

G11 (week 3, Thursday)

Gender at home: father, mother, children

HPAH5013/6013 – Gendered Lives in Ancient
Egypt

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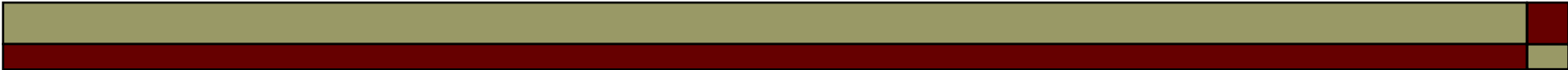
Senior Lecturer for Egyptian Archaeology and
Heritage

Reading

- ❑ Robins, 56-110
- ❑ Johnson, J.H. (1999) 'Speculations on Middle Kingdom Marriage', in *Studies on Ancient Egypt in Honour of H.S. Smith. Vol. Occasional Publications 13* (ed., Leahy, A.), London: Egypt Exploration Society: 169-72.
- ❑ Toivari-Viitala, J. (2001) 'Sensual Women: Pleasure and procreation as aspects of sexuality' in *Women at Deir el-Medina: A study of the status and roles of the female inhabitants in the workmen's community during the Ramesside period. Leiden: Nederlands Instituut Voor Het Nabije Oosten*: 139-182

Reading

- ❑ G. Pinch, *Magic in Ancient Egypt* (London, The British Museum Press, 1994)
- ❑ Zinn, K. 2012. Magic. In: *Encyclopedia of the Ancient World*. New York: Wiley.
- ❑ Wegner, J. 2009. A Decorated Birth Brick from South Abydos: New Evidence on Childbirth and Birth Magic in the Middle Kingdom. In: Silverman: *Archaism and Innovation*. Philadelphia.
http://www.academia.edu/894376/A_Decorated_Birth_Brick_from_South_Abydos_New_Evidence_on_Childbirth_and_Birth_Magic_in_the_Middle_Kingdom



Additional Reading

- David, R. (2002). *Religion and magic in Ancient Egypt*. London.
- Ritner, R. K. (1993) *The mechanics of Ancient Egyptian magical practice*. Chicago.
- Baines, J. (2006) “Display of magic in Old Kingdom Egypt”. In K. Szpakowska, ed., *Through a glass darkly: magic, dreams, and prophecy in ancient Egypt: 1–32*. Swansea.
- TeVelde, H. (1970) “The God Heka in Egyptian Theology” *Jaarbericht van het Voorasiatisch-Egyptisch Genootschap Ex Oriente Lux* 21: 175-87.



Marriage

- ❑ Social organisation of Egyptian society through family groups
- ❑ Groups centred around: man, woman, children
 - Proven by register from Deir el-Medinah (NK – lists all occupants by house)
 - Lists owner in filiation to his parents (husbands sometimes called hi)
 - His wife (hemet from OK, NK nebet per) + her filiation (parents)
 - ❑ What is a hebsut? (Hekanakhte papers) – concubine?
 - Names of children (+ filiation)
- ❑ Instruction of Ani:

Take a wife while you're young,
That she make a son for you;
She should bear for you while you're youthful,
It is proper to make people.' ...



What is marriage in AE?

- Problematic!
- No legal ceremony, no formalisation!
 - But sometimes marriage contracts (especially Late Period and following)
- Maybe active after cohabitation? (entry of woman in house of man) – grg per “to establish a household” (“to live together”)
 - → Therefore divorce = “expulsion” / “departure”
- Other term “take somebody as wife”, never take as husband found
- Sometimes third party = asked to sanction

Marriage and family life as stable of Egyptian society

- ❑ Married young girls around puberty (+-12), boys slightly later
 - Take average life expectancy of about 30 into account
- ❑ Mostly agreed / arranged marriages (concept of love marriage seems to be known from love poems...), but also known cases of women choosing their husband
- ❑ Marriages within family known, but relationship not clear
- ❑ Divorce known, often due to treatment of wife by husband!
- ❑ Religiously hierarchical order: men (social prestige), women, children, but women owned land, were active in business, represent themselves in court

BM EA 10593

Ptolemaic Period



Papyrus marriage contract between the priest Pagosh and Teteimhotep From Assiut, Egypt - Ptolemaic Period, 172 BC

- ❑ Marriage contracts first recorded in Late Period, continued until first century AD
- ❑ drawn up by husband to establish rights of both parties to maintenance and possessions (law did not require marriage to be recorded)
- ❑ BM EA 10593 written on papyrus in demotic script
- ❑ husband agrees to pay money within thirty days in event of divorce; woman could receive a third of the marriage settlement, 8 witnesses stated on reverse → mean: woman could leave husband
- ❑ Many contracts state children = brought up as the man's heirs.



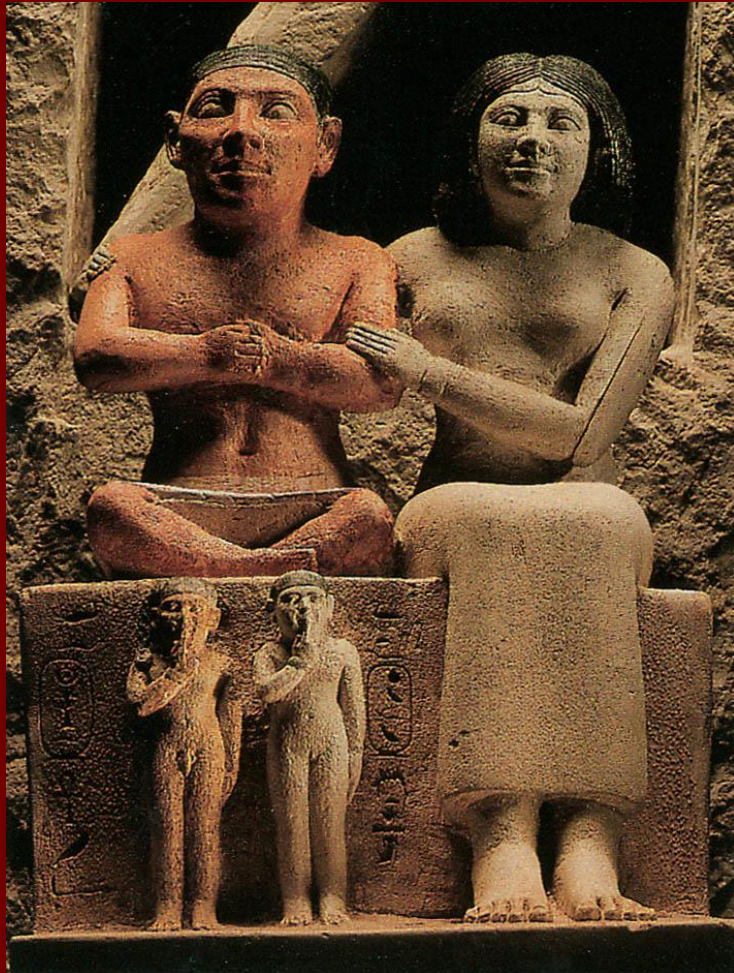
marriage contracts

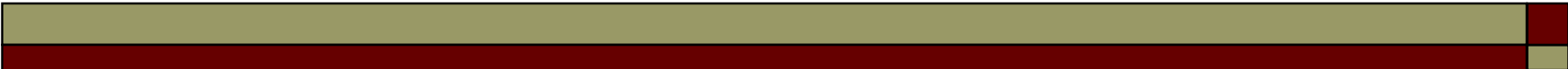
- Reasons for divorce:
 - adultery on either side
 - failure of the woman to produce an heir
 - husband's dislike for his wife
 - husband's wish to marry another woman
- wife = entitled to some support from her husband (no matter what circumstances of the divorce)
- once divorced, both partners were free to remarry

Multiple marriages

- ❑ More than 1 partner at a time or at a lifetime
- ❑ Lifetime → seemed to happen often (high risk in childbirth to die → new wife) → term “former wife” as dead, shown on monuments (divorced women not shown)
- ❑ Polygamy maybe in elite, but difficult to differentiate between consecutive and concurrent marriage
- ❑ Interesting: no evidence for the idea of illegitimate children

Children





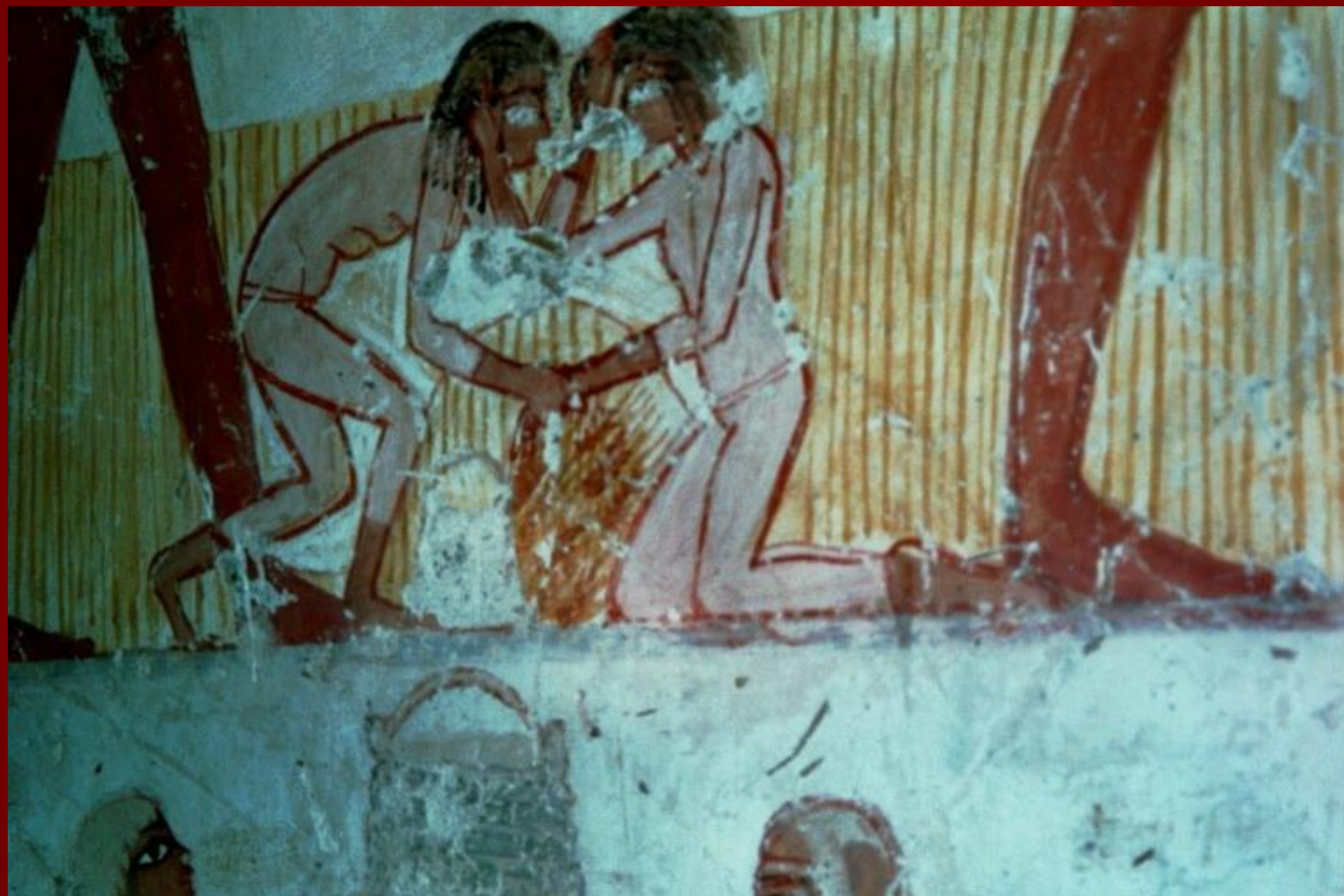
Marriage and family life as stable of Egyptian society

- ❑ Children aimed for, seen as gift – raised by women in household or wet-nurses, nurses in elite families
- ❑ We know of cases of adoption
- ❑ In case of death – son inherited land (estate/household), daughter household items

Children

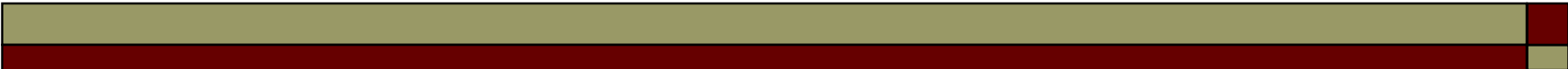






What do you see?





But also birth control!

- ❑ medical document from 1500 BC lists substances that it claims 'stops pregnancy.'
- ❑ According to the papyrus, unspecified amounts of acacia gum, dates, and an unidentified plant were mixed with plant fibre and honey and formed into a pessary (vaginal suppository).
- ❑ Modern researchers have found acacias to be spermicidal.



Family and Magic

We have to be careful!

- ❑ depending on our theological understanding
- ❑ modern mind: magic often seen as opposite to religion or, at best, early stage of religion → describing actions or knowledge relating to the supernatural or the demonic, but not the divine
- ❑ ancient Egyptians: never perceived magic as “black art” or “sorcery,” in conflict with “white” or “pure” religion

Magic

- ❑ Magic was inherent to overall Egyptian thinking and a regular part of religion at all levels of Egyptian society
- ❑ Magic played the primary role in countering ANY kind of threats from outside; various evil spirits needed to be warned off, and deities invoked to protect the vulnerable
- ❑ Described by the term *heka*

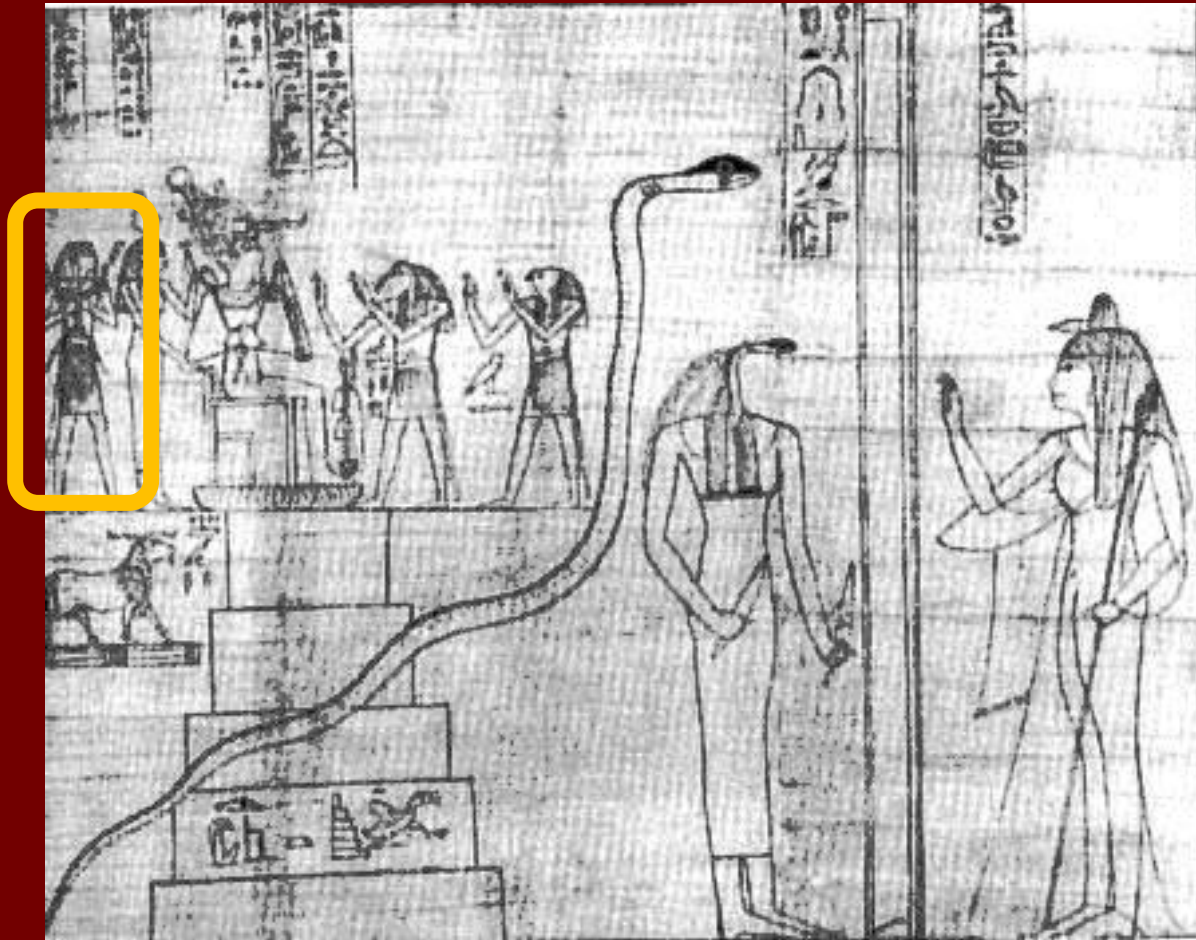
heka and *Heka*

- ❑ *heka* was a cosmic and divine power existing as a force in the universe
- ❑ personified as the male anthropomorphic god *Heka*, who represented the tenth hour of the day and, as such, accompanied the sun god in his day barque → here visualised together with *Shu* (“creative logos”) and *Shia* (“perception”)
- ❑ used throughout Pharaonic period until Roman times.
- ❑ succeeded by the Coptic word *Hik* (xik), which was equated with the Greek word *magia*.

“To become the god *Heka*” (CT 261)

- ❑ best definition of *Heka* in Egyptian terms (Middle Kingdom coffin) :
- ❑ *I am he whom the Lord of all made before duality had yet come into being ... I am the son of him who gave birth to the universe ... I am the protection of that which the Lord of all has ordained ... I am he who gave life to the Ennead of gods ... I have come to take my position that I may receive my dignity. Because to me belonged the universe before you gods had come into being. You have come afterwards because I am **Heka**.*”

**Heka, God of magic (far left), stands with the goddess Maat behind the throne of Osiris.
Funerary papyrus of the priestess
Nesitanebetisheru, c. 950 BC. BM EA 10554/88**



Magic and giving birth

- ❑ Birth not just miraculous, but also dangerous, newly born was especially vulnerable.
- ❑ High child mortality: call upon the help of their gods through magical objects, like birth bricks, and special ritual practices during childbirth
- ❑ birth brick was associated with a specific goddess, Meskhenet, sometimes depicted in the form of a brick with a human head.

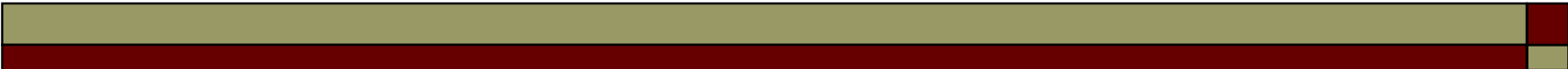
Meskhenet

- personification of birth bricks upon which women squatted during childbirth → helps to protect the delivery, + predicts the future of the infant
- frequently occurs as human headed mud brick in Spell 125 of the Book of the Dead



**A squatting woman giving birth,
assisted by two goddesses (Hathor and
Taweret), (Temple of Hathor,
Dendera)**





Magic and giving birth

- newly discovered birth brick: main scene shows a mother with her newborn boy, attended on either side by women and by Hathor emblem
- Hathor: a cow or human headed goddess closely associated with birth and motherhood

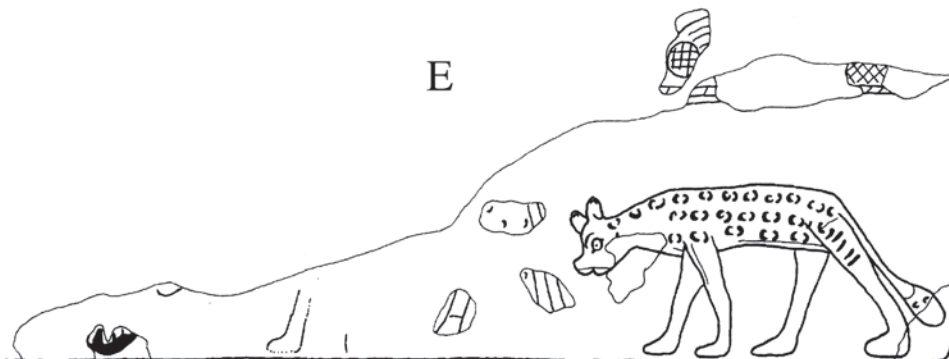
Birth brick





This painted reconstruction shows the mother and newborn scene on the birth brick.

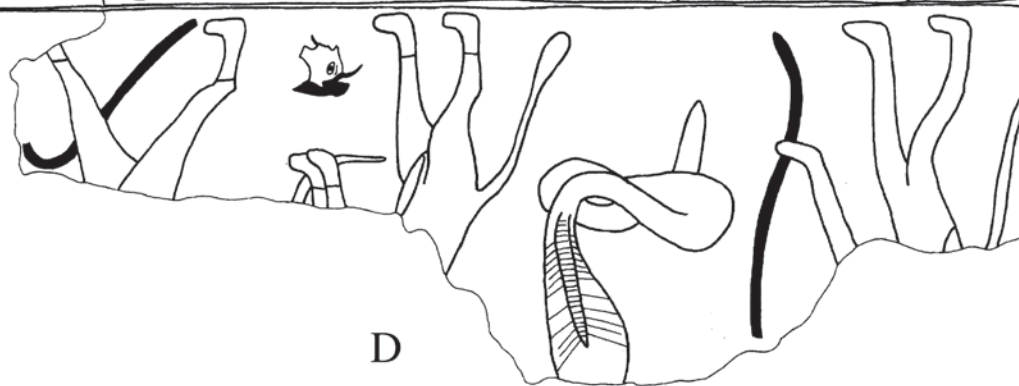
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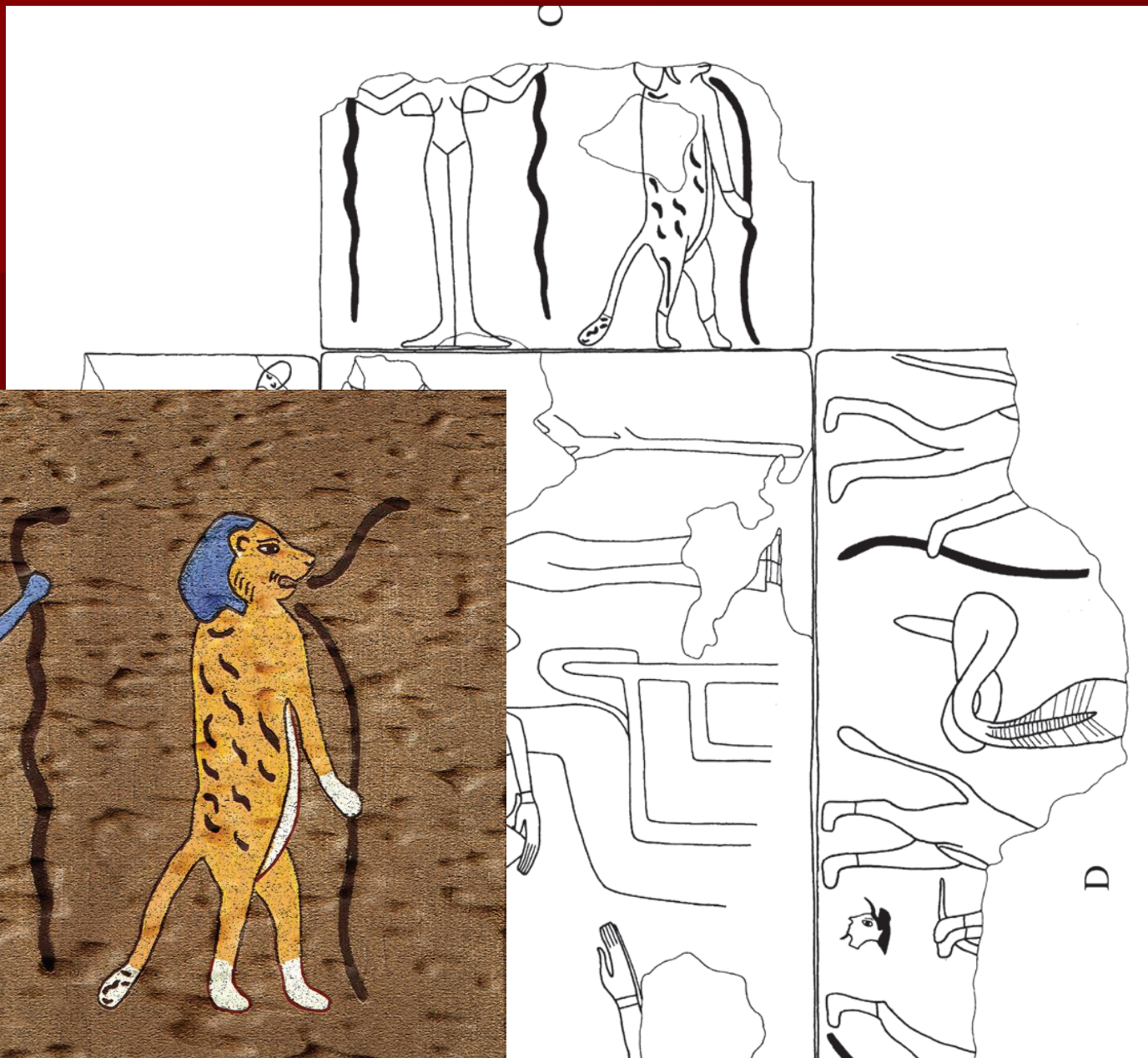


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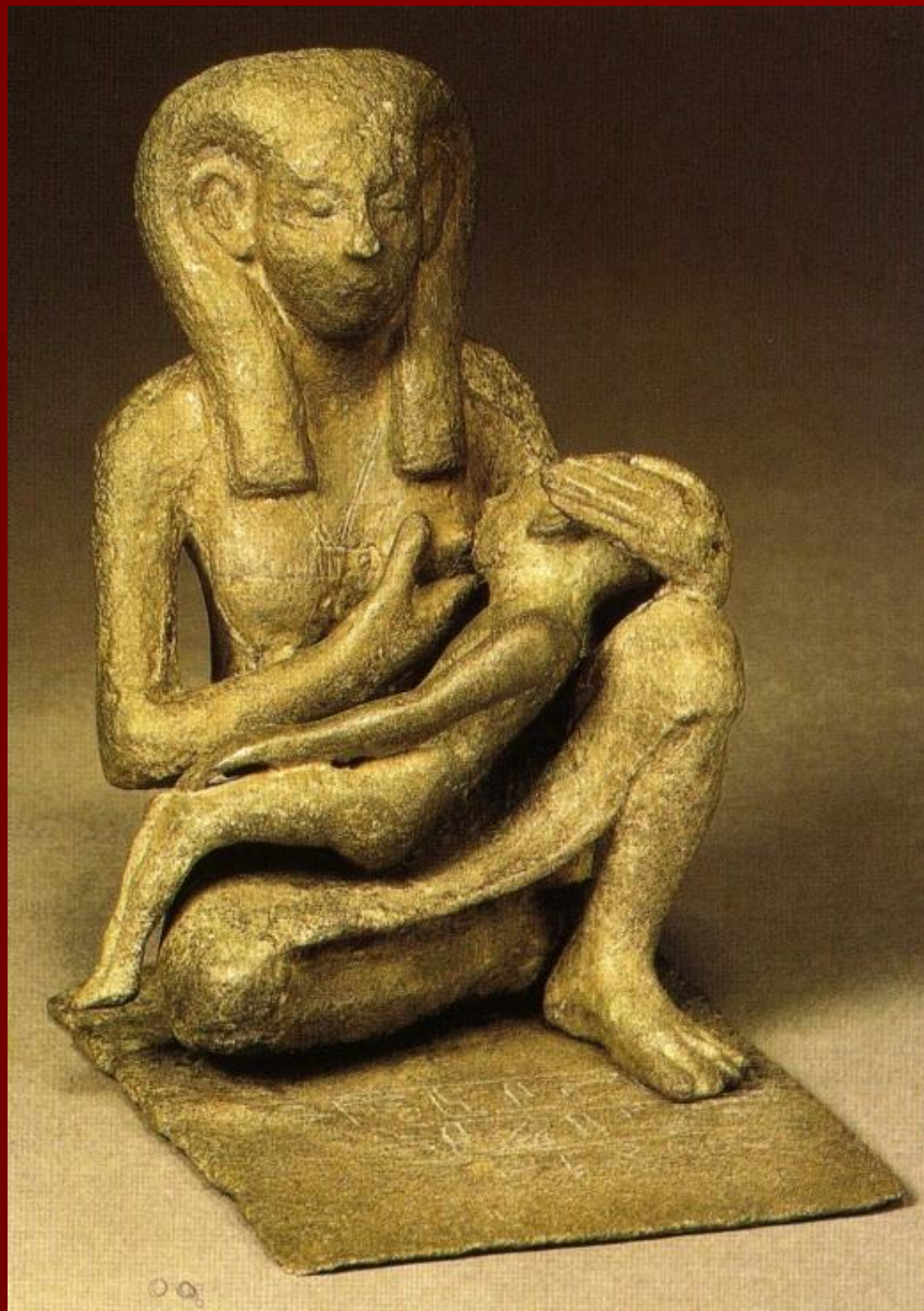


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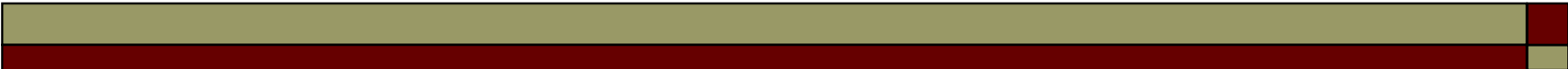




BM EA 18175: Apotropaic Wand

- a magical 'knife' intended for the protection of a mother and child



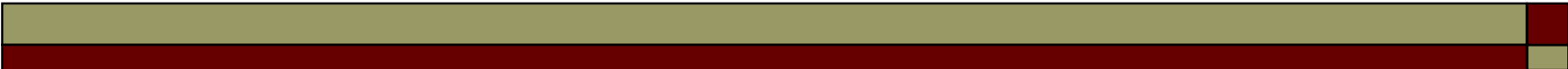


Apotropaic Wands (magic knives)

- ❑ apotropaic = acting to ward off evil
- ❑ usually made of hippopotamus ivory, thus enlisting the support of that fearsome beast against evil
- ❑ term 'knife' is inappropriate, and the shape may be related more to the throwstick (similar to a modern boomerang), used to hunt birds, and flocks of birds were seen as a symbol of chaos, hence the appropriateness of the shape

Apotropaic Wands (magic knives)

- Depictions: range of protective images
 - grotesque dwarf: probably known as Aha at this date, but later the more famous Bes
 - Taweret (a pregnant hippopotamus carrying a knife)
 - Both associated with childbirth
 - Lions, the scarab of rebirth, serpents, and other fantastic protective demons



Apotropaic Wands (magic knives)

- ❑ many of these 'knives' broken
- ❑ Deliberately before being placed in the tombs?
- ❑ One explanation: to destroy some of the object's powers, which would have been inappropriate in the context of death and burial
- ❑ But: some are mended and bound together again
→ reuse?

Case Study

VILLAGE VOICES FROM DEIR EL-MEDINA