

Week 4, Tuesday

The archaeology of Egyptian food

HPAR4002 – Introduction to Archaeology
Dr Katharina Zinn

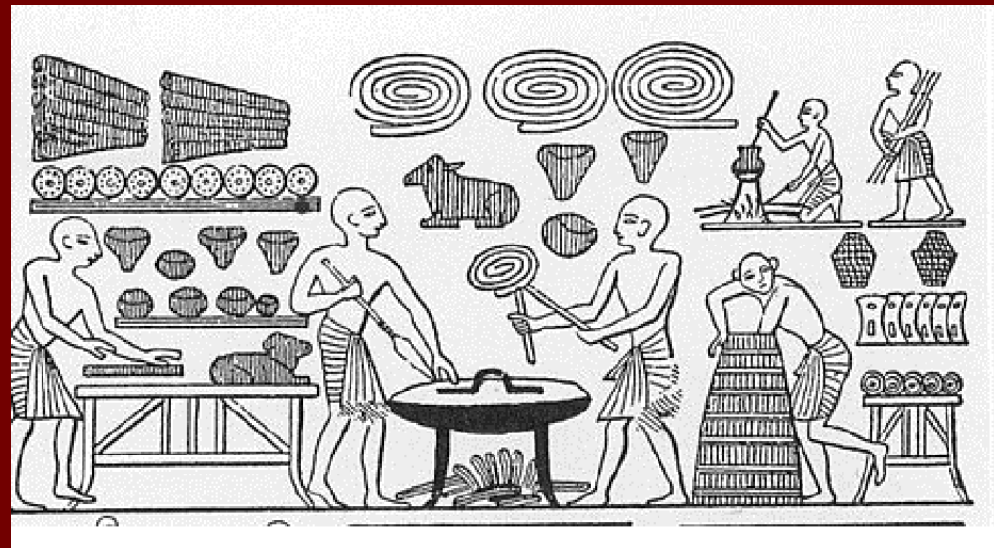
What Did They Eat?

- How can archaeologists reconstruct past diet?
 - Ethnography
 - Archaeozoology & palaeobotany
 - Scientific analyses of archaeological remains
 - Inference from archaeological finds
 - Experimental archaeology
- Also
 - Texts & representations
 - Symbolic food consumption



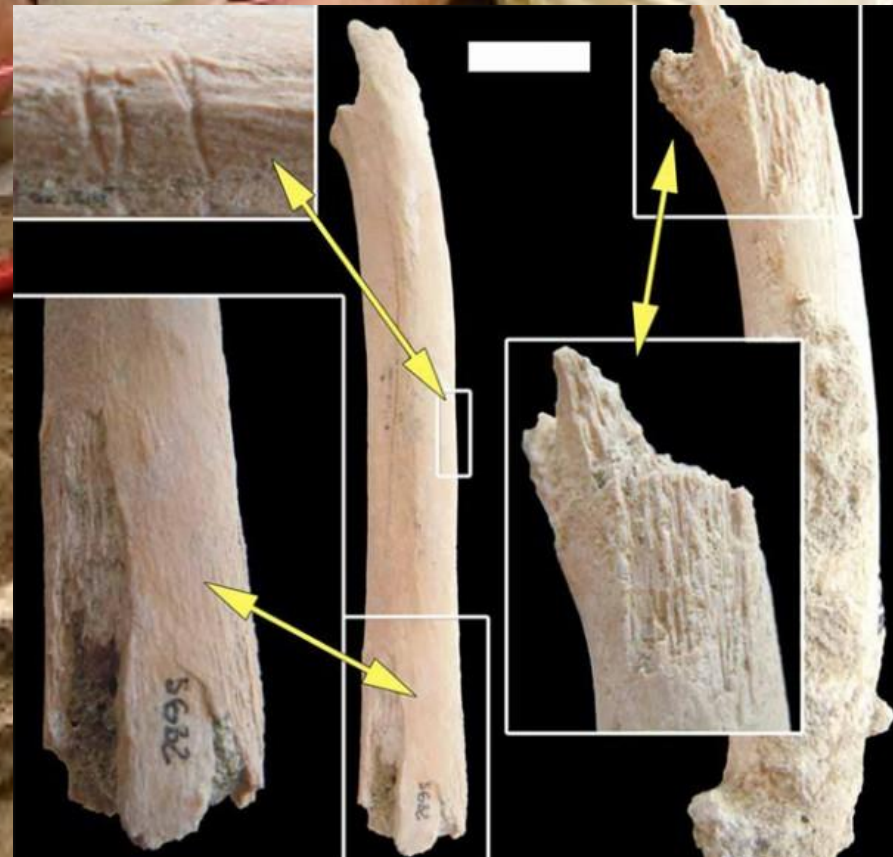
Tomb of Metchetchi:
bread-making

How do we know what we know?



Archaeozoology

- Are animal bones present through human agency or other causes?
- Are animals exploited for food or other resources?
- Seasonal hunting
- Domestication
- How were animals hunted, butchered, consumed?

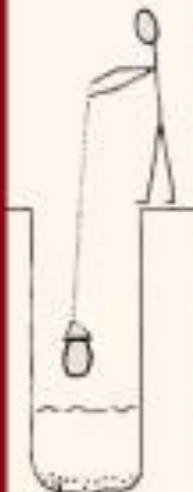


Palaeobotany

Behaviour in the past



Archaeological evidence



wells & pits



hearths



latrines

Human Remains

- What do human remains tell us?
- Human teeth: abrasion patterns indicate less effort need in mastication as Palaeolithic progressed
 - More varied diet
 - Processing of foods
- Tooth wear increasingly common from Neolithic
 - Grit from grinding stones
- Isotope analysis of tooth enamel & bone collagen:
 - Chemical signature of foods consumed



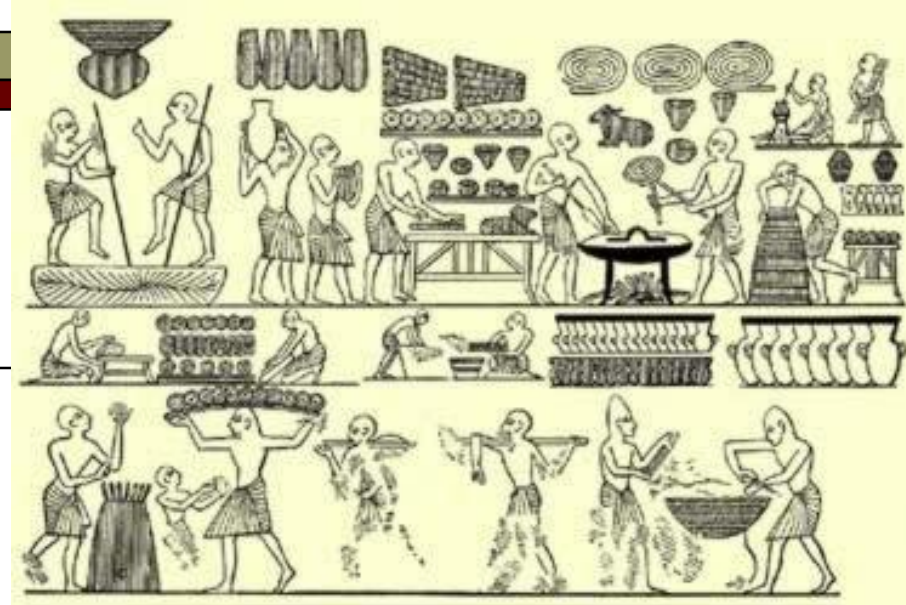
Organic Residue Analysis

- Tartaric acid, tannins & anthocyanins identify wine production
- Example:
- M.R. Guasch-Jane' et al. 2004 Liquid Chromatography with Mass Spectrometry in Tandem Mode Applied for the Identification of Wine Markers in Residues from Ancient Egyptian Vessels. *Analytical Chemistry* 76(6). 1672-1677.



Representations

- ❑ Images of people eating, drinking, preparing food....
- ❑ The cultural aspect of food & drink which might otherwise be hidden within the archaeological record
 - Social practices: eg. table manners
 - Feasting equipment
 - Associated activities & the context of consumption



Egyptian food and diet

Lower class

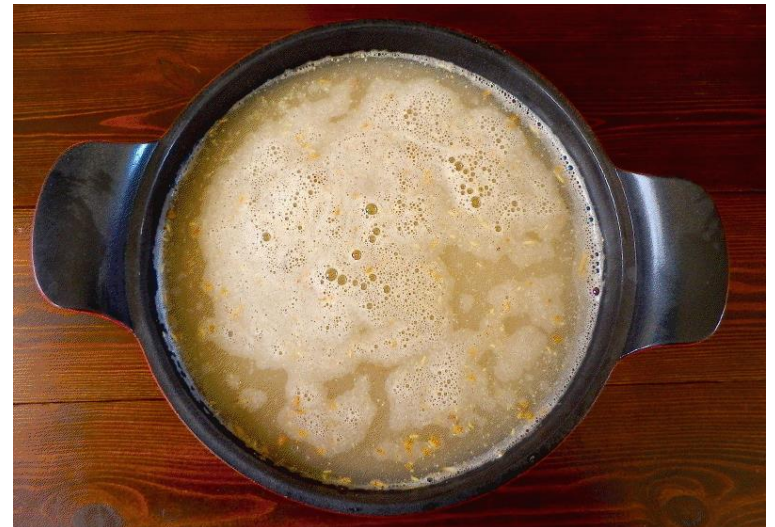


elite



Egyptian Food

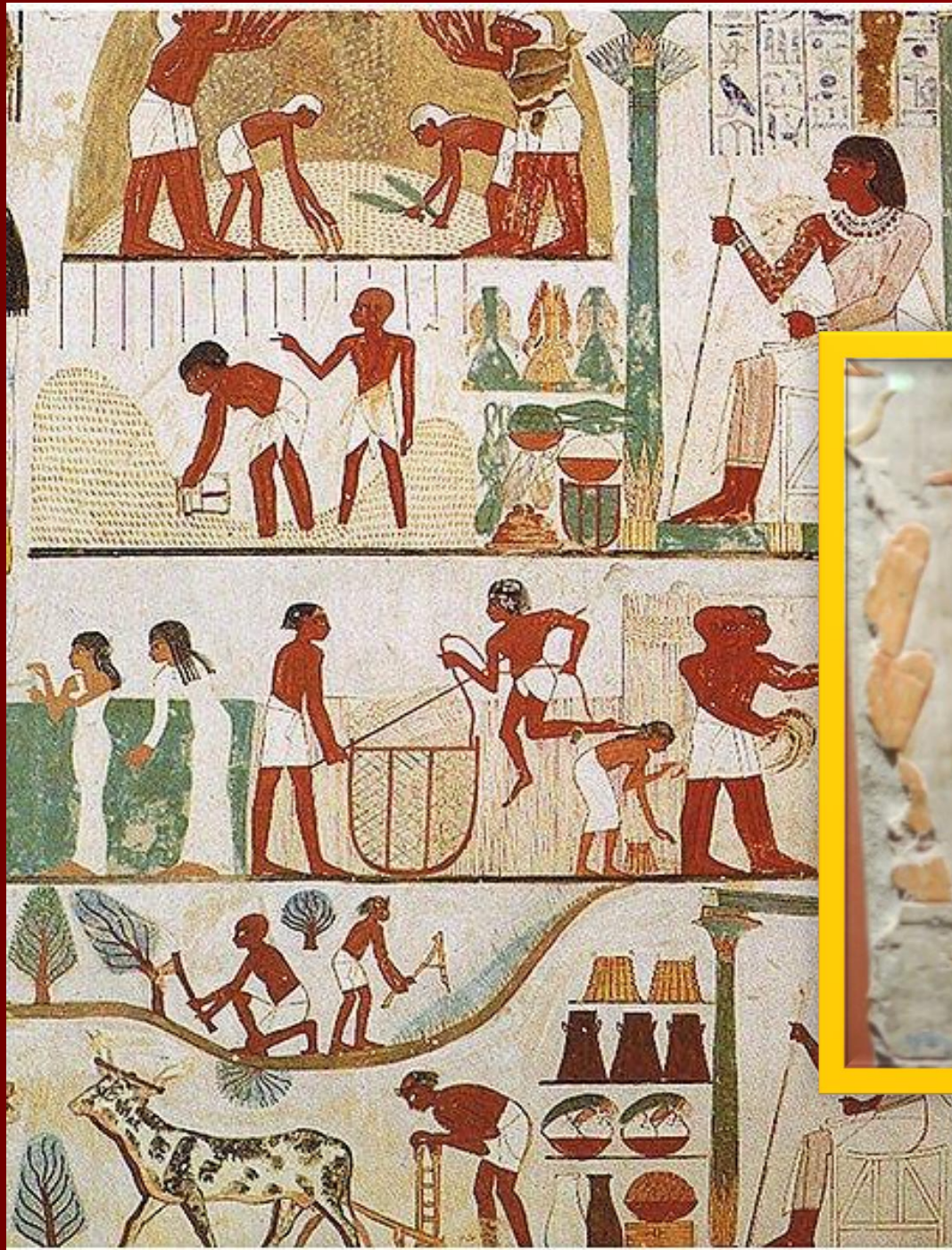
- ❑ Development of this ancient civilisation based on agriculture → Varied diet!
- ❑ but backbone of diet and monetary value (salary): Bread and beer



Ostrakon Berlin 11238

- The Mayor of West Thebes Ramose informs the two chief workmen and their crews that he has received a message from the Vizier Paser, saying:
- Please let the wages be delivered to the crew of the necropolis, consisting of: vegetables, fish, firewood, beer in small vessels, small cattle and milk. Let nothing of it be postponed, so that I would be in arrears with their wages. Be at it and pay heed!

Bread and cereals



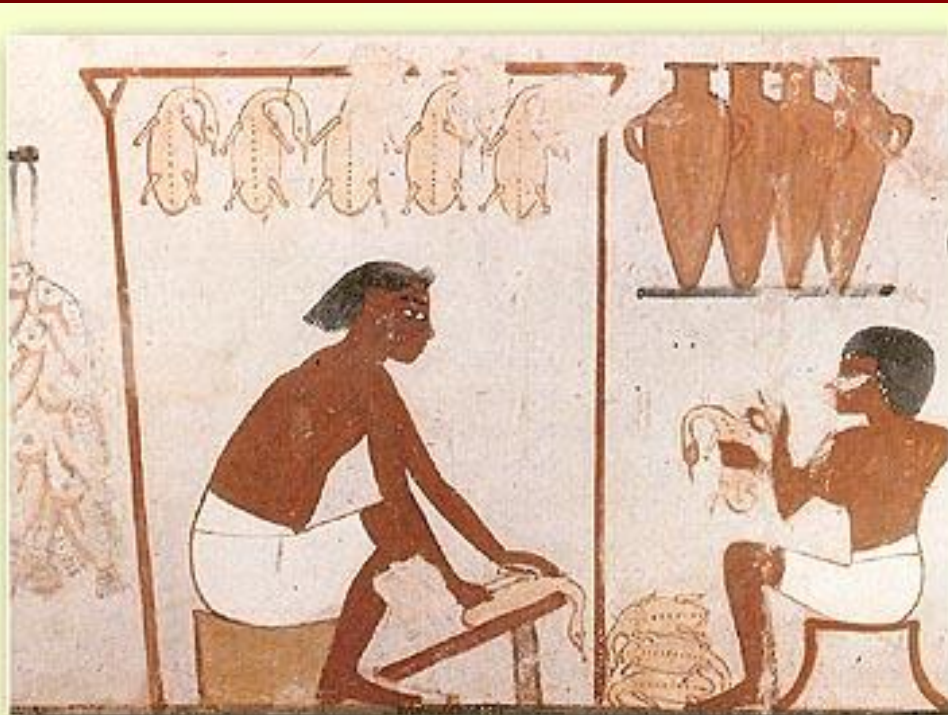
Fruit, nuts and vegetables



Onions
and
leeks



Meat, fish

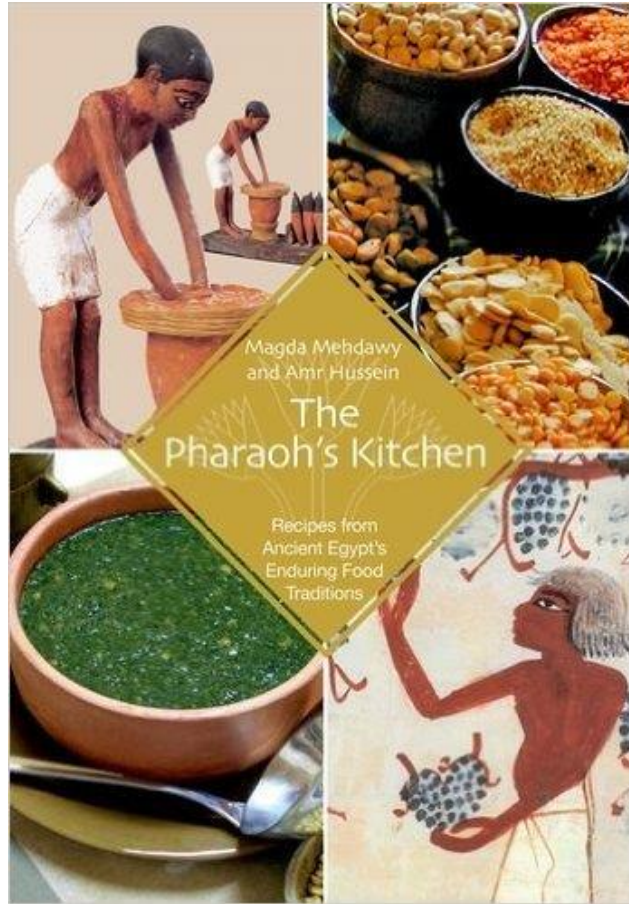


Dairy products and oils



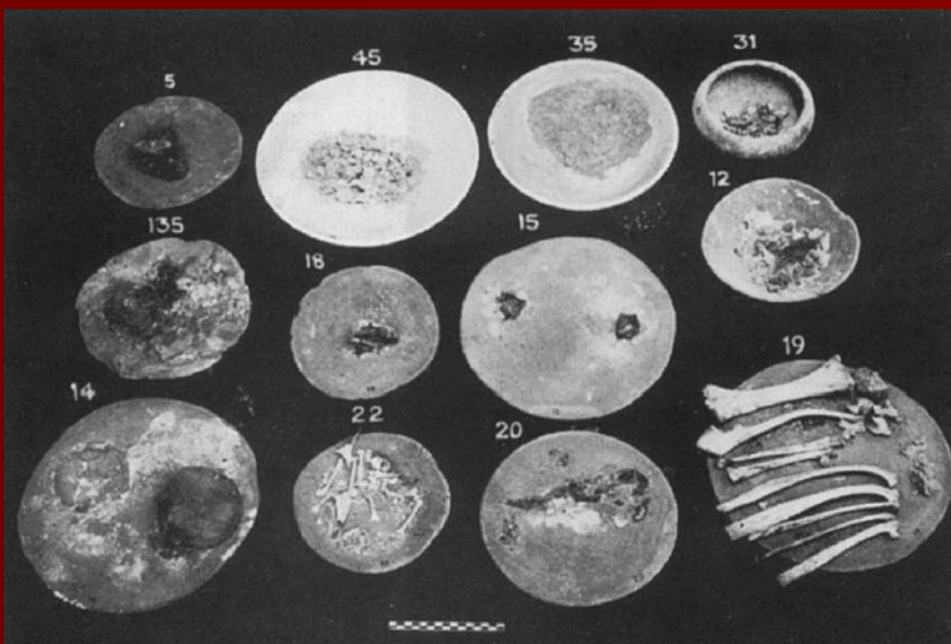
- not proven in archaeological records, but depictions: men carrying pots of milk or cream
- different oils and fat used : olives, almonds, sesame, linseed, selgam, and seemga

The Pharaoh's Kitchen



- While one may discover "ancient Egyptian recipes" on the internet or as book, texts for recipes on cooking food are notoriously absent from the archaeological record.

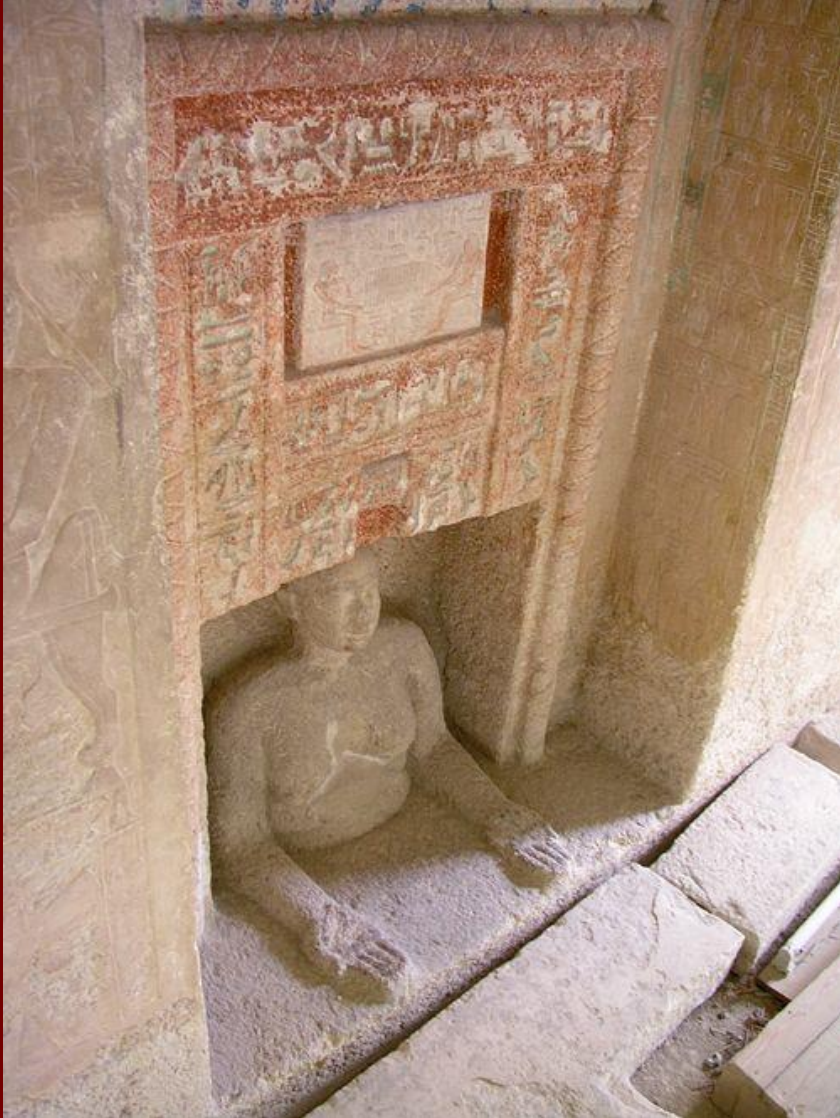
A Funerary Meal (festival meal) in an Egyptian Tomb → served on pottery



A Funerary Meal (festival meal) in an Egyptian Tomb → served on pottery

- ❑ triangular loaf of bread - made from emmer wheat, small circular cakes
- ❑ form of porridge - made from ground barley
- ❑ cooked fish - cleaned and dressed with the head removed
- ❑ pigeon stew, a cooked quail (cleaned and dressed with the head tucked under one wing)
- ❑ two cooked kidneys, ribs and legs of beef , stew? (containing ribs of beef)
- ❑ stewed fruit probably fig
- ❑ fresh nabk berries
- ❑ small jars containing some form of cheese
- ❑ grape wine in a large jar

G7102: Idu



- Eating in the Afterlife as consumption
- AND
- Symbolic consumption with the help of magic

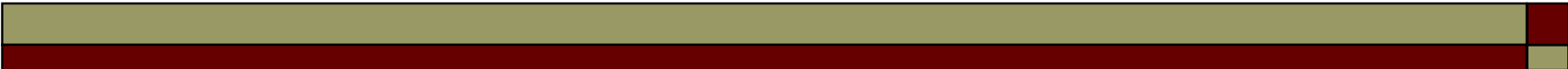
Offering Formula



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."

***I smell the
food of the
Ennead; I sit
with them.***





Supplies

- ❑ tomb-owner continues after death occupations of this life
- ❑ everything required packed in the tomb along with body for continued usage → magically transformed into real thing
 - food
 - writing materials
 - clothing, wigs, hairdressing supplies
 - assorted tools, depending on the occupation of the deceased (often model tools rather full size – cheaper, less space)



Models of offerings (from a 6th dyn. mastaba in Giza)

Meat (MMA 64.66.6)



Beer (MMA 64.66.4b)

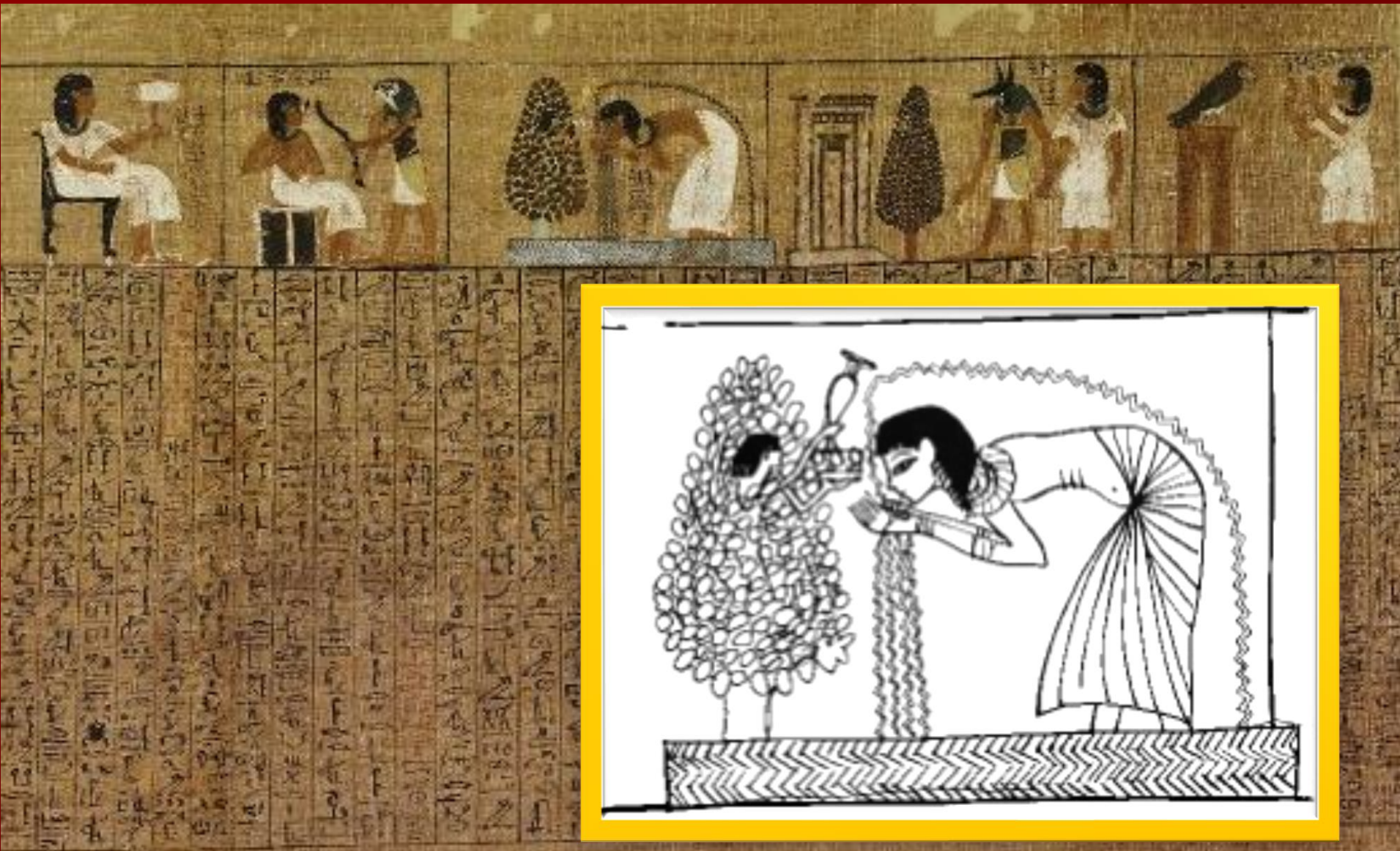


Model of Brewers, Bakers, and Butchers (MK, MMA 11.150.12)



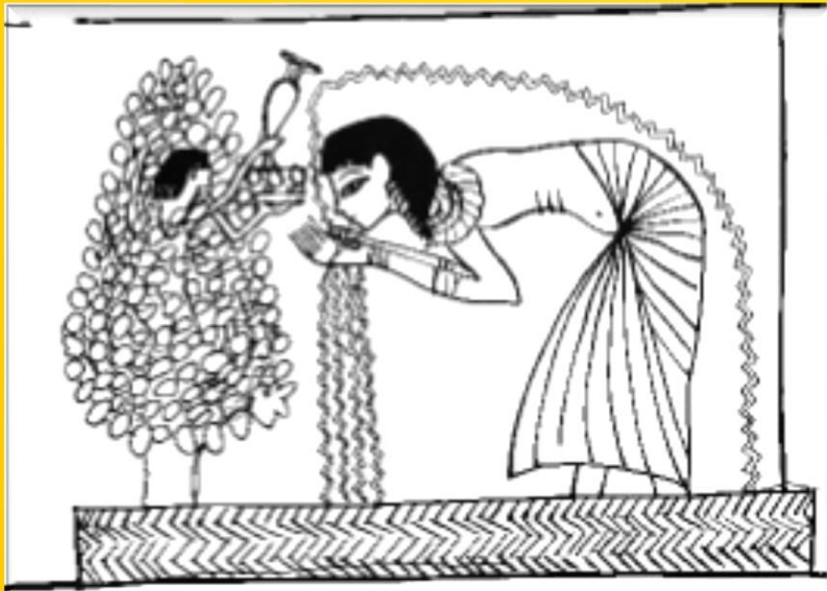
- Right: butchers preparing meat
 - Left: making bread and beer
-
- composite model symbolically provides everything a tomb owner needed to eat and drink

BM EA10471,8 (BoD, Nakht)



Drinking

Water



Beer



Egyptian food and diet

3 case studies

Lower class



elite

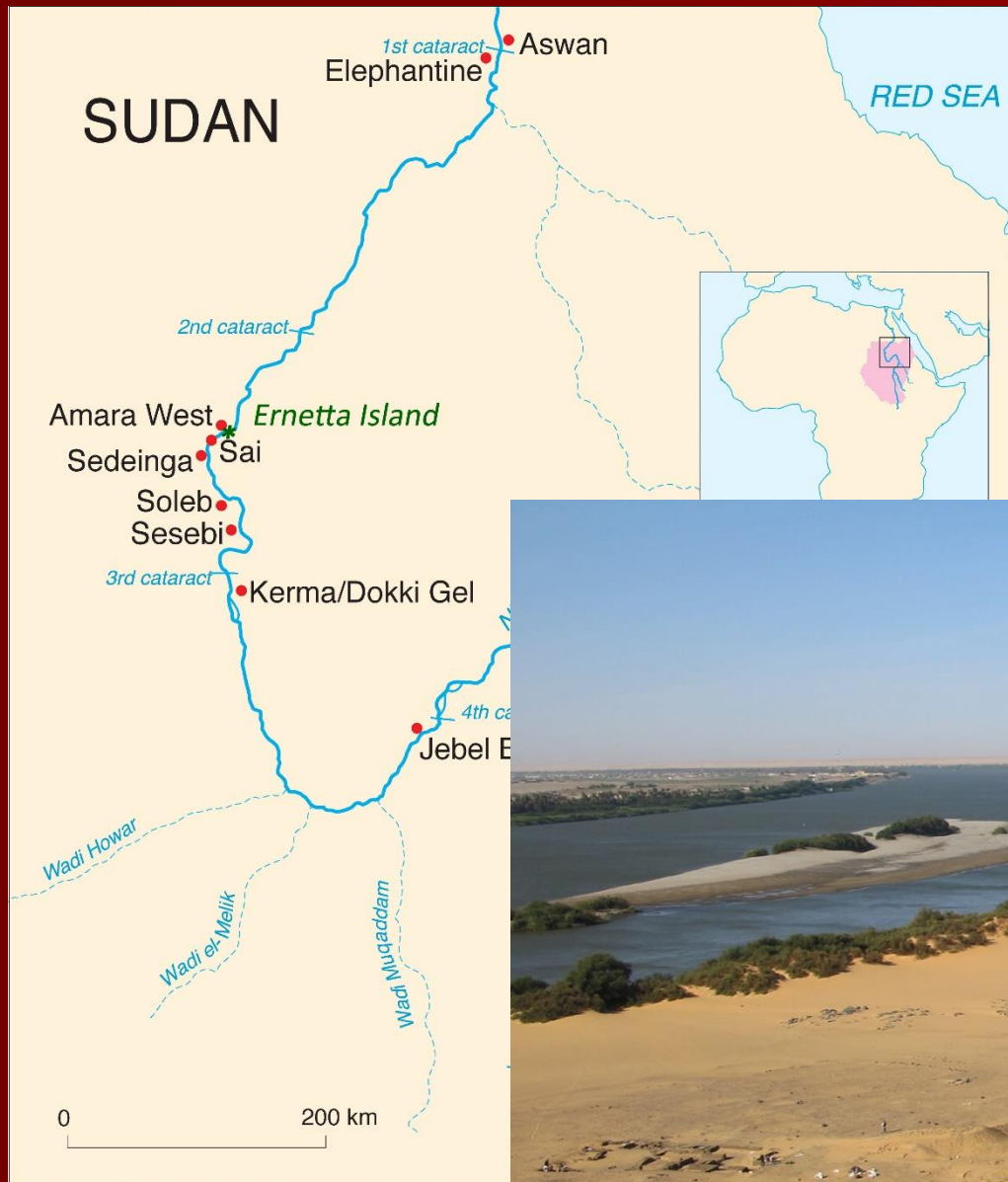


Case Study 1

FROM RAW RESOURCES TO FOOD PROCESSING

ARCHAEOBOTANICAL AND ETHNOGRAPHIC
INSIGHTS FROM NEW KINGDOM AMARA
WEST IN NORTHERN SUDAN

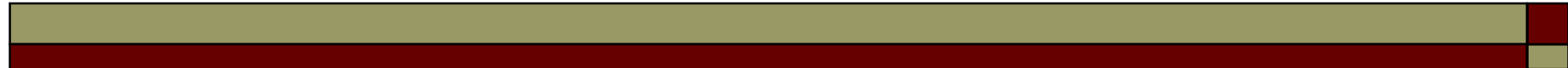
Amara West



Archaeobotanical evidence

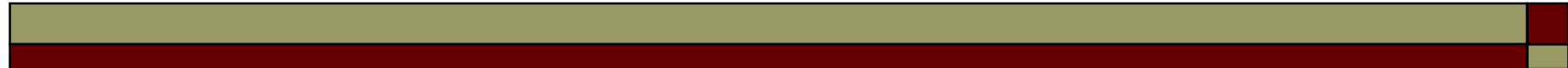
- ❑ archaeobotany studied to investigate diet and agriculture in a New Kingdom colonial town
- ❑ Food evidence from settlement sites = evidence for
 - raw resources
 - stages of preparation
 - by-products
 - waste
 - → usually NOT finished foodstuffs
- ❑ ethnobotanical study of agriculture and diet in Nubian villages (Ernetta Island) → insight into crop cultivation, processing, food preparation in Nile island environment





Comparison of ancient and modern day island agricultures

- ❑ ethnographic study from Ernetta Island helps to consider
 - sourcing, cultivation of food resources
 - potential uses and processing methods for crops and wild plants identified in the archaeobotanical record
- ❑ phenomenon of environmental change: implications for interpreting food procurement strategies and dietary practices in past
- ❑ Modern hulled barley processing reinforces possibility of it as important food crop (bread) in New Kingdom Nubia
 - Also proven by textual and linguistic evidence

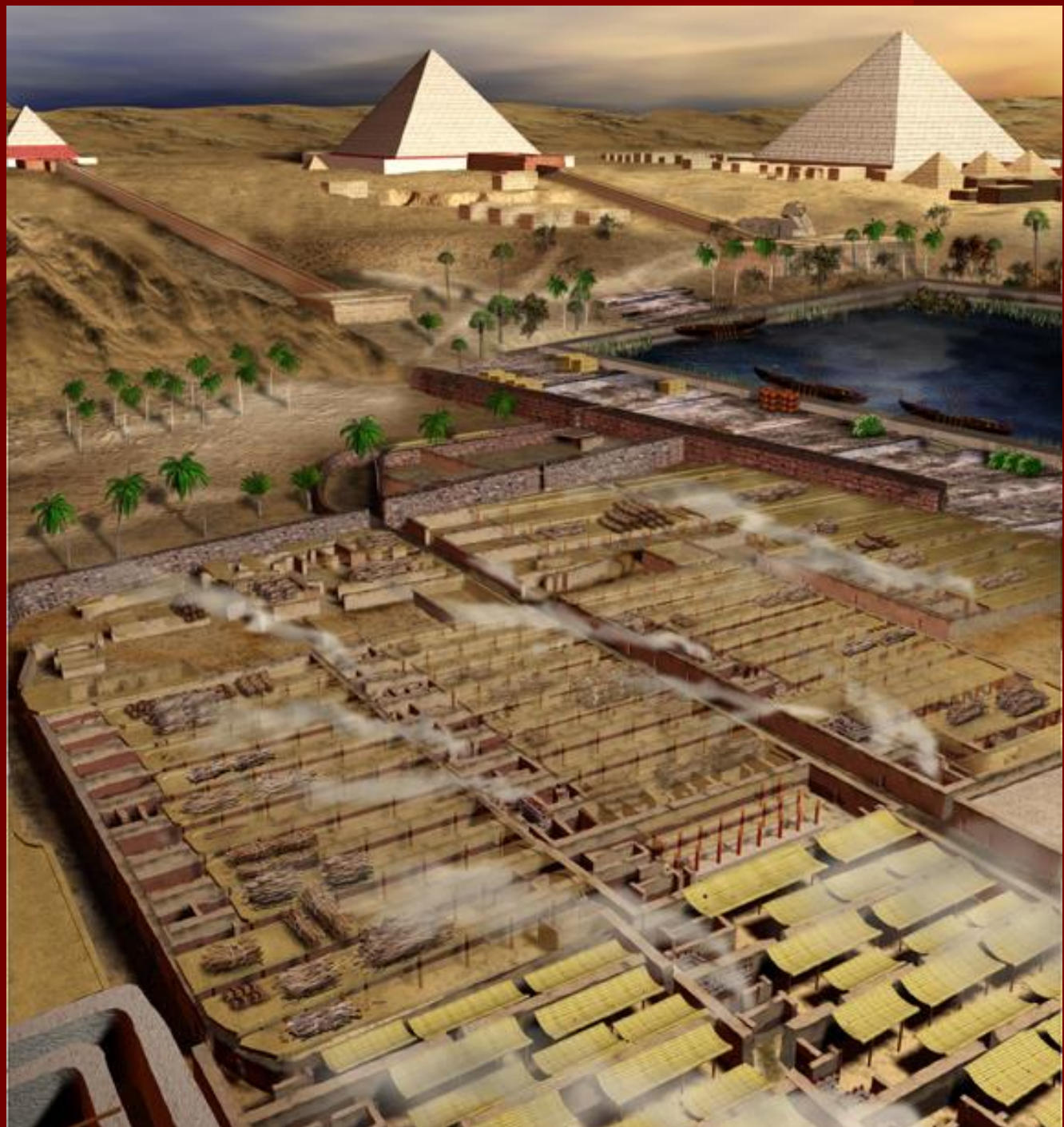


Comparison of ancient and modern day island agricultures

- ❑ high proportions of barley at Amara West
 - easy to grow
 - local choices
 - climatic factors
 - local soil configurations

Case Study 2

EXPERIMENTAL ARCHAEOLOGY: BAKERIES





The Lost City – Giza workers village

- ❑ Situated in low desert, was until recently covered with deep sand, laid down during the later Old Kingdom (2575-2134 BC).
- ❑ Beneath sandy layer = compact surface of gray soil, resulted from a rapid toppling of mud brick settlement walls
- ❑ Inhabitants abandoned the settlement, stripped nearly everything of value: wooden columns, stone doorsteps, even many mud bricks
- ❑ All evidence—pottery, seal impressions, and stratigraphy—suggest: occupants abandoned settlement at end of the 4th Dynasty (2575-2465 BC)

Pyramid town (workers village)

Giza



- Pyramids built by skilled workers and bureaucrats → lived nearby all year long
- farmers → provided seasonal labour during the inundation
- Village: about 300 m south of the Great Sphinx
- 10 m high (Wall of the Crow) separates mortuary complex from village; access via huge gateway with limestone lintel
- Maybe as many as 20,000 people may have lived there

Dated by pottery

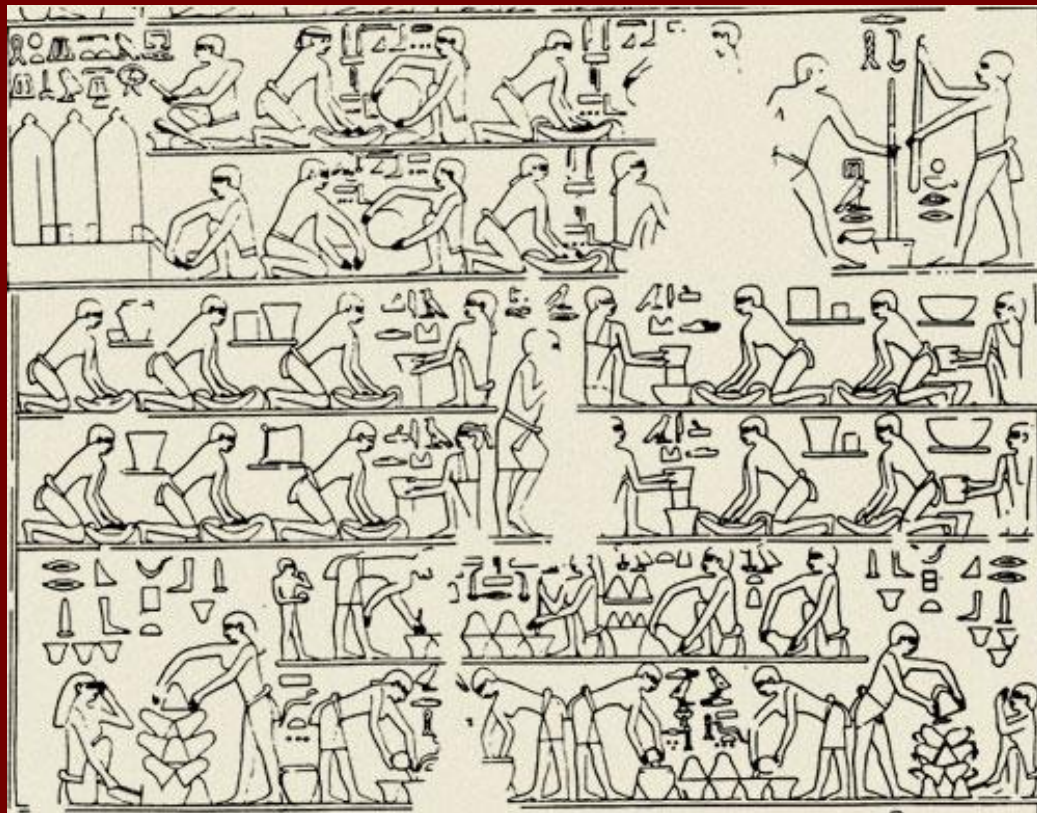
Beer jar



Bread mould



Experimental and experiential archaeology



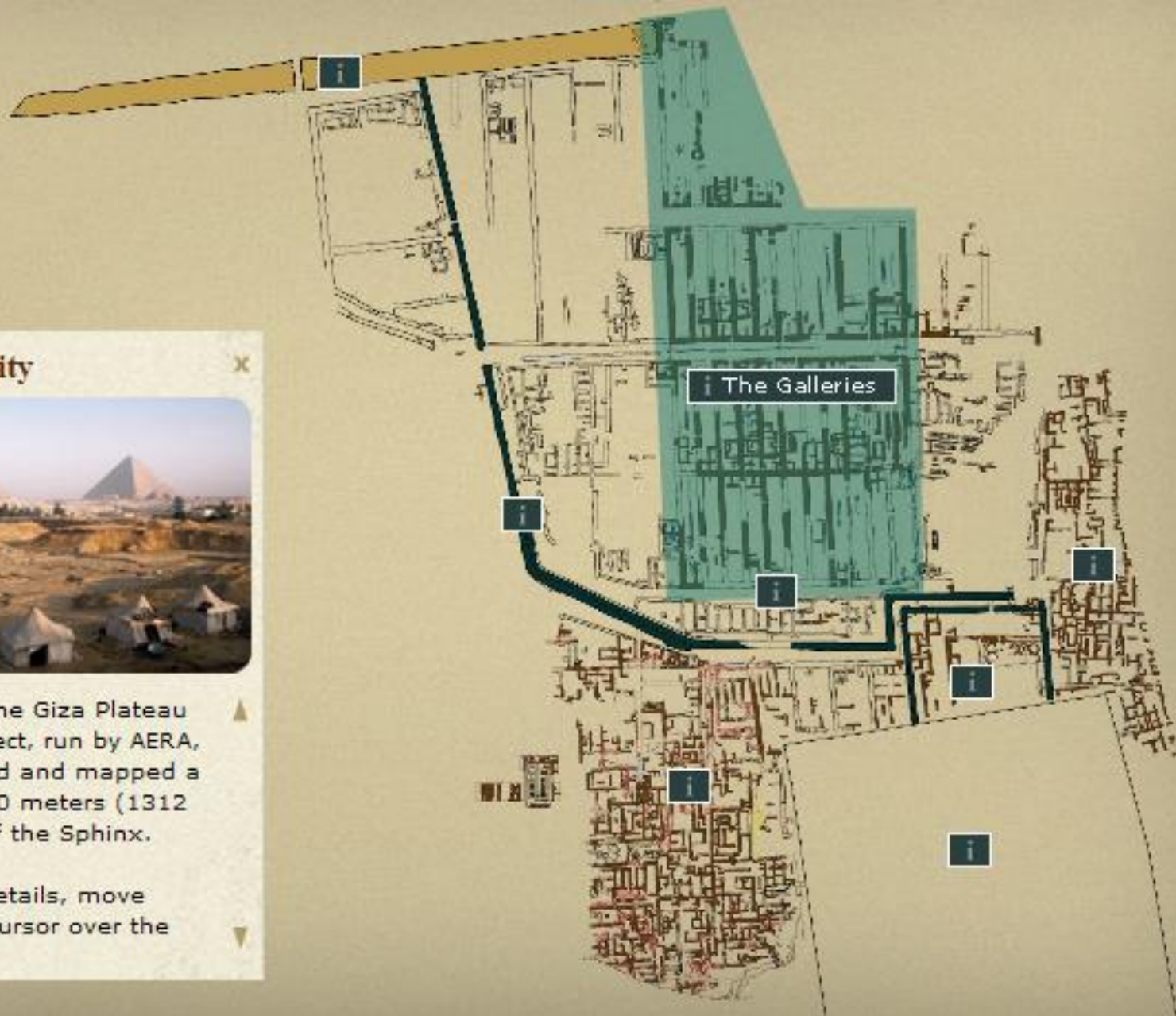
- Old Kingdom tomb scenes: bedja bread moulds stacked upside-down over an open fire so they can be preheated before baking
- Archaeological setting at Giza: open fireplaces in SE corners with upside-down bedja in situ

The Lost City

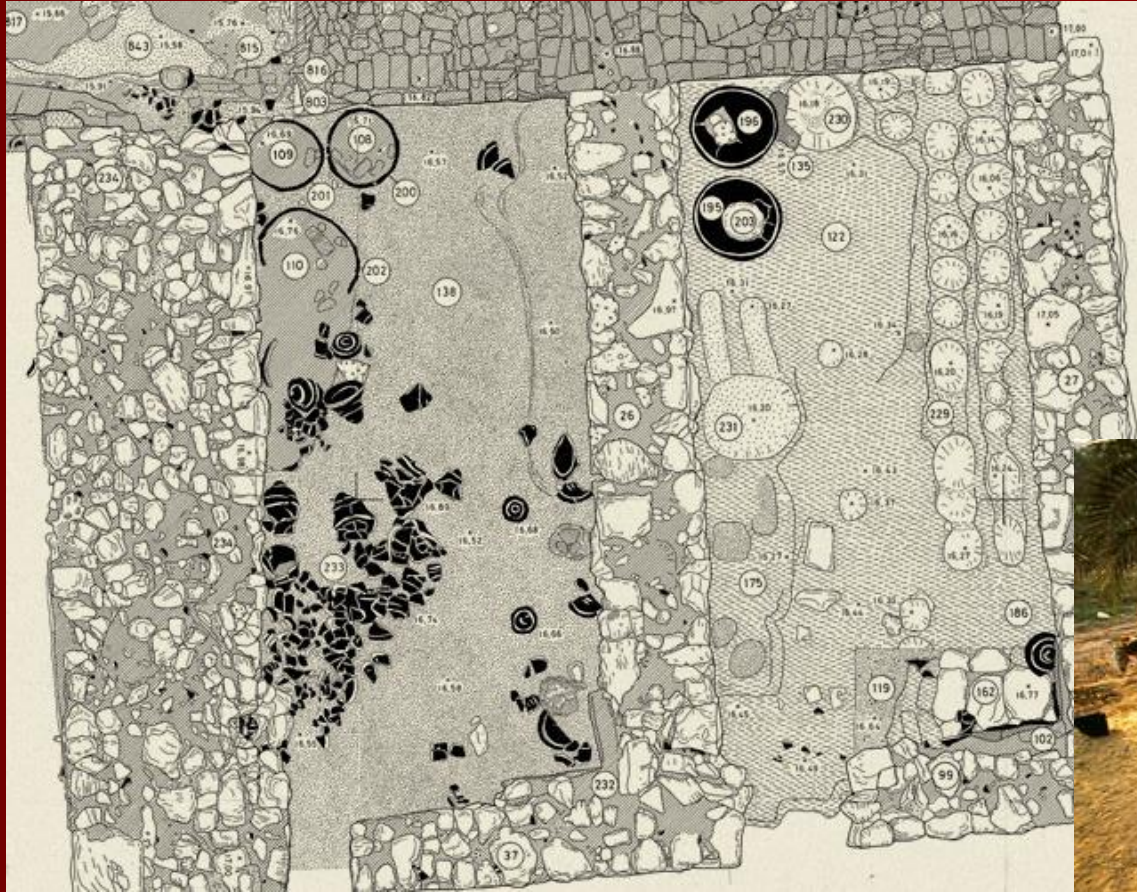


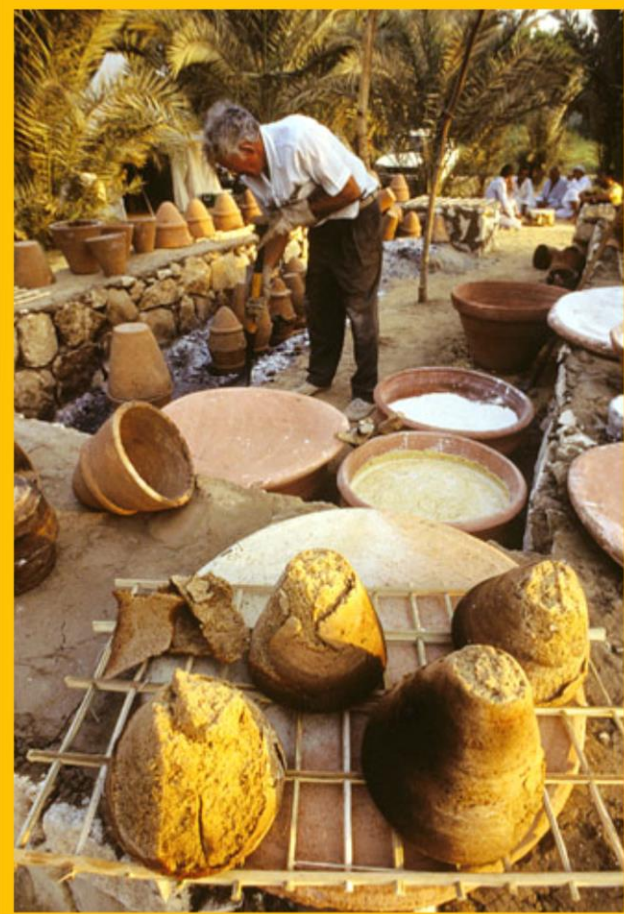
Since 1988, the Giza Plateau Mapping Project, run by AERA, has excavated and mapped a site about 400 meters (1312 feet) south of the Sphinx.

Tip: To see details, move your mouse cursor over the



Bakeries in Gallery Set IV



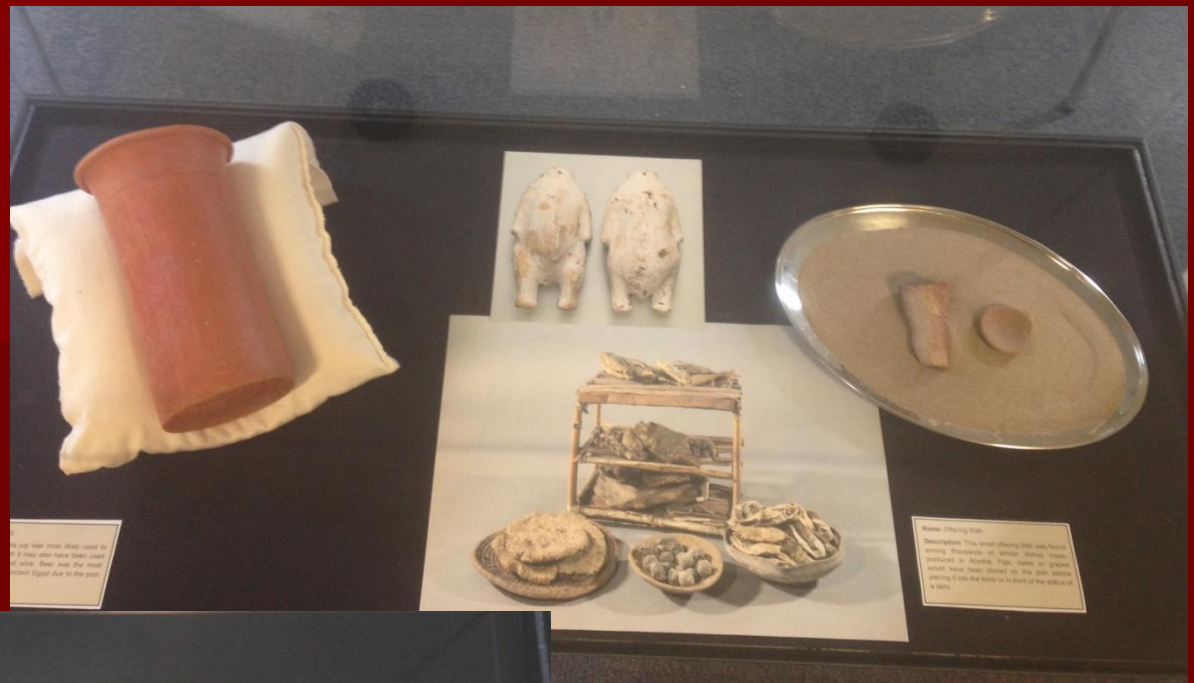


Case Study 3

SYMBOLIC FOOD CONSUMPTION

Offering Plate CC 308.004





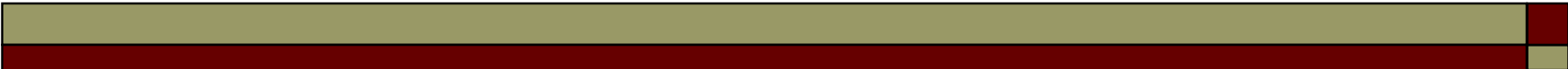
Name: Jar
Description: This jar was used to hold water or oil. It was found in the tomb of a high official of the pharaoh Amenhotep III.

Name: Offering Dish
Description: This small offering dish was found among thousands of similar dishes mass-produced in Abydos. Figs, dates or grapes would have been placed on the dish before placing it into the tomb or in front of the statue of a deity.



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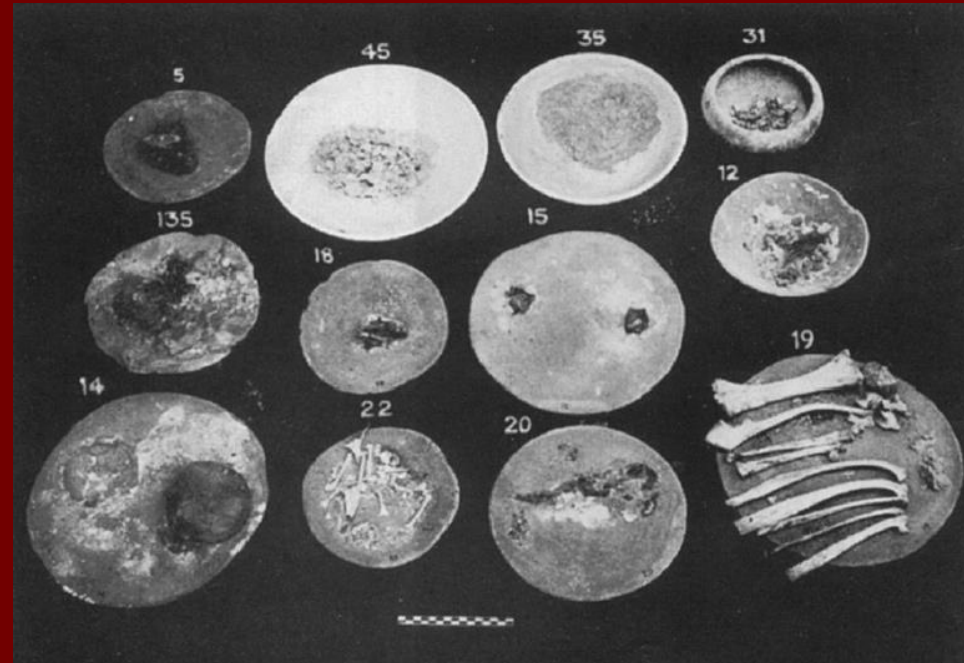




Intro funerary customs AE

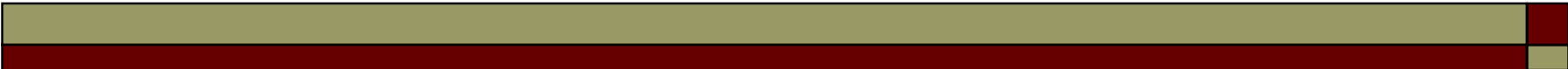
- ❑ funerary customs and beliefs of the ancient Egyptians called for preservation of the body and ample provisions for the after-life (sustaining the spirit aspects of the person)
 - Nourishing with real food offerings (during burial)
 - Magical role of images and models
 - Offering cult
- ❑ = envisaged as continuation of existence before death
- ❑ provision for the life in the Next World: according the best as economic abilities would allow

A Funerary Meal (festival meal) in an Egyptian Tomb → served on pottery



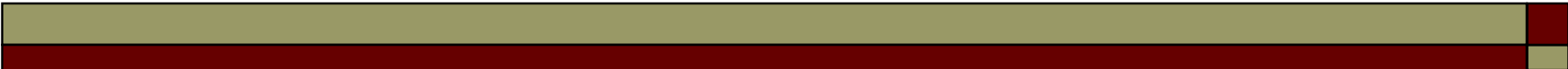
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 - clothing, wigs, hairdressing supplies
 - assorted tools, depending on the occupation of the deceased (often model tools rather full size – cheaper, less space) → magically transformed into real thing



Supplies

- Food provided
 - Real food (offerings)
 - depicted on the walls (magically transformed to supply if expected regular offerings would cease): items which the tomb owner would have eaten in his lifetime and hoped to eat in the after-life
- representations of food, along with the accompanying prayers were thought to supply the tomb owner once the actual food offerings stopped

Magical role of images and models

- Symbolic consumption



Models of offerings (from a 6th dyn. mastaba in Giza)

Meat (MMA 64.66.6)



Beer (MMA 64.66.4b)



Model grindstone (MMA 64.66.9)



A woman grinding grain
– reconstruction of the
ancient method, seen at
Dr. Ragab's Pharaonic
Village in Cairo



Process of food
production:
Model bread moulds
heaped on fire
(MMA 64.66.10)



Model of Brewers, Bakers, and Butchers (MK, MMA 11.150.12)



- Right: butchers preparing meat
- Left: making bread and beer

- composite model symbolically provides everything a tomb owner needed to eat and drink

**False Door of Mehu at
Saqqara, 6th Dynasty**



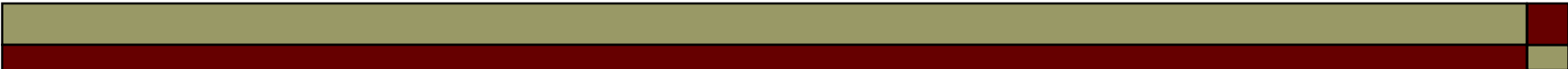
**Rare Wooden False Door
of Ika, 5th Dynasty**



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."



Summary

- ❑ Varied sources of evidence
- ❑ Primarily scientific analyses of the debris of food & drink:
 - Animal bones
 - Pollen analyses
 - Human remains
 - Residue analyses
- ❑ Supplemented by detailed analyses of the artefactual remains
- ❑ Representational and textual evidence: insight into culturally constructed practices
- ❑ (im)materiality of food – symbolic meaning