Smiting All Foreigners, Subduing All Lands: A Diachronic Study of Iconographic, Textual, and Ideological Antecedents of New Kingdom Triumph Scenes

Rebekah Anne Vogel

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.memphis.edu/etd

Recommended Citation
https://digitalcommons.memphis.edu/etd/3256

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by University of Memphis Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Electronic Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of University of Memphis Digital Commons. For more information, please contact khggerty@memphis.edu.
SMITING ALL FOREIGNERS, SUBDUING ALL LANDS:
A DIACHRONIC STUDY OF ICONOGRAPHIC, TEXTUAL, AND IDEOLOGICAL
ANTECEDENTS OF NEW KINGDOM TRIUMPH SCENES

by

Rebekah Anne Vogel

A Dissertation
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Major: History

The University of Memphis
July 2022
Copyright © 2022 Rebekah Anne Vogel
All rights reserved
In loving memory of my mother, Lois Barrett.

You may not have seen me finish this journey, but without you I could never have even begun.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation would not have been possible without the support, contributions, and assistance of my committee members, the University of Memphis Department of History, the Institute of Egyptian Art and Archaeology, and members of my cohort who served both as sounding-boards and stalwart friends. Firstly, I must thank my advisor and committee chair, Dr. Peter Brand for his unwavering support and faith in my abilities, even when I doubted them myself. I am grateful for his instruction in various aspects of ancient history and Egyptology, as well as his help in rescoping, organizing, and researching aspects of my project.

I am likewise indebted to the other members of my committee for their support in my dissertation process and throughout my Ph.D. studies. I am grateful to Dr. Suzanne Onstine, from whom I learned the nuances of Egyptian archaeology and the benefits of interdisciplinary approaches. Her encouragement was indispensable. I am grateful also to Dr. Joshua Roberson for his honest guidance and the quality of his instruction in Middle Egyptian and other aspects of Egyptian language—whole parts of this dissertation would not exist without it. I would also like to thank Dr. Benjamin Graham, whose input and expertise in the history of the ancient world more generally has helped me ensure I have not blindly written for Egyptologists alone.

I would also like to extend my gratitude to the following institutions that have aided in the scholarship of the present work, contributed to my education as an Egyptologist and historian, and/or provided access to information or collections I may not have otherwise obtained: the Institute of Egyptian Art and Archaeology (IEAA), the University of Memphis Department of History, the University of Memphis College of Communication and Fine Arts, the American Research Center in Egypt (ARCE), the Brooklyn Museum, the Museum of Fine Arts (MFA) in Boston, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art.
I would like to thank all my fellow graduate students for their support, friendship, proofreading, and willingness to share ideas, photos, and sources throughout my time at Memphis. Particular thanks goes out to Taylor Deane, Katie Fincher, Amanda Shaffrey, and Daniel Smith.

Similarly, I would never have made it this far without the support, patience, and encouragement of my friends and family, with special thanks owing to Joe and Mary Vogel, Zelina Santiago, and Graham Johnson. I am especially indebted to my father, David Barrett, who has supported me in all I’ve ever done and always championed my efforts in higher education. The words to thank my husband, Riley Vogel, fail me. This process has been a long and grueling one and I can’t imagine what it would have been like without him at my side. This victory belongs to both of us.

Lastly, I would like to thank Dr. Steven Stannish, in whose classroom I was first introduced to professional Egyptology, apotropaic magic, and topographical lists. His influence, I believe, speaks for itself.
ABSTRACT


Egyptian New Kingdom triumph scenes, perhaps one of the most recognizable motifs in Egyptian art, adorned the exteriors of temple complexes and depicted the king smiting his enemies and receiving lines of bound toponyms representing subjugated foreign peoples and places. These scenes have often been studied for their relevance to historical geography as well as the military, imperial, and foreign relations history of Egypt. This study approaches New Kingdom triumph scenes instead as composite ideological motifs that deliberately combined specific iconographic and textual elements in a display of royal victory. It identifies the constituent elements of the motif, traces their derivation and diachronic development, and analyzes how those elements were incorporated into New Kingdom triumph scenes to create ideological meaning within that context. In particular, antecedent forms such as smiting scenes, the bound prisoner motif, and litanies of triumph were employed in various ways throughout Egyptian history before they appeared in New Kingdom triumph scenes. This study explores the artistic development of these antecedent forms, their component iconography and text, their ideological messages, and the physical contexts of their usage from the Predynastic to the New Kingdom.

From an ideological perspective, the composite content of New Kingdom triumph scenes served three purposes: propaganda through the display of state ideology, protection through apotropaic magic, and accomplishment of politico-religious ritual requirements. These functions were interconnected and would have been contextualized by contemporary audiences through the representational, cultural, historical, and literary traditions that informed them. Thus, the
antecedent framework and the diachronic development of the constituent elements determined both the composite form of New Kingdom triumph scenes and their effectiveness as ideological documents displaying themes of royal dominion, royal violence, the otherness of foreigners, divine sanction, and the triumph of *maʿat* through the destruction of *isfet*.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>List of Figures</td>
<td>xi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abbreviations</td>
<td>xiv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historiographical Context</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions and Theoretical Framework</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Diachronic Approach</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Sanctioned Smiting</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tomb 100 Painting</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hierakonpolis Ivory Cylinders</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narmer Palette</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ivory Tag and Cylinder of Narmer</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ivory Tag of Aha</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calcite Palette of Djer</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ivory Tag of Den</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rock Relief of Djer</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rock Reliefs of Den</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rock Relief of Djoser</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rock Relief of Sekhemkhet</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rock Reliefs of Snefru</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rock Relief of Khufu</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rock Relief of Sahure</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sahure Mortuary Complex at Abusir</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rock Relief of Niuserre</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Niuserre Mortuary Complex at Abusir</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rock Relief of Djedkare</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unas Mortuary Complex at Saqqara</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rock Relief of Pepi I</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pepi I Mortuary Complex at Saqqara</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pepi II Cylinder Seal</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pepi II Mortuary Complex at Saqqara</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transition to First Intermediate Period and Middle Kingdom</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nebhepetre Mentuhotep II Chapel at Gebelein</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nebhepetre Mentuhotep II Chapel at Dendera</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twelfth Dynasty Temples</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amenemhat III Pectoral Pendant</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parade Axe of Queen Ahhotep</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variable Contexts in the New Kingdom</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private Smiting Stelae</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Summary: Diachronic Development of Smiting Scenes

3. Foreign Subjugation

Gebelein Textile 127
Battlefield Palette 128
Gebel Sheikh Suleiman Relief 130
Sahure Mortuary Complex at Abusir 134
Pepi II Mortuary Complex at Saqqara 136
Bound Prisoner Statues 137
Bound Prisoners in Decorative Art 138
Execration Figurines 140
Worn Objects and Amulets 143
Scorpion Macehead 145
Libyan Palette 147
Bull Palette 149
Narmer Palette 151
Tomb of Inti at Deshasha 153
Nebhepetre Mentuhotep II Chapel at Gebelein 156
Stela of General Montuhotep from Buhen 158
Theban Tombs 159
Summary: Diachronic Development of Gods Leading Bound Prisoners 167
Summary: Diachronic Development of Topographical Lists 169

4. Victorious Rhetoric

Pyramid Texts 174
Autobiography of Weni 177
Autobiography of Harkuf 180
Shabaka Stone 182
Instructions for Merikare 184
Instruction of Amenemhat 189
The Prophecies of Neferti 191
Senusret I Inscription in Montu Temple at Tod 194
Boundary Stelae of Senusret III 195
Hymns to Senusret III 198
Stela of Sehetepibre 201
The Tale of Sinuhe 203
Execration Text Rebellion Formulae 207
Annals of Thutmose III 209
Poetical Stela of Thutmose III 212
Sphinx Stela of Amenhotep II 215
Kadesh Texts of Ramesses II 217
Mernepah (Israel) Stela 221
Summary: Diachronic Development of Rhetorical Texts 224

5. Synthesis and Conclusions 231

ix
**LIST OF FIGURES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Line drawing of a smiting figure and prisoners from Tomb 100 at Hierakonpolis</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Line drawing of a smiting pattern on an ivory cylinder from Hierakonpolis</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Photograph of the reverse side of the Narmer Palette</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Line drawing of an ivory tag with the name of Narmer smiting a papyrus-headed figure</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Line drawing of an ivory cylinder from Hierakonpolis depicting Narmer smiting captives</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Line drawing of an ivory tag from the reign of Aha</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Line drawing of a calcite palette with smiting imagery, likely from the reign of Djer</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Ivory tag with smiting iconography from the reign of Den</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Line drawing of a rock relief smiting image of Djer, Wadi Ameyra</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Line drawing of a rock relief smiting scene of Den, Wadi el-Humur</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Line drawing of a double rock relief smiting scene of Den, Wadi el-Humur</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Line drawing of a rock relief smiting scene of Djoser</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Line drawing of a rock relief smiting scene of Sekhemkhet, Wadi Maghara</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Line drawing of a rock relief smiting scene of Snefru, Wadi Maghara</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Line drawing of a two-register rock relief smiting scene of Snefru, Wadi Maghara</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Line drawing of a rock relief smiting scene of Khufu</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Line drawing of a rock relief smiting scene of Sahure</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Line drawing of the Libyan Family Scene, Sahure Funerary Complex, Abusir</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Line drawing of the partial trampling scene, Sahure Funerary Complex, Abusir</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Line drawing of a rock relief smiting scene of Niuserre</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. Line drawing of a rock relief smiting scene of Djedkare Isesi</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. Line drawing of a rock relief smiting scene of Pepi I</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. Line drawing of a smiting scene of Pepi I on a cylinder seal</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. Reconstruction of a smiting scene of Pepi II from his mortuary complex at Saqqara</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25. Lower register smiting scene from the chapel of Nebhepetre Mentuhotep at Gebelein</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
26. Line drawing of a plant smiting scene from the chapel of Nebhepetre Mentuhotep at Dendera
27. Pectoral pendant with the smiting iconography from the Twelfth Dynasty tomb of Mereret
28. The blade of the parade axe of Queen Ahhotep
29. Line drawing of a rock-cut stela of Amenhotep III smiting with Amun, Khnum, and Ptah from Aswan
30. Line drawing of a rock-cut stela of Amenhotep III smiting with Amun and Anuket from Aswan
31. Line drawing of a rock-cut stela of Ramesses II smiting with Amun and Khnum from Aswan
32. Fragment of an architrave of Amenhotep III from Luxor Temple
33. Block from Pylon III at Karnak showing part of a smiting scene of Amenhotep III
34. Smiting relief with Reshef from the tomb of Thutmose III
35. Line drawing of a gold foil fragment from the reign of Tutankhamun
36. Ceremonial shield of Tutankhamun
37. Chair panel depicting Thutmose IV as a trampling sphinx
38. Silver ring depicting Amenhotep II smiting
39. Line drawing of a private smiting stela of the hry-wr priest Iry
40. Line drawing of a private rock-cut double smiting stela from Abu Simbel
41. Fragments of a Predynastic textile from Gebelein depicting a possible prisoner on a boat
42. Fragments of the obverse side of the Battlefield Palette
43. Line drawing the Gebel Sheikh Suleiman relief, after Murnane
44. Relief of gods leading bound prisoners from the causeway of the mortuary complex of Sahure
45. Line drawing of a relief of gods leading bound prisoners from the mortuary complex of Pepi II
46. Bound prisoner chair support from Hierakonpolis
47. Middle Kingdom execration figurine with text
48. Pair of sandals from the tomb of Tutankhamun depicting bound enemies
49. Line drawing of decoration on the Scorpion Macehead
50. The reverse of the Libyan Palette in the Egyptian Museum
51. Both sides of the Bull Palette fragment
52. Line drawing of two splayed enemies on the reverse of the Narmer Palette
53. Line drawing of a bull trampling a man and destroying a town on the obverse of the Narmer Palette
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>54</td>
<td>Line drawing of a battle scene with fortification from the tomb of Inti</td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55</td>
<td>Line drawing of town names with crenelated fortification walls from the tomb of Inti</td>
<td>156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56</td>
<td>Smiting scene with kneeling prisoners from the chapel of Nebhepetre Mentuhotep at Gebelein</td>
<td>158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>57</td>
<td>Stela of General Montuhotep from Buhen</td>
<td>159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>58</td>
<td>Line drawing of a tekenu-rite scene from the tomb of Mentuherkhepeshef (TT20)</td>
<td>161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>59</td>
<td>Line drawings of reliefs two from the tomb of Amenemhat Surer (TT48)</td>
<td>164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60</td>
<td>Amenhotep III and Tiye with Nine Bows topographical list from the tomb of Kheruef (TT192)</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61</td>
<td>Line drawing eastern wing of the triumph scene of Seti I at Karnak</td>
<td>235</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>62</td>
<td>Line drawing western wing of the triumph scene of Seti I at Karnak</td>
<td>238</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>63</td>
<td>Line drawing of the southern wing of the triumph scene of Ramesses III at Medinet Habu</td>
<td>241</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>64</td>
<td>Line drawing of the northern wing of the triumph scene of Ramesses III at Medinet Habu</td>
<td>244</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abbreviation</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AJA</td>
<td>American Journal of Archaeology</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BASOR</td>
<td>Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIFAO</td>
<td>Bulletin de l'Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JARCE</td>
<td>Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JEA</td>
<td>Journal of Egyptian Archaeology</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JNES</td>
<td>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JSSEA</td>
<td>Journal of the Society for the Study of Egyptian Antiquities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MDIK</td>
<td>Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts, Abteilung Kairo</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAS</td>
<td>Münchner Ägyptologische Studien</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEA</td>
<td>Near Eastern Archaeology</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OIP</td>
<td>Oriental Institute Publication</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P&amp;M</td>
<td>Topographical bibliography of ancient Egyptian hieroglyphic texts, reliefs and paintings</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rec. Trav.</td>
<td>Recueil de travaux relatifs à la philologie et à l'archéologie égyptiennes et assyriennes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wb</td>
<td>Wörterbuch der ägyptischen Sprache im Auftrage der Deutschen Akademien</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ZAS</td>
<td>Zeitschrift für ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The motif depicting the victorious Egyptian king slaughtering his defeated enemies and triumphing over foreign peoples and places is one of the most recognizable in ancient Egyptian art. Even before Egyptology existed as a defined field, scholars of the history and culture of ancient Egypt were drawn to these triumphal motifs, especially those with the most complex artistic content and monumental size. During the New Kingdom, the pylons of important temples like Karnak were adorned with giant, striding kings in the midst of smiting their foes under the watchful, approving eyes of the gods. In most cases, rows of bound foreign prisoners followed under or behind the king, their defeat—and the defeat of the geographic location or people group they represented—fully assured. This overt display of the awesome power and total dominion of the Egyptian king is ubiquitous in ancient Egyptian art and ideology.¹

The monumental triumph scenes of the New Kingdom represent the apex of this combination of iconography and ideology, but the artistic, literary, and cultural traditions that informed them stretched back to the earliest periods of Egyptian history, even before the formation of the state itself. Within the artistic and architectural program of temples, triumphal motifs occur on pylons, exterior walls, and flanking doorways and other transitional spaces,² but

---


² Swan Hall, *Pharaoh Smites His Enemies*, 17–32. This is consistent with Bestock’s finding (*Violence and Power*, 103) that examples of this type of imagery prior to the New Kingdom are concentrated in transitional spaces.
these were not the only contexts in which they appeared. For most of Egyptian history, triumphal motifs were predominantly restricted to royal settings, adorning the interiors of royal temples and palaces and employed as decorative motifs on smaller items like jewelry, furniture, and ceremonial objects. However, within the composite monumental triumph scenes of the New Kingdom, the existing triumphal iconography and texts were arranged in new ways and placed on the exterior of temples. The size, composition, and placement of these scenes made them some of the most visible scenes in temple decoration programs. They were also some of the most interactive. People could see and experience them from much further away than most other scenes and entering the temple often required walking right through them.

In the past, scholars have tended to classify triumph scenes into two main categories based on function: propaganda and protection. The former category suggests that the primary function of triumph scenes was to serve as state-sanctioned representations of the king upholding order and defeating the enemies of Egypt, assuring his subjects of his all-encompassing power. The latter suggests that their primary function was to serve as apotropaic images, symbolic and magical means of warding off chaos from temple complexes and other royal spaces. In fact, New Kingdom triumph scenes did serve both of these purposes as well as ritual functions within the broader context of the temple decorative program and the official duties of the office of

---


4 A full spatial and architectural analysis of the placement of triumph scenes within temple architectural and decorative programs is outside the scope of the present study, but their relationship to their audience within this context is discussed in chapter 5.


kingship. Throughout Egyptian history, the ideological functions triumphal motifs served were simultaneously apotropaic, propagandistic, and ritualistic.

In order for the motif to serve as effective propaganda, it had to represent the king successfully performing functions inextricable from his office, not the least of which was the protection of Egypt from chaos and foreignness. To effectively function as apotropaic magic, the images contained in the motif had to be symbolic representations of protective acts that occurred in the real world. For the Egyptian state and for the office of Egyptian kingship, magic and propaganda were often one and the same and closely tied to the rituals of kingship and the state. All scenes in ritual contexts have ritual function, and triumph scenes highlighted the outward ritual actions required of a successful Egyptian king, in contradistinction to the more inward-facing actions like libating, processing, and presenting offerings to state deities.

As such, the three primary ideological functions of triumphal motifs are distinct yet inextricably tied to one another and to the requirements of the office of kingship. In particular, the king’s cosmological role in upholding ma’at by violently suppressing the forces of isfet is the ideological and iconographic basis on which the triumphal motif is built, but this motif also reflects the real-world actions of the king and the nature of certain historical realities rather than consisting solely of ideological posturing. At their core, triumphal relief scenes were projections

---


8 Ritner, Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice, 115.

9 Spalinger, “Egyptian New Kingdom Triumphs,” 117; Allon, “War and Order in Eighteenth Dynasty Egypt,” 18–30. For ease of reading in the present study, I have opted to render the Egyptian terms mswt and jisft in their accepted anglicized forms, ma’at and isfet. These terms, representing cosmic order and cosmic chaos respectively, are complex Egyptian concepts integral to the understanding and interpretation of Egyptian ideology and worldview. These are used in the present study at length, making the anglicized forms more practical than their Egyptian counterparts.
of state ideologies into the physical space and lived reality of the ancient Egyptians through the medium of familiar iconographic and literary motifs rooted in the historical and cultural context of the power of the state and role of the king in maintaining and wielding that power.

**Historiographical Context**

An extensive literature review of previous scholarship is not warranted here, though a brief historiographical framework is appropriate to contextualize the diachronic analysis and ideological discussion that follows. The present study builds on a long history of Egyptological scholarship relating to monumental triumph scenes, triumphal iconography, smiting and smiting scenes, topographical lists, representation of foreigners, and the ritual requirements and ideology of kingship. Previous scholarly discussions have often relegated triumph scenes to the realm of exaggerated (and therefore “stereotyped,” “formulaic,” or even “worthless”) symbolism and generalized state propaganda. In other cases, they have been mined for information relating to historical geography or to the movements and actions of the Egyptian military or imperial machine. Only in the last decade or so, with studies like Susanna Constanze Heinz’s *Die Feldzugsdarstellungen des Neuen Reiches* and Anthony Spalinger’s *Icons of Power,* have

---

10 This is not to say that these are not legitimate or worthwhile lines of historical or Egyptological research. Rather, that these have, until the past decade, encompassed the prevailing approaches to triumphal material despite the fact that other worthwhile approaches exist. For exemplars of the historical geographical and political/military narrative approaches to Egyptian triumphs and related scenes, see Donald Redford, *Egypt, Canaan, and Israel in Ancient Times,* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992); William Murnane, *The Road to Kadesh: a Historical Interpretation of the Battle Reliefs of King Sety I at Karnak,* Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilization 42 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985); Garth Gilmour and Kenneth Kitchen, “Pharaoh Sety II and Egyptian Political Relations with Canaan at the End of the Late Bronze Age,” *Israel Exploration Journal* 62 (2012): 1–21; Eric Cline and Steven Stannish, “Sailing the Great Green Sea?,” *Journal of Ancient Egyptian Interconnections* 3, no. 2 (2011): 6–16; Michael Hasel, *Domination & Resistance: Egyptian Military Activity in the Southern Levant, ca. 1300–1185 BC,* Probleme der Ägyptologie 11 (Leiden: Brill, 1998).

scholars really begun to deconstruct the content of triumph scenes and imagery with a more explicit focus on individual iconographic components.

The history of the scholarship of triumphal imagery—especially the composite monumental scenes of the New Kingdom—is a history built on dichotomies and dissonance. That is to say that scholarly discussions of this topic have often been shaped by the interplay of opposing ideas and attempts to rectify seemingly contradictory conclusions. Perhaps the most pervasive of these contradictions is the identification of triumph scenes as either historical documents or ideological ones. Scholars like Kitchen and Redford have approached triumph scenes and other battle scenes as historical documents that should be gleaned primarily for information defining or corroborating battles and military campaigns, illuminating the nature and location of historical places and peoples, and identifying specific events that occurred during the reign of a given king. In this same vein, William Murnane’s *Road to Kadesh* ties the battle scenes of Seti I at Karnak to their historical context and uses the content of the scenes to clarify, corroborate, and expand scholarly understanding of the events that preceded the Battle of Kadesh. However, since the genre of triumphal imagery was fairly standardized by the New Kingdom, those looking for insight into specific, singular events often found triumphal motifs to be historically useless.

---

12 See n. 10 that previously outlined numerous studies that take this approach, including Redford’s *Egypt, Canaan, and Israel*; Gilmour and Kitchen, “Pharaoh Sety II and Egyptian Political Relations with Canaan,” 1–21.


14 This is not so commonly stated outright but rather suggested by the manner in which this content has been dealt with in scholarly works—Redford suggests smiting scenes and related topographical lists were “de rigueur” and only those with large topographical lists based on itineraries are useful as “reflections of historic events” (*Egypt, Canaan, and Israel*, 143). Even Epigraphic Survey, *Reliefs and Inscriptions at Karnak, Volume 4: the Battle Reliefs of King Sety I*. Oriental Institute Publications 107 (Chicago: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 1986), which describes the triumph scenes of Seti I at Karnak in extensive detail, asserts that “as a type, the scene itself is devoid of specific historical reference, and the list of names is a stereotyped collection of places that ought, by rights, to be under Egypt’s control” and that Seti’s scenes are only “redeemed from utter banality” by the fact that some of the
Recently, the scholarly pendulum has swung back in the opposite direction with more focus on the iconic and symbolic nature of the scenes, bringing their ideological role to the forefront. The present study falls firmly within the trend toward ideological analysis with the caveat that ideology and historicity need not be mutually exclusive. In the end, even the most repetitious triumphal iconography has some basis in historical reality, and even the most meticulous historical record contains ideological bias.

A logical result of the history vs. ideology dichotomy present in existing scholarship of New Kingdom triumph scenes is a perpetual struggle to classify these and related war scenes as either primarily iconic or primarily narrative. Scholars have often interpreted the scenes that exhibit more narrative qualities as more historically useful, and more clearly grounded in historical events. However, since triumph scenes are among the most standardized subset of war scenes, the purely iconic nature of the scenes is assumed despite the fact that most New Kingdom triumph scenes occur in conjunction with other war scenes as part of a larger narrative structure. The present study instead approaches the iconic elements of triumphal motifs as the building blocks of narrative, following the precedent set by Susanna Constanze-Heinz and Anthony Spalinger.

Name-rings were recut to better align with the content of nearby battle scenes (OIP 107, 47). Approaches such as these minimize the historical relevance of the iconography, display, and ideological purposes of triumph scenes.

Works like the aforementioned Constanze-Heinz, Die Feldzugsdarstellungen and Spalinger, Icons of Power have been at the head of this charge.

I also take issue with the underlying assumption on which this analysis is based. While there can be a correlation between the presence of a clear narrative structure and the communication of events as they occurred or as they were meant to be remembered, the simple presence of narrative structure does not presuppose historical accuracy.

Similarly, the scholarly dichotomy of propaganda vs. magic and ritual in triumphal imagery stems from another sort of dissonance that exists in triumphal display: the concept of ideological dominion vs. the violent, real-world subjugation that the concept necessitates. Since most New Kingdom triumph scenes attempt to show the king’s dominion both literally and figuratively, they have often been deemed historically unreliable because of their highly ideological and often mythological content. The concept of ideological dominion is a metaphorical one that is rooted in state and religious ideologies related to the role of the Egyptian king and the importance of *ma’at*. New Kingdom triumph scenes rendered martial violence and literal subjugation of foreign bodies to the will of the Egyptian king clearly, though in a stylized manner, visually codifying this metaphor.\(^\text{18}\) The king’s figurative dominion over all the people and places of the earth is equated with literal actions performed by the king. As such, a reciprocal relationship exists in triumph scenes—as the roles between ideology and action are blurred, so too are the lines between propaganda and sympathetic magic. The king’s violent actions perpetuate his ideological dominion, and the ideology of universal dominion perpetuates the need for violence. This relationship allowed New Kingdom triumph scenes to function simultaneously (and with equal efficacy) as both propagandistic installations and apotropaic bastions meant to ward off *isfet*.

The last dichotomy that colors the existing literature of triumphal imagery has already been discussed at length in its own right: the *topos* and *mimesis* of foreign peoples.\(^\text{19}\)

---


\(^\text{19}\) See Anthony Loprieno, *Topos und Mimesis: zum Ausländer in der ägyptischen Literatur*. Ägyptologische Abhandlungen 48 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1988), the publication that initially defined, outlined, and described these concepts and their uses in Egyptian literature and by extension Egyptian representational art.
Nonetheless, no discussion that includes the representation of foreigners in ancient Egypt is complete without at least a cursory review of Loprieno’s *Topos Und Mimesis: Zum Auslander in Der Ägyptischen Literatur*. *Topos* is a literary or figurative theme, motif, or mode of representation, while *mimesis* is a representation that seeks to mirror that which exists in the real world.\(^{20}\) In Egyptian literature, foreigners are often depicted as a stylized other, the inverse of Egyptianness, rife with chaotic, uncivilized, and stereotyped qualities. In some other contexts, they are depicted more mimetically, given distinct physical or personality traits and portrayed engaging in various levels of interaction (warfare, trade, assimilation, etc.) with Egyptians. The Egyptians did not find this dualistic depiction to be mutually exclusive or even contradictory, and it also extends to representational art.\(^{21}\)

The foreigners present in triumphal motifs occur in four places: as images, they are bound prisoners in topographical lists and cowering victims in the smiting icon; in text they are present in both captions and rhetorical speeches that speak of their downfall at the hands of Egypt. While some distinction does occur, all of these representations rely heavily on the *topos* of foreigners for their desired effects.\(^{22}\) According to Spalinger, the *topos* of the un-Egyptian, uncivilized, weak, and cowardly foreigner is central to the efficacy of triumphal imagery.\(^{23}\)

---

20 Loprieno, *Topos und Mimesis*.

21 Broadly speaking, ancient Egyptians had no cultural, religious, or philosophical issue rectifying overlapping or even contradictory information that might otherwise cause cognitive dissonance in a largely literal, fact-centric culture such as our own. Salient examples of the mental flexibility of ancient Egyptians where this is concerned include the simultaneous acceptance of multiple contradictory myths of cosmogony, fluid interpretations of the nature and divinity of the Egyptian king, as well as the varying views on foreign peoples presently discussed. The distinction between the *topos* and *mimesis* of foreigners as presented by Loprieno, then, serves as a useful tool for modern scholars to contextualize and interpret seemingly contradictory information about how foreign people figured into the Egyptian worldview, but this should not be taken as strictly representative of how the Egyptians themselves would have viewed or understood that relationship.


study expands on that conclusion, exploring how efficacy is achieved in New Kingdom triumph scenes through manipulation of the foreigner *topos*, especially when juxtaposed with the figure of the victorious Egyptian king.

**Research Questions and Theoretical Framework**

The purpose of this study is to rethink Egyptian triumphal motifs by accepting the historical relevance of the ideological and symbolic mechanisms of their constituent elements and by placing those mechanisms in their diachronic and cultural contexts. The mere fact that triumph scenes do not record—or even claim to record—historical events as they occurred does not render them useless to the historian. In much the same way that the *Canterbury Tales* reflects aspects of the daily lives of those who lived in 14th century Europe despite the fictional and satirical nature of the text, triumph scenes are a product of their historical and cultural context and must reflect (to a certain extent) the lived experiences and ingrained ideologies of those who created and interacted with them. If we embrace, rather than lament, the symbolic and overtly ideological nature of triumph scenes, new lines of questioning regarding how their apotropaic, propagandistic, and ritual functions were realized are possible.

In addition to considerations like architectural placement and composition, one of the primary ways the ideological functions of New Kingdom triumph scenes were achieved was through the combination and manipulation of long-standing iconographic, literary, and cultural motifs to present specific ideological messages. Each of the individual iconographic and textual elements that formed the composite triumphal motif were drawn from an existing repertoire of artistic and literary options. The traditions from which those options derived would have oriented

---

24 The relationship of triumph scenes to the larger temple decorative programs in which they exist, both in terms of architectural location and proximity to other scenes and motifs, greatly affects how its audience would perceive and interact with it. However, a full analysis of this topic is outside the present scope. I do nonetheless stipulate that these spatial considerations are yet another vehicle through which the meaning of triumph scenes was filtered.
the contemporary audience culturally and historically, allowing them to interpret the scene’s messages within the proper context. What, then, are the constituent elements of the triumphal motif? From where do those elements derive, and what does their development look like? Following that, how are those elements incorporated into New Kingdom triumph scenes and used to create ideological meaning within that context?

To address these questions, I approach the constituent elements of triumph scenes diachronically, taking into account the relationship of the scene elements to the larger triumphal motif, the semiotic and representational nuances of individual elements, and the development, usage, and contexts of the elements over time. This necessitates consideration of triumph scenes from the perspective of their constituent elements, identifying what iconographic and textual elements occurred in triumph scenes and from where those elements derive. Additionally, this study addresses how the cultural, historical, and literary context of each of the constituent elements was used to achieve the simultaneous ideological functions of propaganda through the display of state ideology, protection through apotropaic magic, and accomplishment of ritual requirements.\(^\text{25}\) To a lesser extent, issues of cultural memory, visibility, audience, and experience are also relevant here, as these issues affect the interpretation of—and therefore the ultimate effectiveness of—ideological messages. Overall, this study is one of iconography, ideology, and time, and how these concepts affected one another and the influenced the lived experiences of ancient Egyptians.

The ability of iconography to illustrate, standardize, and signify ideological assertions is a familiar theme in Egyptian art. Yet, Egyptologists rarely employ semiotic theories and principles to Egyptian contexts, despite the complex signification processes ancient Egyptian written and

\(^{25}\) For the purposes of this study, cultic and religious functions are wrapped into the broader category of ritual functions.
pictorial evidence displays.\textsuperscript{26} The present study is hardly a work of semiotics, but it does apply basic semiotic ideas where they are warranted, particularly in discussions of the iconicity of elements as they developed diachronically and how meaning might be gleaned from those images and their display.\textsuperscript{27}

In the present context, each of the individual icons\textsuperscript{28} and texts contained within triumphal scenes serve as the signs required for the semiotic process. Their objects (referents) are real-world people, places, actions, or ideological concepts already existent in ancient Egyptian worldview or lived experience. Because Egyptian iconography and symbolism are well-studied and given the pictorial nature of the hieroglyphic script, identifying individual signs and their referents is not usually difficult. However, the exact nature of the association between them is

\textsuperscript{26} In fact, application of semiotic theories to ancient Egyptian evidence was essentially unheard of prior to Goldwasser’s 1995 publication, \textit{From Icon to Metaphor: Studies in the Semiotics of the Hieroglyphs}, Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis 142 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht,1995). In the intervening 25 years, a few Egyptologists have done research of a semiotic nature, but it is only recently that semiotic theory has begun to be applied with any level of regularity to an ancient Egyptian context. In particular, Valérie Angenot has used semiotics to analyze Egyptian art and iconography in the following works: Jean Winand and Valérie Angenot, “L’image égyptienne peut-elle nier?” in \textit{L’image peut-elle nier?}, eds. Sémir Badir and Maria Giulia Dondero (Liège: Presses Universitaires de Liège, 2016) 153–177; Angenot, “A method for ancient Egyptian hermeneutics,” in \textit{Methodik und Didaktik in der Ägyptologie: Herausforderungen eines kulturwissenschaftlichen Paradigmenwechsels in den Altermumswissenschaften}, eds. Alexandra Verbovsek and Catherine Jones (München: Wilhelm Fink, 2011), 255–286; “Pour une herméneutique de l’image égyptienne,” \textit{Chronique d’Égypte} 80 (2005): 11–35; and most recently “Bak, servant of Aten: an embodied statement of faith,” in \textit{His good name: essays on identity and self-presentation in ancient Egypt in honor of Ronald J. Leprohon}, eds. Christina Geisen et al. (Atlanta: Lockwood Press, 2021), 131–156. With regard specifically to triumphal iconography, scholars like Whitney Davis and Anthony Spalinger have made passing use of semiotic concepts and terminology when discussing iconography and how it is employed to create meaning under certain conditions.

\textsuperscript{27} As per Thomas Sebeok, \textit{Signs: An Introduction to Semiotics}, Toronto Studies in Semiotics and Communication. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), xii, 5, 7–8: The central goal of semiotics is to study the process of semiosis, the production of signs and how the meaning of those signs is interpreted. Semiosis is a tripartite process requiring a sign (a representative image, icon, word, etc.), an object (the referent, either concrete or abstract, to which the sign refers), and the meaning (that results when the sign and the object are linked by association). Additionally, semiosis requires a source (the message creator), a destination (the message receiver), and a channel (the medium through which the message is relayed).

\textsuperscript{28} In this context, I favor the term “icon” for all pictorial representations contained within the scenes, pursuant to Spalinger’s definition presented in \textit{Icons of Power}, 1, “a metaphorical visual image.” Based on the ideological nature of triumph scenes, all pictorial elements and most of the textual elements in theses contexts functioned iconically.
often less clear, as this information is mediated through filters like historical and cultural context, cultural memory, sanctioned ideology and worldview, artistic decorum, and the visibility and ideological accessibility of the signs themselves.

While the semiotic nature of the material is considered here, this study remains foremost a diachronic one, since the development of iconography and text over time and chronological changes in context and presentation inform nearly all filters through which sign-referent associations are processed. Cultural and historical context are highly dependent on cultural memory, ties to a historic past (whether real or constructed), and a concept of how one’s own time and place relates to others. As a result, tracing the diachronic development of the elements that compose the triumphal motif reveals and clarifies how chronology-dependent filters shaped the relationship between the iconography contained in triumph scenes, their ideological underpinnings, and the functions they served for Egyptian audiences.

A Diachronic Approach

Triumphal motifs were a staple of ancient Egyptian art during all chronological periods and existed in a variety of media and contexts. In the New Kingdom, this motif took on a distinct, composite character that drew from exiting artistic and literary motifs concerning royal triumph, domination, foreignness, kingship, and divine sanction. Constituent elements derived from earlier motifs most commonly include: lists of anthropomorphized foreign toponyms, images of the king smiting or otherwise subduing foreigners, a deity witnessing the king’s actions, bound prisoners, deities leading the bound prisoners, textual descriptions of the king’s military victories and/or geographic dominion, caption texts describing the actions of the king
and his victims, and rhetorical speeches and encomia. Some variation does occur within the bounds of the iconographic repertoire from which the constituent elements derive, but a subset of these elements are generally present in each iteration of the triumphal motif.

Since the individual artistic and textual motifs discussed here are relatively common throughout the course of Egyptian history, some relevant material can be cumbersome or repetitive. For this reason, some categories of evidence such as execration texts and figurines and the composite monumental triumph scenes of the New Kingdom are discussed as a category with representative examples provided. An enumeration of all extant material from these and other categories would be a study unto itself and is far outside the scope of the present work. Additionally, a number of interpretive frameworks and approaches that scholars have used previously to analyze triumphal iconography and related topics are relevant but not central to the present study.

In particular, I consider the issue of audience here but only to the extent that neither the ideologies displayed by, nor the function of triumphal motifs can be separated from how they would have been interpreted by contemporary audiences, and it is therefore an integral part of the signification process. In Egyptological scholarship, discussions of audience are generally

---

informed by concepts of visibility, accessibility, and decorum.\textsuperscript{30} With reference to monumental display, decorum is a “set of rules and practices defining what may be represented pictorially with captions, displayed, and possibly written down, in which context and in what form.”\textsuperscript{31} In other words, decorum is the conglomeration of the cultural, ideological, religious, and etiquette-based rules of conduct that restrict display. Such restrictions necessarily limit the overall relevance of a given display to an audience much smaller than the full population. The determination of the exact nature of the intended audience is outside the scope of the present study, but the effect of such restrictions on the forms that triumphal iconography takes is relevant to the present discussion.

I do not discuss some other approaches previously employed in the study of New Kingdom triumph scenes and the topographical lists they contain. Issues of historical geography, such as determining the exact location of historical sites, the trajectory of a military campaign and the like, are not pertinent to the present study. However, broad geographic context and considerations of symbolic geography do have a place here. I do not aim to draw a hard line between ideological information and historical information, and I argue instead that the constituent elements of Egyptian triumphal motifs are both ideological documents and valid historical ones. Their ideological nature informs their historical use and relevance, so these


\textsuperscript{31} Baines, \textit{Visual and Written Culture}, 15.
approaches should not be separate. The ideologies presented and the functions for which they were employed provide valuable insight into Egyptian thought and the role triumphal ideology played in creating state and religious narratives.

Despite the seemingly obvious linear development between triumphal iconography and texts and the works that preceded them, I must heed Whitney Davis’ warning concerning the fruitless search for the “sources” of motifs: “A rigorous distinction should be drawn between the sources for a motif and its ‘meaning’ as used in a particular pictorial text.”

The distinct physical, compositional, and historical context of each occurrence of a motif (its “semiological uniqueness”) affects its interpretation. As such, “meaning” cannot be inferred for any iconography free of this context. I agree with Davis’ assertion that an image can only be understood in the proper context of its chain of replication, “a coherent series of making reference” back to earlier works. Therefore, we cannot understand the context (or by extension, the meaning) of a singular image unless we understand how it repeats, revises, and refuses elements of the images that preceded it.

A central purpose of a diachronic approach, then, is to establish a clear chain of replication for each of the iconographic and textual elements that compose the triumphal motif. This will place each iteration of the triumphal motif in its proper context. Additionally, this will also contextualize the corpus of New Kingdom composite monumental triumph scenes as the

32 Davis, Masking the Blow, 8.

33 This fact is stated outright in Davis, Masking the Blow, 35. However, Davis is not the only scholar to make such an assertion, and a similar theme underlies much of Spalinger’s analysis in Icons of Power, especially where discussions of narrative construction are concerned. Similarly, in Die Feldzugsdarstellungen, Heinz deals with both the internal, unique constructions of individual scenes and the role that their context plays in understanding their meaning.

34 Davis, Masking the Blow, 9.

35 Davis, Masking the Blow, 35–36.
outcome of the convergence of many different chains of replication, clarifying the relationship of those scenes to earlier works. Without this contextualization and clarification, there would be no historiographically sound footing from which to discuss the intended meaning of triumph scenes or the long-standing motifs that compose them.

To that end, the present study traces the diachronic history of three categories of the elements of triumphal motifs separately and then analyzes composite monumental triumph scenes and their ideological functions as the combined result of these developments. Chapter 2 outlines and analyzes the development of smiting iconography and witnessing deities over the course of Egyptian history. Chapter 3 outlines and analyzes the development of the related iconographies of bound prisoners, deities leading bound prisoners to the king, and topographical lists. Chapter 4 outlines and analyzes the development of triumphal texts with a particular focus on litanies of triumph and divine speeches. Evidence is discussed chronologically, and each chapter concludes with a summary and broad analysis of the presented evidence. Chapter 5 discusses the corpus of composite monumental triumph scenes and their usage as the combined result of the different lines of diachronic development and their constituent ideologies. This is accompanied by an analysis of the triumphal ideologies at play in triumphal motifs and a discussion of how the combination of iconography and ideology allowed triumphal motifs to function simultaneously as magical protection, state propaganda, and as ritual fulfillment of the requirements of the office of kingship.

Finally, it should be noted that the present study represents a reduction in scope from the author's original intentions which proved unwieldy and too ambitious for a single dissertation. New Kingdom composite triumph scenes are a multifaceted topic, as evidenced by the variety of approaches scholars have used thus far to study their iconography, functions, and historical
components. Taking into account the complex composite nature of the scenes, I had proposed to create a catalog of New Kingdom composite triumph scenes complete with their architectural locations, artistic structure, and individual iconographic and textual components, in addition to tracing the diachronic development of the constituent elements. However, it became clear that a study of that magnitude was cumbersome and would not allow the proper depth of analysis while remaining at a reasonable length for a dissertation. As such, I rescoped efforts, focusing on the New Kingdom composite triumph scene as a distinct scene type that featured a new combination of iconographic and textual elements with long histories in Egypt and established ideological connotations, resulting in the present form this study takes. Nonetheless, a future study cataloguing the locations, structures, iconography, and texts in each triumph scene (perhaps even to include examples later than the New Kingdom) is a worthwhile historical and Egyptological endeavor, and would provide a solid basis for further, more comprehensive research into triumphal ideology in ancient Egypt.
CHAPTER 2: SANCTIONED SMITING

The “smiting scene” or “smiting icon” is one of the most easily recognized elements of Egyptian royal art and iconography. Kerry Muhlestein succinctly defined and delineated this motif as consisting of “the king grasping one or more enemies by the hair with one hand, with the other hand depicted in the act of bringing some type of weapon upon the head of the foreigner(s).”¹ This definition is well-accepted, and I follow it throughout this study.² Smiting icons and the scenes in which they appear lasted in one form or another from the late Predynastic Period (c. 4,000 BCE- 3,200 BCE) through the end of ancient Egyptian history (30 BCE).³ The smiting motif’s influence eventually extended even further both chronologically and geographically, including later iterations of this motif from the Kingdom of Meroe.⁴

An enduring and powerful representation of the might and role of the king, the smiting icon would eventually become the visual and ideological center of the triumphal motif. By the time smiting iconography was incorporated into the larger, more complex triumph scenes of the New Kingdom, it had already existed as an uninterrupted facet of Egyptian artistic expression for more than two millennia. However, this does not necessarily mean that the New Kingdom

¹ Muhlestein, Violence in the Service of Order, 85.

² The motif described here is alternately referred to in Egyptological scholarship as the “smiting icon” or the “smiting scene.” Scholars use these terms nearly interchangeably—both being served by the definition Muhlestein provides. For the purpose of clarity and precision within this study, I use “smiting icon” to refer only to the distinct iconographic unit of smiting king and associated prisoner(s). When necessary, I will use “smiting scene” to refer to complete scenes that contain smiting icons as their central artistic and ideological element.

³ For approximate dates, I have followed Ian Shaw, Oxford History of Ancient Egypt (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

examples of this iconography should be understood as the same or be interpreted in exactly the same way as their predecessors. Nonetheless, smiting iconography’s role in New Kingdom triumph scenes is clearly the result of intentional selection of and expansion upon existing cultural and artistic traditions that favored this motif. It was from these long-standing traditions that the ideological weight of smiting iconography was derived. But even then, why was it smiting that became the central theme and central iconographic element in New Kingdom triumph scenes? This answer lies in the prevalence and accessibility of the motif, as well as a pattern of use tying it to royal prestige and presentation that adapted it to the changing political and religious needs of individual kings or the periods during which they ruled—from the first Egyptian kings to the “imperialist” kings of the New Kingdom and later.5

The earliest examples of smiting iconography are simple in the sense of limited scope and actors. All that was needed was a figure to do the smiting and a figure to be the victim. However, the simple smiting icon quickly became tied to other icons that were originally ancillary but became integral in more complex smiting scenes from the Old Kingdom onward. In particular, the presence of witnessing deities became a necessary element of smiting scenes over time, though the divine iconography often remained visually separate from the smiting icon itself. The identity, quantity, placement, and actions of witnessing deities provide both mythological context for and divine sanction of the king’s actions. In New Kingdom composite monumental triumph scenes that are much more iconographically complex than their predecessors, the mythological context provided by witnessing deities would have been even more important.

5 For the kings of the New Kingdom, who lived and ruled during the Late Bronze Age in the Mediterranean and took part in the international trade and exchange in that region, including specialized royal negotiation of prestige, royal presentation and displays of royal power were especially important both internally and externally. For more on this phenomenon, see Mario Liverani, *Prestige and Interest: International Relations in the Ancient Near East ca. 1600-1100 B.C.*, History of the ancient Near East: Studies 1 (Houndmills: Sargon, 1990).
This chapter traces the development of smiting scenes and smiting as a cultural and artistic motif in Egypt from their origins in the Predynastic through to the evolution of the composite triumph motif used in New Kingdom triumph scenes. Artistic usage of smiting in Egypt took multiple trajectories and made use of a variety of venues that are also explored here. Previous scholarly interest in the development of smiting iconography is extensive, and as such, I have drawn from previous studies to help contextualize the relevant material. Nonetheless, this chapter remains at heart an analysis based on the primary source material, focusing on the interconnectedness of the iconography and its change over time, undertaken from the perspective of the eventual role that smiting plays in later composite triumphal motifs.

**Tomb 100 Painting**

A relief painting from Tomb 100 at Hierakonpolis offers what Laurel Bestock terms “the first unambiguously violent image from Egypt,” and this image is likely also the first unambiguous representation of the act of smiting. Two walls in this tomb are painted with images rendered in black, red, and white paint. The southwest wall contains the smiting icon in question. In the bottom left corner of the painting, a figure wields a club or mace-like object in one hand and raises it above his head (Fig. 1). His other hand reaches out in front of him to grab the head of the first of three smaller, kneeling figures. The kneeling figures are rendered on a

---


7 Bestock, *Violence and Power*, 27. In Bestock’s study, she does make note of a number of potential—perhaps even likely—early (Predynastic, Naqada I) examples of violence that may be interpreted as smiting or captivity. These are Brussels E.3002, UCL Petrie 15339, Cairo JdE 99072, Abydos U-415/1, Abydos U-415/2. However, because of the ambiguity of these representations, I have elected to omit them from the diachronic study that follows.

8 Humphrey Case and Joan Crowfoot Payne, “Tomb 100: The Decorated tomb at Hierakonpolis,” *JEA* 48 (1962): 12–13; J. E. Quibell and F. W. Green, *Hierakonpolis II*, British School of Archaeology in Egypt and Egyptian Research Account 5 (London: Bernard Quaritch, 1902), pl. 76; Swan Hall, *Pharaoh Smites His Enemies*, Fig. 5.
groundline. A black line running across the three figures just below their shoulders may indicate a rope binding them together.

Though the figures are drawn in outline without much identifying detail, the theme and composition of the image bear a striking resemblance to the more iconographically mature smiting icons of later periods. The standing figure of the smiting king raising his club to strike, a single prisoner or a group of bound prisoners kneeling at his feet, the smiting king’s hand reaching forward to grasp the head or hair of his victim(s)—these elements come to define the smiting icon.9 As the earliest certain incarnation of the smiting icon, the image from Tomb 100 also constitutes the beginning of the chain of replication from which later smiting icons derive.10 Later examples must then reflect repetition, revision (both addition and alteration), and refusal of elements that already exist in the Tomb 100 smiting icon.

Interestingly, the artist who created this image made an effort to visually note a distinct difference (though, whether that distinction is social, ethnic, or something else entirely, we do not know) between the mace-wielder and those who kneel in front of him. There is differentiation in size, posture, and paint color.11 The outline of the mace-wielder is rendered in black paint, but the bodies of his victims and the ground line on which they kneel are rendered in red.12 In later examples, the smiting figure and victims are always clearly distinguished from each other in size, features, dress, and posture. While it would be anachronistic to draw a direct parallel here, we can at least conclude that the stark visual distinction between the two parties

9 See n. 2, Muhlestein’s succinct definition as already outlined.
10 Davis, Masking the Blow, 12.
was an already an important element of the smiting motif as it existed during the Predynastic Period.

Figure 1 Line drawing of a smiting figure and prisoners from Tomb 100 at Hierakonpolis. Image: Quibell and Green, *Hierakonpolis II*, British School of Archaeology in Egypt and Egyptian Research Account 4 (London: Bernard Quaritch, 1902), pl. LXXVI.

Hierakonpolis Ivory Cylinders

A similar early example from Hierakonpolis comes from a series of ivory cylinders that once decorated a staff or walking stick (Fig. 2). Portions of three registers have been preserved, all of which show the repeated image of a large striding figure raising a mace above his head. His other hand grasps the hair of a figure nearly half his size, who walks (or cowers) in front of him. The smaller figure’s arms are bound behind his back at the elbows. While it is historically improbable that the artist of the cylinders had ever seen the tomb painting, the common features suggest that the motif was already well-known, though there may be no direct derivation between these two extant items. The images of smiting icons on the ivory cylinders display the same basic features as the earlier example, but the compositional structure is more regularized.

The figures are also rendered with much more detail. This may be evidence of a standardization in the motif itself, but it could just as likely reflect a representational difference rooted in the materiality of the object and the relationship of the images to the object on which they are displayed.\textsuperscript{14}

Here, the size disparity between the smiting figure and the victim is maintained, though both figures are now placed securely on the ground line. The posture of the smiting figure as he raises his weapon and grasps his victim is similar to the Tomb 100 painting, though this example shows slight variations that are more reminiscent of the smiting icon on the Narmer Palette. In keeping with this, the iconography on the cylinders also displays a number of important revisions that come to characterize later versions of the motif. First, the weapon the smiting figure holds is now clearly rendered as a mace and is held nearer to the top of the handle. Pear and egg-shaped maces such as this remain the most common weapon in smiting iconography throughout the Old and Middle Kingdoms, and it is not until the New Kingdom that other weapons (axe-maces, axes, and \textit{hp\texttt{s}}-swords) regularly appear in this context.

Additionally, the smiting figure is clothed in a kilt and distinctive wig, while his victim is naked. This dichotomy of clothed vs. naked is present in most examples of the smiting icon, though the form of the headdress/crown and other accoutrements worn by the smiting figure is variable. The method of restraining the victim here maintains the use of rope, but the positioning has changed. Arm restraints tied at the elbows or upper arms behind the prisoner’s back become a standard method of depicting defeated foes from this point forward.\textsuperscript{15} These depictions are used in a variety of artistic contexts over the course of Egyptian history, including the

\textsuperscript{14} Davis, \textit{Masking the Blow}, 17–22.

\textsuperscript{15} For a more detailed discussion of the methods used to bind prisoners, both historically and in artistic depiction, see Janzen, “Iconography of Humiliation,” 49–53.
personified toponyms in topographical lists, victims in smiting icons, bound foes used as architectural or furniture decoration, and decoration on worn items.16

Figure 2 Line drawing of a smiting pattern on an ivory cylinder from Hierakonpolis. Image: Quibell and Petrie, *Hierakonpolis I*, British School of Archaeology in Egypt and Egyptian Research Account 4 (London: Bernard Quaritch, 1900), pl. XV.

**Narmer Palette**

Violent imagery seems to have increased during the Protodynastic Period (Naqada III, c. 3,200 – 3,000 BCE) immediately preceding the formation of the Egyptian state.17 As such, many more examples of smiting icons and related imagery survive from this period. The most well-

---


known and often discussed of these is the Narmer Palette (Fig. 3). Many scholars have described and analyzed this artifact and its imagery in detail, so a lengthy description is not required here. For the purposes of tracing the development of the smiting icon, only the largest scene on the palette is immediately relevant, the central register on the reverse side. Egyptologists have long used the Narmer Palette as a quintessential example of the development of royal ideology and related iconography at the time of state formation, in large part owing to the smiting icon represented here. It is with the Narmer Palette that the smiting figure becomes inextricably identified with the Egyptian king.

The Narmer Palette derives from Hierakonpolis like the other earliest iterations of smiting iconography. The central scene on the reverse of the palette depicts King Narmer in smiting icon form, striding on a ground line that serves as the bottom of the register. Two enemy

---


20 The Narmer Palette displays early examples of multiple elements of triumphal iconography. This artifact will be revisited in chapter 3 to discuss relevant iconographic elements not detailed here.


23 The Tomb 100 painting and numerous ivory tags and cylinders discussed in this chapter.
figures are shown directly underneath his feet in the lower register, either fleeing or dead. With one hand, Narmer wields a mace above his head. With the other, he grasps the hair of a prisoner who is kneeling at his feet. He wears a kilt, ceremonial bull’s tail, and the White Crown of Upper Egypt. The prisoner is naked save for a penis sheath, and his hairstyle and full beard are consistent with stereotypical representations of generic northern foes. Behind the king, an attendant or official stands on a secondary floating ground line, holding the king’s sandals in one hand and a jar in the other. In front of Narmer’s face, there is an image of a falcon subduing a personified papyrus marsh with a nose hook. The falcon faces the king and wields the hook with a human-like arm in front of him. The marsh consists of a long strip of land topped with papyrus plants. The human head that sprouts from its edge has features similar to those of the prisoner held by the king and is hooked through the nose by the falcon’s instrument. The only text in this register labels the three human figures: Narmer’s name is present in a serekh above his head, and both his attendant and his victim are labeled with two glyphs behind their heads.

The preexisting elements of the smiting icon are repeated in the Narmer Palette with slight variation: the shape of the king’s mace has changed, his regalia has become more detailed.

24 Davis, Masking the Blow, 69.


26 The nuance of this interpretation comes from Bestock, Violence and Power, 66, 169.

27 The label above the victim is likely a marker of his geographic origin, especially given that the pool glyph is used to determine bodies of water and occasionally the regions that surround them in later iterations of the Egyptian script. The rosette above the sandalbearer indicates that he is an official in royal service. For more on the meaning and usage of this sign in the Early Dynastic, see Cheryl Hart, “An examination and analysis of the role of the iconographic rosette motif in the Egyptian artistic repertoire,” in Egypt 2015: perspectives of research: proceedings of the Seventh European Conference of Egyptologists, 2nd-7th June 2015, Zagreb, Croatia, ed. Mladen Tomorad and Joanna Popielska-Grzybowska (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2017), 59–69; Elise Baumgartel, “Scorpion and Rosette and the Fragment of the Large Hierakonpolis Mace Head,” ZAS 93 (1966): 9–13; Alain Angelina, “Le scorpion et la rosette,” Apuntes de Egiptologia 1 (2005): 15–33.
(and more clearly linked to pharaonic iconography), and his victim is unbound. However, the Narmer Palette also presents the earliest example of a smiting icon placed within the context of a broader smiting scene that includes additional elements such as the presence of a deity and textual labels for the figures involved. As such, it revises the nature of the representation of smiting from earlier examples that lack these elements. Distinct identities are affixed to smiting figure, victim, and observer, and divine presence and support is introduced into the motif in the form of the Horus falcon. Another major revision, the curious inclusion of the king’s sandal bearer in this scene (as opposed to any other important official or attendant) is a strikingly specific detail. While the king is barefoot here (and in most later iterations of the smiting scene), the prominence of the king’s sandals might be understood as a conceptual precursor to the idea of foreign lands and enemies being “overthrown under the sandals” of the king, a sentiment that was commonly included in the texts of New Kingdom triumph scenes.

28 It is unclear if the falcon is meant to be the god Horus himself, observing and assisting in subduing the enemies of the king, or if it is meant to be a secondary representation of the smiting king in his metaphorical identification with the Horus falcon. In either case, this reflects the positive connection of the smiting king to Horus, and therefore it can be assumed that he acts with the sanction of the god.

29 The 19th Dynasty monumental triumph scene of Seti I at Karnak is the most recognizable example. See *OIP 107*, 11, 51, 61.
Ivory Tag and Cylinder of Narmer

Another example of early smiting iconography from the reign of Narmer is an ivory tag that depicts a personified catfish raising a mace in one hand and grasping the forehead of a prisoner with the other (Fig. 4). To the right of the smiting icon, Narmer’s name is written in a serekh surmounted by Horus that shares the same ground line. The prisoner’s head is topped with a papyrus plant that Bestock takes to mean he is of “northern” origin, likely the Nile Delta.

---

30 Gunter Dreyer et al., “Umm el-Qaab: Nachuntersuchungen im frühzeitlichen Königsfriedhof,” *MDAIK* 52 (1996): 113–145, Fig. 29; Bestock, *Violence and Power*, 71–72, Fig. 3.18.

31 Bestock, *Violence and Power*, 71–72. The logic behind this interpretation is similar to that which is used to justify the interpretation of the personified papyrus marsh on the Narmer Palette as a representation of a defeated Delta-dweller.
also notes that it is with the reign of Narmer that images of the act of smiting begin to combine “older elements with radically new ones,” as evidenced by the developments evident on both the Narmer Palette and the tag. This tag is particularly notable for the increased interplay of text, image, and metaphor that is relatively absent in smiting iconography before Narmer’s reign. The use of the personified catfish to stand for the smiting king is an inherently metaphorical representation that depends on the equation of Narmer’s name with the office of kingship in this context.\(^{32}\) Additionally, the papyrus-headed prisoner might be understood as a Delta-dweller, similar to the reading of personified papyrus marsh on the Narmer Palette.\(^ {33}\) This scene repeats the inclusion of labels for both the smiting figure and his victim and continues the metaphorical association of smiting victims with geographic locations and related imagery.

\(^{32}\) This is reminiscent of examples of smiting iconography such as the Gebel Sheikh Suleiman relief and the ivory tag from the reign of Aha in which the falcon atop the serekh bearing the king’s Horus name is anthropomorphized and serves as the smiting figure. The underlying symbolic and metaphorical mechanisms are functionally identical.

\(^{33}\) Gunter Dreyer, “Narmerpalette und Stadtpalette,” in *Studies in Honor of Ali Radwan I*, ed. Khaled Daoud et al. (Le Caire: Conseil Suprême des Antiquités, 2005), 255; Bestock, *Violence and Power*, 71. The \(nw\)-pot next to the prisoner is likely part of the label for that figure, but its meaning is speculative at best. Bestock suggests it may represent an abbreviated writing of \(Thnw\), commonly translated as “Libyan.” This reading is plausible given the regular use of the \(nw\)-pot in similar contexts where the full word is written (see Narmer’s ivory cylinder and the Libyan Palette), but I favor “Delta-dweller” here because of the ambiguity of the writing.
**Figure 4** Line drawing of an ivory tag with the name of Narmer smiting a papyrus-headed figure. Image: Quibell and Petrie, *Hierakonpolis I*, British School of Archaeology in Egypt and Egyptian Research Account 4 (London: Bernard Quaritch, 1900), pl. XV.

A similar artifact in ivory, a small cylinder also from Hierakonpolis (Fig. 5), displays many of the same changes featured on the palette and the tag.\(^{34}\) Narmer is again represented as an anthropomorphized catfish above a *mr*-chisel. He holds a long stick or spear in human-like hands, raising it to strike three rows of kneeling prisoners whose arms are bound behind their backs. Here, the prisoners are clearly labeled *Thnw*.\(^ {35}\) A vulture and falcon hover over the Narmer catfish, carrying an *ankh*. Though it takes a different form in this iteration, the element of divine sanction and protection is repeated here, along with the labeling of figures and metaphorical association of person, name, and geography.

---

\(^{34}\) Ashmolean Museum E3915. Quibell, *Hierakonpolis I*, 7, pl. 15.7; Bestock, *Violence and Power*, 70–71, Fig. 3.17.

Ivory Tag of Aha

After the reign of Narmer, the kings of the First Dynasty continued to expand and elaborate on the smiting icon that had already become so closely tied with Egyptian kingship. A tag from the reign of Aha that derives from Umm el-Qaab, the necropolis of Abydos, continues the tradition in the medium of small ivories (Fig. 6). This example is particularly important because it is the first instance of a smiting icon within this chain of replication that derives from a site other than Hierakonpolis. On this tag, the smiting king is represented by an anthropomorphized serekh bearing his name, wielding a mace above its constituent falcon. A

---

36 Small portable objects in ivory, such as labels and tags, cylinders, walking sticks, maceheads, etc. were common during the Early Dynastic. While many of the extant objects from this period are decorated with smiting iconography or other violent or triumphal motifs, decorations like natural motifs and geometric patterns are also common.
prisoner kneels before the serekh with his hands bound behind his back. A label text above the prisoner includes a bow, but its reading remains dubious. There is a fortification with an accompanying label text inside to the right of the smiting icon.

The imagery on this label repeats a number of iconographic elements from earlier iterations of the smiting icon but revises the way in which they are combined to form the complete scene. Figure labels, kneeling prisoners with arms bound behind their back, and a personified royal name functioning as the smiting figure follow earlier examples. However, the personified royal name is depicted here within the royal serekh, thus combining two existing elements (presence of royal serekh and personified name as smiting figure) in a more nuanced representation. If understood as a rebus, this smiting icon can then be read as, “this prisoner is being killed by Egyptian kingship in its current incarnation of Aha.”

This tag also includes the earliest known iteration of a walled fortification as part of a smiting scene. Given the layout of the scene and the prisoner label text, it is not unreasonable to interpret the walled fortification as part of the label text that would describe both the type and geographic origin of the labeled prisoner. In both earlier and later smiting scenes, these are the two most common methods of designating foreign prisoners, and they are often used in conjunction.

---


38 Bestock, Violence and Power, 204.

39 Earlier examples—the Narmer Palette and the Libyan Palette—do contain images of walled fortifications. However, on the Narmer Palette, this is separated from the smiting iconography by a groundline that also serves as a register line. As such, they are presented as part of the same narrative and as thematically linked but not fully iconographically combined. As for the Libyan Palette, while one probable interpretation of the iconography contends that walled fortifications are being destroyed, there is no unquestionably violent content here, smiting or otherwise.

40 Take as an earlier example the labeling and presentation of the victim in the smiting scene on the Narmer Palette. Topographical lists that display both the location of origin and stereotyped features and dress of the associated figures are the quintessential later examples.
fortification is to be understood as separate from the label text, the gestalt of the scene remains the same. At most, an academic distinction might be made that the incarnation of the king is slaying a prisoner and the fortification/town rather than a prisoner from the fortification/town.

Figure 6 Line drawing of an ivory tag from the reign of Aha. Image: Petrie, *The Royal Tombs of the Earliest Dynasties Part II* (London: Egypt Exploration Fund, 1901), pl. XI.1.

Calcite Palette of Djer

A less complex example comes from a small calcite palette from Saqqara that likely dates to the reign of Djer, the third ruler of the First Dynasty (Fig. 7). The king is depicted near the center of the palette, striding in the expected smiting icon pose. The prisoner at his feet is unbound, turning away from his captor in much the same pose as the victim on the Narmer Palette. As expected, the king is clothed, but the prisoner is naked apart from a topknot (or possibly a feather) on his head. To the right of the smiting icon, the forward half of a recumbent lion emerges from the edge of the scene to face the king.

It is in the Early Dynastic that the smiting icon and related motifs begin to disperse to other locations associated with Egyptian royalty after the imagery has become fully linked with

---

41 Walter Emery, *Great Tombs of the First Dynasty I*, Excavations at Saqqara (Cairo: Government Press, 1949), 60, Fig. 31; Swan Hall, *Pharaoh Smites His Enemies*, 5, Fig. 7. Given the lack of royal name on the palette, dating of the artifact to the reign of Djer is inferred by the archaeological context provided by Emery.
the office of kingship.\textsuperscript{42} This iteration of the smiting icon repeats the poses from the Narmer Palette, maintaining what becomes the central continuity within this chain of replication. However, this image also rejects the use of label texts, while maintaining the innovative incorporation of divine sanction within the wider smiting scene. The exact nature of the recumbent lion within this scene is debated,\textsuperscript{43} but when viewed in light of the earlier examples its purpose becomes clear. In all but one of the earlier smiting scenes that include a divine presence, the deity is represented in fully-animal form to the right of the smiting icon. The fact that the divine presence in this example (if it is indeed such) takes the form of a lion rather than a falcon should not be cause for much concern, as this animal is another that was tied to Egyptian kingship as early as the Predynastic, and some of the earliest identifiable representations of Egyptian deities take the form of lions.\textsuperscript{44}

\textbf{Figure 7} Line drawing of a calcite palette with smiting imagery, likely from the reign of Djer. Image: Emery, \textit{Great Tombs of the First Dynasty I}, Excavations at Saqqara (Cairo: Government Press, 1949), Fig. 31.


\textsuperscript{43} Swan Hall, \textit{Pharaoh Smites His Enemies}, 5.

Ivory Tag of Den

From slightly later in the First Dynasty comes another ivory tag depicting a smiting scene (Fig. 8). This tag from the reign of Den was found at Abydos. Here, the king is portrayed in human form in the now-standardized smiting pose, though his stride is noticeably wider than all of the earlier instances of this pose. He wears a nemes-crown and kilt with bull’s tail. The weapon in his raised hand is a mace, and in his other hand he grasps the hair of his victim along with a so-called “staff of office.” The unbound victim lunges into an almost-kneeling position with one hand reaching up toward the king’s hand on his own head and the other either behind or holding the king’s forward calf. Both the king and his victim are displayed in wide-legged stances, lending a sense of motion to this scene that earlier examples lacked. To the right of the victim, a standard of Wepwawet with a shedshed sign is stuck into the ground, facing the same direction as the king. The ground line in this image is unusually pronounced and fades to a speckled hill at the right edge of the scene. The hill and speckled/sandy ground are both used to emphasize that the action of this scene takes place on foreign soil. The king’s name is present in a serekh in front of his face, and additional textual labels appear behind the king’s back and in front of the victim’s face. On the far right, a text captioning the action of the whole scene reads, “first occasion of smiting the East.”

---


46 Swan Hall, *Pharaoh Smites His Enemies*, 6. This is the first appearance of the staff of office (the staff carried by the king in various ceremonial and official depictions) in this context. This object becomes a regular inclusion in smiting iconography, highlighting the ever-increasing connection between smiting and the ritual duties and functions of the office of kingship.


48 This text references the official Inka and parallels the composition of the Narmer Palette smiting scene that includes an official standing behind the king, though it is not clear if this parallel was intended.

This iteration of the smiting scene clearly repeats the overall composition of earlier examples within its chain of replication. As expected, the king stands at the far left of the composition facing right. The prisoner is rendered in an awkward kneeling/splayed position, looking left, like all the examples from the Narmer Palette onward. Here, divine presence and implication of divine sanction take the form of the Wepwawet standard to the immediate right of the prisoner—the exact location in which we would expect to find divine iconography based on earlier scenes.

Despite its compositional similarity to earlier smiting scenes, this image also presents a number of important alterations and additive revisions from earlier smiting scenes. It includes a curious combination of icon and narrative, an early rendering of the dichotomous representation of the Egyptian king as both perpetual slaughterer of all foreign enemies and as real-world victor over specific enemies at a specific time. The poses of both the smiting king and his victim retain their identifiable iconic quality but are more dynamic than in earlier examples, drawing focus to the action of smiting currently in progress through the wide striding motion of the king, the wide lunge of the victim, and the victim grabbing at the king. This focus on action is strengthened by the inclusion of two texts labeling the king’s actions. These fix the referenced action in both space and time, noting that this image specifically depicts the “first time” this action has occurred, and it is the “East (i.e. Easterners)” to whom it has been done.

50 So far, the only exception to the king being the figure furthest to the left is in cases in which an official is included in the scene, who stands at the king’s back. In the case of the Narmer Palette, the official is rendered in full figure and labeled with his title. In the tag of Den, the official appears only in name at the king’s back.

51 Bestock, Violence and Power, 206.

52 It should be noted that First Dynasty labels of this type are based on eponymous year names based on events (see Donald Redford, Pharaonic King-Lists, Annals and Day-Books: A Contribution to the Study of the Egyptian Sense of History, SSEA Publications 4 (Mississauga: Benben, 1986).) In this way, the Den label is not qualitatively different from earlier ones, just that its artistic iconography and sophistication is more developed and combines most of the iconographic elements that define later smiting scenes.
Additionally, the elaborate desert-sand ground line and hill to the right of the scene frames the narrative as occurring outside of Egypt proper. The text in front of the victim’s face is also directly below the king’s arm, so it is possible that either figure could be labeled by these three glyphs. However, all figures and text in the scene except the victim are oriented facing right, visually and conceptually separating the victim from the label text and the rest of the scene components. Thus, the label appears to be associated with the king whose figure is already labeled by his serekh. The exact reading of the label is uncertain, but its redundancy as a simple figure label, its placement at the forearm of the king, and a possible reading of *tm.sn* “their not [existing],” imply that it references the action in progress.

Overall, this small smiting scene is deceptively complex, incorporating multiple layers of metaphor, blurring the line between text and image, and enhancing the geographic and cultural symbolism already present in the compositional structure of earlier smiting scenes. Many of the symbolic elements included in this scene have direct predecessors in the smiting scene on the Narmer Palette, but here they are more effectively realized as a composite motif that functions on multiple levels of interpretation.

---

53 This assumption is stated in Bestock, *Violence and Power*, 206; however, this is also in line with traditional Egyptian modes of depiction separating the arable Nile floodplain from the desert, *kmt* from *dṣrt*.

54 During the first few hundred years of the development of the Egyptian script, the uses of writing were few and took place primarily in limited administrative contexts. While these early uses of writing are clearly precursors to the fully developed hieroglyphic script that emerged in the Old Kingdom, the exact reading of Predynastic and Early Dynastic texts is often not possible, though inferences can be made based on later texts and usage patterns. For a broad overview of these concerns, see Baines, *Visual and Written Culture*, 117–137.

55 This reading is based on later uses of Gardiner U15 in which the verb *tm* functions as the negatival complement (see R. O. Faulkner, *A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press for Griffith Institute, 1962), 29; James Allen, *Middle Egyptian: An Introduction to the Language and Culture of Hieroglyphs*, 2nd, revised ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 174–175). An equally possible—and equally speculative—reading derives from the meaning of the verb *tm* itself, “to be complete.” From this meaning comes its nominalized use, *tmw*, meaning “totality, all,” especially in reference to people (see Faulkner, *Dictionary of Middle Egyptian*, 298–299). As such, the text in question could also read “their totality” or “all of them,” instead serving as a figural label for the prisoner, indicating that the king slew all foreigners with which he came into contact. This verbiage is reminiscent of the content in later smiting scene labels. For *tm*, see *Wb V*, 302–306.
Compositionally, this image presents an idealized world in microcosm. Egypt lies at the left of the scene, the East and Easterners to the right, sky to the top, and ground to the bottom. All of the figures in the scene except the foreign prisoner face right, coming out from Egypt toward the foreign East. Atop his standard, Wepwawet goes forth before the king to clear a path in his titular role of “Opener of Ways.” With the sanction and support of this deity ahead of him, the implication is that the king will meet no resistance on his way and that the East is his to subdue.

The composition of this image also reflects a more complex and deliberate interplay of text and image than the earlier examples. Firstly, the glyph meaning “East” is the furthest symbol to the right in the entire image and also hovers atop the rising hill, symbolic of foreign places. Additionally, the king’s name is placed directly in front of his face, oriented in such a way that it should be read from right to left, placing the king’s image in the exact place to be understood as the determinative for his own name. This is also true for the uncertain writing under the king’s arm. Depending on the reading of this set of glyphs, the smiting king could be interpreted either as a determinative for the action he takes or as the first-person subject engaging in that action. Lastly, the name of the official behind the king seems to be standing in for the full figurative presence of that official within the image, making this an early example of the type of synecdoche that is common in later triumph scenes.

56 This title/function of this deity derives from the literal translation of his name: wp-w3wt, “one who opens ways (or paths).” In later periods, this title is often associated with Anubis, with whom Wepwawet becomes syncretically linked. For further explanation, see Pinch, Egyptian Mythology, 213–214.

57 Because of the inherently pictorial nature of the hieroglyphic script and the fact that the line between textual and visual communication was commonly blurred or purposefully combined in Egyptian representation, this type of fusion of text and image was common. In particular, the phenomenon of the main image of a person serving as the determinative for their own name present in the text is well-attested in offering stelae. See especially Richard Wilkinson, Reading Egyptian Art: a Hieroglyphic Guide to Ancient Egyptian Painting and Sculpture (London: Thames and Hudson, 1992).
Rock Relief of Djer

As the Early Dynastic transitioned into the Old Kingdom, the smiting icon and the broader scene in which it was often placed were already closely tied to the office of Egyptian kingship. However, with the advent of the Third Dynasty, the forms and contexts of these images began to change. Except for the Tomb 100 painting at Hierakonpolis, all of the earliest iterations of this imagery occur on relatively small, portable objects. Small decorative and ceremonial objects with smiting imagery continue to be produced throughout Egyptian history in royal contexts, but a secondary chain of replication branches off in the Early Dynastic and becomes increasingly common from the Third Dynasty onward: reliefs. This relief-based chain of replication becomes the basis for larger, more visually accessible triumph scenes in later periods. Throughout the Early Dynastic and into the Old Kingdom, smiting imagery on non-portable objects appeared in two primary contexts: as rock reliefs and as decoration in royal mortuary
complexes. The smiting imagery in these contexts also became more complex, more standardized, and appeared in a wider range of geographical locations over time. The expansion of the motif in these ways seems to coincide with the further solidification and centralization of royal power and the development of state-wide administration and unified cultural expression.

The earliest\textsuperscript{58} relief smiting scene comes from Wadi Ameyra, from the First Dynasty during the reign of Djer (Fig. 9).\textsuperscript{59} As we might expect, this image is relatively abstract, with a similar level of complexity to the alabaster palette known from the same reign. However, this rock relief continues the trend of personified \textit{serekhs} serving as the smiting figure. Additionally, the captive is separated from the serekh by a damaged inscription, potentially representative of Ash, the god of the Western Delta.\textsuperscript{60}

\textit{Figure 9} Line drawing of a rock relief smiting image of Djer, Wadi Ameyra. Image: Tallet and Laisney, “Iry-Hor et Narmer au Sud-Sinai (Ouadi Ameyra): un complément à la chronologie des expéditions minières égyptiennes.” BIFAO 112 (2012): Fig. 11.

\textsuperscript{58} Save for the Tomb 100 image that is done in relief but constitutes only a smiting icon rather than a full smiting scene.

\textsuperscript{59} Bestock, \textit{Violence and Power}, 175, Fig. 6.3.

\textsuperscript{60} Bestock, \textit{Violence and Power}, 175; Pierre Tallet and Damien Laisney, “Iry-Hor et Narmer au Sud-Sinai (Ouadi Ameyra): un complément à la chronologie des expéditions minières égyptiennes.” \textit{BIFAO} 112 (2012): Fig. 11.
Rock Reliefs of Den

Also from the First Dynasty is a series of rock relief smiting scenes of Den from Wadi el-Humur. The first bears remarkable compositional similarity to the ivory tag from the same reign despite the difference in size and physical context (Fig. 10). The image contains four figures, the smiting king and his victim at the center. Behind the king is a labeled official, and the god Ash stands at the far right of the scene. The king is labeled by his serekh in the expected location, and both the official and the deity are also given figural labels. The king wears a kilt and the White Crown and is rendered in normal smiting pose with a wide stride. A Wepwawet standard separates the kneeling prisoner, who grasps the pole of the standard, from the figure of Ash.

The repetitions and revisions in this iteration of the smiting scene are similar to those seen on Den’s ivory tag. The presence of a royal official at the king’s back is maintained, as well as the now familiar smiting posture and figural labels. In keeping with earlier scenes, divine imagery remains situated at the far right of the scene. Such imagery is present here in the form of both a Wepwawet standard and the figure of Ash. While the Wepwawet standard faces the same direction as the king, effectively preceding him in the image, Ash faces left and serves as divine witness to the king’s actions. The starkest revision here is the pose of the prisoner. Instead of both knees on the ground or in an awkward lunging position, one of the prisoner’s knees rests on the imaginary ground line and the other is turned up, away from the king. One of the prisoner’s arms grasps the forearm of the king while the other holds the pole of the Wepwawet standard.

behind him. This may indicate a gesture of futile resistance by the prisoner against his imminent fate, but the pose is nonetheless unusual.²

Another scene of Den keeps many of these elements but combines them into a different compositional structure (Fig. 11).³ Here, it is the Wepwawet standard that is the center of the scene, two separate smiting icons appearing on either side of it. The left-hand side features the smiting king labeled by his serekh and wearing the Red Crown. Three labeled officials stand behind him, and the unlabeled prisoner falls to his knees with both hands raised. The right-hand side features the smiting king wearing the White Crown. The king is again labeled by his serekh, and a single official at the king’s back is labeled above his head. The exact pose and features of the prisoner are unclear.


² A similar pose is common in this type of scene, where the victim holds a hand up in the direction of the smiting king, either indicating that the prisoner is begging for their life with a gesture of submission to the king or attempting to ward off the killing blow. Usually, the prisoner’s hand/arm does not reach high/far enough to actually grasp or touch the king. This does, however, also occur in the rock relief smiting scene of Djoser.

Rock Relief of Djoser

The first example of a smiting scene in relief from the Old Kingdom comes from the reign of King Djoser of the Third Dynasty (Fig. 12). The smiting icon is the central element of this scene, as expected. Both the smiting king and his victim are rendered in expected poses, though the staff of office that the king holds along with the victim’s hair is very large. The king’s regalia in this image consists of a nemes-crown, kilt, and a prominent beard. A large serekh stands at the far right of the scene. Behind the king is a life and dominion formula and the figure of an unidentifiable goddess. The placement of the formula text directly in front of the goddess

---


65 A few damaged glyphs above the goddess’ head suggest she may have originally been labeled, but what is left leaves her name or title, if that is indeed what it was, indecipherable. Bestock (Violence and Power, 181) thus notes her only as “a goddess,” while Swan Hall (Pharaoh Smites His Enemies, 7) posits both Wadjet (after Gardiner) and Hathor (after Bothmer) as possibilities.
and at the kings back suggests that it may possibly be read either as a standard protection formula or as a speech of the goddess to the king.

This smiting scene reflects a number of changes from earlier examples, most notably the reversal of the expected orientation of the deity. Here, the goddess is placed at the far left of the scene behind the king’s back in a space that was previously occupied primarily by officials, rather than at the far right of the scene facing the king. The deity still observes the king’s actions, but she also faces the same direction as the smiting figure. It is instead the king’s serekh that bounds the right side of the scene, facing the king rather than preceding him. The beginnings of the life and dominion formula are already present in one of the rock reliefs of Den, but it is much expanded here.\textsuperscript{66} Despite these compositional changes, the constituent elements that compose the scene remain consistent.


\textsuperscript{66} Rather than solely abbreviated forms, this formula contains complete phrases, and notably includes \textit{dft}, “forever,” expressing the hope that the king should enjoy these benefits eternally.
Rock Relief of Sekhemkhet

A smiting scene of Sekhemkhet from Wadi Maghara (Fig. 13) reflects the versatility with which smiting scene elements could be arranged and adds some imagery that does not get repeated into later examples. The smiting icon sits at the far left of this scene. The king raises a mace above his head in smiting pose and grasps his walking stick and the hair of his victim. He wears a kilt and the White Crown, and his serekh precedes him. The prisoner holds one hand up to shield his face and grasps an ostrich feather in the other. The right half of the scene contains two more images of the king facing the same direction as the smiting king figure. These two images are preceded by another serekh—this one wearing the Red Crown. The two kings, one wearing the White Crown and the other the Red, hold weapons pointed forward at their sides as they precede the smiting king.

The smiting icon in this scene represents a logical descendant of the rest of the earlier images. However, the double kings are an entirely new addition. The king with the White Crown is dressed identically to the smiting king, down to the knife tucked into his belt and the shoulder strap on his garment. It is then possible to assume that the smiting king is more identifiable with the White Crown king, the king of Upper Egypt, than with the king when he wears the Red Crown. However, the only crown present on a serekh in this image is the Red Crown. The presence of the same king three times in the same scene is rare and suggests an obviously symbolic rather than literal interpretation of the scene.

While it is likely that the genre of smiting scenes is rooted in the real-world destruction of enemies by the king, whether in battle or ceremonially (as Muhlestein suggests), it is on the whole more symbolic of the generalized act than commemorative of discrete smitings by an individual king. The repetitive yet variable nature of the king’s presence here underscores the figurative nature of the scene.


68 While it is likely that the genre of smiting scenes is rooted in the real-world destruction of enemies by the king, whether in battle or ceremonially (as Muhlestein suggests), it is on the whole more symbolic of the generalized act than commemorative of discrete smitings by an individual king. The repetitive yet variable nature of the king’s presence here underscores the figurative nature of the scene.
Despite the novel iconography, this follows the general trend of this chain of replication and reveals an increasingly figurative structure within smiting scenes. However, multiple interpretations remain. These three images of the king could be understood as representative of three facets of the office of kingship that when combined reflect the cosmic role of the king: ruler of Upper Egypt, ruler of Lower Egypt, and victorious ruler. Alternatively, if the smiting icon is taken as iconographically separate from the other two images of the king, the double kings preceding the smiting icon can be interpreted as personifications of Dual Kingship clearing a path for Sekhemkhet to smite foreign and rebellious entities as ma’at requires.

The prisoner in this scene grasps an ostrich feather and makes a gesture warding off the king. Prisoners holding something—an ostrich feather, weapon, etc.—becomes more common in later scenes.

Rock Reliefs of Snefru

Two rock reliefs featuring smiting scenes are known from the reign of Snefru. The first derives from Wadi Maghara and depicts the king smiting a prisoner surrounded by much more text than previously attested in this type of relief (Fig. 14). The scene is bounded at the right side by the king’s serekh topped with a Horus-falcon wearing the Double Crown and facing into the scene toward the king, indicating he also serves as the divine witness to the king’s actions. At the top, the scene is bounded by two cartouches bearing the king’s names and royal titulary, marking the first appearance of this element within this context. The smiting icon is separated from the serekh by a protection and dominion formula. Behind the king’s back, a caption reads $d\bar{s} \ h\ddot{3}swt$, “subduing the foreign lands.” Both the king and his victim are rendered in their expected poses, though there are some minor iconographic anomalies. Most obviously, the king’s headdress/crown is a hybrid form that seems to be unique in Egyptian art—two feathers, two bovine horns, and two ram’s horns.

This relief clearly retains many of the elements standardized in earlier iterations in this chain of replication, but it also introduces and expands elements. In particular, the texts in this smiting scene are longer and more detailed than in earlier examples and reflect an increasing trend toward including scene captions and more complete royal titulary. This is also the first certain instance of the term $h\ddot{3}swt$ appearing in a smiting scene as the object of the king’s violent

---


70 For the verb $d\bar{s}$, see Wb V, 414–415. For $h\ddot{3}swt$, “foreign land(s),” see Wb III, 234–235. See also Faulkner, Dictionary of Middle Egyptian, 309.

In later periods, this terminology is nearly ubiquitous in association with triumphal imagery.

The second scene, also from Wadi Maghara, is reminiscent of the relief of Sekhemkhet from the same general region (Fig. 15). Here, the scene is composed of two registers with the smiting icon on the upper register. Beneath the groundline, two striding images of the king appear with serekhs preceding them. Compositionally, the primary difference between this scene and that of Sekhemkhet is the placement of the double kings below the smiting icon as opposed to next to it. Additionally, the serekh to the right of the smiting icon is large, about 2/3 the size of the king’s figure, and there are four serekhs included within the entire scene. Given this composition, we should probably understand the smiting icon and the double kings as separate but closely related scenes. Like the Sekhemkhet example, this scene draws on increasingly figurative methods of representation that become the core of the iconographic and structural repertoire from which larger triumph scenes are composed in later periods.

---

72 This is part of the expanded textual captioning that is included here. A few earlier captions do indicate the intended victim of the king’s smiting, but this is the earliest instance of “foreign lands” that is nearly ubiquitous in later examples (particularly in the New Kingdom).

73 Gardiner, Peet, and Černý, The Inscriptions of Sinai. Part I, pl. 4; Bestock, Violence and Power, 185–186; Fig. 6.12.
Figure 14 Line drawing of a rock relief smiting scene of Snefru, Wadi Maghara. Image: Bestock, Violence and Power in Ancient Egypt: Image and Ideology before the New Kingdom (New York: Routledge, 2018), Fig. 6.13.

**Rock Relief of Khufu**

A rock relief from the reign of Khufu continues the trend of larger scale smiting scenes placed within the desert landscape (Fig. 16).\(^7^4\) In this scene, many elements are present that are familiar from earlier iterations within this chain of replication. The king raises his weapon above his head in smiting pose and grasps his victim’s hair and the staff of office with his other hand. A protection formula is at his back and a Horus-falcon hovers above his smiting arm. The king’s name and a scene caption run along the top of the scene. Thoth, at the far right of the scene, witnesses the king’s actions. To the right of the scene, a second, smaller scene is present, featuring a damaged inscription and a Wepwawet standard that faces toward the smiting scene. Given the common presence of Wepwawet standards in many Old Kingdom smiting scenes, the second scene should likely be understood as iconographically related to the first, despite the slight physical separation.

Here, we see the transition from the use of *serekhs* enclosing the name of the smiting king to the use of cartouches for that purpose. In the reign of Snefru, who immediately preceded Khufu, we have already seen that the traditional *serekh* and the novel cartouche were both incorporated into smiting scenes. From the reign of Khufu onward, only cartouches are known from this context. However, the *serekh* is present in the form of the royal *ka* in New Kingdom triumph scenes.\(^7^5\) This scene also maintains the expanded textual categories that were introduced in earlier examples, and the inclusion of protection formulae and scene captions in smiting scenes.

---

\(^7^4\) Gardiner, Peet, and Černý, *The Inscriptions of Sinai. Part I*, pl. 4; Bestock, *Violence and Power*, 187–188, Fig. 6.15; Swan Hall, *Pharaoh Smites His Enemies*, 9.

\(^7^5\) This follows a broader trend in royal naming and display conventions during the Fourth Dynasty where *serekhs* were overtaken by cartouches in all contexts. During the Early Dynastic and the earliest part of the Old Kingdom, *serekhs* containing the Horus name of the king were the primary method of displaying royal names. Cartouches containing the king’s *nomen*, *prenomen*, or both were the standard for most of the dynastic period. The presence of Khufu’s cartouche in this scene reflects that change.
scenes become the norm from this point forward. The end of this scene’s caption is damaged, but the beginning clearly follows the existing paradigm that consists of a violent or subjugative verb in the infinitive followed by its object. Here, it reads, *skr jwntjw...* “smiting the tribesmen…”

A likely restoration would be the name of the Nine Bows people group *jwntjw-stj(w)*, “Nubian tribesmen,” which fits properly in the space of the lacuna and would represent an early example of the singling out of specific traditional enemies as victims of the king’s wrath.

![Figure 16](image_url) Line drawing of a rock relief smiting scene of Khufu. Image: Bestock, *Violence and Power in Ancient Egypt: Image and Ideology before the New Kingdom* (New York: Routledge, 2018), Fig. 6.15.

**Rock Relief of Sahure**

A smiting scene that survives from the 5th Dynasty reign of Sahure (Fig. 17) recalls elements common throughout the entire chain of replication, with particular similarities to the

---


77 This trend is present in the Old Kingdom and continues through to the Middle and New Kingdoms in both smiting scenes and triumphal contexts more broadly. This is most notable in the labeling of the victims in smiting scenes and in topographical lists, though it also occurs in literary contexts and battle and presentation scenes.
smiting scenes of Sekhemkhet and Snefru. It is also one of the earliest examples of a smiting scene bounded by was-scepters and a pt-sign, a common method of delineating later smiting scenes on stelae. Here, the smiting icon is again paired with double striding images of the king. The two scene elements are separated by a Wepwawet standard in the center; the smiting icon is to the right of the standard, the double kings to the left. The smiting king wears the White Crown and his mace and staff of office match those carried by both of the striding kings. Under the pt-sign, above both the smiting icon and the dual kings, a text bearing the king’s name reads, “Horus, Lord of Appearances, King of Upper and Lower Egypt, Sahure.” Two sections of text flank the smiting icon.

Following earlier examples, all the figures in this scene face right except for the foreign enemy in the smiting icon. All the text is also oriented in this direction except for the section immediately behind the foreign enemy’s figure that reads mnTw hst nbt, “Mentiu of all foreign lands.” This reversal in textual orientation is a small detail, but it alters our understanding of the function of the text within the context of the scene. Likewise, this affects our understanding of how this scene has reused and altered textual elements from earlier rock relief iterations of the

78 Gardiner, Peet, and Čemý, The Inscriptions of Sinai. Part I, pl. 5; Bestock, Violence and Power, 189, Fig. 6.16; Swan Hall, Pharaoh Smites His Enemies, 10.

79 Bestock, Violence and Power, 189. This is true of later stelae of both royal and private provenance. For private examples containing these elements, see especially Schulman, Ceremonial Execution and Public Rewards. See also Cathie Spieser, Les noms du Pharaon comme êtres autonomes au Nouvel Empire, Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis 174 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000).

80 This title, nb h₃w, sometimes precedes the king’s nomen as an alternative to the traditional title z₃ r₅. See Wb III, 241–242; Faulkner, Dictionary of Middle Egyptian, 185.

81 MnTw or mnTjw is a term that in Egyptian meant “Bedouin” or “nomad.” In particular, this term referred to nomadic peoples to the north of Egypt—West Asian peoples. Given the nature of the term, it was likely not specific to one distinct ethnic group or geographical region, but instead could refer northern nomadic peoples either conglomerately or to a specific group for which the Egyptians had no other cultural or geographic designation. This is also a Nine Bows name, and as such is common in a variety of triumphal contexts. For reference and translation specifics, see Wb II, 73; Faulkner, Dictionary of Middle Egyptian, 110. For designation as a member of the Nine Bows, see Uphill “The Nine Bows,” 395-397, 408-410.
smiting scene. Traditionally, the text surrounding the smiting icon has been interpreted as two scene captions, with the one behind the king reading, “subduing all foreign lands.” The reading of this caption is unambiguous and clearly derives from the smiting scene of Snefru. The second caption above/behind the foreign enemy is usually read, “smiting the Mentiu of all foreign lands.” While this interpretation of the text is possible, it ignores two distinct nuances in the textual arrangement— the reversal of a portion of the text, and the presence of nfr ³ clearly placed between skr and the figure of the smiting king. Given these nuances, I suggest that this section of text should instead be understood as two separate textual elements: a scene caption reading skr nfr ³, “the great god’s smiting,” in which the figure of the smiting king functions as a determinative in addition to its obvious pictorial qualities; and a figure caption identifying the foreign prisoner as representative of “Mentiu of all lands.”

This is the third (and as far as we know, last) smiting scene that incorporates the striding double kings motif. The figures of the king do hold the now-familiar staff and mace, but the scene is compositionally unique. The Sekhemkhet scene depicts the double kings to the right of the smiting icon with nothing separating the two motifs. The Snefru scene places the smiting on the top register and the double kings on the lower register, separated by a ground line. This example reverts to placing both motifs on the same ground line, but their positions are reversed (double kings to the left, smiting icon to the right). They are separated by a Wepwawet standard, reminiscent of a royal procession. Unlike the earlier examples, the double kings in this scene clearly hold items identical to those held by the king in the smiting icon: staffs of office in their left hands, maces in their right. In the hands of the double kings, the staff and mace are symbolic of the office of kingship and the general dominion afforded by that position. In the hands of the

---

82 Bestock translates the text this way (Violence and Power, 189).
smiting king, these same objects more actively enforce the power that they represent. This is a clear representation of the dichotomous nature of the Egyptian king’s power over all lands and their peoples: metaphorical/ideological dominion (passive) and violent subjugation (active). This dichotomy continues to be represented in smiting scenes and triumphal motifs and is one of the primary reasons for the dissonant tone often identified in New Kingdom triumph scenes.


**Sahure Mortuary Complex at Abusir**

During the Fifth Dynasty, relief-sized smiting scenes began to appear in another context concurrently with rock reliefs: the decorative programs of royal funerary temples. We have extremely fragmentary evidence suggesting that a smiting scene (or smiting scenes) may have adorned the funerary temple of Userkaf at Saqqara, but the earliest example with enough

---

83 Bestock, *Violence and Power*, 86. Most of these are from the Fifth and Sixth Dynasties and take the form of architecturally standardized pyramid complexes.
surviving evidence to be pertinent to this discussion comes from the funerary complex of Sahure at Abusir. At the Sahure complex, smiting and other types of sanctioned royal violence figure heavily into the decorative program. There was at least one full smiting scene\textsuperscript{84} with an associated “Libyan Family Scene” (Fig. 18).\textsuperscript{85} The complex also contains related motifs of the king as a griffin or sphinx trampling enemies (Fig. 19)\textsuperscript{86} and gods leading bound prisoners.

The extant smiting scene is fragmentary and comes from the king’s mortuary temple. Most of the smiting icon itself is gone, save for the raised elbow of a kneeling prisoner. However, many of the ancillary elements of the scene remain. An inscription reading “smiting the chief of Tjehenu [Libya]” is present, along with an image of the goddess Seshat who sits on her throne and over sees the scene and records the number of enemy captives and casualties.\textsuperscript{87} To Seshat’s left, three rows of Libyans (they are labeled as such) raise their arms in supplication in the direction of the now-missing smiting icon. In the bottom register of the scene are two deities: Ash, Lord of Tjehenu, and Imentet, the goddess of the West. Text accompanying the goddess clarifies that she is offering the Libyan chief to the king.\textsuperscript{88}

\textsuperscript{84} There are fragments of at least one additional smiting scene here, but not much more can be said about it given the state of the surviving evidence.


\textsuperscript{86} P&M III-I, 326, loc. 1; Borchardt, \textit{Das Grabdenkmal des Königs S’ahu-Re (Band 2): Abbildungsblatter}, pl. 8; Bestock, \textit{Violence and Power}, 100–103.

\textsuperscript{87} Borchardt, \textit{Das Grabdenkmal des Königs S’ahu-Re (Band 2): Text}, 72.

\textsuperscript{88} Bestock, \textit{Violence and Power}, 94.
From the complex’s valley temple, a trampling scene survives that reinforces much the same ideology as the smiting scene. Here, the king is depicted as a winged feline (perhaps a griffin), standing atop and trampling three prone enemy figures. The image of the king faces out of the temple, accompanied by an inscription reading, “Horus, strong of arm, he who tramples
the rebels."89 Each of the three trampled enemies is depicted with different features and clothing, indicating the king’s dominance over a variety of foreign people groups. Notably, the determinatives for the word *sntjw* in the related caption parallel this depiction, with three different foreign peoples being used to determine the word. Related text also mentions “binding together the Bows,” which is almost certainly a reference to the Nine Bows, particularly in conjunction with the depiction for a plurality of enemy types.

As a whole, the violent and triumphal imagery present in Sahure’s funerary complex is a herald of things to come. The Libyan Family Scene continued to be a popular inclusion in triumphal iconography for the remainder of the Old Kingdom, but this scene type lost popularity by the Middle Kingdom, the kings of which seem to have moved away from this motif.

*Figure 19* Line drawing of the partial trampling scene, Sahure Funerary Complex, Abusir. Image: Borchardt, *Das Grabdenkmal des Königs S’ahu-Re (Band 2): die Wandbilder: Abbildungsblatter* (Leipzig: Hinrichs 1913), pl. 8.

---

89 The word for rebels here is *sntjw*. 
Rock Relief of Niuserre

Another rock relief smiting scene from the Fifth Dynasty, this one from the reign of Niuserre, contains more elaborate texts, with the smiting icon taking up a smaller than average portion of the scene (Fig. 20). While the composition of this scene is unique, it clearly draws from and repurposes elements from its predecessors. The scene is bounded at the top by a pt-sign like the Sahure relief, but the remaining borders here are simple lines rather than was-scepters. Below the pt-sign, a winged sun-disk hovers over the scene. Below that, multiple lines and columns of text list titles, epithets, and names of the king, along with a scene caption and protection formula. A scene with a hes-vase stands immediately to the right of—though visually separated from—the smiting scene. The smiting icon itself is in the lower left corner of the scene and features the king wearing the White Crown, smiting with a mace, and clutching the hair of his victim and his staff of office in the other hand. The prisoner’s pose recalls those seen in earlier iterations with one striking difference: the arm he holds up toward the king appears to be missing its hand, severed at the wrist. If the missing hand is indeed intentionally omitted and not a fluke of preservation, this would provide one of the earliest iconographic confluences of smiting imagery and representations of the practice of martial trophy-taking.

---

90 This scene was removed to the Egyptian Museum (CG 57105, JE 38570). Swan Hall notes that it was later destroyed but mentions no specific information regarding the relief’s destruction. Gardiner, Peet, and Černý, *The Inscriptions of Sinai Part I*, pl. 5; Bestock, *Violence and Power*, 190–191; Swan Hall, *Pharaoh Smites His Enemies*, Fig. 17.

91 Unfortunately, the state of preservation of this scene makes it impossible to say for certain whether the severed hand was intentional, or whether it was simply a victim of decay or accidental erasure. Swan Hall posits (*Pharaoh Smites His Enemies*, 10) that accidental loss of the image is more likely, with which I tend to agree given that the only other example we have of this iconographic quirk comes from the much later ring of Amenhotep II (Brooklyn Museum 37.726E) on which the intentionality of the missing hand can also be disputed. Nonetheless, if the omission was intentional, this would represent one of only a handful of examples of figures with severed hands known from Egyptian art and would also be the earliest of such depictions. Severed hands (those that have been removed from their respective bodies) are, however, common in battle scenes, especially in the New Kingdom.
The scene caption, “Smiting the Mentiu of all foreign lands,” recalls the Sahure relief as well. It is formatted almost identically, save for the fact that none of the text is reversed. However, it is the titles and the names of the king that take up most of the space in the scene. These conceptually reinforce the power the king holds over all lands and all peoples, but visually they overpower the actual image of the victorious king. The balance between textual and iconographic elements is a delicate one, but they serve the same ultimate goal. The increase in the importance of the textual elements that we see beginning here continues, and by the time monumental triumph scenes appear in the New Kingdom, textual elements regularly take up just as much physical space in any given scene as the imagery does.

Figure 20 Line drawing of a rock relief smiting scene of Niuserre. Image: Swan Hall, The Pharaoh Smites His Enemies: A Comparative Study, Münchner Ägyptologische Studien Heft 44 (Berlin: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 1986), Fig. 17.
Niuserre Mortuary Complex at Abusir

The mortuary complex of Niuserre at Abusir continues many of the patterns of smiting iconography development in the Fifth Dynasty. The evidence that remains from this site is fragmentary, but it provides enough data to show continuity in the application of violent motifs, including both smiting scenes and trampling scenes with the king as a sphinx within the context of royal burial architecture.\(^92\) Notably, it is from this complex that the earliest Dynastic example of smiting iconography depicting more than one prisoner derives.\(^93\) Fragments of a smiting scene from the pyramid temple clearly show the king holding at least four prisoners by the hair at once, as he reaches up to strike them in the typical pose. The iconography of the scene is otherwise consistent with earlier iterations of monumental smiting scenes in mortuary contexts, but the addition of more prisoners represents a distinct revision to the motif and one that would later become the norm in all monumental contexts. The addition of multiple prisoners can likely be understood as a move toward symbolic or emblematic representation that does not necessarily require a historical or real-world counterpart to be effective.\(^94\)

A fragment of a trampling scene survives from the north and south walls of the causeway nearest to the valley temple, an important transition point within the mortuary complex.\(^95\) The

\(^92\) Fragments: Berlin 16110/11/15 No. 17922. Ludwig Borchardt, *Das Grabdenkmal des Königs Ne-user-re*. Wissenschaftliche Veröffentlichungen der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft 7; Ausgrabungen der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft in Abusir 1902-1908 (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1907), 86, Fig. 64; Bestock, *Violence and Power*, 104–107.

\(^93\) Bestock, *Violence and Power*, 104–105. The earliest example comes from the previously discussed Tomb 100 painting. While there may have been iconography of this type in earlier royal mortuary complexes, this is the first for which we have confirmation based on preserved evidence.

\(^94\) Bestock, *Violence and Power*, 105. Bestock suggests the emblematic nature of this representation based on the fact that a smiting icon with multiple prisoners no longer conforms to physical reality, as it is impossible to hold four people by the hair all at once and smite them with a single blow. Additionally, the variation in prisoner types is unlikely to reflect historical realities and therefore should be interpreted as an attempt at making the image more universally applicable.

\(^95\) P&M III-I, 336; Berlin 17919. Borchardt, *Das Grabdenkmal des Königs Ne-user-Re*, Fig. 11; Bestock, *Violence and Power*, 105–106.
specifics of the scene are difficult to decipher due to the fragmentary nature of the remains, but the iconography appears to be consistent with earlier examples of this type of scene in similar contexts. However, one curious element may show revision and development of the existing motif: the smiting victim overlaps his family, who have their arms bound. This seems to be a variant of the Libyan Family motif used in the decoration of Sahure’s funerary complex, further cementing the close iconographic (and ideological) relationship between smiting and trampling.

Another fragmentary relief from the valley temple shows a smiting icon. While the composition of the icon itself is typical, the context is unique. On the green arm of Osiris (or possibly another fertility deity), a miniature smiting icon appears on a bracelet. Within the icon, the king wears the Red Crown and strides in the classic pose, holding the hair of his victim. A falcon hovers above the king’s head. In addition to its use in monumental contexts, smiting iconography was a popular theme for royal jewelry in the Middle and New Kingdoms, but this fragment suggests that smiting-themed jewelry was already present in the Old Kingdom.

**Rock Relief of Djedkare**

The next iteration of the smiting scene that occurs in the form of a rock relief dates to near the end of the Fifth Dynasty, from the reign of Djedkare Isesi (Fig. 21). This relief is somewhat poorly preserved and the exact original location is unknown. However, numerous hand copies and line drawings do exist. It is less elaborate than the preceding example (from the reign of Niuserre), but it contains much of the same iconography. The striding king wears a *shendyt* and a *uraeus* and wields a mace above his head to strike a kneeling, unbound enemy of


uncertain type. The king grasps his victim’s hair and the staff of office in his other hand. The smiting icon is surrounded on all undamaged sides by text. Immediately above the king’s mace, his cartouche is present. In front of his face is a protection formula. Behind the head of the prisoner, the text reads $skr \ hk\,hst$, “smiting the ruler of the foreign land.”\(^9^9\) To the right of the smiting icon, the king’s serekh is displayed, featuring an unusually large Horus falcon atop it. On the far-right edge of the scene, separated from the rest by a column delineation, another text records a year. This is perhaps the year in which the scene was carved or in which the smiting was supposed to have occurred.

The overall iconography of this iteration is nearly identical to the examples that immediately preceded it, but slight revisions in the textual content are of note. First, this example includes a date presented in direct conjunction with the smiting scene. The inclusion of a specific date signals a shift in the intended temporality of this type of scene, rooting it more concretely in time and in the singularity of the event.\(^1^0^0\) Earlier iterations of the smiting scene favor more timeless presentations. Another of the textual revisions may also relate to the temporality and/or intentional grounding of the scene in historical reality: the prisoner is labeled as $hk\,hst$. On the surface, the identification of the prisoner as the ruler of the foreign land seems in keeping with earlier labeling conventions, but this is the first time a rock relief smiting scene refers to a prisoner as a ruler.\(^1^0^1\) Prior to this iteration, the prisoner icon functioned as a metaphorical stand-

\(^9^9\) Hk\,h, a term generally translated as “ruler” (Wb III, 170–171; Faulkner, Dictionary of Middle Egyptian, 178), was present in a number of Egyptian titles, but was also one of the most common Egyptian designations for the leader of a foreign place or a foreign people. Wr, “chief” was also used for this purpose.

\(^1^0^0\) This is true whether the date represents the date the relief was created or whether it represents the date on which a commemorated smiting occurred, or even something else entirely. Bestock posits (Violence and Power, 192) that the date of the expedition during which the relief was carved is the most likely explanation, and I agree with this analysis.

\(^1^0^1\) This designation of the victim as a chief/ruler does however occur earlier in mortuary complexes, especially in the context of the Libyan family scenes in the complexes of Sahure and Niuserre.
in for the entirety of his country or people and was referred to as such: “Mentiu of all lands,” “the foreign lands.” Here, the ruler is identified singularly, not as a metaphor for his country, but as the literal head of his country. As the head of his country, he serves as the *pars pro toto* representative for his domain, and his subjugation is thus both his own literal subjugation to the Egyptian crown and the symbolic, eternal subjugation of his domain.


**Unas Mortuary Complex at Saqqara**

The last examples of monumental smiting scenes from the Fifth Dynasty come from the mortuary complex of Unas, the last king of that dynasty. While the evidence from this location is again fragmentary, it is clear that the complex housed much smiting, trampling, and otherwise
violent iconography centered in and around the causeway and pyramid temple.\textsuperscript{102} Fragments from within the causeway confirm the presence of at least one large trampling image with an associated variant of the Libyan Family scene type.\textsuperscript{103} The scene is witnessed by two deities, and rows of prisoners who may be led by deities.\textsuperscript{104} At the top of the scene, Seshat is depicted recording information, perhaps the number of prisoners or the situation that led to their capture. The causeway also contains chaotic battle scenes, including a potential fragment of a fortified town under siege.\textsuperscript{105} Though the iconography of fortified towns in relation to battle and smiting scenes has Predynastic precedent, this is the only known example from the Old Kingdom that reinforces this connection later exploited in New Kingdom triumph scenes.\textsuperscript{106}

Fragments from near the pyramid temple contain a smiting scene that was likely reminiscent of the ones at Sahure’s mortuary complex. Here, the king is depicted in the act of smiting a bound Libyan prisoner.\textsuperscript{107} The prisoner is herded towards his fate by a god holding a


\textsuperscript{103} Labrousse and Moussa, \textit{La chaussée du complexe funéraire du roi Ounas}, 19–20, Fig. 15; Bestock, \textit{Violence and Power}, 110.

\textsuperscript{104} Bestock, \textit{Violence and Power}, 110.


\textsuperscript{106} See also chapter 3 regarding topographical lists for both Predynastic antecedents and subsequent Middle and New Kingdom examples.

\textsuperscript{107} That the prisoner is Libyan is confirmed by the presence of a pointed beard and straps crossed over his chest—both stereotypical features used to depict Libyans in Egyptian art. Flora Brooke Anthony, \textit{Foreigners in Ancient Egypt: Theban Tomb Paintings from the Early Eighteenth Dynasty (1550-1372 BC)} (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 26–27; Bestock, \textit{Violence and Power}, 108–109.
was-scepter and rope, iconography that would become almost ubiquitous in later triumph scenes. Two registers of prisoners accompany the scene.108

Overall, the smiting iconography in Unas’ complex closely follows the trends present in the mortuary complexes of both Sahure and Niuserre, and it is almost certain that these were among the models on which Unas based his decorative program. The Libyan Family scene and the presence of the goddess Seshat in conjunction with scenes of smiting and trampling is typical for the Old Kingdom. Though these icons do not continue in this form into New Kingdom triumph scenes, they do still impact the composition of later scenes. Seshat’s role as the recorder of events, keeping note of the king’s victory for the sake of posterity and as proof that order has been maintained, is eventually usurped by the presence of longer texts (the records themselves) within the scene. The image of the goddess is removed, but her handiwork remains. Similarly, New Kingdom triumph scenes do not feature the Libyan Family motif, but the sentiment it evokes can be found in later examples. As the family looks on while their leader is slaughtered in front of their eyes, they are helpless and defeated and left at the mercy and whims of the Egyptian king. Later scenes often include rows of bound prisoners (both as part of topographical lists and otherwise) that face inward, as enemies witnessing both the downfall of their leader and the sealing of their own defeat.

Rock Relief of Pepi I

The last rock relief smiting scene from the Old Kingdom comes from Wadi Maghara, just as many of the others do (Fig 22).109 Dating to the reign of Pepi I, this scene closely repeats the


109 Gardiner, Peet, and Černý, *The Inscriptions of Sinai. Part I*, pl. 8; Bestock, *Violence and Power*, 192–193; Swan Hall, *Pharaoh Smites His Enemies*, 11, Fig. 20.
content and layout of its predecessors. The scene has a line border on all sides, and the name and titles of the king sit atop the panel. Below the border, a winged sun disk with uraei hovers over the rest of the scene. At the edge of each wing, it is labeled as (Horus) Behdetite.\textsuperscript{110} On the far left of the scene, the smiting icon depicts the striding king in typical form. He wears a shendyt and the White Crown. His kneeling victim turns his body away from the king but faces towards him. The king grasps both the victim’s hair and the staff of office in one hand, and the prisoner also reaches up with one hand to hold his own hair. More names and titles of the king run below the winged sun disk, and a short protection formula appears in front of his face. Behind the back of the prisoner, a caption text reads, “The Good God smites and subdues the Mentiu of all lands.”\textsuperscript{111} The Mentiu, who appear regularly as the prisoner figure in Old Kingdom smiting scenes, are a non-specific group that become associated with the Nine Bows, the traditional enemies of Egypt.\textsuperscript{112} Through this association, Mentiu continue to play a role in smiting and triumphal iconography and are often included among the enemy groups listed in New Kingdom triumph scenes in both rhetorical texts and topographical lists.

Interestingly, while the terms $ds$ “subdue” and $skr$ “smite” carry very similar meanings and were used interchangeably in the caption texts of rock relief smiting scenes, here they are used in conjunction, each supplementing the other’s meaning.\textsuperscript{113} This suggests that while either

\textsuperscript{110} While Horus was iconographically present in Predynastic and Early Dynastic smiting scenes in the form of royal serekhs, the protective, hovering form of the Behdetite is how he appears most commonly in smiting and triumph scenes from the Old Kingdom onward. For this distinct form of the god Horus, see Randy Shonkwiler, “The Behdetite: A Study of Horus the Behdetite from the Old Kingdom to the Conquest of Alexander” (Ph.D. diss., Oriental Institute, University of Chicago, 2014).

\textsuperscript{111} The Egyptian verbs used here are $ds$ and $skr$. For more on the nuances of violent verbiage in triumphal contexts, including these, see chapter 5: §Violence.

\textsuperscript{112} See n. 81 for more on the Mentiu.

\textsuperscript{113} The tandem use of these two terms also occurs in the earlier rock relief smiting scene of Sahure, in which their spatial arrangement differs slightly from the present relief.
could be used in this context, they should be understood as two wholly separate actions, both of which the king performs by completing the actions in the smiting icon. While these actions are separate, they are inextricably combined in assuring the foreign prisoner’s defeat. In order for the king to be fully victorious, he must both smite and subdue his enemies. Later iterations of the smiting icon, including those present in New Kingdom triumph scenes, often appear in conjunction with presentations of this two-fold victory in text and image.


---

114 While on the surface, the distinction here may seem minimal—or even purely academic—the fact remains that the Egyptian creator of this relief selected these two terms to describe the depicted actions of the king, apparently without intended redundancy. The nuance here suggests that royal triumph takes two primary forms: smiting of enemy peoples and subjugation of (surviving) enemy people or their lands. This same dichotomy is reflected visually in the composite triumph scenes of the New Kingdom with the invariable inclusion of both smiting iconography and subjugated foreign lands in the form of topographical lists as representative of the victory the king has achieved.
Pepi I Mortuary Complex at Saqqara

Evidence of a smiting scene from the pyramid temple in the mortuary complex of Pepi I exists, but like the other evidence from Old Kingdom mortuary complexes, what survives is fragmentary. The image of the king appears to be rendered in the expected pose, and he grasps the hair of two kneeling prisoners—one with Libyan features and the other with Nubian features. Accompanying the smiting icon are three figures looking on, curiously labeled with the same names as the figures in the Libyan Family motif of Sahure, albeit with slightly different orthography.

Pepi II Cylinder Seal

One of the most unique instances of the smiting icon motif in the Old Kingdom occurs on a cylinder seal from Tell el-Maskhuta, near the Sinai Peninsula (Fig. 23). The overall shape of the seal art is something of a pseudo-serekh containing three distinct compositional elements. Within the rectangular serekh-like border are two registers divided by three lines. The lower register depicts a line-carved smiting icon reminiscent of those seen on Protodynastic and Early Dynastic portable objects like tags. The upper register gives a portion of Pepi’s titulary,


116 The two victims largely overlap, with the Libyan at the front of the scene. The Libyan figure has the expected stereotypical markers of his ethnicity, and the southerner is depicted with tiered hair, a wavy armband, and a short, square beard—all typical to representations of southern foreigners, such as Nubians. Bestock, Violence and Power, 116.

117 As such, it is clear that this scene is at least in part a copy of the one that was present in Sahure’s complex and indicates an aim for specificity in this genre of scene, regardless of whether or not that specificity is historically accurate. Bestock, Violence and Power, 116.

including the Two Ladies name $ntr-h\textw$. Accordingly, above the rectangular border, two vultures wearing the Red Crown stand on cobras and face each other atop the names of the king.

This seal represents a direct continuation of the tradition of placing smiting iconography on small portable objects. The smiting icon itself shows many of the expected elements, though as a result of their context they are more crudely rendered. The striding king raises a mace above his head and grasps the hair (and/or a staff) of the kneeling prisoner. The prisoner’s position is unusual, however, in that he turns toward the king rather than away. He also holds an object out towards the king, potentially a bow or knife. If this object is a weapon, this would be one of very few instances prior to the New Kingdom in which the prisoner in a smiting icon is shown with a possible method of fighting back against the king.\textsuperscript{119}


\textsuperscript{119} See also the Middle Kingdom pectoral from the reign of Amenemhat III on which the victim wields a \textit{tp}-dagger. While the presence of a weapon in the hand of the victim would seem to indicate that the victim possesses a means of potentially defending himself, the intended message here—counterintuitive to modern viewers—is actually quite the opposite. Egyptian triumphal ideology dictates that the king’s victory must be assured but destroying overly weak enemies would not prove the strength and merit of the king. The enemies are presented as cowardly and any attempts against the king as futile, but nonetheless, they must ostensibly pose a measure of threat in order for the king’s victory to be meaningful. Thus, the weapon is less an icon meant to indicate the victim can fight back, and more a visual reassurance that, despite any attempts to fight back, the king will still successfully slaughter his intended victim. The interplay between the icon of the king and the icon of the foreign victim, including cowardice and futility in the face of defeat and the use of the illusion of threat, are discussed at length in Spalinger, \textit{Icons of Power}, especially chapter 9.
Pepi II Mortuary Complex at Saqqara

Fitting within the trend of earlier examples, the evidence for smiting iconography at the mortuary complex of Pepi II is likewise fragmentary. However, a hypothetical reconstruction of the large smiting scene from the vestibule of the pyramid temple (Fig. 24) has been completed that combines evidence from the fragments with known trends in Old Kingdom temple decorative programs.\(^{120}\) If we assume the accuracy of the reconstruction, this smiting scene clearly repeats most of the elements contained in earlier iterations from mortuary contexts. The striding king is depicted in the expected pose, grasping the hair of his victims, possibly as many as ten. This is the largest group of prisoners evident in any single smiting scene from the Old Kingdom, and it serves as a herald of things to come in later temple complexes—New Kingdom smiting scenes often contain double or triple that amount.\(^{121}\) Above the smiting icon, the king’s names and titles and a caption text are present. To the right of the smiting icon, there are multiple registers of related images. The topmost preserved register shows bound prisoners being led by a deity. Below them, Seshat records the smiting next to a Libyan Family scene containing two women and two children, all of whom are labeled.\(^{122}\)

\(^{120}\) A secondary smiting scene is also known from the valley temple at this site. This example also depicts multiple prisoners. It also features the king’s ka-standard behind his back, an element that becomes standard in New Kingdom triumph scenes. For the reconstructed smiting scenes: P&M III-II, 427; Gustave Jequier, *Le monument funéraire de Pepi II. Tome II: le temple*, Fouilles à Saqqarah (Cairo: L’Institut français d’archéologie orientale, 1936-1940), 27, pls. 8, 36, 38; Fazzini, *Images for Eternity: Egyptian Art from Berkeley and Brooklyn* (San Francisco: Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, 1975), 50, 135, cat. 36b; Swan Hall, *Pharaoh Smites His Enemies*, 12, Fig. 22a; Bestock, *Violence and Power*, 117–119. For fragments of other smiting, trampling, and bound prisoner iconography from this complex: P&M III-II, 426–428; Jequier, *Le monument funéraire de Pepi II. Tome III: les approaches du temple*, Fouilles à Saqqarah (Cairo: L’Institut français d’archéologie orientale, 1936-1940), pls. 12, 14–16, 36; Bestock, *Violence and Power*, 119–127.

\(^{121}\) For example, the smiting icons in the composite triumph scene of Seti I at Karnak each depict two rows of prisoners, each containing at least four to six prisoners. In the later Ramesside triumph scene of Ramesses III at Medinet Habu, the smiting icons feature three rows of prisoners overlapped so extremely there are dozens in all. When referenced in scholarship, this iconography is generally referred to as the king “smiting a multitude.”

\(^{122}\) Jequier, *Le monument funéraire de Pepi II. Tome II: le temple*, 27, pl. 8; Bestock, *Violence and Power*, 117–118.
Transition to First Intermediate Period and Middle Kingdom

Over the course of the Old Kingdom, smiting iconography became intrinsically tied to the effective performance of the office of Egyptian kingship. As state and royal power and cultural influence expanded, the proper locations and methods of display for such imagery were likewise broadened. Rock carvings in the landscape (particularly in the Sinai region), royal mortuary complexes, and small portable objects (especially those associated with labeling) were all common venues for the display of smiting iconography during the Early Dynastic and Old Kingdom. This variety of venues is important for a few reasons. First, it highlights the relative
prevalence of the motif in royal spaces. Second, it suggests a variety of functions for the motif that reflect that the tripartite purposes of New Kingdom triumph scenes—magical protection, state propaganda, and ritual performance—were already attributed to smiting scenes in these earlier periods. Lastly, the increase in the amount and size of the venues and the increase in the complexity of the motifs they displayed mirrors the development and solidification of royal power during the Old Kingdom, including the social and financial authority that would have been required to construct and commission decoration of monumental building projects like mortuary temple complexes.

Following the reign of Pepi II, near the end of the Sixth Dynasty, surviving evidence for smiting scenes becomes exceptionally scarce until the transition into the Middle Kingdom (Dyn. 11). However, this does not mean that smiting iconography ceased to exist at the very end of the Old Kingdom and into the First Intermediate Period. It is possible that the political and cultural upheaval of the period and resultant decentralization of state authority explains the lack of large-scale examples such as those in mortuary complexes. To some extent, the lack of evidence may also be attributed to poor preservation. Despite the fact that the motif is not well-attested in the First Intermediate Period, the motif must have persisted and was transferred into the artistic canon of the Middle Kingdom.

From the Old Kingdom and through to the Middle Kingdom, the venues for display of smiting iconography were varied, but they did remain fairly consistent. Mortuary temples and other royal temples continued to be the most common place for displays of smiting iconography. Small, portable, and decorative items, as well as jewelry\textsuperscript{123} featuring smiting motifs became

\textsuperscript{123} To my knowledge, there are no extant examples of jewelry with smiting iconography that survive from the Old Kingdom, but the presence of the painted smiting bracelet in Niuserre’s mortuary complex suggests the motif was used in such contexts at least as early as the Fifth Dynasty (see n. 97). Nonetheless, it is impossible to say how common this might have been.
increasingly common after the First Intermediate Period. Interestingly, rock relief smiting scenes, which make up a large percentage of the scenes that survive from the Old Kingdom, do not appear at all after the beginning of the First Intermediate Period. It is likely that stelae decorated with smiting iconography that do appear from the Middle Kingdom onward usurped the place of the rock smiting scene. Stelae placed at particular geographic locations and around the landscape would have served the same functions as their original rock-cut predecessors, but they could also be placed in a wider variety of locations and would be more accessible to the audiences that would have passed them by.

The evidence of smiting iconography in the First Intermediate Period is virtually nonexistent, but the evidence that survives from the Middle Kingdom is also extremely limited. At least in part, this is due to the fact that surviving Middle Kingdom temples and reliefs of all types are limited, and the preservation of what does survive is often poor. There are only a handful of large-scale smiting scenes extant from the Middle Kingdom and a few examples on small, portable objects. Nonetheless, this scant evidence is sufficient to trace some aspects of the development of smiting iconography and set the stage for what would come in the New Kingdom.

---

124 As a discrete set, rock relief smiting scenes of the type discussed previously in this chapter are neatly bounded both geographically and chronologically. These types of reliefs are known only from sites in the Sinai region, and then only through the Sixth Dynasty. It appears that these reliefs were of certain cultural and ideological importance during the Early Dynastic and Old Kingdom, as rock relief smiting scenes are extant for many of the most important kings of those periods. With the end of the Old Kingdom, royal ideology seems to have shifted to presenting smiting iconography in other contexts, though the relationship of smiting iconography to surrounding landscape remained significant into later periods. By and large, the state of preservation of Old Kingdom and Middle Kingdom pyramid temples and other temple complexes is poor, and many of these undoubtedly contained smiting imagery. As such, by virtue of their preservation, rock relief smiting scenes may play an overly large part in our understanding of the development of smiting iconography simply because these have survived comparatively well.
Nebhepetre Mentuhotep II Chapel at Gebelein

The most complete surviving examples of smiting scenes from the Middle Kingdom come from the 11th Dynasty reign of Nebhepetre Mentuhotep II.\(^\text{125}\) From Mentuhotep’s chapel at Gebelein, a pair of small smiting scenes are preserved. The first, immediately reminiscent of Old Kingdom examples, composes the lower register of a larger more varied scene (Fig. 25).\(^\text{126}\) Here, the king wears the White Crown as he wields a mace to strike a kneeling Libyan enemy. Where the king’s cartouche would be present in earlier examples, his most basic titulary alone is given. The king’s smiting image serves as his own determinative. The scene is bounded on the left by two Wepwawet standards. On the far right, a figure without a groundline hovers behind the king. The exact nature of this figure is unclear, but he seems to be an official or priest of some kind and thus recalls the sandal-bearing officials in earlier smiting scenes who often appear at the king’s back or above his shoulder.\(^\text{127}\)

That the prisoner is Libyan is indicated both by the figure label above his outstretched arm and by the large ostrich feather clasped in his hand, an iconographic shorthand for Libya or Libyan-ness in Egyptian art.\(^\text{128}\) The positioning of the prisoner is interesting—while one hand

\(^\text{125}\) Those discussed here come from the chapels of that king at Gebelein and Dendera. His temple at Deir el-Bahri would likely have contained similar decoration and triumphal content, but due to the poor state of preservation of the remains of that temple complex, not much can be said for certain, and it has thus been omitted here. For more on Nebhepetre Mentuhotep’s temple at Deir el-Bahri, see Édouard Naville and H. R. Hall, The XIth Dynasty Temple at Deir el-Bahari. Parts 1, 2, and 3 (London: Egypt Exploration Fund, 1907–1913); Dieter Arnold, “Some Thoughts on the Building History of the Temple of Mentuhotep Nebhepetre at Deir el-Bahri,” Bulletin of the Egyptological Seminar 19 (2015): 59–68.

\(^\text{126}\) Cairo JE TR 1/11/17/10. Elisa Marochetti, The Reliefs of the Chapel of Nebhepetre Mentuhotep at Gebelein, Culture and History of the Ancient Near East 39 (Boston: Brill, 2010), 57–61; Labib Habachi, “King Nebhepetre Montuhotep: his Monuments, Place in History, Deification and Unusual Representation in the Form of Gods,” MDIK 19 (1963): 16–52, Fig. 16, pl. XI-a; Bestock, Violence and Power, 164–165; Swan Hall, Pharaoh Smites His Enemies, 12–13, Fig. 23.

\(^\text{127}\) See for example the officials present in support of the king on the Narmer Palette and in the rock relief smiting scenes of Den.

\(^\text{128}\) Anthony, Foreigners in Ancient Egypt, 26.
holds the ostrich feather as far from the king as possible, the other reaches above the prisoner’s head to shield his face from the impending blow. The king grasps the prisoner’s hair along with the staff of office, an element that can now be considered ubiquitous in this type of scene. The positioning of the staff in this scene is slightly unusual, as the terminal end is depicted hovering over the prisoner’s knee rather than behind the prisoner’s torso or flush with the groundline. 

While there is ample evidence to suggest that the Egyptians bound their prisoners and often secured them with a stake or other architectural element, this rendering—a long with that of the staff in the ivory tag of Den, the rock reliefs of Sekhemkhet, and the rock relief of Sahure—clearly depicts a walking staff. In these cases, the length of the object, its form and embellishments, the angle at which it is held, and the fact that it nearly always terminates above the groundline are exactly what we would expect to see if the king was rendered as holding a walking staff while grasping an enemy’s hair with the same hand. There is no reason to suggest that the more ambiguous occurrences of this iconography represent anything different. The staff of office continues to be present in smiting scenes through the Middle Kingdom and into the New Kingdom. The form they eventually take in New Kingdom triumph scenes is more elaborate but consistent with earlier iterations of the motif.

The second smiting scene from the Gebelein chapel (Fig. 56) is unique in both content and organization and represents the earliest surviving example of a smiting icon depicted in conjunction with a set of labeled figures of foreigners arranged clearly into a list. Unlike the

---

129 This evidence is presented most explicitly in Janzen, “Iconography of Humiliation,” especially 50–52; Muhlestein, Violence in the Service of Order, 17–18.

130 With the possible exception of the Narmer Palette, the decoration of which does contain both a smiting icon and multiple figures representing victims or fleeing enemies who are labeled. However, in this case, the exact nature of the labels remains in question and the smiting icon is separated from these figures by a groundline, and thus they exist in a separate register. The present Gebelein relief (Cairo JE TR 24/528/5) is discussed in further detail in chapter 3. See Marochetti, The Reliefs of the Chapel of Nebhepetre Mentuhotep at Gebelein, 50–52.
smiting scenes we have seen so far, here the smiting icon is not the singular visual or conceptual focus of the scene. As such, the smiting icon will be discussed here briefly but a complete analysis of the scene can be found in the section concerning the diachronic development of topographical lists.

The smiting icon is at the far right of the scene at the head of a row of bound prisoners. The striding king wears the White Crown as he brings his mace down toward the head of a kneeling prisoner. The prisoner, who slumps down with both arms hanging limply by his side, makes no attempt to shield himself from the blow or to turn away from the king. If this was not unusual enough, the prisoner wears a shendyt-kilt identical to that of the king and is the only one in the row that has no associated textual label. This led Bestock to posit that this prisoner is Egyptian, a conclusion with which I agree. Given Mentuhotep’s role as the ostensible re-unifier of the Two Lands after the tumult of the First Intermediate Period, the fact that the list of peoples he has conquered should be headed by a (Lower?) Egyptian is so logical as to be inevitable.

131 Bestock, Violence and Power, 163. By virtue of his Egyptian clothing and features, the conspicuous lack of a label, his placement at the front of the line, and the fact that both Upper Egypt and Lower Egypt are regularly included in later topographical lists, this identification is certain.

132 This mirrors exactly the iconography of unification used by Narmer and other Early Dynastic kings and suggests that the use of the White Crown in this context is calculated. Nebhepetre Mentuhotep, himself a southerner, wrangles a contrary Egyptian back into the fold of ma’at. Given this scene’s historical context and iconographic predecessors, the likelihood that the head prisoner is representative of Lower Egypt is all but assured.
Figure 25 Line drawing of a lower register smiting scene from the chapel of Nebhepetre Mentuhotep at Gebelein. Image: Marochetti, *The Reliefs of the Chapel of Nebhepetre Mentuhotep at Gebelein*, Culture and History of the Ancient Near East 39 (Boston: Brill, 2010), 57.

Nebhepetre Mentuhotep II Chapel at Dendera

Another smiting scene from the reign of Nebhepetre Mentuhotep comes from a similar chapel context, but this time at Dendera (Fig. 26). This one, too, is also unique in many ways, through most of the elements are easily traced back to earlier iterations within our present chain of replication. The form of the smiting king and his regalia, his titles, epithets, and the content of the caption text elaborate or slightly revise those known from Old Kingdom examples.

Perhaps the most notable feature of this smiting scene is that the figure of the smiting king is the only figure present (excluding those within the text). Within the smiting icon, there is no foreign prisoner. Instead, the king grasps a staff wound with a papyrus plant in the place of

---

133 Blocks now in Egyptian Museum, JE 46068. P&M VI, 106; G. Daressy, “Chapelle de Mentouhotep III à Dendérah,” *Ann. Serv.* 17 (1917): 227–229, pl. 1; Habachi, “King Nebhepetre Montuhotp,” Fig. 6, pl. 5; Bestock, *Violence and Power*, 165–169; Swan Hall, *Pharaoh Smites His Enemies*, 14, Fig. 25.
the expected kneeling prisoner. This rather singular representation is the only known example of
this type, which raises a number of questions about its intended meaning and the origin and use
of this motif. The staff-and-papyrus has been read in a few different ways, but historical context
and iconographic precedent once again provide the most likely answer. The staff is almost
certainly a rnp(t)-sign, and the plant seems to be only papyrus with no lotus intertwined.134 As an
Upper Egyptian king stylizing himself as the re-unifier of Egypt, Mentuhotep’s apparent
slaughter of the botanical symbol of Lower Egypt makes perfect sense. Similar imagery has
occurred before, most notably on the Narmer Palette, where the victim in the smiting icon can be
interpreted as a personified papyrus marsh and thus as either Lower Egypt or a delta-dwelling
Lower Egyptian. The presence of the rnp(t)-sign seems to mark a specific occurrence, the year of
Mentuhotep’s reign in which the Two Lands were once again reunified. That this smiting scene
is meant specifically to commemorate the act of reunification is supported by the king’s Double
Crown and the sema-tawy motif present on the lower register of the scene.

The texts present in this smiting scene are lengthier than most of their Old Kingdom
predecessors, but their content remains largely the same. In front of the king’s face, where his
cartouche would appear in earlier iterations of the scene, he is instead labeled by the epithet Hr
dsi hst, “Horus who subdues the foreign lands.” In the caption text, Medjayu and Tjehenu
peoples are explicitly called out as those among those subdued, even though the smiting icon
itself contains no foreigners. The smiting king is also captioned as “Beloved of Hathor,” a
goddess who is only rarely present in scenes with smiting iconography. Her mention here most
likely stems from her role as Lady of Dendera and mother of Horus (with whom the king is
identified here), making her the most geographically relevant deity from whom the king can be

134 Bestock, Violence and Power, 165. Traditionally, papyrus and lotus plants are paired in Egyptian art, with the
papyrus being representative of Lower Egypt, and lotus being representative of Upper Egypt.
granted sanction, rather than any inherent association she might have with subjugation or slaughter.

Figure 26 Line drawing of a plant smiting scene from the chapel of Nebhepetre Mentuhotep at Dendera. Image: Swan Hall, *The Pharaoh Smites His Enemies: A Comparative Study*, Münchner Ägyptologische Studien Heft 44 (Berlin: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 1986), Fig. 25.

**Twelfth Dynasty Temples**

Fragmentary evidence for smiting scenes exists from at least three mortuary complexes from the Twelfth Dynasty: those of Amenemhat I and Senusret I at Lisht, and Senusret III at Dashur. From Amenemhat’s temple, an image of a Libyan captive with bound wrists is known,
in addition to an image of a victim (likely Libyan) with an arrow stuck in his head. From Senwosret I’s temple, there is evidence of at least three separate smiting scenes. A fragment of one of these scenes, now residing in the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto, shows the king clutching the hair of five captives and an arrow. This represents a revision of earlier iterations, both for the large number of captives and for the presence of the arrow in the king’s hand. From Senusret III’s complex, at least one smiting scene seems to have been present in the South Temple.

Amenemhat III Pectoral Pendant

In addition to the architectural contexts, smiting scenes occur in a few other contexts during the Middle Kingdom. One of the earliest surviving examples of smiting iconography on jewelry comes from the reign of Senwosret III, in the form of a large pectoral pendant (Fig. 27). The size, shape, and intended purpose of the item on which this scene occurs greatly influences its arrangement. Because of its small size, elements that are longer or larger in architectural contexts are abbreviated here, and the size ratios between elements in the scene are warped toward the end goal of leaving as little negative space as possible.


The smiting scene depicted on the pendant is a mirrored one, bounded on all sides by an architectural framework. The two smiting images of the king take their expected form, wielding maces and wearing cloth wigs adorned with uraei. Down the center of the scene, separating the mirrored halves, are the names, titles and epithets of the king, given here as nfr ṃḏ nb tawy ḫst nbt, “the Good God, Lord of the Two Lands and every foreign land.” The prisoners, labeled as mnt (a variant form of Mentiu, the commonly listed enemy from Old Kingdom smiting scenes), each hold two objects out toward the king as they await their fate: a tp-dagger and what appears to be a throw-stick often associated with foreigners. This combination can be interpreted in at least two ways, and this is perhaps what is intended. If read as abbreviated words, the throw-stick can stand either for “foreigner” or “Asiatic” and tp for something along the lines of “head’ or “first,” potentially indicating that these kneeling prisoners should be understood as Mentiu chiefs. An alternate (or perhaps, concurrent) interpretation is to take the images more literally: a throw-stick and a dagger, weapons in the hand of a defeated enemy. This depiction is rare in both earlier and later smiting iconography. It is uncommon—though not unheard of—for enemies to be shown with any means by which to attempt to circumvent their fate, particularly such effective weapons as these. Much of the ideological power that stems from the image of the victorious king relies on the king’s victory being assured and inevitable, even if it is ostensibly contested.

139 This reading would be in line with the prevalence of Mentiu victims in smiting iconography up until this point, and the fact that the Egyptians used a number of terms to refer to leaders of different cultural groups or geographic regions. Tp(j) is a rarer example, but contextually, the meaning is clear. See Wb V, 263 – 268; Faulkner, Dictionary of Middle Egyptian, 296–297 for the nuances of this term.

140 See the previously mentioned example of the cylinder seal of Pepi II, and the related discussion in Spalinger, Icons of Power, chapter 9.
Where Horus of Behedet would normally be present hovering above the king, wings spread, a divine vulture appears instead. Above each of her wings is the epithet \( nb(t) \ pt \), and this should likely be interpreted as a form of Nekhbet, who is sometimes paired with Horus in this type of scene. Life and stability are clutched in Nekhbet’s talons, being offered to the king as he smites. At his back, an anthropomorphized \textit{ankh} fans the king, in a sort of shorthand for the protection formulae that often hold this position in smiting scenes. In later, larger scenes, it is often the king’s anthropomorphized \textit{ka}-standard that stands at his back either in conjunction with or in place of other protective elements.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure27.png}
\caption{Pectoral pendant with the smiting iconography from the Twelfth Dynasty tomb of Mereret. Image: Bongioanni and Croce, \textit{The Treasures of Ancient Egypt: The Collection of the Egyptian Museum in Cairo} (Vercelli, Italy: VMB Publishers, 2003), 338–339.}
\end{figure}
Parade Axe of Queen Ahhotep

Much like was the case with the First Intermediate Period, evidence for smiting scenes and smiting iconography during the Second Intermediate Period is scarce. The decentralized state would have divided resources, and there were often multiple dynasties ruling different parts of the country simultaneously. This decentralization likely accounts for the lack of monumental smiting imagery, but even in other contexts few smiting scenes survive from this period.

Perhaps the best example of smiting imagery from the Second Intermediate Period is the ceremonial parade axe of Queen Ahhotep (Fig. 28).\textsuperscript{141} Dating to the very end of the period, right at the dawn of the Eighteenth Dynasty, this ceremonial axe reflects many of the elements of the earlier motif, but its structure and arrangement make this a unique example. The design is divided into three registers, with the top register affixed to the axe’s handle. The top register contains the prenomen and nomen cartouches of Ahmose, who was born into the Seventeenth Dynasty and founded the Eighteenth. The fact that this dynasty was warlike and was eventually able to expel the Hyksos to reunite Egypt may explain the resurgence of smiting imagery as well as the somewhat unusual occurrence of a queen being buried with a weapon, even a ceremonial one.

The middle register contains the smiting icon and features two distinct peculiarities. First, the crown the king wears is the \textit{khepresh}, the so-called Blue Crown. This is the earliest example of the Blue Crown in a smiting scene, but due to its iconographic ties to both war and royal ceremony, its use in this context becomes common in the New Kingdom and later.\textsuperscript{142} The

\textsuperscript{141} W. Stevenson Smith, \textit{Art and Architecture of Ancient Egypt} (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 126; Swan Hall, \textit{Pharaoh Smites His Enemies}, 16, Fig. 27. For the broader context of this artifact, see Taneash Sidpura, “Ahhotep: the warrior queen?,” \textit{Ancient Egypt: the history, people and culture of the Nile valley} 89 (2015): 16–21; Bongioanni and Croce, \textit{The Treasures of Ancient Egypt}, 369.

\textsuperscript{142} Swan Hall, \textit{Pharaoh Smites His Enemies}, 16.
physical context of the scene may provide some insight as to the reason the Blue Crown was chosen for this iteration, as opposed to the Red, White, Double, and nemes crowns that account for the majority of earlier examples. The parade axe is both literally a weapon of war and a ceremonial object intended for use in royal ritual, a reflection of both of the Blue Crown’s associations. Secondly, the king’s smiting posture is unusual. Instead of wielding the weapon above his head, he thrusts it out in front of him toward the chest of the kneeling prisoner. He grasps the hair of the prisoner with a straight arm, though in this case it is this arm that is the higher of the two. The most likely explanation for the modified pose is the restricted space within the register, as the figures take up the entire space. The uraeus of the king’s crown nearly touches the groundline of the register above it.\textsuperscript{143}

The lower register depicts a recumbent griffin, an animal we have already seen associated with trampling scenes, the iconographic pair to smiting scenes. Text above the griffin labels him as “Beloved of Amun,” suggesting that this should be taken as a metaphorical image of the king, particularly when taken in conjunction with his cartouches and another image that definitely depicts the king. The fact that the griffin is recumbent rather than actively engaged in trampling or some other form of violence may be explained by the materiality and physicality of the axe. Again, there is not enough space available within the register to properly depict a trampling scene in its normal form. However, sitting or standing atop something becomes iconographic shorthand for trampling, smiting, and subjugation, so perhaps the seated griffin is not so out of place. After all, were the axe ever to be used in a ceremony or to recreate the motion of ritual smiting, the bladed edge—the griffin edge—would sit immediately above the victim prior to the blow.

\textsuperscript{143} Smith (in Art and Architecture of Ancient Egypt) posits that this unusual pose is suggestive of Eastern artistic influence. These two explanations are not mutually exclusive.
Variable Contexts in the New Kingdom

Like earlier examples, non-monumental New Kingdom smiting imagery occurs in the landscape, in smaller-scale relief carving, and on jewelry and small portable items. The smiting imagery in these contexts is derived from many of the same earlier iterations of the motif as the monumental versions and their contemporaneous use elsewhere informs the metaphorical and ideological expression at play in triumph scenes, since they are part of the broader context of artistic usage.

In the landscape, New Kingdom smiting imagery primarily took the form of stelae, often set at boundaries or other important locations far from the capital of Thebes. Two rock-cut stelae from Aswan from the reign of Amenhotep III show smiting scenes featuring that king. In both, the king grasps the hair of two prisoners while also carrying a bow and staff and raising an axe-
mace to smite his victims. The scenes are bounded by *was*-scepters on both sides and a winged sun disk with *uraei* at the top, and the expected figural labels and captions are present. The first stela depicts the king’s back leg stepping on a prostrate prisoner’s head, once again connecting the concepts of smiting and trampling as parallel acts of domination. However, the most interesting iconographic element in this pair of scenes is the presence of multiple witnessing deities in the same scene. Other than Amun, these deities are relatively unusual in this context.

The first stela shows the smiting icon flanked by Ptah, Khnum, and Amun (Fig. 29). At the king’s back, Ptah oversees the scene from his usual kiosk, while Amun and Khnum stride toward the king. Amun offers the *hps* that is customary in this scene, while Khnum offers “all dominion and stability” to the smiting king. In the second stela, the scene is witnessed by Amun and Anuket. Both the deities passively observe, though Anuket’s arm is raised in a gesture of praise (Fig. 30). The presence of both Ptah and Khnum in a smiting scene may serve as a reference to the generative power of sanctioned violence, as these are both creator deities. Khnum also has a geographic connection to the area around Aswan and Elephantine where these stelae are located, so his support provides a secondary local sanction in addition to Amun’s state-level sanctioning of the king’s actions. Anuket, who is the daughter of Khnum and associated with the Nile cataracts and Upper Nubia, likely serves a similar purpose in the second scene.

---

144 The exact nature of the smiting weapon in these two scenes is unclear, but some form of axe-mace seems the most likely. The overall shape is nearly identical to the axe-maces present in New Kingdom composite monumental triumph scenes, though the detail of the macehead does not seem to be included here.

145 J. De Morgan, *Egypte. Catalogue des Monuments et Inscriptions de l'Egypte Antique I* (Vienna: Service des Antiquites, 1894), 4; Swan Hall, *Pharaoh Smites His Enemies*, 22, Fig.33.

146 De Morgan, *Egypte I*, 5; Swan Hall, *Pharaoh Smites His Enemies*, 22, Fig. 34.

147 Anuket was closely associated with the southern borderlands of Egypt and was part of the so-called “Elephantine Triad” with Khnum and Satet. Here, she is referred to one of her geographical epithets, *nb*(*t*) *sTT*, “Lady of Nubia.” For more on this epithet and Anuket more generally, see Pinch, *Egyptian Mythology*, 186–187, and Dominique Valbelle, *Satis et Anoukis*, Sonderschrift, Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Abteilung Kairo 8 (Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 1981).
**Figure 29** Line drawing of a rock-cut stela of Amenhotep III smiting with Amun, Khnum, and Ptah from Aswan. Image: Swan Hall, *The Pharaoh Smites His Enemies: A Comparative Study*, Münchenner Ägyptologische Studien Heft 44 (Berlin: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 1986), Fig. 33.

**Figure 30** Line drawing of a rock-cut stela of Amenhotep III smiting with Amun and Anuket from Aswan. Image: Swan Hall, *The Pharaoh Smites His Enemies: A Comparative Study*, Münchenner Ägyptologische Studien Heft 44 (Berlin: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 1986), Fig. 34.
A similar rock-cut stela from Aswan is also known from the reign of Ramesses II. The image is divided into a double smiting scene showing two separate images of the smiting icon facing each other (Fig. 31). The two images of the king are identical, wearing the Double Crown, grasping the hair of a kneeling prisoner in the same hand as a bow while raising a bladed mace in the other arm. Like the Amenhotep III stelae, this one also features both Amun and Khnum as the witnessing deities, both offering the king a hpš on either side of the double scene. The expected texts are present and organized as usual, though there are a few elements of note. First, the scene caption that describes the king’s action occurs in the same spot in both sides of the scene—next to the smiting arm of the king. This positioning will be familiar, as many earlier iterations of smiting scenes featured action labels under, above, or adjacent to the arm that performs the described action. Interestingly, the label here reads, “Trampling the chief of Nubia,” though the action depicted is clearly smiting, and no trampling is shown. This provides further and somewhat more explicit proof of the intrinsic parallel that the Egyptians understood to exist between these two actions. At least by the New Kingdom, the two concepts seem to be iconographically synonymous and semantically interchangeable.

148 De Morgan, Egypte I, 5; Swan Hall, Pharaoh Smites His Enemies, 29–30, Fig. 50.

149 The Egyptian phrasing here is ptpt wr nw tš-sty. The verb ptpt, meaning “to trample” or “to tread upon” is determined in this example by the striking arm (Gardiner D40) rather than the walking legs (Gardiner D54), further confirming the metaphorical use of the verb and the linguistic equation of trampling and smiting in defeat of foreign enemies. For more on ptpt and its usual determinatives, see Wb I, 563; Faulkner, Dictionary of Middle Egyptian, 96.
Stelae of Ramesses II from three more sites contain smiting scenes that also warrant brief mention here. From a stela at Nahr el-Kalb in Lebanon, the king smites in the presence of Ptah while wearing the White Crown. From Tell el-Reteba in the eastern Delta, one of a pair of smiting stelae survives. Here, Ramesses wears the Double Crown and smites an Asiatic prisoner before Atum. Porter and Moss claim that the lost second stela contained a parallel scene before Seth. From Wadi Sannur near Beni Sweif, two stelae depict Ramesses smiting. In the first,
the king wears the Blue Crown and smites a pair of prisoners with a ḫpš. In the second, he smites a single enemy with an axe-mace in the presence of Seth as a Horus-falcon hovers above him. The captions specifically reference desert tribes in the form of jwntjw and mntjw. Swan Hall notes that the apparent reconciliation of Horus and Seth in this scene can be interpreted as conferring upon the king the strength of both deities. Like earlier examples, the witnessing deities in these smiting scenes are closely tied to the geographical regions in which the stelae themselves were found.

In the New Kingdom, smaller-scale relief smiting scenes also appeared in temple complexes (with their monumental counterparts) and tombs. A few examples from the reign of Amenhotep III are of note, including fragmentary scenes on an architrave in the forecourt of Luxor Temple (Fig. 32) and Pylon III at Karnak (Fig. 33). The Luxor Temple fragment shows the king striding forward to smite a standing enemy who is contorted backward and bears ropes around his neck. The bound anthropomorphized Nubian toponym, “Wretched Kush,” is visible behind the king. The Pylon III fragment shows the legs of the king trampling on the head and back of a foreigner in the presence of at least two other kneeling, bound prisoners.

---


154 Discovered by Cyril Aldred, unpublished before Swan Hall, *Pharaoh Smites His Enemies*, 23, Fig. 35a.

Later, during the Amarna Period, the traditional canon of Egyptian art was revised, but the motif of smiting enemies was maintained, even if it was at smaller scale. Amarna Period smiting iconography tended to be presented as part of a larger composition, often boat scenes. In
these iterations of the motif, Akhenaten (or sometimes even Nefertiti) is shown in the kiosk of the royal barque in the traditional smiting pose.\textsuperscript{156} A kneeling enemy raises their hands in supplication as the king wields a bladed weapon overhead. An Aten disc tops the kiosk, its rays reaching down onto the king as he smites. In some instances, a royal daughter oversees the scene from inside the kiosk, usurping the traditional place of the witnessing deity.

Another example that reflects the diverse usage of smiting iconography during the New Kingdom comes from the tomb of Thutmose III. The tomb’s decoration contains a small painted vignette depicting a mythological smiting scene (Fig. 34).\textsuperscript{157} This scene has many of the exact same features we have come to recognize as iconography integral to smiting scenes, but it is unique among the scenes presented in this study. Since it is roughly contemporary with many of the composite triumph scenes of the Eighteenth Dynasty, it provides a good comparative example of how the motif had also been adapted for funerary use after the Old Kingdom. At the center of the scene, the god Reshef stands in smiting position holding a knife above his head and a staff in his other hand. The staff is held in the center of three kneeling, bound prisoners. The prisoners’ bodies are headless. Behind Reshef, three more prisoners, lying on their backs and bound together with their elbows behind them can be interpreted as either those who have been defeated and are awaiting slaughter, or those who are already dead. From his throne, Osiris oversees the scene.

Despite the familiar structure of the scene, its strictly funerary context necessitates the use of some iconographic variations. Most noticeably, a deity performs the smiting action rather

\textsuperscript{156} Some of the best-preserved examples of this subset of smiting iconography are MFA 63.260 and MMA 1985.328.15.

\textsuperscript{157} Paul Bucher, \textit{Les textes des tombes de Thoutmose III et d'Amenophis II}, MIFAO LX (Cairo: Impr. de l'IFAO, 1932), pl. V; Swan Hall, \textit{Pharaoh Smites His Enemies}, 47, Fig. 91. For more on Reshef, see W. K. Simpson, “Reshep in Egypt,” \textit{Orientalia} 29 (1960): 63–74.
than the king. Additionally, this deity is Osiris, whose purview is the Netherworld and who rarely appears in smiting scenes, that plays the role of the witnessing deity. Lastly, the headless prisoners are shown contradictorily as already dead (beheaded) and awaiting a killing blow. However, a combined understanding of both the smiting motif and the nature of Egyptian funerary art can account for these variations. Often in funerary art and literature, deities or supernatural creatures are called upon to act upon behalf of or in defense of the deceased.\footnote{This concept underlies many spells contained in the Book of the Dead and other Netherworld books and is even present as early as the Pyramid Texts with spells meant to ensure that deities or other entities called upon by the deceased would perform required actions on their behalf to facilitate their postmortem travels and transformations.} Given that in Thutmose III’s tomb, the king and the deceased would be one and the same, a deity performing the kingly act of smiting in his stead in the Netherworld is easily explained. Osiris’ presence can be similarly justified by his role as the god of the dead and his pride of place in the Duat.\footnote{For Osiris generally, and regarding his mythological importance related to death, rebirth, and the Netherworld, see Pinch, \textit{Egyptian Mythology}, 178–180; J. Gwyn Griffiths, \textit{The Origins of Osiris and His Cult}, Studies in the History of Religions 40 (Leiden: Brill, 1980).} Amun-Re and variants of Horus are the most common witnesses in smiting and triumph scenes because of their ties to the state and the office of kingship. In death, it is Osiris who holds these associations, and he therefore serves as the most effective witness. As for the headless prisoners, the most likely explanation can be found in the common practice of severing the heads of images of dangerous creatures in funerary art, lest they be empowered to cause harm to the deceased. As agents of \textit{isfet}, the intact prisoners could be a threat, and are rendered headless to disabuse them of this power. This also suggests that the lying prisoners on the right side of the scene, rendered intact, are dead, rather than simply defeated.
While evidence exists for smiting imagery on portable objects prior to the New Kingdom, extant evidence increases exponentially from the Eighteenth Dynasty onward and includes jewelry, ceremonial accoutrements, seals, amulets, and scarabs. The following instances of smiting imagery are meant to highlight some of the most important artifacts and provide a representative sample of smiting imagery that occurs in these contexts.

A variety of smiting imagery survives from the reign of Tutankhamun, including a gold foil fragment and a ceremonial shield. The smiting scene from the foil fragment (Fig. 35) retains many of the elements and the structure familiar from Old Kingdom examples. The largest, central section shows the king in the Blue Crown wielding a knife (ḥps?) to smite a kneeling enemy. As had become standard by this time, the king’s other hand grasps both the hair of the

---

160 From pit tomb no. 58 in Biban el-Moluk. Theodore M. Davis, *The Tombs of Harmhabi and Toutankhamanou*, Theodore M. Davis’ Excavations: Bibân el Molûk (London: Constable, 1912), 128, no. 4, Fig. 4; Daressy, *Gottinger Miscellen* 53, 35, 45, Fig. 4; Swan Hall, *Pharaoh Smites His Enemies*, 26, Fig. 41.
enemy and the staff of office. Protection formulae are present both in front of the king and at his back, and he looks toward his own cartouche as he smites. But, by far the most noteworthy element of this iteration comes in the form of the witnessing presences, who are not deities but royal family members, the Great Royal Wife Ankhesenamun, and the God’s Father Ay. The inclusion of these figures represents a lingering influence of Amarna-style art, in which the visibility of royal women increased overall, and royal art saw marked increases in the inclusion of royal family members.¹⁶¹

![Figure 35](image)

Figure 35 Line drawing of a gold foil fragment from the reign of Tutankhamun. Image: Swan Hall, *The Pharaoh Smites His Enemies: A Comparative Study*, Münchner Ägyptologische Studien Heft 44 (Berlin: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 1986), Fig. 41.

Tutankhamun’s ceremonial shield (Fig. 36) also presents an interesting combination of familiar smiting iconography.¹⁶² Wearing a horned Atef Crown, positioned in the very center of the shield, the king brandishes a ḫpꜣ and holds two lions by their tails in his other hand. Above the king, a winged sun disc provides protection for the scene. In front of the king’s face, a

---

¹⁶¹ Swan Hall, *Pharaoh Smites His Enemies*, 26. This is reminiscent of the presence of royal family members (including royal women) in boat-scene smiting scenes from the Amarna Period reign of Tutankhamun’s father, Akhenaten. See n. 156 for these.

caption text gives his names and titles and describes the scene. At the king’s back, Mut (or perhaps Nekhbet) in the form of a vulture spreads her wings in a protective gesture as she witnesses the smiting of the lions while perched atop three papyrus stalks. Under the king’s feet (and in fact, the groundline), runs a frieze of ḫṣṣt signs. Despite the abbreviated nature of this scene, it is rife with geographic symbolism. Most blatantly, the king literally stands atop foreign lands as he smites lions, a wild animal often iconographically identified with foreigners in hunting scenes and other artistic contexts. Additionally, with the protection and support of the goddess in the White Crown, he strides out of the papyrus stalks, onto the foreign lands and towards his prey. The resulting metaphorical narrative is unmistakable: as a divinely ordained representative of Upper Egypt, the king traverses the Delta and emerges into foreign territory, where he immediately begins to subdue the chaos that he finds there. While geographic symbolism is present from very early in the development of smiting scenes, it does increase in complexity over time. New Kingdom examples such as this one and those in monumental triumph scenes tend to contain multifaceted iconography that can be interpreted individually or in the context of a larger constructed metaphor.

---

Similarly, panels from a ceremonial chair of Thutmose IV show the king as a sphinx trampling on foreign enemies (Fig. 37). While there is no actual smiting present in this scene, the parallel relationship between smiting and trampling does make this example notable. Horus hovers above the trampling king, and the king’s cartouche is in front of him. Caption texts clarify the action of the scene: ptpt ḫst, “trampling the foreign lands.” This same caption, used in other scenes to caption the symbolically parallel action of smiting, here captions the literal action portrayed. Interestingly, where the active captions in smiting scenes often occur above or in line with the king’s smiting arm, here they sit above the back haunches of the king’s leonine form,

---

the place from which he would generate most of his trampling power. Additionally, the edge of
the scene is cut off, but it appears that the king’s forearm is placed on the shoulder or near the
head of a kneeling prisoner in a gesture similar to the grasping of hair in smiting scenes.

![Figure 37](image-url)

*Figure 37* Chair panel depicting Thutmose IV as a trampling sphinx. Image: “MMA 30.8.45a–c,” Metropolitan
Museum of Art, accessed June 4, 2022,
https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/544826?ft=30.8.45&offset=0&rpp=40&pos=1

By the New Kingdom, smiting and trampling had permeated royal art and iconography to
the point that it appeared in basically all royal contexts, including personal adornments and
amulets. A silver ring currently housed in the Brooklyn Museum is an exemplar of this category
(Fig. 38). Dating to the reign of Amenhotep II, this square bezeled silver ring depicts the king
in smiting pose wearing the Blue Crown. This is one of the earlier examples of the Blue Crown

---

165 Brooklyn Museum 37.726E. Swan Hall notes that it was this artifact that first inspired the research undertaken in
*Pharaoh Smites His Enemies*. Caroline Ransom Williams, *Gold and Silver Jewelry and Related Objects: Catalogue
of Egyptian Antiquities Numbers 1-160* (New York: New York Historical Society, 1924), pls. VIII 26 a-c, X 26 c-d;
Swan Hall, *Pharaoh Smites His Enemies*, 2-3, Fig. 1.
being used in the context of smiting iconography. The kneeling prisoner is shown in a dramatic lunge, with one hand reaching up to grasp either his own hair or the king’s arm. The prisoner’s other arm, reaching down toward his own outstretched knee, sports a curious omission—his hand is missing.\textsuperscript{166} It is possible that the hand was purposefully omitted by the artist due to spatial constraints or to show perspective, but an ideological explanation exists as well. When the Egyptians killed enemies in battle, they were often counted by taking their hands (or phalli) as a record.\textsuperscript{167} If the omission was intended as part of the ideological message, the fact that the prisoner’s hand is already missing before his final defeat both confirms that his defeat is so inevitable it has already been recorded and underscores that the king’s victory has been achieved.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{silver_ring.png}
\end{figure}

In addition to jewelry, royal stamp seals and scarabs had also become popular vehicles for smiting iconography by the New Kingdom. Such a large corpus of these survive that it is necessarily outside the scope of the present study to enumerate them here.\textsuperscript{168} However, both the

\textsuperscript{166} Swan Hall, \textit{Pharaoh Smites His Enemies}, 1–2.


\textsuperscript{168} The corpus is vast and ever-expanding with new finds. The following constitute representative examples: MMA 26.7.221, MMA 26.7.230, MMA 26.7.246, Emory Carlos Museum 2008.001.019, Walters Gallery 42.381, Israel Museum 76.31.4202, BM 41897, BM 47055, Berlin Museum 8175.

99
relative compositional consistency of the smiting motif on seals, as well as its relative frequency in surviving examples, speaks to the continued visual and ideological importance of this motif to royal ideology and in administrative contexts.

**Private Smiting Stelae**

The close connection between the Egyptian king and smiting iconography is by now well-established. For this reason, the motif was generally restricted to the royal domain or at least that of the extreme upper elite levels of society, even though it was common throughout Egyptian history. However, private tombs make use of this and other triumphal imagery as well, though it is normally paired with images of the king to whom the tomb owner was in service.\(^{169}\)

Another example of private use of the motif comes from a distinct genre of stelae whose use seems to have been restricted to the New Kingdom—essentially contemporaneous with the largest and most elaborate composite triumph scenes. This genre of stelae, of which we have at least nineteen surviving examples, were the subject of a comprehensive and controversial study by Alan Schulman in 1988.\(^{170}\)

---

\(^{169}\) See chapter 3, § Theban Tombs.

\(^{170}\) Schulman, *Ceremonial Execution and Public Rewards*. As a discrete set, private smiting stelae were either commissioned by or for private individuals, of whom the names and texts generally accompany the smiting iconography. In his study, Schulman suggested that these stelae were meant to commemorate the presence of officials at events where ritual smiting took place. They would either have been gifts from the king or would have been created as personal status symbols to show important royal activities with which they had been engaged (as was common in the decoration of officials’ tombs). However, Schulman’s ideas were met with some criticism by Egyptologists, and there is still controversy regarding his interpretation of this corpus, as his interpretation necessitates both that ritual smiting—in essence, public execution—took place with some regularity in the New Kingdom and that these displays were meant to be seen or attended by at least part of the Egyptian population. Schulman noted (as have Muhlestein (*Violence in the Service of Order*) and Janzen (“Iconography of Humiliation”)) that much of the criticism of this interpretation stems from a certain “Egyptological squeamishness” and a scholarly unwillingness to ascribe such public and brutal violence to the ancient Egyptians. Yet, the precedent for both physical and ideological violence does exist and continues to increase with more recent finds like Betsy Bryan’s 2011 discovery of the bound skeleton of a prisoner who appears to have been executed within the grounds of the Mut precinct at Karnak. Given this, I agree it is likely that ritual smiting and other types of ritual violence were performed in temples, though it is difficult to discern how common or rare these rituals may have been. Whether or not the reader accepts Schulman’s conclusions, the corpus of private smiting stelae represents an important parallel context for smiting iconography during the New Kingdom.
The corpus of private smiting stelae is relatively consistent in iconography and in the nature of included texts, though some examples are free-standing and others are rock-cut. On each, a smiting scene is presented. These are usually contained within a frame representing the doorway of a pylon gateway.171 Within the frame, the king stands in typical smiting posture and wields either a $hp\delta$ or an axe-mace, usually above the heads of two kneeling or cowering prisoners. In nearly all of the freestanding examples, Ptah is the deity witnessing the scene. Below each smiting scene, a second register depicts a private individual (or individuals)—the commissioner of the stela in each case, kneeling or standing with their arms up in a gesture of adoration toward the scene above. Often, either the upper register, lower register, or both contain texts. The texts that appear in the register of the smiting scene itself are of an expected sort: scene captions, names and titles of the king, etc., similar to those seen in other iterations of this motif. The texts contained in the lower registers tend to be both longer and more variable, but all share a general theme of the private individual acknowledging and honoring the might of the king.

Stela Hannover 1935.200.230 (Fig. 39) serves as a reasonable exemplar of the typical components of this corpus.172 This round-topped stela is composed of two registers, the upper containing a smiting scene and the lower containing four figures kneeling and raising their hands in adoration. In the smiting scene, the king wields a $hp\delta$ with his smiting arm and wears an elaborate combination headdress (potentially a variant of the Atef) that consists of ram’s horns, double ostrich feathers, and double uraei. With his other arm, the king holds a bow and the hair

---

171 Schulman, Ceremonial Execution and Public Rewards, 42–45. This pylon gateway framing is unique to this corpus and is the basis for Schulman’s assertion that each stela records a specific instance of smiting within a specific temple.

172 P. Munro, “Untersuchungen zur altägyptischen Bildmetrik,” Stadel-Jahrbuch N.F. 3 (1971): 35, Fig. 32; Schulman, Ceremonial Execution and Public Rewards, 13–15, Fig.
of a pair of prisoners—one Nubian and one Asiatic, based on the iconography. A cartouche in front of his face gives the king’s name (Menkheperre) and text behind his back gives him the epithet, “Horus, strong of arm.” Ptah, who witnesses the king’s actions from the right side of the screen, is in mumiform guise in his kiosk. Above his head, he is labeled as “Ptah, Lord of Ma’at.”

In the lower register, the stela owner, two women, and another man (almost certainly members of the owner’s family) kneel with hands raised in adoration toward the scene above. They all face right—toward Ptah. The smiting king above them does the same. The only text in the lower register of this example contains the names and titles of the depicted individuals and a note declaring that the stela was “made by the ḥry-wr-priest Iry.” In other examples, if longer text is included here, it generally serves the purpose of declaring the owner’s adoration for the king or clarifying why they erected (or were gifted) such a monumental object.

---

173 Schulman, Ceremonial Execution and Public Rewards, 13–14. Ptah, who is primarily a creator deity, does occasionally appear in smiting and triumphal contexts and is the most common deity within the present corpus of private smiting stelae. Schulman attributes this to the fact that many of these stelae derive from in and around Memphis.

174 Schulman, Ceremonial Execution and Public Rewards, 15. For the title ḥry-wr, see Wb. III, 139, 7.

175 Schulman, Ceremonial Execution and Public Rewards, 20, 23, 31–39
We have fewer examples of the rock-cut stelae in this style, but the most well-known and elaborate is the double rock-cut stela south of the Great Temple at Abu Simbel (Fig. 40).\textsuperscript{176} The frame of the stela is cut to resemble the entranceway of a temple, supported by three registers of vertical text. Visually, the two scenes are nearly identical in arrangement with only small variances in iconography and textual content. Like its free-standing counterparts, each of the two stelae consist of an upper register containing the smiting scene and a lower register containing individuals in the adoration pose, plus associated texts. The texts in the present example are

\footnote{P&M VIII, 118; Lepsius, \textit{Denkmäler} III, pl. 195b, c; Lepsius, \textit{Denkmäler} V, pl. 167; Kenneth Kitchen, \textit{Ramesside Inscriptions. Historical and Biographical, III} (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980), 104–106; Schulman, \textit{Ceremonial Execution and Public Rewards}, 34–37, Fig. 17.}
longer than the comparable texts in the free-standing stelae, but their use is analogous and their content provides largely the same sense.

On the right-hand stela, the king wears the Blue Crown and wields an axe-mace to smite the kneeling Asiatic prisoner whose hair he grasps. Amun, rendered at roughly the same scale as the king, witnesses the scene and offers a $hp\dot{s}$ to the king. In addition to the expected names and titles, a text above the king’s arm also labels him as “Horus, Lord of Power.” On the left-hand stela, the king wears a double-feathered crown and smites again with an axe-mace. Here, Horus witnesses the scene and offers the king a $hp\dot{s}$. Interestingly, the prisoner here is also Asiatic, despite the extreme southern location of the stela itself.

![Figure 40](image.png)

*Figure 40* Line drawing of a private rock-cut double smiting stela from Abu Simbel. Image: Schulman, *Ceremonial Execution and Public Rewards: Some Historical Scenes on New Kingdom Private Stelae*, Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis 75 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1988), Fig 17.

$^{177}$ *Nb sjmy*, an epithet often used for both the king and deities to reference physical might, martial prowess, divine action, and general effectiveness. See *Wb IV*, 245–247.
As a corpus, the New Kingdom officials’ stelae with smiting scenes provide evidence of parallel uses of this iconography at the height of its usage in triumph scenes. The structure and content of these stelae is similar to that of triumph scenes, though enacted on a much smaller scale. Perhaps the most striking thing that this corpus suggests is that by the New Kingdom, while smiting iconography was still intrinsically tied to kingship and the state, the functions it served were also relevant to and accessible by other, non-royal members of the state apparatus. These officials’ stelae were clearly meant to be seen, even if the exact nature of the prestige or commemoration they provide remains contentious.\(^{178}\) At the least, the private use of royal motifs would have provided prestige by connecting the private individual with the person of the king and placing them in proximity to the office of kingship.

One of the most striking consistencies throughout this corpus of smiting stelae is found primarily in the free-standing examples. This is the fact that almost invariably, the witnessing deity present in these scenes is Ptah, who does not regularly appear as a witnessing deity in smiting scenes in other contexts.\(^{179}\) Given the Memphite provenance of many of the stelae, Schulman’s explanation—that the scenes commemorate the presence of officials at rituals undertaken within a temple of Ptah and that the image of the god here is representative of his cult idol—is possible.\(^{180}\) However, this explanation is not mutually exclusive with the possibility that Ptah’s presence in this context is slightly more nuanced. In particular, two of Ptah’s epithets are favored within this corpus: Lord of Ma’at, and He Who Hears Prayers. Ptah does not have as

---

\(^{178}\) Similarly, the exact nature of the intended audience for these stelae is not always clear. They were intended to be seen—but in being seen by the owner, the public, the gods, or the king, these scenes and their intended effect would be different.

\(^{179}\) He is present in a few extant examples, most notably in the rock-cut stela of Amenhotep III from Aswan. Nonetheless, the comparative rarity of his inclusion in smiting scenes outside the present corpus makes the fact that he is by far the most common deity present in the private stelae significant.

\(^{180}\) Schulman, Ceremonial Execution and Public Rewards, 57, 59–60.
clear an association with the related geography or the auspices of the Egyptian state as most of
the deities who regularly appear as smiting witnesses, but it is his direct association with ma’at
that makes him an appropriate, even logical choice for this task, even more so if he is the primary
deity for the geographical region (Memphis) from which many of the scenes derive. In smiting,
the king both enacts ma’at and destroys isfet. Thus, in the context of the smiting motif, the hpš is
a tool of ma’at, so it is sensible that it is Ptah, Lord of Ma’at that offers the hpš to the king,
symbolically sanctioning the king’s actions as well as providing him the means by which to carry
them out.

Unique to this corpus of scenes is the relationship between the smiting motif and the
adoration scene. In some of the examples, the adoration scene is more complex than others, but it
is present every time. While officials often appear in battle and presentation scenes, they are not
regularly present in direct conjunction with smiting iconography after the Middle Kingdom or
within composite triumph scenes. The notable earlier examples include the occasional presence
of sandal-bearers within the smiting motif in Early Dynastic examples, possibly reprised with
Nebhepetre Mentuhotep’s Gebelein scene, though there is no clear link between these two
disparate sets. The particular presence of the officials here speaks to the specific function of
these stelae as private prestige or commemorative items, but it also suggests the Egyptians
viewed the act of the king smiting foreign enemies as both a ritual element of kingship and as
something to be celebrated.

Summary: Diachronic Development of Smiting Scenes

The earliest examples of smiting imagery in Egypt derive largely from Predynastic tombs
and portable objects, including slate palettes such as the Narmer Palette. After the transition to
the Early Dynastic period, these venues continued to be used for triumphal imagery, but small
tags and labels replaced palettes as the most common materials.\textsuperscript{181} It is noteworthy that essentially all the Predynastic evidence and all the Early Dynastic non-relief evidence for smiting iconography comes from two Upper Egyptian sites: Hierakonpolis and Abydos. It is hardly accidental that the earliest evidence comes from Hierakonpolis, the city at the center of royal and administrative power during the period leading up to the formation of the Egyptian state. Hierakonpolis (Egyptian: Nekhen) was also the center of the prehistoric hawk/falcon cult of Horus, and it was here that the close relationship between Horus and early Egyptian kings was solidified.\textsuperscript{182} While it is possible that the prevalence of smiting iconography from the Naqada Period, Predynastic, and Early Dynastic at Hierakonpolis and Abydos may be partially attributed to preservation bias, it is nonetheless significant that these two sites were the most important sites of royal power as early Egyptian king’s centralized their authority, and it was in these two sites that this motif thrived. This suggests that the ideology of the king smiting his enemies to secure the centralization of royal power—and the iconography that reiterated and embodied this ideology—actually predates the formalization of the concepts of \textit{ma’at} and \textit{isfet}.\textsuperscript{183}

During the First through Third Dynasties, smiting scenes also began to appear in landscape contexts as rock reliefs. The earliest known example is that of Djer from Wadi Amyera, perhaps created as an extension of the sphere of royal authority during this formative

\textsuperscript{181} While this does represent a shift in venue for this type of iconography, the broader picture remains somewhat obscure. Due to their material, ivory tags and labels preserve well in Egypt, and we may be missing artifacts of other types from this period on which smiting iconography was also used.

\textsuperscript{182} For the original excavation and artifacts from this site including those with smiting iconography and related to the Horus cult, see Quibell and Green, \textit{Hierakonpolis}, 2 vols. See also Adams, \textit{Ancient Nekhen: Garstang in the city of Hierakonpolis}, Egyptian Studies Association Publication 3 (New Malden: SIA Publishing, 1995).

\textsuperscript{183} This is subject to the caveat that it is extremely difficult to pinpoint exactly when these concepts first appeared, what their early development looked like, and when they were formally adopted into state ideology, since we do not have textual evidence from this early period. However, it is logical to assume that formalized concepts of \textit{ma’at} and \textit{isfet} cannot have been fully incorporated into a standardized state ideology until at least the period of state formation (during which the prevailing state ideologies were constructed).
period. Though they first appeared in the Early Dynastic, overwhelmingly, these rock relief smiting scenes are bounded chronologically to the Old Kingdom and geographically to the regions in and around the Sinai Peninsula. Given the content of these reliefs and their location on the border between Egypt and the outside world, it has been suggested that the primary purpose of these reliefs would have been to serve as protection for the periphery of the nascent Egyptian state as a practical deterrent display for enemies who might enter into Egyptian territory and as a form of apotropaic magic meant to symbolically turn them back. While there is no surviving evidence for rock relief triumph scenes after the Old Kingdom, the symbolic tie between triumphal imagery and the landscape persisted. In the Middle and New Kingdoms, boundary stelae contained much of the same imagery and verbiage as triumph and smiting scenes, and the smiting stelae of Amenhotep III and Ramesses II follow indirectly in this tradition.

From at least the late Predynastic, triumphal imagery was also present in mortuary contexts, including monumental examples in the royal mortuary complexes of the Old Kingdom. The Fifth Dynasty complex of Sahure at Absuir provides the earliest surviving evidence of triumphal motifs used in this context, and their role in the overall decorative program is significant, though confined to interior corridors and spaces. The most visible venue for smiting scenes in any period of Egyptian history was monumental display in temples as the focal point of composite triumph scenes during the New Kingdom. The monumental size and exterior

---


placement of these scenes was a new development of this period. Triumphal motifs in architectural placement and relief had been largely confined to smaller scenes on the interiors of temples up until this point, mortuary complexes like Sahure’s and the provincial temples of Nebhepetre Montuhotep. However, even during the New Kingdom, smiting iconography was also employed in more variable contexts similar to those that had seen images of the smiting king for thousands of years—portable and decorative objects, royal ceremonial items, furniture, and royal stelae and other monuments.

From the Old Kingdom onward, smiting imagery is known from a broader variety of portable objects than just the palettes and tags that survive from the Predynastic. Yet, the physical and cultural context for these items remained within the royal and elite spheres because the constituent iconography was closely tied to the office of kingship and royal legitimacy. To those who lived their daily lives in the sphere of the king, smiting imagery was a conspicuous display of royal power and a symbolic representation of the fact that the king had the support of the gods. In this context, decorative and architectural items were common, as were official and ritual items like royal jewelry and adornments like the pectoral of Amenemhat III. From at least the Second Intermediate Period, evidence survives of triumphal motifs on objects associated with warfare, such as the axe of Queen Ahhotep and the decorated chariots of New Kingdom kings like Tutankhamun and Thutmose IV. It is likely that the tradition of using ceremonial items of warfare and violence as a context for displaying smiting iconography was a relatively uninterrupted one, from the early maceheads of Scorpion and Narmer through to the New Kingdom and later, but Old Kingdom and Middle Kingdom evidence is lacking.

---

This trend continues into the Late and Greco-Roman Periods, where the composite triumphal motif of the New Kingdom is copied in temple decoration. Examples include the triumph scene of Taharqa at Karnak and the pylons of a number of Ptolemaic temples such as Edfu and Esna.
While most smiting scenes and smiting imagery were confined to royal spaces, there were a few exceptions where the motif occurs in elite spaces—namely, within the corpus of officials’ smiting stelae from the New Kingdom. Nonetheless, these examples were still tied to royal ideology and were likely either bequests of the king to the owner of the stela or objects commissioned by the owner in commemoration of an event in which he witnessed the king performing ritual actions in person. In more accessible, public or semi-public spaces, smiting scenes occurred as landscape reliefs during the Old Kingdom and as monumental triumph scenes in temple decorative programs during the New Kingdom.

The underlying ideology and fundamental iconography of smiting scenes was consistent, but the different contexts in which that imagery appeared throughout Egyptian history suggest variable audiences at whom the ideological message was aimed. The Predynastic and Early Dynastic examples consist of reliefs, decorative and ceremonial items, and ivory tags. For these periods, nearly all of the extant evidence for the portable items comes from Hierakonpolis and Abydos. Due to bias of preservation and the fact that these places served as the seats of power for the earliest Egyptian kings, these two sites are where most archaeological evidence for the first few dynasties originates.

Ceremonial items like palettes and cylinders were contained to the royal sphere, and even ivory tags that served as more practical administrative items, were tied to royal power and the

---

187 This is Schulman’s conclusion, the controversy about which is explained in n. 170. Even if the reader should take issue with this assertion, they will likely agree that these smiting stelae fall into a broader category of artistic representation used by officials to document, highlight, and commemorate their roles in royal undertakings or their relationship to the king, his confidences, and his royal actions.

188 While these areas would have been more accessible than highly restricted locations such as the interior of royal mortuary complexes, it is possible that smiting iconography in both the natural landscape and in temple complexes would still not have been seen by any large portion of the Egyptian population.
state apparatus. These early examples of the smiting motif developed hand-in-hand with the state itself, and the audience for this iconography would have been those in the direct cultural and physical vicinity of the king himself. This trend holds for portable items decorated with smiting iconography throughout Egyptian history—they are generally items worn or used by royalty or elite Egyptians or objects closely associated with the administrative functioning of the state.

Landscape relief examples known from both the Early Dynastic and Old Kingdom would have been more physically accessible to the broader population in a theoretical sense, but their placement was in the border landscape, carved into cliff sides, areas that would not likely have been traversed by the average Egyptian. Other examples of smiting scenes in relief prior to the New Kingdom in mortuary and royal temples decorative programs are invariably situated in the interiors of the temples in question, suggesting that the content of these scenes was meant for the gods or the king himself, particularly in the cases of mortuary temples. It was not until the incorporation of smiting iconography into composite monumental triumph scenes during the New Kingdom that large relief smiting scenes would have been visible by any significant portion of the Egyptian population.


190 Bestock, *Violence and Power*, 143–147, but this also fits in with the broader scholarly understanding of the function of royal funerary decoration.
Just as the contexts in which smiting scenes appeared changed over time, the individual details and overall complexity of the iconography shifted as well, though the two primary components—the smiting king and the cowering victim—remained invariable. The smiting king was the central figure of all smiting scenes, from the earliest to the last, from the simplest to the most complex. As such, the iconography relating to the king himself and to the office of Egyptian kingship that he represented is both extensive and integral to the triumphal significance of the motif. In a semiotic sense, the individual iconographic elements are the signs that relay ideological meaning, but this meaning is only made clear through the association of the iconography to the object to which it refers. Thus, the regalia that the king wears, the weapons and ritual items that he holds as he smites his enemies, and the formulaic and artistic trappings of royal representations employed in smiting motifs added cultural and religious nuance to the more explicit ideological meaning on display.

Some of the most ubiquitous elements of royal iconography present in instances of the smiting motif are the crowns and other regalia that the king wears. In smiting scenes and composite triumph motifs that incorporate smiting iconography, the king always wears a headdress or crown of some kind, as is consistent with other official representations of the king in Egyptian art. The exact crown the king wears while smiting varies from scene to scene, including the Red Crown, the White Crown, the Double Crown, the khepresh (Blue) Crown, the atef, the nemes headdress, as well as number of composite horned and/or double-feathered crowns.

---

191 These are the elements that together constitute the bound pair of the smiting icon, and without either, both the iconography of smiting and the ideological message it sends would be incomplete. The one potential exception is the so-called “plant smiting” scene of Nebhepetre Mentuhotep at Dendera, in which the king is shown smiting but there is no anthropomorphic victim present. However, the king is shown grasping the plant and the pole it is attached to in an identical fashion to how he grasps the hair of human victims and the staff of office in other scenes. As such, it does constitute the iconographic “victim.” So, while unique, this scene does not break the canon of the bound smiting pair outright.
The Red Crown of Lower Egypt and the White Crown of Upper Egypt, along with the Double Crown that was formed as a composite of the two, are some of the most common in smiting and triumphal motifs. From as early as the Predynastic, the Red Crown was already associated with the north, Lower Egypt, and the White Crown with the south, Upper Egypt, as evidenced by the iconography of those crowns on the Narmer Palette and the Scorpion Macehead. As such, the Double Crown was symbolic of the unification of Upper and Lower Egypt and was worn by the king in his capacity as nswt-bjtj, King of the Two Lands. In the rock relief smiting scenes of the Early Dynastic and Old Kingdom, the king was sometimes portrayed in parallel scenes, wearing the Red Crown in one and the White in the other (e.g., the reliefs of Den, Sekhemkhet, and Snefru). Beginning in the Fourth Dynasty, the composite Double Crown started to be regularly used in smiting scenes, though this was often in conjunction with the separate iconography of the White and Red Crowns. In particular, the White Crown alone occurs in multiple early iterations of the smiting motif, recalling the symbolic act of the unification of Egypt by the semi-mythical Upper Egyptian figure of Narmer and the fact that the earliest dynasties came from the south.

The khepresh, or Blue Crown, is associated in Egyptian art with the king in martial contexts, so it is often referred to as the “battle crown.” Understandably, this crown is most

---

192 This is also true of trampling scenes that favor many of the same iconographic trappings as smiting scenes.


commonly seen in battle scenes, but it was also used in royal statuary and in triumphal contexts. The earliest surviving example of this crown in a smiting context comes from late in the development of triumphal iconography, in the Second Intermediate Period. However, once it came into artistic use, the Blue Crown was used in smiting scenes, composite triumph scenes, and on portable and decorative items adorned with triumphal motifs. In particular, triumphal imagery that was paired with or related to large-scale battle reliefs often included images of the king wearing the khepresh while smiting, trampling, using his chariot to crush people, or otherwise overwhelming or destroying his enemies.

Composite crowns like the atef and other horned and feathered variants, are also reasonably common in smiting motifs. Depending on the exact nature of the embellishments on the crown, these served as indicators both of the power of the office of kingship (as well as the necessary functions of that office) and of the king’s connection to particular deities like Amun. The presence of composite crowns in smiting scenes is largely restricted to the New Kingdom, paralleling the development of the use of the Blue Crown in smiting and triumphal contexts.

Less often, the king wears the nemes or similar headdresses in smiting scenes and other triumphal contexts. While these crowns are less ostentatious than some of the others, they are still clear representations of the power of the office of kingship and adorned with the royal uraeus. This type of headdress is evident in smiting contexts from as early as the Third Dynasty with the rock relief of Djoser, and its use continued through the Middle and New


Kingdoms. However, in all periods, the nemes and other cloth headdresses do seem to have been rarer choices for the king’s garb in smiting scenes than crowns whose symbolism was rooted in mythologies of unification, subjugation, and divinely sanctioned martial victory.

Like his crowns, the weapons the king wields in smiting scenes are variable within a defined set and include maces, sticks or staffs, ḫpš-swords, and bows. Predynastic and Early Dynastic iterations of the smiting motif feature staff-like clubs and round maces that correspond to weaponry known from the archaeological evidence of these periods. For most Egyptian history, maces remained the smiting king’s most common weapon, though the exact type of mace depicted fluctuated based on the content of the individual scene and the time period in which it was created. A variant form of this iconography consists of the king wielding a mace in conjunction with his staff of office—the mace in one hand, the staff in the other. The earliest example of this iconographic combination come from the First Dynasty reign of Den and is evident both in the ivory tag and the rock relief smiting scenes of this king. Most subsequent smiting scenes, especially those in relief contexts, follow this format with the staff often behind the smiting victim, in their midst if there are multiple. By the New Kingdom, the staff and mace combination was ubiquitous in all smiting iconography, including composite triumph scenes.

Swords are also a common choice for the king’s weapon, particularly the ḫpš-sword, the distinctly Egyptian weapon with a blade curved like a scimitar. The ḫpš, whose name literally doubles as the Egyptian word for “strong arm,” was symbolically associated with the martial prowess of the king in the form of great strength. This iconography was generally restricted to

---

197 During the Predynastic, Early Dynastic, and Old Kingdom, round and pear-shaped maces were most common in smiting scenes, but New Kingdom examples favored axe-maces.

198 For the variable uses of ḫpš, see Wb III, 268–270; Faulkner, Dictionary of Middle Egyptian, 189–190. See also Craig Dochniak, “The ḫpš hieroglyph as a module in Egyptian art and the subsequent implications of its use,” Varia Aegyptiaca 5, vol. 2 (1989): 97–102; Carola Vogel, “Icon of propaganda and lethal weapon: further remarks on the
the New Kingdom and later. In smiting and triumph scenes with a witnessing deity, the *hpš* is
less common as the king’s smiting weapon, as this is instead the weapon the god offers to the
king, instructing “take for yourself the sword.”\(^{199}\) Thus, it is also a symbol of divine sanction and
strength gained from the support of the gods, as well as the proper fulfillment of the roles
associated with the office of kingship.

The presence of a bow as one of the king’s weapons in smiting scenes is less common but
does occur sometimes in conjunction with a mace or the combination of mace and staff. The bow
is never the primary weapon (i.e., the one being used to smite the enemies). Instead, the king
holds it in his off hand, sometimes alone, sometimes with a staff, and sometimes even with the
hair of his cowering enemies. This makes sense from a practical and logistical standpoint, in that
a ranged weapon is hardly the correct choice for dispatching an enemy within arm’s length. The
bow became a particularly common inclusion in smiting iconography during the New Kingdom,
paralleling the rise in the popularity of the composite bow as a martial weapon regularly used by
the king in battle.\(^ {200}\)

In smiting scenes, like nearly all official and ritual representations of the king, he is
accompanied by the additional iconographic trappings of his office in the form of formulaic

---

\(^{199}\) *Sz p n.k hpš*. Depending on context, *szp* (*Wb IV*, 530–534; Faulkner, *Dictionary of Middle Egyptian*, 271) can be
translated as either “take” or “accept/receive,” and either is possible here.

\(^{200}\) For an overview and examples of the composite bow and the introduction of new military technology in the New
Kingdom/Late Bronze Age, see Shaw, “Egyptians, Hyksos and Military Technology: Causes, Effects or Catalysts?”
59–71; Edward McEwan and Wallace McLeod, “The Ancient Egyptian Composite Bow: Some Notes on its
Structure and Performance,” *AJA* 89 (1985): 341; Wallace McLeod, *Self Bows and Other Archery Tackle from the
Tomb of Tutankhamun*, Tutankhamun’s Tomb Series 4 (Oxford: Griffith Institute, 1982).
images and inscriptions. These include protection formulae and symbols of kingship and the support of the gods. In Egyptian art, some form of protection formula is usually present whenever the king is depicted, and oftentimes multiple formulae are applied simultaneously to the same image of the king. Perhaps the most familiar of these (because it is the most common) is the “life, dominion, and stability” formula, indicated by the corresponding glyphs ʿnḥ, wḥḥ, ḏḏ. Similar short wishes for the health and prosperity of the king, such as “living forever” (ʿnḥ ḏṯ) or “given life forever” (ḏj ʿnḥ ḏṯ) also occur in smiting contexts, and all formulae of this type are abbreviated to just a few glyphs. Generally, the protection formulae are situated behind the king unless there are spatial constraints that prevent this placement. Longer versions may mention that “protection is at [his] back.” The use of these stylized protective inscriptions in smiting scenes is consistent throughout Egyptian history starting in the Old Kingdom, paralleling their use in other royal ritual scenes.

Similarly, stylized protection, as well as royal and religious iconography is present in smiting motifs in the form of protective deities, their symbols, and symbols of divine kingship. As they do in other ritual depictions of the king, Nekhbet and Wadjet in the guise of vultures commonly hover above or behind the figure of the king as he smites. Often, a Horus-falcon or a winged sun disk occupy this same space above the king, symbolically reiterating the divine sanction of the royal duty the king is undertaking when he smites an enemy. In Old Kingdom examples of the smiting motif, Horus was favored in this context. By the New Kingdom, the Two Ladies, Horus, and the winged sun disk are all common and regularly appear together in the

201 Another three-glyph variant, snḥ wḥḥ sḥḥ, “life, prosperity, and health” is also among the most common of these protection formulae.

202 There is homonymic wordplay here—sḥ, when written with Gardiner Aa17 or 18, is translated as “back” or “behind,” but the same word written with Gardiner V16 or 17 is translated as “protection.” See Wb IV, 10–14; Faulkner, Dictionary of Middle Egyptian, 206–207.
same scene. Additionally, in smiting scenes that are part of larger composite triumph scenes, the emblem of the royal *ka* also stands behind the king, either next to or in place of protection formulae. The royal *ka* was the incarnation of the office of kingship in the present king\textsuperscript{203} and thus served both protective and legitimating roles in this context. At the back of the king as he killed his enemies, the royal *ka* signified the right and the necessity of the king to perform those actions and confirmed that the king had divine protection and support while doing so. The royal *ka*, after all, did not manifest in those unfit or unworthy of the duties of kingship.\textsuperscript{204}

The second half of the smiting icon—the image of the king’s enemy, prisoner, or victim, depending on how one chooses to look at it—exhibits more typological variety over time, as it depicts people of different cultural or ethnic groups, and often multiple people at once. In the earliest smiting iconography, the enemy generally takes the form of a singular foreigner figure, with the notable exception of the Tomb 100 painting. Beginning with the smiting reliefs of the Old Kingdom, the smiting icon often contains multiple prisoners at once. It was not until the New Kingdom monumental reliefs that the image of the king smiting multitudes simultaneously became the norm.\textsuperscript{205}

Images of prisoners within the smiting icon share a number of similarities throughout most iterations of the motif. Firstly, they are depicted either kneeling or standing, turning away from the king, usually with at least one hand raised toward the king as if hoping in vain to ward off the killing blow or adoring the king. In instances where the prisoner does not raise a hand


\textsuperscript{204} Bell (“Luxor Temple and the Cult of the Royal Ka,” 257) says of the royal *ka*, “All genuine kings possess it; no pretenders do.”

\textsuperscript{205} The size of the “multitudes” in question increased over time, as well. Composite monumental triumph scenes of the Ramesside Period commonly included at least two to three rows of victims in the smiting icon, sometimes with close to a dozen in each row. See Figs. 63 and 64, the triumph scene on the first pylon at Medinet Habu as an example.
toward the king, it is most commonly because the prisoner’s arms are bound behind his back, and he is thus unable to do so. Commonly, the prisoners are depicted naked or nearly naked save for a small item or two that is culturally identifiable—penis sheaths, ostrich feather headdresses, etc. The inclusion of culturally specific clothing items is important, as this often accentuates the ethnically stereotyped features of the prisoners themselves. Semiotically, these identifying iconographic elements allowed the image of the prisoner to be directly correlated with people that existed in the real world, clarifying the ideological message of the scene through more specific sign-referent association.

Throughout Egyptian art, whenever foreigners are depicted in either positive or negative ways, they are represented using a repertoire of particular iconography associated with specific foreign groups that marks each group as non-Egyptian but still distinct from other non-Egyptian groups.206 For example, Asiatic men were given pointed beards and were shown with yellow skin in painted art. They were also depicted with and more regionally specific clothing, corresponding to particular tribes or regions. Images of Nubians were painted black and were generally given African features and gold jewelry. Libyans were often identifiable by their longer hair and ostrich feather adornment. These types of stereotypical features were used in the depiction of foreign prisoners in smiting iconography not only to place the smiting motif into an existing cultural and artistic paradigm for ease of interpretation, but to accentuate the foreignness of the prisoner when juxtaposed with the nearest figure—the king, the ideal Egyptian. In figural and caption texts, the prisoner is commonly names as the “chief of X” or the “ruler of X.” In these cases, the parallelism between the Egyptian ruler as champion of *ma’at* and the foreign ruler as agent of *isfet* is particularly stark.

---

In addition to the figures of the smiting king and the cowering enemy, one of the most consistent elements in smiting scenes is the presence of supporting and/or witnessing deities. The earliest iterations of supporting or witnessing deities come from the Predynastic in the form of divine standards. Predynastic and Old Kingdom smiting scenes depict standards of Wepwawet, the jackal-headed deity whose name means “opener of ways.” Wepwawet’s standard generally faces the same direction as the king and precedes his image in whichever direction he faces as he smites.

Supporting and witnessing deities were also integrated into smiting scenes as full anthropomorphic figures starting in the Early Dynastic (e.g., the rock relief smiting scenes of Den and Djoser). Interestingly, despite the prevalence of his standard, Wepwawet does not appear in either anthropomorphic or zoomorphic form in this context. Instead, diverse deities such as Ash, Thoth, Seshat, Amun, Amun-Re, Re-Harakhty, Ptah, Khnum, and Anuket serve as supporters and witnesses of the king’s smiting actions. Ash and Seshat are some of the earliest deities to take on this role, with Ash being attested in both rock relief smiting scenes and the mortuary temple reliefs of the Old Kingdom.\textsuperscript{207} Ash, as the god of the Western Delta and Libya, was a logical inclusion in smiting scenes that featured Libyan prisoners. In the reliefs in Sahure’s temple complex, he is part of the combination triumph scene that includes the smiting of the Libyan chief that is witnessed by his family. Here, Ash delivers the chief into the king’s hands. Seshat, too, is present in this scene, but her role in the proceedings is less direct—she sits close to the sitting icon, overlooking the king as he defeats his enemy, recording for posterity the account of his deeds, as well as the number and names of the dead.


Rhetorical texts like the lengthy speeches of the witnessing deity have diachronic development all their own, but the figural and caption texts that accompany the actions and the actors of the smiting motif became an integral part of that motif over time. Within the context of smiting and triumph scenes, most texts that are present can be thought of as both textual elements and iconographic ones, especially since they are used in a consistent manner throughout the smiting corpus. Because the king is the central figure of the smiting motif, the captions for the king’s figure are the most consistent and usually the most prominent. The earliest examples label the king with his name within a serekh, then in the Old Kingdom with one or two of his cartouches. As the smiting motif developed, the figure captions often included a title or epithet along with the name of the king. Since space around the king is generally limited in smiting motifs, these usually only contain one or two titles or epithets. However, the Egyptians chose the
titles and/or epithets wisely for the context so that they constituted an abbreviated encomium. It is for this reason that the king’s figural captions focus on qualities of the king related to his strength, martial prowess, dominion, and favor by the gods. Here, the king is, amongst other descriptions: \textit{nb t\texttwonewline}ny}, \textit{nb hp\texttwonewline}š}, \textit{nfr nfr}, \textit{hrw}, beloved of Hathor, and beloved of Amun.

The other primary figures in the smiting motif—deities and prisoners—were often labeled as well. Deities’ figural labels were similar to king’s in that they tended to include both the name and an epithet of the deity in question. In this context, divine epithets with geographical connotations or connections, or those with ties to the office of kingship or the power of the state were favored. Almost as soon as witnessing deities were added to the smiting motif, they were given figural labels providing necessary ideological and mythological context for their presence in the scenes. Similarly, the labeling of the prisoner figures would have provided contextual and cultural cues regarding the nature of the king’s enemies. In general, the prisoners are labeled with less consistency than either the king or the gods, but an indication of their cultural, ethnic, or geographic origin is usually present. In smiting scenes with only one enemy, the text often identifies the prisoner as the chief or ruler of a specific place or group of people, with Nine Bows names being especially prominent.

The smiting scenes themselves are also commonly captioned with a description of the action or general sense of the scene. While the structure of these texts is consistent, they also display literary qualities that suggest iconic functionality without complete standardization of the internal content. As such, the form and content of these captions did not change much over the course of their usage from the Predynastic all the way through to the New Kingdom. They are

similar to scene captions known from reliefs containing other types of content in that they are formatted like headings, describing the action-in-progress at the exact moment the scene captures.

The purpose of the texts is to effectively label the complete image, a goal that is best achieved with repetitive, formulaic sentence structures. Thus, their format is consistent: [infinitive verb] +[object] (+ [agent]), so that most read something like “smiting the Mentiu of all foreign lands,” or “subduing the foreign lands.” Captions that label the action of the entire scene often begin with the narrative infinitive, followed by the direct object. An actor, when included, is usually attached to the verb indirectly rather than as a grammatical subject, either in the form of a possessed infinitive (i.e., “the king’s slaying”) or a prepositional phrase indicating means or instrument (i.e., “slaying by the king”). In the New Kingdom, particularly with the advent of monumental composite triumph scenes, the caption texts became longer and included more staging and contextual information (i.e. where the smiting occurred, further description of the enemies), but their basic grammatical format remained the same. For example, the scene label on the east wing of the Seti I triumph scene at Karnak begins $kr\ wr\ jwntjw\ mntjw$ (“Slaying the chiefs of the Bedouin”). On the west wing, the result of the king’s action is apparent in the figural label describing those who were defeated, being an “assemblage of foreign lands which his majesty slew.”

---

210 This syntax is the most common for labels describing the action within smiting scenes, especially where there is not much text present. However, larger more complex scenes sometimes included multiple labels, not all of which would follow this format.

211 These captions come from the following scenes, respectively: the rock relief smiting scene of Niuserre and the rock relief smiting scene of Snefru.

212 OIP 107, 50.

213 OIP 107, 61.
CHAPTER 3: FOREIGN SUBJUGATION

The motif of the bound prisoner takes many forms in Egyptian art and is attested in a variety of mediums. Like the smiting scene, the bound prisoner motif had its beginnings in the Predynastic Period, long before the formation of a unified Egyptian state. Even in early periods, this motif was used for apotropaic purposes and often incorporated in contexts with a motive element.1 Bound prisoners, prostrate, kneeling, or standing, appear in architectural elements and furniture, as accompaniments to smiting and trampling imagery, in battle and presentation scenes, and as amuletic forms.2 The Nine Bows were the prototypical enemies of Egypt and thus also the prototypical prisoner. As such, many bound prisoner motifs feature the Nine Bows or some subset of the related iconography. When depicted metaphorically as bows, they are trampled underfoot, but when depicted literally as foreign people, they are invariably shown as bound prisoners, trampled or otherwise.3 When depicted in relief scenes, bound prisoners are

---

1 The apotropaic uses of the bound prisoner motif, along with actions used in combination with this motif to produce magical effects (trampling, binding, breaking, hitting, crushing) are treated thoroughly in Ritner, Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice, 113–147.

2 The bound prisoner motif was present in Egyptian art and representation throughout all of Egyptian history and is one of the most common ways in which the Egyptians displayed the ideological themes of the foreigner topos, the triumph of ma at over isfet, and the universal dominion of the king. Given both the artistic prevalence and the ideological importance of this motif, it has been studied from a variety of perspectives. As mentioned in the preceding note, for apotropaic and magical uses of the motif, see Ritner, Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice. For an overview of the constituent iconography, scope, and context of the motif during the New Kingdom and in relation to large-scale battle relief, see Janzen, “The Iconography of Humiliation.” For the binding of foreigners as related to battle and physical violence, see Uroš Matič, Body and frames of war in New Kingdom Egypt: violent treatment of enemies and prisoners, Philippika 134 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2019); Uroš Matič, “Enemies hanged upside (head) down,” in Egypt 2015: Perspectives of Research: Proceedings of the Seventh European Conference of Egyptologists, 2nd-7th June 2015, Zagreb, Croatia, eds. Mladen Tomorad and Joanna Popielska-Grzybowska (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2017), 319–327; “Traditionally unharmed? Women and children in New Kingdom battle scenes,” in Tradition and transformation in ancient Egypt: proceedings of the Fifth International Congress for Young Egyptologists, 15-19 September, 2015, Vienna, eds. Andrea Kahlbacher and Elisa Priglinger (Vienna: Austrian Academy of Sciences, 2018), 245–260. See also Bestock, Violence and Power for prisoner binding as a form of physical and ideological violence prior to the New Kingdom. For treatment of the famous bound prisoner statues from Old Kingdom mortuary complexes, see Prakash, “Old Kingdom Prisoner Statues.”

3 These depictions occur in many of the same contexts as other prisoner imagery, including statue bases, sandals, floor tiles, furniture supports, and within topographical lists. See especially Uphill, “The Nine Bows,” 393–420; Valbelle, Les Neufs Arcs.
often accompanied, led, or presented by deities. This phenomenon is present as early as the Fifth Dynasty but becomes ubiquitous in triumphal relief by the New Kingdom. These deities, usually shown holding the ropes that bind the prisoners together, are either state deities closely associated with kingship or deities with distinct geographical connotations relevant to the scene in question.

Prisoner imagery is incorporated into New Kingdom triumph scenes in two primary ways: as the bound figural elements in topographical lists and as the victims (occasionally bound) in smiting icons. In topographical lists, placenames are anthropomorphized by the addition of the upper body of a foreigner figure, including the arms bound behind the back. While the stereotyped features of the figureheads vary, the positioning of the bound arms, and the presence of a rope binding the prisoners together (often by their necks) is consistent throughout every New Kingdom topographical list. As part of the smiting icon, prisoners are commonly unbound, but they do often exhibit similar kneeling postures and stereotyped features to their bound counterparts.

At the risk of overgeneralizing, the ancient Egyptians loved lists. Listing, organizing, and recording was a tangible way of imposing order onto a disordered world, and compiling and naming things constituted much of the Egyptian theory of knowledge. Therefore, list-making was an essential part of Egyptian state bureaucracy and religion. Lists kept track of inventories, daily occurrences, court records, names and reigns of kings, plants, animals, temple offerings,

---

4 Fifth Dynasty reliefs featuring deities leading bound foreign prisoners are known from the mortuary complexes of Sahure at Abusir, Unas at Saqqara, and Pepi II at Saqqara.

5 For the Egyptians, compilations of lists of the names of things served as historical record (king-lists), administrative records (day-books), religious canon (lists of deities, epithets, and local forms), and scholarship and literature (onomastica). Some of the earliest surviving documents from Egypt include annalistic lists like king-lists, and day-books recording events and important information. See especially Redford, Pharaonic King-Lists, Annals and Day-Books.
historical annals, rituals, spells, remedies, and pretty much anything else a literate Egyptian could think to record. In monumental relief contexts, the most well-known, numerous, and lengthy types of lists take two forms: king-lists and offering-lists. In many ways, topographical lists should be considered part of the same tradition, categorizing the reach of the king’s dominion and the physical state of the ordered world.

While topographical lists do bear some similarities to the earlier geographical list tradition, they are discussed here as something of a fusion of this list-making tradition and the iconography of bound foreigners and the physical domination and dominion of the Egyptian king and gods. Early in Egyptian history, when the bound prisoner motif and the tradition of geographical lists are decidedly separate, they still appear in similar and overlapping contexts, a number of which are presented in this chapter. This does, however, beg the question: why were these two traditions combined and consistently included in New Kingdom triumph scenes? Both list-making and Egyptian domination of foreigners were rooted in the concept of $ma'at$ and when combined they displayed multiple facets of that concept closely tied to triumphal ideology simultaneously. Additionally, the inclusion of a list of subjugated peoples/places to accompany images of the smiting king grounded that standardized, semi-mythical ritual action in the real world, whether or not the audience was familiar with the included locations or if the locations were actually under Egyptian influence.

---

6 Geographical lists or geographical processions are a type of relief scene known from various periods in both tomb and temple decoration, but they were particularly common in Old Kingdom tomb decoration. Geographical processions usually depicted anthropomorphized locations (estates, rivers, regions, etc.) bringing goods or tribute to the king. See especially Yvonne Harpur, *Decoration in Egyptian tombs of the Old Kingdom: Studies in Orientation and Scene Content*, Studies in Egyptology (New York: Routledge, 1987). See also MMA 22.1.31, b, a relief from the reign of Khufu depicting a procession of cattle from different geographic locations; MMA 58.44.2a, a relief from the reign of Snefru from the tomb of Akhthiotep depicting a procession of personified estates; MFA 34.1468A, B, C, D, E, F, 63.489, 58.321, a relief of a procession of estates from the reign of Khufu from the tomb of Ankhaf.
The earliest iteration of the bound prisoner motif known from Egypt comes from a Predynastic (Naqada II) grave at Gebelein. A linen fragment containing a line-drawn boat scene with at least four boats depicts a prisoner in one of the boats (Fig. 41). What remains of the image of the boat in question is incomplete, but enough is preserved for us to understand the nature of the prisoner’s predicament. The stern of the boat contains at least five figures with oars, and the presence of oars at the front suggests there would have been additional figures at the bow. The prisoner is at the center of the boat between the sets of oarsmen, but he is separated from them by rectangular spaces that may represent cabin walls. The prisoner’s figure takes up nearly all the space between the walls, and he is shown kneeling with his hands bound behind his back and attached either to a pole or the wall behind him.

Despite the early date of this example and its somewhat crude rendering, the identification of the central figure as a bound prisoner is reasonably certain. The positioning of the body is identical to later prisoner images, and the clear physical separation and binding sets the prisoner apart from all the other figures on the boat. This suggests that the motif of the bound prisoner was already recognizable to audiences in the Naqada II period. Its placement in a burial context may presage similar imagery that would be used in royal mortuary contexts in the Old Kingdom.

---


8 This is, however, based on comparison with later iconography, as the exact nature of the fragmentary scene (possibly an early depiction of a royal ritual) remains speculative. Bestock (Violence and Power, 27) hedges on the sure identification of the figure as a prisoner but does note that if this scene does indeed depict captivity, it may be ceremonial in nature and relate to the royal rituals presented here.
**Figure 41** Fragments of a Predynastic textile from Gebelein depicting a possible prisoner on a boat. Image: “S. 17138,” Museo Egizio di Torino, accessed June 4, 2022, https://collezioni.museoegizio.it/en-GB/material/S_17138.

**Battlefield Palette**

The obverse side of the Battlefield Palette, a Predynastic slate palette similar to the more well-known Narmer Palette, contains violent imagery of varying types, including captivity (Fig. 42). Two major fragments of the palette survive; one in the British Museum and one in the Ashmolean Museum. The larger fragment shows a battle scene awash with carnage—dying soldiers with contorted limbs, carrion birds, a lion trampling and eviscerating an unfortunate victim. The lion is almost undoubtedly a metaphorical representation of a king or kingship more generally, a form that the king will take in many later trampling scenes. Above the action of the battle, captives are led from both directions toward the central grinding space of the palette.

---


10 Most of the upper-right of the scene is now lost, but the bound arms of a prisoner can be made out at the top of the largest fragment, facing towards the center. Behind him, a figure clothed in some type of ceremonial robes either oversees the scene or guides the prisoner.
Four of the nine enemy/prisoner figures\textsuperscript{11} on the Battlefield Palette are bound, all with their arms behind their backs, secured at the elbow. One is sprawled amongst the carnage of the battle scene, with his eyes being picked out by birds. The other three appear to be prisoners of war, taken as booty during the battle. Only the lower body of the prisoner on the far right remains, enough to show his bindings and orientation but not much else. The two bound prisoners on the smaller fragment are of the most interest for the development of this motif. The bindings of both of these prisoners are attached to standards—one topped with a falcon (Horus) and the other with an ibis (Thoth). Standards like these are representations of divine presence and divine sanction in Egyptian art, and commonly appear in smiting scenes or other instances of sanctioned violence or royal ceremony.\textsuperscript{12} This is one of the earliest examples of prisoners bound to divine imagery, and it sets the precedent for deities holding and presenting (either literally or figuratively) rows of bound captives in conjunction with violent and triumphal imagery.

\textsuperscript{11} The ceremonial-robed figure is excluded here since it is unlikely that he represents a prisoner.

\textsuperscript{12} Perhaps the most apropos are the standards of Wepwawet regularly included in Early Dynastic and Old Kingdom smiting scenes.

Gebel Sheikh Suleiman Relief

A well-known rock relief from Gebel Sheikh Suleiman provides another early iteration of bound prisoner iconography (Fig. 43). There is some dispute as to whether this relief should be dated to the Predynastic or the Early Dynastic, but regardless of where it falls, it is among the


14 The relief was originally dated to the reign of Djer (Arkell, “Varia Sudanica,” 28–30) to ensuing controversy, but Murnane (“Appendix C: The Gebel Sheikh Suleiman Monument: Epigraphic Remarks,” 282–285) determined that the name of Djer is not preserved in the serekh, and it is in fact anonymous, suggesting a date immediately preceding the First Dynasty. More recently, however, Somaglino and Tallet (“Gebel Sheikh Suleiman: a First Dynasty relief after all,” 122–134) have again ascribed this relief to the First Dynasty reign of Djer.
earliest handful of examples of depicting a bound prisoner. Despite the difference of venue, it contains some stylistic similarities with the Battlefield Palette, with the right-hand half of the scene depicting contorted enemies in positions reminiscent of that artifact.

The scene seems to be divided into three separate but closely related sections. On the far left, a falcon-topped serekh without a name stands behind a prisoner whose arms are bound behind his back. Some scholars claim the presence of either one or two arms attached to the serekh, a smiting arm and one grasping the hair of the prisoner. Whether or not this is the case, the prisoner is visually connected to the serekh, and the interpretation that the prisoner’s captivity should be attributed to the king (through the visual vehicle of the serekh) is clear. Though his arms are restrained, the prisoner holds something in his hands that is most likely a bow. Even from this early period, bows were a weapon associated with foreignness and rebellious action contrary to ma’at. Here, it is possible that we see the iconographic beginnings of the later concepts of “subduing the Bows,” and the king as “lord of the (Nine) Bows.” However, due to the overlapping epigraphy, the complex development of early royal iconography, and the as yet uncertain dating of the scene, this assertion is speculative at best.

It is possible that the center portion of the scene is meant to be read in conjunction with the serekh and prisoner, but the somewhat cryptic nature of this section makes this uncertain. What we may see here is the earliest relief example of a geographical/topographical list in conjunction with triumphal imagery. To the right of the “topographical list,” the aftermath of a battle is depicted. Of five enemy figures, four are shown dead or dying, lying with twisted torsos and limbs. The fifth is kneeling and bound, his arms pulled behind his back at the elbows and his

---

15 Somaglino and Tallet, “Gebel Sheikh Suleiman: a First Dynasty relief after all…,” Fig. 5.

16 Bestock, Violence and Power, 63.
neck shackled to the boat that sits atop his fallen comrades. A symbol above the neck-shackle is of unknown meaning, but its most likely function would be as a label for the bound prisoner.\textsuperscript{17} Interestingly, the kneeling prisoner also has an arrow protruding from his chest, an element that seems to be unique to this scene, simultaneously conveying both his defeat in battle and his resulting subjugation.

The evidence from this scene must also be reprised when considering specifically the development of topographical lists, as it is likely the earliest example of this motif in which the geographic locations are presented as a row of names.\textsuperscript{18} The central portion of the scene contains three pairs of glyphs, with each pair consisting of an emblematic glyph and a geographical glyph. On the left, a stylized bow sits atop a pool (Gardiner N39). In the middle, a town glyph (\textit{njwt}, Gardiner O49) is surmounted by a bird of indeterminate species.\textsuperscript{19} On the right, another \textit{njwt} is surmounted by a schematic \textit{nwb}-sign (Gardiner S12). Given the early chronology of this relief and the fact that the hieroglyphic script was in its earliest stages of establishment and development at this time, these sets of glyphs can be interpreted in multiple ways, though all readings suggest with relative certainty their meaning as a list of geographical locations. If each placename is understood as an ideogram followed by a determinative clarifying the type of

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item For example, there are parallels for this in the Narmer Palette and Narmer’s ivory tag, and it is not unusual for victims like this to be labeled in later examples. However, based on Murnane’s revised epigraphic drawing, the symbol in question rests directly on top of the shackle attached to the boat, so it also may be part of the boat or part of the mechanism securing the prisoner.

\item While at least two foreigner figures on the Narmer Palette are labeled and arranged next to each other, the arrangement of the names and figures into a “row” seems to be incidental based on the available space and the sprawling motions of the figures, rather than specifically arranged into a clear “list.”

\item If the bird is a falcon, it is possible the glyph is meant to be read (as on the Libyan Palette) as a royal falcon dominating the town. However, the lack of certainty regarding the type of bird and the fact that this pair of glyphs does seem to be at the center of a schematic list where names are presented suggests that the bird should be identified with the town.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
location that ideogram references, nomenclature such as “Bow(-people) Oasis,” “Bird Town” and “Gold Town” emerge. While non-specific, this is well in line with the geographical naming conventions of the Predynastic and Early Dynastic periods. In fact, given the contemporary prominence and political importance of the town of Naqada (Egyptian: *nwbt*, Greek: Ombos), it is possible that it is the town of *Nwb(t)* referenced here.

Contextually, these geographical locations must relate to the subjugation and military defeat of foreigners pictured on either side, making them likely either places the king has subjugated or places from which his enemies originate. This distinction, however, may be an academic one, as later triumphal reliefs draw an iconographic equivalence between foreign person and foreign place, such that a foreign person is understood as a *pars pro toto* representative of his homeland and a geographic region is symbolically synonymous with the totality of its population. To subjugate one is to subjugate the other.

![Figure 43](image)

*Figure 43* Line drawing the Gebel Sheikh Suleiman relief, after Murnane. Image: Somaglino and Tallet, “Gebel Sheikh Suleiman: a First Dynasty Relief After All…,” *Archéo-Nil* 25 (2015): Fig. 5.

---

20 Or perhaps, “Lake.” Additionally, Murnane’s revised epigraphic drawing of this scene does not clearly render the bow present in Arkell’s earlier version, so it is possible that this lake is presented without a specific designation, or it is actually the strange, large “kite” above the pool that is meant to serve as its label.

21 This is the concept that underlies topographical lists as an iconographic genre, the fusion of subjugated foreign person and place into one composite ideogram.
Sahure Mortuary Complex at Abusir

Sahure’s Fifth Dynasty mortuary complex, already discussed for its smiting scenes, also contains instances of bound prisoner imagery. In fact, it is here that the motif of deities leading lines of bound prisoners by ropes is first articulated with iconography almost identical to that present in later triumph scenes (Fig. 44). In a scene from the causeway, a few registers are preserved that depict rows of standing bound prisoners tethered to ropes held by deities who also hold ankh, was-scepters, and blades. In the four partially preserved registers, the top and third registers contain rows of deities, while the second and lowest registers contain the rows of prisoners that the deities hold. These registers are accompanied by a text, a speech of the gods to the king, informing him that they are bringing prisoners to him from a variety of specified lands.

The prisoners are rendered at a smaller scale than the deities, and their bindings are varied. Some have their arms secured behind their back at the elbows in the most common posture, but others’ arms are bound in front, or painfully above their head. The prisoners are not labeled, but stereotypical features are mixed and matched between figures to indicate diversity. The features on the surviving figures primarily indicate prisoners of overarchingly Asiatic and Libyan types. The deities are rendered at a larger scale and are provided with figural

22 Borchardt, Das Grabdenkmal des Königs S’ahu-Re (Band 2): Die Wandbilder: Abbildungsblatter, pl. 5; Borchardt, Das Grabdenkmal des Königs S’ahu-Re (Band 2): Die Wandbilder: Text, 19–21; Bestock, Violence and Power, 96–98, Fig. 4.6.


24 These methods of binding, their iconography, purpose, and effects on prisoners are treated thoroughly in Janzen, “Iconography of Humiliation”.

25 See n. 32. For more on this phenomenon, see Prakash, “Old Kingdom Prisoner Statues.”
labels. Unfortunately, the only two labels that survive are those of Seth, nwbty, “the Ombite,” and Sopdu, nb hzswt, “Lord of Foreign Lands.” Both Seth and Sopdu are deities associated with foreigner, foreignness, and the chaos of borderlands. Sopdu was most clearly connected to the eastern borders near the Sinai, while Seth was connected to the desert (the “Red Land”) more generally. Interestingly, instead of being listed here by name, both deities are identified by a geographical epithet. It seems that even by the Old Kingdom, the relationship between geography and subjugation as an expression of the king’s victory has already been cemented.

---

26 Early in Egyptian history, Seth was associated with Ombos (Naqada). He was believed to originate from and rule over Ombos, and in this role he was also closely associated with the nearby eastern desert. For the name of the town and the epithet, see Wb II, 242; Faulkner, Dictionary of Middle Egyptian, 129.

27 Like Seth, Sopdu was also associated with the eastern desert, as well as Sinai and lands beyond. See especially Inke Schumacher, Derr Gott Sopdu: der Herr der Fremdländer, Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis 79 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1988).
Pepi II Mortuary Complex at Saqqara

Pepi II’s mortuary complex also contains scenes with bound prisoners. The temple complex’s causeway features at least four trampling scenes flanking the entranceways, separated by prisoner and presentation motifs. In the presentation of foreign prisoners scene, registers of

---

deities lead mixed prisoners (Libyan, Asiatic, and Southern/Nubian are all present) (Fig. 45). There is evidence of the deities holding the ropes tethered to the prisoners, but the exact nature and identity of the deities do not survive—other than Seshat, whose headdress is visible.

Figure 45 Line drawing of a relief of gods leading bound prisoners from the mortuary complex of Pepi II. Image: Bestock, Violence and Power in Ancient Egypt: Image and Ideology before the New Kingdom (New York: Routledge, 2018), Fig. 4.26.

Bound Prisoner Statues

In addition to relief scenes, Old Kingdom mortuary complexes also contained three-dimensional statues of bound prisoners. At least six royal mortuary complexes of the Fifth and Sixth Dynasties had statues featuring kneeling, bound prisoners: those of Niuserre, Djedkare-Isesi, Raneferef, Unas, Teti, Pepi I, and Pepi II. In these contexts, the combination of the bound captive motif, triumphal imagery, and offering scenes is common. Prakash notes that “a bound foreigner…would be an apt gift for the pharaoh’s cult or the deity’s temple…Through his pose, he is aligned with a fettered animal offered to a king or god as a sacrifice.” Thus, the purpose

---

29 Jequier, Le monument funerarie de Pepi II. Tome II: le temple, pl. 38; Bestock, Violence and Power, 119, Fig. 4.26.

30 This corpus has been treated thoroughly in Prakash, “Old Kingdom Prisoner Statues.”

of bound prisoner statuary seems to be two-fold: to serve as a symbolic offering and to magically reinforce the perpetual victory and dominion of the king.

Unlike many images of foreigners found in relief scenes, Old Kingdom prisoner statues have individualized features, so they cannot easily be grouped into the usual stereotyped categories of Libyan, Asiatic, and Nubian. While many of the individual features (hairstyle, eyes, nose, etc.) are pulled from the repertoire of features often seen on foreigners in Egyptian art, they are arranged in seemingly randomized ways. This makes them easily identifiable to an Egyptian audience as foreign without tying them to a known group, ethnicity, or location. Prakash concludes that the faces of the statues were purposefully made to “look different from the others, giving the impression of many different types of people.” This, in turn, served to iconographically support the ideological message that the king has successfully defeated and therefore held dominion over all possible or imaginable groups of people.

Bound Prisoners in Decorative Art

The use of bound prisoner statues of the type described above is largely contained to the end of the Old Kingdom, but other three-dimensional renderings of prisoners bound in myriad poses, some of which are identical to the poses found in the Old Kingdom statues, occur in all periods of Egyptian history. The Egyptians particularly favored this motif for architectural decoration and on furniture, and many of the instances where bound prisoners occur outside of battle, triumph, or smiting scenes occur in these contexts. For example, a relief carved into an

---

32 The method by which the “individualization” of these statues was achieved is important. They are not, and Prakash makes this point, portraits. Instead, they are meant to look as varied as possible. As a result, stereotyped features occur within this corpus in a variety of combinations, creating individualization in the sense that none match the next, or even necessarily fit exactly into existing composite cultural or ethnic stereotypes.

33 Prakash, “Old Kingdom Prisoner Statues,” 188.

ivory gaming rod from Umm el-Qaab depicts a prisoner with his arms tied behind his back at the elbows. Some of the earliest examples of bound prisoner in both architectural and furniture decoration come from Hierakonpolis. A set of door sockets survives that depicts a prone (potentially Nubian) prisoner lying on his stomach with his arms visible and tightly bound at his back. The hole into which the door peg would have been set is right at the middle of the figure’s back. The incorporation of the prisoner figure into this specific element of the architecture is not random or even purely decorative. By placing the bound figure under the peg that would have turned and ground each time the door was opened or closed, those who walked through the door would enact, in perpetuity, the symbolic and magical function of subduing and crushing the enemies of Egypt.

Similarly, chair supports and legs from Hierakonpolis reiterate the early importance of this motif. These kneeling prisoners are carved at the very base of the chair legs, essentially balancing the weight of the chair and its occupant on top of their heads (Fig. 46). Symbolically, this is the same gesture that later triumph scenes exploit; bound and subjugated foreigners are crushed under the feet of the victorious king, signaling his literal, physical domination over them. This bodily defeat, when iconographically repeated over time, gave the iconic couplet—victorious king atop defeated foreigner—a sense of timelessness, perpetuity, and metaphorical weight. If violent physical domination is tantamount to confirmation of metaphorical dominion,

35 W. F. Petrie, *The Royal Tombs of the First Dynasty. Part I*, (London: Egypt Exploration Fund, 1900), 23–24, pl. 12; Bestock, *Violence and Power*, 210–211, Fig. 7.5.

36 Ritner, *Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice*, 114, Fig. 3c.


38 Quibell and Green, *Hierakonpolis. Part I*, 7, pl. 11; Ritner, *Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice*, 119, Fig. 4a.

the iconography of foreigners placed under the body or feet of the king expounds one truth that is both a real-world certainty and a cosmological one: the king always wins.

Figure 46 Bound prisoner chair support from Hierakonpolis. Image: Quibell and Green, *Hierakonpolis I*, British School of Archaeology in Egypt and Egyptian Research Account 4 (London: Bernard Quaritch, 1900), Fig. 11.

**Execration Figurines**

Another form of three-dimensional artifacts that often bear the form of bound prisoners are the figurines associated with the execration ritual. The execration ritual involved writing a list of enemies, foreigners, foreign places, etc. on potsherds, small stones, or figurines, then breaking them and burying the pieces.⁴⁰ We have evidence of this ritual, the purpose of which

---

was to magically destroy, defeat, or pacify the named entities through sympathetic magic, dating from as early as the Sixth Dynasty and lasting well into the New Kingdom.\textsuperscript{41} Like most other Egyptian magical practices, the execration ritual was composed of three parts: the word, the act, and the object.\textsuperscript{42} While each of these three parts in combination was necessary to achieve magical effectiveness, it is the iconography of the objects that are most pertinent to the present discussion.\textsuperscript{43}

The objects onto which execration texts were written varied by geographic location, time period, and availability of materials. While many were written on sherds or stones with natural or roughly tablet-shaped modeling, bound prisoner figurines were also commonly used for this purpose (Fig. 47). Often, the quality of these figurines is not high, and often the intended figure is rendered only schematically. There are even examples of figurines that appear to be only small clay tablets save for the etched or slightly raised depiction of an X-shaped pair of arms bound at the elbows on the reverse of the tablet. Others are rendered more fully as figural sculptures with the bent knees, head, and bound arms of the figure clearly defined.

The bound arms seem to be the most important iconographic element to denote the foreign prisoner or enemy for the purposes of the execration ritual. While the inclusion of such iconography was not strictly necessary to ensure the ritual would be magically effective, its presence would have strengthened the ritual, since the basis of sympathetic magic is like producing like (i.e., if the figure is shown as bound, the people named on the figurine will be bound from causing harm). At its heart, the execration ritual was a binding ritual meant to

\textsuperscript{41} Muhlestein, Violence in the Service of Order, 20.

\textsuperscript{42} Ritner, Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice, 72.

\textsuperscript{43} The textual component of the execration ritual is discussed further in chapter 4.
prevent enemies from causing harm, enacting *isfet*, or holding undue influence over Egypt or its citizens. The bound prisoner figurines, when etched with the names of enemies, when destroyed, when buried, served as effigies of those named enemies, rendered subdued and powerless by the execration ritual.

While the context may be different, this same ritualized subjugation and disempowerment via destruction of enemies in effigy is one of the central themes found in triumph scenes. In triumph scenes, the enemies generally take on two forms: defeated prisoners awaiting slaughter and bound anthropomorphic toponyms. In the smiting icon of any given triumph scene, the king stands amidst the action of slaughtering his enemies. These enemies are often named in the captions and/or given features to align them with a certain group of people or a geographical location. This visually parallels the action that would have occurred during the execration ritual, with much the same goal. The king or ritual-performer, as the stand-in for *maʿat*, breaks, destroys, slaughters, and otherwise annihilates a named image of an enemy, therefore stripping that enemy of power and ensuring their defeat in the real world. Given this, the real-world performance of execration rituals likely served as one of the semiotic referents through which an ancient Egyptian audience would have interpreted the iconography on display in triumph scenes.
Worn Objects and Amulets

Both prior to and during the New Kingdom, another context in which the iconography of bound prisoners often appeared was in personal adornments and as amulets. In their amuletic usage, images of bound prisoners are known from as early as the Predynastic. At Hierakonpolis, items such as door jambs, chair legs, and walking sticks featured this motif. In this context, Ritner notes that the significance of this motif—religious, and by extension both magical and symbolic—derives from the fact that it served as a "concrete expression of foreign subjugation."\(^{44}\)

---

Rather more literally, bound prisoner iconography is also known to have been used for actual amulets at least from the New Kingdom. One such motif, known from two faience amulet fragments again highlights the bound prisoners as objects to be walked, trampled, trod, or stood upon. These amulets each depict two small enemy figures lying face-down on a rectangular base with their arms tied behind their back or against their thighs. The feet of a larger figure stand on their backs. While the figures themselves are not particularly detailed, schematic iconographic elements allow both prisoners on one of the amulets to be identified as Asiatic. On the other, one has Asiatic features and the other Nubian.

Likewise, a few examples of personal adornments are particularly salient to the present discussion, many of which date to the New Kingdom. An exemplar can be found in a pair of sandals from the tomb of Tutankhamun that depicts bound prisoners in conjunction with Nine Bows iconography (Fig. 48). Here, the upper portion of the sole of each of the shoes is decorated with a Northern and a Southern prisoner, back-to-back, each with their arms tied behind their backs at the elbows. There are four bows above and below each pair of prisoners that in combination with the prisoners themselves, signify the Nine Bows. While the prisoners do have some stereotyped features, they are each rendered with slightly different garb and in slightly different positions, with differing facial features, suggesting that they should to some


47 Egyptian Museum JE 62685. I. E. S. Edwards, *Tutankhamun: His Tomb and its Treasures* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1976); Kamal el Mallakh and Arnold Brackman, *The Gold of Tutankhamun* (New York: Newsweek Books, 1978), 297, Fig. 151; Ritner, *Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice*, 120, 123, Fig. 6a.
extent be understood as representing the full spectrum or the totality of foreign peoples who have been subjugated by the Egyptian king.\textsuperscript{48}


\textbf{Scorpion Macehead}

The Scorpion Macehead, like many surviving Predynastic royal artifacts, was found at Hierakonpolis (Fig. 49).\textsuperscript{49} The imagery on the macehead is divided into three main registers,

\textsuperscript{48} For this interpretation of varied foreign features, see Prakash, “Old Kingdom Prisoner Statues,” 188–189. Additionally, the Nine Bows are not only the prototypical enemies, but also as representative of the totality of foreign enemies. In the Egyptian mind (and script), three represented plurality, and nine (3x3) thus represented a plurality of pluralities, or a totality.

with some figures situated on floating registers. The scenes present themes concerning kingship
and subjugation, but unlike many similar works, the Scorpion Macehead does not depict any
overt violence. The central register shows Scorpion (whose name is written in front of his face)
wielding a mr-hoe, wearing the White Crown, and accompanied by attendants who fan him. A
line of tribute-bearers approaches the king offering their goods to him with their backs slightly
bent.

The top register contains a line of standards, each topped with a different icon. A rekhyt-
bird hangs by its neck from each of the standards. The rekhyt usually signifies “people” or the
regular populace of a place. During the Dynastic period, it would come to mean the “ordinary
people, commoners” of Egypt. The standards likely represent different geographic locations,
suggesting the restrained rekhyt-birds represent those from each locale taken captive by the
king. While the far right of the register is damaged, enough remains that a large standing image
of the king can be inferred, meaning that it is to him that the captives of the differing locations
are being brought. The iconography may be slightly different from that of later topographical
lists, but the underlying concept is a familiar one—subjugated locations and their people bound
and brought one by one to the king of Egypt, who is now ostensibly their master.

50 Bestock, Violence and Power, 57.
51 Wb II, 447–448; Faulkner, Dictionary of Middle Egyptian, 152. See also Griffin, All the Rhyt-people Adore: The
52 Wengrow, The Archaeology of Early Egypt: Social Transformations in North-East Africa, 10,000 to 2650 BC,
Cambridge World Archaeology (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 213; Bestock, Violence and
Power, 57.
Libyan Palette

Dating to the Naqada III period, the Libyan Palette is one of the earliest surviving examples of an ordered list of circumscribed geographic locations (Fig. 50). While the exact interpretation of this palette’s decoration has been a matter of some scholarly debate, the fact that it lists geographic locations within Libya is well-accepted. Four registers on the obverse of the palette are preserved, with the top three depicting lines of animals. The lowest register contains olive trees and a very short hieroglyphic inscription reading Ḫnw (Libya).

The reverse of the palette depicts seven sets of glyphs or devices, each surrounded by a crenelated square. But for their shape, these are indistinguishable from the later crenelated ovals indicating towns and other discrete geographic locations in topographical lists and battle scenes.

---

53 Egyptian Museum CG 14238. Alternatively called the Tjehenu Palette or the Towns and Cities Palette.

54 For related issues and interpretations, see among others Davis, Masking the Blow, 229–233; Krzysztof Ciałowicz, La naissance d’un royaume: l’Égypte dès la période prédynastique à la fin de la 1ère dynastie, translated by Krystyna Jachieć (Krakow: Księgarnia Akademika, 2001), 180–182; Wengrow, The Archaeology of Early Egypt, 208; Bestock, Violence and Power, 47–49.
Thus, a likely interpretation of the list is that each of the squares stands for a specific town or fortification either named or represented by the devices within. Additionally, each of the squares is topped by a bird or animal wielding a *mr*-hoe that crosses the plane of the fortification wall. The interpretation of these elements is more uncertain, but I suggest that they are intended to send the same ideological message as later reliefs of bound prisoners or listed towns joined by ropes subjugating them to the Egyptian king, just rendered with different iconography. In this early period, the *mr*-hoe was a symbol of royal office and accompanies the king in his official capacities on the Scorpion Macehead and elsewhere. Only four of the original seven animals remain, but each of these (falcon, pair of falcons, scorpion, and lion) are closely associated with kingship at the dawn of the Egyptian state.55 Most fortifications of this period would have been mudbrick, a medium that could have been destroyed (or at least dismantled) through the use of hoes.56 Here, animal emblems stand in for the figure of the king and the *mr*-hoe for the staff and mace signifying state and divine sanction. Penetration of the fortification walls by these emblems can then be understood as iconographic shorthand for martial defeat and subsequent subjugation to the king (and by extension the state structure) by whom they were defeated. It is worth reiterating here that the emblematic animals sit atop the fortifications, a convention used in contemporary and later Egyptian art to signify defeat and subjugation for those below and victory and dominion for those above.

---

55 Falcons were closely associated with Egyptian kingship through Horus, and some of the earliest surviving royal names are Horus-names preserved in *serekhs*. At least one Protodynastic king bore the name Scorpion. Lions, leonine deities, and mythological felines (such as griffins and sphinxes) were associated with kingship not only in Egypt but across the ancient Near East.

Bull Palette

Another Protodynastic slate palette shares stylistic similarities with the list of towns or fortifications on the Libyan Palette. The Bull Palette, of which only a corner fragment remains, is topped on both sides by an image of a bull goring an enemy while trampling him under his hooves (Fig. 51). What remains of the body registers of the palette seem to depict two different iconographic precursors to later topographical lists—variations on the theme of the king’s dominion over peoples and places. On the obverse, there appear to have originally been multiple registers of fortified towns, as on the Libyan Palette, but here only one full fortification and an extreme corner fragment of another are preserved. Inside the complete fortification wall, the town is labeled with a lion and a nw-pot. A portion of a bird is visible in the fragmentary

---

57 Louvre E 11255. Davis, Masking the Blow, 143–144, Fig. 37; Bestock, Violence and Power, 49–50, Fig. 3.3; Cialowicz, La naissance d’un royaume, 179–180; Etienne, “À propos des représentations d’enceintes crénelées,” 149–164.
fortification wall, but nothing else can be made out. On the reverse, a rope encircles most of the open space still visible. Unfortunately, it is not clear to what the rope is actually attached, but it is possible that it continued down the side of the palette to restrain the prisoner whose head is visible at the bottom of the fragment. Interestingly, five standards arranged in a row grasp the rope, the ends of their poles rendered as clenched fists. Standards, already discusses as visual representations of geographic places and/or of deities, may represent in this case either the subjugation of geographic locations by serving as geographic labels for any prisoners also attached to the ropes or the implied divine sanction of the represented deities as they hold fast the king’s enemies and deliver them to him. This second possibility closely mirrors the iconography of the deities that hold the ropes connecting the defeated toponyms in New Kingdom topographical lists.

Figure 51 Both sides of the Bull Palette fragment. Image: Davis, Masking the Blow: The Scene of Representation in Late Prehistoric Egyptian Art (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), Fig. 37.
Narmer Palette

The lower registers on both the obverse and reverse sides of the Narmer Palette contain iconography that relates to the form of later topographical lists (Figs. 52 and 53). On the reverse below the smiting icon are two enemies that have already been mentioned due to their relationship to the smiting scene. However, they are also important as iconographic forms in their own right as labeled enemies, either fleeing or already having been defeated by the king. The figure on the left is labeled with a rectangular fortification wall, perhaps indicating he comes from the town whose defeat is indicated by the narrative of the palette, a fortified town more generally, or a town for whom that glyph is emblematic. The figure on the right is labelled by a less identifiable device, but this does distinguish him from the other figure, suggesting that the two should be understood as distinct from one another and likely originating from different towns or geographic regions. Later predecessors of the topographical list in its New Kingdom form consist of registers of full foreigner figures either standing or kneeling, each given a geographic label above or in front of their face. Clearly, the basic form from which that iconography derives already existed in the late Predynastic and was already thematically tied to iconography of smiting.

On the obverse, we see an abbreviated version of the same iconography from the Libyan Palette. Here, only one fortification wall is present, but it surrounds a set of glyphs just as those on the Libyan Palette do. In fact, one of the Libyan Palette’s “towns” may actually be the same as the one referenced here. In this register, the fortification wall is shown as clearly breached

---

58 Davis, Masking the Blow, chapters 8 and 9; Bestock, Violence and Power, 67. See chapter 2, n. 19 for a more thorough bibliography of the entire artifact.

59 The town listed on the far right of the bottom row on the Libyan Palette is labeled by a rectangular glyph with two roughly triangular protrusions, and three boxes. The glyph is somewhat more schematic on the Narmer Palette, but the overall shape and number of accompanying boxes is identical. Perhaps these are early renderings of Gardiner Aa24 or N31.
by the goring horns of a bull who simultaneously crushes a prostrate, flailing enemy under his hooves. The fortified location in question is immediately in front of the crushed enemy’s face, the placement of which matches the location of the figural labels on the other side of this palette. This placement is paralleled in both contemporary and later pictorial representations with similar motifs. As such, the gored town serves a dual purpose in this context as an iconographic unit. First, it functions as a geographic figural label for the defeated enemy. However, it also shows the king (symbolized here by a bull) penetrating the fortification walls and thus rendering the town defenseless and subject to the king’s will. In that way, the label is also illustrative—both the town and its inhabitants have been defeated by the king. This iconographic pair of simultaneously defeated people and place provides the conceptual basis for later topographical lists that amalgamate geographic locations and their inhabitants into one discrete iconic unit.

When subordinated to the Egyptian king, these reflect his dominion both spatially and culturally. While these two types of domination are technically distinct, they are symbolically and metaphorically inseparable to the extent that state ideology presupposes them as facets of the king’s all-encompassing, cosmologically assured dominion.

---

60 The destruction of the fortified town by an animal representative of or related to the king is most closely paralleled in the Libyan Palette. However, the battle relief in the tomb of Inti also provides evidence of the systematic destruction of a fortification wall as part of a military campaign.
Figure 52 Line drawing of two splayed enemies on the reverse of the Narmer Palette. Image: Davis, *Masking the Blow: The Scene of Representation in Late Prehistoric Egyptian Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), Fig. 43.

Figure 53 Line drawing of a bull trampling a man and destroying a town on the obverse of the Narmer Palette. Image: Davis, *Masking the Blow: The Scene of Representation in Late Prehistoric Egyptian Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), Fig. 43.

**Tomb of Inti at Deshasha**

The private tomb Inti, an official from the Fifth Dynasty, provides rare Old Kingdom examples of the crenelated fortification wall whose iconography becomes so integral in
topographical lists (Fig. 54). This tomb from Middle Egypt contains some of the earliest depictions of battle in a private tomb. The north half of the eastern wall of the tomb is badly damaged but shows Egyptians engaged in battle with northern enemies, perhaps taking place in the Levant. The battle itself rages both to the left of the town and inside it, with five registers contained inside the fortification wall. In the top register, a bowman snaps his own bow underneath his feet, a symbol of submission as the defeat of his town appears imminent. Interestingly, near the base of the fortification wall, two Egyptian soldiers with sticks or some type of pointed tool carve into the wall to breach it, an action that is shown moments before completion. This recalls the iconography of defensive walls breached by the king in Protodynastic palettes, except instead of wielding a mr-hoe or bull horns, the king wields the full might of the Egyptian army for this purpose.

Additionally, Flinders Petrie also noted in his report of the initial excavation of the tomb that “Possibly there may be place names in the last column but one, determined by outlines of forts containing an enemy,” (Fig. 55). Because of the damage, only one full toponym is preserved, but enough remains that we can confirm the presence of at least four original columns of toponyms, some of which were determined by the “forts containing enemies” that Petrie described, a sort of inverse configuration composed of the same three elements present in later topographical lists: a placename, a fortification wall, and a bound enemy figure. The fact that these toponyms are arranged in a columnal list and paired with fortification walls and bound


63 Petrie, Deshasheh 1897, 5.
prisoner iconography in many ways makes this the earliest iteration of a “topographical list” in the way we mean when we refer to triumph scenes. This list is even paired with battle scenes, a common coordinating motif in later periods.

*Figure 54* Line drawing of a battle scene with fortification from the tomb of Inti. Image: Petrie, *Deshasheh 1897*, Memoir of the Egypt Exploration Fund 15 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Truebner & Co., 1898), pl. IV.
Figure 55 Line drawing of town names with crenelated fortification walls from the tomb of Inti. Image: Petrie Deshasheh 1897, Memoir of the Egypt Exploration Fund 15 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Truebner & Co., 1898), 5.

Nebhepetre Mentuhotep II Chapel at Gebelein

The chapel of Mentuhotep II at Gebelein has already been discussed with respect to the smiting scenes that it contains. However, one of the two smiting scenes preserved at this temple also has a place within the diachronic development of the topographical list motif. This smiting scene (Fig. 56) is otherwise unique in Egyptian art.64 The scene contains five figures: the king and four kneeling prisoners. Only one of the prisoners is actively included in the smiting icon itself, while the other three are lined up behind him facing the king, as if they are waiting their turn to meet their fates.

Three of the four prisoners are labeled with “ethnonyms” based on their regions of origin.65 These labels are included in the expected location, directly in front of the face and

64 Egyptian Museum JE TR 24/528/5. Marochetti, The Reliefs of the Chapel of Nebhepetre Mentuhotep at Gebelein, 50–52; Bestock, Violence and Power, 162–164; Habachi, “King Nebhepetre Mentuhotp,” Fig. 17, pl. XL-b; Swan Hall, Pharaoh Smites His Enemies, 13–14, Fig. 24.

65 I consider these ethnonyms rather than toponyms since each is pluralized, indicating likely reference to the population rather than the location itself.
leading shoulder of the figure they describe. The king is labeled in the same way, “Mentuhotep, Son of Hathor, Lady of Dendera.” The king wears the White Crown and a *shendyt*-kilt and holds a mace to smite the front prisoner. This front prisoner is unlabeled but wears the same *shendyt* as the king, marking him apart from the other prisoners. This has led scholars to posit that he represents a Lower Egyptian, and this scene is meant to commemorate Mentuhotep’s reunification of the Two Lands.

Each of the prisoners is rendered with slightly different features and garb, and each of the three is representative of a group that is eventually included in the Nine Bows (this is also true of Lower Egypt, if that is what is represented by the first prisoner). In later topographical lists, the Nine Bows or some subset of them often head the list of toponyms. While the form of the iconography is different here, the general meaning remains the same—the scene presents a list of labeled peoples defeated by the king. Although not bound, their hand position suggests submission to the king, while the first figure’s hands suggest his helplessness to resist the king’s violent act against him. The nature of the combined iconography in this scene further explicates the interrelated development of topographical lists and smiting scenes. They are closely tied together as different methods of visualizing the totality of the king’s victory, each reiterating the symbolic meaning of the other.
Figure 56 Line drawing of a smiting scene with kneeling prisoners from the chapel of Nebhepetre Mentuhotep at Gebelein. Image: Swan Hall, The Pharaoh Smites His Enemies: A Comparative Study, Münchner Ägyptologische Studien Heft 44 (Berlin: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 1986), Fig. 24.

Stela of General Montuhotep from Buhen

While the concept of methodologically listing geographical and topographical names and items was clearly part of the Egyptian canon from early on, the earliest evidence of a topographical list that takes the exact same form as those in New Kingdom triumph scenes comes from a Twelfth Dynasty stela.66 This large stela dating to the reign of Senusret I was set up by a general named Montuhotep in the temple of Isis at Buhen. Here, Montuhotep lists the names of foreign places he traveled to and subdued in the name of the king. The top half of the stela contains a scene of deities presenting life to the king, along with bound toponyms. Damage obscures the far right and left of the scene, as well as much of the text above the scene, but the

---

central portion—showing two falcon-headed deities (including the war god, Montu) and the
king—remains intact.

![Figure 57 Stela of General Montuhotep from Buhen. Image: Bosticco, Museo Archeologico di Firenze: le stele egiziane dall'Antico al Nuovo Regno, Cataloghi dei musei e gallerie d'Italia (Roma: Istituto poligrafico dello Stato, 1959), Fig. 29a and 29b.]

**Theban Tombs**

Evidence for both bound prisoners and topographical lists in non-royal tombs (and non-
royal contexts more generally) is rare before the New Kingdom. However, these motifs became
common from the early New Kingdom onward, and the iconography of a few Theban tombs is pertinent to the present discussion.\textsuperscript{67}

In particular, the early Eighteenth Dynasty tomb of Mentuherkhepeshef (TT20) contains within a relief depicting the \textit{tekenu} rite, a rather unique image. Here, a vignette showing two kneeling Nubian prisoners being strangled (Fig. 58)\textsuperscript{68} parallels the iconography of topographical lists but presents that iconography with a distinctly different context and composition. The exact nature of the \textit{tekenu} rite remains uncertain, though Muhlestein has suggested it may represent a kind of sacrificial or execration-like ritual.\textsuperscript{69} Regardless of the exact nature of the \textit{tekenu}, or the role that sacrifice or sanctioned killing may or may not have played, what is clear from this image is that two kneeling Nubians are being strangled by two pairs of Egyptians. Each of the kneeling Nubians is labeled \textit{jwnw st(j)} above his head, and each of the Egyptians is labeled with a \textit{shm}-glyph. Interestingly, both Nubian prisoners also have crenelated name-rings set directly atop their heads, identical to those that normally contain the placenames in topographical lists. These are flanked on either side by pairs of kneeling men performing an action similar to the \textit{kd}-glyph that ideogrammatically represents the act of building.\textsuperscript{70}

While this unique relief is not in itself triumphal in nature, it does present some of the constituent triumphal iconography in an alternative but symbolically related context. If we

\textsuperscript{67} These are by no means the only NK Theban tombs with relevant iconography, but that could be a study unto itself. These are meant to be a representative sample and reflect the tombs with some of the most relevant or most extensive bound prisoner or topographical list iconography.


\textsuperscript{69} Muhlestein, \textit{Violence in the Service of Order}, 34–35.

understand the tekenu rite to be a real-world ritual based at least partially around violence against human victims (whether actual or metaphorical),\textsuperscript{71} it can thus be included among ritual smiting and the execration ritual as magical rites meant to ensure the proper order of the world by the violent containment or destruction of the forces of chaos. This is made more explicit by the figural labels and the inclusion of the toponyms. While it is not clear to which exact portion of Nubia the toponyms refer, the relationship between the strangled figures and the placename is clear. Here however, the toponym seems to serve as part of the figural label, as opposed to the figure serving as a means of anthropomorphizing the location (as is the common interpretation in topographical lists). Whatever the exact nature of the rite or the purpose of its depiction here, it is best understood as part of a larger corpus of rituals and apotropaic magic rooted the violent subjugation of foreigners—a concept exemplified in monumental triumph scenes.

\textbf{Figure 58} Line drawing of a tekenu-rite scene from the tomb of Mentuherkhepeshef (TT20). Image: Davies, \textit{Five Theban Tombs (being those of Mentuherkhepeshef, User, Daga, Nehemawy and Tati)}, Archaeological Survey of Egypt 21 (London: Egypt Exploration Fund, 1913), pl. VIII.

In a somewhat less cryptic example, the tomb of Amenemhat Surer (TT48), who was Chief Steward of the King during the reign of Amenemhat III, contains one of the best-preserved examples of a topographical list used in combination with smiting imagery from a private

\textsuperscript{71} This is the theory that Muhlestein suggests, favoring a more literal interpretation of that violence (\textit{Violence in the Service of Order}, 35–36).
funerary context. Two of the tomb’s reliefs are particularly pertinent to the present discussion. The first, which comes from the right back wall of the first hall, depicts Amenhotep III seated in a kiosk atop a frieze of smiting and trampling scenes and a topographical list (Fig. 59a). The second, which comes from the left back wall of the first hall, is similar but doesn’t contain a topographical list (Fig. 59b). In these reliefs, the king sits on his throne in a raised kiosk whose roof is held up by lotus-shaped columns. The king holds his crook and flail and wears the Blue Crown. Protection formulae are inscribed behind the king’s head and behind the throne, and the king’s names and titles are placed before his face. It is unclear whether the kiosk and throne depicted here are representative of real objects the king would have used and officials would have seen when approaching or interacting with him or if they are merely symbolic compositions. However, given the prevalence and relative consistency of these depictions in officials’ tombs and the fact that bound prisoner and Nine Bows iconography was a common theme in royal and palace architecture, furniture, and decoration, it is likely that these kiosk depictions are at least partially based on real objects that existed in royal spaces.

Here, the base of the kiosk is divided into two registers that hold the topographical iconography and related images. The upper register contains alternating miniature smiting and trampling scenes separated from one another by individual columns of the king’s titulary. While the organization and gestures of the figures are consistent throughout the frieze, small iconographic details do vary, including the type of crown the king wears (both in human and sphinx form) and the ethnicity of the victim. In each of the miniature smiting scenes, there is a

---


73 P&M I-I, 89 (7); Save-Soderbergh, *Four Eighteenth Dynasty Tombs*, 38, pl. XXXIII.
small caption text over top of the victim’s head, containing sentiments such as “Lord of the Strong Arm, Chosen of Re,” “Trampling the foreign lands,” and “Lord of Every Foreign Land.”

The lower register of the kiosk depicts a topographical list presented in one row of name-rings. The nine name-rings here correspond to the names of the Nine Bows, in one of their New Kingdom incarnations. In order, from the front of the kiosk to the back, they are: ḥāw nbw, ṣt, ts šmzw, sḥt jšm, ts Ṣḥy, ṭḏjw ṣw, tjhnw, jwnṯjw stj, mntjw nw ṣḥt. The features of the foreigner figures atop the name-rings roughly correspond to the geographic and cultural distribution of the toponyms between the four primary categories of peoples regularly depicted in Egyptian art. Ts šmzw has Egyptian features, tjhnw has Libyan features, jwnṯjw stj has Nubian features, and the figures for the remaining toponyms are depicted with some variation of Asiatic/Northern-type features. Each of the figures’ arms are bound behind their backs at the elbows and ropes are tied around their necks. However, because each of the toponyms is rendered in an individual frame, the ropes do not connect the prisoners to one another, but instead extend downward to the end of each frame and two terminals with lotus or papyrus buds extend upward as if a knot is tied around each figure’s neck.

These reliefs reiterate the close relationship between the iconography of smiting, trampling, and royal dominion over foreign and multitudinous peoples and places. While their location in a private mortuary context means these reliefs would have had significantly less visibility than their counterparts in monumental temple relief, their usage in this context does speak to the prevalence of the motif and the inherent ties between the iconographic elements regardless of the context. It is also significant that the usage of complex triumphal motifs in

---

private contexts tends to revolve around images of the king and the physical trappings of the office of kingship, maintaining the connection to royalty despite the private context.

Figure 59 Line drawings of reliefs from the tomb of Amenemhat Surer (TT48): (a) The kings seated on a throne above smiting and trampling scenes and a topographical list. (b) Detail of small smiting and trampling scenes from the back left wall of the first hall. Images: Save-Soderbergh, *Four Eighteenth Dynasty Tombs*, Private Tombs at Thebes 1 (Oxford: University Press for Griffith Institute, 1957), pls. XXX and XXXIII.

Likewise, another well-preserved example of strikingly similar iconography, also from the reign of Amenhotep III, can be found in the tomb of Kheruef (TT192). In this relief, both Amenhotep III and Queen Tiye are depicted seated in a raised kiosk (Fig. 60). The pedestal on which the kiosk sits is decorated with a topographical list containing Nine Bows toponyms.

---

identical in both content and order to those from Surer’s tomb (TT48). This suggests that the Nine Bows iconography present in these tombs reflects a standard depiction of this theme, potentially specific to the mid-Eighteenth Dynasty.\textsuperscript{76} Each of the figureheads is rendered with the expected stereotypical features, and while all their arms are bound behind their backs at the elbows, they are missing the additional rope around their necks.

Amenhotep III is depicted wearing the Blue Crown and holding the royal flail and \textit{hk3}-scepter. Tiye wears a double-plumed crown and holds a lotus plant across her chest. She is rendered at slightly smaller scale behind her husband, but her throne is much more elaborate than his. The side panel features a trampling scene with a female sphinx bearing Tiye’s own likeness. The animal-legged base is supported by a central \textit{sema-tawy} sign to which two female prisoners are lashed. Both prisoners are naked from the waist up and their arms are bound behind their backs at the elbows and tied to the central pole. The stereotyped features of the prisoners clearly mark one as southern (Nubian) and one as northern (Asiatic). In combination with the \textit{sema-tawy}, this prototypical duology of north and south can be understood not only as a shorthand for all lands and peoples in all directions, but also as a reflection of the role of the rulers in maintaining the Two Lands as one entity.

Images of bound female prisoners, like images of females performing ritual smiting, are much rarer than their counterparts, making this scene particularly notable. Here, the trampling female sphinx and bound female prisoners on Tiye’s throne indicate that it is she who has dominion over and has successfully subdued the forces of chaos in their female forms. Like the king, the queen is the embodiment of a royal office and thus similarly tasked with the

The inclusion of the queen here reinforces the ceremonial and ritual nature of this type of triumphal display.

Figure 60 Line drawing of Amenhotep III and Tiye enthroned on a dais with Nine Bows topographical list from the tomb of Kheruef (TT192). Image: Epigraphic Survey, *The Tomb of Kheruef: Theban Tomb 192*, OIP 102 (Chicago: Oriental Institute, in cooperation with the Department of Antiquities of Egypt, 1980), pl. 49.

77 The queen, or more specifically, the Great Royal Wife, as the female counterpart to the reigning king was not herself deified, but her own role was intimately connected with the office of kingship. Many of the Great Royal Wives (particularly of the Eighteenth Dynasty) were at one point in the lives the siblings, mothers, daughters, and primary wives of reigning kings. Thus, queens were bound by a similar (if less explicit) ideological imperative to preserve *ma’at*. There is also a gendered dynamic to this imperative, because whenever the iconography of queens smiting or otherwise subjugating foreigners does occur, the victims/prisoners are invariably female.
Summary: Diachronic Development of Gods Leading Bound Prisoners

The motif of Egyptian gods leading bound prisoners is both an iconographic and ideological extension of the bound prisoner motif. This motif, like smiting iconography, predates the Egyptian state and was regularly employed in conjunction with smiting and trampling motifs in royal and triumphal contexts.\(^78\) The earliest extant examples of bound prisoner iconography come from the Predynastic, and this motif became immediately tied to the iconography of the victorious king as the Egyptian state began to form. Some of the earliest smiting iconography—Tomb 100, the ivory cylinder of Narmer, and the tag of Aha—all feature bound figures as the prisoners in the smiting icon itself. While later examples tend toward unbound prisoners within the smiting icon, bound prisoners in some form regularly accompany that type of related imagery in triumphs, especially in monumental relief. In the triumphal scenes in Old Kingdom mortuary temples, rows of bound prisoners flank the smiting scenes. New Kingdom monumental triumph scenes incorporate bound prisoners as part of the iconographic basis for topographical lists.

Since bound prisoners were just that—prisoners—they were often depicted not only as being bound individually but also in groups held together by ropes fastened at their necks. In many scenes containing this iconography, the row(s) of prisoners are headed by a deity who gathers the ropes in their hands, holding the tethered prisoners to bring them into the presence of the king. In cases where this iconography is paired with battle scenes, the prisoners are commonly being brought to Thebes or presented to the Theban Triad.\(^79\) Often, the deities leading the prisoners overlap with those who are serving as the witness to associated smiting.

\(^78\) For summary histories of this motif, see especially Janzen, “Iconography of Humiliation” and Matić, Body and frames of war in New Kingdom Egypt. For Predynastic and Early Dynastic use and development of this motif, see Bestock, Violence and Power.

iconography. This is particularly true of deities in composite monumental triumph scenes, where smiting iconography, bound prisoner iconography, and divine witnesses come together to create one triumphal tableau.

The gods who lead or otherwise present rows of bound prisoners in triumph scenes include Seth, Sopdu, Amun, Amun-Re, Ash, Dedwen, and Waset (Victorious Thebes). Seth and Sopdu are both present in the prisoner relief from the causeway of Sahure’s mortuary complex at Abusir but are curiously absent from later iterations of this motif. Given the close associations between Seth and foreignness and the unbridled strength of the king, and Sopdu’s role as “Lord of the East,” one wonders if the lack of later evidence for these deities in this context is a quirk of preservation. Yet, Sopdu is essentially absent from New Kingdom composite triumph scenes and references to Seth in later triumphal contexts are almost entirely restricted to textual format. Instead, other gods with distinctly geographic associations are favored. These generally take two forms: Victorious Thebes bringing all manner of foreign peoples and places to the king or back to Egypt, and deities whose dominions include foreign places (i.e., Ash, Dedwen) bringing their own lands and subjects to be subsumed into the dominion of the Egyptian king.

If the rows of prisoners are not led or presented by deities, they are instead placed under the feet or the throne of the king. For example, statues of Ramesses II from Abu Simbel and Ramesses III from Medinet Habu feature the king standing atop rectangular bases whose sides are decorated with kneeling, bound prisoners, following in the tradition of crushing enemies under one’s feet. This placement is also evident in the architectural designs in Theban tomb

---

80 There are two exceptions with which I am familiar, both dating to the New Kingdom. First, the extremely damaged second stela of a pair of Ramesses II from Tell el-Retaba, which Porter and Moss claim shows Seth as the witnessing deity (P&M VII, 55). The surviving stela of the pair depicts Ramesses II smiting before Atum. Second, Stela Cairo JE 88879, from Qantir, part of the corpus of New Kingdom private smiting stelae.

reliefs, particularly those that depict throne room scenes with triumphal imagery on the thrones and dais. Though the exact iconography of the presentation differs slightly between cases where the rows of the prisoners are being held in check by deities and cases where they are crushed underfoot by the king, the underlying ideology is consistent. *Maʿat*, in the guise of a deity or the king, has brought *isfet*, in the form of foreigners, to heel—Egypt has triumphed, and her enemies are at her mercy.

**Summary: Diachronic Development of Topographical Lists**

Iconographically, topographical lists constitute a further extension of the bound prisoners with leading deities motif, but additional components and a uniform structure make them a discrete motif in their own right. The topographical list motif generally contains a row (or multiple rows) of toponyms, ethnonyms, or a combination of the two. Each individual toponym is ringed by a stylized rendering of a fortification wall, Gardiner O36, indicating that Egyptians would have understood each toponym to represent a distinct geographical location or a distinct people group from a particular geographical area. Each ringed placename is also topped by a figure of a foreigner, shown from the waist up. The foreigner figures are bound with their arms behind the back at their elbows, which was the most common method the Egyptians used to depict a foreign captive or a *skr-*"nh (prisoner of war). The prisoners in each row were bound to each other by ropes tied at their necks, also common in the depiction of prisoners of war from

---

82 *Wb I*, 94–95; Gardiner, *Egyptian Grammar*, 496; Faulkner *Dictionary of Ancient Egyptian*, 23. See also Franck Monnier, “Quelques Réflexions sur le Terme ‘jnb,’” *Égypte Nilotique et Méditerranéenne* 5 (2012): 257–283. The nature of walls and fortifications as expressed by Gardiner O36 suggests surrounding and/or encircling by a wall and separation of that which is within from that which is without. As such, it follows that the Egyptian understanding of geographical locations within this glyph would each be distinct, regardless of their literal size, complexity, or actual political structure.

83 See Janzen, “Iconography of Humiliation” and Matić, *Body and frames of war in New Kingdom Egypt*. For the term *skr-*"nh itself (generally translated as “captive” or “prisoner of war,” but literally “living slain one”), see *Wb IV*, 307; Faulkner, *Dictionary of Middle Egyptian*, 250.
battle reliefs. These prisoner figureheads were given identifiable, stereotyped foreign features that matched the stereotypical Egyptian representations of foreigners in other artistic contexts. Often, the stereotyped features on a given figurehead matched (roughly) the toponym or ethnonym that its fortification ring contained—so toponyms known to be (or understood to be) in Libya were topped by figures with Libyan features and dress, Nubian toponyms had figures with Africanizing features, and so on. However, the Egyptians were flexible with their iconography, and there are an abundance of examples in which African toponyms are paired with Asiatic or Libyan figures, or Libyan toponyms carry an Asiatic figurehead. This suggests a preference for something like historical and cultural accuracy in line with the Egyptian need to categorize the world around them, but at the end of the day, one foreigner was as good as another when it came to depicting the full breadth of the king’s dominion.

From a conceptual standpoint, topographical lists fit within a broader category of Egyptian textual and artistic composition known as onomastica, lists of words by category. They are also part of the more general Egyptian tradition of list-making that includes offering-lists, king-lists, and geographical procession reliefs. Topographical lists do bear categorical similarities to geographical procession reliefs and other lists in royal and religious contexts, but much of the exact iconography that composes them is drawn from artistic and iconographic traditions dating back to the earliest periods of Egyptian history. In particular, the Predynastic Scorpion Macehead, Libyan Palette, and Bull Palette provide evidence for the early iconographic

---


85 For example, selective recutting of the toponyms on both wings of the triumph scene of Seti I at Karnak meant that at various times Asiatic toponyms were paired with African figures and vice versa, though most toponyms match their figureheads in their current state. See OIP 107, 47, 49, 59.

86 For more on these categories of lists, see Adel Yussef Sidarus, “Onomastica aegyptiaca: the tradition of thematic lexicography in Egypt through the ages and languages,” Bulletin de la Société d’Archéologie Copte 39 (2000): 11–22; Redford, King-Lists, Annals, and Day-books.
and ideological conceptions that would characterize later topographical lists. On the Scorpion Macehead, a line of standards representing different geographical locations likely marked places that had been incorporated into the king’s domain. From an ideological perspective, the rekhyt-birds lashed to these standards represent the people from those geographical regions, a usage that parallels later foreigner figureheads topping placenames. However, the use of rekhyt indicate those geographical regions were all understood to be within the borders of Egypt, unlike most of the toponyms included in later lists.\(^{87}\)

The Libyan and Bull Palettes both provide early evidence for the use of Gardiner O 36 as both a textual and visual designation of a foreign place or group. In these cases, it may be taken to represent something closer to their most literal meaning of a fortress or fortified town. The Libyan Palette displays ideologies also present on the Scorpion Macehead and in later topographical lists. A list of fortified towns—and by extension those who lived within those fortification walls—are dismantled by animal emblems of the king. These fortification walls with text labeling the town inside are the exact form that later topographical list name-rings take. However, the shape of the walls themselves and the complexity of the toponyms changed with the development of the Egyptian language over time and remained subject to orthographic variation, as was common in the Egyptian script at all periods.

By at least the Eleventh Dynasty, the Egyptians had already begun to fuse the concept of a topographical list with the bound prisoner motif, as evidenced by the small relief from the temple of Nebhepetre Mentuhotep at Gebelein.\(^{88}\) This fusion was fully realized by at least the

---

\(^{87}\) Or, given their proximity to the period of state formation, at least the real-world physical domain of the king.

\(^{88}\) Egyptian Museum JE TR 24/528/5. Though the prisoners in this scene are not actually bound, they are presented in an ordered line, kneeling and with hands down in a gesture of submission. The prisoners here are, however, clearly labeled and representative of their respective locations and/or people groups.
Twelfth Dynasty, from which comes General Mentuhotep’s Buhen stela, the earliest surviving example of a topographical list with iconography identical to that of composite monumental triumph scenes. Here, the toponyms are arranged in ordered rows, each encircled by a fortification wall topped by a bound foreigner figure, and each figure in each row is tied to those who flank him with a rope at the neck. The ropes are held by a witnessing deity—Montu—who simultaneously offers life to the king in the form of an ankh pressed to his lips. Some of the captive toponyms are in rows behind the god and the remainder run under the feet of the god and the king. While smaller, this composition mirrors exactly the usage of this iconography in composite monumental triumph scenes, as well as related triumphal motifs with topographical lists in New Kingdom Theban tombs.

The content of the toponyms themselves was also an important element in both the iconography and the ideology of topographical lists. Within composite monumental triumph scenes in particular, topographical lists were often very lengthy and contained toponyms/ethnonyms from a variety of different geographical regions. When paired with battle scenes, the names contained in topographical lists tended to highlight the defeat of enemies who engaged in battle against the Egyptians in associated scenes. This would have served the purpose of mythologizing the king’s real-world victory while simultaneously grounding the displayed ideological paradigms in reality. In cases where these historical enemies were pictured, they were often combined with more ideological enemies, further mixing themes of real-world martial victory and ideological dominion. Nine Bows names are some of the most included.

---

89 This is particularly the case with Thutmose III’s northern topographical lists associated with his Annals at Karnak; Seti I’s topographical lists in his triumph scene at Karnak that were closely associated with scenes depicting his primarily northern campaigns (Shasu, Yenoam, Hittite, Kadesh, Libyan); Ramesses III’s topographical lists at Medinet Habu associated with scenes depicting battles with the Libyans and Sea Peoples.
toponyms and ethnonyms in monumental triumph scenes, as well as in more restricted contexts like Theban tombs.

As representatives of the traditional enemies of Egypt in their entirety, the Nine Bows (or some subset thereof) were also the most depicted enemies brought to heel. By defeating real-world enemies, the king symbolically defeated the Nine Bows, and the cosmic assurance that the king would always be victorious over the Nine Bows in turn nullified the threat of any real-world defeat. Additionally, the toponyms contained within triumphal topographical lists often even referred to places and peoples who were by no stretch historically, culturally, or militarily under Egyptian influence, let alone under Egyptian subjugation.⁹⁰ This suggests that even ‘historical’ lists accompanying battle scenes or military campaign texts were first and foremost ideological documents rather than campaign records meant to be taken literally. What they did instead was provide semiotic referents with which ancient Egyptian audiences could better contextualize and interpret the nature and extent of the king’s literal and metaphorical dominion.

---

⁹⁰ For example, “Babylon,” which regularly appears in topographical lists, but was never under direct Egyptian rule and was at best on the far periphery of the Egyptian sphere of influence, even during the Late Bronze Age, when Egypt’s international influence was at its height. See Kenneth Kitchen, “Egyptian New Kingdom Topographical Lists: An Historical Source with Literary Histories,” in Causing his Name to Live: Studies in Egyptian Epigraphy and History in Memory of William J. Murnane, eds. Peter Brand and Louise Cooper (Boston: Brill, 2009), 129–135.
CHAPTER 4: VICTORIOUS RHETORIC

In many New Kingdom triumph scenes, particularly those of monumental size, some of the lengthiest textual elements come in the form of rhetorical speeches. These are usually given by the witnessing deity, lauding the king’s actions, confirming divine sanction for those actions, and reiterating ideological formulas for the king’s health and victory. These speeches are closely related to a variety of other literary texts and regularly contain poetic sections. The content, the syntax, and the overarching structure in these speeches is often similar or even identical to other speeches within the set, but variations are present as well.

Prior to the New Kingdom, elements of the long rhetorical speeches associated with triumphs existed in a variety of textual contexts: literary, political, and religious. Religious texts such as the Pyramid Texts, as well as Old Kingdom autobiographies, smaller royal inscriptions, and literary works all bear marks of the iconography and ideology of triumph. These themes changed and developed in complexity and in combination with each other eventually came to compose the stereotypical vocabulary of triumph. This vocabulary was incorporated into litanies of triumph, figurative and poetic texts that centered around the concepts of praise for the victorious king, violent and active subjugation of foreigners and chaotic elements, the universal and divinely sanctioned dominion of the king, and the physical prowess of the king on the battlefield and while performing other ritual duties of the office of kingship. It was this genre of texts that formed the basis of divine rhetorical speeches in New Kingdom triumph scenes.

Pyramid Texts

Many of the themes that pervade later triumphal ideology were already present in the Pyramid Texts of the Old Kingdom. While these are primarily of a religious and magical nature, the Pyramid Texts are also some of the earliest surviving texts from ancient Egypt with distinct
literary qualities. Additionally, some of the specific literary devices that come to be used in triumph scenes, particularly within the divine rhetorical speeches, exist in similar forms in some of the Pyramid Text spells. Because the Pyramid Texts are formatted as lists of spells (or utterances), most are structured more closely to poetry than to prose. As a result, some elements of the figurative language, imagery, and overarching concepts contained within the spells of the Pyramid Texts are reflected in later triumphal texts that lean toward figurative content.

Literary devices such as repetition, allusion, and metaphor are common in Pyramid Text spells and are also similarly employed in triumphal texts. One of the most striking similarities in the use of metaphor between the Pyramid Texts and later litanies of triumph is the theme of the king appearing or acting as various deities. For example, Unas spell 317, part of a series of spells intended to allow the deceased (king) to enter the sky, directs the deceased to recite the following:

“I have come here in advance of the flood’s immersion: I am Sobek, green of plumage, with alert face and raised fore, the splashing one who came from the thigh and tail of the great goddess in the sunlight… I appear as Sobek, Neith’s son…”

Similarly, Merenre spell 572 contains the following:

“You are Ahes, foremost of the Nile Valley land. You are Dedwen, foremost of Bowland. You are Sopdu under his mangroves.”

This figurative equation of the king with deities—especially deities associated with violence or with geographic connotations—is a regular inclusion in the rhetorical speeches of

---


3 PT 572 (Merenre); Allen, *Pyramid Texts*, 231.
deities in triumph scenes and occasionally occurs in related caption texts. In the present Pyramid Texts, the figurative device of the king being or appearing as a deity endows the king with the divine qualities of that deity. For emphasis, particular qualities or facets of the god are often enumerated, drawing attention to specific roles the king plays as the earthly expression of that deity and their power. This also emphasizes the divine nature of the king, an element that is central to his ability to prosper after death in the case of the Pyramid Texts and his ability to hold dominion in the living world in the case of litanies of triumph and triumph scenes.

The Pyramid Texts also include references to topical elements that are important components of triumphal motifs. For example, a number of spells mention smiting and trampling as methods of destroying or defeating inimical forces. Unas spell 279 makes explicit use of trampling as the magical method by which the deceased may defeat those who would seek to prevent his rebirth:

“I am a trampler, who chops the canals’ mud. Thoth, behind me! Trample the one of the dark, trample the one of the dark!”

The Nine Bows, as the early reflection of the prototypical enemies of Egypt, are also present in Pyramid Text spells. Often, and unsurprisingly, this theme is coupled with that of smiting and trampling within the same spell or within a particular set of spells. Pepi II spell 663 is among those in which both themes occur:

“This is your baton is set in your hand, Pepi Neferkare, that you may open the ram-bolted gates that bar the Fenkhu. You number those of the night, direct the Nine Bows, and take the hand of the Imperishable Stars… Acquire the crown as a sole star who wipes out his opponents… So ascend to the sky amongst the gods, because of this your identity, which your father Osiris has made for you as Horus of the Duat, the identity that strikes them, that destroys them, that spews them out, and you will strike them, destroy them, and spew them out at the lake, at the Great Green…”

---

4 PT 279 (Unas); Allen, *Pyramid Texts*, 56.
5 PT 663 (Pepi II); Allen, *Pyramid Texts*, 243–244.
Overall, most of the apparent relationship between the Pyramid Texts and litanies of triumph is thematic in nature, but a few similarities of format or structure are present. The first is repetitive poetic structure that often repeats a line or phrase for emphasis and potentially as a means of magical expression. Another is the format of recitations by deities supporting the deceased (the king). This is format is evident in the aforementioned Pepi II spell 663, in which the reciter addresses the deceased directly, referencing the provisioning of a weapon and imploring that the deceased slaughter his enemies. Significantly, the spell specifies that the deceased should undertake these actions in his identity as “Horus of the Duat,” which clearly projects the normal roles and requirements of the office of kingship into the Netherworld, including prescribed violence. The slaughter of enemies and destruction of opposition is the jurisdiction of the king as the incarnation of Horus, whether in the living world or in the Duat.

**Autobiography of Weni**

During the Old Kingdom, autobiographical inscriptions became a regular fixture in the tomb chapels of non-royal elites. One of the most well-known of these is the autobiography of Weni from his tomb in Abydos. Weni, whose long career covered the reigns of Teti, Pepi I, and Merenre, was warden of Nekhen and Governor of Upper Egypt. His biography recounts a variety of official tasks that he undertook in the service of each of the three kings, but the most pertinent

---


to the present study is a section that concerns a military campaign against Asiatic enemies to the
north of Egypt that took place during the reign of Pepi I.8

Weni notes that he was placed at the head of the army composed of a coalition of Upper
and Lower Egyptians, Nubians, and Libyans. Interestingly, the text divides the Nubians of the
coalition into five distinct groups based on more exact geographical delineation: those from
Irtjet, Medjai, Yam, Wawat, and Kaau.9 Each of these individual locations are commonly
attested in topographical lists in triumph scenes, along with Upper and Lower Egypt, and Libya
(\textit{tjhnw}). While there is no direct relationship between Weni’s autobiography and later
topographical lists, this does suggest that the Egyptians had a long cultural history of interaction
with people from these distant locations before they were ever incorporated into such lists.
Additionally, it indicates that the Egyptians had a complex understanding of the geography and
toponymy of foreign locations, a prerequisite for subsuming other cultures into Egyptian
cosmology in any ordered fashion. More practically, this also reveals a certain continuity in
naming conventions over the course of the third and second millennia BCE, suggesting
uninterrupted cultural familiarity with these locations.

Later in the same section of the text, Weni describes in poetic verse the safe return of the
army under his command and enumerates the ways in which they defeated their Asiatic foes:

“This army returned in safety,
    It had ravaged the Sand-dwellers’ land.
This army returned in safety,
    It had flattened the Sand-dwellers’ land.
This army returned in safety,
    It had sacked its strongholds.
This army returned in safety,

8 This section lists Weni’s role at the head of the king’s army, as well as the cultural makeup of the army itself. The
text goes on to describe the places the army traveled, and the army’s return is summarized in a repetitive, poetic
section within the surrounding prose text.

It had cut down its figs, its vines.
This army returned in safety,
It had thrown fire in all its mansions.
This army returned in safety,
It had slain its troops by many ten-thousands.
This army returned in safety,
It had carried off many troops as captives.”

This section of Weni’s biography contains structures and themes also seen in litanies of triumph and related rhetorical speeches of triumph scenes. Despite the different context, the subject matter—celebration of the violent defeat of foreigners at the hands of Egypt—is strikingly similar. This poetic celebration is wedged between prose descriptions of Weni’s own role in leading the army, effectively bookending the poem to ensure the understanding that this victory was made possible by Weni’s actions and leadership. On a conceptual level, this mirrors the structure of the god’s speeches in triumph scenes that often begin with the establishment of the filial relationship between the king and the god and the role the god played in establishing the king’s victory. This is often followed by a poetic description of the foreigners’ defeat by the king and then by a reiteration of the role and sanction of the god.

In Lichtheim’s translation of the poetic section, the lines alternate with every other line asserting, “This army returned in safety.” The second line of each couplet then contextualizes the army’s return by describing the actions the army took to successfully subdue the Asiatic peoples against whom they were campaigning. However, given this contextualization, the translation of \textit{m htp} may more appropriately be “peacefully” or “in contentment.” The cosmological struggle between Egypt and the foreign “other,” whether presented as a recounting of a historical event or

\begin{enumerate}
\item Lichtheim, \textit{Ancient Egyptian Literature Volume 1}, 20.
\item For the exemplar of this structure, see the triumph scene of Seti I at Karnak in \textit{OIP 107}, 50–51.
\item Faulkner, \textit{Dictionary of Middle Egyptian}, 179–180; \textit{Wb III}, 188.
\end{enumerate}
as an iconic reflection of ma’at or something in between, is always a struggle born of direct symbolic opposition. Both sides cannot, and both sides should not prevail. If the end goal is the restoration or preservation of ma’at, ensuring that the world remains as it should be, a peaceful, content return to Egypt is predicated on the proper destruction and subjugation of enemies. Each of the victorious acts that Weni’s poem lists the Egyptian army as having inflicted upon their Asiatic foes are nearly identical to those the king is said to have done in triumph scene texts.

**Autobiography of Harkuf**

Harkuf’s autobiographical text from the Sixth Dynasty reign of Merenre comes from his tomb in Aswan. This text is less overtly related to later rhetorical texts than the autobiography of Weni, but there are a few elements of note. Firstly, among Harkuf’s titulary is the epithet *dd nrw ḫr hrw m ḫswt*, “who casts the dread of Horus into the foreign lands.” This syntax persists into the rhetorical texts of New Kingdom triumph scenes in two ways: in epithets that retain essentially the same structure and meaning and as one of the actions that the witnessing deity claims to have accomplished for the king. In such cases, as the god is speaking directly to the king, the syntax necessarily changes to “I have cast the fear of you into” foreign lands or peoples, often specified by name. This idea of the fear (or sometimes awe, dread, terror, respect, etc.) of the king being put into foreign people or places by someone working on his behalf is an integral element of the broader triumphal motif. It simultaneously highlights the

---


15 For example, in Amun’s speeches in the triumph scene of Seti I at Karnak, “I set the awe of you in Upper and Lower Retchenu,” and “I set the fear of you in their hearts, your murderousness being directed against all the ill-natured countries.” OIP 107, 51, 60–61.
fearsomeness of the king and the cowardice of his enemies, both of which are foundational concepts supporting the Egyptian worldview of ma’at and the inherent supremacy of the Egyptian state.

Second, Harkuf’s autobiography contains many real-world geographical references that help explicate the Egyptians’ understanding of and interaction with peoples and places outside of Egypt in the Sixth Dynasty. Many of the locations Harkuf discusses are also mentioned in Wení’s autobiography and are mostly southern placenames: Yam, Mekher, Irtjetj, Irtjet, Setju, Tjemeh-land, Wawat, and Punt. Harkuf claims to have gone to and explored these foreign lands at the behest of the king. This suggests both that these foreign locations were important enough to warrant the interest of the Old Kingdom administration and that properly recounting his travels to these distant or liminal places would be a point of prestige for Harkuf. Similarly, the topographical lists in New Kingdom triumph scenes are only semiotically effective because each listed toponym (the sign) refers to a known location or people group (the object). Without the historical, cultural, and geographical context of these locations, a toponym is just a word in a list. Biographies like those of Harkuf and Wení provide a necessary element of real-world contextualization—real people experiencing distant locations with their own senses and integrating them into their existing understanding of the world and Egypt’s place within it.

Lastly, Harkuf makes an interesting reference to the act of smiting foreigners as he recounts his career. When he reaches the land of Yam on a mission from the king, he notes, “I found that the ruler of Yam had gone off to Tjemeh-land, to smite the Tjemeh to the western corner of heaven.” The Tjemeh feature regularly in triumphal texts and scenes as victims of the

---

wrath of the Egyptian king, but here it is a foreign ruler doing the smiting. This is an uncommon phenomenon in Egyptian texts and likely made possible in terms of decorum by the genre of the text itself. However, this phrase, “to the western corner of heaven” is clearly hyperbolistic, with the idea being that the ruler intended to smite all Tjemeh people from those he first encounters, further and further westward, *ad infinitum*. Conceptually, this mirrors the presentation of the Egyptian king in triumphal texts, whose dominion begins in Egypt but extends out in all directions to encompass all lands and peoples even to the mythological and liminal reaches of the known world. In fact, in New Kingdom triumph scenes that contain longer rhetorical texts, the cardinal directions are often referred to as the “edges” or “corners” of heaven and are listed in succession to highlight the far-reaching and comprehensive nature of the king’s dominion.

**Shabaka Stone**

The Shabaka Stone, a so-called theological treatise carved into a black granite slab, dates to the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty reign of Shabaka. However, it is more properly included here among Old Kingdom material because the text of the stone is a copy of an earlier text dating to sometime during the Old Kingdom, based on the archaic nature of the text. The text concerns three topics related to the Memphite theology: the god Ptah as king of unified Egypt, Memphis as the capital and cosmological center of Egypt, and Ptah as the supreme creator deity. This text is pertinent to the present discussion in that it is rife with symbolic geography relating to larger religious and cosmological themes. Some of the symbolism presented here has broader

---


implications regarding Egyptian worldview, and the text recounts aspects of geographic
mythology that form foundational elements of triumphal symbolism.

For example, one of the most well-known sections of the text tells the story of the
apportioning of Egypt between Horus and Seth. To end the perpetual fighting between the two
gods, Geb divides Egypt in half, giving Seth the land of his birth, Upper Egypt, and giving Horus
the land in which his father was drowned, Lower Egypt. But, after separating the two gods into
the Two Lands, Geb changes his mind. Given Seth’s murder of Osiris and Horus’ place as
firstborn son of Osiris, Geb decides that it is not right for their portions to be equal, and that
Horus alone should receive rule of the Two Lands, the inheritance of his father Osiris and his
grandfather Geb.19 Further, Horus is here identified with Ptah Ta-Tenen, bringing the traditional
myth of the battle between Horus and Seth securely into the Mempite theology. When Horus is
given rule of the Two Lands, the following occurs:

“Then sprouted the two Great Magicians [the crowns of Upper and Lower Egypt] upon
his head. He is Horus who arose as the king of Upper and Lower Egypt, who united the
Two Lands in the Nome of the Wall…Reed and papyrus were placed on the double door
of the House of Ptah. That means Horus and Seth, pacified and united.”20

This short passage relays metaphorical and symbolic elements that are deeply ingrained
in later triumphal iconography. Firstly, this associates (textually, rather than just
iconographically) the crowns of Upper and Lower Egypt with those distinct regions, as well as
with Seth and Horus respectively. Secondly, the same association to both location and deity is
made for reed and papyrus plants.

---


20 Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature Volume 1*, 53.
While it is somewhat surprising that Seth does not regularly appear in New Kingdom triumph scenes given his association with both Upper Egypt and with foreign lands, his absence is easily contextualized by this mythological story. When juxtaposed against each other, Upper and Lower Egypt are seen as being in conflict, Seth against Horus. However, when the Two Lands are grouped together—two distinct places, composing the totality of Egypt, they are thus more properly represented by Horus alone in his role as the Dual King. Triumph scenes that present the ideology of the unified state with the victorious king playing the role of Horus have no need for Seth’s iconography. The presence of Seth in these scenes would undermine the unity of the two lands under the Horus-king, and thus the legitimacy of the king’s universal dominion.

Instructions for Merikare

One of the earlier and lengthier examples of Egyptian didactic literature, the Instructions for Merikare, are presented as a testament on kingship from one king to another.21 As such, the principles and ideology of kingship are described in detail within the text, as well as the actions a king should and should not take in order to properly uphold the duties—both practical and ideological—of the office of kingship. Syntactically, many of the instructions are presented as imperative commands, a list of “do’s” and “don’ts.” The beginning of the text is lost, but one of the first instructions after the break concerns how to respond to a citizen riling up others or inciting rebellion: “Suppress him, he is a rebel…curb the multitude, suppress its heat.”22


22 Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature Volume 1*, 97.
Another section advises similar treatment of rebels and criminals, but juxtaposes this against the rightful treatment of other infractions:

“Beware of punishing wrongfully,
Do not kill, it does not serve you.
Punish with beatings, with detention,
Thus will the land be well-ordered;
Except for the rebel whose plans are found out,
For god knows the treason plotters,
God smites the rebels in blood.”

This section implies a number of things about the nature of smiting and its relationship to kingship. Most clearly, it intimates that killing is a proper punishment, but only for those guilty of treason or rebellion—in other words, action against the king or the state, and by extension, the natural order. The statement that it is god who smites the rebels can be interpreted in two ways: either a deity can be expected to give rebels their comeuppance or the king, as a divine incarnation of Horus, should act on behalf of the gods and with their sanction. Given the fact that once smiting iconography was standardized, it almost exclusively depicted the king smiting in the presence of a state deity, the second interpretation is more appropriate. The implied relationship between the king and the witnessing deity sanctioning his actions is integral to the meaning of later triumph scenes, confirming not only the perceived cosmological necessity of violent action against rebels and foreigners (who are inherently placed in opposition to the Egyptian state), but also that it is necessary for the king to be the violent actor. It is he that is both divine enough and human enough to take such action, it is he whose official duties require destruction of chaos, and it is him alone who has received the proper sanction for such action,

---

23 Lichtheim, Ancient Egyptian Literature Volume 1, 100.

24 The implication here is that the gods can deal with foreigners and preserve ma’at on their own, but the king is the instrument through which they have chosen to exercise these powers. This also explains something of the structure of later divine speeches in triumph scenes that consistently both extol the capabilities, actions, and legitimacy of the king, and highlight the role the god(s) have played in ensuring the king’s victory.
thereby transforming an action that is simply murder in other cases into a necessary official ritual inseparable from the office of kingship.

Another section of the text relates the narrating king’s deeds in subduing foreigners:

“You stand well with the Southland,
They come to you with tribute, with gifts…
I arose as lord of the city
Whose heart was sad because of the Northland;
From Hetshenu to Sabaqa, and south to Two-Fish Channel,
I pacified the entire West as far as the coast of the sea…
The East abounds in Bowmen…
The inner islands are turned back,
And every man within the temples say,
‘You are greater than I.’”

The imagery in this section is less overtly violent, primarily because the intended purpose of the violence has already been realized—all four corners of the world have been pacified and incorporated into the Egyptian world, bringing tribute and acknowledging their servitude to Egypt. The four cardinal directions are used figuratively here to encompass not only the directions themselves with Egypt at their center but also the totality of what those directions contain: all peoples and places. The enumeration of each direction in turn is a literary device that recurs in the rhetorical texts of New Kingdom triumph scenes (e.g., the divine speech of Amun-Re in the triumph scene of Seti I at Karnak). Additionally, the phraseology used here for “I pacified the entire West as far as the coast of the sea,” parallels the syntax seen in Harkuf’s description of the ruler of Yam going to smite the Tjemeh “to the western corner of heaven.” Likewise, similar syntax is seen in both the rhetorical speeches of New Kingdom triumph scenes and in their caption texts.

---


26 This sort of exaggeratory, metaphorical description of distance and geographical breadth continued to be used in triumphal texts and became especially popular in the New Kingdom. For example, a caption text from the triumph
In another passage, the narrating king describes at length the nature of Bowmen and Asiatics:

“Lo, the miserable Asiatic,
He is wretched because of the place he’s in:
Short of water, bare of wood,
Its paths are many and painful because of mountains.
He does not dwell in one place,
Food propels his legs,
He fights since the time of Horus…
When the Bowmen were a sealed wall,
I breached [their strongholds],
I made Lower Egypt attack them,
I captured their inhabitants,
I seized their cattle,
Until the Asiatics abhorred Egypt.
Do not concern yourself with him,
The Asiatic is a crocodile on its shore,
It snatches from a lonely road,
It cannot seize from a populous town.”

The complex description presented here expounds on qualities that, in the Egyptian worldview, were typical of Asiatic peoples. Since Asiatic peoples are some of the most common enemies depicted in triumph scenes, the ways in which the Egyptians conceptualized these people and viewed them in relation to the Egyptian norm are integral to understanding the semiotic function of their images and descriptions in triumphal contexts. First, the mountainous regions of West Asia are denigrated as difficult places to live and traverse, not conducive to settled life. This is presented in unspoken juxtaposition to the lush, flat farmland of Egypt that is conversely easy to traverse, to use for agriculture, and to support settled (read: ordered) living. Next, the king boasts that “when the Bowmen were a sealed wall,” he was nonetheless able to defeat them, listing common indicators of marshal defeat, such as breached strongholds, taking

scene of Seti I at Karnak (OIP 107, 50) reads, “Smiting the chiefs of the Bedouin…of the furthest reaches of Asia and of the great circuit of the sea.”

Lichtheim, Ancient Egyptian Literature Volume 1, 103–104.
of captives, and seizure of possessions. The description concludes with a metaphorical comparison of an Asiatic with a crocodile snatching uselessly from a road, not posing any real threat. These literary elements combine to present a picture of who an Asiatic person is. Their lands are not hospitable, forcing them to live a nomadic lifestyle in direct conflict with the Egyptian ideal of a settled existence. They are weak, easily defeated by the Egyptian king, even at the height of their resistance. They engage in violence, but it is ultimately useless, and they resent that Egypt is greater than they are. In later triumph scenes, the foreigner is iconized as cowardly, weak, and antithetical to Egyptian cultural norms. The basis for this later presentation has its roots in literary descriptions such as this one, which focus on the inefficacy and weakness of the Asiatics writ large and present the homeland of Asiatic peoples as the exact inversion of an idealized Egypt.

From a syntactic standpoint, a few lines in this section relate to sentence structures that appear in later triumph scenes. The descriptions of the king’s actions in defeating the Asiatics are structurally similar to the way in which these deeds are commonly enumerated in triumphal rhetorical texts, and in this case even include some of the exact same actions. Additionally, this section contains two metaphorical descriptions of Asiatics. Metaphorical descriptions are extremely common elements in triumphal rhetorical texts and are used both to describe the nature of enemies and that of the king. In their simplest form, these take the syntax “X is Y,” a direct equation of elements formatted as an AB nominal sentence. That is what occurs here, with both “the Bowmen were a sealed wall” and “the Asiatic is a crocodile.”

---

28 These indicators of foreign defeat in battle are common in both Egyptian art and literature. Whether the defeat is described visually, textually, or both, most of these indicators of defeat appear. They are present in triumph scenes, but in more iconic or metaphorical ways than in literary descriptions or narrative battle scenes. In triumph scenes, topographical lists constitute iconographic representations of the aftermath breached strongholds and captives taken.
Instruction of Amenemhat

A similar piece of didactic literature that dates to the Twelfth Dynasty is styled as advice given from king Amenemhat I to his son and successor, Senusret I. However, this piece seems to have been commissioned by Senusret after his father’s assassination and so harbors themes of suspicion against those who might do wrong or who defy the natural order, in addition to the expected themes of upholding the rituals and expectations of the office of kingship. More than other didactic literature, the Instruction of Amenemhat stresses retribution against criminals, rebels, and enemies. It also takes a much more cynical view of the king’s relationship to his subjects and acquaintances, advising that it is best to trust no one.

From a thematic standpoint, the account of Amenemhat’s assassination given in this text provides an oppositional comparison to triumphal themes, something that is not overly common in either Egyptian art or literature. In triumphal art and accompanying texts, the king’s victory is always assured, and moreover is symbolically necessary to constructing meaning. Attacks on the king, particularly successful ones, represent significant disruptions of ma’at, inversions of the ideal order. However, even when suffering an uncharacteristic defeat, many of the king’s victorious qualities are retained, and the failing is placed squarely on the shoulders of the duplicitous servants. Amenemhat contends that he “awoke at the fighting, alert…Had I quickly seized weapons in my hand, I would have made the cowards retreat in haste. But no one is strong at night.” Here, the king is alert and ready to fight, and explains that he would have been

---


30 Lichtheim, Ancient Egyptian Literature Volume 1, 137.
victorious but for the absence of his weapons and the surprise (read: cowardly) nature of the attack itself. Had the fight been fair, the king, as always, would have been assured of victory.

Later in the text, Amenemhat narrates the deeds he accomplished during his reign:

“No harm had come to me since my birth,
No one equaled me as a doer of deeds.
I journeyed to Yebu, I returned to the Delta,
Having stood on the land’s borders, I observed its interior.
I reached the borders of the strongholds
By my strength and my feats…
One sat because I acted and spoke of me,
I had assigned everything to its place.
I subdued lions, I captured crocodiles,
I repressed those of Wawat,
I captured the Medjai,
I made the Asiatics do the dog walk.”31

This section contains both thematic and syntactic elements that recur in later triumphal texts. In particular, the description of the king as an unequaled “doer of deeds”32 and the concept that things occur as the direct result of his action is an important theme throughout triumphal motifs. The emphasis on violent action and on the king as the one performing that action, provides much of the basis for understanding triumph scenes in their wider ritual context.

Additionally, a familiar structure is present here that gives a laundry list of enemies and the different ways in which the king succeeded in subduing or subjugating them. This list contains commonly mentioned broad categories of enemies: peoples of Wawat, the Medjai, and Asiatics, in addition to the somewhat more allegorical enemies of lions and crocodiles. While it is possible that the king hunted animals such as these during his lifetime, the juxtaposition of

31 Lichtheim, Ancient Egyptian Literature Volume 1, 137.

32 In both literature and royal texts, the king is often described as “one who acts,” or “one who does X.” The importance of the king’s action generally and in triumphal contexts is directly related to the ritual roles of his office and his role as the “doer of things.” For this, see Routledge, Ancient Egyptian Ritual Practice: jr-ḥt and nt-ḥ (Ph.D. diss., University of Toronto, 2001).
lions and crocodiles, both of which are often used to symbolize foreigners in text and art, with actual foreign peoples is meant to highlight the metaphorical equation of the two in this context. This is underscored by the last line, in which the king claims to have made the Asiatics walk like dogs. This serves not only to dehumanize the king’s enemies, but also to accentuate the disparity between the king’s power and the inherent weakness of those who would rebel or fight against him.

The Prophecies of Neferti

The Prophecies of Neferti is a literary-historical text that was written in the early years of the reign of Amenemhat I, the first king of the Twelfth Dynasty.33 While the story is set during the Fourth Dynasty reign of Snefru, the king extolled and ‘prophesied’ by the titular sage Neferti is in fact Amenemhat himself. As a literary work, this text fits easily into the wider genre common in the later First Intermediate Period and Middle Kingdom—lamentations, or literature on the theme of “national distress.”34 However, unlike most other examples of lamentation literature, the Prophecies of Neferti includes not only the expected doomsaying, but also the hope and expectation for the end of the prophesied upheaval. In the story, Neferti foresees a time of violence and destruction, the dissolution of the strong Egyptian state.35 This time of chaos, he predicts, will come to an end with the rise of a great king, who will once again unite the lands and allow for the triumph of ma’at.


34 Lichtheim, Ancient Egyptian Literature Volume 1, 139.

35 This theme underlies much Egyptian literature in the lamentation genre, as it speaks to not only the symbolic triumph of chaos over order, but also recalls historical occasions of political dissolution and cultural unrest.
The great king in question is described as follows:

“Then a king will come from the South,
Ameny, the justified, by name,
Son of a woman of Ta-Seti, child of Upper Egypt.
He will take the white crown,
He will wear the red crown;
He will join the Two Mighty Ones,
He will please the Two Lands with what they wish,
With field-circler in his fist, oar in this grasp.
Rejoice, O people of his time,
The son of man will make his name for all eternity!
The evil-minded, the treason-plotters,
They suppress their speech in fear of him;
Asiatics will fall to his sword,
Libyans will fall to his flame,
Rebels to his wrath, traitors to his might,
As the serpent on his brow subdued the rebels for him.
One will build the Walls of the Ruler,
To bar Asiatics from entering Egypt;
They shall beg water as suppliants,
So as to let their cattle drink.
Then Order will return to its seat,
While Chaos is driven away.”\textsuperscript{36}

This characterization of Amenemhat as the restorer of order out of the existent chaos is rooted almost entirely in the \textit{topos} of the victorious king that was already common in Egyptian literature by the Middle Kingdom (as evidenced by the preceding examples) and which forms a central component of the ideology espoused in monumental triumph scenes by the New Kingdom. Here, multiple facets of the king’s victorious persona are mentioned, including his identity as an Upper Egyptian, his role as uniter of the Two Lands, his ability to decimate enemies of all kinds, and his ability to protect Egypt and its borders from outside incursion.

Given the fact that Amenemhat I seems not to have been directly related to the royal family that preceded him, his geographical ties are listed as part of his literary description here as

\textsuperscript{36} Lichtheim, \textit{Ancient Egyptian Literature Volume 1}, 143–144.
a means of legitimating his rule. Yet, this inclusion is also not incidental and instead served a distinct ideological end that its factuality would only have strengthened. The king’s southern-ness is not only mentioned but reiterated three times. He “will come from the south,” as a “son of a woman of Ta-Seti,” and as a “child of Upper Egypt.” This triplicate description, as well as its focus on his southern lineage, not just the mere fact of his presence in Upper Egypt, evokes cultural memories regarding the unification of Egypt by southern kings—the original formation of the state in the time of Narmer, as well as the more recent re-unification by Nebhepetre Mentuhotep. The clear parallelism between Amenhotep and these earlier kings was a form of legitimizing propaganda. Taken a step further, Amenhotep’s attempts at legitimization through cultural memory within this text extended to the he king’s role as the uniter of the Two Lands and as defender of its borders. Drawing still from this connection to kings like Narmer and Nebhepetre Mentuhotep, Amenhotep calls on the existing ideological relationship between the unification of the Two Lands and the ability to maintain ma’at through the protection of the borders of the Two Lands, once established.

Additionally, the ability of the king to defeat myriad enemies is, once again, the common theme that ties the ideological elements of his persona together. In Neferti’s litany, his enemies take the form of “the evil-minded, treason-plotters,” Asiatics, Libyans, rebels, and traitors. Southern enemies are notably absent in this passage, but this is not irregular. Nonetheless, these

---

37 Gae Callendar, “The Middle Kingdom Renaissance,” in The Oxford History of Ancient Egypt, ed. Ian Shaw (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 146. In fact, the entire story has undertones of legitimating propaganda. While no major calamities seem to have preceded Amenemhat I’s accession to the throne and the beginning of the Twelfth Dynasty, the fact that he was an official (perhaps vizier) unrelated to the royal family meant that the appearance of legitimate succession was all the more important. As such, within this text Amenemhat is described as having a variety of qualities associated with the ideal of kingship, including unification being driven by southern kings, smiting foreigners, and suppressing rebellions.

38 In literary contexts, enemies are predictably separated into and referenced by their primary types: Northern (Asiatic), Southern (African), and Western (Libyan), with more specific groups or locations singled out, but these lists are not usually comprehensive in any way. Southern enemies may have been left out of this text simply due to
enemies include the two quintessential ideological enemies of the established order: foreigners and rebels. This implies that the king is able to maintain order both within Egypt and without, and that those who plot against him do so in futility and against the will of the gods. This, too, is effective legitimizing propaganda and hints at the broader ideologies of triumph on which Egyptian royalty relied.

**Senusret I Inscription in Montu Temple at Tod**

On the west face of a rear wall at the temple of Montu at Tod is a damaged inscription that most likely dates to the reign of Senusret I.\(^39\) Redford suggests that the text is part of the larger tradition of “royal sittings,” a recorded speech from the throne.\(^40\) Within some of the more damaged portions of the text, there are clear allusions to the ideology of triumph, with at least eight lines being dedicated to describing the violent punishment intended for those who had destroyed the king’s shrine, as well as violence inflicted on foreigners more generally. A few legible phrases and sections are as follows:

“He had commanded me, ‘Act!’ I did not cease my acting.”\(^41\)

Here, the king recounts that the god bade him to act against his enemies in retribution for the wrongs they had done to him. The importance of the king’s action in defeating his enemies is central to triumphal ideology and is highlighted by this passage. A subsequent partially damaged passage relates some of the violent actions that the king undertook:

---


\(^{40}\) Redford, “The Tod Inscription of Senusret I,” 44.

\(^{41}\) Redford, “The Tod Inscription of Senusret I,” 43.
“…decapitating the enemy…His legitimate rage was against the young, the knife was applied to the children of the enemy and sacrificial victims were the Asiatics.”

Notably, this text hints at a few different elements known from more purely triumphal texts. The reference to smiting in the form of decapitation is clear and expected in the present context. What is more unique is the fact that the text specifies both that the king’s rage is legitimate and that it is directed at the children of his enemies. Additionally, slightly later in the passage, Asiatics, Nubians, and Medjai are all listed as recipients of the king’s wrath, and female enemies are mentioned separately from their male counterparts.

This text also makes clear reference to sacrificial victims, a topic that has been contentious within Egyptological scholarship. Whether the present reference to sacrificial victims is literal or figurative is outside the realm of this study, but the fact that the reference itself exists as part of a larger description of the king’s divinely sanctioned (read: legitimate) ritual and retributive duties which take the form of violent smiting of enemies, is important. This implies a direct need for divine sanction in order for the king to be able to perform smiting actions—even retributive ones—in an official capacity.

**Boundary Stelae of Senusret III**

The Twelfth Dynasty king Senusret III erected a pair of red granite boundary stelae near the southern border forts of Semna and Uronarti. These stelae contain texts typical of boundary

---

42 Redford, “The Tod Inscription of Senwosret I,” 43.

43 Especially as it relates to smiting, triumph, and the possibility of ritual human sacrifice, this topic has been covered most thoroughly by Muhlestein (Violence in the Service of Order) and Schulman (Ceremonial Execution and Public Rewards).

stelae, as well as a poetic section reminiscent of other literary descriptions of the king’s strength, marshal prowess, and success in bringing foreign enemies to heel. It also warns foreigners—in this case Nubians who lived just south of the border at Semna—against attacking:

“I have made my boundary further south than my fathers,
I have added to what was bequeathed me.
I am a king who speaks and acts,
What my heart plans is done by my arm.
One who attacks to conquer, who is swift to succeed,
In whose heart a plan does not slumber…
To stop when attacked is to make bold the foe’s heart,
Attack is valor, retreat is cowardice,
A coward is he who is driven from his border.
Since the Nubian listens to the word of mouth,
To answer him is to make him retreat.
Attack him, he will turn back,
Retreat, he will start attacking.
They are not people one respects,
They are wretches, craven-hearted.
My majesty has seen it, it is not an untruth.
I have captured their women,
I have carried off their dependents,
Gone to their wells, killed their cattle,
Cut down their grain, set fire to it.
As my father lives for me, I speak the truth.
It is no boast that comes from my mouth.”

The idea that the king has expanded the boundaries of Egypt and added to the territories that his forefathers controlled is, understandably, common in boundary stelae. However, this also has broader implications for the ideology of kingship. The ideological imperative is that a good Egyptian king, a king who is properly upholding ma’at, will necessarily expand the physical borders of Egyptian dominion to more closely reflect the cosmological ideal in which the reach of the king’s power extends to all the corners of the earth and encompasses all lands and peoples. This is one of the foundational ideals that drives the content of triumph scenes and how they are

45 Lichtheim, Ancient Egyptian Literature Volume 1, 119.
arranged, stressing the incorporation of foreign peoples and places into the ideological dominion of the king.

Once again, the king highlights the fact that he is a man of action and elaborates that what he plans is “done by [his] arm.” This specification that actions occur “by his arm” or “by means of his strong arm” regularly appears in both the rhetorical and caption texts of triumph scenes.\textsuperscript{46} In that context, this assertion in the text parallels the action of the king’s smiting arm in the accompanying iconography. Here, the king as actor is necessarily a violent actor, and these actions directly result in the subjugation of foreign foreigners and expansion of the king’s own dominion.

Here, valor and cowardice, embodied in the figures of the king and his foreign enemies respectively, are placed in direct contrast. This dichotomy of bravery and cowardice, clearly already engrained in the Egyptian worldview by this point, becomes central to later triumph scenes. Within triumphal texts, the king’s positive qualities (power, bravery, action) are always presented in contradistinction to the negative qualities of his foreign enemies (weakness, cowardice, inaction). Such comparison underscores the intensity of these qualities and helps establish the ideological justification for the inevitability of the king’s victory: in an ideally functioning world, the king’s positive qualities aided by divine sanction of his actions will always defeat, overtake, or subdue the upstart forces of isfet championed by cowardly foreigners.

As we have seen in previous works with literary qualities, a list of ways in which the king has ensured the defeat of his enemies is usually included when royal deeds are mentioned. In this case, he has taken captives, overtaken wells, killed livestock, and destroyed grain. Each of these losses inflicted by the king upon the Nubians reiterates their defeat, as each is symbolic of defeat

\textsuperscript{46} See also n. 32 regarding the king’s ritual function as \textit{jr-ht}, “doer of things.”
in its own right. Similar litanies of defeat appear in the rhetorical texts of triumph scenes, where they serve to reiterate the images of defeat, particularly the kneeling prisoners awaiting slaughter in the smiting icon and the lines of captive name-rings in the topographical list. In the boundary stelae, the king also makes a point of confirming that the description of his actions presented here is entirely truthful. This emphasis on the veracity of his exploits legitimizes his positive qualities as well as the negative qualities his enemies possess.

Lastly, the physical location of this text must also be taken into account, as the fact that this text occurs on boundary stelae is not insignificant. While boundary stelae are not ‘monumental’ in the sense of their size, they are monumental in the fact that they are stone markers set up to mark a specific occasion and a particular location in the landscape. This placement ties the content of the text to the physical location, marking the spot in the landscape where these actions occurred. The border discussed in the text is the stela itself. The integration of text and landscape is common in ancient Egypt, particularly with respect to texts and images that display royal power. Old Kingdom rock relief smiting scenes are another pertinent example that contains similar themes. In the case of New Kingdom triumph scenes, these are generally integrated into the artistic and architectural programs of temples, providing a ritual and symbolic landscape with which the scenes interacted.

**Hymns to Senusret III**

Also from the reign of Senusret III is a series of hymns extolling the king, written on papyrus. A few of the hymns touch on triumphal themes, but the first is formatted as a litany of

---

triumph and is a particularly stark precursor to the rhetorical speeches of later triumph scenes. It also holds many similarities to the Middle Kingdom examples already mentioned:

“Hail to you, Khakaure, our Horus, Divine of Form!  
Land’s protector who widens its borders,  
Who smites foreign countries with his crown.  
Who holds the Two Lands in his arms’ embrace,  
Who subdues foreign lands by a motion of his hands.  
Who slays Bowmen without a blow of the club,  
Shoots the arrow without drawing the string.  
Whose terror strikes the Bowmen in their land,  
Fear of whom smites the Nine Bows.  
Whose slaughter brough death to thousands of Bowmen,  
Who had come to invade his borders.  
Who shoots the arrow as does Sakhmet,  
When he felled thousands who ignored his might.  
His majesty’s tongue restrains Nubia,  
His utterances make Asiatics flee.  
Unique youth who fights for his frontiers,  
Not letting his subjects weary themselves.  
Who lets the people sleep till daylight,  
The youths may slumber, his heart protects them.  
Whose commands made his borders,  
Whose words joined the Two Shores.”

This hymn focuses specifically on extolling the king in his role as the protector and expander of Egypt’s borders, and as one who subdues and strikes fear into foreigners of all kinds. In doing so, it juxtaposes the slaughter and defeat of foreigners against the safeguarding and support of the king’s own subjects. These two ends are part and parcel of the same aspect of kingship—the king as victor. For foreigners, his triumph is meant to be feared. It reinforces their own lower place in the universe and reiterates their submission under duress. For the king’s own subjects, his triumph is meant to be praised, as he has successfully proven both his ability to protect and defend them and his ability to uphold the physical and ideological requirements of his royal office. This dichotomous ideological figure of the victorious king, as well as the

---

physical act of his triumph (whether real or metaphorical) is a central component in triumph
scenes of the New Kingdom and is exhibited in both the textual and iconographic elements.\textsuperscript{49} In
this hymn to Senusret III, however, the conceptual dichotomy underlying the ideology is at its
most conspicuous.

Another distinct triumphal theme present in this hymn is the idea that the king can
slaughter or defeat his enemies without even having to use his weapons, in essence depending
instead on the characteristic ability conferred on him by the office of kingship to do so. The idea
that the king is someone “who slays Bowmen without a blow of the club, shoots the arrow
without drawing the string,” in this context implies that his mere presence or existence is enough
to defeat his enemies, but he proceeds to subdue them with violence, nonetheless. In some ways,
this seems to be ideologically contradictory—if the defeat of enemies can be achieved without
violence (or even without action), why then does the king invariably meet those enemies with
violence?

The Egyptians were not overly concerned with ideological, symbolic, or even religious
contradiction, and both parts of this contradiction served important ideological ends. On one
hand, the assertion that the king is capable of fully subduing his enemies merely because of who
he is demonstrates both his own competence and that he has divine sanction. It assures his
subjects that order will always be upheld because its champion cannot lose. On the other hand,
the use of violent action to subdue enemies shows that the struggle between $ma’at$ and $isfet$ is by

\textsuperscript{49} The ideology and mythology of the king’s role in the cosmological struggle between $ma’at$ and $isfet$ was such that
it looked different depending on a person’s relationship to the king. For Egyptians, those for whom living in a world
ordered according to the precepts of $ma’at$ was the ultimate goal, the king was the protective force that kept chaos at
bay and allowed them to live in health, peace, and prosperity. However, that peace and prosperity could only be
achieved—at least symbolically—by destruction and oppression of foreign agents of $isfet$.\textsuperscript{49}
its very nature a violent one, as one cannot exist in the presence of the other. As such, violence is often required to defeat the forces of *isfet*.

Another theme present here that is also common in later triumphal texts is the king wielding the spoken word as a weapon. Contextually, words hold the same powers as a bow or *hps* might—they slaughter, they restrain, they strike fear, and induce flight. For the Egyptians, words had magical properties and were themselves an integral component of magical practice, and necessary to ensure the efficacy of magic. Words spoken by the king, mirroring his own actions, thus redouble the effectiveness of those actions.

All of these related themes are rooted in the same base mechanism: the king as the primary, violent actor. This violent action, as it is presented here, is also intrinsically tied to the physical body and physicality of the king himself. The hymn makes clear that it is a function of the physical body that he both protects his own people and defeats his enemies—his arms embrace, his hands subdue, his tongue restrains, his heart protects, his crown smites.

**Stela of Sehetepibre**

A stela of the official Sehetepibre, who lived during the Twelfth Dynasty reigns of Senusret III and Amehemhat III, comes from Abydos and contains multiple different textual genres. Sehetepibre’s text draws from autobiographical traditions, as well as Middle Kingdom instructions, and laudatory poetry. A poetic instruction text from Sehetepibre to his children on

---


the verso of the stela has bearing on the present discussion. The instruction, which urges the
children to honor and serve their king, also lauds the king himself in similar fashion to the
laudatory sections of text in composite triumph scenes. The king is figuratively compared to and
identified with deities and their actions in creating, sustaining, and protecting the ordered world,
as follows:

“He is Re who sees with his rays,
Who lights the Two Lands more than the sun-disk,
Who makes verdant more than great Hapy,
He has filled the Two Lands with life force…
He is the Khnum of everybody,
Begetter who makes mankind.
He is Bastet who guards the Two Lands,
He who worships him is sheltered by his arm.
He is Sakhmet to him who defies his command,
He whom he hates will bear distress.”\(^{53}\)

While this section does mention the king’s role in protecting the Two Lands, it is notably
less overtly violent in imagery and verbiage than some other texts of similar type.\(^{54}\) This may be
due to the nature of the intended audience and the expressed purpose of the text—the celebration
of the king is secondary to the advice that Sehetepibre is leaving for his children. Nonetheless,
the description of the king, both structurally and in base metaphorical content, does provide a
literary precursor to the comparative metaphors that are invariably included in the rhetorical
speeches of witnessing deities in triumph scenes.

Here, the king is identified or compared with Re, Khnum, Bastet, and Sekhmet, and
Hapy. The connection with Khnum and Hapy serves to highlight the generative aspect of

---

\(^{53}\) Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature Volume 1*, 128.

\(^{54}\) While the theme of creating and preserving *ma’at* is clearly present, this text focuses primarily on the generative
and protective aspects of the king’s role in doing so, not unlike portions of the hymn to Senusret III, above.
kingship and the role of the king in the perpetual creation and maintenance of the cosmic order.\textsuperscript{55} The connection with the dualistic feline pair of Bastet and Sekhmet, on the other hand, highlights the role of the king in protecting Egypt and his subjects and vanquishing his foes. This theme carries through to later triumphal texts, and in fact, Sekhmet is one of the most common deities to whom the king is metaphorically linked in the rhetorical speeches of the witnessing deities.

The dichotomy between Bastet and Sekhmet has been well-discussed,\textsuperscript{56} but its literary usage in this stela suggests an important nuance to the relationship that ties to the role of Sekhmet in triumphal texts—Bastet embodies the concept of protective (defensive) violence whereas Sekhmet embodies aggressive (offensive) violence. As such, when Sekhmet is invoked in triumph scenes, the king is identified with an aggressive violent actor. In seeking out, slaughtering, and subduing foreign entities, the king is both the aggressor and the victor.

The Tale of Sinuhe

The Tale of Sinuhe, one of the best preserved and well-known of stories of Egyptian literature, follows the Egyptian official Sinuhe on his flight from Egypt in the wake of the death of the king Amenemhat I, though the story itself dates to later in the Middle Kingdom.\textsuperscript{57} Upon fleeing north to Upper Retenu, Sinuhe explains to its ruler the situation in Egypt, confirming that


Senusret I has taken his father’s place upon the throne. In doing so, Sinuhe provides the following lengthy poetic description of the new king:

“He was the smiter of foreign lands
While his father stayed in the palace…

He is a champion who acts with his arm,
A fighter who has no equal,
When seen engaged in archery,
When joining the melee.

Horn-cuber who makes hands turn weak,
His foes can not close ranks;
Keen-sighted he smashes foreheads,
None can withstand his presence.

Wide-striding he smites the fleeing,
No retreat for him who turns his back;
Steadfast in time of attack,
He makes turn back and turns not his back.

Stouthearted when he sees the mass,
He lets not slackness fill his heart.
Eager at the sight of combat,
Joyful when he works his bow.

Clasping his shield he treads under foot,
No second blow needed to kill;
None can escape his arrow,
None turn aside his bow.

The Bowmen flee before him,
As before the might of the goddess;
As he fights he plans the goal,
Unconcerned about all else.

Lord of grace, rich in kindness,
He has conquered through affection;
His city loves him more than itself,
Acclaims him more than its own god.

Men outdo women in hailing him,
Now that he is king;
Victor while yet in the egg,
Set to be ruler since his birth…
Enlarger of frontiers,
He will conquer southern lands,
While ignoring northern lands,
Though made to smite Asiatics and tread on Sand-farers.”

This poetic description of Senusret I highlights familiar themes central to the motif of the victorious king, including some that focus on the physicality of the king and the violence he is able to inflict. Firstly, the text notes that Senusret was the “smiter of foreign lands” while his father was ruling in the palace. Rather than being a slight against the character of Amenemhat, this comment is meant to underscore Senusret’s ability to successfully perform the royal task of smiting foreign people and places, as proven by the fact that he has already been doing it. This, in turn, assures that there is no break in time between strong, victorious kings—the transition is seamless, and Egypt is not in danger of falling into chaos for lack of a sufficient king. As supplemental confirmation of Senusret’s competence, he is presented as having “no equal” and being a “victor while yet in the egg, set to be ruler since his birth.” This suggests that Senusret is singularly qualified to take his father’s place, as he has been victorious since before he was born and from the time he was born was set to become king.

Senusret is also described as a violent actor in multiple ways. He “acts with his arm,” tying the violent actions in which he engages (“he smashes foreheads,” “smites the fleeing”) directly to the physicality of his body. He takes pleasure in this violence and does not fear it. This is an important distinction, as the Egyptians generally disapproved of taking pleasure in


59 *m swḥt*, “in the egg” is an Egyptian idiom with the essential meaning of “in the womb,” with the sense of something still in the process of being created or still forming (see *Wb IV*, 73). Here and in other triumphal contexts, it is used to retroactively ascribe the important qualities of kingship to him before he was born, in turn suggesting an element of both divine will and divine sanction, the king’s rule having been ordained before he even fully existed.
violence and destruction, but the violent suppression of foreigners by the king was a cosmological and ideological necessity. As such, not only was it proper to do so, but it would have been proper for the king to take pride and even joy in upholding ma’at in this way despite the violent nature of the acts themselves.

Here, Senusret is also ascribed qualities above and beyond a normal warrior that suggest he has been granted divine approval. When he fights “none can withstand his presence,” he kills with only one strike, and no one can escape his weapons. This description of Senusret is fraught with juxtaposition, the two most important being the difference in the perception of the king by Egyptians vs. foreigners and the nature of the king vs. the nature of his enemies. To his own people, the king is kind and beloved, never-failing in his duty to protect them. To his enemies, he is a terror to be feared, an inevitable defeat to flee. This distinction ties back to the multifaceted roles the king is expected to fulfill. He must rule his own people, those who are Egyptian and observe the proper social order just, else he upend ma’at himself. Likewise, he must destroy, subdue, or otherwise restrain foreign and rebellious individuals, else isfet be allowed to prevail. The difference in the nature of the king vs. that of his enemies is a stark one. Where the king stands steadfast in battle and never retreats, his enemies flee even if the action is futile. Where the king is blessed with prowess, his enemies are weak and unable to complete the actions they attempt. This, too, is a reflection of the struggle between ma’at and isfet.

In addition to these thematic elements, the structure of the litany praising the king in the story of Sinuhe is clearly modeled after the victory poems common in other contexts in the Middle Kingdom and bears particular similarities to the boundary stela and hymns from the reign

---

60 Take for example a number of the maxims of Ptahhotep that suggest one should be kind, generous, and not hurtful toward their family, acquaintances, and even strangers, save only for situations in which the person in question has committed a transgression against ma’at, such as “speaking evilly,” stealing or otherwise acting greedily, or acting as does not befit their station. See Lichtheim, Ancient Egyptian Literature Volume 1, 64–65, 67.
of Senusret III. This poetic structure, particularly as it is inset in a larger narrative concerning interactions between Egyptians (often, the king alone) and foreigners, is also reminiscent of similar texts that follow. Both the themes and structures in Sinuhe’s litany are repeated in monumental triumph scenes and other triumphal texts of the New Kingdom.

**Execration Text Rebellion Formulae**

Execration rituals, the magical rite of smashing, destroying, or otherwise obliterating figurines representing enemies or prisoners, were a common form of apotropaic magic performed throughout most of pharaonic Egyptian history.⁶¹ As part of the wider tradition of the execration ritual, the texts that were inscribed on execration figurines provided specificity to the intended outcome of the ritual. Words, whether as a verbal or textual component, were an integral part of Egyptian magical practice and therefore added to the potency of the symbolic destruction that took place during the execration rite.⁶² Execration texts are numerous and varied, though their content became more formalized and consistent over time.⁶³

In many cases, execration texts were very simple, containing only the name, title, or description of a single person. An individual figurine might also contain multiple names, or even a lengthy list of intended victims. In other instances, longer texts were included with the names, clarifying the magical intentions for the figurine and the ritual in which it would have been destroyed. One of the most striking examples of the textual formulae used in this context is the

---


⁶³ In *Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice*, 139, Ritner notes that the ‘rebellion formula’ often found on execration figurines is attested from the Old Kingdom, but it did not become standardized until at least the Middle Kingdom.
rebellion formula, forms of which are known from as early as the Old Kingdom reign of Pepi II and becomes the standard for execration texts by the Middle and New Kingdoms. With slight variations, the rebellion formula typically reads:

“Every rebel of this land, all patricians, all commoners, all males, all eunuchs, all women, every chieftain…every ally of every land who will rebel in [a list of locations], who will rebel or who will make plots, or who will say anything evil against Upper and Lower Egypt forever.”

While the text itself is not particularly complex since it is primarily just a list of enemies, the ideology and symbolism on which it relies is multifaceted and has broader implications for the relationship between magical practice and state-sanctioned ideologies of triumph. Firstly, the focus on rebels and rebellion highlights the fact that from an ideological standpoint, especially where state ideology was concerned, rebels were the quintessential enemies. In the Egyptian view—supported by the contents of the rebellion formula—inimical rebels came in two primary forms. Foreigners (and by extension anyone who allied with them) were considered rebels against the established order by their very nature, the mere fact of their existence outside the rule of ma’at. But, rebels could also come from within Egypt; those who opposed the government or the king, encouraged dissidence, or otherwise acted counter to law and order were rebellious.

The inclusion of a list of names or locations to be destroyed or brought to heel within the rebellion formula parallels in text the same symbolism present in the iconography of topographical lists, especially when considered in combination with the ritual act of destruction.

---


65 Ritner, *Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice*, 139. Slight variations did exist even in the standardized rebellion formula, but the present version, provides a representative example of the normative content of those texts. This text was originally presented with discussion in Abu Bakr and Osing, “Ächtungstexte aus dem Alten Reich,” *MDIK* 29 (1973): 117–130.
In the execration text, the list of names specified the exact people or places targeted by the magical rite, with the performer of the rite (the one ritually breaking the figurine(s)) playing the same part as the king would in a smiting scene or a larger triumph scene with an included topographical list. In both instances, the gathered enemies, specific rebels, foreigners, and enemies of ma ‘at are slain in an act of sympathetic magic meant to ensure the same outcome in the physical world.

**Annals of Thutmose III**

The so-called annals of Thutmose III are a record of his Asiatic military campaigns over the course of at least twenty years of his reign. The annals present an official account of the campaigns they record, with the most significant being the year 23 campaign that culminated in the battle of Megiddo and resulted in the siege and surrender of the city. The account of the battle, as with most Egyptian battle narratives, is embellished and concentrates on the actions of the king and his army that led them to their ultimate victory. In this way, the annals still fall within the broader category of triumphal texts despite the more narrative nature of the text itself. The following text begins the accounting of the battle of Megiddo:

“His majesty set out on a chariot of fine gold, decked in his shining armor like strong-armed Horus, lord of action, like Mont of Thebes, his father Amun strengthening his arm...his majesty was in their center, Amun protecting his person in the melee, and the strength of [Seth pervading] his limbs.”

---


Despite the narrative nature of the overall text, this section retains a number of poetic elements and displays themes identical to earlier litanies of triumph. The physicality of the king, particularly as it relates to the strength of his arm, is the primary focus of this passage that announces his arrival onto the battlefield. He is called “Lord of action,” underscoring the active role the king plays in the battle, especially when paired with the fact that the text notes that “his majesty was in their center.” He is compared to Horus with the specific epithet “strong-armed.” Amun is said to be strengthening his arm while Seth strengthens all of his limbs. Thus, the king’s strength is undoubtedly godlike and is in itself an endorsement from the gods who have lent him their aid. These supporting gods, Horus, Montu, Amun, and Seth are deities often associated with either the iconography or the text of monumental triumph scenes and who each have an important relationship to the ideologies of triumph. Horus, inextricably tied to the office of Egyptian kingship and the ascendancy of Egypt, served as the divine counterpart to the active king. The fierce falcon-headed war god Montu was the embodiment of the violent battle prowess and action the king needed to defeat his enemies and maintain maʿat. Amun, the primary state god, both protects and strengthens the king in his official role as victorious warrior. Seth, whose domain included both the sheer destructive power of nature and the relationship between Egypt and foreign lands, imbued the king with that power and dominion.

A comment that comes slightly later in the text juxtaposes the fear and weakness of the Thutmose’s enemies against the divine power and strength of the king:

“For the fear of his majesty had entered [their bodies], and their arms sank as his diadem overwhelmed them.”

68 ḫps, “strong arm,” in this epithet and elsewhere is the homonym of ḫps, “sickle sword.” This relationship was intentional, and while the orthographic spelling of the words differed, it solidified the relationship between the king’s arm, his weapon, and the power to defeat his enemies. See Wb III, 268–270; Faulkner, Dictionary of Middle Egyptian, 189-190.

69 Lichtheim, Ancient Egyptian Literature Volume 2, 32.
Interestingly, there is a direct iconographic opposition here; the arms of the king are strengthened, and the arms of his enemies sink, losing their strength and will to fight as they are overwhelmed. Yet again the king’s victory is assured from the outset, and his enemies have no recourse but to accept their defeat. Despite the fact that this text was meant to serve primarily as a narrative record, the ideology of triumph is clearly and purposely present in this motif, confirming even before the outset of the battle that the king’s (and therefore Egypt’s) victory is inevitable. The remainder of the record then expounds on the way in which that victory was achieved.

A historical note contained in the section of the text that recounts the siege of the city of Megiddo also reveals another element of the ideology of triumph that was so innate to Egyptians when engaged in conflict with foreigners: subjugation by means of magical encirclement. The text notes that:

“His majesty himself was on the fort east of the town…It was given the name ‘Menkheperre-Encircler-of-Asiatics.’”

The fort from which the siege was run had been named Menkheperre-Encircler-of-Asiatics to magically reinforce the action the king was engaged in during the siege. Such a name would have provided yet another layer of protection ensuring the ideal reality of the king’s assured victory would come to pass. Like smiting, trampling, or crushing underfoot, encircling was a physical action that could be performed to symbolically (and in the case of a successful siege, more literally) subdue an enemy or chaotic force. As an act of sympathetic magic, the symbolic encircling was meant to bring the parallel action into being in the real world. This is the

---

70 Ritner, *Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice*, 23, 57–60

same basic concept that underlies the iconography of smiting and trampling motifs, topographical lists, and monumental triumph scenes of the same period.

Poetical Stela of Thutmose III

The poetical stela of Thutmose III was placed in the same hall at Karnak in which his annals were recorded. The content of the text is almost entirely triumphal in nature and is split into three distinct sections: an encomium-like prologue, a poem, and an epilogue.72 The prologue is lengthy compared to the other sections, and it presents a distinct litany of triumph styled as a speech by Amun-Re to his son and champion, Thutmose III:

“I gave you valor and victory over all lands. 
I set your might, your fear in every country,
The dread of you as far as heaven’s four supports.
I magnified your awe in every body,
I made your person’s fame traverse the Nine Bows.
The princes of all lands are gathered in your grasp,
I stretched my own hands out and bound them for you.
I fettered Nubia’s Bowmen by ten thousand thousands,
The northerners a hundred thousand captives.
I made your enemies succumb beneath your soles,
So that you crushed the rebels and the traitors.
For I bestowed on you the earth, its length and breadth,
Westerners and Easterners are under your command.

You trod all foreign lands with joyful heart,
None could approach your majesty’s vicinity
But, you, with me your guide, attained them.
You crossed the waters of Naharin’s Euphrates,
In might and victory ordained by me,
Hearing your battle cry they hid in holes.
I robbed their nostrils of the breath of life,
And made the dread of you pervade their hearts.
My serpent on your brow consumed them,
She made quick booty of the evildoers.
The lowlanders she swallowed by her flame,
Asiatic heads she severed, none escaped,

---
The foes were tottering before her might.
I let your valor course through every land,
The gleaming diadem protected you,
In all that heaven circles none defy you.”73

The content and the structure of the prologue text is nearly identical to the rhetorical speeches given by deities in composite triumph scenes of the same king, as well later Ramesside examples. Within the speech, the god stresses his own role in causing the king’s victory over his enemies and assuring his universal dominion. While the expected imagery of the king violently defeating his enemies is present in assertions like “the princes of all lands are gathered in your grasp,” “you crushed the rebels and the traitors,” and “you trod all foreign lands with joyful heart,” each of these is paired with a clarification that Amun-Re himself had a hand in these outcomes. Near the end of the text, the inciting persona switches to the personified uraeus on the king’s brow, a further extension of Amun-Re’s support of the king as evidenced by the fact that he refers to it as “my serpent.” Additionally, in other literary contexts the personified uraeus serves as an active symbol of the power and divine fury associated with the office of kingship.74

Essentially, as a symbol both of the power of his office and of the support of the state deity, the uraeus is a succinct metaphor for divine sanction. Like Amun-Re, she also visits violence upon the king’s enemies, consuming them, swallowing them, or severing their heads.

This speech also contains geographical allusions, both historical and symbolic. First, the text is rife with literary and figurative references to the size and totality of the king’s dominion, far above simply noting that the king had been victorious over all lands (though this is also

73 Lichtheim, Ancient Egyptian Literature Volume 2, 36.

74 This is at least partially related to the identification of the uraeus with the cobra goddess of Lower Egypt, Wadjet, who was one of the goddesses associated with the destructive Eye of Ra. See especially, Pinch, Egyptian Mythology, 211–213; Johnson, The Cobra Goddess of Ancient Egypt: Predynastic, Early Dynastic and Old Kingdom Periods, Studies in Egyptology (New York: Kegan Paul International, 1990); Joyce Tyldesley, “Cobra Goddesses,” Ancient Egypt: the history, people and culture of the Nile valley 80 (2013): 10–13.
Amun-Re says that he has placed the dread of the king “as far as heaven’s four supports,” that he has bestowed on the king “the earth, its length and breadth,” and “in all that heaven circles none defy” the king. This reflects the Egyptian concept of entirety as being both all things that are encompassed within a certain area, and as all things in all directions, radiating from a central point (Egypt).

The length and breadth of the earth, supported by the four cardinal directions, are also referenced again with the separate mention of northerners, easterners, westerners, and Nubia’s Bowmen (southerners) all having fallen to the king through Amun-Re’s will.

Following the verse prologue, the stela contains a poem that is an extension of the speech of Amun-Re divided into four-line stanzas that cover similar topics and reasserts the role that the god has played in the king’s victory. The poem is organized using regular repetitive structures, with each stanza beginning with, “I came to let you tread on [X].” In each of the ten stanzas, the king respectively treads upon Djahi’s chiefs, those of Asia, eastern lands, western lands, lowlanders, islanders, Tjehenu, earth’s limits, border people, and Nubians. The poem also makes extensive use of figurative equation of the king with dangerous animals and other terrifying imagery. In the third line of each stanza, Amun-Re proclaims, “I let them see your majesty as [X],” where in each stanza X is variably “lord of light,” “in your panoply,” “a shooting star,” “a youthful bull,” “a crocodile,” “the avenger,” “a fearsome lion,” “falcon-winged,” “southern jackal,” and “the Two Brothers.”

---

75 In the Egyptian view of the world, Egypt was at its center. The further out from that central point one went, the more foreign people, places, and cultures became. Since the four cardinal points—at their furthest from Egypt—were understood to be the supports of heaven, the Egyptians believed the world moved out from its Egyptian center in those four directions. Therefore, Egyptians categorized people loosely based on their direction from the center.

76 Lichtheim, Ancient Egyptian Literature Volume 2, 36–37.

77 Lichtheim, Ancient Egyptian Literature Volume 2, 37.
The stela of Amenhotep II next to the great sphinx at Giza is a usurpation of an earlier stela of Khafre at the same location.\textsuperscript{78} The textual content of the stela is divided into two distinct sections: a poetical section and a narrative one. Both of these sections are triumphal in theme and contain distinct literary, structural, and symbolic similarities with rhetorical texts that appear in composite triumph scenes of the same and subsequent dynasties. In particular, the poetical section displays multiple triumphal motifs including the king’s universal dominion, divine sanction, and violent subjugation or destruction of his enemies, and it makes use of extensive religious and geographical allusions, as follows:

```
“He gave to him the throne of Geb,
The mighty rulership of Atum,
The Two Lords’ portions,
The Two Ladies’ shares,
Their years of life and dominion…
He crushed the Bowmen under his feet.
The northerners bow to his might,
All countries are under his fear.

He bound the heads of the Nine Bows,
He holds the Two Lands in his hand;
The people are in dread of him,
All the gods have love for him.
Amun himself made him rule what his eye encircles,
What the disk of Re illuminates;
He has taken all of Egypt,
South and North are in his care.
The Red Land brings him its dues,
All countries have his protection;
His borders reach the rim of heaven,
The lands are in his hand in a single knot…

Come from the womb he wore the crown,
Conquered the earth while yet in the egg;
Egypt is his, no one rebels,
In all that Amun’s eye lights up.
```

The strength of Mont is in his limbs,
In power he equals the son of Nut;
He has joined the reed to the papyrus,
People north and south are under his feet.”

The main theme of this poem is the king’s universal dominion, and the other triumphal motifs work together to support the assertion that the king’s rule is all-encompassing, eternal, and ordained by the divine. There are distinct similarities in the way the king’s borders and dominion are described here and in the poetical stela of his father, Thutmose III. Here, Amenhotep is explicitly given dominion over Bowmen, northerners, all countries, the Nine Bows, the Two Lands, Upper and Lower Egypt, and the Red Land. His borders extend to the “rim of heaven” and encompass everything the disk of Re (the sun) illuminates in all directions, a sentiment drawn directly from Thutmose III’s stela. This poem does, however, make clearer the dualities present in the king’s domain, particularly between Upper and Lower Egypt and between that which is inside Egypt and that which is outside.

To contextualize and present these ideas, religious and literary allusions are used. The king is ascribed the dominions of various deities—he rules upon the throne of Geb, in the place of Atum, Horus, Seth, Nekhbet, and Wadjet. This connects him to the mythological line of deities who have ruled and presided over Egypt since the beginning of time, presenting him as the heir to Geb, and to both thrones of the Two Lands through Horus and Seth. As the rightful heir of these deities, the king is also presented as having divine qualities—the strength of Montu, and the power of Seth. Notably, this too presents a representative duality, one in which Montu,

---


**80** The throne of Geb is the throne of the legitimate ruler and appointed heir of the gods. Atum, the creator deity and progenitor of the Ennead, held dominion over all things—his creations—as a primordial king. The dominion of Horus is alternately the fertile land of the Nile Valley, Lower Egypt, or Unified Egypt. The dominion of Seth is alternately the desert or Upper Egypt. The Two Ladies, Nekhbet and Wadjet were associated with Upper and Lower Egypt, respectively.
falcon-headed and warlike in the face of agents of chaos, symbolizes the king as ruler in Egypt, while Seth, furious and foreign, symbolizes the king as rightful ruler of all that lies outside Egypt’s borders.

**Kadesh Texts of Ramesses II**

Egyptologists refer to the two most important textual sources for the famous battle of Kadesh as the Kadesh Bulletin and the Kadesh Poem. Together (and in conjunction with the extensive reliefs commissioned by Ramesses II) these texts record the official (read: state-sanctioned) account of the battle of Kadesh, as well as the events that led up to it and the events that occurred in the immediate aftermath of the battle. Ramesses had records of the battle and accompanying battle reliefs and triumph scenes commissioned in a variety of his temples across Egypt, including those at Karnak, Luxor, Abu Simbel, Abydos, and the Ramesseum. These texts fall into the same category of texts as Thutmose III’s annals—literary battle narratives that became popular during the New Kingdom and are often paired with monumental triumph scenes in temple contexts.

The bulletin, the shorter, prose account of the battle, provides a narrative record of the events that transpired. However, some sections of the bulletin do contain distinctly figurative descriptions that are drawn from the larger repertoire of literary triumphal motifs already in use by the New Kingdom. The following section of the text highlights these qualities particularly well:

“The forces of the foe of Hatti surrounded the followers of his majesty who were by his side. When his majesty caught sight of them he rose quickly, enraged at them like

---

his father Mont. Taking up weapons and donning his armor he was like Seth in the moment of his power. He mounted Victory-in-Thebes, his great horse, and started out quickly alone by himself. His majesty was mighty, his heart was stout, one could not stand before him.

All his ground was ablaze with fire; he burned all the countries with his blast…His majesty was like Seth, great of strength, like Sekhmet in her moment of rage.82

Like earlier litanies of triumph, particularly those of Amenhotep II’s sphinx stela and the hymns to Senusret III, the king is figuratively identified with multiple deities whose names frequently appear in triumphal texts—Montu, Seth, and Sekhmet—and with a raging fire. It is also stated that none could stand before him, with the implication being that the moment the king’s enemies took up arms against him, they had already lost.

The poem, the longer and more figurative of the accounts, is formatted as an extended litany of triumph with occasional prose interludes to set up new scenes in the narrative progression.83 The purpose of the poetic text is overt, as it ceremoniously opens, “Beginning of the (recital of) the victory of the King of Upper and Lower Egypt Usermaatre Setepenre, the Son of Re, Ramesses,” followed by an exhaustive list of the combined Asiatic enemies defeated by the Egyptians at Kadesh. This is followed by an encomium describing the physical prowess and general good character of the king and comparing him to various gods and animals.84

Later in the text, after the thick of the battle has begun, an interlude unique to the Kadesh narrative has Ramesses’ army abandoning him in the midst of battle. After this betrayal, he proceeds to charge against his enemies alone before his followers, seeing his success, rejoin the

---


83 Because of its extensive length and complexity, as well as its broad literary and historical importance, a complete textual analysis of the Kadesh Poem is outside the scope of the present study. For works containing more complete analysis and discussion of this text, see n. 81.

fray.\textsuperscript{85} Therefore, in the recounting of his actions, Ramesses makes sure to stress the singular role he played in the outcome of the battle, regularly asserting “I alone” accomplished these things. As a narrative device, the abandonment of the king by his army does increase the tension in the climax of the story, but it also underscores the true role that the king plays in this account. He is the protagonist of the story, the exemplar of kingly qualities, and the singular actor through whom victory can be achieved. After his army flees, the king calls out Amun to ask why he has been forsaken by his men and by the gods. Ramesses lists all the things he has done for the gods, for Egypt, and for his subjects, ensuring that he has been a good king and completed the requirements of kingship that were expected of him. Hearing the king’s pleas, Amun comes to Ramesses and reassures him that he is “lord of victory, lover of valor” and he will give his worthy son victory over his enemies.\textsuperscript{86}

Reenergized by divine support, Ramesses recounts the events that followed in first person, structuring his speech like a litany of triumph within the larger battle narrative. The following portion of the speech succinctly demonstrates the triumphal themes at work in this section of the poem:

“I found my heart stout, my breast in joy,
All I did succeeded, I was like Mont.
I shot on my right, grasped with my left,
I was before them like Seth in his moment…
Not one of them found his hand to fight,
Their hearts failed in their bodies through fear of me.
Their arms all slackened, they could not shoot,
They had no heart to grasp their spears…
I slaughtered among them at my will,
No one looked behind him,
No one turned around,

\textsuperscript{85} This is present in both the bulletin and poem, but it is more extensive and is situated as a central theme in the poetic text.

\textsuperscript{86} Lichtheim, \textit{Ancient Egyptian Literature Volume 2}, 66.
Whoever fell down did not rise.\textsuperscript{87}

Now, the king is brave and joyful as he fights, and his battle prowess is once again compared to that of Montu and Seth. Conversely, the king’s enemies lose their will to fight at this same moment, overwhelmed and fearful of the power of the king. The violence the king inflicts on his fearful foes is merciless; he slaughters them at will, and those who fell to his sword faced certain death. Later, in the conclusion of the poetic account of the battle, the king revisits these themes again, basking in his victory and providing a summary of his triumph:

“My majesty paused in valor and victory,
Having felled hundred thousands by my strong arm…

At dawn I marshaled the ranks for battle,
I was ready to fight like an eager bull;
I arose against them in the likeness of Mont,
Equipped with my weapons of victory.
I charged their ranks fighting as a falcon pounces,
The serpent on my brow felled my foes,
Cast her fiery breath in my enemies’ faces,
I was like Re when he rises at dawn.
My rays, they burned the rebels’ bodies,
They called out to one another:
“Beware, take care, do not approach him,
Sekhmet the Great is she who is with him,
She’s with him on his horses, her hand is with him;
Anyone who goes to approach him,
Fire’s breath come to burn his body!”
Therupon they stood at a distance,
Touching the ground with their hands before me.
My majesty overpowered them,
I slew them without sparing them;
They sprawled before my horses,
And lay slain in heaps in their blood.”\textsuperscript{88}

\textsuperscript{87} Lichtheim, \textit{Ancient Egyptian Literature Volume 2}, 66. Ramesses’ speech here is extensive, but this section provides a representative sample of the themes and structures present in the poem after Amun has come to his aid.

\textsuperscript{88} Lichtheim, \textit{Ancient Egyptian Literature Volume 2}, 70.
Here, Ramesses is figuratively compared to a variety of familiar triumphal icons, Re and Montu, an eager bull, and a falcon. Additionally, his personified royal uraeus is given agency in destroying his enemies in this section of the text, similar to its portrayal in the poetical stela of Thutmose III. She fights in tandem with the king as a symbol of the office of kingship and of the support and sanction of Amun. Similarly, the king’s victims shout that Sekhmet the Great is with him and any who approach him will be decimated. The inclusion of Sekhmet at Ramesses’ side, rather than another of the martial deities to whom he has already been compared in this poem, is meant to reveal something of the quality of Ramesses’ character during the final push of the battle. He is furious, unrelenting, merciless, and bloodthirsty.  

The summary of the king’s victory is followed by a description of the king’s triumphal return to Thebes. In contrast with the earlier abandonment and discouragement of the king, this triumphal return accentuates the ideological importance of divine sanction within triumphal motifs. Even when defeat seemed assured, as Ramesses’ army had left him and he had lost his will to fight, the support of Amun tipped the scales in his favor, guaranteeing the ideologically necessary outcome—the triumph of Egypt and ma’at through the victory of the king.

**Merneptah (Israel) Stela**

The poetical stela of Merneptah, often referred to as the Israel stela because it is the first extant Egyptian source to mention the land of Israel, continued the tradition of kings recounting their victories on stelae in poetic verse.  

---

89 For the destructive nature and blood thirst of Sekhmet, see Pinch, *Egyptian Mythology*, 130, 187–189; Jackson, *Sekhmet & Bastet: The Feline Powers of Egypt*.

Kingdom litanies of triumph that preceded it, and it touches on many of the same motifs, relying on the figurative and literary mechanisms that had become standardized within this genre by the Ramesside Period. However, Merneptah’s text also includes specific historical information (though couched in literary largesse) tying this victory stela and its text to the military campaign in the fifth year of his reign in which he repelled a coalition of Libyans and Sea Peoples from the Nile Delta.91

“The Sole One who steadied the hearts of hundred thousands,
Breath entered their nostrils at the sight of him.
Who destroyed the land of Tjemeh in his lifetime,
Cast abiding terror in the heart of the Meshwesh.
He turned back the Libyans who trod Egypt,
Great is dread of Egypt in their hearts…

The vile chief, the Libyan foe,
Fled in the deep of night alone,
No plume on his head, his feet unshod…
‘A chief ill-fated, evil-plumed,’
All said of him, those of his town.
‘He is in the power of the gods, the lords of Memphis,
The Lord of Egypt had made his name accursed;
Merey is the abomination of Memphis…

Woe to Libyans, they have ceased to live…
Seth turned his back upon their chief,
By his word their villages were ruined;…
The great Lord of Egypt, might and strength are his,
Who will combat, knowing how he strides?

Said the Lord-of-all: ‘Give the sword to my son,
The right-hearted, kind, gracious Baenre-meramun,
Who cared for Memphis, who avenged On…’

Not one of the Nine Bows lifts his head:
Tjehenu is vanquished, Khatti at peace,
Canaan is captive with all woe.

Ashkelon is conquered, Gezer seized,
Yenoam made nonexistent;
Israel is wasted, bare of seed,
Khor is become a widow for Egypt.
All who roamed have been subdued
By the King of Upper and Lower Egypt…”

In the reign of Merneptah’s father Ramesses II and even earlier in the reign of Thutmose III, a tradition of battle narratives as a distinct genre of royal texts (one closely related to triumphs) had been established with the extensive accounts of the battles of Megiddo and Kadesh. While Merneptah’s victory poem maintains the structure of a poetic litany of triumph, the mythological and cultural motifs in this text are grounded in historical and narrative elements that indicate a fusion of these two textual traditions. Particular attention is paid to describing how the king turned back the Libyans who had crossed into Egypt, and subsequent stanzas lament the fate of the Libyan chief, Merey, and those who fought alongside him. In a metaphor for their defeat, Seth is also said to have “turned his back on” them and their cities. Merey, “the abomination of Memphis,” is singled out by name and provides a direct antagonist to the character of Merneptah, serving as a literary device common in battle narratives. Conversely, Merneptah is granted divine sanction in the form of Amun-Re’s command, “Give the sword to my son…who cared for Memphis.”

In the wake of this victory, the poem concludes with an assurance that the Nine Bows have been subdued, both as a singular inimical entity and as individual, real-world enemies. Each of the Nine Bows is listed individually and each is paired with a different verb symbolic of their subjugation and defeat. This is followed by an interesting summarizing comment that “all who roamed have been subdued.” This has larger implications regarding the way in which Egyptians

93 This also occurs in the Kadesh texts where Ramesses II is pitted directly against “the vile chief of Hatti.”
were thinking about and categorizing the Nine Bows by the New Kingdom, arguably the height of Egyptian triumphalism. On a symbolic level, the Nine Bows represented the ever-present and quintessential enemies of Egypt, but while the concept remained constant throughout the pharaonic period, the distinct identities superimposed onto the concept changed over time as political and cultural changes occurred.⁹⁴ For the Nineteenth Dynasty, the ever-present enemy was Asiatic and often nomadic.⁹⁵ To sedentary Egyptians, whose lives and beliefs were closely tied to the geographical locations and realities of Egypt and the immobile structures of the state economy, a nomadic lifestyle was clearly a chaotic one and ran counter to the very core of ma’at.

In subduing the Nine Bows, Merneptah has rectified this particular incarnation of isfet.

**Summary: Diachronic Development of Rhetorical Texts**

Just like the figural and scene caption texts in smiting scenes and triumphal motifs increased in complexity and length over time, early rhetorical texts in triumphal contexts were short, but increased in complexity, length of content, and consistency of use over time. The rhetorical texts contained in New Kingdom composite triumph scenes are the result of thousands of years of literary and ideological development, paralleling in text the development of the imagery associated with the victorious Egyptian king. Rhetorical texts began to be attached to smiting and other triumphal motifs in the Old Kingdom and are visible in examples like the mortuary complexes of Sahure and Niuserre. Litanies of triumph that were common in royal and

---

⁹⁴ One may think here of “a rose by any other name.” Their names and exact identities shifted over time to match prevailing cultural attitudes and realities, but the central meaning of the iconography and the ideology it espoused remained consistent. See Uphill, “The Nine Bows,” 393–397.

⁹⁵ While the Ramessides (Ramesses II, in particular) did undertake southern campaigns and building programs in the south and into Nubia, the more extensive campaigns generally had a northern focus. Over the course of the late Bronze Age, international trade and political and cultural contact increased among the states and peoples of the eastern Mediterranean, including Egypt. For these interactions, see especially Liverani, *Prestige and Interest*. For these interactions with specific focus on the increasing tension between Egypt and northern enemies leading up to the Battle of Kadesh, see Murnane, *The Road to Kadesh*. 
literary texts in the Middle and New Kingdoms form the literary basis for many later triumphal texts. Encomia and divine rhetorical speeches account for most of the remaining lengthy texts associated with triumphal motifs.

Like their pictorial counterparts, the rhetorical texts that appear in triumph scenes were adapted and tailored over time and intentionally selected to serve as representations of specific ideas and to convey distinct ideological and symbolic messages. The regularity in the rhetorical texts should be understood as intentional selection for iconic elements that reflect intended ideological messages, rather than standardization for standardization’s sake. An icon, as we have defined it, certainly includes the pictorial elements of triumph scenes, but this definition does also allow for the rhetorical texts to be interpreted in this way. These texts stand as representations of abstract concepts related to royal power, the ideology of kingship, and the relationship between Egypt and the rest of the cosmos. They are also a quintessential example of the fluidity with which the hieroglyphic script functioned as both text and image.

The divine speeches and extended scene captions in triumph scenes favor verb tenses that suggest repetitive, perpetual, or timeless acts. In particular, the speeches employ the so-called “imperfective” sḏm.f most commonly, but also the stative, indicating prior acquisition of a quality or state as the result of prior action. However, these two constructions do not occur to the

---

96 Baines, *Visual and Written Culture*, 197–201; Spalinger, “Egyptian New Kingdom Triumphs.”

97 As per Spalinger, *Icons of Power*, 1, “a metaphorical visual image.”


exclusion of other verbal predicates and constructions. In extended captions, when verbs are present, they tend to appear in the narrative infinitive. This is typical of label texts in other contexts, such as the description of the king’s ritual act in cultic scenes. The consistent use of these verb forms serves to remove the action from ordinary, linear time and emphasize the typicality and non-transitory nature of both the actors and the actions presented. This sort of timelessness is also reflected in the pictorial iconography, and while the content of the texts clarifies and describes these images, the grammar prevents them from going so far as to fix the images in time or space.

In addition to the general iconicity of the texts, their literary content reiterates triumphal themes expressed in related relief or other associated images. When the rhetorical texts are structured like an extended encomium or a litany of triumph, they include the following triumphal themes: the witnessing deity lauding the actions of the king, the witnessing deity highlighting their own role in the king’s victory, description of the reach of the king’s domain, metaphorical equation of the king with animals and/or dangerous natural forces, and descriptions of the king’s exact act actions in defeating his enemies—smiting them, crushing them, trampling them, making them turn away. While the exact content of the text varies between individual instances, the sentences included in these speeches are often repetitive, beginning with the same phases in each sentence, or repeating the exact same syntax through multiple sentences.

---

100 Subjunctive and other forms do occur, but they are often contained within specific subsections of the text like the wishes for the king’s continued success.


103 See *OIP 107*, 51, 60–61 for an exemplar of this structure, in the triumph scene of Seti I at Karnak.
Deities lauding the actions of the king and praising the qualities of kingship that he reflected were thematic elements in royal and literary texts from early in Egyptian history. This type of text would have been useful for legitimizing the reign of a given king, but it also would have served the broader purpose of reinforcing the ideologies of kingship and the importance of both the king and the state to the proper functioning of Egyptian society. However, it was not until litanies of triumph from the Eighteenth Dynasty onward, in texts like the Poetical Stela and Annals of Thutmose III, that the active role the deity played in ensuring the king’s victory became an essential part of the textual triumphal motif.\textsuperscript{104} Here, Amun strengthens the king’s arm, protects him in the melee, and confirms that it was he who gave the king his valor. He empowered the king to overtake his enemies, and when needed, it was Amun who “stretched [his] own hands out and bound them” for the king.\textsuperscript{105} This theme carried through most other triumphal texts of the New Kingdom and was especially prominent in the rhetorical texts within composite monumental triumph scenes.

While geographical descriptions of the king’s domain are known from earlier periods, it was not until the Middle Kingdom that these were fully incorporated into textual triumphal motifs. Within the litany of triumph in the Prophecies of Neferti, special attention was paid to the king’s identity as an Upper Egyptian and the geographic boundaries of the Two Lands. Surrounding foreign peoples were discussed at length in the description of the king’s domain. Other triumphal texts from both the Old and Middle Kingdoms reflect similar usage of this theme, often making use of more figurative description, like the assertion that the king’s

\textsuperscript{104} Deities were present in these literary motifs earlier, but it is with the texts of Thutmose III onward that these references become standardized and integral to the overall motif, focusing on the role the deity plays in ensuring the king’s ultimate victory.

\textsuperscript{105} From the Poetical Stela of Thutmose III. Lichtheim, \textit{Ancient Egyptian Literature Volume 2}, 36.
dominion reached “to the corners of heaven.”106 By the New Kingdom, rhetorical triumphal texts regularly included descriptions of the geographical reach of the king’s power, as well as the foreign peoples that his power affected. The addition of independent topographical lists to the triumphal motif supplemented the geographical content and themes included in the rhetorical texts and vice versa, ensuring that both the king’s physical and cosmological domains were linked to the victory on display.

This victorious display also relied on figurative equation of the king with deities, strong and violent wild animals, as well as powerful natural forces was part of the textual repertoire for describing the Egyptian king from at least as early as the Pyramid Texts. For example, in Merenre spell 572, the reciter equates the king with Ahes, Dedwen, and Sopdu. In other spells, he is likened to a crocodile, to Sobek, to a star, and to a variety of other things. This motif is also present starting in at least the Middle Kingdom in literary contexts, most notably in the speech of the divine snake in the Shipwrecked Sailor.107 Similarly, later examples recall these figurative equations, but employ them within a more poetical structure. Thutmose III’s Poetical Stela uses figurative equations of the king in Amun-Re’s speech, but he specifies that these are the various metaphorical forms in which he causes the king to appear to his enemies.108 The text of the triumph scene of Seti I at Karnak employs the same literary motif of the god causing foreigners to see the king as different things, and a number of the figurative comparisons are identical to the in the Poetical Stela.109 Here, Amun-Re ends his speech to Seti I with a full eight lines beginning


107 Lichtheim, Ancient Egyptian Literature, 213.

108 Here in the speech of Amun-Re, each of the metaphors is preceded by the phrase “I let them see your majesty as.”

109 Lichtheim, Ancient Egyptian Literature 2, 35–39. However, this phraseology exists earlier (at least Middle Kingdom) in other contexts, including a speech of the divine snake in the story of the Shipwrecked Sailor.
with the phrase $dj.j\ m\z.sn\ \textit{hm.k}\ m \ldots$ ("I cause them to see your Majesty as...")), followed by the expected comparisons to raging animals, or the sheer power of natural and divine phenomena. These comparisons highlight the overt violence and instantaneousness of the king’s actions. For example: $mj\ s\dd$ ("like a thunderbolt"), $m\ k\z$ ("as a bull"), $m\ dpy$ ("as a crocodile"), $mj\ hh\ n\ h\t$ ("like a blast of fire"), $mj\ hprw\ n\ \textit{shmt}\ m\ jsd.t.s$ ("like the manifestations of Sekhmet in her pestilence"), $m\ m\zj-hs$ ("as a fierce lion"), $mj\ szh$ ("like a jackal").

In addition to other figurative language, epithets and other laudatory descriptors of the king have a long history in literary and rhetorical texts, and it is no surprise they are included in triumph scenes, where the king is the primary actor. In this context, the king’s epithets highlight his physical strength and martial prowess with particular focus on the perpetuity of his actions and the direct relationship between his strength and the subjugation of foreigners, as well as the relationship of the foreigners to the physical body of the king. Throughout the triumph scene texts, the king is referred to by such epithets as $nb\ hps$ ("possessor of the strong arm"), $hr-tm\ss-c$ ("Horus the strong-armed"), $skr$ ("one who smites"), $ptpt$ ("one who tramples"), and $nb\ jr$ ("master of action").

Epithets such as these clearly reinforce the physicality and martial ability of the king in subduing foreign lands, but they also parallel the action taking place in the related iconography.

Beginning with some of the earliest examples of lengthy rhetorical text used in combination with smiting and other triumphal imagery, like those within Old Kingdom mortuary complexes, the copious amount of historical and cultural allusions is integral to understanding the iconicity and the ultimate purpose of the rhetorical texts. In particular, the divine speeches

\footnote{OIP 107, 51.}

\footnote{OIP 107, 51, 60–61.}
refer to the Nine Bows and traditional enemies, as well as the never-ending struggle to curtail *isfet* in the form of foreign incursion.\textsuperscript{112} In later examples, the violent role of the king and the requirements of the office of kingship are reiterated, and the texts often refer to both the support of certain deities and the divine qualities of the king that identify him with deities like Horus, Seth, and Sekhmet in triumphal contexts.

One final feature of triumphal rhetorical texts is that they contain elements of timelessness and placelessness consistently across all periods in which they appeared. Impressions of timelessness were achieved through the use of verbal forms that suggest perpetual and repetitive action, with no clear beginning or end relative to linear time.\textsuperscript{113} A sense of placelessness is drawn from the repetition of non-exclusive nomenclature and repetitive descriptions of foreign enemies and the act of the king in smiting them. Additionally, later triumphal texts used literary formats and formulae that dated back to earlier iterations of triumph scenes and smiting scenes in the Old and Middle Kingdoms, as well as literary texts and royal inscriptions from other contexts. This literal continuity of the physical texts heightens the sense of perpetuity and constancy that the texts themselves exhibit and also establishes the cultural tradition from which they are drawn. The texts are made all the more identifiable and familiar because they draw their structures, themes, and even sections of discrete content directly from an existing literary and poetic repertoire.

\textsuperscript{112} This is particularly apparent in the Libyan Family scenes in Old Kingdom mortuary temples.

\textsuperscript{113} Particularly in the caption texts, (narrative) infinitive verbal structures place no time restriction on the actions taking place within the scene, and further suggest they may apply to any and all times.
CHAPTER 5: SYNTHESIS AND CONCLUSIONS

This chapter summarizes and analyzes the diachronic development of the iconographic and textual elements of Egyptian triumphal motifs presented in the preceding chapters through the lens of the New Kingdom composite monumental triumph scenes they eventually came to compose. This corpus of triumph scenes represents the culmination of the development of triumphal motifs over the course of the Pharaonic Period. These large and highly visible scenes combined the iconographic and textual elements of earlier triumphal motifs to create even more complex ideological documents that were inextricably tied to the state, meaning that they served as representations of state-sanctioned ideology and worldview. Like earlier iterations of triumphal motifs, composite triumph scenes acted as cultural and magical manifestations of the cosmological imperative of the king, as the semi-divine representative of the state, to violently suppress foreigners, rebels, and all other forces inimical to the established order.

Accordingly, this chapter also explores the larger ideological themes that underlie Egyptian triumphal motifs and influenced the nature of their development over time. These ideological themes, such as the concept of ‘otherness’ created by the cosmological struggle between order and chaos in the Egyptian worldview, the necessity of the king’s violent actions in suppressing chaos, and the divine sanction required to enable and legitimate his victory, are present in triumphal motifs from the Predynastic Period and the formation of the Egyptian state, all the way through to the composite monumental triumph scenes of the New Kingdom and beyond. This consistency of the underlying ideology despite the cosmetic and contextual changes in triumphal motifs throughout Pharaonic history reveals standardized, if ever-expanding purposes for their use by Egyptian kings. As such, this study concludes with an analysis of the functions of triumphal ideology as presented by the constituent iconography. The content and
composition of triumphal iconography as presented in its various physical contexts (in smiting scenes, triumph scenes, litanies of triumph, memorials and celebrations of the king, and as part of religious and cultural practices), as well as historical contexts, speaks to the functions that underlying ideology served. These purposes were tri-partite, and often concomitant with each other: protection, propaganda, and ritual.

Composite Monumental Triumph Scenes

The triumphal motif did not coalesce into the composite monumental triumph scenes known from temple complexes until the New Kingdom, but the diachronic evidence for the development of each of its individual elements is much broader, and spans thousands of years, the full geography of Egypt, and a variety of contexts and materials. It was during the New Kingdom that triumphal motifs became a regular inclusion in temple decorative programs, and smiting iconography was the central component that held the elements of the composite motif together. Incidentally, this was also the most visible form that smiting iconography took during this period, despite the variety of other contexts in which it appears. In total, there are about forty New Kingdom composite monumental triumph scenes.¹ These scenes vary in size and exact location, but all derive from temple complexes, and were created over the course of the 18th, 19th, and 20th Dynasties. They come from a variety of geographic locations, though the majority

¹ New Kingdom composite triumph scenes at Karnak: scene of Thutmose III on Pylon VI, scene of Thutmose III on Pylon VII, scene of Thutmose III in the Festival Hall, scene of Thutmose III in the courtyard between Pylons IV and V, scene of Thutmose III on Pylon V, scene of Amenhotep II on Pylon V, fragmentary remains of a scene of Amenhotep III, scene of Horemheb on Pylon X and related colossi, scene of Seti I on the north exterior walls of the Hypostyle Hall, scene of Ramesses II on the south exterior walls of the Hypostyle Hall, scene of Ramesses III on the pylon of his small temple in the forecourt and related colossi. New Kingdom composite triumph scenes elsewhere in Thebes: exterior walls, interior walls, and colossi in the forecourt of Luxor temple; first pylon of the Ramesseum; Pylon I, exterior wall behind Pylon II, and interior walls flanking the doorway of the Pavilion at Medinet Habu; Seti I sphinx statue at Qurneh; forecourt of Set I temple at Wadi Abbub; statue bases at the temple of Amenhotep III at Kom el-Hetan. New Kingdom composite triumph scenes elsewhere in Upper Egypt/Nubia: sphinx bases of Seti I at his Abydos temple, fragmentary wall along the approach to Abu Simbel, vestibule of Ramesses II temple at Abydos, column bases at the temple of Amun in Sesebi, column bases at the temple of Amun in Soleb, the temple of Ammenhotep III at Wadi es-Sebua.
can be found in the temple complexes of the Theban region. Others occur in Lower Nubia and elsewhere in Upper Egypt. It is possible (even likely) that monumental triumph scenes once existed in Lower Egypt as well, however, reliefs from the major New Kingdom temple complexes in that region—at Memphis, Heliopolis, and Piramesses—are poorly preserved.

The monumental triumph scene of Seti I at Karnak is perhaps the most well-known and well-studied scene in this corpus, owing partly to its size and placement along the exterior of the Hypostyle Hall at Karnak and to its good state of preservation and publication by the Oriental Institute. This scene, located on the north exterior wall of the Great Hypostyle Hall, is divided into two wings, one on the east wall and one on the west. The smiting iconography dominates the areas nearest the doorway that the scene flanks. Situated between scenes depicting the (primarily) northern wars of Seti I, including campaigns against the Shasu and Yenoam, as well as Kadesh, Hittite, and Libyan campaigns, the large smiting icons of the triumphal motif provide an ideologically loaded, easy-to-interpret visualization of the outcome of these campaigns.

2 The Great Temple of Ramesses II at Abu Simbel is a unique case which warrants a brief excursus here. Though Abu Simbel is a large and important Ramesside temple complex, there are no composite monumental triumph scenes on the pylon or exteriors of the main temple buildings. To some extent, this anomaly can be attributed to the unique architecture of Abu Simbel. The temple is rock-cut and set directly into the side of a cliff, so there is significantly less exterior surface area than in other temple complexes of this size. For this same reason, the façade is not a traditional pylon and is instead dominated by colossal statues of Ramesses II set into the rock. Thus, the lack of a monumental triumph scene is understandable, despite the location of the temple in Upper Nubia and the distinctly triumphal character of much of the complex’s decorative program. However, while the evidence is poorly preserved, Abu Simbel did once have a monumental triumph scene. The approach to the rock-cut temple was originally lined with an enclosure wall and associated gateways, and within the remains of this enclosure wall, there are a few rows of bound toponyms and feet above a groundline suggesting the expected smiting scene. This scene (and perhaps others on parts of the enclosure wall that no longer survive) would have served the same visual and symbolic functions as those on a pylon or exterior wall—to enter the sacred temple area, one would pass by or through it, and it would dominate the visual landscape of the approach.

On the eastern wing (Fig. 61), the king holds the stake to which the prisoners are bound with his left hand and wields a mace above his head with his right in traditional smiting icon. The prisoners raise their arms and faces to either the king or Amun- Re in supplication. The king wears the Red Crown and a shendyt-kilt with bull’s tail. A Horus-falcon hovers above his head and his ka-standard is at his back. The Red Crown he wears is representative of Lower Egypt and may serve to highlight the largely northern focus of the related topographical list. The Horus-falcon is a common indicator of the office of kingship and divine sanction but can also serve contextually as a reflection of Unified Egypt.

Amun-Re is shown offering a hpś to the king with his right arm, while his left arm reaches behind him holding the ropes tethering the first three rows of anthropomorphized toponyms. Below Amun-Re’s feet, the Goddess of Victorious Thebes (rendered much smaller than Amun-Re) holds a bow and sheaf of arrows in her right hand and the tethers for the remaining rows of toponyms in her left. Amun-Re was the primary state god during the New Kingdom, and he was long-associated with Thebes as his cult center. Karnak Temple, from which this scene is derived, was largely dedicated to Amun(-Re) as the state god. The Goddess of Victorious Thebes is the personification of Theban triumph and the Theban nome itself. In conjunction with each other, these two deities leading captive foreign toponyms suggests a distinctly Theban focus for the king’s symbolic defeat and subjugation of the captive toponyms. In effect, it is Thebes who urges Seti to wield the hpś, Thebes who takes up arms herself, and Thebes to whom the foreign places are ultimately bound in subjugation.

---

4 OIP 107, 48–57, pl. 15A.
Figure 61 Line drawing eastern wing of the triumph scene of Seti I at Karnak. Image: Epigraphic Survey, Reliefs and inscriptions at Karnak, volume 4: the battle reliefs of King Sety I, Oriental Institute Publications 107 (Chicago: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 1986), pl. 15A.
The west wing of the triumph scene (Fig. 62) also depicts Seti I slaying a diverse group of foreigners with an axe-mace, witnessed here by Amun-Re and Dedwen of Nubia. The scene includes a list of 65 anthropomorphized foreign toponyms. Five rows of toponyms are situated to the left of the smiting scene and deities, while one longer row runs below the entire scene. Captions label each of the main figures as well as the scene itself. A speech of Amun-Re (again addressing the king and extolling his deeds) appears in front of Amun-Re's face and plumes and continues behind him.

The smiting icon on this wing of the triumph scene mirrors the smiting icon on the east wing. The king’s accouterments are identical, and he restrains the prisoners in the same way. A Wadjet-vulture is depicted above the king’s head and smiting arm, and his ka-standard is at his back. The presence of the Red Crown may again serve to highlight the intended northern focus of the topographical list in its final state. This is reinforced by the presence of the Wadjet-vulture that is also associated with Lower Egypt and the Delta.

Though he appears to the left of the smiting icon, Amun-Re again offers a ḫpsī to the king with his right arm, while his left arm reaches behind him holding the ropes tethering the first three rows of anthropomorphized toponyms. Below Amun-Re's feet, Dedwen is shown at a smaller scale, holding a was-scepter in his right hand and the tethers for the remaining rows of toponyms in his left. In this context, Amun-Re can again be understood as representative of both the Egyptian state and the city of Thebes.

Both wings of this scene also contain triumphal texts including caption texts, protection formulae, and rhetorical texts. The caption texts describe the king’s actions in smiting his enemies and the general nature of the foreigners so defeated. As an example, the following

---

5 OIP 107, 58–65, pl. 17A.
caption comes from above the prisoners on the eastern wing: “Smiting the chiefs of the nomadic Bedouin of all remote foreign countries, of all Fenkhu-lands, of the furthest reaches of Asia, and of the great circuit of the sea.” While the content is more elaborate, the structure of the captions is essentially identical to those that conveyed similar information in earlier smiting scenes. The captions are supplemented by rhetorical texts in the form of divine speeches, spoken by Amun-Re to the king. These exalt the actions of the king in subduing foreigners and highlight the god’s relationship to the king and his role in securing the king’s victory. Poetic forms and figurative language are rife in these speeches, recalling—in some places, nearly verbatim—sentiments present in earlier litanies, triumphal poems, and literary works.

---

6 *OIP 107*, 50.
Figure 62 Line drawing western wing of the triumph scene of Seti I at Karnak. Image: Epigraphic Survey, *Reliefs and inscriptions at Karnak, volume 4: the battle reliefs of King Sety I*, Oriental Institute Publications 107 (Chicago: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 1986), pl. 17A.
Another exemplar of this highly visible composite type of triumph scene comes from the Great Pylon (Pylon I) at the temple of Ramesses III at Medinet Habu. The scene is separated into two wings by the central pylon gateway, and related texts flank the gateway on either side. The south wing of the triumph scene (Fig. 63) depicts Ramesses III slaying a diverse group of foreign prisoners with an axe-mace, witnessed by Amun-Re and the Goddess of Victorious Thebes. The scene includes a list of 125 anthropomorphized foreign toponyms. Eight rows of toponyms are situated to the right of the smiting scene and deities, while two longer rows run below the entire scene. Captions label each of the main figures as well as the scene itself. Speeches of Amun-Re addressing the king and extolling his deeds appear above the god’s head and below his outstretched right arm.

The central image of the south wing is a smiting scene depicting Ramesses III smiting a “multitude” of diverse foreigners in three tiers. The king holds the staff of office to which the foreign prisoners are lashed with his left hand, wielding an axe-mace over his head with this right. The prisoners to the left of the pole raise their hands in supplication to the king, and those to the right of the pole make the same gesture toward Amun-Re. The king wears a shendyt-kilt and the Double Crown, and Horus and Nekhbet hover above his head, framing the top of the scene. Directly above the king is a sun disk with double uraeus, with one cobra wearing the Red Crown and the other the White. The king’s ka-standard and a protection formula are at his back.

Amun-Re is rendered at a slightly larger scale than the king. He faces the king and offers an elaborate šps-sword topped with a ram-headed bust of Amun-Re to the king with his right

---


8 This is one of the more extensive “multitudes” in smiting scenes. In each of the three rows of foreign prisoners, the bodies of each prisoner nearly overlap those next to him, allowing more than three dozen prisoners overall to fit within the smiting icon.
hand. His left hand is at his side holding an *ankh*, but he does not hold the ropes attached to the rows of foreign toponyms. Here, Amun-Re both witnesses and sanctions the king’s actions, an interpretation made more explicit by the presence of the solar ram bust on the weapon itself. The Goddess of Victorious Thebes, standing at the head of the first row of toponyms, holds them by their tethers. Like the iconography in Seti’s triumph scene, the combination of Amun-Re and Victorious Thebes in this context reflects both state sanctioning and Theban focus.
The north wing of the triumph scene (Fig. 64) depicts Ramesses III smiting another mixed group of foreign prisoners with a mace, witnessed here by Amun-Re-Harakhty and an unspecified male deity. This wing of the scene contains a topographical list composed of 124 anthropomorphized name-rings. Paralleling the south wing, eight rows of toponyms appear behind the god, with two longer rows running beneath the entire scene. Captions label most of the figures and the actions taking place in the scene. Speeches of Amun-Re-Harakhty appear above the god’s head and below his outstretched arms.

The central smiting icon in this scene consists of Ramesses III, wearing the expected royal garb and the Red Crown. He wields a mace in one hand and holds the staff of office to which three tiers of prisoners are lashed in the other. The prisoners are depicted nearly identically to the prisoners on the south wing, overlapping in tiers, with the prisoners to the right of the pole reaching their arms up to beseech the king. The prisoners to the left of the pole reach their arms up in the same gesture, but toward Amun-Re-Harakhty. The king’s ka-standard and two protection formulae are behind his back. A Horus-falcon hovers above the king’s smiting arm, and a Nekhbet-vulture hovers over his other arm and the group of cowering prisoners it holds.

Amun-Re-Harakhty is depicted on the same scale and ground line as the king. He is rendered as a falcon-headed human wearing a crown topped with the solar disk. He faces the king, holding a was-scepter and the ropes tied to the middle six rows of toponyms in his left hand. He reaches his right hand out towards the king, proffering a ḫpš-sword topped with a

---

9 *OIP* 9, pl. 102.

10 By the New Kingdom, this raised-arm gesture by the victim(s) in the smiting icon had become standardized. Some form of this gesture is usually present in earlier examples, but the New Kingdom iconography is very consistent and very similar to gestures in other contexts of adoration, supplication, or praise. No longer does it seem as if the victims raise their hands with urgency or to try and ward off the blow—here, this gesture calmly acknowledges both their fate and the king’s victory.
falcon-headed bust of a solar deity, likely Amun-Re-Harakhty himself. The presence of the solar bust on the weapon serves to redouble the sense of divine sanction and assistance. Interestingly, the identity of the secondary witnessing deity in this wing of the scene is uncertain, though context and iconography suggest he may be yet another form of Amun. However, this would be an unusual representation, as secondary witnessing deities (when present) tend to reference relevant geography, foreign peoples and places more broadly, or martial strength and prowess.\footnote{Especially in New Kingdom triumph scenes with two wings, the secondary deity on one of the wings is almost always Victorious Thebes, but she is already present on the southern wing of this scene.}
The monumental triumph scene on the Great Pylon, while clearly the most complex and most visible example of triumphal display at Medinet Habu, is really just a cursory summary of the considerable reliefs, texts, statuary, and other decoration with triumphal themes present at this temple complex. The decorative program of Medinet Habu boasts two smaller smiting scenes, extensive narrative battle and presentation scenes including the famous sequence of the defeat of the Sea Peoples, and royal statuary with bound prisoner bases. Similarly, Seti I’s scene on the Hypostyle Hall is only one of more than a dozen discrete triumphal displays at Karnak. This speaks to a broader increased presence of triumphal iconography and texts within the decorative program of New Kingdom temples and the resultant increased visibility of the constituent ideological themes during this period. As such, these two triumph scenes do not constitute a comprehensive study of the nature of the composite monumental triumph scenes of the New Kingdom. However, they do provide illustrative representative examples of how the iconographic and textual elements of the triumphal motif that developed over the course of Egyptian history were incorporated into these larger, composite scenes.

**Triumphant Ideology**

The iconographic and textual elements of Egyptian triumphal motifs developed over time, each becoming intertwined with the others to create a composite triumphal motif that reflected complex facets of Egyptian ideology. While triumphant ideology includes many nuances and inter-related themes, it can be broadly separated into three overarching topics: otherness, violence, and divine sanction. The concept of otherness is a broad one in the Egyptian sense, and it includes the cosmological struggle between *maʿat* and *isfet* that governed the Egyptians’ understanding of the world and their place in it—and the place of other people. Likewise, the

---

12 See P&M II, 481–503, especially 485 loc. MHD 135–154, 483 (12)–(13), 489 (47), 493 (67)–(69).
The violence inherent in triumphal iconography is multi-faceted and includes not only the ritual violence required of the king in his role as the protector of the Two Lands and of maʿat, but also the concept of universal dominion through violent subjugation. Divine sanction, too, is displayed in a variety of forms in triumphal iconography: divine support via the presence and acclamation of the gods within the scene, active assistance in the form of witnessing deities holding captive toponyms, handing the king his ḫpꜣ, and stating the ways they have personally ensured the king’s victory. This section discusses in detail these ideological mechanisms that underlie triumphal iconography, as well as the how triumphal iconography conveyed ideological messages to their contemporary audience in different time periods and physical contexts.

Otherness

Egyptologists often use the term worldview to describe the perspective of ancient Egyptians on the world around them. While this term and usage is not unique to Egyptology, it does carry a particular weightiness within this discipline. The ancient Egyptians’ understanding of and perspectives on the physical and experiential world around them were shaped by a variety of factors, with the concept of maʿat being foremost among them. The constant, eternal struggle between maʿat (cosmic order) and isfet (chaos) is the foundational concept on which ancient Egyptian worldview was built. Countless studies have centered on the concept of maʿat, its proper definition, and its relationship to Egyptian thought, society, politics, and religion.¹⁴

¹³ For more about Egyptian worldview broadly, see especially Hornung, Idea Into Image; Loprieno, Topos and Mimesis; Redford, King-lists, Annals, and Day-books; David O’Connor, “An Expanding Worldview: Conquest, Colonization, and Coexistence,” in Ancient Egypt Transformed: the Middle Kingdom, ed. Adela Oppenheim et al. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 160–163.

Ma’at is a complex and multifaceted idea,\textsuperscript{15} one that the common Egyptological translation of “order” does not always properly convey. There is no one clear all-encompassing translation for ma’at in any language other than ancient Egyptian because it is a uniquely Egyptian ideal. Yet, ma’at is composed of familiar concepts like order, truth, justice, proper action as dictated by cultural norms, a properly functioning cosmos, eloquence, restraint, and kindness to those in need. In short, ma’at is “the universe as it should be.”\textsuperscript{16}

Conversely, the concept of isfet, which Egyptologists often translate as “chaos,” is perhaps more properly defined as “the universe as it should not be.” For the Egyptians, isfet was the cosmological inverse of the ma’at-ordered world, characterized by disorder, deception, injustice, and cultural norms and ideals turned upside-down.\textsuperscript{17} While isfet was understood to be the natural state of the universe, order could be imposed upon it to bring it into its ideal state—ma’at. Thus, ma’at was the primary ordering principle of Egyptian society and the formal state structure. This would have placed the state in a position of immense ideological power. It was, for all intents and purposes, the only thing standing between Egypt and a swift descent into utter chaos.

While a complete discussion of the exact nature of ma’at and its role in Egyptian thought is outside the scope of this study, aspects of this broader discussion of the oppositional, antithetical relationship between ma’at and isfet bear considerable weight on the topic at hand.

\textsuperscript{15} The concept of ma’at was also personified in the goddess Ma’at, who was an important deity throughout Egyptian history. See Pinch, Egyptian Mythology, 159–161. As evidenced by ma’at’s role in Egyptian thought and the precepts laid out in Egyptian didactic literature, ma’at was also something that people could do (i.e., doing things ‘correctly’ or as they should be done).

\textsuperscript{16} This definition is presented by Hornung (“The Concept of Maat,” in Idea Into Image, 143). However, my first introduction to this view of ma’at came from a class lecture by Joshua Roberson.

The diametrical opposition of *ma’at* and *isfet* underpins the ideology of triumphal motifs in three important ways. First, it suggests that if *ma’at* is the antithesis of *isfet*, then destruction of *isfet* is necessary to upholding *ma’at*. Since the two concepts cannot coexist, the destruction of one is the creation of the other. In order to establish and maintain *ma’at*, *isfet* must be eradicated. Second, it places Egypt in contradistinction to all other cultures, as Egyptian society was governed by *ma’at* while other peoples and places existed in chaos that needed to be eliminated. Lastly, since the Egyptians believed the cosmic struggle between *ma’at* and *isfet* to be never-ending and their natures mutually exclusive, active intervention was required to ensure that it was *ma’at* that won out and continued to reign in Egypt and beyond.

For Egyptians who lived their lives with *ma’at* as their guiding principle, foreign peoples and places who did not share their culture or values were, at least on an ideological level, agents of *isfet*. While the reality of interaction between Egyptians and foreigners was much more complex and often positive, foreign peoples and places that did not adhere to the way Egyptians lived their lives or conceived of the universe were the symbolic chaotic counterbalance to the Egyptian ideal. Surviving literature and royal texts suggest that at the level of state ideology, there was one quintessential enemy of *ma’at*—rebels. But, rebels, to the Egyptian mind, could come in two forms: criminals and hostile foreigners. Criminals offended *ma’at* by rebelling against the natural order and the rule of law, but foreigners were rebellious by their very nature, existing outside the strictures of *ma’at*. In the Prophecies of Neferti, the foretold king who will

---

18 It is this idea upon which much of Muhlestein’s argumentation in *Violence in the Service of Order* is based. The necessity of destroying *isfet* is also discussed by a number of other scholars studying the iconography of smiting and violence against foreigners. See especially Swan Hall, *Pharaoh Smites His Enemies*; Bestock, *Violence and Power*; Janzen, “The Iconography of Humiliation;” Matić, *Body and frames of war in New Kingdom Egypt.*

return *ma’at* to the Two Lands was predicted to have the following effect on rebels, both treasonous criminals and foreign peoples:

> “The evil-minded, the treason-plotters, 
> They suppress their speech in fear of him; 
> Asiatics will fall to his sword, 
> Libyans will fall to his flame, 
> Rebels to his wrath, traitors to his might.”

Kerry Muhlestein argues that the Egyptians would have associated rebels (including the stereotypical hostile foreigner) with the rebellious figures of Egyptian mythology and that they would have “perceived a homology between mundane and mythical events.”

This analysis is consistent with Egyptian worldview more generally, as well as their own history. The connection between real-world foreigners and mythical rebels is also a defining factor in the creation of the much-discussed foreigner *topos* that identifies foreigners as the prototypical rebels and in constant conflict with *ma’at*.

On a symbolic and sociological level, the direct conflict between Egyptians/ma’at and foreigners/isfet played an important role in Egyptians’ understanding and conception of themselves, since one of the most effective ways a people group can delineate itself and foster group loyalty and identity is by placing themselves in contrast with non-included ‘others.’ In the case of the Egyptians, all peoples and places outside of Egypt and those who did not properly uphold Egyptian cultural norms were ‘othered,’ a process that simultaneously identified them with *isfet*. Thus, the *topos* of the uncultured, barbaric, and rebellious foreigner would have aided in the political and cultural unification of the Egyptian state (at varying points in Egyptian

---

20 Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature Volume 1*, 143.

history) by pitting an “us”—Egyptians who were civilized and upheld maʿat, against a “them”—foreign peoples to whom Egyptian civilization was unknown and maʿat was unnecessary.

The ‘othering’ of foreigners is also reflected in the way the Egyptians depicted and discussed foreigners, especially in triumphal contexts where the ‘us vs. them’ dichotomy is at its most visible. As part of the broader triumphal motif, foreigners embodied the qualities of helplessness, cowardice, weakness, and futility. They were also often portrayed as backward and strange, with stereotypical features highlighting their difference from the Egyptian norm.22 This further extends into the manner of their portrayal—they are often rendered in disordered postures, naked or nearly naked, and sometimes face directly forward out of the scene.23 These methods of depiction all run counter to typical Egyptian artistic paradigms. Likewise, much of the underlying ideology of the triumphal motif rested on the juxtaposition of the conventional characteristics of the weak and cowardly foreigner with the image and characteristics of the strong and victorious Egyptian king.

The helpless foreigner/victorious king dichotomy not only served to provide a clear ideological picture of how foreigners might have differed from Egyptians, but it also reiterated the antagonistic and oppositional relationship between maʿat and isfet. In triumphal contexts, foreigners were everything the king was not—weak, cowardly, and ready to turn away from

---


23 Energetic, contorted, and emotional poses and actions run counter to the traditional idealism of Egyptian self-presentation in art and literature. Ascribing these qualities to foreigners served not only to other them but also to highlight their relationship to chaos. For chaotic gestures, poses, and expressions (including figures facing forward rather than profile) and their juxtaposition with Egyptian norms in representational art, see especially Roth, “Representing the Other,” 155–174; Tara Prakash, “Everybody Hurts: Understanding and Visualizing Pain in Ancient Egypt,” in The Expression of Emotions in Ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia, eds. Shih-Wei Hsu and Jaume Llop Raduà (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 103–125; Spalinger, Icons of Power, 90–93, 107–108; Gay Robins, Proportion and Style in Ancient Egyptian Art (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994), chapter 1.
battle without a second thought. These characteristics are summarized well by Senusret III in the description he gives of the Nubians on his southern boundary stelae:

“Since the Nubian listens to the word of mouth, To answer him is to make him retreat. Attack him, he will turn back, Retreat, he will start attacking. They are not people one respects, They are wretches, craven-hearted.”

These same themes were reflected in the iconography of triumphal motifs through the disordered postures and nakedness of foreigner images, even within the standardized imagery of the smiting icon. While nakedness was not unheard of in Egyptian art, it was generally reserved for musicians or dancers in banquet scenes and used almost exclusively in the depiction of women. Egyptian men were rarely unclothed in Egyptian art. Foreigners were also regularly depicted clothed in non-triumphal contexts like those showing trade or voluntary tribute. As such, the presentation of foreigners as unclothed—with the exception of culturally-specific accessories meant to identify the figure’s place of origin—was primarily reserved for smiting, trampling, and battle scenes, triumphal contexts that relied on the othering of foreigners as part of the ideological opposition of ma’at and isfet.

Similarly, the disordered and dramatic postures that characterize images of foreigners in triumph scenes seem to have been generally reserved for such contexts. Normally, figures in Egyptian art were rendered using a set canon of proportions and a strict set of artistic rules.

24 Lichtheim, Ancient Egyptian Literature Volume 1, 119.


26 See Anthony, Foreigners in Ancient Egypt, chapter 4.
Postures were standardized, features were idealized, and figures were shown in profile. In triumphal contexts, foreigners were often shown in contorted positions: flailing their arms, bending backwards as they are trampled, facing fully forward with their mouths open. Within the smiting icon, the king’s victims kneel or lunge in the direction of the king, often raising their hands while turning their torsos away from the king and the impending blow. These dramatic and cowering positions are the visual parallel to the textual commentary that describes the king’s foreign enemies as cowards attempting to flee their inevitable defeat. Their postures and mannerisms are presented as the opposite of the Egyptian norm—decidedly other, and decidedly chaotic.

Triumphal motifs also displayed ideologies of otherness through extensive use of symbolic geography. Geographic symbolism was intertwined with ideologies of kingship and victory from the very earliest periods of Egyptian history. For example, in the iconography of the Predynastic and Early Dynastic, the unification of Egypt was stylized as the subjugation of Lower Egypt by Upper Egypt. The Narmer Palette is perhaps the most well-known example of this iconography, depicting the Upper Egyptian king Narmer smiting a Delta-dwelling man. The underlying ideology of violent suppression of the north by the south is then reiterated by the falcon (a symbol of Upper Egyptian kingship, and later kingship over the Two Lands) restraining or leading a personified papyrus marsh (a geographic metaphor for Lower Egypt). After the formation of the state, those outside the borders of the Two Lands became the regular victims in scenarios of subjugation and suppression, but the iconography of unification remained prevalent in triumphal motifs in subtler ways. The *sema-tawy* motif, the joining of papyrus and lotus

---

27 Robins, *Proportion and Style in Ancient Egyptian Art.*

28 So identified by his features and by the captured personified papyrus marsh with similar features above his head.
(signifying the Two Lands) by literally tying them together was common in triumphal contexts, especially in conjunction with smiting iconography and bound prisoners. Additionally, the toponyms t3 mḥy (Lower Egypt) and t3 śmꜣw (Upper Egypt) were included in enumerations of the Nine Bows within topographical lists in the New Kingdom, indicating that the ideology of subjugation of Egypt’s enemies included Egypt if she or her population should ever turn against the precepts of ma’at.

The Nine Bows, the iconographic and ideological representation of the traditional enemies of Egypt, including the rebellious inhabitants of Egypt, is known from Egyptian art and text from at least the Old Kingdom, but the motif may have existed earlier. The Nine Bows are often juxtaposed against the iconography of the rekhyt-bird that came to stand for the people of Egypt. This is another instance of the othering of foreigners, as it indicates the Egyptian worldview split humanity into two distinct groups: the people of Egypt, and the people of the Bows. This would seem to conflict with the fact that Upper and Lower Egypt were regularly included in the Nine Bows, however, the Egyptians were much less concerned with conflicting ideologies than we might be.²⁹ Additionally, using evidence from the Pyramid Texts, Uphill suggested that the Nine Bows refer to foreign peoples from different general locations outside of Egypt, rather than to actual the countries or specific geographic locations themselves. This suggests that goal of the geographic symbolism of the Nine Bows lies less in the exact physical locations to which their names refer, and more in the variety and complexity of the peoples they represent—isfet in all its possible forms and iterations.

Overall, the importance of symbolic geography as a method of othering foreigners while supporting the ideology of the victorious king cannot be understated. It was used to draw

²⁹ In this case, there is also another ideology at work simultaneously—the idea that Egyptians can also be agents of isfet if they rebel against the king or the established order.
ideological and cosmological distinctions between Egyptians and others that were borne out by real-world geography, and it grounded the ideological concept of the king’s universal dominion in a reality (albeit one filtered through religious tenets and royal propaganda) where real places and real people could be defeated by the king. This is also reflected in the personification and anthropomorphizing of locations and geographical features in conjunction with triumphal motifs that, like smiting iconography, began before the birth of the Egyptian state. The anthropomorphized papyrus marsh on the Narmer Palette is one of the most salient Predynastic examples, but the personified toponyms within the composite monumental triumph scenes of the New Kingdom represent the most systematic use of this device, blending place and person together into one ideological unit.

**Violence**

The explicitly violent nature of the Egyptian triumphal motif was essential to the ideologies that it portrayed. Most triumph scenes, from their inception through to the composite monumental scenes of the New Kingdom, featured smiting or trampling iconography as their central element, the theme around which all the related iconography and ideologies revolved. The centrality of smiting reiterated two important ideological points through the visual medium of violence: the victorious king would always succeed in slaughtering the helpless foreigner in service of *ma’at*, and the creation and maintenance of the king’s universal dominion was made possible through violent subjugation of those who might stand in the way of that goal.

The fact that the king performed smiting actions in order to help maintain *ma’at* has been discussed at length by Egyptologists, but these discussions do not always include the further
implications of this ideological interpretation. If *maʿat* and *isfet* are diametrically opposed and the creation of one is the destruction of the other, then the imperative of the king to uphold *maʿat* would have necessitated him to destroy *isfet* completely—violent action would have been a primary mechanism for ensuring a state of *maʿat*. However, *maʿat* was not upheld by just any violent action, and Egyptian texts even specify that murder and other acts of wanton violence went against the strictures of *maʿat*. As such, ritual violence performed for the cosmological purpose of maintaining *maʿat* required both that the king be the violent actor and that the king’s actions were divinely sanctioned.

Thus, the iconic figure of the victorious king at the very heart of the triumphal motif is the actor on whom rests the burden of the ideology of violent suppression of *isfet*. It is unsurprising, then, that both triumphal iconography and texts focus heavily on the king’s martial ability and the relationship of violent and triumphal actions to the king’s physical body. Allusions to the martial prowess and physical strength of the king in the form of references to specialized weaponry, such as *hpsḥ*-swords, maces, clubs, and chariots are present in the iconography, caption texts, and rhetorical texts of triumph scenes. These instruments of violence, some of which were closely tied to the office of kingship since the Predynastic period, hint at the necessary role violence played in the king’s ability to maintain order and uphold the sanctioned worldview. In smiting scenes predating the New Kingdom, the weapon wielded by the king to slay his enemies was variable, with *hpsḥ*-swords, maces, and clubs being the most

---


31 See for example the rhetorical texts in the triumph scene of Seti I at Karnak: *OIP 107*, 50–51, 60–61.

common. While smiting images in New Kingdom composite monumental triumph scenes tend to employ maces as the weapon of choice, recollection of these other weapons in the texts hearkens back to the long historical and iconographic tradition of enemy-smiting that already existed. This is further underscored by fact that the $hps$-sword is also present pictorially, as the weapon that the witnessing deity hands to the king, providing divine sanction, but also identifying the king as the one who must ultimately engage in the violent action with the weapon in question.

The physical body parts of the king also played an important ideological role in his ability to successfully subdue his enemies. In smiting icons, the king dramatically holds his weapon with his arm raised, drawing attention to this motion, as it is also the primary violent visual mechanism in the scene. Captions and rhetorical texts make reference to the king’s “strong arm,” and to the fact that he has performed actions “by his arm.” This highlights the role of the king’s physical person in defeating his enemies and in the performance of violent ritual actions. Likewise, similar references about the king’s feet (and sandals) are just as common. Visually, the figure of the king in the smiting icon often stood atop one or more rows of the topographical list. In trampling motifs, injured and dying enemies are crushed under the king’s feet, regardless of whether he is pictured in sphinx, griffon, or anthropomorphic form. Additionally, some examples like Tutankhamun’s shield depict the king striding atop a frieze of $hst$-signs while smiting, hunting, or otherwise performing violent actions. Triumphant texts also place importance on the role of the king’s feet and the relationship between the king’s body and his victims. Foreign lands and enemies are regularly described as being “under the sandals” of the king or

---

33 See Bestock, *Violence and Power.*
“overthrown under his feet.” Interestingly, the relationship between smiting an enemy and crushing them underfoot seems to have been a relatively interchangeable one for the Egyptians, as evidenced by the fact that a number of early smiting scenes are captioned “trampling the foreign lands” when they depict only the action of smiting. Both actions were a physical expression of force by the body of the king resulting in the same outcome: the violent defeat of the enemies of ma’at through the actions of the king. Thus, while these actions were iconographically different, the underlying ideology was identical.

Violence rendered visually in triumph scenes, such as smiting imagery, trampling of victims, binding, and leading of bound prisoners was supplemented in text by a vocabulary of violence that reiterated the visual creation and presentation of ideologies of triumph. Textual descriptions of the king’s weaponry, and of the violence and suddenness of his actions served this purpose, reminding the viewer that while the entire scene was ritually timeless, the act of smiting itself was completed instantaneously through one single act of violence, thus providing ideological reassurance of the king’s victory and the foreigners’ defeat. Triumphal texts also used a variety of verbs to describe the actions of the king in defeating his enemies, each with distinct iconographic and symbolic nuances, despite the fact the underlying ideology of the violent defeat of chaotic forces was essentially identical. Some of the most common and

---

34 The Egyptian verb used here is sxr, discussed below.

35 There are symbolic and magical equivalences drawn between smiting, trampling, and standing above or atop something. In royal iconography, trampling and smiting are virtually interchangeable. Magically, trampling or standing atop served apotropaic functions, so the relationship of the king’s victim’s to his body (he stands above or over them) would have reinforced the magical outcome—the king’s victory over his enemies. See Ritner, Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice, 119–134

36 See Hasel, Domination & Resistance, which discusses the terminology of royal violence, as well as reactions to that violence in the context of Egyptian military campaigning in the southern Levant during the New Kingdom.
ideologically important of these verbs were: $skr$ “to smite,”$^{37}$ $s\hat{h}r$ “to overthrow,”$^{38}$ $ds(f)$ “to subdue,”$^{39}$ $dn$ “to kill,”$^{40}$ and $ptpt$ “to trample.”$^{41}$

$skr$ is among the most common violent verbs used within triumphal motifs. This is unsurprising given the fact that it is from $skr$ that we derive the term “smiting scene.” In Egyptian, $skr$ literally translates as “to strike” or “to strike down,” though Egyptologists generally translate it depending on context as either “smite” or “slay” for a smoother English translation with the same essential meaning. The idea of striking the head or body of a foe is particularly closely tied with this verb, indicated by the knife and mace that are used for its determinatives, the weapons held by the king in smiting iconography. As such, this is the verb that most closely mirrors the exact action taking place in smiting scenes, describing the strike of the king’s weapon onto the head of his victim. Additionally, the Egyptian term for prisoners of war or captive foreigners is derived from $skr$. The term $skrw$-$\mathit{nhw}$, “the living slain ones” is how the Egyptians referred to their prisoners of war and bound, defeated enemies.$^{42}$ The use of this terminology implies two important ideological points regarding triumphal iconography. First, if the enemies who were defeated by means of capture were also considered slain, then on an ideological level, binding was tantamount to slaughter—either the death or the capture of enemies served the ultimate need of maintaining $ma’at$. Second, if captives are referred to as

$^{37}$ Wb IV, 306–307; Faulkner, Dictionary of Middle Egyptian, 250.

$^{38}$ Wb IV, 257–258; Faulkner, Dictionary of Middle Egyptian, 242.

$^{39}$ Wb V, 414; Faulkner, Dictionary of Middle Egyptian, 309.

$^{40}$ Wb V, 463; Faulkner, Dictionary of Middle Egyptian, 313.

$^{41}$ Wb I, 563; Faulkner, Dictionary of Middle Egyptian, 96.

$^{42}$ Wb IV, 307; Faulkner, Dictionary of Middle Egyptian, 250. See also Janzen, “Iconography of Humiliation;” Matić, Body and frames of war in New Kingdom Egypt.
those who were struck down and yet still live, this suggests that we are meant to understand skr, when devoid of the ‘nhw clarifier, to refer specifically to the strike of a killing blow.

Dn, perhaps even more so than skr, is unambiguously violent, as it can contextually mean “to cut off (heads)” or “to kill.” This term was particularly popular in Early Dynastic and Old Kingdom triumphal contexts. Its conceptual and ideological importance is highlighted by the fact that the First Dynasty king Den took this as his Horus name when he ascended the throne, a name that would have translated as “Horus who cuts off heads.” In Egyptian mythology, the severing of heads played a number of important roles, but the one most closely tied to triumphal ideology was the fact that cutting the head off of (or otherwise dismembering) an evil or chaotic entity was a method of rendering it magically inert. As such, the use of dn to describe the defeat of foreigners holds a connotation not only of their physical defeat by the king, but also the magical assurance that the forces of isfet that they represent have been nullified.

Sfr, which bears a homonymic similarity to skr based on conventional Egyptological pronunciation paradigms, actually has a completely different etymological origin. sfr is the causative form of the verb hfr, meaning “to fall.” Thus, sfr, with the addition of the preposed causative s, translates literally as “to cause to fall,” often interpreted to mean “throw down” or “overthrow” in martial or triumphal contexts. This verb is more ambiguous than skr in terms of the level of violence that it implies. Depending on the context, it could mean something as broad

---

43 Wb V, 463–465.

44 This was a common practice in Egyptian tomb decoration and funerary texts especially, where heads of animals considered dangerous to the tomb owner on their journey in the afterlife would be separated from the rest of the image. Occasionally, this also even occurred within the text for glyphs like the f-viper. The underlying magical rationale for this practice is discussed in Ritner, Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice, 157, 159–162, 168–171.

45 Wb III, 316.
as “to defeat” or it could mean something as explicit and violent as “to kill.” Often, this is the verb used to describe foreigners being overthrown or on the ground under the feet or sandals of the king. It is usually determined by Gardiner A15, the figure of a fallen man with his limbs splayed around him, an image that is strikingly similar to foreigner figures being trampled by the king in trampling and battle scenes.46

*Ptpt*, meaning “to trample,” was used similarly to *shr* in the instances where it meant that foreigners were overthrown under the feet of the king. In different contexts, it was used to indicate that both people and foreign places were being trampled upon by the king. Additionally, it also seems to have been used as a metaphorical equivalent for the act of smiting, and it led to the same ideological result—the defeat of foreign enemies by the king. However, *ptpt* can also mean simply “to tread” on a path, the ground, etc., the connotations of which are less violent.47 When used to indicate trampling specifically, *ptpt* is often spelled with Gardiner A24 or D40, either in addition to or in place of its normal walking legs (Gardiner D54/55) determinative.

Interestingly, *dj*, meaning “to subdue” is commonly rendered with the walking legs determinative, when it is determined.48 Given the meaning of the word, one might expect a determinative more closely related to violence or active defeat of an individual, but the use of the walking legs suggests additional nuance. In combination with the word’s meaning, the walking legs give the impression of encircling or the acquisition of dominion for oneself by treading upon it, both concepts that were regularly incorporated into triumphal motifs. In a few of the smiting

---

46 In Egyptian art, figures and images could serve as stand-ins for related glyphs, a phenomenon which undoubtedly at play in these contexts. See Wilkinson, *Reading Egyptian Art: a Hieroglyphic Guide to Ancient Egyptian Painting and Sculpture*.

47 *Wb* I, 563.

48 *Wb* V, 414; Faulkner, *Dictionary of Middle Egyptian*, 309.
scenes of the Old Kingdom, individual scenes are captioned using both the words *dsj* and *skr*, suggesting that while these actions served the same ideological goal of depicting the defeat of foreigners, they were distinct enough to be used in tandem to describe the different ways in which this defeat could be realized.

**Divine Sanction**

As previously noted, the presence of divine sanction of the smiting actions of the king was required to ensure that violence undertaken by the king was proper and served the purpose of upholding *maʿat*. As such, the ideology of divine sanction as it appears in triumphal motifs centers around supporting the legitimacy of the king, provisioning the king with the means to perform his duties, and confirming the role the gods played in securing the king’s ultimate victory and universal dominion. From an iconographic standpoint, divine support in triumphal motifs was displayed in three ways: through the passive presence of the divine in triumphal contexts, through the active intervention of the gods, and through divine speeches and encomia.

The passive presence of divine entities was as central to triumph scenes as it was in ritual, offering, and other royal scenes, as the king’s victory over his enemies is as much ritual act expected of his office as any other.49 As such, formulaic inclusions of divine presence are both expected and present in triumphal contexts, including protection formulae, protective deities, and those representing the office of kingship—the Horus-falcon, Nekhbet and Wadjet, and the winged sun-disk of Re and other solar deities.50 When used in triumphant motifs, these emblems

---


of the divine contextualized the content of the scene as part of a larger tradition of royal art and relief that displayed the idealized and ideological roles of the king as he performed the rituals of his office. However, in the context of triumph and in conjunction with the figure of the victorious king, the presence of these deities and their emblems took on additional ideological nuances. For example, in Early Dynastic iterations of the smiting scene, the Horus-falcon commonly accompanied the king as he slaughtered his enemies. In some of the earliest examples, it was even the Horus-falcon atop a personified serekh that performed the act of smiting as a symbolic representation of the king.⁵¹ Thus, the consistent presence of Horus tied the act of smiting not only to the individual king depicted in a given scene, but also to the longer tradition of smiting as a component of the office of kingship.

Passive divine sanction is also present in the titles and geographic epithets of deities that were used in triumphal contexts. For example, when he appeared as part of the triumphal motif, Amun-Re was often given the title nb tswy “Lord of the Two Lands,” highlighting his geographic domain, his preeminence as the state deity, and his connection to the king who likewise bore this title. Other deities were often afforded similar titulary with the format “Lord/Lady of X,” with ‘X’ being a geographical location over which they held dominion and/or that had bearing on the context of the scene in question. For instance, Ash appeared as “Lord of the Western Delta,” in scenes where the king killed or captured Libyans, Dedwen appeared as “Lord of Nubia/Bowmen”⁵² in scenes where the king killed or captured Nubians, and Hathor appeared as “Lady of Dendera” in smiting scenes in provincial temples in the region of Dendera.

---

⁵¹ E.g., the ivory tag of Aha. If following the drawings and analyses of Somaglino and Tallet, this iconography may also be present in the Gebel Sheikh Suleiman relief.

⁵² Ash was particularly prominent in this role during the Old Kingdom in smiting/triumphal contexts in both the decoration of royal mortuary complexes and rock relief smiting scenes in Sinai. Dedwen appears in New Kingdom texts and scenes, most notably leading a few rows of captive southern toponyms in the triumph scene of Seti I at Karnak.
This would have added an additional level of ideological sanction, symbolically granting the king the permission of the local deity to smite and to capture his enemies. In some cases, the deities would even aid in bringing the prisoners from their region to the king, granting him dominion through their power as the divine ruler of a given place or people group.

Divine standards in triumphal motifs generally took two forms: standards of the jackal-headed deity Wepwawet and standards bearing the image of the royal ka. In smiting scenes of the Early Dynastic and the Old Kingdom, Wepwawet’s standard was essentially ubiquitous. The standard faces the same direction as the king and is most often placed in front of him, as if going before him into battle, or clearing the path for him to reach—and subsequently defeat—other lands. Wepwawet, as the deity whose name literally translates as “opener of ways” was particularly well-suited to perform this function, symbolically assuring the way to the king’s victory was clear. However, the iconography of the Wepwawet standard became less common in triumphal contexts after the Middle Kingdom. On the other hand, the standard bearing the royal ka was not present in triumph scenes until the composite monumental triumph scenes of the New Kingdom, but once it was introduced to the motif, it appeared in most iterations. The royal ka, which was believed to pass from one legitimate Egyptian king to the next, was therefore a representation not only of the legitimacy of a given king’s rule but also of his proper fulfillment of the duties of the office of kingship.\(^53\) The placement of the ka-standard at the king’s back in composite triumph scenes represented both a protective element and a reflection of divine sanction—if the royal ka has come to rest on the king as he smites, he is necessarily performing

---

\(^{53}\) See especially Bell, “Luxor temple and the cult of the royal Ka,” 251–294.
those actions with the support of the divine and as legitimate actions required of the current incarnation of the office of kingship.\textsuperscript{54}

It is also worth mentioning here that some early examples of smiting scenes and other triumphal iconography occasionally included figures of officials who stood behind or near the king and who witnessed the action of the scene without actively intervening. This phenomenon was mostly restricted to the Predynastic, Early Dynastic, and Old Kingdom, and overlapped chronologically with the development of witnessing deities in smiting and triumphal scenes during those periods. While divine figures and the figures of officials represent distinct categories of iconography, in the context of smiting scenes they should be understood as part of the same overarching ideological trend, serving as a visual and cultural means of legitimating the king's actions.

Just as divine witnesses provided religious sanction and elevated smiting to the role of royal ritual, the presence of witnessing officials tied the act of smiting to the proper functioning of the state apparatus.\textsuperscript{55} From the Middle Kingdom onward, divine witnesses seem to serve as the means through which both political and religious sanction was conveyed in triumph scenes, thus explicating the general disappearance of officials’ figures in those contexts.\textsuperscript{56} However, this may also be attributed to the implicit differences between royal and private monuments and the

\textsuperscript{54} Bell, “Luxor temple and the cult of the royal Ka,” 257; Jonathan Winnerman, “Rethinking the Royal Ka” (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 2018).

\textsuperscript{55} Especially in the case of the corpus of New Kingdom private smiting stelae, there is a direct relationship between the viewing of actual ritual executions and the subsequent representation of that ritual. Following Schulman’s analysis, an argument can be made that both the ritual executions and monumental images of royal triumph and smiting were aimed at a public audience during the New Kingdom. After all, the starkest contextual difference between New Kingdom monumental triumph scenes and their antecedent iconography is their relative visibility. The increased visibility of New Kingdom scenes is further augmented by the by explosion in the frequency and scale of these images on public facades at complexes like Karnak and Medinet Habu.

\textsuperscript{56} Rare examples of officials within smiting scenes do occur in later periods, particularly the Amarna Period, as evidenced by the smiting scene on the foil fragment from the reign of Tutankhamun (see Fig. 35).
role officials played in royal monuments vs. the role the king played in private monuments. In particular, the corpus of New Kingdom private smiting stelae present an important contrast to the royal triumph scenes of the same period, as they are one of the only contexts in which officials are depicted witnessing smiting scenes after the Old Kingdom. The purpose of private monuments was different from royal monuments; officials used these to emphasize their relationship to the king and the tasks they accomplished during their careers. So, in the case of private smiting stelae, the officials can be thought of as secondary witnesses whose presence ties the depicted smiting ritual to the proper and official functioning of the Egyptian state. Even with witnessing officials present, the deities who observe the king smiting are still the primary witnesses in these scenes because the divine sanction their presence provides is a requisite component of the ideological messages inherent in triumphal iconography.

The support of the gods in triumph scenes also extended to the active intervention of deities into the content of the scene, either as witnessing deities provisioning the king with a weapon, or as deities leading prisoners and/or subjugated places into the presence of the king. The earliest examples of figural deities witnessing the triumph of the king date to the Early Dynastic, with the rock relief scenes of Den and Djoser. In these instances, Ash and an unnamed goddess (respectively) survey the scene of the king smiting but do not attempt to provision the king with weapons. Similarly, in the rock relief smiting scene of Sahure, Thoth holds a was-scepter and faces the king as he smites, and it is possible that the viewer is meant to understand that the god is providing dominion to the king. This interpretation would easily fit the theme of

---

the scene. Here, the support of the gods is direct in the sense that they are physically present in the scene in more than a formulaic way, paving the way for more complex divine intervention in later iterations of the motif.

Witnessing deities provisioning the king with a weapon in the form of a ḫpš-sword were present in triumphal motifs in a variety of contexts in the New Kingdom. The most consistent and visible of these contexts was in composite monumental triumph scenes, where witnessing deities simultaneously provided divine sanction by bringing prisoners (in the form of bound toponyms) into the presence of the king, offering a ḫpš, and engaging in laudatory speech. Here, the witnessing deity in question was usually Amun-Re, the ultimate divine representative of the state. However, other forms of Re, Amun, and Horus, such as Re-Harakhty are also known from this context.\textsuperscript{58} In other New Kingdom smiting scenes, the deity providing the weapon to the king was more variable, though they were always gods with connections to the power of the Egyptian state or to a geographic region that had relevance to the scene in question. For example, in the double smiting stela of Ramesses II from Aswan, Amun offers Ramesses the ḫpš in the left-hand scene, while Khnum offers it to him on the right. Khnum, whose primary center of worship was the island of Elephantine in Aswan, would have been a preeminent deity in the region where this stela was placed.\textsuperscript{59} Together, the active support of Amun and Khnum would have served as symbolic divine sanction at both the state and local levels.

\textsuperscript{58} It is, for example, Re-Harakhty who witnesses the king smiting and furnishes him with a ḫpš on the northern wing of the triumph scene of Ramesses III at Medinet Habu.

While the witnessing deities in triumphal contexts were variable to some extent, the weapon they offered, when present, was not. In each case, it is a *hpš*-sword that is offered by the god to the king as he smites. The *hpš* was introduced in Egyptian iconography as a royal weapon during the 18th Dynasty, corresponding to the onset of this weapon’s regular use as both a martial and ceremonial weapon by the Egyptians.60 In New Kingdom triumph scenes in monumental contexts, on stelae, and on portable items, the distribution of weaponry is predictable—the king smites with a mace or axe-mace, while the witnessing deity offers him a *hpš*. This is often supplemented, especially in monumental scenes, by a reference to the *hpš* in the text, the deity imploring, “Take for yourself the sword.” Likely, there is also an element of wordplay here, with *hpš* referring in related texts both to the sword the deity offers as confirmation of his support, and to the strength of the king’s arm that that support ultimately provides.

As with the witnessing deities providing weapons, deities who actively intervene in the action of the scene to bring either bound prisoners or bound toponyms into the presence of the king are known from earlier examples but did not become consistently employed elements in triumphal motifs until at least the New Kingdom. The Buhen stela of General Montuhotep offers the earliest example of a triumphal motif that unambiguously includes a witnessing deity leading bound toponyms into the presence of the king, though images like those from Sahure’s mortuary complex confirm that this theme existed much earlier in Egyptian triumphal art.61 This form of active intervention in support of the king’s actions is also commonly mirrored in the related


61 In earlier examples like those in the scenes in the mortuary complexes of Sahure and Pepi II, the rows of bound prisoners are clearly led by deities to the king. However, it is not until the Buhen stela (Florence 2450) where the prisoners clearly take the form of anthropomorphized toponyms.
triumphal texts. The combination of text and image to this effect serves not only to confirm that the deities agree with the actions of the king in smiting foreigners, taking prisoners, and expanding his boundaries, but also suggests that the king could expect both symbolic and practical assistance from the divine in performing these actions in support of ma’at.

Finally, divine sanction also took the less visual but more ideologically complex form of speeches and other encomia in which the gods both praised and encouraged the king, in addition to expounding upon their own roles in his victory. The laudatory remarks and encomia that characterized the rhetorical texts of composite monumental triumph scenes in the New Kingdom, as well as the poetic texts and litanies of triumph from which they were derived, focused heavily on praising the physical and martial prowess of the king, his validity as a king, and the extent of his dominion. These themes were also incorporated into triumphal motifs in other ways, but as part of the witnessing deity’s rhetorical speech, coming directly from the mouth of Amun-Re, these encomia take on an extra element of divine sanction as the god lists the qualities that make the king the chosen of the gods and the proper individual to uphold ma’at.

Additionally, in the rhetorical speeches of composite monumental triumph scenes, the witnessing deity confirms their personal role in securing the king’s victory. Sometimes this takes on a poetic form, as when Amun-Re faces each direction in turn to “work a wonder” on behalf of Seti I in the triumph scenes on the north wall of the Hypostyle Hall at Karnak.62 Similarly, the earlier litany of triumph from the Poetical Stela of Thutmose III provides an example of Amun-Re highlighting his own role in securing the king’s victory to the point that he takes credit for nearly all the king’s constituent successes: “I gave you valor…I set your might…I magnified

---

62 Kitchen, Ramesside Inscriptions I, 26–27; OIP 107, 51.
your awe...I stretched my own hands out to bind...I made your enemies succumb.”63 Despite appearances, this assertion of the god’s role serves to further underscore the importance of the king’s victory, rather than undermine it. If the preeminent god of the state or any important deity puts their own strength and willpower to ensuring the king is victorious, it can be assumed that the victory of the king is a cosmological and religious necessity.

**Functions of Triumph Scenes**

Over the course of their long history, the Egyptians used triumphal motifs for a variety of ideological, magical, political, and religious purposes. The motif was an adaptable and multifunctional one, and the constituent iconography could be tailored to be broader or more specific as the situation required. The functionality of triumphal motifs was nuanced and predicated on a base of ingrained historical and cultural filters and the development of familiar iconographic and textual cues over time. Through these mechanisms, triumphal motifs and the scenes and monumental displays that they constructed were used to achieve three ideological functions: protection through apotropaic magic, propaganda in the form of the presentation and celebration of official and state ideologies, and fulfillment of ritual and cultic obligations tied to the office of kingship.

Historians and Egyptologists make distinctions between these purposes to help contextualize and understand the nuances in Egyptian triumphal ideology, but for the Egyptians, protection, propaganda, and ritual would have been closely interconnected. The ritual nature of triumphs—both the scenes and the real-world actions they depict—was integral to their function.

---

and effectiveness as magical expression.\textsuperscript{64} Likewise, the underlying magical nature of the triumphal iconography and the ways in which it was employed supported the effectiveness of royal and state propaganda centered around the image of the victorious king. In particular, as the apogee of the diachronic development of the iconography of triumph, New Kingdom composite monumental triumph scenes combined long-standing iconographic and textual traditions rooted in royal violence, the othering of foreigners, and the supremacy of \textit{ma’at}. This combination of elements resulted in a unified display that contained effective magical expression, celebration of the victorious king and the state apparatus he represented, and which contextualized triumph as a royal ritual within the scope of the required cultic and religious duties of the king. These purposes, both individually and when viewed as interconnected functions, reveal why the many forms, iterations, and venues of the triumphal motif throughout Egyptian history was so persistent and so central to royal display—the figure of the victorious king was the iconographic bedrock upon which all Egyptian state ideology was built.\textsuperscript{65}

\textit{Protection: Apotropaic Magic}

Magic, or the ancient Egyptian concept of \textit{hk\textupsilon}s, was closely tied to Egyptian religion and worldview, but the Egyptians also believed it to be an inherently natural (rather than supernatural) phenomenon.\textsuperscript{66} \textit{Hk\textupsilon}s was—similar to \textit{ma’at}—simultaneously a concept, a deity, and an action that could be undertaken.\textsuperscript{67} Both the concept and the deity are attested in all periods

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{64} For the interconnections between ritual and magic, especially with regard to ritual violence, see Muhlestein, \textit{Violence in the Service of Order}; Schulman, \textit{Ceremonial Execution and Public Rewards}; Schulman, “Take for Yourself the Sword,” 265–295; Ritner, \textit{Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice}, 119–172.
\item \textsuperscript{65} This is not to say his other ritual requirements, roles, etc., were not important, but they all derive first from the victory that assures his legitimacy and his domain. Were it not for the victorious king lashing together the Two Lands, there would be no office of kingship and no roles of which to speak.
\item \textsuperscript{66} Ritner, \textit{Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice}, 23, 28.
\item \textsuperscript{67} Ritner, \textit{Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice}, 15–20.
\end{itemize}
from the Old Kingdom through to the Roman Period, indicating an enduring and influential effect of both on Egyptian thought. In fact, Ritner argues that ḫkš was “the ultimate source of causality, the generative force of nature. It is the notion of ḫkš that unites the tenets of Egyptian religion to the techniques of Egyptian religion.”

Stripped down to its most basic elements, the goal of Egyptian magic—the function of ḫkš—was to create and sustain ideal reality through the application of effective power. ḫkš’s power to shape reality was both generative and destructive and could be transferred by either sympathetic or contagious mechanisms. Egyptian magic was also tripartite, in that it was the combination of the three components of image, word, and action that provided it with maximum efficacy. In the case of triumphal motifs, these components are present as the smiting icon, witnessing deities, bound prisoners/toponyms, caption texts, rhetorical texts, audiences interacting with the scene, and the real-world referent of the smiting king.

The form of ḫkš reflected in triumphal motifs contained both generative and destructive elements, as it sought to destroy enemies and isfet while establishing the king’s domain and the qualities of his person. This was apotropaic magic at work—protective magic, the goal of which was to influence reality by deflecting, destroying, or otherwise negating evil or chaotic forces whose intentions ran counter to the ideal. As such, despite the generative nature of some of the magical elements at play, the complete triumphal motif was an example of the destructive power of ḫkš to protect. Egyptian apotropaic magic was often rooted in violence, and this was

---


71 Ritner discusses this idea at length in *Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice*, including binding and encircling (113–119, 142–144); trampling and Standing atop (119–136); execration (136–142); breaking (144–153);
particularly true of the elements that composed triumph scenes. Both the language and iconography of violence employed in triumphal motifs were rooted in the Egyptian ideological imperatives of violent destruction of isfet and establishment of the king’s universal dominion. The king was required to use violent force to subdue his enemies and to ensure his domain. However, these were not only ideological imperatives but magical ones as well. Apotropaic magic was, at least in part, the mechanism through which these imperatives were realized.

Within triumphal motifs, magical expression in the forms of violent imagery and textual violence regularly made use of similar iconography and allusions, as has been discussed in previous chapters. This iconography included severing and smashing heads, trampling enemies underfoot, binding of prisoners, ritual weaponry, and proscriptive encircling. Ritner notes that “the manipulation of images is perhaps magic’s most universally recognized practice,” and so it is the application of violence to images with real-world referents that provides the most universally understood and most efficacious apotropaic magic in triumphal contexts. Here, magical efficacy was reciprocal—it both relied on the existence of a real-world semiotic referent for the violent action to provide potency to the image and brought about intended real-world change based on the manipulation of the empowered image.

Given the preeminence of smiting within triumph scenes, it follows that the magical traditions of smashing heads and severing body parts (including heads) was some of the most conspicuous imagery in these contexts. From a magical perspective, images of the king smiting his enemies by smashing their heads with a mace, rendered in media res, were a form of sympathetic magic meant to ensure the same eventuality came to pass in the real world. In

---

incineration (157–159); human sacrifice, literal and in effigy (159–163); and cutting, stabbing, and severing (163–172).

72 Ritner, Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice, 112.
triumph scenes, this sentiment was also reiterated in text, with captions announcing the slaying of foreign lands and rhetorical speeches listing the litany of ways the king has already defeated his enemies. Symbolically tied to the acts of smiting and head-severing, weapons—especially bladed varieties—were common instruments of Egyptian magic and regularly functioned as mechanisms through which destructive power could be used for protective purposes.\(^\text{73}\) In triumphal contexts, the most visible example of this tradition is the ḥpš-sword the witnessing deity offers to the king, with his instruction to “take up the sword.” The symbolic nature of this instruction is clear, as the king is already actively engaged in smiting and is not lacking a weapon with which to do so. The provision of a sword instead hearkens back to a magical tradition known from as early as the Middle Kingdom of Egyptians using knives and blades to pierce, decapitate, or dismember images or figures of dangerous or harmful entities to negate the power of the image to cause harm.\(^\text{74}\) The implication that follows is that enemies put to the knife (or, the ḥpš) are not only defeated but simultaneously stripped of their ability to cause chaos or act against maʼat.

Trampling, an action that was symbolically equated with smiting as a variant method of physically crushing the bodies of one’s enemies, carried additional magical nuance. As we have seen throughout this study, the word ptpt, meaning “to trample” regularly occurs alongside both smiting and trampling images. Smiting would have been symbolically synonymous with victory for the Egyptians, and the same can be said of trampling. Both Egyptian language and visual representation metaphorically equate being atop or above something with being victorious over it or superior to it—physical elevation was commensurate with physical, social, or cosmic

\(^{73}\) Primarily through the ritual actions of cutting, stabbing, and severing. Ritner, Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice, 163–171.

\(^{74}\) Ritner, Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice, 164–165.
References to trampling in triumphal motifs had a variety of victims, including literal enemy figures, anthropomorphized toponyms, and Nine Bows (either as foreigner figures or as images of bows).

Trampled figures were often also bound, particularly in the triumphal iconography of the New Kingdom, where bound toponyms ran under the groundline of the smiting icon and royal sandals featured bound images of the Nine Bows on their soles. As a magical practice, binding was used in a variety of contexts and rituals but was particularly common in the bound prisoner motif. This motif, the development of which this study has previously traced, was present in Egyptian art from the Predynastic onward and was essentially ubiquitous in royal contexts. In addition to being used as components in larger triumphal motifs, the bound prisoner motif was used by itself to decorate everything from furniture and architectural elements to chariots, amulets, and statuary. In each case, the bound prisoner represents a “concrete expression of foreign subjugation” whose realization in image was magically empowered to bring about that reality. In topographical lists, the bound prisoner image is supplemented by text labeling the intended target of the magic, in a fashion not unlike that of execration figurines and texts.

Binding was also a symbolic and magical mechanism in the sema-tawy motif, an iconographic emblem that illustrated the unification of the Two Lands by the knotting together of a papyrus plant symbolizing Lower Egypt and a lotus plant symbolizing Upper Egypt. This emblem was often included in triumphal motifs, magically ensuring the perpetual unity of Egypt by binding them together in image. The sema-tawy was commonly placed under the feet or the

---


76 See Fig. 48, Egyptian Museum JE 62685; el Mallakh and Brackman, The Gold of Tutankhamun, 297, Fig. 151

77 Ritner, Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice, 117.
person of the king—Nebhepetre Mentuhotep, for example, stands directly atop the *sema-tawy* as he smites in the scene at his Dendera temple, and the emblem was often placed on the bases of royal statuary and thrones.  

Thus, as the king destroyed his enemies or as he went about the official business depicted in statuary or on his throne, he ensured both the continued unity of Egypt and his own dominion over the Two Lands.

This principle of interactivity was central to the efficacy of Egyptian magic, and magical practice often required an active element to achieve the intended purpose. In triumphal motifs, the protective functions of the motif were reflected not only internally but also in the way their intended audience would have interacted with them. Early triumphal reliefs like the smiting scenes in Old Kingdom mortuary complexes would have been seen by an extremely small amount of the population, and their primary audience would thus have been the deceased king and the gods. This suggests that a human audience was not required for the constituent images to be magically effective internally, but they could also magically influence the audiences who viewed them. To this point, it has been argued that the rock relief smiting scenes at Sinai that come from largely the same time period were intended to both magically and physically ward off enemies attempting to pass into Egyptian territory, turning them back with both magical force and fear. In some ways, this is similar to the use of triumph scenes on the pylons of large temples during the New Kingdom—this placement forced those who viewed the scene to pass directly through it in order to enter the temple.

---


80 Bestock, *Violence and Power*, 193–197. Given their location, by and large these scenes are reasonably accessible by foot and may have been seen by nomadic (Mentiu?) peoples moving around the area, as well as Egyptians on expeditions into the Sinai region. Nonetheless, this still suggests that while these smiting scenes were much more visible than their counterparts in royal mortuary complexes, they still would not have been seen by the majority of the Egyptian population despite their comparative accessibility.
New Kingdom composite monumental triumph scenes expanded on this interactive element: the groundlines of the triumph scenes of temple complexes like Karnak and Medinet Habu are placed exactly at eye-level, meaning that all who approached the scene were symbolically trampled under the feet of the smiting king and the witnessing deity. This once again reinforced the intended magical outcome of the motif—all people are subdued under the feet of the Egyptian king, securing the victory of \textit{ma\textquotesingle at} in perpetuity. This was, after all the ultimate goal of the apotropaic magic in triumphal motifs. The creation and display of triumphal motifs, as well as audience interaction with those motifs, were forms of sympathetic magic intended to produce an ideal Egyptian reality where the king’s victory was assured and \textit{ma\textquotesingle at} succeeded over \textit{isfet}, accomplished through symbolic destruction and subjugation of dangerous chaotic forces and foreign entities.

\textit{Propaganda: State Ideology}

As we have seen, Egyptian triumphal motifs were closely tied to royalty and the office of kingship from their very first iterations through all historical periods up to the New Kingdom and beyond. This association was a logical one, given that it was the king himself who was the primary actor. It is important to note that the worldview that triumphal motifs expressed was necessarily a state-sanctioned one, as it was constructed, used, and viewed primarily in divine, royal, and elite contexts for most of Egyptian history. The clearest exceptions to this trend were the composite monumental triumph scenes of the New Kingdom—they expressed the same state

\footnote{This expands the apotropaic act of trampling into the lived experience of the audience, regardless of the political or cultural makeup of that audience or whether or not they fully understood the motif. See Ritner, \textit{Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice}, 131–133.}

\footnote{Earlier triumphal iconography was first bound together in the composite monumental triumph scene in the New Kingdom, but the composite scene retained popularity though later periods and even cultural divides. Late Period and Ptolemaic examples exist at temple complexes such as Karnak, Edfu, and Esna. For composite triumph scenes as adapted for use by Meroitic royalty, see chapter 2, n. 4.}
ideologies as other examples of triumphal iconography, but they would have been visible to a much larger portion of the population. In fact, it was this visibility that allowed triumphal motifs to serve as effective propaganda in addition to their magical functions.

The state ideologies on display in triumphal motifs were related to the ideology of kingship, as well as the perpetual cosmological struggle between *maʿat* and *isfet*. Triumphs were a vehicle through which the ideology of the victorious king could be celebrated, negotiated, and interpreted. One of the functions of the Egyptian king, as a semi-divine ruler, was to uphold *maʿat* and destroy *isfet*. This imperative was not only a metaphorical or cosmological one but a practical one. It was a good king’s duty to protect his people (if necessary, even from themselves) and defend Egypt’s borders. Particularly in the New Kingdom, the practical imperative to defend Egypt’s borders was augmented to include both defending and expanding the borders of Egypt, literally expanding the sphere of Egyptian cultural, ideological, and often political influence. However, the ideological basis for obligatory expansion already existed in Egyptian thought and was already closely tied to the ideology of the victorious king. On Senusret III’s southern boundary stelae, he begins, “I have made my boundary further south than my fathers, I have added to what was bequeathed me,” and he notes at the end of the text that any

---


son of his who fails to maintain the border is not his son.\textsuperscript{85} By extension, a son thus disowned would also not have been a legitimate king. As such, pictorial and textual display in triumphal scenes of the king defending and expanding Egypt’s borders by smiting enemies and subduing foreign lands confirmed to both mortal and divine audiences that the king had performed these actions required of him.

The king’s legitimacy and the power of the Egyptian state were further supported by the role of the divine in triumphal motifs. In theocratic ancient Egypt, state sanction was tantamount to divine sanction and vice versa, especially given the important roles Egyptian deities played in the functioning of government and the legitimating of the king. In triumphal motifs, the most visible form of state sanction achieved by means of divine support were instances where the king received divine support from both a state deity and a local one within the same discrete scene. The triumph scene of Seti I at Karnak provides a characteristic example: one wing of the scene depicts Amun-Re as the witnessing deity, accompanied by Dedwen of Nubia, both leading lines of bound toponyms into the presence of the king. On the other wing, Amun-Re witnesses again, this time accompanied by the goddess of Victorious Thebes.\textsuperscript{86} As the preeminent state deity during the New Kingdom, Amun-Re’s support provides divine sanction at the state level. Dedwen, a regional deity associated with Nubia and Nubian kingship, provides divine sanction at the regional level, as most toponyms he holds are Nubian and other southern placenames.

The propagandistic role of Victorious Thebes in Seti I’s scene—and in other New Kingdom monumental scenes—is somewhat more complex. Victorious Thebes, \textit{wst} or \textit{wst-nht}, was the deified personification of the city of Thebes, a concept that dates back to at least the First

\textsuperscript{85} Lichtheim, \textit{Ancient Egyptian Literature Volume 1}, 119–120.

\textsuperscript{86} Figs. 61 and 62. \textit{OIP 107}, Figs. 15A and 17A.
Intermediate Period, where she was a militaristic deity and a symbol of the strength and power of Thebes.\textsuperscript{87} She began to appear again in triumphal motifs during the late Second Intermediate Period and into the New Kingdom, coinciding with Ahmose I’s movement of the capital of re-unified Egypt to Thebes.\textsuperscript{88} As such, she is synonymous not only with the city of Thebes and the surrounding region, but also with Thebes as an ascendant power and as the royal, political, and religious center of Egypt. From the standpoint of divine sanction, Victorious Thebes could thus indicate the support of both state and local deities. When the figure of Victorious Thebes is included in triumph scenes, she exclusively serves the role of a secondary witnessing deity, leading captive toponyms to the king. The symbolism here is not subtle—Thebes, the geographic and cosmological center of Egypt, has subdued and bound a variety of foreign places and peoples, and in returning them to the king and to Egypt has assured that they are properly brought into the king’s dominion. The king’s victory, at least as it was conceived of in the New Kingdom, was Thebes’ victory.

State-sanctioned ideology was also reflected in the way foreigners and foreign places were depicted and treated with triumphal motifs. The ideological supremacy of Egypt was dependent on the equation of foreignness with isfet, so stereotyped and subjugated depictions of foreign peoples, lands, and enemies were ubiquitous in triumph scenes. The Nine Bows, who were mentioned or depicted in some way in most triumph scenes, are the quintessential

\textsuperscript{87} The personification and subsequent deification of the city of Thebes, especially as a martial goddess, a stand-in for royal power, and an embodiment/parallel of the ascendant royal line is a subject that warrants further Egyptological study. To date, these topics have been most thoroughly discussed by Sydney Aufrère in “Thèbes-Victorieuse (\textit{Wst-nht}). Allegorie de la guerre et de la science Histoire d’un concept,” \textit{Mediterranes} 28 (2001): 13–40. See also D. Franke, “Erste und Zweite Zwischenzeit – ein Vergleich,” \textit{ZAS} 117 (1990): 124–126; Spalinger, \textit{Icons of Power}, 78, 183–187.

\textsuperscript{88} For the expulsion of the Hyksos by Kamose and Ahmose, and the subsequent establishment of the Eighteenth Dynasty, see Redford, \textit{Egypt, Canaan, and Israel}, 125–130.
example. The constituent peoples of the Nine Bows were often individually enumerated, but whether they are listed separately or jointly, they do not refer just to those nine groups of people but rather the symbolic plurality of pluralities—all people in all lands. The name of the Nine Bows would have been recognizable to any literate Egyptian viewing the scene and their iconography would have been even more widely recognizable. The consistent mention of the Nine Bows in this context subtly reinforces the totality of the king’s dominion over all peoples in all places, historically, presently, and in the future, regardless of what else is happening in the scene.

For human audiences who would have viewed or interacted with triumph scenes, the intended effect of the triumphal ideology differed based on the identity of the viewer. Egyptians viewing triumphal imagery were meant to draw comfort from the visual and magical reassurance of the king’s ability to maintain ma’at. The triumph of their champion, the victorious king, was assured and his actions were to be revered and celebrated. In contrast, foreigners (or even rebellious Egyptians) viewing triumphal imagery were meant to understand the inevitability of their own defeat and the futility of any action taken against the king or the gods. For them, the figure of the victorious king was to be feared. This reinforced the existing paradigms that upheld the ideology of kingship and the power of the state, including the king’s total dominion, the role of violence in the maintenance of order, and the necessity of the king to be the divinely sanctioned actor to perform that violence. Foreigners and rebels had no chance against the established order of the universe.

---


90 Uphill, “The Nine Bows,” 400. See also, Valbelle, Les Neuf Arcs.
Regardless of the exact nature of the intended audience, the visual impact of monumental triumph scenes on those who viewed them would have been profound. In the context of New Kingdom monumental scenes adorning temple exteriors, the triumphal iconography on display was more standardized, more elaborate, and physically larger than it had been in any previous period of Egyptian history. One could not approach the temple without encountering the scene, nor in most cases enter the temple without engaging with it. In the decorative program of large New Kingdom temples, triumphal iconography—and thus, victorious ideology steeped in divinely sanctioned violence and the othering of foreigners—was unavoidable to the ancient observer. Baines has suggested that temples (and thus, the content of their decorative programs) would have been inaccessible to the Egyptian public. For portions of the interior of temple complexes, this is likely true, but there is nothing to suggest that temple exteriors or even courtyards would have been as heavily restricted as the more sacred portions of the temple. Especially in larger New Kingdom temple complexes, portions of the artistic and architectural designs actually suggest the opposite—they were meant to be seen and interacted with by a public audience, serving as a theatrical backdrop for religious and ritual display.91

The themes on display would have been culturally familiar to ancient Egyptians, literate or not. While individual levels of understanding and interpretation would vary, the most basic symbolism and ideology would have been apparent to all viewers: the king was powerful, easily capable of defeating his enemies, and the gods supported him in doing so. However, the visual impact of these scenes on the viewer was not informed only by the content of the scenes. The

---

91 Certain elements of temple complex design during the New Kingdom seem to support this. In particular, the use of windows of appearances suggests—and almost necessitates—a certain amount of public interaction with the temple complex. See Barry Kemp, “The Window of Appearance at el-Amarna and the Basic Structure of this City,” *JEA* 62 (1976): 81–99. Additionally, the sheer size and strategic placement of monumental triumph scenes suggests that they were meant both to be interacted with and seen from far away.
physical size, complexity, and placement of the scenes greatly influenced the audience’s experience of them. At temples like Karnak and Medinet Habu, triumphal motifs and related scene types dwarf all other exterior scenes, and flank central and side axes, doorways, and processional ways. The size and prominence of this imagery reiterated the power and all-encompassing dominion of the victorious king; if a viewer wished to enter or approach the temple, he would pass—or in many cases, enter directly through—a triumph scene. In this way, the audience was not voyeuristically removed from the content of the scene, but rather became part of the ideal world that the symbolic triumph of the king ensured.

**Ritual: Cultic and Religious Roles**

Ritual was ubiquitous at the highest levels of Egyptian society, especially since the Egyptians did not draw clear distinctions between magical, religious, and state ritual the way we might. All Egyptian ritual was rooted to some extent in magical expression, insofar as it was a “symbolic action that [was] not only a conceptual blueprint of a belief, but also an expression or performance of that belief.”92 In other words, ritual was a method of performing the way things ought to be, whether this ideal reality was based in the tenets of Egyptian worldview, religion, or state ideology. This was a broad form of sympathetic magic, but it was also inherently religious, as aspects of Egyptian magic and religion were often so closely tied together that the Egyptians themselves made little to no distinction between them.93

Triumph—the ritual action performed by the victorious king—was a required duty of the office of kingship on par with other religious rituals that he performed as the head of state

---


religion. Just like the king was expected to take part in processing, libating, and presenting offerings to various deities, defeating his enemies (both literally and symbolically) was a duty required of the king in his official capacity as head of both state and religion. Because the religious and symbolic potency of ritual was derived from performative action, triumphal motifs can be interpreted on a broad scale as ritual destruction of isfet. In triumph scenes, the ritual actions were performed by the king as he was aided by the gods, similar to methods of ritual display common on the interior portions of temples.

Within triumphal motifs, both the use and suggestion of violence should be interpreted as aspects of performative ritual. With respect to smiting iconography, the action it depicts (bashing/crushing of a victim’s skull) was a magically-empowered motif dating back to the earliest parts of Egyptian history where it was associated with the newly-formed office of kingship and the king as the incarnation of the god Horus, unifying through violence. When rendered as an icon, the smiting motif recalls all violence the king has used to defend Egypt, as well as mythic-historical traditions about the unification of Egypt. The same can be said of binding when it appears in triumphal motifs—in its simplest form, binding was a magical means of subduing or subjugating a figure or a force. As part of the triumphal motif, binding was elevated to both a magical and a ritual act. Additionally, a subset of the traditional ceremonial weapons of Egyptian kingship, the staff of office, mace, and hps-sword, are present in some form in nearly all iterations of triumphal motifs. This suggests not only the ritual nature of triumphal acts, but also the importance of those rituals to the office of kingship.

—


95 The combination of these iconographic elements exists on many of the earliest examples presented in this study, including the Narmer Palette and the ivory tags of Aha and Den. See Bestock, Violence and Power, chapter 3, covering imagery and royal ideology in the period of state formation.
However, a distinction must be made between triumph scenes as the symbolic representations of a ritual act and the ritual acts that actually occurred. The actual performance of ritual violence in ancient Egypt has been a topic of contention among scholars, though representations of smiting and trampling abound.\(^96\) While I do not suggest that all smiting images represented a discrete real-world instance of ritual execution, actual executions were—in the semiotic sense—the object to which those images and icons referred. Put another way, triumph and smiting scenes do not necessarily record individual historical acts of smiting or violence against foreigners, but these must have occurred (at least occasionally) for the symbolism of the iconography to have any weight.

To this point, evidence suggesting that Egyptian kings performed visible execution rituals with some regularity continues to increase. At Mirgissa, a fort in Nubia, the so-called “human execration victim” dates to the Middle Kingdom and was probably of Nubian origin.\(^97\) The victim from the Mut precinct comes from the 2\(^{nd}\) Intermediate Period or the early 18\(^{th}\) Dynasty and was bound as a captive, executed, and buried.\(^98\) Other clear evidence of ritual or quasi-ritual executions include the recorded slaughter and subsequent display of the bodies of enemy princes

---


\(^98\) To my knowledge, the data and analysis of these finds have not yet been published in their entirety. However, Betsy Bryan presented some preliminary findings on August 9, 2015, at a lecture in Los Angeles entitled “Death in the Mut Precinct: Burial and Execution in the Second Intermediate Period.” See also Janzen, “Iconography of Humiliation,” 315–317, as the author was permitted access to the site in question while writing his dissertation.
by Amenhotep II and texts confirming the execution of enemy prisoners of war by Merneptah after they were relocated to Egypt.99

What then is the relationship between smiting and triumph scenes and real executions and treatment of foreign captives, beyond their semiotic connection as sign and referent? The sacrificial execution of an individual at Mirgissa as part of an execration ritual and the remains of a bound prisoner buried within the Mut precinct at Karnak indicate that royal violence did take place with ritual trappings and within sacred spaces. This, in turn, suggests that Schulman’s assertion that private smiting stelae recorded ritual executions that took place within or in front of temples does fit easily within the broader trend of evidence. Monumental images depicting royal victory through violence and the ritual enactment of that violence through execration, execution, or sacrifice would have combined to create a theatrical display that reiterated state ideologies and immersed the contemporary audience in the ideal reality manifested by the display.

On a symbolic level, the purpose of smiting, execration, and ritual execution was to recreate the zp tpy, the “first occasion.”100 Such a recreation was meant not only to return the world to its ideal state but also to maintain the proper balance between ma’at and isfet and the form and stability of the state itself. In many ways, the first, foundational job of the Egyptian king was violent suppression of his enemies. This was what allowed for the original formation of the Egyptian state and subsequent reunifications after periods of decentralization, and it was from this function that all other roles of the office of kingship were made possible. As such, the visibility of the perpetual recreation of the zp tpy and the ideal state of the cosmos through ritual


100 *Wb V*, 278.
violence performed by the king was integral to the proper functioning of the Egyptian state and religious structure. Actual ritual executions may have taken place only occasionally, but the placement of triumph scenes within the decorative program of New Kingdom temples ensured that the symbolism of ritual execution and royal violence against enemies was ever-present.

Given this, another aspect of Egyptian ritual that has bearing on the discussion of triumphal motifs is the fact that there is often a sense of timelessness and placelessness ascribed to depictions of ritual. Triumph scenes were formatted like ritual scenes in structure, formulaic elements, and artistic paradigms,\(^{101}\) including the eternal and continual nature of the ritual actions being performed. Additionally, the figurative language common in rhetorical triumphal texts (allusion, epithets, and metaphors) allow the actions of the king to be discussed symbolically rather than literally, keeping those actions and their necessary ferocity explicit without tying them to one distinct act or one specific moment in time. Each king is an individual and performs triumphant ritual actions in his own time as is his duty, but all kings serve as a reflection of the office of kingship and its eternal dominion over foreign peoples and places.

Lastly, it should be noted that both royal and private funerary contexts were some of the primary venues for ritual in ancient Egypt. Therefore, it is not surprising that triumphal motifs were common here as well. Smiting, trampling, and bound prisoners appear in the mortuary temples of the Old Kingdom, adorning interior walls and transitional spaces. These spaces would have been highly restricted, and so the primary audience for this iconography was the gods and the soul of the deceased king. For the gods, they would have served as magical and religious confirmation of the role of \textit{ma'at}, ensuring the continued persistence of the universe. For the deceased king, they would have served as magical and religious protection for his soul on its

\(^{101}\) For the usual structure and elements of ritual depiction, see especially Baines, \textit{Visual and Written Culture in Ancient Egypt}. 

286
travels. This same function of triumphal iconography is reprised in Pyramid Text, Coffin Text, and later Book of the Dead spells meant to protect the deceased from demons and other inimical creatures while traversing the Duat. Such iconography was also employed in later tombs, especially during the New Kingdom at Thebes, where officials’ tombs contain reliefs of everything from triumphally-adorned furniture and architecture, to bound prisoners and the Nine Bows presented in the form of topographical lists. In these private contexts, the aspect of ritual protection, while present, would have been secondary to the portrayal of the deeds the tomb owner accomplished during his life, or that they witnessed the king perform. In royal contexts, such as the Reshef smiting scene in the tomb of Thutmose III, the ritual functions of the triumphal iconography would have remained paramount.

**Final Thoughts**

This study approached New Kingdom triumph scenes diachronically, analyzing them as both the ideological and iconographic result of thousands of years of development and use of disparate antecedent motifs that centered on the many facets of the figure of the victorious king and varied in content and context. In terms of content, antecedent forms included smiting iconography, trampling iconography, bound prisoners, topographical lists, witnessing deities, ceremonial weapons, symbolic geography, rhetorical speeches, litanies of triumph, and encomia. In terms of context, antecedent forms are present in different materials and locations throughout Egyptian history. They appear on small ivory and slate artifacts, jewelry, amulets, furniture, and


103 See for example, PT spells 356, 371, 372; CT spells 148, 745, 761, 835, 839, 946, 960.

ceremonial items. They appear in rock reliefs, on stelae, in interior and exterior temple reliefs, and tomb reliefs.

Antecedent forms displayed ideologies focusing on royal dominion, royal violence, the otherness of foreigners, divine sanction, and the triumph of ma’at through the destruction of isfet. The cultural, historical, and literary context provided by these existing ideologies and their representations made it possible for ancient audiences to interpret these same ideologies in the New Kingdom triumph scenes that combined and manipulated these in more complex ways. Thus, these scenes could function as a state apparatus that simultaneously kept Egypt magically protected from chaotic outside forces, upheld the supremacy of the state and the legitimacy of the reigning king, and perpetuated religious and cultural themes integral to the preservation of Egyptian worldview.

The elements of the iconography associated with smiting scenes and the divine sanction of royal violence predate the formation of the Egyptian state. In the Early Dynastic, this iconography became inextricably fused with the ideology of Egyptian kingship, and the pattern of use that followed ensured that divinely sanctioned smiting was both the iconographic and ideological center of the triumphal motif that’s coalesced in New Kingdom composite monumental triumph scenes. Smiting scenes in the landscape guarded Egyptian borders, symbolically and magically turning back isfet. On a more practical level, they also served as stark warnings against rebellion and trespassing. Meanwhile, smiting scenes in royal temple complexes highlighted the ritual importance of the act. On portable items and smaller royal accoutrements, smiting scenes served as amuletic protective devices and visually reiterated aspects of Egyptian worldview to those who moved through royal spaces. The careful adaptation
of smiting iconography as it was displayed in these contexts allowed New Kingdom composite scenes to successfully perform all of these functions simultaneously.

Similarly, the iconography of bound prisoners and foreign subjugation also predates the Egyptian state, but the motif occurred in myriad contexts and forms throughout Egyptian history. It maintained a close association with smiting iconography but was also used separately as a physical and magical manifestation of the destruction of isfet. The foreigner topos that existed in Egyptian literature also manifested in iconographic and artistic forms like bound prisoner statues in royal complexes, execration figurines, and stylized representation of the Nine Bows. These form drew clear boundaries between Egypt and the other, mythologizing and stereotyping foreigners into symbolic enemies. These same ideological messages were incorporated into New Kingdom triumph scenes through the adaptation of this motif into elaborate topographical lists featuring bound anthropomorphized toponyms.

Triumphal rhetoric developed in conjunction with smiting and bound prisoner iconography, filling out the concept of the victorious king. Laudatory epithets, encomia, and figurative descriptions of the king killing or otherwise defeating his enemies eventually formed literary litanies of triumph in support of the king’s victory. The victory in question was characterized by violent destruction of isfet through smiting, trampling, or binding, and the king’s physical and martial prowess in achieving victory against his enemies was the central theme of litanies of triumph. However, these texts also discuss the other positive characteristics and qualities of the king, the weakness and futility of those who attempt to stand against him, the extent of his domain, the divine support he has been given, and the active role the gods have played in his success. This genre of text was copied and modified for use in New Kingdom
triumph scenes, functioning as extended captions describing the king’s actions and as divine rhetorical speeches, highlighting the same themes present in the earlier texts.

The form of the triumphal motif that existed in New Kingdom triumph scenes were the complex iconographic and ideological result of existing traditions of smiting iconography, the bound prisoner motif, and triumphal rhetoric. These existing elements were reconfigured in New Kingdom scenes to further emphasize the othering of foreigners, the necessarily violent role of the king, and the ritual aspects of royal triumph. This tableau of the multifaceted ideology of the victorious king in turn created and displayed the ideal reality of Egypt victorious and helped ensure the proper functioning of the cosmos in perpetuity.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Munro, P. “Untersuchungen zur altägyptischen Bildmetrik,” *Stadel-Jahrbuch N.F.* 3 (1971): 35, Fig. 32.


———. *Hyksos and Israelite Cities*. British School of Archaeology in Egypt and Egyptian Research Account 12. London: British School of Archaeology in Egypt; Bernard Quaritch, 1906.


