

How Religious were the Ancient Egyptians?

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Ancient Egyptian culture was permeated by statements, symbolic and direct, which defined a world of deities and divine power. They amounted to a form of knowledge that was largely divorced from general personal behaviour and which afforded little recognition of individual experience. Furthermore, although practical provision for survival after death was important, life seems not to have offered a quest for enlightenment through enhanced knowledge of the divine. The exemplary life was a career pursued in what was basically a secular society. Our use of the term 'religion' for ancient Egypt, whilst justifiable as a convenience, clearly covers a relationship between belief and behaviour which is distinctive for its place and time. In this article, several kinds of evidence for religious behaviour in ancient Egypt are examined in an attempt to assess the nature and strength of the commitment that they represent. The question of whether the populace at large lived by reference to a world of superstitious gesture which has left little evidence behind is only briefly touched upon.

In 1851 a religious census was carried out in the leading cities of Great Britain (referred to in Briggs 1963, 60–61). It revealed that, in several of them, more than ninety per cent of the population did not actually attend either a church or a chapel. This remarkable fact may reflect an urban population made up of individuals whose personal beliefs contained much that was Christian but who lacked sufficient commitment to propel them to Sunday worship, despite the importance of this to established Christianity. It creates an interesting model of religion in society, one of a strongly-expressed national belief system which is actively supported only weakly by the bulk of the population, their thoughts presumably dominated by worldly concerns and the struggle to survive. Many will probably assume that widespread half-heartedness towards organized religion, extending even to scepticism, is a modern phenomenon encouraged by the growth of urban industrialized proletariats. People in the past, living generally in a Golden Age of religion, took it more seriously. Yet, although the loosening of the hold of religion is an important element in the history of

awareness, how and when it came about is very difficult to investigate properly since lack of explicit expression is its chief characteristic.

The subject is greatly complicated by the fact that religion involves much more than a system of belief. Established religions are often associated with the power of the state. They also have a tendency to mimic the mundane world of transactions, in which commodities change hands and people labour for others, and in which values are placed on property. Religion in this form has something to offer for which an exchange value can be found, although the scale of assessment may well be peculiar to itself. A direct transaction in which a currency, real or votive, is given in return for a spiritual benefit is, however, only part of the complex role that established religions play in society. A second element is pious donation on a scale sufficiently large to turn the religion itself into a source of material benefits. This, in turn, gives to the religion a quasi-secular character, and it becomes an institution in which signs of material success are integral to its character. Through the wealth and power of established religions the

piety of the outwardly faithful mixes with ambition and social convention. Sacralization of self-interest and secularization of the sacred are sides of the same coin.

We can be judgemental and say that a form of double-think is present in which what seem to the outside observer to be worldly interests are pursued via a studied decorum of pious expression. The dilemma for the observer is to decide how far to allow scepticism to colour the language of interpretation. Some may even be accusatory, and imply that hypocrisy is present. More objectively we can accept that individuals live in a bivalent world, in which processing of experiences takes place in parallel according to two sets of values, the one pragmatic and secular, the other an intellectual creation. Actual behaviour is the result of a constant interplay between them and is an aspect of being human.

Religion, then, has three aspects. One is a set of beliefs, which require textual sources for there to be any depth to our understanding; another comprises works — cult, buildings, pious donations — which is where archaeology makes its main contribution. The third is the profile of faith in a population. This, if only we could measure it, would be the range of values that would express the relative strengths of the secular and sacred determinants of behaviour. This is something that is difficult enough to assess in living communities; for those long dead it is almost beyond recovery. Nonetheless, I believe that the act of trying to discuss it is a clarifying experience in itself and deserves to be attempted. Otherwise we risk coming to believe too much in the evidence for religion which expresses itself more explicitly and forcefully than its counterparts.

Ancient Egypt is a particularly appropriate case to study, partly on account of the richness and antiquity of its evidence and partly on account of the widespread impression which the ancient Egyptians themselves have created, that they were (in the words of Herodotus, II, 37, who, of course, witnessed them first-hand) 'religious to excess, beyond any other nation in the world'. I have written this paper out of curiosity at the effect of looking, for once, sceptically at the role of religion in ancient Egypt. In the course of this, I have attempted to explore the tangle of piety and self-interest which one can, without too much difficulty, see was present.

Amongst the Egyptians the parallel sets of behavioural determinants are visible from surviving texts. Those which deal with pragmatic interaction illustrate behaviour in a secularly-construed world at several levels: the making of personal and domestic decisions, the evaluation of evidence for legal

judgements, the conduct of foreign relations. Here the rules were learned partly through experience and partly through didactic teaching which in ancient Egypt was enshrined in a literature that was largely secular. But a world of paranormal forces and experiences was also perceived to exist and to be able, if called upon, to provide comprehensive guidance: from dreams that could be interpreted and traditions that ruled which days were lucky and unlucky; to gods and goddesses who merited shrines, who could be approached for assistance, and who even, through oracular pronouncements, could give direct answers to questions of a worldly nature.

The surviving texts define what was potentially there in the Egyptians' bivalent world but they have been haphazardly preserved and are relatively few in number. Archaeology offers the prospect of a more even coverage, but one limited by being weighted towards those aspects which drew from people a response in materials which can survive. Where belief expressed itself less formally, in domestic cult ('magic'), we know that we are especially poorly served by the evidence. Some texts demanded, when significant words were to be uttered, the use of ephemeral materials such as vulture feathers, pieces of wood, flowers (Breasted 1930, 472–87), and figures made of white bread (Gardiner 1935, 68).¹ An assessment of the extent and frequency of this area of belief and practice is likely to remain beyond the limits of the knowable save when more lasting objects, primarily ceramic figurines, accompanied a rite.

Most of what we mean by 'Egyptian religion' was, however, something expressed more formally, through sacred buildings and a stream of theological speculation and writing. It was not in its nature to impose participation on the individual (other than the king); there was no community of the faithful. Thus the older 'wisdom' texts of instruction on how a person might lead a proper life, which came into use at least as early as c. 2100 BC, ignore temple cults. The New Kingdom instruction of Ani (composed perhaps c. 1300 BC) tells the reader to celebrate the annual festival of his god but urges no further observance, although other texts from the later New Kingdom do imply that visits to local temples were by now a fairly regular part of life, at least for the official class (Pinch 1993, 344, 350–51). The extent to which this general lack of prescription was made up for by the pressure of convention or the spiritual convictions of the individual is part of the question addressed in the title to this paper.

We begin here with material from the New Kingdom and, in particular, the interval between about

1470 and 1170 BC (between the reigns of Tuthmosis III and Rameses III), when cult reached an apogee of relatively well-documented wealth and formality. It serves as a benchmark against which to compare the evidence from earlier and far less well-understood periods.

The recognition of piety

A number of small New Kingdom shrines furnish evidence which is instantly recognizable as the product of acts of devotion. A good example comes from the fortress at Mirgissa in the conquered territory of

Lower Nubia, which presumably belonged to a small garrison (Fig. 1; Vercoutter 1970, 307–62). The shrine was part of a larger precinct which had included a small stone temple (unfortunately dug out before the twentieth century) and two circular grain silos. The brick shrine was not only small (6.50×5.50 m externally) but lacked stonework other than an altar, an unworked but partially whitewashed granite slab. The sanctuary in which it stood was a narrow space measuring only 1.10×3.20 metres. In the sandy debris on its floor, however, were found a great many items to which the term votive offerings is naturally

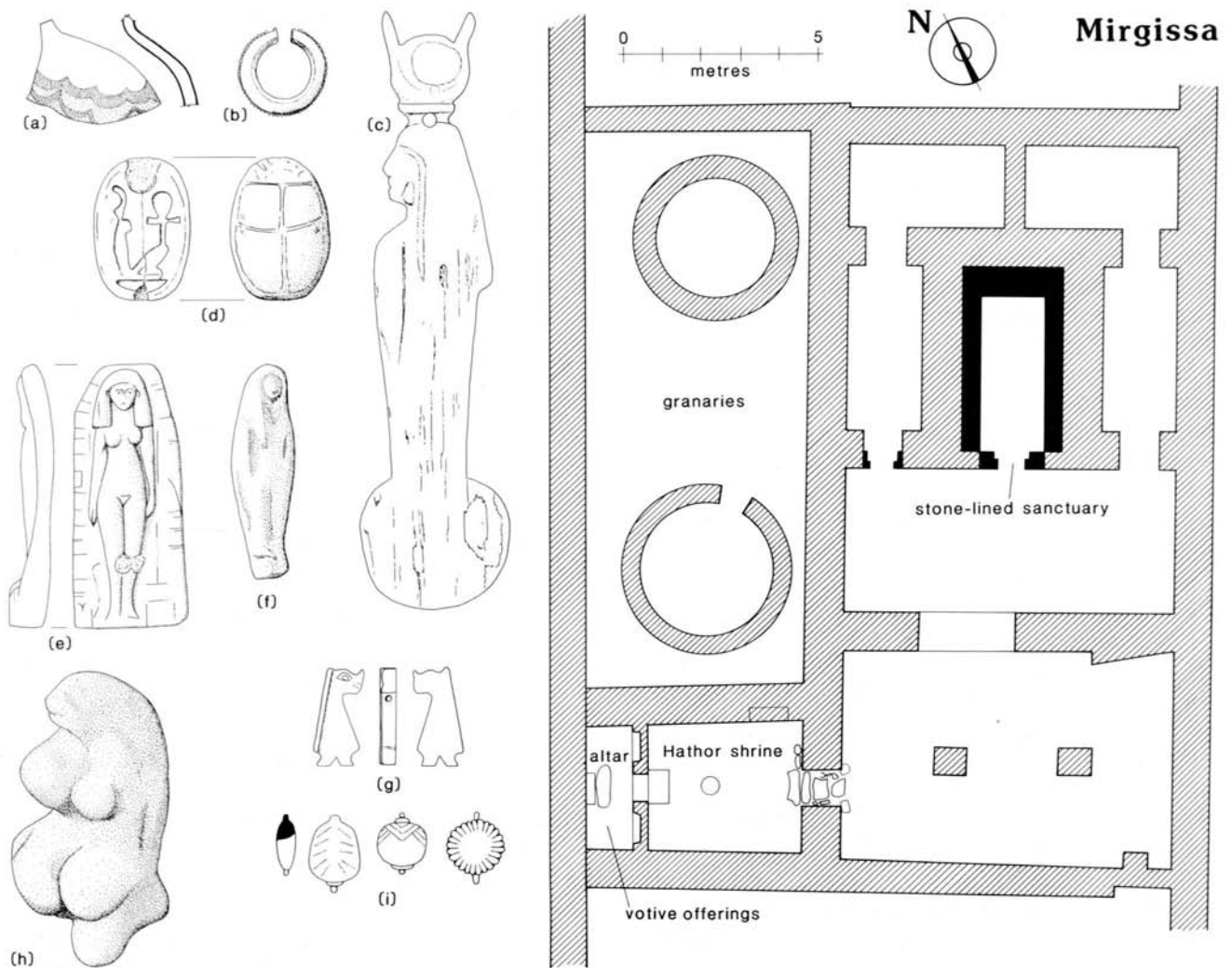


Figure 1. (Right) Plan of the New Kingdom temple at Mirgissa, including the side shrine to Hathor. (After Vercoutter 1970, 307–9, figs. 1–4; Lyons 1916.) (Left) Selection of the votive objects: (a) fragment of polychrome glass vessel, (b) earring in blue faience, (c) painted wooden counterweight in the form of the goddess Hathor, for a bead collar, (d) large blue faience scarab, (e) painted limestone figurine of woman on bed, (f) blue faience figurine of woman, (g) faience bead in the shape of the goddess Taweret, (h) natural pebble, (i) four faience collar pendants in plant designs. (After Vercoutter 1970, 328–60, no scales given in the publication.)

applied (Fig. 1). Most conspicuous were twelve small stelae in stone, wood, and clay, five of which still bore some of their original decoration, and which had evidently stood along the back wall. The stelae preserve the name of the deity to whom the cult was directed, Hathor, Lady of Iken, this last being the ancient name of Mirgissa fortress (Vercoutter 1964).

The offerings, which could additionally have included food and other perishable materials, had been either placed in pottery vessels, many of them whitewashed, or laid on the ground in circular baskets. Many of the artefactual pieces had been packed into one large pottery jar after they had been in the shrine for a while, and fragments belonging to some of them were found in the surrounding area. The objects fall into two broad categories: pieces that one might judge to be cult-specific, and pieces that were not. Amongst the former were pendants and specially-shaped counterpoises in glazed composition (faience) from broad collars of a type particularly associated with Hathor; clay animals; and four faience figurines of women and a further one in limestone where the figure lay on a bed. The second category comprised a collection of glazed rings and amulets, penannular earrings, pieces of bracelet,

studs, scarabs, and natural stones which had arresting nodular shapes and suggested fat or pregnant women and phalli.

By the standards of the day this material must have been of very low value or worthless. It was presumably for this reason that it stayed undisturbed in the sanctuary, and many of the items belong to categories which were discarded on settlement sites (cf. Fig. 3). Not everything need have been like this, however. At a similar shrine, to Hathor, Lady of Ibshek (outside the Nubian fort of Faras), a comparable collection of votive objects also included pieces of thick gold foil, some stamped with Hathor images (Griffith 1921, 86; Pinch 1993, 38, 164, 210). Even though a richer component of the Mirgissa shrine's contents might perhaps be missing, however, it remains true that it was felt appropriate to offer materially-worthless tokens in this particular shrine, and in several others that are known, all dedicated to the goddess Hathor. Their value presumably lay in their transactional potential. The people involved, including those who represented the goddess, must all have agreed that they were adequate as tokens to acquire favourable reception of thoughts, hopes, and fears. One shape of token present in other collections

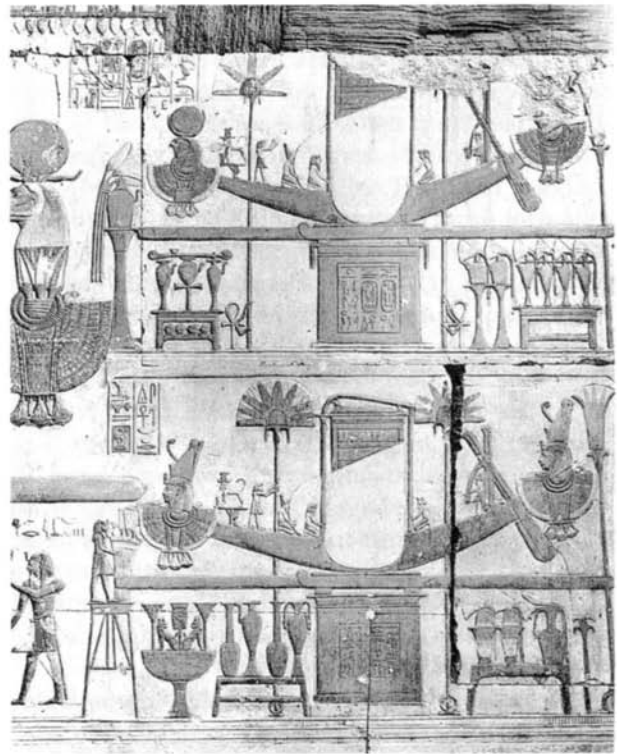


Figure 2. *Egyptian votive objects of the New Kingdom: (left) bronze objects from the Great Aten Temple, Amarna (1926 photograph, with permission of the Committee of the Egypt Exploration Society); (right) items depicted on the walls of the temple of Seti I at Abydos. (After Jéquier 1922, pl. 16.)*

at New Kingdom shrines is actually the human ear, presumably made to assist the hearing of prayers (Pinch 1993, 246–53).

A modern interpretation of this material can scarcely help but see it as an expression of genuine religious experience. A puritan criterion is at work here that takes the modesty of provision as a guarantee of sincerity. This impression is enhanced by the building's layout, the way that the Hathor shrine was the lesser element in a complex which also contained a small stone temple which was probably dedicated to statue cults representing the power of the state (Lyons 1916; Porter & Moss 1951, 142 for reliefs). The Hathor shrine was evidently there to serve a special supplementary need, one which accepted votive material that had a somewhat less formal character than was appropriate in the larger shrines and temples, and which was perhaps all that was within the means of poorer people. We might judge in the same light another small shrine of the New Kingdom, dedicated to a form of a local jackal-god Wepwawet. This was situated in the portico of a disused rock tomb some way outside the ancient city of Assiut, where the main temple to this god was to be found (Munro 1962; Sadek 1987, 40–42). Over a period of ten centuries around six hundred dedicatory stelae had been left there, the vast majority of them made of pottery, 'a few inches high' and apparently blank (the find is unfortunately reported in scant detail).

What was on the mind of those who came to small shrines? On one of the few stelae from Assiut to be decorated can be read a record of gratitude for safe deliverance from an attack by a crocodile. This fits the expectation that personal crisis would have been a common preoccupation. In the case of the cult of Hathor, a particularly close association with women (it had priestesses, for example: Fischer 1982) introduces a possible element of gender. At least three of the five decorated Mirgissa stelae were dedicated by women, and the thought naturally follows that some, perhaps all, of the votive material also derived from them. The fact that the distinctive figurines of women in heavy wigs can be connected to a broader and more explicit iconography of childbirth (Pinch 1983; 1993, 198–225), and are sometimes shown accompanied by a child, points to hopes and fears connected with childbirth.

The 'characters' of Egyptian deities are notoriously difficult to define precisely, however, and Hathor is no exception. In the Middle Kingdom and perhaps earlier she was seen (like the god Horus) to offer a kindly disposition in foreign and especially

desert localities. Even in Egypt a few of her shrines were at conspicuous rocky places (Deir el-Bahari at Thebes, and Gebelein, but not at Dendera, her most important site). At Serabit el-Khadem, the centre of the turquoise mines in Sinai, the leaders of mining expeditions sought to propitiate Hathor 'Lady of Turquoise' to bring them good luck (e.g. the 12th Dynasty text of Harwerra: Parkinson 1991, 97–9). The personnel of the expeditions, sometimes listed in detail, would have been predominantly male, and this is likely to have been even more so in the case of the Hathor shrine in the eastern desert at Gebel Zeit, on account of its remoteness. The votive offerings at both these places, which included female figurines (though rare at Serabit el-Khadem), are thus not likely to have been the donations of women (or of men with procreation on their mind). It would seem that they remained part of the appropriate mode of approach to Hathor — were the right kind of currency — even when she was in her role of protectress of arid places.

Since the Hathor-shrine votives include things in common personal use, chance and illicit discoveries of such groups in the past could have gone unnoticed. Nevertheless, sufficient examples of small shrines not dedicated to Hathor (or sister goddesses such as Sekhmet: Pinch 1993, 78–9, 358) have been excavated to suggest that this type of donation was not usually appropriate to shrines which honoured other divinities, even where similar factors were present. These groups of votive objects, which are rather engaging as evidence for piety, are actually quite rare and seem themselves not to be typical for the New Kingdom.

The level of provision of community shrines

None of the small shrines just discussed was part of a conventional town. Perhaps this is an accident of preservation, perhaps a sign that remoteness and the undertaking of a journey were integral to their character.

The largest extant settlement site from the New Kingdom is the city of Tell el-Amarna. Any discussion of religion here is inevitably affected by the monotheism of its founder, Akhenaten, although just how consistently he pursued his beliefs is hard to judge (one stone building with Hathor-headed columns evidently formed part of his Great Palace; Pendlebury 1951, 69, pl. LXX.8). Whether through the king's lack of interest in the activities of unimportant people, or in the short interval between his death and the city's abandonment, at least twenty-six mud-brick shrines of traditional design were in fact built there (excluding the private garden shrines

dedicated to the royal family: Ikram 1989). They have a markedly uneven distribution. Two of them lay not far from one another in what appear to be public spaces in the main residential area (Kemp 1989, fig. 97) and remain exceptional finds within the huge tracts of the city so far excavated. They seem not to have been insertions made at a late phase in the city's history (after Akhenaten's death). Furthermore, it is noticeable that no shrines of this kind can be identified in those parts of the city built last of all, on the eastern fringes (especially in the North Suburb). One of these two shrines (building P48.4) contained a stela dedicated, rather surprisingly, to the triad of deities at Elephantine: Khnum, Anukis, and Satis (Borchardt & Ricke 1980, 222, Hausplan 64, taf. 28; Seidlmayer 1983, 204–6), but nothing else that could be considered a votive offering. No text was found in the second one (building P47.10), but it did contain a small collection of stone vessels and glazed jewellery, and a figurine. It was just possibly, therefore, a little Hathor shrine (Borchardt & Ricke 1980, 111–12, Hausplan 28), although I would not wish to press this identification.

The existence of these two buildings suggests that small traditional shrines were not outlawed at Amarna; indeed, they lay close to the house and grounds of a senior military officer (General Ramose). They could well represent cults which a neighbourhood brought with them when they moved to Amarna from their home city, but they still raise the question, by what means were such small cults established? I am inclined to see the answer in spontaneous initiatives of unusually pious individuals, with the support of their families and perhaps others in the neighbourhood, or colleagues in the case of remote Hathor shrines. They might have become self-proclaimed priests, violating, as far as we can tell, no law or convention, though whether they could then have gained access to religious texts (often assumed to have been restricted knowledge) we have no way of telling. We do know that major temples provided peripheral locations where the public could make contact with the great deities who dwelt within. The creators of some small shrines might have been people who found this kind of contact insufficiently satisfying.

The remaining twenty-four of the Amarna shrines belonged to an offshoot community of only seventy-one smallish houses placed quite separate from the rest of the city, the so-called Workmen's Village (Peet & Woolley 1923, ch. IV; Kemp 1987, 30–36; Bomann 1991). Whereas the houses occupied a walled compound, the chapels had been built on ground outside. Two of them had tombs adjacent to

them but the funerary aspect was evidently secondary. They seem to have served as places of formal worship of deities, and also as places of family assembly and communal meals. This last aspect, fairly well documented by the archaeology, points to the very distinctive character of the community, in which groups of householders (perhaps related?) evidently shared in the construction and use of a formally laid out shrine. A very real commitment to religious cult is implied and perhaps provides a yardstick against which to measure the commitment of other communities. All the Workmen's Village shrines had escaped plundering in modern times, yet excavation has found little within them that is comparable to the votive collections from the Hathor and related shrines. This is not, however, because such objects were not in use within the community. The Workmen's Village has produced an abundance of pieces of small faience jewellery, and also a good many pottery and clay figurines of women and some of cows which were also symbols of Hathor. There are, however, a few wooden items, including a disc with horns perhaps from a Hathor statue (Peet & Woolley 1923, 100, 105, no. 21/374); an important element if this identification is correct, and in a material which is very prone to destruction on desert sites by termites.

Figure 3 shows the distribution of figurines of women and how they clearly belonged amongst domestic rather than chapel debris. Within this community they seem to have had only temporary utility and retained no permanent sacredness which might lead to them being deposited in or buried near a sanctuary, as happened at Mirgissa, for example. The same is true for figurines of women found dispersed amongst the houses in other parts of Amarna (Pinch 1983, 231–3). One find group, comprising one of these figurines, two pottery model beds, and a painted stele showing a woman and a girl adoring the goddess Taweret, came from the little room beneath the stairs of an ordinary house (Peet & Woolley 1923, 25, house N49.21, pl. XII.2, 4, 5; Pinch 1983, 414). This is an interesting iconographic connection because the goddess Taweret (with the god Bes) was also associated with childbirth in the New Kingdom. A few of the houses in the Workmen's Village had actually been decorated with wall paintings showing these two deities. From one community (e.g. Mirgissa) to another (e.g. Amarna) what constituted an appropriate setting for votive presentation of a more informal kind could thus vary between chapel and house. Within the domain of formality which normally characterized chapels, votive presentation was evidently marginal and dependent on very

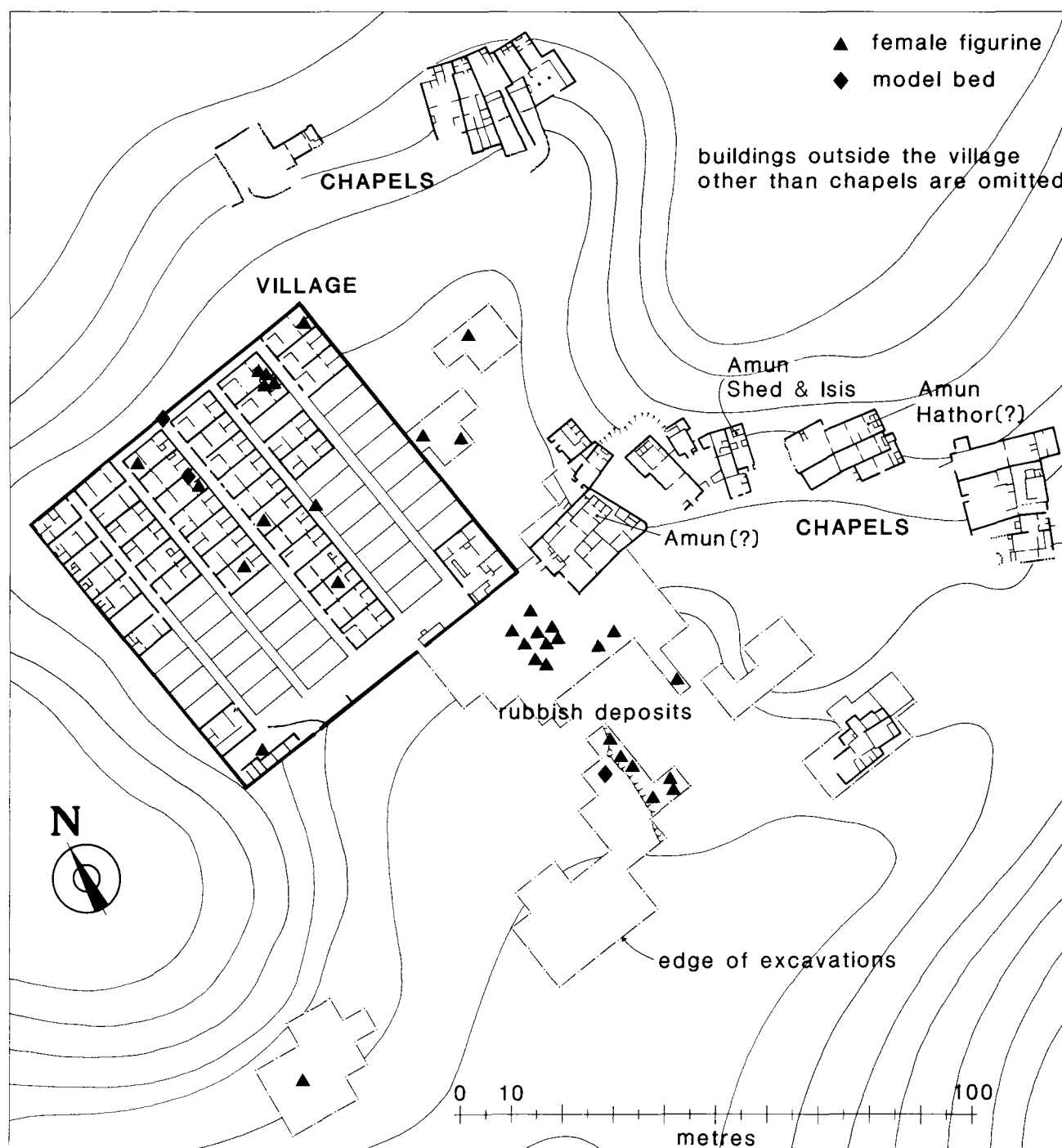


Figure 3. The separation of formal religion (chapels) from domestic religion (expendable figurines) at the Workmen's Village, Tell el-Amarna. The names of deities represented by text or image in the chapels are also included. (After Peet & Woolley 1923, and unpublished field data, with permission of the Committee of the Egypt Exploration Society.)

localized tradition. In the case of the Workmen's Village this tradition had not developed, although the inhabitants had been in a position to construct a Mirgissa-type shrine, had they so chosen, and may

even have maintained a Hathor shrine, as just noted.

The Workmen's Village also provides evidence for a snake cult within houses. Its artefacts are mud or pottery images of rearing cobras, often fixed to

the bottoms of pottery bowls with crinkled rims (Kemp 1981, 14–16). An explanation for these objects is to be found in certain New Kingdom magical texts to protect beds and bedrooms from the evils of the night. They were to be recited over one or four clay figures of cobras (for the texts, Ritner 1990, 32, note O). Given the insubstantial nature of the material that was sometimes prescribed to accompany domestic cult ('magic') the limited number of small finds available is probably a poor guide, however, to its range and frequency. And although it is reasonable to assume that few people would have been able to read the magical texts which could accompany this material (as argued by Ritner 1990, 40), it is not necessary to deny an oral tradition of suitable words and phrases.

We have seen that the city of Amarna shows two quite different levels of provision of small shrines: in the main parts of the city, where they are quite exceptional, and in the Workmen's Village, where they number one to every three houses and occupy ground which is equal to about half that of the settlement. Which should we take as normal?

At few other New Kingdom settlements have significant areas been exposed. One is at western Thebes and comprises the sprawling town of Amenhetep III (of which his palace at Malkata was part) and the much longer-lived necropolis workmen's village of Deir el-Medina which was situated, like its counterpart at Amarna, in an isolated place. Within the main town no small shrines are identifiable amongst the dwellings (Smith 1981, 282–5; Kemp & O'Connor 1974; Kemp unpub. fieldwork; Hölscher 1939, 68–77; Robichon & Varille 1936, pl. IX), although two houses did contain a small altar within their living-rooms (Hölscher 1939, 68–70). At Deir el-Medina, on the other hand, cult was provided for in a way that is strikingly analogous to that at the Amarna Workmen's Village, through a substantial number of shrines. Two additional aspects presumably reflect the much longer time that the settlement had been established: a degree of official patronage for a few of the shrines, and a greater merging of family shrines and family tombs. It is unfortunately less easy to review the general distribution of finds, but the impression that the many excavation reports leave is that, in regard to votive tokens, the situation was analogous to that at the Amarna Workmen's Village. Votives were not common in the shrines, but female figurines were found in some numbers in the actual village itself (Pinch 1993, 230–34), and can be linked to wall paintings within some of the houses. Houses were also the focus for other kinds of cult, including that of

family ancestors (Demarée 1983; Friedman 1994).

The concentration of shrines at Deir el-Medina is complemented by a unique richness of written sources which reveal much about the organization of the community and the inner life of its inhabitants. They tell us, for example, that one of the shrines housed an oracle-giving statue of king Amenhetep I, who was probably the Village's founder, to which the villagers regularly turned for help; they attest a real spiritual attachment to individual deities, including Amun-Ra, the great state god (Bierbrier 1982). In so doing, they have helped to give rise to a modern view of Ramesside Egypt as an 'age of personal piety'. This side to Deir el-Medina, as well as the building of so many shrines both here and at the Amarna Workmen's Village, can create the impression that religion was at the forefront of the lives of these two communities. The full range of sources from Deir el-Medina, however, documents a great diversity of personal outlook, which could lead to acts of sacrilege, to the rejection of oracular decisions, and to outspoken disagreements with senior authority. They imply, in fact, as much variance in outlook and assertion of individuality as is to be expected in far more recent populations. It parallels what is to be encountered, for example, in fourteenth- to sixteenth-century European communities for which we have, via Inquisition records, similarly intense and microcosmic pictures (Le Roy Ladurie 1980; Ginzburg 1989; Kagan 1990).

The remaining settlement evidence from the New Kingdom only serves to emphasize how unusual the two workmen's villages were in this respect. There is Deir el-Ballas, another desert-edge settlement built around palaces of the late 17th and early 18th Dynasties (Lacovara 1990). It has been assumed that it had some of the same functional divisions as Amarna, and that an equivalent of the Workmen's Village can be identified amidst the areas of excavated houses, on the flanks of a hill (a parallel I do not find convincing). One building in the general spread of settlement has been tentatively identified as a small shrine, but the incompleteness of the excavation still leaves a question-mark over it (Lacovara 1990, chapter 3; Bomann 1991, 84). No other shrines have been identified. At Gurob, yet another 18th Dynasty desert town beside a palace (Loat 1905; Kemp 1978), a single small shrine which housed a cult for the deified king Tuthmosis III is known. It seems to have been attached to the palace wall, but our inadequate knowledge of this now largely destroyed site prevents a proper definition of its relationship to a broader community.

A more complete picture of New Kingdom life comes from the colonial settlements of Nubia, and particularly the temple towns at Sesebi and Amara West (Blackman 1937; Fairman 1938; 1948; Shinnie 1951; Kemp 1972b, 652, fig. 1 is an outline plan of both sites). The former is particularly significant because of the area of excavated housing (c. 100 × 110 metres), representing the population of a medium-sized town. It was built during the reign of Akhenaten and has a layout reminiscent of parts of Amarna, although it was occupied for rather longer. No single building can be identified as a small shrine. At Amara West, a temple town of the 19th Dynasty, a little less than half of the interior has been excavated and with the same negative results. Outside the walls, however, a small shrine had been erected over the ruins of a house. It had consisted of a single chamber around which a number of snakes had been buried in pottery jars, possibly signifying a cult of protection for the community. Nubia was, of course, the location of the small Hathor shrine with which this article began. That example had been built into a re-used fort of the Middle Kingdom. Nothing like it can, however, be detected inside the other Middle Kingdom forts re-occupied at this time, even where a good part of the internal plan has been revealed. This includes the major site of Buhen, where the second and smaller temple seems, although largely of brick, to have represented more of a state-supported cult possessing its own attached settlement. Like Amara West, however, one of the reoccupied forts, Faras, had a small shrine outside its walls. This was dedicated to Hathor and was a place to which people brought votive offerings similar to those found at Mirgissa.

We may conclude that in the New Kingdom, people created small shrines when conditions were appropriate, and sometimes but not always established within them a tradition of votive currency. It is thus justifiable to talk of a 'popular' religion (Sadek 1987). The evidence currently available from excavated settlements, however, shows that such places were uncommon, and that the degree of cult provision at the two workmen's villages was highly unusual.

The gods as benefactors

Small shrines were only a tiny fragment of the world of New Kingdom temple religion. A great deal is known about the architecture, symbolism, and ritual of the large temples; rather less about how they involved people other than the priests and scribes who were appointed to serve them. It is generally accepted that entry beyond perhaps the outer court-

yard was tightly restricted (Pinch 1993, 336–7, 342), although the carrying of portable images outside the temple precincts on festival days brought a degree of contact between cult image and the populace. Cult and ritual were, however, only a part of the business of the larger temples. Through their ownership of farmland and other productive sources (which, by convention, were collectively termed 'offerings') they stood at the centre of a kind of penumbra of administration of commodities which the archaeology of religion cannot afford to ignore.

A long-standing modern interpretation of textual evidence from several periods shows that it was a common practice to share out temple offerings amongst the living (the 'reversion' of offerings, Gardiner 1938; Helck 1961–5, [464–7]; Leprohon 1988, 49, 51, n. 55). Some original lists of offerings have survived, such as the set (seventy-one of them, covering daily offerings and periodic festivals) on the walls of the mortuary temple of Rameses III of the 20th Dynasty (c. 1184–1153 BC) at Western Thebes. These detail more than 5500 loaves offered every day, as well as 204 jars of beer (Nelson 1934). This was one of several mortuary temples in the area provided with huge granaries for grain which was also distributed directly as rations to workmen without being turned first into the bread or beer specified in the offering-lists. Insufficient written documentation has survived, however, to enable us to judge how widely spread amongst the local population the right to a temple dole was. This is also the case for the city of Thebes proper (on the east bank) and its temple to Amun-Ra, one of the great landowning institutions of New Kingdom Egypt with the potential for feeding a sizable population.

A major archaeological witness to the scale of the handling of foodstuffs at a major state temple is provided by the Great Aten Temple at the centre of Amarna, dedicated to Akhenaten's sun cult. The Temple enclosure, measuring 760 × 270 metres, contained, at either end, a monumental stone shrine consisting principally of courtyards open to the sky and hence to the direct worship of the sun's disk (Pendlebury 1951; Kemp 1994). Each courtyard was filled with stone offering-tables, simple rectangular blocks measuring about 100 × 80 cm, which numbered around 150 in the case of the Sanctuary shrine at the rear, and perhaps more than 750 in the Gem-pa-Aten shrine at the front. In an open area on the south side of the latter was a field of no less than 920 further offering-tables of mud brick, bringing the total to an extraordinary 1820. The Amarna rock tombs contain remarkably detailed depictions of the Aten temples

and their cult, showing the simultaneous use of the mass of offering-tables. They stand piled high with offerings of bread, vegetables, whole geese, and joints of beef, topped with bowls of burning incense. The detailed offering-schedule had originally been specified on a large quartzite stela which stood in front of the Sanctuary shrine. Only a few fragments have survived to modern times and these remain largely unpublished, but amongst them one can recognize references to cattle and to grain.

To the south of the Great Aten Temple spread what was virtually an industrial complex comprising individual buildings and dumps of waste material, the remnants of what was needed to support an offering-cult of this magnitude (Kemp 1994, 141, fig. 14.4). Particularly impressive is that which pertains to the production of special bread baked in pottery moulds. This operation was carried out in something like 110 baking-chambers, each a vaulted room measuring about 11 × 4 metres, equipped with a bank of ovens at the back, implying a total of between two and three hundred ovens. Huge quantities of discarded pottery bread moulds not only still spread over a sizable area of the desert to the east but engulf the rows of baking chambers as well, as if originally stacks of moulds had filled the corridors and covered the roofs. We probably have to reckon with a prodigious manufacture of offering-bread, which employed several hundred people and fed several thousand. In other buildings of the complex wine jars were opened up, and considerable space seems to have been given over to the butchering of cattle and to the subsequent preparation of jars of preserved meat for storage and distribution.

As to how the distribution of offering-food was achieved we have no direct source to guide us. It is tempting, however, to regard the process as having included a short stage during which they were placed in batches on the fields of offering-tables within and beside the temples, a method of distribution itself requiring considerable numbers of people.

Cult on this scale reflects a different form of behaviour from the donation of tokens at Hathor shrines. What is offered is primarily consumable, whilst the immediate source is not the individual about to make a gesture of piety from his own resources. The offerings come from previously-made gifts of land to the cult, and from royal estates and other institutional suppliers locked into a bureaucratic system. The deity 'receives' the offerings, notionally from the king, but is then in the position of a great provider through a regular distribution of goods, although in a way, like any great lord, it buys

service, both real (administrative) and token (deference). The relationship between devotee and the object of cult that we have seen illustrated in the Hathor shrines has here been compromised. We can nevertheless ask of state cults, Did people give as well as take? Was there still a place for private surrender of tokens of personal piety, particularly on the part of the élite with the resources to match the wealth and dignity of the larger temples?

Pious donation by the wealthy

Artistic sources, mainly wall paintings from the tombs of officials at Thebes, show that a major industry in the New Kingdom was the production of religious furniture. This represented the pinnacle of fine craftsmanship in expensive materials. Its only real rival must have been military equipment. The category comprises statues, vessels, and shrines (including portable boat-shaped shrines), made from metal (gold, silver, or bronze) or from wood either painted or overlaid with gold leaf. Despite having probably been produced in very large quantities indeed, little has actually survived, leaving a substantial void in the archaeological record from Egypt. By far the best and largest collection of examples comes from the tomb of Tutankhamun (Reeves 1990; Smith 1992, 214–19). The presence of religious furniture in temples is amply illustrated by detailed pictures on temple walls (Fig. 2) and by texts. One of these is Papyrus Harris I, which purports to be a detailed account of the benefactions of one king, Rameses III (c. 1184–1153 BC), and includes numerous donations of cult equipment in precious metals (conveniently Breasted 1906, IV, 87–206); another is the set of trial records of thieves accused of stealing temple property at the end of the New Kingdom (Peet 1930; Helck 1961–5, [104]).

Tomb pictures of religious furniture, alongside chariots and jewellery, are shown in two principal contexts. In one they are being manufactured by craftsmen. Few clues are provided as to the setting, either its architecture or its institutional framework, although, from the fact that the scenes are prominent at all, we may judge that the tomb owner had more than a passing interest in this activity. In the second context the tomb owner presents them to the enthroned king in a ceremony which reverses the normal flow of prestige goods from the king to his loyal officials (collected in Aldred 1969). Various iconographic clues and textual statements have been used to link the ceremony to the coronation of a new king and to the occasional jubilee festival for the

longer-reigning kings; but some of the sources speak simply of gifts of the New Year. The amounts could be impressive. One scene (Kenamun) displays fifteen statues and a harvest of military equipment which included 680 shields, 360 scimitars, two war chariots and 58 horseblankets (Davies 1930, 22–32, pls. XI–XXIV; Cumming 1984, 101). Where all this material came from is stated, if at all, in characteristically vague terms: ‘all kinds of artifacts of the craftsmanship of [Lower Egypt]’ (Kenamun), ‘the best productions of the workshop and great places of His Majesty’ (tomb 73) are two examples (Säve-Söderbergh 1957, 2, pl. II). As for its final destination, we can surmise that the chariots and weapons were valuable supplements to the military resources which kings of the New Kingdom greatly needed to maintain their military ambitions. For the statues and religious equipment, however, an annotation beside one of the donated statues in the tomb of Kenamun, to the effect that it was intended for the temple of Amun at Karnak, helps to confirm what we might otherwise suspect, that the king would subsequently present at least some, and perhaps most of it to a temple (although his own tomb would be a suitable home for a few of the pieces; some fine wooden statuettes in Tutankhamun’s funerary equipment had been donated by two of the king’s officials: Schulman 1965, 61, 68).

We might consider that the officials are recording an eventful moment in their duties, and presenting to the king the products of state workshops in which their only involvement was supervisory. When the official in question is a vizier or chief steward to the king this does seem a reasonable possibility but, when he is an overseer of royal tutors (Theban tomb 226, Davies 1933, 38–9, pls. XLI–XLIII) or overseer of the royal harim (Theban tomb 47, Userhat, Aldred 1969; Säve-Söderbergh 1957, 39, n. 4), a personal donation seems a more natural interpretation (for other examples, see Helck 1961–5, [198] ff.). A personal origin of gifts of this kind is implied by one translation of a difficult passage in Papyrus Harris I which would make a group of 2756 sacred barques, statues, and statue-groups into private donations put into the safekeeping of the temple of Karnak (Helck 1961–5, [196]; but cf. Breasted 1906, IV, 126, §225; Gardiner 1948, 17). An interesting variation is known from Nubia, far away from the court. One of the senior colonial officials (the viceroy’s deputy, Pennut), wishing to present a statue of the king, did so to the king’s representative, the viceroy himself who, acting on the king’s behalf, passed on to Pennut in return a pair of silver vessels containing unguent (Aldred 1969, 81).

Few recognizable temple furnishings of the New Kingdom in materials other than stone have actually survived. Even items in faience (which provide a degree of continuity with the material from small shrines) are uncommon (e.g. the group from Dendera, Petrie 1900, 28–9; Pinch 1993, 78). An even rarer exception takes us back to the Sanctuary of the Great Aten Temple at Amarna, where a group of bronzes consisting of five situlae and a tall offering-stand were discovered in the foundations. One of the situlae bore a dedicatory inscription from a regimental standard-bearer named Ramose (Frankfort 1927, 210, pl. XLVI; Pendlebury 1951, 10, 12, 188–9, pl. LX.5–8, fig. 25; our Fig. 2). This is presumably an instance of the practice, just described, of private donation to a cult via the king.

The rarity of temple metalwork from the New Kingdom and earlier contrasts with an abundance that has survived from the Late Period, mainly in the form of statuettes of divinities (most commonly those of Osiris). With these we must be dealing with votive objects which were not tokens but had real value. The contrast in quantities that have survived is quite remarkable and implies a major human intervention in the processes of temple accumulation and storage. Was it the case that these multitudes of statuettes were the result of a melting-down of older votives and re-casting (a custom attested in Greek temples: Aleshire 1992, 97–8)? Or was it that the thefts of temple property recorded in the 20th Dynasty were magnified during the Third Intermediate Period?

People who wanted to make donations of real value to a god either directly or via the king could have turned to the workshops and craftsmen belonging to palace or temple. The city of Amarna, however, adds another possibility. It possessed workshops for certain categories of material, including fine statuary. Whilst some sculptors’ workshops were near the central palace and temples, others were located in the heart of the private residential part of the main city, in some cases attached to the houses of senior officials. The question arises, for whom was the output intended? A very small number of officials’ houses at Amarna also possessed private garden chapels dedicated to the cult of the royal family, and these might have provided a destination, but one surely too modest to account for their whole production. The prime function of these private workshops could have been to provide statues for officials to present to the king, their ultimate destination being the palaces and temples at Amarna which housed a great many statues of the royal family. Such a custom, exemplified by the scene in Kenamun’s tomb, mentioned above, would reveal that something very

like public subscription aided ambitious kings in their undertakings.

The inhabitants of the craftsmen's village of Deir el-Medina, on the other hand, were in a position to exploit their own skills to this end. Their village shrines, for example, were well provided with carved stonework which they were trained to produce themselves (a representative group is Bruyère 1930, 21, 50–70). Moreover, the tomb of one of their number, the sculptor Ipy, contains a scene in which he supervises a group of craftsmen as they make two very elaborate wooden shrines destined for the local cult of the deified king Amenhetep I, and another where craftsmen make the furnishings evidently intended for his own tomb, an interesting pairing in itself (Davies 1927, 64–72, pls. XXXVI, XXXVII, XXXVIII). Since we possess written records of these workmen making and selling items of burial equipment, it is a short step to accept that these shrines are a communal expression of piety to their favoured cult. Indeed, an early excavation at the actual shrine of Amenhetep I uncovered wooden statues of Queen Ahmes-Nefertari, the divinized consort of this king, which bore dedicatory inscriptions from two of the Deir el-Medina craftsmen (Porter & Moss 1964, 693; Janssen 1975, 248, cites a very expensive price for a statue, perhaps for a chapel).

Texts from many reigns also show that cults large and small were normally supported by agricultural land and related resources which they owned. These were also open to increase through pious gifts. The land donations of Rameses III, listed in Papyrus Harris I, totalled 1,070,419 *arouras* (Baer 1962, 42–3), the modern equivalent of 294,365 hectares. The Aten cult at Amarna owned the entire swathe of agricultural land, with its villages, on the opposite bank of the Nile. These are large examples, but the practice of landed support for cults seems to have spread to temples and shrines of quite small size and local significance (e.g. Gardiner 1948, 42–55, 124–57).

The gifts of statues and temple furniture by leading people which were routed to their destination via the king had a counterpart in land, although under arrangements which virtually amounted to a form of leaseback. A revealing case is that of the Steward of Memphis, Amenhetep-Huy (Morkot 1990, and, in general, Kees 1961, 68–70). He made a donation to the cult of a statue of his king, Amenhetep III, which stood in its own shrine which was also part of the major temple of Ptah of Memphis. The donation included (in addition to a huge herd of pigs) 430 *arouras* (118 hectares) of land, half of which had actually been given previously to Amenhetep-Huy by

the king. In return for this he was given a statue of himself by the king and allowed to set it up within the temple. There, under the reversion of offerings system, it was entitled to a share of the offerings made to the king's image. The whole agreement as to reciprocity was fixed in a legal document, and the long-term aim was to ensure an income for the priests of Amenhetep-Huy's own statue cult (presumably his descendants) 'for future generations to come'.

Mixed motives

Important to royal ideology in ancient Egypt was the myth of the king's unique role as intermediary between the gods and the mundane world. The New Kingdom formula for private donation to cult paid heed to this myth: the proper thing to do was to donate to the king, who would then pass it on to a temple. Along with the parallel gifts of military equipment, the formula was, in effect, a disguised tax on the élite. From the rather different situation which existed in earlier periods, when private self-interest was more blatantly built into cults, we might suspect that this was a deliberate royal policy.

With private donations from amongst the élite of costly products and of land, our modern puritan sensibility that modesty of gesture is a hallmark of sincerity no longer applies. Donation at this level is likely to have been not only an obligation of rank and a statement of éliteneess, but also a demonstration of loyalty in return for which material favours from the king (an advancement in career, for example, or just survival in office) would have been hoped for. We are now obliged to invoke the human capacity for double-think which, up to a point, reconciles different sources of authority, in this case the divine and the worldly. This capacity is evident at the very highest level in connection with land. Donations of land differ from donations of objects in that land is a finite resource. Reclamation of swamp and desert could increase the supply but, although this last possibility may have been important in early times, by the New Kingdom temple land seems, from its location and quality as recorded in papyri, to have been no different to anyone else's. With a finite resource comes the zero-sum game. One person's or institution's gain is bound to be another's loss. This being the case, how did the kings of the New Kingdom come to have so much to give away? At whose expense were the huge land donations of Papyrus Harris I made?

It is likely that any system of government which endures for very long has a natural ceiling to the share of resources that the state (in ancient Egypt the

combination of religious foundations and the palace) controls before a contrary process of dissolution sets in. Very rough order-of-magnitude calculations have suggested that the temple land-donations of Rameses III amounted to around one-eighth of the arable land available in Ramesside times (Baer 1962, 42 and the figures in Butzer 1976, 63, table 4). People have guessed, and that is all that one can do, that there is a great deal missing in the form of core foundations that belonged to the old temples which are nowhere mentioned in Papyrus Harris I and which Rameses III, therefore, will not have touched. These would have been substantially larger, perhaps by at least twofold (Schaedel 1936, 57). This would take cult ownership of land to nearly forty percent although, under a variety of arrangements, a good part of this would have been leased back to the community at large. The perception that cults owned this kind of share of the country was communicated to Diodorus (Book I, 21, 73) in a myth that one-third of the land of Egypt had been given to the priests by the goddess Isis.

Royal families owned land themselves, a part of it doubtless ancestral since royal lines tended, as far as we can see, to be drawn from families already prominent. Thus most of the vineyards of the Ramesside royal family, which originated in the eastern delta, were concentrated in this region (Kitchen 1992). But the fact that they remained in royal ownership, although supplying part of their vintage to cults, suggests that kings preferred to retain the basis of their original wealth and power and not to give it away as a pious act. One answer to the question, much favoured by Egyptologists, is that kings were the notional owners of everything and gave lavishly to temples as a pious duty. This may be true in an ideological sense but fails to answer the obvious question that follows: why did they then not own everything in a strictly legal sense? The answer is that theology also made kings the upholders of law, and a substantial corpus of legal texts from Egypt deals with private ownership of property of all kinds and its transfer to others. Kings had to work within a legal and social framework which was basically secular. This means that the land which kings gave to temples must have become available primarily through either reallocation or forfeiture, with voluntary donation by individuals a third category, perhaps the smallest.

Forfeiture or sequestration of property in private ownership is rarely documented directly (a Middle Kingdom case is Hayes 1955, 71–85, 128), but is something that we should expect in a country of dynastic politics and bureaucratic intrigue. Fall from

favour and apprehended treachery were dangers that faced senior officials, and several cases from the New Kingdom can be guessed at. Furthermore, the New Kingdom began with victory in a civil war, and it is much to be expected that those who had been prominent amongst the losers would have been penalized, as presumably were those involved in the poorly understood dispute that divided the 19th and 20th Dynasties (including the rebellious vizier in Athribis mentioned in Papyrus Harris I, pl. 59, Breasted 1906, IV, 181, §361).

As a recent study (Spalinger 1991) has highlighted, however, the New Kingdom witnessed several reallocations of temple resources, when kings ordered widespread inspections and revisions of temple property. It is only by seeing Rameses III's huge land 'donations' of Papyrus Harris I as a euphemism for a revision of an existing allocation that the question, 'Where did the land come from?', can be sensibly answered. The New Kingdom was, in its own way, an age of progress in which some of the old was destroyed to make way for the new, temples being no exception. The mortuary temple of Merenptah at western Thebes, for example, was partly built from material taken from an adjacent grandiose construction of Amenhetep III (though not necessarily from his actual mortuary temple), completed 140 years before (Ricke 1981, 18, 105; Jaritz 1992). And whilst some of the lands from the endowment for the cult of Amenhetep III and Queen Tiye maintained their identity to the end of the New Kingdom, they had somewhere along the way been added to the estates of the temple of Mut, and one portion was in the process of being transferred again to an estate of the God's Wife of Amun (Janssen 1991, 44–6). By a process of dissolution, sometimes discrete in the case of land, new acts of piety were paid for from the chest of past acts that had lost their glamour.

At the highest level which set the tenor of religion, piety was not subject to an absolute standard. Kings lived in a real and finite world and their piety had to be adjustable before pragmatic considerations. The rest of society reflected this. For many of the élite and non-élite alike who were involved in farming and who either leased some of the temple lands or actually worked on them, the temple was a landlord like any other, and so they contributed with their own labour or that of their labourers. What little documentation there is on the subject suggests that all concerned with regular temple income, even though they might refer to it as 'offerings', took an entirely prosaic view of its management, and did not see the productive effort as lying within the realm of the sacred. We do not have to guess at the presence

of latent discord in religious attitude, perhaps even hostility towards the larger temples (in other words, towards state religion). This was kept in check by the rewards and punishments by which royal power was exercised. Near the end of the New Kingdom that system was faltering, preceding a breakdown in the unity of the state and a military takeover of the priesthood of the temple of Amun-Ra at Thebes. Written sources now document thefts and misappropriations of temple property and these not only at Thebes (Peet 1924; Peet 1930; Helck 1961–5, [104]; Thomas 1966, 265–73; Caminos 1977; Bierbrier 1982, 104–6), as well as a more determined attack on the royal tombs which, so it has been suggested, culminated in a final requisitioning of what was left of their treasures by the Theban state (Taylor 1992; Aldred 1979 blames much on the retreat of Panehsy's army, but over-simplifies the evidence). Moreover, part of the interest of the late-Ramesside papyri which cover thefts from tombs and temples is their revelation that those involved lived not on the fringes of society but were townspeople and officials.

Lack of respect for temple property and for the treasures of the dead was not new, however. Decrees to safeguard religious foundations from exactions from within the bureaucratic community have a history which extends back to the Old Kingdom (c. 2430 BC). Tomb robbery, which excavators have sometimes felt took place shortly after interment (e.g. Engelbach 1915, 21–2; Mace & Winlock 1916, 9–12; Engelbach 1923, 3), was as old as burial goods themselves and had, in earlier periods, cleaned out the tombs of royalty and the élite with great thoroughness. A model of religion in Egyptian society must accept that the compromised attitude towards the sacred mentioned already in connection with Deir el-Medina was a general element, and probably quite an important one.

Religion and the community in pre-New Kingdom Egypt

The religious beliefs and practices of the New Kingdom were deeply rooted in the past. Beyond the sphere of major state cults, however, a growing body of evidence suggests that in the period before the New Kingdom, elements which appear to be familiar actually lay within a general context of community religion significantly different from that of the New Kingdom. Part of the difference centred on an aspect of Upper Egyptian society whose full significance is still, I believe, not fully appreciated. This is the combined temporal and spiritual prominence of

leaders of local society who often, though not always, bore the title that we conventionally translate as 'nomarch' (Fischer 1977; Franke 1991). They span, at the very least, the five centuries or so between the late Old Kingdom and the early Middle Kingdom (say, 2400–1900 BC). Conventional historical terminology situates within this period two major breaks in continuity, at the end of the Old Kingdom and at the beginning of the Middle Kingdom. In Upper Egypt, however, continuity in style of local governance and in cemetery archaeology outweighs dynastic discontinuities and really deserves its own historical label. Here the term Nomarchy will be used. The significance of the nomarchs is that, whilst accepting the decorum of subservience to divine kingship, they represented an alternative multi-faceted kind of society to the one which Egyptians tended to idealize, one which was built around a strongly centralizing monarchy, an ideal which we are inclined to see as normal for ancient Egypt.

Who many of these nomarchs were and where they were based has long been an object of study, utilizing the written and pictorial evidence from their tombs. The picture that emerges is of twenty or so families dominant at any one time in their territories, spread with roughly even division between Memphis and Elephantine. A few of these families (including at least those from Abydos, Coptos, Thebes, and Elephantine) were at times closely tied by birth and marriage to the reigning king. They intermarried and, when they could get away with it, attempted to enlarge their territories by force. Although it is in the First Intermediate Period that violent territorial disputes are most openly admitted in texts, the ensuing early Middle Kingdom has provided graphic pictures of urban siege warfare within Egypt (Schulman 1982; some scholars are reluctant to take them at their face value).

The locally powerful position of these men was backed by an ethic of moral leadership. In their tomb autobiographies the stress is on their own paternalistic responsibility for the well-being of their local community (Lichtheim 1988; Baines 1987, 91). Some achieved quasi-divine status and became the focus of local cults. The nomarch of Edfu, Isi, was one such, who became Isi 'the living god'. His tomb just outside the city walls became the focus of a cult which lasted to the end of the Middle Kingdom, six centuries after his death (Alliot 1935; Alliot 1937–8). At Elephantine the cult of a 6th-Dynasty governor, Hekaib, was developed during the Middle Kingdom at a shrine described as his 'soul mansion' (Fig. 6; Habachi 1985; the significance of this term I will

return to shortly). It lay within the tightly packed little town, at the end of a narrow street of houses (Kaiser *et al.* 1990, 200), and in its final stage was a mass of brick cells opening on to interconnecting spaces, the whole measuring only some 18 × 14 metres. Each cell had been lined with stone, a few stood behind a stone portico, and each contained one or more statues. Hekaib's own shrine was one of the smallest but was focally placed with a large offering-table in front. Despite its size, it did not lack status; for the statues of several kings were added to the cult images over the next two centuries, exemplifying the practice that one popular statue-cult could attract another and could lead to a series of cults nested within the host shrine. (The converse of the Hekaib shrine is the mortuary temple of Senusret II at Kahun which housed statues not only of the founding king but of later kings, royal women, and private individuals, amongst them a mayor and a city officer: Kaplony-Heckel 1971, especially nos. 311 and 421.) The modesty of Hekaib's shrine is consistent not only with the small scale of the ancient town of Elephantine but also with the nearby contemporary shrine dedicated to the local goddess Satis (12.10 × 8.20 m in the 12th Dynasty: Fig. 6; Kaiser *et al.* 1993, 145–52). Although this latter building had employed more carved stonework, as reconstructed it was intended for only a single image. This implies that it was the Hekaib 'soul mansion' and its resident cults of kings and commoners which attracted the greater local interest. At this time Elephantine had probably also possessed a third shrine, to the god Khnum, but an assessment of the evidence by the current excavators sees it also as a very small building (Kaiser *et al.* 1993, 152–4).

A recent discovery at the Dakhla Oasis (at the site of Ayn Asil) has provided important evidence how such private cults originated. For perhaps 250 years, roughly the span of the 6th Dynasty, the Egyptians maintained a colony in this distant region (Giddy 1987, Part III; Valloggia 1986; Soukiassian *et al.* 1990; our Fig. 4). Its centre was a fortified town, and that it provided a permanent base for its occupants is revealed by its cemetery which developed on open ground about one kilometre away. Here, in large brick tombs with imposing superstructures, the colony's governors were buried in style. Heavy investment of resources in the local cemetery, of which this is a good example, is a characteristic feature of the times. One of the gateways in the town wall led almost immediately to an oblong space, along one side of which opened three chapels lying side by side, each with a columned portico. In one was found a stone copy of its foundation decree:

issued by the king (Pepi II) it established a 'soul mansion' for one of the governors (Goedicke 1989). The chapels would thus appear to have been for the cults of the governors themselves. As yet no sign has been found within the town of a temple to a local divinity, nor does the name of one appear to be recorded for this period.

'Soul mansions' (a fairly literal translation of the Egyptian name; *ka*-chapels is another: Kaplony 1980) were also created by kings during the same period. Both Pepi I and Teti built one each at Tell Basta for themselves (Fig. 6; Habachi 1957; El-Sawi 1979, 75–6), and they were substantial buildings though mostly of mud brick. Their impressiveness lay mainly in their enclosure walls. That around the Pepi I temple was five metres thick, and measured 89 × 63 metres, whilst the chapel itself, at 15.50 × 17 metres, occupied only one twentieth of the area. Comparable excavated brick temples from the Delta of the Middle Kingdom have also been identified as possible royal 'soul mansions' (Eigner 1992, 77).

'Soul mansions' were not, however, the only setting for statue cults of provincial leaders (and of kings, too). In some places the preference was to find a home in the temple of the local town. How this might work was documented in some detail by the man Hapdjefa who was both mayor of the city of Assiut and the officer in charge of the priests of the local temple of the god Wepwawet (Reisner 1918; Spalinger 1985). During his lifetime (in the early 12th Dynasty, c. 1950 BC) he established a mortuary cult for himself and had a copy of the ten legal contracts which underpinned it actually carved on the walls of his tomb. They inform us that, on the occasion of the regular temple festivals, various members of the priesthood, as well as some of the necropolis staff, offered food and lit lamps for Hapdjefa's benefit, and included him in the religious ceremonies. The focus of the cult was a portable statue of Hapdjefa and possibly other fixed ones as well, and the ceremonies took place in the temple of Wepwawet itself, as well as in the vicinity of Hapdjefa's tomb. It is hard to see in what way the cult of Hapdjefa differed from that of a local god. The fact that he had a portable image that was carried to the Wepwawet temple on seasonal festivals is particularly revealing, for portable images of divinities played an important part in Egyptian temple ritual. Several times Hapdjefa emphasizes that what he is asking is only what was normal for senior local figures. The ceremonies of the local temple thus pulled into the divine orbit the male leaders of the local community.

Hapdjefa paid the priests and others who were

to maintain his cult through a complicated set of manoeuvres involving gifts of land and crops (first-fruits of the harvest) and entitlements to consume temple offerings. The key to an understanding of this lies in the fact that, as a priest himself (and son of priest), he had temple entitlements to bestow on others. As he reaffirms each time this aspect is mentioned, his share of temple revenue is part of his inherited estate. Thus, although in documents the exact legal position was kept clear, in practice the intertwining of the economies of the temple and of the local community leader mirrored the merging of

their statue cults. From this position an increase in temple revenue augmented the resources at his disposal. More than once Hapdjefa claims that he was the first to oblige his peasants (or tenant farmers) to pay a harvest tax to the temple, as he himself did from the first-fruits of the estate that went with the office of mayor. Was this, one wonders, a significant innovation locally in the direction of institutionalizing a cult which hitherto had relied more on spontaneous donation from the catchment population? By this act Hapdjefa added to the pool of special wealth that he, in his role of chief priest, administered and

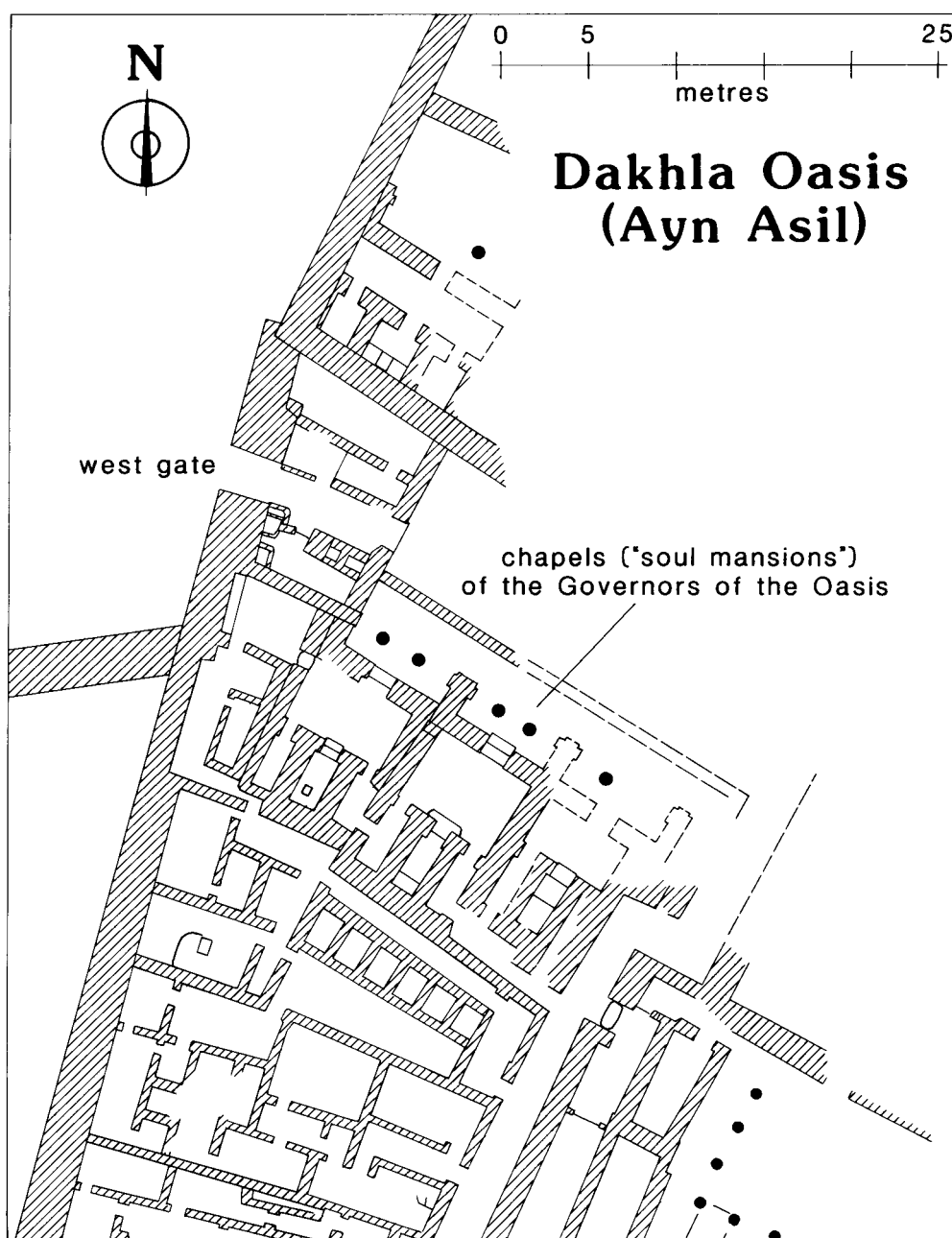


Figure 4. Plan of the sector of the Old Kingdom town at Dakhla Oasis (Ayn Asil) where the 'soul mansions' of the governors were located. (After Soukiassian et al. 1990, 351, fig. 2.)

could redirect as acts of patronage which could enhance his own cult.

Hapdjefa's cult was under the authority of a 'soul priest', but nowhere in his contracts does he mention the existence of a 'soul mansion'. Perhaps this means that leading figures had a choice as to whether they established their statue cult in the local temple or had a special building constructed, probably in the close vicinity. (In the case of the nomarch Isi, it remained his tomb beside the town walls.)

There is much here that is similar to the New Kingdom donation text of Amenhetep-Huy at Memphis mentioned above, but there is also a major difference, in the impression that Hapdjefa gives of donation and patronage that is direct and not mediated through the king. A fine illustration of just how far local leaders could take their ambitions for a statue cult of themselves is provided by a well-known scene in the tomb at El-Bersheh of the Middle Kingdom nomarch and chief priest of Hermopolis, Djehuty-hetep (Newberry 1895, 16–26, pls. XII–XIX; Baines 1990, 9). It shows lines of men dragging from the quarries a statue of alabaster, which is stated to be 6.8 metres high and can only be of Djehuty-hetep himself. The accompanying texts imply that its destination was his home city of Hermopolis and a building (or portal) actually named after him, perhaps part of his 'lower [chapel]' in the city (Baines 1987, 88). The texts celebrate his own authority and munificence, and his control of an extensive militia. Architectural grandeur for these men reached its height in the 12th Dynasty at Qau in Middle Egypt where the tombs of the local mayors were huge processional structures complete with causeways and valley temples modelled on those at royal pyramid sites (Fig. 6). The tomb of one of them, Ibu, had possessed at least six life-sized male statues and one larger than life (Steckeweh 1936, 25). It is reasonable to consider that they were the focus of a major local cult in what could have been the grandest set of religious buildings in the area.

These cults help to explain how the power of the Nomarchy remained so entrenched for such a long time. They also provide a commentary on the process of state formation itself. This was not something which operated just once and in special conditions to create the ancient Egyptian state at the beginning of the dynastic period and then went away. The process was active primarily at the level of the local community and, once it had reached critical mass in the late predynastic period, remained active for centuries afterwards. The Egyptian state was, for a long time, the result of only partial containment of

the forces of state formation. It is true that, for a period that was probably less than a century in duration, one line of kings (the 4th Dynasty) appears to have come close to realizing the ideal of divine kingship on earth, made total subservience a reality, and was able so to dominate the country as to extract the vast labour needed for the sequence of five colossal pyramids that began at Medum and ended at Giza (and to earn, in the process, the disapproval of later generations of Egyptians: Trigger *et al.* 1983, 77). But otherwise, for long periods, kings seem to have shared power with other leading families, even though decorum made royal power appear to be absolute. This sharing of power extended to the realm of cult in a significant way.

Shrine size and cult status

Pre-New Kingdom shrines often seem to represent a level of patronage that was far from grand. This has turned out to be a contentious subject. In a previous review of some of the evidence (Kemp 1989, 65–83) I cited certain of the local temples in Upper Egypt as evidence for the slow and fitful way by which local traditions, expressed through cult which seems to have attracted only modest resources, moved towards the formalized homogeneous culture that is our dominant modern perception of ancient Egypt. The known 'early' shrines are small, diverse in form, sometimes using a rounded structure as a basis and sometimes having an informal arrangement of walls. Some of them, at least, also attracted a more varied range of votive offerings than, for example, has been found in the New Kingdom Hathor shrines, and probably represented a wider section of society. To the examples I cited then I would now add a further one, within the Middle Kingdom fortress at Buhen, where the earliest in a series of shrines of increasing formality must date no later than the early Middle Kingdom (Fig. 5, no. 1). In that architecture is a powerful means of symbolizing abstract concepts about the world, the evident variety of form implies that, away from the capital, diversity in an important area of culture persisted for a long time in the Nile Valley (a thousand years separates the 1st Dynasty from the early Middle Kingdom).

An alternative interpretation of the evidence has now been put forward by O'Connor (1992; *cf.* Roth 1993). One part of it is that, small and greatly varied though these early shrines were, they can in no case be proved to have been the main temple at each of the sites in question. By this view, some were popular little shrines outside the mainstream of

temple development. Others were 'soul mansions' for statues and likewise peripheral to the main temple which, in each of the fairly small number of sites in question, has not yet been excavated.² That there is scope at all for arguments over something as fundamental as what an Egyptian temple looked like prior to the New Kingdom is a sign of how limited our knowledge is of earlier periods. At one level the arguments revolve around technicalities of interpretation at individual sites where sometimes the key excavation was done a long time ago and inconclusiveness is virtually guaranteed. O'Connor's paper does, however, raise two more general questions of interpretation.

One question concerns his appeal to a kind of uniformitarianism in the relationship between the scale and status of religious buildings (Fig. 6). Because large and monumental temples are a conspicuous feature of ancient Egypt, we should, so the reasoning goes, be suspicious of evidence which indicates otherwise in particular cases. Thus O'Connor rejects Petrie's identification of the remains of the New Kingdom temple at Abydos as the actual temple of Osiris on the grounds that it is 'inconceivable' that the Egyptian would not have built a much bigger one. The area of ground covered (c. 40 × 40 m) is, however, within the range of 18th-Dynasty temples even at sites of major cults, such as Coptos. There the foundations of the 18th-Dynasty temple to Min, a god of great prominence in the Egyptian pantheon, was around 30 × 40 m (Petrie 1896, pl. I), whilst at Nagada the stone foundations of the New Kingdom temple to Seth, a god given considerable attention in the 19th Dynasty, covered only 17 × 30 m (Petrie & Quibell 1896, pl. LXXXV). The move to gigantism in temples (outside a few major cities) came with the 19th Dynasty, and Abydos benefited with the great new foundation of Sety I. This, as we know from its texts, was as richly endowed as it was magnificently built, albeit on entirely fresh ground away from the old site (incidentally reversing the relationship between peripheral position and relative size). A related assumption is that, prior to the New Kingdom, temples to ancient deities would automatically have outranked in size and local attention temples to statue cults of kings and local leaders; whereas the evidence can be read with equal validity — I would consider more convincingly — as pointing to a more varied pattern of ranking which has something important to tell us about contemporary attitudes to the divine.

The other question concerns the relationship between building form and function. Some of these shrines have a degree of similarity in plan. One of

them (Tell Basta, Fig. 6) is identified by a text as a 'soul mansion', and it follows, in O'Connor's view, that this is what they all are. The argument thus implies that the form of a 'soul mansion' was specific to its function. There is no good reason for thinking this, however. As far as we can tell, the special character of 'soul mansions' lay not in the basic nature of the cult but probably in some nuance in the way that they were founded. All that comparison with the Tell Basta example does is to show that some late Old Kingdom/early Middle Kingdom temples, whether to a local deity or to the statue cult of a king or local leader, possessed a degree of comparability of layout which arose from the fact that the cult of their statues was a standard one.

The far-from-ambitious level of investment in the building of local shrines is evident from other settlement sites where significant areas have been uncovered. The principal example of Middle Kingdom urbanism is Kahun. It was built alongside a large stone temple for the cult of king Senusret II not far from his pyramid, but the town was not without cults of its own. Papyri mention a priesthood of the star-god Sepdu Lord of the East, and an unusual half-life-sized torso of a naked girl, unfortunately not from a specifically-identified building, has been seen as a possible fertility-cult figure, presumably from a shrine (Bourriau 1988, 123–4, no. 116). Across the 64,000 square metres of excavated buildings, one set of brick rooms with a tripartite arrangement and measuring c. 20 × 15 metres might just qualify as a shrine (Kemp 1972a, 662), but this is all.

A major source for ancient Egyptian urbanism comes actually from Nubia, the stretch of the Nile Valley south of Aswan and Elephantine. Its reconquest early in the New Kingdom (around 1560 BC) gave back to the Egyptians the fortresses and fortified settlements which they had built during the Middle Kingdom, together with control of a stretch of the Nile Valley further south. They then worked to create in Nubia a society which mirrored their own, one of peasants and administrators, of towns and temples. These last fully exemplify in their architecture the common features of New Kingdom temples and cover a huge range in size, from the tiny Hathor shrines to the colossal architecture of Soleb and Abu Simbel. Just as New Kingdom Nubia reflects, in an admittedly restricted way, the parent Egyptian society, so there should be something of interest to learn about Middle Kingdom Egypt, too; not least because some Middle Kingdom fortresses remained far better preserved to modern times than any settlements in Egypt of the same date.

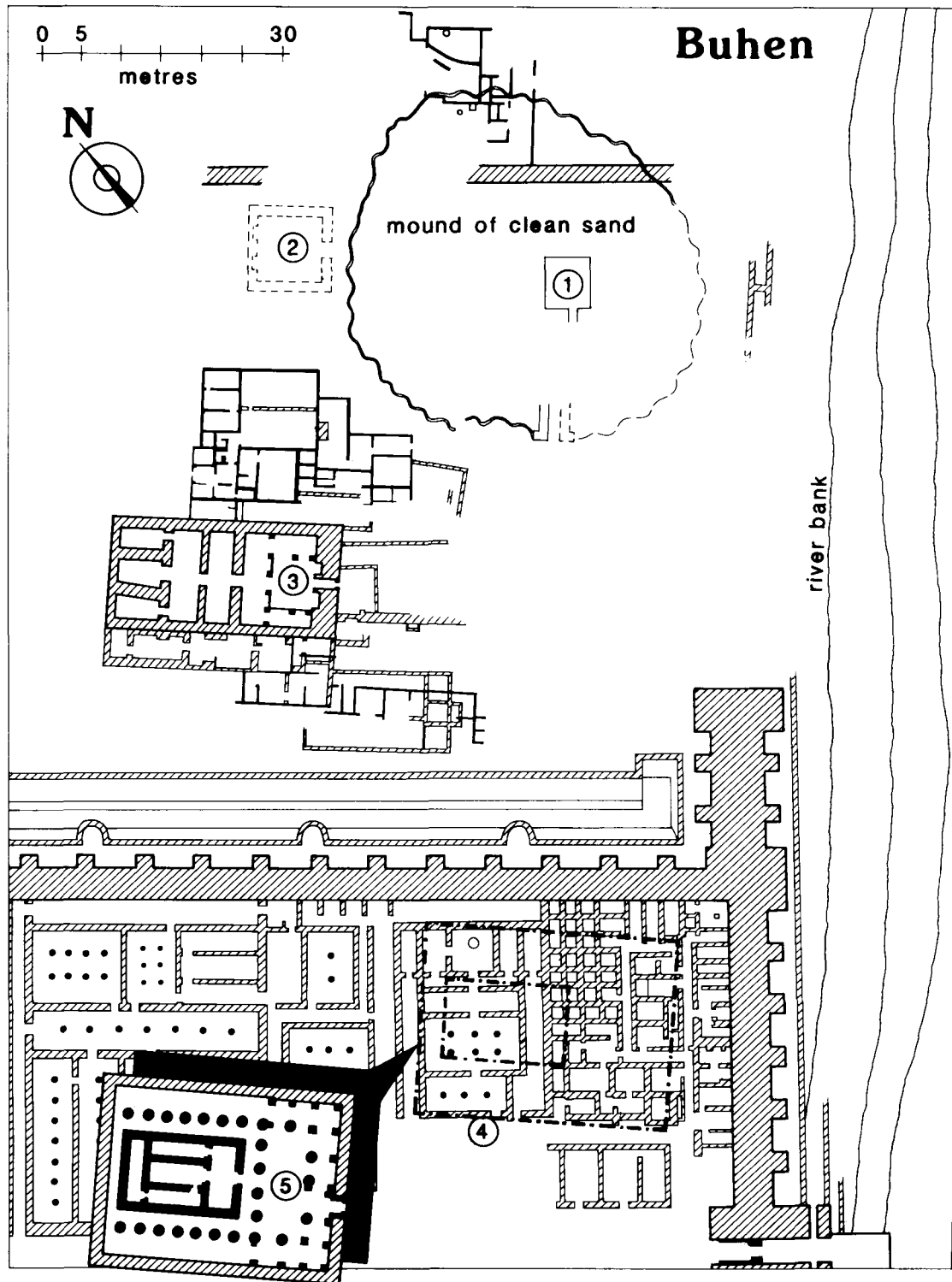


Figure 5. Plan of the temples at Buhen. (After Randall-Maciver & Woolley 1911, plan G; Emery et al. 1979, pl. 14; Rosellini 1844, no. i.) (1) Early Horus shrine (?) on artificial sand mound, perhaps copying the primitive temple at Hierakonpolis, date uncertain but presumably early Middle Kingdom; (2) 'Rosellini' shrine of stone, position approximate, date unknown (late ?); (3) temple of Amenhetep II (c. 1420 BC), possibly over the site of an earlier temple; (4) brick building of the early 12th Dynasty (c. 1950 BC), claimed by some to be a shrine; (5) temple of Horus Lord of Buhen of Tuthmosis III (c. 1470 BC) built over it.

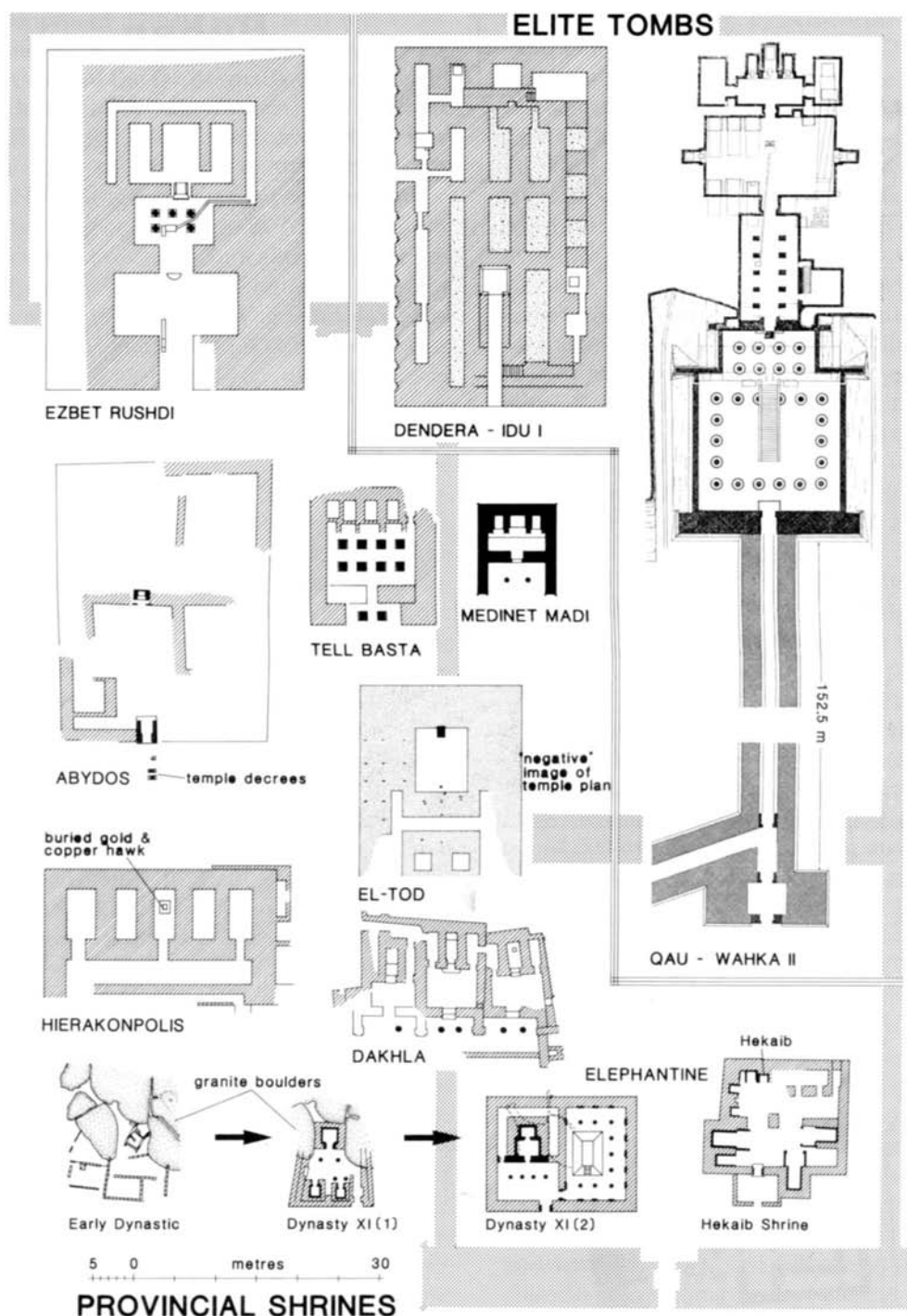


Figure 6. Provincial priorities in religion prior to the New Kingdom. A range of urban shrines (mostly built in an early formal style) is illustrated from the Old and Middle Kingdoms and also (top right) two tombs of nomarchs and town governors of the same period. All are drawn to the same scale. The modest use of carved stone is notable. Mud-brick is hatched, stone rendered as solid black, the mud level at el-Tod is stippled. As a background, the outline of the New-Kingdom temple of Seti I at Abydos (an L-shaped building) has also been included, to show how a truly monumental stone building compared in size. (After Adam 1959, pl. II; Habachi 1957, plan; Petrie 1903, pl. LIII; Bisson de la Roque 1937, pl. II, and cf. Arnold 1975; Naumann 1939, Abb. 1; Quibell & Green 1902, pl. LXXII; Soukiassian et al. 1990, fig. 2; Kaiser et al. 1993, 149; Habachi 1985, plan 4; Petrie 1900, pl. XXIX; Steckeweh 1936, Plan VI.)

Eleven of the carefully laid-out forts or fortified towns have been excavated, not always, it has to be admitted, with complete recovery of plan. As at Kahun, it is very difficult to single out individual parts and, either from their plan or associated finds, be reasonably sure that they were shrines. An exceptional case is Buhen, where it is known from inscriptions that a cult of 'Horus, Lord of Buhen' existed continuously from at least the early 12th Dynasty through to the end of the New Kingdom — even during the Second Intermediate Period, when the fortress was no longer in Egyptian hands (Smith 1976, 76–8 reviews the evidence). The locations of what are probably four religious buildings can be identified by piecing together the results of several surveys and excavations (Fig. 5). The most interesting of them consisted of a platform of sand of an irregular but rounded shape within a revetment made from a serpentine wall one brick thick, mud plastered on the outside only. It had been given a conspicuous entrance, presumably ramped, between two brick piers. On the top of the platform was a single brick chamber measuring about 6.25 m square, its doorway facing and in line with the entrance. The brevity of information given in the old excavation report (Randall-Maciver & Woolley 1911, 123–4, plan G; Emery *et al.* 1979, 87) leaves many questions unanswered, but I would suggest that this building was the initial temple for Horus, Lord of Buhen, modelled on the temple mound for the Horus cult at Hierakonpolis which could well have survived to the early Middle Kingdom. The mounds, at c. 42.5 and 46 metres across the local east–west axis respectively, were very similar in size. The design of this building, dictated by tradition, is in stark contrast to the strict geometry of the layout of the citadel and this perhaps explains why it was built outside. One part of the citadel, which lay beneath the New Kingdom stone temple, has also been identified as a shrine (Fig. 5, no. 4), but the lack of finds indicative of cult, as well as evidence for abandonment in the Second Intermediate Period (when we know from texts that the cult was active) cast doubt over the identification.

The fact that the early temple at Buhen lay outside the walls of the fortress, as it was first built, raises the possibility that extra-mural shrines have been missed at other sites. It remains true, nonetheless, that the carefully planned model communities that were quite a feature of Middle Kingdom society seem to have contained scant provision for cult. How the Egyptians behaved in Nubia was much affected by the nature of their home society. As the New Kingdom progressed it became unthinkable to have

major and even minor settlements without readily identifiable temples and institutionalized cult. In the Middle Kingdom (and earlier) this was not so. The reason I would suggest is that outside a few major centres, temple cult for divinities did not yet have the high profile, reflected in scale and formality of building design, that it was rapidly to develop thereafter. I find the archaeological evidence reasonably consistent on this point.

If most Egyptians' experience of religious cult prior to the New Kingdom was on quite a modest scale and was often associated with a homely mud-brick setting, this need not imply diminished personal significance. The cues for intensity of experience are only partially grounded in scale. The range of evidence from the New Kingdom illustrates this clearly enough. The modest scale of local cult in earlier periods might mean that it was close to the community; but then one might expect to find evidence for the involvement of humbler people (as at New Kingdom Hathor shrines).

At some urban shrines important groups of votive objects have actually been found, belonging to the Early Dynastic Period and part of the Old Kingdom (Dreyer 1986; Kemp 1989, 65–74). Allowing for changes in style, some similarity can be found with those from New Kingdom Hathor shrines. Figurines of women, as well as of children, are present and even, in the Elephantine group, curiously-shaped but natural stones. There are, however, many more kinds of figures and models together with items which are not cheap tokens but represent a very high level of artistic skill (the Narmer Palette being the most famous). Significantly, these are absent from the group which comes from the lesser cult centre, that at Elephantine. We might see in this material a 'normal' evolution of community religion which drew votive offerings from the élite and from the non-élite alike. One can imagine it standing at the beginning of a long evolution into which the New Kingdom votives fitted as part of a continuum. That did not happen, however. Moreover, although some of the votive material runs on well into the Old Kingdom, there is a general feeling that the best is early, spanning the late Predynastic and Early-Dynastic periods only. Henceforth, with few exceptions, local shrines and temples drew in as spontaneous donations of votive currency only objects made in the formal canonical style of court art and generally affordable only by the élite.

As the use of votive tokens faded away or was marginalized, statue cults of kings and of the élite colonized local shrines. Did these perhaps attract

piety? How did people who had no material benefit to gain react to a cult of the local lord? It is as well to recall that at Assiut, according to Hapdjefa's texts (mentioned above), local farmers were forced, from the first-fruits of their harvest, to donate to the local temple, in which the local mayor (Hapdjefa, a major landowner) had a cult of himself.

The sources give no hint that these statue cults were other than the standard ritualized movements of commodities derived from sources dedicated to this purpose. The period of the Nomarchy, however, is also the one from which come the majority of examples of a kind of text known as 'Letters to the Dead'. These are little written petitions left at tombs which were based on a belief that the dead had an influence over the living, for good and for ill, and could be persuaded to act (Gardiner & Sethe 1928; Parkinson 1991, 142–5). In the cult of the deceased nomarch Isi, 'the living god', at Edfu people from the city left little stelae in the entrance passageways to his tomb. They promise Isi food-offerings but do not say what they expected in return. The frame of mind demonstrated by the 'Letters to the Dead' makes one wonder if people (some of his descendants, perhaps?) approached Isi hoping for specific help rather than a general blessing, an attitude which recurs at Deir el-Medina in the late New Kingdom in the personal petitions to the deceased king Amenhetep I. Baines (1987, 86–7) has pointed out that written form seems unnecessary to these communications and wonders if these letters are 'the literate tip of a non-literate iceberg?' It is, in this respect, very significant that one 13th-Dynasty text from the Hekaib shrine (Habachi 1985, 78–9) adds to Hekaib's name the epithet 'who hears prayer', an early example of the more widespread New Kingdom emphasis on personal aural communication with a god (Pinch 1993, 250–53). It is, however, impossible to gauge how widespread such a practice might have been. The Hekaib shrine, for example, despite its good state of preservation, produced only very formal statues and stelae of people who were mostly senior officials and this is true for the majority of shrines of all kinds between a time somewhere in the Old Kingdom and the New Kingdom.

The period of the Nomarchy, however, also witnessed the development of a cult which had widespread popularity and was free from connections with local politics. This was the cult of Osiris at Abydos. Its promise of eternal life gave to all, nomarchs and commoners, a fixed point of hope independent of local cults. Its popularity could be seen as a reaction to the stranglehold on local cult by

the leading families. It also reveals that a proportion of the non-élite had an active interest in a cult which was part of the theology of the state. Of its costs the one that was emphasized was pilgrimage to Abydos (Lichtheim 1988, chapter V). This seems to have been a once-in-a-lifetime act for which local shrines offered no means of regular local reinforcement. Many undertook the pilgrimage and left a permanent memorial at Abydos in the form of a votive tablet in a personal shrine (O'Connor 1985). Whether other costs could be incurred, for example, gifts to pay for a regular offering-cult, is not clear. It has been pointed out that 'Several thousand stelae erected at Abydos in the course of three centuries do not add up to a mass movement' (Lichtheim 1988, 134). This is a fair comment but should not disguise the wide appeal that the cult had. Some of the stelae were tiny and crude and, in listing personal names without titles, indicate donors who were not of the administrative class (O'Connor 1969, 33; O'Connor 1985, 175–7; Bourriau 1988, 52–3, no. 41).³

Excavations early this century and in recent years have uncovered parts of the Middle Kingdom ritual zone at Abydos which was the destination of the pilgrimage, a key part being the cenotaphs just mentioned (Kemp and Merrillees 1980, 106, 287–9; Leahy 1989). The evidence, although fragmentary, is characterized by modesty of scale and materials. It matches much of the other pre-New Kingdom evidence reviewed above, and illustrates again that scale is not necessarily a correlate of piety.

The pull of funerary religion

Attention and resources intended for a spiritual return were directed not only towards local cult but also towards funerary religion. The strength of this alternative (or sometimes parallel) focus is of great importance for understanding the role of religion in ancient Egypt.

In the New Kingdom an élite burial style is visible to which even the contents of Tutankhamun's tomb belong (Smith 1992), although Tutankhamun had more items, and many of them were made more expensively. Tutankhamun had also fared relatively well with food-offerings although they still represent a very modest element of the tomb's wealth. They included thirty pottery wine amphorae, considerably more than non-royal élite burials could muster (Smith 1992, 211). Food-offerings in the tomb were, however, only tokens of the regular supply provided by the institutionalized offering-cult which, in Tutankhamun's case, was planned to be at a large

personal mortuary temple. It is easy to demonstrate that Tutankhamun's burial (and, by implication, certain aspects of the royal style of living) was the outcome of a tradition that was more than a thousand years old. Another makeshift tomb prepared in unusual circumstances (and, like Tutankhamun's, subsequently buried under builders' debris and forgotten) preserved to modern times the burial goods, though not the actual body, of the mother of King Khufu, Queen Hetep-heres (c. 2550 BC; Reisner & Smith 1955; Lehner 1985). It contained far fewer items than Tutankhamun's tomb, and all belonged to the realm of daily life. The main pieces are items of furniture made in wood and covered with gold sheeting, sometimes with inlays (a bed canopy, bed, two armchairs/thrones, a carrying-chair, and three boxes). Provisioning, real or imagined (organic materials in the tomb had largely perished), was represented by a more extensive collection of pottery vessels (228 plus 53 models), although amongst them were only eleven examples of the Old Kingdom equivalent of the wine amphora. Allowing for changes in style (chairs replacing carrying-chairs, for example), one could claim that Tutankhamun's tomb is the New Kingdom equivalent of Hetep-heres, with the significant addition of a new genre of equipment, that specifically for funerary religion (principally shrines and statues).

The point of this comparison lies in the contrast which both of these burials make when set against an even earlier style of elite burial in Egypt, that of the 1st to 3rd Dynasties. Although invariably robbed, the burial chambers of some of these early tombs retained fragments of a rich and varied burial equipment in which one can distinguish a core of mundane (if expensive) furnishings as well as provisions. A rare clue to the possibly lavish use of gold sheeting survived in Saqqara tomb 3504, of the time of the 1st-Dynasty king Djet (c. 3000 BC), where the pilasters on the walls of the burial chamber had been panelled with wood decorated with strips of embossed gold set at one-centimetre intervals (Emery 1954, 10–11; 1961, 134, 190). What principally distinguishes these burials (apart from the tomb architecture) is the presence of storage rooms (magazines) intended to hold (in the words of their principal excavator) 'vast quantities of meat, bread, and wine' (Emery 1961, 145; cf. Engelbach 1946, 205; our Fig. 7), provisions on a scale far greater than that of later times. Thus tomb 3504 contained at least 1700 pottery vessels (excluding those in subsidiary graves), of which roughly half (871) were large wine jars (Emery 1954). To these should be added an abun-

dance of stone vessels, a feature of Early-Dynastic culture which must have been a part-substitute for pottery. Saqqara tomb 3035 (Hemaka), for example, produced fragments from a claimed 384 stone vessels, primarily shallow bowls, flat circular tables, and cylindrical jars used for storing certain kinds of food (Emery & Saad 1938).

The Saqqara tombs, whilst they supply the clearest evidence, belonged to courtiers and not to kings. The tombs of the early kings at Abydos and Saqqara have suffered intense disturbance in both ancient and modern times and it is now very difficult to form a quantitative picture of burial goods. Some assistance, however, is provided by the architecture which offered a storage capacity for burial goods growing, in the 2nd and 3rd Dynasties, into underground labyrinths of galleries and magazines. In the case of the Step Pyramid, the volume of stone vessels so overwhelmed the excavators that they referred to them by tons (Firth & Quibell 1935, 130, and n. 1). Even so, most of the underground magazines of this tomb seem to have been left unfinished, which perhaps explains the general dearth of pottery that was remarked on at the time (Firth & Quibell 1935, 13). Part of a single long magazine built into the masonry of the South Tomb had, however, survived intact. This had contained 'hundreds of pottery vessels' (Firth 1927, 110), mostly large wine jars (Firth & Quibell 1935, 133, pl. 102), as well as the remains of a long box, a bier, and poles from a canopy, all of wood and originally sheathed in gold foil, and compared at the time with the furniture from the tomb of Queen Hetep-heres.

A significant change in burial style, essentially reductionist in terms of burial goods, thus occurred between the 3rd and the 4th Dynasty (the time of Hetep-heres) and this was accompanied by a transformation of funerary architecture which was perhaps not coincidental (cf. Roth 1993). The new style first appears at Medum, a royal necropolis from the 3rd/4th-Dynasty transition. The surrounding architecture and the internal chambers of the king's pyramid have been reduced to a striking level of austerity and simplicity. Nothing survived of the burial equipment, but there was simply insufficient room for anything other than token samples of commodities. Near the pyramid is a line of tombs for the most senior courtiers. Again the large size of their superstructures conceals a modesty of internal space, but the decorated wall surfaces of their chapels now portray the artistic themes that were to remain standard for centuries to come. The most important are lines of bearers bringing food-offerings to the deceased,

accompanied by hieroglyphic labels which give the names of funerary estates (Fig. 7). With them we encounter for the first time the practice which becomes so familiar, the donation of land to create a foundation whose owner was not a living person (Petrie 1892, pls. XI, XII, XV, XIX, XXI). No original decoration from the Medum pyramid itself has survived; it may have been left unfinished in this respect. The next pyramid to be completed, however, that of King Sneferu at Dahshur, contains in one of its temples the most complete list of funerary estates to have survived from the Old Kingdom (Fakhry 1961). They show that Sneferu's mortuary cult owned estates in every provincial district of Upper Egypt and quite likely in Lower Egypt as well (although the latter list is very fragmentary).

It is very tempting to fuse the two lines of evidence into a single explanation: that the establishment of funerary estates which provided 'offerings' for the deceased replaced the attempt to pack around the tomb commodities on a scale commensurate with the power to consume which the tomb owner had enjoyed in life. It is true that there is some textual evidence for cults and mortuary estates in the names of kings of the 2nd and 3rd Dynasties, but these could well be pious retrospective creations of the early 4th Dynasty (Wildung 1969, 55; Helck 1982, 591, n. 1; Roth 1993, 53). I am not talking about the origin of placing food-offerings for the dead at the tomb, or even of doing this in front of a statue of the deceased. These were customs already long established.⁴ What is at issue is at what period the wish to provide dead leaders of society with a respectable measure of wealth was translated into landed institutions with a yield probably far in excess of that required for offerings brought to the tomb.

The link between property and mortuary archaeology has been raised before by others, including in the pages of this *Journal* (Morris 1991), although not in quite this form. Discretely-bounded cemeteries, so the argument runs, might have marked societies in which ownership or control of resources (principally land) is through inheritance from others now dead. In the clearly locatable tombs of those dead ancestors the living heirs can find demonstrable proof of descent. Much of the discussion, though by no means all of it, has been set in prehistoric societies and has concerned the transition from those of an egalitarian tribal kind to those where a significant share of resources is controlled by only a few families (Goldstein 1981, 59–61). The Egyptian evidence relevant to this transition belongs to the early predynastic period, far earlier than the periods con-

sidered in this article (Anderson 1992 is a recent treatment of the Badarian evidence from Egypt). Our periods are set much further along the road of social complexity. The link between tomb and land becomes quite explicit after the end of the 3rd Dynasty with the appearance of funerary estates, but this represents a bifurcation in the manner of ownership. Along the older single track land is inheritable across the generations from leading ancestors who not only lie buried in conspicuous tombs but are the focus of an offering-cult by a representative of the heirs. Along the new track land remains the actual property of the deceased, heirs enjoying only the income. Although the latter represents a kind of subversion of the normal path of inheritance the estate is protected by virtue of its sacred status.

In the New Kingdom, foundations which supported temples to deities represented a significant element in the country's economy and seem greatly to have overshadowed those which supported mortuary cults. (If the case of Amenhotep-Huy cited above was typical for the élite, mortuary cults were under local temple administration anyway.) It is a matter of considerable consequence for how we view earlier periods as to whether we see the same balance present or not. Was what I have just suggested for the Old Kingdom an extension to mortuary religion of a practice already in existence for the benefit of local shrines and temples, or did the development go in the other direction?

From the latter part of the Old Kingdom written records confirm that temples possessed resources which were, according to decrees of immunity and protection, worth misappropriating. Entries on the Palermo Stone detail gifts of land and food-offerings to named cults over a period of some forty years from c. 2470 BC (Shepseskaf to Neferirkara: Schäfer 1902). The written evidence, however, is insufficient to provide a proper evaluative basis. On the assumption that ancient piety saw some relationship between fine buildings and generous support, a far better guide is the simple fact of the immensity of effort which, in the Old Kingdom, was directed to the court necropolis and its central feature, the king's pyramid (and, in the 5th Dynasty, the associated sun temple). All the evidence that we have renders it highly unlikely that comparable building works were undertaken for the shrines and temples of local divinities. Furthermore, the court cemetery set the example for the rest of the country, where the provincial nobility and their followers expended considerable effort on their own fine tombs in large cemeteries (Fig. 6). The grandiose funerary architecture was, we

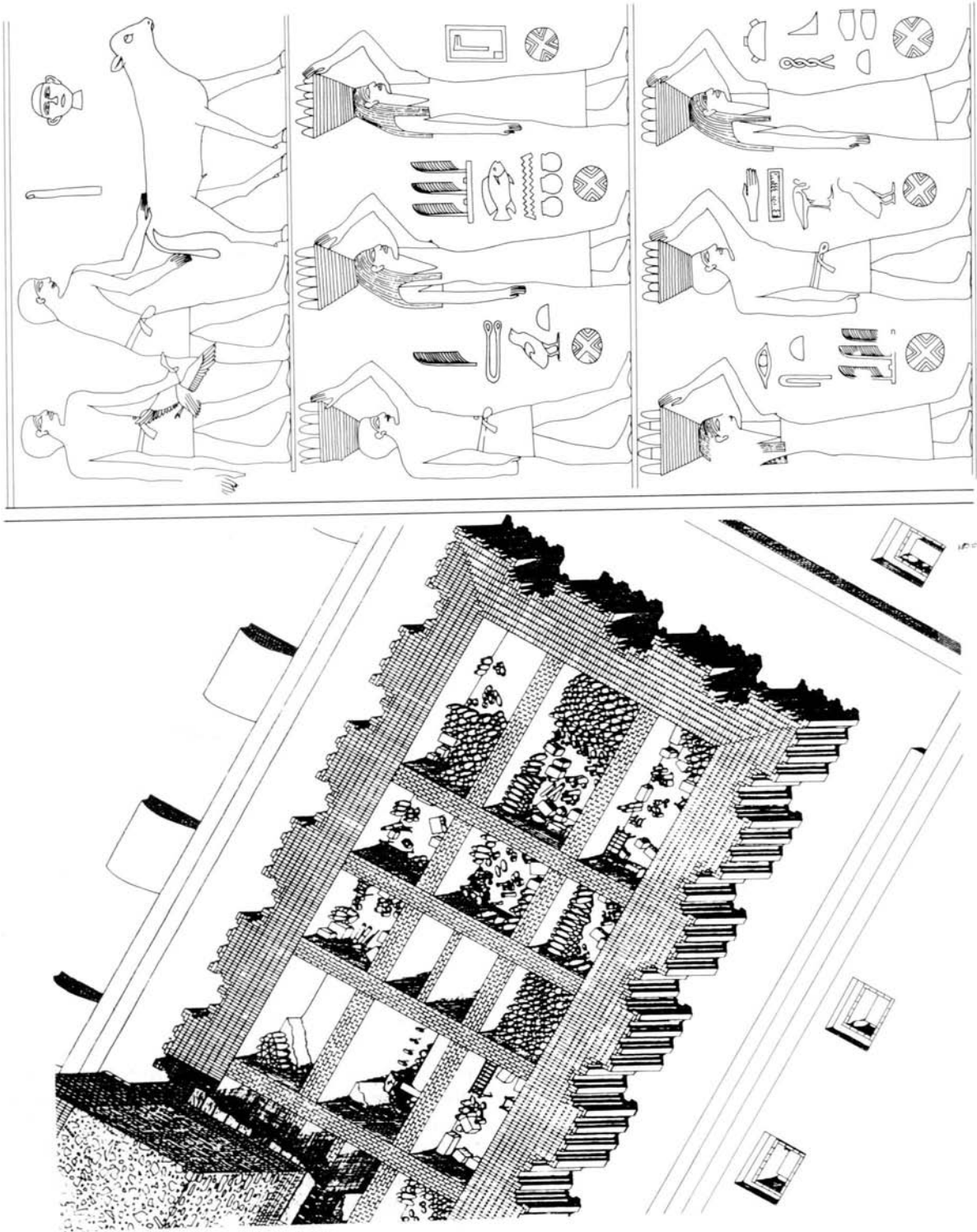


Figure 7. Two kinds of provision for the dead: (left) large-scale burial of commodities in a 1st-Dynasty tomb at Saqqara. (After Emery 1954, pl. XXXIX.); (right) scene of offerings brought to the tomb from personified estates which supply a perpetual offering-cult. (After Petrie 1892, pl. XI.)

know, matched by landed foundations to support the perpetual cult of the owner, whether royal or noble, the combination creating that highly distinctive feature of ancient Egyptian society, the sacralization of self. The implication is that, in every generation, the local cemetery would have attracted expenditure of resources easily equivalent to rebuilding and endowing the local temple. Personal dignity and provision for the afterlife outranked piety. From this perspective it seems at least as likely that the practice of ceding resources to divine ownership was rooted in funerary religion as it was in beneficence towards local shrines. I would see this as reinforcing the view that local religion, in the earlier periods, attracted only modest resources.

Conclusion

Religious belief is a flickering constituent of consciousness. It is often difficult to be sure just what it is that one is studying. The Egyptians possessed a developed theology which centred on knowledge of a hidden cosmos, but this is likely to have been seriously pursued only by a very few as a specialized academic study. It was possible for people (including the inhabitants of Deir el-Medina village) to buy some of this knowledge in written form (Coffin Texts, Book of the Dead) as an aid to survival after death, but it did not serve as a guide to living and so there was not, as far as we can see, a distinctively religious way of conducting one's life. For this reason alone, detailed religious knowledge was probably self-restricting. People needed an elementary level of knowledge in order to be able to recognize the cues in the system of decorum of art and formal language which structured their world. Its deeper meaning was a significant step removed from the emotional and practical life of most Egyptians, whether they belonged to the élite or not. It is true that those who were in a position to do so manipulated the rather simple basis of divinity and cult to include themselves. This required wealth and self-esteem, however, not esoteric knowledge.

It is only natural, when trying to build up a picture of Egyptian religion, to turn to sources which represent the Egyptians being religious. They reveal the mental resource that was available when occasions pushed it to the forefront of an individual's mind. But a wide range of texts are also available from many periods which show Egyptians arranging their lives and trying to make their way in what was, in practice, a secular world which did not require constant reference to the mindset of religion.

Thus if we take the unusually well documented Ramesside Period and focus on religious texts we can see in them an 'age of personal piety'. If, on the other hand, we concentrate on certain legal texts from the very same period we are equally entitled to call it an 'age of cynicism'. Neither term is really appropriate; for it is unreasonable to expect the population of a complex society to be uniform in outlook. They are ends of a spectrum of attitudes, the limits of bivalency, in which the majority of people occupied the middle ground. For them, most of the time, life is likely to have been a basically secular experience in which religion had a place of utility to a degree and with a frequency that will have varied according to circumstances and the individual. The contribution made by the archaeology of religion in ancient Egypt is that it helps to set limits to this variance. The two New Kingdom workmen's villages, which occupied a distinctive and unusual niche in the society of their period, show what a strong commitment to participatory religion looked like on the ground. They provide a picture which cannot be matched elsewhere in Egypt over most of the two millennia considered in this article. That tells a story of its own, of a society that was, in practice, largely secular.

Notes

1. A few of the latter have actually been preserved in tombs (Bruyère 1937, 106, fig. 52; Darby *et al.* 1977, 522, 525, fig. 12.17), but only because of quite exceptional conditions of preservation.
2. The most recent work at Elephantine (Kaiser *et al.* 1993, 152–4) has already reduced the likelihood that this is the case here. At Medamud, where the early temple enclosure occupied most of the ground of the later one, it is also an unlikely interpretation.
3. One part of the Osiris cult-area at Abydos is also the source for two groups of votive objects, none unfortunately from a useful context. The first consists of pottery bowls bearing painted figures of deities, not only of Osiris, and is of the New Kingdom. The other are mud figurines of ram heads, cobras, vultures, and crocodiles where the date is uncertain, though New Kingdom is likely (O'Connor 1967, 16–18; O'Connor 1985, 168, n. 19; Leemans 1867, pls. XXIII.305, XXIV.350, XXV.470, 492, 500, L–LIII). The subject of votive offerings would be enhanced by proper publication of this material which emphasizes the complex relationship between pre-eminent deity (here Osiris) and the religious perceptions of the donor.

4. As is shown by intact offering-deposits in front of tiny windows in tomb superstructures at the 1st-Dynasty cemetery of Tarkhan (Petrie 1914, pls. XII–XIV), by the evidence for statues in special shrines attached to tombs at Saqqara (Emery 1958, 13, pl. 27), and possibly in an underground annexe to the 1st-Dynasty tomb of King Den at Abydos (Dreyer 1990, 75–8, taf. 23b). It is even shown by evidence from the Step Pyramid itself, where, beside an enclosed chamber containing a life-sized statue of King Djoser, lay a temple (apparently not finished) and the remains of perhaps the last offering-ceremony (300 beer-jars neatly stacked in rows: Firth & Quibell 1935, 13, 49–50, pl. 25.2).

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