

Week 3 – Monday

**Theory applied and failed? Ancient Egypt
through a modern lens (KZ)**

What is a 'theoretical background' how
does it affect interpretation, and why
does it matter?

HPHP4018

Exploring Humanities

Subject Group: Ancient Worlds

Dr Katharina Zinn

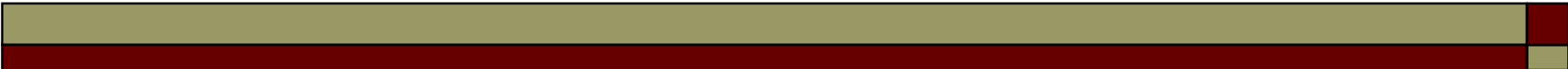
Readings:

- ❑ Brewer, 1,5&6
- ❑ Praetzellis, A. 2011. *Death by Theory*. Plymouth: AltaMira Pr.
- ❑ Levy, P. (2000). Always a Handmaiden – Never a Bride. In: Archaeology. Available online:
<http://archive.archaeology.org/online/features/history/index.html>



Simply to warm up....

- What is theory for you?



Theory is back!

- ❑ vitality of critical thinking
- ❑ Theoretical practice exploded with renewed energy in media, society, the arts and the corporate world
- ❑ New generations of critical ‘studies’ areas (critical animal studies, critical race studies) grown alongside the classical radical epistemologies of the 1970s (gender, feminist, queer, race, postcolonial and subaltern studies, cultural studies, film, television and media studies)

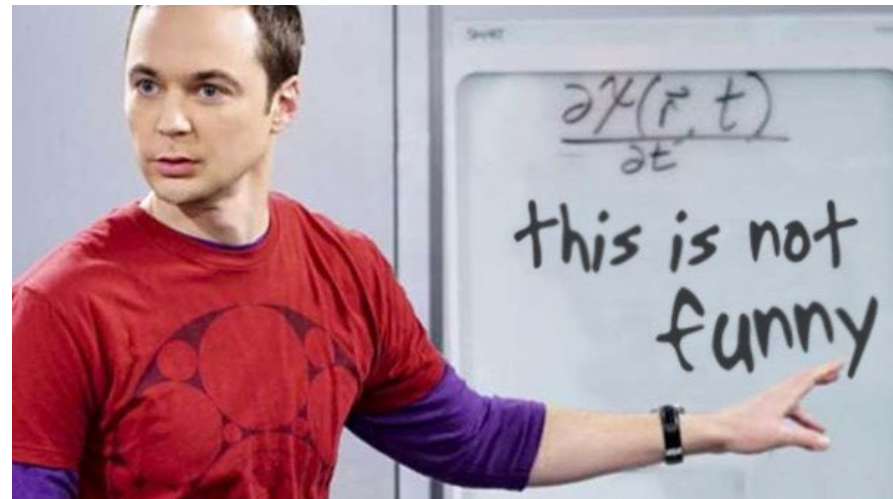
Theory – what should we think about?

□ A History of Ideas

- Tracing the development of intellectual thought from the Enlightenment

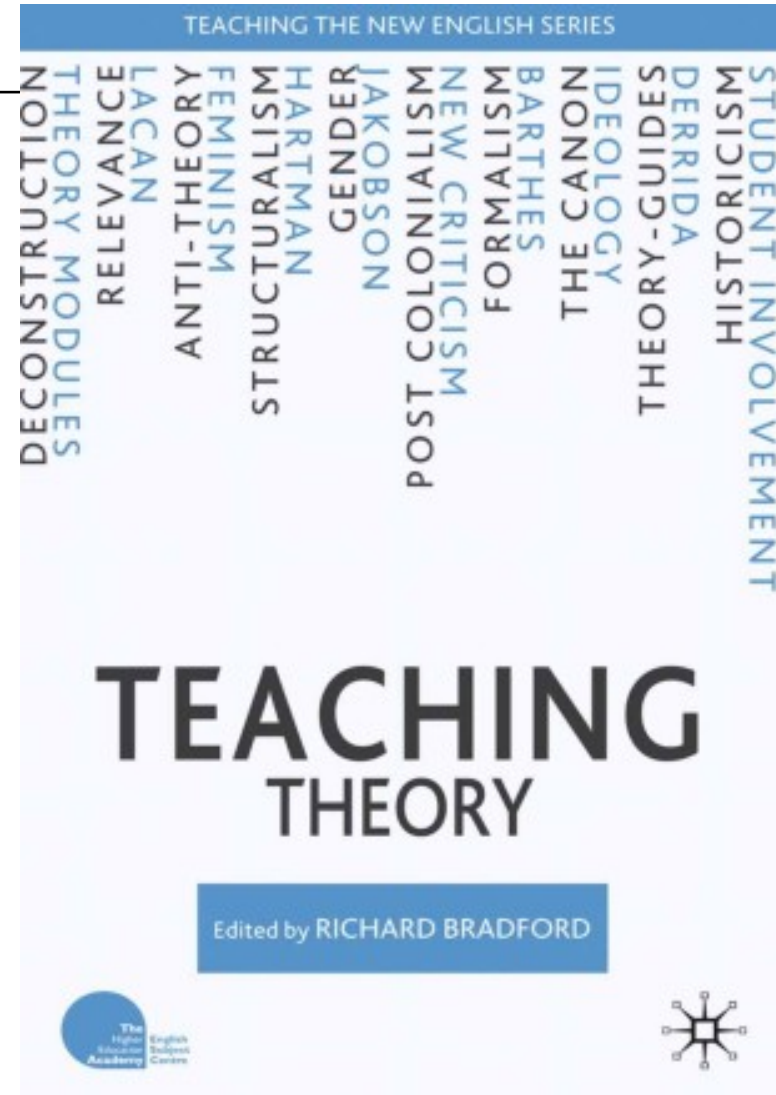
□ Thinking About Social Worlds

- How do we know what we know?
- How do we interpret the facts we find?



(Too) Many ways to explain the world?

- ❑ Empiricism
- ❑ Positivism vs. Rationalism
- ❑ Darwinism & Cultural Evolution
- ❑ Marxism
- ❑ Structuralism & Social Theory
- ❑ Postmodernism
- ❑ Orientalism & Postcolonialism
- ❑ (Post-)Feminism & Masculinism
- ❑ Processualism / Post-Processualism
- ❑ Materialism / New Materialism



Why is theory important?

- What do we know about the past / about other cultures?
 - How do we know this?
 - How do we make sense of this & interpret it?
 - Is “common sense” enough?
-
- Theory is “the set of rules we use to translate the facts into meaningful accounts” [narratives] (Johnson 1999: 7)

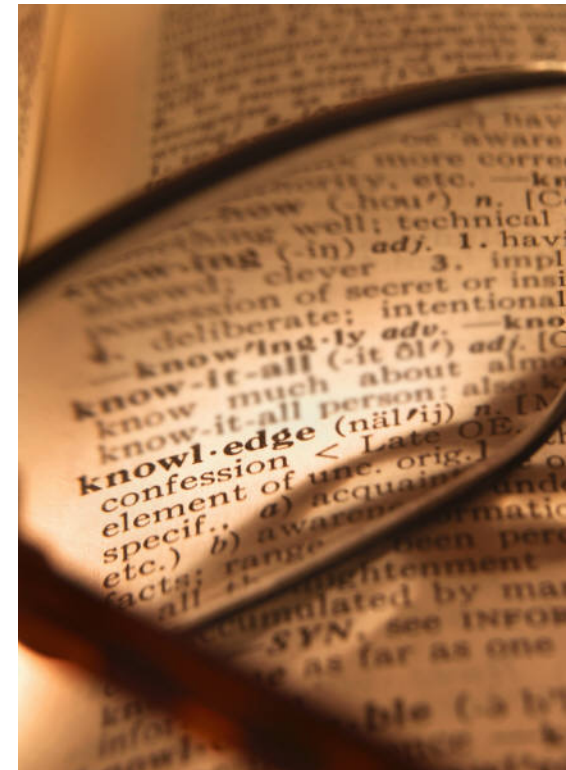
How do we know what we know?

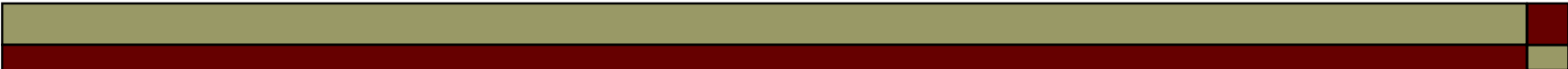
- ❑ What is knowledge?
- ❑ What is a fact?
- ❑ How do we acquire knowledge?
- ❑ How do we make sense of it?
 - What is the basis of interpretation?



Facts

- What is a fact?
- Collecting facts:
 - How do we go about this?
 - How intuitive or straightforward is this?
 - Do we need to follow guidelines
- Ordering facts:
 - How do we organise our knowledge?
 - How do we present our knowledge?
 - How do we interpret facts?
 - = critical thinking





Aims and Methods

- ❑ What are the aims of each of the disciplines Egyptology draws on?
- ❑ What is the core material/data of the three disciplines as well as the one of Egyptology combining them?

Archaeology

- What are the aims of archaeology?
 - To interpret past cultures from their material remains
 - Chronological limits of the discipline?
 - ???
- What is the core data / information source of archaeology?
 - Archaeological sites
 - Maps, aerial photos
 - Material culture
 - Ecofacts
 - ???



History

- What are the aims of history?
 - To write a narrative of past events
 - ???
- What is the historian's dataset?
 - Texts: documents, maps, letters, books, diaries, newspapers....
 - What about oral histories?
 - ???
- What are the chronological limits?



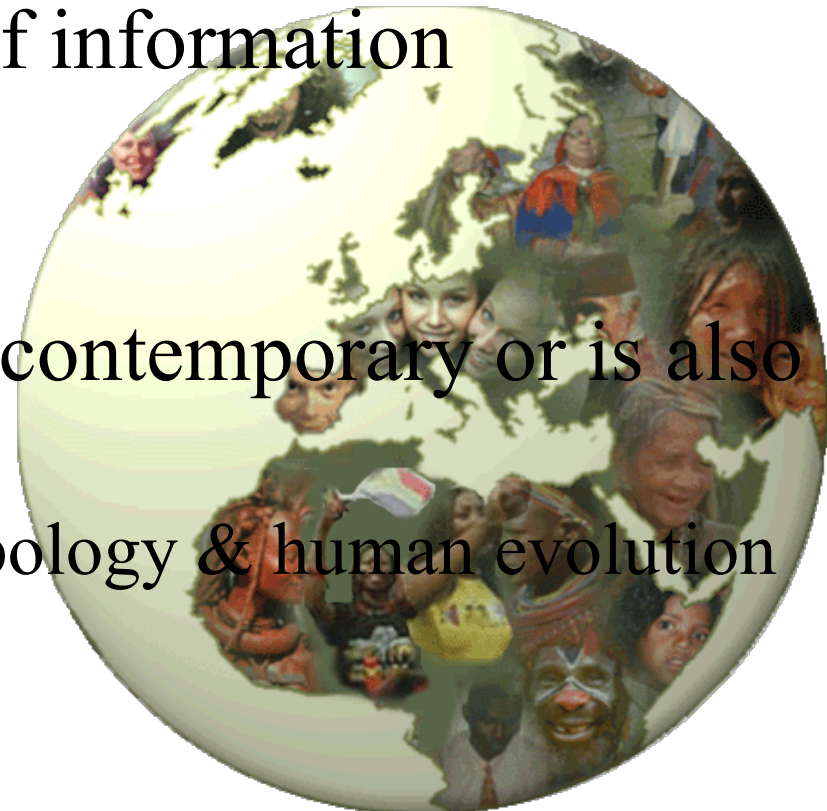
History & Archaeology

- History writes narratives of the past
 - Traditional History: an **empirical** narrative of political events & personalities
 - Social History: examining dynamics of past societies (& use of cross-cultural analogies)
- Archaeology also writes narratives of the past:
 - Greater time-depth: whole “history” of humankind (how far back can we go?)
 - Emphasis is on social process rather than “histories”



Anthropology

- ❑ What is anthropology?
 - The study of human culture & society
- ❑ What are the key sources of information
 - Ethnography
 - Material culture
- ❑ Is anthropology inevitably contemporary or is also a time-depth aspect?
 - What about cultural anthropology & human evolution



Sources

- ❑ Creating narratives: the written word
- ❑ Reliability of the written word?
 - Exclusion?
 - Who writes history?
- ❑ When does written history begin?
- ❑ What about other sources in conjunction with the written word?



Sources

- ❑ Material Culture:
 - Archaeology (like anthropology) “is distinguished by its preoccupation with material culture” (Hodder 1982: 9)
- ❑ Is this relevant to Historians?
 - What about text & maps as material culture?
 - Historic buildings....?



Egyptology offers:



- material culture and textual sources (complementing each other!)

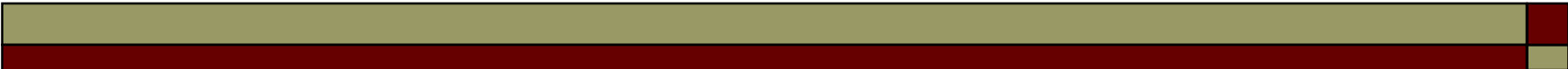


Sources

- ❑ Oral History & Ethnographies
- ❑ Are these relevant to Historians?
- ❑ Are they relevant to Archaeologists?
 - “There would be no archaeological interpretation ... without ethnography, both at the level of the recognition & interpretation of artefacts, & at the level of ... explaining the processes of human cultural development”
(Orme 1981: 2)

Interim summary

- Archaeology, History & Anthropology are all concerned with studying human societies & human action
- How do we know what we know?
- The three disciplines **share** similar source material
- Traditionally all three were grounded in empiricism
- More recently a plethora of related theoretical approaches have been adopted to interpret human societies past & present
- **These are shared by the three disciplines**



What is a paradigm?

- Model to explain what is happening
 - What is studied
 - Which questions should be asked
 - How is research conducted
 - How should the investigation and findings be interpreted
- Can deliver a conceptional framework

3 main paradigms in Egyptian archaeology

- Culture history
 - Emerged in 19th century, connected with the field of history
 - What? When? Where?
 - Based on material record (including written records)
 - Finding specifics and classifying groups of artefacts → grouping into distinctive cultures
- No explanation, how/why these artefacts came into existence

3 main paradigms in Egyptian archaeology

- Culture history
- Processualism
 - Developed in 1950ies
 - Archaeology as the study of a cultural process, which is cultural evolution as environmental adaptation
 - Reconstruct the life and circumstance of people who created artefacts (even past the archaeological record)
 - Attempt to construct an OBJECTIVE past

3 main paradigms in Egyptian archaeology

- ❑ Culture history
- ❑ Processualism
- ❑ Post-processualism
 - Developed by British archaeologists (Hodder)
 - Sees processualism too environmental, critique supposed objectivity by forgetting individual human features (as gender, ethnicity, identity)
 - Scientific approach to archaeology flawed due to our relying on our own modern cultural biases
 - Therefore lack of formal methodology in discourse analysis as chance to explore meaning via linguistic and non-linguistic ‘sign systems’, people construct and place meaning on things
 - Past is what we create it to be

Just to say

- In addition to *paradigm*, you often hear of a *discourse*
- discourse is then seen as an ensemble of ideas, concepts and categorizations

And then there was a ... crisis

- Paradigm shifts as reaction to changed landscapes and perceptions
 - "discursive turn / linguistic turn" within poststructuralism creates an explanatory crises of representations and objects
 - impossible separating 'subject' from 'object' in social research, researcher and researched are part of the same social processes under investigation
- Answer (???!!!): the material turn
 - looks at roles and significance objects play/have in human action
 - Latour and Actor Network Theory (ANT)
 - Critical Realism
 - Graham Harman and Object Oriented Ontology / Speculative Realism
 - Connected with body related corporeal turn

Where does Egyptology stand?

- *Egyptology is a historical discipline devoted to the study of ancient Egypt. (Brewer, p. 1)*
- Relies on written records to supply chronology, historical data, and information
- As historical discipline = particularizing: what happened at a specific place at a specific time
- → is this still all????

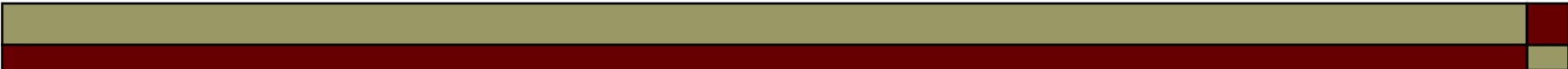
What would each paradigm say?

Post-processualism

- → Ancient Egypt should not be analysed on basis of material remains and techniques to make them, but a detailed description of complex social/ ideological contexts

Material Turn

- → Ancient Egypt should be analysed on basis of material remains and techniques to make them, by taking into consideration further detailed descriptions of complex social/ ideological contexts



Sub-disciplines

- ❑ Archaeology
- ❑ Anthropology
- ❑ History
- ❑ Art History
- ❑ Philology / Linguistic
- ❑ Religious Studies / Theology
- ❑ Museum Studies
- ❑ Heritage Studies
- ❑ Education

Merging with archaeology and anthropology

- ❑ **Egyptology as anthropological archaeology:**
- ❑ Why do we see this idea/event/happening emerging?
- ❑ Is this different to other ancient /modern societies?
- ❑ Try to answer this on the basis of texts and material culture (studies of sites, monumental architecture, settlement archaeology, art historical views with anthropological explanations, ...)

- Amun protects king
- Artistic representation:
- King – male (as the role of kingship dictates)
- BUT: inscriptions s3.t + nsw.yt
- = female endings
- Hatshepsut



Egyptology and its archaeological questions:

- ❑ Explanations of artefacts based on theoretical rules (as rules of authority)
- ❑ → different explanations, using the same object
- ❑ Must deliver an accurate (as best as possible) description with identification, and cataloguing of finds) → leads to assumptions, should be attempted to explain and prove
- ❑ Done via a viable hypothesis (model: presenting phenomena in a logical/objective way)
- ❑ MODEL NEEDS TO BE EVALUATED on the basis of accessible data

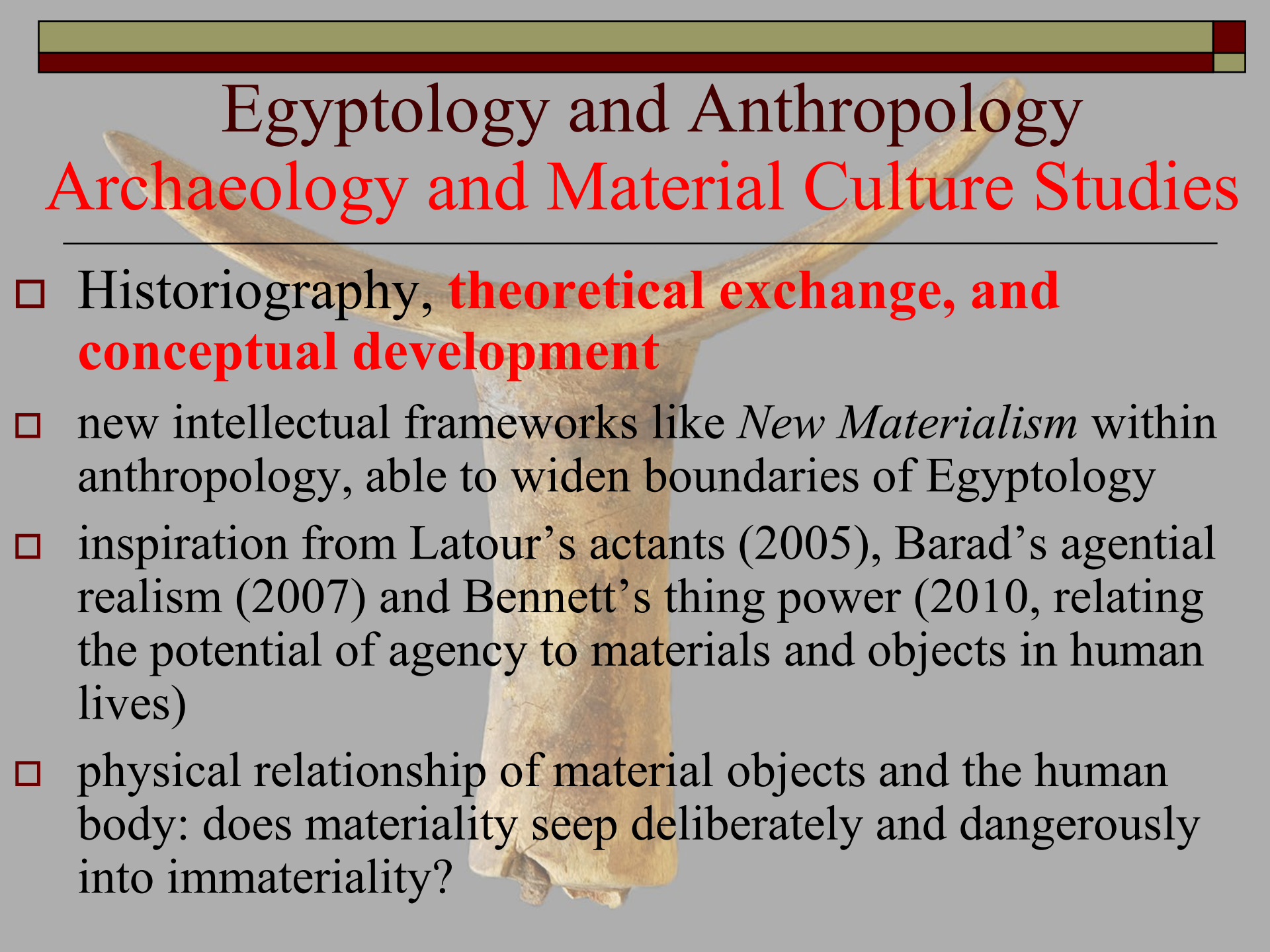
Sleeping hard on your headrest?

Egyptian objects under the
lens of New Materialism

Theory applied – and failed???

Headrests CCM 190.996 and CCM 189.996

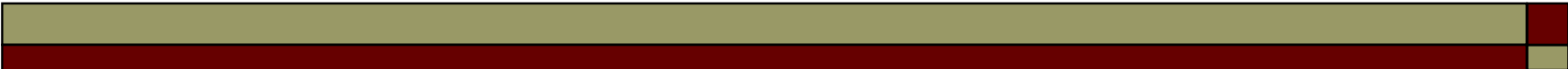




Egyptology and Anthropology

Archaeology and Material Culture Studies

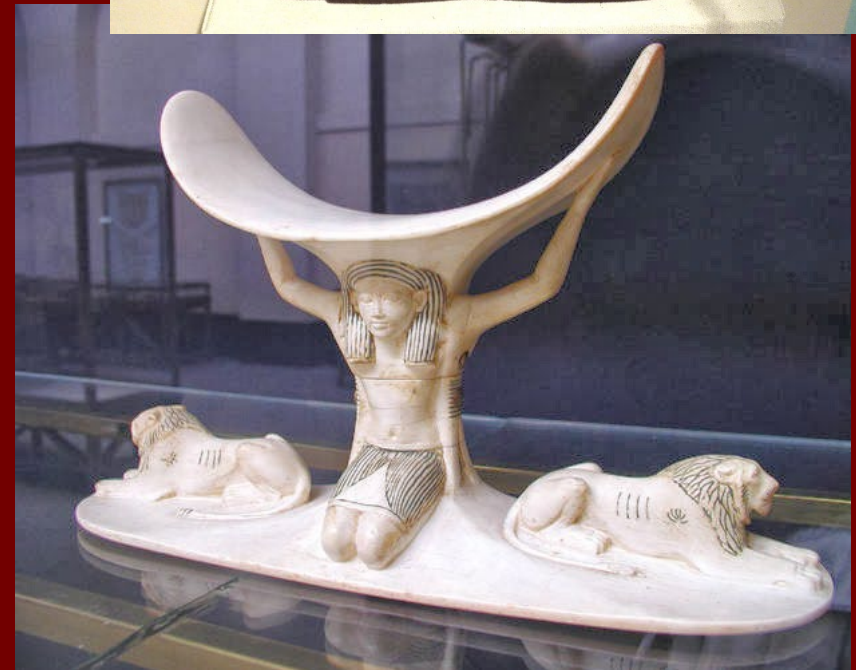
- Historiography, **theoretical exchange, and conceptual development**
- new intellectual frameworks like *New Materialism* within anthropology, able to widen boundaries of Egyptology
- inspiration from Latour's actants (2005), Barad's agential realism (2007) and Bennett's thing power (2010, relating the potential of agency to materials and objects in human lives)
- physical relationship of material objects and the human body: does materiality seep deliberately and dangerously into immateriality?



Egyptology

- ❑ wrs (rs – dream?), wTs
- ❑ unusual part of furniture (Peck) as Egyptians had pillows (used to cushion balustrades, chairs, ...)
- ❑ Made of wood, travertine, limestone, ivory, glass, ...
- ❑ Could be decorated, inlaid

MMA 12.181.308 (18th dyn.) – front; Albany Institute ??? (MK); MMA 19.3.152 (MK), Tomb of Tutankhamun (KV 62, 18th dyn.)



Egyptology

- ❑ wrs (rs – dream?), wTs
- ❑ unusual part of furniture (Peck) as Egyptians had pillows (used to cushion balustrades, chairs, ...)
- ❑ Made of wood, travertine, limestone, ivory, glas, ...
- ❑ Could be decorated, inlaid
- ❑ Predynastic: stones in tombs under heads – precursor? (Petrie)
- ❑ Usual equipment of households (part of furniture), therefore also in tombs: found examples show use or were produced for tomb
- ❑ Appear in religious texts: CT 232; BoD 166
- ❑ Since 3rd dyn. – depicted on tomb walls, coffins, stelae

Tomb of Ramose (TT55)

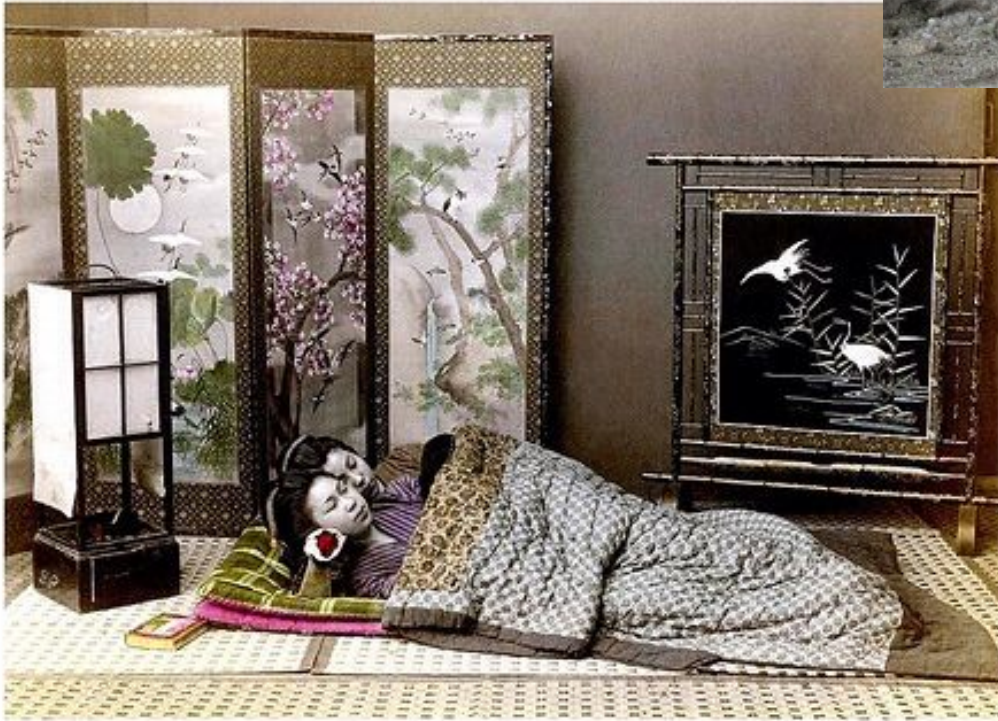


Kestner Museum
Hannover
1964.29 — from
Hermopolis

Unprovenanced – lost?

- Zinn. 2017: “By “reclaiming things” of the material world back from linguistic or textual turn impacting on the cultural research of the late twentieth-century we can hopefully deliver more answers.”
 - Chapter for a headrest
 - May the pigeons awaken you when you are asleep, O Ani, may they awaken your head at the horizon. [...] your head shall not be taken from you forever. (BoD 166, Faulkner 1994, pl 32)

Sleeping on a headrest

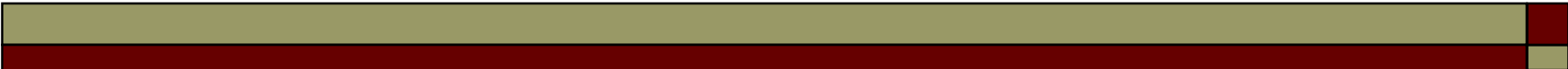


The
material
evidence

Sleeping on a headrest

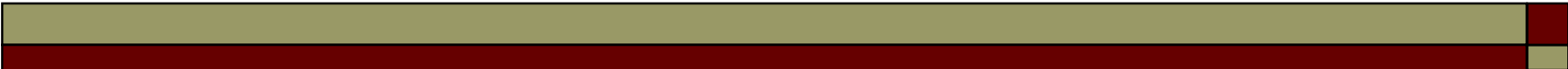


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New Materialism

- ❑ Renewed materialism
- ❑ Changed perception of material causality and corporeality without denying rich materialist heritage
- ❑ As reaction of demise of materialism since 1970ies – nature of matter and place human bodies have within
- ❑ Context:
 - Reaction to advances in sciences (21st cent.)
 - New ethical / political concerns relating living matter



New Materialism - Facts

- Humans are inevitably part of material world
 - Always surrounded
 - AND immersed
- Composed of matter which reacts with other matter
 - Exist in relation to micro-organisms, higher species, material artefacts, stuff in environment
 - Receive and respond with bodily and cellular actions
- Matter materialises in all actions / experiences

New Materialism - perception

- Taken for granted
- Humans stand above matter ?!:

We  Matter

- Distance ourselves from environment of which we are intrinsically part → PARADOX

We  Matter

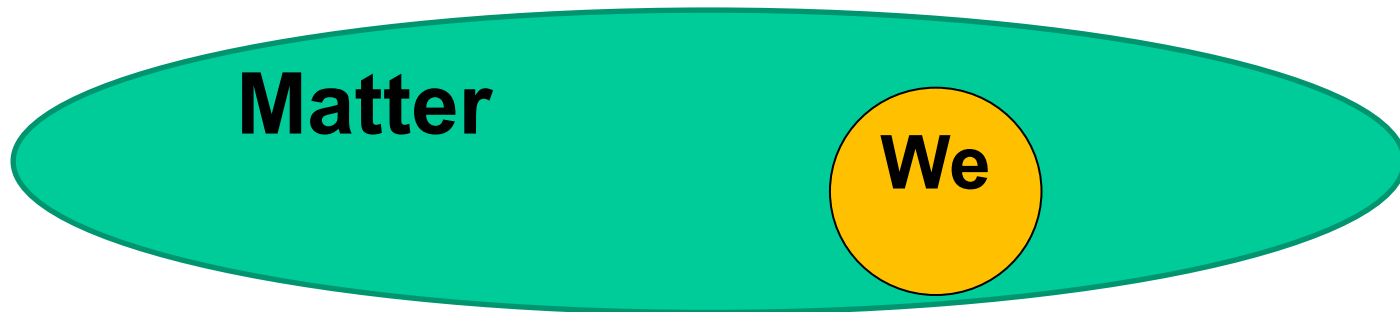
New Materialism - perception

- ❑ Taken for granted
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We → Matter

- ❑ Distance ourselves from environment of which we are intrinsically part → PARADOX

We ↔ Matter

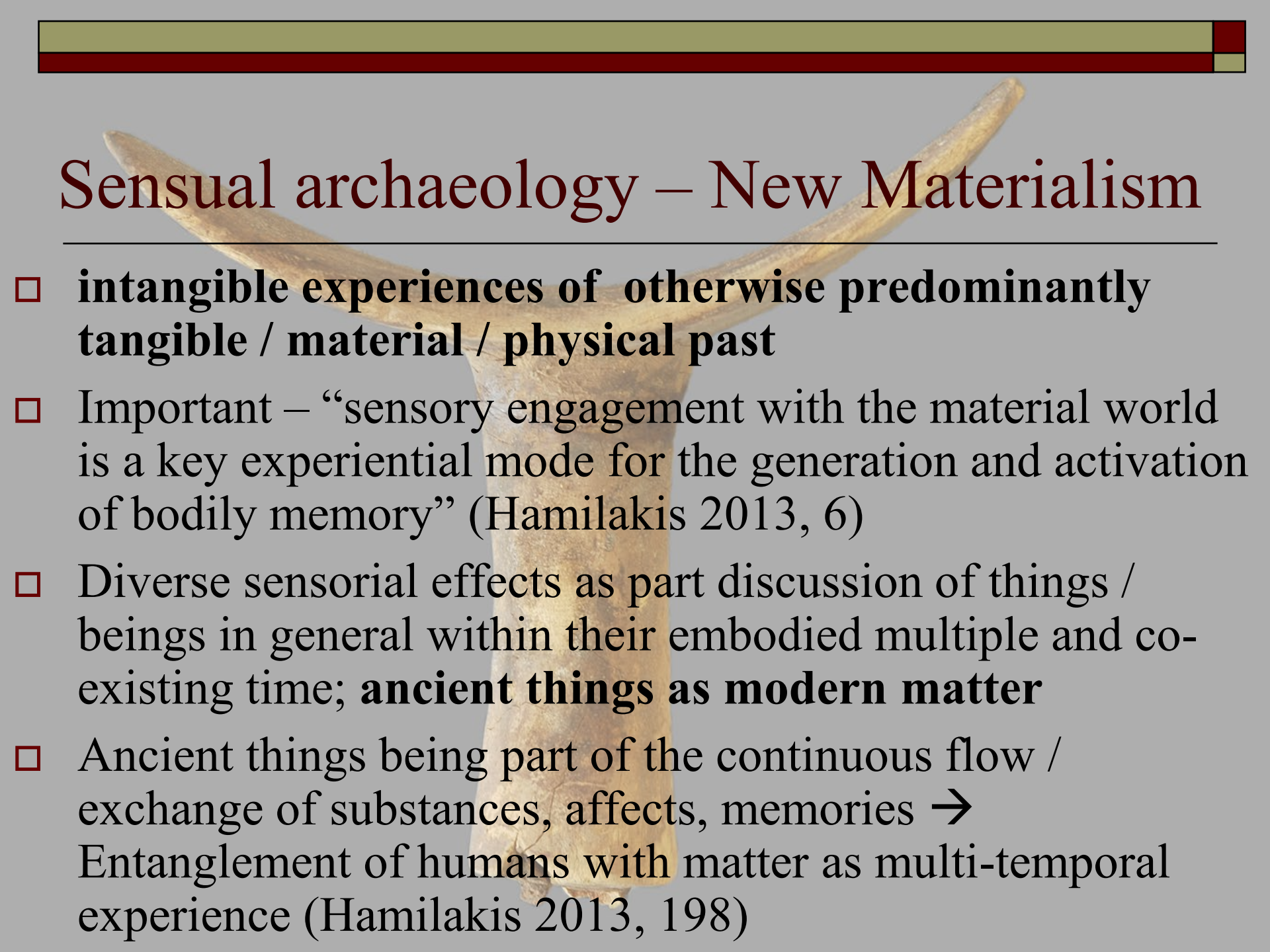


- ❑ New concept of materialisation which is not anthropocentric, but seen as social construct and dynamic



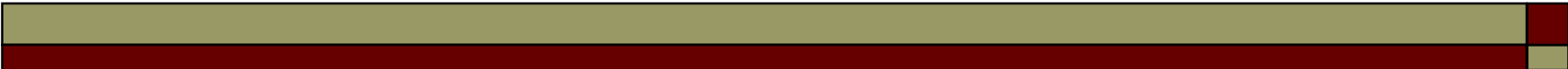
Sensual archaeology – New Materialism

- ❑ Much done: sensescapes, mnemoscapes, sensorial and affective experience
- ❑ But: Less regarding the body itself – interaction of body with matter
- ❑ New Age spiritualism “Getting in touch with **our** senses”
- ❑ extend to ancient civilisations as *anthropology of the past* “Getting in touch with **their** senses”, the matter of past bodies as part of the matter of this world
- ❑ In other words: let’s catch the intangible experiences of the otherwise predominantly tangible / material past
- ❑ **Can it be done?**



Sensual archaeology – New Materialism

- ❑ **intangible experiences of otherwise predominantly tangible / material / physical past**
- ❑ Important – “sensory engagement with the material world is a key experiential mode for the generation and activation of bodily memory” (Hamilakis 2013, 6)
- ❑ Diverse sensorial effects as part discussion of things / beings in general within their embodied multiple and co-existing time; **ancient things as modern matter**
- ❑ Ancient things being part of the continuous flow / exchange of substances, affects, memories → Entanglement of humans with matter as multi-temporal experience (Hamilakis 2013, 198)



Application to Egyptology?!?

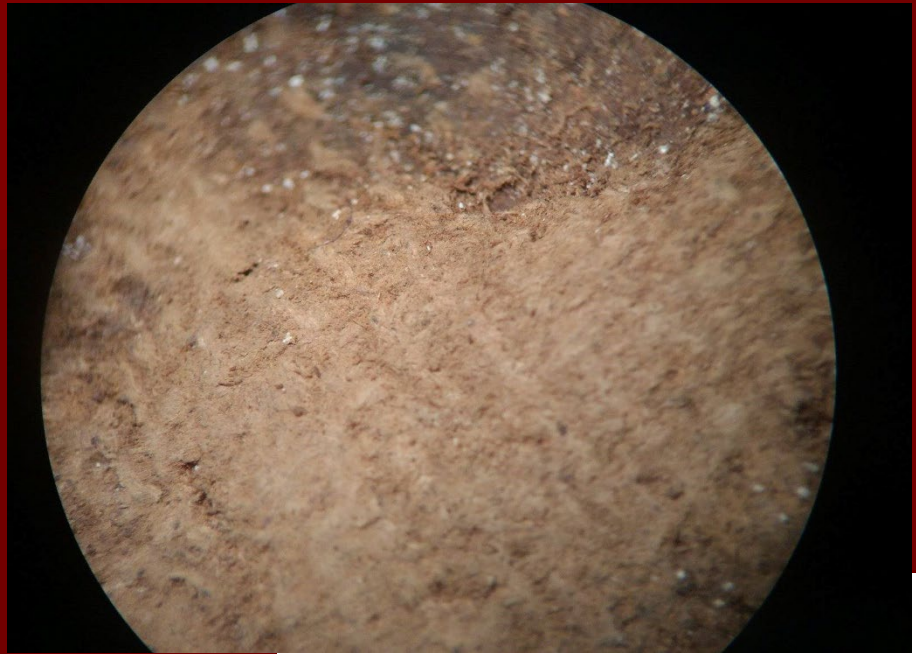
- Rethink complex issues with material realism
 - Daily life (food, ...)
 - Dichotomy life/death (among them sleep)
 - Practices (life, work, religious, ...)
- Examples:
 - Material agencies: cannot be only one version of headrest (interaction materiality headrest – head)
 - Immanence and vitalism of matter: no distinction between inorganic (“inanimate”) and organic matter

Sleeping on a headrest



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Sleeping on a headrest



What was the linen for?

□ “Dust sheet”



□ Padding?



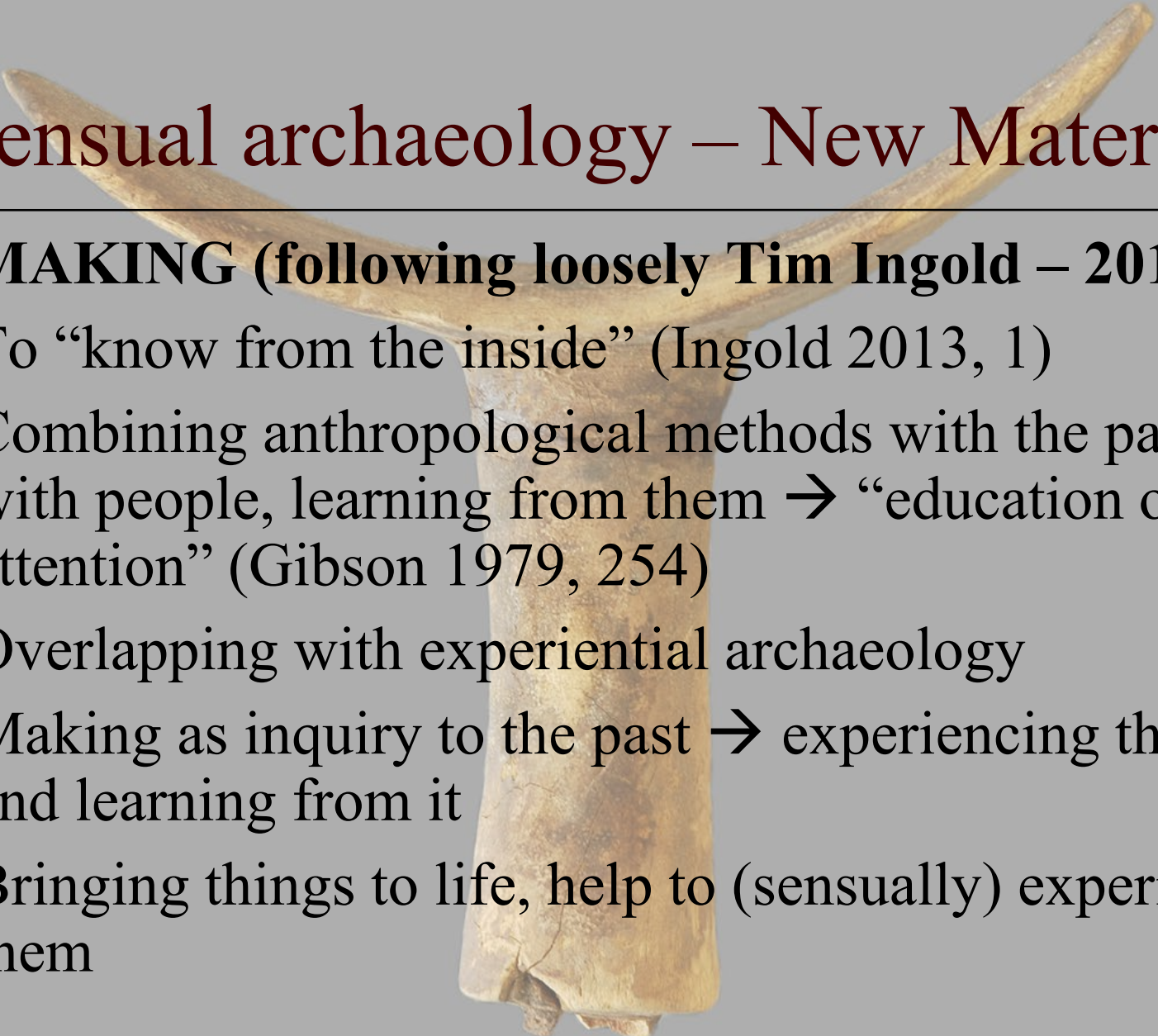
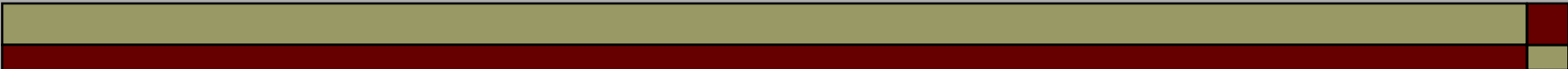
BM EA46631:
wrapped in fine cloth,
wooden headrest
placed at the side of
the head



TT8 Kha and Merit – Merit's bed with headrest

wooden headrest encased in two layers of cloth





Sensual archaeology – New Materialism

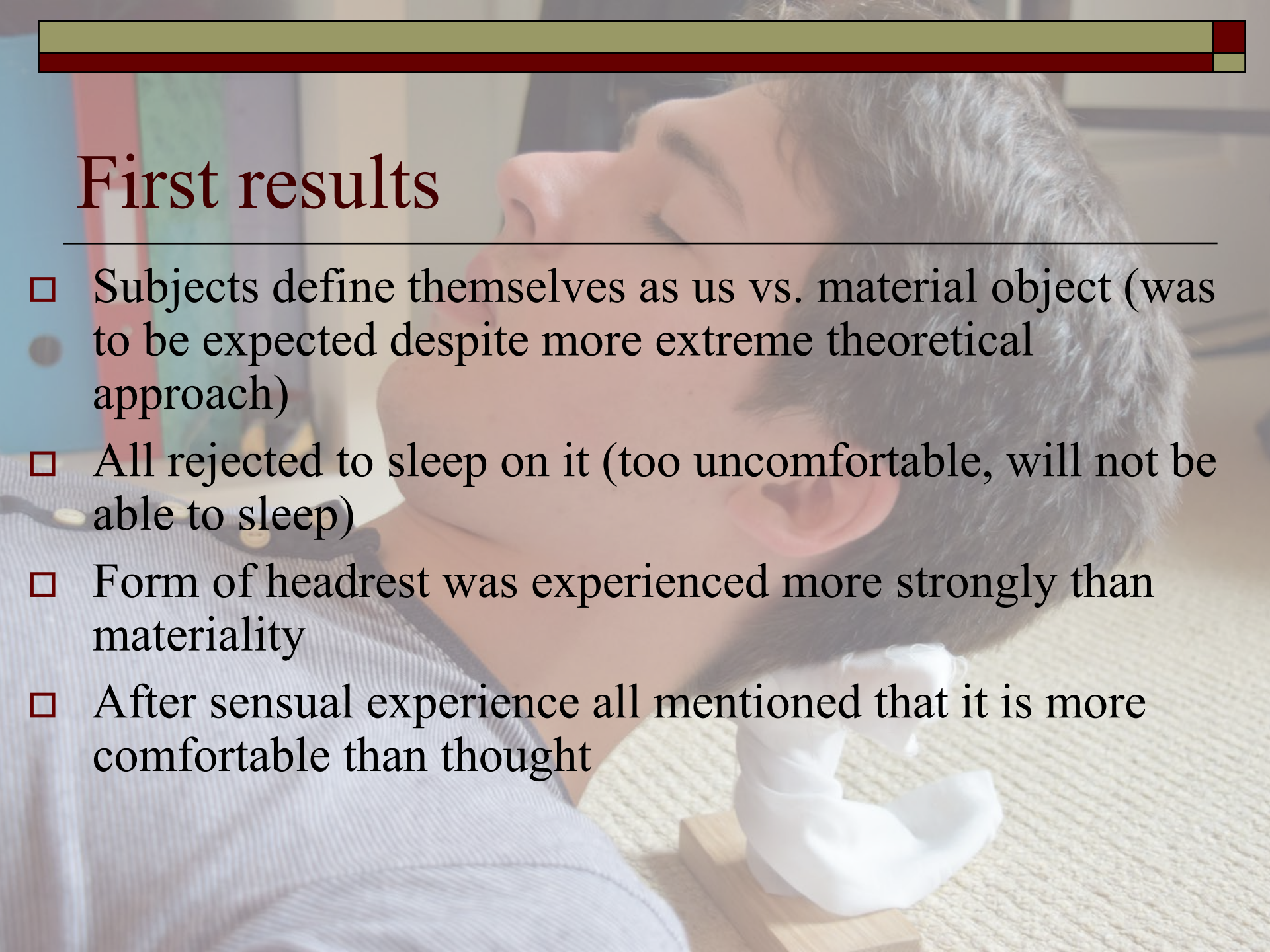
- ❑ **MAKING** (following loosely Tim Ingold – 2013)
- ❑ To “know from the inside” (Ingold 2013, 1)
- ❑ Combining anthropological methods with the past: study with people, learning from them → “education of attention” (Gibson 1979, 254)
- ❑ Overlapping with experiential archaeology
- ❑ Making as inquiry to the past → experiencing the process and learning from it
- ❑ Bringing things to life, help to (sensually) experience them

Sleeping on a headrest



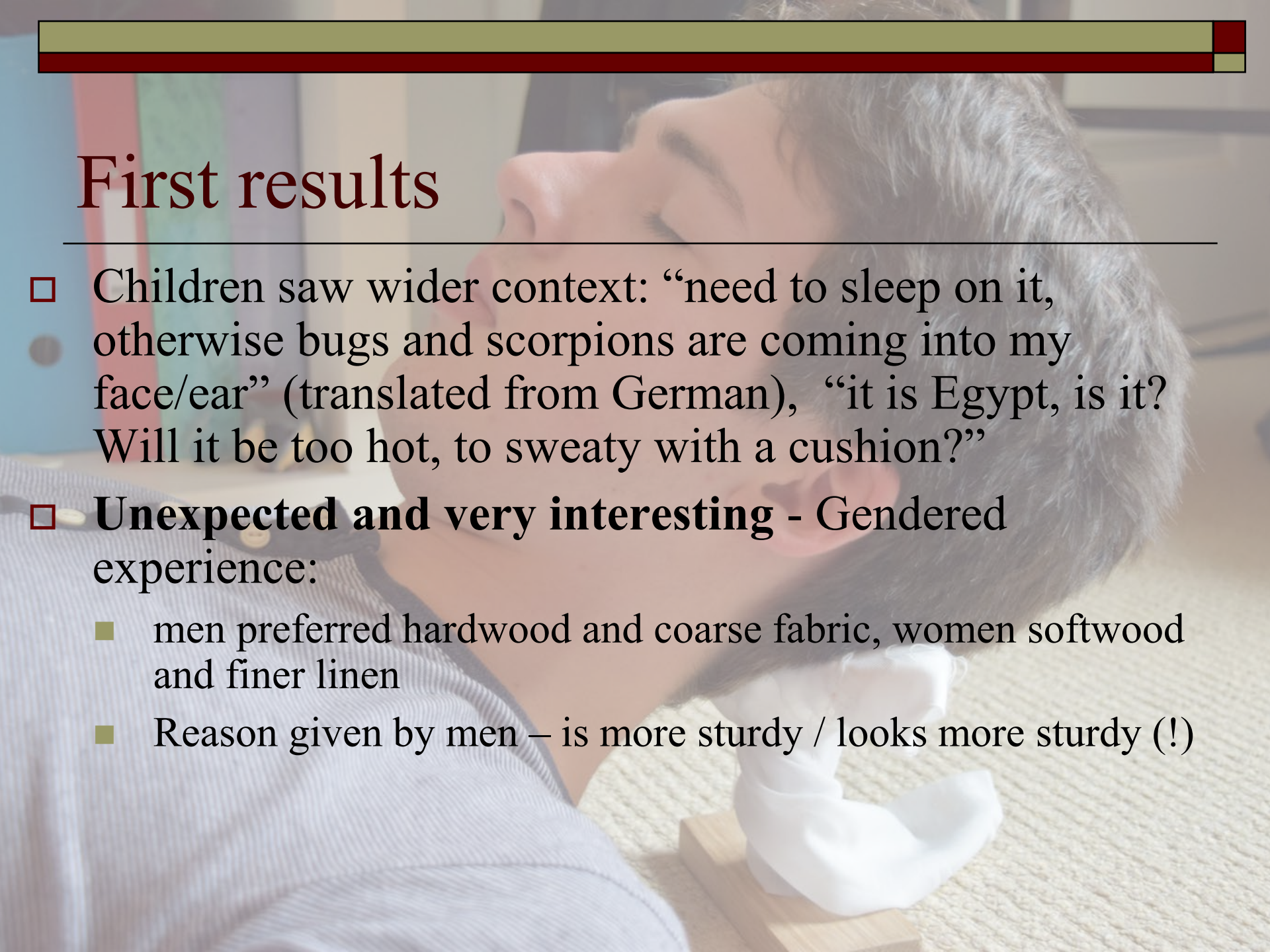
Anthropological fieldwork

- ❑ Observation, survey, questionnaire
- ❑ Experiencing to sleep on a headrest: perceptions, sensual involvement, changed knowledge / understanding
- ❑ Up to now: 16 subjects
 - Non-Egyptologists!
 - male, female, children (8,10) – age, gender, size specifics
 - British, German – differences in cultural background

A photograph of a person with dark hair lying down, their head resting on a white, sculptural headrest. The headrest is placed on a wooden base. The background is slightly blurred, showing some colorful vertical elements. The overall tone is soft and focused on the subject's experience with the headrest.

First results

- ❑ Subjects define themselves as us vs. material object (was to be expected despite more extreme theoretical approach)
- ❑ All rejected to sleep on it (too uncomfortable, will not be able to sleep)
- ❑ Form of headrest was experienced more strongly than materiality
- ❑ After sensual experience all mentioned that it is more comfortable than thought



First results

- ❑ Children saw wider context: “need to sleep on it, otherwise bugs and scorpions are coming into my face/ear” (translated from German), “it is Egypt, is it? Will it be too hot, too sweaty with a cushion?”
- ❑ **Unexpected and very interesting** - Gendered experience:
 - men preferred hardwood and coarse fabric, women softwood and finer linen
 - Reason given by men – is more sturdy / looks more sturdy (!)

Interpretations

- ❑ Application New Materialism to Egyptology
not persuasive / straight forward as presented in
theory → Egyptology will feed back and
influence the establishment of new theoretical
approach
- ❑ Nevertheless helps Egyptologists to understand
 - There is not one form: some padded, some not,
some hardwood, some soft wood
 - Depending on sensual experience, how the matter of
the body becomes one with the matter of the
headrest