INTERDISCIPLINARY EGYPTOLOGY

Summary Article

Introduction: Egyptology in dialogue

Historical bodies in relations, comparisons, and negotiations

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Abstract

Though scholarship broadly acknowledges that understandings of the body are historically situated, such an idea has not yet been appraised in a sustained manner by Egyptology. By drawing on recent archaeological and anthropological theory, this volume recognizes that every society understands the human body in its own way, that the body not only has a history and a culture-specific logic but also that it is relationally contingent. Relations are imperative, be they those foreground relations that are explicitly described in the records between people, bodies of different kinds, and entities inside or outside bodies, or those more diffuse past, present, and future background relations to other bodies, situated contexts, taken-for-granted assumptions and categorisations. Comparisons and negotiations place further emphasis on these relational encounters, between what can be described as spatially and temporally fractal positions, perspectives, and records. Through these concepts, this special issue includes conversations that extend well beyond the discipline, enabling us to engage with Egypt's rich archaeological record with new methodological awareness. The concern of the different chapters is to question and unsettle what we think we know to create the conditions under which one can see things that one would not otherwise have been able to see. This includes both critique of dominant paradigms and positive formulations of alternatives that further our knowledge about bodies in ancient Egypt but also force us to reflect critically on current assumptions and categorisations.

Keywords: dialogue as method, historical bodies, body worlds, relations, comparisons, negotiations

لمقدمة: علم المصريات في سياق حوارات تاريخية: أنماط من المقارنات والتفاعلات التفاوضية

الملخص

على الرغم من الاعتراف العام في الدراسات الأكاديمية بأن فهم الجسد يرتبط بالسياقات التاريخية، إلا أن هذا المفهوم لم يُتناول بعمق واستدامة في مجال علم المصريات حتى الآن. من خلال الاستفادة من النظريات الأثرية والأنثروبولوجية الحديثة، يقر هذا العدد بأن كل مجتمع يمتلك تصوراته الخاصة عن الجسد البشري، حيث لا يقتصر الأمر على أن للجسد تاريخًا ومنطقًا ثقافيًا مميزًا، بل إنه يتشكل أيضًا من خلال العلاقات المتبادلة. هذه العلاقات أساسية، سواء كانت مباشرة وواضحة في السجلات التاريخية بين الأشخاص، أو بين الأجساد والكيانات داخلها وخارجها، أو ضمن الروابط غير المباشرة التي تربط الماضي بالحاضر والمستقبل، والسياقات المحيطة، والمسلمات والتصنيفات. تُضفي المقارنات والمفاوضات بُعدًا إضافيًا على هذه العلاقات التفاعلية، مع التركيز على التداخل بين المواقف، المنظورات، والسجلات التي تمتد عبر المكان والزمان. وبالاعتماد على هذه الإطارات المفاهيمية، يهدف هذا العدد الخاص إلى تجاوز حدود التخصصات الأكاديمية التقليدية، مما يتيح التفاعل مع السجل الأثري الغني لمصر بوعي منهجي متجدد. تركز الفصول المختلفة على مراجعة

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وتحدي ما نعتقد أننا نعرفه، بهدف خلق ظروف جديدة تكشف عن رؤى لم تكن ممكنة من قبل. يتضمن ذلك نقد النماذج التقليدية وتطوير بدائل إيجابية، تُثري معرفتنا بمصر القديمة، وتدفعنا إلى التفكير النقدي في الافتراضات والتصنيفات الحالية.

الكلمات الدالة الحوار كأسلوب، الهيئات التاريخية، عوالم الجسد، علاقات، مقارنات

1 The context of this volume

This volume brings together an international team of scholars in a collaborative effort to investigate historical bodies in relations, comparisons, and negotiations and in so doing to engage in dialogue beyond disciplinary boundaries. The authors have been asked to explore four specific concepts: John Robb and Oliver Harris' body worlds (ROBB & HARRIS, 2013; HARRIS & ROBB, 2012), Marilyn Strathern's relations (STRATHERN, 2004; STRATHERN, 2014; STRATHERN, 2018; STRATHERN, 2020), Matei Candea's comparisons (CANDEA, 2016; CANDEA, 2018; CANDEA, 2019), and Marie Sørensen's negotiations (SØRENSEN, 2000; SØRENSEN, 2007), to ascertain whether they can be useful tools for thinking through patterns (similarity) as well as change and variation (difference) in the ancient Egyptian cultural output as pertains to human and other bodies. The volume thus draws on theoretical paradigms developed within anthropology and archaeology to gain more holistic perspectives on conceptualisations of the human body in ancient Egyptian contexts.

In many ways, it provides something of a follow-up to HOWLEY and NYORD (2018), which sought an encounter between Egyptology and anthropology, as well as other, earlier works seeking to do the same (e.g. LUSTIG, 1997). Where this volume differs is that it engages in explicit dialogue beyond disciplinary boundaries through the encounter between four concepts and a single, quite specific case study—the idea of 'historical bodies' in ancient Egypt.

This volume includes contributions originally presented at a two-day workshop at the Michael C. Carlos Museum, Emory University, in November 2022. The call for this conference encouraged theoretical input from other disciplines and methodological awareness when engaging with the rich archaeological, visual, and textual record of ancient Egypt. Participants were asked to orient their papers towards the larger dialogue, towards method- and/or theory-focused issues of interest to scholars beyond Egyptology. We welcomed syntheses that critically assessed and integrated research on the body, as well as examinations of the history, and explorations of the interdisciplinary potential of this specific area of research. The conference sought the multi-layered processes by which patterns, change, and variation are developed and potentially contested, both within the past and in relation to the present. It was hoped that the concepts—body worlds, relations, comparisons, and negotiations—would stimulate a conversation that extended well beyond the discipline. This being said, instead of being concerned with ready-made models, with social constructions (culture) as opposed to a biological baseline (nature), the concern of the workshop was to question and unsettle what we think we know and seek to create 'the conditions under which one can "see" things … that one would not otherwise have been able to see' (HOLBRAAD & PEDERSEN, 2017: 4).

The contributors to the workshop (Figure 1) included scholars working not only in Egyptological institutional contexts but also in other disciplines, including art history, linguistics, archaeology, anthropology, culture, and gender studies. More importantly, although most of the contributors would probably define themselves as Egyptologists, their theoretical and substantive interests also reach beyond and, in fact, blur, disciplinary boundaries.

Fig. 1: Workshop participants in front of the Egyptian galleries at the Michael C. Carlos Museum (affiliations reflect the time of the photograph). Left side, from the front: Reinert Skumsnes (University of Oslo/Emory University), Willeke Wendrich (UC Los Angeles), Margaret Maitland (National Museums Scotland), Rune Nyord (Emory University), Edward Scrivens (Egypt Exploration Society), Jordan Miller (University of Oxford), Leah Neiman (Brown University), David Wheeler (UC Berkeley), and Richard Bussmann (University of Cologne). Right side, from the front: Leire Olabarria (University of Birmingham), Camilla Di Biase-Dyson (Macquarie University), Emily Whitehead (Emory University), Matei Candea (Cambridge University), Kathryn Howley (New York University), Thais Rocha da Silva (University of Sao Paolo/University of Oxford), and Oliver Harris (Leicester University). Dina Serova (Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin) participated online and is therefore not present in the image. Photo by Linnea Wicklund, courtesy of Reinert Skumsnes.

The two keynote lectures were devised to facilitate interdisciplinary contact and develop the workshop's themes from the perspective of theoretical archaeology and anthropology. Archaeologist Oliver Harris' talk was titled ' "Nobody knows what a body can do": on difference, relations, and body worlds'. In their volume *The Body in History*, ROBB and HARRIS (2013) developed the notion of 'body worlds' to explore how particular corporeal regimes emerge in specific historical contexts. From the hunter-gatherers of the Palaeolithic through to medical workers today, different body worlds emerge in the intersection of architecture, technologies, practices, and beliefs. In his lecture, Harris reflected on the concept of the 'body world' and its usefulness, and explored how the idea of the body world changes once we stop thinking of difference (between bodies, between periods) as negative and instead approach that difference as a positive and creative force. Here the broader relational notion of the body world encountered the differential philosophy of Gilles Deleuze, before returning to one of Deleuze's, and his inspiration Baruch Spinoza's, key questions: what can a body do? This question was explored through a number of empirical snapshots of different bodies in differing body worlds.

Anthropologist Matei Candea's talk was titled 'Comparing bodies of knowledge: units, intensities and disciplines'. This paper reprised some of the enduring ways in which the necessity and impossibility of a 'comparative method' has haunted anthropology, and asked how these intra-disciplinary conundrums might feed into an inter-disciplinary conversation with Egyptology. Candea focused on the dreaded 'problem of units' (what constitutes an interesting, workable, or legitimate unit of comparison?), and suggested some of the ways the problem might be turned on its head, once we accept that comparison is not merely a solitary intellectual endeavour but actually an immanent, worldly, and relational practice. Whilst this insight can be applied to the comparative investigation of bodies, it can also be brought to bear on the comparative investigation of disciplinary knowledges. Revisiting recent explorations of the relationship between Egyptology and anthropology and their differing relations to theory, the paper asked in closing what might happen if anthropology were seen not as a donor, but as a recipient, of theoretical insight in that relationship—how, in other words, might anthropological comparison be enriched by Egyptological concepts?

The papers of all other discussants were arranged around the ideas developed by the keynotes, and connections between the papers were further developed via round-table discussions dedicated to the four key concepts of body worlds, relations, comparisons, and negotiations. The dialogue from the workshop continues in this volume, with interconnections between the different contributions developed by commentaries offered by the keynote speakers, Harris and Candea. The phrase 'in dialogue' in the title of this volume is here intended to draw attention to the collective practices of knowledge production, including the many partial connections behind these practices, between different national traditions, research programmes, thematic and regional specialisms, within and beyond disciplinary boundaries.

2 The aim of this volume: dialogue as method

This volume uses the case study of 'bodies in history', specifically, bodies in ancient Egyptian contexts, to explore the untapped explanatory value of dialogue with concepts that transcend disciplinary boundaries. The choice of the case study of 'bodies', specifically, historical bodies, is grounded in the necessity to engage with two key elements. The first element—historical—recognises the body's potential for difference, whilst the second element—the plural form bodies—reveals our primary focus on how bodies and bodily differences in the ancient Egyptian material context emerge through mutually determining relations. The body is central to how we conduct our lives, including how we use, live through, think, and talk about our bodies, as well as how we 'project our hopes and fears about the future on the body' (ROBB & HARRIS, 2013: 2).

Each contribution thus engages with one or more of the following questions:

- How did the ancient Egyptians perceive/conceptualise the body?
- How did the ancient Egyptians perceive/conceptualise bodily difference?

- What are the key affective environments to past and present perceptions/conceptions of the body and bodily difference in ancient Egypt?
- Are the records in unison, or are there contradictions?
- To what extent can the concepts body worlds, relations, comparisons, and negotiations be useful as heuristic tools for the study of bodies, historically situated in ancient Egypt?

The prevailing idea is that these questions can best be answered in dialogue with frameworks that transcend disciplinary boundaries. Though this statement may no longer be avant-garde, a review of the discourse demonstrates how uneasy the relationship between the discipline of Egyptology and (especially theory-building) ideas developed in other fields has traditionally been. This might come as a surprise to many outside the field, since on the one hand, as an area study defined by its focus on a particular time and place in human history, it stands to reason that Egyptology would need to draw on the expertise of other disciplinary traditions to understand phenomena like religion, economy, etc. On the other hand, however, theory-driven interdisciplinarity has been regarded with a certain skepticism within Egyptology. This might be due to a combination of the 19th-century empiricism that is still very much part of the discipline's ethos and a general skepticism towards frameworks that have often been developed based on much more recent source material. This inherited tension has begun to diminish over recent decades—as indicated also by the launching of the present journal in 2021.

However, significant challenges remain in this area. Firstly, there has been a tendency to think of 'theory' as something necessarily coming from outside of Egyptology in line with the self-understanding of the discipline as strongly empirical and fundamentally bottom-up. This means that the significant number of theories developed within the field have not only tended to avoid reflection as seemingly derived directly from the extant sources, but they have also ended up being incommensurable with theoretical ideas about the same topics developed outside of Egyptology. Secondly, while theoretical frameworks from other disciplines have increasingly been shown to hold relevance for Egyptological concerns, this has tended to be a one-way street: While frequently mentioned, the potential of ancient Egyptian data to inform broader interdisciplinary theorisation has only been very sporadically realised (eg. NYORD, forthcoming). The design of the workshop and this special issue aims explicitly at taking a step towards overcoming these two obstacles via engaging in interdisciplinary dialogue.

The intention of this volume is not to provide theories simply to be applied in a top-down manner. On the contrary, we posit that theory should either function as a disruptive and critical tool that incites reflexivity and challenges assumptions and established paradigms, or as a sort of hypothesis, ultimately to be confirmed or rejected by the research. To this end, the concepts body worlds, relations, comparisons, and negotiations are intended as heuristic tools (HENARE et al., 2007; VIVEIROS DE CASTRO, 2016; HOLBRAAD & PEDERSEN, 2017), concerned with the in-between (and often taken-for-granted), with how conceptions of bodies and bodily difference emerge and become. Thinking with these concepts is a question of method, compelling us to reflect critically on what we know, how we know it, what makes it possible, and what interests it may serve. Specifically, while body worlds draw attention to processes of causation, scale, and change, to the constant (dis)assembling of fragments (HARRIS, 2021: 111–154), comparisons and negotiations are concerned with considerations of differences and similarities between entities, and the interaction between entities and how they affect one another, respectively. Body worlds, comparisons, and negotiations can all be argued to denote specific kinds of relations rather than being hierarchically on a par with relations (STRATHERN, 2020: 19, 45–68). Relations can, in fact, be imagined as an overarching concept, in some way encompassing all the above concepts.

Through these concepts, we recognise that it is impossible to encounter archaeological remains from some sort of objective, apolitical, and atheoretical standpoint. As pointed out by HARRIS (2021: 3–4), 'we are always already caught up in the process of interpreting what we find, from before the first scrape of the

trowel'. By inviting influential current thinkers in archaeological and anthropological theory to be part of the discussion, we are aiming to encourage a two-way conversation between Egyptology and larger, more strongly theorised fields interested in bodies in history and culture.

3 Concepts that facilitate dialogue

Thinking (and engaging in dialogue) with the concepts body worlds, relations, comparisons, and negotiations has compelled the contributors to reflect on how these approaches facilitate dialogue within and beyond Egyptology. By exploring bodies in their temporal, spatial, and relational contexts and by interrogating the frameworks under which they have been studied in their own contexts, the volume traverses territory on a number of different analytical levels, at once historical and historiographical. The special issue starts with case studies tied to bodies, bodily differences and their respective interpretive potential (Harris, Bussmann, Skumsnes), before moving to more theoretical, historiographical explorations of how bodies in their relational networks have been described (Di Biase-Dyson, Miller, Olabarria). New ways of approaching categories relating to bodies, such as gender, ethnicity, and nudity, are then explored (Scrivens, Serova) before the discussion extends outwards to relationships between human and non-human bodies (Wendrich, Whitehead). A reflective piece (Candea) rounds out the volume. The fact that each paper in this volume touches on almost every concept in a different way demonstrates at once both the interrelationship between the concepts as well as the productivity of such a multifaceted theoretical approach.

3.1 Body worlds

The concept 'body world' is described as 'a heuristic tool for thinking through the omnipresence of bodies in human lives' (ROBB & HARRIS, 2013: 215) and defined as 'the totality of bodily experiences, practices and representations in a specific time and place' (ROBB & HARRIS, 2013: 3). Robb and Harris recognise how body worlds, and individual bodies, have histories and culturally specific logics, but also how they emerge through history as historical agents, making certain developments possible while forestalling others. The key tenet of Robb and Harris' work is the co-constitutive nature of body and world (ROBB & HARRIS, 2013: 17): 'in producing the world, people produce their bodies at the same time, it is through learning to move, talk and act in specific ways that those ways themselves are sustained and taught to others'.

In order to understand apparently incommensurate perspectives on the body, HARRIS and ROBB (2012: 668) draw attention to the problem of translating ontological categories, which they describe as 'a fundamental set of understandings about how the world is: what kinds of beings, processes, and qualities could potentially exist and how these relate to each other'. They also underline how conceptions and experiences of the body are the locus of multiple, situational and often conflicting perspectives (what ROBB & HARRIS, 2013: 20–21, define as 'multimodality'), and that the idea that there ever was a simple, unproblematic time before our current confusion is part of the myth of the natural body (HARRIS & ROBB, 2012). Only by looking critically at our own suppositions and attitudes and, in particular, the rules, habits, and bodily practices that make up daily life (ROBB & HARRIS, 2013: 7) can we get a glimpse of alternative conceptions and experiences, namely, more nuanced ideas of bodies as historically configured entities.

Harris and Robb's 'body worlds' (HARRIS & ROBB, 2012) works as a concept within our enquiry because we acknowledge the existence of different bodies and body conceptualisations in history. ROBB and HARRIS (2013: 2) point out that 'every society understands the human body in its own way'. The body is situated historically: it is both in history and history itself (ROBB & HARRIS, 2013: 4).

Contributions to the special issue that touch on body worlds being distinct through time and space engage with how bodies are perceived and categorised, what a body does, and what a body is. Camilla Di Biase-Dyson, for instance, explores the validity of Emma Brunner-Traut's notion of bodily fragmentation as a model to

explain ancient Egyptian body worlds. The success of the theory might be due to its attempts to account for an ancient 'body world', which is in essence the right direction, though the approach and appraisal include highly problematic value judgments about the Egyptian mindset. A reappraisal of the evidence leads Di Biase-Dyson to shift our attention to ideas of wholeness, noting that this should not be seen as a simple counterpart to fragmentation. Instead, wholeness needs to be understood in relation to ideas of healthiness, which indicates the problematic nature of translation. Viveiros de Castro's notion of 'controlled equivocation', which considers the perceptual apparatus of both analyst and culture under analysis (VIVEIROS DE CASTRO, 2004: 4–5), offers a solution of great heuristic value for such a process.

'Controlled equivocation' also emerges as a powerful tool in approaches to body worlds as pertaining to relatedness. Leire Olabarria uses an expression often translated as '(his) bodily son' to raise questions about the role of the body in both Egyptian and Egyptological understandings of kinship. Through this example, she proposes that the body can be used as an expression of hierarchy rather than as a proxy for a relationship that is to be understood as biological.

Like the study by Olabarria, Dina Serova investigates the textual interface with a specific aspect of Egyptian body words, namely, nakedness and nudity. By considering the meanings of four different terms in the Egyptian lexicon pertaining to the semantic category of [EXPOSURE], she illustrates how our understanding of these concepts is best approached relationally, by sketching the semantic relationships between the terms. By exploring these semantic fields as a case study, Serova provides us with a tool to gain insight into a 'totality' of bodily experience around this specific phenomenon. The relations revealed by verbs related to the unclothed body remind us once again of the notion of controlled equivocation, and the problematic nature of a search for linguistic equivalences, which are more accurately expressed by means of relational maps.

Reinert Skumsnes' study of healing texts of the Middle and New Kingdoms explicitly engages with the notion of body worlds to emphasise the historically and relationally contingent perspectives and layers that are accessible through these sources. Although a differentiation between bodies is present in the sources explored, for example, in texts describing sex determination in unborn children, the resulting picture does not map neatly onto modern categories, highlighting the effect and role of different body worlds on our interpretations of ancient evidence. The recognition and acknowledgement of multiple ontologies facilitates a more nuanced study of ancient sources on healing.

Just like healing is based around body knowledge, so are practices related to making. Willeke Wendrich's article engages with (ancient and modern) body worlds as an arena for praxis-based reasoning. Using the chaîne opératoire approach, Wendrich explores how embodied cognition, and specifically embodied knowledge, are communicated and remembered across time and space, between objects, makers, users, and other people, including researchers. The theoretical implication of such an approach is the necessity to reconsider the Western epistemic model, which is based mainly on a Cartesian split between body and mind, in favour of a relational approach that is sympathetic to the existence of differing, sometimes complementary, body worlds. A theory of embodied cognition rejects Cartesian dualism, blurring any boundaries between knowledge and experience.

In her article, Emily Whitehead advocates for an expansion of the concept of 'body worlds' to encapsulate the interaction between human and non-human bodies. To this end, Whitehead's approach draws on assemblage theory, which entails understanding entities as continuously unbounded and emerging. As a case study, she proposes an analysis of a 'solar boat' currently kept at the Michael C. Carlos Museum (Emory), a body assembled over time from pieces of other boats. By highlighting the process of 'becoming', Whitehead proposes a multi-scalar analysis of a model solar boat that takes into account both the time of its creation and deposition and its modern re-assembling into an object for display.

3.2 Relations

The concept of 'relation' has been developed by Strathern as an expository device or tool. By tracing the academic as well as vernacular uses of this concept through time, she draws attention to the way such generic terms behave. She looks at how relation as an abstract concept is configured in the English language (with roots to Latin via old French) and how it has been used in the context of both kin- and knowledge-making practices (STRATHERN, 2014: 3). Rather than simply prescribing particular versions of the concept, Strathern is concerned with how 'kin relations are bound up with knowledge of the world in such a way that "the world" comes to seem their (only, principal) horizon of reference' (STRATHERN, 2020: 181).

As an object of exposition, an experimental exercise of complex and critical reflection, the concept of relation invites us to challenge the foundations of instituted phenomena. The concept is described not only as a scaffolding device but also as an attractor with mediating effects: it is 'a term that engages other terms, a concept in a field of concepts, an idea that draws in values and disseminates feelings, a substantive from which adjectives (relational) and abstractions (relationality) can be made exactly as though everyone knew what was meant' (STRATHERN, 2020: 2). A key idea, then, is the conceptual primacy of relations in the sense that entities come into being through their relationships, rather than the other way around.

When anthropologists talk about relations, human beings usually take centre stage, though they are inevitably enmeshed in a relational world with things, other beings (human and non-human) and entities (material and non-material) that together form their environments (STRATHERN, 2018: 2). Though Strathern encourages links to many other concepts, such as (but not limited to) assemblages (RABINOW, 2003; RABINOW, 2011), companion species (HARAWAY, 2003), networks (LATOUR, 2005), apparatuses and phenomena (BARAD, 2007), she also elucidates the potential of interconnections. In particular, 'entities expose features previously unknown, then, as functions of relations with others, so that these features can never be exclusively properties of the entities themselves; relations open up the capacities of properties in unexpected ways and capacities come into existence through new relations' (STRATHERN, 2014: 4; cf. STRATHERN, 2020: 15). It follows that, in addition to the more traditional approach of identifying relations in structures, systems of classification, co-variation, and so forth, the concept can also be 'applied with equal force to new objects of knowledge, emergent configurations, or co-constructions, and not only in a passive sense (everything is connected), but in the active sense of the observer-writer making phenomena appear, illuminating them, through the concept' (STRATHERN, 2020: 26; cf. STRATHERN, 2014: 5). Relations thus enable the scholar to be reflexive, suggesting 'an ongoing role for the ever-unfinished nature of the relating that keeps it in play, unfinished in that knowing and not-knowing perpetually create one another. Companion to our knowledge of ourselves as much as companion to our knowledge of the world' (STRATHERN, 2014: 8; cf. STRATHERN, 2020: 28).

Relationality has been productively employed in several distinct ways by the contributors to this volume. Some employ it as a heuristic device, seeking to extract distinct relationships between discrete elements of their data, others consider relational structures within elements of the ancient culture itself, and some do both. Amongst the scholars considering relationality as an analytical tool, Dina Serova considers analysts' attempts to establish relationships both between a word and a broader word field as well as between individual words. She notes, for example, how the notions of relations-between and relations-within work well in the context of semantic analysis, as they draw attention to the processes of attribution of meaning and to the connections between a given lexeme and the object to which it refers. In this sense, both the creation and the interpretation of meaning can be productively approached within this relational framework. Her article makes use of graphic representations of potential sematic networks that illustrate connections between lexemes to visually showcase their inherent relations.

A similar approach has been taken with respect to object studies, which foreground the relationality between objects and the people who interact with them. Emily Whitehead's chapter on the 'solar boat' offers an opportunity to reflect on this relationship through the lens of assemblage theory. Her article advocates a post-anthropocentric approach that theorises the emergence of objects as a relational undertaking that

affects not only their physical form but also their interpretations in scholarship. Likewise, Willeke Wendrich's paper on embodied cognition reconsiders a particular kind of relational model, namely, the chaîne opératoire model, to examine its employment in relation to archaeological material. While the model as traditionally understood fits expectations of a linear system to reconstruct processes of making, experience demonstrates that such processes can be linear only in hindsight, as the making itself is often complicated by unexpected circumstances that cannot be mapped out easily in the archaeological record. Relations in their broader sense are a more productive way to reconsider transfer of knowledge, and, for that reason, she proposes to adapt the model of a chaîne opératoire to focus on relations and interactions between objects and people, rather than on fixed sequences of actions.

Finally, Di Biase-Dyson's article takes on relations from a historiographical angle, seeing relations, as defined by HARRIS (2020: 16) from three different perspectives, namely, 'as epistemology', taking on board a scholar's background (i.e. Brunner-Traut and her intellectual forebears), 'as methodology', investigating how the comparative method is applied to ancient sources in relation to the 'aspective' model, and 'as metaphysics', concerning a scholar's theory of culture (e.g. the 'axial age' theory proposed by JASPERS, 1953) as related to the sources they use.

As described above, several scholars employ the concept of relationality to explain structures within the culture under study itself, considering, for instance, what such relations are and how such relational structures are built. In his contribution, Richard Bussmann focuses on the value of relational perspectives to assess social dynamics in the early Old Kingdom and beyond. As opposed to a simplistic focus on a 'social pyramid', relational modelling allows for an explicit recognition of the relative positioning of people and groups in any kind of social analysis. In this sense, he notes, 'non-elite' is an essentially relational classification that relies on the recognition of the existence of 'elite' as a meaningful category. A focus on the body highlights different strategies of social differentiation that can only be understood when approached from a relational perspective, that is to say, in opposition to the iconographic and material treatment of 'elite' bodies.

A similar approach is adopted by Olabarria, who explores different ways to understand kinship as a relational hierarchy. The seeming similarity of the idea of the 'bodily son' with the Western perspective—namely, the association between biological connection and legitimacy of relation—belies different ways of understanding the articulation between embodiment and relatedness in modern and ancient cultures. The degrees of differentiation between 'intensities' (following Miller, this volume) of relatedness can be mediated through bodily connections, which, Olabarria argues, need not be understood as genealogical positioning.

Jordan Miller lastly explores a number of relational perspectives within his source material. He considers, for instance, the way in which fused names of deities represent a 'linking of associations' as well as the way that stone statues of deceased humans might be 'interfaces for relations' with human visitors within the framework of perspectivism.

3.3 Comparisons

Comparison is a method employed across the humanities and social sciences, not least within anthropology, where this method has been theorised to a sophisticated degree. For instance, Candea describes two modalities of comparison, lateral and frontal comparison, not just as elementary structures of anthropological arguments but as linked pair of comparative heuristics, 'a conceptual device for introducing a broader picture of multiply anchored robustness' (CANDEA, 2019: 327). Both heuristics work from and with entities which are assumed to be distinct enough to be compared, but they do this work in different ways and to different effects (CANDEA, 2018: 366).

In frontal comparison an unfamiliar ethnographic entity (e.g. an ethnographic 'other') is contrasted to a putatively familiar background (e.g. the ethnographer's own 'background'). This type of comparison requires that we postulate—heuristically—an 'us' and a 'them', bracketing the possibility of multiplicities within these

categories (CANDEA, 2016: 99). It therefore introduces a constitutive asymmetry between the terms of comparison. The point is ultimately to make the familiar strange and the strange familiar (CANDEA, 2018: 350–352). In lateral comparison two or more symmetrical entities (e.g. different anthropological studies) are laid side by side (CANDEA, 2016: 94–95), with the anthropologist's own perspective either outside the frame or as the frame itself (CANDEA, 2018: 349). Three variants can—heuristically—be outlined: the first involves the classic move of building an abstract model by drawing on the commonalities of a diverse and carefully chosen sample of ethnographies within the region in which this model is supposed to apply. The second operates similarly, but in the opposite direction, to highlight differences within a broader shared domain. In a third variant, distant analogies are repurposed to allow locally-derived concepts to travel and do local work in different contexts without ever having to pay the price of generalisation (CANDEA, 2018: 358–366).

In relation to the ontological turn, CANDEA (2016: 90) argues that frontal comparison has been retooled for a postplural research imaginary (which refuses to characterise the world in terms of fixed entities which could be neatly laid side by side and compared), whereas lateral comparisons have stubbornly resisted such postplural reconfigurations:

> while frontal comparison has monopolized anthropologists' epistemic attention and concern over recent decades, methodological and epistemological discussions of lateral comparison were—with a few notable exceptions—relegated to the doldrums of an outdated positivism. The 'rise' of frontal comparison is partly an effect of this unequal exposure—lateral comparison continues apace, of course, operating mostly under the epistemic radar to support and counterbalance its more showy frontal counterpart (CANDEA, 2018: 344).

Candea brings lateral comparison back into focus, arguing that

> the two heuristics cannot do without each other. Their failures as much as their strengths complement and support each other. Frontal comparison relies on lateral comparisons for its broader points of extension; by lateral comparisons it travels, is limited and judged. Lateral comparison begins and ends with frontal challenges to its ever reimagined framing devices. In frontal comparison we put ourselves to the test. In lateral comparisons we put each other to the test. The two moves are mutually constitutive (CANDEA, 2018: 368).

Good comparisons are comparisons that object, that can interfere with our initial hunches and desires and tend to give us more than what we aimed for. This is why, according to CANDEA (2019: 353), we ought to build comparisons which have their own resistance, independent of our ends.

Like with relationality, contributors to this volume engage with different aspects of comparison, either using it to compare entities within the body of evidence they have collected (i.e. structures within the culture), or by operationalising it at a higher level to consider how comparison works as an analytical tool. When it comes to comparing structures within the culture, several scholars have interrogated the frontal comparisons established by other scholars that place modern categories against purported Egyptian categories. For instance, Olabarria takes issue with the use of under-theorised frontal comparison when it comes to assessing kinship practices from Egypt. Modern Western categories pertaining to filiation patterns are sometimes transposed to ancient Egyptian contexts uncritically. This exemplifies not only an epistemological limitation, but also an ontological problem that can only be redressed by taking ancient sources seriously.

The article by Skumsnes presents a similar criticism of the uses of frontal comparison, which is still dominant in many scholarly assessments of healing texts. For example, he notes how the claim that Egyptians could only have a very limited knowledge of anatomy assumes that there is a single way of understanding the body and its treatments. This is exemplified in the assumption of a masculine model for these healing practices, when an analysis of the sources demonstrates that an alternative feminine model focusing on creation and fertility is also plausible. Rather than a simplistic comparison with modern Western modes of medical

praxis, it is interesting to focus on the role of connections and analogies between patients' bodies and other entities, something which can be done, for example, with reference to language features (like gender).

The article by Miller straddles thinking about comparison within a culture and considering its role as an analytical tool. For the former aim, he surveys modes in which Egyptians engaged in the practice of comparison, using the overlapping notions of images and bodies, for instance, the intermediate humanity of sculptures, as a case study. Miller demonstrates that comparisons in Egyptian sources are presented in very concrete terms, something that contrasts with the much more abstract statements presented in Egyptological discourse. In this sense, Miller not only reviews the role of comparison in Egyptian thought, but also its heuristic impact on Egyptology. In this way, he is able to consider relations both between image and body 'intensities' (a kind of scalarity in ontological terms) as well as between interiority and physicality of entities.

One scholar that explicitly considers the role of comparison as an analytical tool is Edward Scrivens, who uses iconographic and textual depictions of the goddesses Qadesh, Anat, and Astarte to interrogate, via lateral comparison, allegedly binomial constructs such as 'foreign' vs 'local' and 'male' vs 'female'. In this study, it emerges that there is no clear-cut distinction between these apparently opposed categories, highlighting the value of negotiation as an analytical tool in order to find a balance between these poles. In conducting this comparison, it becomes clear that Scrivens is likewise considering the extent to which researchers' categories must be interrogated, and in so doing he considers comparison both as a method of analysis as well as an analytical construct.

This level of meta-comparison showcased by Miller and Scrivens is also present in the article by Di Biase-Dyson, who dissects the historiography of the use of the concept of the 'fragmented body', coined by Emma Brunner-Traut, and its parent theory, aspective representation. On the one hand, Brunner-Traut engages in frontal comparison by assessing Egyptian art in relation to modern representational principles. On the other, lateral comparison is also deployed as a method to present bodies in ancient Egyptian visual culture as 'fragmented' in opposition to those in classical Greek art, for example. These problematic comparisons, supposedly supported by selectively chosen neurocognitive studies, are used to support evolutionary interpretations that assign an ethnic and developmental basis to these representational differences. This review reminds us of the importance of engaging critically with the methodological basis of widespread theories that essentially disguise an 'Us-and-Them' mentality, presenting difference as a fact rather than as a driver for a comparison.

3.4 Negotiations

'Negotiations' as a category and concept was adopted and developed by Sørensen, who defines them as a constitutive practice. This viewpoint entails that social life is affected by competing interests (SØRENSEN, 2000: 61), and that negotiations are 'processes through which people strive to reach agreed/accepted understandings of the world' (SØRENSEN, 2007: 41). She argues that 'these agreements are based upon, and performed in relationship to, the allocation of rights and responsibilities, and that these in turn are reached and understood in relationship to material things' (SØRENSEN, 2007: 41).

Sørensen is concerned with how gender, specifically, is part of these constitutive practices. The central point for SØRENSEN (2007: 45) is that

> gender refers to constructions that exist at different temporal scales, ranging from the moment to generations. Gender, furthermore, is brought into being through the ways that norms and conventions aimed at particular groups set them up in terms of identities, and in terms of how individuals orient and express themselves with regards to these.

Sørensen's idea of 'constructions' is, crucially, framed as a verb rather than as a noun, to highlight its 'reference to the becoming, to an act, which is concerned with the making of gender' (SØRENSEN, 2007: 46).

In sum, SØRENSEN (2000: 60–73) describes gender as situated difference, meaning that it is 'constituted by context insofar as it does not exist per se but is produced by practice' (SØRENSEN, 2007: 45).

Gender negotiation refers to the continuous process 'that takes place within society between internalized, embodied selves and externalized, learned, and confirmed social identities' (SØRENSEN, 2007: 46). The crux for SØRENSEN (2000: 74–95) is how this understanding of gender negotiation creates a direct link to materiality, with resources—including every stage of the chaîne opératoire, from production to distribution and consumption—as the tangible and material medium 'through which such agreements are routinely made and through which they are understood and experienced' (SØRENSEN, 2007: 47). Material culture (in the widest sense) provides the medium for practices of gender (social articulation) as well as the location for its negotiation (material manifestation).

The contribution to this special issue most openly engaging with Sørensen's framework of negotiations is that by Scrivens, who explores the characterisation of three ancient Near Eastern goddesses in Egyptian sources. Crucially, one of these goddesses is an Egyptian creation rather than a foreign import, but she is presented iconographically in a way that highlights her otherness, for example through frontal representations or through nudity. Although references to these goddesses were meant to disrupt some (gender-based and cultural) conventions, there are also normative structures embedded into these representations, for instance in terms of compositional dominance. These combinations of unusual and standard readings are, according to Scrivens, a clear example of negotiations at play, as their alleged otherness is nuanced through Egyptian normative representations, especially in terms of gender roles.

However, in addition to the focalisation on gender, ideas of situated difference sit at the core of negotiations as an analytical category. From this space, a number of other papers contribute distinct ideas about how this category works at the theoretical level. Negotiation at the material level can be theorised, for instance, at the level of the whole body and its interaction with the world, and that world's structuring paradigms, not only of gender, but of hierarchy and of representation. For instance, Bussmann's contribution allows for an exploration of how negotiation can be used as an analytical category outside of explicit discussions about gender. He explores a portion of the cemetery at Zawyet Sultan to reflect on the relative positioning of bodies within the cemetery and in comparison with other sites. This analysis shows that a sense of who was positioned where within a mortuary landscape already existed in the early Old Kingdom as a material expression of that relational understanding of social classifications and interactions. In this context, Sørensen's 'agreed understandings of the world' are demonstrated through those codified processes of establishment of hierarchy in the mortuary landscape.

Whitehead's idea of assemblages and how objects emerge also touches on negotiated relationships between people and objects through history. For example, the existence of pastiches trying to reconstruct a 'complete' or 'original' object relies on the notion of an idealised object that needs to be replicated, as well as on the agreement that such a reconstruction is preferable to a partial product. The perceived importance of human figures is crucial in this context, as these were supplied to fit with a preconceived interpretation of what these models were meant to do, namely provide for the needs of the deceased in the hereafter. It was conceived that such a task could only be achieved by means of human actors, and hence figures were added to ensure that the model would be effective. This is indeed the result of a tension between different body worlds, which are essentially negotiated categories at play.

One could also argue for the existence of visual negotiations, for example between onlooker and image, as demonstrated by Miller in his notion of 'intensities' when characterising images and bodies. His example of a text from the *Amduat*, where differences between the images and the body of the sun god are dissolved, shows that these should not be perceived as separate and bounded categories within Egyptological discourse.

The editors hope that this volume, with its explicit attempt to create an interdisciplinary dialogue around questions on the ancient Egyptian body, offers food for thought. We also hope that it generates more dialogue in turn.

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