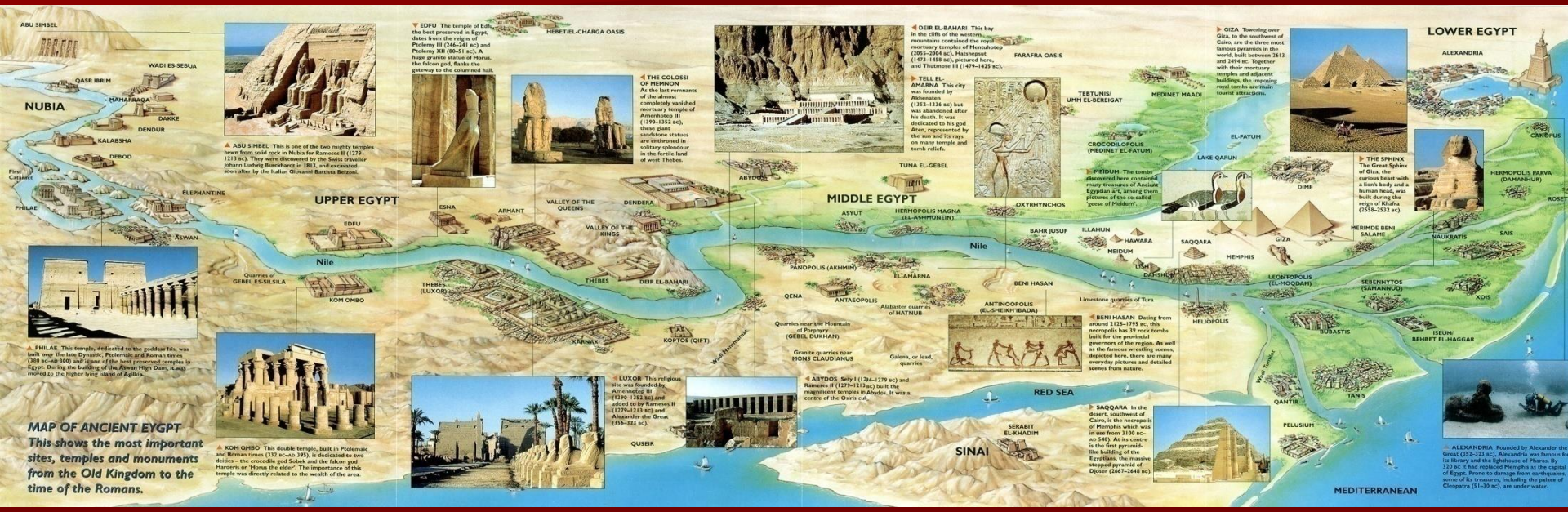
Humans and other animals: the shared Egyptian landscape

Wild creatures, pets, food, taboos

HPFY3011 Humans and other Animals

Dr Katharina Zinn

Ancient Egypt



MAP OF ANCIENT EYGPT
This shows the most important sites, temples and monuments from the Old Kingdom to the time of the Romans.

ABU SIMBEL This is one of the two mighty temples hewn from solid rock in Nubia for Ramesses II (1279–1213 BC). They were discovered by the Swiss traveller Johann Ludwig Burckhardt in 1813, and excavated soon after by the Italian Giovanni Battista Belzoni.

EDFU The temple of Edfu, the best preserved in Egypt, dates from the reigns of Ptolemy III (246–241 BC) and Ptolemy XII (80–51 BC). A huge granite statue of Horus, the falcon god, flanks the gateway to the columned hall.

THE COLOSSI OF MEMNON As the last remnants of the almost completely vanished mortuary temple of Amenhotep III (1390–1352 BC), these giant sandstone statues are enthroned in solitary splendour in the fertile land of west Thebes.

PHILAE This temple, dedicated to the goddess Isis, was built over the late Dynastic, Ptolemaic and Roman times (380 BC–AD 300) and is one of the best preserved temples in Egypt. During the building of the Aswan High Dam, it was moved to the higher lying island of Agilkia.

KOM OMBO This double temple, built in Ptolemaic and Roman times (332 BC–AD 395), is dedicated to two deities – the crocodile god Sobek and the falcon god Haroeris or 'Horus the elder'. The importance of this temple was directly related to the wealth of the area.

LUXOR This religious site was founded by Amenhotep III (1390–1352 BC) and added to by Ramesses II (1279–1213 BC) and Alexander the Great (356–323 BC).

ABYDOS Sety I (1294–1279 BC) and Ramesses II (1279–1213 BC) built the magnificent temples in Abydos. It was a centre of the Osiris cult.

DEIR EL-BAHARI This bay in the cliffs of the western mountains contained the royal mortuary temples of Mentuhotep (2055–2004 BC), Hatshepsut (1473–1458 BC), pictured here, and Thutmose III (1479–1425 BC).

TELL EL-AMARNA This city was founded by Akhenaten (1352–1336 BC) but was abandoned after his death. It was dedicated to his god Aten, represented by the sun and its rays on many temple and tomb reliefs.

MEIDUM The tombs discovered here contained many treasures of Ancient Egyptian art, among them pictures of the so-called 'geese of Meidum'.

BENI HASAN Dating from around 2125–1795 BC, this necropolis has 39 rock tombs built for the provincial governors of the region. As well as the famous wrestling scenes, depicted here, there are many everyday pictures and detailed scenes from nature.

SAQQARA In the desert, southwest of Cairo, is the necropolis of Memphis which was in use from 3100 BC–AD 540. At its centre is the first pyramid-like building of the Egyptians, the massive stepped pyramid of Djoser (2667–2648 BC).

GIZA Towering over Giza, to the southwest of Cairo, are the three most famous pyramids in the world, built between 2613 and 2494 BC. Together with their mortuary temples and adjacent buildings, the imposing royal tombs are main tourist attractions.

THE SPHINX The Great Sphinx of Giza, the curious beast with a lion's body and a human head, was built during the reign of Khafra (2558–2532 BC).

ALEXANDRIA Founded by Alexander the Great (332–323 BC), Alexandria was famous for its library and the lighthouse of Pharos. By 320 BC it had replaced Memphis as the capital of Egypt. Prone to damage from earthquakes, some of its treasures, including the palace of Cleopatra (51–30 BC), are under water.

Nile and Desert

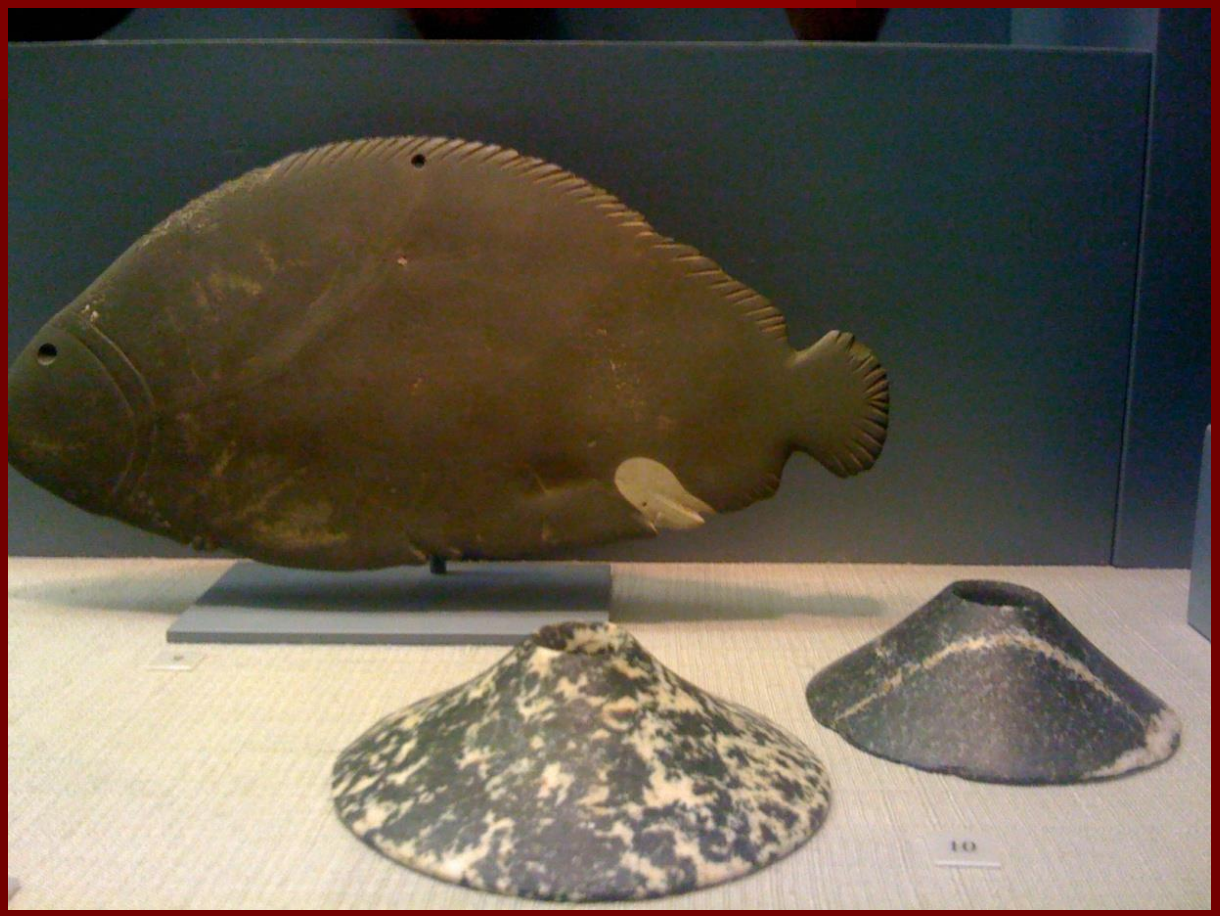
Geography and climate determine life

WILD CREATURES AND THEIR HABITAT (WHERE DO THEY LIVE)

Alamy

PUAM

Slate palette (fish) and mace-heads



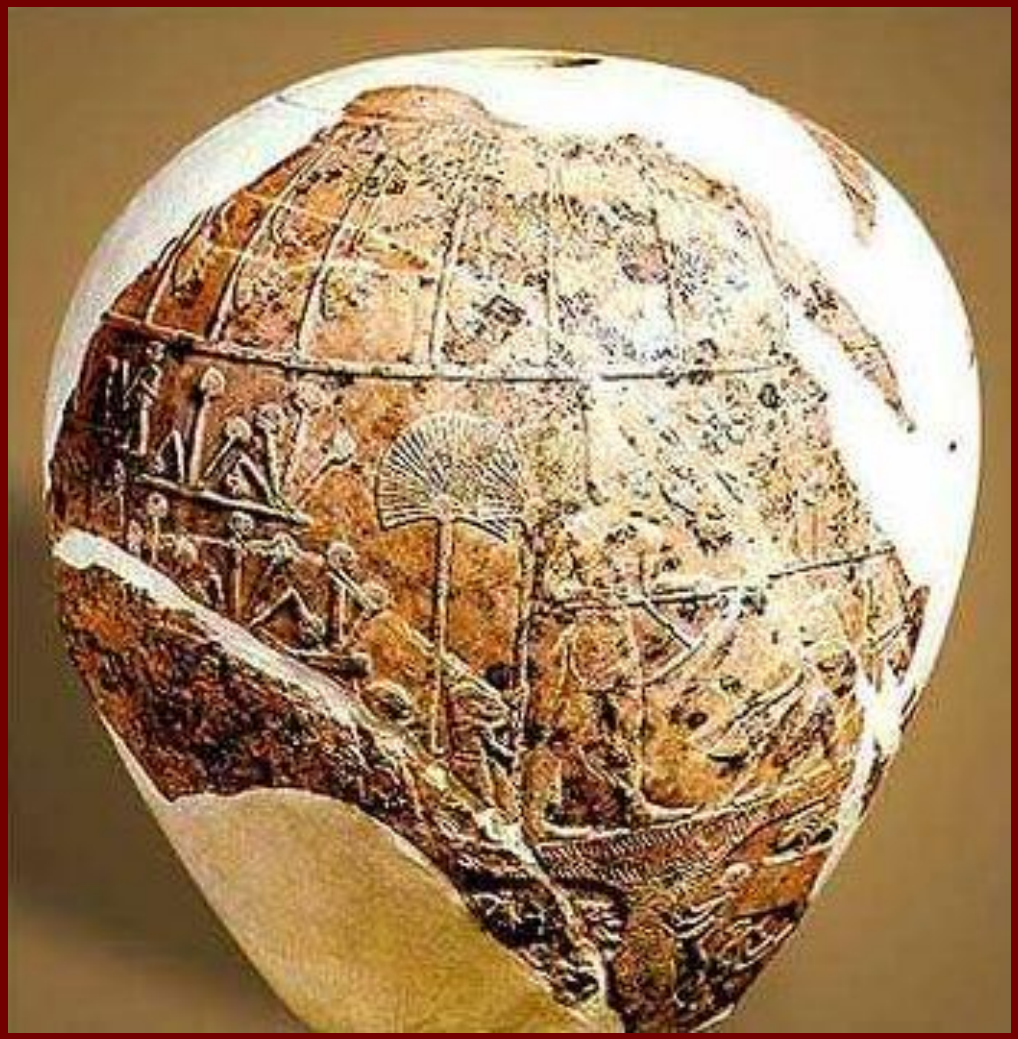
Paris, Louvre 290

Limestone

Upper part stela, king Wadj (dyn. 1)

One of a pair, set up on east side of kings tomb (offering place)

Performing rituals: King Scorpion (Ashmolean Macehead)



PETS

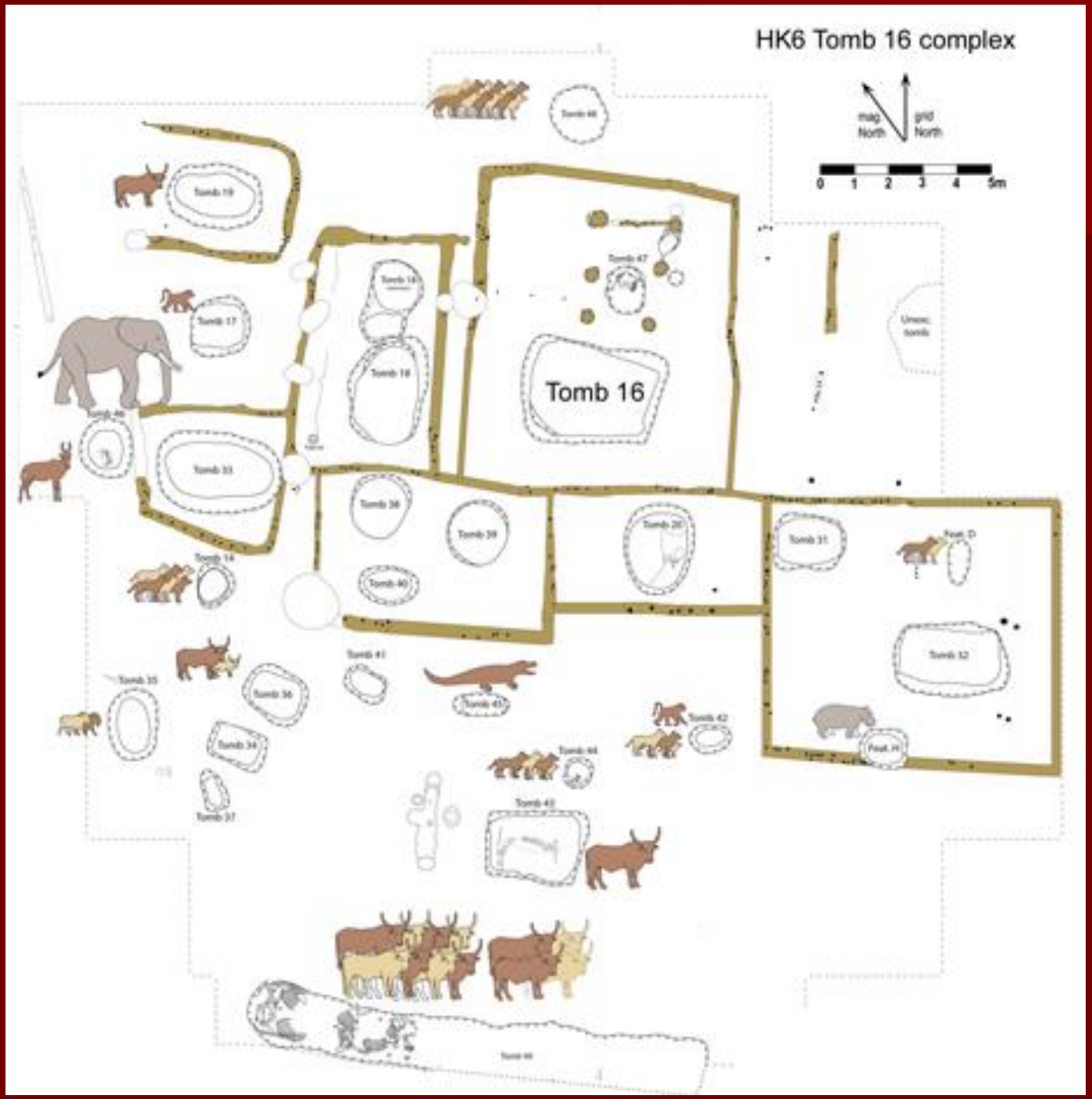
Pets at home and temples – what is a pet?

- domesticated dogs and cats to baboons, monkeys, fish, gazelles, birds (especially falcons), lions, mongoose, and hippos
- Crocodiles kept as sacred animals in the temples of the god Sobek
- domesticated animals of high value – just as popular and deeply loved as pets are in the present day

UC14318 (Koptos, First Intermediate Period)

TT56 Userhat

Working relationship



Hierakonpolis (Nekhen) predynastic and early dynastic elite cemetery

FOOD

Animals as food source

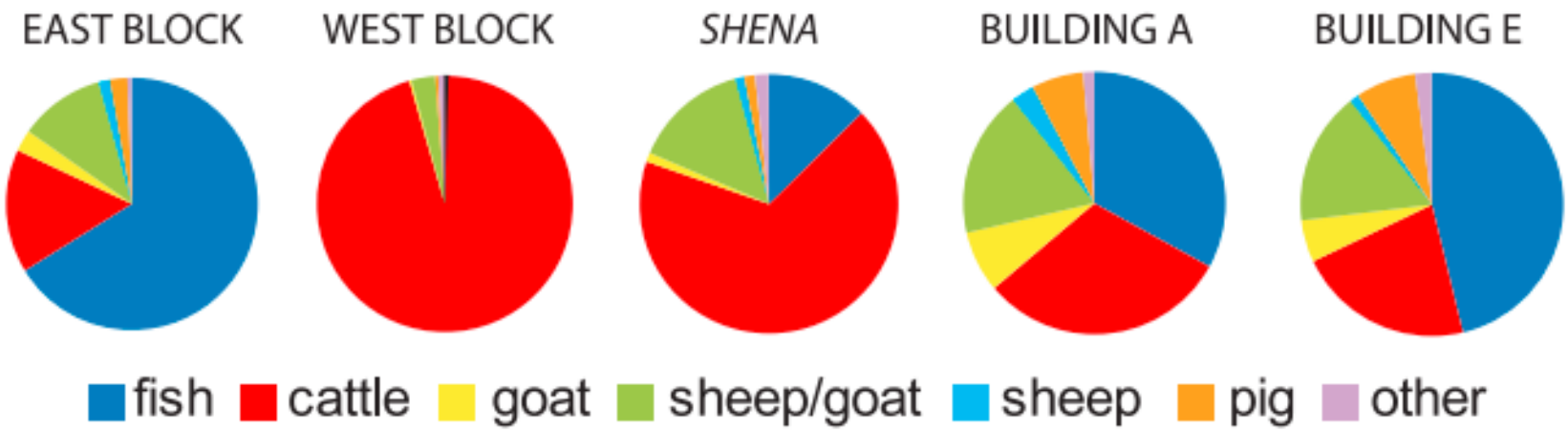
- See your reading about animal husbandry

Abydos (3500 BC – 500AD) -

Kom es-Sultan
(Temple of Osiris)
North Cemetery
N
500 m
Temple of Ramses II
(Dynasty 19)
Temple of Seti I
(Dynasty 19)
Nile Floodplain and
Modern Villages
Umm el-Gaab
(Tombs of the first pharaohs and symbolic Tomb of Osiris)
Senwosret III
Mortuary
Complex
Town of Wah-Sut
Unfinished
Tomb
Complex
of Ahmose
(Dynasty 18)
GEBEL
(High Desert Cliffs)
Temple of
Ahmose
Temple of
Senusret III
ROYAL
TOMBS
Aha
Temple of
Seti I
Temple of
Ramses II
FUNERARY
ENCLOSURES
BOAT
GRAVES
Khasekhemwy
(Shunet el-Zebib)
Aha
Harbor
Temple of Osiris
Connector Canal
To Nile River
5 mi (8 km)
Canal
ANCIENT ABYDOS
Early Dynastic
(1st-3rd dynasties)
ca 2950-2575 B.C.
Middle Kingdom
(11th-13th dynasties)
ca 1975-1640 B.C.
New Kingdom
(18th-20th dynasties)
ca 1539-1075 B.C.
Late Period
(25th-31st dynasties)
ca 715-332 B.C.
N
Scale varies in this perspective.
Distance from royal tombs
to funerary enclosures is
1.2 miles (1.9 kilometers).

Animals as food source

- See your reading about animal husbandry
- Known from bone surveys / research
  - Example Abydos (Wah-sut, Middle Kingdom)



Distribution of fragments from major food animals: East Block (n = 397); West Block (n = 410); *Shena* (n = 610); Building A (n = 2504); and Building E (n = 1669).

Leftovers at refuse pits / areas / deposits

- from food-processing activities – including butchering, preparing, consuming food
  - Clues about cuisine / dietary preferences
  - Food procurement
  - use of animals to produce wool, hides, and bone tools
  - animals provide traction for pulling vehicles and plows
- food is both imbued with social meanings and regulated by status, taboos, and/or rituals

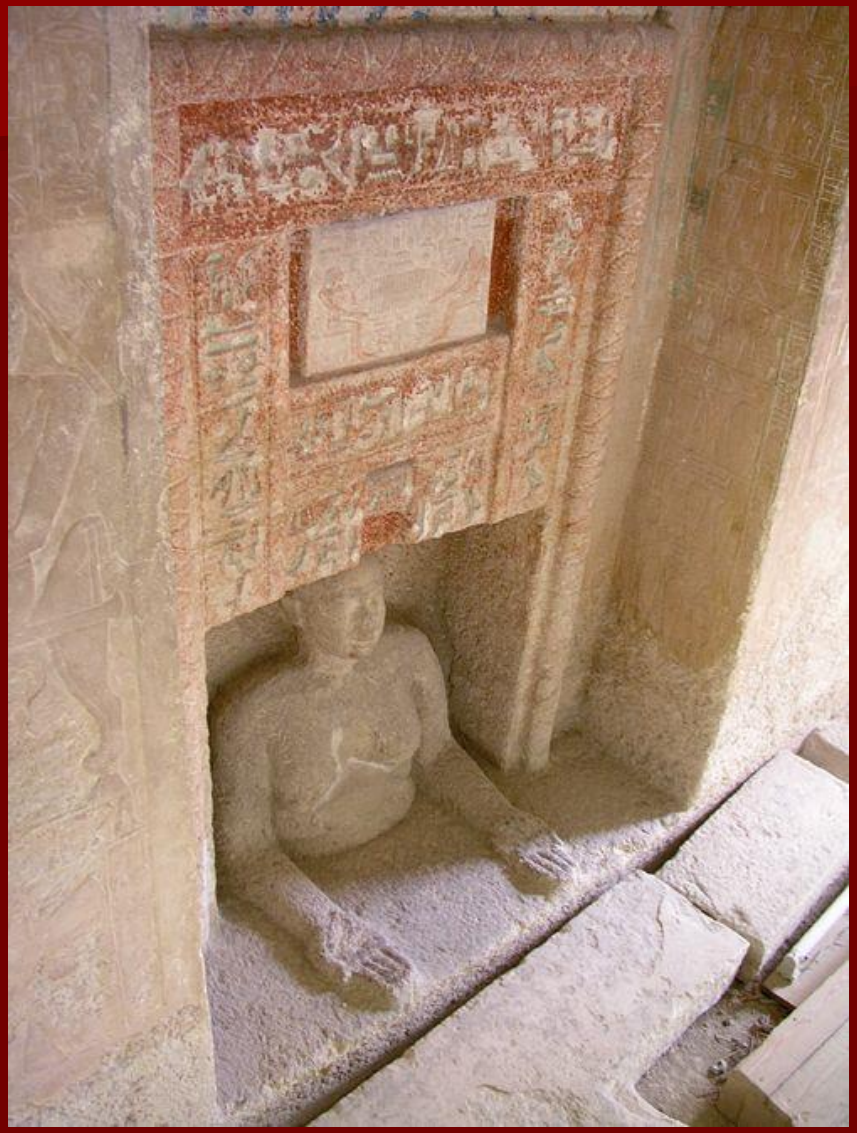
Animals as food source (Abydos)

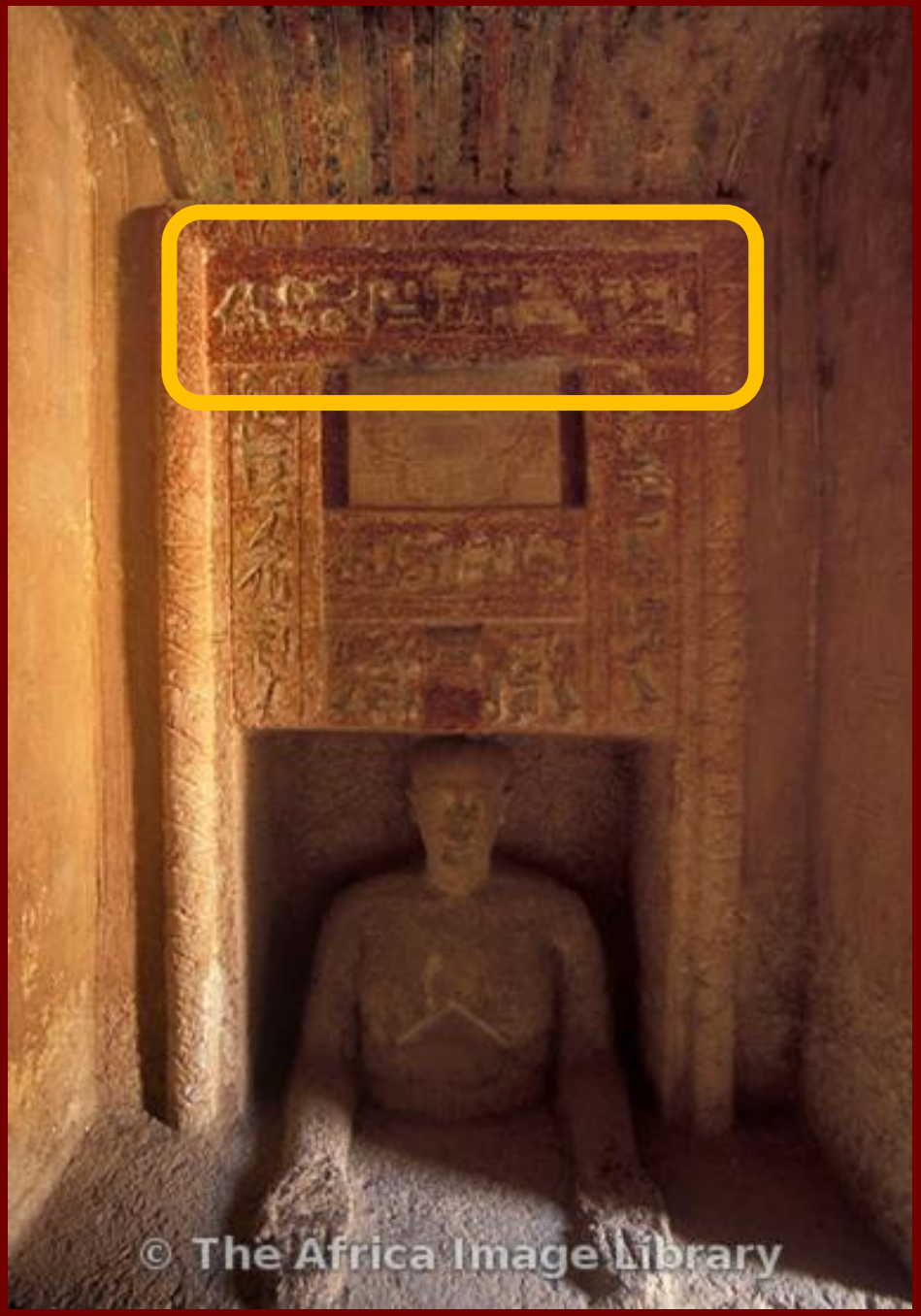
- intense breeding, processing, and consuming of cattle (as shown elsewhere in North Africa)
  - Texts (including New Kingdom economic price lists) show cattle as most valued providers of meat
  - Cuts of beef on offering lists / offering tables

Offering Formula

An offering given by the king (to) Osiris, the lord of Busiris, the great god, the lord of Abydos." "That he may give a voice-offering of bread, beer, oxen, birds, alabaster, clothing, and every good and pure thing upon which a god lives." "For the ka of the revered Senwosret, True of Voice."

G7102: Idu





Animals as food source (Abydos)

- intense breeding, processing, and consuming of cattle (as shown elsewhere in North Africa)
  - Texts (including New Kingdom economic price lists) show cattle as most valued providers of meat
  - Cuts of beef on offering lists / offering tables
  - seal impression temple "Overseer of Cattle Stalls, Ameny" → importance of cattle breeding.

Animals as food source (Abydos)

- Sheep and goats (Egyptian “little cattle”) also very important: meat offerings, hair, hides, dairy products
  - sheep and goat bones notoriously difficult to distinguish (particularly when butchered, cooked, and exposed to soil)
  - Abydos: 3 goat bones for every sheep bone (here more common against rest of Egypt), suggesting that goats were much more common here than at most Egyptian sites where sheep predominate.
  - Maybe related to high amount of cattle at South Abydos: sheep competing with cattle for floodplain grazing area, goats could have subsisted on poor-quality vegetation along the desert edge

Animals, food and status at Wah-sut

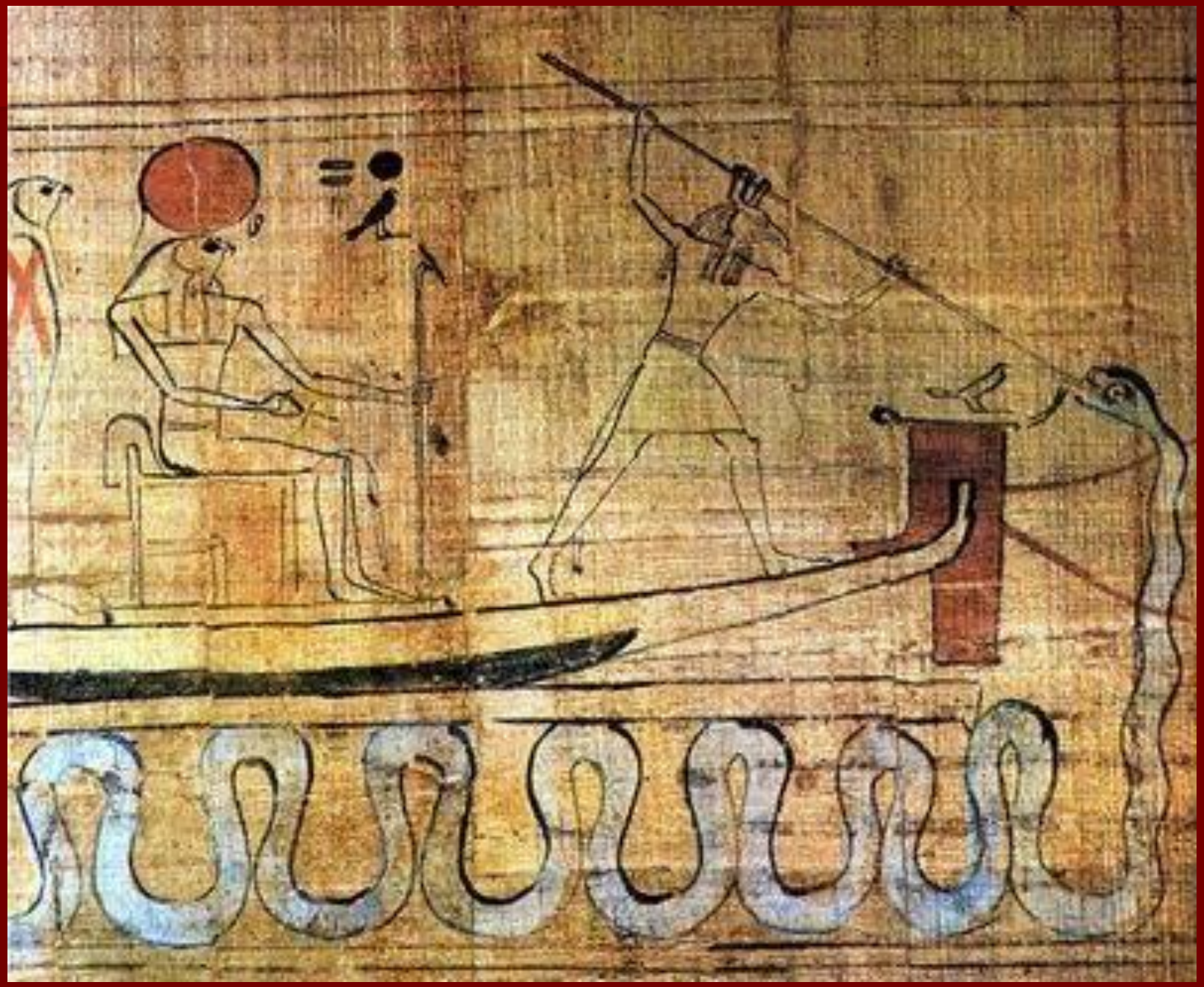
- complex sequence of occupation + disturbed archaeological record → difficult to detail who ate what
- Deposits inside / around the Mayor's House
  - large amounts of cattle remains (redistributed temple offerings as mayor was high priest)
  - large quantities of sheep and goats, pigs
  - Much catfish – consumed by lower-ranking administrative or granary staff
- Other elite households: fewer cattle, more sheep, goats, pigs, fish (less frequent → fewer attendants?)
- strong correlation between socioeconomic status and diet also elsewhere in town

Hunting (Medinet Habu)

Fowling (Nebamun, fowling in the marshes, British Museum)

Reflected as religious battle – Horus is fighting Seth (Edfu)

Protagonists can change – good / evil not so clearly defined



TABOOS AROUND ANIMALS

Taboo - bwt

- Egyptian words with a sign which is not read, but outlines the category / meaning of the word – the determinative
- most common determinative of "bwt" is fish: referring to dirt, impurity, bad things and evil actions or the bird of wretch things or behaviors

Pigs – loved / hated?

- 5th century BCE – Herodotus comments on Egyptian prohibition against swine
- But presence of pig remains in the town of Abydos → we need to question the extent of food prohibitions
- Same with some fish species as “poor people Food”, but found near /in temples
- Seemingly taboo - considerations of health (offensive habits or smells and transmit diseases, Ikram 2001, 47)

Town of Lahun (Middle Kingdom) – mud pig UCL 7186

© 2015 University College London. This work by The Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology UCL is licensed under a CC BY-NC-SA license. Additional permissions may be available from petrie.museum@ucl.ac.uk

Foodstuff Taboos ??? FISH

- Usually special position in Egypt: sacred, part of food
- But also scorned, prohibited to consume
- Nile, the marshy Delta, the Red Sea and Mediterranean coast rich in fish → substitute for more costly meat for the poor people
- Deir el-Medina: king employed fishermen to provide some of the rations for the royal tomb-workers, fish bones discovered around the workers tombs, who built pyramids at Giza
- later temples texts: fish was a taboo diet → local prohibitions six kinds of fish taboos (Danneskiold 1988, 18)
  - Esna, the Nile perch (Lates) taboo diet as identified with goddess Neith, who turned herself oneto navigate to the primeval ocean Nun
  - Mendes: Lepidotus fish taboo diet as associated with goddess Hat-Mehit; "the chief of fishes"