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and
Object Biographies

About this issue:

This issue of Birmingham Egyptology Journal contains a selection of papers from the Fifth Annual Birmingham Egyptology Symposium held in May 2019, along with articles of object biographies for museum items with limited or no provenance – something common in many museum collections, but especially in the Eton Myers Collection items that are on loan at the University of Birmingham from Eton College.

As a note – the Journal is open to submissions of articles across the year via the following email address: submissions.bejournal@gmail.com. Please see our website for further guidelines on the submission process.

For reference, other talks and posters presented at the Fifth Annual Symposium in 2019 which have not been published in this issue are listed below.

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The Reign of King Sobekneferu and her Performance of Gender

Kelly-Anne Diamond, Villanova University

Abstract

This paper is about the short reign of Sobekkare Sobekneferu (c.1777-1773 BC) and how she legitimized her reign through the use of both well-entrenched ideas about kingship and the performance of masculinity. Female masculinity was an active alternative for royal women seeking to justify their claim to the throne while still preserving the cultural values of ancient Egypt. This paper illustrates how Sobekneferu provided a model for the later Eighteenth Dynasty female king Hatshepsut for the presentation of her authority. Sobekneferu was not just part of the story of female masculinity, but in fact she was the engineer of a female embodiment of power, a disruption of male privilege, and a separation of masculinity from the male body. This paper acknowledges Sobekkare Sobekneferu's importance as a role model for later royal women and explores her position as the mastermind behind female masculinity as a political tool.

Terminology and Keywords

Sakkara List – The king-list on the Sakkara Tablet lists fifty-eight Egyptian pharaohs from the First Dynasty to the Nineteenth Dynasty. It was found in 1861 in the tomb of the official Tjenry.

Karnak List – The Karnak king-list is inscribed in the Festival Hall of Thutmose III. It lists sixty-one kings starting with Snefru of the Fourth Dynasty; however, only thirty-name names are still legible.

Manetho – A third-century BC Egyptian priest and historian who was hired by Ptolemy II to write a history of ancient Egypt in Greek.

Nine-Bows – represented all of the traditional enemies of Egypt. These represented people would change over time and were usually symbolized by nine bows displayed under the king's feet.

Sedeinga – Located between the second and third cataracts on the left bank of the Nile. The site is famous for the remains of the temple of Queen Tiye, the great royal wife of Amenhotep III.

Tell Gezer – An archaeological site located in the foothills of the Judean Mountains and in antiquity was strategically placed along the trade routes. It became a major city-state in the early part of the second millennium BC.

Theomorphic – Having a divine form. Something that is formed in the image of a deity and therefore imbued with a divine aspect.

Kumma – Also known as Semna East, an archaeological site in the Sudan located southwest of the second cataract. It was first established in the middle of the Twelfth Dynasty by Senwosret III.

Female Masculinity – Masculinity without men. Masculinity does not need to be constructed by a male body but can be produced outside of it. In this case masculinity is produced by a female body.

Introduction

This article explores the figure of Sobekkare Sobekneferu (c.1777-1773 BC) and how she used gender as a tool to gain and sustain power during her short reign.¹ This work also makes the broader point that female masculinity was an active alternative for royal women seeking to justify their claim to the throne while still preserving the well-entrenched cultural values of ancient Egypt. Sobekneferu's material legacy is not as abundant as those of other rulers', so by necessity we are limited in what we can know about her. This, of course, is in addition to the fact that what we can discern pertains only to her public image, not her private life.

The term female masculinity has been described and explicated by Jack Halberstam, amongst others.² Halberstam's work on female masculinity has inspired this study on Sobekneferu, which brings a new body of theory on female masculinity to the discipline of Egyptology.³ In Sobekneferu's case, masculinity is exposed via a female body. Halberstam's understanding of female masculinity – that female masculinity disrupts accounts of masculinity within which masculinity is the effect of male embodiment and male privilege – serves as a foundation for defining Sobekneferu's unique version of masculinity.⁴ Through her statuary, relief work and smaller artefacts this female king negotiated with the patriarchal system, revealing that masculinity could derive from, and *be constructed by*, outlets other than maleness.

Halberstam's theory challenges the traditional ways of viewing Sobekneferu, but it has also helped this author to formulate new questions about her reign. Scholarship in gender studies has now put us in a position to use gender as an effective lens to explore ancient Egypt, and it is through this lens that this paper hopes to *complicate* the conventional ideas about this lesser known ruler, Sobekneferu.

Sobekneferu ruled at the end of the Twelfth Dynasty (c.1985-1773 BC), following Amenemhet IV (c.1786-1777 BC). Several scholars suggest that she was the wife of Amenemhet IV;⁵ but, there are no contemporary inscriptions that designate her as king's wife.⁶ She might also have been the daughter of Amenemhet III (c.1860-1814 BC), but we cannot confirm this either.⁷ Sobekneferu occupies a unique position in this history, because she was the last ruler of the Twelfth Dynasty and the first female king for whom we have contemporary attestations. Today we would consider her to be a queen regnant, a woman who ruled Egypt in her own right. Yet she promoted herself as *King* of Egypt by assuming a full royal titulary, employing kingly accoutrements, appropriating masculine garb, portraying herself in strong masculine poses, and adopting male prerogatives.

Sobekneferu was recognised in ancient Egypt as a legitimate monarch through various sources. Manetho (early third century BC) calls Sobekneferu 'Skemiophris' and writes that she was the sister of Amenemhet IV (or possibly half-sister), and considers her a legitimate king of Egypt.⁸ According to the Turin Canon, Sobekneferu was king of Egypt for three years, ten months and twenty-four days; she also appears in the Karnak List and Sakkara List.⁹

This work has benefitted greatly from previous research by scholars such as Labib Habachi, Gay Robins, Betsy Bryan, and Gae Callender, to name only a few, who have elucidated the figure of Sobekneferu for us in myriad ways. This work demonstrates the role that masculinity played in Sobekneferu's reign, and how she negotiated her gender to benefit herself politically. This paper will present only the most relevant artefacts from her reign and explain how they reflect her performance of masculinity and how she actively employed masculinity in her quest for, and her projection of, kingship, aligning herself with the current system of power to achieve sovereignty. While these vestiges are minimal because of her short reign and because

¹ The dates in this article follow those in Shaw 2000: 480-489.

² Gardiner 2012: 584-611; Halberstam 2018; Schippers 2007: 85-102.

³ Halberstam 2018.

⁴ Halberstam 2002: 345.

⁵ Gillam 2013: 6296; Ryholt 1997: 209-13.

⁶ Bryan 1996: 29.

⁷ Callender 1998b: 45-56; Gillam 2013: 6296.

⁸ See Africanus' version of Manetho (Fragment 34.7, Syncellus p. 110).

⁹ Callender 1998a: 227-236; Grajetzki 2006:62.

many of her building sites and statuary are now physically inaccessible,¹⁰ they include a statue of her in the Louvre, several statues discovered at the eastern Delta site of Tell el-Dab'a, a bust that was held in Berlin but is now lost,¹¹ building inscriptions from Hawara and Kom el-‘Aqarib in the Faiyum, and random inscribed objects now in several museums, such as the British Museum.¹²

Sobekneferu's female masculinity was a deliberate attempt to capitalise on several well entrenched cultural ideals, such as Egyptian hermaphroditic creator deities, the compositional nature of kingship, and the configurations of dominance and hierarchy in Egyptian art.¹³ Sobekneferu performed military aggression, she erected monuments, she donned male garments and she mediated the relationship between her subjects and the gods. Sobekneferu also acted as the benevolent shepherd king, as the humanity of this office holder emerged as a prevalent theme in the literature of the Middle Kingdom.¹⁴

Representations of Sobekneferu

Sobekneferu situated herself as a military leader and defender of Egypt by showing her ability to harness her raw animal power in her statuary. With military ferocity becoming a feature of kingship in the Twelfth Dynasty, a king's successful reign depended on the display of military prowess.¹⁵ Sobekneferu accomplished this through her seated statues displaying the Nine-Bows, her female sphinx, and her accompanying mighty royal epithets. Two almost life-sized seated statues were discovered at Tell el-Dab'a during Labib Habachi's excavations in the early 1940s (Figures 1A-B p.11). These two headless basalt statues of Sobekneferu show her sitting on a throne and include her name and a dedication to Sobek Shedety: 'Sobek, the one from Shedet.' Shedet is the ancient Egyptian name for the modern city of Medinet el-Faiyum, so the statue may have come from this site originally.¹⁶ Shedet became a prominent town in the reign of Amenemhet III, and Callender suggests that Sobekneferu may have wished to capitalise on his public favor by linking herself with his favorite town.¹⁷ Unfortunately, the current location of these statues is unknown.¹⁸ Sobekneferu demonstrated her ferocity in both the style of her statues and the inscriptions carved on them. On both statues her feet sit atop the Nine-Bows, the traditional enemies of Egypt. This motif of trampling the Nine-Bows was used primarily by kings to show their dominion over Egypt's enemies.¹⁹ Egypt's enemies were artistically transformed into nine individual bows, and thus symbolically represented the sum of them all. The bows often appear on a king's footrest and sandals so that the king could perpetually trample Egypt's enemies.²⁰ This traditional male pose with military imagery reinforces Sobekneferu's attempt to be seen as a powerful king.²¹

In the guise of a sphinx, a traditional expression of masculinity and kingship, Sobekneferu illustrated herself intimidating Egypt's enemies. Her basalt sphinx statue was found by Edouard Naville just east of the site where the aforementioned seated statues were found, and apparently it still rests there.²² Naville recorded the remaining inscription on the sphinx, which was then corrected by Habachi in his publication (Figure 2 p.12). In its earliest depictions, the sphinx was half lion and half king and was invariably understood as male

¹⁰ For a detailed account of her reign, see: Desroches-Noblecourt 1986: 108; Gardiner 1961: 141; Grimal 1996: 171; Hayes 1973: 43; Matzker 1986: 18-20, 50f., 94-6, 174f. For a discussion of finds dating to her reign, see: Callender 1998a: 229-236; Habachi 1952: 443-559.

¹¹ The bottom of this statue might be in the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston and is originally from Semna (MFA 24.742) (Fay *et al.* 2015: 89-92).

¹² For example, BM 16581, a blue glazed cylinder seal containing four of the five names of Sobekneferu.

¹³ Diamond 2020; McCarthy 2002: 176-177; Troy 1986: 19-20; Troy 2002: 1-2; Robins 1994: 36.

¹⁴ Silverman 1995: 49-92.

¹⁵ Richards 2010: 57.

¹⁶ Grajetzki 2006: 62.

¹⁷ Callender 1998b: 48-9; also see Habachi 1952: 459-460.

¹⁸ Callender 1998b: 49.

¹⁹ Graham 2001.

²⁰ A great visual example of the Nine Bows appears on a statue of Ramesses II from the British Museum (BM EA 29282).

²¹ Gillam 2001: 301; Habachi 1952: 458-491.

²² Instead of reading the inscription *sbk-[k3]-r^c*, Naville reconstructed *nfrw* at the end of the cartouche based on what he believed to be the name of the queen (Habachi 1952: 462; plate XI C).

(Figure 3 p.12).²³ By the Middle Kingdom (c.2050-1650 BC), princesses and queens appeared in sphinx form (Figure 4 p.13), albeit in passive poses.²⁴ The oldest surviving image of a female sphinx belongs to Ita, the daughter of Amenemhet II.²⁵ These Middle Kingdom female sphinxes assimilated the subject with Hathor in her dangerous, feline form of Sakhmet.²⁶ But Sobekneferu's use of the sphinx in her role as king provided the prototype for Hatshepsut's (c.1473-1458 BC) later employment of the female sphinx in the Eighteenth Dynasty. Hatshepsut erected her sphinx statues at Djoser Djoseru at Deir el-Bahri.²⁷ The maned sphinxes of Hatshepsut from her temple are reminiscent of the Middle Kingdom sphinxes but are smaller and have smiling expressions, and the only part of this type of sphinx that is human is the face (Figure 5 p.13). In a quarry close to Hatshepsut's temple, six granite sphinxes were excavated in the 1920s and 1930s (for one example, see MMA 31.3.166). Likewise, the head and shoulders of yet another granite sphinx were discovered at Deir el-Bahri, whose length has been estimated to be about 3.2 meters, the largest surviving example from Hatshepsut's reign yet discovered (MMA 31.3.167).

Hatshepsut, followed by Queen Tiye (c.1390-1352 BC), took this one step further by also portraying herself as an *aggressive* sphinx defending Egypt and trampling her enemies. Although rarely shown in military scenes, Hatshepsut depicted herself on the south wall of the Northern Lower Portico and the north wall of the Southern Lower Portico at Deir el-Bahri as a sphinx trampling the enemies of Egypt.²⁸

Queen Tiye's images come from the Theban Tomb of Kheruef (TT 192), a carved block from Tiye's temple at Sedeinga, and a carved carnelian plaque showing the queen as a winged sphinx with human arms, now housed in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (Figure 6 p.14).²⁹ In Kheruef's tomb, Tiye is shown sitting on a throne with an illustration of female captives between the chair legs. On the side panel of the throne she tramples female Nubian and Asiatic captives in the form of a female sphinx; the accompanying inscription to the left reads 'trampling all the foreign lands.' The feminised symbolism in this throne's decoration shows the queen dominating the known world (north and south), and subjugating Egypt via the *sm3 t3wy* motif. Here, Queen Tiye as a sphinx wears a crown on her head and a uraeus on her brow. The throne itself is also in the form of a female sphinx with the ebony lion legs and the head of the crowned queen on the right of the visible side of the throne.³⁰ Queen Tiye also appears in sphinx form at her temple at Sedeinga, where her divinity was celebrated while she was alive.³¹ What is intriguing is that all of the contexts in which Queen Tiye appears as a sphinx were outside of the public sphere: these representations occur only inside private tomb chapels and outside of Egypt.³² It may have been acceptable for Sobekneferu and Hatshepsut to display their ferocity in a public area because they were the kings of Egypt, and not the queen consort as was the case with Tiye. These images of Tiye may have threatened the power of Amenhotep III, indicating her strength and ability to act in the form of a female sphinx. The vigilant face of the sphinx and the violent, savage imagery of its body projected an aggressive military might.

Mutnodjmet (c.1319-1292 BC), the wife of Horemheb, also has a scene on the side of her husband's coronation statue (now in Turin, no. 1379) that shows her as a winged human-headed sphinx with Tefnut's crown.³³ Although rare, this practice continued with the God's Wife of Amun Shepenwepet II (c.700-650 BC) who is shown as a sphinx offering a ram-headed jar to the god Amun.³⁴

By their use of the female sphinx imagery, Sobekneferu, Hatshepsut, and Queen Tiye each summoned the powers of Hathor/Sakhmet, who was the destroyer of Re's enemies and who viciously ravaged the exterior

²³ Morkot 1986: 1-5, note 10; Taterka 2017: 93; Tyldesley 2006: 140, 185; Warmenbol 2006: 159, 288, 290.

²⁴ Roth 2018.

²⁵ Arnold 1996: 107; Hoffmann 2008: 51; Warmenbol 2006: 290.

²⁶ Warmenbol 2006: 159, 288, 290.

²⁷ Roehrig *et al* 2005: 164-167; cat. 88, 89, 90.

²⁸ Naville 1908: 7 and pl. CLX; Taterka 2017: 93.

²⁹ It is likely that this plaque depicts Queen Tiye, but it cannot be confirmed (MMA 26.7.1342). Carney 2001: 33; Matić 2017: 113; Robins 1993: 33; 'Three Engraved Plaques' 1916: 73-75.

³⁰ Matić 2017: 112.

³¹ Gabolde 2015: figs. 4-6.

³² Personal communication with Christian Bayer.

³³ Gabolde 2015: fig. 7; Tyldesley 2006: 140.

³⁴ Tyldesley 2006: 185. See also Warmenbol 2006: 35, 158-9, 173, 177, 290-1, 297, 300.

regions of Egypt. It is therefore not a coincidence that many of the Middle Kingdom female sphinxes have been found in the Levant, as they were intended to incite fear in those inhabitants.³⁵

Sobekneferu's clear assertion that she was willing to take action and fight for Egypt is also expressed in her *nbtj* name, 'Daughter of Power' and her epithet 'Lord of Action.' These titles emphasised her desire to appear fierce and potent. This confident announcement that she is 'Lord of Action, Sobekkare' is found on the sides of the throne of her statues at Tell el-Dab'a. This translation is given by Habachi, but I have amended the text to read 'Lord of Action' instead of 'Master of Ceremonies' and substituted 'Shedet' for 'Faiyum'.³⁶ Unfortunately, the second fragmented basalt statue for Tell el-Dab'a is missing its upper part, feet and pedestal, but Habachi assumed that it resembled quite closely the aforementioned statue. Based on the few remaining visible signs, the inscription on this second statue seems to be the same as the one on the other statue.³⁷ By using the masculine form 'Lord', Sobekneferu highlighted her (traditionally male) role as military aggressor. The fact that the kings of the Twelfth Dynasty rarely stressed a war-like attitude, despite their expansionist policies, further advertised Sobekneferu's ferocity and confirmed her physical prowess as protector of the realm.³⁸ These statues actively worked on her behalf to further her image as a mighty and influential female king.

Sobekneferu considered it imperative to dress like power, as evidenced by a quartzite statue in the Louvre, in which she added male royal garb to her female royal garb (Figure 7 p.14). This statue is the most curious of all Sobekneferu's statues. It was purchased by the museum in 1973 and its original provenance is unknown.³⁹ It is a life size (or larger) quartzite statue, of which only 48 cm of the torso remain.⁴⁰ Over a high-waisted shift dress, Sobekneferu added the royal wraparound kilt with a starched triangular panel in the front. Usually male rulers wore their belts below the navel, but this statue has the belt set above her midriff.⁴¹ Part of the *nemes* headdress can be seen on her shoulders, and she wears a leather chest-pouch pendant resembling that of Senwosret III (c. 1878-1838 BC).⁴² The *nemes* headdress is known before only from male rulers, because all surviving depictions of rulers before Sobekneferu's reign were men. Therefore, she ingeniously combined both female and male garb and complemented her outfit with a beaded belt and apron.⁴³ Sobekneferu's arms may have been raised in prayer, but this is not certain due to the statue's fragmentary nature.⁴⁴ The addition of the male garments to her female garments evokes images of masculine power and authority that augmented her royal image. If the head of the statue were preserved, it would be interesting to see if along with the *nemes* headdress Sobekneferu wore a false beard. In royal imagery, beards conveyed power, aggression and maturity. In general, a beard differentiates a man from a boy and identifies a mature adult male who has passed through adolescence. Mature (or bearded men) were superior to youths in their authority, stature, wisdom and almost everything else, and so the use of a beard most likely acknowledged this ascendancy.⁴⁵

There are two additional statues that may also depict Sobekneferu. There is a dark green schist figurine of a royal woman wearing a cloak that is housed at the Metropolitan Museum of Art (MMA 65.59.1). This royal woman wears a globular wig with horizontal striations and a uraeus on her brow. A pair of vultures with

³⁵ Gabolde 2015: 163, fig. 8.

³⁶ "Lord of Action" is used by Callendar, which I find preferable (1998a: 232); see Willems (2012: 1099) for the ancient toponym *Šdy.t*.

³⁷ Habachi 1952: 459-460.

³⁸ Habachi 1952: plate VIII. See Taterka (2017: 93) for further commentary on Twelfth Dynasty kings.

³⁹ Callendar 1998a: 233.

⁴⁰ Berman and Letellier 1996: 47.

⁴¹ Callendar 1998a: 235.

⁴² See granodiorite statue of Senwosret III from Deir el-Bahri (EA 686) in Baines 2006: fig. 6.

⁴³ Berman and Letellier 1996: 46-47.

⁴⁴ Callendar (1998a: 234, following Delange 1987: 30) postulates that she may have been shown with her arms stretched out on her kilt in an attitude of prayer because the profile view shows her arms had once projected forward. For possible comparatives, see the granodiorite statue of Amenemhat III now in the Cleveland Museum of Art (1960.56) in Oppenheim, *et al.*, 2015: 86 and the granodiorite statue of Senwosret III now in the British Museum (AES 686) in *op. cit.* 276.

⁴⁵ Assante 2017: 65-66.

outstretched wings forms a unique crown incised on the top of her head. She wears a thick cloak with a stiff collar around her that creates a deep V-neck in the front, from which her left hand is exposed and rests on her right breast. According to Callender, the artistic style dates this statue firmly to the late Middle Kingdom; however, others have suggested that the statue is more reminiscent of Old Kingdom iconography, citing Hetepheres II who appears with pointy shoulders in the tomb art of Meresankh III.⁴⁶ The other possibility is a statue fragment from Tell Gezer that displays the inscription, 'the King's Daughter of his body, Sobekneferu, may she live.' All that remains of this statuette is the front part of the base and the feet. Unfortunately, it is not known if this statuette is *the* Sobekneferu who ruled Egypt at the end of the Twelfth Dynasty.⁴⁷ The statuette could also have belonged to the earlier Sobekneferu who was a daughter of Senwosret I. There is nothing on the monument to narrow down the identity of the princess, and there is also the chance that the inscription refers to a different Sobekneferu all together, perhaps the daughter of Senwosret I.⁴⁸ What is compelling is that this is the first piece of royal Middle Kingdom sculpture to be found in Palestine. According to Weinstein, it may have been a gift presented to one of the rulers of the city-states by the Egyptian king, but these gifts have only ever been found in Syria, not Palestine.⁴⁹ If this is indeed the case, this Sobekneferu would be the one we are interested in because she was contemporary with the middle part of the urbanised MB IIA period.⁵⁰ However, there is also the possibility that the statuette came to Gezer post-Middle Kingdom.⁵¹

Enhancing the powerful representations of Sobekneferu in her seated statues, is another statue of her kneeling before the gods (Figure 8 p.15). This fragmentary statue, also from Tell el-Dab'a, shows the king kneeling with her hands on her lap, which may have originally held *nw*-pots.⁵² This gesture arouses ideas of gratitude, blessedness and intended communication, in that Sobekneferu sought wisdom and council from the gods to help her rule according to *mꜣꜥt*.⁵³ This humble position reinforced her dependence on the gods' grace, but also her service to them. It also illustrated that she was the intermediary between her people and the gods and could nurture the fragile, but reciprocal, relationship between the two. Theoretically, only the king could function as the high priest in a god's temple, so this privileged kneeling gesture designated her as the only performer of the cult and as one with an ability to function outside the confines of the physical world.⁵⁴ This presentation was part of the system of artistic decorum that pervaded pictorial representations and accentuated the magnitude of the king's role as intercessor.

As king, Sobekneferu established aspects of the gods on earth, but she was herself a goddess only insofar as there was no existing word for someone transitional between human and divine.⁵⁵ Sobekneferu's official titulary illustrated clearly and succinctly that she was sanctioned by the gods and was ruling at their pleasure. A blue glazed cylinder seal (BM 16581) records four of her five royal names: 'She who is beloved of Sobek of Shedet, King of Upper and Lower Egypt Sobekneferu-Shedety, may she live, the Two Ladies, Daughter of Power, Lady of the Two Lands, Horus of Gold, She whose Appearance is Stable, the Female Horus, She who is Beloved of Re'. Her prenomen or Daughter of Re name, *sbk-kꜣ-rꜥ* 'The one of Sobek, the *ka* of Re', is missing from this group.⁵⁶

Sobekneferu was the Female Horus, and she employed the Horus of Gold name in her titulary. Horus was the royal heir *par excellence* and the epitome of legitimate succession.⁵⁷ The king as Horus-incarnate dates back to early times, but had clearly been used previously by only men. A fragmentary relief from the labyrinth

⁴⁶ Callender 1998b: 52 versus Aronin 2018 and Roth 2018.

⁴⁷ Weinstein 1974: 51-52; Ryholt 1997, 213.

⁴⁸ Weinstein 1974: 51.

⁴⁹ Weinstein 1974: 52-53.

⁵⁰ Weinstein 1974: 53. The Middle Bronze Age is contemporary with the First Intermediate Period, Middle Kingdom and Second Intermediate Period. MB IIA was largely contemporary with the Twelfth Dynasty; however, as more archaeological finds emerge the chronology becomes more controversial (Weinstein 1992: 27-46).

⁵¹ Callender 1998a: 45.

⁵² Habachi 1952: 459.

⁵³ Baines 1995: 9-11.

⁵⁴ Baines 1995: 10.

⁵⁵ Baines 1995: 9.

⁵⁶ Callender 1998a: 233; Callender 1998b: 51; Habachi 1952: 463.

⁵⁷ Meltzer 2001: 119-20.

of Amenemhet III at Hawara shows the *serekh* of that king adjacent to the *serekh* of Sobekneferu, and the Horus of Amenemhet extends the symbols of life and stability towards the Horus of Sobekneferu (Figure 9 p.15).⁵⁸ This scene reinforces that Sobekneferu is Horus-in-the-flesh and situates her in a long line of Horus kings.

Her Horus name 'She who is Beloved of Re' associated her with the sun-god Re. Each king adopted a 'Son of Re' name, which Sobekneferu cleverly adapted to the 'Daughter of Re.' On her statue in the Louvre, Sobekneferu's name is engraved in a cartouche on her belt and reads: 'the daughter of his body, Sobekneferu, may she live like Re forever' (see Figure 7 p.14). It has been postulated that instead of 'the daughter of his body', this inscription should read 'King's Daughter of his body,' which is the more usual version. Or, as Callender suggests, the filiation could refer to Re, who is mentioned in the latter part of the inscription. Her 'Son of Re' name was written in a protective cartouche and associated Sobekneferu with the solar cycle. During the Middle Kingdom this connection was emphasised by the *nswt-bity* name as well, which was a statement about the king's relation to the sun-god.⁵⁹

A third reference to a deity in Sobekneferu's titulary is to Sobek, the crocodile god from the Faiyum. The remarkable choice of the *male* god Sobek, used in his theomorphic form in both Sobekneferu's *nomen* and *prenom*, allowed her to assert her masculinity each time her name was written or read.⁶⁰ This usage promulgated her power through the image of a strong male deity, while at the same time elevating Sobek to the status of a national god. The theomorphic form of Sobek had not been employed in this way by any previous king, so it represented an ingenious method to ensure the cooperation and support of the priests of Sobek and the promotion of the religious and economic centre of Shedet. During the reign of Amenemhet III, a town called Shedet, near Itj-Tawy, became popular. This town was favoured by Amenemhet, who by the reign of Sobekneferu was worshipped as a god. It is possible that Sobekneferu was capitalising on the reputation of Amenemhet III as a great ruler. She also issued a new version of her name in which she included Shedet in her cartouche.⁶¹ Erich Lüddeckens suggests that by using the theomorphic name of Sobek, Sobekneferu was raising herself to the equal status of a god.⁶² This theory is corroborated by the fragmentary Hawara relief (see Figure 9 p.15), where the Horus of Amenemhet offers the symbols of life and stability toward the Horus of Sobekneferu, suggesting that she was on par with Amenemhet, who by this point had become a god.⁶³ Increasingly, the king appeared on equal terms in the company of deities, so this illustration not only solidified Sobekneferu's connection to Amenemhet III, but also demonstrated her divine acceptance as a legitimate king.⁶⁴

Sobekneferu occupied a position as both intermediate and intermediary between the gods and humanity. She was dependent on the gods and expressed her vulnerability, diplomacy and deference through her statuary and titulary.⁶⁵ This special position enabled her to uphold *mꜣꜥt* and rule effectively with the gods' counsel.

Sobekneferu's imagery clearly illustrates a woman in masculine poses with royal insignia, but her quartzite statue in the Louvre shows her with the addition of male garb (see Figure 7 p.14).⁶⁶ Therefore, the known statues of Sobekneferu all show her physiognomy as female, except for her sphinx statue. With the

⁵⁸ Habachi 1952: 464.

⁵⁹ Baines 1995: 9-11.

⁶⁰ A theophoric name was also used by a princess early in the Twelfth Dynasty, so it was not an entirely new invention by Sobekneferu (Callender 1998b: 47).

⁶¹ Callender 1998a: 236; Callender 1998b: 47-49.

⁶² Lüddeckens 1985: 106; see also Callender 1998b: 48.

⁶³ Callender 1998b: 50; Callender 1998a: 234; Habachi 1952: plate XV A.

⁶⁴ Baines 1995: 10.

⁶⁵ Smith describes the kneeling pose as one for offering to a deity (1998: 127). See also Oppenheim *et al.* (2015: 74) for kneeling as an offering gesture. This style first appeared in the Fourth Dynasty and the subject usually holds *nw*-pots, which was the pre-eminent signifier of all necessary offerings to the gods.

⁶⁶ Tyldesley suggests that these statues were designed to stand in her mortuary temple and illustrate her as the idealised dead ruler rather than the living Sobekneferu (2006: 78). If this is the case, then we might need to interpret these statues considering the post-mortem sexual transformation that women underwent in order to reach the Hereafter. The male poses and royal regalia might have been a part of this process.

creation of the Louvre statue, Sobekneferu intentionally modified what she was doing by changing her dress. Wolfram Grajetzki suggests that the so-called 'male garb' (kilt, *nemes* headdress, *etc.*) are better categorised as royal garb and are not a sign of taking over particular male attributes.⁶⁷ He is correct that all previous kings (barring the First Dynasty co-regent Meritneith, for whom we have no surviving depictions) have been male, so inevitably royal regalia, insignia and dress would be conflated with the masculine. But this explanation is too simplistic, because it ignores the dynamics of gender and all of the intentional decisions which Sobekneferu made to enhance her public image, not to mention what these decisions reveal about the possible avenues available to a woman seeking to establish power. By wittingly adding male royal dress to her statue she went one step further in expressing her female masculinity because there was already female royal dress available to her, as shown in her statues from Tell el-Dab`a and her [lost bust from Berlin](#). What is more, the Louvre statue shows her with flattened breasts, a potential precursor to a change in her statues' physique. Callender suggests that this represents the first experimental stage by sculptors to accommodate the female form in pharaonic guise, and that it is reminiscent of Hatshepsut's early statuary.⁶⁸

Sobekneferu also managed to construct an ingenious royal titulary for herself that built off of masculine precedents, but maintained her female identity at the same time. Her Horus name was typically written in the feminine form, but some of Sobekneferu's inscriptions embraced both the masculine and the feminine at the same time. The British Museum cylinder seal displays her Horus of Gold name in the masculine, while everything else is gendered female. In fact, her Horus of Gold name is always written in the masculine form. Her official royal titulary is as follows:

Horus name: *myrt R* 'She who is Beloved (f.) of Re'

Nbty name: *szt shm-nbt t3wy* 'Daughter of Power, the Lady of the Two Lands'

Horus of Gold name: *ddt h* 'She whose Appearance is Stable'

Prenomen: Daughter of Re: *sbk k3 R* 'The one of Sobek, the *ka* of Re'

Nomen: *sbk nfrw* 'The Beauties of Sobek'

As Callender rightly points out, the evidence for Meritneith is incomplete so it is possible that she too had a full royal titulary.⁶⁹ The gender combinations that appear in Sobekneferu's titulary are considered an irregular feature of her name and are usually blamed on incompetent scribes; however, there is another unusual feature of Sobekneferu's name, and that is that it was often written incorrectly. For example, at the site of Kumma in Nubia the king's name is written Neferusobek, with no honorific transposition. Is this a mistake, or does it express her name's pronunciation?⁷⁰ Four reasons have been suggested as to why her name might have been repeatedly corrupted: Sobekneferu's reign was too short for the scribes to get used to writing it correctly; her new theomorphic name confused the scribes; having a female pharaoh on the throne perplexed the scribes and they could not figure out whether to use the traditional masculine or the new feminine; and she also changed her name, adding Shedet, sometime during her reign.⁷¹ All of these theories imply scribal error. These assumptions are reductive and diminish Sobekneferu's creativity and resourcefulness. They also limit the practice of using gender as a bargaining tool to access male privilege and prestige. Sobekneferu's choice of the male crocodile god Sobek reinforces the fluidity of gender in ancient Egypt and the tangible alternative of assembling a public image using different combinations of gendered attributes.

The better-preserved seated statue from Tell el-Dab'a includes both 'Female Horus' and 'Lord of Action' in the same inscription (Figure 1B p.11).⁷² Her more fragmentary seated statue has only 'Lord of

⁶⁷ Grajetzki 2006: 63.

⁶⁸ Callender 1998a: 235.

⁶⁹ Callender 1998a: 228.

⁷⁰ Aufrère 1989: 1-14; Callender 1998a: 232; Valloggia 1964: 45-53.

⁷¹ These possibilities are discussed by Callender (1998b: 51).

⁷² Statue No. 2 in Habachi's publication (1952: 459).

Action', but in her preceding *serekh* the feminine gender ending appears in 'beloved of Re.'⁷³ There is also a cylinder seal in the Cairo Museum (JE 72663) where the queen uses a completely masculine form of her name with the title 'Son of Re,' not the 'Daughter of Re', and the word 'beloved of' written without the feminine 't'. These inscriptions indicate that gender conflation was an accepted tactic used to assimilate a woman to a traditionally male professional role. And in the case of Sobekneferu, her titulary conformed to the androgynous totality of kingship.⁷⁴

To conclude, through these examples of royal women and their surviving images it has been shown that female masculinity was an active alternative for royal women seeking to justify their claim to the throne while still preserving the well-entrenched cultural values of ancient Egypt. So, no longer should Sobekneferu be reduced or omitted from the political narrative of ancient Egypt, but instead she should be championed as the mastermind behind the use of female masculinity as a political and religious negotiating tool. She was the originator of this strategy of embodied power through the performance of masculinity. So, a full three hundred years before Hatshepsut, there was another royal woman on the political scene who stepped into power as a female king, donning a masculine appearance. It was not Hatshepsut who originated this use of female masculinity, but Sobekkare Sobekneferu.

⁷³ Callender 1998b: 51; Habachi 1952: 59-60.

⁷⁴ Troy 1986: 139-143.

Figures



Figure 1A- Statues at Tell el-Dab'a as first discovered. From L. Habachi. 1952. 'Khata'na-Qantîr: Importance', Annales du Service des Antiquités de l'Égypte 52: Plate VI.



Figure 1B - Seated statue of Sobekneferu. From L. Habachi. 1952. 'Khata'na-Qantîr: Importance', Annales du Service des Antiquités de l'Égypte 52: Plate VIII.



Figure 2: Sphinx inscription of Sobekneferu from Tell el-Dab'a. From L. Habachi. 1952. 'Khata 'na-Qantir: Importance', *Annales du Service des Antiquités de l'Égypte* 52: Plate XIX.



Figure 3: MMA 17.9.2. Gneiss sphinx statue of the Twelfth Dynasty king Senwosret III. Possibly from Thebes. Photo courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/544186>



Figure 4: Accession number 56.85. Chlorite head from a female sphinx. Twelfth Dynasty. Photo courtesy of the Brooklyn Museum's website. <https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/objects/3623>

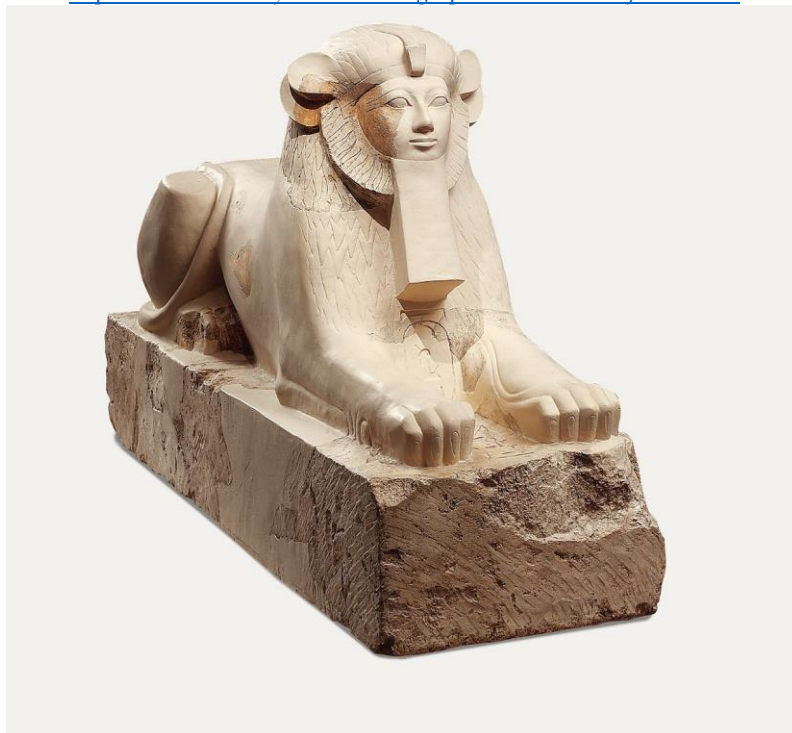


Figure 5: MMA 31.3.94. Small limestone sphinx of Hatshepsut. It was stylized after the Middle Kingdom prototype. Note the lion's mane surrounding the human face. Photo courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art's website: <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/547751>



Figure 6: MMA 26.7.1342. An openwork carved sard plaque from a bracelet probably representing Queen Tiye as a sphinx. From Thebes. Photo courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/544497>



Figure 7: Louvre statue E 27135. Lifesize quartzite statue of Sobekneferu showing both male and female garb. Photo is in the public domain and courtesy of Wikipedia. https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/b/bf/Louvre_032007_01.jpg



Figure 8: Kneeling statue of Sobekneferu from Tell el-Dab'a. Excerpt from Habachi, L. 1952. 'Khata 'na-Qantîr: Importance', *Annales du Service des Antiquités de l'Égypte* 52: Plate VII B.



Figure 9: Line drawing of an image from a column of Sobekneferu at Hawara. The Horus of Amenemhet III offers the emblems of life and stability to the Horus of Sobekneferu. Excerpt from L. Habachi. 1952. 'Khata 'na-Qantîr: Importance', *Annales du Service des Ant*

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The Funerary Roles of Hathor and Inanna: Goddesses and Female Identity in Egypt and the Ancient Near East

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Abstract

The Egyptian goddess Hathor and the Sumerian goddess Inanna were both powerful and multi-faceted deities, connected with various spheres of human existence. Prominent among these were sexuality and, by extension, fertility; so, by contrast, were death and the afterlife. Nevertheless, both goddesses embodied female identity in disparate ways, perhaps with a differing impact on the mortal women who worshipped them. Their respective relationships with death and the underworld may provide a tentative window into how these goddesses were perceived by their worshippers, and how this, in turn, may have influenced female identity in Egypt and Mesopotamia. In discussing the significance of Hathor and Inanna in these long-lived ancient societies, this article will consider textual and artistic evidence from Pharaonic Egypt, from the Early Dynastic (3000–2686 BCE)¹ to the Ptolemaic period (332–30 BCE), and from Mesopotamia, likewise spanning the centuries from the third to the first millennium BCE. The case studies of the female pharaoh Hatshepsut (c.1507–1458 BCE) and the Akkadian priestess Enheduanna (c.2285–2250 BCE) also provide some rare insights into the personal relationships of real (elite) women with their goddesses. While there is little evidence for the personal beliefs of ordinary people in Egypt and Mesopotamia, temple offerings, domestic and mortuary items and some textual sources also allow us to make tentative inferences about what these goddesses meant to their worshippers, and how they may have influenced female identity.

Keywords

Hathor, Inanna, Female Identity, Cthonic

¹ Shaw 2013: 740. Throughout this article I will use Shaw's chronology of Pharaonic Egypt.

Hathor

The cow-goddess Hathor played a primarily nourishing and maternal role in the Egyptian pantheon. She is described variously as both the wife of Re, as a fellow solar-goddess,² and his daughter (such as in *The Contendings of Horus and Seth*, discussed in a later section), and as mother of Horus. The name ‘Hathor’ is transliterated from the hieroglyph *ḥwt-ḥr*, meaning ‘house of Horus’: as his mother, her womb once ‘housed’ the falcon-god. It follows, therefore, that Hathor represents the sky itself.³ Thus, like the male gods with which she was associated, Hathor was a sky- and sun-goddess in her own right, hence her sun-disc headdress (Figure 4, page 23). Hathor and Horus remained intimately linked even beyond the Pharaonic period, with texts from the walls of the Ptolemaic temple at Edfu elucidating the dual processions of Horus and Hathor as part of the ‘Beautiful Feast of Bedhet’.⁴ Yet her name intrinsically reduces her to a vessel for Horus — her identity is defined by this arguably greater male god.

Nevertheless, Hathor was by no means neglected or overlooked in Egyptian religion. By the Fourth Dynasty (2613–2494 BCE) she had arguably come to represent the ‘universal feminine principle’,⁵ with which several other goddesses from the Predynastic deity Bat to the lioness Sekhmet were amalgamated or linked (see section on *The Eye of Re*). Hathor’s primary cult centre was at Dendera,⁶ but her popularity throughout Egypt is demonstrated by the numerous other temples, offerings, texts and artworks produced in her honour, dating, as we will see, from the Fourth Dynasty to the Ptolemaic Period.⁷ As a mother goddess she was rivalled by Isis, another maternal figure closely associated with her husband and funerary god Osiris, who had her own significance in Egyptian religion. She appears in the Old Kingdom Pyramid Texts as a comforting, motherly presence: ‘Isis will nurture [the deceased]’.⁸ Here and in Egyptian myth more generally, Isis is also listed as the mother of Horus with Osiris: ‘she who tied the headband on her son Horus as a young boy’.⁹ Much



Figure 1: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Faience statuette of Isis nursing Horus (c.332-30 BCE), H. 17 cm (6 11/16 in.); W. 5.1 cm (2 in.); D. 7.7 cm (3 1/16 in.), 55.121.5.

² Bleeker 1973: 65.

³ Bleeker 1973: 46.

⁴ Ali 2018: 133.

⁵ Lesko 1999: 83.

⁶ Verner 2013: 445.

⁷ Lesko 1999: 97.

⁸ *Pyramid Texts* 175 (Allen 2005: 49).

⁹ *Pyramid Texts* 467 (Allen 2005: 161).

later, in one vignette of the Nineteenth Dynasty papyrus of Ani (containing one version of the Book of the Dead),¹⁰ Isis and Hathor are both present as the deceased Ani's heart is weighed against the feather of Ma'at, testifying to their involvement in both the creation of life and the passage into the afterlife. Both Isis and Hathor also nourish with their breast milk (see the section on Hathor as king-maker below): numerous statuettes from later periods (dating from c.600 BCE) depict a seated Isis nursing the young Horus (Figure 1, page 20).¹¹ While there are salient differences in their mythology which are too complex to discuss here, Hathor and Isis co-existed as separate mother goddesses, both connected with Horus, throughout Pharaonic history. It was not until the Ptolemaic era that Hathor's prominence was eclipsed by Isis, whose cult was adopted by the Greeks during the Hellenistic period and later the Romans.¹²

King-Maker

Hathor was also closely tied to Egyptian kingship. In royal ideology, 'Hathor became the mother and protector of both the creator sun and his earthly representative, the king'.¹³ As Hathor (Isis notwithstanding) was the divine mother of Horus, and the pharaoh his human embodiment on earth,¹⁴ Hathor was considered the divine mother of the pharaoh. Several Old Kingdom pharaohs thus depicted this 'king-making goddess'¹⁵ as their divine mother or wet-nurse. At his valley temple at Giza, the Fourth Dynasty (2613–2494 BCE) king Menkaure¹⁶ installed four triad sculptures depicting himself accompanied by Hathor and various nome personifications; Menkaure also dedicated temples to Hathor in three of the nomes represented in the triads, in Cynopolis, Thebes and Dendera.¹⁷ In one Menkaure triad depicting (from right to left) the deified Hare nome, Hathor and Menkaure, Hathor occupies a central, enthroned position beside a slightly smaller Menkaure, showing reverence to her divine status. She embraces the king protectively — indeed, their bodies appear somewhat merged together — in what Dunn Friedman identifies as an attempt to legitimise his kingship.¹⁸ At this early stage of Pharaonic history, already Hathor appears as a powerful maternal figure, capable of bestowing the right to rule. The inscription on the base of this statue refers to Menkaure as 'beloved of Hathor, Mistress of the Sycamore'¹⁹ — a funerary epithet of Hathor which will be further discussed below. Pepi I (2345–2181 BCE), too, frequently referred to himself as 'Son of Hathor' in addition to 'Son of Re'²⁰ in his monuments (Figure 2 and Figure 3, page 22), perhaps suggesting parity between the two. Although the inscription in Figure 2 is partial, it names Pepi I as 'son of Hathor' as he kneels, presumably before a god; Figure 3 likewise describes Pepi I as 'the Son of Hathor, Lady of Dendera',

¹⁰ Wallis Budge 1895: ix.

¹¹ Clark 1946: 242.

¹² Lesko 1999: 129.

¹³ Gillam 1995: 218.

¹⁴ Gundlach 2009: 46-47.

¹⁵ Gillam 1995: 234.

¹⁶ Lesko 1999: 85.

¹⁷ Dunn Friedman 2011: 24-25.

¹⁸ Dunn Friedman 2011: 25.

¹⁹ 'King Menkaure, the goddess Hathor, and the deified Hare nome', Harvard University — Boston Museum of Fine Arts Expedition, 09.200.

²⁰ Kraemer 2017: 20; Lesko 1999: 88.



Figure 2: Brooklyn Museum, *Kneeling Statuette of Pepy I*, c. 2338-2298 BCE, Greywacke, alabaster, obsidian, copper, 6 x 1 13/16 x 3 9/16 in. (15.2 x 4.6 x 9 cm), Charles Edwin Wilbour Fund, 39.121.



Figure 3: Brooklyn Museum. *Vase of Pepy I*, c.2338-2298 BCE, Egyptian alabaster, traces of fruit, 2 1/8 x diam. 1 1/8 in. (5.4 x 2.8 cm), Charles Edwin Wilbour Fund, 37.61E.

referring to her cult centre. It was also under his reign that the cult of Hathor at Cusae also flourished.²¹ Into the early Middle Kingdom, Mentuhotep-Nebhepetre (2055–1985 BCE) likewise described himself as the son of Hathor, married six priestesses of Hathor as identified through their tomb inscriptions at Deir el-Bahari,²² and, at Dendera, depicted himself being suckled by the Hathor cow.²³ Mentuhotep-Nebhepetre has also been credited with the establishment of a temple to Hathor at Gebelein.²⁴ Much later, the female king Hatshepsut (c.1507-1458 BCE) likewise styled herself as suckling from the Hathor cow in her own mortuary temple at Deir el-Bahari (see later section on Hatshepsut). This portrayal of Hathor as divine mother and queen, with the ability to empower kings, pervaded the centuries of Pharaonic rule.

²¹ Gillam 1995: 228-229.

²² Gillam 1995: 231; Sabbahy 1997: 164.

²³ Oppenheim et al. 2015: 290.

²⁴ Marochetti 2005: 146.

Figure of Fertility



Figure 4: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 'Menat counterpoise with figures of Hathor as a woman and a cow' (c.1390–1352 BCE), H. 16.3 cm (6 7/16 in.); W. 5 cm (1 15/16 in.), 51.157.2.

Hathor was also a cow-goddess, depicted among others (such as Bat and Mehet-Weret) with bovine attributes (Figure 4). Cattle, and the milk they produce, were a crucial life-giving force in early human society, without which would come starvation and death.²⁵ Women, too, create life, giving milk and therefore nourishment to facilitate human survival.²⁶ Hathor, as both cow and woman, doubly represented this life-giving force, and thus presided over birth and fertility. Along with lesser gods such as the lion-faced Bes and the hippopotamus-goddess Taweret (who will be discussed later), Hathor attended births: one magical text states that 'Hathor will lay her hand on [the woman in childbirth] with an amulet of health',²⁷ evidently a source of comfort and protection to labouring women. Hathor was also associated with the figure of Nebet-Hetepet, 'the Lady of the Vulva', testifying to Hathor's involvement in sexuality, fertility and reproduction.²⁸ Along with Hathor, Nebet-Hetepet is sometimes described as the hand with which the creator-god Atum masturbated and thus created the Ennead,²⁹ introducing into the myth female powers of creation. This fertility function applied not only to the ruling class: ordinary couples also prayed to Hathor for fertility

and virility. Offerings of wooden phalloi and nude female 'fertility' figurines left at her shrine at Deir el-Bahari attest to her sexual and reproductive powers, venerated by men and women of all classes (see later section on ordinary women).³⁰

²⁵ Hassan 1998: 105.

²⁶ Hassan 1998: 105.

²⁷ *The Magical Texts of Papyrus Leiden I 348* (Borghouts 1971: 29, 153, note 365); in Bleeker 1977: 40.

²⁸ Bleeker 1973: 39-40.

²⁹ Pinch, 1982: 146.

³⁰ Pinch 1982: 139.

Mistress of Jubilation

Meanwhile, Hathor, as ‘mistress of inebriety, jubilation, and of music’,³¹ also patronised music, dancing, revelry, and love. Dancing played a role in her cultic activities.³² Hathor was the recipient of ritual ‘mirror dances’,³³ figures from a wall-painting in the Sixth Dynasty (2345–2181 BCE) tomb of Mereruka, four of whom hold mirrors, are said to be playing ‘Hathor’s dancing game’.³⁴ Incidentally, mirrors frequently appear in burials³⁵ and may have had a symbolic purpose in preserving a person’s *ankh* via their reflection,³⁶ making them appropriate tools of worship for the funerary ‘regentrix’ Hathor³⁷ (see section on Hathor as a funerary goddess). Likewise, members of the *khener* dance ‘troupes’ from the Old Kingdom to the New Kingdom invoked Hathor, called ‘the Golden One’.³⁸ The rattle-like *sistrum* and *menat* were also associated with Hathor,³⁹ many of which bear her image (Figure 4, page 23),⁴⁰ and Spell 533 of the Coffin Texts mentions ‘playing music to Hathor’.⁴¹ It has been theorised that the playing of music and rattling of the *sistrum* and *menat* were intended to pacify Hathor’s more destructive aspect,⁴² discussed in the following section. Hathor is also regarded as the patroness of romantic and sexual love in Ramesside love poetry (1295–1069 BCE): ‘let me consecrate breath to the Goddess/that she give me my Love as a gift’.⁴³ As for jubilation, in the New Kingdom tale of *The Contendings of Horus and Seth* (also from a Ramesside papyrus), only Hathor can cheer up the brooding Re by exposing her genitals to him: ‘after a long while Hathor, Lady of the Southern Sycamore, came and stood before her father, the Universal Lord, and she exposed her private parts before his very eyes. Thereupon the great god laughed at her’.⁴⁴

Pinch describes this tale as a ‘farce’⁴⁵ and, according to Wente (whose translation I use here), ‘it is hard to imagine that no humor [sic] was intended’.⁴⁶ The inclusion of the epithet ‘Lady of the Southern Sycamore’ may call to mind Hathor’s more sober funerary role, and her powers of rebirth and revitalisation (discussed further below) in resurrecting Re’s good humour, but may also be an example of *bathos*: a great goddess revealing her genitals for comedic purposes, both within and without the text. Egyptian portrayals of nudity and their symbolic meanings are varied, but while women (clothed or unclothed) are often depicted with a prominent pubic triangle in Egyptian art, female nudity is usually used to represent fertility or sexuality.⁴⁷ Despite her grand titles, here Hathor perhaps displays her less dignified, and more ribald, side.

³¹ Bleeker 1973: 54.

³² Lesko 1999: 113.

³³ Graves-Brown 2010: 167.

³⁴ Graves-Brown 2010: 96.

³⁵ O’Neill 2015: 47, 86.

³⁶ Bianchi 1985: 11.

³⁷ Kozloff 1984: 274.

³⁸ Morris 2011: 73-74.

³⁹ Onstine 2010: 5.

⁴⁰ Pinch 1982: 141.

⁴¹ *Coffin Texts* Spell 533 (Faulkner 1977: 565).

⁴² Pinch 1982: 140.

⁴³ *Papyrus Chester Beatty I*, ‘54. Prayer to Hathor as Goddess of Love’ (Foster 1995: 124).

⁴⁴ ‘The Contendings of Horus and Seth’ 4.1-5 (Wente 2003b: 94).

⁴⁵ Pinch 1983: 148.

⁴⁶ Wente 2003b: 91.

⁴⁷ Goelet 1993: 26.

The Eye of Re

Hathor, therefore, represented not only the creation and nourishment of life, but also its enjoyment; she did not symbolise dutiful conception, but vitality itself. Yet she could, like most gods, also be capricious and violent, requiring prayers and offerings to calm her temper. In the myth of the Heavenly Cow (here referring not to Hathor but the goddess Nut), Hathor, here depicted as the Eye of Re, is the antithesis of her nourishing, life-giving persona. *The Book of the Heavenly Cow* is a 'ritual text' first attested in the Eighteenth Dynasty (1550–1295 BCE) royal tomb of Tutankhamun, among other contemporary tombs in the Valley of the Kings.⁴⁸ Sections of the text have also been preserved on two later New Kingdom papyri from Deir el-Medina.⁴⁹ The text chronicles Hathor's attempted destruction of mankind in the Southern desert as punishment for their plotting against Re. In it, the figurative Eye of Re is summoned to 'smite them [mankind]...who have conspired so wickedly [against Re]'.⁵⁰ The Eye descends 'in the form of Hathor',⁵¹ a force of merciless destruction who '[slays] mankind in the desert' and finds it 'agreeable to [her] heart'.⁵² When Re has an unexplained change of heart⁵³ and decides instead to 'preserve mankind from her',⁵⁴ the only way to placate his marauding Eye is to dye beer red with ochre to resemble 'human blood'⁵⁵ and spread it upon the fields, tricking the Eye into drinking it. 'Delighted' at the prospect of drinking the blood of mankind, the Eye consumes the beer and returns to Re pacified, 'so drunk that she had been unable to recognise mankind'.⁵⁶ Hathor's transformation from furious Eye back to jovial 'Mistress of Inebriety' has been linked to *The Return of the Distant Goddess*,⁵⁷ wherein the titular 'Distant Goddess', identified as the Eye of Re and personified by the lioness Tefnut, storms out to the desert in a fit of rage.⁵⁸ Her return to Re in a festival procession,⁵⁹ attested in Ptolemaic texts from Hathor's Dendera shrine, was celebrated in the annual *Tekh* festival of drunkenness.⁶⁰ Indeed, it is suggested in the text that when Hathor takes the form of the Eye of Re, she is no longer a gentle cow-goddess, but instead becomes the fierce lioness-goddess Sekhmet:⁶¹ 'and so Sakhmet [sic] came into being'.⁶² Evidently, Sekhmet was associated with fury and violence (her name means 'the powerful one'), but also pestilence and disease.⁶³ One convincing reading of this myth suggests that Hathor's transformation into the ferocious Sekhmet is 'a mythical explanation of the uncompromising heat and contagion in summer' prior to the Nile's inundation.⁶⁴ As soon as the Eye of Re is appeased, she turns

⁴⁸ Guilhou 2010: 1; Spalinger 2000: 258.

⁴⁹ Guilhou 2010: 2.

⁵⁰ 'The Book of the Heavenly Cow' ll. 10-15 (Wente 2003a: 290-291).

⁵¹ 'The Book of the Heavenly Cow' ll. 10-15 (Wente 2003a: 291).

⁵² 'The Book of the Heavenly Cow' ll. 15 (Wente 2003a: 291).

⁵³ Spalinger 2000: 271.

⁵⁴ 'The Book of the Heavenly Cow' l. 20 (Wente 2003a: 291).

⁵⁵ 'The Book of the Heavenly Cow' ll. 15-20 (Wente 2003a: 291).

⁵⁶ 'The Book of the Heavenly Cow' l. 20 (Wente 2003a: 291-292).

⁵⁷ Guilhou 2010: 4.

⁵⁸ Richter 2010: 156-157.

⁵⁹ Richter 2010: 156.

⁶⁰ Guilhou 2010: 4.

⁶¹ Richter 2010: 158; Spalinger 2000: 271.

⁶² 'The Book of the Heavenly Cow' l. 15 (Wente 2003a: 291).

⁶³ Richter 2010: 159.

⁶⁴ Guilhou 2010: 4.

back into the nourishing, life-giving Hathor, just as the Nile waters the fertile lands. In addition to Tefnut, both the fellow lioness Sekhmet and Hathor have been identified as the Distant Goddess,⁶⁵ who (similarly to the Eye of Re) is pacified by inebriety during the *Tekh* festival. The intricacies of these goddesses' links to each other — and, indeed, if they can be considered as sub-forms of Hathor or goddesses in their own right — require a paper of their own. Here, it is perhaps enough to conclude that the Eye of Re is associated with a number of goddesses.⁶⁶ What is most interesting, however, is the female characterisation of this powerful and violent entity, and the incongruity of the nurturing Hathor's connection with Sekhmet and apparent thirst for human blood. Bleeker suggests that, in the story of the Heavenly Cow, the Eye of Re has gone rogue— or, as Richter puts it, she is 'overzealous' in her mission.⁶⁷ Without masculine guidance and rationality, her destructive nature runs wild, forcing Re to intervene. The Eye's destructive power never threatens the patriarchal order, however: she is easily corralled and pacified by the king of the gods. Indeed, the Eye of Re's primary function is to protect her master, as Sekhmet and other feline gods were 'ferocious guardians',⁶⁸ perhaps playing on the animalistic urge of mothers to protect their young at all costs (lions and other big cats being particularly dangerous in this regard). While the bovine Hathor's protective, maternal qualities are of a more gentle and comforting style, perhaps the power of Sekhmet, too, lies in what Egyptians regarded as the primary function of woman: motherhood (see page 23).

Though the destruction of mankind is a fascinating episode in Hathor's mythology, she does not typically stray far from her nurturing persona: she must transform completely into Sekhmet in order to fulfil the Eye's violent purpose. As we have seen, however, this uncharacteristic moment of violence arguably embodies the irrational maternal instinct of the lioness, here exercised in the service of a male figure — not entirely unlike Hathor's maternal role in both the royal cult and the lives of ordinary Egyptians.

Inanna

Goddess of Sex (and the City)

The Sumerian goddess Inanna — later merging with, or evolving into, the Akkadian Ishtar (here I use Inanna to encompass both) — likewise occupied a central role in Mesopotamian society and religion. She is attested in writing from at least the Early Dynastic period (c.2900-2340 BCE⁶⁹), occupying a prominent position in early god lists from Abu Salabikh and Fara⁷⁰ as one of 'the most important divine concepts in the developing Sumerian mythological system'.⁷¹ Similar to Hathor, Inanna was linked with the heavens: 'Inanna' translates to 'Queen of Heaven' in Sumerian, and she was also associated with the planet Venus.⁷² Numerous objects associated with Inanna have been

⁶⁵ Richter 2010: 156.

⁶⁶ Darnell 1997: 42.

⁶⁷ Bleeker 1973: 49-50; Richter 2010: 159.

⁶⁸ Pinch 2002: 134.

⁶⁹ I use the CDLI (Cuneiform Digital Library Initiative) chronology for Mesopotamia hereafter.

⁷⁰ Espak 2011: 48-49.

⁷¹ Espak 2011: 49-50.

⁷² Bottéro 1992: 296.

discovered at Uruk,⁷³ Inanna's patron city; in the cosmogony *The Huluppu-Tree*, Uruk is the location of her 'holy garden'.⁷⁴ In the burgeoning urban landscape of Mesopotamia, Inanna was therefore a thoroughly cosmopolitan figure. Inanna, like Hathor, also had royal connections: in the Sumerian Sacred Marriage ritual (dating to at least c.2100-2000 BCE⁷⁵), the king, as the manifestation of the shepherd-god Dumuzi (Inanna's divine consort), was symbolically wed to Inanna.⁷⁶ Whether there was a physical expression of this union (between, for instance, the king and a priestess of Inanna) is a subject of great debate, though the concept of Mesopotamian temple prostitution has been largely deconstructed, as I will discuss later in the section on ordinary women.⁷⁷ In any case, Inanna certainly had a hand in legitimising kingship.⁷⁸ She also presided over love and sexuality, though in this case the focus was on consummation rather than conception. In the Sumerian myth of *The Courtship of Inanna and Dumuzi*, the newlyweds consummate their passion for each other an impressive 'fifty times'.⁷⁹ From her sexuality also comes power: in the tale of *Inanna and the God of Wisdom*, Inanna rejoices 'at her wondrous vulva' and 'applauded herself'.⁸⁰ These lines are a prelude to Inanna's scheme of stealing the divine *me* of the god Enki, establishing her 'wondrous' fertility and sexuality (with a touch of boastfulness). To quote Wolkstein, Inanna is 'delighting in her womanhood and wishing to test its powers'.⁸¹ Even her marriage to Dumuzi is preceded by teasing: 'from the starting of the quarrel/Came the lovers' desire'.⁸² Inanna is not an obedient or submissive wife. Thus, though Inanna's sons are occasionally mentioned in myth, she never conforms to the typical role of wife and mother; she was, instead, the patron of prostitutes⁸³ and a voracious pursuer of men with several notorious paramours, including the hero Gilgamesh. In his titular Epic, Ishtar (here in her Akkadian guise) 'looked with longing' at the handsome king Gilgamesh before proposing marriage.⁸⁴ Gilgamesh rudely declines, listing Ishtar's various failed relationships, from Dumuzi (see the following section on *Inanna's Descent*) to her 'father's gardener', and noting that the objects of her affections invariably meet an untimely demise.⁸⁵ Ishtar responds by setting the Bull of Heaven upon him.⁸⁶ When the hero inevitably slays the Bull, Ishtar 'assembled the courtesans, prostitutes and harlots' to mourn him.⁸⁷ This episode neatly demonstrates Inanna's unabashed sexuality, her connection with and influence over prostitutes, and her savage temper, which is discussed in the following section. Her association with revelry and sexuality notwithstanding, Hathor represented faithful, marital love. By contrast, Inanna's powerful sexuality was not constrained to the state of marriage, nor restrained by patriarchal powers.

⁷³ Collins 1994: 106.

⁷⁴ 'The *Huluppu-Tree*' (Wolkstein and Kramer 1983: 5.)

⁷⁵ Collins 1994: 109-110.

⁷⁶ Wakeman 1985: 11.

⁷⁷ Pryke 2017: 128-129.

⁷⁸ Wakeman 1985: 12.

⁷⁹ 'The Courtship of Inanna and Dumuzi' (Wolkstein and Kramer 1983: 48).

⁸⁰ 'Inanna and the God of Wisdom' (Wolkstein and Kramer 1983: 12).

⁸¹ Wolkstein 1983: 146.

⁸² 'The Courtship of Inanna and Dumuzi' (Wolkstein and Kramer 1983: 34).

⁸³ Jacobsen 1976: 140.

⁸⁴ *Gilgamesh Tablet VI* ll. 6-10 (George 2003: 48).

⁸⁵ *Gilgamesh Tablet VI* ll.32-80 (George 2003: 48-50).

⁸⁶ *Gilgamesh Tablet VII*. 95 (George 2003: 50).

⁸⁷ *Gilgamesh Tablet VII*. 155 (George 2003: 52).

Goddess of War

In addition, Inanna could be invoked as a formidable war goddess, as passionate and violent in war as in love. She takes pleasure in bloodshed: ‘battle is a feast for her’.⁸⁸ She is frequently depicted as a winged, armed warrior, sometimes standing or with one leg resting atop a tethered lion, like a modern-day trophy hunter. Inanna is not merely aligned with lions, but is their master. This prompts an inevitable comparison with the lioness Sekhmet, who, as we have seen, was linked with both Hathor and the destructive Eye of Re. Both Egyptians and Mesopotamians may have come into contact with lions, whose ancient habitat ranged from Africa to as far west as Persia.⁸⁹ In Mesopotamian literature, lions are described as a threat to human life as deadly as the great flood: ‘instead of...the Deluge, a lion could have risen, and diminished the people’.⁹⁰ They were also a symbol of power that was identified with kingship, and appear on the Assyrian royal seal — a fitting motif for the violent goddess who both threatens life and legitimises kingship through the ritual of Sacred Marriage.⁹¹ Likewise, Egyptian literature shows equal parts wariness and admiration towards lions: in the Middle Kingdom tale of *King Cheops and the Magicians* a man called Dedi, who is 110 years of age and possesses superhuman talents, is said to be able to ‘make a lion go behind him, its tether on the ground’.⁹² Likewise, in the contemporary tale of *The Shipwrecked Sailor*, the ill-fated crew have ‘hearts...braver than lions’.⁹³ As in Mesopotamia, lions also took on a royal pedigree: *The Teaching of Amenemhet I* lists subduing lions among the late king’s achievements.⁹⁴ The ferociousness of Sekhmet and other leonine Egyptian goddesses may have been informed by the observation that lionesses are the primary hunters, and therefore perceived as more aggressive than their male counterparts.⁹⁵

Perhaps, then, Inanna has more in common with Hathor’s alter ego Sekhmet than the gentle cow-goddess herself. The Akkadian priestess and poet Enheduanna (c.2285-2250 BCE) describes Inanna-Ishtar as a ‘devastatrix of the lands’ whose ‘malevolent heart is beyond tempering’,⁹⁶ echoing the Eye of Re’s ‘agreeable’⁹⁷ response to destroying mankind. Yet while Hathor-Sekhmet, as the Eye of Re, certainly possessed a vicious streak, and as the ‘Mistress of Inebriety’ Hathor lent her patronage to potential misbehaviour, these elements were arguably tempered by her prevailing wifely and motherly persona. Inanna, meanwhile, failed to conform to a typical female role. She also possesses more agency than either Hathor or Sekhmet, answering to no masculine influence. As both war goddess and divine *femme fatale*, her insatiable appetites are her own.

⁸⁸ Harris 1991: 269.

⁸⁹ Werness 2006: 255.

⁹⁰ *Gilgamesh Tablet XI* ll. 188-189 (George 2003: 95).

⁹¹ Ulanowski 2015: 257-258.

⁹² ‘King Cheops and the Magicians’ ll. 7.1-10 (Simpson 2003a: 18).

⁹³ ‘The Shipwrecked Sailor’ l. 30 (Tobin 2003b: 48).

⁹⁴ ‘The Teaching of Amenemhet I’ 3.3 (Tobin 2003c: 170).

⁹⁵ Werness 2006: 255.

⁹⁶ *The Exaltation of Inanna* ll. 17-19 (Hallo and van Dijk 1968: 39).

⁹⁷ ‘The Book of the Heavenly Cow’ l.15 (Wente 2003a: 291).

Patriarchal creations?

Thus, both Inanna and Hathor were multifaceted goddesses, representing a sometimes unrestrained vitality, though already we see that Hathor conformed more to patriarchal gender roles than the unfettered Inanna. Both goddesses were, too, creations of some of the earliest patriarchal cultures. Hathor's earliest origins are debatable: the horned goddess featuring on the Predynastic Narmer Palette is sometimes identified as Hathor in her typical bovine guise. However, this figure may also represent Hathor's fellow cow-goddess Bat,⁹⁸ described in the Pyramid Texts as 'Bat with her two faces'.⁹⁹ The two-sided Narmer Palette shows two images of the cow-goddess in the upper register of both recto and verso (so that she has in fact four faces), strengthening its association with Bat, whose duality perhaps symbolises the unity between Upper and Lower Egypt emphasised in the imagery of the Palette.¹⁰⁰ Indeed, Lesko suggests that Hathor 'arrived late on the religious scene' in the Fourth Dynasty (2613–2494 BCE), as she is rarely mentioned in the Pyramid Texts (dating to c.2494–2181 BCE)¹⁰¹ — though Bat also has a relatively slim role in the Pyramid Texts beyond the above quotation. Nevertheless, Predynastic figurines with up-reaching arms that mimic cow horns have also been linked to Bat, rather than Hathor, on account of Bat's inward-curving horns¹⁰² (Hathor's are straighter and protrude outwards). The two cow-goddesses also appear to co-exist in one of the aforementioned Menkaure triads, where the Diospolis Parva nome goddess has been identified as Bat.¹⁰³ Bat appears on Menkaure's left, wearing a headpiece depicting a theriomorphic cow with her characteristic inward-curving horns. It is possible that with the rise of centralised kingship in the Old Kingdom, Hathor's royal cult came to absorb Bat,¹⁰⁴ who by Menkaure's reign has taken a secondary role in royal imagery. Lesko therefore posits that Hathor was: '*invented* to be a divine 'right hand' or helpmate, a spouse who nurtured the divine child, the king of Egypt, who was the earthly manifestation of Horus'.¹⁰⁵

Inanna may also be considered a patriarchal creation, predating Hathor. Some of the earliest objects from Uruk bearing the early Sumerian 'Inanna symbol', including tablets, sculptures, cylinder seals and reliefs,¹⁰⁶ date to before or during the Late Uruk period (c.3200-3000 BCE).¹⁰⁷ If Lesko's suggestion is right, Inanna is considerably older than Hathor. Nevertheless, Bahrani suggests that Inanna, too, was a deliberate creation of the burgeoning patriarchy: a symbol of the chaotic, unrestrained feminine against which ordered, masculine civilisation could be defined.¹⁰⁸ Perhaps, then, Inanna simultaneously collaborated with and threatened the patriarchal order. As we will see in a later section, however, the way in which these patriarchal powers originally conceived of these goddesses may have had little bearing on the response of their female worshippers.

⁹⁸ Graves-Brown 2010: 16-17.

⁹⁹ *Pyramid Texts* 460 (Allen 2005: 157).

¹⁰⁰ Hassan 2004: 787.

¹⁰¹ Lesko 1999: 81.

¹⁰² Relke 2011: 413-414.

¹⁰³ Simpson 2002: 112.

¹⁰⁴ Relke 2011: 414.

¹⁰⁵ Lesko 1999: 83.

¹⁰⁶ Collins 1994: 108.

¹⁰⁷ Collins 1994: 107-108.

¹⁰⁸ Bahrani 2001: 154-155.

Funerary Goddesses

Mistress of the West

Perhaps incongruously, both of these vital sky-goddesses were also connected with the chthonic matters of death and the afterlife. Yet another of Hathor's aspects was 'Mistress of the West', denoting the Western Desert which, in Egyptian funerary belief, represented the realm of the dead. From the Fifth Dynasty (2494–2345 BCE) onwards, the funerary gods Osiris and Anubis are both given the epithet *Khentiamentu*, 'Foremost of the Westerners',¹⁰⁹ meaning those who reside in the funerary realm. The connection between the Western Desert and the afterlife, both symbolising a journey into the unknown, is further emphasised in the Middle Kingdom Coffin Texts discussed below. The nurturing Hathor, as Mistress of the West, was seemingly a natural choice for the divine psychopomp who escorted the spirits of the dead into the afterlife, aiding their rebirth.¹¹⁰ As both the Divine Cow and 'Lady of the Sycamore'. Hathor provided nourishment and shelter to the dead. The Nineteenth Dynasty (1295–1186 BCE) funerary stela of Takha(t), a chantress of Amun, shows a cow-headed Hathor emerging from a sycamore and offering food and drink to the deceased,¹¹¹ combining several aspects of Hathor's funerary role. Sycamore trees grew on the desert edge, making them an appropriate motif for the Mistress of the West (not to mention the desert-dwelling Eye of Re or Distant Goddess).¹¹² Hathor's presentation here as a woman with the head of a cow underscores her nourishing role, offering literal sustenance to Takha(t) in the afterlife.

Long before the Nineteenth Dynasty, however, Hathor appears with new emphasis as a funerary goddess in the Middle Kingdom Coffin Texts.¹¹³ She gives the dead 'life in the West'¹¹⁴ and was the creator and guardian of one of the gates to the netherworld, described as 'the great house of Hathor'.¹¹⁵ In one spell, Hathor is in charge of steering the bark of Re, in which the dead were transported to the afterlife.¹¹⁶ Unlike the royal Pyramid Texts, the funerary spells in the Coffin Texts were, in theory, available to the 'common people'.¹¹⁷ The opening of Spell 1, 'here begins the book of vindicating a man in the realm of the dead',¹¹⁸ has an air of equal opportunity for all 'men'.¹¹⁹ As Pinch observes, Hathor also appears in New Kingdom tomb imagery as a cow emerging from the Western Mountain of the Theban necropolis, accompanied by inscriptions stating that: 'great and small are brought (by her) to the place of truth'.¹²⁰ Evidently, Hathor's funerary guidance was no longer reserved for the pharaoh, who was already under her maternal protection. This role, too, can be construed as a maternal one. If death was interpreted by ancient Egyptians as rebirth, Hathor is the one who conveys the deceased into the afterlife, and, as a mother, brings new life into the world.

¹⁰⁹ Smith 2017: 55.

¹¹⁰ Hassan 1998: 107.

¹¹¹ Griffith Institute, Oxford: 71.

¹¹² Lesko 1999: 84.

¹¹³ McGill 2008: 27.

¹¹⁴ *Coffin Texts* Spell 45 (Faulker 1977: 171.)

¹¹⁵ *Coffin Texts* Spell 295 (Faulkner 1977a: 219) and *Coffin Texts* Spell 533 (Faulkner 1977b: 565).

¹¹⁶ *Coffin Texts* Spell 61 (Faulkner 1977a: 239).

¹¹⁷ McGill 2008: 27.

¹¹⁸ *Coffin Texts* Spell 1 (Faulkner 1977a: 28).

¹¹⁹ McGill 2008: 28.

¹²⁰ Pinch 1982: 142.

Hathor's funerary role remained significant throughout Pharaonic history, featuring in the Late Egyptian (c. 664–332 BCE) tale of Merire (found on the *Papyrus Vandier*¹²¹), a court magician who volunteers to take the ailing pharaoh's place in the netherworld. Straddling the boundary of life and death, Hathor can come and go as she pleases, acting as an intermediary for Merire between the realms of living and dead. Through her, Merire discovers that the pharaoh has stolen his wife and property and killed his son; Hathor enables him to take his revenge from beyond the grave.¹²² She plays the part of nurturer and facilitator in the male hero's story, a role that she performs for all of the dead.

Inanna's Descent

Inanna, meanwhile, traditionally had no business in the realm of the dead. The goddess of love, war and passion was the antithesis of the bleak Mesopotamian underworld. Yet, in the Sumerian myth of *Inanna's Descent to the Netherworld* (hereafter *ID*), Inanna attempts to conquer this barren realm, usurping her sister Ereshkigal, queen of the underworld, in a bid to obtain Ereshkigal's chthonic *me* (divine powers).¹²³ Her endeavour is unsuccessful, and Inanna, like Merire, is ultimately imprisoned in Kur (the Sumerian netherworld) and even turned 'into a corpse'¹²⁴ and therefore killed, albeit briefly. Nevertheless, *ID* presents a compelling descent to the underworld or katabasis — an epic topos here undertaken, unusually, by a female protagonist.

Ereshkigal strikes a pitiful figure in *ID*, in mourning for her husband Gugulanna, the Bull of Heaven; later she is described as being in pain, 'moaning with the cries of a woman about to give birth'.¹²⁵ The Sumerian underworld, indeed, is a bleak abode, whose inhabitants know no lovemaking or pleasure, eat clay, and drink muddy water.¹²⁶ Thus Ereshkigal, the vital Inanna's polar opposite, is sometimes interpreted as Inanna's dark side, casting the sisters as two aspects of the same figure.¹²⁷ Frankel theorises that Inanna's katabatic crusade represents her inner struggle, wherein she aims to reconcile her two disparate sides: the vibrant goddess of love and light versus the neglected goddess of death.¹²⁸ While Egypt celebrated Hathor in her funerary role, with festivals,¹²⁹ tomb imagery and spells (as above) designed to court her funereal approval, Ereshkigal was seemingly spurned by the living, with no known iconography. According to Collon, death was an 'unpopular subject' in Mesopotamia.¹³⁰ Perhaps, in allowing herself to be defeated by her dark side, Inanna is confronting the hidden, unsavoury parts of her identity. She is eventually rescued by her female *sukkal* or attendant Ninshubur; she ascends empty-handed, and the tale ends with an exaltation of Ereshkigal.¹³¹

¹²¹ Posener 1978.

¹²² Egedi 2016: 2.

¹²³ While Wolkstein and Kramer's translation of *ID* is based on fragments from Nippur, c.1750 BCE, the myth most likely predates the Late Babylonian period (c.1900-1600 BCE); an abridged Akkadian version dating to c.2444-2154 BCE also exists.

¹²⁴ 'Inanna's Descent to the Netherworld' (Wolkstein and Kramer 1983: 60).

¹²⁵ 'Inanna's Descent to the Netherworld' (Wolkstein and Kramer 1983: 64).

¹²⁶ Dalley 1989: 156.

¹²⁷ Collon 2005.

¹²⁸ Frankel 2010: 120.

¹²⁹ Bleeker 1973: 43.

¹³⁰ Collon 2005: 45.

¹³¹ 'Inanna's Descent to the Netherworld' (Wolkstein and Kramer 1983: 89).

Has the proud Inanna just learned an important lesson in humility and sacrifice, having accepted and come to terms with her own darker aspect?

The text itself gives little insight into Inanna's true motives. Indeed, Inanna appears not to change her arrogant or ruthless ways: upon returning to the living realm, she selects her husband Dumuzi as her replacement in the netherworld, ostensibly as punishment for failing to mourn her, dressed not in mourning clothes but 'shining *me*-garments'.¹³² Removing any (arguably anachronistic) modern psychological interpretations of *ID*, Inanna's katabasis is in aid of her own ambition. She arrives ready to usurp Ereshkigal, girded in her divine regalia: her '*shugurra*' (crown), 'lapis beads', 'royal robe' and 'breastplate', among others.¹³³ The ensuing power struggle shows Ereshkigal as a worthy opponent, who outwits her sister by forcing her to undress, leaving her 'naked and bowed low'.¹³⁴ This undignified defeat is brief, however, and has no lasting effects. Perhaps Inanna's failure to conquer the netherworld serves to reinforce the immutable laws of nature, life, and death for *ID*'s mortal audience. As for confronting her dark side, there is little evidence in the text to conflate Inanna and Ereshkigal into one being. What is most interesting about *ID* is Inanna's aggressive, masculine behaviour in descending to the underworld in the first place; even her failure calls to mind the male hero Gilgamesh, who similarly tries and fails to cheat death.¹³⁵ If we compare Inanna's involvement in the funerary realm with Hathor's, several points of contrast become clear: firstly, that the Egyptian and Mesopotamian formulation of death and the afterlife differ considerably, with the latter more closely resembling the Greco-Roman underworld; secondly, that the goddess Inanna shows mortal traits in being unable to move seamlessly from one realm to the next, and being susceptible to death (though she is also able to come back to life); and thirdly, that Inanna has considerably more personality and agency in her underworld dealings than Hathor.

Comparison of Hathor and Inanna

Though Hathor has symbolic and narrative significance in the tale of Merire from *Papyrus Vandier*, she is ultimately a supporting character in the male protagonist's underworld experience. Her role as a funerary goddess is to nourish, protect, and aid the rebirth of the dead. Her personal motives are non-existent, or simply unimportant, in Egyptian myth. Inanna, meanwhile, acts as the hero: when she invades Ereshkigal's realm, she simultaneously invades the world of male epic, appropriating the topos of katabasis that is now associated with male heroes from Gilgamesh to Aeneas.¹³⁶ While Inanna has her own motivations in *ID*, giving rise to various interpretations, Hathor plays a secondary, selfless role in *Papyrus Vandier*, as elsewhere. Hathor-Sekhmet, as the Eye of Re, wields an Inannaesque power and rains destruction upon mankind, and enjoys it; and for a moment her power escapes Re's patriarchal control (this is especially true of the Distant Goddess tale, who must be tempted back to Re). However, in *The Book of the Heavenly Cow*, the Eye is easily brought back in line. Not only this, but she is fooled into drinking copious amounts of beer to the extent that she is 'unable to

¹³² 'Inanna's Descent to the Netherworld' (Wolkstein and Kramer 1983: 71).

¹³³ 'Inanna's Descent to the Netherworld' (Wolkstein and Kramer 1983: 53).

¹³⁴ 'Inanna's Descent to the Netherworld' (Wolkstein and Kramer 1983: 60).

¹³⁵ *Gilgamesh Tablet XI* ll. 299-318 (George 2003: 98-99).

¹³⁶ Clark 1979: 3.

recognise mankind',¹³⁷ her power entirely nullified. The Eye is also incapable of rationality, calling to mind the time-honoured stereotype of the feminine as irrational and emotional, while the masculine representation (here embodied by Re and his retinue of male gods) is level-headed and reasonable. Inanna, on the other hand, is cunning enough to establish a contingency plan with Ninshubur if she is detained in Ereshkigal's realm¹³⁸ — though she can be hot-headed (as seen in *Gilgamesh*), in *ID* her aggression is complemented by strategy and logic. The Eye is also irrevocably connected with a male possessor — Re — just as Hathor's name, the 'House of Horus', is similarly tied to a male figure. Again, Hathor's very name is an allusion to motherhood: she exists to nurture and nourish others, defined by those who utilise her. This is also reflected in her funerary role: though exalted in funerary texts and powerful beyond mortal comprehension, Hathor merely guides and supports the individual in their journey.

This is not just a question of gender, however: Hathor's functional quality is shared by other Egyptian funerary deities, such as the mummiform ruler of the afterlife, Osiris. Osiris' power in the netherworld is such that both men and women, in funerary stela throughout Egyptian history, are identified with Osiris and referred to by his name.¹³⁹ That everyone, regardless of gender or relative social status, became 'Osiris' in death arguably renders him a figure of convention rather than personality. Naturally, in funerary texts and imagery, the individual is the protagonist in their own transition into the afterlife, while the gods make up the supporting cast. However, it is notable that Hathor, unlike Inanna, does not appear as a protagonist elsewhere. The theriomorphic appearance of Hathor and other gods arguably widens the divide between god and mortal: many of the gods, including Hathor, are fantastical, physically inhuman creatures. As Bleeker observes, the 'theriomorphic shape' of Egyptian gods underscores the 'essential difference between god and man'.¹⁴⁰ This is in contrast to Inanna and other Mesopotamian gods, who look and behave like mortals.¹⁴¹ Inanna is intimately involved with the affairs of the city, and therefore humanity, from the very inception of Uruk (as discussed above). In *ID*, Inanna is subject to the same laws as humans: 'she who goes to the Dark City [or netherworld] stays there'.¹⁴² She requires the divine assistance of the god Enki to escape. By many accounts, Inanna is a formidable and awe-inspiring goddess of war — but as we have seen, she is also fallible, capable of very human failure and disappointment.

Although I have not been able to give Hathor's myriad aspects and forms the detailed treatment they warrant here, none entirely subvert patriarchal roles for women. This is not to say that Hathor is not powerful — after all, she holds the power to bestow and legitimise kingship — but that she, unlike Inanna, is ultimately tied to the primary function of Egyptian women, which was to produce and nurture children (as will be discussed shortly). The very fact that Hathor encompasses so many seemingly disparate spheres under her protective, maternal aegis, as well as disparate lesser goddesses, arguably serves to depersonalise her. Her myriad epithets and titles demonstrate her malleability: Hathor is everything from Mistress of the Vulva to Lady of the Sycamore, connected by the thread of fertility and motherhood. She does not represent individual womanhood but 'the

¹³⁷ 'The Book of the Heavenly Cow' I. 20 (Wente 2003a: 291-292).

¹³⁸ 'Inanna's Descent to the Netherworld' (Wolkstein and Kramer 1983: 53-54).

¹³⁹ Wallis Budge 1895: li-lii; Cooney 2010: 226.

¹⁴⁰ Bleeker 1973: 24.

¹⁴¹ Black and Green 1992: 93.

¹⁴² 'Inanna's Descent to the Netherworld' (Wolkstein and Kramer: 1983 61-62).

universal feminine principle'.¹⁴³ In the following section, I will discuss how these differences may have impacted the way Hathor and Inanna were perceived by the mortal women who worshipped them.

Goddesses and women

Unfortunately, we have little evidence for how ordinary women responded to the myths surrounding either Hathor's or Inanna's funerary activities. What we do know, however, is that two high-profile women listed Hathor and Inanna as their divine patrons, respectively: the Akkadian priestess and princess Enheduanna (c.2285-2250 BCE), and the female pharaoh Hatshepsut (c.1507-1458 BCE).

Enheduanna

In addition to the above roles, Enheduanna, whose father Sargon founded the Akkadian Empire (c.2334-2154 BCE), was a prolific poet, identified as the author of as many as 42 temple hymns, three hymns to the moon-god Nanna (of whom she was priestess), and three hymns to Inanna.¹⁴⁴ Meador describes the latter as 'works of the heart'.¹⁴⁵ Enheduanna, incidentally, is the first named author in known history, defying the ancient trend of anonymity by putting her name to her work. In her *Exaltation of Inanna*, Enheduanna is seemingly cast out of her role as high priestess of Nanna at Ur, perhaps by insurgents rebelling against her father's rule.¹⁴⁶ Yet she entreats not Nanna but Inanna for help. Enheduanna's experience is also somewhat katabatic, having been exiled from the life she knew. She describes herself as barely alive, lost in the wilderness: she has 'exhausted [her] life-strength' as she wanders 'the thorn bushes of the mountains'.¹⁴⁷ Her exile, it seems, is tantamount to a death sentence: 'funeral offerings' are brought for her,¹⁴⁸ as she is 'destroyed...utterly'.¹⁴⁹ She eventually ascends from this personal hell and is restored to her former position, implied to be thanks to Inanna's intervention: 'the powerful lady, respected in the gathering of rulers, has accepted her offerings'.¹⁵⁰ We may speculate that Enheduanna drew comfort and inspiration from the tale of Inanna's own descent, recognising in Inanna a fellow thinking, feeling woman with a complex inner life, and the perfect recipient for her own appeal. Enheduanna at one point casts herself as Inanna's daughter; in the same line, however, she proclaims herself Inanna's wife, both 'captive spouse' and 'captive child'.¹⁵¹ However Enheduanna conceived of her emotional relationship with the goddess, Inanna is not simply a benign maternal figure; the hymn mentions Inanna's vengeful, destructive powers as well as her beneficence. Enheduanna appeals to Inanna as a multi-faceted being whose emotions are as turbulent as her own, asking her to rectify the injustice committed against her. As a celibate

¹⁴³ Lesko 1999: 83.

¹⁴⁴ Meador 2000: 37.

¹⁴⁵ Meador 2000: 87.

¹⁴⁶ Hallo and van Dijk 1968: 3.

¹⁴⁷ *The Exaltation of Inanna* ll. 91-108 (Black et al. 1998-).

¹⁴⁸ *The Exaltation of Inanna* ll. 66-73 (Black et al. 1998-).

¹⁴⁹ *The Exaltation of Inanna* ll. 91-108 (Black et al. 1998-).

¹⁵⁰ *The Exaltation of Inanna* ll. 144-154 (Black et al. 1998-).

¹⁵¹ *The Exaltation of Inanna* l. 139-143 (Black et al. 1998-).

priestess,¹⁵² Enheduanna, like Inanna, existed independently of domestic gender roles: perhaps Inanna provided divine inspiration for single women, something I come back to later. Although Enheduanna presumably believed that Inanna truly was responsible for her reinstatement in Ur, perhaps, in reality, Enheduanna was empowered to conquer her own pseudo-katabatic experience by Inanna's divine example. Thus *The Exaltation of Inanna* arguably showcases an emotional connection between two independent women with comparable katabatic experiences, one mortal and one divine.¹⁵³

Hatshepsut

Hathor, meanwhile, was invoked by the female king Hatshepsut in order to legitimise her claim to the throne. Hatshepsut's mortuary temple at Deir el-Bahari was an exercise in political propaganda, featuring scenes of her conception by Amun-Re (disguised as her true father, Thutmose I) and Queen Ahmose, to prove her royal and divine pedigree.¹⁵⁴ On the walls of her shrine to Hathor, Hatshepsut also depicted herself being suckled by the Hathor-cow, who is cast as Hatshepsut's divine mother and nourisher, saying: 'I have suckled Your Majesty with my breasts'.¹⁵⁵ If, as Pinch puts it, 'the power to rule entered Horus' — and, by extension, the king — 'with the milk of Hathor', here Hatshepsut makes a bold statement to support her right to rule.¹⁵⁶ It is not insignificant that a powerful mortal woman should appeal to a powerful goddess in this way; Lesko describes Hatshepsut's relationship with Hathor as 'intimate',¹⁵⁷ just as Meador describes Inanna as Enheduanna's 'personal' goddess (despite her professional allegiance to Nanna), whom she elevated 'above all other gods'.¹⁵⁸ Arnold goes so far as to suggest that, in the Deir el-Bahari shrine, Hatshepsut attempted to model herself as Hathor incarnate.¹⁵⁹ However, Hatshepsut also famously blurred gender boundaries in her monuments and inscriptions, adapting language and statuary alike to present herself as a female king.¹⁶⁰ Like her Twelfth Dynasty (c.1985–1795 BCE) predecessor Sobekneferu, Hatshepsut seemingly subscribed to a strategy for rulership in a patriarchal society whereby she herself emulated a man.¹⁶¹ Perhaps Hatshepsut did have a personal attachment to the goddess. Or, perhaps, Hatshepsut's exaltation of Hathor was not based on a sense of female community between a woman and a goddess, but rather a shrewd knowledge of male Pharaonic tradition, wherein Hathor was (as we have seen) the 'king-making goddess'.¹⁶² That Hathor presided over all pharaohs arguably detracts from any intimacy between the two.

¹⁵² Harris 1989: 150.

¹⁵³ Meador 2000: 78.

¹⁵⁴ Roth 2006: 149.

¹⁵⁵ Lesko 1999: 107.

¹⁵⁶ Pinch 2002: 138.

¹⁵⁷ Lesko 1999: 107.

¹⁵⁸ Meador 2000: 73.

¹⁵⁹ Arnold 2005: 139.

¹⁶⁰ Robins 2015: 199.

¹⁶¹ Graves-Brown 2010: 129.

¹⁶² Gillam 1995: 234.

Nor did Hatshepsut put Hathor ‘above all other gods’. As above, Hatshepsut also listed Amun-Re as her divine father. We cannot necessarily surmise that, as a woman, she had any more personal connection to Hathor than to Amun-Re. It is safer to assume that Hathor, in her typical nurturing, maternal, milk- and life-giving guise, was simply a means of legitimising Hatshepsut’s rule. Of course, royal women and ordinary women alike may have felt such a personal connection to the goddess who cared for them in love, labour and ultimately death — though the evidence, examined below, is sadly slim.



Figure 5: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Cylinder seal showing ‘pigtailed ladies’ possibly making vessels (c.3300–2900 BCE), 0.79 in. (2.01 cm), 1985.143.

Ordinary women

Though they offer a rare insight into the potential connection between goddesses and women in ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia, neither Enheduanna nor Hatshepsut represent the ordinary woman. Perhaps we can infer from this that individual women formed their own personal relationships with goddesses, whose worship took various forms, from votive offerings to poetry, and had aims varying from romance to rulership. The lives of non-elites, meanwhile, are obscure; as in most ancient cultures, our evidence for specifically female experiences and activities is fragmentary at best, and largely produced by men. However, what evidence we do have for the lives of ordinary women may provide some insights — albeit speculative — into their relationships with the goddesses.

Mesopotamia

Prior to the second millennium BCE and indeed thereafter, women across Mesopotamia — though a geographically and chronologically wide-ranging region — appear to have been relatively liberated, both socially and economically.¹⁶³ It was common for women to work, own property, possess legal rights and hold important religious positions. Ur III (c.2200-2100 BCE) tablets from Garšana and Irisagig attest to a marked female presence in the workforce, wherein women could hold the position of forewoman and seemingly control their own finances.¹⁶⁴ Earlier cylinder seals from the fourth and third millennia BCE also show ‘pigtailed’ figures, interpreted as women, seemingly at work in assembly lines (Figure 5, page 36).¹⁶⁵ Whether women controlled their own position in Mesopotamian economies is debatable,¹⁶⁶ but they certainly played a crucial role in industry.

Mesopotamian women were also reputed to be sexually liberated; as Harris notes, ‘the prostitute in Mesopotamia...was a prime representative of urban life’ and an important aspect of ‘the leisure activities of Mesopotamian men’.¹⁶⁷ So-called ‘temple prostitution’ was supposedly a common practice among the priestesses of Inanna-Ishtar. Due to unreliable sources such as the Greek historian Herodotus and ill-defined terms such as *qadištu* (simply denoting a woman with some kind of religious function), this notion has been deconstructed;¹⁶⁸ the connotation of sexual freedom, however, remains. Furthermore, it has been suggested that the Akkadian term *ḥarīmtu*, traditionally denoting ‘prostitute’, simply signifies a single woman who does not belong to the ‘patriarchally controlled household’,¹⁶⁹ not beholden to her husband or father, and perhaps free to have sex as she pleased.¹⁷⁰ The word *ḥarīmtu* may not have indicated a profession but a social status.¹⁷¹ Every prostitute, then, may have been a *ḥarīmtu*, but not every *ḥarīmtu* was a prostitute. It may have been the case that a woman’s virginity, prized and patrolled by other ancient (and modern) cultures, was simply less valued in a society where women could maintain their own estate. Inanna, both the goddess at the centre of Mesopotamian religion and the ‘divine harlot’,¹⁷² certainly had little concern for her virtue.

It was also not unheard of for Mesopotamian women to be educated, or at the very least literate. Finds at the cities of Nippur and Isin dating to the Old Babylonian period (c. 1900-1600 BC) show that the majority of ordinary households owned texts, and that their members were presumably able to read them.¹⁷³ Female scribes are attested from the same period among the priesthood at Sippar.¹⁷⁴ Even if we cannot be sure that the average Mesopotamian woman in this time would be able to read and write, written literature was, as in many ancient societies, simply one way of

¹⁶³ Asher-Greve 2013, 371; Crawford 2014, 22; Harris 1989: 146.

¹⁶⁴ Lafont 2013.

¹⁶⁵ Porada 1993: 564.

¹⁶⁶ Ruether 2005: 19.

¹⁶⁷ Harris 1997: 82.

¹⁶⁸ Roth 2006: 23; Westenholz 1989: 262.

¹⁶⁹ Assante 1998: 13.

¹⁷⁰ Roth 2006: 24.

¹⁷¹ Stol 2016: 418.

¹⁷² Jacobsen, 1976: 140.

¹⁷³ Veldhuis 2011: 71.

¹⁷⁴ Nemet-Nejat 2002: 150.

communicating stories and myths that were passed down through oral tradition.¹⁷⁵ A Sumerian myth such as *ID*, translated into an Akkadian version (c.2340-2200 BC), and ultimately preserved on Old Babylonian (c.1900-1600 BCE) tablets in its original language, was surely accessible to ordinary women across Mesopotamia in oral form.

The status of women seemingly declined at the turn of the second millennium BCE, coinciding with the marginalisation of goddesses.¹⁷⁶ Ereshkigal, for instance, was usurped by her second husband Nergal as king of the netherworld, as told in the Akkadian myth *Nergal and Ereshkigal*.¹⁷⁷ Yet Inanna, now syncretised with Ishtar, retained her position in the Mesopotamian pantheon for centuries to come, perhaps because she symbolised a particularly female sexuality, and her status as war-goddess was only bolstered by the military campaigns of the second millennium BCE.¹⁷⁸ Mesopotamian society, though increasingly patriarchal, continued to exist under the aegis of a subversive female goddess.

Egypt

In Egypt, on the other hand, women were concerned primarily with the domestic sphere. Unlike Inanna and Enheduanna, ‘while [Egyptian] men were involved in adventures, women stayed at home’.¹⁷⁹ Elite women were interred with male relatives, forced to share their tombs and stelae,¹⁸⁰ on which they are invariably depicted as smaller and less significant than the men (Figure 6, page 39). Didactic texts of the Middle Kingdom emphasise the passive and domestic role of women: the *Instructions of Ptahhotep* state that ‘[a wife] is a profitable field for her lord’, but cautions the reader to ‘keep her far away from power; control her, for her eye is quick and sharp’.¹⁸¹ In contrast to seemingly liberal Mesopotamian values, Myśliwiec argues that virginity was ‘essential’ for Egyptian women in making marriages (though women could also remarry several times).¹⁸² Passivity and chastity were seemingly prized in wives, and Egyptian literature frequently portrays active or unchaste women as predatory and villainous, such as in the New Kingdom *Tale of the Two Brothers*. Both of the titular brothers’ nameless wives are sexually unfaithful and therefore evil; the elder brother’s wife attempts to seduce the younger, saying ‘it was her wish to know him through sexual intimacy’.¹⁸³ This Inanna-esque proposition is poorly received, and results in her death (though she is immortalised as the archetype of the ‘Potiphar’s Wife’ motif¹⁸⁴). However, Ramesside love poetry from Deir el-Medina does hint that premarital sexual relations were not necessarily unilaterally condemned. Depicting the longing between two young people who do not appear to be married, *The Poems of Great Delight* adopt the perspective of the male and female love alternately: ‘she is beautiful

¹⁷⁵ Oppenheim 1964: 22.

¹⁷⁶ Frymer-Kensky 1997: 96.

¹⁷⁷ Dalley 1989: 163-181.

¹⁷⁸ Frymer-Kensky 1997: 103.

¹⁷⁹ Graves-Brown 2010: 34.

¹⁸⁰ Graves-Brown 2010: 33.

¹⁸¹ ‘The Maxims of Ptahhotep’ 10.11 (Simpson 2003b: 139).

¹⁸² Myśliwiec 2003: 146.

¹⁸³ ‘The Tale of the Two Brothers’ (Wente 2003c: 82).

¹⁸⁴ Teyssiere 1998: 62.



Figure 6: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 'Funerary stela of Royal Sealer Indi and His Wife, the Priestess of Hathor Mutmuti of Thinis' (c.2100–2090 BCE), H. 71 × W. 51 cm (27 15/16 × 20 1/16 in.), 25.2.3.

beyond all women'¹⁸⁵ versus 'my lover enkindles my heart by his voice'.¹⁸⁶ To quote Meskell, the Ramesside love songs suggest that: 'ideal love between partners was supposed to be passionate, emotional, and sexual'.¹⁸⁷ Meskell also proposes that while the poems themselves were almost certainly written by men, the female part was intended to be performed by a woman, literally giving the words a female voice.¹⁸⁸ Ironically, a comment from within the poetry itself undermines this notion: according to the male speaker, 'sweet are her lips when they speak,/For she is not given to excessive speech'¹⁸⁹ — though this does not necessarily refute Meskell's suggestion.

Nonetheless, there is little evidence for any class of independent women in Egypt like that in Mesopotamia; motherhood and domesticity were presumably the fate of the majority of Egyptian women. The cult of Hathor can only have promoted this worldview. 'Priestess of Hathor' is a common title for upper-class

Egyptian wives in funerary stelae, usually (as above) belonging primarily to their husbands (Figure 6). Ordinary women and men alike also celebrated Hathor in exchange for fertility, arguably viewing her as a mother-goddess above all. Gillam argues that Hathor came to encompass the 'identity of many fertility and protective goddesses of the folk' — that is, non-elite men and women.¹⁹⁰ Yet Spalinger, in his study of New Kingdom festivals, concludes that temple religion by this time was 'a series of performances for the elite', and that 'the personal connections of Egyptians to these temple gods were limited'.¹⁹¹ Among these 'temple gods' he includes Hathor, whose involvement in the New Year's festival was 'only for a privileged few'.¹⁹² Indeed, the use of hieroglyphs in temples and religious monuments, a mode of writing accessible only to a minority of the population (physically

¹⁸⁵ 'The Poems of Great Delight' 31 (Tobin 2003a: 322).

¹⁸⁶ 'The Poems of Great Delight' 32 (Tobin 2003a: 323).

¹⁸⁷ Meskell 2002: 128.

¹⁸⁸ Meskell 2002: 129.

¹⁸⁹ 'The Poems of Great Delight' 31 (Tobin 2003a: 323).

¹⁹⁰ Gillam 1995: 217.

¹⁹¹ Spalinger 1998: 260.

¹⁹² Spalinger 1998: 254.

and intellectually), arguably attests to this religious elitism.¹⁹³ Gillam's view of 'folk' goddesses is therefore flawed. Indeed, 'folk' deities such as the apotropaic hippopotamus Taweret, who protected women in pregnancy and childbirth,¹⁹⁴ remained popular in domestic settings: she appears on votive stela like that of the Nineteenth Dynasty



Figure 7: The Metropolitan Museum, Taweret amulet (332-30 BCE), H. 5.3 cm (2 1/16 in.), 26.7.888.

necropolis-worker Irynefer, a resident of the workmen's village of Deir el-Medina (his wife is also depicted),¹⁹⁵ as well as protective amulets dating to the Ptolemaic period (332–30 BCE) (Figure 7). Nevertheless, Pinch suggests that 'necklaces made from straw and cakes of mud stuck with broken beads' left as offerings at Hathor's Deir el-Bahari shrine testify to the presence of 'the very poorest stratum of society' and their desire to venerate the great goddess.¹⁹⁶

Hathor was certainly an important goddess for women (and men) across Egyptian society, remaining popular for the better part of two millennia. That Hathor was venerated as mistress of romance and fertility by ordinary people at Deir el-Medina, Deir el-Bahari and undoubtedly elsewhere, indicates that her powers were largely confined to traditionally feminine spheres — for the outcome of love, sexuality and fertility is, inevitably, motherhood. While we can only speculate as to the inner lives of ordinary

Egyptian women, we can imagine that Hathor may have been a powerful figure of comfort and inspiration for the women who worshipped her.¹⁹⁷ Nevertheless, she never steps beyond this maternal mould, whether she is nurturing young love, attending births and rebirths, or nursing pharaohs. Inanna, on the other hand, avoids being typecast as a wife and mother, rejecting and subverting these typical feminine roles.

¹⁹³ Baines 1983: 581.

¹⁹⁴ Lesko 1999: 275

¹⁹⁵ Robins 2008: 189.

¹⁹⁶ Pinch 1982: 140.

¹⁹⁷ Lesko 1999: 113.

Conclusions

In this paper, I have discussed the myriad aspects of the goddesses Hathor and Inanna, examining material and textual evidence from a period of nearly three millennia. I then focused on these goddesses' connections with the funerary realm and the afterlife, comparing Hathor's protective role with Inanna's invasive one. Finally, I explored the possibility that the differing portrayals of Hathor and Inanna, both important and ubiquitous goddesses, may have influenced female identity in ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia (both elite and non-elite), and in what ways.

Hathor's and Inanna's funerary roles illuminate the distinction between the rebellious, ambitious Inanna and the powerful, but non-autonomous, Hathor. While this distinction may be a consequence of differing cultural perceptions of the gods in Egypt and Mesopotamia, it may equally have resulted in differing self-perceptions among their female worshippers. If mortal women looked to the goddesses for an example of female identity, Inanna's heroic role in her descent to the netherworld (among other adventures) may have influenced women to perceive themselves as autonomous and free to pursue their own desires. Enheduanna is one possible example of this attested in surviving literary evidence. If the divine world paralleled that of humans — or, more likely, the divine world was created in the image of the human world — perhaps it is not so tenuous to suggest that Mesopotamian women, like Inanna, could be unattached and autonomous, particularly prior to 2000 BCE. Hathor, meanwhile, was clearly beloved by Egyptians at every social level, from pharaohs (male and female) to ordinary couples hoping for a child. Her aspirational, maternal representation, along with other Egyptian goddesses such as Isis, may have reinforced patriarchal gender roles and led women to seek their identity in motherhood.

We can never conclude with certainty how goddesses may have influenced female identity in Egypt and Mesopotamia. Nevertheless, it is important to underline that these ancient women were thinking, feeling individuals with inner lives, hopes, and beliefs. It is therefore likely that they formed their own individual relationships with such ubiquitous goddesses as Hathor and Inanna, and more than possible that the characterisation of these goddesses at least partly influenced their identity as women.

Figures

- Figure 1. The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Faience statuette of Isis nursing Horus (c.332-30 BCE). H. 17 cm (6 11/16 in.); W. 5.1 cm (2 in.); D. 7.7 cm (3 1/16 in.). 55.121.5. Available from: <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/548310>. Last accessed 23/04/2020.
- Figure 2. Brooklyn Museum. *Kneeling Statuette of Pepy I.* c.2338-2298 BCE. Greywacke, alabaster, obsidian, copper, 6 x 1 13/16 x 3 9/16 in. (15.2 x 4.6 x 9 cm). Charles Edwin Wilbour Fund. 39.121. Available from: <https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/objects/3448>. Last accessed 23/04/2020.
- Figure 3. Brooklyn Museum. *Vase of Pepy I.* c.2338-2298 BCE. Egyptian alabaster, traces of fruit, 2 1/8 x diam. 1 1/8 in. (5.4 x 2.8 cm). Charles Edwin Wilbour Fund, 37.61E. Available from: <https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/objects/3955>. Last accessed 23/04/2020.
- Figure 4. The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Menat counterpoise with figures of Hathor as a woman and a cow (c.1390–1352 BCE). H. 16.3 cm (6 7/16 in.); W. 5 cm (1 15/16 in.). 51.157.2. Available from: <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/548610>. Last accessed 23/04/2020.
- Figure 5. The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Cylinder seal showing ‘pigtailed ladies’ possibly making vessels (c.3300–2900 BCE). 0.79 in. (2.01 cm). 1985.143. Available from: <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/327067>. Last accessed 23/04/2020.
- Figure 6. The Metropolitan Museum of Art. ‘Funerary stela of Royal Sealer Indi and His Wife, the Priestess of Hathor Mutmuti of Thinis’ (c.2100–2090 BCE). H. 71 × W. 51 cm (27 15/16 × 20 1/16 in.). 25.2.3. Available from: <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/552237>. Last accessed 23/04/2020.
- Figure 7. The Metropolitan Museum. Taweret amulet (332-30 BCE). H. 5.3 cm (2 1/16 in.). 26.7.888. Available from: <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/571917>. Last accessed 24/04/20

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Private burials in New Kingdom Thebes: religious belief and identity

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Abstract

The Theban private tombs dated to the New Kingdom (c.1550-1070 BC) are monuments full of symbolism. They belonged to elite officials that wanted to preserve their memory and identity for eternity and ensure their rebirth in the afterlife. Among the functions of these tombs are the protection of the body of the deceased, the preservation of his memory and identity not only among the living but also among the dead, and to act as an instrument for their transformation in the hereafter.

Through the building and decoration of these tombs, we can discern several details of the life of the deceased, his achievements and role in society, and also about Egyptian religious beliefs, their rites and gods, and about many other social, economic and artistic realities of his time.

We cannot forget that these tombs have a magical function related to the mortuary cult, and the interaction between the living and the dead inside of the tombs, which were visited during some festivals celebrated in the necropolis.

This paper aims to analyse these private burials in New Kingdom Thebes and their symbolism, focusing on the buildings themselves, their decoration and the activities that took place inside them. Within the decoration of these tombs, this paper will focus on the 'scenes of daily life', and mainly on the banquet scenes of the Eighteenth Dynasty, because their symbolism is strongly connected to the idea of rebirth, and to Egyptian religious belief.

Keywords

Theban tombs, private tombs, New Kingdom, Thebes, symbolism, tombs, identity, banquet, cult, necropolis

Introduction

Death was one of the most prominent elements within religion in ancient Egypt, as a stage of transition to eternal life.¹ Therefore, for the Egyptians it was important to have a tomb, because they needed to preserve the body of the deceased, and to have a space for the living visitors to pay their respects, and ensure the deceased's transition in the afterlife.

The private Theban tombs of the New Kingdom (c.1550-1070 BC) offer us important information about the function of these monuments and about Egyptian religious thought, as well as about the identity of their owners. These tombs belonged to members of the Egyptian elite who wanted to ensure their rebirth in the afterlife and preserve their identity there. It is the construction and the decoration of the tombs that facilitate this transition to the afterlife, that protects the body of the deceased and commemorates him in the world of the dead and of the living, as these tombs were accessible for the public to visit on certain significant dates, in which it was believed to be possible for the living to interact with the dead, for example, the celebration of banquets.² But also, the surviving evidence in these tombs (their construction and decoration) gives us insights into certain aspects of Egyptian religion and belief and their identity as a society.

This paper intends to analyse the symbolism of these monuments, but for this purpose, basic notions about the historical context (the Egyptian New Kingdom) and geographical context (the necropolis of the city of Thebes) will be offered first. Later, an approach to the role of death in Egyptian religion will be discussed in order to understand the importance of the tomb in Egyptian thought. Next, this paper will analyse the tombs themselves, their structure and decoration, focusing mainly on the scenes of daily life and, within these, the banquet scenes, which bring together a large number of symbolic elements related to Egyptian religious thought and their view of death.

This analysis allows us to see how the private Theban tombs are buildings designed to protect the body of the deceased and perpetuate their memory and identity eternally both in the world of the living and in the world of the dead.

Historical and geographical context of New Kingdom Thebes

Historical context: New Kingdom (c. 1550-1070 BC)

After the invasion of the Hyksos in the Second Intermediate Period (c. 1780-1550 BC), the reunification of Egypt took place during the last years of the reign of Ahmose, the first pharaoh of the Eighteenth Dynasty (1550-1295 BC).³ It is the beginning of the New Kingdom that is characterised as a time of great expansion and prosperity in Egypt.

The first pharaohs of this dynasty gradually expanded the Egyptian territory, and the country enjoyed a peaceful period. With Thutmose I started the Thutmosid period, when an artistic boom occurred.⁴ Later on, in the Amarna period, Akhenaten introduced the monotheistic cult to the god Aten.⁵ This religious change created a crisis and affected many aspects of Egyptian beliefs and art. During this period, the only intermediary between the sun-god and people was the king, so most of the population had no access to the divine help offered by the traditional cults, which had its consequences during the subsequent Ramesside period.⁶

¹ Assmann 2005.

² Hartwig 2004: 5, 8.

³ Morenz and Popko 2010: 101-109.

⁴ Hayes 1978: 74-155.

⁵ Hayes 1978: 280-282; David 2002: 212-235.

⁶ Baines and Froud 2008: 77.

After Akhenaten reigned the mysterious Smenkhare, Tutankhamun, with whom the country reverted back to the old traditions, the vizier Ay and the military official Horemheb, with whom the Eighteenth Dynasty ends as he died childless.⁷

The Nineteenth and Twentieth Dynasties are called the Ramesside period because of the name of many of the pharaohs.⁸ During this period, after the ‘Amarna revolution’, most of the traditional religious beliefs were restored, although some changes remained. Now, the populace was once again free to access and worship the gods after the insecurity of the Amarna period. Moreover, as this paper will demonstrate, as a result of the Amarna period and its aftermath the conception and decoration of the private Theban tombs changed, and were now understood as private mortuary temples, and funerary worship was now integrated with the cult of Osiris.⁹

With the death of Ramesses III, the decline of the Egyptian empire began, due to the division of power between the king and the priests.

Geographical context: Thebes

Thebes is the Greek name of the Egyptian city of Waset, the religious capital of Egypt since the beginning of the New Kingdom, although it is known that there were settlements there since prehistoric times.¹⁰ The area of Thebes would correspond, more or less, to the area between the temples of Karnak and Luxor and would occupy both sides of the Nile river.

In its Western part, in an area of around two kilometres in length, there are different necropolises which were used throughout the New Kingdom, by both royal (the Valley of the Kings and the Valley of the Queens) and private individuals. The private necropolis, which this paper focuses on, occupies the areas of Deir el-Medina, Qurnet Murai, Sheik Abd el-Qurna, el-Khōkha, Deir el Bahari, Dra Abu el-Naga and el-Asasif.¹¹

Deir el-Medina is the southernmost area and was the village of the workers of the royal tombs. Its necropolis was created at the beginning of the Eighteenth Dynasty.¹² The oldest tombs of this necropolis, dated of the reign of Hatshepsut, are in the Eastern part, while those from the post-Amarna period are in the Western part of the site.

The Qurnet Murai necropolis, near Deir el-Medina, has been until recent times under a modern city and that is why many tombs located here have been damaged, although we can still find important examples of paintings and decorative reliefs, like the ones inside the tombs TT 40, TT 276 or TT 277.¹³

Sheik Abd el-Qurna is the central section of the Theban necropolis and one of the most important areas, with the largest number of tombs dating to the Eighteenth Dynasty.¹⁴ Its use began at the same time as the use of the Valley of the Kings, with burials consisting of *saff* tombs, most of them without chapels.¹⁵ The upper part of the site was the first to be occupied because it allowed the direct view of the Great Temple of Karnak above the royal mortuary temples, and was used until the reign of Amenhotep III, when the tomb structure became more complex and there was less availability of space, so then the lower level of the hill was occupied.¹⁶

⁷ Hayes 1978: 297-310.

⁸ Hayes 1978: 326-378; David 2002: 246-291.

⁹ Van Dijk 2010: 377.

¹⁰ Strudwick and Strudwick 1999: 19.

¹¹ Strudwick and Strudwick 1999: 141-142.

¹² Haring 2001.

¹³ Berenguer 2003.

¹⁴ Polz 2001a.

¹⁵ Bryan 2010: 293.

¹⁶ Seidel 1996: 11; Kanawati 2001: 66; Smith 2009: 225.

Another important area is Dra Abu el-Naga, to the North of the necropolis, where we find tombs of the Middle Kingdom, the Second Intermediate Period, and the New Kingdom.¹⁷ It is an area approximately one kilometre long and 250 metres wide divided into two parts, North and South, coinciding with two hills.

In the areas of El-Khôkha and el-Asasif there are tombs of the Eighteenth Dynasty, some Ramesside tombs, as well as tombs of earlier periods. The quality of stone in these areas is higher. For this reason, the elites preferred these locations when the structure of the tombs became more complex architectonically.¹⁸ Despite these modern divisions of the physical space, it should be borne in mind that in ancient times the area was conceived of as a unique sacred space with the name of 'The West of Thebes'.¹⁹

Death and Egyptian religion

Death, the fragmentation of the individual person in a physical and spiritual form, is one of the most prominent elements within the Egyptian religion.²⁰ But before talking about death, we must know how life was understood in ancient Egypt.

For the ancient Egyptians the existence of the whole world and its inhabitants depended on the achievement of different cycles, such as the daily solar cycle or the annual flood of the Nile river. Thus, human existence itself was seen too as something cyclical, in which the rebirth of the deceased was related to the solar cycle.²¹ Therefore, for the Egyptians death was only a state of their existence, a change and not an end that would lead to the afterlife, to eternity.

This relationship between existence and the solar cycle is the reason why the West was seen as the entry point to the Underworld, and why the cemeteries or necropolises were preferably situated in the Western bank of the Nile river.²² As we will see later, this importance of the orientation to the West also influenced the construction of the tombs and their decoration.

Moreover, the Egyptians believed that the universe was inhabited by three kinds of beings: the gods, the living and the dead.²³ Thereby, the human being was composed of different physical parts such as the body, and 'non-physical' parts such as the *ka* or *ba* that still existed after death, and the name and shadow.²⁴ Each of these aspects was capable of independently supporting the existence of the person after death, but each had to be maintained according to its special needs if the afterlife was to be successfully attained.²⁵

The physical body or *khet* had to be preserved after death because it was intended to be an eternal body, the *sah*, a perfect image of the deceased.²⁶ Besides this, its main function was to contain both the *ka* and the *ba*, since for the resurrection its survival and their union were fundamental. This eternal body is different from the earthly one, mainly because of its divine character achieved through the process of mummification.²⁷

The preservation of the heart was important too because it was regarded as the centre of the individual. Inside resided the intellectual, memory and the moral aspects of the individual, so it was preserved inside the body and protected with different amulets, such as the heart scarab shaped from a green stone.²⁸

¹⁷ Jiménez Higuera 2016.

¹⁸ Kanawati 2001: 66; Polz 2001b; Polz 2001c.

¹⁹ Jiménez Higuera 2016: 2.

²⁰ Müller 2001; Assmann 2005.

²¹ Taylor 2001: 11.

²² Seidlmayer 2001.

²³ Taylor 2001: 15.

²⁴ Pinch 2006: 147.

²⁵ Taylor 2001: 16.

²⁶ Taylor 2001: 16.

²⁷ Taylor 2001: 17.

²⁸ Andrews 2001.

The *ka*, considered in some way as the double of the individual, had certain connotations of reproduction, and was also related to the conception itself and represented a link with previous generations.²⁹ During life, it was responsible for all the actions of the individual. Thus, it is also related to the social sphere of the individual, his honour and status.³⁰ After death, it was necessary to feed the *ka* to keep the deceased alive, so that the offerings made by the living inside the tombs were intended to be given to the deceased's *ka*.³¹

The *ba*, commonly represented as a bird with a human head, is considered the 'soul' of the deceased, which separates from the body after death and is able to visit the world of the living or ascend to heaven with the sun god.³² But each night it had to return to the body, or without this periodic contact the deceased could perish. It is also understood as a protector of the corpse.³³

The *akh* or 'spirit' is considered a union between the *ka* and the *ba*, a manifestation of the transformation of the deceased into an eternal being made of light, associated with the stars and the gods.³⁴ One of its most important features was its ability to communicate with the living.³⁵

The name (*ren*) is also important for the survival of the dead because it was an expression of the individuality of the owner, which distinguished him from others. It was closely linked with the prosperity of the name bearer, so the survival of the deceased was also linked to remembrance of the name.³⁶ Therefore, it was necessary that the name of the deceased was pronounced in the rituals of offerings by the visitors to the tombs, as we can see in the inscriptions made on their walls, the funerary texts and a group of texts called the 'Appeal to the Living', which asked the visitors to say a prayer or the name of the deceased to make his eternal survival possible, because 'a man lives when his name is called'. This is related to the belief that the Egyptians had in the power and the magic of the word, both written and pronounced.³⁷

An example of this is the text written in Menkheperresonb's stela in his tomb, dated to the reigns of Thutmose III and Amenhotep II (TT 79)³⁸:

'O living ones on earth,
[people] living in future times,
[*wa'b* priests, lector priests of Osiris Khenamenthes]
all those skilled in divine words:
As they enter my tomb, worship in it,
read my stela, recall my name,
[your god] will favour you...'

The shadow (*shuyet*) could be dissociated from the body too and it contained some part of the individual but its role is not clearly defined, although it was closely identified with the body itself.³⁹ It was a reflection of the body through the sun, considered a symbol of resurrection and rebirth, and it has also a close relationship with the *ba*, as they were judged together in the netherworld.⁴⁰

In addition, after death the deceased was not excluded from society, but the contact between the world of the living and that of the dead occurred through the funeral service, the continued visits to the tombs and

²⁹ Taylor 2001: 19; Bolshakov 2001.

³⁰ Bell 2002: 41.

³¹ Hartwig 2004: 5,8.

³² Harrington 2012: 6.

³³ Harrington 2012: 6.

³⁴ Dodson and Ikram 2008: 16.

³⁵ Harrington 2012: 8.

³⁶ Taylor 2001: 23.

³⁷ Kanawati 2001: 42; Hartwig 2004: 8; Dodson and Ikram 2008: 15. See Salvador (2014) for examples of New Kingdom Appeals to the Living.

³⁸ Hartwig 2004: 10.

³⁹ Taylor 2001: 24.

⁴⁰ Harrington 2012: 11.

the making of offerings, as well as during the celebration of different festivals. These visits, offerings, and festivals were a way of preserving the memory and the identity of the deceased and they all took place inside the tombs.

Thus, the construction of a tomb was a goal in life that gave the deceased the certainty of not falling out of the context of the earthly life as a cultural, social and geographical space, but ensuring a place for him to remain present after death and integrated within the world of the living.⁴¹

Apart from all this, we must remark upon the fact that the Egyptian concept of life was based on the principle of social ‘connectivity’, so death could be seen as isolation.⁴² As the tomb served as a place for the remembrance of the deceased, its construction and decoration was attached to a life lived in righteousness, which was a social principle and had to be shown to visitors through the texts and images carved or painted on the walls of these monuments.⁴³

If we focus on New Kingdom religious beliefs, the importance of Amun must be mentioned. He was the local god of Thebes since the Twelfth Dynasty onwards and was given an important status by the rulers of the Eighteenth Dynasty.⁴⁴ These kings also united Amun with the god Re, creating the deity Amun-Re. One of the main festivals that took place in the Theban necropolis was the ‘Beautiful Feast of the Valley’, a procession of the cult statue of Amun-Re in which the private Theban tombs, among other buildings in the necropolis, were visited to celebrate banquets. These banquets were later represented in tomb reliefs and paintings.⁴⁵ These representations will be analysed later in this paper because of their symbolic importance and their insight into Egyptian beliefs during the first half of the New Kingdom.

The private Theban tombs: their structure and decoration

When we speak of ‘private tombs’ we refer to the tombs of the high officials of the New Kingdom, who formed the elite among the wider population.⁴⁶ In addition, most of these monuments were usually built for a man, who would share his tomb with his female relatives.⁴⁷ These are constructions that offer us details of both the lives of the owners and the funerary beliefs themselves.

As for its function, the tomb protected the body of the deceased, ensured his regeneration and eternal well-being, served as a monument to project his identity in the afterlife, and commemorated him in the world of the living.⁴⁸ All of these functions are also reflected in the name that was given to the tombs, ‘houses of eternity’ (Hwt n nHH or pr Dt).⁴⁹ Moreover, these buildings were intended to last forever, so they were built in stone while domestic spaces, such as houses, were constructed in mud-brick.⁵⁰ In addition, tombs are monuments dedicated to the sacred permanence that united society and visually reinforced the cultural identity of the ancient Egyptians.⁵¹ Thus, having a tomb was something fundamental to them. In addition, the physical location of the tomb inside the wider Theban necropolis was important for the prestige of the deceased, and even some tombs were grouped in specific areas because the tomb owners shared the same profession or had familial connections.⁵²

⁴¹ Assmann 2005: 13-14.

⁴² Assmann 2005: 39.

⁴³ Assmann 2005: 55.

⁴⁴ David 2002: 183-184.

⁴⁵ Foucart 1924; Naguib 1991; Manzi and Pereyra 2014.

⁴⁶ A fundamental publication on the development and the significance of the architectural components of Theban rock-cut tombs is Kampff 1996.

⁴⁷ Dodson and Ikram 2008: 29.

⁴⁸ Hartwig 2004: 5.

⁴⁹ Vivas Sainz 2014: 22.

⁵⁰ Quirke 1992: 141.

⁵¹ Hartwig 2004: 1.

⁵² Dodson and Ikram 2008: 26-29.

On the one hand, the structure of these private tombs (Figure 1), excavated in the mountain areas and preceded by a court, followed a basic model during the Eighteenth Dynasty. This tomb layout consisted of three rooms that form an inverted T: the first one, horizontal or transversal, gave way to an elongated room or corridor that gave access to a small funeral chamber or chapel. In addition, there are tombs with columned rooms or with different annexed chambers that modify the basic structure described.⁵³ They are called chapel-tombs because they are places of both burial and funerary worship. Symbolically, they were the place of contact between the living and the deceased, and also between the deceased and the gods.⁵⁴ The roofs of these tombs used to be flat, although some vaulted ceilings have been found, and the burial sites, composed of one or more chambers, were on a deeper level than the rooms described, constructed by an open vertical axis in any of these upper rooms.⁵⁵

On the other hand, the tombs were divided into three different levels (Figure 2): an upper one with a structure that included a court and a façade that corresponded with functions related to the solar cult (this part of the structure was more important, and therefore, more developed during the Ramesside period, when the solar cult became more important and even pyramidal superstructures were built); an intermediate one that corresponded to the chapels, where the cult of the deceased was celebrated and where family and friends met during the different festivals; and one more internal level, related to the underworld, that corresponded to the burial chamber.

In the Ramesside period, there was little change in the structure of the tombs, except for more importance given to the court and the façade spaces, but the decoration differs from the decoration of the tombs of the Eighteenth Dynasty, as they are conceived as ‘houses of the dead’, and those from the Ramesside period are conceived as ‘private mortuary temples’.⁵⁶ This will be discussed later in this section.

The ideal orientation of the tomb, as mentioned before, would be towards the West, and the decorative program was organised on this axis as a metaphorical reflection of the transition from life (East) to death (West). Thus, the scenes of the transversal hall, situated in the East, were related to the life of the deceased, and those of the inner room, the one in the West, were related to his transition and life in the Hereafter.⁵⁷ Theban tombs that, according to the available space, were aligned north-south also changed the placement of their decorative program accordingly.⁵⁸

In addition, the construction of a tomb is an element of social distinction. On the one hand, the privilege of having a tomb or a space for its construction was something that only the pharaoh could give and that, therefore, was reserved for the elite officials discussed previously. On the other hand, the tomb’s size, the complexity of its architecture, and the quality and originality of the decoration and accompanying biographical content of the tombs symbolised the achievements of the owner.

The size of the tomb is not only an indicator of the social status of the owner, but it is also dictated by the available space within the cemetery and its topography, as well as by the political and economic situation at that time. While the tombs of the early New Kingdom are quite small, they increase in size when the Eighteenth Dynasty is well established, and the country experiences a time of prosperity.⁵⁹

But these spaces were thought of not only as memorials for the owners of the tombs and their families, but also as spaces to perform burial rituals and ceremonies.⁶⁰ In this way, the tombs were liminal spaces standing between the world of the living and the underworld.⁶¹

Thus, the survival of the deceased and his transition to the Hereafter depended on the efficacy of the funerary cult and of different rituals, so the interaction between the living and the dead within the tombs takes

⁵³ Wasmuth 2003.

⁵⁴ Harrington 2012: 88.

⁵⁵ Kamp 1996.

⁵⁶ Kamp-Seyfried 2003: 10.

⁵⁷ Hartwig 2004: 16.

⁵⁸ Hartwig 2004: 18.

⁵⁹ Dodson and Ikram 2008: 23.

⁶⁰ Vivas Sainz 2014: 22-23.

⁶¹ Bryan 2009: 19.

on great importance on the occasions in which these places were accessible to different visitors, such as relatives, priests or even other random visitors.⁶²

These visits also explain the importance of the decoration of the first transversal and elongated rooms within the tomb which were the meeting places, since the deepest room, the internal burial chamber, was sealed. Thus, the transverse hall became the 'public space' of the tomb, where the owner would place the decorative scenes that he considered more relevant.⁶³ Within this space, the importance of the so-called 'focal walls', the ones that are the first to be seen when entering the tomb and that receive more natural light, stands out.⁶⁴ In them, the artist would place scenes of a striking aesthetic or with an important meaning, that also offer us information about the social identity of the deceased tomb owner. Along the side walls of these rooms we can find painted stelas, which were usually on the right wall and were fundamental to the self-representation of the tomb owner as they had an autobiographical text, and false doors, usually on the left wall, that were the transition point between the world of the living and the world of the dead.⁶⁵

The carved reliefs, and more frequently the paintings that decorated these tombs, not only served an aesthetic purpose, but had a determined purpose: to create an ideal Hereafter so that the deceased could live there eternally. Thus, the scenes had a magical and practical function.⁶⁶ But these scenes also provide an insight into the economic, religious, and stylistic changes taking place throughout the New Kingdom.

As for the distribution of the scenes, which may be funerary, religious or biographical, there is not a fixed clear rule, but we can discern certain trends: normally, the biographical, professional, banquet or offering scenes are located in the transverse hall, while the funerary scenes are found in the corridor or in the innermost room, which can also be found devoid of decoration.⁶⁷ Thus, the iconographic program focuses on funerary motifs and the so-called 'scenes of daily life', which actually had a hidden meaning or symbolism that will be partly discussed in the next section of this paper, and that were part of the funerary beliefs of the Egyptians.⁶⁸ It is intended, within these scenes, to remember the moments in which the deceased had participated in life so that he could repeat them in the Hereafter and cross the boundaries between both worlds, that of the living and that of the dead, so that he could be in contact again with those whom he had left behind.⁶⁹ They are, therefore, a mirror of his life in the earthly world.

The professional scenes commemorate the professional identity of the tomb's owner, and in them we can see the deceased serving the pharaoh or the gods if they were officials of the religious administration.⁷⁰

During the Eighteenth Dynasty, details of the earthly life and the important events lived by the owner of the tomb become more common in tomb reliefs and funerary paintings, and were intended to leave a testimony of the life of the deceased that could be remembered by the visitors that had access to the chapel for years after his death, and had the magical function of perpetually reliving the best of their existence on Earth.⁷¹ Thus, as already mentioned, the function of the mural decoration of the Theban tombs is magical and religious, but above all utilitarian since they acted in the service of the owner of the tomb.⁷²

Otherwise, in the Ramesside period, the tomb is considered to be a private mortuary temple for its owner, becoming a place of divine presence.⁷³ In this way, the accessible parts of the tombs were interpreted as a temple, in which the deceased served the gods in the role of a priest.⁷⁴ The decoration of the private tombs

⁶² Hartwig 2004: 7-8; Dodson and Ikram 2008.

⁶³ Vivas Sainz 2014: 23.

⁶⁴ Hartwig 2004: 17.

⁶⁵ Kampp 1996: 51-55; Hartwig 2004: 18.

⁶⁶ Dodson and Ikram 2008: 78.

⁶⁷ The burial chamber was often devoid of decoration too, but there are a few examples of tombs with decorated burial chambers, such as TT 96 or TT 201; Hartwig 2004: 16.

⁶⁸ Manniche 1997a: 166; Bryan 2009: 19; Smith 2009: 240.

⁶⁹ Manniche 2003: 42-45.

⁷⁰ Manniche 1987: 32; with examples: Manniche 1988: 35-7.

⁷¹ Aldred 1951: 6.

⁷² Kroeter 2009: 48.

⁷³ Kampp-Seyfried 2003: 10.

⁷⁴ Assmann 2005: 198.

is no longer focused on the material world or on the deceased's achievements, but on religious and funerary scenes and texts, with most of the non-sacred motifs disappearing.⁷⁵ These more explicit religious scenes turn the tomb into a mortuary temple, with the transition to the next world and the inscriptions of the Books of the Underworld (especially The Book of Gates and The Book of the Dead) becoming more important than the scenes of daily life.⁷⁶ These changes are related to the mentioned religious changes and the associated crisis of insecurity that takes place during the Amarna period, and the freer access to the traditional? gods during the Ramesside dynasties.⁷⁷

The funerary scenes carved or painted on the corridor of the tombs represent the entrance of the deceased to the Hereafter, his funeral and other rites that permitted his afterlife, including the Opening of the Mouth ceremony.⁷⁸

The symbolism of the 'scenes of daily life'

If we focus on the 'public space' of the tombs we can analyse the symbolism of some of the most common scenes that appear there during the Eighteenth Dynasty. These 'scenes of daily life' hide a symbolic meaning; they are mainly agricultural, fishing and fowling scenes as well as banquet scenes, and they all relate to the rebirth of the deceased, to the concept of sexuality, and to eternal life.⁷⁹

The agricultural scenes are related to the act of providing for the deceased in the Hereafter, for his eternal life.⁸⁰ The fishing scenes are also related to the securing of provisions for the deceased, but they also have a hidden meaning of the fishes being harpooned, which are related to the solar cycle and have the properties of sanctity and vitality, and their details, as well as the ones depicted in the fowling scenes, are erotically charged, being motifs associated with rebirth and sexuality (such as the papyrus thicket, the marsh, the geese...),⁸¹

We can also see in this room the deceased performing his official duties, which is a way of commemorating and presenting the tomb owner to the living who visited the tomb.⁸² All of this was also a way of being remembered in the society of the living.

The banquet scenes

To better explain the symbolism of the 'scenes of daily life', I will focus on the banquet scenes, which have their origin in the Middle Kingdom and are one of the main topics of my PhD research on New Kingdom dance scenes.⁸³

The banquet scenes are one of the most repeated scenes in the private Theban tombs of the New Kingdom, and above all in the Eighteenth Dynasty, when it was probably part of their fundamental decoration.⁸⁴ Harrington points out that it is one of the well-known scenes due to its unique imagery, and that usually appears in the transverse hall of this kind of tomb, and in the longitudinal chambers of the private tombs of Elkab.⁸⁵

⁷⁵ Manniche 1987: 64; Baines and Frood 2008: 85; Van Dijk 2010: 379.

⁷⁶ Manniche 1987: 65; Assmann 2005.

⁷⁷ Baines and Frood 2008: 77.

⁷⁸ Manniche 1987: 40-41; with examples: Manniche 1988: 41-42.

⁷⁹ Manniche 1987: 30; Manniche 2003; Kroeter 2009.

⁸⁰ Manniche 1988: 39-40 (with a list of scenes); Dodson and Ikram 2008: 219.

⁸¹ Manniche 1987: 35-37; Manniche 1988: 37-38 (with a list of scenes); Manniche 2003: 42; Hartwig 2004: 105; Kroeter 2009: 49.

⁸² Manniche 1987: 35.

⁸³ Bueno Guardia 2020.

⁸⁴ Manniche 1997b: 29.

⁸⁵ Harrington 2014. Some of the banquet scenes from Thebes will be listed later in the notes of this paper. In the tombs of Elkab, we can find banquet scenes for example in the tombs of Renni and Paheri.

They represent the deceased and his wife during a banquet with their family and friends.⁸⁶ All of them are represented as adults, in the procreative period of their lives, which is a reference to sexuality and rebirth.⁸⁷ Thus, it is remarkable that in these scenes we don't find, among the guests, no old or sick people, nor children, although sometimes we can see girls dedicated to some duties in these scenes, as dancers or servants.⁸⁸ It is because of this ideal representation of the banquet that we can come to the conclusion that these scenes are not real or daily life scenes, but rather that they have a hidden meaning. As I will discuss later in this section, these scenes have a liminal nature, being part at the same time of the world of the living and the world of the dead.

As for the composition of the scenes (Figure 3), these banquets, which consist of different stages from the preparation of the banquet itself to the presentation of offerings to the hosts, were usually presided over by the deceased and his wife, with both of them represented in a larger-scale sitting pose welcoming their guests. In front of them we can see the offering table. The largest part of the scene is occupied by the guests, always segregated by their sex, although apparently in the same room. They are represented in different poses, sitting on chairs or mats. Among them we can see different servants, boys and girls, who serve them. In many cases they are serving wine and beer, this being a play on words because the word 'pour' in Egyptian language has the same letters as the one that describes the sexual act.⁸⁹ The last group to be highlighted in these scenes is the one formed by the orchestras and accompanied many times by dancers.⁹⁰

In addition, many of the banquet scenes are related to the 'Beautiful Feast of the Valley' (Hb nfr n int), which took place on the Theban necropolis once a year.⁹¹ This feast, originally related to the goddess Hathor and later linked to the cult of the Theban god Amun-Re, consisted of a procession with the statue of the god Amun from Karnak that lasted two days and visited the main mortuary temples, Deir el-Bahari, and the private necropolises. This procession was led by the pharaoh, who was accompanied by some relatives and priests of the goddess Hathor, as well as musicians and other characters.⁹² It was a very noisy event, full of music that intended to 'wake up' the deceased so that they could join the god and their relatives in this festivity.⁹³ During the night, the statue of Amun rested with the one of Hathor in the temple of Deir el-Bahari, symbolising in this way their union with a meaning of rejuvenation and rebirth. This journey symbolised the cycle of the sun, entering in this way the living and the dead in contact with Amun and erasing the limits between both worlds.⁹⁴ During this feast, visitors entered the tombs and they celebrated a banquet, of which the main result was 'intoxication' with wine, beer and some plants (such as the lotus or mandrake) to transgress the borders between the earthly and the divine realms, and communicate with the gods and the deceased.⁹⁵ This is the reason why we do not see food in these banquets. Besides, this kind of banquet where the guests appear to only be drinking is a common representation not only in Egypt, but in other Near Eastern or Mediterranean cultures.⁹⁶

In some inscriptions we can read that this act of drinking had the purpose of the participants enjoying a 'happy day' (hrw nfr), an expression that could also have some sexual connotations, because the term *nfr* means dynamism, virility and efficiency, which were necessary attributes for the miracle of the rebirth that was sought

⁸⁶ Schott 1953; Pirelli 2007; Kroeter 2009.

⁸⁷ Kroeter 2009. We can clearly see this in TT 38, TT 52, TT 75, TT 79, TT 80, TT 92, TT 100, TT175, and TT 367.

⁸⁸ Kroeter 2009:51. For example in TT 22, TT 38, TT 52, TT 75, TT 79, TT 100, TT 129, TT 254, and TT 367.

⁸⁹ Manniche 1987: 45.

⁹⁰ Bueno Guardia 2019. Dancers within banquet scenes have been found in TT 251, TT 53, TT 18, TT 82, TT342, TT 79, TT 80, TT 92, TT 100, TT 129, TT A5, TT 22, TT 367, TT 75, TT 176, TT 8, TT 78, TT 297, TT 38, TT 52, TT 175, TT 249, TT 254, TT 49, TT C5, TT 135, and in fragments kept in the British Museum, the *Museo Egizio di Torino*, and in the Bankes Collection, as well as in a copy of a scene made by Duemichen.

⁹¹ Foucart 1924; Naguib 1991; Manzi and Pereyra 2014.

⁹² Manniche 1987: 45; Teeter 2011: 67.

⁹³ Teeter 2011: 69.

⁹⁴ Teeter 2011: 66-73; Padgham 2012: 64.

⁹⁵ Manniche 2003: 44; Szpakowska 2003: 228.

⁹⁶ Harrington 2012; Morgan 2015.

in this festivity.⁹⁷ But this expression has different sacred connotations and we can find it associated with the tomb itself (TT 78), with offerings (TT 17), with drink (TT 21), and with the god Amun-Re (TT 56).⁹⁸ We can also relate the word *nfr* to the presence of the divine, of the god Amun, because the expression *hrw nfr* can also be associated with the divine beauty of this god.⁹⁹

A common representation in these scenes is the lotus flower, which is found many times used as the headdress of the musicians, dancers or guests.¹⁰⁰ It is related to the concept of love and it is considered as a symbol of eternal life and resurrection because it closes at night and opens in the dawn, so it has a very important role in these banquet scenes. In addition, it was also thought that the sun god had been born inside of a lotus flower and that its smell had a sedative or hypnotic effect that influenced the behaviour of the gods and made the communication with them much easier, something sought in the aforementioned 'Beautiful Feast of the Valley'.¹⁰¹

However, there is a theory that the pink lotus flower (*Nelumbo nucifera*) was not known by the Egyptians of the New Kingdom because it was introduced from India in the Persian period (sixth century BC).¹⁰² What they did know were two different types of lilies: the blue lily (*Nymphaea caerulea Savigny*) and the white lily (*Nymphaea lotus Linnaeus Willdenow*). It is therefore possible that the references to the 'lotus flower' are incorrect and, in fact, we are talking about lilies.¹⁰³

The transparent dresses, the perfumes and the jewellery of the ladies that participate in the banquet also highlight the atmosphere of eroticism.¹⁰⁴

The unguent cones that appear above their heads are another play on words, because 'aroma' was translated as 'sti' and its consonants were the same as the ones used to describe the sexual act (something similar to the word 'pour').¹⁰⁵ Moreover, the smell had a great importance in the erotic imagination of the ancient Egyptians and it was linked also to the divinities and human contact with them.¹⁰⁶ These wax cones appear in the beginning of the Eighteenth Dynasty for this kind of scene, which suggests that they are very characteristic of the banquet scenes of the Eighteenth Dynasty in contrast to the banquet scenes found in earlier times, or that they intended to show an aspect of the banquet that was not represented before.¹⁰⁷ They are related to the funerary context and their aroma may have helped in achieving the already mentioned 'intoxication'.¹⁰⁸ The cones created a 'sacred atmosphere', were related to ritual purity, and represented an association between the deceased and the divine.¹⁰⁹ However, its appearance depends on the kind of banquet represented, as they are more commonly found in the banquets related to the 'Beautiful Feast of the Valley', which implies that the unguent cone and its symbolism are specially linked to this particular festivity.¹¹⁰ They are also related to the cult of the ancestors, which grows in popularity during the Eighteenth Dynasty. It is possible that the symbolism of the cone was associated with the transformation that enabled the living to communicate with their deceased ancestors during this festival.¹¹¹ Padgham also sees the possibility of these cones as symbolically related to the access to the solar god Amun-Re that the deceased and the living wanted

⁹⁷ Manniche 1997b: 35; Manniche 2003: 44.

⁹⁸ Padgham 2012: 64.

⁹⁹ Padgham 2012: 64.

¹⁰⁰ Examples can be found in TT 22, TT 38, TT 75, TT 78, TT 80, TT 129, TT 175, TT 342, and TT C5.

¹⁰¹ Manniche 1987: 42.

¹⁰² Harrington 2012: 19.

¹⁰³ Harrington 2012: 19.

¹⁰⁴ Kroeter 2009.

¹⁰⁵ Manniche 1987:45.

¹⁰⁶ Manniche 1997a:28.

¹⁰⁷ Padgham 2012:57.

¹⁰⁸ Kroeter 2009:54.

¹⁰⁹ Harrington 2012: 113.

¹¹⁰ Padgham 2012: 60.

¹¹¹ Padgham 2012: 63.

to achieve.¹¹² They could also symbolise the presence of the *ba* or ‘soul’ of the deceased and the guests in the banquet, which allowed them to receive offerings and made communication between them easier.¹¹³

Finally, the orchestras that are part of these scenes are usually composed of female musicians, although we can also see male instrumentalists in some scenes.¹¹⁴ The instruments that appear most frequently are the lute, the double flute or oboe, the tambourine, the harp or the lyre.

Within these orchestras we also find dancers (Figure 4), who can sometimes be the instrumentalists themselves.¹¹⁵ They are always adult women or girls (we never find male dancers in this type of scenes within the New Kingdom). In addition, sometimes the dancers are foreign women (or women painted with a darker skin colour), which gives the celebration a certain exoticism.¹¹⁶ These dancers transmit their dynamism or movement by having a raised heel and flexing the legs.¹¹⁷ The adults usually wear a long dress, but they can also be represented naked, wearing only jewellery.¹¹⁸ Their jewellery can also be related to the time of prosperity that Egypt is experiencing during the New Kingdom. The young girls appear naked and always between the adults, something common in the representation of children in ancient Egypt.¹¹⁹ All of them also wear wigs of different styles.

That these characters are always women is probably related to the symbolic nature of the banquets themselves, in which the sexual and erotic component was very important, as well as fertility, since it has already been mentioned that the purpose of these celebrations was the rebirth of the deceased in the Hereafter.¹²⁰ Perhaps, in addition, it is a reflection of the reality of society of that time and not only an artistic convention, since it is possible that this profession was mainly exercised by women.¹²¹

All of these elements, the musicians and dancers, the dresses of the women, their wigs, the unguents, relate to the same ideas that we have seen for the tombs’ structure: their religious belief, the rebirth of the deceased in the afterlife, and the preservation of identity in the world of the living. Moreover, it is strange to find evidence that situates the banquet in a determined time or place, which could be due to the desire of the Egyptians to create images that would serve for eternity.¹²²

Conclusions

To summarise, the private Theban tombs of the New Kingdom are monuments not only intended to protect the deceased’s body, but also to preserve his identity in the world of the living and in the afterlife. But it is also important to emphasise the geographical context in which these tombs are located: the Theban necropolis. It is an area situated on the Western part of the Nile that belonged to the religious capital of the New Kingdom, Thebes, and that contains different royal and private tombs, as well as different temples. It is not only important to consider the geographical relationship between the tombs themselves, sometimes linked by the owners’

¹¹² Padgham 2012: 64.

¹¹³ Padgham 2012.

¹¹⁴ Male musicians have been found, for example, in TT 52, TT 79, TT 80, TT 82, TT 100, and TT 342. For examples of female musicians see the note below.

¹¹⁵ Bueno Guardia 2019. As mentioned above, dancers within banquet scenes have been found in TT 251, TT 53, TT 18, TT 82, TT342, TT 79, TT 80, TT 92, TT 100, TT 129, TT A5, TT 22, TT 367, TT 75, TT 176, TT 8, TT 78, TT 297, TT 38, TT 52, TT 175, TT 249, TT 254, TT 49, TT C5, TT 135, and in fragments kept in the British Museum, the *Museo Egizio di Torino* (accession number 1341/1), and in the Bankes Collection (accession number 518617), as well as a copy of a scene made by Duemichen.

¹¹⁶ For example, in TT 22 or TT 38.

¹¹⁷ Bueno Guardia 2019.

¹¹⁸ Naked dancing women can be seen in TT 38, TT 52, TT 75, in the fragment kept in the British Museum (accession number EA37984), and maybe in TT 176.

¹¹⁹ Naked dancing girls can be found in TT 22, TT 38, TT 49, TT 75, and in the fragment kept in the *Museo Egizio di Torino* (accession number 1341/1).

¹²⁰ Manniche 1987: 30; Manniche 2003; Kroeter 2009.

¹²¹ Bueno Guardia 2019.

¹²² Kroeter 2009:50.

professions or familiar relationships, but also the relationship between these tombs and the temples located in this area, because they established a useful network for rebirth and contact with the living world during the festivals celebrated in the necropolis, like the 'Beautiful Feast of the Valley', when the private tombs were accessible for the visitors.

Both their structure and decoration are linked to the religious beliefs of the ancient Egyptians, as they relate to their belief in gods and their way of thinking about death. In private Theban tombs, the burial chambers protected the body of the deceased while the upper level, where the cult chapels were, acted as a vehicle for his regeneration and eternal well-being in the Hereafter. This function of the upper halls is also noticeable in the decoration of these rooms. Within this decoration I have remarked the symbolism of the banquet scenes, as they are a clear example of this idea of rebirth and of the permanence of the individual in the society after his death and even his interaction with the living world during the celebration of some festivals. Thus, the symbolism of both the building and the decoration played an important role in the magical environment of the private burials.

But these tombs are also important to learn about the life of the Egyptian elite, their identity, and culture, as well as their role in society. All of this information was given through the decoration of the tomb, which possibly was chosen by the owner of the tomb to dignify him, to preserve his memory, and to be retained in society and not excluded. This desire for permanence within the living world, as mentioned above, also took place during some festivities and banquets, when the living and the dead communicated between them, so the memory and the identity of the deceased was eternally preserved.

Among the decoration of these tombs, the importance of the called 'scenes of daily life' stands out because of their symbolism. It is important above all in the 'banquet scenes' of the Eighteenth Dynasty, in which their details point to themes of sexuality, rebirth and the communication between gods, the living and the dead. These scenes inform us about some features of the Egyptian society, as well as about its funerary and religious beliefs.

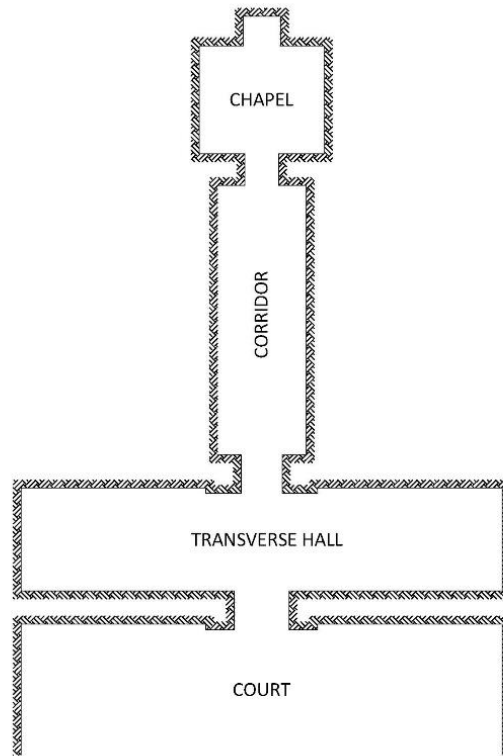


Figure 1: Structure of the typical Theban tombs of the Eighteenth Dynasty (Drawing by the author).

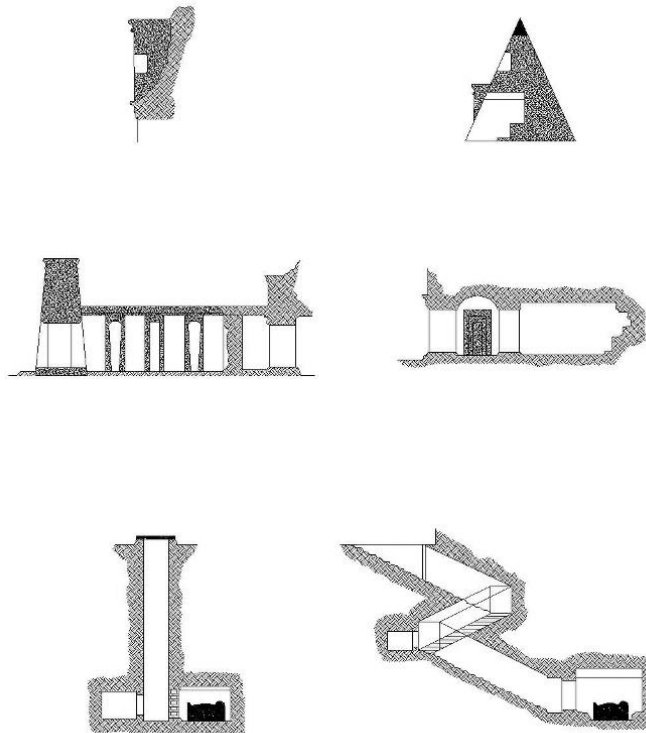


Figure 2: Levels of a private Theban tomb. (Drawing by the author after Kampp-Seyfried 2003).

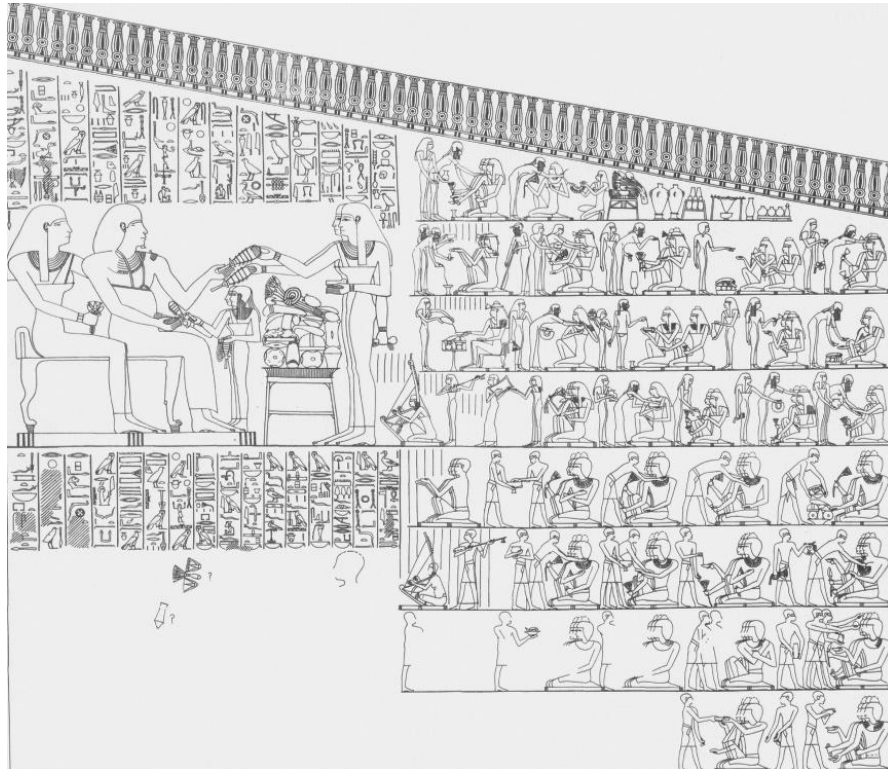


Figure 3: Banquet scene (TT100). (Davies 1935. Public Domain Image).



Figure 4: Musicians and dancers on the TT38. (Accession number 30.4.9, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 1930): <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/557727> (Public Domain Image).

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Object Biography: Manchester Museum 7556

Matt Szafran, Independent Scholar

Abstract

Manchester Museum 7556 is a fragment of a Predynastic Egyptian flat stone palette which was discovered in Hemamieh through the work of British archaeologists Gertrude Caton-Thompson and Guy Brunton. Whilst only a relatively small fragment (92x48 mm) of the original palette survives, the detail on its edges and surface give clues as to its original size and morphology. This paper uses these clues to create a digital reconstruction approximating the object's original appearance. The possible use of the original palette will also be discussed; taking into account its condition, advanced imagery of its surface, find location and comparison with other similar objects from the same and different find locations.

Keywords

Hemamieh, palette, Predynastic, stone, reconstruction, use, Manchester Museum, 7556.

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Rediscovery

The Predynastic settlement at Hemamieh (el-Hammamiya) was rediscovered by British archaeologist Gertrude Caton-Thompson, after joining Flinders Petrie and Guy Brunton at the site of Qau.¹ The settlement was then excavated between 1922 and 1924 as part of a British School of Archaeology mission led by Caton-Thompson and Brunton.² This site features both cemeteries and villages from the Badarian (circa 4500-4000 BCE) and Predynastic (circa 6000-3150 BCE) cultures, and was re-used extensively through the Protodynastic, Old Kingdom, First Intermediate and Roman periods.³ The northern tip of the wadi features settlements and cemeteries from the Early to Middle Predynastic periods.⁴ The villages were comprised of round huts, with mud-plaster floors and wattle and daub walls, and featured rubbish deposits containing domestic objects.⁵



Figure 1: Broken fish-shaped palette Manchester Museum 7556.

On conclusion of the excavation, the finds were distributed amongst various institutions. One such find was a fragment of a palette which was donated to the Manchester Museum, where it was accessioned into their collection as '7556' and described as being 'possibly from a fish shaped palette'.⁶ Fish-shaped (or pisciform) palettes are typical of the Naqada II period (circa 3500–3200 BCE), with is consistent with Caton-Thompson and Brunton's assertions that the

¹ Dawson Bierbrier 2012: 87-88, 108, 428-430.

² Ellis 2000: 89; Cohen and Joukowsky 2006: 351-379.

³ Brunton and Caton-Thompson 1928: 1-3, 44-45.

⁴ Brunton and Caton-Thompson 1928: 43.

⁵ Brunton and Caton-Thompson 1928: 44.

⁶ Patenaude and Shaw 2011: 45.

northernmost spurs of the wadi were from the Early to Middle Predynastic period.⁷ Manchester Museum 7556 is unusual in that the discovery of a palette in a settlement context at Hemamieh is much less common, although not unprecedented, than discovery in burial contexts.⁸

This findspot of Manchester Museum 7556 is confirmed with the object having '51 N.SPUR HAMAMIEH 1' written on its surface (Figure 1), indicating that it is from one of the Predynastic settlements in the north of the site (Figure 2).⁹ The '51' indicates that this object is from plan number 51 and the '1' indicates that it was found at a depth of 1 foot (304.8 mm).

Predynastic domestic rubbish deposits from Spur 3, in the north of the site (Figure 2), also list a possible fragment of a palette.¹⁰ None of the tomb groups listed in Caton-Thompson and Brunton's publication as being bound for Manchester contain a palette fragment, however 'stratified deposits' from Hemamieh are listed as being shared with the UCL's Department of Applied Statistics, Oxford (Ashmolean) and Manchester.¹¹ It is therefore likely that Manchester Museum 7556 was indeed the palette found in the rubbish deposit in Spur 3. Assuming that this is the case, it would appear that the palette was broken in antiquity during day to day use, or even during manufacture, in the settlement context and subsequently discarded in the rubbish deposit along with other broken material culture.

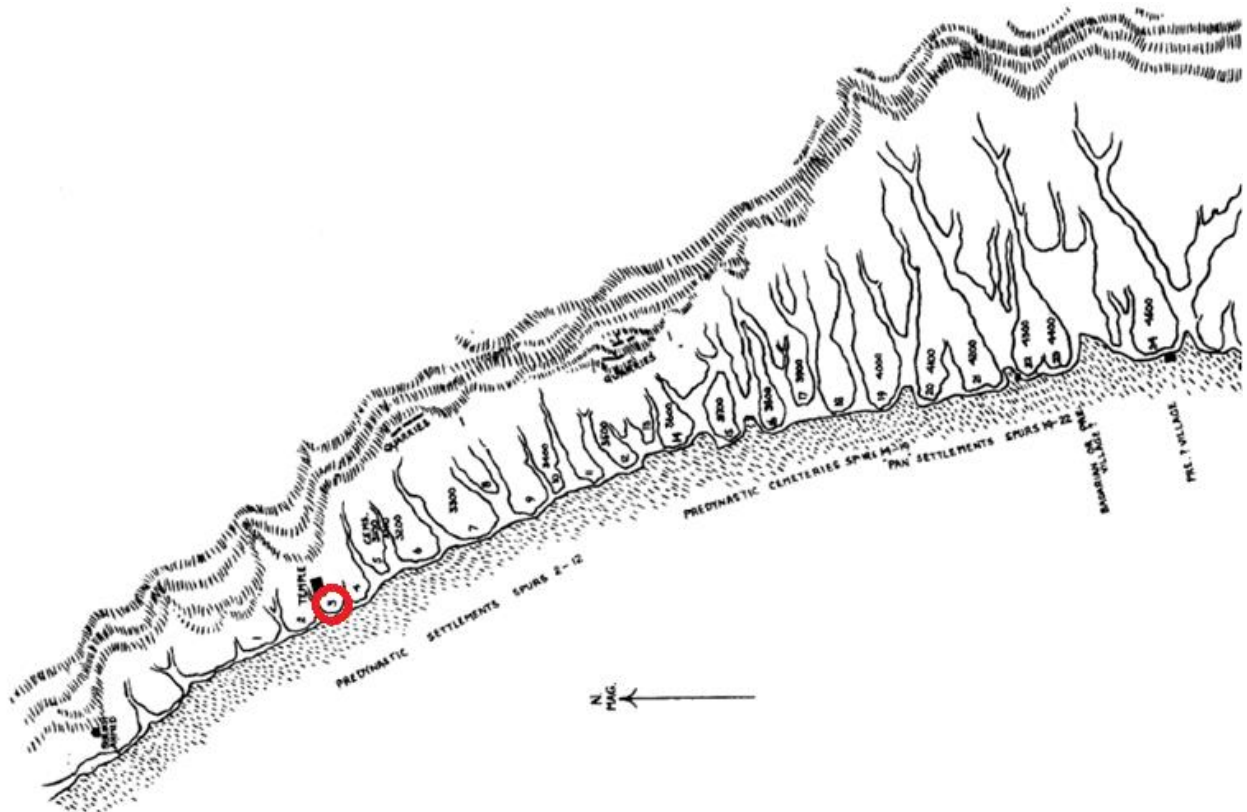


Figure 2: 1:12,500 Sketch map of the north Spur of the Badari District, with Spur 3 highlighted.

⁷ Stevenson 2009: 2-3.

⁸ Brunton and Caton-Thompson 1928: 44-58.

⁹ Brunton and Caton-Thompson 1928: Plate II.

¹⁰ Brunton and Caton-Thompson 1928: 44-45.

¹¹ Brunton and Caton-Thompson 1928: 117-121.

The object inventory from Caton-Thompson and Brunton's publication (Figure 3) indicates that a palette was found at a depth of 1 foot and 6 inches (457.2 mm).¹² The Petrie Museum's catalogue indicates that this palette fragment is in their collection, accessioned as UC10512 (Figure 4). However, the notes written on the surface of Petrie Museum UC10512 conflict with the catalogue and instead list it as being found at a depth of 1 foot, just as with Manchester Museum 7556, and not 1'6. Additionally, Petrie Museum UC10512 does not have the suspension hole indicated by the object inventory, and physically it does not obviously appear to be from a fish-shaped palette. It is more likely that Petrie Museum UC10512 was originally a bird-shaped palette, with the beak now broken away (on the lower left side of Figure 4), similar to the Manchester Museum 2378 double bird palette (Figure 5). As Manchester Museum 7556 was also discovered at plan 51 (Figure 2) and has a suspension hole and fin details, it seems more likely that this is the fragment mentioned in the original object inventory (Figure 3).

Depth.	Object.	Plan No.	Remarks.
1' 6"	Fragments of slate palette.	51*	Fish shape, with suspension hole.

Figure 310: Object inventory for Area A3, located in Spur 3 of the Hemamieh excavation.

The object inventory lists the find as 'fragments', rather than a singular fragment (Figure 3), which supports the notes written on the surface of Manchester Museum 7556 and Petrie Museum UC10512 indicating that they were both found in the same area and at the same depth.¹² Perhaps the close proximity of their rediscovery caused the speculation that they were from the same original palette, leading to the current identical descriptions in their respective museum catalogues. However, study of Petrie Museum UC10512 reveals that this is not the case; the entire perimeter of Petrie Museum UC10512 shows bevelling, all edges are polished (rather than showing breaks such as with Manchester Museum 7556) and additionally the colour, strata and grain size of the stone are different to that of Manchester Museum 7556.

¹² Brunton and Caton-Thompson 1928: 98.



Figure 4: Broken fish shaped palette Petrie Museum Petrie Museum UC10512.

With the object distribution list also showing that finds from this area were shared with the Ashmolean museum, there is the possibility, albeit unlikely, that further fragments of the original palette may have been rediscovered but none, as yet, have not been attributed.¹³



Figure 5: Double bird-shaped palette Manchester Museum 2378.

¹³ Brunton and Caton-Thompson 1928: 121

Materials and Morphology of Manchester Museum 7556

Historically palettes were described as being made from slate, and in publication were often simply referred to as ‘slates’.¹⁴ It is now, however, widely accepted that the stone is not slate, and palettes are typically referred to as being made from siltstone or greywacke from the Wadi Hammamat in Egypt’s eastern desert.¹⁵ Both greywacke and siltstone are forms of sandstone, i.e. sedimentary clastic stones formed from fragments of pre-existing stones.¹⁶ Siltstones are composed of silt-sized grains of 0.01-0.05 mm, with greywacke being formed of grains between 0.06-0.2 mm in a >10% clay matrix.¹⁷ Greywackes form in deep marine environments with sediment being transported by turbidity currents, such as on the edge of a continental shelf and onto the seafloor.¹⁸ The Hammamat series greywackes display a green colouration, caused by chlorite and epidote minerals within the stone from the recrystallisation of the original clay matrix.¹⁹ Greywacke’s hardness and advantageous cleavage make it suitable for the creation of the predominantly flat palettes.²⁰ The stone used in the production of palettes is fine to very fine grained, meaning it can technically be classified as a siltstone, however the presence of the clay matrix and the depositional environment in which it formed means that greywacke is the more descriptive term and should be used in preference over siltstone – as it is already used exclusively in the Manchester Museum’s object catalogue.²¹

Whilst Manchester Museum 7556 is only a 92 x 48 mm fragment of the original palette, it has retained sufficient details to be able to identify its original morphology. The drilled hole indicates the top edge of the palette, and it also identifies the palette as likely being of zoomorphic design – as this group of palettes almost exclusively have pierced holes.²² The true use of these holes is unknown, however the most likely use is for suspension.²³ Capart suggested that this hole could be strung with cordage for suspension on one’s person, additionally suggesting that the smaller palettes may have been amulets rather than functional objects²⁴. However, more recent suggestions also explore the possibility that this suspension could instead be for storage on the wall of the home.²⁵

The top edge of Manchester Museum 7556, with the suspension hole, also has seven small carved notches which are indicative of the fin details ground into fish-shaped palettes. The top edge also features the straight flat perimeter section which is often seen on the ‘forehead’ of fish-shaped palettes, for example Manchester Museum 4602 (Figure 6). Fish-shaped palettes are the most common palette morphology discovered in Naqada II burials, which account for 67.24% (39 out of 58) of all known dated palettes.²⁶ Considering these factors, it therefore seems logical to assume that Manchester Museum 7556 was most likely originally a part of a Naqada II fish-shaped palette.

¹⁴ Petrie, 1895: 371; Brunton and Caton-Thompson 1928.

¹⁵ Stevenson 2009: 1.

¹⁶ Bates and Jackson 1987.

¹⁷ Aston, Harrell and Shaw 2000: 57; Dott 1964: 627.

¹⁸ Dżułyński and Walton 1965; Siddall 2002.

¹⁹ Aston, Harrell and Shaw 2000: 57-58.

²⁰ Stevenson 2007: 150-151.

²¹ Patenaude and Shaw 2011: 45.

²² Stevenson 2009: 3.

²³ Brovarski 2015:49-51; Roy 2011: 88; Hawass and Vannini 2010: 46.

²⁴ Capart 1905: 85.

²⁵ Mendoza 2017: 54; Shaw 2015.

²⁶ Ciałowicz 1991: 21.



Figure 6: Fish-shaped palette Manchester Museum 4602 (27x17 cm).

Assuming that the suspension hole of a palette is central, along with hypothesising the geometry symmetrically from the surviving top edge, it is possible to recreate an approximate size and shape of Manchester Museum 7556 as a complete object (170x95 mm) – as demonstrated in Figure 7.



Figure 7: Manchester Museum 7556 with geometrical guidelines suggesting its original size and shape.

This guiding geometry can then be filled in digitally using features and textures from intact artefacts, and the results of this can be seen in Figure 8. As with all reconstructions, there is an amount of speculation and the use of ‘most common’ and ‘average’ data to estimate the most likely original condition. This reconstruction is based on fish-shaped palettes with both horizontal and vertical lines of symmetry, however it should be mentioned that not all fish-shaped palettes are symmetrical. There is speculation that this variation in shape and design is indicative of the representation of different genera of fish, commonly the *Tilapia*, but also *Mormyrus* and *Tetraodon* genera.²⁷ Additionally, not all fish-shaped palettes contain the same number of and shape of their fins and, equally, some palettes have simple drilled eyes with others having shell or bone inlays (Figures 5, 9). Aside from Manchester Museum 7556, there are no surviving (or at least attributed) fragments of the palette’s perimeter and so it is impossible to accurately reproduce the exact position and number of detailed features. Therefore, the details such as fin shape and location, and the type and location of the eye of this reconstruction, are speculative and based on common features seen in the extant corpus of intact fish-shaped palettes (Figures 6, 9).

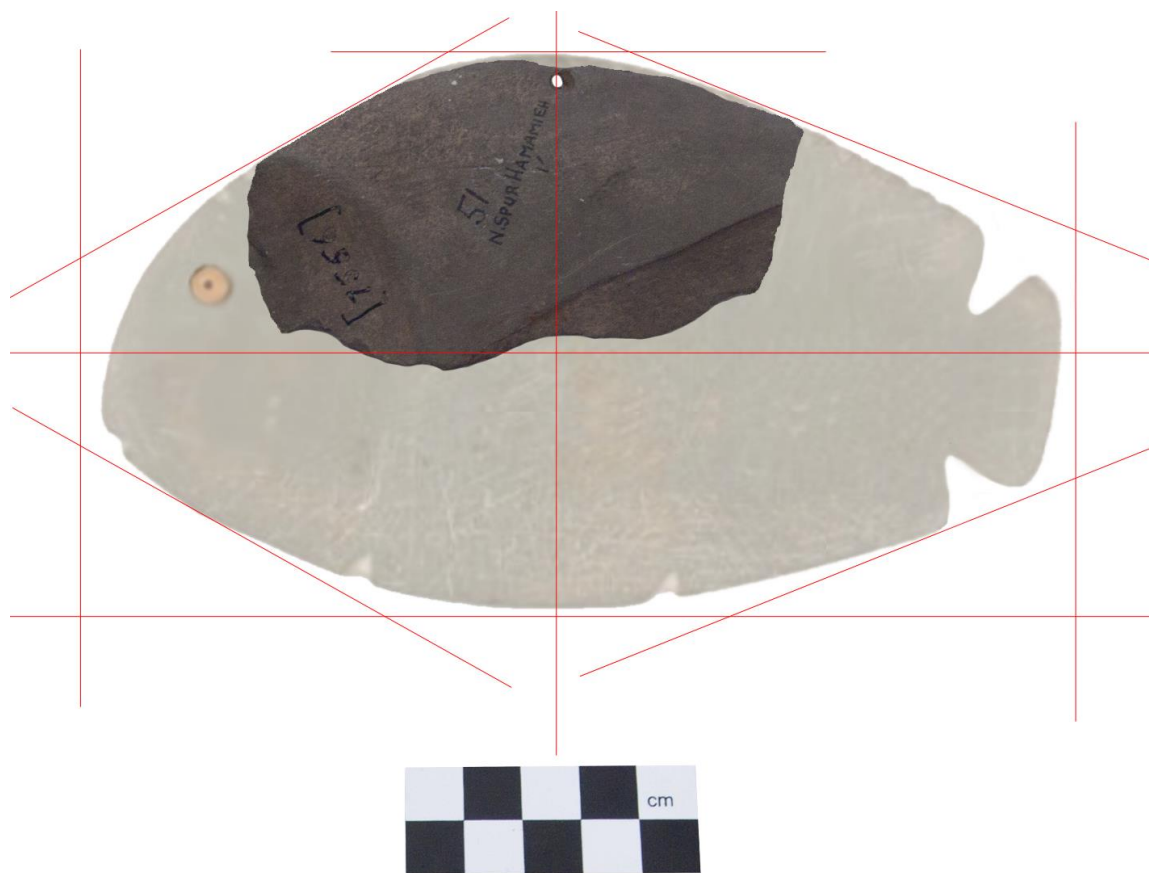


Figure 8: Digital approximation of the original form of Manchester Museum 7556.

²⁷ Stevenson 2011: 160; Brewer and Friedman 1989: 9.



Figure 9: Fish-shaped palette Petrie Museum 4374

Original Use of Manchester Museum 7556

Predynastic palettes were rediscovered during excavations in the late 19th and early 20th century at sites such as Abydos, el-Mahasna, Hu, Hierakonpolis and Hemamieh.²⁸ Many of these palettes demonstrated pigment staining and as such were associated with the production and application of cosmetics, in part due to their presence in close proximity to the head in burial contexts.²⁹

However, Patenaude's and Shaw's more recent analysis of burial contexts of the Manchester Museum's corpus

of palettes (Figure 10) shows that burial near to the limbs is more likely than burial near to the head.³⁰ This of course calls into question the significance of the location of palettes in burials and what can be inferred from it.

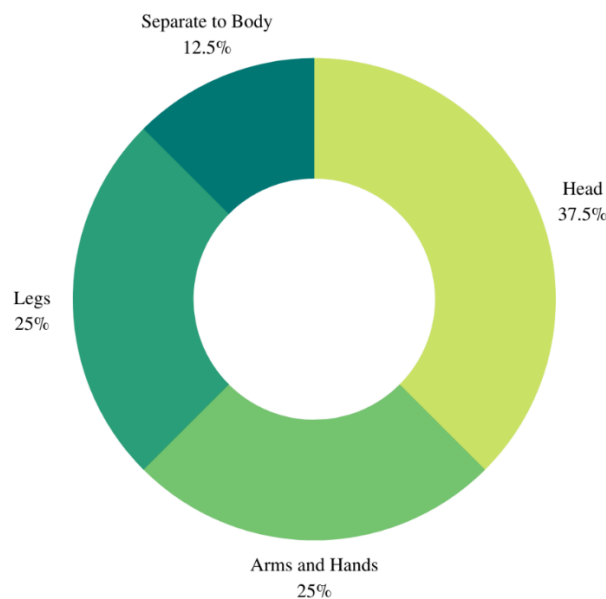


Figure 10: Palette location in burial contexts for Manchester Museum's corpus of Predynastic palettes.

The most common pigment staining found upon palettes is the vivid green of the copper ore malachite.³¹ Since Petrie's definitive 1895 publication, palettes have therefore been

²⁸ Petrie 1921.

²⁹ Quibell et al 1900; Petrie 1917; Adams 1988: 47.

³⁰ Patenaude and Shaw 2011: 67-70.

³¹ Stevenson 2009: 2.

associated with the processing of malachite, specifically through a ‘grinding’ process, for cosmetic use.³² As warned by Stevenson, the usage of the term ‘cosmetic’ is problematic with its modern connotations implying beautification and vanity, something for which there is no evidence for in the Predynastic era.³³ There is, unfortunately, no alternative term without such a connotation and so the use of ‘cosmetic’ will persist in modern discussion, but must always be done with caveat.

Petrie and Mace stated that the use of malachite was both medicinal and used as protection from the sun.³⁴ This was something which Murray later built upon by stating that powdered malachite was mixed with water to form a paste which was then applied to the eyes to defend against the sun.³⁵ The use of water as a base for the pigment seems unlikely and much more likely would be the use of a fat or a drying oil such as linseed or poppy oil.³⁶

In addition to extant palettes demonstrating green malachite staining, there is also additional archaeological evidence of malachite being used for eye cosmetics; with human remains found in Adaima having traces of green malachite residue around the eyes and also with the discovery of a clay head with green painted eyes in grave H. 97 at the Predynastic site of el-Mahasna.³⁷ However, it should be noted that these are the only such examples known to the author and so their existence does not conclusively prove the use of malachite as an eye cosmetic.

Where present, pigment staining is typically in the centre of the palette – which is the most likely practical location for the processing of pigment. Unfortunately, as Manchester Museum 7556 likely does not contain the central section of the original palette, as demonstrated in Figure 8 above, it is therefore impossible to conclude whether or not the original palette was used for pigment processing. Baduel’s study of the Adaima settlement and cemetery contexts has shown that palettes found in settlement contexts are more frequently found with red ochre staining on their surface.³⁸ However, it should be noted that this study also found no fish-shaped palettes with red staining, so even though Manchester Museum 7556 was found in in a settlement deposit, and not a burial, it would therefore be most likely that it would be associated with malachite processing.³⁹ This is notionally supported by the discovery of unprocessed malachite ore at Spur 3.⁴⁰ Using decorrelation stretching to enhance the colour separation of photographs of Manchester Museum 7556 does not help to clarify this question, and unfortunately does not show any extant pigment staining on the palette, as shown in Figure 11. With the lack of obvious pigment staining, and as Manchester Museum 7556 was rediscovered within the settlement’s rubbish deposit, it is also quite possible that the palette was never used and was in fact broken during its manufacture and discarded as scrap by the craftsperson.

³² Petrie 1895: 371.

³³ Stevenson 2007: 150.

³⁴ Petrie and Mace 1901: 20.

³⁵ Murray 2004: 3.

³⁶ Manniche and Forman 1999: 135-136; Lucas and Harris 2000: 333; Serpico and White 2000: 415; Vogelsang-Eastwood 2000: 270.

³⁷ Crubézy et al 2002: 463-464; Ayrton and Loat 1911: 28-29.

³⁸ Baduel 2008: 1068.

³⁹ Baduel 2008: 1068.

⁴⁰ Brunton and Caton-Thompson 1928: 45.



Figure 11: Decorrelation stretch of Manchester Museum 7556, created in AndroidDStretch using the general purpose YDT enhancement mode.

Whilst not a common item, palettes formed part of the Naqada culture's social structure with their value and importance being recognised throughout that culture.⁴¹ Zoomorphic palettes are a late stage in the development of palette morphology, with their shape representing a form of common language – which may have ultimately led to the development of hieroglyphs.⁴²

During the middle of the Naqada III period (circa 3200-3150 BCE) the ruling elite began the confiscation of all prestigious objects, such as palettes and greywacke, which then became an exclusively elite item.⁴³ This 'ideological take over' of such well-known valuable objects allowed the elite to establish and cement their power and position within the Naqada culture.⁴⁴ The owners of palettes would then be seen to represent the intersection of mankind, the animal kingdom and the supernatural world – a role which in later Protodynastic and Dynastic periods would be filled by the king.⁴⁵

The zoomorphic palettes were succeeded by much simpler rectangular and round palettes, such as rectangular Naqada III palette Manchester Museum 5718 found in grave 1659

⁴¹ Baduel 2008: 1061, 1083.

⁴² Baduel 2008: 1084.

⁴³ Baduel 2008: 1057, 1063-1064, 1081.

⁴⁴ Baduel 2008: 1075, 1077.

⁴⁵ Baduel 2008: 1064.

at Tarkhan, before giving way to the introduction of the so called ‘ceremonial palettes’.⁴⁶ This significant simplification in the design of palettes from complex forms, taking significant time and skill to create, to simple geometric shapes may therefore represent the Naqada elite restricting the craftspeople capable of making the more complex palette morphologies, leaving people without access to these craftspeople only simple and relatively easy to produce palette. With the greywacke material itself being seen as special, perhaps even magical, the possession of geometrical palettes would be an elite status – although their owners were perhaps not of a high enough elite status for more the complex shapes or ‘ceremonial palettes’.⁴⁷

What is therefore interesting to note is that there has been no attempt made to rework Manchester Museum 7556 into a smaller functional palette. At 92x48 mm, the fragment Manchester Museum 7556 is larger than other complete examples of palettes such as fish-shaped palette Petrie Museum UC4374 (Figure 9), which is 75x44 mm. Broken potsherds have also been found with holes drilled near their perimeter to facilitate reattachment to their original pot using wire, for example Manchester Museum 4713 which is a fragment of a Predynastic bowl found at the site of Deir el-Ballas. Similar drilled holes have also been observed in ceremonial palettes such as the ‘Two Dogs Palette’ in the Ashmolean Museum (accessioned as AN1896-1908 E.3924), on which the head of one of the dogs on the palette’s broken top edge is missing, with two holes drilled into the base of its neck suggesting a wired repair. However, Manchester Museum 7556 does not display any such repair hole, implying that in addition to the absence of attempts to rework the fragment, there was also no attempt made to repair the original palette. If access to raw materials were being restricted during the time Manchester Museum 7556 was broken, it would seem likely that it would have been regarded as a precious and limited commodity deemed worthy of salvage and rework or repair. However, as Manchester Museum 7556 was instead discarded, that would imply that such materials were sufficiently abundant that there was not the necessity for retention and rework of scrap material.

Unfortunately, there are no primary sources accounting for the use of palettes and there is simply not enough archaeological evidence to make definitive conclusions on the full use of palettes in the Predynastic era. It is also perhaps reductive to attempt to assign a single use to palettes, with their use and significance changing over time and with different groups utilising them differently – something which is alluded to by the differences in pigment staining between burial and settlement contexts.⁴⁸ The archaeological evidence demonstrates that palettes certainly had a place in the funerary ritual, however even on the same site not every burial has a palette whereas other burials contain several.⁴⁹ The infrequency of palettes implies that they were a sign of elite status, especially in the later Naqada periods. It should also be noted that palettes could be found in burials of all ages and sexes.⁵⁰ However, there is no indication that frequency of palettes in burials was proportional to the level of elite status – unlike in later Protodynastic period where quantity of palettes appeared to be more significant than the quality.⁵¹ Graves which are found with a wide array of high-status objects often only feature and only feature one palette. An example of this is the H.29 grave at the site of el-Mahasna, which contained the Manchester Museum’s so called ‘Hippo Bowl’ (accessioned as 5069) amongst a wide array of other objects, and yet only contained one palette.⁵²

⁴⁶ Patenaude and Shaw 2011: 37; Stevenson 2009: 2-5; Wengrow 2006: 151-75.

⁴⁷ Baduel 2008: 1063.

⁴⁸ Baduel 2008: 1061; Crubézy, E. et al 2008: 307.

⁴⁹ Ayrton and Loat 1911; Brunton and Caton-Thompson 1928.

⁵⁰ Baduel 2008: 1078.

⁵¹ Baduel 2008: 1075.

⁵² Ayrton and Loat 1911: 11-12.

The inclusion of malachite in burials implies its significance to the deceased and their survivors and it is also demonstrable that in some cases green cosmetics were applied to the eyes of the deceased, but exactly how common this practice was remains unclear.⁵³ It should be noted that not all rediscovered palettes have malachite staining and not all burials contain malachite. It therefore seems sensible to assume that there were variations in the Predynastic funerary rituals and that no two were identical, even amongst groups holding the same or similar beliefs and perhaps even losing their original meaning over time.⁵⁴ There is also evidence, and speculation, that the use of palettes may also extend into daily life, both associated with the use of malachite and also with ochre pigments.⁵⁵ However, other than the discovery of palettes in settlement contexts, there is little evidence to be able to definitively confirm whether or not palettes played any role in the daily life of the Predynastic Egyptians.

When considering the use of Manchester Museum 7556 we must also consider that it is a broken fragment, presumably from a larger palette, which was rediscovered in the rubbish deposit of a settlement. Even if we were to assume that there were both daily and also funerary uses for palettes, it is impossible to know the roles which its creator and commissioner intended for Manchester Museum 7556. The palette may have been used for many years prior to its breaking and being discarded, or it could just as likely have been broken in the workshop during its manufacture.

Without the rediscovery of more fragments of the original palette we simply may never know the true use of Manchester Museum 7556. However, this article demonstrates that even though they are typically overlooked in favour of intact examples, fragmentary objects can prove to be worthwhile research subjects and help to inform the discussion on the people and cultures which created them. This will hopefully lead to similar studies of other object fragments, which may perhaps even identify parts of the same objects which have been distributed between various institutions.⁵⁶

⁵³ Crubézy et al 2002: 463-464.

⁵⁴ Baduel 2008: 1061; Crubézy, E. et al 2008: 307.

⁵⁵ Baduel 2008: 1068; Murray 2004: 3

⁵⁶ Stevenson 2019.

Figures

- Figure 1 Broken fish-shaped palette. Copyright: Manchester Museum, The University of Manchester. No. 7556.
- Figure 2 1:12,500 Sketch map of the north Spur of the Badari District. Copyright: British School of Archaeology in Egypt.
- Figure 3 Object inventory for Area A3 of Hemamieh excavation. Copyright: British School of Archaeology in Egypt.
- Figure 4 Broken palette. Copyright [CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/3.0/>)]: Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology, University College London. Petrie Museum UC10512.
- Figure 5 Double bird-shaped palette. Copyright: Manchester Museum, The University of Manchester. No. 2378.
- Figure 6 Fish-shaped palette. Copyright: Manchester Museum, The University of Manchester. No. 4602.
- Figure 7 Broken fish-shaped palette. Copyright: Manchester Museum, The University of Manchester. No. 7556.
- Figure 8 Digital approximation of broken fish-shaped palette. Copyright: Manchester Museum, The University of Manchester. No. 7556.
- Figure 9 Fish-shaped palette. Copyright [CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/3.0/>)]: Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology, University College London. Petrie Museum UC4374.
- Figure 11 Decorrelation stretch of broken fish-shaped palette. Copyright: Manchester Museum, The University of Manchester. No. 7556.

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Scarab with Hathor Head (1702.004) from Cyfarthfa Castle Museum and Art Gallery

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Abstract

The scarab with Hathor head (1702.004) from Cyfarthfa Castle Museum and Art Gallery was likely purchased by Major Harry Hartley Southey during his time stationed in Egypt. With evidence of cartouches belonging to Ramesses II situated on the base of the artefact it is possible that this is potentially a Heart or Commemorative scarab, however, the inclusion of the Hathor head is unusual. With this, the aim of this article is to examine the scarab with Hathor head in conjunction with similar artefacts to determine both where and when this scarab was likely produced and the intention behind its creation.

Keywords

Scarab with Hathor head, Cyfarthfa Castle Museum and Art Gallery, Harry Southey, heart scarab, commemorative scarab, Ramesses II, forgery

Background

Cyfartha Castle Museum and Art Gallery, situated on the edge of the Brecon Beacons National Park, houses an unusual collection of curiosities. From portraits and ceramics to early kitchen appliances and objects synonymous with the history of mining in Wales, Cyfarthfa (a community museum) is also home to a small collection of approximately 150 Ancient Egyptian artefacts. Whilst seemingly out of place within the Welsh landscape, one might wonder how these artefacts made their way from Egypt to Merthyr Tydfil. Originally belonging to Major Harry Hartley Southey, son of Harry Wood Southey (the owner and editor of the Merthyr Express), this collection of Egyptian artefacts was donated to the Cyfarthfa Castle Museum and Art Gallery by Henry Southey's estate shortly after his death in 1917 during the Battle of Gaza.¹

Southey, an avid explorer and collector of Asian, Egyptian, Greek and Roman oddities appears to have acquired some of these artefacts during an initial visit to Cairo during 1901.² However, it was during his time stationed in Egypt as a Major in the 5th Welsh Regiment (1916-1917) that Southey began collecting again after sparking a friendship with the curator of the Egyptian Museum.³ Although prior to the discovery of the tomb of Tutankhamun by Howard Carter in 1922, Egyptomania was already present in the late 19th century with Western travellers flocking to Egypt in an attempt to discover a piece of Egyptian history for themselves.⁴ However, alongside this increase in tourism came the looting of ancient tombs. Both legally and illegally excavated, these tombs amassed large numbers of ancient Egyptian grave goods resulting in regulations on antiquities becoming stricter.⁵ Even with regulations being changed and tightened, many antiquities still made their way out of Egypt to private collections and museums, likely sold to finance further excavations or as a way of making a living.⁶ Whilst it is possible that some of the Southey collection was purchased through such transactions, the emergence of fakes and forgeries was likely the result of the market being flooded with genuine ancient artefacts.

Whilst the Harry Southey collection contains a range of artefacts from the decapitated head of a mummy to wooden paddle dolls, it is also representative of great distances in terms of perceived provenance, acquisition and time. However, because of the lack of records kept during early excavations, and without the proper documentation delivered upon purchase, it is almost impossible to determine the precise location of deposition and acquisition for many of these artefacts. This is the case with a large percentage of the collection. With limited documentation supporting the area of deposition, excavation and later acquisition, it is difficult to conclude how these objects came to be in Harry Southey's possession. Whilst we can assume that the scarab with Hathor head was collected by Harry Southey during his time stationed in Egypt, this cannot be stated as fact because of the large lapse in records from the point of acquisition to its final resting place at the Cyfarthfa Museum and Art Gallery in Merthyr Tydfil.

¹ Zinn 2017: 694.

² Zinn 2017: 698.

³ Zinn 2017: 698.

⁴ Reid 2003: 2.

⁵ Colla 2008: 210.

⁶ Davies and Laboury 2020: 281. See also Murray 2007: 254.

Rediscovery

The process of cataloguing the Harry Southey collection began in late 2012, nearly 100 years after its initial donation to the museum and 1 year after its rediscovery in a storeroom at the Cyfarthfa Castle Museum and Art Gallery.⁷ Dr Katharina Zinn, Senior Lecturer in Egyptian Archaeology and Heritage from the University of Wales Trinity Saint David, Lampeter (UWTSD), is the first Egyptologist in recent years to examine the Harry Southey collection. Initially examined by Margaret Murray in 1925 and then by Paul Nicholson in the 1990's, the Harry Southey collection is a prime example of Secondary Archaeology.⁸ Whilst their work does provide some insight into the collection, these publications do not explicitly explore the scarab with Hathor head in isolation.

Whilst some of the Southey collection is already on display at the Cyfarthfa Castle Museum and Art Gallery, Dr Zinn also exhibited some of the key pieces in an exhibition entitled "*Bringing Egypt to Merthyr – The Harry Southey Story*" during March 2017. However, it should be noted that the scarab with Hathor head was not on display during this time. Instead, it is hoped that the artefact will now be displayed in late 2020.

Description

The scarab with Hathor head or 'Hathor-headed scarab' is the only example of its kind within the Harry Southey collection. With the accession number: 1702.004 (previously assigned 58), the scarab with Hathor head is 8.6 x 6 x 2.8cm in dimension and weighs approximately 0.170g (see Figure 1). Following the standardised canon for Egyptian scarabs with evidence of an abdomen, thorax and enclosed wings, the Hathor head instead replaces the typical scarab face (see Figures 2, 3 and 4). However, Hathor (who appears front-facing and in cow form) is unusual in appearance and does not follow the typical style, perhaps promoting the theory that this is a foreign emulation.⁹ On the base of the artefact there are two cartouches resembling the name of Nineteenth Dynasty Pharaoh, Ramesses II (see Figure 5 and 6).¹⁰ Whilst the size of the artefact suggests that it was designed to be held, perhaps as a Heart or Commemorative scarab, it appears that the cartouches are crudely written, leading to the possibility that they were etched on by hand rather than being stamped or moulded.

When examining the hieroglyphs, what could be considered red and black acrylic paint is dotted around the base of the artefact (see Figure 5). These marks appear scattered and random so could be unintentional (a result of the workshop environment or through contact with paint during transit to the museum), however, the colouring of the material appears somewhat burnt as if the crafter purposely attempted to emulate the ageing appearance of stone and thus make the object appear older than it is in actuality (see Figures 2, 3 and 4). Although stone-like in appearance, both its weight and brittle nature suggests that the scarab with Hathor head is instead made of either clay or plaster. Weighing a mere 0.170g, it is unlikely that the scarab with Hathor head is therefore made out of stone. With evidence of air pockets and chips in its stone-like appearance, it is instead likely that a soluble mixture was poured into a mould to create the standardised form of the scarab.¹¹

⁷ Zinn 2016: <https://humanitiesblog.uwtsd.ac.uk/?p=546> (15th April 2020).

⁸ Zinn 2017: 694.

⁹ Higginbotham 2000: 118-121.

¹⁰ Ryholt 1977: 46.

¹¹ Lucas and Harris 2012: 159. See also Kalloniatis 2019: 316.

Since the scarab with Hathor head has no corresponding documents to indicate its deposition, excavation or indeed acquisition it is difficult to determine the precise location and thus date in which the artefact was initially created. Since scarabs were in circulation from the Old Kingdom through to the Graeco-Roman period, it is possible that the scarab with Hathor head could correspond to the stylistic features that appear over a number of periods.¹² Whilst particularly popular during the Early Middle Kingdom the inclusion of two cartouches containing the name of Ramesses II may naturally suggest that the object dates to the Ramesside period (see Figures 5 and 6).¹³ Poorly incised, these cartouches have likely worn away because of the use of poor quality material (see Figure 5).¹⁴ The presence of these cartouches may then suggest that the scarab with Hathor head is instead Commemorative.¹⁵ Specially commissioned to record or commemorate an event or occasion, Commemorative scarabs were usually inscribed with the Pharaoh's name and appeared during the New Kingdom following the reign of Amenhotep III.¹⁶ However, these scarabs are not usually human headed. Because of the inclusion of the Hathor head, we must also additionally take into account the use of stylistic features, potential function and the use of materials when examining this artefact instead of solely relying on the cartouches as means of dating.

The inclusion of the anthropomorphic 'Hathor-head' might then infer that this artefact is instead a Heart scarab. Heart scarabs, also large in size and sometimes human-headed, are usually inscribed with passage 30B from the Book of the Dead such as the 'Heart Scarab with Human Head' from the Metropolitan Museum of Art.¹⁷ Although there are examples of human-headed heart scarabs with cartouches (usually replacing the spell that would magically induce the heart scarab's power), there has yet to be another example of a Hathor headed scarab discovered to date. Instead, the incorporation of Hathor may be the result of her role within the ancient Egyptian religious and funerary sphere.¹⁸ Khepri for instance is representative of both the rising and setting sun and rebirth, is often depicted within ancient Egyptian funerary culture because of the connection to death and rebirth.¹⁹ It is, therefore, possible that Hathor's image has also been used because of her connection to the ancient Egyptian funerary sphere. With epithets including 'Lady of the West' and 'Mistress of Heaven', it is possible the creator intentionally depicted Hathor to invoke the goddess and imbue the scarab with her magical properties.²⁰ It should also be noted that the inclusion of the Hathor head is indeed unusual since Hathor, the Goddess of motherly love, is often associated with women.²¹ The use of her image on this potential Heart scarab might also be considered unusual since Ramesses II attempted to portray himself as a strong, masculine figure as attested by artwork and extensive building projects during the Ramesside Period.²² However, Hathor was also considered the wife and mother of the king and is closely associated with royal cult scenes which could provide a reason as to her depiction on this scarab.²³ Whilst not a completely unfeasible notion,

¹² Bennett 2019: 185.

¹³ Richard 2003: 220.

¹⁴ Wileman 2015: 59.

¹⁵ Hart 2005: 84.

¹⁶ Cline & Rubalcaba 2005: 96.

¹⁷ Wilkinson 2007: 346. See also: <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/550986> (15th April 2020).

¹⁸ Bleeker 2018: 70.

¹⁹ Wilkinson 2003: 230-233.

²⁰ Wilkinson 2003: 139-145.

²¹ Robins 1993: 18.

²² Lesko 1989: 29.

²³ Teissier 1996: 184.

Hathor's feminine attributes could seemingly be at odds with the masculine image portrayed by Ramesses II.²⁴

Whilst the scarab with Hathor head could equally be characterised as either a Heart or Commemorative scarab, it is difficult to definitively determine the symbolic meaning of the Hathor head and the reasoning behind its creation without a known place of deposition. Similarly, without relying on the inclusion of the cartouches of Ramesses II as a dating method, methods such as Rehydroxylation dating, a process that analyses the level of moisture that has been reabsorbed by fired clay after being removed from the kiln, could be used to help determine a likely date for the artefact.²⁵

Fake, Forgery or Souvenir?

Since there are no other known examples of Hathor-headed scarabs we are reliant upon similar examples for comparison in determining a probable area of acquisition for the scarab with Hathor head. An Egyptian souvenir Sphinx scarab paperweight from the Australian War Memorial Museum is not dissimilar to the scarab with Hathor head (see Figures 7 and 8).²⁶ Of seemingly similar size to the scarab with Hathor head (8.6 x 6 x 2.8cm), artefact 15229 does appear more detailed with textured markings on the face of the Sphinx, abdomen and enclosed wings of the scarab body (see Figure 7). Remarkably, the cartouches inscribed upon the base of the artefact are exceedingly similar to those inscribed upon the Hathor-headed scarab (Ramesses II), however, the deterioration makes this difficult to prove definitively (see Figure 5 and 8 for comparison of these cartouches).

Purchased by Sergeant David Roberts of the 17th Australian Infantry Battalion in 1915, the souvenir Sphinx scarab paperweight has been categorised as clay.²⁷ It is believed that Roberts, who was stationed in Egypt during 1915, acquired the paperweight as a souvenir or gift as he travelled around Egypt (specifically Cairo and Heliopolis) during his time away from training.²⁸ As well as artefact 15229, there is also another example from the Australian War Memorial Museum with similar physical attributes to both the aforementioned paperweight and to the Hathor headed scarab. Again, this moderately sized scarab with the head of the Sphinx also appears to be made of clay but with a grey glaze to mimic the appearance of stone. Coincidentally, the artefact also appears to have been collected by an individual training in the army, in this case by Arthur Charles Gunter during his training in Egypt between 1914-1915.²⁹ Upon its donation to the museum some years later, it was revealed that Gunter had been informed that the artefact had been excavated near the pyramids, providing a vague area of deposition for the artefact and highlighting its value.³⁰ Both Robert's Sphinx scarab paperweight and the Gunter scarab have been classified as modern souvenirs, potentially forged by locals in an attempt to sell onto Western visitors as ancient Egyptian artefacts.³¹ Because of these factors, it is also possible that the scarab with Hathor head is a 'modern fake' created to be a 'souvenir'. Scarab paperweights notably began to emerge during the early 1920's with the

²⁴ Graves-Brown 2010: 110.

²⁵ Wilson et al 2012: 3476-3493.

²⁶ Australian War Memorial: Museum accession number/ inventory number 15229.

²⁷ Australian War Memorial: Museum accession number/ inventory number 15229.

²⁸ Australian War Memorial: Museum accession number/ inventory number 15229.

²⁹ Rutherford 2013: <https://www.awm.gov.au/articles/blog/ancient-egyptian-souvenir> (15th April 2020)

³⁰ Brodie 2012: 232.

³¹ Baber 2016: 63.

rise of Egyptomania after the discovery of Tutankhamun's tomb in 1922.³² Scarabs may have been particularly appealing to travellers as they may have been easy to attain because of its small size, likely making them relatively affordable. Interestingly, however, there is the evidence that these examples were sold in an attempt to fool its buyer into believing that they had purchased a piece of Egyptian history, as with the description given to Gunter about his paperweight. Whether authentic or forged, Egyptian history became a commodity that many wished to possess either to influence their own social status or for personal gain.³³ Probably costing more than the typical replica, it is also possible that Harry Southey also purchased the scarab with Hathor head believing that it was ancient in origin.

Conclusions

With this, we can conclude that the scarab with Hathor head is most likely a modern creation. Probably crafted between 1910-1915 and sold as a souvenir to Western tourists it is also possible that the seller intended to dupe the buyer into believing that it was a genuine artefact since scarabs are relatively easy to replicate because of the many stylistic changes over time.³⁴ Aided by the rise of Egyptomania the fascination with all things Egyptian grew. From fashion and jewellery to music and film, the Egyptian Revival influenced Western culture so dramatically that many sought to procure their own piece of Egyptian history.³⁵ With this, it may be inferred that artefacts such as the scarab with Hathor head were crafted to deliberately fulfil this fascination with ancient Egypt. Perhaps created by locals who drew inspiration from a variety of 'real' ancient Egyptian artefacts it is possible that these individuals hoped that the buyers would not be able to identify the real artefacts from the forgeries.

However, whilst this artefact is likely not ancient in origin, we should not entirely disregard its relevance within the scope of Egyptomania and the subsequent rise of forgeries. It may be argued that forgeries and fakes have their own biographies. With the intention to copy or emulate an original's design these artefacts have instead produced their own style. As with the case of the scarab with Hathor head, it appears that the crafter intended to produce a unique item, perhaps to convince tourists of its rarity so as to procure a higher price especially when we consider the cartouches inscribed on the base of the artefact. However, the likelihood that this artefact would then be sold onto Major Harry Southey and eventually make its way to the Cyfarthfa Castle Museum and Art Gallery is perhaps not what the creator of the scarab with Hathor head had originally intended. Whilst we can speculate as to why this object was crafted, purchased and eventually donated to the Cyfarthfa Castle Museum and Art Gallery its story from the original creation to a highlighting piece of the Harry Southey Collection cannot be undermined by its worth in years. Instead, these narratives have highlighted the Hathor-headed scarab's interesting story, as well as providing scope in which to view artefacts and distinguish their value by other means.

³² Curl 1994: 211-222.

³³ Kopytoff 1986: 66-68.

³⁴ Aldred 1971: 160-161.

³⁵ Pierson 2017: 113-117.

Figures

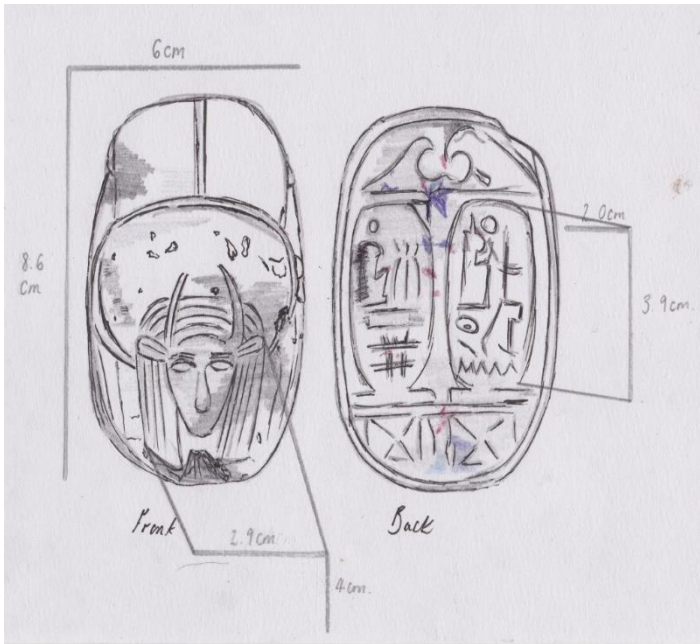


Figure 1: Initial sketch of scarab with Hathor head (sketch ©Jenna Heard 2016)



Figure 2: 'Front view' of scarab with Hathor head (photo ©Jenna Heard 2016), permissions granted by Cyfarthfa Castle Museum and Art Gallery via Dr Katharina Zinn.



Figure 3: Front 'side' view (photo ©Jenna Heard 2016), permissions granted by Cyfarthfa Castle Museum and Art Gallery via Dr Katharina Zinn.



Figure 4: Front 'back' view of scarab with Hathor head (photo ©Jenna Heard 2016), permissions by Cyfarthfa Castle Museum and Art Gallery via Dr Katharina Zinn.



Figure 5: 'Base view' of scarab with Hathor head showing partial inscription (photo ©Jenna Heard 2016), permissions granted by Cyfarthfa Castle Museum and Art Gallery via Dr Katharina Zinn.



Figure 6: Base 'rubbing' of scarab with Hathor head (impression ©Jenna Heard 2016)



Figure 7: Sketch of Sphinx headed scarab (Sketch ©Jenna Heard 2020).

Original object courtesy of the Australian War Museum: REL/15229.

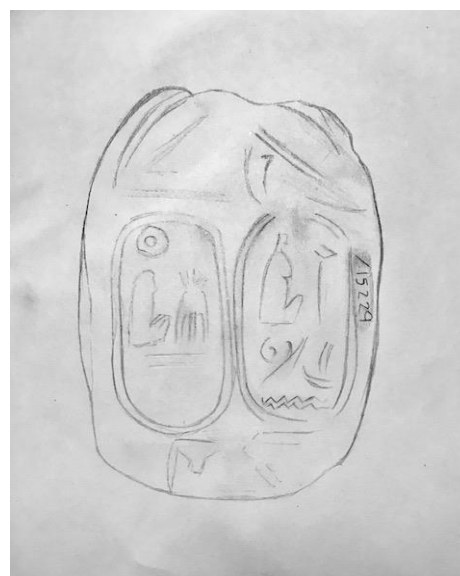


Figure 8: 'Base view' sketch of Sphinx headed scarab (Sketch ©Jenna Heard 2020).

Original object courtesy of the Australian War Museum: REL/15229.

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Eton Myers Collection Object Biography: ECM 220, A Wooden Offering Bearer¹

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Abstract

Over 540 ancient Egyptian objects are currently on loan to the University of Birmingham from the Eton Myers collection, a private collection bequeathed to Eton College by Major William Joseph Myers upon his death in 1899. The collection features a wide range of artefacts dating from the Palaeolithic to the Graeco-Roman period, including a set of two wooden female offering bearers, one of which is now on loan to the University of Birmingham (ECM 220), and the other to Johns Hopkins Archaeological Museum (ECM 219). As funerary figurines typical of elite tomb contexts within the late Old Kingdom through to the Middle Kingdom, these objects can provide insights into ancient belief, technological processes, and ranges in craftsmanship. This brief object biography provides a preliminary analysis of the figures from the Eton Myers collection, and discusses stylistic links that may potentially indicate their shared provenance.

Keywords

Eton Myers collection; Eton College; offering bearer; funerary models; late Old Kingdom; First Intermediate Period; Middle Kingdom; wooden figurine; funerary objects; ECM 219; ECM 220; ECM 1591.

¹ With thanks to Eton College, Research and Cultural Collections within the University of Birmingham, and the Johns Hopkins Archaeological Museum for permission to include images of several objects from the Eton Myers collection. Sadly, much of the intended research relating to the Johns Hopkins figure and Myers' diary entries has been disrupted due to COVID-19 and the subsequent closure of numerous institutions. It is hoped that a future article can expand on the initial comments and suggestions presented here, while also providing further images of the Johns Hopkins object to enable further comparison of the styles.

Major William Joseph Myers & The Eton Myers Collection

The collection of ancient objects amassed by Major William Joseph Myers (1858-1899) began during his military service in Cairo, and after his death during the Second Boer War the collection was bequeathed to Eton College, where previously some of these objects had been used as a teaching resource.² As with many private collections accumulated throughout the late 19th century, the specifics of when, where, and why objects were acquired by Myers can be difficult to ascertain. While the figure Émile Charles Albert Brugsch – the younger brother of the German Egyptologist Heinrich Ferdinand Karl Brugsch³ – is mentioned within Myers' travel diary entries, suggesting this was one likely avenue for Myers' collecting, there's often little explicit recorded information to confirm any transactions.⁴ This speaks to the wider problematic nature of comprehending the motivations for collecting ancient objects in this era, and the dual importance of analysing both the ancient and modern history of museum objects today. After the formal bequest of the Myers collection to Eton College, additional donations from figures such as Percy Newberry, Gerald Avery Wainwright, and Heywood Seton-Karr further contributed to its reputation as an internationally renowned private collection.⁵ While some of these gifted items had a secure provenance and date, overall many objects that formed the original collection have a comparable lack of archaeological detail.

The Myers collection has been the focus of a collaborative project between Eton College, the University of Birmingham, and Johns Hopkins Archaeological Museum in Baltimore, with the aim of actively utilising the ancient objects for teaching, research, outreach and wider engagement within the respective institutions.⁶ Over 540 objects are on loan to the University of Birmingham, and this includes a wide range of amulets, shabti figures, pottery, stone tools, and assorted faience, spanning the entirety of Egyptian pharaonic history. The only wooden offering bearer figurine now held in Birmingham (ECM 220) has not previously been studied in detail, nor have comparisons been made between other surviving models now held at Eton College and Johns Hopkins.

The Development of Offering Bearer Figurines

Several wooden figurines and models form part of the overall collection that originates from Myers' bequeathment, each markedly different in quality, style, and state of preservation. Before looking at some particular examples from the Myers collection in more depth, it is useful to consider the history of such funerary models and their typical styles and attributes.

² For further biographical details of Myers, see: Bierbrier 1995: 305; Georganteli 2010: 16-34; Spurr 1999: 1-3.

³ Myers' travel diaries typically detail his social activities, but nevertheless they provide a useful insight into his life and his interest in ancient Egypt (Georganteli 2010: 18-20; Reeves 1999a: 5-6; Reeves 1999b: 20-22). For both Brugsch figures and their contribution to Egyptology within the 19th century, see Bierbrier (1995: 66-68).

⁴ Myers does mention general 'antique dealers' (Spurr 1999: 2-3) and others by name, such as Panayotis Kycitas who has well known transactions with larger institutions such as the British Museum (Spurr et al 1999: 3). One instance in which Myers does confirm an object acquired through Brugsch is noted by Georganteli (2010: 20), in which it is connected to over 20 separate items found by Brugsch, which were subsequently given to a range of high-status officials and international museums.

⁵ Georganteli and Bommas 2010: 9, 16; Spurr 1999: 1. For further details of the other named donors to the Eton Myers collection, see Reeves (1999a: 4-5).

⁶ From the statement of Lord Waldegrave, Provost of Eton College, recorded in Georganteli and Bommas' exhibition publication *Sacred and Profane* (2010: 7).

Two-dimensional representations of offerings being supplied for the tomb owner is first attested within surviving elite tomb reliefs of the Third Dynasty (2686 – 2613 BC).⁷ During the Fifth and Sixth Dynasties (2494 – 2345 BC, 2345 – 2181 BC), non-royal tombs at Saqqara and Dashur were also decorated with visual motifs depicting food production, agricultural work, and plentiful offerings being presented to the image of the deceased, demonstrating the constant supply from the offering cult for the afterlife.⁸ Together, these popular carved or painted images conveyed the ideal scenario of (continued) abundance which would ‘come into existence’ for the tomb owner’s nourishment.⁹ Within these final phases of the Old Kingdom and into the subsequent First Intermediate Period (2160 – 2055 BC) and Middle Kingdom (2055 – 1650 BC), elite tomb decoration began to be complemented by a range of three-dimensional models and figurines. These were designed specifically for the tomb, and could represent scenes of daily life, the production of vital goods such as bread and beer, and the provision of offerings for the tomb owner, composed either as individuals, pairs, or as a larger group composition.¹⁰

Wooden three-dimensional figures – male and female - bearing offerings are attested from the Sixth Dynasty onwards, and have been interpreted as personifications of those persons shown in tomb reliefs given their similar iconography.¹¹ Female figurines, varying referred to in modern discussions as ‘servant figures’, ‘estate figures’ or ‘offering bearers’,¹² were typically embellished with a layer of gesso and paint to delineate details of the face, clothing, and items being carried. Of varying style and quality, these figures often gazed straight ahead, with the left leg forward implying physical motion, and a basket or chest steadied with the left hand (either opened with goods on display or closed), usually with another item held separately in the right hand.¹³ Variations in offerings being carried by the figures include vessels, loaves of bread, birds, and selections of cut meat.¹⁴ Female figures are also argued to originate from the areas of Memphis and Meir,¹⁵ with the nearby site of Sedment possessing the highest number of these offering bearer figures within the extensive cemeteries found in this area which date to the late Old Kingdom through to the early Middle Kingdom.¹⁶ The status of these models as a desirable part of funerary equipment formed only one part of the wider changes taking place within burial practices during this time.¹⁷

⁷ Hayes 1946: 170; Tooley (1995: 22), however, suggests that these figures are first attested on royal monuments of the subsequent Fourth Dynasty. The dates provided within this article follow the chronology used by Ian Shaw (2000: 480-489).

⁸ Allen 2006: 9-10. Several relief scenes are now part of international museum collections, such as the Sixth Dynasty limestone false-door of Meri (EA 1191, British Museum) and the offering-bearer reliefs from the late Fifth - early Sixth Dynasty tomb of Nayankhnesut (1965.28 M, Dallas Museum of Art). Other examples can be found in Aldred (1980: 82, Fig. 40; 85, Fig. 44), and Russmann (2001: 82-84, catalogue numbers 13-14).

⁹ Eschenbrenner-Diemer 2017: 135-136; Taylor 2001: 98.

¹⁰ Tooley 1995: 22. A high-quality example of a group composition known as the ‘el-Bersha procession’ comes from the tomb of Djehutynakht in the late Eleventh - early Twelfth Dynasty (21.326, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston). Such objects mark a new development in elite funerary settings (Seidlmayer 2000: 114).

¹¹ Eschenbrenner-Diemer 2017: 139; Harvey 2009: 3-4; Tooley 1989: 175-181.

¹² Or ‘anonymous figures’ (Redford 2006: 236-237), or ‘porters’ (Tooley 1995: 22-27).

¹³ Taylor 2001: 103. General discussion of these statuettes can be found in Hayes (1978: 107-115, 210-218).

¹⁴ See for instance a range of goods held by offering bearers now held in the Louvre (E 10781), and the British Museum (EA 30716, EA 41673, EA 47640), and many others now held in museum collections.

¹⁵ Eschenbrenner-Diemer 2017: 137; Tooley 1995: 23.

¹⁶ Tooley 1989: 215.

¹⁷ Harvey 2006: 157. Seidlmayer (2000: 115) notes the importance of recognising simultaneous developments such as the use of Coffin Texts, other model sculpture, and new funerary equipment. For a useful historical overview of changes within the tomb from the Old to Middle Kingdoms, see O’Neill (2015: 2-10).



Figure 11: 'Estate Figure' from the tomb of Meketre
(Accession number 20.3.7, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund and Edward S. Harkness Gift, 1920)

Famous high-quality examples such as those discovered within the Theban tomb of Meketre from the early Twelfth Dynasty (Figure 1) demonstrate the technical skill of the ancient craftsmen, but also the archetypal form of such figurines.¹⁸

While the figures from the tomb of Meketre stand at over 100 cm tall, typically offering bearer figures only range somewhere between 30 cm and 60 cm in height.¹⁹ The occurrence of pairs is noted as a particular trait of figures placed within Old Kingdom burials, and often found predominantly in northern sites,²⁰ but Meketre's surviving figures demonstrate that later examples from southern areas were still possible. The desire for placing paired figures in the tomb is argued by Tooley (1995: 26) to perhaps relate to ideological concepts that defined the Egyptian view of their world, including the distinction between northern (Lower) and southern (Upper) Egypt, or the Black and the Red Lands. It is also possible that the variation in the items being brought by the figures provided a visual complement that ensured the continued provision of both food and drink. From the reign of Pepi II (c. 2325 – c. 2150 BC) onwards, changes within the tomb include the varying distribution of wooden images.²¹ Analysis of the figures' aesthetic characteristics has allowed previous studies to determine several local or regional styles, to examine the possibilities of ancient wood workshops operating across Egypt, and to trace the chronological development of these tomb models from the Old Kingdom onwards.²² The identification of particular stylistic traits from secure dates and contexts also allows for unprovenanced materials to be compared with those from known sites; coincidentally, this analysis has already taken place with other wooden models from the Eton Myers collection.²³

¹⁸ 20.3.7, Metropolitan Museum of Art. An identical figure from the same tomb is also held in Cairo's Egyptian Museum (JE 46725; described in Breasted 1948: 64, Pl. 58a; El-Shahawy and al-Miṣrī 2005: 134-135). Taylor (2001: 103) notes a special significance is intimated by their typically larger size and higher quality of craftsmanship compared with other models.

¹⁹ Tooley 1995: 26. See also Hayes (1978: 226-227).

²⁰ Tooley 1995: 23, 26.

²¹ Harvey 2006: 157. These developments are further discussed in relation to production and trade by Eschenbrenner-Diemer (2017, 2018), with further forthcoming publications related to particular regional areas.

²² Key studies include: Eschenbrenner-Diemer (2017, 2018); Harvey (2001, 2006, 2009); Tooley (1989; 1995).

²³ This practice noted by Tooley (1994: 343-348) is followed by an example from the Eton Myers collection and its physical similarities to group compositions of Gebelein (notably, this includes ECM 1733 and ECM 1550 (formally numbered ECM 2 and 2172 in Tooley respectively)).

Wooden Offering Bearer – ECM 1591 (Johns Hopkins Archaeology Museum)



Figure 12: 'Offering bearer' from the tomb of Hapykem, Meir (ECM 1591, image courtesy of the Eton College Trustees and the Johns Hopkins Archaeological Museum. Photography by James T. Van Rensselaer).

The offering bearer from the tomb of the official Hapykem at Meir is arguably the highest quality figurine held within the Eton Myers collection (Figure 2). Though the poor preservation of the tomb yielded limited information,²⁴ the tomb owner's details are recorded in a painted inscription along the top of the basket carried by the figurine: 'Seal bearer of the king of Lower Egypt, sole companion, overseer of priests, the revered one, Hapykem'.²⁵ Additionally, Myers actually mentions this offering bearer in his diary entry of March 1894, describing it being brought to him by Brugsch and dating the object (erroneously) to the 'Eleventh Dynasty'.²⁶

The female figure wears a long white dress with straps across the chest, leaving the breasts exposed, and her head is covered with a white headcloth. Her left arm supports the basket above her head while in her right hand she carries a pinioned bird, and a white calf walks slightly ahead of the figure. Though physically not as well-crafted as Meketre's figure, both share physical similarities in their pose. And despite her lower quality, Hapykem's figure is also notable as a rare example of a female wearing jewellery, as both of her wrists are adorned with a light blue bracelet or cuff.²⁷ Though the nature of the acquisition process at this time resulted in figures such as these being removed from the original burial assemblages and thus their potential pairs separated, happily in this case another surviving offering bearer figurine from Meir appears 'virtually identical' to ECM 1591, and is now held in Copenhagen.²⁸ Both the modern discussion of the cemetery site and the individual tomb figures have led to suggested dates somewhere between the late Old Kingdom²⁹ and middle of the First Intermediate Period.³⁰

²⁴ Blackman 1914: 6, 10-11; Blackman *et al.* 1954: 57.

²⁵ Georganteli and Bommas 2010: 46, Figure 30; Schneider *et al.* 1999: 29, Figure 4. Both sources record the object's height as 45 cm, though other sources such as Tooley (1989: 184) offer a more precise measurement of 43.2 cm.

²⁶ This diary excerpt is discussed by Maggie Bryson as part of a presentation on this figure (<http://archaeologicalmuseum.jhu.edu/other-stories/symposium-2013-2/an-old-kingdom-offering-bearer/>).

²⁷ Eschenbrenner-Diemer 2017: 138.

²⁸ AEIN 670, Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek Copenhagen; Tooley 1989: 184-185. An image of this figure's 'twin' can also be found in Tooley 1995: 22, Figure 12.

²⁹ Blackman (1914: 6) dates the tomb itself between the reigns of Pepi II and Merenre II. Other discussions simply suggest a date around the end of the Old Kingdom: Breasted 1948: 61; Georganteli and Bommas 2010: 46; Schneider *et al.* 1999: 29.

³⁰ Tooley (1989: 185) suggests this later date based on the resemblance to early Middle Kingdom statuary.

Wooden Offering Bearer – ECM 220 (University of Birmingham)

The offering bearer currently on loan to Birmingham is not only of significantly lower quality than the figures from the tombs of Hapykem and Meketre, but it has also suffered substantial loss of both its ancient gesso and paint across the object surface (Figures 3 to 5, page 7).

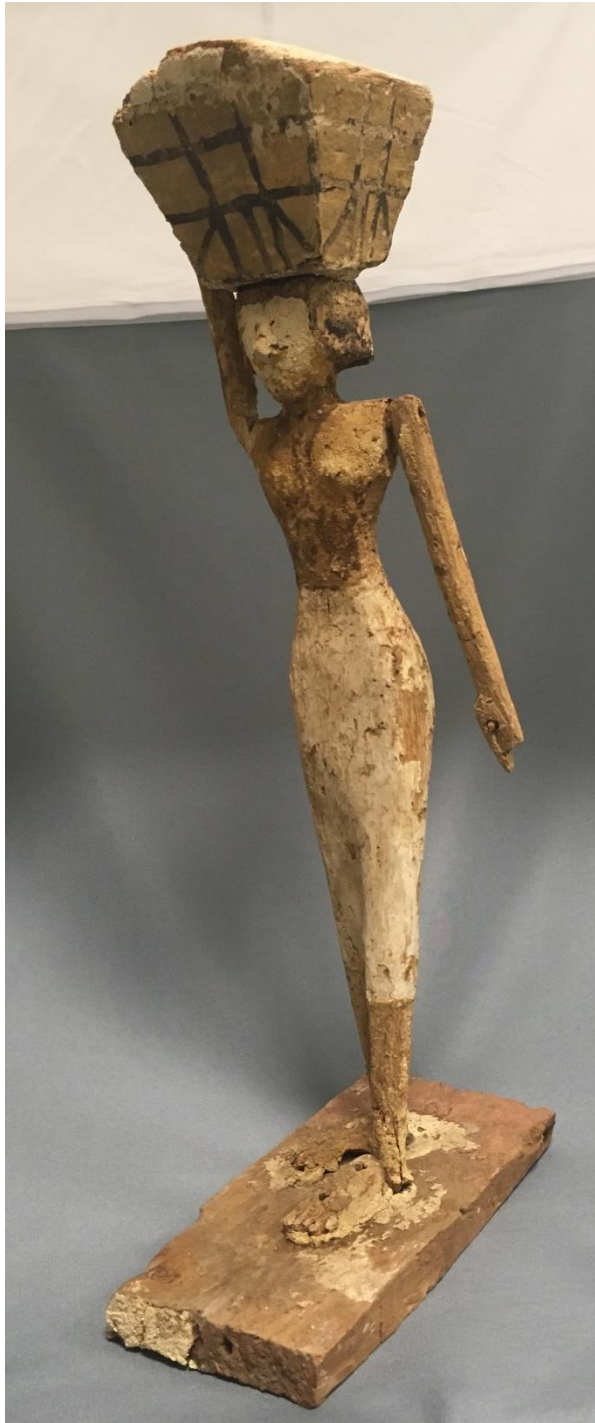
Standing at 30.5cm in height, including the wooden base, the yellow ochre colour traditionally used to portray the female's skin is particularly notable across the chest and torso.³¹ Traces of the white substance used to indicate the tight-fitting sheath dress are also discernible across the lower waist and legs, and though faint traces also appear on the upper body, the style of dress in this area is not clearly delineated. Potentially, based on other surviving forms the dress straps could join at the breastbone and narrow straps around the neck – now obscured from our figure – could have held the cloth up while also leaving the breasts exposed.³² Her wig is closely cropped and with visible dark paint indicating its original colour, particularly on the reverse and the object's proper left side (Figure 4, page 7). Fragments of white and black paint across the face outline the wide set eyes and kohl, and the outline of a nose is also visible. Further black paint has also been used to create the cross-hatching pattern across the closed chest carried over her head, painted on top of the yellow colour, most of which is still intact (Figures 4 and 5, page 7). These limited traces of original colours used for this figure constituted only of yellow, white, and black, though it is still possible that other colours used have since deteriorated. As the original wood is exposed, we are able to see the composition of various separate pieces that formed the united object; the arms are pegged to the main body via dowels or joins in the shoulders, while the feet are secured to the base in the same manner (Figure 6, page 8). The tenon joining the proper left arm to the shoulder of the body is extremely loose and thus the left arm is moveable, though it is unclear whether this was the ancient intention of the object or a result of the loosening of the join over time.³³

In contrast to the pose of Meketre and Hapykem's figures, our offering bearer uses the left arm to support the basket while the right arm is held straight alongside the body and potentially once carried another object, now lost. Another surviving female offering bearer from the Eton Myers collection shares this same subversion of the typical pose; this figure is now broken into two separate pieces with the head and basket separated from the body, however more of the original colour has survived (Figures 7 and 8, page 9). Here it is worth comparing the two in more detail to offer provisional assessments of their similarities, and through comparison with objects from known contexts it is possible to speculate on potential dates and provenances based on their shared stylistic features.

³¹ For further typical conventions in portrayal of females in Egyptian art, in both wooden statuary and other three-dimensional formats, see: Eaton-Krauss 1984; Harvey 2001; Hayes 1978; Robins 1993, 1994; Smith 1949; Tooley 1989.

³² See for instance the style of dress from an offering bearer figure from Asyut, now in the Museum of Fine Arts Boston collection (04.714), dated somewhere between the First Intermediate Period and Middle Kingdom. A much larger Theban example from the Eleventh Dynasty has a similar styled dress, though the straps are larger, and the colour is a distinctive green (05.231, Museum of Fine Arts Boston).

³³ See for instance an example discussed in Tooley (1989: 187, 4.5.2.1).



(top left) Figure 3: Obverse of 'Offering bearer' (ECM 220, reproduced with permission from Research and Cultural Collections, University of Birmingham, courtesy of Eton College).



(top right) Figure 4: Reverse of 'Offering bearer' (ECM 220, reproduced with permission from Research and Cultural Collections, University of Birmingham, courtesy of Eton College).



(bottom right) Figure 5: Face of 'Offering bearer' (ECM 220, reproduced with permission from Research and Cultural Collections, University of Birmingham, courtesy of Eton College).

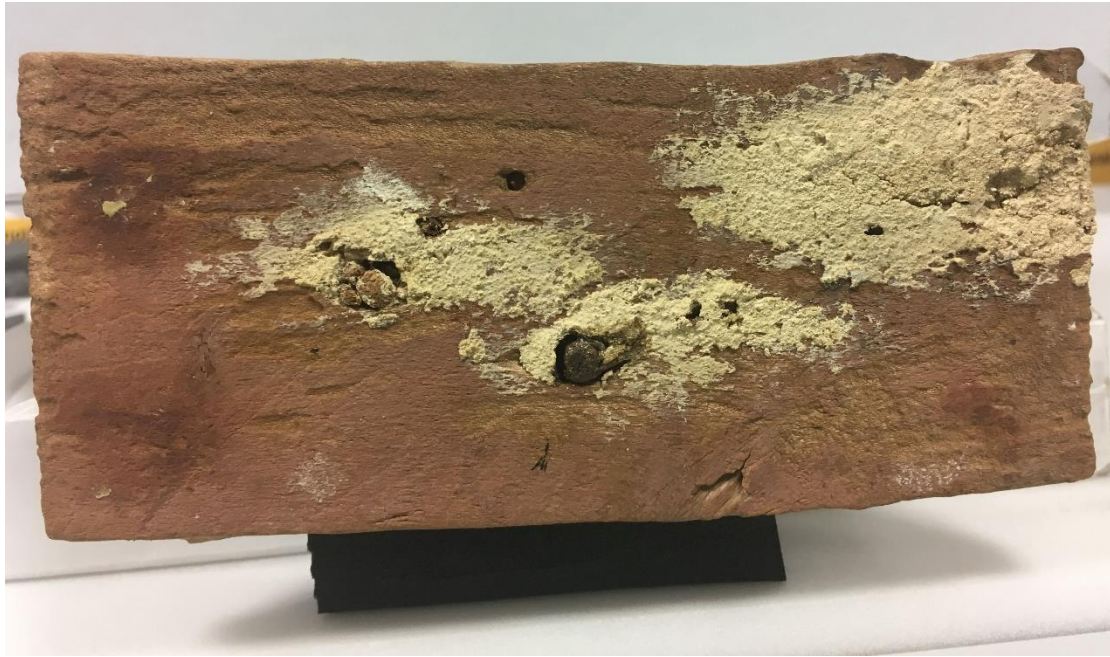


Figure 6: Wooden base of 'Offering bearer' with two dowels securing feet of figurine visible in centre. (ECM 220, reproduced with permission from Research and Cultural Collections, University of Birmingham, courtesy of Eton College).

A Possible Pair?

The broken offering bearer figure currently on loan to Johns Hopkins Archaeological Museum (ECM 219, Figures 7 and 8, page 9) shares several important features with the Birmingham figure. Standing slightly taller at 33cm, a result of the higher basket or chest placed on the head, the two figures would have stood at almost equal height. The white sheath dress falls to knee length, and is again tightly fitted and visible across her chest and back; the style of the upper area of the dress is more clearly discernible and possibly a similar strapped design as the model from Hapykem's tomb (Figure 2). The body and limbs of both figures are extremely lean and similarly painted with a yellow colour, with a sharp chin and nose particularly notable for both figures' facial features. Both also have a straightened left leg that aids the suggestion of the figures' length and slenderness.³⁴ There are, however, some artistic differences; while the Johns Hopkins figure does also bear a close capped wig of similar shape to the Birmingham model, the former bears a white headcloth rather than an exposed wig. Both appear to have traces of gesso on the wooden base, but only the Johns Hopkins figure has visible traces of black paint across the legs, feet, and base on both the left and right sides. This chest is a rectangular trapezoidal shape, and though there is no clear cross-hatching pattern black paint traces appear on the proper right side (see Figure 8), suggesting perhaps a different design was used. No formal analysis of the wood used to produce either figure has taken place, yet both share a similar light-yellow colour, and the most common for the time period and type of object narrows down the most likely source as sycamore fig.³⁵

³⁴ Noted as a trait of wooden figures within the Old Kingdom and First Intermediate Period (Harvey 2006: 165-166).

³⁵ Harvey 2009: 1-2. Trade for conifer is also known to have been exchanged with Egypt's neighbours in Syria from as early as the beginning of the Fifth Dynasty (Scott 1973: 22), though this was typically more suited to larger constructions than these funerary models.

This similar colouring, the tall and lean portrayal of the female body, and similar physical pose (including the aversion of the typical arm placement of the left supporting basket and the right bearing another item), and finally the lack of other similar models within the Eton Myers collection, could indicate that these figures originated from the same region. It's possible that they are referred to within Myers' travel diaries – as yet no such reference has been found – but despite the remarkable mention of ECM 1591 in his writings, it seems reasonable to assume that, firstly, not only were these purchased in a separate transaction from the Meir offering bearer, but that secondly the precedent for the majority of Myers' collection which is not specifically catalogued within his diaries means it is unlikely that he would have detailed their provenance, even had it been known.



Figures 7 and 8: 'Offering bearer' (ECM 219, both images reproduced by permission of the Provost and Fellows of Eton College).

Consideration of Regional Styles

While not without its difficulties, previous studies devoted to the stylistic development of wooden tomb models allow us to consider various regional similarities in terms of

chronological development. Based on the categories posited by Eschenbrenner-Diemer, both figurines possess shared criteria that fit into stylistic traits established from ‘Phase I’, the Sixth to Eighth Dynasty, and ‘Phase II’, broken into part A for the Ninth Dynasty until the beginning of the reign of Mentuhotep II, and part B for Mentuhotep II up to the end of the Eleventh Dynasty.³⁶ In particular, notable manufacturing characteristics include the pegged arms at the shoulders, the feet stuck into the base, and the feet being composed of two parts. Further stylistic traits across both time periods are shared by our figurines, including eyes delineated with kohl, the left legs forward, the shape of the baskets, and the dresses being white in colour and with either one or two braces. While there are various overlapping trends in each category and chronological phase, there are also some notable differences; for instance the decrease in black painted round wigs in Phase II,³⁷ and the development from unpainted or black bases to a shift towards grey and green colours.³⁸ This may seem initially unhelpful in narrowing down the potential date of our figurines, however the artistic traits and features of wooden models produced in the Memphite and Theban areas that are securely dated within Phases I and II can provide useful comparisons. On the basis of active production areas with similar styles and traits to the Eton Myers figures, it seems that those dated within Phase II provide many more comparable examples.

Of the regional technical and artistic styles discussed by Eschenbrenner-Diemer from Upper and Middle Egypt, we find common features associated with our figurines in the descriptions of objects from Sedment and Asyut, and to a lesser extent Beni Hasan and Deir el-Bersha.³⁹ The use of yellow colour for the female skin is present within all four sites (though this is not exclusive, and does occur elsewhere), in addition to their overall simplistic appearance in comparison to other areas.⁴⁰ Examples from Beni Hasan include roughly modelled lean bodies⁴¹ as well as nude figures with straps of linen,⁴² though most of these also have longer wigs and variation in the facial features. Comparable examples from Deir el-Bersha include some figures from the groups of wooden models from the late Eleventh – early Twelfth Dynasty tomb of Djehutyankht, however while they share several stylistic features, none from these two sites could be considered direct parallels.⁴³

³⁶ Eschenbrenner-Diemer 2017: 138, 148. ‘Phase III’ – dating from the end of the Eleventh Dynasty to the reign of Sesostri I within the Twelfth Dynasty (2017: 154-155), generally shows a continuation in the manufacturing practices of these models, though new stylistic changes and an increasing regional trade means that Memphite manufactured goods are increasingly distributed more widely (Eschenbrenner-Diemer 2017: 170).

³⁷ Though the use of the white headcloth is described as a feature of earlier Old Kingdom models in other publications (such as Tooley 1995: 23).

³⁸ The use of black paint for the figure base is particularly associated with the Memphite region up to around the Eighth Dynasty (Eschenbrenner-Diemer 2017: 142-143).

³⁹ For the summary of the features of each of these regions, see Eschenbrenner-Diemer (2017: 157-159). By comparison, the Theban style, being generally of fine quality and larger in size (Eschenbrenner-Diemer 2017: 159; Tooley 1995: 27), appears incompatible with the Myers models (See examples in Breasted 1948: 65, Pl. 61b; also see Tooley 1989: 193, 228, 245).

⁴⁰ Eschenbrenner-Diemer 2017: 158. This is in contrast to other areas such as Thebes, in which the quality of model is generally higher, and models are generally larger (Tooley 1995: 27).

⁴¹ E.6.1903 Fitzwilliam Museum (Garstang 1907: 223; Tooley 1989: 208), dated somewhere around the First Intermediate Period; 55.82.1 Liverpool World Museum (Breasted 1948: 64; Tooley 1989: 209), an 11th Dynasty figure, is crude but bears similarities in the dress and slender body.

⁴² E2306, Ashmolean Museum (Garstang 1907: 132; Breasted 1948: 66); 1953.128, National Museum of Scotland (Garstang 1907: 237; Tooley 1989: 46, 211).

⁴³ The closest examples include the two central figures from the ‘procession’ group mentioned earlier (see footnote 10; 21.236, Museum of Fine Arts Boston), but other independent models are also notable as they are of a similar lower quality to the Myers models (21.484, 21.884, central two figures from the group model 21.888, all from Djehutyankht’s tomb and in the same museum; others found in different tombs include EA30716, British Museum).

The shared trait across these sites of the baskets or chests being painted yellow with black lines is also found within sites at both Sedment and Asyut; for the former, examples now held in the Petrie Museum share both the distinctive use of yellow for the female skin and similar patterned chests to ECM 220.⁴⁴ A pair found within a Sedment tomb of an official named Khenty-khety also appear similar in style to the Myers pair, though the black and white images in the original publication do not help us identify similarities in colour of the skin and clothing.⁴⁵ There was quite clearly a range in quality and style across the various tombs, as other examples are more crudely carved, suggesting a multitude of craftsmen responsible for the models.⁴⁶ Many of these surviving Sedment examples were dated to the First Intermediate Period by Petrie and Brunton, however current literature suggests that many of the Sedment tombs date between the end of the Eleventh Dynasty and the early Twelfth Dynasty.⁴⁷ Sadly, many Sedment examples recorded by Petrie and Brunton with various tombs across the site cannot be located today, and were not recorded in photographs but simply in an inventory list.⁴⁸

Finally, finds from the site of Asyut are also of interest, again with numerous surviving examples sharing the same yellow skin colour and lean physical shape, white dress style, and decorated basket with black lines.⁴⁹ Examples from Asyut are typically later in date, and some provide a stronger, but not identical likeness to the Myers figures. The set currently held in the Louvre (see Figure 9, page 12), particularly the two on the left hand side, share the same slender body and white dress, though for the Myers figures the upper body style of the clothing is uncertain but more likely to mirror the similar strap layout of the figure second from the right.⁵⁰ Other examples from Asyut include two offering bearers from the early Twelfth Dynasty tomb of Minhotep now held in Turin, both of whom are of a higher quality but which again share stylistic traits with the Myers models.⁵¹

⁴⁴ Two models from the Petrie Museum (UC 31756 and 31757), both discovered in an early Middle Kingdom tomb detailed in Petrie and Brunton's publication (1924: Pl. XXXVIII – tomb 1580 of the official Nekhta), also have surviving linen attached to the body, tied across the left shoulder. Examples from tombs 2105 and 2107 are also similar in style and the use of linen (Breasted 1948: 62, Pl. 52b; Petrie and Brunton 1924: Pl. XXVI [11 and 12]), though notably these two tomb examples are also attached to the same base, rather than carved as separate figures. Another figure from Sedment tomb 525, a nude female with no basket or offerings, is also now held in Manchester Museum (E6595).

⁴⁵ Tomb 2111 (Petrie and Brunton 1924: 11-12, Pl. XXVI [9]; Porter and Moss 1934: 116; Tooley 1989: 219-220).

⁴⁶ Eschenbrenner-Diemer 2018. For instance the models found from tomb 2112 which are both joined by the same wooden base, lack any definition in the face and upper body in comparison to other examples from Sedment (1921.1660; now held in the National Museum of Scotland).

⁴⁷ Eschenbrenner-Diemer 2017: 150-151; 2018.

⁴⁸ Petrie and Brunton (1924: Pl. XXXVI – XXXVIX). See the list of models and figures from Sedment as recorded and discussed by Tooley (1989: 215-221), in which over half as recorded as 'Location Unknown'. Such a problem is not unique to this site, but indeed is also the case for areas such as Beni Hasan (see again the list compiled by Tooley (1989: 208-215)). This is also further complicated by the modern splitting up of burial assemblages, which for Sedment means that numerous finds from the same tomb now exist in various museum collections across the UK, Copenhagen, Philadelphia, Chicago, and Brussels.

⁴⁹ See summary of regional styles of Asyut detailed in Eschenbrenner-Diemer (2017: 157).

⁵⁰ From left to right of Breasted's image, these figures are: E12001 and E11991, both from the Twelfth Dynasty tomb of Ankhef and Itibi; E11990, from the Twelfth Dynasty tomb of Wepwautemhet; and E11992, from the late Eleventh Dynasty tomb of Nakhti. The latter two are also briefly discussed in Eschenbrenner-Diemer (2017: 178-79).

⁵¹ S.8794 and S.8796, Museo Egizio; Zitman 2010: 219. Other examples are also now held in the Museum of Fine Arts Boston (04.1774), and again further examples are also found in the Louvre collection (E12029). The excavation of these tombs in Asyut is discussed further in Zitman (2010).



Figure 9: 'Offering bearers' (From: Breasted 1948: Pl. 57).

Thus far, none of these examples described above share a particular interesting feature with our Myers models – namely, it is always the left hand of the figure that is used to support the basket, and the right hand either carries another object or the arm is laid straight against the body. Only three examples that mirror this position in the same way as the Myers figurines have been identified for this study so far; one comes from the Fitzwilliam Museum collection and unfortunately is also unprovenanced, though similarities in the style of dress have also been suggested with models from Deir el-Bahri.⁵² The other examples are a set of two models now held in the Manchester Museum collection, of 12th Dynasty date, from the Deir Rifa site in Middle Egypt.⁵³ The latter set seems closer in style, with painted yellow baskets with decorative black lines and clear slender bodies, yet there are substantial differences in pose, wig, dress, and black painted bases. They are clearly of higher quality than the Myers examples and of a higher quality tomb context, as they also bear an inscription and come from larger burial assemblages. While unusual, there are also examples with both arms raised to support the basket or chest, yet these are often conveyed with straightened arms and no bend in the elbow.⁵⁴ Regardless, the subversion of this typical pose seems to be uncommon, and thus this will be a useful approach to tracking down further comparable models.

⁵² E194.1939, Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, also smaller at 22.5cm, Tooley 1989 191

⁵³ Accession number 4734 and 4738, Manchester Museum.

⁵⁴ Such as the group from tomb A1 at Meir, in which the latter two figures at the back hold both of their arms up straight (Breasted 1948: 65; Tooley 1989: 183-184)

Concluding Remarks

Wooden models disappear from the archaeological record during the reign of Sesostris III, yet prior to this they were fundamental components of the Egyptian burial customs and practices.⁵⁵ Within Upper and Middle Egypt, areas such as Asyut, Meir, and Beni Hasan are recognised as being active production areas of a range of wooden models during the First Intermediate Period and Middle Kingdom.⁵⁶ In addition, it is often noted that over time, generally these wooden offering bearer figurines – and wooden sculpture more generally - decline in quality and also decrease in size, though naturally there are exceptions to this such as the figures from Meketre's tomb.⁵⁷

The discussion provided here aims to firstly draw attention to the pair of offering bearer figures within the Eton Myers collection, and secondly to offer preliminary comparisons of artistic styles and similarities from known contexts, particularly from sites within Middle Egypt. Though we cannot definitively place them in 'Phase I' or 'Phase II' of Eschenbrenner-Diemer's categories based on their own characteristics, the regional similarities discussed with figures with secure provenances, particularly those from Sedment and Asyut, all of which date to Eschenbrenner-Diemer's 'Phase II' or later, would suggest that it is more likely that the Myers figures belong to this same phase. However, it's not yet possible to further distinguish whether they belong to phase 'A' during the early First Intermediate Period, or phase 'B' up to the Eleventh Dynasty. Based on the similarities with some later figures from Asyut, we also cannot rule out the possibility that the Myers figures in fact date into the Twelfth Dynasty, and thus fit into Eschenbrenner-Diemer's 'Phase III'. It is hoped that extended research exploring the links between figures ECM 219 and ECM 220 will yield further insights and can further narrow down the possibilities of date and provenance.

Myers' diaries may not equate to acquisition records or provide the level of detail that we desire, but nevertheless the mentions of known Egyptological figures like Brugsch may implicitly reveal the most likely sites and methods in which objects like these may have come into Myers' possession. Despite this, such objects from 19th century collections shed light on the nature of collecting, and what methods we must use to navigate our way through research without the documentation we may crave. Without solid answers regarding the date and provenance of these objects, however, our anonymous offering bearers still have a story to tell us about their origins and use.

⁵⁵ Eschenbrenner-Diemer 2017: 171.

⁵⁶ Harvey 2009: 2. Eschenbrenner-Diemer, while noting the issue of no surviving archaeological evidence for any wood 'workshops' (2017: 135), later describes the site of Meir as a 'prolific wood workshop' in the Middle Kingdom (2018).

⁵⁷ Harvey 2009: 2.

Figures

Figure 1: ‘Estate Figure’ from the tomb of Meketre, dating to the reign of Amenemhat I (Accession number 20.3.7, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund and Edward S. Harkness Gift, 1920): <https://www.metmuseum.org/en/art/collection/search/544210> (Public Domain Image).

Figure 2: ‘Offering bearer’ from the tomb of Hapykem, A4 at Meir (ECM 1591, image courtesy of the Eton College Trustees and the Johns Hopkins Archaeological Museum. Photography by James T. Van Rensselaer).

Figure 3: Obverse of ‘Offering bearer’ (ECM 220, reproduced with permission from Research and Cultural Collections, University of Birmingham, courtesy of Eton College).

Figure 4: Reverse of ‘Offering bearer’ (ECM 220, reproduced with permission from Research and Cultural Collections, University of Birmingham, courtesy of Eton College).

Figure 5: Detail of face and obverse of basket of ‘Offering bearer’ (ECM 220, reproduced with permission from Research and Cultural Collections, University of Birmingham, courtesy of Eton College).

Figure 6: Wooden base of ‘Offering bearer’ (ECM 220, reproduced with permission from Research and Cultural Collections, University of Birmingham, courtesy of Eton College).

Figure 7: Left side of ‘Offering bearer’ (ECM 219, both images reproduced by permission of the Provost and Fellows of Eton College).

Figure 8: Right side of ‘Offering bearer’ (ECM 219, both images reproduced by permission of the Provost and Fellows of Eton College).

Figure 9: Set of Offering bearer figures from the Louvre (Printed in Breasted (1948) *Egyptian Servant Statues*, Plate 57).

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