

The Hippopotamus of Deir el-Medina

Examining the presence of Taweret in the Workman's Village of Deir el-Medina



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Abstract:

Taweret is known throughout ancient Egypt as one of a multitude of protective deities, with her central intent on safeguarding women and children during the dangerous process of pregnancy, childbirth and early childhood. As a minor deity of the Egyptian pantheon, Taweret never had a cult centre in any known settlement and was relegated to small altars within households. Due to her minor status, there have been no in-depth studies to examine her influence within a settlement before. While many Egyptologists have extensively researched the settlement of Deir el-Medina, focus on the role of the goddess Taweret has been relegated to small paragraph descriptions and not of central concern. This paper shall examine the archaeological remains of Deir el-Medina which pertain to Taweret in order to determine the influence of the goddess within this unique community, and the possibility that there may have been a chapel within the community dedicated to her and a priesthood to support her. These archaeological remains shall be classified into: stelae, statues, ostraca, offering basins and grills, amulets, tomb decoration and evidence for a temple in order to give a holistic perspective of her prominence.

Introduction:

Taweret has long been accepted as the goddess predominantly responsible for safeguarding women and children in the process of childbirth. From fertility to early childhood, Taweret represents an important desire for protection in this dangerous period within the domestic context of Egyptian society. Despite the importance of her role, Taweret never had a temple dedicated to her and is considered a minor deity due to this lack of state-run complexes. Relegated to small chapters or paragraphs in Egyptological compendiums dedicated to the gods, no one, as yet, has produced a detailed account of the goddess throughout Egyptian history. While this paper cannot possibly collate all of the information acquired on Taweret throughout Egyptian history, what it does provide is a snapshot into the role of Taweret in one specific unique community of the ancient Egyptian New Kingdom (1550-1069 BCE).¹ By looking at the role of Taweret in Deir el-Medina in terms of the representations and inscriptions relating to the goddess in one settlement, an understanding begins to form regarding the reaches of her sphere of influence within the community. This leads us to question whether she did ever have a cult centre here as has been suggested by numerous authors,² whether her role was influenced by the multicultural nature of the New Kingdom and introduction of foreign gods, and whether she was as all-pervasive as has been previously assumed.

Who is Taweret?

In order to understand the importance of the role Taweret played in Deir el-Medina, it is first crucial to understand who she was in the Egyptian pantheon. The name *tA-wrt* literally translates to “The Great One”,³ which may be reflected by the physical size of the goddess as a hippopotamus or simply the great role she played throughout Egyptian history. Taweret is represented as a composite form of a hippopotamus with the paws of lions, a crocodile tail (sometimes a full crocodile on her back), with a pregnant stomach and large breasts.⁴ The goddess is almost always shown in an upright position on her hindquarters and usually carries

¹ Dates follow: K.A. Bard, *An Introduction to the Archaeology of Ancient Egypt* (2nd rev. edn; Chichester, 2015), 43

² B. Bruyère, *Rapport sur les fouilles de Deir el Médineh (1934-1935) Troisième Partie: Le Village, Les Décharges Publiques, La Station de Repos du col de la Vallée des Rois* (Cairo, 1939), 106; A.G. McDowell, *Village Life in Ancient Egypt: Laundry Lists and Love Songs* (Oxford, 1999), 103.

³ British Museum, *Motherhood in Ancient Egypt*

<<https://britishmuseum.tumblr.com/post/140454371262/motherhood-in-ancient-egypt>>, accessed 12/02/2019.

⁴ R. Gundlach ‘Thoeris’, in W. Helck and W. Westendorf (eds), *LÄ VI* (Wiesbaden, 1986), 494.

either the *sa* (*s3*) sign meaning “protection,” the *ankh* (*ꜥnh*) sign meaning “life,” or wielding two knives.⁵ Of the deities within the Egyptian pantheon, the vast majority embraced a protective element throughout both life and death, and Taweret was no exception. Her physical form served to represent the deadliest threats (lions, hippopotami and crocodiles) to Egyptian society being channelled against the evil spirits that threaten them.

It has been suggested that Taweret originally evolved from the hippopotamus figurines present in Egypt since the Predynastic period (3100-3000 BCE) and through the Old Kingdom (2686-2181 BCE), which served as some of the earliest symbols of protection.⁶ Taweret first received her name and typical upright form when she was depicted on the apotropaic wands of the Middle Kingdom (2055-1650 BCE), along with other protective deities and fantastic animals who united to protect mother and child throughout childbirth.⁷ It was in the New Kingdom that Taweret gained independent recognition, as seen by the abundance of amulets of the goddess discovered in virtually every settlement and funerary context of the New Kingdom. The role and image of Taweret was found within Tell el-Amarna despite the religious and political turbulence of the time, demonstrating how important she must have been to the people of Egypt.⁸ Her cult continued throughout the Late Period (664-332 BCE) and excelled in the resurgence of classical Egyptian iconography under the Saite kings, throughout the Ptolemaic Period (332-30 BCE), and died out with the remainder of Egyptian religion with the introduction of Christianity in the Roman period (30 BCE-395 CE).

Taweret’s central role in Egyptian society was to protect women and children during the dangerous time of pregnancy, childbirth and early childhood, which extracted a high mortality rates throughout the ancient world.⁹ Unfortunately, figures of the exact mortality rate for mothers and infants in ancient Egypt are virtually non-existent, though figures from pre-modern societies suggest roughly 20% of all newborn children would have died within their first year and another 30% would not have survived beyond their fifth year.¹⁰ It is not surprising that due to the high risk for both mother and child, every stage of childbirth in Egypt would be surrounded by customs and religious practices intended to ward off evil threats to the vulnerable.¹¹ Due to this role within a domestic setting, her cult predominantly took place

⁵ J. Houser-Wegner, ‘Taweret’, in D.B. Redford (ed.), *OEAE* III (Oxford, 2001), 350.

⁶ D.P. Silverman, ‘Deities’, in D.B. Redford (ed.), *OEAE* I (Oxford, 2001), 373.

⁷ D. Meeks, ‘Demons’, in D.B. Redford (ed.), *OEAE* I (Oxford, 2001), 376.

⁸ Houser-Wegner, ‘Taweret’, 350.

⁹ E. Feucht, ‘Birth’, in D.B. Redford (ed.), *OEAE* I (Oxford, 2001), 193.

¹⁰ G. Robins, ‘Woman & Children in Peril: Pregnancy, Birth & Infant Mortality in Ancient Egypt’, *KMT* 5:4 (1995), 27.

¹¹ G. Pinch, ‘Childbirth and Female Figurines at Deir el-Medina and Amarna’, *Orientalia* 52 (1983), 405.

within this context, and her image primarily exists on household items such as beds, stools and headrests.¹²

Why Deir el-Medina?

The choice to study Taweret in the context of Deir el-Medina was a natural progression from a desire to examine her within a settlement. Unfortunately, due to the limited settlements which have survived antiquity the options were finite. While the Delta provides traces of several settlements (Avaris, Buto, Sais, Tanis, etc.) their state of preservation creates difficulties in excavation and examination for several reasons including; the disintegration of organic remains due to climate, the limited supply of quarries causing stone materials to be constantly recycled between different cities,¹³ and the fact many archaeological sites have been levelled for agriculture or built over by modern settlements due to the fertility. Deir el-Medina on the other hand provides a settlement in an arid environment not desirable for modern settlement exploitation and subsequently in an excellent state of preservation.

First excavated from 1905 to 1909 by the Italian Ernesto Schiaparelli, many of the finds from this period made their way to the Egyptian Museum, Turin. This included several of the best-preserved statues and stelae of Taweret. Following the first reports of the site by Schiaparelli, Georg Möller, a German Egyptologist, excavated Deir el-Medina from 1911 to 1912¹⁴ before losing the concession to Émile Baraize who briefly examined the settlement before Bernard Bruyère conducted his in-depth expedition of the site from 1922-1940 and 1945-1951.¹⁵ Bruyère provided the most exhaustive analysis of the settlement in the different publications he produced throughout his field seasons, and is considered the ultimate expert on the archaeology of the site.

Established in a wadi between the cliffs of the west bank of the Nile opposite Luxor, Deir el-Medina was situated in the heart of the New Kingdom mortuary and religious centre, half way between the Ramesseum and Medinet Habu. Across the mountains to the north of the settlement lay the Valley of the Kings, the main site where the inhabitants of the village worked.¹⁶ The settlement was established for the workforce who would dedicate their

¹² *Ibid*, 351.

¹³ P. Wilson, 'The royal city of Sais: the expected, unexpected and the weird', *Ancient Egypt: the history, people and culture of the Nile valley* 100 (2017), 32.

¹⁴ B. Haring, 'Deir el-Medina', in D.B. Redford (ed.), *OEAE I* (Oxford, 2001), 368.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 369.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 368.

livelihoods to the construction and decoration of the royal tombs during the New Kingdom. The exact creation date of the site is not known though the inhabitants attributed its foundation to Pharaoh Amenhotep I and his mother Queen Ahmose Nefertari, hence the two were deified and worshipped within the village.¹⁷ It is known that the site was operational during the late Eighteenth Dynasty, abandoned when Akhenaten shifted the capital to Tell el-Amarna, and re-established in year 7 of the reign of Horemheb.¹⁸ During the Nineteenth Dynasty the population of the village fluctuated, at its height consisting seventy houses with as many as five-hundred individuals occupying the settlement.¹⁹ The settlement was slowly abandoned with the close of the New Kingdom when the state no longer had the administrative and financial control to maintain an entire village of skilled craftsmen.

Deir el-Medina is undoubtedly the most documented settlement site of the Egyptian New Kingdom.²⁰ The reason for this excellent state of preservation is undoubtedly due to its location in the arid, infertile lands that have not been re-settled in the Common Era. Archaeological evidence from the settlement remains has yielded significant insights into the social structure of the community, though it is essential to bear in mind that despite the evidence provided, Deir el-Medina is a most exceptional and unique settlement.²¹ Due to the singular focus of the inhabitants, and the reliance upon the state for all resources required for survival, the community represents a small fraction society as a whole and inferences gleaned from the settlement here cannot easily be extended to the rest of Egyptian society at the time.

Personal Piety in Ancient Egypt

In order to understand Taweret in terms of the domestic sphere of religion in ancient Egypt, it is important to contemplate the “personal piety” concept within Deir el-Medina. The term “personal piety” was introduced into Egyptology by Adolf Erman²² and James Henry Breasted²³ in the early twentieth century in order to describe the perceived introduction of personal religious faith in New Kingdom religious practice, particularly the religious practice

¹⁷ D. Valbelle, *Les ouvriers de la tombe: Deir el-Medineh a l'epoque Ramesside* (Cairo, 1985), 262.

¹⁸ L. Meskell, *Archaeologies of Social Life: Age, Sex, Class, et cetera in Ancient Egypt* (Oxford, 1999), 151.

¹⁹ I. Shaw and P. Nicholson, *The British Museum Dictionary of Ancient Egypt* (London, 1995), 93.

²⁰ Meskell, *Archaeologies of Social Life*, 136.

²¹ J.F. Borghouts, ‘Magical Practices Among the Villagers’, in L.H. Lesko (ed.), *Pharaoh's Workers: The Villagers of Deir el Medina* (Ithaca and London, 1994), 119.

²² A. Erman, *Denksteine aus der thebanischen Gräberstadt* (SPAW 49; Berlin, 1912), 1086.

²³ J.H. Breasted, *Development of Religion and Thought in Ancient Egypt* (London, 1911), 349.

involving personal stela inscriptions throughout the Ramesside Period.²⁴ The subsequent debate regarding personal piety has centred around whether these objects are indeed represent intimate personal dimensions or alternatively a different aspect of official state religions. Three main aspects of personal piety have been of central concern to Egyptologists; the internalization of individual emotions, the identification of personal piety as an invention in the New Kingdom, and the occurrence of this religious movement within the lower classes.²⁵

Helmut Brunner²⁶ and Jan Assmann²⁷ both argued that the emergence of personal piety in the New Kingdom was due to the resulting fear caused by the Amarna Period. While Brunner argued that personal religion in ancient Egypt emerged parallel to the state religions,²⁸ Assmann was more concerned with the subsequent personal piety of the Ramesside period being a form of opposition to the state religion,²⁹ originating with the shift during the reign of Amenhotep III to “new solar theology.”³⁰ This emergence of personal piety in response to the Amarna Period has been questioned in light of the evidence for twenty-six shrines within the city limits of Amarna,³¹ and subsequent evidence of figures of Bes, Taweret and Ptah (among others) emerging from Amarna.³² Assmann has re-imagined his interpretation of the Amarna Period in recent years acknowledging the period as more of a continuation rather than a break, but maintaining his idea that this age served as a tipping point for religious thought in Egypt.³³

John Baines,³⁴ has argued against previous scholars who claim that the concept of personal piety was an original concept of the New Kingdom, stating that most religious practices existed pre-New Kingdom.³⁵ Barry Kemp³⁶ also argues against “personal piety” in ancient Egypt. Baines³⁷ and Kemp³⁸ both argue that piety cannot be an all-encompassing

²⁴ M. Luiselli, ‘Personal Piety (Modern Theories Related to)’, in W. Wendrich, J. Dieleman, E. Frood and J. Baines (eds), *UEE*, <<http://digital2.library.ucla.edu/viewItem.do?ark=21198/zz000s3mss>> (Posted 10 July 2008), 1.

²⁵ *Ibid*, 2.

²⁶ H. Brunner, ‘Persönliche Frömmigkeit’, in W. Helck and W. Westendorf (eds), *LÄ IV* (Wiesbaden, 1986), 951-963.

²⁷ J. Assmann, *Ägypten: Theologie und Frömmigkeit einer frühen Hochkultur*, (Stuttgart, 1984); J. Assmann, *Ägypten: Eine Sinngeschichte* (Munich, 1996).

²⁸ Brunner, ‘Persönliche Frömmigkeit’, 951.

²⁹ Assmann, *Ägypten: Theologie*, 258-282; Assmann, *Ägypten: Eine Sinngeschichte*, 259.

³⁰ Assmann, *Ägypten: Theologie*, 235-241.

³¹ B. Kemp, ‘How religious were the ancient Egyptians?’ *CAJ* 5:1 (1995), 29.

³² L. Weiss, *Religious Practice at Deir el-Medina* (EU 29; Leiden, 2015), 3.

³³ J. Assmann, ‘Theological responses to Amarna’, in G. Knoppers and A. Hirsch (eds), *Egypt, Israel, and the ancient Mediterranean world: Studies in honor of Donald B. Redford*, (PdÄ 20; Leiden, 2004), 179 – 191.

³⁴ J. Baines, ‘Practical Religion and Piety’, *JEA* 73 (1987), 79-98.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 82.

³⁶ Kemp, *CAJ* 5:1, 25-54.

³⁷ Baines, *JEA* 73, 80.

³⁸ Kemp, *CAJ* 5:1, 29-32.

Egyptian phenomenon as it is associated with state sanctioned temples and thus imposed by the state upon the population. Both have argued that Egyptian society may have been as much political as religious, and present an image of a society which may have been largely secular.³⁹ In resurgence from these criticisms, Faried Adrom⁴⁰ and Dieter Kessler⁴¹ have seen personal piety as a development of the long-standing tradition of directly petitioning deceased family members which evolved in the New Kingdom into directly petitioning the deities themselves rather than using the king as an intermediary.

Subsequently the term “piety” itself has been questioned by some scholars. Because of the western implications of Christianity, Susanne Bickel prefers the term “individual religiosity” as it is considered more approachable.⁴² Geraldine Pinch suggests the concept of “personal piety,” centred on individual beliefs regarding the deities of the state cult. “Folk religion,” she states, represented religious or magical practices performed by the populace independent of the state cults centred in the home, while “popular religion,” was the religious beliefs and practice of ordinary Egyptians in daily life.⁴³ Ultimately, the definition of “personal piety” in ancient Egypt has been debated since its conception. Irrespective of its development or change in definition over the century since it has been in use, “personal piety” is important in regards to understanding Taweret as a goddess who can in no way be linked to the state cults and temples.

³⁹ Kemp, *CAJ* 5:1, 50

⁴⁰ F. Adrom, ‘Gipfel der Frömmigkeit. (Soziale und funktionale Überlegungen zu Kultstelen am Beispiel der Stele Turin CG 50058 des Nfr-abw)’, *SAK* 33 (2005), 1-28.

⁴¹ D. Kessler, ‘Dissidentenliteratur oder kultischer Hintergrund? Teil 1: Überlegungen zum Tura-Hymnus und zum Hymnus in TT 139’, *SAK* 25 (1998), 161-188.

⁴² S. Bickel, ‘Aspects et fonctions de la déification d'Amenhotep III’, *BIFAO* 102 (2002), 66-67.

⁴³ G. Pinch, *Votive offerings to Hathor* (Oxford, 1993), 325.

Section 1: Evidence

1.1 Stelae

The stelae of Deir el-Medina and other sites from the New Kingdom is what led Egyptologists to formulate the concept of ‘personal piety’⁴⁴ due to the personal iconography and inscriptions which were recorded on them.⁴⁵ These private stelae are considered the best evidence of personal piety as individual expressions of faith,⁴⁶ and were interpreted as an invocation of assistance from the divine forces represented.⁴⁷ The stelae of Deir el-Medina mainly display either hymns or prayers with the written inscriptions serving as a representation of the original systemic prayers emanating from the state cults and practices.⁴⁸ The stelae with hymns inscribed upon them are virtually absent from the household remains of the settlement, indicating they were created more for public than individual consumption.⁴⁹ Only four texts which could potentially illuminate the functions of these stelae have survived from Deir el-Medina. This lack of information indicates that the stelae were erected in public and their workings and purposes were common knowledge.⁵⁰ These stelae also represent a distinction between the goddess Taweret and the god Bes who were so often represented in the same manner and seen as companions. Taweret is a dominant force upon stelae, depicted on six complete and two fragmentary stelae, while Bes is absent from any stelae.⁵¹ Conversely, on the household altars Bes is dominant and Taweret is lacking. The stelae depicting Taweret within Deir el-Medina can be divided into two categories: those representing Taweret alone,⁵² and those that depict the goddess in conjunction with other deities.⁵³

The most intriguing of the stelae of Taweret which survive from Deir el-Medina is coincidentally also the only one which can be traced to an exact find location, but whose present residence is unknown. Figure 1 depicts the original sketch from Bruyère’s 1934 to 1935 field

⁴⁴ Breasted, *Development of Religion*, 349.

⁴⁵ Luiselli, *UEE*, 1.

⁴⁶ L.H. Lesko, ‘Spiritual and Intellectual Matters’, in L.H. Lesko (ed.), *Pharaoh’s Workers: The Villagers of Deir el Medina* (Ithaca & London, 1994), 89.

⁴⁷ F.D. Friedman, ‘Aspects of Domestic Life and Religion’, in L.H. Lesko (ed.), *Pharaoh’s Workers: The Villagers of Deir el Medina* (Ithaca & London, 1994), 111.

⁴⁸ Weiss, *EU* 29, 155

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 156.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*. One such example of a Deir el-Medina ostrakon mentioning a stela is O. Berlin P. 14256, which references two stelae for the temple of Hathor and the temple of “Amun, Lord of the Thrones of the Two Lands”

⁵¹ L. Weiss, ‘Personal Religious Practice: House Altars at Deir el-Medina’, *JEJ* 95 (2009), 202.

⁵² Figures 1-3.

⁵³

season excavations,⁵⁴ and was originally dedicated to both Taweret and the goddess Hathor. The upper register displays Taweret in a unique representation with a hippopotamus head and human body with the Hathoric horns and sun disk, seated before an offering table and male worshipper venerating her. The lower register displays Hathor who is also in a seated position facing an offering and two women praying to her. The stela emphasises the close connection between Taweret and Hathor in the combined role the two play in fertility. It is rare to see a seated image of Taweret as she was typically depicted upright and pregnant and in seated form this association is less clear. Most importantly though, this stela provides us with an exact find location; room one in house S.O.VI.⁵⁵ The last house of the south-west of the village, house S.O.VI was built under the 19th Dynasty and belonged to Sennedjem (i)'s family.⁵⁶ Unfortunately, we do not know exactly where in room one this stela was found, however, elsewhere in the same room an altar table stood decorated with a scene of Bes.⁵⁷ While we cannot say whether or not the stela was found upon the altar, it is clear the two would have formed an association due to their mutual religious connotations. The fact that this stela can be traced to a household location highlights the role of Taweret within the domestic context.

Figures 2 and 3 also depict Taweret alongside other deities with Figure 2 representing Taweret with the Hathoric horns and sun disk standing behind the goddess Meretseger also wearing the same crown.⁵⁸ Meretseger was an extremely popular goddess within Deir el-Medina due to her role as goddess of the Theban Necropolis and identified with the mountain peak which rises over the Valley of the Kings and Deir el-Medina.⁵⁹ As the chief goddess of the Theban Necropolis, Meretseger was also responsible for safeguarding the men who worked there and their families.⁶⁰ In association with this goddess, Taweret appears more as a general deity of protection rather than specifically offering assistance with fertility. This stela was dedicated to Meretseger and Taweret by Hay (vii) a draughtsman of the Nineteenth Dynasty.⁶¹ Figure 3 is also not dedicated to Taweret alone, rather to Taweret, Amun-Re and Seth.⁶² This

⁵⁴ Bruyère, *Deir el Médineh (1934-1935) Troisième Partie*, 335.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 334.

⁵⁶ Weiss, EU 29, 233.

⁵⁷ Bruyère, *Deir el Médineh (1934-1935) Troisième Partie*, 330.

⁵⁸ Museo Egizio, *Stele de Hay*

<[https://collezioni.museoegizio.it/eMP/eMuseumPlus?service=direct/1/ResultLightboxView/result.tl.collection_lightbox.\\$TspTitleImageLink.link&sp=10&sp=Scollection&sp=SfieldValue&sp=0&sp=0&sp=3&sp=Slightbox_3x4&sp=0&sp=Sdetail&sp=0&sp=F&sp=T&sp=0](https://collezioni.museoegizio.it/eMP/eMuseumPlus?service=direct/1/ResultLightboxView/result.tl.collection_lightbox.$TspTitleImageLink.link&sp=10&sp=Scollection&sp=SfieldValue&sp=0&sp=0&sp=3&sp=Slightbox_3x4&sp=0&sp=Sdetail&sp=0&sp=F&sp=T&sp=0)>, accessed 26/03/2019.

⁵⁹ McDowell, *Village Life*, 98.

⁶⁰ B.G. Davies, *Life Within the Five Walls: A Handbook to Deir el-Medina* (Wallasey, 2018), 187.

⁶¹ B.G. Davies, *Who's Who at Deir el-Medina* (EU 13; Leiden, 1999), chart 8.

⁶² Museo Egizio, *Stele dedicate da Hy ad Amon-Ra, Tauret e Seth Hay*

<<https://collezioni.museoegizio.it/eMP/eMuseumPlus?service=direct/1/ResultLightboxView/result.tl.collection>

unlikely triad is accompanied by a surprising number of women; of the fifteen individuals depicted, twelve are women related to the mistress of the house Mutemwia (*mw.t(-m-wj3)*) which is unparalleled in any other Deir el-Medina stelae.⁶³ The stela appears to be dedicated on behalf of the families of Neferronpet (i) and Qaha (i) whose sister, the same Mutemwia who is the mistress of the house, was likely the first wife of Neferronpet linking the families.⁶⁴ The additional women accompanying Taweret indicate a potential fertility context, and association with Seth may indicate that a failed or unsuccessful pregnancy befell the lady Mutemwia. The stela, therefore may have been a dedication to appease the gods to allow for a successful pregnancy.⁶⁵

The other corpus of stelae depicting Taweret are those that display the goddess as the lone deity and central figure of veneration. Figure 4 depicts Taweret with Hathoric horns and sun disk standing before a portico upon a stela that was designed to reproduce the landscape of Silsileh.⁶⁶ This depiction of the desert directly opposes the inscription referencing Taweret's role as a water deity who represents purified water. This water aspect suggests the physical act of a woman's water breaking as she goes into labour, highlighting her fertility role. The accompanying women are all praying for fertility and protection for themselves. Figure 5 also depicts a solitary Taweret, though she is facing a bust of another powerful goddess – Mut. Accompanied with the epithet “Mistress of the Sky,” Taweret herself is not usually associated with the sky, but rather this epithet highlights her association yet again with Hathor a goddess of femininity and love.⁶⁷ This association leads to the implication that Taweret represents the female gender itself. Figure 6 represents the last intact (with a minor section missing) stela dedicated solely to Taweret.⁶⁸ Dedicated by the workman Irynefer (i) and his wife Mehytkhati (ii), the two have been attested to on numerous stelae⁶⁹ from the reign of Ramesses II in the

[lightbox.\\$TspTitleImageLink.link&sp=10&sp=Scollection&sp=SfieldValue&sp=0&sp=0&sp=3&sp=Slightbox_3x4&sp=0&sp=Sdetail&sp=0&sp=F&sp=T&sp=1](#)>, accessed 26/03/2019.

⁶³ K. Gabler, ‘Stela Turin CGT 50057 (=Cat. 1514) im ikonografischen und prosopografischen Kontext Deir el-Medines: *nb.t-pr Mw.t(-m-wjA)* (vi im Spannungsfeld der Mächte der Taweret und des Seth?)’, *Rivista del Museo Egizio* 1, <<https://rivista.museoegizio.it/article/stele-turin-cgt-50057-cat-1514-im-ikonografischen-und-prosopografischen-kontext-deir-el-medines-nb-t-pr-mw-t-m-wja-vi-im-spannungsfeld-der-machte-der-taweret-und-des-seth/>> (Posted 22 December 2017), 1.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ B. Bruyère, *Rapport sur les fouilles de Deir el Médineh (1935-1940) Fascicule III* (Cairo, 1952), 77.

⁶⁷ The Met, *Votive Stela with Figures of Goddesses Taweret and Mut of Isheru, ca. 1390-1352 B.C.* <<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/544499?searchField=All&sortBy=Relevance&ft=Deir+el+medina&offset=0&rpp=80&pos=60>>, accessed 30/03/2019.

⁶⁸ The British Museum, *Stela EA1388* <https://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=177353&partId=1&searchText=deir+el+medina+taweret&page=1>, accessed 10/04/2019.

⁶⁹ Including one dedicated to Ptah; Davies, *Five Walls*, 253.

Nineteenth Dynasty.⁷⁰ The two last stelae of the collection are small fragments depicting Taweret, seen in fragment nine from Figure 7, and Figure 8.⁷¹ This small section shows how fragile these stelae are and the fact that more representing Taweret surely existed in antiquity but have since been broken, stolen, or simply lost.

1.2 Statues

Divine statues throughout ancient Egypt were known to house the spirit of the deity which they represented and were believed to exist for eternity.⁷² The statues were not considered to be the deities themselves, however were still considered alive by the Egyptians who imbued them with life through the ‘Opening of the Mouth’ rituals.⁷³ This process of bringing the statues to life applied to all statues and statuettes irrespective of size. Divine statues manifested themselves in several ways: cult statues would reside within the inner sanctuaries of temples or chapels, votive statues were dedicated by individuals to the temples honouring the deity, employed to guard monuments, embedded within the architecture of sacred spaces, shaped into receptacle forms or amulets which were small forms used as personal charms or decorative jewellery.⁷⁴ The notion that the deity itself resided within the statue is crucial in understanding the function and importance afforded any representation of the goddess Taweret. Noting the value of these statues, it is understandable that small statuettes would have been removed from the village when it was abandoned, leaving behind only the largest statues and those unfinished, damaged or broken in antiquity.⁷⁵ For the purposes of this essay, ‘statuettes’ incorporate any figures of the goddess smaller than 30cm (excluding amulets which were worn by the Egyptians) and ‘statues’ incorporate any larger than this.

The best-preserved statue of Taweret to originate from Deir el-Medina is Turin C525 (Figure 9)⁷⁶. This statue, carved from wood and painted red, yellow and black is not only the most intact statue of the goddess from Deir el-Medina, but also the largest measuring 40cm

⁷⁰ Davies, EU 13, chart 26.

⁷¹ B. Bruyère, *Deir el Médineh Année 1926: Sondage au Temple Funéraire de Thotmès II (Hat Ankh Shesep)* (Cairo, 1952), 59.

⁷² A.P. Kozloff, ‘Sculpture: An Overview’, in D.B. Redford (ed.), *OEAE III* (Oxford, 2001), 219.

⁷³ A.P. Kozloff, ‘Divine Sculpture’, in D.B. Redford (ed.), *OEAE III* (Oxford, 2001), 242.

⁷⁴ *Ibid*, 242-246.

⁷⁵ Weiss, EU 29, 136

⁷⁶ Museo Egizio, *Statuetta di Tauret*

<[https://collezioni.museoegizio.it/eMP/eMuseumPlus?service=direct/1/ResultLightboxView/result.t2.collection_lightbox.\\$TspTitleLink.link&sp=10&sp=Scollection&sp=SfieldValue&sp=0&sp=0&sp=3&sp=Slightbox_3x4&sp=0&sp=Sdetail&sp=0&sp=F&sp=T&sp=1](https://collezioni.museoegizio.it/eMP/eMuseumPlus?service=direct/1/ResultLightboxView/result.t2.collection_lightbox.$TspTitleLink.link&sp=10&sp=Scollection&sp=SfieldValue&sp=0&sp=0&sp=3&sp=Slightbox_3x4&sp=0&sp=Sdetail&sp=0&sp=F&sp=T&sp=1)> accessed 20/02/2019.

tall.⁷⁷ As has previously been mentioned, the most common way in which Taweret was presented in the New Kingdom was on small amulets to be kept within the home, measuring no more than 20cm. As she did not have a cult centre, there was no requirement for large statues to be erected. Only a handful of 'large' statues of the goddess have been recorded throughout Egyptian history with most coming from the Third Intermediate or Late Periods.⁷⁸ Statue Turin C525 depicts Taweret in her standard upright position, her sharp teeth and red paint emphasise the ferocious protection element as she watches over pregnant women and infant children.⁷⁹ The statue is dedicated to Taweret on behalf of the painter Parahotep and his sons, again indicating the familial role in offering dedications to deities in Deir el-Medina and the purpose of this statue to serve as a votive offering requesting protection from Taweret. Unfortunately, the original find location of the statue was lost so we cannot say with certainty whether it stood guard by a household altar or in cult chapel accessible by the village.

The second mostly-complete representation of the goddess (Figure 10) was recorded in Bruyère's 1948 to 1951 field season report.⁸⁰ Unfortunately the detail surrounding the statuette is limited to the fact that it was carved from limestone, painted in red and measures 23cm tall.⁸¹ Based on the inscription provided by Bruyère, we can see that the statue was dedicated to Taweret on behalf of Neferronpet, although it is not clear which Neferronpet due to the lack of other family members recorded. Indeed, it could be the same Neferronpet who dedicated Figure 3, but we will never know for sure. It is also unclear where this statuette has ended. Similar to the Neferronpet statuette, the base of another statuette of the goddess (Figure 11) was uncovered in a previous Bruyère excavation years 1931 to 1932 of the Deir el-Medina cemetery.⁸² Found within tomb P. 1268,⁸³ the base of the statue was recorded by Bruyère bearing a distinct inscription honouring Taweret. Despite the fact that the statue accompanying

⁷⁷ C. Ziegler, *Queens of Egypt From Hetepheres to Cleopatra* (Monaco, 2008), 321.

⁷⁸ JE 37531 from the Cairo Museum measures 65cm tall, E. Jambon, *Cachette de Karnak - CK 941: Statue de la déesse Thoueris. Caire JE 37531* <<http://www.ifao.egnet.net/bases/cachette/ck941>> accessed 10/02/2019; a statue from the Luxor Cache also measures 60.5cm tall, M. El-Saghir, *La découverte de la cachette des statues du temple de Louxor* (Mainz, 1992), 48; a second Cairo Museum statue measures 96cm tall, A. El-Shahawy, *The Egyptian Museum Cairo: A Walk Through the Alleys of Ancient Egypt* (Cairo, 2005), 277; a statue in the British Museum measures 108cm tall, The British Museum, *Statue EA35700* <https://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=111482&partId=1&searchText=Taweret&page=3>, accessed 12/02/2019; and lastly a statue from the Walters Art Museum measures 53cm tall, The Walters Art Museum, *Statue of Taweret* <<https://art.thewalters.org/detail/6873/statue-of-taweret/>>, accessed 20/02/2019.

⁷⁹ Ziegler, *Queens of Egypt*, 321.

⁸⁰ B. Bruyère, *Rapport sur les fouilles de Deir el Médineh (Années 1948 à 1951)* (Cairo, 1953), 76.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² B. Bruyère, *Rapport sur les Fouilles de Deir el Médineh (Années 1931-1932)* (Cairo, 1934).

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 15.

the base is missing, due to the inscription, the stance and feet type, it is clear who the statue would have depicted. Unfortunately, Bruyère's publication and notes surrounding this statue are absent of any measurements which could lead us to an estimation as to the height of the statue which would have stood there. The two remaining statuettes of Taweret within this collection (Figures 12 and 13), were both referenced in Bruyère's notebooks,⁸⁴ and both consist only of a fractured head of the goddess without an accompanying body. Due to the height of Figure 12, of 5.5cm, it clearly belonged to a statuette no more than 20cm tall, while the 13.5cm height of Figure 13 indicates the full statuette could have measured 30-40cm in height making it a decent sized statue of the goddess.

The fact that only five statuettes/statues of the goddess have remained within Deir el-Medina indicates two different aspects: firstly, it is an example of the abandonment process of the settlement where most small statuettes could have been removed by the inhabitants when they moved away at the end of the Twentieth Dynasty. This is reflected consistently throughout the settlement by the lack of useful or valuable small objects. Secondly, the lack of any large statues which could have resided within a cult chapel to the goddess, forces us to question the idea of a temple dedicated to Taweret having existed within the settlement. However, cult statues may not have been enforced in Deir el-Medina within the small chapels, but rather reserved only for the largest temples (such as Amenhotep I or Hathor).

1.3 Ostraca

While the figurative ostraca of Deir el-Medina do not display any scenes of Taweret, quite a few of the textual ostraca do make mention to the goddess in passing, emphasising her role within the daily life of Deir el-Medina society. In Egyptology the term 'ostraca' refers to potsherds and limestone flakes inscribed or painted upon by the ancient Egyptians.⁸⁵ Deir el-Medina has produced possibly the largest surviving corpus of ostraca related to the daily lives of non-elite members of Egyptian society anywhere in Egypt. Recently proven that

⁸⁴ B. Bruyère, *Notebook MS_2004_0152_007*, <http://www.ifao.egnet.net/bases/archives/bruyere/?id=MS_2004_0152_007> (DEM 3, 1930-1931), 1; B. Bruyère, *Notebook MS_2004_0150_012*, <http://www.ifao.egnet.net/bases/archives/bruyere/?id=MS_2004_0150_012> (DEM 2, 1928-1929), 6.

⁸⁵ Weiss, EU 29, 158.

administrative ostraca where true statements of the daily organization of the settlement,⁸⁶ the insights that these provide in understanding the role of Taweret within this society were crucial.

The first ostrakon of importance which mentions the goddess Taweret is that of O. Gardiner 166 (also known as O. Ashmolean Museum 0166).⁸⁷ This ostrakon is one of a handful which mention a festival dedicated to the birth of Taweret and the feast surrounding this event. Festivals in ancient Egypt dedicated to the local gods/goddesses were undoubtedly times of great celebration, representing a highlight in the annual religious calendar and a symbol of the collective religious identity of the inhabitants.⁸⁸ O. Gardiner 166 details how the workman Nakhtmin had his *sš*-cake stolen from his village chapel during a local festival dedicated to the birth of Taweret by the lady Tanehsy.⁸⁹ The ostrakon goes on to state that Tanehsy turned herself in before Nakhtmin after receiving a divine ‘manifestation’ of the goddess to seek restitution for the stolen cake.⁹⁰ It further states that the restitution Nakhtmin was seeking was not for himself, but to appease the goddess and escape any possible future accusations of him not fulfilling his ritual obligations.⁹¹ The divine power of Taweret and the fact that an annual festival was held for her is crucial in understanding the role of the goddess upon Egyptian society. She clearly had an important function to warrant such fear and celebration. The festival also featured in P. DeM 02,⁹² a list of items given to an unnamed woman and her father on dates corresponding to the New Year, the Following of Horus, the feast of the deified Amenhotep I and the feast of Taweret,⁹³ emphasising that such a festival was celebrated annually.

Ostrakon O. DeM 00251⁹⁴ provides a similar view of the goddess Taweret in terms of the divine justice she could extract and the dangerous aspect of her being. This ostrakon details that a *weret* was stolen and the author of the ostrakon fears that it was used to work a

⁸⁶ K. Donker van Heel and B.J.J. Haring, *Writing in a Workmen's Village: Scribal Practice in Ramesside Deir el-Medina* (EU 16; Leiden, 2003), 76.

⁸⁷ The Deir el-Medina Database, *O. Ashmolean Museum 0166*
<<https://dmd.wepwawet.nl/scripts/dmdobject.asp?id=O.%20Ashmolean%20Museum%200166&m=i>> accessed 10/05/2019.

⁸⁸ Davies, *Five Walls*, 109.

⁸⁹ *Ibid*, 328.

⁹⁰ *Ibid*, 329.

⁹¹ *Ibid*.

⁹² The Deir el-Medina Database, *P. DeM 02*

<<https://dmd.wepwawet.nl/scripts/dmdobject.asp?id=P.%20DeM%2002&m=i>> accessed 10/05/2019.

⁹³ J. Toivari-Viitala, *Workmen at Deir el-Medina: A Study of the Status and Roles of the Female Inhabitants in the Workmen's Community during the Ramesside Period* (EU 15; Leiden, 2001), 225.

⁹⁴ The Deir el-Medina Database, *O. DeM 00251*

<<https://dmd.wepwawet.nl/scripts/dmdobject.asp?id=O.%20DeM%2000251&m=i>> accessed 10/05/2019.

manifestation of Seth against their person.⁹⁵ The *weret* in question is agreed by Egyptologists to be a statuette of the goddess Taweret.⁹⁶ The association between Taweret and Seth appeared consistently throughout ancient Egypt: mostly due to the fact that Plutarch recorded Taweret served as Seth's concubine and both were linked to hippopotami. While Taweret took on the feminine protective form, Seth incorporated the destructive male hippopotamus into his representations.⁹⁷ The notion of divine retribution being extracted upon someone for failing to protect their objects of devotion towards Taweret is another example of the goddess' influence upon the daily life of Egyptians, however, this influence evokes a negative association rather than the more common protective nature of the goddess. This duality of the goddess where she could both protect and destroy is not unique among Egyptian deities. Throughout her identification upon literary ostraca of Deir el-Medina, Taweret is painted as a deity who was celebrated in festivals but also feared. Despite these associations, the fact that only three ostraca mention the goddess is significant. There is no doubt several more ostraca mention the goddess or her festival in passing, however, she is never of central concern. As seen in O. DeM 00251, it was the divine punishment of Seth rather than Taweret that was feared.

1.4 Altars, Offering Basins and Grills

An analysis of the immovable objects used to worship Taweret such as altars, offering basins and grills offers a more reliable source of information than that of smaller movable objects which may have been uncovered in secondary contexts or may be absent due to being removed in antiquity. A unique theme throughout the houses of Deir el-Medina was the presence of household altars built within the first room of many dwellings. Bruyère identified twenty-eight altars within the sixty-eight houses which made up Deir el-Medina.⁹⁸ These altars measured on average 75cm in height, 170cm in length and 80cm in width with steps attached for the inhabitants to climb upon them.⁹⁹ Of these twenty-eight altars, ten platforms were preserved with decoration upon white-washed surface¹⁰⁰ which make reference to pregnancy and fertility such as decorations of Bes, dancing women or women holding newborn babies.¹⁰¹ The prevalence of images related to female life has led many scholars to suggest the altars were

⁹⁵ McDowell, *Village Life*, 102.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ Friedman, 'Aspects of Domestic Life', 97.

⁹⁹ Weiss, *JEA* 95, 196.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 201.

¹⁰¹ Robins, *KMT* 5:4,

dedicated to celebrating fertility and childbirth,¹⁰² with some even going so far as to suggest this was used as an actual birthing area.¹⁰³ The domestic fertility cults have been perceived by some¹⁰⁴ as a symbol of the continued maintenance of the cosmological order and high influence of the female role within the household. Despite the perceived fertility role which these altars may have played, Taweret is conspicuously absent from the decoration of the altars, even though several of her stelae and statuettes were closely associated with the altars. While many of the figures depicted upon altars do relate to the female, only one distinctly depicts a mother and infant fulfilling this fertility function, thereby forcing us to question whether all altars were entirely dedicated to childbirth. Notably, only ten altars had preserved decoration. The remaining eighteen may well also have been decorated, but have deteriorated to a point where we cannot say.¹⁰⁵ In terms of the presence of Bes upon the altars but not Taweret, it is noted that Bes is not represented upon stelae while Taweret is, leading to the suggestion of a differentiation of rank between the deities. Alternatively, the presence of Bes may be due to the rise of Bes in the 18th Dynasty as a relatively new deity, or the fact that these altars were not singularly focused on fertility which would require representation of Taweret. In any case the household altars which exist within Deir el-Medina pose more questions in regard to Taweret than answers.

Offering basins, due to their size and weight, represent another stationary object within Deir el-Medina. These basins served the same function as the offering tables. A constant depiction in ancient Egypt was the deity sitting facing the overflowing offering table,¹⁰⁶ the offering basins replicated this on a smaller scale with the offerings to the deity generally being smaller than those of the state temples on the East Bank of the Nile. Six fragmentary (Figures 14-18) basins have been excavated in Deir el-Medina which make mention of the goddess Taweret. These basins are all in differing states of preservation. The most complete basin within this collection (Figure 14) is no more than two-thirds complete. Due to the level of damage on the basins, several of the fragments are broken off where the name of Taweret would have existed; this is seen in Figures 15 and 18 where only the *t3* is preserved, as well as figure 17 where her name is partially preserved but cut off midway through the *wrt* at the end of her name. Despite the disconnected nature of the basins, Taweret is often mentioned on this medium which would have served a distinctly religious function within chapels, household

¹⁰² Valbelle, *Les ouvriers*, 261; Friedman, 'Aspects of Domestic Life', 98.

¹⁰³ A.I. Sadek, *Popular Religion in Egypt During the New Kingdom* (Hildesheim, 1987), 77.

¹⁰⁴ Weiss, *JEA* 95, 202.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ Weiss, *EU* 29, 127.

altars or temple,¹⁰⁷ emphasising the importance of the goddess. All of the fragments within this collection have been discovered in different sections of the settlement, however, only Figure 14 can be traced to an exact location which is why this is the basin of interest here. This basin is the best preserved in this collection, measuring 15cm in height, 43cm in diameter and with a 4cm length rim.¹⁰⁸ While the inscription states a dedication to Taweret, the image upon the basin is that of the goddess Hathor suggesting a dual function within the cult chapels of both Taweret and Hathor.¹⁰⁹ It has been suggested that the figure of the goddess Taweret and inscription of Hathor are both in sections of the basin now lost and broken.¹¹⁰ This offering basin can be traced to the third room in house S.O. II belonging to Harshire (i),¹¹¹ indicating the use of such offering basins within a clearly domestic setting.

Similar to the offering basins, offering grills were used within a clearly religious context to make an offering of grilled meats to the gods. This is proven true with the offering grill from Deir el-Medina (Figure 19) which contained traces of burnt meat upon it.¹¹² Perhaps due to the small size of the grill, Bruyère claimed the fat in it was from poultry; duck, pigeon, etc.¹¹³ The grill within this catalogue is one of only two uncovered at Deir el-Medina and it's inscription on behalf of Nebdjefa is clearly dedicated to the goddess Taweret.¹¹⁴ The infrequency of offering grills at Deir el-Medina may be due to the lack of access to meat by the villagers. Due to the reliance of the village upon the state for their food rations, the villagers gained meat very rarely, and it was not available to everyone.¹¹⁵ Beef was an expensive delicacy and came to the villagers only on special occasions or as rewards.¹¹⁶ Figure 19 was uncovered in the second room of house S.O. III which belonged to Nebdjefa's son Harnefer (i) and grandson Harnefer (ii).¹¹⁷ The objects relating to this family were found relatively widespread throughout the village suggesting their cult was no longer being practiced by the 20th Dynasty.¹¹⁸ The grill,

¹⁰⁷ Bruyère, *Deir el Médineh (1935-1940) III*, 72.

¹⁰⁸ B. Bruyère, *Notebook MS_2004_0156_018*,

<http://www.ifao.egnet.net/bases/archives/bruyere/?id=MS_2004_0156_018> (DEM 3, 1934-1935), 9.

¹⁰⁹ Weiss, EU 29, 128.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ Bruyère, *Deir el Médineh (1934-1935) Troisième Partie*, 315.

¹¹² Weiss, EU 29, 128.

¹¹³ B. Bruyère, *Notebook MS_2004_0156_015*,

<http://www.ifao.egnet.net/bases/archives/bruyere/?id=MS_2004_0156_015> (DEM 3, 1934-1935), 8.

¹¹⁴ Weiss, EU 29, 324.

¹¹⁵ S. Ikram, *Choice Cuts: Meat Production in Ancient Egypt* (OLA 69; Leuven, 1995), 8

¹¹⁶ J. Janssen, *Commodity Prices from the Ramessid Period: an Economic Study of the Village of Necropolis Workmen at Thebes* (Leiden, 1975), 489-90.

¹¹⁷ Weiss, EU 29, 106.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

like the offering basins, had to be placed on the ground in front of an altar or stelae.¹¹⁹ It was stationary due to its weight and thus remained within the settlement when the inhabitants left. This grill provides a rare example of Taweret upon a solitary stone religious monument as she generally featured in small and subsequently cheaper products such as amulets or statuettes.¹²⁰

1.5 Amulets

Taweret is most famous due to her representation on Amulets throughout the New Kingdom. Amulets in the form of Bes and Taweret are known from virtually every settlement site in Egypt during the New Kingdom as well as numerous funerary contexts. Amulets are considered essential adornment worn by men, women and children throughout every level of Egyptian society in antiquity.¹²¹ Amulets were predominantly used by individuals seeking protection from the chosen deity, symbol or creature represented on it, hence their use during life.¹²² These amulets served a funerary purpose in guiding the deceased in the underworld and were positioned upon the body with a specific meanings and significance which has since been lost.¹²³ These amulets existed in differing sizes with the largest of these having been worn singularly, while the smallest of these beads being incorporated into more complex designs.¹²⁴ Originating in the Pre-Dynastic period within a purely funerary context, early amulets appeared in simple animal forms with the hobbled hippopotamus appearing frequently as a symbol of controlling the wildness of the creature and using it as protection.¹²⁵ Although amulets were uncommon prior to the New Kingdom, the standing hippopotamus appeared as early as the 6th Dynasty and is considered the first phase of Taweret amulets.¹²⁶

Frogs and Hippopotami were used as amulets from the earliest periods of Egyptian society as both were seen as symbols of fertility, these animals later developed into the goddesses Heqet and Taweret respectively.¹²⁷ In the New Kingdom with the explosion of amulets in all forms and purposes, deities associated with protection were still favoured, especially Bes and Taweret.¹²⁸ Despite the fact that Taweret had appeared in her upright form

¹¹⁹ Bruyère, *Deir el Médineh (1934-1935) Troisième Partie*, 206.

¹²⁰ Weiss, EU 29, 106.

¹²¹ C.A.R. Andrews, 'Amulets', in D.B. Redford (ed.), *OEAE I* (Oxford, 2001), 75.

¹²² Weiss, EU 29, 166.

¹²³ C.A.R. Andrews, *Amulets of Ancient Egypt* (London 1994), 7.

¹²⁴ Robins, *KMT* 5:4, 29.

¹²⁵ Andrews, *Amulets of Ancient Egypt*, 8.

¹²⁶ W.M.F. Petrie, *Amulets* (London, 1914), 47.

¹²⁷ Silverman, 'Deities', 373.

¹²⁸ *Ibid*, 373.

upon amulets from the 6th Dynasty, her partner Bes only appeared in amuletic form from the beginning of the 18th Dynasty.¹²⁹ While most commonly represented among domestic contexts of everyday Egyptian individuals, golden Taweret beads have been discovered within a royal context believed to have formed part of the jewellery belonged to royal ladies, with moulds for such Taweret beading discovered in the palace of Malqata.¹³⁰

Despite the important role which Taweret played upon amulets throughout ancient Egypt, they are conspicuously absent from the archaeology of Deir el-Medina. Throughout Bruyère's excavation reports he mentions the presence of amulets of Taweret,¹³¹ and other deities, though he never publishes where these amulets were discovered or in what quantities they appear, simply that they are there and are relatively rare. This lack of evidence is believed to support the concept that most objects of value would have been taken by the inhabitants of the village when the site was abandoned.¹³² Due to their small size and therefore high portability, in addition to their high value, the scarcity of these items within the archaeological record of the site is more representative of the abandonment process rather than an absence in everyday life. The fact that a handful of these amulets and scarabs have survived within the site is indicative of their presence in the site at its peak. Amulets, and the molds used to make amulets, represent one group of material goods which were potentially common at Deir el-Medina but have left little trace in the archaeology or literature of the site.¹³³

Throughout the full corpus of literature of Deir el-Medina, there exists a select few sources which mention the presence of amulets belonging to the inhabitants of the village. Two of these references include P. BM EA 10411¹³⁴ and O. Cairo 25678.¹³⁵ P. BM EA 10411 consists of a papyrus letter from the scribe Butehamun (i) to the scribe Tjaroy, which makes reference to the use of amulets by people who are travelling to ensure their protection. This is repeated in a similar letter Butehamun (i) writes to his father Thutmose (ii), indicating that this practice of using amulets as protection while on a journey was commonplace.¹³⁶ Alternatively,

¹²⁹ Andrews, *Amulets of Ancient Egypt*, 39.

¹³⁰ Pinch, *Votive Offerings*, 293.

¹³¹ B. Bruyère, *Rapport sur les Fouilles de Deir el Médineh (Année 1930)* (Cairo, 1933); B. Bruyère, *Deir el Médineh (Années 1948 à 1951)*.

¹³² Weiss, EU 29, 164.

¹³³ *Ibid.*

¹³⁴ The Deir el-Medina Database, P. BM EA 10411

<<https://dmd.wepwawet.nl/scripts/dmdobject.asp?id=P.%20BM%20EA%2010411&m=i>> accessed 10/05/2019.

¹³⁵ The Deir el-Medina Database, O. Cairo CG 25678

<<https://dmd.wepwawet.nl/scripts/dmdobject.asp?id=O.%20Cairo%20CG%2025678&m=i>> accessed 10/05/2019.

¹³⁶ Weiss, EU 29, 164.

O. Cairo 25678 represents an administrative text listing the objects given to the lady Khaysheb (otherwise unheard of in Deir el-Medina textual sources) which includes several amulets. This administrative ostrakon style is more frequent when referencing amulets and their usage as part of transactions between individuals.¹³⁷

1.6 Tomb Decoration

Despite her main role in Egyptian society being the protection of women and children during childbirth, Taweret had a dual role within the funerary context of ancient Egypt. In this role, Taweret would serve as a goddess of rebirth after death with her statue and amulets placed within tombs assisting the deceased in their journey to the afterlife.¹³⁸ Within this context her powers were considered regenerative as well as life-giving with various myths existing which emphasise her role in nurturing and purifying the deceased as “mistress of pure water.”¹³⁹ It is this role which is seen displayed on the decorated mummification bandage (Figure 20) where Taweret is shown seated, not in a pregnant form, and holding a lotus before an altar of offerings.¹⁴⁰ These linen squares were usually sewn on the external shroud of the mummy as an extra symbol of protection in the journey to the underworld.¹⁴¹ Unfortunately, it is not known exactly where this was found; whether in a funerary or household setting, however, irrespective of its location, its intention to protect the deceased is very clear. It is in objects such as these that the image of Taweret as a protective deity becomes solidified and the versatility of the goddess can be appreciated.

Within the tomb of Nakhtamun (TT 335) two different images associated with the goddess Taweret are painted upon the walls. Firstly, Taweret takes on an association with the goddess Nut (seen in Figure 21). In this scene Taweret is physically represented as the tree with the accompanying inscription stating “Taweret in her name of Nut,” where Taweret takes on the role of welcoming the deceased Nakhtamun and his wife Nebuemshehet to the underworld through her protective association.¹⁴² When assuming a role of protection, many powerful goddesses, such as Isis and Hathor, would take on the form of Taweret, likewise, Taweret

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

¹³⁸ G. Pinch, *Egyptian Mythology: A Guide to Gods, Goddesses, and Traditions of Ancient Egypt* (Oxford, 2002), 142.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁰ Bruyère, *Deir el Médineh (1934-1935) Troisième Partie*, 227.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴² B. Bruyère, *Rapport sur les fouilles de Deir el Médineh (1924-1925)* (Cairo, 1926), 138.

would gradually absorb the qualities of many different goddesses into her role enabling her to grow in stature.¹⁴³ This association with Nut is one in which the goddess takes on the form of a sycamore tree to emphasise the protection of the goddesses bestowed upon the deceased.

Elsewhere in the tomb (Figure 22), Taweret is again depicted in a unique fashion. While her body maintains the standard Taweret form (pregnant stomach, lion paws, crocodile tail, etc.) her hippopotamus face is replaced with that of a human.¹⁴⁴ While this is not the first time Taweret has been represented in such a fashion,¹⁴⁵ it is still unique and one of only a handful of such depictions throughout all of Egyptian history. In this scene Taweret is displayed alongside the goddess Anuket, one of the Aswan triad deities. While Anuket has the clear connotation as a goddess of Upper Egypt, the accompanying inscription anointed Taweret as; “lady of the house of the North,” thereby associating Taweret with Lower Egypt.¹⁴⁶ This association between Anuket of Upper Egypt and Taweret of Lower Egypt is also represented in their geographical placement and evokes a representation of the union of the two lands, which is a common theme throughout the tomb.¹⁴⁷ The duality represented here and the role in which Taweret plays in this image is emblematic of the multitudinous different aspects Taweret employs.

Despite there being over four-hundred tombs within the cemeteries of Deir el-Medina,¹⁴⁸ these are the only traces of the goddess Taweret to be uncovered. However, it cannot be understated that most of the tombs were plundered both in antiquity and the modern age, and thus many of the material goods were completely absent. Even if we take into account the tomb-robbing, the fact that one tomb contains painted images of the goddess upon its walls is significant. Depictions of Taweret inscribed or painted upon tomb walls is infrequent throughout Egypt, perhaps due to the fact that the majority of the Egyptians who could afford this elaborate decoration were elite members of society to whom Taweret played a minor role. The decorated tombs of Deir el-Medina reflect the deities which were considered important for the lower classes of society, but were portrayed in a distinctly elite fashion. The fact that

¹⁴³ Pinch, *Egyptian Mythology*, 142.

¹⁴⁴ Bruyère, *Deir el Médineh (1924-1925)*, 157.

¹⁴⁵ In Gebel Silsileh there is a representation of Taweret in the same fashion with her face appearing as a human while the rest of her body is the standard hybrid form. For drawing see; K. Lepsius, *Denkmäler aus Ägypten und Äthiopien*. Plates Abt. III, Part 7. (Berlin 1853), 175c.

¹⁴⁶ Bruyère, *Deir el Médineh (1924-1925)*, 157.

¹⁴⁷ T. Benderitter, ‘Page 5’, *Tomb of Nakhtamon TT 335*,

<https://www.osirisnet.net/tombes/artisans/nakhtamon335/e_nakhtamon335_05.htm> accessed 05/04/19.

¹⁴⁸ Meskell, *Archaeologies of Social Life*, 137.

Taweret was depicted at all should be considered as significant, though it may simply emphasise one family's connection to the deity rather than a whole societal movement.

1.7 Existence of a Temple?

It is generally agreed upon by Egyptologists that the majority of the cult of Taweret took place in domestic shrines, however, numerous claims have arisen over the decades that there was a cult centre for Taweret located in Deir el-Medina.¹⁴⁹ It is crucial before examining the evidence to differentiate 'temples' from 'chapels' because while the evidence may not support one of these religious centres, it may suggest another. A Temple is generally agreed to be a religious centre erected by the state,¹⁵⁰ in which the pharaoh served as the head priest and had the sole right to perform the cult (fulfilled by high priests in the pharaoh's absence).¹⁵¹ Chapels are considered smaller religious institutions which may reside within temple complexes and do not need to be erected by the state, as seen with the Deir el-Medina chapels which were constructed by the village inhabitants.¹⁵² Deir el-Medina had a religious centre to the north and north-east of their village,¹⁵³ which contained three large temples to Amenhotep I, legendary founder of the settlement, the Hathoric temple built by Seti I,¹⁵⁴ and the Temple of Amun (as well as the rest of the Theban Triad; Mut and Khonsu) by Ramesses II.¹⁵⁵ Alongside these larger temples, the religious precinct of the village consisted of sixteen to eighteen small chapels.¹⁵⁶ These chapels cannot be assigned to specific deities, though the find remains indicate that a few were devoted to ancestor cults while others were indicative of local (Meretseger), distant (Khnum, Satis, Anukis) and foreign (Rashep, Anath, Astarte Kadesh)¹⁵⁷ deities, placed alongside the larger temples of the state gods.¹⁵⁸ Unfortunately the large Hathoric temple built by Ptolemy IV in the Third century BCE integrated several of the earlier chapel structures from the New Kingdom, making it more challenging to determine who they may have originally have been dedicated to.¹⁵⁹ There were also more than fifty small shrines

¹⁴⁹ Bruyère, *Deir el Médineh (1934-1935) Troisième Partie*, 106; McDowell, *Village Life*, 103.

¹⁵⁰ R. Gundlach, 'Temples', in D.B. Redford (ed.), *OEA I* (Oxford, 2001), 363.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid*, 373.

¹⁵² B. Lesko, 'Private Cults', in D.B. Redford (ed.), *OEA I* (Oxford, 2001), 338.

¹⁵³ M.L. Bierbrier, *The Tomb-Builders of the Pharaohs* (London, 1982), 85.

¹⁵⁴ R.H. Wilkinson, *The Complete Temples of Ancient Egypt* (London, 2000), 189.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 190.

¹⁵⁶ Lesko, 'Spiritual and Intellectual', 90.

¹⁵⁷ Davies, *Five Walls*, 61.

¹⁵⁸ Lesko, 'Spiritual and Intellectual', 90.

¹⁵⁹ Wilkinson, *Complete Temples*, 190.

dominating the path from Deir el-Medina to the Valley of the Kings where the workmen spent their nights during their ten-day workweek.¹⁶⁰

The main piece of evidence used to substantiate claims of a cult centre dedicated to Taweret within Deir el-Medina is the door-jamb belonging to Amenwahsu, son of Mesu (hieroglyphic inscription seen in Figure 23, though the original object cannot be traced to any publications with images of the original artefact).¹⁶¹ This inscription refers to a “*b3k*” (servant) of Taweret, suggesting Amenwahsu is a priest of Taweret which would support a religious centre of the goddess within the settlement. As there was no professional clergy within the village, the priesthood of the numerous temples and chapels consisted of ordinary workmen, and it appears that specific families became associated with particular deities.¹⁶² The majority of these part-time priests took on the title of *wab* priests, though titles of “lector,” “fan bearer.” And “*b3k*” (servant) were also used, as is the case with the Amenwahsu door jam.¹⁶³ This door jamb serves as the only direct evidence used to argue for a cult centre for Taweret in the village, the remainder of the evidence is more circumstantial. A full translation of the two doors originally belonging to a shrine or niche from a Deir el-Medina house or chapel from the Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts (I.Ia. 4867 a-b) was provided by McDowell including many epithets for Taweret “Giving praise to Ta-Weret, Lady of Heaven, mistress of all the gods, lady of nourishment, mistress of provisions, lady of marriage, mistress of the dowry, lady of the wind, mistress of the North wind, rich in property, lady of affluence...”¹⁶⁴ These doors measure 36cm in height and 95cm in width,¹⁶⁵ and were dedicated by Mesu father of Amenwahsu. However, the translation provided by McDowell differs from the recorded inscription by Bruyère,¹⁶⁶ as McDowell records Amenwahsu as a servant of Amun, not Taweret.¹⁶⁷ Unfortunately, images of the original artefact cannot be found in any publications to verify the inscriptions.

Additional evidence for a potential chapel dedicated to Taweret can be seen in the chapel of Djebel (chapel 1214) excavated by Bruyère in 1922-1923,¹⁶⁸ and then again in

¹⁶⁰ Lesko, ‘Spiritual and Intellectual’, 93.

¹⁶¹ Bruyère, *Deir el Médineh (1935-1940) III*, 72.

¹⁶² McDowell, *Village Life*, 92.

¹⁶³ Lesko, ‘Spiritual and Intellectual’, 90.

¹⁶⁴ McDowell, *Village Life*, 103.

¹⁶⁵ B. Bruyère, *Rapport sur les Fouilles de Deir el Médineh (Année 1929)* (Cairo, 1930), 22.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁷ McDowell, *Village Life*, 103.

¹⁶⁸ B. Bruyère, *Rapport sur les Fouilles de Deir el Médineh (Années 1922-1923)* (Cairo, 1924), 59-60.

1929,¹⁶⁹ which contains a plethora of objects relating to Taweret and could be a potential cult centre for the goddess. Placed in the northern cemetery of Deir el-Medina, the chapel does not have a tomb complex to accompany it, suggesting it was intended as a chapel for a deity such as Taweret. The origins of the chapel date back to the 18th Dynasty, though the majority of its objects date to the Ramesside Period in the 20th Dynasty.¹⁷⁰ Due to the poor preservation of these chapels throughout the village they cannot be assigned a specific deity of worship, though the amount of objects relating to Taweret in this temple (Figure 8, 13 and 24), indicates the goddess may have played a more central role than other deities. Unfortunately the village records have limited information with regarding the minor chapels and the nature and regularity of the rituals held within them, adding to the difficulties of determining their intended divinity.¹⁷¹ The fact that the only other known reference to a New Kingdom temple of Taweret was found within the land survey known as the Wilbour Papyrus, emphasises the struggle in determining the possibility of Taweret having a cult centre in Deir el-Medina.¹⁷² It is possible that one of the many chapels within the settlement region may have been dedicated to the goddess, but it is also a safe assumption that she did not have a temple erected in her honour with all the grandeur afforded temples in ancient Egypt, due to her domestic prominence.

¹⁶⁹ Bruyère, *Deir el Médineh (Année 1929)*, 20-23.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid*, 16.

¹⁷¹ Davies, *Five Walls*, 59.

¹⁷² McDowell, *Village Life*, 103.

Section 2: Analysis

2.1 Why the lack of evidence?

As has already been examined, the apparent absence of many ‘small’ objects (20cm or smaller) within the settlements seems more indicative of the process of abandonment of the site rather than a lack of them ever having existed. While some amulets did survive from this and earlier periods scattered throughout the site, they have never been catalogued to determine exactly how many relate to Taweret to draw larger conclusions. As Taweret's representations featured most heavily upon the smaller household images, without knowing exactly how many amulets relating to Taweret survived, definitive conclusions about her influence upon the daily lives of Deir el-Medina residents cannot be made. Relying only upon the larger images which survived the abandonment of the city, the community religious function is highlighted over individual approaches. However, the statuettes which survived in the archaeological record were all incomplete, which may indicate that they were broken and therefore abandoned, while complete statuettes were more valued and thus taken with the occupants of Deir el-Medina when they eventually left the settlement. Without a direct account of the amulets we are left with only the larger items which depict the goddess’ image less frequently. It is perceivable that these smaller objects were more likely to be taken with the inhabitants when they abandoned the site, while the larger objects such as the Turin statue (Figure 9) or Offering Grill (Figure 19) were too large and heavy to be transported by an individual. Ultimately, when viewing the apparent lack of emphasis placed upon Taweret at Deir el-Medina, it is important to remember that her image was far more frequent upon smaller household objects over large stationary monuments, which unfortunately did not garner the same amount of attention in the publications of the site. Without these records we cannot say with any conviction whether depictions of Taweret were underrepresented, but we can view the lack of smaller objects as more of an indication of the way in which the site was abandoned rather than how it was lived in. In fact, the lack of these items may highlight the importance of the goddess within the houses.

2.2 If not Taweret then who?

If the existing lack of representation of Taweret within Deir el-Medina is due to the fact that the goddess played a minor role in the ancient community, her role as protectress of women

and children during pregnancy and childbirth must have been fulfilled by another deity. Many Egyptian deities replicate Taweret's duties; such as Isis as a goddess of fertility or Hathor who represented love, sexuality and maternal care.¹⁷³ None, however, were closer to Taweret than the god Bes whose primary function was as a god of fertility but was also highly valued as a god of dance and music.¹⁷⁴ Bes was represented as a dwarf with a lion's face and mane, he was particularly popular during the New Kingdom.¹⁷⁵ He and Taweret were first linked when they appeared on apotropaic wands during the Middle Kingdom together, and by the New Kingdom they are intrinsically linked due to the similar roles they played in Egyptian society within the home protecting the weakest members.¹⁷⁶ Bes and Taweret are in fact often perceived as husband and wife during this period due to their closeness.¹⁷⁷ Bes, like Taweret, did not have a state cult dedicated to him which is why he too featured more heavily within the home than in the religious quarters.¹⁷⁸ While Taweret was absent from the decorations upon the altars, Bes featured on five of the ten altars which had decorations preserved.¹⁷⁹ This is a clear indicator of the importance of the god within the households of Deir el-Medina while simultaneously indicating the difference between Taweret and Bes. While Bes featured upon the household altars, he was conspicuously absent from the stelae while Taweret appeared frequently, suggesting a differentiation between the two in their rank or a perceived different function.¹⁸⁰ It is perceivable that the two were employed for the same purpose of safeguarding women and children but did so in different contexts, which is why they are represented on different mediums and why Taweret is not as dominantly present within the archaeological record of the settlement as her role may have been shared among other deities.

While Taweret was still clearly present within the community, other deities may have been preferred by individual households to fulfil the same function in protecting women during pregnancy. Although, foreign goddesses such as Astarte and Qudshu would not have been the choice over Taweret in all households within the settlement, some may have preferred these Canaanite goddesses and depicted them over Taweret. The chapels of Deir el-Medina were not only used to venerate the deities local to the Theban region (Meretseger), the state deities

¹⁷³ Pinch, *Egyptian Mythology*, 138.

¹⁷⁴ Bierbrier, *Tomb-Builders*, 91.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid*, 90.

¹⁷⁶ McDowell, *Village Life*, 102.

¹⁷⁷ R. David, *Religion and Magic in Ancient Egypt* (London, 2002), 273.

¹⁷⁸ Robins, *KMT* 5:4, 30.

¹⁷⁹ Weiss, *JEA* 95, 197.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid*, 202.

(Hathor and Amun), gods to whom they owed their craft (Ptah),¹⁸¹ or even other deities from distant corners of Egypt (Khnum, Satis and Anukis), there is also evidence that they were used to celebrate a number of foreign Asiatic deities including Reshep, Qudshu, Anath and Astarte.¹⁸² Throughout the Ramesside Period in particular, the village became more multicultural with the introduction of foreign names, and the worship of foreign deities.¹⁸³ The popularity and favour shown to deities of international origin left a clear mark on the local belief system, with these Syrian-Palestinian deities forming strong affiliations with other deities celebrated in Deir el-Medina to create an apparent cohesion between the deities from all manner of regions.¹⁸⁴ The popularity of these foreign deities not only reached the people but was present within the highest ranks of Egyptian society with figurines of Qudshu and Astarte being found in Medinet Habu (Qudshu being represented on beds,¹⁸⁵ Astarte through horse figurines which form an association with the goddess as she was often depicted mounted upon horses¹⁸⁶). While in Canaan, Anath and Astarte were regarded as the same goddess,¹⁸⁷ in Egypt two were seen as distinct goddesses, with both serving as goddess of war, with Ramesses III referring to them as “his shield” in an inscription at Medinet Habu.¹⁸⁸

While the goddess Astarte was predominantly associated with war and military prowess like her associates Reshep and Anath,¹⁸⁹ outside of Egypt Astarte seems to have formed an association with motherhood and sexuality.¹⁹⁰ This dual representation for war and fertility may have featured in Egypt too, though most Egyptian references focus on her role in military strength. Her role as a goddess of motherhood and female sexuality may have provided a different option to Taweret for women hoping to conceive. Astarte flourished within Egyptian society and went on to be venerated in several Egyptian temples (including a chapel beside the Serapeum in Ptolemaic times) and was later assigned the eastern quarter of Tanis.¹⁹¹ Unlike her Canaanite companions, Qudshu held more delicate roles within Egyptian society, not linked to war in the slightest. Qudshu is often associated with Reshep, serving as his consort, and

¹⁸¹ Lesko, ‘Private Cults’, 338.

¹⁸² Lesko, ‘Spiritual and Intellectual’, 90.

¹⁸³ Meskell, *Archaeologies of Social Life*, 151.

¹⁸⁴ Davies, *Five Walls*, 128

¹⁸⁵ E. Teeter, *Baked Clay Figurines and Votive Beds from Medinet Habu* (OIP 133; Chicago, 2010), 163.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid*, 111

¹⁸⁷ R. Patai, *The Hebrew Goddess*, 3rd rev. ed. (Detroit, 1967), 55.

¹⁸⁸ N. Wyatt, ‘Astarte’, in K. van der Toorn, B. Becking and P.W. van der Horst (eds), *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, 2nd rev. ed. (Leiden, 1999), 111.

¹⁸⁹ Davies, *Five Walls*, 128-129.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid*, 129.

¹⁹¹ Along with Amen in the west, Sutekh in the south and Wadjet in the north; A. Wiedemann, *Religion of the Ancient Egyptians* (London, 1897), 150.

along with Min formed a triad (though occasionally Reshep was replaced with Ra).¹⁹² Her primary function, however, was as a goddess of fertility and sexual pleasure which naturally led to her association with Hathor the Egyptian goddess of love and subsequent popularity of the goddess amongst the Egyptian population.¹⁹³ This role in fertility, may have provided an alternative goddess for the Egyptian populace to turn to over Taweret. Both Qudshu and Taweret may have been venerated for different stages in the childbirth routine for women, while Taweret predominantly served to protect women and children during pregnancy and childbirth, Qudshu was celebrated more in the lead up to the pregnancy to help women conceive and embrace their sexual desires. Qudshu, Astarte and Anath all served as a trinity within Egypt too, which is seen in their synchronisation to form a single deity upon a Deir el-Medina stela dedicated by Neferhotep,¹⁹⁴ this demonstrates the closeness of these Canaanite goddesses and the way in which all three can be combined and, to an extent, become interchangeable. The role of Qudshu specifically, but also Astarte, in female reproduction assistance, does appear as a direct threat to the primary role of Taweret within Egyptian society, though clearly the three could co-exist harmoniously within the same settlement and it would be hasty to assume that these Canaanite deities completely replaced Taweret from Deir el-Medina. Their presence may have provided an alternate source which people could turn to making Taweret's role in society less dominant as it may have been before these goddesses arrived in the settlement.

2.3 What is the significance of water?

Of the twelve objects within this catalogue that include hieroglyphic epithets of Taweret (Figures 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 9, 10, 11, 14, 16, 19), three of them make clear mention of her role as a goddess of water (Figures 1, 3 and 4). While it is not unthinkable that a hippopotamus goddess should be associated with water, it is still quite unusual that a quarter of all epithets of the goddess which survive from Deir el-Medina feature this role so heavily. The epithets preserved in Deir el-Medina refer to “the pure water” (Figure 1), “lady of the well” (Figure 3) and “Taweret, who is in the midst of the purification waters of Nun” (Figure 4). The “pure water” is also a name for Gebel el-Silsila, the source of the annual inundation and a cult location of Taweret which highlights her connection to the Nile and role as a riverine goddess.¹⁹⁵ The “purification waters of Nun” (Figure 4) is a clear indication of the primeval waters of chaos which featured in all creation epics from Egypt in which the benben (pyramid-shaped

¹⁹² *Ibid*, 152.

¹⁹³ G. Hart, *The Routledge Dictionary of Egyptian Gods and Goddesses*, 2nd edn. (London & New York, 2005), 132.

¹⁹⁴ Davies, *Five Walls*, 129.

¹⁹⁵ Pinch, *Votive Offerings*, 294.

mound) emerged.¹⁹⁶ This association with the waters in which the world was born, links with the goddess's role in childbirth as it forms the association between the world being born and the birth of a child. The last epithet which references the goddess in terms of water appears on Figure 3 calling her "the lady of the well". It is important to remember that Deir el-Medina was a desert community with no access to fresh running water and the inhabitants had to rely on the state to provide them with fresh water. It is believed that the great pit to the north of the Ptolemaic temple in Deir el-Medina, measuring 52 metres deep, was dug by the inhabitants in search of their own supply of water throughout the reigns of Ramesses III and VI.¹⁹⁷ The search was not successful and the pit became a garbage site where most of the ostraca of the settlement was discovered including an ostrakon which refers to the work conducted in the well itself (Ostrakon DeM 092).¹⁹⁸ Due to the goddess' riverine nature and her association with the annual inundation and role of water bringing life, it is perceivable that the inhabitants chose Taweret as the patron of the well they were constructing in the hope that her presence could help bring life in the form of fresh water to the community. The "purification waters of Nun" also associate the goddess with a well, as the waters of Nun were ever-present in the inundation which is linked to the subterranean source of a well. Unfortunately, this well never appears to have been completed and Taweret's role as a well deity only featured on one surviving stela suggesting that perhaps this position was abandoned when the well's construction ceased. There may have been further attempts to establish a well in the region, however none have been discovered.

¹⁹⁶ F. Fleming and A. Lothian, *The Way to Eternity* (London, 1997), 24.

¹⁹⁷ Davies, *Five Walls*, 141.

¹⁹⁸ The Deir el-Medina Database, *O. DeM 00092*

<<https://dmd.wepwawet.nl/scripts/dmdobject.asp?id=O.%20DeM%2000092&m=i>> accessed 11/05/2019.

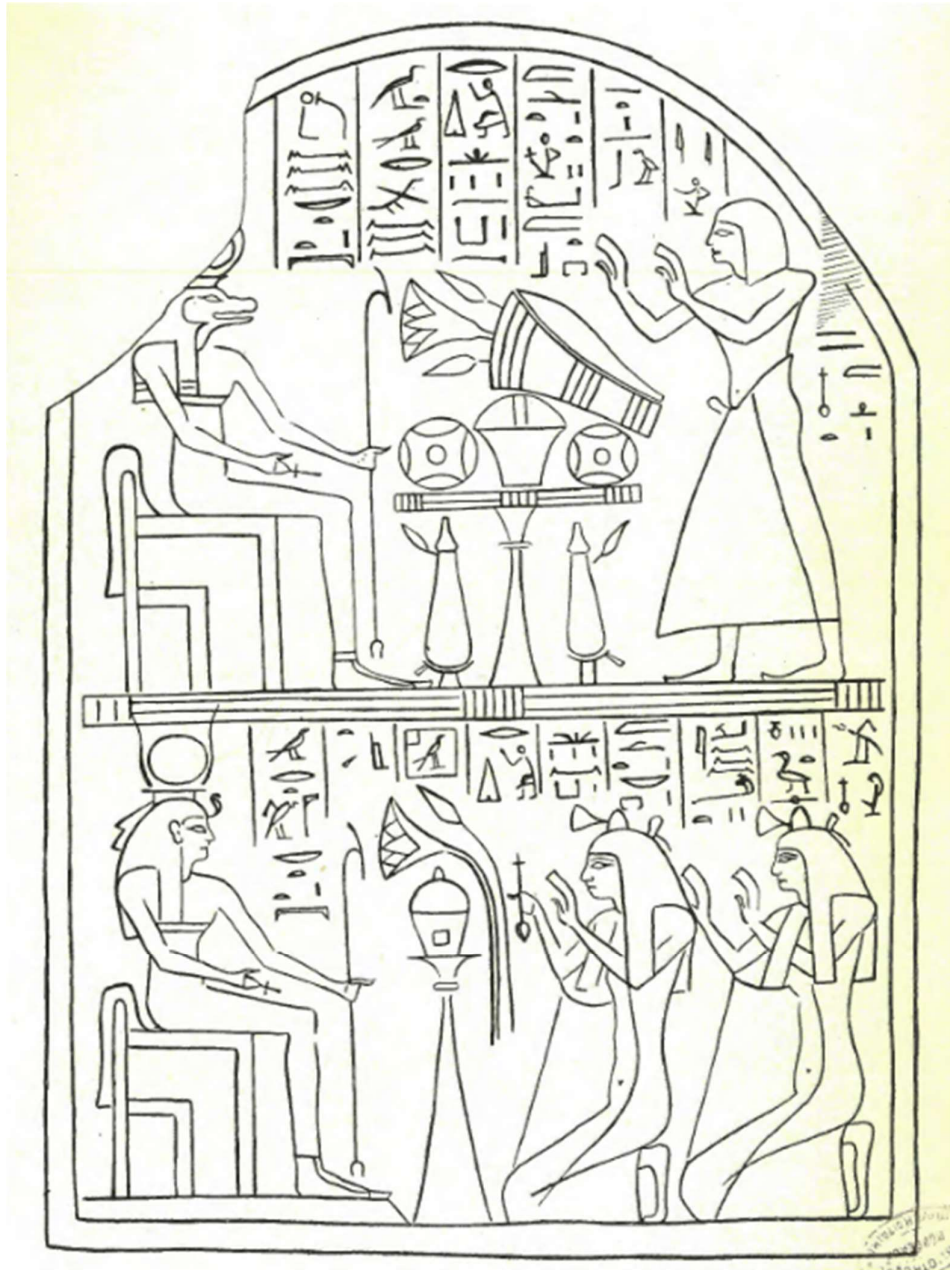
Conclusion:

Ultimately there is a clear lack of evidence of Taweret in the archaeological remains of Deir el-Medina which leads to questions of why this could be. While the lack of smaller amulets and statuettes can be explained by the slow abandonment process of the village and the desire to take such items with them when the inhabitants left, the lack of larger objects remains concerning. Taweret was commonly depicted on smaller household objects, but did also feature on medium sized religious objects throughout Egypt, though in Deir el-Medina only twenty-four objects relating to the goddess survive. Possible explanations for the lack of Taweret's representation at Deir el-Medina are that foreign goddesses, who served a similar function, may have taken some of the focus for protecting women and children, as did the god Bes, leaving Taweret as one of many deities for women to choose the protection of. While it would be ideal to examine Taweret in comparison to the many other deities present at Deir el-Medina to compare their frequencies and mediums, the limitations of this essay suggest this task to be taken up at a later date. The many representations which mention Taweret with an epithet referencing water may be indicative of the goddess fulfilling a riverine function in society not just a goddess of pregnancy. While the great pit in Deir el-Medina is believed to have originally been an attempt by the village to acquire their own water supply, no functional well has ever been uncovered within the settlement or on its outskirts, suggesting the goddess never fulfilled the role desired by the inhabitants, and therefore why she is so lacking in the archaeological record. This combination of the rising popularity of foreign deities in the New Kingdom and the desire for Taweret to fulfil a role more linked to the physical acquisition of water, rather than solely a pregnancy deity, has meant that her legacy is limited in Deir el-Medina. No doubt she still featured within the homes in statuette and amuletic form, however due to the slow abandonment of the settlement these small objects were taken with the relocating inhabitants meant they did not survive to give us definitive clarity in archaeological record. While Taweret's presence in the settlement is not overwhelming, she is still present on a range of different mediums suggesting worship of her was as multifaceted as the goddess herself.

Catalogue of Images:

Stelae

Figure 1:



Source

B. Bruyère, *Rapport sur les fouilles de Deir el Médineh (1934-1935) troisième partie: le village, les décharges publiques, la station de repos du col de la Vallée des Rois* (Cairo, 1939), 335.


Material	Limestone; paint
Dimensions	Height 37.5cm; Width 26.5cm; Thickness 4cm.
Period	New Kingdom, 19 th Dynasty.
Find Location	S.O.VI House – last house of the south-west, Room 1 atop a <i>lit clos</i>
Location & Number	
Comments	Upper Register represents a dedication to Taweret, while the bottom register shows a dedication to Hathor
Inscription	 <p><i>t3-wr p3 mw w3b nbt pt</i></p> <p>Taweret, the pure water, mistress of the sky</p>

Figure 2:



Source

Museo Egizio, *Stele de Hay* <https://collezioni.museoegizio.it/eMP/eMuseumPlus?service=direct/1/ResultLightboxView/result.t1.collection_lightbox.STspTitleImageLink.link&sp=10&sp=Scollection&sp=SfieldValue&sp=0&sp=0&sp=3&sp=Slightbox_3x4&sp=0&sp=Sdetail&sp=0&sp=F&sp=T&sp=0> accessed 26/03/2019.


Material	Limestone
Dimensions	Height 43cm; Width 28cm.
Period	New Kingdom, 20 th Dynasty, Ramesses III.
Find Location	
Location & Number	Museo Egizio, Turin, Stela 1606.
Comments	Dedicated to the goddess Meretseger (represented with a serpent's head on the right) and Taweret (on the left). The inscription states that this stela was dedicated by <i>Hay</i> , the deputy workman who lived in Deir el-Medina in the time of Ramesses III.
Inscription	 <p><i>t3-wrt t3 pt</i></p> <p>Taweret, she of the Sky</p>

Figure 3:



Source

M. Tosi and A. Roccati, *Stele e Altre Epigrafi di Deir el Medina*, n. 50001-50262 (CMET Collez I; Turin, 1972), 93-94.

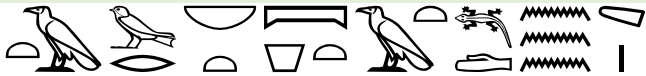
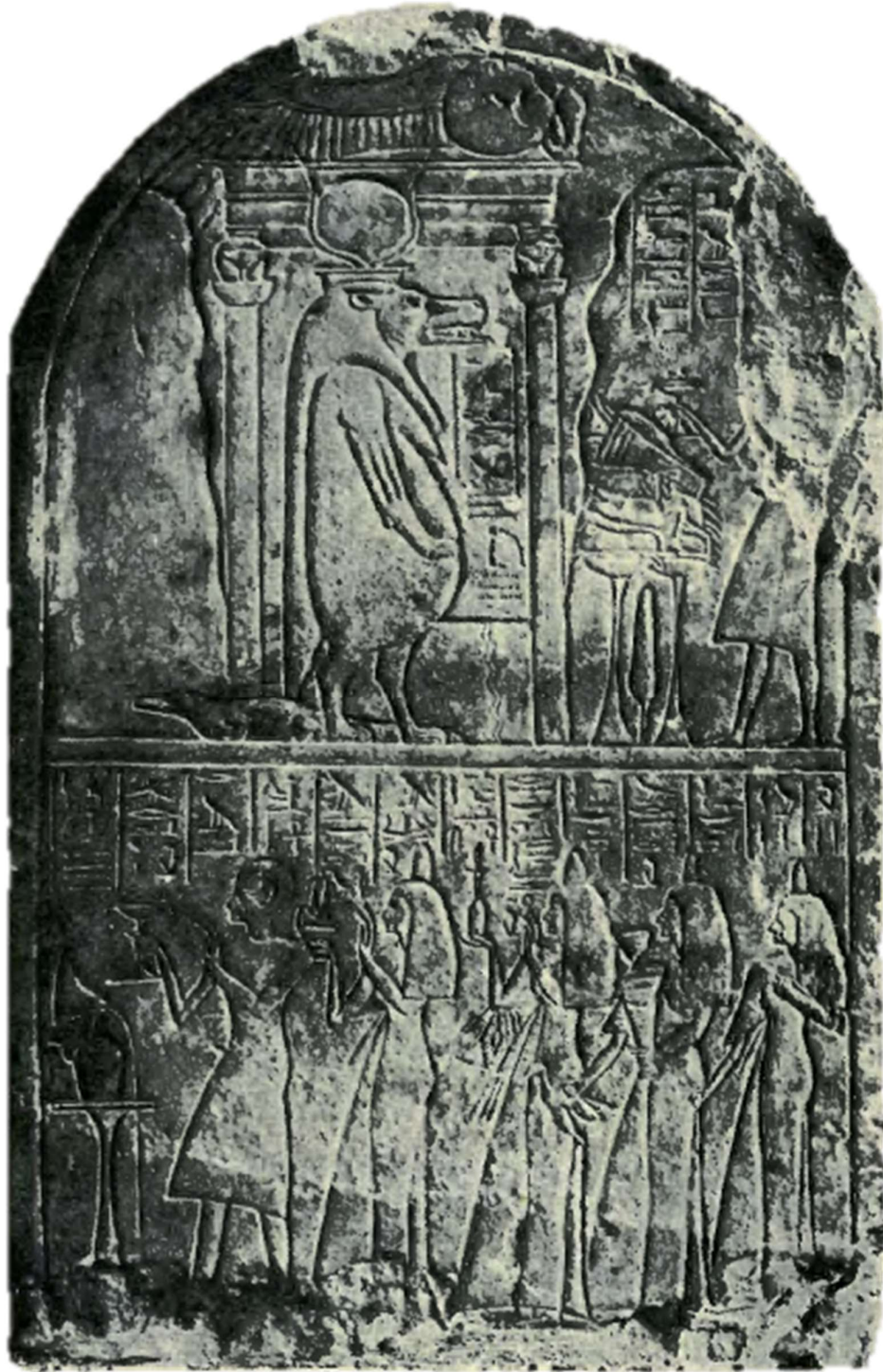
Material	Limestone
Dimensions	Height 42cm; Length 30cm.
Period	New Kingdom, 19 th Dynasty.
Find Location	
Location & Number	Museo Egizio, Turin, Stela 50057.
Comments	Dedicated by Huy (father of Qaha (i) and Mutemwia (vi) and father-in-law to Mutemwia's husband Neferronpet (i) who are all depicted upon the stela) to Amun-Re, Taweret and Seth. Amun-Re is in the centre of the top register in his ram form, followed by Taweret, and then two small hippopotami inscribed "Seth, the good god, the son of Nut."
Inscription	 <p><i>t3-wrt nbt pt ḥnwt t3 šdt</i></p> <p>Taweret, mistress of the sky, the lady of the well.</p>

Figure 4:



Source

B. Bruyère, *Rapport sur les fouilles de Deir el Médineh (1935-1940)* fascicule III (Cairo, 1952), 77.

Material

Dimensions

Period

Find Location

<i>Location & Number</i>	Stela number 36661.
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<i>Comments</i>	Donated by the leader of Amun's cult in Deir el-Medina.
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Inscription



t3-wrt hr-ib mw w3b jmj nwn

Taweret, who is in the midst of the purification waters of Nun.

Figure 5:



Source

The Met, *Votive Stela with Figures of Goddesses Taweret and Mut of Isheru*, ca. 1390-1352 B.C. <<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/544499?searchField=All&sortBy=Relevance&ft=Deir+el+medina&offset=0&rpp=80&pos=60>> accessed 30/03/2019.

Material Limestone; paint.

Dimensions Height 17.7cm; Width 14.3cm; Depth 4cm.

Period New Kingdom, 18th Dynasty, Amenhotep III.

Find Location

Location & The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City, 47.105.4.
Number

Comments Taweret is shown wearing the sun disk and Hathoric horns. The inscription of the stela's commissioner was damaged at the base of the stela "[...] of the [house of] Amun, Khonsu" intended as an offering to Taweret and Mut.

Inscription



t3-wrt nbt pt

Taweret, Mistress of the Sky

Figure 6:



Source

The British Museum, *Stela EA284* <https://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=121025&partId=1&place=35531&plaA=35531-3-2&page=1> accessed 10/04/2019.


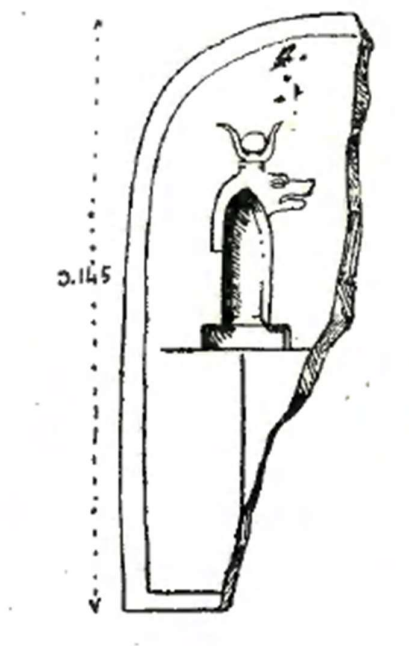
Material	Limestone; paint.
Dimensions	Height 30.5cm; Width 21.5cm.
Period	New Kingdom, 19 th Dynasty, Ramesses II.
Find Location	
Location & Number	The British Museum, London, EA284.
Comments	Stela dedicated by <i>Irynefer</i> with the top register identifying Taweret standing before a altar loaded with offerings, and the bottom scene showing <i>Irynefer</i> and his wife.
Inscription	 <p><i>ḥ-wrt nbt pt ḥnw.t ntrw nbw</i></p> <p>Taweret, mistress sky, lady of all the gods.</p>

Figure 7:



Source	B. Bruyère, <i>Deir el Médineh année 1926: sondage au temple funéraire de Thotmès II (Hat Ankh Shesept)</i> (Cairo, 1952), 59.
Material	Limestone
Dimensions	
Period	New Kingdom, 19 th Dynasty
Find Location	
Location & Number	
Comments	Fragment 9 contains an image of the goddess Taweret standing before an altar loaded with offerings.
Inscription	N/A

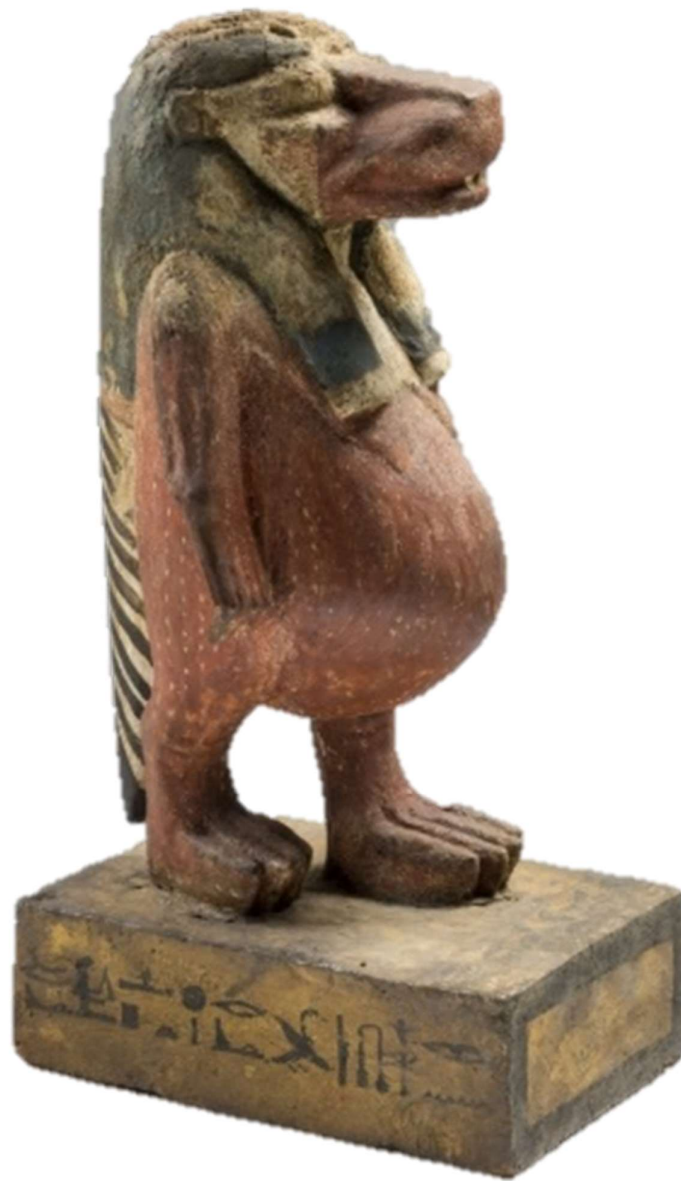
Figure 8:



Source	B. Bruyère, <i>Rapport sur les fouilles de Deir el Médineh 1929</i> (Cairo, 1930), 20.
Material	
Dimensions	Height 14.5cm.
Period	
Find Location	Chapel 1214, Deir el-Medina.
Location & Number	
Comments	Wall fragment depicting Taweret.
Inscription	N/A

Statues

Figure 9:



Source

Museo Egizio, *Statuetta di Tauret*

<[https://collezioni.museoegizio.it/eMP/eMuseumPlus?service=direct/1/ResultLightboxView/result.t2.collection_lightbox.\\$TspTitleLink.link&sp=10&sp=Scollection&sp=SfieldValue&sp=0&sp=0&sp=3&sp=Slighbox_3x4&sp=0&sp=Sdetail&sp=0&sp=F&sp=T&sp=1](https://collezioni.museoegizio.it/eMP/eMuseumPlus?service=direct/1/ResultLightboxView/result.t2.collection_lightbox.$TspTitleLink.link&sp=10&sp=Scollection&sp=SfieldValue&sp=0&sp=0&sp=3&sp=Slighbox_3x4&sp=0&sp=Sdetail&sp=0&sp=F&sp=T&sp=1)> accessed 20/02/2019.

<i>Material</i>	Wood; paint
<i>Dimensions</i>	Height 40cm
<i>Period</i>	New Kingdom, 19 th Dynasty
<i>Find Location</i>	
<i>Location & Number</i>	Museo Egizio, Turin, C525.
<i>Comments</i>	The base of the statue bears an inscription of the painter Parahotep and his sons.
<i>Inscription</i>	

Figure 10:



Source B. Bruyère, *Rapport sur les fouilles de Deir el Médineh (Années 1948 à 1951)* (Cairo, 1953), 76.

Material Limestone; paint

Dimensions Statue: Height 23cm.
Pedestal: Length 8cm; Width 4cm; Thickness 1.8cm.

Period

Find Location

Location & Number

Comments Inscription dedicating the statue to Taweret. The feet and top section of the pedestal have been damaged.

Inscription While the inscription is visible on the image, due to the poor quality of the image and no other sources mentioning this statuette it is unclear what the complete inscription states. The name of *ḥ-wrt* is the only clearly discernible hieroglyphs.

Figure 11:



Source	B. Bruyère, <i>Rapport sur les fouilles de Deir el Médineh (années 1931-1932)</i> (Cairo, 1934), 34.
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Material	Limestone
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Dimensions	
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Period	New Kingdom, 20 th Dynasty, Ramesses IV.
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Find Location	Tomb 1268, Deir el-Medina.
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Location & Number	
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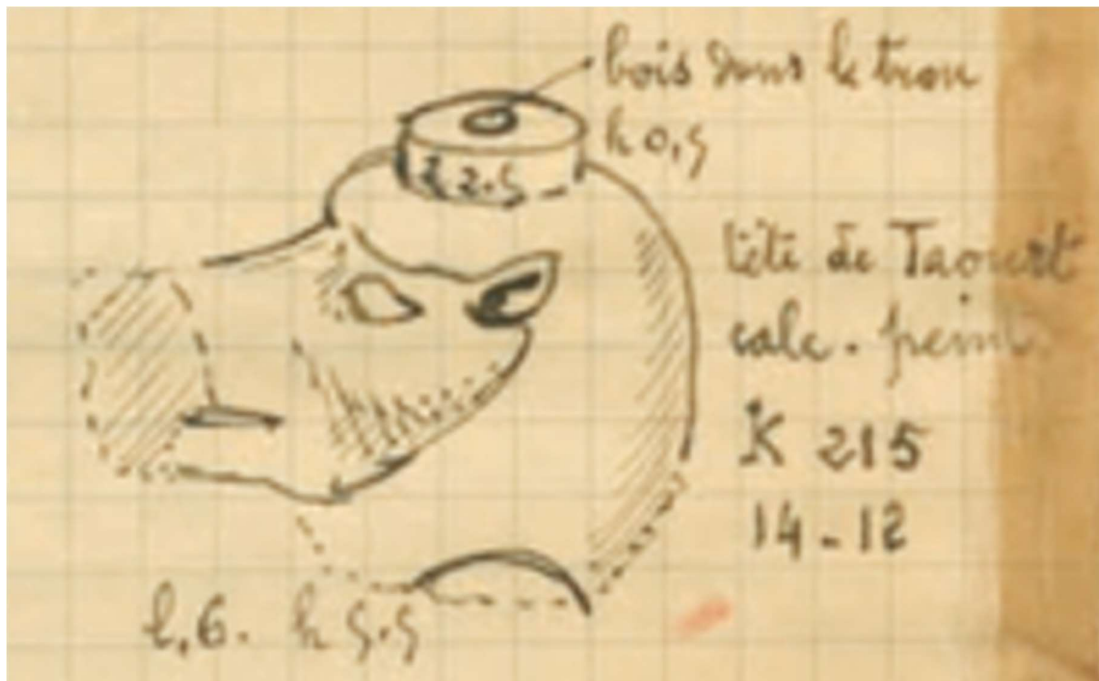
Comments	Engraved and painted base of a statue of Taweret determined to be the goddess due to the lion paw feet, position of the feet and inscription dedicating the statue to Taweret.
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Inscription	
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ḥtp dj nsw wꜥb sp 2 m ḥt nbt nfr [t] n k3 ʔ-wrt špsw[t] ḥnw.t nṯrw [nb]w...

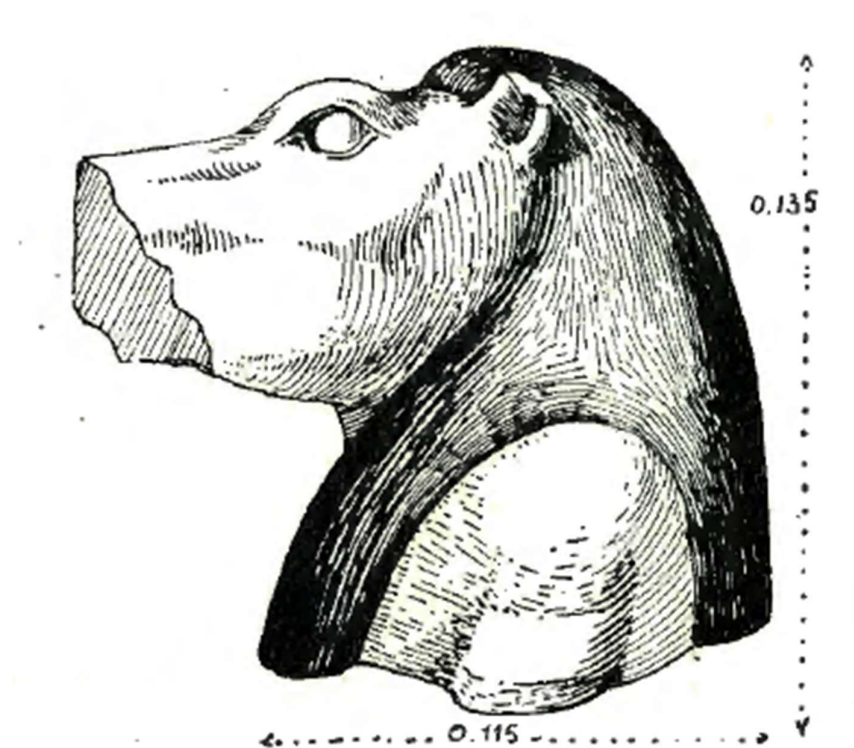
An offering that the king makes two times, consisting of every beautiful thing to the Ka of Taweret, of the noble ones, mistress of [all] the gods, [etc].

Figure 12:



Source	B. Bruyère, <i>Notebook MS_2004_0150_012</i> , < http://www.ifao.egnet.net/bases/archives/bruyere/?id=MS_2004_0150_012 > (DEM 2, 1928-1929), 6.
Material	
Dimensions	Height 5.5cm; Length 6cm.
Period	
Find Location	
Location & Number	
Comments	Fragment from Taweret statuette.
Inscription	N/A

Figure 13:



Source B. Bruyère, *Rapport sur les fouilles de Deir el Médineh* 1929 (Cairo, 1930), 20.

Material

Dimensions Height 13.5cm; Length 11.5cm.

Period

Find Location Chapel 1214, Deir el-Medina.

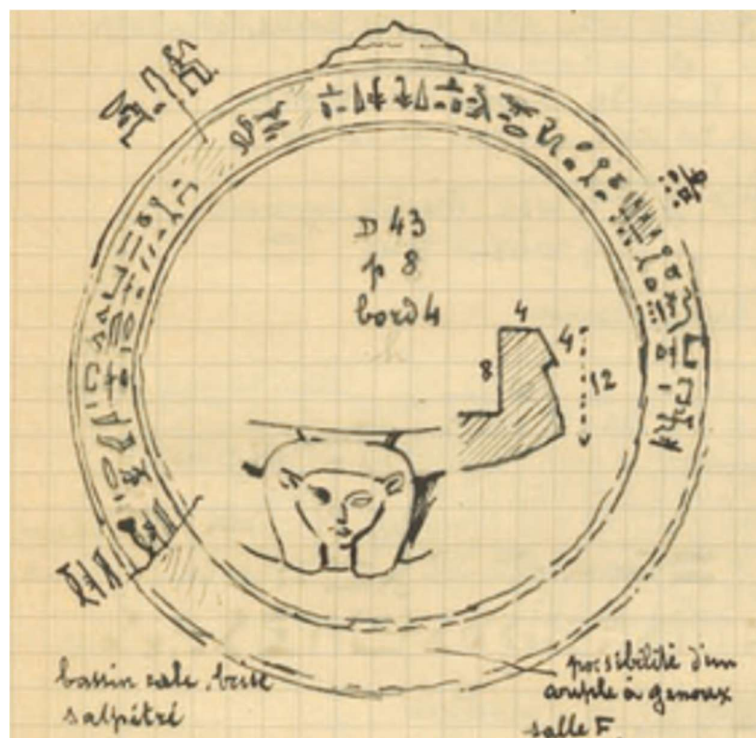
Location & Number

Comments Fragment from Taweret statuette.

Inscription N/A

Offering Basins & Grills

Figure 14:



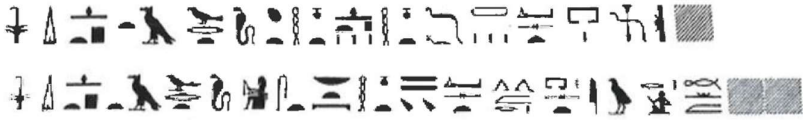
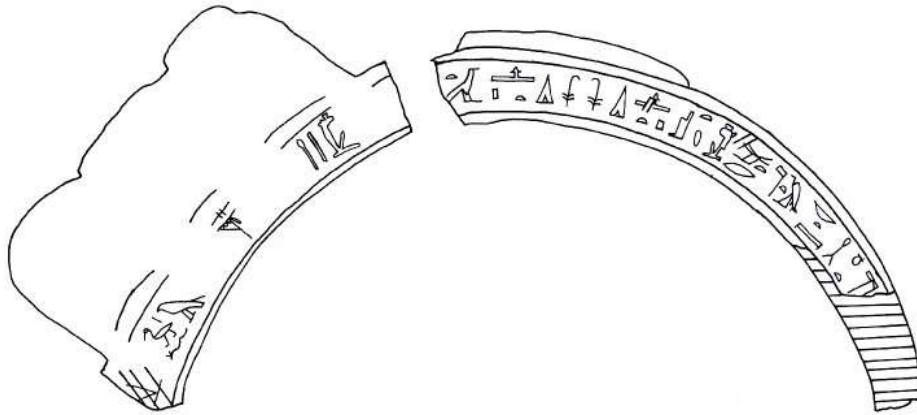
Source	<p>Above: B. Bruyère, <i>Rapport sur les fouilles de Deir el Médineh (1934-1935) troisième partie: le village, les décharges publiques, la station de repos du col de la Vallée des Rois</i> (Cairo, 1939), 319.</p> <p>Below: B. Bruyère, <i>Notebook MS_2004_0156_018</i>, <http://www.ifao.egnet.net/bases/archives/bruyere/?id=MS_2004_0156_018> (DEM 3, 1934-1935), 9.</p>
Material	Limestone
Dimensions	Height 15cm; Diameter 43cm; Length of horizontal rim 4cm.
Period	
Find Location	House S.O. II, room 3
Location & Number	
Comments	Basin dedicated to Taweret in order for the goddess to ensure the protection of the house, depicted with an image of Hathor implying a dual dedication to the two goddesses.
Inscription	 <p>Right – <i>ḥtp dj nsw ʔ-wr.t ḥnw.t ḥtp(.w).t ḥnwt ḏḏ.w dj=s pr w3ḏ [...]</i></p> <p>Left – <i>ḥtp dj nsw ʔ-wr.t šps.t nb.t pt ḥnw.t ʔ.wy dj=s jw ʕnn m r3-pr=s jw r(3)=j mḥ m [...]</i></p> <p>Right – An offering that the king gives to Taweret, mistress of the offerings and the provisions, that she may cause the house to flourish [...]</p> <p>Left – An offering that the king gives to Taweret, the noble one, lady of the Two Lands, that she may cause coming and going in her temple, while my mouth is filled with [...]</p>

Figure 15:



Source	The British Museum, <i>Libation-Bowl EA465</i> < https://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=177405&partId=1&searchText=deir+el+medina+taweret&page=1 > accessed 10/04/2019.
Material	Limestone
Dimensions	Diameter, 57cm
Period	New Kingdom, 19 th Dynasty
Find Location	
Location & Number	British Museum, London, EA465
Comments	Double dedication to Isis and Taweret by two unknown individuals. The name of Taweret is cut off, leaving the question of whether this basin is truly dedicated to Taweret or not and thereby leaving no epithets.
Inscription	<i>ḥtp dj nsw B-[wrt]</i> An offering that the king gives to Taweret

Figure 16:



Source B. Bruyère, *Rapport sur les fouilles de Deir el Médineh (1934-1935) troisième partie: le village, les décharges publiques, la station de repos du col de la Vallée des Rois* (Cairo, 1939), 198.

Material

Dimensions

Period

Find Location

Location & Number

Comments Fragments of libation basins dedicated to Sobek and Taweret. The third fragment mentions Taweret by name,

Inscription



ḥtp dj nsw ʔ-wr.t nbt pt ḥnw.t nṯrw [nbw]

An offering that the king gives to Taweret, mistress of the sky, lady of all the gods.

Figure 17:



Source B. Bruyère, *Notebook MS_2004_0153_003*,
<http://www.ifao.egnet.net/bases/archives/bruyere/?id=MS_2004_0153_003> (DEM 3, 1931-1932), 2.

Material

Dimensions Width, 5cm

Period

Find Location

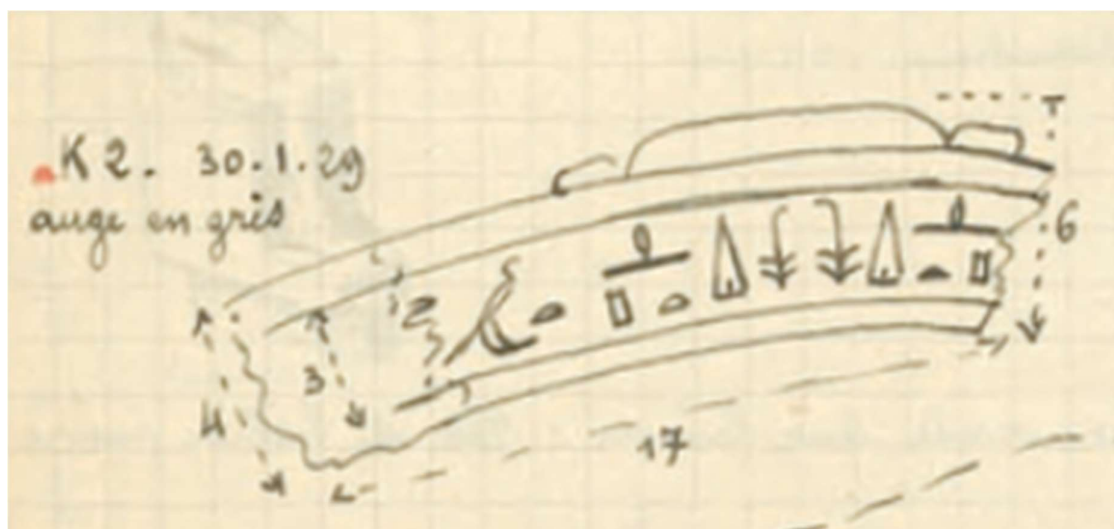
Location & Number

Comments Fragment of an offering basin bearing the name Taweret.

Inscription *ḥtp [dj nsw] ʿw-wrt*

An offering [that the king gives] to Taweret

Figure 18:



Source B. Bruyère, *Notebook MS_2004_0150_011*,
<http://www.ifao.egnet.net/bases/archives/bruyere/?id=MS_2004_0150_011> (DEM 2, 1928-1929), 6.

Material

Dimensions Width, 4-6cm; Length, 17cm.

Period

Find Location

Location & Number

Comments Fragment of an offering basin bearing the name Taweret. As the name of Taweret is where the break of the basin is, there is a possibility that the basin may be a dedication to a different deity, though the formula matches the other basins in this collection identically. Due to the break there are no epithets to accompany the deity's name.

Inscription *ḥtp dj nsw ʔ-[wrt]*

An offering that the king gives to Taweret

Figure 19:



Source B. Bruyère, *Rapport sur les fouilles de Deir el Médineh (1934-1935) troisième partie: le village, les décharges publiques, la station de repos du col de la Vallée des Rois* (Cairo, 1939), 207.

Material Limestone

Dimensions Length 30.5cm; Width 28.1cm; Height 6.4cm

Period

Find Location S.O. III, third room

Location & Number

Comments Offering table dedicated to *Ka* statue of Taweret by *Nebdjefa (i)*

Inscription



[...] m³c h(.w).t nb(.w).t nfr(.w).t w^cb.w.t tw.t n k³ [n] t³-wr.t šps.t n
k³ w^cb m-dj.t sdm c³ m s.t m³c.t Nb-d³β.w m³c hrw [...]

[...] true, all the good, pure and complete things for the *Ka* of
Taweret, the noble one, for the *Ka* of the pure of hands, the servant
of the place of the truth, Nebdjefa, justified.

Tomb Decoration

Figure 20:



Source	B. Bruyère, <i>Rapport sur les fouilles de Deir el Médineh (1934-1935) troisième partie: le village, les décharges publiques, la station de repos du col de la Vallée des Rois</i> (Cairo, 1939), 227.
Material	Linen
Dimensions	
Period	
Find Location	
Location & Number	
Comments	
Inscription	N/A

Figure 21:



Source	T. Benderitter, 'Page 3', <i>Tomb of Nakhtamon TT 335</i> , < https://www.osirisnet.net/tombes/artisans/nakhtamon335/e_nakhtamon335_03.htm > accessed 05/04/2019.
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Material	
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Dimensions	
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Period	New Kingdom, 19 th Dynasty, Ramesses II
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Find Location	Tomb of Nakhtamun, TT 335
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Location & Number	
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Comments	Taweret is appearing as Nut, indicated by the inscription in the bottom left hand corner of the scene, in welcoming the deceased to the underworld.
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Inscription	 <i>ḳ-wr rn.zt nwt</i> Taweret, in her name of Nut
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Figure 22:



Source

T. Benderitter, 'Page 5', *Tomb of Nakhtamon TT 335*,
<https://www.osirisnet.net/tombes/artisans/nakhtamon335/e_nakhtamon335_05.htm> accessed 05/04/19.

Material

Dimensions

Period

New Kingdom, 19th Dynasty, Ramesses II

Find Location

Tomb of Nakhtamon, TT 335

Location & Number

Comments

This image is unique in one of a select few images of the goddess Taweret represented with a human rather than hippopotamus head. In this image she represents the North of Egypt while Anukis who follows her represents the South.

Inscription

None of the inscriptions on the accompanying walls identify this figure as Taweret, however her distinctive stomach, paws and crocodile tail mean that Taweret is the only deity who the figure can represent.

Temple

Figure 23:



Source	B. Bruyère, <i>Rapport sur les fouilles de Deir el Médineh (1935-1940) fascicule III</i> (Cairo, 1952), 72.
Material	
Dimensions	
Period	
Find Location	
Location & Number	The Pushkin Museum, Russia.
Comments	Door jamb discovered in the settlement from an unknown house naming Amenwahsu, son of Mesu served as a servant of Taweret.
Inscription	<i>b3k n ʔ-wrt jmn-w3h-sw</i> Servant of Taweret, Amenwahsu

Figure 24:



Source	B. Bruyère, <i>Rapport sur les fouilles de Deir el Médineh</i> 1929 (Cairo, 1930), 20.
Material	Painting on plaster?
Dimensions	
Period	
Find Location	Chapel 1214, Deir el-Medina.
Location & Number	
Comments	Wall fragment depicting Taweret.
Inscription	N/A

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<https://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=111482&partId=1&searchText=Taweret&page=3> accessed 12/02/2019.

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Abbreviations:

<i>BdE</i>	Bibliothèque d' Etude
<i>BIFAO</i>	Bulletin de l'Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale
<i>CAJ</i>	Cambridge Archaeological Journal
<i>CMET</i>	Catalogo del Museo Euisio di Torino
<i>EU</i>	Egyptologische Uitgaven
<i>JEA</i>	Journal of Egyptian Archaeology
<i>KMT</i>	Journal of Ancient Egypt
<i>LÄ</i>	Lexikon der Ägyptologie
<i>OEAE</i>	The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt
<i>OIP</i>	Oriental Institute Publications
<i>OLA</i>	Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta
<i>Orientalia</i>	Orientalia, Commentarii periodici Pontificii institute biblici
<i>PdÄ</i>	Probleme der Ägyptologie
<i>SAK</i>	Studien zur Altägyptischen Kultur
<i>SPAW</i>	Sitzungsberichte der Königlich Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften
<i>UEE</i>	UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology