

HANDBOOK OF ORIENTAL STUDIES HANDBUCH DER ORIENTALISTIK

SECTION ONE THE NEAR AND MIDDLE EAST

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A HISTORY OF THE ANIMAL WORLD
IN THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST



CHAPTER TWELVE

ANIMALS IN EGYPTIAN RELIGION

EMILY TEETER

Egyptian religion is highly charged with animal iconography. The role of animals in Egyptian religion is generally misunderstood and their significance overestimated, largely because of the misconceptions of Greeks and Romans who visited Egypt in antiquity. Herodotus (ca. 500 B.C.) correctly reported that animal worship involved “praying to the god to whom the particular creature, whichever it may be, is sacred” (II.65), hence that the Egyptians worshiped the god in his living image of the animal. Yet later Classical authors, such as Diodorus (first century B.C.) wrote that “the Egyptians are fanatically addicted to the worship of certain animals, the dead as well as the living” (Diodorus I.83) intimating that it was the animal itself rather than the deity that was the focus of the cult. Lucians’ famous dialogue of the second century A.D. contained this disdainful passage:

But you, you dog-faced Egyptian, dressed up in linen, who do you think you are my friend? How do you expect to pass for a god, when you howl as you do? ... I am ashamed to mention the ibis and the apes, or the goats and the other far more ridiculous creatures from Egypt who you have crammed into heaven, goodness knows how. How, gods can you tolerate seeing them worshiped on equal terms with yourselves or even honored above you?¹

Consider also the judgment attributed to the Persian king Cambyses: “Do you call that [the Apis bull] a god, you blockheads? Are your gods flesh and blood? ... No doubt a god like that is good enough for the Egyptians; but you won’t get away with trying to make a fool of me” (Herodotus II.29).

¹ *Decorum concilium* 10–11, translation from Hornung (1982: 15).

DIVINE REPRESENTATIONS

The foreign misconceptions, bewilderment, and even contempt for animal gods was fueled by representations that were completely unfamiliar (Smelik and Hémelrijk 1984). Not only were the gods shown in what was considered to be base zoomorphic representations, but still stranger and more barbaric were the mixed forms (therianthropic). The fact that a single god could be represented in several different ways only did more to convince people of other cultural backgrounds that the Egyptians were either overly mystical or simply gullible.

Indeed, one of the most fascinating features of animals in Egyptian religion is their use of representations of the gods and the variability in those representations. A single deity might be represented zoomorphically, therianthropically, and anthropomorphically² and conversely, a particular animal could represent a variety of deities (Table 12.1).

Nearly every species of animal in Egypt was at some point associated with a deity, notable exceptions being the horse and the hedgehog. Identifying which god is being represented is not always simple, since Anubis, Wepwawet and Duamutef are all shown as a jackal, a cow may be the goddess Hathor or Mehetweret, and a falcon-headed god can represent a tremendous range of gods (Re, Re-Horakhty, Horus, Horus-Son-of-Isis) whose identity cannot usually be determined without an accompanying caption (see Table 12.1).

The mixed forms, perhaps the most characteristic and distinctive feature of Egyptian iconography, usually placed an animal head on a fully human body (fig. 12.1). The junction of animal and human elements was delineated and defined by a broad beaded collar. In rarer cases dating from the New Kingdom onward, the god's head could be replaced by an entire animal, such as the scarab beetle, which emerges from the shoulders of the god Khepri. In other cases (Selket and Hatmehyet) the animal emblem of the deity (a scorpion and fish, respectively) could simply rest upon, or be attached to the fully anthropomorphic head. More rarely, a human head was placed on an animal body, the best example being the androsphinx, which in the royal context symbolized the king in his leonine aspect.

² For example the god Horus could be shown as a man often with the royal crown, as a falcon-headed man or as a falcon.

Table 12.1. Animals and their principle divine associations and identification.³

Baboon	Hapi Hedjwer Khonsu Thoth	Jackal/dog	Anubis Duamutef Khentyimenty Wepwawet
Black kite/Kestrel	Isis Nephthys	Latus fish	Leontopolis
Bull	Apis Atum Buchis Kamutef Mnevis	Leopard	Mafdet
Cat	Atum Bastet Hathor Isis Mut Tefnut Re	Lion/Lioness	Hathor Mahes Mehyt Mut Nefertum Pakhet Sekhmet Shu Tefnut Wadjet Aker
Centapede	Sepa	pair, or double	Rwty
Cobra	Wadjet	Lizard	Atum
Cow	Bat Hathor Isis Mehetweret	Oryx	Seth Sokar
Crocodile	Sobek	Pig	Seth
Donkey	Seth	Ram	Amun Atum Banebdjed Herishef Khnum
Egyptian Goose (duck)	Amun	Scarab	Atum/Re Khepri
Falcon	Horakhty Horus Horsiese Khonsu Montu Nemty Quebehseuef Re Re-Horakhty Sokar	Scorpion	Selket
Fish	Hatmehyt Hathor Neith	Serpent	Apophis Hathor Isis Mehen Meretseger Nehebkau Nephthys Renenutet Shay Wadjet Wenut
Frog	Heket	Shrew	Werethekau
Gazelle	Anukis	Sow	Horus of Letopolis
Hare	Wenut	Turtle	Isis
Hippopotamus, lion and crocodile hybrid	Seth Taweret	Vulture	Nut Apophis Mut Nekhbet
Ibis	Thoth		
Ichneumon	Atum Horus Khateru		

³ I thank Patrick Houlihan for his suggestions in compiling this table.



Fig. 12.1. Animal headed deity (Khonsu) in the temple of Seti I at Abydos. 19th dynasty, ca. 1290 B.C. Note how the junction between animal and human anatomy is delineated by a broad collar. Photograph by Gaddis and Seif. Photo courtesy The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago.

The combination of human head on an animal body is otherwise generally restricted to a variant form of the deities Meretseger and Renenutet known from Late period faience amulets (Andrews 1994: 35).

Elements of animals (feathers, tails etc.) served as identifiers for deities shown in human form. A goddess with an ostrich plume on her head is Maat; a woman with the curved lyre horns of a bovine and two tall feathers may be Hathor or Isis (or other goddesses), a dwarf dressed in a leopard skin is Bes. Two tall feathers flank the crown of Amun, four feathers rise from the headdress of Inorus and Atum, and a single ostrich plume is characteristic of Shu. A deity might be identified by standing upon an animal. This form was employed mainly for the representation of Asiatic gods, like Qudshu, who stands on the back of a lion.

Egyptian iconography less frequently employed fantastic composite animals. The most prominent is Seth who is shown as part jackal, part dog and other imaginary elements (te Velde 1977: 13–26). Winged cobras and human figures with wings protect the king or the royal cartouches. Sphinxes came in various forms; the androsphinx (human head on lion body), criosphinx (ram head on lion body), hieracosphinx (falcon head on lion body), and a cobra-headed sphinx. Another such composite is Ammet, a combination of a hippopotamus, lion and crocodile who consumed the soul of the damned. Amulets in the form of a cow-headed snake are perhaps to be identified as a form of Isis-Hathor. Animals could be combined into hybrid forms—Nekhet, a vulture deity commonly shown hovering over the head of the king might be shown with a serpent head, thereby forming a syncretistic form of Nekhet and Wadjet (Nelson 1981: pls. 26, 35, 45).

The form of representation was not dependent upon time period or, seemingly, upon function; indeed the reason why one form was employed over another can only be surmised, for example the therianthrope form was probably preferred in the myriad scenes of the king offering to the gods that decorate the walls of temples because such a composition maintained a similar scale of representation between the offerer and the recipient of the offering. Yet there are examples of the king offering to a falcon form of the god Horus and the jackal of Wepwawet (Calverley and Broom 1939: pl. 16).

Animals that are frequently viewed as inimical were not avoided in the representation of deities. Selket whose head was topped with

a scorpion was one of the protective deities of the deceased. Other animals, specifically snakes and the hippopotamus, were highly ambivalent in nature. The cobra is a common element of divine and royal crowns, and its coils encircle and protect the sun god in the darkness of the underworld, yet the serpent Apophis is the arch typical evil god and the enemy of the sun god. In a similar way the hippo can represent the god Seth, the traditional enemy of Horus, yet figurines of hippos, painted with floral designs that evoke regeneration and rebirth, were left in private tombs. Often the only way that the good can be differentiated from the evil is by the context, or more fundamentally, by a caption or label.

As with many aspects of Egyptian culture, the use of animal forms to depict the gods does not follow standard anthropological models, which suggests that such depictions are rooted in totemism (te Velde 1980: 79). According to this theory of development, the gods were initially worshiped in their animal forms observable in nature. Only later did the mixed forms, and finally what might be perceived as the most sophisticated anthropomorphic forms, develop. This idealized progression cannot be applied to Egypt (te Velde 1980: 79). Although the earliest depiction of a god (from the tomb of Djer, Dynasty One) is wholly zoomorphic,⁴ the anthropoid form of the god Min appears in Dynasty 0 or early in the First Dynasty (McFarlane 1995: 164–66; Dreyer 1995). The therianthropic forms that might possibly be interpreted as transitions from animal to human form are attested by the goddess Bat, shown with a human face and cow horns and ears on the Narmer palette and on an ivory carving from the tomb of Andji-ib of Dynasty One (Petrie 1900: pl. XX-VII.71), and by falcon-headed and Seth-headed deities on seals from the tomb of Peribsen at the end of Dynasty 2 (Petrie 1901: pl. XXI.176, 179). Some prominent deities (Ptah and Min) were never shown in animal form, their first appearance in the Early Dynastic era being wholly human.

So too a god could be represented by several different animal species (Thoth as an ibis or as a baboon; Bastet as a lion or a cat), making it less likely that a god was identified by its ancient totemic animal. However some animal forms can be associated with the

⁴ Note that there is disagreement whether animals that appear on top of standards of the Naqada II period should be interpreted as deities. See Hornung (1982: 101) for a brief discussion with references.

attributes of the god. For example Anubis, the god of the necropolis, is depicted as a desert jackal, an animal that commonly roams the cemetery at night, and Hathor, a mother-fertility deity was shown as a cow. However, more often, the association of the deity and the animal form is not clear, and representations of Amun as a goose (which is more properly a large duck), and Thoth as an ibis, among many such examples, have defied explanation.

There is considerable controversy regarding the use of animal masks in Egyptian cults. It has been suggested that scenes showing animal-headed deities are to be interpreted as priests wearing animal masks (Wolinski 1996). Others find this doubtful during the pharaonic period, but a greater possibility during the Late period. Physical evidence for masking during the pharaonic period is limited. Examples include two pottery masks from the Predynastic levels of Hierakonpolis (Adams 1999: 4), a cartonnage mask-like object representing the god Bes from the Middle Kingdom site at Kahun (ca. 1890 B.C.; Petrie 1890: 30; Pinch 1994: fig. 71), New Kingdom (ca. 1350 B.C.) representations of lion-headed masks used by priests during rituals of the jubilee (Wente 1969), and a baked clay helmet-like mask of Anubis from the Late period (ca. 600–300 B.C.; Pelizaeus-Museum, Hildesheim 1585 in Wolinski 1996: fig. 62). Additional evidence for masking is provided by a relief in the temple of Hathor at Dendera that shows a priest in a jackal-headed helmet mask being guided by another priest (in Wolinski 1996: fig. 63). The proponents of masking in the pharaonic period tend to ignore the nature of Egyptian art—that it is symbolic rather than representational, and that it was not composed to give a true appraisal of the object but rather the significance of the object portrayed (Bianchi 1996). Most Egyptologists believe that the scenes of the animal-headed gods portray the mythical, divine sphere of the-
rianthropic gods, not a parade of priests wearing masks.

ROYAL REPRESENTATION

Animals were important symbols of the king and state. The king was the living Horus, who was represented by a falcon. Most of the forty-two administrative districts (nomes) of Egypt had animal emblems. The land was seen in terms of duality—the northern section being under the protection of the cobra deity Wadjet, while the south was

under the vulture Nekhbet. In the New Kingdom, these two animals were paired on the brow of the king's crown or diadem (Russmann 1997: 268–70). The cobra was an element in other parts of the royal regalia. Scenes of Seti I at Abydos show the king (as well as gods) with an ornate crown, surrounded by a band of rearing cobras with solar disks on their heads (Calverley and Broome 1938: pls. 31, 41). The *atef* and the *hemhem* crowns were composed of one or more tall tapering forms flanked by bird plumes. Their bases were composed of a pair of twisting horizontal ram or sheep horns which supported rearing cobras. A protective cobra hanging from the disk of the sun was a motif that was commonly depicted over the head of the king. He wore a sporran decorated with a row of cobras. Some examples of the royal kilt are ornamented with the *sjꜣt*-amulet in the form of a tiny swallow who was a messenger of the sun god (Patch 1995: 110). From the Archaic period, the king, as well as most male deities, wore a highly stylized bull's tail, a symbol of his virility and an echo of his epithet “the strong bull” (see chapter 8). A surviving example of such a tail is made of colored beads (Patch 1995: fig. 9). The king was often pictured in a curiasse decorated with scale-like bird feathers. The addition of a curved ram horn to the crown of the king was a proclamation of his divinity—an iconographic device that continued to be employed in Egypt from the Eighteenth Dynasty into the Ptolemaic period (fourth–first centuries B.C.).⁵

The regalia of queens also incorporated animals. Most prominent was the vulture crown. The body of the bird formed the cap of the crown and the wings swept back over the woman's ears. The vulture cap was often topped with a modius with two tall bird plumes and a sun disk. Although the symbolism of the vulture crown is obscure, it was also worn by goddesses (Calverley and Broome 1938: pls. 31, 33, 34, 40 *passim*), suggesting that it expressed the divinity of the queen.

Priests also wore costumes and emblems derived from animals. Several classes of priests, including the *sem* and *Iwumwtf* priests wore a leopard skin cloak (Faulkner 1994: pl. 12). Other classes of priests wore fabric copies of such skins. The pelt-like robe of the high priest of Heliopolis was decorated with stars that substituted for the animal's distinctive spots. An example of such a garment made of fab-

⁵ This symbol was borrowed by the Greeks for the representation of Zeus. In Lucian's *Decorum concilium*, Momos questions Zeus: “And you Zeus, how can your bear it when they transplant a ram's horns onto you?” (translation from Hornung 1982: 15).

ric with gold stars was recovered from the tomb of Tutankhamun (ca. 1325 B.C.; Carter and Mace 1923: 113; Edwards 1976: 105).

COSMOLOGY

The Egyptian cosmology incorporated many animal images. The newly born morning sun was equated with the scarab-form god Khepri while the setting sun was associated with Atum who, in the new Kingdom and afterward, was portrayed as an archaic form of sheep with corkscrew horns. These deities were, according to some renditions of the cosmologies (Book of the Day and Night), envisioned as crossing the sky in a boat drawn by four jackals and adored by baboons. In the introductory vignette to the Litany of Re, which appears inside the portals of Ramesside royal tombs, Khepri and Atum within their disk are shown repelling evil in the form of a snake, crocodile and a hartebeest(?) with a single spiraling horn or burning wick on its forehead.

According to other conceptions of the universe, the sun traveled across the sky in the simpler form of a scarab beetle with wings, or it emerged from the primordial darkness on the horns of a celestial cow. The creation of the world was heralded, according to some versions of creation, by the screeching of the *benu*-heron or by the cry of the goose called the "Great Cackler." The Heliopolitan myth claims that Atum, the creator god emerged from a bird's egg, while other legends relate that life emerged in the form of the falcon from a bird's egg. The stars of the night sky were organized into constellations, many of which were zoomorphic (and familiar to people today)—a bull, lion, hippo, crocodile and a falcon-headed deity.

The realm of the afterlife was also inhabited by animals. As documented by scenes from the underworld books in the royal tombs (Amduat, Book of Gates, Book of the Heavenly Cow) (Hornung 1984: 1990), and on funerary papyri, the boat of the sun god Khepri-Atum was protected within the coils of a protective serpent. The serpent, with its highly ambivalent nature was a major denizen of the underworld. Apophis, the harbinger of chaos and incarnation of evil, was shown in the form of a snake, yet this same dangerous creature, tail in his mouth, was associated with rebirth in the form of the ouroboros that encircled and protected the hieroglyph for the reborn sun, symbolizing the cyclic nature of the Egyptian cosmos and

its emphasis upon eternal rebirth (Hornung 1990: 107).

The guardians of the portals of the underworld were fantastic composite beings with human bodies and the heads of cats, serpents, gazelles, monkeys, dogs, jackals, crocodiles, birds and other creatures. The Ninth Hour of the Book of Gates was inhabited by a snake that spewed fire at sinners. Other hours and caverns of the underworld were populated by snakes that sprouted wings and legs, and by birds with human heads. The depths of the underworld (hour 6 of the Amduat) was inhabited by Rwti, a double bodied lion who symbolized yesterday and tomorrow. The eighth hour of the Amduat was inhabited by screaming cats, whose deafening roar was equated with the cries of the eternally damned.

One New Kingdom composition, the "Book of the Heavenly Cow," which decorated the largest funerary shrine of Tutankhamun and the walls of the tombs of Seti I, Ramesses II, Ramesses III, and Ramesses IV, relates how the sun god retreated from mankind on the back of a cow. In the course of the texts, the night sky was associated with the spotted body of the divine cow and her legs with the supports of heaven (Piankoff 1955: 26–37).

As reflected in the texts of the Book of the Dead, the afterlife was a place of animal imagery. The weighing of the heart of the deceased to evaluate his worthiness for rebirth took place in the presence of Anubis, the jackal god of the necropolis (Faulkner 1994: pl. 3). Thoth, the ibis-headed scribe recorded the judgment of the deceased before the scale, and the baboon form of the same god guarded the balance. The monstrous creature Ammet stood ready to devour the heart of the damned (fig. 12.2). Chapter 17 describes how Re in the form of a tomcat slew the serpent Apophis with his knife (Faulkner 1994: pl. 10). The vignette for the rubric of Chapter 125 shows the Lake of Fire, protected by four baboons (Faulkner 1994: pl. 32).

The preparation for life after death likewise was full of animal imagery. One aspect of the soul of the deceased, the *ba*, was shown in the form of a human-headed bird (fig. 12.3; Faulkner 1994: pls. 7, 17). The *ba* spent the dark hours of the night with the mummy, but during the hours of daylight left the tomb through the false door to sit in the bright sunshine. The deceased was mourned by the sisters of Osiris, Isis, and Nephthys, who were equated with two black kites or kestrels whose screeching was likened to the wails of mourning women (Faulkner 1994: pl. 7).

Mummies were prepared on leonine biers. In the process of

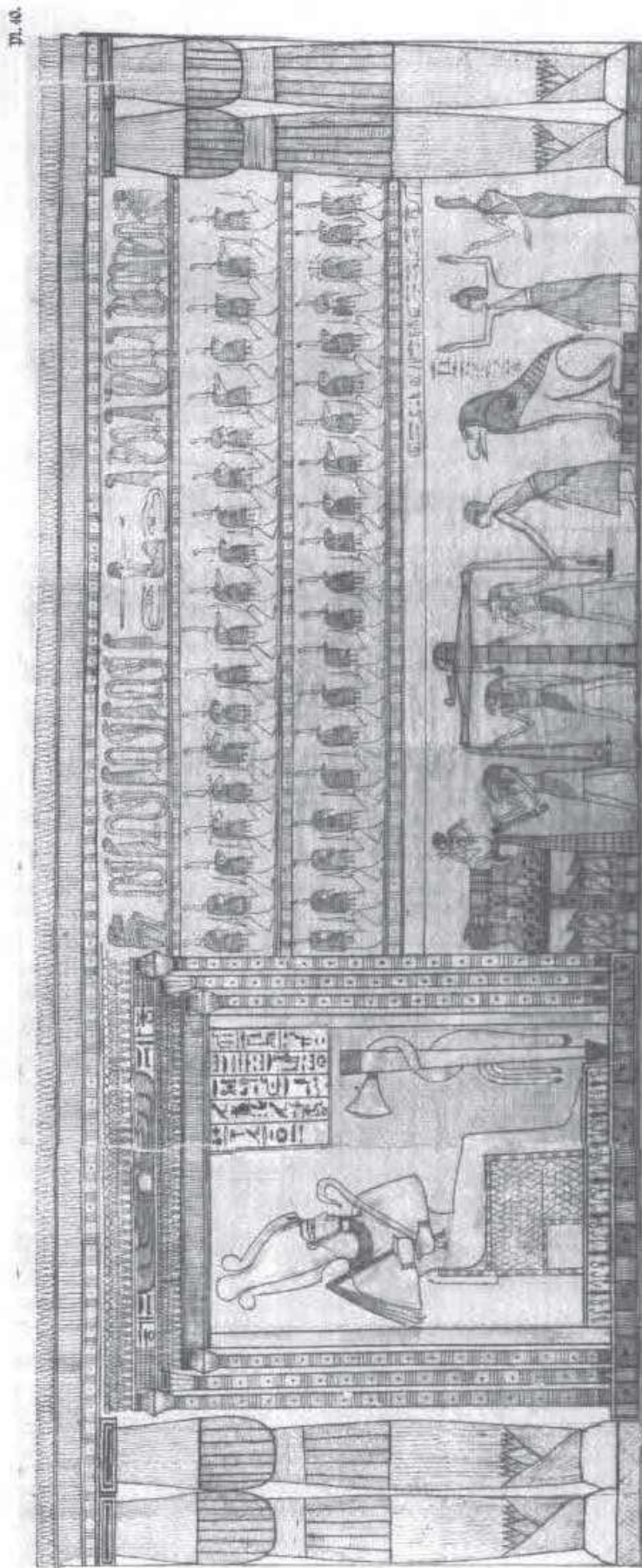


Fig. 12.2. Weighing the heart of the deceased. The jackal-headed Anubis and falcon-headed Horus stand beneath the scale, while ibis-headed Thoth records the judgment. Ammet, part-crocodile, lion, and falcon stands ready to consume the heart of the unjust. The tribunal of the gods with various animal heads sit in attendance in the middle registers. Papyrus Milbank. OIM 10486. Ptolemaic period, 4th–1st centuries B.C. Photo courtesy The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago.

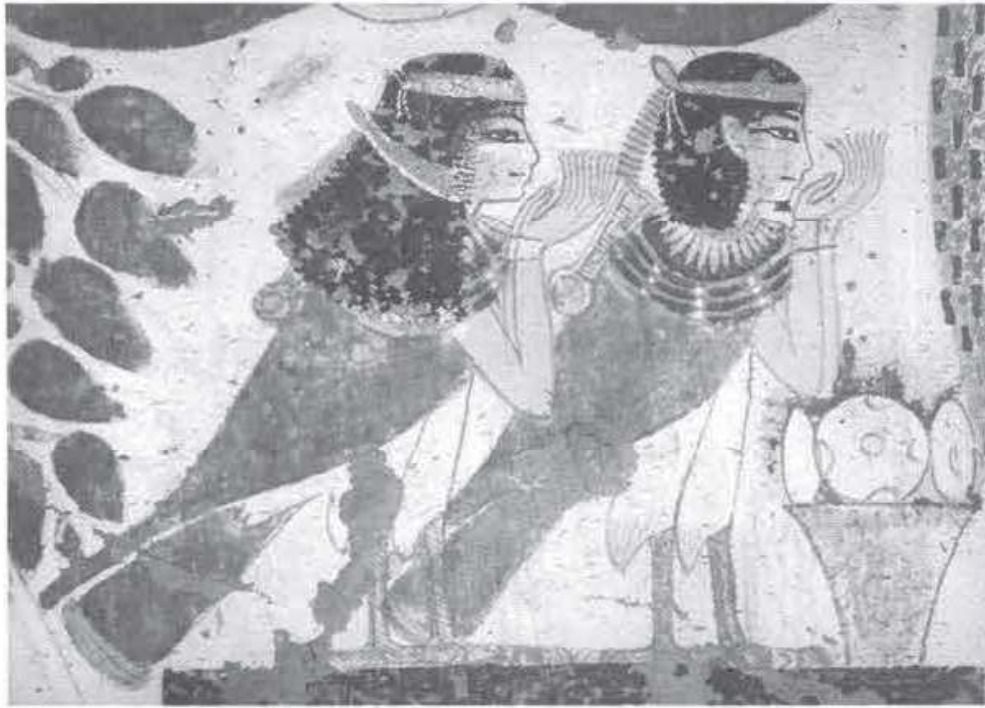


Fig. 12.3. The soul of the deceased and his wife in the form of human-headed birds (*ba*). Detail from a wall painting in the tomb of Userhat at Thebes. 19th dynasty, 1290 B.C. Photo courtesy of The Oriental Institute the University of Chicago.

mummification, the major organs were removed, separately mummified and stored in the tomb in four canopic jars, three of which from mid Dynasty 18 (ca. 1500 B.C.) onward had stoppers in the form of animal deities⁶: Hapi (a baboon), Qebhsenuf (a falcon), and Dwaumutef (a jackal). A protective scarab (the hieroglyph for “to come into being” or “to exist”) of stone or faience was placed over the heart or in its place. The text on its underside (Book of the Dead Spell 30B) instructed the heart in the form of the scarab to not give damaging testimony to the god of judgment. Amulets in the form of the eye of the falcon god Horus or Re and figurines of animal-headed protective deities were arrayed in and around the mummy wrappings. The mummy of Tutankhamun was furnished with protective gold and inlay studded pectorals in the form of vultures, falcons and scarabs (Edwards 1976: nos. 23–24, 26–27).

The wings of the goddesses Isis, Nephthys and Maat were protectively spread around the body of the deceased, and from Dynas-

⁶ The earliest example of animal stoppers for canopic jars were recovered from the tomb of Hatnofer, the mother of Senenmut (reign of Hatshepsut; see P. Dorman, “The Tomb of Ramose and Hatnofer,” Metropolitan Museum of Art, forthcoming).

ty 17, the *rishi* (from the Arabic for feather) coffin evolved, decorated with the deity's feathered wings. The mummy was interred in the cemetery, which, at Thebes, was considered to be protected by the cow goddess Hathor who was the personification of the western mountains where the deceased dwelled.

ANIMALS IN THE RELIGIOUS CULT

Animals played a central role in religious cults in the form of sacrifices. The basic offering that was made to the deceased consisted of “bread, beer, oxen and fowl.” This list of offerings is related innumerable times on tomb walls, stelae and statues. Representations of the preparation of offerings (both in relief and in three dimensional tomb models) indicate that the choicest part of the steer was the foreleg (which also was the hieroglyph *kepes* “power”). Offering stands are also shown with the ribs and heads of cattle/oxen as well as the animal's heart. Tombs were stocked with actual food, some of which was mummified and encased in wooden coffins carved in the form of the animal part within to ensure that they would be eternally available for the soul of the deceased (fig. 12.4; Carter and Mace, 1923: pl. 18). By the New Kingdom, festival scenes in the colonnade hall at the Luxor Temple and elsewhere show elaborate bread or incense cakes that were modeled in imitation of cow heads (Epigraphic Survey 1994: 25 n. 76, pl. 62). Fowl offerings, specified



Fig. 12.4. Mummified, linen-wrapped waterfowl resting in its wooden case. OIM 18275, 18276. New Kingdom ca. 1000 B.C. Photo courtesy The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago.

as geese and ducks, are shown with their necks rung, their unplucked carcasses draped over the offering stands.

The temples and funerary cults of Egypt required huge stocks of livestock for food and offering purposes. Animal offerings for the state-supported temples were raised in the temple livestock yards or obtained as spoils of war rather than being taken from the wild population. Ostrakon Gardiner 86 from the reign of Ramesses II contains a census of the temple staff employed to care for the livestock of the domain of Amun. Although the number of herdsmen is lost, the ostrakon relates that each cared for five hundred head of cattle. The same record lists 23,530 fowl-keepers who each oversaw 34,230 birds for a total of 771,201,900 (Kitchen 1999)! Reliefs at Medinet Habu record that Ramesses III brought back 3609 cattle as spoil from his Libyan war (Edgerton and Wilson 1936: 68). Decrees allowing herds of cattle to be moved from one location to another for grazing indicate that the stockyards that provided offerings for a single temple, such as Amun at Karnak, were scattered throughout Egypt. The fowl yards were probably not far afield from the temple in which the animals would be sacrificed. The southern shore of the sacred lake at the temple of Amun at Karnak has the remains of fowl yards, including a ramp that allowed the birds access to the water's surface (Berg 1987: 48–50).

A reference in Papyrus Jumilhac (Vandier 1961: 90) refers to the sacrifice of a “wolf”⁷ and nine dogs, each of whom represented the enemy of the god. Each animal was characterized by its color, for example a white dog was associated with the enemy of Thoth, a red with Seth, and a black with Osiris.

Rituals that celebrated the annual visit of Hathor of Dendera to the temple of Horus at Edfu were accompanied by the ritual sacrifice of a red steer or bull that symbolized Seth. A priest representing Horus severed the foreleg to symbolize his victory over evil. The sacrifice was followed by releasing four birds that symbolically proclaimed the defeat of Seth, and by the ritual trampling of four fish (although it is not clear whether these were real fish or effigies; Alliot 1954: 520; Meeks and Favard-Meeks 1996: 181). Reliefs from the time of Amunhotep III (ca. 1350 B.C.) attest to the ritual sacrifice of oryx (Derchain 1962). Texts from the Ptolemaic temples at Edfu and

⁷ Referred to as a “wolf” in the literature, although the text must refer to some wolf-like creature for there are no wolves in Egypt.

Philae indicate that in that context, the animal was associated with Seth who represented the enemy of the eye of Horus (Derchain 1962: 26).

Animals were also employed in rituals that did not involve sacrifice. From Dynasty 5 through the Ptolemaic period, the king was portrayed in temples engaged in a ritual known as “driving the calves” (*hwt bhsu*) (fig. 12.5; Egberts 1995). In this ritual the king imitated threshing with four cows, one spotted, one red, one black and one white. This was associated mythically with Osirian rituals of fertility and also with “treading the grave,” commemorating Horus’ search for the grave of his slain father Osiris (Egberts 1995: 357, 373–74).

Another ritual that employed live animals was associated with the festival of Min. Most fully recorded in the reliefs in the second court at the temple at Ramesses III at Medinet Habu (Epigraphic Survey 1940: pl. 205A; Murnane 1980: 38–39), the ritual celebrated the fertility of the god by imitating the cutting of grain followed by a procession of ancestral statues and a white bull, then releasing four birds⁸ that served as emissaries to the cardinal points to announce the rejuvenation of Horus and the king (Murnane 1980: 38).

Egypt lacked the tradition of extispicy so characteristic of other cultures of the ancient Near East, and the foretelling of the future was accomplished mainly by oracles and human mediums. Rarely, the oracles consulted were in animal form such as a falcon statue (Kákosity 1982), and a ram from Kom el-Wist (Brunton 1947: 293–95). The Apis bull was supposed to be able to predict good or bad outcomes by its selection of stalls (Kákosity 1981: 144 n. 34; Meeks and Favard-Meeks 1996: 137–38), and it foretold the death of Germanicus by refusing offerings (Meeks and Favard-Meeks 1996: 137).

The bucolic scenes of fishing and fowling encountered in temples from the Old Kingdom throughout the Pharaonic period are also religious in nature. These compositions normally consist of the tomb owner standing in a boat in the marshes, throwstick raised in readiness to bring down the birds shown overhead (Decker and Herb 1994: pls. CCL–CCLXX). The man’s wife and children are usually shown placidly at his feet. Such scenes are allegories for the victory of order

⁸ According to Houlihan (personal communication), the birds at the Ramesseum (Ramesses II) are pintail ducks, while those at Medinet Habu (Ramesses III) are more like doves. See Keel (1977) for the identification as rollers.



Fig. 12.5. Ritual of the “Driving of the Calves,” in which the pharaoh herded four colored cows, symbolizing the search of Horus for the tomb of his slain father Osiris. Temple of Luxor, reign of Amunhotep III, ca. 1375 B.C. Photo courtesy The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago.

over chaos for the wildness of the birds is emblematic of the forces of disorder, which can only be quelled by the power of order. The theme of controlling wild animals, thereby taming the forces of chaos, was employed by the king to demonstrate that he could safeguard his domains. These scenes, which were employed as a standard part of temple iconography from the Old Kingdom and employed into the Ptolemaic era, are typified by that on the south wing of the first pylon at Medinet Habu (Ramesses III), which shows the king charging into the marshes in pursuit of a wild bull (Epigraphic Survey 1932: pl. 117; Decker and Herb 1994: pl. CLXXXV). In a similar fashion, scenes of netting birds shown in tombs and also in temples throughout the pharaonic era are also allegories. There, the deceased or the king stands behind a blind, pulling a great clapnet closed around a group of birds (Decker and Herb 1994: pls. CCLXXI–CCC; Houlihan 1986: fig. 16). The wild birds symbolize disorder and the unpredictability of the universe while the action of mankind symbolizes the victory of order. In the royal scenes the allegory is more complex, for the birds may represent the people of Egypt and hence the scene symbolized the king's rule over his subjects.

ANIMALS AND MAGIC

Animals were frequently incorporated into the sphere of magic (for medical texts, see chapter 8). Among the earliest examples of animals associated with magic are the Middle Kingdom magical “wands,” curved blades of ivory or bone that are incised with depictions of a variety of real and fantastic animals such as hippos, rams, cats, falcons, frogs, lions, winged griffins and double sphinxes as well as the deities Bes, Taweret and falcon-headed gods. The ends of some examples of wands are decorated with the image of a leopard and a fox (Pinch 1994: 40–44). Inscriptions that appear on some examples promise protection to the possessor, who is usually female: “We [the gods] have come to protect the lady ...” (Pinch 1994: 42). It has been suggested that the wands, which have been recovered mainly from tombs, are related to the protective knives that deities are shown holding in the underworld books, or that they are related to throwsticks that likewise are attributed protective powers. Others believe that the wands were used to trace a circle around vulnerable beings, probably children (Capel and Markoe 1996: 64).

Amulets in the form of a frog, the goddess Hekat who was associated with birth (the tadpole was the hieroglyph for 100,000), were worn as protection in childbirth and to promote fertility.

Images of crocodiles, snakes and scorpions were frequently employed for protective purposes against the sting of venomous animals. The best examples are magical steles (cippi) showing "Horus on the Crocodiles" triumphing over dangerous animals (fig. 12.6). In such compositions, which date from the New Kingdom to the second century A.D., the youthful Horus (indicated as such by his sidelock and nakedness) stands on the back of pacified and powerless crocodiles. He holds the tails of serpents, lions, scorpions and a gazelle, all symbols of wild realms, hence magically taming the forces of chaos. Cippi were used both to ward off and to cure the sting of venomous animals. Most cippi have a head of the protective god Bes and their entire surface is covered with scenes of the gods and with magical spells that call upon Isis, the mother of Horus, to cure and save the petitioner just as she rejuvenated her husband Osiris. Some cippi were equipped with basin-like bases. Water was poured over the magical spells incised on the statue, collected from the base and drunk as a cure.

Images of a god restraining wild animals were also employed in the stelae showing the god Shed who shares much of the same iconography with the youthful Horus. These stelae are simpler than the cippi, showing the god holding scorpions, snakes and an oryx. As with the cippi, the god may stand on the back of crocodiles.

Pantheistic deities were also employed for magical protection. Known best through bronze figurines and faience amulets of the Late period, the deity is often a bewildering combination of the god Bes, and a jackal, with long falcon tail (fig. 12.7; Pinch 1994: 40–43; Andrews 1994: 36–38). Some have a ram head, or have multiple heads and many wear the *atef* crown. Texts indicate that some of these composite animals represent the god "whose great and mysterious forms are hidden from men" (Andrews 1994: 38), hence these creatures combine the protective powers of several deities into an especially potent protector.

More humble uses of animal motifs for magical purposes are also attested. A fish-shaped protective pendent was worn by women. As related in Westcar Papyrus (Middle Kingdom, Andrews 1990: 109, figs. 156, 157), a pleasure outing of the king was disrupted when the fish pendent of one of his entourage fell into the water. Fish-shaped



Fig. 12.6. Horus on the Crocodiles (Cippus) showing the youthful Horus grasping inimical animals (lion, gazelle, serpents, scorpions) and standing upon crocodiles. The zoomorphic form of Horus, also standing on a crocodile and a snake, appears at either shoulder. The steatite statue is incised with magical protective spells. OIM 16881. 4th century B.C. Photo courtesy The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago.



Fig. 12.7. Pantheistic deity with a jackal (front) and falcon (back) face, and human body with the tail of a falcon. He holds serpents and stands on crocodiles. A cobra and vulture emerge from his knees. Another serpent, its tail in mouth symbolizing the eternal cycle of the sun, encircles the upper surface of the base. OIM 11375. Bronze, Late period, ca. 4th century B.C. Photo courtesy The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago.

amulets were employed as amuletic jewelry perhaps because the tilapia fish was mistakenly believed to give birth through its mouth and was therefore associated with rebirth (Houlihan 1996a: 132–33).

A magical text of the third century A.D. refers to the ritual sacrifice of a cat, which in the final gloss is referred to as a spell [suitable] “for every ritual purpose: A charm to restrain charioteers in a race, a charm for sending dreams, a binding love charm and a charm to cause separation and enmity” (Betz 1992: 22). In the course of the ritual, the conjurer invoked the deity Sekhmet-Bastet to protect the cat—the incarnation of the deity—from the evil that the practitioner enacted in the name of his enemy; “behold your form being mistreated by [your] opponent [personal name] so that you may revenge yourself upon them.” The spell instructs the conjurer to drown the cat while speaking magical formulas. Three charms made of metal were inscribed with magical texts and images. These were placed in the anus, ears and upon the throat of the dead cat. The animal was then hidden in a tomb and the water in which it was drowned sprinkled near the enemy in order to draw the vengeful deity to the practitioner’s prey. The whiskers of the cat were retained as charms that were thought to invoke the god Helios.⁹

ANIMAL CULTS

Animal cults, in which an animal representative of a god was venerated, were an important part of Egyptian religion, especially in the Third Intermediate and Late periods. According to Herodotus, the animal cults were so prevalent that “both wild and tame [animals]—are held to be sacred,” and that “they have guardians appointed for them ... who are responsible for feeding them” (Herodotus II.65).

There were two forms of animal cults. The first involved the veneration of a living animal who, as the sole earthly incarnation of a god, was thought to be imbued with the *ba* (spirit) of that divinity. This type of animal cult is first attested by the Early Dynastic period cult of the Apis bull (Simpson 1957), the incarnation of Ptah or the *ba* of Osiris, and later of Serapis at Memphis. Other cults that focused on bulls include those dedicated to Buchis, the incarnation

⁹ I thank Robert Ritner for bringing this text to my attention.

of Montu, and the Mnevis bull, the avatar of the sun god of Heliopolis. Each animal was selected on the basis of special markings, the Apis by a triangle on its forehead, an eagle-shape on its back, a scarab marking under its tongue and double hairs in its tail (Herodotus II.29; Diodorus I.85). According to Herodotus, the birth of the sacred animal was heralded by a flash of lighting over the mother of Apis. The Apis, Mnevis and Buchis bulls were each considered to be an emissary of their respective god and they were worshiped for the duration of the animal's natural lifetime. The greatest crime attributed to the Persian king Cambyses was his purported slaughter of the Apis,¹⁰ an act that turned the Egyptians against the Persians, and was a sure portent of the doom of the foreign domination.

Once identified, the Apis bull was taken to its temple at Memphis where it lived in luxury attended by a staff of priests (Thompson 1988: 195–98). The death of the Apis was marked as a major chronological event within a king's reign (Kitchen 1986: 489), as was the selection of the next Apis. The funerary service for the Apis was extraordinary. The carcass was mummified in the temple at Memphis where the great lion-headed tables thought to be used for the embalming still stand. After the same elaborate process employed for humans (Thompson 1988: 198–203), the carcass was heaped with dry natron, then anointed, perfumed, purified and wrapped in pure linen, and finally conveyed to Sakkara where it was deposited in a mammoth wood, and later, hard stone sarcophagus. The tomb of the Apis initially was a free standing chapel with a burial chamber. In the reign of Ramesses II, the great catacomb at Sakkara (the Serapeum) was built as the final resting place of the Apis. This catacomb was later enlarged to accommodate burials dating to the end of the Ptolemaic period.

Another such animal cult is known from the Ptolemaic period at the temple of Horus at Edfu. There, the sacred personification of the god Horus was selected each year from a flock of falcons maintained by the temple priests. The selection was made by the oracle

¹⁰ See Thompson (1988: 106 n. 3) for a brief bibliography regarding the veracity of this event. Darius provided 100 *talents* of gold to the one who discovered the new Apis (Thompson 1988: 192–93), making the charge against Cambyses even more improbable.

of Horus represented by a statue of the god (Alliot 1954; Meeks and Favard-Meeks 1996: 130–32). Once selected, the bird was crowned as an incarnation of the king and it was referred to as the “living image, the living falcon.” During its “reign” the bird occupied an aviary in the temple. This residence was closely modeled on the royal temple with courtyards and a window of appearance from which it could be adored by the multitudes. Liturgies inscribed on the temple walls detail the offerings of flowers, gold jewelry, and food that were made to the falcon (Cauville 1984: 13: 72–73; Meeks and Favard Meeks 1996: 132–34). There is no information to suggest the fate of the falcon who was deposed by his “heir.”

Herodotus refers to a crocodile cult in Thebes and the Fayum where “they keep one particular crocodile which they tame, putting rings made of glass or gold into its ears and bracelets round its front feet. In fact while these creatures are alive, they are treated with every kindness, and, when they die, embalm them and bury them in sacred tombs” (II.69). Several temples had specially designed pools for the sacred crocodile (Gessler-Löhr 1983: 481–88). Diodorus (1.84) recorded the cults of these living animal incarnations of the god, noting that “the details are easy enough to relate, [but] they will scarcely be believed by anyone who has not witnessed them.”

In the second form of animal cult, the animals were bred as sacrificial animals to be used as votive offerings to the god with whom they were associated. This type of cult was far more common and widespread than that of the Apis or the living Horus. Such practices are attested from the Ramesside period to about the second century A.D. with their peak of popularity in the Ptolemaic period (fourth–first centuries B.C.). In this form of worship, a great variety of species of animals in the Nile Valley was mummified as a part of cult devotions.¹¹ Cat mummies were dedicated to Bastet; hawks to Horus and Re; ibis and baboons to Thoth; crocodiles to Sobek; dogs and domestic dogs¹² to Anubis. Even smaller animals—scarabs, ichneumon (mongeese), snakes, frogs, shrews—were raised by the staff of the temple and sacrificed to the god with whom the animal was associated. In the case of cats, the animals were killed at the ages of

¹¹ See Kessler (1986: 580–81) for a listing of animals mummified as part of cult devotions. See Houlihan (1986: 140) for a list of the birds that were mummified.

¹² Often referred to as jackals in the literature, but more correctly identified as domestic dogs (Houlihan, personal communication).

ten months and of two years of age, thereby culling their numbers while maintaining breeding stock (Armitage and Clutton-Brock 1981). The animals were mummified and wrapped. This process had many variations, from beautifully arranged mosaic-like patterned wrappings to the most coarse and careless procedures. Some animal mummy packets contain only part of the body (Filer and Andrews 1999), or a disarticulated body wrapped with sticks and rubbish. Some animals were placed in pottery or wood coffins, while small animals in the Late period were often enclosed in bronze box-like coffins (fig. 12.8). The coffins employed for cats were often feline-shaped containers of wood or bronze, now ironically mistaken by the museum-going public as tributes to the Egyptians' love for cats.

The animal mummies were purchased by pilgrims who might inscribe their name or a wish upon the wrapping or container, such as "may Thoth the great god give life to lady Tateharbeke ..." (Smith 1974: 45). The animal was donated to the temple where it was placed in the temple's catacomb as a symbol of devotion to the god. One baboon discovered in the catacombs at north Sakkara bore the inscription "Mestatatoumis" ("The Hearing Ear"; Smith 1974: 42) indicating that it may have functioned as an intercessor to funnel requests to the gods.

The mummification of votive animals was a very popular practice in the Late period and catacombs have been excavated in all parts of the country.¹³ The sacred ibis catacomb at north Sakkara alone is estimated to hold four million birds (Ray 1976: 138). This again is at odds with Herodotus (II.66) who claims that "anyone who deliberately kills one of these animals is punished with death; should one be killed accidentally, the penalty is whatever the priests choose to imposed but for killing an ibis or a hawk, whether deliberately or not, the penalty is invariably death."

Biographical inscriptions of a priest named Hor who worked in the ibis catacombs indicate that the burials at North Sakkara took place several times a year, the bird mummies being put aside in preparation for their final ceremonial internment (Ray 1976: 140). However not all animals that were mummified were considered to be sacred.

It has been suggested that a mummified horse and an ape discov-

¹³ See Kessler (1986: 579–80) for a listing of the major animal necropolises.

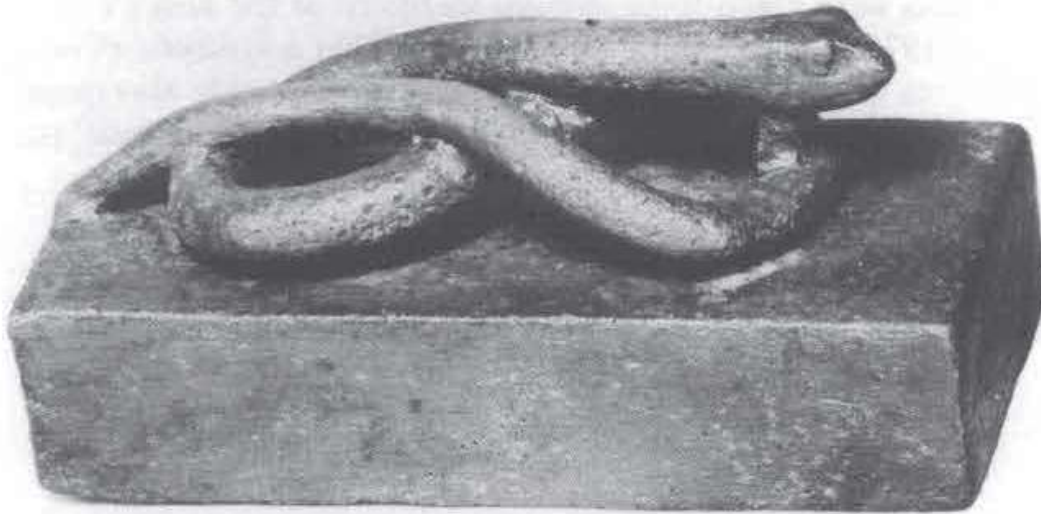


Fig. 12.8. Bronze coffin for a mummified snake. OIM 11189. Late period–Ptolemaic period, ca. 6th–1st centuries B.C. Photo courtesy The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago.

ered near the lower tomb of Senemnut at Deir el-Bahari were pets buried near their master (Winlock 1947: 154; Boessneck 1970), a conclusion that is apparently based on the fact that the horse was not sacred to any deity (te Velde 1980: 81). Further, it was buried with a decorated linen saddle cloth (or blanket), which is unprecedented for a votive offering.¹⁴ Neither animal was truly mummified, but simply wrapped in linen bandages. The horse was placed in a wooden coffin over seven feet in length.

Another form of animal sacrifice that may be related to votive animals is attested by bucrania made of clay with real horns that were placed on a bench-shaped structure of a First Dynasty tomb (no. 3504) at Sakkara (Emery 1972: 71, pls. 8–9). More than three hundred of these unique ornaments decorated the structure.¹⁵ The

¹⁴ In contrast to the lack of Egyptian rituals associated with horses, Nubians incorporated horses into burials at el Kurru (seventh century B.C.; D. Dunham 1950: 110–17), and horses, donkeys, camels and dogs into the royal tomb complexes at Ballana (fourth century A.D.) (Emery and Kirwan 1938: 26, pls. 9, 13 and pls. 55, 56 for horse trappings). See Williams (1991: 26) for a more recent analysis of the animal burials at Qustul.

¹⁵ Real animal skulls are not uncommon elements of tombs of the Pan-Grave people of Egypt and Nubia (ca. 2200 B.C.). See, for example, the gazelle horns (at-

significance of these emblems is unclear. It has been suggested that the horns were taken from animals sacrificed at the king's funeral (Lauer 1976: 88) and that they thus were either a symbolic offering or a form of "magical protection." They are probably also closely related to the literary allusions of the king as a "strong bull" (see chapter 8).

tached to the top of the cranium) painted with red and black stripes and dots that were recovered from cemetery K at Adindan (Williams 1983: 113, pl. 131).