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Les manifestations artistiques de l'Égypte prédynastique

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Visual representation and state development in Egypt

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In Predynastic representations, strongly stylised animals and plants with symbolic values occur. The astonishing craftsmanship by which some objects were decorated shows that the artisans were capable of producing almost any kind of representation they would have desired. Therefore, if a representation is stylised, this should be intentional. One of the most important reasons for the stylisation will have been the fact that the artisans did not want to render the exact image of one individual animal, but on the contrary the general idea and characteristics of the animal. Another reason for this mode of representation was to allow double interpretations, or more exactly to combine originally independent ideas into new symbols. They will become a kind of labels, which can be used in different contexts. This mode of representation occurs from the very beginning of the Naqada culture and continues throughout the whole of it. Changes will certainly have occurred during this period of nearly a thousand years, but a number of basic iconographic elements continued to be used. Some of them were integrated into formal Egyptian art, others were not and disappeared from the artistic record. A close relationship can be observed between bovines (principally the bull), birds (originally probably the ostrich but from the Naqada III period onwards mainly the falcon), the hippopotamus and the so-called “Naqada plant”. But human representations are the central element around which this visual language is built.

1. Kathryn Piquette most kindly and thoroughly corrected the English of the present article and furthermore made an important number of relevant remarks on an earlier draft. Vivian Davies, Renée Friedman, Ulrich Hartung, Dirk Huyge, Luc Limme and Geneviève Pierrat kindly allowed to include illustrations of objects from excavations and collections under their responsibility. This article is the result of lectures given in Imola (2004) and Berlin (2005). At Imola, Laura Degli Esposti and the other members of CISE are to be thanked for making my stay most pleasant, as was also the case with my visit to Berlin, with thanks due to Nicole Alexanian and Stephan Seidlmayer.

From the very beginning of the Naqada I period, semantic representations of military victory are attested while an iconography related to the afterlife is shown on the Naqada II Decorated pottery.

On trouve dans l'iconographie prédynastique des représentations stylisées d'animaux et de plantes à forte valeur symbolique. Des objets parfois très étonnants dans leur réalisation montrent que les artisans étaient capables de produire presque toutes les représentations qu'ils souhaitaient. De fait, si une représentation est schématisée, il s'agit là d'un geste intentionnel. L'une des raisons les plus importantes pour la stylisation pourrait être liée au fait que les artisans ne voulaient pas reproduire l'image exacte d'un animal particulier mais au contraire l'idée et les caractéristiques générales de l'animal. Une autre raison pourrait plutôt laisser place à une interprétation double, plus précisément la combinaison d'idées indépendantes dans des symboles nouveaux. Ils deviennent alors des sortes d'étiquettes qu'on peut utiliser dans différents contextes. Ce type de représentation existe dès le début de la culture de Nagada et a perduré tout au long de cette phase. Des transformations se sont certainement produites durant cette période de presque un millénaire, mais de nombreux éléments iconographiques basiques ont continué à être utilisés. Certains d'entre eux ont été intégrés dans l'art égyptien officiel, d'autres non, et ont alors disparu du répertoire artistique. Une relation étroite peut être observée entre les bovins (principalement le taureau), les oiseaux (probablement d'abord l'autruche puis surtout le faucon à partir de Nagada III), l'hippopotame et le signe qu'on qualifie de « plante nagadienne ». Mais les représentations humaines forment l'élément central autour duquel ce langage visuel est construit. Dès le tout début de la phase Nagada I, les représentations sémantiques de victoire militaire sont attestées tandis qu'une iconographie liée à l'au-delà apparaît sur la poterie décorée de Nagada II.

Introduction

Over the last decades, much interest has been shown in the socio-economic development of the Predynastic period (Griswold 1992; Bard 1994; Ellis 1996; Savage 1997; Delrue 2001; Buchez 2004; Rowland 2004; 2007; Castillos 2007; 2011) and state formation in Egypt (Pérez-Largacha 1996; Wilkinson 1996; Gundlach 1998; Campagno 2002; 2004; 2011; Raffaele 2003; Anđelković 2004; 2008; 2011; Menu 2004; Köhler 2008; 2010). Among other kinds of documentation, such studies repeatedly draw on a rather limited number of representations, such as those found on the late Predynastic decorated palettes (Ciałowicz 1991). Far less attention has been paid to the meaning and symbolism of the vast majority of Predynastic – Early Dynastic objects and representations. These, however, offer important possibilities for understanding the intellectual context of 4th millennium society in Egypt, which will by 3000 BC lead to the centralised state. Stylisation of shapes for stressing essential characteristics is an important element of Predynastic art,² and will be fundamental for the present study. This is already obvious from Badarian times onwards, as can be seen in figurines

2. The term “art” is not used here in its modern sense, where the artist himself or herself decides about the subject, style etc. of his or her work, but more in the sense of artisan. See: Davis 1983; Junge 1990; Midant-Reynes 2003: 342-345.

and decorated objects of that period (e.g., Brunton & Caton Thompson 1928: pl. XXII, XXIV). The tendency for “simplifying” shapes should not be seen as a lack in ability; already at that time, artisans show remarkable skill in working different types of materials. Furthermore, there is no evolution towards realism during the Naqada period. The art of this early period never had the imitation of reality as its ultimate goal. Rather than examine visual representation only from an evolutionary perspective, our aim is to situate understanding within the broader political, religious and social context.

White Cross-lined pottery

As a starting point for the present contribution, a small group of exceptional White Cross-lined vessels decorated with scenes including human representations will be used. Two of the jars, one in the Royal Museums for Art and History at Brussels (E.3002, Hendrickx 1998 with further bibliography) (**fig. 1a**) and another in the Petrie Museum (London UC.15339, Petrie 1920: pl. XXV, 100M) (**fig. 1b**), both unfortunately without recorded provenance, are well known. In recent years, three more have been discovered, all during excavations in cemetery U at Abydos, one in tomb U-239 (U-239/1, Dreyer et al. 1998: 111-114, Abb. 12.1, 13.) (**fig. 1c**) and two in tomb U-415 (U-415/1, U-415/2, Dreyer et al. 2003: 80-84, Abb. 5, 6.a; Hartung 2010: fig. 4) (**fig. 1d-e**). Most recently, these vessels have been dated to the early Naqada I period (Hartmann 2011: 928, phase Ia2) and are therefore most literally at the beginning of a long history. The common theme among these vessels is their decoration referring to interpersonal violence and victory (cf. Hendrickx 1995; 2004; Köhler in Dreyer et al. 1998: 111-112; Hartmann in Dreyer et al. 2003: 80-82; Midant-Reynes 2003: 326-330; Hartung 2010; Hendrickx & Eyckerman 2010a). Fundamental to this interpretation is the presence of prisoners, represented with their arms bound at the back and in some cases “attached” to larger figures,³ considered as the victors. Besides by their relative large size, these latter figures are occasionally characterised, among other things, by the presence of maceheads (Abydos U-239/1, U-415/1),⁴ while other elements which distinguish them from the prisoners include feathers or branches (?) worn on the head, and animal tails hung from the belt⁵. The larger figures on the jars in Brussels and London and one from tomb U-239 at Abydos are also characterised by the upraised position of the arms, a particular attitude that, in the past, has been interpreted as dancing (Baumgartel 1955: 64-65) and occasionally still

3. The position of the arms bound at the back is especially obvious on jar U-239/1, and in this case resembles most Late Predynastic and Early Dynastic prisoners such as those on the “Battlefield palette” (London BM EA.20791, Spencer 1980: n° 576) or on several decorated ivories from Hierakonpolis (Whitehouse 2002; Droux 2005-2007). On other White Cross-lined vessels, the arms are not indicated separately but are incorporated into the general outline of the bodies, resulting in one of the shoulders often being a little broader than the other (cf. Brussels E.3002, Hendrickx 1998: 207, fig. 6). The ropes to which some prisoners are “attached” have been misinterpreted as arms (Scharff 1928: 268; Baumgartel 1955: 64; Garfinkel 2003: 247-248), despite the fact that these “arms” would start from the neck and not from the clearly indicated shoulders.

4. On the Brussels and London vessels maceheads may be recognised in the objects hanging from the belt of the victors, although, especially on the Brussels jar, penis sheaths seem more plausible.

5. Cf. page 25.

Fig. 1

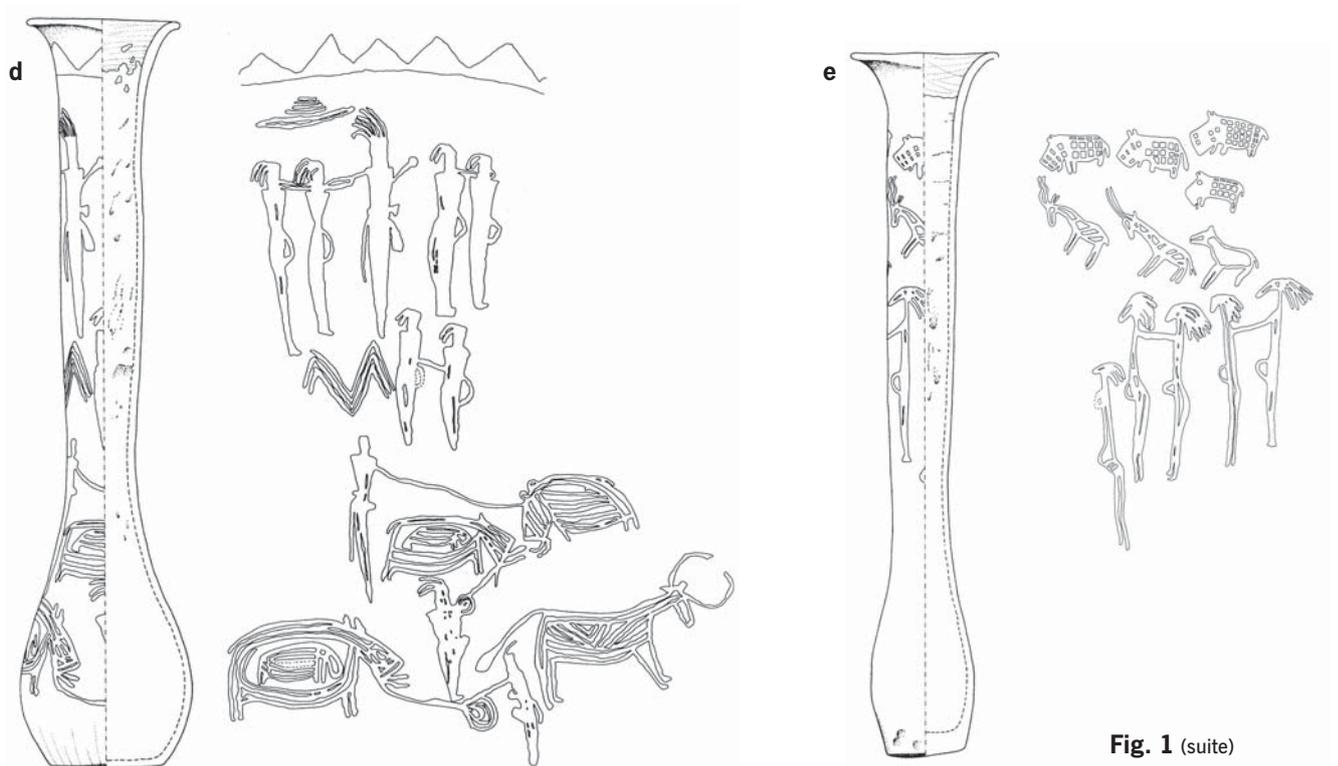
White Cross-lined jars with victory scenes

a. Provenance not recorded, Brussels E.3002 (Hendrickx 1998: 206-207, fig. 5-6) (H. 28,6 cm)

b. Provenance not recorded, London UC.15339 (Adams 1988: 46, fig. 28d) (H. 31,5 cm)

c. Abydos U-239/1, Cairo JdE 99072 (Dreyer et al. 1998: 113-114, Abb. 12.1, 13) (H. 29,8 cm)



**Fig. 1** (suite)

d. Abydos U-415/1, Abydos SCA storeroom (Dreyer et al. 2003: 81, Abb. 5) (H. 50,6 cm)

e. Abydos U-415/2, Abydos SCA storeroom (Dreyer et al. 2003: 83, Abb. 6 & Hartung 2010: 118, fig. 4c) (H. 46,6 cm)

is (Garfinkel 2003: 233-267).⁶ Alternatively, its meaning as a symbol of power by reference to bull horns (Hendrickx 2002a: 283-284; 2004: 38-39) will be discussed in further detail below.

Before going into the details of this small group of jars, a general remark on White Cross-lined pottery is necessary. The figurative scenes on all vessels of this type, not only those mentioned above,⁷ are asymmetrical in composition, although the artisan usually takes into account the round shape of the vessel in designing the composition. For example on a bowl from Abydos (Oxford AM 1892.1045, Payne 1993: n° 405) (**fig. 2a**), the net for catching a crocodile follows the round shape of the vessel, although the overall composition is asymmetrical. More in-depth study is required, but generally the decoration of White Cross-lined ware does not appear to have been designed with the material features of the vessels in mind, and sometimes the adaptation of the com-

6. Garfinkel (2003: 233-249) interprets the representations on the vessels from Brussels, London and Abydos U-239 (the vessels from tomb U-415 had not yet been published when Garfinkel's book appeared) as dancing scenes. Although Garfinkel does not clearly substantiate his "dancing" interpretation, he does mention that interpretations such as "fighting, conflict, warfare", are unlikely based on the absence of weapons, aggressive body gestures and defeated enemies (Garfinkel 2003: 248). However, the representations have been published as victory scenes or scenes with prisoners (Hendrickx 1995; 2004; Köhler in Dreyer et al. 1998: 111-112; Hartmann in Dreyer et al. 2003: 80-82), referring only indirectly to fighting or warfare, and it is therefore not surprising that aggressive body gestures are not depicted. Furthermore, Garfinkel completely ignores the presence of maceheads and the ropes by which the prisoners are bound to the victors, nor does he explain why the prisoners' arms are bound at the back.

7. Petrie 1921: pl. XX-XXV. Further important examples include: Abydos U-380 (Dreyer et al. 2000: Abb. 7c-d); Bonn, BoS 223 (Regner 1998: 125-126, n° 103); New York MMA 12.182.15 (Behrmann 1989: cat. 24f); Princeton 30.491-30.494 (Kantor 1953); Turin S.1827, S.1823 (Donadoni Roveri & Tiradritti 1998: 142, 146).

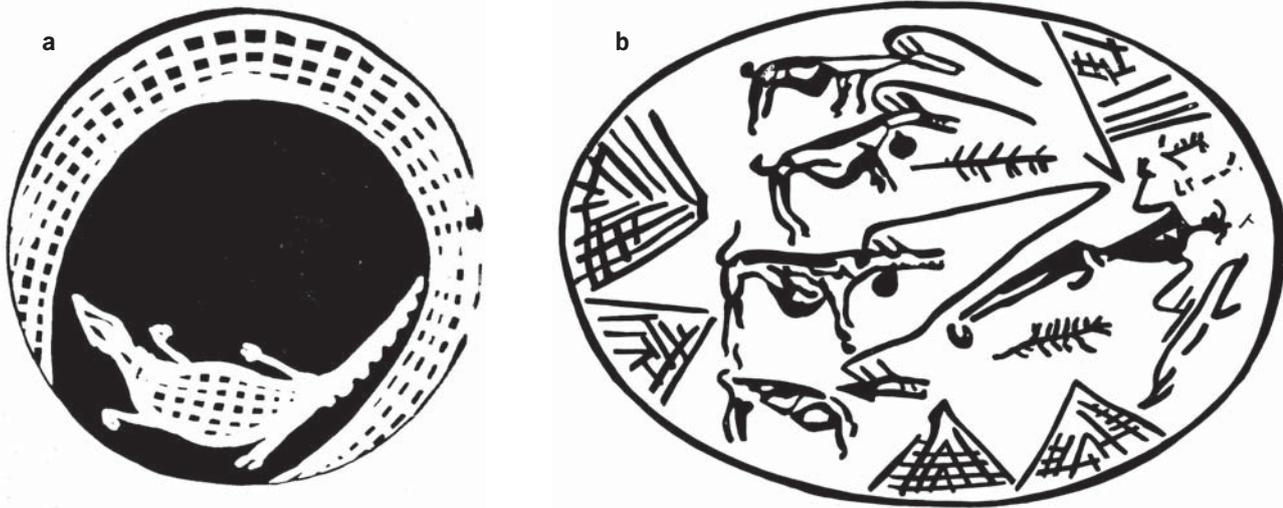


Fig. 2

White Cross-lined
bowls

a. Abydos, Oxford
AM 1892.1045
(Payne 1993: fig. 28,
n° 405) (W. 14,0 cm)

b. Provenance not
recorded, Moscow
Museum of Fine Arts
2947 (Leclant &
Huard 1980: fig. 1)
(size unknown)

position is rather clumsy (cf. Wengrow 2006: 102-103). A particularly obvious example is the position of the hunter, oblique to that of his dogs, on the well known plate from Moscow (Museum of Fine Arts 2947, Graff 2009a: 196, n° 9) (**fig. 2b**). On the vessels with “victory” scenes discussed here, the decoration extends around them, and as Wengrow (2006: 102) states, “Rotation of the vessel, and hence some form of memory-work, are therefore essential to any reading of their content...”. But as the decoration is not symmetrical or repetitive, the starting point for viewing had to be selected by the past artisan and viewer. It would seem the scenes were transferred from compositions on flat surfaces to the vessels. For the purpose of publication, adapting the circumferential decoration of a jar necessitates the selection of a “breaking point”, and for jars such as those under discussion which exhibit no overall symmetry in composition, this is particularly difficult. The way in which the “break” is chosen can influence the interpretation of the scene. It is therefore of importance to select with great care the “beginning” of such figurative scenes which encircle White Cross-lined vessels. Published drawings of such vessels and their decoration should be critically evaluated since the way in which the decoration is rendered is a modern construct. On the vessels themselves, there is no clear indication of the “beginning” of a scene, as this will have been perfectly obvious for viewers in antiquity. The only possible exception is on vessel U-239/1 from Abydos, where a vertical stroke could indicate the manner in which the scene is to be divided. Accepting this (**fig. 3**), the scene would start from right with the large scale figure with two prisoners to the right of him; continue with two identical groups comprising a large scale figure with two prisoners to the left of him and the scene would terminate with the large scale figure with raised arms. In this way, the artisan’s intended beginning and end of the scene might be recognisable in a more coherent way than the published drawing suggests.⁸ Unlike other jars in the small group mentioned above, two vessels from tomb U-415 show animal representations beside victory scenes. On vessel U-415/1, the lower scene represents a hippopotamus hunt, consisting of three hunters,

8. This is also the accepted by Rita Hartmann (pers. com.), who is preparing the final publication of the pottery from cemetery U.

each harpooning an animal, while vessel U-415/2 bears two rows of animals which form the upper part of the decoration. Hippopotamus hunting scenes occur regularly on White Cross-lined pottery and rarely on Decorated vessels (Hendrickx & Depraetere 2004: 818-819; Hendrickx 2010). A symbolic interpretation for the hippopotamus hunt should be sought as it can hardly have had economic importance for the Predynastic way of life predominantly involving agriculture and animal husbandry. The hippopotamus in a hunting scene probably symbolically represents elements of chaos to be brought under control by positive forces, an idea that continues into dynastic times (Säve-Söderberg 1953; Hendrickx & Depraetere 2004: 814-815; Müller 2008). Interestingly, a large bull with oversized horns and a tail is also found in the lower scene of U-415/1. The animal has nothing to do with the hippopotamus hunt, and although visually linked, can not be part of the same narrative. But the bull is prominently represented and can not be considered simply a space filler.⁹ During dynastic times, the bull is directly associated with the king, an idea that can already be found on the Narmer palette.¹⁰ Although there is of course a significant chronological gap between the Narmer palette and the White Cross-lined jars, it can nevertheless be tentatively suggested that the bull on U-415/1 already represents the idea of “royal” power.¹¹ The combination of the hippopotamus hunt and the bull would in this way be a forerunner of the royal hippopotamus hunt of the Early Dynastic period (Säve-Söderbergh 1953: 15-19). Consideration of the symbolism of both the bull itself and the

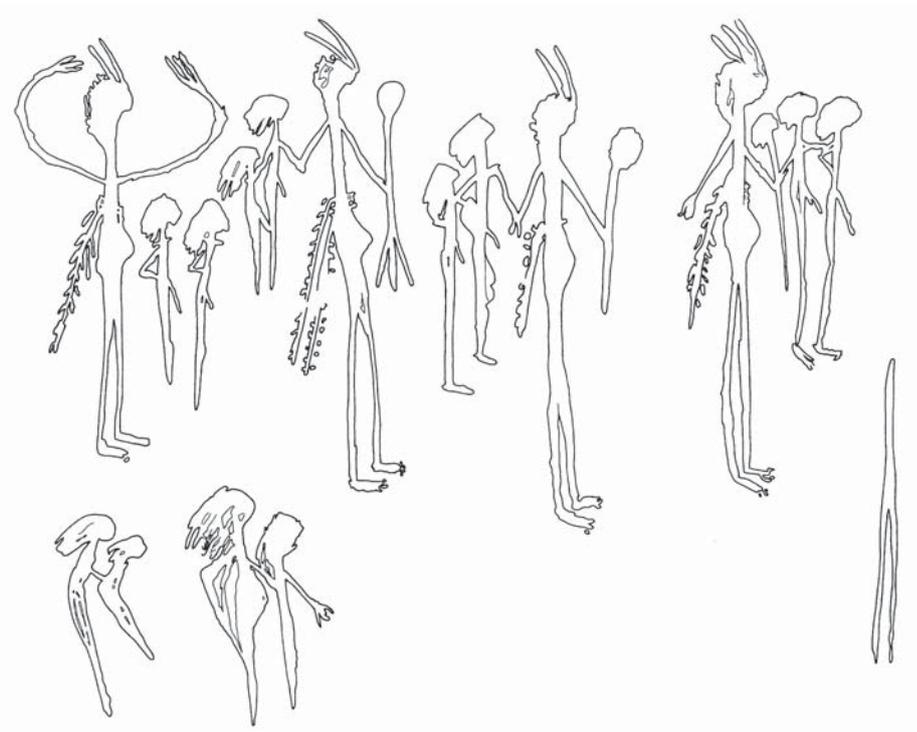


Fig. 3
Abydos U-239/1,
alternative after
Dreyer et al.
1998: 113-114,
Abb. 12.1, 13

9. There is only one other example of a bull on White Cross-lined pottery, a vessel from Mahasna tomb H.97 (London BM EA.49025, Ayrton & Loat 1911: pl. XIV; Graff 2009a: 228, n° 103) on which a bull occurs in the company of a hippopotamus, a crocodile and two elephants.

10. And also on the probably slightly older “bull palette” (Paris Louvre E.11255, Ziegler 1990: 17).

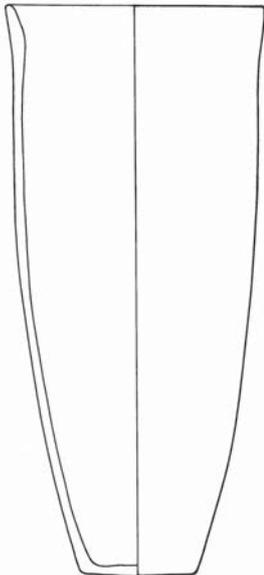
11. At present we lack the possibility to define the actual political power of Egypt’s early regional rulers, therefore the term “royal” is used here in a general way, referring to elite “social” power.

hippopotamus hunt as elements of “royal” power allows an integrated interpretation of the lower register of U-415/1. The form of the oversized horns of the bull on this jar brings to mind the shape of the raised arms of the victorious figure on vessel U-239/1. Instead of being a minor element of the scenes on U-415/1, the bull – the largest element of the decoration – should be seen as central, representative of a dominant, positive power. Furthermore, it should be noted that the position of the bull on the published drawing (Dreyer et al. 2003: Abb. 13) has been shifted slightly compared to the original object as the published photos (Dreyer et al. 2003: Tf. 15a) show no blank space above the bull. The animal is depicted directly below the upper hippopotamus and the bull is located immediately to the left of the lower hippopotamus. Therefore it seems more likely that the bull was the intended centre of the scene.¹² From this point of view, the bull would be the mirror image of the person dominating the prisoners in the upper scene. The prisoner scene is probably not a representation of any real event or situation, but symbolically refers to violent power, and the victor or ruler is in this context depicted as a human being. The hippopotamus hunt by contrast is far more symbolic, and although the hunters are represented as humans, they refer only indirectly to the concept of power, which is expressed symbolically in the form of a bull. Although the meaning of the upper and lower scenes on U-415/1 can be linked, these do not seem to have formed a unified composition, possibly as a result of the difference in shape between the tubular upper and bulbous lower part of the vessel.

The significance of the range of animals on U-415/2, four hippopotami, two antelopes¹³ and a canine, most probably a dog¹⁴, raises various questions, par-

Fig. 4
Hunting scenes

a. Provenance not recorded, engraved jar, Brussels E.2631 (Hendrickx 1992: 8, fig. 5; 16, fig. 6) (H. 33,1 cm)



12. Rita Hartmann, pers. com.: “In my opinion, the three pairs of hippopotami with hunters were planned from the beginning, but the bull was probably drawn first, followed by the two upper couples of hippopotami with hunters. When all this was drawn, there was not enough free space left for the last couple, the hunter of which had to be squeezed in underneath the tail of the bull.”

13. An addax and an oryx according to the excavators (Dreyer et al. 2003: 82).

14. Despite the fact that the tail of the animal is not curling upwards, the usual pose for Predynastic dogs, identification as a dog is still the most plausible given the profile appearance of the animal (Dreyer et al. 2003: 82).

ticularly as they are not directly engaged in any kind of instructive activity. There does not seem to be a common theme linking them together. Because of their diversity, they can not be understood as establishing the particular environmental or geographic context for the scene with human figures below. As for the two other vessels from Abydos already discussed, the question of the original composition on a flat surface arises again (Hendrickx 2006: 729, fig. 4; Hartung 2010: fig. 4c). When the dog is placed at the end of the sequence of animals, the lower placed prisoner becomes the first of the series of prisoners and can be considered the “first” element after the hypothetical break (fig. 1e). This framing allows comparison with a scene incised on a roughly contemporary large, Black-topped beaker (Brussels, E.2631, unprovenanced, Hendrickx 1992) (fig. 4a). The vessel is decorated with animals only, arranged in three rows, the upper-most of which “ends” with two dogs.¹⁵ Comparison can also be made with a vessel from Abydos (Chicago OIM E8923, Ayrton & Loat 1911: pl. XVII; Hendrickx in Teeter 2011: 153-154) (fig. 4b), on which the animals are painted vertically in three relatively short rows, at least two of which “end” with dogs. Although no human figures occur on these vessels, the collars on the dogs of the Brussels jar make indirect reference to a human presence. On the one hand, these scenes can simply be understood as representations of hunting, but given the lack of narrative details such as biting or similar hunting-related acts, and the static arrangement in rows, a more symbolic interpretation should be sought. The general framework for interpretation is the theme of order over chaos (Asselberghs 1961; Kemp 2006: 92-99; Hendrickx 2006; Hendrickx 2010: 125-127), in which the desert animals, similar to the hippopotamus, represent chaos, and the dogs the controlling element. Thus, the dog on U-415/2 can be understood as an element of order.

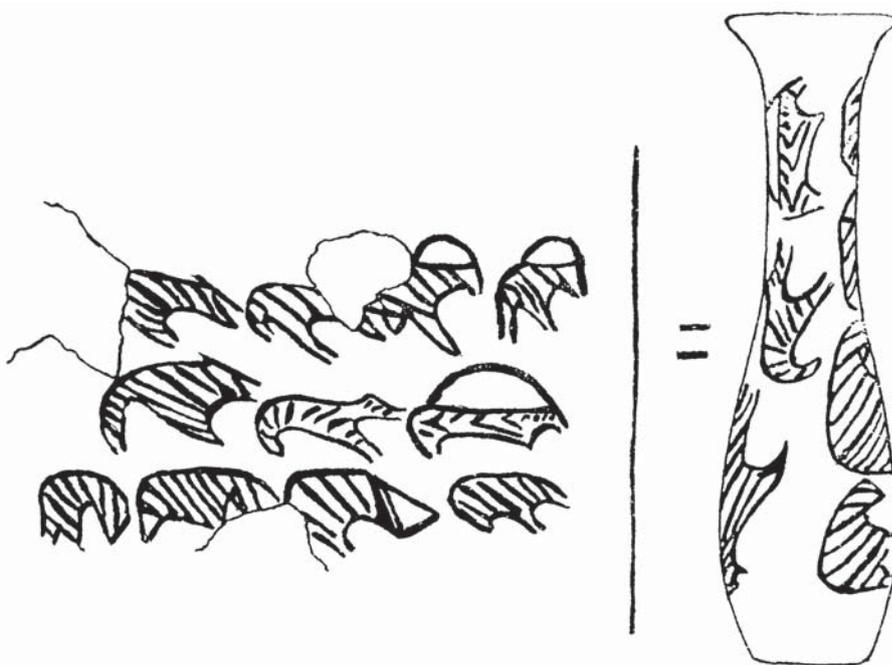


Fig. 4b

Abydos C.2,
White Cross-
lined jar, Chicago
OIM E8923
(Ayrton & Loat
1911: pl. XXVII)
(H. 32,2 cm)

15. The “mountain sign” between the legs of the “first” animal in the lower row could be considered as an indication for this animal is indeed being the first of its row, similar to the above mentioned vertical stroke on U-239/1.

A point that can be made for the two jars from Abydos tomb U-415 is that they also embody the theme of power and control, expressed once on each jar with the prisoners motif and once through animal symbolism. It also should be noted that the two jars, although similarly shaped and found in the same tomb, were most probably not decorated by the same person; comparison shows that the style of the hippopotami and the human figures is different on each jar. For the hippopotami, not only do their internal details differ completely, but the shape of the snouts and hind parts also differ. Furthermore, each scene is orientated differently, right to left on U-415/1 and left to right on U-415/2. This analysis takes into consideration two jars only, but the repeated occurrence of scenes with very similar content, organisation, animal types, relative size of the images, etc. and which avail themselves to a similar symbolic interpretive framework, yet composed by two different artists, indicates that they were drawing from an extant iconography, of which unfortunately very little has been otherwise preserved.

In sum, the White Cross-lined jars with victory scenes comprise the earliest pictorial evidence for violence and domination expressed in a visual “language” based on symbolism, rather than a direct representation or narrative of real events. This visual symbolic system must have been part of the ideology used to legitimise the status and authority of early regional rulers. At present this hypothesis can only be proposed for Abydos, from where all vessels with recorded provenance derive, but it would hardly be surprising if similar scenes were attested from the early Naqada II “royal” tombs at Hierakonpolis (Friedman 2008; Friedman et al. 2011), as a few figurative fragments of White Cross-lined jars found there might indicate (Adams 2002: 25-26, fig. 4-7).

Decorated pottery and the Hierakonpolis painted tomb

Scenes with prisoners do not occur on the Decorated pottery of the Naqada IIC-D period. This, however, does not necessarily mean that such representations fell out of use. As attested by the contemporary image of a ruler figure smiting his enemies from the “painted tomb” at Hierakonpolis (Naqada IIC, Quibell & Green 1902; Gautier 1993; Ciałowicz 2001: 157-163; Midant-Reynes 2003: 331-336) (fig. 5). The victory scenes on White Cross-lined pottery have been considered as part of a visual repertoire which occurs in other material

Fig. 5
Hierakonpolis
“painted tomb”
(Quibell & Green
1902: pl. LXXV)
(W. ca. 5 m.)



forms, and the use of these scenes must have continued during the Naqada IIC-D period on objects other than pots. Not only are the representations on Decorated ware far more standardised than those on White Cross-lined pottery (cf. Graff 2004: 771-772; 2009a), but their general characteristics are also different (see Wengrow 2006: 102-104). The main topic of the scenes on Decorated vessels is related to funerary aspects and the afterlife (Graff 2003; 2009: 122-124), but this does not imply that such vessels were made especially for the tomb as they have also been found in settlement sites.

Figures with raised arms occasionally occur on Decorated pottery (cf. Hendrickx 2002b; Graff 2009a: 151). These are typically considered to be representations of females¹⁶ and generally co-occur with boats, often accompanied by male figures, which appear subordinate based on their relative size and orientation towards the females. Because these representations relate mainly to the afterlife (Graff 2003; 2009a) the position of the raised arms does not relate to expressions of aggression or “power over” as proposed for the victory scenes. The layout and subject matter of the scene in the “painted tomb” at Hierakonpolis strongly parallel the scenes on the Decorated jars, but are far more elaborate and, of course, funerary in nature. Funerary scenes are therefore not limited to Decorated pottery, but their appearance in other contexts is extremely rare. Recently, fragments of painted plaster have been found in the elite cemetery HK6 at Hierakonpolis (Friedman 2008: 1186-1187, fig. 15), and although poorly preserved, the so-called “Naqada plant” may be depicted on these fragments. Unlike the decoration inside the “painted tomb”, this newly discovered painted scene was part of an above-ground structure adjacent to the tomb and must have remained visible after the funeral. Although the exact chronological position of this find has not yet been established, it is probably contemporary with Tomb 23, dated to the Naqada IIB period. If so, this would make it older than the vast majority of the Decorated jars. Although admittedly speculative, such large scale painting could be a source for the development of the figurative scenes on Decorated pottery.¹⁷ Be that as it may, the iconographical syntax of the Decorated jars with boats and other frequently occurring elements show no development over time from their first appearance indicating that iconography and syntax are already established when they appear on the vessels. As such development is lacking on pottery, it must have occurred in contexts and on other material objects that have not survived (cf. Hendrickx & Eyckerman 2010a). This helps explain what appears to be a major gap in style and subject matter between White Cross-lined and Decorated pottery. Certainly, the iconographic repertoire and the systems of meaning to which it belonged changed over time (and place), as well as the choice of vessels or other material substrates.¹⁸

16. An exception to this is a fragmentary vase from Naqada, tomb 60 (Oxford AM 1895.819, Payne 1993: n° 916). A male figure with raised arms is also found in the “painted tomb” from Hierakonpolis (cf. fig. 28).

17. This would not have been a new phenomenon because, as already argued (cf. page 2-3), the figural representations on White Cross-lined pottery derived from scenes laid out on flat surfaces.

18. This possibility has been given little serious consideration. In the past, the difference between White Cross-lined and Decorated pottery has often been attributed to foreign influence (e.g., Baumgartel 1955: 72-89); at present the question is generally ignored or avoided. For the importance of taking account of the material substrate used for representations, see Midant-Reynes 2003: 315-317.

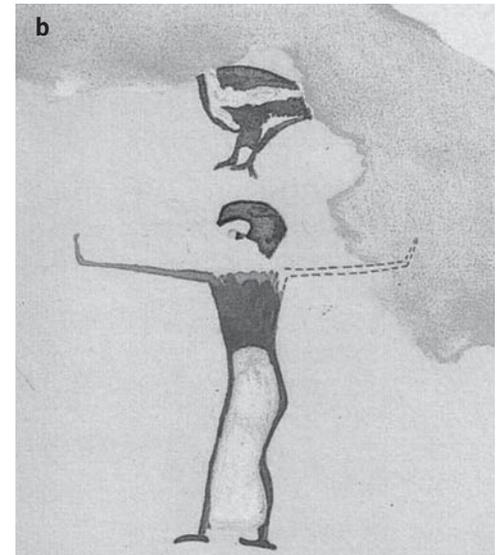
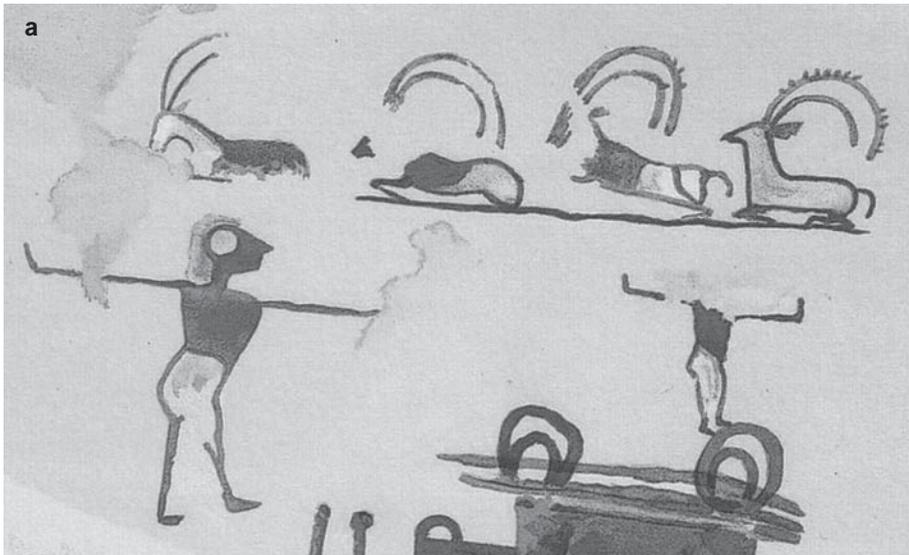
Returning to the “painted tomb”, the boats in the central part of the scene are generally interpreted as representing a funeral procession,¹⁹ hence the funerary interpretation of boat scenes on Decorated jars. In this painting, we also find persons, both male and female, with raised arms. On the right side of the tableau, a hunting scene with dogs can be identified. Although not identical, it is very similar to the hunting scenes on White Cross-lined pottery, indicating temporal continuity for certain iconographic themes despite their almost complete absence on Decorated jars. And exceptionally, “old” themes do occur on Decorated jars, for example, the hippopotamus hunt can be found on a few hippopotamus-shaped jars (cf. Hendrickx & Depraetere 2004: 819),²⁰ and hunting scenes with dogs also occur occasionally on Decorated jars (Hendrickx 2006: 726-727).

Above the largest boat on the painted tomb at Hierakonpolis, three female figures are depicted with their arms outstretched to either side (fig. 6), rather than raised above the head. This pose is most probably due to spatial constraints resulting from the placement of animals above their heads. We therefore consider it to be a variant of the raised-arm pose. The animals appear to be directly related to the women depicted below them, most likely representing some aspect of their identity. The group of three animals above the central figure and the single animal above the left figure, are oryxes (fig. 6a), while the bird (damaged) above the right figure can be identified as a guinea-fowl (*Numida m. somaliensis*, cf. Keimer 1942: 329; Houlihan 1986: 82-83; Beaux 2004) (fig. 6b). Both the oryx and the guinea-fowl occur on Decorated pottery, albeit rarely. The animals can tentatively be considered elements of a more elaborate iconography, which hardly ever occurs on the “abridged” version of the Decorated jars. During dynastic times, the guinea-fowl becomes a

Fig. 6

a. Hierakonpolis “painted tomb”, detail (Quibell & Green 1902: pl. LXXVI)

b. Hierakonpolis “painted tomb”, detail (Quibell & Green 1902: pl. LXXVI).



19. However, not all scenes including boats are to be considered funerary as is shown by boat processions in rock art (Darnell 2009; Hendrickx et al. in press).

20. The hippopotamus hunt can also be found on the painted linen from Gebelein (Turin S.17138, Galassi 1955; Donadoni Roveri & Tiradritti 1998: 168-169), which unfortunately is not well dated. The tableau on this heavily damaged object can not be reconstructed in its entirety, but boats are an important element undoubtedly linked with the boat motifs on Decorated pottery.

hieroglyph (Gardiner G 21), used for writing *nh.h.* “eternity” (cf. Beaux 2004). Writing of course did not yet exist when the Hierakonpolis tomb was painted, but the presence of this particular bird on a few Decorated jars²¹ and on the “Battlefield palette”, generally dated to the early Naqada III period,²² allows a chronological link to be made with the Dynastic period. This might very well indicate that, during Naqada IIC, the bird was already connected with ideas about the afterlife – a topic entirely relevant to the Hierakonpolis tomb painting. The meaning of the oryx can at present not be discerned, but the religious, and later divine, status of the three female figures can nevertheless hardly be questioned. The shape formed by the raised arms expresses religious significance and power, although its precise character derives from the general context in which the arms and the figure itself occur. In addition to their representational function, the two symmetrically upward curving lines formed by the raised arms may be understood in a more abstract way, acting as a symbol which can be used, for example, in political and religious contexts. Intellectually, the process of moving from pictorial representation to abstract symbolic signification is a prerequisite stage in the development of writing, although not writing in itself (cf. Graff 2009a: 122-124).

Figurines and the development of symbolism

The raised arms pose is well known among a number of figurines (Naqada I-II), both male and female (Ucko 1968),²³ which show several highly stylised features. The heads of the objects are often bird-shaped, as seen on the well known figurines from el-Mammariya (Brooklyn 07.447.502, 07.447.505, Needler 1984: 336-338, n° 267-268) (**fig. 7**). That the shape should be interpreted as the head of a bird is supported by identically shaped features on palettes, combs, etc. (e.g., Petrie 1921: pl. LIV; Payne 1993: fig. 78). The white painted legs of the figurines are cone-shaped and taper off, generally without indication of feet (cf. pages 14-15). The overall shape of the figurines is paralleled in a remarkable flint object from Naqada (Brussels E.6185a, Hendrickx 2002a: 284, fig. 16.3; Bavay & Hendrickx in Karlshausen & De Putter 2000: 131) (**fig. 8**)²⁴. Although it strongly resembles the figurines, it never had a head

21. Naqada 173, Oxford AM 1895.605, Payne 1993: n° 858; Basel private collection, Schlögl 1978: cat. 16a-b; Vienna private collection (Scharff 1931: 152, Abb. 62).

22. The largest piece of the “Battlefield palette” is in the British Museum (see n. 2), but the two fragments on which the guineafowl occurs are in Oxford AM 1892.1171 and (formerly) the Kofler-Truniger collection at Luzern (Müller 1964: n° A 3).

23. The numerical dominance of female figurines (cf. Graff 2008: fig. 3) compared to male figures is most probably due to chances of discovery. The majority of provenanced figurines is female, but these come from limited find spots which may heavily influence the ratio of female to male figurines. The most important figurine find spots are tombs 2 and 186 at el-Mammariya, found by de Morgan in 1906-1907 (cf. Needler 1984: 336-343). There are also a large number of figurines in the British Museum, said to come from Khozam, but these were actually purchased on the antiquities market, the details of which are unknown (Ucko 1968: 114-122). The traditional interpretation of most figurines as female has influenced the interpretation of probably forged figurines as also female, bolstering the idea that such figurines are generally female. Barbara Adams, who at the time of her death was engaged in a project (unfortunately unfinished) to catalogue and study all known figurines, estimated that the large majority of those without a known context were fakes (Adams, pers. comm. 2000).

24. The object was found in 1904-1905 by Garstang in a cache in the Royal Tomb at Naqada (Naqada IIIC1), but is certainly older and may well date to late Naqada I – early Naqada II (Hendrickx 2002a: 283).

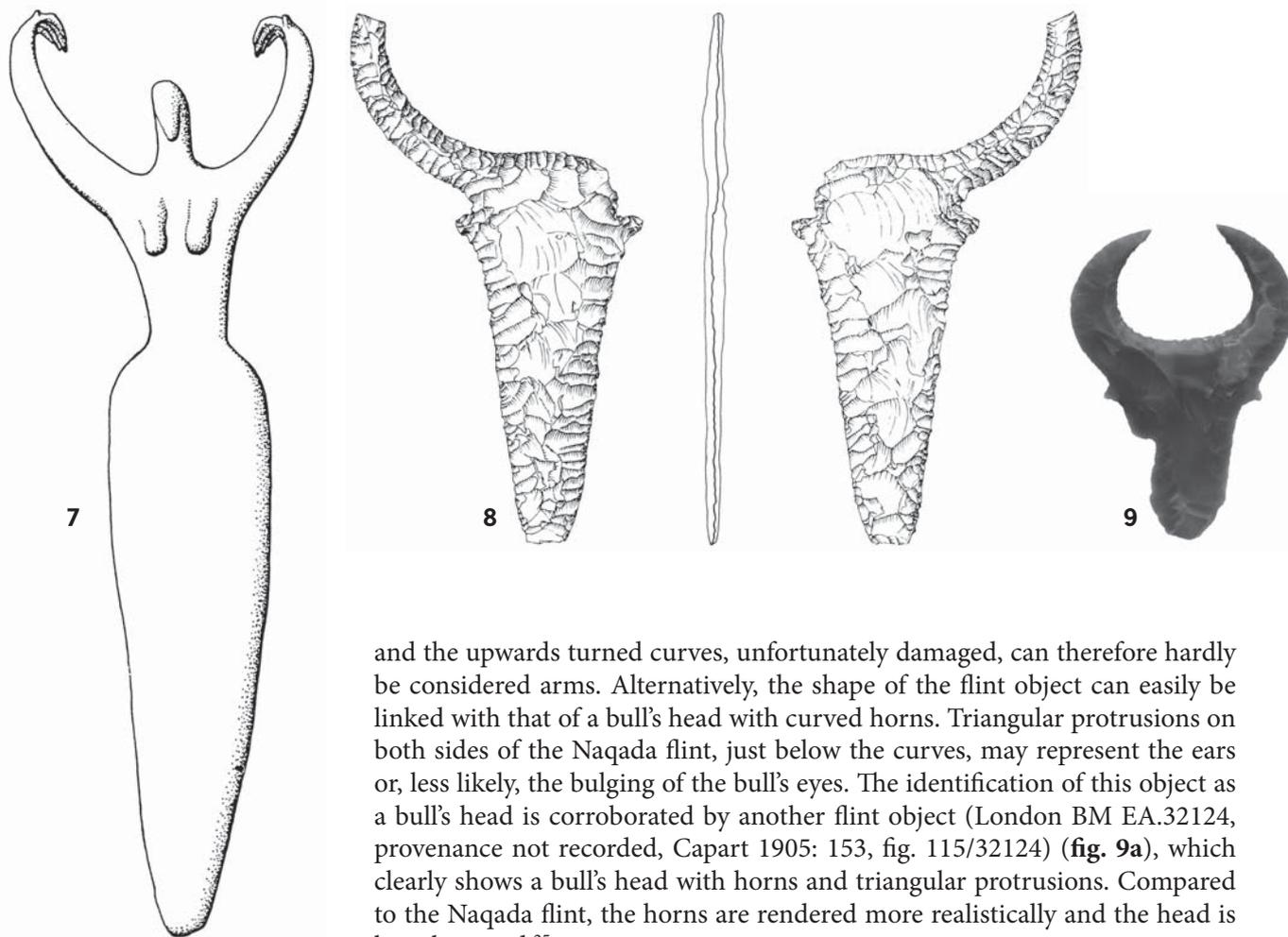


Fig. 7
El-Mammariya tomb 2, figurine, Brooklyn 07.447.502 (Ucko 1968: fig. 48) (H. 34,0 cm)

Fig. 8
Naqada “Royal tomb”, flint object, Brussels E.6185a (Hendrickx 2002: 284, fig. 16.3) (H. 17,1 cm)

Fig. 9
Provenance not recorded, flint bull head, London BM EA.32124 (courtesy British Museum) (H. 7,5 cm)

and the upwards turned curves, unfortunately damaged, can therefore hardly be considered arms. Alternatively, the shape of the flint object can easily be linked with that of a bull’s head with curved horns. Triangular protrusions on both sides of the Naqada flint, just below the curves, may represent the ears or, less likely, the bulging of the bull’s eyes. The identification of this object as a bull’s head is corroborated by another flint object (London BM EA.32124, provenance not recorded, Capart 1905: 153, fig. 115/32124) (**fig. 9a**), which clearly shows a bull’s head with horns and triangular protrusions. Compared to the Naqada flint, the horns are rendered more realistically and the head is less elongated.²⁵

Accepting the bovid interpretation of the Naqada flint object, it is only a small step to recognise its strong resemblance with the Bat emblem (Hendrickx 2002a: 292),²⁶ confirming the suggested bovine interpretation. One major difference between the two, however, is the cone-shape of the lower part of the flint compared to the triangular “torso” of the Bat emblem. The latter was recently shown to have appeared already in the Naqada IIA period (Hendrickx 2005, see also Hendrickx & Friedman 2003a; 2003b).²⁷

25. At first view, the flint object seems to show the face of the bull in profile with a characteristic curve on the left side indicating the shape of animal’s jaw. This profile can be found on vessel inscriptions from tomb U-j at Abydos, where a bull’s head on a pike or support is represented (Dreyer 1998: 65-68) (fig. 9b) or on the bull in the lower register of the verso of the Narmer palette. However, recent examination of the object by Renée Friedman (pers. com.) showed that the notch on the side is just damage. There is no edge retouch around the notch the way the edge has been microretouched on the undamaged side.

26. For a detailed discussion of the Bat emblem, see Fischer 1962.

27. Chronological continuity between the Early Dynastic Bat emblems (cf. Hendrickx 2002a: 310) such as that on the Narmer palette, with Predynastic examples is evidenced by: a potmark from Hierakonpolis HK6, tomb 16 (Hendrickx 2005; Naqada IIA), an “ostrakon” from Hierakonpolis HK29A (Hendrickx & Friedman 2003a; 2003b; Naqada IIB), the Gerzeh palette (Gerzeh tomb 59; Cairo JdE 43103; Petrie 1912: pl. VI,7 (of Naqada IIC-D1 date, Stevenson 2009: 108), a potmark from Naqada tomb 584 (Petrie 1896: pl. LII, 77a; Naqada IIIA1). In addition to the list of provenanced objects decorated with the head of Bat which I published previously (Hendrickx 2002a: 310, appendix H), and in addition to the potmark and “ostrakon” from Hierakonpolis just mentioned, there is a gold amulet from Abydos (Price 1896: 338, fig. 2); an ivory plaque from the Hierakonpolis Main Deposit (?) (Adams 1974: n° 340); and an ivory comb from Kostamna (Garstang 1907: pl. XII,II).

As for the relationship between the figurines and the flint object, the heavy stylisation of the latter allows the portion which resembles the bull's head to be interpreted, equally, as a female torso, and the triangular protrusions as female breasts. The reverse is also true, that bovid features can be recognised in the figurines.

Not rendering nature, or rather not trying to render nature as visible, is of course a deliberate act. The broader context of the relationship between pictorial representation and meaning was first discussed for Predynastic Egypt in an important study by Tefnin (1979), and as expressed for example by Patrick Gautier (1993: 46), "*l'espace figuratif n'a pu devenir espace idéologique que par le renoncement à la figuration de l'espace visuel*".²⁸ Overlap in the resemblance of forms between the figurines and the bull's head, provides opportunities for this "new" image to be attributed meanings that could be used in a wider range of contexts.

The combination of the curved arms/horns with the triangular protrusions immediately below them can be found on a large number of objects, often in combination with bird heads, but generally without details such as the eyes and beak. Through the stylisation or omission of certain features, a symbolism is developed which can be used without further figurative context to express cognitive values by themselves.²⁹ By way of example, on a number of rhomboidal palettes, ivory combs, hair pins and amulets two types of symbol can be distinguished. The first consists of the upwards curved horns/arms and the triangular extensions (Hendrickx 2002a: 313-315, appendix K-L) (fig. 10a & 11a), strongly resembling the Bat amulet (fig. 10c), although both motifs continue to be used simultaneously. The second has additional bird

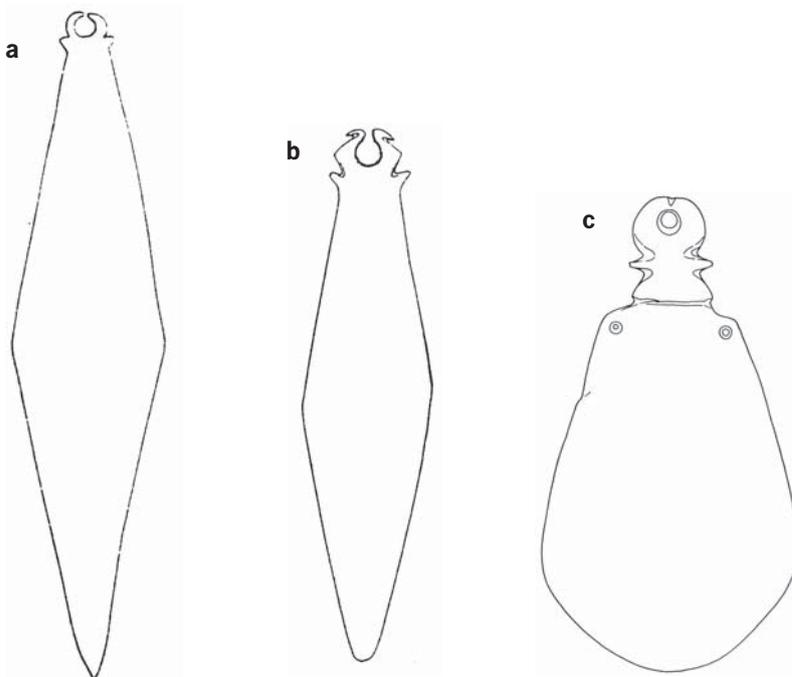


Fig. 10
Palettes

a. Provenance not recorded, Cairo CG 14236 (Quibell 1905: pl. 48, n° 14236) (L. 63,0 cm)

b. Naqada, London UC.6025 (Petrie 1920: pl. XLIV,91t) (L. 29,8 cm)

c. Provenance not recorded, Brussels E.7129 (Hendrickx 2002a: 294, fig. 16.12) (L. 17,8 cm)

28. See also Midant-Reynes 2003: 310-312.

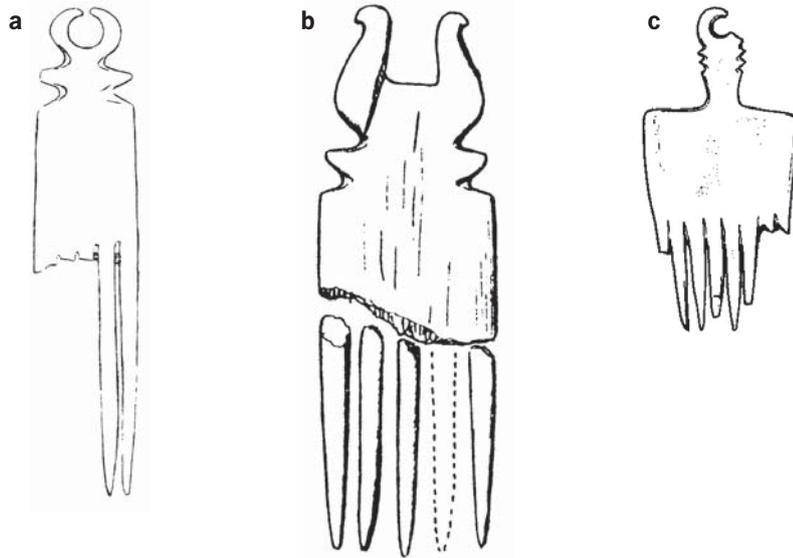
29. Comparison can be made with a number of early hieroglyphs consisting of two figurative elements which form composite signs (cf. Dreyer 1998: 183-187), called "control signs" by Kemp (2000: 234).

Fig. 11
Combs

a. Naqada tomb
1417, Berlin
12854 (Petrie
1896: pl. LXIII,57)
(L. 10 cm)

b. Matmar tomb
2626, München
(Brunton 1948:
pl. XVI.5)
(L. ca. 12,6 cm)

c. Naqada tomb
1852, Oxford AM
1895.938 (Payne
1993: fig. 78,
n° 1908) (L. 7,6cm)



heads (Hendrickx 2002a: 315-317, appendix M) (fig. 10b, 11b & 12). As both symbolic elements occur mainly on objects related to personal adornment, an apotropaic meaning is proposed for these symbols. This is of course in perfect agreement with the religious or military “power” expressed by the raised arms of the figurines and the figures on White Cross-lined and Decorated pottery. The frequency of such symbols, the earliest of which date to Naqada IA (Hendrickx 2002a: 317), as well as their geographical distribution, indicate that the meaning of these symbolic elements was widely understood and therefore a common part of the religious and conceptual world during Predynastic times. Familiarity with these symbols must have been such that variation in the number of triangular extensions (fig. 11c) or their reduction to a 90° angle (fig. 12b-c) did not alter the intended symbolic meaning.

In this context, the bull’s head amulet (fig. 13c), which is the most frequently occurring amulet type during Predynastic times, should also be mentioned. The oldest example dates to the early Naqada II period, and continues to be made and used until the 2nd dynasty (cf. Hendrickx 2002a: 307-309, Appendix F). These amulets have originally been identified by Petrie (1914b: 44) as ram’s heads. Baumgartel (1960: 73-74) was the first to note their ambiguous human/bovid character, but ultimately she considered them to be representations of the “mother goddess”. At present, they are generally considered bull’s

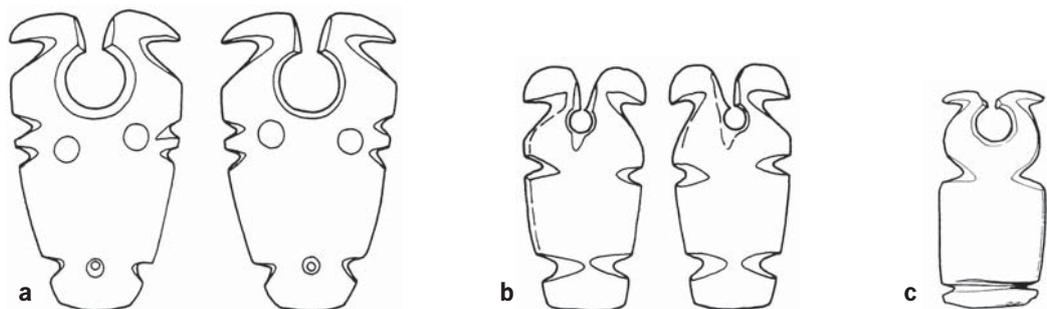
Fig. 12

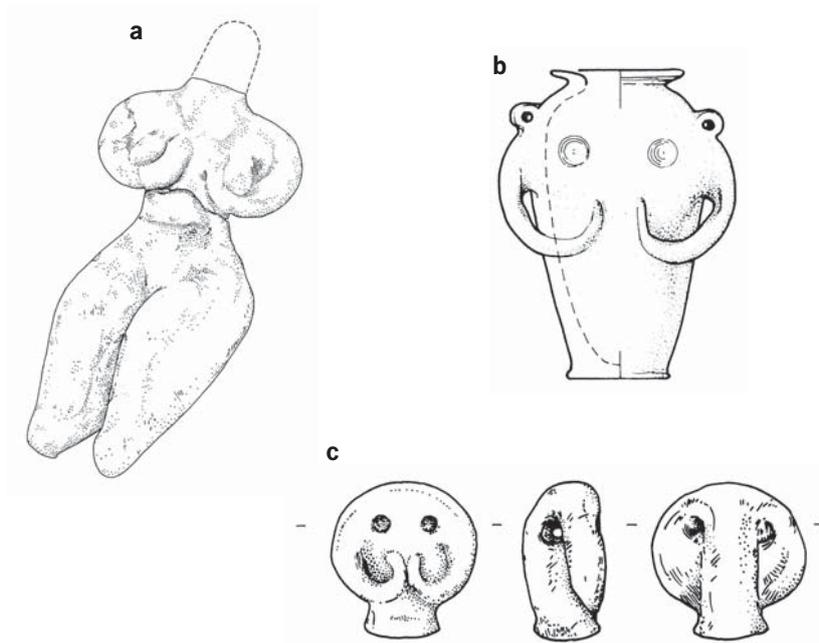
Grauwacke tags

a. Provenance not
recorded, Brussels
E.2882 (Hendrickx
2002a: 295,
fig. 16.13a)
(L. 6,8 cm)

b. Provenance not
recorded, Brussels
E.2881 (Hendrickx
2002a: 296,
fig. 16.14a)
(L. 4,7 cm.)

c. Matmar tomb
3133, Oxford AM
1832.897 (Payne
1993: fig. 82,
n° 1989) (L. 5,1 cm)



**Fig. 13**

a. Provenance not recorded, figurine, London UC.15814 (drawing Merel Eyckerman) (H. 10,0 cm)

b. Provenance not recorded, serpentine vase, Oxford AM.1948.18 (Payne 1993: fig. 57, n° 1201) (H. 6,9 cm)

c. Provenance not recorded, bull's head amulet, Brussels E.2335 (drawing Merel Eyckerman) (H. 3,7 cm)

heads, although this is occasionally still questioned.³⁰ There can, however, little doubt when the amulets are compared to the plaster covered bull skulls surrounding tomb S.3504 at Saqqara (Emery 1954: 8-9, pl. I, VI-VII).³¹ The general outline of the modelled heads as well as the modelling of the jaw, which is defined by a straight line with square edges, shows a strong resemblance with the bull's head amulets. Likewise, the position and shape of the eyes, formed from small bulbs of clay also resemble the amulets.

The human features distinguished by Baumgartel (1960: 73-74) for the bull's head amulets are most obvious when compared to a particular type of statuette representing a woman with her arms curved underneath her breasts (fig. 13a).³² Although more stylised, the same idea can also be seen in a small stone vessel of unknown provenance (Oxford AM 1948.18, Payne 1993: n° 1201) (fig. 13b). Male statuettes with their arms curved downwards in this way are not attested. The combination of the arms and breasts seems essential to the nature of the female figurines.³³ The manner in which the arms, and especially the hands, are curved is physically impossible and has, again, is probably not intended

30. Hoffman (1989: 321) was undecided between a bucranium or an elephant amulet, while Van Lepp (1999) accepted the latter.

31. This mastaba was surrounded by a low bench on which had been placed about 300 bull's heads modelled in clay, with real horns affixed. Other examples, but far less numerous, were found at mastabas S.3506 (?) and S.3507 (Emery 1958: 41, 76, pl. 90). A single bull's head was found in front of mastaba XVII at Abusir (Radwan 2000: 512, pl. 83-84).

32. Hendrickx 2002a: 309-310, appendix G, to which should be added: provenance not recorded, New York MMA 07.228.53, Ucko 1968: 154, n° 202; Hayes 1953: 19, fig. 11 middle. This type of figurine may have its predecessor in Badarian times, judging from the well known ivory figurine from tomb 5107 at Badari (London BM EA.58648; Brunton & Caton-Thompson 1928: pl. XXIV,2, XXV,3-4; Ucko 1968: 70, n° 2) and a pottery figurine from tomb 5227 (London BM EA.5964; Brunton & Caton-Thompson 1928: pl. XXIV,1, XXV,6-7; Ucko 1968: 69, n° 1).

33. Other examples of this combination can be found on a few pottery vessels with applied decoration (Naqada tomb 1449, Oxford AM 1895.1220, Payne 1993: n° 105; Abadiya tomb B 101, Oxford AM E.3195, Payne 1993: n° 106; Hu, tomb U 179, Oxford AM E.2952, Payne 1993: n° 107).

to represent reality. The downward curving of the arms mirrors the upwards curving arms/horns discussed above and suggests that we are dealing with two variants of the same symbolic expression, presumably to which the same or related semantic values were attributed. The downward curve of the arms (although the breasts are not explicitly represented) can be seen as emphasizing fertility, which is the interpretation already suggested by Baumgartel for the figurines. However, the amulets are less clearly female and may refer to ideas of fecundity more generally, both in actual life and the hereafter.

Birds

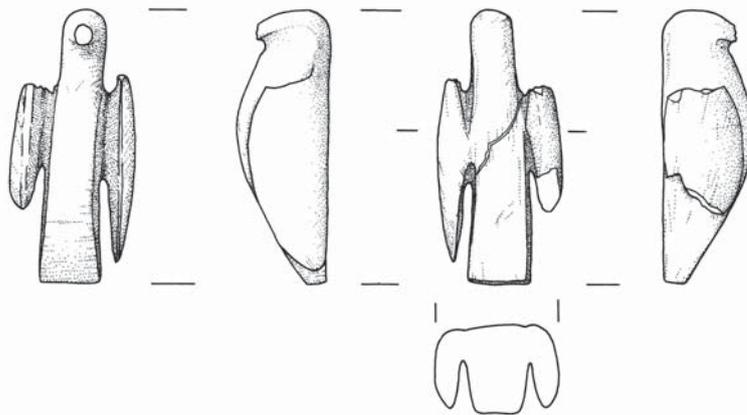
The nature of the association of bird heads with bull heads and human representations and its general symbolic significance is the next topic for discussion. Birds occur very frequently in Predynastic art, but it is generally difficult to identify bird species because of the highly stylised nature of their representation. The bird that frequently occurs on Decorated pottery is most probably the ostrich (Hendrickx 2000), but the representation of the species seems not to have been the primary concern of the artist. In addition to the combination of birds, humans and bovines, the bovid-bird theme is found in other forms as exemplified by the figurines and the second type of amulet described above. Some bovid-shaped stone vessels and palettes show the horns of the animal shaped to resemble birds.³⁴ Most interesting are two palettes,³⁵ for which the legs are elaborated as the heads and necks of birds, the shape of which is similar to certain amulets (Petrie 1920: pl. XLIV,102n-p). Another example of the relationship between birds and bovines is probably to be found in the so-called “pelta” palettes, but will not be discussed here (cf. Hendrickx 2002a: 289-290).

In addition to bovine and bird combinations, a composite ibex-fish was identified by Huyge (2004) and more of such composites can be mentioned.³⁶ This further supports our argument that particular combinations of figurative elements were intended for symbolic use, although their meaning is not always obvious. Graff (2008) convincingly argues for a parallel between the representation of raised wings on the ostriches regularly shown on Decorated vessels, and the raised arms of human figures. The male ostrich uses his wings mainly to impress and attract a female during the mating period. To some extent, this can be considered as corroboration for the “power” being expressed by raised arms and bull horns.

34. Vessels, all of unknown provenance: Cairo JdE 66628 (Saleh & Sourouzian 1986: n° 6, the bird head has an incised eye which is hardly visible in photographs); Hildesheim 6078 and 6079 (Schmitz 1993: 14, Abb. 7); BC galleries, item a2893 (internet); for palettes the horns/bird heads are often broken off unfortunately, but see Hendrickx 2002a: 305-306, Appendix C.

35. Brussels E.4992, Hendrickx 2002a: 290, fig. 16.6; private collection Kilchberg, Switzerland, Page-Gasser & Wiese 1997: 30-31, n°12.

36. A small limestone figurine from Naqada tomb 721 [Naqada IIC] represents another composite of an unidentifiable quadruped, eventually a lion, with a bird head (Petrie 1896: pl. LX,13; Payne 1993: n° 16). Also, turtle palettes occur with bovine and avian elements (New York MMA 21.6.113; Paris Louvre 24727 (Cenival 1993: fig. 2); Naqada 271 (Oxford AM 1895.841, Payne 1993: n° 1809); Naqada (Petrie 1921: pl. LII,9G) and a palette combining bovine and fish elements is in Chicago (OIM E11470, Hendrickx 2011: 200-201). Yet another combination, eventually of a dog or lion with a catfish, occurs in the Dynasty 0 rock art tableaux at Nag el-Hamdulab (Hendrickx et al. in press). The so-called mythological animals (griffon, serpopard) on the late Predynastic decorated palettes are also to be considered in this context, cf. Kuhn 2011.

**Fig. 14**

Hierakonpolis HK6
07-429, Pillared Hall
complex, Structure
07, locus 715/727.
Falcon figurine
(drawing Jane
Smythe, courtesy
Hierakonpolis
Expedition)
(L. 6,7 cm)

Towards the early Naqada III period, the avian characteristics of the Decorated pottery largely disappear, not only from the vessels, but also from bird-shaped palettes (cf. Petrie & Mace 1901: 20, pl. III; Ciałowicz 1991: 28-30; Regner 1996: 21). Palettes with bird heads, however, continue to be used well into the First Dynasty (Ciałowicz 1991: 30-32; Regner 1996: 20), although their stylised form makes it difficult to identify the type of bird. Fully represented birds also disappear from the combs and other bone and ivory objects (cf. Petrie & Mace 1901: 21, pl. III), although they can still be found in a very simplified form on hair pins, albeit far less frequently than before (Martin del Rio Álvarez & Almenara Rosales 2004). The only bird to be represented frequently during the Naqada III period is the falcon, both on palettes and in the decoration of ivories (Hendrickx et al. 2011). From the very beginning the Naqada III period, style and pose of the falcon is generally shown in the way it appears on the Early Dynastic *serekhs*.³⁷ However, falcon figurines are already known from the elite cemetery HK6 at Hierakonpolis (Hendrickx et al. 2011: 130-132) (**fig. 14**) and despite time difference, stylistic continuity with the Naqada III examples is hard to deny (cf. **fig. 16**). Falcons are not a part of the painted decoration on Decorated vessels, which for as far as birds are concerned, is largely reserved for the ostrich. But falcons occur as handles applied to the shoulders of two Decorated jars, both of which are unfortunately unprovenanced,³⁸ but which can be dated to Naqada IIC, or IID1 at the latest, based on style and the content which includes boats and others elements (**fig. 15a**). The falcon handles do not seem to be part of the painted decoration and its meanings. Furthermore, a “double falcon” is depicted on a Decorated vessel in Paris (Paris Louvre AF6851, Cenival 1973: 20, n° 42) (**fig. 15b**). Similar to the handles just mentioned, the “double falcon” motif does not seem to relate to the syntax of the decoration on this vessel. It seems to provide additional information regarding the boat on which the “double falcon” occurs, forming an independent unit of meaning.³⁹ All in all, the falcon is a very different kind of bird compared to the

37. The falcon is usually more horizontal in its posture up to the reign of Hor-Aha and becomes more upright thereafter (cf. Schäfer [1974]: 10-11).

38. New York MMA 15.2.34 (Graff 2009a: n° 270); London BM EA.36328 (Graff 2009a: n° 203)

39. For the “double falcon”, see also Williams 1989: 309-311, as well as a potmark from Abadiya cem. U (Petrie & Mace 1901: pl. XX, 35). His suggestion that the earliest examples could already date to Naqada I is however most unlikely. The only archaeologically well documented example comes from Ashkeit, site 332, tomb 53B (Nordström 1972: pl. 93), dating to the early Naqada III period. The fact that the “double falcon” mainly occurs as a potmark confirms that it had a meaning by itself.

ostrich and the other birds on Decorated pottery and ivories. The presence of falcon representations during the early Naqada II period at Hierakonpolis and their absence from the visual language of Decorated pottery shows that the falcon did not simply replace the other types of birds.

Falcons are almost completely absent from the decorated ivories such as the Abu Zeidan knife handle,⁴⁰ while ostriches are occasionally represented, although the iconography of the ivories has little in common with the Decorated pottery. On the decorated palettes and mace heads, however, falcons occur mainly on standards or as royal symbols,⁴¹ while ostriches are rare,⁴² and only on the “Hunters palette” do both animals occur on the same object. In the latter case, however, the two birds are shown in a completely different role when compared to each other, with the stylised falcon on a standard while the lively depiction of an ostrich is part of the animals representing chaos in the central part of the palette. As for the Decorated pottery, there is no indication that ostriches and falcons may have been interchangeable.

Fig. 15
Decorated vessels

a. Provenance not recorded, London BM EA.36328 (photo courtesy British Museum) (H. 31,7 cm)

b. Provenance not recorded, Paris Louvre AF 6851 (Garfinkel 2003: fig 19 c) (H. 20,5 cm)



40. An exception is a fragment of an ivory wand (?) from the Main Deposit at Hierakonpolis, London UC.14864, Adams 1974: 60, n° 324.

41. Scorpion mace head (Oxford AM E.3632, Quibell 1900: pl. XXVIa); Narmer mace head (Oxford AM E.3631, Quibell 1900: pl. XXVIb); “Hunters palette” (London BM EA.20790, 20792/Paris Louvre E 11254, Spencer 1980: 79, n° 575); “Battlefield palette” (London BM EA.20791, Spencer 1980: 79-80, n° 576); “Abu Umuri palette” (Cairo JdE 71326, Kaplony 1965); “Libyan palette” (Cairo CG 14238, Saleh & Sourouzian 1986: n° 7); Narmer palette (Cairo CG 14716, Quibell 1898); “Geneva palette” (Geneva Barbier-Mueller Museum 203-29A, Zimmermann 1991: 32-33); “Bull palette” (Paris Louvre E.11255, Ziegler 1990: 17); “Serekh palette” (New York MMA 28.9.8, Fischer 1958); “Falcon fragment” (London UC.36342, Asselberghs 1961: pl. LXXX, afb. 139).

42. “Hunters palette” (cf. n. 38); fragmentary palette (London BM EA.32074, Spencer 1980: n° 577); “Spiegelberg fragment” (Berlin 23301, Scharff 1929: 76-77, n° 107A); “Manchester palette” (Manchester 5476, Asselberghs 1961: pl. LXIV, afb. 119-121); Fish palette (Vienna AÖS 9067). The ibis-like birds on the “Louvre palette” (Paris Louvre E.11052, Ciałowicz 1991: 47-48) and the “Hierakonpolis palette” (Oxford AM E.3924, Baines 1993) might be “replacements” for the ostrich because of the way they are rendered, differing mainly in the shape of the beaks.

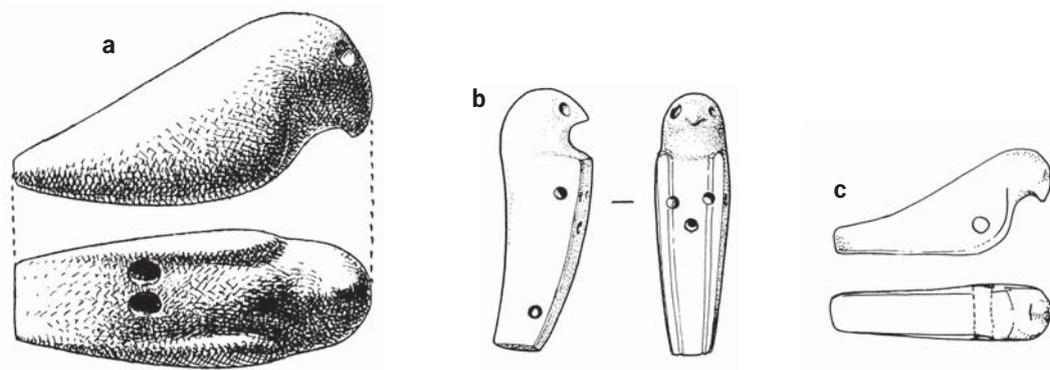


Fig. 16

Falcon figurines and bead

a. Badari 3000/3, Manchester 7242 (Brunton 1927: pl. XX,63) (L. 9,1 cm)

b. Naqada tomb 721, Oxford AM 1895. 136 (Payne 1993: fig. 4, n° 17) (L. 5,5 cm)

c. Elkab tomb 31 (Hendrickx 1994a: pl. XXIX, H 830) (drawing Merel Eyckerman) (L. 4,4 cm)

Whatever the relationship between the traditional birds on Decorated pottery and the falcons may have been, it is nevertheless remarkable that from the early Naqada III period onwards, the falcon is by far the most frequently represented bird, occurring on decorated palettes and ivories or as beads, amulets, figurines and palettes (figs. 16 & 17), none of which seem to predate the Naqada IIC period with the exception of the mentioned figurines from Hierakonpolis (Hendrickx et al. 2011). The fact that the falcon is a royal symbol hardly needs to be mentioned; the falcons on top of the Early Dynastic *serekhs* (cf. van den Brink 1996; 2001; O'Brien 1996; Jiménez-Serrano 2003) or on the Narmer palette even make the bird the most important royal symbol of that period.⁴³ The uniform style of the falcon representations, their royal symbolism which will be continued throughout the dynastic period, suggests direct continuity from the early Naqada II “kings” at Hierakonpolis with the iconography of state formation.

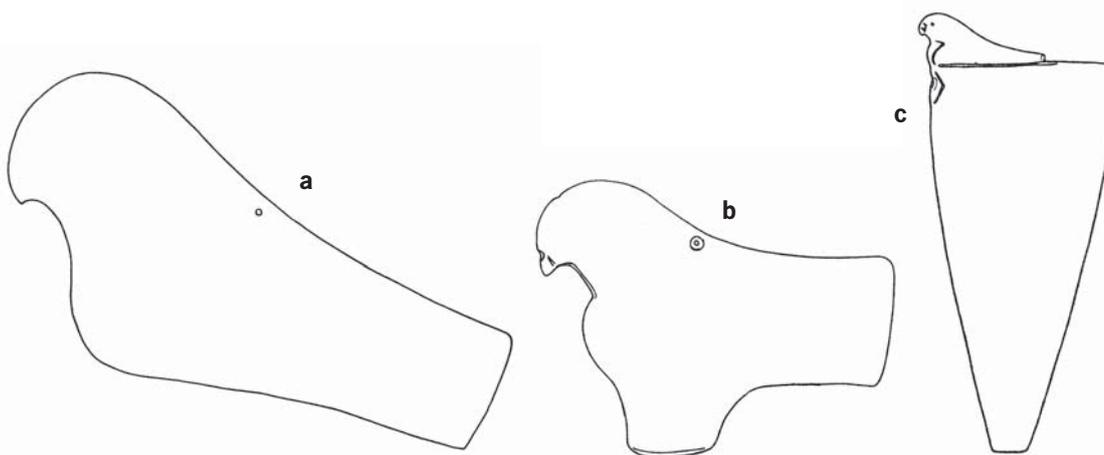


Fig. 17

Falcon palettes

a. Tarkhan (?), London UC.15778 (Petrie 1920: pl. XLIII,20g) (L. 31,5 cm)

b. Tarkhan tomb 873, Cairo (Petrie 1914a: pl. XXII,10d) (L. 18,0 cm)

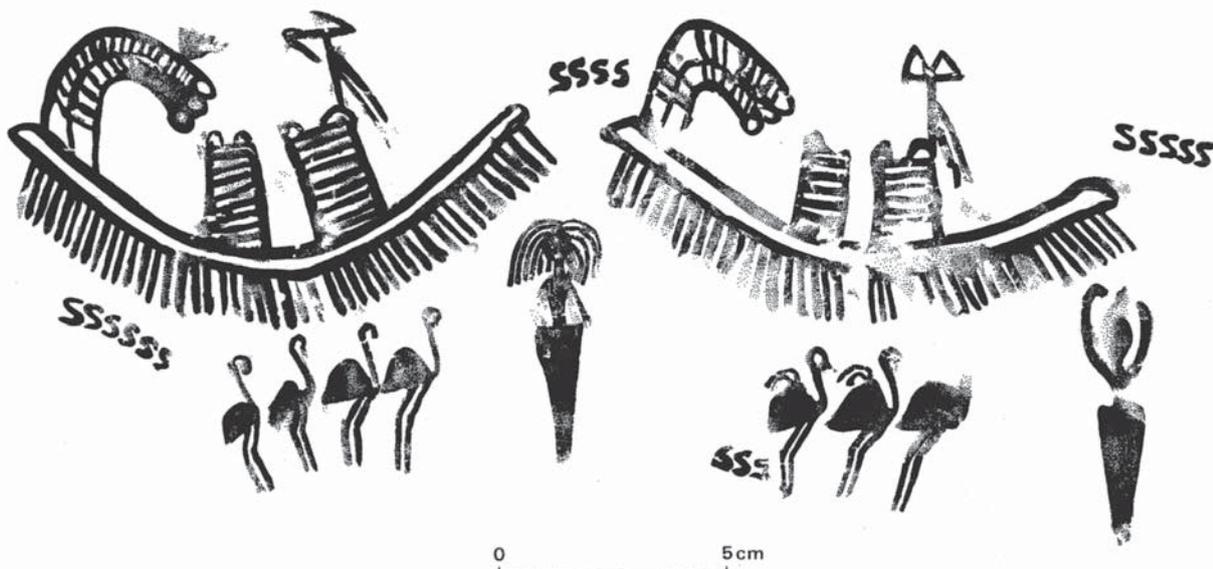
c. Tarkhan tomb 1636, Cairo JdE 44223 (Petrie 1914a: pl. XXII,10l) (H. 16,8 cm)

43. A little mentioned representation of a falcon on top of serekh-like structure on a statuette in Stockholm (Medelhavsmuseet MM 11391, Peterson 1980: 4-6) connects the iconography of palettes with a falcon on top (e.g., Petrie 1921: pl. LIII,20S) with the actual serekhs. See also Ciałowicz 2008: 506-507, fig. 3.

The Naqada plant and the palm tree

Graff (2009b) considers the female figurines and the female representations on Decorated vessels to be forerunners of the dynastic tree goddesses, related to the renewal of life. She notes a parallel in the pose of the female figure with the shape of the so-called Naqada plant within the decorative schemes of Decorated ware. However, the female figure and the plant rarely co-occur,⁴⁴ and considering the similar pose of both, they may very well be interchangeable motifs. Also of relevance are the representations of female figures on two Decorated jars, one of them recently excavated at el-Hosh (Huyge 2005: 245-246, fig. 11-12) (**fig. 18**), and the other unprovenanced, now in New York (MMA 20.2.10, Baumgartel 1960: pl. XIII,1-3). The small lug-handled jar from el-Hosh is particularly interesting. The decoration is organised in harmony with the handles. In between the handles on each side of the vessel, a boat can be seen with a row of ostriches below, and a female figure is located underneath each handle. Interestingly, each figure is represented differently from the other. One is of the raised arm type regularly attested on Decorated pottery, while the arms of the other are held next to the body, the figure being further distinguished by a unique “dreadlock” hair style paralleled only on the New York jar just mentioned. For Graff (2009b) the arrangement of the hair echoes the shape of the so-called Naqada plant. This, together with the absence of the Naqada plant on the el-Hosh vessel and the pose of the two female figures in combination with the boats, often matched by the combination of the Naqada plant with boats on other Decorated jars, substantiates the interchangeable character of the figures and the Naqada plant. The two rows of ostriches on the el-Hosh jar are also of interest; in one row the birds have their wings raised while in the

Fig. 18
el-Hosh tomb 1,
Decorated vessel,
Elkab SCA storeroom
(Huyge 2005: 246,
fig. 12) (H. 12,2 cm)



44. Exceptions include a vessel from Naqada, tomb 454 (Oxford AM 1895.584, Payne 1993: n° 865), on either side of which a plant and a female figure occur together; a vessel of unknown provenance (Brussels E.3003, Hendrickx 1994a: 29), showing a female figure flanked by plants, and finally a vessel from Ballas, tomb Q100 (Petrie 1896: pl. LXVI,8), shows a female figure on top of a plant.

other they do not, parallelling the differences in the pose of the upper limbs and arrangement of the hair between the two female figures also on this jar. The figures and the ostriches seem to be variations of each other, illustrating again the link between humans and birds as also expressed, for example, by the bird-headed figurines. All in all, the similarity in shape between the “dreadlock” hair style and the raised arms suggests that the two female figures on the el-Hosh vessel embody two different aspects of the same meaning.

If the link posited above between the representation of female bodies and the Naqada plant were to be doubted, it would be due to the rarity of the representation of the female figures with the “dreadlock” hairstyle. Nevertheless, a common element is the cone-shaped “legs” of the bird-headed figurines and most of the female figures on Decorated vessels, a shape which also characterises the “trunk” of many Naqada plants (Graff 2009b; Hendrickx & Eyckerman 2011: 533-534) (**fig. 19a**). That we are not just dealing with a simplified leg shape is clear from the very large size of the “cones” for some female figures on the painted linen from Gebelein (n. 19) while contemporary human representations on some Decorated pottery occur with articulated legs and feet. The legs of male figures on Decorated pottery are never cone-shaped.⁴⁵ That cone-shaped “legs” are characteristic of representations of female figures therefore supports their correlation with the Naqada plant on Decorated pottery.

However, apart from the Decorated pottery, cone-shaped “legs” are attested for males, and even earlier as on Decorated pottery, as is already shown by the small group of White Cross-lined jars with victory scenes discussed at the beginning of this article. The clearest examples are those on the jar from University College London, but they may also be represented on the Brussels jar and jar U-415/1.⁴⁶ The difference in the style of the “legs” is not surprising given the lack of stylistic uniformity in other aspects of White Cross-lined decoration. For the small number of male figurines, cone shaped “legs” occur exceptionally.⁴⁷

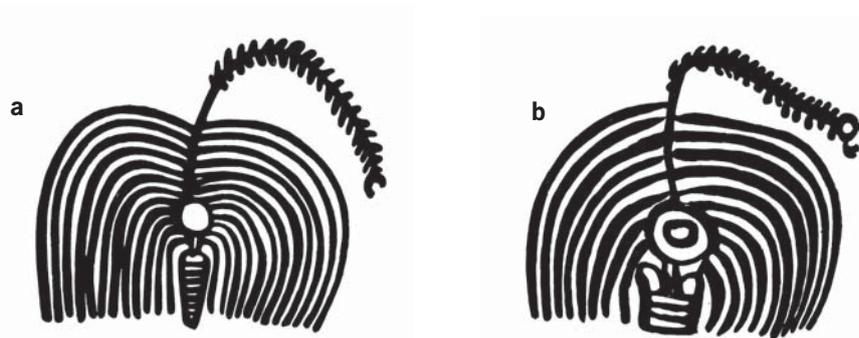


Fig. 19

a. “Naqada plant” with tusk shaped trunk (detail of Brussels E.3003) (drawing Merel Eyckerman)

b. “Naqada plant” with boat cabin shaped trunk (detail of Robert V. Fullerton Art Museum, San Bernardino El 02.005.2004) (drawing Merel Eyckerman after Kaplan 2005: 98)

45. This was confirmed by Gwenola Graff (pers. com.) according to her extensive database.

46. Also found on two vessels in Turin (S.1827, S.1823, Donadoni Roveri & Tiradritti 1998: 142, n° 33, 146, n° 40).

47. Most of the male figurines have the legs indicated (e.g., Abadiya cem. B, London UC.10791, Ucko 1968: n° 80; Abadiya B.119, Oxford AM E.1028, Ucko 1968: n° 11; Payne 1993: n° 48; Abadiya U.96, UC.10796, Ucko 1968: n° 12; Naqada (?), Berlin 13806, 13808, Scharff 1929: n° 50, 52; Naqada (?), Brooklyn 35.1269, Needler 1984: 343-344, n° 274; unprovenanced, Boston 04.1802, Freed et al. 2003: 48. However, this is not so for a few male figurines which do have cone-shaped “legs”, (el-Amrah A.56, Oxford AM E.1058, Ucko 1968: n° 14, Payne 1993: n° 47; el-Amrah A.94, Cambridge Museum of Anthropology and Archaeology Z15083A, Ucko 1968: n° 18; unprovenanced, London UC.15157, Donadoni & Tiradritti 1998: 205, n° 163).

This stylistic theme is also represented by a series of cone-shaped “tags” with human heads (Hendrickx & Eyckerman 2011: 513, type B.5.b). All are bearded, confirming that cone-shaped “legs” are not exclusive to female figures. The meaning of the terms “tusks” and “tags” is a problem in itself (cf. page 19), but obviously the cone-shaped “legs” of male representations can not be connected to tree goddesses as proposed for female figures. The “cone” shape seems to be a feature which, similar to the raised arms/horns, may have different, but related, meanings which are dependent upon the context of use. For the female representations on Decorated pottery and the female figurines, the “cone” shape was probably related to the symbolism of the tree-goddesses in a role associated with the after-life. A different meaning will be suggested for the male representations following a more detailed discussion of the “tusks” and “tags” below (cf. pages 19-23).

Returning to the Decorated pottery, the relationship drawn above between the cone-shaped “legs” of human figures and the “trunk” of the Naqada plant is complicated by the fact that the “trunk” is not always cone-shaped. A second type of “trunk” is attested with a horizontal baseline with straight angles and two semi-circular bulges at the top (fig. 19b). This configuration resembles the so-called boat cabin that occurs both independently and as part of boats on Decorated pottery. It is possible that the cabin-shape is used as an “abbreviation” for the boat itself. It is also notable that the boats often have curved floral elements on their prows similar to the right or left half of the Naqada plant stalks. Exceptionally, two branches occur on the boats, showing a particularly close resemblance to the shape of the Naqada plant (London BM EA.36326, Aksamit 1981: 166, fig 13; Naqada tomb 454, Oxford AM 1895.584, Payne 1993: n° 865).⁴⁸

The interpretation of the patterning among these motifs remains difficult, but it seems clear that there is a link between boats, female figures and particular floral elements. Given the substitution of female figures with plants, the boat seems to be an element related to either (cf. Graff 2004: 773, fig. 4). The general funerary meanings expressed on most Decorated pottery (Graff 2003) suggest that the boats represent funerary boats.⁴⁹ The reason for the apparently random substitution of the cone for the boat cabin, and vice versa, as “trunk” of the Naqada plant remains to be explained, however.

The final Naqada plant element discussed here is the “ring”, generally consisting of two concentric circles at its centre (fig. 19). If we accept that the branches/leaves refer to a particular female (?) hairstyle and that the “trunk” of the plant and the lower part of the female body are interchangeable in representation, the “ring” in the plant is in the position of the human head.⁵⁰ The heads on Decorated pottery are only shown in outline, as are all of the human representations, but they are almost all circular in shape like the “ring” of the Naqada plant.

48. Similar branches or leaves can also be found on boats in rock-art.

49. The importance of boats in the funerary context is attested by the presence of actual boats dating to the time of Hor-Aha near the funerary enclosure of Khasekhemwy at Abydos (Ward 2006) and at Saqqara near the mastabas S.3357 (Emery 1949: 8-9, pl. 3), S.3036 (Emery 1949: 75), S.3503 (Emery 1954: 138) and S.3506 (Emery 1958: pl. 44). At Helwan, 19 boats have been found (Saad 1969: 70), among others near tombs 1502 H.2 (Saad 1947: pl. XL, LIX), 649 H.5, 680 H.5, 762 H.5 (Saad 1951: pl. LIX-LX), 575 H.5, 1216 H.9, 423 H.9 (Saad 1969: pl. 105-108).

50. Piquette (2004: 943) notes on a label from Abydos how non-human elements - in this case the smiting catfish and a chisel - are arranged in such a way as to resemble the shape of the human body, thus creating an anthropomorph from the sign spelling out the ruler's name.

By the end of the Naqada II period, the style and probably also the purpose of pottery decoration change. Decorators cease using the Naqada plant motif altogether. Comparison might, however, be made with the representation of a palm tree on a few decorated palettes, where it is flanked by two giraffes.⁵¹ A figurative mudstone vessel from the tomb of Den at Abydos is made in the shape of a similar tree (fig. 20a), and a piece of faience inlay from the early temple at Abydos.⁵² The fronds of the palm trees are divided symmetrically

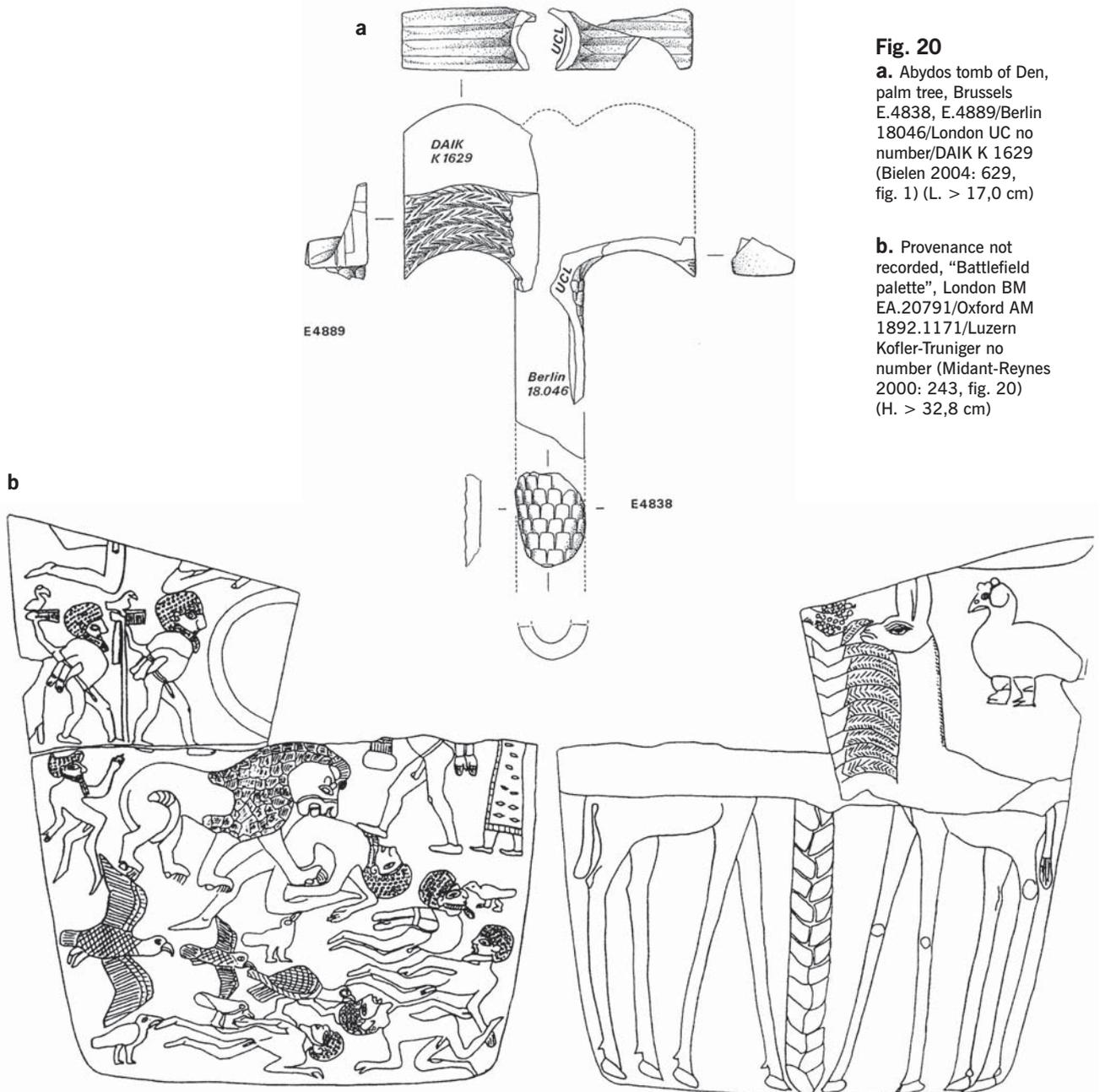


Fig. 20

a. Abydos tomb of Den, palm tree, Brussels E.4838, E.4889/Berlin 18046/London UC no number/DAIK K 1629 (Bielen 2004: 629, fig. 1) (L. > 17,0 cm)

b. Provenance not recorded, "Battlefield palette", London BM EA.20791/Oxford AM 1892.1171/Luzern Kofler-Truniger no number (Midant-Reynes 2000: 243, fig. 20) (H. > 32,8 cm)

51. "Battlefield palette", "Louvre palette", Spiegelberg fragment (n. 38); fragmentary palette (Berlin 20171, Scharff 1929: 74-75, n° 107); Minshat Ezzat palette (Cairo, el-Baghdati 1999).

52. Palm tree vessel (Bielen 2004: 628-631); faience inlay (Petrie 1903: pl. I, VII,87, published upside down). For other similar examples on pottery and cylinder seals, see Ciałowicz 1992b and Harvey 1996.

curving down to the right and left on either side of the trunk, a configuration that is strongly reminiscent of the Naqada plant. The chronological dating of the decorated palettes is problematic, but a date towards the end of the Naqada II period and/or the beginning of the Naqada III period is generally accepted (e.g., Ciałowicz 1991). The Abydos vessel probably comes from the tomb of Den and therefore would date to Naqada IIIC2. It can hardly be doubted that all of the examples postdate Naqada IIC-D1, when the Naqada plant was probably reformulated into the palm tree, although the reasons for this change remain unclear at present. It is equally likely that the transition was not in the type of plant, but only in the style of depiction and that the Naqada plant always represented a palm tree.⁵³ The main argument against this is of course the shape of the “trunk” of the Naqada plant. But if this part of the plant was altered to create a visual similarity with the “legs” of female statuettes or the “boat cabin”, there would be no objection to its identification as a palm tree. On the contrary, the shoot at the top of the Naqada plant can easily be seen as the seedling or the branch carrying fruit, indicated by a bundle of dates at the top of the palm tree, between the two bundles of leaves seen on the decorated palettes (with the exception of the Louvre palette) and the Abydos figurative vessel.

The meaning of the palm tree, and its combination with giraffes remains problematic.⁵⁴ For Ciałowicz (1992b: 16), the palm tree is a symbol of the state and of power, while for Williams (1988: 29) it represents the king himself. The occurrence of the palm tree as a potmark (Wallert 1962: 64, n.4), of which several date to the late Naqada I to early Naqada II period, suggests that the palm tree did not represent the king, at least in its earliest manifestations (see also Ciałowicz 1992b: 16-17), although an evolution from power symbol to royal symbol is possible. Ciałowicz (1992b) interprets the combination of the palm tree with giraffes as the unified state, but this would imply that a symbol strongly linked to the formation of the Egyptian state would not have been integrated into formal art.⁵⁵ This seems unlikely since such formal iconography appears as a product of state formation (cf. pg. 26-27). Köhler (1999) on the other hand considers the palm and the giraffe to represent two oppositions; the palm depends on human intervention for pollination among other things, while the giraffe can not be domesticated. According to Köhler, the giraffe symbolises the wild aspect of nature, and therefore chaos, and the palm tree the tamed aspect of nature, and therefore order. This is to be seen in the wider symbolical sense of the contrast between order and chaos that is so important for our interpretation of (late) Predynastic art. Köhler’s interpretation is very convincing,⁵⁶ although it does not explain why, with so many wild animals to choose from, artisans chose the giraffe.

53. The identification of the Naqada plant has been much debated, but no proposal generally accepted. For an overview of the proposed identifications, see Graff 2009b: 38-40.

54. For an overview of earlier interpretations, see Ciałowicz 1992b: 13-15 and Köhler 1999: 53. Wallert (1962: 72) suggests that the palm tree may have been an emblem of Upper Egypt, expressing the victory of Upper Egypt. This is, however, not substantiated by the Minshat Ezzat palette found in Lower Egypt (el-Baghdadi 1999).

55. The term “formal art” is used here in the sense employed by Kemp 2006: 111-141.

56. See also Huyge 2002: 199-200. The cosmological interpretation accepted by him, originally proposed by Westendorf (1966), can be another positive aspect of the giraffe, similar to the positive and negative aspects attributed to the hippopotamus (Hendrickx & Depraetere 2004). On the other hand, Westendorff’s interpretation of the palm tree and giraffe motif on the decorated palettes is difficult to accept because it draws almost entirely on much later religious beliefs (cf. Ciałowicz 1992b).

Perhaps this choice was for reasons of composition in which the palm tree had to be combined with a vertically shaped wild animal.

The common theme in all the interpretations of the palm tree is that it refers to a positive element: order, “power” or the king. This agrees well with the link proposed previously between the Naqada plant and the female figure with raised arms, where a power element is also involved. Interestingly, on a cylinder seal from tomb 160 H.3 at Helwan (Saad 1947: 165-166, fig. 14; Köhler 1999) the palm tree and giraffes occur in combination with a male figure with raised arms, considered by Köhler (1999: 54) the ruler and/or the “master of the universe”. This is probably the most recent example (Naqada IIIA2-IIIIB ?) where power and domination are expressed by raised arms, in a manner that must by then have been part of a very old tradition.⁵⁷ Although the raising of both arms as an expression of power does not occur in formal Egyptian art, the idea is still present in the raised arm of the king holding the mace, such as on the Narmer palette (fig. 30c) and in the classic gesture of Min during Dynastic times (cf. McFarlane 1995).

During the Early Dynastic period, the palm tree can, in our opinion, be seen in a “rosette” motif (fig. 21). The “rosette”, occasionally also called a “star”, occurs on several late Naqada II and early Naqada III objects.⁵⁸ It can be recognised by the slightly oval shape of the “leaves” and especially by the small circle in the middle, both of which make it clear that we are not dealing with stars.⁵⁹ The earliest examples, on the “ostrakon” from the early temple site at Hierakonpolis, HK29A, (Naqada IIB ?) and on the Gerzeh palette (Naqada IIC-D1),⁶⁰ occur in combination with the previously mentioned Bat amulet, although subsequently the rosette appears independently.

The rosette has already received much scholarly attention (e.g., Baumgartel 1966; Winter 1994; Schneider 1997),⁶¹ but its identification is nevertheless still under discussion. The identification accepted here is that it represents a palm

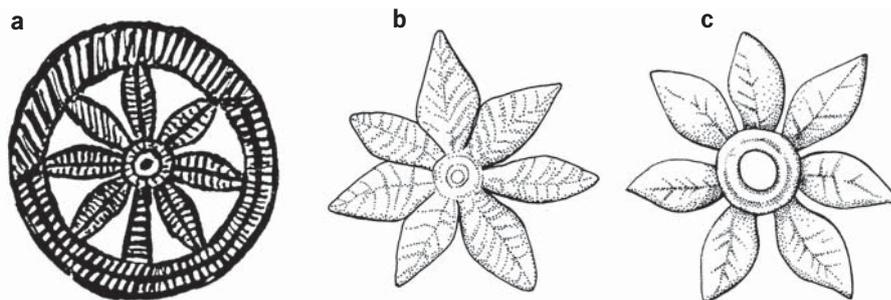


Fig. 21

a. Helwan tomb 44.H5, pendant, Cairo (Saad 1951: 35, fig 13A) (diam. ca. 4,2 cm)

b. Hierakonpolis, Narmer palette, detail rosette, Cairo CG 14716 (drawing Merel Eyckerman)

c. Hierakonpolis, Scorpion mace head, detail rosette, Oxford AM E.3632 (drawing Merel Eyckerman)

57. Another very late example is on a jar from Qustul tomb 23 (Chicago OIM 24119, Williams 1986: 152-154, pl. 84-85), where a person with raised arms occurs next to a palm tree.

58. For a catalogue of objects with the rosette motive, see Hendrickx 2006: tab. 4.

59. In some cases, the circle in the middle is not present, but the slightly oval shape of the “leaves” as seen for example on the Gerzeh palette, nevertheless suggests a rosette and not a star. The identification of a star often mentioned for the Gerzeh palette as an element of Hathor as sky goddess is not relevant because Bat, not Hathor, is represented (Fischer 1962; Hendrickx 2002a: 292-298), and Bat is a cow goddess without celestial associations.

60. For references, see n. 25.

61. A full discussion of the previous literature can be found in Winter 1994, with some additions in Schneider 1997.

tree seen from above as proposed by several investigators (Täckholm & Drar 1950: 211; Saad 1951: 34; Williams 1988: 34-35), although not accepted by some (e.g., Wallert 1962: 73, n.1) and recently, this proposal has been rejected by Schneider (1997: 257). His re-interpretation of the rosette as a lotus cannot, however, be confirmed from the surviving rosette iconography.⁶² The most detailed representation of the rosette is to be found as an amulet from Helwan (tomb 44.H5, Naqada IIIB-C (?), Saad 1951: fig. 13, 1969: pl. 81) (**fig. 21a**). Here, the lower leaf is replaced by the trunk of a tree, the internal linear detail of which leaves little doubt that the representation of a palm tree is intended. In this way it strongly resembles the attribute of the goddess Seshat, which Schneider (1997: 264) already convincingly argues resembles the rosette, although he does not accept its identification as palm tree. The Seshat attribute is known at least from the time of Den and the change from the rosette, as seen on the Narmer palette, to the Seshat emblem, must have taken place early in the First Dynasty. This could also explain why the rosette is not used as a royal symbol from that time onwards.

A final argument for identifying the rosette as a palm tree from an overhead view might be found on a jar from Semaineh (Oxford, AM E.2881, Payne 1993: n° 835), on which Wallert (1962: 65) recognises a palm tree. Accepting this identification,⁶³ the circle between the trunk and the leaves on the jar from Semaineh represents the tree in section and presumably matches the circle within the rosette motif.⁶⁴ In our opinion, this is also a good reason for relating the palm tree to the Naqada plant because the “ring” at the centre of the latter has never been convincingly explained (cf. Larsen 1957). Originally, the ring of the Naqada plant may have been added to allow interchangeability with human representations, but at the same it emphasizes the shape of the trunk, which is otherwise ambiguous in its cone or boat cabin shape.

On the Narmer palette and other Early Dynastic monuments, the rosette is used as a hieroglyph (**fig. 21b**). Schneider (1997) argued for a reading as *nb* against the generally accepted *hr* (Kahl 1994: 55) or the previously proposed alternative *sš* (Winter 1994). However, all readings refer one way or another to the king and the rosette is unanimously accepted as a royal emblem (see also Kemp 2000: 234). On the Qustul incense burner (Chicago OIM 24069, Williams 1986: pl. 34) and probably also on the Metropolitan museum knife handle (New York MMA 26.241.1, Williams & Logan 1987), both of which presumably predate Narmer, the rosette can be seen in combination with a representation of a king. The rosette also occurs on a number of decorated ivories, the archaeological context of which is only known (partially) for the Abu Zeidan knife handle (Brooklyn 09.889.118, Churcher 1984) (**fig. 22a**), allowing a Naqada IIIB date. Here, the rosette occurs as a “dominating” element, or “control sign” as it termed by Kemp (2000: 234), at the end of a row of animals, similar to the position of a dog attested in three other rows on this knife handle (cf. Hendrickx 2006: 736-739; Raffaele 2010). This is also paralleled by the Davis comb (New York MMA 30.8.224, Ciałowicz 1992a: 251) (**fig. 22b**).

62. Also, the lotus only shows up in the iconography from the Early Dynastic period onwards (Pommering et al. 2011) while the history of the rosette can be traced back to at least the Naqada IIC period.

63. Payne 1993: 105 does not see in this image a palm tree but rather “an unusual form of ?network”. However, the interior drawing of the „trunk“ certainly allows the palm tree identification. This is less obvious for the “palm trees” recognised by Williams (1988) on some White Cross-lined and Naqada III Decorated vessels.

64. For other interpretations, see Täckholm 1951; Larsen 1957.

There can hardly be a doubt that the rosette at the end of animal rows is already a symbol of authority, although perhaps not yet associated with royal authority, a more cautious interpretation would be to see the rosette in this context as a symbol of “control over chaos”.

In addition to its location at the end of animal rows, the rosette can also be found in other positions on decorated ivories. It occurs in combination with entwined snakes on two similar knife handles (London UC.16294, Petrie 1920: pl. XLVIII.3-4 and Berlin 15137, Scharff 1929: 82, n° 111) and on the Gebel et-Tarif knife handle (Cairo CG 14285, Quibell 1905: n° 14285) (**fig. 22c**) where the rosette is also connected with the domination of animals. A final example occurs on the Carnarvon knife handle (New York MMA 26.7.1281, Bénédite 1918: pl. I-II) where the rosette forms the boss of the handle and thus dominates the entire composition including the animals depicted.

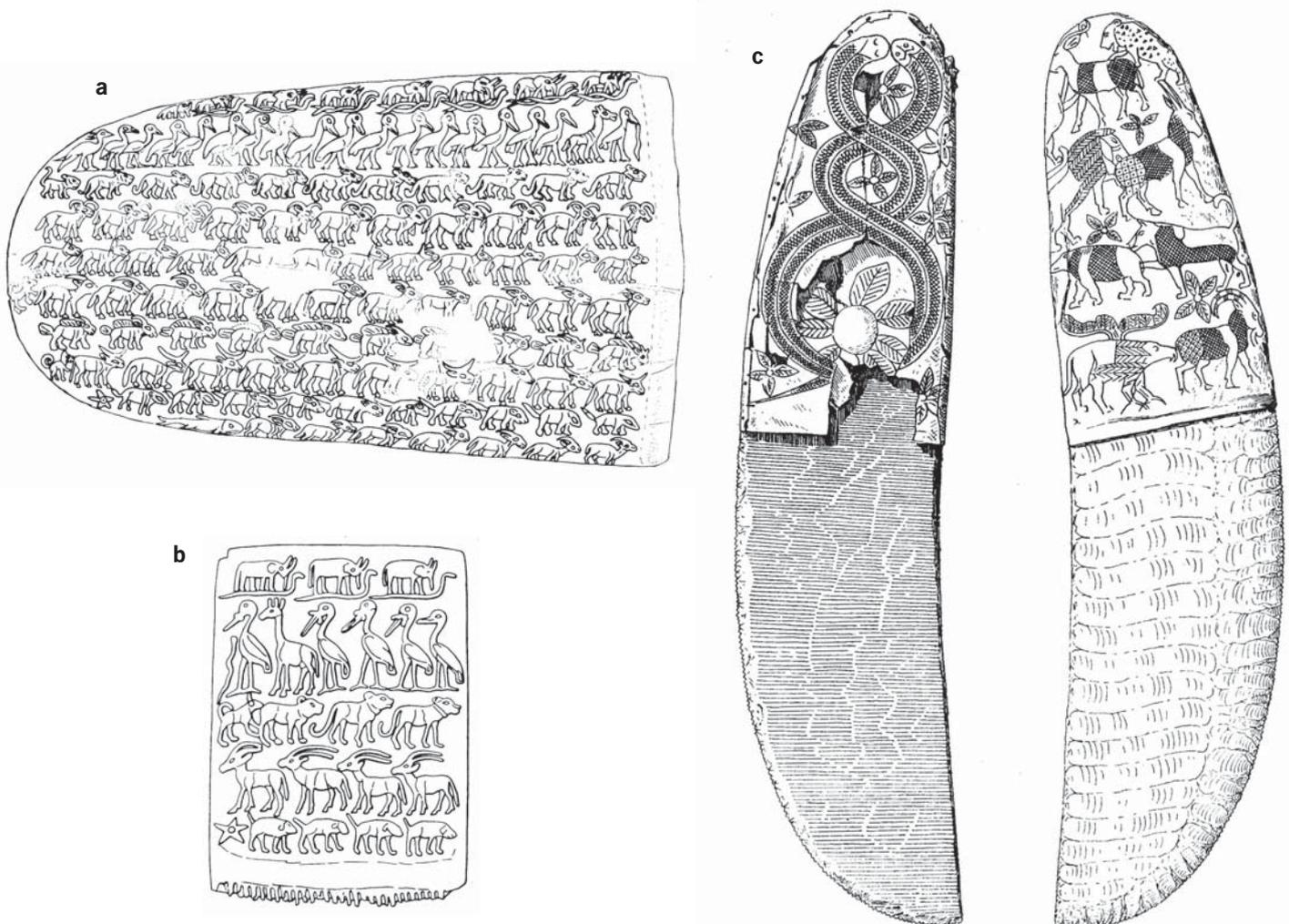
By way of summary, it is proposed that the Naqada plant is a religious symbol and can not be directly related to royal ideology as seen on the Scorpion mace head and the Narmer palette. Nevertheless, the rosette on the Abu Zeidan knife handle, for example, symbolises positive forces in keeping with the order over chaos theme. Although a direct link from the meaning of the Naqada plant to that of the palm tree/rosette can not be made, it is hardly problematic to accept a slight shift from a religious symbol to a primarily political one with a religious connotation. We may even be dealing with symbols being attributed different meanings depending on the context of use, similar to the arms/horns described above.

Fig. 22

a. Abu Zeidan tomb 32, knife handle, Brooklyn 09.889.118 (Churcher 1984: 154) (L. handle 9,8 cm)

b. Provenance not recorded, “Davis comb”, New York MMA 30.8.224 (Ciałowicz 1992a: 251, fig. 6) (H. 5,5 cm)

c. Gebel et-Tarif, knife handle, Cairo CG 14265 (Morgan 1896: fig 136) (L. knife 21,7 cm)



Tusks and tags

The cone-shaped element that often makes up the lower part of human representations and the Naqada plant is also attested as an object itself, generally called tusks and/or tags (Baumgartel 1955: 35-36; 1960: 57, 60-65; Finkenstaedt 1979; Nowak 2001; 2004; Hendrickx & Eyckerman 2011) (**fig. 23**). Tusks are objects made from hippopotamus tusks or lower canines (**fig. 26**), or imitations of these in other materials (**fig. 23b**), which may be worked and decorated. Tags are generally smaller, always worked, and mainly flat or oval in section (**fig. 23**). Tags can be made of hippopotamus ivory but also occur frequently in bone and different kinds of stone.⁶⁵ Both tusks and tags can be decorated with human heads or other elements (Hendrickx & Eyckerman 2011: 510-517). Tags and tusks have been found in a number of Predynastic tombs, dating from at least Naqada IB onwards. They seem to have disappeared, more or less together with the Decorated pottery by the beginning of Naqada IID (cf. Petrie & Mace 1901: 21, pl. III; Hendrickx & Eyckerman 2011: 518).⁶⁶ Generally, two or three are found together in a tomb, but they occur also in settlements. The meaning of these objects has never been satisfactorily explained and also in the context of the present contribution they are, in our opinion, the most problematic element. Nevertheless, the frequent occurrence of such objects implies that their meaning was common knowledge in Predynastic times.

The material and shape of tusk objects suggests that this object type originated from actual hippopotamus tusks. Unworked hippopotamus tusks are already found in Badarian tombs (Brunton & Caton-Thompson 1928: 34). In addition, hippopotamus ivory is the most frequently used material for both tusks and tags. That both the material and the animal itself were of importance is illustrated by a few small tusk-shaped jars which sit on a hippopotamus-shaped base (Droux 2011: 352-353; Hendrickx & Eyckerman 2011: 508-510).⁶⁷ A link between the tusks and the hippopotamus is suggested by the occurrence of small hippopotamus figurines with “rims” on their backs, usually made of pinkish limestone, which occasionally occur in tombs in sets of two, similar to the tusks and tags (Droux 2011: 354-368).

Baumgartel (1955: 35-36, 1960: 60) mentions that tusks are generally found in pairs, one hollow and one solid, as also noted by Petrie (Petrie & Mace 1901: 21), and considers them to represent male and female sexuality relating to fertility rites. This view is accepted by some (Finkenstaedt 1979) but rejected by others (Nowak 2004: 895). The latter opinion is definitely the correct one because all of the human heads are bearded and thus male. Baumgartel considered the triangular incisions below the faces to be necklaces or indications of clothes, to support her assertion that in many cases the figures represented women. But this is highly unlikely because the triangular incisions are identical in shape to other detailed representations that are clearly beards.⁶⁸ A stone statue with detailed face and beard, presumably from Gebe-

65. The identification of objects as ivory or bone in many older publications should be questioned.

66. The statement of Finkenstaedt (1979) that tusks were still in use until the end of the Naqada II period is based on questionable evidence.

67. For a complete list, see Droux 2011: 353, tab. 1.

68. E.g., Turin S.1068 (Donadoni Roveri & Tiradritti 1998: 171); Brussels E.2331a-b (Hendrickx 1994a: 42-43).

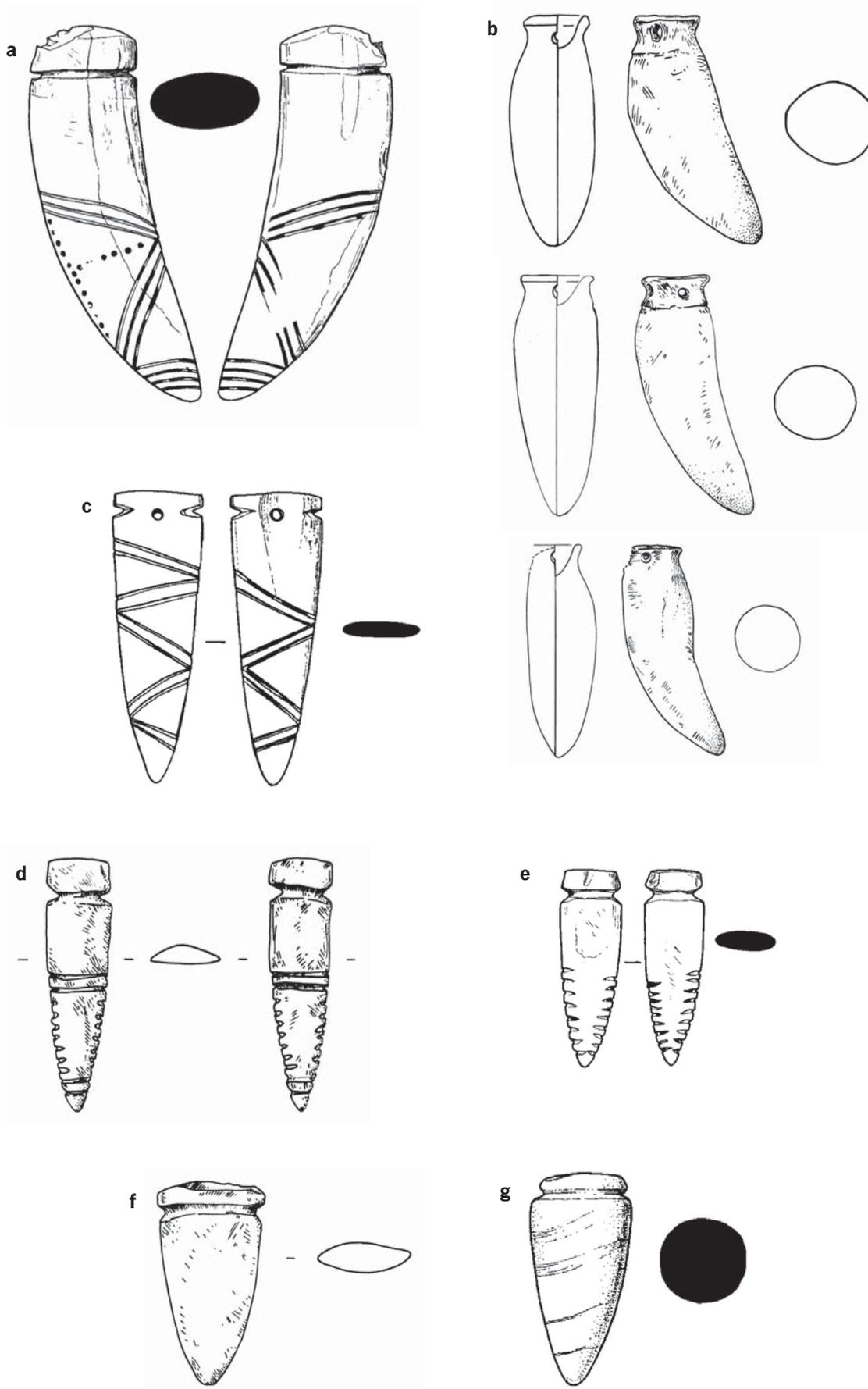


Fig. 23

Tusks and tags

a. Abadiya tomb B102, Oxford AM E.989 (Payne 1993: fig. 83, n° 2001) (L. 14,3 cm)

b. Provenance not recorded, Brussels E.2899A-C (drawing Merel Eyckerman) (L. 10,3; 10,3; 6,0 cm)

c. Abydos, Oxford AM 1892.865 (Payne 1993: fig. 84, n° 2020) (L. 9,1 cm)

d. Abadiya tomb B102, Oxford AM E.994 (Payne 1993: fig. 84, n° 2013) (L. 7,8 cm)

e. Provenance not recorded, Brussels E.2333 (drawing Merel Eyckerman) (L. 6,4 cm)

f. Provenance not recorded, Brussels E.2819 (drawing Merel Eyckerman) (5,0 cm)

g. Provenance not recorded, Oxford AM 1933.754 (Payne 1993: fig. 84, n° 2029) (L. 6,0 cm)

lein (Lyon 90000171, 90000172, Hendrickx & Eyckerman 2010b) has a body shape that clearly resembles the tusks. The latter also shows resemblances with the “MacGregor man” (Oxford AM 1922.70, Payne 1993: n° 5) and the Koptos colossi (Oxford AM 1895.105c-f, Cairo JdE 30770, Payne 1993: n° 1-4; Kemp 2000), all of which have the cylindrical shape characteristic of the tusks and are male beyond doubt. Circular depressions carved in the chest area, intended for inlays, were initially interpreted as female “breasts” (Baumgartel 1955: 35) but this is no longer certain given that eyes, breasts and ears appear interchangeably on composite human and bovine symbols located in what seems to be the chest area of the object. Research to date concludes that the human headed tusks symbolise aspects of masculinity rather than female features.

Two types of tag can be distinguished: symmetrical (**fig. 23c-f**) and asymmetrical (**fig. 23a**) (Hendrickx & Eyckerman 2011: 500). In section tags may be flat or roughly round to oval, and in either case they can be solid or hollow. Nearly all tags have an incision around the broader end, often in combination with a perforation for threading. When found in situ in tombs they generally occur in twos or threes tied together with leather strips and placed near the forearm of the deceased, but not attached to it.⁶⁹ In settlements, tags have been found together with shells, beads and palettes, and placed in jars. In the Badari town groups 3165, 3167, 3284, respectively 8, 2 and 5 tags were found (Brunton & Caton-Thompson 1928: pl. XLVII,4-6), indicating that tags and tusks were not exclusive to the funerary context but were objects used in daily life. In tomb B333 at Hierakonpolis HK43, an Egyptian alabaster tag with a human head seems to have been a component in a magical kit found in a basket (Friedman 2003).⁷⁰

The probable symbolism of the tags and their archaeological context points to an apotropaic, magical function for the tags, which we will now try to define in more detail. Nearly all of the ivory and bone tags are decorated with zigzag and horizontal lines or a number of small horizontal incisions on the sides. Similar linear decoration is also found in the cone-shaped “legs” of the two individuals in the victory scene on the White Cross-lined jar from University College London (UC.15339). Furthermore, a few figurines bear incised or painted zigzag lines along the “legs”,⁷¹ which are similar to the decoration of the tusks. Although the number of parallel elements between tags and figurines is limited, the similar form of tags and cone-shaped “legs” allows to recognise a parallelism between tags and figurines (cf. [pages 14-15](#)).

An explanation, admittedly very tentative, for the meaning of the tags might be found through comparing them with Predynastic flint knives (Holmes 1989: 400-410), among which are the well known ripple-flaked knives (Midant-Reynes 1987). The shape of the rhomboidal knives, especially when the missing hafting is imagined, corresponds well to that of the symmetrical tags, while the other knives, including the ripple-flaked type, resemble the shape of the asymmetrical tags. The use of hippopotamus tusks for the decorated knife handles (n. 78, also Dreyer 1999), provides a further material link.

69. Several well preserved examples have been found at Naq' ed-Deir, e.g., tombs 7130 (Lythgoe & Dunham 1965: 78), 7150 (id.: 87, fig. 35c) and 7150 (id.: 170). See also Nowak 2004: 898-899. 1994a: 42-43).

70. The combination with a palette is of interest because of the supposed magical function of these objects (Midant-Reynes 2003: 342).

71. Naqada 1687, Oxford AM 1895.123 (Ucko 1968: n° 42; Payne 1993: n° 29); unprovenanced, London collection Robert Erskine (Ucko 1968: n° 166).

The pouches for keeping such knives, in which they will normally have been seen in Predynastic times, have not been preserved, but must have existed as is shown by the imitation knife from tomb S.24 at Adaïma (Crubézy et al. 2002: 79, S.024/13b) (**fig. 24**).⁷² The imitation pouch from Adaïma was painted red, presumably to imitate the colour of leather, and decorated on both sides with white dots, perhaps to represent decorative stitching.⁷³ White lines adorning the handle are doubtless representative of the cord wound around the actual handles as reinforcement (cf. Friedman 2004). These white painted dots and lines around the handle are similar to the lines and notches incised on tags.

Both the rhomboidal and the ripple-flake knives must have had a primarily symbolic meaning as they show no traces of actual use (Midant-Reynes 1987; Hendrickx 1994a: 52-55). Although their symbolism is not fully understood at present, such elaborate knives were undoubtedly connected to some form of ritual violence which would simultaneously signify order and protection. This accords well with the apotropaic function already suggested for the tags and might confirm that their shape was inspired by knives.

Returning to the symbolism behind the selection of hippopotamus ivory for the decorated knife handles, the most likely connection is the aggressive character of the animal. In Predynastic iconography, the hippopotamus is attributed both a positive and a negative connotation, but the aggression of the animal can be considered a reinforcement of its apotropaic character (Hendrickx & Depraetere 2004: 815), which in turn can be linked to both the flint knives and the tags just discussed.

Limestone and Egyptian alabaster tusks and tags seem to come into use at the same time as their ivory and bone equivalents, although this requires confirmation in a more detailed investigation. The colour and patterning of limestone and Egyptian alabaster resembles that of ivory, possibly explaining the selection of these stones. The stone tusks and plain tags are rarely decorated (**fig. 23f-g**). This may partially be due to the fact that such decoration is more easily applied to soft materials such as ivory and bone, but at the same time, working stone was not a problem in Predynastic Egypt. Therefore, the stone tags only make reference to the hippopotamus tusks rather than to the flint knives, which seems to be the case especially for tags which are round or oval in section.⁷⁴

In addition to the plain tags and those decorated with lines, there is also a significant number which have one end worked into the shape of a human

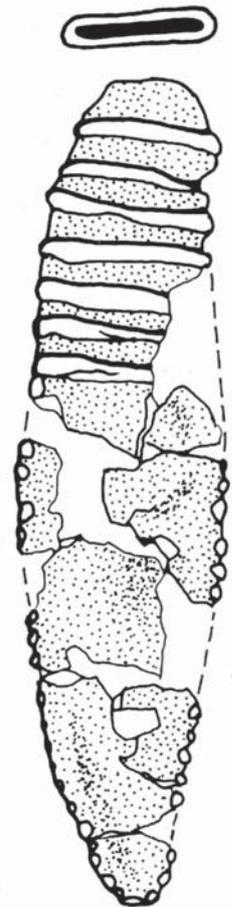


Fig. 24
Imitation knife,
Adaïma tomb S.24
(Crubézy et al. 2002:
79, S.024/13b)
(L. 18,9 cm)

72. The pouch of an imitation knife from Hierakonpolis (AM E.1070, Payne 1993: n° 84) is not decorated. Two imitation knives may have been found in tomb B83 at Abadiya (Petrie & Mace 1901: pl. VI,1 lower row, second from right), but the poor quality of the published photo makes this impossible to determine with certainty. Another possible example is said to come from Khozam (Berlin 14370, Scharff 1931: 60-61, n° 95).

73. Imitation sandals were also found in tomb S.24 at Adaïma, made in the same style (Crubézy et al. 2002: 79, S.024/13a). A link, albeit speculative, could be made with the dots surrounding the tusk shaped "legs" of the dominating male on the White Cross-lined jar from London (fig. 1b). This is however far from certain, especially because on the jar from Brussels (fig. 1a) the dots seem to indicate an animal tail.

74. Omitted from the discussion are the broad, hollow cones (e.g., Payne 1993: n° 1945-1947), generally with holes around the rim used for attachment to leather bags (cf. Scharff 1929: n° 362), although they seem related to the tusks in shape and probably also the context of use.

Fig. 25

Tusks and tags

a. Naqada tomb 271, Oxford AM 1895.132 (Payne 1993: fig. 81, n° 1960) (L. 8,2 cm)

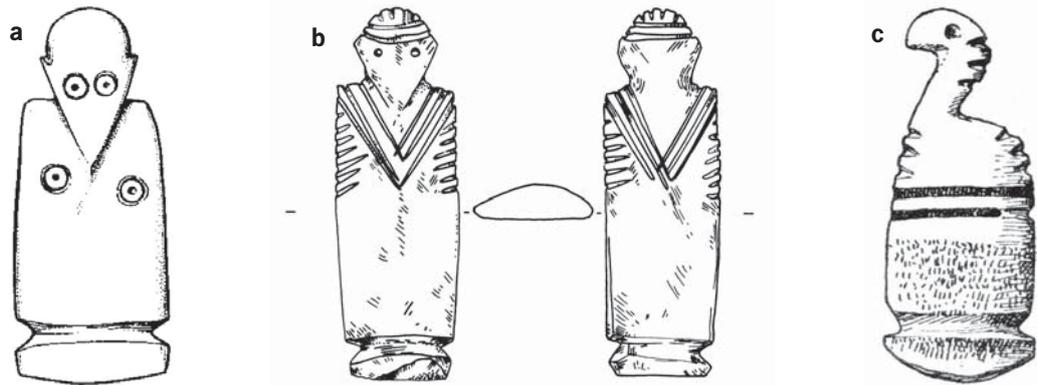
b. Provenance not recorded, Brussels E.2841 (drawing Merel Eyckerman) (8,0 cm)

c. Matmar tomb 3123, Cairo JdE 57429-30 (Brunton 1948: pl. XVI.21) (8,1 cm)

d. Naqada tomb T24, Oxford AM 1895.917 (Payne 1993: fig. 81, n° 1963) (L. 5,5 cm)

e. Abadiya tomb B102, Oxford AM E.993 & 1001 (Payne 1993: fig. 83, n° 1995) (L. 16,3 cm)

f. Abadiya tomb B102, Oxford AM E.993 & 1001 (reconstruction Merel Eyckerman)



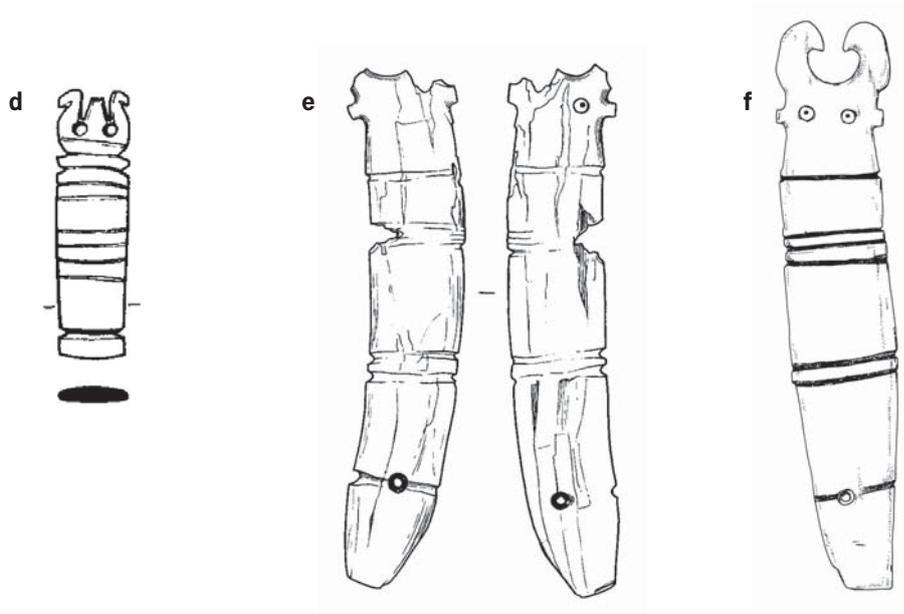
head (**fig. 25a-b**), a bird or bird heads (**fig. 25c-d**), or bovine horns (**fig. 25e**). Besides the ivory and bone examples, these are also made of siltstone, relating them materially to palettes and the ritual significance proposed for the use of siltstone (cf. Midant-Reynes 2003: 338-340).⁷⁵ As for the tusks, the human heads seem to be exclusively male based on the presence of long beards,⁷⁶ although these are heavily stylised. As far as gender is involved in the tusks and tags, it is exclusively related to masculinity. The presence of beards on important statues such as the Koptos colossi or the early Naqada II pottery masks from Hierakonpolis (Adams 2004: fig. 4), and the later use of the beard as royal symbol during pharaonic times, allows us to consider it as a metaphor for male power (Hendrickx & Eyckerman 2011: 531-532), which was also the concept behind the hunting scenes and the (ritual) knives. Therefore, the interpretation of the tusks as referring to the hippopotamus, flint knives or even beards may very well not be mutually exclusive but on the contrary represent interchangeable elements.

Most interesting are two tusks from the elite tomb B 102 at Abadiya (Payne 1993: n° 1994-1995; Hendrickx & Eyckerman 2011: 514-515, fig. 20) (**fig. 25e-f**). Although they are damaged, one can tentatively recognise bull horns with triangular protrusions below them. These elements also occur on tags. Given that bull horns may be represented on tusks, the “ring” on top of a “disc” in some examples may be seen as a simplified version of the horn motif (**fig. 26**). This can be found on plain tusks (**fig. 26a**), and a top male-headed tusks in particular (**fig. 26b-c**),⁷⁷ but the horns have now been transformed into a closed ring and thus adapted to the more functional task of allowing the tusk to be suspended or otherwise attached to another object. In all these examples, the bull horns are associated only with male figures.

75. The relationship with siltstone also exists for the amulets previously mentioned (cf. Hendrickx 2002a: 305-317).

76. Beards are another important symbol in Predynastic representation but will not be discussed here. See Midant-Reynes 2000: 176-178.

77. Not to be confused with tusks with human-heads bearing vessels (e.g., Naqada 271, Oxford AM 1895.129, Payne 1993: n° 8; Scharff 1929: n° 47), which may represent female gender based on the presence of a necklace depicted. A similar scene can be found on a decorated ivory fragment from Abydos, cemetery U (Dreyer 1999: fig. 10a). A tusk-shaped object made from vegetable paste from Naqada tomb 271 (Petrie 1896: pl. LIX,11), in which the aforementioned tusks were also found, is a female figurine because breasts are indicated.



The human + bovine + bird combination discussed above reappears on the tusks and tags. An important difference between these and the figurines and Decorated vessels, however, is the exclusively male aspect of the tags and tusks, which corresponds well with the violence they refer to by the link with the hippopotamus and the flint knives.

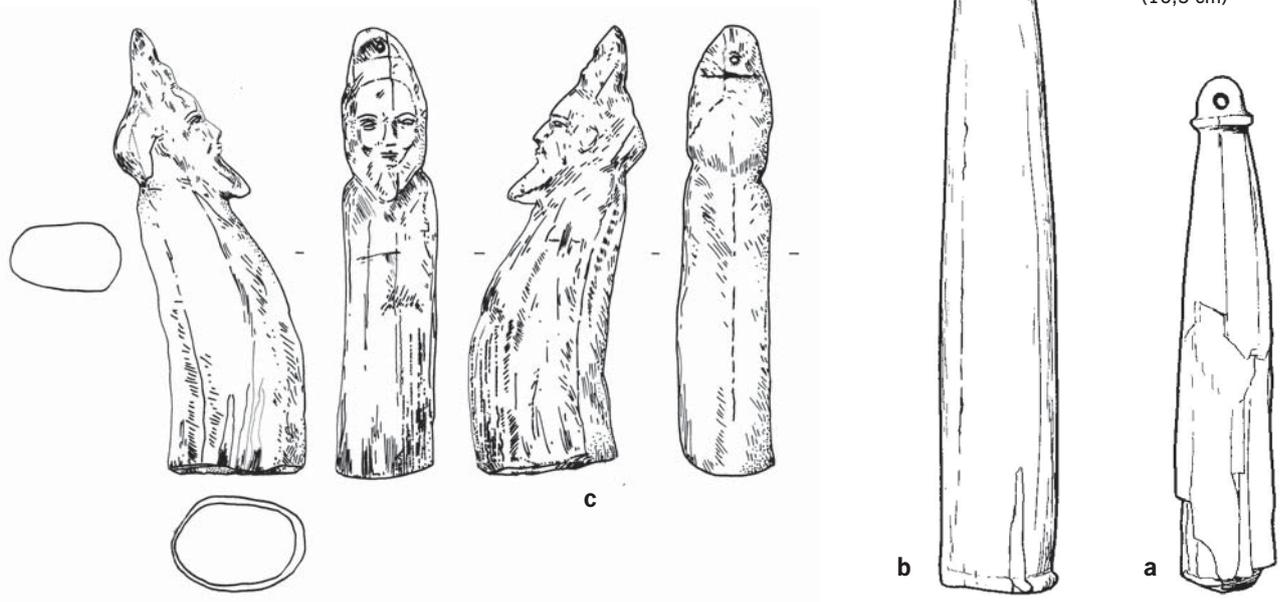
To summarise the interpretation put forward above, cone-shaped elements embody different meanings for female and male figures. Female figures are linked to the Naqada plant and together related to religious ideas of a positive afterlife. In contrast, male figures are related to apotropaic powers offering protection during actual life. Both meanings are interrelated on a more abstract cognitive and intellectual level, indicating that the visual element of the cone had a semiotic meaning of protective power that only obtains its specific meaning through the context in which it is used, as was the case for the other elements already discussed.

Fig. 26
Tusks

a. Abadiya tomb B101, Oxford AM E.965 (Payne 1993: fig. 81, n° 1968) (L. 12,3 cm)

b. Naqada tomb 226, Oxford AM 1895.923 (Payne 1993: fig. 81, n° 1964) (L. 20,8 cm)

c. Provenance not recorded, Brussels E.2331A (drawing Merel Eyckerman) (10,5 cm)



Hunting

Hunting is a dominant theme in Predynastic art (Hendrickx 2010). Hippopotamus hunting as a symbol for order over chaos, evolving over time into royal symbolism, has already been discussed (cf. pages 3-5). Depiction of hunting desert animals, often with dogs, was also mentioned but should be elaborated further. Hunting scenes can be found on White Cross-lined and occasionally Decorated vessels (Flores 2003: 56-57; Hendrickx 2010) but also frequently occur in rock-art (e.g., Hendrickx et al. 2009). Often only dogs occur, possible as a symbolic representation of the hunter. It should be mentioned again that hunting was only of marginal economic importance during the 4th millennium BC (Linseele & Van Neer 2009). Hunting, as well as the keeping of hunting dogs, may have been the reserve of the elite given the importance of dogs in hunting scenes and also in reality, as evidenced by dog burials in important tombs (Hendrickx 2010). Interestingly, the results of the hunt, in the form of dead animals, or the anecdotic action of the hunt are never shown.⁷⁸ On two White Cross-lined vessels in Turin (n. 5) (fig. 27), hunters armed with bows are followed by a row of captured desert animals suggesting that it was more important to show hunters controlling animals than actually killing them. This also explains why lassoing, which permits animals to remain alive, is the only type of hunting depicted in a more or less anecdotic manner in the Hierakonpolis tomb painting and on the “Hunters palette”. Bringing captured animals from the desert to the settlements will not have gone unnoticed, but on the contrary confirmed the social prestige of the hunters involved. The representation of captured animals being brought to ritual sites can be identified on a few Decorated vessels (Graff et al. 2011), while the archaeozoological remains of the actual rites have been found at the ritual site HK29A at Hierakonpolis (Linseele et al. 2009).

Fig. 27

Provenance not recorded, White Cross-lined plate, Turin S.1827 (Donadoni Roveri & Tiradritti 1998: 142, n° 33) (max. diam. 17,0 cm)



⁷⁸. A number of rock-art scenes could be considered hunting scenes with anecdotic elements such as animals being bitten by dogs, but even these show a high degree of iconographic uniformity.

Wild animals were also kept in captivity, at least for some time (Linsele & Van Neer 2009: 63-64), which may also have been an aspect of elite behaviour. Controlling, and in due course killing, wild animals was part of the funerary ritual conducted at the Hierakonpolis elite cemetery HK6 (Van Neer et al. 2004; Friedman et al. 2011). This may also be attested in a subsidiary tomb of Hor-Aha's burial complex at Abydos which contained lions (Boessneck & von den Driesch 1990: 86-87).

The symbolic manner in which hunting is used on Predynastic monuments – as signifying control and power over – seems to relate to the way dogs are deployed. They are used as elements of control on the ivory knife handles already mentioned where, similar to the rosette (cf. page 19), they occur at the end of animal rows (fig. 22a-b).⁷⁹

Less frequently, hunting scenes including dogs are combined with raised-arm figures. The clearest example is in the decorated tomb from Hierakonpolis, immediately to the right of the upper two boats. Here we find a male figure with raised arms behind two dogs chasing antelopes or similar animals (fig. 28). A similar scene occurs on a vessel from Abydos (Oxford AM E.2832, Payne 1993: n° 873), although this time the raised-arm figure

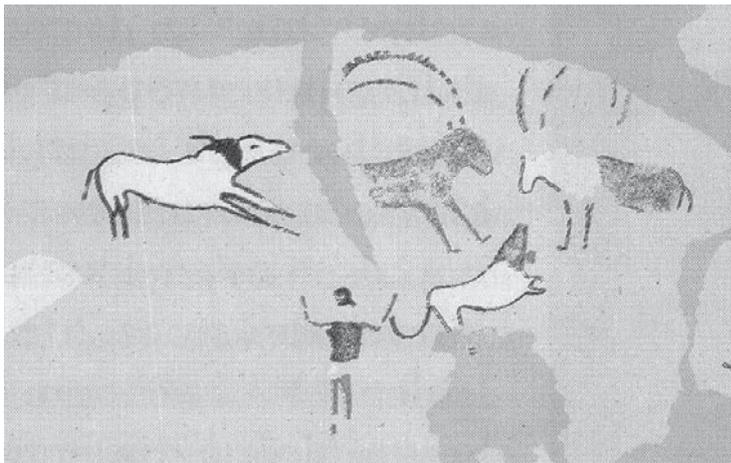


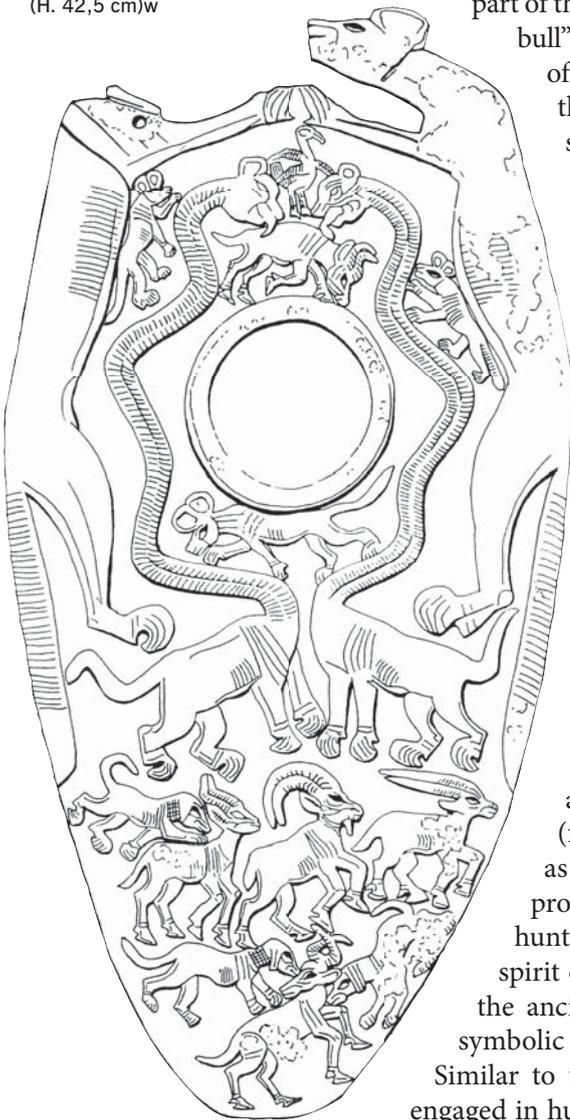
Fig. 28

Hierakonpolis
"painted tomb",
detail (Quibell
& Green 1902:
pl. LXXVII)

is female. While these scenes appear to be exceptional, and not part of the regular iconographic repertoire of Decorated ware, as mentioned, this is probably due to a lack of preserved decorated objects, perhaps of a less durable nature. The Hierakonpolis tomb painting and the jar from Abydos show us an aspect of this largely archaeologically absent iconographic world, indicating that hunting as an expression of control over chaos could also be connected with raised-arm figures. Again this is an indication of power, this time not in a political or religious context, but rather as an expression of general social status, through the elite symbolism of hunting. But in doing so, a visual meaning system is used which we have already encountered both in political and religious contexts.

79. Abu Zeidan handle (Brooklyn 09.889.118, Churcher 1984); Pitt Rivers handle (London BM EA.68512, Ciałowicz 1992a: 249, fig. 3-4), Carnarvon handle (New York MMA 26.7.1281, Bénédite 1918: pl. I-II); Abydos K 1262 a handle (Dreyer 1999: fig. 6); Davis comb (New York MMA 30.8.224, Ciałowicz 1992a: 251, fig. 6-7). Possibly also a spoon from Tarkhan tomb 1023 (Petrie 1913: pl. XIII,1-6).

Fig. 29b
 Hierakonpolis,
 "Hierakonpolis
 palette", Oxford AM
 E.3924 (Baines
 1993: 60, fig. 1)
 (H. 42,5 cm)w



The most elaborate hunting scene known for Predynastic times can be found on the "Hunters palette" (n. 37) (fig. 29a). A chaotic mass of desert animals in the central part of the palette is encircled by two orderly lines of hunters. As mentioned above, the only active hunter is lassoing, and although the lions on each end of the palette have arrows stuck in their heads, they are not shown as dead or dying. Nevertheless, violence is clearly expressed in the representation of a wounded lion overcoming one of the hunters which indirectly demonstrates the determination and power of the hunters. The fact that we are not merely dealing with an anecdote of daily life, is, among other things, indicated by the presence of a building and a so-called "double bull" motif in the upper right part of the palette (Ciałowicz 1991: 55-56; Baines 1995: 151).⁸⁰ The "double

bull" seems to be associated with the adjacent building, the meaning of which remains open for discussion. Baines (1995: 112) suggests the building and "double bull" group was a representational device symbolising royalty, but later disappeared.⁸¹ He also leaves open the possibility that the "double bull" could identify the building. Anyhow, the symbolic significance of the "double bull" can not be denied and situates the scene on the "Hunters palette" on a religious or political level.⁸² The presence of the hunters themselves is also interesting. They have a wide arrange of weapons with them, including maces which are rather more suited for war than for hunting, illustrating again the non-realistic character of the depiction. More significant, however, are the feathers or branches on the heads of the hunters and the animal tails attached to their girdles. The tails are rendered with enough detail to recognise them as those of the *Lycaon pictus* or African hunting dog, figuring on several of the Late Predynastic decorated palettes (Fischer 1958; Asselberghs 1961; Lopez 1995) (fig. 29b).

There are several whole and fragmentary palettes along the edges of which large scale *Lycaon pictus* figure (cf. Asselberghs 1961: pl. 70-96; Ciałowicz 1991; Hendrickx 2006: tab. 5). This "heraldic" position of the animals finds its composition paralleled in the position of the hunters on the "Hunters palette" (fig. 29a-b),⁸³ corroborating the identification of the hunters' tails as those of *Lycaon pictus*. The way the animals frame the palettes is probably inspired by the cooperative way in which the *Lycaon pictus* hunts by surrounding its prey (Hendrickx 2006: 738-742). The group spirit of these animals and their social behaviour probably impressed the ancient Egyptians, attributes that may well have influenced their symbolic use on the palettes.

Similar to the representations of dogs, the *Lycaon pictus* is not actively engaged in hunting activities, but is rather a "controlling" element, especially

80. Illustrations of the "Hunters palette" generally show the palette horizontally, but there is no doubt that it should be regarded vertical as is the case for all other decorated palettes. See Tefnin 1979: 223.

81. See also: Morenz 2004: 165-169; 2005: 121.

82. For other examples of the "double bull", see Hendrickx 2002a: figs. 16.1, 16.10; Scharff 1931: 170, n° 406, Abb. 68; Quibell 1900: pl. XIX,3.

83. For the composition of the decorated palettes, see also O'Connor 2002.

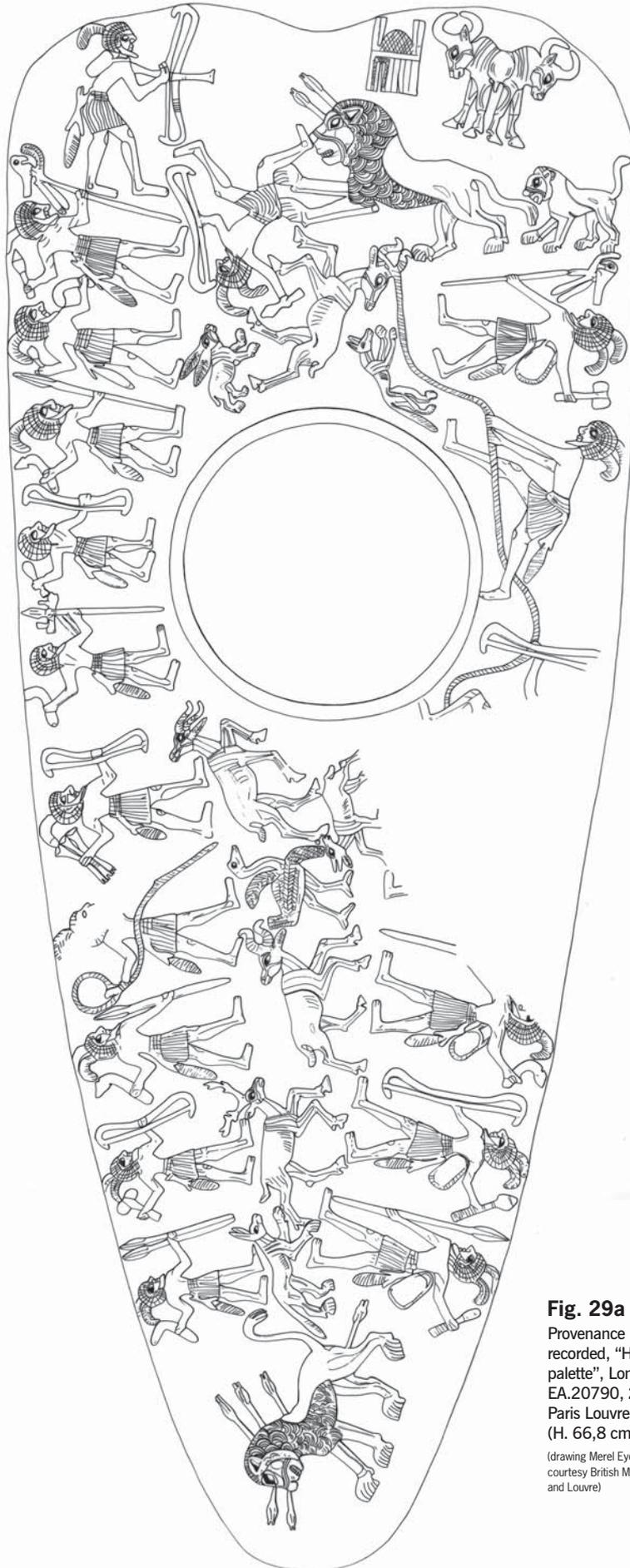


Fig. 29a
Provenance not recorded, "Hunters palette", London BM EA.20790, 20792/ Paris Louvre E.11254 (H. 66,8 cm)

(drawing Merel Eyckerman, courtesy British Museum and Louvre)

when compared to the chaotic animal world which they encircle. The most obvious example is the “Hierakonpolis palette” (fig. 29b), interpretations of which have already been proposed, with a first major breakthrough by Asselberghs (1961: 166-192), but for the present article, the slightly different interpretations of Kemp (2006: 92-99) and Baines (1993) referring to the “containment of unruly in the universe” will be followed.

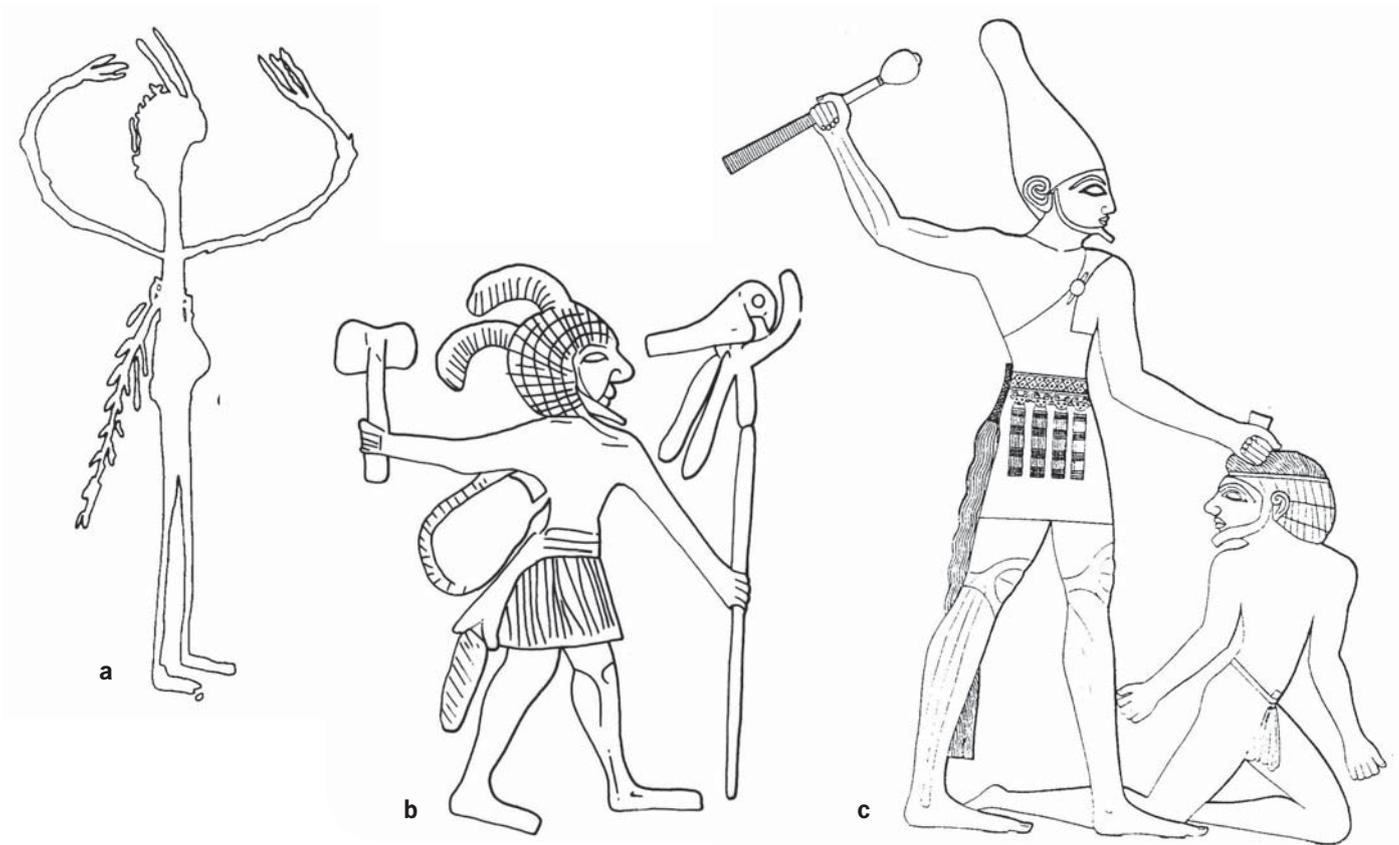
The presence of the hunters on the “Hunters palette”, with feathers on their heads and tails attached to their belts, is strongly reminiscent of some of the victors on the White Cross-lined jars discussed at the opening of this article (fig. 30a-b). The resemblance is particularly close with jar U-239/1, and to a lesser extent U-415/1 (fig. 1d). The similarity can hardly be due to chance, although there is a significant chronological gap between the White Cross-lined jars and the “Hunters palette” that at present cannot be bridged by other examples. Again, this must be due to the limited iconographic repertoire of the Decorated pottery. The lack of detail does not permit us to state with certainty that the victors on the White Cross-lined jars wear *Lycaon* tails, and this seems unlikely given the absence of clearly identified representations of this animal prior to the Naqada IID-III period, to which the decorated palettes are dated.⁸⁴ Whatever the nature of the tail, its symbolism is connected to power, in both the context of military violence and hunting. This symbolism continues into the Dynastic period, when a bull’s tail is part of the royal paraphernalia, as first seen on the Narmer palette (fig. 30c). The replacement of

Fig. 30

a. Abydos U.239/1 detail (after Dreyer et al. 1998: 114, Abb. 13)

b. “Hunters palette” detail (mirror image) (drawing Merel Eyckerman, courtesy British Museum)

c. Narmer palette detail (after Quibell 1898: Tf. XIII)



84. The appearance of the *Lycaon pictus* is limited to the decorated palettes and the animal is not represented on Decorated vessels, but as already demonstrated for victory and hunting scenes, this may be due to the limited iconographic repertoire of this pottery category. This animal may be represented on the Stockholm palette (Medelhavsmuseet E.M.6000, Asselberghs 1961: pl. XLVI; late Naqada I - early Naqada II ?), which would give it a far wider chronological range.

the *Lycaon* tail by that of the bull accords well with the complete disappearance from the archaeological record of the *Lycaon* by the beginning of the 1st dynasty (Hendrickx 2006: 743). Although the kind of tail involved changes over time, it is nevertheless obvious that its use as power symbol starts at least around 3700 BC and continues over the millennia until the end of dynastic times.

Conclusions

The conclusion reached by Tefnin (1979), that the “hunt” on the “Hunters palette” can not be considered a rendering of daily life, can be expanded to all the iconic evidence discussed above. The victory and hunting scenes on White Cross-lined pottery already present a religious and social structured view of life, in which the maintenance of order and the dominating role of an elite are fundamental. During the Naqada II period, the representation becomes expressed in an increasingly structured manner, giving iconographic elements a more precise use as metaphors. This implies the use of “rules” governing image organisation and association, but not in the same way as encountered in writing. This is to be placed in the context of preformal art as defined by Kemp (2000; 2006).

The continued use of iconographic elements over a long period can be found both in the full meaning of certain scenes and in particular iconographic details. The “ruler” holding a mace head is first employed on White Cross-lined pottery and approaches a formal style in the Hierakonpolis painted tomb. On the Narmer palette, the king strikes his enemy in the same way as it will be depicted some 3000 years later on the pylon of the Edfu temple, for example. A similar development can be recognised for the hippopotamus hunt. Other iconographic details that continue to be used include the animal tails worn by the ruler figure. The earliest iconographic element known at present to have survived into dynastic times is the Bat amulet, attested from the early Naqada II period onwards. Although these examples show that the origin of certain Egyptian symbols dates back to at least 600 years before the onset of the First Dynasty, they remain nevertheless exceptional when compared to the full record of Predynastic representations.

Most Predynastic images discussed above will not be part of later formal Egyptian art and appear and disappear at different moments, some within the time frame of the Predynastic period itself, including the tags and tusks, or others, such as the rosette, surviving until the final phase of state formation, coinciding roughly with Dynasty 0. The importance of such change is best illustrated by the disappearance of the visual repertoire found on Decorated vessels and the related symbolism of tags and tusks. This happened apparently over a rather short period of presumably only a few generations.

Major difficulties in our understanding are caused by elements that may have undergone changes that may be difficult to follow due to, among other reasons, the paucity of evidence over such a long time span. An obvious example is the problem in discerning the precise symbolic relationship between the Naqada plant and the palm tree.

Another problem is the one-sided information provided by the Decorated pottery which dominates the representational evidence during the Naqada IIC-D period. This is presumably the reason for the absence of victory scenes during this period, although they do occur both before and after the Naqada IIC-D

period. The extremely limited amount of visual culture on other media allows only a glimpse into the iconographic and semiotic universe that must have once existed.

The origins and development of formal iconography are intimately linked to the emergence of kingship. Although some formal elements can be traced over an extended period, the definitive establishment of the formal principles that are fundamental for Early Dynastic art must have happened over a relatively short period. Accepting that formal art is largely established by the time of Narmer, we can see that even a highly important royal symbol such as the *serekh* has not yet taken its classic form during the time of Irj-Hor, only two reigns before Narmer (cf. Jiménez-Serrano 2003). The amount of pictorial evidence that can be dated with certainty to this crucial period is unfortunately very limited, in part because of heavy post-depositional disturbances in the south-eastern part of cemetery U and in cemetery B at Abydos, where the “kings” of those respective period were buried. Nevertheless, the speed at which the establishment of formal art took place and the consistency of its application indicates that this happened in a very restricted elite environment with the ruler at its centre. The pre-existing iconography was partially taken over and in the course of doing so, the meaning of certain elements must have been selected or adapted to fit the ideological need for a formalised iconography associated with the ruler. This is obvious for the rosette, which nevertheless disappears, and the falcon which continues as a royal symbol until the very end of Pharaonic history. That royal symbolism required exclusivity can, for example, explain why the dog, a “common” animal that can be controlled by all humans, was not be used as a royal symbol and disappeared from the iconographic record as an expression of control and power.⁸⁵ Less ordinary animals on the other hand, such as the bull and the falcon found their way into the royal iconography and at the same time referred to a very ancient tradition for expressing power, albeit originally in a less strictly defined context.

The development of and control over a formal iconography and its syntax was probably of fundamental importance for the elite that had every reason to stimulate a strictly uniform iconographic language, confirming their own privileged position.

85. On the very well known disc from the tomb of Hemaka (Cairo JdE 6279, Emery 1938: 29, n° 307), two dogs are chasing gazelles, but unlike older hunting scenes, this is shown in a more anecdotic manner, including a dog biting a gazelle. This will become characteristic for the hunting scenes of the Old Kingdom.

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