

# Reproducing human limbs. Prosthesis, amulets and votive objects in Ancient Egypt

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## 1. Preserving the body: an ancient Egyptian perspective

In ancient Egyptian religion and culture concepts of dismemberment and reconnection were complementary. As is known from the myth, Osiris' body was dismembered by his brother Seth and thrown into the Nile water which carried each limbs to various places of the Egyptian land. On the contrary, it was Isis that collected all body parts to reunite them and reanimate his husband. The *Great Hymn to Osiris* on the Stele of Amenmose, XVIII Dynasty (Louvre, C 286)<sup>1</sup> contains the fullest account of the myth extant in Egyptian sources even though one of the most important fact of the myth occurs only in Diodorus<sup>2</sup> and Plutarch<sup>3</sup>: Isis' failure to find the god's virile member which had been swallowed by a fish and replaced by the goddess with an artificial one. Unfortunately all texts reporting the mythical account, such as Spell 366 in the Pyramid Texts<sup>4</sup>, do not mention this passage.

The Coffin Texts mention Isis' function with reference to body reconnection: «may you watch over me, I am Osiris, may you trans-

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<sup>1</sup> Moret 1931, 725-750.

<sup>2</sup> Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliotheca Historica* 1, 21.

<sup>3</sup> Plutarch, *De Iside et Osiride*, 13.

<sup>4</sup> Assmann 2005, 25.

figure me, may you raise my limbs»<sup>5</sup>. This reconnection of the corpse brings to mind the mythic counterpart of the embalming ritual. There were rituals, images and texts that awakened Osiris to new life and Isis, the goddess of physical restoration, was the one that recited magical spells to gather the limbs of the body:

«She recited the word (or, formula) with the magical power of her mouth, [being] skilled of tongue and never halting for a word, being perfect in command and word. Isis the magician avenged her brother. She went about seeking for him untiringly»<sup>6</sup>.

In the same way priests performed rituals and recitations to restore the corporal unity that had been compromised by death, primarily the heart which had to reassume its role as centre of connectivity: «my heart, it creates my limbs, my flesh obeys me and raises me up»<sup>7</sup>. The verbal accompaniment to the embalming process centered on the theme of reuniting what had been torn apart. Osiris was the prototype of every deceased, thus everyone could be endowed with life. Consequently the embalming ritual consisted in performing the myth for the dead, no matter what kind of death he had died. One by one limbs and organs were restored to the deceased. With the help of symbolic forms, limbs were gathered back together because speech had a potent power on life and afterlife in ancient Egypt. Thanks to the magic effect of spells and protection of the gods the scattered limbs went back to a single body. In confirmation of the importance of every part of the body many texts from the Old Kingdom to the Late Period contain lists of the parts and organs of the body enumerated from top to bottom and associated with godly protection, for example the head is Ra, the ears are Isis and Nephthys, the fingers and fingernails are the children of Horus, the breasts too are Isis and Nephthys<sup>8</sup>. It is

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<sup>5</sup> De Buck Vol. I, *CT* 237.

<sup>6</sup> Budge 1912, 103.

<sup>7</sup> De Buck vol. I, *CT* 171, spell 39 e-g.

<sup>8</sup> De Buck vol. VI, *CT* 761, spell 391a-392f; *CT* 762, spell 392g-p. The body parts identified with gods appear already in *Pyr* utterance 215, 135a-b, 148-9 and 539, 1303-15, see also Piankoff 1964, 38.

important to notice that the lists do not necessarily correspond with each other. The same god could preside over different parts and, most interestingly, the body of the deceased is now composed by deities because «my limbs are gods, I am entirely a god, no limb of mine is without a god, I walk as a god, I come out as a god [...]»<sup>9</sup>. The same concept of the body composed of gods is found also in *The Litany of Re*: «his members are gods, he is a god completely there is not a member in him without a god, the gods have become his members»<sup>10</sup>.

If, for the Egyptians, life is connection and integration, on the contrary death implies disintegration and isolation. To integrate or reintegrate means to preserve or, in other words, to confer continued existence, by recalling Osiris' myth together with a correspondence between the image of the body and that of social structure<sup>11</sup>. The body's fragmentation is the opposite of life and just as death reflects social isolation so does the reconnection of the corpse aims to restore and integrate the social position of the dead<sup>12</sup>. Integration and isolation were both part of social life and deadly condition.

## **2. Prosthesis for missing limbs in life and death**

In the British Museum is stored the so-called Greville Chester toe<sup>13</sup>, an original prosthesis made of cartonnage. The toe was apparently discovered in Thebes and it is in the shape of the right big toe and portion of the right foot, lacking of the false nail. Signs of wear in several areas suggest that it was actually used to replace a right toe. This is also suggested by eight holes on the inner left side with distinct signs of rubbing and four holes right outside used either to attach the prosthesis onto the foot or perhaps to fasten it onto a sock or sandal. It was claimed that it was found in position on a mummy. The oblit-

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<sup>9</sup> Assmann 1969, 348; Assmann 2005, 36; Hornung 1976, 88-89; see also Naville 1914, De Wit 1953, 90-94.

<sup>10</sup> Piankoff 1964, 39.

<sup>11</sup> Assmann 2005, 28.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>13</sup> Reeves 1999, 73-77.

eration, for funerary purpose, of the attachment holes required for daily use confirms the thesis<sup>14</sup>. The size of the toe suggests a male owner; it was dated to before 600 BC and is one of the earliest prostheses to have been identified from the ancient world.

A second ancient Egyptian false big toe was discovered in the Theban necropolis in 2000 and is now in the Cairo Museum<sup>15</sup>. Unlike the former example this one was fastened onto the right foot of a female mummy, identified as Tabaketenmut (950-710 BC). Diabetes probably caused ischemic gangrene into the toe. Like the Greville Chester toe, it too has eight lacing holes on the inner edge and four on the outer, but it is possibly older.

These artificial toes are important evidence from mummified remains and show that ancient Egyptian embalmers made every attempt to reinstate the completeness of the physical body before burial. The body could be mould in plaster, packed with mud, sand, linen, butter, or soda. Even sawdust was stuffed between the skin and muscle to re-form the contours, and false eyes, noses, and often genitals were added. Where limbs were missing generally poor imitations made of linen, reed, mud, and resin were added. The reassembling of body parts was considered necessary to achieve rebirth into the afterlife. A well preserved corpse was a prerequisite to the reanimation expected in the next world. Even though the two toes are too sophisticated in both design and appearance than general embalmers' restorations because of their functional purpose to the living, they point to the interest on the part of the ancient Egyptians in maintaining the body as functional and intact as possible during life and afterlife.

Embalmers' restorations, especially in the Ptolemaic and Roman periods, were generally not very accurate and attempted to make the body whole for the hereafter. In several cases, the artificial prostheses were realized by shaping the linen into hands and feet with the aid of resin to confer more resistance to the textiles (only in a few cases pros-

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 74.

<sup>15</sup> Wagle 1994, 999-1000.

thesis were made of wood maybe because it was easier to reproduce limbs and give them a well done shape by modeling), as in the case of the mummy from Darlington Museum (ca 250 BC) and currently on loan to the Oriental Museum of Durham<sup>16</sup>. The corpse is that of a woman who was presumably born with a malformed left arm which ended in a stump above the wrist. Embalmers added an artificial hand to provide her with both hands for the next world. Both forearm and hand were made of linen and soaked in resin so that the limb could fit properly into the stump. The hand now stands aside the mummy after having been removed by researchers.

A further example of restoration by ancient Egyptian embalmers is stored at the Archaeological Museum of Naples (inv. 2343)<sup>17</sup>. The mummy probably dates from the Ptolemaic or Roman Period. Radiology showed a 35-40 year-old man with both hands and a third hand between the femurs (the reason for this extra hand is unknown). Feet have been replaced by a single prosthesis. It was typical of tolemaic Period to replace missing limbs with dummies. Restoration on mummies at that time was very frequent even though in the Late period more attention was paid to the external wrapping and less to the treatment of the body<sup>18</sup>.

### **3. Mummy 1770 in the Manchester Museum**

The most interesting and well-known example of ancient restoration on Egyptian mummy is that of the Mummy 1770 in the Manchester Museum, believed to have been discovered by Petrie during his excavation at Hawara in 1910-11 (but researchers are unsure of such provenance). Also the age of this person is unclear. X-rays showed a child of indeterminate sex, probably a teenager<sup>19</sup>. The

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<sup>16</sup> Loeffler 1984; Gray 1966, 138-40; Middleton 1992.

<sup>17</sup> Giuffra, Fornaciari and Ciranni 2006, 274-278.

<sup>18</sup> Ikram and Dodson 1998, 118-30.

<sup>19</sup> David 2000.

cartonnage suggests a date back to the early Greco-Roman period but researchers succeeded in finding various surprises. In fact the corpse shows clear signs of re-wrapping which were made centuries later by embalmers who apparently ignored her identity and sex, probably due to her bad condition. That's why the mummy can be classified as an evidence of gender reassignment<sup>20</sup>.

Mummy 1770 was unwrapped in June 1975 by the team of University of Manchester. A very interesting video was taken from that operation, showing the poor conditions of the mummy as well as points of deep interest. The team unwrapped the mummy like an archaeological excavation layer by layer. Once the bandages had been carefully cut away from the chest area, revealing the arms crossed over the chest, the team discovered two gilded nipple amulets. In fact there are some cases of breasts covered and accentuated by two small caps made out of blue faïence with nipples in black<sup>21</sup>. While unwrapping the hands the team discovered gold finger stalls, or nail covers, ten in all, a kind of artifact generally reserved for the upper classes (Fig. 1). This indicates that the mummy prepared by the embalmers was thought to be a person of some status and importance. The purpose of these stalls was to prevent fingers from breaking during the mummification process. Carter found golden fingers and toes still wrapped in place on Tutankhamun's corpse together with golden slippers on the king's feet<sup>22</sup>. Each digit was engraved showing details of nails. Egyptians also used finger guards made of stone which were held in place with the other fingers, as we can see in the Twentieth-Dynasty example from Lisht (Metropolitan Museum 11.151.634)<sup>23</sup>. When nails, fingers and toes were gilded a prayer was played for the deceased

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<sup>20</sup> Tapp 1979, 83-93; Tapp 1986, 51-6.

<sup>21</sup> Kamal 1901, 34, 38; Brunton 1927, 64. See also Nicholson-Shaw 2000.

<sup>22</sup> Carter 1963, 129-30, 137. In the Pelizaeus Museum in Hildesheim are nine finger caps dated to 4-3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C. Gold was used to ensure that these body parts would all function again after life. In origin this was reserved to royal mummies. See Germer 1997, 26 fig. 16.

<sup>23</sup> Vogelsang-Eastwood 1993, 125-126, pl. 32. A bead-net dress from Qau, Middle Egypt, from a Fifth Dynasty tomb no. 978 (UT 17743) and now in the Petrie Museum London. It is a dress made out of beads strung together in geometric pattern, with two small caps for wearing over the breast made out of blue faïence with the nipples in black faïence.

before he was wrapped in linen: «O Osiris you received your nails of gold, your fingers of gold»<sup>24</sup>. The mummy of Horuta from Hawara (Fayum, found by Petrie in a Saitic tomb) was provided with an interesting series of objects<sup>25</sup>, among them a gold sheath for male member found between the legs<sup>26</sup>. On all fingers and toes of the mummy were gold plates<sup>27</sup>. Another golden phallus sheath was found in Tell Ibn es-Salam (Mendes)<sup>28</sup>.

When the Manchester investigation team reached the pelvic cavity of the mummy a false phallus made of a roll of bandages was found. This possibly suggests that the embalmers provided the mummy with male and female attributes, the false phallus and the nipple amulets, in order to guarantee life and full sexuality to the deceased in the next world. It seems that they were uncertain about the sexual identity of this person, maybe because the mummy was found in a very bad condition when they decided to re-wrap it during the Roman Era. Another unexpected discovery was made concerning the legs. The right leg had been artificially lengthened by means of a wooden limb covered with mud in order to make it as long as the left leg. The right leg was carefully constructed whereas the left one was simply an irregular bundle (Fig. 2). The feet were made of mud, reed and wooden pieces and were intended to replace the missing limbs in the next world. It has been argued that Mummy 1770 died during an encounter with a crocodile. That's why he is missing the legs. Finally, artificial feet were beautifully decorated with painted slippers and adorned with gilded toenail covers (Fig. 3). The golden ornaments suggest that the embalmers regarded to this mutilated child as a person of some importance. Dating tests provided several answers: the bandages date from 380 BCE but whereas the bones dates from 1000 BCE, so they are more than a thousand years older than the bandages. Thus the child could have lived during the 21<sup>th</sup> Dynasty. The body was re-wrapped in the

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<sup>24</sup> Budge 1899, 187.

<sup>25</sup> Petrie 1890, 19-20; Vernier 1927, Pl. XCIII; Reisner 1907, no. 12916-13100.

<sup>26</sup> Reisner 1907, 76, no. 13099.

<sup>27</sup> Petrie 1890, 19-20.

<sup>28</sup> Vernier 1927, 459, no. 53469, pl. LXXXVII.

Roman period probably because it was believed to be the body of someone of considerable importance but the exact identity of the person remains unknown. The case of Mummy 1770 confirms the importance of modeling a mummy when badly preserved, a tradition that seems to go back to early times of ancient dynastic period of Egypt. An Old Kingdom mummy from Medium discovered in 1891 was wrapped in many layers of linen, the outermost of which were soaked with resin and moulded into body shape. Limbs, facial features and genitals were well delineated. Unfortunately the mummy was destroyed during the bombing of London in 1941<sup>29</sup>. The embalmers' aim was not only to preserve a corpse but also to give a chance of immortality by restoring every part which needed to be reintegrate to a have a complete life and mobility in the next world. A man's head from the Third Intermediate Period shows artificial eyes inserted into the orbits<sup>30</sup>. Hence, the sight too had to be preserved and guaranteed to allow the deceased to front his new existence.

#### **4. Body parts amulets: meaning and symbolism**

As is known, ancient Egyptians made use of amulets for apotropaic and propitious purposes. Part of these objects belongs to the group called 'body part' amulets<sup>31</sup> reproducing parts of the human body or organs (legs, arms, hands, eyes, heart, etc.). Such items must have functioned magically and medically, as offerings to the deities in return for good health and limb soundness or as pendants for protection. These amulets were also placed underneath the mummy wraps to give power to the deceased. They show an important duality by serving a purpose in both life and afterlife. Their forms were made to endow their wearer by assimilation with their particular bodily functions but they could also be employed as substitutes in the other

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<sup>29</sup> Taylor 2010, 29, fig 17.

<sup>30</sup> Taylor 2010, 34, fig 22.

<sup>31</sup> Andrews 1994, 69-73; see chapter III in Petrie 1914, pl. 1.



world for damaged or destroyed body parts and organs<sup>32</sup>. Interestingly they are dated from Predynastic Period onwards. In fact, several findings from tombs point to a continuous use of such objects (often very close to jewellery) from the First Intermediate Period onwards and to the conscious choice of different materials in relation to the protection and the function they performed.

Body part amulets are typical of Late Old Kingdom and First Intermediate Period burials, with some continuing to be produced until the end of Dynastic history.

Flat-backed front-facing heads are exclusive to the Late Old Kingdom and the First Intermediate Period and different types of carving. Generally they have a short beard, prominent ears and a projection on top of the head for suspension. Such a type was intended to give the use of the sense in general. Bone, limestone, steatite, ivory were frequently employed but the predominant material, since the Predynastic Period, was cornelian<sup>33</sup>, a translucent form of chalcedony with ranges in colour from red-brown or orange to barely red-tinged transparency which could be found in considerable quantities in the eastern desert. Symbolically cornelian reflects the colour red, connected with blood, energy, dynamism and power in general.

Evidence of the unadorned human eye, whose function was to provide the sight in the other world, seems to begin with Fifth Dynasty from Mostagedda, to disappear in the Late Period where multiple examples are the norm. Gold-foil exemplars come from the Roman era and were generally found on mummies to protect the organ on which they lay<sup>34</sup>. Also tongue shaped gold-foils were placed on Roman mummies' mouths in order to guarantee faculty of speech or to protect the orifice from harmful forces which might seek to enter through it.

Human ear amulets had the function to provide hearing. In the same way hands or fists, made of cornelian, bone, ivory, copper,

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<sup>32</sup> Andrews 1994, 69.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, fig 67.

<sup>34</sup> Germer 1997, 25, fig 14. Exemplars are in The Pelizaeus Museum in Hildesheim, LH5 LH6.

limestone and steatite, sometimes showing bracelets depicted, were intended to confer dexterity and power of manual activity. Open hands found on the corps' wrists are often strung with beads (Fig. 4) while fist amulets seem not to be fixed in position on the body.

Arms with fist, from Late Old Kingdom and First Intermediate only, made almost exclusively of glazed composition, were used to confer the capability for any forceful activity, as well as legs with foot and knee were intended to give the power of movement or replace a lost limb<sup>35</sup>. It is possible that the foot amulet was associated with the trampling of enemies<sup>36</sup>. In fact the ancient Egyptians thought that the demon could reside in the foot of the “bad”, the left foot. That’s why enemies are called “people of the left” and are generally associated with the god Seth, “The Left One” and therefore invested with negative meaning<sup>37</sup>.

During the Old Kingdom and First Intermediate Period, small hand and foot amulets were commonly included in bracelets and anklets. These amulets, often made of carnelian, protected the limbs and extremities of their wearers, while possibly conferring abilities such as dexterity, creative potential, or speed. They also guaranteed a speedy recovery. The color of the stone, reminiscent of blood, would bring power and energy to the amulet. A long amuletic string in the British Museum presents many amulets of various materials representing turtles, hawks, baboons, ba birds, lions and, of course, five hands, two fists, six hornets, four leg-with-foot amulets, three faces. Form and material of some of these suggest that they dated from the Middle Kingdom but unfortunately provenance is not recorded<sup>38</sup>.

Particular amulets are generally representative of the Late Period and Roman era, like phallus amulets that seem to be unique from the Late Period to protect the organ in question or to empower the

<sup>35</sup> Andrews 1994, fig 67.

<sup>36</sup> Pinch 1994.

<sup>37</sup> Borghouts 1971, 70; Alliot 1954, 734, note 7. Many texts refer to this theme: *Pyr* 601f; *CT* IV, spell 151a; VII spell 162i; *Urkunden* VI 5,14,44,9; *Papyrus Bremner-Rhind* 22,5; 23,5; 28,16; 29,14; 29,15; *Edfu* VII 319. See also Nyord 2009, 96, 286.

<sup>38</sup> Andrews 1981, 49, no. 269, pl. 27.

deceased to copulate in the other world<sup>39</sup>. Also nipples amulets are present generally linked to the power of lactation and positioned on the mummy's breast<sup>40</sup>.

## **5. Fingers in sacred texts and rituals**

Amulets in shape of fist or fingers are probably derived from magical protective gestures, linked to sacred ceremonies and embalming moments. The “two-fingers” amulet represents the index and middle finger of the right hand, with the nails and joints clearly indicated. They were generally placed on the mummy near the incision made on the corpse to remove internal organs during embalming with the purpose of holding the two edges of the incision together. It has been argued that the two fingers are those of Anubis, the god of embalming. Thus the amulet evoked the exact moment of that process or maybe it was employed to “hold” the incision sealed and prevent malign forces from entering the body<sup>41</sup>. Remains of the resin used during embalming are still visible between these fingers. “Two-fingers” amulets were mostly made of a dark hard stone such as basalt, obsidian or steatite<sup>42</sup>. The reason may lay not only in the hardness of such stones that could become symbols of endurance but also in the association with the Underworld darkness. Black was also the colour of Osiris' skin and the Nile waters in which he drowned as well as that of the mud which believed to be the god's choler. The amulets' purpose was to ensure everlasting magical power to preserve the body intact for eternity and allow the deceased to live in the other world. In spite of all these reasons the “two-fingers” amulet seems to have been a late arrival. The first evidence is dated only after around 600 BC.

The Pyramid Texts give some references about the importance of the two fingers: «Pepi has gathered together his bones, he has

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<sup>39</sup> De Buck Vol. VI, *CT* 576, spell 191a-p.

<sup>40</sup> Petrie 1914, 10, pl. 1: 8a-b.

<sup>41</sup> Andrews 1981, fig. 64.

<sup>42</sup> Budge 1899, 55.

collected his flesh and he has gone quickly into heaven by means of the two fingers of the god of the Ladder (Horus)»<sup>43</sup>. These two fingers could be intended to represent Horus' index and medium, the same fingers that the god employed in helping his father. Horus is said to hold out his "two fingers" to help Osiris to climb the Ladder and reach the Heaven. It has been argued that the two fingers amulet will assist the deceased in reaching the Netherworld as substitute of the divine fingers. That could explain its presence on the mummies. However there could be another point of junction between Horus and fingers. The "first" ritual of opening of the mouth, that of Osiris, was played by his son Horus: «[...] your mouth is split open by Horus with this little finger of his with which he split open the mouth of his father Osiris»<sup>44</sup>. Horus was the first to perform the ritual as son of Osiris and according to Egyptian tradition, a son should do the same for his father. Thus King Ay, successor of Tutankhamon is represented in front of his father, opening the mouth of the deceased with a adze<sup>45</sup>. Horus was in fact the heir of his father Osiris and the prototype of the king. As the heir of Horus in Earth, Pharaoh had the title "Finger of Horus" since the Predynastic period. The Pyramid Texts read:

«The children of thy child have raised thee up, perfect *H<sup>c</sup>py*, [Imsety], Duamūtef, and *Ḳebḥsenuf* [whose] names you have [wholly] made, [who washed thy face], [who dried] thy tears, who opened thy mouth with their copper (or, iron) fingers»<sup>46</sup>.

This passage refers properly to a finger-shaped instrument. Here the actors are the four Horus' sons using their fingers to perform the ritual. Now fingers are made out of *bi3*, maybe with reference to the historical evolution of instruments and performance.

<sup>43</sup> Budge 1985, 301; Pyramid of Pepi I, lines 192-f.

<sup>44</sup> Faulkner 1969. *Pyr* Utt. 540, 1330a-b. See also Spells 11-15. Only in Pepi II and Queen Neith pyramids.

<sup>45</sup> Roth 1993, 65.

<sup>46</sup> Faulkner 1969. *Pyr* Utt. 670, 1983a-e.

To open the mouth means to give breath and birth to the deceased; it symbolizes the clearing of the newborn's mouth at birth by the midwife reacting of the primeval ritual played by Horus to the "first" deceased Osiris. The earliest implements used during rituals were probably the priests' fingers, later replaced by finger-shaped iron blades and adzes. In the New Kingdom among the tools for the ritual of the opening of the mouth the so called «finger of *dfm* (gold)» replaces the previous *bi*<sup>47</sup>. Representations of this gold finger among the opening the of mouth ritual tools can be found on the walls of the New Kingdom's tombs, as it can be observed in Tutankhamon's tomb.

The New Kingdom adze called *dwn-ꜥ* represents an outstretched arm whose fingers are represented by the blades at the end of the tool<sup>48</sup>. So it can be argued that curved blades represented the human fingers of the midwife or priest.

## **6. Votive objects in shape of human body parts**

The temple of Hatshepsut at Deir el Bahari provided a large number of votive offerings, most of which are in shape of human body parts. These objects have often been ignored by excavators and museums and assigned automatically to a very late period as foreign influence. Reports refer about many basketsful or roughly-carved wooden phalli from the Hathor shrine<sup>49</sup>. It is worth remembering that the British Museum holds 19 phalli from Deir el Bahari (BM 41171-3, 47776-86, 48107-10, 49473-4). The standard of workmanship of objects like these phalli is generally low and most of them appear to be made of acacia. Traces of red paint survive on several examples (red was the normal masculine flesh colour). In some cases veins are also rendered by blue bands.

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<sup>47</sup> Roth 1993, 66.

<sup>48</sup> Glazov 2001; Otto 1960, 19.

<sup>49</sup> Pinch 1993, 236-237, pls. 52-53.

From the same temple come also a clay phallus (BM 47775) and vases decorated with female breasts (BM E 2722)<sup>50</sup>. Votive offerings in shape of female breasts and genitals recurring together with virile members are also made in faïence like the exemplars of vulva and a phallus in the British Museum (BM 47766 e 47768)<sup>51</sup>. A small oval amulet in dark blue frit (BM 41100)<sup>52</sup> shows a pair of breasts in relief and is pierced for suspension.

The presence of this type of votive offerings inside the Hathor chapel can be connected with rituals of fertility and the role played by Hathor. In fact Hathor is most closely linked with phallic symbolism thanks to her role as the “Hand of Atum” and the epithet of “Lady of the vulva” in her form of cow<sup>53</sup>, referring to the mythical episode where she shows her genital to Ra to drive out his bad humour. So the reason of the great number of phalli found in the *speos* around the Hathor cow statue stands in her mythic role. The small number of faïence phalli can be dated to the XVIII Dynasty. Wooden phalli found outside the *speos* were probably presented during particular festivals and then removed to an outer area. Because of the lack of inscribed material the exact function of such *ex voto* remains uncertain but it could be useful to mention one inscribed phallus dedicated to Hathor now in the Cairo Museum and found into the tomb of Ramose at Deir el Medineh<sup>54</sup>. The text inscribed on the base of the *ex voto*<sup>55</sup>, a cryptic praise to Hathor, is difficult to understand, though it could indicate that Ramose had no children. Thus, phalli presented to Hathor were probably votive objects offered in return for a cure for impotence or sterility and could be dedicated both by men and women.

Votive objects from Deir el Bahari are also in shape of ears and eyes. This may suggest that offerings were made also as a request for restoration of sight and hearing, very frequent especially in funerary

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 210, pl. 52.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 237, pl. 52.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., pl. 33.

<sup>53</sup> Pinch 1994, 84.

<sup>54</sup> Bruyère 1952, 15-16.

<sup>55</sup> Černý 1973, 325.

texts. Hathor was also linked with the cure of blindness in the myth of *The Contending of Horus and Seth* where she restores the sight of Horus with her milk<sup>56</sup>.

Hathor was also the Lady of banquets and music. Votive hand-shaped clappers<sup>57</sup> similar to castanets were generally dedicated to the goddess. Usually made of bone or wood, ancient Egyptian clappers were straight or curved. They may represent the human right and left forearms handles often decorated with bracelets and roundel ornaments and pierced with a hole at the end of the forearm. Such clappers are attested from the First Intermediate Period and Middle Kingdom onward. Some exemplars dated to the New Kingdom may present a stylized papyrus column below the hand<sup>58</sup>. A well preserved exemplar from the New Kingdom, said to be from Thebes, consists of a pair of curved clappers in the form of a right and left hand with the Hathor head below<sup>59</sup>. Fingers have nails carved out and elaborated bracelet. The Hathor head has curled wigs and a decorative frieze. The noise of clapping, banging and rattling was thought to drive away hostile forces. The noise of cymbals or castanets was thought to scare off hostile forces and Hathor was often invoked in spells to drive away evil spirits such as those which caused illness<sup>60</sup>. For all these reasons hand-shaped clappers of ivory or wood were used in magic and dance.

During the Greek-Roman period religious syncretism gave birth to a series of assimilations and associations between Egyptian, Greek and Roman gods. Deities as Serapis and Isis were among the most popular and venerated ones. Serapis was a health god associated with Asclepios during the Greek period. *Ex votos* in shape of human limbs were reproduced and presented to every Asclepeion or Serapeion which were often decorated with all type of human-parts-shaped votive objects dedicated to the gods in return for health or to give

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<sup>56</sup> Papyrus Chester Betty I; Broze 1996, 84-87.

<sup>57</sup> Anderson 1976, 9-22.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 17-18, no. 6169, fig. 25; 18-19, no. 6171, fig. 26.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 20, no. 20779-20780, fig. 30.

<sup>60</sup> Pinch 1994.

thanks for a restored limb. Sculpted feet seem to be strictly linked to the Serapis cult as suggested by some exemplars. This is the case of a right foot in dolerite probably an *ex voto* now in the Cairo Museum<sup>61</sup>. The Greek dedication on the marble foot wearing a sandal on a pillar from the Ras El Soda Temple, Alexandria (II-III centuries CE), and placed in the middle of the temple platform, thus reads: «Isidorus dedicates this foot to the goddess, which saved him from the fatal fall from the chariot»<sup>62</sup>. The name of the goddess is not specified but is suggested by the name of the devout, Isidorus, as well as by the evidence of foot *ex voto* often associated with Isis, Serapis and other deities<sup>63</sup>. Inside the Ras El Soda Temple were found white marble statues representing Isis, Osiris Canopus, hermanobis and Harpocrates together with two Sphinxes of black granite. It seems very probable that this private temple built in the garden of a rich men who lived in Alexandria, was dedicated to the goddess Isis being her statue the largest one<sup>64</sup>. A foot with inscription from Aelia Capitolina was dedicated to Serapis by a woman of high status, Pompeia Lucila<sup>65</sup> while a further record now in the Beirut Museum shows an eagle seated on a human foot dedicated to Serapis<sup>66</sup>. A great marble foot in the Egyptian Museum in Turin<sup>67</sup> is a well example of *ex voto* to the Egyptian triad: it presents a sandal, two snakes with human heads representing Isis and Serapis and, on the back of the foot Harpocrates is standing in human form (Fig. 5). As one of the greater god of Late antiquity Serapis was also linked to Zeus: a giant foot was discovered at Mt Carmel and dedicated to the Zeus of Heliopolis<sup>68</sup>. A drawing of a bust of Serapis on a human foot is now in Florence<sup>69</sup> and shows

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<sup>61</sup> Edgar 1906, 48, no. 33388, pl. XIX.

<sup>62</sup> Bernard 1969, 428-430, no. 109, pl. 78.

<sup>63</sup> Dunand 1973, pl. XVII; Malaise 1980, 106-ff; Devauchelle 1983, 123-131; Castiglione 1967, 239-252; Castiglione 1971, 30-17; Castiglione 1974, 75-81; Belayche 2007, 448-469; Dow 1914, 58-77.

<sup>64</sup> Nacrebout 2007, 506-554, fig. 6; Adriani 1940, 136-148; Wild 1984, 1739-1851.

<sup>65</sup> Belayche 2007, 465-466, fig. 7a.

<sup>66</sup> Vidman 1969, SIRIS 364 = Bricault 2005, RICIS 402/1201.

<sup>67</sup> Castiglione 1971, 30-43; Castiglione 1974, 75-81.

<sup>68</sup> Avi-Yonah 1952, 118-124; Hadas-Lebel 2006, 332.

<sup>69</sup> Zannoni 1817, 113-118, fig. 38.



the main theme of the “foot of Serapis” also attested on various coins all dating from Roman period<sup>70</sup>: the deity’s bust standing above the divine foot is represented on several coins of the Antonine and Severan periods from Alexandria<sup>71</sup>. Sculpted feet were frequent but also footprints were common, as those inside Egyptian temples<sup>72</sup>. The tendency was confirmed in Late period as shown by a small rectangular marble base, in the Museum of Chaironeia, inscribed with «Phyros son of Soteas, at the command of Isis». Two cavities in the shape of feet, presumably of the goddess, are engraved in the upper surface. The provenance of the base is unknown but it can be dated to II century AD<sup>73</sup>.

All the exemplars recorded are just a small part of objects which show how important health and body preservation was considered during ancient Egyptian times. It is interesting to note that some traditions were fully received during the Greek and Roman era to be sometimes reinterpreted even though preserving their original meaning. Devotional performances were part of religious cult and daily life. The purpose was to supply the lack due to nature, illness and, of course death by magic and devotion to deities. Many ancient Mediterranean and Near Eastern cultures share traditions which have survived thanks to late cultures and religions such as Christianity which received them and contributed to show to what extent the ancient is inserted in modern and contemporary times. Thinking about Ancient, Hellenistic and Roman Egypt, it will be explicative to remind just a couple of examples of interaction: the so-called *Isis lactans* which clearly influenced the Virgin Mary and Jesus Child iconography and, last but not least, the footprint inside the Church of Domine Quo Vadis (Santa Maria in Palmis) in Rome where a pair of feet carved in

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<sup>70</sup> Castiglione 1971; Le Glay 1978, 573–589.

<sup>71</sup> Dattari 1901, 233, nos. 3515-3516 (Marcus Aurelius), 267, nos. 3938-3939 (Commodus), and an unpublished coin (ANS 1973-56-1005; year 3 of Septimus Severus).

<sup>72</sup> Castiglione 1967, 239-252. Devauchelle 1983, 123-131.

<sup>73</sup> Manganaro 1961, 187-188, fig. 9-9a; 81-190; Schachter 2007, 381.

marble had been considered by Christian tradition as the feet of Jesus Christ but which is, on the contrary, a Roman votive stone dedicated by a traveler before his departure<sup>74</sup>.

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<sup>74</sup> Guarducci, 1942-1943, 305-344.

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## Figures



Fig. 1. Close up of 1770 hands with gold finger stalls. 118022a.  
Courtesy of The Manchester Museum, The University of Manchester.



Fig. 2. Artificial leg made of reeds and mud. 118336.  
Courtesy of The Manchester Museum, The University of Manchester.





Fig. 3. Artificial foot of mummy. 1770 118318.  
Courtesy of The Manchester Museum, The University of Manchester.



Fig. 4. Open left hand with golden nails, Faïence.  
Late Period Dynasty XXV-XXXI (712-332 BC).  
Cat. 1211 RCGE 26661. Courtesy of The Egyptian Museum, Turin.



Fig. 5. Votive foot with sandal and Isis, Serapis and Arpocrates.  
White marble. S. 17137 RCGE 19497.  
Courtesy of The Egyptian Museum, Turin.