



Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin  
Northeast African Archaeology and Cultural Studies

# CONCEPTUALIZING BODIES IN ANCIENT EGYPT

Zoom-Lecture Series

organized by Dina Serova & Frank Kammerzell

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Thursdays, 6–7 p.m. (CET)

April 28 – July 7, 2022 (via Zoom)

# Conceptualizing Bodies in Ancient Egypt

## Northeast African Archaeology and Cultural Studies

### Zoom-Lecture Series

**Organisers:** Dina Serova & Frank Kammerzell

Thursdays, 6.00–7.00 p.m. (CET), April 28 – July 7, 2022

In this digital event featuring different international speakers every week, interested listeners can gain insights into ongoing research on the body and corporeality in Ancient Egypt and Egyptology.

The topics range from gender roles, violence and punishment, eroticism and sexuality, illness and disability to specific body techniques. Textual, pictorial (two- and three-dimensional) and archaeological sources are consulted as a material basis. The focus is on emic and etic perspectives on as well as conceptualizations of the body in Ancient Egypt in its manifestations as *subject*, *object* or *medium*. The talks will cover whole and fragmented bodies of humans, kings, deities or demons, taking different methodological and theoretical approaches into account. The Zoom-Lecture Series is characterized by diversity in several respects with regard to the selection of source material and the time periods treated, but also by the unique combination of speakers with their respective individual sociocultural and professional backgrounds. This lecture format is designed as a precursor to the international conference “Bodies in Ancient Egypt: Subjects, Objects, Media” to be held in Münster from July 15–17, 2022.

## 1 Lecture program

| Dates    | Referents   | Lecture titles   |
|----------|---|--|
| April 28 | Hagenmüller, Matthieu (Paris)                                     | Violence and punishment in Old Kingdom funerary scenes   |
| May 5    | Lhoyer, Bénédicte (Montpellier)                                   | Disability from Nagada to the Middle Kingdom: Evidences, iconography, and perception               |
| May 12   | Matić, Uroš (Vienna)  | Precarious lives in Ancient Egypt: Sketches for an archaeology of vulnerability and trauma         |
| May 19   | Pabst, Rebekka (Berlin)   | “Unite Your Limbs!” The Transformation of the Dismembered Corpse                                   |
| June 2   | Poole, Federico (Turin)   | On “transgender” shabti figures  |
| June 9   | Conte, Gabriele (Pisa)  | Corporeality and bodies in Ancient Egyptian demonology   |
| June 16  | Di Biase-Dyson, Camilla (Sydney) and Jaqueline Stock (Heidelberg) | The Contendings between the Body and the Head (tTurin CGT 58004) – A gender debate from antiquity? |
| June 23  | Polkowski, Paweł L. (Poznan)                                      | Body parts in rock art: Feet, hands and pubic triangles  |
| June 30  | Böckler, Nadja (Munich)   | Looking behind the phallus: The so-called “erotic” figures of Ancient Egypt                        |
| July 7   | Hellum, Jennifer (Auckland)                                       | Kahun and the female body in translation   |

## 2 General information

If you are interested in listening to the lectures, please feel free to join via Zoom at the following link:

**<https://hu-berlin.zoom.us/j/65552253534>**

Meeting-ID: 655 5225 3534

The Zoom “waiting room” will be opened 15 minutes prior to the talk (at 17.45, German time). Please note that the common Zoom rules apply. We kindly ask listeners to keep their microphones muted during the talk. Questions to the speaker can be asked after the lecture in the chat or by use of the “raise hand”-function. Zoom meetings are not being recorded. By entering and participating in any lecture from the program, you agree to assist in creating a space free from any form of discrimination or violence. Participants should not record any chat room activity taking place in the virtual space.

In case you encounter any technical issues or have a question related to the Zoom-Lecture Series, please feel free to write an email to **[d.serova@hu-berlin.de](mailto:d.serova@hu-berlin.de)**

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## Violence and punishment in Old Kingdom funerary scenes

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Matthieu Hagenmüller  
*Sorbonne Université Paris, FR*

Thursday  
28.4.22  
18.00–19.00  
zoom

While most of the scenes from Ancient Egyptian funerary iconography show an idealized and pacified vision of the world, some include bad treatments and violence on individuals.

From the 4<sup>th</sup> Dynasty onward, renderings of accounts are depicted, during which people are forced to bend in front of the scribal authority. Corporal punishments, ranging from spanking to bastinados, though quite rare, are also sometimes included in funerary iconography, and contrast sharply with the overall harmony in the rest of the scenes.

To discuss these scenes, I wish to analyze them using the theoretic frame coined by M. Foucault, especially his works on body and sexuality. I argue that one of the funerary images' purposes was to legitimize a hierarchical order and dissymmetrical social relations, and thus can be seen as having a “disciplinary” aspect. I wish to seek the meaning and purpose of each type of violent behavior in tomb images, and why some acts have been represented and some have not. This leads me to question the link between the perception of violence in Egypt and what we call funerary “decorum” since J. Baines. I also aim to try to elaborate a definition of “legitimate” violence, conceived as relational, that is depending on who uses it against whom.

I will focus on Old Kingdom iconography, and sometimes compare it to later images.

**References:** • Baines, J. (2013): *High Culture and Experience in Ancient Egypt*, Sheffield. • Foucault, M. (1975): *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Paris (English translation 1995). • Foucault, M. (2003): *Psychiatric Power*, Paris (English translation 2006).

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## Disability from Nagada to the Middle Kingdom: Evidences, iconography, and perception

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Bénédicte Lhoyer  
*Université Montpellier, FR*

Thursday  
5.5.22  
18.00–19.00  
zoom

The period between Nagada and the Middle Kingdom is particularly rich in images of people with disabilities. In fact, since prehistoric times, there have been already several works of art showing bodily deformities resulting from a disability.

Despite the omnipresence of images with a perfect physique, it is obvious that the reality was quite different: dwarves, hunchbacks, lame or starving people can be found in tombs, in relief and painting, as well as in statuary. And despite their obvious presence, few studies have been entirely devoted to them. Yet, they are essential in order to understand Egyptian society and to understand how the ancient Egyptians considered them. Thus, there is an ambivalence: a handicap can be seen as something positive (mainly the dwarves) or negative (the starving foreigners in the pyramidal complexes), even in an in-between state as for the herdsmen with their twisted leg.

There is a vibrant discourse that still needs to be cleared up in our discipline. Consequently, our communication proposes to approach the theme of the handicap by relying simultaneously on the human remains, the iconography chosen for the works of art and the perception of difference through texts and vocabulary.

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## Precarious lives in Ancient Egypt: Sketches for an archaeology of vulnerability and trauma

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Uroš Matić  
*ÖAW Vienna, AUT*

Thursday  
12.5.22  
18.00–19.00  
zoom

Different forms of social inequality in Ancient Egypt are almost by a rule absent from museum exhibitions and Egyptological publications. Instead, one encounters the material culture of the rich and beautiful (in emic perspective).

However, most of the Ancient Egyptian population were the members of the lower classes and the poor who are hard to recognize in the archaeological record, partly because they were rarely looked for. Furthermore, the theoretical and methodological frameworks of this search were never clearly defined. At the same time, visual representations and written sources which depict these internal others have different ideological backgrounds as their connecting thread.

In this paper, I will attempt to sketch possible frameworks of an archaeology of vulnerability and trauma in Ancient Egypt, by focusing on the evidence on the poverty, disability, bodily punishment and ugliness (in emic perspective).

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## “Unite Your Limbs!” The Transformation of the Dismembered Corpse

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Rebekka Pabst  
*ÄMP Berlin, GER*

Thursday  
19.5.22  
18.00–19.00  
zoom

Many funerary Ancient Egyptian texts thematize the dismemberment of the dead body. According to the written sources, the unity of the whole, complete body that once existed in life seems to dissolve after death. In the texts, several body parts of the deceased are often listed at once, but at the same time there seems no word in these sources that could refer to the whole (dead) body. The subject of such textual sources is thus a corpse that is dismembered into its individual limbs. Certainly, such descriptions can be compared with the fate of the god Osiris, whose body was dismembered by his brother Seth after his death. The dismembered body of Osiris is also iconographically documented. Mostly these kinds of representations show severed body parts like the head or the limbs of the god.

In Egyptology, such sources (texts and images) have sometimes led to the assumption that there existed no concept of the body as a whole in Ancient Egyptian culture. Rather, the body seemed to have been perceived as the sum of its parts, as a kind of “Gliederpuppe”. From an emic point of view, however, it should be noted that a dismembered (dead) body did not correspond to the ideal conception of a corpse. Rather, dismemberment seems to be a temporary stage that the deceased himself must overcome. In the written sources this is expressed, for instance, by the request to collect individual body parts (flesh, bones, limbs). Such statements can be compared with archaeological sources. Certain body parts could either be remodeled or replaced during the process of mummification. In addition, the different wrapping methods of mummy bandages are an important factor for the external appearance of the corpse.

The lecture will present, compare and discuss texts, iconographic representations and archaeological sources. Based on the analyzed sources, it will be elicited how a (in the symbolic sense) dismembered corpse could be transformed externally. Furthermore, the deeper meaning for these opposing conceptions will be presented.

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## On “transgender” shabti figures

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Federico Poole  
*Museo Egizio Turin, IT*

Thursday  
2.6.22  
18.00–19.00  
zoom

Starting in the Ramesside period, female deceased were sometimes outfitted with shabtis clearly characterized as male by their costume: a duplex wig and a wraparound dress forming an apron in front.

Most conspicuous among these are overseer or “reis” statuettes (<sup>c</sup> *3.w-mḏ*, “Greats of Ten”), each meant to head a group of ten mummiform shabtis within the large shabti gangs – ideally of one “worker” shabti per day of the year – that became typical by the Third Intermediate Period. But examples of shabtis in the male garb of the living made for women are also known that do not show the specific features of the overseer; particularly, so-called “orant” or “praying” shabtis, with their hands pictured palm-downwards on their apron.

These figurines date from the Ramesside period, apparently before the rise of a clear-cut overseer/worker dichotomy among shabtis. The gender incongruity could be explained away by connecting it to the commonly held notion of the “depersonalization” of the shabti: by the time these “transgender” figurines appear, they are no longer images of their owner, but of her/his servants. However, both the iconographical and the textual evidence point to a more complex situation, inviting reflections on the subtleties of the relationship between individuals and the surrogate bodies they are represented by.



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## Corporeality and bodies in Ancient Egyptian demonology

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Gabriele Conte  
*Università di Pisa, IT*

Thursday  
9.6.22  
18.00–19.00  
zoom

The corporeality of demons was a matter of great debate and speculation in ancient Mediterranean cultures, from Mesopotamian religion to Hellenistic philosophy and Christian theology. Ancient Egyptian religion did not develop a coherent and distinct demonology and had a different conception of spirit, soul, and body; still, the matter of the corporeality of demonic entities can be helpful to address the problem of the nature of demons in Ancient Egypt correctly.

In Ancient Egyptian demonological studies, a widespread tendency is to conceive disease-bringer demons as almost coincident with the disease itself. The demonic entity loses its individuality in favour of an interpretation as a personified disease, which usually corresponds precisely with an illness of our current medical knowledge.

The present lecture aims to redirect the issue by analyzing the physical appearance of disease-demons in Ancient Egyptian religion and art. The lecture will proceed through four case studies: the violent approach to the demon *sāmānu*, which the magician fights in a fierce and bloody battle; the reverse corporeality of the demon *sh3kḳ* as a representation of chaos and disorder; the representations of disease-demons (particularly *nsy*) in magical papyri, that show a non-canonical and unique disposition of the human body; the other “states of matter” the demon could appear with, particularly as wind and bodily fluids or poisons.

The examples proposed point to a characterization of Egyptian demons not as abstract entities or personifications of diseases but as real and corporeal creatures of the world.

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## The Contendings between the Body and the Head (tTurin CGT 58004) – a gender debate from antiquity?

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Camilla Di Biase-Dyson  
*Macquarie University Sydney, AUS*

Jaqueline Stock  
*Universität Heidelberg, GER*

Thursday  
16.6.22  
18.00–19.00  
zoom

Our recent study of the Late Egyptian literary work, “The Contendings between the Body and the Head”, has resulted in a new edition and translation of the Turin writing tablet CGT 58004. The accompanying textual analysis reconsiders the generic characteristics of the work, positioning it within Mathieu’s (2011) genre “Procès”.

It has also revealed the highly playful and metaphorical nature of the language, whereby the feminine – and feminised – body paints a vivid picture of her roles and responsibilities in order to challenge the primacy of the masculine head over the other body parts.

**References:** • Mathieu, B. (2011): Les “procès”: un genre littéraire de l’Égypte ancienne, in: B. Eszter, A. Gulyás, and A. Hasznos (eds), *From Illahun to Djeme: Papers presented in honour of Ulrich Luft*, Oxford, 161–166.

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## Body parts in rock art: Feet, hands and pubic triangles

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Paweł L. Polkowski  
*Poznan Archaeological Museum, POL*

Thursday  
23.6.22  
18.00–19.00  
zoom

The majority of dynastic petroglyphs found to date at the Dakhleh Oasis consists of depictions of human body parts. Feet (also sandals and shod feet) are by far the commonest motifs, of which more than a thousand specimens have already been recorded (many of which were created also in the Graeco-Roman period). This is supplemented with over 600 images of pubic triangles and some two dozen hands found so far in Dakhleh.

Such a large number of images, coupled with various regular associations with other motifs, seems to indicate that some well-defined cultural practices involving petroglyph production existed in the Dynastic period. In this paper I would like to offer some reflections on possible understanding of such petroglyphs by reconsidering some fundamental ontological aspects of the images themselves and the very places in which they are located.

It is argued here that their significance cannot be fully apprehended when only their “representational” aspect is considered. I thus deliberate on the role of the landscape and its inherent powers, which must have played a crucial part in the phenomenon of (at least much of) rock art production of the time. The body parts petroglyphs would thus constitute peculiar devices used in response to various phenomena experienced by people in the oasis area. This, in turn, invites some considerations over ontological and phenomenological aspects of the desert landscape.

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## Looked behind the phallus: The so-called “erotic” figures of Ancient Egypt

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Nadja Böckler  
*SMAEK München, GER*

Thursday  
30.6.22  
18.00–19.00  
zoom

The so-called “erotic” figures from Egypt are a colorful mixture of different objects that have one physical feature in common: they show the human genitals uncovered. For Ancient Egypt, corresponding figures have been handed down equally for women and men – however, in the field of Egyptology, female figures are referred to as “fertility figures”. “Erotic figures” usually mean those objects that show a boy or man with a greatly enlarged phallus; these have so far only been little explored.

If you look past the core element of the figures – the phallus – and take a look at the bodies, it is noticeable that the figures on the one hand have elements that, according to general opinion, fit into the “little child schema”: clear stomachs, breasts, “childlike” facial features and even the curl of youth. It is only because of this representation of the body that the figures in research have often been equated with representations of Harpocrates. Equally, however, there are also objects that one would not speak of as “boys”: a beard is clearly depicted or other features that classify the person as older.

The main characteristic of the objects, the oversized phallus, also offers approaches for research questions. Depictions of the phalli vary widely; on the one hand, depending on the man’s posture, in four possible directions, on the other hand in the richness of detail. The more details there are, the clearer statements can be made: While some objects unmistakably show an unerected phallus, an erection can clearly be assumed for others. In this context, it can be examined whether the practice of circumcision is reflected in these figures or whether this detail was important.

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## Kahun and the female body in translation

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Jennifer Hellum  
*University of Auckland, NZ*

Thursday  
7.7.22  
18.00–19.00  
zoom

According to the Hippocratic authors and Plato, a number of gynaecological disorders and diseases were the result of a “wandering womb”. In this diagnosis, the womb moved all over a woman’s body, from head to feet, causing chaos, and as a diagnosis, it lasted until the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Although this idea of a “wandering womb” is generally associated with the ancient Greeks, it has often been attributed in the first place to the ancient Egyptians, specifically in Case II of the Kahun Gynaecological Papyrus (UC 32057).

These were originally translated by F. Ll. Griffith, who translated most of the female anatomy into Latin in his translations. He also diagnosed one of the cases (No. XI) as a “well-known variety of hysteria” (cf. Griffith 1897, 8). These betray a typical Victorian understanding of the female body and condition. While Griffith’s conclusion regarding “hysteria” and Case XI has not been set into Egyptological medical lore, his translation of “wandering womb” has led to the wide belief that Egypt was the original source for this misunderstanding of the female anatomy.

This paper will address the possible reasons for this, examining the grammar of the phrase that caused the problem – *st mr n(y) id.t-s m hp*. It will provide another possible translation, and investigate why Griffith’s odd habit of translating “unsavoury” passages into Latin does such a disservice to Egyptian women and their bodies.

**References:** • Griffith, F. Ll. (1897): *The Petrie papyri: Hieratic papyri from Kahun and Gurob (principally of the Middle Kingdom), I: Text*, London.