

Week 1

The characteristics of Ancient Egyptian Religion

HPAH7015: Ancient Egyptian Religion

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and Heritage

Ancient Egyptian Religion?????

ANCIENT EGYPTIAN RELIGION!

Harrison, P. 2017. Profane Egyptologists: The modern revival of ancient Egyptian religion. London Routledge.

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Bibliography

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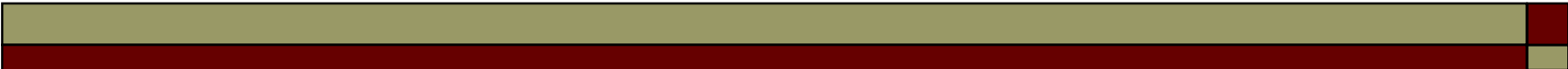


Kemeticism

- ❑ Loosely defined as re-creation of the religion of ancient Egypt
- ❑ Within paganist movement (following the wider / broader historical use with denotation as “non-Christian” status)
- ❑ Includes African traditional religions and combines them with contemporary (!) pharaonic religion as blue print in the reconstruction of practices and ideologies
- ❑ Important within BAME, Black Live matters and an awareness of religious experiences

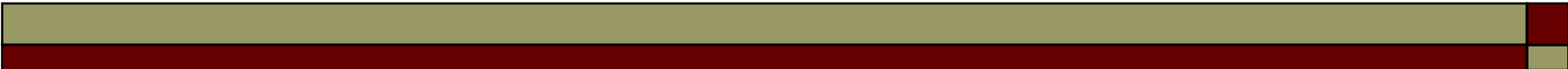
Ancient Egyptian Religion?????

ANCIENT EGYPTIAN RELIGION!



HOWEVER ...

- ❑ Heightened need of knowledgeable understanding of AE religion and its civilisation beyond eclecticism and esoteric interpretation
- ❑ Eclecticism – blending several traditions of different cultures and areas (mostly) free of concern of historical and cultural authenticity



BUT ... - at the same time

- ❑ Heightened need of knowledgeable understanding of Kemeticism, paganism etc beyond Egyptological and religious studies interpretation
- ❑ Be open for interdisciplinarity, comparatist views on (ancient) religions and aspects of an anthropological view on (past) religions

Mapping Egypt in Time and Space

SPACIAL AWARENESS





Nile and Desert - seamless



Mapping Egypt in Time and Space

**TEMPORAL AWARENESS
HISTORIES AND
CHRONOLOGIES**

Chronology $\leftrightarrow$ Chronologies

- ❑ Hornung et al (2006): *It is widely accepted that chronology is the “spine” of history.*
- ❑ <https://uee.cdh.ucla.edu/chronology/>
- ❑ <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/museums-static/digitalegypt/chronology/index.html>
- ❑ Shaw: Oxford History of Ancient Egypt
- ❑ ...

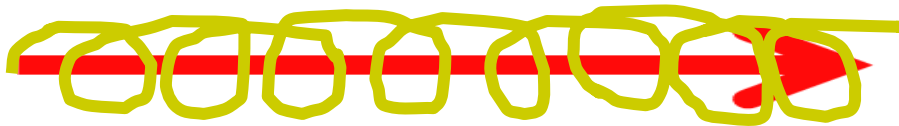
Time concepts AE

- Linear time (f.i. linear passage of generations)

- $\underline{d}.t$ (djet)



- Cyclical time (occurring cyclical patterns – f.i. seasons)



- $n\dot{h}h$ (neheh)

- Both = expressions of ETERNITY

Relative vs. Absolute Chronology

relative

- relative chronological position of objects, events, and longer periods

absolute

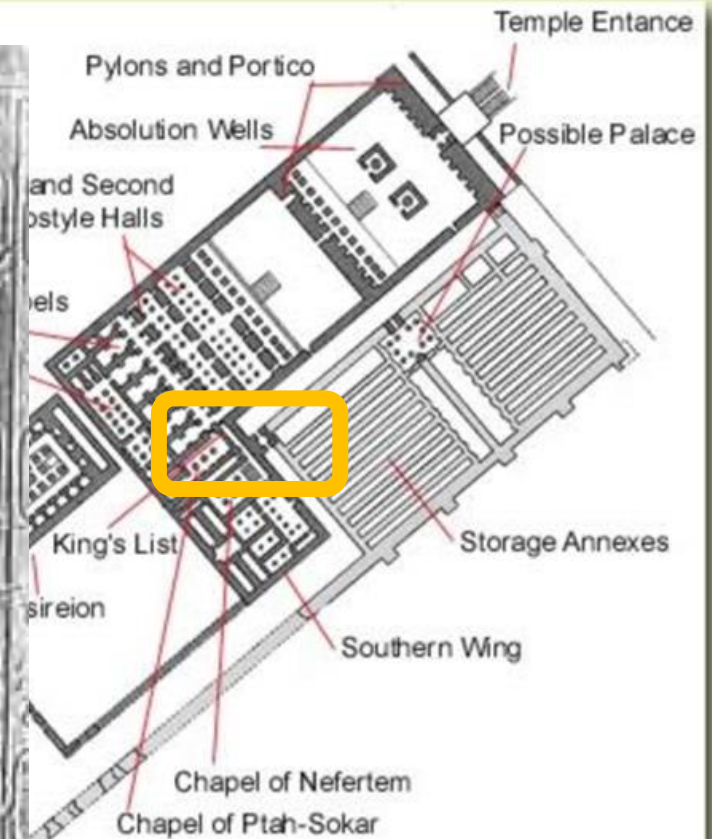
- chronology in absolute numbers (years)
- Egypt: established back from beginning of the Late Period (// Greek chronology, Assyrian king-lists) back to the Ramesside Period (still debated)
- Earlier: several problems
 - Form of dating: 'year 3 of king X', but exact length not known, nor every Egyptian king, chronology would be no problem. However, we do not even number of kings for all periods
 - reigns overlapped (coregency, political disunity)

Making history?

- For religious and administrative purposes
 - lists of kings, sometimes with the exact length of reign
 - none of them is well enough preserved to solve every detail of absolute chronology
 - Royal Canon Turin



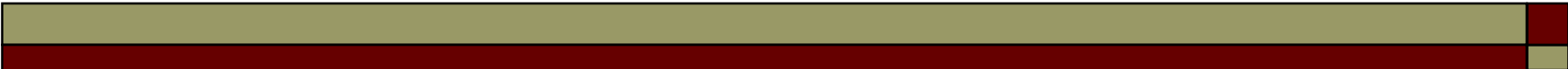
Abydos- Temple Sethos I, King List



Kingdoms

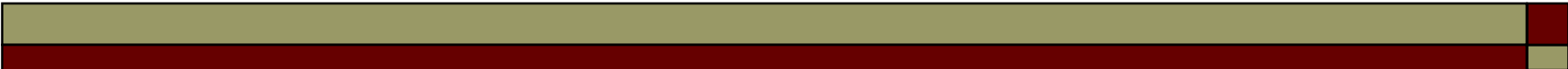
-
- Old Kingdom
-
- Middle Kingdom
-
- New Kingdom
-
-
-





All Periods

-
- Old Kingdom
- First Intermediate Period
- Middle Kingdom
- Second Intermediate Period
- New Kingdom
- Third Intermediate Period
-
-



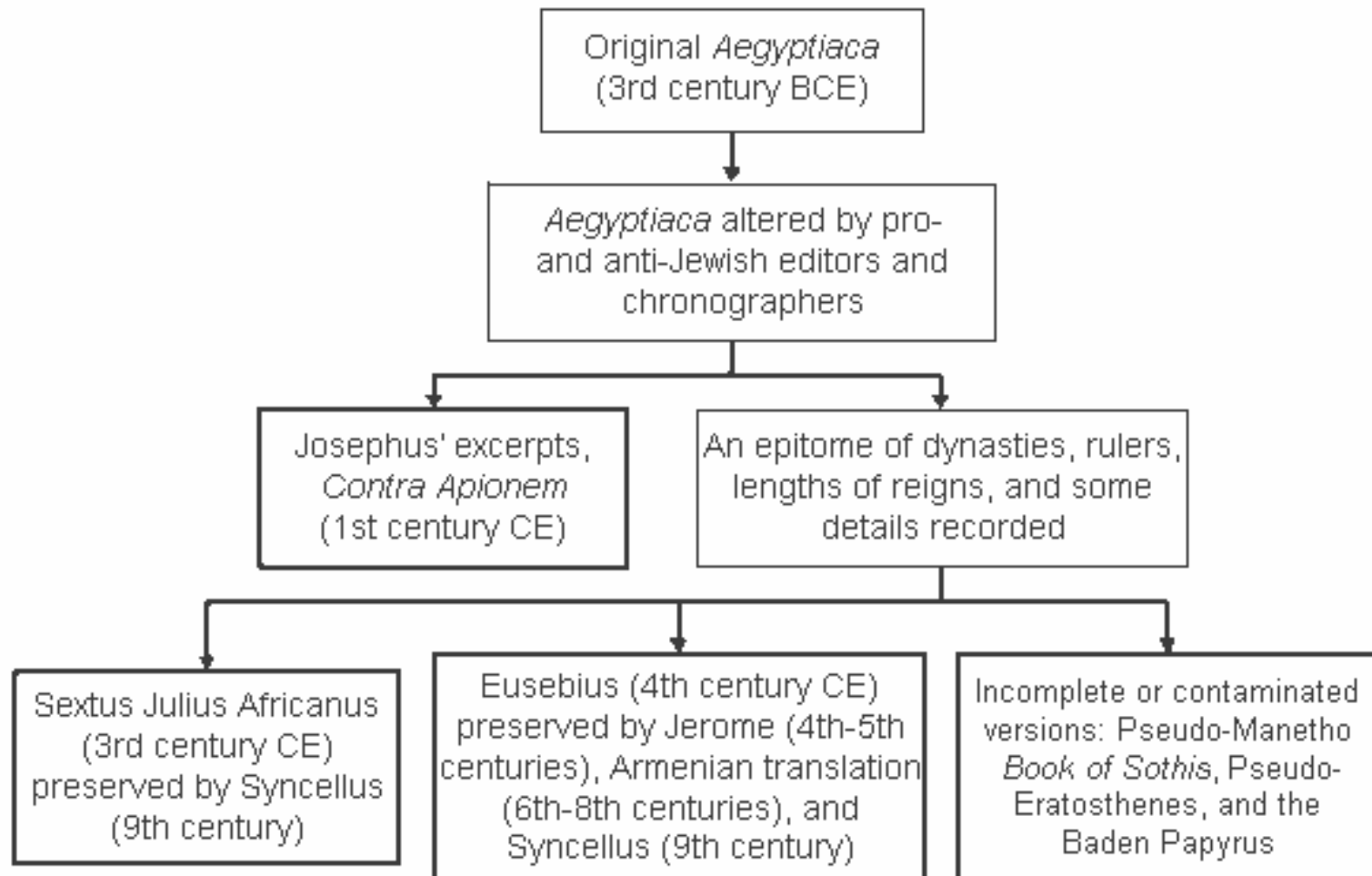
All Periods

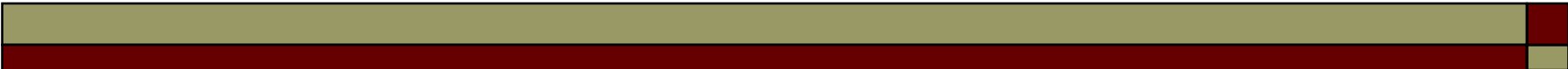
- ❑ Pre- and Early Dynastic Period
- ❑ Old Kingdom
- ❑ First Intermediate Period
- ❑ Middle Kingdom
- ❑ Second Intermediate Period
- ❑ New Kingdom
- ❑ Third Intermediate Period
- ❑ Late Period
- ❑ Ptolemaic and Roman Period

Making history?

- For religious and administrative purposes
 - lists of kings, sometimes with the exact length of reign
 - none of them is well enough preserved to solve every detail of absolute chronology
 - King lists in Greek
 - Compiles by Egyptian priest Manetho (3rd cent.), preserved in summaries by early Christian writers, with excerpts in other writers of the Roman Period and later, notably the Jewish historian Josephus.

Manethos Aegyptiaca





Periods

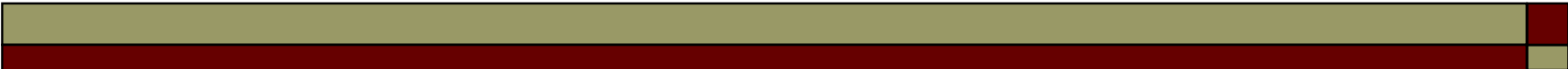
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- ❑ Second Intermediate Period
- ❑ New Kingdom
- ❑ Third Intermediate Period
- ❑ Late Period
- ❑ Ptolemaic and Roman Period

Dynasties

- ❑ Predyn. (5300-3000BC), 0-2
- ❑ 3-6
- ❑ 8-11
- ❑ 11-12
- ❑ 13-17
- ❑ 18-20
- ❑ 21-24
- ❑ 25-30
- ❑ No dynastic time anymore (332BC -331AD)

Back to religion (Edfu Tempel)

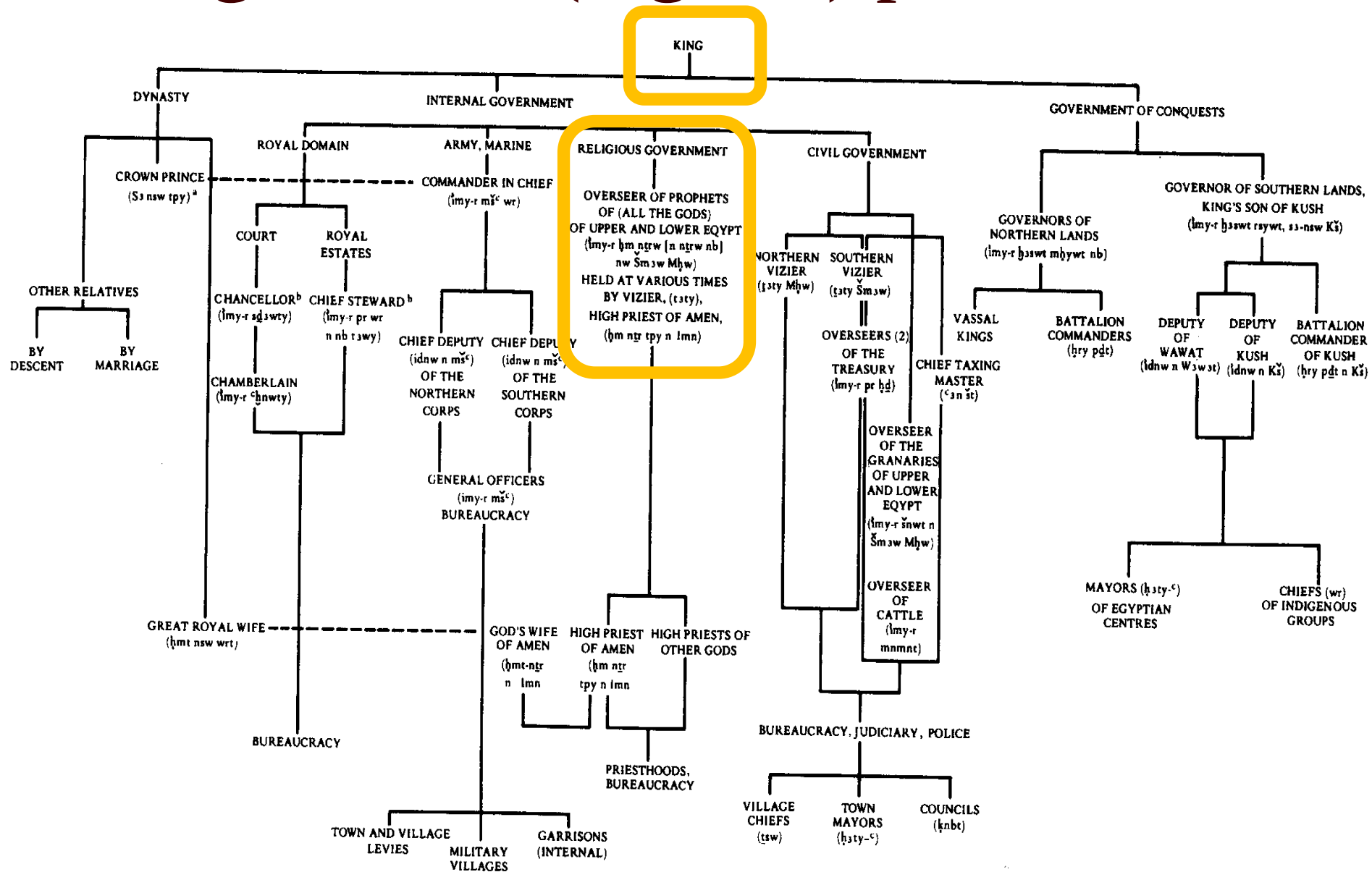


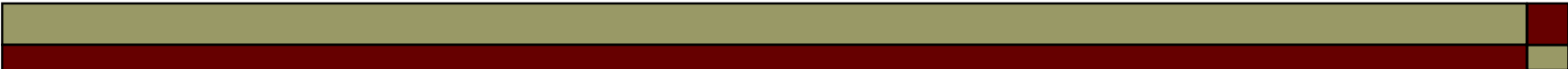


Religion in ancient Egypt

- ❑ explained the mysteries of the universe and acted as a “social glue”
- ❑ priesthood preserved old traditions underpinning Egyptian culture
- ❑ kept order within society, maintained religious institutions, social structure
- ❑ religion central to everyday life in ancient Egypt
- ❑ AE religion as integral part of all aspects of Egyptian society

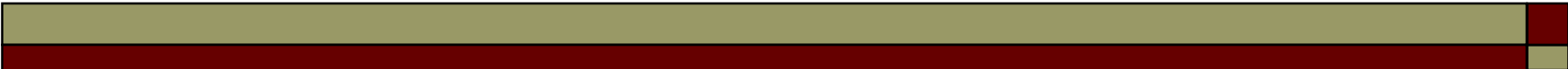
King as THE (highest) priest





The dual king: Divine kingship and mortality

- king is by nature divine
 - he is Horus, and offspring of Ra
- also inhabiting a human body → therefore mortal
- duality of divine character and mortal constraints is the essence of Egyptian kingship



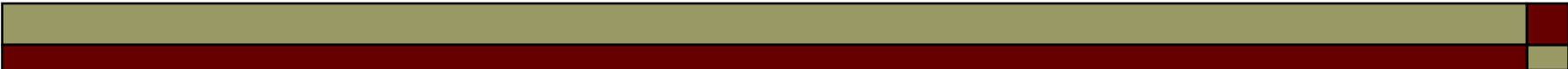
Priesthood

- ❑ Egypt as sacerdotal state: religion helped to formulate and realise important matters of kingship and administration
- ❑ Priests responsible for mythology and theology with king as highest priest, but also administrative officials in all matters of the temple society
- ❑ Not a class with distinctive lives: most work in temple = routine performance of well-established rituals or pure administration of commodities and personnel



Temples as institutions

- ❑ Economic role: temple owns productive sources (land, farmer, personnel) to produce offerings, renting out land (high proportion soldiers and women!)
- ❑ Spiritual contribution: shelter for divine image and gods with regular sustenance (food offerings)
- ❑ Bolstering monarchy as symbiotic relationship (theological, strengthen king's role, economical) – exchange goods and ideas (temples get prisoners of war to work for them), Khato-land (owned by king, administered by temples)



The nature of religion

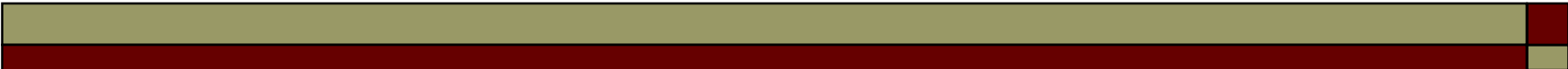
- ❑ The myth(odology) (and theology)
- ❑ The cult
- ❑ Gods and Goddesses
- ❑ Temples
- ❑ Festivals and Processions
- ❑ Kingship
- ❑ Afterlife beliefs

Why important today?

"Egypt is a country that lives within
us"

Arab Spring (28/01/2011)- storming the Qasr al-Nil bridge





Pharaonist movement / Pharaonism

- ❑ ideology against colonial involvement of Britain / France
- ❑ rose to prominence in Egypt in the 1920s and 1930s
- ❑ looked to Egypt's pre-Islamic past and argued that Egypt was part of a larger Mediterranean civilization
 - older and better civilization than everything Europe is characterized by
 - stressed the role of the Nile River and the Mediterranean Sea
- ❑ Creating of an Egyptian vs Arab identity
- ❑ Own their heritage
- ❑ most notable advocate was Taha Hussein



Egyptian
Artefacts



**Curiosi-
ties:
destined
or Wales**

Heritage

Museum



Questions of identity came to the fore in the 20th century as Egyptians sought to free themselves from British occupation and Ottoman Emire → rise of ethno-territorial secular Egyptian nationalism ("Pharaonism") as dominant mode of expression of Egyptian anti-colonial activists of the pre- and inter-war periods



Arab Spring (28/01/2011)- storming the Qasr al-Nil bridge (Saad Zaghloul monument)





Egyptian
Artefacts



**Whose
heritage
?**



Heritage

Museum

Initiative on re-interpretation of cultural heritage WHOSE HERITAGE?



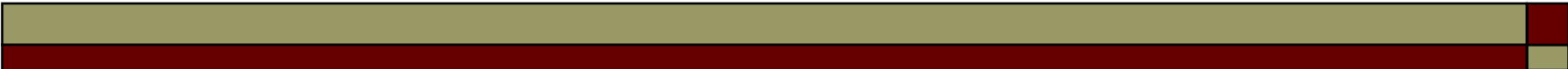


“Egypt as in-official colony”

- ❑ How to decolonise (what is not a colony)?
- ❑ How to disentangle the past?
- ❑ What are the implications for heritage on
 - Macro- (world)
 - Meso – (relationship Wales and Egypt) and
 - Micro-level (within Wales)?
- ❑ Can the collection / objects / material culture and their life-cycles/biographies help to develop narratives suitable for distinctive identities and shared heritage by including entangled emotions?

The nature of religion

The religious side of nature



Aspects of Egyptian religion

- Most should be traced back to people's observation of environment
 - Fundamental – love of sunlight: (daily, seasonal, annual) solar cycle + wellbeing brought by the regular rhythms of nature
 - and the agricultural cycle surrounding the rise and fall of the Nile.

Geography and climate determine religion



Egypt and the sun

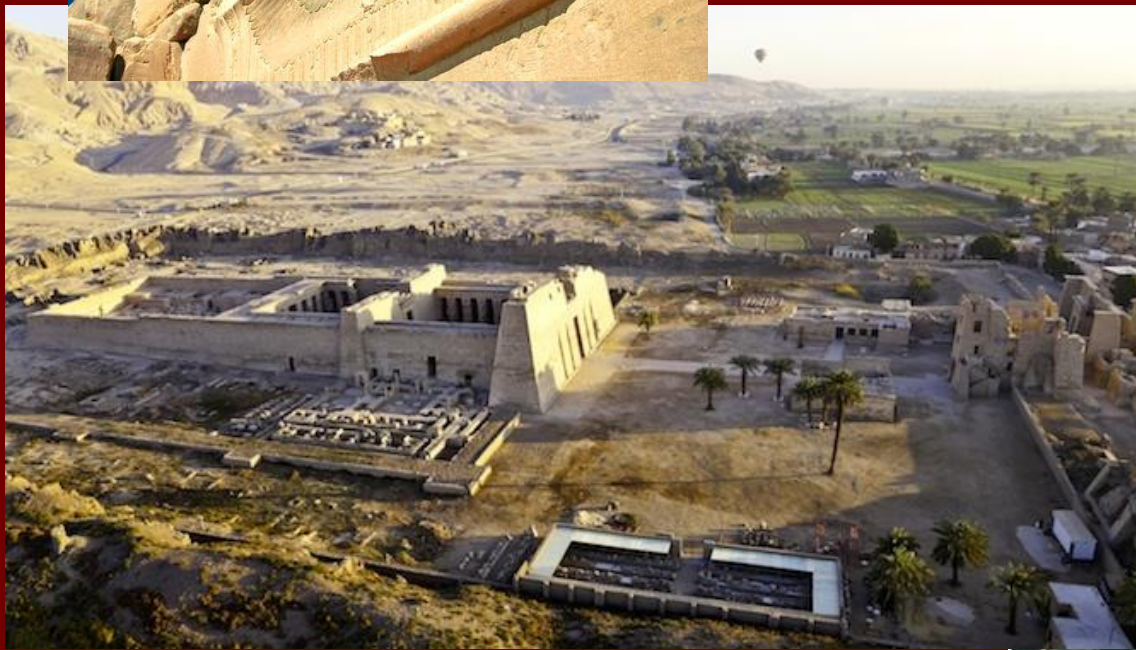


TEMPLE OF DUSH,
PARIS OASIS, EGYPT



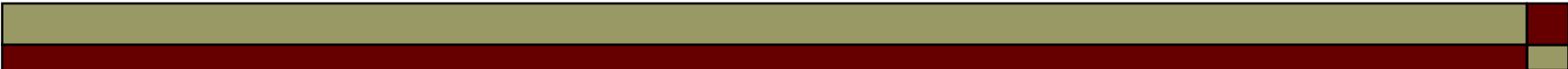
Ancient Egypt and the sun:

nature forms (natural, social and religious)
landscapes



Karnak

W ← → E



Aspects of Egyptian religion

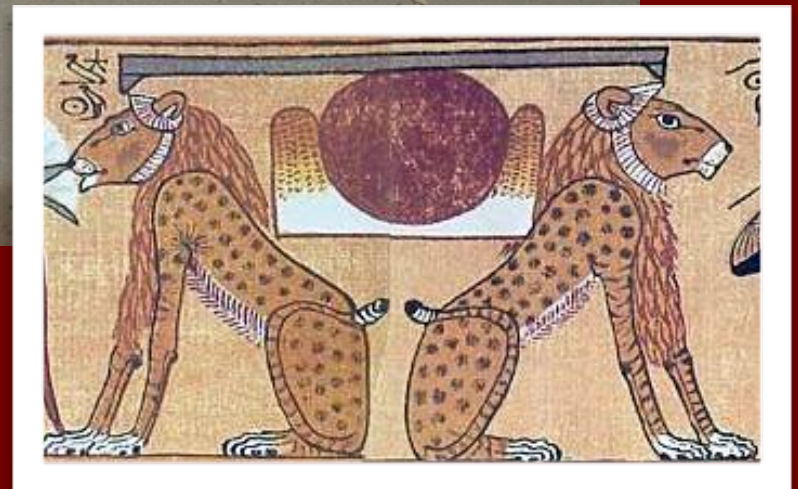
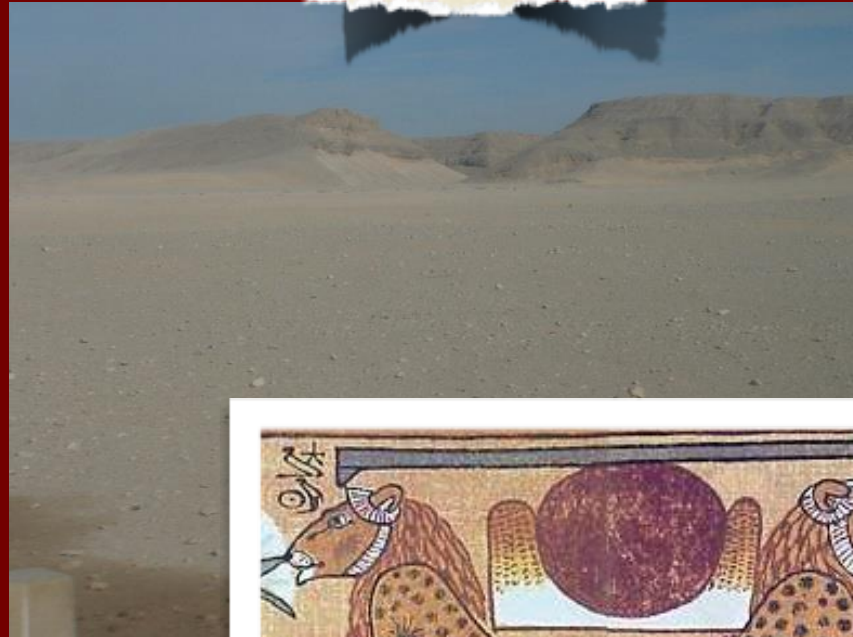
- Most should be traced back to people's observation of environment
 - Fundamental – love of sunlight: (daily, seasonal, annual) solar cycle + wellbeing brought by the regular rhythms of nature
 - and the agricultural cycle surrounding the rise and fall of the Nile.
- Egyptian **theology** attempted to explain natural and cosmic but incomprehensible phenomena
 - Development of series of understandable metaphors based upon natural cycles and understandable experiences.

Theological motivations for choosing the site of a new capital - Amarna

- Topography

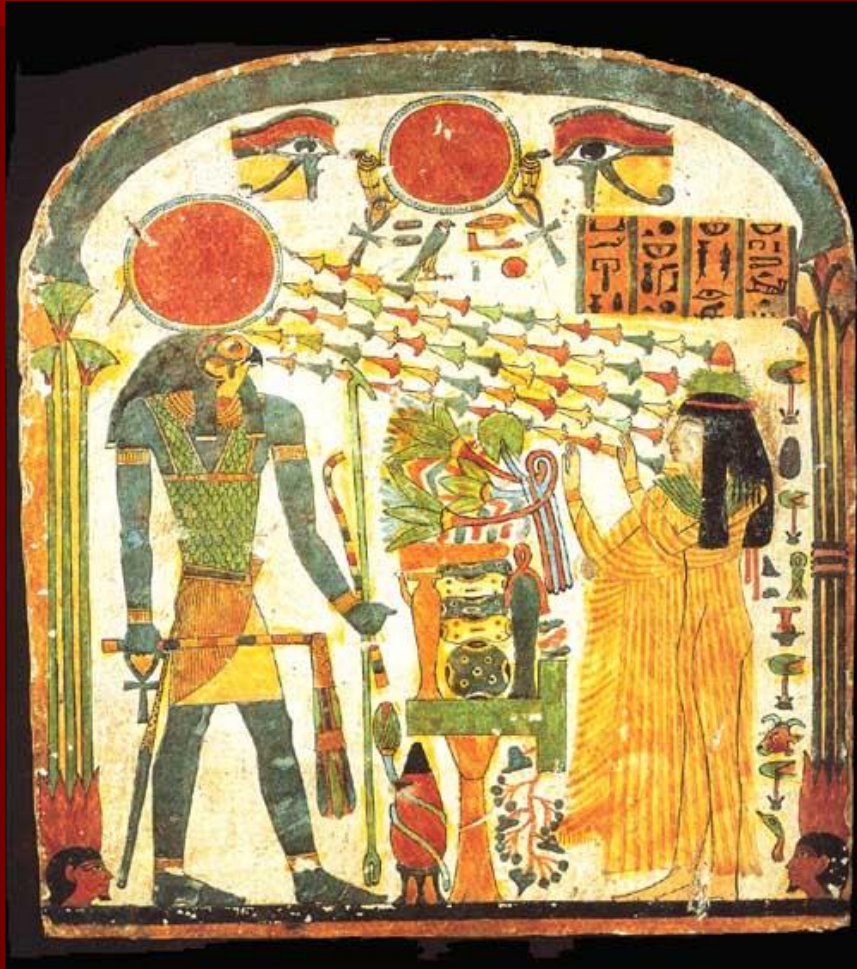
- large, flat area in the desert; plenty of room to build
- close to Nile and farming

- Solar symbolism: Akhet-Aten = "Horizon of the Solar Disk"



Sun symbolism:

Akhet, Ra, solar barque with worshipping baboons



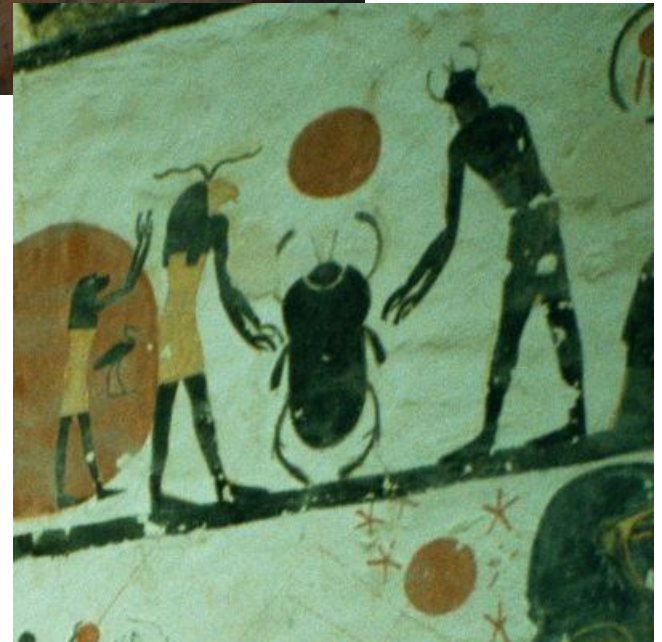
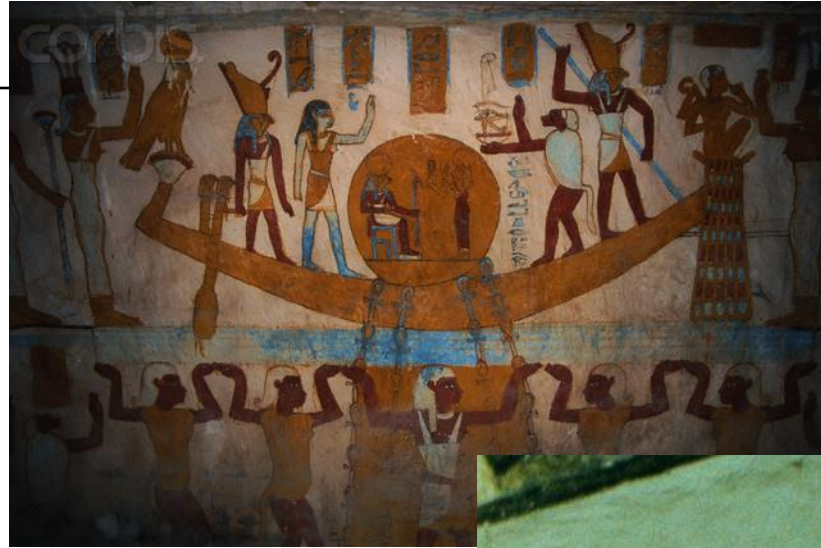
Geography, climate, Nile, sea → the (solar) barque





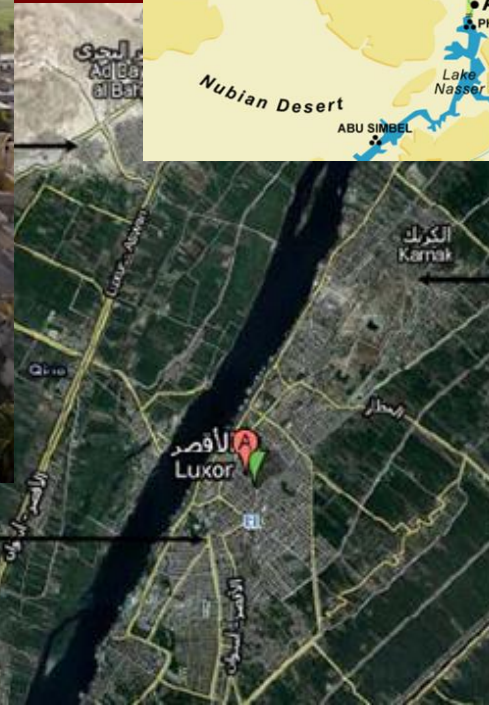
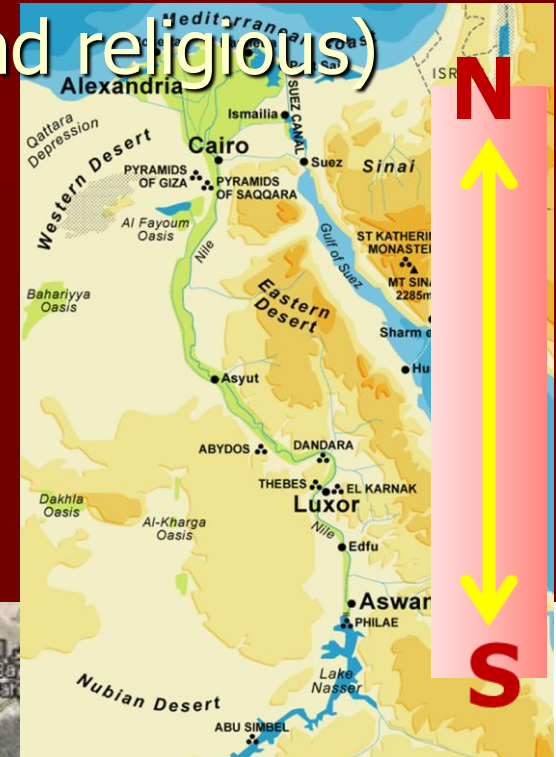
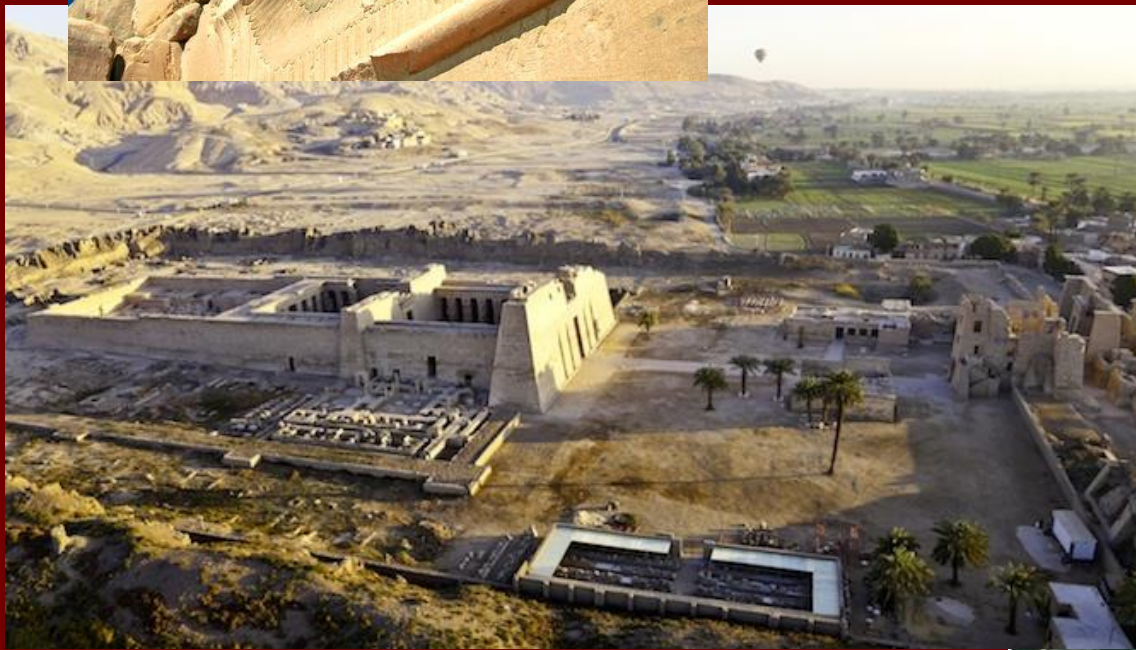
Aspects of Egyptian religion

- movement of the sun across the sky was represented by images of
 - sun in his celestial boat crossing the vault of heaven
 - sun flying over the sky in the form of a scarab beetle



Ancient Egypt and the sun:

nature forms (natural, social and religious)
landscapes



Karnak

W ← → E

Riverine society

already represented in earliest representations

Hierakonpolis Tomb 100: (about 3500 BC - Naqada II)



Early Dynastic Funerary boats at Abydos North

- Complete fleet of 14 boats
- boats vary from 18/19 to 24/27 meters long
- sealed by mudbrick casing
- Traces of white pigments on planks
- prows towards the Nile
- mudbrick casing support for poles/pennants on top of the boats?



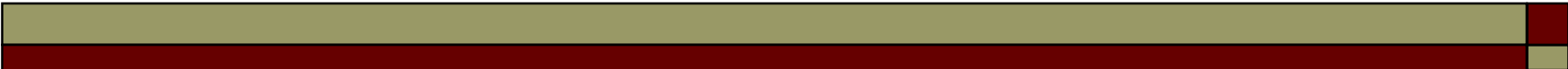
2 types of boats: sailing downstream, rowing upstream



Aspects of Egyptian religion

- ❑ **concept of death**
- ❑ transformed from the cessation of life into a mirror image of life
- ❑ The deceased and present gods = same material requirements + desires





Aspects of Egyptian religion - gods

- ❑ As the religious imagined landscape was influenced by nature, so were the gods
- ❑ To a great extent, gods were patterned after humans:
 - Born
 - some died (to be reborn)
 - fought amongst themselves
 - needed food, care, clothing → satisfied by daily cult ritual
 - gods' behavior resembled human behavior
- ❑ BUT: gods immortal and therefore always superior to humans

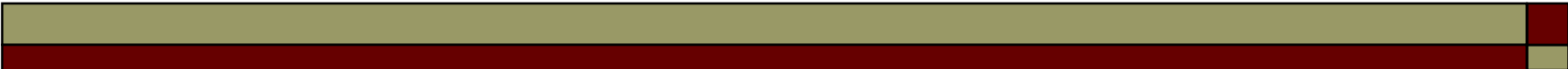
“human” care for gods

Offering of an animal, of water and incense. (Temple of Medinet Habu, 13th cent. B.C.)



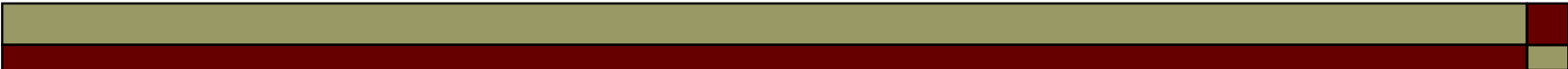
Clothing of the statue
(Pharao Seti I. before Amun, Osiris-Temple, Abydos)





Aspects of Egyptian religion

- ❑ many aspects of Egyptian theology elusive to modern researchers
- ❑ results from tremendous development of religious ideas throughout the nearly 4,000 years of Egyptian civilization
- ❑ however, only few concepts were discarded
- ❑ layered upon each other in an ever more complex and seemingly convoluted manner
- ❑ reinterpreted

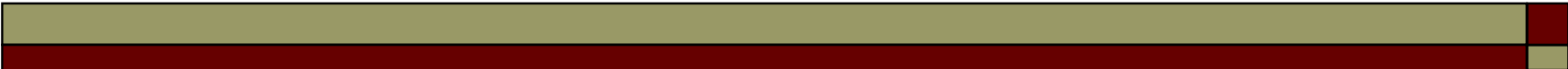


Aspects of Egyptian religion

- ❑ sometimes dismissed as signs of a primitive culture or of the Egyptians' confusion about their place in the universe
- ❑ BUT: seemingly contradictory beliefs better interpreted as extended metaphors used to explain the intangible
- ❑ Coped better with the explanation of the world than many other civilisations to come
- ❑ Example – creation: different theologies
 - Ptah – by force of thoughts
 - Khnum – on his celestial potter's wheel
 - Atum – used spittle or semen

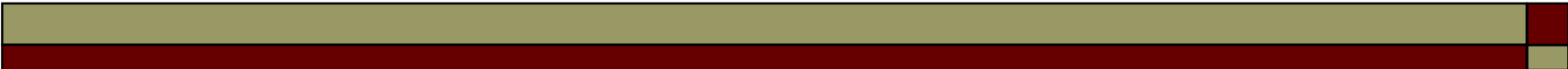
The emergence of religion in ancient Egypt

Where did it all start?



Additional Reading

- ❑ Wilkinson, T. A. H. (2001). *Early Dynastic Egypt*. Cambridge.
- ❑ Wengrow, D. (2006). *The Archaeology of Early Egypt: Social Transformations in North-East Africa, 10,000 to 2650 BC*. Cambridge.
- ❑ Wenke, R. J. (2009). *The Ancient Egyptian State: The Origins of Egyptian Culture (c. 8000-2000 BC)*. Cambridge.
- ❑ Wilkinson, T.A.H. 2000. What a King Is This: Narmer and the Concept of the Ruler. In: *The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 86(2000), pp. 23-32
→<http://www.jstor.org/stable/3822303>



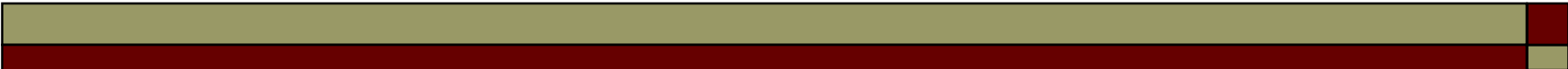
The emergence of religion in AE

- Predynastic and Early Dynastic Periods → 5000 BC – to the end of 2nd dyn.
- → parallel to the emergence of civilisation and compilation of state



Prerequisites for evolution of religion

- ❑ Extended brain size in humans → looking for explanations
- ❑ Use of tools
- ❑ Use of language(s)
- ❑ Living in groups → morality



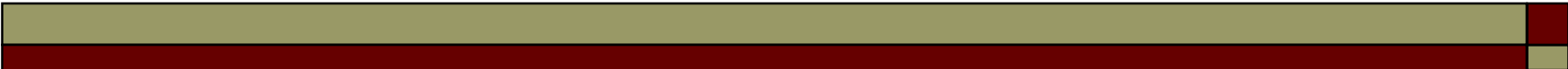
Origins of religion in AE

- standard anthropological models:
 - gods in early civilizations derived from a mother goddess
 - or incarnation of aspects of nature
- → do not necessarily fit the Egyptian evidence.
- Gods are attested from the earliest time of Egyptian civilization
- deity could be represented in human form, in zoomorphic form, or in a mixed animal-human form

PUAM

Slate palette
(fish)



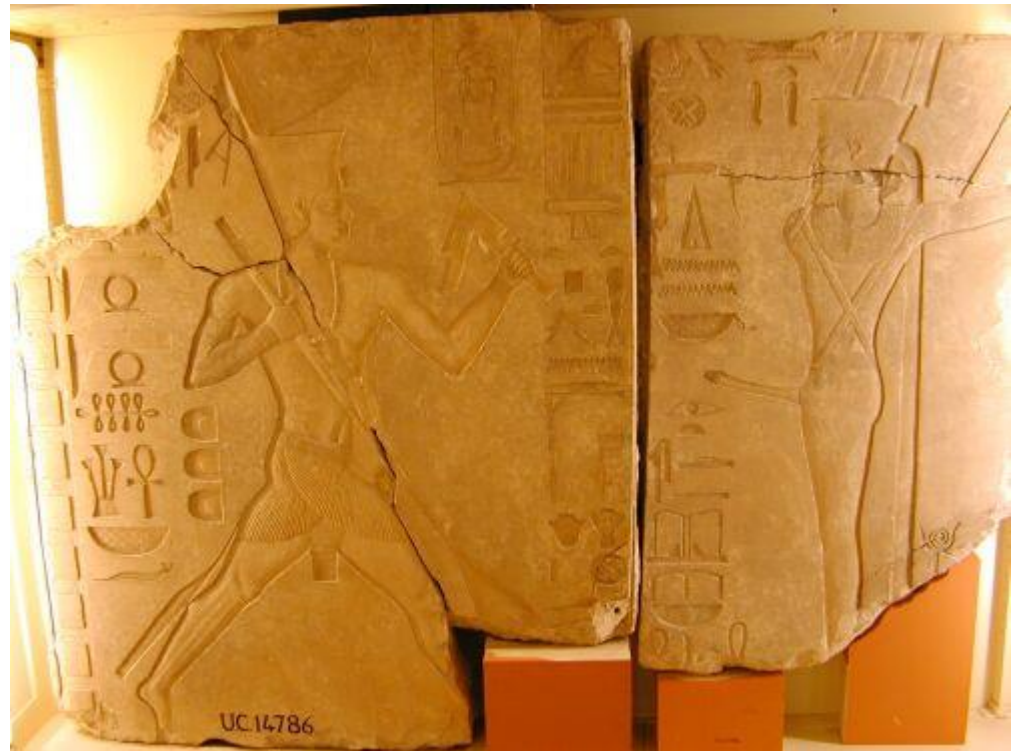


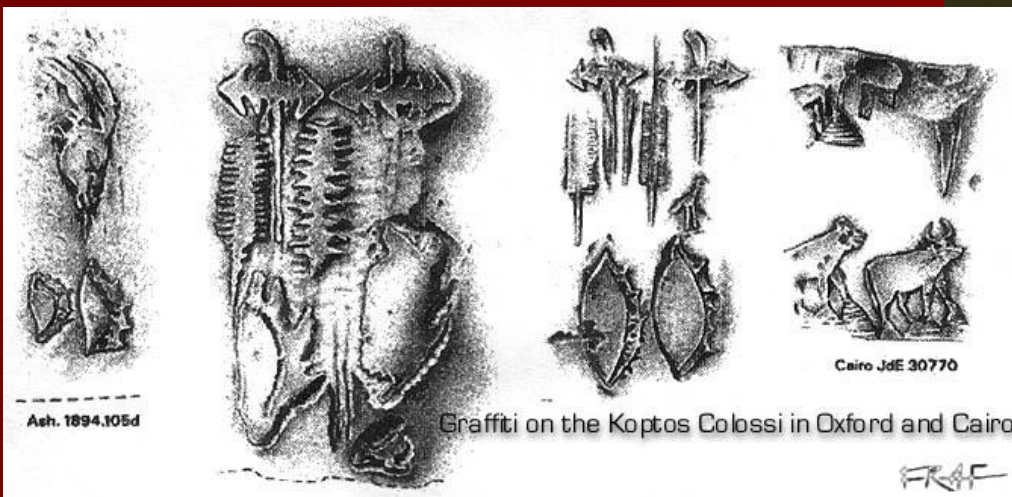
Origins of religion in AE

- ❑ animal and therianthropic (part human, part animal) forms slightly predate anthropoid manifestations
- ❑ Nevertheless unlikely that gods derived from totemic animals or practiced zoolatry (i.e., worship of animals)
- ❑ More likely: animal forms were probably used to suggest metaphorically something about the characteristics of the god

Origins of religion in AE

- ❑ Certain gods were associated strongly with specific localities (worship was not limited to those regions – especially later)
- ❑ → case study: Min of Koptos





Min colossi Ashmolean Museum

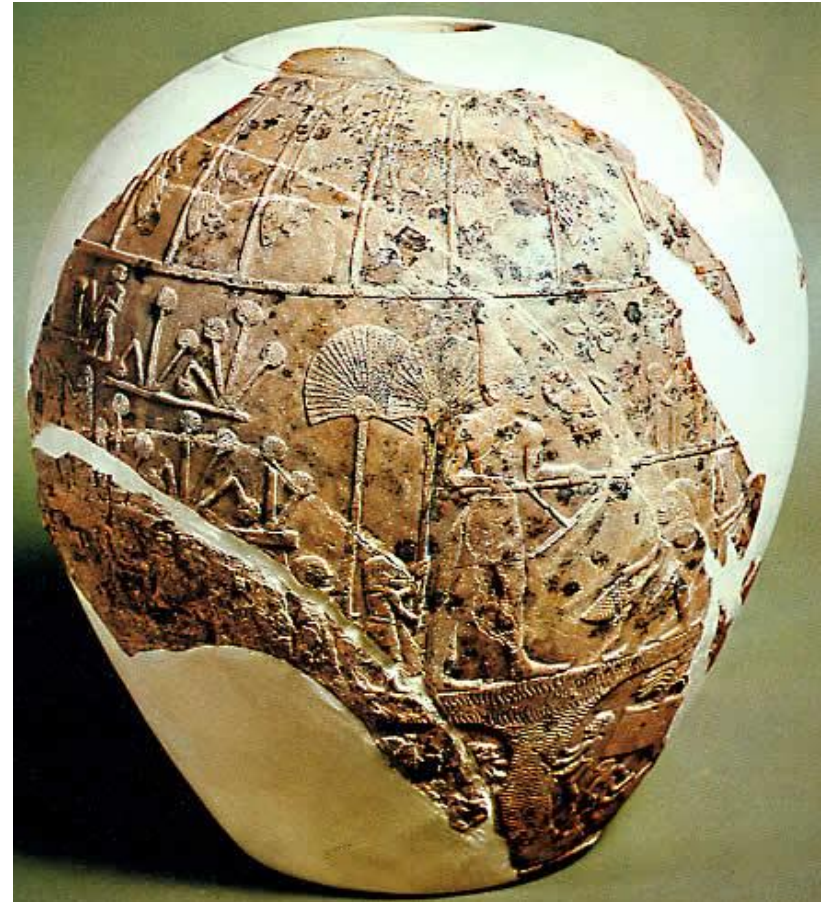


Koptos, Temple of Min (reconstruction)

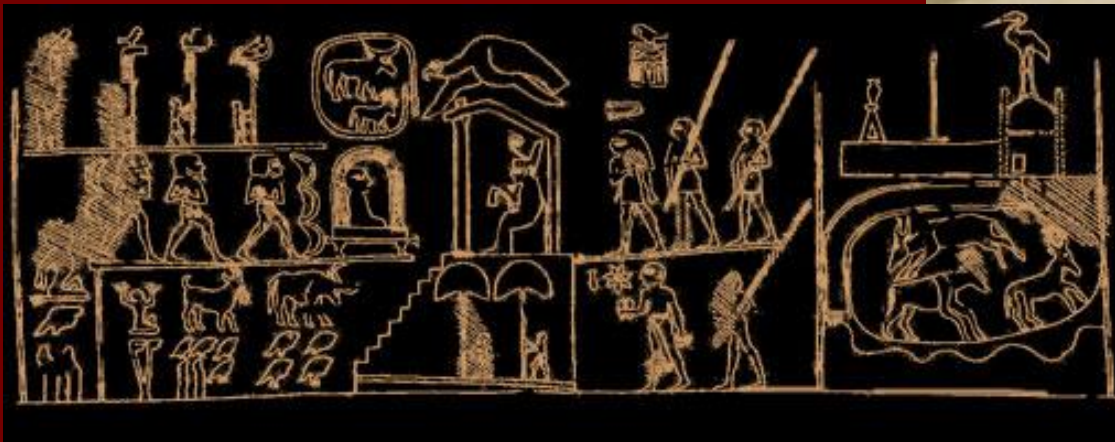
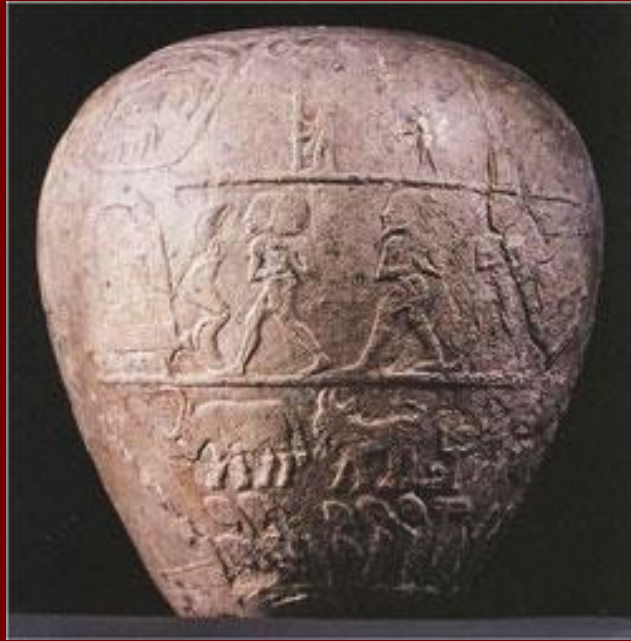


Origins of Civilisation

- Emergence of **complex society**
 - Population size
 - Hierarchical organisation
 - Division of labour
 - Literacy & centralized organisation
 - Development of arts, literary traditions, sciences
 - Laws
- Usually equated with **state**
- → “kicked” off by religion as final human architect?



Narmer Macehead

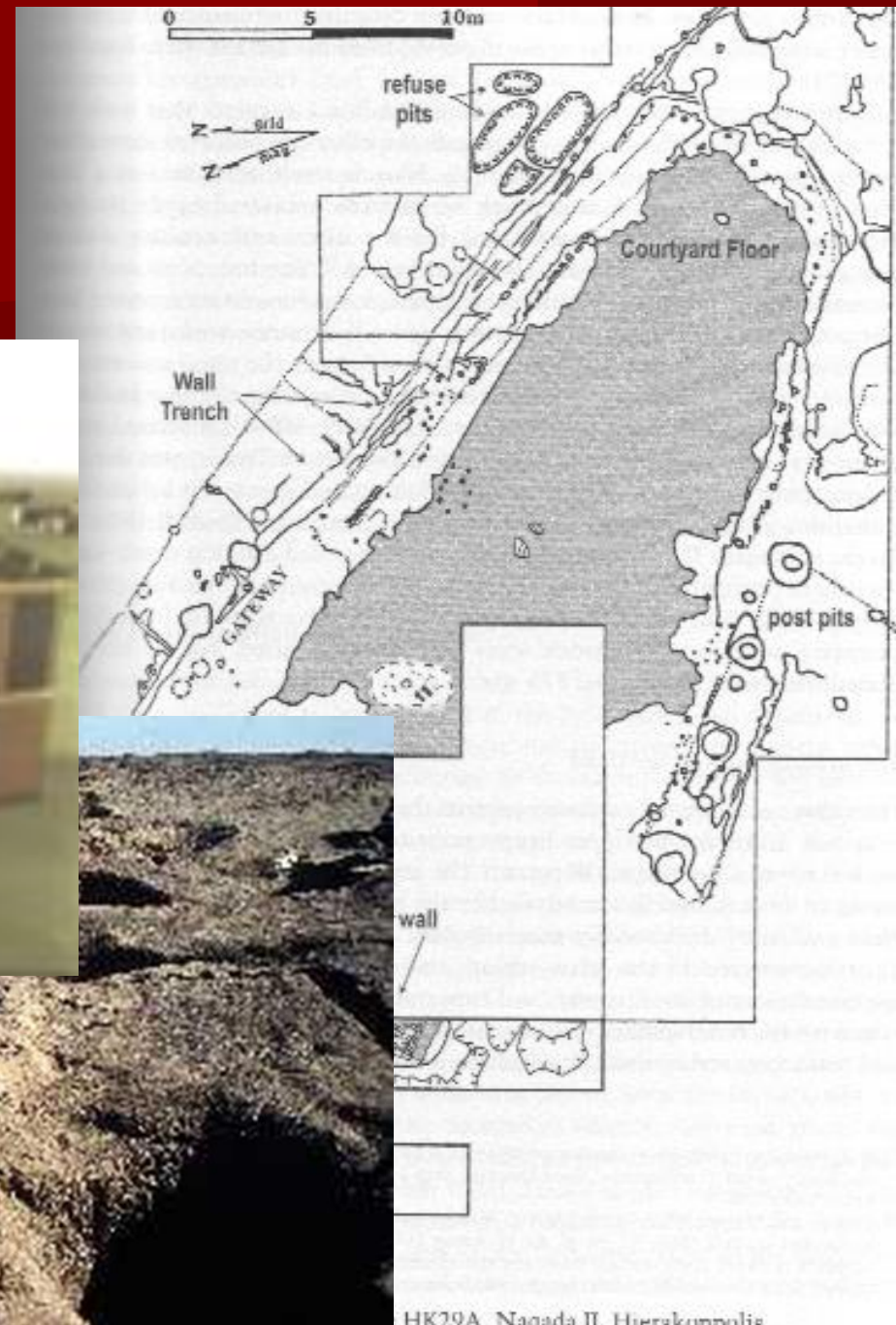




Comparison structure with Narmer- Macehead

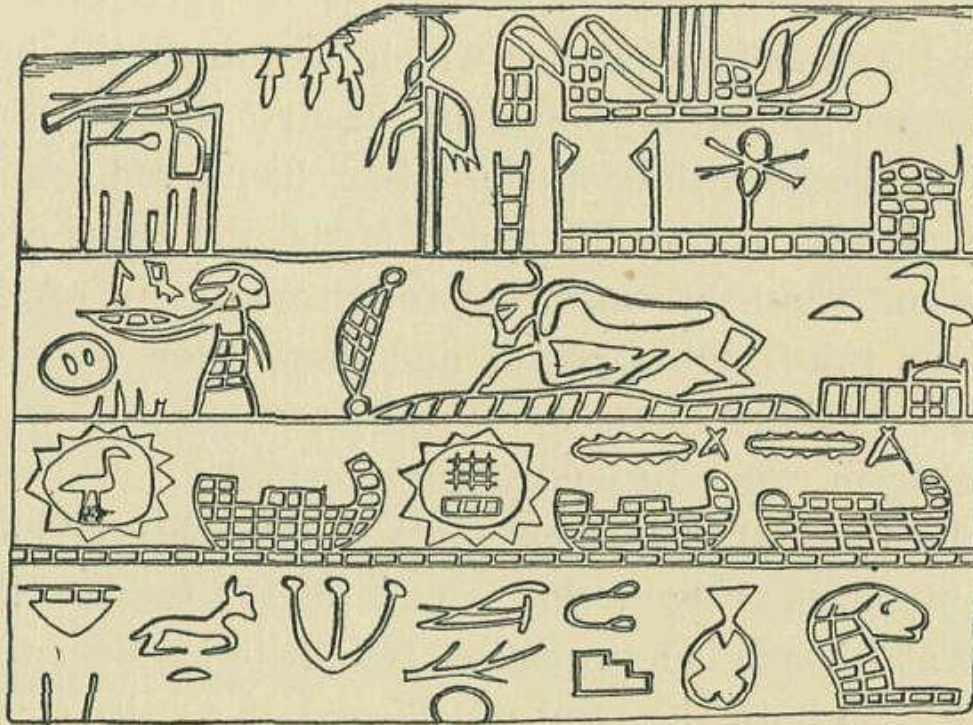


HK29A – Excavated Areas

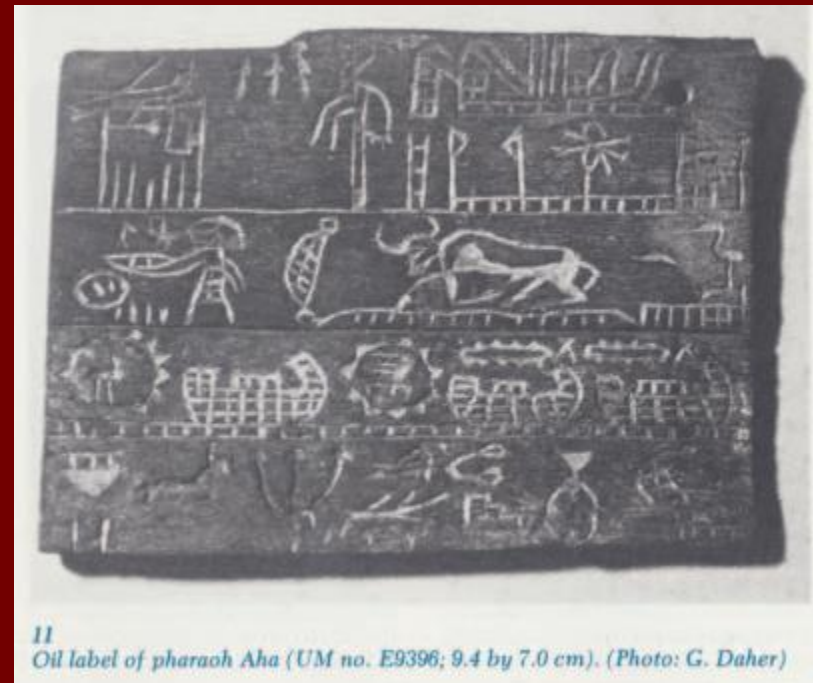


HK29A, Naqada II, Hierskonpolis

From Abydos (tomb of AHA) – SACRED LANDSCAPES AS SPACES FOR ROYAL FESTIVALS

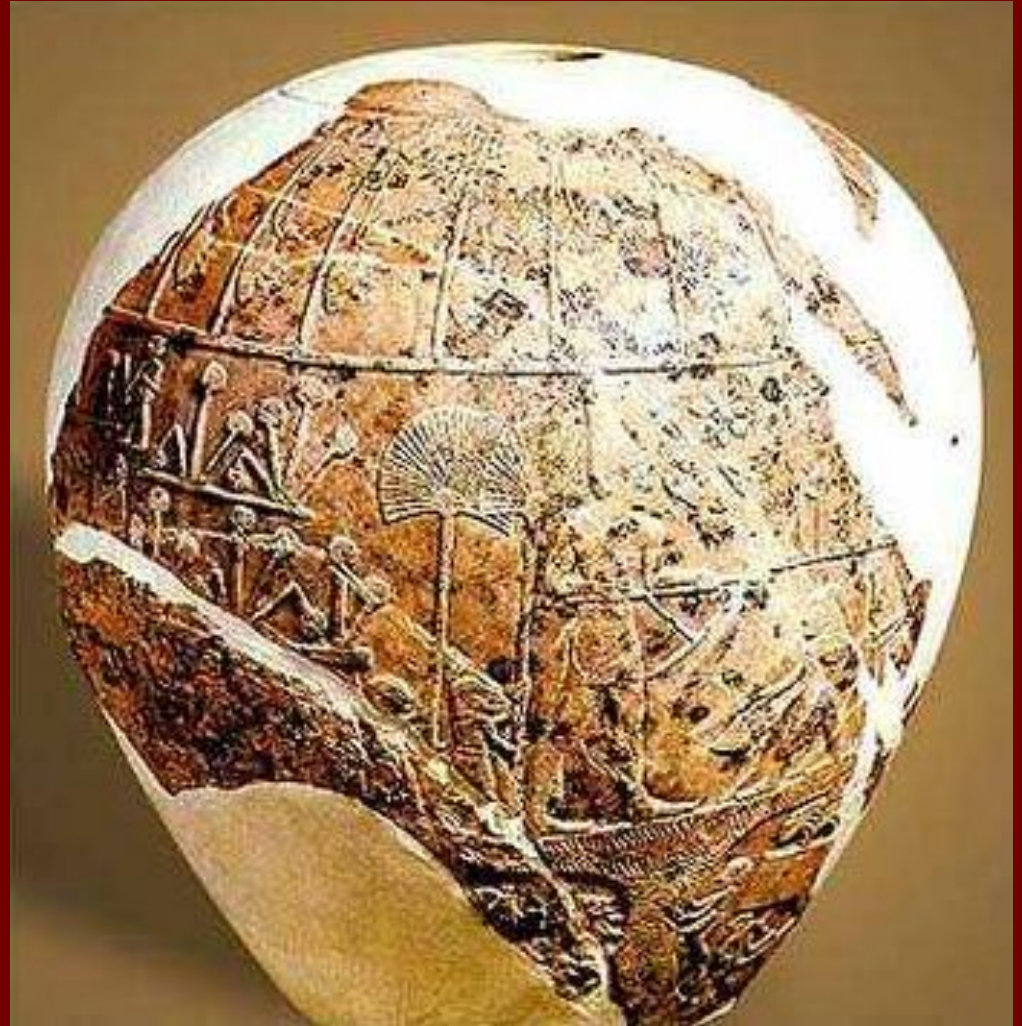


EBONY TABLET OF KING AHA-MENA.



11
Oil label of pharaoh Aha (UM no. E9396; 9.4 by 7.0 cm). (Photo: G. Dahér)

Performing rituals: King Scorpion (Ashmolean Macehead)

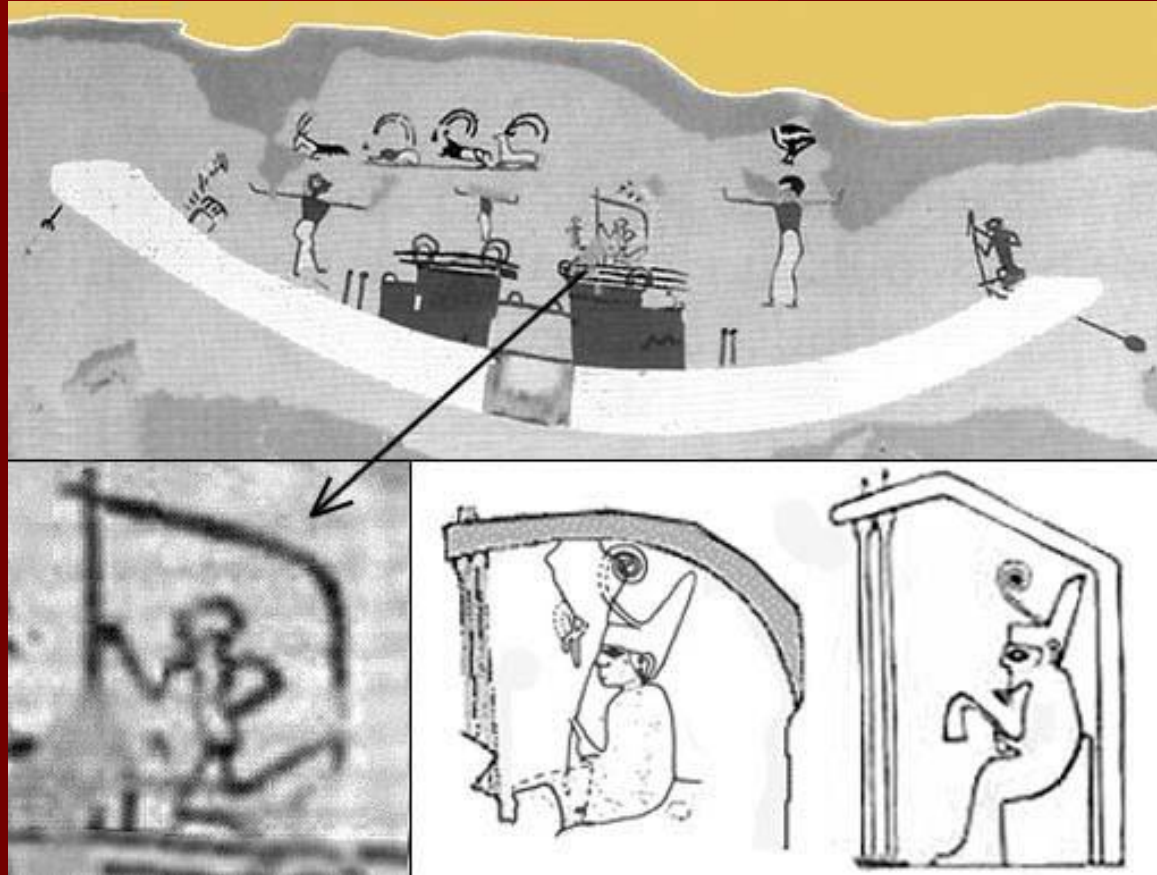


Hierakonpolis 100



Development: Hierakonpolis 100 – maceheads

- figure within the canopy king?
- Sedfest depictions?
- later depiction: pharaoh sitting (maceheads Scorpion and Narmer),
- king here stands up (no crown , no regalia).



BM EA 37996



BM EA 37996: Ivory statuette of a king in jubilee robe

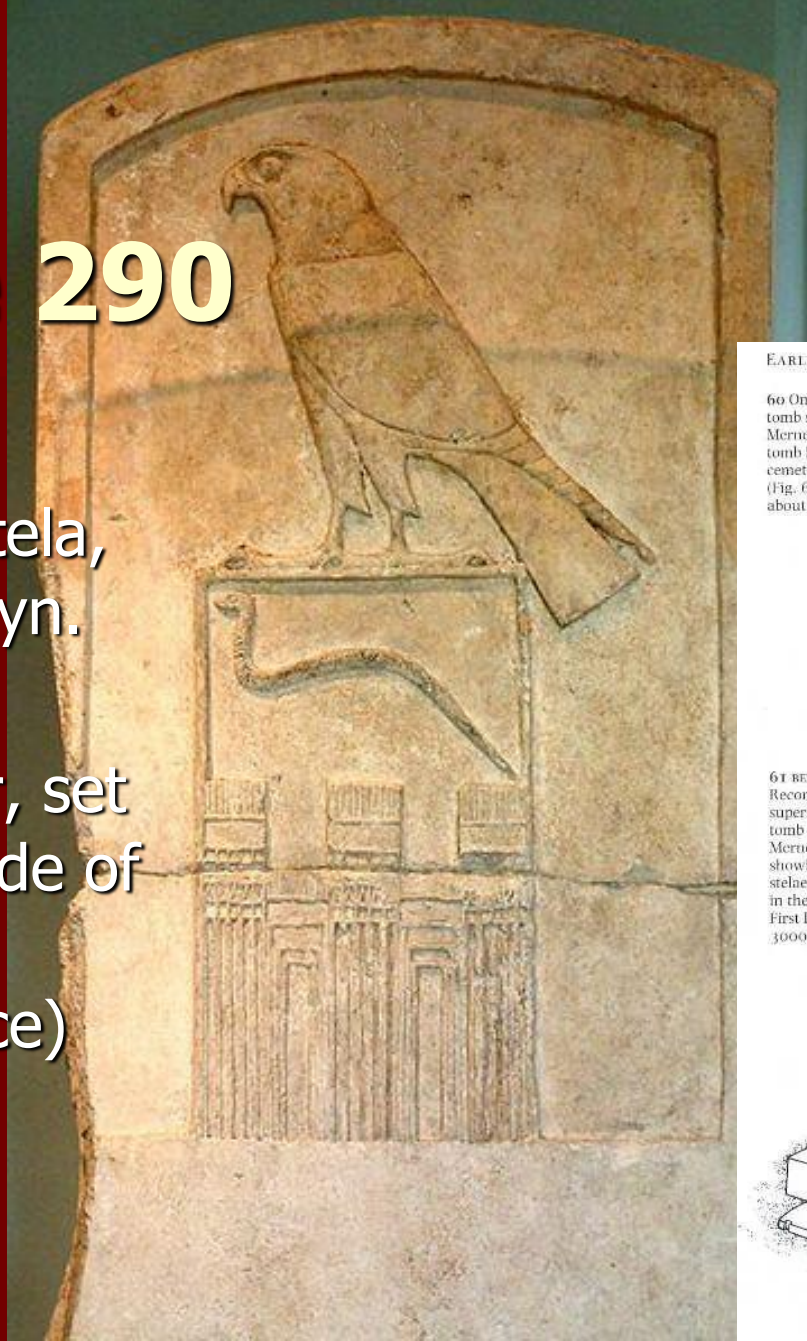
- ❑ From the Temple of Osiris, Abydos, Egypt
Early Dynastic period, perhaps mid-1st Dynasty
- ❑ This figurine is one of the earliest surviving portraits of an Egyptian king. (Which one?)
- ❑ The robe, decorated with a fine pattern of diamond shapes enclosed by double lines, is of the distinctive type worn by kings when celebrating the *sed* or jubilee festival. The figurine may be evidence that this festival was celebrated right at the beginning of the historical period in Egypt.

Paris, Louvre 290

Limestone

Upper part stela,
king Wadj (dyn.
1)

One of a pair, set
up on east side of
king's tomb
(offering place)

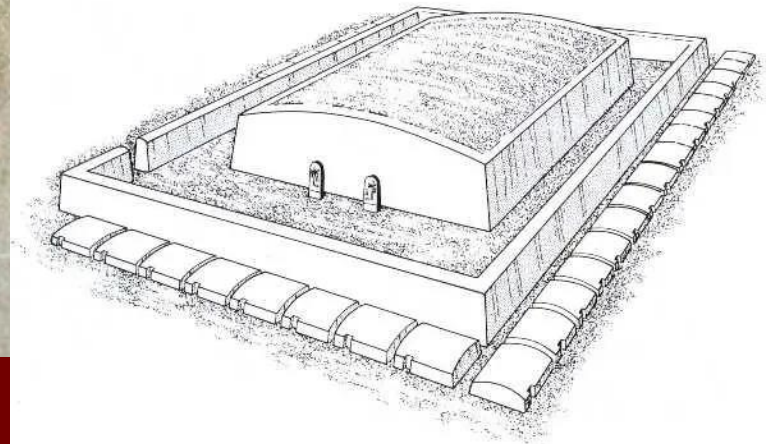


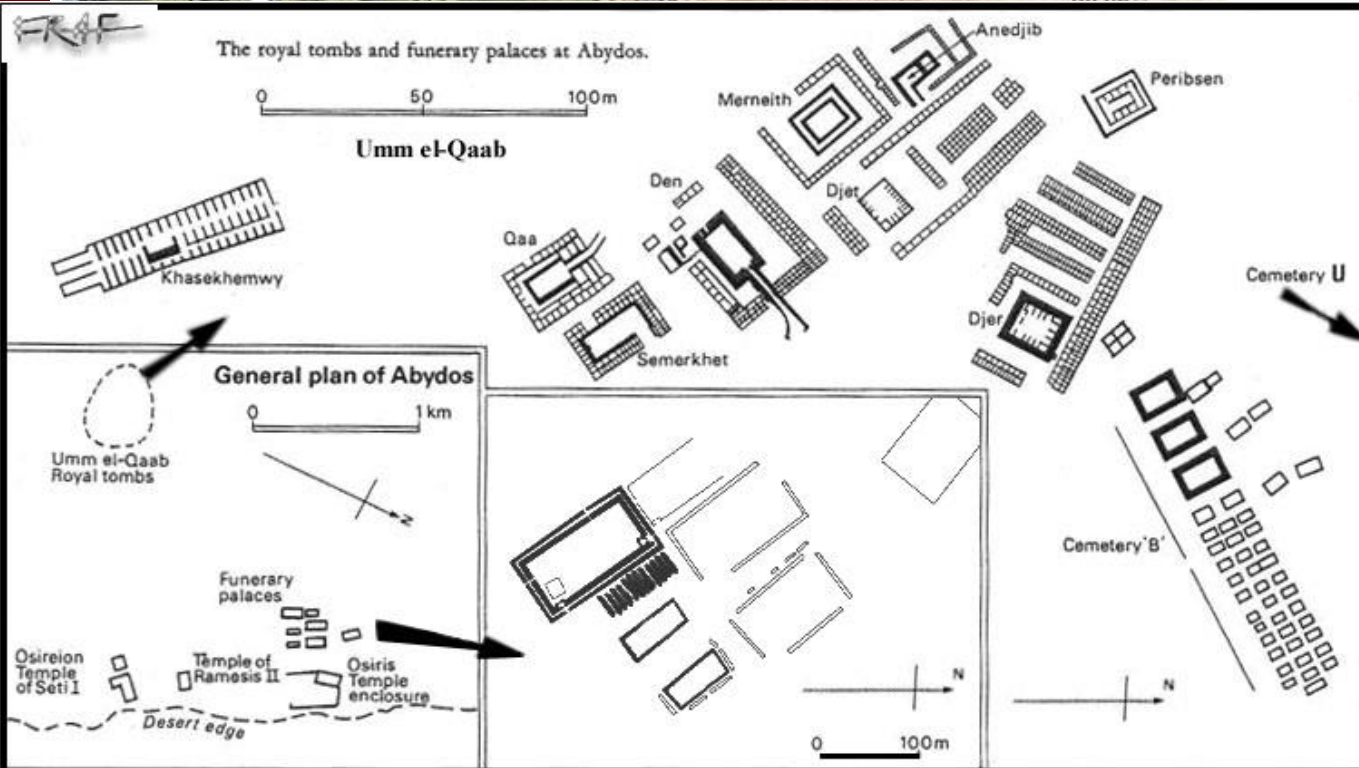
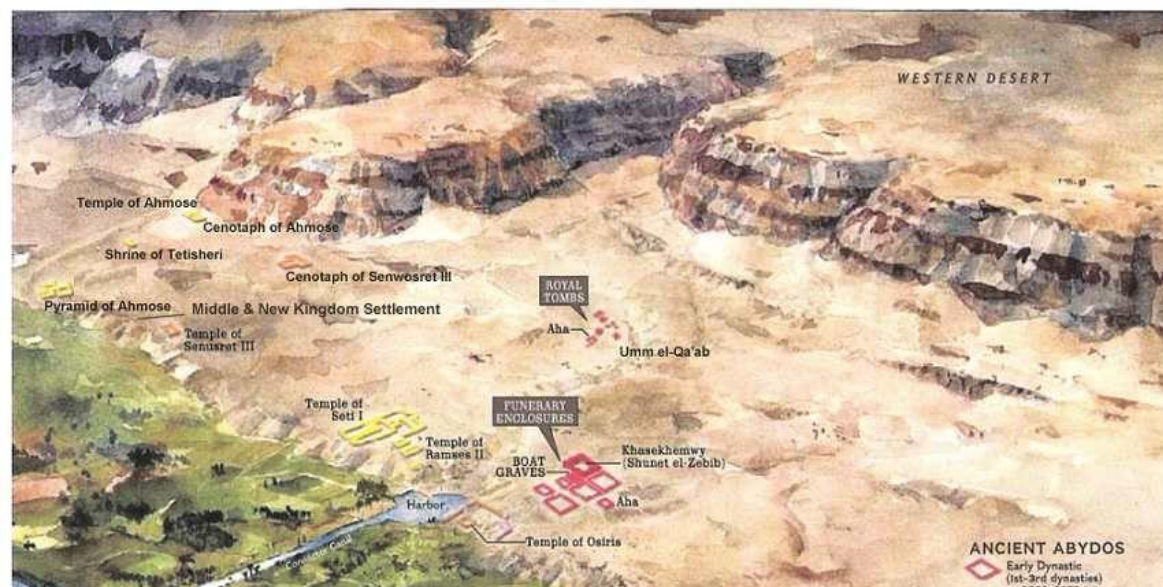
EARLY EGYPT

60 One of the pair of
tomb stelae of Queen
Mernueith, from her
tomb in the royal
cemetery at Abydos
(Fig. 61). First Dynasty,
about 3000 BC.



61 BELOW
Reconstruction of the
superstructure of the
tomb of Queen
Mernueith at Abydos,
showing the paired
stelae (see Fig. 60)
in the offering place.
First Dynasty, about
3000 BC.





B. Trigger, in: Trigger, Kemp, O'Connor, Lloyd, *Ancient Egypt: A social History*, 1983, fig. 3.2 (with some modifications)



MMA 1.4.93

Private stela
Senba

Abydos,

King Djer

→ Early writing
(name of the
deceased)



MMA

19.2.16

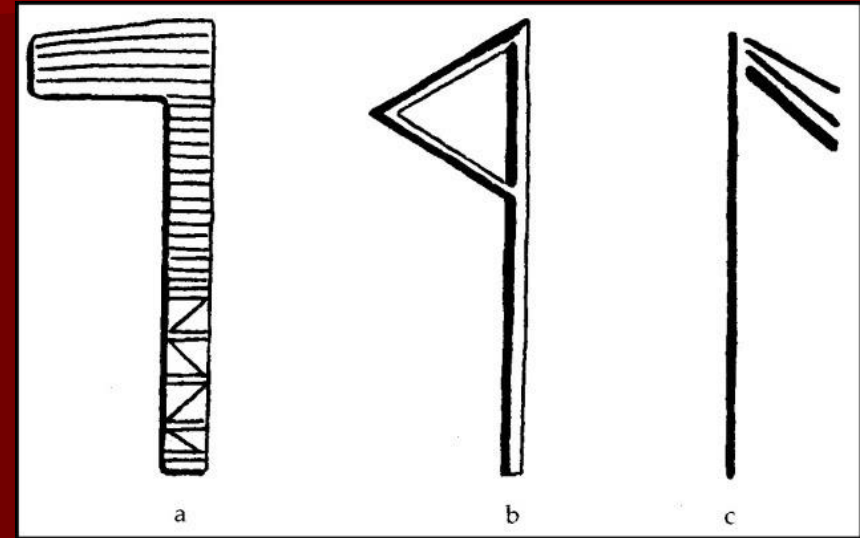
Ritual vessel
(libation?)

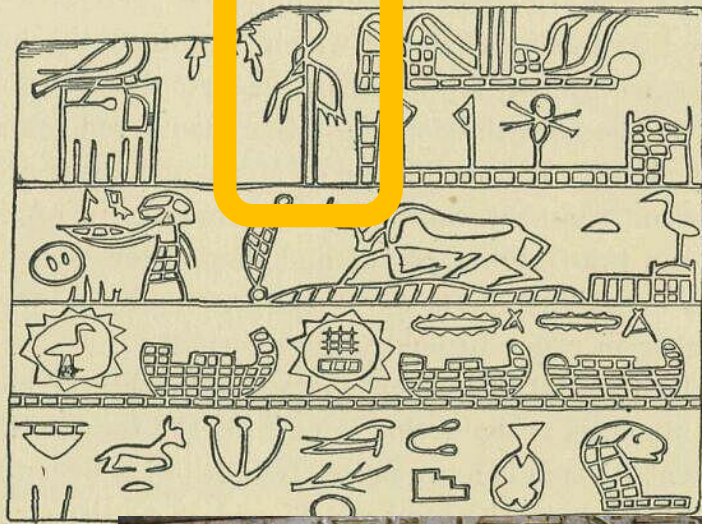
Dyn 1

→ Early writing



Fetish, sanctuary, shrine, temple?

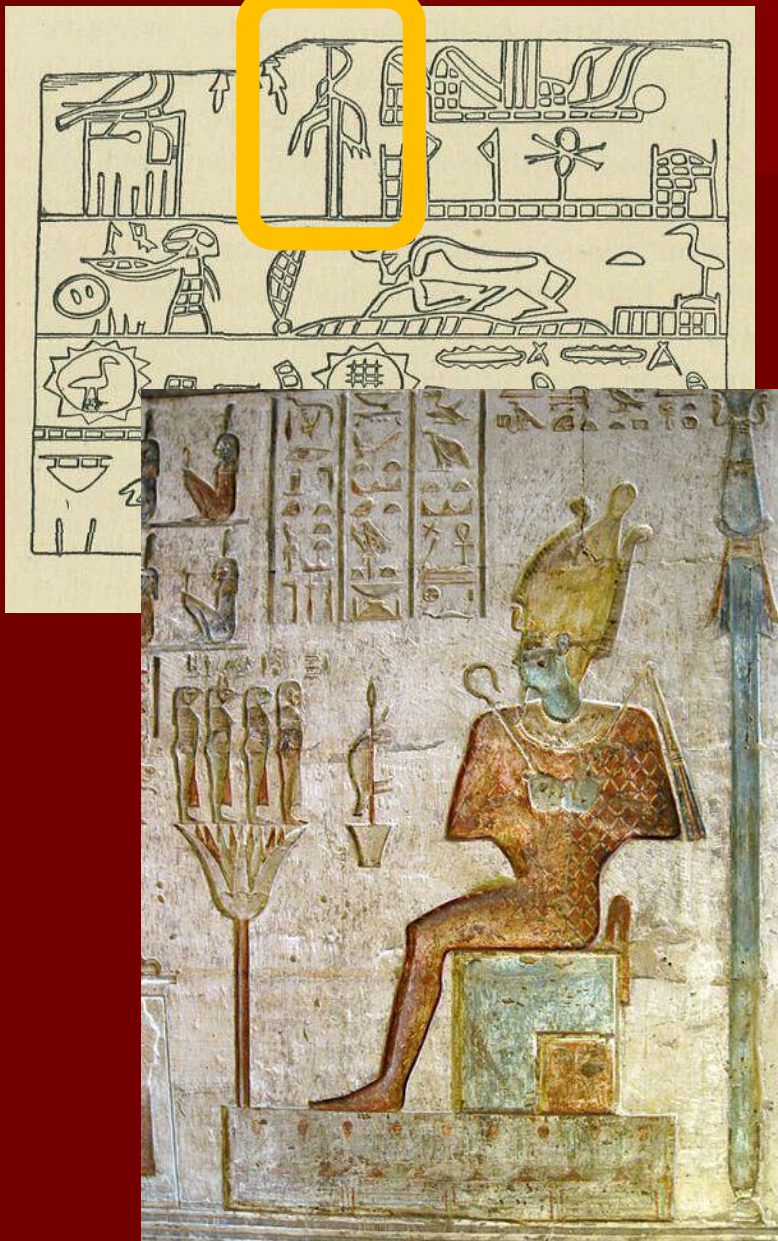




Imiut - fetish

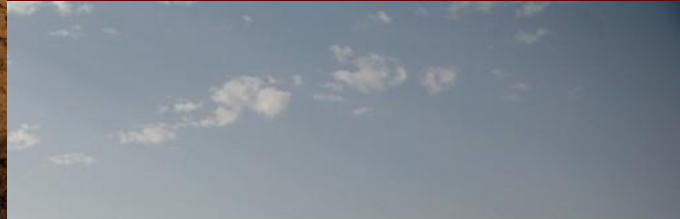


Imiut - fetish



Connected
with
underworld
/afterlife?





Khasekehmui (Shunet ez Zebib, Abydos)



Early Dynastic Funerary boats at Abydos North



- Complete fleet of 14 boats
- Before interpreted as bastioned corner of small enclosure
- boats vary from 18/19 to 24/27 meters long
- sealed by mudbrick casing
- Traces of white pigments on planks
- prows towards the Nile
- mudbrick casing support for poles/pennants on top of the boats?