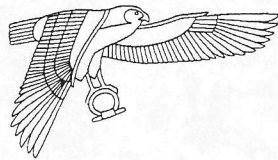


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## IN THE WOMB

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This article\* is an initial investigation into the way in which the ancient Egyptians defined their universe in sexual terms. It is a well-established fact that the creation of the orderly, Egyptian world from chaos may be construed as a sexual act through which one god created two gender differentiated deities, thus setting free the components for subsequent creative activity. These mechanisms have been presented elsewhere.<sup>1</sup> It has also been demonstrated that sexuality was the underlying force in funerary beliefs of the non-royal elite, and that through symbols and metaphors in text and images in their tomb chapels they declared their aspirations to be reborn through their own creative powers in order to achieve eternal life in the cosmos.<sup>2</sup> Similar ideas are absent from the walls of royal tombs where under normal circumstances the specific decoration is based on the various books of the underworld and representations of the deceased king among the gods, a different approach to cosmic eternity. Sexual concepts are, however, suggested in certain items of royal funerary equipment. References to the "mysterious space" of gestation are also apparent in certain cult objects (for which see below) and items of funerary equipment for non-royal individuals, but it is not generally known that the Egyptian artists actually devised a number of options for depicting the womb, unknown territory to all but an unborn infant.

In literature, the medical treatises supply words to designate 'womb' and 'vagina': *k3t* for the private parts in general, *šd* for the vulva, *idt* for the uterus,<sup>3</sup> the word *ht* used as a general designation for the location of the unborn child. Little mention seems to be made of the placenta.<sup>4</sup> It is, however, in the religious texts that we find the most imaginative vocabulary, although it will occasionally overlap with medical terminology,<sup>5</sup> and this is also the most illuminative context for information about the relevant components of the female anatomy, clinically defined as uterus, ovaries and vagina (hidden from view) and pudenda and placenta (in theory visible).

The occupier of this mysterious space, the foetus, is referred to as *hrd* 'child'. In the Papyrus Ebers an aborted foetus is called *wnw*, the same word being used in the Greco-Roman period to designate the solar child.<sup>6</sup> The metaphor of the womb or of 'being in the egg' was used in a configurative sense to describe the location where this solar infant, in itself the origin of all life, was created and nurtured.

### A womb for the sun

The birth of the sun and the circumstances surrounding this both primeval and daily ritual is a subject which the Egyptians revert to again and again in their hymns to the solar god. In order to grasp the logic in what happens, it is important to remember that the Egyptians believed that conception took place through any orifice, be it vagina, mouth, nose, or ears, and that conception occurs the moment the sperm makes contact with the womb. The *daily* birth of the sun, however, does not require daily conception through the agency of a sperm-producing being. It is visualised in a different way: the sky—in the form of a woman—swallows the sun every evening, and the disk passes through her body during the night to appear again from her womb in the morning at dawn.

This is represented in different contexts where a room for eternity is needed. In the temples, which depict the world in a nutshell, the ceiling is a picture of the sky, decorated with yellow stars on a blue background or, alternatively, with a representation of the sky goddess, bending at the hip and stretching her arms in order to occupy three of the four sides of the square space. The sun appears between the thighs of the goddess, spreading its rays over the temple and the rest of the world.

In the royal tombs, the ceiling of the burial chamber is the nocturnal sky, the red sun disc passing through the body of the goddess and being re-born as the solar child, the *hpr* scarab pushing the image of the disc in front of it. In stone sarcophagi the inside of the lid may have the decoration of the sky goddess seen *en face* with her arms outstretched. To the deceased in the coffin, she is the sky, arching herself over him forever, and as the sun is born from her body every day, so shall the deceased partake in the cosmic cycle.

It is common to both religious texts and images that the cosmic phenomenon has been set in a context which made sense to the Egyptians, and that they borrowed their pictorial language to describe the cosmos from their familiar world: conception, pregnancy and birth. The visual reference is thus naturally the woman's body. The sky is a woman, the uterus is the location of pregnancy, and the pudenda are the gateway to new life.

### The womb in isolation

Religious sources expand on the concept of the female body, and they go far beyond what the medical treatises have to offer.<sup>7</sup> On a grandiose scale, landscapes are interpreted in sexual terms; the Fayum oasis, for example, is seen as a uterus containing the life-giving fluid which originated from the primeval ocean. The entire Nile valley would be drawn into this concept; and

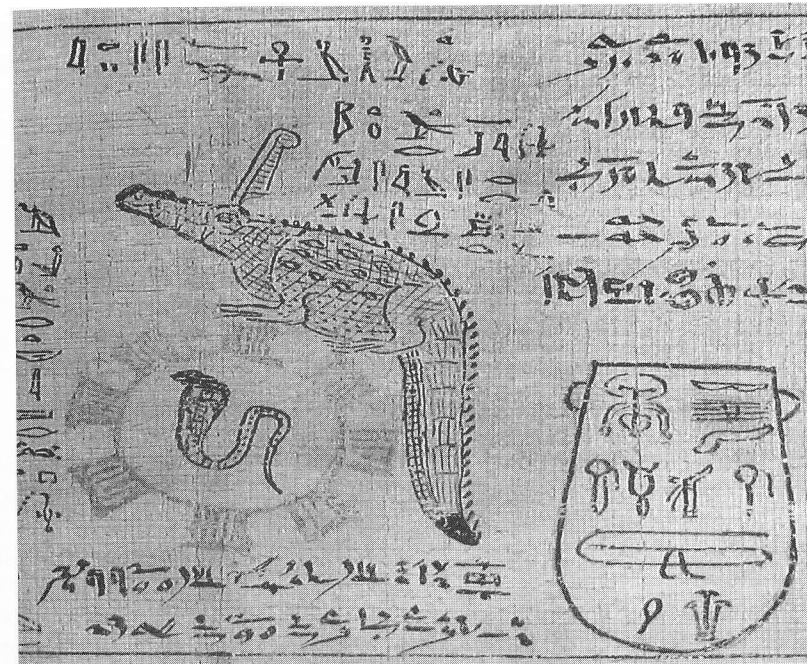


Plate 1. Papyrus Salt 825. Photo: author.



Plate 2. *Menat* in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Photo: author.

the cliffs alongside the Valley of the Queens are seen as the vagina of a cow, not just of any cow, but of the goddess Hathor.<sup>8</sup> The examples demonstrate that the uterus as a concept can be isolated from its context in nature in a cow, a goddess or a woman.

This is also the case when in a religious context the uterus is represented symbolically as a crocodile (whose own habitat is that of the primeval waters), or as a serpent, or even an octopus.<sup>9</sup> We also meet a new word for the womb: *šbt*, the original meaning of which is 'secret', 'mystery'—a very apt way of describing it. This is apparent in Papyrus Salt 825 in the British Museum, a treatise on the preservation of life.<sup>10</sup> In addition to representing the uterus as an animal, the Egyptians also saw it as a vessel (Plate 1).<sup>11</sup> The caption to the object runs as follows:

*šbt pw bwt=s pw m3=s swdt.n it n s3=fnn m3 nn sdm*  
This is a uterus whose *bwt* is that it be seen, that is, that which the father passed on to his son, without seeing without hearing

This suggests, or even proves, that the *šbt*, which clearly also designates the womb in other texts, is conceived of as a vessel, as the caption has now been demonstrated to refer to the jar.<sup>12</sup> A crocodile is lurking on the left. Here it is meant as an amulet, the manufacture of which is described in the main text of the papyrus. In the picture, the vessel 'uterus' contains a cryptic writing which can be read as a spell of protection for Osiris.<sup>13</sup> In the same papyrus there is a drawing of another vessel of a shape similar to the decoration of Osiris inside a ram's hide (probably meant to be an embryonic version). The word *šbt* may refer both to the egg and the uterus. This is also the case with another Demotic word *krht* or *klht*, which has survived in Coptic **ⲕⲁⲗⲁⲒⲬ**.<sup>14</sup>

### The *menat*

In a different context we have pictorial references to this secret place where a fetus is nurtured. This is the *menat*, an ornament shaped rather like a keyhole, which in theory fulfils the practical function of a counterpoise on a heavy beaded necklace (Plate 2), with the beads worn on the chest, the *menat* on the back. This is, however, almost incidental for the necklace is usually not worn around the neck, but carried in the hand<sup>15</sup> with the *menat* as the handle and the beads dangling and making a rattling noise when shaken. That this is intended is revealed by the fact that the *menat* occurs with the sistrum, a sacred rattle, which in addition to its acoustic properties also carries a potent Hathoric symbolism.

It is interesting to compare the shape of the *menat* with a drawing on a flake of limestone found in the Valley of the Kings (Plate 3). It refers to the life of the solar child just prior to its being born. The circle is the shape of the sun disc itself, but because of its position on the woman's body, it is relevant to see it as the uterus concealed inside her body. The *menat* now lends itself to a new interpretation: the circular part *is* the uterus.<sup>16</sup> For confirmation on this point we may consult another myth about the goddess Hathor, originally a cow goddess belonging in the celestial regions. According to this myth she took over the role of the mother of Horus. Literally the name Hathor means 'palace of Horus', a metaphor for the space where he grew up, in other words, the womb of his mother. A *menat* is often decorated with references to Hathor, having a picture of Hathor offering her breast to the not so tiny child, or—in the circular area—showing Horus, here in the form of a falcon in a papyrus thicket (as we also see him on the walls of mammisi), his original divine shape before he got involved in the Hathor myth.<sup>17</sup> Elsewhere we see a little child in the thicket. This is where he was concealed in order to be out of reach of those who had designs on his life. Both the drawing on the flake of limestone and the decoration on the *menat* position the child in the *circle*. The entire *menat* may therefore be interpreted as a woman's torso, focus being on the essential part of her anatomy: the uterus. The beads of the *menat* may then be seen as her copious wig.

In the Greco-Roman period, Hathor is 'mistress of the *menat*', but she is more, she is the *menat* itself. In the '*menat* chamber' in the crypt of her temple at Dendara, she is shown as a *menat* with the arms and head of Hathor. She carries the infant, here her son Ihy, and the sign of life.<sup>18</sup> A bronze *menat* of 18<sup>th</sup>-Dynasty date, found in Semna in Nubia, incorporates three aspects of her divine image: her head with cows' horns and solar disc; a full-length, similar depiction; and the celestial cow in a boat. A similar *menat* was found at el-Amarna suggesting perhaps that its basic symbolic significance had not been totally eradicated.<sup>19</sup> The *menat* seems to be absent in Amarna art, but it reappears in the decoration of the golden shrine of Tutankhamun.<sup>20</sup> In a three-dimensional representation we may see a woman of the elite clasping the *menat* to her bosom, strategically placed to remind us of the uterine symbolism.<sup>21</sup> In the circular section of the *menat* there may be the depiction of a fish, known from elsewhere to be a symbolic representation of one of the stages of a human being just prior to birth/re-birth.<sup>22</sup>

The part played by the *menat* as a symbol of fertility, an object which may help in the transformation from one form of existence to another, is beautifully summed up in a representation in the often visited tomb of Inherkhau at Deir el-Medina, where the counterpoise of the necklace is not a *menat*, but a scarab,

Plate 3. Ostrakon in the Egyptian Museum, Cairo:  
CG 25074. From: G. Daressy, *Ostraca*  
(Cairo, 1901) pl. XV.

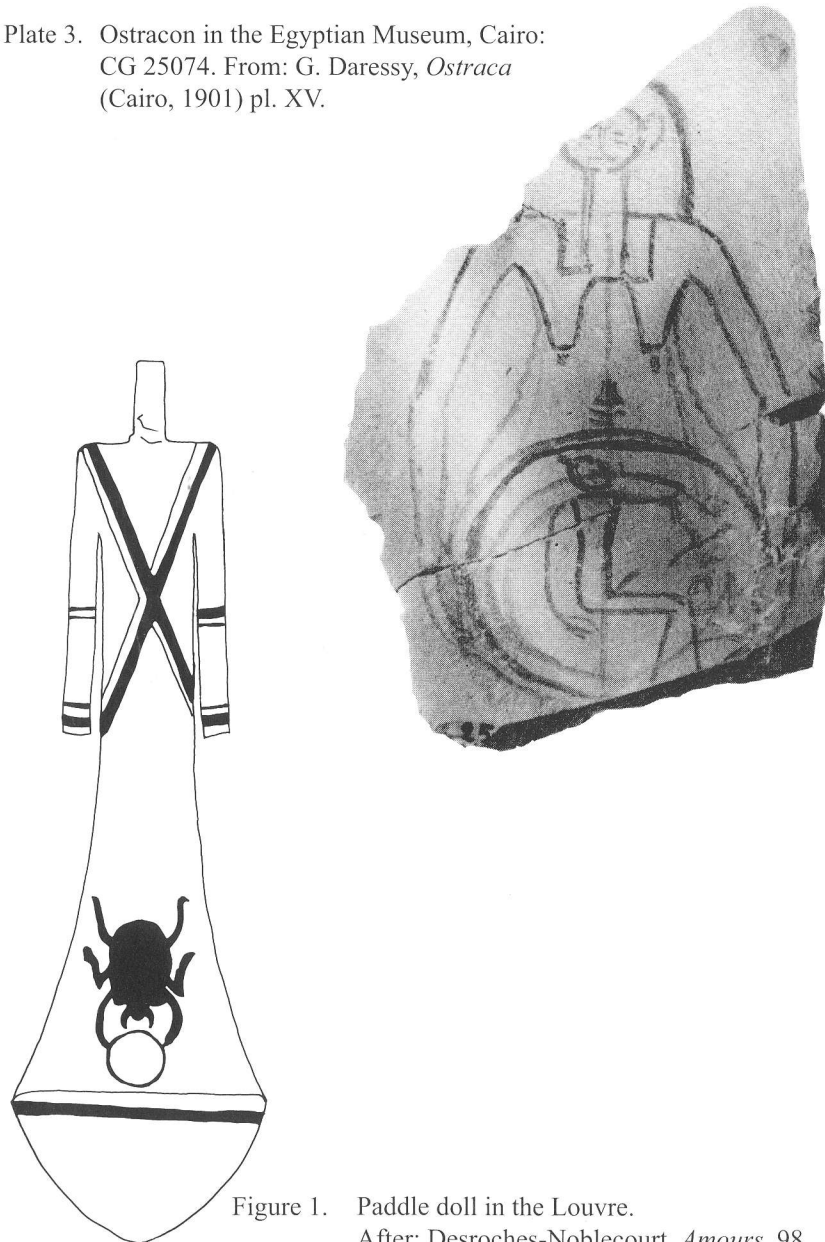


Figure 1. Paddle doll in the Louvre.  
After: Desroches-Noblecourt, *Amours*, 98.

the hieroglyphic sign for *hpr* 'form of, appearance, manifestation' and also 'to come into being'.<sup>23</sup> The *menat* has a part to play during the *sed* festival when by the rituals, the king was to be reborn to a new period of kingship.<sup>24</sup> We may even find a lotus flower (for which see also below) decorating the *menat* to remind us of what is to take place: the birth of the solar child. The triangular shape of the flower in the depiction may specifically refer to the pudenda.<sup>25</sup> When is replaced by a rosette, this may well be the lotus flower as seen from above.

The womb may well be an implied, but not shown setting in scenes that depict a goddess suckling a king. This would have to be the king 'in the egg', not during the first months or even years after birth. The moment of birth is near, but has not yet happened. It is probably significant to note in this context that the word for '(wet-)nurse' is *menat* (*mn<sup>c</sup>t*). It would be unlike the Egyptians not to make the connection.

#### Paddle dolls

The *menat* is not the only object which depicts a womb. Hundreds of figurines, previously called 'primitive' and 'toys' have been proven to be much more than that.<sup>26</sup> These are female figures, some 20 cm tall, carved out of a flat board of wood in a shape reminiscent of a paddle, hence their current name 'paddle dolls' (Figure 1). They usually have a small projection at the upper end to fit a head made of clay, now lost; but an abundance of hair in the form of clay or faience beads usually survives. The arms are stumps, and there are no legs; the lower part of the body is semi-circular. Around the 'hips' we may find a painted string of cowrie shells with, below, a triangle with its tip pointing downwards. This is obviously the pubic triangle. There may be geometric designs above. The breasts are indicated as two dots. All of these paddle dolls date to the Middle Kingdom, especially the 11<sup>th</sup> dynasty.<sup>27</sup>

One such paddle doll in the Louvre is slightly different, but very instructive.<sup>28</sup> Its basic shape is as described; but interestingly just above the belt is the motif of a scarab moving downwards. This can only be interpreted as a reference to the sunchild-to-be, being pushed by the beetle. Other paddle dolls may be decorated with figures of Bes or Taweret, both deities playing a part in conception and/or birth. In form and content these dolls are thus related to the *menat*, but their context and use differ. The dolls are no doubt votive gifts to the goddess from ordinary mortals, whereas the *menat* usually, though by no means exclusively, appears in the temple cult at a different level in the context of rituals. Both signify fertility by focussing on a representation of the uterus. On the basis of the contents of the circular shape in both the *menat* and the


paddle dolls, 'we must accept that this is in fact the foetus in the uterus of the goddess' (i.e. Hathor).<sup>29</sup>

### The child on the lotus flower

The relation between the lotus flower and the newborn sun as may be seen in the objects mentioned above is known from one version of a creation myth, where the deity is born from a lotus flower,<sup>30</sup> and also from depictions.<sup>31</sup> Birth and re-birth are two faces of the same coin, and we are now in the realm of funerary beliefs. In the Book of the Dead a vignette shows a head emerging from a lotus flower, revealing the aspirations of the owner of the book to achieve the miracle of re-birth. The funerary equipment of Tutankhamun includes an object, a wooden head, which exemplifies that this was equally relevant for a king. The items placed in this tomb come from a variety of sources. Some were made for other members of the royal family, or were not intended as tomb equipment in the first place. The coffins, the golden mask and other objects may have been based on the actual features of the young king (see recent forensic reconstructions shown on television). However the wooden head appearing from the lotus flower is related to the group of objects with similar facial features, and it is an unambiguous reference to the idea that the king was to be reborn in the same way as the solar child was born, not just once but every day for eternity.

At the very latest, this object would have been carved shortly after the Amarna Period. That the lotus flower was still thought of as the womb is suggested by a detail in the Tutankhamun head. It stands on a circular base, which is omitted in most illustrations of this object. But it is more than a support, it is a significant iconographic element: it is circular and greyish blue/green in colour. We know a greyish blue/green circle from another context, the placenta.

### The placenta

In the list of hieroglyphs used by Egyptologists today, there is a group of unidentified signs. It has been suggested that one of them, Gardiner Aa1 , represents a placenta.<sup>32</sup> When depicted in colour, it is often dark green with black, horizontal lines. The first known examples of 4th-Dynasty date (Meidum mastabas), however, consistently show it as yellow with black or red lines.<sup>33</sup> Usually colour conventions are very strict and have their origins in the Old Kingdom,<sup>34</sup> but there are examples of changes of colour within certain categories (dark green, dark blue and black, or red and yellow) for symbolic or other reasons. As the Egyptian palette is rather restricted, choices had to be made at an early stage to fit the infinite variety of nature's colours into this

scheme. In some instances we understand this choice, but for others we do not immediately see the reason. In the case of the hieroglyph discussed here, it is unusual to find such a radical change of colour, which may suggest that among the Egyptian scribes themselves there was some uncertainty as to what the sign actually depicted.

Today we know that the uterus is a red muscle; but being an internal organ, it would have been unknown to most Egyptians. The placenta, on the other hand, was visible. Its external face, affixed to the uterus, is red, whereas the inside, towards the foetus, is dark blue.<sup>35</sup> In the *menat* and paddle dolls, the uterus was rendered as a circle, and there would be a certain Egyptian logic in combining the circular shape with a dark blue or greenish colour, or possibly red. There may well be other less literal interpretations: dark blue and green being relating to black, the colour of the fertile Nile mud and hence of the colour re-birth. When used phonetically as the sign for *h*, the shape's origin may have been ignored.

It follows from these observations that the base of the Tutankhamun head may be a representation of a placenta, and that it was included in the design not just to form a base, but also as a reference to the source of the king's nourishment in the womb.

At the end of the Amarna Period, the hieroglyphic sign is once more red in colour. An inlay in the coffin from KV 55 is carved out of a piece of red chalcedony,<sup>36</sup> a very specific choice of colour and a material specially selected for the purpose.<sup>37</sup> The same seems to be the case on one of the coffins of Tutankhamun. It is tempting to see an affinity with the solar disc here, but as there can be no doubt about its phonetic value, it must be the sign for *h*.

The greyish blue colour is not generally used for depicting objects, though shades of colours do occur from time to time in Egyptian art. It is interesting that this colour occurs as background colour in some private tombs in the Old Kingdom as well as in royal tombs in the New Kingdom. The tomb is a way station between life and re-birth and is thus itself a kind of womb. This idea is further supported by the representations of the celestial goddesses Nut and Hathor decorating certain sarcophagi and ceilings. The womb-like interior<sup>38</sup> is emphasized by the use of this particular *placenta colour*.

In Greco-Roman times, when the use of the old hieroglyphs almost developed into an independent language (Ptolemaic), some signs came to be used in a different way. It is at this time that we find the circular hieroglyph used not as a phonetic sign but as an ideogram, being taken literally for what it represents.

It is employed in this sense followed by a hieroglyph showing a child as the determinative which defines the category to which the preceding word belongs. What could possibly be the meaning of this word? Nearly a hundred years ago, A.W. Blackman had taken an interest in anthropology and studied manners and customs of contemporary tribes in Uganda, which are of the same Hamitic origin as the Egyptians.<sup>39</sup> He was intrigued by their rites and traditions concerning the placenta and its intimate connection with a person's self. He suggested a parallel here for ancient Egypt, where the circle and the child could be just that: an aspect of someone's personality (and we know that the Egyptians had a vivid imagination in this area). At Meir, where Blackman was working at that time, he found a similar writing in much older, 6th-Dynasty tombs, used in the tomb-owner's title which was 'priest for the two *hw* of Horus', Horus being of course the king.<sup>40</sup> Rather than accepting this as the 'two personalities of the king', which he found an unlikely idea, he made a comparison with the people of Uganda who preserved not only the placenta, but also the umbilical cord which was considered a 'second placenta'.<sup>41</sup> The title could thus be 'priest of the two placentae of the king'. The translation 'placenta' was taken up some fifty years after Blackman by P. Barget, who had arrived at this result through a different channel. He suggests an affinity between the placentae and the royal names, which were an integral part of a person's personality.<sup>42</sup>

### The cartouche-shaped container

This brings us to another interesting little object: the double cartouche-shaped container from the tomb of Tutankhamun.<sup>43</sup> On each side it contains two cartouches with one of the king's names, Neb-kheperu-ra. Instead of writing the *hpr* (kheper) as usual with the scarab, it is written with a human figure. In the two cartouches on one side of the double vessel, this figure is a little child; on the other side, both figures are adults one of whom has a black face. These are the four manifestations, or hypostases, of a person's life cycle: birth, adulthood, death and re-birth. The black head again signifies the stage between life and re-birth, and it is not just a piece of reject glass, it was specifically manufactured for the purpose. The king's name *Nb-hprw-R* means "lord of manifestations is Ra", a name construed for the king at his accession to the throne, signifying that it is Ra who is the master of the king's life cycle. The word *hpr* is also the designation for the newly born sun god.

This is a small vessel, just 16 cm tall, and it is usually referred to as a perfume container. It was discovered under the bed supporting the golden coffins, and it was thus very close to the king's body. This could be a coincidence. Or else, someone in charge of the burial placed it at this exact spot because they

realised its significance. But what did it contain? A scented substance, which would suit its small size and whose properties would play a part in sending the king to destination of eternal life? We have to consider the presence of the name. The crucial significance of the name in Egypt is well demonstrated above the entrance doorway of the temple of Ramesses II at Abu Simbel, where the king gives presents his own name, in fact himself, to Ra-Harakhty.<sup>44</sup> *Wsr-M3t-R* means "The *maat* of Ra is strong", and it is this *maat* (equilibrium) which the king offers to the god hoping to receive it in return in even greater measure to enable him to fulfil his royal destiny and maintain equilibrium on earth. The king gives the most precious commodity he has, himself. The content of the jar of Tutankhamun must therefore have been very special, something representing his own self. We have little information as to what happened to the placenta at /after birth. Maybe it was just thrown away, but in theory we may imagine that, as a visible sign of the uterus and the habitat where the foetus had spent its early months, it was could have been embalmed and placed in a vessel. In a non-royal context at Deir el-Medina, placentae wrapped in linen appear to have been found in excavations of burials of infants and neonates.<sup>45</sup> In royal circles, it was perhaps placed in a container such as this one.

If we pursue this thought for a moment, it takes us into the Amarna period when Tutankhamun was born. The immediate problem is that Tutankhamun was not king at the time of his birth, and there would be no evident connection between the placenta from his own birth and a vessel which would only have been decorated some 7–8 years later at the earliest, when he ascended the throne, unless of course it was kept elsewhere in the meantime.

Another possibility is to see the vessel as an object that was part of a funerary ritual which is not known elsewhere, partly because the tomb of Tutankhamun is unique, partly because it may be a detail which had its origin in the departure from normal funerary beliefs which appear in the Amarna Period (see below).<sup>46</sup> Perhaps a placenta and umbilical cord which were not the king's own had been laid in the cartouche-shaped vessel as part of the funerary rites. We would probably find an answer if we could obtain an analysis of the contents. This is not possible at present. We only know that it contained 'a brownish substance'.<sup>47</sup> The decoration of the vessel refers unambiguously to the king's *hprw*, his manifestations, by depicting them as different little hieroglyphs. This is unique and may have been done in order to adapt the exterior to the contents. Whether it actually contained an embalmed placenta and umbilical cord we do not know, but it may well have played a part as if it did.

C. Desroches Noblecourt has also argued for the existence of two placentae in funerary rites, but with no reference to this little jar. She relates them to an ancient burial rite in the Delta city of Buto where the deceased receives his two souls, one belonging to his former life on earth (Osiris) and the second to his eternal life (Ra).<sup>48</sup> These 'souls' are related to embryonic existence and to two placentae, one of which is the 'non manifest shape of the king'. There may be further items of royal funerary equipment which could prove relevant in this context.<sup>49</sup>

### Foetuses

Let us focus for a moment on the unborn child, the foetus encapsulated in the uterus, taking its nourishment from the placenta. This stage is relevant not only for the continuation of the species but also, in Egyptian thinking, for the continuation of the life of the individual beyond the moment when they draw their last breath and a ritual takes over. It is at this stage that the individual is black, the colour of fertile soil where the seed germinates and prepares to become a new plant. The Egyptians had various symbolic ways of describing and depicting this state, but it is also shown in a more immediate form in the form of a foetus, or something representing a foetus, as burial equipment. Again the tomb of Tutankhamun supplies the evidence. Two mummified foetuses were found here, placed in two mummiform coffins, covered with bitumen and golden bands with hieroglyphs referring to 'Osiris', and carefully sealed with linen straps and the seal of the necropolis.<sup>50</sup> The smaller foetus had a miniature mask. The second one did not, but as early as in 1907–08, Howard Carter had found a comparable mask among embalming material outside the tomb. Carter took these to be the still-born offspring of the king. More recent x-rays suggest that they were about 7–8 months old *in utero*. The coffins were placed in a vertical position in a wooden box. If the missing mask is the one found outside the tomb, this may suggest that the two little coffins and their contents were associated with the burial of the king and hence were not necessarily the offspring of Tutankhamun. In other words, this could be visual proof of a burial rite involving one or more foetuses, and perhaps the parallel for a rite concerning a placenta.<sup>51</sup>

### A burial rite at el-Amarna?

It has recently been suggested that a placenta may have played a part at the burial of members of the royal family at el-Amarna. J.R. Harris attempts to grasp the significance of part of the royal tomb decoration at el-Amarna, where three separate (*sic!*) scenes each feature an unidentified infant.<sup>52</sup> For a number of reasons it is difficult to accept an interpretation of these scenes as referring

to the death in childbirth of three princesses, and Harris comes to the conclusion that the figure of the child may be re-birth personified. Those in charge of the burial rites at the court of Akhenaten might have been forced to re-think the traditional ceremony and perhaps chose to represent the last manifestation of the deceased as a newborn child. In order to provide a pictorial framework for this idea, they spun a tale of lit-de-parade, mourning relatives and other anonymous participants. In view of the evidence provided, among other items by the decoration of the cartouche-shaped container mentioned above, the idea is put forward that the infant represents one of the *hprw* of the deceased, the 'nurse' being either the equivalent of figures seen in theogamy scenes or of the golden goddesses included in the burial equipment of Tutankhamun. What happened at the actual burial remains uncertain, but it is possible that a child, or an image of a child, or some other object related to birth, such as the placenta, was present for the purpose of confirming the act of re-birth.<sup>53</sup> If the scenes do not correspond to actual burial rites, then they are purely symbolic.

Any discussion of representations of the uterus and placenta must also consider two ritual objects of similar shape and context: the so-called Khons standard and the *tekenu*. These will be taken up at a later stage.

\* This article is based on a lecture presented at Macquarie University in August 2006. The on-going research is funded by the Carlsberg Foundation in Copenhagen

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, L.H. Lesko, "Ancient Egyptian cosmogonies and cosmology" in: B.E. Shafer (ed.), *Religion in Ancient Egypt* (Ithaca and London, 1991); S. Sauneron / J. Yoyotte, *La naissance du monde selon l'Égypte ancienne*, Sources Orientales 1 (Paris, 1959).

<sup>2</sup> For a summary see L. Manniche, "The so-called scenes of daily life in the private tombs of the Eighteenth dynasty: an overview" in: N. Strudwick / J.H. Taylor (eds), *The Theban Necropolis. Past, Present and Future* (London, 2003), 42–45.

<sup>3</sup> H. von Deines / W. Westendorf, *Wörterbuch der medizinischen Texte* (Berlin, 1961–62), VII.2, 894–95, 873 and 597–600 (*idt* here read as *hmt*). The unusual designation *mwt n rmt* (*Wörterbuch* VII.1, 364) is here taken to mean "uterus", but see n. 4.

<sup>4</sup> The unusual designation *mwt n rmt* (*Wörterbuch* VII.1, 364) is translated "placenta" by von Deines and Westendorf (p. 364); likewise most recently by J.H. Walker, *Studies in Ancient Egyptian Anatomical Terminology*, Australian Centre for Egyptology: Studies 4, (Warminster, 1997), 269.

<sup>5</sup> As in the case of Horus being in the *idt* (belly) of his mother.



- 6 Papyrus Ebers 206 (cp. *WB* I, 515.11–12 and v. Deines / Grapow, *Wörterbuch* VII.1, 185).
- 7 B.H. Stricker, *De Geboorte van Horus I*, Mededelingen en Verhandelingen van het Voorzatisch-Egyptisch Genootschap, Ex Oriente Lux 14 (Leiden, 1963), 36–60 on the sexual organs of the woman.
- 8 Chr. Desroches-Noblecourt, "Le message de la grotte sacrée" in: *Les dossiers d'archéologie* 149–150 (May–June 1990), 4–21.
- 9 Stricker, *De Geboorte van Horus I*, 39ff.
- 10 P. Derchain, *Le Papyrus Salt 825 (B.M. 10051). Rituel pour la conservation de la vie en Égypte*, Académie royale de Belgique, Classe des Lettres et des Sciences Morales et Politiques, Mémoires 58 (Brussels, 1965) II, pl. IX and I, 145, pl. IX. I am indebted to Richard Parkinson of the British Museum for showing me the papyrus and allowing me to photograph it.
- 11 Stricker, *De Geboorte van Horus I*, 456 (cf. I, p. 50) was the first to understand the significance of this jar.
- 12 P.J. Frandsen (forthcoming) "Menstrual taboo in Ancient Egypt" in: *Journal of Near-Eastern Studies*.
- 13 R. Parkinson, *Cracking Codes. The Rosetta Stone and Decipherment* (London, 1999), 86–87.
- 14 S. Sauneron, "Copte **ⲕⲁⲗⲁⲒⲞ**", in: *Mélanges Maspero I*, *Orient ancien* 4, MIFAO 66 (Cairo, 1961), 113–120, esp. 116.
- 15 As a significant detail in the iconography of Khons, the *menat* is worn around the god's neck. This may occasionally be seen in other deities. *Menats* are also displayed with *sistra* in the wall-decoration of *mammisi* (types of buildings attached to Late Period to Roman period temples where rituals of the marriage of the goddesses and the birth of the god-child were performed).
- 16 Originally P. Barguet, "L'origine de la signification du contrepoids de collier-menat" in: *Bulletin de l'Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale* 52 (1953), 103–111.
- 17 C. Desroches-Noblecourt, *Amours et fureurs de La Lointaine* (Paris, 1995), ch. IV, esp. 100–109.
- 18 Barguet, in: *BIFAO* 52, 107; illustration: Desroches-Noblecourt, *Amours*, fig. p. 105; photograph: E. Chassinat, *Le temple de Dendara*, V.2 (Cairo, 1952), pl. 125.
- 19 H. Frankfort / J.D.S. Pendlebury, *City of Akhenaten II* (London, 1933), pl. XXXVI.3.
- 20 M. Eaton-Krauss / E. Graefe, *The Small Golden Shrine from the Tomb of Tutankhamun* (Oxford, 1985), pl. XVI.
- 21 For example the statue of Meryt in the Rijksmuseum van Oudheden in Leiden.
- 22 C. Desroches-Noblecourt, "Poissons, tabous et transformations du mort" in: *Kêmi* 13 (1954), 33–42.

- 23 Line-drawing in Desroches-Noblecourt, *Amours*, 103.
- 24 For example in the Theban tomb of Kheruef (TT 192), depicting the jubilee of Amenhotep III. The *msw nsw* carry *sistra* and *menat* during the rite of erecting the *dd*-pillar: The Epigraphic Survey, *The Tomb of Kheruef: Theban Tomb 192* (Chicago, 1980), pl. 57.
- 25 Barguet, in: *BIFAO* 52, 104.
- 26 Barguet, in: *BIFAO* 52, 113; cp. G. Pinch, *Votive Offerings to Hathor* (Oxford, 1993), 279; Desroches-Noblecourt, *Amours*, 105 seconded by C. Cannuyer "Aton, nourrice dans le sein, succédané des maîtresses de la ménat" in: *Göttinger Miszellen* 157 (1997), 11–14.
- 27 Thirty-three such paddle dolls found at Deir el-Bahari are in the Metropolitan Museum of Art: W.C. Hayes, *The Scepter of Egypt I*, (New York, 1953), 219. For a presentation of the material see D. Spanel in: A.K. Capel / G.E. Markoe (eds) *Mistress of the House, Mistress of Heaven* (New York, 1996), 65.
- 28 Desroches-Noblecourt, *Amours*, fig. p. 198.
- 29 Desroches-Noblecourt, *Amours*, 49.
- 30 Sauneron / Yoyotte, *Naissance du monde*, 58–59.
- 31 H. Schlögl, *Der Sonnengott auf der Blüte*, *Aegyptiaca Helvetica* V (Basel, 1979).
- 32 K. Sethe in: L. Borchardt, *Das Grabdenkmal des Königs Sahu-re II*, (Leipzig, 1913), 77; accepted and discussed further by A.M. Blackman, "The Pharaoh's placenta and the moon-god Khons" in: *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 3 (1916), 235–249.
- 33 W.M.F. Petrie, *Medum* (London, 1892), colour plates passim.
- 34 C. Ransom Williams, *The Decoration of the Tomb of Per-neb* (New York, 1932), 38 n. 2: the author wonders why the colour of this hieroglyph has not yet been investigated. In the tomb of Perneb it appears to be green.
- 35 For colour photographs one may consult <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Placenta> (accessed September 2006).
- 36 A. Grimm / S. Schoske (eds), *Das Geheimnis des goldenen Sarges. Echnaton und das Ende der Amarnazeit* (Munich, 2001), 100 ('Chalzedone') and illustrations pp. 104–107.
- 37 On the significance of the colour of inlays, see L. Manniche "Body colours of gods and men in jewellery and related objects from the tomb of Tutankhamun" in: *Acta Orientalia* 43 (1982), 5–12.
- 38 See also Frandsen, (forthcoming) in: *Journal of Near-Eastern Studies*, with numerous references in n. 62.
- 39 A.M. Blackman, "Some remarks on an emblem upon the head of an ancient Egyptian birth-goddess" in: *JEA* 3 (1916), 199–206, esp. 205.
- 40 Blackman, in: *JEA* 3 (1916), 243–249.

- 41 See also G. Pinch, *Magic in Ancient Egypt* (London, 1994), 130.
- 42 P. Barguet, "Un groupe d'enseignes en rapport avec les noms du roi" in: *Revue d'égyptologie* 8 (1951), 9–19 (the relation between the Khons-standard and the *nbtj*-name of the king), 18 (a re-evaluation of the suggestion of the standard being on the one hand related to the living *ka* of the king (*k3 nswt*) and on the other to the royal placenta (*h nswt*, 'la forme non manifesté du roi').
- 43 Cairo Museum JE 61496 (Carter 240bis); *Treasures of Tutankhamun* (exhibition catalogue from various cities in the USA 1976), no. 19, 127–128.
- 44 P.J. Frandsen, "Trade and cult" in: *Boreas* 20 (1989), 95–109.
- 45 B. Bruyère, *Fouilles à Deir el-Médineh (1934-1935)* (Cairo, 1937), 12: 'enfant mort-né, foetus ou sac amniotique'. W.R. Dawson / P.H.K. Gray, *Catalogue of Egyptian Antiquities in the British Museum. I. Mummies and Human Remains* (London, 1968), 8 (no. 16), n. 6: presence of a placenta in a bag placed on the head of a (male) mummy. The mummy EA 30720 has now been CT scanned and the 'placenta' turned out to be a clay bowl. The two other cases, mentioned in the footnote, remain unidentified. (I am indebted to J.H. Taylor of the British Museum for this information.)
- 46 The suggestion of alternative contents of the cartouche-shaped container was first mentioned in passing by J.R. Harris during a conversation many years ago.
- 47 *Treasures of Tutankhamun*, cat. no. 19, p. 127.
- 48 Desroches-Noblecourt, in: *Kēmi* 13 (1954), 33–42, esp. 37: 'un embryon incapable de se mouvoir par lui-même'; C. Desroches-Noblecourt, *Tutankhamen. Life and Death of a Pharaoh* (London, 1963), 253 and figs. 161–162; N. Reeves, *The Complete Tutankhamun*, London, 123–125
- 49 Compare the two objects found in the tomb of King Horemheb in the shape of a so-called Khons-standard: Th. Davis, *The Tombs of Harmhabi and Toutankhaman*, (London, 1912 / reprint 2001) nos. 26–27 on p. 105 (see also the concluding remarks of this article).
- 50 H. Carter, *The Tomb of Tut-ankh-Amen*, III (London 1923 / New York, 1963), 88, 167–169, pls. 26 (coffins) and 51 (foetuses).
- 51 Desroches-Noblecourt, *Tutankhamen*, 253. One may also recall the foetus now displayed in the tomb of Amunherkhepeshef in the Valley of the Queens, originating from a burial at the mouth of the valley; the case of 'Maakara's baby' from the 21<sup>st</sup> dynasty; and the recently discovered infant coffin found in KV 63.
- 52 J.R. Harris, "En sag om forveksling" in: *Papyrus* 2004/02, 4–13.
- 53 A connection with a funerary ceremony was briefly suggested, but considered 'improbable' by M. Gabolde, *D'Akhenaton à Toutankhamon* (Paris, 1998), 120.

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