VAN RYNEVELD, MARIA MAGDALENA

THE PRESENCE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF KHEPRI
IN EGYPTIAN RELIGION AND ART

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THE PRESENCE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF KHEPRI
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by

MARIA MAGDALENA VAN RYNVELD

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Supervisors:
Mr. H.J.J. van Rensburg
Mrs. B.T. Millar

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South African Cultural History Museum, Cape Town.
Wellington Museum, Wellington.
DEDICATED TO

Mr. J.C. Maurer and the late Mrs. M.M. Maurer, who passed away while this study was in progress.
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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

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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 Dead\(^2\) and the Am Duat\(^3\), 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 seal. 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), Thracia, 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 seals 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).

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 religion, 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.

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8. For works on Egyptian religion see: David (1982); Hornung (1982); Faulkner (1989) and Breasted (1959).
(1974), Aldred (1980), Kischkewitz (1989) and others. 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 A.

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.
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)\textsuperscript{11}.

\textsuperscript{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 EGYPT

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

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