

THE PRESENCE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF KHEPRI
IN EGYPTIAN RELIGION AND ART

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PROBANTE

INTRODUCTION

Background

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Chapter 1: Introduction 39

Chapter 2: Literature Review 40

Chapter 3: Methodology 41

Chapter 4: Results 42

Chapter 5: Discussion 43

Chapter 6: Conclusion 44

Appendix 45

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
Historical Background	1
Aims	4
Scope	5
Methodology	6
Research Design	7
Appendix A: Chronology of Ancient Egypt	9
CHAPTER I: KHEPRI IN EGYPTIAN RELIGION	10
Introduction	10
The Name Khepri	11
Khepri in Ancient Egyptian Cosmogony	11
Khepri in Ancient Egyptian Mythology	16
Khepri as Manifestation of the Sun-god	18
Khepri and the Afterlife	18
Conclusion	32
Excursus: Entomology	34
Appendix B: Glossary of terms	37
CHAPTER II: SIGNIFICANCE OF KHEPRI IN ART	39
Introduction	39
Khepri as Creator	39
Khepri as Protector	40
Khepri as god of Resurrection	41
Khepri as symbol of Upper and Lower Egypt ..	42
Conclusion	42

CHAPTER III: THE DEPICTION OF KHEPRI IN EGYPTIAN

ART	44
Introduction	44
Heart scarabs	48
Mummies	52
Coffins	59
Jewelry	63
Painting and Relief	75
Sculpture	92
Conclusion	94
Excursus: Scarab seals	97
Introduction	97
Historical background	97
Function of scarabs	99
General Characteristics	101
Seals in the Republic of South Africa .	102
CHAPTER IV: CONCLUSION	116
PRIMARY SOURCES FROM SOUTH AFRICAN MUSEUMS	i
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS	ii
BIBLIOGRAPHY	xviii
SYNOPSIS	xxvi
Afrikaans (Samevatting)	xxvi
English (Synopsis)	xxix

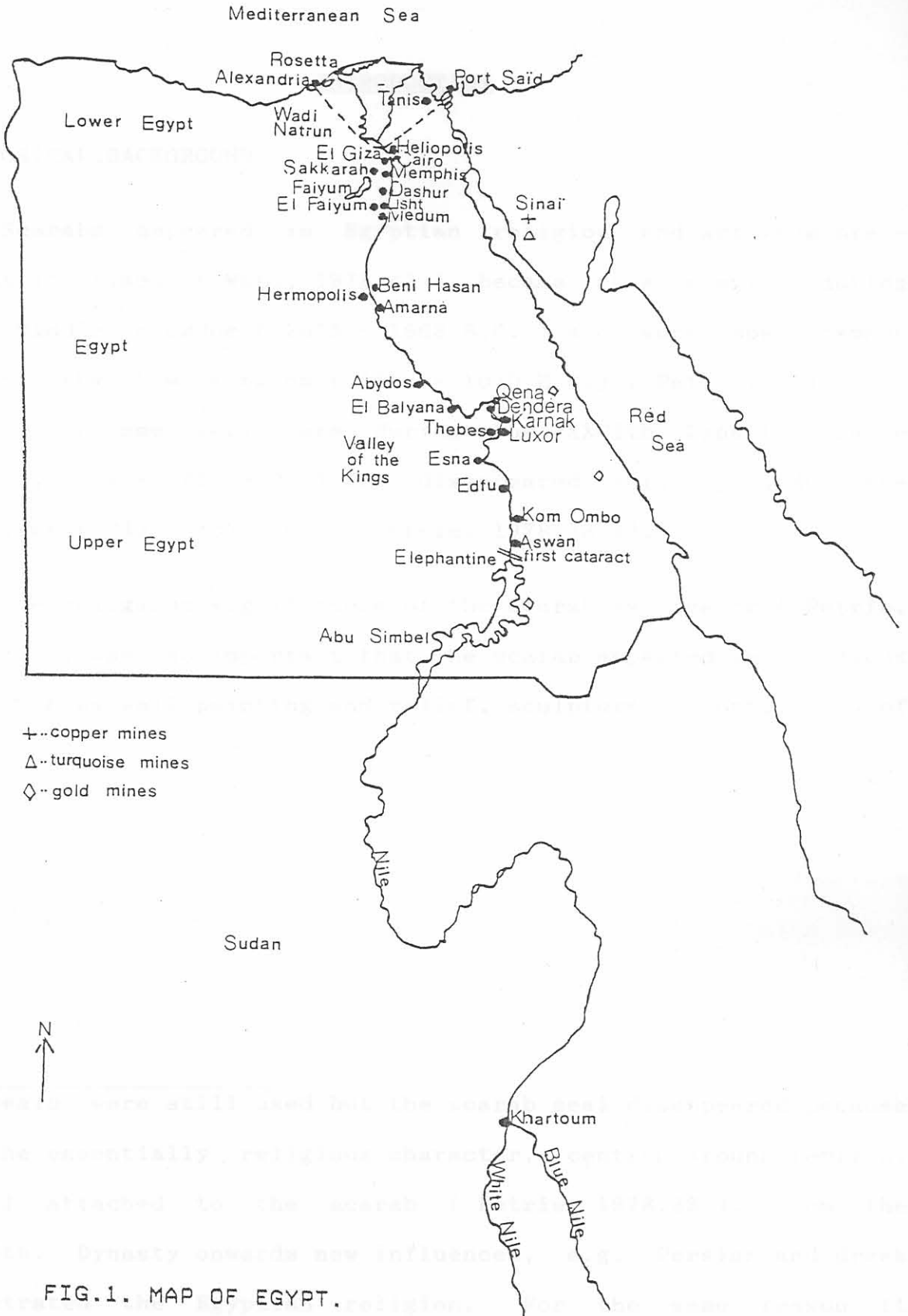


FIG.1. MAP OF EGYPT.

INTRODUCTION

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Scarabs appeared in Egyptian religion and art from pre-dynastic times (Ward, 1978:43), became more popular during the Middle Kingdom (2035 - 1668 B.C.) and were most common during the New Kingdom (1552 - 1070 B.C.) (Petrie, 1978:4). Scarabs became very rare during the XXVIth. Dynasty (Saite Period, 664 - 525 B.C.) and disappeared entirely under the Persians (343 - 332 B.C.) (Petrie, 1978:33)¹.

The religious significance of the scarab as Creator (Petrie, 1978:2), was so important that the scarab appeared in religious art such as wall painting and relief, sculpture, illustrations of

1. Seals were still used but the scarab seal disappeared because of the essentially religious character, centred around rebirth, still attached to the scarab (Petrie, 1978:33). From the XXVIth. Dynasty onwards new influences, e.g. Persian and Greek penetrated the Egyptian religion. For the same reason it disappeared in art.

the Book of the Dead² and the Am Duat³, decorations on mummy coverings and coffins.

The scarab often appeared in jewelry which was worn as

2. The Book of the Dead is a funerary text. It was written on sheets of papyrus accompanied with illustrations. Its purpose was to help the deceased pass through the dangers of the underworld to attain a peaceful afterlife (Faulkner, 1989:11). Some of the spells originated in the Pyramid Texts which first appeared, carved in hieroglyphs, about 2345 B.C. During the Middle Kingdom (2035-1668 B.C.) more spells were added and were written on wooden coffins, therefore known as Coffin Texts. The Coffin Texts were the direct predecessors of the Book of the Dead (Faulkner, 1989:11f.). An example is the papyrus Book of the Dead of Pinedjem I, L.450cm. W.37cm: XXIst Dynasty, 1065 - 1045 B.C. Discovered at Deir el-Bahri. Egyptian Museum, Cairo (Saleh, 1987:pl.235).

3. The Am Duat was a synthesis of acute astronomical observation and religious speculation describing the night - voyage of the sun through the Netherworld (Bonnet, 1952:18). It is also known as the Book of the Hidden Chamber, or the Book of That which is in the Netherworld (Mallakh, 1980:50ff.). An example of an Am Duat written on papyrus is housed in the Egyptian Museum, Cairo. It dates from the end of the XXIst Dynasty, 970 B.C. and was found in a tomb of a high priest of Amun at Deir el - Bahri. L.145cm. W. 23,5cm. (Saleh, 1987:pl.236). At Thebes the burial chamber of Tuthmosis III, 1490 - 1440 B.C. is painted as though a huge papyrus was unrolled around the walls, inscribed with the Am

a personal adornment by the living. Together with jewelry the scarab was also placed on the corpse (Aldred, 1978:10ff.), e.g. on the corpse of Tutankhamen (Aldred, 1978:pl.69). The scarab was often the focal point in jewelry designs (Aldred, 1978: pl.80).

The most general use of the scarab was as an amulet or stamp seal⁴. As amulet it became so popular that it even replaced the "ib" or heart amulet of earlier times (Budge, 1988:29f.). Its use as stamp seal and/or amulet spread to the countries around the Mediterranean with the result that scarabs were found in countries such as Palestine (Joines, 1988:15), Thracia⁵, Greece and Italy (Etruscans) (Hughes, 1972:19) [fig.2].

Duat (Mallakh,1980;53). It was thus written both on papyrus and walls.

4. A multitude of scarabs was found in Egypt of which hundreds of inscribed ones can today be found in museums in Paris, London, Cairo and elsewhere. " They stand thus to Egyptian history much as coins stand in relation to Western history" (Petrie, 1978:1).

5. In the Rijksmuseum van Oudheden, Leiden, a small carnelian scarab is exhibited (among other similar objects) which was found in Thracia. It has an approx. length of 1,5cm. It bears an inscription on the underside. The inscription is very vague but may have been a figure, placed in an oval frame of fine diagonal lines (rope border).

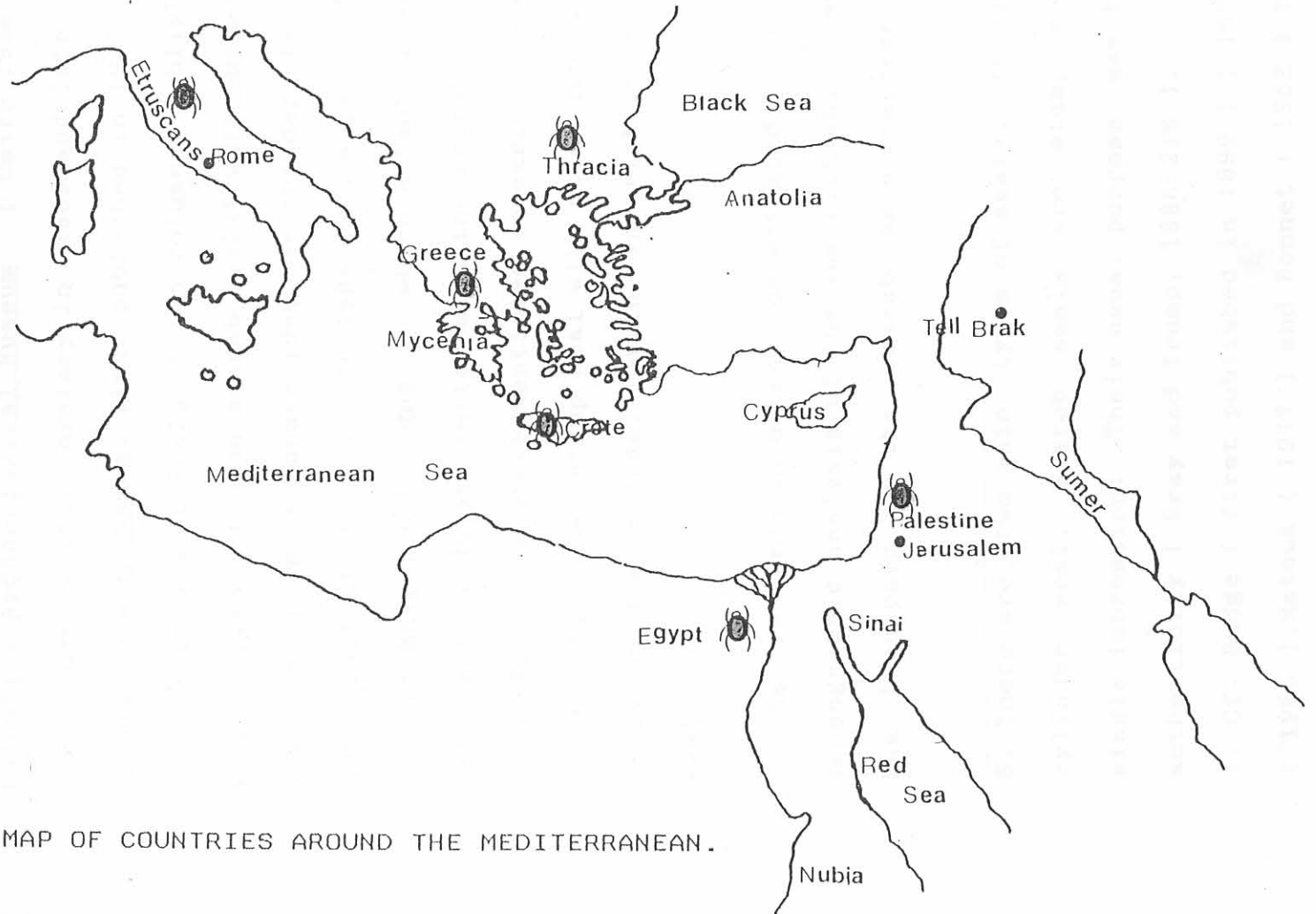


FIG.2. MAP OF COUNTRIES AROUND THE MEDITERRANEAN.

AIMS

Major research has already been done on scarabs as seals and amulets. As stated by Ward (1978:1) catalogues on scarabs have long been published, such as the Catalogue of Scarabs in the Palestine Archaeological Museum (Cairo,1936). Petrie brought some order to their history in 1889 and later wrote Scarabs and Cylinders with Names, first published in 1917. Ward followed with Studies on Scarab Seals in two volumes, published in 1978. These works concentrated on scarab seals⁶,with emphasis either on the inscription on the underside, or the depiction of the scarab as upper part of the seal. In 1986, Eva Wilson published her work on Ancient Egyptian Designs, in which attention was also paid to the different kinds of patterns on the scarab seals (Wilson, 1986: pl.88ff.)⁷. The above-mentioned research tended to concentrate on the scarab as stamp seal with attention given to either the scarab on the obverse, or the inscription on the reverse of the seal.

As research so often concentrated on the scarab seal, with iconographic analysis of the inscription,not sufficient attention has been paid to the scarab as a representation of the god

6. There are two main types of seals, the stamp seal and the cylinder seal. Scarab seals are stamp seals which give a single impression. Their usual purpose was to mark ownership or authenticity (Bray and Trump, 1986:216).

7. Cf. Budge (first published in 1899) (1988), Brunner-Traut (1965),Matouk (1977) and Bonnet (1952) for further research into the scarab.

Khepri. This study addresses the lack of attention given to Khepri as god with specific religious functions and his appearance in art. Therefore the aim of this research is:

- a) To explore the presence of Khepri in Egyptian religion and art.
- b) To determine the significance of Khepri in Egyptian religion and art.

Khepri's significance in art raises the question: Does the significance lie in the fact that the depiction in art reflects the religious function? To address this question particular works of art incorporating Khepri will be studied and analysed iconographically. The aim of the iconographic analysis is to establish the religious functions of Khepri and to illustrate how these functions were depicted in art.

SCOPE

This study will not include an in-depth research of Egyptian religion⁸, but only those aspects concerned with Khepri. This will include Khepri as he appears in a) the Heliopolitan cosmogony, b) mythology, c) his manifestation of the sun and d) his role in the barque of Ra during the nightly voyage to the Netherworld (afterlife).

A study of a wider context of Egyptian art will be excluded. Much research has already been done on Egyptian art by Schäfer

8. For works on Egyptian religion see: David (1982); Hornung (1982); Faulkner (1989) and Breasted (1959).

(1974), Aldred (1980), Kischkewitz (1989) and others⁹. The appearance of Khepri in different categories of art will be singled out and analysed. These categories will include heart scarabs, mummy coverings, coffins, jewelry, painting (papyrus illustrations and tomb decorations), relief and sculpture. A few examples of seals present in South Africa will be studied and included in an excursus at the end of Chapter III. These examples will be ordered according to the classification of Ward (1978: 47ff.) based on seal inscriptions.

To explain the natural habits of the scarab an excursus on the entomology of the beetle is included at the end of Chapter I. As entomological terms are used to describe the scarab beetle, a glossary of terms is included under Appendix B.

The chronology of ancient Egyptian history is a very debatable subject. As it is beyond the scope of this study to offer a new chronology, the chronology as proposed by Aldred (1986:7f.) has been adopted for this study and is included in Appendix A¹⁰.

METHODOLOGY

This study concerns the importance of Khepri in Egyptian religion, as well as his significance in art.

9. See Lange and Hirmer (1968), Wilkinson (1988) and Iversen (1975) for further research into Egyptian art.

10. Other chronologies are those of the following: James and Davis (1984:71); Schäfer (1974:370ff.); Lurker (1980:132ff.) and Kischkewitz (1989:31ff.).

The methodology of this study is based on:-

a) A theoretical study of sources on Egyptian religion as well as a translation of the text of the Am Duat to determine the significance of Khepri in religion. Through the Am Duat the interpretation of Khepri's religious role as resurrector is clarified. Therefore this study will strongly concentrate on the Am Duat.

b) Works of art are analysed to determine the presence and significance of Khepri in art. The selected works are placed in the following order:- heart scarabs, mummy-coverings, coffins, jewelry, painting, relief and sculpture. The reason for this placing is that the iconographic analysis as well as the iconological interpretation (Panofsky, 1987:58) separate their functions. The iconographic method used follows that of Panofsky (1987:51). An iconographic identification of the images of Khepri and solar gods in close relationship with Khepri (e.g. the beetle and the sun-disc) (Lange and Hirmer, 1968:376ff.) is done. This is interwoven by an iconographical analysis explaining the meaning of those images. An iconological interpretation will further explain their religious functions.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Literature on Egyptian religion, art and iconography was collected and studied. In the discussion of Egyptian literature, e.g. the Am Duat, no primary sources were used but only secondary sources, i.e. the translation by Eric Hornung (1963)¹¹.

11. Other translations from Egyptian literature used were that of Faulkner (1989) and Budge (1989).

The following museums were visited and their collections of particular Egyptian art, incorporating Khepri, studied:

British Museum, London.

Rijksmuseum van Oudheden, Leiden.

National Cultural History and Open Air Museum, Pretoria.

National Museum, Bloemfontein.

South African Cultural History Museum, Cape Town.

Wellington Museum, Wellington.

This included jewelry, seals, heart scarabs, illustrated papyrus works, sculpture, coffins and mummies.

The burden of selection of artworks in this study, rested on the manner of depiction and not on technique or period.

Photos were taken and sketches made of specific artworks to illustrate this study.

APPENDIX A

CHRONOLOGY OF ANCIENT EGYPT¹²

<u>PERIOD</u>	<u>APPROX. DATE</u>	<u>DYNASTY</u>
Archaic	3168 - 2705 B.C.	I - II
Old Kingdom	2705 - 2250 B.C.	III - VI
First Intermediate Period	2250 - 2035 B.C.	VII - X
Middle Kingdom	2035 - 1668 B.C.	XI - XIII
Second Intermediate Period	1720 - 1550 B.C.	XIV - XVIII
New Kingdom	1552 - 1070 B.C.	XVIII - XX
Tanite	1070 - 946 B.C.	XXI
Libyan	946 - 712 B.C.	XXII - XXIV
Kushite	712 - 664 B.C.	XXV
Saite	664 - 525 B.C.	XXVI
Late	525 - 332 B.C.	XXVII - XXXI
Ptolemaic	332 - 30 B.C.	Greek

12. The above chronology follows: Aldred, Cyril (1986: 7ff.).