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KINGSHIP IN THE EVERYDAY:
EXPERIENCING ROYAL AUTHORITY IN THE MIDDLE KINGDOM

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BY

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Abstract

The goal of this study, broadly speaking, is to better understand how Middle Kingdom (ca. 2055–1650 BCE) kingship worked from a non-royal perspective. Egyptological scholarship has traditionally taken for granted both that Egyptian kings were omnipresent in ancient Egyptian society, and that the intricacies of kingship were restricted to royal and elite circles. This contradiction between expected omnipresence and simultaneous restriction is most often explained through the concept of "decorum," which as applied in Egyptology proposes that royal symbols and the image of the king were confined to the royal sphere. This is a reductive approach that removes the agency of those outside the royal circle. Instead, this dissertation prioritizes non-royal agency in engagement with kingship.

The dissertation's main argument is constructed from two separate but related parts: first, kingship was not omnipresent; second, kingship was still relevant and present in non-royal society in specific context-dependent ways. The simultaneous omnipresence and restrictedness of kingship can be differently explained if one considers the relevance that kingship had to non-royal Egyptians in different circumstances. In highlighting relevance, this study makes an argument that restrictedness is not necessarily an imposition from above, but that it may also be a choice for something else by non-royals. This argument was developed based on evidence from settlement contexts in Egypt (Chapter 3), royal, divine, and elite monuments and rituals (Chapter 4), and funerary practice (Chapter 5). Rather than simply a critique of decorum, this study proposes an opposing explanation for the role of kingship in broader ancient Egyptian society that takes into account the agency and priorities of different actors, rather than just the king.

This study can be thought of as a bottom-up exploration of kingship, one framed by and contextualized in methodologies employed in the archaeologies of empire and sovereignty. The

primary way in which Egyptology has approached interactions with kingship in the past—as a largely uniform engagement conditioned by strict decorum—has gotten in the way of our proper understanding of both kingship itself, as well as how it fit into broader Egyptian society. Kingship cannot be said to not have been important. But based on the evidence discussed in this study, it also cannot be said that the king or kingship were always overarching concerns. The ways in which kingship was engaged with by different parts of the population could differ dramatically, and previous models used to explain non-royal engagement with kingship have obfuscated that variability. Kingship in the Middle Kingdom was not monolithic: it was not experienced in the same way by all Egyptians, and it was more relevant and invoked by some more than others.

Chapter 1

Was Pharaoh Egypt?
Introduction, Theoretical Background, and Methodology

"In the study of Egyptian society, ideology has usually had the advantage over reality, whether it is the ideology of the historian or the ideology of the Egyptian ruling class itself."[1]

"Ancient Egypt has proved remarkably resistant to the writing of history which is not traditional in character; which is not, in other words, concerned primarily with the ordering of kings and the chronicling of their deeds."[2]

§1 Introduction

For a long time, ancient Egyptian kingship has been approached simultaneously—and paradoxically—as a remote, restricted institution that did not necessarily have an interest in affecting regular people, and as utterly pervasive in ancient Egyptian culture. Despite this supposed remoteness, its assumed propagandistic elements are seen as infallible because it was not the victim of any outright revolutions. These perspectives remain ingrained in the scholarly literature in assumptions that Egyptians would have been in awe of kingship, and that they would have implicitly supported it.[3] Such assumptions are built upon evidence, such as royal texts and monuments, that place the king at the center of both the cosmos and society.[4] The almost sole use of such royal evidence to argue for the centrality of kingship in the lives of Egyptians leads to circular conclusions about its importance. This circularity has been an issue in studies of ancient kingship and state authority more broadly than just ancient Egypt.[5]

Such self-fulfilling approaches have started to shift in recent decades, with an increasing scholarly consensus that the construction of monumentalized spaces and expressions of official

[1] Eyre 1999, 55.
[2] Ambridge 2007, 636, citing Trigger, Kemp, O'Connor, and Lloyd, eds., 1983, xi.
[3] E.g., Morris 2019, 76–78.
[4] Manning 2013, 65. See also Moreno García 2022, 84–89.
[5] Yoffee 2004 lays this out clearly throughout his study (e.g., p. 2), as do the authors of chapters in Ando and Richardson, eds., 2017. For discussions of Mesopotamia specifically, see Richardson 2012, 2017, 2018.

discourse should themselves be considered a claim to sovereignty rather than the natural outcome of its success.[6] The writing of the history of ancient Egypt has traditionally focused on kings, with scholars starting to approach it as a social and historical phenomenon only around the 1950s.[7] Today there is an increasing urge to explore co-existing (and often competing) networks of power, with growing confidence that power was not monolithic and uncontested, and that kings would hardly have been the only ones with authority.[8] However, there is still some reluctance to write narratives that, based on non-royal and non-monumental evidence, might diverge from traditional accounts of kingship based on royal rhetoric.[9] This should not be a deterrent; on the contrary, different types of evidence *should* be considered when trying to write a historical narrative of any aspect of ancient Egyptian history if the goal is to understand divergent ancient realities, belonging to different actors who had different life experiences.[10] Kingship is no exception.

In discussing the nature of power in *The Dawn of Everything*, David Graeber and David Wengrow emphasized that, in order to understand the realities rather than the ideology of power, we must acknowledge the gap between claims made by kings (or other ruling figures) and how those actually worked in practice.[11] The book has generally been lauded for precisely one of the authors' main goals in publishing it: its insistence that past (and current and future) humans are much more creative, and much less simplistic, than current academic discourse usually gives them credit for.[12] This reductive approach to human possibility is a strategy of social theory that

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[6] Ando 2017, 9–10.
[7] Do. Arnold 1996, 63.
[8] E.g., Warden 2015, 29.
[9] E.g., Bárta 2013, 278; Baines 2019, 259 n. 41.
[10] Bussmann (2020, 517) has similarly emphasized the need for "agent-based perspectives."
[11] Graeber and Wengrow 2021, 741, 794–795, 798, 835, 865–866.
[12] For a critical review of Graeber and Wengrow 2021, see Appiah 2021.

reduces "everything to a cartoon" in order to reach conclusions.[13] When that reductive approach remains the mainstream understanding long after overall theories have been established and overall histories have been written, however, it results in an impoverished account of past peoples—in an impoverished history. Graeber and Wengrow speak in general terms, but many of their observations can be applied to a study of ancient Egypt.

Indeed, Egyptological scholarship sometimes relies on big, untested ideas that have been stated and restated over many years—for instance, that the desert was a frightening place,[14] that Egypt had no cities,[15] that the king was the only true priest.[16] Recent successful reevaluations of many such Egyptological truisms have instead made a point to consider how they would have worked in practice, and kingship needs to be included in this effort.[17] The study of kingship, riddled with untested truisms, is complicated by an issue pointed out by Richard Bussmann: that the field lacks considerations of scale.[18] This lack leads to assumptions, for example that kingship "unfold[ed] a gravitational force affecting all members of Egyptian society."[19] While inarguable from the vantage point of an overall historical narrative, there is much room to define how this "gravitational field" operated, and whether this is even an apt metaphor to describe the overall relationship between kingship and Egyptians. Might a "magnetic field" be more fitting, in which connections are formed not solely through differences in scale, but instead through specific circumstances? In other words, was proximity to the king the determining factor (or *a* determining factor) for how much kingship was felt? In order to evaluate the accuracy of this analogy, it is vital to investigate where and why the influence of the king might have been

[13] Graeber and Wengrow 2021, 61.
[14] For a recent reevaluation, see Hackley 2020.
[15] For a recent treatment of the issue, see Moeller 2023.
[16] For a recent reevaluation, see Baines 2021.
[17] Tomkins 2023. See also Jiménez Meroño 2023.
[18] Bussmann 2014.
[19] Bussmann 2015b, 6.

strongest, as well as where it might not have been recognized as such—where, when, and in what contexts kingship was not an active force, perhaps superseded by local powers that eventually tied back to the king but which might not have been recognized to do so. Acknowledging that issues of scale exist in studies of kingship—that we as modern scholars often struggle to clearly define the extent to which kingship featured in Egyptian lives—opens space for explorations of how it might have been experienced by those who are usually not associated with kingship in the first place.

This dissertation seeks to start closing this major gap in our current understanding of the ancient Egyptian royal institution by focusing on evidence from the Middle Kingdom. It does not aim to argue that kingship was *not* powerful or effective; it was. What it ultimately hopes to accomplish is to start moving away from the story that has been told primarily (and oftentimes solely) through the lens of ideology—both of kings and scholars—towards something a bit closer to the realities of non-royal ancient Egyptians.

§2 Research aims

Broadly speaking, this dissertation aims to explore the subjective experience of royal power in the Middle Kingdom (ca. 2055–1650 BCE). Accordingly, the overall question under investigation here can be articulated as follows: how did Egyptians not directly involved with the royal court—non-royal Egyptians—experience and engage with kingship in Middle Kingdom Egypt? "How" is used here for the sake of simplicity, but I am of course also interested in the "where," "when," and "why" these interactions took place. When I use words like "experience" and "engage," I want to shift the focus from official ideology to politics as it was generated by the needs and practices of non-royal people. What changes about our understanding of ancient

kingship if it is constructed by these kinds of concerns as well as by official ideology?[20] While such a study would be fruitful from a fully non-elite perspective, current evidence available from Egypt makes answering that question from that perspective quite difficult. There is a strong bias in our available sources, which favor elite rather than non-elite contexts. As such, this study focuses on non-royal Egyptians more broadly: including both elite and non-elite Egyptians who likely engaged with kingship and kings in varying circumstances and frequency. Those distinctions will be discussed, when possible, in the following chapters.

Scholarship of ancient Egyptian kingship has essentially accepted both that kingship was everywhere and that it was functionally invisible (as further discussed in Chapter 2). This study purposefully approaches kingship in the Middle Kingdom without that assumption in mind, instead examining evidence (both material and textual) from different contexts to track where exactly kingship *does* appear and where it does *not*. This allows me to test the assumption that kingship was simultaneously restricted and omnipresent, offering instead a consideration of exactly where, when, how, and to whom it appeared, as well as why.

In order to properly explore this main issue, this dissertation considers the following: 1) Was kingship as an institution separate from the state (i.e., are there references to "the state" in people's daily lives rather than kingship)? How should that separation be understood, if indeed there was one? 2) What were the immediate versus remote sources of power, and what were the links between them? Was the king understood as the overall source of authority or were local leaders more relevant or important in certain contexts? These questions, though fundamental for a proper exploration of the scale of kingship in the lives of non-royal Egyptians, cannot be answered in full here due to the types of evidence discussed. The conclusions of this study,

[20] I thank Seth Richardson for helping me to articulate this.

however, add to both our understanding of the parameters of kingship as compared to the state, as well as the boundaries of influence of kingship in local contexts.

A different set of questions arises out of the overall low (though context-dependent) visibility of kingship in daily life as compared to the higher incidence of kingship-related motifs in funerary practice. This discrepancy has primarily been explained through the concept of decorum as applied to Egyptology (for which see Chapter 2), which assumes that kingship was not present in certain contexts because it was not supposed to be. This assumption, besides being based on an absence of evidence,[21] is problematic for removing the agency of non-royal Egyptians by assuming that they would have wanted to engage with kingship but simply could not do so. Ancient Egyptian funerary evidence is often used as a proxy for discussions of daily life, in large part because so much more of it is preserved and has been excavated and studied than evidence from settlement contexts. But should we speak of the influence of kingship in life primarily based on its importance in death? I do not think that we should, and this study is premised on that contention.

§3 Historical background

Before diving into the theoretical and methodological backbones of this study, it will be useful to lay out a brief overview of the Middle Kingdom itself. I focus on this period because it would not be possible to study non-royal engagement with kingship across all of Egyptian history in a project of this scope, not least because kingship changes considerably throughout

[21] See Gillen 2017.

time. Furthermore, Middle Kingdom evidence that can be used to explore the themes of this dissertation is both diverse and abundant (for which see below).[22]

The periodization of ancient Egyptian history is in many ways a scholarly construct. The division of kings into dynasties largely derives from a categorization by Manetho, an Egyptian priest who lived in the Ptolemaic period, and so it might be thought of as an emic (but temporally removed) understanding of Egypt's political history—though the applicability of that division to understanding ancient Egypt beyond kings and kingship has been rightly called into question.[23] The subsequent division of dynasties into Kingdoms and Intermediate Periods, however, is unarguably an etic scholarly classification. In present scholarship the Middle Kingdom is generally thought to have encompassed the Eleventh, Twelfth, and Thirteenth Dynasties, but this was not always the case. In fact, the Thirteenth Dynasty was until quite recently instead primarily thought of as part of the Second Intermediate Period due to its quick succession of rulers and apparent instability of kingship.[24] This study follows the current understanding of the Middle Kingdom in terms of its political-temporal boundaries, especially because including all three dynasties allows for a consideration of non-royal engagement with kingship when it was being reestablished (in the Eleventh Dynasty), seemingly stable (in the Twelfth Dynasty), and under strain (in the Thirteenth Dynasty) (for more information on kingship in the Middle Kingdom, see Chapter 2). The division into Kingdoms allows for easier study of material based on common characteristics, but it may also blur the lines between different levels of continuity and change across time. The "Middle Kingdom" is therefore used as a framework here with the

[22] This period is also a vibrant area of current study, with a dedicated book series (Middle Kingdom Studies) and continued excavations and publications. E.g., Jiménez-Serrano and Morales 2021; Hudáková, Jánosi, and Siffert 2018; Miniaci and Grajetzki 2016; Miniaci and Grajetzki 2015.
[23] E.g., Shaw 2000, 1–2.
[24] Callender 2000, 137. For a recent reevaluation and recontextualization of the Thirteenth Dynasty, see Siesse 2019.

dual acknowledgement that this study's conclusions cannot be blindly extended to other periods, and that containing them may perpetuate a primarily modern understanding of the royal institution.

With all due caveats about the nature of Egyptological periodization, the Middle Kingdom is usually thought of as a time of stability. This is particularly the case because it followed the First Intermediate Period, characterized by political decentralization.[25] In the past, the First Intermediate Period was broadly considered a time of collapse largely due to a lack of centralized kingship, as well as texts that refer to generalized chaos and disorder.[26] Most scholars instead now recognize that it was a time of regional dynamism, and that the loss of royal power took place in lockstep with provincial growth.[27] Even so, the lack of centralized rule means that Egyptian kings in the Middle Kingdom were in many ways reestablishing kingship. This reestablishment of kingship—and moreover of Old Kingdom traditions—is visible in the art style and purposeful archaism employed during the Middle Kingdom.[28]

Despite a conscious return to Old Kingdom models, the Middle Kingdom is also marked by major changes and developments in material culture and religious practices,[29] perhaps most notably in funerary ritual (for which see Chapter 5). Additionally, this period saw significant developments in the state's administration, including—around the reign of Senwosret III—a

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[25] Many theories have been proposed to explain the transition between the end of the Old Kingdom and the First Intermediate Period. Explanations for the weakening of the royal institution range from economic problems caused by the spreading of the state's wealth and internal conflict to uncritical and simplistic considerations of climatic changes thought to have been so dramatic as to upset the traditional order of the ancient Egyptian state (for critiques, see Moeller 2005a; Moreno García 2015).
[26] These texts include so-called works of "pessimistic literature," such as the *Prophecy of Neferti*, and funerary autobiographical inscriptions in officials' tombs. For a recent discussion on whether we should take such texts seriously as historical sources, see Morris 2023b.
[27] See e.g., Arnold and Arnold 2015, 38. However, the period is still sometimes considered one of collapse and decline (e.g., Hamdan et al. 2016).
[28] Goedicke 1971, 2–3, 6.
[29] E.g., Wegner 2010b. For an extensive view at the intersection between archaism and innovation in the Middle Kingdom, see Silverman, Simpson, and Wegner 2009.

decrease in the power of provincial leaders, who had gained prominence in the First Intermediate Period.[30] This administration was not confined to Egypt; the Middle Kingdom was also a time of increase in Egypt's relations with other regions, particularly Nubia with the construction of fortresses that were used, among other things, to regulate access to gold and other resources in the area, as well as trade with locals and regions farther south.[31] Just as its kings looked back to the Old Kingdom as a foundation for their dynasty, so did early New Kingdom rulers later attempt to emulate Middle Kingdom models,[32] which in many ways came to be seen as classical examples of Egyptian culture.

Indeed, the Middle Kingdom is commonly lauded as a high point of Egyptian culture in Egyptology, in both royal and non-royal spheres.[33] Outside of Egyptology, however, this mainstream understanding is sometimes met with skepticism. In *The Dawn of Everything*, Graeber and Wengrow claim that the Middle Kingdom could just as well be considered a time of "violent disputes over royal succession, crippling taxation, state-sponsored suppression of ethnic minorities, and the growth of forced labour," and that literature or religion would have "offered little solace" to Egyptians descendent from people who likely lived "quite peaceful lives" in the First Intermediate Period.[34] Assuming that Egyptians lived more peacefully in the First Intermediate Period than in the Middle Kingdom seems like a willful dismissal of evidence, but the point is well taken that most of our evidence does not pertain to conscripted workers or supposedly suppressed ethnic minorities. We are bound by what survives in the record—by materials—but it would be a mistake to forget the social dimension of materials, of people's

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[30] Franke 1991; Callender 2000, 162–164.
[31] Callender 2000, 171. For a recent synthesis about the fortresses, see Bestock 2021.
[32] Wildung 1984, 17–22; Wegner 2010b, 140. For an in-depth examination of the changing process of conscious revival of Middle Kingdom art from the beginning of the Eighteenth Dynasty through the Thutmosid Period, see Laboury 2013.
[33] See, e.g., Grajetzki 2006; Silverman, Simpson, Wegner 2009.
[34] Graeber and Wengrow 2021, 770–771.

lives. That prosperity and sophistication are hallmarks of the Middle Kingdom is undeniable, but it depends on *who* we are talking about. The difficulty of reaching the social dimension of life in the Middle Kingdom will remain a tension in this study, in particular in the ways in which kingship is now visible (or invisible) to us, and in how it might have been present in different degrees to ancient Egyptians despite its visibility or invisibility.

§4 Theoretical framework

This section focuses on a discussion of the writing of historical narratives and expectations of ancient authority and power more broadly than just Egypt. This review of past scholarship does not seek to be comprehensive, but rather to raise specific points and discuss scholarly approaches with real implications for this study. The overview of scholarship on Egyptian kingship itself is found in Chapter 2.

Egyptologist Donald Redford once wrote that "history from Below has a tendency to employ anecdotal evidence and runs the risk of drawing much too far-reaching conclusions outside its own narrow purview."[35] While this critique is perhaps not unwarranted, the potential of the approach to offer new perspectives of the past means that it cannot be discarded offhand. The "history from below" approach, initially put forth in the works of British historians such as Edward Palmer Thompson and Christopher Hill,[36] makes an effort to bring attention back to people, "to humanize history."[37] This sentiment has been critical to the emergence of non-elite perspectives in archaeology in recent decades, as scholars have started to more seriously consider

[35] Ambridge 2007, 634, citing Redford 2003, 3. The capitalization of "Below" is that of the original author, presumably because it stands for the personification of the collective of non-elite actors about whom such history is written.
[36] Thompson 1963 and 1991; Hill 1972.
[37] Bhattacharya 1983, 4. It became a hallmark of modern Indian history as well, and the concept of the "subaltern" was famously developed in that context (for a history of its study in India, see Bhattacharya 1983).

how the agency of different actors worked in the past. The acknowledgement that agency was not only the privilege of rulers and elite who dominated communities through coercion or manipulation—that there *were* indeed different types of and levels of agency across different social classes—is characteristic of the so-called "bottom-up" approach. This is the opposite of the "top-down" approach that considers agency more narrowly, by focusing on precisely the purview of those rulers and elites.[38] Historical narratives that are written with a more thorough consideration of *both* categorizations of agency and the complexities of their interactions enrich our understanding of past societies as a whole, from kings to officials to farmers and craftsmen.

In Egyptology, this methodological approach has proved fruitful in studies of personal piety and private religion, as opposed to official state religion. The traditional scholarly approach to Egyptian religion is in many ways similar to traditional approaches to kingship due to a focus on state temples and ritual texts; like kingship, however, there is reason to doubt that centralized religion had much of an impact on those outside the higher echelons of society.[39] Barry Kemp has questioned the extent to which regular Egyptians would have been religious in a study that serves as a model for this one in many ways. By looking at practices such as the deposition of votive objects in shrines rather than state-sponsored offerings, he concluded that the majority of Egyptians likely lived "in a highly secular world" without access to the "intricacies of religion."[40] While not an uncontroversial publication,[41] it neatly illustrates that useful conclusions can be drawn about the influence and reach of high culture, in this case religious practices, in everyday life by looking at evidence from local contexts. The use of votive stelae

[38] Furholt et al. 2019, 159–160, 185, with more sources therein.
[39] Moreno García 2019, 148; Baines 2000.
[40] Kemp 1995.
[41] In particular in light of Herodotus' famous assertion that Egyptians were "religious beyond measure"; see Ritner 2008. An important caveat is that Herodotus approached Egyptian history from a largely Greek perspective, and it is unclear whether he actually consulted Egyptian sources: Armayor 1978, 63–65.

and personal piety more generally has been characterized by Juan Carlos Moreno García as a failure by the crown to provide protection,[42] betraying the common assumption that the king should have been present in everyday life when such an assumption seems largely unwarranted. Kemp acknowledged that the personal experience of religion in Egypt might be largely irretrievable, particularly for non-elites, but contends that the exercise itself is a clarifying one—a perspective followed in this study.

Similarly, the postcolonial turn in archaeology emphasizes the need to reconsider colonialism from the perspective of silent actors (the subaltern),[43] who are often misrepresented or entirely omitted from colonial narratives and ideological textual sources.[44] This exercise also has the potential to lead to alternative narratives about past societies—written without the "biases of master narratives"[45]—since a focus on subjective experience helps us move beyond the simplistic and Eurocentric assumptions about the "herd mentality of the subaltern," as demonstrated by Richard Blanton and Lane Fargher in *Collective Action in the Formation of Pre-Modern States*.[46] In Egyptology, such approaches have been primarily applied to the relationships between Egyptians and Nubians in Nubia, with many scholars in recent years choosing to highlight the experiences of locals rather than simply the Egyptian colonial perspective (the latter which is often reliant on Egyptian textual sources).[47] The study of Egyptian kingship in Egypt is evidently not equivalent to that of Egyptian kingship in Nubia, but the use of postcolonial approaches—and particularly the focus on actors who are usually

[42] Moreno García 2019, 180. For the concept of personal piety, see Baines and Frood 2011; for an alternative view, see Bussmann 2017.
[43] Spivak 1988.
[44] Lemos 2022, 3.
[45] Khatchadourian 2016, 196–197 and sources therein.
[46] Blanton and Fargher 2008.
[47] For an example of the successful application of such approaches to the relationships between Nubians and the Egyptian state, see Lemos and Budka 2021; Lemos 2022.

deprived of agency—is quite pertinent when thinking of non-royal and non-elite ancient Egyptians vis-à-vis kingship. One of the most recent books published about the ancient Egyptian state, Moreno García's *The State in Ancient Egypt*, addresses the role of different sectors of the Egyptian populace in the functioning of society (such as traders, landowners, and foreigners), in accordance with its goal to focus on the limits and weaknesses of the state, rather than simply restating narratives of an absolutist and static royal apparatus.[48] Yet, it includes only three pages dedicated to the relationship between "lower society" and royal power, as well as the extent to which the state is thought to have infiltrated local contexts, in a chapter aptly titled "Building Statehood Through Culture."[49]

Outside of Egyptology, postcolonial approaches to imperial rather than colonial power also often involve considerations of the political and interpretive agency of subjects who would have likely been studied in the past as mere "inert debris," as mere addressees of imperial authority, "people without history."[50] Lori Khatchadourian's work *Imperial Matter* is an example of how this can be effectively investigated with an analysis of material practices, which enables the deconstruction of the perceived monolithic power of empires by considering how material entanglements can "reproduce or dilute the efficacy of rule."[51] Rather than assuming that the subjects of the Persian empire simply submitted to their own subjection, Khatchadourian examines the interface between institutional power and the agency of subjects—the material practices and the *materials* through which those subjects both navigated and responded to

[48] Moreno García 2019. These discussions are included throughout the book, but see particularly Chapter 5, "Hidden Forces? Invisible Actors and their Impact on the State" (pp. 87–107).
[49] See Moreno García 2019, Chapter 7 (pp. 137–161) and specifically the section titled "State values and lower society" (pp. 159–161).
[50] Khatchadourian 2016, 197, citing Wolf 1982; Khatchadourian 2016, 37. See also Ando 2017, 6. For an overview of the archaeology of empires more generally, see Sinopoli 1994.
[51] Khatchadourian 2014, 138; Khatchadourian 2016, 37. Throughout the book she makes clear that material culture needs to be seen as constitutive of culture rather than simply a corrective to histories written based on textual sources.

imperial policies.[52] The resulting work is an account of "empire in the everyday,"[53] a phrase that inspired this study's title. A similar approach has been taken by Claudia Glatz in studies of the Hittite empire,[54] which had previously been seen as a monolithic entity—a narrative written primarily from royal sources.[55] Thanks to the work of primarily Glatz, the Hittite empire is now more readily recognized as a web of complex and differential imperial interactions, interactions which were also often conditioned on material expressions that could differ dramatically by context.[56] As suggested by the title of the book—*The Making of Empire in Bronze Age Anatolia*—the empire was never static, but rather constantly being made and remade. More broadly, Bradley Parker has thought about imperial borders and control, demonstrating primarily in the Assyrian case that what we might think of as the ideological boundaries of empires are not necessarily equal to what is experienced by subjects on the ground.[57]

In Egyptology, Stuart Tyson Smith has argued that Egyptian imperialism cannot only (or even primarily, as argued by Kemp) be approached through the lens of ideology, and that instead ideological constructs need to be integrated with material evidence to better understand the social dynamics at the borders of ancient states.[58] Though the dynamics between an empire and its subjects are quite distinct from those of a centralized state and its people, a closer look at the material culture of the daily life of non-royal Egyptians can also shed light on the reach and dynamics of ruling power and ideology in Egypt itself (in this case, of the Egyptian king), as has been done by Khatchadourian, Glatz, and others for imperial contexts.

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[52] Khatchadourian 2016, 47. For an eloquent discussion of the need to consider *both* texts and materials when writing ancient Egyptian history, see S.T. Smith 2010.
[53] Khatchadourian 2014.
[54] Glatz 2009 and 2020.
[55] E.g., Bryce 2014.
[56] Glatz 2009 and 2020.
[57] Parker 2001; Parker 2006.
[58] S.T. Smith 2003, 58.

This project is not only situated in the approaches used in the archaeology of empires but also in the recent rise of so-called archaeologies of sovereignty, which focus on sovereignty in practice. "Sovereignty" refers to the power to command.[59] Similarly to an archaeology of empires, this is done through examinations of the material practices that "articulate authorities and subjects" and the dynamics of "authorization and subjection."[60] Beyond materials themselves, such investigations also rely on the role of ritual and performance in effecting subjection, as well as the locations where such interactions took place.[61] The role of the political landscape and its monuments, therefore, is also significant (for further discussion of theories of monumentality, see Chapter 4). In a parallel to how agency was defined above as something dynamic, here sovereignty is conceptualized as a result of *interactions* between rulers and subjects, rather than as something definitively possessed and utterly uncontested. Instead of a strict typology of authority and subjection, the archaeology of sovereignty highlights the messiness of distinct habits and activities (including rituals) that make, unmake, and remake sovereignty in interactions "from the spectacular to the everyday."[62]

In line with methodological approaches such as the archaeology of sovereignty, the power of the ancient state has recently started to be more commonly questioned by scholars, most notably in the *Ancient States and Infrastructural Power* edited volume,[63] where case studies from varied cultures explore the limitations and sovereignty of different types of centralized authority and power. In his studies of the ancient Mesopotamian state, Seth Richardson has emphasized that it is not enough to move away from assumptions that royal texts accurately and

[59] Graeber and Sahlins claim that divine kingship is sovereignty in its "purest form" (2017, 456–458).
[60] A.T. Smith 2011, 415, 417.
[61] A.T. Smith 2011, 420–421; Inomata and Coben 2006a.
[62] A.T. Smith 2011, 419.
[63] Ando and Richardson, eds., 2017.

straightforwardly record history, but that we must also establish who the audience for such claims was and how it was affected by them.[64] It is a mistake to take for granted that propaganda worked, and more critically that it worked equally for everyone.[65] Though it is broadly accepted in scholarship that the ancient Egyptian institution of kingship itself was never questioned (even if individual kings may have been),[66] it would be foolish to consequently assume that kingship was relevant to all Egyptians in equal measure, or in the same ways.

In *Seeing Like a State*, James C. Scott argued that pre-modern states were unable to implement ideologies in wider society like modern ones do. This was a consequence of pre-modern states' lack of knowledge about their subjects, such as wealth, property, location, and identity. According to Scott, the illegibility of pre-modern societies resulted in rudimentary interventions and made it harder to control the population.[67] Similarly, Michael Mann has differentiated between what he calls despotic and infrastructural power, the former being "the range of actions which the elite is empowered to undertake without routine, institutionalized negotiation with civil society groups," while the latter corresponds to the capacity of the state to actually "penetrate civil society," something usually associated with modern rather than ancient states.[68] In Egyptology, however, it is often expected that there was actually a degree of "penetration of official culture among common people."[69] The use of a verb such as "penetration"[70] in this context betrays the tendency to focus on those artifacts and monuments—

[64] Richardson 2012, 44–45; Richardson 2018, 264. Seri (2006) has also investigated the limits of Mesopotamian kingship by looking at local powers, but it is important to note that such studies have been received critically by Assyriologists (e.g., Dalley 2007). I thank Hervé Reculeau for drawing these works to my attention.
[65] Richardson 2017, 18.
[66] E.g., Morris 2013.
[67] Scott 1998.
[68] Mann 1984, 188–189; also see Mann 1986, 109–115.
[69] Moreno García 2019, 159–160.
[70] E.g., Bussmann 2015b; Bussmann 2016, 38; Moreno García 2019, 159–60; Bussmann 2020, 503. This is not only the case in studies of Egyptian kingship; "penetration" is also used by Mann when describing the reach of states more generally (1984, 188–189).

and those who commissioned or inspired them— without considering the agency of the people who would have made, used, lived near or with them.[71] There is evidence that non-royal Egyptians genuinely believed in and ascribed to royal ideology (for some specific examples, see Chapters 3–5), and we should not presume that it was merely a tool for exploitation.[72] But it should also not simply be assumed that the impressiveness of royal and divine monuments, and particularly the size of pyramids, can be taken as a proxy for state influence on and control of the wider population, as they often are.[73] It is simplistic to assume that pyramids or other royal constructions would have communicated the power of kingship to large numbers of people, something that is usually taken for granted.[74]

Even if royal ideology did *influence* (rather than *penetrate*, a vital distinction) the lives of common Egyptians, it is necessary to closely consider the ways in which it did so in different contexts. Rather than assuming a monolithic engagement with royal ideology and culture by non-royal Egyptians, we must instead be open to the idea that there were interactions that determined the ways in which this occurred in different degrees. This expectation needs to be accompanied by an acknowledgement of the very real possibility that non-royals had agency in light of royal influence, too. As in the study of empires, which by and large have been shown to be pervasive across their domains, but not necessarily constant—or inescapable—in the ways in which they were engaged with by local actors, Egyptian kingship, which is thought to have been both

[71] See Knapp 2010 and case studies from Steadman and Ross 2010. Yoffee (2004, 131–160) has called for greater attention to individual agency in studies of ancient civilizations.
[72] For an exploration of exploitation in the Middle Kingdom that does not discount the agency of non-royals, see El Nabolsy 2020.
[73] E.g., Lehner 2010.
[74] Moreno García (2019, 180), for example, argued that New Kingdom tombs in the Valley of the Kings lost their role as "visible symbolic references of kings' authority," which implies that earlier royal funerary monuments had done precisely that. While such construction projects certainly affected Egyptians in terms of the level of required manpower, it is too simple to expect that large monuments would translate to an effective state presence. Morris (2019, 73), for instance, thinks the construction of the pyramids would have led part of the general population to feel "resentment rather than pride."

omnipresent and restricted, needs to be thought of as dynamic in its interactions with different parts of its subject population.

§5 Data and methodology

The research aims outlined above can be achieved through the study of relevant published archaeological, iconographic, and textual data, as well as the spaces and contexts in which non-royal Egyptians encountered that evidence. Much of this will be interpretive, working to identify and understand patterns in the material. While developing a methodological approach suitable to an abstract topic such as the one pursued here is challenging, Scott's notion of an "intermediate zone" where practices of everyday life fall both within and beyond sovereign reach offers a productive place to start,[75] as do the frameworks of the archaeology of empire and sovereignty, both of which look to the mediations of the material world and the performance of authority to better understand not only the dynamics and mechanisms of subjection, but also the agency of subjects. This section outlines the data available for this study by chapter, expanding on how the evidence was approached in each chapter. It ends with an overall statement of my expectations of the role of kingship in daily life and the funerary sphere as derived from its visibility or lack thereof and the nature of interactions between non-royal Egyptians and kingship in different contexts.

Before diving into the specific categories of evidence analyzed in this study, it is important to highlight that the analysis is conducted on the basis of both textual and non-textual evidence, and that both are considered equally significant to the question under investigation. For the Middle Kingdom, private texts that might give hints of the non-royal perspective of kingship

[75] Scott 2010, 7; also discussed by Khatchadourian 2016, 195.

are not common, but the preserved examples are informative. In terms of material evidence, the *lack* of objects or materials tied to kingship in the non-royal record of ancient Egypt is one of the major factors that lead to this study in the first place. However, "…every little scarab is a portion of life solidified,"[76] and the traces that do remain of ancient life in this period are approached with this perspective in mind: that they have the potential to tell us about ancient priorities and customs in ways not necessarily available in texts.

Chapter 3 examines evidence from settlement sites in Egypt proper.[77] Archaeological evidence of daily life is abundant in the Middle Kingdom,[78] fortunately from different types of settlements, including state-planned, orthogonal settlements (Lahun,[79] Wah-Sut,[80] Qasr el-Sagha,[81] Ezbet Rushdi,[82] and Tell el-Dab'a[83]) and non-orthogonal settlements primarily in the provinces (Elephantine,[84] Memphis,[85] East Karnak,[86] Edfu,[87] Kom el-Hisn,[88] Abu Ghalib,[89] Mendes,[90] and Lisht North).[91] Evidence from some of these sites is more relevant for this study than others, and therefore the sites of focus in Chapter 3 include Lahun, Wah-Sut, Qasr el-Sagha,

[76] S.T. Smith 2010, 172, citing Petrie.
[77] The Egyptian fortresses in Nubia are also interesting for an examination of kingship in the Middle Kingdom and will be part of the expansion of this dissertation into a book. For some of the fortress excavation reports, see Randall-MacIver and Woolley 1909; Steindorff 1935–37; Dunham and Janssen 1960; Dunham 1967; Vercoutter 1970; Emery, Smith, and Millard 1979.
[78] For synthetic discussions of many of the following sites, see Moeller 2016.
[79] Petrie 1890; Petrie 1891; Griffith 1910; Petrie, Brunton, and Murray 1923; O'Connor 1997; Quirke 1997; Quirke 1998; Quirke 2005; Szpakowska 2008; Collier 2009; Gallorini 2009; Mazzone 2017; Moeller 2017.
[80] Wegner 1998; Wegner 2001b; Rossel 2004; Wegner 2006a; Wegner 2006b; Picardo 2006; Wegner 2010a; Cahail 2014a; Picardo 2015.
[81] Śliwa 1983; Śliwa 1985; Śliwa 1986; Śliwa 1987; Śliwa 1989; Śliwa 1990; Śliwa 1992a; Śliwa 1992b.
[82] Bietak and Dorner 1998; Czerny 2010; Czerny 2012a; Czerny 2012b.
[83] Czerny 1999; Aston 2004; Bader 2015a; Bader 2015b; Müller 2015; Bader 2020.
[84] Habachi 1985; Franke 1994; Seidlmayer 1996; von Pilgrim 1996a; von Pilgrim 1996b; Raue 2014; Seidlmayer, F. Arnold, Drauschke, Kopp, von Pilgrim, and Wefers 2016; Sigl 2017; Sigl, Kopp, and Fritzsch 2018; Sigl and Kopp 2019; Sigl 2020; Sigl and Kopp 2020.
[85] Malek 2000; Giddy 2012; Knoblauch 2012; Bourriau and Gallorini 2016; Giddy 2016; Mahmoud Mohamed 2017.
[86] Redford 1981; Redford, Orel, Redford, and Shubert 1991; Redford 1993; Do. Arnold 1996; Vlčková 2007.
[87] Moeller 2009; Moeller 2012; Ayers 2018.
[88] Wenke, Redding, and Cagle 2016.
[89] Bagh 2002; Bagh 2012.
[90] Wilson 1982; Redford 1996.
[91] S. Allen 1994; Do. Arnold 1996; F. Arnold 1996; Aruz 2000.

Ezbet Rushdi, Tell el-Dab'a, Elephantine, Memphis, Edfu, and Lisht North. But all published evidence from all sites was examined in order to gather as comprehensive a picture as possible.

One of the reasons why kings dominate our understanding of power in Egypt is because history is more often reconstructed through monuments than houses, but domestic contexts offer "particularly rich ground for detailing sovereignty in the everyday" and will be used here for that purpose.[92] In order to interpret evidence from domestic and local contexts, I first added all relevant objects to a database. "Relevant objects" for the study include all textual, material, and iconographic data that either mention or depict the king himself or topics related to kingship, that mention or depict other facets of the state (such as other officials), or that mention or depict other non-state (usually cultic) forces that can be understood to have played a role in people's lives, such as protective deities. The database tracked the following characteristics of specific objects or texts: artifact ID, type (of text or object), provenance, date, general description, title of owner (if known), kingship references, state references (e.g., local leaders), and non-state forces. This database contains 343 objects or texts from Lahun, Wah-Sut, Elephantine, Tell el-Dab'a, and Memphis. Entries include private letters, administrative documents, religious texts, amulets and beads, seals and seal impressions, figurines and statues, offering tables and stands, and stelae. In order to properly analyze these objects and texts, they were contextualized in terms of the spaces and circumstances in which they were used and read, as well as by whom, since they cannot be understood if disconnected from overall patterns of past life. Overall, the interpretation was conducted according to the frameworks above: highlighting the agency of non-royal Egyptians, and thus prioritizing explanations that do not simply consider how kingship infiltrated local contexts, but rather in what situations—and why—it might have done so.

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[92] A.T. Smith 2011, 423; also see Warden 2015, 24.

Chapters 4 and Chapter 5 are more impressionistic than comprehensive due to the nature of the evidence and contexts discussed. While the objective of Chapter 3 is to understand as fully as possible the ways in which kingship does or does not affect non-royal lives in settlement and domestic contexts, Chapter 4 instead seeks to contextualize some of the major royal, divine, and elite monuments of the Middle Kingdom with regards to how they might have been perceived and experienced by regular Egyptians. This analysis relies again on a prioritization of the agency of non-royal actors, considering the many distinct ways in which they would have interacted with kingship: when seeing a royal monument in the landscape, when engaging directly with a royal monument, when participating in rituals in divine or royal contexts, and when interacting with the monuments of local leaders. Similarly to how objects cannot be responsibly analyzed if disconnected from broader ancient practices, the monuments and festivals discussed in this chapter are also contextualized in the landscape and in considerations of memory production and perpetuation.[93] Besides royal and divine monuments themselves, data discussed in this chapter include votive objects deposited in cultic contexts by non-royal individuals, as well as texts and private monuments dedicated at festivals (primarily the Osiris festival at Abydos).

In Chapter 5, the role of kingship in funerary ritual is examined.[94] Similarly to Chapter 4, it does not seek to analyze funerary evidence from the Middle Kingdom in a comprehensive way, but rather to consider overall patterns in the funerary corpus. Published reports of numerous tombs from both provincial cemeteries and cemeteries at royal centers were consulted. These include examples from the provincial cemeteries of Deir el-Bersha and Beni Hasan, and of royal centers Dahshur North, Harageh, Lisht, Thebes, and Abydos. In addition to those tombs, the 96

[93] For theoretical considerations regarding both landscape archaeology and monumentality, see Chapter 4.
[94] For a review of different approaches to the use of funerary evidence in the study of social contexts and daily life, see Bussmann 2020, 479–480.

tombs from several sites recorded in the online repository of Middle Kingdom tombs Meketre were also taken into account.[95] Chapter 5 includes an analysis of coffin decoration and Coffin Texts, which relied on Harco Willems' and Katja Goebs' extensive studies of each topic.[96] In all cases—including evidence from tombs, coffins, and Coffin Texts—the material was analyzed with the question of the experience of kingship in mind. This meant taking note of royal symbols and names, as well as iconography related to the royal sphere, and thinking about how and why they featured in rituals and broader funerary practices, including where such rituals would have taken place and who might have had access to them.

As further discussed in Chapter 2, Egyptological scholarship has created a trap for itself when describing ancient Egyptian kingship: according to most modern treatments, kingship was *both* omnipresent *and* restricted. This might have been the case in practice, since it is possible to have a broad acknowledgement of kingship without directly engaging with it, but by claiming that it could be both without properly exploring the intersection of pervasiveness and restrictedness we are left with vague expectations about where kingship should have been seen and where it should not have been seen, expectations that tend to prioritize royal rather than non-royal agency. What should we expect to find if ancient Egyptian kingship had in fact been omnipresent or pervasive in daily life: amulets with royal symbols used for protection, perhaps, or evidence of royal cultic worship? Or would the visibility of pyramids constitute an inescapable royal presence, even if it was not physically manifest inside a settlement's enclosure walls? Pyramids were restricted to certain locations and were likely only seen by certain portions of the population (see Chapter 4). Their visibility or lack thereof is therefore hard to trace, and

[95] https://meketre.org/ (accessed 17 January 2023).
[96] See Chapter 5 for further information on the amount of data featured in each study.

we should not assume that it was the only form of royal presence possible. The only reason we do assume so, in fact, is because of the common fallback on decorum as an explanatory concept.

Once again, the notion of decorum seems simplistic, or at least incomplete, when used as explanation for the low visibility of kingship in private daily life contexts as opposed to its higher visibility in either private funerary contexts or official settings. It assumes the relevance of kingship for non-royals by implying that images or symbols of the king, for instance, do not appear in daily life contexts (and in funerary contexts from early periods) because they could not, or should not, be used by those outside the royal circle. Rune Nyord has tied this type of intuitive interpretation in Egyptology (in his case the flawed "democratization of the afterlife"[97]) to Jean-François Lyotard's notion of the "narrative of emancipation," convincingly arguing that a more holistic view is needed when investigating "underlying processes of knowledge transfer."[98] Here, the narrative of decorum is questioned with the aim of emphasizing the agency of private people, rather than simply expecting that they wished to have access to royal symbols and motifs.

In order to do so, this study considers what is present in daily life *instead* of kingship, using that to argue for the relevance of other forces in the lives of non-royal Egyptians. In discussing a phenomenology of power, Jochen Dreher separates "relevance" into intrinsic and imposed relevance, the former being the outcome of individual interests and the latter being prescribed, and thus unchangeable by individual desires.[99] This separation is traced to Alfred Schutz's theorization of relevance; he emphasized that individuals were not only exposed to power structures, but also had the ability to react to them in distinct ways.[100] The

[97] This model had been commonly used to describe the changing access to religious beliefs from the royal to the private spheres in the transition from the Old to the Middle Kingdom. It is now largely discredited, not least due to its evident anachronism in the ancient Egyptian context (see e.g., M. Smith 2008).
[98] Nyord 2021, 203, 208; Nyord 2023. See Lyotard 1984.
[99] Dreher 2013, 112.
[100] Dreher 2013, 114; Schutz 1962[1953] and Schutz 1970[1957].

acknowledgement of an interplay of both types of relevance—one which can be tied to the individual agency of Egyptians, and the other to the use of decorum in Egyptology—allows for a better understanding of how past actors navigated their world and the "dialectical relationship of individual and society."[101]

This consideration of relevance is only useful when accompanied by an examination of where, when, and how kingship appeared in non-royal lives. I use the word "presence" to signify the either tangible or intangible occurrence of kings and kingship in diverse contexts. The term is admittedly broad, which is purposeful: I do not presume to impose strict categorizations, but rather to highlight the variations—rather than strict decorum—in engagements with kingship. "Presence," then, might mean the occurrence of a royal symbol in a house, or the mention of a king in the invocation formula of a private letter, or yet the encounter of a non-royal Egyptian with kingship in a public ritual festival. All these types of presence are significant for our comprehension of the non-royal experience of the royal institution in the Middle Kingdom. It is important to note, however, that "presence" is not used as a term here to signify a simple dichotomy in the analysis. It is not merely a matter of whether kingship was present or absent, but also a matter of the *ways* in which kingship was visible or invisible. To better understand these variations in the role of kingship in non-royal lives, different chapters will think through distinct axes along which engagement with kingship might have differed, depending on the available evidence. These axes include status, gender, periodicity and time, proximity to royal monuments, and states of being (more specifically, whether one is alive or dead).

Much of this analysis, particularly in daily life contexts such as settlements in Egypt, relies on negative evidence: the lack of evidence for kingship in the everyday. The danger of this

[101] Dreher 2013, 112.

is acknowledged, and the direct engagement with it as a methodological point is deliberate. Since negative evidence is expected, positive evidence—of what *is* found in daily life—is key to exploring what forces other than the royal institution may have been relevant, as well as how that should inform our understanding of the capability or lack thereof of kingship to affect ancient Egyptian society. It is worth reiterating that the mainstream argument—that kingship was not visible in non-royal daily life due to decorum—is *also* based on absence of evidence. The issue with that interpretation is not the absence of evidence alone, but rather how that absence is interpreted and particularly how non-royal agency is dismissed. There is little reason to simply assume that kingship was not present in non-royal daily life because it could not be there. This is not to say, however, that absence itself could not have been a significant potential engagement with kingship in Egypt. This possibility will be further discussed in later chapters, but it is worth noting here that the absence of people *other than the king* in daily life—people who were conscripted to build a pyramid, for instance—might have left a big mark on non-royal Egyptians, even if that mark is not conspicuous to us today.

When first setting out to write this dissertation, I expected the evidence to demonstrate that kingship was largely irrelevant in non-royal daily life. This "irrelevance," which can be more precisely described as a choice to engage with forces other than kings, is most apparent in Chapter 3, which deals with evidence from settlements. Later, when analyzing evidence pertaining to monumental contexts and funerary practices in Chapters 4 and 5, it became clear that I needed to give intellectual space to greater nuance on that front. It would be inaccurate to say that kingship was irrelevant. Rather, it is instead more accurate—and, incidentally, more compelling—to highlight a variability of non-royal experiences of kingship. While it does remain the case that kingship and kings do not seem to have been very visible in daily or local

contexts, they are inarguably salient for non-royal Egyptians elsewhere. The dissertation's structure, which hinges on contexts rather than strictly types of evidence, may thus make it seem like the study's goals shifted halfway through, from arguing for irrelevance to arguing for dynamic engagement. This is not strictly the case, as the goal was always to, broadly speaking, better understand how non-royals engaged with kingship: essentially how kingship worked from a non-royal perspective. As will become clear in the following chapters, the dissertation's argument is constructed from two separate but related parts, roughly respective to the first and second halves of the study: put simply, that kingship was not omnipresent and that scholars have been wrong to approach it that way, *and* that kingship was still relevant and present in specific context-dependent ways that have been largely ignored due to the discipline's reliance on decorum as an explanatory framework.

§6 Outline of the dissertation

This dissertation consists of six chapters: this introduction (Chapter 1), Chapter 2 on the state of the field of Egyptian kingship studies, Chapter 3 on kingship in daily life, Chapter 4 on non-royal engagements with monuments and rituals, Chapter 5 on kingship in funerary practice, and the conclusion (Chapter 6).

Following the present Chapter 1, which is a broad introduction to the aims of the study as well as its theoretical and methodological frameworks, Chapter 2 provides an overview of scholarship on ancient Egyptian kingship, particularly focusing on debates and past approaches that have led to the current mainstream understanding that kingship in Egypt was both omnipresent and restricted. It also includes short discussions of specifically Middle Kingdom

kingship, detailing particular characteristics of royal ideology and practice in the Eleventh, Twelfth, and Thirteenth Dynasties.

Chapter 3 analyzes archaeological, iconographic, and textual data from settlements in Egypt. The analysis in this chapter results in a few main conclusions, primarily that non-royal engagement with kingship and kings in daily life and in contexts of local experience was not merely a consequence of a top-down choice to restrict. Consequently, the chapter emphasizes the agency of non-royal Egyptians in relation to the royal institution and any potential royal impositions. This more general conclusion is built upon specific observations, including that some non-royal Egyptians had agency in invoking kingship; that, despite the cultic significance of kings, domestic cult revolved around deities and ancestors more relevant to daily life concerns; and that local leaders seem to have been more locally visible and perhaps relevant than kings. Rather than a consequence of decorum, evidence suggests that non-royal Egyptians made choices about what was most relevant to their own lives. In this case, absence of kingship may even be read as a type of silent resistance to kingship—in the sense that these choices may have renegotiated royal power, even if that was not their primary purpose.

Chapter 4 discusses non-royal engagement with three categories of monuments and rituals (which sometimes overlap and should not be thought of as mutually exclusive): royal, divine, and elite. This analysis relies on a prioritization of the agency of non-royal actors, considering the distinct ways in which they would have interacted with kingship when seeing or engaging with these different monument categories. The chapter suggests that, when considering the perspective of royal rituals and monuments by royal and non-royal actors, different qualities of experience led to heterogeneous religious groups. Interactions with royal rituals were limited for most people, whose lives were also structured by other ritual, religious, and political

participation. The restricted nature of royal rituals likely led to non-royal reliance on spiritual or religious forces *other* than the king in their own lives, though the rarity of royal rituals might have also made them more salient.

Chapter 5 demonstrates that, in funerary ritual, kingship was critical. Significant manifestations and associations of kingship in mortuary practice were not only those of human kings or living rulers, but rather (and in fact primarily) mythological and Osirian in nature. The role that kingship played in the standard offering formula, where a king is the guarantor of offerings to the dead, or in rituals that ensured the continued existence of the deceased after death, would have influenced conceptions of kingship beyond just mortuary contexts. Ritual practice cannot be divorced from the broader ancient Egyptian lifeworld, and the importance of kingship in mortuary traditions is thus analyzed with an understanding that it would have impacted not only dead, but also living, people. That not everyone would have understood all the intricacies of funerary customs emphasizes that different Egyptians had different experiences and interpretations of kingship in the Middle Kingdom.

Finally, I present my conclusions in Chapter 6, which establishes the primary contributions of this dissertation to the fields of Egyptology, broader ancient studies, and broader understandings of sovereignty and power. The case studies and examples analyzed in Chapters 3, 4, and 5 demonstrate that kingship in the Middle Kingdom was not monolithic. It was not experienced in the same way by all Egyptians, and it was more relevant and invoked by some more than others. That is precisely the outcome of this study: that the ways in which kingship was engaged with by different parts of the Egyptian population could differ dramatically, and that previous models used to explain non-royal engagement with kingship—particularly decorum—have obfuscated that variability. Next steps for this project include expanding this

study to include a deeper consideration of what non-royal Egyptians thought and valued, away from a focus on kingship and how non-royals engaged with it.

Chapter 2

Ancient Egyptian Kingship:
The State of the Field

"Kingship and ancient Egyptian civilization are virtually synonymous. Rule by a single king over the land of Egypt began in around 3300 BCE and was intrinsic to the country thereafter: pharaoh was Egypt." [1]

§1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to lay out modern scholars' current understanding of ancient Egyptian kingship, as well as how this study seeks to revise our interpretation of the reach of Middle Kingdom kingship in non-royal lives. The first section covers the state of the field of ancient Egyptian kingship studies, including a number of questions that have yet to be answered satisfactorily on the nature of the king and kingship, and the functions of royal rhetoric and representations. The second section dives more deeply into Middle Kingdom kingship specifically. Building on the short historical overview of the Middle Kingdom in Chapter 1, this section focuses on evidence for changing royal ideology and how kings in that period connected with different audiences, including the elite, the broader Egyptian population, and the gods. The conclusion highlights the questions that remain to be explored in the following chapters.

Though what follows is primarily a literature review, it is not meant to be a comprehensive account of scholarship's treatment of kingship throughout all of Egyptology. Rather, the goal is to highlight the somewhat perplexing treatment of kingship in modern scholarship, namely that there are almost as many opinions about the nature of Egyptian kingship as there are scholars. Even if there is an overall mainstream understanding, it is one riddled with debates about the most salient characteristics of kingship. This lack of consensus about elements

[1] Sabbahy 2021, 161.

as fundamental as the role of kingship in ideology as compared to the role it played on the ground, or whether the king should be considered a political or religious figure, or even the extent to which kings should be considered divine at all, suggests that Egyptologists have not always been systematically drawing up expectations about the royal institution and then testing them.

The scholarly debate of biggest significance to the aims of this dissertation, and thus the one that is placed at the forefront here, is whether Egyptian kingship should be considered omnipresent or restricted. My use of "omnipresent" refers to the expectation that kingship was widely encountered by non-royal Egyptians in non-royal society, outside of the royal court. It is important to clarify that this is a modern expectation, and not something that seems to have necessarily been a goal of Egyptian kings themselves. Central to the expression of royal power were ritual practice and performance, ideological and often bombastic rhetoric, and royal display including in temples, tombs, and palaces.[2] But in most cases, such displays—such as the image of the king—were not accessible to large parts of the population.[3] "Restricted," then, refers to the ways in which kingship was kept separate from non-royal society.[4] Unlike omnipresence, which is not a characteristic of kingship for which we have much evidence, restrictedness *is* clear in the ancient sources. The restricted nature of kingship is evidenced, for instance, in rituals described in royal and elite texts, or in what would have been a reduced access to royal monuments. Despite this, royal monuments and rhetoric still often lead to the interpretation that kingship *was*

[2] Baines 1995a, 7. For a specific case study from the Middle Kingdom, see Lorand 2015.
[3] This is common to ancient societies, where high culture was used for communication within the inner elite: Van Buren and Richards 2000, 3, citing Baines and Yoffee 1998, 235.
[4] Quack 2010b, 220. Also see Richards 2010, 59. The king was a source of patronage for high officials, but even the highest elite did not usually include representations of the king in their own tombs until the New Kingdom (for an exception see Chapter 5), though he was frequently mentioned in autobiographical inscriptions in earlier periods. See Hill, Jones, and Morales 2013, 21; Bardonova 2021.

everywhere: that it infiltrated local contexts, and that Egyptians wished to be associated with kingship by using royal symbols.

There is a tension between expectations that kingship was pervasive and a lack of evidence for that pervasiveness. This tension is explained away in Egyptological scholarship through the framework of decorum, "a set of rules and practices defining what may be represented pictorially with captions, displayed, and possibly written down, in which context and in what form," something used to "separate the royal symbol from others."[5] Introduced to the discipline by John Baines, who described the weight of its norms as "formidable,"[6] the concept of decorum goes back to the ancient Roman theory of rhetoric and the European Renaissance, a pedigree that was laid out by Ernst Gombrich in his book *Symbolic Images*.[7] One of the examples provided in that book is that of the Orion Fountain in Messina (Italy), which is composed of decorative marble reliefs showing mythological scenes involving water—motifs appropriate to a fountain (Figure 2.1). "Decorum" essentially refers, then, to the proper way to do things, such as using appropriate and meaningful decoration for specific architectural spaces. In art historical scholarship, decorum can be considered a result of negotiation, or the interplay between structure and agency.

[5] Baines 2007, 15, 18, citing Baines 1990, 20. See also Loprieno 1996, 539. In a recent publication, Baines compares decorum to habitus: Baines 2023, 78. See also Gillam 2005, 7.
[6] Baines 2009, 12.
[7] Gombrich 1978.

Figure 2.1: The Orion Fountain in Messina, Italy (photograph by Sailko).[8]

However, decorum can sometimes also be problematically extended to strict rules or prohibitions, rather than thought of as a guidance.[9] Though unrelated to ancient Egypt, a modern example is illustrative of this phenomenon: in 2016, the so-called Decorum Squad of the City of Rome was seen erasing street art showing the Pope adding peace sign graffiti to a city corner, while a member of the Swiss Guard kept watch (Figure 2.2). In Egyptological scholarship, decorum is also thought of as a prohibition, a top-down imposition that determines when, where, and how images of the king could be displayed. When first introduced to the discipline by Baines, the concept was helpful and used primarily to explain the decoration of temples and their depictions of kings and gods. It has also assisted Egyptologists in moving beyond evolutionary

[8] Photograph from: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Messina,_Fontana_di_Orione_03.JPG (accessed 14 June 2023).
[9] In a recent publication, Baines briefly mentions three Egyptian terms with supposedly similar meanings to decorum, one which also had a prescriptive connotation: Baines 2023, 75.

models to consider "that which remains beyond representation."[10] But the application of decorum—in this specific formulation, in which it is thought of as an imposition—becomes problematic when it is used to explain broader social concepts, such as kingship. I am not the first to claim this, with for instance Niv Allon stating that "the reduction of decorum to principles and systems obliterates the role of agents in the formation of their ways of expression,"[11] and Todd Gillen offering a scathing (but, to my mind, largely warranted) critique of the uninformed popularization and institutionalization of decorum as a methodological tool in Egyptology.[12] In a recent publication, even Baines admitted that it "may be contentious whether any given domain can be approached analytically through decorum as a concept" and questioned its broad application in the field.[13] The goal of this study is not to argue that decorum itself needs to be wiped from the map of Egyptology, but instead to stress that decorum is not a fitting framework through which to consider non-royal engagement with kingship, at least not on its own. The following chapters will demonstrate that, instead of decorum, we must consider how relevant kingship was to non-royal Egyptians in different contexts and circumstances.

[10] Allon 2019, 83, citing Podemann Sørensen 1989.
[11] Allon 2019, 84; see also Trimpi 2012, 342 and Riggs 2013, 157. In Allon 2019 and primarily in Chapter 2, he questions the application of decorum in the study of rare images of elites engaging with texts in their tombs, arguing instead that we must look to the examples that *do* exist to think about individual elite choices and priorities.
[12] Gillen 2017.
[13] Baines 2023, 75.

Figure 2.2: Street art of the Pope painting peace signs on a wall being erased by the Decorum Squad of the City of Rome (photographs by Serrano/AGF/Rex/Shutterstock).[14]

As noted in Chapter 1, Egyptological scholarship tends to accept that kingship was *both* omnipresent in ancient Egyptian society *and* restricted to royal and high elite circles. However, we cannot simply claim that it was both without examining how that would have worked in practice. Doing so naturally leads to assumptions, ones that in this case are simplistic, as well as reductionist, for primarily highlighting royal power and choices—by relying on decorum—at the

[14] Photographs from: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/oct/19/rome-decorum-cops-remove-mural-depicting-pope-graffiti-artist (accessed 18 April 2023).

expense of non-royal agency.[15] There is a danger, in attempting to deconstruct total concepts such as “omnipresence,” of setting up a straw man argument. While that may have provided a starting point for this study, both the literature review below and the data chapters that follow will demonstrate that this is simply a way to reach more nuanced answers. There is a problem with how Egyptological scholarship has approached kingship, and particularly with how it has framed its reach and role in wider ancient Egyptian culture beyond the royal court. This chapter’s goal, then, is to bring together previous work on the reach of kingship in non-royal Egyptian society: to draw up expectations that will then be tested with regards to Middle Kingdom evidence in the following chapters.

§2 Ancient Egyptian kingship: debates and questions

As also discussed in Chapter 1, ancient Egyptian kingship was until relatively recently approached solely through a top-down perspective reliant on royal monuments and texts.[16] This focus was a result of approaches within the older traditions of the Egyptological discipline and the fact that kingship is more readily visible from the top-down perspective than from the bottom up. By default, such studies focused predominantly on the ideological portrayal of kings and discussed it through frameworks such as propaganda or legitimacy.[17] Propaganda is a reductive approach, not only of different modes of display (including texts and representations, as well as performance), but also of their audience and their artistry.[18] The use of the term “legitimacy” to

[15] See also Gillen 2017; Allon 2019, 85.
[16] This is by not only the case for Egypt, and kings and gods have historically been prioritized in narratives about archaic states. For further discussion, see Yoffee 2004. See also Ben-Marzouk 2023.
[17] E.g., Simpson 1982; Gundlach 1992; Thériault 1993; Simpson 1996; Gundlach 1997; Gestoso Singer 1999; Beylage 2002; Gestoso Singer 2005; McCormack 2010; Morris 2013; Stadelmann 2013; Leprohon 2015; Barbotin 2016; Gozzoli 2018; Lurson 2019; Sabbahy 2021.
[18] Parkinson 2002, 15. Propaganda is also problematic because the concept “presupposes an intentional attempt to mislead the recipients of the manipulated information” (El Nabolsy 2020, 353).

discuss ancient Near Eastern political structures, including those of ancient Egypt, is problematic due to its anachronistic supposition that ancient kingship was conditioned and constrained by the rule of law.[19] Despite these pitfalls, approaches that focus on royal evidence are still essential for an understanding of the royal institution from an ideal perspective.[20] But they often lead to uncritical interpretations,[21] and they certainly do not generate a complete picture, or at least as complete a picture as can be gathered from the fragmentary record—not least because royal evidence tends to cluster at specific sites in specific periods.[22]

The quote included in the beginning of this chapter, from one of the most recent publications on Egyptian kingship, illustrates the point.[23] Lisa Sabbahy's thorough treatment of kingship in the Old and early Middle Kingdoms makes room for discussions of the context of kingship, though that context is mostly restricted to the royal family itself.[24] In stating that pharaoh was Egypt, this particular quote is reminiscent of one of contemporary archaeology's most disliked analogies: pots equal people.[25] Pots do not equal people, and pharaoh was not Egypt—though he was undoubtedly a significant part of it. The question of what "Egypt" itself was in the past is beyond the scope of this study, but it is not irrelevant to note here that our understanding of ancient Egypt is itself also largely a modern construct. Part of that construct is

[19] Richardson 2020. In exploring Mesopotamian kingship, Richardson suggests that the concept of "validity" is more appropriate because it implies the satisfaction of generic expectations and provides a sense of coherence, rather than establishes "royal qualifications so that subjects could tick them off a checklist" (Richardson 2020, 257).
[20] Frood 2010, 470, citing Seidlmayer 2001.
[21] Moreno García 2019, 12. Also see Assmann 1984, 98; Leprohon 1995; Hill, Jones, and Morales 2013, 9.
[22] Manning 2013, 67–68.
[23] It is important to note that the quote itself is not the problem—what is worth critiquing is the common approach that it exemplifies. Sabbahy is certainly not the first to frame Egyptian kingship in this way. As Assmann put it, "seen from the outside, the Egyptian king has always been, from Ezekiel and Herodotus to Wittfogel, as the epitome of unrestricted monarchical usurpation of power, oriental despotism" (Assmann 1984, 97). In Ezekiel, the king says that he made the Nile: Assmann 1984, 97. For contemporary Egyptian opinions of their ancient kings, see Haikal 2022.
[24] See also a review of the book that emphasizes this specific strength of the work: Prakash 2021.
[25] For a case study that cautions against the use of simple analogies used to express identity, particularly looking at the fallacy of "pots equal people," see Dores Cruz 2011.

the impression that the king *was* Egypt, due to the nature of the evidence that survives—and part of the goal of this study is to determine to what extent that was also the case for ancient Egyptians themselves.

Though much about Egyptian kingship is debated, ancient sources make it clear that kings were intimately associated with the gods—especially Horus—and that they were understood as parts of a continuous royal sequence since the (mythological) beginnings of Egyptian history.[26] Kings acknowledged the existence of this mythological period and attempted to fit in this idealized timeline by conforming to old models and referring to what had been accomplished by predecessors, often to demonstrate their comparably greater power.[27] The portrayal of the king in official sources, both iconographic and textual, is idealized: he is seen as a warrior, the keeper of cosmic order, and the intermediary between the mundane and the divine.[28] This idealized, emic portrait of kingship derived from royal sources does not correspond well to what modern scholars might expect of the English word "king," including that he was courteous or a lawgiver.[29] From the Middle Kingdom, the so-called *Hymns to Senwosret III* provide a useful overall idea of what the king stood for—at least at that time (for more on this text and how different audiences might have engaged with it, see Chapter 3).

[26] Bell 1985, 258; Silverman 1995, 67–68. This is in part evident from evidence of the unchanging royal *ka.* The ancient Egyptian concept of the *ka* is sometimes translated as "soul" or perhaps more accurately as "essence," though its exact meaning remains uncertain and debated. For a critical discussion of the *ka* in the Old and Middle Kingdoms focused on Egyptian worldviews rather than modern concepts, see Nyord 2019. For a recent discussion and re-evaluation of the royal *ka*, see Winnerman 2018. For a discussion of the transmission of the *ka* more generally, see Olabarria 2018. This understanding of royal succession fit into the Egyptian conception of time and history, which was an idealized timeline of events that represented an extension of the primeval or "First Time": Popko 2014; Vernus 1995, 36–42. Royal ideology allowed for occasionally fallible kings but was able to sustain the overall institution, even in periods when centralized kingship faltered: Morris 2019, 75–76. For more on how ideology preserved the power and status of kings, see also Baines 1995a, 3–4, 7; Baines 2015. This was common in archaic states more generally: Baines and Yoffee 1998, 213–214, 238, 254.
[27] Vernus 1995, 42–90.
[28] Bárta 2013, 258–259; Silverman 1995, 66–67.
[29] We cannot really talk about the king's role in law and justice, outside of literary tales (*The Eloquent Peasant,* for instance). This baggage carried by the term "king" can be traced back at least partly to Arthurian legends, and to the significance of Arthur in English-language mythology and identity: Allen 1988.

Greetings, Khakaure [Senwosret III],
Our Horus, divine of evolution;
Who protects the land, who broadens its borders,
who suppresses countries with his crown;
who encompasses the Two Lands with his arms' embrace,
who defends the subjects (*rekhyt*) with his action […]
Young Unique One, who fights for his border,
who does not let his dependents grow weary;
who lets his cohort (*pat*) sleep with his heart as their protector […]
He has come to us,
having given life to the elite (*pat*),
having made breathe the subjects' (*rekhyt*) throat […]
May you [the gods] love Khakaure [Senwosret III], alive forever continually […]
who is commanded to make your [the gods'] sustenance,
and rescue […][30]

This excerpt suggests that there was not much effort to establish a relationship between the king and non-royal Egyptians beyond the elite, other than in giving life to and protecting his subjects. In the ideal portrayal of Egyptian kings, there is hardly any representation of relations between kings and people other than enemies, who were usually crushed by royal might.[31] This lack is contrasted by the hymn's claim that the king encompassed the Two Lands with his embrace, which however implies a pervasiveness that was more metaphorical than actual. The text also reinforces the king's main duties, which included protecting Egypt and pleasing the gods.

Kingship's inextricability from the world of the gods is hardly in question, but whether kings themselves should be classified as divine or human, or both, has been questioned by scholars.[32] For a long time, Egyptology considered kingship as entirely separate from the non-

[30] Translation from Allen 2015, 369–381.
[31] Ramesside inscriptions, including those of Ramses II, sometimes describe the king's paternalistic concern for his subjects, specifically workers on royal projects. See Brand 2023, 98–99.
[32] This is a debate that extends beyond ancient Egypt. Frazer's *The Golden Bough* (1890) is one of the most influential treatments, though it has been strongly criticized. For a relatively recent cross-cultural consideration, see the papers in Brisch 2008b. In Egyptology, famous treatments of the issue include Moret (1902) and Frankfort (1948) who argue for a more significant divine side of the king, while Posener (1960) believed the Egyptians were aware of their king's mortality and human nature, despite the focus on his divine aspects in official discourse. Goedicke (1960) and Lorton (1979) have also highlighted the human side of the king. Further discussion of the issue can be found, e.g., in Baines 1995a and 1995b; Silverman 1995; Morales 2014.

royal Egyptian world due to the king's perceived divinity.[33] More recent approaches range from focusing on either side of the dichotomy, to treating them as separate but equal aspects of the king, to seeing how they intersect.[34] Some have attempted to identify the "divine" and "human" sides of kings in emic terms,[35] but that separation remains unconvincing. There is no clear dividing line between "human" and "divine" in this context,[36] and in studies of ancient kingship outside of Egyptology many scholars have acknowledged that our categories of the human and the divine are predominantly tied to Western, Judeo-Christian beliefs rather than ancient ones.[37] As a result, many have called for the abandonment of such distinctions,[38] and it seems like that should also be the case with regards to Egyptian kingship, with scholars instead focusing on thinking about Egyptian kings in terms of their unique characteristics. The rest of the study will purposefully therefore avoid slotting kings into either category, instead considering how the entire king was engaged with in different circumstances. It is true, however, that royal divinity was emphasized in some contexts more than others, particularly those relating to the death of kings.[39] This debate is beyond the scope of this study, but it is important to note that it exists

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[33] Bárta and Dulíková 2019, 26–27.
[34] Hill, Jones, and Morales 2013, 4.
[35] For instance, that *nswt* should be understood as the divine royal institution and Hm as the person of the king, and thus distinct parts: Goedicke 1960; see also Morris 2019, 75; Troche 2021, 53. Frandsen (2008), through a linguistic approach, also argued that the way in which possession is expressed grammatically in Egyptian suggests that the king had characteristics that were either intrinsic to or separate from his divinity, and that he was thus both human and divine. For a short review of the study of emic terminology associated with kingship, see Winnerman 2018, 53–54 and sources therein.
[36] Kóthay 2013, 480.
[37] See e.g., Selz 2008 on Mesopotamian kingship. Kantorowicz's (1957) concept of the "two bodies" of the king in medieval and early modern times is frequently invoked in discussions of Egyptian kingship (notably in Bell 1985), as well as studies of ancient Near Eastern kingship more broadly (e.g., Kühn 2018). However, it is important to question the applicability of this anachronistic model and to prioritize the emic terminology in the sources themselves. For a critique of the use of Kantorowicz for this purpose, see Winnerman 2018, 18–27.
[38] Brisch 2008a, 8.
[39] Silverman 1995, 63, 67. It is also true that our perception of royal divinity changes across Egyptian history: Silverman 1991. The Old Kingdom is often considered a high point of royal divinity, when royal funerary monuments and cult seem to have eclipsed that presented to the gods (for Snefru's efforts to increase the divinity of kingship, see Borrego Gallardo 2014). Statuary from the end of the Middle Kingdom has sometimes been interpreted as a display of kings' human nature (for such analyses, see entries on statues of Senwosret III and Amenemhat III in Oppenheim, D. Arnold, D. Arnold, and Yamamoto 2015). In the New Kingdom, Amenhotep III

because at several points in the next few chapters I will argue that non-royal Egyptians were purposefully associating with kings specifically in their role as gods.

Our difficulty in accepting that Egyptian kings should not be classified as either only divine or as only human affects the ways in which they are approached in scholarship, with some considering them primarily through religious and others primarily through political frameworks.[40] Again, it is unlikely that such a separation is useful,[41] and we should strive to establish concepts that do not rely on these dichotomies in the first place. For Egypt, as well as other ancient societies characterized by divine kingship, it is important to think of ritual power *as* political—and to recognize that both religion and ritual are integral to the theorization of politics, that they are just as real or effective as more material (or secular) influences.[42] Attempting to approach Egyptian kingship through solely religious or political frameworks risks either denying that ancient Egyptians could think as rationally as modern people, or ignoring ancient sources because they diverge from our own understanding of how kingship and kings should function, as well as what such words mean.[43] While also largely beyond the scope of this project, this scholarly debate is significant because non-royal engagement with kingship in the Middle Kingdom, as will be demonstrated in the next chapters, cannot be classified as either simply political or religious. Evidence for cultic effectiveness is easier to find in the record, likely because royal administrative decisions were outside the norm.[44] Political engagement with

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and Ramses II are thought to have been deified to the greatest extent, and Akhenaten also seems to have deified himself and his family (Silverman 1995, 73–75; Morales 2014, 70).

[40] Graeber and Sahlins go as far as to say that no secular authorities exist, and that "human power is spiritual power—however pragmatically it is achieved" (2017, 3).

[41] Though it is true that kings' religious and political roles are highlighted in different types of evidence, for instance religious and administrative records: Quirke 1999, 70; Cahail 2014a, 28.

[42] Morrison 2008, 267 and sources therein. Also see Quack 2010b, 222; Bourriau 1991, 4, on the problematic separation between the spiritual and the political.

[43] Hill, Jones, and Morales 2013, 5. See also Goebs 2019, 65.

[44] Shirley recently suggested that, because royal administrative decisions were outside the norm, they were remarked upon when they occurred: Shirley 2023.

kingship was predominantly the purview of royal officials, while other non-royal Egyptians tended to engage with local leaders more closely than with the king or the royal court themselves. But interactions with local leaders were often cultic, emphasizing the lack of separation between the two spheres (see Chapters 3 and 4).

The recognition that the power of Egyptian kings should be recognized as *both* religious and political has led more and more scholars towards considerations of the limits of royal authority.[45] Ellen Morris, for example, has speculated on changing opinions of specific kings, particularly regarding the views of non-royal Egyptians towards the construction of monumental structures such as pyramids.[46] Immense pyramids and bombastic royal rhetoric might give the impression that Egyptian kings were divine autocratic leaders, as for example claimed by Kara Cooney in *The Good Kings,* where she refers to kings as "inviolable superhumans."[47] But we should not equate absolutism and divinity (if either existed in Egypt at all), a correlation that results from using the early modern European understanding of monarchy as the Egyptological standard for kingship.[48] Others have also emphasized that, rather than a full-fledged autocracy, the ancient Egyptian state was sustained by dynamic webs of power that included the influence of the broader Egyptian population.[49] Titles of local officials in the Old Kingdom, for instance, have recently been argued to demonstrate a decentralized system rather than absolute authority.[50] As noted in Chapter 1, one of the questions tangentially explored in this study is whether kingship and the ancient Egyptian state should be considered one and the same, since that

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[45] E.g., Gundlach and Klug 2006; Gundlach and Taylor 2009; Spence 2007; Moreno García 2013; Richards 2010; Bardonova 2021, 97. A recent research trend has also focused on the little impact that the royal administration likely had on rural Egypt (Moreno García 2019, 120–121). Also see Kóthay 2013, 481–482.
[46] Morris 2019.
[47] Cooney 2021, Chapter 2.
[48] Tomkins 2023.
[49] Bárta 2013; Moreno García 2013, 100; Warden 2015; Moreno García 2019, 62, 131–132, 165; Tomkins 2019; Troche 2021, 49; Feinman and Moreno García 2022, 6. See also Ben-Marzouk 2023.
[50] Tomkins 2023.

relationship is still hardly well defined in Egyptology.[51] Is the state administration royal simply because administrative officials are appointed by the king? The nature of the evidence discussed in the next few chapters makes it difficult to tackle this question head-on, but there are several instances in which it seems like state forces and administrative elements, such as local leaders and mayors, might not have been directly tied back to the king himself. At least not by everyone, or not always. This dissertation does not propose an alternative definition of the ancient Egyptian state, but it suggests ways in which the king did not serve as its only effective representative in non-royal contexts (see Chapters 3 and 4).

Indeed, the extent to which the king *was* present in non-royal contexts has not been systematically examined in Egyptology. Instead, there is a tension between a mostly unacknowledged expectation that kings successfully infiltrated local contexts and assertions that they had no interest in doing so.[52] Barry Kemp has suggested that the almost complete absence of monumental royal display outside pyramid centers in early periods meant a "country of two cultures,"[53] a central one and a local one, an argument that has been questioned.[54] This would have changed in the Middle Kingdom, when the central administration supposedly spread more deeply into local contexts through increasingly formalized temples.[55] When discussing the presence of gods in the cult of the king, Stephen Quirke claimed that "in Egypt all cult is royal cult."[56] This is tied to the common interpretation that divine temples were immediately evocative

[51] Some scholars refer to kingship as the central part of the state, which implies that it is a part rather than the whole (e.g., Manning 2013, 61, 64–65, 89), while others conflate the two (e.g., Morris 2019, 61; Moreno García 2019, 133–34, 153–54).
[52] Bussmann and Moreno García have claimed the latter: Bussmann 2015b; Moreno García 2019, 159.
[53] Kemp 2006, 113, 135.
[54] This view was countered by O'Connor (1992), who believed that the early temple at Hierakonpolis showed that kingship was more pervasive than in Kemp's model, even in early periods. Recent work on the administrative Gebelein Papyri has also demonstrated that, though far removed from the Memphite capital, this town was a royal domain that supported the royal cult: Papazian 2021.
[55] Bussmann 2020, 503; Bussmann 2016, 37–38.
[56] Quirke 1997, 46.

of the king,[57] a connection that does not seem straightforward. If temples were becoming more formalized in the Middle Kingdom, they might have been more tied to kingship than local community efforts—but they are also thought to have become more restricted.[58] It is important to remember that not all access to the divine was mediated by state temples or the king, and that community-based ritual practice continued to some degree despite the formalization of temples.[59] Similar statements have been made about a rising visibility of kingship in the provinces due to the prominence of local leaders' tombs.[60] It is worth questioning whether provincial divine temples with various levels of restricted access would have stood for more than the wide gap between the elite, the gods, and the non-elite.[61] It is just as valid to wonder whether local elite tombs—which likely indicated the status of their owners based on their size and decoration, especially if that was produced by artists from the capital—might have been reminders of local rather than solely royal or centralized power (for more on both local temples and tombs, see Chapters 4 and 5).

A common culture is thought to have developed in the New Kingdom, prompted by an increased presence of kingship in non-royal society. This is argued to have taken place through

[57] That interpretation is related to the understanding that the king was the ultimate authority over temples on earth: Kóthay 2013, 507.
[58] See Bussmann 2010, 2015a, 2017.
[59] For Middle Kingdom examples of other ritual expression and engagement separate from temples, see Chapters 3–5. Clearer instances of non-state communal shrines and communal ritual practice that do not seem to have been very exclusive are attested in the New Kingdom sites of Deir el-Medina and Amarna. See, e.g., Ikram 1989; Weatherhead and Kemp 2007; Štubňová 2017.
[60] Claimed by, e.g., Richards 2010, 63; Bussmann 2015a, 982–83; Bussmann 2015b; Moreno García 2019, 70, 75, 79–81, 158; Morris 2019, 75. For a more nuanced view of Old Kingdom provincial power, see Tomkins 2019. The so-called nomarchs, local leaders from the end of the Old Kingdom and the Middle Kingdom, are particularly associated with local temples (Bussmann 2020, 510–511). There are also examples of local officials who had popular cults (e.g., Isi at Edfu, Heqaib at Elephantine, see Chapter 3 and Troche 2021).
[61] Major New Kingdom temples are thought to have been largely restrictive, evidenced by textual evidence, but for earlier periods the picture is less clear. They were likely more embedded in local than state contexts in the Early Dynastic period and the architecture of Old Kingdom sacred places appears "more approachable" than later temples, but priestly titles associated with local elites hint at the hierarchization of temples and cult already in that period (Bussmann 2020, 508). See also Baines 2015, 39.

the construction of cultural memory once non-royal Egyptians started to depict the king in private funerary contexts,[62] but how that development intersects with the supposed decorum of earlier periods is not clear. If subjects were prohibited from depicting the king earlier, how do we know that he was not relevant, and how can we then say that he became more relevant when he appears in tombs if he had been prohibited from doing so before? In emphasizing local interactions rather than primarily considering a royal perspective, Richard Bussmann has more recently—and more convincingly—instead argued for shared origins in central and local contexts, rather than strictly separate traditions up to the New Kingdom.[63] What these interpretations demonstrate is that the visibility of kingship changed over time, but what that visibility was in any given period remains to be considered in depth.

There are still many uncertainties in the modern study of ancient Egyptian kingship. But answering whether kingship should be understood as divine or human, as religious or political, is not the aim of this study. Those distinctions are hardly useful in the first place, largely because they originate in our own expectations of how kings and kingship should function. In any case, it does not seem like either dichotomy was paradoxical for the ancient Egyptians themselves. That kingship could have been simultaneously omnipresent and restricted also appears paradoxical, but this is not as paradoxical as it might first seem. The analyses in the following chapters will suggest that non-royal Egyptians had a general awareness of kingship and simultaneously did not often engage with it directly, and this engagement differed considerably by context.

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[62] Heffernan 2012. For broader discussions of cultural memory in Egypt, see Assmann 1988; Assmann 2011, 147–174.
[63] Bussmann 2020, 507. Also see Bussmann 2016.

§3 Middle Kingdom kingship

When speaking of Egyptian kingship in the Middle Kingdom (ca. 2055–1650 BCE), it is important to highlight that the period includes three different dynasties: the Eleventh Dynasty (ca. 2150–1991 BCE), the Twelfth Dynasty (ca. 1991–1802 BCE), and the Thirteenth Dynasty (ca. 1802–1650 BCE). The Eleventh Dynasty offers a glimpse at the reunification of Egypt after the First Intermediate Period (ca. 2160–2055 BCE) and thus at the reconstitution of royal power.[64] The Twelfth Dynasty is considered one of the high points of Egyptian kingship in modern scholarship, and Twelfth Dynasty kings left behind an abundance of evidence of different types. Lastly, the Thirteenth Dynasty offers a window into the beginnings of another period of decentralized kingship, discussed further below.[65]

Rather than relying on an overall characterization of Middle Kingdom kingship, this study attempts to consider potential differences in royal ideology between not only dynasties, but also reigns. The following subsections, then, briefly tackle some questions of audience and reception, as well as the ways in which the (either perceived or actual) power of kings were articulated throughout this period. Unfortunately, not all of the evidence discussed in the following chapters has enough chronological resolution to be placed in specific reigns, but available dating usually allows for its placement at least in dynasties.

§3.1 The Eleventh Dynasty

The Eleventh Dynasty rose to power in Thebes in a process that scholars call the transition from the First Intermediate Period to the Middle Kingdom. Intef II started pushing

[64] Though see Chapter 1 for comments on the validity (or lack thereof) of the use of “intermediate period” as a label.
[65] It is important to remember that modern impressions of “weak” vs. “strong” kingship may often be a consequence of rather our weak or strong state of knowledge about different reigns based on availability of evidence: Richardson 2020, 248.

northwards towards Herakleopolis, and Nebhepetre Mentuhotep II is credited with the final victory over the Herakleopolitan Dynasty. He built chapels primarily in Upper Egypt, all linked to local cults—perhaps in order to ensure his visibility, though the issue of restricted audience remains pertinent. A chapel in Gebelein includes a curious representation of the king smiting a figure who appears to be an Egyptian, while more traditional foreign enemies watch (Figure 2.3). He wears a shendyt kilt and a label mentions the "chiefs of the Two Lands." Rather than a historic representation of the war of reunification, the inclusion of other foreign enemies suggests a ritual illustration of the overall might of the king before his enemies, including Egyptian ones.[66] Another scene with a similar thematic focus was found in a chapel at Dendera, though there the king does not smite an Egyptian person but rather an Egyptian emblem.[67] The location of the Gebelein relief is unclear, but the Dendera relief would have been inside the chapel and behind the statue of the king, in a location invisible to most human eyes.[68] They were necessary statements of royal might to the gods, and one questions whether they would have been expressed more broadly.

[66] Bestock 2018, 162–164.
[67] Bestock 2018, fig. 5.7.
[68] Bestock 2018, 167.

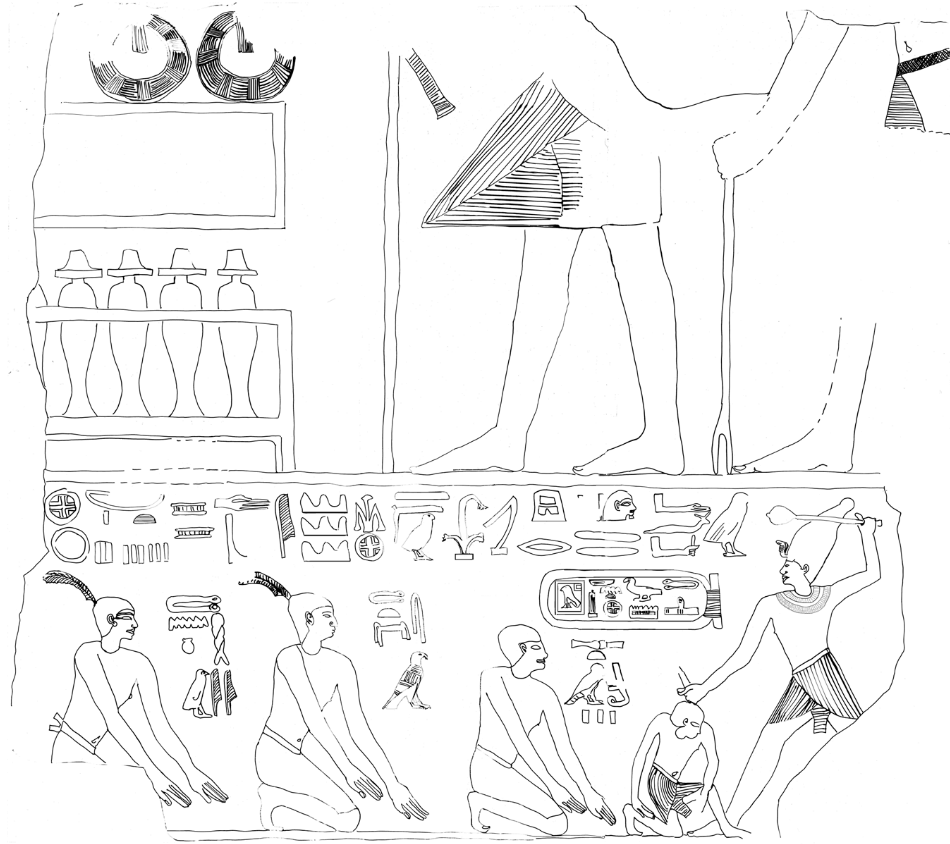

Figure 2.3: A relief of Nebhepetre Montuhotep II smiting an Egyptian from a chapel at Gebelein (Bestock 2018, fig. 5.5).

Ellen Morris has written about how the reunification might have been received by Egyptians,[69] a largely impossible question to answer based on currently available sources. But this relief at least suggests that Egyptian audiences were in play and that the relationship between king and subject may have been fraught at this time, and one wonders whether these new kings were easily accepted. Juan Carlos Moreno García claimed that Eleventh Dynasty kings, who he argues had virtually no connection to "traditional" kingship, continued to contend with other regional powers after achieving unified rule,[70] though the two things do not seem to be necessarily connected. After all, as argued above, even in periods of "traditional kingship" kings

[69] Morris 2019, 83.
[70] Moreno García 2019, 146.

still contended with local powers. Even so, he considers this insecurity one of the reasons why these kings worked on restoring and renovating temples primarily in Upper Egypt: to secure their rule.[71] They relied on traditionally Theban funerary architecture (the *saff* tomb) to express their kingship, which makes sense considering their origins in the Theban region and suggests that they purposefully did not link themselves to Old Kingdom models (see Chapter 4).[72]

§3.2 The Twelfth Dynasty

The transition from the end of the Eleventh to the beginning of the Twelfth Dynasty is obscure, as highlighted by a period of seven unassigned or "empty" years after the reign of Montuhotep-Nebtawyre (IV), the last king of the Eleventh Dynasty, in the Turin Canon royal annals.[73] It is unclear how Amenemhat I, the founder of the Twelfth Dynasty, ascended the throne. The *Prophecies of Neferti*, a literary text,[74] refers to Amenemhat I as a non-elite person born to a commoner mother and "well-born" father,[75] which fits with the theory proposed by some that he was the vizier of Montuhotep IV.[76] Though Nebhepetre Mentuhotep II is traditionally understood as the unifier of Egypt after the First Intermediate Period, Amenemhat I still had to squash revolts and settle disputes in his own time—both in Egypt itself and on its borders (against peoples from Nubia, the Levant, and Libya).[77] This is suggested by literary

[71] Moreno García 2019, 146. See also Sabbahy 2021, 133.
[72] See Seidlmayer 2000.
[73] Jánosi 2010, 7.
[74] Piccato 1997, 144–146. The historicity of ancient Egyptian literary texts has been extensively debated, and caution is of the utmost importance when using them to write a narrative history (Parkinson 1997, 3; for a thorough discussion of Middle Kingdom literary texts and their stylistic and aesthetic principles contextualized in their historical moment, see Parkinson 2002). The *Prophecies of Neferti*, for example, has been variously dated to the Middle Kingdom (e.g., Parkinson 1997, 3, 131–143) and to the Eighteenth Dynasty (Gnirs 2013). For a linguistic approach to dating Middle Egyptian literary texts, see Stauder 2013.
[75] Arnold and Jánosi 2015, 54.
[76] Arnold and Jánosi 2015, 54. See also the inscriptions from the Wadi Hammamat, which mention the vizier named Ameny: Lichtheim 2006, 113–115. Some have hypothesized that he may have deposed the previous weakened king; now, however, the consensus is that the succession was likely peaceful: Postel 2004, 279–280.
[77] Grajetzki 2006, 31–32.

evidence, in mentions of the Walls of the Ruler—a fortification or fortification system in the northeastern border of Egypt—in the *Prophecies of Neferti* and the *Story of Sinuhe*,[78] by the discovery of a fortification in the Wadi Natrun, and by mentions of military activity in two officials' texts.[79]

The revitalization of kingship and Egypt itself after the First Intermediate Period was a main part of the royal program of Amenemhat I, who was revered by later Egyptian kings for doing so. This revitalization is reflected in his titulary, which evolved throughout his reign: he began with a sequence of titles that referred to his role as a unifier and founder of a new dynasty and later focused on the renewal of what had come before.[80] These titles have many parallels to those of Eleventh Dynasty kings,[81] which suggests that a link was purposefully forged between Amenemhat I and his predecessors. Amenemhat I and other Twelfth Dynasty kings also built pyramids (see Chapter 4). These monuments were in the north, far from Thebes and closer to the traditional capital zone in the Old Kingdom. Amenemhat I's pyramid is often considered a deliberate link to Old Kingdom monumental forms and a departure from the regional Theban architectural style mentioned above.[82]

Twelfth Dynasty kings were in a strong position in Egypt and outside of it—evidenced by the construction of a string of fortresses in Nubia—but both texts and material evidence still demonstrate a slight insecurity often thought to have altered royal ideology at this time. A potential manifestation of the uncertainty supposedly plaguing kings after the First Intermediate Period is the practice of coregency, when the king would rule with his son—the chosen

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[78] Parkinson 1997, 28 (*Sinuhe*), 132, 139 (*Neferti*); Lichtheim 2006, 224; Allen 2015, 70. See also Vogel 2003.
[79] Arnold 1991, 19.
[80] He was first called "He Who Pacifies the Mind of the Two Lands" (sHtp-ib-tAwy), "He Who Pacifies the Mind of Re" (sHtp-ib-ra), and "The Uniter" (smA): Leprohon 1996, 165.
[81] Postel 2004, 281, 288–289; Arnold and Jánosi 2015, 54.
[82] See Di. Arnold 2015b; Silva 2023. Some now think that Amenemhat I had a first tomb in the Theban style built close to Nebhepetre Montuhotep's funerary monument on the Theban west bank: Do. Arnold 1991.

successor—to ensure a smooth transition after his death. Twelfth Dynasty coregencies, which used to be heavily debated but are now more accepted in scholarship, are largely missing from royal sources (why they are debated in the first place) but are still thought to have affected the framing of royal ideology.[83] Further potential indications of instability are found in texts attributed to Senwosret I, which highlight his "initiative in seizing kingship" perhaps as a result of succession issues, and his statuary program also hearkened back to royal predecessors supposedly as a legitimization strategy.[84] A remarkable text, the *Ramesseum Dramatic Papyrus*,[85] seems to commemorate the dead Senwosret I and a cult for his statue. When discussing it, Christina Geisen highlighted that the audience for this ritual would have been restricted.[86]

Despite the restricted nature of royal rituals, it is often said that Twelfth Dynasty kings emphasized their humanity to connect with their people. This is a result of texts such as *The Teaching of Amenemhat*, which chronicles the death of the king, and of the statuary of Senwosret III and Amenemhat III, which far from conventional pristine royal faces show the king as wrinkled and worn (e.g., Figure 2.4).[87] Janet Richards extended this to claim that kings attempted to legitimize the "ideology of rule to audiences beyond the inner elites" by building a new political center at Itjtawy, the fortresses in Nubia, and enabling the creation of private votive areas at Elephantine and Abydos.[88] As will be discussed in the following chapters, however, the

[83] See Saladino Haney 2018 for a review of literature and an art historical exploration of the issue.
[84] Lorand 2015. Also see Sabbahy 2021, 162.
[85] See Gillam 2005, 20.
[86] Geisen 2018.
[87] E.g., Cahail 2014a, 34. For an alternative interpretation of the change, see Laboury 2016–2017.
[88] Richards 2010, 57. Though it is important to remember that royal ka-chapels had already existed in the Old Kingdom. For an example of Pepy I's from Elephantine, see Bussmann 2021. For examples from Abydos, see O'Connor 2009, 81.

connection between kingship and at least some of these monuments and texts is not entirely self-evident.

Figure 2.4: An example of a statue of Senwosret III, showing his worn visage (Met 26.7.1394, public domain).

There was an increase in the size of temples at this time, something that must have helped kings to secure the backing of gods.[89] Julia Troche claimed that temple building in this period emphasized the divine status of kings,[90] but it is still unclear to whom that was being communicated. There was also a decrease in the number of monumental provincial tombs in the later part of the Middle Kingdom, particularly in the reign of Senwosret III. This has been used

[89] Lorand 2015; Moreno García 2019, 31.
[90] Troche 2021, 58.

to argue for a more centralized administration but could also have been due to changing burial customs.[91] Considerable administrative shifts took place, including the expansion of titles and offices and the apparent curbing of provincial power.[92] Twelfth Dynasty royal rhetoric often emphasized the "magnanimity" of the king,[93] and Nicholas Picardo suggested that these reforms may have linked "a larger proportion of the populace than ever before" to the capital.[94] Curbing the power of local elites might have consisted, at least in part, in linking them closer to the king, as for instance seen in the case of Khnumhotep III, who received high-ranking court titles but not his father's office of nomarchy.[95] That local leaders may have been further linked to the king, however, does not mean that broader connections between non-royal Egyptians and the central administration would have also been strengthened. Literary and royal texts from this period have often been interpreted as propagandistic,[96] which as mentioned above is a simplistic interpretation. Lisa Sabbahy hypothesized that the appearance of "propagandistic" literary texts, starting in particular with Senwosret I, might have been a way to communicate especially with the literate elite, since enormous pyramids and statues are "clear to anyone."[97] This highlights the contradictory modern expectation that kings were speaking to a restricted circle and at the same time reaching everyone in the same way.

[91] Grajetzki 2013b. Also see Wegner 2010b. Many changes in material culture occurred in the Middle Kingdom, including new manifestations of the divine-human relationship. For a review of the intersection between archaism and innovation in the Middle Kingdom, see Silverman, Simpson, and Wegner 2009.
[92] E.g., see Franke 1991.
[93] Bardonova 2021, 84.
[94] Picardo 2015, 248.
[95] Franke 1991, 63.
[96] E.g., Sabbahy 2021, 142, 185. But see Thériault 1993; Parkinson 2002.
[97] Sabbahy 2021, 162.

§3.3 The Thirteenth Dynasty

The Thirteenth Dynasty has gained notoriety as the waning of the Middle Kingdom, but that does not exactly correspond to evidence from this period. Instead, at least in its early phases there does not seem to have been a stark break from the Twelfth Dynasty in terms of administration,[98] or religious and social practices.[99] The royal residence seems to have remained in Itjtawy, suggested by the stela of Horemkhauf, a priest who traveled to the capital during the late Thirteenth Dynasty to pick up statues of Horus and Isis for delivery at Hierakonpolis.[100] At least, prominent officials continued to be buried there. The Thirteenth Dynasty kings are also mentioned as the successors of the Twelfth Dynasty in the Turin Papyrus.[101] They ruled for short periods of time, with fifty kings in around 150 years. These short reigns lead to a lack of clarity and debates over mechanisms of succession. Additionally, currently available evidence makes it difficult to determine what the last reign of the Thirteenth Dynasty was, though the last king attested in the Turin King List is Sobekhotep VII.[102]

Royal ideology seems to have shifted across the Thirteenth Dynasty. At first, kings emphasized their connection to their Twelfth Dynasty predecessors, as had been done by the Twelfth Dynasty kings themselves in looking back towards the Old Kingdom. In the Thirteenth Dynasty's second phase, kings instead focused on non-royal lineages. Because the last kings of the Thirteenth Dynasty lost most of the Nile Delta to the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Dynasties, they are often thought of as ineffective rulers.[103] Alexander Ilin-Tomich has also hypothesized that the last phase of Thirteenth Dynasty kings was caught in a conflict with the rising Theban

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[98] Some specific titles, particularly those of women who seem to have had some connection to the royal court, are unique to the late Middle Kingdom in Upper Egypt, however: Ilin-Tomich 2016–2018.
[99] See Grajetzki 2013a; Siesse 2019, 109.
[100] Ilin-Tomich 2014, 147.
[101] Siesse 2019, 108–109.
[102] Ilin-Tomich 2014, 162; Siesse 2019, 110.
[103] Landau-McCormack 2008.

kingdom in Upper Egypt (the Sixteenth Dynasty),[104] but this claim is not based on much contemporary evidence.

Some of the Thirteenth Dynasty kings continued to build (smaller) pyramids in the Memphite region and most continued to add to temples,[105] but many did not commission as many monumental buildings as their predecessors had. This perceived decline in royal monumentality is sometimes identified as one of the consequences of decreasing royal power at this time.[106] Taking a different approach, Dawn Landau-McCormack pointed out that Thirteenth Dynasty royal monuments remained "greater" than those of private officials of the period,[107] suggesting that this comparative monumentality is evidence for continued royal influence. Though not unconvincing, this claim would likely benefit from further consideration in terms of local context and audience.

The high levels of continuity described above between the Twelfth and Thirteenth Dynasties serve as justification for including the latter in the Middle Kingdom, rather than in the Second Intermediate Period,[108] when Egypt underwent another period of decentralized rule. Since the Second Intermediate Period is another modern periodization, one that is problematic due to its pejorative connotations, it could be argued that including the Thirteenth Dynasty in one period or another does not much matter. The Dynasties of the Second Intermediate Period, however, do represent a much more considerable rupture in social practices and administration than what had changed between the Twelfth and Thirteenth Dynasties.[109] As such, the Thirteenth Dynasty serves as an appropriate end point for this study.

[104] Ilin-Tomich 2014.
[105] E.g., Medamud, Karnak, Abydos, and Memphis: Landau-McCormack 2008, 112.
[106] For comments on the common equation of monumentality and kingship in Egyptology, see Chapter 3.
[107] Landau-McCormack 2008, 112.
[108] The classification of periods as "Intermediate" is even more problematic, since it implies a period of no importance that was simply between two Kingdoms. See Franke 1988, also Lehner 2000, 276–277.
[109] Siesse 2019, 109.

§4 Conclusion

Though we might often make the mistake, the king was *not* Egypt. Kingship was not the be-all and end-all, in large part because Egypt itself did not have a singular reality in the past—and so saying that anything could stand for all of ancient Egypt begs the question of which ancient Egypt we are referring to. We must, then, think of Egyptian kingship vis-à-vis other ancient actors, rather than just assuming that it was the most relevant institution for all Egyptians as it may now appear in the archaeological record. Essentially, if kingship is thought of as the most visible part of ancient Egyptian society, we should aim to study the dappled places in which kingship meets the non-royal realm.[110]

The main purpose of this chapter was to establish the scholarly understanding of Egyptian kingship that serves as the starting point for the rest of the study, and especially to highlight the current debates that frame the field's overall interpretations of kingship. As articulated both above and in Chapter 1, there is much room to problematize several assumptions made about the likely myriad ways in which kingship was engaged with by those outside the royal court. However, this dissertation does not seek to tackle all debates regarding kingship, and it certainly does not aim to provide a new total interpretation of kingship in the Middle Kingdom. Instead, the main point of interest is the conundrum of restriction and omnipresence, as well as the use of decorum as an explanatory framework, which keeps us from better understanding how kingship would have been engaged with by distinct Egyptians. It is this aspect of kingship that will be tackled in the rest of the dissertation. The following chapters thus address the main question of the visibility and presence (or lack thereof) of kingship in settlements and households (Chapter 3), royal and non-royal monuments (Chapter 4), and funerary practice (Chapter 5).

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[110] I thank Felipe Rojas for this formulation of the issue.

Chapter 3

The Relevance (or lack thereof) of Kingship in Daily Life: Evidence from Middle Kingdom Settlements in Egypt

§1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the contexts and circumstances in which evidence of kingship appears in Middle Kingdom settlements, as well as why it might do so. As discussed in Chapter 2, modern scholars generally accept that kingship could have been both omnipresent and restricted, using the concept of decorum to explain how non-royal Egyptians engaged (or not) with kings and royal symbols. Rather than accepting that interpretation here, this chapter instead examines alternative factors that might have affected non-royal engagement with kingship in the day-to-day. Not all experiences detailed below belong to the sphere of daily life, but they all pertain to local contexts, specifically domestic spaces and settlements in Egypt. We cannot reduce what was most important to non-royal Egyptians solely to daily experience, but we can presume that the local determined at least to an extent what was most germane in non-royal life. Since the next chapter covers non-royal engagement with spaces and events directly tied to royal practice, the insights from the evidence discussed below provide a necessary base line for non-royal engagement with kingship in the non-royal sphere.

This chapter's primary contribution is to suggest, based on varied types of evidence, that kingship was not omnipresent in general ancient Egyptian society, and more specifically that non-royal engagement with kingship and kings in daily life and in contexts of local experience was not merely a consequence of a top-down choice to restrict. If kingship *were* a strong influence in daily life—if it successfully "penetrated" non-royal society[1]—we might expect to

[1] See Chapter 1 for further discussion of the use of "penetrate" in this context, and of ancient states' general inability to do so in comparison to modern states.

find evidence of royal veneration in domestic cultic practices, or evidence of frequent royal festivals in settlements, or even yet local palaces where the king spent time in different towns. By stating that decorum restricted the contexts in which royal symbols could appear, Egyptological scholarship essentially assumes that, if it were not restricted, kingship would be everywhere. Instead, this chapter's analysis of settlement evidence demonstrates that non-royal Egyptians often chose to rely on and honor entities other than kings. This general conclusion is derived from more specific observations, including that at least some non-royal Egyptians had agency in associating with and invoking kingship; that, despite the cultic significance of kings and occasional non-royal engagements with royal rituals in settlements, the foci of domestic cult was *not* kings but rather deities and ancestors more relevant to daily life concerns; and that local leaders seem to have been more immediate sources of authority and thus of higher relevance in a local context. Together, these conclusions emphasize the agency of non-royal Egyptians vis-à-vis any potential social conditioning of interactions with kingship.

The chapter first briefly discusses the potential for a study of the visibility of kingship in the everyday. Then, it covers the evidence for kingship at the pyramid town of Lahun, which includes mentions of kings in private letters, royal hymns, objects deriving from domestic cult, and the architectural layout of the town and its different parts in relation to the pyramid complex. No site should be taken as a model for life in Middle Kingdom Egypt, including people's engagement with kingship, and that is not what is intended by the privileging of Lahun here. As will become clear from the analysis below, there *are* differences in the ways in which kingship appeared in sites such as Lahun, closely tied to a royal funerary complex, and others such as the provincial center of Elephantine. But there are also similarities in the evidence from those sites, particularly in terms of domestic cultic practices, and one of the goals of this chapter is to

explore those similarities and differences to better define the contexts in which kingship was visible at this time.

The robust corpus of evidence from Lahun allows me to paint a coherent picture of non-royal engagement with kingship that is harder to reach for other sites, due to disparate sources and qualities of evidence. First painting a picture of this phenomenon at the royal center of Lahun, then, allows me to contextualize other non-royal experiences of kingship elsewhere in Egypt, thus arriving at a better overall understanding. Accordingly, the rest of the chapter is organized around the main conclusions mentioned above, which are first defined through analysis of the Lahun material. These subsections include evidence from other Middle Kingdom sites, including both royal and provincial centers, where non-royal experiences of kingship were both similar and different to those at Lahun. That evidence includes texts that demonstrate an engagement with kingship or other religious forces, evidence of domestic cult, and architectural evidence of both royal and elite monuments—such as the residences of local officials—that defined settlement contexts.

Both in the Lahun case study and in the rest of the chapter, focus is given to evidence relevant to a discussion of kingship. This category includes objects related to kingship in some way or that indicate relevant forces other than the king, both in terms of political authority and religious practice. It is critical to highlight that much of the argumentation is based on *negative evidence*. But the lack of evidence of kings in settlements and everyday life *is* in fact evidence, particularly when paired with what does feature in local contexts and when compared with evidence for non-royal engagement with kingship.

§2 Kingship in the everyday

As discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, scholarly narratives of ancient Egyptian kingship have been primarily written based on royal evidence, material that sheds light on the royal understanding and perspective of kingship: on how kings themselves conceptualized their role in the wider (Egyptian) world. In order to improve our understanding of how kingship actually affected non-royal Egyptians, and why it did so, it is necessary to consider how relevant the royal institution and its symbols were in contexts divorced from obvious royal associations, such as royal mortuary temples and tombs. In other words, we need to turn to the political "hidden transcript"[2] that plays out beyond direct royal influence.

Figure 3.1: Map of sites discussed in this chapter (map by author).

[2] See Scott 1990.

Archaeological evidence of daily life in the Middle Kingdom is abundant, fortunately from different types of settlements (Figure 3.1). These include both settlements associated with royal funerary complexes, which are orthogonally planned (such as Lahun and Wah-Sut), and provincial settlements that are not orthogonally planned (such as Elephantine or Tell el-Dab'a).[3] Settlements and households are ideal contexts for this investigation, since they represent part of an "intermediate zone"[4] where practices of everyday life fall both within and beyond the reach of royal power.[5] The materialization of royal ideology makes it possible to establish and reinforce legitimacy.[6] Unsurprisingly, the frameworks utilized in the archaeology of sovereignty and the archaeology of empires, mapped out in Chapter 1, demonstrate that both authorization *and* subjection are conditioned at least in part on "the mediations of the material world."[7] Following Lori Khatchadourian in *Imperial Matter* and Claudia Glatz in *The Making of Bronze Age Anatolia*, this chapter seeks to deconstruct the perceived monolithic power of authority—for them of the Achaemenid and Hittite empires, here of Egyptian kingship—through an analysis of material practices and an emphasis on the agency of subjects, thus moving away from considering them inert debris[8] by acknowledging the situational nature and mechanisms of power. The mechanisms involved in both building and maintaining empires and royal states are different, but as discussed in Chapter 1 both manifestations of authority can be examined from this perspective.

[3] Scholarship, both of ancient Egypt and other ancient cultures, tends to refer to these types of settlements as "organic"—a somewhat problematic categorization, in the sense that all settlements are planned to an extent and "organic" just tends to refer to settlements that grew without state planning (M. Smith 2007).
[4] See Scott 2010, 7, and Khatchadourian 2016, 195 for more on this concept.
[5] A.T. Smith 2011, 423; also see Warden 2015, 24.
[6] DeMarrais et al. 1996.
[7] A.T. Smith 2011, 423.
[8] Khatchadourian 2014, 138; Khatchadourian 2016, 37. Also see Glatz 2009, Glatz 2020.

Material practices are instrumental to an understanding of daily life in ancient Egypt, but so are sensorial experiences, which are easier to understand and reconstruct primarily in contexts of ritual practice. Daily life is here understood as "the actions of people to ensure their bodily and general well-being, occurring mainly within their homes and the directly surrounding areas."[9] As described by Dorothea Arnold, the exercise of reconstructing ancient lives is hampered by "a set of opaque glass screens" that separate modern viewers from ancient practice, allowing us to see only "blurred outlines."[10] Most household objects are not preserved in situ,[11] and ancient Egyptian tombs are therefore often thought of as richer sources of information. However, that does not justify a generalized view of daily life—including the interaction with kingship—constructed primarily from funerary evidence. In this chapter, distinct categories of evidence from Middle Kingdom domestic and settlement contexts are examined in depth with the goal of pushing back against the traditional narrative of an omnipresent kingship.

§3 Experiencing kingship at Lahun: a case study

The function of the settlement of Lahun was to serve as the pyramid town of the funerary monument of king Senwosret II, and the royal pyramid was therefore quite close to the settlement (see Figure 3.2).[12] In addition to the pyramid, the settlement was located adjacent to the valley temple of the funerary complex, where the king's funerary cult was performed by priests. Clearly, kingship was part of the functioning of the town of Lahun in the Twelfth Dynasty.

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[9] Sigl and Kopp 2020, 8.
[10] Do. Arnold 2012, 161.
[11] See Rainville 2015, 20, citing Robbins 1973.
[12] There is no sign of occupation after the Thirteenth or Fourteenth Dynasties, but it was again inhabited in the New Kingdom: Petrie 1890, 31. When Petrie was excavating the site people still visited the pyramid because they believed in the power of the king to make them fertile: Petrie, Brunton, and Murray 1923, 14.

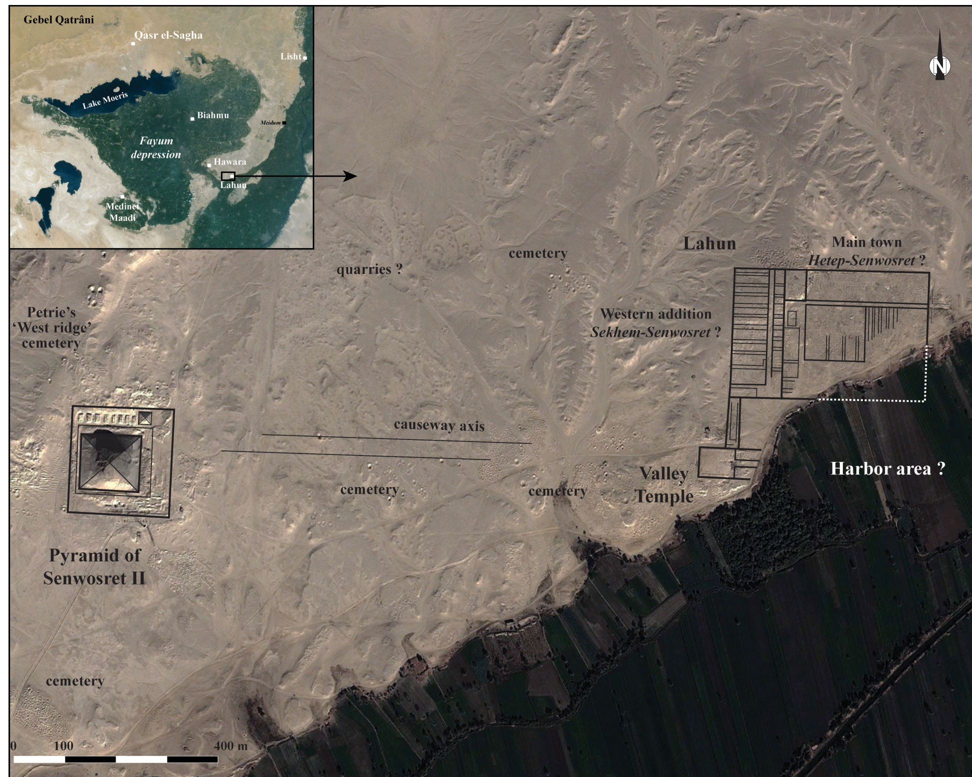

Figure 3.2: Lahun shown in relation to the pyramid of Senwosret II (Moeller 2016, fig. 8.19).

Figure 3.3: Lahun's two main sections, Hetep-Senwosret and Sekhem-Senwosret, and Senwosret II's valley temple (Mazzone 2017, fig. 4).

Lahun was divided into two sections: Hetep-Senwosret was the eastern, larger section run by the mayor, while Sekhem-Senwosret was the smaller, western part associated with the funerary cult of Senwosret II in the valley temple (Figure 3.3).[13] It is likely that a settlement existed in the area before Sekhem-Senwosret was built to support the royal cult, a fact suggested by the discovery of a cornerstone in the wall between the two sections.[14] Lahun was first excavated by Flinders Petrie in 1888–1890 and again in 1914. Though his work was exemplary for the time, the lack of precise stratigraphic information makes it difficult to be certain about findspots.[15] His excavations yielded an extensive map of the town, which demonstrates that inhabitants of Lahun lived in both large houses (often referred to as "mansions") and smaller ones. It is likely that the different house sizes represent different social classes, and the lack of precise findspots is therefore regrettable. It is of note, however, that some seemingly prestige items—including imported pottery, decorated wall paintings, and papyri—were found in smaller houses (for some examples, see below).

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[13] Mazzone 2017, fig. 4; Moeller 2017, 194. Though the toponyms of Hetep- and Sekhem-Senwosret included the name of a king, it is possible that they lost their inextricable connection to kingship over time, or at least that argument has been made with regards to other toponyms in the Twelfth Dynasty, such as Itjtawy: Lorand 2016, 34. See also Denoix 2016; Dhennin and Somaglino 2016. The toponyms are found in many of the documents from Lahun: UC 32280, UC 32195 (IV.5), UC 32190 (III.1), UC 32181 (lot VI.2), UC 32174 (lot VI.13), UC 32182 (lot VI.15), UC 32168 (lot VI.21), UC 32180 (lot VI.22), UC 32184 (lot XIV.1), UC 32099B, UC 32106A, UC 32114D, UC 32204 (lot VI.8), UC 32205 (lot III.4), UC 32170 (lot VI.14), UC 32212 (lot V.1), UC 32173 (lot XXXVI.1), UC 32352, UC 32353, UC 32102A, UC 32095C,E, UC 32116G, UC 32127, UC 32132, UC 32146B, UC 32151B, UC 32278.

[14] Moeller 2016, 273; Moeller 2017, 204.

[15] Collier 2009, 232; O'Connor 1997, 394; Quirke 2009a, 367. This is true of both material and textual evidence, though there are at least two major groups of texts. The group of papyri found in the valley temple mainly consists of papers belonging to a temple scribe, Horemsaf, who worked in the reign of Amenemhat III; some of the papyri also date to the reign of Senwosret III (Quirke 2005, 32–33). They include journal fragments, temple accounts, letters about temple affairs sent between the temple scribe and the town mayor, and festival and priest lists (Quirke 1997, 25, 30; Quirke 1999, 66; Quirke 2005, 34. Also see Luft 1992a, Luft 1992b, Luft 2006). The papyri from the town itself are said to date primarily to the reign of Amenemhat III and his successors in the early Thirteenth Dynasty and are divided into excavation lots (Wente 1990, 68–69; Quirke 1997, 25).

§3.1 Invoking kings in private letters

Evidence from Lahun demonstrates that its residents had agency in choosing whether to associate themselves with kings, and that when this personal association was expressed it was with the king as a god.[16] The most telling pieces of evidence are invocation formulae featured in letters. It is therefore worth starting the discussion of non-royal engagement with kingship in this period with the invocations from a collection of nine model letters on papyrus UC32196 (lot III.2):[17]

> *Letter 1*: "The dual king [*nswt bity*] Maakherura and all the gods as the servant there wishes. It is a communication to the lord l.p.h. to have brought to me ten geese to the servant there…"
>
> *Letter 2*: "The servant of the personal estate Djashe says to Renseneb l.p.h. in the favour of Sokary in Tepsedjemu as the servant there wishes."
>
> *Letter 3*: "The servant of the personal estate Wehemmesut says to Heqaib l.p.h. It is a communication to the lord l.p.h. as follows: all the affairs of the lord l.p.h. are safe and sound in all their circumstances … in the favour of Anubis lord of Miu as the servant there wishes."
>
> *Letter 4*: "The servant of the personal estate Iuferankh says to Iufersep l.p.h. in the favour of the dual king [*nswt bity*] Sehetep-[ib]-ra as the servant there wishes…"
>
> *Letter 5*: "[The servant of the personal] estate Ankhtyfy says to Seneb l.p.h. in the favour of the dual king [*nswt bity*] … and all the gods as the servant there wishes."
>
> *Letter 6*: "[The serv]ant of the personal estate Nehy [says to S]enebtyfy l.p.h. in [the favour of] Sekhmet and Sheret (?) as the servant there wishes."
>
> *Letter 7*: "The servant of the personal estate Ser says to […] l.p.h. in the favour of Sobek lord of Kheny as the servant there wishes."
>
> *Letter 8*: "The servant of the personal estate Horwerra says to Iaib l.p.h. in the favour of Hathor [mistr]ress of Byblos as the servant there wishes."

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[16] Papyri from the town have previously been studied in terms of the presence or absence of kingship, but this analysis was focused on administrative texts: Quirke 1999.

[17] Collier and Quirke 2004, 48–49. Alternative translations are also available in Wente 1990, 69–70. Also see Wente 1990, 1 for the potential of letters to get us closer to daily life than official or monumental texts.

> *Letter 9*: "The servant of the personal estate Inpuherkhenet says (to) the temple overseer Ra l.p.h. in the favour of Sobek lord of the town […]"

Model letters were used in scribal education and can be considered the standard for epistolary conventions and style.[18] In this case, a few patterns help with the interpretation of other texts from the site. First, it is worth pointing out the obvious: the king *is* mentioned in a few of the model letters. This variability in invoking or not invoking the king can be taken as cautionary evidence against strict rules of decorum. Out of nine model letters, a specific king appears in three. The model letters do not differ in tone or content: all nine consist of requests made from subordinates to their superiors, including for things such as geese, raisins, boats with provisions, and grain. If there was a need to include the king in some letters but not in others, that need is not discernible in the texts themselves.

Second, of the three model letters in which a king appears, he only appears alone—without other gods—in one. In the other two, the invocation of the king is followed by the phrase "and all the gods" in a way that groups the king with those gods. In other letters (e.g., UC 32123, UC 32131, UC 32198, UC 32199, UC 32126), the place taken by the king here is filled by a god, who is also accompanied by the phrase "all the gods"; the parallelism in construction suggests that the king, when he appears, is playing the role of a god. In Letter 4 above, the king (Sehetepibra: Amenemhat I) is not accompanied by other gods. Interestingly, Edward Wente added a "deceased" to his translation even though it does not appear in the original Egyptian. The name of Amenemhat IV (the king mentioned in Letter 1, Maakherura) provides a *terminus post quem* for the model letters. It is likely that invoking a dead king (Amenemhat I) meant something different than invoking a living king (see discussion of kingship in Chapter 2). Third,

[18] Wente 1990, 1–2.

there is a diversity of gods invoked in the model letters, which suggests that there was a level of choice involved when deciding who these invocations would include.

The pattern detectable in the model letters—that the king appears in fewer invocations than diverse gods, and that when he does, he is invoked *with* gods—is borne out by letters from the town. Out of the published corpus of texts, thirty letters include invocation formulae mentioning either the king or gods.[19] Some letters feature polite greetings that mention neither gods nor kings, such as UC 32216.[20] There are also letters without invocation formulae; sometimes they were not preserved, but the omission can also be indicative of the status of the recipient and sender. In the Middle Kingdom, invocation formulae were used when subordinates wrote to their superiors, but rarely when superiors wrote to their subordinates.[21] All of this supports the suggestion that there was some choice when framing letters, sometimes but not always conditioned by social status. It is unclear whether the agency in the choice of formulae should be given to scribes asked to compose the letters or to the senders themselves.[22]

[19] UC 32092 A-C, UC 32115C, UC 32197 (lot IV.4), UC 32202 (lot VI.6), UC 32203 (lot III.3), UC 32205 (lot III.4), UC 32210 (lot VIII.1), UC 32213 (lot VI.5), UC 32214 (lot LVI.1), UC 32341 (lot XLIV), UC 32115D, UC 32198 (lot I.7), UC 32199 (lot II.2), UC 32126 (lot II.3?), UC 32091B, UC 32101G, UC 32109B, UC 32114A, UC 32118F, UC 32149B, UC 32156B, UC 32200 (lot XV.1), UC 32201 (lot VI.4), UC 32206 (lot III.6), UC 32212 (lot V.1), UC 32123 (lot II.4), UC 32131 (lot II.5), UC 32122 (lot II.6), UC 32115D, UC 3210I. See Collier and Quirke 2002; Collier and Quirke 2004.
[20] Collier and Quirke 2002, 153–155.
[21] Wente 1990, 10.
[22] Wente 1990, 6.

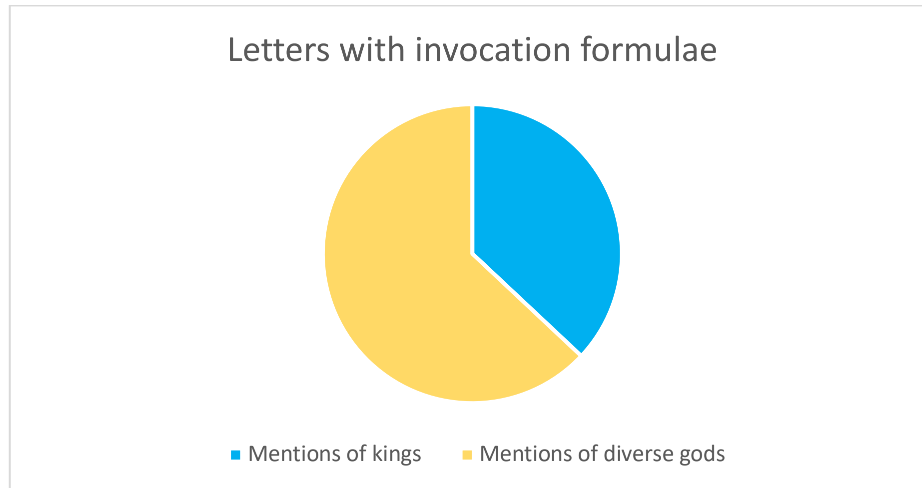

Figure 3.4: Breakdown of letters with invocation formulae from Lahun.

Out of the thirty letters with preserved invocation formulae, eleven (or 37%) mention the king (Figure 3.4).[23] The remaining nineteen letters (63%) include formulae that name only gods—a selection that mirrors the variety in the model letters.[24] Ten of these are fragmentary,[25] making it possible that the king was included in more formulae than have been preserved. However, from the ratio of model letters in which the king was mentioned and those in which he was not, we can perhaps expect that there were indeed more letters without him in the town. Even this percentual breakdown is significant, though. While none of the letters address transactions that involved the royal court, over one third of them invoke the king explicitly, showing his ideological importance even when functionally removed from this particular setting.

[23] UC 32092 A-C, UC 32115C, UC 32197 (lot IV.4), UC 32202 (lot VI.6), UC 32203 (lot III.3), UC 32205 (lot III.4), UC 32210 (lot VIII.1), UC 32213 (lot VI.5), UC 32214 (lot LVI.1), UC 32341 (lot XLIV), UC 32115D.
[24] UC 32198 (lot I.7), UC 32199 (lot II.2), UC 32126 (lot II.3?), UC 32091B, UC 32101G, UC 32109B, UC 32114A, UC 32118F, UC 32149B, UC 32156B, UC 32200 (lot XV.1), UC 32201 (lot VI.4), UC 32206 (lot III.6), UC 32212 (lot V.1), UC 32123 (lot II.4), UC 32131 (lot II.5), UC 32122 (lot II.6), UC 32115D, UC 3210I.
[25] UC 32091B, UC 32101G, UC 32109B, UC 32114A, UC 32118F, UC 32149B, UC 32156B, UC 32200 (lot XV.1), UC 32201 (lot VI.4), UC 32206 (lot III.6), UC 32212 (lot V.1), UC 32123 (lot II.4), UC 32131 (lot II.5), UC 32122 (lot II.6), UC 32115D, UC 3210I.

This is not the case for letters from other sites, as discussed below, and the importance of the king here may be tied to the proximity of the royal cult.

Out of eleven letters that include the king, only one mentions the king alone (UC 32092 A-C). He is identified as "true of voice" (*mAa-xrw*), which suggests that he was dead and invoked in that capacity. The dead king is also mentioned in letters UC 32115C, UC 32203 (lot III.3), UC 32210, UC 32213, UC 32214, and UC 32341—in these cases alongside "all other gods." Other invocation formulae perhaps featuring the dead king are found in UC 32197 (lot IV.4) and UC 32210 (lot VIII.1); the "true of voice" epithet does not appear, but the letters invoke Senwosret II and are thought to date to later in the Twelfth Dynasty.[26] In several of these the king is also mentioned *after* another god and before the "all the gods" clause, which reinforces the notion that he was a god, as well as the fact that he was not the preeminent god, if we can take the order of gods as indicative of importance. These letters include UC 32197 and UC 32205 (lot III.4) (king after Sobek), UC 32210 and UC 32214 (lot LVI.1) (king after Sobek and Horus), and UC 32213 (lot VI.5) (king after Khenetkhety lord of Kemwer and before "the gods of Upper and Lower Egypt"). That senders could choose the gods they invoked, and that this choice likely depended on their own circumstances rather than necessarily those of the recipient, is suggested by a papyrus from the valley temple. In Papyrus Berlin 10031A, dated to the reign of Amenemhat III and addressed to the temple scribe Horemsaf, the "prophet of Sobek" invoked his god,[27] which suggests a choice based on occupation. On the other hand, a letter (Papyrus Berlin 10025) from the same reign sent to Horemsaf from the servant of the estate Imbu invokes Senwosret II, who would have already been dead.[28]

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[26] Wente 1990, 83, 86.
[27] Wente 1990, 76.
[28] Wente 1990, 77.

Invocation formulae from Lahun suggest that kings were relevant in daily life in specific ways. Judging by the fact that letters with such formulae only appear in Lahun—keeping in mind the caveat about survival of evidence—it is possible that we should think of these letters as part of a narrow communication system for the Lahun residents themselves.[29] It is unclear to whom these invocations signaled: for instance, whether it was important for the sender to invoke the king as one of his gods, or whether the sender knew that he should invoke the king in a letter sent to a particular superior. At any rate, the invocations demonstrate that some Egyptians living in Lahun in the Twelfth Dynasty had an interest in associating with kings, and it is possible that those associations were relevant to particularly an internal Lahun audience, which helps us to think about differences in non-royal engagement with kingship across distinct sites. Since the dead king and his mortuary cult were present nearby and were one of the *raisons d'être* of Lahun, this connection to kingship and the invocation of deceased kings makes sense, though it is important to remember that Senwosret II was not the only king invoked in these texts. Some kings of the Old, Middle, and New Kingdoms were venerated by local people after their deaths, likely because they were seen as potent deities in those contexts,[30] and Lahun should be considered one of those sites.

Kings also appear in the bodies of letters and in administrative texts, and in those cases royal associations are usually general rather than specific. Only nineteen papyri with accounts—a group that includes a considerable number of fragments—make any reference to the king or royal categories directly.[31] Eight of these (42%) are mere mentions of titles associated with the

[29] I thank Leah Neiman for this helpful suggestion at ARCE 2023.
[30] For Old and Middle Kingdom examples, see Chapter 4. A famous New Kingdom example is the worship of Ahmose Nefertari and Amenhotep I at Deir el-Medina and the broader Theban necropolis: Hollender 2009. The cult of Amenhotep I continued after the New Kingdom: Lieven 2001.
[31] These are documented in Collier and Quirke 2006.

king and/or the royal court, such as king's sealer, sole companion, and king's priest.[32] Letter UC 32209 (lot XII.1) recounts the capture of a king's servant (*Hm-nsw*) who had fled, while UC 32148A mentions the provisioning of another *Hm-nsw*. There is a reference to a "king's road" (*wAt nswt*) in UC 32129A (lot VI.25); the "chambers of the king" in association with the construction of the pyramid in UC 32125 (lot VI.26); the "palace" (*pr-Aa*) in UC 32179 (lot VI.10). The "Residence" (*Xnw*)— a single place of both kingship and administration, in this period likely Itjtawy[33]—is mentioned in a few letters and accounts papyri.[34] UC 32212 (lot V.1) documents the transportation of "king's foods" (*anxw-nsw*) to the "foundation of the King's Daughter Neferuptah."[35] UC 32127 mentions grain from the Residence being sent to northern districts, while UC 32179 (lot VI.10) refers to the "herds of dual king Sehetepibra true of voice" and UC 32186 (lot XIII.1) discusses the giving of royal land with kings' names to temples. UC 32114E is fragmentary but includes "favour of the Dual-King […]," while UC 32199 (lot II.2) includes "[…] so that the ka of the ruler will continue to favour you."[36] These texts demonstrate that royal endowments directly affected people's lives. The rarity of mentions of specific kings, however, suggests that the institution of kingship, rather than a specific king, was most significant in this context.

The generically formal ways in which the royal institution and its different parts are referenced in administrative papyri are different from how kings appear in private letters. In letters, specific kings were *invoked* to bless and protect addressees. The lack of direct connection

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[32] UC 32310; UC 32100A; UC 32103Diii+32099C+32100B recto, with 32099A; UC 32104; UC 32145A; UC 32098F; UC 32147G; UC 32149E.

[33] Quirke 1999, 65; Quirke 2009b; though also see Obsomer 2020 for different ways in which *Xnw* is translated, particularly in the *Shipwrecked Sailor*.

[34] Letters: UC 32128, UC 32200 (lot XV.1). Accounts papyri: UC 32310, UC 32142B, and UC 32127. Interestingly, UC 32200 (lot XV.1) includes what seems to be a complaint about judicial processes, which suggests that procedures were known outside of the royal circle (Collier and Quirke 2002, 101).

[35] Collier and Quirke 2002, 139.

[36] Collier and Quirke 2002, 97. Translation also available in Wente 1990, 79.

to the royal court in those letters demonstrates the importance of kings in their divine capacities in this town. Despite the clear importance of the king at Lahun, *not every private letter invoked the king*. On the contrary, two-thirds of preserved letters from the town *invoke other gods* instead. It is fair to wonder why, in a pyramid town that revolved around a royal cult, not every resident seems to have always turned to the king.

§3.2 Royal veneration in a pyramid town

The invocation formulae discussed above suggest that the king was considered a significant deity in Lahun. However, they also imply that the king in his role as a god did not reach all residents of Lahun in the same ways. Indeed, there *is* evidence that royal rituals occurred in the town, but not evidence that all residents participated in the rituals in equal capacities (for more on disparate experiences of royal rituals by non-royals, see Chapter 4).

That royal rituals took place in Lahun is suggested by different texts, including religious, literary, and administrative types. The recto of UC 32157 (lot LV.1), found in one of the smaller houses,[37] includes the well-known *Hymns to Senwosret III*. These hymns demonstrate that the Egyptian people, as well as gods, were expected to praise the king. More interestingly, the arrangement of text on the papyrus—similar to modern poetry—suggests that it was a libretto for an actual ceremony.[38] Miriam Lichtheim hypothesized that the hymns were sung during a visit of the king to Lahun,[39] and James Allen that they were composed upon his accession to the throne.[40] The papyrus was reused on its verso, which suggests that it was kept at least partly for

[37] Parkinson 2002, 71.
[38] Allen 2015, 369. It is usually accepted that Middle Kingdom literature would have been "almost certainly performed at least in part" (Parkinson 2002, 55–56).
[39] Lichtheim 2006, 198.
[40] Allen 2015, 369.

the papyrus itself, but its findspot in a domestic context cannot be ignored. It is unclear whether the findspot represents a primary or a secondary deposit.[41] If a primary deposit, it is possible that the hymns were kept by someone who participated in a ceremony or festival in honor of the king. Should we expect that all participants of a public ceremony would have been able to read? Likely not;[42] elites probably read the hymns while others followed along. Either way, the fact that this text was found at Lahun, and that it was potentially part of a public ceremony, is a reminder that ephemeral rituals hardly survive in the record. If such a celebration took place, it was likely a notable occasion for residents. But we cannot assume that everyone reacted in the exact same ways, namely by agreeing with the hymns, even if royal ideology or the "public transcript"[43] imply otherwise.

Administrative papyri also suggest that royal festivals occurred, but they demonstrate that the focus of the festival calendar was on gods.[44] From the valley temple papyri, P10003B—the inventory of a statue procession—lists an ebony statue of Senwosret II, an ivory statue of Senwosret III, and a statue of Anubis.[45] The statues are mentioned in association with the so-called Sailing of the Land, perhaps an annual celebration of the burial of the king.[46] This suggests that a celebration of these kings (and Anubis, who possibly had a cult in the pyramid complex)[47] took place. The size and reach of such a procession, and whether it was restricted to

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[41] Parkinson 2002, 71.
[42] Parkinson 2002, 66. Also see Baines 2007.
[43] See Scott 1990, 4, 58 on the potential of the "public transcript" to skew evidence towards how the dominant group would want things to seem. See also Osborne forthcoming. Assuming that everyone knew what the hymns meant or agreed with what they said would be similar to assuming that every Englishman who sings "God Save the King" believes in God or, for that matter, the king, rather than participating in a ceremony in which the singing of that specific hymn is expected.
[44] There is some evidence that other divine cults existed inside the town, but the number of temples and to whom they belonged is debated: Kóthay 2015, 763–764; Moeller 2017, 200–201.
[45] A fragment of papyrus from the town—UC 32143B—also mentions the statues of two unnamed kings.
[46] Quirke 1997, 29–32; Kóthay 2015, 769.
[47] Quirke 1997, 34. In P. Berlin 10012, for instance, he is mentioned alongside Senwosret II and Sobek as the focus of the mortuary temple cult (Wente 1990, 73).

the sacred precinct, remains unclear due to the lack of a processional axis. In papyri from the town itself, the cult of Senwosret II is directly attested only in a festival calendar, UC 32191 (lot XLI.1), which records the attendance of singers and dancers.[48] Other festivals include the festival of Sokar, the "sailing of Hathor," the "anointing of the gods," the "day of butchery for the god," and the festival of the "cloth of Khakheperra."[49] The papyrus does not record broader public attendance, making it difficult to ascertain the reach of the festivals, but it is not farfetched to think that some—such as the festival of Sokar—were more public, while others—perhaps the cloth festival of Khakheperra (Senwosret II)—were "small-scale secluded ceremonies."[50] Mark Collier and Stephen Quirke assumed the latter festival was unique to Lahun, which suggests an association with the temple rather than the town.[51]

It is possible that rituals such as royal processions or occasions where royal hymns were sung were significant for being known to take place even if they were not widely visible.[52] One would presumably experience kingship differently in a public festival—where participation would have likely been sensorially stimulating—than by walking past a pyramid or other royal monument. It would be unwise to underestimate the experience of occasion, especially in comparison with the durability of architecture. But this should not lead to an assumption that participation in the royal cult was enforced,[53] or that every resident of Lahun participated in the same ways. It is also important to remember that the town possibly had its own temple (or temples), independent of the royal cult and dedicated to other gods.[54] Despite the usual caveats

[48] Quirke 1997, 26.
[49] Collier and Quirke 2006, 92.
[50] Collier and Quirke 2006, 92.
[51] This festival also seems to be mentioned in UC 32135B, though there it is not associated with the king.
[52] Quack 2010b, 219–220.
[53] As claimed by Mazzone 2017, 34.
[54] There is evidence of cult worship of other gods, for instance Hathor and Sobek. See Quirke 1997, 31–32; Kóthay 2015, 763–764; Mazzone 2017, 34; Moeller 2017, 200–201.

about the serendipity of preservation, it is significant that what is often taken as the primary reason for the town's existence—the cult of the dead king—is barely acknowledged in these records. This is perhaps further evidence that the smaller part of Lahun was added later, and that it was the section most closely linked to the cult of the dead king.[55]

Interestingly, kings were prominent in Middle Kingdom literature, including in the few literary papyri found in domestic contexts at Lahun. The verso of UC 32157 (lot LV.1), the papyrus that contains the *Hymns to Senwosret III*, features the *Tale of Hay.* This highly fragmentary story consists of twenty-six lines that recount the death and burial of Hay.[56] In the section that discusses the burial, a king with the throne name of Neferkara (either Pepy II or one of the Eighth Dynasty kings) is mentioned.[57] Collier and Quirke tentatively added *mr* (pyramid) to a lacuna and proposed the following translation: "Then he placed him/it [Hay or his burial] behind […] pyramid (?) of Neferkara true of voice saying…"[58] It is impossible to know whether this was the original phrasing, but the association between this burial and *something* of the king is relatively clear. What remains of the text does not allude to Hay's social standing, so it is unclear whether he could have been buried close to a king. Either way, the fact that this story was found in the house of someone who likely did not have a sufficiently high status for that honor is compelling. The not uncommon inclusion of kings in literary texts in this period is a further suggestion that the Egyptological application of the concept of decorum with regards to engagements with kingship is too simplistic.

[55] See Moeller 2016, 273; Moeller 2017.
[56] Quirke 1996, 269.
[57] von Beckerath 1984, 185–186; Leprohon 2013, 43–46.
[58] Collier and Quirke 2004, 47.

The reach of stories such as the *Tale of Hay,* known only from single sites, may have been small.[59] Other instances of fragmentary texts so far only known from Lahun include UC 32107A and UC 32105A, in which a man reports an incident to the king and a woman is presented to the king, respectively. Beyond these unique examples, the *Tale of Sinuhe* (UC 32106C)—considered a canonical literary work from the period—was also found at Lahun,[60] though its exact findspot is unknown. Set in the beginning of the Middle Kingdom (though probably composed around the reign of Amenemhat III), the story revolves around the flight of the official Sinuhe to the Levant after the death of Amenemhat I. Sinuhe eventually returns to Egypt, where he visits the palace and loses consciousness because he is so overwhelmed by the king's presence. Later, he is buried in the royal cemetery.

The plot of *Sinuhe* is not surprising in light of royal discourse. What is more surprising is its discovery in Lahun, when literacy is thought to have been low and decorum strict. One wonders whether texts that made the relationship of the elite and the king clear to those outside the royal circle contributed not only to a feeling of awe towards kingship—the usual interpretation, derived from texts such as *Sinuhe*—but also to a lack of interest in people and places divorced from one's reality. There is not much evidence that non-royal lives at Lahun revolved around kingship, and modern expectations that they did so get in the way more than they help: often by assuming that the king was critically important both when his name or symbols are present *and* when they are absent.[61]

[59] See Parkinson 2002, 67–70, on the differences between lesser-known and canonical works commissioned or approved by the royal court.
[60] It is considered one of the great works of ancient Egyptian literature, not least because of its preservation in several copies from different periods: Parkinson 2002, 67–68; Allen 2015, 55.
[61] E.g., in commenting on the fact that the names of kings in dating formulae were often missing in private letters and "unofficial documents" from Lahun, Quack suggested that this was a "sign of taboo" (Quack 2010a, 3), since most official inscriptions include specific kings' regnal years (see, e.g., the translations in the "Monumental Inscriptions (Middle Kingdom)" section of Lichtheim 2006, 113–130). This interpretation erases the agency of those who composed these documents and keeps us from considering that such formalities might have been irrelevant, or

§3.3 Local (daily?) cultic practice at Lahun

At Lahun, the king had a clear cultic significance. This is not only demonstrated in the invocation of kings in private letters, but also in the little we can tell about non-royal engagement in royal rituals. However, it does not seem like kings were regular fixtures of non-royal cultic expression in the town. Instead, abundant evidence of domestic cult shows that Lahun residents relied on primarily protective deities and ancestors in daily life. This allows us to highlight the relevance of other religious forces in comparison to kingship.

Symbols and names of kings appear primarily in house burials, which strengthens the link between kings and the funerary sphere (further explored in Chapter 5). These occasional burials under floorboards were of children, one of the ways in which the dead were brought into daily life.[62] Remains were placed in boxes and sometimes accompanied by grave goods, including beads with the names of Senwosret II and Amenemhat III in one case,[63] a cylinder seal with the name of Amenemhat II alongside a figurine of a monkey in another,[64] and jars and seals inscribed with the name of Senwosret III in a third.[65] It is possible that in this context both beads and seals had an apotropaic function.[66] The addition of burials to houses created liminal spaces

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even that scribes sometimes chose to mention a specific king and sometimes not. Translation issues regarding regnal years are beyond the scope of this work, but it is worth noting that the same Egyptian phrase (*rnpt-sp*) is inconsistently translated as "regnal year," "year," "year of reign," and "year of count" in the scholarly literature, differences that do not correspond to original differences in meaning. See, for instance, inconsistencies in Collier and Quirke 2002, Collier and Quirke 2004, and Collier and Quirke 2006. For some of the key pieces of the discussion of transliteration and translation, see: von Beckerath 1969; Gardiner 1949. It is possible that omitting the king's name means that there would have been no confusion regarding the king's identity (Hayes 1955, 15 regarding date lines without kings' names in Papyrus Brooklyn 351446, which dates to the Twelfth Dynasty).

[62] Stevens 2009, 11–12.

[63] Petrie 1890, 24 and pl. X nos. 9, 10, 11; Petrie 1891, pl. VI no. 9.

[64] Petrie 1891, 11. Petrie does not make it clear whether this is the burial of a child, but since it is a town burial and those were most commonly of children it is included here.

[65] Szpakowska 2008, 47. A string of beads found with another infant burial included a hawk and a lion, animals closely associated with kingship (e.g., objects in Brunton 1920). But it is unclear if they should be considered royal symbols or primarily apotropaic in this context. Such symbols may often also have merely been decorative, such as a cosmetic box with lion carving: UC 16685; Petrie 1890, 20, pl. VIII no. 11. The function of the hawks' heads as game pieces, suggested by Petrie, is uncertain: Petrie 1891, 11 and pl. VIII nos. 7–8.

[66] Quirke 2005, 102; Müller 2015, 360. It is possible that both were also used in life: Szpakowska 2008, 77.

closer to the divine world.[67] As will be discussed in Chapter 5, kingship was an essential fixture of non-royal funerary rituals, for instance in the standard offering formula, though objects with specific kings' names are not very common outside burials of the royal family. Here, objects with kings' names were perhaps appropriate for the protection of the vulnerable deceased.

Royal names cluster in domestic funerary contexts at Lahun, but one royal object was also found in what seems like a proper domestic cultic assemblage: a scarab of Neferhotep of the Thirteenth Dynasty discovered with a so-called "dwarf stand" (Figure 3.5).[68] Petrie found a few such stands in which dough remained inside the dish, which led him to propose that they were used for "household offerings of daily bread."[69] It is assumed that these "dwarves" represent Bes, a protective god suitable to domestic religion because of his multivalence.[70] If these stands were used to present offerings, it is unclear to whom the offerings were made; it is possible that they were not solely for the god but also to other members of the divine realm, including ancestors.[71] These stands are uniquely associated with domestic cult, and thus the discovery of the Neferhotep scarab can be considered a parallel to the occasional invocation of kings in letters, in that the owner of this house chose to include the king in his (potentially) daily ritual. It is also likely that the scarab with the royal name functioned as a protective amulet, since scarab amulets were some of the most common in Egypt.[72] It is important to consider whether regular Egyptians would have recognized royal names. Due to the pictographic nature of the Egyptian script it is

[67] Szpakowska 2008, 34; Stevens 2009, 11–12.
[68] Petrie 1890, 26. Other offering stands, or potentially incense burners, found at the settlement were carved in the form of lotus flower capitals (e.g., Manchester 275).
[69] Petrie 1891, 11 and pl. VI nos. 9–10.
[70] This refers to his human and animal aspects, the "demonic and numinous" (van Oppen de Ruiter 2020, 1, 21). This interpretation is not fully accepted. Some have suggested that the figures represent pregnant women (which seems unlikely), Aha (the early form of Bes), or Beset (the female form of Bes): Szpakowskwa 2008, 133–135.
[71] Szpakowskwa 2008, 137–138.
[72] See Cooney 2008; Boonstra 2020 for further information on scarab amulets.

assumed here that they would, even if they might not have recognized the specific king named, but that is a potentially complicating factor.

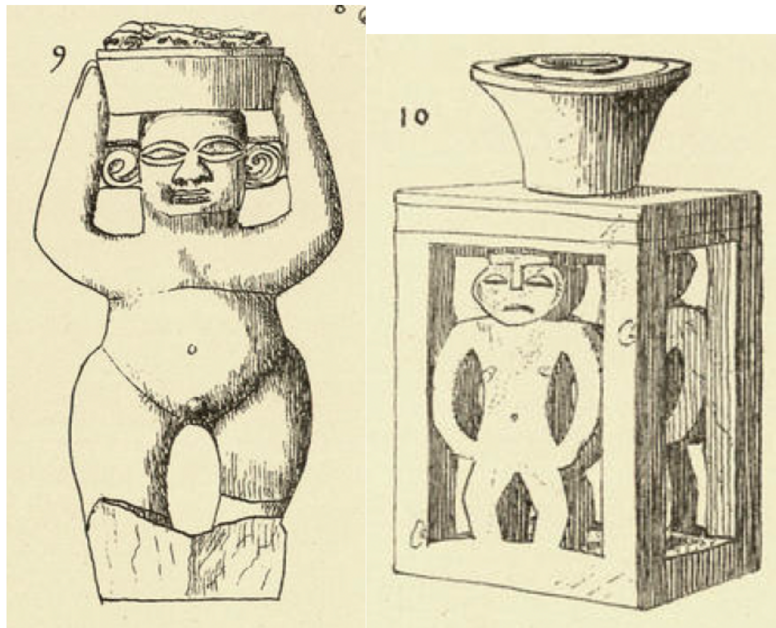

Figure 3.5: “Dwarf stands” from Lahun (Petrie 1891, pl. VI nos. 9–10).

Despite these examples, most cultic objects from town contexts are *not* associated with the royal sphere.[73] Several figurines, both zoomorphic and anthropomorphic, were found in the town.[74] Some of the female figurines have emphasized pubic areas—one of them wears nothing but jewelry[75]—which suggests a tie to fertility. Besides their potential use as cult images, it is possible that they were amulets.[76] Small figures with holes used for suspension, thus more

[73] Functional objects with potential symbolic meaning include a pottery dish incised with fish and lotus flowers, motifs reminiscent of New Kingdom “marsh bowls” interpreted by Nyord as manifestations of creation (Nyord 2020b, 61–64). There is also a bowl decorated with lions: Petrie 1891, 8.

[74] Petrie interpreted many of these as dolls (including lions, a rabbit, crocodiles, a hippopotamus, an ape, and male and female figures: Petrie 1890, 30–31; Petrie 1891, 11 and pl. VIII nos. 1–2). This is a common issue, since it is often impossible to determine whether something had a cultic function (Stevens 2009, 3), and it is possible that objects originally created for ritual use were secondarily used as playthings (Szpakowskwa 2008, 54–57). Other objects that were undoubtedly toys (such as wooden tops) were found: Petrie 1890, 30; Szpakowskwa 2008, 54; Griffith 1910, 16.

[75] Though this one does not come from a secure domestic context: Stevens 2009, 10.

[76] Stevens 2009, 7.

certainly amuletic, include Taweret (Manchester 6169).[77] A limestone statuette of the goddess evidences her importance to the residents of the town, likely in her capacity as protector of mothers and children.[78] Further objects perhaps used for this purpose include fragments of faience rods, similar to the "magic wands" or "birth tusks" well-known from this period.[79] Even more compelling, a masked figurine was found buried inside a house alongside a "Bes mask" (Figure 3.6).[80] The latter's identification with the god is uncertain, but evidence of ancient repair demonstrates that it was used, and a pair of ivory clappers (Manchester 124) found in the same house suggests that it was used in a domestic ritual involving music. Domestic ritual practice could also be sensorially rich and dynamic, and its potential to be memorable and potent should not be underestimated, particularly not in comparison with likely less frequent and less accessible royal festivals.

Figure 3.6: "Bes mask" from Lahun (Manchester 123 and Quirke 2005, 83).

[77] A pendant of a falcon with the double crown was also found in the town, but no specific provenance is given: Manchester 173; Griffith 1910, 24.
[78] Szpakowskwa 2008, 125.
[79] Quirke 2005, 100.
[80] Also see Petrie 1890, 30 and pl. VIII nos. 13, 13A, 27.

Together the assemblage described above is suggestive of rituals focused on the protection of family members. The association between domestic cult and family is strengthened by the discovery of fragments of stelae, statuettes, and offering tables in the town. Petrie assumed these objects had been "ransacked" from tombs in the later part of the Twelfth and the early Thirteenth Dynasties,[81] but it is quite possible that they were instead originally created for domestic cult.[82] Whether something should be classified as part of domestic cult or funerary practice is a complex issue with no simple answers, not least because objects such as "magic wands" functioned in both contexts.[83] An example that illustrates the complexity of categorization is a painting on the wall of a Lahun house, interpreted by Petrie as "a servant offering to his master" (Figure 3.7).[84] A familiar scene to the Egyptologist, the arrangement in which a bigger figure sits while a smaller figure makes an offering is usually found in funerary contexts. There is no reason to think this instance is funerary, as corroborated by a representation from a New Kingdom Theban tomb—TT 104—which shows the house of Djehutynefer, where the tomb owner and head of the family is seen seated in front of two offering figures.[85] Even if not representative of cult,[86] these two scenes demonstrate the preeminence of the head of the household[87]—rather than the king—in the domestic sphere.

[81] Petrie 1890, 31; see pls. X nos. 65–66 and XI nos. 10–15.
[82] O'Connor 1997, 394.
[83] Cahail 2014a, 229; Stevens 2009, 8. For a consideration of this in terms of "funerary" stelae in the Middle Kingdom, both in settlements in Egypt and in the Nubian fortresses, see Silva and Bestock forthcoming.
[84] Petrie 1891, 7 and pl. XVI.
[85] Shedid 1988, 70, Tafel 5.
[86] It is also possible that the Lahun scene was a focal point of cult: Stevens 2009, 7.
[87] Spence has argued the same for Amarna houses: Spence 2015a, 96.

Figure 3.7: Wall painting from Lahun, presumably depicting the owner of the house receiving an offering from a servant or family member (Petrie 1891, pl. XVI).

§3.4 Prominence of the mayor

In the private house, the head of the household was the most significant figure.[88] In the town more broadly, it seems like the mayor also held a position of great importance. This subsection, then, switches the focus from religious forces to those of political significance in the lives of Lahun residents—though religious and political cannot be considered static or mutually exclusive categories, as discussed in terms of kingship in Chapter 2.

At Lahun, the prominence of the mayor is best demonstrated through an analysis of the architecture of the town. The pyramid dominated the landscape.[89] However, Lahun's enclosure

[88] Lehner (2000) has proposed a patrimonial household model for ancient Egypt, in which all of society would have been viewed as an extension of the king's household, and that the king was thus essentially the head of every household. The evidence discussed in this study suggests that this may not have been the case, or at least that—if society was in fact ordered in this manner—such ordering was not of significance to all Egyptians.
[89] Quirke 2005, 7.

walls—around 6 meters high and 3.25 meters thick—created a separation between people's living quarters and the sacred precinct,[90] even if residents of the town were not confined inside the walls.[91] The massive enclosure walls should likely be seen as at least a symbolic separation between the spaces of the living and of the royal divine—a delineation between the sacred and the mundane.[92] Beyond a symbolic separation, it is also important to consider who would have ventured outside the town most often, and thus actually seen the pyramid most often. Though gendered experiences of kingship are not a focus of this study due to the available evidence, that might be a fruitful avenue of investigation—and, in this case, distinct gender roles at Lahun might perhaps have played a role. Women tend to be more associated with food production areas in the domestic sphere of the town, while men are thought to have been more involved in interactions beyond the immediate household itself.[93] While likely a reductionist perspective, this still might suggest that men would have moved beyond the town walls more frequently, and thus been in the presence of the pyramid more frequently. Even then, however, that distinction should not be drawn too starkly; for instance, there is evidence from the New Kingdom town of Deir el-Medina that a designated space existed for menstruating women outside the town walls.[94] No such evidence from Lahun exists, but it is untenable to suggest that women would have remained inside the walls at all times.

[90] Mazzone 2017; Siegel 2020, 607.
[91] It is possible that some had rural estates nearby, to which they would have traveled not infrequently, and there is no evidence to suggest that the walls were defensive in purpose: O'Connor 1997, 394; Siegel 2020, 609. There is also no evidence of settlement expansion beyond the walls, though modifications were made to houses over time: Moeller 2017, 192; O'Connor 1997, 391.
[92] Mazzone 2017, 24–25; Siegel 2020, 111, 317–319, 332, 347.
[93] Wilfong 2010, 174. For more on women from Lahun, see Quirke 2007.
[94] Wilfong 2010, 175. See also Jiménez Meroño 2023, 6–7.

Lahun's walls were undeniable presences in the landscape, and they would have conditioned the way in which people moved and interacted in these spaces.[95] Besides the wall around the town, both the valley temple and the pyramid were also enclosed by walls (estimated to have stood at 1 meter and 7 meters high, respectively) (Figure 3.8).[96] Despite these separations, Petrie suggested that offerings of small pots were presented by "poorer people" at the pyramid, on a brick platform.[97] Stephen Quirke also highlighted that while the pyramid cemetery is today a "lifeless landscape," in the past it likely "resounded with daily rituals and festival ceremonies."[98] We are missing evidence for interactions of Lahun residents with their king's funerary monument, which is of course not to say that they did not take place. But the architecture suggests a separation rather than integration of royal monumental and living spaces.

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[95] Mazzone interpreted them, and the orthogonal planning of the town, as a "form of 'monumental propaganda,'" as well as "ideal for population mind control and indoctrination" (Mazzone 2017, 28, 32), which is an extreme position not supported by the evidence.
[96] Petrie, Brunton, and Murray 1923, pl. viii; Petrie 1890, 21; Siegel 2020, 610.
[97] Petrie, Brunton, and Murray 1923, 10–11.
[98] Quirke 2005, 28.

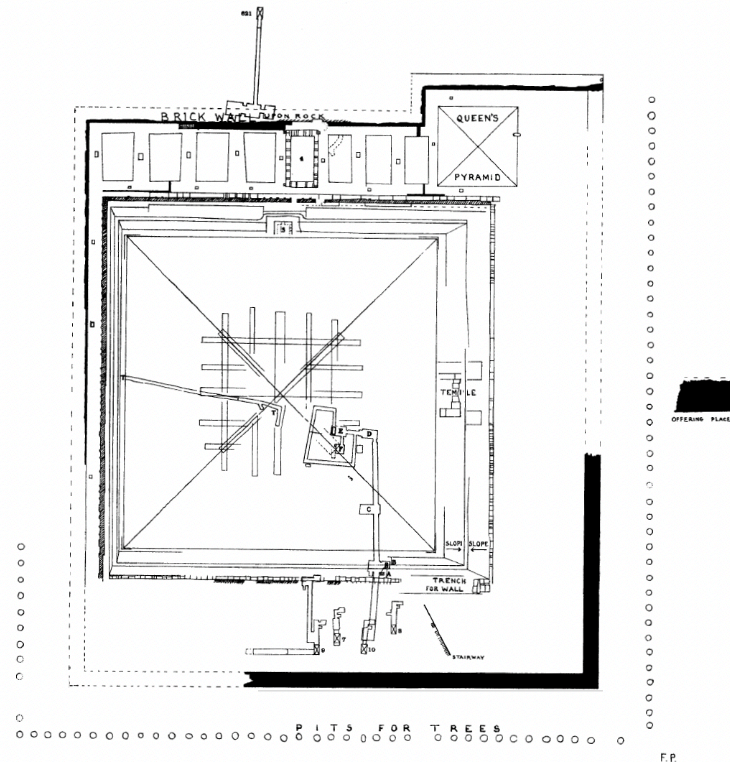

Figure 3.8: The pyramid of Senwosret II at Lahun, with enclosure walls (Petrie, Brunton, and Murray 1923, pl. viii).

For instance, it is unclear whether public processions between town and pyramid took place. Petrie suggested that the axis between valley temple and pyramid was “solely spiritual” and not processional due to the lack of a causeway (Figure 3.9),[99] which has however since been identified but not investigated.[100] The causeway is visible on satellite imagery but it is unclear if it was ever finished, or if it was meant to be fully constructed like Old Kingdom and later Middle Kingdom examples (see Chapter 4). If the causeway was constructed, that would suggest that any processions were restricted, though that does not necessarily mean that all movement to the pyramid went through the causeway, nor that residents could not have otherwise witnessed the event.[101]

[99] Petrie, Brunton, and Murray 1923, 1 and pl. ii; Quirke 2005, 11; Moeller 2016, 273.
[100] Lehner 1997, 176.
[101] For more on causeways and access to pyramids, see Chapter 4.

Petrie also assumed that the king visited Lahun "occasionally" to check on the progress of the construction of his funerary complex.[102] It has long been hypothesized that the ancient Egyptian royal court would have been relatively mobile, so this is not a farfetched suggestion.[103] In Petrie's case, however, this assumption is anchored on his interpretation of a building he termed the "acropolis" as a place where the king would have stayed during such visits (Figure 3.10).[104] Recent interpretations have instead identified the building as the house of the mayor, in part due to a parallel location for a mayor's house at Elephantine, though no objects corroborate either interpretation.[105] The mayor was a permanent fixture of the town,[106] suggested by his presence in texts. If he did reside in the "acropolis"—the highest point in the settlement—he would have been the most visible, and therefore perhaps the most present,[107] form of local authority. Josef Wegner has associated an area in front of the "acropolis" to a potential "plaza" in front of the mayoral residence at the site of Wah-Sut (see below). This perhaps allowed for a more personal connection between residents and the mayor, which they might have lacked in the restricted royal funerary monument nearby. If the king did visit Lahun he would perhaps have been more present than the local mayor at that time, even if the mayor was more prominent for most of the year. Periodicity is one of the ways in which engagement with kingship might have differed, and it will be further addressed in Chapter 4.

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[102] Petrie 1891, 6. Some of the Lahun temple papyri may also suggest this: Quirke 1999, 66–67.
[103] For recent treatments of the issue specifically in the New Kingdom, see Hagen 2016; Yoyotte 2021.
[104] Quirke 2005, 46.
[105] Moeller 2017, 197.
[106] Kóthay 2015, 765.
[107] Quirke 2005, 47.

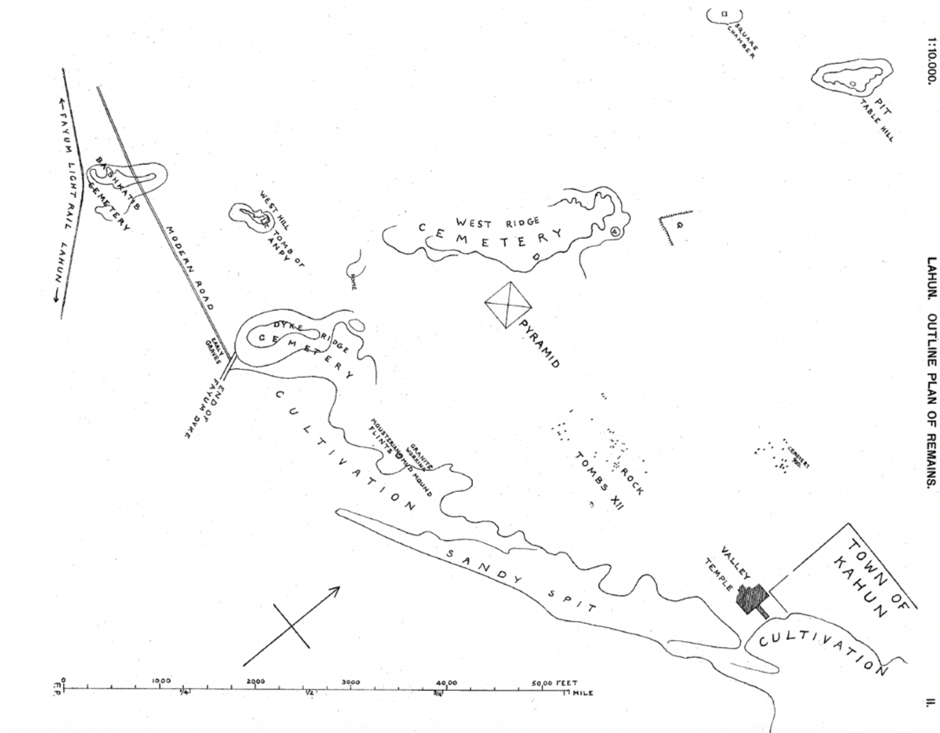

Figure 3.9: The invisible Lahun processional axis between Senwosret II's valley temple and pyramid (Petrie, Brunton, and Murray 1923, pl. ii).

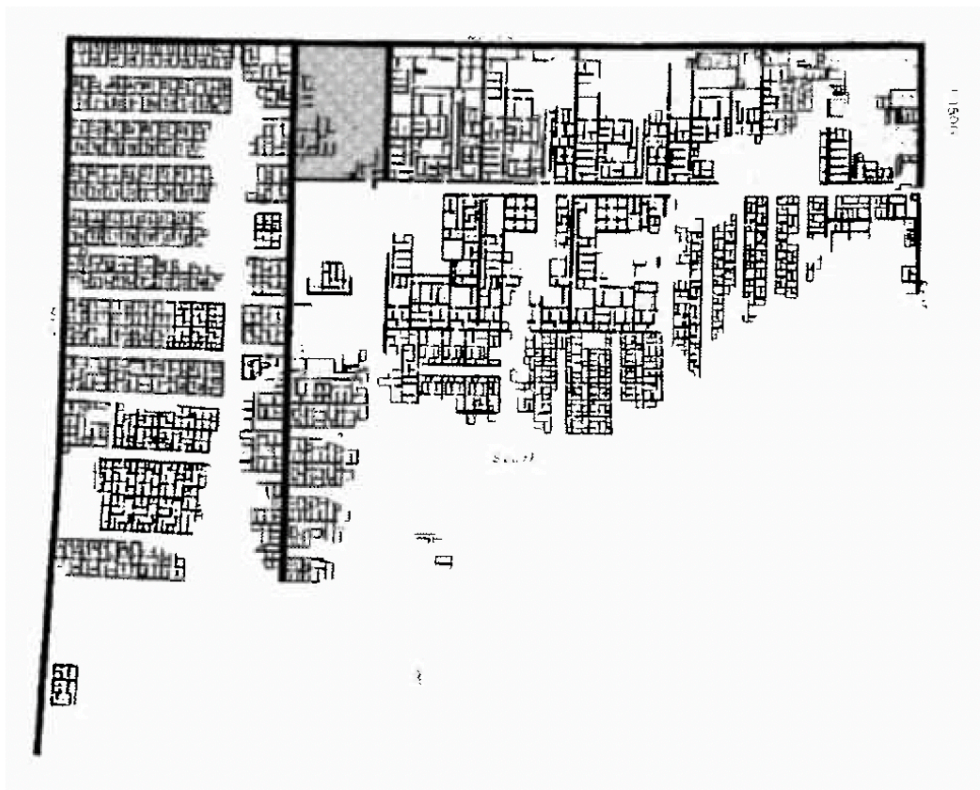

Figure 3.10: The so-called "acropolis" at Lahun (shaded gray) (Quirke 2005, 46).

Kings were nonetheless present in administrative terms, suggested by cylinder and scarab seals and seal impressions with their names. Arguments have been made for the amuletic or votive function of most royal and private name scarab seals from this period.[108] Daphna Ben-Tor, for instance, argued that the often-poor quality of scarab designs means that they were not royal objects meant for administrative use.[109] This interpretation rests on the assumption that such scarabs were mainly produced in royal workshops, but there is clear evidence for local production, and the quality of the scarabs can be less good in those cases.[110] That many scarabs could have been worn has also suggested primarily amuletic functions,[111] but this also fits with administrative practices. Seal impressions from Lahun include the names of kings (Amenemhat II, Senwosret II, Senwosret III, and Amenemhat III),[112] names of specific institutions, and titles of officials.[113] Many also feature amuletic devices such as the *sema-tawy*, the symbol of Egyptian unification, which begs the question of whether its symbolism was recognized as royal. One seal with figurative decoration includes a standing lion, similar to ones found on "magic wands" typical of the period and perhaps of an apotropaic function.[114] Due to the lack of precise findspots from Lahun, it is impossible to determine in what contexts the seals were used. If the royal seals are accepted as not only amuletic, but also administrative—in particular the cylinder and square stamp varieties—they were likely used in restricted contexts,[115] though it is difficult to say what proportion of the Lahun population was involved in administrative matters.

[108] Ben-Tor 2004; Ben-Tor et al. 1999.
[109] Ben-Tor et al. 1999, 54.
[110] Some scarabs from Edfu, for instance, are very worn—and thus were clearly frequently used—and are thought to have belonged to local officials (Nadine Moeller, personal communication May 2023).
[111] Giddy 2016, 23.
[112] Petrie, Brunton, and Murray 1923, 41.
[113] Quirke 2005, 88. See Petrie 1890, pl. X; Petrie 1891, pls. VIII—X
[114] Quirke 2005, 88; Stevens 2009, 8.
[115] See Kóthay 2013, 503.

§3.5 Lahun: conclusions

Lahun is a useful case study through which to frame the chapter because, beyond the sheer amount and variety of evidence that can be used to explore the non-royal experience of kingship there, its location right next to a royal pyramid provides a setting in which one *would* expect kingship to be omnipresent. As will become clear below, residents of Lahun did have more contact with kingship than Egyptians living in some other sites in this period. But the evidence discussed above shows that, though some residents of Lahun chose to invoke kings in their letters, they generally did not worship kings in their homes, instead worshipping protective deities or ancestors. In all these letters the king (most likely the deceased king) is invoked in a role similar to that of protective deities, which is of note since almost no trace of kingship is visible in domestic cult. Is it fair to suppose that was the case because Lahun residents were *not allowed* to worship the king in those contexts?

The evidence from the site, which shows that associating with kingship was possible, allows us to instead hypothesize that the lack of associations with kingship at Lahun beyond those letters was a *choice*: a choice, for instance, to venerate ancestors or Bes, who might have been more accessible and therefore better able to help in daily matters. This choice was perhaps born of the restricted nature of kingship and royal rituals, and the fact that even at Lahun the king does not seem to have been the main—or at least not the only—source of local authority. That some made the choice to invoke kings demonstrates that some could have a close connection to kingship. But this choice also serves as evidence for many non-royal Egyptians feeling rather distant from the king, and closer to traditional household deities and ancestors. The following analysis of material from other Middle Kingdom sites departs from this demonstrated choice to associate with kingship at Lahun.

§4 Invoking gods: agency in associating with kingship?

The connection with kingship at Lahun was forged mainly between its residents and the king as a god in private letters; those are the clearest indications that there was a choice involved in engaging with kingship. Private letters from Thebes do not mention kings, as discussed below. The appearance of kings in invocation formulae from Lahun and their omission in Thebes, where gods such as Herishef and Montu are invoked instead, allows us to ask questions about the differing visibility of kingship at different religious centers, and about the immediacy of the connection between kingship and local divine cults. This analysis allows for an emphasis on the relevance of forces other than kingship, as well as the choice and capacity to invoke them.

The picture painted by texts from Lahun is complicated by those from Thebes, a site that had been gaining prominence in the Middle Kingdom but from which not much domestic evidence remains.[116] The Heqanakht papers, some of the most significant documents from this period, were found in this region. Discovered in the tomb of Ipy and his dependent Meseh (TT 315), they date to the reign of Amenemhat I or Senwosret I.[117] The texts reveal that Heqanakht was a mortuary priest in the Theban necropolis, and that he owned land holdings in Sidder Grove.[118] The exact location of Sidder Grove is uncertain, though it was certainly north of Thebes; some have suggested the Delta,[119] and others the Memphite region or the Fayum.[120] Four letters and five accounts belong to this corpus;[121] the letters, which address Heqanakht's

[116] The Theban region became the religious center of Egypt in the New Kingdom with the rise of the cult of Amun: Do. Arnold 1991; Vlčková 2007. Some traces of domestic occupation were preserved from the Twelfth and perhaps also the Thirteenth Dynasties in the Karnak temple area (in north, east, and central Karnak): Redford 1981; Redford et al. 1991, 90. Also see Redford 1993, Debono 1978–1981. The settlement from this period (and the First Intermediate Period) represents the most extensive occupation in the history of Karnak.
[117] Do. Arnold 1996, 64; Allen 2002, 127–133.
[118] Wente 1990, 3, 55.
[119] Müller 2023.
[120] Allen 2002, 122–125.
[121] Allen 2002, 3.

concerns with the way his residence and fields were administered in his absence, are the focus here. Three include invocation formulae. Montu, lord of the Theban nome, is invoked in Letter 2, written from Heqanakht to his mother and Hetepe. In Letter 3, sent from Heqanakht to the overseer of Lower Egypt Herunefer, the following formula is used: "May Herishef, lord of Heracleopolis, and all the gods who are [in heaven and earth] help you, and may Ptah, South-of-his-Wall, gladden you with living fully … May your standing be good with the Ka of Herishef, lord of Heracleopolis."[122] Lastly, Letter 4—from a daughter to her mother—includes an invocation of Hathor. The variety of gods again suggests that senders chose whom to invoke. Despite the absence of kings, Montu was a god closely associated with the Eleventh Dynasty Theban royal line, and Herishef had been the patron of the Heracleopolitan Dynasty of the First Intermediate Period. Edward Wente suggested that the inclusion of Herishef is linked to a Theban recognition of the "religious superiority" of the Heracleopolitans,[123] a largely unconvincing hypothesis. More useful is to recognize that changes in religious beliefs did not occur in lockstep with political changes.

It would be irresponsible to draw broad conclusions from such a small corpus, but it seems compelling that residents of Lahun, a pyramid town, invoked (dead) kings—perhaps because they were more immediately relevant in that context—while Heqanakht, in writing to his family living in a rural context (either in the Memphite region, the Fayum, or the Delta), relied instead on gods tied to royal centers. This might suggest that kingship and kings had less reach in rural contexts at this time,[124] at least in a cultic sense. But it also implies that residents of rural areas had knowledge of changing seats of power—that they were not completely divorced from

[122] Wente 1990, 62–63 (but he renders Herishef as Arsaphes).
[123] Wente 1990, 55.
[124] The urban vs. rural dichotomy is still well alive in studies of ancient Egypt, even if those categories seem to not fully correspond to emic understandings of space. See Moeller 2023 for the state of the field regarding this issue.

political developments, in contrast to the static sphere of "rural time" often ascribed to residents of Mediterranean rural contexts.[125]

The absence of kings in invocation formulae is also visible in several hieratic ostraca from Thebes, which demonstrate the frequent copying of an early Middle Kingdom model letter. The formula used, known as the Memphite formula, went out of fashion by some time in the early Twelfth Dynasty.[126] It mentions numerous gods, perhaps associated with the location in which the letter was written: "…May Montu, Lord [of Thebes], benefit thee, [as this servant desires]. May Ptah, south of his Wall, [gladden] thy heart with a long life, a good old age … [May thy reward be good from] the ka of Montu, Lord of Thebes, as this servant desires, in very good peace!"[127] Kings are missing from all letters thought to originate in the Theban region. These include Papyrus Meketre and Papyrus Cairo 91061, both dated to the late Eleventh Dynasty, which include invocations nearly identical to that of Heqanakht Letter 3.[128] Papyrus Haun No. 1, also from the late Eleventh Dynasty, invokes Montu and Ptah.[129] Papyrus BM 10549, dated to either the late Eleventh or early Twelfth Dynasties, invokes Montu alongside "all the gods."[130] From the same period, Papyrus BM 10567 invokes Ptah, Sobek, Horus, Hathor, and "all the gods."[131] Lastly, Writing Board MMA 28.9.4, from the early Middle Kingdom, invokes Montu, Amun, Sobek, Horus, Hathor, and "all the gods."[132]

A few possibilities might account for the inclusion of kings in Lahun letters and their omission here. First, the Lahun letters date to later in the Middle Kingdom, around the reign of

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[125] Van Oyen 2019; Kearns 2023.
[126] Hayes 1948, 2–3.
[127] Hayes 1948, 8.
[128] Wente 1990, 63–64.
[129] Wente 1990, 64.
[130] Wente 1990, 65.
[131] Wente 1990, 65–66.
[132] Wente 1990, 66.

Amenemhat III, while these are all earlier. Second, Lahun's association with Senwosret II's pyramid complex might mean that its residents were more attuned to kingship and kings. There are no similar letters from other sites related to funerary cults in this period, such as Wah-Sut, but that might be a mere consequence of preservation rather than indicative of a phenomenon unique to Lahun. Either way, in light of the close connection between Lahun and kings, one must remember the link between gods such as Montu and Herishef and kingship. Did Heqanakht and other Thebans invoke such gods because they wished to invoke the king but were not allowed to? Assuming that Thebans did not mention kings because they could not do so is reductive. The invocation of such gods in these letters supports the notion that kingship was associated with cultic developments throughout Egypt, since the cults of Montu, Herishef, Amun, and Sobek rose at least in part because of political changes in the First Intermediate Period and the transition to the Middle Kingdom. It also suggests, however, that expecting state cult to be an immediate tie to kingship for the local population is problematic. Here, even if kings were responsible for the prominence of gods, it was still the gods who were called upon—though Egyptians seem to have had the flexibility to include kings in invocation formulae, at least at Lahun. This should be kept in mind when considering whether royal patronage of local cults increased the local visibility of kings, a connection often taken for granted and discussed further in Chapter 4.

§5 Protective deities and ancestors: the non-royal foci of domestic cult

Even though kings were invoked as gods at least in Lahun, they are not often the focus of domestic cultic practices. On the contrary, even sites associated with royal mortuary complexes such as Lahun (complex of Senwosret II) and Wah-Sut (complex of Senwosret III) demonstrate that domestic cult revolved around daily life needs such as the protection of mothers and

children, and the honoring of ancestors. This seems to also have been the case at Tell el-Dab'a, Elephantine, Lisht North, and Qasr el-Sagha, the latter suggesting that domestic cult was not restricted to wealthy households, which makes sense if such practices were most relevant for daily concerns. The relatively high number of objects with royal names found in potentially cultic contexts in Memphis, discussed below, should perhaps be tied to the nature of the site: a capital around which royal funerary monuments clustered across thousands of years.[133] If such instances are cultic, they could be evidence of the ability of some to choose to honor kings.

Rather than assuming that Egyptians were not allowed to have royal symbols in their homes, an emphasis on agency opens up the possibility that the frequent lack of kingship in daily life and local contexts, as opposed to its presence in funerary contexts, was a consequence of what was more relevant in the day to day and in death, as will be further discussed in Chapter 5. Domestic cult was part of a continuum of related but not equal cultic practices in temple and funerary contexts.[134] That some objects overlap between daily life and funerary practice suggests that some of the concerns of the living and the dead also overlapped.[135] But instead of assuming that Egyptians simply wished domestic cult to mimic cult practiced in other contexts, the analysis below looks more closely at what *does* remain from daily life contexts with relevance—rather than decorum—in mind.

Lahun and Wah-Sut are often compared in the scholarly literature, with the striking similarities between the two suggesting "cogent lines of cultural expression" that extended to

[133] Amenemhat I founded a new capital at Itjtawy in the early Twelfth Dynasty, but the Old Kingdom capital of Memphis remained significant. The oldest layers, dating to the Twelfth through the Thirteenth Dynasties, were discovered at Kom el-Fakhry: Jeffries 2012, 5. Kom el-Fakhry was also the site of a First Intermediate Period or early Middle Kingdom cemetery: Mahmoud Mohamed 2017, 722; Eissa 2017, 714. At Kom Rabi'a, the earliest levels date to the late Middle Kingdom, probably the Thirteenth Dynasty: Giddy 2012, 2; Giddy 2016.
[134] Stevens 2009, 1, 9–10.
[135] Stevens 2009, 8.

domestic cultic practices.[136] Indeed, domestic cult at Wah-Sut also revolved around protective artifacts and the worship of ancestors; no connections to kingship are found. The focus on ancestor worship is evident in the discovery of objects such as funerary stelae, offering tables, non-royal statues, and offering columns (including "dwarf" columns similar to those from Lahun).[137] They enabled the dead to enter the homes of living relatives to accept offerings and presumably also to bless them, while continuing to take part in family life.[138] Some, such as offering table SA.15472—which belonged to one of the mayors of the town—were reused as building material.[139] The reuse of such objects is not uncommon, which suggests that this was part of the natural life cycle of objects that lost their meaning to inhabitants some generations after they were made, and that ancestor worship itself came with a life cycle.[140] In the case of offering table SA.15472, the name and title of its owner were preserved, suggesting that the stone was kept at least in part for its connection to the dead. The strength of this connection is implied by the purposeful destruction of many of these objects, which were often destroyed or damaged when they needed to be disabled. Kevin Cahail suggested that destruction was necessary to "sever the link" with the deceased, a step perhaps needed to transfer ownership of a

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[136] Cahail 2014a, 94, 176. Wah-Sut was inhabited primarily through the rest of the Middle Kingdom (until about 1640 BCE): Wegner 1998, 9, 42; Wegner 2006a, 9; Wegner 2001b; Cahail 2014b, 38; Picardo 2015, 255; Rossel 2004, 199. It was later also occupied in the Eighteenth Dynasty: Cahail 2019, 98. Besides the funerary complex of Senwosret III, South Abydos was the site of two tombs that likely belonged to Thirteenth Dynasty kings Neferhotep I and Sobekhotep IV (S9 and S10). These attributions seem to be debated: Cahail 2019, 93; McCormack 2017. See also Wegner and Cahail 2021. Houses at Wah-Sut were mostly elite. Though smaller non-elite structures have not yet come to light, it is likely that they existed and were similar in scale to those at Lahun: Wegner 2001b, 282; Picardo 2006, 38. Though the residents of Wah-Sut were presumably ordered to move to the town when it was founded, they maintained connections with outside communities, particularly those of Qaw el-Kebir and Deir el-Bersha: Wegner 2010a, 438, 443, 447.

[137] There are at least nine stelae and at least six offering tables: Cahail 2014a, 251–283. The fact that a nearby cemetery has not been discovered suggests that these objects were originally meant for the town (Cahail 2014b, 36). It is also possible that a nearby non-royal necropolis remains undiscovered; this is perhaps suggested by reused architectural elements seemingly from Middle Kingdom tomb chapels (Cahail 2014a, 174, 190), but it remains undiscovered (Cahail 2019, 108).

[138] Cahail 2014a, 288–289.

[139] Wegner 2001b, 302; Cahail 2014b, 37.

[140] See Harrington 2012, especially chapter 2.

house because the deceased's connection to the living was no longer relevant.[141] If an accurate interpretation, it would suggest that domestic cult was more for the living than the dead.[142]

If domestic cult was predominantly for the living, it makes sense that it addresses immediate needs such as the protection of children. Burials of children were found beneath house floors at Wah-Sut,[143] one with a necklace of carnelian and bone beads that was likely apotropaic.[144] Unfortunately, most cultic objects were not found in their original places in houses.[145] An exception is the discovery in Building E of fragments of animal figurines and family statuettes in "private family chambers" where domestic cult might have been practiced.[146] The frequent lack of secure context has led to doubts about whether objects such as faience hippos came originally from tombs.[147] But a birth brick found in Building A suggests that much of this apotropaia could have been used in domestic settings.[148] The only one of its kind so far discovered, it is decorated with painted scenes of a mother and newborn child, as well as imagery in line with that found on other artifacts related to the protection of children and mothers. It is not clear how representative of other birth bricks it should be considered due to its elite context and elaborate decoration, and it is impossible to determine whether it functioned as part of a birthing stand and/or as an amulet.[149] Regardless, it again draws attention to the familial focus of cult, as well as the forces relevant to the protection of family.

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[141] Cahail 2014a, 249.
[142] Cahail 2014a, 529.
[143] Wegner 2001b, 257, 303.
[144] Picardo 2006, 40.
[145] Cahail 2014b, 37.
[146] Picardo 2006, 38.
[147] Cahail 2014a, 174, 227.
[148] It was found in the same house as an ivory apotropaion: Cahail 2019, 104.
[149] Wegner 2009. No similar birth brick was found at Lahun, but a brick mold from the town shows that residents also had the means to create birth bricks (Griffith 1910, 13; Szpakowska 2008, 25).

This focus on ancestor worship and family protection remains largely consistent across other sites. At Lisht North, one of the excavated houses, thought to have belonged to a craftsman, includes the burial of a child. In this same house, a brick installation was found with a limestone stela, which has led to its identification as a domestic altar.[150] At Tell el-Dab'a, the focus on ancestor cult is less visible in potentially cultic objects found in houses, other than a fragment of a female statuette,[151] though two installations in two separate houses have been interpreted as house altars.[152] However, the focus on the protection of family remains strong: infant burials are not uncommon (in both areas A/II and F/I),[153] and are often accompanied by bead necklaces, scarabs, and amulets.[154] So-called "houses of the dead" in the late Middle Kingdom at Tell el-Dab'a have also been interpreted as a way to display family continuity and closeness in line with ancestor worship at other sites.[155] Benches and offering pits with the remains of feasts in these structures suggest that the rituals that took place there were dynamic occasions involving several

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[150] F. Arnold 1996, 15–17; Stevens 2009, 14. Mace also claimed that many of the houses had shrines with "rough limestone figure[s] of the household god[s]," but it is unclear from his discussion whether these can be associated with Middle Kingdom levels (Mace 1921, 6, 12). Additional finds from the settlement include a small box with an animal figurine inside, wrapped in cloth to mimic a mummy. Mace classified this as a toy, an interpretation that is not impossible but is simplistic: Mace 1922a, 15–16. Scarabs with royal names are also not uncommon, though it is unclear whether they were excavated in the town or nearby burials (Mace 1922a, 16; Mace 1922b). If from the town, it is possible that they were amuletic.

[151] Bietak thought this originally belonged to a tomb in the nearby cemetery, which is possible but not conclusive; even if it did, it might have been subsequently reused in domestic cultic practices. Other likely cultic objects include a small statue of a baboon and model or miniature vessels (Bader 2020, 47, 52, 63, 82, 108), a clay human head (Bader 2020, 63, 82, 108), a faience bird's head (Bader 2020, 248–249, 256), and clay figurines (Müller 2015, 345).

[152] In Compound 12 (A/II), a feature has been interpreted as a house altar because pottery associated with it "belongs to the typical offering pottery repertoire" and was purposefully laid out against the brick platform (Bader 2020, 179, 188–189). Another potential altar was identified in this compound due to its similarity to the first "brick platform" and the discovery of a "usually ceremonial flint knife" (of a type also found at Lahun and Kom Rabi'a) within a nearby wall) (Bader 2020, 210, 222, 225). The settlement in area A/II, from the late Twelfth and early Thirteenth Dynasties, is thought to have housed a "middle-class" due to the small size of houses: Bader 2015a, 46; Bader 2015b, 26; Bader 2020, 28, 35.

[153] From the early Middle Kingdom, areas F/I and R/I (Ezbet Rushdi) are thought to have been planned due to their orthogonal layouts: Müller 2015, 341–42 (citing Kemp 2006); Czerny 2010, 70, 73, 76–77; Czerny 2012b, 49. Area R/I was domestic and potentially also industrial, while F/I was mostly domestic: Czerny 2012a, 61–62. Three areas at Tell el-Dab'a, which lack orthogonal layouts and are thus not associated with state planning, date to the late Middle Kingdom: A/II, F/I, and A/IV: Bader 2015b, 25; Lange 2015, 201.

[154] These were found in particular in A/II: Bader 2020, 34–35, 129.

[155] Müller 2015, 351, 356; Miniaci 2019, 15.

participants, likely family members, who perhaps came together to venerate particularly the head of the household.[156]

Published domestic cultic evidence from Middle Kingdom Elephantine is also not abundant (see below for a discussion of the governor's residence),[157] but practices do not seem to have differed: family continues to be the focus. Several children's burials were discovered underneath houses dated to both the Eleventh and Twelfth Dynasties.[158] They were often accompanied by grave goods such as amulets and beads, including what seems to have been a falcon.[159] House 169, the biggest residential building of the late Middle Kingdom so far excavated, included "requirements for religious/magical practices (e.g. offering trays and figurines)."[160] Most of these were in fill layers, which makes it impossible to tell if they were part of cult practiced in the house. Other houses yielded a small baboon statue perhaps used as a burner or a lamp stand,[161] statuette fragments,[162] and unfinished stelae.[163] Excavators also suggested that House 32 was a chapel, since it was distinguished by a white-plastered exterior

[156] These structures and rituals are often associated with Levantine influence, but interestingly they were no longer in use in the Hyksos period and so seem to have been an Egyptian innovation (perhaps due to foreign influence): Miniaci 2019, 15–16.
[157] Its Middle Kingdom houses, which were frequently rebuilt and refurbished, have plenty of evidence for production activities: Seidlmayer et al. 2016, 204; Sigl et al. 2018, 169–171; Sigl and Kopp 2020, 13, 22. In recent years, a project started by the Deutsches Archäologisches Institut (DAI) called Realities of Life (or Lebenswirklichkeiten) has sought to investigate the minutiae of life at Elephantine through an emphasis on scientific methods often ignored in Egyptology: Sigl 2017; Sigl et al. 2018; Sigl and Kopp 2019; Sigl 2020; Sigl and Kopp 2020. Much remains to be published of Middle Kingdom finds at the site, particularly those from domestic contexts. von Pilgrim (1996, 315) said that a separate publication of the Middle Kingdom finds was forthcoming, but that has yet to appear.
[158] When these burials were given specific findspots, they came from Houses 25a, 23, 69, and 76. See von Pilgrim 1996b, 36–37, 42, 132, 136, Abb. 138e; Seidlmayer et al. 2016, 204.
[159] von Pilgrim 1996b, 36–37, Abb. 138e.
[160] Sigl et al. 2019, 10.
[161] House 84: von Pilgrim 1996b, 88.
[162] House 81: von Pilgrim 1996b, 107.
[163] House 81 (von Pilgrim 1996b, 107) and House 76 (von Pilgrim 1996b, 134).

façade.[164] In House 12, excavators came across a space marked by yellow-painted plaster, perhaps for the placement of an incense stand or a small altar.[165]

Figure 3.11: Cultic assemblage from the early Middle Kingdom at Kom el-Fakhry, Memphis (Tavares and Kamel 2012, 6).

One of the clearest suggestions that domestic cult in this period was at least in part dedicated to ancestor worship comes from Memphis. In a house in Kom el-Fakhry (Room 40) was found a "complete" household cult assemblage: a stela, offering table, and a small statue of a man and a woman (Figure 3.11).[166] Some houses in Kom el-Fakhry also included infant burials[167] and one a "dwarf lamp"[168] parallel to examples at Lahun and Wah-Sut. At Kom Rabi'a, also in Memphis, were found an offering table fragment and figurines that excavators

[164] von Pilgrim 1996b, 50.
[165] von Pilgrim 1996b, 46.
[166] Tavares and Kamel 2012, 6. Other objects found in the room include several zoomorphic figurines, such as crocodiles, a hippopotamus, and a turtle (Mahmoud Mohamed 2017, 722; Tavares and Kamel 2012, 6).
[167] Tavares and Kamel 2012, 4.
[168] Jeffreys 2012, 6.

thought might have been used in household cults.[169] Lastly, from Qasr el-Sagha,[170] sparse evidence also points to domestic cultic practice: these objects include a stela fragment,[171] a clapper,[172] and a limestone slab with a simplified engraving of an anthropomorphic figure.[173] The latter was discovered alongside faience bracelets, a cosmetic palette, a fragment of a bone pin, and amethyst beads and a scarab.[174] Its findspot implies that this object was of value, despite its rustic appearance.[175] The simplified engraving suggests that domestic cult did not require elaborate furnishings.

In sum, Middle Kingdom sites in Egypt have evidence that point to domestic cultic practices relating to ancestors and protection. But like in Lahun, some objects related to kingship have also been found in domestic contexts at other sites, primarily in Memphis and Elephantine. In domestic contexts in Memphis, some seal impressions with Fifth Dynasty royal names (of Sahure, Userkaf, and Niuserre) were found, as well as a crudely carved scarab with a lion and bound captive.[176] One of the Niuserre sealings (object 3733) was found in a collection of

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[169] Giddy 2012, 52, 164, 166, 168, 175, 180, 182; Giddy 2016, 15, 18. Other objects from Kom Rabi'a include clay model animals, a clay model head, and "fish dishes": Giddy 2012, 27, 51, 59–60, 67, 103, 105, 174, 182; Giddy 2016, 199–200.
[170] The architectural complex at Qasr el-Sagha, about eight kilometers from the shore of Birket Qarun, was inhabited during the Middle Kingdom and Second Intermediate Period: Śliwa 1988, 189; Śliwa 1983. It included an unfinished temple built during the Twelfth Dynasty (likely in the reign of Senwosret II), a largely unexplored Middle Kingdom cemetery, and two areas of habitation: the Eastern and Western Settlements: Moeller 2016, fig. 8.12. Śliwa 1988, 189; Śliwa 1992a, 19–20. The Western Settlement seems to have been used for housing, while the Eastern Settlement was more closely tied to production activities (though the extent to which it was a production site is unclear): Śliwa 1988, 192; Moeller 2016, 269. The construction of the Western Settlement in particular, which consisted of a barrack-like layout, suggested to Śliwa that the site could have been a *kheneret* or "forced labor camp": Moeller 2016, 265, citing Śliwa 2005.
[171] Śliwa 1992a, pl. 3. The excavator thought it most likely came from the nearby cemetery, but this is uncertain: Śliwa 1992a, 30; Śliwa 1992b, 185.
[172] Śliwa 1992a, 30.
[173] Fragments of a limestone statuette and of two basalt figurines were found in the Eastern Settlement. These are all unfinished, and their discovery in this area led excavators to identify it as a stone workshop: Śliwa 1988, 213.
[174] Śliwa 1992a, 32, fig. 20.
[175] Cult objects did not need to be of high quality: Stevens 2009, 7.
[176] The sealing of Userkaf was found in an ash deposit in an oven room in Kom el-Fakhry: Eissa 2017, 714–715. The sealings of Niuserre (objects 3733 and 2523) and the scarab (object 3317) were found at Kom Rabi'a: Giddy 2012, 82, 94–95, 105.

objects—including another Old Kingdom/First Intermediate sealing—that was buried in a late Middle Kingdom pit, perhaps a "treasure hoard."[177] This suggests that the impression with the royal name was valuable long after Niuserre's reign.[178]

There is debate about whether seals with earlier kings' names could have been used for administrative purposes, rather than as amulets.[179] While possible that installations related to Niuserre's and Sahure's funerary cults in Abusir were near Kom Rabi'a, the findspot of Niuserre sealing 3733 makes it possible that all of these were kept by residents of Memphis for other reasons.[180] The act of burying residual sealings is reminiscent of baby burials at Lahun that include objects with the names of kings, and it is worth asking whether both cases might have had a sanctifying purpose akin to foundation deposits. Foundation deposits are mostly found in temples, tombs, and royal constructions, but several late Middle Kingdom domestic foundation deposits from Ayn Asil suggest that this was not so uncommon.[181] It is likely that the Memphite residents burying these objects knew the named kings were dead, and possible that this added to their power. Old Kingdom vessels with inscriptions were also found in the settlement,[182] which perhaps indicates a broader valuation of older objects.

An apparent valuation of objects with royal names is also evidenced at Elephantine, in the form of a faience bowl with the name of Sobekhotep IV that was repaired anciently.[183] Additionally, a stamp sealing with the name of Amenemhat III was found underneath a wooden

[177] Giddy 2016, 165, 173.
[178] Some have suggested that scarabs with kings' names could be used to invoke the names written on them: von Pilgrim 1996b, 250.
[179] A functional interpretation has been proposed for a seal of Snefru found at the Delta site of Abu Ghalib in an early Middle Kingdom level, for instance: Bagh 2002, 39; Bagh 2004, 13, 15, 19, 24.
[180] Giddy 2016, 173. See Morales 2006 for Niuserre's continued importance in the Middle Kingdom.
[181] Marchand and Soukiassian 2010, 122–123. For more on Ayn Asil, including figurines found in Middle Kingdom contexts, see Marchand 2012 and Jeuthe 2018.
[182] Giddy 2016, 194.
[183] From House 47c: von Pilgrim 1996b, 316–317.

threshold, reminiscent of buried royal sealings and objects with royal names at Lahun and Memphis.[184] Lastly, a stela fragment with the name of Amenemhat III was found in a waste pit in a house,[185] but its function and use in a domestic context are unclear.

The above analysis demonstrates that Egyptians in the Middle Kingdom relied on protective forces and ancestors to solve daily problems. This reliance is visible, for instance, in the discovery in houses of objects related to deities like Bes or Taweret, and stelae and offering tables. In contrast, the evidence of objects with royal names and symbols is slight in domestic contexts. They mostly cluster in royal centers, which makes sense alongside the conclusions about the agency in invoking kingship in private letters in Lahun. It is possible that this agency can be extended to the occasional inclusion of royal symbols or royal names in what appear to be ritual contexts in houses, whether those be contexts of active ritual practice or intentional depositions in burials or pits. That objects with royal names were sometimes valued after the reigns of specific kings might suggest that they were more common in settlements, and that we do not have more preserved because they were moved elsewhere. However, the fact that inbuilt domestic cult installations are not common in this period suggests that domestic cult relied on portable equipment, which is generally less well preserved in proper contexts.[186] Rather than undermining the conclusions proposed here, the portability of cultic objects demonstrates that there *is* in fact a lot of evidence for domestic cultic practice, and that kingship and kings simply do not seem to be regular fixtures of it.

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[184] Sigl et al. 2018, 14; Sigl and Kopp 2020, 15–17. Other seals with royal names were found in the settlement, as well as seals with royal motifs such as a crowned Horus (von Pilgrim 1996b, 240, 242, 246–247, 249). They were, however, mostly found in waste deposits so their original contexts of use are irretrievable (von Pilgrim 1996b, 254). From the north-western area of the town, most seal impressions are decorative, with a design that includes *wedjat* eyes perhaps playing an amuletic role (Sigl et al. 2016, 15).
[185] von Pilgrim 1996b, 316.
[186] Stevens 2009, 6.

§6 Prominence of local leaders: alternative foci of legitimacy?

As discussed in Chapter 2, Egyptian kingship cannot be neatly categorized as either a religious or a political institution. So far, this chapter has primarily focused on cultic evidence because it is the most visible in domestic contexts, and because that is the major theme put forth by the invocation of kings as gods in the Lahun letters. But the discussion of evidence from Lahun also touched on the apparent significance of the mayor in the town, something emphasized by not only administrative texts but also architecture. This prominence given to local leaders is relatively consistent across sites in the Middle Kingdom, and particularly architectural evidence suggests that they were notable in both cultic and administrative capacities. Some examples, including funerary evidence discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, suggest that local leaders' roles could mimic those of kings in certain circumstances. Beyond this link to kingship, they were also immediately relevant to local inhabitants who were familiar with them (and many times with local mayoral families), and local memory likely played a role in their prominence.

Architectural evidence of mayoral monumental residences is visible in Wah-Sut, Edfu, Elephantine, Tell el-Dab'a (F/I), and Bubastis. Monuments at the latter two sites are often considered royal palaces but were likely either solely or primarily used by local mayors, which complicates the notion that monumentality can be considered a proxy for kingship. Local leaders were also more relevant than the king in cultic terms at Elephantine and Edfu, which provide a comparison to more "royal" sites such as Lahun. Rather than assuming that this cultic prominence of local leaders is a consequence of a distance from royal centers, these examples allow us to highlight the agency of both local patrons and worshippers.

In a parallel to the "acropolis" at Lahun, the mayor's house at Wah-Sut—Building A—was the most prominent building at the site, even bigger than the nearby mortuary temple of

Senwosret III (Figure 3.12). The temple was near Wah-Sut, which was built to support the royal funerary cult, and had life-size figures of the king on its façade.[187] But unless residents approached it, the most imposing structure in close proximity was Building A. It had substantial 1.6 meter-thick walls, "clearly designed to impress," and it was an "imposing sight on the landscape."[188] Architecture at Edfu also seems to have ensured the prominence of the local governor, suggested by the discovery of the town's administrative quarter (Figure 3.13).[189] A monumental building with two columned halls, one with at least sixteen columns, it is thought to have been a hybrid complex with both residential and administrative functions. These administrative functions likely included contact with the royal palace, suggested by royal seals.[190] It was located in a prominent location, adjacent to a main street and close to the temple.

The building that was the residence of the local leader at Elephantine (structure H2) was also in a prominent location, the highest point in the southeastern part of the town that overlooked much of the rest of the island (Figure 3.14). Similarly to the building at Edfu, H2 presumably functioned as the heart of the town's administration, likely including that of the temple, since the governor was also the highest temple authority.[191] A block of domestic buildings was excavated across the street from the residence,[192] which demonstrates that this

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[187] Wegner 2000, 13; Wegner 2006a, 9.
[188] Wegner 2006b, 31.
[189] Moeller 2010, fig. 3.; Moeller 2012, 116. Tell Edfu was a significant settlement in the south of Egypt. It grew in the First Intermediate Period while other sites declined, and its rise seems to have continued in the Middle Kingdom.
[190] Nadine Moeller, personal communication (February 2022); Moeller 2010, 89, 100; see also Moeller 2012, 116. All that has been found of early Middle Kingdom activity consists of seal impressions from a fill layer beneath the later columned hall, but this building seems to have been used until the Thirteenth Dynasty: Moeller 2010, 88, 105; Ayers 2018, 58. For a discussion of the term "hybrid household" in Egypt, see Picardo 2015; Moeller 2015. Excavations at the governor's residence led to the discovery of seals from the Thirteenth Dynasty king Sobekhotep IV, which has enabled a reinterpretation of the Hyksos king Khayan, of whom seals were found in associated contexts. See Forstner-Müller and Moeller 2018, especially Moeller and Marouard 2018. A new type of seal was also discovered in a late Middle Kingdom deposit with a design that includes a striding king: Moeller 2009, Tafeln xxiv–xxv; Moeller 2012, 120.
[191] Moeller 2016, 309.
[192] Moeller 2016, 315.

building was embedded in the settlement and its residents' daily lives. Modern *sebakh* digging unfortunately destroyed most of H2, but excavations demonstrated that it was occupied from the Old Kingdom through the end of the Middle Kingdom (the Thirteenth Dynasty).[193] A visible mark of the governors' status was a group of decorated wooden panels at the main entrance of the structure that showed processions of officials; originally dated to the Sixth Dynasty, they were later reattached to the entrance in the Eleventh Dynasty.[194]

A further feature of importance in H2 is a small niche that seems to have been associated with the local cult of Heqaib (further discussed below) in the First Intermediate Period and through the early Middle Kingdom. It later stopped being actively used in cultic practice and that space became a deposit for cult objects that had fallen out of use.[195] There are two main phases of deposition attested, the first from the late Sixth Dynasty or the early First Intermediate Period, and the second from the early Middle Kingdom (Eleventh Dynasty).[196] Out of the objects deposited in the first phase, two (a stone vessel and a weight) name Unas of the Fifth Dynasty, and many sealings also name Pepy II of the Sixth Dynasty. The second phase included portable wooden shrines naming Heqaib (and others), and they seem to have been used repeatedly in local processions.[197] The objects in the second phase of deposition were covered by a later Middle Kingdom deposit of sealings,[198] which shows that this area was still used in that period. These

[193] See sections on Old and Middle Kingdom Elephantine in Moeller 2016. Some have suggested that H2 lost its function as governor's residence after the late First Intermediate Period, but this does not seem to have been the case: Moeller 2016, 226. See von Pilgrim 1996, 39–44. The criticism of calling H2 a governor's residence is mainly related to the fact that Elephantine was not a nome capital, but a mayor's or expedition leader's residence is still plausible, and it was certainly the residence and administrative building of the local leadership of the town (Nadine Moeller, personal communication May 2023).
[194] Dorn 2015, 123; Moeller 2016, fig. 7.8. This is another example of a type of representation that, if found disassociated from its original context, would likely have been thought to come from a tomb (see the discussion of the Lahun house painting above).
[195] Moeller 2016, 221–222. For a detailed treatment of the objects, see Dorn 2015. See also von Pilgrim 2001.
[196] Dorn 2015, 123.
[197] See Dorn 2015.
[198] Moeller 2016, 312.

deposits are significant for this chapter for a couple of reasons. First, they highlight the importance of local leaders' cults at Elephantine, cults that were active over several periods. The cultic importance of local leaders, particularly Heqaib's, will be discussed below. Second, they demonstrate a connection between the governors at Elephantine and royal objects, at least in the Old Kingdom—a connection that is also discussed below with regards to the mayors of Bubastis, one which in that case was not necessarily widely known outside the mayoral palace.

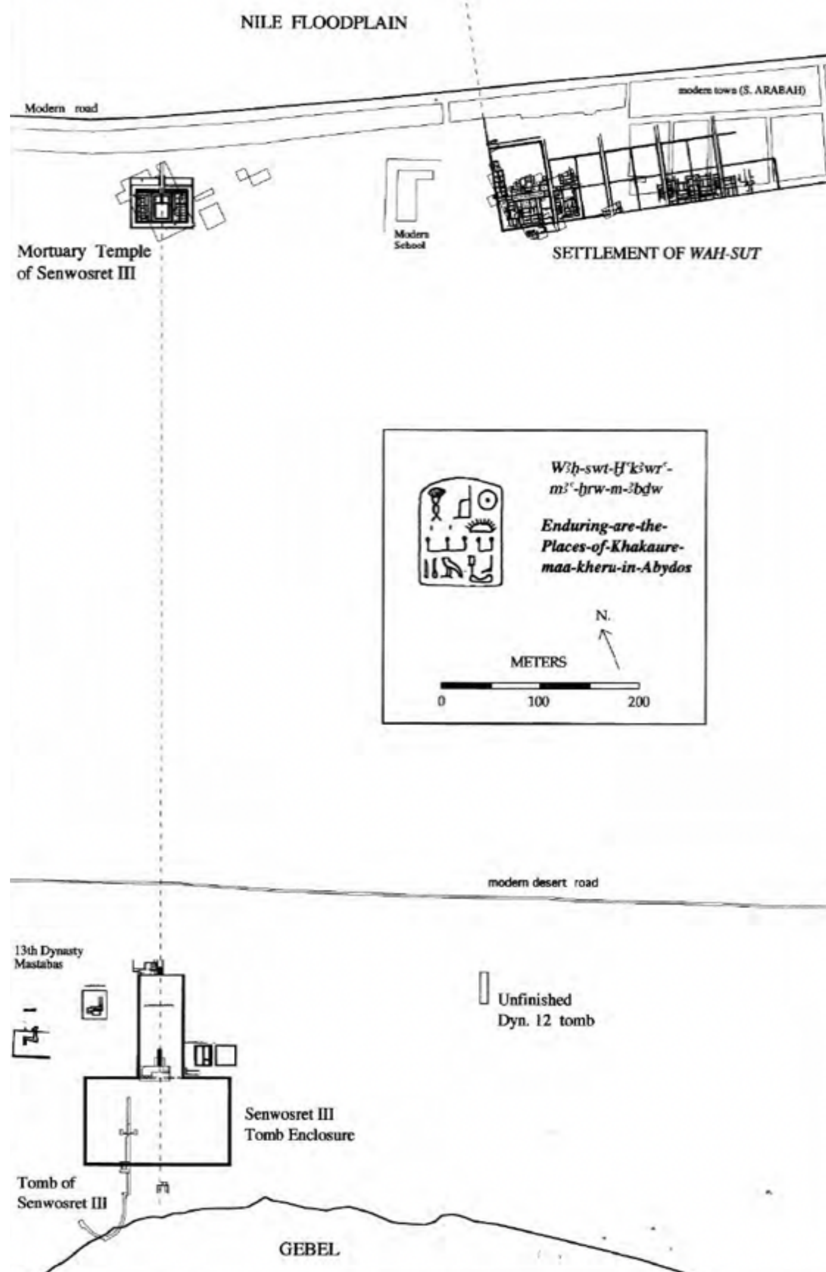

Figure 3.12: Wah-Sut shown with Senwosret III's mortuary temple and tomb. Building A is the biggest structure in the bottom left of the town area (Wegner 2001b, fig. 1).

Figure 3.13: The administrative quarter and likely residence of the mayor at Edfu (Moeller 2016, fig. 8.45).

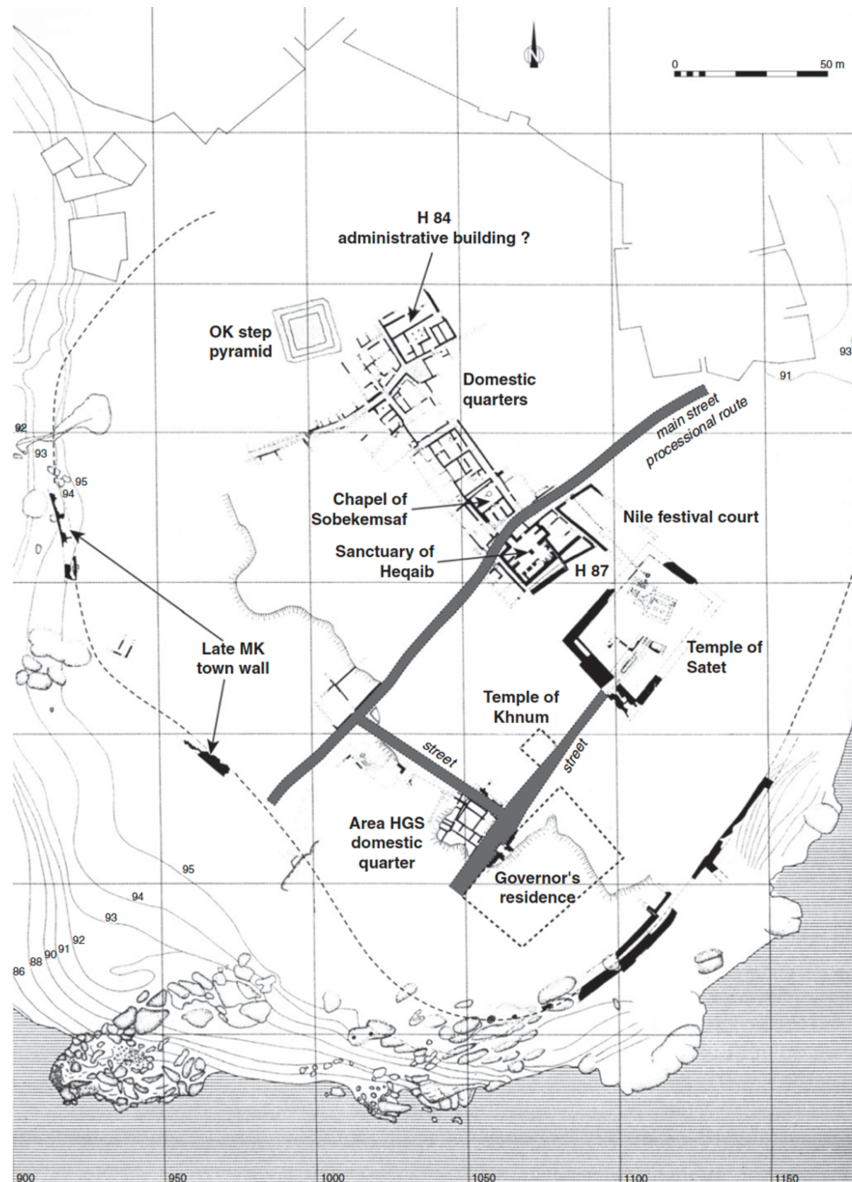

Figure 3.14: The governor's residence at Elephantine shown in relation to the rest of the settlement (Moeller 2016, fig. 8.40).

This intentional prominence of local leaders is strengthened by the area in front of Building A at Wah-Sut. The main doorway is now destroyed, but excavators found remains of brick access ramps that would have led visitors up to the elevated threshold of Building A. Immediately in front of the entrance framed by ramps, excavators found an empty area without any built structures (Figure 3.15). Differently from other empty spaces in and around Wah-Sut,

this 34-m wide area was remarkably devoid of pottery and other remains, which suggests that it was purposefully cleaned relatively regularly.[199] It is somewhat reminiscent of a temple forecourt, and non-royal engagement with temples will be discussed in Chapter 4. Rather than a forecourt, Josef Wegner describes this area as a "plaza," which is a term with some baggage, particularly considering Mesoamerican examples. The potential of plazas for the legitimization of rule through performance has been well studied for contexts such as the Maya world.[200] Plazas are lacking in ancient Egyptian cities, which Juan Carlos Moreno García thinks indicates that "'citizens' were politically irrelevant."[201] Not all open spaces should be considered "plazas," since open spaces occurred in settlements from time to time. Indeed, spaces were sometimes left unconstructed but could have been used for community purposes unrelated to performances.[202] However, the regular cleaning of the empty space in front of Building A, in comparison to other spaces in Wah-Sut that were not kept clean, suggests that it served a specific purpose. In using the word "plaza," Wegner suggests that the space could have been used by the mayor to communicate with locals. He has suggested a parallel between this "plaza" in Wah-Sut and a similar empty space in front of the "acropolis" in Lahun. If these spaces were used by mayors to communicate with their residents, they further demonstrate their status as the most immediate sources of authority.[203] *If* they should be considered "plazas" used for this purpose, they represent a closer interaction between local leaders and non-royal Egyptians than can be found

[199] Wegner 2006b, 35.
[200] Inomata 2006.
[201] Moreno García 2019, 35, 149.
[202] E.g., in Middle Kingdom Tell el-Dab'a (Moeller 2016, 254).
[203] Wegner 2006b, 32–33. Royal names appear in seal impressions at the site, but due to their administrative function they were likely visible to a small portion of the residents. The names include those of Senwosret III, Amenemhat III, Neferhotep, Swadj[ka]re (Hor), Khatotepre-Sobekhotep VI, Khahetepre (Sobekhotep V), Wahibre-Ibiaw, and Merneferre Ay (Wegner 1998, 37; Wegner 2004, 232). Seal impressions were found both in the town and Senwosret III's funerary complex, and according to Wegner likely indicate correspondence between Wah-Sut and central offices (perhaps the royal palace itself): Wegner 2001a, 91–93.

between the king and the broader population in this period—with the obvious caveat that no structures definitively identified as royal palaces survive from the Middle Kingdom (more on this in Chapter 4).[204]

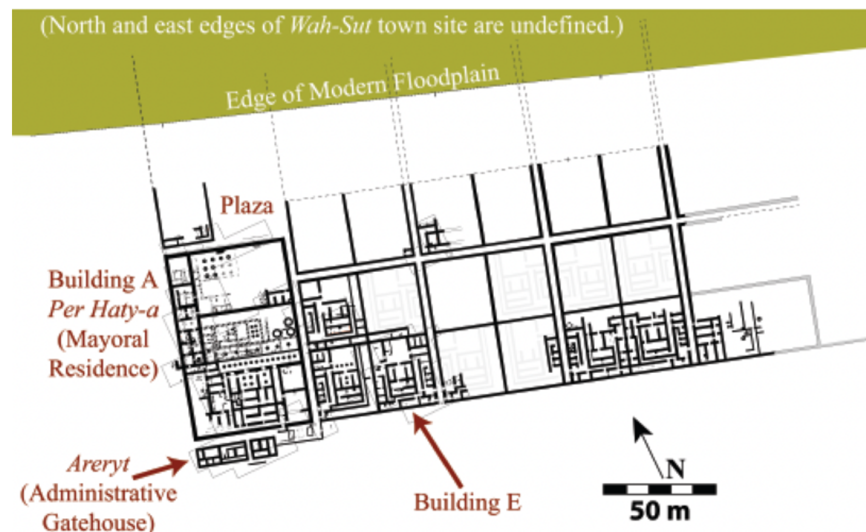

Figure 3.15: Elite houses at Wah-Sut, with the empty space area in front of Building A labeled as a "plaza" on the top left (Wegner 2006b, 32, 35).

It is fair to suppose that "plaza-like" spaces associated with mayoral residences would have been more accessible to locals than any similar areas in royal monuments, if they functioned in that way. Two buildings from this period, at Tell el-Dab'a (area F/I) and Bubastis, have been interpreted as royal palaces because of their monumental character, but the monumentality of mayoral residences gives us room to question those interpretations.[205] Before critiquing the mainstream interpretations of those structures, it is important to establish what the category "ancient Egyptian palace" actually indicates. Numerous studies have been conducted on

[204] New Kingdom palaces often included Windows of Appearance, used by kings to interact with officials and perhaps larger parts of the population. See, for instance, a representation from the tomb of Meryre II at Amarna in Morris 2021, fig. 7. For more on Windows of Appearance, see Kemp 1976.
[205] There are no unambiguous royal palaces from this period: see Silva 2018, chapter 1.

the various terms translated as “palace,”[206] but less attention has been given to their archaeological definition.[207] Egyptian palaces are usually pinpointed archaeologically on the basis of a throne room (identified by the presence of a dais), as well as residential suites, enclosure walls, and often extensive courts and halls.[208] Their usually large scale (which can vary considerably across different palaces), layout, decorations, and often their locations can be helpful with identification when the throne room or residential suite is not well preserved.

The structure at Tell el-Dab’a,[209] often referred to as a “palace” or “mansion,” dates to the Thirteenth Dynasty (Figure 3.16).[210] Its identification as a palace due to its monumental size—for instance by Dieter Eigner,[211] who thinks it housed one of the “ephemeral” Thirteenth Dynasty kings—is reminiscent of Bruce Trigger’s somewhat reductive thermodynamic explanation for monumentality.[212] Nothing from the building itself, other than its monumentality, indicates a royal association. The only suggestion of a royal character is our modern, perhaps anachronistic, use of the word “palace” to describe it.

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[206] For example, Goelet 1982; Lorton 1991.
[207] Spence 2015b, 16.
[208] Lacovara 1997, 35; Spence 2015b, 16–17. New Kingdom palaces are closely parallel to temples of the same period in architectural layout (O’Connor 1991, 168; Zinn 2011, 182), and palaces of the Middle and New Kingdoms have also been compared to private houses (Eigner 1996, 75; Jaritz 1996, 102). Spence (2007, 323) argues that these slight similarities between palaces and houses are likely due to “the hierarchical nature of social relations structured by architecture” rather than any mimicking of palatial structure on the part of the larger population, or vice versa; she builds upon this notion in 2015a, arguing that small to large houses were largely designed around the point of displaying and regulating access to the head of the household.
[209] Tell el-Dab’a in the Delta became a site of great significance in the Second Intermediate Period as the capital of the so-called Hyksos kings. Already in the Middle Kingdom it was a site of state interest, likely as part of the “internal colonization” policy in that period: Moeller 2016, 249–252.
[210] Lange-Athinodorou 2018, fig. 5. Eigner 1996, 73. Wegner (1998, 25) thinks it is elite because it parallels other Middle Kingdom houses. Its construction was never completed, though it underwent constant rebuilding in its approximately thirty years of occupation: Eigner 1996, 75–76.
[211] Eigner 1996, 78.
[212] Trigger 1990.

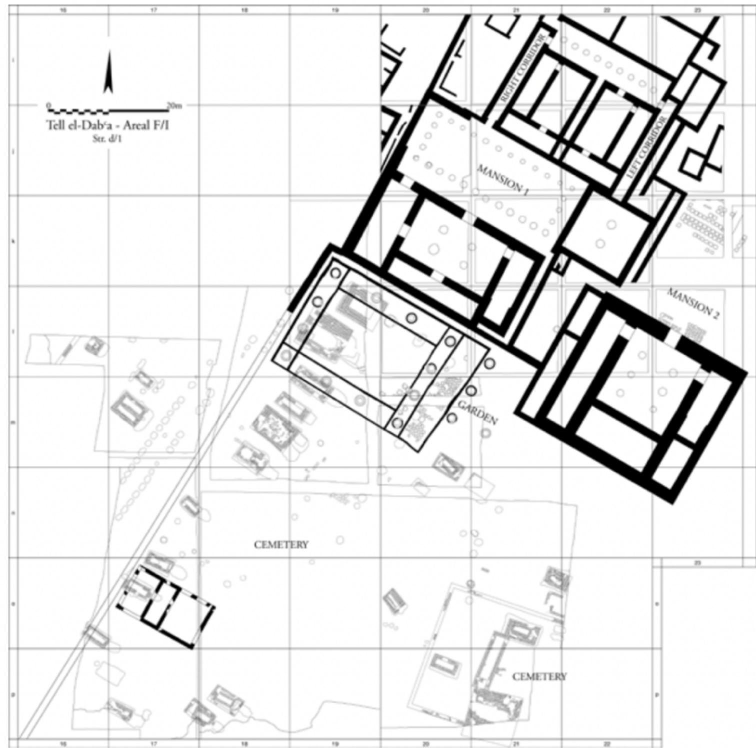

Figure 3.16: The supposed "palace" in area F/I from the late Middle Kingdom at Tell el-Dab'a (Lange-Athinodorou 2018, fig. 5).

The function of the so-called Middle Kingdom "palace" (Figure 3.17) at Bubastis[213] is also debated,[214] but it unambiguously points to the significance of local leaders in cultic practices while highlighting the importance of royal patronage to the elite.[215] Its residents, mayors who served during the reigns of Amenemhat II, Senwosret III, and Amenemhat III, combined secular and religious responsibilities, including not only the city's but also the local Bastet temple's

[213] Bubastis (or Tell Basta), in the Delta, gained prominence in later periods. Already in the Old Kingdom, however, it had received royal attention and patronage, something that continued in the Middle Kingdom: Lange 2013; Lange-Athinodorou and el-Senussi 2018.
[214] Lange 2015 unambiguously refers to it as a "palace," while Van Siclen III (1991, 187) called it a "great mayoral palace."
[215] The building has an adjacent cemetery that spans the Twelfth Dynasty, suggesting that its occupation does as well, though it was still used through the Thirteenth and perhaps the Fourteenth Dynasties: Van Siclen III 1996, 245; Bietak 2019, 208, 210, 236.

administration.[216] The designation of the building as a "palace"[217] is still largely due to a correlation of monumentality with kingship. But in this case a *heb sed* relief of Amenemhat III (Figure 3.18) complicates rather than clarifies matters.[218] It was discovered in front of a doorway that led to a blind court, which has been identified as a parallel to later Windows of Appearances, though this interpretation is not terribly convincing.[219] The relief has been interpreted as a royal gift to the local mayors,[220] but such gifts were more commonly statues than reliefs. Another, perhaps more likely interpretation, is that part of the "palace" was used by the king when he visited Bubastis.[221] Similar reliefs from Middle Kingdom temples suggest that the Bubastis *heb sed* representation was part of a chapel dedicated to royal cult.[222] It is also possible that such a space was used by local leaders to communicate with officials. If that were the case, they would have been visibly supported by kingship behind them.[223]

[216] Van Siclen III 1991, 193; Lange 2015, 198; Bietak 2019, 210.
[217] E.g., in Lange 2015; Bietak 2019. Also see Bietak and Lange 2014.
[218] Bietak 2019, fig. 26. Van Siclen III 1991, 193; Van Siclen 1996, 245; Bietak 2019, 210.
[219] Van Siclen III 1996, 246, fig. 12. A study that focuses on *heb sed* scenes from the Middle Kingdom and in what contexts they appear is a desideratum, but this is a topic that goes beyond this dissertation.
[220] Van Siclen III 1991, 193; Van Siclen III 1996, 245.
[221] Van Siclen III 1996, 246; Bietak 2019, 225, 236.
[222] A similar relief dates to the reign of one of the Sobekhoteps of the Thirteenth Dynasty. It was discovered in the foundations of the Ptolemaic temple at Medamud and is currently in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo. I thank Nadine Moeller for making me aware of this parallel.
[223] This is a possibility that Bietak outright rejects (2019, 212).

Figure 3.17: The so-called "palace" from Bubastis (Bietak 2019, fig. 4).

Figure 3.18: Amenemhat III *heb sed* relief from the "palace" at Bubastis (Bietak 2019, fig. 26).

The question, then, is *who* would have been invited (summoned?) to such displays of power. A select few likely had access to this space, whether used by local officials or the king, and other locals engaged with the building from the outside. Its entrance façade, a monumental twelve-columned porch with a screen wall, is thought to have been reached by a street associated

with the main temple of Bastet.[224] The possibility that there were processions dedicated to the mayors also suggests a ritualized engagement with the building. That a significant cultic component was part of local engagement with the mayors is suggested by several objects found inside the "palace," including two offering tables and three almost life-size statues lined up in the main hall of the complex thought to have been featured in processions.[225] These objects suggest that part of the veneration of the mayors at Bubastis, which seems to have taken place both in the main columned hall and in processions, was tied to ancestor cult. The itinerant nature of kingship meant that the king was not in any palace permanently, though he likely visited different settlements occasionally, perhaps at least in part to visit local sanctuaries.[226] Even if this *was* a hybrid mayoral-royal structure, it is necessary to ask with whom it would have been most closely associated on a day-to-day basis: very likely the mayors.[227]

The cultic prominence of local leaders is emphasized by evidence from both Edfu and Elephantine. At Edfu, Isi was venerated as a powerful intermediary between the mundane and the divine by local residents at his tomb.[228] Much more evidence survives from Elephantine, particularly pertaining to the veneration of the late Old Kingdom official (Pepinakht) Heqaib in

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[224] Van Siclen III 1996, 239; see Bietak 2019, 213.

[225] Van Siclen III 1991, 193; Lange 2015, 192; Bietak 2019, 220–221.

[226] For instance, a stela of Senwosret III found near the southern city wall at Elephantine may have been dedicated during a celebration of the construction of a fortification, one which the king might have attended: Sigl et al. 2016, 34–35; British Museum stela EA852. That the king visited local sanctuaries across Egypt was at least the case in the New Kingdom, a phenomenon attested for instance in the Konosso stela of Amenhotep II. I thank Nadine Moeller for pointing me to this text.

[227] See also Kóthay 2013, 507, on residences of local officials being more integral to settlement contexts than centrally planned, royal monuments.

[228] Troche 2021, 130. It is possible that a shrine dedicated to him was part of the urban fabric of the town, but we only currently have evidence of his tomb, where objects were dedicated to him by locals. The area dedicated to his cult in the cemetery was clearly bigger than what has been excavated, since some Middle Kingdom objects, including stelae and statues, continue underneath the later tell accumulation on top (Nadine Moller, personal communication, April 2022); see also Moeller 2005b. Wahka at Qau el-Kebir, also seemingly deified at this time, also lacked a separate shrine, but his tomb was an appropriation of royal architecture that likely showcased his elevated status: Troche 2021, 114, 137–139.

the Middle Kingdom and Second Intermediate Period, when he was deified.[229] Processions to the necropolis of Qubbet el-Hawa likely took place in his honor and legitimized his authority locally,[230] as well as that of his class of high officials, and his sanctuary was a focus of pilgrimage of "supra-regional importance" (for example for Gebelein).[231] He was invoked, not only with gods, but also by himself, and asked to provide blessings.[232] His cult had ties to broader ancestral veneration[233] and he was considered beneficial for the town as a whole, one reason why his worship extended beyond the elite, particularly in processions tied to the Feast of Sokar.[234] Heqaib's shrine abuts a major street that might have been a processional road tying the shrine to the temple of Satet (Figure 3.19),[235] a location that demonstrates the importance of his cult. Several houses and a large administrative building are also nearby. The shrine was embedded into life at Elephantine, quite visible even if it was not always accessible to all.

[229] His title was "chancellor of the king of Lower Egypt and sole companion" (Habachi 1985, 21). Other late Old Kingdom officials venerated at the site include Sabni, Sobekhotep, and Mekhu: Raue 2014, 2. From the early Middle Kingdom, Sarenput I (and others) also had shrines with statues and offering tables: Habachi 1985, 19–20. There is much debate about what type of god Heqaib was; see Troche 2021, 127–128.

[230] Feinman and Moreno García 2022, 59. Finds that suggest this include the discovery of wooden caskets, shrines, and a wooden statuette in Heqaib's first ka-chapel, House 2: Habachi 1985, 15.

[231] Raue 2014, 12.

[232] Habachi 1985, 21, 49, 59, 63, 161, 163; Franke 1994, 131–146; Troche 2021, 114.

[233] Raue 2014, 1–3.

[234] The donation of chapels and stelae, at least in the earlier part of the Twelfth Dynasty, seems to have been a privilege of the elite who had connections to the king. This is visible on many of these statues: Habachi 1985, 43–44; Raue 2014, 8, 12. In the Thirteenth Dynasty, access to the sanctuary became less exclusive: Habachi 1985, 61. The Feast of Sokar has been compared to the festival of Osiris at Abydos: Habachi 1985, 20; Raue 2014, 12. See, for instance, inscriptions on the statues of Ipj and Senbebu: Habachi 1985, 163. See also Franke 1994, 127–131; von Pilgrim 1996b, 126, 148, 220; Troche 2021, 154.

[235] Raue 2014, fig. 4. Troche 2021, 116–117; Stevens 2009, 11; Willems 2014, 115.

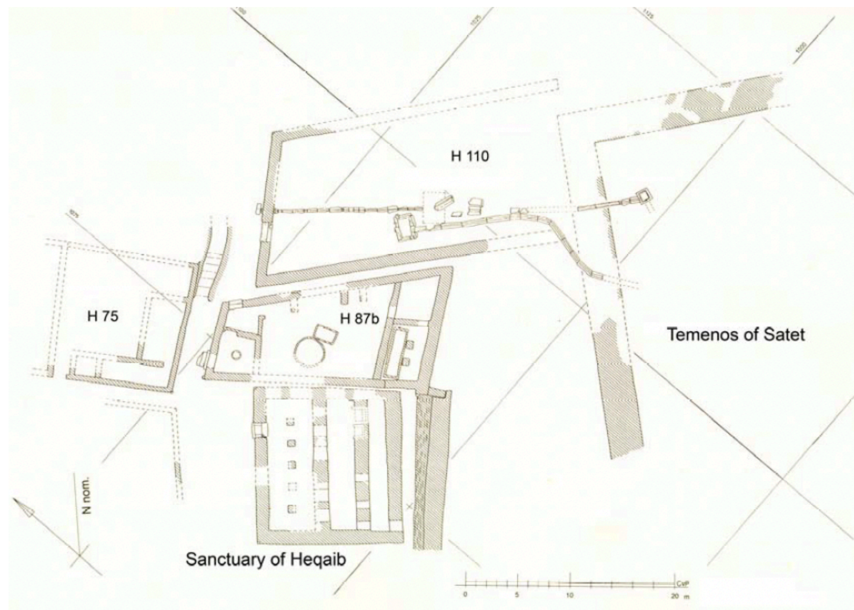

Figure 3.19: Location of Heqaib's shrine in the overall temple precinct of Elephantine, surrounded by houses (Raue 2014, fig. 4).

Additions to the shrine of Heqaib were mostly commissioned by local leaders,[236] an example of patronage not tied to kingship that served as a reference point for the population. However, traces of kingship can be found at the shrine starting in the Eleventh Dynasty.[237] Statues of Twelfth Dynasty kings, including Senwosret III and Amenemhat V, are also possibly but not securely associated with the shrine.[238] It has been proposed, based on inscriptions of Sarenput I (stela 10) and Intef-aa (later usurped by Amenemhat III),[239] that "kings appropriated this growing locus of importance,"[240] perhaps because they felt threatened by it.[241] This is not a

[236] Raue 2014, 8.
[237] This includes an inscription of Intef III and three statuettes of Eleventh Dynasty kings found nearby: Habachi 1985, 17; Raue 2014, 5.
[238] Their lack of secure provenance makes it possible that they come from the temples of Satet or Khnum: Raue 2014, 12.
[239] Habachi 1985, 109.
[240] Troche 2021, 118, 127, 140.
[241] Kings seem to have sometimes wished to insert themselves into Elephantine's cultic landscape, for instance with the construction of the provincial pyramid there. It is uncertain whether this meaning tied to royal cult would have still been attached to the monument in the Middle Kingdom, however. For more information on provincial pyramids, see Marouard and Papazian 2012.

very convincing interpretation because kings at least in both earlier and later periods sometimes granted permission for local leaders to establish their own cults.[242] Even if true, this did not increase royal prominence at the expense of Heqaib's.[243] Royal patronage was likely mostly visible to the elite, and likely meant for the elite.[244] Royal statues were also generally smaller than those of local leaders,[245] emphasizing that the focus here was not on kingship but rather on "*other*, potentially *alternative* foci of loyalties, identities and legitimization."[246]

In scholarship, it is often claimed that local leaders were mere extensions of the king,[247] but that relationship is not straightforward. For instance, that the mayor held a significant place in the Wah-Sut hierarchy is clear, but whether he should be considered an obvious local manifestation of kingship is not. Reniseneb, a wife of a mayor in the mid- or late Thirteenth Dynasty, was a daughter of the king. [248] Marriage of royal family members to local leaders was common, since it was a way for kings to ensure the loyalty of local elites.[249] That kings needed to secure loyalties is an important counterweight to the image of an all-powerful, omnipresent ruler. Did this practice increase the local visibility of kingship, or was it more relevant for elevating the authority of local leaders themselves? Are those two things mutually exclusive? In thinking about this one remembers the jewelry found buried with Mereret (B), probably a daughter of Senwosret III, in his pyramid at Dahshur.[250] One of her pectorals shows Senwosret III as a

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[242] From the Old Kingdom, a Sixth Dynasty decree from Pepy II in Balat shows that he granted permission for the local cult to be practiced: Pantalacci 1985. In the New Kingdom, permission was also granted to Amenhotep son of Hapu: Bard 2015, 238.
[243] See also Habachi 1985, 158.
[244] Feinman and Moreno García 2022, 31.
[245] Habachi 1985, 109.
[246] Moreno García 2019, 79, my emphasis. See also Moreno García 2022, 89–91.
[247] E.g., Cooney 2021, chapter 3.
[248] Wegner 2004, 231.
[249] Feinman and Moreno García 2022, 54.
[250] Bestock 2018, 207–209.

trampling griffin, and another a smiting Amenemhat III (Figure 3.20).[251] It is possible that these pieces were worn during life, when they would have been seen by a restricted royal circle. Smaller examples of jewelry with royal motifs likely worn by royal women include scarab rings and necklaces.[252] The possibility that Reniseneb had jewelry with royal symbols is a good reminder that kingship might not only have been manifested by the king in local contexts.

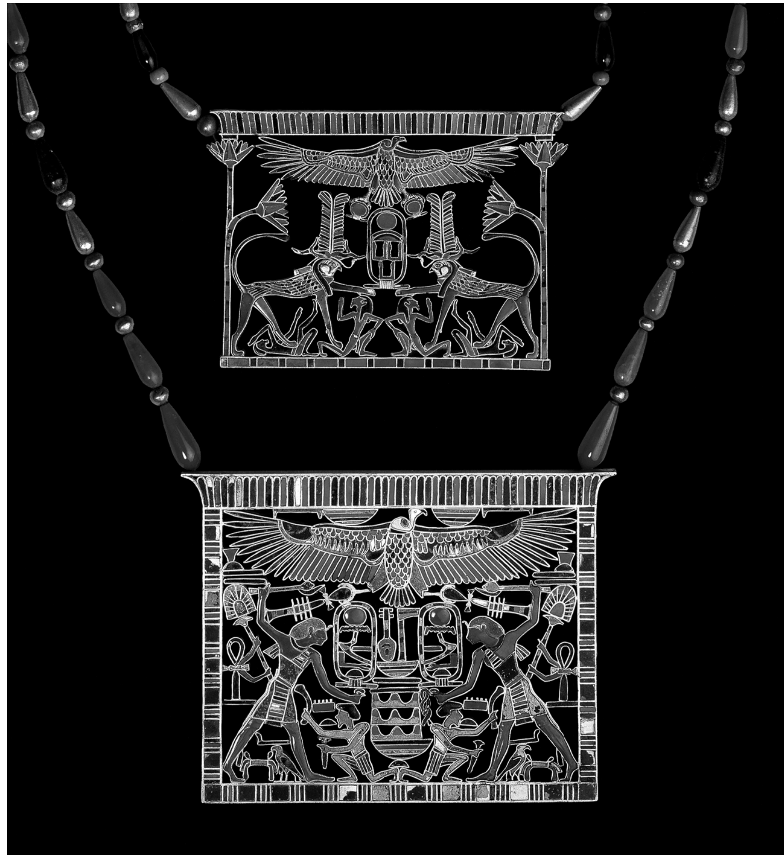

Figure 3.20: Pectorals with images of Senwosret III and Amenemhat III discovered in the tomb of Mereret (B) at Dahshur (Bestock 2018, fig. 7.4).

Another example that suggests that the association of local leaders with kingship was not only relevant to manifesting the power of kings, but also their own power in local hierarchies, is

[251] Bestock 2018, fig. 7.4.
[252] Ben-Tor 2004.

the fact that elite statues were modeled after royal examples.[253] Upper-elite statues were often placed in temple courtyards and sanctuaries,[254] and it is worth wondering whether such royal visages might have been considered reflections of the king by those who saw them. In the case of Heqaib son of Sattjenj, he is even pictured kneeling and offering vases, a pose usually reserved for kings.[255] As discussed by Rune Nyord, the statue of a private person with the facial features of the reigning king "'blended' [them] visually and conceptually."[256] Whether this was recognized by those who saw the statue, and if so whether it was considered a royal rather than elite presence, is unclear. It is not unlikely that this parallelism increased the visibility of kings in local contexts at least to other elites themselves, but it is also likely that elites drew legitimacy from that association.

§7 Conclusion

This conclusion starts in a perhaps unorthodox way: by introducing a case that has not yet been discussed at length, that of Lisht North.[257] An area near the pyramids of Amenemhat I and Senwosret I, it included a small settlement that developed in the late Twelfth Dynasty and grew in the Thirteenth Dynasty.[258] Differently from other settlements associated with royal funerary

[253] Habachi 1985, 11, 17, 117–139. For instance, Connor has argued that the statuary of Senwosret III and Amenemhat III had two main variants: one—the sterner visage—meant for large-scale statues displayed in open-air spaces, and the other—"more human and sensitive"—meant for smaller statues and more secluded places. The latter was used as a model for private statuary: Connor 2015, 58, 63–64, 66. See also Connor 2020.
[254] Connor 2015, 64.
[255] Habachi 1985, 57.
[256] Nyord 2020b, 26.
[257] It is assumed to have been the necropolis of the Twelfth Dynasty capital of Itjtawy, though the city itself has not been found. It is possible that Itjtawy never developed into a major royal center but was instead the site of the main royal residence: Lorand 2013b, 137; Moeller 2016, 360.
[258] Mace 1921, 11; Do. Arnold 1996, 72, fig. 49; F. Arnold 1996, 13. This was presumably the suburb of a nearby city (perhaps the new capital?), with houses covering most of the cemetery to the south, east, and west of the pyramid field. Evidence suggests that the settlement was also occupied in the beginning of the Second Intermediate Period: F. Arnold 1996, 19. The population of Lisht North is thought to have been "middle class,"[258] since houses were not small and were altered over time: F. Arnold 1996, 13.

complexes discussed here, Lisht North houses were built directly against the pyramid of Amenemhat I (Figure 3.21).[259] There was no physical separation. That these houses were allowed to be built (or not stopped from being built) immediately next to a pyramid is surprising in light of the restricted nature of royal monuments and the supposedly strict rules of decorum. The standard interpretation of kingship as an omnipresent force would perhaps lead to assumptions that these people lived right next to a pyramid because they wished to be close to it,[260] but it is just as plausible that houses were built there because the pyramid had fallen into disuse by the late Twelfth Dynasty: that it was no longer a site of royal restriction.[261] The fact that the pyramid casing was taken down at this time, and that much of the pyramid complex was demolished and its blocks reused to build domestic structures,[262] suggests that the latter interpretation is closer to the truth. Even if it raises more questions than it answers, Lisht North is a critical reminder that potential prescriptions put forth by the royal court regarding the appropriate ways in which to interact with kingship are all well and good, but that the ways in which Egyptians in fact experienced the royal institution and its manifestations likely often diverged from that model.

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[259] Do. Arnold 1996, fig. 49.

[260] The perhaps closer engagement with kingship here could explain the discovery of an unusual royal figure: Mace 1922a, 13–15; Do. Arnold 1996, 68. Found during surface cleaning west of the pyramid, it is unclear if it should be associated with the town, the monument, or nearby tombs, but its informal appearance and composition in unbaked clay make it unlikely that it was made for the royal mortuary complex itself.

[261] Several non-royal tombs were also built very close to the royal pyramid, in an area usually reserved for the royal family, and in describing the site Di. Arnold similarly interpreted this as a "lack of respect for the royal tomb" and a "conquest of a pyramid cemetery" (Di. Arnold 2008, 63).

[262] Di. Arnold 2008, 63.

Figure 3.21: Houses built against the slope of Amenemhat I's pyramid at Lisht North (Do. Arnold 1996, fig. 49).

The goal of this chapter, to establish the contexts in which non-royal Egyptians engaged with kings and kingship in settlements and daily life, as well as how they did so, is necessary for the overall aim of this dissertation: to write a more balanced narrative of the royal institution in the Middle Kingdom, one that does not prioritize royal over non-royal agency in matters of non-royal lives. The analysis of material, iconographic, and textual evidence from several sites in Egypt put forth above demonstrates that the restricted nature of Egyptian kingship cannot be considered a simple consequence of a royal imposition, and more broadly that kingship was not omnipresent in non-royal Egyptian society. We can tell that kingship was not omnipresent because certain experiences *were* associated with kingship. When kingship is not evident in local or daily encounters, that can be thought of as a consequence of non-royal agency and a purposeful engagement with something *other than* kingship.

To reach this conclusion, the chapter relies on a few key observations, chiefly that Egyptians at least in some places had a choice when engaging with kingship. The non-royal agency visible in private letters from Lahun allows me to extrapolate about why kingship is not more prevalent in the daily or local, something that here was tackled both in religious and political terms by examining evidence of domestic cult (as well as the sparse evidence for royal rituals in settlements) and the visibility of local leaders and sources of authority. These conclusions allow me to reject decorum as the sole determinant of who could engage with kingship, as well as where, when, and how they might do so, instead pivoting to a greater consideration of the relevance of kingship in quotidian contexts. We should not assume that kingship was relevant to all Egyptians in equal measure, and moreover that the only reason we do not see kingship in more daily or local contexts is because it could not be there.

In terms of patterns across royal and provincial centers, it should be mentioned that some conclusions might be a result of the state of publications of different sites and could include biases that do not reflect reality. However, the corpus is robust enough that these results should be taken seriously. The evidence discussed above demonstrates that there were common categories of experience, which suggests common paradigms. Rather than a pan-Egyptian "kingship experience," however, there are also significant differences that argue for localism—albeit one in which kingship was still not manifested in an omnipresent way. Most settlements discussed here have evidence for a developed domestic cult that did not focus on kingship, though some are more easily identifiable than others. Sites like Lahun, Memphis, and Wah-Sut—closely associated with royal funerary monuments, and in the case of Lahun and Wah-Sut also orthogonally planned—have more evidence for royal visibility than provincial centers. We should probably think of the experience of kingship at these sites as hinging both on the durable

presence of kingship in architecture and royal monuments, as well as on ephemeral ritual occasions in which some residents might have participated. Even so, Lahun and Wah-Sut have a higher visibility of local leaders in the towns themselves, whereas kings were more present in likely restricted funerary monuments and administrative contexts—except for when they visited. Prominent residences of local leaders are also found in provincial sites, with the ones at Tell el-Dab'a and Bubastis often identified as royal palaces due to their monumentality. This ambiguity is fascinating because it could easily go either way: royal palaces built in sites farther from royal centers to increase royal presence there, or a greater prominence of local leaders due to a distance from royal centers. Regardless, local leaders at a number of provincial sites were also the object of cult, including at Elephantine, Edfu, and Bubastis.

The deification of select private individuals occurred solely in the provinces in this period,[263] and one wonders whether this was the case because Egyptians in those places had more freedom to develop their own centers of worship, far from centralized kingship.[264] This increased freedom in the provinces has been tied to the concept of decorum,[265] which seems like a missed opportunity to consider the agency of for instance Elephantine's residents, who worshipped their local god,[266] as well as of the local patrons who ensured the maintenance of Heqaib's cult at that site. The prominence of local leaders in this period becomes particularly critical to consider when thinking of the interactions between mayors and residents in the potential "plaza-like" spaces at Lahun and Wah-Sut. It is not unlikely that local leaders were traced back to the king, maybe particularly in cases like that of the mayor of Wah-Sut who was

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[263] Troche 2021, 115, 140, 153.
[264] Feinman and Moreno García 2022, 62–63.
[265] Troche refers to this phenomenon as apotheosis: Troche 2021, 153.
[266] Some have called Heqaib a "saint," but Troche (2023, 64) draws a separation between the distinguished dead, who could be called "saints" due to their accessibility, and figures such as Heqaib, who were actively deified.

married to royal princess Reniseneb. But rather than seeing them as simple extensions of the king, it is perhaps more accurate to think of these figures as representative—for instance, in the case of Heqaib—of potentially alternative foci of loyalty or legitimacy for non-royal Egyptians.[267]

In a recent book, Julia Troche suggested that the "dead, in their social capacity, could be mobilized to subvert royal power in Egypt's Old through Middle Kingdoms, during which 'power' could take many forms."[268] She focuses on kings' role as mortuary benefactors, something that will be discussed in Chapter 5, but the redefinition of royal power as related to the agency of Egyptians other than the king is relevant here. In a recent work on the politics of the Iron Age Syro-Anatolian City States, James Osborne argued that an utter lack of evidence of nonelite political participation might be evidence of resistance to domination and power by refusing to engage with it.[269] In that case, and if the nonelite political silence can be taken as resistance, it would exemplify an everyday type of "silent resistance" that did not explicitly move to create change.[270] This type of interpretation is well suited to the "intermediate zone" or the "hidden transcript" mentioned above,[271] concepts that acknowledge existing hierarchies of power while allowing for spaces where that power could be negotiated, even if quietly.

The archaeology of resistance has not been given much attention in the ancient world,[272] and particularly not in Egypt, where the focus has historically been on structures of royal power.[273] Going back to the analysis by Troche that the dead could subvert royal power, my

[267] Moreno García 2019, 79.
[268] Troche 2021, 47.
[269] Osborne forthcoming. I thank James Osborne for suggesting that resistance would be a useful interpretation for some of the evidence discussed in this chapter.
[270] Rubin 1995.
[271] Both put forth by James C. Scott, in 2010 and 1990 respectively.
[272] Osborne forthcoming; see also González-Ruibal 2013.
[273] Resistance is being more seriously considered in studies of Egyptian presence in Nubia, however. See, e.g., Lemos and Budka 2021; S.T. Smith 2021.

intention is not to imply that Egyptians necessarily focused their domestic cults on ancestors or protective deities *in order to* negotiate power.[274] But by choosing to venerate the dead, or protective deities, in domestic cultic practices, they *did* negotiate power—or at least ensured, whether purposefully or not, that royal rhetoric did not dominate their daily lives. It is notable that the worship of kings was not a common feature of domestic cult in Lahun nor Wah-Sut.[275] Other cases discussed in this chapter could be considered examples of resistance to royal power, including the cults to Heqaib at Elephantine and Isi at Edfu, which were supported by local patronage. In the case of Heqaib, it is even possible that kings tried to use it to increase their own visibility at the expense of the local god's, something that seems to not have worked judging by Heqaib's continued significance into the Second Intermediate Period. The most convincing example of resistance is the construction of houses against the pyramid at Lisht North. As discussed with regards to the pyramid at Lahun, there was usually a separation between pyramid complexes and living areas by enclosure walls, a separation that was certainly purposeful.

"Resistance" is a loaded term, and since it is not often used in Egyptology my use of it here may seem rash—particularly because active resistance against kingship is almost nonexistent.[276] However, I use resistance to indicate a renegotiation of power that did take place, whether it was purposeful or not. This may have simply been a consequence of the lack of relevance of kingship to non-royal daily life: it is possible that the power of kingship was just too

[274] See Quack 2010b, 219, on the genuine ancient Egyptian belief in their gods that "motivated their religious behavior, more than any conscious intention of social control." Stevens (2009, 12) stresses that domestic religious practices may at times have incorporated aspects of official religion, but that they do not seem to have ever been harnessed by the state.

[275] This also seems to be the case for the Old Kingdom pyramid town of Heit el-Ghurab at Giza, though not all small finds have thus far been published. For the recent first volume of the site's object typology, see Malak et al. 2022.

[276] Even in the First Intermediate Period, examples of obvious, active resistance are hard to find, though they might have been expected. This is perhaps because there was no centralized royal authority to resist, but in tomb inscriptions such as those of Ankhtifi references are still made to a king, and the official's titles still fit the Old Kingdom mold of association with the royal court: Campagno 2011.

distant or not familiar enough to non-royal Egyptians to be engaged with frequently. Addressing one's ancestors is more personal, and ancestors could have acted as intermediaries between non-royals and more removed entities such as gods or kings.[277] But failing to acknowledge how renegotiations of power such as those discussed above affected the manifestation and meaning of kingship in non-royal contexts would be a mistake. When looking at such practices through the lens of the visibility (or lack thereof) of kingship, and combined with other textual and architectural evidence analyzed in this chapter, it would be remiss of us to ignore the potential of traditions such as these to concretize forces other than kingship as most relevant in daily life. The potential of these traditions to resist kingship, if we choose to go that far.

[277] Ancestor worship was not unique to non-royal Egyptians. A thought-provoking example from the New Kingdom is the statue of prince Ahmose Sapair, who was petitioned by members of the royal family to act in their favor after his death: Barbotin 2005.

Chapter 4

Beyond Pyramids: Encounters with Royal, Divine, and Elite Monuments in the Middle Kingdom

§1 Introduction

Though the title of this dissertation might imply that its sole focus is non-royal engagement with kingship in everyday life, those experiences of course do not cover all factors that were significant to non-royal worldviews. On the contrary, interactions with kingship and kings through royal monuments and festivals were also influential in wider Egyptian society, though they were rare, as argued below. In considering how royal and divine monuments and festivals might have featured in non-royal realities in the Middle Kingdom, this chapter will continue to highlight a variability of experiences that are usually ignored in scholarship when the focus is on a monolithic engagement with kingship dictated by decorum. Variables—or axes—pertinent to the discussion below that were not considered as much in Chapter 3 due to the nature of the evidence there include periodicity and time, status, proximity to royal buildings or centers, and states of being.

This chapter might imply that the argumentative goalposts of this study have shifted: from arguing that kingship was a less important part of people's regular lives than has been previously thought, to arguing that kingship has been presented too statically when it was instead highly variable. Most of the examples discussed below, however, do not pertain to the local level or daily existence, and so they do not speak directly to the issue of kingship in the everyday. This chapter therefore does not detract from the dissertation's overall aim of demonstrating that kingship was less important to non-royal Egyptians than decorum implies; instead, it adds to that argument by also demonstrating that engagement with kingship could differ significantly in monumental contexts, and that it was not solely imposed by the royal sphere.

Interpretations of ancient monuments, such as the Egyptian pyramids, have historically focused on their longevity and assumed they were as effective in the past as they are now in communicating royal power.[1] Recent decades have instead witnessed the rise of a scholarly consensus that we need to think more critically about ancient power and how it functioned beyond royal (or imperial) rhetoric and monuments.[2] One useful approach to a greater understanding of ancient constructions of power is questioning how people in the past experienced monumental displays, thus moving away from a focus on formal attributes towards one on their meaning.[3] For instance, who walked through temples or read the inscriptions, and how might they have reacted to such buildings in comparison to what the monuments themselves seem to communicate? Considering who would have come into contact with monuments—and which specific parts of monuments—in what circumstances, as well as how they might have reacted to them, is critical for a better understanding of kingship, and for moving away from simplistic interpretations.

To better explore the role of royal monuments and festivals in the Middle Kingdom, one must consider them alongside both divine and elite constructions and celebrations that had the capacity to communicate to (often distinct) audiences in similar ways.[4] In this chapter, royal monuments and festivals are discussed first, since the general expectation is that these will be the most significant. They are followed by divine monuments and festivals, which are not as well-known in the Middle Kingdom as their counterparts in the New Kingdom and thus might be thought of as less prominent. It is useful to discuss royal and divine contexts together, since it is

[1] E.g., Lehner 2010. This is not only the case in Egyptology; see, e.g., Pollock 1999.
[2] E.g., Ando 2017, 9–10. A three-year ASOR session (2021, 2022, 2023), for instance, aimed to investigate this question among others in an attempt to re-define power in the ancient world: "Understanding Power in the Ancient World: Approaches, Manifestations, and Responses" chaired by Jessica Tomkins and Shane M. Thompson.
[3] See Osborne 2014.
[4] For the importance of studying monuments within their wider context, see, Moore 1996, chapters 3 and 5.

unwise to separate them in too distinct categories. Lastly comes a discussion of the engagement of non-royals with private, elite monuments, which are usually not included in studies of kingship. When they are, they are assumed to have reflected royal power away from the royal court, as is also often said of provincial divine temples.[5] However, as already demonstrated with the discussion of settlements such as Elephantine, Lahun, and Wah-Sut in Chapter 3, local leaders seem to have been more prominent to local populations. This will be no different here. The usual explanation for such a discrepancy between levels of engagement with different types of monuments would be decorum, but this chapter will continue to make the case that we must instead think of the role of contextual relevance (and thus agency) as at least part of the explanation for non-royal engagement with kingship.

§2 Monuments and festivals: questions and approaches

As described by anthropologist Adam T. Smith, landscapes—including both built and natural environments—are inherently laden with politics. In this chapter, so-called political landscapes are considered through the ways in which they shape relationships between rulers and subjects, as well as how subjects move through and perceive the world in which they live.[6] From the dawn of the Egyptian state, kings constructed a distinct political landscape replete with monumental constructions.[7] One would be hard-pressed to deny that the landscape that remains to us today from ancient Egypt—dominated by pyramids and stone temples that overshadow

[5] Claimed by, e.g., Richards 2010, 63; Bussmann 2015a, 982–83; Bussmann 2015b; Moreno García 2019, 70, 75, 79–81, 158; Morris 2019, 75.
[6] A.T. Smith 2003. See also Tilley 1994.
[7] For the construction of the earliest royal monuments at the site of Abydos, see, e.g.: Dreyer 1998; Bestock 2009; O'Connor 2009. For a discussion that specifically deals with the likely practice of retainer sacrifice in the First Dynasty royal tombs, see Morris 2007. See also Moore 1996, chapter 5.

buried mudbrick settlements[8]—is a reflection of royal power. The visual aspects of landscapes are often those that, understandably, stand out the most.[9] Consequently, though royal monuments have historically been a focus of Egyptological studies, such studies do not usually take into account the stories of local populations, neither ancient nor modern.[10] But landscapes, and space in general, are vested with cultural memory.[11] By definition, cultural or social memory belongs to a collective rather than a unit: to ancient Egyptians, rather than the Egyptian king. However, collective memory can be situated at the intersection of the individual and the social, and both perspectives need to be considered together for a better understanding of how memories are formed, transformed, and transmitted, including how they affect both individuals and groups.[12] After all, it is individuals themselves who actively remember.[13]

Scholars have recently emphasized that agency needs to be considered in the experience of individuals once the monument is completed, not only when and by whom it is commissioned.[14] It is thus necessary to acknowledge that the materiality of monuments and their dialogic quality can have different affordances, properties which cause people to engage with and react to them in distinct ways, including ones unintended by their commissioners.[15] Even if

[8] For a discussion of the repercussions of this differential decay in scholarly understanding of Egyptian monuments, see Silva 2020. Also see Wilkinson 2003, 3–14 with regards to ancient Near Eastern landscapes more generally.
[9] Wheatley and Gillings 2002, 179–192. See also Llobera 2001.
[10] Bednarski and Tully 2020, 508. See also von Pilgrim 1996b, 13.
[11] Richards 1999; A.T. Smith 2003, 54. See also Nora 1984; Ingold 1993.
[12] See Cordonnier et al. 2022. The complicated topic of memory is largely beyond the scope of this study, but it is important to note here that the concept of social or collective memory is debated. It was developed by Maurice Halbwachs (1994 [1925], 1997 [1950]), who did not believe that isolated individual memories exist. Pierre Nora (1984) has been instrumental in the development of the concept of collective memory in the field of history, particularly with the idea of *lieux de mémoire*—any place, object, or concept vested with historical significance in collective memory.
[13] See Connerton 2010 for specifically the bodily manifestation and construction of social memory. See also Morris 2023a for a very recent consideration of social memory in ancient Egypt, as well as how both the individual and the collective are instrumental for remembrance in strategies including writing and ritual, specifically in this case with regards to famine.
[14] Osborne 2014; Pauketat 2000.
[15] For the original theory of affordances, see Gibson 1979. See also Tilley 1994; Osborne 2014; Alcock 2002; Gillings 2012.

the experience of monuments can be exploited in systems of domination,[16] simply because monuments were built does not mean that they were successful in fulfilling their intended function(s), whatever those may be. In discussing the construction of the Vittoriano by Mussolini, for instance, John Agnew made clear that while that monument was meant as a statement of Rome's connection to the classical past it was perceived as preposterous by many of its viewers.[17] Much of this viewers' perspective is irretrievable for ancient Egypt. Indeed, in most cases we are unable to say with certainty how a specific monument was engaged with by different groups of people. In the Graeco-Roman period, Amenemhat III's so-called "Labyrinth" at Hawara awed visiting emperors and travelers, who wrote about it as one of the greatest architectural marvels ever built.[18] We lack such accounts from the Middle Kingdom, and even if Egyptians' engagement with monuments can be deeply theorized not many answers might be forthcoming. This is why it is important to consider a more mundane world of daily engagement[19] by thinking of who might have seen such monuments in what contexts, as well as what such interactions might have meant.

Beyond monuments themselves, one of the cornerstones of the archaeology of sovereignty is the consideration of the role of ritual and performance in effecting subjection.[20] The theorization of performance is largely beyond the scope of this chapter, particularly as it has been a growing scholarly interest since the 1990s.[21] Performances, which can be thought of as

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[16] See, e.g., Jackson and Wright 2014; Pauketat 2014.
[17] Agnew 1998.
[18] Uytterhoeven and Blom-Böer 2002, 111–112. See also Petrie 1889, 4. Nothing from the original plan of the building remains, but preserved statuary from the temple suggests that Amenemhat III emphasized his connection to local gods there: Petrie 1889, 3.
[19] Jackson and Wright 2014, 136.
[20] A.T. Smith 2011, 420–421; Inomata and Coben 2006.
[21] For a review of literature of performance studies both applied to the ancient world and more generally, see Lysen 2022.

materializations of ideology,[22] are generally understood as dynamic interactions used to influence specific audiences. They are multivocal and mean different things to different people in different circumstances.[23] Performance has been explored for other areas of the ancient world in addition to Egypt,[24] where such considerations are not common. Though a thorough review of literature is both impossible and unnecessary here, it is important to mention anthropologist Clifford Geertz, who formulated the notion of a "theater state" in his ethnographic study of the Balinese Negara.[25] In this formulation, rituals do not merely represent the state—they are not solely commemorative of power—but instead actively construct it. In addition to creating power, ritual and performance are also thought to construct community and identity.[26] As discussed below, festivals and public rituals could be a powerful tool in the negotiation of power, not only of the Egyptian king but also of the gods and of local leaders.

Whether spaces are understood as constitutive or symbolic of authority,[27] their potential to affect—even control—how people move and live in and around them is indisputable. Ancient Egyptian temples were restrictive to different degrees in different periods, and so claims that they made kingship more visible to local populations are debatable and context-dependent.[28] But festivals and processions theoretically made the divine and the royal more accessible, though their frequency also differed by period.[29] It is important to highlight that Middle Kingdom royal

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[22] See DeMarrais et al. 1996.
[23] Lysen 2022, citing Turner 1970.
[24] E.g., for the Hittite Empire: Gilan 2011; Glatz 2020, 101; Lysen 2022. For broader considerations of Near Eastern (primarily Mesopotamian) performance, see Ristvet 2015. For performance in archaeology more broadly, see Inomata and Coben 2006a.
[25] Geertz 1980. This theory has received criticism for being too static: Lysen 2022, 33.
[26] Inomata and Coben 2006b, 24.
[27] A.T. Smith 2003, 76, citing Ashmore 1989 and Bard 1992.
[28] On the restricted nature of temples: Moreno García 2019, 35; Baines 2006; Baines 1995a, 12. For a perhaps more balanced view, in particular regarding Old Kingdom and earlier shrines and temples, see Bussmann 2017, Bussmann 2020.
[29] Accetta 2013. Even if some claim that oracular processions gave the king an active role in people's lives; see Heffernan 2012.

festivals are not considered part of everyday life due to their lack of frequency.[30] Or at least this is how daily life is understood here, as a heuristic choice that allows me to think more critically about non-royal engagement with specifically royal (and at times divine) festivals alongside more common practices such as domestic cult. It is not meant as a broader statement that it would be impossible to imagine an approach where festivals are regarded as part of daily life due to their regularity. Other types of festivals or rituals, particularly ones related to local elite or familial funerary practices, should perhaps be considered closer to daily life (see below and in Chapter 5). This is where the axes of engagement mentioned above come in, particularly periodicity: just because festivals do not take place every day does not mean that the occasions when they did occur were not meaningful or did not matter, and their infrequency may have in fact made them more significant than they would have been otherwise.[31] Consequently, the discussion below highlights these occasions and gives their role in interactions between non-royal people and kingship their deserved weight.

Related to the periodicity of many of the festivals and rituals discussed below, be they royal, divine, or elite, are the ways in which we can think of broader religious experiences in Middle Kingdom Egypt. Ancient Egyptian religion can be classified as imagistic religious expression, defined by anthropologist Harvey Whitehouse as featuring infrequent but sensorially salient rituals. This mode differs from the doctrinal religious mode, which consists of regular and repetitive teaching of religious truths and is dominant in the modern world.[32] The intensity of

[30] See Assmann 1991. Assmann understands the divine as intruding into an otherwise disenchanted world, making his analysis a matter of identifying how this happened.

[31] I initially wished to argue that encounters with kingship in festivals would have meant less than the absence of kingship in daily life, but was reminded by Laurel Bestock that Christmas is my favorite time of the year, though it is definitely not part of my daily life (and that is perhaps at least in part why it is so significant, as pointed out by Rune Nyord). Modern parallels can often be more misleading than elucidating, but in this case one was needed.

[32] Whitehouse 2004, 8, 63. For a detailed explanation of each mode's various characteristics, see the table in Whitehouse 2004, 74. Whitehouse makes it a point to state that not every characteristic of what he calls the imagistic

imagistic rituals combined with their periodicity is thought to lead to localized, exclusive communities of ritual—essentially heterogeneous religious groups. Centralized authority and authoritative corpora of religious teachings play no role, with people experiencing religion directly from the gods or ancestors.[33] The inherent heterogeneity of the imagistic mode is salient for considerations of the access of different audiences to distinct categories of performance in the Middle Kingdom, including royal, divine, and elite. It is also significant for our understanding of how distinct monuments or rituals might have been remembered by distinct groups. Combined with the axes of engagement introduced above, particularly status and proximity to royal monuments, the notion of heterogeneous religious groups allows for a deeper exploration of variability in non-royal engagements with kingship.

Of course, the meanings of both landscapes and monuments change over time.[34] This chapter does not seek to be a comprehensive account of non-royal interactions with ancient Egyptian monuments. Instead, it focuses on many that would have taken place in the Middle Kingdom. The monuments of focus are also consequently from the Middle Kingdom, with some from previous periods mentioned as appropriate.

§3 Experiencing monuments in the Middle Kingdom

It is common in Egyptological scholarship to assume that monuments such as provincial divine temples and elite tombs were means of increasing the presence of kingship in areas away from the royal court.[35] But is that relationship straightforward, or should such structures instead

mode needs to be present for a religion to be considered imagistic, and similarly that religions can be characterized by both imagistic and doctrinal traits: Whitehouse 2004, 1, 75–76.

[33] Whitehouse 2004, 73, 76. For discussions of this phenomena in ancient Egypt, see Baines 1990; Kemp 1995.

[34] Wernke et al. 2017; Bednarski and Tully 2020, 509–510; Weiss 2021, 135. See also Fleming 2006.

[35] Seidlmayer 1996. More generally: Bussmann 2015b; Morris 2019, 75; Moreno García 2019, 19–20, 70, 140, 158.

(or also) be considered evocative of divine and local authority? The following three sections discuss what we can say about engagement with royal monuments, as well as question the expectation that divine and elite monuments should be seen as royal statements. Themes considered in all discussions include audience and visibility, as well as reception and performance.

§3.1 Royal monuments and festivals

What exactly does it mean for the king to be relevant in people's lives? Chapter 3 argued that kings were not as relevant as ancestors, or local leaders, in daily life and local contexts. But as mentioned above, not everything of importance to people can be boiled down to what happens in the day to day. Since kings seem to have been largely absent in these circumstances, it is important to also think about situations in which they might have been more present. Beyond thinking of the binary scale of omnipresence and restriction, it is also key—particularly when it comes to royal monuments and festivals—to focus on the *quality* of the presence or absence of the king. Does it necessarily diminish the role of the king and kingship that the general population can only take part in certain aspects of royal ritual—or might the sensory overload of such occasions make them more salient for their restrictions and relative rarity?

When discussing Middle Kingdom royal monuments, one must start with those belonging to the kings of the Eleventh Dynasty, even if they might be less known than their later Twelfth Dynasty successors. The founder of the line that would later become the first dynasty of the Middle Kingdom, Intef I, was a local leader at Thebes who declared himself king. His tomb, as well as those of his successors Intef II and Intef III, were thus all built in that area, specifically at

the site of el-Tarif.[36] They were clear departures from Old Kingdom royal tomb models and fit with the rise of provincial tomb types during the First Intermediate Period.[37] Known as *saff* tombs, they were cut into the bedrock and included sizeable forecourts (Figure 4.1). The complex of Intef I (Saff el-Dawaba) is the biggest; his burial chamber was located in the back, but there were also numerous side chambers set aside for the burial of those who had played important roles during this reign.[38] This mixing of royal and elite burials also occurred in the complexes of Intef II and Intef III and demonstrates these kings' deep roots in Theban society.[39]

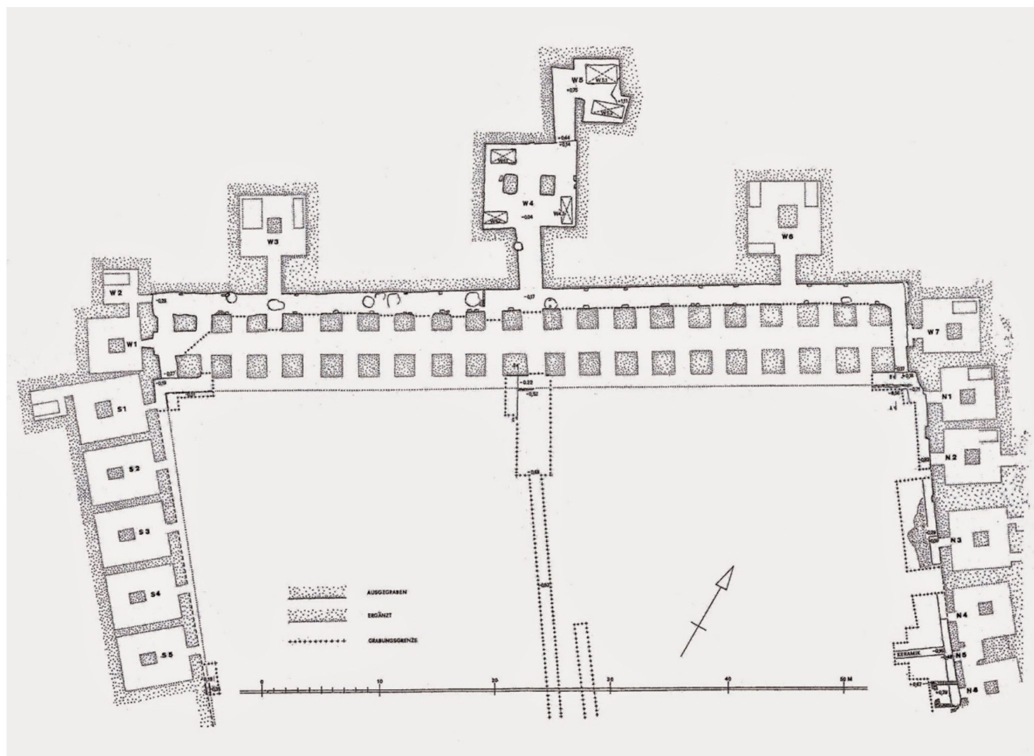

Figure 4.1: *Saff* tomb of Intef I at Saff el-Dawaba (Di. Arnold 1972, Abb. 2).

[36] Lehner 1997, 165.
[37] Seidlmayer 2000.
[38] Lehner 1997, 165.
[39] Seidlmayer 2000.

The inclusion of non-royal tombs in these royal complexes is thought-provoking in terms of access: it is possible that, due to the Intefs' connection to the local community, any rituals that took place there would have been relatively public. At least, it is not farfetched to imagine that the elite tombs in the complex would have been visited by their respective families. Indeed, Harco Willems argued that Eleventh Dynasty kings purposefully made their monuments more open, and thus perhaps more public, than had been the norm in the Old Kingdom. He suggests that this was politically motivated, since a greater involvement of the population in royal cult could have strengthened royal legitimacy.[40] There is not much evidence of royal pageantry at this time.[41] However, a monumental chapel that was part of the eastern side of the large courtyard in the *saff* complex of Intef II (Saff el-Kisasija) might suggest a processional access. The chapel was built next to the canal that flowed in front of the complex, a layout reminiscent of Old Kingdom causeways and valley temples (see below) that might suggest access to the complex from the water in processions.[42]

At the end of the Eleventh Dynasty, Nebhepetre Mentuhotep innovated once again, commissioning a unique funerary structure at Deir el-Bahri (Figure 4.2).[43] Nebhepetre's monument seems to have continued the trend of more open complexes, but high walls of both brick and stone surrounded the courtyards and columned halls, restricting access. It was still not public,[44] and those who could access this space were perhaps limited to priests and the high elite. This is also suggested by a lack of non-royal burials in the complex, in contrast to the royal

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[40] Willems 2020, 34–35.
[41] Gillam 2005, 46.
[42] See Di. Arnold 1976, Abb. 16 for a reconstruction of the complex with the chapel. I thank Nadine Moeller for pointing this feature out to me. This was the findspot of Intef II's famous "dog stela": Aufrère 2000.
[43] Di. Arnold 1974. It is clear however that it builds on the *saff* tomb model used by his predecessors: Lehner 1997, 166. For more information on the temple, see: Naville 1907; Naville 1910; Navile 1913; Arnold 1974a; Arnold 1974b.
[44] Chudzik 2016, 2.

practice at el-Tarif; the only subsidiary tombs belonged to either queens or princesses.[45] Nevertheless, Nebhepetre's temple may have been the focus of processions,[46] which would have moved through a processional way flanked by standing statues of the king as Osiris.[47] Nebhepetre was the first to draw a link to the well-known Beautiful Feast of the Valley discussed below, which suggests that he established that processional route in Thebes.[48] These processions may have been in honor of both the dead king and different gods, since specific areas of the temple were dedicated at different points to both Montu-Re and Amun-Re.[49] This association with gods in Nebhepetre Mentuhotep's temple may have been a strategy to ensure his continued relevance in festivals and the continuity of his cult, since chapels to gods would have likely been integrated in processions for longer periods of time.[50] Hieratic graffiti on the cliffs above the temple at Deir el-Bahri show that royal funerary priests took part in the festival.[51] Other spectators' ability to witness the procession from the east to the west bank would have likely ended once the royal mortuary complex was reached, emphasizing the separation between spaces (and rituals) accessible to wider audiences and those barred to anyone but the initiated. Without discounting the salience of the ritual for the uninitiated, this separation is an example of what I refer to as heterogenous religious groups: of people who would have experienced such rituals differently. The separation could have served to heighten the significance of the royal monument

[45] Bard 2015, 190.
[46] Ćwiek 2020, 27.
[47] Lehner 1997, 167. These statues were decapitated and buried in tree pits, and it is unclear when that took place.
[48] Willems 2020, 38–39. The first textual evidence for it comes from the reign of Amenemhat I: Fukaya 2007, 97. The festival is best known from the New Kingdom, from which much more evidence survives. The route may have started as early as the reign of Intef II, however: Sullivan 2008, 8–9. See also Do. Arnold 1996, 65; Postel 2000, 236; Sabbahy 2021, 124.
[49] Di. Arnold 2015a, 13.
[50] At least, this was the case with the integration of a chapel to Amun in the Eighteenth Dynasty mortuary temple of Hatshepsut also at Deir el-Bahri, which was thus integrated into the Beautiful Feast of the Valley: Bard 2015, 235–237. It is possible that her integration of Amun in that temple goes back to an innovation by Nebhepetre Mentuhotep.
[51] Willems 2020, 39.

while emphasizing its central position in the local cultic landscape, which will be discussed more below with regards to the Beautiful Feast of the Valley as well as local elite tombs.

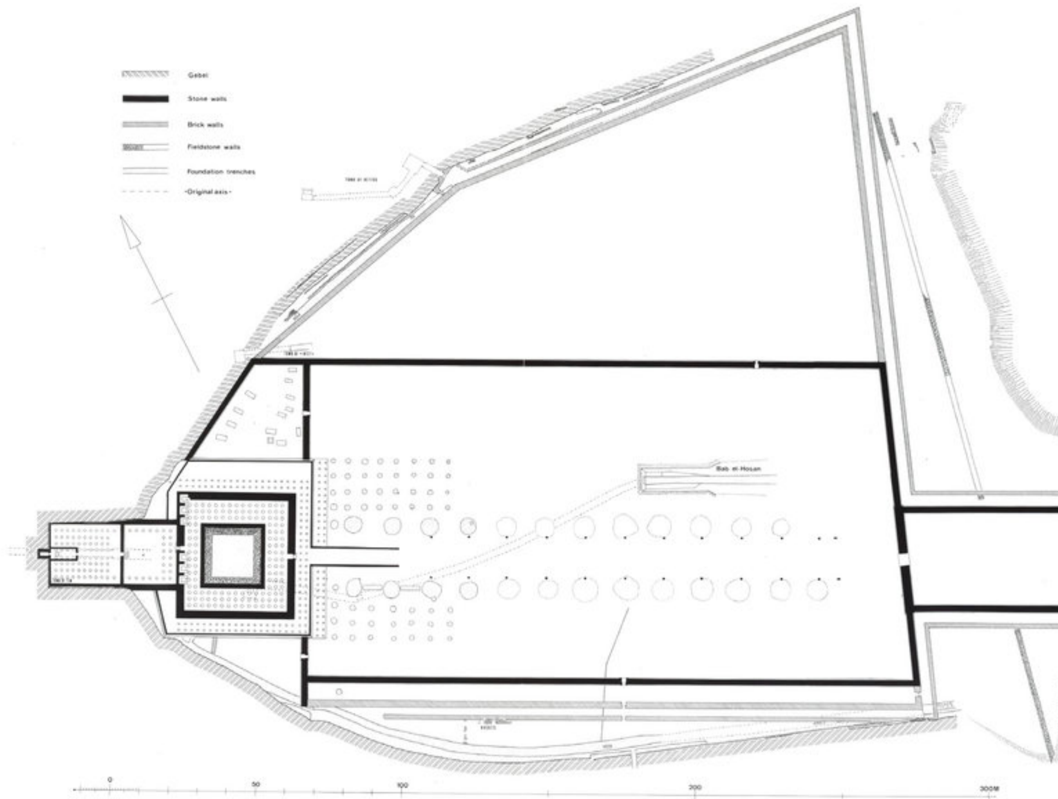

Figure 4.2: Deir el-Bahri temple plan (Di. Arnold 1979, pl. 38).

In the beginning of the Twelfth Dynasty, Amenemhat I commissioned the construction of a pyramid at Lisht (Figure 4.3).[52] Pyramid building had begun in the Third Dynasty and continued through the Old Kingdom.[53] Amenemhat I's decision to again build a pyramid after the rise of different royal tomb forms in the First Intermediate Period and Eleventh Dynasty is

[52] For more information on the pyramid, see: Di. Arnold 2015b; Jánosi 2016.
[53] Though the first "true" pyramid is attributed to Snefru, rather than Djoser (who built the so-called Step Pyramid). For a complete overview of royal pyramids throughout pharaonic history, see Lehner 1997. In the Third and Fourth Dynasties so-called provincial pyramids were also built. They are thought to have been associated with royal cult but to not have served a funerary function. These monuments are not discussed in this chapter, since it is difficult to determine whether any of them were sites of post-Old Kingdom activity (e.g., the one at Edfu had a limited period of use: Marouard and Papazian 2012, 6–8). Their purpose is also debated: see Ćwiek 1998.

usually considered a purposeful return to Old Kingdom traditions, and pyramids continued to be built throughout the rest of the Twelfth Dynasty and by some Thirteenth Dynasty kings. [54] Pyramids were thus the standard form of royal burial for almost 800 years, and to suggest that they retained the same meaning throughout that time would be foolish. There are no texts that directly address the symbolism of royal pyramids in any period,[55] which makes it difficult to hypothesize about potential changing meanings,[56] even if we can speak of changing forms.[57] The basic function of pyramids was to serve as the burial place of the king. That they were additionally meant as visual representations of kingship—or whether that was their actual effect—is merely a guess,[58] albeit a logical one. Beyond their tie to kingship, they are associated with the *benben* stone and the creation of the world,[59] as well as potentially with natural cliff formations, characteristic landforms in royal burial places of the Early Dynastic and New Kingdom in the south of Egypt.[60] These distinct but related categories of potential meaning

[54] Wildung 2003; Billing 2011. See also Di. Arnold 2015b and Jánosi 2016. We lack evidence for much of the Thirteenth Dynasty royal burials. Some early New Kingdom kings of the Seventeenth Dynasty also built small pyramids at Dra Abu el-Naga: Lehner 1997, 188–189. For the pyramid of Senwosret I, see: Di. Arnold 1988; Di. Arnold 1992a; Senwosret III: Di. Arnold 2002; Amenemhat III: Di. Arnold 1987; Uphill 2000; Blom-Böer 2006.
[55] Billing 2011, 59. The Middle Kingdom pyramids also lack the Pyramid Texts traditional of late Old Kingdom pyramids, though those texts are notoriously difficult to interpret (Billing 2011, 53–54).
[56] This lack of texts has also led to much debate about their function, both in academia and outside of it. For instance, while Assmann wrote that pyramids did not stand for the personal glorification of the king (1984, 100), Cooney (2021, chapter 2) claims that their purpose was to “divinize authoritarianism, to moralize absolute power, to turn kings into inviolable superhumans.” Outside of academia, ridiculous theories range from pyramids being built by aliens to serving as grain storage.
[57] There are two main pyramid complex types, one that can be tied to Djoser’s Step Pyramid and the other to most pyramids after Snefru’s at Meidum. Main formal changes include a switch in orientation from north-south to east-west and the locations of entrances and the mortuary temple, as well as the addition of a causeway on the later type. See Lehner 1997 for an overview. The composition of pyramids also changed over time, with many of the Twelfth Dynasty examples being constructed out of brick rather than stone: Silva 2020.
[58] Creasman and Doyle 2015, 84.
[59] The *benben* is a pyramidal stone, part of Egyptian cosmological stories that conceptualize the creation of the world. It is associated with the primeval mound, the first part of the world to have risen from the universal ocean. The actual stone is thought to have been kept in a shrine at Heliopolis, the Benben Enclosure (Quirke 1992, 27). The stone was also deeply associated with the solar cult and is usually interpreted as the inspiration for the shapes of pyramids and pyramid capstones, as well as obelisks (Kemp 2006, 137). Some, however, disagree with the solar cult interpretation: Bauval 1989.
[60] Bestock unpublished manuscript. I am also currently working on a paper about this with Didi El-Behaedi.

suggest that pyramids could signify different things to different people, potentially in distinct periods. It would be silly to suggest that kingship was not their most salient association; the question, really, is who would have seen or known about them, and when.

Figure 4.3: What remains of the pyramid of Amenemhat I at Lisht, with a modern cemetery in the foreground that serves as scale (photograph courtesy of Ernesto Graf).

Besides returning to Old Kingdom models, it has been suggested that Amenemhat I's choice to commission a pyramid was related to a desire for a more restricted type of monument.[61] This idea might be amusing in light of the sheer monumentality of pyramids, but it is unclear how much interaction actually occurred between these monuments and people beyond priests and the royal court. Royal funerary processions, for instance, moved through pyramid causeways, a feature present in all major Twelfth Dynasty pyramids.[62] Remains of the causeway

[61] Gillam 2005, 51. In particular perhaps because he is thought to have begun construction on a funerary monument similar to that of Nebhepetre at Thebes: Arnold 1991.
[62] Amenemhat I (Lehner 1997, 169), Senwosret I (Lehner 1997, 170–172), Amenemhat II (Lehner 1997, 174), Senwosret II (Lehner 1997, 176), Senwosret III (Lehner 1997, 178), Amenemhat III (Lehner 1997, 181, 183). The pyramids of the last few kings of the Twelfth Dynasty have not been securely identified but may have been built at Mazghuna: Lehner 1997, 184–185.

of Senwosret I, particularly life size statues of the king placed at regular intervals inside it,[63] suggest that movement through that space was highly ritualized. Reliefs from the causeway of Amenemhat I, in turn, suggest that the group allowed to move through it was restricted: they depict processions of foreigners, estates, nobles, and gods.[64] If the funerary context of the reliefs was not enough of a hint that they cannot be considered accurate reflections of reality, the inclusion of gods would be. But it is still unlikely that participation in the royal funerary ritual in this way would have been possible for anyone other than priests, high officials, or members of the court.[65] As mentioned in Chapter 3 with regards to Lahun, this restriction does not necessarily mean that the event could not have otherwise been visible and attended,[66] or that others could not have approached the pyramid outside the causeway. For the royal funeral, rather than regular mortuary rituals, it is also logical that the procession would have traveled through the river to the valley temple before proceeding through the causeway, and it is not unlikely that it would have been accompanied by pomp and circumstance.[67] The discrepancies in the ways in which different groups participated in royal funerary events goes back to the notion of heterogeneous religious experience. The lack of frequency of royal funerary processions might have made them more salient, but the variability in access might also have conditioned that salience and defined it differently for different people.[68]

More concrete evidence for engagement with pyramids was discovered in Meidum, specifically in the funerary temple of the monument usually ascribed to Snefru of the Fourth

[63] Lehner 1997, 170–172.
[64] Lehner 1997, 169.
[65] See Willems 2020, 33.
[66] See Gillam 2002, 137.
[67] While obviously an anachronistic example, it is worth remembering the fanfare associated with the movement of the rediscovered royal mummies in the Deir el-Bahri cache, or in the recent transport of the royal mummies from the museum in Tahrir Square to the new Grand Egyptian Museum.
[68] See also Lysen 2022, 420.

Dynasty. The graffiti found there probably date to the Twelfth Dynasty and record the personal names of either visitors to the monument or priests associated with royal cult at the site.[69] The royal cult of Snefru was reinvigorated in the Twelfth Dynasty,[70] so it is plausible that these were priests. Snefru's was not the only cult of an Old Kingdom king practiced in the Middle Kingdom, with additional examples including a cult of Niuserra (Fifth Dynasty) at Abusir early in this period.[71] As discussed in Chapter 3, there was also a potential attachment to Old Kingdom kings in Memphis at this time.[72] If the inscribers of the graffiti at Meidum *were* visitors rather than priests associated with that monument or another cult of Snefru, it is worth wondering whether the reason why we lack many graffiti from contemporary Middle Kingdom pyramids goes beyond the fact that visitors' graffiti did not become common until the New Kingdom.[73] It is surely of note that one of the only examples of this practice at this time comes from an older pyramid, making it possible that both interest and access were consequences of the pyramid's age. In discussing the cult of Niuserra at Abusir, Antonio Morales drew a distinction between the official royal cult and popular manifestations of piety directed towards the king who in death had become a "saint."[74] This appears related to the discussion of Lahun letters in Chapter 3, where it seemed that kings were only invoked once they were dead. The king's state of being—whether he was dead or alive—was therefore also a significant axis of engagement. Once kings were

[69] Peden 2001, 27.
[70] His funerary monuments at Dahshur were restored and reused for worship of the king: Fakhry 1954; Ventura 1985. This is also evidenced by a second phase of occupation in the valley temple of the Bent Pyramid: Moeller 2016, 141–144. Snefru's cult was also practiced in the mining region of the Sinai: Lupo de Ferriol 1993; Ventura 1985. And there are Middle Kingdom mentions of cults of Snefru in Moalla and Asfun in Upper Egypt: Papazian 2021, 207. Quirke even thinks that one of the reasons for the location of Twelfth Dynasty pyramids in the Fayum may have been a desired for association with Snefru: Quirke 2005, 9–10.
[71] See Morales 2006.
[72] See also Malek 2000 for other examples in Memphis.
[73] Peden 2001, 290.
[74] Morales 2006, 314, 341. It is likely more accurate to refer to deified kings as "gods" rather than "saints," however, since at least modern terminology distinguishes between gods and saints: Troche 2021, 64. See also Malek 2000 on Memphis.

dead, they became more accessible, or perhaps more desirable as objects of worship. We cannot push this too far, since cults to Old Kingdom kings were not commonplace in the Middle Kingdom—but they certainly existed.

Another Middle Kingdom pyramid with tangible evidence of engagement in the form of graffiti is the Dahshur monument of Senwosret III. An impressive number of inscriptional graffiti date to the New Kingdom, which demonstrates the monument's continued significance at that time,[75] while perhaps reinforcing the above point that pyramids became more accessible to visitors some time after they were built. More interesting for our purposes is a collection of figurative graffiti discovered in the underground apartments of the pyramid, including its serdab.[76] The graffiti assemblage includes almost fifty foreign-looking male profiles, which have been identified as Asiatics based on their hairstyles and clothing (Figure 4.4).[77] Previously dated to the Ramesside period, it now seems more likely that these images should actually be associated with the Thirteenth Dynasty and the end of the Middle Kingdom.[78] At least, a vessel found at the entrance of the tunnel leading to the chambers and a graffito depicting an Egyptian in a style characteristic of the late Middle Kingdom indicate that the interior of the pyramid was already accessible from the outside by that point.[79] Departing from the likely assumption that Asiatics themselves left the graffiti behind in Dahshur, Dorothea Arnold suggests that they visited the monument in religious pilgrimage and that the graffiti were inscribed in response to a

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[75] For the New Kingdom graffiti at the Dahshur pyramid complex, see Navratilova 2013; Navratilova 2022a. For broader considerations of graffiti (or "secondary epigraphy") as significant loci of engagement with Old and Middle Kingdom pyramid complexes in the New Kingdom, see Navratilova 2022b.
[76] Di. Arnold 2002, 42.
[77] Do. Arnold 2010, 204.
[78] Do. Arnold 2010. Di. Arnold 2002, 100 claimed that other Middle Kingdom graffiti would be published by Felix Arnold but that study has not materialized, and it is unclear whether that is in reference to inscriptions such as control notes, which occur at the monument from the Middle Kingdom: Navratilova 2013.
[79] Do. Arnold 2010.

religious experience they underwent there.[80] It is impossible to say whether that is the correct interpretation, and if it is accurate it would provide an interesting contrast to the lack of similar Middle Kingdom graffiti of *Egyptians* going on similar “pilgrimages” to contemporary monuments. Another obvious possibility is that the graffiti represent some sort of statement against the monument, or perhaps a statement that those Asiatics had the ability to visit—or trespass?—there. At least, this provides a thought-provoking comparison to the example of houses being built against the Lisht North pyramid discussed in Chapter 3. Both cases suggest that, in the late Twelfth and Thirteenth Dynasties, these Middle Kingdom pyramid complexes were no longer restricted in access, or that any restrictions were not actively enforced.

Figure 4.4: Graffiti on the north wall of the serdab in Senwosret III’s pyramid at Dahshur (Di. Arnold 2002, pl. 24).

[80] Do. Arnold 205–206.

Pyramids were massive, and they survive to us today as obvious statements of the power of Egyptian kings. They are perhaps not very different in this respect from modern monumental courthouses or government buildings around the world, which despite not being entered by most of the population can still make effective impressions of state power on that population. However, differently from the Palace of Westminster or the White House—which are embedded into London and Washington, D.C., respectively— pyramids were usually built at some distance from population centers (compare Figures 4.5 and 4.6 to Figure 4.8). Their immense size made them highly noticeable in the landscape, but it is not always clear who would have actually seen them—it is difficult to judge how mobile the average Egyptian might have been.[81] It is thus also important to think about their location in relation to where people actually lived. Some Old Kingdom pyramids, including those at Giza and Saqqara, could be seen from the capital at Memphis (Figure 4.7).[82] But they were not *in* Memphis and were only close to pyramid towns such as Heit el-Ghurab, where Egyptians involved in the construction of the pyramids lived.[83] At least some Middle Kingdom pyramids were near settlement sites, including presumably those at Lisht, though the nearby capital of Itjtawy has thus far not been located, and certainly that of Senwosret II at Lahun (Figure 4.8).[84] But as discussed in Chapter 3, it is unclear who would have actually seen the Lahun pyramid and when, and it seems to have been purposefully kept separate from the walled town at least to an extent.

[81] For a discussion of the mobility of specifically New Kingdom artists, see Vivas Sainz 2017.
[82] Jeffreys 2009, 257.
[83] Lehner 2015; Lehner 2016. It is also possible that Heit el-Ghurab served as a port: Lehner 2013.
[84] For Itjtawy, see Lorand 2013b, 137; Moeller 2016, 360.

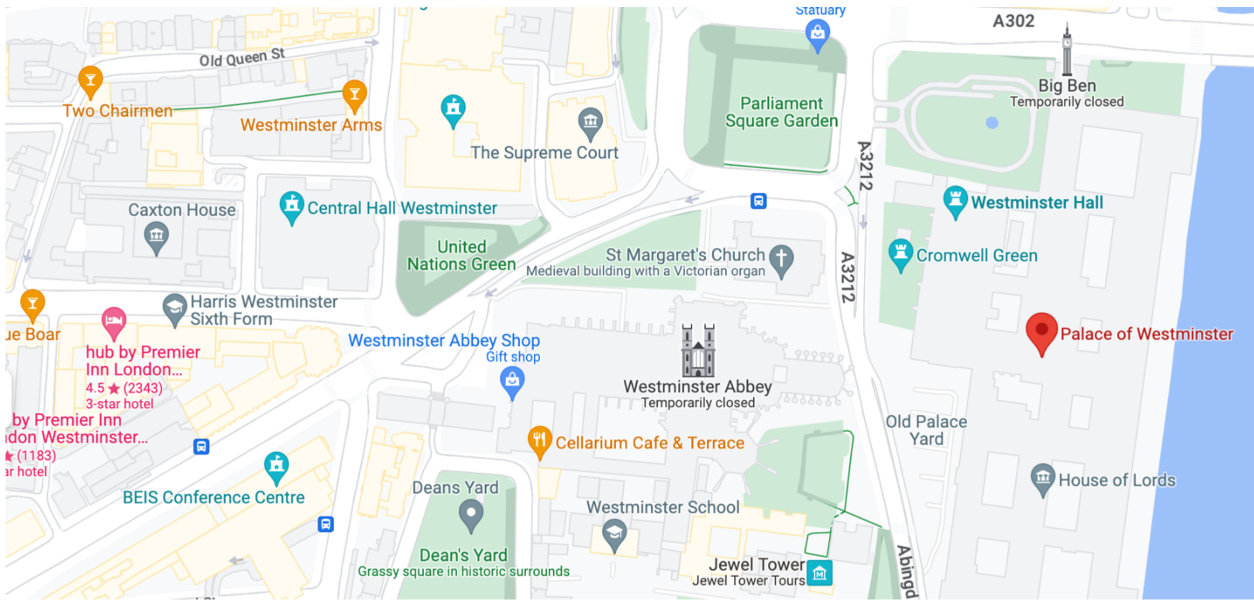

Figure 4.5: The Palace of Westminster relative to the wider City of Westminster in London (from Google Maps).

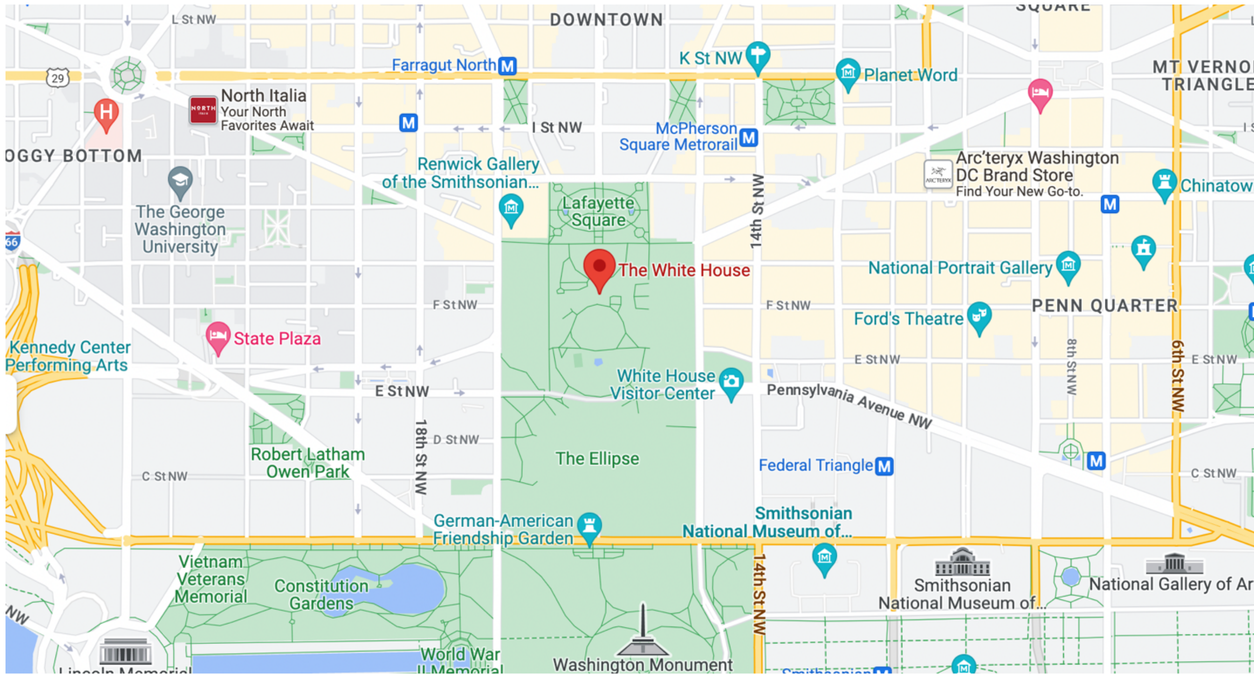

Figure 4.6: The White House shown relative to nearby neighborhoods in Washington, D.C. (from Google Maps).

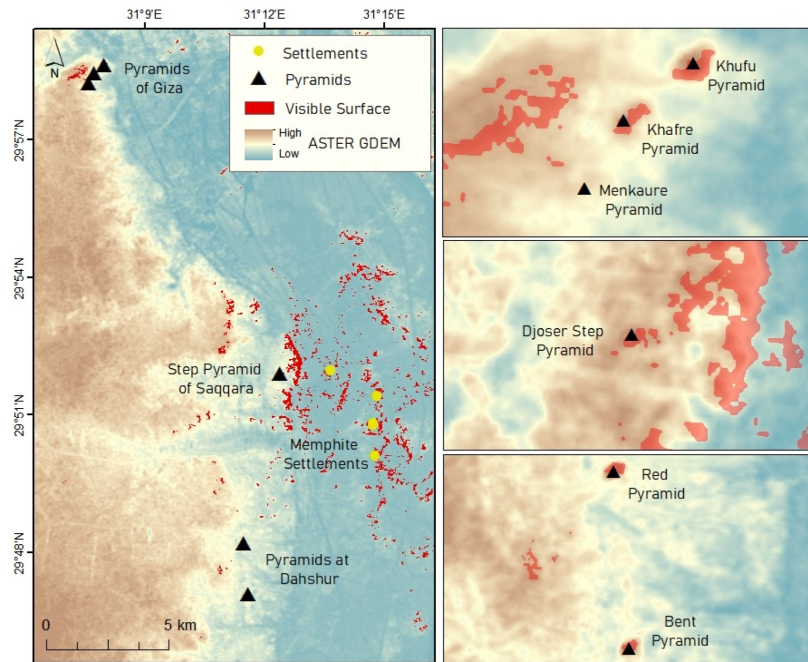

Figure 4.7: Cumulative viewshed of Old Kingdom pyramids from the capital of Memphis (figure by Didi El-Behaedi).

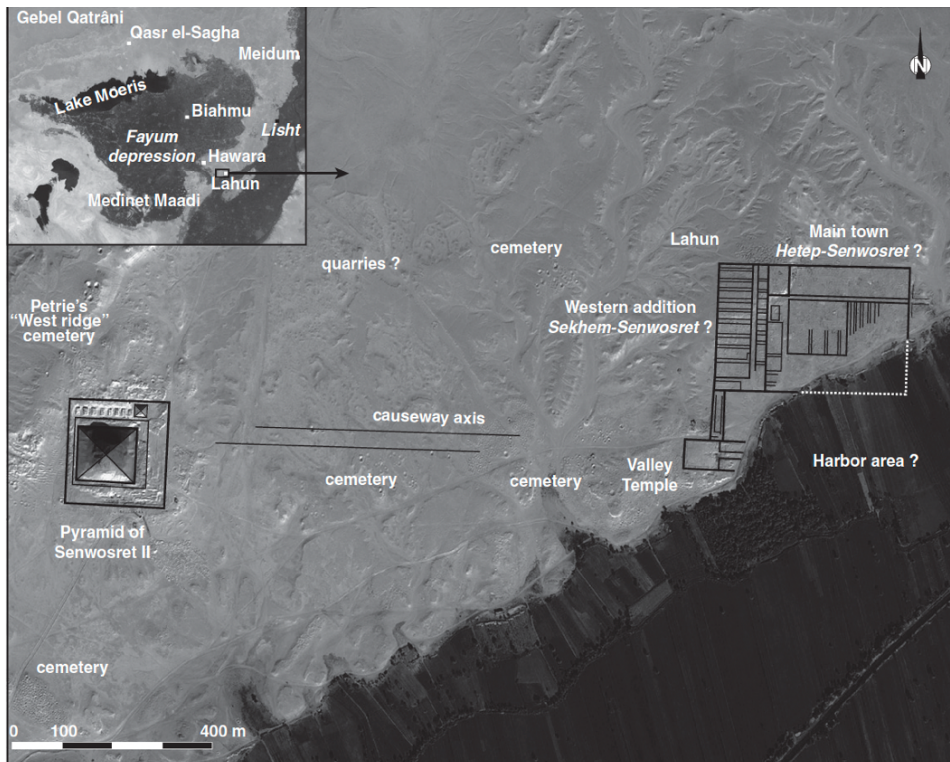

Figure 4.8: Annotated satellite image showing the walled town of Lahun in relation to the pyramid of Senwosret II (Moeller 2016, 272, fig. 8.19).

This difference in the apparent relationship between pyramids and living areas in ancient Egypt, and monuments such as the Palace of Westminster or the White House and modern cities, may of course be a consequence of pyramids' nature as funerary monuments rather than places of administration or residence. This might therefore be an unfair comparison, and this analysis would perhaps lead in quite different directions if there were preserved Middle Kingdom royal palaces to think about. It is also possible that other types of royal monuments—such as statues—were placed in towns, and that we simply do not have evidence for them.[85] Two colossal statues of Amenemhat III at Biahmu (Figure 4.9), thought to have stood at least 60 feet tall,[86] looked over Lake Moeris.[87] They may have monumentalized a road headed either to the capital or Crocodilopolis and its Sobek temple.[88] Since the Fayum was an area of royal interest and patronage in the Twelfth Dynasty the presence of such monuments makes sense, if their purpose was to indicate and support such interest. They were not directly near any population centers, and the infrequent glimpses that travelers would get of them was perhaps part of their power.

[85] Senwosret I's monument at Abgig in the Fayum, for instance, might have served as a tangible sign of kingship: Zecchi 2005, Zecchi 2008. For the capacity of monumental art to create meaningful places in Iron Age Anatolia, see Gilibert 2011, chapter 5. For a discussion of colossal statues of Ramses II in temple courtyards and their veneration, see Brand 2023, 394–399.
[86] Petrie 1889, 55. They would have been visible in the landscape: Willems 2014, 109, citing Di. Arnold 1992b.
[87] Petrie 1889, 2. The statues seem to have been placed in the middle of courtyards surrounded by walls at least six courses high: Petrie 1889, 54.
[88] Petrie 1889, 55; Willems 2014, 109, citing Di. Arnold 1992b.

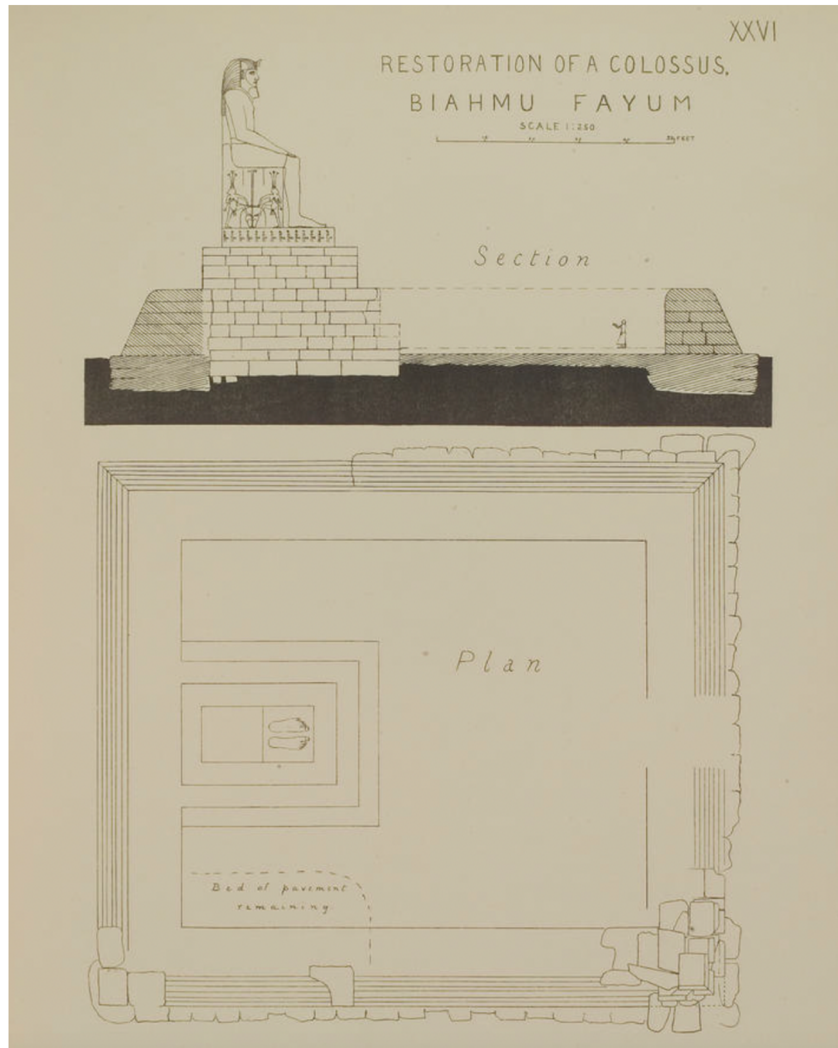

Figure 4.9: Reconstruction of one of the Biahmu pedestals by Petrie (Petrie 1889, pl. xxvi).

The extreme contrast between the size of pyramids, their consequent visual accessibility in the landscape, and their likely restricted nature and distance from people's daily realities is conspicuous.[89] It is valid to suppose that these funerary monuments sent different messages to different audiences: for instance, the small circle of humans and gods who engaged with the monument directly and the broader Egyptian population who likely did not (or at least not often). To the former, pyramids perhaps signaled the king's power in a more legible way, one that was

[89] Baines 2006, 262.

reassuring for demonstrating his ability to sustain both the elites and the gods. To the latter, they likely remained impressive. But it is possible that their inaccessibility made them symbols of an equally distant and inaccessible sovereign, and that this was an intentional communicated effect of the structures. These monumental symbols may have been activated and become more legible or at least more accessible during festivals or processions, though it is still difficult to say what exactly they might have signaled.

Built pyramids may or may not have been visible and accessible at different points by different people. The *building* of pyramids also needs to be taken into account in two main ways: the effect that such a monumental construction project would have had on the Egyptian population, and the potential of such monumental construction processes to be significant loci of performance. Classic examples of conspicuous consumption from an etic perspective, the building of pyramids required incredibly high investments of both resources and, more pertinent for this discussion, manpower. As Miroslav Bárta has discussed, their construction would have firmly placed royal and elite people on one side and the *rekhyt*, or commoners, on the other.[90] With regards to the construction of the Great Pyramid at Giza, commissioned by Khufu in the Fourth Dynasty of the Old Kingdom, Bárta estimated that at least ten thousand men worked on the construction itself for 250 days a year, for twenty years or longer.[91] This number would have been increased by thousands of others needed for other tasks, such as maintaining the royal cult. In total, Bárta estimates that 200,000 to 250,000 people (including not only the workers themselves but also their families) received either direct or indirect income from pyramid construction.[92] He also emphasizes that pyramid building would have been only one of many

[90] Bárta 2022. Graeber and Wengrow (2021, 865) think the pyramids would have only manifested power when they were being constructed.
[91] Bárta 2022, 227–228.
[92] Bárta 2022, 230.

construction projects or expeditions commissioned or mounted by kings during any single reign. All of this means that conscription of labor was likely one of the very real ways in which kingship was manifest in non-royal communities in Egypt, including in the Middle Kingdom, even if it is now not tangible in the archaeological record of settlements and households (see Chapter 3). Kings were present in local contexts through the absence of people who were away from their homes and families working for them.[93] This absence may have been longer or more fraught for non-elite Egyptians who took part in hard labor rather than those of higher social classes, such as craftsmen or administrators: this is thus likely another way in which status affected engagement with kingship at different levels.

Beyond the potential of pyramid construction to affect conscripted royal subjects and their wider communities, it is possible that the process of construction was also a meaningful moment of performance.[94] Reliefs from the pyramid causeway of Fifth Dynasty king Sahure show the dragging of his pyramid's capstone in a public event,[95] and similar occurrences could have taken place during the construction of Twelfth Dynasty monuments such as Amenemhat I's pyramid at Lisht.[96] For instance, a Twelfth Dynasty text from Lahun seems to mention a festival that celebrated the raising of an obelisk.[97] Perhaps large numbers of people were not only engaged with the monument as the necessary workforce, therefore, but also as spectators of construction festivals. Spectacles of construction and transportation of both building materials and finished monuments are common across different cultures, including—just to name a few—ancient Rome, the Inca Empire, and Iron Age Upper Mesopotamia.[98] A close parallel to Sahure's

[93] See Stoler 2008 for a discussion of the effects of imperial constructions on people, and how long it can take to extricate oneself from their power (in her case, ruins rather than contemporary monuments).
[94] Baines 2015, 32.
[95] Baines 2006, 266–267.
[96] Silva 2023.
[97] Papyrus fragment UC32371: Collier and Quirke 2006, 120.
[98] For a discussion that focuses on Egypt but engages with these and other cross-cultural examples, see Silva 2023.

relief, for instance, are Neo-Assyrian reliefs from the reign of Sargon II that depict the quarrying and dragging of *lamassu* statues.[99] Though such spectacles could differ in purpose and motivation, they are often ultimately interpreted as demonstrations of political authority.

In a study of festivals in Anatolian Iron Age sites such as Carchemish and Zincirli, Alessandra Gilibert argued that large-scale, open-air figurative reliefs were used as a backdrop to significant ritual events, and that this combination of monuments and festivals effectively created a potent memory of the event that would have remained powerful after the fact.[100] Building on some of the scholarship on monumentality, memory, and performance discussed above, she provides a useful case study for the materialization of ideology. It is likely that the reliefs under discussion in Gilibert's book, which were purposefully placed in courtyards, were much more accessible than many of the depictions discussed in this chapter, including Sahure's relief placed in a causeway. However, it would be a mistake to assume that the combination of monumentality (either in terms of built monuments or artworks) and festivals or performances would have functioned differently in Egypt. The lack of iconographic evidence for large groups of spectators cannot be taken as evidence of absence—neither the absence of the iconography itself, which might have existed and simply not survived (something maybe suggested by examples from the New Kingdom), nor of the spectators. Construction spectacles, if they did occur, might indicate some degree of public understanding and appreciation of the monument's function, at least in the generation when it was erected. We know that such spectacles occurred in the case of local leaders, for which see below.

Textual evidence also suggests the occurrence of festivals at the mortuary temple of Senwosret III at Abydos, an example that serves as an informative complement to pyramids.

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[99] Barnett, Bleibtreu, and Turner 1998.
[100] Gilibert 2011.

None of the evidence is definitive, but there are suggestions that statue or bark processions took place on festival days.[101] As with the example of Nebhepetre Mentuhotep at Deir el-Bahri, this would likely have linked the king to the wider sacred landscape of Abydos (for which see below). Josef Wegner has suggested that the most probable route for such processions was to leave the royal temple in the south and head to the Osiris temple in the north, a route visible to habitation areas in North Abydos—rather than South Abydos, or Wah-Sut.[102] This is an intriguing possibility in light of the analysis of Wah-Sut in Chapter 3, where it was said that the town mayor was likely more present in the settlement than the king. That analysis remains valid, though it is complicated by the possibility of occasional royal rituals. Unless there were also processions that went south rather than north (see Figure 4.10), they would not necessarily have been visible from Wah-Sut itself. But it stands to reason that residents might have left the town to observe the festivities. As argued in Chapter 3 regarding the possibility that the king visited Lahun and that his local importance might have increased during those visits, these potential processions also need to be thought of in terms of periodicity. If the royal temple was indeed the center of ritual processions different from the ways in which the mayor's residence was used, it is likely that such processions would highlight the importance of the king to the local context of Wah-Sut and Abydos. This does not mean that the mayor should not be understood as the most accessible source of local power, only that the king could *also* have been salient. Processions were also ways in which Egyptians engaged with divine contexts, though in those cases there is more concrete evidence for such interactions.

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[101] Wegner 1996, 283, 290–291, 415.
[102] Wegner 1996, 296.

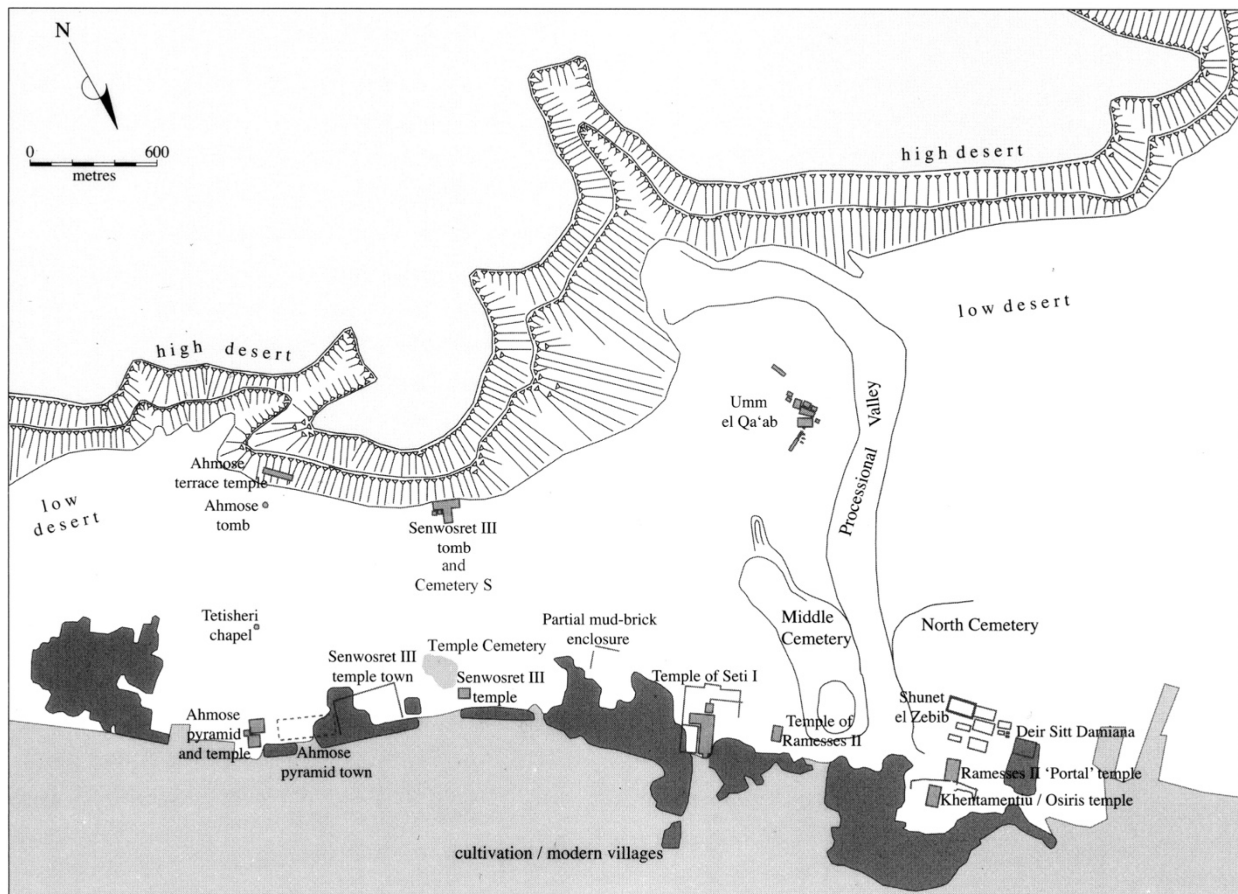

Figure 4.10: Map of the greater Abydos area, showing the Senwosret III temple in relation to Wah-Sut and the temple of Osiris, as well as the processional valley going from the Osiris temple to Umm el-Qaab and the Great Wadi (Cahail 2014a, figure 1.1).

§3.2 Divine monuments and festivals

Ancient Egyptian temples—both royal and divine—were by and large exclusive spaces. But during festivals, the boundaries between secret rituals and the outside world were temporarily suspended. Common people were able to interact with gods, normally in processions.[103] Such occurrences are frequently represented in New Kingdom temple reliefs and

[103] Assmann 1994, 20. Gods' statues often remained concealed inside shrines, but even so that was a closer interaction than that which regular people had with gods elsewhere: Stadler 2008, 1–3.

so seem to have been more common then, though it is possible that we simply lack similar temple decoration from the Middle Kingdom, since there is a vast difference in the amount of preserved temple reliefs from those two periods. At any rate, there are still meaningful conclusions to be taken from Middle Kingdom divine festivals. This section first discusses the sparse information remaining from Middle Kingdom temples, then moves to how festivals illuminate our understanding of Middle Kingdom religious experience despite their ephemeral nature.

Major New Kingdom temples are thought to have been largely restrictive, evidenced by textual evidence, but for earlier periods the picture is less clear. They were likely more embedded in local than state contexts in the Early Dynastic period and the architecture of Old Kingdom sacred places appears "more approachable" than later temples, but priestly titles associated with local elites hint at the hierarchization of temples and cult already in that period.[104] Temples started becoming more formalized in the Eleventh Dynasty, with increased royal investment in provincial temples.[105] Unfortunately not much remains from Middle Kingdom temples, but we do know that local mayors were usually also the heads of temples in this period,[106] which suggests that they remained embedded in their local contexts despite increased levels of royal patronage.

A temple built by Amenemhat III at Medinet Madi in the Fayum, dedicated to the gods Sobek and Renenutet, is largely preserved but not much has been published beyond architectural plans and reliefs.[107] There is also some evidence at Karnak of a temple complex used throughout

[104] Bussmann 2020, 508.
[105] See Bussmann 2010, Bussmann 2015a, Bussmann 2017.
[106] This was the case in Bubastis, for instance, for which see Chapter 3. It was also the case in Elephantine: Hope and Kaper 2010, 229. The title "mayor and overseer of priests" was introduced in Nebhepetre Mentuhotep's reign in the Eleventh Dynasty: Franke 1994, 11; Hope and Kaper 2010, 226.
[107] See, e.g., Bresciani et al. 2006.

the Middle Kingdom, likely starting in the Eleventh Dynasty.[108] This includes Senwosret I's famous White Chapel, which may indicate that bark processions took place in Thebes.[109] There were also votive statues and offering tables left in the sanctuary of Amun-Ra, which suggests that those who made offerings did so in order to be close to the god.[110] The portion of the population able to make such offerings seems to have been restricted, and both statues and stelae offered there were often provided by the king.[111] Senwosret I himself offered monuments to royal ancestors at Karnak, including statues of Sahure, Niuserre, and Antef-Aa, which further supports the royal association of cult practice at this temple.[112] That divine temples included royal and private statue shrines is true from the Old Kingdom onwards.[113] The construction of such chapels increased in the Eleventh Dynasty, which has been interpreted as a mechanism for expressing the association between kingship and local gods.[114] The same is often said for renovations and expansions of local temples by kings.[115]

A useful case study for exploring the dynamics of kings and gods at the level of local temples, and in turn how these spaces were approached by local people, is the temple of Satet at Elephantine. This is the temple whose history is best known in this period,[116] though it cannot be taken as a model for temple interaction more broadly since it was embedded in a highly localized context.[117] The Satet temple was part of a bigger temple precinct, which included the shrine of

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[108] Gabolde et al. 1999; Charloux 2005.
[109] There is apparently some debate on whether the chapel originally functioned as a barque shrine, or whether it simply housed statues: Sabbahy 2021, 156.
[110] Postel 2000, 227–230.
[111] E.g., stela Cairo JE 37515 from the late Middle Kingdom (Enany 2008), which includes mention of a high-ranking "ornament of the king"; stela Cairo JE 37507 from the Thirteenth Dynasty (Bazin and Enany 2010), which was given as a reward by the king.
[112] Lorand 2013a.
[113] Kamrin 1992, 79.
[114] Wegner 1996, 88–89.
[115] E.g., that of the Osiris temple at Abydos (Wegner 1996, 124–125).
[116] F. Arnold 2020, 37.
[117] Bussmann 2013, 21. Also see Wilde 2020.

Heqaib discussed above, the Nile festival courtyard, the Temple of Khnum, and the main street of Elephantine, which was established in the Middle Kingdom and used as a processional route during festivals (see Figure 3.14).[118] The Satet temple, which had existed in various forms since the Predynastic period, was rebuilt and formalized by Nebhepetre Mentuhotep in the Eleventh Dynasty, and then again by Senwosret I in the Twelfth Dynasty.[119] In discussing Senwosret I's reconstruction, Felix Arnold pointed out that the Twelfth Dynasty building was meant for the safeguarding of the goddess' cult image rather than community worship, which was made possible through cultic processions later in the Eighteenth Dynasty, in the temple built by Hatshepsut. In the Twelfth Dynasty, the king served an important role as the protector of the goddess who lived inside the sacred building. Senwosret I's temple was built shorter than its enclosure and its white limestone walls stood out from the surrounding landscape, which would have emphasized its otherness (Figure 4.11).[120] The Middle Kingdom temple is sometimes described as a royal institution in contrast to the earlier "local temple," an argument tied to the "two cultures" model developed by Barry Kemp discussed in Chapter 2.[121] But royal patronage does not necessarily translate to sole royal visibility, as will be argued below with the Abydos festival.

[118] The Nile festival court, used in festivals associated with the Nile flood, contained a water tank that might have been used by locals: Moeller 2016, 308. This would be a rare example of a religious space that was also accessible by regular Egyptians on a presumably relatively regular basis.
[119] Bussmann 2013, 22, 31; F. Arnold 2020, 37–39.
[120] F. Arnold 2020, 40–42, fig. 3.
[121] E.g., Bussmann 2013, 21.

Figure 4.11: A reconstruction of Senwosret I's version of the temple of Satet at Elephantine (F. Arnold 2020, fig. 3; photograph courtesy of Felix Arnold / German Archaeological Institute).

Despite the seemingly limited function of the temple in this period, evidence still suggests that locals presented offerings, presumably to Satet herself. Votive objects from the Middle Kingdom, as well as from earlier and later periods, were found deposited under and scattered across temple floors.[122] The assemblage includes items such as beads, vessels, figurines, and amulets, objects typically used in daily life and paralleled in finds from settlements (both Elephantine itself and others, such as Lahun) (Figure 4.12).[123] The types of objects discovered at the temple also parallel typical assemblages of votive offerings, assemblages that

[122] Bussmann 2013, 22–23.
[123] See the catalogue in Kopp 2020. Middle Kingdom votives occur across the catalogue, in most offering categories.

are usually associated with private religious initiative.[124] The significant quantity of objects and the repeated nature of offerings across several periods suggest that they were presented by locals, people who could regularly access the shrine over time. None of the Middle Kingdom votives from this temple include royal names. Since offerings presented by kings at provincial shrines or temples were often marked as royal in some way (see for instance the royal statues offered in the Heqaib shrine discussed in Chapter 3), this supports the argument that these votives were offered by non-royal people. The unofficial nature of these offerings is perhaps reflected in the presentation of faience amulets and pendants of Taweret,[125] a goddess primarily linked to private domestic cults due to her apotropaic capabilities, though she also sometimes appears in royal material.[126] These faience amulets were found associated with ceramic material from the Eleventh and early Twelfth Dynasties.

[124] See Kemp 1995.
[125] Kat. Nr. 471, 472, 474, 475, 476, 477, 478, 479: Kopp 2020.
[126] E.g., on statues of Sobekemsaf (Davies 1981, pl. IVB) and on a statue of Hatshepsut (Keller 2005, 171).

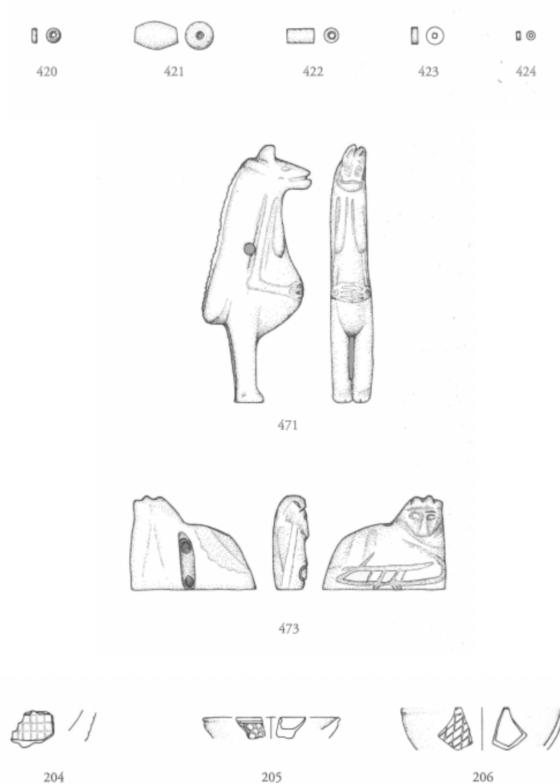

Figure 4.12: Examples of votives from Elephantine, including beads (top), amulets (middle), and model vessel fragments (bottom), all from the Eleventh and Twelfth Dynasties (image by author after Kopp 2020).

Faience objects are by far the most common finds in the votive deposits at the temple of Satet. Faience, due to its production from common and inexpensive raw materials, was both widespread in non-elite strata and used by elites (as well as sometimes found in royal tombs).[127] It can therefore not be considered a prestige good, and it similarly cannot be assumed that its use was restricted to non-elites. Faience figurines specifically concentrate in power centers in the late Middle Kingdom (Lisht, Lahun, Harageh, Thebes, and Abydos),[128] but though some faience figurines were found at the Satet temple there are also high numbers of other types of objects,

[127] Miniaci 2018b. See also Miniaci 2021 for further information on faience production.
[128] Miniaci 2018b, 151; Miniaci 2017.

such as amulets or game pieces.[129] The social profile of faience and the types of objects discovered at the temple suggest that these votives were presented not only by the high elite—people who could have offered silver or gold jewelry, which are also found in smaller quantities—but also perhaps by other residents of the town.

In discussing common people's access to gods in the Middle Kingdom, it is important to also discuss the role of festivals. Two of the major Theban divine festivals of the New Kingdom likely began in the Middle Kingdom (in the Eleventh Dynasty): the Beautiful Feast of the Valley and the Opet festival.[130] From later depictions we can tell that singers, musicians, and dancers took part in such occasions (Figure 4.13). This perhaps suggests that hymns were sung,[131] possibly not only by the performers but also by the population at large. During the Beautiful Feast of the Valley, both the royal and private dead benefitted from Amun's blessings and offerings,[132] and there was therefore an ideological connection between the king, the god, and the people.[133] The broader population participated in the festival by witnessing the procession of Amun from the east to the west bank, as well as conducting private rituals in ancestral family tombs.[134] This is an example of a feast that brought together different spheres of existence—the general population, the king and his circle, the divine, and the dead. As mentioned above, the temple of Nebhepetre Mentuhotep at Deir el-Bahri seems to have been a focal point of this festival, and it would thus be unwise to definitively separate Amun from the king here. The Opet's focus was the reinvigoration of both Amun and the king.[135] New Kingdom

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[129] See Kopp 2020.
[130] There are debates surrounding the period in which the Opet festival started: Sullivan 2008, 2; Warnemünde 2006; Darnell 2010, 4.
[131] Stadler 2008, 3.
[132] Fukaya 2007, 95–97, 115; Stadler 2008, 7.
[133] Fukaya 2007, 96–97.
[134] Fukaya 2007, 100.
[135] Stadler 2008, 6.

representations of the procession, for instance from the Colonnade Hall of the Luxor temple, suggest that the general population was able to observe the festivities.[136] This is another clear example of heterogeneous religious groups: certain Egyptians participated fully in the festival, while others watched. They likely experienced the event differently, therefore, but not necessarily in less significant ways.[137]

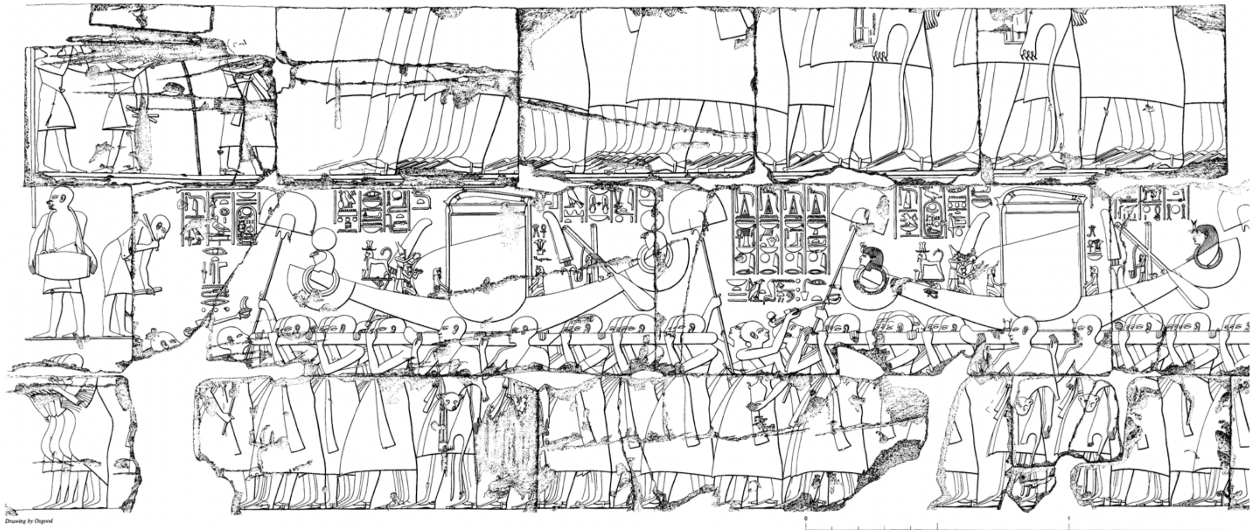

Figure 4.13: Example of relief picturing a portion of the Opet festival procession, with drummers visible on the top left (Epigraphic Survey 1994, pl. 14).

The most consequential festival of the Middle Kingdom, for which we have the most evidence, is that of the god Osiris at Abydos. Abydos was the burial place of the first kings of Egypt and the location of a funerary monument by Senwosret III.[138] It was a site with unquestionable significance for the expression of kingship. The Osiris festival has thus been

[136] Gillam 2005, 52, citing Schechner 1988; Romero Arduino 2018. For the reliefs, see Epigraphic Survey 1994.
[137] The significance of such occasions to spectators is made clear in the coronation inscriptions of Hatshepsut (Eighteenth Dynasty), for instance, which mention their awe at seeing both Hatshepsut herself and Amun: Breasted 1906–1907, volume II, 215–242.
[138] See O'Connor 2009.

associated by scholars with kingship,[139] in no small part because kingship is strongly thematized in the mythology and pageantry of Osiris. But because the procession was witnessed by different sectors of society, it is worth questioning what it might have meant to distinct audiences and participants.[140] Was the festival representative of kingship or the divine, or both, why did different actors participate, and how does that affect our interpretation of the visibility and experience of kingship at this site?

One of the reasons for the festival's association with kingship is the procession's destination at the cemetery of Early Dynastic kings at Umm el-Qaab. Starting in the Eleventh Dynasty, the festival procession left from the Osiris temple,[141] passed through an area with a concentration of private monuments, and headed to the tomb of Djer, which was in this period identified as that of Osiris (see Figure 4.10).[142] It is unclear to what extent Abydos was remembered as the primordial site of Egyptian kingship in this period, and by whom. It would be a stretch to suggest that a monument as prominent as the Shunet el-Zebib (Figure 4.14), a Second Dynasty funerary enclosure close to the cultivation, was irrelevant, and we know at least that respect for early Abydene monuments remained until much later periods.[143] Fragments of early kingship remained across the site, and yet its meaning in the Middle Kingdom seems to have differed for different audiences.

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[139] Moreno García 2019, 32, 146. Processions could have been both cultically and politically significant: Stadler 2008, 7.
[140] This is something often missing from Egyptological and broader studies of ancient rituals: Chaniotis 2006.
[141] Wegner 1996, 50–51: the temple was actually dedicated to Osiris-Khentiamentiu, the latter a canine god known as the "Foremost of the Westerners," associated with Abydos perhaps even before the Early Dynastic period.
[142] Wegner 1996, 50–51, 95; Kucharek 2006, 55; Stadler 2008, 2; Willems 2020, 36. There is some debate about when the tomb was associated with the god, but it makes sense that it was in the Twelfth Dynasty in the reign of Senwosret I, based on the increasing interest in rituals at the site at this time as well as seal impressions from Umm el-Qaab from his reign: Leahy 1989, 55–56; Snape 2019, citing Müller 2004.
[143] Snape 2019, 5–6; Bestock 2019.

Figure 4.14: The Shunet el-Zebib in the landscape of Abydos (photograph courtesy of Laurel Bestock).

A great concentration of non-royal monuments, including chapels—in which statues, offering tables, and stelae were found—and standalone stelae, were constructed in the so-called Terrace of the Great God behind the Osiris temple close to the cultivation.[144] Even though most stelae belong to officials who held high positions in the central administration and had links to the royal court, some also belonged to "middle class" Egyptians such as craftsmen, workers, farmers, and washermen.[145] Adding a monument to the site enabled continuous participation in the procession, which was more accessible than repeated physical presence at festivals, since that

[144] Simpson 1974; Gillam 2005, 58; Stadler 2008, 2; Whelan 2016. There is debate about whether some of the chapels might have been associated with burials, or whether they were solely meant for association with the Osiris festival: e.g., Simpson 1974, 3. Many of the stelae are not found in situ, but similar formulae often enable the identification of Abydos as their provenance: Snape 2019.
[145] Gillam 2005, 20, 58; Whelan 2016, 315–317. A priest Mentuhotep of the Eleventh Dynasty who left a stela at Abydos, for example, was described as a "humble" cattle farmer before he became a priest: Lichtheim 1988, 68. See also Szpakowska 2008, 146.

opportunity was uncommon for most.[146] Many of these stelae were set up by spectators of the procession, which included performances such as mock battles between the enemies of Osiris and his protectors, as described in the stela of Ikhernofret.[147] Most spectators were likely unable to access the beginning and end points of the procession at the Osiris temple and the tomb of Osiris at Umm el-Qaab,[148] which suggests a separation between different social spheres even in a public festival. Again, this emphasizes that there were different religious groups, but it does not mean that the event would not have been salient to spectators. On the contrary, the emphasis in the stelae inscriptions is in being able to participate in the act of worship.

In the Eleventh and Twelfth Dynasties, Abydene private stelae frequently included the so-called Abydos Formula, which mentions the expected provision of offerings by Osiris, as well as the desire to participate in the Osirian cult both in life and in death.[149] Ankhu, for instance, reveals that he went to Abydos in order to worship Osiris, and that he erected a stela when he was there.[150] Many stelae are not actually from Abydos, which suggests that some of their owners visited the site specifically to take part in the Osiris cult.[151] Carrying a stela from far away to present it to the god is illustrative of the effort required by those who were not local to Abydos to take part, and is thus revealing of the significance of participation in the wider sacred happenings at the site. Sometimes those who were unable to attend the festival and erect their monuments themselves did so by proxy,[152] which demonstrates the importance of participating in

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[146] Leahy 1989, 54; Gillam 2005, 58; Kucharek 2006, 60. See also Cahail 2015 on how *mahats* were integrated into the festival.
[147] Gillam 2005, 59; Baines 2006, 9. It has been said that audiences stood on the hills on either side of the wadi, for instance: Gunnels 2003, 12. For the stela of Ikhernofret (stela Berlin 1204), see Schäfer 1904.
[148] Kucharek 2006, 57–59.
[149] Wegner 1996, 62–63, 72–73; Gillam 2005, 56; Kucharek 2006, 54, 59. For instance: CCG 20099; CCG 20153; CCG 20538; CCG 20497; Louvre C 170; BM 573, HT II; BM 231, HT III (all cited in Simpson 1974, 10–13).
[150] Lichtheim 1988, 101.
[151] Snape 2019. One is from a Lahun official: Quirke 2005, 38; Szpakowska 2008, 145.
[152] Szpakowska 2008, 146.

one way or another. Nebipusenwosret, for instance, sent his memorial stela to Abydos under the care of an Abydene priest, who had been to the royal palace to attend the king's jubilee celebration.[153] The act of leaving a monument behind at the Terrace of the Great God turned ephemeral processions into something concrete: certainly for us now, and likely for the Egyptians themselves.

Non-royals were not the only ones who participated in the Osiris festival and it depended on royal patronage,[154] which some have cited as a reason for the cult's popularity.[155] The temple of Osiris itself was renovated by kings across the Middle Kingdom, particularly in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Dynasties.[156] There are remains of two ka chapels built by Nebhepetre and Sankhare Montuhotep of the Eleventh Dynasty, perhaps meant to emphasize the relationship between the veneration of the king and that of the god.[157] There is also evidence for the construction of royal cult buildings in the reigns of Twelfth Dynasty kings, including Senwosret I, Senwosret III, and Amenemhat III.[158] Royal interest continued in the Thirteenth Dynasty, demonstrated by cult buildings built by Neferhotep I, Sobekhotep IV, and Khuiqer,[159] as well as two stelae dated to the reign of Neferhotep I. One stela describes his visit to the site in order to participate in the "Osiris Mysteries," which suggests that kings joined the celebrations.[160] The decree on the other stela ensured the protection of the site's sacred area and banned it from use as a private cemetery.[161] The processional route remained free of construction until the Graeco-

[153] Lichtheim 1988, 101, 122.
[154] Gillam 2005, 58. See also Wegner 1996, 138.
[155] Whelan 2016, 317.
[156] See, for instance, Baines 2006.
[157] Wegner 1996, 74, 79, 81, 84–85, 94.
[158] Wegner 1996, 102.
[159] Wegner 1996, 102.
[160] Kucharek 2006, 56; Snape 2019. For the stela, see Helck 1983.
[161] Leahy 1989; Gillam 2005, 58.

Roman period, demonstrating the amount of royal influence at the site.[162] More importantly, it suggests that there was a considerable demand for space at Abydos for the construction of private monuments.

For kings, the significance of the Osiris cult at Abydos may have been tied to the origins of kingship, or to the role of the god as the divinity of the royal dead.[163] The level of royal support of the festival was also likely tied to its importance for the proper functioning of the cosmos.[164] The draw that royal patronage had for high officials, and the fact that many went there on royal missions,[165] also cannot be ignored. But this does not mean that for others the major connotation of the Osiris procession was its connection to the manifestation of kingship by living people. Inscriptions such as that on stela CCG 2009, in which it is said that the owner built the offering chapel "so that [he] may receive offerings in the presence of the great god," demonstrate the importance of *Osiris*.[166] It is important to note, of course, that Osiris was himself a king: not only in terms of obvious iconography, but also as a central element of the mythical narrative recreated by the procession, which is described by the inscriptions of both Ikhernofret and Neferhotep mentioned above. Some stelae in fact refer to Osiris in that capacity, as king of the gods or of the Two Lands.[167] Kingship therefore remained relevant in these inscriptions, but it was not specifically the power of the Egyptian ruler that seems to have been in play.

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[162] Gillam 2005, 58.
[163] A link that goes back at least to the Pyramid Texts in the Old Kingdom, and quite possibly earlier: Wegner 1996, 16, 24, 26–27, 31–33, 52.
[164] Kucharek 2006, 61.
[165] Snape 2019. For example, Amenisonbe from the Thirteenth Dynasty: Baines 2009. Also Ded-Ique in the reign of Senwosret I: Lichtheim 1988, 93–94.
[166] Simpson 1974, 10–11. Many other stelae do not mention the king at all and are decidedly focused on the god. E.g., the stela of Rudhahau in Lichtheim 1988, 70.
[167] Two stelae likely from Abydos with such inscriptions include those of Sebeksen (late Eleventh Dynasty/early Twelfth Dynasty) and Wepwawet-Hotep (Thirteenth Dynasty): Lichtheim 1988, 124–125, 126. Another definitely from Abydos is the stela of Ibia (from the Twelfth or Eleventh Dynasties): Lichtheim 1988, 127.

Similarly to how Antonio Morales described the cult of the Old Kingdom king Niuserra in the Middle Kingdom as that of people worshipping their "saint," Miriam Lichtheim categorizes the Middle Kingdom worship of Osiris at Abydos as an early example of personal piety, a phenomenon usually attributed to the New Kingdom.[168] The significance of the god and Abydos itself for the afterlife rose significantly in the Middle Kingdom as he ceased to be a deity of chiefly royal funerary importance, a process that had already begun in the Old Kingdom.[169] At this time, not only the royal dead, but instead all deceased Egyptians were thought to become Osiris in death.[170] As discussed above, *dead* kings were the ones worshipped more freely by non-royal people, perhaps because they were more accessible or seen as more effective. Osiris, as king of the dead, was a dead king. Again, states of being significantly impacted the ways in which non-royal people engaged with kingship. This case makes it clear that "kingship" as a concept was complex, and that it cannot only be associated with the sovereign on the throne, or even with dead kings. Rather, the concept of kingship was applied both to people and to Osiris. Since living kings became Osiris in death this distinction should not be drawn too starkly, and it will be further explored in Chapter 5. But the distinction between different manifestations of kingship, and the apparent focus on the ruling king by some and on Osiris by others, suggests that it would be incorrect to assume that the festival had a static meaning for all Egyptians—from the king and his officials to those outside the purview of the royal court.

While primarily about divine monuments and festivals, this section has demonstrated that kingship was present in non-royal lives in different ways, which varied according to several

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[168] Lichtheim 1988, 134. On personal piety, see Baines and Frood 2011; Bussmann 2017.
[169] This is part of the process that is sometimes problematically referred as the "democratization of the afterlife." See M. Smith 2008; Nyord 2021.
[170] Whether the deceased became or simply interacted with Osiris in death is debated (e.g., M. Smith 2017, chapter 4). Here the traditional interpretation that the deceased became Osiris is followed.

factors. The inextricability of kingship from the divine, discussed in Chapter 2, is certainly one of the reasons why kings remain some of the main players in a section focused on provincial temples and festivals dedicated to gods such as Satet and Osiris. The case of Osiris is a particularly thought-provoking example, since Osiris was himself a divine king. The overlaps between different manifestations of kingship as manifested by Osiris will be further discussed in the next chapter, but for now it is worth highlighting that many of the examples of kingship discussed above do not occur in forms that scholars traditionally assume. These multiple forms of engagement with kingship in different circumstances are tied to the fact that kingship was not omnipresent. Royal patronage at the temple of Satet at Elephantine, for instance, may have been of significance to certain parts of the local population, but for others who presented regular votive offerings, it is likely that the local goddess—who had been worshipped at the site since the Predynastic period—was the most present, or most accessible, entity.

§3.3 Elite monuments and festivals

The existence of different audiences that likely reacted differently to distinct monuments is something that needs to be kept in mind when thinking of elite monuments, too. It would be difficult to argue that an elite tomb is comparable to a royal pyramid in terms of its potential to display power. However, such monumental tombs were the most impressive constructions visible on a local scale, for those who did not live close to pyramids as in Lahun or Itjtawy. Community burial sites were usually located near where the deceased was born and lived, and at least in the early Middle Kingdom this was also the case for high officials.[171] The cemetery was a place of social interaction not only between the living and the dead, but also between the living

[171] This changed in some respects during the reign of Senwosret III. See, e.g., Franke 1991.

themselves. The cemetery's status as an "extra-urban" space means that it should be understood as an extension of daily life,[172] something discussed further in Chapter 5.

Owning a monumental tomb demonstrated one's standing in the community. Elite tombs often mimicked royal ones in either form or decoration, a choice that likely served to enhance the owner's status[173]—rather than only increasing royal visibility. As was the case for royal and divine monuments mentioned above, the potential of elite tombs to increase the standing of their owners was heightened with the celebration of rituals and festivals, which might have been inspired by those of early Middle Kingdom kings.[174] These festivals were geared towards the local sphere,[175] and thus likely more accessible. Elite funerary ceremonies would have included not only priests, but also the deceased's family and likely individuals from the community, who might have participated as carriers of offerings, mourners, or witnesses.[176]

A valuable case study for the way in which non-royal people interacted with elite monuments comes from the site of Deir el-Bersha, which gained importance in the reign of Nebhepetre Montuhotep in the Eleventh Dynasty. The monumental tombs of local leaders, who had nationwide authority as viziers rather than only local power, overlooked much of the Hare nome (Figures 4.15 and 4.16).[177] More than places of burial, they were vibrant ritual spaces that connected the provincial capital of Khemenu (modern el-Ashmunein), where the tomb owners lived, and Deir el-Bersha.[178] What must have been the processional route was a mere dirt road, which made local leaders' monumental tombs the point of orientation in the landscape.[179] Their

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[172] Weiss 2021, 125.
[173] Weiss 2021, 132; Feinman and Moreno García 2022, 60.
[174] For instance, Willems suggested that Nebhepetre's efforts to create processional landscapes were taken up by local leaders (Willems 2020, 25, 41).
[175] Willems 2020, 33.
[176] Bickel 2019, 42.
[177] Willems 2020, 26–28.
[178] Willems 2020, 29.
[179] Willems 2014, 101–103.

status as centers of the ritual landscape is a parallel to the royal funerary temple of Nebhepetre Mentuhotep at Deir el-Bahri, which might have been the end point of a festival that probably involved both elites and non-elites.

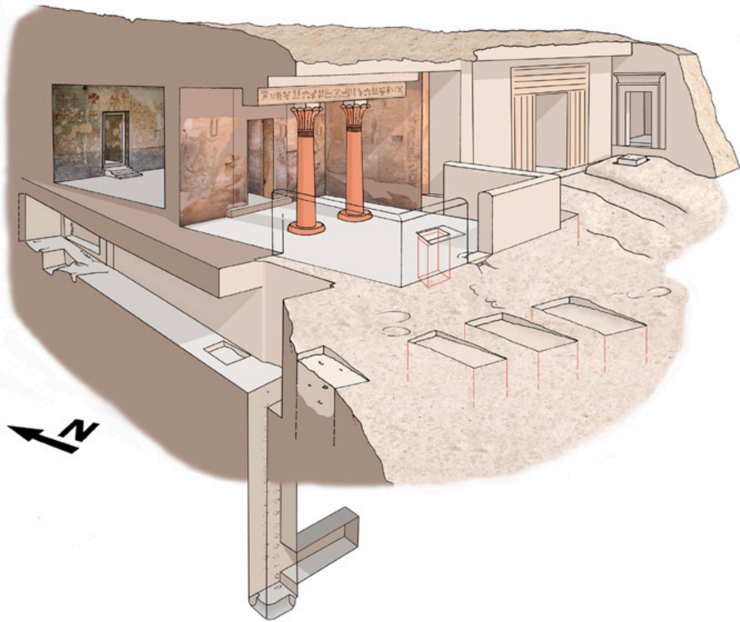

Figure 4.15: Reconstruction of a monumental tomb at Deir el-Bersha (Willems 2014, fig. 16).

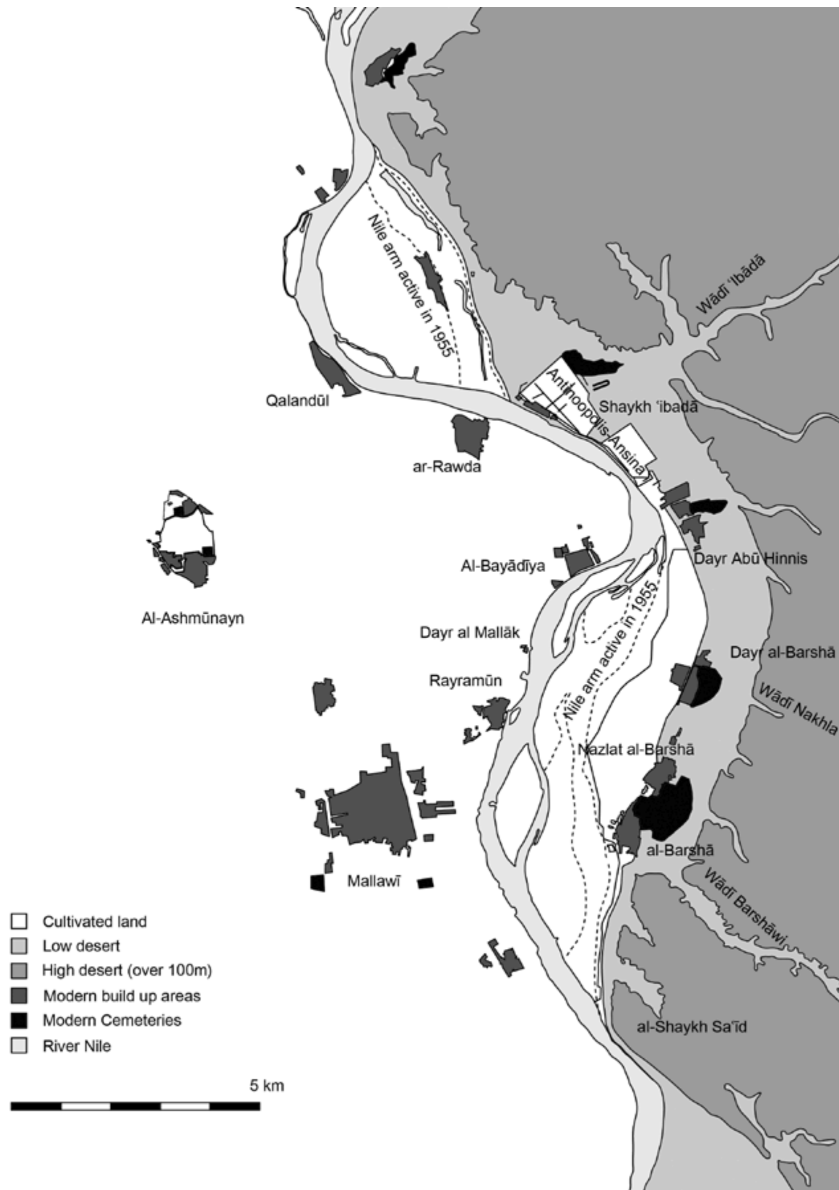

Figure 4.16: Map of the general area, showing Deir el-Bersha in relation to Khemenu (el-Ashmunein) (Willems 2014, fig. 8).

Texts and representations in Deir el-Bersha tombs such as Djehutihotep's give us more information about these processions, including that cult to local leaders was performed not only in the tombs themselves but also in chapels along the riverbank.[180] Djehutihotep's sequence of

[180] Willems 2020, 29–30. Another tomb inscription that mentions a statue procession for a local leader is that of Khnumhotep II at Beni Hasan (Kamrin 1992, 78).

reliefs that showcase the transportation of his monumental statue (Figure 4.17) and accompanying inscriptions demonstrate the involvement of community members in the event,[181] which is described as a sensorially stimulating experience. Such inscriptions testify to the participation of local people who are said to have happily praised the deceased, similar records of which are largely lacking for royal festivals in the Middle Kingdom. We cannot consider these images and texts entirely accurate reflections of reality due to their funerary contexts. But it seems safe to say that, for the population of Khemenu, the cult of the local leader was both incredibly relevant and incredibly significant. Even if a large portion of the processional group stopped at family tombs rather than continuing all the way to the leaders' tombs, the latter would have still been the visually dominant constructions in the landscape.

Figure 4.17: Painting showing the transportation of Djehutihotep's statue from his tomb (photograph: M. De Meyer. © KU Leuven, Dayr al-Barsha Project).

[181] Newberry 1894–1895; Monnier 2020; Silva 2023. See Gilibert 2011 for the potential of art in this respect.

My choice of emphasis here might seem like the exact opposite of the interpretation of royal monuments above: that for pyramids, their visibility coupled with their inaccessibility would have increased the inaccessibility of the king. But it is not only a matter of distance; rather, people living in these communities would have entered these cemeteries frequently to visit their own deceased family members. At Lahun for instance, many residents of the town were buried in the nearby cemetery of Harageh, which was in the opposite direction of the king's pyramid (Figure 4.18). If they headed to tombs of family members to visit them, they would not have been engaging with the pyramid—because it was not part of that specific ritual landscape. This analysis of the location of local elite tombs is reminiscent of the Beautiful Feast of the Valley discussed above, when private people also visited their family tombs during the festival and thus perhaps saw the royal temple at Deir el-Bahri as its ritual focus. But again, periodicity might come into play: the Beautiful Feast of the Valley is thought to have occurred once a year, and non-royal tombs in that area were otherwise distant enough from the bay of Deir el-Bahri that the temple would not have always been as conspicuous. Regardless, it seems clear that many of these occurrences and landscapes were complementary in numerous ways.

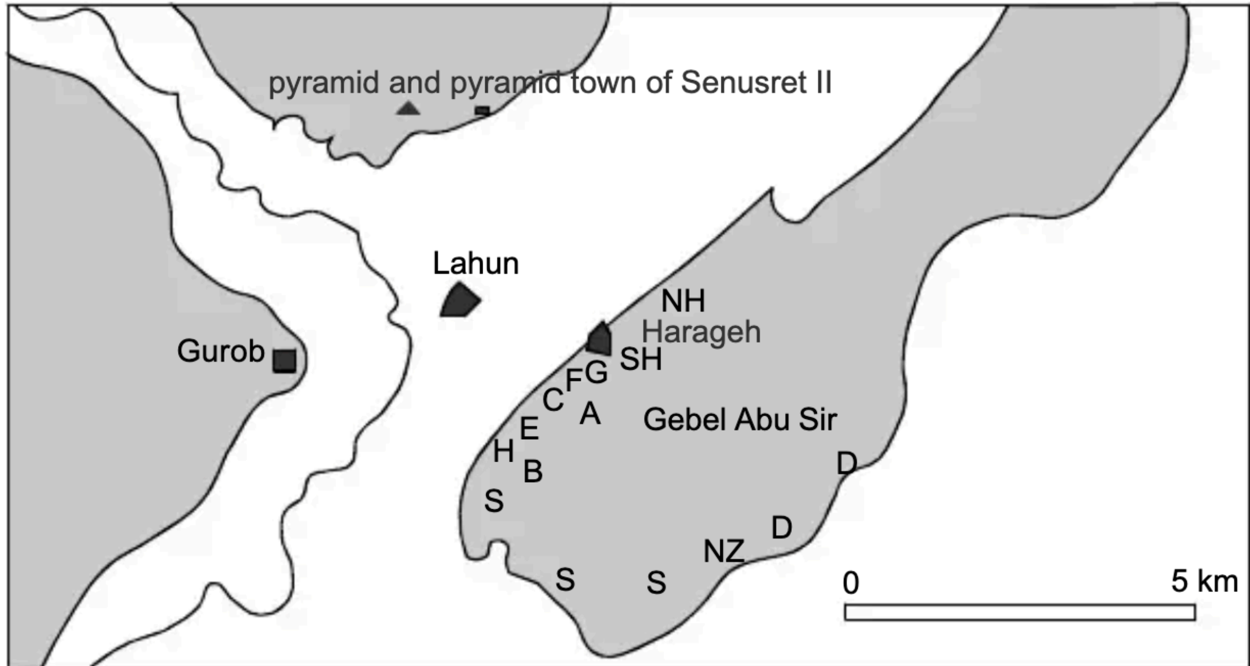

Figure 4.18: Schematic representation of the Lahun area, showing the pyramid, the town, and the Harageh cemetery (Grajetzki 2004, 9).

Even if festivals revolving around local community leaders and their funerals happened as rarely as those dedicated to Senwosret II at Lahun, or Senwosret III at Wah-Sut, local leaders' tombs would have been present in a very different way than a pyramid or a funerary temple that was occasionally the focal point of salient celebrations. The wider cultic landscape at Deir el-Bersha had both continuities and differences when compared to royal ritual landscapes, which were perhaps purposeful on the part of local leaders who sometimes modeled their tombs after those of kings. Kings were likely salient to non-royal people who engaged with them in periodic festivals, though status would have conditioned the means of participation of different groups, which therefore likely experienced the salience of the festival in distinct ways. The tombs of local leaders and the leaders themselves perhaps also increased in importance during and in association with festivals, but at least visual access to their tombs does not seem to have hinged on periodicity. They were embedded in local cemeteries, where fellow community members

were also buried and where tombs were therefore visited by a variety of people on a likely relatively daily basis. This arrangement is somewhat reminiscent of the *saff* tombs of the Intefs at el-Tarif, which are thought of as more public than those of even Nebhepetre Mentuhotep, and certainly later Twelfth Dynasty kings', and which also incorporated other tombs—those of officials and figures important to their reigns—in their complexes.

Processions at Deir el-Bersha took place from at least the Eleventh Dynasty (tenure of Ahanakht I) through the Twelfth Dynasty (tenure of Djehutihotep).[182] The structure of the ritual landscape at Deir el-Bersha is similar to that of Abydos, which highlights the importance of the local leader to local cultic practice[183]—again perhaps purposefully so. The autobiography of Djehutinakht might even imply that he participated in reenactments of fights against enemies of the local god, in a potential parallel to the Osiris festival.[184] If true, this demonstrates the existence of a well-developed local cultic landscape that also hinged on mythological narratives, though it was not linked to royal cult. If it was associated with the Osiris festival it may have been linked to kingship more broadly. The statue of Djehutihotep has also been compared in terms of size to those of Amenemhat III at Biahmu,[185] highlighting the prominence of local leaders in that context. As discussed in Chapter 3, the importance of these figures may have been traced back to the king due to their role in state administration, though it is just as plausible that they served as local, perhaps alternative, foci of loyalty and authority. Examples such as Djehutihotep's statue transportation scene suggest, at the very least, that if local leaders *were* manifestations of the king, they were also quite prominent in their own right. These interpretations need not be mutually exclusive, and status is perhaps again of importance here,

[182] Willems 2014, 101–102, 109.
[183] Willems 2020, 41.
[184] Willems 2014, 93.
[185] Willems 2014, 109.

since different parts of local communities might have been attuned to these distinct facets of the identities of local leaders in different degrees.

The case of Deir el-Bersha was not a unique phenomenon. Tombs of local leaders at several sites in the Middle Kingdom were the most imposing sights in the landscape and visible from considerable distances.[186] At Qaw el-Kebir and Qubbet el-Hawa, tombs had causeways reminiscent of royal pyramid complexes; at Thebes, high officials' tombs had long courtyards in front of tomb entrances that likely ended in chapels. At Beni Hasan and Asyut little remains of causeways, but texts describing an entrance staircase at the tomb of Djefaihapi in the latter and festival processions in the tomb of Khnumhotep II in the former suggest that—though regional variations existed—tombs of leaders in regional centers were built to enable the presentation of cult and to mark the landscape in a grand scale, acting as small mortuary temples on a local rather than national level.[187] The tomb of Djefaihapi also includes texts that describe the placement of his statue in a local temple, which makes it possible that the worship of local leaders was not restricted to their own tombs.[188] These examples are reminiscent of the chapel of Heqaib discussed in Chapter 3.

In analyzing the decoration in the tomb of Khnumhotep II at Beni Hasan, Janice Kamrin suggested that certain motifs, including the ceremonial beard worn by kings and gods, were present in order to identify the tomb owner with the king (or Horus or Osiris).[189] It is unwise to push this argument too far, and prudent to remember that the function of such funerary representations seems to have been to establish a relationship with Osiris rather than the ruling king (see Chapter 5). But even if these scenes would not have been seen by many outside

[186] Chudzik 2016, 4.
[187] Kamrin 1992, 79–80, 241, 261; Willems 2014, 109.
[188] Kamrin 1992, 79.
[189] Kamrin 1992, 84–86.

Khnumhotep's family,[190] such motifs may still suggest the role that local leaders were thought to play in local contexts, either in their own perception or in that of locals. If that interpretation is a stretch, the fact that the king is not a focus of cult for the general Egyptian population in this period is not—as already suggested in terms of domestic cult in Chapter 3.

§4 Conclusion

As discussed in Chapter 2, attempting to separate the "religious" and "political" sides of ancient Egyptian kingship is largely futile, mostly because no meaningful separation existed in the functioning of kingship in the past. This chapter began with a discussion of political landscapes and then mostly focused on an examination of ritual practice. This is because in thinking about the ways in which Egyptian monuments were experienced the ritual dimension is most evident. Lived religion in ancient Egypt is one of the few ways in which we can hope to access the role of kings (as well as gods) to non-royal Egyptians, and by extension how ritual shaped the social order.[191] This is, of course, relevant to a discussion of the actual role that kings might have played (or not played) in administrative matters, as also discussed briefly in Chapter 2. Unfortunately, quite a bit about the lived religion of ancient Egyptians is lost, but as the above discussion demonstrates there is much to still be gathered from a closer consideration of the ways in which people engaged with the monumental and the liminal outside daily life contexts as considered in Chapter 3.

This chapter surveyed examples of non-royal engagement with three distinct but sometimes overlapping categories of monuments and performance: royal, divine, and elite. Beyond these categories, the analysis above also emphasized distinct axes of engagement that

[190] See Baines 1991.
[191] See Weiss 2021, 126.

affected how different groups interacted with these monuments and entities. These axes include periodicity, status, distance to royal centers, and states of being. All of these variables, and perhaps others not discussed here, led to the creation of heterogeneous religious groups, which had differential levels of access to distinct monuments and rituals. Rather than assuming that decreased access by non-royal people to royal festivals would have led to a decreased importance of the king, this experience of inaccessibility and relevance on select occasions might actually have helped to underscore a significant presence (that of the king) in people's minds. As discussed above, ritual and performance are not merely reflections of power, but rather tools to *construct* power. It would therefore be foolish to suggest that kingship was not significant to ancient Egyptian society in light of the evidence discussed in this chapter, and indeed that was never the goal of this study. But the evidence discussed above still suggests that kingship was significant in specific contexts and to specific audiences in distinct ways, and that it was not *always* relevant to *all* non-royal Egyptians, and especially not to non-royal Egyptians who lived far from royal centers or who did not witness royal festivals or processions. It was not omnipresent.

The ritual landscape and wider cultic setup could have served to instantiate continuities, analogies, and differences between social strata, and different groups—perhaps particularly local leaders—might have intended this. In discussing the generally considerable size of chapels of local leaders in the Old and Middle Kingdoms as compared to the divine temples of those same periods, Barry Kemp concluded that human individuals who had played prominent roles in local communities were more notable and worshipped—one could easily say *relevant*—than the divine cult.[192] When summarizing Kemp's conclusions, Harco Willems said that "the

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[192] Kemp 1995; Willems 2014, 121–22.

relationship between the patron and his clients, rather than a theological theory, constituted the matrix on which religious thinking was patterned."[193] I contend that the same can, and should, be said of the weight of royal cult, and thus kings, in the lives of regular people in the Middle Kingdom. The abundant evidence for participation in elite festivals and in the cult of local leaders demonstrates their weight, and the nearness of their tombs as opposed to the greater distance (both physical and metaphorical) associated with royal monuments and festivals suggest that Kemp's point—that important community members were more notable than the divine cult, which I extend to the royal cult—is pertinent in this discussion.

At some points throughout the chapter, it may have seemed like proposed interpretations for the significance of both royal and non-royal monuments and festivals were circular and feasible primarily because of the preexisting model followed in this study. Essentially, if we look at a specific monument or site—the festival of Osiris at Abydos, the temple of Satet at Elephantine, or tombs of local leaders at Deir el-Bersha—assuming that kingship was not as important to their meaning as other scholars have previously said, then we might read the evidence as indeed showing that kingship was not as important in those contexts. There is a methodological danger in seeking alternative explanations or frameworks to explain the significance of specific monuments, and to then use those frameworks to interpret them. But we must start somewhere, and it is worth reminding ourselves again that previous interpretations of many of those monuments—that provincial temples or elite tombs, for instance, are manifestations of kingship away from royal centers—are just as circular and often based on even less evidence and more assumptions. The interpretations in this chapter, therefore, were proposed

[193] Willems 2014, 122.

with an awareness of the hermeneutic circle, and should thus be read and evaluated with that in mind.[194]

To return to the ultimate royal symbol, Egypt in the past was much more than pyramids; it was festivals and funerals and the vibrant particularities of individual lives. The act of building pyramids was conspicuous, as was the absence of people that their construction likely caused in local communities; their associated funerary rituals were also conspicuous, perhaps at least in part for their exclusivity. The Lahun example, discussed both here and in Chapter 3, is illustrative: the pyramid was close to the town, and royal rituals (and perhaps royal visits) likely took place. Yet, in evidence from the settlement we see a clear range of engagement with kingship, much which seems to have been a result of non-royal choices *against* kingship. To argue that the king was not important at all in light of these choices, and particularly in light of exclusive festivals, would be to substitute the framework of decorum with an explanation that is just as monolithic, and just as blind to variation. Just because kings do not seem to have been omnipresent on a daily basis does not mean that they would not have been significant more broadly. This chapter thus aimed to define some of the ways in which kings might have been significant primarily in contexts other than local or daily circumstances, alongside other types of ritual practice and monuments that also defined other significant loci of worship.

[194] See also Lysen 2022, 56, for a similar justification for using performance theory to study Hittite festival texts.

Chapter 5

Kingship in Funerary Ritual and Practice: Types and Meanings

§1 Introduction

Kingship is not only relevant to a study of ancient Egyptian life, but also to a study of ancient Egyptian death. Kings were effective mortuary benefactors, which makes kingship integral to an investigation of non-royal mortuary culture.[1] Their power in the funerary realm was particularly important for non-royal engagement with kingship in several periods, including the Middle Kingdom. Many of the same axes of engagement discussed in Chapters 3 and 4 remain relevant here, and though Egyptian funerary culture is often unfairly seen as static both across time and tomb,[2] the emphasis again will be on different levels of variability in experiencing kingship. States of being is a key variable to consider here, and periodicity is likewise helpful. Status is also a critical axis of engagement, but unfortunately one that is more difficult to analyze for the simple reason that most of the evidence discussed below pertains to Egyptians who had the means to build monumental tombs or to be buried with grave goods. In other words, to elites rather than non-elites, who were often buried in shallow graves with no (or few) grave goods. The ways in which status affected non-royal engagement with kingship in funerary practice will be further discussed below, but it is important to preemptively emphasize that this is the chapter that departs most markedly from the bottom-up approach laid out in Chapter 1, out of necessity due to the available evidence rather than choice.

[1] Troche 2021, 49, 51.
[2] For some discussion of the issue and an analysis of a unique tomb relief of the Old Kingdom, see Torres 2021b. See also Vischak 2006.

There is some overlap between the evidence discussed in this chapter and that in Chapter 4; this is by design but might seem confusing, so an explanation is warranted. In Chapter 4, certain royal funerary structures were included because they are important for our understanding of how non-royal Egyptians engaged with kingship *in royal contexts*. These monuments included royal pyramids and mortuary temples, which were contextualized in discussions of monumentality and landscapes, as well as performance and festivals. Here the focus is instead on how kingship was present in *non-royal* funerary customs—the question is not how non-royals engaged with royal funerary monuments, but rather how non-royals engaged with kingship in their own ritual practices. Some elite tombs featured below, particularly those at Deir el-Bersha, were already discussed in Chapter 4, where the focus was on how they fit in the landscape and how their monumentality and their role in local festivals was both similar and different to how Egyptians interacted with royal monuments in royal centers. In this chapter, those and other elite tombs are instead considered from a perspective of the funerary rituals themselves, with much more attention paid to issues of royal symbology and royal names present in both elite tomb decorations and inscriptions.

The occurrence of royal names and symbols in royal funerary contexts is not surprising,[3] but their presence in private funerary contexts can lead to assumptions that kingship was prevalent in daily life at this time, since funerary evidence is often used as a proxy for discussions of what ancient Egyptian life was like. The standard offering formula, used by the deceased to ask for continued offerings, begins with the phrase "an offering which the king gives…". It is the one non-royal context in which kingship and kings are constant. The

[3] This does not only include the burials of kings themselves, but also of other members of the royal family. See, e.g., Grajetzki 2014a, chapter 1, for examples of burials of princesses and royal women. Pectorals found in the tombs of royal women, for instance, were perhaps gifts from the king: Grajetzki 2014a, 122. See also Dodson 2005.

significance of that phrase is discussed at the end of this chapter. Before then, the chapter covers evidence from Middle Kingdom tombs—including imagery, inscriptions, and grave goods—from both provincial sites and royal centers, as well as coffins and Coffin Texts. The evidence includes material both from before and after the well-known shift in funerary practices around the reign of Senwosret III.

A closer examination of this evidence demonstrates that kingship *was* fundamental in rituals and symbolism related to death and funerary practices, though in ways that often stray from quotidian manifestations of royal ideology. In this context, generic kingship was more important (or at least more common) than specific kings, and references to kings most often are in fact references to the god Osiris, rather than kingship as practiced by living rulers. These conclusions are significant to the overall goal of this study, to better understand how kingship was experienced by non-royal people in the Middle Kingdom from a non-royal perspective. The evidence discussed below, particularly that of royal imagery in tombs, strengthens the case against decorum as a suitable model for exploring non-royal engagement with kingship in this period. Funerary rituals were part of life in ancient Egypt, but the clear significance of kingship in death cannot simply be extended to an equivalent importance of kingship in life. It is impossible to argue that living non-royal Egyptians would have been unaware of the role played by kings in death, though it cannot be said that they were reliant on kings in life in the same, or even in similar, ways.

§2 Ritual practice?

Ancient Egyptian funerary evidence is often used as a proxy for discussions of daily life, in large part because so much more of it is preserved and has been excavated than evidence from

settlement contexts.[4] There were certainly elements of funerary culture that could not be experienced by the living, at least after the funeral, but there are also many that were accessible. Tombs were places for the living as much as for the dead: visiting and interacting with them was, in fact, a part of life.[5] They were meeting points between the living and the dead, and thus mediational spaces between generations.[6] Beyond visiting tombs, preparing for death was also relevant to life, both in terms of planning for one's own continued existence after death (or for that of family members) and in terms of the production of grave goods and the decoration of tombs by artisans and craftsmen. We cannot take funerary evidence as proxy for discussions of Egyptian life, but it would be equally problematic to disregard a meaningful relationship between life and death in ancient Egypt just because we cannot think of representations in tombs as accurate depictions of life.[7]

Both in Egyptological scholarship and outside of it, there has for a long time existed a general surface-level misconception that ancient Egyptians were obsessed with death, or with immortality and the quest for an eternal afterlife. Recently, Rune Nyord argued that these ideas, at least on an academic Egyptological front, are entrenched in 19th century perspectives, on Victorian wishes for eternal life after death, which would result from living a virtuous life. It is also questionable to argue that ancient Egyptians were instead obsessed with life, an idea that was born out of a desire to push back against the "obsessed with death" trope but which equally

[4] For a review of different approaches to the use of funerary evidence for the study of social contexts and daily life, see Bussmann 2020, 479–480.
[5] See Torres 2021a on the importance of the relationship between the tomb and the tomb visitor, and how much of the tombs' decorative programs may have been crafted with a viewer's perspective in mind. Miniaci 2019 also discusses the similarity between life and death specifically in the Middle Kingdom, in his case focusing on the importance of family as evidenced by the Middle Kingdom tradition of multiple burials and Letters to the Dead.
[6] Allon 2019, 82.
[7] Tomb scenes are often referred to as "scenes of daily life" in Egyptology, though that is a somewhat of a misnomer. They sometimes do show activities that would have happened in life, but that was not their primary purpose, which was instead to support the deceased in the afterlife. For some background on the study of these scenes, see Manniche 2003 (who focuses on Eighteenth Dynasty depictions).

paints ancient peoples as Orientalist caricatures.[8] Instead, Nyord proposes that we need to take ancient Egyptian mortuary religion seriously, in the sense of making an effort to think through the conceptual, social, and experiential consequences of the ideas evidenced in the sources. We take ancient Egyptian mortuary religion seriously by embedding it within the "ontological, social, and ritual lifeworld" of the ancient Egyptians,[9] thus moving away from a focus on a separate, transcendent afterlife existence.

Similarly, but perhaps less radically, Lara Weiss has sought to move beyond the supposed ancient Egyptian obsession with death by focusing on lived religion, or the ways in which religious traditions were shaped by not only ritual, but also daily, practices. She emphasizes that cemeteries were not only places for interactions between the living and the dead, but also loci of interactions between the living themselves. Mortuary religious strategies, therefore, were not solely means of achieving a successful afterlife, but also part of a wide spectrum of social strategies employed by Egyptians.[10] There is currently a move in Egyptology towards questioning the idea that all funerary culture referring to the transcendent afterlife of the deceased implies the complete separation between daily life and funerary spheres. Instead, scholars are increasingly focusing on the ways in which people would have experienced funerary culture from its creation to its performance and receptions.

This new trend in Egyptology can be contextualized in wider arguments about the nature of ritual practice in other disciplines. Particularly relevant is Catherine Bell's formulation of ritual from within the framework of practical activity, abandoning a focus on ritual as a set of

[8] See Nyord 2018. I also thank Rune Nyord for suggesting this avenue of thinking, and saving me from a simplistic argument that kingship was not relevant in life because life and death are ultimately separate spheres.
[9] Nyord 2018, 80.
[10] See Weiss 2021; Weiss 2022; Weiss et al. 2022.

special practices separate from other social activity.[11] The point is not that everything is ritual, which really would mean that nothing is, in fact, ritual.[12] Instead, Bell focuses on strategies of ritualization, a way of acting that is used to differentiate some acts from others. In this framework, the significance of ritual behavior is not due to its status as an entirely separate sphere of action, but rather in how ritual activities are different from other, non-ritual activities. This approach focuses less on assumptions about what ritual activities might mean,[13] instead prioritizing the strategies through which ritual activities perform their intended functions. A fundamental aspect of ritualization is its link to the body and its interaction with a spatial and temporal environment.[14] Specific people perform rituals, and ritual practice thus needs to be understood as rooted in specific social acts. Ritual occurs in the context of the multiple ways of acting in a specific culture. The classification of ritual as part of practical activity is also relevant for the performances discussed in Chapter 4, though there it is less significant due to the relative rarity of royal or divine festivals in comparison to the types of ritual practice discussed below, especially frequent visits to family members' tombs.

How ritualized *was* the act of visiting a family member's tomb? As in, how separate from visiting a family member's house? It was certainly different, but not completely dissimilar. The overlaps between the living and the dead are particularly well demonstrated by ancestor cultic worship in houses, discussed in Chapter 3, which includes many of the same kinds of objects that are also found in tombs.[15] Funerary material will be considered here, rather than as a separate

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[11] See Bell 2009.
[12] Bell 2009, 73.
[13] For a review of how the concept of ritual had been previously treated in a largely circular fashion in scholarship, see Bell 2009, chapter 1. In the past, most theories of ritual had either framed it as an autonomous and distinct set of practices or as an aspect of all human activity, which relegated ritual solely to the symbolic rather than the instrumental or practical.
[14] Bell 2009, 93.
[15] See Harrington 2012, especially chapter 2, for more information on ancestor cult across periods in Egypt (with cross-cultural examples).

sphere, as a category of evidence of activities among the living, who after all wrote the texts, made the images, and performed the rituals. That is how the perspectives outlined above will be used in the discussions below: as strategies to address the possible impacts of funerary culture on the conceptions of the living. More specifically, they will be used to consider how the funerary ideas that serve as the focus in this chapter impacted more general experiences of kingship.

§3 Brief overview of Middle Kingdom funerary evidence

The goal of this chapter is not to be comprehensive, but rather to look at patterns in the overall funerary corpus, while zooming into specific categories of evidence and examples, to better understand the visibility and relevance of kingship in funerary practice in this period. Before discussing the specific categories of evidence, then, it is important to first determine the contexts in which funerary evidence from this period has been discovered, as well as some common patterns and interpretations of that evidence.

Numerous cemetery sites have evidence of Middle Kingdom tombs from the Eleventh, Twelfth, and Thirteenth Dynasties, but not all are published to the same degree (some in fact not being thoroughly published at all). As mentioned above, poorer non-elite Egyptians were usually buried in shallow holes in the ground that lacked extensive grave goods other than pottery vessels.[16] These burials are often found in the same cemeteries where richer tombs were built, particularly in provincial contexts. Most tombs that pertain to a discussion of kingship can thus be associated with either elite or high elite non-royals; those are the tombs of focus in the remainder of the chapter.

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[16] Grajetzki 2014a, 95, 144.

Some of the most thoroughly studied provincial cemeteries of the Eleventh and Twelfth Dynasties include Beni Hasan, Deir el-Bersha, Meir, and Asyut.[17] Cemeteries closer to the royal residence, including Lisht and Dahshur, became more important for non-royals in the late Twelfth and Thirteenth Dynasties.[18] Since this chapter does not seek to be comprehensive, it was important to find well-published cemeteries and tombs, particularly because much of the evidence associated with kingship comes from tomb decoration and grave goods, and so lists of tombs or short summaries are not useful. Additionally, it was necessary to look at evidence from different types of cemetery contexts, including both those in the provinces and those closer to or associated with royal centers. Accordingly, published reports of tombs in Deir el-Bersha, Beni Hasan, Dahshur North, Harageh, and Lisht were utilized. Thebes and Abydos, both also associated with royal and divine monuments in different periods, were considered to the extent that they were available. Deir el-Bersha was a focus in Chapter 4, and it was chosen as one of the main sites for this discussion so that the salience of local leaders in the local cemetery could be returned to here in a more thorough discussion of their tombs. The publications of the tombs of Beni Hasan include both good reproductions of the decoration and translations of the texts, so that was also chosen as a focus.

Harageh and Lisht were logical choices, both for lack of alternatives of cemeteries associated with royal centers and because they have been well published. The Dahshur North tombs are not well published, but since they were studied recently it was hoped that more up-to-date methods of excavation and analysis might result in useful interpretations. The very few known Middle Kingdom tombs in Thebes,[19] where the Eleventh Dynasty kings were buried,

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[17] Grajetzki 2007, 42.
[18] Grajektzi 2007, 43.
[19] Besides TT 60, which will be discussed below, the other Middle Kingdom Theban tombs are TT 103 (see Martín García de la Cruz 2020), TT 117, TT 240 (see Stupko-Lubczyńska 2020), TT 280, TT 308, TT 310 (MMA 505), TT

were also taken into account, in particular because TT 60 is significant for a discussion of kingship. Abydos was an important center of burials in the Middle Kingdom due to the site's rising importance as a focus of the Osiris festival discussed in Chapter 4, and so it would have been a good choice to include in more detail here. Unfortunately, the Middle Kingdom tombs from Abydos have not been thoroughly published, though existing publications were also consulted.[20]

Ultimately, this spread of tombs from both provincial cemeteries and those associated with royal sites provide a representative sample to discuss broad patterns in Middle Kingdom funerary evidence. All published tombs from the sites discussed above were consulted, even if not all of them are mentioned in the discussion below. While tombs at those sites were analyzed in more depth, the 96 tombs recorded in the online depository of Middle Kingdom tombs, Meketre, were also taken into account.[21] The depository brings together information on tombs from the Eleventh through the Thirteenth Dynasties from Thebes, Gebelein, Deir el-Bersha, Beni Hasan, Kom Ombo, Deir Rifa, Mitrahina, el-Barnugi, Harageh, el-Saff, Dendera, Meir, Lisht, Saqqara, Qubbet el-Hawa, Asyut, Dahshur, Qaw el-Kebir, Herakleopolis, Khelua, el-Kab, Kom el-Hisn, and Hierakonpolis. Some further tombs from other sites, ones of major significance to the topic under discussion, are also included below when relevant.

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311 (MMA 508, see Ragazzoli 2021), TT 313 (MMA 513), TT 314 (see Chudzik and Caban 2019), TT 315, TT 316, TT 319, TT 366 (see Roehrig 1995; Hudáková 2016), and TT 386. These tombs are located in Sheikh Abd-el Qurna, Asasif, and Deir el-Bahri. See Soliman 2009 for an overview; Allen 1996 for the tombs of officials; and Chudzik 2020 for recent reinvestigations of the Asasif tombs.

[20] Several areas of Abydos include Middle Kingdom tombs, namely the North Cemetery, Cemetery S, South Cemetery: Peet 1914; and Cemetery D: Peet and Loat 1913, 23–X. The Twelfth Dynasty tombs in Cemetery S have barely been published and there is not much beyond architectural attributes: Peet 1914, 33–45. In Peet's publication, the North Cemetery tombs get half a page: Peet 1914, 54; they also feature in Petrie 1925, but in a very cursory treatment. For some of the excavation history and history of the publication, see Grajetzki 2014b. See also Mariette 1880, and Richards 1992 for the most recent investigations in the North Cemetery.

[21] https://meketre.org/ (accessed 17 January 2023).

Based on the copious amount of funerary evidence from this period, Egyptologists have established major trends and changes in funerary customs across the Eleventh, Twelfth, and Thirteenth Dynasties. Because these patterns are well known in scholarship, they are described very briefly here. In the early Middle Kingdom, many funerary trends from the First Intermediate Period continued.[22] A wide range of Egyptians were buried with objects especially made for the tomb, including mummy masks, decorated coffins (including with Coffin Texts), and wooden models.[23]

In the late Middle Kingdom, around the reign of Senwosret III, the types of grave goods and therefore likely also funerary beliefs changed profoundly. Non-elite tomb equipment became more connected to practices of daily life as wooden models and Coffin Texts stopped being used.[24] Elite burials started to more commonly include objects such as model scepters and staves, as well as weapons, tied to a more specialized ritual practice termed "Osirification" in modern scholarship. Other objects demonstrate a concern for protection parallel to that seen in settlement contexts in Chapter 3 (such as ivory tusks/wands, some which had been used during life).[25] It is possible that these objects took over, at least in part, the protective functions previously performed by Coffin Texts.[26] Objects produced specifically for burials, including shabtis, also became more common.[27] The concentration of protective objects associated with birth and rebirth in burials of the late Middle Kingdom has been interpreted as indicative of an anxiety particular to that period, but protection was always a concern, expressed differently at different points.[28] In the Thirteenth Dynasty, funerary customs of Egyptians close to royal centers and in

[22] Grajetzki 2014a, 143–144.
[23] Grajetzki 2007, 50; Grajetzki 2014a, 144.
[24] Bourriau 1991, 16; Grajetzki 2014a, 147.
[25] Grajetzki 2007, 50; Miniaci 2018a, 247.
[26] Bourriau 1991, 13–15.
[27] Miniaci 2019, 1.
[28] See Miniaci 2018a, 268.

the provinces sometimes differed. Egyptians in the provinces were often buried without objects of funerary industry, which were at this point mostly produced in the centers and thus associated with those close to the royal court.[29]

Several of these overall patterns will be significant below in the discussion of the occurrence of kingship in funerary contexts. In particular, an analysis of the Coffin Texts of the early Middle Kingdom and the "Osirification" trend in burials in the late Middle Kingdom, both of which have historically been associated in scholarship with kingship, will demonstrate that the royal overtones in these funerary traditions are more complex than is sometimes presumed.

§4 Evidence for kingship in funerary rituals

This section analyzes the following evidence: 1) tombs (including imagery, inscriptions, and grave goods), 2) coffins and Coffin Texts, and 3) the offering formula. The subsections are arranged in this order for a reason: they go from contexts in which kingship is least visible, or at least less recognizable as such, to the only context in which kingship is consistently featured. Admittedly, the separation of the offering formula into a separate category is somewhat artificial, since offering formulae occurred as central parts of both tombs and coffins. However, there is not much evidence of kingship—as pertains to human rulers—in neither tombs nor coffins *besides* offering formulae. Separating the offering formula into its own section gives me the opportunity to emphasize its importance away from tombs and coffins, while acknowledging its key role in funerary practice. The reasons for the lack of visibility of kingship in tombs cannot be solely attributed to a social prohibition, and the outwardly royal characteristics of Middle Kingdom funerary culture are not straightforward. In short, this chapter will demonstrate that,

[29] Grajetzki 2016, 41–42.

even in funerary ritual where kingship as a concept plays a significant role, the ways in which it was manifested are not simple—and modern interpretations should accordingly not be simplistic.

§4.1 Tombs: imagery, inscriptions, grave goods

This section considers evidence from Middle Kingdom tomb contexts. It is split into two subsections because of where evidence tends to be found: monumental tombs are richer in terms of imagery and inscriptions but they were frequently looted in antiquity, so discussions of grave goods tend to be anchored on tombs with less to offer on the decorative or textual front. The main conclusions derived from the evidence discussed in this section emphasize that the ways in which kings and kingship appeared in tombs were not solely conditioned by a top-down imposition from the royal sphere, and that, when they appeared, royal symbols were used by tomb owners to establish an identity after death.

§4.1.1 Imagery and inscriptions

In the context of kingship, the first thing that becomes apparent in a study of Middle Kingdom tombs from different parts of Egypt is that they generally do not include representations of kings (or gods). Tombs of officials, however, do often mention kings in autobiographical inscriptions. This usual omission of kings in decoration and inclusion in texts is tied to the function of those two modes of expression, rather than solely (if at all) to decorum. Following the use of "top" and "bottom" in the theoretical formulations of top-down and bottom-up social structures laid out in Chapter 1, it can be said that images looked down, socially, while texts looked up—in terms of both subject of focus and audience. Their functions are also related

to the ancient Egyptian understanding of time and the dual conceptions of *neheh* and *djet*,[30] particularly as related to death and the afterlife. Both communicate about social ties and are directed towards social actors, and both are about (or rather function in) time, but they address quite separate and even opposite aspects of each.[31] At the center of both was the tomb owner, who functioned as the social fulcrum in his (or her) tomb.

Images in tombs, including of the Middle Kingdom, did not reflect the totality of one's life on earth because they did not usually have a documentary function. Instead, images—which included people, actions, offerings—primarily show repeated or cyclical acts. Common decorative themes across dynasties and locations in the Middle Kingdom include marsh-related activities, agricultural pursuits, food preparation and storage, and funerary rites.[32] In this sense, and keeping in mind the significance of family ties—as discussed with regards to ancestor cult in Chapter 3—it is perhaps not surprising that the emphasis in imagery in tombs was on family members, who were not emphasized in texts,[33] and on activities necessary for the continued existence of the deceased. By that logic, the lack of inclusion of the king in tombs can be thought of as a consequence of the function of the images: the tomb owner needed to be the main figure in his own microcosm to ensure his continued existence. Of note, however, is that Middle Kingdom tomb decoration includes some more documentary scenes than had been the norm in the Old Kingdom: some are tied to specific events in the tomb owner's life (see, for instance, TT

[30] *Neheh* was a cyclical conception of time, tied to motion and change, the repetition of events, and the life cycle of living things; *djet* was a lasting, stable, and linear progression that extended from the primeval time: Assmann 2003. For other connections between the dual strands of time and specifically funerary practices, see Nyord 2013. *Neheh* and *djet* have been primarily used in Egyptology as illustrations of a hypothesis, rather than necessarily in ways equivalent to how the ancient Egyptians themselves would have conceptualized these ideas. But they hold great explanatory power as analytical terms, so they are used here in that way (see Nyord 2013, 202).
[31] I said I would not thank my committee members in footnotes every time they suggested ideas, since that would look ridiculous. I have so far refrained, but it should be said that this interpretation is entirely Laurel Bestock's, and that I am thankful for it.
[32] See also, for instance, the tomb of Djehutihotep at Deir el-Bersha: Newberry 1894–1895, vol. 1, 7.
[33] Bickel 2019, 33–34.

60 below). This change seems related to the later more common inclusion of kings in New Kingdom tomb decoration, for instance in scenes of officials receiving rewards from the king.[34] This gradual shift from more general and cyclical to more specific tomb imagery, including more frequent appearances of the king in New Kingdom tomb decoration, is largely beyond the scope of this study.[35] But this diachronic development underlines the cogency of this analysis of the function of tomb imagery in the Middle Kingdom (and perhaps also the Old Kingdom).

Khnumhotep II's tomb at Beni Hasan is an example of decoration that does not reflect the totality of his life on earth, though there are certain scenes that depict supposedly specific events.[36] In her detailed study of this monument, Janice Kamrin described it as a "miniature mortuary temple" that should be seen as a parallel to divine or royal temples in the local context.[37] As discussed in Chapter 4, local monumental tombs served as the foci of cult for local residents. Like other officials in this period, the images in Khnumhotep II's tomb situated him as the most prominent figure in his funerary environment (e.g., Figure 5.1).[38] Similarly, in the tomb of Djehutihotep at Deir el-Bersha, he is designated as "the heir [who] flourishes in his inheritance by the favour of our lord the king."[39] The tomb owner was highly important in his own tomb, and having an image of the king would presumably threaten that prominence—though this admittedly does not serve as a total explanation in light of later New Kingdom developments.

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[34] See, e.g., Coulon 2009–2010.
[35] For some comments on New Kingdom kingship, see Chapter 6.
[36] Miniaci 2019. A good example of the increasing specificity in tomb decoration in the Middle Kingdom is the famous scene of tribute from Asiatics in the tomb of Khnumhotep II: Mourad 2014.
[37] Kamrin 1992, vii.
[38] Kamrin 1992, 215–216.
[39] Newberry 1894–1895, vol. 1, 21.

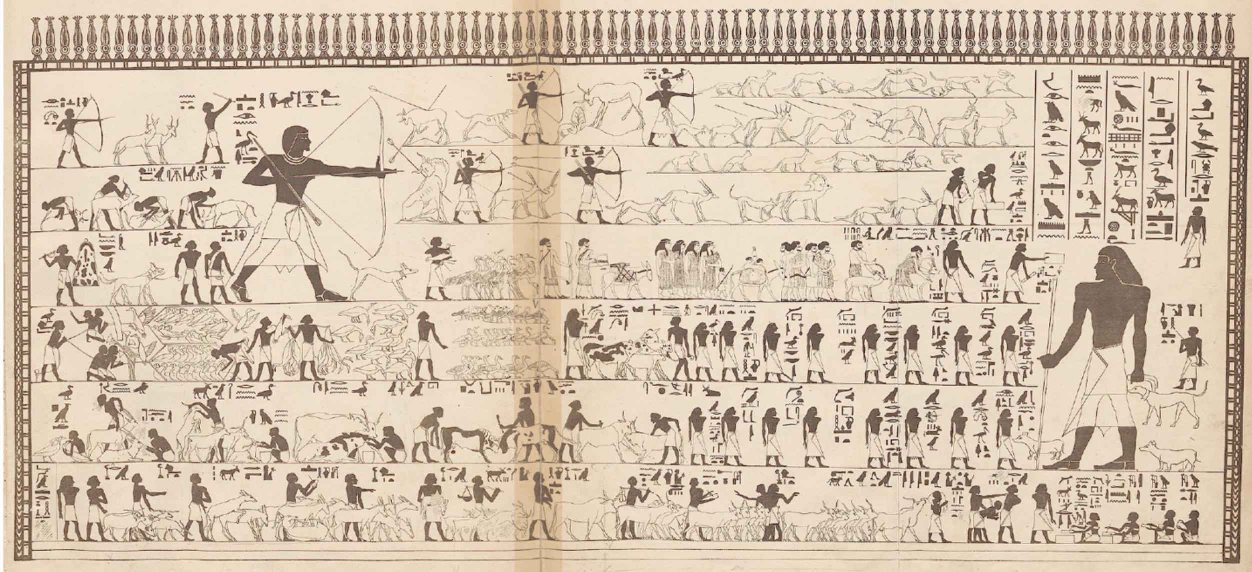

Figure 5.1: Scenes from the north wall of the chapel of Khnumhotep II's tomb at Beni Hasan. The tomb owner is pictured twice, once with a bow and arrow and once with a staff. He is much bigger than anyone else, indicating his importance (Newberry and Griffith 1893–1900, vol. 1, pl. XXX).

The claim to a prominent social status and a "powerful projection of self," the establishment of an identity, were also central to tomb autobiographies.[40] Self-presentation was a common component of ancient Egyptian high culture where the social role of the individual was purposefully demonstrated to both people and gods, and it was thus relevant beyond funerary ritual.[41] Self-presentation indicates not only the priorities of the presented person, but also what the presented person thinks society values. In Egypt, self-presentation was generally more concerned with the roles performed by specific actors rather than distinct personalities.[42] Accordingly, autobiographies—a genre of ancient Egyptian writing also central to high culture—were tasked with recording the social position of the deceased, vis-à-vis not only peers but also

[40] Bickel 2019, 27–28, 32. Those of non-elite status focused less on their social positioning and more on concerns such as subsistence.
[41] See Bassir 2019 and the many case studies there, focusing on different periods.
[42] Eyre 2019.

superiors.[43] The emphasis in biographical inscriptions is on professional social roles,[44] perhaps because they were outward facing, while decorations were often found in more private areas of the tomb.[45] It is likely that these autobiographies were read out loud.[46] The autobiography was directed towards not only the living but also the gods, and its function was to seek their approval, protection, and remembrance.[47] In comparison to images, texts are instead more linear and specific,[48] and by virtue of being textual are exclusive and pointed towards a literate and thus elite (or divine) audience. They also look up in terms of subject, primarily to the favors of the king.

Since the role of autobiographies was to record and extol the social position of the deceased, the king was often mentioned, both in tombs and on stelae belonging to officials with ties to the royal court. The function of these texts, rather than showcasing what the deceased needed in his existence after death, was to encourage others to provide offerings, and ties to the royal sphere perhaps served as incentive to do so. Officials who mention the king in their autobiographies often do so to showcase their own abilities. The autobiography of Djari from the reign of Wahankh Intef II (Eleventh Dynasty), for instance, documents that the "great ruler made me fare north to procure food … because of my knowing matters and speaking well…"[49]

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[43] Bickel 2019, 33. The principles and purposes of self-presentation shifted over time. For self-presentation in the Eleventh Dynasty, see Landgráfová 2019. For self-presentation in the Twelfth Dynasty, see Leprohon 2019. For a recent treatment of autobiographies in Egypt, including the problematic terminology of "autobiography" (or "biography") as applied to the Egyptian material, see Stauder-Porchet et al. 2020.
[44] Bickel 2019, 33–34.
[45] Bickel 2019, 34–35. For example, in the tomb of Djehutihotep at Deir el-Bersha, though in that case representations of family members were also found in the outer parts of the tomb: Pieke 2016, 102.
[46] Bickel 2019, 43. At least in the Twelfth Dynasty, this is suggested by the common use of *Dd.f* (he says) to start the texts: Leprohon 2019.
[47] Lichtheim 1988, 2.
[48] Autobiographies also often drew on stock phrases, which by definition are general rather than specific: Nyord 2013, 204.
[49] Lichtheim 1988, 40-41. See also a stela of the chief priest Wepwawet-aa (Senwosret I/Amenemhat II): Lichtheim 1988, 78–79; the stela of the chamberlain Semti the Younger (Amenemhat II, Twelfth Dynasty): Lichtheim 1988, 96–97.

Officials also showcased their status by claiming proximity to the king, using phrases such as "alone in his majesty's heart," "his majesty's true favorite," "favorite of the king in his palace," and "true servant whom he favors."[50] That these associations were significant outside of the tomb is demonstrated by the inclusion of the names of kings under whom Djehutihotep served (Amenemhat II, Senwosret II, and Senwosret III) on the façade of his tomb at Deir el-Bersha.[51] Their cartouches only appear on the façade, emphasizing that association with the king was showcased to the outside world.

The tomb of Amenemhat (No. 2) at Beni Hasan[52] is a great example of how kings could be used to showcase the tomb owner's prominence in writing, while at the same time the tomb owner needed to be the most prominent figure in the decoration. Inscriptions in Amenemhat's tomb mention the duties he performed for the king in his position in the court of Senwosret I, but the scenes focus on agriculture, fishing and fowling, and crafts.[53] More importantly, they show offering bearers bringing provisions for Amenemhat (Figure 5.2) as well as pilgrimages to Abydos and Busiris. Besides providing the tomb owner with what he might need after death, the tomb imagery also placed him at the center of his own microcosmos.

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[50] Stela of chief treasurer Tjetji (Intef II–III, Eleventh Dynasty): Lichtheim 1988, 46–47; Stela of Intef son of Tejfi (Nebhepetre II, Eleventh Dynasty): Lichtheim 1988, 49–51; stela of the assistant seal-bearer Mery (Senwosret I, Twelfth Dynasty): Lichtheim 1988, 85–89. Also see the quarry inscription of the steward Henu (Seankhkare Mentuhotep III, Eleventh Dynasty): Lichtheim 1988, 52–54; the stela of the chief priest Wepwawet-aa (Senwosret I/Amenemhat II, Twelfth Dynasty: Lichtheim 1988, 75–76.

[51] Newberry 1894–1895, vol. 1, 2–3, 12. At Deir el-Bersha, Djehutihotep's tomb is the only one that mentions specific kings, though this could be due to preservation: Newberry, 1894–1895, vol. 2, 4.

[52] At Beni Hasan, only three of the twelve inscribed tombs contain royal cartouches: Tomb 14 (Amenemhat I), Tomb 2 (Senwosret I), and Tomb 3 (Senwosret II): Newberry and Griffith 1893–1900, vol. 1, 2. However, most officials buried there had titles such as "confidential friend of the king" or "royal acquaintance": E.g., Neternekht (No. 23), Remushenta (No. 27), Baqt I (No. 29), Baqt II (No. 33), Baqt III (No. 15), Khety (No. 17): Newberry and Griffith 1893–1900, vol. 2, 27–53. The cemetery included both monumental rock-cut tombs of local leaders and smaller shaft tombs on the lower slope: Newberry and Griffith 1893–1900, vol. 1, 3. The shaft tombs included similar grave goods to the monumental tombs, but usually in lower quality; these include plain pottery and figurines: Newberry and Griffith 1893–1900, vol. 2, 81.

[53] Newberry and Griffith 1893–1900, vol. 1, 11–33.

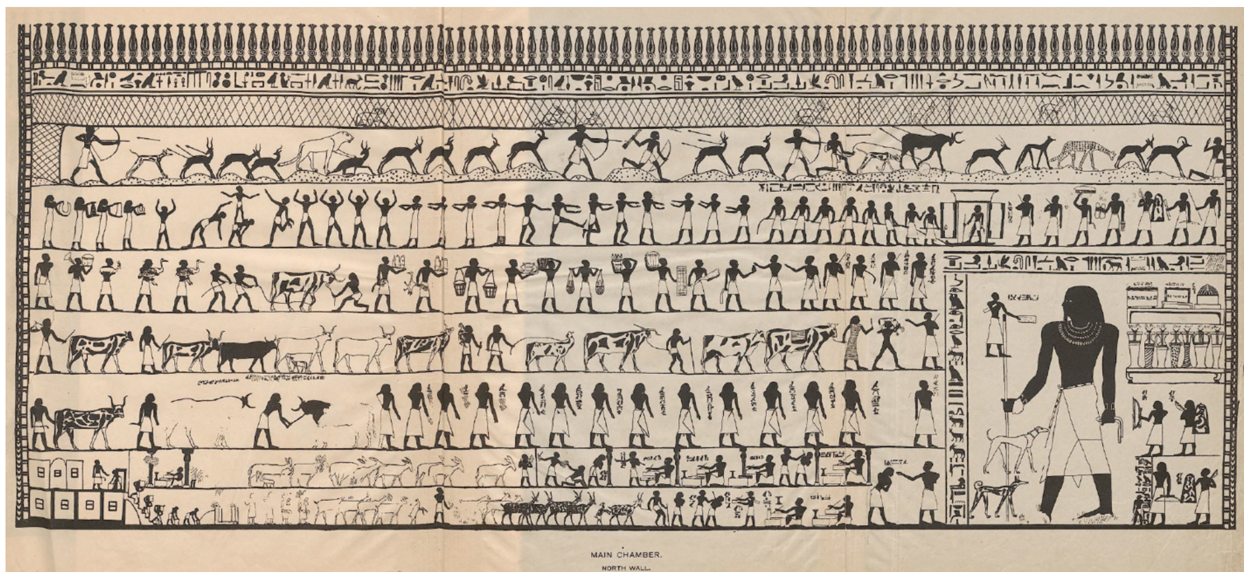

Figure 5.2: Offering bearers in the tomb of Amenemhat at Beni Hasan (Newberry and Griffith 1893–1900, vol. 1, pl. XIII).

Though the king was usually not included in non-royal tomb decoration in this period, tomb owners primarily in the early Middle Kingdom sometimes pictured themselves with accoutrements that originated in the royal sphere and featured tomb decoration of a royal character.[54] For instance, a colossal figure of Khnumhotep used to sit on a throne in his tomb at Beni Hasan,[55] and statues of Wahka II from his tomb at Qaw el-Kebir wear a shendyt kilt and false beard.[56] Djehutihotep at Deir el-Bersha was also represented with a shendyt kilt.[57] Broad collars, common in representations of officials in the late Middle Kingdom, are interpreted as identifying the deceased as a king or a deity.[58] The use of royal-like garments in non-royal tombs has been tied to the decline of royal control in the First Intermediate Period,[59] a simplistic

[54] See also Feinman and Moreno García 2022, 50.
[55] Newberry and Griffith 1893–1900, vol. 1, 71.
[56] Fiore Marochetti 2016, 40. A ceremonial beard was also used by Khnumhotep II in his tomb: Kamrin 1992, 215–216.
[57] Pieke 2016, 97–98.
[58] Grajetzki 2018.
[59] Zelenková 2010, 150.

interpretation, not least because this practice was not uncommon and does not seem to have been censored. Early scholarship on the tomb of Ukhhotep IV at Meir, who lived during the reigns of Senwosret II and Senwosret III, assumed that he had claimed royal privileges due to his use of decoration usually reserved for royal contexts: the *sema-tawy* sign, the tomb owner holding an ankh, a procession of fertility figures (Figure 5.3), and an inscription saying that Ukhhotep "may appear as king of Upper and Lower Egypt."[60] Besides granting the tomb owner a heightened status, such inscriptions and representations that likened the tomb owner to the king are tied to Osiris and what (or perhaps who) the deceased needed to be after death. This connection will be discussed further below.

[60] See Grajetzki 2022, 903; Grajetzki 2014a, 183; Blackman and Apted 1953, 35, pl. xvii.

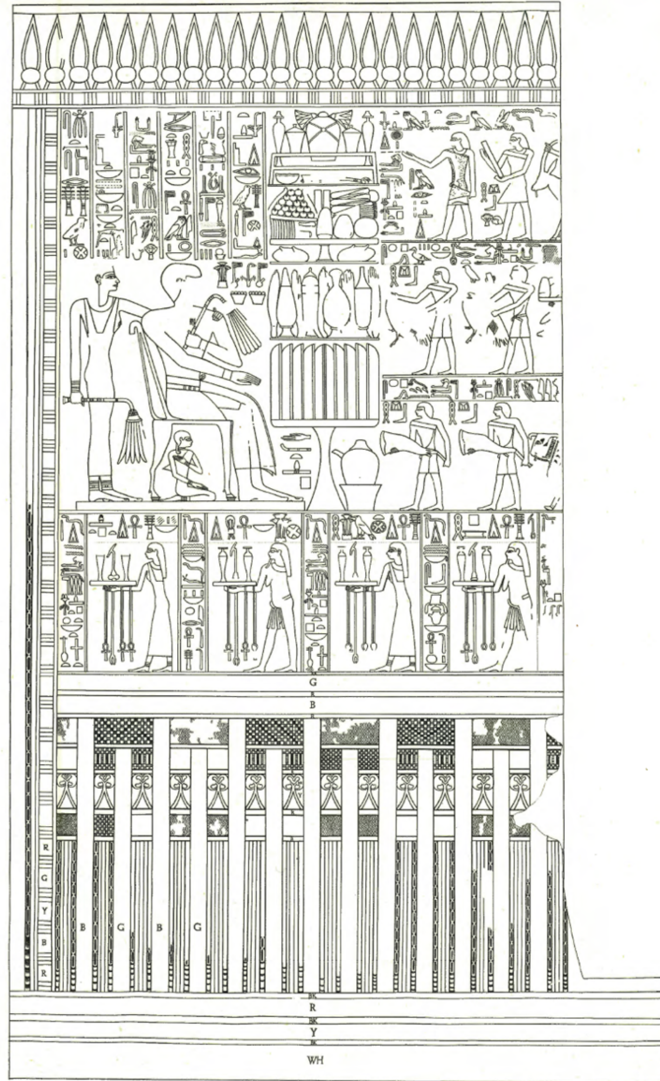

Figure 5.3: Procession of fertility figures in the tomb of Ukhhotep (Blackman and Apted 1953, pl. XVII).

Rules often have exceptions, and the lack of royal depictions in Middle Kingdom tombs is no different: Senwosret I is featured in Theban tomb TT 60 (Figure 5.4).[61] While usually attributed to the vizier Antefoqer, the tomb actually belonged to a woman named Senet, and Antefoqer plays a rather subsidiary role.[62] It is unclear whether Senet was the mother or a wife of

[61] I thank Maggie Geoga for bringing this tomb and its royal representation to my attention.
[62] Davies 1920, 1. For more on Antefoqer and his career as a vizier (as well as his tomb in Lisht), see Di. Arnold 2008, 69–71, pls. 129–133.

Antefoqer.[63] TT 60 oddly does not feature in discussions of the supposed decorum that would have kept royal images from being included in tombs in this period. But though very badly preserved, there is clearly a royal representation. All that remains of it is a part of the canopy under which the king would have sat or stood, the top of the Horus of Behdet, a part of the cartouche of Senwosret I, symbols associated with the *heb sed*, and a small part of a crown.[64] It is not impossible that other Theban tombs included such depictions, but if so none have been preserved.[65] TT 60 is thus an outlier, and it is not clear why Senwosret I is depicted. Senet was a priestess of Hathor and Antefoqer was a vizier, but it was clearly not common for officials or high-ranking women to feature the king in their tombs at this time; this became relatively common in the New Kingdom, and this example serves as a precursor to those later depictions. It should thus be contextualized in the shift from general to more specific tomb decoration discussed above.

The rest of TT 60's decoration fits what one would expect from tomb imagery in this period: agricultural scenes, hunting, and the boat journey to Abydos. Norman Davies suggested that the image of the king was a "magnification of office" or a dating strategy due to the potential *heb sed* association.[66] Perhaps including an image of the king here was supposed to heighten the status of the tomb owner(s), or perhaps it was tied to an important event in life—attending the *heb sed* ceremony?—that would help with the transition to life after death (like the funeral). Proponents of decorum would presumably assume that this depiction was only allowed because a

[63] Ragazzoli 2013, 271. Di. Arnold (2008, 69) believes Senet was his mother.
[64] Davies thought the image of the king might have been purposefully removed because of the patterning of the damage, and since several depictions of Antefoqer were purposefully removed that is not an impossibility: Davies 1920, 6, 13–14. It is not clear why or when these erasures would have taken place.
[65] TT 60 is the oldest tomb in this area of Sheikh Abd el-Qurna. Davies thought there might have been many others, which would have been usurped in the New Kingdom: Davies 1920, 1. There is at least one example of a Middle Kingdom tomb in Thebes that was later usurped, TT 117.
[66] Davies 1920, 14.

taboo had been lifted, or maybe because personal permission had been granted by the king. An equally valid explanation is that, for some reason, Antefoqer or Senet wished to depict the king in their tomb and that this was a *choice*. What exactly the image was doing or was meant to do is impossible to say, but the tomb owner's status as a social fulcrum in the tomb means that it should be interpreted in terms of what the image could do for him—or, in this case, her.

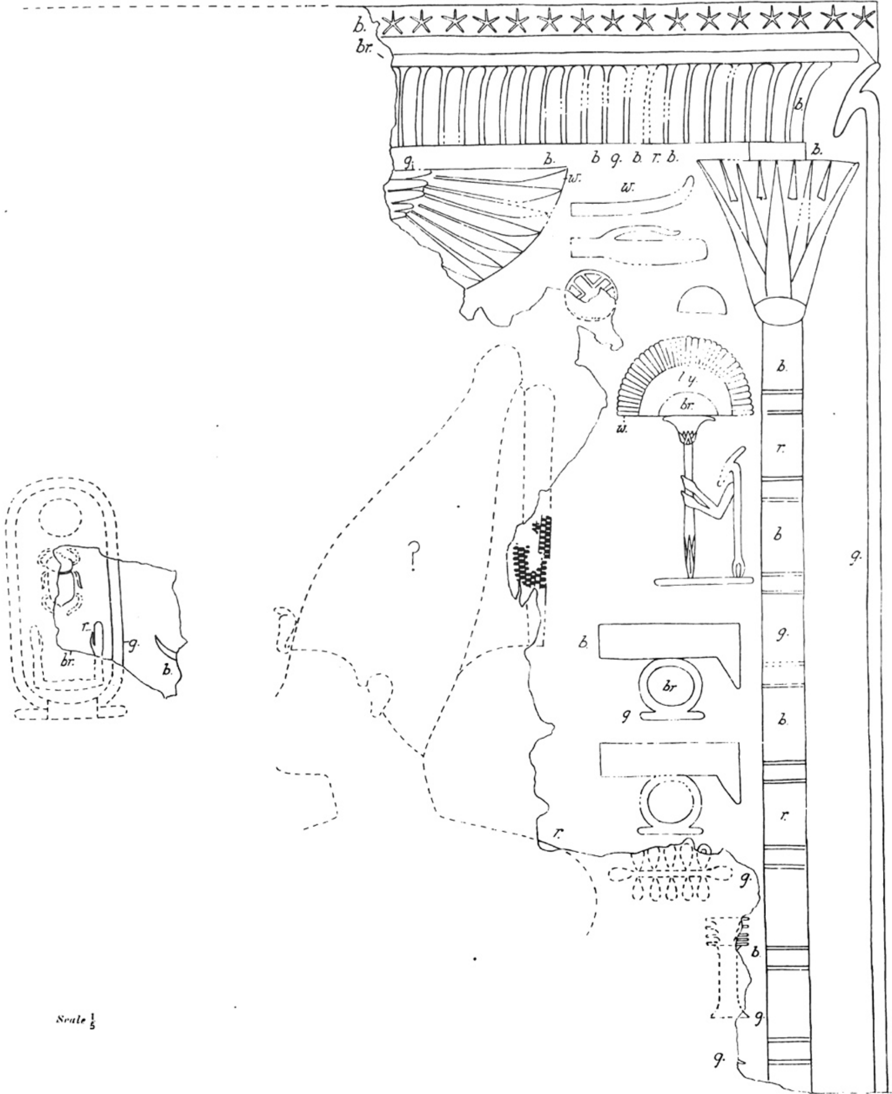

Figure 5.4: Senwosret I from TT 60 (Davies 1920, pl. XVI).

Beyond its pertinence for a discussion of kingship in the Middle Kingdom, TT 60 also offers potential insights about the experience of kingship across periods. This tomb has the highest number of visitors' inscriptions in the Theban necropolis, inscribed by early Eighteenth Dynasty visitors.[67] The impressive number of graffiti have of course been associated with the image of the king, who is mentioned in one of them with his full titulary; two also mention Queen Sobeknefru, who was thought by some Eighteenth Dynasty Egyptians to have been the owner of the tomb.[68] However, the rest of the graffiti are focused on documenting people's visits to the tomb of *Antefoqer* (the ancients, too, attributed it to him rather than to Senet). The distribution of the inscriptions may also be telling: 42 of them cluster on the north wall alongside the daily life scenes and ten cluster on the south wall where Senwsoret I was depicted, but those are associated with the depiction of the deceased's journey to Abydos (Figure 5.5). It would be easy to explain this away as some sort of taboo that stopped people from interacting with the king's image, and it is possible that there *were* graffiti there, which were destroyed when the royal image itself was. But it is also plausible that the interest in the tomb was due (at least partly) to its prominent position on the hill and its well-preserved state. If interest on the tomb *did* hinge on the image of the king,[69] it is perhaps the case that TT 60's location close to Eighteenth Dynasty tombs in use at that time made it more accessible, or perhaps more central, than if it had been an isolated royal monument (see Chapter 4).[70]

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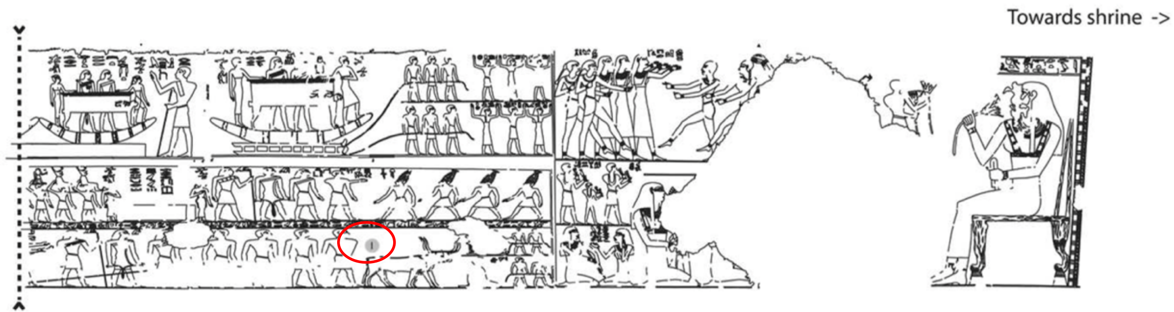
[67] There are 67 graffiti in total: Ragazzoli 2013, 271–272. This count is a result of Ragazzoli's recent reevaluation of the tomb, adding to the lower count in Davies 1920.

[68] Ragazzoli 2013, 290, 314. See also Davies 1920, 8, 27–29.

[69] Something that suggests an association with kingship in visitors' minds, even if it was not what initially drew them there, is the discovery of an ostracon in the area with parts of the *Teaching of Amenemhat*: Dorn 2005. Additional evidence that might support the idea of kingship attracting interest to past tombs is a graffito from the tomb of Khnumhotep II at Beni Hasan, which erroneously associates that tomb with Khufu of the Fourth Dynasty: Newberry 1893–1900, vol. 1, pl. 38, no. 3; this graffito is discussed in Spiegelberg 1917, 99.

[70] See Ragazzoli 2013 for the power of graffiti in individual and social memorialization, a process which TT 60 was a part of in this context.



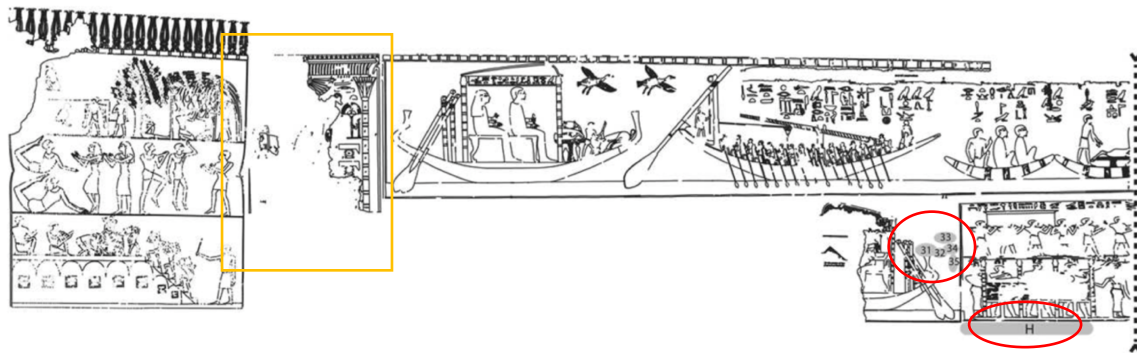


Figure 5.5: Locations of graffiti on the south wall of TT 60 (circled in red). Note that there are no graffiti close to the image of the king (highlighted in orange) (after Ragazzoli 2013, fig. 22).

As discussed in this section, the functions of tomb images and texts are tied to the nature of both the tomb owner and death itself as fulcrums. The tomb owner is a social fulcrum, a pole in both images and texts, which represent the parts of his life on either side of him (life and death, respectively). Death is a fulcrum in time, a meeting of linear and cyclical.[71] There are exceptions to this rule: tomb decoration often includes the funeral, which is linear rather than cyclical, and the standard offering formula, discussed below, is a text that is certainly cyclical rather than linear. But particularly in terms of social fulcrum, this interpretation justifies that the tomb owner is prominent in both images and texts, but that in one pole (images) his prominence is primarily due to overseeing other people, while in the other (texts) it is a case of being favored

[71] For a discussion of how death, and more specifically mummification, transferred the living from one strand of time to another (from *neheh* to *djet*), see Nyord 2013, 201–202, 209.

by those in charge of him, or in superior positions. Both inscriptions and texts worked together to showcase, and often increase—particularly through association with kingship—the status of the tomb owner so that he might survive his existence after death, a survival that hinged on being supported by the gods and by the living who brought offerings to the tomb. This interpretation, which satisfyingly explains why kings do not usually appear in elite tomb decoration but do frequently feature in texts in tombs, serves as an alternative to the prohibition of decorum by stressing the priorities of tomb owners rather than the supposed priorities of the royal institution. Importantly, it is anchored in the functions of each medium, as well as in the functions of tombs themselves.

§4.1.2 Grave goods

The connection between royal symbols, Osiris, and needs tied to one's continued existence after death is strengthened by grave goods discovered in tombs from this period. This section discusses primarily evidence from the late Middle Kingdom, when funerary objects associated with Osiris became relatively common. Wolfram Grajetzki has identified three main types of burials in the late Middle Kingdom. These types should not be seen as fixed categories, but instead as a spectrum of burial choices.[72]

The most common type of burial in the late Middle Kingdom belonged to non-royal and non-elite Egyptians. This burial type included objects that prioritized the protection of the deceased and the maintenance of their social identity, generally lacking objects of a funerary industry. The protective element of these burials is most clearly seen in objects such as amulets,

[72] Grajetzki 2014a, 156.

which in this period were often in the form of hawks or *wadjet* eyes.[73] Three graves from Abydos also provide a thought-provoking example in their inclusions of royal amulets: two in the form of the crown of Lower Egypt and one with a cartouche of Amenemhat III.[74] These graves were not rich, and so it is logical to assume that these amulets were prized possessions. Not much can be made of this example since such amulets are not common in Middle Kingdom burials at Abydos, but given the significance of the site at this time and the associations with different manifestations of kingship it is worth noting. At least, the amulets can again be read as a choice in engaging with kingship, in this case presumably in part because they were seen as powerful in an apotropaic sense. Since such objects are not common outside of Abydos, it is not impossible that these choices were influenced by the salience of kingship at the site.

In discussing non-elite graves, Grajetzki claimed that these people's afterlives were an extension of life and social identity on earth,[75] but it is important to remember that ritual depositions should not be straightforwardly interpreted as reflections of what the afterlife was like.[76] Perhaps they should instead, or additionally, be thought of as parts of ritual practices relevant to the funeral. These types of objects were also not restricted to non-elites. In the tomb of the official Senwosret at Lisht, the burial of his wife Hepy included several objects associated with domestic cultic practice, such as ivory figures of dancing dwarves and faience dolls.[77] It is unclear whether they are original to the burial, but if so they demonstrate that funerary needs did not always differ from cult practices performed in life. A second type of burial, primarily found

[73] E.g., from tombs in Abydos: see Tomb 197 in Grajetzki 2014b and tombs in Richards 1992. See Chapter 3 for the burial of hawk amulets in domestic contexts at Lahun, too.
[74] The amulets in the form of the crown of Lower Egypt were found in a shaft tome in Cemetery S (Peet 1914, 42) and in a shaft tomb in the North Cemetery (Peet 1914, 54). The cartouche amulet was found in Tomb 101 in Cemetery D (Peet and Loat 1913, 23).
[75] Grajetzki 2007, 51; Grajetzki 2014a, 156.
[76] This idea has long been problematized in broader archaeology based on ethnographic comparisons, though it has remained a staple in Egyptological scholarship. See, e.g., Ucko 1969.
[77] Di. Arnold 2008, 26.

in the Memphite region and the Fayum, but also in Abydos and Thebes, belonged to higher status individuals not closely associated with the royal court.[78] This burial type contained objects of a funerary industry, such as decorated coffins and mummy masks.

The burial type of most significance for a discussion of kingship is the so-called "court-type burial," known from the mid-Twelfth Dynasty onwards from elite tombs in Lisht, Dahshur, and Hawara, as well as provincial cemeteries.[79] This burial type included objects such as elaborate jewelry, staves, weapons, and scepters—many which were not used in life but instead made especially for the tomb, though some staves were potentially used in funerary rituals.[80] Court-type burials were not reserved for men, as is made clear from burials such as that of princess Nub-hepeti-khered and Senebtisi.[81] The usual explanation for the presence of objects such as weapons and scepters in non-royal tombs is that they turned the deceased into Osiris.[82] This is suggested by much later iconography that shows Osiris being brought back to life alongside his royal regalia (Figure 5.6).[83] It is a practice that may have started in the late Eleventh Dynasty, as some officials started being buried with mummy masks that could include a false beard and the nemes headdress.[84] This tendency towards "Osirification" in late Middle Kingdom burials may seem like a major difference from the purpose of less wealthy burials, but as discussed below the deceased's transformation into Osiris was also a protective measure that established an identity suitable for existence after death.

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[78] Grajetzki 2014a, 154.
[79] Grajetzki 2014a, 19. For example, the burial of Djehutynakht at Deir el-Bersha, which included staves, a flail, and a royal girdle: Grajetzki 2014a, 157.
[80] Grajetzki 2014a, 147, 151.
[81] Grajetzki 2007, 48; Grajetzki 2014a, 25–34. For numerous further examples, see the rest of Grajetzki 2014a.
[82] García González and Jiménez Serrano 2018, 20.
[83] Grajetzki 2007, 48.
[84] García González and Jiménez Serrano 2018, 15–16.

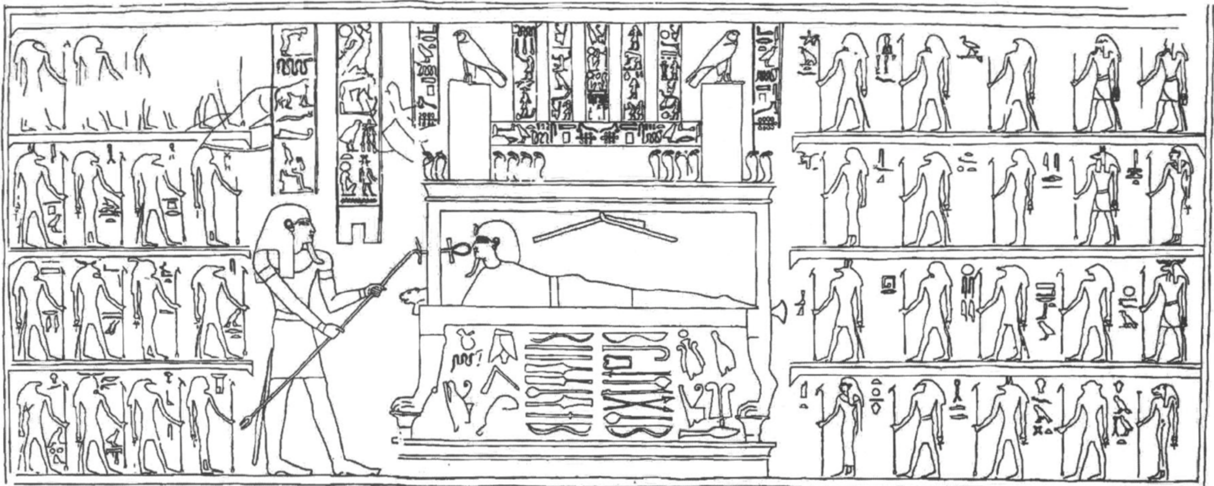

Figure 5.6: A representation of the resurrection of Osiris from the tomb of Sheshonq III (Grajetzki 2007, fig. 6).

Thought-provoking examples of “Osirification” burials come from cemeteries associated with royal centers. Harageh functioned as the Lahun cemetery.[85] The Middle Kingdom tombs (in Cemetery A and Cemetery S) are richer than those from other periods, likely because their owners were connected to the cult of Senwosret II.[86] Common grave goods include beads that represent the flail,[87] and Tomb 124 includes a fragmentary pectoral with the cartouche of Senwosret II and another with a Horus wearing the double feather crown, perhaps gifts from the king.[88] Dahshur North served the community associated with the cemeteries of Senwosret III and the Thirteenth Dynasty kings at Saqqara South. Due to tomb sizes and burial assemblages, it is assumed that their owners were not part of the royal court, though they are not poor graves.[89] Dahshur North shafts 79, 82, and 107 include faience fragments of what seem to have been flails

[85] Baba and Yazawa 2015, 23.
[86] Engelbach 1923, 9.
[87] Engelbach 1923, 10–12.
[88] As suggested by Engelbach (1923, 15); Grajetzki 2014a, 134. There are also cylinders and scarabs from the site with kings’ names, but their specific provenances are unfortunately not published (Engelbach 1923, 19).
[89] Baba and Yazawa 2015, 1, 23. Also see Baba and Yoshimura 2011; Yoshimura and Baba 2015; Yazawa 2017. Published tombs in Dahshur North include uninscribed as well as inscribed coffins, with most including primarily ceramic vessels. These include the coffin from Shaft 65. A stela with the offering formula was also found in Shaft 106: Baba and Yazawa 2015, 7–8, 20. Yazawa 2017, 537.

and *was* scepters,[90] and the deceased buried in Shaft 42 had a mummy mask with a false beard and a blue feathered headdress.[91]

Lisht was another cemetery with tombs of officials likely associated with the royal funerary cult and/or the royal court.[92] As expected, kings are mentioned in autobiographies in tombs of officials.[93] More interesting is the discovery of two statues outside the enclosure wall of the tomb of official Imhotep (Figure 5.7).[94] They wear the red and white crowns and have features that parallel those of Amenemhat II's statues. It is unclear, however, who (or what) the statues represent. It has been said that, rather than the human manifestation of the king, the divine kilts worn by the statues indicate that they are instead divine guardian spirits.[95] However, this interpretation might arise from a mislabeling of Tutankhamun's famous black and gold standing statues by Howard Carter as "guardians" due to their placement at the entrance of the tomb,[96] statues which are similar to these. At least one of those statues is labeled with the name of Tutankhamun, showing that it was a representation of the king. The statues found at Lisht are not labeled, and since this was not a royal tomb it is perhaps less likely that they represent a specific king; also, the divine kilts do still imply that they are divine. The statues were found with an *imiut* standard (the Anubis fetish), a symbol associated with Osiris found in royal tombs.[97] Two model boats were also buried near Imhotep's tomb, and they may represent boats

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[90] Baba and Yazawa 2015, 12; Yazawa 2017, 539.
[91] Baba 2014; Baba and Yazawa 2015, 13.
[92] The cemetery included hundreds of shaft tombs, but unfortunately the published report does not discuss them in detail: Di. Arnold 2008. For information on several Lisht mastabas, see Oppenheim 2021.
[93] These include the tombs of Senwosretankh, Intef, Mentuhotep, and Djehuty. The tomb of Senwosretankh also included serekh façades in the decoration of the burial chamber: Di. Arnold 2008, 13–23, 26–27, 38–44, 52–53.
[94] Di. Arnold 2008, 33–35, pl. 47.
[95] This is an argument by Dorothea Arnold, which has unfortunately not been published, making it hard to engage with. It was mentioned in Di. Arnold 2008, 35. This is also the interpretation on the Met website (the object's accession number is 14.3.17).
[96] See Price 2019. I thank Rune Nyord for pointing this out to me.
[97] Met 14.3.19–20. For more information on the origins of the *imiut* standard, see Logan 1990.

used for the funerary voyage to Abydos.[98] But boats were sometimes also buried with kings, including in the Twelfth Dynasty.[99] It seems, therefore, that a plausible interpretation for the assemblage is that it was meant to turn *Imhotep* into a king in death. If that interpretation takes the evidence too far, it still cannot be discounted that a non-royal person has two figures deposited by his tomb that reference ideas of kingship and royal embodiment. They clearly however do not depict a specific, and certainly not a living, king, and they are funerary in nature.

Figure 5.7: One of the statues found outside the tomb of Imhotep at Lisht; this one wears the red crown (Met 14.3.17, public domain).

[98] Di. Arnold 2008, 35.
[99] Inglis 2023. For a royal boat burial from the Twelfth Dynasty, see Wegner 2017.

§4.1.3 Imagery, inscriptions, and grave goods: conclusions

While the Egyptians mentioned above, buried in royal cemeteries, were not in the royal court, they were undoubtedly exposed to royal symbols in serving the king. It is worth asking, therefore, whether symbols such as the flail—undeniably royal—would have been recognized as such in this context. Even though these objects were buried, there are different audiences to consider. The craftsmen who made the objects, anyone witnessing the burial and performing funeral rites, the deceased themselves, and of course the gods. This is worth asking because, similarly to tomb owners wearing royal attire in tomb decoration, the usual interpretation for the presence of such objects in tombs is that they allowed the deceased to become Osiris. Consequently, it seems important to define the connotations of "royal" and "kingship" closely here: which manifestation of kingship is actually in play, and can we distinguish between different iterations of kingship? Most of the evidence discussed so far suggests that kingship was critically important once a person was dead. Royal attributes and attire in tomb imagery and objects with royal connotations in burials all seem to be tied to Osirian kingship, and particularly with the practice that the dead became (an) Osiris in death.

This is not the case for mentions of specific kings in autobiographies, or for the depiction of Senwosret I in TT 60, so that interpretation is not total. As discussed with a variety of examples in previous chapters, the non-royal experience of kingship could differ dramatically according to status (among other factors). This becomes particularly pertinent in the case of mentions of specific ruling kings in private autobiographies. For a royal official, the king *was* important for his self-definition, for his social role. And so it makes much sense that, based on the function of autobiographies discussed above and their audience, the specific kings whom they served would be featured. But the burial of royal statues in the tomb of Imhotep at Lisht,

which was likely accompanied by funeral rites, or the visiting of a tomb in which the tomb owner was depicted with a shendyt kilt, means that these symbols of royal power would have been engaged with by other living people—that they would have been critical to the practice of those rituals. The importance of kingship in death would therefore also have been recognized by the living. These conclusions will be both strengthened and complicated in the following sections.

§4.2 Coffins and Coffin Texts

This section deals with royal symbols represented on coffins, and with the content of Coffin Texts. The main conclusion from this section, resultant of the analysis of both images and texts, is that the symbols and Coffin Texts so often associated with quotidian kingship are instead associated with Osiris. While kingship as embodied by human rulers and Osirian kingship should not be entirely separated, conflating them leads to misinterpretations of the role of quotidian kingship in funerary practice. The importance of kingship in particularly the Coffin Texts, which were performed by living ritualists, would have also been recognized and understood by living people.

It is often difficult to evaluate how elite monumental tombs such as the ones discussed above and decorated coffins worked together due to the scattered state of the remains.[100] Though elaborately decorated coffins are usually primarily associated with monumental elite tombs, they are sometimes also found in less rich funerary contexts.[101] Harco Willems' 1988 study of Middle Kingdom coffins remains the authority on typology and categorization. His conclusions were based on a considerable number of coffins,[102] including examples from Beni Hasan, Deir el-

[100] Bickel 2019, 28.
[101] De Meyer 2016.
[102] For which see the lists at the beginning of Willems 1988.

Bersha, Meir, Lisht, the Memphite area, and Thebes—both provincial capitals and cemeteries close to royal centers. As such, his typology is taken as the starting point here.

At the end of the Old Kingdom, in the transition to the First Intermediate Period, coffins were rectangular with inscriptions on their exterior that invoked gods, as well as an eye panel. The most important change from earlier Old Kingdom coffins was the introduction of Coffin Texts, as well friezes of objects and offering lists.[103] This style of coffin continued through the Eleventh Dynasty, and in the early Twelfth Dynasty coffins became more elaborate with columns of inscription on the outside and false doors, as well as elaborate texts and decoration inside. In the middle of the Twelfth Dynasty, it became more common to have a niched frieze around coffins, which has been interpreted by some as the palace of the deceased (due to the association with the palace façade or *serekh*),[104] though arguments have also been made for a solely architectural rather than royal association.[105] At any rate, the use of this motif declined around the reign of Amenemhat III or a bit later.[106] Around the reign of Senwosret III, coffins became simpler once more, with a lack of decoration particularly in their interior (including a lack of Coffin Texts).[107]

For the purposes of this study, the most notable characteristic of early Middle Kingdom coffins is the interior decoration that often included representations of offerings and other objects in decorative friezes (or *frises d'objets)* (e.g., Figure 5.8). It is believed that the representation of

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[103] For a general overview, see Taylor 1989, 17–26.
[104] Willems 1988, 120, 162. This is sometimes also interpreted as symbolic of the house of the deceased, an interpretation that Willems disagrees with (1988, 242): the point was not to represent a house, but rather the palace the deceased would live in during his afterlife as king of the gods. Two examples of coffins (B7C and B14C) have also been interpreted as reproducing the pattern of the wall of Djoser's Step Pyramid complex, and their owners likely had close ties to the royal court: Willems 2021.
[105] Walsem 2014.
[106] Grajetzki 2016, 38.
[107] Grajetzki 2007, 42.

objects of daily life enabled the coffin to become a microcosmos,[108] and that many of the depicted objects were used in funerary rituals.[109] More than mere representations, these paintings of objects were made effective after the Opening of the Mouth ceremony and likely acted as abstract renderings of ritual acts associated with the presentation of funerary objects to the deceased.[110] *Frises d'objets* also included items of royal regalia, including crowns, scepters, weapons, and collars. It is thus possible that—if the objects represented funerary rituals—those rituals derive from both royal and non-royal contexts (some objects, like weapons, may have been relevant to both ritual categories).[111] The royal rituals themselves might have already become more accessible to non-royal people, since different royal prerogatives were already being popularized by the end of the Old Kingdom.[112] Just because an object has a royal background does not mean that its immediate origin was royal, and for our purposes the origin is less relevant than whether something was recognized or understood as primarily royal by its contemporaries.

[108] Willems 1988, 47.
[109] See Willems 1988, 200–209; Willems 1997.
[110] Willems 1988, 47, 202.
[111] Willems 1988, 204–205, 225; Miniaci 2010, 58; Grajetzki 2014a, 27.
[112] Willems 1988, 225. See also Willems 2014, chapter 3, especially 135–140.

Figure 5.8: From the coffin of Ukhhotep, son of Hedjpu, an example of a decorative frieze that includes a pair of sandals (Met 12.182.132a, b, public domain).

A well-preserved coffin with regalia in the decorative frieze is that of Djehutynakht from Deir el-Bersha (Figure 5.9),[113] where many coffins with these symbols were found.[114] While perhaps a well-worn example, the available documentation for the coffin makes it an excellent case study, particularly due to the high quality of images. However, many other coffins could have been used to illustrate the following points, since this type of decoration was not uncommon in this period.[115] Djehutynakht's coffin includes representations of maceheads and

[113] Freed et al. 2009.
[114] Willems 1988, 220.
[115] For a table showing the frequencies of royal insignia (among other motifs) on Middle Kingdom coffins, see Willems 1988, table 13. For examples of other coffins with royal regalia in the decorative frieze, see Jéquier 1921 (page numbers after motif types): nemes (8–9), uraeus (12), shendyt kilt (20–21), bags with labels associated with kings (32–33), crook (168–169), divine scepters (176–177), flail (188), mace (204–205). A catalogue with all

bows, broad collars, scepters, weapons, and a shendyt kilt. Interestingly, the frieze also includes the representation of eight pouches of linen labeled "king's equipment" (*aprt nswt*) (Figure 5.10).[116] The pictured objects parallel physical sticks and staves that are replicas of scepters found in the tomb.[117] Willems suggests that the function of the representations of royal regalia was to allow the deceased to "assume the role of king in the Hereafter,"[118] emphasizing that the king was Osiris.[119] The notion that such emblems stood for a co-opting of royal privilege and power had been previously argued by Hermann Kees, who assumed that this category of decoration was introduced during the First Intermediate Period, when kingship was destabilized and kings were unable to prevent their subjects from usurping their symbols.[120] It was thus associated with the problematic "democratization of the afterlife."[121] However, nothing suggests that the use of such symbols by non-royal Egyptians was menacing to the royal institution.[122] Additionally, friezes with royal regalia actually started appearing around the reign of Amenemhat II,[123] becoming increasingly common until the shift in funerary practices in the reign of Senwosret III.[124] The inaccuracy of the interpretation also becomes evident when consulting the Coffin Texts that often accompanied these representations of royal symbols.

Middle Kingdom coffins featuring royal regalia in object friezes is a desideratum, since it would perhaps allow for the analysis here to be taken a step further, by identifying patterns based on location or other factors.

[116] Freed at al. 2009, 122–123.
[117] Freed et al. 2009, 141.
[118] Willems 1988, 47.
[119] Willems 1988, 221.
[120] Kees 1956.
[121] See Bourriau 1991, 4; M. Smith 2008; Nyord 2021.
[122] Willems 1988, 222.
[123] Willems 1988, 216–218.
[124] Willems 1988, 226.

Figure 5.9: Front panel of the coffin of Djehutynakht (MFA 20.1822, photograph by Marcus Cyron).[125]

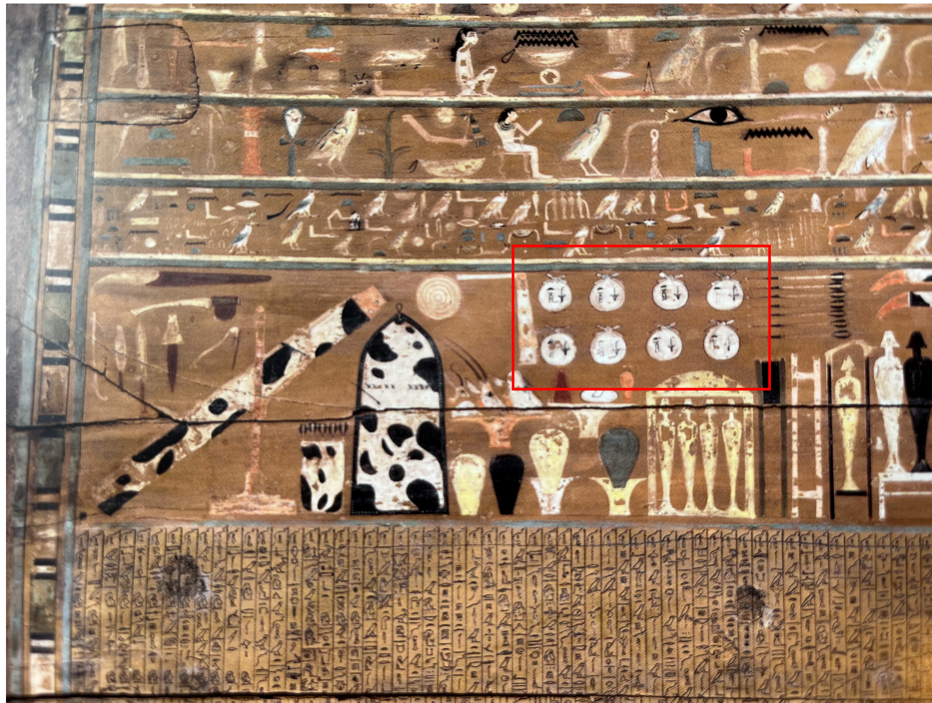

Figure 5.10: King's equipment (*aprt nswt*) from the coffin of Djehutynakht (after Freed et al. 2009).

[125] Photograph from https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Outer_Coffin_of_Djehutynakht_5.jpg (accessed 15 June 2023).

Coffin Texts were inherently associated with funerary ritual and its requirements, but can be considered both from quotidian and otherworldly perspectives.[126] There seems to have been a level of choice in the Coffin Texts employed, even though similar spells could be used across a range of coffins.[127] While tomb autobiographies emphasized the deceased's identity in life, Coffin Texts were responsible for establishing a new identity for the deceased adequate to a continued existence after death, including divine characteristics and powers.[128] The establishment of this identity can be seen in Coffin Text 149, where the deceased is described as a great falcon, a strategy where power was attained through the integration of godly features.[129] In the Coffin Texts, the deceased also enacts mythological roles, such as those of Seth, Isis, and Heka: this was the most effective way to claim an invulnerable status.[130] The establishment of this identity is tied to descriptions of the deceased possessing objects such as crowns, staffs, or weapons, objects also sometimes represented in *frises d'objets*.[131] These motifs may ultimately originate in the royal context of the Pyramid Texts, from which the Coffin Texts derive at least in part.[132] However, this phenomenon should be considered in terms of the function it played in the funerary context of non-royal people: where they were used for the establishment of an identity for the dead.[133] Rather than allowing the deceased to become a king in the human political sense through the possession of such symbols, the deceased became Osiris. These symbols, therefore, pertained to hierarchies of power as they did on earth, but in this context they cannot be merely associated with the human king.

[126] Bickel 2019, 28.
[127] Bickel 2019, 29–30.
[128] Bickel 2019, 33–36.
[129] Bickel 2019, 37–38. See also Coffin Text 313 (Goebs 2019, 79).
[130] Bickel 2019, 38, 42.
[131] Goebs 2019, 79.
[132] For an example of a Coffin Text that does not derive from a Pyramid Text, see Goebs 2019, 79 (Coffin Text 313). It has also been argued that the Coffin Texts do not all originate from a funerary context: Lieven 2019.
[133] Bickel 2019, 36–37. See also Goebs 2019.

Though Coffin Texts are tied to funerary practice, they also shared functions with other ritual texts. They were thus parts of the Egyptian lifeworld, rather than only pertinent to funerary concerns.[134] Conceptually speaking, this means that Coffin Texts should be seen as references to mythological processes in which the dead could be embedded through ritual practice.[135] One implication of this is that these texts were not meant only for the deceased's knowledge in the afterlife, but were likely also performed by living people.[136] The godly and royal characteristics taken on by the dead would therefore not only have been known by the deceased undergoing the transformation, but also by the person(s) performing the ritual (and perhaps by the craftsmen writing the texts on the coffins, though there we must grapple with the restricted nature of ritual and religious knowledge in ancient Egypt). Crucially, the mythological elements in the Coffin Texts suggest that the ritualist did not transform the deceased into an entity resembling the human ruler, but rather that the point was to become a divine Osiris.

The need to distinguish kingship as manifest in quotidian and mythological contexts is further corroborated by Katja Goebs' study of the royalty (or lack thereof) of the Coffin Texts. Her survey produced 41 attestations of *n(j)swt* (king), discounting the more abundant occurrences in the standard offering formula. She also found three occurrences of *bjtj* (usually associated with kingship of Lower Egypt), two of *njswt-bjtj* (often translated as King of Upper and Lower Egypt or King of Two Lands),[137] and two for *nsyt* (kingship). There were also 23 examples of *HqA* (ruler) and 17 of *jty* (sovereign), and though those terms are not solely used in

[134] For a history of scholarship on why Coffin Texts (and other "funerary texts") have been traditionally associated solely with the afterlife in Egyptology, see Nyord 2020a.
[135] This is contrasted by Nyord with the "assumed primacy of the salvation of an individual in whose services a barrage of mythology is deployed" (Nyord 2020a, 14).
[136] See e.g., Nyord 2020a; also Willems 2019.
[137] Though this translation is not uncontroversial, and it has been reevaluated in more recent scholarship, particularly with regards to its use in titulary of Nubian kings of both the Napatan and Meroitic periods. See, e.g., Török 1997, 208-209; Cervelló Autuori 2003, 50–51; Leprohon 2013, 17; Pope 2020, 12–13.

reference to kings in other texts, in the Coffin Texts they are used as synonyms for *njswt* or *bjtj*.[138] Most of these attestations refer to Osiris, sometimes to Horus; most are associated with cosmic processes tied to a succession of celestial rulers.[139] Coffin Text 45 uses the mythology of Osiris to indicate that, by becoming Osiris, the deceased has the power to ensure his continued existence, including through access to provisions. Though Osiris is the most common association, the deceased could also be associated with other gods, of primarily solar character, who allowed him or her to continue existing by participating in the solar cycle.[140] When the deceased did not become *nswt* themselves, they were said to be in the favor of one, for instance in Coffin Text 257, where the deceased becomes "an honored one of the *njswt*-king of the sky."[141] Both scenarios gave the deceased the power to continue existing.

While references to king and kingship in the Coffin Texts refer to Osiris, Coffin Text 313 demonstrates that the hierarchy of power in the divine realm was conceptualized in terms of a system of political rule based on kingship. In this text, the deceased refers to himself as both Osiris and Horus, in terms of their right to rule and their use of regalia such as thrones, crowns (including the uraeus), and scepters.[142] Goebs claims that this example explains better than any other why kingship terms are used in these texts: they make the otherworldly nature of power understandable.[143] Osiris even claims to appear both as the ruler of the sky and as the king of the earth. But this does not mean that the deceased was supposed to become the *living manifestation* of kingship, and certainly not a specific ruling king. This is suggested by for instance Coffin Text 256, when the office of kingship is explicitly linked with a celestial location rather than a region

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138 Goebs 2019, 70–71.
139 Goebs 2019, 72.
140 Goebs 2019, 77.
141 Goebs 2019, 85, 94.
142 Goebs 2019, 80–81, 94.
143 Goebs 2019, 94.

in Egypt.[144] This is also suggested by the fact that the royal title most usually associated with (supposedly) geographical territory, *nsjwt-bjtj*, only appears in these texts twice.[145]

In the Coffin Texts, concepts of royalty and kingship are "ultimately employed metaphorically … intended to express this desired state of affairs in an easily comprehensible, yet magically effective manner."[146] Though terms such as *nswt* are frequent in the Coffin Texts, they cannot be said to in this context refer to kingship in its quotidian sense. The fact that they occur at all, of course, is still relevant for a consideration of an experience of kingship in the Middle Kingdom. But in this case it should be qualified as the experience of Osirian rather than kingship as manifested by individual human rulers.

§4.3 Offering formula

Ancient Egyptian offering formulae are extremely commonplace; they would have occurred on most (if not all) tombs and coffins discussed above, which often means that they are taken for granted and not studied very closely.[147] However, they are the only non-royal context in which kings are consistently found. As such, they are an essential category to consider when investigating the non-royal experience of kingship. Their separation into a separate category here is not meant to imply that they are not key to the functioning of the tombs and coffins analyzed in the previous two sections—rather, offering formulae were ubiquitous in funerary practice.

The so-called standard offering formula included a set of consistent components: *nswt* (king), one or more gods (optional), requests for offerings and blessings, and the name of the recipient. In the Middle Kingdom, this standard formula changed in style and orthography, but it

[144] Goebs 2019, 82–83.
[145] Goebs 2019, 97.
[146] Goebs 2019, 94.
[147] Franke 2003, 39.

continued to include those main components.[148] The portion that includes the king, *Htp di nswt*—usually translated as "an offering that the king gives" or a "royal offering"—is often used as a label for the formula itself. Common gods included in the offering formula in this period are Osiris and Anubis in the Eleventh Dynasty, and primarily Osiris (who sometimes becomes Ptah-Sokar-Osiris) in the Twelfth Dynasty. Other commonly included gods are Ptah, Hathor, Khnum, and Heket.[149] Formulae in the Middle Kingdom sometimes only included the *Htp di nswt* portion without the addition of gods, though it seems like gods were the only ones able to directly fulfill afterlife wishes, based on the formula's grammatical construction (the *di.f* or *di.sn* never refer back to the king, and there are no known examples of *Htp di nswt di.f prt-Hrw*).[150]

Modern translations of the offering formula sometimes differ in basic meaning. In the past, the Middle Kingdom offering formula had been translated as "an offering which the king gives/has given *to* [specific god(s)]," who would then give the offering(s) to the deceased. In this reading, gods are understood both as givers and recipients of offerings.[151] Instead, Detlef Franke argued that Middle Kingdom offering formulae should be read as "an offering which the king has given (and) Osiris has given…"[152] (with Osiris able to be replaced with other gods' names). Rather than a dative construction (with a *n* between *nswt* and the god) that would make the god(s) the recipient(s) of the offerings, the gods are givers of offerings together with the king. Franke's rereading makes sense, though the cyclical nature of the offering formula discussed above suggests that it should be translated as an action that occurs in the present, rather than in the past. This discussion is something of a minefield, and trying to solve the question is beyond

[148] Smither 1939; Bennett 1941, 77; Vernus 1991; Franke 2003, 39; Ilin-Tomich 2011.
[149] Bennett 1941, 80.
[150] Franke 2003, 45–46, 51.
[151] Franke 2003, 40, 46, 53.
[152] Franke 2003, 39, 45.

the scope of this chapter. The important point to be stressed is that *nswt* acts as a giver of offerings that ultimately reach the dead.

The inclusion of *nswt* with other gods in the standard offering formula is reminiscent of the same in the Lahun letters discussed in Chapter 3, and perhaps also suggests that the king is acting in his role as a god here. However, there is an important difference between the inclusion of kings in offering formulae and the invocation of kings in letters: while the residents of Lahun invoked a *specific* king by using their names, offering formulae most often include simply *nswt*. The letters existed in a specific point in time.[153] On the contrary, the offering formula was cyclical in nature and supposed to function *over* time. Different possibilities, none of them mutually exclusive, might explain the lack of specificity of *nswt* in offering formulae. It is possible that a specific king was not mentioned because that was unnecessary, since the king would have been known. If we accept that a tomb needed to function for a long time, more than one living king would have been relevant, since kings would die and new kings would ascend the throne during that time. An important implication here is that the offering formula would have been seen and probably spoken by visitors, and that they would have known that one of the figures responsible for the offerings to the dead was a king, and presumably which king it was (if that mattered). The lack of specificity in the offering formula could also (or instead) indicate that for the formula to be effective it was important that any and all kings could make offerings; the formula is not tied to a specific reign, but rather to the role of kings writ broadly. This is suggested by the fact that offering formulae could be used in royal contexts, for example in the

[153] If we had a larger corpus of letters, and in light of the analysis of the offering formula here, it would be interesting to see if there are patterns in the invocations according to subject matter and timescale in the content of the letters.

Thirteenth Dynasty stela of Awibre Hor, where the unspecified *nswt* offers to the ka of the king (Figure 5.11).[154]

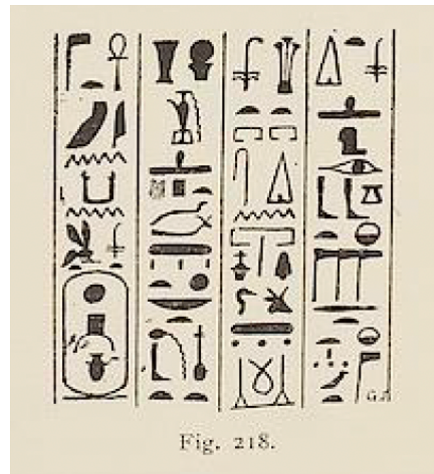

Figure 5.11: Excerpt from stela of Awibre Hor, where the offering formula mentions offerings being given to the ka of the king (de Morgan 1895, fig. 218).

The suggestion that the *nswt* in the formula was a generic king might be supported by an example of an extended offering formula in the stela of Nebpu from the Twelfth Dynasty (Figure 5.12).[155] This offering formula mentions several gods, such as Ptah and Anubis, who are included in the usual phrasing of *Htp di nswt ptH* or *Htp di nswt inpw*, which as discussed above can be translated as "an offering that the king and [god] give." Further down, a less usual construction appears: *Htp di nswt nswt bity khakheperra* [Senwosret II] *n ka n*… Given the position of the seated king sign wearing the crown of Upper Egypt (Gardiner 43) after *di*, it cannot be read as a determinative without emendation; rather, it should be considered a separate ideogram. This means that this phrase cannot be read as "An offering that the king Senwosret II gives to…," where Senwosret II's cartouche is used to specify the king giving the offering.[156]

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[154] Grajetzki 2014a, 148. For the stela, see de Morgan 1895, 94, fig. 218.
[155] Engelbach 1923, pl. lxxi.
[156] Examples where a king might be specified are inscriptions on the outside of mastabas at Dahshur: Oppenheim 2021.

The parallelism with the rest of the inscription and the way this same construction is used with the names of Ptah and Anubis suggests that the titles and the name of the king are taking the standard position of the god in the formula. Here, then, a generic *nswt* again offers to a specific king, or offers with a specific king. Like in the case of Awibre Hor above, Senwosret II also seems to be dead here. This is suggested by the stela's origin at Harageh, which as discussed above was one of the cemeteries associated with the town of Lahun. It can be supposed that the king occurs here as a recipient of a local temple cult.

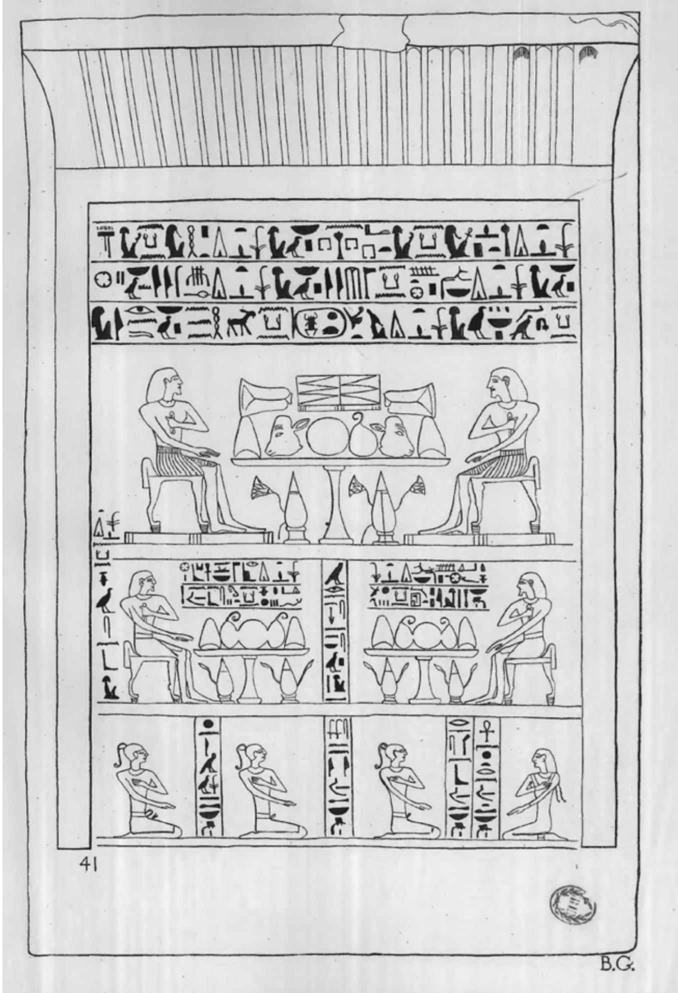

Figure 5.12: Stela of Nebpu with the extended offering formula (Engelbach 1923, pl. LXXI).

Indeed, the standard offering formula is mostly discussed in the context of tombs, but it was also relevant elsewhere. A statue of Senbebu from the sanctuary of Heqaib, for example, shows that participants of the Sokar festival, of which the cult of Heqaib was an important part in Elephantine (see Chapter 3), were asked to say the offering formula (specifically *Htp di nswt*) out loud in order to engage with the local god.[157] The offering formula is also found on stelae erected at Abydos that are not associated with funerary monuments, but rather with the festival of Osiris (see Chapter 4).[158] Additionally, stelae found in houses and likely used in domestic cult sometimes feature offering formulae. Examples of the latter include stela fragments found in Building A (the mayor's house) at Wah-Sut.[159] Though not all of these examples are associated with tombs, they all pertain to ancestor cult: Heqaib was a revered ancestor, Osiris is a revered ancestor (or ancestors, really), and, as discussed in Chapter 3, Middle Kingdom domestic cult often honored a family's ancestors, or deceased family members. These examples also emphasize that the offering formula was not only relevant for the dead, or for visitors to tombs. Participants of the Sokar festival, or those who had altars at home with stelae that included offering formulae, would have been aware that a king was a key part of their ritual practice.

When translating the phrase *Htp di nswt* on the stelae fragments found in Building A at Wah-Sut, Kevin Cahail used the expression "royal offering" rather than "an offering which the king gives." He uses the same translation when the offering formula is found in funerary contexts at Abydos.[160] This translation, which can be traced back at least to James Allen's Middle Egyptian grammar and seems to be the most common translation today,[161] draws attention to the

[157] Habachi 1985, 163.
[158] For examples, see Whelan 2016.
[159] Fragments 12631, 101-14-2, and 12639: Cahail 2014a, 36.
[160] E.g., a statue from tomb AGE.45 at North Abydos.
[161] Allen 2000.

nature of the offering rather than the supposed giver of the offering. This seems more appropriate if the interpretation proposed here—that what mattered was not that a specific king was making the offering, but rather that the offering was associated with *nswt*—is accepted. An inscription that supports this reading comes from the stela of the steward Mentuwoser, who served Senwosret I, from Abydos (Figure 5.13). On this stela the phrase *Htp di nswt* comes after the phrase *rd.n n.k Hm*, "[my] majesty gave to you." Miriam Lichtheim translates the inscription as "My majesty gives to you this stela as an offering-that-the-king-gives…,"[162] a meaning implied by the grammatical construction that again suggests that *Htp di nswt* is a type of offering: an offering that, for some reason, needed to be tied to *nswt*. This phrasing, and the connection between "king" and offering, may be tied to the origin of the offering formula, in the sense that the king theoretically monopolized the giving of offerings to private cults.[163]

[162] Lichtheim 1988, 104.
[163] It has also been suggested that the king may have originally actually done so: Strudwick 2005, 31.

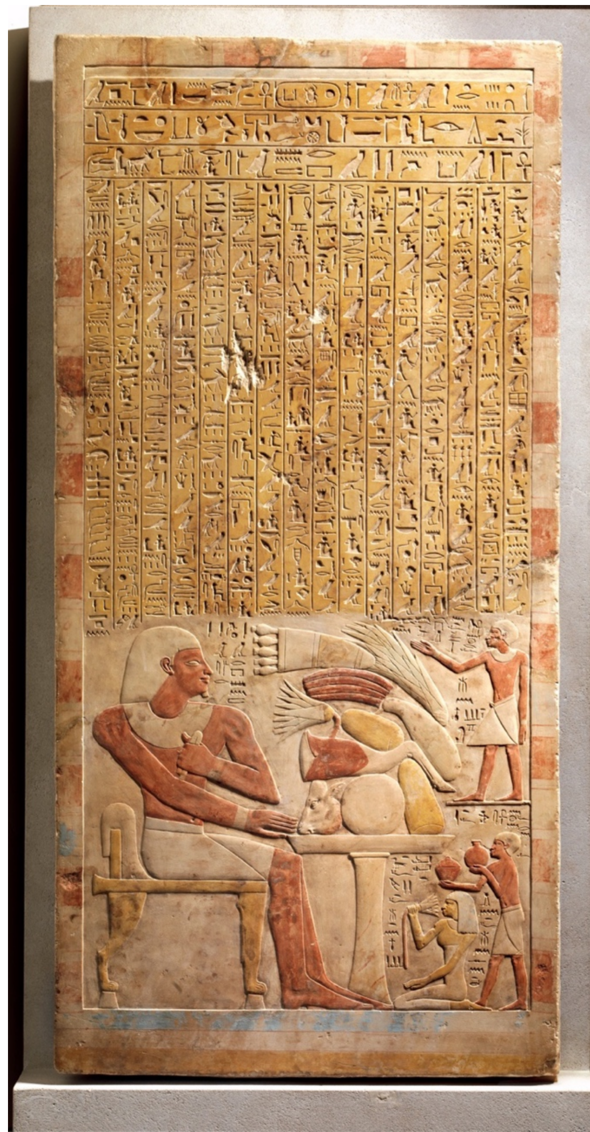

Figure 5.13: Stela of Mentuwoser (Met 12.184, public domain).

In *Peace in Ancient Egypt*, Vanessa Davies discusses the meaning of *Htp*—which can mean "peace" and "contentment" or "fulfillment," in addition to the more usual "offering"—extensively in offering scenes in both funerary and divine contexts. Due to her focus on "peace," she unfortunately does not explore the inextricable association between *nswt* and the standard offering formula, simply referring to the formula as "the *hetep*-offering that the king gives."[164]

[164] E.g., Davies 2018, 68 n. 36.

This demonstrates how the components of the standard offering formula are often taken for granted in scholarship, which should not be the case: the inclusion of the king is not self-explanatory and needs explanation. Fortunately, Davies does helpfully explore the relationship between the different meanings of *Htp* and their connections with the ideological concept of *maat*, or order, as well as how the latter is associated with royal duties. *Hetep,* in its meaning of "contentment" and "fulfillment," could be offered and received by a variety of actors, including the living and the dead, the king, and the gods.[165] These exchanges were made possible and significant through social interactions, which are what gave the images and texts in which offerings were pictured and mentioned their potency.[166] These interactions, and *hetep* itself—an ideological concept—were the result of "action[s] in accord with *maat*."[167] One of the king's main responsibilities, according to royal ideology, was to preserve *maat*,[168] and perhaps that serves as explanation for the consistent role of *nswt* in the standard offering formula: offerings could be, and indeed were, most often given by living relatives rather than the king himself, but in order for those offerings to be in accordance with the proper order of things—in order for them to be effective[169]—they needed to be contextualized in the king's role of preserving *maat*.

The above cannot serve as a full explanation of the phenomenon, particularly in light of the king's absence in other, less frequent, designations of offerings in the same context.[170] But this explanation does go some way in elucidating the sense in which the king is evoked in the offering formula. In light of the analysis above, it can be said that the king—perhaps a specific king in some instances, perhaps a generic *nswt*—was ubiquitous and prominently placed in

[165] Davies 2018, 59, 97, 112.
[166] Davies 2018, 72, 103, 108–109.
[167] Davies 2018, 82–86, 89.
[168] Davies 2018, 86, 112. See also Assmann 1990; Teeter 1997; Goyon 1998.
[169] Davies 2018, 107.
[170] The *prt-xrw* or so-called "voice offerings," for instance.

requests for offerings to the deceased. This was true whether the request was made in a tomb, or whether the ancestor was being venerated in a public festival or apparently even in a house. This presence of the king, and the significant role played by the king in death, would not have only been known by the dead or the gods, but also by the living who would have encountered such offering formulae in all of these contexts, as well as likely said it themselves. The oral performance of the formula can perhaps even be attributed to non-literate people. Kingship, therefore, remains critical in rituals associated with the dead—rituals that would have been relevant to the living as well.

§5 Conclusion

In the Middle Kingdom, kingship was critical to mortuary practice—to rituals that would have been performed by the living, relying on objects and texts crafted by the living.[171] In the discussion above, two different, but undoubtedly linked, manifestations of kingship were discussed: kingship as manifested by human rulers on the throne of Egypt, and mythological kingship primarily manifested by the god Osiris. Those different manifestations are sometimes conflated in discussions of the importance of kingship to non-royal Egyptians, which can sometimes be misleading.[172] But what is really of significance to the wider project at hand are the consequences of the critical role played by either manifestation of kingship in funerary practice for wider understandings of the role of the king in society, and specifically in the non-royal experience of kingship.

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[171] Continued existence after death in Egypt can be understood as "envisaged from an interrelated double perspective" in this regard: Bickel 2019, 32.

[172] In discussing the meaning of royal regalia in *frises d'objets*, Willems (Willems 1988, 227–228) refers to the "deceased's role as a king," which is unintentionally misleading: the deceased was not the human king, but rather Osiris. Willems explicitly acknowledges that this kingship pertains to Osiris rather than the human king by explaining that he does not think these motifs need to be explained in "political terms." But even using the term "king" in this context, without qualifying its meaning, is a bit unclear.

As theorized by Catherine Bell, ritual is not separate from other social practices; rather, ritual is a social practice, one that is *distinguished* from quotidian practices through ritualization. Funerary ritual in ancient Egypt was equally not separate from the broader Egyptian lifeworld, in particular because living people were crucial elements to many of the rituals and practices discussed above. Not all non-royal Egyptians would have owned coffins with royal regalia, and in fact much of the material discussed above is rather elite.[173] But living people also painted the tombs[174] and inscribed autobiographies; they participated in burial rites in different capacities (as offering bearers, as mourners, as spectators),[175] acted as ritualists and performed the Coffin Texts, and certainly either heard the offering formulae recited or did it themselves—likely not infrequently. It is not realistic to expect that all of these actors and audiences would have understood these practices in the same way, or that all of them would have understood the intricacies at all.[176] But the offering formula in particular, ubiquitous as it was, would have ingrained the ideology of the king as the guarantor of offerings. Hearing the deceased referred to as (an) Osiris, or seeing them being equipped and addressed with trappings of royalty, or even looking at tomb decoration that likened the deceased to the king, would likely have shaped the sense of a fairly wide range of participants and spectators of the dead as a king.

What specific roles did kingship play in mortuary practice? As discussed above, specifically mythological (or Osirian) kingship was critical in establishing the deceased's identity in the continued existence after death, something that is visible for instance in tomb imagery that likens the tomb owner to a king, in the statues found in Imhotep's tomb at Lisht, in

[173] Grajetzki 2014a, 135.
[174] Willems claimed that artists would have been the one making many of the choices when selecting decorative elements: Willems 1988, 179. See also Pieke 2016, 103 for a discussion of how artists were involved in the process of tomb creation.
[175] Workmen might also have transported objects to tombs: Bickel 2019, 30.
[176] On the restricted nature of a lot of this knowledge, particularly the Coffin Texts, see Bickel 2019, 31, 41.

the Coffin Texts and in *frises d'objets*. Kingship as manifested by human rulers is less visible: for instance, in private non-royal autobiographies, or in the depiction of Senwosret I in TT 60. It is unclear whether the *nswt* in the standard offering formula was a generic king, meant to enable the formula to be effective for a long time, or whether living people who read it out loud or maybe heard it spoken would have associated the mention of a king in the formula with the ruler on the throne. Different people would perhaps have had different associations in this case, depending for instance on status or whether they had taken part in a royal festival, with the reigning king perhaps being more real (or a more positive figure) in that case than he might have been to another Egyptian whose only contact with kingship was a relative who had been conscripted to build a pyramid at Lahun.[177] As has been the case in all previous chapters, the social element remains quite relevant here—and we thus cannot assume that everyone would have understood, or engaged with, these manifestations of kingship in the same ways. Importantly, this acknowledgement emphasizes that different non-royal Egyptians might have had quite distinct experiences of kingship in the Middle Kingdom.

Funerary ritual practice was a bounded sphere of human activity, but one that impacted larger conceptions in ancient Egyptian society. That the first thing people saw and said in the cult to their own ancestors held references to the ideology of kingship and to a king as the guarantor of offerings would have emphasized the critical role played by kings *in death*.[178] That every ancestor was an Osiris, and that this status was explicitly thematized through wordings in ritual texts and funerary iconography, would have further concretized the role of kingship in the continued existence *after death*. Since Osiris and human kings were not regarded as separate, but

[177] Some think funerary beliefs would have remained the same across distinct social classes. See, e.g., García González and Jiménez Serrano 2018, 22.
[178] Though also see Bárta 2022 who says that 250,000 people would have directly or indirectly been supported by the king.

rather as two sides of the same ideological complex, we can say that the king was a role model *in death*. This chapter clearly demonstrates that kingship was critical in death in different ways, both the human and the mythological king. These understandings surely bled into non-royal Egyptian life for all of the reasons discussed above.

But the conclusions reached in this chapter, which may seem to support the notion that kingship was omnipresent in Egyptian life, need to be combined with those from Chapters 3 and 4. Chapter 3 considered the role of kingship in settlements in Egypt, and the analysis of that evidence suggested that non-royal Egyptians often had a choice in engaging with kingship. This choice was clearest in letters from the town of Lahun, where the king was sometimes *but not always* invoked. The cemetery of Harageh, discussed in this chapter, was associated with Lahun, and royal symbols were found in those tombs though they were not part of domestic cult in Lahun houses, other than in burial contexts. Lisht, where the controversial statues with the red and white crowns were found in a non-royal tomb, is also where private houses were built against the royal pyramid with apparently no regard for the sanctity of the monument. These are merely two examples, but they illustrate how impossible it is to isolate funerary evidence from Egyptian life, as well as how foolish it would be to think that funerary evidence tells the entire story. Chapter 4 also demonstrated the context-dependent significance of kingship in monuments and festivals. Monumental evidence suggested that kings became more relevant and accessible once they were dead, perhaps due to ties to ancestor cult and regular domestic ritual practice. That chapter also demonstrated that, on a local context, leaders other than the king were more prominent in ritual and monumental terms due to the distance of most royal monuments from population centers. That observation is thought-provoking in light of evidence discussed in this chapter, which demonstrated that provincial tomb decoration often included royal symbols.

Those symbols would likely not have been seen by broad audiences, but they indicate the importance of kingship for the self-identification of local leaders and their own understanding of how they fit into society.

When brought into conversation with evidence from both settlement contexts and monuments, it seems clear that the prevalence of kingship in funerary ritual cannot be taken as evidence that kingship, and especially not human rulers, were omnipresent in Egyptian life. Like in Chapter 4, where kingship was shown to have been important to non-royal Egyptians in specific circumstances, the discussion of funerary evidence in this chapter and the abundance of different manifestations of kingship in non-royal burial rites may seem to discount this study's overall aim of demonstrating that kingship was not omnipresent, or that decorum cannot be used as a suitable model to explain the absence of kingship in daily life. Similarly to Chapter 4, however, the analysis of this material shows that decorum does not work as a framework to explain kingship, and moreover that engagement with kingship was variable and thus not simply a result of a royal imposition.

Chapter 6

Pharaoh Was Not Egypt: Conclusions and Future Directions for (Middle Kingdom) Kingship

"All models are wrong, but some are useful."[1]

§1 Introduction

The above quote, pithy as can be, is also true: some models, or frameworks, are useful—though all are inevitably simplifications of much more complex, much more real, social systems. Some models, however, are not useful. The way the framework of decorum has been used in Egyptology, as a prohibition and a top-down imposition, is *not* useful for the study of non-royal engagement with kingship, even if it may still be relevant for the analysis of, for instance, the layout of temple decoration. The institutionalization of decorum as an explanation in Egyptology for several phenomena that cannot be easily explained otherwise, from the restricted nature of kingship to supposedly low levels of literacy,[2] has also led to the institutionalization of myriad untested assumptions about ancient Egyptian culture. This study tackled one of those institutionalized assumptions: that non-royal Egyptians were largely unable to engage with kingship in the non-royal sphere because they were prohibited from doing so, even though kingship was supposedly nonetheless pervasive in non-royal society; essentially, that Egyptian culture was defined in terms of kingship and that no real alternative existed.[3]

In *The Dawn of Everything*, David Graeber and David Wengrow questioned why modern scholars tend to gravitate towards far less interesting, or far less quirky, explanations when guessing what ancient peoples might have been doing in the past. Why do we so often ignore the

[1] This is a common aphorism used in the discipline of statistics, usually attributed to George Box (and particularly a 1976 paper). For a discussion of the relevance of the aphorism to archaeology, see Brughmans 2013, 649. I am grateful to Shirley 2023 for bringing the quote to my attention.
[2] Allon 2019.
[3] El Nabolsy 2020, 355.

potential of human possibility? According to them at least, that is because any account of the past that shows humans "expressing freedom" or "shaping their own destiny" is considered illusory, or unscientific.[4] The decorum explanation for the simultaneous pervasiveness and restrictedness of kingship by definition hinders us from thinking about how non-royal Egyptians themselves might have approached kingship, and it has likely become an Egyptological truism because the absence of evidence for kingship outside royal contexts that allows it to be an explanation in the first place also makes it difficult to falsify. But it is important to remember that decorum is in fact an argument constructed from absence, and that instead looking for the presence of human possibility may yield more interesting explanations.

This study has demonstrated that, in fact, that is the case: the simultaneous omnipresence and restrictedness of kingship can be differently explained, at least in the Middle Kingdom, if one chooses to accentuate non-royal agency and choices rather than solely royal priorities. By doing so, it is possible to consider the relevance that kingship and kings might have had to non-royal Egyptians in different contexts, as well as different circumstances. In highlighting relevance, this study makes an argument that restrictedness is not necessarily an imposition from above, but that it may also be a choice *for something else* by non-royals. This argument was constructed based on distinct types of evidence from different contexts. In Chapter 3, which zooms in on settlements, the focus is on what we see being invoked by non-royals, as well as what forces appear more prevalent in daily life and local contexts. The argument is also constructed from considering the non-royal experience of royal rituals and monuments in Chapter 4, where it is argued that different qualities of experience led to heterogeneous religious groups, not all which focused on centralized religious practice. Lastly, Chapter 5 explores the

[4] Graeber and Wengrow 2021, 999–1000.

relevance of (primarily mythological) kingship in death, arguing that it bled into people's lives through ritual practice and that it thus shaped broader conceptions of kingship at least to an extent. Rather than simply a critique of decorum, therefore, this study proposes an opposing explanation for the role of kingship in broader ancient Egyptian society that takes into account the agency and priorities of different actors, rather than just the king.

§2 Summary of findings

The main outcome of this study is to show that the ways in which kingship was engaged with by different parts of the Egyptian population could differ significantly. Kingship in the Middle Kingdom was not monolithic, and there was a fragmentation of kingship in spaces other than the royal. This conclusion is obstructed by frameworks, such as decorum, which assume that non-royals did not have significant agency in the ways in which they engaged with the royal institution, that kingship was restricted because of a top-down imposition. Instead, the limited contours of subject experience with kingship ideologies tell us that creating *subjectivity*—the ways in which political relations were constructed—was a bi-directional process that required participation and concrete contexts of practice.[5]

Decorum as an explanation for the rarity of non-royal engagement with kingship flattens non-royal experience, but so would suggesting an overarching framework in which non-royals did not engage with kingship at all. That is *not* what this study attempted to do, because in fact there *was* non-royal engagement with kingship, just not in the prevalent manner that modern scholars seem to expect. By suggesting that kingship and its symbols were restricted because they were kept away from non-royal people, decorum implicitly implies that non-royals *wished*

[5] I thank Seth Richardson for phrasing this better than I could.

to have access to kingship—that kingship was more significant to them in the day to day than is visible in the archaeological record. As discussed in previous chapters, this assumption is problematic for several reasons, not least because it removes any consideration of the different and quite purposeful ways in which non-royal people engaged with kingship. It also implies that kingship was omnipresent in non-royal society. Instead, this study has demonstrated that kingship was *not* omnipresent and that its visibility was instead context dependent. Previous chapters therefore aimed to highlight the variability of engagement with kingship in the non-royal sphere, including for instance encounters hinging on the durability of architecture or the experience of occasion. Different axes of engagement allowed me to highlight this variability in distinct contexts. In Chapter 3, proximity to royal monuments and gender proved useful; in Chapter 4, proximity to royal monuments, periodicity, and status; and in Chapter 5, primarily states of being but also status were significant. It is perhaps worth reiterating some of that variability here.

Chapter 3 highlighted different ways in which non-royal people interacted with kingship in local settlement contexts. Taking Lahun as its first case study, it demonstrated that residents could invoke the king in his capacity as a god in private letters, and that many—but not all—did so. Those who did not chose to invoke other gods, such as Anubis or Hathor. This choice to invoke kingship is extended to the worship of protective deities and ancestors in domestic cultic practices; rather than assuming that residents of Lahun relied on such forces instead of the king because they did not have access to the latter, it makes sense to consider that those entities were more relevant to daily life concerns. The king is also not very visible in administrative terms at Lahun, with the mayor seemingly more accessible to the local population and thus likely the most immediate source of local authority. This does not mean that kings would not have been

more present on a local level if they visited at certain times throughout the year, and so this higher prominence of local leaders was likely also contingent on factors such as periodicity. Kings *were* more present at Lahun than in many other Middle Kingdom settlements, likely due to the town's function in supporting the royal funerary cult, but they were still not omnipresent, despite the proximity of the town to royal monuments and potential royal rituals. Elsewhere in Egypt, there is further evidence for the common reliance on ancestors in domestic cult and the significance of local leaders to local communities both in administrative and cultic terms. A powerful example of the latter is Heqaib at Elephantine, whose local worship has been interpreted through the lens of decorum.[6] Instead, this chapter suggests that, through such efforts—including not only the local patronage of Heqaib, but also choosing not to invoke the king at Lahun and worshipping ancestors, or most notably building houses against Amenemhat I's pyramid at Lisht North—locals were (whether purposefully or not) engaging in a form of silent resistance, were effectively negotiating the power of kingship in their own communities.

Another example of both the context-bound importance of kingship, as well as the ability of non-royal Egyptians to choose whether to engage with kingship, is the use of basilophorous names in the Middle Kingdom—something that was not covered in the study because it was beyond its scope. But the lack of consideration of basilophorous names here does not mean that they are not significant to the non-royal experience of kingship in the Middle Kingdom, especially because names are known to have been of the utmost importance in ancient Egypt.[7] Not everyone was named Senwosret or Amenemhat, and it is not completely clear whether the

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[6] Troche 2021.

[7] Vittmann 2013a, 1. Names could also be theophoric, containing those of divinities: Vittmann 2013b, 3.

use of such names should always be traced back to kings.[8] But those were common names,[9] so they were clearly chosen by some and not others. This again suggests a level of variability that is ignored if non-royal experience is studied solely through reductive frameworks such as the application of decorum to Egyptology.

In Chapter 4, the variability in the non-royal experience of kingship was further highlighted through a consideration of engagements with royal, divine, and elite monuments. In this chapter, non-royal choice was less emphasized than the relevance (or lack thereof) of royal monuments in local contexts, as well as how interactions with royal monuments differed dramatically based on factors such as status and proximity to royal centers. These different factors likely led to the creation of heterogeneous religious groups, a characteristic of imagistic religious practice; this means that different groups could have experienced royal festivals, for instance, quite differently. Which is not to say that royal festivals would *not* have been significant to a non-royal Egyptian who might have witnessed a royal funeral from the banks of the Nile while the royal procession moved through the pyramid causeway—and it is possible that their inaccessibility and lack of frequency made them more salient. But the evidence does suggest that these festivals meant distinct things to distinct people. This is argued to have been less variable on a local level, when non-royal Egyptians participated in funerary rituals or celebrations of local leaders who were buried in local cemeteries. These cemeteries were extra-urban spaces, meaning that they were extensions of daily life. The proximity of these elite tombs, for instance at Deir el-Bersha, to tombs of local residents would likely have made local leaders,

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[8] It was common to name children after ancestors to stress family bonds, for instance: Vittmann 2013a, 5; Vittmann 2013b, 7. And names such as Amenemhat and Senwosret were already used before the Twelfth Dynasty: Hayes 1955, 25.

[9] See https://pnm.uni-mainz.de/info (accessed 5 March 2022) for a list of basilophorous names of the Middle Kingdom.

and their festivals, more accessible—and perhaps thus more significant—on a local level on a regular basis. Rather than simply extensions of the king, these figures should be thought of as different foci of worship and perhaps loyalty. They were likely more concrete to local populations than a king they had never seen, and being more tangible or familiar likely also played a role here. This significance was contextual and not exclusive, and occasional evidence of the worship of Old Kingdom kings in the Middle Kingdom (such as Snefru or Niuserra) demonstrates that kingship was also of importance to non-royal people.

This importance of kingship to non-royal people can be quite difficult to see in the record, but the material record does not cover all potential ways in which non-royals engaged with kingship and kings. Though in archaeology we are largely bound by what survives in the record, it would be a mistake to forget the social dimension of people's lives. If a son of a Lahun resident was conscripted to build Senwosret II's pyramid, for instance, kingship would have been a significant presence—perhaps a shadow—in that family's life even if they chose to make offerings to Bes in the day to day. This would also likely have been the case for families living far away from royal centers. Beyond the fact that examples of such engagement or awareness of kingship do not often survive in the record, it is also necessary to acknowledge that there could have been a level of royal influence that was not directly recognized as such by Egyptians themselves; that top-down structures that depended on the king influenced those at the bottom, whether or not those outside the royal circle reflected on or referred to the importance of the king. The structure of patronage comes to mind,[10] or the patrimonial notion that every household

[10] See Bardonova 2021 on the possibility of patronage relations existing between the king and his subjects in the Middle Kingdom. See also Bardonova and Nováková 2017.

in Egypt was modeled after that of the king.[11] Even if kingship is not always visible, it would be foolish to claim that it was *not* part of ancient Egyptian non-royal realities.

It would be similarly unreasonable to suggest that the clear importance of kingship in funerary practice would not have been felt, or understood, by the living. The critical role of kingship in funerary ritual was examined in Chapter 5, which argued that funerary ritual cannot be utterly disconnected from the Egyptian lifeworld. Primarily mythological (or Osirian) kingship, but also the human manifestation of kingship, were instrumental in death in different ways: in demonstrating status, in establishing a suitable identity for continued existence after death, and especially in guaranteeing and providing offerings for the dead. These diverse roles would not have only been relevant to the dead, but also to the living who prepared for, performed, and witnessed these rituals. The fact that one's ancestors would have been kings, and that kings were guarantors of offerings, undoubtedly influenced broader understandings of kingship, those beyond death. This evidence still does not, however, indicate that kingship was omnipresent—its importance was instead still quite context-bound, though that importance itself cannot be discounted.

Does the fact that the king was not omnipresent necessarily make him less relevant than neighbors, family members, or ancestors? Probably when it came to everyday affairs, but for arguably more salient concerns such as securing a good harvest or healing an illness, one might have needed to turn to other powers (perhaps kings, perhaps gods), whose smaller everyday presence may be precisely part of what gave them efficacy. Kingship cannot be said to not have been important, and that was never the goal here. But based on the evidence discussed in this study, it also cannot be said that the king or kingship were always overarching concerns, and the

[11] See Lehner 2000; Schloen 2001. But see also Moreno García 2022, 108–112.

ways in which they were engaged with can certainly not only be thought of through decorum. Instead, the importance and relevance of kingship both differed by context—and it is these variabilities and variables that make non-royal engagement with kingship, as well as kingship itself, more compelling.

§3 Unanswered questions and further avenues of research

An initial goal of this study had been to expand whatever conclusions were forthcoming about Middle Kingdom kingship to the Old and New Kingdoms. Not in the sense that whatever was said here about Middle Kingdom kingship would be blindly applied to those other periods, but in the sense that perhaps what was said here might inform at least approaches—if not conclusions—about kingship throughout other periods of Egyptian history. It soon became clear that expecting this study to influence specific conclusions about kingship in other periods, however, would be a mistake.

Ancient Egyptian kingship changed considerably across time. An instructive example is the fact that the king *was* much more commonly featured in New Kingdom tombs, something that has been noted in scholarship but not well explained,[12] particularly if accepting the decorum framework; or that votive stelae demonstrate the veneration of colossal statues belonging to Ramses II;[13] or even that the royal cartouche was sometimes included in New Kingdom private lintels, not only in Egypt but also in Nubia.[14] In discussing one such lintel, Niv Allon claimed that—by adding these lintels to their homes or chapels—the elite was able to constantly negotiate both praise and its language, and thus that royal discourse did not solely emanate from the king.[15]

[12] See, e.g., Baines 2023, 87.
[13] Brand 2023, 395–399. See Exell 2009, 179–185 for the votive stelae themselves.
[14] For a comprehensive treatment of such examples, see Budka 2001.
[15] Allon 2021. I am grateful to Niv Allon for sharing his work with me.

It is thus possible that kingship in the New Kingdom should also be considered a phenomenon that was negotiated by non-royal actors, though it cannot be assumed that those arenas of negotiation were the same as those discussed for the Middle Kingdom. At the very least, if simply looking at a threshold of the presence or visibility of kingship in non-royal society, the lintels alone suggest that the king was more visible in the New Kingdom.

It is not ridiculous, therefore, to expect that non-royal engagement with kingship changed across Egyptian history, and this expectation is not unimportant to the broader project of rethinking Egyptian kingship. However, it is worth asking whether extending this critique of the uncritical application of kingship to non-royal experience in the Middle Kingdom to other periods would reveal more about the Egyptological interpretation of kingship than has already been disclosed here. It could even be said that this study uses the Middle Kingdom evidence to make the point that our interpretation of interactions between the royal and non-royal has thus far been uncritical, rather than adding much knowledge about the Middle Kingdom itself. Hopefully the point has been proven: we cannot use kingship to understand non-royal experience in Egypt, and so perhaps the focus should switch to what we *can* in fact say about non-royal experience itself, whether in relation to kingship or not. I will return to this below.

Another avenue that I wished to pursue at the beginning of the study, but which quickly became difficult to address due to the nature of the evidence, is the question of the relationship between kingship and the state in ancient Egypt (in this case in the Middle Kingdom). As discussed at several points in the previous chapters, things like the prominence of local leaders in this period, as well as their engagement with town residents, suggests that the ancient Egyptian state should perhaps be seen as a larger administrative apparatus than just kingship, one that was less centralized than royal ideology would have us believe. Similar arguments are currently being

made for Old Kingdom kingship based on titles of local leaders.[16] Additional hints that this might be a subject to pursue further include the fact that the fortresses in Nubia or some towns in Egypt are named after kings, whereas names for *kheneret*s or prison-like spaces do not demonstrate the same level of royal association.[17] It seems like there was a royal effort to be present in certain spaces and circumstances more than others, and it seems like further theorizing that potential separation between the king and other administrative forces would be fruitful and help us to think more critically about the functioning of the Egyptian state.

The last topic under the list of things that were meant to be included, but which ended up not being pursued due to either a lack of time or unsuitability of evidence, rather than due to a lack of interest or significance, is the non-royal experience of Middle Kingdom kingship outside of Egypt. This is a concern especially relevant for this period, when Egyptian fortresses were built in Nubia. Recent (re)investigations of the fortresses have demonstrated that Egyptians and Nubians lived alongside one another, and that attempting to distinguish between "Egyptian" and "Nubian" populations in that context leads to largely artificial categorizations.[18] It is now well accepted that the fortresses were more than just royal ideological stamps on the landscape, and that they performed other functions, including the economic management of local resources.[19] Thus, it is no longer the case that studies of the fortresses focus predominantly on the royal Egyptian perspective, much the contrary. But these monuments were still forceful symbols of a strong royal (or state) presence. More recent accounts of local perspectives of colonial

[16] Tomkins 2019; Tomkins 2023.
[17] Thanks to Oren Siegel for discussing this with me. See also Małecka-Drozd 2021 on whether early Nile Delta settlements can be tied to "royal" influence.
[18] This is especially the case in studies of Uronarti: Bestock and Knoblauch 2020; Knoblauch and Bestock 2017. See also de Souza 2021 on the terminological baggage of "Nubian" and "Egyptian," and S.T. Smith 2003 on Nubian and Egyptian local collaboration.
[19] For a recent treatment, see Bestock 2021. For an older treatment, see Kemp 1997. See also S.T. Smith 1991, on Askut specifically.

fortifications suggest that thinking about the Middle Kingdom Egyptian fortresses in Nubia through the same lens employed in this study—one that prioritizes non-royal agency in the experience of kingship—would be fruitful, particularly in light of the theoretical discussions in Chapter 1 about the subaltern.[20] Evidence from Nubia would also help to increase the consideration of non-elites in this study.

Determining the threshold for the "importance" of kingship in non-royal society, or the degree of involvement of kingship in daily life, will always be a matter of relativism. Just to take a straightforward example, it would be hard to argue against the higher visibility of Roman emperors in the lives of their subjects if compared to Egyptian kings.[21] However, scholars of ancient Rome are starting to make the same argument that I am about the lack of reach of the state in the day-to-day based on their material.[22] I have intentionally largely isolated Egypt in this study to avoid this issue, but this does not mean that the methods employed here cannot be used to draw conclusions about other ancient cultures and other time periods. In fact, the conclusions articulated throughout the dissertation about the fragmentation of royal presence and the numerous ways in which kingship was engaged with by non-royals are relevant well beyond Egyptology.

As such, a future development of this project should be to collaborate with colleagues focusing on other regions and time periods. The focus on kings and their monuments, as well as on royal evidence, is also an issue for how ancient societies in other regions are studied. Especially in Chapter 1, but also elsewhere throughout the dissertation, I have mentioned parallel problematic ways in which ancient royal or imperial institutions elsewhere than Egypt have been

[20] For instance, contemporary perspectives and experiences of forts and castles in both the pre-colonial and colonial periods of Ghana: Hove 2018.
[21] For a discussion of the relationship between Roman imperial ideology and Roman subjects, see e.g., Ando 2000.
[22] Anthony Kaldellis, personal communication October 2022.

approached in scholarship, again primarily from top-down considerations. More importantly, I have also relied on studies of other regions for methodological inspiration and critique, since many scholars of different cultures and time periods are already working on similar questions about the reach of ancient power structures: on histories of ancient power from below, from a non-royal perspective.[23] It would be valuable to bring Egypt more fully into this conversation, and this dissertation is a first step in doing so. Rather than focusing on toppling royal or imperial narratives, next—and hopefully collaborative—steps would benefit from thinking more about the people who lived in empires or under royal power but undoubtedly experienced life much more richly. Such comparisons would highlight both differences and similarities, and through such differences and similarities allow for more concrete thinking about the role of kingship or empire beyond royal or imperial ideology: about subject experience and that interface between ideology and unofficial practice.

§4 Conclusion: so, what?

This study did not seek to present a new total understanding of ancient Egyptian kingship, not even Middle Kingdom kingship. Rather, it can be considered an important step towards thinking more critically about both kingship itself and non-royal engagement with kingship in this specific period. Consequently, this study and its conclusions are also a critical step towards thinking more about non-royal life experiences. The critique presented here, of how the influence of kingship on broader society has been approached in scholarship, opens a space to talk about what non-royal Egyptians thought. What did they care about, if as argued here they did not always care about the king? Previous chapters already suggested some conclusions on this front, particularly in terms of the relevance (or lack thereof) of kingship in light of domestic

[23] E.g., Khatchadourian 2016; Ando and Richardson 2017; Glatz 2020.

cultic practices and potential alternative foci of authority in local contexts, but there is room to expand in this direction.

The significance of this study for the field of Egyptology, as well as studies of the ancient world more generally, is to show that kingship *can* be studied through a non-royal perspective. More importantly, it is to show that such an approach is illuminating not only in terms of kingship itself, but also in terms of the intersection between kingship and non-royal realities. We are not only bound by royal sources when thinking about kingship, or imperial sources when thinking about empires; in fact, we should not be. Within Egyptology itself, this study should be situated in a significant growing trend of critically rethinking kingship, or perhaps more accurately the ways in which the discipline has so far approached kingship.[24]

To return to the aphorism in the beginning of this chapter, some models are certainly useful in the study of the past. But many are not. One of the overarching points in this study has been that the primary way in which Egyptology has approached kingship in the past—as a largely uniform engagement that was conditioned by strict decorum—has gotten in the way of our proper understanding of both kingship itself, as well as how it was engaged with by broader ancient Egyptian society. What this study has shown is that the ways in which non-royal people engaged with the royal institution in this period were variable and varied. There were multiple realities of non-royal people, and so we should perhaps think of ancient Egypt (which is largely a modern construct anyway) as multiple different Egypts, some of which can be better studied through certain types of evidence than others. In the end it is not only that *kingship* is the wrong overarching framework if what we want to understand is ordinary people's ordinary lives, or the

[24] That this is currently an area of interest in the field was made clear at the Annual Meeting of the American Research Center in Egypt (ARCE) 2023, when the two History sessions on 21 April (Friday) included six (out of seven) papers about kingship and Egyptological assumptions that should be revisited on the topic.

interface between kingship and non-royal people—it is rather that *overarching frameworks* get in the way more than they help, at least in this case. Consequently, clearing the simplistic framework out of the way is only the first step. Was pharaoh Egypt? Of course not, but that also depends on *which Egypt* one is talking about.

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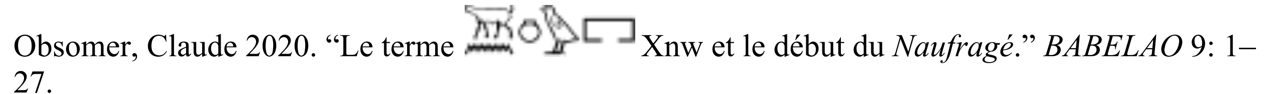
Obsomer, Claude 2020. “Le terme  Xnw et le début du *Naufragé*.” *BABELAO* 9: 1–27.

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