

JULY
15-17
2022



BODIES IN ANCIENT EGYPT

SUBJECTS, OBJECTS, MEDIA



REGISTRATION AND INFO:
BODIES.CONFERENCE.2022@LISTS.HU-BERLIN.DE



& VIA ZOOM



Fachbereich 09
Philologie



FRIDAY, 15TH JULY 2022

- 14:30–16:30 *Registration, reception, conference materials*
- 16:30–16:45 A. Lohwasser (University of Münster)
Welcome and opening of the event
- 16:45–17:45 D. Serova (HU Berlin), A. Rickert (University of Münster), U. Matic (ÖAW Vienna)
Thematic introduction to the conference
- 17:45–18:00 *Coffee break*
- 18:00–19:30 **Keynote:** R. Nyord (Emory University, Atlanta)
Approaching ancient Egyptian bodies: cognition, phenomenology, ontology, and beyond?
- from 20:00 *Evening reception*

SATURDAY, 16TH JULY 2022

PANEL I: BODIES IN SOCIETY

- 09:00–09:40 J. Carballo-Pérez (University of La Laguna), S. A. Schrader (Leiden University)
Embodied labours in engendered bones: reflections on social inequality and physical stress during the state formation in Egypt and Nubia (4400–1750 BCE)
- 09:40–10:20 D. Sweeney (Tel Aviv University)
Describing bodies at Deir el-Medīna
- 10:20–11:00 T. Rocha da Silva (University of São Paulo/University of Oxford)
Dwelling in the Amarna Workmen's Village: senses and bodies
- 11:00–11:30 *Coffee break*

PANEL II: BODIES AS MEDIA

- 11:30–12:10 A. David (Hebrew University of Jerusalem)
Moving and standing like a god: the performing royal body in Atenist imagery
- 12:10–12:50 L. Kerk (University of Münster)
Tattoos in Ancient Egypt: human bodies as artefacts and media
- 12:50–14:30 *Lunch break*

PANEL III: BODIES IN (CON)TEXT

- 14:30–15:10 N. Lazaridis (CS University Sacramento)
Bodies narrated: the depiction of human bodies in ancient Egyptian storytelling
- 15:10–15:50 V. Angenot (Université du Québec à Montréal)
The semiotic body: metaphor, allegory, prosopopoeia and self-thematization
- 15:50–16:20 *Coffee break*
- 16:20–17:50 **Keynote:** T. Pommerening, R. Brömer (University of Marburg)
Collecting, studying, and exhibiting human bodies. Cultural considerations on the ethics of scholarship and education
- from 18:00 *Open evening / Referent's dinner at 8 p.m.*

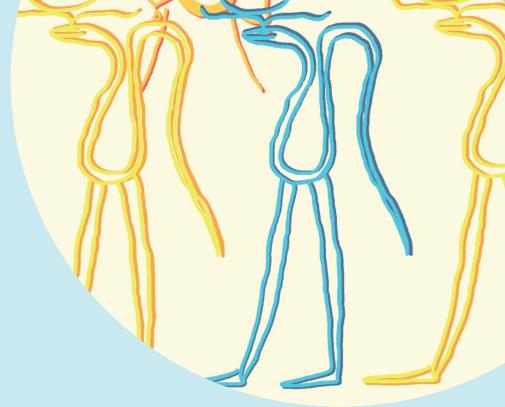
SUNDAY, 17TH JULY 2022

PANEL IV: BODIES BEYOND NORMS

- 09:00–09:40 K. L. Jordan (UC London)
Towards an understanding of Ancient Egyptian approaches to disability
- 09:40–10:20 F. Taterka (IMOC PAS Warsaw)
Interpreting Hatshepsut's (fe)male body
- 10:20–10:50 *Coffee break*

PANEL V: BODIES, SEX AND GENDER

- 10:50–11:30 S. Speck (University of Mainz)
Ancient bodies and modern bias: sex and gender concepts in Predynastic anthropomorphic sculpture revisited
- 11:30–12:10 P. Moore Johnson (IFA New York)
The phallic framing of masculinity in Ancient Egypt
- 12:10–13:40 *Lunch break*
- 13:40–14:20 S. Nagel (University of Heidelberg)
How to 'hack' your body – and those of others. The (gendered) body as subject, object and medium in Graeco-Egyptian erotic magical practices
- 14:20–15:00 *Coffee break*
- 15:00–16:30 **Keynote:** A. von Lieven (University of Münster)
Sex, gender and queerness in Ancient Egypt
- 16:30–17:15 A. Lohwasser (University of Münster)
Final discussion and goodbye
- from 17:15 *Open evening*



Conference venue: Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität
Münster (Germany), Rosenstraße 9, room RS 2.

REGISTRATION AND INFO:
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Approaching Ancient Egyptian Bodies: Cognition, Phenomenology, Ontology, and Beyond?

Rune Nyord
Emory University, Atlanta

Friday
15.7.22
18.00–19.30
KEYNOTE

From a primary focus during the late 20th century on bodily ideals on the one hand and “medical” ideas and practices on the other, interest in ancient Egyptian bodies has increased greatly in the last decade and a half, branching out in several different directions. Influential ideas have entered Egyptological discussions from different neighbouring fields of the humanities as well as the social and natural sciences.

Cognitive linguistics has propagated the idea that human language and thought is fundamentally embodied, a notion that has been particularly influential in guiding studies of Egyptian conceptions of the body, its parts, and its activities. Focuses on ancient experiences and the role of the senses have often been inspired in a more or less direct way by philosophical phenomenology with the fundamental understanding of the body as the means of being in the world. Most recently, approaches such as the “ontological turn” and new materialisms have started to question the fundamental nature of human bodies as largely unchangeable and clearly bounded entities.

This lecture explores the influence of such ideas in Egyptology, tracing their development and examining the conceptual underpinnings of such prominent approaches as cognition, phenomenology, and the “ontological turn”. In doing so, questions are raised of what assumptions underlie such approaches, to what extent they are complementary or compatible, and what the future of body studies in Egyptology might look like.

Embodied Labours in Engendered Bones: Reflections on Social Inequality and Physical Stress During the State Formation in Egypt and Nubia (4400–1750 BCE)

Jared Carballo-Pérez
University of La Laguna

Sarah A. Schrader
Leiden University

Saturday
16.7.22
9.00–9.40

The concept of embodiment in Archaeology helps us to understand that the bodies from the past have incorporated into their biology the material and social world in which they have lived. Therefore, it is necessary to understand that human remains are an entity that exists between the natural and cultural borderlands (Krieger 2001; Schrader 2019; Matić 2019).

Despite the evident theoretical tensions between sex and gender in Osteoarchaeology (Sofaer 2006; Higuero 2020), comparing the health and physical stress status between different sexual categories can help reflect on their articulation with gender in past societies.

In this sense, the analysis of the physical activity in skeletal remains can shed new light on the evolution of engendered inequalities throughout the process of state formation in Egypt and Nubia (4400–1750 BCE), since previous studies have already pointed towards a decrease of women stature and activity between the Palaeolithic and the Predynastic (Zakrzewski 2002; Stock et al. 2011).

Thus, we intend to offer some reflections on the study of the quotidian remodelling of various bone remains from Egypt (Badari, Naqada, El-Ballas and Hu) and Nubia (Northern Dongola Reach), placing the dialogue between bodies and objects at a crossroads between materiality and immateriality, nature and culture, or sex and gender.

References: • Higuero Pliego, A. (2020). El esqueleto sexuado: reflexiones en torno a la potencia en el hueso. Sexing the skeleton: Considerations about the power within the bone, in: *Revista ArkeoGazte Aldizkaria* 10, 185–199. • Krieger, N. (2001). Theories for social epidemiology in the 21st century, *International Journal of Epidemiology* 30, 668–677. • Matić, U. (2019). *Body and Frames of War in New Kingdom Egypt: Violent Treatment of Enemies and Prisoners*, Harrassowitz. • Schrader, S. (2019). *Activity, Diet and Social Practice: Addressing Everyday Life in Human Skeletal Remains*, Cham. • Sofaer, J.R. (2006). *The Body as Material Culture: A Theoretical Osteoarchaeology*, Cambridge. • Stock, J.T. et al. (2011). Body Size, Skeletal Biomechanics, Mobility and Habitual Activity from the Late Palaeolithic to the Mid-Dynastic Nile Valley, in: R. Pinhasi and J.T. Stock (eds.), *Human Bioarchaeology of the Transition to Agriculture*, Chichester, 347–367. • Zakrzewski, S. (2002). Variation in Ancient

Egyptian Stature and Body Proportions, *American Journal of Physical Anthropology*
121/3, 219–229.

Describing Bodies at Deir el-Medîna

Deborah Sweeney
Tel Aviv University

Saturday
16.7.22
9.40–10.20

This presentation expands on the concept of decorum (Baines 1990) to discuss body representation at the royal tomb-builders' community of Deir el-Medîna, and to investigate who described whose body, how and in what context, and who may have accessed these descriptions.

Male expert artists in this community constantly depicted the idealized bodies of royalty, gods, themselves and other community members in tombs and temples, and on stelae. But nuanced departures from this norm were included even in these sacred contexts. For instance, the tomb-owner's parents were sometimes represented with white/greying hair (and healthy bodies) (e.g. TT 3), perhaps indicating the tomb-owner's support for his elderly parents.

Anonymous female scantily clad idealized bodies are described in love poetry (e.g. P. Chester Beatty I) and depicted on ostraca and occasionally in domestic wall paintings. Isolated body parts were also depicted on ostraca, probably for training artists. Bodies which did not conform to Egyptian ideals are also represented on ostraca in cartoons or caricatures.

Anne Austin's research on physical remains at Deir el-Medîna has shown that the workmen often suffered from arthritis due to their strenuous commute to and from the Valley of the Kings (Austin 2017: 544). Nonetheless, absence lists show that workmen might work through illness, or come in to work when sick (Austin 2015). There may have been a professional ethos of disregarding illness.

Apart from medical texts, illness in the workmen's community was recorded for absence from work, or in the context of needing help (looking after sick persons, obtaining ingredients for medicine, etc.) The scribe Dhutmose's unusually extensive coverage of his illness in Nubia in the Late Rameside Letters can be associated with requests to intercede for his safe return (Sweeney 1985), demonstrating his good standing with his superior, who provides for him (Ridealgh 2016: 254–255), and implying that he is working despite ill-health, as a dedicated royal tomb-builder should.

Access to these body descriptions is likely to have been quite restricted – probably only a few officials read the absence lists, access to tombs and

chapels may have been limited, and we do not know how widely ostraca circulated in this community.

References: • Austin, A. (2015). Accounting for Sick Days: A Scalar Approach to Health and Disease at Deir el-Medina, *JNES* 74/1, 75–85. • Austin, A.E. (2017). The Cost of a Commute: A Multidisciplinary Approach to Osteoarthritis in New Kingdom Egypt, *International Journal of Osteoarchaeology* 27, 537–550. • Baines, J. (1990). Restricted Knowledge, Hierarchy, and Decorum: Modern Perceptions and Ancient Institutions, *JARCE* 27, 1–23. • Ridealgh, K. (2016). Polite Like an Egyptian? Case Studies of Politeness in the Late Ramesside Letters, *Journal of Politeness Research* 12/2, 245–266. • Sweeney, D. (1985). Intercessory Prayer in Ancient Egypt and the Bible, in: S. Israelit-Groll (ed.), *Pharaonic Egypt, the Bible and Christianity*, Jerusalem, 213–230.

Dwelling in the Amarna Workmen's Village: Senses and Bodies

Thais Rocha da Silva
Universidade de São Paulo/University of Oxford

Saturday
16.7.22
10.20–11.00

Egyptologists interested in houses focused on typologies, architectural features and activity areas as means to identify the people who once lived in those buildings, but little attention was given to how people might have experienced their domestic environment. Dwelling implies a spatial organization necessarily linked to the body and to social life.

Our modern, Western definition of house emphasises a place of “closing doors” defined by the architectural building. Space arrangements, division, and activities shape notions about private and public spheres, gender and social status that cannot be projected to other societies. But a house is more than its architecture; it evokes memories, emotional and sensorial experiences which constitute and transform the space and the body within it. Regarding their spatial dimensions, houses, among other buildings, inscribe the human experience in the landscapes through material culture and therefore, are the material interface of the bodily experience.

In this paper I examine the relationship between bodies and houses not limited to the dwelling unity. An anthropologically orientated approach takes into consideration the domestic sphere in a holistic way, investigating how houses embody social practice. I explore new theoretical and methodological frameworks to understand how a large – and communal – domestic space, such as the Workmen's Village of Amarna, affected the bodies of its inhabitants, constituting a particular type of living experience.

Moving and Standing Like a God: The Performing Royal Body in Atenist Imagery

Arlette David
Hebrew University of Jerusalem

Saturday
16.7.22
11.30–12.10

Amenhotep IV–Akhenaten’s peculiar body image in the iconography of his reign (ca. 1350 BCE) was part of carefully designed attempt to confront depleted formulas of traditional royal imagery, using a semiotic shock tactic to revamp the King’s central presence in the visuals. The need to re-substantiate the royal icon was motivated by the new politico-religious doctrine instigated by the King (Atenism) that placed the King at center-stage as the living substitute, solar son, and personification of his unique God, Aten. Not only new royal formal features but also new attitudes, gestures, and activities were depicted at an early stage of the reign to manifest the King’s divine essence.

With the help of new assemblages of talatat-reliefs from the *Rwd mnw n 'Itn r nhh* monument in Karnak depicting the ritual toilette, adornment, and theogamy of Akhenaten and Nefertiti and their close affinity with the traditional Daily Temple Ritual performed on the statues of Amun and Mut in Karnak (David and Vergniew 2021), and of the non-verbal communication of the couple expressed in visuals from Amarna, a progressive conceptualization of the royal body as divine will be delineated, its focal performance staged in Aten’s spotlight.

References: • David, A. and R. Vergniew (2021). Akhenaten and Nefertiti’s Morning Toilette in Karnak, *JNES* 80/2, 245–274.

Tattoos in Ancient Egypt: Human Bodies as Artefacts and Media

Lukas Kerk
University of Münster

Saturday
16.7.22
12.10–12.50

The practice of tattooing in Ancient Egypt can be traced back to the Predynastic period and by this represents one of the world's oldest known evidence for this kind of skin modification. Finds of tattooed human mummies and representations of tattooed people in art from different time periods have shown that, according to current knowledge, tattooing in Ancient Egypt was largely restricted to women.

While earlier research (e.g. Keimer 1948) tended to attribute a primarily erotic function to tattoos, more recent scholarship discusses approaches that criticise these patterns of thought and offer a much more nuanced picture of tattoos in Ancient Egypt (Austin *forthcoming*). Irrespective of the many possible interpretations of the tattoos, it can be stated, that unlike temporary body-modifying practices such as hair styling or body painting, tattoos are permanent body modifications that go beyond a ritual or situational context and permanently mark their bearers. Due to their irreversibility, tattoos possess a finality that manifests itself in an attachment of the individual to the bodily modification until the end of life. It is precisely this irreversibility and permanence that makes this form of body modification a highly interesting object of research. The ability to shape the human body provides important indications for conceptualising it as an artefact and part of material culture, and for systematising it as a medium of communication processes.

The presentation takes the archaeologically proven cases of tattoos in Ancient Egypt as a starting point for theoretical considerations on the hybridity of modified human bodies. This hybridity concerns, on the one hand, the consideration of modified bodies as human subjects (in the sense of the mortal remains of a once living individual) and, on the other hand, as objects (in the sense of an artefact produced as part of material culture) and as independent communicative media.

References: • Austin, A. (*forthcoming*). Shifting Perceptions of Tattooed Women in Ancient Egypt, in: M. Ayad (ed.), *Women in Ancient Egypt*, Cairo. • Keimer, L. (1948). Remarques sur le tatouage dans l'Égypte ancienne, *MIE* 53, Cairo.

Bodies Narrated: The Depiction of Human Bodies in Ancient Egyptian Storytelling

Nikolaos Lazaridis
CS University Sacramento

Saturday
16.7.22
14.30–15.10

Recent scholarship considers the human body as the nexus of material and textual evidence, a significant point around which buzz theories about human action and about the relationship of individual actors with society, environment, and history. Scholars who have investigated notions and representations of the human body in ancient Mediterranean cultures and who have been following the latest trends in gender studies and postmodernism have observed that ancient human bodies were constructs defined and informed by evolving sociocultural agendas and historical circumstances, and that personal identity and living experiences were “embodied”, that is, they were considered to reside inside, grow out of, and/or resonate with the body (for a taste of such theories, see Bahrani 2001 or the 2012 edited volume by Berlejung, Dietrich and Quack, and especially the critical scholarship overview by A. Koch).

Ancient Egyptians acknowledged the significance their bodies held in their lives in multiple ways: they aspired to taking care of them while alive, they protected them with laws and moral codes, and they made conscious efforts to preserve them for an afterlife. Within that cultural context, Egyptian storytellers depicted and moralized the human body in relation primarily to ageing, pain, disease, temporary disability, public image and behavior, and sexuality.

In this essay, I concentrate on story-moments, when the storytellers of Egyptian fictional stories such as *Sinuhe* or *Two Brothers* decided to zoom in a narrated event that usually included a character’s entry into a scene or the transformation of a character’s physical status. This storytelling process of “zooming in” involved the use of descriptive details about the ways in which characters’ bodies responded to unfolding extra-corporeal circumstances or intra-corporeal conditions. Approaching, thus, descriptions of human bodies and their adornment as a storytelling technique, I explore the manners in which physical details contributed to the construction of Egyptian character bodies and their corpo-real story-worlds.

References: • Bahrani, Z. (2001). *Women of Babylon: gender and representation in Mesopotamia*, London/New York. • Berlejung, A., J. Dietrich, and J.F. Quack. (2012). Menschenbilder und Körperkonzepte im Alten Israel, in Ägypten und im Alten Orient, Tübingen.

The Semiotic Body: Metaphor, Allegory, Prosopopoeia and Self-Thematization

Valérie Angenot
Université du Québec à Montréal

Saturday
16.7.22
15.10–15.50

From a semiotic viewpoint, the body cannot be considered as accessory. The body, as a tangible support to cognition, is the channel of semiosis through which meaning passes. If Saussure’s semiotics is “disembodied” (Fontanille 2011), all agree today to recognize the process of sign and meaning production as proxemic in nature, that is thought from a bodily perspective (Rastier 2010 [identity / proximal / distal]; Angenot *forthcoming* [synecdochic / metonymic / metaphorical], Fontanille 2011).

It is therefore no surprise that one of the first elaborate visual semiotic systems extensively used the body, and the embodiment of signifying processes, to convey concepts, qualities, agency or complex ideas. It would nevertheless be important to specify the terms in which these mechanisms – which have sometimes been misunderstood by Egyptology – are activated.

Mummification is a semiotization of the corpse; the anthropomorphic depictions of the gods are allegorical supports of transcendence, manifested in immanent forms; and, through a similar – though reversed – process, the Egyptians stage themselves in self-thematizations (Assmann 1996), mixing iconicity and symbolism (Tefnin 1992, Angenot 2022). In this way, the body-sign supports meanings that go far beyond the “simple” notion of iconicity or physical resemblance (mimesis), so as to encompass intangible ontology (Angenot 2022).

With this lecture, we will review the different tropological (metonymy, metaphor...) and rhetorical uses (allegory, prosopopoeia...) through which the body is instrumentalized in iconography, to produce meaning that exceeds the limits of the sensitive world.

References: • Angenot, V. (*forthcoming*), De la trilogie peircienne aux trois grands tropes : Éléments de sémiotique tropologique. • Angenot, V. (2022), Sémiotique visuelle de l’incarnation. Le cas de la réforme religieuse atoniste (1371–1337 BC), in: L. Hébert and É. Trudel (eds.), *Sens de la transcendance. Sémiotique et spiritualité*, Paris. • Assmann, J. (1996). Preservation and Presentation of Self in Ancient Egyptian Portraiture, in: P. der Manuelian (ed.), *Studies in Honor of William Kelly Simpson* 1, Boston, 55–81. • Fontanille, J. (2011). *Corps et sens, Formes sémiotiques*, Paris. • Rastier, F. (2010). Objets culturels et performances sémiotiques. L’objectivation cri-

tique dans les sciences de la culture, in: L. Hébert and L. Guillemette, *Performances et objets culturels*, Québec, 15–58. • Tefnin, R. (1992). Les yeux et les oreilles du roi, in: M. Broze and P. Talon (eds.), *L'atelier de l'orfèvre: Mélanges offerts à Philippe Derchain*, Leuven, 147–156.

Collecting, Studying, and Exhibiting Human Bodies. Cultural Considerations on the Ethics of Scholarship and Education

Tanja Pommerening
University of Marburg

Rainer Brömer
University of Marburg

Saturday
16.7.22
16.20–17.50
KEYNOTE

The current dominant discourse regarding the treatment of human remains in scientific and didactic endeavours is at least in part a presentist concern, based on today's conception of the human body and its dignity after death. Traditions of exhibiting bodies and body parts as trophies and the public dismembering of still living persons as punishment go back to Antiquity and continued into early modern times – as the citizens of Münster are of course well aware. The use of cadavers for the acquisition and dissemination of knowledge, on the other hand, has been considered problematic, if not been banned outright, for much of the course of human history.

While the educated classes in the positivist 19th century tended to advocate very strongly for the deceased to provide their service to science posthumously, attitudes in Western societies changed significantly in the aftermath of the Nazi atrocities revealed in the Nuremberg trials. Since then, informed written consent given by any body donor while still legally competent has developed into the ethical gold standard for the retention and manipulation of human.

However, what about bodies appropriated by medicine, ethnology, or indeed archaeology, prior to the establishment of consent? How should we deal today with the remains of persons who died without being asked their consent to the scientific use of their corpses or who actually opposed the transfer of their bodies to anatomy *post mortem*? Is there an ethical difference between doing research on human beings who lived among the ancestors of the scientists as opposed to studying the remains of persons brought into these lands forcibly, either dead or alive? And finally, does it matter if human “specimens”, be they mummies from Ancient Egypt or saints of the Roman Church, are exhibited ‘in the flesh’, materially, or in sophisticated virtual reproductions, digitally – a central point in the most recent debates about the presentation of human “objects”, e.g. in the German Digital Library. Increasingly, today's academic communities are trying to take seriously the concepts of body and bodily integrity that

we believe were maintained by the communities of origin from which the collected items have been taken.

This lecture will trace the development of contemporary concerns with the ethical status of human bodies in research and education, with particular emphasis on collections in museums and universities in the 21st century, focusing on human remains from Ancient Egypt. Perspectives from academic disciplines will be contrasted with public discourses, illuminating the tensions emerging between different communities confronting death and dead people in radically different ways, hands-on vs. hands-off. From a more general angle, what is at stake is an ethical assessment, in the light of human dignity beyond death, of the methods to be used for the generation of scientific knowledge applying invasive or non-invasive procedures such as aDNA sampling or computed tomography to people's mortal remains.

Towards an Understanding of Ancient Egyptian Approaches to Disability

Kyle Lewis Jordan
UC London

Sunday
17.7.22
9.00–9.40

How did the Ancient Egyptians view and conceptualise disabled bodies? Studies of disability within the broader corpus of ancient world studies have, for at least the past two decades, attempted to identify some form of a definition (and thus, institutional recognition) of disability across multiple societies in the ancient past. This, however, has led to rather paradoxical arguments: due to the lack of any singular word for “disability” within many ancient lexicons, some have tried to argue that there simply was no conception of disability in antiquity, despite the wide array of visual and textual evidence that shows ancient peoples often dealt with, and had conflicted feelings towards, a broad spectrum of bodily differences.

This talk will aim to put forward the idea that, instead of hoping for our ancient interlocutors to provide us with a definitive answer to how they understood disability, perhaps we should instead open our imaginations to the possibility that they were just as flexible and discursive with the idea as we are today. From a disabled person’s perspective, and with an open mind, this talk will show how ancient Egyptians engaged disability through their visual and textual media: how they were keenly aware of the variability of the human body, and in fact took many steps to actively engage and accommodate these differences. Furthermore, this talk will argue that by approaching disability as an embodiment – one of many in a person’s life – we may begin to unlock a deeper understanding of how disability played a part in and informed their lived experiences and relationships within ancient Egyptian society.

Interpreting Hatshepsut's (Fe)male Body

Filip Taterka
IMOC PAS, Warsaw

Sunday
17.7.22
9.40–10.20

Hatshepsut is certainly the best known female king of ancient Egypt, whose reign deeply impacted the rest of the New Kingdom. Although she was not the first woman on the throne in Egyptian history, the particular circumstances surrounding her accession forced her to seek for new ways of expressing her kingship in both image and text which still puzzle many scholars. Older, binary interpretations argued that for political reasons Hatshepsut tried to hide the fact that she was a woman and pretend she was a man. Although this view was persuasively criticised by Uroš Matić in his 2016 paper “(De)queering Hatshepsut”, it seems that the traditional view is still shared by many Egyptologists, often unconsciously. It is thus necessary to complement Matić’s observations by the analysis of Hatshepsut’s representations at Deir el-Bahari.

The aim of the paper is therefore to re-analyse Hatshepsut’s depictions in her most important monument in order to discuss her particular use of gender(s) which was aimed at following the traditional patterns of Egyptian kingship which were, however, modified whenever necessary in order to accommodate them to the specific circumstances of her reign. This will enable us to re-evaluate the accuracy of modern interpretations and of the applicability of our etic concepts to ancient Egyptian phenomena.

Ancient Bodies and Modern Bias: Sex and Gender Concepts in Predynastic Anthropomorphic Sculpture Revisited

Sonja Speck
University of Mainz

Sunday
17.7.22
10.50–11.30

Like all objects made by humans, images of the body are realised through the human mind and body themselves. As such, we can assume that anthropomorphic images are direct self-expressions of humans about their self-perception, self-concept and contain different aspects of the ideas about their subject – the human body. These body concepts were mapped onto anthropomorphic images by their creators. By adopting an emic perspective, modern researches can re-trace these “maps” to their origin. Including knowledge about the human mind gained by cognitive science can be a powerful tool in this endeavour.

Among the pool of body concepts which can enter anthropomorphic images, concepts on sex and gender often become objects of research. Studies on anthropomorphic images in Egyptology regularly discuss the topics of sex and gender in connection with ideas about fertility, often assigned to female, and power, often assigned to male. But can we be sure that these and other connotations are really contained in our sources or are rather biased by our own concepts of the human body and concepts about Ancient Egyptian bodies?

This paper, which is based on my PhD-project within the research training group “Early Concepts of Humans and Nature: universal, specific, interchanged” (DFG-GRK 1876), aims to pursue the topic of sex and gender in Predynastic anthropomorphic sculpture from an emic perspective with the assistance of cognitive science. Subsequently, I will compare results with modern body concepts and the Western Egyptologist’s perspective on the body in Predynastic Egypt. By being aware of the pitfalls of modern bias we enhance our view on Ancient bodies.

The Phallic Framing of Masculinity in Ancient Egypt

Peter Moore Johnson
IFA New York

Sunday
17.7.22
11.30–12.10

The ideal condition of being male in Ancient Egypt has been interpreted in bodily terms through textual and art historical sources as one of dominance, victory, hardness, and penetration. The phallus lies at the nexus of these readings through its use as a hieroglyphic classifier, literary trope, and presence in representational imagery.

Iconographic analyses have expanded the symbolic significance of the phallus by associating the motif to representations such as fishing and fowling scenes meant to encode the performance of gender. However, these analogous interpretations present the modern viewer with a conundrum: if the phallus is essential for understanding Egyptian masculinity, and indeed omnipresent in representations, why are male figures depicted without this emphasized sexual characteristic? This paper argues that there is a corpus of evidence which was, and to some extent continues to be, censored and obscured in the academic construction of ancient Egyptian masculinity. The phallus in Ancient Egyptian art was the primary offending member in these suppressive works of scholarship and museum curation.

This paper assembles a corpus of some of these obfuscated works and suggests that the circumstances surrounding these practices of concealment are indicative of the prevailing social mores at the time. These acts have influenced a modern understanding of masculinity in Ancient Egypt. This historiographic treatment will provide an entry point to argue for rethinking masculinity, one in which gender and biological sex, and its manifestation on the body, are not synonymous. These traits, while mutually constituted, are entangled with an Egyptian emphasis on fertility and importance of rebirth in the afterlife.

How to ‘Hack’ Your Body – and Those of Others. The (Gendered) Body as Subject, Object and Medium in Graeco-Egyptian Erotic Magical Practices

Svenja Nagel
University of Heidelberg

Sunday
17.7.22
13.40–14.20

Today’s social media and lifestyle magazines are brimming with tips by – often self-made or self-declared – experts in all things concerning beauty, fitness, sex and general health and attractiveness, thus reflecting an apparent widespread need for social appreciation based on, or centred around physical appearance and performance. Quite different types of sources, however, may inform us about similar interests in ‘hacking’ (to use a modern term) one’s body and sexual life in the multicultural society of Graeco-Roman Egypt.

A vast corpus of Demotic and Greek magical handbooks with collections of recipes as well as activated texts and objects produced in the course of magical rituals is preserved from this period and reflects the frequent recourse to spells, curses, amulets, figurines and concoctions by people desiring to improve their health as well as their social, and especially their sexual, relationships.

In the subgenre of erotic magic, comprising all those practices intended to manipulate one’s own sexual life and/or that of others, the human body – especially the gendered and sexualised body – forms the central point of reference. On the one hand, these practices are often aimed at creating a forceful power dynamics between the body of the operator and those of one or several target persons. On the other hand, their ritual techniques make use of the human body or its single parts, parings and secretions in different ways, thereby both objectifying them and using them as media.

By means of selected examples from the written instructions as well as images and objects from applied spells, e.g. abstracted representations of a human body, it will be demonstrated how the human body (parts) could assume a magical agency from the emic perspective, and through which types of rationale their manipulation was supposed to function. Finally, concepts of the body, sexuality and gender underlying these uses, and their cultural tradition(s), will be highlighted.

Sex, Gender and Queerness in Ancient Egypt

Alexandra von Lieven
University of Münster

Sunday
17.7.22
15.00–16.30
KEYNOTE

Sex and gender played an important role in the culture of Ancient Egypt, both in real life, as well as in the religious imagination. Some of these aspects could in a modern perspective also be labelled as cases of queerness, although this concept did of course not exist in Ancient Egypt itself. The lecture will look at some of these cases, both well-known ones as well as not so obvious ones, and give some fresh thoughts on them.

