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### The Middle Bronze Age Egyptian griffon: whence and wither?

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ORIENTALIA LOVANIENSIA

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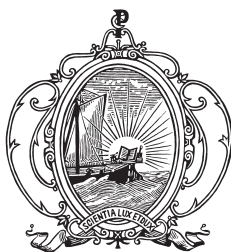
## COMPANY OF IMAGES

### Modelling the Imaginary World of Middle Kingdom Egypt (2000-1500 BC)

*Proceedings of the International Conference  
of the EPOCHS Project  
held 18th-20th September 2014 at UCL, London*

edited by

GIANLUCA MINIACI, MARILINA BETRÒ and STEPHEN QUIRKE



PEETERS

LEUVEN – PARIS – BRISTOL, CT

2017

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## THE MIDDLE BRONZE AGE EGYPTIAN GRIFFON: WHENCE AND WHITHER?

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**Abstract.** This paper will focus on the iconography, meaning and contextual use of the griffon in Middle Bronze Age Egypt, specifically the griffon in tomb scenes. To accomplish this, a discussion of ancient Egyptian griffons from the Predynastic to the New Kingdom will be included, to help analyze the meaning of the griffon in light of its context in ancient Egyptian material objects through time. The Middle Bronze Age Egyptian griffon is found in tomb depictions at Beni Hasan and el-Bersheh, and also on the apotropaic wands. What is the origin of this creature, and in what context is it used in these tombs? Why would the griffon appear in these specific tombs and scenes? How does its use and possible meaning on earlier and later monuments help our interpretation? In particular, the symbolism of the griffon with a human head between its wings will be addressed.

The griffon first appears in Egypt during the late Predynastic, depicted on a knife blade, ivory pieces that might be fragments of knife blades, a stone palette, and at least one ivory statuette. On the Gebel Tarif knife blade,<sup>1</sup> said to be from Amra, a griffon is depicted in the bottommost of four pairs of predator and prey, while on the reverse side of the Dog Palette,<sup>2</sup> from the Hierakonpolis deposit, a griffon is part of the chaotic crowd of animals, both predators and prey. Three rows of animals are depicted on a curved ivory piece, possibly also from the Hierakonpolis deposit; a griffon is walking in the middle row.<sup>3</sup> There are two griffons, walking behind a row of birds, on an ivory fragment of a possible knife handle from Tomb U-127 at Abydos,<sup>4</sup> All of these griffons have comb-like, horizontal wings, resembling the griffons on seals from Susa and Choga Mish, dating to approximately 3500 BC.<sup>5</sup> On these seals the griffons are also walking in rows, or part of a mixed group of animals.

<sup>1</sup> QUIBELL, *Archaic Objects*, pl. 49.

<sup>2</sup> QUIBELL, *Hierakonpolis*, vol. II, pl. 28.

<sup>3</sup> ADAMS, *Ancient Hierakonpolis*, pl. 40, 327; UC 14871.3.

<sup>4</sup> DREYER, in ZIEGLER (ed.), *L'art de l'Ancien Empire égyptien*, fig. 11.

<sup>5</sup> ROACH, *The Elamite Seal Corpus*, nos. 65, 67, 73.

The meaning of these animals, either paired in groups of hunter and hunted, or walking in rows, seems to be symbolic of power and control, paralleling later pharaonic scenes, including hunting, which symbolize the king's defeat of chaos.<sup>6</sup> Both the composite creature of the griffon itself, and its appearance in repetitive rows of possibly captured or sacrificial animals are found in both the Near East and Egypt at the time of the beginning of an elite hierarchy, state formation, and the beginnings of urbanism.<sup>7</sup> Why this is so is not entirely clear, but it has been suggested that these designs on stamp seals might be an attempt by the new "urban elites to encompass the transformative power of established ritual displays, and harness it to the control of everyday transactions".<sup>8</sup> In Egypt certainly the idea of elite power remains with these depictions, as all of the above objects with griffons belonged to the elite, and the majority discovered at centers of rule, such as Hierakonpolis and Abydos.

A statuette from Tell el-Farkha, found in a deposit in the Western Kom, abandoned by the time of Dynasty One, along with 33 other hippopotamus ivory figurines, depicts a seated animal with a bird's head, holding a wine jar with hand-like paws.<sup>9</sup> It appears to have breasts, and marks for feathers on its back.<sup>10</sup> Another statuette found in Tomb 721 at Nagada is limestone, and depicts a crouching animal which has been suggested is either Seth<sup>11</sup> or a griffon.<sup>12</sup>

The earliest known depiction of a griffon in the Old Kingdom was found in an area of rock carved with graffiti of the Fourth Dynasty in Dakhla oasis.<sup>13</sup> It is simply drawn, but a four-legged, winged animal with a bird's head is clear. All the other griffons known from the Old Kingdom date to the Fifth or Sixth Dynasty, and occur in relief depictions placed in either the valley temple or causeway of royal pyramid complexes. Cwiek suggests that these two parts of the complex represent earthly life, and the "active role of the king...destroying enemies".<sup>14</sup> Chauvet suggests these scenes are apotropaic, and "meant to magically protect the complex from evil incursion".<sup>15</sup>

<sup>6</sup> See the discussion by KEMP, *Anatomy of a Civilization*, 92-9; BAINES, in O'CONNOR, SILVERMAN (eds.), *Ancient Egyptian Kingship*, 111; RAFFAELE, in RAFFAELE, NUZZOLO, INCORDINO (eds.), *Recent Discoveries and Latest Researches in Egyptology*, 245-85.

<sup>7</sup> WENGROW, *The Origins of Monsters*, see esp. 51-73.

<sup>8</sup> WENGROW, *Paléorient* 37/1, 161.

<sup>9</sup> CIALOWICZ, *BMSAES* 13, fig. 31.

<sup>10</sup> CIALOWICZ, *SAAC* 15, 14.

<sup>11</sup> PAYNE, *Catalogue of the Predynastic Egyptian Collection*, 16, fig. 4.

<sup>12</sup> CIALOWICZ, *BMSAES* 13, 95.

<sup>13</sup> KUHLMANN, *MDAIK* 61, 285, fig. 48.

<sup>14</sup> CWIEK, *Relief Decoration in the Royal Funerary Complexes*, 302-5.

<sup>15</sup> CHAUVET, in D'AURIA (ed.), *Servant of Mut*, 46. Interestingly enough, there is one Archaic Period cylinder sealing from Susa which shows a reclining griffon facing the façade of a building, SMITH, in FRIEDMAN, ADAMS (eds.), *The Followers of Horus*, 238, fig. 17.

The earliest preserved pyramid complex griffon scene comes from the outside north wall of King Sahure's Fifth Dynasty valley temple at Abusir.<sup>16</sup> The scene is partially destroyed, so the head of the creature cannot be seen, but the body is that of a lion, with wings folded down on its back, trampling foreigners with its paws. This same type of scene must have been in the Fifth Dynasty Neuserre pyramid complex at Abusir, as two block fragments depict trampled foreigners and large paws.<sup>17</sup> Fragments of griffon trampling scenes were found in the lower part of the causeway of King Pepy II of the Sixth Dynasty.<sup>18</sup> There are enough fragments left to show foreigners beneath paws. Jéquier suggests that there were four different griffon figures on opposite sides of the walls: four winged sphinxes with the king's head, and four griffons with bird heads.

For the purpose of this study, the author uses the term griffon for a creature that is a mix of large cat and bird. In general, Egyptologists differ rather widely in the terminology applied to griffons. For example, in reference to the two creatures with a leonine body, falcon's head and wings, flanking the cartouche of Senusret III and trampling foreigners on the pectoral of Mereret, the creatures are called griffons,<sup>19</sup> sphinxes,<sup>20</sup> falcon-headed sphinxes,<sup>21</sup> and hieracosphinxes.<sup>22</sup> Griffons in Egypt break down into three main types: lion's body with a bird's head and wings; a lion with wings; or a human-headed lion with wings. Two other griffon variations are found, but not commonly: a seated lion with falcon head and no wings, and a winged Seth animal, both to be discussed further below.<sup>23</sup>

A fragmentary griffon is shown in a relief scene depicting the season of *Akhet* from the Fifth Dynasty Sun Temple of King Niuserre at Abu Ghorab.<sup>24</sup> Behind a large female personification of the season, are smaller registers with activities pertaining to that season. A griffon appears to be feeding from a tree in a desert setting, and in the partially broken register just below, what seems to be a giraffe is feeding from a tree.

A change in context takes place in the late First Intermediate Period/early Middle Kingdom, when depictions of griffons are preserved in five rock-cut tombs from Beni Hasan and El-Bersheh. Four of these tombs belonged to

<sup>16</sup> BORCHARDT, *Das Grabdenkmal des Königs Sahu-Re*, pl. 8. There may have been earlier Fourth Dynasty scenes like this, see SMITH, *A History of Egyptian Sculpture and Painting*, 158.

<sup>17</sup> BORCHARDT, *op. cit.*, pls. 8-12. This scene type is also restored for the Unas causeway at Sakkara: LABROUSSE, MOUSSA, *La chaussée*, 20, fig. 15.

<sup>18</sup> JÉQUIER, *Le monument funéraire de Pépi II*, vol. III, pl. 15.

<sup>19</sup> SMITH, *The Art and Architecture*, 114, fig. 204.

<sup>20</sup> ROBINS, *Art of Ancient Egypt*, 114, fig. 122.

<sup>21</sup> ANDREWS, *Ancient Egyptian Jewelry*, 129, fig. 112.

<sup>22</sup> ALDRED, *Jewels of the Pharaohs*, 194.

<sup>23</sup> GERKE, *Der altägyptischen Greif*, 14-5, suggests slightly different definitions of griffon types.

<sup>24</sup> EDEL, *Die Jahreszeitenreliefs*, pl. 1. See also GERKE, *Der altägyptischen Greif*, 134; FISCHER, in FARKAS, HARPER, HARRISON (eds.), *Monsters and Demons*, 16-7.



officials carrying the title of “Great Overseer of the Nome”, or nomarch. The griffons are shown associated with hunting in the desert, rows of animals, or in one case, a clearly female griffon is shown directly facing the tomb owner and his wife.

There is some disagreement on the dating of these tombs, which also extends to the dating of the use of the title nomarch.<sup>25</sup> The two tombs from El-Bersheh, Nehery I, Tomb 4, and Ahanakht I, Tomb 5, probably date to the Eleventh Dynasty, or possibly Nehery I, to the beginning of the Twelfth Dynasty.<sup>26</sup> The tombs of Baqet III, Tomb 15, and Khety I, Tomb 17, have been dated as early as the reign of King Mentuhotep II before year 39, and as late as the early Twelfth Dynasty.<sup>27</sup> The Beni Hasan tomb of Khnumhotep II, Tomb 3, who holds the title “Overseer of the Eastern Desert”, is dated to the reign of King Amenemhet II.<sup>28</sup>

In the Beni Hasan tomb of Baqet III, there is a scene of desert animals and hunting in the top register of the north wall in the main chamber<sup>29</sup> (Fig. 1). Right behind a man shooting arrows at a wild bull, a Seth animal, winged griffon, serpopard and rhinoceros walk in line with other realistic desert animals behind them. Above the griffon is written the hieroglyphic name *sfr*. There is a very similar scene in the tomb of Khety I, also in the top register of the north wall of the main chamber. A man shoots arrows at a wild bull, and behind him, after a dog and bush, walk a serpopard, a winged griffon, and a Seth animal, followed by desert animals.<sup>30</sup> Once again, the griffon is named *sfr*<sup>31</sup> (Fig. 2).

In the somewhat later tomb of Khnumhotep II, the desert hunting scene on the top of the main chamber’s north wall takes up two large registers, and is more complicated.<sup>32</sup> Each of the two large registers has a smaller register taking part of the upper space. In the lower larger parts hunting is going on, but in the upper smaller parts, there are only desert animals. In the smaller part of the topmost register, the fourth animal in the row is a winged griffon with a human head between its wings (Fig. 3). It is the only creature in the entire desert scene that is not an actual animal. A detailed drawing of the griffon shows that it is

<sup>25</sup> WILLEMS, *Historical and Archaeological Aspects*, 33-53, esp. 47; WILLEMS, *Chests of Life*, 60, n. 11; WILLEMS, *JEOL* 28, esp. 91-4.

<sup>26</sup> WILLEMS, *Dayr el-Barsha*, vol. I, 83 ff.

<sup>27</sup> BROVARSKI, in SIMPSON, DAVIS (eds.), *Studies in Ancient Egypt*, 28; and see WILLEMS, *JEOL* 28, 91.

<sup>28</sup> BROVARSKI, in WOODS, MCFARLANE, BINDER (eds.), *Egyptian Culture and Society*, 50, n. 119.

<sup>29</sup> NEWBERRY, *Beni Hasan*, vol. II, pl. 4; GERKE, *Der altägyptischen Grief*, 137.

<sup>30</sup> NEWBERRY, *op. cit.*, vol. II, pl.13; GERKE, *op. cit.*, 138.

<sup>31</sup> For *sfr*; later demotic *sfr*; see GERKE, *op. cit.*, 93-102; QUACK, in RIEMER *et al.* (eds.), *Desert Animals*, 350; MORENZ, SCHORCH, *Orientalia* 66/3, 372 ff.

<sup>32</sup> NEWBERRY, *Beni Hasan*, vol. I, pl. 30; GERKE, *op. cit.*, 136.

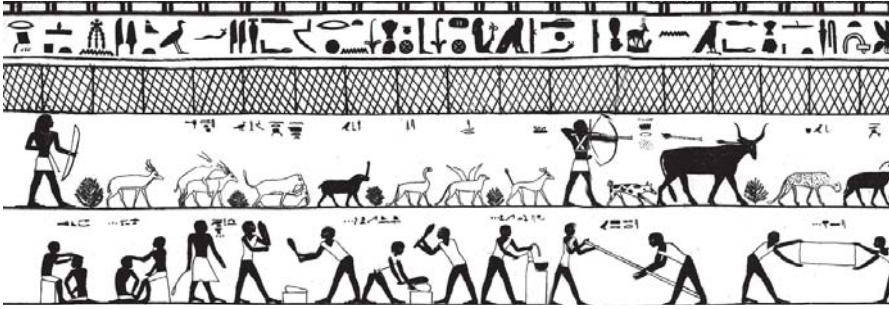


Fig. 1 – The *sfr* griffin from the tomb of Baqet III (No. 15) at Beni Hasan (NEWBERRY, *Beni Hasan*, vol. II, pl. 4, detail).  
Courtesy of the Egypt Exploration Society

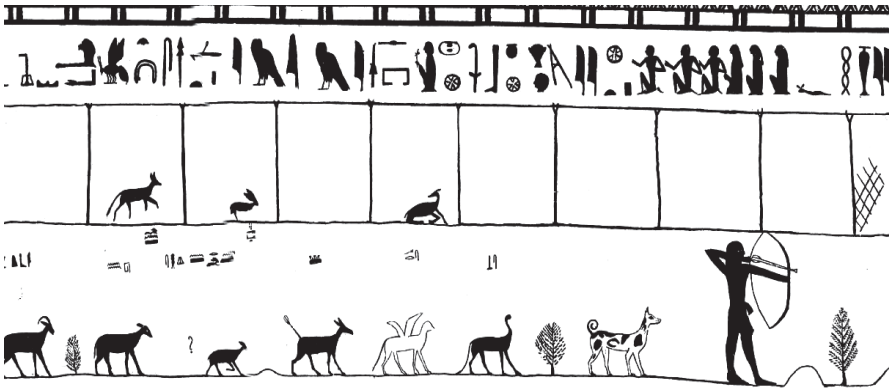


Fig. 2 – The *sfr* griffin from the tomb of Khety I (No. 17) at Beni Hasan (NEWBERRY, *Beni Hasan*, vol. II, pl. 13, detail).  
Courtesy of the Egypt Exploration Society

spotted, like a leopard, and its head is very serpent-like.<sup>33</sup> A possible explanation for the human head will be discussed in detail below.

On the south wall of his tomb, Khety I stands facing to the east, with his wife behind him. A griffin, on a short ground line running from the top of Khety's staff, stands right in front of his face. The griffin is female, as she has a row of teats filled with milk hanging below her abdomen. She wears a collar and short leash. Her wings are folded down on her back. Her tail ends with the shape of a lotus, and in the facsimile done by de Garis Davies,<sup>34</sup> the lotus is

<sup>33</sup> DAVIES, *BMMA* 28/4, fig. 7.

<sup>34</sup> *Art. cit.*, fig. 5 and MET 33.8.14.

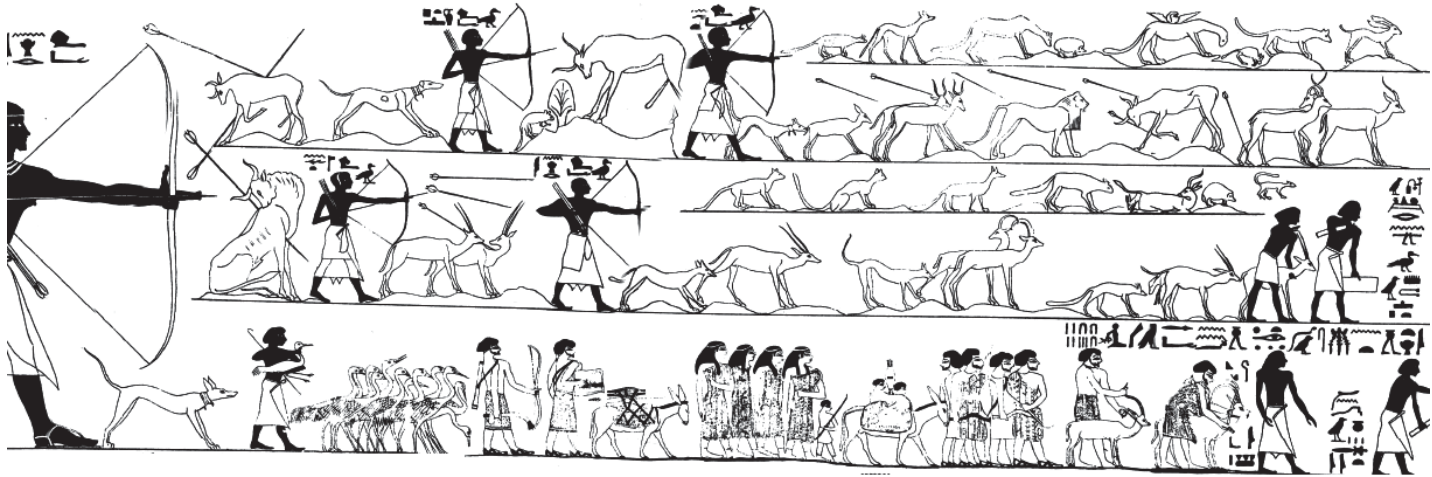


Fig. 3 – Griffin from the tomb of Khnumhotep II (No. 3) at Beni Hasan (NEWBERRY, *Beni Hasan*, vol. I, pl. 30, detail).  
Courtesy of the Egypt Exploration Society

blue. Above the griffon is written: *s3wg m.s.*, “her name is *s3wg*” (Fig. 4). The only parallel known to the author of a mythical creature pacified with a leash, are the two entwined serpopards on the Narmer Palette, each of which has a rope tied to its neck and held firmly by a man.<sup>35</sup>



Fig. 4 – The *s3gt* griffon from the tomb of Khety I (No. 17) at Beni Hasan (NEWBERRY, *Beni Hasan*, vol. II, pl. 16, detail).  
Courtesy of the Egypt Exploration Society

The blue lotus tail of this female griffon is mirrored by the lotuses that curve above the tails of the griffons on the pectoral of Princess Merit, daughter of Senusret III, found in her tomb at Dahshur.<sup>36</sup> These griffons, flanking the cartouche of Senusret III, are the king himself, trampling foreign enemies. The scene is set within a frame, held up on each side by a vertical stem with lotus at the top. On each side, a second lotus curves out of the stem, directly above the curved tail of each sphinx. This pectoral comes straight out of the tradition of protective griffons at the beginning of the king’s causeway in the Old

<sup>35</sup> PETRIE, *Ceremonial Slate Palettes*, pl. K.

<sup>36</sup> SALEH, SOUROUZIAN, *Egyptian Museum Cairo*, no. 110; ALDRED, *Jewels of the Pharaohs*, pl. 41.

Kingdom,<sup>37</sup> but with the addition of the lotuses, the pectoral becomes protective of creation and regeneration.

There is a second Middle Kingdom pectoral that also displays the use of protective symbolism with traditional royal iconography. The pectoral was acquired in two separate pieces in the later Nineteenth century, but undoubtedly came from a royal female burial at either Lahun or Dahshur.<sup>38</sup> Horus as a falcon-headed lion sits facing Seth, in his animal form. Between them is the emblem of the goddess Bat, a cow goddess synonymous with Hathor. The tails of Horus and Seth go straight up, parallel with the two vertical lotus stems which frame the pectoral on the right and left. At the very top, the lotus stems curve in, placing the lotus blossoms at the tops of the tails. Two wadjet eyes, with a sun disk and uraei form the top of the pectoral. The pectoral is replete with symbols of protection, which will be discussed further below, including the figures of Seth and Horus, who also appear, exactly in these forms, as protective figures on a few apotropaic wands, such as Berlin 14207.<sup>39</sup>

In Gerke's discussion of the *s3gw* griffon in Khety's tomb, she suggests that this scene is comparable to a kind of 'folk art' use of royal iconography. The griffon is shown as female, with a collar and leash, "*als eine ganz bewusste 'Verballhornung' dieses Motivs (i.e. the griffons on the Merit pectoral) gesehen werden, das ähnlich wie das Aufführen des 'Erschlagens der Feinde' aus seinem üblichen Kontext gerissen und verdreht wurde*".<sup>40</sup> Gerke is correct in that there must be two different levels of depiction going on here, but this author believes that she has missed the point of the depictions, which in both cases is protection for birth or rebirth. The pectorals are based on traditional royal iconography, while the tomb scenes of the desert animals and griffons are more popular images of the Myth of the Return of the Goddess. Ultimately, these scenes suggest the birth of the new sun god, and in an extended sense, the promise of rebirth. Vasiljević states that the griffon must be interpreted in the wider context of the tomb's decoration, and that this scene on the southeast wall "inhaltslich in den derzeitigen Vorstellung von der Voraussetzungen für die Wiedergeburt".<sup>41</sup>

<sup>37</sup> See ft. 15 above.

<sup>38</sup> SPURR, REEVES, QUIRKE, *Egyptian Art at Eton College*, 16, no. 8; GERKE, *Der altägyptischen Grief*, 141.

<sup>39</sup> LEGGE, *PSBA* 27, pl. 4; ALTENMÜLLER, *Die Apotropaia*, vol. II, 11-2, no. 10. Altenmüller's catalogue lists only one wand with a Falkenköpfiger Löwe, no. 10, but six with a Seth-tier: nos. 10, 20, 21, 32, 65, 74. *Op. cit.*, vol. II, 75, notes parallels in the arrangements of figures on some wands and those on royal pectorals.

<sup>40</sup> GERKE, *Der altägyptischen Grief*, 55.

<sup>41</sup> VASILJEVIĆ, in KLOTH, MARTIN, PARDEY (eds.), *Festschrift für Hartwig Altenmüller*, 436.

Another example of this same female griffon is depicted on a fragment of wall decoration from Tomb 4 of Nehery I at El-Bersheh<sup>42</sup> (Fig. 5). Part of one register depicts sandy ground, on which walk a male and a female baboon, and above them a male and female monkey. The tail of the female monkey stretches back to the collar on the griffon, visually paralleling the collar and leash of the Beni Hasan Khety I tomb griffon. This Bersheh griffon also has its wings folded down. It has pointed ears (plumes?) on its head, which the other female griffon did not. The name above it is *s3gt*, writing out the female ending *-t*, missing in the Khety I tomb inscription.



Fig. 5 – The *s3gt* griffon from the tomb of Nehery (No. 4) at Deir el Bersheh  
(NEWBERRY, *Beni Hasan*, vol. II, pl. 11, detail).  
Courtesy of the Egypt Exploration Society

The association of a griffon with monkeys and baboons, and the fact that the griffon has its wings folded down, fit in with the story preserved in the demotic Myth of the Eye of the Sun, or the Return of the Wandering Goddess.<sup>43</sup> Very briefly, in the myth, Hathor (or Tefnut or Sakhmet), a personification of the Eye of Re, gets angry and goes into the desert in the south. The sun sends various agents to bring her back, particularly Thoth in the guise of a baboon. The goddess is persuaded to return, and as she does so from the far desert, through the closer desert and into the Nile Valley, various peoples and animals accompany her.

<sup>42</sup> NEWBERRY, *El Bersheh*, pl. 11; GERKE, *Der altägyptischen Griffen*, 139.

<sup>43</sup> QUACK, *Einführung in die Altägyptische Literaturgeschichte*, vol. III, 148-60; and for a bibliography of versions, translations and commentaries HOFFMANN, QUACK, *Anthologie der Demotisch Literatur*, 356-8.



Probably related to this myth is a hymn to Hathor of Gold at the entrance of the Temple of Medamud, greeting the goddess as she returns and enters the temple.<sup>44</sup> The people and animals with her celebrate her entry into the temple, the ultimate outcome of which will be her giving birth to the new sun god. The monkeys and baboons give her praise, while: “The griffon swathes himself for you with his wings”,<sup>45</sup> symbolizing that it has become pacified and peaceful. The author of this paper suggests that, in particular, the *s3gt* represents such a pacified griffon, symbolizing its role in the ultimate outcome of the goddess’s return, which is her giving birth. Fertility, and also birth and rebirth, is hinted at by the lotus at the end of the *s3gt*’s tail in the Khety I tomb. It is also interesting that the *s3gt* is represented right in front of Khety’s face, which brings to mind *PT* 266: “I appear as Nefertem, a lotus-bloom which is at the nose of Re”.<sup>46</sup>

These two tomb scenes are the only known occurrences of the *s3gt* griffon. Later in the New Kingdom, there are female griffons shown with milk-filled teats. A royal example is Queen Mutnodjmet, wife of King Horemheb, depicted as a female griffon on the side of a seated statue of her and her husband in the Turin Museum.<sup>47</sup> Her wings are folded back, but not down, and she wears a crown with flowers above it. This type of griffon is generally referred to as a ‘Syrian’ griffon, and appears to have been reintroduced back into Egypt from Syria.<sup>48</sup> An earlier example is that of Queen Tiye on a bracelet plaque of carnelian, probably from the tomb of Amenhotep III.<sup>49</sup> Teats are not clearly shown on this figure, although Dorothea Arnold has pointed out that the hair piled up on her head resembles that of the woman in a birth bower on an ostrakon from Deir el-Medineh.<sup>50</sup> Tiye’s depiction as a griffon is all the more interesting because of her role as the Eye of Re at the temple of Sedeinga.<sup>51</sup> There are numerous non-royal examples of this female griffon depicted on small objects.<sup>52</sup> In terms of this paper, the ‘Syrian’ griffon type is interesting as being a continuance of the connection between the griffon and birth.

A recently published tomb scene from Asyut supplies further evidence for a desert hunting scene with an ‘unreal creature’. The tomb of the nomarch Iti-ibi-iqer, contemporary with King Mentuhotep II, was first discovered in

<sup>44</sup> See the study of the hymn by DARNELL, *SAK* 22, 47-94.

<sup>45</sup> QUACK, in RIEMER *et al.* (eds.), *Desert Animals*, 348, and see 339, n. 15, reading griffon as singular rather than as DARNELL, *SAK* 22, 80, who translates: “The griffons cover themselves for you with their wings” and comments, 84-6.

<sup>46</sup> FAULKNER, *Pyramid Texts*, 61. See the discussion by ANTHES, *ZÄS* 80, 81-9.

<sup>47</sup> GARDINER, *JEA* 39, pl. 1; ROTH, *Gebieten aller Länder*, fig. 11.

<sup>48</sup> KANTOR, *Plant Ornament*, 492.

<sup>49</sup> BAYER, *Teye*, 377-9, and pl. 83e.

<sup>50</sup> ARNOLD, *Royal Women of Amarna*, 107-8, figs. 102, 90.

<sup>51</sup> KOZLOFF, BRYAN, BERMAN, *Egypt’s Dazzling Sun*, 110.

<sup>52</sup> For example, CROWFOOT, DAVIES, *JEA* 27, pl. 20; and see MONTET, *Les Reliques de l’Art Syrien*, 172-4.

2005.<sup>53</sup> The decoration has been badly damaged by both ancient and modern reuse, but six registers depicting a hunting scene are still preserved on the south wall of the chapel.<sup>54</sup> The top two registers have animals, but no actual hunting of them; men with bows and arrows are depicted hunting other animals in the registers below them. The top register shows a gazelle, a leopard-like animal (?) whose head and middle section are damaged, and a baboon. Considering that a baboon accompanies this animal, it could be a griffon. In the register below stands a frontal Bes-like figure and two gazelles, which are walking away looking back. The figure is painted blue, faces front with legs splayed, feet pointed out. A lion tail curls around its right leg. The head of the figure is not preserved, but across its shoulders is a gazelle, and another gazelle is held upside down in its left hand. El-Khadragy suggests it is Aha, 'the Fighter',<sup>55</sup> whose iconography is very close to that of Bes, and was also one of the guardians of the newborn sun god.<sup>56</sup>

The different gazelles shown with this figure also connect this tomb scene to Hathor and the myth of the Return of the Goddess. Quack, in his study of desert animals and the myth, discusses numerous connections between the goddess and the gazelle: the goddess becomes a gazelle during her return;<sup>57</sup> the gazelle is high status meat that can be offered to her;<sup>58</sup> and in leaving Egypt and disappearing into the desert, the goddess is associated with desert creatures.<sup>59</sup> The manner in which the Aha figure carries the gazelle over its shoulders is commonly seen in the Old Kingdom as a way of bringing and offering a gazelle.<sup>60</sup> Aha holds a gazelle in his hand, just like Horus or Horus-Shed hold desert animals on Late Period *cippi*, guaranteeing protection from wild animals belonging to the desert domain of Seth.<sup>61</sup>

These top two registers of animals are like the animal scenes depicted at Beni Hassan and El-Bersheh where there are animals in the desert, but not being hunted. These are the animals, mythological and otherwise, who are returning back out of the desert with the goddess. Altenmüller has suggested that the different creatures shown on the apotropaic wands of the Middle Kingdom, including the griffon, are those in the myth of the Return of the Goddess,<sup>62</sup> and

<sup>53</sup> EL-KHADRAGY, *SAK* 36, 105-35.

<sup>54</sup> *Art. cit.*, fig. 5.

<sup>55</sup> *Art. cit.*, 111; QUIRKE, *Exploring Religion*, 53-4; Aha appears and is named on two apotropaic wands; see ROMANO, *The Bes-Image*, 10 and cat. nos. 17 and 23; ALTENMÜLLER, *Die Apotropaia*, 152-4.

<sup>56</sup> RAVEN, *Egyptian Magic*, 23, 92.

<sup>57</sup> QUACK, in RIEMER *et al.* (eds.), *Desert Animals*, 342, 356. Also see STRANDBERG, *Gazelle*, 183.

<sup>58</sup> *Op. cit.*, 355.

<sup>59</sup> *Op. cit.*, 356.

<sup>60</sup> STRANDBERG, *Gazelle*, 117-8.

<sup>61</sup> RAVEN, *Egyptian Magic*, 94; QUIRKE, *Exploring Religion*, 190.

<sup>62</sup> ALTENMÜLLER, in FLOSSMANN-SCHÜTZE *et al.* (eds.), *Kleine Götter-Grosse Götter*, 11-27. See earlier suggestion of this by KESSLER, *SAK*, 15, 187, ft. 52, pointed out by HORVÁTH, in MINIACI, GRAJETZKI (eds.), *The World of Middle Kingdom*, 141.



he is certainly correct.<sup>63</sup> The animals in these tomb scenes are the same: they are coming back out of the desert to accompany the Eye of the Sun back into the Nile Valley. The different animals may also represent the different environments passed through by the goddess, from the distant south by the Red Sea, to the closer desert, and ending in the papyrus swamp of the Nile Valley.<sup>64</sup> Darnell points out that the creatures in the final section of the Medamûd hymn: “griffon, fox and hippopotamus- represent the three divisions of the southern lands” and “represent the three phases of the distant goddess’ travels”.<sup>65</sup>

One last griffon is depicted in Tomb 5 of Ahanakht at El-Bersheh. In front of the standing tomb owner, are two partially damaged registers showing animals walking away, with a scene of fishing below.<sup>66</sup> The first animal in the top register is a griffon, winged, with something on its head from which the tips of two plumes project. Above the griffon is written, *tštš*, “the chopper”<sup>67</sup> (Fig. 6). The animal behind the griffon is a deer, but it is unclear what the two animals in the register below are. What is most interesting, however, is what the griffon has on its head. The drawing is rather imprecise, but it may be horns, some kind of crown, or a bouquet (?), with the tips of two plumes sticking up in the middle.<sup>68</sup>

What is on the head of the *tštš* resembles what is on the head of the god Nefertum, the personification of the blue lotus from whose petals the sun god was born.<sup>69</sup> His headgear is always a lotus with two tall plumes, and hanging down, usually on each side of the lotus, is a menat, or necklace counterweight (Fig. 7). The menat is associated with Hathor,<sup>70</sup> as is the lion. As the son of Sakhmet, Nefertum could be shown as a lion, or standing on a lion<sup>71</sup> (Fig. 8). The Wandering Goddess can take the form of a lion, like Sakhmet, and the same Hathor-Sakhmet relationship is seen in the Myth of the Heavenly Cow.<sup>72</sup> What is the symbolism or significance of the two slender plumes, however?<sup>73</sup> (Fig. 9).

<sup>63</sup> GERKE, *Der altägyptischen Grief*, 41, sees as problematic a relationship between the griffons on the wands and those in the Beni Hassan scenes.

<sup>64</sup> See DARNELL, *SAK* 22, 91. An interesting discussion of animals and Hathor can be found in QUACK, RIEMER *et al.* (eds.), *Desert Animals*, 341-61.

<sup>65</sup> DARNELL, *SAK* 22, 91.

<sup>66</sup> NEWBERRY, *El Bersheh*, vol. II, 34-5, pl. 5; GERKE, *Der altägyptischen Grief*, 139-40.

<sup>67</sup> Wb V, 330, 7. See the discussion by GERKE, *Der altägyptischen Grief*, 85-9.

<sup>68</sup> See two photographs of the creature, from the Dayr al-Barsha Project, published by GERKE, *op. cit.*, 139-40, n. 19, abb. b, c. It is not possible to make out the details on which the Newberry drawing was based.

<sup>69</sup> See discussion by MUNRO, *ZÄS* 95, esp. 36-9.

<sup>70</sup> STAEHELIN, *Untersuchungen zur ägyptischen Tracht*, 125-7.

<sup>71</sup> ANDREWS, *Amulets*, 18-9; DARESSY, *Statues de Divinités*, pl. 7; HORNEMANN, *Types of Ancient Egyptian Statuary*, vol. V, 1334.

<sup>72</sup> RICHTER, in DOLIŃSKA, BEINLICH (eds.), 8. *Ägyptologische Tempeltagung: Interconnections between Temples*, 156-9.

<sup>73</sup> For this lotus with two plumes in the Nefertum chapel at the Seti I Temple, Abydos, see MORENZ, SCHUBERT, *Der Gott auf der Blume*, fig. 2. It is also interesting in terms of which animals

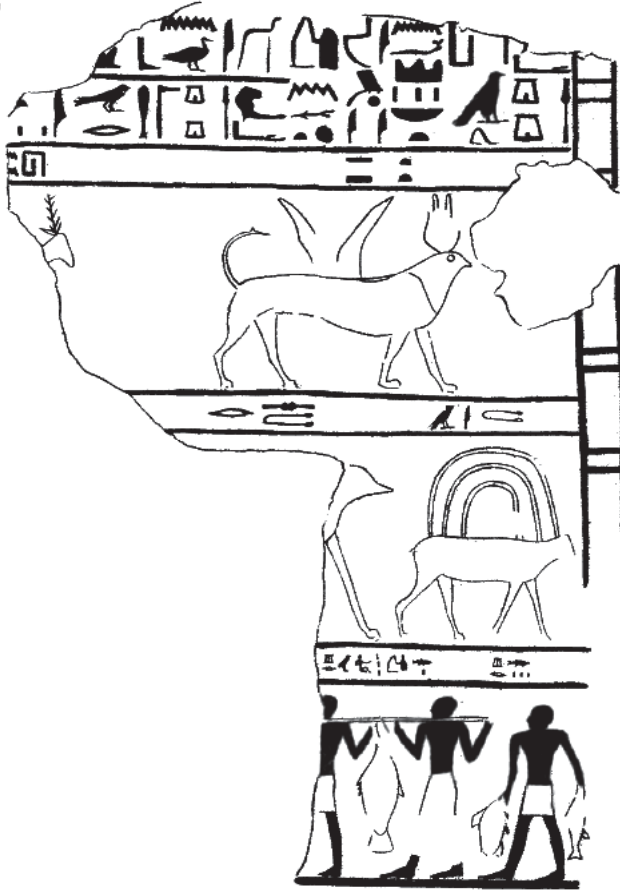


Fig. 6 – The *tšš* griffin from the tomb of Ahanakht (NEWBERRY, *El Bersheh*, vol. II, pl. 16, detail). Courtesy of the Egypt Exploration Society

In the collection of the Cairo Museum is a diadem of Princess Sat-Hathor-Yunet, found in her tomb next to the Lahun Pyramid of her father, King Senusret II.<sup>74</sup> The diadem itself is a gold band, decorated with gold rosettes. Three gold streamers hang down, one on each side, and the back. Projecting from the front of the diadem, so over the forehead, is a uraeus, and at the back is a small gold lotus, from which projects two tall, slender plumes. A similar type of diadem can be seen on women celebrating what seems to be a festival of Hathor in the Twelfth Dynasty tomb of the count and governor Ukh-hotep at Meir.

a griffin is a composite of, that Nefertum can be depicted as a lion-headed man, with a falcon on his head, and a lotus on the head of the falcon, see Fig. 9.

<sup>74</sup> SALEH, SOUROUZIAN, *The Egyptian Museum Cairo*, 111.



Fig.7 – Statuette of Nefertum wearing lotus crown (MMA 38.2.19).  
© The Metropolitan Museum of Art



Fig. 8 – Amulet of Nefertum as a lion wearing lotus crown (The British Museum, London, EA 64617)  
© Trustees of the British Museum



Fig. 9 – Nefertum shown on the north wall of the Nefertum Chapel, Seti I Temple at Abydos. Photograph by the author

In a register on the east wall of the second room, seventeen women are in a procession moving toward the seated tomb owner.<sup>75</sup> Nine of the women are wearing fillets with two slender plumes at the back; two women have a lotus at the back instead. Ten of the women hold a lotus-topped scepter (Fig. 10). In a second scene before the tomb owner, two registers of female musicians and women clapping all wear these same plumes.<sup>76</sup> On stands before the figures are sistras and menats, emblems of the goddess Hathor. It would appear that plumes and lotus are associated with both Hathor and Nefertum, and the author would suggest that is because both of these deities are tied to the birth of the sun god.

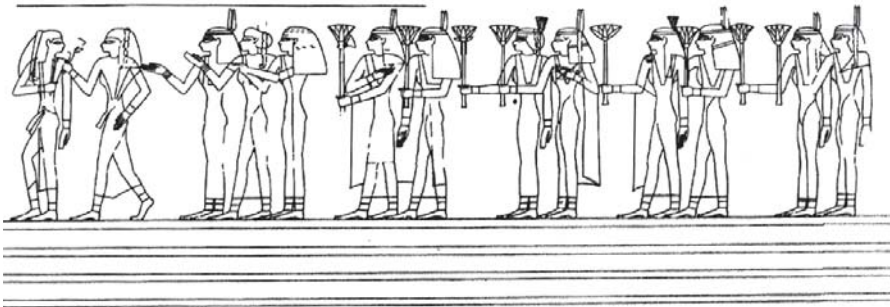


Fig. 10 – Procession of women from the tomb-chapel of Ukh-hotep  
(BLACKMAN, *Meir*, vol. VI, pl. 10, detail).  
Courtesy of the Egypt Exploration Society

One last point to be addressed is the meaning of the human head between the wings of the griffon shown in the Beni Hasan tomb of Khnumhotep II, and on the apotropaic wands. In the view of this author, the wings on the Khnumhotep II griffon (see Fig. 3 above) are very plant-like, and the head coming out of the wings is reminiscent of the famous head of Tutankhamen born out the lotus (Fig. 11). A Middle Kingdom coffin in the Louvre depicts a headrest with lotus buds on each side.<sup>77</sup> Visually the headrest becomes like the central part of the lotus flower, so that a head rising from this headrest is born, like the head of sun god born from the lotus. A lotus, headrest, horns of the celestial cow, the *akhet*, or horizon - all these things resemble each other visually, and take on the same symbolic meaning of a place of birth. In Wegner's study of the late Middle Kingdom birth brick found at Abydos, the decoration on the brick, and on the objects, including apotropaic wands, used by those attending the birth,

<sup>75</sup> BLACKMAN, *Rock Tombs of Meir*, vol. VI, pl. 10.

<sup>76</sup> *Ort. cit.*, vol. VI, pl. 19.

<sup>77</sup> CHASSINAT, PALANQUE, *Une campagne de fouilles*, pl. 17.





Fig. 11 – Tutankhamun as Nefertum, emerging from a lotus (The Egyptian Museum, Cairo, JE 60723). Copyright Griffith Institute, University of Oxford

transform the birth bricks into the eastern *akhet*, the mother into the goddess Hathor, and the newborn into the sun.<sup>78</sup>

Of one hundred and fifty apotropaic wands, fifty-eight have the depiction of a griffon.<sup>79</sup> A fox appears on one end of the wands fifty-five times.<sup>80</sup> Twelve wands have a lotus at the other end of the wand, and at least six of the foxes also have a lotus on their head between their ears<sup>81</sup> (Figs. 12-13). Just as the lotus is connected to the birth of the sun god, the fox also might have a symbolic connection to birth. Three fox skins tied together form the hieroglyphic sign, *ms*, “to give birth”.<sup>82</sup> The writing of this word in the Old Kingdom mastaba of Ankhmahor at Saqqara clearly shows the three fox skins tied together at the nose.<sup>83</sup> The skins once formed an apron worn by males,

<sup>78</sup> WEGNER, in SILVERMAN, SIMPSON, WEGNER (eds.), *Archaism and Innovation*, 479 ff.

<sup>79</sup> GERKE, *Der altägyptische Greif*, 35; ALTENMÜLLER, in FLOSSMANN-SCHÜTZE *et al.* (eds.), *Kleine Götter-Grosse Götter*, 12-3.

<sup>80</sup> HUBAI, *SAK*, 37, 182. See also ALTENMÜLLER, in ROCCATI (ed.), *La magia*, 134.

<sup>81</sup> ALTENMÜLLER, *SAK*, 13, 5, and see Abb. 1.

<sup>82</sup> BORGHOUTS, *Egyptian An Introduction to the Writing*, 55, sign F31.

<sup>83</sup> BADAWY, *Tomb of Nyhetep-Ptah*, figs. 32, 45. See also BORCHARDT, *ZÄS* 44, 75.

and its function in covering the sexual organs led to its connection with reproduction and birth.<sup>84</sup> In the line of the Medamûd hymn which states: “the foxes raise up their heads for you”,<sup>85</sup> Darnell suggests that: “The foxes, heads raised, may be meant to suggest the three fox skins attached at the noses which form the *ms*-sign”.<sup>86</sup> Störk suggests that this line of the hymn<sup>87</sup> not only shows a connection between the fox and Hathor, but between the fox and eroticism and fertility.<sup>88</sup>

The author suggests that the winged griffons, which appear in the very late First Intermediate Period and the Middle Kingdom in tomb scenes or on magical birth objects, are representations of the god Nefertum. This is highly speculative, but based on Middle Kingdom representations of griffons, the use and importance of the lotus, and the later iconography of the god Nefertum. His iconography does not really develop until the Third Intermediate Period, when the first amulets of Nefertum appear,<sup>89</sup> but the elements tied to him are: lotus, menat, plumes, the lion, and the falcon.<sup>90</sup> Nefertum is the original lotus, whose petals opened to produce the sun god, and is the symbol of regeneration and rebirth.<sup>91</sup>

Griffons have a role in the myth of the Return of the Wandering Goddess, as well in the goddess’s giving birth to the new sun god. In the latter case, the wings of the griffon are visually symbolic of the lotus from which the sun god emerged, and the head between the wings of the griffon represents the individual to be born.<sup>92</sup> The griffons on the apotropaic wands can have a human head between the wings because these wands were made as objects to be used in daily life birth rituals, for protection after birth, and also put in the tomb to

<sup>84</sup> JÉQUIER, *Les Frises d’Objets*, 94

<sup>85</sup> DARNELL, *SAK* 22, 80.

<sup>86</sup> *Art. cit.*, 88.

<sup>87</sup> Referring to Schott’s translation, SCHOTT, *Altägyptische Liebeslieder*, 80. Thausing and Kerszt-Kratschmann connect the fox skin to rebirth as well, THAUSING, KERSZT-KRATSCHMANN, *Ägyptische Totenbuch*, 57, ft. 5.

<sup>88</sup> STÖRK, in *LÄ*, II, 348; OSBOURNE, *Mammals*, 71.

<sup>89</sup> ANDREWS, *Amulets*, 18-9.

<sup>90</sup> SCHÖGL, *Der Sonnengott*, 31-2.

<sup>91</sup> PIEKE, *SAK* 37, 99. Also see the discussion by KÜHNERT-EGGEBRECHT, *Die Axt*, 76-7.

<sup>92</sup> ALTENMÜLLER, in FLOSSMANN-SCHÜTZE *et al.* (eds.), *Kleine Götter-Grosse Götter*, 21, suggests the griffon depicts Shu-Onuris, and the head is “das Sonnenauge in Gestalt des Kopfs des Atum”. Gerke does not disagree with that interpretation, but states it is problematic. She suggests that at least later, based on examples of a human figure between wings in the Amduat, it was understood as Sokar or Atum, see GERKE, *Der altägyptische Greif*, 41-6. At least two wands show a short projection coming from the forehead of the head between the wings, see LEGGE, *PSBA* 28, pl. 3, nos. 51-2; also, ALTENMÜLLER, *Die Apotropaia*, vol. II, nos. 52 and 85. This could be interpreted as blood, such as determinative A14, GARDINER, *Grammar*, 443; SETHE, *Pyramidentexte*, vol. II, Spruch 570, 1453 a and f; FRANDSEN, in WILLEMS (ed.), *Social Aspects of Funerary Culture*, 151, n. 46, or possibly a tuft of hair, or a protome, which would affect the interpretation of the head.

protect rebirth.<sup>93</sup> The griffons in the tombs were shown as participants in the myth, or in one case in the tomb of Khety I, the griffon with a lotus tail is placed at the nose of the deceased, symbolically representing Nefertum, the lotus at the nose of Re.

Von Lieven states that the Myth of the Eye of the Sun “*is a deeply religious text which concerns one of the most important elements within the Ancient Egyptian belief system*”.<sup>94</sup> She sees the New Kingdom drawings of the so-called animal fables, as illustrations of the Myth of the Eye, and serve as evidence, that even though the copies we have are much later, the myth was already being written down.<sup>95</sup> It is possible that the tomb scenes discussed above can be explained in this way as well. The same nomarchs who chose to inscribe their coffins with Coffin Texts<sup>96</sup> may have chosen to include illustrations from this myth, one that ultimately brings the promise of birth or rebirth, in their tomb as well, sharing in royal access to the afterlife.<sup>97</sup> The Coffin Texts fell out of use, as did these scenes, suggesting a possible change in funerary rituals, or the way in which elite official status was represented in their tomb and funerary equipment.<sup>98</sup>

<sup>93</sup> QUIRKE, in OPPENHEIM *et al.* (eds.), *Ancient Egypt Transformed*, 200. GNIRS, in KESSLER *et al.* (eds.), *Texte-Theben-Tonfragmente*, 131.

<sup>94</sup> VON LIEVEN, in WIDMER, DEVAUCHELLE (eds.), *Actes du IXe congress international des etudes démotiques*, 173.

<sup>95</sup> VON LIEVEN, *art. cit.*, 174 ff. For a comprehensive discussion of the myth, see the references in n. 43.

<sup>96</sup> See in particular the discussion by WILLEMS, *Historical and Archaeological Aspects*, 176-81. Were the mythical scenes an appropriation of royal scenes? See related discussion by IKRAM, in GRIMAL, KAMEL, SHEIKHOESLAMI (eds.), *Hommages Fayza Haikal*, 141-8.

<sup>97</sup> For a relevant short discussion of these Middle Kingdom tomb scenes, see KAMRIN, in OPPENHEIM *et al.* (eds.), *Ancient Egypt Transformed*, 31-2; and for ‘democratization of the after-life’ SØRENSEN, in ENGLUND (ed.), *Religion of the Ancient Egyptians*, 114-7.

<sup>98</sup> WILLEMS, *Historical and Archaeological Aspects*, 225-9; BOURRIAU, in QUIRKE (ed.), *Middle Kingdom Studies*, 15.





Fig. 12 – Ivory magic wand, front (The Walters Art Museum, Baltimore, 71.510). Courtesy of the Walters Art Gallery



Fig. 13 – Ivory magic wand, back (The Walters Art Museum, Baltimore, 71.510). Courtesy of the Walters Art Gallery

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