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CURRENT RESEARCH IN EGYPTOLOGY 2011

Proceedings of the Twelfth Annual Symposium

which took place at

Durham University, United Kingdom
March 2011

edited by

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ISBN 978-1-84217-498-2

OXBOW BOOKS
Oxford and Oakville

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ATHERTON, Stephanie (University of Manchester) *Rearing sacred birds in Ancient Egypt.*

BORTOLANI, Ljuba Merlina (University College London) *The snake, the lion and the scarab: Egyptian images of the primordial/creator god in a Greek magical hymn.*

BRYAN, Cathie (The British Egyptian Society) *A new slant on Egyptianising architecture in England 1837–1935.*

COOPER, Julien (Macquarie University) *The cosmographic expression “god’s-land:” a textual study in Egyptian geographic phraseology.*

FIGUEIREDO, Alvaro (National Museum of Lisbon/IMI) *The Lisbon mummy project: preliminary results of the radiographic study (CT multi-Detector / 64) of the human mummies in the collection of Egyptian antiquities in the National Museum of Archaeology, Lisbon.*

FIRST, Grzegorz (Jagiellonian University) *The icon of Pantheos: research on the phenomenon of polymorphic deities in late Egyptian religion and iconography.*

FRANZMEIER, Henning (Freie Universität Berlin) *News from the Vizier (Pa-)Rahotep: Sedment tomb 201 revisited.*

GAUTSCHY, Rita (University of Basel) *Chronology of the second millennium BC.*

GREGORY, Stephen (University of Birmingham) *Roman Egypt or Egyptian Rome: the significance of Egyptian obelisks in the diffusion of ideology.*

HUANG, Tzu-Hsuan Maxime (Chinese University of Hong Kong) *Memory album of life course: a tentative study on elite tomb decorations of Old Kingdom Egypt and Han China.*

KESHK, Fatma (Leiden University) *Origins and development of early urbanism in Egypt: research questions.*

LANKESTER, Francis (Durham University) *Egypt’s central eastern desert rock art: distribution, dating and interpretation.*

MCGARRITY, Luke (University of Birmingham) *The Tale of Woe: problems and reception.*

MONTGOMERIE, Roger (University of Manchester) *The characterisation of ancient lung particles.*

RIDEALGH, Kim (Swansea University) *Talking to God: the Role of Amun in the Late Ramesside letters.*

PRICE, Campbell (University of Liverpool) *Archaism and filial piety: an unusual Ptolemaic pair statue from the Karnak cachette.*

ROWLAND, Megan (University of Cambridge) *Hoarding Heritage?: searching for the philosophy behind Egypt's 'retentionist' antiquity regulations and legislation.*

SOLIMAN, Daniel (Leiden University) *Reconsidering statues: the three-dimensional sculpture of Amenemhat IV and Neferusobek.*

STARING, Nico (Leiden University) *Memory sites: on the use and re-use of the New Kingdom necropolis at Saqqara.*

TAYLOR, James (Durham University) *Describing religious landscapes: pilgrimage accounts and monastic landscapes in Egypt.*

WEBER, Anke (Freie Universität, Berlin) *Dinner for one: the food of the deceased in New Kingdom offering table scenes at Deir el-Medina*

Introduction

After a successful eleventh conference being held in Leiden University (The Netherlands), the twelfth Current Research in Egyptology conference returned to the United Kingdom to be hosted by Durham University in March 2011. The conference gathered both speakers and attendees from all corners of the world. The aim of the 2011 conference was to highlight the multidisciplinary nature of the field of Egyptology. Papers in these proceedings reflect this multidisciplinary nature, with research based on Archaeology, Linguistics, Cultural Astronomy, Historiography, Botany, Religion and Law, amongst others. By means of one or several of these disciplines, contributors to this volume approach a broad range of subjects spanning from Prehistory to modern Egypt, including: self-presentation, identity, provenance and museum studies, funerary art and practices, domestic architecture, material culture, mythology, religion, commerce, economy, dream interpretation and the birth of Egyptology as a discipline.

ABD EL GAWAD is approaching the royal names of the first three Ptolemies as one of the various modes of presentation used by the royal figures. The paper offers an insight on the issue of royal image management and the actual audience of the archaeological evidence.

AMERY reflects on how the current means of assessing antiquities at the point of export is not sufficient for determining the value of archaeological artefacts. This is done through an analysis of fragments of offering scenes attributed to the Old Kingdom tomb of Pehenuka.

BACKHOUSE is examining the images of women on beds and in pavilions at the tombs of Deir El Medina. These scenes are created by the workmen for their own purposes and do not normally appear in the formal repertoire of Egyptian art.

BRADY offers an approach towards the study of the divine myths from the perspective of cultural astronomy. The paper focuses on a particular star phase type showing the sequence of its observed movements and how it bears a strong parallel to the narrative of the ascension of the king in the Pyramid Text.

CHAUHAN FIELD investigates the role of the Seven Hathors during the New Kingdom, whom seem to have a more particular role and function within the Egyptian pantheon than the many other deities who exist in groups of seven or hebdomads.

CLARK is tracing the early development of tomb security in Ancient Egypt from the Late Palaeolithic (c. 21000–12000 BC) until the end of the Naqada IIIA period (c. 3300–3150 BC). The main aim of Clark's paper is to examine, by tracing the development of tomb architecture from the Predynastic Period onwards, whether many of the architectural elements that were incorporated in Egyptian tombs were a consequence of the need to protect the burial, rather than the result of monumental or religious considerations.

CORREAS-AMADOR explains the manner in which an ethnoarchaeological study of modern mudbrick houses can help re-establish the link between material and context, an essential connection to achieve a holistic understanding of ancient Egyptian domestic architecture.

DEGLIN presents a status report on the possibility of the existence of wood exploitation in ancient Egypt through our current botanical knowledge and a re-examination of particular textual and iconographic sources.

FERNÁNDEZ NEGRO is following the steps of Antonio Bernal de O'Reilly in Egypt in order to highlight the legacy he left in his book *In Egypt* where he provided his own outlook on the history of ancient Egypt, a historical contribution that silenced the echoes of European influences in Spain.

HEIKKINEN is exploring the influence of Christianity on burial practices in Middle Egypt through archaeological evidence. The paper discusses in detail the various shifts in burial practices during the period from 400 to 640 AD.

LAPORTA is discussing why Hatshepsut was crowned as king, providing a re-examination of the usurpation of Tuthmosis III and attempting to find some answers to the confusing question of why Tuthmosis III retained Hatshepsut's courtiers and followed her building programme.

LIESEGANG is exploring the phenomenon of personal religion in the Ramesside Period, from the "Poem" of Ramses II through to the Prayers of Ramses III. This is done through examining the related literary evidence in an attempt to shed some light on the relationship between the king and the god.

LIGHTBODY is looking into the use of Egyptian royal encircling symbolism, represented by the shen ring. The paper describes how and why this symbolism was incorporated into royal artworks, architecture, decoration and rituals.

MILLWARD is addressing the mechanism of mourning in New Kingdom Egypt. The paper focuses on the New Kingdom tombs of the Theban elite, more specifically, on the wall decoration contained within these superstructures.

NORRIS is giving an account of a project to trace the provenance of one cartonnage and how it came to be found at the Welshpool Museum in Wales.

PIGNATTARI is reporting on her current research on an organic group of Middle Kingdom stelae (1987–1759 BC), forming the main part of a corpus of documents belonging to a functionary called Djaf-Horemsaf, chief of at least three expeditions to the turquoise mines of Serabit el-Khadim, in Sinai, in the years 6, 8 and 9 of Amenemhat IV (1772–1763 BC).

PRADA is providing an insight on ancient Egyptian oneiromancy and demotic dream books. The paper reveals the wealth of unpublished sources on this topic which clearly show strong links between the demotic and the earlier *oneirocritica*.

SCHILLER is following the activities of the merchants and their trade in an Egyptian harbour as well outlining possible problems encountered in the trade connections of New Kingdom Egypt with the Eastern Mediterranean area.

STEWART is seeking to frame the problem of myth in Ancient Egypt by surveying the definitions and approaches of more general myth studies, attempting to provide mediation between the divergent opinions in Egyptology concerning myth.

TAMORRI suggests that deviant burials in Predynastic Egypt do not necessarily reflect social exclusion or rejection, but are likely to be merely another burial type in a wide repertoire of burial practices.

VELASCO PÍREZ is looking into female hippos, whose form was adopted by several goddesses in the Egyptian pantheon. Some of these gods have two names while others remain anonymous; the paper attempts to resolve the question of how many hippo goddesses the Egyptian pantheon had.

The twelfth meeting of the Current Research in Egyptology conference not only witnessed the gathering of the future names of Egyptology but also a reunion of Durham University's Egyptologists. This was reflected in the conference's keynote speakers Dr Toby Wilkinson, Dr Penny Wilson and Dr Karen Exell who presented the past, the present and the future of Egyptology tradition at Durham University. Dr Wilkinson's arrival at a complex time within the Department of Archaeology helped ensure the successful continuation of Egyptology at Durham. As well as a renowned Egyptologist in her own right, Dr Penny Wilson has supervised a number of students that have gone on to become curators and lecturers at United Kingdom and overseas universities such as Dr Karen Exell, who was at the time of the conference the curator of Egypt and the Sudan at the Manchester Museum, University of Manchester. Through their work, it has been possible for many postgraduate students to undertake research on a wide range of Egyptological subjects.

The editors would like to thank the following institutions who kindly supported the Current Research in Egyptology XII conference: The Department of Archaeology at Durham University, Durham University's Graduate School, the Durham Centre for the Study of the Ancient Mediterranean and Near East, The Egypt Exploration Society, the North East Ancient Egypt Society, Oxbow Books, Durham Tourist Information Office and Durham Oriental Museum.

The editors would also like to thank Dr Penny Wilson, Dr Toby Wilkinson, Dr Kathryn Piquette, Dr Karen Exell, Ms Lyn Gatland, Mr Nico Staring, Dr Gillian Scott, Dr Stuart Weeks, Ms Rachel Grocke, Dr Campbell Price and Dr Angus Graham for chairing the conference sessions and stimulating vibrant discussions which will certainly boost current and future research in Egyptology.

The Editors

*Heba Abd El Gawad, Nathalie Andrews, Maria Correias-Amador,
Veronica Tamorri and James Taylor*

October 2011

Figured ostraca from Deir el-Medina

Joanne Backhouse

Introduction

Deir el-Medina, on the west bank of Thebes, has been extensively excavated since the beginning of the twentieth century. In addition to the considerable archaeological remains, the site has yielded over five thousand limestone ostraca (Bruyère 1952, 60). As a readily available source material they were predominantly inscribed with hieratic text, for administrative purposes, prescribing lists of workers, materials, accounts and letters, with a small proportion containing hymns to the gods, cult rituals and love songs (Bruyère 1952, 61). However, a significant number contain an image, so called ‘figured ostraca.’ Generally they are inscribed in black and red with occasional additional colours used. Satirical images, depictions of animals and human figures are the most common subject matter. This paper will examine a particular genre of image, that of women on beds and in pavilions. These scenes, created by the workman for their own purposes, do not appear in the formal repertoire of Egyptian art and hence are worthy of detailed study. This paper represents research to date for my PhD at Liverpool University. As such, it is very much a work in progress.

Source Material

Ernesto Schiaparelli worked systematically at the site between 1905 and 1909, for the Egyptian Museum in Turin, but died before completing a full excavation report. Consequently, although the Turin Museum has a large collection of figured ostraca, these have not been published in a comprehensive manner. Schiaparelli did publish four pieces in his 1923–1927 publication but these were from Valley of the Queens and did not include any images of women on beds or in pavilions (Schiaparelli 1923–1927 Vol. 1 figs. 120, 121, 124). Georg Möller later worked at the site for the Berlin Museum. He recovered both hieratic and figured ostraca, a selection of the latter being published by Schäfer (1916) and Brunner-Traut (1956). Although no detailed report of the excavation was produced, Rudolf Anthes (1943, 1–68) published a brief report, thirty years later, based on Möller’s notes. However, this does not contain any further information regarding the figured ostraca found by Möller.

The Institut Français d’Archéologie Orientale (IFAO) took over the concession for the site from 1917. From 1922 until 1951, Bernard Bruyère directed the excavation and regularly published reports of their work, the most important for this study being the 1939 publication, which documents the 1934–1935 season and focuses on the village itself (Bruyère 1939). Bruyère did not catalogue or publish the figured ostraca in any detail. This was done by Jean Vandier D’Abbadie whose work represents the most comprehensive publication of figured ostraca to date (Vandier D’Abbadie 1937, 1946, 1959) although, it must be noted, for the purposes of academic

study this work has serious limitations. There are very few photographs; most representations are line drawings and therefore are subject to individual interpretation. In addition, as all were drawn by the author, they are similar in style, consequently hampering the identification of any individual artist based on idiosyncrasies of style or composition. The limitations of this method of representation for the purposes of academic study have been noted by previous scholars (Peck 1985, 14).

A significant number of museums also have examples of figured ostraca which are unprovenanced. The majority are assumed to have come from Deir el-Medina due to stylistic similarities (Demarée 2002, 9). The most significant collection of such material, for the purposes of this study, is found at the Medelhavsmuseet in Stockholm. These came from the Gayer-Anderson Collection and were published by Peterson (1974). There are clear similarities between these and the excavated pieces from Deir el-Medina; consequently they cannot be excluded from the dataset.

Context

No excavation report provides any detailed contextual information regarding the find spots of individual figured ostraca. Bruyère (1952, 60–61) informs us that most were found in two locations, firstly in a heap of rubble to the south of the village and secondly in a pit to the north. This pit was more than fifty metres deep and thirty-five metres wide, so this was a substantial undertaking. It is believed it was dug in the Ramesside period, in an abortive attempt to reach the water table (Bruyère 1953, 129). The abandoned pit subsequently became filled with debris. Bruyère believed heaps of rubbish built up in the north and south locations as these were the only spots accessible for the accumulation of rubbish during the life of the village (Bruyère 1952, 61). Vandier D'Abbadie (1946, 1), using the finds of Bruyère, provides a little more information, noting figured ostraca were also found in the debris of houses and amongst the ruins of votive chapels. Meskell (2000b, 259) makes the important point that the site must be considered as a whole, not merely the enclosed village. The extended site encompasses houses beyond the enclosure walls, four hundred tombs in the necropolis, the chapel complexes and the Hathor temple. Indeed, Bruyère's successors identified between forty and fifty dwellings situated amongst tombs and chapels (Valbelle 1985, 120). This highlights the juxtaposition of the realms of the living and the dead in the community, in stark contrast to modern industrial society, which has much clearer demarcations. Those boundaries are more blurred at Deir el-Medina and we must be aware of this when attempting to contextualize the ostraca.

Dating

Despite the limitations of the contextual information it is possible to date the figured ostraca with a degree of certainty. This is based on the work of Černý (1935), as noted by Vandier D'Abbadie (1946, 5). Working for IFAO, Černý examined non-figurative ostraca, *i.e.* textual. From 1935 until 1951 he produced five volumes of work. Based on the epigraphy and royal cartouches on a number of pieces, he was able to date the non-figurative ostraca to the reigns of Seti I and Rameses II (Černý 1935). However, the figurative and non-figurative pieces can be dated as a group, as they were found together in the same locations and no figurative pieces

have been found in the Eighteenth Dynasty remains of the site. Therefore, the ostraca can clearly be dated to the Nineteenth Dynasty, although it is also possible to attribute them to the Twentieth Dynasty as objects dating to the reigns of Ramesses III and Ramesses IV have been found in the same contexts.

Methodology

The present study focuses on images of women on beds and in pavilions. They were identified as a coherent group and classified as ‘scènes de gynécées’ by Vandier D’Abbadie (1946, 80). He suggested these scenes, taking place in what he identified as the female part of the house, depicted elite women in Egyptian society (Vandier D’Abbadie 1946, 81). I initially began examining these images as a secondary source of data. I was primarily interested in New Kingdom figurines and the objectification of the female form in New Kingdom material culture, *e.g.* mirror handles, cosmetic spoons and kohl pots. However, the images on the ostraca brought together, in a unique way, many separate elements that had been the object of my study, clearly identifying them as worthy of independent analysis.

In order to carry out the aforementioned study, a database has been constructed and each image entered, recording its component parts and details, for example if the main figure is facing right, if a servant is present or if the scene contains a child. In this way repeat motifs and correlations can be identified. It is hoped that, by deconstructing the iconography, the pertinent features of the scenes will become apparent and in doing so, will shed light on the purpose and intent of these depictions.

Preliminary Analysis of the Data

Two datasets have been identified, ‘women on beds’ (Fig. 1) and the smaller group ‘women in pavilions or outdoor locations’ (Fig. 2). As work progressed, it became apparent that these were clearly linked. The former group consists of images which depict any part of a woman on a bed; to date, this group contains twenty-nine ostraca; twenty-one are from Deir el-Medina, of which eighteen were found by Bruyère and three by Möller. An additional piece is known to have come from the Theban necropolis and is now in the Louvre (Keimer 1940–45, 4). Seven pieces with no provenance have been included in the dataset due to stylistic similarities; five are from the Gayer-Anderson Collection, now in Stockholm, and the remaining two pieces can be found in Munich.

Of those twenty-nine pieces, only twelve contain an image of a child, while seventeen do not. However, twelve of those seventeen are incomplete images (Fig. 3). Complete images are considered to be those in which both the foot and head ends of the bed are visible. Therefore, incomplete images could have contained a child, as part of the scene is missing. There are in fact only five complete images without a child. Two of these are very unclear (MM14070 and Berlin 21773) and it has been noted a child could be present in at least one (Peterson 1974, 103). It appears to be the norm for a child to be included in the scene. With regards to orientation, in twenty-four of the images the women on the bed turn to the viewer’s right (Fig. 1). In only five instances does the woman face the viewer’s left and only one of these includes a child, which is lying on the bed behind the women. Of the twelve images which include a child, in eight

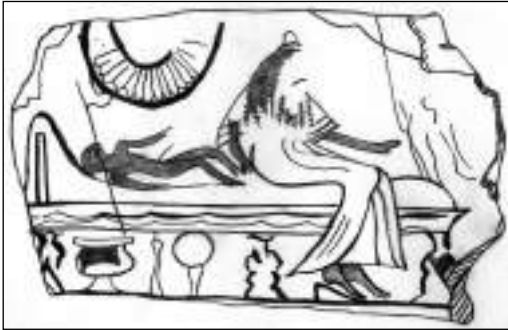


Figure 1. Drawing of a figured ostraca, Deir el-Medina, example of 'women on beds' dataset. 2337, Present location – IFAO, based on Vandier D'Abbadie (1937 Pl. L).



Figure 2. Figured ostraca, provenance unknown, example of 'women in pavilions or outdoor locations' dataset. BM 8506, Present location – British Museum © Trustees of the British Museum.

examples the child is in front of the woman who is facing the viewer's right. Apparent there was a preference to orientation, with the main figure facing the viewer's right.

There are clear areas of significance within the scenes. The bed itself appears as an important and highly decorated item. Indeed, the most frequent motif across the dataset is the depiction of the god Bes on the feet of the bed as seen in Figure 1. This occurs in sixteen images, more than half of the dataset. Serpent imagery also appears on eleven of the bed frames (see in Fig. 1 and Fig. 3). This was possibly a reference to Mertseger, the serpent goddess who we know was worshipped at Deir el-Medina (Bruyère 1929). A stylized depiction of convolvulus leaves (a perennial weed) appears in fourteen of the images, often as prominent features of the scene, intertwined between figures. This gives a sense of nature and abundance, suggesting the outdoors. This links the scenes to the 'women in pavilions and outdoor locations' dataset which will be discussed later. Scenes of offering and presentation are also a common theme. The images have a clear emphasis on depicting a specific set of objects, with items under the bed (Fig. 1), in the background (Fig. 4) and being presented (Fig. 3). Mirrors appear in eleven scenes, most commonly under the bed but also in the background and as items of presentation. Kohl pots appear in seven scenes, always in conjunction with a mirror. Broad collars appear five times either in the background or as items of presentation, never under the bed. Perfume cones are depicted five times, either as items of presentation or under the bed. Patterns are clearly emerging, suggesting the scenes were constructed using a visual code, a symbolic language that held meaning to their creators and viewers. The objects depicted – mirrors, jewellery, make up and perfume cones – relate to adornment and beautification. Were these gifts presented at marriage ceremonies or births, with the



Figure 3. Figured ostraca from Deir el-Medina, example of an incomplete image. E14337, Present location – Louvre, Paris. Courtesy of the Louvre Museum, Paris.

bed symbolizing the place of procreation and the joining together of a couple? However, it is worth noting that the only males depicted in these scenes are servants; the emphasis is clearly on the female figures.

Within the dataset a small but distinctive sub-group has been identified, so called ‘elaborate beds.’ This comprises only two pieces, one in the Medelhavsmuseet, Stockholm (Fig. 4) and another one now in Berlin (21451) (Shäfer 1916, fig. 10). However, distinctive iconography defines them as a coherent group. In both scenes the bed has Bes feet, with scalloped edges and a thick mattress. In addition, in both scenes the main figure is facing the viewer’s right, breast



Figure 4. Figured ostraca, provenance unknown, example of 'elaborate beds' subgroup.

feeding and appears naked except for a broad collar. Mirror and kohl pots are present either in the background or as items of presentation. These images have much in common with the 'women in pavilions or outdoor locations' dataset and serve as a link between the two groups.

The 'women in pavilions or outdoor locations' dataset comprises just three pieces, two excavated by Bruyère (Figs 5 and 6). The other piece (Fig. 2) has no provenance but has been attributed to Deir el-Medina due to similarities in style (Demarée 2002, 9). Again, highly distinctive imagery defines these pieces as a coherent group. A kiosk is clearly visible on two of the pieces (Figs 2 and 5), but all three have an abundance of convolvulus leaves, suggesting an outdoor location. As in the elaborate bed scenes, the women appear naked but are in fact intricately and elaborately adorned, with wigs and jewellery. They all wear a tripartite wig, broad collar necklace and have an unusual veil or a cape around their shoulders. They all sit on stools, facing right and are breast feeding. Mirror and kohl pot are presented clearly in two of the three scenes (Figs 2 and 5). In Figure 6 flowers may be presented, which would fit in with the rare and almost erased inscription which states 'to give beautiful plants and fruits, offerings of the gardens and fields alike' (Vander D'Abbadie 1957, 28). However, the interpretation of these designs as a mirror and kohl would be more consistent with the dataset. It has been suggested that the presentation of mirrors maybe part of purification rituals after birth (Kemp 1979, 52–53).

The hairstyles of the servants in these outdoor scenes are equally distinctive. In Figures 2 and 6 we see male servants with shaved heads and long locks, what Vandier D'Abbadie (1957, 23) called 'la meche de la temple'. This distinctive hairstyle is also seen on two fragments of ostraca now in Brussels (Werbrouck 1932, fig. 4; Werbrouck 1953, fig. 11). The female attendants



Figure 5. Figured ostraca, Deir el-Medina, example of 'women in pavilions or outdoor locations' dataset. E2533, Present location – Louvre, Paris. Courtesy of the Louvre Museum, Paris.

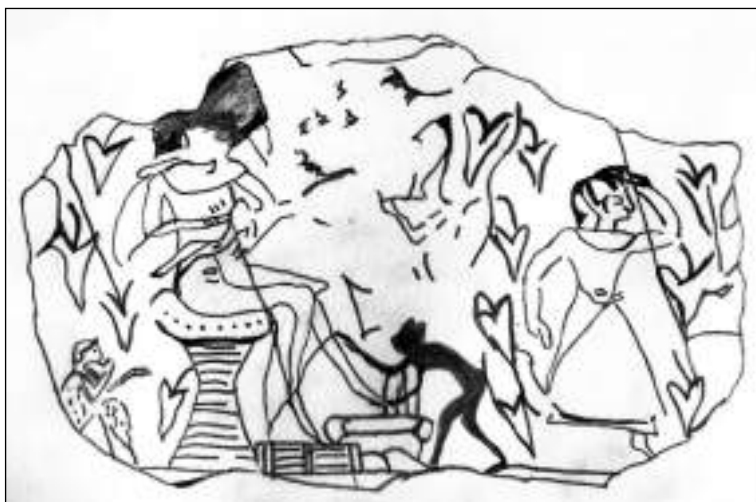


Figure 6. Line drawing of a figured ostraca, Deir el-Medina, example of 'women in pavilions or outdoor locations' dataset. 2858, Present location – IFAO; based on Vandier D'Abbadie (1959 Pl. CXX).

also have idiosyncratic hairstyles (see Figures 5 and 6). Vandier D'Abbadie (1957, 23), called them 'meche ondulée.' The high pony-tail style, gives the head an elongated, conical shape. The servant in one of the 'elaborate bed' scenes (Berlin 21451) also has this hairstyle and is likewise holding a mirror and kohl pot (Shäfer 1916, fig. 10). A similar hairstyle is also depicted in a scene of animal parody. Here a young girl, possibly a servant, dances naked, before a kiosk (Peterson 1974, 102). Lastly, the same hairstyle is seen on a fragment in Brussels. All that now remains is the upper body of a young girl, who is naked and also holding a mirror and kohl pot (Werbrouck 1954, 98, fig. 9). It would therefore seem that this hairstyle is strongly associated with servant girls and the presentation of mirror and kohl pots.

Purpose and Intent

The prevalence of repeat motifs and correlations within the imagery suggests the scenes were constructed using set formulae, a symbolic language which held meaning to their creators and viewers. This raises the question of what significance was attached to these images and why were they drawn. It was originally assumed they held little importance to their creators as they were found broken, stained and disregarded (Vandier D'Abbadie 1946, 1). While it is suggested that some were practice pieces for tomb scenes and wall paintings, it was also believed the majority were works of leisure, doodles to pass the time (Vandier D'Abbadie 19, 118–119). However, there are too many patterns forming coherent groups for these to be random scribbles. Some are of quite intricate design and it is clear care and attention has been put into them. Many look like finished pieces, with colour applied (Figs 3 and 5). Is it possible they were objects in their own right? It is useful here to consider Meskell's definition of 'materiality,' which is the making of a thing from a non-thing (Meskell 2004, 2). In these terms the ostraca have clearly undergone a process of transformation. They were probably selected from debris, an image drawn upon them and in many cases colour applied. After handling a number of pieces, it must be acknowledged that they have a presence, a sense of being, in comparison to purely a flat two-dimensional image. My research to date suggests Meskell is correct in her assertion that the ostraca are both representational and physical objects (Meskell 2004, 148). Several of the complete scenes are approximately the size of a hand, some even larger, therefore they are not insubstantial pieces. It is possible they were used like stelae, as free standing objects to display images of significance.

Vandier D'Abaddie suggested some ostraca depicting figures or religious themes may have been ex-voto, built into walls of domestic chapels and close to altars. In his publication he does in fact note one example, an image of Sobek, which had traces of plaster around the edges. This had been built into the walls of a house (Vandier D'Abbadie 1946, 119). Nevertheless, it must be acknowledged, that none of the ostraca so far handled for this study provides any indication of having been mounted. Unfortunately, Bruyère's reports do not give a breakdown of where all the individual ostraca were found, although one is noted to have come from a tomb (Bruyère 1928, 22). This belongs to the 'women on beds' dataset and the imagery is consistent with others in that group.

Although scant evidence survives, similar imagery is painted on the walls of the houses at Deir el-Medina. Published material is limited; the best example is a female dancer found in house S.E. VIII (Fig. 7) (Bruyère 1939, 273). It was published in more detail by Vandier D'Abbadie (1938, 27). We can see the woman is naked except for a veil or a cape, which is similar to

the veils worn by the women in the pavilion and outdoor scenes, on the figured ostraca. She appears to be on her toes as if dancing and is playing the flute. Bes, the most prevalent motif on the figured ostraca, is depicted possibly tattooed on her thighs. There is also an abundance of convolvulus leaves, again a common motif on the figured ostraca. Ostraca 2399, now in IFAO, also depicts a young girl bending as though she were in a dancing pose, naked except for a cape or veil, playing a double flute.

More fragmentary evidence was found in house S.E. I (Fig. 8), consisting of the remnants of a group scene (Bruyère 1923, 122). All that remained was four pairs of feet, two papyriform columns and a stool. Although incomplete, the image does suggest a seated figure on a stool, attended by servants, surrounded by convolvulus leaves, and consequently similar to the pavilion



Figure 7. Drawing of a water colour of a wall painting, Deir el-Medina, House S.E. VIII. Based on Vandier D'Abbadie (1938, PL. III).

and outdoor scenes on the figured ostraca. Bruyère (1923, 132) attempted to reconstruct this scene in light of these images. However, he believed the seated figure to be Hathor breast feeding her son Horus and consequently reconstructed the design by adding cow horns and a sun disk. The surviving evidence does not, in my opinion, provide any justification for this. Brunner-Traut's reconstruction (1956, fig. 5) was more plausible, with the breast feeding woman wearing the tripartite wig as seen on the figured ostraca discussed (Figs 2, 5, 6). There are also a number of similarities between the two wall paintings. Both were painted on whitewashed backgrounds, both have a triple striped edge delineating the scene. This pattern is located on the vertical edge in the case of the image of the dancer and on the horizontal edge in the case of the group scene. Also, as previously noted, there is an abundance of convolvulus leaves. Bruyère (1939, 264) believed the two wall paintings were painted 'without a doubt' by the same artist, whom he believed was also responsible for two wall paintings of Amenhotep I and his mother Ahmose-Nefertari among the same convolvulus leaves, as recorded by Budge (1914, no. 37993–37994). It is worth noting that both the wall paintings in S.E. I and S.E. VIII are multi-coloured, unlike the next group of scenes, which are confined to grey and white. Perhaps these multi-coloured scenes were the most significant; indeed Bruyère (1939, 60) described S.E. I as the most lavishly constructed and decorated of all *lits clos* (these structures will be discussed in detail below). Alternatively, the residents of these houses may have simply been more affluent. Perhaps poorer households, who could not afford such lavish wall paintings, owned similar images but on ostraca.

Evidence of the depiction of the god Bes also remains on the walls of at least seven houses (Bruyère 1939, 57–58). All scenes are drawn in white over a grey background. Two types can be distinguished; Bes is either depicted in profile making music and dancing or depicted frontally with arms and wings outstretched. In some houses, the god is depicted more than once. For example, in house N.E. X the remains of three panels were collected from the debris. Two side panels show Bes in profile, dancing, playing the tambourine and double flute. A third panel, which would have stretched above the door, shows Bes frontally with outstretched arms and wings, holding in his hands bouquets of lotus flowers (Bruyère, 1939, 58). These profile depictions give a sense of movement and life to the music and dance scenes. Profile depictions were the norm in Egyptian representation, frontal depictions being a rarity. However, nearly all the depictions of Bes, on the figured ostraca under consideration are frontal, with the depiction of the god, generally incorporated into the legs of the bed. He is most often seen with his hands on his hips, in a squatting pose, wearing a kilt and feathered headdress. In only one occasion (Berlin 21451) is he depicted making music, in another example of frontal depiction (Shäfer



Figure 8. Drawing of wall painting, Deir el-Medina, House S.E. I. Based on Bruyère (1923, 133).

1916, fig. 10). It is clear that on both the figured ostraca and the wall paintings Bes was a key component, incorporating both profile and the more unusual use of frontal depictions.

Another image of interest to this study was found in house C.V. II; this shows the bottom half of a scene depicting a woman at her toilette. As in previous cases, the figures are drawn in white over a grey background (Bruyère 1939, 311). Although it is not clear from the illustration, Bruyère (1939, 59) suggested she was being assisted by a naked slave. The inclusion of a naked female attendant is consistent with several images on the figured ostraca, for example Fig. 5. Consequently, although the evidence is limited, there are undeniable similarities between the figured ostraca and the depictions on the walls of houses. A possible explanation for these similarities could be that the former were practice pieces for the latter. However, we are still left with the question of why these images, which do not appear in the formal repertoire of Egyptian art, appeared in prominent positions in domestic contexts.

The archaeological context of the images may provide some insight. All images discussed have been found on the exterior of brick structures, which Bruyère called '*lits clos*' because they reminded him of a type of Breton bed in Brittany of that name (Bruyère 1939, 57). Of the seventy houses excavated by Bruyère these structures/*lits clos* were found in twenty-eight homes, always in the first room of the house (Bruyère 1939, 61). He identified seven different types. They were constructed in the corner of the room, often incorporating the exterior walls of the house. On average, they were 1.70m long, 0.80m wide and 0.75m in height. They were fully or partially enclosed and had a small staircase of between three and five brick steps, situated on the exterior wall (Bruyère 1939, 56–57). They were commonly plastered and white-washed; some had evidence of decoration still surviving. Bruyère (1939, 137) initially believed these structures to be '*mit-autel, mit lit d'accouchment*', that is, both a cultic installation used to worship ancestors and a utilitarian feature, used to give birth in. Since Bruyère published this material there has been much debate regarding the purpose of the *lits clos* (Cherpion 2006, Koltsida 2006). Romano (1990, 26–27) advocates a more practical use, as a piece of functional furniture, questioning if villagers would have given up ten per cent of the rooms floor space to a birthing bed, used perhaps once a year. While this is a valid point, given the dimensions of the feature, the suggested alternative does not seem very plausible, as a couple would not have slept comfortably together in this structure, nor would it have been an ideal place for sexual relations. In addition the enclosed and raised nature of the feature would have hampered rather than assisted child birth. The location of the structure, in the first accessible room of the house, is itself an unlikely delivery spot, being very public in what would have been a crammed and enclosed village. Overall, the evidence suggests the structures had a cultic, as opposed to secular, function.

A cultic function is also suggested by the presence of niches or alcoves cut into the inner walls of the *lits clos* (Bruyère 1939, 60). Bruyère suggested these could be for stelae or busts, but they could also have contained the items depicted on the figured ostraca under consideration, for example mirrors, perfume cones, offering dishes *etc.* However, this is only speculation as Bruyère did not find any items in situ. Recesses were also found at ground level which could accommodate a table of offerings. This combination of niche and recess was present, for example, in house S.E.VIII, where the image of the dancer was found (Bruyère 1939, 273). Houses C.V and C.VI also contained a niche opposite the *lit clos*; as previously discussed, remains of Bes decorations were found in both these houses. Interestingly, the *lit clos* was not included in the original layout of the Eighteenth Dynasty houses. There is evidence that houses built at that time were later altered to include this feature, for example house N.E. II (Bruyère 1939, 61). It would appear that the *lit clos* became a desirable element in the Ninetieth and Twentieth

Dynasty home, therefore being concurrent with the figured ostraca under consideration. It is possible that it became a vehicle for display of important images and the niche and recess acted as receptacles for items possibly of cultic significance. Given the prominent position in the first room of the house, both the structure of the lit clos and the decoration may have acted as markers of prestige and status. The images may have been expressions of personal piety or celebrations of births and marriages; however, without direct textual references we can only speculate.

In the general repertoire of New Kingdom figured ostraca there are a limited number of parallels with divine representations which may help us understand the meaning and significance of the images under consideration. Ostraca HO49 from the Ashmolean Museum (Oxford) shows Renenutet, a serpent goddess of the harvest and divine nurse, sitting on a throne-like chair, breastfeeding a child. A male servant stands in front of her with his arm outstretched holding possibly a piece of fruit, in an offering gesture. This ostraca was given to the museum by Sir Alan Gardiner and is said to be from Deir el-Medina but has no firm provenance, nor is it published. Piece MM14006 from the Medelhavsmuseet in Stockholm depicts Isis suckling Horus (Fig. 9). The inscription gives the title, 'Isis Lady of the Sky' and names private individuals of Deir el-Medina. Similar images of goddesses breast feeding kings have been found inscribed in stone in chapel 15E at Deir el-Medina. This includes a much damaged image on a stela (Bruyère 1929, pl. VI) and another one on a fragmentary block of limestone (Bruyère 1929, fig. 20). In light of these images it is possible that the depictions of breastfeeding women at Deir el-Medina, were seeking to emulate the goddesses and that these women were looking for their protection and blessings for their children. However, it is also possible that the images had another layer of meaning. In the tomb of Nefer-renpet at Deir el-Medina (TT336) we see Mertseger, the serpent goddess of the site, breast feeding the tomb owner who, we are told, becomes a child again in another time (Bruyère 1929, fig. 21). Perhaps the images of breast feeding women did not solely relate to protection of the child in this life but also to his rebirth.

There are no clear divine parallels for the images from the 'women on beds' dataset. The closest similar depiction is part of the divine birth scene at Deir el-Bahri (Naville 1898, pl. XLVIII), portraying queen Ahmose sat on a bed. The god Amon, who has taken the form of her husband Tuthmosis I, sits opposite her, handing to her the ankh sign. These images were used to legitimize the rule of Hatshepsut as divine daughter of both a god and a king. The bed is clearly visualized as the place of sexual union and the joining together of the couple for procreation. The idea of the bed as the place of sexual activities is also seen in the *Turin Erotic Papyrus* which, although unprovenanced, may have originated from Deir el-Medina (Toivari-Viitala 2001, 147). Based on items depicted and epigraphy, it is certainly contemporaneous with the figured ostraca (Toivari-Viitala 2001, 147). The papyrus has been divided into twelve scenes by scholars, with scene six showing a naked girl lying on a bed, trying to entice a man lying under the bed (Omlin 1973, pl. X). Images of beds themselves, in Egyptian representation are rare, consequently their context is significant.

Future Research

Work to date clearly demonstrates that the images of women on beds and in pavilions, on the figured ostraca, form a coherent group. The inclusion of repeat motifs and themes suggest these scenes were created using set formulae which held meaning and significance to their creators and viewers. It is highly likely that similar imagery was depicted on the walls of houses at Deir



Figure 9. Figured ostraca showing Isis sucking Horus, with names of private individuals from Deir el-Medina. MM14006, Present location. Medelhavsmuseet Museum, Stockholm. Courtesy of the Medelhavsmuseet Museum, Stockholm.

el-Medina. These representations must be viewed within the context of the society in which they were created. Therefore, in order to broaden our understanding of these images, my future research will assess their relationship to contemporaneous material culture. I will initially focus on three dimensional female figurines, examples of which were found at the site of Deir el-Medina in their hundreds, both on beds and standing alone (Bruyère 1939, 109). Many have similar iconography to the figured ostraca under consideration, for example convolvulus leaves and the inclusion of a mirror and child. I also intend to explore the objectification of the female form, which blossoms in New Kingdom Egypt. This includes the use of female figurines on mirror handles which, as objects themselves, were depicted frequently on the scenes under consideration, often held by naked servant girls.

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