

ABSTRACT

GUY, MICHELLE ELAINE. Enchanting, Banishing, and Confusing: Clay Execration Figurines in the Egyptian Old Kingdom. (Under the direction of Dr. Tate Paulette).

During their time working at Giza, the Harvard-Boston expedition led by project director George Reisner found two caches of unusual Old Kingdom clay artifacts. These objects were flattened pieces of unbaked Nile mud that were approximately 5.5 cm by 2 cm in size. The front side of each artifact was inscribed with a single name, and the backs featured a pierced loop. Between the two caches, there were over 150 of these objects. The Reisner team was unsure what to call the objects and they were nearly forgotten. Years later the German-Austrian expedition, also working at Giza, discovered a third smaller deposit of 21 clay objects which were nearly identical to the Reisner deposits. The project director, Hermann Junker, believed that they were execration figurines used in cursing rituals. Since Junker's find, two other caches of figurines have been found—a fourth deposit from Giza, containing 249 figurines, and one deposit from Saqqara, containing 12.

The following thesis seeks to examine the peculiarities of the Old Kingdom execration figurines. Chapter one will begin by laying the groundwork for analyzing execration magic. This chapter will discuss how magic has been studied throughout the twentieth century, both generally and within the context of Egypt. This will be followed by a discussion that examines how magic was conceptualized in ancient Egypt, and how execration operated within this system. Chapter two will detail how the Old Kingdom figurines have been interpreted. These figurines are unusual examples of execration that stand out when compared to other figurines. This chapter will trace how execration rituals developed over the course of Egyptian history and underline where the differences lay. This discussion will highlight how these differences reflect

the problems plaguing the Old Kingdom during the sixth dynasty. Chapter three is a case study that examines the lifecycle of the Old Kingdom figurines. This discussion will utilize the available images of each figurine to visually identify patterns of use and theorize how the artifacts were created. This analysis will detail these artifacts moved through different life stages, and how they operated within execration rituals.

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Enchanting, Banishing, and Confusing: Clay Execration Figurines in the Egyptian Old Kingdom

by

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INTRODUCTION

During their 1913-14 field season at Giza, the German-Austrian expedition uncovered an Old Kingdom jar filled with 21 strange mud artifacts (fig. 1). These artifacts were small, flattened pieces of unbaked Nile mud that were approximately 5.5 cm by 2 cm in size. They were rectangular in shape with a pinched stem on one end. The front side of each artifact was inscribed with a single name, and the backs featured a pierced loop. The project director, Hermann Junker, was initially unsure what the clay objects were. The artifacts were not associated with any of the surrounding graves and there were not any obvious clues to how the objects were used. It was not until years later, after having read the work of Georges Posener, that Junker began to piece together what these artifacts were.¹ Junker realized that the shape of the artifacts was reminiscent of Middle Kingdom execration figurines studied by Posener, although smaller and more stylized. Additionally, the inscriptions on the objects were Nubian names, which Junker believed could be the names of foreign enemies. Because of this evidence, Junker determined that artifacts were “Feindfiguren” or “enemy figurines” used for execration



Figure 1. Old Kingdom Execration Figurines.
Image from: Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

¹ Hermann Junker, *Giza VIII: Der Ostabschnitt Des Westfriedhofs, Zweiter Teil*. (Vienna: Hölder-Pichler-Tempsky Kuraszkiwicz, 1947): Pg. 30-38.

rituals.

Execration magic was practiced in every period of Egyptian history, from the Old Kingdom through the Roman occupation. The purpose of execration was to curse someone or something. This practice tended to be directed at foreign enemies, but it could also target other Egyptians, deities, animals, or the dead.² There were several ways execration could be practiced; however, one of the most common rituals utilized figurines. These figurines were made to represent the enemy, and were often contorted, pierced, broken, burnt, or buried. Although figurines were commonly used throughout Egyptian history, during certain periods of unrest execration rituals became more common, and in some cases, execration figurines were mass produced. For example, as the Old Kingdom was declining during the reign of Pepi II, hundreds of execration figurines were deposited in caches at Giza and Saqqara. What Junker found was one example of this, and over the course of the twentieth century, four more of these caches were recovered. The figurines from these five deposits did not resemble other execration figurines from this period. Additionally, these deposits were unusual because execration was typically only directed at one or two people at a time. However, in this case, there were 445 figurines, and each was inscribed with a different name.

The goal of this thesis is to examine the five deposits of Old Kingdom execration figurines with all the current available evidence. While each assemblage has been assessed individually, this thesis will compare all five deposits and examine the similarities and differences. This examination will build off the work of Hermann Junker, Abdel-Moneim Abu-Bakr, Jürgen Osing, and Joachim Quack, who have each published reports on one or more of

² Robert K. Ritner, *The Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice* (Chicago: The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 1993).

these deposits.³ While these reports are critical to the study of the Old Kingdom figurines, these scholars largely focused on analyzing the artifacts' inscriptions. Very little work has been done that examines the figurines as physical objects. The 445 Old Kingdom figurines demonstrate a rapid change in execration magic, which appeared and disappeared suddenly in large quantities. This thesis will argue that this sudden appearance and disappearance is reflective of political and economic uncertainty. It is the intention of this thesis to fill gaps in research by utilizing excavation reports, archival records, and photographs to examine the physical style and form of these artifacts. This examination will demonstrate that these figurines were unusual when compared to other execration figurine styles.

The peculiarities of the Old Kingdom execration figurines will be explored in the following chapters. Chapter one will begin by laying the groundwork for analyzing execration. This chapter will first detail how magic has been conceptualized within academia. Magic can be a difficult concept to navigate as scholars have used this term to categorize many different beliefs. This chapter will first examine several selected scholars whose contributions have been pivotal to the study of magic, both generally and within the context of Egypt. While numerous individuals are worth mentioning, the scholars discussed in this chapter were selected as their works have helped inform the current thesis. This chapter will then discuss how magic operated within Egyptian thought. Magic was based on the Egyptians' understanding of the world, and it was within this wider system of religion and magic that execration operated. This background is

³ See: Hermann Junker, *Giza VIII: Der Ostabschnitt Des Westfriedhofs, Zweiter Teil*. (Vienna: Hölder-Pichler-Tempsky Kuraszkiewicz, 1947): Pg. 30-38; Abdel-Moneim Abu Baker and Jürgen Osing, "Ächtungstexte Aus Dem Alten Reich," *Mitteilungen Des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts Abteilung Kairo* 29 (1973); Jürgen Osing, "Ächtungstexte Aus Dem Alten Reich (II)," *Mitteilungen Des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts Abteilung Kairo* 32 (1976); Joachim Friedrich Quack, "Some Old Kingdom Execration Figurines from the Teti Cemetery," *The Bulletin of the Australian Centre for Egyptology* 13 (2002).

critical to understanding how execration figurines were used in order to hypothesize what might spark rapid changes in style.

Chapter two seeks to situate the Old Kingdom figurines within the broader spectrum of Egyptian execration magic. This chapter will first detail how the Old Kingdom figurines have been interpreted. These artifacts stand out when compared to other examples of execration figurines, and they were not initially recognized as such. This chapter will trace how execration developed throughout Egyptian history. This discussion will work backward from later periods where evidence of execration practices is more readily available. The progression of execration demonstrates that these rituals tended to follow predictable patterns. While the Old Kingdom figurines exhibit some of these patterns, there are still irregularities, which are reflective of the problems plaguing the Old Kingdom as it was starting to collapse.

Chapter three is a case study that examines the lifecycle of the Old Kingdom figurines. This discussion will identify the different life stages each assemblage went through. The chapter will begin by analyzing the available information for each deposit. The excavation of each deposit is critical to understanding how the objects were used and when. However, the five deposits under study were discovered over the course of the twentieth century, and unfortunately, due to poor record keeping, some confusion has arisen. This discussion will examine these issues and detail how the artifacts can be dated. This will be followed by a discussion that examines the creation, use, and deposition of each deposit. This examination will utilize the available images of each figurine to visually identify patterns of use and theorize how the artifacts were created. The visual differences and similarities between each deposit, as well as the differences and similarities within the entire assemblage, will be examined. This analysis will demonstrate how these artifacts moved through different life stages.

CHAPTER I: DEFINING MAGIC IN THE EGYPTIAN OLD KINGDOM

1. Introduction

“I am he, whom the One Lord formed before duality had originated upon this earth... To me belonged the universe before you gods had come into being. Descend, you who have come in the end. I am *Heka*.” — Coffin Text 261, Eleventh Dynasty.⁴

Across ancient Egypt, magic was an ordinary part of everyday life. Throughout all social classes, the Egyptian people recognized magic as a force that actively impacted the world around them. The Egyptians conceptualized magic, which they called *heka*, as a power which could control, change, or influence the natural and supernatural worlds. According to funerary texts, *heka*, and the god which personified it, was a primordial force that came into existence before the common gods.⁵ This force was central in how the Egyptians understood the universe to operate. *heka* resided in all living beings, whether human or divine, and could be tapped into and used as a tool. Magic was considered morally neutral and believed to be accessible independently to humankind, without divine assistance. The Egyptians utilized magic in a wide variety of circumstances— from protecting the interests of the state by ensuring the success of a campaign, to personal matters, such as enchanting a lover. In Egypt magic was a system of knowledge which worked within the realm of natural laws— natural laws as the Egyptians understood them.

Over the course of the twentieth century, scholars were increasingly drawn to magic as a subject of study— to such an extent that magic studies have now become an established genre across the humanities. Unfortunately, terms like magic, witchcraft, and sorcery are often

⁴ Translation from: Herman Te Velde, “The God Heka in Egyptian Theology,” *Jaarbericht Ex Oriente Lux* 21 (1970): Pg. 180; Robert K. Ritner, *The Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice* (Chicago: The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 1993): Pg. 17.

⁵ *Ibid*, Pg. 17.

haphazardly thrown around to describe foreign rituals or exotic belief systems without a clear definition of what the terms refer to. In the western world, magic has been largely reduced to the world of entertainment—a term that has been applied to illusions and the make-believe. Further confusion arises when magic is compared to religion as there is often an unclear or artificially imposed distinction between the two. Because of this, the term magic has become ambiguous, so much so that some scholars have suggested that the term be abandoned within academia.⁶ However, in Egyptology, magic has been retained as a useful category of study. The reasoning for this is that the Greek word “mageía,” which “magic” is derived from, has an ancient connection to the Egyptian word “*heka*.”⁷ Therefore, Egyptologists have deemed magic as an appropriate term to describe an ancient concept.⁸

Because magic has become a loaded term which has multiple meanings, it is necessary for magic to be defined within each culture under study. In Egypt, magic was a tool which could be used constructively or destructively by those with the right expertise.⁹ Egyptian magic was not morally good or bad as some scholars have observed elsewhere, nor can it be separated from its broader religious context.¹⁰ Depending on the desired purpose, magic was invoked through different instruments, such as spoken spells, imagery, texts, or figurines. Scholars have further divided Egyptian magic into different categories based on the intention behind the

⁶ H.S. Versnel, “Some Reflections on the Relationship Magic-Religion,” *Numen* 38, no. 2 (1991): Pg. 177-197.

⁷ When the book of Acts was translated from Greek to Coptic, “mageía,” was translated as “ⲉⲓⲕ,” which stems from the Middle Egyptian “*heka*.” See: Robert K. Ritner, *The Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice* (Chicago: The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 1993): Pg. 14.

⁸ Robert K. Ritner, *The Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice* (Chicago: The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 1993): Pg. 4-13; David Frankfurter, ed., *Guide to the Study of Ancient Magic* (New York: Brill, 2019): Pg. 3-20.

⁹ Maarten J Raven, *Wax in Egyptian Magic and Symbolism* (Leiden: RMO, 1983): Pg. 24-27.

¹⁰ This will be discussed further in the following section. See: George James Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study of Magic and Religion*, 3rd ed., vol. 1 (London: Macmillan Publishers, 1890); E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1937).

magic.¹¹ Execration magic was one such division. Execration, the act of ritually cursing someone or something, was a very prominent class of magic and could be accomplished through several different means. In Egypt, this concept originated before the dynastic era, and by the New Kingdom multiple types of execration rituals were practiced. Evidence from the New Kingdom indicates that execration was utilized in a range of different situations— from cursing foreign enemies to attacks against the king. However, evidence of execration magic during the Old Kingdom is much more limited. The evidence that is available is archaeological and requires more interpretation. One of the most traceable execration rituals involved inscribed clay figurines which were sealed in pots and buried. Multiple different deposits have been uncovered at Giza and Saqqara containing a dozen or more figurines each. Based on the number found and their uniformity, some scholars have speculated that these figurines were being mass produced and that their production was controlled by the state.¹² While it still can be debated whether this was strictly a state-sponsored operation, the frequency of these deposits and the evidence for large-scale production indicate execration rituals were widely practiced.

The current chapter will examine how the concept of magic has been studied and understood, both generally and within the context of ancient Egypt. The following discussion will begin by analyzing how magic has been defined within academic thought. The meaning of the term magic has changed over the course of the twentieth century. Scholars have used this term to categorize many beliefs and practices across cultures and the term carries different meanings within different contexts. This discussion will look at several selected scholars who

¹¹ Robert K. Ritner, *The Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice* (Chicago: The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 1993): Pg. 9-12; Maarten J Raven, *Wax in Egyptian Magic and Symbolism* (Leiden: RMO, 1983): Pg. 24-27.

¹² Joachim Friedrich Quack, "Some Old Kingdom Execration Figurines from the Teti Cemetery," *The Bulletin of the Australian Centre for Egyptology* 13 (2002): Pg. 149-163.

shaped how magic is defined and studied. This will be followed by a discussion that explores magic within the context of Egypt. Magic in Egypt is rooted in a complex religious system, and scholars' understanding of Egyptian religion has grown over the past century. As the study of Egyptian religion evolved, so too did scholars' understanding of magic. This discussion will examine several influential scholars who paved the way in Egyptian religious studies. Finally, this chapter will examine execration magic. This discussion will lay the foundation for the following chapters, which will study this practice in depth.

2. A Selected Historiography of Magic Studies

Any discussion of magic ritual in ancient Egypt must first be situated in the broader discussion of magic. In his work *The Golden Bough: A Study of Magic and Religion*, James Frazer laid the foundation for how magic would be understood for the decades to come. Originally published in 1890, this study grew to be twelve volumes long and went through multiple editions until it was released in its completed form in 1915. Frazer defined magic as a “spurious system of natural law as well as a fallacious guide of conduct; it is a false science as well as an abortive art.”¹³ In other words, magic was based on a false understanding of how the world operated. Magicians act by using these false, hypothetical laws to their advantage. This definition of magic, along with Frazer's beliefs on religion became very influential. Frazer took a Darwinian approach and attempted to methodically categorize magic.¹⁴ His analysis was framed around two assumptions, which he argued societies who practiced magic believed about

¹³ George James Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study of Magic and Religion*, 3rd ed., vol. 1 (London: Macmillan Publishers, 1890): Pg. 37.

¹⁴ This approach has been heavily criticized in recent scholarship. See: Sarah Iles Johnston, “Magic,” in *Ancient Religions: Beliefs and Rituals Across the Mediterranean World* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2007): Pg. 139-152.

the world.¹⁵ The first was what he called the law of similarity. This principle is the belief that “like produces like.” In other words, a desired result can be produced through imitation.

Frazer’s second assumption, the law of contact, was the idea that an object that has been in contact with someone could have a continued effect after it had been removed. From these two hypothetical laws of nature, Frazer developed two ways of categorizing magic: homeopathic magic based off the law of similarity and contagious magic based off the law of contact. He gives the combination of these two categories the umbrella term sympathetic magic because: “both assume that things act on each other at a distance through a secret sympathy... what we may conceive as a kind of invisible ether.”¹⁶

Frazer deepened his definition of magic by analyzing its relation to religion. In Darwinian fashion, Frazer believed that religion was a more advanced stage in development—one that would overtake magic as the society advanced. He defined religion as the belief in a superior power that controls the course of nature and human life, which is worshiped, loved and feared. Magic and religion, he argued, do not overlap. However, he acknowledged that some confusion might arise in societies which have “risen to higher levels of culture,” such as ancient Egypt.¹⁷ Although the Egyptians believed in deities, they were not treated with what Frazer considered to be proper respect. Egyptian magicians had an “arrogant demeanor towards the higher powers,” and their spells demanded rather than begged.¹⁸ According to Frazer, magic *was* the Egyptian religion.

¹⁵ George James Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study of Magic and Religion*, 3rd ed., vol. 1 (London: Macmillan Publishers, 1890): Pg. 36-38.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, Pg. 39.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, Pg. 115.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, Pg. 114.

Frazer's application of this framework is problematic. He believed magic was a "bastard art" practiced by "savages" with "underdeveloped minds."¹⁹ Frazer argued that it is up to the scholar to make sense of the reasoning behind magic practices, which led him to impose his own ideas on foreign societies without fully understanding the system of thought that produced the belief in magic. Regardless of this clear bias, Frazer's work cannot be completely discredited, particularly when dealing with Egyptian execration magic. For instance, in ancient Egypt, the belief that an attack on one's likeness could bring harm to the individual was the basis of execration magic. This practice resembles Frazer's homeopathic magic. However, despite what Frazer might have led his audience to believe, this belief system was highly complex and logical. Moreover, although Frazer's law of similarity might be a common theme in many different magic systems, how it functions and the reasoning behind it is unique to every culture as magic is intertwined with each societies' religion and worldview.

At the heart of Frazer's work was a question about human rationale. While Frazer's success at analyzing this topic is up for debate, his work posed questions about magic that would continue to be explored by the next several generations of scholars. Anthropologists, such as Bronisław Malinowski and E.E. Evans Prichard, built off Frazer's work while adding their own ideas on how magic should be defined and its relationship to religion. While these scholars were not directly influential to the field of Egyptology, some key points are worth highlighting as they have shaped how magic is conceptualized generally. In his famous work *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (1922), Malinowski observed how magic functioned within the Trobriand society. Many of Frazer's ideas were echoed throughout Malinowski's writing, whom he

¹⁹ George James Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study of Magic and Religion*, 3rd ed., vol. 1 (London: Macmillan Publishers, 1890): Pg. 36-38.

credited for being highly influential for him.²⁰ However, Malinowski's definition of magic differs slightly from that of Frazer. He defines magic as "the attempt of man to govern the forces of nature directly."²¹ This take on magic emphasizes physical actions and their functions within a particular culture rather than the system of thought.

Malinowski's impact on Egyptology was indirect. His work was so renowned in academia during the mid-twentieth century, that his ideas—and therefore many of Frazer's—were echoed by those he influenced and continued to dominate how magic was viewed for several decades. This influence can be seen in the work of E.E. Evans Prichard, whose book *Witchcraft, Oracles, and Magic Among the Azande* (1937) was pivotal in the development of magic studies. This ethnography examined the cultural and religious system among the Zande tribes of South Sudan. Evans Prichard, like Malinowski, focused on how the concept of magic operated and functioned within a society. However, unlike his predecessors, Evans Prichard saw magic as a logical way of understanding the world. For instance, in *Witchcraft, Oracles, and Magic Among the Azande*, Evans Prichard presented magic as one component within a complex belief system, which he argued developed to justify why bad things happened.²² According to Evans Prichard, the Azande believed that misfortune was the result of witchcraft—a term he used exclusively to refer to what elsewhere might be called destructive or evil magic. Witches were believed to be ordinary people who were born with the "witchcraft substance" in their bodies.²³ To the Azande, witches, who may or may not know that they are witches, cause misfortune by simply thinking

²⁰ Not only was Frazer influential to the development of Malinowski's ideas, but he also personally contributed to *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* by writing the preface which highly praised Malinowski.

²¹ Bronislaw Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific: An Account of Native Enterprise and Adventure in the Archipelagoes of Melanesian New Guinea* (London: Routledge, 1922): Pg. 56.

²² E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1937): Pg. 18-21.

²³ *Ibid*, Pg. 1-2.

badly about someone. This force was the Azande's way of explaining seemingly random events or negative experiences. Magic, on the other hand, was a performative act which was used by specialized magicians to counter witchcraft.²⁴ Evans Prichard argued that this dichotomy between magic and witchcraft was the basis for how the Azande understood the world. His work was one of the first real attempts to understand magic through the worldview of the native society under study.

The next major shift in magic studies came in 1978, with the release of Morton Smith's book *Jesus the Magician*. This work has been credited by some as being the foundation for how magic is understood and studied by modern scholars.²⁵ This highly controversial book sparked a wave of both criticism and support for its depiction of Jesus as the ancient Romans would have viewed him— as a magician.²⁶ Like Evans Prichard, Smith's approach was unique because he made a conscious attempt to examine magic as it would have been understood by the culture which practiced it, rather than from a modern Judeo-Christian perspective. This approach fell in line with contemporary anthropological and historical methodology trends, such as “thick description” and microhistory, which emphasized detailed cultural analysis. By adopting this approach, Smith demonstrated that there is a very fine line between what is considered magic and what is considered religion, and more often than not, this distinction is artificially imposed. Smith challenged several long-held beliefs about magic, many of which Frazer perpetuated. When contending with the theoretical difference between religion and magic, Smith wrote:

When we compare avowedly religious texts and reports of religious practices with the texts of the magical papyri and the practices they prescribe, we find the same

²⁴ E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1937): Pg. 176-177.

²⁵ David Frankfurter, ed., *Guide to the Study of Ancient Magic* (New York: Brill, 2019): Pg. 3.

²⁶ Morton Smith, *Jesus the Magician* (New York, NY: Barnes & Noble Books, 1978): Pg. VII.

goals stated and the same means used. For instance, spells for destruction of an enemy are commonly supposed to be magical, but there are many in the Psalms. The cliché, that the religious man petitions the gods while the magician tries to compel them, is simply false. The magical papyri contain many humble prayers...²⁷

This shows that the Frazerian framework, which distinguished religion through the act of respectful worship, was inadequate, particularly when dealing with the ancient world. Moreover, Smith disagreed with any “abstract” definition of magic, as each belief system should be defined by the culture in which it existed.²⁸

Smith’s work was arguably the first truly emic approach to the subject, and it paved the way for modern scholars. In the decades that followed, magic became a topic of interest across many disciplines, and scholars followed this emic approach. Numerous researchers, including many classicists and Egyptologists, have since devoted their careers to studying magic and the works they produced are highly specialized.²⁹ Academia has turned away from broad frameworks that attempt to organize cross cultural phenomena, in favor of narrowly focused, highly detailed studies. With this trend came the understanding that magic could only be understood within the context in which it was practiced.

3. *Defining Egyptian Magic*

It was still in the era of Frazer and Malinowski that the first foundational works on Egyptian religion were published, and it is within these works that Egyptian magic first began to be explored. Pioneering this field was James H. Breasted, whose 1912 work *Development of*

²⁷ Morton Smith, *Jesus the Magician* (New York, NY: Barnes & Noble Books, 1978): Pg. 69.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ For examples see: Christoffer Theis, *Magie Und Raum: Der Magische Schutz Ausgewählter Räume Im Alten Ägypten Nebst Einem Vergleich Zu Angrenzenden Kulturbereichen* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014); Andrew Wilburn, *Materia Magica: The Archaeology of Magic in Roman Egypt, Cyprus, and Spain* (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 2016).

Religion and Thought in Ancient Egypt was pivotal. However, although this work was meant to be a comprehensive study of religion, Breasted only vaguely addressed the concept of magic. In his brief discussions of the concept, Breasted made no attempts to define what he meant by magic, however, through his language he left some clues. From his introduction, it is clear that Breasted, like Frazer, took an evolutionary approach when he stated: “Only Amenhotep IV (Ikhnaton) seems to have outgrown [magic], because Oriental magic is so largely demoniac and Amenhotep IV as a monotheist banished the demons and the host of gods.”³⁰ He went on to say, “magic invades the realm of morals.”³¹ From these claims, two things can be inferred: Breasted believed that magic was a negative, if not evil, practice and secondly, magic was something societies should outgrow. This thinking framed his study and how he depicted Egyptian religion.

Many of Breasted’s ideas have since been disputed as the field advanced. However, his work is still worth noting as it laid the foundation for another influential Egyptologist, Henri Frankfort, whose 1948 book *Ancient Egyptian Religion: An Interpretation* is still well regarded. Like Breasted, Frankfort did not directly discuss magic. In fact, there were noticeably fewer mentions of the practice than in Breasted’s work. Nevertheless, one brief mention of magic stands out. When describing a type of funerary ritual, Frankfort adopted the Frazerian terminology “sympathetic magic.”³² This is an interesting use of Frazer’s framework as there seems to be a fundamental conflict between the two scholars’ works. Frankfort’s book, despite being a very detailed study of Egyptian religion, only mentions magic a handful of times, indicating that he did not consider magic a fundamental part of the religion. Frazer, on the other

³⁰ James Henry Breasted, *Development of Religion and Thought in Ancient Egypt* (New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1912): Pg. 3.

³¹ Ibid, Pg. 6.

³² Henri Frankfort, *Ancient Egyptian Religion: An Interpretation* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1948): Pg. 115.

hand, believed that magic was the basis of Egyptian religion and that the two belief systems could not be separated. Frankfort's book demonstrated the contrary, and this influenced how the next generation of Egyptologists would study magic as an institution separate from religion.

One of the first in-depth publications to specifically focus on Egyptian magic came in 1980 with Bob Brier's *Ancient Egyptian Magic*. Published a few years after Morton Smith's famous piece, this work followed the popular trend of its day and took an emic approach. Although this work was written for a popular audience, Brier presented clear ideas on how to define magic in an Egyptian context. He detailed the development of the English term "magic," which derived from the ancient Greek word "magi."³³ This term meant "wise men," but specifically referred to the Zoroastrian priests of ancient Persia. This gave the term a sense of foreignness, which evolved into meaning something evil. By the twentieth century the term had further developed and became synonymous with trickery. None of these meanings, Brier explained, are applicable to the ancient Egyptian belief system. He argued that magic, as the ancient Egyptians practiced it, was a "direct attempt by the practitioner to control supernatural forces to achieve a specific goal."³⁴ According to Brier, the Egyptian practice of magic had three defining characteristics: the spell, the ritual and the magician. He was also careful to distinguish magic from religion. He stated that "in magic the magician is the agent; whereas, when a priest prays for something, it is not he but a deity who brings about the effect."³⁵ Additionally, a goal is not essential to a religious ritual, unlike magic, which always has an intended— and often practical— purpose. Brier believed this is what distinguished spells from prayers and magicians from priests in the Egyptian context.

³³ Bob Brier, *Ancient Egyptian Magic* (New York, NY: William Morrow Paperbacks, 1980): Pg. 10.

³⁴ *Ibid*, Pg. 11.

³⁵ *Ibid*, Pg. 11.

Brier's book marked the start of a trend in Egyptology. Magic became a popular topic of interest to budding Egyptologists in the eighties and nineties. However, because Egyptology is often slow to change, many new works from this era mixed fresh ideas with old frameworks. A break from this tendency came in 1993, with Robert Ritner's *The Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magic Practice*. This work has become the authority on the topic of Egyptian magic up through the present day. Ritner, like Brier, acknowledged the problems of defining magic. Additionally, he recognized the history of the term's use in academia and addressed where problems lay. Ritner argued that Frazer's and Malinowski's works had a "reductionistic nature," which failed to distinguish between different cultures and time periods.³⁶ Ritner's main criticism of Frazer's "sympathetic magic" was the way in which Frazer applied it, but he contended that this terminology had found a home in Egyptology.³⁷ He disagreed with this framework on the terms that it was a cross-cultural approach that did not acknowledge unique features of any given magic system. Ritner's work served to introduce a new methodology, which he laid out in the introduction:

Rather than imposing a universal definition of magic on both, the present thesis adopts an 'emic' approach in which Egyptian and Western concepts are evaluated independently, and in their own terms. In order to obtain a "working definition" of the Western definition of "magic," a new method was selected in which *activity* serves as the diagnostic criterion. For the purpose of this study, any activity that seeks to obtain its goal outside the natural laws of cause and effect is designated as "magical" in the modern Western sense.³⁸

Ritner's framework allowed him to explore magic in the terms that the ancient Egyptians practiced it.

³⁶ Robert K. Ritner, *The Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice* (Chicago: The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 1993): Pg. 9-10.

³⁷ Such is the case with Christopher Farone's piece, which adopted Frazer's terminology and was published the same year as Ritner's book. See: Christopher A. Faraone, "Molten Wax, Spilt Wine and Mutilated Animals: Sympathetic Magic in Near Eastern and Early Greek Oath Ceremonies," *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 113 (1993): Pg. 60-80.

³⁸ Ritner, *The Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice*, Pg. 1.

Ritner's description of Egyptian magic was similar to that of Brier. Nevertheless, there is one key difference worth highlighting. While Brier saw clear differences among magic and religion, Ritner argued that "within the *Egyptian* worldview there is no distinction between magician and priest, spell and prayer, nor ultimately between religion and magic since a recognized category of 'religion' did not even exist."³⁹ This was a semi-return to the Frazerian argument that magic was the Egyptian religion. However, Ritner had very different reasoning behind this assessment. Ritner demonstrated that the differentiation between religion and magic has been imposed on the ancient culture. These classifications were intertwined in a complex belief system, which was central to the Egyptian way of life and conceptualization of the world. Religion and magic were simply two sides of the same coin.

Despite nearing thirty years in age, Ritner's book continues to dominate the study of ancient Egyptian magic as it is the most thorough and complete work on the topic. With that said, Ritner's work focused on magic's performative nature—the act of "doing magic." He separated magic into categories of actions, which included speech and different acts of violence. This gave him the foundation to examine the symbolic meanings behind the actions and why they appeared in different kinds of rituals. This methodology served his purposes well, but by focusing on the performance of magic he limited discussing the system of thought that created the practice. There are many scholars who have since greatly contributed to the study of magic within ancient thought that are worth mentioning. Two such scholars are David Frankfurter and Christopher Faraone who have both produced numerous works over the past thirty years—many of which have helped inform the present thesis.

³⁹ Robert K. Ritner, *The Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice* (Chicago: The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 1993): Pg. 242.

Although he is not an Egyptologist by trade, Frankfurter's work has focused on the Christianizing of the ancient world and much of this research has revolved around Egypt. In his 1998 book *Religion in Roman Egypt: Assimilation and Resistance*, Frankfurter examined how traditional religious practices, such as magic, bled into Christianity.⁴⁰ Since this piece, much of his research has focused specifically on Egyptian magic. Frankfurter has examined magic with a grassroots perspective. He largely focuses on how magic, cultural identity, and individual experiences intersect. His most recent edited book, *Guide to the Study of Ancient Magic*, brought together over a dozen scholars who specialized in ancient Mediterranean societies.⁴¹ This work was a comprehensive examination of how magic was conceptualized by ancient peoples, which has provided a valuable insight for the following chapters. Similarly, the work of Christopher Faraone, a Greek historian who studies magic within the Hellenistic world, has been useful for examining execration magic. In his work "Molten Wax, Spilt Wine and Mutilated Animals: Sympathetic Magic in Early Greek and Near Eastern Oath Ceremonies," Faranoe analyzed how execration magic operated and spread within different ancient cultures across the Mediterranean. Because execration was often used against foreign enemies, it has been useful to understand how neighboring societies view these rituals. Comparative studies, such as Faranoe's work, help to explore how Egyptian execration fit into a broader system.

4. Execration within Egyptian Magic

Magic as a belief system was so fundamental to the Egyptians' perception of the world that it can only be understood within that context. The Egyptians understood the human identity

⁴⁰ David Frankfurter, *Religion in Roman Egypt: Assimilation and Resistance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998).

⁴¹ David Frankfurter, ed., *Guide to the Study of Ancient Magic* (New York: Brill, 2019)

to be composed of multiple interconnected components.⁴² Four of these components, the *rn* (name), *ka* (vital energy), *ib* (heart), and *ba* (personality), were often key in magic practices. Each aspect was essential to the wellbeing of a person, and each aspect could also fall under attack. Arguably, the most important of these aspects was the *ka*. The *ka* can be understood as a person's life force or vital energy, and it was believed that every being—both divine and mortal—possessed one. This concept was intertwined with the Egyptian conceptualization of magic, which is evident in the spelling of the hieroglyphic word *heka*.⁴³ Egyptian word for magic, *heka*, had the hieroglyph for *ka* at its core in written language, indicating a direct association. Herman Te Velde suggested that this word derived from the phrase *hwj k3*—meaning one who strikes or consecrates the *ka*.⁴⁴ Furthermore, *Heka*, the deity that personifies the force of *heka*, is often associated with the *ka* in texts.⁴⁵ For instance, in coffin text 388, a Middle Kingdom work, *Heka* is identified as “Lord of the Kas.”⁴⁶ This association suggests the Egyptians understood magic to be life giving, and because the first mentions of *heka* date to the Old Kingdom, this belief likely developed early in Egyptian history.⁴⁷

The language that is used to describe magic in the Old Kingdom further supports the idea that magic was associated with life. *heka* is frequently described as residing “in the belly” of the

⁴² Rosalie David, *Religion and Magic in Ancient Egypt* (London: Penguin, 2002): Pg. 111; Lynn Meskell, *Private Life in New Kingdom Egypt* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005): 57-62.

⁴³ Robert K. Ritner, *The Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice* (Chicago: The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 1993): Pg 25.

⁴⁴ Herman Te Velde, “The God Heka in Egyptian Theology,” *Jaarbericht Ex Oriente Lux* 21 (1970): Pg. 179.

⁴⁵ *Heka* the deity and *heka* the force of magic are easier to distinguish between in hieroglyphic. *Heka* the god is written with the seated god determinative, indicating a divine being, whereas *heka* the force was written with the scroll determinative, indicating an abstract concept. For the purpose of this essay, the deity will be written with an uppercase H while the force will be lowercase.

⁴⁶ Herman Te Velde, “The God Heka in Egyptian Theology,” *Jaarbericht Ex Oriente Lux* 21 (1970): Pg. 179.

⁴⁷ Ritner, *The Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice*, Pg. 15.

king and these references are associated with his life after death.⁴⁸ In these cases, magic is used as a synonym for life. A stanza from the pyramid of Unis, the pyramid with the first pyramid texts, states: “Oh, you back-turning star, Unis does not have to give you his magic... Unis will be taken to the sky.” This has been taken to mean that Unis does not have to give up his life because he will be taken to the netherworld, where he will continue to live.⁴⁹ A similar text is found in the pyramid of Pepi I, which states: “This magic in the belly of [Pepi] belongs to him, as he emerges and ascends to the sky.”⁵⁰ While these early texts can only provide subtle clues to how magic was understood, they indicate that magic was believed to be intertwined with life.

This belief system allowed Egyptians to practice magic independently of divine assistance. Because *heka* resided within all living beings, it was believed that anyone could learn to control it. While it was by no means uncommon for magic rituals to invoke the power of a particular deity, it was not a requirement. Execration magic is one such practice. Execration, as the Egyptians practiced it, might be best understood as a magical attack on an individual. This could be carried out by ritually attacking one of the components of the individual’s identity. The most basic manifestation of this belief system was typically directed at an individual’s *rn* and *ba*. The *rn* was a person’s name. Names were sacred, and it was believed that a person could not exist without one.⁵¹ The concept of *ba* is often described as a person’s personality; however, it extended further than that. The *ba* also incorporated a person’s image and how they were

⁴⁸ James P. Allen, tran., *The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005): Pg. 52.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, Pg. 60.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, Pg. 170.

⁵¹ Lynn Meskell, *Private Life in New Kingdom Egypt* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005): Pg. 57-62

perceived by others.⁵² Execration could be carried out by attacking either of these components through the defacement of images or by carving out names. This form of execration was commonly used against unfavorable kings and queens—the most famous case being that of Akhenaten, who had almost all traces of his image and name destroyed after his death, which nearly caused him to be erased from history.

More complicated forms of execration magic were well established by the Middle and New Kingdoms. For instance, the Lee and Rollin Papyri, which will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter, describe the use of wax effigies. Wax figurines would be contorted, disfigured, or ritually destroyed—driven by the belief that these acts had physical effects on the individual they represented.⁵³ This practice was quite possibly the most complex form that execration took, and the Lee and Rollin Papyri likely represent the most extreme example of this practice, in which magic was used against the king. Most execration practices were more subtle and often did not have such specific intentions, particularly during the Old Kingdom. There are no known wax figurines that date to this period—although, beekeeping developed in Egypt during the 25th century B.C., so the use of wax figurines cannot be ruled out.⁵⁴ Additionally, written accounts of Old Kingdom execration is very limited. Execration from this period is best documented through imagery and ceramics.

The earliest indication of a belief in execration magic comes from the Old Kingdom's first king. The Narmer Palette is typically interpreted as a depiction of the formation of the

⁵² Lynn Meskell, *Private Life in New Kingdom Egypt* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005) Pg. 57-62; James P. Allen, *Middle Egyptian: An Introduction to the Language and Culture of Hieroglyphs*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014): Pg. 100.

⁵³ Christopher A. Faraone, "Molten Wax, Spilt Wine and Mutilated Animals: Sympathetic Magic in Near Eastern and Early Greek Oath Ceremonies," *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 113 (1993): Pg. 66.

⁵⁴ Maarten J. Raven, *Wax in Egyptian Magic and Symbolism* (Leiden: RMO, 1983): Pg. 11; Gene Kritsky, *The Tears of Re: Beekeeping in Ancient Egypt* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2015): Pg. 33.

Egyptian state and the south's triumph over the north (fig. 2).⁵⁵ Narmer, the pharaoh credited with uniting Egypt, is shown on the palette smiting his enemies atop those he had killed. This type of imagery becomes a reoccurring motif that continued throughout Egyptian history. Enemies are always depicted as captured, bound, or slain, and their bodies are typically contorted or disfigured, as shown at the bottom on both sides of the Narmer Palette. This representation is so prevalent that it transferred into hieroglyphic writing. The names of enemies are always written with a bound prisoner determinative following their name.⁵⁶ The execration elements in this imagery are subtle, but the rationale can still be picked out. By depicting their enemies as captured or slain and by writing their names with the bound prisoner hieroglyph, the Egyptians



Figure 2. Narmer Palette.
Image from: The Egyptian Museum, Cairo

⁵⁵ Toby Wilkinson, *The Rise and Fall of Ancient Egypt* (New York, NY: Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2013): Pg. 5-7.

⁵⁶ James P. Allen, *Middle Egyptian: An Introduction to the Language and Culture of Hieroglyphs*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

were in a sense attacking the *ba* or *rn* of these individuals.⁵⁷

Attacks on the *ba* or *rn* through imagery and writing was a common way that execration magic was practiced in Egypt; however, many Egyptians did not have access to these tools. Because the bulk of the population was illiterate and did not have the means to produce lasting images, the development of execration magic cannot simply be traced through imagery and writing. Execration magic continued to develop in complexity throughout the Old Kingdom and it is not until more intricate execration rituals develop that clues emerge which indicate how the public participated in execration practices. There are two Old Kingdom rituals that are believed to be forms of execration magic, although one is still up for debate. What has been called the “breaking of the red pots” ritual, has been argued by Ritner to be execration magic. As the name suggests, this practice involved ritually destroying red pots, and numerous deposits of red pot sherds have been excavated from the late Old Kingdom. No texts or imagery appear with these ceramics, but texts from the pyramid of Unis indicate the practice. Spell 244 states: “Behold, this is the Eye of Horus. Take it so that you may be strong and that he may be terrified of you. Break the red vases.”⁵⁸ Other texts from later periods also speak of the tradition; however, there is not much that explains what the purpose was. Nevertheless, because red is associated with hostility and the practice had a violent nature, Ritner suggests that this ritual had a “malevolent

⁵⁷ This principle extended to dangerous animals as well. Crocodiles and snakes, in certain settings, were depicted as slain or injured to render them harmless. See: Robert K. Ritner, “Killing the Image, Killing the Essence: The Destruction of Text and Figures in Ancient Egyptian Thought, Ritual, and ‘Ritualized History,’” in *Iconoclasm and Text Destruction in the Ancient Near East and Beyond*, ed. Eleanor Guralnick and Natalie May (Chicago, Illinois: The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 2012): Pg. 395-407.

⁵⁸ Robert K. Ritner, *The Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice* (Chicago: The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 1993): Pg. 144.

intent.”⁵⁹ While this assessment is viable, without knowing the goal of the ritual it is hard to determine if it should be classified as execration.

A better understood Old Kingdom ritual was the burial of what has been interpreted as clay figurines. These artifacts were small rectangular slabs of unbaked clay with a pinched end that is believed to represent a neck.⁶⁰ Each execration figurine, or “enemy figure” as they are sometimes called, was inscribed in black or red ink with a name of the person that they represented. Four deposits of these figurines have been excavated at Giza and one at Saqqara. These deposits contained anywhere from a dozen figurines to nearly two-hundred and fifty.⁶¹ All of the four deposits found at Giza came from the cemeteries surrounding the Great Pyramid. However, despite their proximity to this fourth dynasty monument, the deposits likely date to the sixth dynasty.⁶² The Giza figurines were sealed in jars and buried throughout the complex. As for the lone Saqqara deposit, twelve figurines were uncovered from a burial shaft in the cemetery near Teti’s pyramid.⁶³ This deposit has also been dated to the sixth dynasty. These figurines were not sealed within a vessel, but rather dropped into the shaft. None of the figurines at either site seem intentionally damaged.⁶⁴ Because of the time period and the suddenness with which

⁵⁹ Robert K. Ritner, *The Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice* (Chicago: The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 1993): Pg. 147-149.

⁶⁰ These artifacts are around 5.5 cm by 2 cm, but sizes varied depending on which deposit they came out of. See: Joachim Friedrich Quack, “Some Old Kingdom Execration Figurines from the Teti Cemetery,” *The Bulletin of the Australian Centre for Egyptology* 13 (2002): Pg. 149.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² Teodozja I. Rzeuska, “Execration Again? Remarks on an Old Kingdom Ritual,” *Polish Archaeology in the Mediterranean* 22 (2013): Pg. 633.

⁶³ Hermann Junker, *Giza VIII: Der Ostabschnitt Des Westfriedhofs, Zweiter Teil*. (Vienna: Hölder-Pichler-Tempsky Kuraszkiwicz, 1947). Pg.65; Joachim Friedrich Quack, “Some Old Kingdom Execration Figurines from the Teti Cemetery,” *The Bulletin of the Australian Centre for Egyptology* 13 (2002).

⁶⁴ Abdel-Moneim Abu Baker and Jürgen Osing, “Ächtungstexte Aus Dem Alten Reich,” *Mitteilungen Des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts Abteilung Kairo* 29 (1973): Pg. 97-99; Abdel-Moneim Abu-Baker, *Excavations at Giza 1949-1950* (Cairo: Government Press, 1953).

these deposits appeared in the archaeological record, there may be a link to the development of this ritual and the collapse of the Old Kingdom.

What stands out about these rituals is the number of deposits recovered and the inscriptions on the figurines. Because the figurines were inscribed, there must have been craftsmen involved who were literate, and because scribes tended to be members of the elite, these rituals were likely sponsored by the government. However, as was the case with other elements of state religion, it is possible that these rituals originated at the household level.⁶⁵ The construction of these figurines was rather crude and cheaply made. These figurines did not need to be expertly crafted by skilled workers, as would be the case with later examples of execration figurines. The basic form of these examples could have been crafted by anyone who had access to Nile mud and a reed stick. This is to say that a simplified version of this ritual, which lacked the written inscription but served the same purpose, could have been performed at the household level.

5. Conclusion

In ancient Egypt, magic was conceptualized as a force which could control, change, or influence the natural and supernatural worlds. As with every society, Egyptian magic was a complex system defined by the way the population understood the world. However, scholars have not always recognized this complexity. Several generations of scholars have made contributions which form the basis for how magic is now understood and investigated, both in Egypt and elsewhere. James Frazer's work was one of the most influential to magic studies. Although Frazer's framework of sympathetic magic has proven to be problematic, as it tends to

⁶⁵ Robert K. Ritner, *The Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice* (Chicago: The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 1993): Pg. 183-190.

overgeneralize, he was one of the first scholars to try to understand how magic is rationalized by the people who practice it. Frazer's contribution to the study of magic cannot be overstated and many of his ideas were continually echoed by those he influenced. Similarly, Morton Smith's work has had lasting impacts which effect how Egyptian magic is studied. Smith was one of the first scholars to really take an emic approach and analyze magic within the cultural context of those who practiced it. This paved the way for the first detailed studies of Egyptian magic, such as the works of Bob Brier and Robert Ritner. Brier and Ritner's works defined the way Egyptian magic is understood in modern academia. Brier was one of the first Egyptologists to really grapple with the problems in Frazer's works and he demonstrated that Egyptian magic could only be understood within the Egyptian culture. Ritner's work laid a new framework for how magic could be understood through the way it was performed, which continues to dominate the study of Egyptian magic today.

While the work of these scholars was fundamental to understanding Egyptian magic, there are still aspects that need to be explored. For instance, there have been five deposits of Old Kingdom execration figurines uncovered over the past century which deserve more attention. At first glance, these artifacts are not recognizable as figurines. The figurine interpretation emerged in the early twentieth century after the first two deposits were discovered and has gone unchallenged. However, there have since been several more deposits recovered, and it is worth revisiting this interpretation with all the available evidence. Because these figurines appeared suddenly, in large quantities, they indicate a rapid change in ritual practice. A detailed study of these artifacts will provide clues to how execration rituals evolved. By tracing the development of execration and comparing these objects to other execration artifacts it is clear that the Old

Kingdom figurines do not follow typical execration patterns. Examining these anomalies will be the goal of the chapters that follow.

CHAPTER II: INTERPRETING EXECRATION FIGURINES

1. Introduction: Changing Interpretations

On March 17, 1927, the Harvard-Boston expedition discovered a collection of odd artifacts at Giza. In street G7200, excavators uncovered an Old Kingdom coarse red ware vessel that was filled with approximately seventy strange mud objects. These artifacts were flattened pieces of unbaked Nile mud that were approximately 5.5 cm by 2 cm in size. They were rectangular in shape and had a pinched stem on one end. The front side of each artifact was inscribed in hieratic, and the backs featured a pierced loop (fig. 3 and 4). In addition to the seventy smaller artifacts, the assemblage also included one much larger artifact of the same shape, which was also inscribed. Noel F. Wheeler, the chief assistant to project director George Reisner, described the find in his diary: “Found in floor packing near north end of [mastaba] G7230, below and near mudbrick casing, about 70 mud tickets, inscribed in black ink (one in red) inside a rough Old Kingdom jar (also inscribed black ink).”⁶⁶ Given that Wheeler crossed

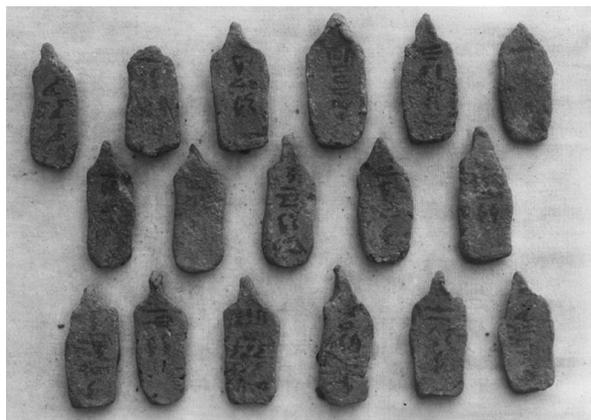


Figure 3. Reisner 1 Deposit — Front
Image from: Giza Project at Harvard University

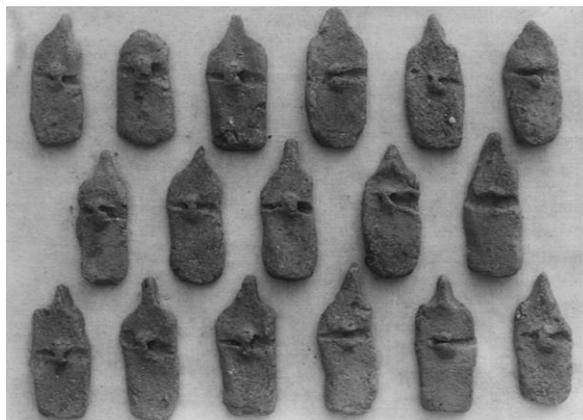


Figure 4. Reisner 1 Deposit — Back
Image from: Giza Project at Harvard University

⁶⁶ Noel F. Wheeler, “Expedition Diary of Noel F. Wheeler” (Digital Giza, March 16-17, 1927), <http://giza.fas.harvard.edu/diarypages/3718/full/>. Pg. 723.

out and wrote over the word “mud,” it seems that he was hesitant on what to call the objects inside the vessel. Wheeler’s confusion was reasonable given that the deposit was unlike anything he had found before. This deposit of “mud tickets” was not the only such deposit that the Reisner team would find. A second vessel, containing around ninety mud objects, which were all roughly the same size and shape as the first seventy, was found in Cemetery G2000.⁶⁷ Unfortunately, the details of its discovery were not recorded by the excavation team. It was not until 1947, years after Reisner’s excavation had concluded, that this second deposit first appeared in the historical record. In preparation for being shipped to Boston, the second find was catalogued as a “carton [of] mud tags.”⁶⁸

The initial interpretation of these objects as being “tickets” or “tags” is relatively straightforward. Each object was inscribed with a single name, and most had an attached loop on the back. This could allow the object to be strung or tied to something so that it could serve as a label or marker of possession. However, this interpretation was quickly abandoned. In 1947, the same year that the second Reisner find was catalogued under the description “mud tags,” a different interpretation emerged. This interpretation was based on a third Giza deposit excavated by the German-Austrian expedition which contained twenty-one mud artifacts that were nearly identical to the Reisner finds. Initially Hermann Junker, the project’s director, interpreted these in the same way the Reisner’s team had. In his 1936 excavation report, Junker briefly described the finds as “Tonplättchen,” which roughly translates to “clay platelets” or “clay tiles.”⁶⁹ However, by the publication of *Giza VIII* in 1947 his interpretation had evolved. In this report,

⁶⁷ This location is debated and will be addressed further in chapter 3.

⁶⁸ “Harvard University-Boston Museum of Fine Arts Expedition Packing List, 1947” (Digital Giza, 1947), <http://giza.fas.harvard.edu/unpubdocs/39636/full/#details>. P. 28.

⁶⁹ Hermann Junker, *Giza III: Die Mastabas Der Vorgeschrittenen V. Dynastie Auf Dem Westfriedhof* (Vienna: Hölder-Pichler-Tempsky, 1936): Pg. 226.

Junker argued that these artifact types were stylized “Feindfiguren” or “enemy figures” used in execration rituals.⁷⁰ Junker reasoned that the pierced loops on the back represented a captured enemy with their hands bound behind their backs. His assessment was brief and largely based on the work of Georges Posener, whose book *Princes et pays d’Asie et de Nubie* examined Middle and New Kingdom enemy figurines.⁷¹ However, Posener’s later figurines were much larger and more detailed than the Junker artifacts (see fig. 5 for an example).⁷² Additionally, they were inscribed with multiple lines of text that better indicated their purpose, and they were often intentionally broken. Despite these differences, Junker’s interpretation of the Old Kingdom artifacts has endured through the present day.



Figure 5. Middle Kingdom Execration Figurine
Image From: The Royal Museums of Art and
History, Brussels



Figure 6. “Needle Figurine”
Image from: Louvre Museum

In the decades following Junker’s analysis, two additional deposits of “figurines” were uncovered. In 1955, a team from Alexandria led by Abdel-Moneim Abu-Bakr excavated the

⁷⁰ Hermann Junker, *Giza VIII: Der Ostabschnitt Des Westfriedhofs, Zweiter Teil*. (Vienna: Hölder-Pichler-Tempsky Kuraszkiewicz, 1947): Pg. 30-38.

⁷¹ Georges Posener, *Princes Et Pays D’asie Et De Nubie.: Textes hiératiques Sur Des Figurines D’envoûtement Du Moyen Empire* (Bruxelles: Fondation égyptologique reine Élisabeth, 1940).

⁷² —, *Execration Figurine*, 1850 BC, Unbaked Clay, Royal Museums of Art and History, Brussels.

largest Giza deposit, containing 249 artifacts. Nearly forty years later, in 1994 an Australian team working in Saqqara unearthed a smaller deposit of twelve artifacts. Both teams followed Junker's interpretation, and in their publications the objects were presented as "enemy figurines" or "execration figurines." Neither team considered alternative explanations for these artifacts. However, they also did not make any attempts to synthesize the available evidence to demonstrate that Junker's interpretation was correct. This chapter seeks to, first, reevaluate Junker's analysis by fully examining the current available evidence. Tracing the development of execration rituals backwards in time demonstrates that execration rituals tended to follow predictable patterns. By examining periods that have more available evidence and are better understood, it becomes clear that Junker's interpretation of the Old Kingdom figurines is reasonable. This analysis will be followed by a discussion that highlights the unique peculiarities of the Old Kingdom figurines which do not follow typical execration patterns. These anomalies reflect external circumstances, which heightened the need to produce ritual objects in bulk quantity.

2. *Evidence for Execration Figurines*

The most elaborate Egyptian execration figurine dates to the Roman occupation (fig. 6).⁷³ The so-called "Needle Figurine" depicts a naked woman kneeling, with her hands and feet twisted and bound. The statuette was pierced thirteen times in deliberate locations, including through both eyes, ears, chest, mouth, and groin. This figurine was the pinnacle in a long line of stylistic development that progressed— more or less— from crude and stylized to detailed and realistic. This progression, however, does not simply represent the advancement of art, but

⁷³ —, *Needle Figurine*, 200-399AD, Terracotta, 4.2 cm x 9.6 cm. E 27145 A. Louvre.

rather reflects evolving beliefs, ritual practices, and external circumstances. The Old Kingdom Egyptians were more than capable of producing highly detailed figurines for their rituals— but for the purpose of these particular rituals, they chose not to. The use of figurines in execration is attested for in almost every period of Egyptian history; however, during different periods the Egyptians practiced different rituals and favored different mediums for making these artifacts. For instance, the aforementioned “Needle Figurine” was carved in unbaked clay and pierced with iron pins. No writing is found on the figurine itself; however, it was found alongside a lead plaque that detailed how the object was to be used. Despite the appearance of this object, the intention of the ritual was not to harm the woman being depicted, but rather to control and influence her.⁷⁴ This is an important distinction, because execration magic for the purpose of controlling someone— as opposed to harming them— is likely to require different rituals and produce different styles of figurines.

The practices attested in the Late Period and New Kingdom utilized other mediums for creating figurines. The most common style of figurine from these periods to survive in the archeological record was made from carved limestone. Unfortunately, none of these limestone figurines were inscribed, so their exact use is unknown. However, there are several clues that indicate their purpose. This style of figurine commonly depicted a similar level of detail to its later counterpart, with clear facial features and bound arms and legs (see fig. 7 and 8 for examples).⁷⁵ There is no indication that these objects were pierced or intentionally damaged, which could be evidence that they were used for different purposes. Additionally, unlike the

⁷⁴ Andrew T. Wilburn, “Figurines, Images, and Representations Used in Ritual Practices,” in *Guide to the Study of Ancient Magic*, ed. David Frankfurter, vol. 189, Religions in the Graeco-Roman World (Leiden: Brill, 2019): Pg. 456–506.

⁷⁵ —. *Figurine of a Bound Captive*. Late Period. Limestone, 4.9cm. Museum of Fine Arts Boston; —. *Limestone Figure of an Asiatic Prisoner*. New Kingdom. Limestone, 2.3cm by 6.3cm. The British Museum.

Roman Period example which depicted a native woman, the carved limestone examples commonly featured the stereotyped hair styles of Egypt's foreign enemies. Because of this, it is likely that the purpose of these objects was to harm or curse those that they depicted.



Figure 7. New Kingdom Limestone Figurine of an Asiatic Prisoner
Image from: British Museum



Figure 8. Late Period Limestone Figurine of a Bound Captive
Image from: Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

Although limestone figurines are the most common style found during the New Kingdom and Late Period, this style was not the only one in use. Textual sources from the New Kingdom indicate that certain execration rites utilized wax figurines, though none have survived in the archeological record. One of the best examples of execration magic in practice comes from two papyri fragments: the Rollin and Lee papyri. These fragments are believed to have originally been a part of the Turin Judicial Papyrus—a much longer document that detailed an assassination attempt on Ramesses III, an event that has been called the ‘harem conspiracy.’ Because of their fragmentary nature, the context of the documents is not entirely clear; however, these texts seem to be describing either confessions of the accused or summaries of the investigation. Both documents describe how magic was used to aid in the assassination. The opening lines of the Rollin papyrus, the first of the two documents, states:

It happened because writings were made for enchanting, for banishing, for confusing — because some 'gods' were made into wax and some men (also) — and (furthermore) for enfeebling the limb(s) of men — and which (writings) were placed in the hand of *P3y-b3k-k3mn*.⁷⁶

Several parts of this text are worth highlighting. *P3y-b3k-k3mn* is known from the Turin Judicial Papyrus as being a primary conspirator, whose role was to “stir up the people” and cause a rebellion.⁷⁷ The Rollin papyrus describes how he used magic for this purpose. The words “enchanting,” “banishing,” and “confusing” are significant because they indicate that the goal was not to harm the victims of the magic, but rather to assert control over them.

The magic described in the Rollin papyrus is carried out through the use of both “writings” and individuals “made into wax.” These elements are further described in the Lee papyrus:

When *Pn-hwy-bin*, who was (formerly) overseer of cattle, said to him, 'Give to me a piece of writing for giving to me power (and) authority', he gave him a piece of official paper of *Wsr-m3^ct-r^c-Mri-imn*, l.p.h., the great god, his lord. And it happened because of (the feast of) the arrival of the God and the excitement of the people that he reached the — harem side of that other very high place. It happened because the people were made into wax (and) because of the writings of demand that one allowed that they were taken in in the charge of the commissioner *Idrm* — and while (members of) one group banished and the others deceived, the few conspirators taken led the others on.⁷⁸

The scholarly consensus is that people “made into wax” refers to wax execration figurines. However, there is less agreement as to what “writings” refers to. One possibility is that these “writings” had a similar function as the lead plaque found with the “Needle Figurine.” This

⁷⁶ Translation from: Hans Goedicke, “Was Magic Used in the Harem Conspiracy Against Ramesses III? (P.Rollin and P.Lee),” *The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 49 (1963): Pg. 72.

⁷⁷ A. de Buck, “The Judicial Papyrus of Turin,” *The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 23, no. 2 (1937): Pg. 152–164.

⁷⁸ Translation from: Goedicke, “Was Magic Used in the Harem Conspiracy Against Ramesses III? (P.Rollin and P.Lee),” Pg. 78.

plaque operated as a guide for the execration ritual, which detailed how the figurine should be created and used. It is possible that these “writings” were a magic formula which detailed how the ritual was to be performed. This would indicate that the figurine on its own does not produce the desired result. Figurines needed to be used in a specific way.

The interconnection between figurines and ritual performance is further attested in the Middle Kingdom. Execration figurines from this period took many different forms, which likely represents experimentation with magical practices. The most common medium for figurines at this time was clay, both baked and unbaked; however, some wood and limestone examples have been recovered. Additionally, a Middle Kingdom document known as the Westcar Papyrus describes the use of wax crocodiles in a magic ritual, so it is likely that wax execration figurines were also in use.⁷⁹ From the archeological evidence, two distinct styles of figurines have survived: inscribed slab-style figurines and full body figurines. The full body style figurines are similar to the limestone versions found during the New Kingdom; however, most are



Figure 9. First Intermediate Period/ Middle Kingdom Clay Execration Figurine
Image from: Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge



Figure 10. Middle Kingdom Wood Figurine
Image from: Louvre Museum

⁷⁹ J. Hunt Cooke, “The Westcar Papyrus,” *The Biblical World* 4, no. 1 (1894): Pg. 49-53.

significantly less realistic (fig. 9 and 10).⁸⁰ This style shows the full body of a captured enemy with their arms bound behind them. Full body figurines could be depicted standing upright or in a kneeling position. Most examples do not include writing on the figurine; however, it is likely that written spells were used alongside the figurine, as was the case for later examples.

The slab-style figurines were distinctly different from their full body counterparts. This style typically featured a head and flattened wedge-shaped body (fig. 11 and 12).⁸¹ The heads ranged from no detail to very detailed, with a fully carved face and hair. The backs of these slab-style figurines are typically poorly preserved; however, a team from Brussels has recently completed a study using new technology which showed that many of the slab-style figurines feature very faint markings that represent bound arms.⁸² In addition, one remarkably well-preserved example from the Netherlands even features a notched back which is similar to the Old Kingdom figurines (fig. 12).⁸³ The fronts and backs of the bodies are typically covered in red ink inscriptions. These inscriptions follow what has been called the “rebellion formula.”⁸⁴ This formula was a writing formula that became standardized for execration rituals early in the Middle Kingdom. These inscriptions began by listing several victims, typically rulers of foreign enemy states. This is followed by a generalized description of anyone who might support the victims. For instance, one example of a rebellion formula states:

⁸⁰ —. *Clay Execration Figure*. First Intermediate Period-Middle Kingdom. Clay, 12 cm. The Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge; —. *Prisoner Figurine*. Middle Kingdom. Wood, 4.7 cm x 18.2 cm. E 27204. Louvre. <https://collections.louvre.fr/ark:/53355/cl010024581>.

⁸¹ —, *Execration Figurine*, 1850 BC, Unbaked Clay, Royal Museums of Art and History, Brussels.

⁸² Vanessa Boschloos et al., “The Egyptian Execration Figurines of the Royal Museums of Art and History, Brussels: Conservation, Pigments and Digitisation,” *Bulletin Des Musées Royaux d’Art et d’Histoire* 87/88 (2016-2017), *Bruxelles*, p. 5-29, January 1, 2018.

⁸³ —. *Prisoner of War*. Middle Kingdom. Clay, 32 cm x 14.5 cm. Rijksmuseum Van Oudheden, Netherlands.

⁸⁴ Robert K. Ritner, *The Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice* (Chicago: The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 1993). Pg. 136-142; David Frankfurter, ed., *Guide to the Study of Ancient Magic* (New York: Brill, 2019): Pg. 103-113.

The ruler of Sai, Seteqtenkek, and all the stricken ones who are with him. The ruler of Webaset, Bakuayt, called Tchay, born of Ihaas, born to Wenkat, and all the stricken ones who are with him... their strong men, their messengers, their confederates, their allies, who will rebel, who will plot, who will fight, who will say that they will fight, who will say that they will rebel, in this entire land.⁸⁵

While these inscriptions are clear as to who the targets of the ritual were, the intention of the ritual is not stated on the figurine itself.

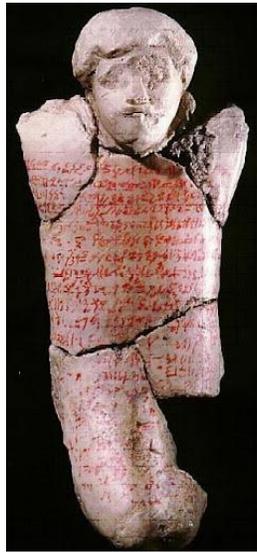


Figure 11. Middle Kingdom Execration Figurine
Image From: The Royal Museums of Art and
History, Brussels



Figure 12. Middle Kingdom Clay Figurine
Image from: Rijksmuseum Van Oudheden,
Netherlands

Both styles of figurines appear simultaneously early in the Middle Kingdom, which indicates that it was not simply a case of one style evolving into the next. The inscribed slab-style and the full body style were two distinct types of figurines that served different purposes. This is supported by the condition and contexts in which these artifacts were found. For instance, slab-style figurines were often intentionally broken, which suggests that the destruction of these artifacts was part of their purpose. On the other hand, the full body figurines were often

⁸⁵ Translation from: Robert K. Ritner, "Execration Texts (1.32)," in *The Context of Scripture: Canonical Compositions from the Biblical World*, ed. William W. Hallo and K. Lawson Younger, vol. 1 (Leiden: Brill, 1997): Pg. 50-52.

found in clay pots or carved limestone boxes and do not seem to have been intentionally broken. Unfortunately, there are no texts that give further indication of how these artifacts operated in rituals, but it seems likely that the differences between these two styles represent differences in their intended purposes. As the New Kingdom and later periods demonstrated, execration could be performed with the intention of harming or with the intention of controlling, and this is where the stylistic differences in figurines stem from. It is likely that the slab-style figurines, which were typically inscribed with the names of foreign kings and then purposely broken, were more commonly used in rituals meant to bring harm. On the other hand, the full body figurines, which were typically non-inscribed and intentionally buried, likely served a different purpose, possibly in rituals meant to control.

3. Tickets or Figurines?

When Reisner's team first excavated the initial deposit of Old Kingdom "mud tickets" there was not a clear indication of what the team had found. The mud figurines they had unearthed were unlike any of the execration figurines that had been recovered previously. These figurines were small, highly stylized, crudely made, and featured very little writing. From the initial evidence available, it appeared that this style of artifact emerged and disappeared suddenly from the archeological record. There was no clear evidence that connected these artifacts to the practice of execration. Junker's interpretation that these objects were enemy figures was primarily based on the shape of the objects and their inscriptions. His strongest point was that the names on the figurines were mostly Nubian, suggesting that they were the names of foreign enemies. Junker further reasoned that the Old Kingdom artifacts vaguely resemble a human torso and neck. He argued that this was meant to represent a bound captive and that the pierced loop on the artifacts' backs represented tied arms. However, even when compared to their most

visually similar counterpart, the Middle Kingdom slab style figurines, it still seems that the Old Kingdom finds are better described as “mud tags” than a ritual object.

The five assemblages of mud figurines stand out further when compared to contemporary sixth dynasty execration figurines. While there are notably fewer surviving examples of execration figurines from the Old Kingdom, those that have survived are recognizable as execration figurines. For example, several sixth dynasty wooden figurines have been recovered from Giza and Abusir. Like the Middle Kingdom full body style, these wooden figurines clearly depict a kneeling prisoner with their arms bound behind their back and do not appear intentionally damaged (fig. 13 and 14).⁸⁶ These wooden figurines demonstrate that the Old Kingdom Egyptian’s did produce clear and detailed figurines for execration— but for the



Figure 13. Old Kingdom Figure of a Bound Captive
Image from: Museum of Fine Arts, Boston



Figure 14. Abusir Excavation Figurines
Image from: Verner, 1985

⁸⁶ —. *Figure of a Bound Captive*. Old Kingdom. Wood, 9 cm. 13.3459. Museum of Fine Arts Boston. <https://collections.mfa.org/objects/141019/figure-of-a-bound-captive>; Verner, Miroslav. “Les Statuettes de Prisonnier En Bois d’Abousir.” *Revue d’Égyptologie* 36 (1985): 145–52.

purpose of the five rituals at Giza and Saqqara, they chose not to. It is likely that this was because the mud figurines served a different and very specific purpose.

While there are some similarities between the Old Kingdom deposits and later examples, there are three pieces of evidence that better justify the figurine interpretation. A primary clue is the context in which they were deposited. All five deposits were located within pyramid complexes, which was ritually significant. It was common for execration rituals to be practiced within the realm of the dead. For instance, the sixth dynasty wooden figurines were each found near or within a tomb. Joachim Quack, a member of the Saqqara team, explained: “Given that the figurines are not intentionally damaged, the spells spoken on them and the very act of placing them near a burial seems to have been considered as a sufficient means to ensure the desired result.”⁸⁷ Because of their burial location, it is likely that the deposition of the clay figurines symbolized the burial of an enemy.

A second indication that these objects were in fact figurines comes from the first Reisner deposit. Buried with the deposit was a small tablet, which mimicked the shape of the figurines (fig. 15). The tablet, which measured 9.7 cm by 6.1 cm by 2.0 cm, featured a rectangular body, a proportionally sized neck, and a pierced back loop. This was the only tablet of its kind to survive; however, large broken fragments found amongst the Abu-Bakr deposit, were likely the remains of a similar artifact. Six lines of text were inscribed on the front of this larger artifact, which Jürgen Osing translated:

Jeder Nubier, welcher rebellieren sollte, in (den Ländern *jrt[t]*, *w3w3t*, *z3tw*,
j3m, *k33w*, *‘nhj* (oder *j‘nh*), *m3sjt*, *mḏ3* und *mtrtj*, welche rebellieren,

⁸⁷ Joachim Friedrich Quack, “Some Old Kingdom Execration Figurines from the Teti Cemetery,” *The Bulletin of the Australian Centre for Egyptology* 13 (2002): Pg. 155.

Subversion betreiben oder begehen oder irgendwelche böse Äußerungen machen sollten.⁸⁸

(Every Nubian who should rebel, in (the countries) *jr[t]*, *w3w3t*, *z3tw*, *j3m*, *k33w*, *ˢnhj* (or *jˢnh*), *m3sjt*, *md3* and *mtrtj*, which rebel, practice or commit subversion or should make any nasty remarks.

This inscription is likely a proto-type of the rebellion formula, which would become standard on slab-style figurines in the Middle Kingdom. Like these later artifacts, the large Old Kingdom figurine does not describe the purpose of the execration ritual. The inscription is simply a generalized list of potential enemies. Because this was used alongside the smaller figurines, which named specific people, it is likely that the larger figurine was an additional step to ensure that the magicians had not missed any possible enemies.

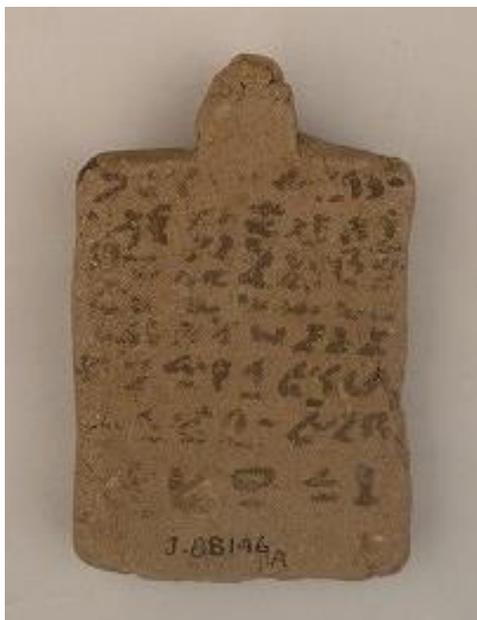


Figure 15. Reisner 1 Tablet
Image from: Digital Giza



Figure 16. El-Lisht Figurines
Image from: The Metropolitan Museum of Art

⁸⁸ Jürgen Osing, “Ächtungstexte Aus Dem Alten Reich (II),” *Mitteilungen Des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts Abteilung Kairo* 32 (1976): Pg. 146.

The final piece of evidence suggesting that Junker’s interpretation is correct is the timeframe in which the figurines were deposited. All five deposits have been dated to the end of the sixth dynasty when the Egyptian state was on the verge of collapsing.⁸⁹ Although Egyptians typically were more conservative with religious and magical practices, this would be a logical period for new ritual objects to appear suddenly in mass quantities—particularly for the purposes of execration. The rapid creation and deposition of hundreds of execration figurines was a response to uncertain times. This hypothesis is supported by a collection of unique Middle Kingdom execration figurines found at El-Lisht (fig. 16).⁹⁰ These artifacts are remarkably similar to the Old Kingdom figurines, both in appearance and context. There were ninety-six figurines found sealed in a coffin-shaped clay box which had been deposited west of the mastaba of Senwosretankh. The El-Lisht artifacts are rectangular pieces of unfired clay, approximately 6.5 cm by 3 cm, and each feature a face with its mouth open, as if to represent a person screaming. The front of each artifact had a small hieratic inscription in red ink. Most inscriptions began with the words, “the deceased, the rebel.” This is followed by the enemy’s name, which is written with the dead enemy hieroglyph as a determinative.⁹¹

Like the Old Kingdom artifacts, which stand out from contemporary figurines, the El-Lisht finds are not typical of Middle Kingdom execration figurine styles. The El-Lisht figurines were deposited at the end of the Middle Kingdom when Egypt was again facing political instability. Because figurines are typically found by themselves or in small quantities, the sheer number of figurines within the deposit suggests desperation. The same was true for the five Old

⁸⁹ How the artifacts have been dated will be discussed in more detail in chapter 3.

⁹⁰ —. *Magical Figure*. Late Middle Kingdom–Second Intermediate Period. Unbaked Clay, 6.5 cm by 3 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

⁹¹ William Christopher Hayes, *The Scepter of Egypt: A Background for the Study of the Egyptian Antiquities in the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, vol. 1 (New York, Ny: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1978): Pg. 329.

Kingdom deposits, which seem to have increased in volume with each deposit.⁹² The Old Kingdom deposits and the El-Lisht deposit suggest that when faced with political uncertainty, Egyptians turned to execration—and because during periods of chaos there likely would have been more enemies to target, more figurines would have been required. Because of this, typical figurine styles were abandoned in favor of styles that were stylized. These simplified figurines were able to be produced quicker, so that hundreds of enemies could be directly targeted in a single ritual.

4. Conclusion

The development of execration figurines throughout Egyptian history is evidence that many different types of execration rituals existed, and each produced unique material culture. The figurine styles examined in this chapter were the most commonly recovered—however, other styles, such as figurines made from wax, also existed. The similarities between these figurines show that typically figurine styles did not appear suddenly, but rather evolved slowly as figurines were adapted to suit the needs of the Egyptian people. For example, full bodied, non-inscribed figurines are prevalent in all periods, however, during different periods, Egyptians favored different mediums for crafting them. New Kingdom examples were most commonly carved from limestone, whereas Middle Kingdom artifacts were typically clay. Additionally, it was also common for figurines from all periods to be used alongside written spells. Textual evidence from the New Kingdom suggests that “writings” were regularly produced separately from the figurine. However, the Middle Kingdom slab-style figurines featured inscriptions on

⁹² This will be discussed further in chapter 3.

the artifact itself. The difference in figurine style reflected different ritual practices, trends in magic, and changing external circumstances.

When the most common figurine styles from each period are compared, several patterns emerge. For instance, figurines that were full bodied and did not feature writing tended to be deposited whole. On the other hand, figurines that were inscribed tended to be intentionally broken. While there might be some similarities between the later figurines and the Old Kingdom objects found by Reisner, Junker, and others, the Old Kingdom artifacts do not follow this pattern of use. These figurines were inscribed, but not intentionally broken. Because the Old Kingdom artifacts were atypical, the chain of development that has been proposed in this chapter alone does not justify Junker's interpretation that these artifacts were in fact figurines. Three other clues better justify the figurine interpretation. The first clue is the context in which they were found. Execration figurines, from all periods, have been found deposited within pyramid complexes as this location represented the realm of the dead. Additionally, the initial deposit uncovered by the Reisner team included a tablet, which listed several enemy kingdoms. While this tablet was not clear what the purpose of the deposit was, the inscription seems to be a prototype for the later rebellion formula, which listed a generalized description of all potential enemies. The final and most telling clue came from the Middle Kingdom El-Lisht deposit. The El-Lisht figurines are stylistically the closest artifacts to the Old Kingdom examples. Like the Old Kingdom deposits, the El-Lisht figurines appeared suddenly in a large quantity when the kingdom was facing instability. These unusual figurines are reflections of external circumstances, which heightened the need to mass produce ritual objects. This indicates that in uncertain times, traditional execration practices were replaced with quick and simple versions—as was the case for the five deposit of “ticket” figurines.

CHAPTER III: OLD KINGDOM CASE STUDY

1. Introduction: Historical Background

“All of Upper Egypt was dying of hunger and people were eating their children... The whole country has become like locusts going upstream and downstream (in search of food).” — Autobiography of Ankhtifi, First Intermediate Period.⁹³

“Lo, the river is blood, as one drinks of it one shrinks from people and thirsts for water... Towns are ravaged, Upper Egypt became wasteland... Lo, great and small say, 'I wish I were dead.'” — The Admonitions of Ipuwer, a Twelfth Dynasty inscription describing the First Intermediate Period.⁹⁴

By the sixth dynasty the Old Kingdom was in decline. The Egyptian state, which had been one of the most prosperous and politically sound states of its time, quickly dissolved into chaos following the reign of Pepi II in the 23rd century B.C. This collapse was caused by several interconnected circumstances, which were exacerbated by the sixty-four yearlong rule of Pepi II.⁹⁵ During this reign, the nobility gradually gained more power, which slowly undermined the central government. This political backdrop, coupled with a prolonged drought, led to the state's inability to adapt when the king died without a living heir. As a result, the kingdom broke into competing political factions. Artifacts from this period indicate the desperation of the Egyptian people. Texts, such as the admonitions of Ipuwer and the autobiography of Ankhtifi, describe desolate conditions during the height of the crisis. Although some scholars have suggested that these depictions of widespread famine do not accurately represent historical reality, the First Intermediate Period was, nevertheless, a period of transformation in the makeup

⁹³ Translation from: Stephan Seidlmayer, “The First Intermediate Period,” in *Oxford History of Ancient Egypt*, ed. Ian Shaw (Oxford University Press, 2000): Pg. 108-136.

⁹⁴ Translation from: Miriam Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature: A Book of Readings*, vol. 1 (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1973): Pg. 158-159.

⁹⁵ The Ptolemaic priest Manetho credited Pepi II for a 94-year long reign. Modern scholars now believe that his reign was around 64 years long. See: Hans Goedicke, “The Death of Pepi II – Neferkare’,” *Studien Zur Altägyptischen Kultur* 15 (1988): Pg. 111-121.

of the ruling class, which impacted civil, economic, and religious activities.⁹⁶ This transformation, however, was not sudden. Archeological evidence demonstrates that cultural shifts were beginning to take place prior to the Old Kingdom collapse.

The deposition of hundreds of clay execration figurines at Giza and Saqqara in the sixth dynasty suggests that problems were beginning to arise before the death of Pepi II. Although many types of execration rituals had been practiced prior to these deposits, such as those discussed in chapter one, the five caches of execration figurines are anomalies which represent uncertain times. These deposits, which contained a dozen or more clay figures each, demonstrate that execration figurines were being mass produced and suggest that execration rituals were being practiced on a much larger scale. The trigger for this increase in execration magic is difficult to pinpoint because the exact date for each deposit is unclear. The relative age of each cache has been determined by the context in which it was found and other markers, such as style of writing. All five have been dated to the period between the reign of Pepi I and the early First Intermediate Period.

The current chapter will examine the lifecycle of the five known deposits of clay execration figurines. This discussion will move through the different life stages that the five assemblages experienced, starting with their most recent stage: rediscovery. The excavation of each deposit is critical to understanding how the objects were used and when. The discussion that follows will detail what is known about each deposit's rediscovery in the twentieth century and evaluate this context as evidence for dating. This will be followed by a discussion that examines each cache of figurines for clues about their creation, use, and deposition. This will

⁹⁶ Nadine Moeller, "The First Intermediate Period: A Time of Famine and Climate Change," *Ägypten Und Levante / Egypt and the Levant* 1, no. XV (2005): Pg. 153–167.

highlight the differences and similarities between each deposit, as well as the differences and similarities within the whole assemblage. Finally, this chapter will conclude by examining what this lifecycle indicates about execration magic during the end of the Old Kingdom.

2. *Rediscovery*

During their 1994-95 field season, a team from the Australian Centre for Egyptology discovered the only known Saqqara deposit. This deposit was the only deposit that was not sealed in a container; instead, the twelve figurines had been dropped down shaft five of the mastaba of Nedjetempet.⁹⁷ Although the mastaba of Nedjetempet is within the Teti cemetery complex, shaft five is believed to be a later intrusion dating to the reign of Pepi I. It has been argued that this deposit is the oldest of the five caches of execration figurines. In the analysis of these artifacts, Joachim Quack dated them based on their similarities to the Giza deposits. He argued that “given the relatively close typological correspondence of our figurines to the rest of the [Giza] material... it seems plausible to attribute the material from the Teti cemetery to about the same date, but a bit earlier for paleographical considerations.”⁹⁸ Based on this reasoning, Quack dated the Saqqara finds to the reign of Pepi II because that was the date that earlier scholars had attributed to the Giza deposits. Quack reasoned that the Saqqara figurines were slightly older than the Giza examples because they were on average larger, and he believed that the size was reduced due to increased production. Unfortunately, the dating of the Giza deposits to the reign of Pepi II was also based on limited evidence.

⁹⁷ Karin Sowada, Tracey Callaghan, and Paul Bentley, *The Teti Cemetery at Saqqara IV: Minor Burials and Other Material*, vol. IV (Warminster: Aris and Phillips, 1999): Pg. 65.

⁹⁸ Joachim Friedrich Quack, “Some Old Kingdom Execration Figurines from the Teti Cemetery,” *The Bulletin of the Australian Centre for Egyptology* 13 (2002): Pg. 154.

Of the four deposits found at Giza, three were well recorded and preserved by their excavators. The exception was the second Reisner find (Reisner 2), which was not well documented when it was excavated. Because of this, some confusion has arisen. One issue is determining the location in which the deposit was found. It was not until 1976, fifty years after the deposit was excavated, that it was first studied. In this analysis, Jürgen Osing believed that the find came from cemetery G2000 in the western cemetery.⁹⁹ He got this location from Junker, who compared his deposit to a deposit found by the Reisner team:

... Figürchen ganz derselben Art fanden sich in einem Privatgrabe auf dem amerikanischen Grabungsabschnitt, das, wenn ich mich der Angabe recht erinnere, auf dem Felde östlich Grab Lepsius 23 steht.¹⁰⁰

(... figurines of exactly the same kind were found in one private grave in the American excavation section, which, if I remember correctly, is in the field east of the Lepsius 23 grave.)

Because the first Reisner deposit came from a different location, Jürgen Osing assumed that the figurines mentioned by Junker were the Reisner 2 find. However, there is additional evidence which suggests otherwise. Two different packing records from the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, where the artifacts are now stored, list the objects under the location G7510, in the eastern cemetery (shown on map 1).¹⁰¹

The poor archival records also indicate a second issue. Packing records state that the Reisner 2 figurines were originally found in one or more vessels, like the other Giza deposits; however, this vessel (or *vessels*) is missing. From these packing records, it is unclear how many

⁹⁹ Jürgen Osing, "Ächtungstexte Aus Dem Alten Reich (II)," *Mitteilungen Des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts Abteilung Kairo* 32 (1976): Pg. 133-134.

¹⁰⁰ Hermann Junker, *Giza VIII: Der Ostabschnitt Des Westfriedhofs*, Zweiter Teil. (Vienna: Hölder-Pichler-Tempsky Kuraszkiewicz, 1947): Pg. 36.

¹⁰¹ —. "Packing List, 1947 Folder Camp Close, 2nd Shipment Corr & List, P.06." (Digital Giza, 1947.) <http://giza.fas.harvard.edu/unpubdocs/39563/full/>; —. "Packing List, 1947 Folder Camp Close, 2nd Shipment Corr & List, P.12." (Digital Giza, 1947.) <http://giza.fas.harvard.edu/unpubdocs/39569/full/>.

vessels were originally found or when they disappeared. A diary entry from 1939 states: “In packing small objects inside BGS boxes; we finished twelve boxes from No. BGS 487 to 498; and also two BG boxes, one contains the pottery jars with the mud seals...”¹⁰² This entry indicates that more than one jar of figurines was sent to Boston. Another document describes two cartons of “various mud objects” listed under the same catalogue numbers given in the 1939 entry.¹⁰³ However, both of these records conflict with a 1947 correspondence which listed only one jar.¹⁰⁴ These archival inconsistencies could be explained by several possibilities. It is possible that the Reisner 2 assemblage was much larger when it was found and was contained in multiple vessels. However, another possibility is that there were other deposits found by the Reisner team which went undocumented and are now missing. This could explain why Junker recalled an unknown deposit coming from the western cemetery.

Because the excavation of the Reisner 2 assemblage was poorly recorded and the container (or containers) is now missing, there is very little evidence with which to date the deposit. The Reisner 2, like the Saqqara deposit, can only be dated by its similarity to the other deposits. However, the remaining three deposits are also difficult to date with certainty. The first Reisner deposit (Reisner 1) was found in the packing of street G7200 in the eastern cemetery, near the north-eastern end of mastaba G7230 (shown on map 1 and 2). This deposit was contained within a coarse redware jar that was approximately 37 cm high and 15 cm wide (fig. 17). The vessel did not have a clear association with any of the surrounding graves. The jar

¹⁰² —. “Diary Transcription: Page 829.” (Digital Giza, 1939.) <http://giza.fas.harvard.edu/diarypages/2773/full/>.

¹⁰³ “Packing List, 1947 Folder Camp Close, 2nd Shipment Corr & List, P.06.” (Digital Giza, 1947.) <http://giza.fas.harvard.edu/unpubdocs/39563/full/>.

¹⁰⁴ “Harvard University-Boston Museum of Fine Arts Expedition Packing List, 1947” (Digital Giza, 1947), <http://giza.fas.harvard.edu/unpubdocs/39636/full/#details>. Pg. 28.

was a common tapered style vessel that typically was used to transport water or beer.¹⁰⁵ Because these jugs were readily available it is possible that this jar was repurposed to store the figurines. The neck of the jar featured a hieratic inscription in black ink, which read: “year after the 5th count, third month of *pr.t*, day 5.” This was the standard Egyptian dating formula during the Old Kingdom, which calculated the year based on the bi-annual cattle count of a given king. Unfortunately, the king’s name was not included in this inscription, so the year is unclear.

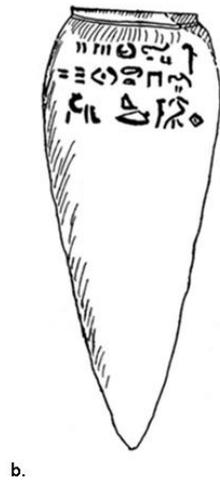


Figure 17. Reisner 1 Redware Jar
Image a. from: Giza Project at Harvard University
Image b. from: Osing, 1976

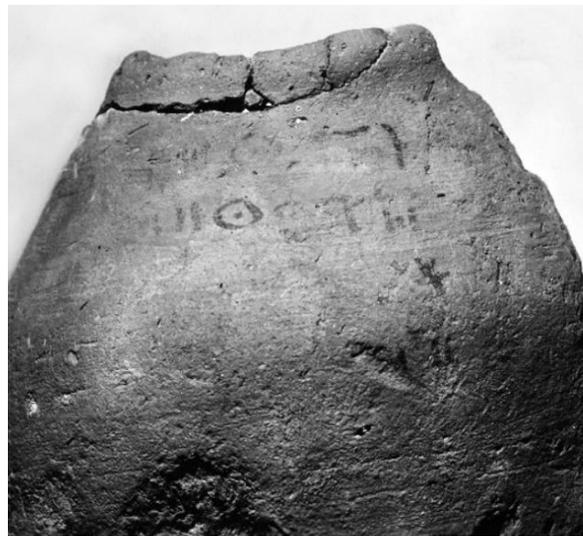


Figure 18. Junker Redware Jar
Image from: Giza Project at Harvard University

The Junker and Abu-Bakr deposits, both also from Giza, were remarkably similar to the Reisner 1 deposit. Both caches were contained in tapered redware vessels and were buried with no noticeable connection to the surrounding graves. These deposits were located north-west of the Reisner 1 deposit in the western cemetery. The Abu-Bakr deposit was buried in the road north of the mastaba of Neferi (shown on map 1). This deposit was contained within two

¹⁰⁵ Hermann Junker, *Giza VIII: Der Ostabschnitt Des Westfriedhofs, Zweiter Teil*. (Vienna: Hölder-Pichler-Tempsky Kuraszkiwicz, 1947): Pg. 30-38.

vessels. The context of this find was not well documented, but it was noted that the jars were nearly identical in size, measuring approximately 31 cm by 16 cm. The Junker deposit was found outside the eastern courtyard wall of the Rawer II mastaba (shown on map 1 and 3.) Junker recorded that the jar, which was also approximately 31 cm by 16 cm, was buried upright between mastaba S 679 and S 705, around 0.35 m deep.¹⁰⁶ He noted that the vessel was missing a large piece along the rim which was not found. This is further evidence that these vessels had been repurposed. If the jar was damaged while being buried, the missing piece likely would have been recovered near the jar. Junker suggested that the vessel had been used first for water but sustained damaged to the rim making it no longer suitable for this job. Junker reasoned that if this was the case, the vessel likely would have first been used nearby, as it was unlikely the jar would have been transported far in its fractured condition.¹⁰⁷ The Junker jar also featured a hieratic inscription in black ink written in the same hand as the inscriptions found on the figurines. The jar reads: “year after the 5th count, third month of *pr.t*, day 4” (fig. 18).¹⁰⁸ This date is one day off from the Reisner 1 deposit. However, like Reisner 1, the name of the king was not included so the regnal year is not certain. The same was the case for the Abu-Bakr jars, which each featured the same inscription: “year after the 5th count, third month of *pr.t*, day 29.”¹⁰⁹

Because the name of the king was not included on any of the inscribed jars and they were not associated with surrounding graves, the primary evidence for dating is the style of writing

¹⁰⁶ Hermann Junker, *Giza III: Die Mastabas Der Vorgeschrittenen V. Dynastie Auf Dem Westfriedhof* (Vienna: Hölder-Pichler-Tempsky, 1936): Pg. 226.

¹⁰⁷ Hermann Junker, *Giza VIII: Der Ostabschnitt Des Westfriedhofs, Zweiter Teil.* (Vienna: Hölder-Pichler-Tempsky Kuraszkiwicz, 1947): Pg. 30-38.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid*, Pg. 31.

¹⁰⁹ Abdel-Moneim Abu Baker and Jürgen Osing, “Ächtungstexte Aus Dem Alten Reich,” *Mitteilungen Des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts Abteilung Kairo* 29 (1973): Pg. 131.

and historical context. All three date inscriptions list “5th count, third month of *pr.t*,” and it seems likely that the other two caches were deposited around the same time. If this is true, then year after the 5th count would be year eleven, assuming the cattle count did occur every two years. Therefore, the earliest the depositions could have taken place was during the eleventh year of the reign of Pepi I. This is indicated by the Saqqara deposit, which because of its location could not have been deposited earlier. The latest that the deposits could have occurred was during the early First Intermediate Period. This is evident by the old hieratic style that was used for the inscriptions, which fell out of use shortly after the Old Kingdom collapse.¹¹⁰

Other clues help narrow this window slightly. For instance, the dating formula using the cattle count disappeared shortly after the reign of Pepi II. Additionally, the deposits could not have taken place during the rule of Merenre I, as he only reigned for nine years. This leaves the eleventh year of Pepi I (c. 2310 B.C.) or Pepi II (c. 2267 B.C.) as the only possible dates that these depositions could have occurred.¹¹¹ However, while it is possible that the unnamed pharaoh could be either of these kings, scholars have argued that the deposits were more likely from the reign of Pepi II. This argument was first postulated in the 1973 analysis of the Abu-Bakr deposit and is based on names found on the figurines themselves. Abu-Bakr and Osing, pointed out that there were far more Nubian names on the figurines than any other group. Because of this, they reasoned that the deposits were most likely from the reign of Pepi II as Egypt was facing more issues with its southern neighbors at this time.¹¹² Because of this

¹¹⁰ Abdel-Moneim Abu Baker and Jürgen Osing, “Ächtungstexte Aus Dem Alten Reich,” *Mitteilungen Des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts Abteilung Kairo* 29 (1973): Pg. 131-133.

¹¹¹ These years were calculated using the chronology listed in Ian Shaw’s *Oxford History of Ancient Egypt*. These dates are approximate and different chronology’s dates may vary slightly. See: Ian Shaw, ed., *Oxford History of Ancient Egypt* (Oxford University Press, 2014): Pg. 480-488.

¹¹² Abu Baker and Osing, “Ächtungstexte Aus Dem Alten Reich,” Pg. 131-133.

historical context, the deposition of the figurines can reasonably be dated to the mid-23rd century B.C.

3. Creation, Use, and Deposition

The lifecycle of the figurines should be distinguished from the lifecycle of the vessels that they were stored in. These vessels went through approximately five life stages in antiquity: creation, use, discard, reuse, and deposition. They began their life for the purpose of transporting liquid and were likely used by tomb builders. Many tapered style vessels have been found discarded in hordes throughout Giza and Saqqara, leading archeologists to believe that they were cheap and readily available. As for the four execration vessels, it is likely that they were reused— either because they were no longer needed for their original purpose, or because they had been damaged, as in the case of the Junker vessel. If this was the case, then it is unclear if the vessel itself had any magical significance. Because the vessel was not originally intended for the ritual, it may have simply been functional. This assumption is further supported by the Saqqara deposit, which was not found in a vessel. This evidence suggests that although the act of burial was an important aspect of the ritual, the vessel itself may not have been.

In antiquity, the execration figurines went through at least three life stages: creation, use, and deposition. Examining these artifacts provides clues about each stage. The following analysis will use the available images of each figurine, to visually evaluate and compare the artifacts with one another (see appendix C for a compiled collection of available images). In total the five deposits include are 445 execration figurines, 377 of which were intact. All of the figurines were approximately 2 cm wide, but their height varied from 3.9 cm to 6.5 cm (see table

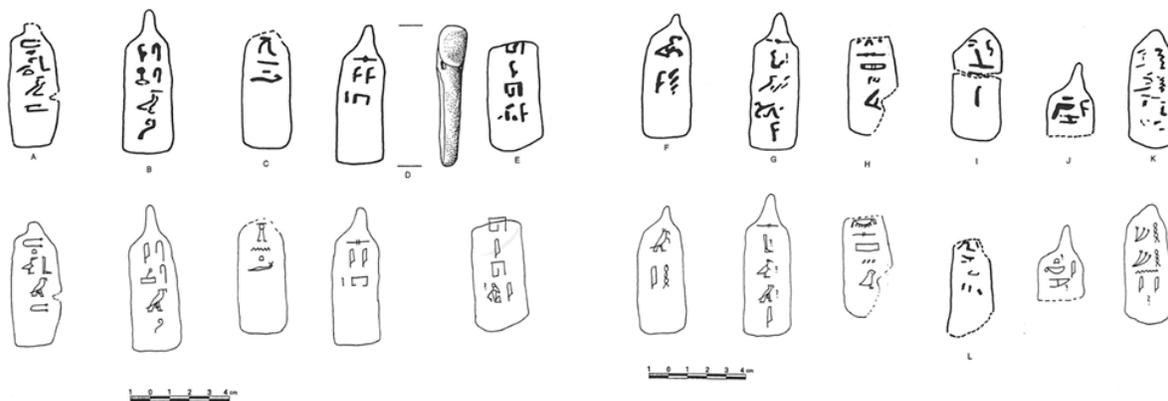


Figure 19. Saqqara Figurines
Image from: Quack, 2002

1). These figurines began their life as raw material, with each figurine being crafted out of Nile clay. This choice in material was deliberate, as clay was thought to be a life-giving substance, associated with the fertile flood plains of the Nile valley.¹¹³ Additionally, clay was inexpensive, which for a project of this size would have been ideal. Supposedly, the first figurines to be crafted were the twelve from Saqqara (fig. 19). These figurines were the largest, between 6.0 - 6.5 cm in height and 2.0 - 2.5 cm in width.¹¹⁴ Unfortunately, the thickness was not provided in Quack's analysis; however, the drawing that he provided suggests that the figurines are approximately 1 cm thick. The figurines seem to have been individually hand formed. Additionally, because the pieces are not perfectly flat, the craftsman likely shaped the clay by pressing it between their palms to flatten the piece— as opposed to using a tool to roll or press the clay. Flattening the clay would have been the first step in a six-step process. Secondly, the edges were then pinched and smoothed with the fingers into a rectangular shape. Next, the craftsman would have pinched and pulled the top to create the neck shape. Two different styles of necks are present when the deposits are compared. The first style is the narrow neck style,

¹¹³ Toby Wilkinson, *The Rise and Fall of Ancient Egypt* (New York, NY: Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2013): Pg. 14-18.

¹¹⁴ Joachim Friedrich Quack, "Some Old Kingdom Execration Figurines from the Teti Cemetery," *The Bulletin of the Australian Centre for Egyptology* 13 (2002): Pg. 149.

which can be seen in the figurines labeled B, D and G in figure 19 (Saqqara figurines 2, 4, and 7). These figurines are relatively square, have defined shoulders, and a straight and centered neck. A second neck style can be seen in figurines I and K (Saqqara figurines 9 and 12). This second neck style is more triangular, with sloping, undefined shoulders.

The same two neck styles can also be seen in the images of the Reisner 1, Reisner 2, and Junker deposits (see table 2). It is possible that the Abu-Bakr deposit also demonstrated this variation in neck styles; however, this deposit was not photographed, and therefore it is not possible to visually compare these figurines to the other artifacts. The Reisner 1 deposit included a nearly even assortment of both neck types. Of the 72 figurines, 66 were whole and 64 included intact necks. Of these 64, approximately 56% featured narrow necks, and 43% featured triangular necks. The proportions of the Reisner 2 deposit were very different. Of the 91 total



Figure 20. Junker Figurines
Image from: Junker, 1947

figurines, 66 were whole, and 62 included intact necks. This deposit featured more triangular necks, with only 10% being narrow and 90% being triangular. The Junker deposit was the opposite. Of the 21 Junker figurines, 17 were whole, but only 5 included intact necks (figurine 1, 8, 9, 11, and 13 in fig. 20). Of these five, all featured the narrow neck type. However, it is reasonable to assume that all 21 originally featured this neck style, as the narrow neck would have been more fragile and likely to break. Additionally, several of the figurines that do not have an intact neck show evidence of a narrow neck base, as with figurine 3 and 21. While there could be multiple possibilities for why these styles emerged, one explanation is rushed craftsmen. Because the narrow neck was more defined, it likely took more time to make this style. If this is true, the variation in neck styles between the deposits might indicate a heightened demand for the finished product.

After the necks were formed, the fourth step in the creation process would have been adding the back loop. The back loop has been largely overlooked by previous research. Because of this, there are very few images of this feature. Only 35 of the 445 figurines have had this feature photographed, all of which come from the Junker and Reisner deposits (see appendix c). From the photographs available, it seems that there were different methods for creating the back loop, possibly indicating the involvement of multiple craftsmen. Junker figurine 21 and Reisner 1 figurine 40 are examples of one method (fig. 21 and 22). These figurines feature a deep imprint along the back where the clay was forced up and out. This ridging is evidence that something was pressed into the back of these artifacts—possibly a reed stylus. The loops on figurines with this imprint pattern are thinner and irregularly shaped. Evidence for this method was present in 17 of the 18 Reisner 1 back images. The outlier was figurine 70, which exemplifies a second method (fig. 23). This figurine also features a horizontal imprint,

indicating that something had been pressed into the clay; however, the marking does not seem to be as deep, and the ridging is very faint. The loops on figurines with this pattern have smooth, rounded edges and are significantly thicker (fig. 24). 5 out of the 11 available Junker back images and all 6 of the available Reisner 2 back images feature these elements (see table 3).



Figure 21. Junker
Figurine #21
Image from: Giza Project
at Harvard University



Figure 22. Reisner 1
Figurine #40
Image from: Giza Project
at Harvard University



Figure 23. Reisner 1
Figurine #70
Image from: Giza Project
at Harvard University



Figure 24. Reisner
2 Figurine #36
Image from:
Museum of Fine
Arts, Boston

These different imprint patterns and styles of loops suggest two possible creation methods. The first method involved pressing a reed into the back deep enough so that excess clay was forced up, as seen in figure 21 and 22. This excess was then smoothed over a portion of the reed to create a loop in the center of the figurine. This method created a thinner loop, as no additional clay was added, and many of these loops have cracked where the clay was joined. The second hypothetical method involved adding extra clay to the back. These figurines feature loops that are very well rounded and have markings which indicate that they were separate additions to the figurine, as seen in figure 23 and 24. This suggests that a small ball of clay had

first been rolled between the craftsman's fingers. The craftsman then pierced the ball with a reed and used the reed to push the clay ball onto the back of the figurine. This would create bulging where the two pieces were joined, which can be seen in these examples.

The fifth step in the creation of the figurines would have been drying. All of the figurines were sunbaked, and they would have been laid out flat to dry. While it is possible that the artifacts could have been hung to dry, it is doubtful that the loops would have been able to hold the weight of the figurine before it was fully hardened. From here they would have moved to the sixth and final step in the creation process: inscription. While it is possible that this step was carried out by the initial craftsman, literacy was limited, and it is more likely that the figurines were then given to a scribe. Luckily, the inscriptions are the feature that has been most heavily researched, and most deposits have been analyzed.¹¹⁵ Abu-Bakr and Osing are responsible for most of this work as they studied the Abu-Bakr deposit, which contained the largest number of figurines at 249 total. In this study, they noted:

Die Aufschriften auf den Krügen und den Figuren sind offenbar alle von derselben Hand mit schwatzer Tinte in einem flüssigen, ausgeprägten Hieratisch geschrieben, das seinen Formen nach eindeutig dem sogenannten Althieratischen (5. Dyn. — 1. Zwischenzeit) zuzuweisen ist.¹¹⁶

(The inscriptions on the jugs and the figures are evidently all written by the same hand in black ink in a fluid, pronounced hieratic, which, judging by its forms, can be clearly assigned to the so-called old hieratic (5th Dynasty — 1st Intermediate Period).)

¹¹⁵ For a detailed analysis of the inscriptions see: Abdel-Moneim Abu Baker and Jürgen Osing, "Ächtungstexte Aus Dem Alten Reich," *Mitteilungen Des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts Abteilung Kairo* 29 (1973); Jürgen Osing, "Ächtungstexte Aus Dem Alten Reich (II)," *Mitteilungen Des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts Abteilung Kairo* 32 (1976); Joachim Friedrich Quack, "Some Old Kingdom Execration Figurines from the Teti Cemetery," *The Bulletin of the Australian Centre for Egyptology* 13 (2002).

¹¹⁶ Abdel-Moneim Abu Baker and Jürgen Osing, "Ächtungstexte Aus Dem Alten Reich," *Mitteilungen Des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts Abteilung Kairo* 29 (1973): Pg. 98.

Osing then went on to analyze and publish both Reisner finds, which had gone unstudied. Osing also noted in the Reisner study that each deposit was done by a single scribe.¹¹⁷ Unfortunately, by the time of this publication the vessels had been lost, so Osing was unable to confirm whether the figurine inscriptions were written by the same hand as the date inscriptions on the jars. Additionally, it is unclear if the same scribe was responsible for all three deposits, or if the inscriptions for each deposit were written by a different scribe.

It is likely that the inscription step was a particularly important part of the ritual. It is worth noting that any of the previous steps could have included a magic element to them— such as a spell being spoken while the shape was being formed. However, as discussed in chapter two, writing is known to have been connected with magic.¹¹⁸ Additionally, within the Egyptian belief system, a person’s name is one of the elements that made up their identity. Therefore, it is during this sixth step that the figurine would have become associated with a specific enemy, and it was likely that this is when the artifacts moved from the creation life stage into the use life stage. Evidence from the Reisner 1 deposit indicates that this step was done very thoughtfully. While most of the figurines were inscribed in black ink, one was deliberately inscribed in red. Out of all five deposits, this is the only use of red ink. Because red is customarily associated with evil figures, such as Seth or Apophis, this enemy must have been particularly dangerous, possibly a Nubian king.¹¹⁹ Additionally, red is documented to have been used in other Old Kingdom execration rituals, so it is possible that red was used in this instance for extra potency.

¹¹⁷ Jürgen Osing, “Ächtungstexte Aus Dem Alten Reich (II),” *Mitteilungen Des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts Abteilung Kairo* 32 (1976).

¹¹⁸ Robert K. Ritner, *The Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice* (Chicago: The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 1993): Pg. 35-57.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid*, Pg. 147-148; Jürgen Osing, “Ächtungstexte Aus Dem Alten Reich (II),” *Mitteilungen Des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts Abteilung Kairo* 32 (1976): Pg. 140.

Once the figurines were complete, they could have been used for the execration ritual. Unfortunately, it is difficult to know what this part of the figurines' life entailed. It is reasonable to assume that spells would have been spoken over the figurines, as this was a common theme in later execration rituals. Execration could have many different goals, and it is unclear from the figurines alone what their purpose would have been. It is during the use stage that each deposit took different trajectories. At some point after their creation the objects had to be moved to their burial location. For the Giza deposits, it was at this time that they were placed into their containers. For the Saqqara deposit, it is possible that they were moved individually or strung for transportation. Although each deposit was found in different contexts, it is noteworthy that none were found associated with or within tombs. Scholars have suggested that their deposition within the Giza and Saqqara burial complexes was symbolic of enemies being placed into the realm of the dead.¹²⁰ While this seems reasonable, their individual placement does not seem random. The first cache to be deposited was the Saqqara deposit, which lies southeast of Giza. Next was the Junker deposit, followed by Reisner 1 and Abu-Bakr, which when mapped fall on a relatively straight northwestern line (see map 1). Additionally, if Junker's location of the Reisner 2 deposit was correct, then it too falls on this line. While this might be a coincidence, it is possible that the deposition of these figurines progressed in a specific direction.

4. Conclusions

The previously outlined life stages, and the steps within each stage, were laid out in the order that seemed most reasonable. However, it is necessary to acknowledge that any of these supposed steps might have been altered or performed in a different order where possible. For

¹²⁰ Joachim Friedrich Quack, "Some Old Kingdom Execration Figurines from the Teti Cemetery," *The Bulletin of the Australian Centre for Egyptology* 13 (2002): Pg. 156-157.

example, it is possible that the craftsman created the back loop before forming the neck. Moreover, it is worth noting that these proposed methods are largely based on the available research and images alone. Further examination of the artifacts is needed to confirm or deny these hypotheses. The evidence examined in this chapter is derived from the five known execration deposits. There are clear reasons to believe that these were not the only deposits of their kind, and other evidence might emerge which could add to this discussion. For instance, at the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna, where the Junker deposit is housed, there is a single figurine that does not line up with the archival record (fig. 25). This artifact was labeled as one of the Junker finds; however, it was not included in Junker's very detailed report. Junker recorded having found 21 figurines, which he drew with painstaking detail (as was shown in fig. 20). All of these are accounted for in the museum's archive. This means that Junker overlooked this hypothetical 22nd figurine, which seems unlikely, or that it came from somewhere else and was mislabeled by the museum. This lone object could suggest that execration figurines were



Figure 25. Unknown Figurine.
Image from: Digital Giza

not always deposited in large quantities. It is possible that single figurines were deposited and are simply less likely to be recovered than large caches.

While it is possible that the five deposits only represent a fraction of the rituals that occurred, the comparison and analysis of these deposits shed light on the conditions of Egypt during the mid-23rd century. These deposits exclusively used cheap and repurposed materials. For instance, the vessels that contained the Giza deposits show signs of having been recycled for the ritual. The figurines were also made of unbaked mud, which was easily accessible, and because they were simple, they did not require an expert craftsman to create. These choices in material and construction stand out when compared to the execration rituals examined in chapter two, many of which used imported stone or wood and were more carefully formed. One possible explanation for the sudden appearance of this style of inexpensive and crudely constructed execration figurine is financial hardship. This is a reasonable explanation given that economic mismanagement has been considered a reason for the collapse of the Old Kingdom.¹²¹

Another possibility for the sudden appearance of this style of figurine is an increased need for execration magic. This explanation is supported by the change in figurine neck shapes over time and steady increase in deposit size. The earliest two deposits, the Saqqara and Junker deposits, were the two smallest deposits, with 12 and 21 figurines respectively. These deposits also demonstrate a higher percentage of the narrow neck type. Because this neck would have taken longer to craft, it is probable that the Saqqara and Junker craftsmen had more time to form each piece. The next deposition was the Reisner 1 deposit. This deposit contained 72 figurines, about half of which featured the narrow necks, while the other half featured triangular. The

¹²¹ Toby Wilkinson, *The Rise and Fall of Ancient Egypt* (New York, NY: Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2013): Pg. 77-98.

increase in triangular necks likely suggests an increase in the speed of production. If this is the case, then it is likely that the Reisner 2 assemblage was deposited next. This deposit contained 92 figurines and demonstrated a further shift towards the triangular neck style, with only 10% being the narrow style. The Abu-Bakr cache was deposited last and was the largest deposit, containing 249 figurines. Unfortunately, images of this deposit are not available, so it is unknown what styles of necks were present.

The evidence for financial hardship and the desperate need for execration rituals reflect uncertain conditions during the reign of Pepi II. These rituals were carried out early in his decades-long rule, which indicates that problems were accumulating early on. Centuries of costly building projects during the Pyramid Age left the sixth dynasty pharaohs economically weak. Pepi II inheriting the throne at six years old added to the growing problems. His reign opened a vacuum that allowed the nobility to gain wealth and influence. By the time that Pepi II came of age, the power of the king had become questionable. Nubian leaders took advantage of these conditions. This sparked the need for mass numbers of inexpensive and quickly made execration figurines, which were intended to curse Nubian enemies.

CONCLUSION

This thesis examined the five deposits of Old Kingdom execration figurines in light of all evidence available currently. Previous research, such as the works of Hermann Junker, Abdel-Moneim Abu-Bakr, Jürgen Osing, and Joachim Quack, largely focused on analyzing the inscriptions on each figurine. This thesis took a different approach, which examined the figurines as physical objects. By analyzing images, archival records, and excavation reports, the previous chapters highlighted the unusual characteristics of the 445 clay “ticket” figurines, which appeared and disappeared suddenly in large quantities. This thesis argued that these figurines reflect the political and economic uncertainty Egypt was facing at the end of the Old Kingdom. As discussed in chapter three, Egypt’s problems with their southern neighbors and political instability created a need for execration figurines to be produced rapidly and in mass quantities. This led to a new style of figurine, which was easy and inexpensive to make. Creating the body of the figurine only took a couple of steps, and it did not require an expert craftsman. The materials and tools needed— Nile mud and a reed stylus— were readily available to anyone. Once the body was formed and the clay hardened, the figurine was inscribed with the name of an enemy. This step did require a scribe, as literacy was limited. However, the inscriptions were simple, and this step also could have been done relatively quickly. The speed at which the figurines could be manufactured allowed for dozens to be created for each ritual.

Once the figurines had been created, they were transported to their burial locations. Burial was a common practice in later forms of execration, and because each of the Old Kingdom caches was found within a cemetery, the act of burying the figurines most likely symbolized burying a dead enemy. It is difficult from the available evidence to determine what else the ritual entailed or what its specific goal was. As discussed in chapter two, execration

could have different intentions, which led to different ritual practices. For instance, evidence from the Middle and New Kingdoms suggests that execration could be offensive or defensive. The purpose of execration ranged from confusing or subduing a potential adversary to bringing harm to a known enemy. As described in the Lee and Rollin papyri, execration figurines were made to “enchant,” “banish,” and “confuse” the target. The goal of this ritual was to “enfeeble” and “deceive.”¹²² Depending on the intention of the ritual, different styles of figurines were used, and these rituals followed predictable patterns. Rituals meant to subdue or enchant the victim likely used full-bodied figurines which were buried. Other rituals were meant to harm their victims, and figurines used in these rituals were often intentionally broken. This practice is seen in the Middle Kingdom slab-style examples, which are rarely found whole. The five deposits of Old Kingdom clay figurines were anomalies because they did not follow these typical execration patterns.

The execration magic practiced during the sixth dynasty reflects the concerns of the Egyptian state. As explained in chapter one, magic is a product of a specific time, place, and culture. However, scholars have not always recognized magic as such. Over the course of the twentieth century, how magic is understood and studied has evolved. The earliest scholars to examine the topic, such as Frazer and Malinowski, studied magic with an etic perspective. This approach has since been abandoned. As the field of magic studies advanced, it was recognized that magic can only be defined by each culture that practiced it. In Egypt, magic was a part of a complex religious system and unique understanding of how the world operated. Magic, or *heka*, was believed to reside in every living being, and it was associated with the *ka*. Because of this, it

¹²² Hans Goedicke, “Was Magic Used in the Harem Conspiracy Against Ramesses III? (P.Rollin and P.Lee),” *The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 49 (1963): Pg. 72.

was believed that anyone could practice magic. Execration is one example of this. Textual evidence indicates that execration was practiced among all social classes. Many rituals, both simple and complex, were in use. For instance, execration could be carried out by attacking the *mn* or *ba* of an individual. Carving out the name or defacing the image of an individual was a simple attack on their identity. Burying or destroying figurines was a more elaborate representation of the same ideas, as has been demonstrated through the examination of the Old Kingdom figurines.

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- . *Magical Figure*. Late Middle Kingdom–Second Intermediate Period. Unbaked Clay, 6.5 cm by 3 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art.
- . *Needle Figurine*. 200-399 AD. Clay, 4.2 cm x 9.6 cm. Louvre.
- . *Palette of King Narmer*. From Hierakonpolis, Egypt, Predynastic, 3000 B.C. Egyptian Museum. Cairo.
- . *Prisoner Figurine*. Middle Kingdom. Wood, 4.7 cm x 18.2 cm. E 27204. Louvre. <https://collections.louvre.fr/ark:/53355/cl010024581>.
- . *Prisoner of War*. Middle Kingdom. Clay, 32 cm x 14.5 cm. Rijksmuseum Van Oudheden, Netherlands.
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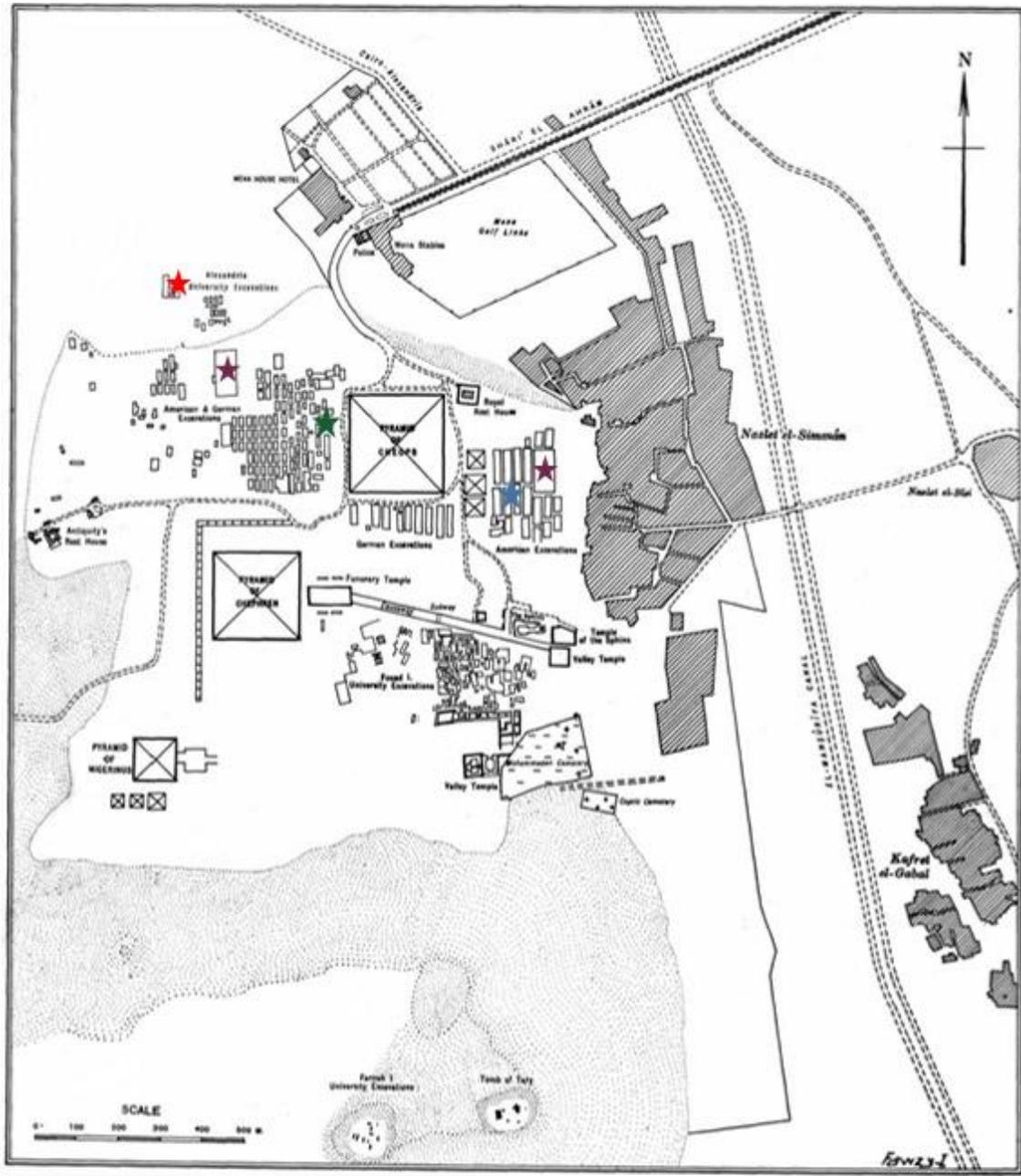
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APPENDICES

Appendix A. Maps

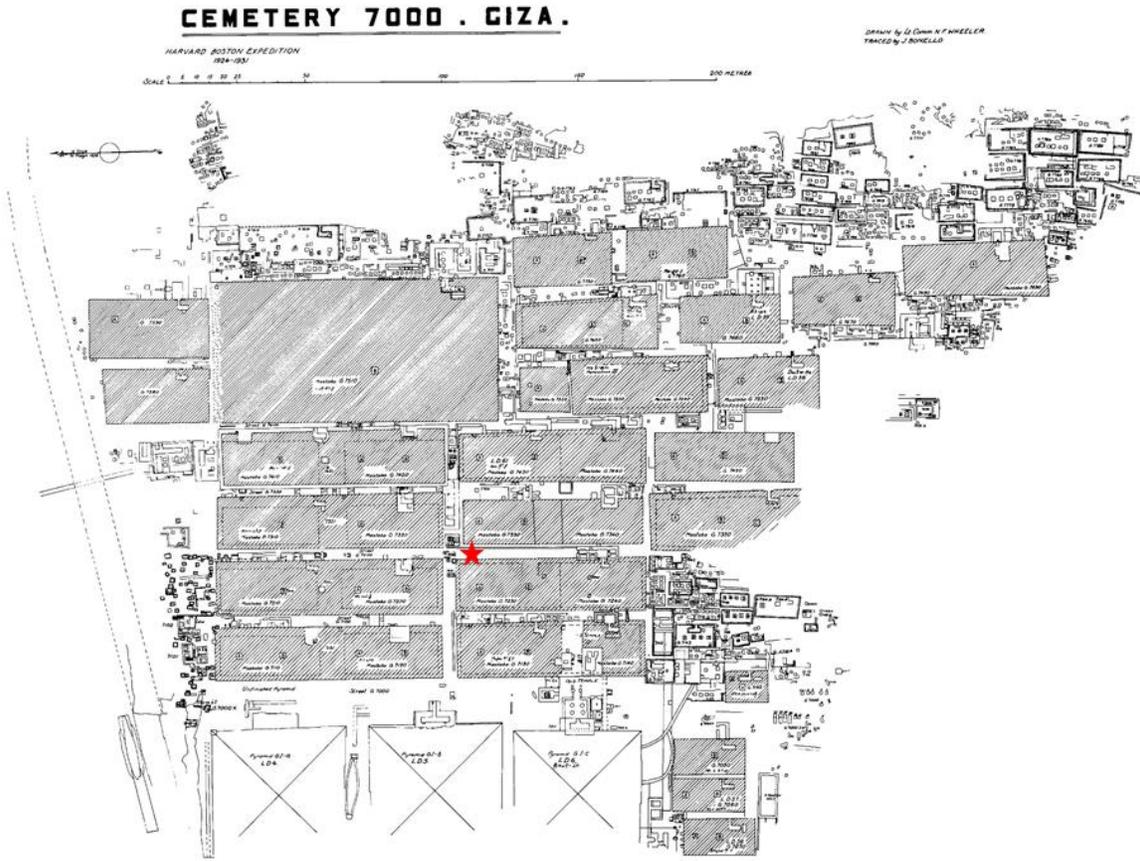
Map 1. Site Plan of the Giza Necropolis



- ★ = Approximate Location of Abu-Bakr Deposit
- ★ = Approximate Location of Junker Deposit
- ★ = Possible Location of Reisner 2 Deposit
- ★ = Approximate Location of Reisner 1 Deposit

Image From: Abu-Bakr, 1953

Map 2. Eastern Cemetery



1. Cemetery 7000, Expedition 1924-1931

★ = Approximate Location of Reisner 1 Deposit

Image from: Giza Project at Harvard University

Appendix B. Tables

Table 1. Deposit Data

Deposit Name	Deposit Composition	Approximate Size	Find Location	Vessel Date
Reisner 1 Deposit	Total: 72 Whole: 66 Fragment: 6	Height: 5.0 – 5.4 cm Width: 2.1 – 2.3 cm	Giza. street G7200, near the north-eastern end of mastaba G7230 in the eastern cemetery	Year after the 5th count, third month of pr.t, day 5.
Reisner 2 Deposit	Total: 91 Whole: 66 Fragment: 25	Thickness: 0.4 – 0.7 cm ¹²³	Giza. Possibly cemetery G2000 in the western cemetery, or G7510 in the eastern cemetery	Unknown
Junker Deposit	Total: 21 Whole: 17 Fragment: 4	Height: 3.9 – 5.6 cm (4.6 cm average) Width: 2 cm Thickness: 1 cm	Giza. eastern courtyard wall of the Rawer II mastaba	Year after the 5th count, third month of pr.t, day 4
Abu Bakr Deposit	Total: 249 Whole: 223 Fragment: 26	Height: 5.5 cm Width: 2 cm Thickness: 0.4 – 0.9 cm	Giza. road north of the mastaba of Neferi	Year after the 5th count, third month of pr.t, day 29
Saqqara Deposit	Total: 12 Whole: 5 Fragment: 7	Height: 6.0 – 6.5 cm Width: 2.0 – 2.5 cm Thickness: 1 cm	Saqqara. Shaft five of the mastaba of Nedjetempet	N/A

¹²³ These measurements come from Osing's report, which only listed the combined average sizes. See: Jürgen Osing, "Ächtungstexte Aus Dem Alten Reich (II)," *Mitteilungen Des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts Abteilung Kairo* 32 (1976).

Table 2. Neck Data

	Reisner 1 Deposit	Reisner 2 Deposit	Junker Deposit	Abu Bakr Deposit	Saqqara Deposit
Number of Figurines	Total: 72 Whole: 66 Intact Neck: 64	Total: 91 Whole: 66 Intact Neck: 62	Total: 21 Whole: 17 Intact Neck: 5	Total: 249 Whole: 223 Intact Neck: Unknown	Total: 12 Whole: 9 Intact Neck: 6
Narrow Neck	56%	10%	100%	Unknown	66%
Triangular neck	43%	90%	0%	Unknown	33%

Table 3. Back Data

	Reisner 1 Deposit	Reisner 2 Deposit	Junker Deposit	Abu Bakr Deposit	Saqqara Deposit
Data Available	Images: 18 Figurines # 8, 9, 13, 16-18, 30, 33, 34, 36, 38, 40, 42, 44-46, 60, 70	Images: 6 Figurines # 25, 34-36, 77, 87	Images: 11 Figurines # 1-6, 8, 9, 12, 13, 21	Images: 0	Images: 0
Deep Imprint	Figurines # 8, 9, 13, 16-18, 30, 33, 34, 36, 38, 40, 42, 44-46, 60,	None	Figurines # 1, 2, 5, 6, 12, 21	Unknown	Unknown
Faint Imprint	Figurine # 70	Figurines # 25, 34-36, 77, 87	Figurines # 3, 4, 8, 9, 13	Unknown	Unknown

Appendix C. Figurines

Reisner 1

Images from: Osing,
1976

Images From: Giza Project at Harvard University

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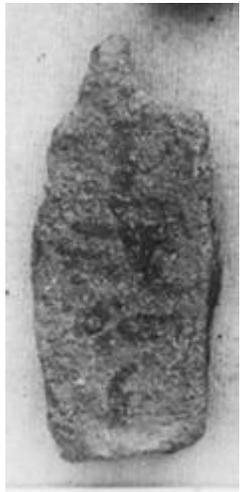


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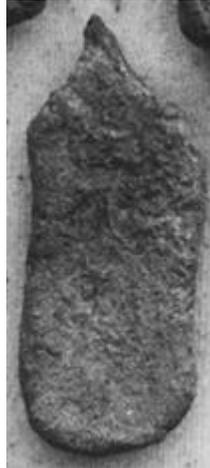
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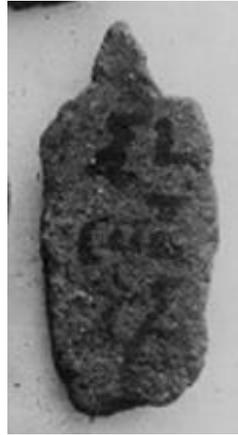


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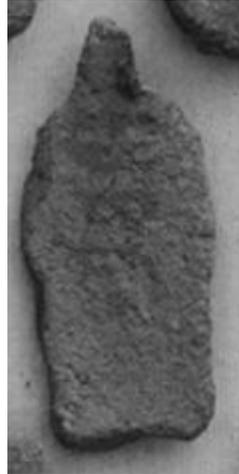


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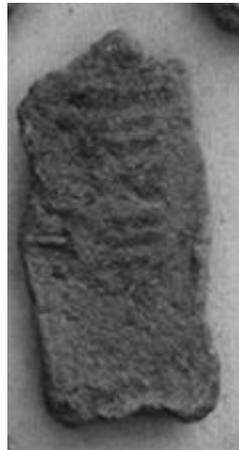


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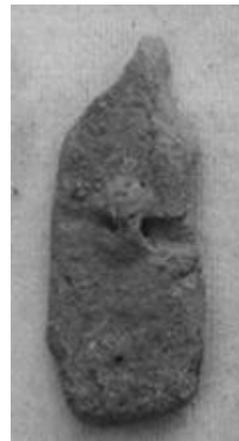
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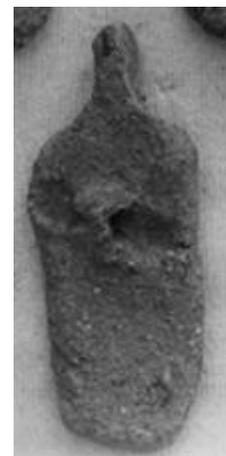


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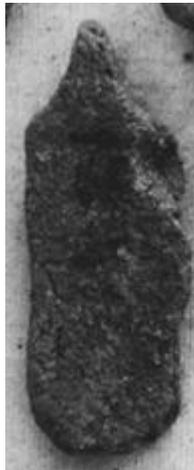


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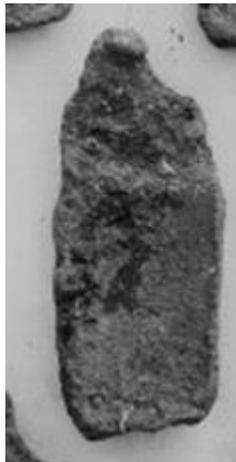


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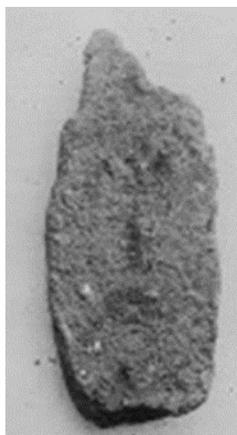


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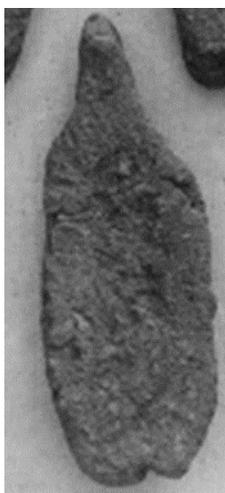


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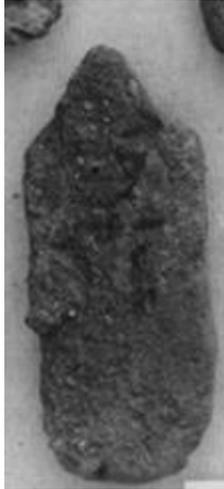


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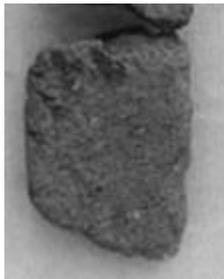


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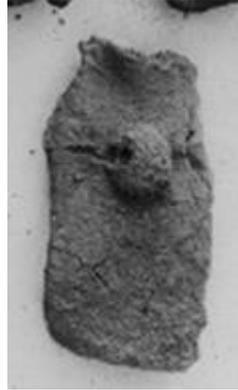


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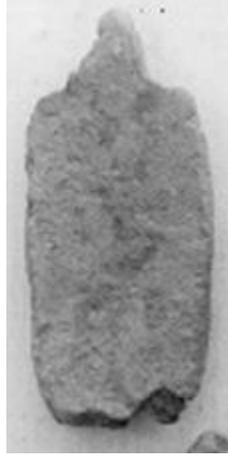


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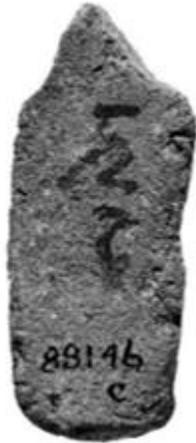


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Reisner 2

Images From: Abu Baker and
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Images From: Giza Project at Harvard
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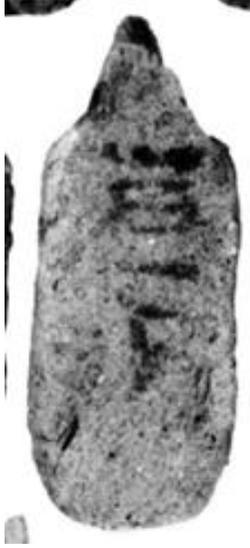
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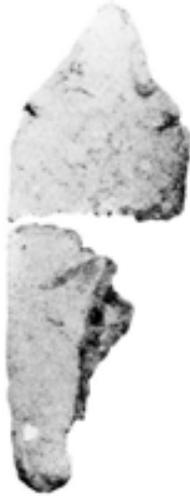


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Junker Figurines

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Images From: Giza Project
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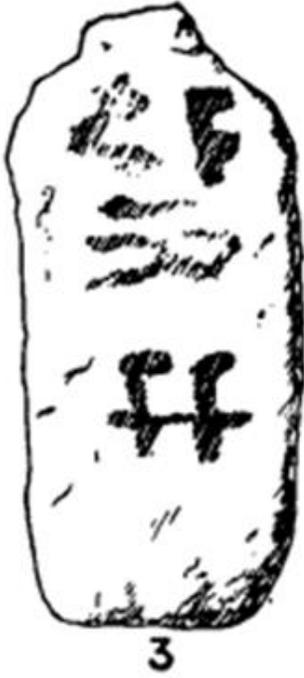
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Saqqara Figurines
Images from: Quack, 2002

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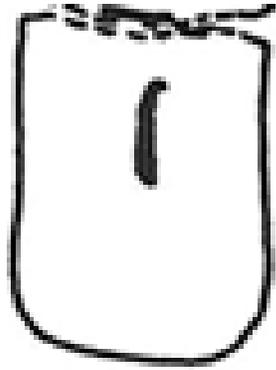
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