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CREATING THE NON-EXISTENT

A materialistic approach to the development of composite animals
from the Predynastic period until the Middle Kingdom

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Creating the non-existent: a materialistic approach to the development of composite animals from the Predynastic period until the Middle Kingdom

Introduction

The ancient Egyptians were in constant need to master the unknown, both in the real and in the fictitious sphere. To face their fear of natural and geographical phenomena of which they had little understanding, abstract images were employed to express their perception of the unknown. This symbolic language of images visioning the unknown was then mixed with elements taken of everyday life to compile a view on the world with all its dangers. In doing so, the Egyptians got a certain grip on different unfamiliar environments and forces over which they had no control. By giving free reign to their fears of the creatures that lingered in the desert or the Netherworld, a remarkable collection of odd-looking hybrids was created, composed of animal features and characteristics that were founded in the real world. The hybrid beings were, as to say, composite animals which expressed an imagined reality. Or as David Wengrow describes such a creature:

“The total bodily form of that [a certain kind of] species is absent from the resulting depiction, but its presence is signified, nonetheless, by the special disposition of elements around the body that belongs to an animal of a different kind. The outcome is a new kind of figure that is sui generis, imaginary, but nevertheless retains a certain basic coherence on the anatomical plane.”¹

This description immediately calls to mind the odd-looking hybrid beings found in the architecture of Western medieval churches, for example dog-headed men on the tympanum of a basilica in Vézelay (fig. 1), which strongly remind of the Egyptian jackal god Anubis. It is true that the Middle Ages reveal numerous monstrous creatures, demonstrating that the creation of the non-existent is something also found in the Western history of art and therefore not limited to the ancient Egyptian sphere.²

It can be tough to exactly define the concept of a ‘composite animal’. For example, human-headed animals do not adapt to the ‘animal’ part of the designation, but in our modern sense they are still considered a composite product of human imagination. This study will therefore be limited to hybrid beings that are chiefly composed of parts of several animals.³ The focus in this thesis will be on the development of composite animals in Egyptian art from the Predynastic period (c. 6000–3100 BC)

¹ David Wengrow, *The Origins of Monsters: Image and Cognition in the First Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, (Princeton and Oxford, 2014), 27.

² For an impression in the depiction of monstrous creatures in medieval Europe and their eastern influence, see Rudolf Wittkower, *Allegory and the Migration of Symbols* (Over Wallop, 1977), 45–92. The dog-headed men are discussed on pages 54–5.

³ Even when creatures with human parts are left out, demons or even gods still apply to this category. Due to the scope of this thesis, these will not be taken into account.



1. Dog-headed men from the tympanum of the basilica of Sainte-Marie-Madeleine of Vézelay, Twelfth century.

until the Middle Kingdom (c. 2040–1750 BC).⁴ Moreover, it will be questioned how this fascinating imagery originated in the context of Levantine trading contacts and the process of Egyptian urbanization. Associated with this development, Wengrow’s remarks in his book *‘Origins of Monsters: Image and Cognition in the First Age of Mechanical Reproduction’* concerning the relationship between culture and cognition are examined by a materialistic approach.⁵ That means the

source material of this research will be ancient Egyptian material depicting composite animals. In order to obtain an as accurate view as possible of the repertory of hybrid animals in the Egyptian art of the selected period, several images of composite animals in two- and three-dimensional art will be discussed.⁶ These artworks and their interpretations will be studied in chronological order, i.e. starting with the Predynastic period and ending with the Middle Kingdom. Special attention will be given to the category of Middle Kingdom magic wands; the presence and purpose of composites on these objects will be discussed in a case study. Beforehand, it is necessary to define the concept of art itself, for which I would like to refer to the definition by René van Walsem:

“Art is the term for the, in (potentially) various degrees and under chronologically varying context(s) and circumstances, individual and/or collective product of human behaviour, in which by means of artefacts and/or performances, in a relatively creative and original way – beyond the purely fictional – a concept (in the widest sense of the word) is skilfully expressed, resulting in an intellectual and/or emotional interaction, in (potentially) different degrees of intensity, between the maker and all categories of observers (including the patron).”⁷

⁴ Numerous examples of hybrid animals are known from the dynasties after the Middle Kingdom, but since this thesis is of a limited size, a time restriction is necessary. The dates of Egypt’s dynasties are derived from Stephen Quirke and Jeffrey Spencer, *The British Museum Book of ancient Egypt* (London, 1992).

⁵ Wengrow’s concept of ‘mechanical reproduction’ will be explained later.

⁶ As Wengrow rightly indicates, the term “images” is more suitable than “representations” of composite animals, since these creatures were created in the imagination of the ancient Egyptians, instead of drawn solely from nature. Moreover, I also follow Wengrow in not using the expressions ‘fantastic animal’ or ‘monster’ to refer to the composite animals, since these terms tend to carry a value judgment. “Composite/hybrid animal” does sound more neutral. See Wengrow, *The Origins of Monsters*, 24–5.

⁷ Leading to Van Walsem’s definition of an *artefact*: “any concrete, spatially and temporally delimited concrete entity functioning in a man-given context, i.e. distinct from nature itself”. Of course, these definitions are not

1. Predynastic Period

The use of a symbolic language to master the unknown goes back to the earliest times in Egyptian history. Hybrid beings were already present in art of the Naqada period (c. 4000–3100 BC), for instance on several slate palettes. Besides, they are also depicted on dagger handles and as small figurines. In all cases, they occur in a similar environment in the company of several wild animals, most probably living in the Egyptian wastelands. However, there is still uncertainty about many aspects of this early period in which the pharaonic Empire began to take shape. The iconography as it would be so well known in later times was still evolving and chronological difficulties make it hard to date objects with certainty. Moreover, the lack of written sources complicates interpretation of objects too. Still, by looking for similarities and connections between the examples themselves, but also of objects abroad, a lot can be learned about the perception of composite animals at this time.

1.1 Composite figurines from Tell el Farkha

Composite animals are represented as figurines in the Neolithic period (c. 6000–3100 BC) in Egypt, although scarcely. At the site of Tell el Farkha, located in the eastern Nile delta, were found two cultic



shrines dating to the Proto- and Early Dynastic Periods (c. 6000–2686 BC). Each sanctuary included a votive deposit, one of them consisting of a few dozen figurines crafted of hippo tusks, which were equally precious as ivory at that time.⁸ Among the votive objects human representations are dominant, but the deposit also contains animal figurines and two fantastic creatures.

The first animal (fig. 2), which is over seven centimetres long, resembles the features of a griffin, a composite animal generally perceived in a Western view as: “a fabulous beast with the head and wings of an eagle and the body of a lion”.⁹ But, as Shih-Wei Hsu rightly points out and as will appear throughout this thesis, this definition is not suitable for Egyptian griffins.

The griffin as it appears in Egyptian art is most often a

2. Griffin-figurine from Tell el-Farkha, Naqada IIIA (first half First Dynasty).

combination of a feline body with the head and wings of a bird, likely a falcon. Deviations in details of the hybrid’s appearance

fixed. See René van Walsem, *Iconography of Old Kingdom elite tombs: analysis & interpretation, theoretical and methodological aspects* (Leiden and Leuven, 2005), 1–2.

⁸ These votive deposits are the only ones in Egypt which can be dated very precisely, namely to the end of Dynasty 0 and the beginning of the First Dynasty (c. 3200–3000 BC). This means that already during the formation of the Egyptian state a great development in art took place, of which many models were copied and modified in the following centuries. See Krzysztof M. Ciałowicz, ‘Votive figurines from Tell el-Farkha and their counterparts’, *Archéo-Nil* 22 (2012), 73–4, 92; Website Polish mission in Tell el-Farkha <<http://www.farkha.org/english/stanowisko.html>> accessed 06.12.2015.

⁹ Shih-Wei Hsu, ‘The “Griffin” as a visual and written image for the king’, *GM* 231 (2011), 45.

occur frequently, but the general image of a feline-bird creature remains the same.

The Tell el-Farkha griffin is composed of a feline body and a birdlike head with a raptor beak, but remarkably with human arms. The creature is squatting on a flat base while resting its hands on a tall jar that is clenched between its knees. According to Krzysztof Ciałowicz, the head is an image of a falcon with broken pointed ears.¹⁰ The eyes of the animal are almond-shaped with thick eyelids. Remarkable are the modelled human breasts and small incisions on the back, which probably imitate feathers. Moreover, the beginning of a tail can be distinguished in the lower part of the figure. Whereas the feet of the animal resemble birds' talons, its hands have distinctive human fingers. This is interesting, since all of the griffins that will further be mentioned here, have birds' talons or feline



3. Serpentine figurine from Tell el-Farkha, Naqada IIIA (first half First Dynasty).

paws. Ciałowicz attributes this difference to the possibility that the shape of the paws was dependent on the type of action the griffin was involved. When attacking, predator or birds' paws were chosen, but when holding a vessel like human beings do, hands were preferred.¹¹ This sounds reasonable, although the lack of other examples of griffins with human hands makes it hard to verify this argument.

The second figurine (fig. 3) is less than three centimetres high and has a snake's body with a woman's face. The creature has similarly almond-shaped eyes, together with prominent eyebrows, a broad nose and thin lips. The woman's hair, of which the hairline is indicated on the forehead by a thick incision, is parted in the middle. A curving in the neck forms the transition of the hair into the serpentine body. The lower part of the figurine is decorated with a diagonal net pattern with a dot in the centre. Ciałowicz recognizes in this a rectangular basis, but in my view it also might be part of the serpentine body, concerning the pattern. However, then it remains vague why the upper part of the snake's body is left smooth.¹² Ciałowicz puts forward that the cross-hatching of the 'base' refers to a *neb* basket, thereby connecting the snake figurine to the goddess Wadjet.¹³ In my opinion, it is precarious to attribute names of gods or

¹⁰ Ciałowicz, *Archéo-Nil* 22, 84. However, falcons do not have such ears, so these are derived from a different animal: perhaps a dog.

¹¹ Ciałowicz, *Archéo-Nil* 22, 86.

¹² Ciałowicz, *Archéo-Nil* 22, 84.

¹³ To bolster his argument, Ciałowicz refers to a large cylindrical seal that was found earlier in Tell el-Farkha, which dates to the beginning of Naqada IIIB. According to him, the signs on this object (a *serekh* with a falcon, perhaps a basket, a schematic bird and probably a snake) depict together a royal *nebti* name. In this respect, he suggests that the seal inscription and the serpentine figure both allude to royal titulary. He states that the snake figure, together with several other finds at Tell el-Farkha, point to a close connection between the site and the emerging monarchy. See Ciałowicz, *Archéo-Nil* 22, 86-87, 92; Marek Chłodnicki and Krzysztof M.

goddesses that are known from later periods in the Egyptian history to predynastic images that resemble them. It is still uncertain if at the dawn of the Egyptian state specific gods were already worshipped. Simply because nothing has been written down by the ancient Egyptians on these early figurines, they could as easily have had nothing to do with religion.

Thus far, no figurines have been found that look the same as these two hybrid animals, although Ciałowicz believes that a small statuette (fig. 4) in the Ashmolean Museum resembles the griffin-like creature. Dating to the Naqada IIc period, the figurine represents a lying feline animal with a bird-like head. The limestone example is interpreted as an early figure of a Seth animal, but Ciałowicz points out that the earliest images of the Seth animal look more canine than feline.¹⁴ Unlike depictions of the Seth animal, the snout of the Naqada figurine is indeed not elongated and rounded,



4. Figurine of a griffin/Seth animal, from Flinders Petrie's excavations, Naqada IIc (c. 3450 BC).

but more like a sharp birds' beak.

Ciałowicz continues by inferring that the animal must be a griffin, even while it lacks indications of wings or feathers. This might be a premature conclusion, also when taken into account that the separately modelled ears and tail are not preserved.¹⁵ Since the original appearance of the creature is not entirely known, it might have looked different from what is perceived as a griffin.

1.2 Palettes and daggers: relief images of hybrids

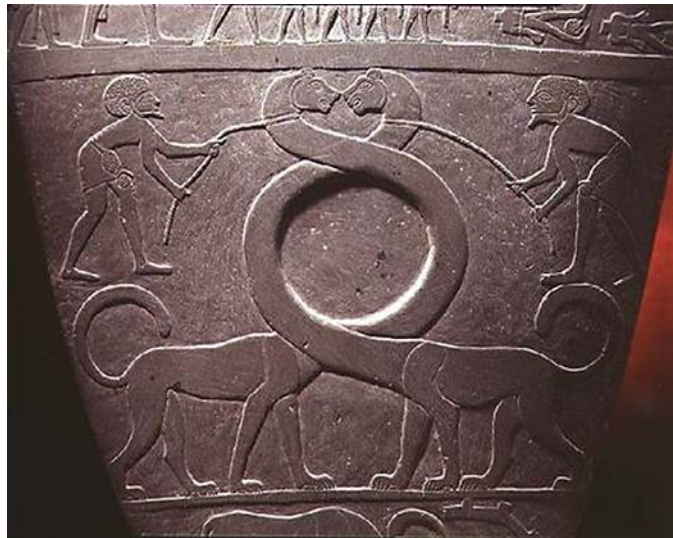
Beside figurines, composite animals are also represented in Predynastic relief images. The slate palettes occur in various shapes and sizes and some of them contain images of odd-looking composite creatures that are depicted alongside normal, or 'worldly' animals. The reverse of the famous Narmer

Ciałowicz, 'Tell el-Farama (Ghazala), season 2005', *Polish Archaeology in the Mediterranean* 17 (reports 2005, 2007), 149.

¹⁴ For this, Ciałowicz refers to depictions of the animal on King Scorpion's mace-head and reliefs from the time of Peribsen and Khasekhemwy. See Ciałowicz, *Archéo-Nil* 22, 85.

¹⁵ Ciałowicz strengthens his argument by stating that, together with the presumed griffin, figurines of a falcon and a lion were found in the same grave. See Ciałowicz, *Archéo-Nil* 22, 85; Diana Craig Patch, Marianne Eaton-Krauss and Susan J. Allen, *Dawn of Egyptian Art* (New York and New Haven, 2011), 198.

palette (fig. 5) which was discovered at Hierakonpolis for example, depicts two identical animals with long necks that almost fill the whole middle section of the palette. This type of animal is commonly referred to as ‘serpopard’, a blend of the words ‘serpent’ and ‘leopard’, referring to the idea that the creature portrays a combination of these two animals.¹⁶ This creature has a serpentine neck and the body of a feline, considered its paws and tail that can be depicted held down or curved over the back. However, the designation of ‘serpopard’ is a modern invention and no known name for the creature in any ancient texts has survived.¹⁷



5. Serpent-necked felines carved in the Narmer palette (detail), from Hierakonpolis, late fourth millennium BC.

The serpopards on the Narmer palette do the serpentine aspect of their name right by their long, entwined necks, which however, lack a serpent’s scale pattern. Their slender bodies are clearly feline with paws and long, curved tails. Two men hold a rope that is wrapped around the long neck of both hybrids. The animal’s necks are entwined, thereby defining a recess in which pigments could be mixed to create make-up or other mixtures. This aspect reminds of the importance of not losing sight of the object’s function, of which the artistic aspect was subject. Perhaps the artist did not even intend to depict a partly snake-like animal: the long necks may be a simple exaggeration of the feline, just to act as a frame for mixing the cosmetics. However, no traces of use have been found on these palettes, which alludes to a symbolic function: the objects could have been made to convey power and wealth within a royal, ritual context.¹⁸

Surmounted and framed by two large dogs clasping one another’s paws, the so-called ‘two-dog palette’ (figs. 6 and 7) is filled with a chaotic tangle of animals. The obverse and reverse are both

¹⁶ Later on it will also become clear that the designation ‘serpopard’ is only suitable for a selection of this type of composite animal.

¹⁷ According to Dimitri Meeks, the ancient name for the city el-Kusiyeh (*Qís*) which may stand for the verb “to tie”, could refer to the depiction of serpopards with entwined necks, as can be seen on the Narmer palette. See Dimitri Meeks, ‘Fantastic Animals’, in D.B. Redford (ed.), *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*, I (Oxford, 2001), 506.

¹⁸ Sonja Gerke, *Der altägyptische Greif: von der Vielfalt eines "Fabeltiers"* (BSAK 15; Hamburg, 2014), 19.



6. Detail of the ‘two dogs palette’ from the main deposit in Hierakonpolis, Naqada III (c. 3200–3100 BC).

concerned with herbivore hunting, in which the hunted animals are said to embody chaos and disorder, but this remains an assumption. To maintain order, it was the task of a ruler to suppress chaos and therefore to catch these wild animals.¹⁹ On the reverse side a large herbivore is being attacked by what seems to be an early image of a griffin. The griffin’s body and paws on the slate palette resemble those of the panther and lions above the creature. This in contrast to our ‘modern’ interpretation of the griffin, which is often shown with bird’s

claws instead of feline’s paws.²⁰ The animal’s head resting on a short neck shows the slightly bent beak of a bird of prey. The artist portrayed the griffin as characteristic as possible by depicting the wings from a birds’ eye of view, while the rest of the animal is shown in full profile. Still, the wings are quite stylized and resemble more the teeth of a comb rather than feathers. The griffin is not the sole composite animal on this palette; it is accompanied by a small serpopard and a canine figure playing a flute. Other ‘normal’ animals like a giraffe, rams and goats point to a desert context, in which the hybrid beings seemed to fit perfectly well according to the ancient Egyptians.

Another palette (fig. 8) found at Hierakonpolis contains even four dogs who are accompanied by desert animals as well, including a feline animal with a long, twisted neck. The dogs are framing the palette and the twisting feline is enclosed between two of them. It could be an image of a serpopard. On the other side of the round (mixing) recess are positioned a lion and a standing bird with a long, bending beak. The reverse shows the same four dogs, again framing the scene, this time made up by a large palm tree vertically filling the space, flanked by two giraffes. One might expect that the griffin on the Two Dogs Palette would be depicted as being hunted down so the Egyptian would gain control over the ‘unknown’. Nonetheless, the opposite is true: the griffin is obviously represented

¹⁹ This is why Ciałowicz considers it possible that the lion in the upper part of the palette reverse is actually a depiction of a ruler. See Ciałowicz, *Archéo-Nil* 22, 87.

²⁰ As will be clear from the majority of the discussed examples of griffins, the animal’s front paws are almost always feline.



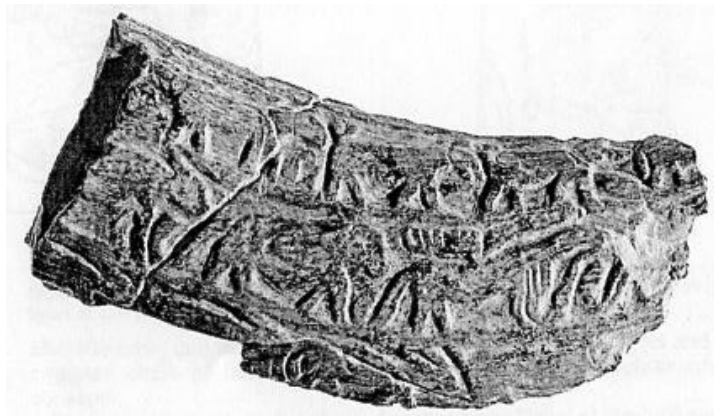
7. The 'two dogs palette', from the main deposit in Hierakonpolis, Naqada III (c. 3200–3100 BC).



8. The 'four dogs palette', from the main deposit in Hierakonpolis, Naqada III (c. 3200–3100 BC).

playing the role of chasing the herbivores. The role of the supposed serpopard on the Four Dogs Palette remains uncertain. As to the inclusions of lions, these animals immediately evoke a powerful image. According to Richard Wilkinson, lions either standing or recumbent served mainly a defensive role. Through the history of Egypt this symbolic role is for instance expressed by carving furniture in the form of lions (or body parts of the feline).²¹ Not to forget about the famous human-headed sphinx of Giza, wearing the royal *nemes* headdress which bears a resemblance to lion's manes. The feline's inclusion in the confusion of animals on the palette seems to be in favour of the 'good side': the lions are clearly hunting down the cervid animals. Therefore, they are helping in maintaining (or re-establishing) order, just as the pharaoh was ought to do.

In addition to the slate palettes, the ancient site of Hierakonpolis provided another object with a composite animal. The main deposit contained a partially preserved, curved fragment of an ivory knife handle (fig. 9) that is finely decorated with various desert animals divided in three registers. Together with two ibexes, several dogs, a few undefined animals, a hyena and a hare, an image of a griffin is included.²²



9. Fragment of an ivory knife handle, Hierakonpolis, Naqada III (c. 3200–3100 BC).

The fantastic creature is positioned in the middle register and has a bird-like head, a long lowered tail and a pair of wings arising from the centre of its back.²³ The wings are depicted similar to the griffin from the previously mentioned two-dog palette and its body is shaped identically to a lion that is depicted squatting two rows above. A difference between the feline animals is that the lion has its tail raised, whereas the griffin has it lowered. Moreover, the front paws of the griffin resemble more bird claws than feline paws, although the hind paws of both predators are the same.²⁴ The relief is badly damaged so it is difficult to distinguish what is depicted in front of the griffin, but it looks like the animal is holding a snake in its mouth.²⁵

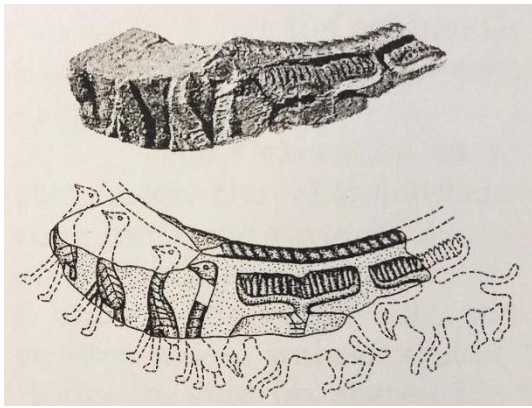
²¹ According to Wilkinson, since the Fifth Dynasty the king is depicted as a lion standing on its hind legs, the forefeet in the air, trampling his enemies. See Richard Wilkinson, *Reading Egyptian art: a hieroglyphic guide to ancient Egyptian painting and sculpture* (London, 1992), 69.

²² Barbara Adams, *Ancient Hierakonpolis* (Warminster, 2002), 61; Barbara Adams and Krzysztof M. Ciałowicz, *Protodynastic Egypt* (Shire, 1997), fig. 35.

²³ Ciałowicz, *Archéo-Nil* 22, 85. Gerke says it cannot be decided if the animal has a bird's head or not, since the fragment is so damaged, for which she is right. See Gerke, *Der altägyptische Greif* 15, 131.

²⁴ Ciałowicz, *Archéo-Nil* 22, 86.

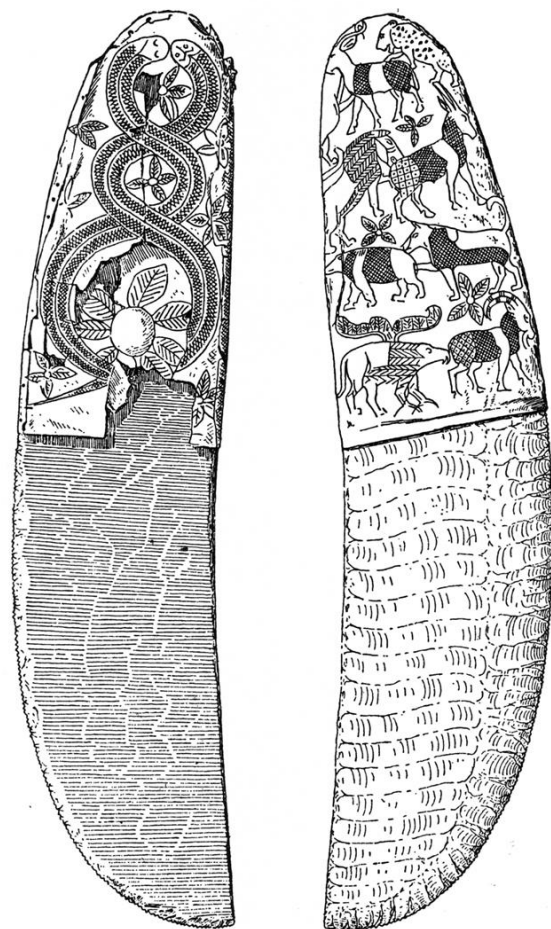
²⁵ According to Ciałowicz, some decorated knife handles contain depictions of birds with snakes in their beaks and lions with lowered tails. He puts forward that the griffin with a snake is a combination of these two motifs. See Ciałowicz, *Archéo-Nil* 22, 85.



10. Fragment of an ivory dagger handle, Abydos, Naqada II (c. 3500–3200 BC).

Another interesting object that contains hybrid animals is an ivory dagger handle (fig. 10) that was discovered in a grave at Abydos.²⁶ Although the handle is poorly preserved in three fragments, the figures of two animals that resemble griffins are still recognizable on the smallest piece. Of both animals only their back and comb-shaped wings remain. Since the fragment is so badly preserved, it is impossible to distinguish the other body parts the creatures are composed of. They seem to chase a row of birds with long necks.²⁷

An elaborately griffin is easier recognizable on a dagger handle (fig. 11) found in Gebel el-Tarif. Manufactured in ivory and gold leaf, this handle depicts four rows of animals in a zig-zag sequence. Instead of horizontal rows, these animals are arranged vertically. Each row contains two animals: at the top an antelope or gazelle is being ambushed by a spotted feline animal, followed below by a lion catching another cervid. The third pair is made up by a large dog grasping an unidentified quadruped animal and the lowest row contains a griffin behind a ram. In my opinion, it may be evident that according to its position, the griffin is fulfilling a role of predator as well.²⁸ Parts of both prey and predator are decorated with geometric patterns, from crosshatching to zigzag, sometimes filled with dots. Even the wings of the griffin contain a zigzag



11. Knife handle from Gebel el-Tarif, Naqada II (c. 3500–3200 BC).

²⁶ The fragments were found in Tomb U-127. Traces left on the fragments indicate that the knife was not made of flint, but rather of smooth metal. See Günter Dreyer, 'Motive und Datierung der dekorierten prädynastischen Messergriffe', in C. Ziegler and N. Palayret (eds), *L'art de l'Ancien Empire égyptien: actes du colloque organisé au musée du Louvre par le Service culturel les 3 et 4 avril 1998* (Paris, 1999), 209.

²⁷ Ciałowicz thinks the griffins are hunting ostriches. See Ciałowicz, *Archéo-Nil* 22, 86; Gerke, *Der altägyptische Greif* 15, 130.

²⁸ Meeks mentions that the serpopard was the only type of composite animal that attacked other animals. This is certainly not the case when Predynastic images of griffins are taken into account, for example the predator-griffin on this knife handle. See Meeks, in Redford (ed.), *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt* I, 506.



12. Flint knife with ivory handle found at Abu Zaidan, Upper Egypt, ca. 3300 BC.

pattern, instead of implying feathers. The griffin with its long beak has feline hind legs, but its front legs are clearly raptor claws. Between the animals three rosettes are inserted, just as on the backside of the handle, decorating the voids between the bodies of two large, entangled snakes.

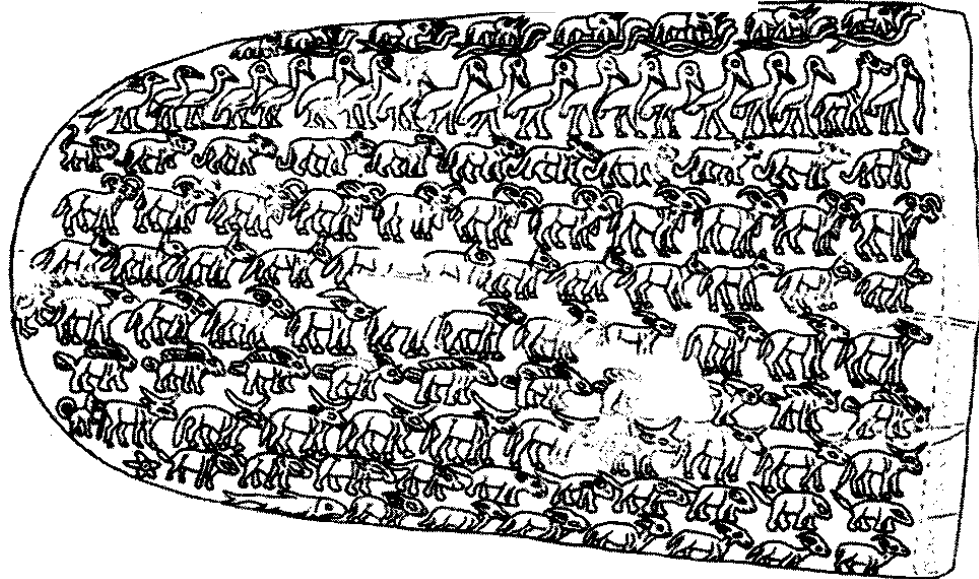
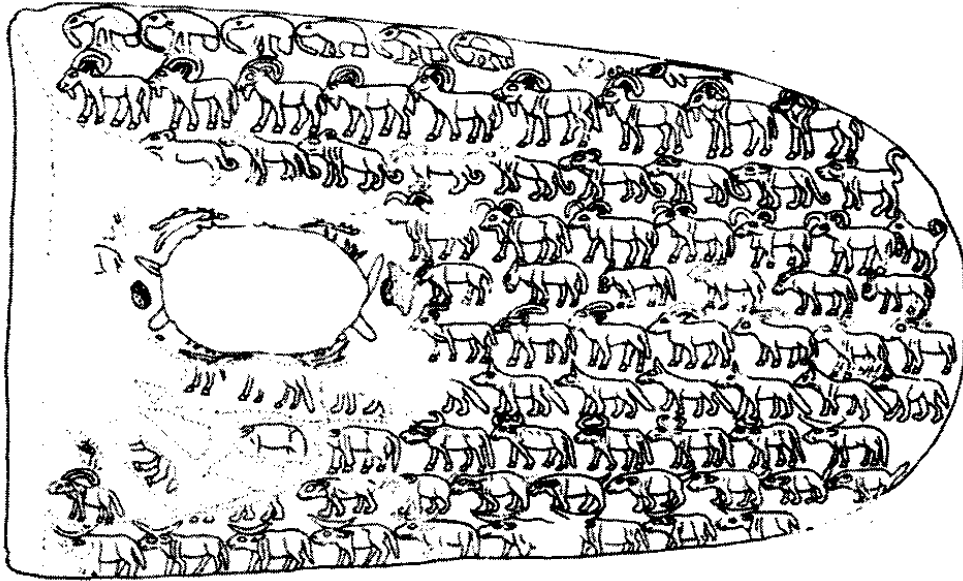
Prey and predator are arranged very differently on the so-called Brooklyn knife handle (figs. 12 and 13) from Abu Zaidan. The ivory object is decorated with linear sequences of animals, every single row dedicated to a different species of animal, except for the cattle, which on two examples extend through two rows. Of special interest is the uppermost row which depicts elephants: on the reverse side of the handle the mammals are even trampling serpents. Rows of carnivore predators and herbivore prey tend to interchange. In that way, predators like hounds are never really depicted hunting their prey, since they are positioned side by side and do not interact with animals like antelope and gazelle species from other rows. Perhaps this scene is not even meant as a hunting spectacle, as was so evident in the previous examples. The reverse side of the handle contains hybrid animals which have not previously been encountered: the fourth row from below depicts quadruped, horned animals, with fishtails and fins on their back.²⁹ The animal's bodies are most probably of a mammal like a gazelle, considering the horns and ears of the animal. The hybrids inclusion between rows of herbivores suggests that this type of composite animal should be assigned to the group of carnivores. In that way, its role does not differ from its fellow hybrid animals.³⁰

By all means, it seems that the hybrid figurines, slate palettes, and dagger handles do not derive from a daily life context.³¹ If these objects were used in everyday life by 'normal' people, less elaborate versions should have also been found. On the contrary: the discussed palettes and figurines were all found in deposits and the dagger handles were fabricated of precious materials (think of the gold-leafed Gebel el-Tarif knife handle). Most importantly, all of these objects lack any traces of use. Therefore it seems more likely that they were intended for royal rituals and/or designed for the owner

²⁹ According to Wengrow, the fins are derived from the *Tilapia* fish. See Wengrow, *The Origins of Monsters*, 27.

³⁰ The animals depicted on these knife handles evolve during time and are found more developed on the ivory magic wands from the Middle Kingdom onwards, that will be discussed later. What will be clear is that by that time the composition is arranged more neatly, with animals occurring in one row instead of several registers. Moreover, the animals on the knife handles are in relief instead of being incised as visible on the magic wands.

³¹ Gerke, *Der altägyptische Greif* 15, 19.



13. Front side (above) and reverse side with hybrids (below) of the Abu Zaidan knife handle, ca. 3300 BC.

to propagandize his power and wealth.³² Wengrow is also certainly right when denoting that these objects served as components of social display: they served as status symbols in the context of personal presentation, supposedly of the king himself. By depicting the king as triumphant in the hunt and domination of animals, his supremacy was assured.³³ The position of the hybrids in the relief presentations likely refer to a protective purpose, since they seem to aid other predators in the hunt on prey: perhaps symbolically helping the king with suppressing chaos. But because of the lack of written sources exemplifying them, the role of the composite figures during the Predynastic period remains ambiguous.

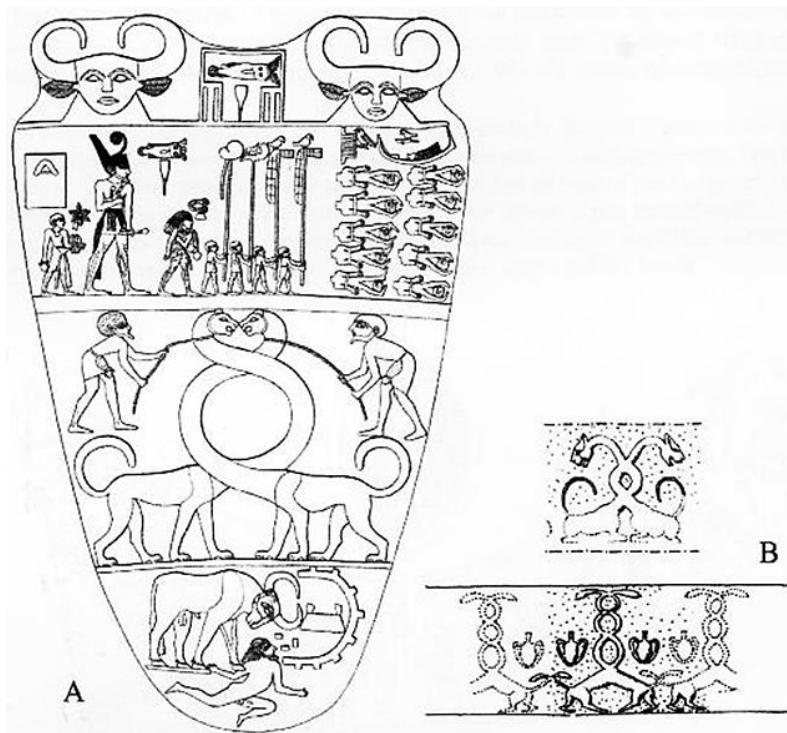
³² Harry S. Smith, 'The Making of Egypt: a Review of the Influence of Susa and Sumer on Upper Egypt and Lower Nubia in the 4th Millennium B.C.', in: R. Friedman and B. Adams (eds), *The followers of Horus: studies dedicated to Michael Allen Hoffman* (Oxford, 1992), 235.

³³ Wengrow, *The Origins of Monsters*, 54.

1.3 Influence from abroad: the impact of seal impressions

It is interesting to question to what extent foreign art may have influenced Egyptian art, or the other way around. In the past, research has been done in order to find answers on the original appearance of similar artistic motifs found in both Egypt and the Middle Bronze Age Levant. Based on different archaeological sources it has been proven that already in the early stage of the formation of the Egyptian state contacts between Egypt and the Levant existed.³⁴ These contacts were not violent, but mostly of commercial character. Trade routes are thought to have existed from Mesopotamia and Elam via Arabia to Egyptian soil or by taking the sea route around the peninsula. There may have even been a route from Mesopotamia to Upper Egypt across the Persian Gulf, Indian Ocean, and Red Sea.³⁵

Barbara Adams and Ciałowicz note that the trade contacts increased when Egypt developed into an organised state.³⁶ Seen in the wider context of the development of Bronze Age civilisations, Wengrow is of opinion that the process of urbanization went hand in hand with the construction of a



14. A) Serpent-necked felines on the Narmer palette and B) similar hybrids on cylinder seal impressions from Uruk, late fourth millennium BC.

repertory of hybrid creatures. He draws attention to the close connection between the emergence of mechanical methods in Mesopotamia and the first widespread use of these techniques in the reproduction of images, including depictions of hybrid beings. The spread of devices as terracotta moulds, stamp and cylinder seals depicting composites testify of what Wengrow calls mechanical reproduction.³⁷ Shifting networks of trade were related to the development of urban life, and therefore in the distribution of

³⁴ This is based on Levantine motifs (for example on stamp and cylinder seals) found in Predynastic Egyptian art, but also imported ware, Levantine influences in Pre- and Early Dynastic architectural remains, and written sources in Egypt, which is thought to have been influenced by the Levant. See Gerke, *Der altägyptische Greif* 15, 16 and note 87.

³⁵ According to Smith, Egyptian artefacts depicting Susan/Sumerian parallels are found most of all in Upper Egypt and Lower Nubia, making the idea of a southern route between Susa and Egypt very plausible. See Smith, in: R. Friedman and B. Adams (eds), *The followers of Horus*, 245.

³⁶ According to Adams and Ciałowicz, these contacts remained during the first two dynasties. If the occurrence of composite animals is related to these intensified contacts will be clear later, when examples from the Old Kingdom are discussed. See Adams and Ciałowicz, *Protodynastic Egypt*, 52–3 and 56.

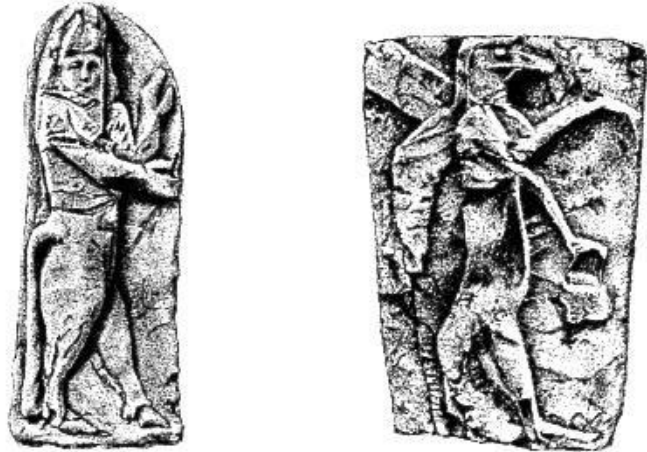
³⁷ Wengrow, *The Origins of Monsters*, 80–1.

composite animals. Since short and long-distance trading routes existed, composite animals sometimes passed along the same routes that brought merchandise and (precious) materials from as far as the Indus to the Aegean, as well as to Egypt.³⁸ Wengrow points to the fact that composite animals fail to become popular in the millennia preceding the urbanisation of ancient civilisations. Instead they emerge together with urban settlements and the upcoming classes of social elites.³⁹ The lack of common chronologies of Egypt and the Levant is disadvantageous when comparing the material from both regions and the motifs could as well have developed independently from each other.

In any case, it is suspected that the Elamite motifs found their way to Egypt due to the diffusion of seal impressions, where they were picked up and used in other forms of art.⁴⁰ The serpent-necked felines depicted on the Narmer palette for example, are a common motif on the floodplains of the Tigris and Euphrates. Their close resemblance can be illustrated by examples of cylinder seal impressions (fig. 14) from Uruk in southern Mesopotamia from the late fourth millennium BC. Moreover, the entangled snakes with rosettes as depicted on the reverse of the Gebel el-Tarif knife handle are to be found on more knife handles discovered in Egypt.⁴¹ It has even been suggested that this and other knife handles were created by Elamite craftsmen who were active in Egypt, while other scholars believe these artefacts are the products of Egyptians imitating the Elamite examples.⁴²

Apart from cylinder and stamp seals and as indicated above, composite animals also found their way to Egypt by depictions on casting moulds. From the second millennium BC onward, these were used to replicate terracotta plaques

(fig. 15) that contained standardized images of grotesque hybrid creatures.⁴³ Since the excavation context of most of the discussed objects is uncertain (or even unknown if they were bought on the thriving art market), accurate dating is hard. Partly for this reason it is difficult to indicate where composite animals like the griffin or serpopard originated.



15. Terracotta plaques with composite animals, from Assur in northern Iraq, early first millennium BC.

³⁸ Wengrow, *The Origins of Monsters*, 60–2.

³⁹ Wengrow, *The Origins of Monsters*, 51.

⁴⁰ Gerke, *Der altägyptische Greif*, 17–18. These impressions ranged from mud stoppers of jars to the surfaces of clay documents on which transactions were recorded. See Wengrow, *The Origins of Monsters*, 62–7.

⁴¹ Gerke, *Der altägyptische Greif*, 17.

⁴² Adams and Ciałowicz, *Protodynastic Egypt*, 55.

⁴³ David Wengrow, 'Cognition, materiality and monsters: the cultural transmission of counter-intuitive forms in Bronze Age societies', in *JMC* 16 (2), 142.

1.4 The origins of composites: a cognitive approach

The question arises how hybrid creatures originated in the mind of the people of the Bronze Age civilisations. Robert Kuhn believes that the “Fabelwesen” as he calls the hybrid animals, were created by the Egyptians by observing nature and fossilized remains of animals. In his research, he mainly focussed on the origins of the serpopard. He refers to dozens of examples of skeleton fossils found in Egypt, among them a large skeleton of a prehistoric giraffe. According to Kuhn, the fossils could have triggered the phantasy of the ancient Egyptians, causing them to create hybrid animals like the serpopard by assembling bones.⁴⁴ This assumption does sound reasonable, but it is not consistent with the motifs of composite animals found from the Indus to the Aegean.

While Wengrow connects the development of urban centres with mechanical reproduction, he also adverts to a cognitive approach in interpreting the spread and universality of composite animals. He refutes evolutionary hypotheses of cognitive psychologists stating that phantasy creatures can only be generated in complex social environments. He rightly questions the methodology of this research, including that drawings of composite animals by children were used to model prehistoric cognition: these are obviously different time periods.⁴⁵ Above all, Wengrow rather chooses for a materialist methodology, based on examples in different areas and time scales. He exerts the “epidemiological” theory, which states that composite animals are widespread because of their disturbing character and are therefore cognitively catchy. Because images of hybrid animals violated the basic expectations of worldly animals, they were more likely to be remembered and transmitted.⁴⁶

An epidemiological approach is useful according to Wengrow, because of three modes of transmission: transformation, integration, and protection. Firstly, images of composite animals found in material culture were not limited by language, so transmission could occur without spoken or written sources. He states that the movement and stylistic innovations of images of hybrids can be traced, which also became evident in the previous paragraph concerning the seal impressions.⁴⁷ Secondly, the transmission happened while societies changed very fast, causing the composite animals to be adopted and integrated from abroad. Only people who could access prestige goods could use the ‘exotic’ imagery to bolster their rank and status: goods may have been exchanged between leaders in some competitive way.⁴⁸ This, in my opinion, became already visible in the Predynastic objects depicting composite animals, which were most likely royal status symbols. The integration of foreign and own elements causes difficulties of attributing the motifs to its source. This is probably why scholars are still arguing on the origins of griffins and other composites.

Thirdly, Wengrow assumes that the composites were borrowed or integrated for protective

⁴⁴ Robert Kuhn, ‘Überlegungen zur Herkunft und Bedeutung eines Mischwesens in der formativen Phase des alten Ägypten’, in: L. D. Morenz and R. Kuhn (eds), *Vorspann oder formative Phase? Ägypten und der Vordere Orient 3500-2700 v. Chr.* (Philippika 48; Wiesbaden, 2011), 174–8.

⁴⁵ Wengrow, *The Origins of Monsters*, 4.

⁴⁶ Wengrow, *The Origins of Monsters*, 5 and 23.

⁴⁷ Wengrow, *The Origins of Monsters*, 90–4.

⁴⁸ Wengrow, *The Origins of Monsters*, 94–9.

purposes: people could have assigned magical powers to the creatures, to use them in rituals to guard persons or their households against dangers.⁴⁹ In this case, one is reminded of the votive figurines found at Tell el-Farkha, which fit quite well into Wengrow's explanation. In any case, Wengrow is of opinion that the level of complexity of a society's political economy decided whether composite animals were created or adopted.

2. *Old Kingdom*

The discussed motifs developed further during the Old Kingdom, one of the most dynamic periods of ancient Egyptian art, caused by a stabilized, flourishing civilisation. Nonetheless, this period reveals only a few examples of composite animals, all of which can be perceived as images of griffins. Two types of griffins have developed: the *hieracocephalic* type, with a lion's body and a bird's head, and the *androcephalic* type, a feline with a human head.⁵⁰ None of them occur on slate palettes, which disappear entirely, nor as three-dimensional objects like figurines. According to Philippe Germond and Jacques Livet, tombs became the favoured setting for the development of an astonishing bestiary. This in contrast to temples, they state, where human forms were preferred and animal images were not included in the architectural programme.⁵¹ However, this is not entirely true if a look is taken at the Old Kingdom mortuary temple of pharaoh Sahure at Abusir.

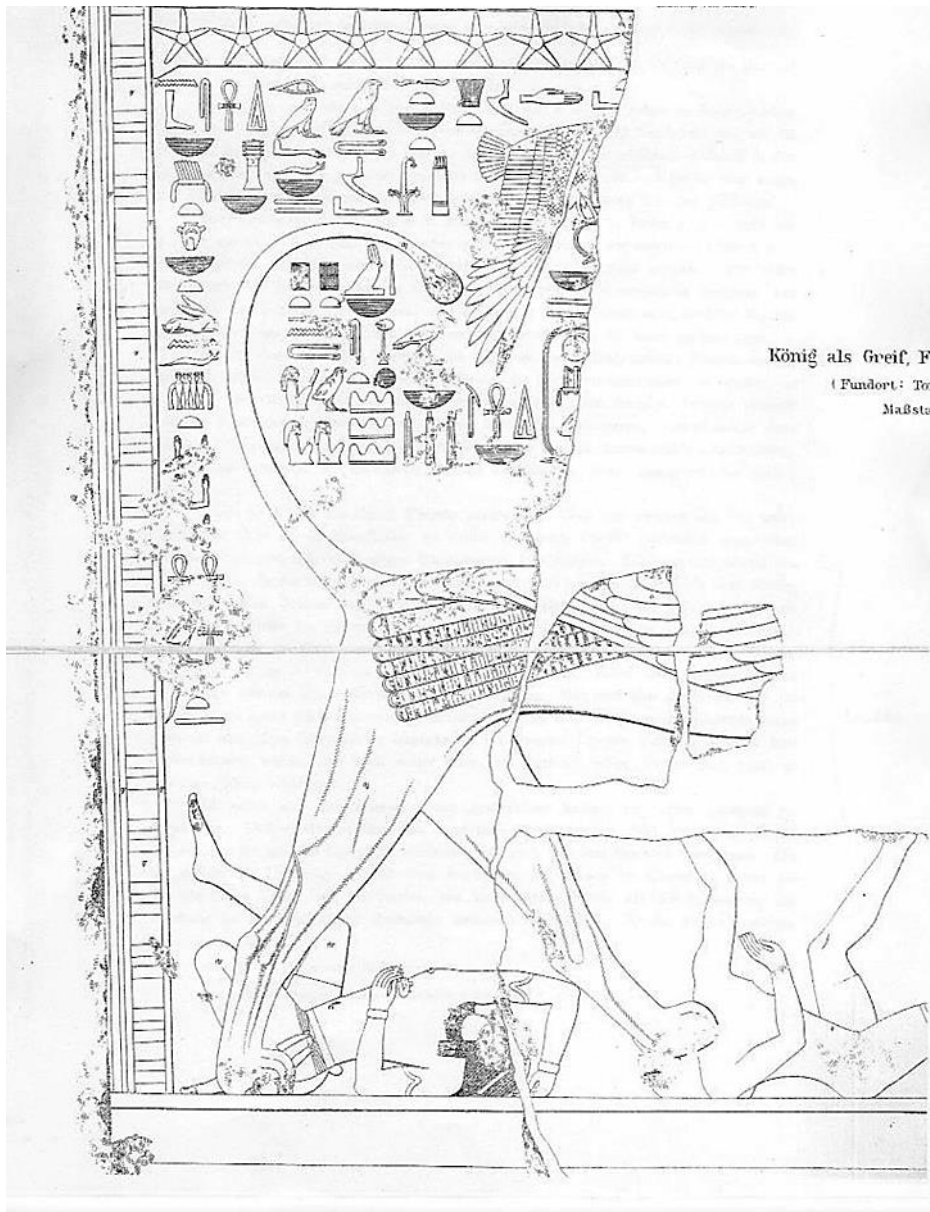
2.1 **Royal reliefs: the king as composite animal**

Dating to the Fifth Dynasty, the funerary monument of Sahure was once located at the shores of Abusir lake. The valley temple is now in ruins and partly silted over time, however many parts of the building have survived the ravages of time. Of importance here is a relief (fig. 16) that depicts a large griffin: the complete appearance remains unclear, since the animal's head and shoulders are missing from the fragment. However, in my opinion it must be a griffin and not a sphinx, since the animal has wings folded on its body. Above the creature is a half preserved image of the vulture goddess Nekhbet, hovering and protecting the griffin. Whether the creature was hieracocephalic or androcephalic: in both cases it symbolized pharaoh Sahure overthrowing his enemies. This evident symbolism is supported by the inscription belonging to the scene, mentioning all titles of Sahure and

⁴⁹ Wengrow, *The Origins of Monsters*, 89 and 99–104.

⁵⁰ Hsu, *GM* 231, 45. Winfried Barta argues that this androcephalic hybrid should not be considered to be a griffin, but a type of sphinx. In my opinion, the wings clearly indicate that the animal is another version of a griffin, and not a *wingless* sphinx. See Winfried Barta, 'Der Greif als bildhafter Ausdruck einer altägyptischen Religionsvorstellung', *JEOL* 23 (1973–74), 337.

⁵¹ Moreover, their statement about the absence of animals in temple decoration is incorrect in view of the New Kingdom temples: these were adorned with gods existing of human bodies with animal heads, which can be considered as composite creatures as well. To examine all the animal-headed gods is beyond the reach of this thesis. See Philippe Germond and Jacques Livet (eds), *An Egyptian bestiary: animals in life and religion in the land of the Pharaohs* (London, 2001), 192.



16. Relief of the valley temple of Sahure in Abusir, Fifth Dynasty (c. 2494–2345 BC) .

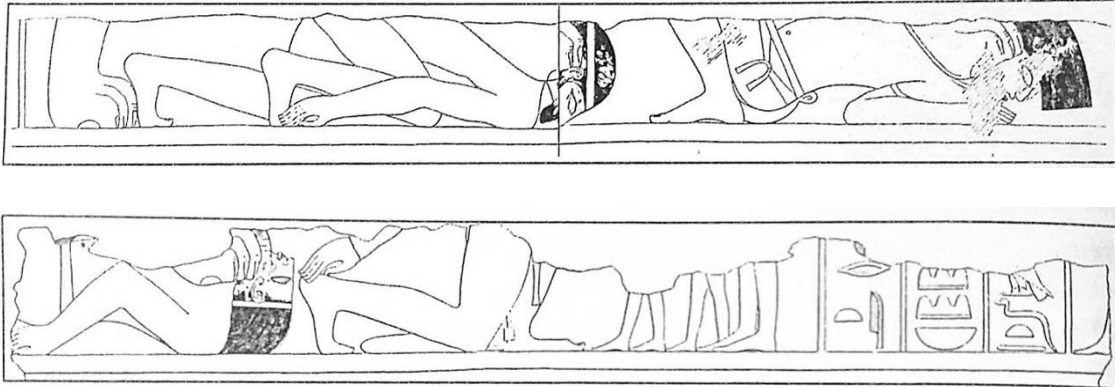
comparisons with the gods Sopdu and Horus.⁵² These cited gods can therefore be seen as the embodiment of this particular griffin.⁵³

The preserved left part shows the rear of the animal with its long, curved tail, and the tip of its right wing. The animal is as usual composed of a lion's body and the wings and head of a falcon. The artisan has cleverly incorporated the bird's tail by depicting it on the lion's rump. It is noteworthy that, in contrast to all previously discussed griffins in two-dimensional art, Sahure's griffin keeps its wings flat against its body. Stripes neatly indicate the animal's feathers and even its musculature is designated by brushstrokes. The creature is trampling down two enemies beneath three of its paws.

⁵² For the entire transliteration of the inscription, see Ludwig Borchardt, *Das Grabdenkmal des Königs S'ahu-Re*, II: *Ausgrabungen der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft in Abusir 1902-1908*, 6–7 (Wissenschaftliche Veröffentlichungen der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft 14; 26; Leipzig, 1910–1913), 83–4.

⁵³ Gerke, *Der altägyptische Greif* 15, 133; Borchardt, *Das Grabdenkmal des Königs S'ahu-Re*, II, 23.

A touching detail is visible to the left where one of the foes literally holds his heart, giving voice to the Egyptian expression “it is close to his heart”.⁵⁴ To the right of these unfortunate victims an enemy is kneeling: the animal presumably held its right front paw on the head of the foe.⁵⁵ This part of the relief is unfortunately lost. The original location of this fragment is unsure, although Ludwig Borchardt believed it belonged to the place where it was found, namely in a columned portico on the north side, on the right side of the start of the temple’s causeway.⁵⁶



17. Reliefs of the causeway leading to Niuserre’s valley temple in Abydos, Fifth Dynasty (c. 2494–2345 BC).

In Abusir more composite animals can be found on two temple reliefs (fig. 17) located at the causeway leading to the Fifth Dynasty pyramid complex of Niuserre, in the vicinity of the pyramid of his uncle Sahure. Unfortunately, the same hieracocephalic/androcephalic classification problem occurs here, since both reliefs have only been preserved in the lower region. Since the composition of this scene reflects that of Sahure’s relief, the animals depicted here again likely symbolize the pharaoh defeating its enemies. What is left of the picture are lion’s paws together with the bodies of enemies that are trampled down: the victims are depicted on their back with their hands raised in agony or pushed forward to the ground. In front of them the legs of smaller, standing figures are visible, followed by three columns of inscriptions. According to Sonja Gerke, this violent scene is repeated on both sides of the causeway for at least seven times, presenting the same suppressed nations over again.⁵⁷ If this is true, the walls flanking the causeway were filled with large figures of these composite animals.

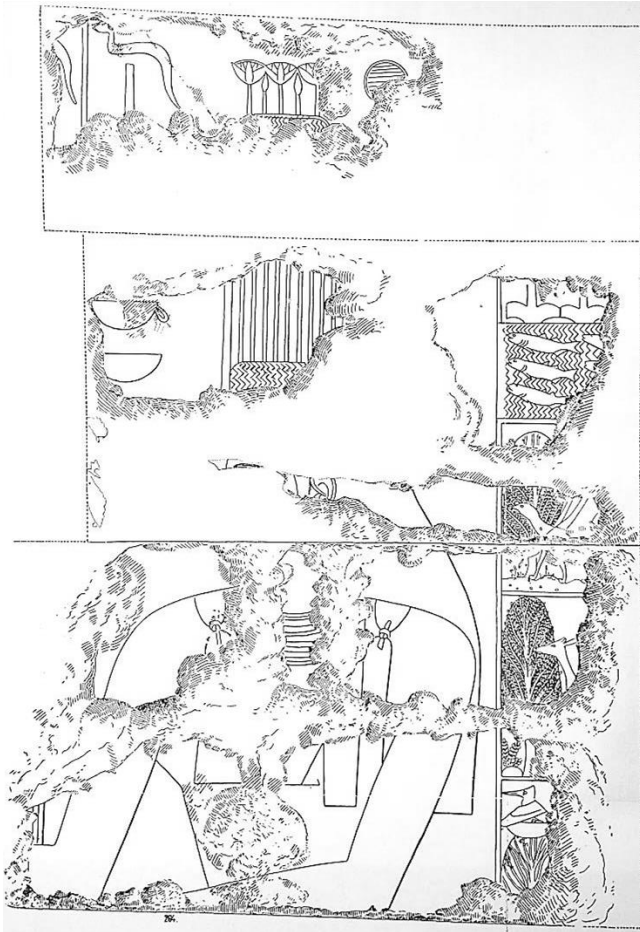
Not far from Abusir, Niuserre had built a sun temple at Abu Ghurab. Fragments originating from this complex were assembled and documented, one of them containing the figure of a small odd-

⁵⁴ Borchardt recalls the German saying “sein Herz geht heraus”, loosely translated in Dutch as “hij houdt zijn hart vast”, referring to the desperate plight of the enemy. See Borchardt, *Das Grabdenkmal des Königs S’ahu-Re*, II, 23.

⁵⁵ Sonja Gerke mentions that the laying enemies are an Asiatic and a “Puntmann” (someone from Punt?), the kneeling foe being a Libyer, but without telling why. The same accounts for Borchardt. See Gerke, *Der altägyptische Greif* 15, 133; Borchardt, *Das Grabdenkmal des Königs S’ahu-Re*, II, 23.

⁵⁶ His conclusion is based on measurements and observations on ornaments found on the fragment. See Borchardt, *Das Grabdenkmal des Königs S’ahu-Re*, II, 21.

⁵⁷ According to Gerke, these enemies can be distinguished by their looks as Asiatics and inhabitants of Punt and Libia. The three-columned inscriptions are repeated as well. See Gerke, *Der altägyptische Greif* 15, 134.



18. Relief fragment of the east wall of the sun temple of Niuserre at Abu Gurab, Fifth Dynasty (c. 2494–2345 BC).

creature has a feline body is unclear: the paws of the animal could either be feline's or bird's claws, this is hard to decipher. The pointed head indicates a bird's beak and from the animal's back two large wings seem to be raised. Indications of feathers or lines that clarify its beak are missing, although they can also have been left out in the publication or have been lost before documentation.

According to Gerke, it is tricky to identify the creature as a griffin, since the back of the animal is badly damaged. Nonetheless, in my view the preserved parts strongly point out that we are dealing with another griffin, or at least a non-worldly animal with wings. Leaves of another large tree in the fourth register are plucked by an animal designated as a giraffe by Gerke. The last register contains a kingfisher on its nest in a tree.⁶⁰ The inclusion of the (presumed) griffin could suggest that the animal was conceived by the Egyptians as part of the Egyptian fauna.⁶¹

looking creature (fig. 18). These fragments, stored in the Ägyptisches Museum, were unfortunately destroyed during World War II.⁵⁸ Luckily, old publications make interpretation of the fragments still possible. The relief fragments are in a bad condition according to the numerous indications of demolitions, but the subject can still be deciphered. The majority of the assemblage is occupied by the female personification of the *3h.t*-season, who has been preserved from her waist. The headgear of the woman is made up by some sort of basin from which lotus stems are sprouting, referring to her association with the annual inundation.⁵⁹ To the left of this female figure, the beginning of five narrow registers can be observed.

Two date palms are visible in the most upper register, followed by some fish in water in the register below. Standing in front of a large tree, the composite animal occupies the third register. Whether the

⁵⁸ Gerke, *Der altägyptische Greif* 15, 134.

⁵⁹ Friedrich W. von Bissing, 'La chambre des trois saisons du sanctuaire solaire du roi Rathourès (Ve dynastie) à Abousir', *ASAE* 53 (1) (1955), 325.

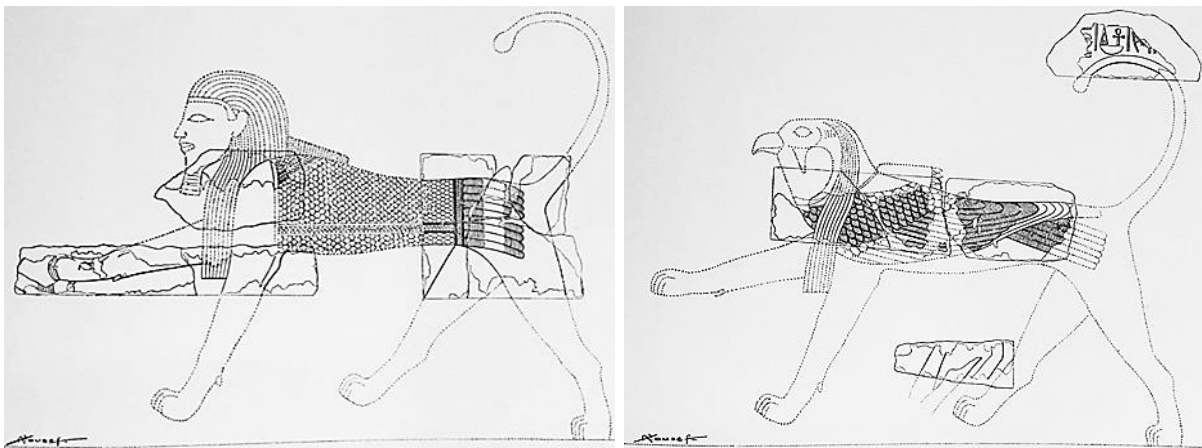
⁶⁰ Gerke, *Der altägyptische Greif* 15, 134.

⁶¹ Gerke sees a connection between the griffin and giraffe as both being exotic. See Gerke, *Der altägyptische Greif* 15, 24.

A series of fragments (figs. 19 and 20) of Pepi II's causeway of his Sixth Dynasty mortuary temple display griffin-like animals in great detail. Only fragments of these composite animals remain, once adorning both sides of the causeway over a length of twenty metres.⁶² Parts of the heads have not been preserved; still, two types can be distinguished by differences in feather patterns. One fragment contains the lower part of a false beard attached to a human chin, indicating this griffin could be androcephalic. Besides, this griffin wears a tripartite hairdo and its folded, small feathers are depicted in a densely pattern. Near the hips some longer feathers are visible, slightly extending downward. In comparison, the folded wings of the other type of griffin are more falcon-like, partly overlapping a bird's tail.

A reconstruction of the wall fragments made by Gustave Jéquier suggests that the animal has a falcon's head, but neither fragments of the neck, nor of the head have been preserved.⁶³ Also, the strips of the head cloth are again sevenfold, all pointing to the assumption that the head of this type may have been human-like as well. The pose and placement of both types on the flanking walls of the causeway strongly remind of the slaughter scene in Sahure's monument. It is therefore likely that the space beneath each of the animal's paws was originally decorated with the bodies of enemies, overthrown by the Egyptian pharaoh. Gerke supposes that this scene of the composite animal suppressing its foes was depicted on each side of the causeway eight times in total.⁶⁴

The last example of what most likely also imagines a griffin is located on a graffito (fig. 21) drawn on a cliff at Dakhla Oasis.⁶⁵ Carried out in a few striking lines, the animal contains four legs, a



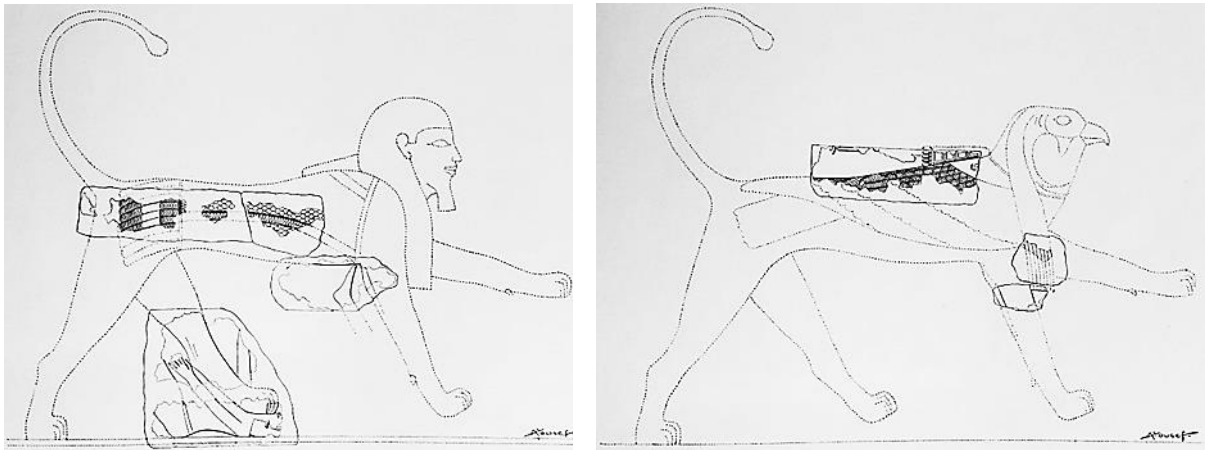
19. Fragments with androcephalic griffin (above) and hieracocephalic griffin (below), south wall of the causeway of the mortuary temple of Pepi II in south Saqqara. Sixth Dynasty (c. 2345–2181 BC).

⁶² Gustave Jéquier, *Le monument funéraire de Pepi II, III: Les approches du temple* (Cairo, 1940), 9–10.

⁶³ Jéquier believes this type of griffin found its origin by the symbolic association of the god Horus in combination with the fierce lion, together representing the omnipotence of the pharaoh. This sounds reasonable, only that the exact depiction of Pepi's hybrid beings remains unclear. See Jéquier, *Le monument funéraire de Pepi II, III*, 12.

⁶⁴ Gerke, *Der altägyptische Greif* 15, 135.

⁶⁵ This graffito is dated by Klaus Kuhlmann to an expedition in the Fourth Dynasty. According to Gerke, this is highly speculative, since we are dealing with a simple rock engraving. See Gerke, *Der altägyptische Greif* 15, 24.



20. Fragments with androcephalic griffin (left) and hieracocephalic griffin (right), north wall of the causeway of the mortuary temple of Pepi II in south Saqqara. Sixth Dynasty (c. 2345–2181 BC).

tail and a head with pointed beak (?). Noteworthy are its wings, which are shown from a bird's eye view on both sides of the animal's slender neck.⁶⁶ Details like feline's paws or feathers are missing, still the creature seems unworldly and fits in the series of former described griffins. No written sources on griffins from this period are known, and without obvious depictions, the importance of this hybrid being appears to reduce during the Old Kingdom. The same accounts for serpopards or unworldly animals other than griffins that seem to disappear from Egyptian art.

On the basis of these examples, the most startling is that during this era composite animals seem to have been depicted solely on royal monuments: they are curiously absent from elite tomb decoration or other non-royal art.⁶⁷ This can be due to the position of Egypt in the worldly perspective of that time. During the Old Kingdom, there was political unity by a centralized government.

Expeditions were carried out to Nubia, but there was no question of great interaction with foreigners



21. Graffito from the Dakhla Oasis, Fourth Dynasty? (c. 2613–2494 BC).

as would be the case in the following dynasties. From the First Intermediate Period onward, the influence from outside must have grown due to invading foreigners from the Levant region. The meeting of different cultures allows for an interaction of all aspects of life, including artistic conventions. That is why it is possible that foreigners may have caused a revival of composite animals in the repertoire of non-royal art. If this assumption is correct may become clear in the next chapter, where composite animals dating to the Middle Kingdom are examined.

⁶⁶ Gerke compares the position of the animal's wings with those of the flying duck as depicted in hieroglyph G40. See Gerke, *Der altägyptische Greif* 15, 135. Perhaps the artisan used this hieroglyphic sign as an example.

⁶⁷ Apart from the Dakhla graffito, of which its precise depiction is uncertain.

3. Middle Kingdom

Especially during the Middle Kingdom, the role of the Egyptian state became internationally more and more significant. Therefore it is not surprising that Egyptian material culture has left its mark in the Near East and the Aegean, just as it was affected by neighbouring countries.⁶⁸ According to Naguib Kanawati and Alexandra Woods, it has been proved that foreigners resided within the borders of Egypt.⁶⁹ These people must have had certain influence on the daily Egyptian life, including its artistic motifs. By this time an important change seems to have occurred: composite animals are no longer to be found as impressive beasts on royal monuments, instead they emerge in the private sphere. Moreover, the human-headed griffins are not presented in either two-dimensional, nor three-dimensional art, which raises the question whether this type of composite animal was reserved for pharaohs.

The companion of the Old Kingdom ‘causeway griffin’ does present itself in the Middle Kingdom, this time clearly with a falcon’s head. Still, this type of griffin seems to be in the minority, since several other depictions of the griffin make their way into Egyptian art during this period. Even creatures like the serpopard and the Seth-animal re-appear in the art of the Middle Kingdom, although looking slightly different from their Predynastic predecessors. Again, they occur mostly in a desert context together with other wild animals. By far the majority of the composite animals from this time are known from objects that are referred to as ‘magic wands’. Apparently, there is a link between the choice of hybrid animals and the purpose of these objects. Since the magic wands form such a large part of the total number of known represented composite animals, a selection will be discussed in a case study.

3.1 Gold and gemstones: griffins in jewellery

Levantine influence is again evident in the rendering of two symmetrically placed griffins forming a delicate silver pendant (fig. 22). Executed in the repoussé technique combined with chasing, the creatures are linked by their beaks and extending forepaws that are overlapping each other. The spiralling horns on their



22. Silver pendant with griffins, Twelfth or Thirteenth Dynasty (c. 1985–1795 / 1795–1650 BC).

⁶⁸ Joan Aruz gives some interesting examples of Egyptian motifs found in the Near East and the Aegean, for example Bes and Taweret. See Joan Aruz, Kim Benzel, and Jean M. Evans (eds), *Beyond Babylon: art, trade, and diplomacy in the second millennium B.C.* (New York and New Haven, 2008), 136–48.

⁶⁹ Naguib Kanawati and Alexandra Woods, *Beni Hassan: Art and Daily Life in an Egyptian Province* (Cairo, 2010), 12.

heads are a new feature in the imagining of griffins.⁷⁰ Joan Aruz and Kim Benzel think the animals are wearing long Egyptian headdresses that reach to the chest, but this is difficult to see, maybe the artisan instead depicted lion's manes. The creatures stand on a base curled at both ends, resembling their own curled, doglike tails (which are again a novelty). Whereas Aruz and Benzel believe the silver object is Levantine in origin, others think the pendant derives from a Minoan workshop, despite its Near Eastern features.⁷¹ In my opinion it could as well have been fabricated in Egypt, inspired by Levantine motifs. By all means, these different opinions show the difficulty of tracing back the origin of an object when its motifs are subject to an exchange of artistic ideas.

Two elaborate pectorals show the type of griffin resembling its Old Kingdom predecessor depicted on the causeway walls. The first of both adornments (fig. 23) was found in a royal tomb in



Dashur: it once belonged to princess Mereret, daughter of Sesostri III.⁷² Composed of gold, lapis lazuli, cornelian, and turquoise, the piece of jewellery is truly princess worthy.⁷³ The cloisonné front depicts a mirrored scene of two griffins facing each other, while trampling enemies. Each of the hybrid beings is holding a paw on the head of an enemy that is pushed to the ground. This time the griffins wear a high double feather crown with *uraeus* and ram- and cow horns, on top of a tripartite hairdo.

23. Pectoral with two griffins, from the cache of Mereret in Dashur. Twelfth Dynasty (reign of Ammenemes III, c. 1854–1808 BC).

Between both creatures a cartouche containing the throne name of Sesostri III is depicted, underneath a large figure of the vulture goddess Nekhbet with outstretched wings. The scene is framed by two lotuses with open flowers, together with another bending inwards, and topped by a cavetto cornice. Since this pectoral was found in a royal grave, it could be yet another indication that up to this time, this type of griffin was reserved for pharaonic iconography, certainly due to the royal headdresses the animals are wearing.

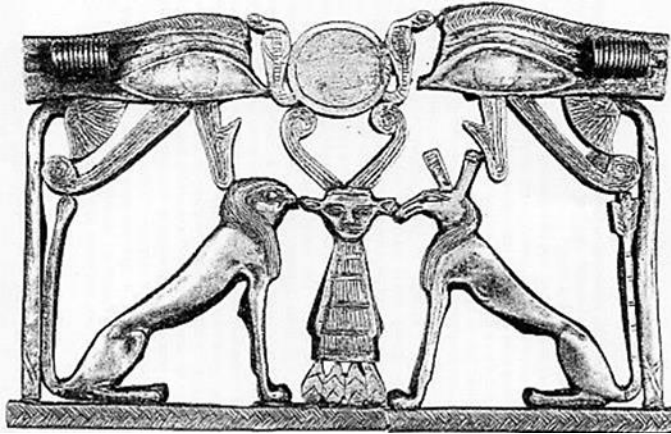
⁷⁰ According to Aruz and Kim Benzel, these spirals might be associated with Hathor, when compared to an ivory plaque from Byblos (cat. no. 26 in their publication). See Aruz, Benzel, and Evans, *Beyond Babylon*, 113–14.

⁷¹ Aruz, Benzel, and Evans, *Beyond Babylon*, 113.

⁷² Carol A. R. Andrews, *Ancient Egyptian Jewellery* (London, 1996), 128.

⁷³ Gerke, *Der altägyptische Greif* 15, 141.

The other collar necklace (fig. 24) dates also to the Twelfth Dynasty, although its whereabouts are unsure. This exemplar, also executed in cloisonné, depicts a squatting griffin and Seth-animal facing each other, their tails held upright.⁷⁴ This time the griffin lacks wings, but the animal can still be considered composite because of its falcon's head and lion's body. Both animals wear the tripartite hairstyle often worn by gods. Between them a symbol resembling a sistrum (without hoop) with cow goddess can be seen, which symbolizes the goddess Bat, predecessor of Hathor.⁷⁵ Right on top, a sun disk is flanked by two *uraei*, each in their turn preceded by a large *wꜥ3.t* eye. The animals are flanked on both sides by a bending papyrus stem with open flowers.



24. Pectoral with griffin and Seth-animal, from Dashur (?), Twelfth Dynasty (c. 1985–1795 BC).

disk is flanked by two *uraei*, each in their turn preceded by a large *wꜥ3.t* eye. The animals are flanked on both sides by a bending papyrus stem with open flowers.

According to Carol Andrews, the animals fulfil the role as protectors of Upper and Lower Egypt, but this remains an assumption.⁷⁶ One thing is certain: since these griffins are the sole examples of their type from the Middle Kingdom, it can be ascertained that they are the exception in the art repertoire of this time.

3.2 The composite animal in wall paintings: prey or predator?

The small village of Beni Hassan some twenty kilometres south of El-Minya, forms the backdrop of an important group of rock-cut tombs carved into the eastern limestone cliffs, providing a magnificent view across the river.⁷⁷ The tombs are divided over two ridges: the upper terrace is the last resting places of the nobles of the province, while at the base of the cliffs a series of less elaborate tombs are located. Of the thirty-nine rock-cut tombs of the upper cemetery, only twelve are decorated with wall paintings and inscriptions which allude to a range of administrative positions. Eight of these decorated tombs belong to governors of the Oryx-nome, who served the kingdom during the Eleventh and Twelfth Dynasties.⁷⁸ By lifetime, the officials to whom the tombs belong enjoyed an array of leisure activities, including hunting in the desert. One of the nomarchs had chosen to decorate the walls of his tomb with a detailed hunting scene, including a special creature.

Tomb no. 3 (fig. 25) belongs to Khnumhotep II, a nobleman who held several titles, for

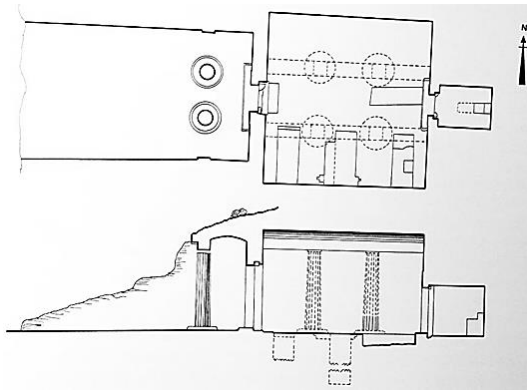
⁷⁴ Presumably from Dashur too, see Gerke, *Der altägyptische Greif* 15, 141; Andrews, *Jewellery*, 91.

⁷⁵ Gerke, *Der altägyptische Greif* 15, 141; Wilkinson, *Reading Egyptian Art*, 213.

⁷⁶ Andrews, *Jewellery*, 91.

⁷⁷ Due to its possession of good quality limestone, the region witnessed large scale quarrying activities from the Predynastic period up until the Late Period. See Kanawati and Woods, *Beni Hassan*, 5.

⁷⁸ The lower cemetery tombs were reused in the Middle Kingdom. They consist of hundreds of shaft tombs that probably belonged to residents of the region and close relatives of the noble officials, who obtained a richer grave in the upper cemetery. See Kanawati and Woods, *Beni Hassan*, 5–6.



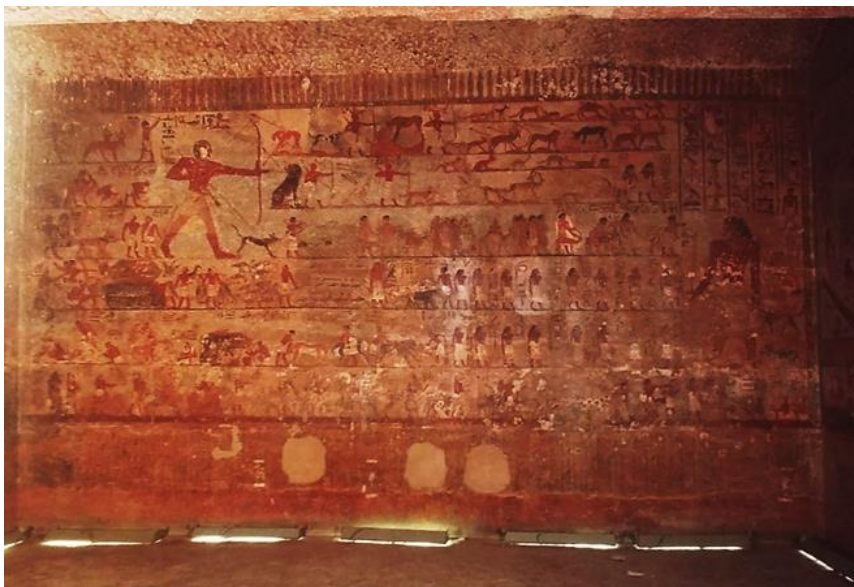
25. Plan and section of Khnumhotep II's tomb, Twelfth Dynasty (reigns of Amenemhat II and Senwosret II) (c. 1922–1874 BC).

example 'hereditary prince' and 'overseer of the Eastern Desert', as well as some priesthoods.⁷⁹ When looking at the footage of this tomb, one has to agree with Kanawati and Wood that Khnumhotep II was buried in one of the best preserved and most detailed executed tombs of Beni Hassan. Preceded by an open court and a portico, the chapel of the elaborately decorated tomb is formed of a main room and a shrine.

The artist(s) painted the scenes and accompanying inscriptions in great detail over a thin layer of gypsum plaster.⁸⁰ In fact, the attention in detail is such that even a fine shading can be observed on the painted animals.

Besides common themes such as agricultural pursuits and exercising crafts and industries, the chapel includes a scene (fig. 26) in which Khnumhotep II is shown hunting wild animals in the desert. This activity is divided in two rows in the uppermost register of the northern wall, almost completely covering its full width.

The tomb owner is clearly represented as the major figure leading the hunt: depicted in a larger size, he covers the height of the concerning register. The nomarch is assisted by his sons and attendants, who are chasing the desert animals with bows and arrows, aided by hunting dogs. The artist also thought of the imagination of the desolate desert landscape, which is represented by sand dunes. Above the animals, a large fence covers the full width of the scene. It looks like the hunt is



26. North wall of the tomb of Khnumhotep II (c. 1922–1874 BC).

taking place inside this fenced enclosure, since some animals are shown grazing just outside the fence. By driving up the prey and surrounding them in the enclosure, the animals were trapped. The desert inhabitants range from large feline animals as lions and cheetahs, to jackals, wild bulls, gazelles, oryxes, and

⁷⁹ Kanawati and Woods, *Beni Hassan*, 33.

⁸⁰ Kanawati and Woods, *Beni Hassan*, 35–6.

ibexes. In addition, smaller sized foxes (and hedgehogs) can be found in the rows of animals that are being chased down.⁸¹ Furthermore, the hunting spectacle is enlivened by arrows flying around the prey, some of them hitting their target. Whereas the animals are represented in great detail, their attitude is rather rigid. The group of prey derived from the ‘real world’ is enriched by the figure of an elaborately painted griffin (figs. 27 and 28). The exquisite quality in which the animal is portrayed can also be explained by the medium the artist used: wall paintings make the execution of details better possible than hard materials as stone or ivory. In addition to the quality, the appearance of this griffin is different in comparison to his previously discussed ‘relatives’. The griffin’s wings are more V-shaped instead of flat or folded against the body.

Lisa Sabbahy believes that the dangerous character of the griffin is primarily made up by its ability to fly and strike his prey from above.⁸² By representing the griffin with its wings down, the hazardous quality of the animal is taken away. Moreover, the animal’s body in Khnumhotep III’s tomb is shaped more slender and contains speckles, suggesting the upper body of this example is not leonine, but from another member of the *Panthera* family.⁸³ The griffin’s neck is also longer than the former discussed griffins, and bent down instead of raised up.⁸⁴ Perhaps the position of the animal’s neck could also indicate its aggressive or tamed nature: bended down, it would do less harm. The most remarkable of this animal however, is the male head sprouting between the griffin’s wings. Cut off at the neck, the head leaves the viewer with questions. Why did the artisan add a human part to the composite animal?



27. Griffin with V-shaped wings and male head situated on the north wall of the tomb of Khnumhotep II (c. 1922–1874 BC).

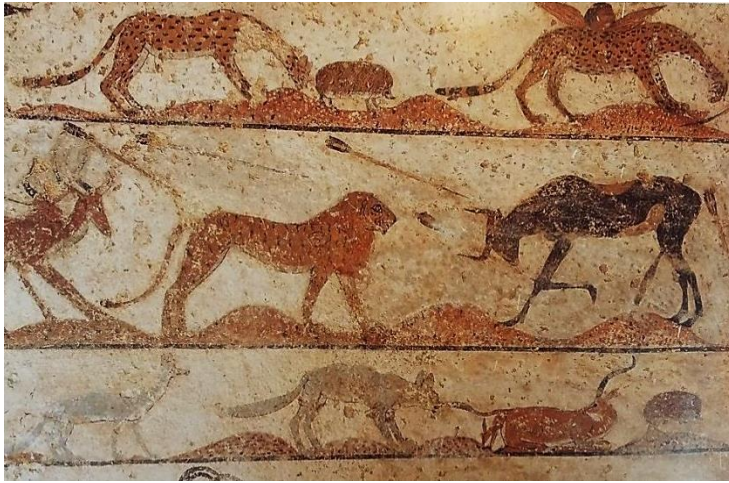
⁸¹ For a complete designation of the species depicted, see Naguib Kanawati and Linda Evans, *Beni Hassan, I: The tomb of Khnumhotep II* (Australian Centre for Egyptology 36; Oxford, 2014), 46–7.

⁸² Email, 02.11.2015, addenda, 67.

⁸³ Gerke is certain that the griffin’s body is derived from a jaguar. See Gerke, *Der altägyptische Greif* 15, 136.

⁸⁴ Kanawati and Woods describe the griffin’s head and neck as snake-like. In my opinion, the neck is certainly long, but since it is spotted a reference to a snake seems out of the question. Also, the animal comes into my mind as falcon-headed, anything but serpentine. See Kanawati and Woods, *Beni Hassan*, 79.

No written sources have been preserved that explain this extraordinary motif, but Lisa Sabbahy has her own supposition about the inclusion of these human heads. The form of the griffin's wings remind her of the horns of the divine cow, as well as the curved shape of the traditional Egyptian headrest.



28. Hunting scene in Khnumhotep II's tomb (c. 1922–1874 BC).

According to Sabbahy, this shape was not only thought of as the horizon, but also of the petals of the lotus flower. She continues her presumption by saying that Egyptian mythology recounts the birth of the young sun god out of lotus petals. Therefore, Sabbahy assumes that the griffin's wings symbolically represent the horizon where the sun was born anew every morning. By bringing these symbolical elements together, she

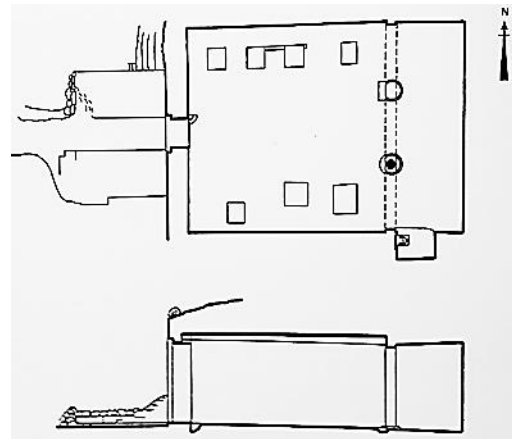
argues the head between the griffin's wings symbolizes the young sun god itself, born out of the horizon or lotus plumes surrounding him. Since everything in this philosophy revolves around the birth of the sun god, Sabbahy supposes the key to the appearance of the winged griffins is birth symbolism. Moreover, because the creatures are depicted in a funeral setting, she thinks the griffins allude to rebirth symbolism.⁸⁵

Even though Sabbahy is still searching for further proof to support her hypothesis, I believe her current ideas are implausible. In the first place, the griffin's wings in the wall paintings (and on other objects, as will be clear later) are not really curved, but rather V-shaped. Therefore, I do not see a correlation between the creature's wings and horizon symbolism. Whereas the wings do kind of remind of lotus petals, they differ in such manner from the traditional Egyptian way of depicting lotus flowers that this link seems to me out of the question. Besides, then it would not make sense for the artisans to carefully indicate feathers on the wings, which will become apparent in later examples. Most of all, it is dangerous to make too big steps in the process of interpretation: Sabbahy connects one symbolism to another, forgetting that if the first interpretation is incorrect, her whole hypothesis is unfounded. Since the ancient Egyptians have not handed down the explanation themselves, the puzzle of the male head between the wings remains unanswered.

On the other hand, Hartwig Altenmüller argues that the head symbolizes a dead person,

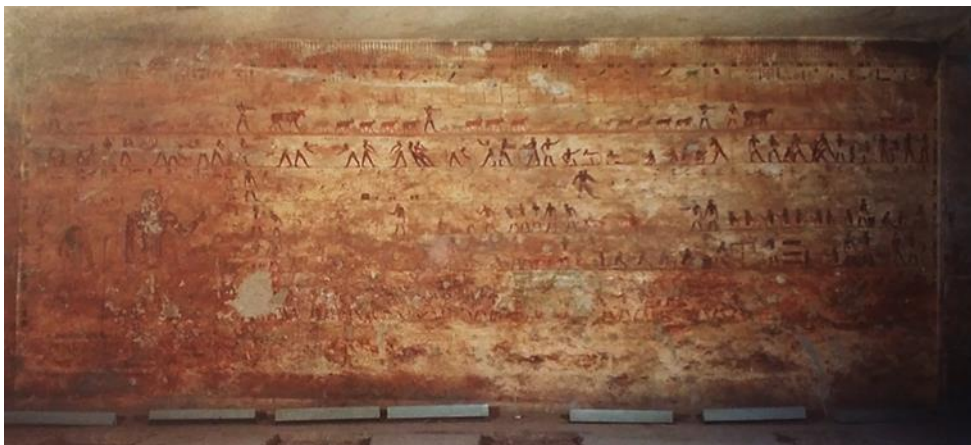
⁸⁵ Sabbahy is currently researching the relation between griffins and birth symbolism. Her conference paper is to be published in Leuven in early 2016. See email 02.11.2015, addenda, 67.

probably of Egyptian origin according to its hairstyle. He thinks a ray of blood is spraying from a head above a griffin on a so-called magic wand in Berlin, but this is unclear from the publication of the wand.⁸⁶ Altenmüller should have given more examples, most of all in which blood is clearly visible. Moreover, as will be clear from later examples, these heads are also depicted attached to the griffin's body, and therefore have nothing to do with dead Egyptians. When looking to the meanings Wilkinson attributes to the head (D 1), he firstly states that it signifies the whole being, whether a person, god, or animal. He gives the Narmer Palette as example, on which the inhabitants of Lower Egypt are symbolized by a head attached to the hieroglyph for land.⁸⁷ Perhaps the head above the griffin referred to desert inhabitants, but this remains an assumption and can hardly be substantiated.



29. Plan and section of Baqet III's tomb, Eleventh Dynasty (c. 2125–1985 BC).

More composite animals at Beni Hassan can be found in tomb no. 15 (fig. 29) belonging to the nomarch Baqet III, a man of importance considering his titles as 'sole companion' and 'great overlord of the entire Oryx-nome'.⁸⁸ One of the largest tombs of the cliff, the last resting place of Baqet III consists of a small open court, a large central room and a small shrine. Although executed in less detail than the previous tomb decoration, the figures and animals in this tomb are still well rendered. The



30. North wall of the tomb of Baqet III (c. 2125–1985 BC).

uppermost register (fig. 30), which extends over the full width of the wall, represents a desert hunt in which four composite animals (figs. 31

⁸⁶ Altenmüller argues that the griffin with V-shaped wings images the god Onuris and that the human head must be seen in the light of the myth of bringing back the 'sun eye' to the sun god. This idea is very far-fetched and there is no evidence whatsoever that the ancient Egyptians were referring to this happening with their depictions of griffins. See Hartwig Altenmüller, 'Der rettende Greif: zu den Bildern des Greifs auf den sog. Zaubermessern des Mittleren Reiches', in Mélanie C. Floßmann-Schütze, Maren Goecke-Bauer, Friedhelm Hoffmann, Andreas Hutterer, Katrin Schlüter, Alexander Schütze, and Martina Ullmann (eds), *Kleine Götter - große Götter: Festschrift für Dieter Kessler zum 65. Geburtstag* (Vaterstetten, 2013), 14–15.

⁸⁷ Wilkinson, *Reading Egyptian Art*, 41.

⁸⁸ Kanawati and Woods point out that Baqet III most probably lived during the Eleventh Dynasty, but that his tomb cannot be dated more precisely. See Kanawati and Woods, *Beni Hassan*, 41.

and 32) are involved. Interesting are the hieroglyphic inscriptions written above each of them, most probably designating the type of creature.

The leftmost of the animals is perhaps not composite, rather seems to be some sort of rhino considering its horn. The inscription above reads *ꜣbw*, meaning ‘elephant’, ‘elephant tusk’ or ‘ivory’, thus indicating that we are probably dealing with an elephant.⁸⁹ The square end of the elephant’s slightly curved horn perhaps indicates that the animal could do no harm. Preceded by the presumed elephant, a type of serpopard can be clearly distinguished. Just as the previously discussed examples, this serpopard has a feline body, mainly marked by its tail that is topped with a plume. This time not only its neck, but also the creature’s head is plainly serpentine. This type of serpopard was designated as *s(w)ḏꜣ*, probably meaning ‘one who travels afar’: perhaps an allusion to the extensive desert the animal dwelled in.⁹⁰ The serpopard is followed by a simply executed figure of a griffin (fig. 32), its unelaborate wings formed by a few strokes of paint. The creature lacks any indication of fur or feathers, still the creature’s beak and his paws and tail indicate that it is partly birdlike, partly feline. In contrast to Khnumhotep II’s griffin, here the intriguing head between the wings is missing. Above the animal can be read *sfr*. The term *sfr* or *srf* does not only occur in wall reliefs, but also appears in texts of later periods, for example in the demotic “Myth of the Solar Eye”.⁹¹

The last of the four ‘unworldly’ animals is perhaps not truly composite in character, but can also not be clearly designated as an existing animal from the real world. The canine-like animal closely resembles the creature that was usually regarded as the manifestation of the god Seth. Whereas the animal poses like a dog or another canine animal like this famous god, this beast has triangular ears and an elongated snout. Therefore, it contradicts the designation as the god Seth, since he was generally depicted with angulated or squared ears and a curved, downwards pointed snout. The hieroglyphs above the animal, reading *šꜣ*, clarify the nature of the animal no further.⁹²

The other animals participating in the hunt are members of the cervid family or other ‘worldly’ animals. The landscape lacks sand dunes, but does contain a few bushes, which reflect the character of the dry scenery. Altogether, the row of animals is depicted a bit more static than the hunt in Khnumhotep’s tomb; flying arrows are lacking, and the animals rather seem to take a slow pace. Still, we are dealing with a hunt considering the appearance of Baqet III and his companions who are carrying bows, arrows and a lasso, while being aided by hunting dogs. However, one vivid detail (fig. 33) needs to be mentioned: a lion biting the muzzle of his prey, trying to suffocate it. Is the lion still hunted down, or aiding the Egyptian hunters? Perhaps the divine character of the lion makes sure that these worshiped animals were never depicted wounded or dead, let alone hunted by humans. Besides,

⁸⁹ Adolf Erman, Hermann Grapow, and Wolja Erichsen, *Wörterbuch der ägyptischen Sprache*, I (Leipzig, 1926), 7.

⁹⁰ Meeks, in Redford (ed.), *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt* I, 506; Gerke, *Der altägyptische Greif* 15, 137.

⁹¹ Papyrus Leiden I 384, second century AD. See Barta, *JEOL* 23, 335; Hsu, *GM* 231, 46.

⁹² Gerke, *Der altägyptische Greif* 15, 137.



31. Composite creatures on the north wall of Baqet III's tomb
(c. 2125–1985 BC).



32. Composite animals on the north wall of Baqet III's tomb
(c. 2125–1985 BC).

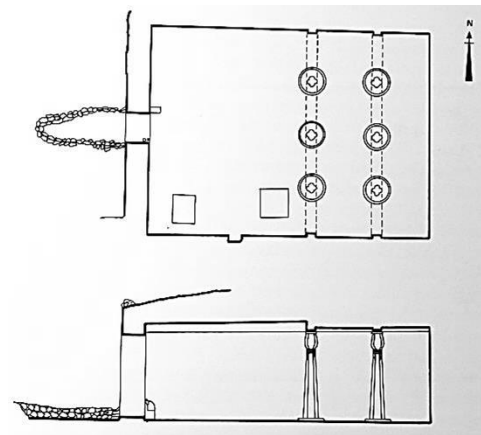


33. Detail of the hunting scene in Baqet III's tomb
(c. 2125–1985 BC).

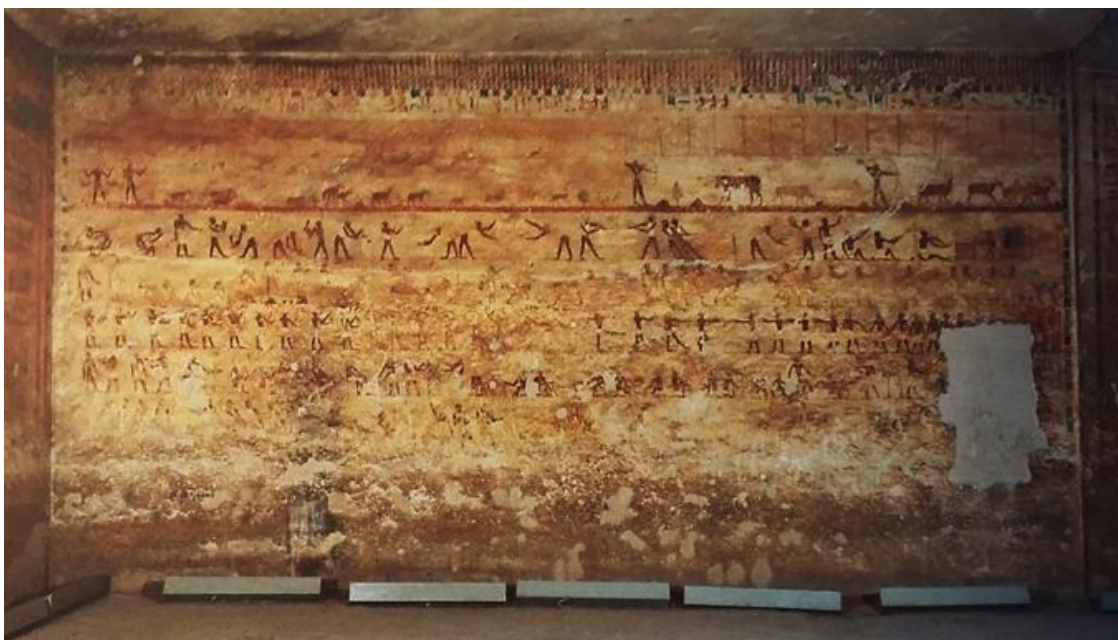
when the lions on the described slate palettes are taken into account, their role as ‘good’ animals on these wall painting is verified. Whether the composite animals are hunters or prey, remains speculative. One thing is certain: they are not portrayed as ferocious beasts that attack the Egyptians.

Close in proximity to the tomb of Baqet III, a nomarch named Khety found his last resting place (fig. 34) in a chapel consisting of one large rectangular room.⁹³ The north wall of the tomb can be split into a western, middle and eastern section, divided by pillars in line with two rows of lotus columns. It is in the western part (fig. 35) that hybrid beings can be found, again in the context of a desert hunt.⁹⁴

Likewise, the artist choose to depict animals inside and outside an enclosed or fenced area (fig. 36), shown above the main row of animals on the baseline. Men are using the traditional gear, bows and arrows, to strike their prey. The hunting scene is carried out in a less static way than Baqet III’s painting: a large mammal is shot down by a rain of arrows, and to the left, a cervid tries to jump over another deer. In the middle section another deer is lying on its back, shot dead or wounded. His companion has just been caught by a lasso, while hunting dogs are driving the other prey.



34. Plan and section of Khety’s tomb (c. 2125–1985 BC).



35. North wall (west section) of the tomb of Khety (c. 2125–1985 BC).

⁹³ Both tombs share architectural and artistic items. Moreover, Kanawati and Woods point to the fact that Khety’s father is named Baqet, which makes their argumentation that Khety is most probably Baqet III’s son, reasonable. See Kanawati and Woods, *Beni Hassan*, 49. Their family bond could have caused the same choice or interest for including composite animals in their tomb decoration.

⁹⁴ The hunting scene extends to the middle section, but here only ‘worldly’ animals are depicted caught up in the hunt.



36. Enclosed or fenced area depicted on the north wall (west section) of the tomb of Khety (c. 2125–1985 BC).

Overall it is a vivid scene, set to the background of a desolate landscape indicated by some sand dunes. In the middle of the western section three composite animals (fig. 37) can be distinguished. To the left is a Seth animal, similar to the one in Baqet III's tomb. The middle animal can hardly be recognized as a griffin, judging from its V-shaped wings and feline body.

There are no traces of a head between the wings. Finally, a serpopard is visible: its slender, feline body painted ochre red, including the serpentine neck and head. The names of the composite animals are, as seems to occur more often at Beni Hassan, again written above them: *š3*, *sfr*, and *s(w)q3*.⁹⁵ The row of animals is almost faded away by the ravages of time and from what is left, they do not seem to have been carried out in a particularly detailed manner.

This in contrast to one other griffin (fig. 38) that can be hardly overlooked on the south wall of Khety's tomb: the animal is by far the most intricately executed example of the discussed griffins yet. The text above refers to the creature as a *s3g.<t> rn=s* (Saget is his name). The feline body of the falcon-headed creature almost looks like a brightly coloured patchwork: its upper body is yellow, whereas its hind legs and belly are vivid green. Notice the toothed underside with traces of red paint: an unusual detail previously unseen by



37. Composite animals on the north wall of the tomb of Khety (c. 2125–1985 BC).

⁹⁵ Gerke, *Der altägyptische Greif* 15, 138.

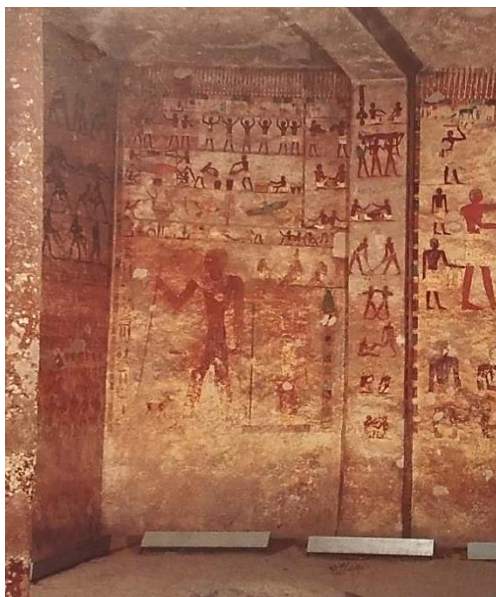


38. Griffin on the south wall of the tomb of Khety (c. 2125–1985 BC).

griffins. Van Walsem supposes these represent nipples, copied from pigs, which is a plausible assumption.⁹⁶ The bright blue back ends in a forked tail, according to Kanawati and Woods reminiscent of the Seth creature.⁹⁷ Just as was the case in the funerary complexes of Sahure and Pepi II, the griffin's wings are folded against the body.

However here the feathered parts are richly decorated in a striped pattern. The most important detail is the broad, elaborately box-hatched collar around the griffin's neck. Besides, the creature is leashed, although the rope is not held by someone.

By wearing these items, the creature is truly represented as a domesticated animal that would have done no harm to the Egyptians. This can be an expression of taming wild, dangerous desert animals, but seen in the light of the hunting scenes, the griffins seem to have been presented as being tame themselves.



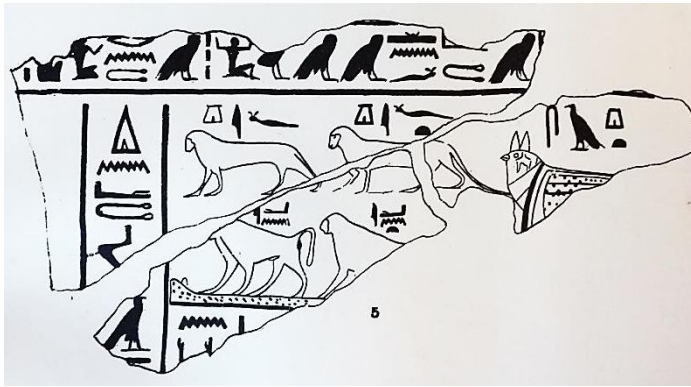
39. South wall (east section) of Khety's tomb (c. 2125–1985 BC).

Notably too is the positioning (fig. 39) of the composite animal on the wall. Hovering in space, the animal is shown immediately in front of the tomb owner's face, who is standing with his wife and dog. Khety is wearing a leopard skin and is holding a staff and sceptre. Could it be that Khety was preparing himself for the desert hunt, depicted elsewhere in the tomb? Or is the griffin, just like the dog, one of the tomb owner's pets? Unfortunately, Khety's decorative programme will not solve these questions.

Apart from hunting scenes, composite animals also appear on wall reliefs of which the context is not entirely clear. One example was found near a Twelfth Dynasty tomb at El-Bersheh, the chief city of the Middle

⁹⁶ Mentioned in an oral discussion with Van Walsem on 16.12.2015.

⁹⁷ Kanawati and Woods, *Beni Hassan*, 79. The stylized tail also shares some similarities with the lotus or water lily, even more when taken into account that it is painted blue, just like the Egyptian blue *Nymphaea cerulea*. See Wilkinson, *Reading Egyptian Art*, 121.



40. Fragment of wall painting depicting monkeys and an griffin, the tomb of Neheri I at El-Bersheh (c. 1985–1795 BC).

Kingdom nomarchs of the Hare nome.

The decoration of the two-chambered tomb of governor Neheri I had witnessed vandalism – and an earthquake – through the ages, leaving only a few blocks in situ and several others lying scattered close to the tomb. On one of these fragments (fig. 40) illustrated by Percy Newberry, a

griffin is depicted in the company of from monkeys designated as guenons (*gif/gif.t*) and baboons (*j'n/j'n.t*). The griffin is only

recognizable as such because of the wings on its back and its bird's beak. This exemplar also has two horns or pointed ears, perhaps derived from feline ears. The legs and back of the hybrid being are broken off the fragment. The inscription above the hybrid being refers to the animal as *s3g.t*, denoting the animal as a female.⁹⁸ Since this term also appeared in the description of the previous mentioned griffin at the tomb of Khety, it was most probably a designation for this kind of domesticated type of griffin (and not the griffin's name, for example).

More composite animals in El-Bersheh can be found in the tomb of the nomarch Ahanakht, the first officer of his time in the Hare nome.⁹⁹ One might think that Ahanakht's position assured him of a richly decorated tomb, but the wall paintings are of modest quality. Much of the monument has not withstood the ravages of time: earthquakes and quarrying have caused great damage. The last resting place of Ahanakht originally comprised two chambers, but the ancient Egyptians accidentally (or deliberately) quarried away the entire second chamber when building another tomb.¹⁰⁰ Nonetheless, the scenes and inscriptions were carved so deeply in sunk relief that the outlines are often still traceable in the limestone bedrock.¹⁰¹ Besides, the preserved themes of the wall paintings are varied and rare, which makes this tomb an interesting subject of study.¹⁰²

Like the wall paintings at Beni Hassan, the composite animals (fig. 41) in the outer chamber of

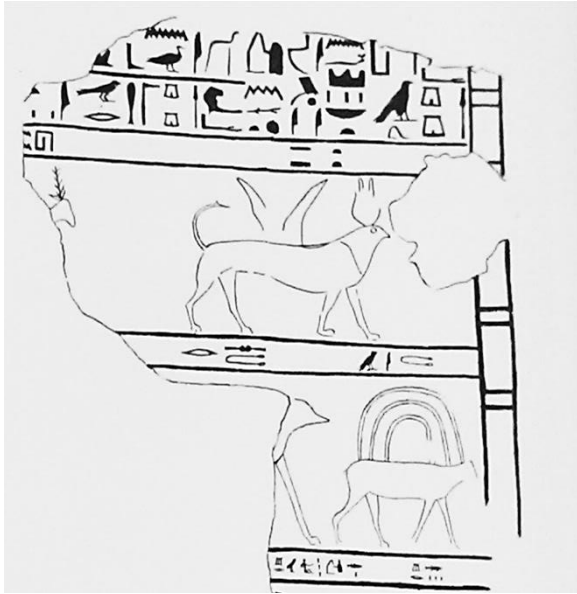
⁹⁸ In Dutch, *gif(.t)* are referred to as meerkatten. See Gerke, *Der altägyptische Greif* 15, 139. Unfortunately, the block was not recovered during the dig season in 1990 carried out by a joint expedition in which Leiden University participated. See David P. Silverman, Edward Brovarski, and Rita E. Freed, *Bersheh Reports*, I (Boston, 1992), 63; Percy E. Newberry, *El Bersheh*, II (London, 1895), 5.

⁹⁹ Based on the style of the wall paintings, the tomb is dated late in the reign of Mentuhotep II. See Silverman, Brovarski, and Freed, *Bersheh Reports*, 56.

¹⁰⁰ Newberry, *El Bersheh*, 29.

¹⁰¹ Silverman, Brovarski, and Freed, *Bersheh Reports*, 53.

¹⁰² Newberry believes that in Ahanakht's tomb the earliest examples of 'mythical' animals can be found, which is incorrect regarding, for example, the Predynastic slate palettes. See Newberry, *El Bersheh*, 8–9.



41. Fragment from the outer chamber of the tomb of Ahanakht, El-Bersheh (c. 1985–1795 BC).

Ahanakht's tomb are represented in the context of what is presumably intended as a hunting scene.¹⁰³

Two rows of desert animals are visible on the uppermost section of the right side of the inner wall. Unfortunately, Ahanakht's hunting scene is badly damaged, making it hard to distinguish some of the half preserved animals. Left on the top row, the head of an animal with antlers is still visible, recognizable by the inscription *hnn* as a fallow deer.¹⁰⁴ The cervid is preceded by what is clearly a type of griffin, considering its feline body and bird's head resembling that of a falcon. The creature's wings are simply V-shaped, lacking any references to feathers, and also without a male head

between them. The plainly rendered body of the

griffin recalls his relative in the tomb of Baqet III, although at El-Bersheh the creature has its tail curved. Moreover, one detail is new in the repertoire of griffin images thus far: Ahanakht's griffin wears a head ornament, resembling the stylized horns which were often worn by gods. Newberry also recognizes plumes between them, but I think the publicized picture is too vague to prove this statement.¹⁰⁵ Furthermore, reference is made to the griffin with a hitherto unknown name: *tštš*, meaning "the one who tears to pieces".¹⁰⁶ Quite a fearsome denotation and appropriate to the nature of the beast in the service of those who sought for protection.

In the lower row the remains of two animals are visible, although the left one is mostly quarried away. The inscription above the creature refers to it as a *str*. What remains of this animal are its head with a pointed nose and its front paw. According to Newberry, the animal depicts a hound or a composite animal.¹⁰⁷ In my opinion the snout is too pointed to be of a hound, but rather belongs to another griffin, also when taken into account the animal's feline-looking paw. To the right of this undefinable creature, some fawn or calf-like animal designated as *tjm* is depicted. Unseen in both two- and three-dimensional art before, this creature wears a strange object on its back, composed of three concentric lines running from one side of the animal's back to its neck. Newberry supposes the symbol represents the hieroglyphic sign S35 for a fan or sunshade, to adorn or decorate the desert animal

¹⁰³ As seen in the view of Newberry. Whether we are really dealing with a desert hunt, will become clear below. See Newberry, *El Bersheh*, 34.

¹⁰⁴ Gerke, *Der altägyptische Greif* 15, 140.

¹⁰⁵ Newberry, *El-Bersheh*, 34–5; Gerke, *Der altägyptische Greif* 15, 140.

¹⁰⁶ Gerke, *Der altägyptische Greif* 15, 140.

¹⁰⁷ Newberry, *El-Bersheh*, 34.

against the heat.¹⁰⁸ However, Egyptian shades are depicted differently in wall paintings, most of the time lotiform- or palmiform shaped, otherwise in the form of other plants or bird wings. In any case these fans do not consist of the lines as seen on the back of this desert animal. What it does stand for, remains a mystery.

Furthermore, Newberry argues that the left-hand side was probably occupied by normal, ‘worldly’ animals, while the other end depicts composite creatures.¹⁰⁹ Since only a head of an animal with antlers remains to the left of the griffin, it is not proven that this and the other animals were ordinary beasts. Perhaps there were no more animals portrayed at this section, or even more composite animals. At the same time, Newberry’s designation of the scene as a desert hunt casts doubt. Unlike the vivid interplay between the predators and their prey in the tombs of Beni Hassan, no tomb owner is shown chasing the animals together with his relatives. Nor do the animals interact with each other, whereas in the previous described hunting scenes prey was overthrown by the claws of the feline predators, or felled by a rain of arrows. Neither is a desert landscape indicated by sand dunes or bushes. Of course, all these details could have been quarried away in ancient times, yet the outlines of the creatures remain, so if references to a hunt in the desert existed, traces should be visible. Apart from that, when the position of Ahanakht’s scene is taken into account compared to the location of the previously described hunting scenes, it becomes clear that there is a preference for the highest register on the wall. Therefore, the theme was considered quite important, but not the most relevant, otherwise the hybrid animals would have been positioned completely at the bottom of the walls or at eye-sight.¹¹⁰

At first, the composite animals can be thought of beasts that were hunted down in the desert, but the wall paintings at Beni Hassan suggests that the opposite is true: the griffins in these scenes seems to be at the service of the hunter in chasing the real world variety.¹¹¹ The tomb owners’ choice for the inclusion of a hunting scene could be sought in its symbolical significance. According to some, hunting beyond the Nile valley was conceived as an act of preserving *maat*, or order. By subduing and taming hostile forces that threatened the fertile Nile and therefore the Egyptian civilisation, the hunt became a protective ritual for the benefit of Egypt.¹¹² On the other hand, the limited presence of hunting scenes in tombs of this period refutes that hunting was a matter of vital importance. It is quite possible that the hunting scenes are some sort of expression of an ancient Egyptian encyclopaedia

¹⁰⁸ Newberry, *El-Bersheh*, 34; Wilkinson, *Reading Egyptian Art*, 179.

¹⁰⁹ Newberry, *El-Bersheh*, 35.

¹¹⁰ The most important/appreciated scenes were located on eye level: a position where composite animals never occur. Nor are they to be found below eye sight.

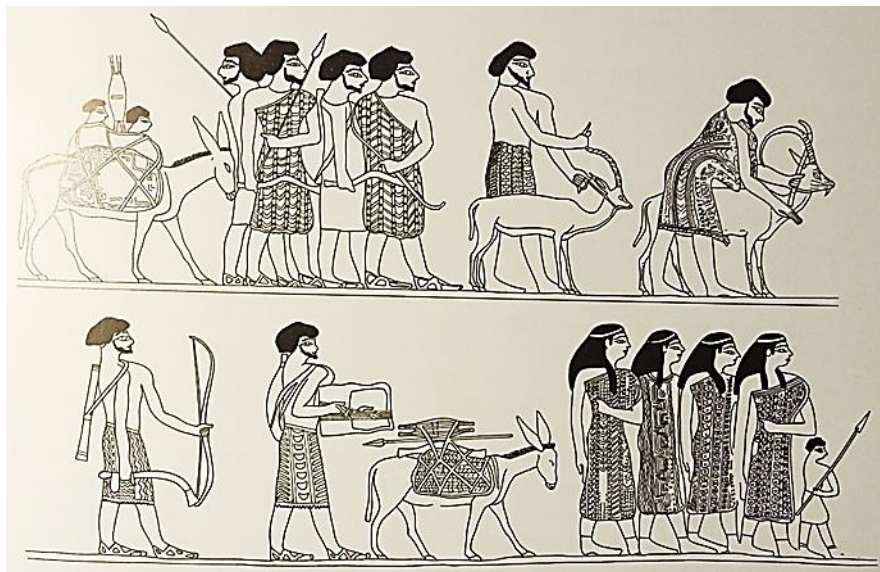
¹¹¹ Meeks believes that in one scene the dogs and griffin resemble each other in such a way, that the hybrid being can only be recognized by its wings. He is most probably talking about the scene in the grave of Khnumhotep II: still the griffin is completely different, if only by the intricately painted fur. Meeks even mentions that it has been supposed that the griffins were actually dogs in disguise to look like the hybrid beings, in order to transform ordinary hunting dogs into fearsome hunters. According to him, this ceremonial spectacle could have enhanced the prestige of the dog’s owner. Without any (textual or other) evidence this suggestion remains implausible. Especially seen in the light of the ‘domesticated’ griffins on a leash, the idea seems unconvincing. See Meeks, in Redford (ed.), *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt* I, 505.

¹¹² Meeks, in Redford (ed.), *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt* I, 505.

showing which animals were living in the desert.¹¹³ This argument is strengthened by other scenes on the walls of the tombs of Khnumhotep II, Baqet III and Khety. These tombs include an inventory of real birds, portrayed in such a truthful way that the exact species of each bird has been identified. Some of them are also accompanied by their names.¹¹⁴ Perhaps the nomarchs thought of themselves as experts on zoology, implicating that they perceived composite animals to be part of the natural environment as well.

According to Rita Freed, the unusual iconography of griffins shared by El-Bersheh and Beni Hassan suggests that regionally a common artistic milieu existed.¹¹⁵ These two cities are in close proximity of each other, thus it is highly possibly that trading contacts between both cities existed during the Middle Kingdom. Not to mention that the important desert road to the Red Sea coast, the Sinai and to Nubia started at these places. The nomarchs who built their tombs at Beni Hassan and El-Bersheh were most probably occupied with the inspection of these roads. When hunting in the desert or inspecting the trade roads, the nomarchs could have witnessed shy desert animals in the distance. The vibrating desert air may have distorted body parts of these animals, which made the nomarchs believe the refracted images were as real as other ‘normal’ desert animals.¹¹⁶

The resemblance of the hybrid beings of the rock cut tombs at Beni Hassan and their counterparts in neighbouring countries is interesting in the light of another scene (fig. 42) found in the



tomb of Khnumhotep II, previously discussed for its composite animals. Located in the register directly under the desert hunt, this scene could strongly be related to the origin of these creatures. During the reign of king Senwosret II, this governor chose to depict the arrival of Asiatics in the province. The group

42. The arrival of Asiatics in Egypt in Khnumhotep II's tomb (c. 1922–1874 BC).

¹¹³ Argued by Van Walsem in an oral discussion on 16.12.2015.

¹¹⁴ Kanawati and Woods, *Beni Hassan*, 78.

¹¹⁵ This assumption is not only based on the occurrence of griffins in tombs found in these places, but also other iconographical features, like baboons and wrestlers. Moreover, the analysis of the style of the tomb scenes Freed gives, makes her argument highly plausible. It is even possible that the same artisans worked at these sites, but to confirm this, more research is needed. For an art historical overview of the examined tombs and their cohesion with the so-called pre- and post-reunification styles, see Silverman, Brovarski, and Freed, *Bersheh Reports*, 53–63.

¹¹⁶ Argued by Van Walsem in an oral discussion on 16.12.2015.

counts 37 people and is designated as '3mw (Asiatics), led by the 'ruler of foreign land, Ibsha'. According to Kanawati and Woods, the presence of woman and children in the group and their luggage indicates that these foreigners were not for a short period, but for a longer time or even permanently in Egypt. It is highly possible that these foreigners were recruited for an army. Moreover, in the light of this image Kanawati and Woods point to a strong reversal from past circumstances: instead of fighting for (or against) the Egyptian state, the Asiatic soldiers are hired by provincial governors.¹¹⁷ This indicates that there was close contact between the ethnicities, which must have stimulated an exchange of artistic ideas, perhaps causing the close resemblance in the depiction of the composite animals.

3.3 Case study: the magic sphere of Middle Kingdom wands

Magic played a primary role in ancient Egypt when it came to warding off evil spirits and invoking deities to protect the vulnerable. A particularly interesting group of artefacts in this sphere are the so-called magic knives, also known as apotropaic (i.e. evil repelling) wands.¹¹⁸ For references to these artefacts, the term 'wand' shall be used here, as this term is most commonly used in literature. The term 'knife' is rather misleading, since the edges of the objects are rounded and were certainly not meant to cut. The wands are a common feature in burials of the late Middle Kingdom, though they were used up to the early New Kingdom. They all have a similar shape: curved with one end slightly rounded, the other flat. The objects are usually made of hippopotamus tusk (hence the curved shape), which may also be an allusion to an intrinsic value that the Egyptians attributed to this fearsome, but also worshipped beast. In most cases, only the curved side of the wands is incised, the other left blank.¹¹⁹ Some examples contain inscribed words or sentences that reveal their purpose; protective words or spells that should repel off evil.¹²⁰ The beneficial purpose is further enhanced by the incised images of protective images on each wand, varying from a proto version of Bes to the hippopotamus goddess Taweret, as well as lions, scarabs and demons.¹²¹ Most of these animals have ancient

¹¹⁷ Kanawati and Woods, *Beni Hassan*, 12–13.

¹¹⁸ Concerning the limits of this thesis, not all the preserved magic wands can be discussed here. Therefore, I have chosen for a selection: the magic wands in the collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art and of the British Museum which are of relevance in this research.

¹¹⁹ There are also examples of wands without decoration.

¹²⁰ It has been suggested that the protective benefit was achieved by scraping in the earth around the area where persons slept. See website Metropolitan Museum <<http://www.metmuseum.org/collection/the-collection-online/search/544243>> accessed: 06.12.2015. According to the Brooklyn museum, the magic knives were placed on the stomachs of pregnant women during childbirth and on babies to ward off evil, but this sounds rather interpretive and has not been proven. See website Brooklyn museum <http://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/objects/3185/Fragment_of_Magic_Knife> accessed 06.12.2015.

¹²¹ Bes and Taweret are both associated with childbirth, while scarabs refer to rebirth. See Wilkinson, *Reading Egyptian Art*, 107.

connotations with fertility, regeneration and protection. Of interest here is that composite animals often seem to be present on these wands, many of them containing a griffin and/or a serpopard.¹²²

3.3.1 Memphite wands from the Metropolitan Museum of Art

The Metropolitan Museum of Art owns twenty-three complete and fragmentary preserved magic wands, of which nine include images of composite animals. The majority of them was found in pits in northern Lisht, in the Memphite area. However, none of these magic wands were located in the same pit. The first example (fig. 43) derives from a pit in the tomb of Nakht. The wand was originally shattered in six pieces but glued back to its former glory. In the left corner the head of an unknown animal with pointed ears is visible, a motive that will recur more often in this place as will be clear later. This animal is followed by a female headed cobra with a woman's face. Armed with a knife, the demon is depicted on (probably in, according to the principles of Egyptian art) a basket. Next a remarkable scene can be seen in which a man is being slayed down by a creature that is also armed with a knife. The animal is composed of a hippopotamus' upper body and the hind legs of a lioness (or other big wild feline). Noteworthy is the back of the creature, resembling the horned back and tail of a crocodile. As will appear later, all images of this animal on magic wands contain this stylized crocodile spine, ranging in detail.

The knives that are depicted on this and on all other magic wands are the same as the hieroglyph *des*, used in the context of cutting, carving and slaying.¹²³ Therefore, it can be assumed that the creatures holding knives were protecting the owner of the wand against evil spirits. They may as well represent the danger itself, but in my opinion the former interpretation seems more plausible,



43. Magic wand from northern Lisht, late Twelfth to early Thirteenth Dynasty (c. 1850–1700 BC).

¹²² In his research to Middle Kingdom magic wands, Altenmüller has attributed the griffin to the 'Horus gods', who slash their enemies and those of the sun god. In my opinion this is ungrounded, since no Egyptian sources clearly prove this. See Altenmüller, in M. C. Floßmann-Schütze, M. Goetze-Bauer, F. Hoffmann, A. Hutterer, K. Schlüter, A. Schütze, and M. Ullmann (eds), *Kleine Götter - große Götter*, 11; Barta, *JEOL* 23, 348.

¹²³ Wilkinson, *Reading Egyptian Art*, 189.

given the nature of the animals that are holding the knives. They all have a fearsome side, but their protective characteristics speak for their good nature.¹²⁴ So the man that is slayed down on the wand discussed here, represents evil, whereas the hippopotamus-creature protects the holder of the wand against these forces. From early times, the hippo was seen as a fearsome beast that trampled the harvest. Therefore, the animal was hunted down and seen as a manifestation of disorder. Most of all, the hippopotamus represented not only doom and gloom, but was also held in awe.

On the magic wands the animal is depicted as a symbol of fertility in the guise of Taweret, the goddess of pregnancy. That the focus here lays more on her positive, protective forces instead of her negative, harmful character, can be seen from her standing pose on her hind legs.¹²⁵ Still, the artist of this magic wand chose to include the dangerous side of the hippo: the unfortunate's right arm is already in Taweret's mouth and the next two men await no rosy faith either. While one person has been trampled down by a lion, the other is being devoured by this predator. The role of the lion here resembles that of the lion depicted on the previous discussed slate palettes. Thereafter the cobra is depicted again, although mirrored, without a knife and with big spread wings. Finally, the wand displays an inscription which reads "protection by day" and "protection by night".¹²⁶ The words consist of schematically scratched hieroglyphs into the ivory and are accompanied by the figure of a seated god with a donkey's head (Seth?). According to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the wand shows signs of wear on one tip, which would indicate use in life before the magic object was placed in the grave.¹²⁷

The surface of another wand (fig. 44) which was found in Lisht too, is almost completely covered with cracks, but the protective animals are still recognizable. At the far left, a large crocodile is visible: the artist incised lines and dots to indicate the animal's scale and the spiny crest on its tail. Just like the hippopotamus, the crocodile was perceived by the Egyptians as both a dangerous and a sacred animal. Fearsome, because the animal caused death of fishermen on the Nile, sacred for its emerging from the water like the sun god.¹²⁸ In addition, it seems that the Egyptians thought that the dangerous side of this kind of aggressive animals could be turned against enemies, thereby protecting

¹²⁴ The role of the snakes on the wands seems remarkable at first. As Wilkinson recalls, hostile animals like serpents and scorpions were often depicted cut by several knives, because the ancient Egyptians believed that by doing so, the animals could do no harm. But on the wands, snakes are holding knives as a weapon: in this view, they should not be interpreted as malevolent creatures. Most of all, the well-known dilated hood of the serpents that are depicted on the magic wands proves that (in these cases) we are dealing with the rearing cobra. This sacred creature became associated with the sun, the kingdom of Lower Egypt and more symbolic connotations, as well as deities. See Wilkinson, *Reading Egyptian Art*, 189 and 109.

¹²⁵ According to Wilkinson, hippopotami standing on all four legs usually represent the negative side of the animal, though there are exceptions, for example the funerary bed. See Wilkinson, *Reading Egyptian Art*, 71.

¹²⁶ Website Metropolitan Museum of Art <<http://www.metmuseum.org/collection/the-collection-online/search/544243>> accessed 06.12.2015.

¹²⁷ Website Metropolitan Museum of Art <<http://www.metmuseum.org/collection/the-collection-online/search/544243>> accessed 06.12.2015. I think it is hard to see very clear traces of use, only the tip seems to be slightly worn off. On the other hand, this may also have been caused by natural influences after the object was buried.

¹²⁸ Wilkinson, *Reading Egyptian Art*, 105.



44. Magic wand from northern Lisht, mid Twelfth to Thirteenth Dynasty (c. 1900–1650 BC).

themselves from it. The crocodile on the magic wand is followed by a combination of the hieroglyphic signs of walking legs and the sun disk, facing a schematic image of a serpopard. The composite animal is striding forth and its deformed head makes it hard to determine from which animal it originates, but, as will be clear from other examples, it is probably derived from a feline like a leopard or a lion.

The subsequent section is too damaged to distinguish, but the next visible animal is some long-legged feline animal, depending on its paws and tail. A long, straight staff with the head of either a wild dog or jackal may be combined with the Anubis animal, the chief god of the dead before the rise of Osiris.¹²⁹ This canid god was associated with the necropolis from the earliest times, therefore it is not surprising to spot him on a magic device which was buried with the dead.¹³⁰ The canid-sceptre precedes the standing figures of a lion and Taweret armed with a knife. Although the right end of the wand is rounded off, some part is missing as can be derived from the non-continuous incised line along the edge.

The site of Lisht revealed even more magic wands: a third example (fig. 45) depicts a writhing body of a cobra with a female head, depicted simply without any indication of a snake pattern. It will be clear that the other motifs and animals on this wand are cut out of the ivory in much less detail than the preceding and following wands. The snake is followed by the sun symbol (N5), the canid-sceptre with knife, the combined walking legs with sun and down below that a serpopard. The composite animal is again represented without any textual references to the animals it is composed of: the recognition as a serpopard is solely based on the contours of the animal. In the middle, a vulture with flail is flanked by two hieroglyphic signs associated with fire (Q7), perhaps to protect the user of the device against it. Thereafter an intriguing image of a griffin is visible: the animal has its head lowered, its body covered in a stripe-like pattern with spread wings that are enriched by dots and

¹²⁹ The staff resembles the *was*-sceptre, but lacks the typical loop at the bottom.

¹³⁰ Wilkinson, *Reading Egyptian Art*, 65.



45. Magic wand from northern Lisht, mid to end Twelfth Dynasty (c. 1900–1795 BC).

streaks to suggest feathers. A large head emerges from the griffin's wings; just as was the case by the griffin on the wall painting of the tomb of Khnumhotep II. Shown in profile, the head lacks any special features except that it seems to represent a male according to the hairstyle. Next to the composite animal another canid-sceptre is visible, this time the knife being decorated with streaks. The row of protective animals is closed by the hind part of a feline animal, most probably a leopard considering the dots indicating its fur. The animal is only half visible because the wand has been broken off at this point. The rear part of an incised snake is just visible above the predator.

Also derived from Lisht is a magic wand preserved in two fragments (fig. 46): one large piece and the smaller, utmost right end. The procession of fantastic animals starts with an elongated feline animal, presumably again a leopard. The paws (and other body parts) of this predator are cut out with much more precision than those of the previous discussed feline animals. Even more elaborate is the succeeding figure of a griffin, whose elegantly shaped body ends in a curled tail. The bird's beak is more prominently visible than in previous examples, as is the feather texture of the animal's wings. The feathers are designated one by one and with its different sizes they resemble those of real-life



46. Magic wand from northern Lisht, mid Twelfth to Thirteenth Dynasty (c. 1900–1650 BC).

birds. Just as was the case by the previously discussed griffin, a male head sprouts from the animal's wings, the figure this time being adorned with a tripartite hairdo. Other facial features are invisible due to the damaged surface.

Subsequently, the hieroglyphic sign Q7 is depicted threefold, above the slender body of a serpopard. Again, the feline characteristics are clearly recognizable in the animal's contours and this time even its muscles are accentuated by thin stripes. The hybrid being is succeeded by a lion, standing upright and holding what looks like a snake. It seems that the artist wanted to convey that part of the reptile is clasped between the predator's jaws. Next the figure of the protective god Aha is shown: full faced with its legs bent, its genitals prominently visible. Aha can be seen as the prototype and ancestor of the New Kingdom fertility god Bes.¹³¹ The god is wearing a lion mask and tail, while clasping a snake in either hand.

By depicting these figures crunching dangerous snakes, the idea of the animals as safeguards was even more enhanced. When owning a magic object like this wand, the possessor of the device would not have to be afraid of dangers lurking around every bend.¹³² The subsequent animal is almost completely cut off: the typical back of the goddess Taweret can just be recognized at the edge of the magic wand. Regarding the shape of the jagged edges and the mismatch of the broken figures on both wand pieces, it seems evident that one small piece is still missing. The smaller fragment which forms the other end of the wand, shows a detailed illustration of a crocodile. The artist had studied the animal closely in real life: he even bothered to depict little dots close to the scale edges, which identify these reptiles as crocodiles instead of alligators.

Griffins seem to have been quite popular in the selection of animals for the magic wands: another of these fascinating creatures can be found on a small fragment (fig. 47), again deriving from Lisht. The preserved part of the wand only presents two animals, of which the griffin is included on



47. Magic wand from northern Lisht, Thirteenth Dynasty (c. 1795–1650 BC).

¹³¹ Germond and Livet (eds), *An Egyptian bestiary*, 193.

¹³² The same accounts for the knives some of the protective animals and deities are holding. These large knives may seem offensive and dangerous, but rather served in a positive, protecting way for the owner, against evil forces the Egyptians believed were everywhere.

the left, holding a knife in its paw. The creature's features are more angular than those of the prior described griffins, although when examined closely, one can detect details like strokes indicating feathers and little triangles suggesting fur. These triangles can also be seen in the man's head cloth: could this be another pattern or does it indicate that the man is wearing some feline-like headgear? The griffin's head is adorned with a tripartite hairdo, resembling those of his previously mentioned relatives. Another evident detail is that part of the man's chest is visible above the griffin's back, instead of only his neck. The other preserved animal consists of a standing lion which also carries a big knife.

As with most of the previously discussed examples, the next magic wand (fig. 48) is also broken in pieces: one part is still missing and two fragments are glued back together.¹³³ The largest fragment on the left opens the line with a big Wedjat-eye in the corner. This sacred eye symbol had, above all, a protective purpose.¹³⁴ The Wedjat-eye is followed by an erected cobra, its tail arranged with a loop behind the reptile's head. Subsequently, a canid-sceptre with blank head cloth is succeeded by an image unseen on previously magic wands: a large hippopotamus head seen in profile, depicted in the middle of a quarter-turned *hwt*-hieroglyph.



48. Magic wand, origins unknown, Twelfth Dynasty (c. 1985–1795 BC).

Below the hippo the back of a feline animal can be observed, judging from the animal's tail and hind leg. The middle part of its body is interrupted by the missing fragment, but it looks like the body continues on the preserved part. Here the animal is seen being held by a leash, which is held by a standing lion. While the head of the leashed animal somewhat resembles that of a dog, there is no doubt that we are dealing with the same animal, considering the curve of the wand. Behind the lion's back, a slender griffin with a tripartite hairstyle continues the row. This time a male head between the

¹³³ This wand was purchased back in the Nineteenth century, its origins are unknown. However, it is most likely that this object is also derived from northern Lisht. See Website Metropolitan Museum of Art, <<http://www.metmuseum.org/collection/the-collection-online/search/558368?rpp=30&pg=1&ft=magic+wand&where=Egypt&pos=14>> accessed 06.12.2015

¹³⁴ Wilkinson, *Reading Egyptian Art*, 43.



49. Magic wand, origins unknown, Twelfth to Eighteenth Dynasty (c. 1985–1550 BC).

griffin's long, carefully detailed wings is lacking. The artist paid extra attention to the rendering of the creature's eye, which bears a resemblance to the Wedjat-eye. The row is closed by another canid-sceptre (including knife), a seated god with a donkey's head which might represent Seth, and in the corner another Wedjat-eye.

Another wand (fig. 49) has not survived the ravages of time entirely as well, as can be judged from its fragmentary and glued state.¹³⁵ Most of the left part is missing. The first visible animal consists of the front of a griffin decorated with the same triangular dots as mentioned before, its head also adorned with a tripartite hairdo. Due to the abruptness, it remains a question if the body included a male head. The execution of the next animal is remarkable, to say a least. Most probably it represents the motif of the standing lion with knife, as derived from the animal's tail. Moreover, this time the artist bothered to emphasize the furry skin of the feline, by incising many large strokes. Besides, the lion is clamping a snake between its jaws. The animal preceding is of a type that has not been encountered yet: standing on its tall legs, the spotted animal has a slightly tortuously neck and an undefinable head, more feline-shaped than of a bird. The creature could be regarded as another serpopard, but this is uncertain. Just like its predecessor, the animal is holding a snake in its mouth. The animalistic procession is closed by a large, frontal feline head in the corner, preceded by an aggressively looking Taweret who is grasping a snake and raising her knife.

The wands are not always executed in a detailed way: one example (fig. 50) depicts several animals by using simple, though effective lines. The outer left part of the wand is incised with the figure of a frog sitting in a basket. Although this animal was not included on the other described magic wands, its presence is not surprising: because of its capacity to produce a swarm of tadpoles, this amphibian was associated with creation, fertility, (re)birth, and regeneration.¹³⁶ Within the sphere of the underworld the frog symbolized forces which animated life, doing justice to the funerary

¹³⁵ As with the previous example, the provenance of this wand is unclear due to a purchase: it could be from Lisht. See Website Metropolitan Museum of Art <<http://www.metmuseum.org/collection/the-collection-online/search/556565?rpp=30&pg=1&ft=magic+wand&where=Egypt&pos=16>> accessed 06.12.2015.

¹³⁶ Moreover, the amphibian symbolized the frog-headed Heket, the goddess who watched over childbirth and was venerated as the female accompany of the creator-god Khnum. See Wilkinson, *Reading Egyptian Art*, 107.



50. Magic wand, origins unknown, Twelfth to late Thirteenth Dynasty (c. 1985–1650 BC).

context in which the wand was found.¹³⁷ The amphibian on the wand is succeeded by the goddess Taweret and a crocodile, both carried out in a simple manner. This can also be said of the griffin, its body lacking any details and its feathers simply suggested by some light scratches in the hippopotamus tusk. The same accounts for the next figures of the demon Aha, a jackal head with knife (Anubis?), an upright standing lion and a baboon, squatting on its haunches, with arms raised. Within the context of the funerary world, baboons are mentioned in descriptions of the Underworld where they guard the first gate to the realm of the dead.¹³⁸ The right end of the wand is left blank.

The last example from the Metropolitan Museum of Art to be discussed here (fig. 51) is incomplete and mostly dark discoloured on the whole left part. Both ends are not preserved. The first animal on the left is a tortoise seen from a bird's eye view, its shell indicated by a chequered pattern of incisions. Then, depicted under two horizontally entwined snakes, a remarkable image of a bull can be seen: the animal consists of two front halves of a bull, resulting in a double-headed mammal with four front legs, but lacking hind legs. According to Wilkinson, the Egyptian bull was strongly connected to fertility by representing procreative life, e.g. as a symbol for the inundation of the Nile.¹³⁹



51. Magic wand, origins unknown, Twelfth to Eighteenth Dynasty (c. 1985–1550 BC).

¹³⁷ Wilkinson, *Reading Egyptian Art*, 107.

¹³⁸ Wilkinson, *Reading Egyptian Art*, 73.

¹³⁹ Wilkinson, *Reading Egyptian Art*, 57.

In this respect, its addition to a magic wand is not surprising, also because the image of a bull must have evoked a strong protective feeling, especially when being double-headed. As on the Narmer palette, the bull is shown with (both) its head(s) lowered and horns aimed to an opponent. However, in the case of the magic wand figures of enemies or symbols representing danger are never depicted, whereas on the palette a foreigner is being trampled down. The bull is followed by a figure of Taweret executed in almost exactly the same manner as on a previously discussed magic wand (fig. 49), including its knife. Between the hippo-goddess and the back of a walking feline, the figure of a serpent-like creature is inserted, its body divided in segments. What creature came after the feline animal is unknown due to the object's incompleteness.

3.3.2 Hybrids on magic wands from the British Museum

Other than the Metropolitan Museum of Art the British Museum contains some special examples of magic wands, of which a selection depicting composite animals will be discussed here. Generally, all of the magic wands were undecorated on the back, however a detailed example (fig. 52) dating to the Twelfth Dynasty is adorned with incised images of deities on both sides. The magic charm is fully preserved, although broken in half and glued back together. Unlike the other discussed wands, this object has an unmistakable upward curve and it does not diminish to a point: both ends are approximately of comparable size. The front shows animals that have been seen multiple times before; a snake armed with a knife, above it a lion (although this time in resting position), Taweret clasping a knife, Aha with snakes seen frontally, the hieroglyphic 'fire' sign Q7, followed by a winged griffin.

The fur of the creature is indicated by dots and again there is a head visible between the animal's expanded wings. The head is lacking any specific details. Above the griffin's head the hieroglyphic sign (N8) for sunshine is inserted, followed by the figure of a goddess holding the life symbol alias ankh in her right hand, her left arm is raised towards a column of hieroglyphs depicted besides a standing feline figure. The head of this animal is too damaged to identify the species. Other animals that are represented are a canid-sceptre, a raised cobra, a rather large crocodile executed in great detail (although damaged severely), and the figure of a Horus falcon with its typical



52. Magic wand from Thebes, Twelfth Dynasty (c. 1985–1795 BC).

'teardrop' marking at the corner of the eye, illuminated by a solar disk. The hippo goddess Taweret is – one can almost say irrevocably – featured too on this wand. Here she is resting a paw upon a large *sa* sign (V17), a hieroglyph that symbolizes protection.¹⁴⁰ The large knife she is holding can only underline the guarding aspect. The row of animals is closed by a snake armed with a knife, surmounted by a large, highly stylized eye of Ra.

Some of the aforementioned animals are repeated on the reverse (fig. 53) of the wand, however, other creatures that have not occurred on the previously described wands can be seen as well. Both ends are adorned with an armed snake, surmounted by a resting lion, turned towards the edge. In the space between, as first a remarkable kneeling figure of a god with a snake's head can be perceived, holding in each hand a big snake. The snake-god is followed by a ram's head with *Atef*-crown, enlightened by a solar disk above (N8). Ram gods were worshipped from the earliest times and, in the context of the magic wands, were a common symbol of fertility thanks to their association with the trampling of the seeds in the fertile Nile mud.¹⁴¹ Then Aha is depicted full faced while clasping snakes which intertwine the god's bent legs.

A large scarab or dung beetle is depicted in the lower centre of the wand, probably the sacred species known as *Scarabaeus sacer*. This animal was connected to creation and solar symbolism for its habit of rolling balls of animal dung and rapidly popping up from the underground.¹⁴² Other animals that fill the middle section are a canid-sceptre, a crocodile's head and a serpopard executed in a simple manner, with a long, winding neck. They are surmounted by a resting double sphinx, a knife hovering in front of its chests. According to Joshua Roberson, this feline creature represents the god Aker, known of its presence in depictions of the Netherworld.¹⁴³ The right part of the



53. Magic wand from Thebes, Twelfth Dynasty (c. 1985–1795 BC).

¹⁴⁰ Wilkinson, *Reading Egyptian Art*, 71 and 197.

¹⁴¹ Wilkinson, *Reading Egyptian Art*, 61.

¹⁴² The beetle was named *Khepri*, meaning “he who came forth” or “he who came into being”, see Wilkinson, *Reading Egyptian Art*, 113.

¹⁴³ Joshua Roberson, ‘The Early History of “New Kingdom” Netherworld Iconography: A Late Middle Kingdom Apotropaic Wand Reconsidered’, in D. P. Silverman, K. William, and J. Wegner (eds), *Archaism and Innovation: studies in the culture of Middle Kingdom Egypt* (New Haven and Philadelphia, 2009), 429 and 440.

wand is filled with yet another snake, a frog sitting on a basket, and then a motive that has not occurred on the described wands before: a lion balancing with each paw on an animal-headed sceptre, all with a knife down below. According to Van Walsem, these could be the heads of giraffes: their long necks could be linked to the verb *ser* (to predict), indicating that they could foretell danger. In my opinion this is yet another way for the artist to symbolize the victory of good over evil: by stepping over the danger, the lion keeps control. The other figurines on the wand consist of an armed Taweret with *sa* sign and another crocodile's head.

The next wand in the British Museum (fig. 54) shows another range of symbols, animals and creatures: the left end begins with a jackal head, followed by a large eye of Ra, a canid-sceptre, an erected armed cobra and a lion sitting on its hind legs, preceded by a symbol that is too damaged to distinguish. The right part is filled with figures of an armed Taweret, a winding snake, and then an armed serpopard with a snake in its beak. The composite animal has a slender, straight neck and its fur is indicated by dots, although the rendering of the animal is in general rather simple. Last, the hieroglyphic signs of walking legs and the sun disk and a large feline head end the row. Whereas these animals are now rather familiar, the backside of the wand is striking for it contains an incised inscription reading “*snb.f-rs*”, or Senebfres, perhaps the name of the owner of the amuletic wand.¹⁴⁴



54. Magic wand, origins unknown, Middle Kingdom (c. 2040–1750 BC).

Not all wands in the collection of the British Museums are as well preserved, for example two preserved fragments of a wand (fig. 55) depicting a canid-sceptre, Taweret with highly simplified *sa*-symbol, a griffin and finally a feline head. The incisions are simple, but effective: take for example the tail of the griffin that is formed by a slender line, with a delicate curl at the end. A head between the stylized wings is missing, just as dots indicating the animal's body texture.

¹⁴⁴ Website British Museum
 <http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?assetId=96330001&objectId=152572&partId=1> accessed 06.12.2015.



55. Magic wand, origins unknown, Middle Kingdom (c. 2040–1750 BC).

Dots are present, however, on the body of a serpopard on another magical ivory wand (fig. 56), from which only a small part is preserved. The composite animal is therefore only half visible, but that we are dealing with a serpopard may be evident by the characteristic twists in its neck and its feline head. The creature is holding a snake in its beak and is preceded by another, unknown animal with a long neck. Other incised figures on this wand are a baboon, a canid-sceptre and a frog on a basket, the latter two holding a knife. It looks like the baboon is clasping an eye in its paws, which refers to the animal's association with the sun: the *wedjat* eye symbolizes the solar orb.¹⁴⁵ The end of the wand is decorated with parallel horizontal stripes, preceded by the combination of walking legs and the sun disk. Generally, all figurines on this wand are carved in a simple manner.



56. Part of a magic wand, origins unknown, Middle Kingdom (c. 2040–1750 BC).

The last wand (fig. 57) to be discussed here is quite remarkable, for it has been restored in ancient times. The wand contains a breaking point a little right of the centre, just across a figure of a griffin. Three sets of binding holes have been drilled through the ivory, which originally held both fragments together with rope. The small wand is decorated with a large feline head in the left corner, then the double bull-motif that has come across here once before, followed by the griffin in the centre. The fur of the animal is again marked by dots, this time even on the part where the wings turn into feathers, which are indicated by strokes. A head with slender neck is inserted between the wings, which extend

¹⁴⁵ Wilkinson, *Reading Egyptian Art*, 73.



57. Magic wand, origins unknown, Middle Kingdom (c. 2040–1750 BC).

over the entire length of the animal, and beyond. The wand is complemented by an armed Taweret, an armed frog on a basket, a jackal head within a rectangular frame (perhaps again the *hwt*-hieroglyph) and another jackal head in the right corner.

3.3.3 Motifs and meaning: the style and purpose of magic wands

Even though the magic wands look similar, several differences can be detected in terms of size, preservation, sequence and selection of symbols/animals, and execution: especially in the level of detail. Concerning the sequence of the images, Altenmüller designated two classes of wands: firstly, wands with its images organized into one register, its figures usually occurring only once. Secondly, a smaller class of wands that depict its figures into two separate groups, more or less mirroring each other from a central image or middle point. In this case, the images are sometimes duplicated on the same object.¹⁴⁶

When observing the used motifs on the wands, several conclusions can be drawn.¹⁴⁷ It may be clear that by each wand a selection was made from a selected group of animals and symbols, some of them occurring more frequently than others. The lion for example, is represented on no less than nine out of the fourteen discussed wands. Moreover, EA18175 (figs. 51 and 52) even contained four lions in total, which shows that this animal was quite a popular choice. Other motifs that seem to have been relatively popular are the goddess Taweret (chosen eleven times), the canid-sceptre (ten times present on seven wands), the serpopard (depicted six or seven times), and the griffin (represented on nine wands). There is not a strict preference for the inclusion or the omission of the male head between the creature's wings (five times versus three times, apart from wand 32.8.3 (fig. 48) on which it is unknown). Almost all wands contained either a cobra or snake: the wands that are an exception are

¹⁴⁶ Hartwig Altenmüller, *Die Apotropaia und die Götter Mittelägyptens: eine typologische und religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung der sog. 'Zaubermesser' des Mittleren Reichs*, II: *Katalog* (München, 1965), 75. One of the magic wands from the British Museum, EA18175 (figs. 51 and 52), belongs to this second class of wands.

¹⁴⁷ For an overview of the used symbols/animals on each wand and their frequency, see TABLE I *Frequency of symbols/animals on the discussed magic wands*, addenda, 68. Wand EA18175 is listed twice, for its reverse side is also decorated.

only partially preserved, but they most probably also contained a snake or two.

Moreover, there appear to be no fixed rules for the sequence of particular motifs. When included, the large jackal or feline heads fill one or two corners of a wand, a space sometimes occupied by a *Wedjat*-eye, although this symbol could be depicted on another spot as well. However, it has to be taken into account that the ends of some of the discussed wands are missing. In addition, pieces from the centre of the objects have sometimes not been preserved as well, from which it can be said that the statistics are actually incomplete. Besides, details of only fourteen wands were taken into account here, whereas many more of these objects have been found.

When examined closely, the designation of the animals on the wands known as ‘serpopards’ seems arguable: when looking back to the serpopards on the Predynastic palettes, they rather seem to represent creatures with the body of a lion and a serpentine neck. In that way, the composite animals could be named ‘serpent-necked lions’. However, on several magic wands their fur is indicated by dots, which could be a reference to the leopard’s densely packed, black rosettes. Moreover, in all cases the creatures lack a snake pattern on their neck, but that does not withhold Egyptologists to refer to them as serpentine anyway. In this respect, the lack of dots on several images should probably be understood as a choice by the artist. On the other hand, it is possible that two types of these creatures existed: one with a lion’s body and the other with a leopard’s appearance. Therefore, the designation of these composite animals as ‘serpent-felines’ is perhaps the most appropriate.

Considering the appearance of the griffins, some details are worth noting. A few of the described griffins seem to be collared, which can be seen for instance on the British Museum examples EA38190 and EA24426 (figs. 55 and 57). Seen in the light of the previously discussed Middle Kingdom wall paintings, the collar could be a reference to the aspect of the griffin as a domesticated animal, tamed and therefore of no harm to the Egyptians themselves. The other griffins that have been discussed rather wear the tripartite hairdo, hanging down beside the creature’s neck. This hairstyle is clearly visible on magic wand 26.7.1288a,b (fig. 48) and depicted simplified in other cases. These two types of appearances existed along each other, and the artisan may have had his reasons to choose for one or the other.

In contradiction to some griffins who were depicted with lowered wings, all of their discussed relatives on these magic wands are shown with outstretched wings. The level of domestication/danger will probably not really have depended on the position of these wings. Perhaps the artisan simply thought outstretched wings would better convey the *idea* of the composite animal. One detail is clear: all of the discussed griffins so far, whether represented in two-dimensional or three-dimensional art, are depicted with feline paws. This in contradiction to our well-known Western perspective on the griffin, whose forelegs are most of the time feathered and end in bird claws.

Since the composite creatures were depicted among the fantastic protective demons and deities, they apparently likely had a defensive purpose and were not perceived as threatening evil, despite their fearsome appearance. Their strong connection with the protection of children becomes

clear already by some inscriptions that can be found on a few of these magic wands. In addition to the previously discussed words on wand 15.3.197 (fig. 43), an exemplar in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum contains a whole sentence carved on the back of the charm:

*“Recitation by the many protectors: We have come that we may extend our protection around the healthy child Minhotep, alive, sound, and healthy, born of the noblewoman Sitsobek, alive, sound, and healthy.”*¹⁴⁸

The purpose of the wands as magically protecting young infants is further enhanced by a little cup of faience (fig. 58) discovered in a deposit near the pyramid of Amenemhat I at Lisht. It was found together with a crocodile figurine. The small cup was used to feed babies milk and it is decorated with the same protective deities and demons as mentioned on the magic wands. This feeding cup shows schematic figures of a serpopard, snakes, frontal figures of Bes, walking lions and turtles.¹⁴⁹ More of



58. Feeding cup with composite animals, origins unknown, Twelfth to late Thirteenth Dynasty (c. 1985–1650 BC).



59. Feeding cup with griffin, origins unknown, Middle Kingdom (c. 2040–1750 BC).

these cups were found in Lisht, besides faience also made of clay or stone. One limestone exemplar (fig. 59) depicts a griffin in the same manner as the magic wands. Gerke even recognizes a male head between the animal’s wings, but this is hard to distinguish.¹⁵⁰

Another magical artefact that is of importance here is an example of a *mshnt*, or a so-called birth-brick (figs. 60 and 61) discovered in South Abydos.¹⁵¹ This object is closely associated with childbirth, since these bricks were used by pregnant women to squat on while baring a baby. Most importantly, the base of

¹⁴⁸ Website Metropolitan Museum of Art <<http://www.metmuseum.org/collection/the-collection-online/search/544149>> accessed 06.12.2015.

¹⁴⁹ Website Metropolitan Museum of Art <<http://www.metmuseum.org/collection/the-collection-online/search/545936>> accessed 06.12.2015.

¹⁵⁰ The cup’s whereabouts are unknown, but it could derive from Lisht considering its iconography and style. See Gerke, *Der altägyptische Greif* 15, 142.

¹⁵¹ The word *mshnt* can be literally conceived as “that which is in the front of birthing”, see Josef Wegner, ‘A decorated birth-brick from South Abydos’, in D. P. Silverman, K. Simpson, and J. Wegner (eds), *Archaism and Innovation: studies in the culture of Middle Kingdom Egypt* (New Haven and Philadelphia, 2009), 471.



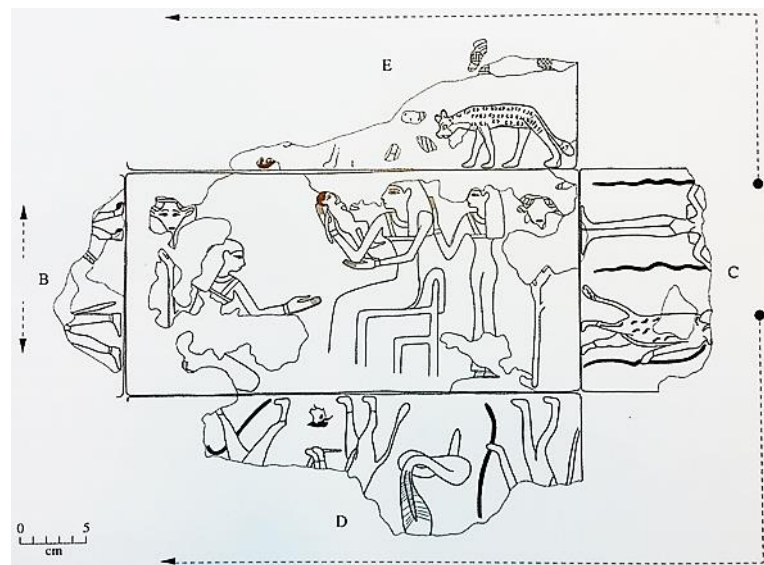
60. Birth brick, South Abydos, late Thirteenth Dynasty (c. 1700–1650 BC).

the brick shows a scene in which a mother is holding a new-born child in the company of two female attendants. Moreover, the edges of the birth-brick are decorated with polychrome imagery identical to the motifs found on the

previously discussed magic wands. Out of the preserved figures can be distinguished with certainty: a wild cat, Taweret and other anthropomorphic deities, a baboon grasping a snake, a coiled cobra, and a standing lion.¹⁵² In this respect, Josef Wegner rightly points out that the dual occurrence of imagery related to childbirth alongside images known of magic wands proves that one important function of magic wands was to protect the new-born.¹⁵³

The question remains *why* the magic wands were included in burials. The protection of infants does not come across as the most important reason in a funerary context. However, when considering the association between (some of) the depicted animals and fertility, the deposition could express the wish of a deceased Egyptian of being assured of rebirth in the afterlife. Noteworthy is that many of these wands were not found intact in the tombs by archaeologists: it is speculated that they have been deliberately broken. Could this have been done to diminish their powers which were not desired in the context of death? Most probably

not: natural reasons could have caused these fractures too. Besides, one of the discussed wands was restored in its former glory: this can be done only on purpose. If a tomb owner did not want certain effects of a magic wand in his grave, he would simply not take it into the



61. Birth-brick, South Abydos, late Thirteenth Dynasty (c. 1700–1650 BC).

¹⁵² According to Wegner, the lion has just decapitated a human enemy, whose head is depicted below. See Wegner, in Silverman, Simpson, and Wegner (eds), *Archaism and Innovation*, 454–5.

¹⁵³ For a detailed analysis of the Abydos birth-brick and its relevance seen in a wider context, see Wegner, in Silverman, Simpson, and Wegner (eds), *Archaism and Innovation*, 447–96.

afterlife. It is possible that the aim of the magic wands changed in context. During life, the objects could have been used in magical rituals during childbirth or to protect young infants. Then again, they could have served as static objects, carried along by or laid down near children to ward off evil. When buried among grave goods, the wands either acted as an assurance for rebirth, or were given along with the deceased as a sentimental, personal object that referred to the person's childhood. Taken out of the context of children, the wands could have provided defence against illness or evil during life for adults as well. Generally it seems that the wands were given along in the grave to ensure a continued protection of the person's spirit in its eternal afterlife. One explanation does not exclude the other, and until no written sources have been found that determine the function of the magic wands with certainty, the interpretation remains speculative.

Conclusion

Prior to the urban revolution around the fourth millennium BC, composite animals seem to fail in the material culture of Egypt. This all changed when the Egyptian state took shape and came under the authority of a leader. Composite animals made their way into the artistic repertoire heralding the unification of the 'Two Lands' of Upper and Lower Egypt. Wengrow is certainly right that social complexity co-located with the creation and adoption of composite animals. Because of trade contacts with foreign civilisations that urbanised simultaneously, the image of hybrid creatures were transmitted and integrated by the elite that had access to these sources.

This became evident from the material culture of the Predynastic period, which involves composite animals depicted on objects propagated by the king to express his royalty and wealth. Besides, the hybrids were used as protective-magical devices by the elite, to guard them against misfortune and diseases. This defencing role is later perfectly evident in the inclusion of composite creatures on Middle Kingdom magic wands. The Egyptian examples clearly demonstrate a similarity to images of hybrid beings from the Levant and beyond. These were most probably transmitted to the land of the Nile by depictions on seal impressions and other devices used in urban systems of administration.

It is striking how few examples of composite animals are known from the Old Kingdom. Perhaps this is due to less contact with neighbouring countries. Anyhow, of all discussed composite types, solely griffins occur during this period. They personify the unconquerable king, who tramples his enemies ruthlessly in the disguise of the fearsome hybrid. Leading up to and during the Middle Kingdom, contacts with foreigners increased and so did the exchange of artistic motifs. During this era, several types of composites animals reoccur in the artistic repertory, whereas the royal human-headed griffin seems to fall away in the background – or disappears altogether.

This correlates with the location the hybrids occur in: instead of royal monuments, private tombs are adorned with the animals often depicted aiding the tomb owner in the desert hunt. Royal

examples are not dismissed entirely, as became evident from delicately ornamented jewellery. The depiction of composite creatures culminates on the Middle Kingdom magic wands. Although the precise function of these magic charms is still unclear, they certainly had a protective character, whether that be in the daily or afterlife of the ancient Egyptian. Artefacts as feeding cups and a birth-brick depicting scenes similar to those on the magic wands, indicate that the charms were almost certainly related to childbirth protection.

Since this thesis was limited to the period of Predynastic age until the Middle Kingdom, a large amount of data from following eras was left out. It would be interesting to investigate how the discussed types of composite animals evolved over time, especially during the New Kingdom, when Egypt was at its maximum territorial extent. During this era even new types of composite animals emerge, for example horse-snake creatures.¹⁵⁴ Therefore, it would be compelling to search for the origins of these new kinds of hybrids, and what caused them. By that time, these hybrids could have found their way into the Egyptian artistic repertoire because of the Kingdom's widespread expansion.

One thing is certain: the ancient Egyptians were equally concerned about the creation of the non-existent as our western medieval predecessors. Above all, there is still a lot of research to be done to the imaginary animals that emerged when the Egyptian state came into being. As long as no written sources from this time about the fascinating creatures are found, their existence will remain an enigmatic part of Egypt's art history.

¹⁵⁴ For an examination on the origin and function of these "cheval-serpents" as Caroline Thomas appoints them, see Caroline Thomas, 'Le cheval-serpent, un curieux génie funéraire', *RdE* 64 (2013), 211–30.

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Abbreviations

<i>Archéo-Nil</i>	<i>Archéo-Nil. Bulletin de la société pour l'étude des cultures prépharaoniques de la Vallée du Nil</i>
<i>ASAE</i>	<i>Annales du Service des Antiquités de l'Égypte</i>
<i>BSAK</i>	<i>Beiheft SAK (Studien zur Altägyptischen Kultur)</i>
<i>GM</i>	<i>Göttinger Miszellen: Beiträge zur ägyptologischen Diskussion</i>
<i>JEOL</i>	<i>Jaarbericht van het Vooraziatisch Genootschap (Gezelschap) „Ex Oriente Lux“</i>
<i>JMA</i>	<i>Journal of Material Culture</i>
<i>PAM</i>	<i>Polish Archaeology in the Mediterranean</i>
<i>RdE</i>	<i>Revue d'Égyptologie</i>

Illustration credits

Title plate: See fig. 27.

1. Dog-headed men from the tympanum of Vézelay, Twelfth century.
2. Figurine of a griffin, Naqada IIIA (first half First Dynasty), from the so-called 'votive deposit' in Tell el-Farkha. Ivory, height: 7,2 cm (basis: 0,6 cm). Egyptian Museum, Cairo. Field inv.

- no. WD 06/37. After website Polish mission in Tell El-Farkha
<<http://www.farkha.org/english/galeria.html>>.
3. Figurine of a serpentine creature, Naqada IIIA (first half First Dynasty), from the co-called 'votive deposit' in Tell el-Farkha. Ivory, height: 2,4 cm. Egyptian Museum, Cairo. Registration number unknown. After website Polish mission in Tell El-Farkha
<<http://www.farkha.org/english/galeria.html>>.
 4. Figurine of a griffin/Seth animal, Naqada IIc (c. 3450 BC). Pink limestone, measurements unknown. Ashmolean Museum of Art and Archaeology, Oxford, from Petrie's excavations. AN1895.138. After Patch, Eaton-Krauss, and Allen, *Dawn of Egyptian Art*, cat. 177.
 5. Narmer palette, late fourth millennium BC, from Hierakonpolis. Siltstone, c. 64 cm x 42 cm. Egyptian Museum, Cairo, JE32169 / CG 14716.
 6. Detail of the 'two dogs palette', main deposit in Hierakonpolis, Naqada III (c. 3200–3100 BC). Ashmolean Museum of Art and Archaeology, E.3924.
 7. The 'two dogs palette', from the main deposit in Hierakonpolis, Naqada III (c. 3200–3100 BC). Ashmolean Museum of Art and Archaeology, E.3924.
 8. The 'four dogs palette', from the main deposit in Hierakonpolis, Naqada III (c. 3200–3100 BC). Musée du Louvre, E 11052.
 9. Fragment of an ivory knife handle, from the main deposit in Hierakonpolis, Naqada III (c. 3200–3100 BC). After Courtesy of the Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology, University College London, UC14871.
 10. Fragment of a dagger handle, Abydos (tomb U-127), Naqada II (c. 3500–3200 BC). Ivory, length: 1,9 cm. K 1104. After Gerke, *Der altägyptische Greif* 15, Kat.-Nr. 1.
 11. Knife handle from Gebel el-Tarif, Naqada II (c. 3500–3200 BC). Ivory with traces of gold foil, height: 21,7 cm, width: max. 4,9 cm. Egyptian Museum, Cairo, CG 14265.
 12. Flint knife with ivory handle found at Abu Zaidan, Upper Egypt, ca. 3300 BC.
 13. Reverse side of the Abu Zaidan knife handle, ca. 3300 BC. After W. Needler, *Predynastic and Archaic Egypt in the Brooklyn Museum*, 1984, page 154. Brooklyn Museum 09.989.118.
 14. A) Serpent-necked felines on the Narmer palette and B) similar hybrids on cylinder seal impressions from Uruk, southern Mesopotamia, late fourth millennium BC. After Wengrow, *The Origins of Monsters*, fig. 4.6.
 15. Plaques with composite animals, from Assur in northern Iraq, early first millennium BC. Terracotta, heights c. 12 and 14 cm. After Wengrow, *The Origins of Monsters*, fig. 6.4.
 16. Relief of the valley temple of Sahure in Abusir, Fifth Dynasty (c. 2494–2345 BC). Ägyptisches Museum, Berlin, 21832. After Gerke, *Der altägyptische Greif* 15, Kat.-Nr. 6.
 17. Two temple reliefs of the causeway leading to the valley temple of Niuserre in Abydos, Fifth Dynasty (c. 2494–2345 BC). After Gerke, *Der altägyptische Greif* 15, Kat.-Nr. 7a and b.

18. Relief fragment of the east wall of the sun temple of Niuserre at Abu Gurab, Fifth Dynasty (c. 2494–2345 BC). Ägyptisches Museum, Berlin, 20041 (destroyed in war). After Bissing, *Annales du Service des Antiquités de l'Égypte* 53 (1), Pl. IX.
19. Fragments with androcephalic griffin (above) and hieracocephalic griffin (below), south wall of the causeway of the mortuary temple of Pepi II in south Saqqara. Sixth Dynasty (c. 2345–2181 BC). After Jéquier, *Le monument funéraire de Pepi II*, III, Pl. 15.
20. Fragments with androcephalic griffin (left) and hieracocephalic griffin (right), north wall of the causeway of the mortuary temple of Pepi II in south Saqqara. Sixth Dynasty (c. 2345–2181 BC). After Jéquier, *Le monument funéraire de Pepi II*, III, Pl. 16.
21. Graffito from the Dachla Oasis, Fourth Dynasty (?) (c. 2613–2494 BC). After Gerke, *Der altägyptische Greif*, 15, Kat.-Nr. 10.
22. Pendant with griffins, Twelfth or Thirteenth Dynasty (c. 1985–1795 / 1795–1650 BC). Silver, height: 3,5 cm, width: 5,4 cm. Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology, University College London, UC34342. After: Aruz, Benzel, and Evans, *Beyond Babylon*, cat. no. 63.
23. Pectoral with two griffins, from the cache of Merit in Dashur. Twelfth Dynasty (reign of Ammenemes III, c. 1854–1808 BC). Gold, lapis lazuli, carnelian, turquoise. Front in cloisonné technique, back depletion gilding. Height; 6,1 cm, width c. 8,5 cm, 61,9 gram. After Andrews, *Ancient Egyptian Jewellery*, cat. no. 112.
24. Pectoral with griffin and Seth-animal, from Dashur (?), Twelfth Dynasty (c. 1985–1795 BC). Openwork gold cloisonné, inlays on the reverse side now lost, height: 3,8 cm. After Andrews, *Ancient Egyptian Jewellery*, cat. no. 71.
25. Plan and section of Khnumhotep II's tomb, first half of the Twelfth Dynasty (c. 1922–1874 BC). After Kanawati and Woods, *Beni Hassan*, fig. 22.
26. North wall of the tomb of Khnumhotep II, first half of the Twelfth Dynasty (c. 1922–1874 BC). After Kanawati and Woods, *Beni Hassan*, fig. 30.
27. Griffin with V-shaped wings and male head situated on the north wall of the tomb of Khnumhotep II, first half of the Twelfth Dynasty (c. 1922–1874 BC). After 'Abd al-Ġaffār Šadīd, *Die Felsgräber von Beni Hassan in Mittelägypten* (Mainz am Rhein, 1994), Abb. 95.
28. Detail of the hunting scene on the north wall of Khnumhotep II's tomb, first half of the Twelfth Dynasty (c. 1922–1874 BC). After Šadīd, *Die Felsgräber von Beni Hassan in Mittelägypten*, Abb. 119.
29. Plan and section of Baqet III's tomb, Eleventh Dynasty (c. 2125–1985 BC). After Kanawati and Woods, *Beni Hassan*, fig. 35.
30. North wall of the tomb of Baqet III, Eleventh Dynasty (c. 2125–1985 BC). After Kanawati and Woods, *Beni Hassan*, fig. 38.
31. Composite creatures on the north wall of Baqet III's tomb, Eleventh Dynasty (c. 2125–1985 BC). After Kanawati and Woods, *Beni Hassan*, photo 205.

32. Composite animals on the north wall of Baqet III's tomb, Eleventh Dynasty (c. 2125–1985 BC). After Kanawati and Woods, *Beni Hassan*, photo 206.
33. Detail of the hunting scene in Baqet III's tomb, Eleventh Dynasty (c. 2125–1985 BC). After Kanawati and Woods, *Beni Hassan*, photo 38.
34. Plan and section of Khety's tomb, Eleventh Dynasty (c. 2125–1985 BC). After Kanawati and Woods, *Beni Hassan*, fig. 43.
35. North wall (west section) of the tomb of Khety, Eleventh Dynasty (c. 2125–1985 BC). After Kanawati and Woods, *Beni Hassan*, fig. 46.
36. Enclosed or fenced area depicted on the north wall (west section) of the tomb of Khety, Eleventh Dynasty (c. 2125–1985 BC). After Šadīd, *Die Felsgräber von Beni Hassan in Mittelägypten*, Abb. 48.
37. Composite animals on the north wall of the tomb of Khety, Eleventh Dynasty (c. 2125–1985 BC). After Kanawati and Woods, *Beni Hassan*, photo 207.
38. Griffin on the south wall of the tomb of Khety, Eleventh Dynasty (c. 2125–1985 BC). After Kanawati and Woods, *Beni Hassan*, photo 208.
39. South wall (east section) of Khety's tomb with the richly coloured griffin to the left of the tomb owner's face, Eleventh Dynasty (c. 2125–1985 BC). After Kanawati and Woods, *Beni Hassan*, fig. 51.
40. Fragment of wall painting depicting monkeys and a griffin, from the outer chamber of the tomb of Neheri I at El-Bersheh, Twelfth Dynasty (c. 1985–1795 BC). After Newberry, *El Bersheh*, II, Plate XI.
41. Fragment from the outer chamber (north wall, right side) of the tomb of Ahanakht, El-Bersheh, Twelfth Dynasty (c. 1985–1795 BC). After Newberry, *El Bersheh*, II, Plate XVI.
42. The arrival of Asiatics in Egypt in the tomb of Khnumhotep II, first half of the Twelfth Dynasty (c. 1922–1874 BC). After Kanawati and Woods, *Beni Hassan*, fig. 9.
43. Magic wand from northern Lisht, late Twelfth to early Thirteenth Dynasty, c. 1850–1700 BC. Hippopotamus ivory, length 26,8 cm; width 4,4 cm; thickness 0,3 cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 15.3.197. After website Metropolitan Museum of Art <<http://www.metmuseum.org/collection/the-collection-online/search/544243>> accessed 07.12.2015.
44. Magic wand from northern Lisht, mid Twelfth to Thirteenth Dynasty, c. 1900–1650 BC. Hippopotamus ivory, length 34,2 cm. Metropolitan Museum of Art, 22.1.153. After website Metropolitan Museum of Art <<http://www.metmuseum.org/collection/the-collection-online/search/544247>> accessed 07.12.2015.

45. Magic wand from northern Lisht, mid to end Twelfth Dynasty, *c.* 1900–1795 BC. Hippopotamus ivory, length 34 cm. Metropolitan Museum of Art, 22.1.103. After website Metropolitan Museum of Art <<http://www.metmuseum.org/collection/the-collection-online/search/544246>> accessed 07.12.2015.
46. Magic wand from northern Lisht, mid Twelfth to Thirteenth Dynasty, *c.* 1900–1650 BC. Hippopotamus ivory, length 31,1 cm. Metropolitan Museum of Art, 22.1.154a, b. After website Metropolitan Museum of Art <<http://www.metmuseum.org/collection/the-collection-online/search/544244>> accessed 07.12.2015.
47. Magic wand from northern Lisht, Thirteenth Dynasty, *c.* 1795–1650 BC. Ivory, length 10,8 cm. Metropolitan Museum of Art, 22.1.65. After website Metropolitan Museum of Art <<http://www.metmuseum.org/collection/the-collection-online/search/546636>> accessed 07.12.2015.
48. Magic wand, origins unknown, Twelfth Dynasty, *c.* 1985–1795 BC. Metropolitan Museum of Art, 26.7.1288a, b. Bone or ivory, length 20 cm and 13,2 cm. After website Metropolitan Museum of Art <<http://www.metmuseum.org/collection/the-collection-online/search/558368>> accessed 07.12.2015.
49. Magic wand from Egyptian Antiquities Service/Maspero excavations, 1885–86, Twelfth to Eighteenth Dynasty, *c.* 1985–1550 BC. Metropolitan Museum of Art, 32.8.3. Ivory, measurements unknown. After website Metropolitan Museum of Art <<http://www.metmuseum.org/collection/the-collection-online/search/556565>> accessed 07.12.2015.
50. Magic wand from Egyptian Antiquities Service/Maspero excavations, 1885–86, Twelfth to late Thirteenth Dynasty, *c.* 1985–1650 BC. Ivory, length 28 cm. Metropolitan Museum of Art, 86.1.91. After website Metropolitan Museum of Art <<http://www.metmuseum.org/collection/the-collection-online/search/556561>> accessed 07.12.2015.
51. Magic wand from Egyptian Antiquities Service/Maspero excavations, 1885–86, Twelfth to Eighteenth Dynasty, *c.* 1985–1550 BC. Ivory, length 21 cm. Metropolitan Museum of Art, 19.2.18a, b. After website Metropolitan Museum of Art <<http://www.metmuseum.org/collection/the-collection-online/search/556563>> accessed 07.12.2015.
52. Magic wand from Thebes, Twelfth Dynasty, *c.* 1985–1795 BC. Hippopotamus ivory, length: 37 cm. British Museum, EA18175. After website British Museum <http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=119554&partId=1> accessed 07.12.2015.
53. Reverse side of fig. 51.

54. Magic wand, origins unknown, Middle Kingdom (c. 2040–1750 BC). Hippopotamus ivory, length 33,2 cm; width 5,7 cm; depth 0,6 cm. British Museum, EA65439. After website British Museum
<http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?assetId=96330001&objectId=152572&partId=1> accessed 07.12.2015.
55. Magic wand, origins unknown, Middle Kingdom (c. 2040–1750 BC). Ivory, length fragment 1: 18,7 cm; fragment 2: 4 cm. Width fragment 1: 5,2 cm; fragment 2: 5,2 cm. Depth both fragments 0,8 cm. British Museum, EA38190. After website British Museum
<http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=166668&partId=1&searchText=ivory+wand+middle+kingdom&page=1> accessed 07.12.2015.
56. Part of a magic wand, origins unknown, Middle Kingdom (c. 2040–1750 BC). Ivory, length 16 cm; width 4,1 cm; thickness 0,8 cm. British Museum, EA38192. After website British Museum
<http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=100855&partId=1&searchText=ivory+wand+middle+kingdom&page=1> accessed 07.12.2015.
57. Magic wand, origins unknown, Middle Kingdom (c. 2040–1750 BC). Ivory, length 30,5 cm; width 11 cm; thickness 0,7 cm. British Museum, EA24426. After website British Museum
<http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=117791&partId=1> accessed 07.12.2015.
58. Feeding cup with composite animals, Twelfth to late Thirteenth Dynasty, c. 1985–1650 BC. Blue faience and paint, height 3,5 cm; width 8 cm; depth 4 cm. Metropolitan Museum of Art, 44.4.4. After website Metropolitan Museum of Art
<<http://www.metmuseum.org/collection/the-collection-online/search/545936>> accessed 07.12.2015.
59. Feeding cup with griffin, origins unknown, Middle Kingdom (c. 2040–1750 BC). Limestone, height 3,3 cm; diameter 4,3 cm. Courtesy of the Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology, University College London, UC 16644. After Gerke, *Der altägyptische Greif* 15, Kat.-Nr. 20.
60. Birth brick, South Abydos, late Thirteenth Dynasty (c. 1700–1650 BC). Unfired mud brick, width 17 cm; length 35 cm; depth reconstructed to ca. 13 cm. After Wegner, in Silverman, Simpson, and Wegner (eds), *Archaism and Innovation*, Fig. 1.
61. Line-drawing of the imagery on the birth-brick, South Abydos, late Thirteenth Dynasty (c. 1700–1650 BC). Unfired mud brick, width 17 cm; length 35 cm; depth reconstructed to ca. 13 cm. After Wegner, in Silverman, Simpson, and Wegner (eds), *Archaism and Innovation*, Fig. 6.

Addenda

Mail correspondence with Lisa Sabbahy

On Nov 2, 2015, at 12:06 AM, Vibeke Berens <vibeke_berens@hotmail.com> wrote:

Dear Mrs Sabbahy,

Last winter I participated in the Cairo semester under supervision of Marleen de Meyer (from whom I got your mail address). At the Dutch Institute you gave a very interesting lecture about the meaning of the griffin through time. I am currently writing my master's thesis on composite animals and I was wondering if you could confirm what I wrote down that day. Is it right that you consider the griffins with wings down as tamed animals, rather than dangerous creatures (so are they dangerous when depicted with their wings up?) Could you perhaps clarify the relationship between the griffin, the sun god and childbirth symbolism? Am I correct that in your view, the wings are not actually wings, but a representation of Nefertum/lotus plumes and therefore connected to horizon birth symbolism? Thank you so much!

With kind regards,

Vibeke Berens (Leiden University)

On Nov 2, 2015, at 17:27 AM, Lisa Sabbahy replied:

Thank you for writing. Yes, the dangerous part about a griffin is that it flies and strikes from above, and so without its wings it is pacified. I was trying to make sense of the head between the wings of some griffins. The shape of the wings is like the horns of the divine cow, like the headrest, which is thought of as a horizon, and like the petals of the lotus, which is what the young sun god was born out of. They are very much wings, but I think symbolically became the horizon, place of the sun's birth, lotus petals, etc. Since all this ties to the birth of the sun god, it is birth symbolism, or perhaps in a tomb, rebirth symbolism. I am now doing last changes on my conference paper about griffons and birth symbolism. It is to be published in Leuven in early 2016. Hope this helps, and feel free to write again. Best, Lisa Sabbahy

TABLE I *Frequency of symbols/animals on the discussed magic wands*

	15.3.197	22.1.53	22.1.103	22.1.154a b	22.1.65	26.7.1288 a,b	32.8.3	86.1.91	19.2.18a, b	EA18175	Reverse EA18175	EA65439	EA38190	EA38192	EA24426
Aha				x				x		x	x				
Baboon								x							
Baboon (holding <i>Wedjat</i> -eye)														x	
Canid-sceptre		x	x x			x x				x	x	x	x	x	
Cobra (erected)						x				x		x			
Cobra (in basket)	x x														
Cobra (writhing)			x							x x	x x	x			
Crocodile		x		x				x		x					
Crocodile's head											x x				
Double bull									x						x
Double sphinx											x				
Feline animal		x	x	x		x			x	x					
Feline head in corner							x					x	x		x
Frog in basket								x			x			x	x
Giraffe-sceptre											x x x x				
Goddess with <i>ankh</i>										x					
God with snake's head											x				
Griffin						x	x?	x					x		
Griffin (with head between wings)			x	x	x		x?			x					x
Hieroglyph for fire (Q7)			x x	x x x						x					
Hieroglyph for sun (N5)			x												
Hieroglyph for sunshine (N8)										x	x				
Hieroglyph walking legs + sun disk		x	x									x		x	
Hippo-head in <i>hwt</i> - symbol						x									
Horus falcon										x					
Human figures	x														
Jackal head (longnecked)								x							
Jackal head in corner	x											x			
Jackal-head in <i>hwt</i> - symbol															x
Lion	x	x		x	x	x	x	x		x	x x x	x			
Ram's head with <i>Atef</i> -crown											x				
Scarab											x				
Seated donkey figure	x					x									
Serpopard		x	x	x			x?				x	x		x	
Snake(s)			x	x			x		x	x	x	x			
Taweret	x	x		x			x	x	x						x
Taweret with <i>ankh</i>												x			
Taweret with <i>sa</i> - sign (V17)										x	x		x		
Tortoise									x						
Vulture			x												
<i>Wedjat</i> -eye						x x				x		x			