry, and a triptych. The posters and art were arranged around the edges of the large rectangular room, with one of the larger art installations placed centrally within to create a feature. The session lasted one hour (Figures 1 and 2).



Figure 1. View from the central art feature. Both posters and print art can be seen placed around the edge of the space. © George Allen.



Figure 2. Opposite view from central art feature. © George Allen.



Figure 3. Q&A Panel discussion session. © George Allen.

Q&A Panel Discussion: Back in the lecture theatre, the two artists and the art facilitator were asked questions about their/the art, their processes, and influences, by the conference attendees and by each other. Some of the art was brought in to be made visually available during the discussion. This session lasted one hour (Figure 3).

Influences and underlying frameworks

The formalisation and formation of archaeology (and associated fields) as a scientific discipline in Western scholarship, museums, and museology during the peak of European colonisation, have undoubtedly left long term issues and structural imbalances within academia, heritage professions, and institutions (Moro-Abadía 2006; Trigger 1996; Tully 2011: 137–140). Most glaringly, these issues are the exclusion of scholars and perspectives from the Global South, specifically in the arena of shaping and presenting academic knowledge (Moosavi 2020: 332–342; Two Convivial Thinkers 2024: 356–358). Direct removal of political power and military presence from a country does not remove the ideologies of the Colonial Period imbedded within academic disciplines and the creation of knowledge (Abd el-Gawad 2025: 496–498; Langer 2017; Langer and Matić 2023). Recognition of colonial legacies and ideology rooted within academia, the physical and psychological violence of imperialism, as well as the subsequent structural problems of Western academia (including Egyptology), are being addressed within the written output of Egyptology, but are usually subject of wider research in other academic disciplines. However, Egyptology has only relatively recently focussed much more on colonial issues, the works of Heba Abd el-Gawad (2023, 2025), Heba Abd el-Gawad and Alice Stevenson (2021a, 2021b), William Carruthers (2016), Debbie Challis (2013), Yasmin El Shazly (2024), Usama Ali Gad (2025), Monica Hanna (2021, 2025),⁹ Salima Ikram (2018), Lisette M. Jiménez *et al.* (2024), Claus Jurman (2022), Christian Langer (2017; 2023a; 2023b), Christian Langer and Uroš Matić (2023), Renon Lemos (2022), Uroš Matić (2018), Hana Navrátilová *et al.* (2019),

⁹ The latter publication was not available at the time this article was submitted, but the author was aware of its imminent publication, indicated online to be released in 2025.

Thomas Schneider and Peter Raulwing (2012), and Loubna Youssef (2002), evidencing this greater focus. There also has been pushback against decolonisation efforts and discussions in Egyptology by Thomas L. Gertzen (2020) (rightly critiqued by Langer and Matić [2023: 18] and Carruthers [2024: 307, n. 26]). Other studies such as Elliott Colla (2007), Okasha El-Daly (2005), Donald M. Reid (1985, 2002), Christina Riggs (2014), Alice Stevenson (2019), Gemma Tully (2010, 2011, 2017), and Michael Wood (1998) explore the complexities surrounding themes of identity, modern history, politics, museums, archaeology, colonialism, together with Egyptology. Publications originating outside of Egyptology that need to be consulted as well include Robin Boast (2011), Gurminder K. Bhambra *et al.* (2018), James Cuno (2008), Leon Moosavi (2020) and Richard Sandall and Eithne Nightingale (2012). The plethora of written academic outputs surrounding the impact of colonialism, the period itself, and the subsequent unpicking and examination of its legacies and ideologies are too extensive to comprehensively list in this article. However, these studies demonstrate the growing awareness of both the histories of, and the inherited frameworks found within, academia and its associated professions. Researching, documenting, and discussing ancient Egypt and Egyptology in relation to colonialism is important and necessary work. However, it is equally, if not more important that this information is used to create and reconstruct Egyptology's processes and spaces, to address long term imbalances.¹⁰ These imbalances are principally the 'entrenched exclusion of minority groups and perspectives within academia' (Moosavi 2020: 332). Decolonising academia needs to go beyond emblematic calls and outputs and offer more tangible means of readdress.

Being a place for postgraduate and early career researchers, the CRE conference functions as a space that provides opportunities and experiences with presenting, for developing professional networks, and knowledge exchange between peers. It represents the next generation of scholars, teachers, curators, and other professionals within in the history and heritage sphere, working in a vast array of public and private institutions. As such, CRE has the potential to influence the thinking, networks, approaches, and frameworks adopted or taken by its participants into their future professional practices and institutions – as well as their own research and its eventual outputs. Thus, continuing the work towards developing equitable spaces for outward looking ideas, to foster the ability to self-reflect and address historical inequities, can only be beneficial for enabling the discipline (and academia) to confront its colonial origins and grow in new directions.

Substantial influence for the session equally came from the heritage sector – specifically museums – where contemporary art is often incorporated within the display of artefacts and used to convey historical narratives.¹¹ Looking towards the museum sector was a natural choice, as museology is a closely associated discipline, and research and university based academics will often work closely with museums and museum professionals. This close relationship is partly bound up in the museum's function in 'translating' academic and specialist knowledge to a wider audience, as part of the wider role of these institutions as places of education (Robins 2013: 155–156). Contemporary art has in this respect also been understood to provide benefits for teaching and education more generally. The placement of contemporary art next to the outputs and methods of professional historical research was seen as an important introduction. Desai *et al.* (2009: 7) state the following:

...thinking about history and contemporary art together suggests new ways to teach and to think. Contemporary art, we believe, can in fact serve as a pedagogical site itself, one that that suggests alternative ways of thinking about the past, present, and future. Thinking about history through an investigation of visual art does not simply provide

¹⁰ The three ways in which we sought to do this at CRE 2024 are mentioned in this article's introduction.

¹¹ For a recent study on this topic specifically related to the display of ancient Egyptian material culture see Stevenson (2025).

students with yet another set of texts to understand. It provides students with a new landscape within which to make sense of their world and develop their opinions.

The success and enduring popularity of the use contemporary art in museum and heritage spaces (and specifically in use for learning more broadly) was an essential part of the reason why it was adapted for the session at CRE. There is a large, and growing, body of research and scholarship on both the use of contemporary art in museum spaces, teaching, and academia, as well as the certain influences ancient Egypt has had on a variety of art in the last hundred years or so. On the former, Nicholas R. Brown (2023), Dipti Desai (2002), Dipti Desai *et al.* (2009), Colin Renfrew (2003), Claire Robins (2013), to name a few; and on the latter, the edited volume of Eleanor Dobson and Nicola Tonks (2020), Abraham I. Fernández Pichel (2022), Anna Ferrari and Benjamin Hinson (2022), Alice Stevenson (2024, 2025), Akili Tommasino (2024) and Katharina Zinn (forthcoming) are some of the more recent publications. The use of ancient Egyptian material culture for teaching and engagement specifically (which is a role the museum can have as well) is also a topic of research (e.g. Abd el-Gawad and Stevenson 2021; Thum *et al.* 2024; Zinn 2019; also touched upon by Tully 2017; and for art in general touched upon by Desai *et al.* 2009).

The relationship between the world of art and the display of ancient Egyptian material culture in museums has a long and complex history, particularity apparent in the networks of artists and scholars in the early 20th century (Stevenson 2025: 16–38). As mentioned, in more recent times, many exhibitions and collections have now sought to incorporate contemporary art within the interpretation and narrative of specific objects/collections, and within the wider social and historical narratives conveyed in these spaces. This involves not just the objects' histories up until their placement in the museum, and the priority given by museums to the intellectual value of objects, what I would term the 'intellectualisation' of the objects, but also the ongoing 'social, political, or economic messages...conveyed by the artists to their audience' through their use and interpretation (Brown 2023: 221). Indeed, it has been argued that one of the most important roles of the museum is their position in storytelling (Bedford 2001). There has been a keen focus to re-contextualise collections and objects which were often acquired during the Colonial Period, or as a consequence of it. This is often done through the work of indigenous professionals and/or reframing collections within the context of indigenous narratives. In this regard, a number of examples local to Liverpool (the conference location), and northwest England in general, informed the Art and Academia session, and served as inspiration for myself. These were:

1. The International Slavery Museum's 'Challenging histories: Collecting new artworks' permanent display. This project collects contemporary artworks that respond to the trans-Atlantic slave trade. The incorporation of this art intended to provide new perspectives and voices, with the aim of challenging and enriching the learning experience of visitors (National Museums Liverpool n.d. a and n.d. b). As such, this display uses contemporary art that specifically responds to the social and historical contexts and consequences of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, to develop deeper understandings and prioritise people and emotions. The original collection is no longer the primary source in conveying historical narrative, and a focus has shifted to a people-centred approach (Fleming 2014: 28; National Museums Liverpool n.d. a).
2. Liverpool World Museum's 'I, too, am a survivor' exhibit, brought about in collaboration with, and part of, the larger 'Poetry and Porcelain Dream-Worlds' TIDE project. Seven objects of Chinese ceramic are the focus of this display. The immersive presentation and experience consists of a circular space (technically a 12-sided room) with the objects placed within the wall, each behind glass. Each object, in turn, becomes the focus of illumination, surrounded by visual light effects and images. Each object is given a voice, and its (supposed) journey to the Museum is narrated in poetry form (through a speaker) by Hong Kong-born Chinese-British

poet Sarah Howe (Das 2017; Harvard Radcliffe Institute n.d.). The ending line of one object's story becomes the beginning of the next, so that the whole recorded narration of these objects feels like one long poem. Howe's poetic narrations of the objects' journeys were created by her through discussions between herself and the project researchers (National Museums Liverpool 2021). This partnership was part of the museum's initiative to investigate its collection through an 'issue-based, rather than culture-based' approach, with the artist exploring themes of 'migration, displacement, and identity' (Das 2020).

3. Manchester Art Gallery's 'Rethinking the Grand Tour', seeks to reassess the 'Grand Tour' – a term used to describe the privileged cultural tourism of the European upper classes (especially British), peaking in the 1700–1800s (Black 1985). The extended scope of this tourism beyond the original classical Mediterranean into the Middle East and Asia, coupled with colonialism, meant that many artefacts acquired during this period eventually ended up in museum collections (Manchester Art Gallery 2022). The Grand Tour would often be recorded in art, with the upper-class travellers having various portraits depicting themselves during their tour. In this exhibition, four contemporary artists produced work in response to the Grand Tour. These works are displayed alongside the objects and the artwork associated with the Grand Tour in the Gallery's collection (Manchester Art Gallery 2022).

Within the events and spaces associated with the display of ancient Egyptian material culture and of academic Egyptology, the inclusion of contemporary art is becoming more of an established practice and approach. Notable examples include, 'Time Machine: Ancient Egypt and Contemporary Art' at the British Museum in London, UK (Putnam and Davies 1994), 'Expedition Egypt' at the Art and History Museum in Brussels, Belgium (Museum Kunst en Geschiedenis; Sallam 2021), 'Re-imagining Egypt', at the Saffron Walden Museum (UK) (Tully 2017), and 'Reading reuse. Image recycling in Egypt and beyond'/'Reading Reuse' a symposium and exhibition organised by the Institut française d'archéologie orientale, where contemporary artists displayed work centred around the theme of reuse (Institut français d'archéologie orientale 2023).

In most of these examples listed above, particularly those local to Liverpool, the institution worked with artists who have national, ethnic, or cultural identities/heritages connected to the material culture on display. Most have therefore sought to facilitate (re)interpretation of these objects through collaboration with artists representing the cultures in question.

Some conceptual differences in the conference space and the museum space

While the Art and Academia session at CRE 2024 was inspired by museum practice, there are key differences in the use, purposes and setup within the physical space of the museum and the conference that need to be noted. It is these differences which were also an influence in adapting museum approaches for the CRE 2024 session. The intention was not to blindly replicate the practices in museums, but adapt them in order to address similar issues, as well as remedy specific networking gaps the museum does not always cater for with artistic interventions.

From an organisational perspective, the museum has a wide range of responsibilities and stakeholders. It must cater to the public's various needs and expectations, consider the objects it is custodian of, as well as being accountable to, or under the gaze of, government, governing bodies, and industry codes of practice (Clarke 1991; Department for Digital, Culture, Media, and Sport 2018a; 2018b; International Council of Museums 2017; Museums Association n.d.). Therefore, artistic introduction into these spaces may involve a large amount of planning, organisation and approval from the various different stakeholders. The introduction of art and artists into the academic conference setup, however, comes with a different focus, along with distinct responsibilities and constraints.

CRE's current guidelines are fairly brief, with the only stated aim being 'to provide a platform for postgraduate students, early career researchers and independent scholars to present their research' (Current Research in Egyptology 2016). No wider aims or practices are stated; however, as previously mentioned, the conference's previous roundtables, discussing future aims and practices, and the recording of these, can be found in some earlier conference proceedings (Piquette and Love 2004: vii–viii). Self-reflective aspects and wider topics of discussion from the AGM are not necessarily recorded in the volume in a formalised way. Less so in recent years, and not always in-depth. CRE guidelines are amended through in-person voting at the conference AGM (open to all attendees), which is held annually at the end of each conference. The conference is the sole responsibility of the Organising Committee, generally under the supervision of the host institution. This can provide a relative amount of freedom to the Organising Committee in being able to decide the frameworks within which they wish to operate. However, they can equally be constrained by the host institution's own agendas and frameworks, especially as the financial responsibility of the conference usually (but not always) falls on the host institution.

Initial differences between the two setups of the conference and the museum are apparent. The museum as an institutional place/space is in most cases permanent and fixed (International Council of Museums 2017),¹² whereas the CRE conference, albeit annual, is temporary (being on for a few days each year) and transient. The community itself mirrors these points. For instance, the CRE community is transient in comparison to that of the fixed community of the museum (staff, local population). This is not to say that museum communities do not have transient parts to them; they do, like non-local visitors, visiting scholars/researchers, temporary staff, etc. Traditionally the museum prioritises visual experience and narrates history through objects, while CRE focuses on oral transmission of knowledge from specialists, with a subsequent possibility of written outcomes for a niche academic audience. The museum community is usually public and open, whereas CRE is for a relatively small and often closed group. Other differences also exist, and these aspects are typically indications rather than fixed definitions, being used here specifically in comparison of the two spaces to each other.

The following section comprises some preliminary thoughts and reflections on the differences between the conference and museums arising from the curating of this session for CRE. These thoughts and reflections came from specifically thinking about how and why art's incorporation within the museum is now a well-established phenomenon, and how museum practices, aims, audiences, and outputs perhaps lend themselves more easily to this when compared to those of the academic conference. As in some of the examples mentioned, artistic intervention in museum space often aims to provide a response to the collection, a theme, an event, and perhaps also to provide some institutional critique (Stevenson 2025: 9).¹³ In the museum, focus will still revolve around and incorporate, to some degree, the display of objects/artefacts. Although less of a focus on objects and a centring of people and emotions may be new approaches adopted by museums (Fleming 2014), they are still inhabited by objects, whose upkeep and storage, whether for display, conservation, or research, is an integral function of the museum (International Council of Museums 2017). While museums now understand their role as more than just a repository for artefacts, being places for learning, social engagement, recreation, leisure, and even healing, objects are still the centre of visitor attention (Falk and Dierking 2013: 39–46; Levent and Pascual-Leone, 2014: xiii). Although more focus and attention is being paid to curating multisensory engagement within museums (and

¹² This is in specific reference to the physical museum. The digital aspect of museums allows them to reach non-fixed audiences and creates a dynamic online space. The ICOM (2022) defines the museum in the following terms: 'A museum is a not-for-profit, permanent institution in the service of society that researches, collects, conserves, interprets and exhibits tangible and intangible heritage.'

¹³ See below for further discussion on 'intervention art' and its application to this session.

galleries), the predominant sensory focus, from the mid-twentieth century onwards, is on the visual experience, where touching objects is generally prohibited (Candlin 2008; Levent and Pascual-Leone 2014). As objects form a major part of the physical context of museums, they are traditionally places in which someone will primarily expect to go and *see* something (Falk and Dierking 2013: 32, 134–139) – as opposed to the conference setup where people go primarily to *discuss* something. This is the key difference between the two spaces – the conference is engineered specifically toward prioritising in-person academic discussion, in a way in which museum exhibitions are not. Equally, seeing and touching physically present objects is not expected at the academic conference.¹⁴ It is likely this is the reason the display of contemporary art alongside museum objects seems a more natural fit when compared with art inclusion in the conference setup – visual interaction is already an experience prioritised in the spaces of museums and art galleries.

The art created for museum spaces is ultimately displayed for consumption and interpretation by the public (although not all art in the aforementioned projects was produced exclusively for the museum space). Indeed, the term 'exhibition' in English brings the museum and art gallery within the same linguistic nexus, with the term commonly used by both institutions to describe curated displays of objects. In this scenario though, aside from those directly involved in bringing the exhibition together, direct and in-person dialogue between artists and academics is not guaranteed to be an outcome of the artistic intervention within the museum space. Because museum exhibitions are not set up specifically for individual or specific groups, discussions that go beyond the original commission and setup phase, even if they involve artists and academics in the decision-making, are often not possible. Questions from academics, artists, and those people collected around special interests who are *visitors*, generally cannot be relayed directly to those involved in the curation process. They can only consume the information given to them, and there is little guarantee of there being social infrastructure created to bring these two groups together specifically for the purposes of dialogue. Exploring processes and research questions through direct involvement between wider groups of artists and academics exclusively (especially postgraduate and early career professionals), largely remains uncatered for in these specific spaces. Due to this disconnection in the exhibition process, groups of academics may only passively, at a distance, consume knowledge surrounding the artist's practices through visiting museums and reading the scholarly output from museum professionals who curated the exhibition. Bringing art and the process of artistic interpretation and research into the conference space, acts as a means of creating dialogue and conversation between academics and artists, and allows active, in-person and immediate group engagement with the ideas and processes involved in the interpretation, research, and use of history. It also forces the academic community to confront alternative methods of storytelling, and the contemporary use, understanding, and interpretation of history. In the case of CRE 24, Egyptology and ancient Egypt specifically. This more immediate engagement brings these important conversations to the centre of the academic knowledge creation process, instead of relying on academics to engage with the narratives told through art in museum spaces by going to the museum itself.

Another reason why art is perhaps not usually incorporated into the conference space in the same way as it has been in the museum space might be the intended consumers of the final outputs – art can be (and to some degree is intentionally) consumed by anyone, whereas academia cannot. With art, although it can be considered as a type of language that requires knowledge or learning to be 'read', we accept that it can be interpreted on several different levels. At the same time, the aesthetic

¹⁴ However, from an academic's point of view, the museum space and the poster presentation session at conferences might be experienced in similar ways. Both involve walking around a specific area, often consuming large amounts of written and visual information. Differences have been focused on here in order to show the gaps where art might be well adapted for use in the conference setting. Conceptual similarities between academic conferences and museums do exist, of course.

enjoyment of art does not require any kind of learning or knowledge. However, with academic outputs (especially articles and monographs), expert knowledge is usually required or expected and they are not generally created with the intention of a universal (within reason) understanding.¹⁵ For written academic studies, language creates barriers for accessibility through the language(s) in which these texts are written (e.g. English, Arabic, French, German) and the complexity of the language, particularly the use of academic jargon. The latter can make the content especially difficult for non-academic audiences. This academic barrier is then compounded by the level of background knowledge that might be required to read it. For instance, heavy use of an ancient language like Greek or Latin, without providing a translation, strengthens this barrier and makes understanding difficult. Conferences are perhaps also seen as an aspect of the academic research process, of which the creation of written academia is the final outcome. Thus, artistic incorporation and intervention into the conference space may well have been overlooked, due to a perceived lack of utility for this specific research process toward the goal of written outputs. However, similarity can be found in these differing outputs. If we can accept that academic outputs are, like art, only partially understood and can also only represent a partial understanding of their themes, then they are not so entirely dissimilar. Indeed, both the artist and academic may well function within similar overarching societal roles – for instance that of ‘storyteller’ (see the *‘Converging roles of Artists and Academics’* section below for further discussion, especially on the role of narrative in both professions and disciplines).

The art displayed at CRE 24 was already in existence and not commissioned for the event, or for any particular purpose associated with it. Thus, it was not identical to intervention art as understood in museum and heritage spaces.¹⁶ However the art from the MOL project was intervention art in its original context. In some respects then, the art in the ‘Art and Academia’ session at CRE was not intervention art specifically. However as the work was brought into the CRE with the specific intentions of ‘facilitating new readings of existing orders’ (Robins 2013: 2), in the context of CRE 24 the art did function in this way. I would consider the project as a whole an example of intervention art, but not the art itself (Mobarak’s and Taymour’s) outside the context of the conference. As academic conferences primarily provide a forum for knowledge exchange within a specific community, this session at CRE was engineered to focus on the processes of research and creation of narrative inspired by ancient Egypt. Through in-person interaction (networking), the session facilitated the exploration of different narrative approaches, and the generation of new questions and understandings. The Q&A session that followed allowed larger group participation but also gave purposeful elevation of the artists to a position akin to a keynote speaker to emphasise their position as experts in their fields. Thus, both the art *and the artists* formed part the intervention. This provided an opportunity for a large group of academics to converse with artists (and vice versa), which is a specific type of networking not usually afforded by the museum space and the art intervention practices found within them.

The Art and the Artists

Once the artists and art-facilitator agreed to participate, a number of meetings were set up to discuss how the session might look, what pieces would be displayed, and to discuss logistical aspects related to their conference participation. This section explores this process and describes the art displayed in more detail.

¹⁵ An added barrier to academic outputs (especially recent ones) is that they can often lie behind some sort of paywall.

¹⁶ Intervention art is broadly understood, to be art that ‘engages with an existing context’ (Robins 2013: 2). Especially in the context of museums and heritage institutions, distinction should be made between art that intends to provide an essentially aesthetic change, versus art that intends to provide new readings (Robins 2013: 2).

For the display, both Taymour and Mobarak were asked to present an artist profile, which consisted of a short biography and a portrait photo. This information was then printed on an A0 sheet of paper, the same size as the academic posters. I created these 'posters' and displayed them alongside their art pieces.

Paintings by Nada Mobarak

Selecting which of Nada Mobarak's pieces to be displayed was the first task I approached. The two major factors dictating the choice of art were the art's content and the logistical feasibility of its display. From an early point, it was decided that prints would be used instead of the original paintings due to both logistical and financial reasons. For example, some of her pieces were too big to display in the space set aside for the session, which meant that a number of the artworks were excluded. For example, one piece depicting a young girl standing with a group of Water Buffalo measured 3m in length. At the same time, the high cost of sending artwork from Egypt made it unfeasible for original pieces to be exhibited. With Nada Mobarak based in Egypt, we agreed that she would join the Q&A session via video conferencing – an approach supported by CRE 24's hybrid format. Displaying the artworks on easels was the most viable option for exhibiting them alongside



Figure 4: Painting depicting a man reading the القرآن (Qu'ran). © Nada Mobarak.

the posters, accounting for financial, spatial, and logistical factors that ruled out display on poster boards, hanging from the ceiling, or placement on the walls of the room. As the size of the original pieces determined their visual impact, it was decided that we would print each piece in the size equivalent to that of the original painting. However for a couple of smaller pieces, slightly larger (to scale) prints were created.

In choosing the pieces to be included, some of Mobarak's work did not necessarily fit with the overall theme of the conference. For example, a number of Mobarak's animal subjects in her paintings are not native to Egypt, and so she decided that they would not be appropriate for display in a conference on Egypt. Additionally, not all of her art needed to make explicit reference to ancient Egypt, given their representations of modern Egypt were enough to 'converse' with the ancient Egypt found in the academic posters. For instance, one painting we discussed was Mobarak's recent piece of a man reading the *نَارِقْلَا* (Qu'ran) (Figure 4). The original work was sold as part of a campaign to raise



Figure 5. 'Thoth Baboons', painting representing baboons with lunar discs. © Nada Mobarak.



Figure 6. 'Standstill', painting depicting a man sleeping in a chair. © Nada Mobarak.

money for victims of the ongoing *Nakba* in Gaza,¹⁷ but did not make reference to Egypt's natural landscape or ancient history. Even though the piece is important to contemporary geopolitical issues bordering modern Egypt, it was decided by the artist that this painting did not fit as well in the context of CRE as some of her other works would.¹⁸ Through discussion between Mobarak and myself, a total of nine images were selected to form three distinct groups, each consisting of three individual prints.

The first group of prints I will discuss portrayed animals native to modern and ancient Egypt. These captivating images were chosen due to their subjects' ubiquitous depictions in ancient Egyptian art (baboons, ibises, and cattle). An example can be seen in the painting of the two seated baboons, each one crowned with a lunar disc on their head (Figure 5), which gained direct inspiration from the

¹⁷ *Nakba* is often understood and referred to in English legal terms as occupation, apartheid, and/or genocide (Eghbariah 2024).

¹⁸ For an example of the role modern art can play in addressing contemporary issues, see Stearn (2014: 103–105).

similar examples seen in ancient Egyptian art. Out of all of the pieces, these had the most visually noticeable connection to ancient Egypt, but also had the potential to situate the viewer's thoughts to Egypt's fauna (both ancient and modern). Nada's paintings of bulls can be quite large pieces, with the real and impressive physical size of the bulls communicated through the scale of art itself. Bulls are particularly special to Mobarak, who has previously stated how, when she accidentally drew one, she felt like she had 'discovered a long lost relationship' (Mobarak 2019). They continue to feature prominently in her work, with Mobarak stating that they 'are my muses to this day and it's their significance in Ancient Egypt as symbols of strength and fertility, together with their golden horns that resemble crescent moons that draw me to them even more.' (Mobarak 2019).

The second group of prints comprised of a pair of paintings that depict a seated man sleeping in a chair, and a small painting with a kingfisher as its only subject. In his hand, the man in the chair holds a papyrus reed, which either gracefully extends towards the floor (Figure 6), or sits within his lap. These two larger paintings show the man from different angles, at different points in time, with a kingfisher sitting either on the arm or back of the chair. Colour and symbolism of the two larger pieces depicting the man in the chair reflect Egypt. The bright, golden yellow background conjures imaginations of sunshine, warmth, sand, and perhaps the golden artefacts often visualised when thinking about ancient Egypt. The papyrus reed seems to be symbolic of Egypt itself. It is a ubiquitous feature found in ancient Egyptian art, especially as a representation of Lower Egypt. The use of yellow, green, and the blue in the man's clothing conjures up the colours of the Egyptian landscape itself. In discussing one of her favourite places in Egypt, Mobarak describes the 'raw untouched landscapes of Sohag in Upper Egypt where the Nile, still electric blue, meets the rocky hills on one



Figure 7. 'What lies ahead', painting portraying a boy on a skiff, Aswan. © Nada Mobarak.



Figure 8. Painting depicting two Spur-winged Lapwings. © Nada Mobarak.

side and bright green fields on the other' (Mobarak 2019). The embodiment of the landscape in this portrait (Figure 6), perhaps subtly signifies the connection between the man and the land of Egypt. In discussing this interpretation with Mobarak, and whether this use of colour was intentional, she explained that this was both yes and no. The use of the colour blue is deliberately used a lot by her in her work and is 'inspired by the beauty and widespread use of faience in Ancient Egypt' (Mobarak, personal communication). The colour blue became a topic of conversation at the Q&A session, with Mobarak further commenting on the almost juxtaposing qualities of this colour being both loud and bold, yet peaceful and calming. The green of the papyrus simply stayed true to its natural colour, and the yellow had no symbolic meaning but worked well with the painting overall – possibly because they invoked the landscape (Mobarak, personal communication).

The final group of paintings consisted of one large piece (the largest of all the prints) and two smaller ones. The larger piece depicted a young boy seated on a skiff, moving along the Nile waters (Figure 7). At the front of the skiff sits a spur-winged lapwing. This species of lapwing is also featured in the two other smaller pieces. Mobarak's hand-written note on one of these smaller paintings reads: 'Spur-winged lapwing. Denotes the common people of Egypt. In temple of Seti, Abydos, Seti holds Rekhyt in left hand as a sign that all people in Egypt are under his rule' (Figure 8).¹⁹ This reveals the echo and influence of ancient Egyptian culture in the creation and understanding of the painting, easily lost to the viewer without this explicit mention. The lapwing depicted in the painting of the boy on a skiff takes on important symbolic meaning when this specific understanding is known. Mobarak's placement of the spur-winged lapwing in the scenes of the daily life of Egyptian people creates a dialogue between the ancient and the modern. This is seemingly, to an Egyptologist's eye,

¹⁹ See Calverley *et al.* (1958: pl. 22) for an image of Seti I holding the *rekhyt*-bird in his Abydos temple.

coupled with an inversion of actions, positions, identities, and relationship between the person and the lapwing in comparison to the image in the Seti temple. The figure of a king is no longer the main human actor, and this instead is an ordinary and unidentified modern Egyptian boy. Opposed to the formal and ritualised actions of the king, the boy simply carries out a general task – paddling a skiff on the Nile’s waters. The lapwing, sitting on the skiff, is unconstrained, and free from the grip of any figure. Both the boy and lapwing exist in state of harmony. The artist, through taking the lapwing out of the hand of the king, is making a specific statement about freedom and control, and the desire for political power to rest with the people of Egypt, and not in the hand(s) of powerful individuals (Mobarak, personal communication).

Overall, Mobarak’s works helped to intricately weave Egypt’s social and natural landscapes, with subtle references to its ancient past, within the CRE session. This provided a small window into contemporary Egypt as seen through the artist’s gaze, allowing the conference attendees to engage with these themes in an emotive, visual way.

‘I AM NOT YOUR SHABTI’ by Hedayat Taymour

Hedayat Taymour’s recreation of ‘I AM NOT YOUR SHABTI’ brought a three-dimensional element to the session. The original display consisted of 180 individually crafted figurines, placed on two three-stepped plinths that faced each other. The original exhibit was held at the Heatherley School of Fine Art in July 2023. Each piece is individually named, and each can represent a concept, person, or group of people. At the same time, a large double-sided mirror was placed between these plinths (Figure 9).

This is a creative exploration of figurative forms and installation while expressing frustration with the current state of the world. The installation delves into themes such as migration, collective displacement and lack of communication, and the duality of life. Inspired by ancient shabtis, I used them as a metaphor for human helplessness (Taymour 2024: 4).

Much like Mobarak’s inversion of the image of Seti I gripping the *rekhyt*-bird, Taymour’s figurines also invert the notions of the ancient shabti. The ancient shabti is understood as a representation of a person in their dignified/glorified post-mortem form, and as a servant or substitute for the deceased who would carry out manual labour for them in the afterlife (Milde 2012: 2–3). Taymour explicitly describes the figurines as not being shabtis – reflected in the title of the work (Taymour, personal communication). A contrast between the helpfulness of the ancient shabti who is magically required to assist the deceased and the figurines as symbols of human helplessness reveals itself (Taymour 2024: 1). Taymour further states:

In *I Am Not Your Shabti*, I was particularly interested in reinterpreting the concept of the ‘Shabti’—traditionally a servant figure in the afterlife—to reflect the modern human condition and our growing sense of powerlessness. By incorporating materials and colours with rich, symbolic origins, I aimed to add layers of meaning to the piece, weaving together past and present through both concept and form (Taymour, personal communication).

Differences are also explored in Taymour’s original installation with the use of a mirror separating the two groups of figurines. The mirror is used to show that the figurines are ‘unaware of the beyond’ (Taymour, 2024: 1). This ‘beyond’ is of an equally similar, helpless existence as their own, which is being experienced by the figurines on the other side of the mirror. The idealised, better place of the ‘beyond’, in which the ancient shabti operates, is positioned in complete contrast to Taymour’s



Figure 9. 'I AM NOT YOUR SHABTI'. © Hedayat Taymour

figurines, who manifest the reality of being stuck in the same place (Taymour 2024: 1). One cannot help but wonder if these figurines could collectively represent agents working *against* the pursuit of an ideal life (or indeed simply enjoying life), as opposed to working for this purpose as seen in the role of the ancient shabti.

While discussing a potential display of the figurines for CRE, it became apparent that an identical setup would not be possible for the one-day event. Thus, it was decided that Taymour would pick a selection of figurines from the 180 original ones that could be transported and displayed at CRE. She would bring them to the event herself on the day. I sourced a plinth for their display. However, sourcing and using a large mirror for the installation at CRE was impractical from a logistical standpoint, so it was decided that no mirror would be used. In addition to the installation, we looked to display some of Taymour's initial design drawings alongside the figurines. Including these design drawings would allow the audience to view and understand the creative process behind the making of the figurines. In addition, these drawings could be experienced as artworks in their own right. Two of the figurines would be the subject of a large photo, each to be printed and then displayed behind the main installation. Taymour picked one of these and I picked another. These figurines



Figure 10. 'Burdened'. © Hedayat Taymour.

were called 'Burdened' and 'Chief' (Figures 10 and 11). This collaborative selection process of picking these two figurines was intentional, as it was a manifestation of the overall intention behind the session. Asking why each of us chose the specific sculpture to feature in this way opened a dialogue between Taymour and myself, exploring the visual and emotional draws behind the selection.

'Burdened' was the figure chosen by Taymour to be displayed in larger print form (Figures 10 and 12). This piece was made in emotional response to the removal of house boats on the Nile in 2022 (Middle East Eye Staff 2022; Mohamad 2022). In describing the creation of this piece, Taymour said that:

Burdened was born out of a day filled with deep dejection and hopelessness, following the decision by officials to remove the houseboats on the Nile—spaces that had long been home to artists and writers, and stood as powerful cultural icons of contemporary life along the river in Cairo. Despite widespread opposition and petitions, their removal felt like an erasure of creative history, and the frustration of that loss is what I poured into the piece (Taymour, personal communication).



Figure 11. 'Chief'. © Hedayat Taymour.



Figure 12. Recreation of 'I AM NOT YOUR SHABTI' at CRE 2024. © George Allen.

Here, the dialogue between ancient Egypt and contemporary Egypt is vividly apparent. The colour of 'Burdened' perhaps invokes faience, a common material used for ancient shabtis and other objects, while the posture of the figure, hands on head, represents the despair felt by both the artist and those affected by the contemporary political decision to remove the houseboats.

'Chief' was chosen by me to feature in one of the enlarged images accompanying the installation (Figures 11 and 12). At CRE, Taymour asked why I chose it, and there were a number of reasons for this. The complexity of the textures and the colours were one aspect. I liked how the white, sandy colours complimented the varied, vivid, and shining blue glaze at the base of the figurine. It was also very detailed; the hair on the head looked to be made up of smaller intricate pieces, while the base and much of the middle formed a concentric, wavy, ridge-like pattern and texture. For me, the pattern and colour partly evoked the Nile waters. The pattern being reminiscent of the hieroglyph sign of a water ripple (Gardiner no. N35), and how water is more generally depicted in ancient Egyptian art through this pattern. On closer inspection though, the figurine appeared to have a darker aura. The mouth area was filled with the same textured effect as the hair, which protruded outwards from the figure's face. Combined with the slightly pushed back angle of the upper part of the figure, I felt the subject gave the impression of being silenced, tortured and in pain. This opposition of beauty in the textures, colours, and patterns, with the rather violent aspects of being bound, silenced, and tortured, stirred the greatest mix and juxtaposition of feelings and emotions. The strength of this draw to the figurine was one of the main reasons for choosing it. This theme of being bound was also one of the concepts explored by Taymour in this work overall. My interpretation and understanding of the figure I also hoped would help communicate some of the ideas the session aimed to explore. It was important for me that pain and silence were recognised and emotionally connected with. There is pain in the history of colonialism bound up in Egyptology, and there is silence both inflicted on others and self-inflicted through the unrecognition of harmful practices, harmful narratives, and the suppression of the narratives of others. It is just as important that we communicate and explore

the negative aspects of Egyptology's past, as well the 'fun' and intellectually stimulating elements. In a more abstract way, the tallness of this figure, in comparison to the others, along with the colour, reminded me somewhat of the 'ivory tower' motif. Academics are often accused or perceived as being in, or locked away in, their 'ivory tower' – an idiom for a form of self-imposed and privileged seclusion from the real world and the rest of society, often in order to pursue intellectual interests.

As the plinth material (wood) was not complementary in texture or colour for the figurines, a fabric covering was placed over the plinth. Through discussion between Taymour and myself, a linen style fabric was chosen. This complemented the textures and colours of the figurines but also invoked the mummiform shape and tomb setting of ancient Egyptian shabtis – fitting for an Egyptological audience (Figure 12).

On the day, one sculpture in particular, 'Fermented Mind', was a prominent topic of conversation. This figure was noted for its 'cuteness', due to its apparently smiling face, and the round head emerging from what appears to be a loosely wrapped garment, which visually hides the body (Figure 13). This initial impression is in complete opposite to the concept behind this figure, who represents the incumbent politician, official, or leader, whose lengthy position in office has 'fermented' their mind, causing them to ignore the problems and needs of the people they are supposed to serve. Their own power and position are their primary concern. Another figurine represented soldiers in Egypt: men who are instruments of a militarised society and government, receiving minimal pay,



Figure 13. 'Fermented Mind'. © Hedayat Taymour.

and yet express the upmost kindness and helpfulness toward civilian people on the street (Taymour, personal communication).

As it was an important aim of the session to bring contemporary Egypt to the forefront of the conversation, and specifically to the academic community of CRE, Taymour's work helped facilitate this. The uniqueness and individuality of each figurine adds an incredible amount of depth to the overall art piece. With so much attention to detail given to every individual aspect, 'I AM NOT YOUR SHABTI' provided a three-dimensional essay on the state of society and life, as seen through the lens of the artist, and adapted to an academic conference space.

The Museum of Lies from Katharina Zinn

Art from the MOL project formed the final artistic element of the session (Zinn 2017, 2019, forthcoming). This project was invited to participate as it had already explored ways in which art and academia could work in tandem, achieved through applying interdisciplinary methods with the hope of partly dissolving borders between academic and creative disciplines (Zinn 2017).

This project was centred around several unprovenanced ancient Egyptian artefacts at Cyfarthfa Castle Museum and Art Gallery, Merthyr Tydfil. As traditional object biographies were not possible, researchers, students, artists, and the wider public were brought together to explore these objects through various creative processes, with the expressed aim to connect the objects with the modern identities of these various communities (Zinn 2019: 167–169). The notion of 'lie' was understood in a provocative way as the opposite of a perceived academic truth. Then, combining these truths with fictional situations and ideas that describe real existing material culture, allowed for the different communities and academics to think through these objects in new ways (Zinn 2019: 173).



Figure 14. A scrapbook from the Museum of Lies Project. © Katharina Zinn.



Figure 15. 'Into the Light' by Julia Davis. © Katharina Zinn.

Storytelling and the creation of new narratives facilitated discussions with expanded audiences by allowing groups to connect modern sensibilities to the past, discover academic truths, and advance their own knowledge (Zinn 2019: 185).

As this project was initially driven from the academic perception, the display at CRE also included a poster presentation about it. The artistic outputs of this project and its subsequent sub-projects are vast, including interpretive dance, poetry, short stories, scrapbooks, painting on wood (in the form of a triptych), digital artworks, photographs, sketches, clay sculpture, and larger abstract art pieces (Zinn 2019). Some artwork from the project was not possible to display due its size, and was logistically unfeasible to transport. Others belonged to the creators, such as clay sculptures, meaning that they were unavailable. All the remaining available artwork was displayed and could be transported in-person or by post. The nature of the pieces meant that they were best displayed on tables, like the framed images/text, scrapbooks, and triptych. This enhanced the three-dimensional aspect brought by the 'I AM NOT YOUR SHABTI' display and allowed for more tactile interaction. These pieces could be picked up, looked through, and touched, while Taymour's figurines could not. For example, three student-created scrapbooks were displayed that could be flipped through. These scrapbooks covered wider themes from the study of ancient Egypt, and featured images, drawings, and descriptions of the unprovenanced objects from the museum (Figure 14).

The largest piece of this display was the triptych (Julie Davis, 'Into the Light'), inspired by a wooden Sokar bird. The artwork depicts an image of the wooden Sokar bird from the collection on one panel, a realistic depiction of the bird species on another, and the central panel containing the silhouette of a bird flying into the light (Figure 15; Zinn 2019: 183). The artist was unfamiliar with Egyptological understandings of the object but had managed to capture the notions of the deity Sokar through the artwork (Zinn 2019: 183). Culturally respecting the object was integral to Davis's personal response to the museum piece, and this was reflected in the choice of triptych which was familiar to the artist through their exposure to British/European iconography, but understood by them as a form not unique to a specific belief system, place or time (Zinn and Davis 2019). The artist's recent personal experiences had drawn her to the object, the image of the bird connecting her to the memory of her father (Zinn and Davis 2019).

One specific piece that drew attention and discussion during the art and poster session was the digital image of an anthropomorphic canopic lid, overlaid with flowers as if they were hair (Lid of Canopic Jar [CCM 1706.004] – Photographic Collage – Madeleine Smith, Figure 16). In describing the

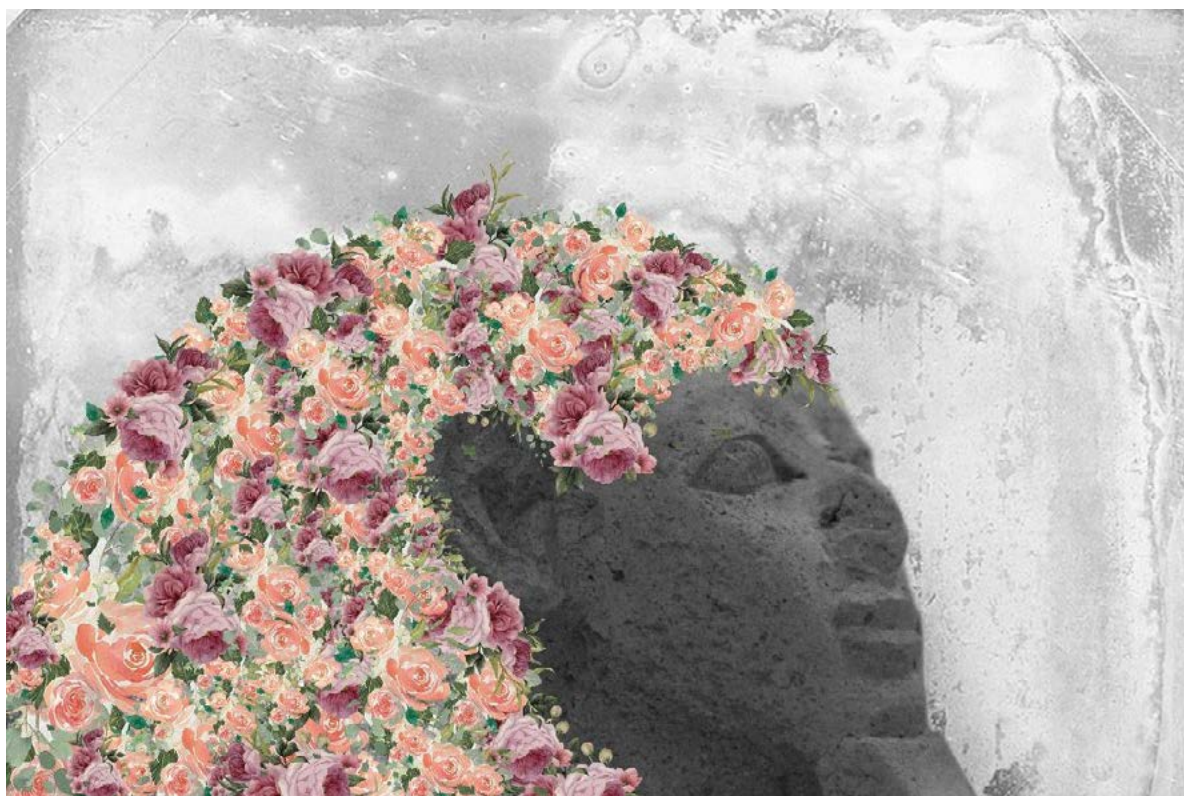


Figure 16. A photographic collage by Madeleine Smith. © Katharina Zinn.

image, Katharina related how, after the work was created, many commented to the artist on how the flowers were reminiscent of her hair. Although not intended to be a self-portrait, the process enabled Madeleine Smith to view and reflect themselves subconsciously through their reinterpretation of the ancient artefact. The conversations around this piece in particular were able to emphasise the subconscious ways in which personal experiences and perceptions can affect creative outputs. This allowed reflection on the processes behind different types of outputs – both academic and artistic.

The MOL project enriched the session in a number of ways. It was able to provide a point of reference for theoretical and academic discussion on the collaboration between artists and academics. The project could demonstrate how artistic practice can benefit teaching and heritage spaces and approaches, from its various successful applications. Attendees would then be able to connect with the motives and aims of the session, through the physical presence of the art and the accompanying explanation of the project. As artwork from Mobarak and Taymour came from the artistic space, the MOL project showcased how artist and academic collaborations can be driven by the academic side. It therefore plugged a directional gap in the understanding of approaches in this type of collaboration.

The academic posters from contributors

The academic posters were placed between the various groups of artworks. To bring all the works of the artists and academics together in a cohesive format, posters were placed near artwork in which thematic links could be made between them. For example, posters that presented research from the museum and heritage sectors were grouped with the Museum of Lies Project; a poster which presented research on wooden figurines was placed near the 'I AM NOT YOUR SHABTI' display; research posters which focused on animals in ancient Egypt were placed next to Mobarak's paintings of animals. This approach emphasised the 'in conversation' element of the broader session, in a way

in which the material content could be consumed and that invited and stimulated the viewer to make connections and form links between the differing artistic and academic content together.

There was some difficulty here in balancing the (presumed) expectations between the primary stakeholders of the session – poster presenters, artists, and attendees. For the poster presenters, one of the major benefits we sought by bringing in the art and artists was to increase the engagement and interest in the session though having a greater variety of media to offer attendees. This would give more opportunities for poster presenters to discuss their work with a larger and more captive audience. From an organisational perspective, this appeared to have been achieved. As poster sessions can have the potential to create cognitive overload through large amounts of reading and digestion of scholarly information, the art provided a means for attendees to process and reflect on information. This was also afforded partly by the size of the physical space. Less cramped than a corridor or corner, all the attendees had room to move about. This retained attendees in the space for longer, and resulted in much less cursory walkthroughs or quick visits to the poster session by attendees. It was also noticed that some participants who wanted to talk to presenters who were already engaged in conversation, would view the artworks to wait, rather than hang around awkwardly by the conversation itself. To my personal surprise, attendees and presenters were still fully entrenched in conversations at the end of the session, and in hindsight, more time for this part of the session would have been beneficial.

A number of presenters found the inclusion of the art and their discussions with the artists enjoyable and stimulating. It gave them options to explore ancient Egypt in new formats, while also offering the experience of communicating ideas with professionals who work outside of formal academia. However, one possible drawback from the session would be that poster presenters could feel overshadowed by the artistic elements. Some informal feedback did indicate this for a few of the poster presenters. There was, then, an unforeseen danger that the art could become such a strong focus that it drew attention away from the posters and those wanting to talk about their research. This may well have been a more widespread feeling had there been more artists, but the balance between the two felt right for the conference size. There is no easy answer to rectify this possible drawback, and it can only be overcome with greater feedback and through trial and error. However, the restructuring of the session in this way brought up questions about the expectations of each group. Specifically, thinking about the nature of the relationship between different actors in the exchange of knowledge and the dialogue around research. From my perspective, I was very much concerned with what each group might gain from the session. For presenters in particular, they might be expecting to benefit from critique and dialogue, especially as poster presentations often present works in progress, preliminary results, or new research ideas. However, this type of event also, I hope, allowed people to reflect on the perception and role of poster presentations – from one possibly more focused on receiving (feedback) from academic peers, to one that has the potential to give (inspiration, new ideas) to other professionals (artists). In this sense, within a session like this the poster presentations have the potential to play a greater role in contributing to a wider audience, achieved through broader viewership and conversations that go beyond the academic.

Converging roles of Artists and Academics

Artists as Researchers

A researcher within indigenous knowledge can be a fisherman, a hunter, a mudbrick builder, or a land surveyor. To put it simply, they are experts – within their own knowledge systems – in any form of inquiry related to their tangible and intangible surroundings and environment. They could have gained this knowledge through their

elders, the land, the water or the classroom, and they can belong to any age group, including the young (Abd el-Gawad 2023: 295).

No doubt, the group of indigenous researchers by this definition could also include the artist. This quote highlights the already overlapping and interdisciplinary way in which history can be researched, understood, and narrated through a multitude of conscious and subconscious methods and practices. Artists have been discussed in a similar way, in which they might often use the same source material as the professional historian – employing comparable, if not identical, methods of research in order to create their work (Desai *et al.* 2009: 22–36). For Taymour, ‘researching historic materials and exploring their potential within [her] work is something [she] finds deeply fulfilling’ (Taymour, personal communication). These terms, ‘*artist*’ and ‘*academic*’, are fairly reductive (see footnote 2 of this article for explanation). Being an artist does not exclude the individual from also being an academic or academically-minded, and vice versa. For instance, Taymour holds degrees in Interior Design as well as Political Science with a minor in Fine Art, while Mobarak holds degrees in Political Science and Development Management. Mobarak’s work in community and philanthropic projects, as well as human rights, combined with the deep, often social messages imbued within her art, would no doubt fulfil the definition of social activist (Mobarak 2019).²⁰

However, this is not to say that all artists are, and consider themselves, researchers. In her work, Mobarak purposefully chooses not to be bound by research or carry out too much of it. To this extent she does not place herself in the role of researcher, stating:

I don’t consider myself a researcher and I’m not a research-based artist. I like to get inspired by historical symbols – in broad strokes – and reinterpret them for the purposes of commentary on contemporary socio-political issues, without being too bound by them or beholden to researching them too extensively, which I find can limit the creative process. I also find that putting too much emphasis on Ancient Egyptian symbols sometimes risks bordering the clichés of Egyptomania (Mobarak, personal communication).

On the flip side, some artists do explicitly identify with the role of researcher. This is reflected by Sara Sallam (n.d. a, n.d. b), who has worked on several projects, and with different museum institutions, focussed on reinterpreting Egyptological collections—she describes herself as ‘a multidisciplinary artist-researcher’ and ‘multidisciplinary artist’.

Operating outside the boundaries of academia, however, means that the research methods employed by artists are not bound by the neglect or elision of emotions, as seen and held imperative within the research process and outputs of the professional academic, be it as historian, archaeologist, Egyptologist, Classicist, etc. (Desai *et al.* 2009: 22–36). In academic settings, emotional explorations and approaches are not common practice, aside perhaps in the field of experimental archaeology. But, to say that history and historical/cultural objects do not elicit emotional responses, or that researchers do not have emotional connection (and responses) to their research or the material they deal with, would seem absurd to assume. The logical purity claimed by the researcher is perhaps to some extent a fallacy. This is not to say that objective research does not exist, just that conscious recognition of bias and emotions does not always exist. The emotional self-reflection of the researcher about their personal, social, and cultural bias in their understanding of the world, and how this is possibly reflected in their work, is not an evident process revealed or commonly noted in academic outputs.

²⁰ On the role of the academic as an activist, see Two Convivial Thinkers (2024: 358–361).

Emotion and Storytelling

As key constitutional and constituent elements of human experience, emotions can and do take a central role in the telling of history in museum settings (Fleming 2014). The emotions embedded into objects through storytelling, and the revealing of a multitude of meanings for different groups, can allow people to connect with history on a personal level (Zinn 2019: 178). Hayden White (1973, 1987, 2002, 2005a, 2005b) extensively discussed the use of narrative in respect to history. He argued for 'recognition that every historical account is a construction in discourse of past reality rather than simply a translation of the facts contained in the evidence into contemporary language' (White 2002: xiii). In a process termed 'emplotment', historians transform historical events into a sequence that is then given a structure, in a similar fashion to myths or literature (White 2005b: 137). Often, historical events will be given a beginning, middle, and an end, and are thus transformed into stories, with some type of moral or ideological covering (White 2005b: 137). Historical writing will always be selective in what elements of the past it discusses and cannot render fully its diversity and complexity (Ankersmit 2005: 220).

Narratives can create an emotional response. This is due to narrative not being processed in a purely cognitive way, and the fact that information can be intentionally manipulated to elicit certain responses (Schneider 2005: 137). This emotional response is highly dependent on the recipient's values and beliefs, which are partially shaped by cultural contexts (Schneider 2005: 137). Although psychological research on the emotional response to narrative has been largely situated in the realm of fictional media (Schneider 2005: 137), one may only think of the public discourse surrounding the evolving narratives around historical figures, like Winston Churchill, to witness how historical narrative can elicit very emotional responses.²¹ Desai *et al.* (2009: 9–11) highlight how there will always be an embodied nature to historical inquiry involving physical and emotional processes, and that there will ultimately be an emotional quality to historical storytelling. The visual arts are undoubtedly recognised as being able to tell stories, and both individually and collectively communicate narrative(s) (Wolf 2005: 431; Bal 2005: 630). Thus, both academics and artists can assume the role of a storyteller and are creators and implementors of narrative within their varying outputs. For instance, Taymour states that she has '...always been drawn to storytelling, especially in how ancient mythology can serve as a lens to examine contemporary issues' (Taymour, personal communication). She further describes herself in the following terms: 'I am a visual storyteller, moulding my pieces into narrative forms. I use clay, stone, plaster and ceramic. My sculpture reflects my thoughts on the human condition and what it means to be human' (Taymour 2024: 1). Meanwhile, in Mobarak's expressive works, it has been noted that 'she weaves intricate narratives that echo the very essence of the human experience' (Khalid 2023).

Audience, motivations, and intentions may differ between the professional artist and the professional academic, but both (in this instance) use and engage with ancient Egypt, its language and/or material culture, in order to tell a story, whether intentionally or not. On the one hand, the academic constructs a narrative based on textual and material data (ancient texts are themselves narratives) to reveal a historical reality, explanation of a particular phenomenon, or a precise account of a series of events. Sometimes, the intent may even be to demonstrate complexity and difference in the ideas and actions of historical peoples and persons, reveal historical narratives that have been ignored/repressed, or even inspire positive outlooks for the future. On the other hand, the artist has the freedom to research and narrate in an intuitive way – their intentions, aims and motives being their own, and perhaps to some extent explicitly their own in a way which is, often, unrecognised by the academic (Desai *et al.* 2009: 9–12). However, there are big differences within

²¹ I invite the reader to look up any comment section in mainstream online articles, videos, and forums discussing the legacy of this mentioned figure, with special attention to how this plays out in the political and news spheres.

academic disciplines and approaches. Traditionally, historians focused on past cultures create narratives within a framework that draws predominantly from the rigorous perceived dominance of a linear understanding of history, manifest in dates following a linear calendar. Thus, placing events and people in a 'correct' sequential order is part of the task of writing history. Egyptology is certainly not free of this, however, it does often (ideally) use diverse datasets in order to approach a more adequate interpretation and explanation of the world. Art, when it investigates and explores things like emotion and meaning, is not necessarily bound by the same frameworks or principles of linear time – indeed concepts of time may even be explored through art. The narrative contained within art does not necessarily have to be fixed or communicate a sequence of events. It can have a fluid quality with its intent, with an enduring ability to be re-interpreted over time, communicating universal or multimodal understandings. Research through art, may then offer alternate means of understanding through differently constructed narratives with respect to time.

Narrative is thus an essential element of both art and academia. In the context of this session, art and academia intersected with ancient Egypt. This then begs the question to what extent, on a personal level, ancient Egypt plays a role in the identity of those placed in close physical and/or metaphysical proximity to it? This is rhetorical, of course. But this question should be food for thought when approaching and understanding the ways in which individuals connect with and convey the ancient past. Whether that manifests in professional, national, and/or spiritual identities, the socio-emotional importance of ancient Egypt to individuals and collectives is polyvalent.

We cannot miss the ironies of the process of cultural translation and adaption which allowed the same group of cultural artifacts, narratives, and images to mean such different things to different actors...the significance of ancient Egypt expanded even further: to know ancient Egypt and, more important, to feel it were crucial within a developing nationalist sensibility (Colla 2007: 273).

This quote from Elliott Colla, in which he is commenting broadly on the role of ancient Egypt in contesting/legitimising colonialism in the context of modern Egyptian identities and political processes, highlights this point. It stresses the need to bring awareness to, and acknowledgment of, the manifold meanings, specifically the emotional responses, ancient Egypt has for different communities. Something which it was hoped was highlighted by the session at CRE 2024.

The expansive definition and understanding of a researcher, given in the quote above from Heba Abd el-Gawad, invites us to think more critically about the 'R' (Research) in CRE. Founded from within Western academia and by an academic community,²² the traditional purview of research has been sought from only the academic space. This is reflected in the most recent call for papers (for CRE 2024) which stated that '[w]e welcome abstracts from all aspects of Egyptology and Nubiology, including, but not limited to: ...', followed by a list of academic disciplines and specific areas of study/research topics. This call did not necessarily exclude other forms of research, but it did not explicitly encourage them either. Both the type of research and from whom it is undertaken is somewhat strictly defined in this call, being further compounded with 'Egyptology and Nubiology' – academic disciplines with colonial origins. But, considering the quote from Abd el-Gawad, does the CRE conference really encompass all types of research(er)?

Calls for those not specifically within 'Egyptology' is an increasingly standard aspect of conferences, but as in the example from CRE 2024 demonstrates, these calls are generally seeking participation

²² The first CRE was hosted by Oxford University in 2000, with the specific purpose to foster communication and knowledge exchange between students of Egyptology at UK universities (McDonald and Riggs 2000: iii). The geographical and disciplinary scope of the conference has grown considerably since then.

from researchers in other academic disciplines (i.e. within the academic system). The term 'interdisciplinary' is generally understood to mean collaboration between academic disciplines when used in the context of academia (Stevenson 2025: 10).²³ This lateral expansion to encompass other academic disciplines invites wider and necessary collaboration, but still restricts the definition of research within the bounds of formalised, Western, academic knowledge systems. Having an active programme of collaborating with non-academic researchers in these spaces is one step to encourage others into dialogue with one another. This could be coupled, in this instance, with changing 'Egyptology' to 'Ancient Egypt'. This is not to suggest that academic Egyptology-focussed conferences be totally disbanded, but rather that spaces be created, restructured, and participated in where academic Egyptology is just one approach, among others, of researching and engaging with ancient Egypt. This approach follows the same vein of thought in which Tully (2011: 140–141) states how engaging a diversity of approaches and communities in the collaborative interpretation of museum displays 'does not mean compromising the scientific nature of archaeology, but rather acknowledges how research integrates with society'. It also follows similar calls taking place within the Classics discipline (Umachandran and Ward 2024).

Separation of these different forms of research may lie in their differing outputs, as already partially touched upon above when discussing the differences between the museum and conference spaces. On the one hand, the academic essentially puts ideas and knowledge into language (written and verbal) through articles, books, museum catalogues, teaching materials, conference talks, object labels, etc. On the other hand, the visual artist mainly, but not exclusively, puts these into image (dynamic and static) through painting, drawing, sculpture, clothing, and dance, among other media. However, written language can and often is used in art (e.g. Figure 8), and is, of course, a major aspect of performance art such as film, poetry, songs, and theatre (which can also be accompanied by strong visual elements). Art is also unrestricted in its sensory output and is more attentive to these elements when compared to the outputs of academics. These varying types of productions require different methods of engagement and will likely appeal to different audiences, and elicit very different responses. As the structure of an academic conference is engineered towards the production of academic outputs (e.g. this volume and their associated lectures), this may be off-putting for certain types of researchers and might make it logistically difficult to accommodate other processes that are producing different types of sensory outputs. On this note, it is worth briefly mentioning here how written academic outputs are also an integral part of professional academia and incentivised by the conference space. For aspiring and early career Egyptologists, having publications is seen as an essential prerequisite, alongside correct qualifications, for obtaining an academic job. In this sense, the conference setting can be understood and experienced as a rather competitive environment, and aspects of collaboration and decolonisation might only be engaged with so long as it aligns with academic goals. The museum space, however, is perhaps more conducive to the visual aspect of art in comparison to the conference and is possibly one of the reasons why this space has at this point been more receptive to artistic inclusion and collaboration. It functions as a space where both artists and the public overlap with an understanding of, and the process of interpreting, history – they feel it emotionally in a way the academic is trained (and claims) not to, yet artists and academics (can) use identical processes and methods in researching the past.

Conclusions

We did not formally collect feedback from attendees; however, the informal, in-person feedback was positive. This different format provided new and engaging conversations, with the artists finding

²³ Stevenson (2025) also mentions how collaboration with non-academic partners is alternatively termed 'knowledge exchange'.

the session both interesting and inspiring. On the whole, poster presenters appeared to benefit from an increased engagement with the session from attendees, with many presenters also stating they enjoyed the new type of session. Although there was some feeling expressed by a few individuals that the art overshadowed the academia slightly. For attendees, many also expressed that the format provided an enjoyable variety of interactions with different media, whilst engaging in important conversations connecting academia to contemporary Egypt. As this was the first attempt at introducing this type of collaboration into, and organising this type of event at, CRE, many aspects could be improved upon if repeated. The following conclusion primarily reflects on aspects of the session which could have gone better, as well as highlighting ways an event like this one could evolve or expand if replicated at future CRE's or other postgraduate academic conferences.

We had planned to find ways of inviting Egyptian nationals and people with Egyptian heritage who live in the local area (and the UK in general) to the event. Connecting diaspora communities with each other, and with visiting Egyptian academics was one of the Organising Committee's goals in doing and creating this event. Our aims had thus been very specific in regard to the type of public participation, as we were looking to invite certain groups. Due to time and resource constraints, this intent was unfortunately not achievable, and this would be something that future events could better plan for. We could have also considered inviting local artists to the event, who may have enjoyed or benefitted from engaging with the artistic displays, the artists, and the subsequent conversation. CRE is technically open for members of the public to attend, but it is not actively advertised outside Egyptological and academic communities. One could argue that as museums already play such a prominent role in public engagement, to what extent the academic conference needs or wishes to open the space to a wider public is something still to be explored further. An increase in public engagement at the conference could provide important experience for early career Egyptologists in explaining their research to those outside of professional Egyptology, an important skill many will need if going into public-facing roles. In its current form, and although not explicitly mentioned in its guidelines, part of the function of CRE is to make early career researchers in Egyptology known to more senior Egyptologists. This type of networking is not unimportant, but the variety and multitude of professional and personal needs of early career academics go beyond this, and should not be what CRE is (informally) structured around.

There was unfortunately no presence of Sudanese art, artists, or academic participants. For the former two elements, this was partly due to the time and resource constraints which resulted in an inability to find and/or contact artists. The ongoing political situation in Sudan likely resulted in the absence of academic participants from the country. Violent clashes between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) have resulted in the displacement of over 12.5 million people as of April 2023. This was on top of already existing political instability, conflicts, economic issues, disease outbreaks, and climate emergencies (The UN Refugee Agency 2025).

Something which we did not have the capacity to facilitate, but which future events could look to do, is the exploration narratives from the perspectives of peoples and regions outside modern Egypt, but which have a connections to it through both ancient and modern relationships. For example, Sudan, Libya, Cyprus, Greece, and the Syria-Palestine region. Equally, the support offered to Egyptian and Sudanese academics could be extended to include scholars from neighbouring regions, like Libya.

Feedback from the event suggested that more time should have been set aside for the poster and art session. Logistically, this session could have incorporated the welcome drinks, had they been at the same venue. This was not possible due to the opening times of the building where the posters and art were presented, but this would have allowed an organic continuation of conversation into a

more informal and relaxed setting. Alternatively, a whole afternoon (approximately 4 hours) could have been set aside for the poster session and Q&A. The artists and art facilitator were also only able to commit a certain amount of time to the conference, and we did not ask for or expect their presence beyond the day or time of the session. Indeed, whole conferences could even be organised around this concept. This session brought discussion and exploration of process to the forefront, in a way in which academics could engage directly with the artists. However, I still had greater access to the art and artists themselves, which was afforded through managing the process of curating the event over a long period of time and prolonged contact with those involved.

This event only scratched the surface with potential avenues of collaboration and engagement outside of academia. For example, the entertainment industry (gaming, film, TV)²⁴ or architecture and landscaping professionals could be potential sources of collaborative presentation in a specially curated space. As the number of graduates in Egyptology is extremely high when compared with the number of academic jobs in Egyptology, the incorporation of other professionals, crafts, and industries in this professional and networking space might allow students and early career scholars to explore future career options better through the networking potential offered by this type of expanded event. This is arguably the purview of the university, but Egyptology departments are often small (sometimes individual Egyptologists are situated in broader ancient studies departments, which themselves may also be small) and there is no guarantee that a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration and networking exists in all of them. There is also the issue of those who carry out research in non-standard ways – for instance through distance and/or part-time methods – do not have the same level of access to networking and discussion opportunities as their full-time and campus-based counterparts. Some elements of proactive, collective action towards networking that facilitates a greater exploration of professional and creative opportunities for participants can only be a positive outcome for all.

The focus on art could also be expanded – more artists and more time would allow for greater networking potential for both artists and academics. One critique of 'Rethinking the Grand Tour' was that having only four voices engaged in the gallery's decolonisation effort seemed tokenistic (Naseem 2023). Had we had a bigger budget, more time, more space, and more volunteers on the project, we would have incorporated more artists, and thus a greater variety of voices. However, for the size of the conference in terms of the number of participants, especially when compared to long term museum exhibitions and large institutions, the three different artistic installations were deemed acceptable. Different media of art (and design) could also be incorporated and were even discussed during the early planning stages: pottery, furniture, homewares, fashion, music, short film, dancing, and acting. These could be live performances or played recordings, in-person displays or printed/projected images.

Through incorporating Egyptian artists, who in this instance took inspiration from ancient Egypt, it is hoped that this event caused academics to reflect on the socio-emotional value that Egyptian material culture has for individual and collective lives and identities, and how the culture and objects continue to play a part in a variety of individual and collective narratives within contemporary culture. Hopefully, this event demonstrated new ways in which the conference space can work towards more innovative, inclusive and expansive collaboration, while also working on active ways to construct a postcolonial framework of knowledge sharing, and networking in academia. The aims brought together in this session do not necessarily need to be tied together in the same space if sought to be reproduced in another context. However, they demonstrate an approach rooted in

²⁴ We did reach out to gaming and TV professionals to find ways of incorporating them within the conference, but unfortunately this could not be brought to fruition.

intersectionality which is important when (re-)creating spaces focussed on equity of its participants and evolving the role and understanding of research in society.

But what next? This session focussed on inclusion within, and expansion of, the conference, to bring in marginalised knowledge systems in the context of wider decolonisation efforts. In this sense, our framework was one which was looking to expand, incorporate, and add to what was existing. However, as highlighted by Olivia U. Rutazibwa (2023: 329), there also needs to be a serious discussion in academia about what needs to be removed, going beyond the processes of enrichment and reforming. CRE 2024's collaborative work methods, highlighted by the multi-institutional make-up of its organising committee and funding streams, demonstrate that organisation by a single university institution is not the only possible method. Two factors encourage the option of more collaborative organisational methods in the future. One is the current over-reliance on university funding, which in an increasingly volatile financial situation within higher education (certainly in the UK), meaning even fewer institutions will have the ability to host the conference and/or have enough students to organise it. This results in less students having the opportunity to organise the conference and also concentrates the shaping of Egyptology within only a select few institutions/departments. Collaboration between higher education institutions is one method to solve these issues, with financial and other resource advantages already outlined by the joint hosting of CRE in 2014 (Pinarello *et al.* 2015: xiii). As a community, CRE could also look towards museums, charities, and self-funding through grants, for both partners and options for the conference's funding, organising and hosting. I echo here the similar encouragement made in the CRE 2014 volume (Pinarello *et al.* 2015: xiii). The second factor is that in its current form, CRE essentially replicates more established academic conference models, generally taking place at university institutions. However, as 'knowledge sources are an important site of colonial reproduction' (Rutazibwa 2023: 330; see also Icaza and Vázquez 2018: 111–112; Shilliam 2018: 59), partially or fully resituating the CRE (conference and community) both physically and conceptually outside the university could help address some of these issues. This is not to say that the university needs to be abandoned with respect to CRE, but that models outside those that enable single institutional oversight and influence should be preferred. With alternative models that focus on collaboration, the university is but one partner of many, helping the CRE community and the conference organisers facilitate specific, and a greater variety of, needs.

Finally, one simply way of generating more accountability, self-reflection and transparency, could come from a more persistent effort to include the frameworks and discussion outcomes of each conference in the CRE volume itself. This is something which has appeared in few volumes. Documenting the evolution and decision making processes of the CRE conference in an open way would benefit future organisers through communicating best practices and a variety of organising methods.

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