F4 – Week 1, Friday

Religion and Magic

HPAH5076/6076

Funerary Beliefs in Ancient Egypt

Dr Katharina Zinn

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
- Wegner, J. 2009. The Mayor's House of Ancient Wah-Sut. In *Expedition* 48, 2. http://www.penn.museum/documents/publications/expedition/PDFs/48-2/Mayor.pdf
- Parkinson, R. *The Ramesseum Papyri*. Available online *http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/publications/online_research_catalogues/rp/preface.aspx*

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.*

We have to be careful!

- modern mind (especially Western): 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
- Egyptology: took some time before western scholars could accept how strongly religion, magic, and the sciences, like medicine, were intertwined in ancient Egypt
- Book titles as “Religion and Magic in Ancient Egypt,” chosen for an overview of all aspects of ancient Egyptian religions (David 2002), would not have been possible in the early years of Egyptology

Magic

- Magic was **inherent to ALL 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*

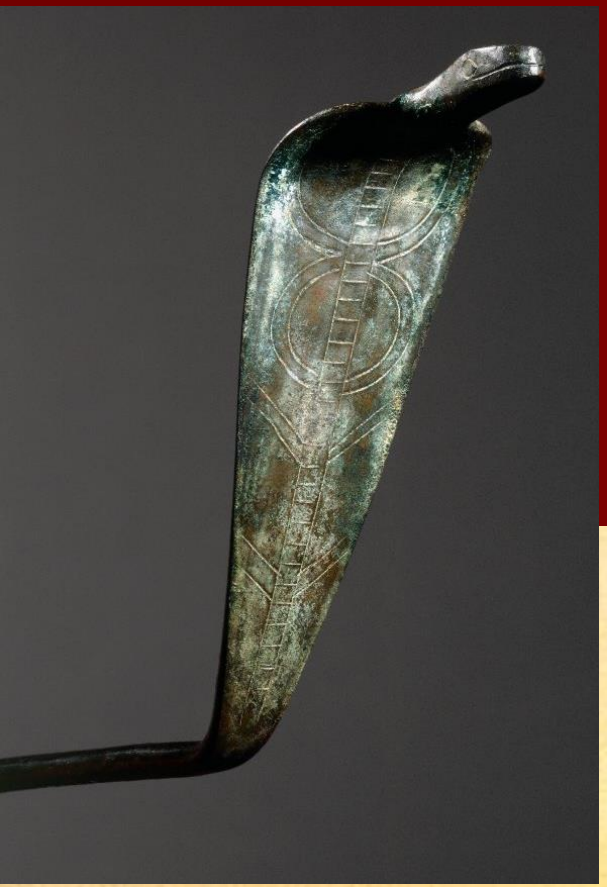
“To become the god *Heka*” (CT 261)

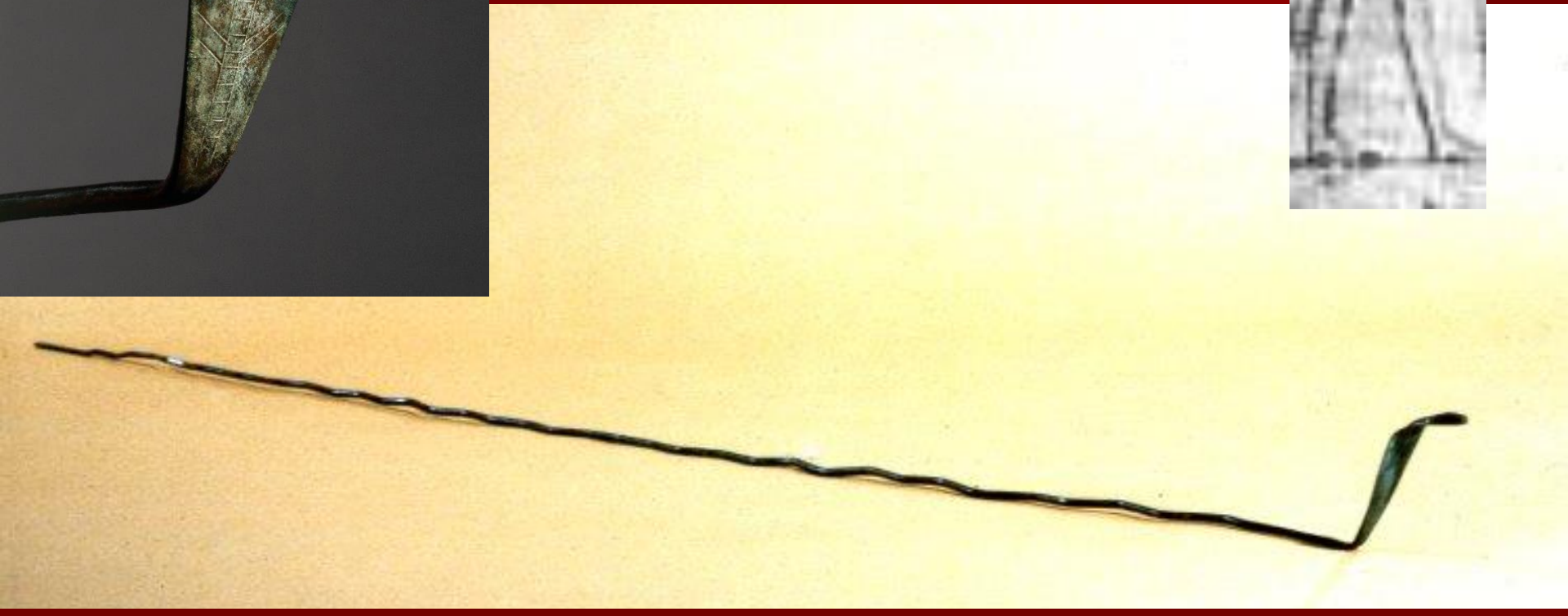
- best definition of *Heka* in Egyptian terms (Middle Kingdom coffin – CT) :
- *I am he whom the Lord of all made before duality had yet come into being … I am the son of him who gave birth to the universe … I am the protection of that which the Lord of all has ordained … I am he who gave life to the 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 Maat behind Osiris – Funerary papyrus of the priestess Nesitanebetisheru, c. 950 BC. BM EA 10554/88

Materiality of the religious aspects of *magic*

BM EA52831





Ramesseum Statuette

- Found in tomb 5 (MK, 12th dyn.?) with a box full of papyri, reeds, magical equipment

1.1 - Papyrus Ramesseum A
papyrus; P. Ramesseum A (P. Berlin 10499), Frame A. Papyrus written on the recto and verso in hie...

1.2 - Papyrus Ramesseum A
papyrus; P. Ramesseum A (P. Berlin 10499), Frame B. Papyrus written on the recto and verso in hie...

1.3 - Papyrus Ramesseum A
papyrus; P. Ramesseum A (P. Berlin 10499), Frame C. Papyrus written on the recto and verso in hie...

1.4 - Papyrus Ramesseum A
papyrus; P. Ramesseum A (P. Berlin 10499), Frame D. Papyrus written on the recto and verso in hie...

1.5 - Papyrus Ramesseum A
papyrus; P. Ramesseum A (P. Berlin 10499), Frame E. Papyrus written on the recto and verso in hie...

1.6 - Papyrus Ramesseum A
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1.7 - Papyrus Ramesseum A
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1.8 - Papyrus Ramesseum A
papyrus; P. Ramesseum A (P. Berlin 10499), Frame H. Papyrus written on the recto and verso in hie...

2.1 - Papyrus Ramesseum B (the Drama...
papyrus; P. Ramesseum B, Frame 1. Papyrus written on the recto in linear hieroglyphic script,

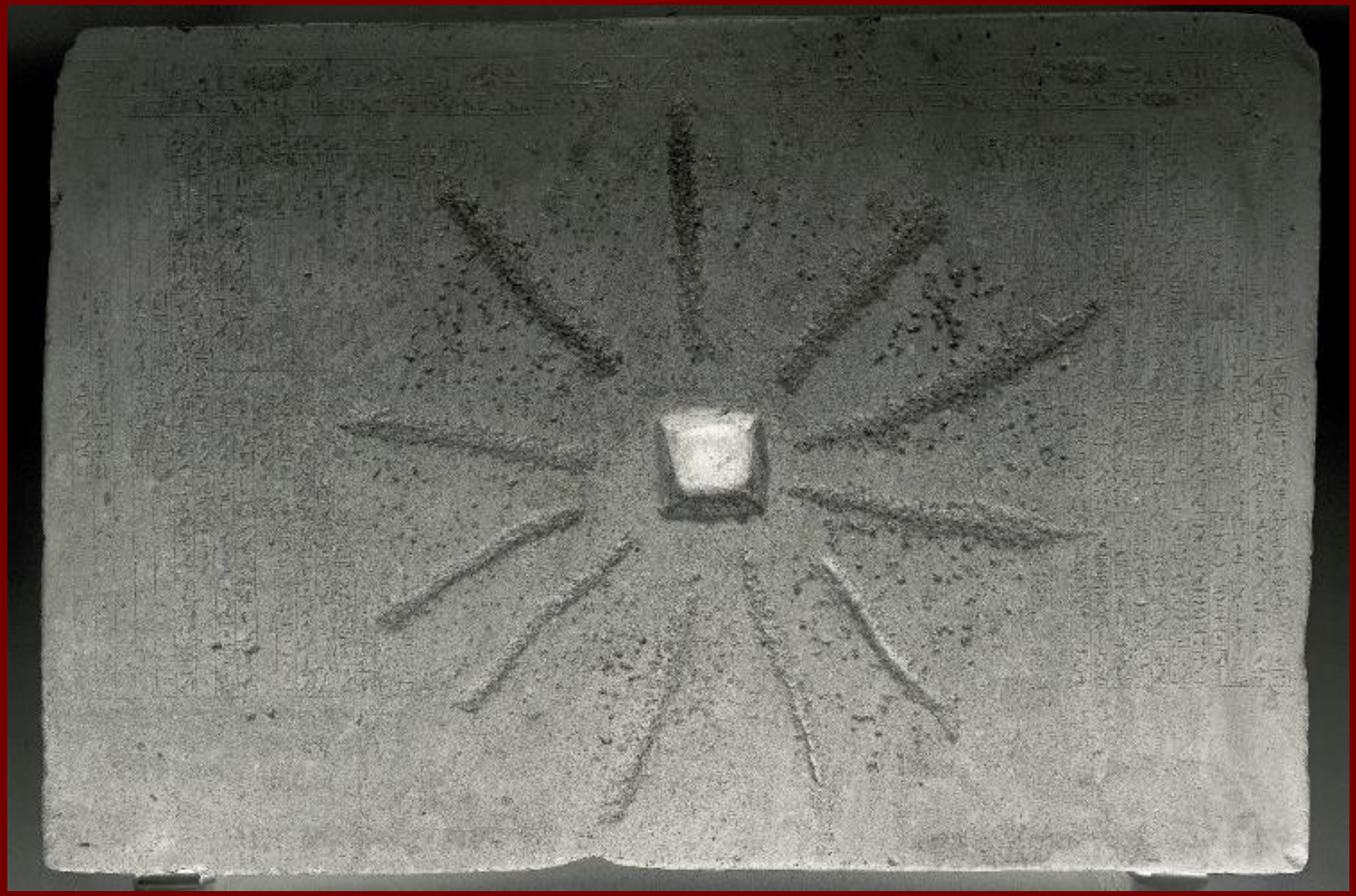
Ramesseum magical equipment

- Fitzwilliam E.63.1896
- Copper alloy cobra magical 'wand'

heka

- *heka* existed before creation of divine and mundane world, because was cause for emanation of cosmos = “life-giving energy” (conceived in mind of the creator god + expressed as “divine logos”)
- Expressed in Memphite theology, articulated in the inscriptions on a late period monument the Shabako Stone

Monument of Memphite Theology – Shabako Stone

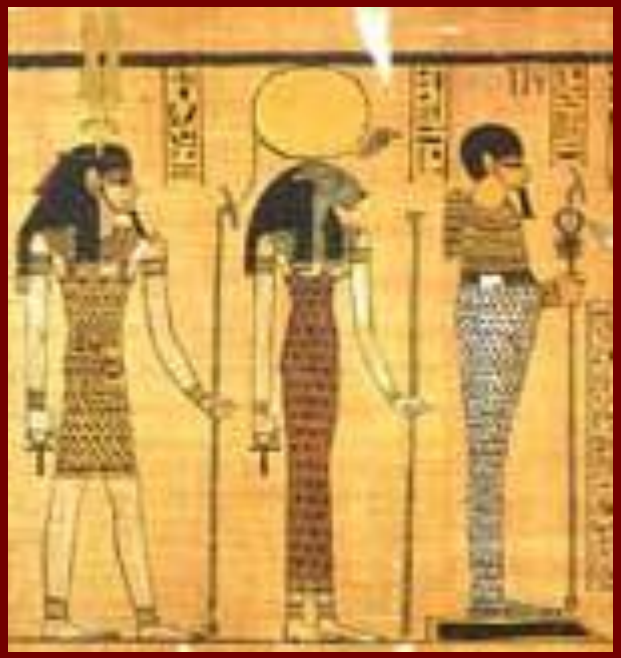


Monument of Memphite Theology – Shabako Stone (BM 498)

- two horizontal registers of hieroglyphs: names of Shabako and ‘ancient fiction‘ (he preserved ancient text, dated OK)
- below 60 vertical registers of hieroglyphs (some substantially damaged): record the 'Memphite Theology' or creation myth
  - text perhaps originally composed during the New Kingdom, in which Ptah is responsible for the creation of all things by means of the spoken word.

Ptah: God of Craftsmen, Rebirth and Creation

Cairo JdE 60739



Ptah within Mennefer (Memphs) Triad (Ptah, Sekhmet, Nefertem)

heka – Memphite theology I

- creation of each human or divine being (in general everything that exists in the universe) by creator god Ptah
- achieved through verbal manifestation of **divine thought** and its **correct pronunciation** in recitation (speaking out ALOUD) as “logos,” (*Hw*), or “word, command” (*medet*)
- divine “logos” refers to encrypted abstract, symbolic notion of “name” (*ren*)

heka – Memphite theology II

- By "proclaiming the name of everything" Ptah gave birth
  - initially to Shu and Tefnut
  - consequently to fill whole Ennead (group of nine gods).
- Not possible without notion of *Heka* as power who brought proclamation to life
- All the gods and human beings came afterwards as result of this divine creativity caused by *heka*, made manifest by the spoken words of Ptah

God *Heka* and Ka

- Another epithet for *Heka:* “the one who consecrates imagery” (HkA-kA)
- Refers to primeval generative attribute of *heka* to empower creator’s divine thoughts and actions; translate them into their substantial equivalent in the visual and material world
- *Heka* as animation force behind every ritual act, state or private, beneficent or hostile
- creation of the “first time” was re-enacted in daily temple ritual, “the ritual of the opening of the mouth,” every morning → *heka* (as power, force, ..) was present in *every* ritual activity

Opening of the Mouth ritual

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

Meat (MMA 64.66.6)

Beer (MMA 64.66.4b)

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

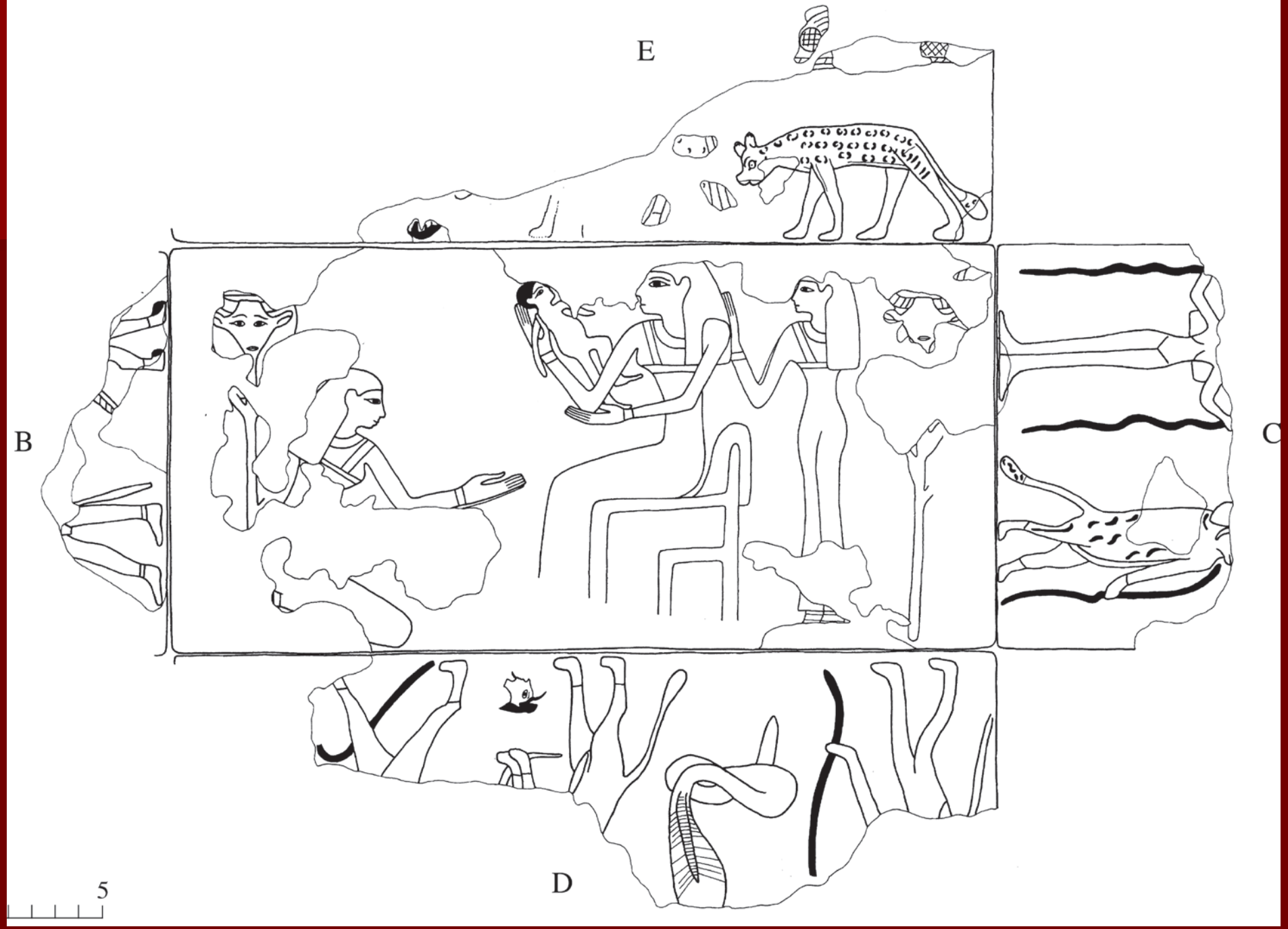
A squatting woman giving birth, assisted by two goddesses (Hathor and Taweret), (Temple of Hathor, Dendera)

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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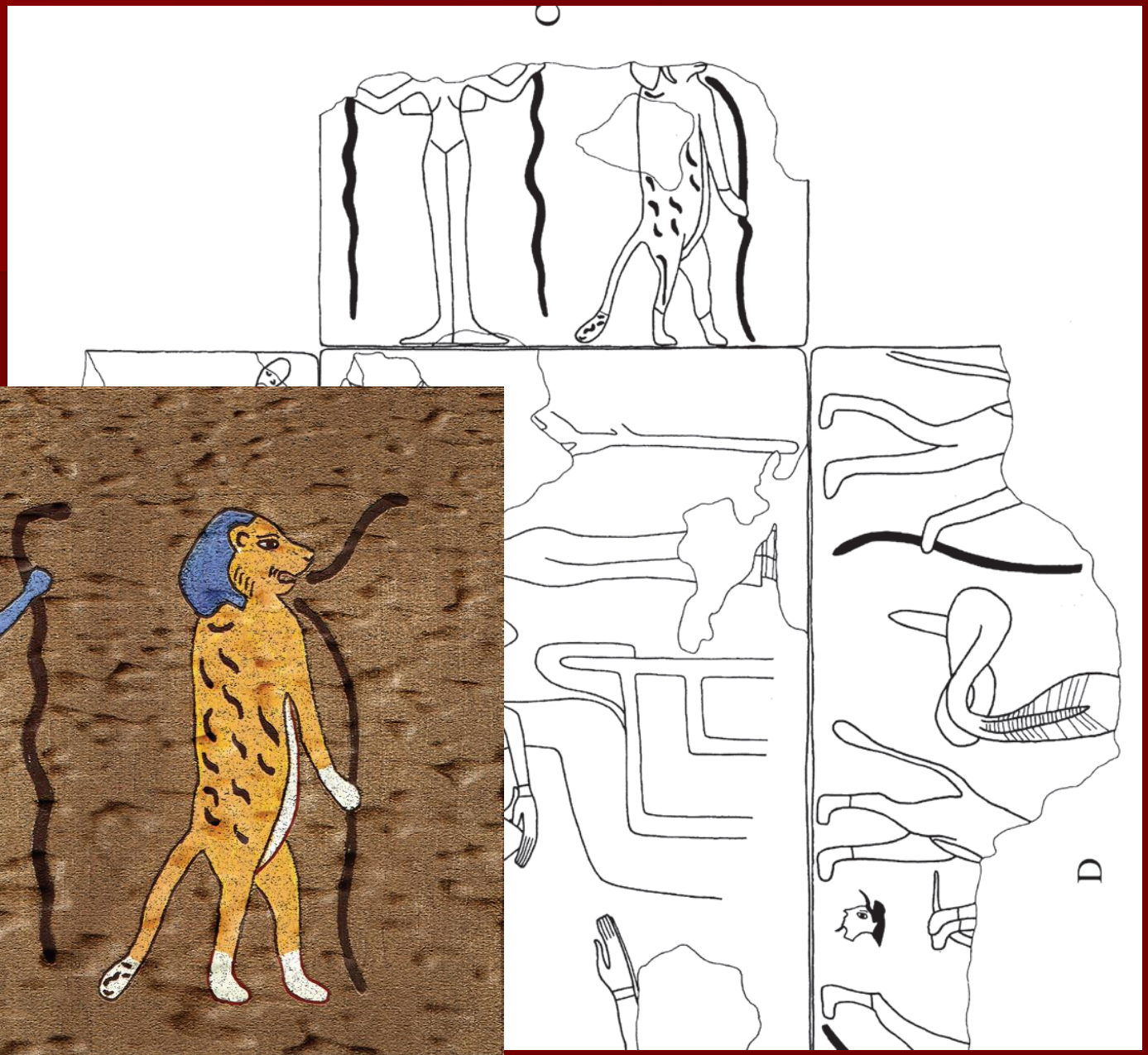

Ramesseum Statuette

Magic and giving birth

- Birth bricks on which the woman in labour crouched, were decorated with depictions of Hathor and other goddesses and were believed to bestow **protection** on the mother and above all her baby, and charms were used to guard children from evil demons. Boys appear to have been favoured by their parents and given better protection, e.g. only boy's names are mentioned on apotropaic wands carved of ivory and decorated with pictures of protective deities.

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?